

Place Time Relations

Exhibition Dates:
5th – 23rd October, 2026



Gallery hours: Mon – Fri, 9.30am – 4.30pm
Email: gallery@unitec.ac.nz
Building B108, Unitec, Carrington Rd,
Mt Albert, Auckland.
Unitec

PLACE IMAGE RELATIONS

Allan McDonald's curatorial process is paced gradually over time. Circling around images, and options, McDonald has included artists with well-established practices alongside those worthy of more visibility. Relationships appear between pictures that may otherwise never have been brought closely together.

Our initial discussion about this evolving exhibition had touched on landscape photography and how it has informed notions of place, but his thinking hinged on a very specific series of images. The pictures were made by Robert Curd, a former student of McDonald and they depict carvings that now stand in Unitec's wharenuī, Ngākau Māhaki. The images give us some sense of why photography can still be such a powerful marker of both time and place. The photographs of the carvings hold a charge, something that McDonald is all too aware of, having lived with one in his home for a number of years.

The pictures show four carvings by the renowned Māori carver and sculptor Lionel Grant. Two pictures show the entities Tainui and Te Akitai, depicting ancestors of the many whānau and hapū of Tāmaki Makaurau. The third photograph shows the diverse influences of Grant's carving, drawing on both the traditional and the urban, with the figure Hongi Hika standing with Urban Shift. The carvings carry the weight of place and of time, as do the photographs. These are images made years ago that project into the present. The figures are also present now, in place, in the wharenuī. They are entities that embody a circular sense of time. Past, present, future.

Discussion about photography today is often focussed on the shifting sands of AI image generation, so it is worth noting that the artists in this exhibition represent a rebuttal to this process. They work with the categories of place, image and relations as strategies for their image making and the work asserts the phenomenological importance of their being present, making work that responds to where they were, where they are.

The Czech Brazilian writer Willem Flusser signalled the emergence of the 'technical image' and presented strategies for alternatives. He noted in *Towards a Philosophy of Photography*, how photography is defined by the 'apparatus'. It is even more true today that camera manufacturers are producing cameras that have ever growing and more sophisticated capabilities to record the details, colours and actions of our lives. However, for Flusser the apparatus was more than just the camera and included ideas, manufacturing standards and technological developments as well as conventions of photographic practice such as those evidenced in documentary.



Zahra Killeen-Chance & Solomon Mortimer,
Coffin mirror at Tylee Cottage, 2021.



Hannah Rose Arnold
Donkey with Shipwreck [from the Ponui Island series], 2026.





Wendy Bornholdt
Twilight – Out on The Shelf_3065_0733_2014/ 20/ 24/ 25



Tony Nyberg
Kiso Valley, Japan [from the series *Fluid Archipelago*], 2025

Importantly, Flusser also discusses how our capacity to 'play against technology' can offer some resistance for photographers to just operating as functionaries of the apparatus. Flusser positions the unpredictable and the spontaneous use of the camera against this instrumentalism. *Place Time Relations* offers this form of resistance. Through both an interest in the analogue, where the negative's frame, grain and the materiality of printing processes resist the immediacy of the networked digital image, and also via the more complicated positioning of work against cultural, environmental, political and commercial photographic operations.

The photographers featured in *Place Time Relations* also resist an easy and often clichéd sense of the everyday. It is not that they conjure the exceptional, but they ask of us to think about the relational and they ask of us to think about spaces. What makes a place stay with us, so we can imagine it again?

This is one of the enduring outcomes of photography's engagement with place. The ability to harness an emotional charge that allows us to speculate what it is about a place that resonates beyond its location. We are given the opportunity to share the curiosity of the photographer.

An important aspect of this process is the act of observation itself. The film historian and theorist Erika Balsom explains that observational cinema 'facilitates a form of thinking with appearances that depends simultaneously on the image's ties to phenomenal reality and the image's differences from it.' The works in *Place Time Relations* similarly allow us to respond to the places that the artists have made work in and to combine that with our own memories and spatial experience.

Flusser also saw something of the magical in images, and photography, and framed this magic as having a relationship to simultaneity, positioned against linearity. There is a close affinity in this idea of time with place. Whether this be the telescoping of past, present and future, or that space, and place, can contain many things, and many actions, at once. Things happen at the same time, they repeat or they reverberate via cyclical processes. Flusser noted in his discussion of simultaneity that "in the magical world, sunrise means crowing and crowing means sunrise". He was arguing against a simple cause and effect way of understanding the world. If anything, the images in *Place Time Relations* share this commonality. The world is complex. Artists find ways of working through it with an intent to give expression to the relations that at times divide us and at times hold us together.

David Cowlard

Place Time Relations, 2026

Curator: Allan McDonald
Gallery Curators: Carly van Winkel and Gina Ferguson
Catalogue Design: Carly van Winkel
Installation Technicians: Karen Crisp and
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