

# THE DIVIDING LINE

LISA CHANDLER

'The whole world is watching' was chanted as crowds of people took to the Hamilton rugby pitch on 25 July 1981 to protest the apartheid South Africa team's tour of New Zealand. Eight years later 'wir sind das volk' (we are the people) was the rallying cry for over 70,000 people when they met on 9 October 1989 in Leipzig to protest the authoritarian East German government...  
—Sarah McClintock

In viewing the suite of works that make up *The Dividing Line*, we might recall how pivotal historical instances of resistance have been to forming our national identity: from the barbaric treatment of Te Āti Awa iwi pacifists at Parihaka in 1881, to many important events from the 1970s onwards, including the 1975 Māori Land March, the 1981 Springbok Tour protests, and numerous occasions in our efforts to be nuclear free.

Lisa Chandler (b.1969) is interested in the ways that culture is undeniably shaped by such formative clashes. Yet, based between Nelson and Spinnerey, the artistic heart of Leipzig, Chandler's works are also informed by her seasonal movements between New Zealand and Germany. These transnational shifts have heightened Chandler's awareness of differences in how each respective country does and does not acknowledge their complex past. Drawing on international media depictions of civic unrest, Chandler's paintings might

be read at the outset as a call to confront a pervasive historical amnesia in Aotearoa, in contrast to Germany's insistence on continually retaining relics and memorials of dark historical events in their past within civic spaces.

Chandler paints in a variety of formats, from large-scale self-contained pieces to small-scale studies, which in more than one instance here combine into clusters to form the largest artworks on show. The large, singular painting *Language of the Unheard* depicts a visceral clash of forces, with riot gear and came as at the ready. Its ambitious scale and sophisticated composition recalls many historical painters' efforts to depict a decisive moment of change. To differ, the namesake artwork of the exhibition, *The Dividing Line* (located at the north entrance) is formed from 28 individual paintings, each capturing a moment of tension. Through this mode of presentation, Chandler asks the viewer to linger on each instance but also to observe it within a stream of events, much like the news ticker scrolling along the bottom of a television screen.

The placards of protest that also feature in a number of her paintings are echoed in the mobile works presented on makeshift timber boardings. These make a direct reference to street art and the gritty urban spaces in her European city, where protest is a regular feature of life. Chandler's mark making and her use of non-traditional materials—including posters, graffiti and paint—speak of the power of viral, vernacular communication, which has proven so pivotal to many protest movements. Channelling all of these concerns through painting, Chandler questions the role that art can have in both remembering and participating in social change, during a time where the one certain is a continual cycle of unrest.

This introduction is based on an extended text produced by Sarah McClintock, Suter Gallery Curator, for the publication Lisa Chandler | The Dividing Line, available at the front desk.



Lisa Chandler | The Dividing Line | Paintings



## A review by Andrew Paul Wood Eye Contact Magazine, December 2019

*The imagery is sourced from variety of places. It could be Extinction Rebellion or students rioting in Hong Kong. The specifics really don't matter because it is at once obvious what's going on. Soldiers and police, victims and uprising. Images of violence, protest and gas masks repeat as the central motifs throughout the work, timeless as much as they are timely. It's an appeal to emotion and morality, a metaphorical call to arms.*

Having previously been shown in Leipzig, Germany and at the Suter in Nelson, Lisa Chandler's *The Dividing Line* is an interesting work in that it manages to drive a strong political message without compromising on aesthetic and artistic integrity.

A product of Whitecliffe College of Arts and Design, Chandler divides her time between Leipzig and Golden Bay, having built up an impressive résumé of exhibitions and residencies over the last decade or so.

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*The Dividing Line* is powerful stuff, and extremely impressive in a time when earnest figuration and narrative tend to be disregarded as liabilities in painting. It's more of a step back, in a way, to the postmodern new history painting of the 1990s without once feeling stale or recycled.

The larger paintings are flatly executed in acrylic in a well-judged Baconesque palette of blues, greys and fleshy pinks, vigorously enlivened with sgraffito, scraping and even spray paint.

These are accompanied by a set of small monoprints encyclopaedically cataloguing variations on the gasmask, terrifying to behold, blank and skull-like. From Pink

Floyd's *The Wall to Dr Who*, the gas mask has become the pop-cultural face of mass, anonymous horror. Chandler deploys it with great effect to deliver surgical blows against comfortable complacency.

Superficially the style of the paintings owes much to pop art's flat expressionistic slathers over a bricolage of charged imagery - Robert Rauschenberg in particular comes to mind - but beneath that is a humanist life force, elegant melancholy and anger that seems to be channelling the wartime imagery of British neo-romantics like Eric Ravilious, or Henry Moore's drawings of Blitzed London - and the raw anguish and frustration of German new objectivity.

At times the paintings strive for the status of trompe-l'œil graffiti with a nod to Banksy and a wink at Jean-Michel Basquiat that is just subtle enough not to be annoying. This is the legacy of installation art, the need to create a holistic environment for the viewer.

For all that, and one could easily go back further to Picasso's *Guernica*, and Goya's *Third of May 1808*, or even to Renaissance paintings of battles and massacres, this is resolutely contemporary painting, virtuosic at points, speaking to us in the here and now, taking its cue from the image and atrocity-saturated media bombardment by which we experience the world.

It makes you feel something in these jaded and empathetically fatigued times, and how often can you say that?

### **Masked**

2018

70 x 50cm

NZ \$2400

Acrylic on Linen





**Never Be Silent**

2018

140 x 100cm

NZ \$6000

Acrylic on Linen





**Unconquered Spirit**

2018

140 x 100cm

NZ \$6000

Acrylic on Linen





**The Bystander**

2018

200 x 150cm

NZ \$10,500

Acrylic on Linen





**Five Minutes of Fame**

2018

200 x 150cm

NZ \$10,500

Acrylic on Linen







**They Want Us to be Afraid**

2018

140 x 260cm

NZ \$11,000

Acrylic on Linen





**Flares of Hope**

2018

180 x 300cm

NZ \$15,000

Acrylic on Linen





**Resist**

2018

Triptych 200 x 300cm

NZ \$15,000

Acrylic on Linen





**Silence Encourages the Tormentor**

2018

190 x 250cm

NZ \$11,000

Acrylic on Linen