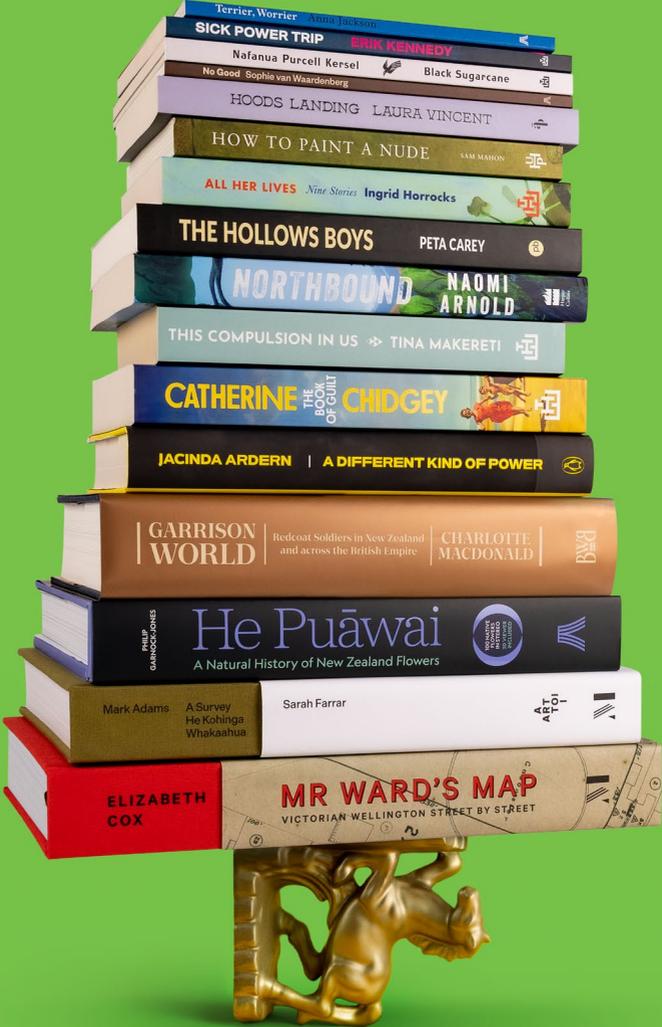


Our Finest



Every year, books carry the voice of Aotearoa out into the world, challenging, delighting, and reminding us of who we are. Now, 16 remarkable books stand out from that chorus.

The New Zealand Book Awards Trust Te Ohu Tiaki i Te Rau Hiringa is thrilled to reveal the 2026 Ockham New Zealand Book Awards shortlist, a line-up that celebrates imagination, craft and bravery in equal measure.

Behind these 16 finalists lies a monumental task: 12 judges, 178 entries, and countless hours of reading, reflecting, and robust conversation. From a longlist of 44, they have shaped a snapshot of excellence that captures the spirit and diversity of our literary landscape. A special welcome goes to our international judge Leslie Hurtig, artistic director of the Vancouver Writers Festival, who joins the fiction panel at this stage.

These awards could not exist without a community of supporters who believe in the power of books. Our deepest thanks to Ockham Residential; Creative New Zealand; Booksellers Aotearoa New Zealand, presenters of BookHub; Mary and Peter Biggs; the Mātātuhi Foundation; the Auckland Writers Festival Waituhi o Tāmaki, and the Acorn Foundation, custodians of the legacy of the late Dr Jann Medicott MNZM.

To this year's shortlisted authors and publishers, warmest congratulations. To readers everywhere, seek out these stories in bookshops and libraries nationwide, and join us in celebrating the winners on Wednesday 13 May 2026, at the Ockham New Zealand Book Awards ceremony at the Kiri Te Kanawa Theatre in Auckland.

For more details and tickets visit www.writersfestival.co.nz.

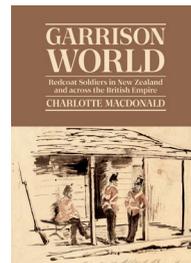
#theockhams www.nzbookawards.nz

BookHub Award for Illustrated Non-Fiction

Garrison World: Redcoat Soldiers in New Zealand and Across the British Empire

Charlotte Macdonald
Bridget Williams Books

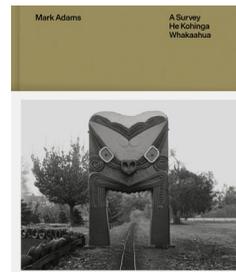
Extensively researched, impeccably written and richly illustrated, Charlotte MacDonald's compelling narratives reconstruct the stories of people shipped to Aotearoa to carry out the imperial orders of the British Empire in the mid-nineteenth century and their impacts on Māori communities. Revealing political power shifts, *Garrison World* illuminates the lived experiences of ordinary people caught up in the global machinations of the colonial project — histories often hidden in plain sight in the land, monuments and street names.



Mark Adams: A Survey – He Kohinga Whakaahua

Sarah Farrar
Massey University Press and
Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki

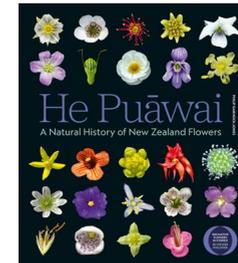
Long overdue, *He Kohinga Whakaahua* surveys five decades of work by the renowned photographer Mark Adams, who through his large format camera regards cross-cultural sites of colonial and Pacific histories. This book celebrates Adams' extensive research processes and how, through intersecting narratives, his work consistently draws attention to locations, people and historic events. The photographs are met with texts by Sarah Farrar, Ngāhuia te Awekōtuku and Nicholas Thomas, who furnish valuable context to Adams' practice.



He Puāwai: A Natural History of New Zealand Flowers

Philip Garnock-Jones
Auckland University Press

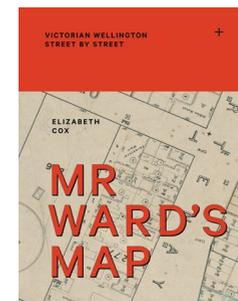
As both author and photographer, Philip Garnock-Jones presents a new take on the sex life of Aotearoa's native flora. Offering a sense of wonder through meticulously detailed stereoscopic photography (complete with 3D glasses) which documents the intricate parts of each flower, *He Puāwai* delivers from cover to cover. Notable for its encyclopaedic manner and seamless design, its exquisite photographs and informative text offer both universal and scientific appeal, rewarding amateur, dilettante and expert readers alike.



Mr Ward's Map: Victorian Wellington Street by Street

Elizabeth Cox
Massey University Press

Based on a map of Victorian Wellington, still in use today, this book traces the 1890s — a period of rapid growth and social change. Elizabeth Cox reveals stories located throughout the cityscape: in the gutters and sewers, boarding houses, tearooms and mansions on the hill. From the dust jacket and typography to the pairing of historic photographs with relevant map excerpts, this book has been artfully designed — bringing navigational clarity to the complexities of the map.

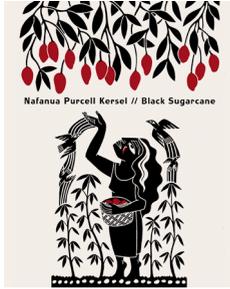


Mary and Peter Biggs Award for Poetry

Black Sugarcane

Nafanua Purcell Kersel
(Satupa'itea, Faleālufo, Tuāefu)
Te Herenga Waka University Press

Traditionally black sugarcane was well known for its medicinal properties, and Nafanua Purcell Kersel's debut collection serves as good medicine for the soul, its vivid imagery and seamless flow bringing the reader's attention to the language and traditions of Fa'a Sāmoa. A powerful new voice who sits confidently alongside well-known Pasifika female poets, she uses storytelling to reveal the people, customs, spirituality and village life of her Pacific homeland.



No Good

Sophie van Waardenberg
Auckland University Press

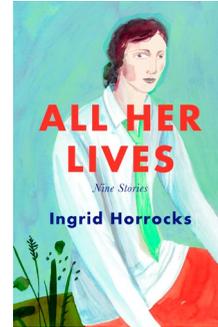
Rather than make an index of all slights and offences, in *No Good* Sophie van Waardenberg takes all the bad stuff and crafts it into something wonderful and refined. Her poems possess the angelic tranquillity of a favourite child on their death bed, cut and pasted into the florid atmosphere of a Bosch painting where love and bereavement come and go. This is a debut poet who continues to blush at the beauty of her world.



All Her Lives

Ingrid Horrocks
Te Herenga Waka University Press

Connections abound in this intelligent, skillfully observed story collection. Characters reappear, their past acts echoing through generations. From the life of Mary Wollstonecraft and the troubled legacy of Truby King to the complexities of queer life, the struggles of a single mother and the consequences of political and climate activism, in *All Her Lives* Ingrid Horrocks subtly depicts the challenges and transformations of women from 1795 to the present day.



Hoods Landing

Laura Vincent (Ngāti Māhanga, Ngāpuhi)
Āporo Press

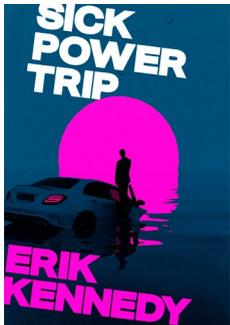
Four generations of the Gordon whānau gather to celebrate Bufty's birthday in the shrinking settlement of Hoods Landing. Bufty's youngest daughter, Rita, has yet to announce her cancer diagnosis, and more revelations are in store. Laura Vincent's novel engulfs the reader in a memorable matriarchal whānau: the decades-long tensions and in-jokes, the closely guarded recipes, the tarot readings and the singalongs. Instantly recognisable but utterly unique, epic yet contained, expertly woven and delightfully funny, *Hoods Landing* contains multitudes.



Sick Power Trip

Erik Kennedy
Te Herenga Waka University Press

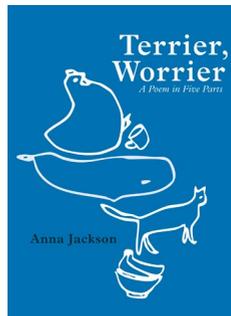
Persuasive, subversive, cohesive, immersive ... these and many other rhyming words describe Erik Kennedy's latest collection *Sick Power Trip*. In addition to his trademark wit, play and societal awareness, Kennedy's range and muscularity announce him as a master craftsman; a poet who can bend and mould the shaping of modern life and, in that shaping, reveal something new, something hidden, something human.



Terrier, Worrier: A Poem in Five Parts

Anna Jackson
Auckland University Press

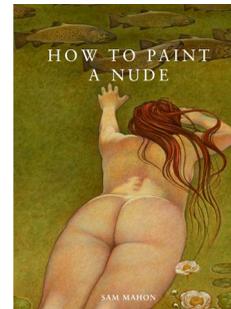
Weaving essays through five seasons, beginning and ending in summer, *Terrier, Worrier* is poetic prose flow at its most extraordinary. Partly autobiographical, the five prose-poems connect with readers through individual thought, expressed with words and feelings that compare to animal thoughts and emotions. Anna Jackson masterfully paints these into images that relate on a personal level, while entwining the quotes and references of various writers with her own take on the seasons.



How to Paint a Nude

Sam Mahon
Ugly Hill Press

A Belarusian refugee and a local artist meet for coffee every Tuesday in pre-quake Ōtautahi to discuss art, romance, political oppression, the degradation of our natural environment and much more. This sly and wry reflection from artist and provocateur Sam Mahon abounds with meta-fictional games and killer one-liners. Mahon may have changed some names but he doesn't pull punches: 'Sometimes it is an author's duty to protect the guilty.'



The Book of Guilt

Catherine Chidgey
Te Herenga Waka University Press

Can good come from evil or must the rot return? Thirteen-year-old triplets are the last remaining residents of a boys' home, part of a wider scheme on which the UK government is turning its back. Elsewhere, Nancy is never allowed outside by her parents. The connection between these children, the nature of the scheme and the alternate timeline in which events take place are masterfully revealed in Catherine Chidgey's menacing yet thrilling novel of big ideas.



General Non-Fiction Award

A Different Kind of Power

Jacinda Ardern
Penguin, Penguin Random House

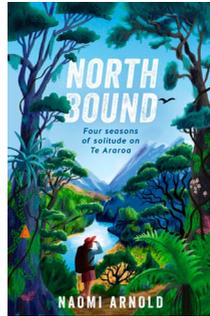
A well-crafted, candid, rewarding account of a turbulent period in national history from one of its significant actors. Jacinda Ardern interweaves the political context with a personal story of her life and upbringing, her struggle with imposter syndrome, and the unwanted mantle of political leadership, offering insight into a life of service. The writing is emotionally wise and balances the needs of local and international readers, while also appealing to those less interested in politics.



Northbound: Four Seasons of Solitude on Te Araroa

Naomi Arnold
HarperCollins Aotearoa New Zealand

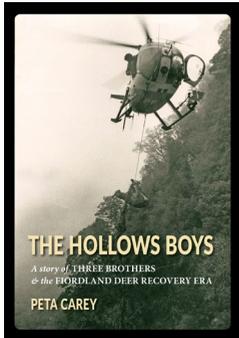
The main character of *Northbound* is not the author, who walks Te Araroa trail, but rather the land of Aotearoa New Zealand itself. Naomi Arnold is a warm, funny, insightful guide, and the immediacy of her writing puts readers on the track right next to her. Her honest self-awareness conveys the significant personal costs of the undertaking, as well as its potential for transformation and the gift of learning more about the country in which we live.



The Hollows Boys: A Story of Three Brothers & the Fiordland Deer Recovery Era

Peta Carey
Potton & Burton

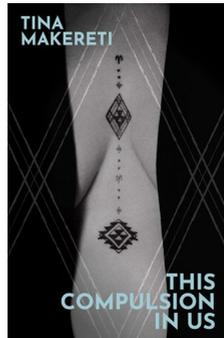
The Hollows Boys brings to life the Fiordland helicopter deer recovery industry, a uniquely New Zealand slice of social history. Peta Carey focuses on the fascinating, exciting and sometimes tragic story of three brothers, through which she explores our mythology of landscape and male heroism. Her protagonists emerge as reckless yet surprisingly vulnerable. The writing is always rich and evocative, and the book is liberally illustrated with historic photos.



This Compulsion in Us

Tina Makereti
(Te Ātiawa, Ngāti Tūwharetoa,
Ngāti Rangatahi-Matakore, Pākehā)
Te Herenga Waka University Press

This beautifully written collection of interconnected essays records Tina Makereti's journey of self-discovery as a writer, daughter and mother as she gradually becomes aware of her Māori identity. Always brave and generous, Makereti's words will resonate with New Zealanders who are finding out they have whakapapa. It is a mature and reflective work, suggestive of long periods of thinking as the author finds a way to live within cultural duality, contradiction and paradox.

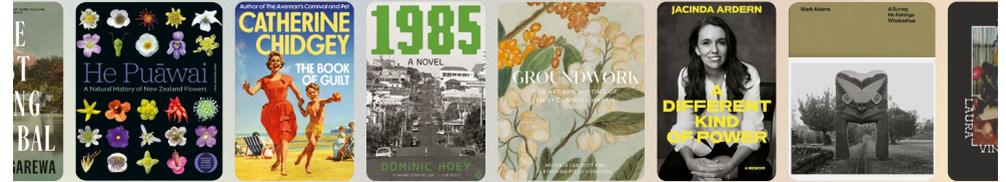


Judges: Philip Matthews (convenor),
Georgina Tuari Stewart (Ngāpuhi-nui-tonu, Pare Hauraki), Dan Salmon



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As Ockham's Mark Todd says, "Books matter to anyone who cares deeply about the world. Through creativity, they invite us to reimagine what's possible and help us find our own place or path. At Ockham, we believe our communities would be far poorer without art, without words, without science – without critical thought. That's why our partnership with the New Zealand Book Awards means so much to us."

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