



Out of the Woods: Te-Wao-Nui-a-Tane
Jane Zusters

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Tiritiri Matangi

The first time I went to the bird sanctuary on Tiritiri Matangi I Father and I were among a crowd waiting on the wharf. We watched a long line of Muslim schoolgirls in white headscarves, trackpants, and brand new trainers trail up the gang plank and board the ferry before us.

"Where do you think those kids are from?" I asked my Father.

"Mt Roskill", he said reading the side of their school minibus.

When we got to the island visitors were subject to comprehensive instruction by Department of Conservation staff on all aspects of our behaviour. We were briefed on bio-security, fire lighting, photograph taking, bird feeding, rubbish collecting and permissible style of track walking.

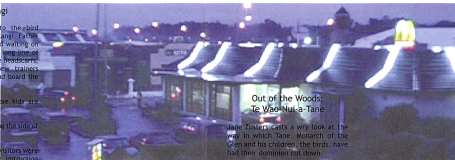
Father and I listened politely and at the conclusion of the lecture were released. Surprisingly the way into the forest was marked by an extravagant golden arch of flowering and heavily scented Australian wattle. Nectar feeding birds like kokako loved the easy find food and gurgled themselves silly so the ranger said.

Father and I pushed through the cloying yellow swathe and found ourselves on a track of beaten earth wide enough to walk only in single file. Intuitively I fell in behind and without speaking we began to make our way along the margin of manuka scrub and deeper into the regenerating bush. It was cool and even in high summer slightly damp. All was quiet but as the track plunged into a gully the air was suddenly filled with the din of multiple conversations. Right above our heads flitted piwakawaka chatting incessantly. Behind them tieke in a Versace inspired coat of chocolate brown and black with striking orange saddle sewing on the end of a branch arguing loudly with tit. Hiti twitchy as ever could not resist making comment while mohua only feigning attention was preoccupied by garrulous old katarakihi and their typically cheeky response. However close to the feeding station a single voice could be heard against the rest. Kormako, brilliant green breast thrust forward, throat swelling assumed centre stage and then in the manner of the grand opera declaimed like a diva. How extraordinary it was to stop and listen to the children of Tane.

Talking.

All at once and in te roe.

Cushla Parekzohai



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Jane Zusters casts a wry look at the way in which Tane, Monarch of the Glen and his children, the birds, have had their dominion cut down.

Their homes and habitats have been milled and planed and sanded and smoothed to become Sovereign timber souvenirs.

Using found Sovereign timber objects Zusters playfully reflects how the primordial forest of these islands has been put on our coffee tables, mantelpieces and pencil cases.

Laid on the ground like parquet flooring, assembled in a 'hopscotch' game, are a range of domestic paraphernalia such as pokerwork trays decorated with birds appropriated from Buller's iconographic aviary. The 'hopscotch' references a formation where in ancient times the Romans rehearsed battle games and campaign strategies. This type of military assault course used to toughen the most hardened of centurions, was copied by children and turned into a game. In New Zealand school playgrounds the game of 'hopscotch' omits the square at the top representing heaven. In her configuration Zusters makes the extinct hula occupy this space since literally the long dead species hula are these days found only in heaven.

Through the medium of digital video Zusters also thinks about representing the land as it is now and as it was before. In fast food for thought wily kaha feeding convivially are tensely juxtaposed with the processed anonymity of a McDonald's drive-in. You want fries with that?

Cushla Parekzohai

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Information on Jane Zusters' art:
www.janezusters.co.nz

