

# Review



September 8, 2021, Parnorby, and winter's bite was no barrier when we were allowed out to exercise in our neighbourhood. Photo / Alex Burton

## PHOTOGRAPHING from the lip

A photographic exhibition showcasing news images from the past two years has opened in Auckland. Herald visual journalists Michael Craig and Dean Purcell talk to **Kim Knight** about life behind the lens.

Of course they're behind. Two photographers, silhouetted against the giant glass windows of a giant New Zealand media company, waiting for this interview and their coffees. "We put our prey in the light," says Michael Craig. Is he joking? Photographers are all about the light. Dean Purcell has ordered a hot chocolate, which is perhaps the exact opposite of what you'd imagine him drinking, after you hear him say: "I remember meeting a photographer a few years ago and he was new to the game and we went to court. Just the usual... a guy comes out of court... he's a naughty boy, you photograph him - and he spat in my face. This other photographer just freaked out. He couldn't handle it. And I said, 'Well, at least he didn't punch me'."

Michael Craig: "I find that worse than being physically attacked. It's more intimate. It's a disgusting thing." Craig, 52, and Purcell, 48, are news photographers - Auckland-based visual journalists with NZME, the company that produces the *New Zealand Herald*. Their work appears online, in newspapers around the country and, until June 12, at the Auckland Festival of Photography. **Disruption - New Zealand Herald Visual Journalists** (in Silo 6 at Wynyard Quarter) showcases some of the thousands of images shot over two years of upheaval - from Covid lockdowns and protests, to floods and droughts.

In March 2020, when New Zealand entered a level 4 lockdown and Government ordered citizens stay home and save lives, Michael qualified as "essential workers". News photographers hit the streets - history could not be recorded from the sofa. Purcell: "Especially during the first lockdown, when we were told we were all going to die, I remember going to one of the pool cars and Michael had these bottles of hand sanitiser and he'd written 'Covid Killer' on them. We were literally spraying ourselves down every time we got out of the car, fully disinfecting everything - our gear, the car keys, the door handle, every time we went out there."

Craig: "It was unweaving and it was stressful. At the end of the day, when I came home, I'd take all my clothes off in my partner's studio, because we just didn't know what was safe. But at the same time, while terrible things were happening around the world, in New Zealand, there was almost an excitement. It was unusual, history was being made. And the weather was fantastic, and the roads were empty. "I remember thinking this is really interesting - and terrible - all at the same time."

The *Disruption* exhibition features *New Zealand Herald* published work from photographers based around the country, including Alex Burton, George Head, Mark Mitchell, Jason Oxenham, Brett Pihlis, Mike Scott and Sylvie Whitroy. A looped show reel (with interviews) will screen



April 3, 2020, Deabulls, a time when the supermarket was almost the only place New Zealanders shopped. Photo / Michael Craig



July 21, 2021. In Westport, Bazil's Hotel and Surf School went up in flames. Right, February 22 this year and the protest outside Parliament continued to grow. Photos / George Heard, Mike Scott



February 24, 2020. Peering between riot shields on day 17 of the occupation outside Parliament. Photo / Mark Mitchell

Auckland's Mills Lane, very close to the Herald's office at the time. Purcell's front page photographs divided talkback radio - he was a parasite, he was just doing his job. Purcell: "He'd lost a lot of blood, and it trickled down these nice clean cobblestones. I used to have to walk up the lane from the train station every morning. Of course they'd cleaned it and sprayed it down, but I could still see the outline of the blood, even after hundreds of thousands of people had walked there. It took about a year before those bloodstains disappeared." He tells that story in response to the question: Have you cried on the job? "No," says Purcell. "But some jobs stay with you."

Craig: "I shed tears for things I see in the media regularly, but never for a job I've been working on. You're somehow slightly removed from it. "I remember, just before the first lockdown seeing footage of Italians singing to each other from their balconies - people, desperate to communicate. That brought a tear to my eye. But when you're involved with the story yourself, you tend to be a little more stoic. I guess."

### SCENES FROM THE DISRUPTION: Stories behind the photos



Dean Purcell: This was the first day of the second national level 4 lockdown, when I realised we couldn't do our job by staying across the street, we had to get in there. I was about half a metre away from Billy Tjipir when he was arrested. The cops didn't care about our being there that day, they just needed to get him out of there before the protests kicked off.



Michael Craig: This is a foodbank at a marae in Mangere, a community hall with strip lighting and not a very interesting place. I'm on the other side of the glass, so there's a reflection, which is unusual and you'd get colour from the food. Essentially we'd done street pictures for months and months on end and we had to start communicating with people again."



Michael Craig: In this shot, people are trying to communicate, yet there's distance, even between friends. I set the picture up and waited for the elements to come together. There were only three people there. Two of them, and me."



Dean Purcell: "We were in the first lockdown and you look at that, and it could have been photographed in Africa. It was something we'd never seen before in New Zealand. It's an average photograph, but it's got that historical significance. In 20 years time, you'll look at that and go 'That was downtown Auckland'."

Disruption, *New Zealand Herald Visual Journalists*, May 30 - June 12, 10am-4pm (closed Monday, June 6) at Silo 6, Silo Park, Wynyard Quarter, Auckland, as part of the Auckland Festival of Photography.