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A dissertation, presented in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements for the degree of

Masters in Māori Visual Arts

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New Zealand.

**Wi Te Tau Pirika Taepa**

Te Arawa; Ngāti Whakaue, Te Roro o Te Rangī, Te Āti Awa

2018

## Abstract

Apart from the occasional production of musical instruments like nose flutes, the making and firing of clay artworks is pretty well unknown in Māori arts and crafts traditions, though its emergence is connected with the prehistoric Lapita pottery tradition of SE Asia and passed through New Caledonia, Melanesia, Central and Eastern Pacific to reach Samoa and Tonga by approximately 1000 BC, where it then ceased.

From service in Vietnam, working as a prison officer at Wellington's Wi Tako prison, and becoming a self-taught carver, to employment as a social worker where I taught boys in reform institutions how to carve, I came to develop a specific interest in clay as an alternative to wood, as a medium. Clay offered me a welcome level of freedom compared with carving, and the speed of clay work allowed me to capture an idea while it was fresh.

I like to make individual pieces using a low-tech approach – hand building and sawdust firing, using oxides and other clay slips, while incorporating Māori design elements. The innovations I make grow from knowledge of customary forms and designs and are often based on container and figure shapes while technically exploring patterns of notches and lines of early Polynesian and Māori art and recreating these in clay with both man-made and natural tools. There is also an evolving personal language that comes forth in the development of my practice.

The evolution of my work with Hineukurangi and Mahuika; Clay and Fire, and an exploration of my major thematics; Te Putake, Kauhuri, Hononga, Raranga, Kaitiaki, Mahere, and Te Reo Karanga o Taranaki that capture my thinking, ingress an understanding of the whakapapa base of an abstract clay practice. The major exhibitions; **Retrospect** (2016) and **Retrospective** (2018) conceptually explore these major themes, surveying 30 years of my practice, within public spatial environments.

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Huakina te rangi e tū  
Huakina te papa e tākoto  
Huakina ko tēnei wānanga

Me tāku karanga ki te ao  
He kai! He kai! He kai!  
He kai mo te hinengaro  
He kai mo te wairua

Ko ngā kai o roto hei tauira  
Hei tauira mā wai?  
Hei tauira mā Tāne  
Mā Tāne te Pukenga  
Tāne te Wānanga  
Tāne te Whakaputa  
Te Whakaputa ki te Whai Ao  
Ki te Ao Mārama

Uhi wero  
Tau mai te mauri  
Haumi e  
Hui e  
Taiki e

Ko te mihi tuatahi, he mihi ki te wahi ngaro ki ngā  
atua, ki ngā mana kei tua o te pae o maumahara  
tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou.

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rangatira, ōku matua, Laura Taepa kōrua ko Canon  
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huihui nei. No reira e ngā mate, huia katoatia,  
haere, haere, haere ki te pō!

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tena hoki koutou.

Let it be open, open  
The sky above  
The land below  
To begin this learning

My cry to the world  
A feast, feast  
For the mind  
For the spirit

These fruits an example of whom?  
of Tāne;  
Tāne the skilled  
Tāne the learning  
Tāne the progenitor  
To the flowing world  
To the world of light

Let the energy be settled here  
To gather  
And be bound

First I greet those beyond the physical.  
The supernatural ones beyond the realm of  
remembering.

I greet also those who have recently passed.  
My parents Laura Taepa and Canon Hohepa Taepa.  
Let them and those who have passed recently be  
bound and journey together into the night.

To the master artists from indigenous peoples  
around the world, greetings.  
Bring your prestige and practices and believes  
among us in this world of light.

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