

THE CAMPUS AS A CANVAS

BEHIND THE PAINT

CURATORS
SASHA MCLAREN
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03 JUL
—06 NOV

ROSS LIEW /
MARGARITA VOVNA
AHSIN AHSIN /
POUNAMU WHAREKAWA

XAVIER TAPP
T WEI
REGAN BALZER
KELCY TARATOA
POIHAKENA NGAWATI



1_XAVIER TAPP
The Deceptive Field 2022

2_T WEI
Gardening not Architecture 2022

3_REGAN BALZER
Te Papahou: Time to Level Up 2020

4_KELCY TARATOA
Ngā Wai e Rua 2020

5_POIHAKENA NGAWATI
Ngā Taonga Tuku Iho 2020

6_ROSS LIEW /
MARGARITA VOVNA
Everyone & Us, Everywhere & Here 2022

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Ao te Pō, Pō te Ao 2026

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Kia whakatōmuri
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Poutama 2020

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GINA KIEL
The Explorer 2022

COVER
KELCY TARATOA
Ngā Wai e Rua
2020
Work in progress,
photographed by
Mark Hamilton.

BELOW
ROSS LIEW /
MARGARITA VOVNA
Everyone & Us,
Everywhere & Here
2022
Work in progress,
photographed by
Tim Carter.

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THE CAMPUS AS CANVAS: BEHIND THE PAINT

When someone interacts with a mural for the first time, it is almost always on a surface level. The unexpected splash of colour as you walk past, an appreciation of the sheer size and scale, or perhaps an instant connection to the design. This exhibition reveals that what lies hidden beneath those layers of paint can provide rich stories which allow a deeper appreciation of the surface.

Unlike typical artworks hanging in a gallery, there is often no explanatory text or plaque with the title of the work, materials, or date it was completed. The artist's name may just be an obscure tag or signature. While the work is public, much remains unknown, a mystery, private.

Speak to any mural artist and they might open up on the vulnerabilities of painting in public spaces or tell you how physically demanding it can be. There is a performance aspect associated with live art. All street art is public, and without studio walls to protect the creative process until the polished work is released, murals can go through vulnerable, awkward, or even 'ugly' stages with an audience who are not used to seeing art gradually unveiled.

Yet, memories of interactions with passers-by can also be hugely positive. The lift from being handed a beer, or encouragement from a random person on the street who loves what is unfolding in their neighbourhood. The satisfaction of knowing your work is ultimately temporary but has the potential to reach a wide audience of people who may never step into a gallery. The combination of joy and exhaustion of finishing a work after long days up and down ladders or scaling huge heights on cherry pickers.

The experiences of a mural artist are unique and often unknown to most of us and we in the community also have our own stories about individual murals as they become part of our everyday lives. There is a unique dynamic on a campus, as the ever-changing university population experience these murals in their own way as the murals become part of the background tapestry of a significant period in their lives.

This exhibition seeks to bring these perspectives to light and capture the point in time when these works were created. These featured murals were commissioned during Boon on Campus, an initiative that sought to change the feel of the campus for staff and

students, to make it more interesting and inspiring. A place where students can enjoy spending time, to feed their creativity, and tell new stories about a place. It was a transformation from utilitarian walls to walls with personality. The initiative was a collaboration between the University and Boon Street Art, and over a few years resulted in around 15 different artworks scattered around the campus. Six of these much-loved pieces are showcased and one new temporary mural will be created on the gallery walls itself, a collaboration between Pounamu Wharekawa (Ngāi Te Rangi, Ngāti Ranginui) and Ahsin Ahsin (Aitu, Aitutaki) to celebrate Matariki 2026 through their unique vision. In painting directly onto the wall, they draw attention to both the public performative aspect of mural painting, and also the temporary nature of the murals.

This exhibition explores the inspirations behind Ross Liew and Margarita Vovna's work *Everyone & Us, Everywhere & Here*; the themes woven into Kelcy Taratoa's (Ngāi Te Rangi, Ngāti Ranginui, Ngāti Pūkenga) *Nga Wai e Rua*; the important influences on Regan Balzer's (Ngāi Te Rangi, Ngāti Ranginui, Ngāti Hangarau, Tūhourangi) *Te Papahou: Time to Level Up*; the unofficial collaboration in T Wei's *Gardening not Architecture*; the techniques behind the precision of Xavier Tapp's *The Deceptive Field*; and the challenges in Poihakena Ngawati's (Ngāti Hine, Tainui, Ngāpuhi) *Ngā Taonga Tuku Iho*.

A last point to emphasise is that what remains hidden in mural art is often the artist themselves, and we are excited to be able to centre them here as well as their work. This exhibition of their murals and the temporary mural in the exhibition space showcases the creative journey as well as the finished piece. We hope the stories beneath the paint that we've collated in this exhibition will enrich your experience of the murals and allow you to rediscover them in new ways

SASHA MCLAREN AND IAIN WHITE
EXHIBITION CO-CUTRATORS

RIGHT
DREAMGIRLS COLLECTIVE
Gina Kiel working
on T Wei's mural,
photographed by
Tim Carter



BELOW
DREAMGIRLS COLLECTIVE
Work in progress,
photographed by
Tim Carter.



BELOW
REGAN BALZER
Te Papahou:
Time to Level Up
2020
Regan Balzer,
photographed by
Mark Hamilton

BOTTOM
XAVIER TAPP
The Deceptive Field
2022
Work in progress,
photographed by
Tim Carter.



RIGHT
POUNAMU WHAREKAWA /
AHSIN AHSIN
AITU, AITUTAKI
Untitled
2026
Mural concept drawing.



ARTISTS POUNAMU WHAREKAWA / AHSIN AHSIN KŌRERO

Ahead of developing the design concept for their first collaborative mural, artists Pounamu and Ahsin sat down for a Q&A kōrero with each other. Below is an extract from that conversation.

POUNAMU What's something about my work that makes you excited to paint together?

AHSIN Kinda like how we were talking about the concept earlier today. Basically, your baddie character hanging out with my crocodile character.

POUNAMU I feel like they'd be friends.

AHSIN Yeah, like we're friends. It's like our kids. When you told me the motorbike concept, I was like "Bam, that's it right there, bro. Right there." I was hyped.

POUNAMU What notions of Matariki keep popping up in your head while thinking about this mural?

AHSIN When I was looking into Matariki, the different phases of Maramataka came up.

AHSIN Does the temporary nature of this mural connect to Matariki for you in any way?

POUNAMU Yeah, in that everything is temporary. And Matariki is a new phase. So I think having a brief phase of a mural being up and then all of a sudden...

AHSIN Do you think knowing this mural is temporary changes the way people will experience it?

POUNAMU Probably, right? Like my grandma. She does not like that I'm doing this gig specifically because she's like, "But they're gonna take it down so quickly. What's the point? Don't they appreciate what you're doing?" I'm like, "No, that's like the whole point." Like it's almost like performance art in itself, right?

AHSIN It is, 100%,

POUNAMU And it's like, all murals are temporary.

AHSIN Yeah. You put in a lot of literal blood, sweat, tears... And then it's gone. But that's just the nature of it.

POUNAMU How physical is mural painting for you?

AHSIN It is pretty physical, it is. It can be physical; it can be draining. It is kind of like a bit of a tradie kind of a job, gotta take all your gear there, gotta use machinery like the lifts and stuff, cherry pickers.

POUNAMU I do feel like there's like a weird tension between artists and tradies a lot of the time. 'Cause a lot of the time murals will be installed while other work is being done. And so there's this weird thing of whoever's hired you treating you as if you are one of the tradies, because you are.

The tradies are like 'You got the hat on, you got the high vis... you're a f*cking tradie'. But, you're an artist.

AHSIN Like, 'Bro, we do what you do. Just different.' That's pretty crack up.

POUNAMU Well, you're a man that's been a tradie. So, you are probably more seamlessly inserted.

AHSIN Well, yeah, they go, 'Hey, bro. Hey, brother.'

POUNAMU They're looking at me and talking to each other, like, 'Dude, what is she doing here?'

AHSIN Do you think our styles are going to blend together nicely, or wrestle each other a bit?

POUNAMU I kinda feel like it'll be a little bit of both. I think it'll be a good learning curve for both of us. Your work tends to be pretty dynamic... there's a lot of movement, whereas mine is quite like, standing still. So it'll be pretty interesting to find a balance of both of those things, but I'm also really excited because I feel like making dynamic art is something that I struggle with a little bit.

AHSIN I think it'll be pretty cool to work together. I've low-key always been keen to work with you because I'm a fan of your artwork.

POUNAMU I like that we're gonna be doing something fun...like, playful.

AHSIN Hard out. Yeah, it's gonna be fun.