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Turumeke Harrington

PLAYING NICELY WITH OTHERS

Playing nicely with others

An exegesis presented in partial fulfilment of
the requirements for the degree of

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of
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Pia, you are the coolest kid I know. Thank you for being so tolerant when I am not.

To my partner, James, I guess I was wrong about the workload. Thank you for everything.

To my parents Kiri and Jonathan. I hope I am making the most of everything you have given me. I will keep trying. You guys are very cool and I love you.

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Preface

The following text is a reflection of myself and of my making process. Not only in the finished *thing*, but in the way it has been created too. Initially it isn't a clear picture, it pulls ideas and constraints and external influences together like plaited threads. Not one at a time, but building and overlapping with each pass. By the end of the reading the sense for who I am, where I come from and the *all* that my practice encompasses is apparent. It's a vibe, man.

† In their 2020 text *Onamata, anamata: A whakapapa perspective of Māori futurisms* authors Hana Burgess (*Ngāpuhi, Te Roroa, Te Ātihaunui a Pāpārangi, Ngāti Tūwharetoa*) and Te Kahuratai Painting (*Ngāpuhi, Ngāti Rongo, Ngāti Raukawa, Ngāti Tūwharetoa*):

interpret the concept of whanaungatanga as pertaining to the notion of 'being in good relation', which Kim TallBear draws from a Dakota understanding of existence" acknowledging that "through whakapapa, all of existence is whanaunga, existing in a natural state of whanaungatanga. (Burgess & Painting, 2020, p. 209)

It is this definition that I use in this text.

I have employed a methodology of whanaukataka[†], because that is how I engage with the world. My life is one shared with others, others are integral to my practice, and it is in serving and sharing with others that I find my sense of purpose and being. It would be a strange thing for me to produce the content for a text on my own because I do not do anything *on my own*.

Similarly this text is not a linear account of what has been, much like how whakapapa is not a linear account of what has been. It is all that has been, all together, all at once that allows everything that could be to become[‡].

The main narrative of this text is a conversation between myself, Ioana Gordon-Smith and Natalie Jones. Ioana (Faleula, Le'auva'a) is a curator and arts writer in Aotearoa and is currently Curator Māori Pacific at Pātaka Art + Museum in Porirua. Natalie (Ngāti Kahungunu, Rangitāne, Ngāi Tahu) is a curator and arts practitioner based in Pōneke. We sat at my kitchen table one Saturday night and together they helped me to plait these threads together. Manaaki and tautoko from my partner, James, who fuelled the conversation. Side notes in a generous margin give room for the many edits and comments of the *others* who have read this text, alongside excerpts from additional conversations recorded while working on this project and my own voice in a concurrent dialogue with the main conversation.

* "Whakapapa is often translated to the Western concept of genealogy, which confines it to the past, and can make it appear to be primarily focused on human relationships of biological descent. However, as Māori, we understand whakapapa as much more expansive. Whakapapa is just as concerned with future generations and how our past and future generations relate to the rest of existence. In knowing something's whakapapa, the layers that make it up, you can know how it came to be, and how it relates to wider existence. In knowing whakapapa, we can know what will come to be – we can know the future." (Ibid.)

Ehara taku toa i te toa takitahi, engari kē he toa takitini.

Within this text there I have, inconsistently like our tūpuna, used the southern dialectic's k in place of ng. Underlined for clarity.

Ioana:
Okay, what do you want? 😂

Turumeke:

I just want to show that I'm competent and that when people read this, they will have read something interesting that covers all these facets, right? And to contextualise myself in relation to Aotearoa New Zealand art and Indigenous practice. As we're talking, I'm hoping what will happen is that I'll be like, 'Oh, shit, here we go...'

Natalie:

I have some questions that Shannon [Te Ao] sent through. We can start with those if you want? "What informs your process? Discuss your thinking around some of your decision making when deciding how you're going to present or make your work?"

T:

A few things, simultaneously: What's the space? The budget? Who's going to install it? How much time have I got? These pragmatic things then the ups and downs of what it [the work] is. I'm not trying to say anything specifically, more, 'Here's a bunch of making that comes out of a point in time where I'm thinking about this'. And where I am struggling is that it is not always a clear cut thing.

There's a lot of fluidity, not only in this work but in most of my projects. I don't mind the objects being redeployed for other means or to express other ideas. It's just *that* moment in time—the confluence of all of the constraints and all of the considerations.

When I think about this Blue Oyster show², and the research trip to Moeraki specifically, it wasn't the intention to travel there and come back with an idea. Moreover the intention was: 'What can I do for my family? I can take them on holiday, and we can go research. I can sit with my mum¹ and have these conversations, clearly, for the first time ever, in the place where we're from, we can go to the rūnaka office, we can check on our enrolment...' And really, to make this clear connection here, after Kiri's done all this research. My brother will be here, my father will be here and there might be awkward bits like why would you even come here? And that's fine.

My question is: what can art do for me and my whānau? What funding and resources can I give to making some kind of useful contribution to these people? And we've got Pia and instead of her being 29, and trying to understand and dig through all this, maybe she'll be like, 'Yeah, no, of course, this is Moeraki, this is where we come, where we whakapapa to, here's the land'.³

¹ Kiri Jarden is my māmā. Kiri is an artist and has been working as a senior arts advisor in local government for the last 20ish years. Kiri has also undertaken the significant, ongoing and not easy task of compiling our whānau whakapapa. It is because of this work and because of the tautoko and encouragement of Kiri that I am able to do my work. I love my mum.

My dad is an engineer who has worked in forestry most of my life. That is the least interesting way to describe him. His name is Jonathan Harrington, after Pia was born his name became Jono. I love my dad.

I have two brothers. Papaitua is 4 years younger than me, he is currently a dairy farmer in Canterbury. Rua Te Rawhiti is 6 years younger than me and he is a builder and lives in the Netherlands. I think we're becoming better friends as we get older.

My partner's name is James. He is also a builder. James is, in equal parts, a fierce supporter and critic of my work. I am lucky.

Pia Hine Marcia Hill is my empathetic, energetic and very cool six-year-old daughter. Pia enjoys building with Lego, drawing and hanging out with the whānau we have and have collected around us.

My name is Turumeke Harrington. I carry the name of my tipuna, Ema Turumeke. I am of Kāi Tahu, Kati Mamoe and Ngāti Mairehau of Rangitāne descent. We don't know much about the Rangitāne line, but we're learning.

² *Special Time (Ehara i te ti)* was an exhibition presented at Blue Oyster Art Project Space, Ōtepoti Dunedin, in June–July 2021.

Comprised of three central works, the exhibition sought to bring together ideas of contribution, whakapapa, connection and value through:

- elements of formal sculpture in the suspended lines of the title work *Special Time (Ehara i te ti)*
- an immersive audio track, *Tāhaku irika*, written by Kommi Tamati-Elliffe and performed with Marlon Williams, and produced by Tom Lynch
- a whalebone hei tiki that I commissioned

³ I interviewed Pia (8 August, 2021) to talk about my work and what she makes of it all. Here is some of that kōrero:

Turumeke: So, I want to talk to you about the art show. This show I made for a lot of reasons. But I was thinking a lot about Kiri and I was thinking a lot about Jono and I was thinking a lot about you when I made it. Do you remember that we went to Moeraki? And we talked a lot about our whakapapa and about our whānau and we went to look at where our land was... So I took you to Moeraki. And we went and we talked about whānau, and we went and we met David Higgins. And we went to the rūnaka office in Moeraki? We talked about Ema Turumeke and we talked about how she had her children there and how she lived there. And we went to the beach, we had a look at all

of the shells. And we spent a lot of time in that place?
Do you know why we went to Moeraki?

Pia: No.

T: So we went to Moeraki, because Kiri has been doing all of this research into our whakapapa and collecting all the stories from where we come from. And then I thought, I'm your māmā and I need to teach you about where we come from. And part of that is making sure that we listen to Kiri and that we have these cool opportunities to be all together, support each other and learn about it ourselves and spend some time in the place where we come from. And I just wonder what you thought about that. Trying to learn about where we come from?

P: Yeah, it was really helpful.

T: Helpful? What did you learn?

P: Well, I learned quite a lot of things. I made new friends.



Pia on, what was, whānau land, Moeraki, 2021
Note the trailer skeleton and the *tī kōuka*
Image supplied

N:

Your work discusses whakapapa, taking from the past to project into the future, and what it is that we're creating for our children. It might be useful to reflect on some mātauraka Māori concepts? I wonder if those are easier terms in which to talk about the processes and outputs of your work?

T:

The thing that I find different about this project to any other that I have done, is that before I'd even made the work, I said to Rachael [Rakena] and Richard [Reddaway, my MFA supervisors], 'I don't care, I'm done. I've had conversations I've never had before with my family and friends, I've been able to engage in making work and thinking through work with them like I haven't before. And at this point it is almost irrelevant what the work is like'.

My goals for this [MFA] programme were, in part, to find the things I thought were missing from my practice. Sure, you can just keep making things, and I love making things, but to try and get a bit *more* from the process. And so before I even got to the making stage, I felt like I had already achieved that. I find the whole process of contextualising practice quite difficult because practice is—everything, *all at once*.

⁴ By this I mean that I don't make work that necessarily looks Māori but can be perceived as such. This is due to the effort and achievements of the artists before me who questioned what it meant to be Māori and make contemporary art work and how that work can exist as Māori work.

⁵ There are so many Māori artists who are a part of this whakapapa that I too am a part of.

I first met Peter Robinson in my role as a technician at the Centre of Contemporary Art Toi Moroki (CoCA) in Ōtautahi Christchurch, one of the very first shows I ever installed. I had known his earlier work—graphic paintings and large installations of polystyrene—but this show, *Fieldwork*, marked "a move away from bright felt forms of recent exhibitions, signalling a move toward quieter, more delicate material explorations". ("*Fieldwork*", n.d.)

This was my first intimate interaction with such work. Working with Peter over the course of the week has had a lasting impact on the way I consider the relationship between art and the gallery's architecture and, perhaps more importantly, how to conduct myself as an artist when working with people—to be generous, clear and a pleasure to be around.



Fieldwork, 2018
Peter Robinson

Image courtesy the artist and Daniela Aebli

In 2014 Areta Wilkinson published her PhD, *Jewellery As Pepeha: Contemporary jewellery practice informed by Māori inquiry*. As a Kāi Tahu artist who interrogates ideas of taoka and Kāitahutaka through jewellery, Areta's practice has made room for artists such as myself. I have come to know Areta through my involvement with Paemanu, a group of professional Kāi Tahu contemporary artists (Kiri is currently chair of the board).



Hei Tiki, 2019
Areta Wilkinson

Photo: John Collie. Courtesy of The National

⁶ Blue Oyster Art Project Space in Ōtepoti, Dunedin. Director Hope Wilson, Public Programme Coordinator Mya Morrison-Middleton and Design, Publishing & Communications Manager Erin Broughton.

It is whakapapa, blood lines and whatever. It's also all of the work that I'm influenced by. It is wanting to acknowledge and 'be in service' to the ability or freedom I have to make Māori art that looks the way it does⁴, because a whole bunch of other Māori artists came through and were like, 'this is what Māori art can be'.

And so, all of these things all at once, how do I push that forward? How do I make the most of the opportunities given?

Not specifically to me. But in the work of people like Peter [Robinson] and Areta [Wilkinson] and all of them⁵—making the most of my freedoms and opportunities as a way of expressing gratitude? Not writing them Thank You letters, but what does it mean to serve the work of these people? What does it mean to serve the work of my mum's research? And not just Māori whakapapa, right? Because this work is influenced as much by my dad, who isn't Māori, as well. And simultaneously, all this work is about what it is to be a good person or what it is to respect and acknowledge the way, and how you got *here*.

N:

There's this trending thing at the moment, the whakapapa not only of your genealogical whakapapa but the whakapapa of your making.

T:

Yeah. I don't think we could have talked in this way about things very long ago. I mean, people couldn't pronounce my name five years ago. We live in a changing environment, one where we can be in a Pākehā institution and I can talk about the whakapapa of my work and have that broadly understood. Where do you start [talking about work and practice] when it's about everything all at once? It's not necessarily cathartic work. I mean, the effort of doing it is cathartic but the output is not my soul bared and laid out, right? In an earlier conversation with the team at the gallery⁶, we discussed that it is a challenge to make work where it is clear enough in it's intention that people walk in, like, 'Oh, someone was trying to do something' and they don't feel alienated by that *something*. But they also don't necessarily know what that *something* is, but have their own immediate reading that might be entirely something else. And in that haze there, there's like a mirror or a parallel to the way that I see making work as well—it could be any of these things. But it is also nothing.

I:

I think it's quite useful to think about materials when you're trying to talk about so many things. You talk about potential and the future as kind of the same thing. Or more, contribution and the future. And I think the reason that you talk about te kore⁷ is because the idea of *how* to contribute seems like a massive void. How do you locate yourself within the space of infinite possibility? I know that a lot of artists do this thing where they construct a problem to respond to. In terms of this particular project there are some specific choices that you've made regarding the materials and the installation and the hei tiki, and so forth. I suppose my question is what was the start for the making of this work?

T:

I might have been driving, because when you're driving long distances and you can't do anything else your brain can start drifting through things. And I've always liked [outer]space and maybe it's time to try something different and do some kind of

⁷ There is a kind of irony in giving form to te kore through art. What Māori Dictionary defines as "realm of potential, The Void" (Māori Dictionary, n.d.), te kore has many interpretations. There is variation between iwi, but most recall te kore within creation whakapapa.

In a Kāi Tahu tradition, recalled by tohunga Matiaha Tiramōrehu, te kore succeeds te pō (the night) and te ao mārama (the light) (van Ballekom & Harlow, 1987, p. 1). Te kore can also be understood as "the realm between non-being and being" (Marsden, 1992). Te kore, as a concept, is explored by many artists, including myself. I find comfort in the idea of existence being greater than myself, not like a god, but imagining te kore as the place where, though limited by English words, things like serendipity, magic, chance, inspiration and synchronicity may come from.

Seemingly in contradiction to this, I am also working on a large project that considers te kore through the late-stage capitalist lens of productivity and expectation: what an immense pressure! A whole realm of potential and no way to live up to it!

⁸ There are some notable stories however, and these have been compiled along with other information Kiri has collected as part of the major whakapapa document she has published. *Narrative of the Battle of Omihi* is one such story, it was recorded and translated by Ema Turumeke's daughter, Metapere and is recalled when Ema is an "old woman still living... who at the time of the incidents referred to in this history, was about 14 or 15 years of age" (1894). This story details an attack by Te Rauparaha of Ngāti Toa and Ema's escape with her mother and infant sibling.

⁹ Here is some of that email chain (March 12, 2021):

Turumeke: Why do you think about it? Because you saw it a lot there?

Jonathan: The chiming sound it made at 5am was pure magic.

T: I wonder if we could find the sound and see what that makes you feel

J: I'm not sure I'd even recognise it. The whole thing might be a story I made up to tell myself.

T: I wonder if it's somehow more memorable because now you can never see/have it again.

large made up narrative, maybe I want to have some silliness, maybe some space and time travel, and then I end up with, 'Oh, we'll go to the future. In a spacecraft.' Because I was still intrigued by the aesthetic opportunities of making this fake space trip, 'I'll go to the future in this spacecraft and we'll get taōka that's been passed down from now', because we don't have anything that has been passed down. We're not a family with any kind of taōka, we were too poor. There are barely any stories.⁸ There was no time and there was no room to think, 'What do I need to keep, what do I need to learn'. Kiri may feel differently though. But in terms of *stuff*, there's no *stuff*.

I mean, my mum's got lots of stuff now. I'll get lots of her stuff 😊.

So I started talking to my dad—he's quite sentimental, quite philosophical—and he was reflecting on this alarm clock, a mantle piece clock, that his grandparents had. He was sad that it had been thrown in the skip after Pop had died. That it wasn't valued. I have this email chain between him and I⁹, where it doesn't really matter if the memory isn't accurate, it is just a way we tie value to certain objects. And so it's like, 'Hey, we've got a spaceship', because that's just ripe for making cool shit, never mind the fact you don't need a spaceship to go to the future.

Anyway, we'll go to the future, we'll get the taōka that maybe I've passed down. Then I started thinking that I would make a collection of things because I'm also trying to tie in my jewellery making practice, how do I mix up the scales? I like making these small things but I don't know how to tie them to these massive things [installations]. And before I get pigeonholed into being this massive [installation] guy, maybe I could make this collection of things.

Then, maybe it's not all jewellery, maybe there's a charm bracelet. When Pia was born, I was like, 'I'll make her a charm bracelet, I'll add a charm to it every year' and now I'm six years deep and I haven't started it. Then I was like, 'I've fucking figured it out, I'm going to go to the future -

N:
Where it's finished!

T:
Where it's finished! And I can bow out of my guilt for the next 60 years.

N:
My mum had a charm bracelet, it was the only thing any of us ever wanted, something about it...

T:
Probably the collecting of things, over time! 😊 Not made all at once! Or, you know, strings of pearls or, for a while I thought I should include a writing desk or whatever heirloom furniture is to other people. Then I started thinking, do I need to get really speculative? Finding objects that are from like, 20, 100 years in the future?

That's all fun to think about. And the idea of the spaceship has gone by this point, because it doesn't make sense to travel on a spaceship—it's a show about time travel. Or, it's not a show

¹⁰ In a 2012 conversation with Areta Wilkinson, Tāua Maruhaeremuri Stirling (2012, as cited in Wilkinson, 2014) described taōka as "...what is given to you including that of a different nature" (p.71). In a later recorded interview Stirling expands upon the concept:

there were other taonga that belonged generally to everyone. But there's always something that was yours and you always had, you always had a connection to taonga wherever they are but there is always something personal that is given to you and it does not have to be in a physical term, it could be spiritual. (p. 71)

Areta also shares in her text Ross Hemera's [fellow Kāi Tahu artist and pou tokomanawa of Paemanu] considerations of taōka:

According to Hemera taōka as form is manifest in three ways. First, is the notion that "...taonga is actually in you"... Hemera argues that the notion of taōka within relates to being "...the product of your parents and your ancestors" and its continuity. Second, taōka can be described as a manifestation of what has been handed to us, including one's talents or wairua (spirit). Third, taōka is other people, their wairua, inherent qualities and contributions. Considering these three manifestations of taōka to his own art practice, Hemera concludes, "...taonga is the whakapapa". (Wilkinson, 2014, pp. 71-72).

¹¹ Lewis Tamihana Gardiner (Te Arawa, Ngāti Awa, Te Whānau Ā Apanui, Ngāi Tahu) is a carver based in Rotorua. From 2009 to 2013 Lewis was Tumu Whakairo (Head of School) of Te Takapū O Rotowhio at the New Zealand Māori Arts and Crafts Institute.

¹² From the roomsheet (Appendix 1)

How can I contribute?

I commission a hei tiki from carver Lewis Gardiner. A taonga from the future called back to encourage some reluctant optimism, or maybe purpose, and a mate for me and for the ones after us.

Watching from a place like te kore. The unknown future, full of potential (like a school report card—should try harder).

Kiri names her. Ko Māheno ia. He kaihautu o te waka Mānuka.

For more information on her name, see (Appendix 2)

Kōrero with Pia continues:

T: So we had this hei tiki made -

P: Do you know the story of the seven Matariki stars? Yeah, so one of them, Ururangi, the little sister. She made a kite, paua shells are the eyes. Now, I like how this is like versioned the same as it -

T: Oh, 'coz Māheno's got paua shell eyes?

P: Yeah.

T: She's beautiful, isn't it? But what do you think about the idea that this taonga, instead of just being the object itself, it's about what it represents. Like it's about looking after your whānau and it's about having something to give to you when I die or what you might have and then you will look after it for

about time travel but *here* is the narrative. Then I was able to free myself from that, the exhibition doesn't have to be about the story. That was just a way that I could get there—to the idea of commissioning a taōka.¹⁰ If the ideas of value come down to material and who made them and what they look like and if you specifically think about the Māori objects that have not been handed down, then well, hei tiki—that's pretty top tier. And of course the other thing, in thinking about what can art do for me? 'Hey, so I want to commission a hei tiki, get funded with that art money'. I'm always trying to get things out of exhibitions, right, like what do I need for my house? Maybe I can make furniture as part of a show....

N:



T:

I don't know how to get this across without it sounding like, 'What I did was base a show around this thing because I wanted to get it', but it just ties together. 'I will commission a hei tiki', and I was like, fuck this is genius, I'll commission a carver [Lewis Gardiner¹¹], someone who my mum's got a personal relationship with. I'll pitch him the idea of 'I'm going to use this in a show. It's essentially coming from the future, because I'm commissioning for my family now but it will hold a room and here's what the rest of the show might be like'.¹²

N:

It is adding potency to an object, giving it value and history but here in the present moment. That's what I'm getting from it. You don't have that long, historical reference to this thing, but it needs it to anchor you in your whakapapa.

T:

How do you assign value without getting too hard into anthropological theories of it, how do we quantify value? How do you come to something being valuable? You have materiality. You have provenance, who's owned it, right? Well, I'm assigning all of that, but in the future. I'm saying it's valuable.

When it came time to pull this exhibition together, I didn't think the narrative [travelling through time and space] was important to articulate to an audience, it was a way of me getting somewhere. In terms of presentation or in terms of the way these works now read, that [narrative] doesn't need to be explicit.

She [Māheno, hei tiki] is valuable. I mean, you can see, she was in a room on her own. It's all black with a spotlight and a big, droning sound behind her. She's given the space and that room is so distinct from the front room. And it's really beautiful, and it's made of whalebone.

N:

It's mana. Assigning mana to this object for the future as well.

T:

There would have been ways to do something similar with something that I had made but I think because it is made by someone who's revered amongst practitioners, there's something about that too. By the same token, I get a lot of my work fabricated, but the weight [emotional, cultural, conceptual] this

your whānau? And it's like a way of thinking about the future, where we're thinking 'okay, It's good to try and contribute. It's good to try and make for a better future because look at this. We can hand this down for our whānau, same with the song that they [Kommi and Marlon] wrote. That's another taonga that we can learn and pass down. What do you think about...

P: Sorry, I'm just getting a closer look into the eyes.

T: You like the eyes? Gorgeous aye. Pretty spectacular.

P: Like, so when you get it, it's a brand new one. Why are the eyes so dirty?

T: Because they're made of shell and she is made of whalebone. It's not like plastic or anything, it's not a new material. She's from the ocean, which is actually quite cool, right? Because we love kaimoana and we were in Moeraki and we were talking a lot about, you know what seafood we get from there including kōura. So this Māheno, she's from the ocean. She's not pounamu. She's whalebone. Beautiful eyes, aye?

P: Yeah.

T: Actually, now that you've zoomed in I'm looking at them and I'm looking at her- look her eyes are kind of like the spiky, the beads, you know like the whetū [stars] and the tī kōuka in the front gallery with the red thread. You know how they're spiky and her eyes are spiky too, that's pretty cool. Look at this beautiful niho, the notches.

What are you thinking about?

P: I just want a really big zoom into the eyes.

T: I guess with this conversation I'm trying to... Have you heard of a thing called accountability?

P: No, I haven't.

T: Do you want me to tell you kind of what I think it means? It's about taking responsibility for your actions. And it's about doing things. And when you say 'Hey, I made this artwork. I've been thinking about my daughter. I've been thinking about what I want to teach her'. It's all well and good to say that but is it actually achieving that? Is it actually of interest or is actually helping my daughter learn about things in the world?

So just in this conversation, and with the conversations I have with other people, it's about practising a kind of accountability, which is a funny thing to think about when you have an idea like artists can just make their own work and it doesn't matter whether other people like it or not, but it's not really about whether you like the artwork, it's more just when I say I made this artwork because I'm trying to learn about things and teach them to my daughter. Like are you learning things do you think? Like, am I doing it right in your eyes?

P: (sigh) Yeah! You're doing it greeeat.

T: You just don't talk to me anymore.

P: I do!

T: It's a funny word though, accountability.

P: Accountability. Never heard of it.

T: I just described it to you, what it means.

P: Yeah, okay.

piece of 'fabricated artwork' has, we start getting into the prickly, funny bits of contemporary art and *how* we produce work. *That* work [Lewis'] isn't my work, but *that* work in it's conception as part of *this* work is?

N:

I grew up being raised Pākehā and my pathway to learning about my identity was through art making, going to art school. You do feel like you have a duty to your children to create a whakapapa for them that they can hold to and tie to. You don't want them to feel like you did. My family freak out when I'm like, 'Okay, we're doing some whakapapa research' and they're like, 'Oh, really? That's going to be really challenging for us'.

T:

It's only in the last few years I've started realising that my parents, or any parents, were just people making it up and... 'Oh shit, are we not ... Is this hard for you?! Oh, fuck...' But they drilled me pretty hard, 'What are you doing? Go do something useful'. Always just, 'Go do something useful'. And well, this feels kind of useful and at the same time as being quite good material for making art about. Whether it's trendy or not, I don't care, but this



Māheno, 2021
Lewis Tamihana Gardiner
Image courtesy of Bunty Bou and Blue Oyster

seems like a necessary thing to get through so I can start talking about or working with ideas that are bigger than me. I first have to get those things 'right'.

N:

Isn't there a whakataukī about making your own house tidy before you go out? There's a whakataukī where it's basically, *make sure your own house is clean before you venture out into the world*.

T:

Going back to what the show is, and how we end up with these strings and the formal elements. We're in Moeraki and we've gone there under specific but vague pretense to *just be somewhere* and try and talk about things and try and find out where this piece of land is and try to figure some things out.

I had taken some materials and tools so we could make things. We ended up making beads and sitting around the table.

Kommi [Tamati-Elliffe¹³] by this point in time, had started writing things for a potential audio work, and as we were beading and threading, I was like, 'Hang on—this kind of stacking of things together feels good, how do you do this at a building scale, how do you do jewellery for the building?' Which itself is not a radically new idea. There's something about the action of making and threading and knotting.¹⁴

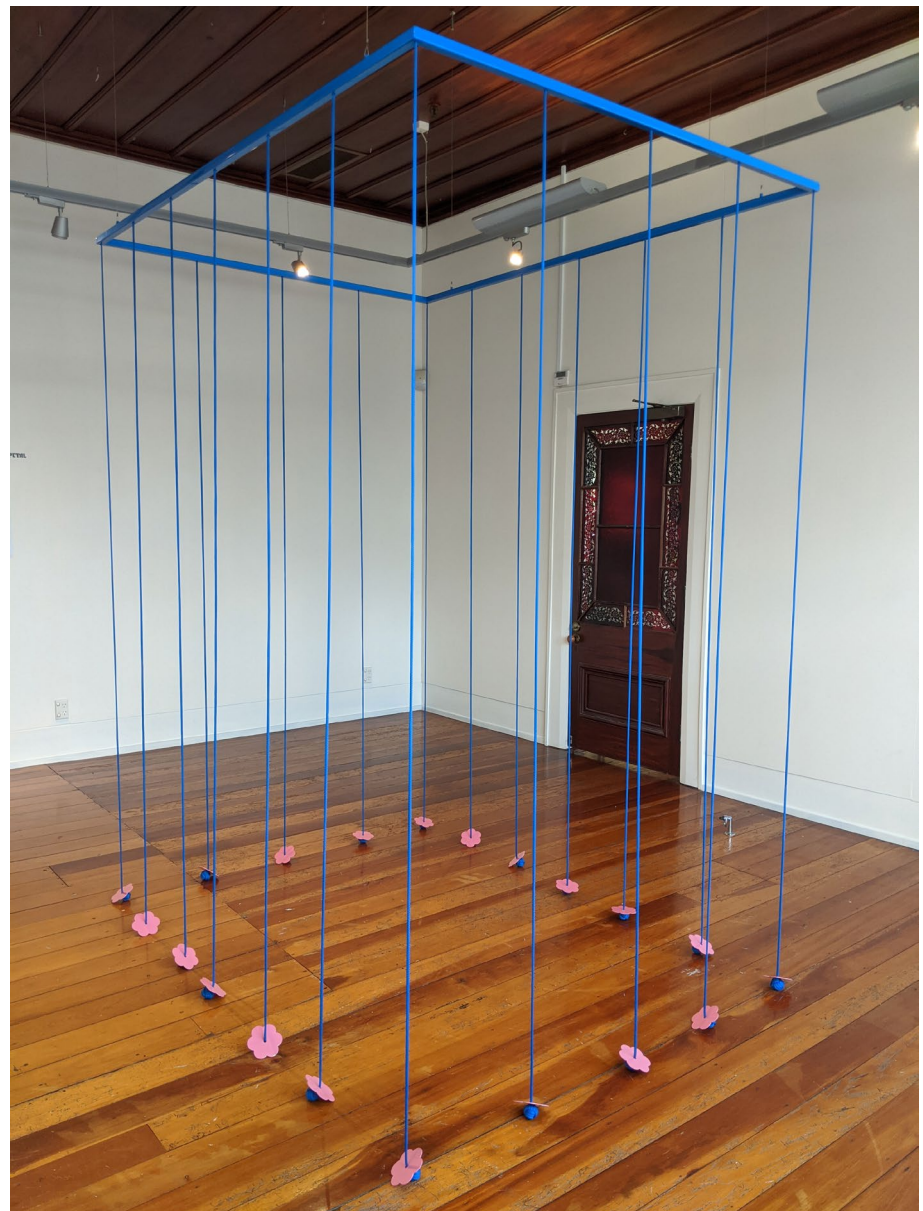
¹³ I have known Kommi (Kāi Tahu, Te Atiawa) since I moved to Lyttelton in 2014/5. Kommi is a lecturer at the University of Canterbury in Te Reo Māori and Indigenous Studies. I checked it out just the other day, Kommi and I have been collaborating since the very first exhibition I ever made in 2017 (which, now that I see that written down is not as long ago as it feels). I do not think I would be where I am without him. I certainly wouldn't have the confidence, or we could call it cultural security? At a party the other night, a bit excited by my surroundings, I said just that to him. Phwoar, how lucky I am to have someone to workshop these things, find sexy bits of language, share stories, work through awkward identity feelings. Kommi has a daughter, Aio, who is 8 days older than Pia.

¹⁴ As I was sitting in Moeraki, thinking I had just discovered something new for myself, it dawned on me that I have actually employed a similar formal device previously in my work *Te Koretētāmaua SETTLE, PETAL* (2020, Corban Estate Arts Centre, Tāmaki Makaurau).

This work reflected the dimensions of a queen size bed in a suspended steel frame and had long lines weighted down by steel flowers, balanced on spherical woven knots.

The title for this work was developed in collaboration with Kommi and it refers to the whakapapa recalled by Matiaha Tiramōrehu (1987). *Te Koretētāmaua* names the phase of *the unstable void* or "the void/potential that does not hold fast... About to let itself rip loose, to expand into other forms of being" as Kommi defined it in a personal communications, June, 2020.

For more information on *Te Koretētāmaua*, see (Appendix 03)



Te Koretētāmaua SETTLE PETAL, 2020
Image supplied

I can't remember exactly how I got to cabbage trees. Apart from that they really piss people off because they ruin lawn mowers and I think it's fucking hilarious. They're of such importance for wayfinding and, going through this material and constraint driven research of how do you make beads of this 'architectural size'? To make larger three dimensional objects, and a lot of them that would be needed to potentially fill a room, it is difficult, and you come up with rotational moulding or injection moulding, and your costs start going up. And you come back to balancing out, 'What are other materials that could be used to make this larger than-jewellery-scale things. Okay, acrylic, which I'm quite resistant to using because it's picked up a lot of naff design connotations over the last 15 years but in that you have the ability to scale outwards', and then to start thinking to what is the symbolism or what is a repeated motif that could work with?

¹⁵ There's a short paragraph I've drawn upon for this project written by Dr Terry Ryan, Kāwai Kaitiaki of Ngāi Tahu Whakapapa:

Imagine a distant past where the mist and fog shrouded flatlands, spreading out towards the sea, rich with bird and water life. There were few landmarks emerging from the mists of what was then essentially swampland. If weather obscured the hills there was no way of knowing where you were. That is if it were not for the ti kōuka (cabbage trees) that were carefully planted in significant places to mark out routes across the land like green spiky beacons. (n.d.)

Ti kōuka, you see them when you're driving, they make strong rope. They look cool and they're everywhere and they're spiky.¹⁵ Then you start reading about local importance for them and I don't know if I want to eat it, doesn't sound that great 😊. Once you stylise them they look like stars.

This is another bit I find difficult to articulate without detracting from the work, because this process where you are thinking through things and kind of stumbling and making your way in these loops—and it might just come from 'I've made a spiky shape. A spiky shape is like the star. Oh cosmos!' And we come back to, 'What kind of space am I *creating*', and it's not weakness to come from... whatever the way of describing it is.

That these multiple readings, and plethora of ways the work could be understood. Because you make these things and put them up and then you look at them and you're like, 'Fuck, this looks like something else entirely, do you know what this makes me think of', and in that there is a kind of magic, right?

If you knew exactly what would happen at the end of everything, there would be very little fun in starting at all.

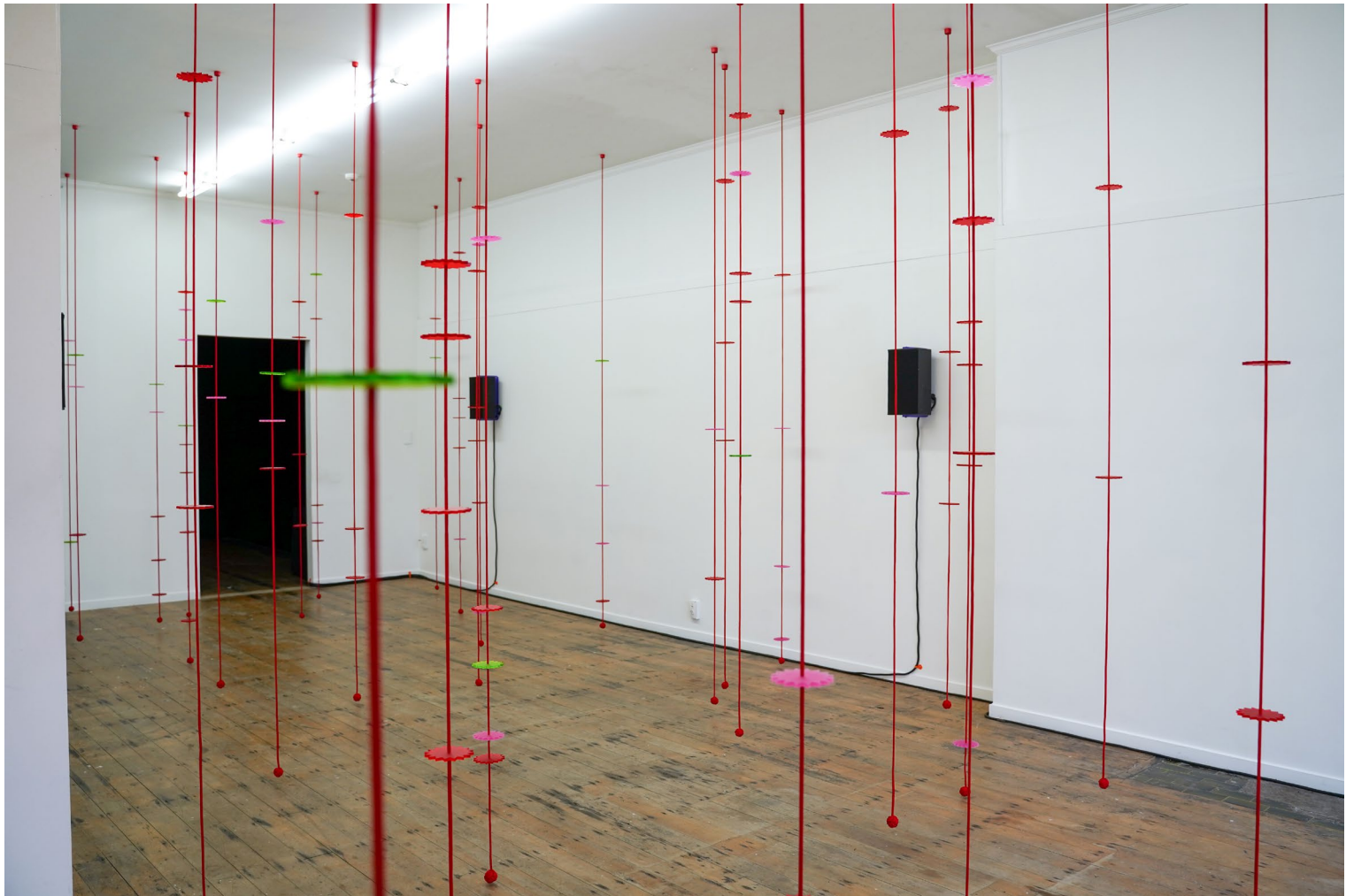
Pia, again:

T: What questions do you have about that last show of this of the with, the spiky you know, the cabbage tree, kind of like stars and we had that hei tiki - Have you got any questions about that show?

P: Ah, not really but I am grateful for the people who helped us make it.

T: Oh, that's very kind.

P: Marlon and Kommi and Tom. I'm very grateful for them.







I:
I think the level of intellectual thinking that's been done and the wealth of positioning as you've said it before, all that thinking and reading occurs in the moment where you recognise the coincidence is a good thing. And where you can say, 'It is great that these look like stars, because they remind me of the cosmos. And it is great that it reminds me of the cosmos for this reason...' And I think in that moment of serendipity, what is actually happening is *in thinking* recall of all of that other, previous knowledge. So, I think it is sometimes unfair on yourself to say this feels un-academic to *just have made this thing*.

T:
The magic is there! That's entirely the magic of it all, that you can make something, potentially not know even why or what, and then you make it and you're like, 'Oh, shit, I'm taken aback. So that's who you are, very well then'

I:
Being able to look at it and know that's what it is, that's the surface layer to so much depth of research and thinking. I just feel like sometimes we underestimate the level of intellect that happens in those moments.

T:
It's intuition. It's like proof versus intuition or nuance and subtlety and -

I:
Intuition is knowledge is what I'm trying to say.

T:
It's reasonable assumptions based on prior experience.

I:
You've asked me for a few times for readings and we've talked loosely about afro futurisms, or Indigenous futurisms, and actually hearing you talk—because I think maybe this is the most relaxed instance in which I've heard you talk—I feel as if that was a lens I thrust upon your work, because it feels a lot more like you're talking about conversations that are jewellery based, really, or object based. They're about value and scale and about the mana of a maker. Who or what has been useful in thinking about how value was imparted or imbued in what you make?

T:
😂 Yeah, because I love Lisa Walker!¹⁶

I:
Yeah, I was gonna say, because the scale and -

T:
I love her 😂 and have done since I was like fourteen! I might have even been younger. Kiri showed me her work. I was like, 'What the fuck is this? This is amazing. This is ridiculous.' And since then I've written about her work numerous times.¹⁷ 'How do you be an adult and have so much fun! Why are you looking like you're having fun still! Fuck!' What is that? What is that quality there that's kind of like, 'Up yours!'

¹⁶ In 2021 a second edition of the book *An unreliable guidebook to jewellery* by Lisa Walker was released. There is precedent within this book for a text that rejects a traditional linear narrative. The book is made up of Walker's works [chronologically ordered], Walker's text—a collection of reflections and 'notes to self' [not in order, or presented in relation to the works they may/may not be about]—and, inserted throughout, a series of questions from the editors Kate Rhodes and Nella Themelios along with Walker's response.

I could have bookmarked every page. Some of these words I have read or heard before in other texts and exhibitions of Walker's, and along with her sculptural work, have influenced my practice. Then there are the words I haven't read before, that could have come direct from any of my own notebooks. I think that's very cool. Here are some that speak to me:

I don't always know what I'm doing. I hope it stays like that. (p. 37)

I want to buy more gold. (p. 57)

Sometimes you just have to make it and show it, then see what the repercussions are. (p. 147)

Tension describes a feeling as well as a physical action. I think you could work many lifetimes within this. Every piece I make must have this tension, or presence or correctness. I don't want to describe it any more than that. (p. 171)

I like taking advice from people who make suggestions about my work — it's nice to have a break from having to make all the decisions myself. (p. 177)

There's a photograph spread over pages 282 and 283, it is of Lisa Walker's studio. There are three or four work benches covered in *stuff*, there are two of three walls with shelves overflowing with *stuff*. The centrepiece though, for me, is a timber cot in the middle of the floor with a baby (that I am going to assume is Walker's). This is a practice that supports and is supported by a whole life. When I was 14 I certainly wasn't looking for precedents of parenting within the arts, but here it is. Ka rawe!

¹⁷ One such writing published in *Femisphere* zine in 2019 (Appendix 05)

I:
She's got her middle finger up but you can't see it!

N:


I:
Tui, I'm talking to you in the future! This is very appropriate.

T:
You can make subversive work or anti-establishment work and it can be really confronting and aggressive. It is kind of this and isn't. And she's dead serious about her practice. There's a kindness or an openness in the playfulness of her work. I would say that's similar to my approach. A kind of inclusiveness, letting people in through familiar form or material or colour or humour and a bit of yours.

N:
This is the thing between object making and fine art - the object making and the process and the materials are the priority. That drives the development of the work.

T:
I think there is a lot of interesting potential that I explore at the intersections of art and craft and design. The distinct yet inseparable contexts and processes. I think a lot about the effect of the way I consider, or prioritise even, the needs of an audience and a space. That seems a kind of *impure* thing to do in an art sense, to give up some of the *sacredness*. How is this going to affect someone? I will health-and-safety myself from the beginning. Where are the access routes? How are you going to get through? How can you get in the way of people but still leave a 1200mm gap? How can you create these spaces that don't appear to be accessible but are? They're designed, right? In my way of working I haven't lost anything, any of the *art* qualities I've gained from being able to take from all these places. But being comfortable sitting in this [indeterminable 'wooerrrr' sound]... I'm getting there, it depends on who I'm talking to.

N:
Yeah.

T:
Some people make me feel fine about being this - playdough guy? Kaleidoscope? Flexible, not spineless. *I'm not spineless, I'm just open.*

N:
What do you define practice by? Do you define it by the material? Do you define it by what you're qualified in? What is one of those core things that drives your practice, outside of all of those kinds of considerations?

T:
Herein lies a new problem, or concern or challenge. My career as a practicing artist has been driven entirely by producing shows, exhibitions in spaces that are called 'art galleries'. In doing that you're like, 'It's an art show at an art gallery', that takes some of this weight of, 'Oh, what is it?' I'm an artist in an art gallery.

Here's where the title comes from
SPECIAL TIME (Ehara i te ti)

Ehara i te ti
YOLO - you only live once

Derives from the whakatauki:
"Ehara i te ti, e wana ake" - "unlike the ti (cordyline or cabbage tree), it will never bud."

The various species of ti are noted for their ability to survive in spite of the serious prunings they receive. Even one cut to ground level normally produces young shoots. Moreover they can easily be transplanted from cuttings. Man is quite the opposite. Once he falls (dies), he will never rise again.

— Te Ao Hou, No. 17 (December 1956)
(Ehara i te ti, n.d.)

YOLO, You Only Live Once. It can mean: *you only live once, so fuck everything, do whatever you want, live hard, just go* or it can mean the complete opposite: *you only live once, you should really try and make something of this entire thing*. This being my definition of the colloquialism and very relevant to my considerations and approach to this work and my practice. You should try. I should try. But also fuck everything at the same time. I appreciate the tension within the phrase.

From here, you can see how the ideas and the symbolism of the ti kōuka tie with this concept of YOLO. When working through abstractions for the form of the ti kōuka I was compelled to reference the 'sale' or 'special' star shaped, neon card signs you can see in dairies or other similar stores. *SPECIAL TIME* makes references to this, like *SALE TIME*, and perhaps to the tensions in the commodification of culture and identity. Within this also *SPECIAL TIME* is an allusion to a fluid or creative sense of time. And also sex.

But it's untenable to only make exhibitions, in this country and as a mother 😊.

N:
Yeah 😊.

T:
It's untenable to only make exhibitions.

N:
It is.

T:
I haven't quite figured out how. There's a lot of effort that goes into making these massive things [installations], it would seem really weird to do that, to make them, and just leave the work in a box at home and never have them out again.

As well as that, it is that push of the deadline and the proposition or inspiration in the spatial response that drives me. Even if that work gets shown somewhere else later, the initial spatial response is a real key driver.

N:
It's that initial interaction.

T:
It's that initial interaction or instigation—What are we working with here? And then after that, I mean, galleries can feel free to morph these works into whatever other things they want to be.

N:
I think of the Toi Pōneke show¹⁸ or the Blue Oyster show, those works were very specific to those two spaces, and there have been others. When you're thinking of the space, the constraints, the budget, the general architecture and how your work is going to fit within them, are you thinking of who is in those audiences that are coming, depending on the locations of that work?

T:
I guess, because most of the places that I've shown in have been project spaces or small galleries—as opposed to say my “professional career”/day job in larger public institutions—there's an understanding that you can, kind of, get away with a bit more, health and safety wise, in a small space, because your visitor numbers are low. So still make it safe, don't make it dangerous, but you can get away with some shit that we couldn't pull off at work.

It's a little bit like, who's actually coming in? 😊 And so in that regard it has not necessarily been audience specific. I definitely still consider egress constraints and fire constraints and how's this thing going to hold up to the wall. And when inevitably someone pulls on something, how are you going to make sure that thing doesn't fall on them? Or learning very quickly that you shouldn't invite people to touch things. You can have them able to touch works, but don't invite them to, because they will ruin it, immediately 😊. So you learn all these things? So no, not specifically thinking 'Oh, well, this is a Dunedin audience' or 'this is an inner city Wellington one'.

¹⁸ *Gentle Ribbing* was a solo exhibition presented at Toi Pōneke, Wellington in November of 2020. The main component of this exhibition was a work called *Longer than I can remember*, a 15m long neon-coloured, nylon patchwork quilt.

Accompanying this exhibition was a collaborative text written with Kommi and edited by Ioana. On reflection, that text, as well as the influences of another couple of books (*Conversations Before the End of Time*, Suzi Gablik, 1997 and *An unreliable guidebook to jewellery*, Lisa Walker ed. by Kate Rhodes and Nella Themelios, 2021) have undeniably had an influence on the approach I have taken to writing this work. Something in the way of working ideas out together, over time.

For more information see text supplied (Appendix 04)

Longer than I can remember, 2020
Image supplied



N:
Who would you say it's for? Say we're not talking about site specific work just, in general?

T:
My first response would be to say the works are for Pia, or my whānau but I can't help but acknowledge that to say it is *for my family* is, a way to remove it from myself. I'm making work because I feel a need and want to make things and these are the outlets that have funding or have deadlines. The work might be made with them in mind, or inspired by them, but if I think about it more they're not really experiences made *for* them.

Honestly, it's mainly about deadlines. If I don't have a deadline I won't do it, it'll just be another thing that I really wanted to do for ages that I've probably started or I might have all the tools for—but the *why do it* is a kind of force thing, stacking up external deadlines so I *have to* do it. Then the expectations are outside of yourself. Someone *else* needs you to do this. Which I've now learnt, you can do too fucking much of.

N:
Yeah 😂, how many deadlines have you had in the last while?

T:
mumbles Eight in the last year. With four or five to go.

So I'm learning that doesn't make for a sustainable practice. It's not a sustainable practice to go in search of external deadlines all of the time. I think it's definitely good some of the time, but what would make this particular part of the process of the MFA useful to me is to come out at the end of it with an ideas of what I might try differently.

This qualification is not going to get me a job. So, what can I extract from this? In this process of talking to people... what should I try next?

N:
Is it about refining your practice?

T:
Yeah, and being okay with it, with the nature of it. And having these documents to reference in the future, so every project I'm not starting from scratch. I've done the work. I've done some work. It's classic, millennial expectation capitalism fucking yada, yada, 'But what did I achieve?!' How do I break away from that?

I:
Was the Blue Oyster show successful for you?

T:
Yeah. I think so.

I:
How come?

T:
I think it was already successful beforehand. And that's not because of the show. It's because of the difference in process, and even this conversation now, as an extension of that, 'Hi, I need my friends to come and help me talk about this'. Because it turns out that you can ask people to have conversations about things instead of just waiting around and being like, 'No one ever talks to me about my work', you can just go and ask them to talk to you about the things that you're thinking a lot about.

So, I feel like with that part, I felt success in being able to have those conversations. With Kommi and Marlon [Williams¹⁹], and being able to talk to these people who share whakapapa and positions. What does it mean to be Māori? What does it mean to be Kāi Tahu? And we're a bit weird, and not wanting to be [Māori] at the *expense* of everything else.

My dad is not Māori and he's such a huge part of everything that makes up all of me and my work. So, trying to find the words to describe this idea that Māori whakapapa [because we *all* have whakapapa] is not more righteous, or has any more... This objection to whakapapa being lorded over anyone else? It makes my skin crawl, because that comes at the expense of all my other people. So being able to have these conversations with my friends and family...²⁰

¹⁹ Marlon Williams is a Kāi Tahu artist and musician. He, like Kommi and I, has whakapapa to the hapū Ngāi Tūāhuriri. Marlon also has whakapapa to Moeraki and Ngāi Tai ki Tōrere. Marlon is a friend of Kommi and I and also collaborates frequently with Kommi in his practice.

In March 2021, the three of us held an informal wānanga in Te Waipapa Diamond Harbour on Te Pātaka Rakaihautū Banks Peninsula.

The outcome of this wānanga is the taōka, *Tāhaku irika*. The recording of this *keri* [(noun) chant for launching a canoe (Māori Dictionary, n.d.)] is the audio track that accompanies the exhibition *Special Time (Ehara i ti)*.

²⁰ I have two brothers. I left home when I was 16. Papataitua [Tai] was 12 and Rua, 10. For a long time it has felt like we have existed worlds apart—mainly because I acted like a dickhead and they were annoying. If this project is about *relating to people*, then who better to talk to than my siblings. We share parents, memories and whakapapa. I don't think we've ever had a *serious* conversation between the three of us. We've certainly never discussed my practice.

We met over Zoom, Rua in Utrecht in the Netherlands, Tai on a farm in Canterbury and me in my studio at home in Wellington.

After we hung up I didn't know how to feel. They were insightful and considerate in a way I hadn't seen before, maybe I just haven't been paying attention. When I considered talking with them for this project part of me was looking for a kind of permission, this is our whakapapa (August 15, 2021).

Tai: For me [art] is your expression of what's going on in your life at that time, what you're thinking, what you're feeling. It is open to interpretation in a way. But you also have the ability to define what the perception can be, as the artist.

Turumeke: Yeah, for sure.

Tai: Because you can write a description, and you can say this is what this is about.

Rua: If you take the description away, then there's nothing other than your own idea [of the work].

Tai: But that's what I mean, that's still her expression. It's still her saying, 'This is what I wanted to do. Here's why I did it, here's what I was feeling. And I think I achieved this'. You know, I can't tell you do a shit job at art, because art is different for everyone.

Turumeke: It is not just about whether I've done a good job, right, and I agree entirely, this is why I get very funny about what text to put with an exhibition? Because you can kill a really good experience that leaves the work open to people by writing 'This is a thing about this, this and this'.

Rua: When you're doing an exhibition like that, do you give the writing before or after people come in?

Turumeke: I think most people see it 'blind' first. When you see it and then if you're interested or anything is kind of tickled then you can [read the room sheet or text].

Tai: I like that though, I like being able to see what this is about.

Turumeke: Yeah.

Rua: What, reading the text?

Tai: Yeah, and because then you can go -

Rua: Right, well then you have to read the text afterwards. Because you have to look at the thing for yourself and then you go, 'Oh fuck, that's what they meant'.

Tai: Nah, but my brain goes, 'Well what's going on in that person's head, what the fuck is this'. And it's just going to mean nothing to me. But if you sit there and you can read about the work you go, 'Oh, this person is trying to say these things', you can be like, 'Oh, that's pretty cool'. You get to see how their mind is working.

Turumeke: So, here's the reason for having this conversation. As I'm talking to you, and as I'm looking at this [*SPECIAL TIME*], and I wonder what I was thinking about and how it reads now and if I break it down, it looks a bit confusing and a bit kind of jumbled in the front [gallery] there. But there's

these kind of lines that are trying to connect all these elements that are—we're trying to find ways to hold ideas in place, maybe.

Tai: Connecting dots that aren't there sorta shit.

Turumeke: Yeah, because you just go about having all of these thoughts about all sorts of things all at once. Some people have nice clear lines of thought. You carry a lot of things all at once. And sometimes you're like, I don't know where this thought comes from. I don't know how to -

Rua: I think that people that have very clear lines of thought are generally dickheads 😏

Tai: Psychos 😏

Rua: I don't know why I think that, maybe it's just because I don't have those clear patterns of thoughts. I'm intimidated, and it makes me feel insecure. If someone knows what they're thinking, but I don't know what I'm thinking.

Turumeke: I feel similarly, right? I've been trying to figure out how you say that in a way where it's not a detracting or negative or self deprecating thing.

Rua: Is it not just a *I don't give a fuck* attitude? I don't need to explain anything because it doesn't mean anything if it doesn't mean anything.

Tai: It is what it means to you so if you're happy with what it means to you...

Tai: What I'm getting at is for me, because I feel no one which way about any one thing - your art, in your art, I want to see your expression, from your perspective.

Turumeke: I agree it should -

Tai: I want you to tell me what you're thinking.

Turumeke: Okay, cool. Good.

Tai: I also want to understand: what do you know? What were you thinking? What was your insecurity? What was your confidence? What was your reasoning?

I guess an intention for my practice is: understanding what a genuine expression of Indigenous identity is for me? Can I find a place to sit... in which I don't think that I'm just doing things for funding? 😏 Or because it's going to give me a show? Because it's the fucking soup of the day? Where is the genuine? And where can I push into that? Not that I necessarily think I am only working with these ideas for these reasons, but I think it is good to interrogate yourself. As part of figuring out 'the genuine', it is contributing and being honest about what these 'contributions' have or haven't meant to others. I have my own set of satisfaction or dissatisfaction or whatever with my contributions to things [art, relationships, life], but to go and find out from those people themselves -

You know, I'll go talk to my brothers tomorrow night. And I've never talked to them about art, or really about our lives, either. It's like 'You guys are from the same lines as me, okay, what do you make of this work?' The potential to be paralysed by the fear of getting whakapapa wrong or misstepping. Or, safety is not a word I want to use, but how can I proceed in a safe way—because I just want to make things, I like making stuff. Inspiration comes from different places and it is helpful to tie ideas to this making, in that they become mnemonic markers, right? 'What was I thinking about at this point in time, that's what the works about'.

Which is where I get confused when I'm trying to talk about the work because it's not necessarily the work. It is, 'I was doing this at this time and this work was made', they're tied together now because I can recall stories based on what these works are, but those works could go and be interpreted for different means. I don't mind them being redeployed.

There's these simultaneous aspects. This is where I get stuck with this kind of Western, or academic institutional demands on contemporary practice, it is not cool to talk about the objects? 'Oh, that's a really nice looking show and the stuff looks nice!'

N:



T:

With jewellery, you can get away with saying, 'That's a fucking cool, shiny ring. Oh my god! It's amazing, look how many stones you got on there!' You know, you can talk about the object. In contemporary practice it can feel like you're not meant to talk about the objects, which is, in some ways, kind of good, because you can get away with making shit objects 😏.

For this show I felt I needed to make the space feel weirder, heavier, to match the weight of the research and process. Which is why I ended up with sound in this show, because I needed it to be a bit spooky. But I don't make spooky looking stuff. Get my friends in there, get their voices in there, it'll sound awesome it was. I think it would have worked without the soundtrack,²¹ but with it, the experience made a far stronger impact.

²¹ In the kōrero I had with Hope, Mya and Erin from Blue Oyster we discussed, in further detail, the audio track (August 10, 2021):

Turumeke: If I go, say, see someone doing some live music, and they're sweating, and that moment of acute expression, I get quite quite genuinely jealous. How do I get that? How do I get that feeling of release. But that's installs, right? And this is part of why I will, though I can't just keep churning out exhibitions because it's hella taxing. But that's the only thing I can liken it to, I'm not expressively painting or using my body in a cathartic way, but in that install where you've got all this sweat and you're feeling a bit nervous, or perhaps you're very hungover 🤔, you know that's the kind of closest thing I have to it.

Erin: The audio work that was in the space, and it might be just because of the massive subs [woofers], often I'm like, 'Man, I don't get the buzz from art that I do from live music', like when I'm at a gig.

Turumeke: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

E: 'Oh my god, I'm witnessing something that's really special', and we're all in the space and there's this big feeling. But because there was that sound that came on intermittently and it felt like they were around, I think your exhibition had *that* feeling, the buzz, which was a really amazing thing.

M: Yeah.

T: Good! That's exactly it, that feeling of watching people perform and you're like how do I give someone this?

H: I think it did do that! I think for us as well, even right at the end when we were closing the exhibition, to have this sound work playing—you still felt that feeling when the sound kicked in.

E: When it first came on I legitimately thought that I might cry.

H: The impact and movement of audio and just walking around the space, that kind of communication to the audience. I think that the moments of sitting down and talking about the work afterwards, maybe there's a feeling there of relief there. For me this conversation is so rare, in the way that we develop exhibitions here we don't often get the opportunity to reflect and it feels really singular. I would say that your work because of the way that you've approached it has opened up these conversations. It feels really special for me to reflect on an exhibition that we all love.

E: Genuinely loved.

M: That's not a frequent feeling. I don't love a lot of shows, and not just our shows. I don't often really love them. I wonder if this may be the same, in terms of doing all of that pre-stuff with your mum and Kommi and Marlon. And maybe that's where that release happens?

I:

It feels like a good point to ask if there is anything that you want us to talk about together? You've covered a lot.

T:

Yeah, okay, I'm not just trying to satisfy submission requirements. What I would really like is for someone to read this and think, 'Well, this feels like a person who is really engaged in their practice and has taken something from this process'.

N:

In thinking about Indigenous knowledge and transference of knowledge—we're sitting here having a conversation, as opposed to writing an essay. When I think about your work, about the whakapapa of it, and thinking about the transference of knowledge and that future transference—if you were to imagine the future and what you've prepared for Pia, what are some of those core Māori values that you want her to take away from this process, at the age of 30, when she has her own children and talks them about it?

T:

Because we're trying to learn together, what we talk about most is manaakitaka. In exhibition making, you can practice that—I mean, we practice it at home and the way we host and welcome people—but in exhibition making, you can practice it, 'Hey, Pia, we're gonna get a little bit in the way [with the installation] but look it is friendly, and welcoming'. Or on opening nights it is usually her job to say 'hello', to offer people drink and food. It is this unashamed practice in which it's not about you. And people who come to galleries, especially when it is not forced, they generally want to share in that [experience]. So, just being aware—because we learn about history in school as such a separate thing to ourselves, 'History is a thing that happened somewhere else over there in the past', as opposed to—you didn't just arrive from nowhere. And a lot of people, a lot of times, have thought a lot about you and, it's not about you specifically.

That is the other neat or captivating thing, for me, about the concept of whakapapa—that we're so individualised in our society that it is difficult not to centre *yourself* in whakapapa. But you're not, right? You're not the centre, not the result. It is not you and then everything else, it is everything else and then you. You're kind of deeply insignificant and in this, or because of this insignificance you can do things. There's a freedom.

I:

I just had a light-bulb moment because you're always asking for readings, but I have been finding it quite hard to find readings that align with the show but I've just found one and it's a text about whakapapa. It is the way that they talk about whakapapa as layering—inherently past and future simultaneously and you're just kind of somewhere and you don't know where in the whakapapa you are, but you're somewhere in it. I feel like when we talk about whakapapa in contemporary arts, you're the end of it. Whakapapa comes down and we're here now, whereas this text talks about whakapapa and it's a long thread and you're somewhere in it and you don't know where but you are not the end.²²

²² The text Ioana refers to here is *Onamata, anamata: A whakapapa perspective of Māori futurisms*.

T:

Because there's this other part to this work that goes, 'I wish that I wasn't alive. I think this sucks. It's shit. I'm sorry I made a child', but in or because of that I'm like, 'Okay, well, I'm now I'm committed to not copping out, because I have this child and she didn't ask for this.' There's something so out of character in this work, 'Oh, am I secretly an optimist behind my deep fucking hate for the world? In which I've devised an artwork that comes from the future which suggests that I believe there is a future?' That's fucking perverse to me. It's so dark, right? I mean, it's how I genuinely feel, I wish for that I wasn't alive 😂.

N:

If we're thinking about academic settings and ways of communicating, are we allowed to talk about these responsibilities that you have as a parent? You know, it's not always widely discussed -

T:

What? To not kill yourself?

N:

😂 To be responsible for the wellbeing of your future children and not drag them into your issues.

T:

To not drag your kids deep down in your fucking dark hole? How do you teach them about how the world sucks without them feeling broken by it? Yeah! Of course, I think that's deeply important, but don't worry because mothering is not allowed to be talked about in the arts.

N:

😂

T:

It's not a thing anyone does in the arts! For sure, because I don't want to lie to her but I also don't walk around being like, 'Hey, shit's fucked aye? Why are you even alive? This sucks'. You can't say that. I think you have an obligation to not destroy your children psychologically if you... are able to 😂.

So one of the ways we think about it is, 'Fuck this, but we're here so we better try' [YOLO]. It's such an emo position to take, 'I can't give up, but I will sulk about it', because it would feel, for me, like such a great waste of energy to walk out now. What was everyone else's effort for then? It would just seem ungrateful 😂.

So, in this discussion about whakapapa wherein you have this *not specialness* or *not end-game-ness*, in which you can be absorbed into a thing that means everything and nothing all at the same time because it just is. It's about it [whakapapa] being... It is just that *it-is* and *it-was* and *it-will* be. An in that *nothing-everything-just-is-ness* there are some antidotes to the upsetting parts of this world that we've built. Like the, 'You're alone and there is no one out there and everything sucks' kind of part, because well, considering whakapapa, that seems a bit rude, 😂. Look at all these people who have all these stories, they had all these lives, and it feels good because they weren't living for you, it wasn't about you at all. And the fact that it's not about you is what I think is nice, or comforting, about it [whakapapa].

That was articulate. Not.

²³ Among the many reasons I continue to be drawn to the work and practice of Lisa Walker is the freedom with which she approaches materials. There is one piece in particular *Pendant, 2011* which is blue lacquered silver and pounamu.

Liesbeth den Besten, in her 2010 essay *Lisa Walker and the world of things*, describes the work as: "quite a 'European' pendant with five broken pieces of pounamu (New Zealand jade) set on a blue-sprayed silver silver [sic] background as gems. Silver chain with rude silver charms — the mocking of her European experience has begun." (Walker, 2011, p. 49)

I take *European experience* to not only mean that of Walker's travel in Europe but a critique of the *European experience* of colonisation in Aotearoa too. I also take from this piece my own permission to work or play in the materials of my whanauka.

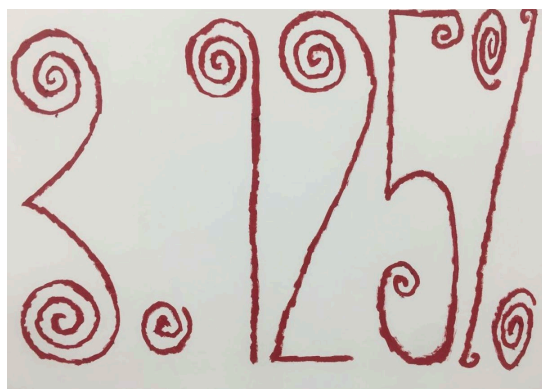


Pendant, 2011
Lisa Walker

Reproduced with permission of The National. Photo: Lisa Walker. Courtesy of the artist and The National

²⁴ Recently Peter has revisited his *Percentage Painting* works after years of seemingly distancing his practice from them.

That there wasn't a finality to the work and that the ideas and the works themselves are available for reworking and further development years in the future gives me a kind of relief: that I don't have to solve everything now, that I don't have to make my work and leave it behind.



"I did this a few minutes ago. Contemplating my privilege and the injustices suffered by generations before me." (2 October)

Image and caption retrieved from Peter Robinson's personal Instagram account, 8 October, 2021.

²⁵ To not be offensive is important to me.

Though I ham-fist my way through a lot of interactions, offending or upsetting has never been my thing. Subverting, tricking and playing, sure.

I have described it in previous interviews and exhibition texts, that I approach my work and the making of these exhibitions and experiences from a place of *manaakitaka*, which in this context is to

I:
No, I think that's good.

T:
How to talk about suicide and wanting to die in your art project without drawing sad faces on things 😂.

N:
Okay, another of Shannon's questions: "what are significant texts, books, artworks, events that inform some of your decisions?"

T:
Always Lisa [Walker²³] and Peter [Robinson]. I love his work. I'm very glad that I don't have to make artwork about blood quantum.²⁴ I'm glad he's already done it! 😂 And now he's just making some fucking weird piles of rubbish! 😂 And I think that's very cool. Because he can. Same with Lisa. They're just fucking around, because they can! They've done the work, subverting materials and expectations and a bit of messing with you but it's not offensive?²⁵ I don't really want to upset anyone, but these guys are up to some pranks.

N:
😂

T:
'Okay, let's just go hang some rods from the magnets. A pin with an ear plug shoved into it', Peter that's ridiculous. 😂 It's awesome. Good, fine. There's a few others too. The jeweller Helen Britton, Louise Paramor, Tom Sachs. Thinking about why I like their work, they're all collectors, assemblers, replicators. Their works are made up of all these parts, made and found. Assembled and redeployed.

N:
In terms of the future of your work, how do you see your practice evolving?

T:
Trying to make some work that isn't *whispers* an exhibition. Can I get the same [response, feeling] for myself out of resolving and realising work that isn't for an exhibition or for immediate public consumption. If the past two years was boot camp where I've repeatedly drilled [the making process] out then now I know a bit more about how this process goes—I know to expect the slump, and that there'll be an incredible period of self doubt about the thing. 'Okay, I know that I've got to wait before I can look at this again'. A kind of trust in the process. James and I talk about this a lot. It's not about arrogance, but it's like you have to acknowledge a certain amount of competency to be able to trust the lull, but not too much confidence in your work to think you get by without trying?

N:
Not to be too arrogant! 😂

T:
Yeah, you have to have enough confidence to trust that you can go on but not so much that you're a prick. It's real, right? How do you accept these slumps? I think that I have conducted, in a very short time, a pressure-test to rigorously examine my process.

come with generosity.

In one of the conversations I recorded for this MFA project with Hope, Mya and Erin from Blue Oyster, Erin described this generosity as the way my work offered space for the viewer to generate their own understanding of the installation—that there wasn't some *one thing* to get. In requiring the audience to find that *one thing*, for me, there's an alienation or exclusivity.

To me that is an offensive-ness that I refuse.

I might be suggesting that generosity is in opposition to offence, but not in opposition to challenge.

And it goes: *Very excited. Very excited. Yes, fuck yeah. Buy stuff. Oh, fuck. I don't know what the concept is. Oh, it's disappeared. Hang on. I've resolved it. Don't make any of the work for ages. Start making it. Oh, this is very boring. Oh, shit. Oh, it sucks. It sucks. Why did I do this. Oh, now it's too close to the deadline. Hang on don't worry that thing you were making was good.*

Basically, well, maybe sometimes that repeats a few times depending on the scale. But you have to fall into a couple of holes.

N:

So, dream project, you don't have a job you have to go to, you're actually being paid, say on a residency to develop a new body of work. How does it go?

T:

Depends if it's for an exhibition or not.

N:

Without an exhibition! Just freedom to let the making take you.

T:

At the moment, these lights [below]. This is the first time I've got two materials together in a way that feels really good. In them I can see so much opportunity to make work that can become installations, but also, they satisfy this desire to occupy domestic spaces and as things I can give to my friends. I can't give my friends 15m long quilts, but I can give them lights, and they're chuffed, and they look cool.

Te Tauwhirowhiro Maruwehi, 2021

Reproduced with permission of Enjoy Contemporary Artspace. Image courtesy of Cheska Brown



N:

So, a combination of small jewellery or sculpture.

T:

Yeah, pushing this idea that I have been working on for a few years that one day I might have a nice, big studio with shelving racks. And on those racks are just all of my parts.

I can go digging through them and accidentally leave one on the shelf as I'm looking for something else, and these moments of, 'Oh, you're here and you're here. That looks cool'. Some of my parts and some of my other parts, making 'sentences'. And to be able to have enough parts and enough space to leave them out, because sometimes you just need to have things accidentally next to each other on the desk, 'That looks quite nice, doesn't it? I've never thought that. Oh, cool.' And then what do you do with that? Magic and studio time. I don't know what studio time is, that isn't just dealing with tasks that already exist. I would like some free play, please. I would like some mahi tākaro.

N:



T:

I would like someone to say 'no tasks!' Because at the moment it is just grinding through what *thing* has to be packaged what *thing* has to be done. You know, I was painting some pictures before and I was thought to myself, 'This is very naughty. I should be cleaning!'

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Appendices

Tāhaku irika
Mai te ika
Taku uru ki te ao
Ko te ao uru
Mai i ao kā...
Mai i ao kā...
Maka atu taku aro e... i

How can I contribute?
 Jonathan encourages this.
How can you contribute? Not necessarily because others need you to, or not only because others need you to, but maybe more because he knows you and he knows what you're like and you should contribute. It's good for you.
Are you doing something useful? Is that the same thing?

The conversion of potentiality to actuality.

Imagine a distant past where the mist and fog shrouded flatlands, spreading out towards the sea, rich with bird and water life. There were few landmarks emerging from the mists of what was then essentially swampland. If weather obscured the hills there was no way of knowing where you were. That is if it were not for the tī kōuka (cabbage trees) that were carefully planted in significant places to mark out routes across the land like green spiky beacons.¹

We go to Moeraki. An uncle, remembered favourably, sells "our" land at the kaik. The carcass of the caravan he dragged up there after héd sold it still sits there. Where exactly we've only just learnt. It has been there a long time and if we're too eager we'll be the ones who have to remove it. Kiri goes to find out who bought it.

Welcome to the club, pal

Tōhoku moooorihariha kē
Rorohuri e
Whakarakirua
Kai kō tāhaku wā ko tīpoupou

How can I contribute?
 I commission a hei tiki from carver Lewis Gardiner (Te Arawa, Ngāti Awa, Te Whānau Ā Apanui, Ngāi Tahu). A taonga from the future called back to encourage some reluctant optimism, or maybe purpose, and a mate for me and for the ones after us. Watching from a place like te kore. The unknown future, full of potential (like a school report card—*should try harder*). Kiri names her. *Ko Maheno ia. He kaihautu o te waka Mānuka.*

Whakāroaro noa,
me uruwhi au?
Kāhore kau!
Ko whai aro kā e!²

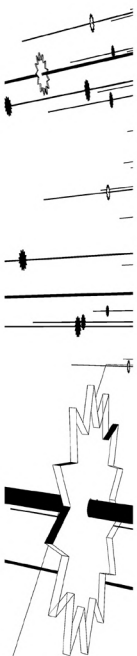
If *The Secret* says everything one wants or needs can be satisfied by believing in an outcome³, then this isn't that. It's doing something, active participation in making a future I might care to be a part of. Dipping a toe into the swamp of existential dread rather than wallowing in it. With the help of my whānau, my mates and the whakapapa we bring with us.

YOLO

¹Tī Kōuka Whenua, Terry Ryan M.B.E., J.P. (<https://my.christchurchcitylibraries.com/ti-kouka-whenua/>)
²Tāhaku irika, written by Kommi Tamati-Eliffie, 2021
³[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Secret_\(2006_film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Secret_(2006_film))

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Turumake Harrington is a Ngāi Tahu artist living in Wellington. She grew up in Christchurch andRotorua, studied industrial design at Victoria, Fine Arts at Canterbury and shoemaking at RMIT in Melbourne and is currently working towards a masters in fine arts at Massey. Working across sculpture and installation, Turumake's work is characterised by bold colours and references to domestic forms and materials. Sitting somewhere between art and design she is currently interested in exploring how objects, material and colour can express, challenge and pursue matauranga Māori through their composition.



Inspired to make work that is generous to its audience while occasionally tripping them up, a lot of consideration is given to making art accessible both physically and conceptually. Much of Turumake's mahi is driven by a desire to engage her young daughter in making, understanding and challenging contemporary art practice. Turumake has recently shown work at Adam Art Gallery in Pataka 101, Enjoy Contemporary Art Space, Toi Pōneke, RMI Gallery and Objlectspace.
 Instagram @turumake / turumake.com

Blue Oyster Art Project Space,
 16 Dowling Street
 admin@blueoyster.org.nz
 03 479 0197

Turumake
Harrington
SPECIAL TIME
(Ehara i te tī)

In Kupe's tradition, he was following two whales south, one being Ārai Te Uru and the other Niwa. In the Ngāi Tahu tradition, Ārai Te Uru is a waka of legend, captained by Roko-i-Tua.

While in Te Waipounamu Roko-i-Tua met the Kāhui Tipua and an exchange of food occurred with Roko-i-Tua sharing kumara he had stowed away ahead of his long journey from home Hawaiki.

Rongo-i-tua (Fame-from-afar) was the first to arrive in this island from Hawaiki. He found the country inhabited by the Kahui Tipua, their chiefs were named Toi, Rauru, Hatoka, Riteka, Rongo-mai, Tahatiti, and Tama-rakai-ora. On seeing the stranger, they ordered food to be set before him; and the servants brought mamaku, and kauru, and kiekie, and all their choice delicacies, but Rongo-i-tua hardly tasted anything, and presently asked for a kumete, or bowl of water, to be brought. This he placed behind him, so as to conceal what he did. Then, unfastening his waist-belt, he took from it some kao, or dried kumaras, which he placed in the bowl, repeating all the time the following incantation:

*Ka rere, ka rere, te pito nei
Kei te puni puninga, te pito nei,
Kei te kore korenga, te pito nei,
Kei Maatera, kei Hawaiki.*

He kept feeling the kumaras, and when they were sufficiently softened, he mashed them into a pulp, and mixing them with the water, handed the bowl to his hosts. "When the Kahui Tipua tasted the sweetness of the mixture, they wanted more of the food, and asked their guest where he obtained it; he told them from across the sea.

Soon after this, Tua-kakariki, one of their number, found a large tōtara tree on the beach, cast up by the sea. He measured its length, and found, after extending his arms along it ten times, that he had not reached the end of it. Delighted with his discovery, he hastened back to the pa. In the meantime, Rongo-i-tua reached the beach, and seeing the tree, mounted upon it, and deposited his excrement near the butt of it.

When he, afterwards, heard Tua-kakariki claiming the tree by right of prior discovery, he told the people that it could not be claimed by Tua-kakariki, as it belonged to him long before in Hawaiki, from which place it had followed him; and that if they went and examined it, they would find his private mark upon it, made before leaving home. The discovery of the excrement settled the question of ownership in favour of Rongo-i-tua.

The tree was subsequently split in two, and out of each half a canoe was made; one, called Manuka, because of the disgust expressed at the sight of the excrement,—the other, Arai-te-Uru. Manuka was first finished, and the Kahui Tipua, impatient to possess the kumara, sailed away to Hawaiki in search of it. They obtained a cargo, and returned; but, on planting them, they were disappointed to find that none grew. In the meantime, Rongo-i-tua sailed away on the same errand in Ārai-te-Uru. On reaching Whanga ra (sunny cove), the place in Hawaiki where the kumara grew, he ordered his men to surround the chief's house. They heard the people inside repeating the kumara charms and incantations. "Ah," said Rongo, "those karakias are what you need. Learn them."

Appendix 03

Room sheet for *Te Koretētāmaua SETTLE, PETAL*
Corban Estate Arts Centre, AKL, 2020

Te Koretētāmaua SETTLE, PETAL takes its name from two places; Ngāi Tahu whakapapa as recorded by Matiaha Tiramōrehu in 1849 and from my father, Jonathan Harrington.

Like my tupuna and namesake, Ema Turumeke, Matiaha Tiramōrehu following attacks from Te Rauparaha and Ngāti Toa moved south from Kaiapoi to Moeraki where after the death of his father, Karaki, in about 1833 he became chief until his death in 1881 [1]. Ema too is buried in Moeraki. In this particular Tahu whakapapa stages of Te Pō are followed by stages of Te Ao then stages of Te Kore. Of these realms of potential, *Te Koretētāmaua, the unstable void*, is described by Māori and Indigenous studies lecturer Kommi Tamati-Elliffe as one that's clinging to a form but letting it go - about to let itself rip loose, to expand into other forms of being.

As a person I have for all my life suffered a tendency to, ah, be a bit anxious. Not a particularly special or useful character trait but persistent nonetheless. My dad would say to me 'settle, petal', which in hindsight I take to kindly mean 'hey, I love you, it's all good, now chill the f**k out'. I called him, he does mean it like this*, and then I wondered to him that I hadn't heard anyone else use it before to which he said something like 'I definitely didn't come up with it'.

Settle Petal.
Kiri Jarden

I tend towards 'calm your farm' and only because it rhymes. Unlike 'settle petal' I don't think it is deemed derogatory though perhaps equally at risk of coming across as condescending. And at times 'calm' might best be viewed from afar while driving at 100km an hour, as you might drive past a farm. But what has this to do with whakapapa?

Whakapapa is the anchor and the rock upon which we can tether ourselves to in the storms of confusion that may come during times of crisis. [^]

Kia māoriori. Be at ease. You know who you are, and even if you can't name all or any of your tīpuna, they are there-you are evidence of that.

E kore au e ngaro – he kaakano i ruia mai i Rangiaatea.
I shall never be lost – a seed scattered from Rangiaatea.

Your father, who did use 'settle petal' when panic looked like it was ensuing, says of this exhibition, "My only question is, am I Clarice?"

[^] Retrieved from <http://www.hearingvoices.org.nz/index.php/en/different-perspectives/maori-perspective/32-the-importance-of-whakapapa-an-explanation-by-egan-bidois>

** In a further email he wrote
"while I'll buy "settle petal" coming off as slightly condescending, with you I think of it as a term of endearment (petal) preceded by a gentle encouragement (settle), generally sotto voce. if someone said it to me I'd be (a) surprised, (b) amused then finally I'd get around to having a think about what it was they thought needed settling"*

[1] *Te Waiatatanga mai o te Atua South Island Traditions recorded by Matiaha Tiramōrehu*, ed. Manu van Ballekom and Ray Harlow, Canterbury Māori Studies, 1987

Turumeke Harrington (Kāi Tāhu) in conversation with Māori and Indigenous studies lecturer, **Kommi Tamati-Eliffe** (Kāi Tahu, Te Ātiawa, Taranaki)

Ed. Ioana Gordon-Smith

Turumeke:

Hey Kom, thank you for helping me out with this. To start I'll give you what I have so far which is the short blurb for show promo:

Turumeke Harrington's new exhibition Gentle ribbing is a birth, a coming into being with a lifetime ahead. The exhibition of sculpture and major installation features a huge, brightly coloured quilt. Much like birth itself, the quilt represents hours of labour, boredom, procrastination and a triumphant finish. Harrington divides the gallery space to reflect here her interpretation of birth in Māori cosmology.

So this massive quilt is being used here to squeeze you through the space and also represents a labour in itself. I have been really interested in the value/power/respect for birth literally and as a narrative tool in creation whakapapa and mythology and general 'lessons' from Te Ao Māori. Like it makes sense, it makes life.

But I'm keen to talk with you about the humour, darkness and sexy-ness we could tease out.

For instance, these saucy bits, from Natalie Robertson's 2008 text 'The 10 Predicaments of Maui: Notes on Tricksters'

As he made his way in through the Te Paepae o Tiki and into her vagina, his companion Piwakawaka, or Tiwaiwaka, the fantail, fell about laughing at the sight of Maui, and so woke Hine up. Now according to some sources, it was her arousal, her awaking to a wriggling inside her vagina that made her genitals (Mokakati) 'come' thus creating powerful contractions that crushed Maui to death.

She's quoting from Elsdon Best, I know not to take all of his accounts as accurately translated or even accurate at all... but, for me it offers a really interesting twinkle. What other sexy bits are missing?

Here Natalie is again:

You see, while the early missionaries and anthropologists were busy collecting Maori stories, some of them were also busy telling us that we were wrong to believe such things and that any mention of sexuality should surely be sanitised away.

Like, duh, of course.

Kommi:

Huhuee yes, yes of course yeah hard. Everything from trying to change our way of carving, where genitals were no longer shown to omitting the blatantly sexual parts of waiata in translations.

I'm all for bringing our sexual aspects of culture back and having no shame about sex and sexuality and expression, but I'm also sceptical about what old dead white perverts and prudes said. Also I'm sceptical about anyone trying to take old well known stories and put new angles on them. I mean yes narratives change through generations or through each individual's re-telling, that's an inherently Māori thing, but I have heard some people's, errr, misinterpretations, where for example someone felt a story was too male-orientated so they changed the narrative to a pro-feminist kōrero which those unknowing could have easily misconstrued that as an ancient telling, but in reality they'd just twisted the kōrero. But then on the flip side there are more valid cases where we tell a kōrero for how its known but sort of insert our own theories into it.

I guess it's not about it being sexy even. Event to just start with, yes, this is a body part, these are the things that make us, and that carry us. This is penis, that is a vagina. To deny that is to deny whakapapa

T:

I had that rant going in my head a couple of months back, about blaming colonisation for my prudishness. I'm not sure how the politics of decolonisation lies with me (I think Indigenise might be more in line) but more simply what I think these kōrero maybe offer me is picking up really small bits that I can fold in a kind of meaningful way into my work, what I talk to Pia about and what I talk to other people about.

In thinking back to this installation that I'm going to show, the title itself is a little bit saucy. Initially I had wanted the whole thing to be a lot more explicit, dildos and holes, but my practice, my knowledge and my confidence are all not mature enough to pull off the dick show of my dreams, I'm also not sure what I am saying. Some loosely reasoned decolonize pro-feminist one line humour I'm not quite committed to publicly. So, for this it is more about the process. There's almost exactly the gestation period of a child in that quilt, 10 months. The context and intention for the work has changed in that time, but I wouldn't say that's too dissimilar to being hapu either. Especially in my case with Pia, things were all a bit unknown right. We have a process of labour and labour and birth and I'm just trying to figure out how, in a text like this that will support the exhibition, I can raise some idea or start some thoughts ticking rather than resolve or argue anything.

Appendix 04

Accompanying text for exhibition *Gentle Ribbing*
Contd.

Failure is the mother of success... One of my greatest failures was my inability to convince my kaumatua that the sexually explicit ancestral figures that I had carved for the back of our wharehau Taharora were a potent reminder of a tradition that had been suppressed by Christian moral values. Ngāti Porou carvings of the late 19th century have been emasculated. After initially being called back home to defend my actions the end result was my having to remove the carvings and to get rid of their genitals... Christianity won again. I had no option but to oblige. My kaumatua at that time maintained the role of ahi kaa, they kept the home fires burning by living there. I was a transient visitor who visited once or twice a year at most. And I needed to quell the accusations against our ancestral house from other hapū on the east coast that Taharora was a small house with a big mouth. While the comment might seem trivial the criticism was expressed in te reo Māori, and as such the term for mouth is an allegorical term for the vagina and by implication the male genitals as well, in the case of the carvings on the back wall.

I reduced the size of the ancestral figures on the back wall as a reminder of the shame that my actions had precipitated and the need to whakaiti or to humble myself in light of my actions. I carved manaia in the pubic area of the ancestral figures assisted by Ross Hemera and Lyonel Grant. It taught the most valuable lesson that shapes my practice as an artist today: artistic licence, or arrogance, is a construct inherited from the West and has no place within the marae context.²

K:
Haha yeah me and my nephews were just exchanging jokes before about Hinenuitepō, referring to all vaginas in general as Te Pō lol. It might not be an official narrative for vag, but metaphors as such pop up all the time.

That's also got me thinking about weaponry. How we refer to diddles as taiaha, and gineys as tewhatewha, or some say patu. Lol.

T:
I mean, they're powerful, right. In good and bad ways. But how novel a concept to revere/fear/laugh-at all genitals.

K:
Haha that's a sad story about the carving off of dicks. That's still a thing today for many carvers. It reminds me of back home at Ōtākou in the late 80s or early 90s when a bunch of our people, men and women, came together to carve a couple of big pou which are now on display at the NZ Royal Albatross Colony at Tairaroa Head. All those depictions of tūpuna had their penises shown. I heard that one of the carvers, who was from up north (but married to an Ōtākou woman, my aunty) wasn't happy with the penises, not because they were penises, but because none of them were circumcised. So he went back to the carving shed or studio or wherever the set up was and he "cut off" all the foreskins with his chisel - if I remember right, this was the night before the official display of the carved pou. Now anyone who visits the Albatross colony centre might make the assumption that all our tūpuna's diddles were circumcised! I'm not sure if that's even a thing but I have heard the term 'Tamatea-ure-tehe' (Tamatea circumcised penis) in reference to our eponymous ancestor Tamatea the rangatira of the Tākitimu waka.

T:
There's also an aspect to all this funny and interesting stuff that really does, in a serious way, have me looking to some stories in Te Ao Māori for a way to talk about sex, genitals, birth, life, power in the hope to raise these young girls we have, to be sure of themselves and their bodies in a physical and conceptual sense. And make some jokes along the way. I mean, that's really the only way I can see the whole art practice being valuable - to reinforce the mahi of others (like you, like other indigenous artists, like my mum) and to find a way to teach it to Pia, so she has tangible memories to build this knowledge around. (And make some jokes along the way).

K:
Yes, all symbols and metaphors for genitals are indeed powerful. They can be funny and cheeky, but also considered seriously. So many things represent our gennys, like certain arm movements in haka, our facial expressions like whētero (protruding of the tongue) for tāne to represent our ure, but as for women it's their version of whētero - I'm not sure if there's a specific word for it, but it's when the tongue is used to push the lower chin area outwards as they pūkana (widen/bulge the eyes lol) at the same time.

For women it represents their genitals I meant.

So yea I guess all that just shows the significance of our procreative abilities and the importance of the ability to produce offspring. But on the flipside there's the cheeky, funny reference to our private parts within expression and entertainment and song that is perhaps just an extension of normal behaviour for us - be it as indigenous adults with colonised or puritan views that can override it, whether we want to be or not, or be it as kids pointing these things out. I guess it's also a "I've got this you've got that and they're different" type of kōrero. Like for example Āio, she used to

Appendix 04

Accompanying text for exhibition *Gentle Ribbing*
Contd.

pretend she had boloz, and she'd scream it out "Look at my bolloz!!!" as she'd grab her crotch - shit I never taught her that!), and now she points out penises or makes funny bum and diddle jokes. Even though I don't really respond to her silly talk I feel it's just a normal healthy human thing towards understanding ourselves and others physically and physiologically. And I feel that maybe culturally in regards to our identity around this, for us as Māori it's part of who we are too and something we can use to empower our children, especially our young girls to be confident and comfortable within themselves. We can't go saying that aspect of cheekiness is not our way of being, but it's also hard to say it's not. What I just said is probably not articulated all that well, I guess it's 'cos this is something I'm only just thinking about for the first time now as I tap these words out.

T:

The ongoing and changeable impacts of colonisation on gender, sex and sexuality politics is way too big for me to deal with. I guess when I read that Natalie Robertson text, it was really the first time I'd ever felt the ability to flex confidently against "colonisation". I read that little bit of text and I'm like, duh, of course there could have been a pre-colonial acknowledgement that sex could be enjoyable as well as procreative as well as not always heterosexual as well as not monogamous. But also, because of how immature I am, sex and genitals are also very funny. So, like not a piss take, but also some more open ground to stand on, to say, haha I'm a prude because of colonisation. Look at this impact!

And I'm just trying to work all these things into a way to contextualise this show, that is essentially just a giant brightly coloured flappy wall divider and some lights. Art's weird man.

K:

But yes, of course our tūpuna loved sex and got into it. Why else do we revere our ancestors and their nakedness and their gennys all out as they should be (on a nice warm day lol). And despite western guilt and shame suppressing our stories there's evidence of our non-heterosexuality and as far I understand it there was no doubt sex before "marriage", only just perhaps not for those already deemed pride of the tribe rangatira puhi and so on. In regards to homosexuality, take Tūtānekai's takatāpui buddy Tiki³ for example. Before he hooked up with Hinemoa I'm sure him and Tiki were a thing. Now, that makes me wonder if there's any kōrero that touches on that stuff within our Kāi Tahu narratives, hmmm....

I don't think you're immature. Sex and genitals can be funny, just not for everyone, and in my opinion for those people somethings either not quite right, or maybe they are just different and I need to deal with that. Anyway, I sometimes am overcome with prudey feelings too, and I blame colonisation for it, so I totally relate.

Haha yes (f)art is weird! You're weird too <3. Everything and everyone is weird and especially the subject matter you're addressing with your show. You're doing more than making art about it, you're instigating a bunch of conversations, or you're carrying the narrative. I fckn dig it.

1 Retrieved from <https://openrepository.aut.ac.nz/handle/10292/2941>

2 *Things I Learnt at Art School: Bob Jahnke*, Bob Jahnke in conversation with Mark Amery, The Spinoff 03.10.19, retrieved from <https://thespinoff.co.nz/art/03-10-2019/things-i-learned-at-art-school-bob-jahnke/>

3 Excerpt retrieved from <https://teara.govt.nz/en/hokakatanga-maori-sexualities/print>:

"Tūtānekai is best known for his romance with Hinemoa, who swam to Mokoia to be with him. Before he married Hinemoa, Tūtānekai had a close male companion, Tiki. This relationship is seen as reflecting a traditional example of same-sex attraction. In a manuscript by 19th-century scholar Te Rangikāheke, Tūtānekai says to his father:

*Ka aroha atu a Tūtānekai ki a Tiki, ka mea atu ki a Whakaue.
Ka mate ahau i te aroha ki toku hoa, ki a Tiki.
Tūtānekai loved Tiki, and said to Whakaue
I am stricken with love for my friend, for Tiki."*

Here is my contribution to issue 3 of the zine *Femisphere* from 2019. The invitation was "Judy and I would like to invite you, as a practicing artist whom we admire, to respond to any past or present female* artist whose work has inspired your own thinking and/or making."

IT WAS PROBABLY MY MUM WHO INTRODUCED ME TO THE WORK OF LISA WALKER WHEN I WAS 10 OR SOMETHING. SHE HAD ME HOOKED. THERE'S THIS IMAGE OF LW SITTING IN HER STUDIO, TAKEN FROM ABOVE, SURROUNDED BY SHIT TO MAKE SHIT FROM. IT'S POSSIBLY MY FAVOURITE STUDIO PHOTO I'VE SEEN FROM ANY CREATIVE. MESS AND POSSIBILITY.

**I LOOKED TO HER MAHI WHEN I WAS AT DESIGN SCHOOL.
I LOOKED TO HER MAHI WHEN I WAS AT TAFE STUDYING SHOEMAKING.
I LOOKED TO HER MAHI WHEN I WAS AT ART SCHOOL.**

I THINK IT'S BECAUSE THE WORK LW MAKES IS SERIOUS FUN, AND THE WORK SHE MAKES LOOKS LIKE IT WAS ENJOYABLE TO MAKE. IT'S A JOY TO EXPERIENCE.

IT'S SILLINESS, GIVEN THE CARE OF SOMEONE WHO

KNOWS THEIR CRAFT AND PLAYFULNESS MADE BY AN ACTUAL ADULT.

WHAT COULD BE MORE INSPIRING THAN THIS IDEA THAT YOU CAN BE A SUCCESSFUL, PROPER, GROWN WOMAN+MOTHER AND STILL HAVE FUN?

Lisa **WALKER**

