



Ruth Cleland Ground

10 November – 17 December 2022
Sumer, Tauranga

Sumer is pleased to present *Ground*, an exhibition of recent work by Tāmaki Makaurau-based painter, Ruth Cleland. This is the artist's first exhibition at the gallery.

Ruth Cleland's painting practice is one that merges hyperrealism with the abstract. Her works often depict common workaday surfaces—e.g. bitumen, concrete, vinyl, carpet. All decidedly ordinary things which seldom hold our attention for any more than an instant. And so it seems almost antithetical for such things to hold centre stage in an artist's work; being so perfunctory, so decidedly utilitarian, lacking in any apparent glamour or class. And yet here they are, as paintings, and there is something altogether surprising and illuminating because of this. Through their careful rendering, these modest (no)things attain a sense of spectacle and beauty, not only in their appearance but also in their objecthood, in the evidence of the artist's toil, her investment of energy and time.

Others have previously written that she focuses on these everyday things to encourage us to slow down, to notice the small things within our daily lives. While this may well be so, and is certainly a virtuous sentiment, this alone does not explain why they hold particular interest or significance as paintings.

The generic surfaces she draws upon all pertain to non-place—i.e. interstices, liminal spaces such as airports, shopping malls and roadways. As materials they are unaesthetic, not intended to be a subject, not considered as a thing for any reason other than their material properties and their ability to perform a functional task. This is significant for two reasons. The first is *time*. As constituents of such non-place, they hardly register time at all. Yet the artist has imbued them with time through her rendering of them; slowed them right down to a near standstill, making them crystalline. Her work is as much about representing the time as it is about the thing itself. Time, instantiated in this moment depicted within the image and of the painting in itself, encompasses its making, its life as a thing sitting on a wall, and the time that one takes in observing it. Time in painting here becomes evidently non-linear and labyrinthine.

The second reason these materials hold specific interest is *value*, and further to this status and hierarchy. In Cleland's work we see her treating these industrial materials less as her subject but as objects in themselves. They are not the subjects in a conventional sense, for there is no scene to speak of, they are divorced from their surrounding information, and context. And furthermore, they do not represent space with any sense of perspectival depth but rather they show flat surfaces, substrates. When we couple this with the knowledge that they are, in fact, paintings, they become understood less as representations but as transmutations. Materials such as concrete or oil on bitumen become latex paint and graphite over linen or cotton rag, or visa-versa. And adding to this that these objects are literally elevated in their position, as surfaces transposed from the horizontal to vertical. This ringing true with a well-trod artistic trope of material alchemy; that art is analogous to *chrysopoieia*: the process of making gold through the transmutation of base metals such as lead. Elevating the everyday, the nondescript to the monumental. There is a desire to upend hierarchies, possibly to challenge the status anxiety which afflicts society with its conspicuous consumption; its insatiable hunger for spectacle and meaning, even where there is ostensibly none.

Ruth Cleland (born 1976, Kirikiriroa Hamilton) currently lives and works in Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland. She graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts in 1998 and a Master of Fine Arts (with distinction) in 2002 from the Dunedin School of Art, specialising in printmaking. Cleland has exhibited nationally and internationally in private galleries as well as public art institutions and has won several awards, including the Park Lane Wallace Trust Development Award (2008) and the NZ Painting and Printmaking Award (2003).

[Download artist's CV](#)



Ruth Cleland
Oil Slick 3, 2022
Acrylic on board
38.7 x 29.2 cm
15 1/4 x 11 1/2 in
(RC-000008)



Ruth Cleland
Oil Slick with Grid 2, 2020
Acrylic on Bristol board in artist's frame
22 x 31 cm artwork; 36.5 x 44.8 cm framed
(RC-000005)



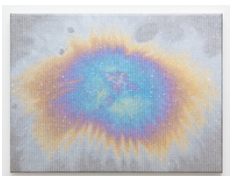
Ruth Cleland
Oil Slick with Grid, 2020
Acrylic on bristol board in artists frame
38.3 x 28.5 cm artwork; 55.7 x 42.5 cm framed
(RC-000001)



Ruth Cleland
Oil Slick with Grid 3, 2020
Acrylic on Bristol board in artist's frame
31 x 22 cm artwork; 44.7 x 36.2 cm framed
(RC-000004)



Ruth Cleland
Oil Slick with Grid 5, 2021
Acrylic on linen
60 x 45 cm
23 1/2 x 17 3/4 in
(RC-000009)



Ruth Cleland
Oil Slick with Grid 6, 2022
Acrylic on linen
45 x 60 cm
17 3/4 x 23 1/2 in
(RC-000012)



Ruth Cleland
Oil Slick 2, 2021
Acrylic on board
38.7 x 29.2 cm
15 1/4 x 11 1/2 in
(RC-000010)



Ruth Cleland
Grid 43, 2021
Acrylic on aluminium
69.5 x 52 cm
27 3/8 x 20 1/2 in
(RC-000002)

Back Gallery



Ruth Cleland
Grid 42, 2021
Acrylic on board
38.5 x 29 cm
15 x 11 1/2 in
(RC-000015)



Ruth Cleland
Concrete, 2020
Graphite and acrylic on Bristol board
38.3 x 28.5 cm image
55.7 x 42.5 cm framed
(RC-000013)



Ruth Cleland
Concrete 2, 2020
Graphite and acrylic on Bristol board
57.5 x 43 cm image
74 x 59 cm framed
(RC-000014)