"Mostly it is loss which teaches us about the worth of things"

Arthur Schopenhauer

LISA CHANDLER LANDSCAPES OF LOSS

When Lisa Chandler contacted me to write the introduction to this catalogue in May 2022, Europe was entering a summer that would be marked not only by war but also crises arriving at a speed and on a scale never seen before: record poverty, heatwaves, drought, and fire; and, most recently, the near grounding of river barges on the river Rhine and the death of thousands of fish on the river Oder. While in New Zealand, extreme storms and floods have closed the roads of an entire coastline and stalled the truck carrying the paintings of *Landscapes of Loss* towards the Hastings City Art Gallery and an exhibition opening on the 9th of September.

Evermore relevant it seems, the paintings of Chandler's major new series, *Landscapes of Loss*, embody the crisis of crises that seems to define our time. With each of her works, we are able to dwell, and move within, a space nuanced by personal and collective loss, just as a previously assumed human trajectory of amelioration is lost to us. Significantly, Chandler's paintings bear witness to a suddenly more ruinous epoch, and the possibility of an artistic practice that responds both affectively and responsibly to it.

When I first saw the images of Chandler's paintings, I happened to be reading Czeslaw Milosz's *The Witness of Poetry*. As I wrote, it was as if I ran my fingers over both paintings and text, trying to understand the artist's achievement. And

so, my essay exploring the artistic 'language' of Chandler's oeuvre ensued. It follows Sarah McClintock's guide to the context, content and importance of Chandler's works by way of the exhibition's sub-themes of *Ruin*, *Absence*, *Mercy*, and *Havoc*.

As McClintock says, art has a central role in 'reflecting and affecting us', and this has always been the inherent aim of Chandler's work. As a 'contemporary history painter', the artist always opens us to scenes, or a kind of landscape, within which we might recognise and reflect on the accumulations of history that have formed our epoch, and the ways in which that might unfold in our future. With Chandler, we continually see, and feel, the types of pivotal, and transformational, events that befall us.

Typically, Chandler divides her year between New Zealand and Europe, after having been a resident artist of the Leipzig International Art Programme in 2016 and taking a studio within the 10 hectare art and cultural centre of the Spinnerei. After her usual summer visit to New Zealand in 2019, she found herself unable to return to Germany because of COVID-19. Digging in, she began her most ambitious series of work yet: a broad and painterly exploration of the many nuances of loss in human experience witnessed within the frame of recognisable and often ruinous local and global phenomena and events.

In Chandler's works of *Ruin* and *Mercy* we feel what it means to live with the ubiquity of extreme events such as floods; a global pandemic; social crises, including the housing of over 4,000 NZ children in motels; war; refugee crises; severe famine and drought; and tyrannical forms of imposed control. In the unfortunate familiarity of these events, and aware of their consequences, we inhabit each work's sense of loss – their 'gentle sorrow' as McClintock calls it.

There is a material pathos to the artist's *Absence* (large-scale collages, installation and prints), as we are opened to the nuances of a more personal grief. Making the coincidence of both presence and absence central to these works, Chandler is able to explore the most difficult moments in our lives when we have to question what we do, or do not, know of our loved ones, and ourselves. Affectively, found or 'scavenged' domestic materials, objects and photographs materialise our existence within the most intimate, and poignant, ambit of memory and nostalgia.

As the artist makes the 'remnants' that were first conceptualised in the painting of *Ruin* physically real in these works, they embody our own sense of personal loss. So, as McClintock says, 'memory and materiality are inextricably intertwined.'

Since I first met Lisa Chandler in 2012, her painterly visual 'language' has remained compellingly consistent. The artist's aesthetic and sensibility has always been marked by her process of coincident construction and disintegration of material and form to create traceries and layers of past, present and (possible) future(s). This is evident from the continually arriving-and-departing figures of her *In Transit* series; to the fragility of contested

spaces about to tip into an era of 'progress' in *China Dream* and *Between Yesterday & Tomorrow*; to this exhibition's supremely intimate, tactile and ultimately fraught archaeology of a lost life in *You'll Always be in My Heart*.

In *Havoc*, the formative potential of the artist's 'landscape' is almost overcome by a deluge of articles and ephemera that bear witness to the deep divisions that have arisen in New Zealand over its response to COVID-19. Each highly charged piece of the installation is held 'in place' by masking tape, along the length of one wall. It is formed, in an extremely provisional way, by the force of havoc. And yet, it 'reads' as always in formation, the way a landscape is: as landscape that is both proof and prospect of the shaping of one's land.

What Chandler achieves in *Landscapes of Loss* is much more than an instantiation of crisis after crisis. Her works provide a critical lens on our landscape and our construction of it – our ability to protect what we (do and should) hold dear; to be kind; and to change our ways, or not.

They allow us to see our lives as characterised by both ruin and beauty. No, more than that, they achieve something Milosz was trying to get at – they hold us in an artistic space of suspension, a 'limbo space', as I call it, of both hope and fear for our future. Each of Chandler's *Landscapes of Loss* allow us to occupy a space in which an artistic practice can still express itself beautifully, as we live contemporaneously in the memory of ourselves, materially aware of our losses and where we would want to find ourselves, together, in the future.

Jodie Dalgleish, Luxembourg, Summer 2022

Read Jodie's full essay at the back of this catalogue



NOUN

- 1. a destroyed or decayed building or town
- 2. the state or condition of being destroyed or decayed
- 3. loss of wealth, position, etc, or something that causes such loss; downfall
- 4. something that is severely damaged his life was a ruin
- 5. a person who has suffered a downfall, bankruptcy, etc

Word origin: from Old French ruine, from Latin ruīna a falling down, from ruere to fall violently

Collins English Dictionary. Copyright @ HarperCollins Publishers



Ruination 2021 70 x 50cm Acrylic on canvas We live in a constant state of crisis. Fires rip through forests, flood waters erode coastlines, wars tear cities to the ground, pandemics take lives, inequality divides us, and it is easy to feel that we exist in a time of ruin.

As a contemporary history painter Lisa Chandler seeks out that which defines our time – the forces that have created this moment. It is impossible for her to ignore the various crises that we face, and with *Landscapes of Loss* she tackles the broad external and existential forces that impact the ways in which we live our lives and perceive our world.

We cannot pretend that terrible things do not happen, the reality is that climate change is at a precipice and scenes such as that depicted in *At the Mercy of Nature* will soon become the norm. Actearoa is an island and we are particularly vulnerable to the forces of nature, but even in the most landlocked nations rivers are breaking their banks and causing untold destruction as a result of climate change. Similarly, the reality of the housing crisis is that thousands of children live in motels as shown in *A Bleak Existence*. The sick acidity of the yellow in this painting ensures that we remain uncomfortable in the face of the reality our youngest and most vulnerable people face.

Chandler loves paint and its ability to transform from a gentle wash on the canvas to impasto on board. Her use of paint is always thoughtful – aggressive mark making contrasts with dreamy liquid stains, shine and gloss is juxtaposed with flat matte surfaces, and the figurative sits alongside abstraction – always in ways that carefully align the process with the meaning of the work. Bombed out buildings are reduced to rubble in *Ruin*, and with the painterly ashy and fluid effects that spread from the debris it seems that this wreckage is the result

of a disaster – likely brought on by fire or war. We are completely vulnerable to these forces and in truth there is little that separates any of us from similar displacement. With *Nowhere to Turn* Chandler has created a composition that perfectly represents the very thin line between comfort and loss. A narrow border divides a line of figures from a tent city. It is a scene we are becoming increasingly familiar with as refugee crises across multiple countries and continents surge as a result of the rising tide of war, famine, and tyranny.

The resilience needed to fight ruin is best expressed in the painting *Forgotten*. The huddled figure in the left panel, undoubtedly an unhoused person seeking shelter with their shopping trolley, has found respite under the dramatically twisted branches of a tortured manuka tree. Buffeted for countless years by prevailing winds, these trees thrive despite the forces of nature. They bow but do not break. Their resistance is the lesson – in times such as these we need to protect and help each other. In the face of ruin, we must mend things together.

Sarah McClintock

¹ https://www.rnz.co.nz/national/programmes/checkpoint/audio/2018818398/more-children-living-in-motels-as-housing-crisis-unrelenting, accessed 12 July 2022.

A Bleak Existence 2022 170 x 220cm Acrylic on canvas





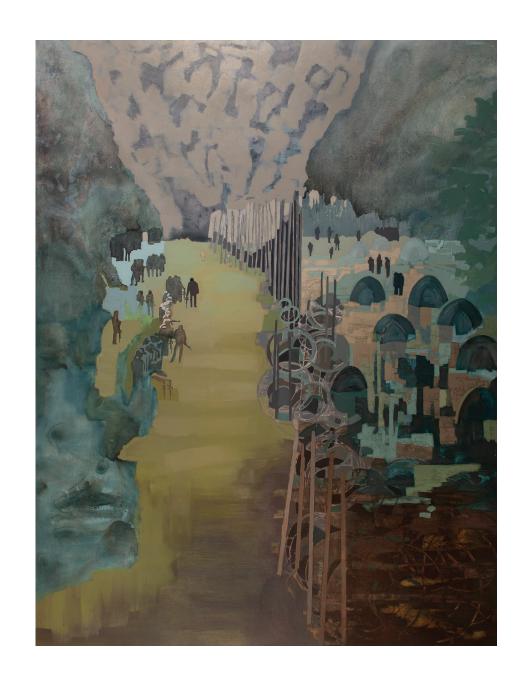
At the Mercy of Nature 2021 150 x 200cm Acrylic on canvas





Nowhere to Turn 2022 250 x 190cm Acrylic on canvas





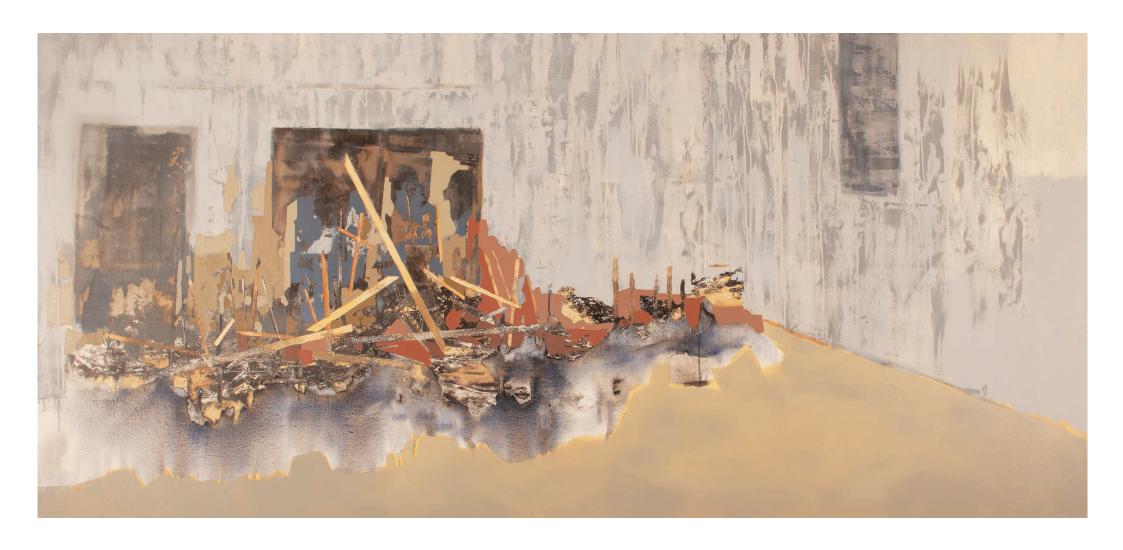
Forgotten
2021
120 x 180cm
Diptych, Acrylic on plywood panel





Ruin 2021 120 x 260cm Acrylic on canvas







NOUN

- 1. the state of being away
- 2. the time during which a person or thing is away
- 3. the fact of being without something; lack

Word origin: via Old French from Latin absentia, from absēns a being away

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absence

Lisa Chandler spent much of 2021 as a scavenger – she looted derelict buildings, scoured op-shops, and collected from junk yards. Her mission was to find materials for a series of artworks that examine loss and nostalgia. As a painter who in recent years has begun including printmaking in her work, this body of work represents a further evolution of her practice. Rusty iron, peeling wood, hessian, aged wallpapers, corroded nails, paint, as well as old photos, books, lace, clothes, and blankets have been brought together to create large-scale collages.

The major seven panel work *Remnants* is the most sculptural of Chandler's latest work. Retaining her colour palette of ochre, grey, rust red and seafoam, she has layered found materials, primarily from abandoned and dilapidated homes. There is rich conceptual potential in such materials – they are now anonymous but were once sites of lives lived – with all of the love, sadness, hope and anger that this represents. They are, as Chandler puts it, real remnants of past lives and times.

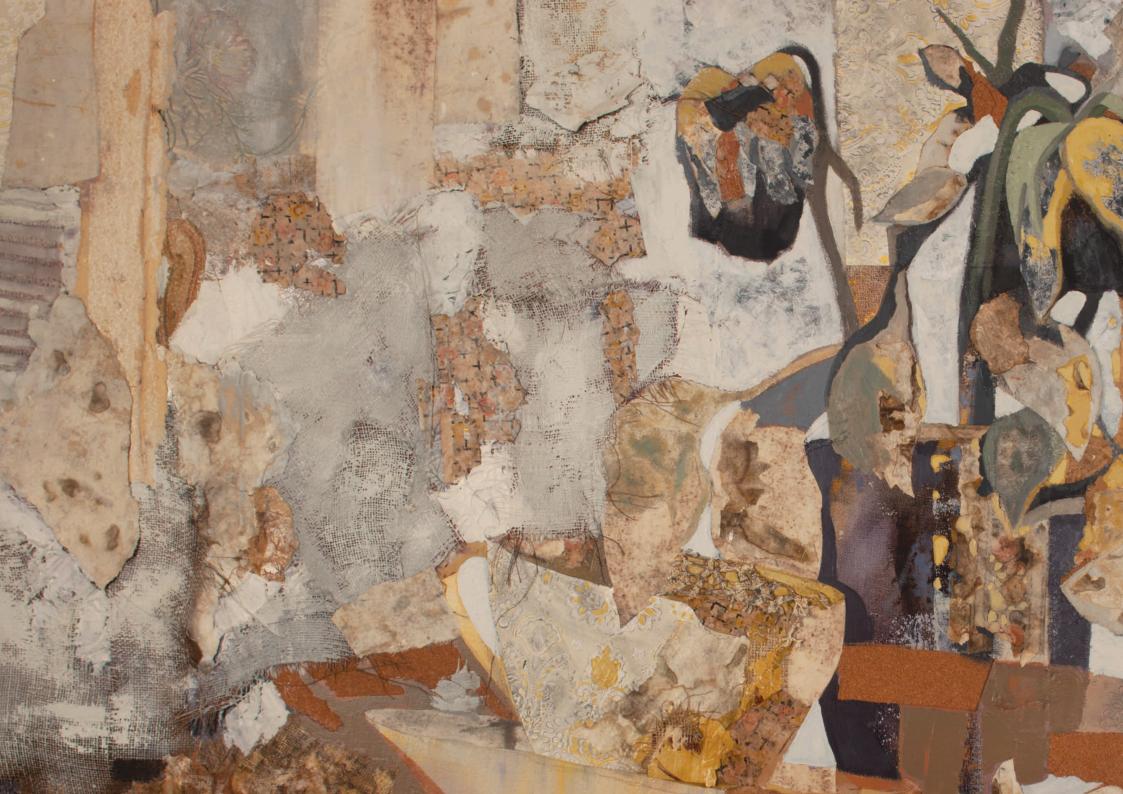
Memory and materiality are inextricably intertwined. We often keep talismans from people who have passed – photographs, jewellery, tchotchkes, letters, objects, and heirlooms through which to keep someone's spirit with the living. But memory is an active pursuit, without work crucial people and events can be lost to time. Recent studies suggest that the Holocaust is becoming a mystery to younger generations. With the youngest survivors entering their late 70s, soon it will have completely disappeared from living history.² With no living connections remaining, the lessons learned from this horrific history will rely on family members, historians, and all of us to work to keep its memory alive and avoid generational amnesia.³

A gentle sorrow permeates many of Chandler's paintings, but these works contain a particularly personal grief. Each of the collages are intimately connected to family – the loss of which is the most painful period in most people's lives. *His Favourite Chair* and *You'll Always be in my Heart* act as poignant expressions of absence and presence. The father figure seated in what must be his favourite chair and the forgotten wilting flowers are overlaid with textiles that evoke emotion – blankets, well-worn shirts, candlewick bedspreads, and doilies that perfectly represent fathers, mothers, grandparents, and old friends.

Ghosts haunt the installation *In Memoriam* – faded memories of weddings, holidays, and generations long gone. Obscured through the printing process, like pale reflections of happier times, the images are displayed with objects in a shrine to the lost. They have been purposely rendered without faces to universalise the figures, meaning that this could be any family, in any place, at any time. Chandler resonates with the power and pathos of the bittersweet.⁴ Beauty can be found in pain and loss – we can only appreciate the light because of the dark. The absence of those we love hurts because grief is an expression of love.

Sarah McClintock

- ² https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/study-shows-americans-are-forgetting-about holocaust-n865396. Accessed 12 July 2022.
- ³ More about generational amnesia, specifically from an environmental perspective can be found at https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20210623-generational-amnesia-the-memory-loss-that-harms-the-planet, accessed 12 July 2022.
- ⁴ The concept of 'bittersweet' is best explored in Susan Cain's book *Bittersweet: How Sorrow and Longing Make Us Whole*, Penguin, 2022.



His Favourite Chair 2021 190 x 150cm Reclaimed wallpapers, calico, hessian, blanket, shirt, cork, acrylic paint on canvas





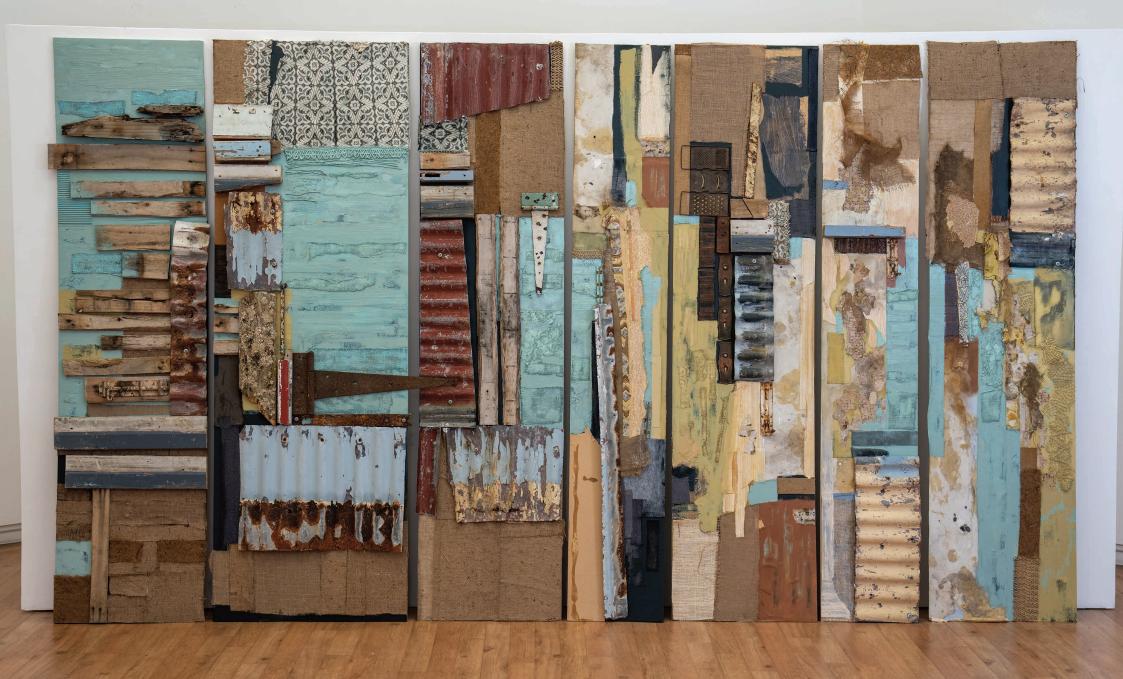
You'll always be in my Heart 2021 150 x 200cm Reclaimed wallpapers, candlewick bedspread, embroidered placemat, lace doily, calico, hessian, blanket, baking paper, cork, acrylic paint on canvas





Remnants
2022
Septych
240 x 700cm
Corrugated iron, reclaimed wood,
hessian, bed strapping, reclaimed
wallpaper, lace tablecloth, calico,
corroded nails and bolts, door hinges,
grater, door handle plates, iron,
corrugated card, baking paper, acrylic
paint on plywood panels





In Memoriam 2022

Collagraph and Cyanotype prints on paper, Collagraph plate, photo frame, tea cup and saucer, sherry glasses, crystal decanter, variety of china ornaments, glass bottle, china vase, china jug, small china plate, cameo brooch, necklace, encaustic wax, oil stick, lace doilies







NOUN

- compassionate treatment of or attitude towards an offender, adversary, etc, who is in one's power or care; clemency; pity
- 2. the power to show mercy to throw oneself on someone's mercy
- 3. a relieving or welcome occurrence or state of affairs

 his death was a mercy after weeks of pain
- 4. at the mercy of

Word origin: from Old French, from Latin mercēs wages, recompense, price, from merx goods

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"Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me."

Matthew 25:34-36

The seven-panel painting of *The Seven Acts of Mercy* holds many secrets, including the true identity of the artist. Something that is not a secret is that it was common during this period for art to reflect and project the wealth, power, and morality of the person or group that commissioned the work as much as the technical skill of the artist. The Master of Alkmaar takes the works of mercy described in the bible and transports them to the 16th century city of Alkmaar, likely at the behest of the confraternity from the city's Holy Spirit Almshouse. The aim was to both encourage acts of good work in the city and highlight the charitable work, as well as the religious and social standing of the commissioners.

Art has always had a role in reflecting and affecting us – an aim inherent in all of Lisa Chandler's work. In her *The Seven Works of Mercy after the Master of Alkmaar 1504* she follows the thematic and compositional structure of the original. We start in the left panel with *Feeding the Hungry*, and then move through *Water to the Thirsty, Clothing the Naked, Burying the Dead, Sheltering the Homeless, Visiting the Sick*, and finally *Visiting the Imprisoned*. Like the original, Chandler transports these works of mercy to contemporary society, but with a masked health worker holding up an iPad, displaced refugees,

and shelled buildings. While the lessons may have their roots in Christian traditions, Chandler places these acts within the realm of health, migration, housing inequality, and disaster – all of which are quickly becoming universal experiences. Chandler works with positive and negative space to create tension in her work and takes this series to another level by distressing the surface. Through the act of scraping away at the surface of her own painting, Chandler is reflecting the damage done to the Alkmaar paintings over the past five centuries. But the process also holds conceptual meaning. The panels deal with distressing material and that the surface shows wear reflects the toll that mercy truly takes.

Mercy is a complex word – it has its roots in French and Latin and is often linked to an expression of kindness within an unbalanced power dynamic. Someone who gives mercy is always more powerful than those who receive mercy. When engaging in charitable deeds, it is necessary to understand the complex social structures that have created the need for this type of humanitarianism. Without appreciating this it is impossible to address the true imbalances at play. That these are works of mercy is crucial to understanding the meaning of these paintings. Kindness is a word that has been heavily used over the past 3 years: it has been an antidote to crisis and has brought people together. It takes real work to maintain generosity, empathy, and compassion in the face of relentless bad news, but it is possible.

Sarah McClintock

⁵ J.P. Filedt Kok, 'Meester van Alkmaar, Polyptych with the Seven Works of Charity, 1504', in J.P. Filedt Kok (ed.), Early Netherlandish Paintings, 2008online coll. cat. Amsterdam: hdl.handle.net/10934/RM0001.COLLECT.9048, accessed 13 July 2022.

The Seven Works of Mercy after the Master of Alkmaar 1504 2022 Septych each panel 170 x 93cm Acrylic on plywood panels

From left to right:
Feeding the Hungry
Water to the Thirsty
Clothing the Naked
Burying the Dead
Sheltering the Homeless
Visiting the Sick
Visiting the Imprisoned

















Be Kind 2017-2022 150 x 100cm Acrylic on canvas Acts of Kindness 2022

A5 postcards

Lisa Chandler and Te Whare Toi o Heretaunga - Hastings City Art Gallery invite you to take a moment to write a short note of thanks to someone who has recently supported you on one of Lisa's postcards. Then pop your postcard in the box and gallery staff will post it for you.

In March 2020, Amnesty International launched The Big Kindness Count. In the first month New Zealanders undertook more than 16,000 acts of kindness, turning the threat of Covid into acts of solidarity and hope. Two years later the national psyche is in a very different place – with the seemingly endless pandemic, rising costs of living, inflation, and the housing market collapse. In this environment acts of kindness are even more important.





NOUN

- 1. destruction; devastation; ruin
- 2. informal; confusion; chaos
- 3. (transitive) archaic to lay waste

Word origin: from Old French havot pillage, probably of Germanic origin

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Social stratification is a force that defines many societies – the categorisation of people and their 'value' through their birth, wealth, occupation, education, race, and perceived power.⁶ It has led to deep division and systemic inequity, and its impact has been felt even more keenly in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. The 1981 Springbok tour was perhaps the last time Aotearoa was quite so acutely divided, with families, friends, and colleagues separated across ideological lines. Locked in quarantine, as depicted in *Cordon Sanitaire*, it was easy to dive into the depths of the internet without restriction. In New Zealand these restrictions initially brought us together as a 'team of 5 million', but in other countries isolation policies and restrictions left vulnerable people desperate and alone.⁷ The pandemic has revealed the underlying imbalance that causes economic vulnerability and disaffection. The rise of misinformation has contributed to these divides and the perception of elite academics as untrustworthy is a direct result of social stratification.

Lisa Chandler creates a landscape that examines this division with her work *Havoc*. Sourced from 8 months of news articles, ephemera, and her own printmaking, this work is deliberately chaotic. From afar it appears as an abstracted cliff face that shifts in tone from white, to grey, through to yellow and shades of turquoise. It is massive and overwhelming in scale and reflects the sheer amount of information we have all had to process over these uncertain years. As you draw closer, graphics and text are revealed – we see headlines proclaiming death counts, government sanctioned pamphlets, and anti-vax flyers. Chandler then obscures these messages by painting over crucial information, layering to hide context, and masking with tape – each an action that highlights the ways in which information is manipulated and hidden. Even

the way each piece of paper is hung is vulnerable to loss – fixed on the wall with masking tape the entire work can change in an instance, by anyone, with the removal or shifting of a single piece. While more can be discovered through contemplating *Havoc* it is impossible to understand everything it contains – a true reflection of the current status of information in the digital age. We have never had more access to each other and to information, and yet many lack the tools to negotiate the authenticity and reliability of this deluge of data.

Havoc is where the title of the exhibition, Landscape of Loss, is at its most relevant. It deals with loss in all its forms, including the loss of life, certainty, comfort, and community through rising inequality. But it is also a landscape – with layers of geological stratification. The strata of the earth are created over millennia and are evidence of the dramatic changes the Earth has undergone. This kind of geological timeline can give us perspective in this time of great change. Everything seems urgent, and it is, but if the very earth can change and adapt, so can humanity.

Sarah McClintock

⁶ David B Grusky, "The Past, Present and Future of Social Inequality." In Social Stratification: Class, Race, and Gender in Sociological Perspective (Second ed.). Boulder: Westview Press, 2011. p.3.

⁷ https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/may/07/qatars-migrant-workers-beg-for-food-as-covid-19-infections-rise, accessed 18 July 2022.

⁸ https://www.gns.cri.nz/Home/Our-Science/Land-and-Marine-Geoscience/Regional-Geology/The-Geology-of-New-Zealand/Stratigraphy, accessed 13 July 2022.

⁹ https://www.gns.cri.nz/Home/Our-Science/Land-and-Marine-Geoscience/Palaeontology/Online-Resources/New-Zealand-s-Geological-Timescale, accessed 13 July 2022.



Havoc 2022

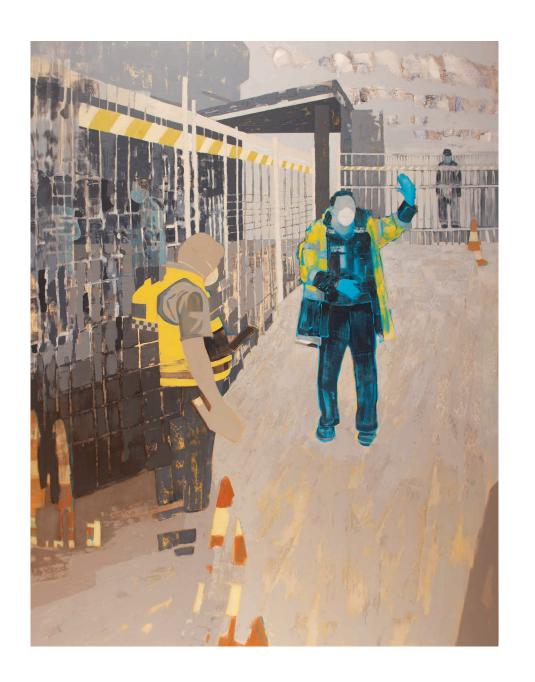
Colour and B/W photocopies of original works, Coloured papers, New Zealand Government posters and flyers, newspaper cuttings, letters to the editor, posters, caution tape, emergency striped tape, masking tape, spray paint and acrylic paint

Disclaimer: Any of the opinions expressed in the content of this artwork do not reflect the views of Lisa Chandler or Te Whare Toi o Heretaunga - Hastings City Art Gallery.



Cordon Sanitaire 2022 Acrylic on canvas 220 x 170cm





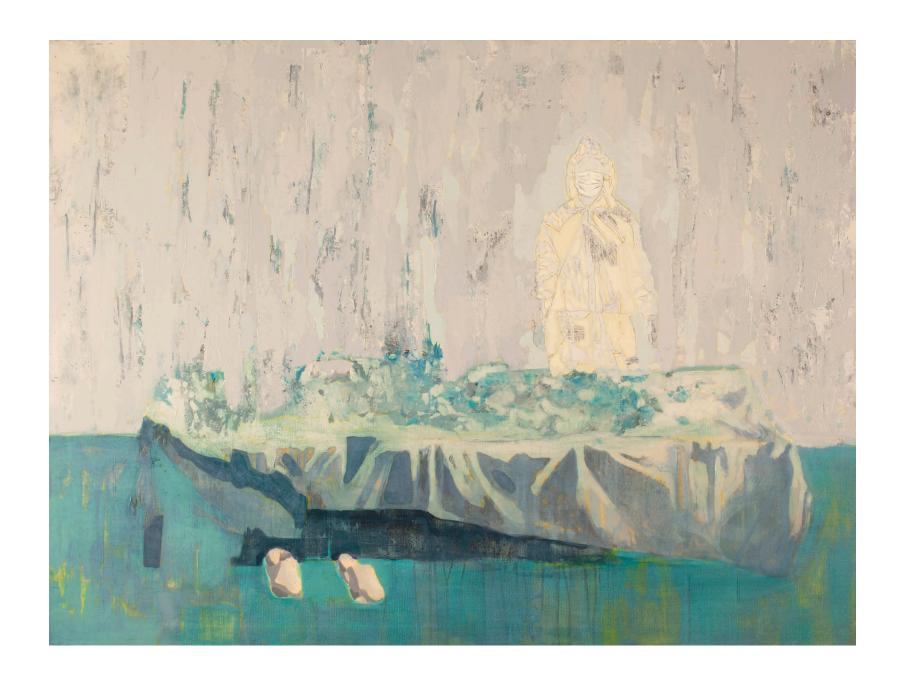
Taken II 2021 Acrylic on canvas 160 x 120cm





Gone 2021 Acrylic on canvas 91 x 122cm





OPENING LANDSCAPES OF LOSS

When Lisa Chandler wrote to ask me to write the introduction to this catalogue in May 2022, Europe was on the verge of a summer that would seem unprecedented in history. The month before, the countries of the continent were sceptical of the possibility of a major war on the tail end of a global pandemic and the ramp-up of a climate crisis, and then shocked when the first attack, of what would obviously be a campaign, was made. At the same time, energy and cost of living crises tipped record numbers of families below the poverty line, especially in the UK. Then, on top of ongoing warming and water scarcity, the heat of summer moved in like never before and ignited thousands of acres of forests and crop lands.

With the most violent trigger of war, it seemed to me like 'a switch had been flicked' and the trajectory of a new, more resoundingly ruinous, epoch that would run humanity towards its final end, or not, had burst into view.

For the last few years, I have been thinking about where our artistic 'language' has got us. What did we commit to, or engage in, for us to end up here? And most importantly, in what way can we aesthetically respond to our times as artists, with some sense of responsibility? It's a question I consider now, as I happen to read Czeslaw Milosz's *The Witness of Poetry*, and as I encounter Chandler's *Landscapes of Loss*.

Milosz wrote *The Witness of Poetry* (in a series of lectures between 1981 and 1982) as a Polish-American writer who had witnessed his native country's subjection to two totalitarian regimes and devastation by two world wars. Specifically, his survey of poetic activity in his native country after WWII provides a case study on the personal and public reach for an expressive language when all seems lost. Centrally, Milosz is concerned with the question of whether or not our artistic production can bear witness to our time, or whether we would fall prey to a myth of the 'isolated artist' or go round in circles with an aesthetics that cannot, or does not, 'speak' of what we see.

As a 'contemporary history painter', Chandler depicts our potentially ruinous epoch in a material way, across a global range. Her work has always carried a sense of humanity making itself within an epoch of 'progress' marked by both its 'construction' and disintegration. The artist explores events that seem typical of our human trajectory, and as they arrive and pass, and arrive again, her paintings of the past always seem currently familiar, as if they always have an inevitable prescience about them. With her, history is especially contemporary, and the contemporary is always coloured by history.

Lisa Chandler's artistic 'language' has been consistent from the very first time I met her, as curator of the New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts in 2012.

Throughout her oeuvre, her abstract-and-figurative 'language' has embodied the transitional and transformational nature of her chosen events, in the appearance and disappearance of washes, marks and figures, and in the ambiguity and dynamism of her pictorial space. With her characteristic process of engaging in the constant formation and destruction of her subject's material form, she embodies and evokes the traceries and layers of past, present and possible futures that coexist in her works.

With Chandler's exploration of the human inhabitation of quintessentially transitory spaces, such as Kuala Lumpur's international airport in 2012 (as her *In Transit* series), and Singapore's malls in 2013 (as *Slice*), she has created the kinds of traceries that evoke both presence and absence in her work. In one of the first works I selected for exhibition, actually completed in Wellington, New Zealand in 2012, the artist plays materially with the duality of pedestrians that are both an inhabitant (as an impression of, and on, the built environment) and a passing figure lost to the 'snapshot' almost immediately. As I see them, her figures always exist on the verge of being recognisable (by way of their face, or not), just as each event she captures is poised on the verge of falling to the forces of its time.

Chandler also gives us 'windows' on particularly contested spaces, as she did with *China Dream* of 2015. In this series, the artist captures figures poised on the verge of the 'development' of the megalopolis 'Jing-Jin-Ji' in Beijing. While in *Between Yesterday & Tomorrow* of 2016, she gives us already occupied spaces in Leipzig (her adopted town for half of the year) about to tip into their moment of gentrification. In one of my favourite paintings, *One never goes*

further than when they do not know where they are going, a loose lattice of lines and cracks, and the hint of something like a green vine, occupy a window-sized view on the clash-and-confluence of both an (intimately) inside, and (seemingly endless) outside, architectural space.

In *The Dividing Line* of 2020, contested space takes on an urgent and more muscular 'street'-style quality as Chandler depicts the increasing ubiquity, and potentially forgotten past, of violent spaces of protest. Yet in these works too, I find the artist's characteristic 'language' of construction-and-disintegration in play as riot-, gas-, and hygiene-masked figures clash, fall and run, but nobody really seems substantial to history, or to language, even as they take sides.

For me, all of Chandler's scenes hang in a kind of suspension, or 'limbo space', between personal identity and erasure, hopeful and questionable human effect, and past, present and future. They materially contain and carry their losses, both in paint and in their subject of an event that results in loss.

Now with *Landscapes of Loss*, Chandler materially explores the theme of loss itself: something she realises that she has been painting about all this time, she tells me.¹ And this is a most challenging project – an exploration of the many nuances of loss in human experience within the frame of a broad range of recognisable, potentially ruinous, events. Yet, with her sub-themes of *Ruin*, *Absence*, *Mercy* and *Havoc*, the artist is able to not only broadly reflect the realities of loss-filled events but also embody the many subtle nuances of our personal and collective experience of loss as we live through them. In *Ruin*, physical and social structures that should support us tumble into ruin, while in *Absence*, a material life of memory is full of lost stories and personal identities,

and *Mercy* leads to a question of faith in humanity and artistic practice. After which point, *Havoc* expresses both doubt and hope in the human ability to 'be kind', along with a kind of grief for the way New Zealand society has become so divided over its response to COVID-19.

Across Chandler's sub-themes, we discover not only the material subject of the artist's work but also the details of her material choices that constitute the syntax of her painterly 'language': the arrangements of marks, patterns and inflections that charge the painting with its meaning(s).

In *Ruin*, the artist begins with a syntax of staining, which she uses to optimal effect. In her spread, drip and smear of paint, she creates an epic kind of 'ruin room' (my words), or container, for the material detail of 'ruin'. Most effectively, a background of disintegrating verticals of viscous paint frames and contains the detailed traceries and patterns that have formed as the artist's pooling of paint has penetrated her masking of the foregrounded uprights that 'read' like a collapsing lattice. In my mind, *Ruin* materially conceptualises the idea that the act of painterly construction can exist within a structure of disintegration. And in it, I even find the etymology of 'ruin' itself, as the word's sense of being both evidential (like a noun) and dynamically in-process (like a verb), as in the 'act of giving way and falling down' (my emphasis).²

In *At the Mercy of Nature*, Chandler's use of staining is able to evoke the elemental material of water as indicative of the way extreme events arrive suddenly, and ubiquitously, along with their various, and very real, manifestations of loss. Here, the artist's extremely thin and unusually animate

washes of paint embody a 'crisis', and a 'crisis of crises', as a dinghy carries a 'rescued' occupant, manned by inundated and masked rescue workers, towards the viewer. It 'speaks' to me of Milosz's description of a ruinous epoch that is characterised by extreme events that arrive at a speed and 'on a scale never witnessed before.' In this painting, we see that nature is both under threat and threatening as the basic anthropocenic order of weather systems and the pathogenic separation of animals and humans continues to ubiquitously fail.

Just this week, the headlines remind me of crises of water. On the Rhine, river barges critical to transportation from central Europe to the North Sea come close to being grounded even with significantly reduced loads of cargo. And the European heat wave that has burned forests manifests itself not only in a record-high 'marine heat wave' in the Mediterranean Sea but also in the thousands of dead fish that have washed up on the banks of the river Oder bordering Germany and Poland, because of some as yet unidentified toxic substance.⁴ And all this comes as the artist tells me that the transportation of her paintings to Hastings City Art Gallery has been stalled because of extreme storms and floods.

Milosz says that no creative production can be ambivalent to a past–future axis that contains, and evidences, both our histories and our (ultimate) fate.⁵ Treating it as a continuum of practice, different artists of different epochs might place themselves differently. Some artists, dedicated to the past (because of present failures and a concomitantly bleak future) will be at one end, and those dedicated to an optimistic, even utopian, future (based on 'favourable'

accumulations of the past) will be at the other (my paraphrase).

Chandler's practice is concerned with both past and future, as she explores the kinds of losses occurring in each moment within the framework of an open, but far from guaranteed, future. The moments of her paintings occupy a time when our epoch, as Milosz describes it, is 'out of joint.' They exist in a kind of temporal suspension, estranged from any simple notions of future 'well-being' based on an 'organisation' of past events: as the disruption of a non-critical type of hope. As Milosz might think of it, Chandler's paintings are inherently dialectical – they are able to simultaneously embrace the past and the future. They are connected to past realities yet construct an artistic expression that 'speaks' of possible futures. And as such, they are informed, as Chandler's sense of 'contemporary history' is, by hope and a reflexive kind of fear of the harm done by unchecked human 'progress'.

Milosz also says that when an artist lives in an epoch of collapse, their materials may well comprise 'the remnants found in ruins.' As remnants of what has 'fallen' around us, they are likely to be come across in a more quotidian sense. And as the 'constructive units' of an artist (my words), they will testify to 'the fragility of those things we call civilisation or culture. [Because] what surrounds us, here and now, is not guaranteed. It could just as well not exist' (Milosz).⁷

In *Absence*, the remnants that the artist first conceptualised in the painting of *Ruin* are made physically real, as the 'remnants of past lives and times' (Chandler),⁸ and as the embodiment of a more personal sense of ruin, and loss. Here, 'found objects' and the salvage of domestic lives are collaged together to embody the absence-and-presence that those materials inherently contain.

Affectively, Chandler is able to explore the most difficult moments in our lives when we are unable to know or reconstruct the memories and stories that such objects may have carried for a loved one who is now 'gone'.

In the large-scale collage *You'll Always be in my Heart*, fragments of embossed wallpaper, the hessian of scrim, a ribbed candlewick bedspread and a checkered blanket combine to present a charged and beautifully tactile slice of a valued, yet ultimately unknown, domestic life. With this painting, it is as if we sit alone at the table of a lost loved one, with the objects they have touched and charged over many years. With the artist's tactile use of collage, we have the sense of almost being able to run our fingers over the textures of a life-in-process. And as we engage in the genre's method of rupture and remaking we understand the affective pathos of this work: that it creates a 'whole' that is ultimately incomplete, from a hand-lead process of 'salvage' that is always fraught.

With Chandler's installation, *In Memoriam*, the artist's materials of past lives become even more intimate, as a collection of hand-held everyday objects. And with even more tactility, as in the case of a bone china teacup, they are wrapped in old decorative fabrics or doilies and made venerable by way of a pigmented coating of aromatic beeswax. They are made votive too, like the contents of a shrine, as they are clustered below a collection of the artist's prints. In these prints, Chandler uses both found and family photographs and the many techniques of Cyanotype and Collagraphic printmaking to play between presence and absence on a most intimate level and scale. In them, 'known' faces are blanked out and 'unknown' faces are 'seen', while a delicate tracery of marks already found in the large-scale collaged works decorate their surface.

In *Absence* then, Chandler allows us to most poignantly inhabit not only the reality of losing a loved one but also the fact that we are increasingly living in a time when the personal realities of our own lives are repeatedly collected and lost. And this is especially true as our numerously reconstituted self-identities appear and disappear on the road to what might yet be a future of irreparable damage, harm and displacement for many.

'When misfortune touches a human collective, whether by way of war, the rule of terror, or natural catastrophe,' Milosz says, it is difficult to find one's 'raison d'être.' A questioning of faith not only in humanity but also artistic creation occurs, as our assumed human trajectory is itself subject to question. And, for me, this is the central problem of artistic practice, as I also find it in Chandler's *The Seven Works of Mercy after the Master of Alkmaar 1504*.

The original *Seven Works of Mercy* painted by the Master of Alkmaar for the Dutch Spirit Hospital of the same name, was an ecclesiastical work intended to extol the works of mercy, or 'charity'. The charity it presents is both personal and public, as in the archaic meaning of 'charity' as the 'love of humankind', derived from the Latin carus, for what we hold 'dear'¹⁰. At this work's centre, is the panel depicting the faithful burying their dead. Christ sits on his throne in the sky on the Day of Judgement, pointing to his wounds as the cause of the suffering and compassion that he demands from others. Also central, is its message that practicing works of charity is essential to each individual's 'salvation' and, in turn, the continuance of a Christian (and here, hierarchical) society that must faithfully tend to those in need.¹¹

By contrast, at the centre of Chandler's work the empty sky of a ruined

landscape opens over workers in PPE suits and masks, straining to lower a coffin into barren ground already marked by a hasty accumulation of crosses. There is no rhetoric of salvation here. Rather, as a flock of birds fly off through the subsequent panels, the work as a whole falls increasingly into a state of disintegration. There is no organised 'system' of charity with which to bind this work, and neither is their the neat and cohesive structure of the originals Dutch town. Rather, we are bound by the familiarity and ubiquity of crises as we see them in the mass media, and by the open question of how we can help each other. Inevitably, this work carries its commensurate load of moral anxiety and opens us to a loss marked by universal need that may, or may not, be met, as we (humankind) construct, and destroy, our landscapes, on both a personal and collective level.

Following this, *Havoc* makes it clear that Chandler's landscapes are always open to question, as is our ability to positively impact on our future. *Landscapes of Loss*, in this sense, are more than just scenes of crises. They are landscapes as a view of the 'prospect' held within our shapings of the 'land'. Notably, their often unfortunate content is familiar to us while their artistic marks and gestures 'speak' a syntactical 'language' that opens us to a process of formation that allows us to reflect on our own part in that process. Like the German word for landscape, 'landschaft', Chandler's landscapes are 'constituted' and 'shaped' by way of their 'condition' by way of their 'condition' by way of their 'condition'.

Even using language (or a failure of language) as content itself, the landscape of *Havoc* is literally overloaded by 'news' articles, government posters and flyers, letters to the Editor and signage, all relating to COVID-19. Language

here is a form of non-sense and yet its artistic (re)constitution leaves the work's ultimate questioning of the way in which New Zealand has responded to its local version of a global pandemic, and the way people have or might treat each other, up in the air.

In Landscapes of Loss, Chandler provides a critical lens on contemporary history, capturing moments wherein humanity hangs in the limbo state of being beset by its past and uncertain of its future. Significantly, Chandler creates the kind of dialectical 'language' that Milosz wrote about in 1981, as based on his native country's traumatic epoch post WWII and as artistically productive in the future. In a time when the language that has helped create us has failed to produce the society of our intent, Chandler has somehow created works that recognise our fraught history yet present the material, and often beautiful, kernel of an artistic 'language' that stands, suspended and constructive, in paintings that question the possible trajectories of our future.

In terms of Milosz, I would say that Lisa Chandler has achieved what the writer hoped for at the very end of his book, wherein works of art, characterised by a dialectic of both hope and fear, might bear witness to their time, when:

'Humanity as an elemental force conscious of transcending nature, lives by memory of itself, that is, in History.' 13

Jodie Dalgleish Luxembourg, summer 2022

- ¹ Author's conversation with the artist, 20 July 2022.
- ² Online Etymology Dictionary, 'ruin (n.)': https://www.etymonline.com/word/ruin.
- ³ Czeslaw Milosz, *The Witness of Poetry*, (Harvard University Press, 1983), p. 116.
- DW News, 13 August 2022, 'Drought disrupts cargo traffic on Germany's Rhine River': https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H54N1M4pPMM. NBC News, 16 August 2022, 'Mystery surrounds tons of dead fish found in Polish-German river': https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/dead-fish-river-oder-germany-poland-rcna43064.
- ⁵ Milosz, *The Witness of Poetry*, pp. 10–16.
- ⁶ Ibid, p. 107.
- Ibid, p. 97. For Milosz's example of a quotidian use of language in poetry see Miron Bialoszewski's poem 'A Ballad of Going Down to the Store', pp. 88–9.
- ⁸ Lisa Chandler, Work-in-progress document, link shared with the author, 31 May 2022.
- ⁹ Milosz, The Witness of Poetry, p. 66.
- Dictionary by Apple Inc., corroborated by Collins English Dictionary at https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/charity.
- 11 As described in the online religious arts journal *ArtWay*: https://www.artway.eu/content.php?id=2443&lang=en&action=show.
- ¹² The University of Chicago, 'Landscape': http://csmt.uchicago.edu/glossary2004/landscape.htm.
- ¹³ Milosz, *The Witness of Poetry*, p. 116.



BIOGRAPHY

Lisa Chandler is a contemporary history painter - she looks closely at our moment in time and explores such issues as gentrification, migration, social and economic injustice, climate change and the COVID pandemic.

Chandler employs her love of painting to portray how these events affect individuals and communities. Her paintings tell stories of loss, isolation, grief and exhaustion, but they also offer hope - showing how people unite together and support each other in difficult times.

Chandler holds an MFA (Hons) from Whitecliffe College of Arts and Design, Auckland. Since 2012 she has held 10 solo exhibitions, and been selected for numerous group shows including *Cruel City* at The Suter Art Gallery, Nelson, New Zealand and the *International Art Survey* Beijing, China. She has been a finalist in a number of major New Zealand art awards including the National Contemporary Art Award (2015), the New Zealand Painting and Printmaking Award (2018, 2015) and the Molly Morpeth Canaday Art Award (2015, 2014 and 2012). International artist residencies have included: Instinc, Singapore; Red Gate Residency, Beijing, and the Leipzig International Art Programme, Germany.

In 2016, following a four-month residency at the Leipzig International Art Programme in Germany, Chandler created a body of work, titled *Between Yesterday & Tomorrow* that explored issues of gentrification in the city. Inspired by the strong painting scene, Chandler set up a base in Leipzig and has a permanent studio at the Leipziger Baumwollspinnerei (Spinnerei), a well-known art hub situated in an old industrial cotton mill. From 2017 to 2019 Chandler worked in the

Spinnerei every New Zealand winter developing a major body of work titled *The Dividing Line*. *The Dividing Line* was exhibited at the Archiv Massiv Gallery, Leipzig in 2018 before the works returned to New Zealand. Between 2019 and 2021 *The Dividing Line* was exhibited at The Suter Art Gallery Te Aratoi o Whakatu, Nelson; the Aigantighe Public Art Gallery in Timaru, Expressions Whirinaki Art Centre in Upper Hutt and Tauranga Public Art Gallery.

When the Covid pandemic closed New Zealand's borders in March 2020, Chandler began a major new series titled *Landscapes of Loss*.

The continuing thread of Chandler's practice is her love of the act of painting, the substance of paint itself, colour and types of mark-making. She constantly strives for a balance between abstraction and figuration. Urban structures and people intertwine through a process of layering, obliterating and tracing. Alongside her large-scale paintings, she also creates works on paper, often including collage and printmaking techniques.

recent solo exhibitions

2021	Landscapes of Loss 1, The Quiet Dog Gallery, Nelson, New Zealand
2021	The Dividing Line, Tauranga Art Gallery, New Zealand
2020/21	The Dividing Line, Expressions Whirinaki Arts & Entertainment Centre, Upper Hutt, New Zealand
2019/20	The Dividing Line, Aigantighe Art Gallery, Timaru, New Zealand
2019	The Dividing Line, The Suter Art Gallery Te Aratoi o Whakatū, Nelson New Zealand
2018	The Dividing Line, Archiv Massiv Gallery Leipziger Baumwollspinnerei Germany
2018	Traces of the Past, Parker Gallery, Nelson, New Zealand
2017	Small Works, Kunst Konzil, Leipzig, Germany
2016	Between Yesterday & Tomorrow, Mckee Gallery, Nelson, New Zealand
2015	China Dream, SALT Gallery, Nelson, New Zealand
2014	Slice III, Icon White Gallery, Upper Moutere, New Zealand
2013	Slice II, LightSpace Gallery, Wellington, New Zealand
2013	Slice I, Instinc Gallery, Singapore
2012	In Transit, Red Gallery, Nelson, New Zealand
2012	Negotiating the Non-Place, Black Asterisk Gallery, Auckland, New Zealand

recent group exhibitions

2020	The Return, Quiet Dog Gallery, Nelson, New Zealand
2019	The 26th Leipziger Jahresausstellung, Werkschauhalle, Leipziger Baumwollspinnerei, Germany
2018	Finalist, New Zealand Painting & Printmaking Award
2017	in(visible) ION Gallery, Singapore
2016	Patterns Beyond the Obvious, Leipziger Baumwollspinnerei, Germany
2015	Finalist, National Contemporary Art Award, New Zealand
2015	Finalist, New Zealand Painting & Printmaking Award
2015	Finalist, Molly Morpeth Canaday Art Award, New Zealand
2014	Instinc 10, Gallery 67, Singapore
2014	World Art Exhibition, Songzhuang Museum, China
2014	Finalist, Molly Morpeth Canaday Art Award, New Zealand
2013	Cruel City, The Suter Art Gallery Te Aratoi o Whakatū, New Zealand
2013	re:New:all, Pearce Gallery, Auckland, New Zealand
2012	Finalist, Molly Morpeth Canaday Art Award, New Zealand
2012	Art on Life, Academy Galleries, Wellington, New Zealand
2009	Aqua Marine, The Suter Art Gallery Te Aratoi o Whakatū, New Zealand
2007	Winner, Landscape/Seascape Award, Nelson Art Awards, New Zealand

reviews & articles

- Chandler's Paintings in Timaru, December 2019, EyeContact, Andrew Paul Wood
- History is made by those who take Action, February 2019, Sarah McClintock
- Die weltweite Protestkultur in der Kunst Lisa Chandler, December 2018, Dr. Sara Tröster Klemm
- Leipziger Strassenmagazine KiPPE, June 2018
- Creative Nelson Magazine, December 2018
- Between Yesterday & Tomorrow, September 2016, Dr. Sara Tröster Klemm
- China Dream, September 2015, Anna Marie White
- Art Exchange, April-June Issue 2015, Singapore International Foundation
- A Slice of Life in Exhibition, November 2014, The Nelson Mail
- Slice, June 2013, Fann ZJ, Art Critic, Singapore
- Mapua Artist to Show Art Practice Overseas, April 2012, The Nelson Mail

interviews

2019	Standing Room Only, Radio New Zealand National
2018	Fresh FM, Nelson, New Zealand
2016	Fresh FM, Nelson, New Zealand
2015	Fresh FM, Nelson, New Zealand
2012	93bFM, Auckland, New Zealand
2012	Arts on Sunday, Radio New Zealand National
2012	BBC Derby, England
2012	Fresh FM, Nelson, New Zealand

artist talks

2021	Tauranga Art Gallery, New Zealand
2019	Aigantighe Gallery, Timaru, New Zealand
2019	The Suter Art Gallery Te Aratoi o Whakatū Nelson, New Zealand
2018	Parker Gallery, Nelson, New Zealand
2016	Mckee Gallery, Nelson, New Zealand
2015	China Week Nelson, New Zealand
2015	Pecha Kucha, Tasman, New Zealand
2013	LightSpace Gallery, Wellington, New Zealand
2013	Art Week, Auckland, New Zealand
2013	The Suter Art Gallery Te Aratoi o Whakatū Nelson, New Zealand
2013	Instinc Gallery, Singapore
2013	Pecha Kucha, Singapore
2012	Affective Landscapes Conference, University of Derby, England Presented a paper
2012	Red Gallery, Nelson, New Zealand

residencies

2016	Leipzig International Artist Programme, Germany
2014	Collaboration Project, Instinc Gallery, Singapore supported by the Asia New Zealand Foundation
2014	Red Gate Residency, Beijing, China
2013	Instinc Gallery Residency, Singapore supported by the Asia New Zealand Foundation

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