**Fiona Clark and Tertius**

***PAY HERE***

**By Frances Ann Clark**

Tertius and Fiona Clark met as fine arts students, and began working together in 1975. Their connection has endured, yet *PAY HERE* is their first joint show since 1979. After Elam, they returned to Taranaki and opened a gallery in an abandoned dairy factory in Tikorangi, funded by their partnership in Cabbage Enterprises, a successful business manufacturing and retailing clothing. This return to Taranaki, where both artists grew up, coincided with Muldoon’s ‘Think Big’ petrochemical plans for the region. While they continued to make art, they devoted much of their energy to environmental and social activism with other local people. Tertius primarily contributed through writing environmental impact statements and drafting submissions to local and national authorities. Fiona worked alongside people of Te Āti Awa in documenting the degradation of kai moana by the Motunui synthetic petrol plant and Waitara Valley methanol plant, and in doing so contributed to the historic Wai 6 submissions. In Tertius’ words, “Our crash course in economics, politics and the extraction industries played a big role in determining our life goals and the trajectory of our individual art practices.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

Tertius’ subsequent career in Australia involved many Community Arts and Arts and Working Life projects, funded by the Australia Council for the Arts. He also continued to exhibit in group and solo shows. Tertius views his painting as a practice that enables community, both in his community arts projects, and in every instance of a viewer engaging with his work, making meaning with it: “I see painting as the well-spring that enables me to work with groups of people. The formality of the rectangle becomes the stage for a shared surface space, as it is the viewer who makes a painting’s reality. The triumph of paint is its fluidity and ability to trick out the metaphor in the moment of the mark.”[[2]](#footnote-2) Tertius’ works in *PAY HERE*, be they from the Think Big era or the 2020s, welcome a collaborative making of meaning with viewers. From the bombed-out buildings obscured by supermarket staples in *Heydaypayday* to *All cones not equal’s* garden in summer bloom, Tertius’ paintings give enough familiarity in their imagery that we viewers can take hold of them with ease, but with unexpected, chaotic juxtapositions that draw social, political and economic concerns out into the open.

From the 1980s onwards, Fiona Clark’s practice continued to centre around witnessing people and places in Aotearoa. Her photographs are held in institutional collections throughout the country, and she continues to show often. She is represented by Michael Lett in Auckland. Clark’s commitment to community and relationship-building make her photographic archive rich and persistent; many faces and landscapes reappear in her work over the course of decades, in tribute to their survival, despite injustice and prejudice. Her work on show in *PAY HERE* includes evidence of her continued care of the land where she lives and works, both in the form of her polaroid record of mammalian pest control, and in her photographs documenting ongoing fracking and flaring in Tikorangi. Also included in *PAY HERE* is a rare showing of one of Clark’s installation works: *1918 Homage to Hope,* the title of which references both her parents’ birth year, and the pandemic into which they were born. As ever, Clark’s work is unflinching, hopeful, and representative of a lifetime of stoic survival.

1. Tertius, email to author, 12 May 2025. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)