SEASON

THE LINE OF EMPIRE

HANAHIVA ROSE

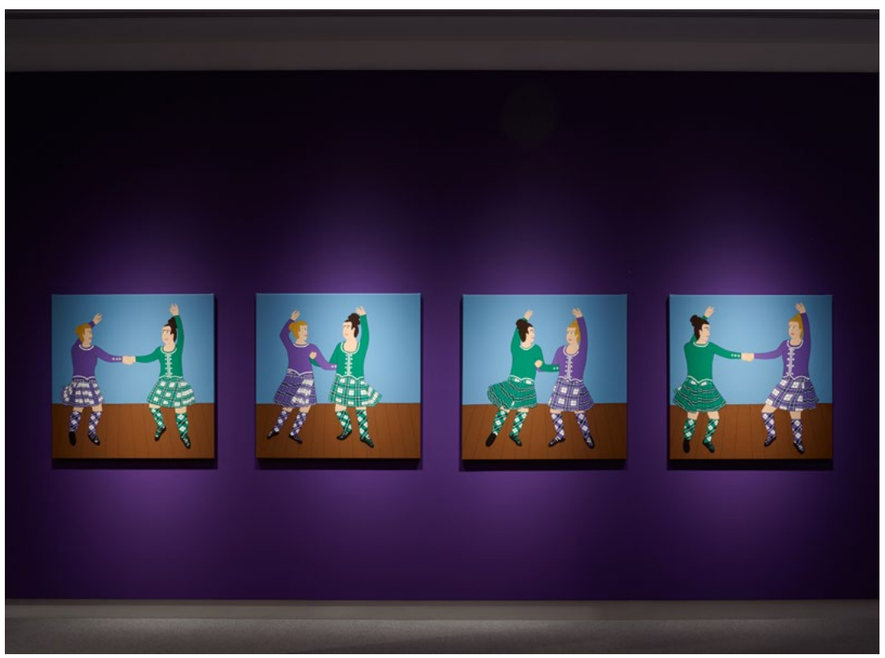
The Line of Empire



AYESHA GREEN
The Frontier (There'll Be No One to Welcome You Home), 2026
Acrylic on canvas
2000 x 2500mm

AYESHA GREEN
Dancing Girls #1–4
Acrylic on canvas
1000 x 1000mm (each)

All photographs by Adrian Vercoe.



landlessness … has a whakapapa that is inseparable from our own.

—Ani Mikaere[1]

'There'll be no one to welcome you home my dear boy, there'll be no one to welcome you home. And when you return to the land of your birth, there'll be no one to welcome you home,' goes the mother's refrain in the 19th-century folk song 'The Emigrant's Lament', carefully transcribed by Ayesha Green in her drawing of the same name. There was no one to welcome Ayesha home to Scotland when she visited in 2024, but what the exhibition *The Highlander's Farewell* nevertheless describes is a series of encounters with history and whakapapa, as held in landscapes, images, materials, and language.

The 'dear' of 'The Emigrant's Lament' is subject to a productive slippage in Ayesha's self-portrait *The Frontier (There'll Be No One to Welcome You Home)*, which records a meeting between her and a deer as she walked to Shiaba, a ruined settlement on the Isle of Mull, which Ayesha's ancestors were evicted from in the mid-19th century, influencing their subsequent migration to Aotearoa in 1879. These histories of evictions and enforced landlessness have, of course, parallels in the colonisation of Aotearoa: one of the 'contradictions and inconsistencies' that the 'colonial psyche' displays, as Hana O'Regan describes.

We feel incensed at the way our [Scottish] forefathers and mothers were treated by the British; impoverished, alienated from their land, abused and discriminated against. Yet those same ancestors, knowing full well the injustices, the pains, and the humiliation of colonisation could escape to the other side of the world and behave in exactly the same way as their own colonisers.[2]

This is the knot which *The Highlander's Farewell* attempts to unravel—the entanglement between Scottish and Māori as both agents and subjects of imperialism—by tracing its thread back from Aotearoa to Scotland, through what Ayesha calls a 'whakapapa of colonisation'. In his article 'Mātauranga Māori (Māori Epistemology)', Hone Sadler outlines the whakapapa of a series of phenomena descending from the colonisation of Aotearoa, many of which could equally describe the drivers behind Scottish migration to this country. Landlessness cohabits with a saddened heart to produce lethargy. Listlessness cohabits with loss to produce affliction. Hunger, homelessness and ill health are the products of unemployment and debt, which descend from a saddened heart and urbanisation.[3]

In *The Frontier (There'll Be No One to Welcome You Home)*, Ayesha stands on a wide expanse of grassy hill, her head turned to look back at us, while the deer looks down at her from the ridge, framed by clear blue sky. It is, at least in part, a portrait of absence, or of Ayesha's determination to fill a history which

she has otherwise encountered as an absence. People were forced to leave this landscape—left it empty yet filled with stories—and travelled to a place they likely imagined as both unpeopled and un-storied. Like Ayesha, who brings Aotearoa with her in a kōwhai patterned dress and Macpac backpack, they found ways to carry home with them.

In *The Highlander's Farewell*, various processes of transmitting and upholding history are interrogated for their construction as performance. The Highland Hullachan, as portrayed in *Dancing Girls #1—4*, is at once an assertion of identity and a means of conveying a history that is capable of carrying culture across time and place. The question that the exhibition asks, however, is: to what purpose? And if we understand the processes of history making, or storytelling, or reciting whakapapa, to be necessarily selective—emphasising certain details while omitting others—what does the shadow of any particular narrative serve to obscure?

A scene is set. *Culloden Battlefield Trail (You Are Here)*, placed at the entrance to *The Highlander's Farewell*, functions as an act of displacement that mirrors the negotiation between here/elsewhere that drives the exhibition, by locating us in a different physical landscape to the one we currently occupy. *Culloden Battlefield Trail (You Are Here)* is a painted copy of a trail map from the Culloden Battlefield near Inverness in the Scottish Highlands, where, in 1746, the Jacobite army were defeated by British government forces in the final battle of the Jacobite uprising. Ayesha identifies this defeat as an important precursor to Scottish migration to Aotearoa, arguing that despite its physical distance 'this site is New Zealand history.'[4]

The idea that Scottish history is New Zealand history is implicit in Dunedin's coat of arms, where a Scottish man and a Māori man flank various symbols of the two countries, including Edinburgh Castle. Ayesha's freestanding version of the castle acts as a set piece within the gallery, establishing the exhibition as a stage in which we, the audience, are actors. Between the authoritative presence of the castle and paintings that surround it, the untitled collages mounted on the back of the castle nod to another way of understanding the landscape in their use of earth pigments collected from Shiaba. One translation of whakapapa is to turn towards Papatūānuku, or to turn towards the earth, an action which the collages perform: looking behind the farmlands, gardens, and ruins to the narratives that human histories have failed to record but which the whenua remembers.

Ayesha's practice of copying or painting 'over' an existing image serves not to obliterate, but to highlight. Some details are obscured while others are amplified—a fact that is true, of course, of image-making generally, as well as storytelling and the recitation of whakapapa—in a process that allows her to address the inevitable omissions of the original image. William Hodges' 1773 painting *A View in Dusky Bay, New Zealand*, on which Ayesha's *Self-Portrait*



AYESHA GREEN
Edinburgh, 2026
Free-standing wooden set-piece
3150 x 4200 x 850mm



AYESHA GREEN
Culloden Battlefield Trail (You Are Here), 2026
Acrylic on canvas
2000 x 2500mm





AYESHA GREEN
King Charles Pretending to Be a Shepherd, 2026
Acrylic on canvas
1500 x 1500mm

AYESHA GREEN
Self-Portrait as A View in Dusky Bay, 2026
Acrylic on canvas
1500 x 1500mm

as A View in Dusky Bay hinges, has its own absences: the figure is presented alone, isolated from the larger party he was recorded as being with, and placed at a distance from Hodges, who is implicit in the gaze of the viewer. The original painting, Peter Brunt has argued, stages 'an encounter between "savage man" and the natural sublime,' where the sublime landscape becomes a stand-in for the European empire as a force of transformative power.[5] In *Self-Portrait as A View in Dusky Bay*, the drama of the sublime has been subdued. The perspective is lifted, giving a greater sense of Tamatea and the islands and mountains that extend into the fiord, but the sense of violent potential in the landscape is diminished for it is no longer unknown and unfamiliar. Instead, the painting's focus is the apprehensive figure of Ayesha, her gaze directed across to the painting hanging beside it, where she eyes another force of empire, masquerading as a diminutive shepherd: the former prince, now king, Charles III.

The photograph that *King Charles Pretending to Be a Shepherd* is based on was taken in 1997, and shows Charles wearing a kilt and carrying a shepherd's crook on Balmoral Estate. Just as Hodges' *A View in Dusky Bay, New Zealand* isolates its Māori subject as a lone wanderer, *King Charles Pretending to Be a Shepherd* presents Charles alone, removing from the original photograph his sons William and Harry. Shown beside *Self-Portrait as A View in Dusky Bay*, a reversal is performed. While the archetypal 'savage man' of Hodges' painting is replaced with the identifiable Ayesha, Charles is almost entirely subsumed by the forces of empire he represents. She: located within a landscape that, while vast, she understands herself in relation to; wrestling with a history of representation she is implicated in but capable of responding to. He: defined not by the landscape, but by the systems put in place to define, domesticate and corral it; the beneficiary of many of the selections and omissions of history as it has been widely told. The whakapapa of colonisation is not the beginning or end of either Māori or Scottish history, and its lines of descent through each are unique and divergent, but there is a point at which those histories collide. It is the line that Charles represents, the one that Ayesha asks us to consider our own implication in, that has been represented and reinforced in the paintings, photographs and texts produced in its service: the line of Empire.

1 Ani Mikaere, *Colonising Myths — Māori Realities He Rukuruku Whakaaro* (Huia Publishers, 2011), 210.
2 Hana O'Regan, 'The Symbols of Our Fears: Response to the Work of Peter Robinson,' unpublished paper, 1998, np.
3 Hone Sadler, 'Mātauranga Māori (Māori Epistemology),' *International Journal of the Humanities* 4, no. 10 (2007): 42–43.
4 Ayesha Green, working notes, 2026.
5 Peter Brunt, 'Savagery and the Sublime: Two Paintings by William Hodges Based on an Encounter with Māori in Dusky Bay, New Zealand,' *The Eighteenth Century* 38, no. 3 (1997): 277.

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