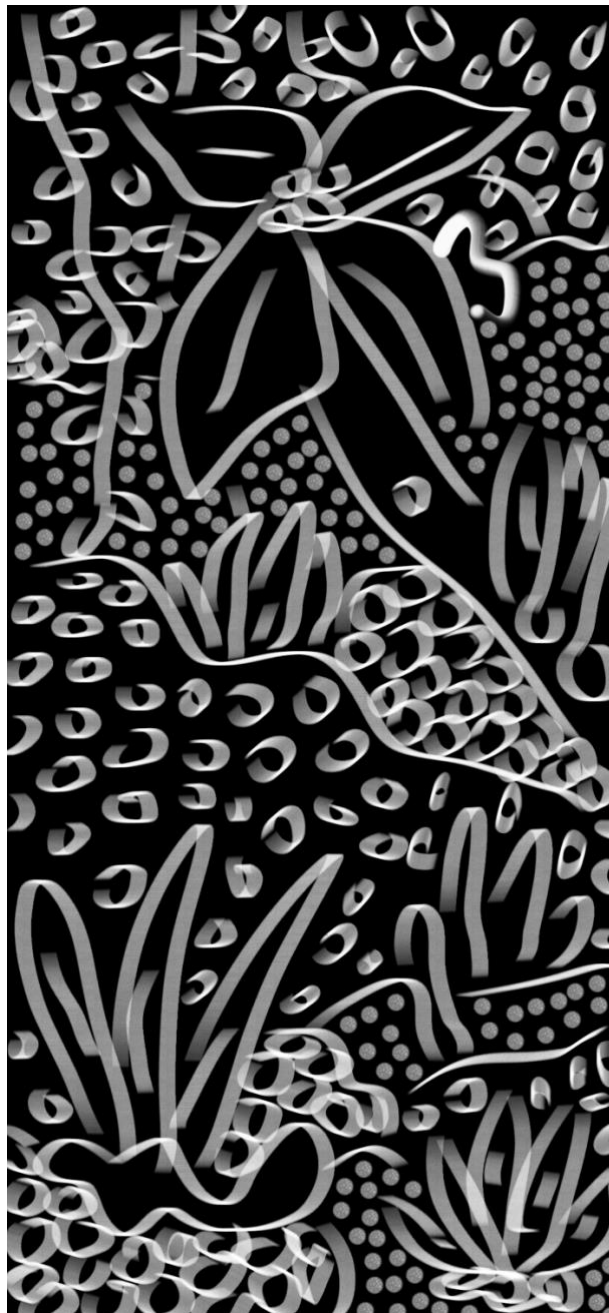


Artists' Kōrero

The Art of Wesley John Fourie

Wesley John Fourie, Felix Harris, and Taarn Scott



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The Art of Wesley John Fourie

I saved all my ribbons for thee....
Leonard Cohen, "Bird on a Wire"

A painting should be fertile. It must give birth to a world....
Joan Miró

The art of Wesley John Fourie tugs at the heart like an emotional "bed hoist" with evocative longing. Post-punk musings flirt with the poetic as we are pulled into this world of lush greenery. Fourie's use of materials forges a special relationship with the viewer. A *Portrait of a Midnight Ghost Forest* (2021) evokes an aura of mystery and a sense of wonder. Eroticism and desire blend into a magical landscape where two figures embrace expressing their love of nature. Native flora abound. Like the haze of a dream reminiscent of French artist Henri Rousseau's *The Dream* (1910), there is much joy and life in the habitat. Here ferns stand erect much like the flowers in the French artist's painting. There is a frank admission of love and love lost. *Heartbreak Express* (2020) is one such example of being crushed in the aftermath of a relationship and lusting after what once was. Embroidered with text as if it were the blanket he wore while camping in the wilderness, Fourie takes us on this journey, somewhat of a slippery slope at times, with its longing and heartache.

Felix Harris
Dunedin, June 2022

Interview with Wesley John Fourie

Conducted by Taarn Scott via email

[T] Kia ora Wesley, thank you for taking the time to have a *kōrero* around your practice, it's always a delight to talk to you and I have great respect for you and your creations! Firstly, it's not been long since we spoke, but how are you doing and how are your days looking at the moment?

[WJF] *At present my days are largely spent sitting on the sofa stitching for twelve hours or more a day, with the odd break for painting. Over the last year or so, my insomnia has led me to be more creatively active in the night, rather than the day, so I am answering your question in relation to the night, more than the day. I'm doing okay, I have a lot going on at the moment and just trying my best to navigate it.*

[T] I am glad to hear that you're doing okay. The lack of boundaries around work for the studio artist can be a nightmare to negotiate! Speaking of said practice, when you are working on a piece, after conceptualizing the work how does this take form for you?

[WJF] *This is totally dependent on the work I'm making at that moment. For example, the work sitting in the window, Snare (Mount Cargill, in Loved Up Colors), took about a month of solid knitting. For a painting it can take days or months, and for*

embroidery it's almost always a long time. I recognize I'm definitely more attracted to working on something long term, rather than high turnover, as the process of making the thing is very often what I'm the most interested in, rather than the resolved work itself.

[T] When I think of your practice in a practical sense, I think tactile, laborious media that have a portability to them. Is this a deliberate aspect of your making?

[WJF] *No! Not at all. I'm just terrible with deadlines so I make on the bus because it's free time. Whenever I catch a long bus ride, I always bring an embroidery hoop and some thread with me, but the majority of what I make probably couldn't be made there. It's handy that a lot of the materials I work with can pack down. I'm yet to try painting [in transit] dunno how that would work out.*

[T] Could you elaborate on the labor-intensive side of your making?

[WJF] *I like things that take a lot of time to work on and work through. I am attracted to the process of making the thing. Ideas are usually resolved to me over extended periods, which allow a deepening of my relationship with the works as they are being created. I never really just work on one thing at a time, I quite like to have multiple things on the go so I can have that time with them to best address what the end result would be.*

[T] So it's integral to the work and this time feeds back into the piece. The laborious links with settled, perhaps introspective

periods and yet you are rather nomadic. Through moving around a bit in the last couple of years, how have your feelings towards your practice changed?

[WJF] *Yeah, I hop around a fair bit. I like it about 90% of the time. I'm consistently taking in new information which I think is good for my practice. A lot of the time when I'm going somewhere, I'm doing it for art. The next thing is a residency in Venice in October, where I want to try and create a little bronze sculpture.*

[T] Who and what currently inspires your pieces?

[WJF] *At present, I'm working on a suite of paintings taken from old gay porn magazines I had as a teenager. I've always painted, or rather, made work in response to the natural environment and in this recent series it's been interesting to inject the human form into that. I'm also stitching away on a large-scale color field embroidery which I'm hoping to have ready by the end of the year, which at present looks like a wave that's going to crash over the world. I am inspired by my friends mostly. I like the work of Tracey Emin, and for New Zealanders in particular I'm a huge fan of Kate Newby and Natasha Matila Smith.*

[T] I know that your work is grounded in a deep affinity for the natural world, and indeed many of your pieces in "They Came to Me the Night" explore this concept. Tell me a little more about this.

[WJF] *I used to work on the Milford Track, and when I couldn't sleep, I would go for these torch-lit bush walks, then hop back into bed and draw them. It's kinda become something of a language to me, this drawing process. I have these patterns that aren't allowed to touch one another, and normally after a drawing or two I fall asleep. Recently I have turned back to this drawing process, the results of which are currently in this room.*

[T] That's a really interesting process. When you draw these pieces now, are they tied to insomnia and used as a tool, or has it developed into more of an aesthetic technique?

[WJF] *The drawings themselves are like a method of meditation for me. I would agree [that I use these images] more as an aesthetic language than as a tool, though I do use them in the times when I can't sleep. I draw whenever I feel like it.*

[T] With your return to drawing, in your show at RDS Gallery "They Came to Me in the Night," you bring together different media and emotions. What are your thoughts around this show?

[WJF] *This show is very much what I feel like is going on in my brain at the moment. Reflecting on old memories, insomnia, the lonely figures, trying to work through relationships with our rapidly changing natural environment. In Alistair's [Alistair Fox] essay he references Roland Barthes sense of postmodern romanticism, where the object of desire is already lost. I kind of feel like that's*

what is going on for me with this show, some bizarre sort of mourning, but in the happiest colors possible.

[T] With so many different projects on the horizon, what is a work that remains, at this moment, unrealized, but that you'd love to dream into reality?

[WJF] *Haha, I would love to arm knit the height of Aoraki | Mount Cook and plonk it in a piazza at the Venice Biennale. Nah really there are so many ideas that come to mind. Before I die, I want to make something in bronze, and to turn some of my poetry into large scale neons.*

[T] I can absolutely see these pieces, bold and glorious! Well Wesley, thank you for your time and thoughts. We are lucky enough to experience the outpouring of you in your *toi* at RDS and all the richer for it. All the love e *hoa*.

Taarn Scott and Wesley John Fourie

August 2022

