

HAYDEN FOWLER



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A photographic exhibition tracing performance artist Hayden Fowler's tattooed history of New Zealand's many bird extinctions is a beautiful silent protest against ecological destruction.

Hayden Fowler's *Your Death* is a new photographic series documenting an ongoing performance project in which the artist submits his own body in a poignant remembrance of New Zealand's catastrophic bird extinctions. Over three sessions during Sydney's Art Month in March this year, in a street-front window, Fowler's torso was tattooed with an image of the South Island Kkako – last sighted in 1967 and officially declared extinct in 2004.

In June 2014 the project was undertaken in Berlin, where the extinct Whēkau, or Laughing Owl, was tattooed in flight across his chest, commemorating the 100th anniversary of its disappearance. Each event was choreographed over three sessions, irreversibly transforming Fowler's skin into a conjunction of living bodies.

Your Death continues a project the artist began in Auckland in 2007, where images of the lost Huia were etched onto his back in a high street shop window. His imagery

has been pieced together from 19th-century watercolours, fragmented descriptions, early black and white photographs and taxidermy specimens. For Fowler, these representations symbolise the pervasive and tangible absences in the landscape.

Hunting, museum collection, the introduction of mammals and the industrial destruction of vast areas of ancient forests resulted in New Zealand losing half of all its terrestrial bird species. Many of those remaining exist as a type of living dead in tiny, isolated colonies on remote offshore islands. The remnant mainland forests are all but silent.

As with any wearing of mourning, Fowler's is an acknowledgement of absence and loss. The destruction of entire species and whole ecosystems, however, is an event of such significance that the mourning can never be fully completed, the empty spaces never filled. In submitting himself to be tattooed, Fowler sacrifices his own body in a ritual of both repentance and resurrection. The



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white, geodesic set-construction in which the tattooing takes place, prophesies a sterile future as increasing numbers of species follow the Huia, Whēkau and Kōkako into oblivion, but also hope, as these birds somehow find a way back through the cracks of human cultural history and time. ■

This project has been assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body.

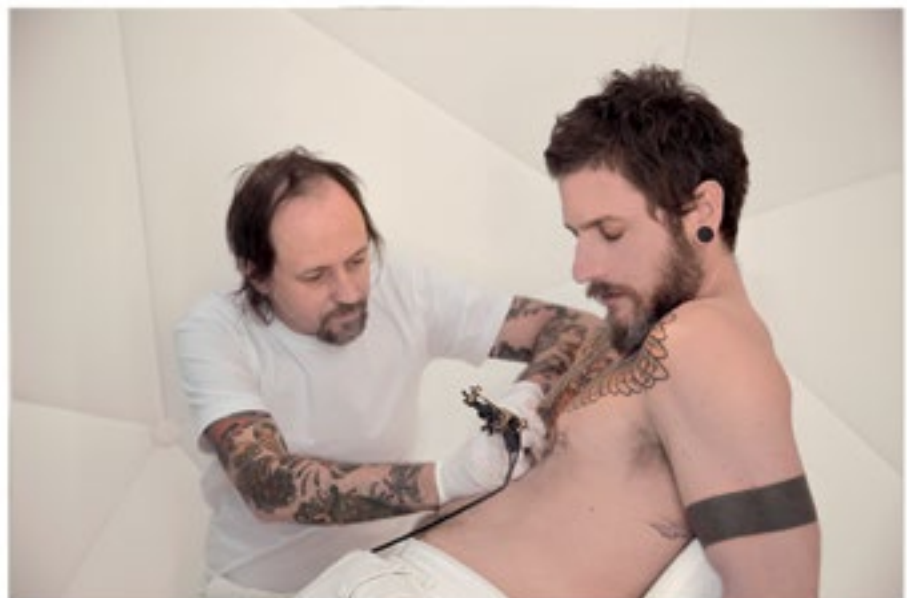
EXHIBITION

Your Death
 Gallery 9
 3-27 June 2015

haydenfowler.net
 www.gallery9.com.au

- 01 Your Death, 2015, performance documentation, photographer Joy Lai
- 02 Your Death, 2015, performance documentation, photographer Joy Lai
- 03 Your Death, 2015, performance documentation, photographer Jonas Friedrich
- 04 Your Death, 2015, performance documentation, photographer Joy Lai

Courtesy the artist and Gallery 9



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