



(left) EMILY PARR *Port of Refuge* 2020  
Still from HD video, 11'

(below left) AREEZ KATKI  
*Study on cotton duck* 2021

(below right) Dominic Hoey performing  
at Whammy Bar on Karangahape Road,  
Auckland, c.2011

*Past the Tower, Under the Tree*  
edited by Balamohan Shingade and  
Erena Shingade  
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Many regard education as the formal dissemination of knowledge and skills, delivered through a range of primary, secondary and tertiary institutions, a pursuit and a process around which society has moulded itself.

There are however many modes of learning, and ideally the gaining of knowledge and wisdom is a never-ending, ongoing, real-life experience. Balamohan Shingade and Erena Shingade call this 'teaching that is grounded in relationships, and learning in beloved company'. They have arranged for 12 individuals to write about their own experiences, and brought these together in *Past the Tower, Under the Tree: Twelve Stories of Learning in Community*.

The contributors are a mixed bunch, and several of them are active in the visual arts. The essay provided by Edith Amituanai is a visual one; instead of words she provides a series of Polaroids from a few years ago. The remarkable energy and dynamism of her young subjects seem to point to an artist who learns from those around

her by taking their photograph, repositioning the camera as a tool of humility and openness. Areez Katki's contribution is a fragmented portrayal of his own mother, before his birth. It is a dreamy quotidian narrative spelled out in a series of epigrams; the combination of speculation and familial closeness produces a poignancy that parallels the impact of his words on the white space of the page:

her needle pierces across generational planes  
it softens, nourishes with each lick  
the eye spears through time and finds her son  
he, unborn, learns how to embroider using  
shorthand

Emily Parr shares her gaining of knowledge (she is conducting doctoral research) with generosity and warmth; her travels around the Pacific (Samoa, Tonga, Tauranga) are conducted with eyes and heart firmly oriented towards her ancestors, and the stills from her video works are strong and intriguing enough to make you seek out her work online. Terri Te Tau writes an enjoyably rambling narrative that takes her around the world through to the formation of the Mata Aho Collective, of which she is a member, all the while reflecting on the role that water plays in her life.

There is a plethora of voices in this book: Daniel Michael Satele is an Auckland-based writer who makes a strong claim for the same space that Virginia Woolf campaigned for in *A Room of One's Own*, not for himself, but for all artists; Dominic Hoey recounts, with the spit and humour of the spirit of punk, how the self-taught art of rap helped him learn how to write novels; Balamohan Shingade explores the political and sonic consequences of practising Hindustani classical music in New Zealand; Richard von Sturmer details his decades-long relationship with Zen teacher Bodhin Kjolhede, interspersed with poems and self-critique—on the progress of his Zen practice he wrote:

I'm just a snake with horns  
Scraping them against the walls  
Of a long, dark tunnel

In a neat turn, the book's designer, Katie Kerr, contributes a chapter called 'Lessons: A Note on the Design' and supplies a valuable extra, as she acknowledges her mentors and goes some way to explain why the book feels so good in the hands of the reader.

The editors call these 12 stories 'learning in community', but they are in fact life lessons, really, stemming from a breadth of experience that is a testament to the reach of the contributors and the vision of the editors. Together they make up a volume that is edifying, yet welcoming; like the best of lessons, it invites you in and takes you further than you thought you could go.

