

# IN THE MARGINS

A small Karangahape Rd enterprise brings all aspects of art and photography publishing under one roof.

Graphic designer and publisher Katie Kerr's studio is in an old brick outhouse behind Karangahape Rd's communal workspace Strange Haven — two cubicles knocked together, complete with old rusty taps hanging from the ceiling and a built-in bookcase. It's from here that she co-runs the intercontinental publishing platform Gloria with Berlin-based photographer Alice Connew.

Launched in 2016, Gloria produces some of the most thoughtfully designed and elegantly produced art and photography books in Aotearoa. Primarily interested in artist-made books where the full arc of bookmaking is completed in-house, Kerr and Connew started Gloria simply because they each had artistic projects that required a publishing platform, so decided to do it themselves. "What most interested us was how the book as an object would differ if these roles traditionally performed by multiple parties were undertaken by an individual with a singular intention for the whole project," explains Kerr.

Gloria has just published *Dwelling in the Margins: Art Publishing in Aotearoa*, a collection which brings together writing and essays from 30 small press practitioners. Seeking alternatives to commercial practices, art publishing in Aotearoa has a rich history, allowing artists autonomy and a platform for their own or a community's work. Contributors include Dominic Hoey and Samuel Walsh from Dead Bird Books, Luke Wood from Ilam Press and Jonty Valentine from design studio Index.

Fans of Patti Smith, Kerr and Connew named their small press Gloria after the New York punk poet's cover of the anthemic Them song, which opens her debut album, *Horses*. One time, when Kerr was visiting Connew in Berlin, Smith was performing there and the duo were excited about seeing her in concert together. The tickets stated the doors opened at 7pm. They casually arrived at 8.30pm, not realising that in Germany, bands play on time. They missed most of the gig. "We were devastated. Alice's boyfriend suggested we venture around the back of the venue where we might see Patti walking to her car. No such luck. We popped out the back for a smoke, only to find ourselves sitting next to the window of Patti's dressing room. She graciously had a long conversation with us. She was brilliant! So when it came to naming our publishing platform, we chose a song from our mutual muse hoping to evoke some of the relentless energy she brings to the song... G. L. O. R. I. A!"

In addition to running Gloria, Kerr is involved with Strange Haven, which as well as being a communal studio workspace is also a venue and clubhouse for creative community happenings.

Attached is affiliated bookshop Strange Goods, which stocks a selection of multi-disciplinary art books, publications and assorted ephemera from across Aotearoa. The collective based the space on places they admired overseas, such as the multi-purpose space Onomatopee in the Netherlands. Is it a studio? A bookstore? A gig venue? An event space? Kerr says it took a while for people to understand the concept of Strange Haven "I'm not sure we could call it a 'success,' but four years later and despite roadworks and rent hikes, the space still lives on. Until Karangahape Road becomes fully gentrified and we can't afford it any more!"

Kerr also teaches final-year students at the communication design programme at AUT. Her classes focus on publication design and her students follow a similar model to Gloria, where they take on a publishing project and produce the content and undertake each step of the publishing process.

Kerr spent most of her twenties in London, and it was during her last few years there that she became the head of design at the School of Life — a high-end self-help organisation founded by pop philosopher and writer Alain de Botton. She worked directly with de Botton on the School of Life's brand, books, events and products. When she returned to Aotearoa, she continued to design some of its books and is currently working on a title for it called *How to Survive the Modern World*.

"Their content has taken a rather sombre tone since the pandemic. I'm really impressed by Alain's capacity to produce an enormous amount of content and confidently publish it through his own channels. I was working there when I started Gloria, so perhaps some of his confidence rubbed off on me," she says. "We don't kid ourselves. We don't have the breadth of experience that comes with many years in the industry. But for better or worse, sourcing content, editing, designing, printing, distributing and promoting the books in Gloria's canon is entirely under our creative control. And there's something quite interesting in that."

Kerr's next project is a digital and print publication that explores making art and thinking and talking about creative practice, labour and life in contemporary Aotearoa in collaboration with Wellington's Enjoy Gallery. She says Gloria also has a photobook by Connew on the horizon which involves an all-female motorcycle gang in Berlin. "And after that, who knows what is next? I'll probably need a few months to decompress and dwell on the next project. But that's the beauty of having your own press — there's not too much pressure."