

THE SUPPORTING ACT

By Sophia Smolenski

Offering It Up toys with the language of museums. Being a mount-maker by profession, I had been thinking about this project for a while, but it wasn't until 2020 that I decided to try for funding from Creative New Zealand to make it happen.

Working as a museum technician is largely about building and cultivating relationships with people as well as objects. Another defining part of mount-making is that it is always in response to something else; and from the beginning, I knew I wanted to explore a reversal of this. I invited twenty-two other artists from across Aotearoa to each make a work 'in response to' one of these mounts.

Offering It Up has been staged at Te Pātaka Toi Adam Art Gallery and at Te Whare o Rehua Sarjeant Gallery. Documentation of the project can be found on Instagram, @offering_it_up.

Sophia Smolenski, *Offering It Up*. Installation view, Te Whare o Rehua Sarjeant Gallery, 2025





Chloe Rose Taylor
Alley-Oop, 2022

Rubber, rabbit fur, glue, silver, patina, stainless steel

I'm not going to lie. When Chloe gave me the title of this work I had to look up what alley-oop meant. This is what the online dictionary said: "Noun. Basketball. A high pass caught by a leaping teammate who tries to dunk the ball before landing." Example sentence: "She could catch alley-oops all day."

Over the course of this project, Chloe moved across the world to various places. Dashing across the global court, you could say. She is the only person I couldn't visit in person, so we conducted our chats over Zoom and I posted her a mount.

I have always loved how Chloe finds materials like a hunter and gatherer, saving them for the right work. Each material has been carefully chosen with her keen eye and stashed away for the appropriate moment. If I remember correctly, Chloe may have 'borrowed' this basketball chew toy from a dog in Hong Kong. Then I think we alley-ooped in both directions.

Moniek Schrijer
A Mirror, An Axe, A Shell, 2022

Copper, paint, cubic zirconias, sterling silver

When I first spoke to Moniek about mount-making, I explained that a mount is often a stand-in for our hands. When something is created for display, it sits on a surface. But when something is meant to be held, used and wielded, a mount is intended to hold it in view.

Moniek has created this piece by morphing the silhouettes of three things that would usually be held in your hands: an axe, a mirror and a conch shell. I like the idea of Moniek's work being the answer to the hypothetical question: "What three tools would you take with you into an unknown world?" In this world, the axe could help you be resourceful and protect yourself against the unknown. The mirror could remind you to self-reflect once in a while, and harness or wield light. The conch shell could help you be a better listener, or maybe help summon your mates.





Emily Hartley-Skudder
Birth of Venus, 2022

Oil on board, plastic, electric motor

Spinning slowly in front of a tiny mirror like a dancer in a music box, this mount has a touch of *The Red Shoes* about her in the way that she also can't stop dancing. Except the funny thing is, on occasion, the motor does stop (it's probably tired after being on display for a while), and the wee mount gets a rest. On those occasions, you will find her stuck looking in the mirror.

The mirror, the exhausting expectation of performance, the scale, the pace with which it moves, the strong nod to *The Birth of Venus* — to me, this work reads as a space rather than an object. By creating a stage for the mount, the context of performance has been established for us to view the mount dancing, behind the glass of the vitrine. Emily has made a long-spanning exploration of gendered spaces, and here she has managed to make us active participants in this performance.

Simon Attwooll
Very Touching, 2022

Screen Print on found Perspex

I imagine Simon was scratching his head when he started to take a closer look at the mount he chose. It's actually a bit of a puzzle. I failed good with this mount. I made a really basic mistake and put too much heat into the join, and it flopped and twisted at the stem. I decided to keep it that way, which meant that the original object didn't fit into it. In fact, it was hard to imagine what it could hold at all.

Simon has screen-printed his fingerprint onto one face of this acrylic ribbon. I think it is important to note that Simon has also spent many years as a gallery and museum technician. After being in spaces where we are constantly trying to protect things from our own grubby mitts, and spending hours cleaning acrylic, there is something tongue-in-cheek about screen-printing a fingerprint onto a material like this. A nod to the metaphorical and literal fingerprints we leave, as technicians, despite our best efforts to hide our tracks.



Caitlin Devoy
Wrecked, 2022

Silicone

This really is the work that everyone wants to touch, but if they did, they would probably squirm on the spot, mildly unnerved by the bodily nature of it.

I remember seeing Caitlin's works in 2019, recorders cast in silicone and displayed on the wall on exquisitely crafted acrylic mounts. The thing that truly struck me about the mounts she had made was that they weren't just there to hold the cast objects on the wall, they activated the work. Caitlin knows exactly where to hold something in a way that amplifies the material and exaggerates the suggestion it makes.

Caitlin has cast in silicone a Trojan branded crowbar, typically rugged and rigid, ready to wreck and dismantle — and if you look closely, you will see Band-Aids patching its otherwise invisible wounds. The mount is valiantly supporting this wrecked guy, like it has just collapsed into the mount's arms, weak and flaccid.

I remember Caitlin and I talking about the many other supporting roles that are played out between people: two dance partners, romantic relationships and work dynamics. All in all, this work is a material piss-take of stereotypical gendered power dynamics ■

