

This weekend Dunedin will host writers, designers, photographers, artists and publishers from around New Zealand at the inaugural Small Press Fest. **Rebecca Fox** talks to Katie Kerr about her publishing platform Gloria.

Return to the printed form

FOR a while it looked like printed books you could hold and turn pages of could become a thing of the past.

But there are many out there showing that is not the case including a growing group of creatives — writers, designers, photographers and artists — working outside of the conventional publishing industry.

“Despite the popular idea that the internet would kill print, the book has not only endured, it is kind of thriving in a way but it has changed,” Auckland-based graphic designer Katie Kerr says.

Among them is Gloria, an “intercontinental publishing platform” for art and photography books created by Bristol-based photographer Alice Connew and Kerr. “We very much believe in the printed book. We try and play around with materials with the idea of breaking the boundaries around what an art and photography book can look like,” Kerr says.

The platform came about in 2017 while Connew was in Berlin and Kerr was in London. Both studied graphic design at Ilam School of Fine Art in Christchurch but took different paths after graduating — Connew into photography and Kerr into book design.

“Art publishing was a common language down there.” But they both found themselves revisiting the book as a space for experimentation in their own practices, photography and design.

“Most books when they are made, published or produced with many minds and hands, there are many different perspectives that come into the process.”

So they thought it would be “fun and interesting” to approach the publishing process from a singular perspective.

“What could happen if an artist or a designer had control of the whole publishing process, what books could be

made out of that? How does that change how books are made? How they are promoted?”

They created Gloria, which only publishes their work as opposed to a traditional publishing house printing others’ work.

“We think of it more as a publishing treehouse, where Alice and I go to experiment and play with the publishing process. For better or worse the sourcing content, editing, designing, printing distributing, promoting every book in our Gloria cannon is under



our control.”

This ultimately means the process takes a long time and they often only release one book a year.

“It’s an art practice and a side practice too, unfortunately we can’t do it fulltime but it’s a really enjoyable part of our lives.”

Part of the reason for the arts focus of their books is that is what they know and part of it is wanting to be a bit experimental which the “arts” gives them the space to do in content and design.

“Art publishing offers an alternative to mainstream publishing and outside the constraints of having to make what sells and often gives a platform for voices not heard commonly.”

“We like to sit in that arena even though our books

obviously can push outside that.”

Gloria publishes small format paperbacks and photo books rather than “big glossy toms” that sit on coffee tables.

“Ours can be read on an aeroplane, in the bath or at the playground — they can be moved around the world.”

As a result of a lot of their books trying to bend people’s ideas of traditional genres — think a cookbook with poems in it — it can confuse booksellers.

“They don’t know where to file them on the shelf. We’re interested in that genre bending, margin dwelling, sub-categories and try to subvert expectations of what a book can be even if they can’t be categorised easily.”

Connew is at present working on a photo book which is based on an all-female motorcycle gang in Berlin that she has been following for five years.

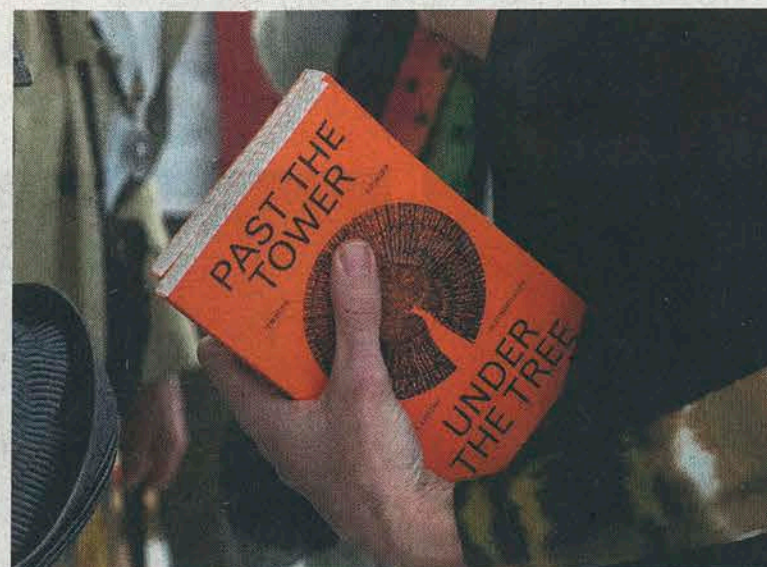
They have also recently released an anthology *Past The Tower Under the Tree: Twelve Stories of Learning in the Community* featuring 12 contributors, Edith

Amituanai, Catherine Delahunty, Mohan Dutta, Dominic Hoey, Areez Katki, Emily Parr, Daniel Michael Satele, Kahurangiariki Smith, Mokonui-a-rangi Smith, Richard von Sturmer, and Terri Te Tau talking about their experiences and edited by Balamohan and Erena Shingade.

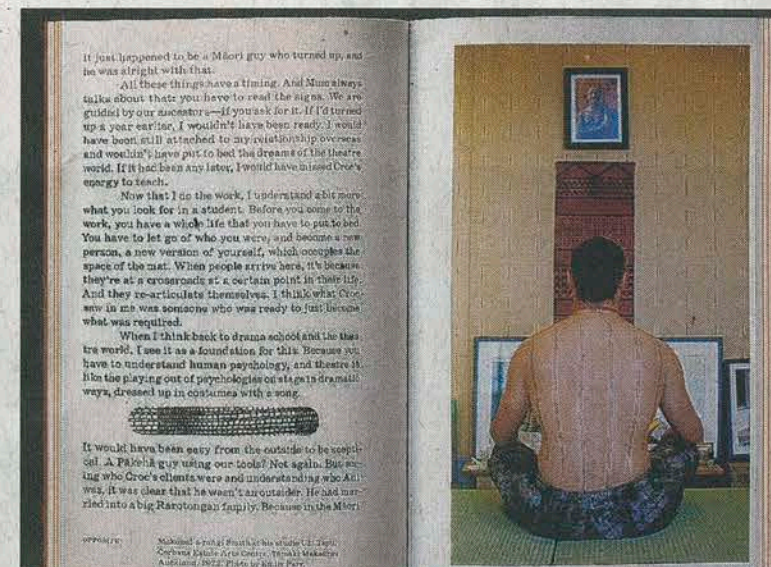
It looks at the education opportunities that happen outside of traditional school, university or polytechnic learning institutions.

“It’s all about alternative-based learning in arts and activism that is flourishing at the moment especially with the current state of universities that we have been hearing about at the moment.”

This could be learning tā moko (traditional Maori tattoo) in an apprenticeship or learning Indian classical music through the master-disciple relationship or learning Te



Gloria’s latest book *Past The Tower Under the Tree: Twelve Stories of Learning in the Community*



Katie Kerr (left) says the small press industry is “a little bit underground”. She and Erena Shingade smile at a launch. PHOTO: SUPPLIED

Reo from family members.

The concept came about while Kerr was lecturing at Auckland University of Technology.

“I was in this education environment and I had been through the masters system and I felt a lot of what I had learnt was from the community and we recognised there are quite a few people we know that are moving outside that traditional model.”

Kerr and Connew are not alone in their endeavours. Kerr’s last book *Dwelling in the Margins: Art Publishing in Aotearoa* found a cottage industry of small press publishers that are pushing the boundaries of book making despite the challenges of the huge costs of printing and the challenges of distribution.

“It’s something really thriving here. When we went to the Melbourne Art Book Fair earlier in the year there was a huge contingent of art publishers from New Zealand who went over. The organisers

said the quality of art publishing coming out of New Zealand was quite amazing, it’s punching above its weight.

“We seem to have this thriving desire to make books here.”

Gloria, along with a couple of other small presses, run a distribution collective called Expensive Hobby. Gloria, Compound Press and Dead Bird Books “divide and conquer” the labour and have about 10 small presses under their umbrella. They distribute their books to independent book stores.

“It ticks along, it does quite well. People are more interested now in buying books that are well designed, that are locally made and have heart to them and you see that in a lot of the work small presses are doing.”

There are a lot of reasons for that interest from nostalgia, desire for off screen attachment, the tactility of print and wanting to read something tangible.

“The book as an object has had to adapt and change a little bit from being an essential source of information to something that is a valuable object we will pay money for.”

It also allows different communities stories to be told and voices to be heard.

“We make books we like to read.”

The Small Press Fest, three days of workshops, talks, readings and a book fair, also highlights there is quite an audience for their work as well. Kerr is looking forward to coming to Dunedin to talk books and catch up with others in the community.

Kerr is now based in Auckland after returning to complete her masters in 2018 and is freelancing in book design while Connew has moved to Bristol. When not photographing she works in block chain technology.

“Since then we’ve been separate. I’m on this side of the world and Alice on the other side. It’s great.

“Alice last week was at the Dublin Art Fair doing a talk about Gloria there. We manage to get around and have a presence in Europe and the UK.

“The hard part is trying to get books back and forwards between us, it’s not cheap. We had a few book mules, we put books in their suitcases when they went to Europe.”

Both love the opportunity to work on Gloria, often finding it is what they retreat to when needing a break.

“We really have a passion for it.

“We get to flex our artistic muscles in a really nice format.”

TO SEE

Small Press Fest August, Evening Books/Yours, Moray Place, August 18-20; Publishing as Critical Practice: The Story of Gloria Books 7pm Friday; Expensive Hobby on Distributing Independent Publications in Aotearoa, 12.30pm Saturday.