

**Tim Veling** (born 1980)

New Zealand

***Sentinels, 2018. Halley Place, Avonside, Christchurch.*** 2018

archival pigment prints on Canson Infinity Platine Fibre Rag paper  
Tim J Veling, courtesy P G Gallery 192, Christchurch

Configured like an 19th-century myriorama – a landscape made up of individual scenes that join to form a larger continuous vista – Tim Veling's photographs present a newly evolving Edenic scene. At first glance it may seem as if Veling is picturing an image of a planned and plotted grand garden, one perhaps formed in the style of English designer Capability Brown or the subsequent picturesque movement, which sought to create natural-looking plantings with variations in vistas – tall trees, shrubs and small clearings offering an informal arrangement. But Veling's is an altogether contemporary vision – an unexpected paradise reasserting nature's tenacity and opportunistic growth in the wake of seismic disruption.

Over the 11 years since the catastrophic earthquakes of Christchurch in 2010 and 2011, Veling has been visiting the area of Avonside. A settled community of some 3600 people and one of the oldest suburbs of the city, Avonside, with its pretty houses and garden plots, winding along and around the Avon river, was both close to the city and very much its own place. During the 2010 earthquake it suffered massive damage and the earth cracked open, producing tonnes of liquefaction. Foundations and land became unstable. The subsequent 2011 earthquake brought further damage, to such an extent that the government assessed the area as unliveable – a 'Red Zone' – and commenced plans for demolition and assisted relocations for the residents. People were ordered to move by 2013. While some held out, the majority of people accepted the government buyout and relocated elsewhere, leaving their houses in Avonside to be demolished. There are many stories about insurance, about resistance, about economics and futures – and about loss.

Over the past 10 years Avonside has transformed from an established, domesticated place to a wild space. Ghost domestic gardens – roses, exotic plantings, herbaceous borders – continue to mark the edges of plots upon which houses once stood, while around them unplanned nature has moved in to inhabit the fallow land now left vacant, providing small clearings and sinuous views from block to block. People come to walk their dogs, joggers run along the river, kids play games. Avonside has become a self-grown park; a desirable green oasis of the inner suburbs – a paradise regrown.

Veling's photographs memorialise that which has been lost but also document and celebrate this irrepressible place re-wilding finding its balance with destruction. It is an optimistic project amongst much devastation and demonstrates nature is quicker than governments or insurance agencies to deal with the circumstances of destruction and reconstruction.