

M A A K

ELIZABETH COX

I N N G

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A HISTORY OF

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A

WOMEN
ARCHITECTS

C E

IN AOTEAROA
NEW ZEALAND.

34. GOING PUBLIC: CIVIC AND SPECIAL PROJECTS

Catherine Hammond

When you respect a community by giving people something of quality they really respond. It's always a great privilege working on public buildings for that reason.¹
– Julie Stout

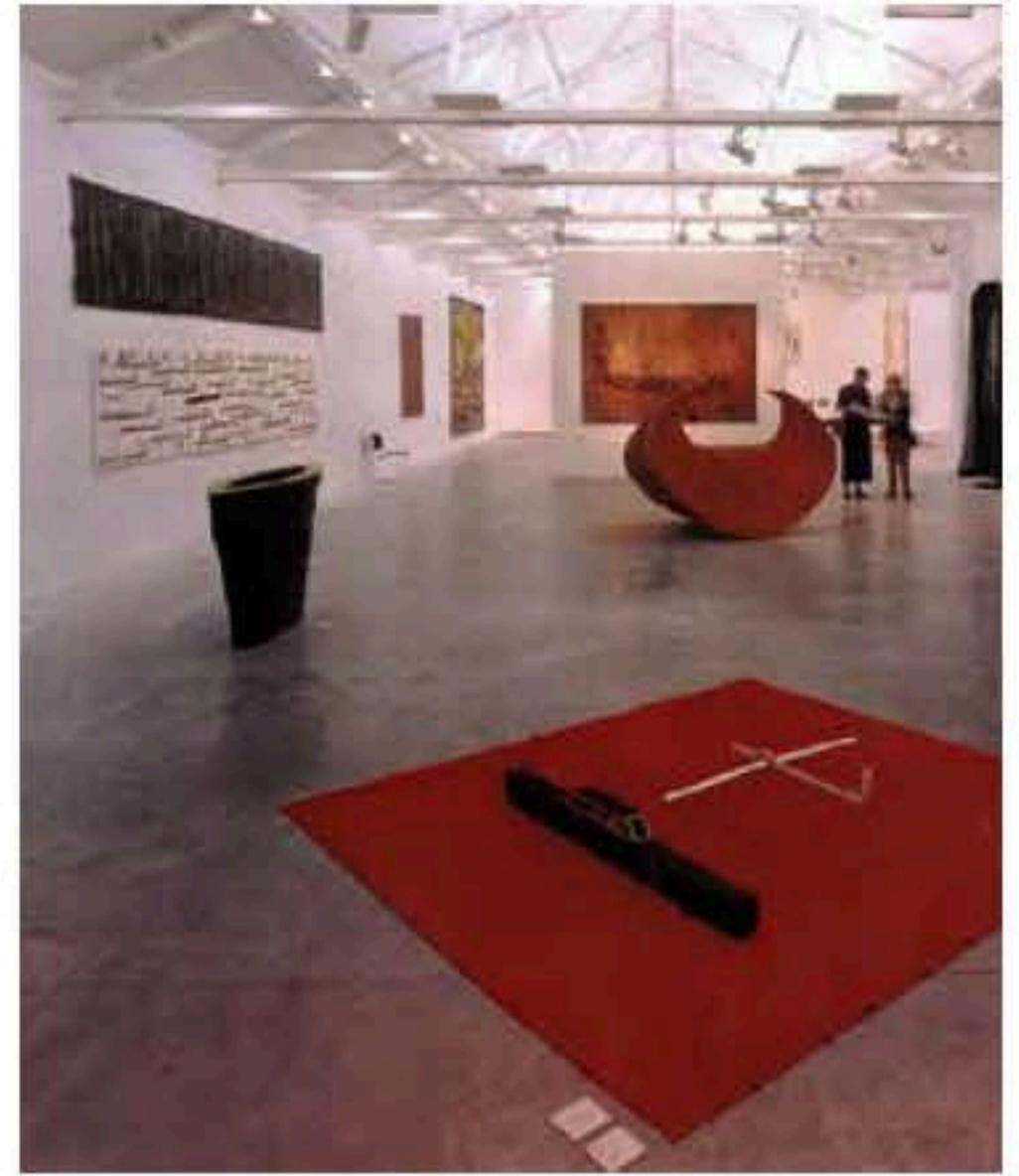
Something interesting happens in the architectural record of Aotearoa in the first decades of the new millennium. We see growing evidence of the involvement of women architects on special projects, civic buildings, and the range of dedicated public structures where people and communities gather. Earlier examples of this kind exist, of course: Julie Stout, Felicity Wallace and Anne Salmond, for instance, all designed public buildings in the 1990s, but at a time when residential projects were still substantively the norm for women in practice. After 2010, the contribution of women architects in leading roles starts to accumulate more rapidly in the public sphere; in part this is made possible by the increasing number of graduates and women in senior positions, but it is also fuelled by client demand, and sustained by the demonstrable benefits that a diversity of ideas, perceptions and relationships brings to public projects.

Julie Stout's first civic commission was the NEW Gallery (1995), a contemporary art exhibition space for Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, a metropolitan art museum established in the late nineteenth century. With her partner David Mitchell, and with their signature whimsy, they converted a former telephone exchange building in central Auckland into a light-filled, flexible showcase for the gallery's growing contemporary collections and special exhibitions. The NEW Gallery was decommissioned after a major extension to Auckland Art Gallery's main building in 2011, but it remains an influential exemplar of both sensitive retrofitting and a subtle rethinking of the established white cube aesthetic for exhibiting contemporary art.

Mitchell & Stout would design two more public art galleries in the decades that followed: the newly established Tauranga Art Gallery (2009) in the Bay of Plenty and Te Uru Waitākere Contemporary Gallery (2015) in Titirangi, west Auckland. Tauranga was another civic project that repurposed an existing structure, in this case a former bank building, but Te Uru was a substantial new build on a challenging narrow site which abutted an allied heritage building, Lopdell House.

For Stout, who first became the first woman to receive the NZIA gold medal in 2022, the health of a building is rooted in and sustained by its communities.² She led the extensive community consultation necessitated by the project, and an award-winning public building emerged in the process.³ Clad in painted aluminium, Te Uru is a striking aspect of the Titirangi streetscape; its vibrant green hue a sympathetic allusion to the nearby rainforests of the Waitākere Ranges Regional Park.

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A significant feature of all three Mitchell & Stout galleries is the presence of natural light that somehow conforms to the strictures of displaying art. Vertical light shafts are used in Te Uru exhibition spaces to harness and control daylight. An experienced sailor, Stout explains that the system of refracted light the practice employed, with a circular canopy diffusing the natural light coming through the rooftop oculus, was influenced by observing the way light behaves when reflected off the sails of a yacht. Such close attention to the illumination of galleries speaks to a respect for both artists and audiences, and a desire to create the best possible conditions for art to be viewed and to inspire artists to respond to the space.⁴

Anne Salmond identifies winning the competition to design Pātaka Art + Museum (1998) in Porirua while a director at Architecture+ as a 'step change' in her career that signalled a move to working on larger-scale buildings.⁵ Salmond transformed an existing 1970s commercial and warehouse space into a cultural hub for Porirua City. For this youthful and ethnically diverse urban centre, Pātaka organises civic amenities such as a contemporary art gallery, museum, and library around a naturally ventilated internal 'street' or spine that connects visitors to the different parts of the complex.

The project had a tight budget and benefited from Salmond's meticulous performance-based design approach, and the pragmatic, effective use of simple construction methods and utilitarian materials such as corrugated steel. Visual impact, particularly from a distance, was created by the dramatic effect of the red central spine and the woven pattern of external louvres. Pātaka quickly established itself as a dynamic cultural centre, and more civic work followed for the practice with Expressions Whirinaki Arts Centre (2003, now known as Whirinaki Whare Taonga), a theatre and gallery for the neighbouring local Upper Hutt community.

Lynda Simmons' Remuera Library (2002) and a tiny private chapel in Northland (2003) designed by Megan Rule of South Pacific Architecture are two very different, but equally sensitively executed commissions led by women running independent practices. Simmons' sympathetic remodelling and extension of the original Gummer and Ford neo-Georgian library and lecture hall (1926) emphasised the building's heritage elements while gently coaxing it into a modern library space. The chapel was an early project for South Pacific Architecture and found an international audience with its inclusion in the *Phaidon Atlas of 21st Century World Architecture* (2008). Built to hold no more than seven people, and hand-crafted out of timber sourced from the remote site, the chapel's meditative qualities are enhanced by an elemental interior and position above a flowing waterfall. Commenting on her aspirations, Rule notes:

I have always seen architecture as a progression or an evolution of building. You tend to start with smaller projects and then as your knowledge base becomes more sophisticated you become involved in more sophisticated projects, maybe on a larger scale, maybe on a more complex scale.⁶

Rule's next church project was indeed a progression in scale, but with a similar attention to the materiality and ambience created by the timber interior. Designed in close consultation with New Zealand's first Tuvaluan Christian congregation on a project it had envisaged for decades, the Tuvalu Community Church in Henderson, west Auckland, opened in 2020. Lofty and elegant, with a soaring wooden vaulted space reminiscent of an ocean vessel, it was described in these terms: 'This is not just a church, one of Christianity's symbolic boats, but a Tuvaluan vaka as well: a vessel nurturing Tuvaluan community, culture, heritage and coming generations on their voyages to who knows what is next.'⁷

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In the 2010s, a succession of projects involving women architects revitalised the public experience at a range of attractions and community spaces: the Zealandia Visitor Centre (2010) in Wellington, involving Jasmay's Evelyn Axten; the Wellington Zoo Hub (2011) by Louise Wright of Assembly Architects; and MOTAT's new Aviation Display Hall (2011) in Auckland by a Studio Pacific Architecture team that included heritage specialist Lianne Cox. In the same year, Sarah Scott's Holy Family Catholic Church was built in Wānaka. Tere Insley (Te Whānau-ā-Apanui) of Kauri Architects, in conjunction with Ngā Taonga ā Ngā Tama Toa Trust and Tairāwhiti Museum, developed the C Company Māori Battalion Memorial House (2014) in Gisborne, which tells the history of the 28th Battalion in the Second World War. Katherine Skipper led cultural and community projects for Warren and Mahoney, including Te Papa Tongarewa Museum of New Zealand's new art gallery Toi Art (2018) and Waihinga Martinborough Community Centre. Jo Aitken, of Atelier Aitken, worked with Patterson Architects on the New Zealand Guest of Honour Pavilion at the 2012 Frankfurt Book Fair, and as project architect for the Len Lye Centre Art Gallery in New Plymouth (2015).⁹ Yvette Overdyck at Stevens Lawson Architects led the early stages of design of the striking new chapel for St Peter's College in Khyber Pass Road in Auckland, from stakeholder engagement through to developed design.

A new generation of Māori and Pacific women graduates has begun working in the public realm in practice and in academia, in both physical and digital spaces. As noted in Chapter 31, Jade Kake (Ngāpuhi [Ngāti Hau me Te Parawhau], Te Whakatōhea, Te Arawa) works within an interdisciplinary framework – she is an artist, writer, designer and architect, and director at Matakohē Architecture + Urbanism in Whangārei. Kake uses a community-led design approach to realise projects for Māori organisations and mana whenua, and also works on artistic collaborations to forefront indigenous voices, such as *Chapel Pacific*, which was exhibited at the Honolulu Contemporary Museum of Art in 2015.

In the wake of the Christchurch mosque attacks in 2019, Karamia

Müller developed the research project and exhibition *Violent Legalities* (2020) at Wellington's Pātaka Toi Adam Art Gallery, which mapped the links between the built environment, violent incidences and legislation. Müller, a Pacific academic at the University of Auckland specialising in indigenous space concepts, argues that

our understanding of land as architectural practitioners can't just be the engineering of buildings; it has to take into account social histories and narratives. Enriched understandings are, in my perspective, more likely to have richer creative processes.⁹

Marianne Riley's work with Tāmaki Paenga Hira Auckland War Memorial Museum as project architect for Jasmx began with the development of the building master plan in 2013, as the museum looked to re-imagine and renew its orientation and exhibition spaces for the twenty-first century. An experienced architect on large projects and kaiāwhina of Waka Māia, Jasmx's cultural advisory group, Riley worked with project partners fjmt, Design Tribe and Salmond Reed Architects, and engaged with the museum's Māori and Pacific advisory boards, artists, and designers to make sense of the building's architectural legacies and to acknowledge mana whenua and connection to moana Pacific.

Te Ao Mārama, the revitalised South Atrium, opened to visitors in 2020 along with a suite of permanent and special exhibition spaces. Riley describes 'activating the tikanga'¹⁰ in Te Ao Mārama, giving primacy to protocols around arrival with a careful layering of thresholds into the orientation space. The atrium as a whole is designed to reinforce the notion of Tāmaki Makaurau as a gathering place where all Aucklanders feel a sense of belonging, and all peoples might feel welcomed.

We are beginning to see the results of this growing inclusiveness in architecture. The position of women architects working on buildings designed for public use continues to strengthen – it is now almost a given that a major civic project will include female representation or leadership. Embracing the talents of the wave of women architects from the past 20 years, many of whom have acumen in various design disciplines along with cultural competencies and connections, is essential to the development of relevant public structures and spaces in Aotearoa. The notion of what constitutes 'public' continues to evolve, with digital architecture projects creating a conceptual 'open space' online that enables new research and future visioning to help create better and more equitable built environments for all.

1 John Walsh, *Te Uru: Mitchell & Stout Architects* (Titirangi: The Lopdell Trust, 2021).

2 Julie Stout, in conversation with Catherine Hammond, 17 July 2021.

3 Both Tauranga Art Gallery and Te Uru received NZIA National Awards in the Public Building category.

4 Stout, in conversation.

5 'Designing Women: Anne Salmond on her career in architecture', Radio New Zealand, *Nine to Noon*, 14 November 2019 (<https://www.nz.co.nz/national/programmes/ninetoon/audio/2018722179/designing-women-anne-salmond-on-her-career-in-architecture>, accessed 10 September 2021).

6 Clare Ellery, 'Megan Rule of South Pacific Architecture', *Houses NZ*, no. 21 (September 2011).

7 Bill McKay, 'A Vessel Landed on Another Shore', *Architecture New Zealand*, iss. 2 (March 2021).

8 The Frankfurt Pavilion won the Supreme Award at the New Zealand Interior Awards in 2013 and the International category at the New Zealand Architecture Awards in 2014, and the Len Lye Centre was a finalist in the Culture Category at the World Architecture Festival Awards in 2016.

9 'Violent Legalities: In conversation with Karamia Müller and Sarosh Mulla', *Architecture Now*, 23 July 2020 (<https://architecturenow.co.nz/articles/violent-legalities-in-conversation-with-karamia-muller-and-sarosh-mulla/>, accessed 10 September 2021).

10 Marianne Riley, in conversation with Catherine Hammond, 10 September 2021.