

## Making friends in the Super City suburbs

Small workshops take art and friendship into the neighbourhood.

Xin Cheng and Chris Berthelsen have been offering a diverse range of small workshops, at Mairangi Arts Centre. While based in the Auckland suburbs, the workshops aim to use the resources of the Super City – its harbours, beaches, mountains and myriad resources that can be found in our backyards. They are also working with diverse range of collaborators from New Zealand and around the world.

The small workshops aim to explore questions such as: How can we mix art, life, and the everyday environment, through making and being together? How can we transform everyday materials together?

Cheng and Berthelsen say they have been enjoying a “(s)low-key” exploration of these questions through projects supported by self-proclaimed “local weirdos”, passersby, the Creative Communities Scheme and Hibiscus and Bays Local Board.

They have traversed the neighbourhood pulling (and sometimes riding in) junk carts, soaped up strangers on improvised waterslides, made pottery on the beach, using local clays and a kiln built in the nearby cliffs (with Jack Tilson).

They’ve held mass meditations in a space filled with junk (with Adam Ben-Dror), organised wild-food street parties (which involved cooking on gutter-grills and eating weed tempura), held haircut marathons and given head massages. They have failed and laughed, says Berthelsen.

“We’ve found that pleasurable collaborations come from making friends with people that we happen to meet,” says Berthelsen. “Every ‘thing’ has its own flavour that will bubble up, be nurtured, and mixed together (where friendship is a dynamic spectrum not a particular state). Submissions of proposals are not necessary. Things emerge from the uncertainty of everyday life if we are open and maintain a stance of noticing and accompanying.

“We want to work in public,” he adds. “We want to invite conversation, facilitate chance encounters, and feel a little awkward.” Documentation of these projects can be found at [small-workshop.info](http://small-workshop.info).

Make friends when you feel like it by contacting “local weirdo” Chris Berthelsen: [chris@a-small-lab.com](mailto:chris@a-small-lab.com). Mairangi Arts Centre, [mairangiarts.co.nz](http://mairangiarts.co.nz)



Xin Cheng and Chris Berthelsen’s series of small workshops around Mairangi Bay, Auckland

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