

THE NEXT GENERATION



*Harriet Hawksworth, Kāhu Kaan,
Mona Bekhit, Raina Mackenzie
Mapel, Unna Pumjan*

**RDS Gallery
2026**

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*Harriet Hawksworth, Kāhu Kaan,
Mona Bekhit, Raina Mackenzie Mapel,
Unna Pumjan*

Assembled by
Scott Eady

An Essay on the Occasion of the Exhibition
The Next Generation, at RDS Gallery,
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Editors
Alistair Fox and Hilary Radner

RDS GALLERY

Cover Image: Mona Bekhit, *Needles II*, 2026, ceramic stoneware and cotton thread, 400x130x100mm

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The Next Generation: Lightness as a New Methodological and Aesthetic Position

By Scott Eady

Recent sculptural practices emerging from Aotearoa increasingly foreground questions of material agency, ecological consciousness, and the reconfiguration of inherited craft traditions.

Ōtepoti is host to numerous marble and bronze statues that assert the authority and permanence of the British Empire. A cluster of these sits only a block from RDS Gallery in Queen's Garden, where the Queen Victoria Memorial Statue stands in dignified grandeur. This work exemplifies a traditional sculptural logic that is fixed, commemorative, and invested in stability and control.¹

Unlike those working within the more fixed and commemorative traditions, these five artists, presented in "The Next Generation," approach sculpture differently. Their works do not seek permanence, monumentality, or the staking of territorial claims. Instead, sculpture becomes a site of negotiation. Across

¹ While the twentieth century saw a spate of developments in sculptural practice within the art world, the public face of sculpture remains largely associated with this tradition, addressing a cohesive "imagined community" (in Benedict Anderson's terms) of nation and state. [Editors' note.]

the exhibition, this includes shifting relationships between land and history, handmade processes and contemporary ideological frameworks, and individual expression and collective responsibility. Not every artist engages with all of these concerns equally, but each operates within this expanded field, where meaning is contingent, responsive, and often unresolved.

A shared attentiveness to salvaged matter, recycled substrates such as reclaimed timber, scrap metal, repurposed school stationery, recycled clay, and environmentally responsive modes of making situates these artists' practices within broader contemporary conversations around material agency and ecological thinking. Increasingly, sculptural practice is understood not as an act of mastery over inert substances, but as a collaborative process of listening, adjustment, and ethical responsiveness to the vitality of organic and non-human material worlds—the idea that materials are not passive, but exert their own pressures, behaviours, and constraints, within the making process and ecological thinking.

Across these works, formal concerns such as structure, surface, weight, repetition, and spatial rhythm remain central. Yet they are consistently inflected by historical awareness, as materials are selected and handled for the histories they carry rather than for form alone. Timber, clay, paper and shell are not treated as neutral substances but as carriers of environmental memory and colonial inscription, with traces of use, extraction, and displacement influencing the work's formal outcomes.

Harriet Hawkesworth

Harriet Hawksworth's sculptural practice intervenes in the lifecycle of processed native timber, drawing attention to the entanglement of forestry, settlement, and domestic construction within capitalist economies of extraction. Working with salvaged Rimu sourced from demolition sites and discarded structures, Hawksworth subjects the material to a process of sawing strips, steaming, bending, and temporary reattachment to living trees. This procedure establishes a reciprocal relationship between dead timber and its still-living arboreal counterparts. Branches become active collaborators, enabling the formation of serpentine curves that resist the rectilinear logic typically imposed through industrial processing. The subsequent stitching of these elements with cotton thread and the addition of protective spikes introduces a further layer of symbolic complexity—the suggestion of an oscillation between healing and defence.

Suspended within the gallery space, Hawksworth's forms evoke arboreal canopies or skeletal remnants. Their apparent lightness destabilises conventional sculptural expectations of mass, gravity and “grounded-ness,” suggesting instead a condition of ecological precarity and interdependence.

Kāhu Kaan

Kāhu Kaan's sculptures engage directly with the spatial and material consequences of colonial settlement in Aotearoa. His practice frequently stages encounters between Māori cosmological understandings of land, sea and sky and the infrastructural impositions of settler economies.

In one series, weathered pūriri fence posts are carved to reveal emerging forms of tuna (eels), symbolically re-inhabiting structures historically used to demarcate property boundaries and restrict access to traditional food-gathering sites. This act of material reanimation recalls the draining of wetlands and the transformation of Mahika kai into pastoral farmland.

Elsewhere, meticulously fabricated pāua-shell nails mimic industrial hardware, destabilising distinctions between fragility and durability, craft and manufacture. A reconstructed Tī kōuka tree assembled through exaggerated dovetail joints introduces an element of deliberate absurdity, emphasising the impossibility of fully restoring pre-colonial ecological conditions within contemporary gallery spaces.

Kaan has recently begun to focus on the symbolic figure of the jetty as a threshold structure connecting terrestrial and maritime domains. Historically associated with industries that extracted both timber and whale products, the jetty becomes a charged architectural index of colonial encounter and environmental transformation. In this context, the intertwined figures of the great Kauri and the sperm whale suggest the exploitation of the divine siblings Tāne Mahuta and Tangaroa -

guardians of forest and ocean. Through these propositions, Kaan positions sculpture as a form of material historiography that makes visible the ongoing entanglement of cosmology, commerce, and landscape.

Mona Bekhit

Mona Bekhit's ceramic practice explores the acoustic and phenomenological properties of fired clay. Rejecting the polished finish often associated with studio ceramics, Bekhit presents unglazed hand-built forms that foreground tactility, porosity, and resonance.

Arranged directly on the floor, elevated on untreated timber surfaces, or suspended within the gallery, these sculptures invite auditory as well as visual engagement. Their capacity to generate percussive and ambient tonalities situates them within expanded sculptural discourses that encompass sound art and performance-based activation.

Bekhit's longstanding engagement with dance and music informs her sensitivity to rhythm, gesture, and spatial timing. Her installations can be understood as choreographic environments in which sound, movement, and material presence become interdependent. The influence of her Japanese and Egyptian heritage further shapes an attentiveness to ritualised action and atmospheric subtlety. The resulting works function less as static displays than as conditions for embodied listening and spaces in which viewers become attuned to vibration, duration, and breath.

Raina Mackenzie Mapel

Raina Mackenzie Mapel's work addresses the ideological infrastructures embedded within systems of measurement, classification, and spatial governance. Beginning with discarded mathematics exercise books—objects associated with rationalisation and bureaucratic control—Maple constructs extensive slotted paper grids that expand into and inhabit architectural space.

The grid has long functioned as a key instrument in colonial land surveying, facilitating the transformation of whenua into administratively legible territory. Maple extrapolates the latent logic of her chosen material into three-dimensional form, rendering visible the abstract systems through which landscapes were historically partitioned, commodified and controlled. When installed within architectural contexts and illuminated by natural light, these delicate paper structures oscillate between legibility and dissolution. Viewers encounter shifting visual analogies to waterfalls, mountain ranges, and digital pixelation. The work thus occupies a liminal position between representation and abstraction, foregrounding the instability of both landscape imagery and the knowledge frameworks that underpin it.

Unna Pumjan

Unna Pumjan's densely populated sculptural tableaux, first developed for the 2025 SITE exhibition at the Dunedin School of Art, offer a contrasting yet complementary investigation into the psychological dimensions of handmade practice. Hundreds of individually modelled figures inhabit an artificial green terrain reminiscent of a miniature golf course or imagined landscape. Despite their playful colour palette and toy-like scale, these works are less concerned with social observation than with the unstable terrain of inner emotional life. Each figure appears to embody a distinct psychological or affective condition - vulnerability, loneliness, coping, pain, withdrawal, resilience - while existing within a shared yet deeply subjective world. Some figures cluster together in quiet alliances, while others remain isolated, seemingly overwhelmed by their own internal states.

There is something simultaneously humorous and melancholic in Pumjan's miniature universe. More akin to Fisher-Price "Little People" than heroic sculptural archetypes, the figures oscillate between innocence and unease, daydream and nightmare. Pumjan's practice underscores the continued relevance of craft-based methodologies as tools for imaginative world-building. Her installations operate as psychological microcosms in which handmade repetition, variation, and accumulation become ways of navigating the complexities of contemporary emotional experience.

Concluding Remarks

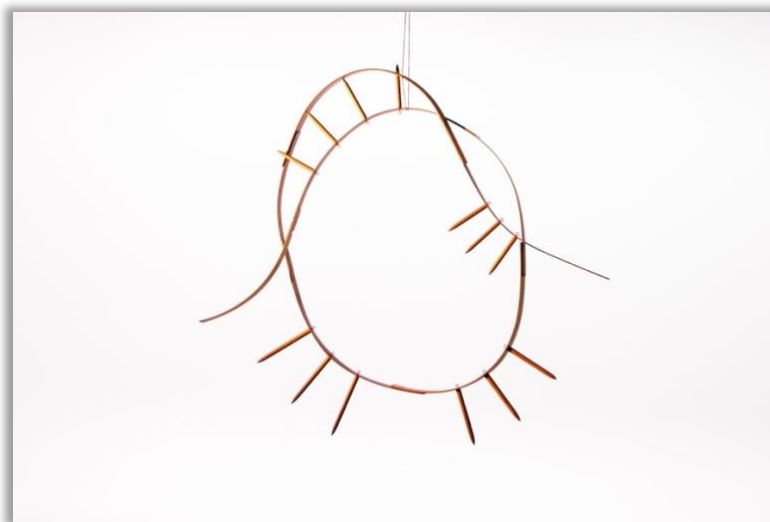
Collectively, the works in “The Next Generation” propose an alternative sculptural model characterised by attentiveness rather than assertion. Traditional associations of sculpture with permanence, monumentality, and material dominance are here replaced by strategies of suspension, fragility, reuse, and ecological sensitivity.

This shared orientation reflects the conditions facing a generation shaped by climate crisis, cultural renegotiation, and economic uncertainty. Rather than producing heavy symbolic statements, these artists construct provisional forms that remain responsive to context and capable of transformation.

Lightness, in this sense, should not be understood as aesthetic insubstantiality. It functions instead as an ethical and methodological position and a commitment to working carefully within complex material and historical networks. Through their engagement with sustainable resources, relational making processes, and the lingering traces of colonial spatial systems, these artists demonstrate how sculpture can operate as a critical practice grounded in responsibility, care, negotiation, imagination, and hope.



Raina Mackenzie Mapel, *Framed 1*, 2026, Steel flatbar & our recycled mathsbooks. 470x290x25mm



Harriet Hawksworth, *Riding Mountain*, 2025-26, recycled rimu, cotton thread, red hooks, 1140x1430x120mm

Contributors, with Statements by the Artists

CURATOR

Scott Eady is a principal lecturer in sculpture at the Dunedin School of Art, Otago Polytechnic. His work has been exhibited internationally at major events, including the Venice Biennale and the Gwangju Biennale. His sculptures are held in significant public collections, including the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Dunedin Public Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetū, The Chartwell Collection, and University of Otago Ōtākou Whakaihu Waka, as well as international institutions including the Artetage Museum of Modern Art and the New Zealand Honorary Consulate in Vladivostok.

He has also completed prominent public commissions, including *The Philanthropist's Stone* for the Wellington Sculpture Trust, *Tātou Ahau* at Otago Polytechnic, and *7 Miles* at Caroline Freeman College, University of Otago Ōtākou Whakaihu Waka.

Eady would like to acknowledge Dunedin School of Art sculpture colleagues Michele Beevors and Jamie Oliphant for their supervision and support of the artists represented in "The Next Generation." Thanks also to David Green for the catalogue photography.

ARTISTS

Harriet Hawksworth is a sculptor working with wood and is currently studying in the BVA Honours programme at Dunedin School of Art. Originally from Hawke's Bay, Harriet began her art education at Massey University in Wellington before moving south to Dunedin in 2021. She has exhibited in Napier, Wellington and Dunedin. In 2025 she was part of "Ensnared" group exhibition (supported by Dunedin Dream Brokerage) as well as fundraising and catalogue shows at Pond and Hutch gallery respectively. She will also be exhibiting as part of an upcoming duo show at Hutch later this year.

Always Falling and *Riding Mountain*, on view in the exhibition "The Next Generation," are part of a series of works that play with the idea of the loop, or open circle, as an unresolved gesture in space that suggests the possibility of, perhaps endless, continuation. These works sit within a broader sculptural practice which examines the generative relationships between repetition, material and place.

Kāhu Kaan (Kāi Tahu) is an artist with Kāi Tahu, Pākehā and Chinese whakapapa, who primarily works in sculpture, amongst other mediums. Graduating from Dunedin School of Art in 2025 with a Bachelor of Visual Art (with merits), he delves into experiences of multiculturalism relating to identity, both collectively and individually. Kaan uses materials as a way of exploring histories, by incorporating used, found or gathered materials into his work. He presents these objects and materials in a way that is often surprising or unfamiliar, allowing the viewer to consider these objects in a way that they might not have in their everyday setting.

This body of work included in the exhibition “The Next Generation” consists of a series of carved wooden sculptures made from reclaimed rākau and collected pāua shell. The surface of the rākau has been carved into, introducing a water like texture, rippling outwards. The work is a consideration of wai being a force that has the ability to connect people, materials and cultures across both distance and time. There are meeting points throughout the work, between whenua and moana, settlers and tākata whenua, solid and fluid, the present and the past.

Mona Bekhit was born in Ōtautahi, Christchurch and raised in Ōtepoti, Dunedin, is currently completing a BVA (Hons) at the Dunedin School of Art. She received a Diploma in Ceramics in 2024 and a Bachelor of Visual Arts in Sculpture in 2025, culminating in a major installation exhibited in the DSA SITE Exhibition, integrating ceramic and sound. Influenced by backgrounds in film, music, and dance, her practice explores materiality, tactility, repetition, and movement. Her work is held in the collection of The Arts House Trust at Pah Homestead, Tāmaki Makaurau, Auckland.

Suspended in space, *Needles* is an invitation to the viewer to consider materiality and tactility: movement, static, hard, soft, weighted, weightlessness, resilient, fragile, a body of fragments. *Needles* was conceived, and then fashioned, as an apparatus for producing sound: heavy, clanky, metallic, tinkly, lustrous, a mass of asynchronous chatter.

Raina Mackenzie Mapel, after graduating from the Dunedin School of Art in 2025, now lives in Ōtepoti. Her work focuses on material boundaries, repetition, and place. Installations look at how to produce art within the constraints of sustainability, with making something beautiful the first and foremost consideration.

The work on view in “The Next Generation” is a reconfiguration of the installation *equating time & place* (2025) that centres on recycled mathematics books, which are woven together within steel frames, interacting with space, light, landscape, and architecture.

Unna Pumjan is a Thai-born ceramic artist who moved to New Zealand at the age of 15. She completed a Bachelor of Visual Arts at the Dunedin School of Art in 2025, specialising in ceramics. Her practice explores memory, imagination, and childhood through carefully constructed dreamlike installations of hand-built figures and dolls. Drawing on personal experience, her work examines emotional vulnerability, interiority, and subtle coping mechanisms. The figures inhabit intimate, self-contained environments that foster contemplative and psychologically charged spaces, where delicacy and unease coexist.

As Is (2026, stoneware, clear glaze) consists of a collection of ceramic figurines (stoneware clay, clear glaze) that uses candles as metaphors for inner states. The works depict varying stages of melting and depletion, translating the temporary nature of burning wax into fired clay. What would ordinarily dissolve over time is instead fixed and preserved. Each figure embodies a different condition of "being": some upright and steady, others collapsing, fading, or nearly absent. Existing side by side without hierarchy or resolution, the works reflect on emotional and psychological vulnerability as shifting rather than stable states. Through the permanence of ceramic, fleeting moments of exhaustion, endurance, and decline are held in suspension.