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Waipapa Taumata Rau
University of Auckland

UniNews

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For the fortnightly Whaimōhio The Loop newsletter, email: staff-comms@auckland.ac.nz.
Deadlines are on the intranet under News, Events and Notices, The Loop.

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IN THE NEWS

A selection of University staff and students who provided expert commentary in the media recently. Let us know! Email: uninews@auckland.ac.nz.

Claire Reid

Screen use and kids' brains

PhD student Claire Reid (School of Psychology) told RNZ that children's brains are changing because of screen use. She pulled together research from around the world showing that 81 percent of 58 studies showed at least one negative link between screen use and the brain's executive function, or management system.

tinyurl.com/reid-rnz-screens

Job cuts stalling pathways

Dean of Engineering and Design Dr Richard Clarke told RNZ's *Morning Report* that engineering job shortages are making it harder for students to secure the 800 hours of practical experience they need to graduate, with at least half of those hours required to be in engineering roles.

tinyurl.com/clarke-rnz-job-shortages

Richard Clarke

Alison Talmage

The brain-healing power of song

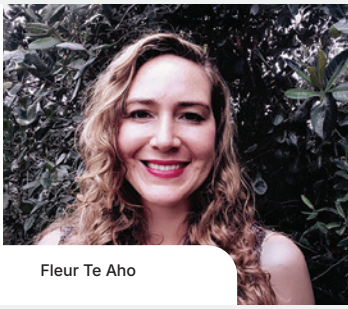
Music therapist and recent PhD graduate Dr Alison Talmage told RNZ's *Nine to Noon* how choirs could help people with brain conditions, such as Parkinson's disease and dementia. She has created a handbook for people who want to launch their own therapeutic choirs.

tinyurl.com/talmage-rnz-choirs

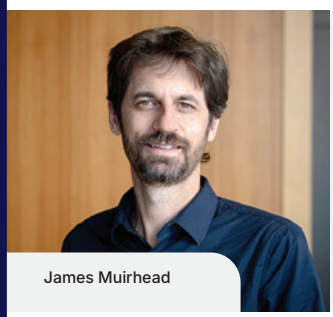
Approaches to prison law

Auckland Law School's Dr Fleur Te Aho (Ngāti Mutunga) and co-authors have secured $153,000 from the Michael and Suzanne Borrin Foundation to write a book on prison law. She told *Waatea News* a key focus is exploring how tikanga Māori principles can help reshape approaches to prison law and prisoner treatment.

tinyurl.com/te-aho-waatea-prison-law



Fleur Te Aho



James Muirhead

Be alert, not alarmed

Geologist Dr James Muirhead (School of Environment) told *The Detail* podcast that a faultline along the south side of Auckland's Hunua Ranges is active and could trigger a 6.8 magnitude earthquake. However, earthquake risks in the region remain relatively low compared to other parts of New Zealand.

tinyurl.com/muirhead-the-detail-faultline

Addressing AI in advertising

Katherine Jensen, a professional teaching fellow in marketing, told RNZ there's increasing backlash around AI use in advertising. "There's a real undercurrent of dislike for AI content. I appreciate that in some contexts it's necessary, but I think there's absolutely still a place for quality, original, human-generated content."

tinyurl.com/jensen-rnz-ai-advertising

Katherine Jensen

Aligning stars: Matariki and maramataka

As we mark Matariki this month, maramataka practitioner and researcher Ayla Hoeta advocates for using the holiday to look at the wider system in which the celebration sits.

Photo: Simon Young

Ayla Hoeta says maramataka is a way of understanding the sacredness of time.

"We're in the phase of Whiro," says Ayla Hoeta (Waikato), sitting in the University's Tai Tonga Campus in Manukau.

It's a quiet morning, with students moving softly through the space, and for Ayla the stillness is a tohu – a sign of guidance.

Whiro is the dark phase of the maramataka, the Māori lunar calendar, and marks the beginning of a new moon cycle. It is often associated with darkness, says Ayla, which should not be mistaken for negativity.

"Whiro is a time for rangahau [research], wānanga [meaningful discussions], grief and reflection," she says.

Ayla is a maramataka practitioner, lecturer and first-year doctoral candidate in the Faculty of Engineering and Design. Her work helps to connect people with the rhythms of the moon, stars, tides and body, through design and mātauranga Māori.

"Some of those observations include planting, harvesting, training, rest, focusing on well-being and, for me, community design," she says.

Maramataka has taken Ayla, who is from South Auckland, around the world, including to Antarctica. There she worked on a project exploring how mātauranga Māori could sit alongside Antarctic science and climate research.

She has met Indigenous women revitalising their lunar knowledge around the motu and in Hawai'i, Ra'iātea and Canada. A common theme, she says, is the need for practical tools that help Indigenous communities understand ancestral knowledge.

One project that has recently kept her closer to home is the installation of a playground alongside the Puhinui stream in Manukau. Ayla has helped design the playground to reflect maramataka principles.

"The playground does two things: it immerses tamariki in maramataka knowledge, normalising it in their everyday play life, and it restores life to the area, which was previously polluted," she says.

"It's playful and it's helping restore the mauri of the whenua, bringing new life to the place while revealing ancestral, tupuna knowledge that has long been hidden."

Maramataka is often described as a calendar, but Ayla says it is a way of understanding the sacredness of wā (time) through te ao Māori.

"Our tūpuna didn't say 'Wednesday'; they would say āpōpō [tomorrow, or sometime in future], or at the Rākaunui [full moon], or we're preparing now to garden in the Tangaroa phase. It was their version of time."

That way of seeing time sits at the heart of how Ayla understands Matariki, which she says is not separate from the maramataka but belongs within the same whānau – te whānau marama, or the family of light.

"Matariki is a key tohu of our maramataka," she says. "It gets a lot of recognition because it's our main celebratory event, and is embedded in policy."

Across different iwi and rohe, other stars also carry significance. Ayla says Puanga (Rigel) is recognised in places including Waikato and Te Tai Tokerau, where it indicates the start of the year. In other places, Rehua (Antares) may be observed as the indicator of the new year.

The Matariki public holiday falls on a different date each year and is timed to align as closely as possible with the rising of Matariki and the Tangaroa phase of the maramataka, a period associated with abundance, flow and flourishing.

Ayla began learning about maramataka while gardening with her grandmothers. Watching cycles of planting, growth, harvest, rest and return gave her lived experience of the maramataka, she says, before she learned the language around it.

Her understanding later grew by learning alongside maramataka expert Rereata Mākiha, as well as through her own writing, gardening, exercising and tracking of tohu.

That practice eventually led her to contribute to the development of Ao Maarama, an interactive app designed by Māori health organisation Te Rau Ora.

The app uses the maramataka and Māori health frameworks Te Whare Tapa Whā and Mauri Ora Tai Pari to help users build awareness, knowledge and connection with the rhythms of well-being.

As Matariki rises again, Ayla says she is keen to explore more opportunities to make such knowledge accessible for different audiences, and highlight that the annual Matariki observance is one part of a much wider system of knowledge.

"Matariki invites us to look up; maramataka asks us to look around and within," she says.

Te Rina Ruka-Triponel

Health researchers gain $16m

Research projects to improve outcomes for preterm babies and treat cataracts are among those recently supported by the 2026 Health Research Council funding round.

Thirteen University research projects have been funded to a total of $16 million.

Among them is a project led by Professor Katie Groom of the Liggins Institute to address outcomes of preterm birth. It is the leading cause of death in tamariki aged under five, and preterm birth survivors often face lifelong health challenges.

The project involves New Zealand researchers, in collaboration with Australian partners, developing the first-ever perinatal adaptive trial platform – PLATIPUS (Platform for Adaptive Trials in Perinatal Units). PLATIPUS and its first pregnancy trial, PROMOAT, will identify the best antibiotic treatment for people with preterm rupture of membranes, with the aim of improving lifelong outcomes for babies.

Another project, led by Associate Professor Julie Lim in the Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences, aims to address cataracts, which are becoming increasingly common in our ageing population.

Professor Katie Groom

While oxidative damage is well established as a key contributor to cataract formation, antioxidant-based therapies have so far proven ineffective in slowing the development of cataracts, due to inadequate delivery to the lens. The project harnesses the lens microcirculation system to enhance water transport and improve antioxidant delivery to the lens, potentially reducing reliance on surgery and healthcare costs.

Interim Vice-Chancellor Professor Frank Bloomfield says the research funded demonstrates "the highly innovative approach taken by our researchers, with each project having a clear goal for the potential impact on the health and lives of New Zealanders."

Full story: auckland.ac.nz/2026-hrc

Photo: Richard Ng

The University's 2026 Distinguished Alumni were sports administrator Raelene Castle, artist Reuben Paterson, Justice Dame Ellen France and physicist John Dudley. (Absent: Young Alumnus Moses Mackay)

Nominate a Distinguished Alumni

Do you know a University of Auckland graduate who has made a remarkable contribution to their profession, community or the wider world?

Nominations are being sought for the 2027 Distinguished Alumni Awards, which are presented annually by the University of Auckland and the University of Auckland Society. Up to five outstanding achievers are recognised in the awards, including a Young Alumnus or Alumna of the Year, who is aged under 35.

Nominees can excel in any field, from social and cultural impact to sports, environment and economics.

Nominate online: auckland.ac.nz/daa-nominations

A thesis in three minutes

The clock is ticking for competitors in the flagship event of the doctoral calendar, the Three Minute Thesis (3MT) final, which will be held on 17 July.

The annual competition involves top doctoral candidates explaining their research in less than three minutes and supported by a single, static slide.

Winners and runners-up of 3MT competition heats held in the faculties will compete in the final; the overall final winner will then represent the University at international 3MT competitions.

Vickie Mingxia Ma was recently among the four students competing in the Business School 3MT heat. She will now represent the school in the final, talking about her research into whether two devices are better than one.

She explains that the inspiration for her PhD came during a family holiday to Shanghai Disneyland in 2022, when she and her daughter noticed a Wi-Fi-connected smart mirror in their hotel room.

"We realised we could buy Disneyland tickets using the mirror, but when it came to the payment stage, I switched to my smartphone," she says.

"It made me question people's device use and preferences: are two devices better than one?"

Vickie says preparing for the heats forced her to think carefully about her audience and the practical relevance of her work.

"A recent survey found 97 percent of US consumers switch devices when shopping online. This is a really common thing."

Using a large US dataset, she found smartphone-to-laptop switching was more common than laptop-to-desktop combinations.

Full story: auckland.ac.nz/3mt-business-2026

To book free tickets to the final visit: auckland.ac.nz/3mt

Photo: Lina Li

(Left to right) Business School 3MT heat winner Vickie Mingxia Ma (marketing), with fellow competitors Hanyi Xu (accounting), Kiki Zhang (property) and Liz Yingxue Zhao (marketing).

Photo: Chris Loufte

Beatrice Faumuinā wants Kupe scholars to gain the confidence to lead globally.

Beatrice Faumuinā to lead scholarship programme

Olympian and former diplomat Beatrice Faumuinā is the new director of the University's Kupe Leadership Scholarship.

Beatrice will lead the annual programme, which is dedicated to developing exceptional leaders and combines financial support with intensive leadership coaching.

As the recipient of several scholarships throughout her life, Beatrice knows first-hand the difference a scholarship can make. She says helping future leaders broaden their horizons was an aspect of the role that particularly appealed to her.

"Kupe offers not just a scholarship, but also a way of defining what Aotearoa's leadership will look like moving forward," she says.

"That's exciting to take on as a mission, because when we talk about Aotearoa, we talk about a country that's multi-ethnic and multi-generational, and here's a programme that aims to do the same, reflecting where we are now, while also looking to the future."

Hosted by the Business School, the multidisciplinary programme pairs scholars with a mentor. It also gives them access to learning experiences with political, business and community leaders.

After completing the programme, they join the Kupe alumni network of leaders creating local and global impact.

Beatrice, who was named a Companion of the New Zealand Order of Merit in the 2026 King's Birthday Honours, says she hopes Kupe scholars leave the programme with the confidence to lead globally "while staying grounded in who they are".

2027 Kupe Leadership Scholarship applications close at midday on 20 August 2026.

More information: auckland.ac.nz/kupe

Sophie Boladeras

Space minister at mission control

Space Minister Hon Chris Penk touched down at Te Pūnaha Ātea Space Institute on 11 June to announce the round one and two recipients of the inaugural Kiwi Space Activator Programme.

The University has been awarded $300,000 for its Rakiraki CubeSat mission – a small satellite project developing a new reference point for space-tracking networks.

The project is led by Associate Professor Nicholas Rattenbury and research fellow Dr Joseph Ashby from the Department of Physics, with AUT's Professor John Cater. Operational partner Space Operations New Zealand completes the team.

The Kiwi Space Activator pilot programme is a first step towards achieving the New Zealand Space and Advanced Aviation Strategy 2024–2030 objective of developing New Zealand's sovereign space capability.

The minister's announcement from the Space Institute's Mission Operations Control Centre (MOCC) was attended by Interim Vice-Chancellor Professor Frank Bloomfield; Dean of Engineering and Design, Dr Richard Clarke; and director of Te Pūnaha Ātea Space Institute, Professor Guglielmo Aglietti. Recipients of rounds one and two of the programme also attended.

Among them was senior research fellow Dr Ben Taylor, who is mission lead for the TPA-2 project, which received $283,827 in the programme's round one.

Ben led the minister on a tour of the institute, including the MOCC and the Fabrication Assembly Facility (Cleanroom). During his visit, the minister was able to get a hands-on look at the institute's satellite technologies and gain a sense of its industry-focused research and spin-out company activity.

Full story: auckland.ac.nz/penk-tpa-visit

Photo: Simon Young

Space Minister Hon Chris Penk is presented with a framed photo captured by the Space Institute's TPA-1 satellite by Dr Ben Taylor.

Gehan Gunasekara

Matters of privacy

Photo: Chris Loufte

Privacy was a nascent area of the law when the commercial law professor first began his research in the field; now it's central to how we negotiate our digital world.

When Gehan Gunasekara and his family left Sri Lanka in 1974 with three pounds sterling, there was no looking back.

The only way was forward, to a land he had pored over in glossy tourism brochures; where ice creams were huge, and rugby was even bigger.

So big, in fact, that seven years later, the sport bitterly divided the nation. At the time of the 1981 Springbok Tour, Gehan was a student at Whanganui Collegiate School, and when the school gave students an August afternoon off to watch the South African rugby team play at Spriggens Park, he elected to join an anti-tour march instead.

That initial activism subsequently led him to take part in demonstrations supporting nuclear-free New Zealand and consider studying law.

"I was proud of the fact that I stood up for what I believed. I saw that if you wanted something, you had to fight and advocate for it," says Gehan.

That sentiment hasn't waned. Today, the Business School professor's research focuses on approaches to protecting personal information and whether they remain fit for purpose in a world where people have little bargaining power against large corporations. It provides an opportunity to challenge the status quo and advocate for change, he says – something that first drew him to law as a teenager.

During his inaugural professorial lecture on 16 June, 'Is it personal? Uncovering the many faces of privacy', Gehan explored the tension between protecting information and the need to share it.

"Individuals have virtually no power against corporations; on our own we just tick 'consent' because we have no real choice.

"My activism taught me that if you want something to change, you have to fight for it and mobilise people, and I've taken that lesson into privacy law.

"The challenge now is to build legal frameworks that let people act collectively, so privacy protections actually mean something."

No going back

Gehan grew up negotiating changing times and circumstances.

His early childhood was spent on the outskirts of Colombo in a home his parents designed. It had an interior fishpond and coconut trees in the garden.

He was a "free-range kid", but Sri Lanka was changing. During the second term of Sirimavo Bandaranaike, the world's first female prime minister, a push for national self-sufficiency created widespread shortages. Families queued for rice, milk powder and bread.

Schools increasingly taught only in Sinhala. Gehan's public servant dad, Neville, and anaesthetist mum, Tilina, wanted their children to speak fluent English and to have the chance to study and work overseas.

"That government became increasingly authoritarian. As kids, we were told to be careful about what we said to strangers."

When the Gunasekaras decided to leave their home for New Zealand, Gehan was 11, his sister Menik was 13, and his brother Sanji was 18 months old.

Under the government at the time, they weren't allowed to leave with much. The family sold their home, distributed the profits and any savings among relatives and left with all that was allowed: those three pounds.

"There was no going back," says Gehan. "As a result, I was motivated for our new life; I was told, 'this is it'.

"When we got to New Zealand, I was excited to find that the ice cream portions were enormous. It was more than I could eat. It was like paradise."

The family settled in Whanganui, where his mum worked at Whanganui Hospital. "The people in Whanganui, particularly the hospital community, were incredibly kind and generous," he says. "They knew that as

Sri Lankans, we would be arriving in pretty dire straits."

At Whanganui Collegiate School, Gehan believes he was the first South Asian student, and most classmates had never heard of Sri Lanka. Among around 500 boys, there was one Māori student and one Chinese student. "There was definitely some cultural ignorance," he recalls.

The school was also rugby obsessed, so as a non-sporty kid, Gehan joined the school band, learning the saxophone, which he still enjoys playing today.

In his final year, he scooped a number of academic prizes and, inspired by those early experiences of activism and interested in the law's ability to shape policy and improve people's lives, he chose to study law at Victoria University of Wellington. He worked as a summer law clerk in Whanganui, and although it was interesting at times, "it was also tedious and involved a lot of paper pushing", he recalls.

Matters of privacy

He moved into academia after landing a junior lecturing role at Massey University. During this time, he grew to love teaching, and his philosophy remains the same to this day: "If students enjoy the experience, they'll learn."

While travelling in the US, he met his wife Aruni, whose family had also left Sri Lanka at around the same time as the Gunasekaras. They maintained a long-distance relationship before eventually building a life together in New Zealand. Aruni worked in school administration and was the primary caregiver for their two children, Darren and Caitlin.

"She's been my biggest support," he says.

Gehan went on to do his Master of Laws at Victoria before transferring to the University of Auckland, graduating around the same time Darren was born. Soon after, Gehan was offered a lecturing position in the Department of Commercial Law at the University's Tāmaki Campus.

"The head of department, Professor Ian Eagles, was a great mentor, encouraging me to get going straight away with research.

"I hit the ground running, and I got some very good early publications into English journals. There was a colonial mentality that you have to publish internationally, 'New Zealand doesn't count', kind of thing."

When Gehan began researching privacy, many of his colleagues thought he was wasting his time. New Zealand's first Privacy Act had only recently come into force and privacy law was a niche field.

"One of my information systems colleagues, Lech Janczewski, was really curious about the Act, and so I looked into it.

"Lech and I wrote a few things together with other colleagues: conference papers, book chapters, and co-authored articles in mainly information systems journals."

Still, not everyone was convinced. "Colleagues said, 'It's not serious law; you're going down the wrong track'. They said it was a 'sissy' subject, 'You should be doing mergers and acquisitions', but I persevered."

Gehan was well placed when Web 2.0 arrived; suddenly, privacy was a big thing.

He went on to become a member of the academic reference committee for the New Zealand Law Commission's privacy review, providing advice on updating the Privacy Act. He later helped establish the Privacy Foundation New Zealand, a not-for-profit organisation that advocates for stronger privacy protections.

Another area that caught Gehan's attention was franchise regulation. Frequent trips to the US to visit Aruni's family exposed him to franchise regulation that didn't exist in New Zealand. He was concerned about the vulnerability of franchisees here and advocated for reform.

"Communicating effectively with the public through the media, through conferences, can really influence change," he says.

Some of his work ultimately influenced amendments to New Zealand's Fair Trading Act. He points to provisions that closely reflect recommendations contained in his co-authored research.

Digging into data rights

During his inaugural lecture, he talked about some of his current research. Drawing on te ao Māori concepts, including the legal personhood framework established for the Whanganui River, Gehan is examining whether groups with shared characteristics might have rights over their data.

"The law needs to somehow accommodate data collectives, and that's where my research is currently heading. My focus is on building the theoretical foundation for why these arrangements should be recognised in law," he says.

"The analogy I draw is with the emergence of corporations 200 years ago. People were able to aggregate capital for a collective purpose. If data is the new oil, people should be able to aggregate data in a similar way, without handing ownership to corporations. That's why I'm exploring the idea that data could own itself, with people holding rights over it."

His inaugural lecture was also an opportunity to acknowledge those close to him. His father, mother, brother, wife and children were in the audience, alongside other family, friends and colleagues from around the world. Gehan's father, aged 99, attended despite being recently hospitalised, and the professor spoke of the enormous influence he had on his life.

"Dad never went to university and was educated at a time of British colonial rule. He taught me early on that if you felt strongly enough about something you had to be able to put it down in writing, to make a convincing point," he says.

"This lesson has proved invaluable over the years."

Sophie Boladeras

Gehan started playing saxophone in the Whanganui Collegiate School band, and still plays today.

Photo: Ian Burrows

Marine Science Professor Andrew Jeffs planting at the Leigh campus.

Leigh campus returns to nature

Staff, students and community are digging in to return the native bush that once covered the area surrounding the Leigh Marine Laboratory.

Native bush once blanketed the land where the University's Leigh Campus sits, but pests and clearance for farming reduced it to a few patches along its margins.

Marine Science Professor Andrew Jeffs recalls studying what was left of the bush for the first time as an undergraduate science student on ecology field trips, and he says the kikuyu grass that took root in place of the bush has stifled the chances of the forest regenerating in the years since.

Thanks to the efforts of staff, students and community, however, Andrew says a plan is underway to restore more native bush to the area, including its distinctive pōhutukawa-lined coast.

Last month, volunteers from Mahurangi College in Warkworth mucked in, helping plant 800 native trees cultivated through Trees for Survival, a charitable environmental education programme.

It followed previous events held this year, during which University staff, students and other volunteers planted more than 1,500 trees, and added to 700 that were planted the year prior.

Last year, pōhutukawa were planted on the coastal fringes of the campus; this year planting has been concentrated in a valley next to the Leigh Marine Laboratory. They're adding to what's known as the 'legacy grove' – an area of bush planted more than a decade ago as an alumni activity.

"Our initial goal is to try and connect the replanted valley with the coastal bush so that we have an ecological path for birds to move along the coast, and to re-establish the pōhutukawa fringe that is a real feature of the Leigh coastline," says Andrew.

While it may sound like a lot of trees, Andrew says they need to be planted compactly to have a chance to outgrow the kikuyu grass, and he'd ultimately like to see a much bigger vision embraced for the 60-hectare piece of land at Leigh that the University owns.

> **"What I'd like to see is that we … become the first marine lab in the world that's carbon neutral."**
>
> Professor Andrew Jeffs

"In my time, I've seen some massive changes in the marine environment, and it's being driven by climate change," he says.

"It's challenging, because academics like to travel and network globally, which is incredibly carbon intensive, and as a marine research institute, we run boats all the time. We have a large boat that burns a lot of diesel, so we're all part of the problem.

"What I'd like to see is that we use that 60 hectares to offset our carbon and become the first marine lab in the world that's carbon neutral."

Andrew says regenerating the bush has many other positive impacts, such as reducing sediment runoff, which directly impacts water quality and clarity in the adjacent marine reserve.

Te Hāwere-a-Maki/Goat Island is also home to a sea-bird nesting colony and University staff put a huge effort into pest control to protect this from predators. However, kikuyu provides an excellent habitat for mustelids, like ferrets and stoats, who tunnel through the grass, allowing them to move across the land under cover then swim out to the island where they can decimate the colony.

"If we can replace that kikuyu with native bush, then we reduce that risk and then there's also the potential to expand that bird colony onto the mainland, which would be really cool."

Andrew says the planting days have also provided an opportunity to meet and talk with members of the wider community who visit the hugely popular Goat Island Marine Reserve.

"We've been planting along the Goat Island Walkway and there are so many people going up and down there all the time to look out over the coast.

"It's a big resource for the public – and it's just gorgeous."

Caitlin Sykes

Photo: Chris Loufte

Associate Professor Chris Wilson is an expert on white supremacist-related terrorism.

Terror attack's warning signs went unseen

A new account of the events leading up to 15 March 2019, written by University of Auckland researchers, refutes that nothing could have been done beforehand to identify the terrorist responsible for the deadliest attack in modern New Zealand history.

In *He Told Us: How an Australian Committed Far-Right Terrorism in Christchurch, New Zealand* (Allen and Unwin, 2026), politics lecturer Associate Professor Chris Wilson and Master of Conflict and Terrorism Studies student Michal Dziwulski look back at the events leading up to the Christchurch terror attack at two mosques.

It also profiles some of the extraordinary people the Australian white supremacist deprived of their lives when he murdered 51 people and injured 40 others.

The terrorist is now imprisoned for life with no chance of parole after a high-profile trial and a Royal Commission of Inquiry, and despite a recent attempt to overturn his convictions and force a retrial.

"We realised there was a real lack of information out there, despite a $17 million Royal Commission and a major transnational investigation," says Chris.

The authors felt the Commission simply didn't have much evidence and therefore drew weak conclusions and then declared the case closed.

"But now there's a document, this book, that tells the truth about one of New Zealand's most important events, and which proves the explanation set in stone [by the Royal Commission] is now wrong," he says.

The Commission's key conclusion was that there was essentially nothing that could have been done to identify the terrorist as a threat in advance of the attacks, except by chance. This was in part based on an acceptance of his claim that he didn't use "extreme right-wing websites".

However, Chris and Michal, who both specialise in white supremacist-related terrorism, decided this couldn't be the case.

"So we went looking for him online," says Chris, "using forensic linguistics, looking at the way he writes, his syntax, grammar, word choice, capitalisation and various other strange things."

And they used that knowledge to trawl through an anonymous forum called 4chan, an image-based, English-language bulletin board, where they not only identified him, but found 400 previously undiscovered posts from various countries over a five-year period leading up to the attacks.

"We map him getting more and more radical and militant, and his views change and his targets change as he takes on more ideology," says Chris.

Essentially, they discovered the terrorist had a deep hatred of anyone who wasn't white, which evolved over time.

"We see him [online] speaking candidly and unguardedly, which is quite different to his manifesto and statements to the Royal Commission and investigators afterwards, which was propaganda and lies."

The book includes a whole chapter on the methods the researchers used to identify the terrorist. While the researchers relied on hindsight to find the terrorist online, his posts – and many other red flags – provided opportunities for his detection, says Chris. He believes this information should now provide lessons to those tasked with keeping New Zealand safe.

"[The terrorist's posts included] him saying twice while in New Zealand, and before the attacks, 'I'm going to attack mosques in the South Island.' If he did that on a public forum, why did the Royal Commission say he didn't tell anybody he was going to commit the attack or interact with anyone about it?"

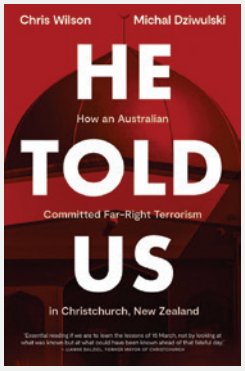
Ahead of the attacks, the terrorist also visited Akaroa from his base in Dunedin, "clearly as a reconnaissance trip", says Chris, and purchased seven AR-15 semi-automatic weapons, exposing weaknesses in our gun laws at the time.

The attacks sparked a major review of the firearms laws, with then-prime minister Jacinda Ardern banning most military-style semi-automatic firearms, assault rifles and high-capacity magazines, as well as implementing a nationwide gun buyback scheme and establishing a national firearms registry.

Chris says the attack's victims and their families have been very supportive of the book and had wanted "proper information and critical analysis" of how such a terrible thing was able to happen, which hasn't been provided by the Commission's conclusions.

All information submitted to the Royal Commission has been suppressed permanently and can't be accessed through the Official Information Act or in any other way by researchers, says Chris.

"This shut case is not fair to the victims first and foremost, but it's also not fair to New Zealand, and it's dangerous, because it's undermining our chances of preventing something similar happening again."



He Told Us: How an Australian Committed Far-Right Terrorism in Christchurch, New Zealand (Allen and Unwin) is now widely available in bookshops and online.

Full story: auckland.ac.nz/he-told-us

Julianne Evans

Tracing artists over time

Recent additions to the University's art collection exemplify how artists are always pushing the boundaries of their practice.

Looking at an artist's body of work offers the opportunity to trace multiple stories over time.

The University of Auckland Art Collection holds examples of artworks made at different times by dozens of individual artists, representing developments in their style, subject and medium.

Considering an artist's work within the context of their own practice bridges our understanding of their place within the art, social and historical landscapes. It also visually documents how and where an artist has pushed the boundaries in their making.

The recent acquisition of three new artworks by two mid-career Pacific artists, Claudia Jowitt (Fiji, iTaukei; Pākehā) and Serene Hodgman (nee Timoteo), (Sāmoa, Safotu and Faleasiu; Rotuma; Tonga; Ireland), demonstrate such developments in each woman's practice.

Both Claudia and Serene have a significant early artwork held in the collection; the introduction of their more recent artworks to the collection, which were coincidentally first shown together in group exhibition *Tali* (Melanie Roger Gallery, 2025), reveals much about their growth as artists.

Claudia's expansive painting 'Untitled' (2015) was created during her Master of Fine Arts at the Elam School of Fine Arts, when she was interrogating ideas around 'feminine' qualities of painting.

Claudia is known in this era for her decadent painterly surfaces, achieved using cake-icing sets and kitchen implements to apply thick layers of pastel-coloured paint. The result is less about making an image, and more about bringing attention to the process employed in the formation of her sculptural canvases.

This characteristic impasto technique is echoed in the custom frames of 'Drauna kei na senikau ni Savusavu II and V' (2025), which have a coral-like texture. Each of these recent collection acquisitions hold a moana-blue cyanotype at their centre.

These works are from a series that was created in Savusavu, during Claudia's travels to her homeland. Each comprises silhouettes of native Fijian flora and fauna captured using the cyanotype process, so they appear like scientific specimens.

These works represent Claudia's forays into a new process, while retaining elements from earlier painterly explorations. The cyanotypes demonstrate how she is establishing a physical sense of place in Moana-Nui-a-Kiwa and her links within it.

Like Claudia, Serene's large-scale artwork, 'When you've grown up in Auckland your fine mats look like this' (2014), was also created during her time studying at Elam. It is an early example of her hybrid-textile works that contemporise traditional Pacific making practices, such as tivaevae (Cook Islands embroidery), 'ie toga (Sāmoan fine mats) and koloa (Tongan fine mats) to explore ideas around home and identity.

Though created a decade later, Serene's recent work, 'Auo le fete Pepe Keke' (2023), leans on the same guiding principles of humour, colour, language and texture. The Sāmoan words serve as both the title and the subject woven into the surface of the work, translating in English as 'don't be afraid baby cake'.

While retaining the same technique used in her earlier work, the notable difference is the more intimate scale, which Serene has turned to as her practice has evolved alongside the growth of her young family.

Recent works have incorporated even more vibrancy in their palettes, inspired by the children's books and toys that surround her at home. The smaller scale has also allowed her to continue her practice within a domestic space, creating punchy pieces that are banner-like in their format and feeling of declaration.

As mid-career artists, both Claudia and Serene have boundless room to pivot and grow in their approaches to making from here. Their recent works demonstrate how the collection can grow and expand alongside them.

Madeleine Harvey
Art collection adviser

Claudia Jowitt. 'Drauna kei na senikau ni Savusavu V' (2025). University of Auckland Art Collection. Photograph courtesy of Melanie Roger Gallery.

Claudia Jowitt. 'Drauna kei na senikau ni Savusavu II' (2025). University of Auckland Art Collection. Photograph courtesy of Melanie Roger Gallery.

Serene Hodgman. 'Auo le fete Pepe Keke' (2023). University of Auckland Art Collection. Photograph courtesy of Melanie Roger Gallery.

Big banana appeal earns sculpture prize

Everyone can expect to slip up from time to time, and that's fine.

That's the light-hearted theme behind Auckland artist Brittany Walker Smith's winning submission for a newly established prize in public sculpture.

Brittany (above), an Elam doctoral student, is the inaugural recipient of the Collin Post Sculpture Award and Longveld Plinth Award.

The award, open to current Elam students, will see Brittany's concept, 'One Foot in the Grave, the Other on a Banana Peel', created to represent a large banana peel and displayed on a specially constructed plinth in the Elam gardens at the end of year.

Elam lecturer Associate Professor Fiona Jack was on the judging panel, which agreed the proposal "demonstrates ambition, humour and strong potential for development".

The award comes with a one-week residency in Brisbane to develop the concept into a 'digital design package' at UAP (Urban Art Projects), a globally recognised art consultancy and manufacturer.

One of the areas of expertise at UAP's Brisbane manufacturing base is sandcasting, an artisan process where molten metal, including bronze, aluminium and stainless steel, is poured and cast within sand moulds.

During the residency, Brittany and Elam lecturer and artist Ruth Watson will be immersed in everything from sandcasting, curation, design, advanced manufacturing and estimating, to pattern making, fabrication, finishing, patina and paint.

The pair will also receive advice from UAP's team of expert makers, and the chance to engage directly with Brisbane's broader arts industry.

The work will be made by Longveld, an engineering and custom metal fabrication company based in Hamilton.

Brittany says she's "stoked with the incredible opportunity", really looking forward to going to Brisbane, and got so much out of the proposal process, even before she'd won.

"I liked the fact that we got feedback and critique on our proposals, as that so rarely happens."

She says the banana peel idea is an extension of previous works she's done (in materials like felt and glitter) of both everyday and luxury objects, with nods to artists like Warhol and Duchamp.

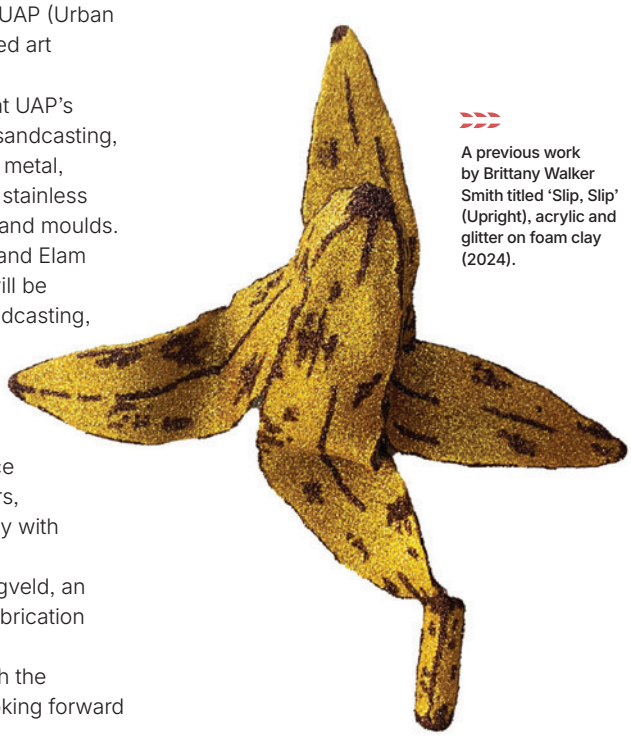
"I enjoy the slapstick comedy of the banana peel as a symbol of failure. These things are going to occur; you're going slip up."

It also connects to her own experience as an undergraduate art student: "The most failure I ever had was in my undergrad years!"

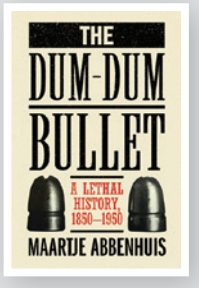
Brittany says her practice "leans into fantasy as both a coping mechanism and a form of critique, where glamour, humour and material indulgence sit alongside discomfort and contradiction."

Full story: auckland.ac.nz/collin-post-award

Julianne Evans



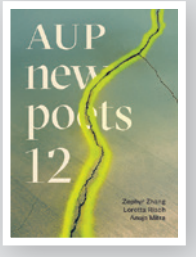
A previous work by Brittany Walker Smith titled 'Slip, Slip' (Upright), acrylic and glitter on foam clay (2024).



The Dum-Dum Bullet: A Lethal History, 1850–1950

Professor of history Maartje Abbenhuis reveals how the invention of ready-to-use rifle cartridges in the industrial era revolutionised gun violence on and off the battlefield. The dum-dum bullet was the most famous of these expanding bullets that flooded the market from the 1850s onward. This book examines why the bullet was regulated by international law, and traces the changing landscape of public responses to its use and abuse.

Maartje Abbenhuis, Cambridge University Press, $89 (digital copy)



AUP New Poets 12

The work of alumni Zephyr Zhang and Anuja Mitra features alongside that of Loretta Riach in *AUP New Poets 12*. The trio are described as 'careful observers of the everyday and the ineffable', with their work telling 'of wandering through cities, ghostworking from office cubicles and sweating through heat waves and tax season; of grappling with questions of alienation, belonging, lust and grief'.

Zephyr Zhang, Loretta Riach and Anuja Mitra, edited and introduced by Anne Kennedy, Auckland University Press, $30, released 9 July

Te Tiriti, Equality and the Future of New Zealand Democracy

Leading Māori political scientist Dominic O'Sullivan (Te Rarawa, Ngāti Kahu) draws on theories of republicanism and the commonwealth to challenge understandings of Te Tiriti as a partnership between races, or between Māori people and the Crown. He proposes a new politics where Māori self-determination and liberal democracy promote meaningful and culturally grounded political equality.

Dominic O'Sullivan, Auckland University Press, $40

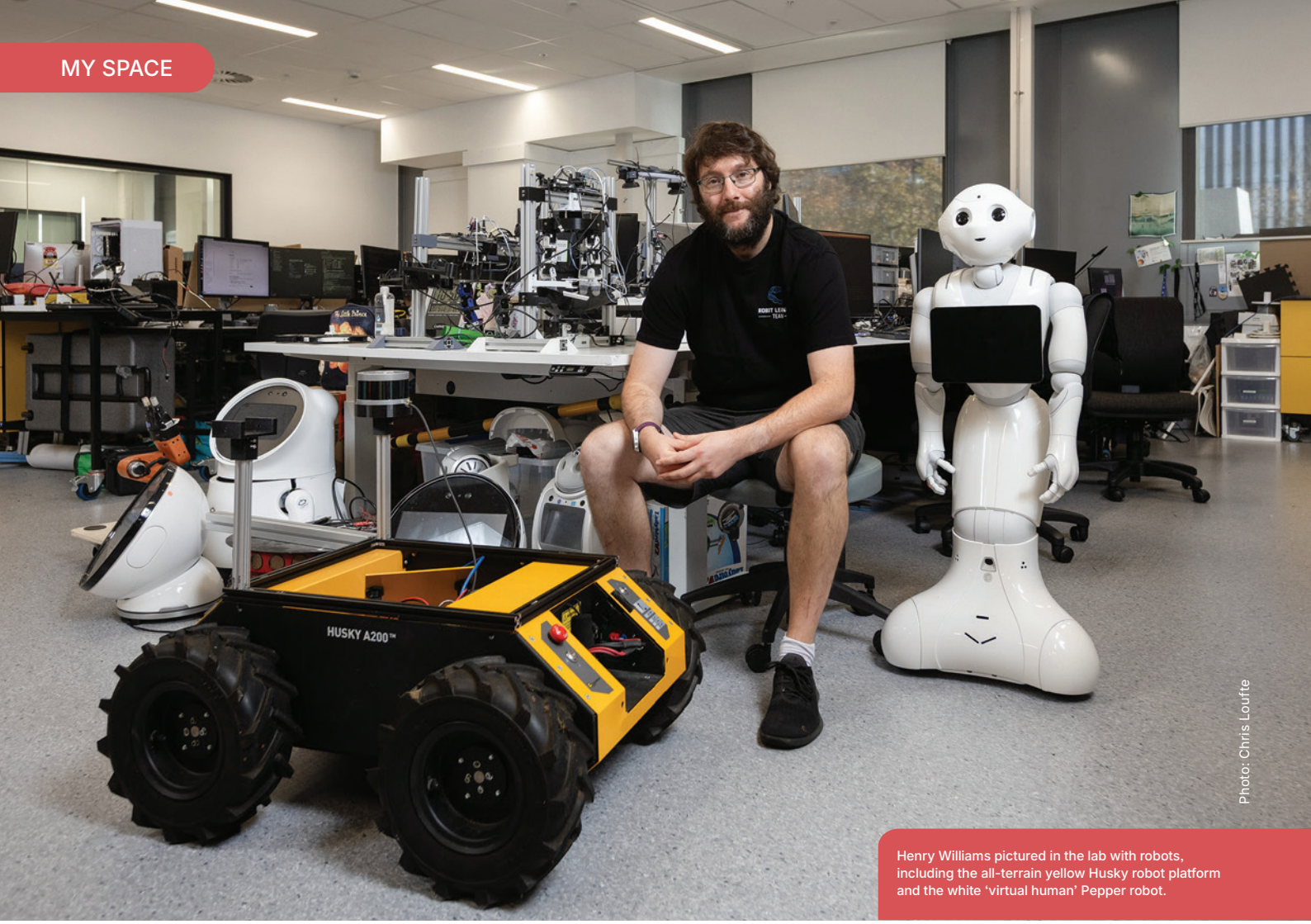


Photo: Chris Loufte

Henry Williams pictured in the lab with robots, including the all-terrain yellow Husky robot platform and the white 'virtual human' Pepper robot.

Well-oiled machines

The lab at the Centre for Automation and Robotic Engineering Science (CARES) is a little like a preschool, except it's robots, not children, who are there to learn.

Undergrad to postdoctoral researchers working in the centre spend their days teaching robots not only what to learn – to inspect the hull of a boat, for example – but how. Just like a parent raising a baby, many of the lab's researchers engage in deep learning projects that involve 'feeding' robots past experiences. They then reinforce desired behavioural responses with 'rewards', so the machines will one day be able to efficiently carry out complex tasks on their own.

The robots are trained to do tricky work. On a tour of the lab with robot learning team lead Dr Henry Williams, he points out machines being designed to prune trees, scan for mines or replicate the movement of human hands. Then there are the machines that are just plain cool: members of the team are working on a massive dancing jellyfish that spans ten metres, and they once created a scale replica of NASA's *Opportunity* Mars rover (now displayed at Te Whatu Stardome).

"We have a lot of freedom in how we approach things," says Henry. "We don't have to worry too much about the risk of trying an idea; we throw something at the wall, see what happens, learn something from it and move on."

Henry came to the University of Auckland around a decade ago, after completing his PhD in robotics at Victoria University of Wellington. CARES collaborates extensively on projects with other institutions and industry, and Henry initially began working on an agricultural robotics project.

He's since worked on many others, including prototypes for a system that ultimately led to the development by industry collaborator Robotics Plus of Prospr, an autonomous vehicle platform used for a range of horticultural tasks and now sold in the US.

"Over the past ten years, I've spent a literal year of my life in an orchard or a vineyard with these platforms doing the testing and evaluations, either when it's freezing cold or super-hot," he says. "But those times are the most fun, because testing something in the lab is one thing, but seeing it happen in the real world is another. I still remember the first time I saw a robot I'd been working on reach up and deliberately grab a kiwifruit; after all the fixes and corrections and learnings, you finally see it at a point where it's working."

The practical nature of the research means many of those who have come through CARES now run their own companies or are working in cutting-edge startups.

Henry is embedded in the robotics community as chair of the New Zealand Robotics, Automation and Sensing network of researchers, engineers, technologists and students, and secretary of the Australian Robotics and Automation Association.

Robotics has always been a popular area of study – "because everybody loves robots" – but more students want to train in the area now than ever, he says. Advances in technologies like 3D printing and machine learning are also accelerating the possibilities of what robots can achieve.

"You never stop learning, which is a lot of fun. When you've solved one problem, there's still another one to solve," he says.

Caitlin Sykes