

Progress is the hallmark of any artist worth their salt. Too many accomplished and talented practitioners find a winning formula then rest on their laurels, reproducing variations on a lucrative theme. Such methodology can produce commercial success but inertia is the enemy of innovation. Artistic stagnation burrows at the soul ultimately failing to connect with any but those who find comfort in the safety of a ship in harbour. There is a reason we are attracted to people invested in development, who refuse to accept their current state as their final form. There is a reason our albeit flawed education system favours the triptych boards as a method of assessment, with ideas and techniques flowing, rolling and growing to create a body of work in motion.

Taken as a whole, *Wave Function* exposes the process of photographic artist Cathy Carter, from figurative to abstraction, as she explores the Anthropocene environment with a fluid focus on the nature of water. It's a theme that resonates in the gallery's location of Havelock North. Though it occurred more than half a decade ago, the outbreak of campylobacter in the town forced residents to stomach the grim reality of man's impact on water and land. The triptych formula fits, as Carter, aided by sympathetic curation from the crew at Muse, takes the viewer by the hand, leading them on a journey from her most accessible works through to those which pose a more visual and philosophical challenge. Hooks are important. Pushing the viewer off the end of a pier will only lead to confusion, distress, misunderstanding.

The gallery window is dominated by *Waimarama Bathers, Gala, 2021*, a superlative piece documenting surfers and bathers in various stages of action. Though taken as a candid snapshot from shore, the balanced composition of the piece speaks to the artist's adroit eye. Strata of wave and sky divide the landscape creating discrete plains for figures each engaged in their own communion with the ocean. There is a sense of industry and of agency but also of atomisation. Each figure occupies their own space, on their own mission. There is a juxtaposition between collective community action and individual goals that speaks to the age of social distance.

Were we to continue the triptych motif, the central panel in our journey is occupied by crisp studies of water in motion, from the radial ripple and dreamy clouds of *Cerulean Seas 2021*, through to the regular golden waves of *Amber Ripples 2021*, to the three *White Wash* circular aerial images of the ocean in flux. Though these are ostensibly focused on fluid, Carter does not let us forget that photography, as is all visual art, is primarily an inquiry in light. The way she captures the complex interplay between these disparate elements speaks to the marriage of art and science.

All of this leads us neatly to our metaphorical third panel, feats of seemingly pure abstraction, their source material opaque to all but the imagination. Two sets of *Psychedelic Waves* and a *Chromatic Island* chart the artist's progress towards the multiple meanings of the eponymous *Wave Function*. Quantum entanglement sits on the cutting edge of science, with its feet dangled over the precipice of the vast landscape of the unknown. Einstein's cryptic description of 'spooky action at a distance' equally applies to the work. When the mind is shaken free of

preconceptions or ties to what it is that we think we know, our options are limitless and we are at liberty to create our reality as we want it to be.

As tempting as it is to disappear into a fractal shaped rabbit hole of musings on meaning, it would be remiss to deny the arresting aesthetic of the work. It is universally vibrant, alluding to an augmented reality inimitably appealing. There is emotion in the colour palette, from the moody blues of the ocean, to the glowing yellow joy of *Amber Ripples 2021*, to the manic rainbow luminescence of the abstract pieces. The quality of the work is reflected in the quality of the materials, from the paper and ink to the glass to the selective led backlighting, impossible to fully appreciate unless in its physical presence. In person, the work holds nuances incapable of being reproduced on a screen, a rare gift for the increasingly digital age.