



# FAIR GAME

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Duck shooting and whitebait harvesting are fiercely territorial and even tribal activities. If you doubt this assessment, you could test this out by trying to set up a new baiting stand on the river or 'peg down' an apparently abandoned blind on pegging day. Chances are you'll discover that spot has been used by the same family for years and they may not appreciate any intrusion. I wouldn't want to give the impression that some wild game sportsmen would knock your block off for stealing their regular spot, or that usurping whitebait stands may have started family feuds that lasted decades. Suffice it to say that without an introduction from someone in the know it can be a bit tricky for a newcomer to find a way in. The locals already figured out the best spots when Adam was still a gleam in God's eye and worked it out informally between themselves who goes where. There is an etiquette involved, and a system that works. You can be sure there is a complex hierarchy of status at work and competitive rivalry ranging from affectionate to bitter. But there is also the simple dynamic of people who enjoy doing the same thing getting together and doing it.

Southland Art Foundation William Hodges Fellowship award winners, artists Don Hunter and Ana Terry have used the Southland traditions of fishing and shooting as a place to start an artistic investigation. The pair timed their residency at Burwell House to coincide with 2008 hunting season, fully intending to work as much as possible with people who live here while developing their exhibition project. Hunter and Terry brought the principle of collaboration to the project, collaborating with each other and also actively seeking ways to collaborate with people living in Southland. Their investigations have taken a playful approach rather than a scientific one, not looking for social documentary but taking something on of the irreverent and adventurous spirit of recreational hunting. The physical environment of Southland has also



Above: Duck shooter Victor Hubber, from Gore, shows Don his first gun, a two shot browning.

played its part in the development of this work, with the wetlands territory in particular catching the attention of the artists.

For Hunter and Terry the view from an aeroplane window on frequent trips to and from Invercargill has been an important starting point for this body of work. This view in many ways provides an interesting metaphor for the experience of the itinerant artist, with the benefit of distance you can gain an overview and a sense of perspective but from the air the details that make up daily life are harder to see. This play between objective distance and closely observed detail remains in the work produced for the exhibition; the micro and macro views contrasted and combined in innovative ways and the perspectives of distance subverted and recombined.

A large work installed on the floor titled *Flatlands* dominates the gallery space. This work changes according to the viewing position and also on viewing distance. The work begins as the residency also did, with an aerial cartography. The existing floor covering, carpet, is gridded with an overlay of large squares of carpet in contrasting colours. Burned carefully into the carpet surface are symbols and pictograms used by map makers to represent different kinds of environmental conditions. The pair were considering the way that farmland is inscribed by controlled brush burn-off when deciding to similarly inscribe

the carpet by burning. The symbol that appears on the gallery floor is one that informs us the area is a wetland. Silhouette cutout marshland grasses rise from the grided floor, alluding to the wetland environment in direct ways. Other silhouette images are used that create a link to the hunter's environment, such as a wind bent tree and a life sized Pointer taking up the breeds characteristic stance.

Along with the use of aerial survey techniques came the art of avoiding aerial survey. In the game of hunter and hunted each understands the value of avoiding being seen. The basic principle of how camouflage works is to use samples of colour taken from the local area and use it to break up the silhouette so the form becomes more integrated with the surrounding environs and appears less out of place. For *Flatlands* Hunter and Terry have used this tactic, making the distinction between figure and ground less defined, by using some of the same carpet on the floor to work the face surface of the props in a camouflage pattern that mimics the wetland environment. Somehow the arrangement of carpet and metal plate combine to evoke an image of pools of water in the distance. A kind of multidimensional landscape drawing emerges, containing views of the territory as seen from a distance and simultaneously scaled as if you were standing within it. Because the props are flat cutouts with a simple stand and only one side has been camouflaged, moving around the work and seeing the installation from different angles shifts the emphasis.

As soon as the unadorned side of the props are seen the fragile illusory representation of the wetlands shatters.

The checkered grid on the floor surface recalls strategy game spaces (such as checker game boards used for Chess, Dominos and Go) and it also recalls the view of farmland laid out under the aeroplane wing. The silhouette cutouts are parts of a constructed landscape image but they are also arranged on the grid as game pieces. A visual scene is created that appears as a frozen moment of narrative, or like a theatrical vignette in one of Benjamin Pollock's Toy Theatres. The pull ring on each stand directly reference the duck decoy mechanism which both tethers and animates the toy. The adult activity of hunting is playfully combined with childhood memories of play. Strategy games could be regarded as ritualised hunting, with feint and counterfeint over territory taking a controlled and stylistic form. The pair were also considering other game-spaces where ritualised shooting as adult game appears, such as the paintball park they regularly drive by en route to Oreti Beach.



Detail from *Flatlands*, 2008.



Above: Whitebaiters, Waimatuku River Mouth, 2008.

Another work on a wall nearby extends the idea and the possibility of game space to wider gallery. *Duck 'n' Guns* is a rack of wheeled toys designed to be rolled around the room, introducing a tongue in cheek interactivity. The toy is operated by grasping the handle which turns out to be the butt of a gun and use it to direct the wheeled duck attached to the end of the barrel. The comical flipping of rubber duck feet as the wheels rotate may well be charming enough to make you temporarily forget the spectacle you are presenting. Similar in construction and aesthetic to the props and decoys in *Flatlands*, the walkabout push toys are linked to the larger work.

*Lightbait*, another major work in the room, is a large chandelier with a shimmering theatrical presence and classical elegance more suited to a ballroom. An elaborate light fitting like this is reference to an elite and luxurious way of life that is the preserve of a wealthy few. The other works in the room have used clear references to duck shooting, this work brings the world of whitebaiting into the conversation as closer inspection reveals that the hundreds of pendant droplets are all cut from acrylic in the form of whitebait. Each has small details, delicate fins and gut marked, each tiny eye pierced by a pin that hooks the translucent fish to the tiered structure. The image of the chandelier is completely shifted and changes profoundly according to viewing distance. Suspension of the chandelier is modeled on the rope and pulley which lift and

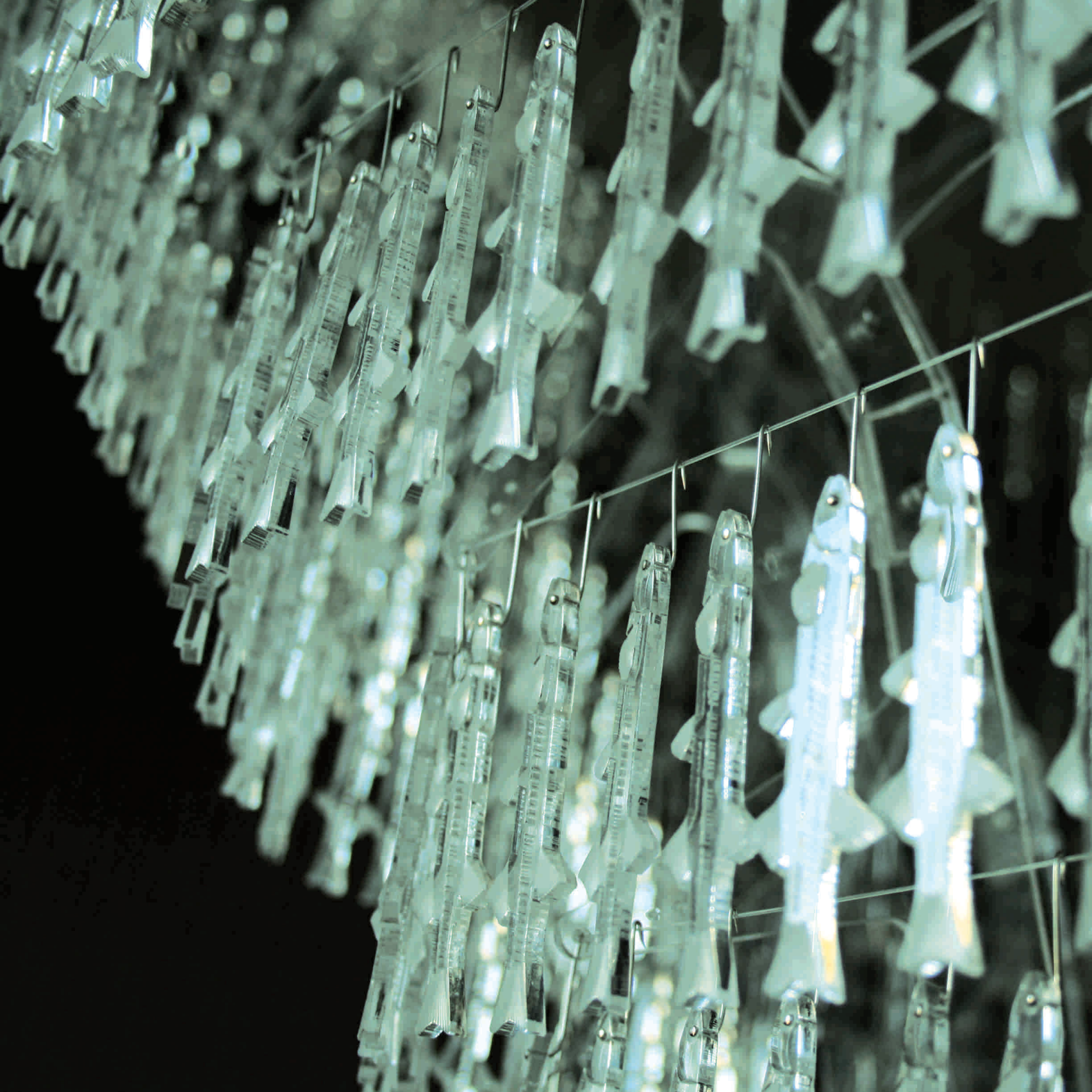
lower the net on and off a whitebait stand. This system reinforces the provisional, the pendants are not cut crystal but are acrylic and the glitzy show of wealth is both ersatz and temporary.

As you negotiate the games and diversions in the landscape of the gallery an intermittent soundtrack lets you overhear small snippets of conversation. The voices are those of six Southland residents talking about their memories of whitebaiting and duck shooting. This aspect of the exhibition is not intrusive and may be the last thing that visitors become aware of as they move around the space. Small excerpts have been taken from interviews and conversations that Hunter and Terry had with local duck shooters and whitebaiters during their residency. The comments are about childhood memories and personal events like the first duck shooting trip (or, as Victor from Gore describes, the last with his old mates). This series of disconnected but very individual moments reconnect the work in a quiet way with the real people who live in Southland and the place these activities have had in their lives.

As one local put it, "because we are in an elevated position we can see along way across this flat plane."

Ali Bramwell, January 2009





**Don Hunter** works with industrial strength kinetic sculpture. He pursues and investigates the idea of function in his machines until it reaches absurd vanishing points. He thinks about power relationships, the cultural and social impact of subverting factory standards. His inventions are perverse and willful; very often the idea of an operator is completely redundant. These slightly demented inventions promise action but seldom deliver what might reasonably be expected. During his Fine Arts study he undertook a highly successful exchange at Utrecht School of the Arts in the Netherlands, where he also exhibited. He is currently on leave from his lecturing position at the Otago Polytechnic Design School where he works on degree and certificate programmes. Based in Port Vila Vanuatu at present Don is currently co-ordinating an international theatre festival. (visit [www.artcrew.co.nz](http://www.artcrew.co.nz))

**Ana Terry** is a multi-disciplinary artist. Currently her research investigates creative processes and what may constitute 'an arts practice' which includes the development of work, curatorial projects, and collaborations. She often responds to a given location and/or everyday objects from which to draw out ideas and metaphoric associations. She is particularly interested in applying archaeological and geographical methodologies and processes in both thinking about and making work. She has lectured in project drawing, digital media and graphic design at both the University of Otago and the Otago Polytechnic School of Art since 2000. Currently Ana is on a two year voluntary assignment working with a community theatre based in Vanuatu as a visual communications and design advisor. This experience is informing her art practice through work with theatre, story telling, and play as a means to educate and empower.

Writer Ali Bramwell is a practicing artist, independent curator, arts administrator and lecturer in Art History & Theory for the Otago Polytechnic School of Art. She has been working as a sculptor since 1990 producing a range of exhibitions and public projects both nationally and internationally. Recent projects include a permanent public sculpture work in Germany and exhibitions in Sweden, Bosnia, Australia, South Korea as well as New Zealand. (visit [www.springsteelchicken.co.nz](http://www.springsteelchicken.co.nz))

Special thanks to the following individuals and businesses who have contributed to and supported this project:

Regal Floors, The Southland Times, Rosalei Day, Gaye McElroy, and Rachel Gillies.  
Stella Pessione modelling *Duck 'n' Gun*.

Whitebaiters & Duck Shooters: Shirley McRandle, Colin Anderson, Alan McElroy, Victor Hubber,  
Teri McClelland, Allison Booth & Marc Knoll.

Campbell Booth from Otago Polytechnic Product Development Centre for  
the use of the rapid prototyping facility.

Funding from the Otago Polytechnic Education Foundation and Operational Research Grant Committee.

Catalogue Design: Ana Terry | Photographs: Don Hunter & Ana Terry

Catalogue Writer: Ali Bramwell

Printed by: Craigs Printing Company Ltd

We also wish to gratefully acknowledge the support from the following organisations:

