

PRACTICAL SUSTAINABILITY FOR ARTISTS AND GALLERIES
A TOI ŌTAUTAHĪ WORKSHOP PRESENTED IN CONJUNCTION WITH PHYSICS ROOM

Based on the presentation by [James Tapsell-Kururangi](#), Director, Physics Room

We can't solve the climate crisis through the same economic system that produced it. Art as it is currently practiced is thoroughly embedded in that system. To the extent that it could have an active role in the social and material transformation that is required, art would need to shift its frame of reference away from traditional object and exhibition-based formats, towards endeavors that are situated within and act upon the material-economic system itself and society more broadly. We don't need an additional quantity of art objects and exhibitions produced by the existing system. Rather we need artists (and everyone) to help create entirely new systems.

Sean Raspet. *The Point: Remember when contemporary art solved the climate crisis?* Art Asia Pacific

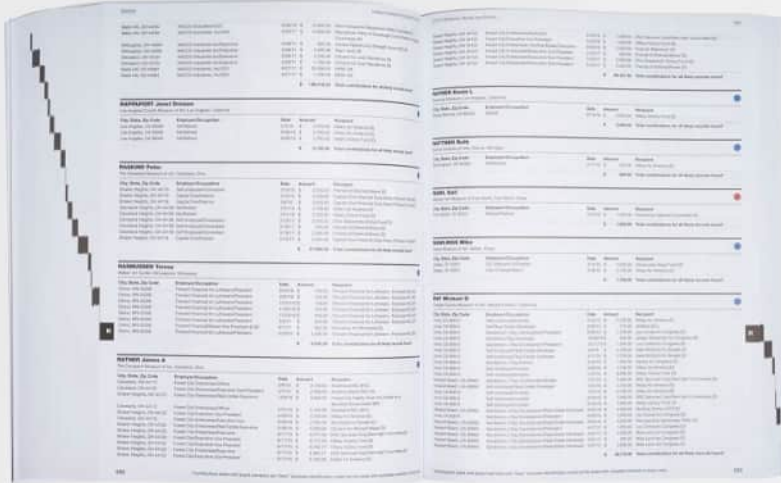
James began by acknowledging the tensions inherent in environmental sustainability. As artists, arts workers and organisations, we are all operating within economic systems that depend heavily on fossil fuels and resource extraction. This creates a contradiction: we are attempting to reduce environmental harm while continuing to function within systems that contribute to it.

The workshop was therefore framed not as a search for perfect solutions, but as an exploration of practical actions, critical reflection and ongoing improvement. James also raised concerns about carbon offsetting, noting that offset schemes can sometimes create the illusion that environmental impacts have been "cancelled out" without addressing underlying behaviours and systems.

Key Takeaways

- Sustainability is a complex and imperfect process.
- Artists cannot solve climate change alone.
- Meaningful change may require examining broader systems of economics, power and resource use.

Individual actions matter, but structural change is also necessary.



Andrea Fraser, *Museums, Money, and Politics* (2018)

James discussed Fraser's examination of the contemporary art funding ecosystem. Her research investigated major donors and patrons within the arts sector and revealed connections between philanthropic art funding and political interests.

This example was used to demonstrate that sustainability extends beyond environmental concerns. Questions of equity, governance, power and funding are deeply connected to climate justice. Understanding where money comes from and how it shapes institutions is an important part of examining sustainability within the arts.

Why It Matters

Environmental responsibility cannot be separated from discussions about who holds power, who benefits from systems of wealth, and how cultural organisations are funded.



228 E 2 St.
Block 507 Lot 97
24 x 105' 5 story walk-up old law tenement
Owned by Harriet Realty Inc. 600 E 11 St. 312
Contracts signed by Harry J. Shapolsky, President ('65)
Acquired from John The Shapolsky Foundation
475 The Bank of New York, 40 Wall St. 312
for \$100,000. (also 5 other properties)
8-12-1967
\$100,000. mortgage (also on 5 other properties) at 6%
interest as of 1-1-1968 due 1-1-1970
held by the Directors and Shareholders benefit fund of
The American Baptist Convention, 475 Riverside Dr. 312
Assessed land value \$7,000.- total \$80,000.- (1971)



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Block 507 Lot 98
24 x 105' 5 story walk-up old law tenement
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Assessed land value \$7,000.- total \$80,000.- (1971)



228-29 E 2 St.
Block 507 Lot 50
50 x 105' 5 story walk-up old law tenement
Owned by Ernest Callipari Estate 600 E 11 St. 312
Contracts signed by Anna Callipari, executrix
Principal according to Real Estate Surrogate of Manhattan
Harry J. Shapolsky
Acquired from Ernest Callipari Construction Corp. 600 E 11 St. 312
Contracts signed by Ernest Callipari ('65/66) Anna Callipari
('67)
Assessed land value \$16,000.- total \$78,000.- (1971)



170-74 E 3 St.
Block 507 Lot 15
74 x 105' 4 story walk-up old law tenement
Owned by 174 E 3 St. Corp. 600 E 11 St. 312
Contracts signed by Harry J. Shapolsky, President ('65/66)
Anna Callipari, President ('67/68)
Charles Deane, President ('69/70)
Harry Shapolsky, President ('71/72)
Acquired from 174 E 3 St. Corp. 600 E 11 St. 312
Contracts signed by Harry J. Shapolsky, President ('65)
Harry Shapolsky, President ('66/67)
Acquired from 174 E 3 St. Corp. 600 E 11 St. 312
Contracts signed by Harry J. Shapolsky, President ('65)
Harry Shapolsky, President ('66/67)
Acquired from 174 E 3 St. Corp. 600 E 11 St. 312
Contracts signed by Harry J. Shapolsky, President ('65)
Harry Shapolsky, President ('66/67)
Assessed land value \$10,000.- total \$105,000.- (1971)



185-89 E 3 St.
Block 507 Lot 16
74 x 105' 4 story walk-up old law tenement
Owned by 185 Realty Corp. 600 E 11 St. 312
Contracts signed by Ernest Callipari, President ('65/66)
Harry J. Shapolsky, President ('67/68)
Charles Deane, President ('69/70)
Harry Shapolsky, President ('71/72)
Acquired from 185 Realty Corp. 600 E 11 St. 312
Contracts signed by Harry J. Shapolsky, President ('65)
Harry Shapolsky, President ('66/67)
Acquired from 185 Realty Corp. 600 E 11 St. 312
Contracts signed by Harry J. Shapolsky, President ('65)
Harry Shapolsky, President ('66/67)
Assessed land value \$10,000.- total \$105,000.- (1971)

Hans Haacke's Shapolsky et al Manhattan Real Estate Holdings, A Real Time Social System as of May 1, 1971

James used Haacke's work to illustrate how artists can expose structures of power. Haacke's investigation into New York property ownership challenged influential interests and was famously withdrawn from exhibition at the Guggenheim Museum.

The significance of this example lies in demonstrating that artists can contribute to sustainability by investigating systems and institutions rather than only producing environmentally themed artworks. Art can help reveal relationships between power, ownership and social conditions.

Key Message

Artists have the capacity not only to represent environmental issues but also to interrogate the systems that contribute to them.

#19BoS Working Group

Blog created by artists involved in the 19th Biennale of Sydney to discuss the call to boycott the Biennale over its sponsor Transfield's involvement in offshore mandatory detention.

Thursday, February 20, 2014

Open Letter to the Board of the Sydney Biennale From Participating Artists

19 February 2014

To the Board of Directors of the Biennale of Sydney,

We are a group of artists - Gabrielle de Vietri, Bianca Hester, Charlie Sofo, Nathan Gray, Deborah Kelly, Matt Hinkley, Benjamin Armstrong, Libia Castro, Ólafur Ólafsson, Sasha Huber, Sonia Leber, David Chesworth, Daniel McKewen, Angelica Mesiti, Ahmet Ögüt, Meriç Algün Ringborg, Joseph Griffiths, Sol Archer, Tamas Kaszas, Krisztina Erdei, Nathan Coley, Corin Sworn, Ross Manning, Martin Boyce, Callum Morton, Emily Roysdon, Søren Thilo Funder, Mikhail Karikis, Mikala Dwyer, Rosa Barba, Sara van der Heide, Henna-Riikka Halonen, Shannon Te Ao, Hadley+Maxwell, Ane Hjør Guttu, Yael Bartana, Emily Wardill, Agnieszka Polska, Bodil Furu, Eglé Budvytytė, Eva Rothschild, Annette Stav Johanssen, Synnøve G. Wetten, Tori Wrånes, Siri Hermansen, James Angus

- all participants in the 19th Biennale of Sydney.

We are writing to you about our concerns with the Biennale's sponsorship arrangement with Transfield.¹

We would like to begin with an affirmation and recognition of the Biennale staff, other sponsors and donors, and our fellow artists. We maintain the utmost respect for Juliana Engberg's artistic vision and acknowledge the support and energy that the Biennale staff have put into the creation of our projects and this exhibition. We acknowledge that this issue places the Biennale team in a difficult situation.

However, we want to emphasise that this issue has presented us with an opportunity to become aware of, and to acknowledge, responsibility for our own participation in a chain of connections that links to human suffering; in this case, that is caused by Australia's policy of mandatory detention.

Contact Us

If you would like to contact us for comment please include your name, organisation and phone number in the subject line of your email.

Thanks
contact19boswg at gmail.com

recent posts

- ▼ 2014 (6)
 - March (1)
 - ▼ February (5)
 - Statement of Withdrawal from 19th Biennale of Sydney
 - Biennale of Sydney Board - Response to Working Group
 - PRESS RELEASE Artists Working Group
 - Open Letter to the Board of the Sydney Biennale Fr...
 - Transfield, the Biennale of Sydney and Australia's...

"Transfield Holdings, a private company, has a minority stake in Transfield Services, a public corporation which holds a government contract to administer two of Australia's immigrant detention centers – the highly controversial offshore facilities used to detain migrants and refugees attempting a treacherous arrival via boat. These detention centers, which have witnessed hunger strikes and at least one death, have been condemned by the United Nations and referred to by critics as "Australia's Guantánamo". Nevertheless both major political parties and a majority of Australians support the mandatory detention policy."

Open Letter to the Board of the Sydney Biennale From Participating Artists. 2014.

James reflected on protests by artists during the 2014 Sydney Biennale, where concerns were raised about sponsorship links to offshore immigration detention centres as well as historical connections to fossil-fuel infrastructure.

This example demonstrated how environmental justice frequently intersects with social justice. The discussion highlighted questions such as:

- Should artists accept funding connected to harmful practices?
- How much influence can artists exert through contracts and negotiations?
- What responsibilities do cultural organisations have when selecting sponsors?

James noted that while the protests sparked substantial discussion, institutional change was limited, illustrating both the importance and difficulty of advocacy.



Any embassy is a place of diplomacy. Diplomacy is about dialogue and negotiation. Embassies are one of the few places on earth where people and nations of difference can tend or mend the relationships between them – without resorting to war.

Embassy 2023, Tate Modern. (Above)

Tainui Stephens, *A most diplomatic intent*, e-tangata, 2024. (quote)

James described visiting [Richard Bell](#)'s *Tent Embassy* installation at the Tate Modern. The work created a space for dialogue around Indigenous sovereignty, colonialism and justice.

A related component, *Pay the Rent UK*, continuously displayed the growing value of resources owed to Indigenous Australians. Through invited speakers and public discussion, the installation functioned as a living forum for negotiation and exchange.

James suggested that sustainability discussions could benefit from a similar "embassy" model, creating spaces where complex issues can be explored collectively rather than reduced to simplistic answers.



Megan Cope. Kinyingarra Guwinyanba installation
off the east coast of Brisbane.

In Megan Cope's oyster reef restoration project, rather than making work solely for human audiences, the project creates habitat for oysters and contributes directly to environmental regeneration.

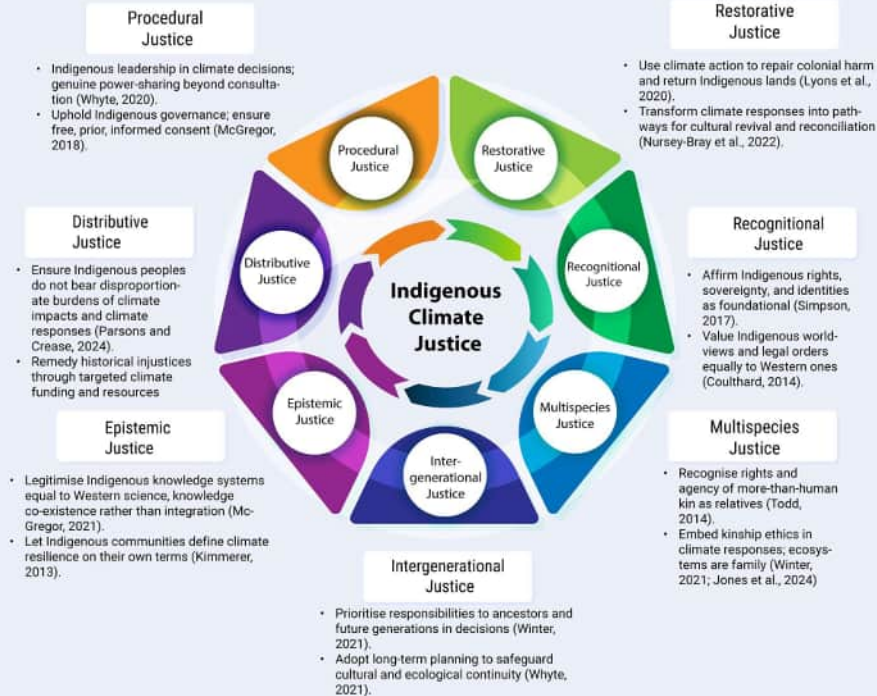
James was particularly interested in Cope's framing of the work as being "for Country" rather than for people. The project demonstrates how art can move beyond representation and become an active participant in ecological restoration.

Themes

- Collaboration with natural systems
- Environmental restoration
- Indigenous stewardship
- Art as practical intervention
- Long-term ecological benefit

Indigenous Climate Justice

Conceptual Framework



Megan Cope. Kinyingarra Guwinyanba installation off the east coast of Brisbane. (Above).

Meg Parsons., & Iresh Jayawardena. *Advancing Indigenous climate justice: Māori perspectives on managed retreat and climate adaptation policy in Aotearoa New Zealand*. Vol.9 Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space Journal.

James introduced a conceptual framework that combines Indigenous rights, environmental stewardship and climate adaptation. The framework identifies five dimensions:

Relational Justice

Restoring relationships between people, land and water.

Procedural Justice

Supporting Indigenous participation and decision-making.

Distributive Justice

Ensuring fair allocation of benefits and burdens.

Recognitional Justice

Respecting Indigenous knowledge and authority.

Restorative Justice

Addressing historical and ongoing colonial harms.

Why This Matters

The framework expands sustainability beyond emissions reduction and encourages a more holistic understanding of environmental responsibility.



Java Bentley in the exhibition *Matatau* 2022 at Te Manawa



Sustainability refers to sustaining or maintaining the balance of a process over time. Kaitiakitanga as a concept of guardianship speaks to the sky, sea and the land. Reciprocity is important in sustaining and protecting Papatūānuku so that she can continue to sustain and protect our next generation.

Java Bentley, *Gifting Back to Papatūānuku. Correspondence 3.2*. The Physics Room

James explored the concept of kaitiakitanga as an approach to stewardship, responsibility and reciprocal care. He reflected on efforts to incorporate Indigenous perspectives while developing sustainability policy at Physics Room. [\](#)

Using Bentley's writing and installation *Hangarua* as an example, he highlighted:

- Use of reclaimed materials.
- Repurposed umbrellas and pallets.
- Design for reuse and relocation.
- Sustainability embedded within artistic process. [\[greening a...transcript | Word\]](#)

Key Message

True sustainability is not only about reducing harm but also about maintaining reciprocal relationships with people, place and environment

What resources as an artist or organisation, what are we doing as a gallery and what resources are available to artists?

The GCC was presented as one of the most useful sustainability resources available to artists and cultural organisations. The platform provides:

- Carbon accounting tools.
- Emissions calculators.
- Artist toolkits.
- Best-practice guides.
- Environmental rider templates.

Sustainability guidance for commissioning.

The Physics Room Environmental Sustainability
Policy & Implementation
2025–2030

**THE
PHYSICS
ROOM** CONTEMPORARY ART SPACE

TPR decarbonisation strategy & action plan 2025 -2030

	PRIORITIES	ACTIONS
2025 Planning and getting on board with sustainability	Implement the Sustainability Policy and action plan	- December Board Hui - approve of plan for 2025 - 2030 (Director and Board) - Finalise with the Business Manager the implementation of the Gallery Climate Coalition Carbon Calculator Spreadsheets reporting for the 2026 Budget (Business Manager and Director) - Finalise with the staff the revised artist agreement with the new sustainability section 11. (BM, Director, Staff) - Run a hui in December with staff specifically on the Gallery Climate Coalition and our Sustainability Policy and 2025 - 2030 decarbonisation action plan (Director and Staff) - Finalise, exhibition's new reflections summary with sustainability. (Director and Staff)
2026 Measuring our impact & working toward an awareness of our emissions.	- Measure emissions - Analyse and report on data to Governance and Funders - Increase awareness of our commitment to sustainability with staff, volunteers and artists through hui	- Measure our emissions from Jan - July 2026, using the GOC calculator (Business Manager) - Half-yearly report to the TPR board at the August 2026 AGM on our impact (Director and Business Manager) on challenges and what's working - Implement discussion with artists when commissioning on sustainable practice (All staff), and new exhibitions reflections summary (Curator) - Run a hui with our volunteers on our sustainability policy and practices. (Volunteer Manager) - Continue to measure our emissions, July - December 2026. (Business Manager)
2027 Set our aims for decarbonisation and	- Analyse and report on data to the public and governance - Set reduction targets, draft and implement	- Measure our emissions from Jan - Dec 2027, using the GOC, with Aug reporting (Business Manager) - Run annual volunteer and staff hui on sustainability (Volunteer

Physics Room's Experience

Using GCC resources, Physics Room measured:

- Flights
- Freight
- Surface transport
- Energy use
- Materials
- Digital storage
- Computer usage

James explained that while the process is labour intensive, it provides valuable baseline data that can inform future decisions.

GCC

Donate



Menu

Creating an
environmentally
responsible art world.

↘ Become a
member

↘ Calculate
emissions

↘ Take action

What We Do

Gallery Climate Coalition (GCC) is an international community of
arts organisations working to reduce our sector's environmental



<https://galleryclimatecoalition.org/>

Exhibition Reflection and Evaluation

A simple but important initiative at Physics Room is the inclusion of environmental reflection in post-project reviews. Staff consider:

- What was reused.
- What was recycled.
- What generated waste.
- Opportunities for improvement.
- Environmental successes.

Examples included borrowing exhibition furniture, reusing artworks, choosing low-VOC paints and recycling construction materials.

What were the highlights and successes? Things we did tika?

- Great group of people who attended regularly, and lots of engagement with the events
- Exciting and felt like a new/different way of having an exhibition to have it so active the whole time and changing
- Testing ground for Lee's research that will become the basis for his Masters project
- Made new connections with places like LACA, Fair Enough Book Fair, and strengthened existing relationships with Laurel Doody
- Programming at different times so different groups of our audience that can't always make it to evening events could attend.

What were the challenges? Was the project under-resourced?

- When there was lots of programming on, sometimes I felt undersupported, too busy, or sometimes Lee dropped the ball on some of the events and I ended up doing most of the work (e.g closing celebration, Maria Lind dinner, LACA talk)
- Complaint about the behaviour of one of the remote collaborators
- Audio set-up for video sessions required some troubleshooting

What would you do differently? How could it be improved?

- I would make sure I had connected with all the collaborators involved in this kind of project to make sure, as far as possible, everyone's values are aligned with TPR
- Programming should be locked in much further in advance—too many things were being organised last minute and then having to be announced last minute. It was stressful
- Perhaps someone could be contracted in to assist with event support and tech for video conferencing for this kind of event in the future
- Encourage programming that connected this international cohort with other practitioners here (e.g maybe US graphic designer could talk to someone like Shaun Naufahu, grounded more in Aotearoa/thinking about ways to structure these sessions so it's not like the centre sanctioning the periphery?)

What was the impact on Te Tai Ao?

- Made use of video conferencing to host events rather than getting people to travel and be there in person
- Resource shared with Ilam for screenprinting materials and Lincoln to share resources like materials and flights where necessary with their parallel programme Another Table
- Borrowed screen from CAG
- All the materials involved in Another School will be reused (speaker/beanbag/poster box)
- Used things close to hand for the classroom set up like chairs etc
- New paper and ink used for screenprinting, kept print runs small to avoid excess and waste

What were the highlights and successes? Things we did tika?

- NZSL Tour - with NZSL interpreter, hosted by Geo
- Collaboration with Te Wai Ngutu Kaka
- Showing some hard-hitting Māori, Pacifica moving image
- Steady numbers
- Great access through: Artist Talk, recorded, documented
- Podcast: episode - Contemporary Art Kōrero

What were the challenges? Was the project under-resourced?

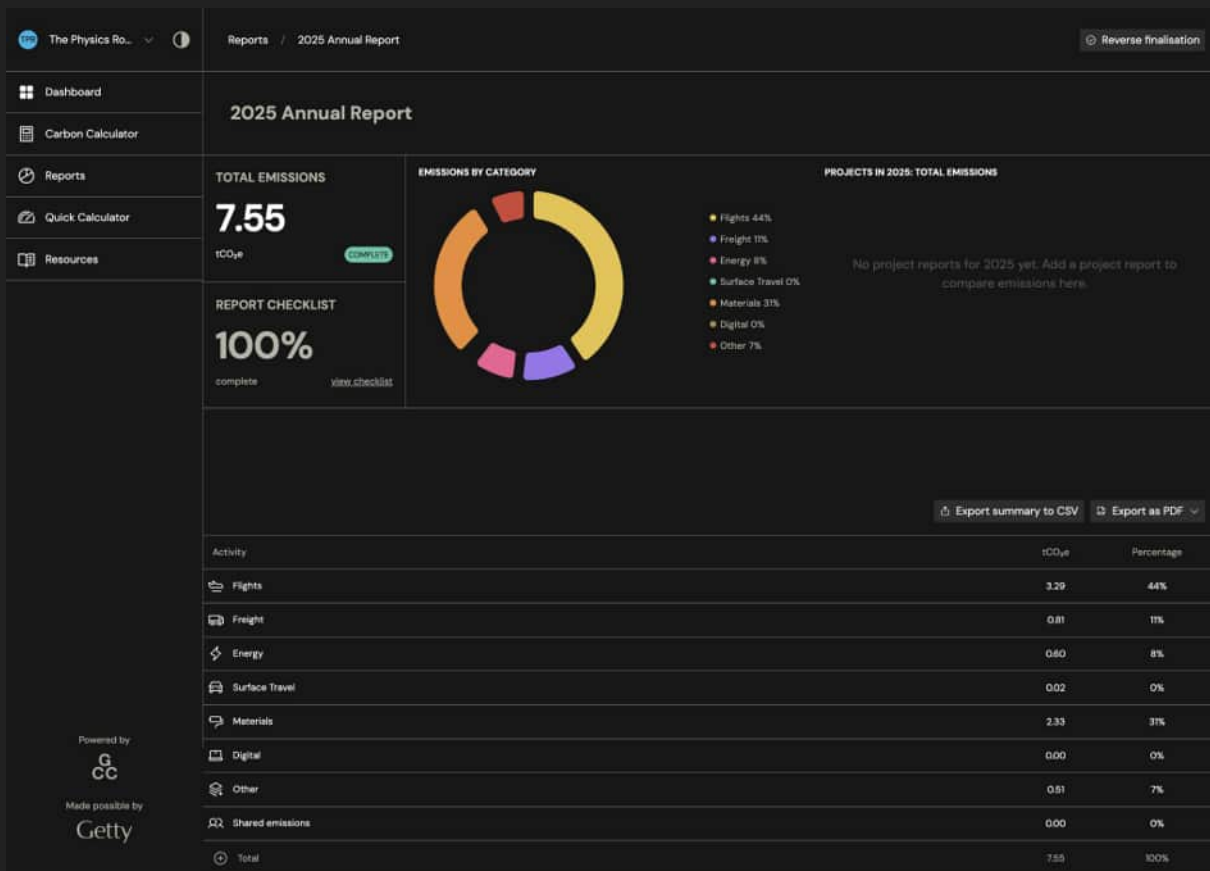
- Really short turnaround
- Staff sickness during install

What would you do differently? How could it be improved?

- Have more money to commission one more public programme to locate the work in Te Wai Pounamu

What was the impact on Te Tai Ao?

- Great that this is the second showing of an exciting work, so no resources were used in producing the work
- Painted the gallery black, but with eco paint low VOC
- Borrowed curtains, and benches
- Shared resources borrowed speakers
- Building of screen was main resource, including MDF, and timber, which was taken to Eco Drop.



Carbon Calculator
<https://galleryclimatecoalition.org/>

Public Accountability

James discussed the importance of annual environmental reporting. Publishing emissions data creates transparency and accountability while enabling organisations to monitor progress over time.

He also acknowledged the limitations of current measurement tools. Some environmental impacts, particularly digital infrastructure and cloud storage, remain difficult to quantify accurately.

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GCC

Best Practice Guidelines

Shopping

Having a plan for the purchase of materials and the way they are stored.

Travel

Having a plan for the way you travel to work and the way you travel to the gallery.

Energy

Having a plan for the way you use energy in your studio and the way you use energy in the gallery.

Artist Toolkit

Having a plan for the way you use your toolkit in your studio and the way you use your toolkit in the gallery.

Art Fairs Toolkit

Having a plan for the way you use your toolkit in your studio and the way you use your toolkit in the gallery.

Decarbonisation

Having a plan for the way you use your toolkit in your studio and the way you use your toolkit in the gallery.

Climate Justice

Having a plan for the way you use your toolkit in your studio and the way you use your toolkit in the gallery.

Green Teams

Having a plan for the way you use your toolkit in your studio and the way you use your toolkit in the gallery.

Capital Projects

Having a plan for the way you use your toolkit in your studio and the way you use your toolkit in the gallery.

Waste

Having a plan for the way you use your toolkit in your studio and the way you use your toolkit in the gallery.

Packaging

Having a plan for the way you use your toolkit in your studio and the way you use your toolkit in the gallery.

Climate Control

Having a plan for the way you use your toolkit in your studio and the way you use your toolkit in the gallery.

Digital

Having a plan for the way you use your toolkit in your studio and the way you use your toolkit in the gallery.

Strategic Climate

Having a plan for the way you use your toolkit in your studio and the way you use your toolkit in the gallery.

NFTs

Having a plan for the way you use your toolkit in your studio and the way you use your toolkit in the gallery.

Finance

Having a plan for the way you use your toolkit in your studio and the way you use your toolkit in the gallery.

Effective Actions

Having a plan for the way you use your toolkit in your studio and the way you use your toolkit in the gallery.

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GCC Artist Toolkit

THE 10 SECTIONS

You can explore the sections in numerical order or skip between the sections that are most relevant to you using the navigation bar.

1	Advocacy	
2	Activism	
3	Research and Development	
4	Commissioning	
5	Materials	
6	Production	
7	Shipping and Packaging	
8	Travel	
9	Exhibition-making and display	
10	Acquisition, sales and aftercare	

TOOLS

In each section you'll find some or all of the following tools.

Effective actions

Artist Toolkit
<https://galleryclimatecoalition.org/>

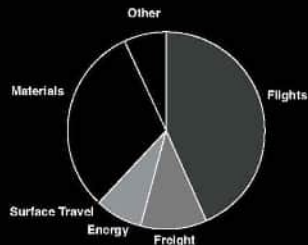
Toward a sustainable future in 2030

Our vision

We are proud to now follow our *Environmental Sustainability Policy & Implementation Plan* through to 2030, which outlines monitoring our carbon emissions and an active decarbonisation plan to monitor and offset over the coming years.

This sustainability policy affirms our responsibility to reduce environmental harm, support climate justice, and, importantly, honouring the kaitiakiāra, the sovereignty of Māori and Te Tai Ao, especially in the rohe of Ōtautahi and Te Waipounamu. Our stewardship is upheld through our value of manaakitanga, upholding a culture of care for our artists and visitors, which extends to caring for the environment we inhabit.

A year in review 7.55 tCO₂e



44% Flights
11% Freight
8% Energy
0% Surface Travel
31% Materials use
0% Digital
7% Other

We measure of carbon emissions with the Gallery Climate Coalition Carbon Calculator. Over the next 4-years we will aim to offset our emissions with local carbon credits and reduce our impact. *Surface Travel measured 0.02 tCO₂e and Digital emissions were negligible as a statistic shown as 0%.



Image: Kai Valu stands at Sifton House as part of a rehearsal for Nosamako Roto. 2025. Photo by Hōhua Kureno

Final Reflections

The workshop concluded with a discussion about the realities of sustainability work in Aotearoa. Participants noted challenges including:

- Geographic isolation.
 - Dependence on air travel.
 - Small organisational budgets.
 - Limited local economies of scale.
- Tensions between artistic ambition and environmental responsibility.