

This Home is Occupied

30 May – 25 July 2014

State housing has been a part of the history of Aotearoa for over a century. Since 1905, when the policy was first introduced, the idea of state housing has significantly shifted alongside changes of government, seeing it move from an initiative to provide workers with the opportunity to own and live in homes that they would otherwise be unable to afford, to a way of accommodating the needs of those unable to partake in the increasingly unaffordable private housing market. State housing is one of Aotearoa's major assets. It has, for most of its history, been a source of pride for New Zealanders; a large proportion of the houses were well-built, sturdy and desirable. Many of those whose parents or grandparents were moved into state homes still remain in those same homes and communities.

As with any service that is not primarily in the interest of those in power, there is a growing struggle to maintain it. As government relentlessly moves to a model based on privatisation, state houses are increasingly viewed as commodities, not homes. Alongside the decline in government responsibility for social welfare, goes a decline in support for those in state homes. When the National Government introduced a market rent to those in state homes in 1991, a group fought back. The State Housing Action Coalition (SHAC) battled with Housing New Zealand and with government and private corporations to keep tenants in their homes.

The struggle continues. Communities all over Aotearoa are currently being divided up and pulled apart in a major restructure of state housing policy, which enables the privatisation of a great percentage of the total stock of houses, and the freeing up of areas seen as valuable for developers. In Auckland, the suburb of Glen Innes is a large-scale example of this. Residents of Glen Innes are in the middle of the eviction of over 156 families (to date), and homes are being demolished or removed as part of this 'regeneration.' The land in Glen Innes is seen as extremely valuable: it is close to the city, and much of it has sea views. Because of this, private developers have been given the all clear to dramatically change its landscape. This begins with moving people out. The Tamaki Housing Group was formed in 2011 in response to the announcement of this redevelopment, by tenants and others frustrated at their lack of involvement in the decision making process which affects their community. The Group has staged a number of protests at the removal of homes from their community, and has put increasing pressure on the companies involved in the gentrification process. They have watched some of their own homes being taken away, and have seen streets become bare with empty sections and vacant houses. Glen Innes is just one example of what is happening countrywide; communities are being torn apart and people pushed out to make way for private profit.

The exhibition *This Home is Occupied* pays tribute to the struggle that has been fought by state housing tenants and their supporters for decades, and continues today. It came about through ST PAUL St Gallery's 2014 Research Fellowship, which is held by Kyoto-based Sakiko Sugawa, a cultural worker directly involved with issues of social justice. Before her arrival in Auckland in April, Sakiko was connected with Ella Grace McPherson-Newton, an activist and artist involved with the Tamaki Housing Group. Through connecting with Ella Grace and other members of the Tamaki Housing Group, the focus of the Fellowship project became about issues surrounding state housing in Aotearoa.

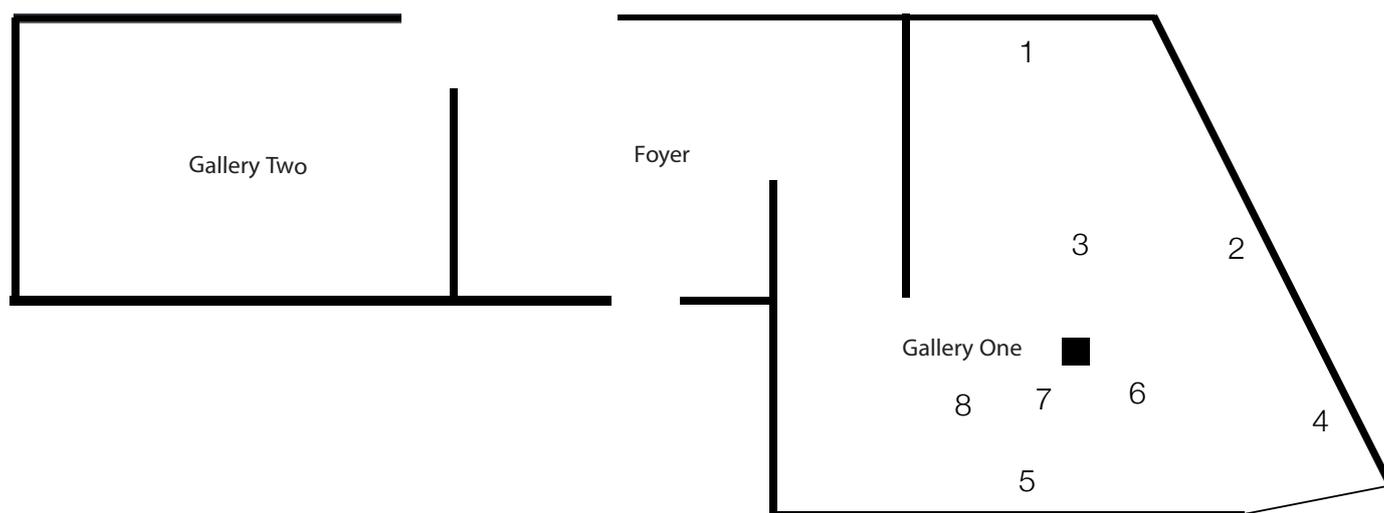
While attempting to respond to and act on the emergent nature of the issue on a day-to-day level, Sakiko and Ella Grace also wanted to investigate how art and activism can supplement each other in fighting for social justice. Their approach to this is underpinned by the concept of 'accompaniment', as outlined by civil rights activist Staughton Lynd, who describes there being 'an element of mystery, of openness, in accompaniment. I'll go with you and support you on our journey wherever it leads. I'll keep you company and share your fate for a while. And by "a while," I don't mean a little while. Accompaniment is much more about sticking with a task until it's deemed completed by the person or people being accompanied, rather than by the accompanateur.'¹

¹ Staughton Lynd, *Accompanying: Pathways to Social Change* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2012).

As a university gallery, ST PAUL St has taken one of the primary instructions for universities in the New Zealand Education Act to 'accept a role as critic and conscience of society' as a directive that underpins our approach to programmes. This aspect is more important than ever because of the current shift in the perception of education's purpose, from its having intrinsic social good to being an individual's investment in themselves for the purposes of employment. In developing this exhibition one of the guiding questions was: how can the contemporary art gallery engage with political and social issues without simply aestheticising them, and without taking agency away from those who are directly affected by the issues?

This exhibition is one outcome of the research conducted by Ella Grace and Sakiko in collaboration with ST PAUL St Gallery staff members and others. Other aspects of the Fellowship include a weekly reading group, 'Thinking about Overproduction', which focuses on the constructive critique of social practice, the formation of a collective of young artists and designers to work providing visual resources for community groups focusing on social inequalities, and ongoing dialogue with a wide range of active groups promoting social justice. In all of these activities there is an emphasis on making change through collaborative structures that are practical, egalitarian and long-term.

This Home is Occupied Gallery One



1. Excerpts from documentary Whare Tapa Wha
Cinematography: Briar March and Meg Perrott
Work in Progress footage shot 2012-2013
Directed by Briar March
Produced by Richard Riddiford
Excerpts edited by Tim Woodhouse
HD video

The completed documentary Whare Tapa Wha will screen on Maori Television later in 2014.

2. Photo essay of empty homes and sections in Glen Innes as at December 2013
Researched by Betty Kanuta and Ioela Rauti
3. State Housing Action Coalition (SHAC) archives
Courtesy of Len Parker and Jimmy O'Dea

4. Left to right, top to bottom

1. Former Prime Minister Michael Joseph Savage carrying furniture into the first state house, Miramar, Wellington. Original photographic prints and postcards from file print collection, Box 5. Ref: PAColl-5800-49. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand.

2. New Zealand National Party. New Zealand National Party: 16,400 new homes built; a record of achievement. We promised more homes; they have been built. Vote National again. [1950-1951].. Ref: Eph-C-NZ-NATIONAL-1951-01. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand.

3. New Zealand Labour Party. New Zealand Labour Party: Labour guarantees homes for all. [1957?]. Ref: Eph-A-HOUSING-1957-01. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand.

4. New Zealand Labour Party: Stop. Labour guarantees security of tenure as long as you live. [Cover. 1946]. New Zealand Labour Party: [Fliers, cards and pamphlets for New Zealand Labour Party and its members and political candidates. 1944-1946]. Ref: Eph-A-NZ-LABOUR-1946-02. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand.

5. Image from State Housing Action Coalition (SHAC) archives
Courtesy of Len Parker and Jimmy O'Dea

6. Bastion Point protester Eruera Nia, Wellington. Further negatives of the Evening Post newspaper. Ref: EP/1977/2326/28a-F. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand.

7-17. Images from State Housing Action Coalition (SHAC) archives
Courtesy of Len Parker and Jimmy O'Dea

5. State Housing Timeline

6. Links to media coverage of housing issues and websites addressing housing issues

20/02/12: 'Tenants continue protest over eviction' TV3
Footage from an early protest in Glen Innes in response to the eviction notices.

20/04/12: 'HNZ changes worry country's most vulnerable' TVNZ
A look at the reviewable tenancies policy, and who it will affect. Talking to Alison Haplett, a woman with cerebral palsy living in a state home in Ponsonby.

12/08/12: 'Harawira slams petty charge after protest/ Harawira arrested at housing protest' TV3
News report from the morning after the Lunn Ave (Glen Innes) protest which saw Hone Harawira and five other activists arrested, and an interview with Harawira.

14/03/13: 'Glen Innes state house tenants refuse to budge' Te Kāea
The Kanuta family are given their eviction notice. Minister of Housing Nick Smith speaks about 'affordability'.

01/09/13: 'Glen Innes tenants accuse HNZ of aggressive tactics' TV3
Makelesi Ngata and Sue Henry from the Tamaki Housing Group speak about the evictions in Glen Innes.

23/04/14: 'Protesters egg Prime Ministers car in Napier' TVNZ
Tu Tangata Maraenui stand up against Prime Minister John Key when he visits the suburb to unveil new housing development.

13/04/14: 'Social housing reforms come into effect' TV3
A look at the current reforms from the government and the Labour Party.

