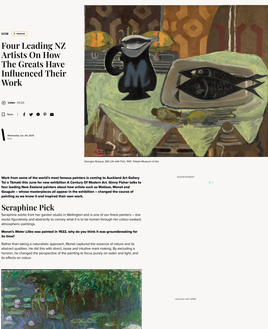

Georgia Bisset, Still Life with Fish, 1941. Toledo Museum of Art.

Four Leading NZ Artists On How The Greats Have Influenced Their Work

Editor 2022

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Wednesday Jun 08, 2022

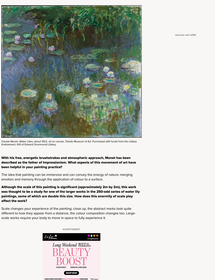
Work from some of the world's most famous painters is coming to Auckland Art Gallery. We've asked this year's four new exhibitors A Century Of Modern Art, Strong Fisher talks to four leading New Zealand painters about how artists such as Matisse, Monet and Gauguin have influenced their own work. Plus, Fashion Fashion – champion of painting as we know it and inspired their own work.

Seraphine Pick

Seraphine works from her garden studio in Wellington and is one of our finest painters – she paints the natural world with sensitivity to convey what it is to be human through her colour-soaked, atmospheric paintings.

Monet's Water Lilies was painted in 1915, why do you think it was groundbreaking for its time?

Rather than taking a naturalistic approach, Monet captured the essence of nature and its atmospheric qualities. The work is dreamy and immersive, and it feels like a meditation on horizon, he changed the perspective of the painting to focus purely on water and light, and its effects on colour.



Claude Monet, Water Lilies, circa 1915, oil on canvas, Toledo Museum of Art. Purchased with funds from the Libbey Endowment, 1926 (Libbey Bequest)

With his free, energetic brushstrokes and atmospheric approach, Monet has been described as the father of impressionism. What aspects of this movement of art have been helpful in your painting practice?

The idea that painting can be immersive and can convey the energy of nature, merging perceptions and sensations, has been a fundamental idea for me.

Although the style of this painting is significant (approximately 8m by 2m), this work was thought to be a study for the very large version in the 200-odd series of water lily paintings. Why do you think it's one double this size: How does this eccentricity of scale play effect the work?

Scale changes your experience of the painting close up, the abstract marks look quite different to how they appear from a distance, the colour composition changes, large-scale works require your body to move in space to fully experience it.

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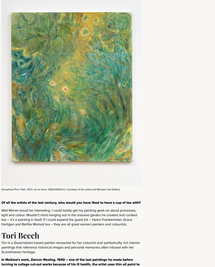
In your experience what's different about working outside – how does it change the work?

Working directly from nature allows you to connect deeply to what you are seeing, how the light changes the movement the wind, rain, sun, all the aspects of nature in the environment you paint more intuitively. Monet was a gardener so he was totally connected to nature in his everyday life.

In this digital age, do you think it's more difficult for artists to connect in a meaningful way with their audiences?

There, I think, is far more distancing to artists and it's overwhelming how much we can see. @dlmjd on a monitor. The screen just reflects images, not reality, which involves all our senses, and it's not a meaningful connection between artist and viewer. I think the Covid lockdown has made us more adaptable with technology and will still progress, all through it I will be interesting to see where the use of AI in art will go from here. I think technology affects how we think and what we paint, if you Google AI or Bitcoin, it is obviously a very, something completely different and it's not so good – I'm all Jacquemus from the land is used.



Seraphine Pick, Path, 2021, oil on linen. 500x400mm. Courtesy of the artist and Michael Lett Gallery.

Of all the artists of the last century, who would you have liked to have a cup of tea with?

Bert Morisot would be interesting, I could totally get my painting geek on about provinces, light and colour. Wouldn't mind hanging out in the massive garden he created and curated with his family, I'd be interested in what he thought of the Impressionist movement, Pierre-Auguste Renoir and Berthe Morisot too – they are all great women painters and colourists.

Tori Beech

Tori is a Queenstown-based painter renowned for her colourful and symbolically rich interior scenes, which combine meticulous botanical images and personal memories lifted intact with her Scandinavian heritage.

In Matisse's work, *Dancer Resting*, 1940 – one of the last paintings he made before turning to collage and works because of his ill health, the artist uses this oil paint to draw outlines, and in the flat areas he reveals the movement of his brush. The collage-like composition of the work, with its flat areas of colour, is a technique he was certainly evolved by his own ruin set. What artists you as successful in this work? And are the rules of painting made to be broken?

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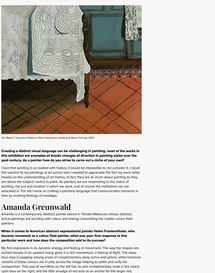
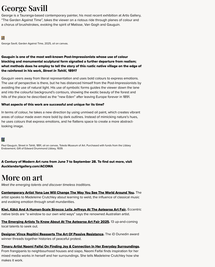


Tori Beech, Transition Pattern, Wool Gabardine Quilting & Wool Tufting, 2021.

Matisse's unique mastery over both composition and colour is universally recognisable, and at the time he painted this work he was at the top of his game, I am drawn to the confident simplicity of his composition, his technical virtuosity – evident in the simple forms he uses to create a dynamic composition, the sensuality of the curvilinear form, the contrasting patterning and has a bold and harmonious colour palette. His south Seas paintings are amongst his most confident lightness. Yes, the rules are made to be broken, but in painting it is definitely important to understand the rules first but breaking them can produce unexpectedly wonderful results.

Matisse often painted interior spaces filled with symbolic objects. You also paint interiors, what has been your journey in this genre?

As a painter I'm drawn to the formal patterns concerns interiors offer and the narratives they hold. I'm interested in how objects and patterns accumulate and how they can be layered, horizontal lines and forms to observe light and shadow play. Some are full of colours and patterns like the description you give of Matisse's work. While others are totally muted, with a focus on the shape of the room and the contrasting rectangular forms of doors and paintings as symbols of spaces. We occupy these spaces and they become the containers, holding our social, emotional and aesthetic narratives.



Tori Beech, Transition Pattern, Wool Gabardine Quilting & Wool Tufting, 2021.

Creating a distinct visual language can be challenging in painting, most of the works in this exhibition are examples of drastic changes of direction in painting styles over the past century. As a painter how do you strive to carve out a niche of your own?

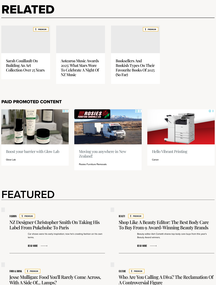
I love that painting is so rooted with history, it would be impossible to not contribute. I recall the reaction to my paintings at art school was I needed to appreciate the fact my work relies on the work of painters who came before me. I'm not trying to reinvent painting, I'm just one dot about the subject I select to paint. As painters we are contributing to the status of painting, the era and location in which we work, and of course the institutions we are exhibiting in. It's important to be aware of the context we are in and contextualise moments in time by curating footings of metaphor.

Amanda Greunwald

Amanda is a contemporary abstract painter based in Tamaki Makaurau whose abstract, geometric forms are bursting with colour and energy connecting the reader colour field painters.

When it comes to American abstract expressionist painter Mark Rothkoinfamous, who famously said, "I'm not an abstractionist, I'm not interested in relationships of colour or form or anything else." Is this perspective said to be accurate?

My first impression is its dynamic energy and feeling of movement. The way the shapes are arched towards or on passed casting gives it a kinetic movement, a feeling of flight. The areas that area is popping among areas of complementary deep ochre and yellow, while harmonic tones of pink and purple are used to balance the work. I'm interested in the balance of composition. That pop of vermilion on the left has its own complimentary mate in the nearly cyan blue on the right, and the little smudge of red acts as an anchor for the larger red, helping to guide your eye across the picture plane.



Mark Rothko, Untitled (Red, Orange), 1954. Toledo Museum of Art. Gift of The Woodward Foundation.

Fundamentalist was inspired by nature and landscape in her abstract paintings – what are you inspired by when you work?

At the moment, I'm inspired by walking a line between the arbitrary and deliberation, listening to the space between and seeing how much chaos I can squeeze in before the thing falls apart. I've been looking at the marks and splodges and velvet left on my drop cloths and wondering if I can translate that into a big palette of melting ice paintings and carving them as bases for new compositions.

The well-known arab-pitch process, where Fundamentalist poured thinned oil paint on to new canvas on the floor, resulted in large areas of colour that seemed to have merged into the canvas organically, guiding the shape of the work. Do you work like this?

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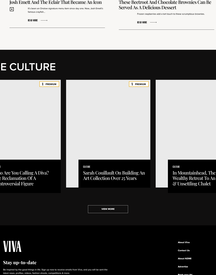
George Savill

George is a Tauranga-based contemporary painter, his most recent exhibition at Arts Gallery Tauranga, Ngā Tohu Ngā Tohu, was a study in the relationship between abstract form and colour and a choice of Scandinavian, evoking the spirit of Matisse, Van Gogh and Gauguin.



George Savill, Garden Against Time, 2020, oil on canvas.

Fundamentalist's works embraced the joy of pure colour and surface. how does your art differ and do there any other artists in the show who inspire your practice?

Unlike Fundamentalist I am interested in three-dimensionality, where it's possible to place I like the eye to be able to fly through a painting and really inhabit it. I'm not chasing that for perfection, I'm more interested in the relationship between the surface and the compositional tool, bribing areas together in a sort of sculptural way. Hella Hoffman has also been a great influence on my work, specifically the use of colour in manipulating space to create a dynamic tension. Hoffman's work creates, using complementary colours and changes in opacity to generate movement.

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