

The



Will

Not

HOLD

George Turner

28th July - 15th August

Bowen Galleries

Opening 5-7pm 28th July

The Ground Will Not Hold

George Turner

Bowen Galleries

2026

Altered rivers, managed forests, fenced fields, planted ranges, browsed flowers, extracted soils, depleted seas, crumbling valleys, drained lakes, toxic puddles, wilding conifers, concrete veins, and eroding coasts. New Zealand is a fantasy. A formation upon faults, it is under the weight of a nation the ground will not hold.

At the centre of this space lies the remnants of a ritual. Its remains rearranged into these islands where a nation has burrowed. Its twisted and charred form can't escape the grid it was made within. Only its spirit is lifted up and spread into the room.

Entering through the west facing window, the sun stretches the shadows long, white and pale. The winter light heats the wax and releases its scent. The smell of home, holiday, childhood, and grief fills the space. Corrupted by this fragrance, one becomes carrier. Inhaling the works and tasting the images themselves. With each breath the work enters the body. The scent holds memory to be taken from the gallery and spread throughout the city. On one's breath, on one's clothes, and on one's mind.

The flag burns because the fire was lit by us.

The paintings are blurry because the image is not real.

The fungi arrive when the past seeps through the cracks.

By the time you leave, colony collapse disorder follows you home.

Work List

Clockwise from the door

To the Greatest Extent Practicable V, 2026

Oil on canvas, wind-felled pine, beeswax, pine oil, cotton wick
Canvas 200 × 200mm; overall 200 × 240 × 140mm

To the Greatest Extent Practicable I, 2026

Oil on canvas, wind-felled pine, beeswax, pine oil, cotton wick
Canvas 250 × 250mm; overall 250 × 420 × 110mm

National Heat I, 2026

Archival pigment print, unique hand-made frame
Edition of 3 plus AP
700 × 500mm

National Heat II, 2026

Archival pigment print, unique hand-made frame
Edition of 3 plus AP
700 × 500mm

Every person commits an offence, 2026

Archival pigment print, unique hand-made frame
Unique print plus AP
1280 × 1020mm

To the Greatest Extent Practicable III, 2026

Oil on canvas, wind-felled pine, beeswax, pine oil, cotton wick
Canvas 200 × 200mm; overall 200 × 225 × 120mm

To the Greatest Extent Practicable IV, 2026

Oil on canvas, wind-felled pine, beeswax, pine oil, cotton wick
Canvas 200 × 200mm; overall 200 × 230 × 140mm

Ten Studies of Exhaustion, 2026

Archival pigment print
Each an edition of 3 plus AP, unframed
220 × 160mm

To the Greatest Extent Practicable II, 2026

Oil on canvas, wind-felled pine, beeswax, pine oil, cotton wick
Canvas 250 × 250mm; overall 250 × 320 × 130mm

The Ground Will Not Hold, 2026

Beeswax, cotton wicks, fire
1840 × 2453 × 300mm

Prices at gallery desk

Good grief!

By Holly Walker

This essay is an invitation into a collective witnessing of ongoing loss. As I write, I am wishing that by holding the hard truth of our environmental grief we will be able to transform it into action.

I count the unlit candles of *'The Ground Will Not Hold'* and consider our relationship with hope. Hope can feel like a momentary relief, like a morning coffee. A little pick me up, out of the enduring state of grief many of us are carrying through this human-made climate collapse and the ongoing extreme colonial violence. Every day there is more loss, every night possums consume an estimated 21,000 tonnes of vegetation and 'of course' their diet includes the leaves, flowers, and fruits of native trees.¹ Not pine or gorse or old man's beard. Not prime ministers or billionaires... And I'm thinking hope isn't going to take care of that.

You may experience an emerging sensation of avoidance or discomfort after reading those opening lines, I understand these feelings. In te ao Pākehā we are socialised to think that we'll be better off spending as little time, preferably none at all, with grief and despair or contemplating loss. I once watched a man tap his watch on the hour at a priest during a funeral service.

Our grief, like stolen land, has become privatised and in doing so many of us have isolated ourselves. Because of this, many of us are unable to remember our inextricable, interdependent, living relationships with everything on this earth. This is not to blame, this is to repair the impact of separatist theories like René Descartes's Mechanistic view² and The Great Chain of Being.³ These western hierarchical ideas 'dis-ordered' our understanding of humans as a part of nature, within the ecology of the earth. Many of us now participate in knowing that non-human 'matter' is alive. That may be informed by indigenous knowledge, instinct, a scientific understanding, an enthusiasm for posthuman critique or a unique inter-dependent relationship you may have formed with a non-human relation.

We know that our lives are dependent on the lives of each other. Ancient forests, an 800 year old rimu tree, bees, grandmas, oceans, fresh water, neighbours, migrants, rongoā, seaweed, safe kai, te reo Māori, a home. All of these life-giving relations are at risk as we witness their/our survival being threatened, acre by acre and legislative bill by legislative

¹ Hannah. 2025. Review of *Understanding the Threat: How Possums Impact New Zealand's Ecosystems and Economy – Connovation*.

² Blum, Paul Richard. 2019. *Substance Dualism in Descartes*. Press.Rebus.Community. Rebus Community. September 10, 2019. Note: 'I think therefore I am' philosophy centering human intelligence by asserting that humans are the only earthly species that can think about our thinking and everything else is 'dead matter'.

³ Ngata, Tina. 2024. "Tina Ngata: Colonial Racism and Us | E-Tangata." *E-Tangata*. Note: The Great Chain of being is a western, historical, philosophical, and religious framework that organizes all matter and life into a strict, divinely ordered hierarchy. It was used as a basis to justify the colonial imperialism inflicted by the doctrine of discovery. "Indigenous people were featured as beings of nature, and sometimes in the realms of demons, as enemies of Christ."

bill. Neglecting to participate in grieving these losses, and by not 'letting' that grief drop by drop throughout our daily lives, may we be practicing the forgetting and rejecting of relationships that sustain us?

The Ground Will Not Hold is a materialisation of George's devotion to witnessing and learning from their own web of relations. This collection of work can be read as a response to grief, colonial greed and environmental despair, alchemised through creative practice into inter-being advocacy. Every candle and carving that has passed through George's committed hands, becomes a memorial and an act of devotion. Is the gallery a shrine? A vigil? For us, community ritual has always been a way for us to metabolise suffering, together. When grief is too large for any one of us to hold. What I'm talking about here is radical interdependence⁴. This can be understood as the realisation that true autonomy and flourishing are only possible through deep, reciprocal reliance on one another and the natural world. In this exhibition, George presents us with some truth – not human-centred, ephemeral hope – to call us in to witness and activate our living relationships with Aotearoa by realising our inter-connection.

What can mushrooms tell us about decay and transformation if we listen to them as if they are ancient teachers? Well, we have to sustain the health of the ngahere in order to inherit those teachings. This collective attention and deep care for relationships with each other, and the taiao is how we comprehend and practice our belonging. People belong to places, not the other way round. Our belonging is affirmed and sustained through caring participation with the grounds that hold our lives and our stories. Locally, this may be understood as whanaungatanga.⁵

In the practice of non-anthropocentrism and good whanaungatanga, I am delighted to *call forth* and share collected knowledge of just a couple of the non-human collaborators in *The Ground Will Not Hold*. By carrying the 'good grief' with me in this research, its presence has become a guide. Grief has been a generous compass influencing and revealing connections that otherwise may have not presented themselves outside of the context of loss.

Here are some of the notes I have made.

The bees who contributed the wax.

In Aotearoa, ngaro huruhuru (the native bees) do not produce beeswax, honey or honey comb.

Ngaro huruhuru travel towards the beauty of mānuka, kānuka, pōhutukawa, koromiko, and rewarewa to collect kai for their larvae. Days motivated by seeking life sustaining beauty and colour to achieve one of the most fundamental and connective rituals across all species, feeding our loved ones. Ngaro huruhuru live in the whenua. They make their own

⁴ Brown, Adrienne Maree. 2017. *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds*. Chico, CA: AK Press.

⁵ Burgess, Hana, Donna Cormack, and Papaarangi Reid. 2021. *Calling Forth Our Pasts, Citing Our Futures: An Envisioning of a Kaupapa Māori Citational Practice*. *MAI Journal: A New Zealand Journal of Indigenous Scholarship* 10 (1).

little burrows in the ground or sometimes logs and sticks, not The Beehive⁶⁷. Designed to house the *colony*, that institution and all its foreign laws, languages and social *order* came to Aotearoa with the Pākehā bee. The honey bee. Introduced to Aotearoa the year before Te Tiriti was signed, honey bees are the workaholics who *contribute an estimated \$650 million directly to New Zealand's gross domestic product (GDP)*. However, *their total economic impact is far larger, injecting over \$5.1 billion annually into the economy when accounting for critical agricultural pollination services*.⁸

The population of these busy bees has since grown. Grown to the point that they are often referred to as 'super colonies', vastly surpassing the presence of the ngaro huruhuru. By way of out-competing ngaro huruhuru for pollen, displacing them from foraging sites and introducing and spreading disease like myrtle rust. Honey bees are now the dominant species.

Honey bees, *in what they mostly refer to as 'New Zealand'*, now only know a life of 'living to work' for the hive. They have become heavily, if not completely, reliant on this system constructed by the keeper. This system, though the honey bees are mostly blind to it, has caused irreparable harm to ngaro huruhuru. It has also brainwashed the honey bee through blind patterns of inherited privilege. This privilege was originally acquired by way of unjust inheritance and forcibly removing indigenous bees from their whenua. It is further sustained by the honey bee's 'historical amnesia'⁹ which fuels an entitled sense of belonging. You may recognise this normalised entitlement, it sometimes sounds like the culturally assimilating phrase, '*We are all New Zealanders*'.¹⁰

By this point I expect you are seeing the relationship of inter-species colonial strategy... The settlers' unsettling longing for belonging, manifests in a myriad of ways, one being grief. Good, critical, self realising, ancestral longing, anti-colonial grief. Before their arrival in Aotearoa, honey bees were wild and established their own nests in the hollows of trees. They even had their own unique dances they performed to communicate where there was rich pollen and nectar. If the honey bees didn't have to mass produce for profit. If they made their wax and honey as surplus to their joy of pollinating and they returned to their hollows. Then these candles would only be a gift, not a grief.

Werewere kōkako,

A small blue mushroom, the form of which George has referenced in their work '*The Ground Will Not Hold*' is native to Aotearoa. Werewere kōkako can be found on the damp forest floor, living within the forest's decay.¹¹ They are also found on the New Zealand \$50

⁶ Kasper, J. (2021). *New Zealand's native bees – quiet lives of desperation*. In *Te Papa's Blog*.

⁷ NZ Parliament website note: The Beehive is the Executive Wing of the New Zealand Parliament Buildings. Designed by British architect Sir Basil Spence. The building houses the offices of the Prime Minister and Cabinet Ministers

⁸ Frazer, A. (2018, September). *NZ farm forestry - encouraging bee population growth is vital to New Zealand's ecosystem*.

⁹ Bell, A. 2006. *Bifurcation or entanglement? Settler identity and biculturalism in Aotearoa New Zealand*.

¹⁰ Mikaere, Ani . 2004. *Are We All New Zealand Now? A Māori Response to the Pākehā Quest for Indigeneity*.

¹¹ Soukoutou, Ruth. 2023. *Fungi on the Track*. Wilderness Magazine.

note, though mycelium is a vastly different, much more sustainable system than the currency of capitalism. It does not depend on continual growth on a finite earth, rather it depends on decay. In fact when capitalism falls over from growing too tall and too narrow for too long, it may also be transformed by mycelium back into earth. How good would it feel to die a \$50 note and transform to soft damp earth. In the dark, werewere kōkako death doula the elders of the forest through seasonal loss, receiving the bodies of fallen trees and retired leaves. Without these mushrooms, the trees would quickly bury themselves in their own debris and there would be no room for future generations.

What better teacher for George to call into their work to help us compost our grief surrounding land consumption and greed, into life sustaining knowledge that could make room for and feed our future forests. The survival of the trees, which is also survival of the birds, the insects, the earth and the people are dependent on these death doulas sensitive systems of intelligence. The mycelium whakawhanaunga with native trees like rimu, tōtara, and beech to form symbiotic relationships. With each new connection the werewere kōkako learn and adapt to what is needed throughout the ngahere.

In the quiet shadows of the forest floor the werewere kōkako glows like a piece of the sky has fallen to the ground. Could they gently be reminding us that all life returns and belongs to the ground? Therefore, we must love this ground! I imagine George, like the bird, the kōkako was lured into this relationship with the werewere kōkako by its pigment blue colour. Various pūrākau-Māori, cosmological narratives, share that the kōkako began without blue in their cheeks and gained the colour by brushing their face against the mushroom, making themselves more confident and attractive¹². Another pūrākau illustrates a story of how the kōkako gained their blue cheeks, sharing that when Māui was trying to slow down the sun to create longer days, he became desperately thirsty. The kōkako carried a mouthful of water in their cheeks to Māui for him to drink. As a reward, Māui stretched the bird's legs, enabling the kōkako to move easily through the forest.¹³ I share this, not to re-contextualise an indigenous narrative to fit a Pākehā practice, but to note that tauīwi are undeniably shaped by this land and by the generosity of tangata whenua. These pūrākau draw us in closer to the land and activate our responsibility to protect, to love, to hold the land which has held each one of us back. I see this intersectional solidarity in the way the werewere kōkako has rubbed off on George; perhaps giving them the gumption to make what is needed, not what is easy. *The Ground Will Not Hold* is a creative offering to repair our inter-being relationships through ecological criticism of capitalism and colonialism.

Maybe this exhibition is George's mouthful of water. It is their offering toward slowing down the burning sun and contributing to land back resistance of tangata whenua. Thank you to George and thank you reader for your presence.

Toitū te Whenua, Toitū te Tiriti.

¹² Kōrero Mai. 2025. *Creatures and Features: Werewere Kōkako*. *Korero Mai | Let's Talk Hauraki*.

¹³ Hutching, Gerard. 2009. *Large forest birds – Kōkako*. Te Ara.

What the Flag Held

The fungi arrive when the space begins to rot.

The fungi arrive when the body is shifting shape.

The fungi arrive when the past seeps through the cracks.

The paintings are blurry because our sight is unclear.

The paintings are blurry because nature is unclear.

The paintings are blurry because the image is not real.

The flag burns because it has to.

The flag burns because a nation is lit by its own light.

The flag burns because the fire was lit by us.

Out of the Scene, Into the Fever [Activated]

Credits

Videographer – Ted Whitaker

Assistant – Ryder Smith

Frames by Elliot Creative

This show wouldn't exist without the incredible friends, family, and community I have around me.

Special thanks to

Holly Walker, Brooke Pou, Chrissy, Hunters and Collectors, Dan, COMMODE, Helena, Bowen Galleries, Ryder, Tom, Anja, and Mum.

bowen**GALLERIES**

2/39 Ghuznee Street | Wellington 6011 | New Zealand

T +64 27 471 3661 W bowengalleries.nz E helena@bowengalleries.nz GST 145-438-179