

MEDIA RELEASE

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Attention: Visual Arts editors, Visual Arts writers
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the fundamental practice

et al. represent New Zealand at the 51st Venice Biennale

New Zealand exhibition, Calle della Pietà, off Riva degli Schiavoni, Behind Santa Maria della Pietà church, Castello, Venezia / **Vernissage** 8 – 11 June, 9.00am – 8.00pm / 12 June – 6 November, 10.00am – 6.00pm
New Zealand Party 8 June, 9pm till late & **Official Opening Reception**, 9 June 5 – 7pm

The art group et al. is representing New Zealand at the 51st Venice Biennale of International art with a new, site specific installation, [the fundamental practice](#).

Celebrated in their own country the group has shown extensively in Europe – most recently at the Museum De Paviljoens in Almere, The Netherlands. Et al. was also selected by René Block for the **Eighth Biennale of Sydney** and has been the subject of a major survey exhibition, *abnormal mass delusions?* at the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery in New Zealand.

In October 2004 et al.'s *restricted access* was awarded the **Walters Prize**, New Zealand's most prestigious and largest art award, by senior US curator Robert Storr. At the time he noted, "It seems to me in a variety of ways that this team of artists has radically addressed the problem of contemporary art."

Central to et al.'s work is an exploration of the human tendency to establish truths and orthodoxies in response to the unknown. It is a concern that is reflected in et al.'s long-standing choice not to reveal their identities. The artists involved have a 20-year history of exhibiting under a variety of titles that include personal and group histories, androgynous names and gender switching; identities who in turn have been associated with discrete practices involving objects, paintings, films, sound-works, books and installations. The group is currently steered by one artist who remains anonymous outside the moniker et al., thereby protecting her own mutability, and the homogeneity of the group.

In recent installations et al. have explored links between art, technology and areas of behaviour reformation involving political ideologies, scientific theories and fringe religious practices. If these installations seem particularly pertinent given current geo-politics they also engage numerous historical texts on the nature of truth and meaning.

With [the fundamental practice](#), et al. extend their investigations into the nature of human belief with a major new installation. What this new installation appears to present is a machine and programme for generating a belief system. Confronted in the installation space, with little guide, the viewer is placed in the position of 'explorer', in the poetic sense of that word. They must feel comfortable with a condition of not knowing, while finding a route through belief systems and their mechanised representatives.

Crucial to [the fundamental practice](#) are moments in which movement, sound and speech are orchestrated, seemingly autonomously, into a unified crescendo. Such harmony envelops the space, thereby increasing the sense that the objects and voices are attempting to 'engineer the viewer's consciousness'. As viewers we experience a sense of rapture, while enclosed in the programme's totalising mind set. Ultimately the experience is one of disorientation given that [the fundamental practice](#) encompasses conjecture, refutation and opposition, elements that are the very antithesis of fundamentalism.

The project is being developed by New Zealand artists et al. in association with the New Zealand Commissioner **Greg Burke** and New Zealand Curator **Natasha Conland**.

Burke comments, "Long at the forefront of experimental art practice in New Zealand, et al. have recently brought together separate strands of work into complex and powerful installations. Gritty, industrial and often threatening, these installations are far from models of perfection but they do appear to be models for both the world and the self. Their sculptural and conceptual strength comes from their acute and haunting ability to engage the viewer on both a physical and metaphysical level."

Of [the fundamental practice](#) **Conland** says: "Imagine a machine for generating belief. How would it be structured? In [the fundamental practice](#) et al. shuffle and disorientate found texts and sounds without differentiating between artistic, religious, political and other belief systems. The installation itself appears to be engineering answers, truths and solutions, but somehow the answer is lost or irrelevant and we are left witnessing mechanised behaviour. "

The New Zealand Commissioner Greg Burke is Director of the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, a leading museum of contemporary art in New Zealand. Burke has a reputation for producing exceptional contemporary art exhibitions which have recently included *Mediarena: contemporary art from Japan*, *Bloom: mutation, toxicity and the sublime* and et al.'s *abnormal mass delusions?*. He has been responsible for many artist monographs including those on Rosemarie Trockel, Christopher Williams, Pae White, Lee Bul, Sam Durant and Marcel Odenbach and curated the inaugural New Zealand exhibition for the Venice Biennale in 2001.

The curator of the exhibition Natasha Conland is Curator Contemporary Art at the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, the home of the national art collection and has a background in freelance art writing and curating. Conland was responsible for the recent major project on New Zealand artist Judy Darragh and has followed the work of et al. for some time.

New Zealand's presentation at the 51st Venice Biennale of International Art is an initiative of **Creative New Zealand**, the Arts Council of New Zealand Toi Aotearoa. This initiative is a vital part of Creative New Zealand's strategy to grow New Zealand arts internationally by encouraging increased audiences, markets, opportunities and professional development for New Zealand artists and arts organisations.

Peter Biggs, Chair of Creative New Zealand says,

"Et al. and [the fundamental practice](#) proposal was chosen to represent New Zealand by a panel of nine leading New Zealand curators, directors, critics and collectors following Creative New Zealand's open call for proposals from New Zealand artists and curators.

"The Venice Biennale was inaugurated in 1893, the year that New Zealand was the first country to give women the vote. New Zealand's leadership in social reform has been matched by a strong history of experimental and innovative arts practice. Et al. is a risk taking artist collective with a body of challenging and provocative work.

We think it's fitting that that et al. will represent New Zealand in the same year that the Venice Biennale has not just one but two women directors for the first time."

the fundamental practice has been organised in association with the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery and the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa. The principal sponsor is 42 BELOW Vodka and major support has been provided by the Patrons of New Zealand at the Venice Biennale. Further support has been provided by the Supporters of the fundamental practice, Montana Reserve and Lindauer Special Reserve wines, Aalto colour, Case da Abitare and the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. The University of Auckland have also provided significant support for the artists.



New Zealand

Calle della Pietà, off Riva degli Schiavoni, behind S. Maria della Pietà church (La Pietà), Castello 3703/a, Venice

Vaporetti: San Zaccaria, Lines 1, 82, 41-42, 51-52, N

Dates and Times:

Vernissage: 8 – 11 June, 9.00 – 20.00 / 12 June – 6 November 2005, Tuesday – Sunday 10.00 – 18.00

For interviews, invitations, information and images of et al.'s work please contact:

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