



Auckland

Christina Pataialii *On the Lam*

Tim Melville Gallery

26 March–20 April

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Christina Pataialii is a painter of multiplicity. The works in *On the Lam*, her first dealer gallery show, are marked by an assured visual brevity, giving you more the more time you give them. They have an immediate and enduring formal and sensual appeal. The mint-green background of *Ace in the Hole* is the work's own winning card. It tugs at my visual memory days after encountering it for the first time. The pleasure Pataialii takes in constructing images from the various pigment-based media she uses—from the house paint that has become something of a trademark, to the charcoal she scrubs into her stretched drop-cloth supports—is palpable. She has not chosen to work as she does because painting is a

prestige and saleable form; it is simply her language.

Pataialii draws on a host of different reference points, many personal, some derived from her upbringing in working-class suburbs of central and west Auckland. The materials she favours connect with her father's profession, house painting. A monumental Stetson hat in *Lonesome Loser*—its crown thrusting up between the serpentine brim like the shark from *Jaws*—might relate to a trip she took to the western United States a couple of years back or simply to the American cultural waves that have long washed out over the Pacific. The title of *Islands in the Stream* seems at once a playful means of describing the Hauraki-flavoured forms in the work and a nod to the famous Kenny Rogers and Dolly Parton song: precisely the sort of thing you might hear blaring out from the radio next to a painter's ladder.

Landforms are particularly prominent in *On the Lam*. The works

feature not only islands, but also paddocks, mountains, hillsides, and—in the eponymous painting—a desert, through which an outlaw or runaway might flee in the style of Marge Simpson (in the style of *Thelma & Louise*). *Long Way There*, a highlight of the exhibition, centres on a pair of buttery blocks of land pinned with goal posts, managing to encompass motifs as disparate as a terrain casually commodified and divided, and a parent's less than successful attempt at making a rugby-themed birthday cake. I find it unutterably moving.

Plumbing the emotions is perhaps where Pataialii most decisively wins me over. Very often, experiencing one of her works is like stumbling across a poem that gets at a scenario or sensation I have not previously had the words for. There, I think, are the front-yard fences of the Grey Lynn I grew up in, a Grey Lynn that has changed so much, and so quickly, from the one in my memory. The fences are higher now, glossily coated. Some have key pads. The few children playing in the street are as white as the pickets. I do not, of course, mean to imply that a story of gentrification is necessarily intended by Pataialii. Her articulations are never so bald. While her paintings are politically charged, politics are not their fundamental *raison d'être*. Rather, they are expressions of lived complexity—invitations to core-deep reflection and response.



(above) Christina Pataialii's *On the Lam* at Tim Melville Gallery, March 2019
(Photograph: Kallan MacLeod)

(left) CHRISTINA PATAIALII
Long Way There 2019
Acrylic & house paint on canvas drop cloth,
1020 x 1520 mm.