

# Dark Watch

Pauline Rhodes

ST PAUL St Gallery One

19 February – 24 March 2016

Pauline Rhodes' artwork, characterised by her long-term concern with the environment, is situated in two spatially separate but materially and conceptually connected zones – temporary sculptural interventions outdoors that are documented, and gallery based sculptural installations. While these physical and conceptual spaces are often described as opposites: open and closed space, exterior and interior, nature and culture, through small-scale interventions and over more than 40 years, Rhodes' work has consistently moved between them. As Christina Barton has written, "rather than maintain rigid distinctions between these binary terms as a system of structured opposites, Rhodes disrupts them in order to re-conceive them as related and intertwining."<sup>1</sup> Rhodes persistently pushes against fixed definitions by drawing our attention to habitual understandings of how the world is organized and therefore engaged with. Her handling of materials relating to 'natural' and 'built' environment is responsive and she fluidly moves between the two contexts, transferring and reconfiguring natural and human-made materials in response to the contingencies of each environment.

For *Dark Watch*, Rhodes has worked into the ST PAUL St Gallery space with a combination of materials that are new and reused, natural and human-made. Her actions result in forms she refers to as 'twists', 'folds', 'overlays' and 'crumples.' While the work fills the space, its mass is not weighty, and through this Rhodes has achieved a sense of both volume and lightness. Central to the installation are the leaning aluminum rods propped with steel rods and stained cedar offcuts. They are the sentinels of the *Dark Watch*. Most of these Rhodes has previously installed within the intertidal zone (a space that she has worked with since 1972) at New Brighton Beach, Christchurch. There they were installed as watchers, a gesture of concern for the effects of climate change, rising sea levels and the pollution of the oceans. Now they are redeployed as watchers in the gallery space, where they lean gracefully flexed towards the windows and the street outside.

The forms and colours of the materials often echo each other, as with the clusters of rusted wire netting and the reddish branches of the Pōhuehue (*muehlenbeckia complexa*). These are materials frequently used by Rhodes. Both the Pōhuehue, slowly drying out over the course of the exhibition, and the rusting wire netting, which was once galvanised, slowly decomposing as it succumbs to the process of oxidation, are altered by their location – the netting has been deliberately left outside, the Pōhuehue has been cut off and brought inside. By doing this Rhodes "refutes completeness," preferring instead to emphasise processes of change and contingency through contextual shifts and material change.<sup>2</sup> This is most apparent with the presence of rust – the obvious transitional state of oxidation exemplifies temporality, making visible "interactions of light, air and water" which blurs the boundaries of materials and environments.<sup>3</sup> Rust is a process, a material, and a symbol of decay; its presence speaks eloquently about the natural and the human-made (not only in terms of human-made material, but also in terms of human impact on material – including the natural environment) and of non-human timescales.

At Rhodes invitation, in an ongoing process during the exhibition aspects of the work will be reconfigured by AUT Art and Design students. If you are interested in participating in this please see Gallery staff.

Presented in association with:



1. Christina Barton 'Moving /On: time, place and the body in the work of Pauline Rhodes' in Christina Barton *Ground/Work: The Art of Pauline Rhodes* (Adam Art Gallery & Victoria University Press: Wellington, 2002), 15.

2. Barton, 17.

3. Barton, 18.