

Art in motion

For a year, a roving art gallery toured the country, connecting artists and audiences.

On 30 April 2019, Belgian couple Arthur Buerms and Eugénie Coche set foot in Aotearoa with the purpose of launching The Nomadic Art Gallery, an art gallery on wheels, which also gradually became a moving public artwork. After two successful crowdfunding campaigns through Boosted, supported by Kent Gardner and the Arts Foundation, the pair, with a background in art research and curating, law and project management, hit the road in January 2020. One year and 36,000 kilometres later, this hybrid space, connecting more than 200 artists, is now a temporary sculpture at Connells Bay Sculpture Park on Waiheke Island, where John and Jo Gow unravel this project, echoing far beyond the borders of New Zealand.

In the midst of a global pandemic, the inside of the truck served as a gallery space for unconventional pop-up exhibitions, public performances and interventions, thereby forging networks and shared opportunities within the creative industry. Out of this collaborative mindset, 16 exhibitions at arts festivals, artist-run spaces, food courts, record shops, community galleries and wineries originated. The accessible theme of 'life' fuelled the exhibition programme and served as a guide in building a personal collection for the project's mentor, Kent Gardner.

As art critic Mark Amery noted in *Art Collector*: "In the distinctive collection of 66 artworks there are many young artists the dealers have yet to discover, under-appreciated established artists and an impressive roster of the acclaimed".

While the unconventional space generated waves of enthusiasm, the outside of the truck has become a national incubator of artistic documentation, interaction and celebration. Throughout the country, each of the 106 participating artists was individually recorded when they added their mark to the unusual canvas. As a relational art object, the truck represents a synthesis of the intellectual, social and artistic energies that have come together to shape what could be a collective memory of New Zealand's visual culture at an (un)certain time in history.

This ephemeral and performative experiment aimed to challenge people's perception of art while reshaping the boundaries between art, its environment and our daily lives. By connecting a plurality of activities, the project reflects its larger context, mirroring the ubiquitous mechanisms of social control in the institutionalised art world. Without an academically outlined purpose, The Nomadic Art Gallery is a profound reflection on authorship, the

means and sites of artistic production, the promotion, circulation and reception of aesthetic practices, the institutions of the art world, and the relation of all of this to the social, political and economic situation of a particular country.

Apart from continuing to underline the importance of public art in our digital society, Buerms and Coche are publishing a book later this year in which the untold stories of The Nomadic Art Gallery will be released. As a natural extension of their project, and in order to structurally promote the art scenes they've researched, the pair will soon launch an online art platform where artworks will be made available to a European audience. Wherever the future may take them, their long-term goal is to establish a 'Nomadic art residency space' in Europe, a fertile ground for artists from explored countries.

Despite the uncertain future of the truck after its stay at Connells Bay, this dedicated team is already planning their next steps to replicate the format elsewhere. A Vespa in Italy? A boat in the Netherlands or an air balloon in Morocco?

Find out more at thenomadicartgallery.com and follow their next steps on Instagram @thenomadicartgallery7. To view The Nomadic Art Gallery, visit connellsbay.co.nz

Clockwise from left:
The Nomadic Art Gallery
in the South Island.
Photo: The Nomadic
Art Gallery

John and Jo Gow with
The Nomadic Art Gallery

Audiovisual installation
by Lee Woodman, Nelson.
Photo: The Nomadic
Art Gallery

