

Akiko Diegel was born in Japan and now lives and works in Auckland, New Zealand. She graduated with an MFA in 2008 from the Elam School of Fine Arts at the University of Auckland.

Between 2005 and 2012 Diegel was selected to exhibit in a number of significant group and solo exhibitions at Stark White Gallery, Gus Fisher Gallery and RM Gallery in Auckland, Waikato Museum in Hamilton, Hastings City Art Gallery in Hastings, The Green Bench in Whanganui, Blue Oyster Art Project Space in Dunedin, The New Dowse in Wellington and Tauranga Art Gallery in Tauranga.

In 2011, Akiko Diegel was awarded the Paramount Award for her work *Cure* at the 20th Annual Wallace Art Awards. Her work has been included in the Wallace Art Award finalist exhibition each year from 2006 to 2010. She was also a finalist in the Waiheke Art Awards (2011), the Waikato Museum National Contemporary Art Award (2007-2010) and the Norsewear Art Award (2007).

She is currently undertaking a six-month art residency at the International Studio and Curatorial Program in New York.

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7x10, 2009



untitled, 2010



hold me, 2008



qualia, 2010





In a practice that moves fluidly between the seductively kaleidoscopic to the poised, quiet and contained, Akiko Diegel's works deal with the stuff of existence: things that are consumed, worn, worked, worried, carried, things used as comforts and things used as crutches. Where Diegel's final artworks often relate to the body, she uses processes that deal more with human behaviours.

Acts of collecting, recording, constructing, stitching (all acts involved in the primal protection and sheltering of the body) are utilised and examined in Diegel's practice, balancing the works between addressing the corporeal and the behavioural sides of being a person.



To me Diegel's works read as portraits of humanness; not portraits in a pictorial sense, but more like the development of a character in a book. Going beyond a mere figurative likeness, she makes tangible what causes the metaphorical ticks and twitches of being in this world. She takes into account the foibles, idiosyncrasies and strange habits that occur in the expanding and contracting nature of our existence.

Diegel's works are beautiful but at the same time convey some uneasiness. As portraits of human activity, the works seem to contain a little sigh of the artist's worry about, perhaps even dissatisfaction with, what she observes in the world around her.



The Disprin packets configured into bulldog clips and alligator clips are allegorical of the twenty-first century's clenching attachment to pharmaceuticals. The plastic fork holding a woman's hair in place confounds expectations and confronts the taboo of an elegant knot of hair secured with a pair of chopsticks.

The word 'humanity' knots together, in meaning, the state of being a human and the quality of being kind. Diegel's works share the dual yet linked meanings; the likenesses Diegel takes are not flattering, but they always have a sense of humanness and empathy in them.

With a definite awareness of the portrait taker always being implied in the portrait, she puts on display her collections, her acts of repetition, her records and reconstructions.

Almost like a pile of letters addressed to an agony aunt, Diegel's works are poignant records of human problems: of an ambivalence towards boundaries, of the line crossed between a comfort and a crutch, of mole-hills turned to mountains, of the vague anxieties and niggling problem associated with comprehending and surviving existence. They are prismatic reflections of people.

Gabrielle Amodeo

