

in rivers

Group Statement

"In rivers, the water you touch is the last of what has passed and the first of that which comes, so with present time."

Leonardo da Vinci, Notebooks

We used the above quote by da Vinci as a starting point to explore rivers universally, as well as the Whanganui River. As a group of artists who all reside in Whanganui, our daily lives are affected by this capricious body of water. The city was, and continues to be, shaped by the awa that flows through it and so are our daily lives. The city is split in half by it, we walk and drive over bridges that cross it, have houses on ancient flood plains and garden in their fertile soil.

It is tidal, prone to flooding, murky, and rudely has been accused of flowing upside down and it is uniquely beautiful.

Rivers have shaped this country, and other countries of the world. Each river is unique to its context and is more than just a body of water. More than just a geographical feature.

In 2017, ideas of the uniqueness of the Whanganui River were affirmed by the Te Awa Tupua Act, which acknowledges the river legally a person, with the same rights, responsibilities, and legal identity as a person. This approach has been recognised internationally as innovative and influential, and five days after the Whanganui River legislation, the River Ganges was bestowed personhood by the Indian government.

With this exhibition each artist getting to know the river that is the focus of their work; living in Whanganui where our river is a person that we live along side. Together we have explored the physical, emotional and metaphorical aspects of this and other flowing bodies of water.

Jenn Dickie, Jill Stegmann, Fiona McGowan, Catherine Macdonald and Lindsay Marsh

{ Gallery 2 }

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Exploring the physical, emotional and metaphorical aspects of flowing water.

{ Gallery 2 }

Jill Stegmann

"Every valley has been made by its own river"

Leonardo da Vinci, Notebooks

Catherine Macdonald

The farm I grew up on has the Upokongaro Stream running through it, beyond our farm it connects with the Makirikiri Stream and then, they flow into the Whanganui River. I spent a lot of my childhood playing in, on and besides the stream. I built forts, got stuck in quick sand, watched water boatmen and avoided eels.

My parents were part of the local Civil Defence network this involved having a CB radio that in case of an emergency would connect them with others in the community. Flooding in the various valleys could result in farms being cut off. The CB radio network helped warn people of what was coming and allowed for the moving of stock to higher ground. Floods seem to come at all times and for me would change the landscape of my backyard playground. I was told to leave it for a while, until it settled down.

Once the waters where back to where they should be there would be a cautious of checking the swimming spots. Had they changed depth? Was there slips? What has been buried by the silt and what had been uncovered? Was it safe? There would be a thick coating of mud over everything, but over the months lush grasses would push through and gradually the landscape would become familiar again.

Jenn Dickie

Originally from Wellington, Jenn Dickie is a graduate from the *Quay School for the Arts, Whanganui*.

Dickie's current body of work is part of her ongoing response to the theme *in rivers*, aiming to capture the energies created by flowing water. The fluid activity of painting enables Dickie to transform the materiality of paint into a metaphor of nature.

Lindsay Marsh

My work focuses on the movement of tides.

It is fascinating to observe the merging of the incoming tide of the sea with that of the outgoing river tide, or the resulting friction when two waters meet.

One can also enjoy the serenity of the gentle flow of a river's journey out to sea - before the next cycle begins.

Fiona McGowan

“The Whanganui, then, was a river without beauty, in a region without a sense of place, in a community without a sense of belonging.” This quote from David Young in *Woven by Water* describes the Whanganui we came to town to in my childhood. There was no pride in a river full of sewage and waste.

I loved going fishing with my Grandfather at the Castlecliff Wharf. At the end of the day a huge rush of blood gushed out under the wharf as the abattoir flushed out the killing chain. It attracted the fish. You turned away from the river in the town, not wanting to see things floating past. The Bridge to Bridge swimming race was cancelled. Not only was the once clear river full of waste but its waters were laden with silt from eroding hills which had been “broken in” by European settlers for pastoral farming.

Hence the title of “the River that runs upside down”. The Māori river people were coming to live and work in town. Once the decision was made to remove waste from the river, beginning at the Coastal city of Whanganui and eventually all the way up to Taumarunui and beyond, the mood of the town gradually lifted. People faced the river with a sense of pride.

At the time of the Pākaitore Occupation in 1995, River tribes stood firm on their place on the River and Pakeha showed a desire to learn more. We (Pakeha) even learned to spell the name correctly, acknowledge Māori ancestral and spiritual relationships and feel pride in the personhood of the Whanganui River, Te Awa Tupua.

I acknowledge the river tribes in choosing the Tata or canoe baler to represent the movement of water and life on the Whanganui River.