



FACE
TO
THE
SKY

MICHELE
LEGGOTT

A new collection by award-winning poet Michele Leggott.

In her latest collection, Michele Leggott speaks to the art and writings of nineteenth-century New Zealand painter Emily Cumming Harris. *Face to the Sky* tells stories of love and loss from two women in the shadow of the same mountain, more than a century apart.

‘Voices sing from the archive: a choir of breakers on a North Taranaki beach. Two women born more than a hundred years apart tell stories of love and loss in the shadow of the mountain that is always there. One of them becomes a painter of botanically accurate native flora, and writes all her life. The other, now without sight, lives in a world of sounds caught into expanding webs of memory. She listens for the other, tracing the delicate shapes of what she cannot see, taking her cue from the words of others. She listens and travels, picking up connections over time and place. Mothers and fathers come and go, adding their voices to the tumult on the beach, the shadow of the mountain, the hills above Nelson where the first woman comes to rest. The second, living between two small volcanos in a northern city, waits for a miracle that might cure the lymphoma that has been tracking her days. Through it all, the familiar phrases of the weather forecast sound their ever-hopeful, ever-changing predictions.’

— Michele Leggott

Face to the Sky is **Michele Leggott**’s eleventh poetry collection. Her selected poems, *Mezzaluna*, was co-published in 2020 by Wesleyan and Auckland University Presses. Earlier titles include *Vanishing Points* (2017) and *Heartland* (2014), both from Auckland University Press. She is working on a study of archival poetics, provisionally titled ‘Groundwork: The Art and Writing of Emily Cumming Harris’. Michele Leggott co-founded the New Zealand Electronic Poetry Centre (nzepc) with fellow poet and librarian Brian Flaherty in 2001. She was the New Zealand Poet Laureate 2007–2009 and received the Prime Minister’s Award for Literary Achievement in Poetry in 2013. In 2017 she was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of New Zealand.



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Lines on p. 68 from 'The Sea and the Mirror'
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I was moved by the angelic life growing on the ground.

—M. C. Escher

Contents

early morning cloud

Konene Wayfarers	2
Speaking distance	4
The wedding party	8

light winds at first

escher x nendo	14
angelic life dialogue wonder	16
I have named her Amelia	20

scattered showers

Very fine lace knitting	24
A Vida Portuguesa	32
Dark Emily	42

gales in exposed places

Walks and days	48
Haemopoiesis	55
The patient navigator	60

isolated heavy falls

Neinei in blossom at Mokau	64
White-flowering mānuka and pōhutukawa	66
What is needed	68

changes across the region

The workbook	72
Iridescence	75
Whakaahurangi	77

Notes and acknowledgements	81
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EARLY MORNING CLOUD

Konene | Wayfarers

there it is
the Peter Buck memorial
a canoe prow
sticking out of the trees on the hill we pass
on the main road north
leaving or coming home

in the primers we learn
that Peter Buck was a famous man
who went to our school a long time ago
he was born across the river
where the swing bridge is now
we know this is true
because our mother shows us the stone chimney
in the paddock where sheep graze on our way to the beach
we imagine
Peter scarfing his breakfast and paddling across the river
to get to school
a long time ago
did he see the Chinese lantern bushes as he walked
up the hill to school
were there sheep around the stone chimney
smoking on the river flat below
did he pull out a shanghai
and ping the magpies on the fence
was he friendly with the Herlihys
and the kids from Okoki
Peter Buck was a very famous man
his canoe sticks out of the hill on the main road north
red and white and only the prow

coming out of the trees in pointy concrete
where is the rest of the canoe

one day we turn off the road
and bump along the track to the hill
there is deep shade under the trees
and fierce heat where light cuts in
slanting
a shutter clicking open and closed
open and closed
but no canoe
only a concrete bunker with steps going up
to the platform

where the prow rears itself against the sky

Te Rangi Hīroa

Peter Buck is here

in the vault below our feet

laid to rest and looking north

always north

Te Rangi Hīroa

oh yes he is here

not at all in the vault but here

ponga heads coiled and uncoiling

blue and black and iridescent

over the edge of the platform

a shutter clicking open

a shutter clicking closed

close enough to touch

blue and black and iridescent

a word the five year old will meet in time

wingbeat | featherfall

and pull towards the moment

wingbeat | featherfall

a long time ago

when Peter Buck was there among shadows and tall trees

on the hillside at Okoki



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