

Frances Libeau

→ *Lake of Wandering Spirits*, 2026

Over three days in August 1978, an unknown cameraperson armed with a portable video camera observes a group of Livestock Officers from the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries carry out the brutal task of putting to death and burying more than 5,000 sheep at Crater Block, a quarantined sheep station near Rotorua.

Crater Block—where imported “exotics” were bred and data collected on lambing, carcass sizes, and wool samples—had seen an outbreak of the prion degenerative disease known to farmers as scrapie.

Lake of Wandering Spirits considers this footage and broader implications of the event through the dispersal and rematerialisation of its contents, reaching for a reanimation of sound, image and language. Carefully selected footage and sound from the slaughter is recast alongside field recordings, material remediations (including submersion of a 1978 cassette in nearby roto Rerewhakaaitu), and other archival ephemera.

The work regards the hauntological properties of the digitised media which—either through its capture on a 1970s Portapak, temporal degradation, or archival digitisation—is visually troubled by strange spectres and a curious disjunct in the synch of sound and image. This point of enquiry is informed by Michel Chion’s ‘phantom sound’, translated from *en creux* (meaning the gap, relief or hollow), as employed in intaglio printmaking (1). Considering the generative possibilities of absence, a spectral materiality in turn unsettles the coherence of

the settler-colonial conditions that allowed this life to proliferate and then be reduced to waste.

Emphasising the instability of archival media challenges the narrative of colonial settlement as peaceful or complete. Rather, archival media, as well as the colonial psyche, are riddled with discontinuities—elisions, ruptures, double exposures, delays and divergent endings. A question on the absence of visual coherence or visibility prompts: “what are the consequences for dying images and for images of death?” (2)

Taking cues from Keri Hulme’s aptly-named 1986 coastal horror ‘A Tally of the Souls of Sheep’, the work draws attention to tools of cinematic affect (sound, cuts, script) to point to the mediated nature of the archive and its cinematic properties.

Lake of Wandering Spirits was made utilising excerpts from archival media held by Te Rua Mahara o te Kāwanatanga Archives New Zealand (Wellington repository) in their open access collection, and adapted under a Creative Commons Attribution 2.0 Generic License.

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(1) Claudia Gorbman, in Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision*, trans. by Claudia Gorbman (Columbia University Press, 1990), p.218.

(2) Laura U. Marks, *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media* (University of Minnesota Press, 2002), p. 91.

Artwork caption

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Lake of Wandering Spirits, 2026

multi-channel video, stereo sound, mixed media

10 mins 25 secs

commissioned by Te Tuhi, Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland

About the artist

Frances Libeau is an interdisciplinary artist and writer. Their compositions, sound designs and writing feature across various platforms of contemporary art, film, theatre and dance. Libeau's work often explores the hauntological potentialities of found audiovisual materials, and possibilities for queering compositional and archival practices. They are currently researching reproductive animacies in agricultural material cultures.