Making Worlds: Art, Words and Worlds

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Introduction

‘The world’ seems, often, to be more a proposition than a place, more a theory than a thing-in-itself. The fluidity of its meanings means that the dominant discourse tends to focus on the conceptual, the economic and the political, rather than on lived experience, phenomenological encounters, or the multiple ways of being in what each person might consider ‘the world’. How we might access the plural experience of the world is a point of considerable scholarly debate as philosopher Nelson Goodman notes, writing that ‘universes of worlds as well as worlds themselves may be built in many ways’.¹ We start from Goodman’s constructivist premise, and focus on art as a domain for the making of worlds. Art is perhaps under-determined compared with linguistic and political mediums, but it may have equally profound effects on how lived worlds emerge and are understood. In this paper we take up the twin concepts of plurality and practice to explore how art might enable an exploration of connectivities and differences, and how it might form a venue for the making of worlds that are not fully in accord with contemporary logics and ‘truths’. We do this through a discussion of a recent exhibition that was framed around the theme of ‘making worlds’, and mounted in a small regional city in New Zealand, Whanganui. It included the work of seven artists² whose common point of connection is that town—one of the oldest colonial towns in New Zealand, and a fountainhead for indigenous rights protests within Aotearoa. The artists’ connection with this liminal town, and their separate experiences and identifications, serve to highlight the ways in which visual art can afford the place to situate oneself: whether a geographical or an ontological place. From such places they can produce and present their works to un-make and re-make the known, authorised world—to allow new conceptual frameworks and, possibly, new grounds for human connectivity.

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1 Goodman, N. 1978, *Ways of Worldmaking*, Indianapolis, Hackett, p. 5.

2 See Appendix for biographical information on the artists: Chaco Kato, Lily Aitui Laita, Kate Lepper, Faith McManus, Helen Manning, Kura Te Waru Rewiri and Lorraine Webb.

Art and the World

'Art is not a copy of the real world. One of the damn things is enough'³

The relationship between art and the world is something discussed frequently by artists and art critics. At conferences, in artist talks and in critical writings it is not uncommon to come across discussion about whether art reflects the world, represents it, replicates it or re-makes it. We aimed to add to this discussion but focus on the making of the world. To do this, we mounted an exhibition titled 'Making Worlds' (27 June–23 July 2011). We invited a group of artists⁴ to show works that in some way reflect their sense of art and world; and interviewed them to tease out what they see as the connection between art and world.

Our starting point for this exercise was the philosopher Nelson Goodman, who several decades ago published the influential *Ways of Worldmaking* (1978), a text that lays the foundation for so much thinking about world-making that has happened since. Goodman analyses the relationship between the domain of art and social understandings of 'the world'. Drawing on the writing of earlier philosophers, including Ernst Cassirer and William James, he engages questions of 'the multiplicity of worlds, the speciousness of "the given", the creative power of the understanding, the variety and formative function of symbols' in order to ask the following questions: 'What are worlds made of? How are they made? What role do symbols play in the making? And how is world-making related to knowing?'⁵ These are questions that engage us also: in particular, the possible relationship between world-making and knowing; and the creative power of the understanding as each applies to art and to artists. In this paper we discuss the outcome of the process—of conceiving and mounting the exhibition, interviewing the artists, and undertaking archival and observational research into the issue of whether, or how, particular artists build worlds, imagine worlds, and find ways to live in and across those worlds.

The artists we selected for this exhibition and for the question of art and world are painters, printmakers, installation artists and sculptors. Their cultural backgrounds include New Zealand (Maori and Pakeha), Japan, Samoa, Britain, South Africa and Croatia, and they now mainly reside in New Zealand, Australia or the United Kingdom. Their only real point of connection is the Quay School of the Arts in Whanganui. The wide range of ethnic, cultural and national backgrounds, and of art practices, provided us the opportunity to test

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3 Virginia Woolf cited in Goodman, N. 1976, *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols*, [second edn] Indianapolis, Hackett, p. 3. The citation comes from the epigraph to this book although it is uncertainly attributed to Woolf.

4 See Appendix for the details of artists in 'Making Worlds' 27 June–23 July 2011, Whanganui, New Zealand.

5 Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking*, p. 5.

perceptions of world held by people who share a position in the field of art, but otherwise occupy very different positions. The fact that these artists have only limited shared experiences suggests that they are likely to have distinctive approaches to the topic of the exhibition, and to what it means to make art/make worlds.

Not surprisingly, their responses to questions of world and world-making are somewhat idiosyncratic, reflecting differences of culture and/or differences in the traditions of making in which they practice. The painters, for example, seem to have a sense of ‘world-making’ that is different from the installation artists; the artists with an indigenous cultural identity articulate a sense of ‘world’ and of world-and-art that is different from the other artists. The artists also use different conceptual frames for the idea of ‘world’, referring variously to world-as-system, world-as-illusion, world-as-body and world-as-space; and describing world-making variously as contributions to a living system, a way of integrating dream-states or of crafting connections, and a practice that provides opportunities to learn about the lived environment.⁶

But there are homologies across their answers too: homologies that seemed to us to be predicated on their mutual investment in the discourses and values of the world of art. None, for instance, claimed to be directly engaged with the geopolitical world, or to be consciously attempting to change it; and none claimed to be making a world that is potentially habitable by others. Rather, they all, to varying degrees, suggest that if art makes world, the world it makes is a private one. The making of art enables a space in which they can operate, can explore the things that matter to them, and can feel ‘at home’. Though they come from very different backgrounds, work in different forms and have different sets of interests and imperatives—though, in short, their worlds are very different—they hold in common a sense of the importance of space/place and an enduring investment in the work of making art.

Their answers provide a fruitful line of thought about the work of (some) art and artists in relation to the construction of (an idea of) world: mainly in terms of how an individual artist not only inhabits a space, but also creates a sense of world as a way of seeing, making and living ethically. Their notions of ‘world’ are, moreover, in line with much philosophical thought about art and world: art-making and world-making, we will argue in the paper, share some important properties. Each has a physical form and yet is highly conceptual; each resides in abstraction but manifests in materiality; each is inchoate, but directed towards organisation through form; and each starts from a point of blindness and seeks

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6 All references to artists’ comments come from a series of recorded conversations and email exchanges we held with the artists during 2011 and 2012. We do not refer directly to Lorraine Webb’s comments because, as one of the authors of this paper, her position is already embedded in the text.

to achieve the visible. Because of this, we focus on art as something that both shapes and manifests such understandings of the world and its possibilities, and hence as something that is integral to the work of shaping and manifesting the idea of 'world'.

What is World?

The concept of 'world' and world-making informs a discussion that has been explored throughout Western philosophy. From Plato arguing for the co-presence of two worlds, the sensible and the allegorical;⁷ through Heidegger's account of simultaneously shared and different worlds;⁸ and to David Lewis arguing for 'modal realities' and the existence of 'possible worlds',⁹ philosophers have consistently engaged the problem of what 'the world' means to us.

Their definition of the word 'world' does not refer to the planet, or to geopolitical arrangements, but to domains of practice and of discourse. Goodman uses 'world' in this sense, referring for instance to the 'worlds' of art and science, rather than conceiving 'world' as the planet on which we live. This is etymologically sound: the word 'world' comes from a combination of the Old English *wer* (man) and *eld* (age), which draws attention not to the physical globe, but to the human domain, the lived and the experiential. World as 'the age of man [sic]' is not a concrete 'thing' but an abstract space, a space of possibility. As the 'ages' pass, and as human societies change, so too does the world change. This implies that built into the word 'world' is a sense of mutability, plurality and plasticity. So, as Goodman argues, 'world' is conceptual rather than concrete, something that is 'built in many ways'¹⁰ rather than given to us in established form.¹¹ Of course the world-as-planet comes to us *a priori*, with its own concrete reality; and no amount of lived experience will negate the effects of a cyclone or an earthquake, or undo the power of the laws of physics. But the cyclone, the earthquake and the laws of physics are also 'built in many ways', in that human understandings of what they are, how they work and what they mean are predicated on cultural rather than material knowledge: articulated and accounted for by modes of representation. We cannot access the physical world immediately, because knowledge of any external thing is 'indirect, in that it is mediated by the ideas,

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7 Plato, 2004 [c380–350BCE], *Republic* trans. Benjamin Jowett, Book VII, New York, Barnes and Noble .

8 Heidegger, M. 1982, *Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press.

9 Lewis, D. 1986, *On the Plurality of Worlds*, Boston, Blackwell.

10 Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking*, p. 5.

11 We draw here on the long line of twentieth century theorists whose work analyses the relationship between materiality and meaning: including Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Cassirer and Lyotard. This perspective does not refute the material presence of the world of things, but rather indicates the limited extent to which human beings can access the world of things, mediated as it is by language and signification.

which are as it were clues to, or evidence for, the external things that act on our senses’;¹² and these ideas are experienced and articulated through the mediation of systems of signification.

Perception and Conception

Because of this, Goodman argues, there cannot be

perception without conception.... Although conception without perception is merely *empty*, perception without conception is *blind* (totally inoperative).... We can have words without a world but no world without words or other symbols.¹³

Like the Old English *wer-eld*, his is a world predicated on signification and representation. We might dispute Goodman’s claim that we can have words without a world—in what environment would they circulate?—but he is on solid philosophical ground when he insists that there cannot be a ‘world without words’; that is to say, there cannot be a world *for us*: there cannot be an ‘age of man’, or a way of grasping and rendering the experiential qualities of being, without symbolic representation and communication.

Goodman’s conception seems to be reflected in some of the comments made by the artists in the exhibition. Chaco Kato, for instance, makes the point that although sculpture is about the concrete because it requires the artist to deal with physical issues (such as gravity), and to manipulate physical materials, it is also highly abstract. This is not only because, for Chaco, the work typically begins with an idea, but also because as a professional artist she finds it important to see a visual form as information, rather than as something ‘real’ that needs to be reproduced as an art object. She notes:

Amateur artists tend to gather the ‘what is’ of the object and reproduce it, rather than going through the process of deconstructing the thing they’re looking at, analyzing that information, and then recreating or reconstructing the information. Get away from direct representation; think about the components; look at each element. This is worldmaking: when you don’t take the world as it is presented to you, but you engage with it and its components, and make something very new.

This is a highly symbolic and representational approach to art and to the world: seeing it as discrete packages of potential, coding and framing it, and producing a communicative object from that process.

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¹² Dickerson, A.B. 2004, *Kant on Representation and Objectivity*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

¹³ Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking*, p. 6.

Left to right: Kura Te Waru Rewiri, 2005, *Fragments*, Acrylic on canvas, 70 x 30 cm; Kura Te Waru Rewiri, 2011, *Wesley Anthony Armstrong*, Acrylic on canvas, 61 x 91.5 cm; Lorraine Webb, 2011, *Voyage*, Acrylic on canvas, 96 x 96 cm.

Courtesy Lorraine Webb

Kura Te Waru Rewiri is a painter who works very much with symbolic forms—such as the Kowhaiwhai patterns of traditional Maori art—rather than producing direct images of ‘what is’. She identifies herself as an abstract thinker, saying that ‘Even when I think about figurative work, I break the shapes up to abstract’; and she begins by thinking about colour, and light and dark, rather than (in the first instance) about the material world in front of her. This approach to work, and the expressionistic, often sombre abstracts she paints that acknowledge the presence and mana of ancestors, and the *mauri* (life force) of the land, locate her as an artist who relies on *conception* for her *perception*.

A Different Point of View

While both Chaco and Kura identify the importance of abstract thinking and signification, both are also—like the other artists in this exhibition—deeply connected to the material of art and art-making, as fluent in discussing the physical properties of their practice and their sense of world as they are in discussing analysis. Both points of view are equally valid, because the abstract and the material, the plastic and the concrete, are implicated in how human beings create a world, or a sense of world, and inhabit it.

While Goodman's views have some very compelling elements, a different perspective on the work of world-making and of art appeared in the literature about a decade after Goodman's *Ways of Worldmaking*, when George Steiner produced his *Real Presences* (1978). This text traverses similar terrain—how human beings create a world, or the sense of world, through creative practices and creative artifacts—though it has a very different starting point. Where Goodman identifies the creative possibilities inherent in the disconnect between the physical and the conceptual, Steiner identifies a lack in society brought about by what he terms the '*break of the covenant between word and world*';¹⁴ or between worlds as such—concrete places—and 'worlds', or discursive spaces. For Goodman, and for many twentieth century thinkers, this 'break' instantiates creative possibilities. The proliferation of meanings, the slipperiness of language and the loss of belief in a transcendent referent which mean that the word 'world' means nothing, in fact allow it to mean almost anything, providing us opportunities to build worlds. But for Steiner, it means we need to 'learn anew what is comprised within a full experience of created sense',¹⁵ and to recover a sense of *real* reality—which, for him, means the apprehension of the presence of God. For Goodman, worlds are present to us because we make them; for Steiner, the only reason we can make worlds is because there is, behind our experiential being, a 'real presence' that enables such representational acts. It is God's presence that underpins our creative and world-making work, Steiner insists, writing that 'There is language, there is art, because there is "the other"'.¹⁶ For Goodman, we keep making and un-making, 'taking apart and putting together'¹⁷ in order to organise objects and ideas in ways that will create 'real' experiences; for Steiner, reality is already there in the 'necessary possibility' of God's presence¹⁸ which we encounter in the making and consumption of aesthetic objects. So, while Goodman's model starts from a possibility that permits the making of (contingent) actualities, Steiner's model starts from an actuality that permits the making of (contingent) possibilities.

Both writers are concerned to understand the relationship between 'word and world' (Steiner) or 'words and worlds' (Goodman). Both writers identify art as an important site for the testing of their ideas though each focuses on language and literary arts rather than on visual art. Each also takes a rather limited perspective on the topic. Goodman, for example, shows little appreciation of phenomenology, history or media in his account of how worlds are made,¹⁹ and overextends his argument that 'world' effectively means little more than domain.

14 Steiner, G. 1989, *Real Presences*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, p. 93.

15 Steiner, *Real Presences*, p. 4.

16 Ibid., p. 137.

17 Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking*, p. 7.

18 Steiner, *Real Presences*, p. 3.

19 Nünning, A. and Nünning, V. 2010, 'Ways of Worldmaking as a Model for the Study of Culture: Theoretical Frameworks, Epistemological Underpinnings, New Horizons', in V. Nünning, A. Nünning and B. Neumann (eds), *Cultural Ways of Worldmaking: Media and Narratives*, Berlin, Walter de Gruyter, p. 2.

We can agree that human beings apprehend ‘the world’—the physical globe—through the mediation of symbolic systems, but the natural world certainly impresses itself on us. Steiner’s reliance on the transcendental domain, and his determination to build on a notion of the divine, cannot be substantiated in a discursive economy that relies on evidence and argument; and his concern that world has been betrayed by word relies on an unsustainable premise.²⁰

While we may agree that world and word *are* separated by a great gulf, and that worlds *are* discursive formations, there is more to it than that. ‘The world’ may be more a proposition than a place, more a theory than a thing-in-itself, but the focus of so much discourse on the conceptual, the economic and the political, means that the lived experience of groups and individuals is often left out of the equation. Both Goodman and Steiner also tend to leave out of the equation that fact that we do, after all, live in a physical environment, and that while our engagement with it is deeply mediated by discourse, we are—as the many recent natural disasters have reminded us so tragically—entirely reliant upon the planet that is (also) our world. Actuality, the thing that evades linguistic finality, continually works on us, changing us even as we change it, and it is the intersection of the actual, material world, and the representational, discursive worlds, that demands attention. Karl Marx, writing in 1867, raises this issue, reminding readers that human beings cannot in fact remain outside the material world.²¹ We interact with the material world through our labour; we shape the world, and it in turn shapes us because labour is, for Marx, ‘a process by which man [sic], through his own actions, mediates, regulates, and controls the metabolism between himself and nature...he acts upon external nature and changes it, and in this way he simultaneously changes his own nature’.²² But despite this close association between humans and nature, Marx reminds us, humans are always distinguished from the rest of the world because we possess the faculty of imagination:

a bee would put many a human architect to shame by the construction of its honeycomb cells. But what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is that the architect builds his cell in his mind before he constructs it in wax.²³

This comparison allows us to move outside Steiner’s language-based perspective of the world. It is of course in language that arguments are most explicitly mounted and undertaken, and knowledge is most precisely conveyed.

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20 Derrida J. 1974, *Of Grammatology* trans. Gayatri Spivak, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, makes the point that transcendental logic relies on an emptiness, and yet comes with considerable authority. There is, Derrida observes, a longing for presence and for a centre that is manifested in the sort of reliance on the impossible that Steiner’s position encapsulates.

21 Marx, K. 1976 [1867]. *Capital* vol. 1 trans. Ben Fowkes). London, Penguin. p. 283.

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid., p. 284.

Art is perhaps under-determined compared with the linguistic medium. But our concern is not with the relative fluency of visual or linguistic media, and more with the question of how imagination and representation work together to conjure worlds. Whether in visual art or in language, they can have profound effects on how lived worlds emerge and are understood; and art, because of its comparative muteness, is capable of connecting at an embodied rather than abstracted level, touching its viewers and its makers.

This embodied connectedness is a feature of much art, and one of the artists in the exhibition, Kate Lepper, speaks very directly about it. Kate's practice is conceptually grounded on the notion of autopoiesis, and particularly the idea of the 'living system' that she draws from the writings of Fritjof Capra.²⁴ She reads this as providing a conceptual distinction between process and structure, with structure being the effect of a process that happened in the past, and process happening in the present being directed to a structure in the future. This principle of practice means on the one hand that her work is not deliberately designed, but rather something that emerges out of the interaction between its elements, its content and its contexts. On the other hand, her work is deeply imbued with thought about the responsibility involved in the making of a future, and about consciousness of the fact that, as she writes, 'All material is riddled with the myriad trajectories that enable it to come into being. My aim is to become aware of these trajectories'.

In this regard, it is possible to see Kate's work as part of a way of thinking that belongs not only to the Capra logic of living systems, but also from earlier points of view. We can refer here to Marx, of course, and his conception of the inevitable imbrication of the human in the natural world; and also of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's notion of 'organic thought',²⁵ the thought that begins not from the distance of reason, but from the proximity of interconnection. Merleau-Ponty writes, 'The world is not what I think, but what I live through',²⁶ a corrective to Goodman's and Steiner's perhaps overly discursive view of worlds and world-making. What art-making can make evident, in this 'conversation', is that human beings are both part of and separate from the natural world; both makers and destroyers of worlds; and always shaped by the world even as we shape it.

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24 Capra, F. 1997, *The Web of Life: A New Scientific Understanding of Living Systems*, New York, Anchor Books and Capra, F. 2004, *The Hidden Connections: A Science for Sustainable Living*, New York, Anchor Books.

25 Merleau-Ponty, M. 1958, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith, London, Routledge, p. 89.

26 Ibid., p. xviii.

Exhibition view, left to right: Kate Lepper, 2011, *Leaf Preservers* (Albers), Re-used plastic bags, elastic, plastic buckles and adjusters, zip, Radiata Pine needles, variable dimensions; Kate Lepper, 2011, *Leaf Preserver* (Backpack Prototype), Re-used plastic bags, found fabric, strapping, plastic buckles, zip, mixed autumn leaves, variable dimensions; Chaco Kato, 2010–2011 (ongoing), *Endless Days, Borderless World* (section), Mixed media on paper, variable size.

Courtesy Lorraine Webb

Bridging the Gap

Goodman, Steiner and Marx are all very significant players in this field, but it is worth observing that none are visual artists. Goodman is a philosopher who was for some time an art dealer, Steiner is specifically invested in the literary arts as writer and critic and Marx a scholar of the social sciences. This does not vitiate the quality of their investigations into, or observations of, the work of art, but it does mean that their capacity to speak with authority about the process of making is less secure. In this section we turn to the perspectives of writers who are also visual artists, specifically John Berger, who provides something of a bridge between the related but contradictory positions on art and world offered by Goodman and Steiner, and the more phenomenological perspective offered by Marx and by Merleau-Ponty.

In a ‘conversation’ with the art historian James Elkins published in *Berger on Drawing* (2005), John Berger describes drawing in a way that encompasses human imagination, the actuality of the material world, and the possibility of the other, or the transcendent. Drawing is, he writes, ‘a way of addressing the absent, of making the absent appear’, a definition that seems to allow the possibility of something like Steiner’s model of the transcendent. But then he continues, describing drawing as ‘the place where blindness, touch and resemblance come together’.²⁷ This second depiction seems closer to the work of world-making as Goodman conceives it: as using the techniques of signification and symbolisation, along with ‘the creative power of the understanding’,²⁸ to make a contingent ‘real’. At the same time it reflects Merleau-Ponty’s and Marx’s phenomenological accounts of the physical world—expressed here through ‘touch’—as being integral to the production of symbolic representation.

This is a perspective presented by several of the artists in our exhibition. Helen Manning, a graduate of the Quay School of the Arts in painting who has more recently been working in contemporary sculpture, in some ways rehearses Berger’s point about touch, connections and resemblances. She describes her process of making as ‘drawing in space’, and for her it does in fact ‘make the absent appear’ because of the representational shapes that emerge from her making and thinking. The starting point is a period of creating netting from ‘individual circles of stitching which connect to each other’, and through this, she writes, ‘my work evolves into figurative pieces’. The heads, and the whole bodies, that have emerged from this process reflect not only the fairytales that mobilise her thinking, but also the ‘blindness’ (working in the abstraction of thread and netting), the ‘touch’ (work made through a long repetitive process) and the ‘resemblance’ (to the human form and to fairytale characters) that Berger identifies as being at the heart of drawing.

This conception of drawing analogises the work of world-making because it draws attention to the imperative to know, and to find ways of knowing through making. Whether we conceive of ‘the absent’ as Steiner’s presence of God, or as Goodman’s ‘worlds already on hand’,²⁹ this absence is the foundation of the worlds created through art, because it is the formal skill, technical ability, cultural ways of knowing and personal investment in representation that come together to generate human understandings of an idea of the world. The absent and abstract ideas of world cannot be effective unless they are made concrete; so the work of art-as-world-making brings together ‘blindness’ (unknowing), ‘touch’ (where the abstract becomes ‘real’), and resemblance (a likeness to what is already known, so that the new can be apprehended). This is never a

27 Berger, J. 2005, *Berger on Drawing*, Aghabullogue, Occasional Press, p. 109.

28 Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking*, p. 5.

29 Ibid., p. 6.

finished work, though. For Berger, 'Drawing is a ceaseless process of correction. It proceeds by corrected errors';³⁰ and for Goodman, 'making is a remaking'³¹ because the worlds we make are incomplete, partial and contingent. Therefore the world as humans perceive it—the 'age of man'—is constantly being (re) made, by various forces and acts, in various ways.

Helen Manning, 2011, *The Narrators*, Machine embroidery, thread and mixed media, 25 x 14 x 20 cm.

Courtesy Lorraine Webb

³⁰ Berger, *Berger on Drawing*, p. 110.

³¹ Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking*, p. 6.

Left: Chaco Kato, 2010–2011 (ongoing), *Endless Days, Borderless World* (section), Mixed media on paper, variable size. Centre: Faith McManus, 2011, *Riders of the Red Manuka Toile*, Woodcut, 120 x 90 cm.

Courtesy Lorraine Webb

However, it is not the responsibility of art to generate knowledge or understandings; its first imperative is art, and for the artists in our exhibition, the knowledge or understanding generated by their practice was conceived as something quite personal and internal: the making of worlds for, or of, the self. This does not need to imply a solipsistic view of world-making; as Faith McManus says, ‘I like the idea that you can take stories that are very particular and share them—there are things that run through everything we do that other people can and do understand’. Faith describes her work as exploring the points

of connection between ancestry, myth and culture. This involves another kind of bridge-crossing: between the abstract/ephemeral and the concrete/material. She says:

I need lots of dreamtime to make work, and some of my work has come to me in dreams, some has gone away in dreams. I suppose I think of the world we live in as a dream as opposed to reality; this world is illusion and dream, and I suppose that there is a real world elsewhere. I try to make that world in my work, and when I work, that's the world I enter.

This could be read as a commitment to a Steiner-esque transcendence, but it is more than that: it is a world that emerges from the self, from personal and family history, and from reflection on experience and practice.

Devices for World-Making Through Art

Each of the artists with whom we spoke about world-making focused on the 'making' part of that compound word, and spoke eloquently about their own approaches and processes of making art. Several of them independently identified the 'world' part of that term as something related either to the world of art in which they live, or the studio space—a 'safe place' for thinking, making and shaping—or the actual process of art-making as a world in itself. World-making is thus, for them, both noun and verb, both space and process.

Goodman takes a slightly more prescriptive approach. While his argument is productively open and plural, he does keep his attention, for the most part, on process. Early in the book he attempts to put flesh on the bones of ideas of world-making by listing the techniques and devices he identifies as being at the heart of this process. Among those listed are some that have relevance to the making and/or the viewing of visual arts: 'weighting'³² for instance, which references the ways different artists will show very different depictions of a same scene, or 'ordering',³³ which involves the organisation and arrangements of the of parts that make up the work. Each is, of course, dependent on the processes followed by the artists concerned—the decision about the perspective on and proxemics to a scene, or the colour palette used. However, they seem at least equally relevant to the critic or other viewer, whose interest may be in comparing like with like, rather than in the originary act of making the world of the work.

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³² Ibid., p. 10.

³³ Ibid., p. 12.

Others of his devices do seem more relevant to the making, than to the reading, of a work. 'Deletion and supplementation',³⁴ for instance, involves selective appropriation and excision of 'what is there' in order to create a world out of another world. Goodman exemplifies this by referring to what he calls 'a lithograph by Giacometti' which 'fully presents a walking man by sketches of nothing but the head, hands and feet'.³⁵ This is presumably Alberto Giacometti's 'Walking man' (1957), a print that beautifully conveys movement through a few gestural lines. But perhaps Marcel Duchamp's 'Nude descending a staircase No. 2' (1912) more precisely exemplifies deletion and supplementation because it not only excises both the surroundings and the detail of the nude's face and body, but also supplements the image by means of repetition, in the process creating a world of movement.

Whether one identifies his list of devices as genuinely part of the process of *making* art works/worlds, or more appropriately associated with the analysis of the *already-made*, Goodman himself names them as tools for world-making: first because they structure how we frame and perceive the world; and next because they 'are not "found in a world" but *built into a world*'.³⁶ So, while Goodman draws on art for his examples, it seems to us that the techniques and processes of world-making he describes do not reliably match how artists describe their techniques and processes, or their understanding of what they are seeking to do in the making of their work/world.

Left to right: Lily Aitui Laita, 2009, *Sisifo Frontia 1*, Oil on canvas, 36 x 45 cm; Lily Aitui Laita, 2009, *Sisifo Frontia 2*, Oil on canvas, 36 x 45 cm; Lily Aitui Laita, 2009, *Sisifo Frontia 3*, Oil on canvas, 36 x 45 cm.

Courtesy Lorraine Webb

³⁴ Ibid., p. 14.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

There are some parallels with practice, though, because fundamentally, what artists are doing is trying to find something, and create something, that hasn't been before. Artists engaged in this work do not necessarily know what it is they are looking for. All they can do is search through the materials, work with the process, and take the time to sort, to add in, and to take away, in the attempt to create that 'something new', or find ways of 'seeing anew'. This is very similar to Goodman's 'deletion and supplementation', but in a more organic way than his account suggests. Lily Aitui Laita, for instance, identifies a core element of the processes of making as involving 'a continuum, blurring of boundaries'; which does not precisely match Goodman's list of devices. Nor does she conceive of world-making in art as producing an end product as such. 'There is not a final destination', she says; rather 'making is a continuum and you're in the moment, making things up as you go'. This does not imply randomness; like the other artists in the exhibition, Lily's work pursues some enduring concerns or points of interest; but it is neither reductive nor mechanistic. Instead the process relies on absorption in the physicality of making, and in engaging with the layers, the veiling, that is an effect of painting on a flat surface. It is a task of making and also of finding: of 'building' it into a world, certainly, but (*pace* Goodman) quite possibly of 'finding' it in that world too.

Making Worlds? A Conclusion

What we can identify from the literature on world-making, starting with Goodman's seminal work and going right up to the present, as well as the interviews we held with the artists, is that there is fairly close agreement among both artists and philosophers/critics about the broad principles of world-making. These are: that worlds are multiple, plastic and contingent; that the physical world informs but does not necessitate any single experience or understanding of the lived, constructed world/s; that a world is never complete, but always in process; and that visual art may lack the capacity to mount a coherent argument, but can effectively convey the sense of 'world' through the images it depicts. Art is not divorced from the discursive domain, but it is weighted more to the side of organic than linguistic thought. Consequently, the making of art, and to some extent its reception, operates on the body and its affects. Indeed, as several of the artists suggested in their interviews, the worlds made in art may be as small as the body of the artist or the viewer, and are likely to be built in, and by, bodily orientation and reaction. Because it thus sidesteps discourse, art can rupture the conventions of seeing and knowing, and show the world in a new frame, a new light: we *feel* art at least as much as we *think* or indeed see art.

This extra-discursive, physical element enables art to introduce—or rather, re-awaken—us to other ways of thinking: thinking through seeing, thinking

through movement, thinking through making: thinking outside the confines of language. This has the potential to awaken new understandings of world because it allows the individual to rupture the controlling effects of linguistic discourse and contemporary ways of knowing and of being. This happens primarily when an individual breaks with their conventional ways of seeing—is able to see in a new way—and thus interrupts the controlling effects of what psychologist William James first described as ‘selective attention’:

Millions of items of the outward order are present to my senses which never properly enter into my experience. Why? Because they have no *interest* for me. *My experience is what I agree to attend to.* Only those items which I *notice* shape my mind—without selective interest, experience is an utter chaos. Interest alone gives accent and emphasis, light and shade, background and foreground—intelligible perspective, in a word.³⁷

The ‘utter chaos’, which is in fact the multitude of material, the multitude of worlds, is not necessarily something to be dismissed. The ‘intelligibility’ that selective attention produces is manufactured, rather than actual—that is to say, the ‘world’ as it is conventionally understood has no more reality than the worlds manufactured in a studio. But the latter worlds can shift perspective and suggest new ways to understand and inhabit the physical and social worlds in which we all live. Being willing to take on new experiences, or attend to things beyond one’s experience; being willing to (re)shape one’s mind by noticing things that are not conventionally part of the brief: these are central to art-making and to world-making, and allow experimental and experiential engagement with things as they are, and as they might be.

Art, or world: which comes first? Does art make and shape our worlds, or does the world make and shape the possibilities of art? Like any chicken and egg question, it is almost certainly true that it works both ways. Art is in the world, and the world is in art; the social, discursive and material worlds inform the possibilities of art, and art shapes ways of seeing and understanding those same worlds.

What then is the point of art? We suggest that a point might be to help us—artists, audiences—fit ourselves to the world, and the world to us. Simon Schama writes, in this respect, that human beings are characterised by ‘an unassuageable craving’ to ‘nail down transient experience’, something that is, he claims:

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37 James, W. 2007 [1890], *The Principles of Psychology* vol. 1. New York, Cosimo Press. p. 402.

as basic to us as the self-pitying sorrow for our own mortality, and just as invariably doomed to disappointment. But art draws its wistful power from the heroically futile struggle against disappearance, and what it leaves behind are the visual traces of its defiance.³⁸

Those 'visual traces' not only provide a permanent record of how the world was, but also a blueprint for how things might be. And that wistful power is perhaps what is at the heart of world-making in art—the attempt to re-examine the 'what is', and to make it into something that is genuinely new.

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38 Schama, S. 2004, *Hang-Ups: Essays on Painting (Mostly)*, London, BBC Books, pp. 9–10.

Appendix: Artists' Biographical Information

Chaco Kato (Japan/Australia)

Meals in the forest, 2006. Oil stick, oil, crayon, 1200 x 1670 mm

White Nest, 2009. Acrylic yarn, peg, dimensions variable

Chaco works predominantly in what she calls 'ephemeral sculpture': site-specific installations made of ephemeral materials—string, vegetable matter—not designed for permanence. Chaco comes from Japan; has lived and studied in Japan, the US, France and in Australia, where she now lives; and held an artist residency at the Quay School of the Arts in 2000. See <http://www.chacokato.com/biography/>

Lily Aitui Laïta (Ngati Raukawa, Tanugamanono, New Zealand and Samoa)

After Aoga, 2009. Acrylic media on wooden trays, dimensions variable

Sisifo Frontia, 2009. Acrylic media on canvas, 355 x 455 mm

Lily, a painter who draws on a heritage that includes Maori, Pakeha and Samoan, taught for some time at the Quay School of the Arts, and now teaches art in an Auckland college.

Kate Lepper (New Zealand/United Kingdom)

Dead Frog Tripod, 2010. Found plastic bags, tree leaves, dessicated frog carcass, plywood, found packing material

Mini Meadows (installation view detail), 2009. Meadow plants, scrap pvc fabric, found objects, second hand enema bags, solar shower, IV drips, water, soil

The Persistence of Visual Nutrients (detail), 2009. Plasticine and organic Romanesco Cauliflower

Kate is an installation artist and a recent graduate from the MFA (painting) program of the Slade School of Fine Art, having previously graduated from the Quay School of the Arts. See <http://katelepper.com/>

Faith McManus (Ngapuhi, Ngai Takoto; Aotearoa, New Zealand)

Wiki (from the Riders of the Red Manuka Suite), 2009. Colour Woodcut, 260 x 190 mm

ROTRM Toile, 2011. Colour Woodcut on Harakeke (Flax) paper, 900 x 600 mm

Faith is a printmaker, and was previously a member of the teaching staff at the Quay School of the Arts. She has a DFA (Hons) from Otago Polytechnic, a MFA from RMIT Melbourne and works and teaches in Northland.

Helen Manning (New Zealand)

Fairytale Childhood, 2006. Mixed media, size variable

Fabricator 1, 2011. Machine embroidery thread and mixed media, 250 x 250 x 150 mm

Helen is a graduate of the painting programme at the Quay School of the Arts, and now works in contemporary sculpture. She lives and works in the North Island, New Zealand.

Kura Te Waru Rewiri (Ngati Kahu, Ngati Raukawa ki Kauwhata and Ngatirangi; Aotearoa, New Zealand)

Beyond the Veils 1, 2002. Acrylic on canvas, 1500 x 2000 mm

Harmony/Disharmony, 2005. Acrylic on canvas, 960 x 1120 mm

Kura is a painter who has been making and exhibiting art since 1975. Previously on the staff of the Quay School of the Arts, she currently lives and works in Northland, Aotearoa New Zealand. See <http://www.maoriartmarket.com/kura-warurewiri-p-264.html>

Lorraine Webb (South Africa, New Zealand)

(see also Contributors list)

Ideal Childhood #2, 2010. Watercolour on paper, 280 x 380 mm

Red Gulf, 2011. Acrylic on canvas, 1000 x 1500 mm

Lorraine Webb is a painter whose work is in public collections in New Zealand, and private collections in Australia, New Zealand and France. Head of Painting at Whanganui UCOL's Quay School of the Arts in New Zealand, she has a DFA (Honours) Printmaking from the University of Canterbury, and a MFA by research from the VCA, University of Melbourne.