

# Chance and Impermanence

A conversation between Kate Newby and  
Daria de Beauvais

by Daria de Beauvais, Kate Newby

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Kate Newby, work in progress at CRAFT (Limoges), 2022. Courtesy of the artist.



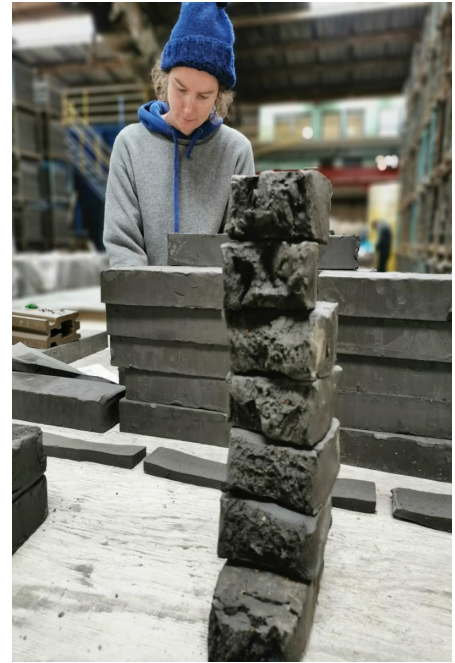
Kate Newby, *The edge of the earth* (detail), 2022. Bricks, mortar, produced with the support of Rairies Montrieux (Les Rairies). View of the group exhibition "Reclaim the Earth", 2022, Palais de Tokyo (Paris). Courtesy of the artist and Art : Concept (Paris). Photo: Aurélien Mole.



Kate Newby, *it makes my day so much better if i speak to all of you.* (detail), 2022. Porcelain, minerals, found glass (Paris), produced at CRAFT (Limoges). View of the group exhibition "Reclaim the Earth", 2022, Palais de Tokyo (Paris). Courtesy of the artist and Art : Concept (Paris). Photo: Aurélien Mole.



Kate Newby, *Try doing anything without it*, 2022. Bricks, coins, wood, found glass (Paris, Texas), produced at Rairies Montrieux (Les Rairies). Courtesy of the artist and Art : Concept (Paris). Photo: Nicolas Brasseur.



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*Among the fourteen artists in Reclaim the Earth, currently on at Palais de Tokyo in Paris, is Texas-based Aotearoa artist Kate Newby. Curated by Daria de Beauvais, the exhibition seeks to uncover the links between body and land, replacing notions of domination and sublimation of humans over the natural world, reconsidering our relationship as one instead of kinship and alliance.*

*In this piece, Newby talks with de Beauvais about the production of new pieces commissioned for the show, Newby's process of collaboration and materials-driven artworks, and the ecological themes in her practice and Reclaim the Earth.*

DARIA DE BEAUVAIS     I've been following your work closely for a few years now. I remember quite vividly for instance your subtle intervention at the SculptureCenter (NY, 2017), and with fondness your beautiful project at the Kunsthalle Wien (Vienna, 2018) where we met for the first time.

KATE NEWBY     Yes, I remember meeting you very clearly. The exhibition *I can't nail the days down* at Kunsthalle Wien was made up of around 6,000 bricks forming a large carved floor piece that viewers were able to walk over. I had just finished laying it out (one of the largest projects I have made to date) and came back early in the morning with a coffee to soak in the final work. I saw your children before I saw you because they were running and jumping over the clay tiles in the ground outside. It was a profound moment for a chance meeting. The Kunsthalle is a glass pavilion so I created a parallel work on the hill outside. The city of Vienna had excavated the subway system below the Kunsthalle, and the local art school had kept the remaining clay. It was using this clay that I created handmade tiles which were then inserted back into the ground like a drain of some kind.

DB                     You've grown up in Aotearoa New Zealand, and are currently based in rural Texas after living for several years in New York City. How have these different contexts informed your creative process?

KN                     I think New York taught me a lot in regards to learning how to trust myself and my instincts for making the sort of work I want to make. At the end of 2020, I relocated to Floresville in Texas, in a rural landscape that couldn't be more different from where I grew up. The possibilities Floresville has offered me mark an opening up of my practice and have really pushed the improvisational quality to my work. There I have developed an open air studio where I can work with the elements around me with a new intensity. Sunlight and rain, grasses and sand, wildlife and extreme temperatures: they have all given me the opportunity to interact closely with a unique environment.

DB                      During lockdown you spent a lot of time in Aotearoa New Zealand, producing your solo show *YES TOMORROW* for the Adam Art Gallery Te Pātaka Toi in Wellington.

KN                      I did! I feel super grateful for that experience. The early stages of the pandemic in 2020 really took away many things like travel and exhibitions. I spent a lot of time in my own thoughts so when I had the opportunity to make *YES TOMORROW* with Christina Barton it felt like something I had been saving my energy up for.

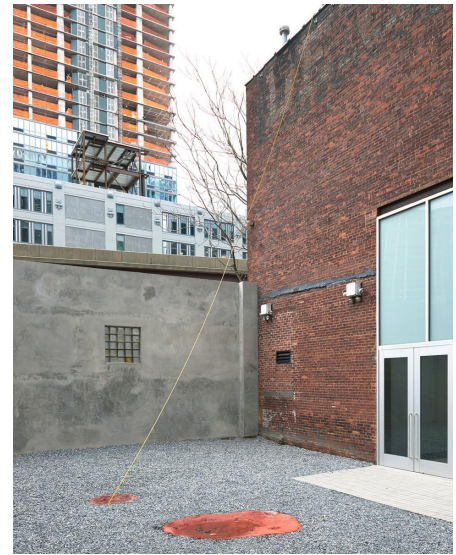
I was given the entire building to create my project. There is this interesting aspect of the Adam Art Gallery where you enter on the top floor, then you can see down for three floors. There are also windows that look outside and over a loading dock. My works for the exhibition incorporated these different viewpoints, including the loading dock, where I inserted a tile mural. It meant a lot to make this exhibition in my home country and I had a lot of support from my family, friends and artist community.



Kate Newby, *I can't nail the days down*, 2018. Ceramics, concrete. View of the exhibition "I can't nail the days down", Kunsthalle Wien (Vienna), 2018. Courtesy of the artist and The Sunday Painter (London). Photo: Jorit Aust.



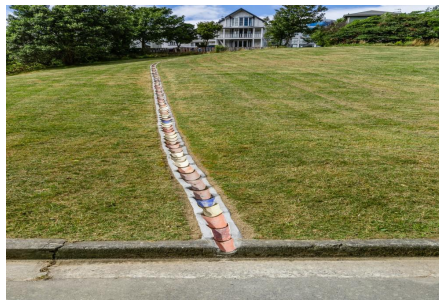
Kate Newby, *I can't nail the days down* (detail), 2018. Bricks, found glass, bronze, coins, ceramics, silver, brass, white brass. View of the exhibition "I can't nail the days down", Kunsthalle Wien (Vienna), 2018. Courtesy of the artist and The Sunday Painter (London). Photo: Jorit Aust.



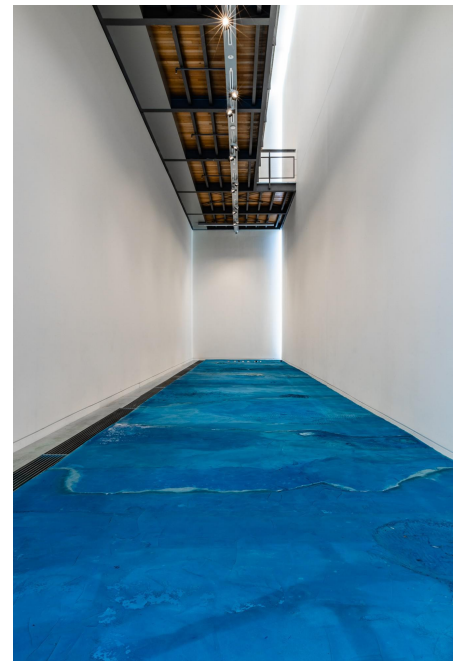
Kate Newby, *Not this time, not for me.*, 2017. Mortar, concrete color, silver, white brass, bronze, porcelain, cotton rope, glass, stoneware. Glass fabrication: Leo Tecosky. View of the group exhibition "In Practice: Material Deviance", 2017, SculptureCenter (NY). Courtesy of the artist and Cooper Cole (Toronto). Photo: Kyle Knodell.



Kate Newby, *A desert, plain and dry.* (detail), 2017. Pit fired stoneware, salt fired stoneware, porcelain, earthenware, sand. View of the group exhibition "In Practice: Material Deviance", 2017, SculptureCenter (NY). Courtesy of the artist and Cooper Cole (Toronto). Photo: Kyle Knodell.



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Kate Newby, *What Kind of Day Has it Been*, 2021. Screed, pigment, glass, silver. View of the exhibition *YES TOMORROW*, 2021, Adam Art Gallery Te Pātaka Toi (Wellington). Courtesy of the artist and Michael Lett (Auckland). Photo: Ted Whitaker.

DB I invited you for the group exhibition *Reclaim the Earth* that I curated for the Palais de Tokyo (Paris, 2022). It was obvious for me early on that you should be part of it! This project

traces the trajectories of artists with different approaches to natural elements, irreducible to their mere materiality, considered both as medium and tool—cultural, historic and political vectors being revitalised in a context of ecological emergency. What did this project evoke to you?

KN                    I think a lot about the materials I use, where they come from, and what will happen to them after my projects. It was a meaningful process for me to participate in this exhibition and the overall ideas struck a very deep cord. Each artist was coming from their own specific position and it was incredibly valuable to have time with the other artists and their work. I feel challenged to continue creating works that take into consideration the process of how things are formed, and not just what the final outcome looks like.

DB                    The fourteen participating artists, from different generations and non-western cultural backgrounds, tell us that we are not just "face to face with a landscape", nor "living on Earth", but that we are part of it.

KN                    I think this is a super interesting part of the exhibition and I loved that the involved artists all made works quite consciously with the large ecosystem that surrounds us all. What were some of the more surprising moments for you in the research process? Did you find that your thinking changed from some of your initial ideas about what this exhibition could be?

DB                    Working on *Reclaim the Earth* was a journey, with the artists and the scientific advisors (Léuli Eshrāghi and Ariel Salleh) as my travel companions. It has indeed evolved through the almost three years it took to complete it. But in a sense it is still not "complete", I feel this is just the beginning!

It was good to work on replacing relations of domination and subordination with kinship and alliance. I feel the time has come to leave behind the obsolete model of an extractive society and put

humans back into their rightful place: not above all, but among all —finally overcoming the Nature/Culture partition that Europe has inherited from the "Enlightenment" in the 18th century.

Simplicity and authenticity were important concepts for this project. Your site specific interventions seem very simple, but in fact they question the buildings and institutions that welcome them. For instance at the Palais de Tokyo, several hypotheses we had been working on couldn't be completed because it is a protected building.

KN                    We had many rounds of suggested artworks and a lot of back and forth with the Palais de Tokyo building services. I think the process of finding what work we could push over the line to get approval only strengthened the final projects. The work had to be distilled into its most essential form, and each time I made a proposal it became more clear to me that the works should not just be placed on top of the building, instead I wanted my work to be inserted into the space where it was getting exhibited.

DB                    Yes, I feel your works are part of the building and its history now! Actually the two site specific interventions you have made will stay after the exhibition ends. You always spend a lot of time in the buildings and surroundings of the art institutions inviting you. What is your process? How do you connect to local stories, materials and knowledge?

KN                    When I am developing projects, I try to think about the actual building itself as a non-hierarchical space. I think about the columns, the cracks, the broken bits because every detail is as important as the big white walls. The Palais de Tokyo is a really significant building and institution, but I try to forget about all of that when I am on site and looking around.

I also talk to people a lot. I reach out to friends, to colleagues, to strangers. During site visits I try to walk around as much as I can and I visit companies or potteries or anything really. I do a lot of awkward cold calling which is uncomfortable but often necessary.

My goal is to build up an idea and an understanding for process, for materials, and for local histories.



Kate Newby, work in progress at CRAFT (Limoges), 2022. Courtesy of the artist.



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Kate Newby, *it makes my day so much better if i speak to all of you.* (detail), 2022. Porcelain, minerals, found glass (Paris), produced at CRAFT (Limoges). View of the group exhibition "Reclaim the Earth", 2022, Palais de Tokyo (Paris). Courtesy of the artist and Art : Concept (Paris). Photo credit: Aurélien Mole.

DB                    In the Palais *magazine* 33 dedicated to *Reclaim the Earth*, you've made a visual essay including words you found by chance on site.

KN                    The words I use for my titles and for these artist pages are always taken from the spaces and sites around me while I am working. I don't make them up myself, I pluck them from something I have read or even sometimes heard. I see the process of titling my work in the same way that I work with materials and forms. For this visual essay I collected words during my site visit to Paris. Some of the phrases come from a CD by Houria Aïchi, an Algerian singer, that I found in one of the squares where the brick pieces are. Others are from street posters and the names of stores.

DB                    Can you tell me about the collaborative project *it makes my day so much better if i speak to all of you?* You call these "puddles", transforming them into a natural phenomenon one wouldn't expect indoors.

KN                    Excavation and subtraction are a huge part of my work. For *it makes my day so much better if i speak to all of you*, this happened through the collection of broken glass from the streets of Paris by myself, friends, and staff from the Palais de Tokyo. The pieces of glass were some of the largest and the smallest pieces I have worked with. I never alter the sizes when the glass is collected. I made all the porcelain forms in Limoges, a city historically known for this extremely fine and white clay, and shaped them to the glass shards I placed at their bottom.

DB                    By bringing these elements together (combining them intimately through the firing process), you produced an upcycled work – the material is transformed, magnified, creating a multitude of microcosms. It feels like the tide has left an assembly of shells on the Palais de Tokyo concrete floor. You have been developing this process in different contexts, what made you use it here and how did you choose to use porcelain?

KN                    Each of my three production opportunities were very specific to France. I worked with bricks at Les Rairies Montrieux, a factory making bricks for generations. I also worked at Atelier Loire in Chartres to create my glass panes, using the process of *jaune d'argent* which is a specialty of that particular workshop. The opportunity to work with Limoges porcelain seemed to make sense. I didn't want to use any old clay when there was this historically significant porcelain available. I've never made one of these works with only one clay body so I enjoyed the challenge of figuring out how slight shifts and changes in scale could affect the outcome of the work. I worked a lot with texture made by my fingernails and hands because the clay picked up every little detail.

DB                    With *you wish. you wish*, you've performed a work of repair, on the Palais de Tokyo main entrance. How did you get interested in this specific location, knowing that this door is as old as the building (built on the occasion of the Exposition internationale des arts et techniques de la vie moderne in 1937)?

KN                    Depending on how you view the exhibition, this work is either the beginning or the end, with the brick work installed outdoors and the porcelain work inside the exhibition space. Using the entrance to the Palais de Tokyo was an opportunity to create work for this threshold between interior and exterior spaces. These doors are huge and a defining moment of entering the building. They have old and thick glass panes, I have never seen anything like them. There were a few perspex panes, replacements for the glass ones that had been broken over the years. By making five new panes to replace those in plastic, it felt like an act of giving to the building. These window panes undermine and interrogate the assumptions, history and purpose of windows as a key architectural element.

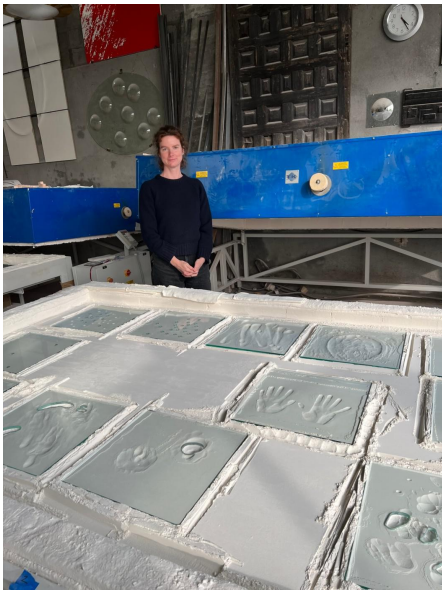
DB                    I love the fact that you used *jaune d'argent* (a cementation color which pigments the glass during its firing), a process that appeared in the West at the beginning of the 14th

century and revolutionised the technique of stained glass. There are also imprints of the texture of your fingers, the touch of your hands, and the presence of natural elements such as light, rain, sun or wind on the surface. This work is only fully revealed when the Palais de Tokyo is closed to the public (from midnight to noon) and its doors are shut.

KN                    It was interesting for me to have a work that one could only see when the building was closed. I am always interested in having works that are less mediated than those inside of institutional and gallery spaces. At the same time, it's very easy for one to miss them entirely. That's something that comes with the territory of using spaces that don't ordinarily host works.

DB                    You've also worked in the lower courtyard, a public space overlooking the Seine river. *The edge of the earth* is composed of handmade clay bricks on which you imprinted some body parts. But the patterns you created are abstract, evoking fossils as much as dinosaur footprints: it's as if this work had always been there! Through this subtle intervention, you propose a re-reading of the site.

KN                    Each square has its own personality and I see them as an extension of the surrounding landscape. There are two different clay bodies, fired at three different temperatures, in gas kilns but also in traditional wood fired kilns. It was a feat to be able to do this. The team at the Rairies Montrieux brick factory were really committed to producing the work to the best of their abilities. It still amazes me that they transported the bricks to us without a single one missing.



Kate Newby, work in progress at Ateliers Loire (Chartres), 2022. Courtesy of the artist.



Kate Newby, *you wish. you wish.*, 2022. Glass, jaune d'argent, produced at ateliers Loire (Chartres). View of the group exhibition "Reclaim the Earth", 2022, Palais de Tokyo (Paris). Courtesy of the artist and Art : Concept (Paris). Photo credit: Aurélien Mole.



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DB                      You said that you wanted this work to live and be  
lived with.

KN                    While I was still in Paris I would go and check on the bricks and every time I went there, something different was happening: some people would be sitting on the bricks in groups, kids would be running up and down the slopes of the carved forms, I saw some energetic skateboarding as well. This work was created through the act of subtraction and excavation to form holes, puddles, and various textures. The idea was that the work would create space rather than take up space, and in turn the work would create a new life for the five dirt squares that have remained unused for years? Decades?

DB                    These squares have been unused for a very long time, and it is beautiful to give them another life in relationship with their environment – the building, the city, the Seine and the trees...

Most of your projects are very collaborative and inclusive, with everyone playing a role. I remember how the install team was engaged in the work with you, as you all bravely kept going under the pouring rain...

KN                    Yes, absolutely. I couldn't do these sorts of projects without people supporting me every step of the way. From the moment we dive into production research, to when I am onsite producing the works in workshops, to when it comes to install everything, I work very closely with everyone. This community becomes a part of the work somehow in the final realisation of the project. Installing the bricks was particularly gruelling because we didn't have easy access to the site. Not only that, but it was a work that I had never installed before so I couldn't exactly say how to do it. I've worked with bricks a whole bunch, but never going several layers deep in a highly trafficked area in public space. I think everyone was super patient and supportive of one another, even in the rain.

DB                    At the same time of making your works for the Palais de Tokyo, you produced a solo exhibition, *Try doing anything without it*, at the Art : Concept gallery in Paris. How did you

address working on two projects at the same time, in the same city but in different contexts?

KN I thought of them in the same way, in the sense that I wanted to find out comfort zones and limits for the works within the exhibition. I try not to distinguish between non-commercial and commercial projects but instead respond to the space and what interests me about it.

I often find myself diving into projects with about 60% planned and the rest up for improvisation. For the Palais de Tokyo I worked with a solid mass of bricks that was inserted into the ground and for the Art : Concept show I carved tiny spaces into the clay so that shape could host glass shards. The bricks then slotted together to form a wall. Thus one brick project was horizontal and the other vertical. I felt very fortunate to explore the same materials from different approaches. I had to make very clear decisions so that each project had its own outcome, even if it had the same process.

DB I'm fascinated by how you transform everyday materials and landscapes (both indoor and outdoor), creating situations that demand a special attention from the viewer. You always develop a strong relationship with the environment, how do you do so?

KN One of my driving forces is the transformation of very simple materials, and then connecting that with things outside of my control like the weather. There is an alchemy that can happen when transparent glass is connected to sunlight, or when a hollowed out brick puddle is filled with rain during a storm. Starting from this position means that site and environment are key informants for the resulting work. Because of this there is a symbiotic relationship that my work has to the environment that it is shown within.

DB                    Most of your interventions are site-specific, which means you need to come and work locally. How do you engage with the context? Would you say that your works "belong" to a place?

KN                    I think my works participate with a "place" and try to fit in, but I am always aware that the interventions are never permanent and that these sites are hosting the work. I sometimes wonder if it's a codependent relationship – the site needs them and they need the site.

For me it's really important that I can make my work as locally as possible when I am working on exhibitions. It means that I am asking questions more than I am providing answers or solutions. I also think it's important that these works don't get shipped from a studio. I like turning up empty handed and working with collaborators, with limitations, and with possibilities that wouldn't have been possible if I wasn't on the ground. I think this method makes the work naturally a part of where it's getting exhibited.



Kate Newby, work in progress at Rairies Montrieux, 2022. Courtesy of the artist.



Kate Newby, installation in progress at Palais de Tokyo (Paris), 2022.



Kate Newby, *The edge of the earth*, 2022. Bricks, mortar, produced with the support of Rairies Montrieux (Les Rairies). View of the group exhibition "Reclaim the Earth", 2022, Palais de Tokyo (Paris). Courtesy of the artist and Art : Concept (Paris). Photo credit: Aurélien Mole.



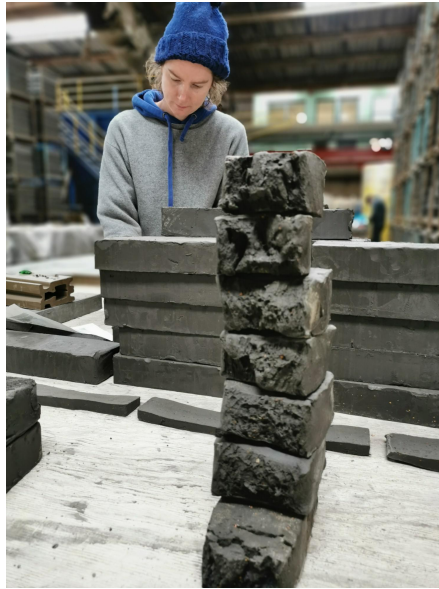
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Kate Newby, work in progress at Rairies Montrieux, 2022. Courtesy of the artist.

DB I like this idea of sourcing materials and working locally. It also seems that chance and impermanence are strong elements of your creative process and in what you want to achieve.

KN Yes, they are. I think a lot about this. I get worn out planning exhibitions through emails ahead of arriving and getting to work. But when I am working on site I feel that momentum takes hold of the situation and things just start happening. I leave lots of room for chance and to determine parts of the work. For example, it was from a walk down the Seine before I headed to the brick factory that I saw some piles of dirt that had been sculpted around a tree that was no longer there. It was this form that provided direction for what I then carved on my bricks. If I had tried to plan things from Texas, it would have felt more superficial. It takes a risk when I don't plan it all out but this way of working leaves space for localised details to emerge in the work.

DB Chance is also part of the curatorial process when you commission an artist with new works, it's about trust and leaving a door open.

KN                    You are extremely well informed about the artists you work with. I was always amazed to hear how much of my work you had seen over the years—not only New York or Vienna as mentioned before, but also Wellington, Sydney, Villeurbanne, London... The development of our project together was very much a back and forth. I always trusted your opinion because you know my work extraordinarily well. I felt resistant to having a work inside the exhibition space but you encouraged this hypothesis. *It makes my day so much better if i speak to all of you* is the result and I couldn't imagine my work for the exhibition without it. It was crucial in the end!

But it must also be demanding and challenging to invite artists and not know how they will respond. What is this balance for you?

DB                    I believe in the possibility of failure and this possibility makes that most often the result pleasantly surprises us. But above all I believe in trust, and in a form of companionship between curators and artists, a long term relationship in which the exhibition is just one possibility amongst others.

KN                    *Reclaim the Earth* has many raw and pertinent propositions for how we are inhabiting this planet. I know for me it has further deepened my awareness about our time on this planet and how we use its resources. Has making this exhibition changed how you think about creating your further exhibitions?

DB                    *Reclaim the Earth* has modified both how I want to position myself in the world and the way I want to make exhibitions. Drawing away from a Western-centered vision, the artists in the exhibition develop new connections with the environment. Their actions form a complex assemblage of practices and scales of relationship: with the Earth, with ancestors, with human and non-human life... Their artistic, social, cultural or spiritual quests bear witness to the resurgence of knowledge: knowing how to think, knowing how to do, but above all knowing how to be in the world.

## Biographies



Kate Newby received her Doctorate of Fine Art in 2015 from the Elam School of Fine Arts at the University of Auckland; she has shown internationally at galleries and museums. Recent institutional exhibitions include the Palais de Tokyo (2022), Adam Art Gallery Te Pataka Toi (2021), Institute of Contemporary Art Villeurbanne/Rhône-Alpes (2019), Kunsthalle Wien (2018), 21st Biennale of Sydney (2018) and the SculptureCenter (2017). In 2012 she won the Walters Prize, New Zealand's largest contemporary art prize. In 2019 Kate was awarded a Joan Mitchell Foundation Painters & Sculptors grant. She has undertaken residencies at The Chinati Foundation (2017), Artspace (2017), Fogo Island (2013), and the ISCP (2012). Kate currently lives and works in Floresville, Texas.



Daria de Beauvais is Senior Curator at the Palais de Tokyo (Paris) where her collective exhibition *Reclaim the Earth* is currently on view. She was recently co-curator of *Antibodies* (2020), *Future, Former, Fugitive* (2019) and the 15th Biennale de Lyon (2019). She has also curated numerous solo exhibitions, including Mimosa Echard, Angelica Mesiti, Laure Prouvost, Camille Henrot, Mel O'Callaghan, Mika Rottenberg... She previously held positions at institutions (Biennale and Peggy Guggenheim Collection in Venice; Museum of Modern Art and Independent Curators International in New York) and commercial galleries (Zlotowski, Paris; Alessandra Bonomo, Rome; Lili Marleen, New York). She is also a freelance curator, teaches at Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, writes for various journals and publications, and regularly participates in committees and juries.

