

MATERIALISING: THE ART OF GAYE JURISICH

Essay accompanying the solo exhibition
The Jurisich Experience: In-situ installations by Gaye Jurisich

*There are no rules.
That is how art is born, how breakthroughs happen.
Go against the rules or ignore the rules.
That is what invention is about.*

- Helen Frankenthaler

It was in North Waikato, Raahui Pookeka - Huntly near Lake Whangapee that Hazel and William Beverland bought some farm land. They extended their land mass, purchasing extra acreage from Kaumaatua Jack Moana. By 1953 their family of five expanded to six - Marjory Gaye Beverland was born. Living an idyllic pastoral life provided the young Marjory (known by her middle name Gaye) with her first landscape view that would inspire her love of land-art and open space.

Being raised with expansive horizons, a father who played the piano accordion and mother who would sing around the house, write poetry and paint, Gaye's own habits of singing, drawing, and making things developed organically within such a creative family culture. Drawing was to be the longest lasting of these interests to continue in Gaye's life. Her mother taught her knitting, crocheting and sewing from a very young age as well as giving her access to a massive shed filled with all kinds of farm materials with No.8 wire, some serious cutting tools, wood fencing posts, and baling twine. Without close neighbours or spatial limitations, she had a free-for-all life: making contraptions and with all the tools and materials to do so. This investigative inventiveness formed the foundations of what is Gaye's primary art practice today.

In 1976, Gaye married Anthony Jurisich; they settled in Hamilton and soon were parents to two sons. As an early childhood educator, Gaye was less able to find time for her art practice as well as parenting, so her artistic urges were gratified through music. She began singing jazz in 1981 and performed regularly in Hamilton venues. With no time available between family and working life, art school was no longer an option. Instead, Gaye undertook her own research - informed by her music and studying art history and artists that were pertinent to her perception as an artist. As the children grew less dependent, Gaye's art practice continued to flourish.

LOCALE

As time became more available, Gaye forged a close relationship with the local art community in Waikato. Joining the Waikato Society of Arts, she found her 'people', eventually teaching painting classes for them over the years at different intervals. Her work extended to teaching privately and eventually to become a gallerist in 2018 with *Freit Contemporary*. This was an art gallery which mounted exhibitions of some of the most current and renowned Waikato artists such as Ahsin Ahsin, Peter Dornauf, Tracy Croucher, Craig McClure, Eliza Webster, and Helen Dowling. The gallery was one of the most successful short-term contemporary art spaces opened in the Waikato due largely to the huge respect from Gaye's extensive network of friends and contemporaries established over her long career.

INFLUENCES

One of the influences of importance to Gaye's sculptural practice was the American minimalist painter and sculptor, Fred Sandback (b. 1943 d. 2003) – this is especially evident in her land and foreshore works which utilise coloured twine arranged in multiple strands. They are pegged to the ground and tethered to the low-tide beach during low tide. Other land artists who have inspired her are American sculptor, David Smith (b. 1906 d. 1965), British land-artist, Sir Richard Long (b. 1945), and German American sculptor, Eva Hesse (b. 1936 d.1970). Among her painting heroes, Gaye names German abstract expressionist, Georg Baselitz (b. 1938), American painter, Helen Frankenthaler (b. 1928 d. 2011), African-American painter, Kara Walker (b. 1969), British painter, Rose Wylie (b. 1934) and British painter, Roy Oxlade (b. 1929 d. 2014).



Sir Richard Long RA, *Circle in Antarctica*, 2012 (image retrieved from <https://www.royalacademy.org.uk/article/ra-recommends-5-11-august> on 29 July 2020).



Gaye Jurisich's *Garland*, gathered oyster shell clusters, 2012, 11,000 mm dia., Westmere Beach, New Zealand, image courtesy of the artist.

The development of Gaye's large-scale land installations began in 2005 after she received an invitation from directors Dorothy and John Wakelin to exhibit at the Waitakaruru Sculpture Arboretum in Tauwhare, just outside Hamilton. To get access to an expanse of natural parkland was a return to the large areas of land she enjoyed in her youth and a rare opportunity to exercise her playfulness with colour, line and scale in ways she had never been able to before. Her works would finally take epic journeys suspended in the skies, above the land, course through the trees and travel from the whenua (earth) to the moana (sea). An example of this is *Stitch* (twine, wire pegs, 2009), installed by Gaye as part of *Sculpture on the Gulf*, Waiheke Island. The work sat, or rather began, on the land, suspended in space, stretching out and painting the ocean and skyline with pink lines.

Gaye's work with lines in various landscapes, sky and waterscapes work together with nature and treat nature as a 'substrate' or surface upon which to make marks. This juxtaposition of the unnatural against a natural backdrop could be considered a living collage. She doesn't see this as enhancing nature but collaborating with nature to give viewers a glimpse of the way she thinks and sees. *Stitch* literally stitches one landform to another.

The relationships between surrounding/site and work are vital to the success of the finished sculpture and so as I continue all of this reflective progression, ideas are generated.

- Gaye Jurisich, 2019



Stitch, twine, wire pegs, 2009. *Sculpture on the Gulf*, Waiheke Island, Aotearoa New Zealand. Image courtesy of *Sculpture on the Gulf*.

In 2012, another extensive work was installed across a small body of water in the Waitakaruru Sculpture Park.

Since that time, her large-scale works have featured nationally and internationally in *Sculpture on the Shore* in Auckland; *Westcott Bay Sculpture Park*, San Francisco, USA; *Headland – Sculpture on the Gulf – Waiheke Island*; *Sculpture by the Sea – Cottesloe*; *Swell Sculpture Festival – Brisbane*; *Lorne Sculpture Biennial – Victoria, Australia* and her ceiling to floor installation of red ribboned corn-starch strips, *Big Red* featured at Tauranga Art Gallery Toi Tauranga, to name only a few.



Sway, crop twine, 2012, Waitakaruru Sculpture Park, Hamilton, Aotearoa New Zealand. Image courtesy of the artist.

Like jazz music, some of Gaye's more abstract painted works possess a certain musicality – like the counter rhythms one might hear in a smooth or more avant-garde jazz. Perhaps it is her ability to sing modern jazz that informs Jurisich's ability to piece together disparate elements to compose an artwork. Jurisich's drawing and painting style are evidence of a rare ability to interpret an idea through gestural marks: each, a small-scale performance.

Her work with No.8 wire is among some of the more experimental of sculpture works. Her award-winning work *Snare* could be called a three-dimensional rendering or drawing in wire. Many of her works use one material, like a riff that can be heard in a song: using one type of material acts as a repeated motif in various series of Gaye's works. *Snare* (see image below) shows off Gaye's ability to draw a tenuous emotive line using any material. Comparing the marks made in *Untitled* (see image below) with *Snare*, – show them to be quintessential 'Jurisich' gestures. They reveal an artist whose comprehensive understanding of materiality results from a life-long engagement with them.



Gaye Jurisich amidst her award-winning work, *Snare*, 2019, Fieldays No 8 Wire Art Award. Image courtesy of the artist and Waikato Museum Te Whare Taonga o Waikato



Untitled, acrylic on canvas, 2018. Image courtesy of the artist.

Still, the large-scale installation currently showing in The Barry Hopkins Gallery, is similar in concept as the white thread installation occupies only a small amount of negative (free) linear space across the opposing gallery walls. It is Gaye's sensitivity to timing and tension that makes these large-scale works an immersive experience. Each person entering will wend their way through Gaye's work as though it is tapu or hallowed space. This is not like other exhibitions where pictures are placed on a wall, nor are they sculptures that can be easily viewed from all angles. This is an orderly network of physically drawn lines that invites us to come closer while simultaneously repelling us with its delicate orchestration. It is a work that evokes the same feeling you might get when you stomp into a room and then realise the baby is sleeping. This appearance of fragility asks us to pause awhile. Perhaps you will experience something unusual or new, or something you haven't experienced in a very long time.

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