



*Cathy Tuato'o Ross, Sorting Things Out (2012)*

# settle

Cathy Tuato'o Ross, Vanessa Crowe, Caroline McQuarrie

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Geoff Wilson Gallery

NorthTec, 57 Raumanga Valley Road, Whangarei  
[www.geoffwilsongallery.com](http://www.geoffwilsongallery.com)



# thinking of home

by Vaughan Gunson

If you put three artists in a gallery you are required, at some level, to put them into a relationship. Which is what curators, art critics, visitors to the gallery, and artists themselves do.

With *settle* there's a real sense of the work of Cathy Tuato'o Ross, Vanessa Crowe and Caroline McQuarrie holding together, with each artist contributing to an overall visual and intellectual experience. Like Cathy's photo of hundreds and thousands on a plate separated into like colours, next to a bigger

pile of the colours all mixed, you see the parts separate, and you see the effect of the whole.

The exhibition title provides one framework, but it's the focus of the photographic lens on "home" that is another conceptual thread and physical reality that links the work.

Home is not presented in a simple or naïve way. Caroline McQuarrie's slightly distorted photos of embroidered pillows with text which read like affirmations, held over the face like a mask, ensure we don't slip into an easy sentimentality. But it is a place where we might find something of value, something to value.

Caroline's 'Back Stitch (Flying Geese)' consists of photographs of the artist's childhood home projected onto a quilt made by Barbara McQuarrie, the artist's mother. Overlaying both is a stop-motion animation of stitches from the back of an embroidery: the bright greens, yellows, and reds creating abstract designs as we watch.

The work suggests that home is not just where we are, but is a construction of our



Caroline McQuarrie, *A Home is a House With Love* (2012)

layered memories, invested with meaning that changes over time or through the eyes of nostalgia.

Vanessa Crowe's photos of toys, books and detritus on the shelves of a child's room, remind us of those early years of play and discovery, which parents want to encourage and contain simultaneously. Next to the photos, a tower of cardboard boxes, each covered with the print of gilded gold lino floor tiles, does not seem ironic, but rather something important being constructed, even if a child's hands could easily topple it over.

Vanessa's photos of stacked clothing and towels, are formally beautiful, but as the title suggests their stability is something precarious as well. And maybe our domestic routines and close relationships in the home are equally precarious. We give it meaning and importance, but it can fall apart. You can have faith in something, value it, but there's always room for doubt.

Perhaps not in 'The Optimist's House', in Cathy's photographs doubt and cynicism is something to be banished. Stars are stuck on a window; grass is wrapped in a bouquet; dirty dishes are covered in icing; a child's mouth opens to take the spoonful of sugar; and most tellingly the artist herself is shown wearing

a pair of cheap sunglasses with the lenses painted pink: rose-tinted, indeed. With these on you surely cannot see the world properly – which is the point, optimism may just be wilful denial.

But the beauty of a photograph like 'Glass Half Full, Glass Half' empty tips the balance. We see an artist making art, creating value in the immediate world around her: the home,



*Vanessa Crowe, An Island of Precarious Stability (2010)*



*Cathy Tuato'o Ross, Glass Half Full, Glass Half Empty (2011)*

which is at once celebrated and transcended.

In our 21st century world, where value is uncertain, where institutions can become cynical – and by this I mean the ideologies that legitimate institutions, whether it's the family home or the house of parliament – we still need to believe in what we're doing, where we are.

The work of the three artists in this exhibition, by exploring the sentiments and ideals associated with the home and family, is an opportunity to think critically about

values often evoked in the photos we take or the material objects we treasure. As Socrates famously said: "The unexamined life isn't worth living."

Examination, however, doesn't mean negation, which Socrates certainly understood. It can lead to a clearer affirmation of what we value, whether it's to be found in our homes or anywhere else.

Because belief in values – and I'll make a grand meta-statement here – is a human necessity. We can't settle for anything less.



*Caroline McQuarrie, still image from stop motion video, Back Stitch (Flying Geese) (2012)*





*Vanessa Crowe, Blue Boat & Green Truck (2012)*

**Caroline McQuarrie** is a Wellington based interdisciplinary artist whose work primarily engages conventions of photography and hand-crafted textile objects. Exploring the location of memory in photographic images and hand made objects, her work exploits and questions the sentimentality inherent in both these forms. With a BFA (Photography) from Canterbury University and an MFA (distinction) from Massey University, McQuarrie now lectures in Photography at Massey University, Wellington.

**Vanessa Crowe** has a thing for patterns and surfaces. Playing with conventions of ornamentation, architectural structures and the juggle of order and chaos in everyday life, her current practice brings glimpses of home life into public and gallery spaces. Crowe majored in Textiles as part of a BFA at Otago School of Art and completed a MFA (with distinction) at Massey University in 2008. She currently works as a senior tutor at Massey University in Textile Design and in the Culture and Context Department at Victoria University School of Design.

**Cathy Tuato'o Ross** lives on the edge of the Whangarei Harbour with her partner and four young children. Her current work explores optimism, and related attitudes that determine how individuals see and understand the world they inhabit. Optimism, while generally cast as golden or rosy, involves denial as well as daydream. Working with what she finds around her, she makes objects, gestures, drawings, and tableau then photographs them. Tuato'o Ross works as an artist, art-writer and independent researcher, with a PhD from the Otago University, MFA from RMIT University (Melbourne) and BFA from Otago School of Art.