

The title of Megan Jenkinson's new series plays on the Latin and French words meaning to follow, cut or prune, and alludes to the collage technique Jenkinson used to fabricate these works from the carefully saved Cibachrome fragments of photocollages made decades earlier.

The slow accumulation of time in Jenkinson's works, their three-dimensionality and the use of Cibachrome – an obsolete analogue process – sets them in conversation with a growing number of contemporary women artists using historical image-making techniques to question how we use and understand photographs in the digital age – as throwaway objects that are instantaneous, multitudinous, endlessly reproducible and with little individual value.

Known for its intense colours, high contrast and glossy, metallic surfaces, Cibachrome printing fuelled an exciting new wave of women photographic artists in the early 1980s, including Jenkinson, Margaret Dawson, Di Ffrench and Christine Webster – all intent on exploring subjectivity, the body and more fluid understandings of gender. They experimented with feminist and postmodern ideas and techniques, such as collage and staged photographic tableaux, and often focused the lens on their own bodies and the details of their everyday lives rather than spectacular or heroic subjects as a way to challenge the male gaze and the dominance of social documentary in New Zealand photography at the time.

Auckland-based dealer space Real Pictures Gallery was established in 1979 by photographic artist, Ian MacDonald, and played a vital role in re-energising New Zealand photography – mentoring artists, offering state-of-the-art colour processing services and holding regular exhibitions. While working there in 1981, Jenkinson used the gallery's new Cibachrome machine to print her own work, and some of the leftover fragments from those images appear in her new photocollages.

Rather than using her camera to document the world as she finds it, Jenkinson imagines scenarios, often making drawings, and then setting out to gather raw material – images of the sea, sky, stones, shadows, leaves, her own face and body, bones, cutlery, crockery and furniture – which are then cut out and reassembled into intricate collages encoded with mythological and classical references. She became well known for her series, *The Virtues*, which toured nationally in the mid-1990s and was developed into a book in 1997. The series explored the personification of the female form through a radical re-imagining of visual tropes used in ancient Greek and Roman representations of women which were intended to model correct moral behaviour.

In her new work, digital and analogue layers collide in ragged, explosive pulses of energy, exerting a push-pull force that leaves the viewer unsure of where background and foreground meet. Ambiguous spaces and layers mess with our understanding of time and space, and echo the way we seldom perceive time as a seamless continuum – when our lives are in danger, for example, time slows down and an instant can seem like eternity.

The disruptive energy reaches flashpoint in *Diaspora*, a work in the 'Antimatter' series. Olive branches with hard green fruits and narrow, spear-shaped leaves – shiny and dark on one side, pale and silver on the other – float on a mottled background of pink marble, its

fine seams and smudged blotches contrasting with the linear shapes of the leaves. The image has been severed down the middle with a scalpel and then misaligned so that the two halves don't meet, creating a sense of slippage and fragmentation. Adding to the unease, is a white void on the right side of the image where foreground and background have been excised. Investigating the title of this series led me to a cosmic mystery described as the matter-antimatter asymmetry, which describes a puzzling violation of symmetry occurring in the physical universe. Because matter and antimatter are thought to form and behave in almost identical ways, it makes sense to predict that they would have been created in nearly equal portions during the Big Bang. In reality, the universe is composed almost entirely of matter and contains virtually no antimatter – except that created by radioactive decay and cosmic ray collisions. Particle physics has so far failed to explain this mystery.

Jenkinson has always been interested in history and systems for understanding the world – whether those used by physicists to describe the cosmos, the classical Greek and Roman philosophical ideals explored in *The Virtues*, or the ancient Japanese art of flower arranging known as ikebana. The latter informed the structure and principles of her new collages with their asymmetrical compositions and experiments with imperfection. The human figure, which appeared in past works, has almost disappeared and elements of the natural world have taken over. Yet, nature in these works is tightly controlled rather than chaotic and wild – lustrous cutout shapes of flowers, twigs, leaves and fruits emerge from curvaceous vases set against shadowy interior backdrops that have been stitched together from digital photographs taken in mausoleums in Buenos Aires and museums around the world. In these images, the analogue and the digital collide as dull, glitchy, pixelated backdrops meet shiny Cibachrome fragments, leaving us unable to construct a coherent pictorial space in our minds.

The focus and pleasure Jenkinson derives from harvesting and reconfiguring her glistening Cibachrome remnants to create magical scenarios and alternative realities is akin to the joy gardeners know – that of meandering through an abundant flower bed, secateurs in hand, snipping an armful of choice blooms and arranging them in a carefully chosen vase.

Virginia Were, April 2026