

Our Finest



OCKHAM



The New Zealand Book Awards Trust Te Ohu Tiaki i Te Rau Hiringa is honoured to present the 16 finalists in the 2024 Ockham New Zealand Book Awards, the premier event in Aotearoa's literary calendar.

Carefully selected by an experienced and courageous panel of 12 judges, the extraordinary books they describe in this booklet have risen to the top from a competitive field of 172 entries and a longlist of 44 announced in February. Our judges, whose names are listed on each category page that follows, have been reading and deliberating for months, and we salute them for their valiant work. The fiction panel is joined at this stage by a specially appointed international judge, the best-selling British author, writer and broadcaster Natalie Haynes.

The Trust is so grateful to the organisations that continue to share our belief in the importance of literature to the cultural fabric of our society: First and foremost, our visionary naming sponsor Ockham Residential, which has recently renewed its commitment to the awards for a further five years. Creative New Zealand remains our cornerstone funder, and we treasure our ongoing relationships with Mary and Peter Biggs, the Mātātuhi Foundation, Booksellers Aotearoa New Zealand, and the Acorn Foundation, which represents the interests of the late Jann Medlicott, whose generosity has secured the fiction prize money in perpetuity. We are also fortunate to partner with the Auckland Writers Festival, which showcases the awards ceremony as a marquee festival event and features a number of the finalists in its programme. Ngā mihi nui ki a koutou.

Most importantly, we pay tribute to all the authors and their publishers whose work has been recognised in this shortlist. We encourage readers to seek these titles in bookstores and libraries across the motu. And we invite you to join us on 15 May to hear the finalists reading from their books, and to celebrate the ultimate winners of the \$125,000 prize pool at the Ockham New Zealand Book Awards ceremony in Auckland's Kiri Te Kanawa Theatre.

For more details and tickets visit www.writersfestival.co.nz.

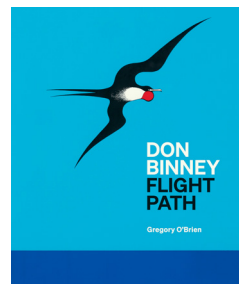
#theockhams www.nzbookawards.nz

Booksellers Aotearoa New Zealand Award for Illustrated Non-Fiction

Don Binney: Flight Path

Gregory O'Brien
Auckland University Press

In this wonderfully rich and honest portrait of the artist Don Binney, Gregory O'Brien is never an unquestioning cheerleader for his subject. So while readers see and appreciate his famous



works and learn about his interest in both geology and royalty, they also discover his sometimes prickly and sardonic personality. Binney neither liked nor identified with the description 'bird man', but hear the name Don Binney and his soaring solo birds come instantly to mind.

Fungi of Aotearoa: A Curious Forager's Field Guide

Liv Sisson
with photography by Paula Vigus
Penguin Random House

Liv Sisson's fungi field guide is a joyous combination of information and advice that is totally practical, potentially lifesaving and

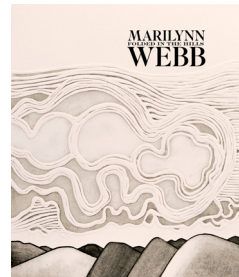


deliciously quirky. If you don't know a black landscaping morel from a death cap or a stinky squid from a dog vomit, look no further. Fungi might not move but they are notoriously hard to photograph, so full credit to Paula Vigus for making the mostly tiny subject matter look enticing, and even monumental.

Marilynn Webb: Folded in the Hills

Lauren Gutsell, Lucy Hammonds, Bridget Reweti (Ngāti Ranginui, Ngāi Te Rangi)
Dunedin Public Art Gallery

From its irresistibly tactile cover to the end note from the Webb estate that the humble Marilynn would have been honoured by the book, this is a magnificent publication. Creating a book from an

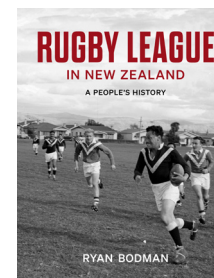


exhibition has many fishhooks, but the writers, contributors and designer have produced a book that shines. Webb's life story and her artistic practice are told in both te reo Māori and English, and her art is lovingly and accurately reproduced on the page.

Rugby League in New Zealand: A People's History

Ryan Bodman
Bridget Williams Books

One of Ryan Bodman's many achievements with this, his first book, is the fact that you don't have to know or even be interested in rugby league to



enjoy it. He presents us with a genuinely fascinating social history which includes identity, women in sport, gangs, politics and community pride in their teams. The photographs taken on and off the field are an absolute treasure-trove of a record of the sport.

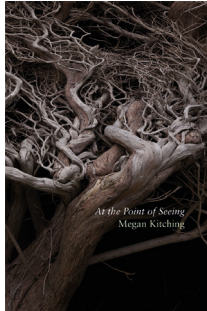
Judges: Lynn Freeman (convenor), Marianne Hargreaves, Ane Tonga

Mary and Peter Biggs Award for Poetry

At the Point of Seeing

Megan Kitching
Otago University Press

With a polymath's ear and a photographer's eye, Megan Kitching creates sharp, complex pictures of the landscapes and lifescapes of Aotearoa.

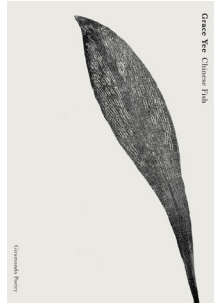


Many of her best poems focus on unruly coastal zones as points of contact, where history is always being made and remade, but she doesn't ignore the human domain with its 'petty hungers or awkward flutters'. Importantly, her work insists on the fact that difficult social and political questions cannot be separated from aesthetic ones.

Chinese Fish

Grace Yee
Giramondo Publishing

Grace Yee's sequence narrates a family's assimilation into New Zealand life from the 1960s to the 1980s with a striking aesthetic. We navigate swerves in personae, extratextuality, illustrations, Cantonese-Taishanese phrases and English translations provided on the back pages.



Yee skillfully bends genres and displaces the reader, evoking the unsettledness of migration. An invigorating read with its tapestry of scenes, characters, food, and language, *Chinese Fish* contributes a new archival poetics to the Chinese trans-Tasman diaspora.

Root Leaf Flower Fruit

Bill Nelson
Te Herenga Waka University Press

This intriguing verse novel leads us at a walking pace – sometimes tumbling and scraping – across country and suburb, and volatile seasons.



There are pivots in perspective and a rich sense of deep time as we encounter nature, injury and recovery, and a settler farming legacy. Bill Nelson's writing has a sonic quality, protean line breaks, and surprise story threads. The final section with its hint of the New Zealand gothic, is gripping.

Talia

Isla Huia (Te Āti Haunui a-Pāpārangi, Uenuku)
Dead Bird Books

These poems buzz with energy: intellectual, linguistic, literary. Sharply conceived, engaged in conversation and debate across poetry, place, history, and language, Isla Huia's work brings unexpected material into productive collision. English and te reo Māori meet this way, as do lines and echoes from older poets with present concerns. Huia has an inspired ear and engaged eye, and her poems' sonic range and sense of adventure combine with a crafter's care on the page.



Judges: Erik Kennedy (convenor), Tru Paraha (Ngāti Hineāmaru, Te Kahu o Torongare ki Waiomio, Ngāti Te Tarawa), Dougal McNeill

Jann Medlicott Acorn Prize for Fiction

A Better Place

Stephen Daisley
Text Publishing

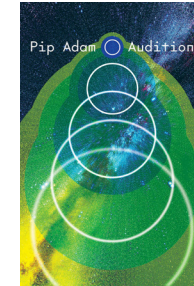
The tragedies of war and prevailing social attitudes are viewed with an unflinching but contemporary eye as Stephen Daisley's lean, agile prose depicts faceted perspectives on masculinity, fraternity, violence, art, nationhood and queer love in this story about twin brothers fighting in WW2. With its brisk and uncompromising accounts of military action, and deep sensitivity to the plights of its characters, *A Better Place* is by turns savage and tender, absurd and wry.



Audition

Pip Adam
Te Herenga Waka University Press

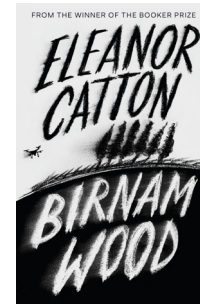
Three giants hurtle through the cosmos in a spacecraft called Audition powered by the sound of their speech. If they are silent, their bodies continue to grow. Often confronting and claustrophobic, but always compelling, *Audition* asks what happens when systems of power decide someone takes up too much space and what role stories play in mediating truth. A mind-melting, brutalist novel, skillfully told in a collage of science fiction, social realism, and romantic comedy.



Birnam Wood

Eleanor Catton
Te Herenga Waka University Press

When Mira Bunting, the force behind guerilla gardening collective Birnam Wood, meets her match in American tech billionaire Robert Lemoine, the stage is set for a tightly plotted and richly imagined psychological thriller. Eleanor Catton's page-turner gleams with intelligence, hitting the sweet spot between smart and accessible. And like an adrenaline blockbuster grafted on to Shakespearean rootstock, it accelerates towards an epic conclusion that leaves readers' heads spinning.



Lioness

Emily Perkins
Bloomsbury

After marrying the older, wealthier Trevor, Teresa Holder has transformed herself into upper-class Therese Thorn, complete with her own homeware business. But when rumours of corruption gather around one of Trevor's property developments, the fallout is swift, and Therese begins to re-evaluate her privileged world. Emily Perkins weaves multiple plotlines and characters with impressive dexterity. Punchy, sophisticated and frequently funny, *Lioness* is an incisive exploration of wealth, power, class, female rage, and the search for authenticity.



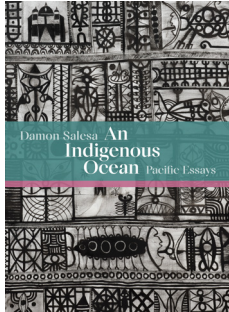
Judges: Juliet Blyth (convenor), Kiran Dass, Anthony Lapwood (Ngāti Ranginui, Ngāi Te Rangi, Ngāti Whakaue, Pākehā)

General Non-Fiction Award

An Indigenous Ocean: Pacific Essays

Damon Salesa
Bridget Williams Books

Damon Salesa's collection of essays re-frames our understanding of Aotearoa New Zealand's colonial history in the South Pacific. A seminal

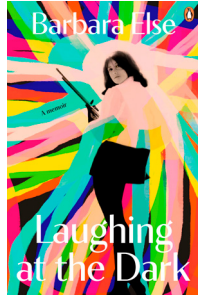


work, *An Indigenous Ocean* asserts Pacific agency and therefore its ongoing impact worldwide, despite marginalisation by New Zealand and others. Salesa brings together academic rigour, captivating stories and engaging prose, resulting in a masterful book that will endure for generations.

Laughing at the Dark: A Memoir

Barbara Else
Penguin Random House

In this beautifully-crafted memoir, Barbara Else reflects on her writing career and its impact on her life. Else's narrative is both resolute and

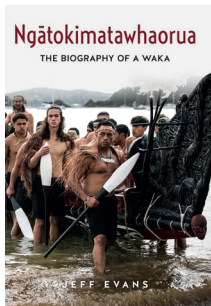


nuanced, artful and authentic. A story that perhaps could only be told decades after the death of her first husband, Jim Neale – the archetypal patriarchal man in the 1960s and 1970s – Else also explores how toxic masculinity took its toll on him while examining when she herself needed to be held to account.

Ngātokimatawhaorua: The Biography of a Waka

Jeff Evans
Massey University Press

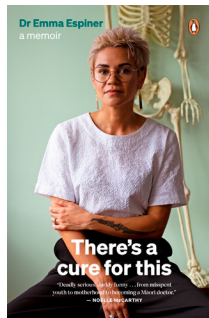
Beginning with an expedition into the Puketi forest alongside master waka builder Rānui Maupakanga, Jeff Evans takes us on a vivid journey of discovery as he tells the story of the majestic waka taua Ngātokimatawhaorua, a vessel that is both a source of pride and a symbol of wayfaring prowess. Evans' biography showcases both the whakapapa of the waka, including the influence of Te Puea Hērangi, and its role in the renaissance of voyaging and whakairo (carving) traditions.



There's a Cure for This

Emma Espiner (Ngāti Tukorehe,
Ngāti Porou)
Penguin Random House

Engaging, eloquent and occasionally confronting, Emma Espiner's memoir is comprised of a series of powerful essays about her journey as a Māori



woman through both her early life and her time in medical school. Emerging as a doctor, she recounts the racism she and others experience and highlights the structural inequalities in New Zealand's health system. This book brims with candour, pathos, and wry humour.

Judges: Jim Tully (convenor), Kerry Sunderland, Rebecca Kiddle (Ngāti Porou, Ngā Puhi)

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matatuhifoundation.co.nz

 **MĀTĀTUHI
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MAKING HOMES, BUILDING IMAGINATION

Photo: Adrian Malloch

On a serenely suburban street in old school Avondale, the Wong residence twinkles with an evening ritual as familiar as the moon. Each night their littlest falls asleep under a book, sometimes Roald Dahl, sometimes Dr. Seuss, most often, Maurice Gee's *Under the Mountain*. Shortly afterwards, the parentals gently lift the tome from her face, tuck the spectacles away, turn off the light.

That love of reading has never left Tania Wong, Ockham's empress of lines and light. Architect of both our eponymously named first building, and our most recent, Ponsonby's *The Greenhouse*, she's two-thirds through *The Axeman's Carnival* with the Great Chidgey's *latest latest* waiting in the wings. "Riveting, rhythmical... rambunctious!" says she. "Hear! Hear!" say we, on the eve of the ninth incarnation of #theockhams. "And glory to our scribes, our thinkers, our word weavers who sprinkle the world with wonder."

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