

Celebration? Real life

An exhibition by Ruth Buchanan with:

Anne Boyer

Benjamin Buchanan

J.C. Sturm & John Baxter

Marc Camille Chaimowicz

Maya Schweizer



Maya Schweizer, *Voices and Shells*, 2020, still, HD video, colour, duration 18:20 min.

What could a diagram of and for life look like? Life in its most total sense, a life that includes all of life? We'll start where I often start, with poetry:

J.C. Sturm, one of Aotearoa New Zealand's most significant Māori women writers of the twentieth century, caught me. I first came to her work years ago with her poem about Wellington Public Library as I myself was spending long days in various iterations of those places. I came to her work then, but she truly caught me and held me blazingly close these past most unique of years. I arrived through her sharp description and critique of societal infrastructures and their administrative institutions that carry power, such as libraries, museums, schools, and governments. What kept me with her work, what held my reading, was her staunch insistence on bringing dignity to the fullness of human experience, as physical bodies living in place and in time. Poems that diagram our lives, document but also manifest future iterations. Sturm's roving of being alive sets into motion what I've come to understand as spiral time.

Over this past pair of years, spent closely with her work and in conversation with her son John Baxter, I have come to see that while this spiral time is somewhere you reside, it is also a state you enter. Entering the paradigm that Sturm offers re-orientations of value through a process of a deeply embodied engagement with observation and critique. Sturm's poetry runs like a spiral that connects our most public sense of self with our most intimate desires, our deepest reckonings with injustice and grief with intense joys, our most radical commitment to life with the passing of that same life. This writing through her body cast me close to her, a torquing that doesn't diminish difference but ignites friction an aliveness to texture proposes an otherwise.

Jumping from poetry to the next place I stop, we arrive at an artwork.

Celebration? Realife (1972) is the title of the work by Marc Camille Chaimowicz originally staged for the exhibition *Three Life Situations* at Gallery House London. This work, a critique of modernist

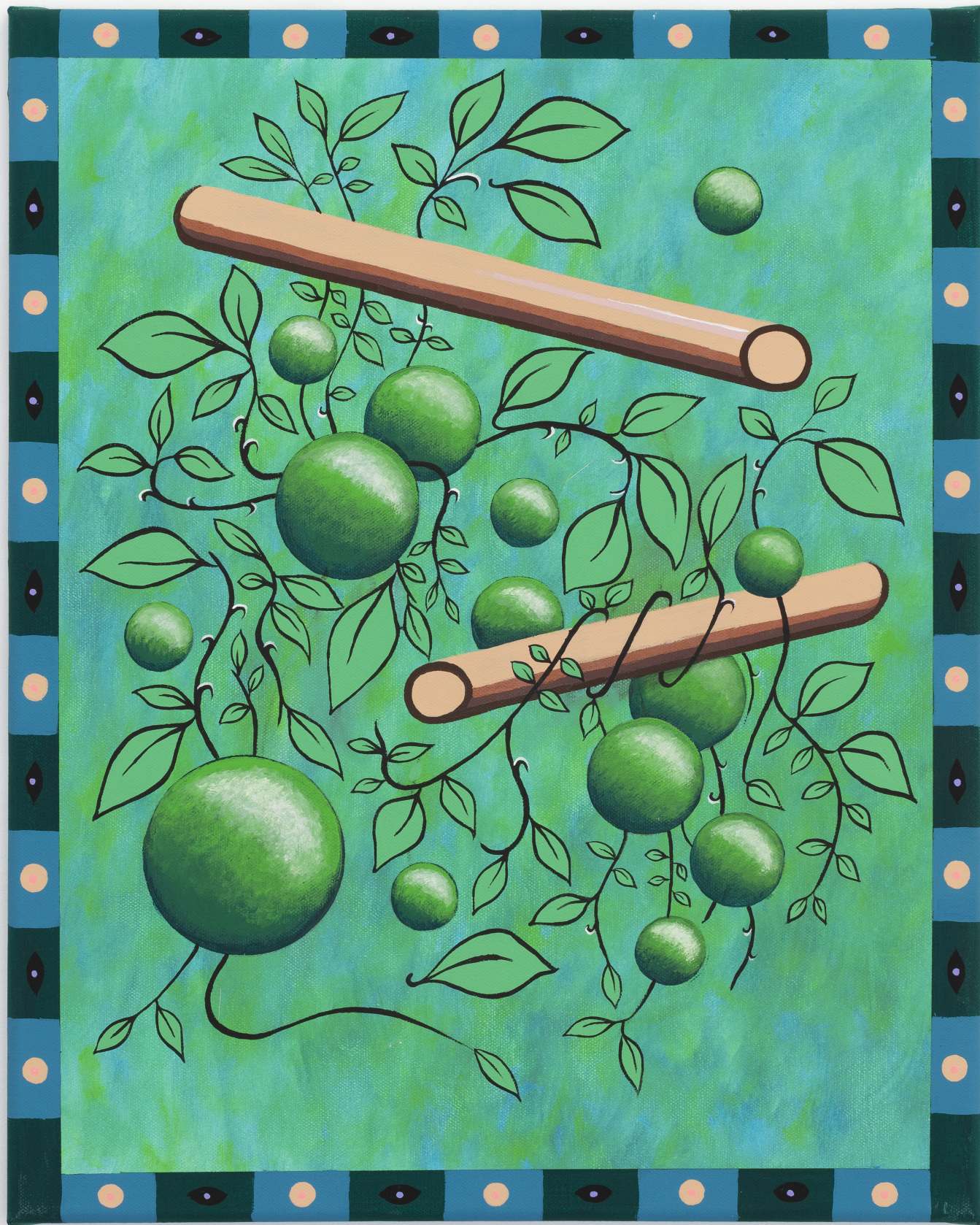
objectivism, also successfully loosened up a relationship between art, design, theatre, performance, and language and established a powerful example of embodied critical (transformative) practice. This work stages a paradox; it is both profoundly alive to and ambivalent toward the codified relationships (split) between so-called art and so-called life. The work also centres the body and its humanness. Full to the brim with sensorial experience but metabolised. Here experience is not something that can be bifurcated from its situated complexity and made neatly into something we can promote. Here, experience is ambiguous and, therefore, also asks for tolerance as we move in relation to it. The artist-participant-director-reveller set loose.

What Sturm and Chaimowicz have in common is an engagement with the paradox that is the (re)configuring of how to be a human being with a body in the world that is both deeply tender and ultimately radically staunch.

The exhibition at Coastal Signs, *Celebration? Real life* (the title kindly gifted by Chaimowicz and tweaked for this occasion) slips on this proposal, placing this relationship tenderness, staunchness around the physical state of Tāmaki Makaurau. Initially spring-to-summer-time doubling back to my northern autumn-winter now to be twisted and reversed, in a water-way that slips in and out of time: the other time, 'post-contact' time, industrialisation and urbanisation, late capitalism, Covid time, and now violent time. The contributions and practitioners in this essay-cum-exhibition arc across generations and whānau links, arcing between neighbours, materials, process, and status; deforming automated disciplinary division. It invites us to loop these edges of life around our fingers, tangle them, hold them close, let them go.

This is life, and it is all around us, all of the time.

Ruth Buchanan, written between Autumn 2021, Berlin (Spring 2021, Tāmaki Makaurau) and Spring 2022, Berlin (Autumn 2022, Tāmaki Makaurau).



Benjamin Buchanan
Glass Grapes / Post Ceramic, 2022
flashe and acrylic on canvas, 505 x 405mm