

Creative Responses to Sustainability



Creative Responses to Sustainability
Cultural Initiatives Engaging with Social and
Environmental Issues
Aotearoa Green Guide 1st edition, 2026

Published by

Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF)
31 Heng Mui Keng Terrace
Singapore 119595
T: +65 6874 9700
F: +65 6872 1135

www.ASEF.org

Series Editor

Valentina RICCARDI, Kerrine GOH, ASEF

Researcher

Shea O’NEILL

Design

Jungie CHOI

ISBN 978-981-94-6351-0
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(ASEF), July 2026

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THERE ARE PEOPLE
WHO DREAM OF
MOUNTAINS AND
RIVERS AND
FORESTS AND
OCEANS.
AND THEN
THERE ARE
PEOPLE WHO ARE;
MOUNTAINS AND
RIVERS AND
FORESTS AND
OCEANS.



Muriwai, Aotearoa. Image courtesy Shea O’Neill

Preface

The Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) is pleased to present the Green Guide for Aotearoa New Zealand, the 11th in the *Creative Responses to Sustainability series*, launched in 2015.

Developed following an open call in 2025, the guide has been researched and written by art practitioner and researcher Shea O’Neill. The series explores how artists and cultural organisations across Asia and Europe engage with environmental sustainability, offering locally grounded insights that contribute to a broader bi-regional dialogue.

Aotearoa New Zealand, a nation shaped by geographic isolation and extraordinary biodiversity, faces mounting environmental pressures — from climate change and ecosystem degradation to the tensions between economic development and ecological protection. At the same time, it is home to a dynamic cultural landscape where the arts are deeply connected to land, community, and identity. This guide highlights a diverse range of 15 arts organisations that are rethinking how creativity can contribute to environmental stewardship, resilience, and future-making.

What emerges from this landscape is a set of distinctive approaches rooted in both place and practice. Many initiatives embed sustainability directly into their modes of production — through waste reduction, circular design, and resource-sharing models — while others confront the environmental costs of mobility by reimagining touring, transport, and local sourcing. Across the sector, there is a strong emphasis on collaboration, with artists working alongside scientists, communities, and environmental advocates to generate new forms of knowledge and engagement.

Central to this context is the influence of Te Ao Māori, where concepts such as kaitiakitanga (guardianship) frame sustainability as a relational and intergenerational responsibility. When approached through genuine partnership, Māori knowledge systems offer powerful frameworks that connect cultural practice, environmental care, and collective well-being, enriching contemporary artistic approaches in Aotearoa and beyond.

The guide also points to key areas for further development: recognising and resourcing the role of the arts within sustainability agendas; strengthening locally grounded infrastructures and solutions; enabling meaningful cross-sector collaboration; and supporting approaches that centre Indigenous knowledge and leadership. It further highlights the importance of storytelling through the arts in addressing eco-anxiety, fostering dialogue, and shifting perspectives towards more hopeful and action-oriented narratives.

Together, the organisations featured in this guide demonstrate that environmental challenges are not only scientific or policy concerns, but cultural ones. Through creative practice, they offer ways of understanding, connecting, and responding that are rooted in lived experience and collective responsibility.

By bringing these perspectives together, the Green Guide for Aotearoa New Zealand invites readers to reflect on how creativity can act as both a catalyst and a connector, supporting more sustainable, inclusive, and resilient futures across Asia, Europe, and beyond.

Valentina RICCARDI
Director, Culture, ASEF
Singapore, July 2026

Acknowledgements

The publication would not have been possible without the research and writing by New Zealand creative producer, strategist and manager, Shea O’Neill. Shea’s deep engagement with New Zealand’s creative communities were instrumental in bringing this guide to life.

We are also grateful to Dan Koh, for his editorial precision, which helped sharpen the language and coherence of the guide.

Our heartfelt thanks to the organisations and artists across Aotearoa New Zealand, who contributed their voices and experiences. Their generosity in sharing their perspectives have made it possible to reflect a dynamic and evolving dialogue between artistic initiatives and environmental consciousness.

Special thanks to Kerrine Goh at the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) for her thoughtful coordination, thorough editorial support throughout the development of this guide.

Since 2015, ASEF has been publishing the series Creative Responses to Sustainability through its arts website, culture360.ASEF.org. This series of country-specific guides looks at arts organisations and artists’ initiatives that address issues of sustainability in their artistic practice in several countries of Asia and Europe. The previous guides focused on Singapore (2015), Korea (2016) Indonesia (2017), Australia (2018), Portugal and Spain (2019), the United Kingdom (2021), India (2025) and the Philippines (2025), with the spin-off in the series on the city of Berlin (2017).

Creative Responses to Sustainability builds on the discussions initiated by the Green Art Lab Alliance (GALA)¹ since 2013 and previously, on ASEF’s engagement with the topic of artists and climate change in global dialogues around environmental sustainability through its Connect2Culture programme (2008-2011).² Through this series, culture360.ASEF.org continues to respond to the existing gaps in the information on arts & culture in Asia and Europe. In doing so, it also contributes to the Agenda 2030, particularly SDG 16.10 (access to information).³

1 Established in 2013, the Green Art Lab Alliance (GALA) is an informal network of 45 cultural organisations across Asia, Europe and Latin America contributing to environmental sustainability through their creative practice. For more information: <https://greenartlaballiance.com/>
2 Download the programme portfolio of Connect-2Culture (2008-2011) at: <https://culture360.asef.org/resources/special-dossier-outlines-role-culture-tackling-global-issues/>
3 Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements: <https://sdg16now.org/report/target16-10>

Introduction



Ruapuke, Aotearoa. Image courtesy Shea O’Neill

Aotearoa New Zealand is a nation with strong ties to nature. There is a long tradition of connection between the arts and the natural environment, from Māori⁴ arts traditions to celebrated modern artists such as painter Colin McCahon⁵ and poet James K. Baxter,⁶ through to the contemporary rite of passage of attending outdoor music and arts festivals.

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Art in Aotearoa is in dialogue with the natural world — inspired by, and often advocating for, its landscapes, ecosystems, and taonga (treasured) species.

At this moment in Aotearoa, as the world faces the impacts of climate change and the whenua (land) shows signs of strain under the pressures of modern development, the arts continue to be connected to environmental responses. They are a voice for the natural world, a space for discourse about environmental sustainability, and a vision of a possible future.

This guide aims to celebrate this tradition by telling Aotearoa’s story and showcasing some of the contemporary organisations working in and advocating for both the arts and the environment.

The objectives of this guide are to provide:

- A directory of organisations and initiatives in Aotearoa that work at the intersection of the arts and environmental sustainability,
- An overview of some of the key ways of working in the Aotearoa context and their challenges,
- Examples of environmentally sustainable practices in the arts and possible solutions.

Te reo Māori (the Māori language) is the Indigenous language of Aotearoa. It is common to use Māori words alongside English in both written and spoken communication. This approach is reflected in this guide’s use of Māori place names and terms. Te reo Māori does not translate directly into English, and many words have multiple meanings. Readers are encouraged to refer to the Te Aka Māori Dictionary, a free-to-use online Māori dictionary.⁷

⁴ Māori are the Indigenous people of Aotearoa New Zealand.
⁵ The Colin McCahon Research and Publication Trust, “The Colin McCahon Online Catalogue,” accessed January 28, 2026, <https://www.mccahon.co.nz/>.
⁶ G. O’Brien, “Some Remarks on Poetry and the Environment in Aotearoa/New Zealand,” Poetry, February 1, 2018, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/articles/145497/some-remarks-on-poetry-and-the-environment-in-aotearoa-new-zealand>.
⁷ J. C. Moorfield, Te Aka Māori Dictionary, accessed February 10, 2026, <https://www.maoridictionary.co.nz/>.

Methodology



This guide is based on research and interviews that explore the key environmental challenges facing Aotearoa, with a specific focus on how the arts sector is being affected and how it is responding.

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It began with a review of news coverage, policy documents, and reports from governmental and non-governmental organisations. This was supplemented by conversations with experts from various fields related to environmental policy and the arts, including policy specialists, arts managers, artists, and activists.

Organisations that work in the arts and are responding to the challenges of environmental sustainability were identified by searching websites, contacting leads from both personal and professional networks, and following the recommendations suggested during interviews.

Semi-structured interviews with key people from shortlisted organisations provided deeper insights into the day-to-day operations of their practices, as well as their experiences and challenges. The organisations in the final list were chosen for the centrality of both the arts and environmental response in their programmes.

When analysing the gathered information, patterns were identified in the key issues raised, how they are being addressed, and advice on best practice. This revealed trends that informed this guide’s overview of the sector’s current state and future potential.

State of Affairs



Aotea, Aotearoa. Image courtesy Shea O’Neill

Aotearoa is an island nation in the South Pacific Ocean. Its geological setting, shaped by its position on the boundary of the Pacific and Indo-Australian tectonic plates, has brought about a diverse range of environments, from the volcanic landscapes of the North Island to the alpine environments of the South Island. Together with the country’s isolation, these conditions have provided the foundation for ecosystems and species found nowhere else on earth.⁸

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Human History

A relatively young nation, Aotearoa was the last major habitable land-mass on earth to be discovered and settled by humans.

Pacific navigators reached Aotearoa on voyages of exploration, and in some traditions, the navigator Kupe is credited with its discovery. Polynesian settlement began around the late 13th century, and the first recorded European contact did not occur until 1642. The arrival of British settlers in the 19th century marked the beginning of a period of colonisation, during which political and social control was imposed over a land already inhabited by Māori. The signing of the Treaty of Waitangi in 1840 was a significant moment in this history.⁹

The Treaty, signed between representatives of the British Crown and rangatira Māori (Māori chiefs), exists in two versions: the English-language Treaty and the Māori text, Te Tiriti o Waitangi. Differences between the two texts led to conflicting understandings of sovereignty and authority. Many rangatira understood Te Tiriti as affirming their continued rangatiratanga (chieftainship and self-determination), while British authorities relied on the English version to assert sovereignty. These differing interpretations have had lasting impacts that continue to shape the country today.¹⁰

8 Ministry for the Environment and Stats NZ, New Zealand’s Environmental Reporting Series: Our Land 2024 (Ministry for the Environment and Stats NZ, 2024), <https://environment.govt.nz/publications/our-land-2024>
9 Te Ara – The Encyclopedia of New Zealand, “History,” by J. Wilson, accessed January 5, 2026, <https://teara.govt.nz/en/history/print>.
10 Te Ara – The Encyclopedia of New Zealand, “Te Tiriti o Waitangi – the Treaty of Waitangi,” by C. Orange, accessed January 8, 2026, <https://teara.govt.nz/en/te-tiriti-o-waitangi-the-treaty-of-waitangi/print>.

In Te Ao Māori (often described as the Māori worldview), identity is closely connected to te taiao (the environment).



“Te Mauri tū Te Mauri ora,” by Kelly Kahukiwa, Toi Taiao Whakatairanga. Image courtesy Dan Nathan

This is reflected in the principle of kaitiakitanga, a concept often described as guardianship, protection, and stewardship, which is grounded in an understanding that people are interconnected with the natural world. As part of that relationship, there is a responsibility to care for the environment for present and future generations. As Dr Caleb Hamilton, Ngāti Raukawa ki te Tonga, Kāi Tahu, explains:

“ From a Te Ao Māori perspective, sustainability is about knowing the connection to where you are and why it is important. Having the ability to find a balance within that environment to make sure that you are thinking about future generations. So we’re future-focused in that way, but contextually present and anchored by the past.

– Dr Caleb Hamilton, Ngāti Raukawa ki te Tonga, Kāi Tahu

Mātauranga Māori refers to knowledge systems, practices, and values developed and maintained by Māori across generations. This knowledge continues to evolve and inform contemporary approaches to sustainability. In Aotearoa and internationally, there is growing awareness within the scientific community of the value of Indigenous knowledge and its relevance to environmental sustainability.¹¹ For example, research initiative Mobilising for Action recognised that Māori cultural beliefs, values, and practices are deeply connected to te taiao and are an important part of understanding the human dimensions of forest health management in Aotearoa, alongside the contributions that Western science continues to make. One aim of its work was to explore how artistic practices can engage with both mātauranga Māori and scientific frameworks.¹²

11 Predator Free New Zealand Trust, “Mātauranga Māori,” accessed January 9, 2026, <https://predatorfreenz.org/toolkits/groups-toolkit/governance/matauranga-maori/>.
12 Mobilising for Action, “Our Waka Hourua Research Model,” archived December 3, 2025, at <https://web.archive.org/web/20251203152305/https://www.mobilisingforaction.nz/waka-hourua>.



Climate Impacts

The impact of climate change on Aotearoa is undeniably significant. The increased pressures on the environment are having real impacts on the arts sector, particularly those that rely on outdoor activities, such as events, festivals, and outdoor art.

Increasingly unpredictable weather means that where the concern used to be about a storm, now it is more likely to be a cyclone or other extreme weather events. This is leading to an increase in cancellations, insurance costs, and financial losses, as well as a growing focus on adaptation and resilience within the sector.

In early 2023, a national state of emergency was declared when Cyclone Gabrielle devastated parts of the North Island. The storm tore through its towns and cities, destroying infrastructure, transforming the landscape, and tragically claiming lives.

Dorothy Wakeling, Co-Founder of the Sculpture Park at Waitakaruru Arboretum, recalls that February 2023 was one of the most daunting periods during their 35-year project. During Cyclone Gabrielle, more than 100 trees were knocked down in the park, some of which were more than 30 years old. In response, they worked with sculptor Marcus Tatton on “The Portal Project,” an artwork using the fallen trees to give new meaning to the area and show that, from the destruction of nature, there can be new life.¹³

13 The Sculpture Park at Waitakaruru Arboretum, “The Portal Project by Marcus Tatton,” accessed January 12, 2026, <https://www.sculpturepark.co.nz/the-portal-project>.

Generations of New Zealanders have altered Aotearoa’s landscape to support the needs of the economy. A significant contributor to this change is the primary industry, including dairy, beef and sheep farming, forestry, horticulture, and fisheries.

This sector relies on productive land and water bodies and can put pressure on the natural systems that support them. Impacts of the intensive dairy industry include pollution of lakes and rivers, destruction of ecosystems, and damage to the climate due to methane gas.

The Ministry for the Environment’s Our Environment 2025 report highlights ongoing pressures on Aotearoa’s freshwater ecosystems. It presented that around half of monitored lakes show signs of nutrient enrichment, approximately 90% of wetlands have been lost since human settlement, and many rivers do not consistently meet guidelines for swimming.¹⁴

The Resource Management Act (RMA) was established in 1991 to promote the sustainable management of natural and physical resources. While it is currently undergoing significant reform, the RMA has played a central role in governing resource use.¹⁵ Its scope extends to cultural, environmental, and ecological considerations for public artworks. For instance, in a project Deborah McCormick, Director at Deborah McCormick Consulting, worked on in Ōtautahi (Christchurch), the project team had to seek consent under the RMA to place artist Antony Gormley’s cast iron sculpture in the awa (river). She shares that they consulted with iwi and worked with an ecologist to create ecological benefits from the art. The engineer and the ecologist designed a fish ring at the base of the sculpture to encourage mahinga kai¹⁶ by enabling fish to spawn in the area.



Maukatia Bay, Aotearoa. Image courtesy Shea O’Neill

Tourism New Zealand’s “100% Pure New Zealand” brand campaign has been running since 1999, promoting an international reputation for Aotearoa’s pristine natural environments and outdoor experiences, which have become part of the nation’s clean and green identity.

The 100% Pure image, however, is often challenged by environmentalists, scientists, and creatives, who question the widening gap between the marketing imagery of a natural paradise and the realities of the country’s pollutive industries, environmental record, and economic priorities.

Aotearoa has recently experienced an economic downturn. Tight monetary policy to reduce inflation, alongside high interest rates, has contributed to low economic growth, with sustained declines in per capita GDP that are widely regarded as among the most significant in recent decades.¹⁷ This has resulted in a focus

on economic growth, the tightening of budgets, and reduced funding, creating a challenging environment for many organisations working in the arts and environmental advocacy.¹⁸ There are many accounts of projects and events that are struggling financially, going on hiatus, and facing uncertain futures.

Despite these challenges, the arts organisations featured in this guide are finding ways to lead progress: through modelling sustainable practice, advocating for the environment, and contributing to a more sustainable Aotearoa for future generations.

14 Ministry for the Environment and Stats NZ, New Zealand’s Environmental Reporting Series: Our Environment 2025 | Tō tātou taiao (Ministry for the Environment and Stats NZ, 2025), <https://environment.govt.nz/publications/our-environment-2025/>.
15 Ministry for the Environment, “Resource Management Act 1991,” updated August 28, 2023, <https://environment.govt.nz/acts-and-regulations/acts/resource-management-act-1991/>.
16 Also known as mahika kai, the term refers to the “value of natural resources that sustain life, including the life of people.” See Environment Canterbury, “Mahinga kai/mahika kai,” updated October 6, 2025, <https://www.ecan.govt.nz/your-region/your-environment/biodiversity-and-biosecurity/biodiversity/mahinga-kai>.

17 The Treasury, “Budget 2025: Economic Outlook,” accessed January 5, 2026, <https://budget.govt.nz/budget/2025/bps/economic-outlook.htm>.
18 R. Tan, Rooted in Practice: A Mapping of Aotearoa New Zealand’s Creative Ecosystem (Asia-Europe Foundation, 2026), <https://culture360.asef.org/insights/rooted-in-practice-exploring-new-zealands-creative-ecosystem/>.

Trends in Aotearoa



Ways of Working

Dancers performing with sculptures by Levi Hawken, The art trail at Splore Festival 2021. Image courtesy Shea O’Neill

This section presents various key themes and ways of working in the arts and sustainability in Aotearoa. The trends raised during the research were often common sustainability challenges impacting the organisations’ work, while the strategies to overcome them arose as a core part of their practice.

Reducing Waste Through Creative Practice

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Aotearoa consistently ranks among the highest generators of waste per capita in the developed world, making waste management a pressing issue and a common challenge impacting many organisations.

Artists and makers face fundamental dilemma when it comes to waste. By nature, their job is to create, which often requires new materials at one end and results in waste at the other. For projects that are often already stretched for time and resources, this can present a difficult choice between environmental and financial sustainability. Minimising waste is a complex and multifaceted problem requiring many paths to a solution, which is reflected in the variety of responses to the issue from the arts sector.

Sustainable festivals and events are having a material impact on waste generation by engaging audiences in waste-conscious experiences. These include practical initiatives such as reusable cups to reduce single-use plastics, waste separation to divert waste from landfill, and recycling programmes. Splore Festival is a leader in

festival sustainability in Aotearoa. The festival operated on a zero-waste philosophy, aiming to send no waste to landfill. They engaged a sustainability manager whose role was to examine all the points of interaction between the festival and the environment, identify initiatives that can target these impacts, and aim for better outcomes. Festival producer Fryderyk Kublikowski adds:

“ We also try to communicate with our audience, and nudge their understanding, and hopefully the whole culture around to a mindset that is more conscious of those impacts.

– Fryderyk Kublikowski, Producer, Splore

Other arts organisations are also taking a solutions-focused approach to reducing Aotearoa’s waste generation by finding creative ways to repurpose and reuse materials, rather than buying new. Local Making provides creatives with the opportunity to find new ways of working with waste by gathering materials destined for landfill and transforming them into creative resources. Adam Ben-Dror from the Tāmaki Makaurau (Auckland) initiative explains:

“ We’re realistic about scale. No single creative project can solve the 200,000 tonnes of textile or 90,000 tonnes of e-waste going to landfill annually. But our hope is that by having conversations and by fostering thinking and understanding, we can contribute to shifts in understanding, and in ways of making and living that are necessary for broader change.

– Adam Ben-Dror, Artist-Inventor, Local Making

Left: “E-spinner,” a spinning machine for making yarn that is powered by a motor and battery from a discarded battery powered line trimmer, by Xin Cheng and Adam Ben-Dror, testing at Avondale Library Textile Tuesday Club. Image courtesy Local Making

Right: Mural at Graffiato: Taupō Street Art Festival 2025, by Ross Liew and Margarita Vovna. Image courtesy Ross Liew



Organisations such as Green Green Room provide collective solutions. A physical resource for independent performing arts in Te Whanganui-a-Tara (Wellington), it is where materials can be stored and used by other practitioners who need them, reducing the need to buy new and reducing what ends up in landfill.

On an individual level, certain creatives not only embrace these ideas and solutions but also embed them into their practices and the projects that they produce. One such practitioner is the artist and producer Ross Liew, who observes:

“ A lot of the creative community has had contact with these organisations, and it’s initiated thought and reflection about personal practice. So there are things that we’re trying to do as individuals around generating waste, managing waste, and diverting waste. And then, when you move up from your own practice, if you’re in a position where you are organising something and you have artists participating, you have the ability to provide a bit more of a framework for them to follow.

– Ross Liew, Creator and Cultivator, Trust Me Ltd



Reducing Waste Through Transport Efficiency



Trick of the Light Theatre packing in “The Road That Wasn’t There” in Waikari, North Canterbury. Image courtesy Ralph McCubbin Howell

Being a long way from the rest of the world means that bringing art to Aotearoa, and exporting New Zealand art abroad, comes at the cost of high carbon emissions.

Many organisations are aware of this problem and are working towards developing locally focused solutions to manage carbon emissions and minimise the impacts of their creative practices.

Trick of the Light is a theatre company based in Te Whanganui-a-Tara (Wellington) that has produced the *Green Theatre Touring Guide* to support artists and theatre companies in touring Aotearoa and overseas in an environmentally sustainable way. The guide helps practitioners understand and reduce the environmental impacts of touring, including emissions, waste, and environmentally harmful practices. After crunching the numbers, the authors found that the biggest part of their touring footprint was transportation:

“ That traces back to the fact that we’re an island at the end of the world, so if we’re taking our work overseas, or bringing in materials from overseas, that becomes a massive part of the footprint. But even within the country, using native materials, you can’t really move things around by any means other than road transport.

– Hannah Smith and Ralph McCubbin Howell, Co-Directors, Trick of the Light Theatre

This issue is also relevant for visual artists working with large-scale touring works, such as sculpture and light installation. For instance, from Tāhuna (Queenstown), the collective South Island Light Orchestra (SILO) uses light, sound and sculpture to deliver immersive experiences and installations that tour around Aotearoa and internationally. Over the years, they have learned to create increasingly transport-efficient artworks, because from a sustainability point of view, the more that can fit into a smaller space, the more efficient the transport will be. They also aim to use local suppliers, rather than transporting materials in.

The catch-22 is that, as a small and isolated country, Aotearoa needs both international touring work coming to the country, as well as the export of its own art to the rest of the world. This presents a difficult choice for artists and arts organisations who are conscious of their environmental impact and trying to reduce their carbon footprint. It is a challenging balance to strike that is often outweighed by convenience and financial incentives. Arts organisations working to provide resources and develop innovative approaches to efficiency are laying the foundations for important sector-wide awareness, knowledge, and improvement.

Creative Collaboration for Environmental Advocacy

Aotearoa’s isolation from continental land-masses has created a high level of endemic biodiversity, and its two main islands and many small islands are home to an estimated 80,000 species of native animals, plants, and fungi.¹⁹

Like the rest of the planet, however, Aotearoa faces significant threats to its biodiversity and natural landscapes. Some organisations have dedicated their practice to using the arts to protect these taonga species.

In Aotearoa, ngahere (forests) are under increasing pressure from introduced pathogens, including kauri dieback and myrtle rust, which attack many native and endemic tree species. In response, significant research and investment have been directed towards understanding diseases like kauri dieback and supporting efforts to protect the ngahere. One such initiative is Mobilising for Action, a large-scale strategic research programme that included Toi Taiao Whakatairanga, a creative project that worked with artists to explore public awareness of kauri dieback and myrtle rust.²⁰ As its Co-Lead Dr. Mark Harvey observes:

“ Kauri dieback research has been sped up so much because of engagement with Māori and Māori experts working alongside Western scientists. We were able to build on that with our arts practices and related practices that the arts brought in.

– Dr Mark Harvey, Co-lead, Mobilising for Action

Most New Zealanders live by the coast and understand that Aotearoa’s oceans and freshwater systems are taonga that need to be protected, a sentiment reflected in the work of many organisations focusing on protecting Aotearoa’s water.

This is exemplified by Kiwis Against Seabed Mining (KASM), an advocacy group dedicated to protecting Aotearoa’s oceans from the threats posed by seabed mining. KASM is a grassroots community volunteer organisation that has been standing up for coastal communities for over 20 years. There are arts communities within those communities, and the arts have often been embedded in grassroots efforts, bringing artist collaborations into their advocacy work.

One of KASM’s most high-profile art collaborations was a nationwide mural tour in 2022, conducted in partnership with Greenpeace Aotearoa and the Deep Sea Conservation Coalition. The tour featured the work of renowned New Zealand muralist Cinzah Merkens, known for his vibrant, ocean-inspired murals that explore the relationship between humans and the natural world.²¹ These types of collaborations between artists and advocacy groups create important partnerships that help communities engage with environmental issues:

“ Integrating the arts with environmental considerations, decisions, and actions to bring those involved into heart space is incredibly powerful.

– Phil McCabe, Ocean Advocate, KASM (Kiwis Against Seabed Mining)

19 Convention on Biological Diversity, “New Zealand: Country Profile,” accessed January 5, 2026, <https://www.cbd.int/countries/profile?country=nz>.
20 M. Mullen, S. C. R. Jerram, M. Harvey, N. W. Waipara, and C. Athena, “Artistic Practice, Public Awareness, and the Ngahere: Art–Science–Indigenous Māori Collaborations for Raising Awareness of Threats to Native Forests,” Ecology and Society 28, no. 4 (2023): article 13, <https://doi.org/10.5751/ES-14479-280413>.
21 Mr Cinzah. “Instagram.” accessed February 9, 2026. <https://www.instagram.com/mrcinzah>.



“Phonogram,” by Simon Holden of SILO, Splore Festival 2024. Image courtesy SILO

Art Supporting Environmental Stewardship

Ever since people arrived in Aotearoa, they have transformed the landscape as they cleared land for agriculture, built homes, and developed industry.

Through industrial projects like intensive farming, forestry, quarrying, and mining, a large part of Aotearoa’s landscape has been altered far from its natural, healthy state. Arts organisations are working to restore and protect damaged whenua, aiming to restore the land through native planting, wetland restoration, and predator control. These multi-decade projects intertwine art with ecology and sustainable practices and show the scale to which the arts can support the environment.

The Sculpture Park at Waitakaruru Arboretum is a rehabilitation project that, over 30 years, has transformed a derelict quarry site into one of Aotearoa’s largest outdoor galleries. The rehabilitation was undertaken in a sustainable and pragmatic way, as far as resources would permit, and art has played an integral part in their story. It is a model of land rehabilitation that shows that even the most neglected landscapes can be restored to life through persistence and creativity. The park’s Co-Founder Dorothy Wakeling explains:

“**The catchphrase, wasteland to wonderland, is really quite important for us to realise the significant change. This is a 34-year project so far. This industrial site had been stripped with no effort to rehabilitate it. It is a huge transformation, and it’s taken a lot of will and determination to get this far.**

– Dorothy Wakeling, Co-Founder, The Sculpture Park at Waitakaruru Arboretum

Another regeneration project is Brick Bay, which began as a family farm and has evolved over the decades into a landscape

that features vineyards, native bush, wetlands, and a sculpture trail. Wetland restoration and predator control are focus areas at Brick Bay. Brick Bay is a significant watershed close to the coast, so wetland restoration and water management protect the waterways flowing into the Mahurangi Harbour. Predator control, implemented through collaborations with local trapping groups, helps Brick Bay serve as a predator-controlled barrier at the base of the Mahurangi Peninsula, creating a buffer zone that supports the backyard trapping projects further down the peninsula.

Globally, there is growing recognition that some of the most important knowledge about how to protect, support, and regenerate the environment comes from Indigenous communities who have had deep connections to the land over generations. In Aotearoa, learning from this knowledge means honouring Te Tiriti o Waitangi, supporting Māori in their roles as kaitiaki (cultural guardians), and embracing Māori approaches to land stewardship that connect the environment, culture, and the arts. An example of this is the Wai 262 claim lodged with the Waitangi Tribunal in 1991.²² The claim explores the recognition of Māori cultural values within Aotearoa’s laws and government policies. It examines the role of iwi and hapū (subtribes) as kaitiaki of the environment and of taonga, including traditional knowledge, artistic and cultural works, significant places, and flora and fauna. By recognising Māori knowledge and guardianship in this way, Wai 262 illustrates the close relationship between cultural identity and environmental stewardship in Aotearoa.²³

22 “The Waitangi Tribunal is a standing commission of inquiry. It makes recommendations on claims brought by Māori relating to legislation, policies, actions or omissions of the Crown that are alleged to breach the promises made in the Treaty of Waitangi.” See Waitangi Tribunal, “The Waitangi Tribunal,” accessed February 12, 2026, <https://www.waitangitribunal.govt.nz/en>.
23 Wai 262, “Wai 262: Kia Whakapūmau,” accessed January 15, 2026, <https://www.wai262.nz/>.

Educating Through Creative Engagement

The arts play an important role in creating dialogue around environmental and social challenges.

To many organisations, the arts provide a space to explore potential solutions, influence cultural perceptions, and support shifts in behaviour through education and engagement. By telling stories of environmental sustainability that are not bleak and hopeless, but offer optimism and potential solutions, organisations harness the arts to open up conversations, bridge gaps between ideologies, and provide access points to different perspectives.

Recognising that climate change will have long-lasting consequences on future generations, it is important that tamariki (children) are part of the solution. The Wanda Foundation’s Founder Anna van Riel uses her one-woman environmental stage show, “Waste Free Wanda,” to provide Aotearoa’s future generations with the solutions they need to build a sustainable future. Van Riel recalls:

“**I was noticing extreme anxiety in children, and when I sang any environmental song and talked about nature, the first thing they would do was start hyperventilating and talking about how all the turtles and the dolphins are dying. I said, what if I created a body of work for Tamariki that could support them with a solutions-based toolbox, so they understand what they can do as Tamariki.**

– Anna van Riel, Trustee and Founder, The Wanda Foundation

Education through the arts lays the foundation for developing sustainable practices to combat climate change. In a world overwhelmed by negative media and eco-anxiety, the arts can open doors, engage positive emotions, and inspire people to discover more and start on their own journeys of climate action. Frameworks for different knowledge and perspectives come together through creative spaces.

Some organisations are taking a community-focused approach to education by supporting people on their path to sustainable practice. Envirohub Bay of Plenty is part of a network of environmental hubs across Aotearoa focused on helping community members to live sustainably. Art is an important part of their approach. As Project Coordinator Te Ara Dirkse puts it:

“**There is a real desire to try to use methods of communication and inspiration that are hopeful and fun. We’re trying to reach a broad range of ages, backgrounds, and levels of knowledge. So art really works for us in that way, because it’s a way of drawing in people at the start of their journey and turning them on to thinking more sustainably.**

– Te Ara Dirkse, Project Coordinator, Envirohub Bay of Plenty

Recommendations



“Aotearoa is was (the last place on earth),” 2024, by Elliot Collins, oil on canvas, 800 x 800mm. Image courtesy Elliot Collins and Black Door Gallery

This section presents a few recommendations developed from ideas discussed with interviewees during the research. These draw on conversations about areas for improvement, potential solutions for the arts community in Aotearoa, and examples of good practices that could be applied to make the arts sector more environmentally sustainable.

Valuing and Supporting the Role of the Arts in Sustainability

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Aotearoa is experiencing a depressed economic period, which has led to a shrinking funding environment and amplified the financial pressures felt by many organisations and practitioners working in the arts sector and in the culture that supports it.

Numerous organisations have experienced funding cuts or reduced revenue, and some are facing the reality of becoming financially unviable. These acute economic pressures make it challenging simply to run an organisation, let alone one with a sustainable practice. An economy where creative, social, and environmental practices are undervalued, however, leads to a flow-on effect on wider cultural attitudes towards the natural environment:

“Developing opportunities seems to be the biggest hurdle at the moment. There is less philanthropy, less funding, and less opportunity, so the creative environment is becoming kind of stagnant. And that gets echoed in other things, like how we’re treating the environment. I feel like there’s a weird correlation that doesn’t get recognised, where when we don’t care about the arts as much, we also don’t care about the environment.”

– Elliot Collins, Artist and Researcher

The arts need to be recognised and valued for their contribution to environmental education, advocacy, and stewardship. The natural world is connected to culture and the arts, and social, cultural, and financial support are crucial for their prosperity and the country’s environmental sustainability. For Aotearoa to progress towards a more climate-ready future, greater value must be placed on collaboration between environmental science and the creative sectors, supporting the arts to do the important work of holding conversations, finding solutions, and creating space to explore ideas without the pressures of financial insecurity.

Enabling Local Solutions for Sustainable Practice

Running an arts organisation and sustaining a creative practice is challenging, and despite their best intentions, practitioners are often faced with the moral dilemma of choosing between what is best for the environment and what is best for their business.

Recognising these challenges, some organisations support the sector by providing ideas, tools, knowledge, and resources to enable environmentally sustainable choices, from reusing production equipment to local sourcing, sustainable production, and touring.

Many of the organisations interviewed stress the importance of keeping the end-to-end management of resources local. For example, screen industry non-profit Greenlit is developing a local procurement tool to support local sourcing and partnerships. Co-Founder Craig Gainsborough recognises that even if a supplier is sustainable, they may still be located 100 km away, generating more emissions.



He explains:

“ It’s sourcing local, and it’s redistributing or disposing locally. For example, you can find really great local composters. We found an old lady who had a commercial composter in her backyard in Te Aroha, which was crazy.

– Craig Gainsborough, Co-Founder, Greenlit

There are often simple solutions to common challenges. Hannah Smith, Co-Director of Trick of the Light Theatre, offers an alternative to carbon offsetting: connect travel to events with local acts of environmentalism. For example, if you were hosting a four-day conference in Te Whanganui-a-Tara (Wellington), a beach clean-up could be added to the calendar.

Increasing the availability of local solutions and support to enable creative practitioners to make environmentally sustainable choices will contribute to a healthier, more equitable, and sustainable future for Aotearoa’s arts sector, broader culture, and environment.

“Suitcase Show,” by Trick of the Light Theatre. Image courtesy Lewis Ferris

Muriwai Beach, Aotearoa. Image courtesy Shea O’Neill



Working in True Partnership with Māori

As it works towards an environmentally sustainable future, Aotearoa has the advantage of a body of knowledge developed over generations through deep connections to the land.

With the guidance of Māori communities, Māori ways of thinking, concepts, and ideas can inform the creative process, support cultural integrity, and contribute to environmentally sustainable arts projects. When arts organisations and creative projects embrace concepts such as kaitiakitanga, recognise their interconnectedness with the natural world, and take responsibility for caring for it for future generations, this can fundamentally shift how they understand their relationship to the environment and approach sustainability.

Rather than being appropriated or applied independently, it is important that these concepts are respected and led by those with authority to guide their use. For non-Māori arts organisations, this requires working in true partnership with Māori communities:

“ It’s about actually working with Māori and creating space for Māori voices. That’s the most important thing, because without it the work can become disingenuous, and a lot of organisations fall over in this space. If organisations are claiming a Te Ao Māori perspective, the question is whether they’ve genuinely engaged with Māori communities and are operating in a true partnership.

– Dana O’Neill, Māori development and environmental policy specialist

Working in true partnership with Māori, the arts can create space for different forms of knowledge to come together. In doing so, they can contribute to a future in which Māori cultural practices, knowledge, and frameworks strengthen Western scientific and artistic practices, while ensuring that Māori knowledge is applied in ways that are respectful, reciprocal, and guided by those with authority to lead.

Promoting Environmental Storytelling Through Art

Art can engage emotions and open minds, making it a valuable tool for supporting science in communication, education, and advocacy for the environment.

As environmental problems continue to intensify, exposure to negative media, greenwashing, and a perceived lack of progress can lead people to withdraw from sustainability efforts, with some moving away from active solutions in favour of inaction, avoidance, or even denial. Art can provide a way to overcome this fatigue by opening access points to positive conversations, inspiring action, and shifting the story from fear-based narratives to solutions-focused creative approaches:

“ **Eco-anxiety is a growing issue for people, and as soon as anybody has anxiety, they freeze up. That’s not a solutions-based approach to anything, because you get closed when you’re anxious. So, if we can feel more solutions-based, everyone’s going to feel more confident to start thinking before perhaps they take a piece of single-use waste.**

– Anna van Riel, Trustee and Founder, The Wanda Foundation

As a platform for storytelling, the arts can help people relax, open space for creative thinking, and allow information to be seen with fresh eyes, even a sense of wonder. Environmental storytelling can provide glimpses of alternative ways of being and offer audiences tangible experiences of possible futures. Promoting the arts as a platform for communication about environmental sustainability can help create a future in which eco-fatigue, negativity, and apathy are replaced with creativity, innovation, and solutions-focused progress.



“AETHERIUM Ancestral vale,” 2000–2019, by Virginia King, Brick Bay Sculpture Trail. Image courtesy Brick Bay

Directory of Organisations in Aotearoa



This directory of organisations is not intended to be exhaustive, but hopefully provides a snapshot of how some organisations in Aotearoa are addressing environmental challenges through creative practice.

Effort was made to ensure that organisations were selected from across the country and a range of artistic disciplines. However, as the two largest cities, Tāmaki Makaurau (Auckland) and Te Whanganui-a-Tara (Wellington), are the main hubs for the arts sector, they naturally have more listed organisations than others.

Brick Bay

Founded: 1986

Sector: Visual Arts, Craft

Focus: Art Supporting Environmental Stewardship

Where: Matakana, Tāmaki Makaurau (Auckland)

More info: <https://www.brickbay.co.nz>

Brick Bay is a regenerative landscape in Matakana that combines a vineyard, sculpture trail, restaurant, gardens, and farm. It is guided by a vision to preserve and regenerate the landscape through sustainable practices, including a certified-sustainable vineyard, garden to table dining, regenerative agriculture on the farm, and art installations. Wetland restoration, water management, and predator control are key focus areas, as Brick Bay is a significant watershed close to the coast. These efforts have earned Brick Bay a Qualmark Gold certification for sustainable tourism.

The Brick Bay Sculpture Trail is a 2-km journey through native bush and open pastures, showcasing over 50 contemporary artworks. The Brick Bay Sculpture Trust supports New Zealand artists by providing interest-free loans to create large-scale works, fostering growth and innovation within the arts community.

Brick Bay creates dialogue about environmental issues through the artists’ installations. One example is Tiffany Singh’s

2014 work “The Tree Which Moves Some to Tears of Joy Is in the Eyes of Others Only a Green Thing That Stands in the Way”. The artist designed her installation as an offering to the forest spirits, in the hope that they would keep the kauri trees safe in the face of kauri dieback disease. At Brick Bay, a series of torii gates, which in Japan mark the division between the human and spirit worlds at Shinto shrines, led visitors along a wooden boardwalk through a kauri grove to the main kauri, which the artist viewed as a living shrine. The artist’s hope was that visitors would be encouraged to learn and carry out the hygiene steps necessary to help halt the spread of the disease, which is caused by a microscopic, soil-borne pathogen.²⁴

Also installed at Brick Bay is Turumeke Harrington’s work “Stumping Ground,” part of a wider research project centred on the colonisation of land in Aotearoa and how this is manifested in the landscape. The series responds directly to the significance of tumu (stump or stake) in the dispossession and occupation of whenua, referencing the intensive clearing of bush for timber and farming, as well as the historical use of wooden survey stakes to mark and divide Māori land.²⁵

“ I think artists play a big role in helping us to imagine a different future, by presenting ideas and challenging us, so that it’s not all about critique, it’s about ideation of something better.

– Anna Didsbury, Director, Brick Bay

24 Tiffany Singh, “The Tree Which Moves,” accessed January 21, 2026, <https://tiffanysingh.com/brick-bay-summer-artist-2014/>.
25 Brick Bay, “Turumeke Harrington: Stumping Ground,” accessed December 22, 2026, <https://www.brickbay.co.nz/products/stumping-ground>.

“Stumping Ground,” 2024, by Turumeke Harrington, Brick Bay Sculpture Trail. Image courtesy Brick Bay





Actor Elz Carrad on the set of Rūrangi. Image courtesy Melissa Nickerson

Founded: 2021

Sector: Film

Focus: Reducing Waste Through Creative Practice, Reducing Emissions Through Transport Efficiency

Where: Nationwide

More info: <https://greenlit.org.nz>

Greenlit is a non-profit organisation overseen by a board of filmmakers from Aotearoa’s screen sector, including producers, commissioners, and sustainability officers. They support the film, documentary, and television industry with environmentally sustainable production practices.

Greenlit was launched to support the industry in aligning with the values of environmentalism. Their goal is to develop tools and strategy to support the industry with meeting environmental aims, including the increasing regulatory requirements of taking sustainable action.

Greenlit aims to be a global leader in supporting sustainable production by providing tools and resources that enable productions to implement sustainable

practices, with a focus on embedding Te Ao Māori perspectives into these processes and developing a bicultural approach to sustainability that is unique to Aotearoa.

Their model involves employing and supporting contractors to work in sustainability departments on productions to oversee sustainability. While responsibility for environmental sustainability rests collectively all crew members, the sustainability department supports and coordinates these efforts.

Greenlit has developed a carbon calculator that is unique to Aotearoa, using local emission factors to collect data, create industry wide reports and ensure it makes accurate measurements of carbon emissions. The carbon calculator is free to use for on-screen productions and will soon be developed for use across other arts productions.²⁶

“ Emissions reporting is not the objective for us. Ultimately, it’s about culture change, and that starts with planning and strategic thinking at the start.

– Craig Gainsborough, Co-Founder, Greenlit

26 Greenlit, “Carbon Calculator,” accessed January 22, 2026, <https://greenlit.org.nz/carbon-calculator/>.

Local Making

Founded: 2022

Sector: Visual Arts, Design, Craft

Focus: Reducing Waste Through Creative Practice, Educating Through Creative Engagement

Where: Tāmaki Makaurau (Auckland)

More info: <https://localmaking.org>

Local Making is a neighbourhood-scaled initiative fostering creative and resourceful zero-waste living and making. They foster communities of makers who see potential in discarded materials. Through practices or creative reuse, repair and upcycling, they redesign and repurpose waste and discarded technologies into tools for resilient, convivial, low-energy and local ways of living. Their activities include artist and designer residencies, hands-on workshops, hackathons, design competitions, exhibitions, and an online platform sharing case studies and guides.

Local Making uses creativity to engage with materials, people, and places, making these systems visible, tangible, and discussable. Textile and e-waste are focus areas, but they are concerned with a wide range of materials destined for landfill and the ecological impacts of dumping large amounts of waste into the ground.

They offer creative fellowships for artists working with waste materials, inviting makers to undertake micro-residencies.

Residents are encouraged to conduct creative research in response to the themes of reuse, repair, and circular making, with a focus on e-waste, textile waste, and other hard-to-recycle materials. Participants receive a project fee, access to waste streams, technical support, and collaborative brainstorming sessions, and document their experiments and outcomes on the organisation’s blog.

One of their residents is Kristian Larsen, a multidisciplinary artist known for blending contemporary dance, experimental music, and digital technology. During his residency, he experimented with repairing discarded iPads, a common item found in e-waste recycling centres, and installing a suite of experimental sound-making tools to develop performance work.²⁷

From the first hackathon that Local Making ran emerged a mobile e-waste arcade, which they have taken to various events, including the Whau Arts Festival 2025.

“ Art is a way of redirecting attention and inviting people to slow down and notice things which they normally wouldn’t notice.

– Xin Cheng, Artist and Researcher, Local Making

27 Local Making, “Kristian Larsen,” accessed January 22, 2026, <https://localmaking.org/kristian-larsen/>.



“E-Waste Arcade,” made by youth participants during E-Waste Hackathon @ Zeal West, Whau Arts Festival 2025, Avondale. Image courtesy Local Making



Mobilising for Action

Founded: 2020

Sector: Visual Arts, Film, New Media, Photography, Performing Arts, Design, Craft

Focus: Creative Collaboration for Environmental Advocacy, Educating Through Creative Engagement

Where: Tāmaki Makaurau (Auckland)

More info: <https://www.mobilisingforaction.nz>

Mobilising for Action is one of seven research themes within the Ngā Rākau Taketake (Saving Our Iconic Trees) programme, developed and funded by the Biological Heritage National Science Challenge. These research themes focus on accelerating research into and the management of kauri dieback disease and myrtle rust, aiming to support, engage, and empower New Zealanders in their efforts to save the ngahere from current and future biological threats. Mobilising for Action’s research focuses on the human dimensions of ngahere health. They seek to understand the meaning people attach to te taiao, ngahere, and taonga species, to explore how to foster and support people’s connection to the environment, forests, and treasured species, and to empower them to make a difference now and in the future.

One of the aims of their work is to build bridges between cultural divides by engaging people through projects, some of which involve the arts. For example, Toi Taiao Whakatairanga was a cross-disciplinary research project bringing together the arts, science, and Te Ao Māori to raise awareness of health threats to the ngahere. Over three years, the project commissioned Māori artists to develop artwork through creative engagement with iwi, hapū, and communities across areas impacted by kauri dieback and myrtle rust. By tracing the dynamics of interactions between communities, artists, mana whenua (territorial rights), and people engaged in forest kaitiakitanga, Toi Taiao Whakatairanga aimed to contribute to understandings of how artistic practices can engage with colonial science and mātauranga Māori frameworks.

Funding for the Mobilising for Action project ended in 2024, but the work continues unofficially, with plans to apply for future funding.

“It’s about working together and working with whatever media is appropriate for the context. And for me, the arts provide a way to engage with these challenges, to sometimes address them, but also to educate, inform, and empower, all of those things.

– Mark Harvey, Co-lead, Mobilising for Action

Founded: 1981

Sector: Visual Arts, Photography, New Media, Craft

Focus: Creative Collaboration for Environmental Advocacy, Art Supporting Environmental Stewardship

Where: Tāmaki Makaurau (Auckland)

More info: <https://uxbridge.org.nz>

UXBRIDGE Arts and Culture is an independent, not-for-profit creative hub that offers classes, workshops, programmes, events, and exhibitions. The organisation is primarily known for the Estuary Art and Ecology Awards, which have been running for 20 years as Aotearoa’s only annual contemporary art awards with ecology at the core.

This nationally recognised platform fosters dialogue between art and science by encouraging artists to delve into the ecological significance and fragile beauty of the Tāmaki Estuary, a vital 15 km-long waterway on the eastern edge of Tāmaki Makaurau (Auckland), where freshwater from the land meets the saltwater of the Hauraki Gulf.

Historically a key transport route for Māori, it is now a crucial space for urban recreation and wildlife. The estuary’s mix of mangrove forests and mudflats provides an important habitat for native birdlife as it faces environmental pressures from urbanisation.

A donation box is made available to the public for the duration of the Estuary Art and Ecology Awards each year. The donations received from visitors are passed directly on to the Tāmaki Estuary Preservation Society, with the aim of providing direct financial support to an organisation, group, or individual dedicated to supporting the Tāmaki Estuary.

The awards currently represent UXBRIDGE’s main ecological engagement, with most other programming focused on the local community. The organisation is extending its ecological focus beyond the awards programme into its wider operations. It plans to develop offshoot projects alongside the Estuary Art and Ecology Awards to accelerate sustainable practice and engagement with artists working in ecology.

“ Conceptually, the Estuary Art and Ecology Awards are going to get bigger and will feed into new projects. It’s a point from which other things can grow, so it will inform and support our sustainability practice and our engagement with artists in that realm.

– Paul Brobbel, Executive Director, UXBRIDGE Arts and Culture

18TH Estuary Art and Ecology Awards, UXBRIDGE Arts and Culture, 2024. Image courtesy Tatiana Harper



Splore Festival



Top: The lagoon at Tāpapakanga Regional Park, home of Splore Festival. Image courtesy Shea O’Neill

Bottom: The art trail at Splore Festival 2021, featuring artworks by Vesica Aotearoa, SILO, Levi Hawken, and Cut Collective. Image courtesy Shea O’Neill

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Founded: 1981

Sector: Festivals, Music, Performing Arts, Visual Arts, New Media, Dance

Focus: Reducing Waste Through Creative Practice, Educating Through Creative Engagement

Where: Tāpapakanga, Tāmaki Makaurau (Auckland)

More info: <https://www.splore.net>

Splore is Aotearoa’s longest-running music, arts, and camping festival.

It has always been a festival focused on delivering rich experiences across both music and the arts. Its aim is to explore how art could contribute to the festival, affect the audience’s sense of space and relationship to place and people, and create encounters that challenge thinking, behaviour, and beliefs. Splore has hosted a range of artists who delivered artworks that left a lasting impression on the event and its audience, with projects using environmentally safer materials and methods given priority.

A leader in festival sustainability in Aotearoa, the festival operates on a zero-waste philosophy, aiming to send zero-waste to landfill. The festival hires a sustainability manager whose role was to identify friction points where the festival interacts with the environment, design initiatives that target these impacts, and aim for better outcomes. These ranged from discouraging single-use plastics to keeping campsites clean and well-managed, with the support of Camp Kaitiaki and Zero Waste volunteers. Working with Tāpapakanga’s iwi, Ngāti Paoa and Ngāti Whanaunga, to honour the land, the festival leaves its site in almost exactly the same condition as it was found.

Splore also communicates its sustainability measures to its audience, with the aim of shifting festival culture towards a more environmentally conscious mindset. Splore Festival’s organisers announced that Splore 2026 will be the last edition, reflecting ongoing challenges with ticket sales and uncertainty around the festival’s financial sustainability. While Splore’s legacy will continue, its future direction is unclear.

“ If you look at a festival as an artistic experience, or a sort of a combined artistic practice, I think it does give people an opportunity to glimpse a way of doing things, a way of living.

– Fryderyk Kublikowski, Producer, Splore

The Sculpture Park at Waitakaruru Arboretum

Founded: 1991

Sector: Visual Arts, Craft

Focus: Art Supporting Environmental Stewardship, Educating Through Creative Engagement

Where: Tauwhare, Hamilton, Waikato

More info: <https://www.sculpturepark.co.nz>

Once a scarred and depleted quarry, the Sculpture Park at Waitakaruru Arboretum has been transformed through a rehabilitation project into a thriving 17.5-hectare landscape of art, nature, and community.

Thousands of native and international trees have been planted to increase biodiversity and create habitat for native birds. The Waitakaruru Arboretum includes many New Zealand species, as well as rare trees and shrubs from around the world. Some of these tree species are endangered in their own habitats.

In 2011, the park qualified to join the New Zealand Emissions Trading Scheme,²⁸ the government’s primary tool for reducing greenhouse gas emissions, with a focus on carbon sequestration through its tree canopy.

The park adopted the ruru (native owl) as its emblem because the Waitakaruru Stream flows through the park. “Waitakaruru” means “owl by the water” in Māori, and several rescued ruru have been released in the park to add to the genetic diversity of the population.

As one of Aotearoa’s largest outdoor galleries, the Sculpture Park showcases over 100 modern and traditional sculptures and installations that have been made in Aotearoa either by New Zealand artists or artists visiting from other parts of the world.

Art is viewed as a bridge between different perspectives and a non-threatening way to engage people with environmental issues. This approach is reflected in a programme of annual events, including Creative Play Weekend, during which families create art from natural materials, and Seeds of Renewal, which highlights ways of renewing, renovating, and restoring land, soil, and vegetation by teaching visitors how to use natural materials for creative ideas and propagating their own trees.

“ We can serve as a bridge. There are a lot of conversations and interactions that happen in this sort of environment. It’s a way of engaging people in a different way.

– Dorothy Wakeling, Co-Founder, The Sculpture Park at Waitakaruru Arboretum



28 Ministry for the Environment, “New Zealand Emissions Trading Scheme,” accessed January 5, 2026, <https://environment.govt.nz/what-government-is-doing/areas-of-work/climate-change/ets/>.



Top: Precious Plastic workshop, Envirohub Bay of Plenty. Image courtesy Envirohub Bay of Plenty

Bottom: EnviroHub 48 Hour Fashion 2024, Envirohub Bay of Plenty. Image courtesy Envirohub Bay of Plenty



Envirohub Bay of Plenty

Founded: 2001

Sector: Visual Arts, Craft, Design, Festivals

Focus: Reducing Waste Through Creative Practice, Educating Through Creative Engagement, Creative Collaboration for Environmental Advocacy

Where: Tauranga, Bay of Plenty

More info: <https://envirohub.org.nz>

Envirohub Bay of Plenty is part of a network of environmental hubs across Aotearoa. They act as a conduit, connecting people living in harmony with the environment and those seeking a deeper environmental connection.

Their primary focus is supporting sustainable living in the community through collaborations with environmental groups, and they often use art to communicate environmental messages.

Some ongoing Envirohub Bay of Plenty projects include a predator-free programme aimed at removing pests and supporting the return of native birds to local neighbourhoods, and Space for Nature, an initiative that celebrates and supports urban residents of the Bay of Plenty who are protecting biodiversity in their backyards, creating ecological corridors that allow native species to flourish and move between estuary ecosystems.

The reuse of materials is also a significant part of their programme. Their project Precious Plastic BOP works on circular solutions for plastic resources that would otherwise go to landfill. For instance, plastic lids are too small for kerb-side recycling, but they are well-suited to community recycling enterprises. Using a network of collection points, schools, and local organisations, such resources are gathered and value is added through creative recycling.

Re:Stitched Runway is an upcycled fashion show intended to inspire a change towards more eco-conscious fashion. Members of the public join the competition, upcycling clothing destined for landfill into ready-to-wear outfits for the runway.

As part of the Climate Action Festival, Envirohub Bay of Plenty partnered with the arts and culture organisation Creative Bay of Plenty and invited artists, makers, innovators, and visionaries to take part in Climate Canvas – Art for Action, a visual art competition designed to spotlight the climate crisis, not with despair but with defiant beauty, bold solutions, and hopeful resistance.

“ Art is a great way to bring people in and give them a different lens to look at sustainability. Because sometimes it can feel serious and stressful.

– Te Ara Dirkse, Project Coordinator, Envirohub Bay of Plenty

Trick of the Light Theatre

Founded: 2011

Sector: Theatre, Performing Arts

Focus: Reducing Waste Through Creative Practice, Reducing Emissions Through Transport Efficiency, Educating Through Creative Engagement

Where: Te Whanganui-a-Tara (Wellington)

More info: <https://www.trickofthelight.co.nz>

Trick of the Light is an award-winning theatre company from Te Whanganui-a-Tara (Wellington), balancing creative output with environmental advocacy. As a company, they are committed to adapting their work and ways of working towards environmental sustainability, and to using their platform to advocate for better practices.

The fragility of life on this planet, and of human life is a consistent theme in their work. This is reflected not only in the content of their work, but also in how the work is made, demonstrating that it is possible to be mindful of the environment while making and touring art.

Trick of the Light’s *Green Theatre Touring Guide* came out of their concerns around making their own projects.

With support from Manatū Taonga (Ministry for Culture and Heritage), they collaborated with Performing Arts Network New Zealand and non-profit group Playmarket to produce a guidebook and toolkit on environmentally sustainable touring for performing artists and companies touring theatre in and from Aotearoa. It is aimed at those putting work on, rather than the venues that host it, and at work going on tour rather than one-off or in-house seasons. However, much of the information is applicable beyond this.

Since publishing the *Green Theatre Touring Guide*, they have been invited to speak on panels and give presentations on sustainable touring, including at the Entertainment Technology New Zealand conference 2023, Arts Wellington, and Creative New Zealand. They have also co-initiated the Green Green Room, a theatre resource library that supports the reuse of props and set pieces instead of sending them to landfill.

“ The arts are incredible at storytelling and making people see things with fresh eyes. So we have a duty, I think, to be amplifying the story of climate disaster and trying to offer not just bleak hopelessness, but maybe some kind of optimism and a call to action, while also not shying away from the fact that we are dancing at the edge of a huge extinction event of our own making.

– Hannah Smith, Co-Director, Trick of the Light Theatre



“The Griegol,” by Trick of the Light Theatre. Image courtesy Julie Zhu



“I am Hina, I am Moana,” by Tina Ngata and Terri Crawford, Mana Moana water screen opening at Mana Moana 2020. Image courtesy Mana Moana Collective

Mana Moana

Founded: 2019

Sector: Visual Arts, Film, Photography, New Media, Design

Focus: Creative Collaboration for Environmental Advocacy

Where: Te Whanganui-a-Tara (Wellington)

More info: <https://www.manamoana.co.nz>

Mana Moana brings together leading interdisciplinary Māori and Pacific artists to collaborate on multimedia and moving-image artworks, exploring relationships with the ocean, climate change, and technology through Indigenous perspectives, knowledge, and narratives.

Through the use of technology and art, Mana Moana seeks to draw attention to, critique, and request action on environmental issues through a future Indigenous frame. Its work centres on creating a platform for upholding a healthy and respectful relationship with the moana in all its forms: oceans, lakes, rain, rivers. By providing a Māori frame from which to enable and encompass Indigenous moana perspectives, it creates a positive platform for critical discussion and celebrates whakapapa (genealogy) relationships with the environment.

The inaugural Mana Moana project in 2019 presented five audio-visual works on a water screen at Whairepo Lagoon in Te Whanganui-a-Tara (Wellington) as part of Matariki celebrations.

Mana Moana encompasses multiple projects, including Mana Moana – Pacific Voices, a collection of emotive and artistic video works created to amplify and support the Pacific in driving global action to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions. This initiative is supported by Aotearoa and coordinated by the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme, with support from Pacific peoples, organisations, and communities. The videos were developed to be screened during the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, COP26, and other relevant climate change events.

Mana Moana Digital Ocean brings together more than 20 leading Māori and Pacific artists from across Aotearoa for an online collection of multimedia and video art, all housed within an immersive waterscape rendered in 3D. The result is an innovative exhibition that speaks to our relationships with water and the need for collective action to ensure its survival.

“ These films explore Indigenous relationships and identities with the ocean. As we grapple with climate change, our futures will be linked in new ways. Water is connective tissue, the seas connect us all between the islands of the Pacific, and Mana Moana is literally projecting its stories on water.

– Rachael Rakena, Curator, Mana Moana

Founded: 2023

Sector: Theatre, Performing Arts

Focus: Reducing Waste Through Creative Practice

Where: Te Whanganui-a-Tara (Wellington)

More info: <https://www.greengreenroom.nz>

Green Green Room is a library of materials for performing arts practitioners in Te Whanganui-a-Tara (Wellington), co-founded by Trick of the Light Theatre and Barbarian Productions.

A theatre resource hub for set, props, costume, and tech, it is a place for borrowing, sharing, and upcycling resources. It provides a space where materials used in productions can be stored and used by others who need them, giving these materials another life rather than sending them to landfills. Users can donate approved assets for stewardship and borrow what they need for their latest project.

Theatre sets typically reach the end of their life when a production finishes. While many materials could be reused or recycled, storage is often costly and finding new owners can be inconvenient. For items required only on a short-term basis, it can also be cheaper to purchase materials than to hire or store them. As a result, it is often more affordable and easier for these materials to end up in landfill.

Practitioners often have materials they could share without the space to store them. Green Green Room provides access to a range of pre-used materials and offers a place where these resources can be stored and reused. This reduces the need to purchase new materials and helps prevent items from being sent to landfill.

“ There’s a generation that came through who are just buying everything because it’s so cheap. But that is the worst thing to do when we’ve got all the costumes in the world. We just need to share them, which is what Green Green Room is trying to do.

– Dr Sally Richards, Director, TAHI New Zealand Festival of Solo Performance





TAHI New Zealand Festival of Solo Performance. Image courtesy Dianna Thomson Photography



TAHI — New Zealand Festival of Solo Performance

Founded: 2019

Sector: Performing Arts, Theatre, Festivals

Focus: Reducing Waste Through Creative Practice, Reducing Emissions Through Transport Efficiency

Where: Te Whanganui-a-Tara (Wellington)

More info: <https://www.tahifestivalnz.com>

TAHI – New Zealand Festival of Solo Performance is an annual festival that gathers soloists from around the nation and beyond to present work, collaborate, and make connections across the industry. The festival provides opportunities for practitioners to develop new work, share practice, and network through an integrated programme of performance, workshops, and forums.

Festival director Sally Richards believes that creating something is the perfect opportunity to implement the things that are important to you. With this in mind, from the beginning, TAHI Festival has considered a Te Ao Māori insight in its approach, alongside accessibility and environmental sustainability.

TAHI Festival aspires to minimise its impact on the environment and maximise the effective use of its resources. It aims to achieve this by increasing communication and awareness of its efforts, and by fostering responsible environmental behaviour among members of its board, staff, and artists.

Sustainability policy guidelines are presented to artists when they are programmed for the festival, providing information to support them in thinking about environmental sustainability from the point of creation. This includes considering how materials are sourced, where they are working, and how they are working, with encouragement and support provided along the way.

TAHI Festival is committed to improving and promoting sustainable practices in theatre events and festivals, and hopes to become a leader in environmental sustainability in the arts. In 2021, TAHI Festival began consulting with Sustainability Trust to develop guidelines that could be implemented and measured. As part of the TAHI Festival, they also hosted a sustainability hui (meeting) in collaboration with the Sustainability Trust. The hui brought together the TAHI Festival team, artists, and venue representatives to share knowledge, discuss challenges, and explore practical approaches to sustainability within festival and venue contexts.

“ When I first meet with artists, I say, this is the kaupapa (policy) of Tahī, we’re interested in these things, they’re at the top of our agenda. I want you to think about accessibility for your show, and I want you to think about green theatre. And so I’m beginning to feel that trickle-down now.

– Dr Sally Richards, Director, TAHI New Zealand Festival of Solo Performance

South Island Light Orchestra (SILO)

Founded: 2020

Sector: New Media, Visual Arts

Focus: Reducing Waste Through Creative Practice, Reducing Emissions Through Transport Efficiency

Where: Tāhuna (Queenstown), Otago

More info: <https://silo.nz>

South Island Light Orchestra (SILO) is a collective of creatives who use light, sound, and sculpture, combined with interactivity and strong narratives, to deliver immersive experiences and installations.

They are the creators of the award-winning LUMA Southern Light Project in Tāhuna (Queenstown), which pioneered a zero-waste approach to large-scale events in the South Island and helped establish a template for sustainable events that has informed local council funding guidelines.

Being sympathetic to the space is important to them from an environmental point of view. When building artworks and choosing materials, they consider the sustainability of those materials and what will happen to them afterwards, aiming to find a balance between recycling and reusing products. They have also learned to create highly efficient artworks by maximising transport efficiency and sourcing locally to reduce the environmental impact of their work.

This approach has developed over time. Initially, they built works designed to last, so they could be reused by shipping them to light festivals around the world. Over the past ten years, they have shifted this approach to building artworks from components that can be reused to create new light works. For example, a recent installation involved placing around 10,000 pixels into a pond, and every one of those LED strands has since been power-washed, folded up, and put back on the shelf, ready for the next artwork.

“ There’s respect for the environment that we’re doing the event in, and there’s also respect in terms of how we dress something, so that when we finish with it, all of that stuff doesn’t just end up going to the skip.

– Simon Holden, Artist, South Island Light Orchestra



Top: “Breathe / Manawa Ora,” by Dan Move of SILO, Luma 2019. Image courtesy Trey Ratcliff

Bottom: “Arc,” by Simon Holden of SILO, TSB Festival of Lights 2026. Image courtesy SILO



Community Day, Wānaka Festival of Colour. Image courtesy Deanna Gerlach

Southern Lakes Arts Festival Trust

Founded: 2005

Sector: Festivals, Dance, Music, Theatre, Performing Arts, Literature, New Media, Visual Arts

Focus: Reducing Waste Through Creative Practice, Reducing Emissions Through Transport Efficiency, Educating Through Creative Engagement

Where: Wānaka, Otago

More info: <https://festivalofcolour.co.nz>

Southern Lakes Arts Festival Trust is the home of the Wānaka Festival of Colour and Aspiring Conversations.

Wānaka Festival of Colour is the flagship arts event for the Southern Lakes region. Set against the autumn colours of the Upper Clutha Basin, the week-long festival offers a rich and diverse programme, celebrating the very best of the arts world.

Southern Lakes Arts Festival Trust is dedicated to environmental responsibility and is auditing its impact to work towards zero waste. Through a partnership with community enterprise Wastebusters Wānaka, the festival aims to minimise waste, reuse resources, and maximise recycling across all festival venues.

Sustainability initiatives are considered throughout planning, with a focus on encouraging people to think about the environment and explore new approaches. Performers and the team are encouraged to embrace sustainable practices as part of their time at the festival. This includes reducing travel emissions, minimising waste, and considering eco-friendly production elements. Sometimes this happens through gradual changes, such as producing less print collateral and signage, while educating audiences about why these changes are being made.

The Aspiring Conversations programme focuses on discussions with experts in their fields about political, social, and environmental topics that are currently relevant. One area of focus is climate change, encouraging people to think from different perspectives so that the conversation remains meaningful and can continue.

“ I think for a lot of people art opens up a different perspective, or a different way of talking about things. It challenges their preconceived ideas of how something should be, so it’s an extraordinary platform to enable that.

– Sophie Kelly, Artistic Director, Southern Lakes Arts Festival Trust

The Wanda Foundation

Founded: 2021

Sector: Theatre, Performing Arts,
Visual Arts

Focus: Reducing Waste Through Creative Practice, Creative Collaboration for Environmental Advocacy, Educating Through Creative Engagement

Where: Southland and Otago

More Info: <https://www.thewandafoundation.org.nz>

The Wanda Foundation is on a mission to inspire positive environmental change through the arts. They leverage the power of creativity, storytelling, and artistic expression to ignite conversations, foster empathy, drive action, and catalyse the transition towards a more sustainable and harmonious relationship between humanity and the natural world.

The foundation was established by performing artist and environmental ambassador Anna van Riel. van Riel’s one-woman environmental stage show, “Waste Free Wanda”, supports children to make positive choices around waste reduction. She is also the founder of Plastic Free Wānaka, a non-profit focused on supporting communities to reduce single-use waste at a grassroots level.

Anna formed the Wanda Foundation to extend this work further afield. With a keen focus on advocating for the arts, the foundation believes that to be our best creative selves, we need a healthy environment to be creative in.

The Wanda Foundation uses art alongside science by providing resources, tools, and networks, and by finding ways to connect people so they have a lived experience of how they can make a change. The foundation supports artists through the grant process, provides access to a broader pool of funders, and helps artists realise their creative visions. It also offers tools and tips to track environmental impact and plan environmental projects. For artists already working in the environmental arts, the foundation provides support, networks, and ways to connect to resources. For those who have not previously considered themselves environmental artists, it offers a space to explore how art can share solutions-focused toolkits and inspire positive environmental change. For other organisations, the trust offers the opportunity for collaboration; fostering a practice of working together for the greater good.

Projects such as “Our World Inside a Suitcase” provide opportunities for the community to get involved in the arts. The project invites artists and community groups to create an artwork depicting their positive view of the natural world inside a vintage suitcase, using only handmade, upcycled, or pre-loved items.

“ Accountability is really important right now, shining a light on where the issues are, and then having integrity around why we want to make a difference, and how we do that with really clear pathways, rather than box ticking.

– Anna van Riel, Trustee and Founder, The Wanda Foundation



Top: Southland Artist Traci Meek-Reid shares her “Our World Inside a Suitcase” submission at Invercargill’s Whare Taupua Gallery. Image courtesy The Wanda Foundation

Bottom: Dunedin street artist Bruce Mahalski shares his work with the kids from St John’s School and Maniototo Area School. Image courtesy The Wanda Foundation





Maukatia Bay, Aotearoa. Image courtesy Shea O’Neill

