

# Now you see it

Artist and framer Tom Mackie's work draws attention to what might otherwise go unnoticed.

## INTERVIEW

Alice Lines

## PHOTOGRAPHY

Simon Wilson



After completing a Bachelor of Fine Arts in printmaking, a lack of money and equipment saw Wellington's Tom Mackie fortuitously move from creating works on paper to experimenting with sculpture. For his early exhibitions, he created site-specific works that highlighted galleries' inherent qualities and celebrated their subtleties — works that sat in corners, for instance. He's since experimented with a wide range of mediums, but keeps coming back to exploring a hybrid of print and sculptural, reworking found and ready-made materials to evoke new narratives and draw attention to what often goes unseen. Right now, his work questions how the painting and picture frame work cohesively together.

### So the painting came before the sculptural exploration?

Yes, but I'd overthink it and question my hand in the making. I'm more interested in conceptual painting — transforming materials and objects into visual puzzles that question our understanding of paintings.

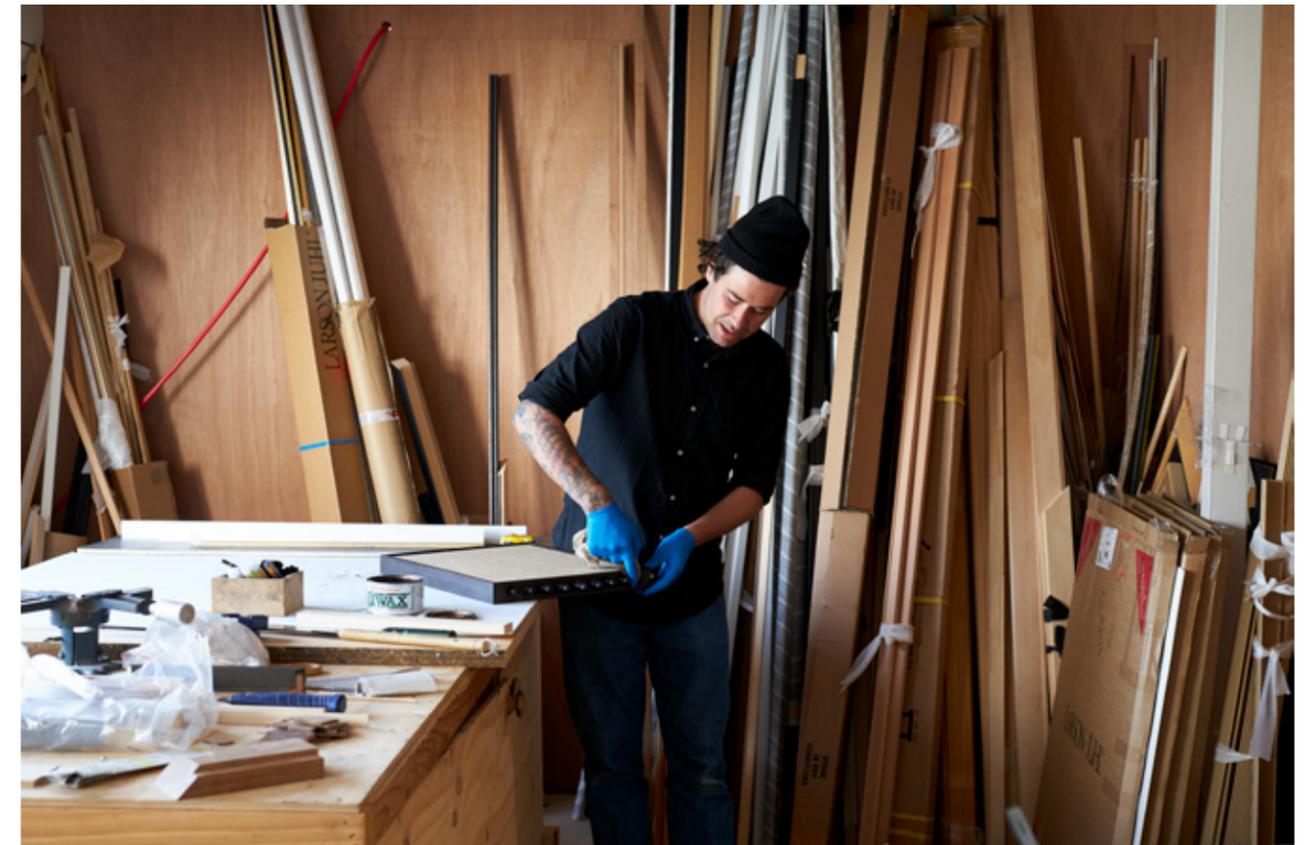
**Talk us through how these 2D and 3D elements come together in your work...** Through my work in the picture-framing trade, I began exploring what the fabrication of an artwork means. A frame is typically the final step in presenting a work, but

for me, the frame is often the more important part. I like to draw attention to what viewers often look past.

**And you use a lot of repurposed materials?** I use wooden offcuts and found objects to reinvent the frame, then pair this with discarded paintings or canvas objects that I rework to show the hand or craft of the maker. An example of this is inverting an old painting to show markings on the underside that were never intended to be seen, allowing viewers to slow down and think about more than just what's on the surface.

**Where do you work from?** I mostly work from my inner-city studio. A regular art-making day usually starts with coffee with an artist friend, which helps to kick-start my creativity. Then I settle into the quiet and still of my studio, where I can concentrate on research and construction. I often have a lot of noise in my head, so I find comfort in the quiet, and I think that's reflected in my work.

**What other spots in the area do you like to hit up?** My studio's close to Cuba and Ghuznee streets, which are home to my favourite café, Milk Crate, and independent galleries like McLeavey, Robert Heald and Precinct 35. >



**ABOVE** Tom in his studio making finishing touches by waxing a timber frame. **OPPOSITE** "Works often take months or years to resolve, so I hang them on the wall to contemplate," says Tom. "Most ideas are discarded, but it's the moment that a work or object has the energy to levitate that keeps me coming back for more." He says when he hits a creative block, "removing myself mentally or physically is the only way I can overcome it. Heading somewhere remote without my phone helps, as does reading or listening to podcasts."

**How do you split your time between your art making and your fine art framing business?** My framing business, Elliot Creative, keeps me busy behind the tools at least four days a week, but also provides me with a good amount of quiet time to think about what I want to create. It's always hard to find the perfect balance between the two, but I'm grateful the business allows me to work with so many amazing artists, curators and collectors.

**You have a show coming up at SPA\_CE in Napier in December — is there a specific theme this body of work is shaped around?** I'm very excited to be working with SPA\_CE's Megan Poppelwell for my exhibition. My ongoing ideas explore slowing down the process of looking and evoking new narratives. The works will be playful yet structured, with elements of humour. I'm looking forward to constructing a show that'll end the year on a high.

**What else is on your agenda this summer?** My wife Meg and I are hosting our family on Christmas Day for the first time, then we're off to find a secluded camping spot in which to welcome in the new year. Here's hoping next year is a little less dramatic than this one's been. ♣

[tommackie.net](http://tommackie.net); [thisisspace.co.nz](http://thisisspace.co.nz)



**TOP** *Posterior II*, 2019, made with found jute fabric in a hand-carved wooden frame. **ABOVE RIGHT** Tom's been in this studio for a year and loves its central location and natural light. Here, he's stretching canvas on his work table. The artwork on the left of the wall behind him is *Hands & Knees* by Mary Teague, an Australian artist whose work he was introduced to by a friend. He says, "It's a luxury to be surrounded by great artworks every day that inspire me to think and create."