

Sacred Sites

23 Jul - 23 Aug 2019

Jen Bowmast



Future-makers

Wendy Richdale
Curator—Ramp Gallery
2019

Jen Bowmast
**A gorgeous holy
darkness**
photographic
inkjet print
2018

What do we do this all for?
This thing called life?

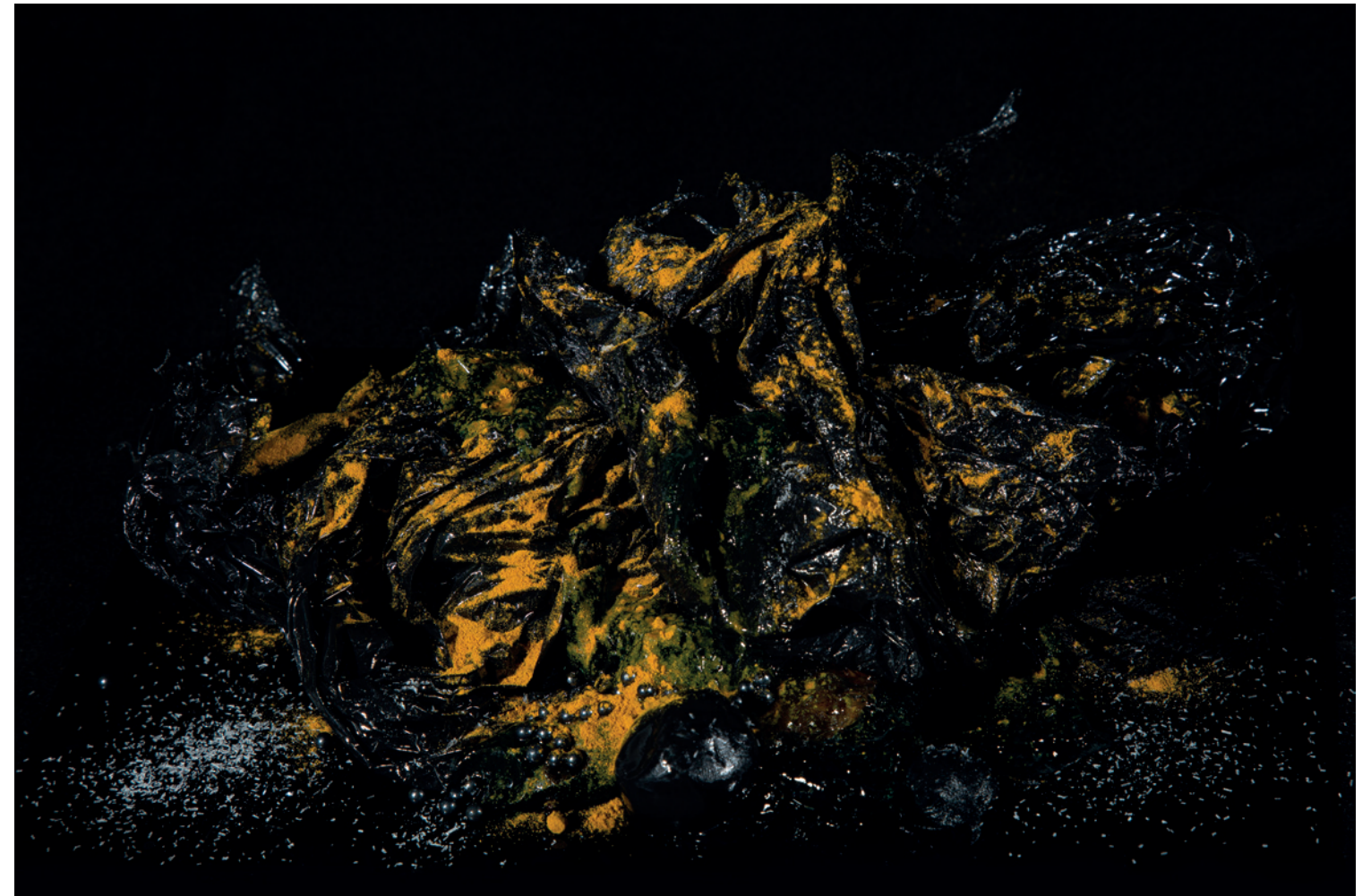
Some make art, some explore space, some seek higher and higher education, some go to Church, some consult the tarot cards. As humans we have an instinctual drive to be meaning-makers. Searching for threads and new perspectives to understand our existence here on this planet.

Each generation finds their ‘why’ in their own way, looking to contextualise their experience of the world and find meaning within their lifetime. To find solace in the knowledge of something that will outlast and outlive their lifespan.

Sacred Sites is a meditative yet powerful exhibition by New Zealand artist, Jen Bowmast, that makes a space for contemplation whilst exploring ‘ways of knowing’ and the human impulse to connect to ideas larger than the self. Jen’s work, spanning installation, performance, photography and object making, also explores themes around spirituality. These areas of curiosity have led Jen to an interesting practice of engaging psychic mediums in her research and making processes.

Turning to the ‘unknown’ as a way of researching destabilises the dominant hierarchies of knowledge (think art history, philosophy and western structures of research that are taught in tertiary institutions). In Jen’s practice the ephemeral and ‘felt’ take precedence over the intellectual and rational—one might say ‘women’s intuition’ can be seen at work.

Jen has long learnt to trust her intuition—and that’s where the creative rebelliousness of her art practice can be seen. During her Masters study, Bowmast found herself increasingly frustrated by the academic trope of referring back to long-dead, (often) French philosophers, all of whom were definitely men. Jen decided to engage psychic mediums to explore how knowledge gained directly from a ‘living woman’ might expand and develop her artistic practice.



What began as perhaps a quip (and certainly as a commentary on academia’s fixed knowledge systems), turned into a beautiful exchange that enhanced and shifted her practice. An authentic connection between medium and participant was forged. Jen utilised this to explore her future as an artist and in a sense her present, as it influenced her ways of working. These exchanges acted as research tools, that informed her material and conceptual practice. The artist became the future-maker.

Accompanying **Sacred Sites** is a written work titled **The Future is Obsidian** by Natasha Matila-Smith. Natasha is an intuitive writer whose practice often deals with social exchanges and anxieties, across installation and digital contexts. In this piece Natasha lets her ‘self’ come to the fore. Laid bare in her frankness, Natasha’s words both explore her own point of view and expose larger ideas that talk to the universal—the quest for love and the search for a hidden meaning in the chaos of the world. Her personal sense of spirituality that is self-made inspires the reader to find solace in their own mish-mash of meaning-making. Just like Bowmast’s critique of the accepted ‘ways of knowing’, Matila-Smith’s work questions the way we ‘do’ spirituality.

In the way that only artists can, both Jen Bowmast and Natasha Matila-Smith, present work that allows us to see our own place in the world in a new light. Feeling a connection beyond our rational ways of knowing, helps us to discover (or build) our own ‘why’ and to become future makers of our own legacies.

“He who
has a why
can bear
any how”

—Dr. Viktor Frankl
(psychiatrist & holocaust survivor)



Jen Bowmast
Calling in the Divine
 clay, copper, glass,
 marble, nephrite jade,
 obsidian, peppercorns,
 rope, sugar, wood
 2019

The Future is Obsidian

Natasha Matila-Smith
2019

Jen Bowmast
Calling in the Divine
(detail)
clay, copper, glass,
marble, nephrite
jade, obsidian,
peppercorns, rope,
sugar, wood
2019



My grandmother was a tarot reader at Victoria Park Markets for many years. As children, my sister and I would spend our school holidays there being a nuisance while Mum was at work. Even though we became very familiar with and were at times fascinated by all of the ‘fortune telling’ paraphernalia, we really went there for the fried noodles.

Nana had this substantial Amethyst rock in her possession, which I’ve always been mesmerised by. Amethyst is the ethereal purple birthstone of Aquarius. I can’t tell if it’s because the stone actually had chemical properties which energised me or because a cosmic connection was suggested, but I’ve always had a fierce pride about being an Aquarian.

I didn’t care much for sports or political leanings, but my spiritual allegiances, I felt they were a divine gift. I did kinda think I would be the protagonist (or even the antagonist) in an apocalypse type scenario...I mean, it could still happen. With that said, I was never one for mathematics and actual astrological charting, so I guess I’ve always technically been an intuitive dabbler.

I’ve learned over the years, at least as far as tarot and the stars and palmistry go, that love is not on the cards for me. My friend who is *also* an Aquarius Sun and *also* single, said it’s an inbuilt trait of our star sign to be single. Apparently, we are too head-in-the-clouds, too focused on things not of this world, to be stable enough to relate to another human being.

Whenever I’ve had my tarot read, the cards always focus on career. Everything but romantic love. When I had ‘boyfriends’, they were never real. Meetings and love are always clandestine. I’m not meant to be loved and I’m not meant to express love in a public way. The only thing I knew intimately of romantic things was pain. Massive ongoing pain.

All throughout my childhood, I was obsessed with films about girls with special powers and the ability to travel to other worlds. I’ve watched *Labyrinth* (1986) quite literally hundreds of times. I was enamoured with the prince and princess, star-crossed lovers paradigm that has been marketed to little girls for millennia.

I still find it hard to shake that indoctrination, despite considering myself very open-minded. It’s a desire I still can’t seem to expel. I still want a great love that defies corporeality. I want the magical predestined kind of love that will make you question your reality. I know it isn’t there though, and it’s the logical part of me that struggles with my heart’s inability to accept this.

Maybe as an Aquarius, I feel like the potential for magic is even greater than other star signs would. Maybe it’s just me, an idealist, a dreamer. I’m a Pisces Ascendant. Well, this is based on a hypothetical time of birth as my family have no recollection of the actual time I was born. Based on the time of 7.55am on Monday 13 February 1984, I am a Gemini Moon.

The cards often tell me I am my own worst enemy. That if I could only get out of my own way, that there would be a success of some kind. The stars don’t really say much about my unconventional body type or the fact that I am a woman of colour. How this affects my chances with love remains to be seen, but being 35 and on Tinder is rough.

I’m also sceptical. According to the Cosmopolitan article *Everything You Need to Know About Aquarians*, Aquarians can be analytical and in the negative, detached. I think I must be a dark Aquarius because I like Bauhaus and Depeche Mode and stuff. I’m different, not like the others. We’re also characteristically known for being ‘different’, not like others.

When I was in high school, my friends and I went to this Wicca store in New Lynn. We had watched *The Craft*, and thought it would be goth fashion, wearing black eyeliner, levitating and invoking the spirits. Like a gust of wind picking up our incantations and making them real. The fascination fizzled out after we realised it was a lot less glamorous than we had imagined.

I’ve always believed I am a psychic and an empath. I’ve had premonitions in dreams before. Mostly banal things, like my uncle out of the blue, picking me up from school, or people being pregnant. I once went to a spiritual church and one of them singled me out and said I could be one of them. I dunno, I felt kinda special. The tea and biscuits afterwards were nice.

I receive monthly horoscopes from Chani Nicholas and Naimonu James. I follow accounts like Zodiac Boyfriend, Aquarius Memes, Zodiac Bitchhh and Benny Drama on Instagram. They tell me who I am at any particular time when I need that ‘guidance’. If I read through Chani’s horoscope and find nothing relevant on that day, I look to Naimonu’s horoscope, and vice versa.

There’s always something for me to grasp onto in times of need. My Church is comprised of various components which I customise to suit me. My friend told me to watch this YouTuber who he’s been following for years and is apparently ‘scarily accurate’. I subscribed to her channel but I couldn’t watch the videos. I found them too long.



Jen Bowmast
Calling in the Divine
 (detail)
 clay, copper, glass,
 marble, nephrite
 jade, obsidian,
 peppercorns, rope,
 sugar, wood
 2019

Jen Bowmast
**I am not sure that's
 where your vibration
 is right now**
 photographic
 inkjet print
 2018

Front cover:
 Jen Bowmast
**Becoming a
 better seer**
 photographic
 inkjet print
 2018

With special thanks
 to Bobby Jo (Universal
 Granite) & Paul (AGB
 Stone).

Install photographs
 by Holly Russell.

