

Turn over a log in any forest and you're in for a big surprise, all manner of creatures scuttle into the light. The hidden is revealed and then just as quickly concealed again as the forest protects its own. For Darragh a body of work starts with found materials sourced from op-shops, utility suppliers or haberdashery stores. "The materials I find tell me what to do, what to make," she says.

*Forrest of Dreams* is no exception but this time materials sourced from nature, feathers, wood, cork are fused with her signature plastic extending the reach of her concerns about the environment. Playing with scale and juxtaposition in works that can be interpreted in multiple ways Darragh transforms everyday objects into artworks that further challenge humanity's collective addiction to plastic, an addiction that has resulted in plastic entering the biosphere - we are no longer made of stars. A transparent foot flanked by a delicate toadstool invite visitors to take that first tentative step into a transcendent, supernatural *Forest of Dreams* where time frames collide and collapse and magic pings.

"When you go into the forest it becomes timeless. The human timeframe is meaningless when you encounter mighty ancient trees that are hundreds of years old, or consider the life-cycles of plants and insects such as delicate butterflies that only live for 24 hours. Much happens in a forest, it is dark and hides things," says Darragh.

Darragh's past two shows *Competitive Plastics* at Objectspace and then COCA Otautahi were focussed on the collective plastic attraction, beginning in childhood with shiny, smooth, colourful toys. Darragh spent time post these shows at the Eden Arts Karekare House Residency at Auckland's wild and beautiful Karekare Beach, taking only her glue gun in an attempt to do a plastic "detox". This conscious uncoupling from plastic resulted in creating works which reframe natural materials. Darragh collected driftwood and as it was winter the woodpile offered her wonders of chopped wood and leftovers from the house renovations. She used the wood to build hands. Hands that she says represent tools for making, and also signal resistance - her own hands have become sore after years of work.

In Darragh's sublime forest "seed" pearls gleam on various surfaces. Plastic chairs form skeletons for birds of a feather. Treelike columns sprout plinth branches that support smaller works in the pecking order. The hands made from recycled wood seem to grasp for invisible tools or reach up towards the light above the canopy. Discarded hubcaps become bejewelled, redemptive bling rings. Stickmen stand by. Red knee-high boots with crystal soles emerge from the wall.

The journey into *Forrest of Dreams* is a personal one for Darragh. The knitting needles are about her mum who knitted everything.

“She always had a jersey ready to go, the click and clack, hands again at work,” she says.

Hundreds of knitting needles are pierced into exercise foam rolls, weird acupuncture or the needles of invasive wilding pines that suffocate native forests?

Wall works feature massed plastic funnels that could be listening or about to deliver a message, white plates embellished with colour and eye-like mirrors that play with reflections and movement. Layers of coloured net form spider-like webs.

There is a family of photographs. The central one is Darragh’s white-gowned, melancholy Auntie Edna taken by Darragh’s mum with her instamatic in 1965. Auntie Edna stands Dryad-like in in the bush reclaiming a moment of freedom from the West Coast institution where she was confined for suffering post-natal depression. The photos of ferns on either side represent wings that could give Auntie Edna the impetus to take flight, a way to escape.

Much happens on the journey into in Darragh’s forest, this hallucinatory walk on the wild side, much to admire, much to think about.

Linda Niccol, January 2025