

# Te Pūtahi Auaha

## Avondale Graffiti Pavilion

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### Abstract

Public architectural and art installations can enable leftover and forgotten urban spaces to be positively reinvigorated. These interventions can be produced at different scales and placed in a variety of existing neighbourhood locations. Such projects aim to foster cultural recognition of a place within diverse communities.

In collaboration with Eke Panuku Development Auckland, students from the Unitec School of Architecture developed an architectural design intervention for a leftover space within the suburb of Avondale. The project's aim required students to design an architectural product that considered community, place, material and function.

The project followed a three-step programme. The first step required architectural students to formulate a placemaking intervention for a defined space set by Eke Panuku. The second step required students and academic staff to prefabricate and install a pavilion on site. The project's final step required students to observe The Pavilion being graffitied by six curated artists over six months.

At the end of the programme, the pedagogical outcomes highlighted the ability for students to reflect on and be resilient to evolving design problems. The success of the architectural intervention led Eke Panuku to extend the onsite programme to eighteen months, and the naming of The Pavilion in te reo Māori as Te Pūtahi Auaha.

### Introduction

Today, Avondale's former 3 Guys supermarket site has become a space for street artists and the community to organise and express themselves. The 7500-square-metre

space has primarily sat empty since the late 1990s and is currently owned by Auckland Council's development arm, Eke Panuku Development Auckland. Towards the back of the site, the original supermarket parking lot still has the same function. Of the supermarket building, only the concrete floor and block wall remain. An artists' collective has claimed the block wall to create the Avondale Art Park, a 60-metre-long by 2-metre-high concrete wall as their public canvas. This legal wall operates as a hall of fame for artists and a central hub for creative activity. The leftover concrete floor area has become an informal community congregation space. Local schools and other community organisations also use the area to host public events and festivals throughout the year.

After much delay and several changes to the design brief, Unitec's School of Architecture students installed The Graffiti Pavilion onsite at the end of January 2021 for Eke Panuku. Invited local graffiti and street artists were asked to adorn The Pavilion with temporary artwork to reflect the context and street-art culture. The purpose of the artwork placed on The Pavilion is that it should be viewed as an artistic ritual that does not need to have permanence, but expresses the life and thoughts of an individual artist that resides within the Avondale community.

The work discussed in this paper focuses on architectural students and their experiences in designing and building a placemaking product that considers community and place. Like many other design-build courses hosted within architecture schools, the project asks students to investigate novel ways to engage with material, form and function.

The design process asks students to work with Eke Panuku to ensure the community's social outcomes are embedded within any design output that is produced.<sup>1</sup>

### Purpose of Placemaking

Placemaking is about the production and introduction of an intervention into the neighbourhood. The measure of its success can be acknowledged by how others respond to what has been created. Cities, in general, are made up of novel neighbourhoods with distinctive urban, social and economic traits. While some neighbourhoods have attractive public amenities, private social enterprises and landmarks, other less-fortunate neighbourhoods lack these urban attractions to offer visitors. Inhabitants and, to a larger extent, the communities they live in develop their own 'sense of place' within neighbourhoods by simply assigning their experiences, perspectives and feelings to them. Other ways people assign a sense of place to a neighbourhood can be through history and unique environments.<sup>2</sup>

Public artworks and installations are significant place-making markers that can allow leftover and forgotten space to be positively reinvigorated. These interventions take place at different scales within existing neighbourhood locations.<sup>3</sup> The aim of such enterprises is for councils and communities to invest in and foster cultural recognition of a place. Ultimately, the hope of place-making activities is that they can prompt and entice novel ways of experiencing the neighbourhood.<sup>4</sup>

### Project Methodology

The project followed a qualitative and experimental research methodology. A large amount of value of architectural research comes from observing, evaluating and reflecting on a design post erection.<sup>5</sup> The cross-disciplinary team comprised architecture students and academics from Unitec New Zealand, artists from the Avondale art collective, urban designers and placemaking specialists from Eke Panuku. The make-up of diverse cross-disciplinary teams can allow for innovation, as working within a discipline can stifle experimentation.<sup>6</sup> Both Eke Panuku and the students worked with key external product suppliers, community stakeholders and consultants to ensure the project was an important way for students to gain quality design feedback and critique. The research formulated a placemaking programme for Avondale that was divided into three steps. They were:

Step 1, Master of Architecture (Professional) thesis students were asked to formulate a placemaking concept intervention

for a defined space. The process required architecture students to work through various design iterations with urban design and placemaking specialists at Eke Panuku. Step 2 required Bachelor of Architectural Studies students to work with the thesis students to develop, prefabricate and install The Pavilion on site. The process involved the architecture students collaborating with material suppliers and fabricators to further refine the construction detail of The Pavilion and prefabricate modular components within the School of Architecture workshops before taking them to the site.

Step 3, post-occupancy studies, saw The Pavilion repainted by different artists each consecutive month for the six-month duration of the pilot project. An artist-researcher curated the painting of The Pavilion. Two emerging artists assisted, observed and offered them insights. While the artworks were temporary, each of the repainted pavilions was documented in real-time video format and paired with a 30-minute interview with each artist to discuss their background and journey, and unpack the creative process. The interview process also followed a narrative methodology called The Hero's Journey, which is an approach to storytelling usually found in films, but in this case, it was applied to the context of the artists.<sup>7</sup> The importance of this exercise should not be understated, as it understands actions taken by the community beyond the initial design work. It can be a great way to determine whether the design intention of the project meets its anticipated objectives.<sup>8</sup>

The success of a project was measured by three overarching criteria. The first was for the project to meet Panuku's aims to create a structure that could provide a simple amenity for people to use, whether it be every day or for events. The second was the need to visually complement and contribute to the site's street-art scene. The third was for the project to meet the pedagogical requirement of understanding design and detail, and to fabricate and install the prefabricated architectural outcome on site. Overall, the three criteria needed to meet to help solve the community's frustration at the lack of action within the former 3 Guys supermarket site.

### Project Timeline

The three steps outlined above spanned over two years, with three different cohorts of students participating in the project. The timeline of events was as follows:

1. Semester 1, 2019: Architecture students and Eke Panuku collaborate to formulate a project brief for Henderson.

<sup>1</sup> Harriet Harriss, "Co-authoring a Live Project Manifesto," in *Architecture Live Projects: Pedagogy into Practice*, edited by Harriet Harriss and Lynnette Widder (London: Routledge, 2014), 45.

<sup>2</sup> Sako Musterd and Zoltán Kovács, "The Importance of Places and Place Branding," in *Place-making and Policies for Competitive Cities*, edited by Sako Musterd and Zoltán Kovács (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2013), 98.

<sup>3</sup> Tom Barker, "Catalysing our Cities: Architecture as the New Alchemy for Creative Enterprise," in *Re-imagining the City: Art, Globalization, and Urban Spaces*, edited by Elizabeth M. Grierson and Kristen Sharp (Bristol: Intellect, 2013), 50.

<sup>4</sup> Elizabeth M. Grierson and Kristen Sharp, "Situating Art, Urban Space and Globalization," in *Re-imagining the City: Art Globalization, and Urban Spaces*, 5.

<sup>5</sup> Avila Aksamija, "Integrating Innovation," in *Architecture: Design, Methods and Technology for Progressive Practice and Research* (West Sussex: Wiley, 2016), 175.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 173.

<sup>7</sup> Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 3rd ed. (Novato, CA: New World Library, 2008).

<sup>8</sup> Harriss, "Co-authoring a Live Project Manifesto," 45.

2. Semester 2, 2019: Students produce and develop design concepts for Eke Panuku.
3. Semester 1 and 2, 2020: Students work with local material suppliers and distributors to develop the design further and create shop drawings for prefabrication. Where necessary, amend the design and prefabricate The Pavilion at the School of Architecture workshop.
4. Summer Semester, 2020 and 2021: Students install The Pavilion on site.
5. February to July 2021: Dr Bobby Hung curates a six-month exhibition of The Pavilion painted by graffiti artists.

### Step 1: Formulating a Concept

Students and Eke Panuku collaboratively formulated a design brief and developed a design concept for The Graffiti Pavilion. Eke Panuku's involvement in the development of the brief originally sought for an interesting activation for a car-park site that would provide amenity for people and signal change. Unitec's previous work with pavilions in other spaces provided a different take on activating a space.

The original project was to be designed for 5 Trading Place in Henderson Town Centre. The site was located behind Waitākere Library and Unitec's Waitākere Campus, and added value to existing cycleway placemaking activities. The site was defined by a cul-de-sac road on the west, a park with Waikumete Stream on the east, and blank buildings north and south. Concepts of the space were initially about creating a place for the student community and local residents to dwell, relax or find shelter.

The brief developed by the students and Eke Panuku was conservative in scale to ensure resource and building consent requirements and an initial budget of \$10,000 could be met effectively. There was a requirement for The Pavilion to be durable and be easily maintained. A large part of the design brief was dedicated to students needing to research effective ways to mitigate or remove vandalism from the structure. The most difficult aspect students faced while designing the structure was that it had no permanent foundations and needed to be bolted to the ground. Two main design changes were presented to the students to entice the community to be drawn to The Pavilion and the site. The first was to create a pavilion that allowed the site to be open and allow the public to feel safe. The second was to formulate ideas on how to work with the institution to promote community.

View angles from adjacent buildings largely drove the first design iteration. The students pursued concepts centred around floating canopies to ensure The Pavilion felt open and safe (Figure 1). Instead of designing large vertical obstructions, such as screens and heavy vertical structural elements, tapped column elements were designed into the scheme. A large seating module was placed under the canopies for the columns to be affixed and to anchor The Pavilion. The thesis students involved in the project worked with a lighting engineer from Stephenson and Turner Architects to light up The Pavilion at night. The resulting design led to the concept of The Pavilion to become a 'nightlight' and cast images of students' work on walls of the site (Figure 2). To realise this concept, the lighting engineer and the student working on a scheme to project light down

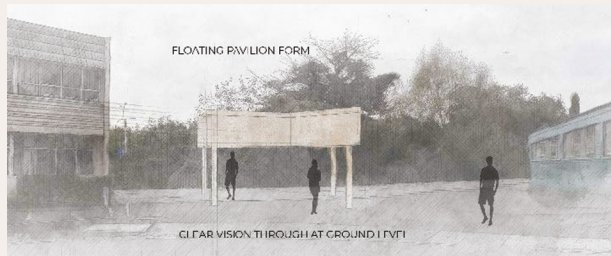


Figure 1. Floating canopies sketch. Image: Myles Durrant, 2019



Figure 2. Number 5 Trading Place, night render. Image: Myles Durrant, 2019

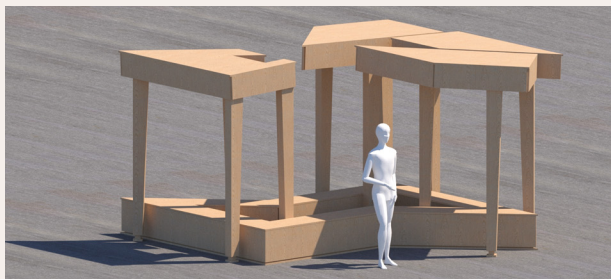


Figure 3. The third design iteration. Image: Neil McCulloch, 2019

onto the ground surrounding The Pavilion to create a soft glow around it. The second design iteration reduced the construction cost and complexity by reducing the size and removing expensive design features. Disappointingly, the lighting elements needed to be removed from the design, as a product sponsor could not be found to fund the lighting equipment and the expense to provide The Pavilion with electricity was simply too high. The third design iteration (Figure 3) sought to modularise the design so it could be easily transported without the need to hire a truck-mounted crane (HIAB). The third design iteration led to students taking on advice from product sponsor Nuralite Waterproofing to refine the canopy design to suit their product range. The ultimate design changes led to the design of the canopy to be reduced in size.

The project's fourth iteration responded to Eke Panuku's decision to move The Pavilion to the former 3 Guys site as part of their Avondale rejuvenation project. The move was informed by Eke Panuku's feedback from their consultants

on the evolution of the design of The Pavilion; a change in location was suggested to a more visible location in Avondale. The permeability of the structure to take on characteristics of the site, e.g. the graffiti wall, made the move to the new locale a successful choice.

In collaboration with Dr Bobby Hung from the Avondale art collective and Unitec School of Creative Technologies, the design brief was updated to ensure that The Pavilion would fit into the existing context, with the goal of the project to be informed by the design and art culture.<sup>9</sup> Dr Hung advocated that The Pavilion should respond to the graffiti activity that had been occurring on site for well over a decade. To do this, The Pavilion became a three-dimensional structure designed to be a rotating showcase for local graffiti and street artists, to ensure other graffiti artists would not vandalise The Pavilion. A methodology used to underpin the curation of this project draws on a framework of reclaiming public space, where artists within the community are partnered together to beautify spaces and celebrate the identity that already exists within the site.<sup>10</sup>

Instead of starting afresh, the students decided to keep a large portion of the existing design. It was important the updated design was oriented and welcoming from the Avondale Central Reserve's community square to the south of the site. Students modified the structure by removing columns, creating three equal-sized canopies and breaking the loop of the seating module. The result was a pavilion that was symbolically closed from the north, east and west but opened to the south.

## Step 2: Prefabrication and Install

The fabrication and installation of the project went through four stages. The first stage saw Bachelor of Architectural Studies students working with the thesis students to prefabricate canopy and column components out of polyisocyanurate foam and plywood in the School of Architecture's workshop (Figure 4). The materials were selected as the students wanted to create an affordable but rigid structure without the need of framing elements. Constant conversation with Nuralite during the fabrication exercise led students to discover that The Pavilion could be made out of a series of structural insulated panels (SIPs). This in turn led students to collaborate with Nuralite to produce a series of SIPs by sandwiching plywood on either side of their Enerthem polyisocyanurate foam product. To ensure there was a strong bond between the Enerthem and plywood, Nuralite sponsored the PU adhesive product to ensure the foam did not dissolve.

The second stage saw the March 2020 Covid-19 snap lockdown put a pause to the fabrication programme. This led to a compromise of the original ten Digital Fabrication Elective students being able to use the project as a platform to learn how to operate digital fabrication technologies. It instead led to four students working on The Pavilion outside their study timetable for extra credit.



Figure 4. An architecture student prefabricating roofing components. Photograph: Yusef Patel, 2020



Figure 5. Assembled Pavilion in the architecture workshops. Photograph: Yusef Patel, 2020



Figure 6. The portion of The Pavilion flipped after a winter storm. Photograph: Yusef Patel, 2021

The second Covid-19 lockdown, in August, placed extra pressure on the four students working on the project. When

<sup>9</sup> Aksamija, *Integrating Innovation in Architecture*, 173.

<sup>10</sup> Luca M. Visconti et al., "Street Art, Sweet Art? Reclaiming the 'Public' in Public Place," *Journal of Consumer Research* 37, no. 3 (October 2010): 520, <https://doi.org/10.1086/652731>



they returned from their month-long break from the project, they found that some of the prefabricated elements were damaged due to the poor manner in which they had been stored. This setback added to the work students needed to undertake and led to their losing focus on the project.

The project's third stage saw all the prefabricated elements assembled in the workshop (Figure 5) before being painted. This was an important step to ensure all the pieces came together effectively and to find any defects that might have occurred during the fabrication stages. The results of conducting a mock assembly led to the students discovering major flaws in the fabrication of the columns and details within the canopies. To fix these problems onsite would have been difficult and resulted in the students needing to return the prefabricated elements to the school's workshops to be repaired.

The fourth stage of the project was to disassemble The Pavilion, pack it up into a transport van and erect it on site over one and half days. This time included fixing up some damage that occurred during the transportation to the site. The students made a few errors when bolting The Pavilion to the ground. The mistake resulted in one of the canopies flipping over during a mid-winter storm (Figure 6). The durable design of The Pavilion meant the damage to the canopy was minimal and was simple to put back into place with the correct bolt fixings.

### Step 3: Post-occupancy Observation

The graffiti community regularly uses the site, and it was essential to select local artists who already contributed to the space to participate in the project. It was equally crucial for Dr Hung to curate select artists to produce work representing substantial cultural diversity, gender and output quality.

Haser painted the first iteration (Figure 7), with work that explored graffiti letterforms and structures. Using a background of retro-inspired colours, his letters were reminiscent of the early New York subway styles from the 1970s. The second iteration (Figure 8) was painted by Levi. He adopted an alternative aesthetic and intention. While the foundations of his work were also influenced by graffiti lettering, the forms, shapes and graphic linework were like brutalist architecture. Gasp's approach to the third iteration (Figure 9) was an intersection of aesthetics between type and image by bridging the realms of signwriting, typography and 1960s popular culture; his artwork embraced approaches of appropriation and remix. Fluro's practice is a synergy of influences between hip-hop culture, graffiti and typography. As a full-time graphic designer, her art for The Pavilion spelled out the word 'Avondale' in various typefaces from multiple perspectives on the fourth iteration (Figure 10). Doubling as an artist and curator, Berst's version of the fifth Pavilion (Figure 11) featured abstracted graffiti letterforms and followed a tonal rendering of colour. Each letter was situated within the irregular planes of The Pavilion and painted using an infrared-like treatment to give focus and depth between foreground and background. The sixth and most recent iteration of The Pavilion (Figure 12) was painted by TrustMe. His practice responds to the local area of Avondale and involves the research of local history and stories. Public interest in The Pavilion has been highlighted



Figure 7. Pavilion painted by Haser. Photograph: Bobby Hung, 2021



Figure 8. Pavilion painted by Levi. Photograph: Bobby Hung, 2021



Figure 9. Pavilion painted by Gasp. Photograph: Yusef Patel, 2021

on social media. Ongoing stakeholder engagement and feedback has been sought through conversations on social media and community Facebook groups. This feedback has evidenced the project's impact on the community and the improved accessibility of the arts in public spaces. Images and video of the structure have been posted on platforms such as Instagram and YouTube. The architectural and urban design community have rallied behind the initiative. Architects from Woods have 3D-scanned painted iterations of the structure and placed it on Vimeo, while also distributing it through digital networks like LinkedIn. Urban designers have posted encouraging comments on Instagram, stating: "Excited to



Figure 10. Pavilion painted by Fluro. Photograph: Bobby Hung, 2021



Figure 11. Pavilion painted by Berst. Photograph: Bobby Hung, 2021



Figure 12. Pavilion painted by TrustMe. Photograph: Bobby Hung, 2021



Figure 13. The Graffiti Pavilion at Matariki Night Ride. Photograph: Yusef Patel, 2021

see all the graffiti artists that will have their work displayed between now and July at the pavilion in Avondale by @Eke Panukuakl."

Client Eke Panuku has highlighted how well The Pavilion has been incorporated into the community. Their previous pop-up intervention on the Pump Track site was vandalised, and needed to be refurbished when relocated to a new site. Over the past six months, each artwork has been treated with respect. The Bike Avondale community group recently worked with Unitec to incorporate the structure into their Eke Panuku-sponsored Matariki Night Ride event (Figure 13).

### Conclusions

The Pavilion's presence in the space enables an activation that acknowledges the graffiti walls in Avondale and the street art community, and meets Eke Panuku's aims to create a public amenity for the community. Its visibility from the street helps to enhance and reflect the pulse of creativity imbued into the wall and provides a place for local residents to interact and engage with a new character in the long-form narrative of urban regeneration.

It is well known and acknowledged that students who can reflect and learn from failure would be better prepared to engage with and manage problems in the future.<sup>11</sup> In this project, students took the opportunity to reflect when they were given a chance. To have successful outcomes, the students needed to participate in meaningful discussions with all the stakeholders and compromise where necessary. The fabrication aspects of the project taught the students about design detail and prefabrication workflow processes. By the end of the project, the students acknowledged that it is not easy to work with constantly changing briefs, project delays and abandoned ideas. The process of working to overcome these challenges, however, led the students to grow their understanding of the realities of producing built architectural outcomes and to expand their capacity to be resilient. Although Covid-19 lockdowns brought challenges to the pedagogical outcomes of the projects, the students that participated in a project were not denied the learning outcomes found within a design-build course.

Avondale community has a strong connection with the site, taking ownership while it has sat vacant, with walls that have seen many interactions, meetings and events of every scale. The introduction of The Pavilion has helped to highlight its character as well as contribute to ongoing discussions of change. In a public social media statement, Eke Panuku posted the following message on Instagram:

We'd like to tell you about the meaning of Te Pūtahi Auaha, aka The Pavilion. Part of our ongoing work in Avondale, Te Pūtahi Auaha translates here to "The Meeting Place for Creativity", acknowledging the exciting streetart project that we're running with Dr Bobby Hung of School of Creative Industries. Each month has seen a different ringatoi (artist) transform Te Pūtahi Auaha through tohungatanga (expertise) and mahi (work). The project has been such a success that it's been extended into next year! Once it's safe to do so, be sure to head

<sup>11</sup> Harriss, "Co-authoring a Live Project Manifesto," 45.

down to the old 3 Guys site in the town centre and check out Te Pūtahi Auaha in person. Shout out to our project partners, Unitec School of Architecture, and to Nuralite for sponsoring the materials!

The success of the installation has resulted in the lifespan of The Pavilion being extended further, with Dr Hung invited to curate six more iterations of The Pavilion over the next six months. The next line-up of artists has been confirmed and includes Burns, Deus, Deow, Mark, Bone and Techs. Each artist presents a variety of aesthetics, approaches and discourses of practice. Upon completion of the pavilion by these artists, a third round of artists will be selected to complete the project. Rather than paint being utilised to protect The Pavilion, it is being used to connect and reflect the community Te Pūtahi Auaha serves. Overall, The Pavilion helps to signal change as well as being a new character in the long-form narrative of urban regeneration.

### Authors

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