

## **Tessa Laird**

### Artist Statement and Biography

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#### **Artist Statement**

*The Politics of Ecstasy* developed during Tessa Laird's doctoral studies at the Elam School of Fine Arts, but fully flowered a year and a half after graduating. Laird's doctorate investigated the "revolutionary power of colour," looking at 1960s counterculture with its heady mixture of personal spiritual development, public political engagement, and East-meets-West philosophies. Laird became interested in the process of research itself – drawing attention to the physical facts of studying by fashioning clay facsimiles of every book she read, so that by the end of her doctorate she was able to present her entire bibliography in ceramics.

These unreadable books were an acknowledgement of the book as a fetish object, as Walter Benjamin designates them in his essay "Unpacking my Library." They also reference the fact that the first writings were on clay tablets. Resembling bricks in their materiality, these clay books eventually conglomerated into stacks and steps, like pyramids or ziggurats – building structures with appropriately metaphysical connotations. The process of reading as self-improvement, leading to a state of personal enlightenment, was taken to its logical conclusion when the book stacks began to flower with candelabras.

Bright colours and folkly workmanship reference outsider art and the art of children. The candelabra form owes a debt to the Mexican folk-art Tree of Life, or *Arbol de la Vida*. It also shares similarities with the Jewish Menorah, and indeed there is a Kabbalistic tradition of The Tree of Life, alluding to energy points in the body, not unlike the Hindu chakra system, in which Kundalini, an energetic female snake, travels up and down the spine activating different coloured energy centres. Esoteric knowledges from various cultures are the building blocks of the *Politics of Ecstasy*. Trees of knowledge, energetic snakes, good luck bats, fruits and flowers, enliven this personal quest for spiritual development.

## Artist Biography

### Tessa Laird New Zealand

b. 1971, Auckland, New Zealand

### Education

- 2012      Doctorate of Fine Arts (University of Auckland)
- 2006      Masters of Fine Arts, First Class Honours (University of Auckland)
- 1993      Bachelor of Fine Arts (University of Auckland)

### Current Employment

2012-2014 Professional Teaching Fellow, Elam School of Fine Arts, University of Auckland

### Selected Exhibitions

- 2014      *We are but dust and shadow*, with Richard Orjis and Tiffany Singh, Melanie Roger Gallery, Auckland  
*The Homely Frontier*, The Vivian Gallery, Matakana  
*Slipcast*, curated by Emma Bugden, Dowse Museum, Wellington
- 2013      *Freedom Farmers*, curated by Natasha Conland, Auckland Art Gallery  
*Chupacabra Candelabra*, Melanie Roger Gallery  
*Scales of the Serpent*, Urban Dream Brokerage, Tory Street, Wellington  
*Tawny Boar of the Sky*, curated by Balamohan Shingade, Papakura Art Gallery
- 2012      *Paper Jams: Artists Between the Covers*, curated by Andrew Clifford, Gus Fisher Gallery, Auckland  
*Sheshnag's Coloured Canopy*, Doctoral Exhibition, George Fraser Gallery, Auckland (solo)  
*Naga Garta*, with Balamohan Shingade and Sam Thomas, Snakepit, Auckland  
*Reading Room*, Tessa Laird and Peter Lange, Objectspace, Window Gallery  
*21<sup>st</sup> Annual Wallace Art Awards* (Second Runner-Up Award Winner), TSB Bank Wallace Art Centre, Auckland  
*Walker and Hall Waiheke Art Award 2012*, Waiheke Art Gallery  
*Portage Ceramic Awards 2012*, The Cloud and Lopdell House Offsite at New Lynn  
*Summer Reading*, Tivoli Bookstore, Waiheke, (solo)
- 2011      *Old Genes: Artists reading Len Lye*, curated by Tyler Cann, Govett-Brewster Gallery, New Plymouth

*Post- Post- Poster*, (solo) as part of *Double Rainbow* with Tiffany Singh, South Side Arts Festival, Papakura Gallery, Auckland  
*Horoscope Show*, Curated by Erica van Zon, Enjoy Gallery, Wellington *Bold Horizon Contemporary Art Award*, Waikato Museum, Hamilton

- 2010 *Wihaan*, with Tiffany Singh, as part of the Microsites Public Art Trail, Auckland City Council, ongoing until 2014  
*Eat, Sleep and Reproduce*, Projectspace B431, University of Auckland  
*Take it From Here*, Mangere Arts Centre, Nga Tohu o Uenuku, Auckland
- 2009 *The Rainbow Reels*, The Film Archive Auckland; The Film Archive Wellington (solo)
- 2008 *The Do-It-Yourself Shelf Museum of Possibilities*, Geisel Museum 2, Tokyo; Rm103, Auckland; Blue Oyster Gallery, Dunedin
- 2007 *Cuba/Aotearoa Liberators*, Cuba; Mexico; Parihaka; Whaingaroa; Hamilton; Waiheke; Spain.
- 2006 *Another Museum of the Other*, MFA exhibition, Anthropology Department, University of Auckland, (solo)  
*Headway*, Emerging Artists Exhibition, Artspace, Auckland  
*Dynasty*, curated by Emma Bugden, Te Tuhi, Pakuranga, Auckland  
National Drawing Award, Artspace Auckland (Merit Award Winner)
- 2005 *The Violence of Language*, Viewfinder, Auckland Public Library, (solo)
- 2004 *Old Habits Die Hard*, Sparwasser HQ Touring Video Show: Berlin; London; Oslo; Zurich; Istanbul; Malmo; New York; Sydney
- 2003 *Mysteries of the Gods*, Rm103, Auckland (solo)

## **Collections**

Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, *Points of Agreement*, purchased 2012

Waikato Museum of Art and History, *Pow Wow*, purchased 2011

*Aotearoa Liberators* Poster Sets in the collections of: Te Wananga o Aotearoa, University of Waikato, Museum of Waikato, 2008

James Wallace Arts Trust, *Pallid Bat*, purchased 2008

## **Prizes**

Best Doctoral Thesis, NICAI, University of Auckland, 2012

Second Runner-Up, 21st Annual Wallace Art Awards, 2012

Merit Award, National Drawing Award, 2006