

Visual Studies Seminar Semester 2, 2025
Sponsored by Research Network in Cultures, Histories and Identities, a University
of Otago/Dunedin School of Art Initiative

For further information, and for recording links, contact:

Ed Hanfling

ed.hanfling@op.ac.nz

Full Abstracts

Time and Date: 5-&pm, Wednesday 13 August, 2025

Place: Boardroom, rm F209, Forth Street Building, Otago Polytechnic

Chair: Ed Hanfling, ed.hanfling@op.ac.nz

Presenter: Associate Professor Cecilia Novero

Kafka's Drawings as Sites of Form and Play: A Reading Informed by Walter Benjamin

This talk is divided into two main parts. The first briefly outlines Kilcher & Schmidt's theses presented in their recent volume of Kafka's drawings (cited in caption above). The second offers a concise exegesis of Walter Benjamin's essay on Kafka, alongside related ideas—particularly his writings on the mimetic faculty, Mickey Mouse, and, implicitly, the storyteller. The selection of these themes is deliberate: on one hand, it sketches the arc of my reading of the drawing-text relationship in Kafka, as derived from Benjamin. These reflections, I argue, open a space for interpreting Kafka's drawings not merely as marginalia or visual curiosities, but as pictorial acts that resonate with Benjamin's understanding of Kafka's prose. On the other, along these lines, my paper proposes that these drawings suggest a longing for a figurative *ex-negativo* expression of freedom and justice—forces that, for Benjamin, emanate from the desiring and playful charge of childhood, which persists even in Kafka's distorted world.

Bio: Cecilia Novero's interest in Visual Studies has focused on the historical and neo-avant-garde movements of the 20th century. More recently, Cecilia's research has delved into the representation of non-human animals in European literature, cinema and contemporary art. Her theoretical approach draws on critical theory, especially Adorno and Benjamin. She is on the editorial boards of several journals, including *The Journal of Avant-Garde Studies*. She is co-editor of the book series Otago German Studies (University of Otago).

Time and Date: 5-&pm, Wednesday 3 September, 2025

Place: Boardroom, rm F209, Forth Street Building, Otago Polytechnic

Chair: Ed Hanfling, ed.hanfling@op.ac.nz

Presenter: Dr Anya Samarasinghe

Iconographies of Civilisation and Ruins - Aotearoa New Zealand Soldiers' Encounters with Ancient Egypt during the First World War

Letters written by Aotearoa's soldiers stationed in Egypt during the First World War reference the ancient monuments, sites, and stories associated with Egypt's ancient past. These accounts have a vivid visual character expressed through descriptions of ruins. Some of these descriptions are echoed in sketches and watercolours made by soldiers. Formal and iconographic analysis of this visual material situates ancient Egypt in a wider cultural imaginary space and encapsulates an interest in the picturesque and the concept of ancient Egypt as a mysterious landmark in the history of Western civilisation. This paper considers how contested histories, visual imagination, and concepts of Egypt, the British Empire, and Aotearoa New Zealand are refracted through the prism of Aotearoa soldiers' encounters with Egypt's ancient past during the First World War.

Bio: Anya Samarasinghe is the 2025 Ihupukutaka Kairauipi Curatorial Intern at the Dunedin Public Art Gallery. She completed her PhD on Victorian art collections in Aotearoa's public art galleries in 2023 and has worked on projects involving the reception of ancient Egypt and medieval culture in Aotearoa.

Time and Date: 3-5pm, Sunday 21st September, 2025, WMH Lecture

Place: Dunedin Public Art Gallery Auditorium

Chair: Jonathan Cweorth, ignatius@dunedinblog.co.nz

Presenter: Professor Susan Ballard

Extraction, Energy, Ecology and Landscape in Aotearoa

In the late eighteenth century, the scientists and engineers of the Industrial Revolution in Scotland and England developed techniques to release millions of years of stored energy from deep in the earth. Not long after, these colonial practices of natural resource extraction were brought to Aotearoa and contributed profound transformations to the environment.

In the late twentieth century it was artists, amongst many others, who sought to challenge these extractive and colonial legacies by articulating ecological and environmental connections between people and place, narrative and whenua.

These shifting energies—from the earth as a resource to the earth as a lived presence—are recorded in works of art that represent the fundamental place of the geological imaginary in Aotearoa. In this talk, I explore how conflicted values of extraction and ecology continue to determine relationships to the earth, and the energies stored within it.

Bio: Susan Ballard is a Professor of art history and environmental humanities at [Te Herenga Waka](#)—Victoria University of Wellington, Aotearoa New Zealand. She brings decolonial and ecocritical feminist thinking to contemporary art and writing on themes of nature, extraction, affect, care, collaboration, and memory. She has written essays for *October*, *Environmental Humanities*, *GeoHumanities*, *Art New Zealand*, *Art in Australia*, and the *Sydney Review of Books* amongst many others. Recent books include the award-winning *Art and Nature in the Anthropocene: Planetary Aesthetics* (Routledge 2021) and *Alliances in the Anthropocene* (with Christine Eriksen, Palgrave 2020). Su's ongoing collaborative curatorial project with Sophie Thorn includes the exhibitions [Listening Stones Jumping Rocks](#) (2021) and [Folded Memory](#) (2023) both at Te Pātaka Toi Adam Art Gallery. Her collaborative autotheory *Shift Work: A Conversation on Art and Life in the Third Millennium* (with Liz Linden) will be published by Punctum in 2025. She is currently co-curating the exhibition *Reclaimed Land* (with Israel Randell) for the New Zealand Portrait Gallery in November 2025, and, working on a new book tracing an environmental art history of Aotearoa New Zealand, to be published in 2027.

Visual Studies Research Network Seminar: Visual Literacy Panel

Time and Date: 5-7pm, Wednesday 1 October 2025

Place: Boardroom, rm F209, Forth Street Building, Otago Polytechnic

Chair: Leoni Schmidt, leonisch@outlook.com

Presenters: Metiria Stanton Turei and Ana Terry

Metiria Stanton Turei on "Indigenous Visual Jurisprudence - Reclaiming Sovereignty"

Law is not exclusively confined to the written word nor solely dictated by codification within colonial legal systems. Indigenous law is enacted through relational obligations, visual and performative traditions, and the intergenerational transmission of knowledge. It exists beyond the formal boundaries of text-based legality, woven into whakapapa, whanaungatanga, kaitiakitanga, and the relational ethics of care, reciprocity, and responsibility.

Drawing on literature by Indigenous authors such as Ariella Aisha Azoulay, C. F. Black, and Indigenous creative works from Paemanu, Robyn Kahukiwa, Zoe Black,

and Maungarongo Te Kawa I consider the intersection of Indigenous creative works and legal theory literature in the development of Indigenous visual jurisprudence. Indigenous visual jurisprudence manifests as a reclamation of sovereignty articulated through visual and performative legal expressions - resistance woven into the fabric of cultural practices - a testament to the resilience of Indigenous legal orders.

Bio: Metiria Stanton Turei (Ngāti Kahungunu ki Wairarapa, Āti Haunui a Pāpārangi, Rangitane, Te Ātiawa) is a pukenga mātua (senior lecturer) in the Faculty of Law at Ōtākou Whakaihū Waka, University of Otago and holds an LLM, University of Otago. She teaches Mātauraka Ture me te Mātāpono (Māori law and Philosophy) and her research specialty is in Indigenous Visual Jurisprudence. She has an Honours degree from the Dunedin School of Art, is a textile artist and was a Member of Parliament for 15 years.

Ana Terry on “A Pictorial Turn: Visualising Education”

“Seeing comes before words,” observes Berger (1972), suggesting that visual recognition precedes verbal articulation. While this insight is foundational in early childhood education, by the time we reach tertiary level the academic focus shifts profoundly from image to text (Kędra, 2018). The relationship between seeing and knowing is not afforded the same academic rigour as that between text and knowledge (Kearney, 2020). This textual hegemony is at odds not only with the highly visual world in which we live and communicate, but it also disregards how best we learn - with images being key. Although visual literacy has long been identified as a key twenty-first century competency (New Media Consortium, 2005), tertiary education continues to lag in embedding it into academic culture and policy (Fragou & Papadopoulou, 2020). Over the past four years, Ana has been working to position visual literacy as a recognised and embedded interdisciplinary practice in higher education. In this presentation, she shares a research-informed visual literacy framework designed to support teaching and learning in this space.

Bio: Ana Terry is a principal lecturer and learning and teaching specialist with Te Ama Ako - Learning and Teaching Development at Otago Polytechnic and holds an MFA from the Otago Polytechnic. She teaches a postgraduate course in visual communication for learning design and is an academic capability partner working with Design, Dunedin School of Art, and Architectural Studies. She has a Master of Fine Arts from the Dunedin School of Art, is a practicing artist/filmmaker, graphic designer, and an executive committee member of the International Visual Literacy Association ([IVLA](#))