

Tātaki Whakakitenga
Exhibition Guide

CATHERINE GRIFFITHS | WALK WITH ME

—

30 July - 5 September 2025

NGUTU KĀKĀ

Walk With Me is a focused presentation of artist and designer Catherine Griffiths' evocative typographic practice. The exhibition is an invitation to stroll through Griffiths' diverse applications of letterforms, which here form the basis of newly produced site-responsive wall paintings, as well as sculpture, video, print matter, publications, and activistic works spanning more than 20 years. Over this period Griffiths' practice has increasingly blurred the boundaries of design- and art-based thinking, and this exhibition attests to the extraordinary agency she exercises in deploying her distinctive visual language in service of a diverse range of applications and contexts.

Upon entering the exhibition, we are met by its namesake, *Walk With Me, 48 views* (2025), an imposing in situ wall painting spanning 23 metres in length. What initially appears as a commanding angular monochrome painting is in fact based on the language of letterforms - an entire typeface designed by Griffiths in 2014, *Legs alphabet, a construct in seven weights*. In typography a 'leg' is the downward-sloping stroke found in both uppercase letters such as 'K' and 'R' and the lowercase 'k' 'p', 'q', and so on. Griffiths' narrowly-proportioned typeface features a raised crossbar (centre line) for each uppercase letter, creating even 'leggier' bottom sections. Entirely made from straight lines, Griffiths introduces slanted angles across the typeface, which further echo the sloping legs. It includes multiple variations of several individual letters (four A's, three S's, etc.) enabling her to further animate the letters across the page like a stop motion study of a figure running (for the full specimen of *Legs alphabet* see *SOLO IN [] SPACE*, p.62-65, available at the front desk).

Considering these multilayered bodily references, it's no mistake that the prototype of the font first appeared as the 13 letters required for the title on the cover for *Bruce Connew: Body of Work*, a book designed by Connew and Griffiths in 2014 around a gritty and highly visceral photographic essay exploring the practice of horse breeding in Aotearoa. To date, Griffiths has not released *Legs alphabet* into the world as a functional typeface, instead reserving the typeface for increasingly daring forays into abstraction. As the alphabet is increased in weight, the blacks of the letters increasingly encroach on the white negative space, to a point where practically all gaps between the letters are subsumed into a field of black. In 2023 and 2025 Griffiths translated the full alphabet into 7/7, *14 Views*, two site-responsive wall paintings realised in galleries in Auckland and Melbourne¹. These iterations utilise

the heaviest version of the typeface (7/7), squeezing the gaps between the letters to 14 white 'slits, slots and slivers' (or 'views'). In *Walk With Me*, she has pulled the weight back one step (6/7) and reconfigured her alphabet into an even larger and commanding panorama, increasing the number of 'views' between the letterforms to 48. In this state, while few clues to the underlying typographic alphabet remain, the bold angular legs are transformed into large slashes, as if the anatomy of the typeface has been violently redacted with a giant marker.

While *Walk With Me* comprises an entire type set, as we survey several past typographic works woven into the exhibition, Griffiths provides glimpses into a larger journey that has led to this moment in her practice. Her *AEIOU* series (2009-) provided a breakthrough in her investigation into the potential of individual letters. In this ongoing series, Griffiths focuses on individual vowels, playing with repetition of line to project the letters into the built environment. As momentum for these projects built so did Griffiths' collaborators, which include several high profile architecture firms. Perhaps the most prominent work to date, *AEIOU, a typo/sound installation* commissioned by Karen Krogh Architects for Cubana Apartments in 2009, remains permanently instated on the facade of the Cuba St building in Central Wellington. Over the course of the following decade Griffiths developed significant works for a range of urban sites. These self-contained sculptures act as interventions into buildings and landscape architecture for public parks and civic spaces. Selective documentation and fragments of this project are collated in the Front Box, which Griffiths' as adapted as a 'Vitrine'.

Griffiths' vowels are a key precursor to perhaps her most ambitious public sculpture to date, *Light Weight 0*, which is presented here in a gallery setting for the first time. With its proportionally thin brass ring outlining a sizable 2.4m circular mirror on its front face and a brass relief on the rear. Griffiths conceived of the work as a light sculpture, an object which takes on light, reflection, and emits its own. The title is also a play on words, as while the sculpture may resemble a slender '0', but in tipping the scales towards half a tonne, it's certainly no 'lightweight'. The irony of Griffiths' title was not lost on the team of fabricators, structural engineers, and riggers involved in instating it in its original site, several metres above O'Connell Street in Central Tāmaki. As if this task of elevating the sculpture was not challenging enough, a precisely engineered swivel at its apex enables the sculpture to gently pivot

in response to the elements. instead, it is designed to gently draw attention to the sky and the built environment that frames it.

Primarily based in Aotearoa, Griffiths also spends long periods of time in Europe, and her oeuvre includes curious collections related to the sites where she has lived and worked. *The Phone Book* consists of hundreds of photographic reproductions of handwritten phone numbers, each collected by the artist across the streets of Paris during her periodic visits over a decade. The 2024 lithograph, *What is my threshold now?* presents a stark picture of the artist's Karekare studio, including paper documents and an archive of her own hair. This introspective work has larger implications and in this presentation, offering an oblique view of the somatic preoccupations that underpin major works like *Legs alphabet*.

Of course, in everyday life, typefaces are not bodily gestures - they are manufactured images designed for infinite repetition, and for the transmission of content. The diaristic, itinerant methodology that underpins works like *The Phone Book* is used to starkly different ends in outspoken polemic pieces such as *GAZ/A*. Here, and increasingly, we see Griffiths' typographic work turning toward the political sphere. These concertina-folded prints capture dozens of gaz (French for 'gas') sidewalk covers, which Griffiths collected during her periods of living in France, and hand draws a large red 'A' overtop. Seen together they form a poignant and prolonged meditation on the widely condemned atrocities currently being committed by the Zionist entity in Palestine.

The wall painting, *W in Blood*, is another activist work, originally made in support of the 2017 Women's March protesting the inauguration of the US president. The work was reconfigured for a recent exhibition at Enjoy Contemporary Art Space, Wellington, alongside *GAZ/A*, which this presentation closely echoes. Griffiths describes this configuration of the painting as 'a diptych with a void, split', referencing the way that the wall paintings are dispersed across opposing surfaces with the open space between them acting as a void - a place for visitors to pause for thought.

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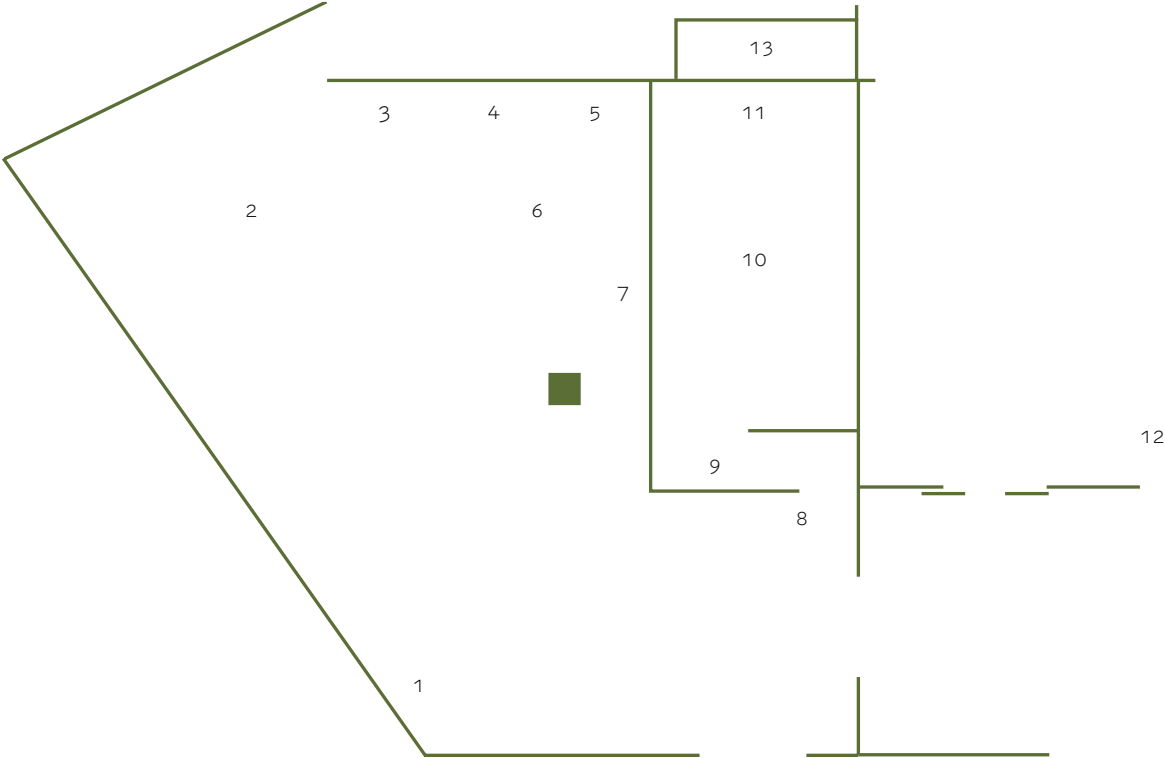
The history of typography reflects a continual tension between hand and the machine, the organic and the geometric, the human body and the abstract system. While Griffiths' practice emerges out of a design discipline, here, untethered to client briefs or commercial imperatives, her exploration of typography

has extraordinary scope. She comfortably moves between prioritising activism, legibility, or exploring the abstract and material potentiality of letterforms. Griffiths' individual type monuments form key landmarks within urban environments, and when experienced in person their architectural scale variously envelopes, obstructs or confronts the viewer. Her type forms are not only designed to be read but to activate, provoke, or even choreograph our attention. Through these works, Griffiths structures and processes her deepest convictions, which may begin with her own body but extend outward to connect with the bodies of a global population.

Stephen Cleland, July 2025

Catherine Griffiths has practised internationally for four decades, including exhibiting in Australia, Chile, France, the USA, China, South Korea, and Aotearoa. *Catherine Griffiths | Walk With Me* builds on two prior surveys of Griffiths' practice, the 2019 exhibition/ publication *SOLO IN [] SPACE*, curated by Zhihua Duan (The Space Gallery/ Pocca publishing, Shanghai, 2019), and the recent exhibition *Catherine Griffiths: Out of Line*, curated by Ela Egidy and Megan Patty (The Design Gallery, University of Melbourne, 2025), which tours in 2026. Griffiths lives in Karekare, West Auckland, and also spends time intermittently in Paris.

1. *Catherine Griffiths: 7/7, 14 views*, Te Tuhi, Auckland, 20 August 2023 - 22 October 2023; *Catherine Griffiths: Out of Line*, The Design Gallery, University of Melbourne, 2025



GALLERY 1

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|---|--|---|---|
| 1 | <u>WALK WITH ME, 48 VIEWS</u> , 2025
acrylic on wall
23m x 4.2m | | |
| 2 | <u>TRAJECTORIES, 36</u> , 2025
installation in nylon
builders line
dimensions variable | 6 | <u>CLUB DE CONVERSATION, KEYHOLE #1, LE PIANO</u> , 2012
rug, hand-tufted wool
1m x 2m
Courtesy of Dilana Rugs |
| 3 | <u>LIGHT WEIGHT O, DRAWINGS FOR A MIRROR-FACED, BRASS-BACKED OBJECT, #1-6</u> 2018
six archival inkjet prints
594mm x 841mm each | 7 | <u>A WHAKAKAPA, TWO LINES OF WOMEN</u> , 2016
vinyl on wall
7.6m x 2.4m |
| 4 | <u>THE PHONE BOOK (2012), DECONSTRUCTED</u> , 2019
ten archival inkjet prints
120mm x 2.2m each | 8 | <u>W IN BLOOD, TRIPTYCH WITH VOID, SPLIT</u> , 2025
acrylic on wall
variable widths x 3.2m |
| 5 | <u>i</u> , 2015
digital video
7 min 55 sec | | |

	WINDOW GALLERY		OUTDOOR PROJECTION
9	<p><u>WHAT IS MY THRESHOLD NOW?</u> <u>ARCHIVE OF COLLECTED HAIR</u> <u>[ARTIST'S OWN], STEEL BOX,</u> <u>LIGHT, SHADOWS CAST,</u> <u>NUMBERED PAPER PACKETS,</u> <u>EXPOSED.</u>, 2024 lithograph, acrylic, brass 560mm x 760mm</p>	12	<p><u>THE JETS</u>, 2011 digital video 2 min 30 secs (operating nightly)</p> <p>Unless otherwise stated, all works are loaned and exhibited courtesy of the artist.</p>
10	<p><u>LIGHT WEIGHT Q</u>, 2012/2018 mirror, brass, stainless steel 2.4m x 2.4m x 90mm Commissioned by Auckland Public Art He Kohinga Toi, 2012 Collection of Te Kaunihera o Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland Council</p>		
11	<p><u>GAZ/A</u>, 2025 inkjet print on concertina folded paper, brass 3.2m x 200mm</p>		
	FRONT BOX		
13	<p><u>THE VITRINE</u> 2025 various objects</p>		
	Prints		Objects
	<p><i>A Hillside Intervention</i>, 2016 archival pigment print 250mm x 350mm Photograph: Bruce Connew</p> <p><i>Driving South with Lucy from the Big Blue Hills</i>, Vincent O'Sullivan, 2002 Wellington Writers Walk, 2002 archival pigment print 475mm X 400mm Photograph: Bruce Connew</p> <p>O-o-o, 2015 manhole cover archival pigment print 210mm X 297mm</p> <p><i>Collidescape</i>, 2017 (detail) archival pigment print 420mm x 594mm photograph: Mitchell Bright</p>		<p><i>Installation with mirror and line, volcanic bomb</i>, 2016 mirror, nylon builders line dimensions variable</p> <p><i>E</i>, 2015 from AEIOU, a typo/cound installation steel pipe twenty 1200mm x 15mm rods</p> <p><i>Prize object/ive</i>, 2018 reflective roadsign (found object) 450mm x 600mm</p> <p><i>[I]ntervention</i>, 2025 timber 1.7m x 4.7m</p> <p><i>Wellington Writers Walk</i>, 2002 concrete cast letters variable widths x 100mm x 40mm</p> <p><i>Clôture Électrique</i>, 1988 found sign 297mm x 150mm</p>

THURSDAY 7 AUGUST 5:30PM

**Fiona Jack & Catherine Griffiths |
In Conversation**

Please join us for a conversation between Catherine Griffiths and Fiona Jack, artist and current Head of School at Elam School of Fine Arts, University of Auckland Waipapa Taumata Rau.

Over many years both practitioners have engaged in various modes of activism in their respective practices. Jack has produced banners and flags, led parades, and facilitated various expressions of protest such as gathering, organising, and collaborating with the public to examine the disparities and injustices that continue to impact societies and communities. Jack's banners symbolise modes of collective expression and reflect her longstanding interest in drawing attention to political histories.

Similarly, Griffiths has long deployed the typography and design for social and political commentary often in the guise of type-specimen posters, publishing, and initiating community projects. Within the design field she has been vocal about the underrepresentation of women in Aotearoa's most prestigious design awards, and has actively facilitated alternative sites for discourse, including the inaugural Designers Speak series (2005), and TypeSHED11, and the international typography symposium (2009). She founded the platform Designers Speak (Up), which led to the Directory of Women* Designers, and curated/led the 2019 poster and hikoi project, Present Tense : Wāhine Toi Aotearoa, later published in 2023.

The conversation will explore how activism has materialised in their practices, and what it means to be a maker in Aotearoa in times of global unrest.

Please RSVP as seating is limited:
ngutukaka@aut.ac.nz

THURSDAY 28 AUGUST 5.30PM

Eve de Castro-Robinson | Sound Work

Please join us Thursday 28 August 5:30pm, for a special in-gallery sound piece produced by one of New Zealand's most renowned composers, Eve de Castro-Robinson.

Over de Castro-Robinson's long career she has produced genre-defying compositions spanning orchestral, vocal, chamber, and theatrical, for performances in Aotearoa and internationally. She draws inspiration from an array of eclectic sources including hymns, sonic art, free jazz, poetry, punk, cinema, dance, and abstract painting. A trained graphic designer, de Castro is uniquely placed to respond to not only Griffiths' art practice, but to interpret her works as an expansive graphic score.

Eve de Castro-Robinson retired as Associate Professor in Composition from the University of Auckland in 2020, after 25 years, and works as a freelance composer, music consultant and writer.

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Exhibition designer: Eddie Clemens
Public programmes: Nat Tozer
Signwriting: Mitchell McGrath
Technicians: Zak McNeil, Josh Whitaker

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Te Wai Ngutu Kākā Gallery is the art gallery
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Te Wai Ngutu Kākā Gallery
40 St Paul St
Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland 1010

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Art | He Kohinga Toi



Exhibition Guide

Te Wai Ngutu Kākā Gallery
Auckland University of Technology
2025

Wāhi

Level 1, WM Building
40 St Paul Street
Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland 1010

Kōrero Mai

ngutukaka@aut.ac.nz
@ngutukaakaa
ngutukaka.aut.ac.nz

