

# Pollen in the Trough

12 October - 12 November 2022

Wormhole Gallery and Studio

Rebecca Hawkes (Pākehā)

Sarah Hudson (Ngāti Awa, Ngāti Pūkeko, Ngāi Tūhoe)

Madison Kelly (Kāi Tahu, Kāti Māmoe, Pākehā)

*Pollen in the Trough* considers spooky season in the countryside. We write a rural horror story together, as fat blossoms burst outside, and tankers rattle over cattle stops.

There's pollen in the trough and pollen on our eyelashes. Old sores fester, fences sag, and hearts beat faster in the cowshed.

The exhibition brings together three queer artists from across Aotearoa who make use of slightly scary, visceral, prickly aesthetics to explore their relationship to land - and the ways this relationship has been impacted by colonial land management practises.

*Pollen in the Trough* is not just a critique of agriculture and conservation practises. It's a mihi to the places that raise us. It's a reminder that queer bodies live here too. It's a challenge, to pick up care and run with it, to dissolve rigid categories, and recognise the ways human, creature, land swirl together.

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*Manatū Ahu Matua* by Sarah Hudson (Ngāti Awa, Ngāti Pūkeko, Ngāi Tūhoe) shows the artist with bare shoulders, face almost fully obscured by a pale yellow mask. The title is the Reo Māori name for the Ministry of Primary Industries. The mask is made from processed cheese slices.

Taped and glued together, the cheese mask wraps around Sarah's head, shutting off all sensory inputs except for the ones in her mouth. Looking at it is a tactile experience. I hear the plastic and imagine what it feels like to blink inside that clammy, quilted enclosure.

The image was made in 2014, when the artist first moved back home to Whakatāne. It is part of a larger body of work that explores the impact of introduced species and practices on the whenua. The project intertwines aesthetics from BDSM culture to open a dialog about consent and the relationships we have with the primary sector.

Sarah's practice has morphed a lot since 2014, but investigating and deepening relationships to land and mātauranga Māori continue to ground their mahi. Land, land back, land rights all the time. We're hungry for it.

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*Matarua Fence Walk* by Madison Kelly (Kāi Tahu, Kāti Māmoe, Pākehā) is a prickly, slippery weaving made from jewellery wire, fencing wire, and utility wire.

In this iteration she hovers in the mouth of the space like a ghost, twined whenu just brushing the floor. Her edges are prickly and fine. You can walk around *Matarua*, look at both sides, breach the boundary.

*Matarua* is a vaguely body sized weaving. The weaving method Madison has used, whatu, is a finger weft-twining technique usually used to construct garments from soft harakeke fibre. But here, whatu looks like mesh, a harsh net, a slippery grid.

Madison intended *Matarua* to look like a fence. Specifically, the predator resistant fencing on the sanctuary they work at: Te Korowai o Mihiwaka. The name, gifted to the sanctuary by Madison's hapū, refers to the fauna and flora of the valley as a korowai that descends from the mauka Mihiwaka and envelops the taoka species there.

At work, Madison walks this boundary line. It protects, but it also excludes. It drapes over the valley in a different way to the ngāhere korowai. It is rigid. Madison's mahi toi explores multispecies histories and futures. *Matarua Fence Walk*, made from precious and utilitarian wires, brings boundaries and conservation culture into question. She's a wobbly drawing of a fence. A bristling cloak. She's made with care; she shows us both sides.

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Rebecca Hawkes (Pākehā) contributed words for *Pollen in the Trough*. Her poem *Peach Teats* is painted large on the wall, and *Meat Lovers*, her first book, sits on a shelf nearby for further reading.

Rebecca's writing and paintings (which adorn the book) are visceral, infected, fantastic, awful, gorgeous. *Meat Lovers* was mostly written in Wellington, with heavy reference to the sheep and beef farm Rebecca grew up on near Methven. It delves into the places and sensations that raised her.

*Peach Teats* comes from the MEAT section of *Meat Lovers*. In it, young calves drink milk from a trough with teats. The milk is their mother and they are literally frothing for sustenance. No thoughts, just pretty eyes and a survival drive that fattens them to perfection. The machine works like it's meant to. Rebecca shows us its body parts; the flaps and valves. The system works perfectly. Like it's natural.

Obscene and innocent and beautiful all at once, Rebecca's words are tasty. The big letters require us to gaze upwards to read them. Some visitors, who leave their boots at the door to the gallery, chuckle softly in recognition.

Rebecca wanted *Meat Lovers* to bear witness to the care, responsibility, and emotional gravity involved in farming animals, as well as the more fraught moments of moral compromise in our custodianship of land and creatures. She also wanted a sexy rebrand for rural queers out here yearning in the pastures.

*Meat Lovers* renders the rural experience surprising and extremely tactile. Metal, hide, skin, and food dissolve into one another. Hierarchies are set up, then ruptured like coldsores. Sex, birth, death, rot, care, control, and toil seep out from the rural setting and infect the protagonist's relationships. The rural is more than a backdrop; it's a complex character, which haunts the book as much as queerness does. It's interesting to see them in the same space. The farm girl shapeshifts. Does she take the farm with her?

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*Pollen in the Trough* brings these works together in Edgecumbe, a town surrounded by farmland. The gallery is over the stopbank from Rangitaiki River, which is flanked by paddocks and canals on its clear cut journey out to sea. These works are more than concepts. The questions they ask glint in the light. They find flesh. They are imaginative. They help me feel real in my semi-rural context.

Me and this place make eye contact. It's complicated, but we care for each other. The dry grass chafes my legs and there's pollen on the wind. The river runs past. I sneeze.

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## Artist Bios and Works List

**Rebecca Hawkes** (Pākehā) is a queer poet and painter from a sheep and beef farm near Methven. Her first book of poems, *Meat Lovers*, was unleashed by Auckland university press in 2022 and won Best International First Collection in the UK Poet Laureate's Laurel Prize for ecopoetry. She co-edits the online journal *Sweet Mammalian* and co-edited an anthology of poetry on climate crisis from Aotearoa and the Pacific, *No Other Place To Stand* (also released by AUP in 2022). She lives and works in Pōneke, tending to her carnivorous pitcher plants.

[www.rebeccahawkesart.com](http://www.rebeccahawkesart.com)

@ gorse\_bloom

*Meat Lovers* (2022)

Paperback

160mm x 210mm

*Peach Teats* (2022)

Poem painted on wall

**Sarah Hudson** (Ngāti Awa, Ngāti Pūkeko, Ngāi Tūhoe) is an artist, researcher and mother from Whakatāne. As a founding member of Kauae Raro Research Collective, Sarah has spent the last two years promoting and protecting Māori paint making practices. She splits her time between home-educating her 7-year-old, facilitating weekly content for Kauae Raro, and creating works with her other art collaboration, Mata Aho Collective.

[www.sarahhudson.co.nz](http://www.sarahhudson.co.nz)

@sharkfather

*Manatū Ahu Matua* (2014)

Digital photograph on Hahnemuhle photo rag 308

594mm x 841mm

**Madison Kelly** (Kāi Tahu, Kāti Mamoe, Pākehā) graduated from the Dunedin School of Art in 2017, with a BVA (Hons First Class) in drawing. Grounded in processes of observation and duration, their Ōtepoti based practice works to explore multispecies histories and futures.

[www.madisonkellyart.com](http://www.madisonkellyart.com)

@mfmkelly

*Matarua Fence Walk* (2022)

Fencing wire, jewellery wire, utility wire

800 mm x 2000 mm

## Further Reading

Check out [this interview](#) with Rebecca Hawkes and NZ Book Lovers.

Rebecca was reading [Horse with Hat](#) by Marty Smith, [Unseasoned Campaigner](#) by Janet Newman, and [The Cow](#) by Ariana Reines while writing *Meat Lovers*.

Head over to Circuit for a [video work](#) from the *Manatū Ahu Matua* series by Sarah Hudson.

Check out Sarah's other mahi as part of collectives [Kauae Raro](#) and [Mata Aho Collective](#).

Madison Kelly recommends [Te Manu Huna a Tāne](#), by Jennifer Gillam and Eugene Hansen, which focuses on a series of wananga run by Ngāti Torehina on the use and pelting of kiwi, and includes kōrero from DoC on the evolution of conservation practices and the acknowledgement of mātauranga Māori.

Madison also suggests looking at mahi by painter [Diane Prince](#).

When researching for this exhibition, I came across [Whatu Kākahu: Māori Cloaks](#), ed. Awhina Tamarapa. This has beautiful photos, diagrams, and information on Māori weaving techniques used for making garments. They may help you understand how Madison's work is constructed. There's a copy at Whakatāne Library - call number 746.41 WHA MAORI. Maybe there will be a copy at your local library, too.

