

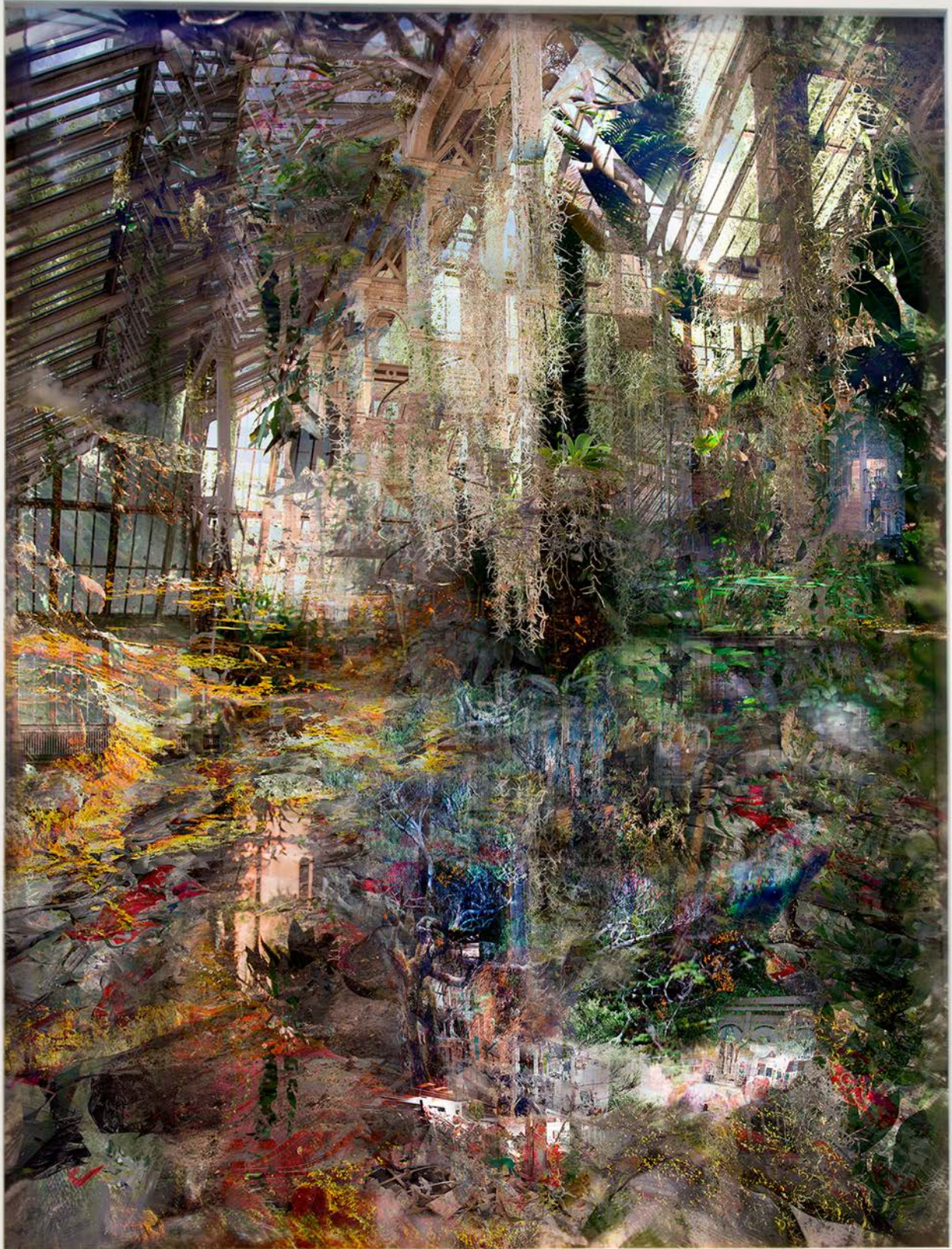
Ink must be one of the least onomatopoeic words in the English language. Short, hard-edged, guttural (and a sad victim of the stunted vowels of the Kiwi accent), it fails miserably to reflect the thing that it names. Ink the substance is liquid, flowing, viscous, mutable, historical, infinite.

This chasm that exists between the substance and its given name has a parallel with Ink, the group show organised by Prue MacDougall at Auckland's Railway Street Studios. Perfunctory and literal, the exhibition's title fails to reflect the vitality and range of the prints on the wall at the gallery.

There are five artists showing as part of Ink, and if MacDougall chose them because their art practice intrigued her, collectively they make up a remarkably balanced exhibition.



Above: INK at Railway St Studios LtoR: Deborah Crowe, Christine Wylie, Prue MacDougall, LW (Steve Lovett and Amanda Wright)
Below: Deborah Crowe, Left: *Blush*, Right: *Promise* 670x 500mm ea, Limited edition archival pigment print on Ilford fine art paper.



Deborah Crowe, *An Other World: Slip*, 1120 x 860mm, Limited edition archival pigment print on Ilford fine art paper

Deborah Crowe has made three works that adopt a similar format – the bottom half is what looks like a toxic swamp; the top, an explosion of flora. In a pre-election time of environmental pronouncements, Crowe casts doubt on what we know ought to be true, seeming to imply that plant life can feed off a toxic swamp; she positions the archetypal bloom as a parasitic beauty, one that perhaps cannot be trusted. *An Other World: Slip*, is an all-over exploration of fecundity fuelled by architectural ruins, a Mediterranean Gormenghast that hovers between dream and nightmare, depending on where and for how long you look.



Four works by Carole Shephard make up the rest of the Dionysian part of the equation of Ink. They are perfect examples of balance in abstract composition – form, colour and an astute use of both negative space and the impact of intersection add up to an exquisite harmony. The shapes appear randomly placed, yet connected, logically, to form a complete unit. Hints of figuration invade some parts of each work; like memory, the mix of haze and clarity seduces. These are mimetic artworks, displaying thought and emotion.

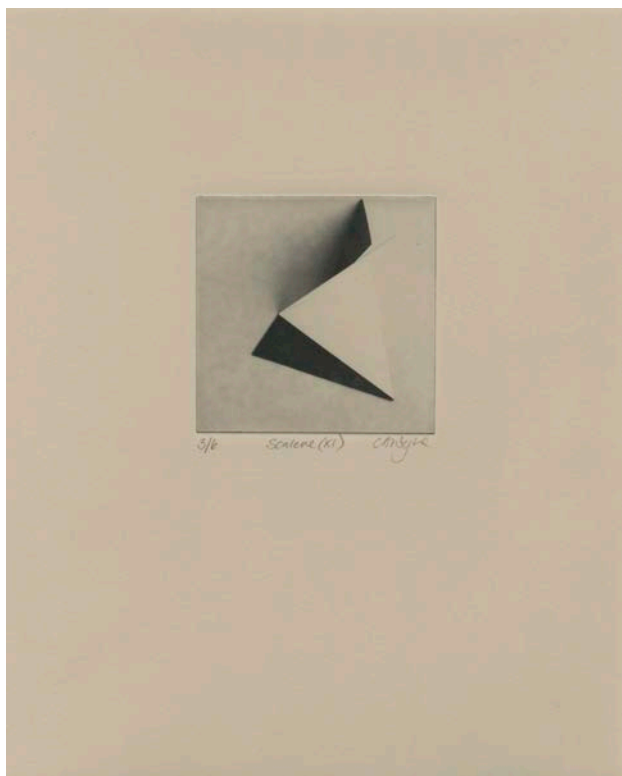
Christine Wylie spearheads the Apollonian half of Ink, with interlocking triangles producing a formal investigation into the arrangement of monochromatic space. These are photogravure prints and the effect is a remarkable rendering of dark and light, and all the shades of shadow in between. The areas of dark and light appear solid; moreover the grain of the paper they are printed on presents them as textural as well, confounding our expectations of what is matter and what is merely perceived. Wylie's processes seem to define her prints, and at the same time disappear into them; they become incidents in the manipulation of geometry in light.

Steve Lovett and Amanda Wright have also produced riffs on a theme – here it is the production of moiré patterns within a tondo form. In Pursuit of Errors is the result of experiments into the impact of changes to the production process – each print is unknown until it is complete. The almost-repeating patterns and the eye-disturbing visual noise seem to conceal a soft, fallible side to the systematic means of production; the round shape of each print introduces a foil to the rigour of the straight lines it encloses, and each experiment ultimately appears to be as organic as the error that produced it.

Spanning the dichotomies within the show she has curated Prue MacDougall supplies the glue that holds Ink together. The restraint of her self-portraits is festooned with the foliage and flora from an English country garden, her face almost succumbing to the camouflage of composed wilderness – the sepia tones make these prints feel as if your family's long-lost photo album has been used to dry and press flowers. Also on show are her prints on bird feathers, so delicate that they should be impossible, wisely mounted behind glass. It is tempting to brush the forefinger across the plumage, disturbing the delicacy of the print along with the flawlessness of the feather, thus bringing the exertion of human expression and the perfection of nature crumbling down in a heap, so that we can begin all over again.

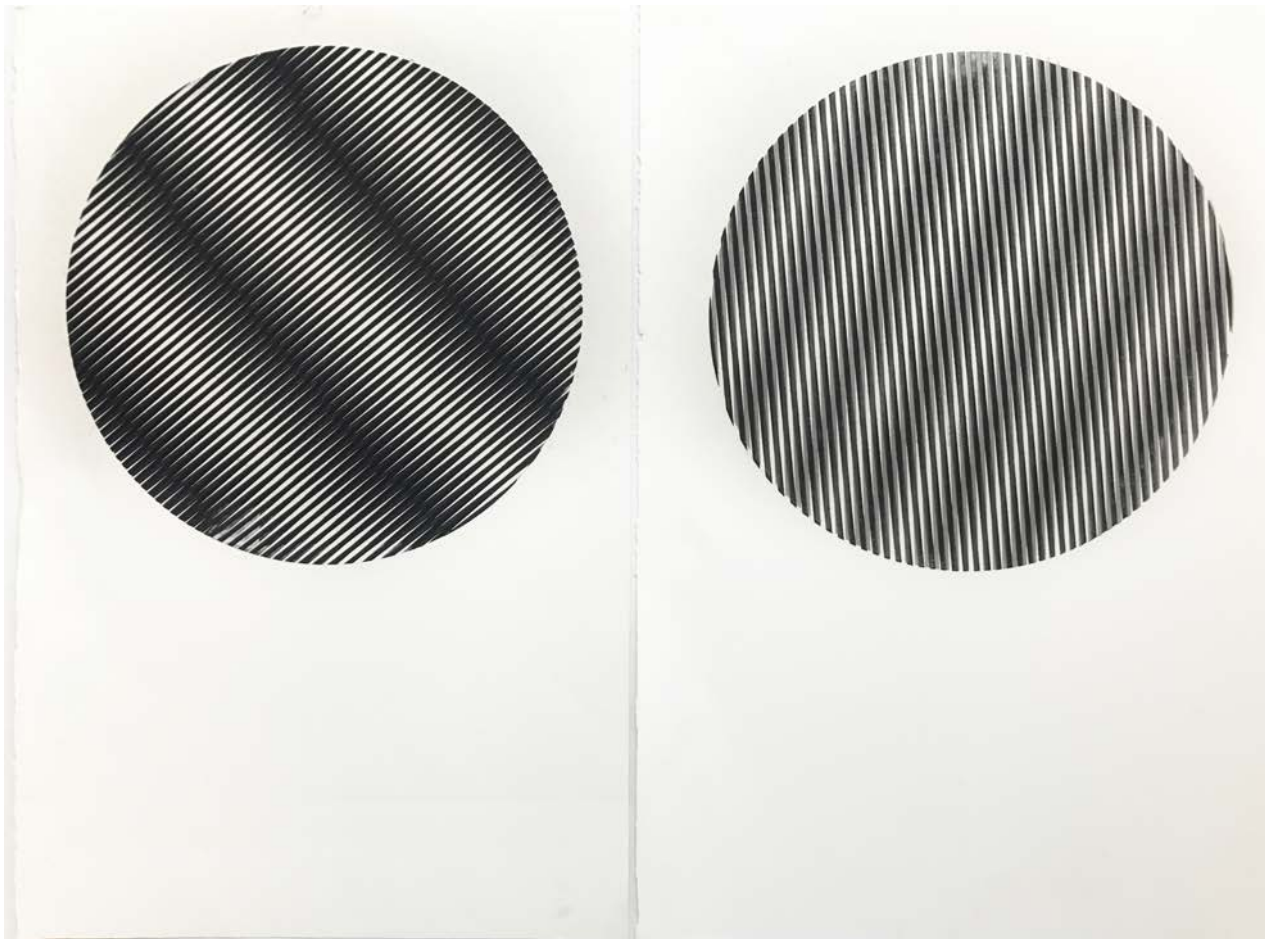
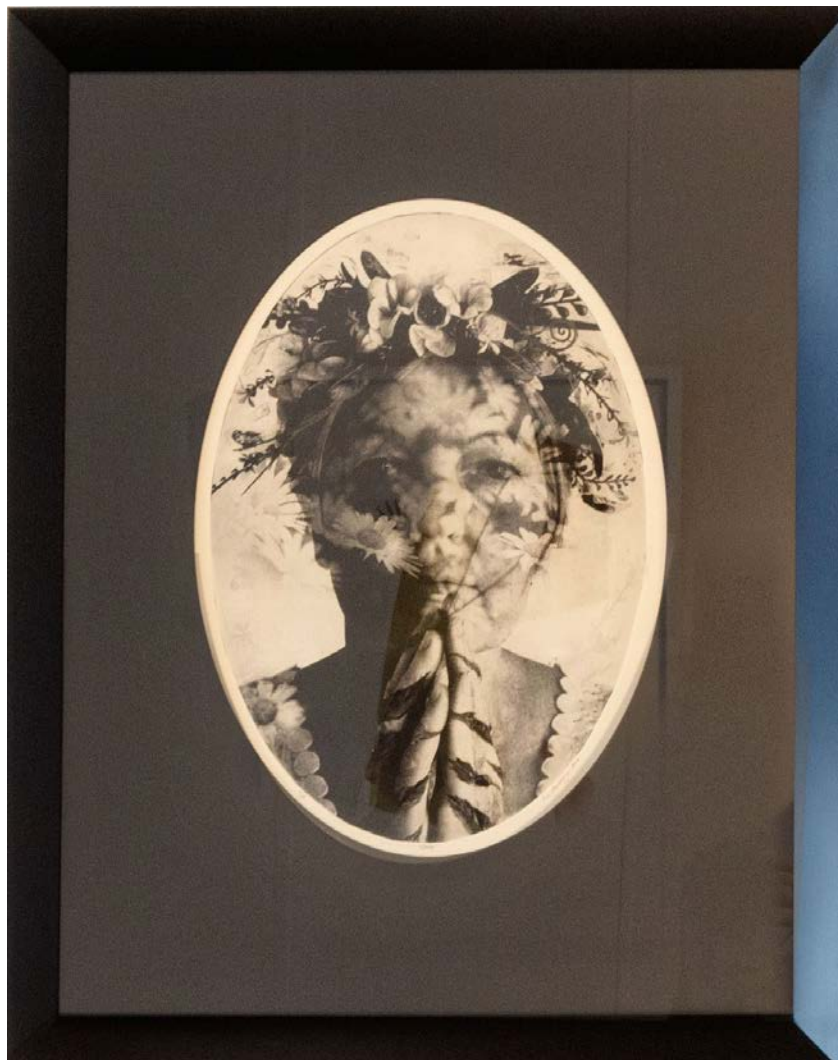
Don Abbott, 2017.

Don Abbott is an Auckland-based writer and is deputy editor of Art New Zealand. He is the author of *Vivid: The Paul Hartigan Story* (2015) and *Elizabeth Rees: I Paint* (2017).



Above: Carole Shephard, *Like a Thief in the Night, The Fall From Grace*, 800 x 600mm, dry point & chine colle.

Below: Christine Wylie, *Scalene XI*, 100x100mm, Limited edition photogravure (solarplate) etching printed on Somerset Velvet Grey.



Above: Prue MacDougall, *Daisy*, 640 x 460mm, hand printed limited edition intaglio polymer etching.
Below: LW (Steve Lovett and Amanda Wright), *In Pursuit of Errors*, 560 x 350mm ea, Hand printed laser cut wood blocks.