



Revisiting the Summer of Love

In the 1960s artists were a driving force behind social and political change. Looking back at the visual language and heady idealism of that decade, today's artists are still critiquing the status quo and dreaming of the revolution. Sue Gardiner reports.

“There can be no doubt that we are living in confusing times. The social pressures alone are enough to start one thinking about an alternative lifestyle.” This might sound like a sentiment expressed in the uncertain times we face in 2012 but it is in fact a quote from a 1979 publication about the Nambassa Festival in Waihi – a music and lifestyle event which signalled the heyday of the hippie era in New Zealand (published by AH and AW Reed).

Nambassa kept close ties to its hippie predecessors in the United States through the presence at its 1979 festival of Stuart Butler, a member of the legendary Farm Commune in Tennessee and a participant in the Haight Ashbury happenings in San Francisco in the summer of 1967.

During the summer of 1967, which became known as “The Summer of Love”, about 100,000 people amassed for several weeks on the streets of San Francisco at the intersections of two streets named Haight and Ashbury. It was a defining moment centred around social experimentation, peace, sexual freedom, communal living, compassion, love and self-fulfilment all amid growing opposition to the Vietnam War,

and just a year before world-wide protests in 1968, which focused on racism, civil rights, feminism, social justice, the Vietnam War and the nuclear threat.

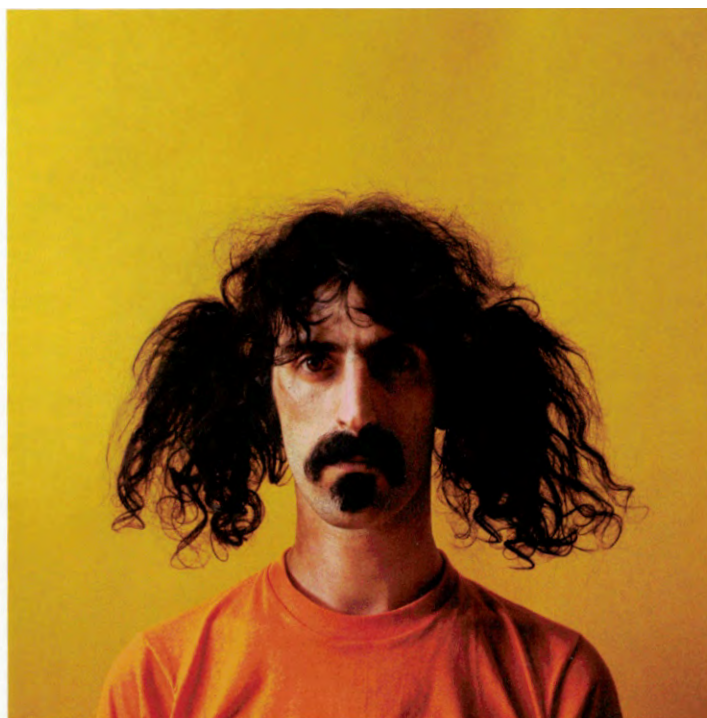
The influence of that “Summer of Love” was immense – spreading through intensified social movement activism and many aspects of political and cultural life, including music and art. Sixty-seven was a time of both artistic innovation and artistic fragmentation and there was a strong sense of heady utopianism and optimism that the ‘flower-power’ generation could change the world. This 1960s influence and its contemporary equivalents are still having an impact today as artists continue to critique our times.

Certainly, amid the present unstable financial climate, global warming, unpopular wars, social upheaval and mass protests, such as those that occurred during the Arab Spring, the dissenting voices as well as the utopian voices are coming out again – and embracing change. Last year the arts community rallied in opposition to the 81-day detention of Chinese artist and social commentator, Ai Weiwei, who was accused of ‘economic crimes’, allegedly related to tax issues.

This year, there was widespread support for avant-garde Russian punk theatre group, Pussy Riot, three of whom were arrested and convicted after staging an anti-Putin musical performance in Moscow's Cathedral of Christ the Saviour. One year after their Wall Street protest camps, some of the diehard Occupy Movement protesters worked with curators and had a presence at both the 7th Berlin Biennale and dOCUMENTA (13) in Kassel, Germany, this year.

"Make Love Not War" was the catch cry in the 1960s. American artist Robert Indiana captured this optimistic sentiment in several artworks using the word "love". One of them, a large felt banner from 1968, is in Auckland Art Gallery's collection and was displayed there recently. Another artist using text in the 1960s was Los Angeles conceptual artist John Baldessari, whose more recent work *Learn To Dream*, expresses a strident sense of optimism. Commissioned in 2008 by Artspace for the Langham Hotel Billboard on Karangahape Road, it encouraged us not to passively drift into a day-dream but to actively dream. The text used a typeface called Churchward Montezuma 96 Extra Bold, designed by Samoan New Zealander Joseph Churchward. In 2011 Baldessari used the same typeface to create a new edition of *Learn To Dream* silkscreen prints, one of which is held in the Chartwell Collection at Auckland Art Gallery.

In 1967, the legendary music magazine *Rolling Stone* was launched, which led to an explosion of musically inspired documentary photography by artists such as Annie Leibovitz. This summer Auckland Art Gallery



presents *Who Shot Rock & Roll*, (from 10 November until 3 March 2013) featuring some famous photographs, including Frank Zappa, "Himself", 1967, by Jerry Schatzberg. The exhibition originated at the Brooklyn Museum in New York, an institution that houses a collection of rare lithographic concert posters for bands such as the Grateful Dead, who, along with Jefferson Airplane and Janis Joplin, lived a short distance from the Haight Ashbury intersection.

Around 1967 artists were showing interest in physical and biological systems, plants and living organisms, and it



Opposite page: Benjamin Buchanan, *Forever*, 2012, vinyl, installation, Dowse Art Museum. Photo: John Lake

Above: Jerry Schatzberg, Frank Zappa, "Himself", 1967 (printed 2009) chromogenic print. Courtesy of Jerry Schatzberg. *Who Shot Rock & Roll*, Auckland Art Gallery, Toi o Tamaki

Left: Robert Indiana, *Love*, 1968, felt, 1524 x 1524 mm. Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki, purchased 1970



was about this time that the first examples of Land Art/Earth Art appeared – an exciting art movement led by the likes of Robert Smithson and other artists whose large-scale art was created in and of nature, using natural materials such as soil and rock. With a nod to this heritage, Auckland sculptor Regan Gentry has created a temporary work, *?!Deposition Composition*, in the intertidal zone at French Bay, Titirangi, as part of his 2012 McCahon House artist's residency. Using earth-moving equipment, and plenty of manpower, Gentry placed a line of Pacific oyster shells heading out from the beach so they're visible each day when the tide withdraws and exposes them. He says, "The shells will erode and scatter with time, depending on the water currents and storm conditions. The continued tidal flux will affect the line of shells more the closer to shore they are. It is estimated the outer limit of the shell line will be visible for a number of months, until seasonal storms do their natural rearrangement."

In art today we are also seeing a resurgence of 1960s ideals of art as community, as social interaction, as energy source, as inclusive and therapeutic. Sixties Brazilian artist, Lygia Clark, who believed in intuition, in participants becoming one with the art piece and in art therapy, influenced the curators of the Sydney Biennale this year. The themes of many biennales this year have dwelt on collective, shared experiences and focused on activism-style art practices. Take the theme of the 2012 Shanghai Biennale – the curators write that the old systems of

mining the earth for unsustainable energy sources have led to conflict and war. They suggest instead we look at other ways to find energy from the collective. "For example, on cold winter days when we are kids, we would not use a stove to keep us warm. Instead, we would cuddle with each other. Energy is not some hidden treasure waiting to be discovered; it comes from collective consciousness... "Others" are our new mine," they write on the biennale's website. Personally, I support any art project that encourages us all to cuddle!

New Zealand artists continue to share the collective spirit with gusto – I've compiled, thanks to Facebook friends, an incomplete list of current local artists' collectives: Local Time, The everyday collective laboratory, Parlour Peeps, JahJahSphinx (trans-Tasman), Dust Collective, SEEK, Habeus Corpus, Snake Pit, Pauline, Lgop (Looks Good on Paper), Puehu: Cultural dust (collaborative blog site), Madpanic Collective, Cut Collective, et al., D.A.N.C.E. Art Club, and All the Cunning Stunts, whose members are Liz Allan, Clare Noonan and Marnie Slater.

Work by All the Cunning Stunts currently features on the billboards at Te Tuhi in Pakuranga. The collective's multi-layered imagery references advertising images, text language, queer politics and the 'pink dollar' – teasing out, as they note, "What it means to achieve active political agency and search for a celebratory vision of self and group representation in the context of the image bank".

In the composite images presented on three billboards, the group uses “the latest in rainbow-surfacing technology, pixel presence and hypnotic potential”, including the black and white swirl motif reminiscent of 1960s Mod design, Op Art and perhaps even the Spirograph, which incidentally was the top-selling toy in America in 1967.

Good vibes and positive energies keep on coming. Artist A.D. Schierning is running a project at Artstation, Auckland (until November 10) that focuses on forging a reconnection between society and nature. As part of the exhibition, various community groups and the general public are invited to plant a lettuce seed and to watch, as Schierning writes, “their tiny miracle grow... in a project that highlights the beauty of simplicity and the importance of the fundamentals of life”.

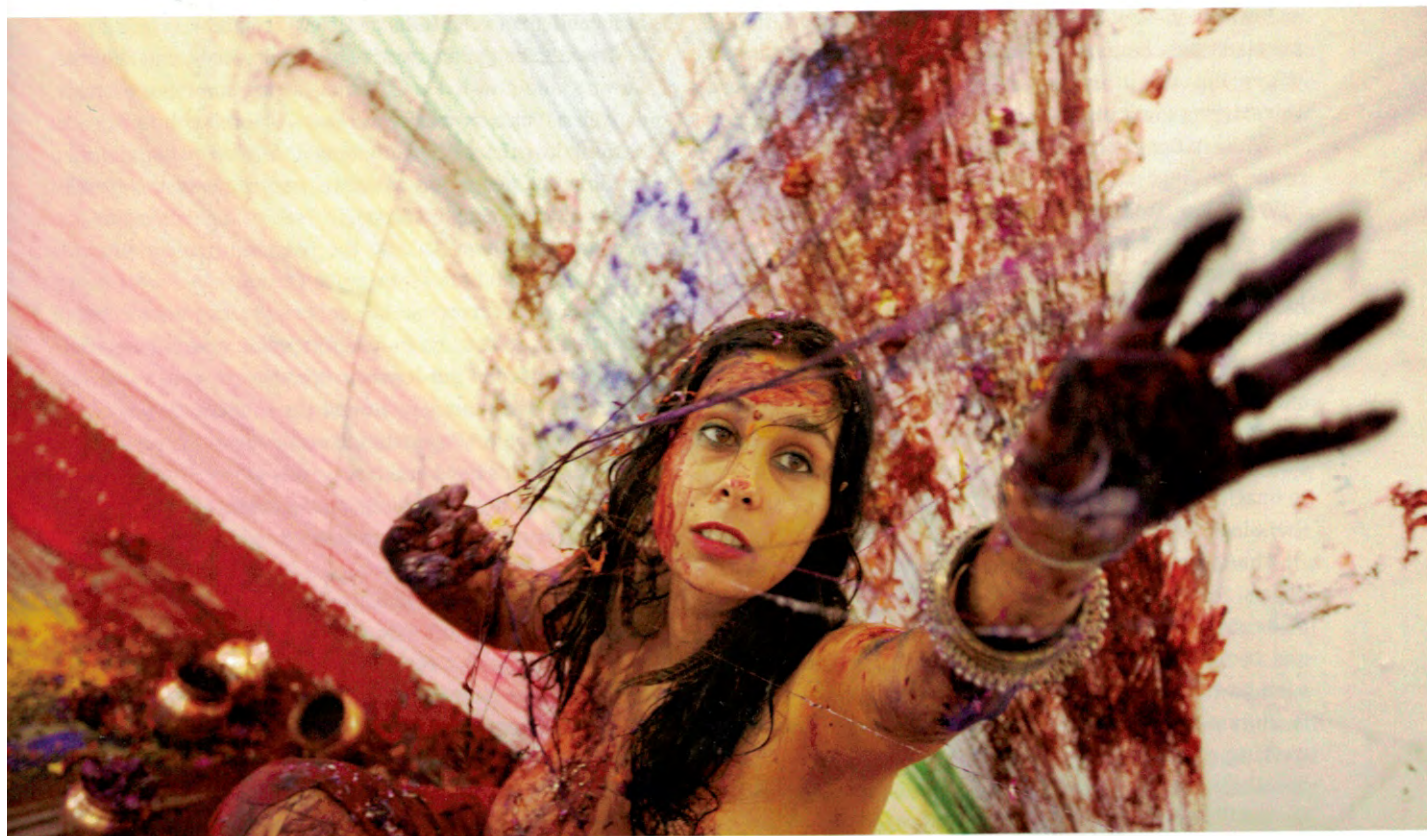
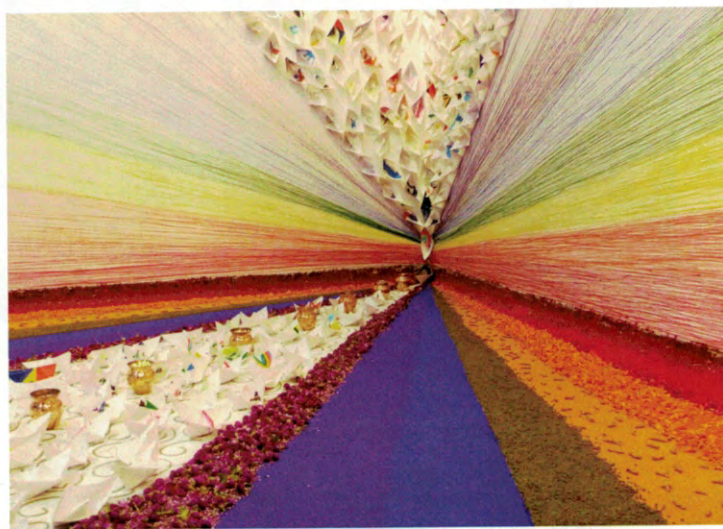
Christchurch’s urban regeneration project, Gap Filler, continues its often madcap community-based projects bringing energy and positivity into the Red Zone, including the Dance-O-Mat. Just as the 1967 Haight Ashbury Happenings brought people into the streets to dance, so does Dance-O-Mat, an outdoor dance floor on a vacant site in Oxford Terrace, complete with coin-operated lighting and sound. Created in response to the loss of many of the performance spaces around the city, Dance-O-Mat is bringing life back to the broken city.

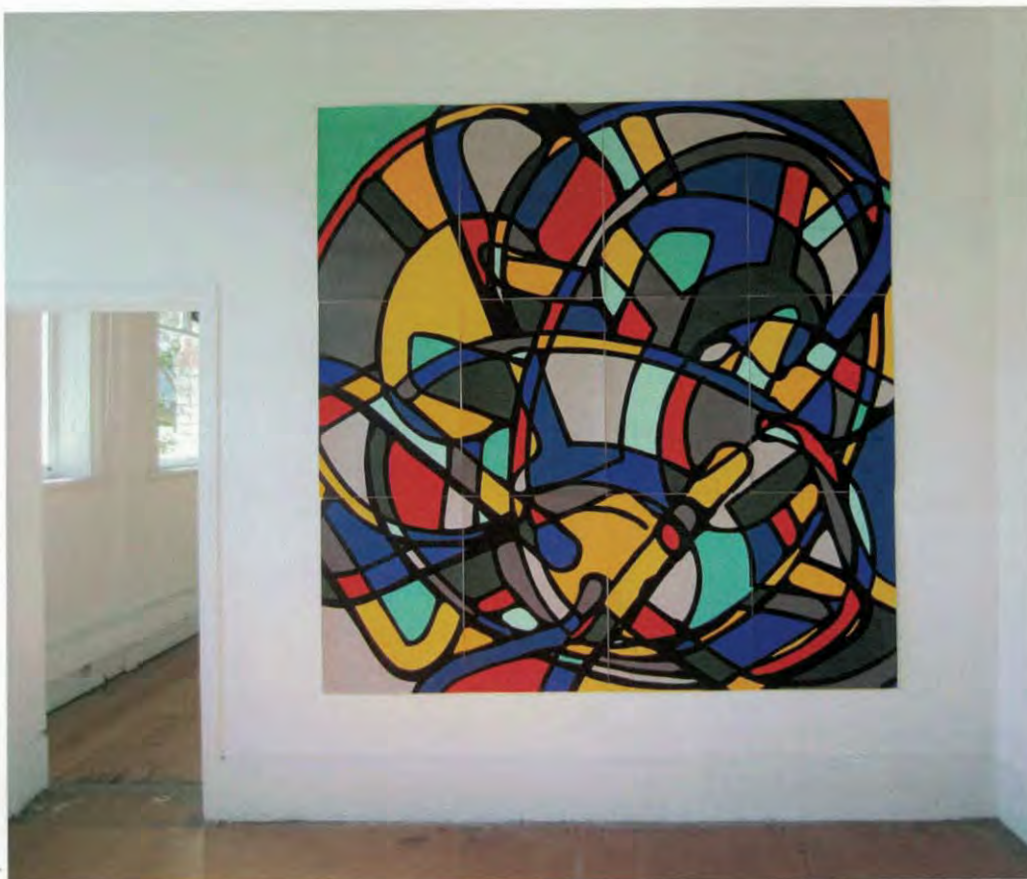
The Summer of Love exponents shared an interest in exploring spirituality through Eastern religions, and the New Zealanders at the Nambassa Festival in 1979 heard a rare opening address from Swami Satchidananda, who spoke at the famous Woodstock Festival in 1969 in front of 600,000 people.

Opposite page (clockwise from left): Regan Gentry (18th McCahon Artist In Residence) has constructed a temporary installation, *?!Deposition, Composition*, made from Pacific Oyster shells at French Bay, Titirangi; willing workers; Regan Gentry with loader. Photos: Chris McBride

Below: Tiffany Singh, *Imagination is more important than knowledge*, 2012, installation in Bangalore, India. Photo: Tiffany Singh

Bottom: Tiffany Singh, still from video work, *Collapse Of A Rainbow*, Bangalore, India. Collaboration between Tiffany Singh and Indu Antony. Image: Indu Antony





Left: Adrian Jackman, *Collider (ii)* 2012, vinyl acrylic on paper. Courtesy of the artist and Snowwhite Gallery

Opposite: All the Cunning Stunts, *The Gayze Off!!!*, 2012, inkjet billboard print. Courtesy of Te Tuhi Centre for the Arts

In a contemporary sense, New Zealand artist Tiffany Singh is thinking through ideas of spirituality, community and healing, principally through the use of collective, community-based public actions. In recent times she has created collaborative projects in Melbourne (Next Wave Festival), Sydney (Biennale of Sydney) and Bangalore (The 1.Shanthiroad residency) and is back in New Zealand to prepare a major work for the Auckland Arts Festival in March 2013. Titled *Fly Me Up To Where You Are*, it aims to give Auckland schoolchildren a voice during the festival.

While in Bangalore on the Asia: New Zealand Foundation residency, Singh worked with children – many of whom had HIV/AIDS or had become orphans as a result of the disease. She was welcomed into their school to conduct a series of drawing workshops encouraging the children to think imaginatively about their hopes and dreams. “I had to really push them to work with and draw from their imaginations, and to realise there was no right or wrong way to do this,” she says, reflecting that the school system there was based on rote learning. “It took time for them to feel confident to be part of a collective process, to engage with abstract thinking, to imagine a ‘magic place’ and what it might feel like to be in that place,” she comments.

Then, making origami-style boats from their drawing papers, Singh installed them in the gallery to create a temple of exuberant colour. Addressing the location of ‘value’ and commercialisation in a community-based art practice such as her own, the artist strongly believes the artwork is ultimately to be found in the process of making – of working, communicating and sharing – with the gallery-based installation being a visually stunning outcome. In this work, the installation’s structure referenced the mandala, the healing

power of chakras, the colour spectrum and sacred rituals performed in temples. The work also took on a powerful feminine reading, with bands of colour pulsating from an energised central focal point. Singh selects her materials and colours carefully, exploring how they are perceived in different cultural contexts, and tracing shared histories and disruptions in meaning between India and New Zealand.

For the Bangalore work she used spices, oils, market flowers, and powders used for cleansing and temple rituals, as well as 7000 metres of rainbow-coloured cotton threads. Surrounding the work were Rangoli folk art patterns drawn by different people on the floor each day. At the time of de-installation, Singh wrapped herself in the cotton threads, and immersed her body in the coloured powders, liquids and flowers. “It was an experimentation piece with a nod to 1960s performance art,” she says, “a deconstruction of a rainbow – gathering, holding, mending and pulling while being grounded in the domestic deconstruction of India right now, with a commentary around the collapse of the secular into everyday life.” Pigments and petals eventually muddled as traces of Singh’s hand and body prints were left on the walls and floor. Finally, everything was gathered and returned to the earth during the ceremonial planting of a tree at the end of the residency.

For Auckland artist Adrian Jackman the use of colour by British artists in the 1960s, such as Bridget Riley, Derrick Greaves and Patrick Caulfield, has been a source of inspiration for a series of new paintings. Shown at Unitec’s Snowwhite Gallery, they present the eye with a series of challenges – forms flip in and out of focus as pattern, colour and strong, graphic, black outlines work hard to activate visual sensations. There’s an interplay between the desire for a holistic reading of form



(we search for this across the canvas) and a close focus on independent segments or details, in which small sections of colour dominate and recede, breaking up the whole.

Jackman quotes Bridget Riley: "The eye can travel over the surface in a way parallel to the way it moves over nature. It should feel caressed and soothed, experience frictions and ruptures, glide and drift. One moment, there will be nothing to look at and the next second the canvas seems to refill, to be crowded with visual events".

Enveloping the viewer in colour and pattern is the pulsating, hypnotic work of Wellington-based artist Benjamin Buchanan, who is currently in Beijing on a Red Gate residency. "I'm imagining it might be a bit like the 1960s in London or San Fran or something," he says. "People seem ready for change and there are lots of awesome outfits about the place."

Earlier this year Buchanan undertook a commission for The Dowse in Lower Hutt. The huge work, made painstakingly from adhesive vinyl, and without the use of preparation drawings, radiated across several walls in a brightly coloured, kaleidoscopic design, literally driving your eye 'around the bend'. Titled *Forever*, the work implied a sense of infinity as it reverberated across the space, eventually breaking up at its edges. "Colour is how I create a vibe or feeling in the work," says Buchanan. "Every colour and colour combination adds to or effects the feeling of the work."

Asked if the mandala was an influence, Buchanan says that his work is more about chance than balance. "There's an element of chance in what I do – the compositions are not planned but kind of just materialise. There would be a relationship between what I do and the mandala through the meditative process I have. I hope for something profound, but when you are working with vinyl on paper or the wall, there

are always material constraints. Psychedelia is a process." There's a sense of rhythm and musicality in the works, which is not surprising given Buchanan's musical background. As rapper Erik Ultimate he worked with musician Coco Solid from 2003 to 2008 – a period he describes as "very psychedelic in spirit". "I'm totally into album cover art and have recently contributed my work to several album covers. Most of my vinyl collection is punk, post-punk and rap stuff. I listen to a bit of 1960s music, like Rocky Erikson, but couldn't care less about the Beach Boys or the terrible Beatles. Psychedelic music from the 1990s makes a bit more sense to me."

"I often think of a psychedelic effect in my work but not really specifically of the 1960s. If I think of psychedelia, a bunch of images come to mind – mainly of people taking drugs and dancing about – and how these images are still used to sell stuff. I suppose what interests me most about that period is notions of self-expression and movement. I see it as the point where pattern and abstraction (in a modernist sense) changes from being potentially spiritually transformative to becoming corrupted. So the 1960s are pretty much a mystery to me, but, you know, Catholic school in small-town New Zealand in the 1980s was pretty trippy."

Influential American artist, cultural analyst and writer, Martha Rosler, whose work spans from the 1960s to the present, has written (online in the e-flux journal #33) about artists' involvement in social change and protest throughout history and she tracks these "dreams of revolution". As each decade expresses its particular "dreams of revolution" through the relevant tactics of the times – a 1960s rainbow-coloured counterculture, a 1970s punk "uglification", or an 1980s globalisation – it becomes clear that art and artists have long been at the centre of instituting change.