

Whangārei Art Museum

Peter Robinson Charcoal Drawing

8 September – 8 December, 2024

The project: Peter Robinson Charcoal Drawing

Physically imposing yet also vaguely laughable, the burnt-wood-veneer aluminium works in this exhibition call back to Robinson's previous engagements with obstinately artificial materials, such as polystyrene and felt. However, compared to the almost histrionic theatricality of some older works, these "charcoal drawings" are comically dour, although it would be a mistake to interpret this faux-minimalist posture as purely ironic. The miserable artificiality of the materials on display here—grim, production-line facsimiles of a half-remembered natural world—does not negate their status as art objects; on the contrary, by building an exhibition entirely around these quasi-sculptural superstructures, Robinson encourages the viewer to really consider them, to focus on their qualities as objects and allow their implications to gradually unwind from there. Look, he seems to say, see how the veneer cracks and buckles when I fold the metal. See how quickly the illusion is dispelled, yet how flexible and resilient the underlying matter actually is.

A brief examination of Robinson's recent works helps to further untangle the journey that led to *Charcoal Drawing*. In the last handful of years, his long-standing concerns with, and criticisms of, the politics of identity have seem in hugely been



Peter Robinson, *Charcoal Drawing* (2024)

channelled and directed—or, perhaps, incarnated—into the realm of materiality, while losing nothing of his characteristic iconoclasm. In 2020, his exhibitions *Rag Trade* and *Notations* took an aggressive, maximalist approach to the idea of material deconstruction, leading to galleries strewn with seemingly-discarded scraps of cloth and metal entangled with broken plastic furniture. In these shows the chaotic, frightening sociopolitical energies of the new decade were made blindingly manifest, sublimated into a jagged, raw-edged physicality.

As the 2020s wear on, Robinson's work has begun to address the decade's pervasive sense of continually accelerating material decay and social disruption differently. In 2023's *Kā Kaihōpara*, new structures began to emerge from the chaos, gangly, familiar spiralling forms created by bending rectangular-cross section aluminium beams. Crucially, however, these structures did not exist in a vacuum, but were contextualised (or, indeed, contested) by a cacophonous Greek chorus of other voices emanating from the works on the walls, some of which were Robinson's and some those of his friends and whānau. This element of community or multiplicity is perhaps crucial to understanding Robinson's new direction, in that it reintroduces elements of dialogue, uncertainty and reciprocity to the proceedings. However, this is an offline, tangible language, quite different from the kind of linguistic point-scoring that so often leads to frighteningly unpredictable real-world misery. An opportunity for kōrero, not debate.

As an artist whose reputation was built in part on works that commented on Pākehā anxieties about Māori and Māori anxieties about those anxieties, it is understandable that Robinson might seek to re-imagine his role in the contemporary political landscape. It seems that, rather than

attempting to engage with the bottomless well of the online commentary vortex, which affords endless opportunities for outrage and psycho-social violence undreamt of in 1990s New Zealand, Robinson has wisely chosen to move the battle to a place of his own choosing, namely the physical gallery space, redolent of floor cleaner and bulk-bought white acrylic paint. In the present climate, perhaps the most constructive action one can take is to disconnect from cyclical, algorithmic modes of thought and instead focus on the physical world, which still exists as a discrete entity, separate from its digital nightmare-self.

Te kaupapa: Peter Robinson Charcoal Drawing

Te kaiora āhuatanga ōkiko engari anō te hākirikiri katakata, ko ngā mahi konumohe papaangi – wahie – tahuna ki roto i tēnei whakaaturanga he mea karanga whakahoki ki ngā whakapāpātanga ki mua a Robinson ki ngā rawa tāwhaiwhai ngana pērā i te kōmama me te whītau. Engari kia whakaritea ki te tērā pea whakameremere hītōria o ētahi mahi tawhito ake, ko ēnei “tuhinga waro” he pukuhōhe mōkinokino, ahakoa ka hē pea kia whakamāori i tēnei tū whakapū – whakatapeha hei pāraharaha tūturu. Ko te tāwhaiwhai poururu o ngā rawa ka whakaatūhia ki konei – whakaahua mōkinokino, rārangi o te maumaharatanga haurua tai ao – ka kua e whakakore i tā rātou tūnga hei taonga toi; engaringari, mā te hanganga whakaatūranga pōkeretia katoa ki ēnei tāraitanga - ūmanga whakatakotoranga nunui, ka whakahaua e Robinson te kaimātakitaki kia āta whakaaro ki a rātou, kia arotahi ki a rātou kounga hei taonga, ā, tuku i a rātou whakaritenga kia āta tākirikiri mai i reira. E titiro, hei ko tāna pea, me kitea he pēhea te pakē me te whekoki o te papaangi ka whakakopakopa au i te konganuku. Me kitea he pēhea te horo ka whakamaheatia te āhuahanga, engari he pēhea te ngāwari me te aumangea o te hangahanga tonu kei raro.

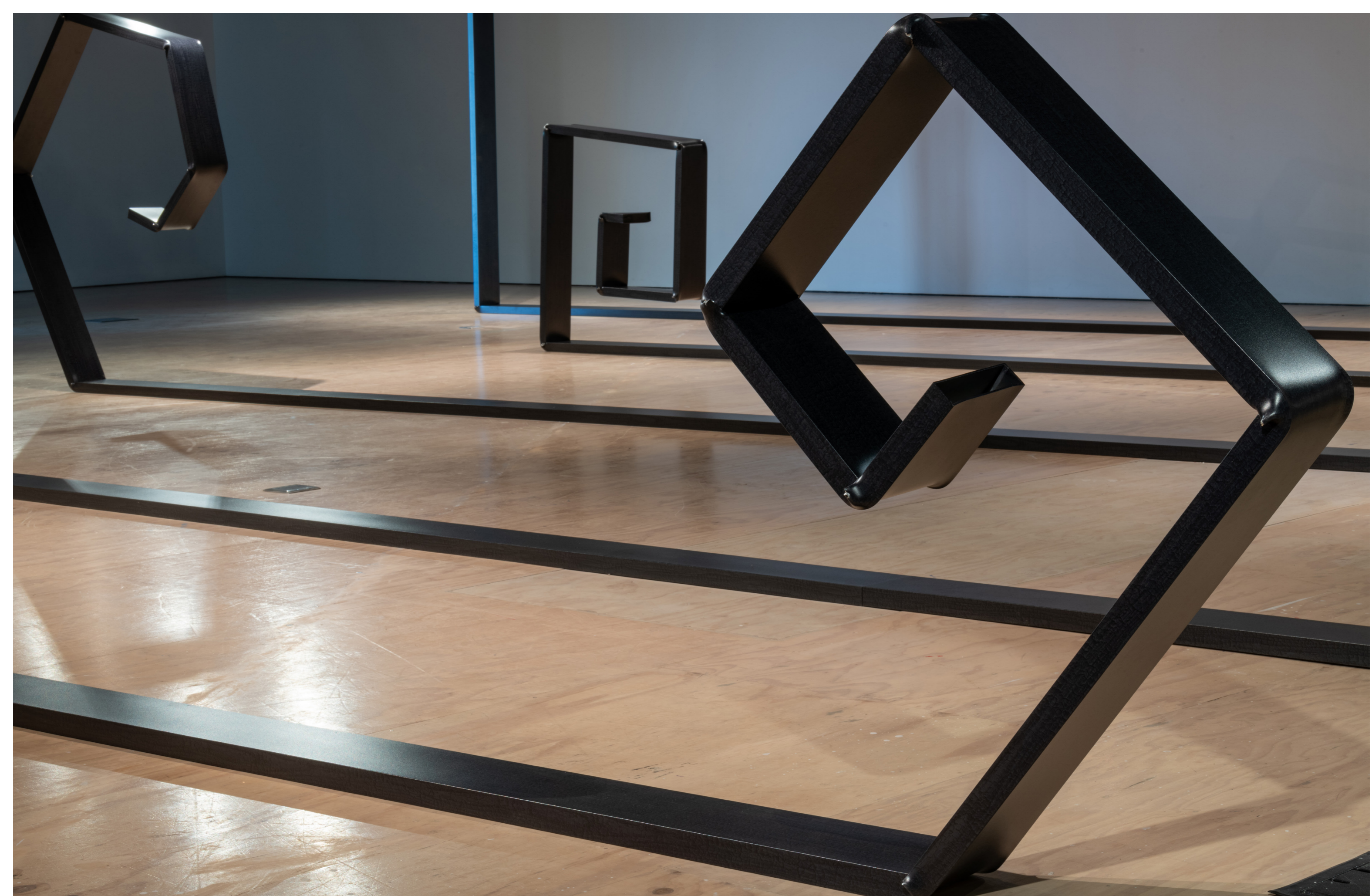
He whakamātautau poto o ngā mahi onāianeī tonu ka āwhina kia mataara i te hikoinga ka hua mai a *Tuhinga Waro*. Ki ngā tau torutoru tata nei, ko ana raruraru roroa ki te, me ngā akiaki o, ngā tōrangapū tuakiri kua āhuanuitia te tawaka me te anga – rānei, tērā pea, ākahukahu – ki roto i te ao rawa, e kore nei e ngaro he aha i tōna tūāhua rangirua. I 2020, ki ana whakaatūranga *Rag Trade* me *Notations* ka tango i te āhua ririhau, kauawhi tōnuitanga ki te whakaaro o te whakahoro rawa, e puta ai he huarewa kūwawatia ki te hanga ruirui o ngā mara ngetangeta me te konganuku kua tauwhiwhitia ki ngā taonga whare kirihou pākarukaru. Ki roto o ēnei ka tītōhutia te kūnakunaku hihiri whakamataku o te tekau tau hou i hanga whakatinanatia kāpōtia, akuakutia ki roto i tētahi whakakoikoi, hanganga taitapa māota.

Hei te wā e ngaro haere nei ngā tau 2020, ko ngā mahi a Robinson ka timata ki te whakautu i te tekau tau tūāhua rangiwhāwhā o te whakahorohoro haere noa tonu o te pirautanga rawa me te tihahu hāpori kia whano kē. I *Kā Kaihōpara i ngā 2023, he pūnaha hou ka whiti ake i te tihahu*, he pōraharahu, he āhua taunga, he rauponga i hangaia mā te whakapiko tekihana whakawhiti – tapawhā paepae konumohe. Waiwai, heoi anō, ko ēnei whakatakotoranga horekau i tauora i roto i tētahi mārua, engari i whakawhirinaki (koia rānei i whakataetae) nā tetahi korihī Kariki wawā a ētahi ake reo enanga mai ana i ngā mahi ki ngā pātū, ētahi o ēnei nā Robinson, ā, ētahi nā āna hoa, ētahi nā tōna whānau. Ko tēnei huānga o te hāpori, o te whakarea, tērā pea he waiwai kia mārāma ki te ara hou a Robinson, inā rā ka whakarauora huānga kōrerorero, te rangirua me te tauutuutu ki ngā whakahaerenga. Heoi anō, he mea motuhake, ko tēnei he reo kōhure, he tino rerekē i tērā o te mātauranga wetereo whiwhinga piro ka hura rawa ake ki te kumukumu whakamataku auhi ao tūturu. He whakapuakitanga mō te kōrero, ehara i te tautohetohe.

Hei tētahi ringa toi ko tāna rongō i hangaia kia whai wāhi ki ngā mahi ka kōrero mō ngā awangawanga a Pākehā e pā ana ki a Māori me ngā awangawanga a Māori ki ēnei awangawanga, ka mārama kia kimikimi a Robinson kia whakaaro anō ki tōna tūnga ki roto i te takotoranga tōrangapū onāianeī. Te hanga nei, engaringari kia tarai kia whakapāpā ki te puna tākere kore o te waiōmiomio reo tuihono, ka whakauru whakapuakitanga haere noa mō te takariri me te taikaha mātai hinengaro, mātai hāpori Matakite koretia ki ngā 1990 ki Aotearoa, kua kōwhiritia matatautia e Robinson kia nekehia te pakanga ki tētahi wāhi o tōna ake kōwhitinga, koia ko te tinana takiwā huarewa, whakakakara ki te hopiwē puroa me te peita kiriaku mā i hokona kauteretia. Ki te huarere onāianeī, tērā pea ko te hohenga tino whai hua ka taea e tētahi ko te whakamakere i ngā whakaauau, momo whakaaro pākiki, ā, me arotahi kē ki te ao kikokiko, e tauora tonu nei hei hinonga nahenahe, wātea mai i tōna kiritau moepapa matihiko



Right: Peter Robinson, *Charcoal Drawing* (2024)







Key contacts

Simon Bowerbank

Kaitohu • Director

simon.bowerbank@wdc.govt.nz

Nimmy Santosh

Kairēhita • Registrar

nimmy.santosh@wdc.govt.nz