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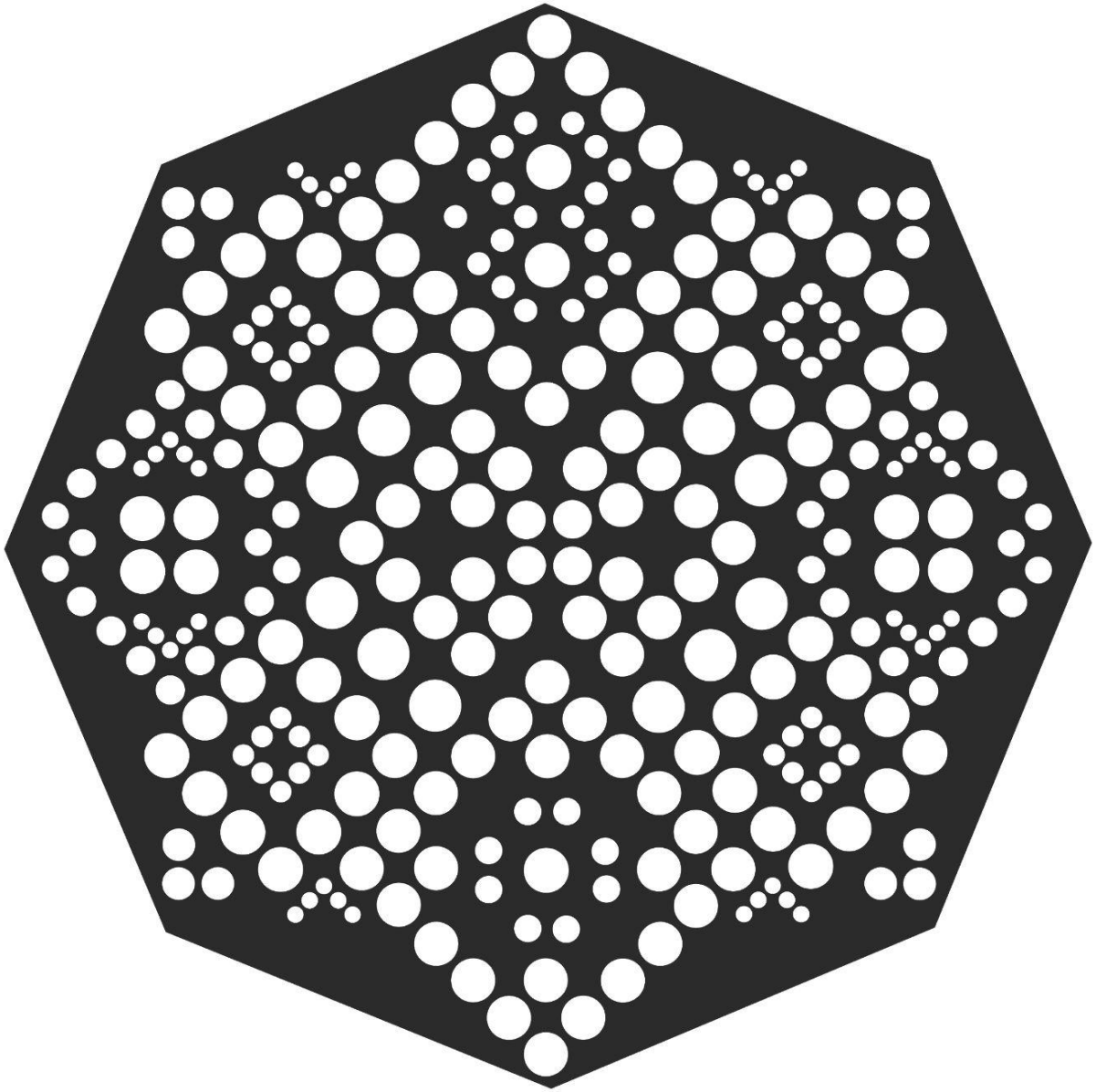

Whakapiri

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A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

Master

of

Fine Arts

At Massey University Wellington, Aotearoa New Zealand.

Maioha Kara

2021

Abstract:

Whakapiri establishes whakapapa as the heart of my practice and reaches outward to origins of creation and relational understanding within te ao Māori. Through cyclical pattern, and the approach to mauri as moving energy that is neither destroyed nor newly created; I have developed a holistic awareness of the experiences, theories and processes I have been afforded and that have informed the way in which I operate within my practice today.

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“Ā tātou mahi i mahia e tātou nānahi, whakārohia e tatou i tēnei rā, hei mahi ma tātou mō āpōpō

The things we have done in the past become our future” - Te Ao Pehi Kara.

Wise words from my papa speak into the nuances of whakapapa that have supported the agency to learn, explore and create toward the position I have found myself today.

For my whānau who fill my cup and keep me grounded. I am so lucky.

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Tīmatanga kōrero

Throughout this text are three main theorists that speak into and affirm my understanding of Te Ao through mātauranga Māori and wider indigenous research. Manulani Aluli Meyer, Rev. Māori Marsden and Rangimārie Turuki Pere operate as three pou within this body of writing as well as being fundamental in the development of my practice. Here, I share how I have come to my understanding of the interconnected relationship between moving energy, cyclical pattern and the concept of mauri as life force. With these pou as my basis I extend my knowledge and uphold mātauranga Māori through the framework of Infinity by way of mathematical reasoning, the science of quantum physics and notions within ancient asian and east asian practices of Reiki and Yoga.

Whakapapa is an integral part of my practice with an example of that being among the first words shared in this body of work. A whakatauāki from my Pāpa, Te Ao Pehi Kara who was a tōhunga, prominent educator and advocate for Te Reo Māori as well as a skilled kaikōrero that worked closely with Dame Te Atairangikaahu. This whakatauāki comes from his voyage on Te Aurere to Taputapuātea, where he was a tōhunga for the trip and assisted in the clearing of tapu from the sacred site. His quote and artifacts can be viewed as part of the Te Aurere exhibition at Te

Papa. I draw attention to his words because they have significantly informed both my understanding and interpretation of whakapapa. “The things we have done in the past become our future” for me quite literally details that which I have aimed to convey throughout this text, that the connection to all that came before me is integral to the position that I find myself in now. Whakapapa explained by Ani Mikaere understands that “Nothing stands in isolation, and all things have a history as well as a present and a future. It is only by recognizing this fact that we can truly make sense of our present situation.”[1] Mikaere’s research has helped unpack and affirm the way in which I have applied this notion within my practice as well as how it has helped resolve thoughts, ideas and the significance of experience.

I position my writing style through a personal lens, sharing my journey through an autoethnographic account. R. Lyle Skains describes that while it is a favoured methodology for creative based practice it can sometimes fail to relay the arrival at certain processes[2]. While this rings true to an extent, as an artist I often neglect expansion on ideas and processes which have become so much of a given that they are somewhat like the air that I breathe. Because of this awareness, I have tried to convey my thoughts and

[1] Mikaere, *”He Rukuruku Whakaaro”*, 175

[2] Skains. “Creative Practice as Research: Discourse on Methodology”, 87.

ideas as best I can through considered reflection and references that hopefully aid in the understanding of my processes[3].

It's important for me to reiterate the core theme of whakapapa as the navigational tool throughout this text. It is with the support of autoethnographic methodology that I am able to structure this body of work, alongside a framework fashioned by Meyer[4] that divides this text into three wāhanga. It is my hope that this work might offer another lens from which to consider our position and potentiality within the movements of our everyday life.

[3] Alice, Adams, Bochner. "Autoethnography: An Overview", 2.
[4] In reference to Auli Meyer, Holographic Epistemology: Native Common Sense diagram of "3 light beams"

Wāhanga tuatahi

It's hard to say if this is just me shedding a former self and decluttering my mind as I grow older, but each year I have become acutely aware of recurring thoughts and ideas that are persistently at the front of my mind. Summer 2019, shortly after Puhoro ō mua, Puhoro ki tua, 9th International Indigenous Artists Gathering[5] I had struck an interest in polygons. It was at the gathering that I was afforded the time to explore ideas that had begun to develop over the last few weeks. My initial interest in the form was developed through my gradual familiarity of working in Adobe Illustrator, which came from having just completed my first substantial body of work for my debut solo exhibition[6] at Weasel Gallery[7] in Hamilton. I had moved from a very manual making process of hand mapping pattern directly onto the surface using a plunge router; into a digital format in a matter of days. I learnt the basic functions of a CNC milling machine as well as undertook a beginners tutorial in Illustrator. This hard and fast introduction was the opening that I needed for my practice to expand to where it is now. Around this time, I was also starting to

[5] An intensive ten day wānanga that was held at Tūrangawaewae Marae in Ngāruawāhia. With over one hundred and twenty indigenous artists from across the country plus a range of places overseas such as Canada, USA, Australia and the Pacific Islands. Minimal sleep with every hour possible spent talking, making and sharing stories of home, process and materials. A very special privilege to be invited to my first gathering alongside my father, who hadn't attended one since I was born in 1996.

[6] "*The Sweet Taste of Numbness*", 2019.
[7] Now operating as Laree Payne Gallery.

make sense of what it was that I'm interested in within my practice; seeking to make sense of what I had created thus far. I craved to be able to put a name to my ideas. Previously I had worked with the accounts from Wiremu Tāwhai on the regional maramataka of Te Whānau-ā-Apanui[8] I learnt of and became fascinated with the intimacy that exists between people and nature, and how intrinsic the movements of te taiao are to ourselves directly. Learning about maramataka resulted in my understanding and further appreciation of our environment and the way in which the moon provides guidance to take heed of holistically. Alongside learning the significance of the way in which the moon moved, I had also begun to pursue the teachings of Dr Rangi Matamua. The stars aligned perfectly with my research interests in that Dr Matamua's first book[9] was released in the same year I had begun my quest. Between these two significantly impactful bodies of research I have been able to recognise the whakapapa of god, man and universe[10] present within everyday occurrences as well as establish an initial understanding of the significance of pattern as I have come to know it now.

My interest in polygons resulted in a ripple like effect throughout my journey to date, offering so much in

[8] Tāwhai, *"Living by the Moon"*

[9] Matamua, "*Matariki: Star of the Year"*

[10] Marsden, "*The Woven Universe: Selected Writings of Rev. Māori Marsden*", 2.

both visual and conceptual language. I had begun with a particular interest in hexadecagon which is a 16-sided polygon, a peculiar and unknown form to me, but one I felt drawn to when thinking about the host of realms within Te Kore, Te Pō and Te Ao Mārama[11][12] respectively. In Pei Te Hurinui Jones account of creation, the knowledge is laid out in a uniquely conversational recount for readers. At the back of the book Jones has illustrated the creation narrative through drawings of rauru gradually growing in size to depict the layers and phases that are being moved through. In Jone's account there are a total of thirty realms within the lore of the Tainui people. Though in the *Woven Universe,* apart from the nights of Te Pō there is no clear number of states within the realms of creation as explained by Marsden[13]. With these knowledges I have approached this shape in a way that lends itself to an idea of many/mass.

It was uncanny to then return home to Rotorua where my parents live, and learn of a sculpture my uncle and father were planning to make at our house. While the idea of making at home was no new feat to my mother and I, as my father has a large studio on the property, the scale and the shape of the proposed work was what drew my attention.

[11] Jones. "*He Tuhi Mārei-kura: A treasury of Sacred Writing",* 168.
[12] Marsden, *"The Woven Universe: Selected Writings of Rev. Māori Marsden",* 181.

[13] Marsden, 16

As a child I'd begrudgingly spent many long hours tailing my parents at exhibition openings, afternoons in various uncles carving sheds and putting in the mahi as a pint-sized human bench clamp on many of my fathers projects. It's worth mentioning though that as arduous as it was growing up next to the cheese and cracker table at exhibitions and sitting in dusty wood filled sheds, it has benefited me in a way that I am only now appreciating in my pursuit of the arts. As well as providing a sense of grounding with an initial introduction and appreciation for toi Māori. My father, Eugene Kara, specializes in bronze sculpture, a very niche field of practice and a skill set that is now found few and far between. He has over twenty years of experience in the arts and has dedicated much of his time to teaching across Waiariki Institute of Technology (now Toi Ohomai Institute of Technology) as well as seeing the beginning and completion of the first fully bronze cast elevated Whatarangi[14]. During this time he also developed and established the foundry Te Ahi Kōmau that is now part of the new school building completed for the New Zealand Māori Arts and Crafts Institute in Rotorua. Over the duration of my university experience I've been fortunate to also learn (among many things) aspects of this casting process from him. I have also become aware of the rarity of this way of making. Because of this my father

[14] Completed in 2017 and installed at Te Puia, Rotorua. This sculpture is destined for the New York United Nations

is regarded as an expert in the field and is one of few artists versed in the casting processes which is in part, why Uncle Brett Graham approached him with this work in mind. Through my father's side we are Ngāti Korokī Kahukura from Maungatautari maunga in Waikato. It's through this whakapapa that he and Graham[15] are cousins, and how I know him as uncle. He and my father have completed many projects together on behalf of our hapū, including the Cambridge section of the Waikato Expressway[16] in 2015, alongside koro Fred Graham. For that project the three of them each created site specific sculptures along the newly completed section. This project was also my first experience willingly helping my father with his work since I was young. Here, I learnt the careful consideration and patience required when beginning and ending different making processes. I was tasked with constructing marquets from drawings using cardboard rolls as well as learning how to sculpt wax models in preparation for 3-d scanning and casting. From the marquets I moved outside and learnt the basics of sculpting stone and then went on to work on sections that would be the column aspect of his work. His sculpture is named *Te Kitenga mai o Maungatautari* and is a bronze figure atop a stone column, situated at the beginning of the expressway, looking out to Maungatautari. His work gives honour

[15] From herein, I refer to him as Brett or uncle
[16] NZTA, "Urban design, Cambridge section"

to the maunga and speaks to the deep connection between Tainui people and the Maungatautari mountain. With my fathers work being the first encountered among the three, Brett's site is a few kilometers further, situated next to the Horotiu paa bridge. With four outstretched arms extending from the Niu, Brett's work *Te Rongo Tai* echoes the significance of place and people. Particularly that of Maungatautari hapu, Ngāti Haua and Ngāti Koroki-Kahukura. The final work is from koro Fred Graham and marks the end of the Cambridge section of the development. His work is named *Maara Kai* and is a large gardening tool known as a Timo. His work is based of a proverb from King Tawhiao who once said in a waiata "*Te Koopuu Maania o Kirikiriroa me oona maara kai*" Meaning, "across the smooth belly of Kirikiriroa its gardens bursting with the fullness of good things". Each of these works speak to the significance of our maunga as a spiritual tupuna and the values rooted in Waikato identity as well as the whakapapa of this whenua. I was really fortunate to have witnessed and participated in aspects of this project through my fathers contribution. Alongside learning formal techniques and processes I was also exposed to the many moving parts that contribute to large scale projects like this. Things like managing the communications between various parties that are involved, and the sourcing of materials, labour,

fabrication, freighting and installation quotes were only a few among the many factors that were part of this project.

It felt like a serendipitous moment standing in my father's studio looking at these plans for a very large polygon sculpture of a redoubt. Having put so much thought toward this inkling of an idea (polygons) to then see an iteration of it in front of me seemed dubious. Recently, after a conversation with Brett[17], I was able to gather insight into his decision in using the shape. Based in the formalities of carving and sculpting techniques used when working stone, he spoke to the stages and processes one undergoes to achieve round forms, "In order to make rounds or poles the stone is cut into facets, it is first squared, then squared by half (making an octagon) and then faceted

[17] Conversation with Brett Graham, 17th May 2021

again (making 16 sides). It is then filed into a round. So working with octagons is a natural part of shaping round forms. The Niu was eight sided, based on the first Corten Steel Niu by Cambridge motorway[18]". Niu hold a significant place within Pai Mārire[19], integral to ceremonial ritual in the 19th century. It has been an interesting journey understanding more about Pai Mārire, having only known its practice in Waikato; I only recently discovered its origins in Taranaki when listening to the speakers at the opening of Brett's show in New Plymouth. It was here that I began to comprehend the complexities of our history and also the shared devastation that occurred in both Taranaki and Waikato. While it's all still very new to me and there is so much to learn in this space, I've enjoyed the nuances at play within his use of the form and the presence that they hold. His critique on monumental structures is unpacked through incredibly moving sculpture in his momentous show *Tai Moana, Tai Tangata*[20].

[18] NZTA
[19] Religion established in Taranaki that travelled and is also practiced in Waikato in our ceremony

[20] Rose, "Memories Carved in Relief".

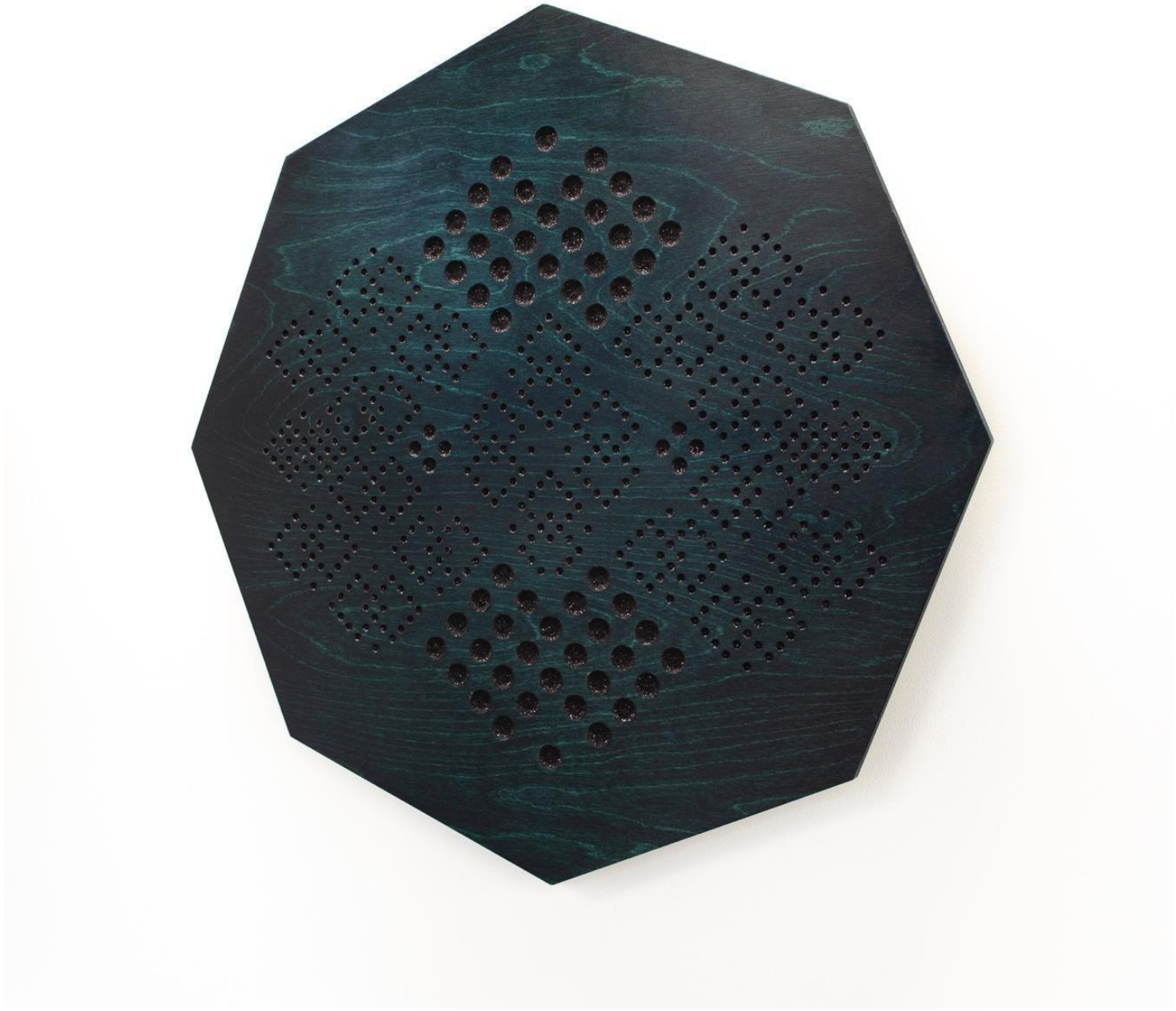
Over that summer I continued to mull over this idea and sort through different possibilities in my own work, whilst I spent my time helping to make Brett's massive sculpture. By the beginning of 2020, I had come to a definitive point in my practice and was able to identify this common thread of methodical pattern that I found myself constantly gravitating toward within layers of mātauranga. Once I was able to establish this, the concepts based in my Māoritanga[21] began to flow freely. Since my first few years of art school I have utilised te ao Māori and mātauranga Māori as a puna, a constant source of grounding, inspiration and expression through art. What I have carried with me throughout all my work is a constant connection to our creation story as explained by Marsden[22]. Some works have this narrative at the forefront and others layered beneath. Regardless, the whakapapa back to Te Kore remains constant. I've found great comfort in our creation story, enamoured by the nothingness of Te Kore, the stillness within Te Pō and the brilliance of Te Ao Marama. While my aesthetic developed in motif and material, so too did the conceptual weight of my work. I had begun working with ideas derived from te maramataka as mentioned earlier of Tāwhai[23] and the moon and stars within this cyclical system according to Matamua[24] .

[21] Marsden, "*The Woven Universe: Selected Writings of Rev. Māori Marsden*", 2.

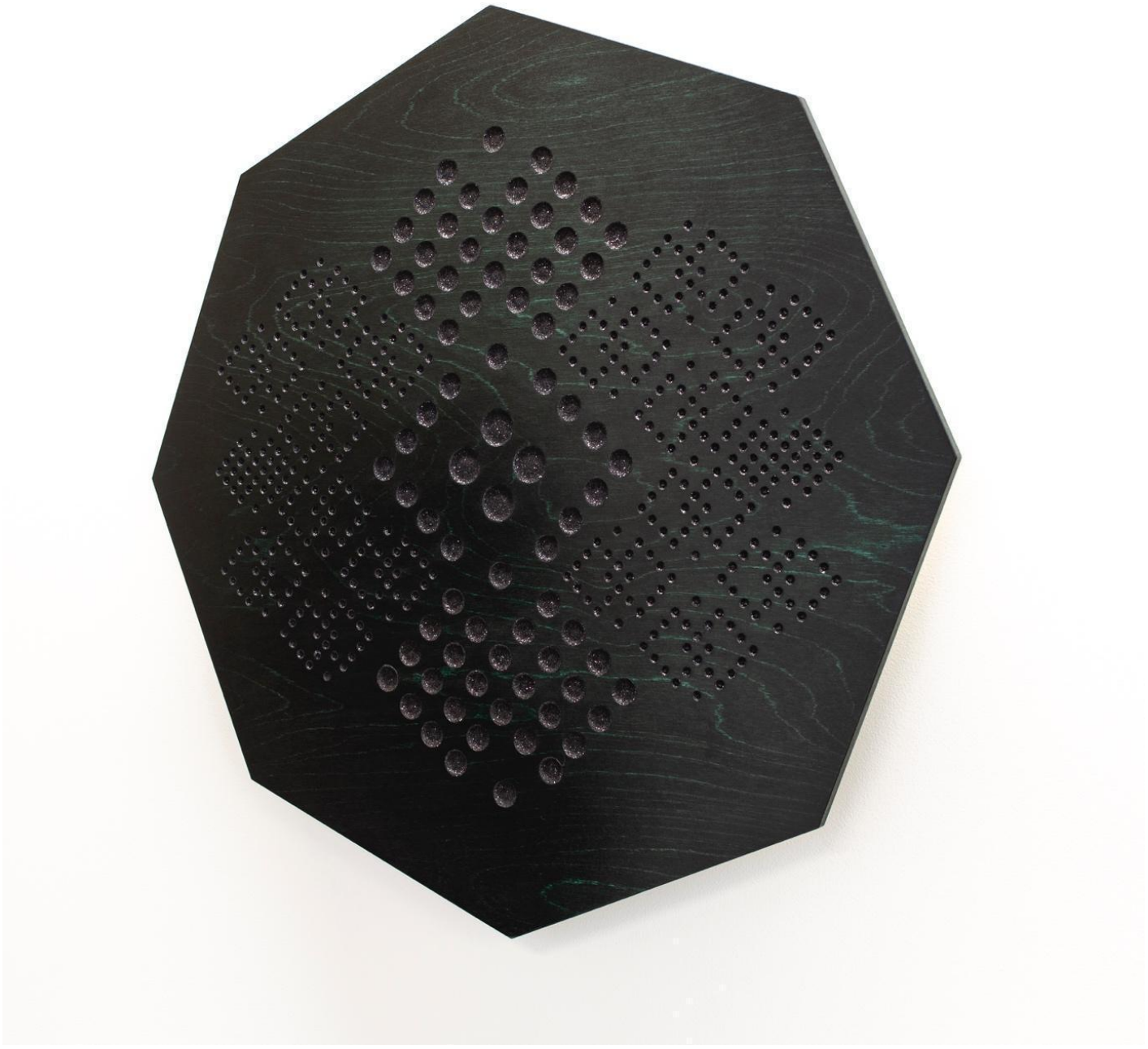
[22] Marsden, 19.
[23] Tāwhai, *"Living by the Moon",* 13.
[24] Matamua, "*Matariki: Star of the Year"*

Pattern and predictability were aspects that I particularly enjoyed within this research - which then made sense for me to apply to our creation story. It was within this research that I was able to develop my relational understanding of coexistence as well as grow my base awareness of mauri as life force energy[25].

[25] Marsden, "*The Woven Universe: Selected Writings of Rev. Māori Marsden*" 31.



Kānapanapa I, 2020



Kānapanapa II, 2020

It was later in my research that I found *Te Wheke: A Celebration of Infinite Wisdom"* by the mighty Ngāi Tūhoe tōhunga Rangimarie Turuki Pere[26]. And it is within this understanding or structure that I've been able to clearly speak to my use of polygons within te ao Māori, as well as resolve the connection between the many aspects of my holistic and spiritual knowing. In this framework the wheke or octopus, is used as a metaphor to describe key Māori concepts that define Māori wellbeing. Te whānau is depicted as the head of the octopus to represent the notion of relational wellbeing. That Māori health should not be measured individually, rather as a full whānau unit. Waiora (total wellbeing for the individual and family) as the eyes of the animal, then each tentacle representing a dimension that contributes to the total wellbeing of te wheke/te whānau.

[26] Pere, Te Wheke: A Celebration of Infinite Wisdom.

1. Wairuatanga (spirituality)
2. Taha tinana (physical wellbeing)
3. Hinengaro (the mind)
4. Te whanaungatanga (extended family)
5. Mana ake (the uniqueness of each individual and family)
6. Mauri (life force/energy)
7. Hā a koro ma, a kui ma (the breath of life from our forebearers)
8. Whatumanawa (the open and healthy expression of emotion

The notion behind this framework being that when each limb of health is cared for we can then experience total wellbeing. This structure has been fundamental and affirming in my use of the octagonal shape and has since become a shorthand symbol for these eight dimension

During my MFA journey, I have pursued my long interests in holistic living and spirituality. Enjoying the power of meditation, the teachings of energy systems and growing a greater awareness of the body. The things I have learnt within Reiki and Yoga have held space within my research and afforded a sense of clarity and deeper connection to
the overlaps I have found within mātauranga Māor

An example of this overlap is that of Pere's *Te Wheke* framework and the ancient teachings of *Ashtanga*, or what is commonly known as the eight limbs of yoga[27]. Both detailing eight dimensions that feed into total wellbeing/enlightenment. The eight limbs being:

1. Yama (attitudes toward environment)
2. Niyama (Attitudes toward self)
3. Asana (physical postures)
4. Pranayama (breathing practices)
5. Pratyahara (sense restraint)
6. Dharana (concentration)
7. Dhyana (meditation)
8. Samadhi (complete integration)

[27] Vasudev, *Inner Engineering: A Yogi's Guide to Joy,* 140.

While in different contexts, what I have taken from these frameworks is the relational understanding of wellbeing. Once you understand the value and the impact of yourself in relation to your environment or your surroundings, you are then broadening your awareness beyond a tangible experience. It offers an opportunity to step into being fully present in your experience and the emotions and energies you move through. An example of this can be seen within the transition of moon phases and the effect they may, or may not have on the moods and the energies within you. It's been a joy to be able to establish these connections between my personal interests into my art practice, and in a way affirmed that what I have been researching is something special. And while I am grounded in mātauranga Māori, I am able to establish connection to ancient indigenous knowledge such as this.

Much of the ethos of yoga echoes aspects of what I'd been reading from Marsden, with one particular quote from Marsden presenting an overlap of understanding as he explains "All is One and interlocked together"[28]. I listened to *Inner Engineering* whilst planning and creating the designs for Salutations, Summer Days & Summer Nights as well as the work for the Peacocke roundabout development being built in Hamilton. His teachings speak to this interconnected way of being

[28] Marsden, *"The Woven Universe: Selected Writings of Rev. Māori Marsden"*, 33.

and harnessing the energies we possess within us[29]. Much of what he teaches relates back to the concept of mauri. How it is always active and abundant in all living things.

Pere's writing on Aroha[30] echoes much of what Samadhi encapsulates within the eight limbs of yoga. Like Samadhi, Aroha is the all-encompassing, a concept that is better actioned than spoken about and the very core of our beings. Samadhi is the final limb in the eight limbs of yoga and means enlightenment. To practice samadhi means to practice all limbs at once. It is the collation or act of absorbing each into the other and to exist in a pure state of being. As explained by Pere "the tentacles can also be intertwined so that there is a mergence, with no clear cut boundaries. The dimensions need to be understood in relation to each other, and within the context of the whole."[31] And so with this in mind, it is my understanding that beneath the layers of our human experience we are essentially love energy. I have interpreted both these theories, while different in delivery, essentially as guides to operate in pure energy and to ultimately be at our highest frequency using our full potential.

[29] Vasudev, *Inner Engineering: A Yogi's Guide to Joy,* 144.
[30] Pere, *Te Wheke: A celebration of Infinite Wisdom,* 6.
[31] Pere, 3.

The octopus is an incredibly intelligent creature, a perfect vehicle to interpret indigenous mātauranga. Serving as a reminder that the aspects I embrace both visual and conceptual are not exclusive from each other, instead very much involved and intertwined with each other.

My edition of three Kānapanapa were the first of many explorations into the polygon, exploring ideas of transition and movement. I like to think about Te Kore and the potentiality associated with it – the nothingness/void and this being both our birthplace and our resting place, where we return to complete a full cycle[32]. I imagine Te Kore to be much like an atom. An effervescent space of total darkness. Kānapanapa also offers insight to my Māori and Cook Island Māori ancestry. The word Kānapanapa is used in both languages with very similar meanings which is to describe a shine, gleam or sparkle and also within te reo Māori, to be emerald in colour

[32] Relating to what is described by Nepia, "*Te Kore vol.2*", 50.

I finish this wāhanga of understanding shape, with the conceptual beginning: abundant in nothingness, darkness and unbound potential. Te Kore[33], where we are just an essence of a thought in a chaotic and exciting space and time. To think of Te Kore as singular, as one dimensional, would be denying oneself the richness that this knowledge offers. My affinity to Māori cosmogony is one of the three constant light beams[34] within my practice. It is a topic that is unpacked throughout this exegesis as each aspect of my making calls on different dimensions or layers of this knowledge.

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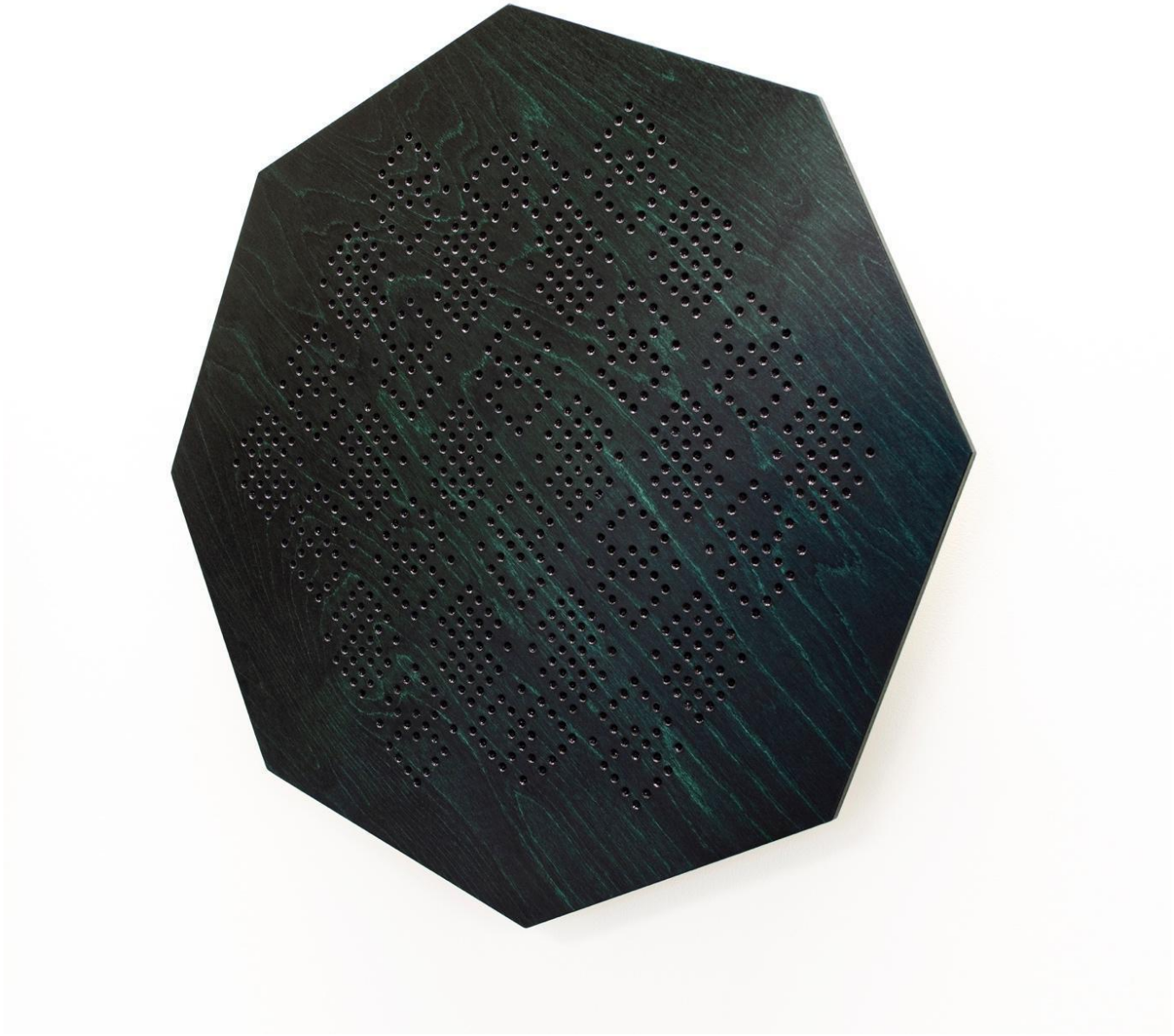
[33] Marsden, *"The Woven Universe: Selected Writings of Rev. Māori Marsden"*, 20.
[34] In reference to Auli Meyer, Holographic Epistemology: Native Common Sense diagram of "3 light beams"



Kānapanapa III, 2020

These were tentatively made in level 3 of our 4 level lockdown system during the initial outbreak of Covid-19. Everytime I look back on these works I sense an air of fragility. The uncertainty and stressful thoughts behind every “normal” we knew is laced into these works which I think can be read in the choice of colour and the kind of awkward dimensions of the finished works. Maybe a better way to describe this is to say there is a certain tension sensed in these works felt through a visual “hashing” out of ideas and thoughts during a time of chaotic stillness.

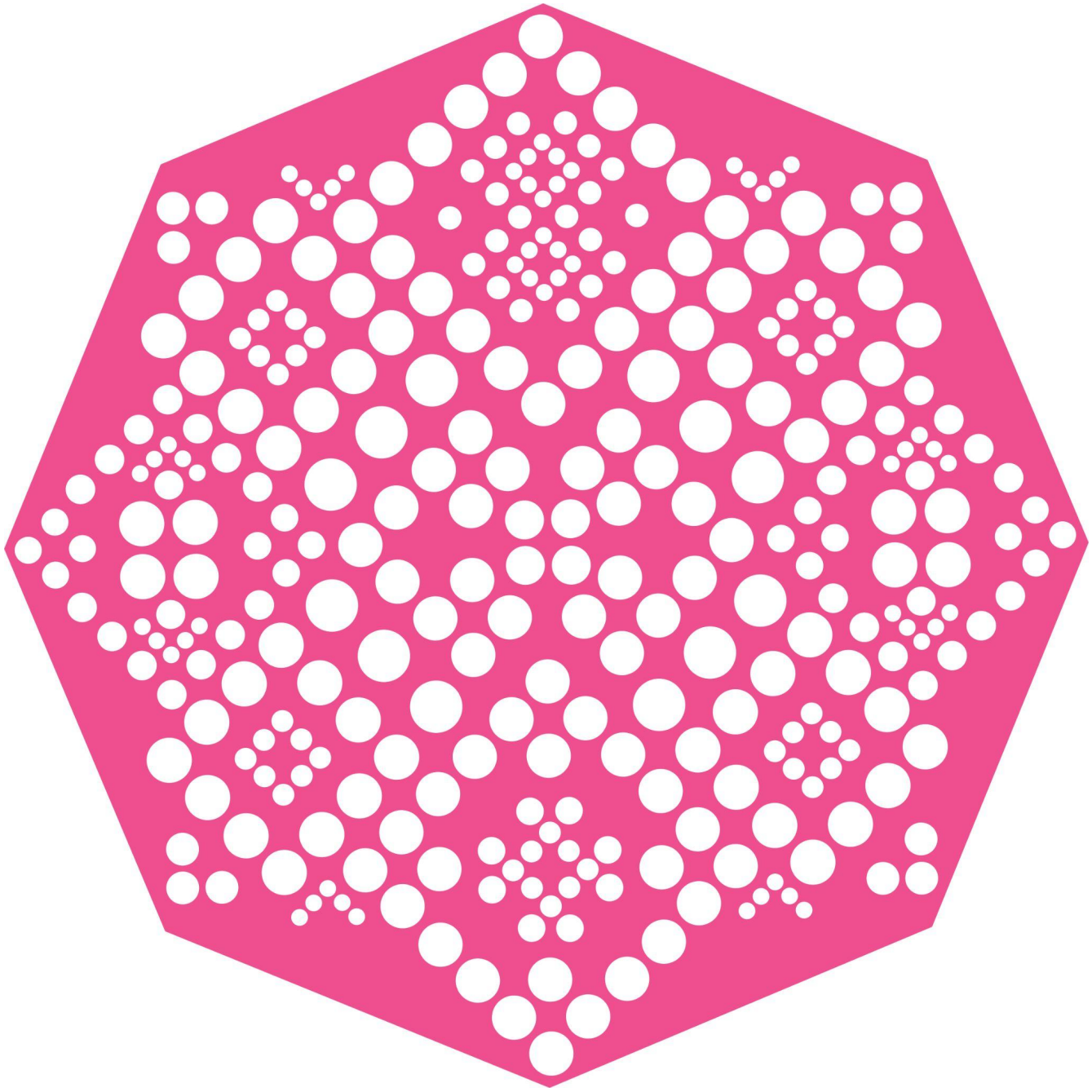
Who really knows. What is most valuable about these works is the steady progression and development that is present in both my visual output and my conceptual grounding. Having a somewhat firm grip on what it is that I am now wanting to explore allows me to look back on these works and acknowledge the tentative nature of where I was in my journey and what that looked like. These works were first shown in a group exhibition named “He Tohu”[35] at Jhana Millers Gallery. This show was aligned with the celebration of Matariki and consisted of work from Nikau Hindin, Ayesha Green, Kauri Hawkins and myself. A really beautiful and I think thoughtful presentation of emerging contemporary Māori artists and also an opportunity to reconnect after our shared experience of isolation. Two

[35] *He Tohu,* 2020, Wellington, 18 June - 11 July 2020.

of the three were shown again at the beginning of 2021 with my gallerist Laree Payne Gallery in Hamilton[36]. This show was “He Taura Here” and was curated with the intention of continuing the conversation of the contemporary Māori art landscape that Nigel Borell had initiated with Toi Tu Toi Ora at the Auckland City Gallery.

[36] *He Taura Here,* 2021, Hamilton, 27 January - 20 February 2021.

Wāhanga tuarua



Colour and surface operate as a vehicle for many things within my work and because of its significant presence within the work and the materiality of the substance, I feel it is important to unpack its use through my work Salutations.

To work with glitter is no easy feat and I acknowledge Reuben Paterson's use of the material. I remember the first time I experienced Paterson's work. I wasn't long into my time at high school and we had taken a trip to the Rotorua Museum and they had a group show in the left wing of the building[37]. Through the doors you could see these enormous glistening canvases sitting side by side. It was the tiger's massive face I remember vividly, nestled in amongst these huge kōwhaiwhai panels. To have that as my very first encounter with glitter and scale was an overwhelming amazing moment: the way glitter catches the light adds to the charm of this playful material. It's what drew me in as a magpie-like teenager and something that has continued to remain with me even now.

Since then I have been lucky enough to see his work many times and just recently was able to sit in on his floor talk last year for his show *Black Matter* at The Dowse Museum in Lower Hutt, Wellington[38]. I hadn't

[37] *Flow Riders: Tracing Kowhaiwhai Traditions,* 2013, Rotorua, 20 April - 4 August.

[38] *Reuben Paterson: Black Matter*, 2020, Wellington, 14 November - 21 March 2021.

met him before so to hear him speak directly to his work was really special. Coming to this talk as an adult and having worked for some time with glitter myself, I had developed my own understanding of the conceptual connection and significance of the material to my practice and so I was eager to hear if/what he might share on that aspect of his work. It was a really thoughtful conversation between him and Dowse director, Karl Chitham. Paterson shared his childhood experience with the black sand on the beach he grew up by and how that memory has stuck with him. He went on to explain the likeness of the sand to Te Kore and that, even though we know and understand Te Kore as a vast darkness, there is no light without dark and that is evident in the glittering black sands of Piha.

His whakaaro, while different to my own, supports the way in which I view the material within my practice. Since revealing my interests in mauri and cyclical pattern, I have established a kind of relationship between the motif and material within my work. I have named the motif I use “Iraira”, which according to Māori dictionary means to be spotted or to have various dots. I chose this because it also means to shine or glitter, so it makes for a fitting name. These iraira are vessels for the glitter, which for me operates as acknowledgement to our cosmology, our origins

and the very essence of energy. Being a light diffracting material, it enhances these qualities likened to orbs being made of moving light energy. Like Paterson, I too think about the materials I use in relation to our creation story particularly when I work with deeper tones of stain and glitter. The balance of light and dark at work within the grain of the wood and the depth of each iraira creates any amount of shadow that plays with the way light hits the glitter.

There's a kind of harmonious balance between the wood and the glitter, a co-existence that makes me think about the relationship and the relativity of Te Kore, Te Pō and Te Ao Mārama. How they are indeed interconnected and not without the other. I often think about the very conception of thought brought together in Te Kore, through a section by Marsden (2003) explains

"...*Te Waipuna Ariki* (the divine fountain of Io the fountainhead). This is the fountain through which the primal energy of potential beings proceeds from the infinite realms of Te Korekore through the realms of Te Pō into the world of light (Te Ao Mārama) to replenish the stuff of the universe as well as to create what is new. Thus it is a process of continuous creation and recreation. Te Korekore is the realm of potential being, Te Pō is the realm of becoming and Te Ao Mārama is the realm of being."(21)

I think about how when birch wood takes stain it offers three levels of saturation within it. It's satisfying to think how this very light blonde coloured wood kind of comes alive when treated with coloured stain. The tonality of the wood grain offers contrast and interesting movement within the surface that I think plays nicely on its own accord within the work. And when the glitter is dropped into the pattern, it shows you the light potential that emanates from each of the teeny tiny particles.

Salutations is a Rimu work, a surface I that is special to source and a joy to work with. A few years back my father helped me map out the whakapapa of my work, from there we were able to establish a connection from material back to the atua. It has allowed me to engage with the intricacies and interconnected, cosmological relationships at play between our natural world and mātauranga Māori. In my instance I've been able to establish the whakapapa of my surface through layers present literally in the composition of plywood and then extending through to the experience of growing from Papatūānuku, to the harvest and extraction from our earth mother who birthed Tāne Mahuta, god of the forest whomst watches over all living things. For me to be able to do

that strengthens this notion of taonga[39] especially when working with native trees and in this case, Rimu.

It's a meditative process of oiling wood; you watch the surface drink in the oils and the depth of the grain begin to reveal itself. In preparing this work I got a really clear visual of what it will look like. A rich brown with pockets of lime green and purple glitter sitting within its surface and set against a very specific, very bright green. It reminded me of watching "That's So Raven"[40] as a child experiencing what I imagined having a vision might feel like and it made me laugh. My intuition guided the making of this work, fulfilling what I'd envisioned in my mind. I couldn't really give much explanation as to why I had chosen these colours whilst in the middle of making, particularly when trying to find the perfect shade of green for the walls of the gallery space. I had a selection of green swatches on the wall, some leaning too much towards a green screen look and the others looking too much like the colour of Shrek[41].

[39] The notion alluding to the meaning of treasure, to be special and a precious resource
[40] Correll, *That's So Raven*.

[41] Adamson, *Shrek*.

The green that ended up being perfect and exactly the tone I envisioned is a shade some would describe as and find absolutely offensive, yet in that moment it was doing exactly everything that I was looking for. It filled me with just the right amount of anxiety and excitement thinking about an entire space (though small) covered in the questionable colour. The whakamārama for the work came to me funnily enough, after it was picked up and on its way to the Govett-Brewster. From the surface, *Salutations* acknowledges the shift in season, in line with the time I made the work, we were transitioning between spring and summer. This transition theme allowed me to link back into the recognition of the seasons/cycles we navigate both in our internal and external worlds. *Salutations* vibrant pinks and greens against the richness of the wood was a decision that was prompted by the season's colour palette and tender nature. Beneath these layers of shifting pattern and celebration of transitioning seasons, *Salutations* is an ode to that which makes me, me. It is a tribute to my whakapapa, of both my maternal and paternal lineage. The colours imbue that of my iwi, purple for Ngāti Porou and my nanny Margy, and green for Waikato, for my dad and my pāpa.

It’s become custom for me to dedicate the names of my works to my nan, and *Salutations* is no exception.

“Salutations!” is how she would greet me every school holiday and every other weekend trip we took to Ōpōtiki to visit her. My nan was a fierce Ngāti Porou woman with the biggest heart and those classic 1950s pins for legs. Nan was an absolute beacon of love and grace, a true matriarch of our family and dedicated teacher who raised my mum and uncle whomst also became teachers. She instilled in us grandkids the importance of education and nurtured creativity in my cousin’s and I with painting supplies and activity books. When I name my works, I think of everything I love and all the things I’ve experienced since her passing. Naming each piece as if it is an ode to her. It’s something special that is typically reserved for my family and I, but in this instance, feels nice to acknowledge this small aspect of my practice and especially so in this work, *Salutations*.

The morning of the opening blessing for Tai Moana Tai Tangata[42] will forever be one of my most treasured memories. I have heard stories of the feelings and emotions people had experienced at the opening of Te Māori[43] in the 80s. I imagine this to be my version of Te Māori. Uncle Brett had invited our hapū from Ngaati Koroki Kahukura to open his show Tai Moana Tai Tangata and so our whanau travelled from Maungatautari to New Plymouth for the eight AM

[42] Saturday 5th December 2020
[43] A landmark exhibition of toi Māori that toured the US in 1984 before returning home in 1987

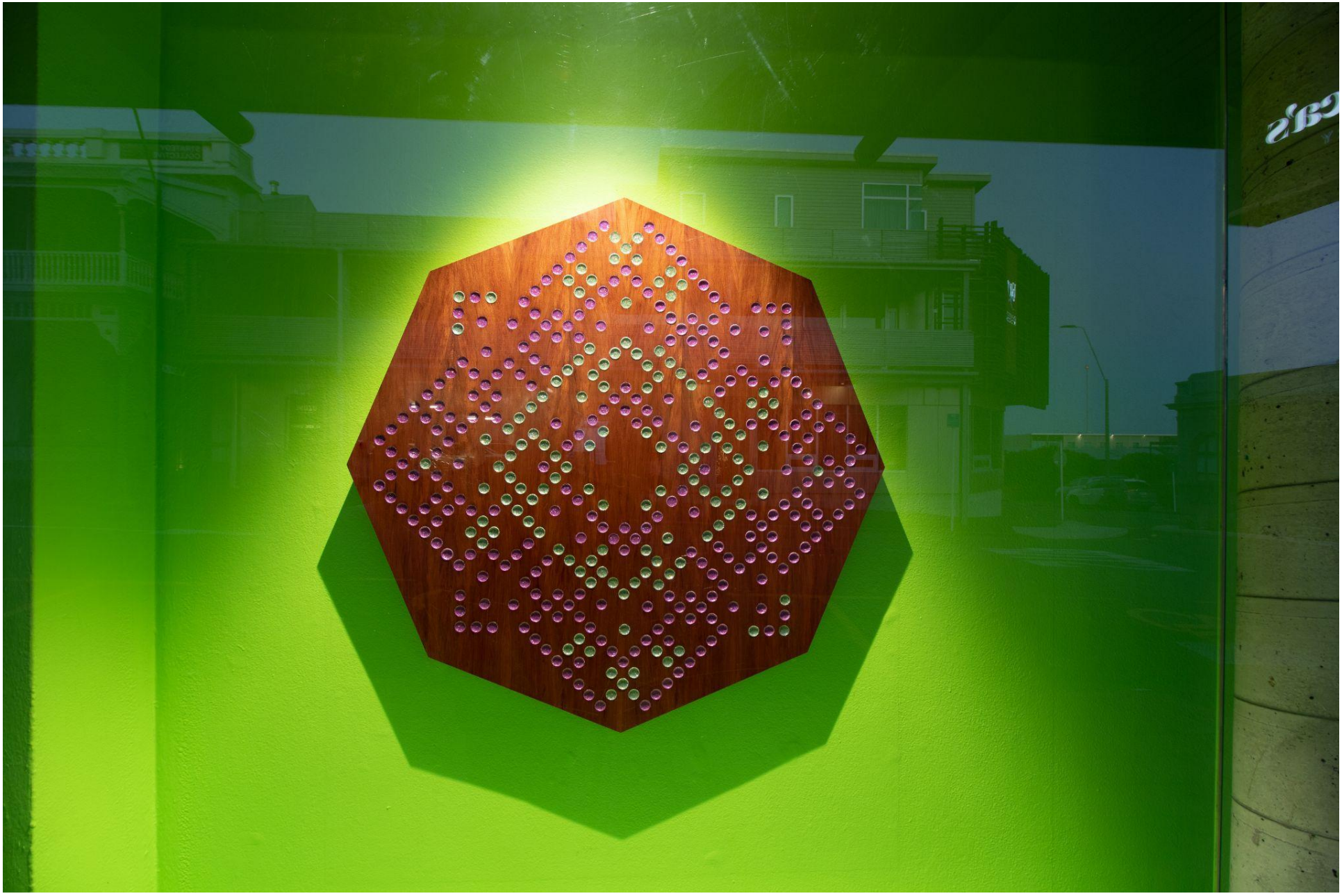
commencement. A four hour trip for a bus load of our whanau. They filled the space with Pai Marire, It is a special privilege in itself to have been part of this momentous exhibition that my uncle had developed over years of consistent hard work, but to have been able to also have work in the same institution and for our whanau to be there to bless everything was so incredibly special.

A couple days earlier whilst looking for an outfit for the opening I settled on a bright green blouse, making a conscious decision to unashamedly match my artwork. The morning of the exhibition opening, I could feel my inner turmoil starting to crank up and feelings of whakamā bubbling to the surface; classic art opening jitters. It was as if the stars truly aligned when the bus arrived and everybody started coming off after an early morning start in Maungatautari to begin the lengthy journey to New Plymouth. I felt excited and proud to be there at that moment, taking it all in. My most prized moment of the whole day was when all the ladies and the kuia slowly started coming off and you just saw these bright green scarves tied around their necks.

A bright green that happened to be the exact same shade as the one I had chosen for the walls of Salutations. I had chosen Pōhara Green, or better Pōhara green chose me. Pōhara is one of our marae on Maungatautari. It was a goosebumps, choked up moment to witness and almost like an exhale, feeling as if this is exactly where I'm supposed to be and this is exactly what was supposed to happen. Any sense of restlessness or reservations I held about my decisions with my work were settled as soon as I saw those silky green scarves walk off

that bus. It pains me still to this day that I didn't get a picture with my cousins, aunties and kuia all wearing our colours.

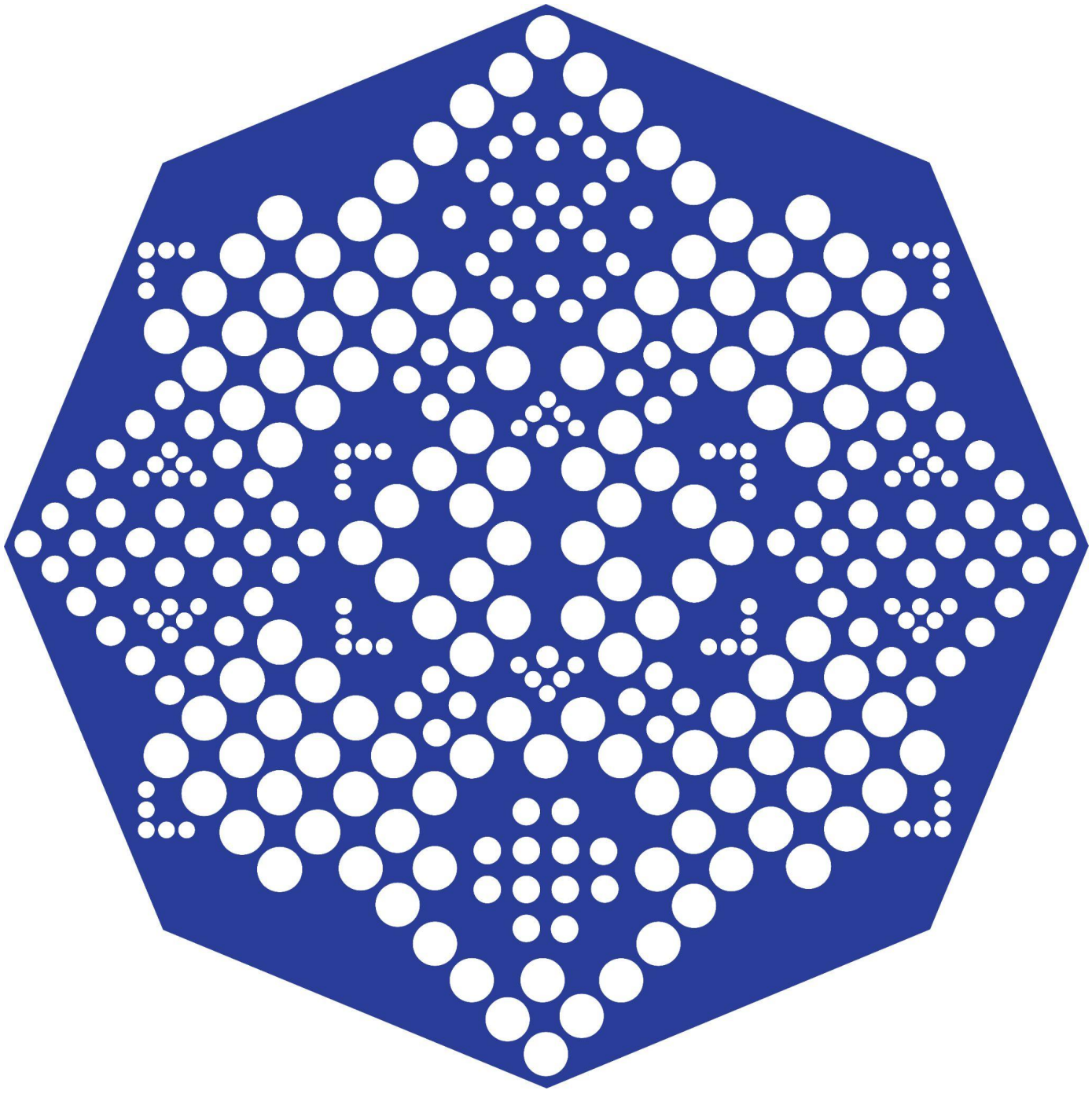
It was layers upon layers of amazingness that day. From the very beginning seeing those scarves walk off that bus to feeling Pai Mārire reverberate through the entire gallery. I had never experienced Pai Mārire in this capacity before that moment. As an adult, I felt myself have a bodily response to the chanting. Just a huge sense of overwhelming pride flooded me. I thought about how amazing our culture is and how special and so cool it is to be Māori. I imagined my tūpuna were present that day, standing proudly amongst the massive works Brett had created and supporting the Pai Mārire ceremony. It was a completely spiritual experience and very special to be in amongst for all who attended the blessing. Salutations was commissioned and curated by Hanahiva Rose, assistant curator at the Govett-Brewster New Plymouth for the Open Window gallery. The work was opened and exhibited in line with Brett Graham's *"Tai Tangata Tai Moana''* from December to March 2021 and had been extended to May 2021 following its successful positive response from the wider public.



Salutations installation view, 2020

Salutations installation view, 2020

Wāhanga tuatoru



In the previous two wāhanga, I briefly touched on “iraira” and mauri. It is in this section that I aim to unpack each of these concepts and offer an extended journey as to how I arrived at my understanding of these ideas.

Being familiar with energy in a spiritual sense has allowed another lens when seeing it addressed within academia. Science has been an area of research that helped affirm and further ground my knowing of energy within the academic space. Quantum physics; a study of how and why everything is and came to exist[44] has become a significant source of reference and one that I’ve found is inherent within both spirituality and mātauranga Māori. When we understand that everything is vibrating because nothing is solid and everything is energy or is giving off a vibration[45]. It is simpler for me to connect my experience back to the whakapapa of te ao Māori. Reiki is an alternative medicine which offers healing through an exchange of universal energy and has acted as another mode of which to understand the concept through. I had the opportunity to learn the teachings of Mrs. Hawoyo Takata through an intensive workshop on understanding this elemental energy that is active both in and around us and how to harness it. Reiki for me has been really nourishing for my well being as well as an instrumental influence in

[44] Orzel, *Six Things Everyone Should Know About Quantum Physics*.

[45] Robinson, *Did Einstein really say that?*.

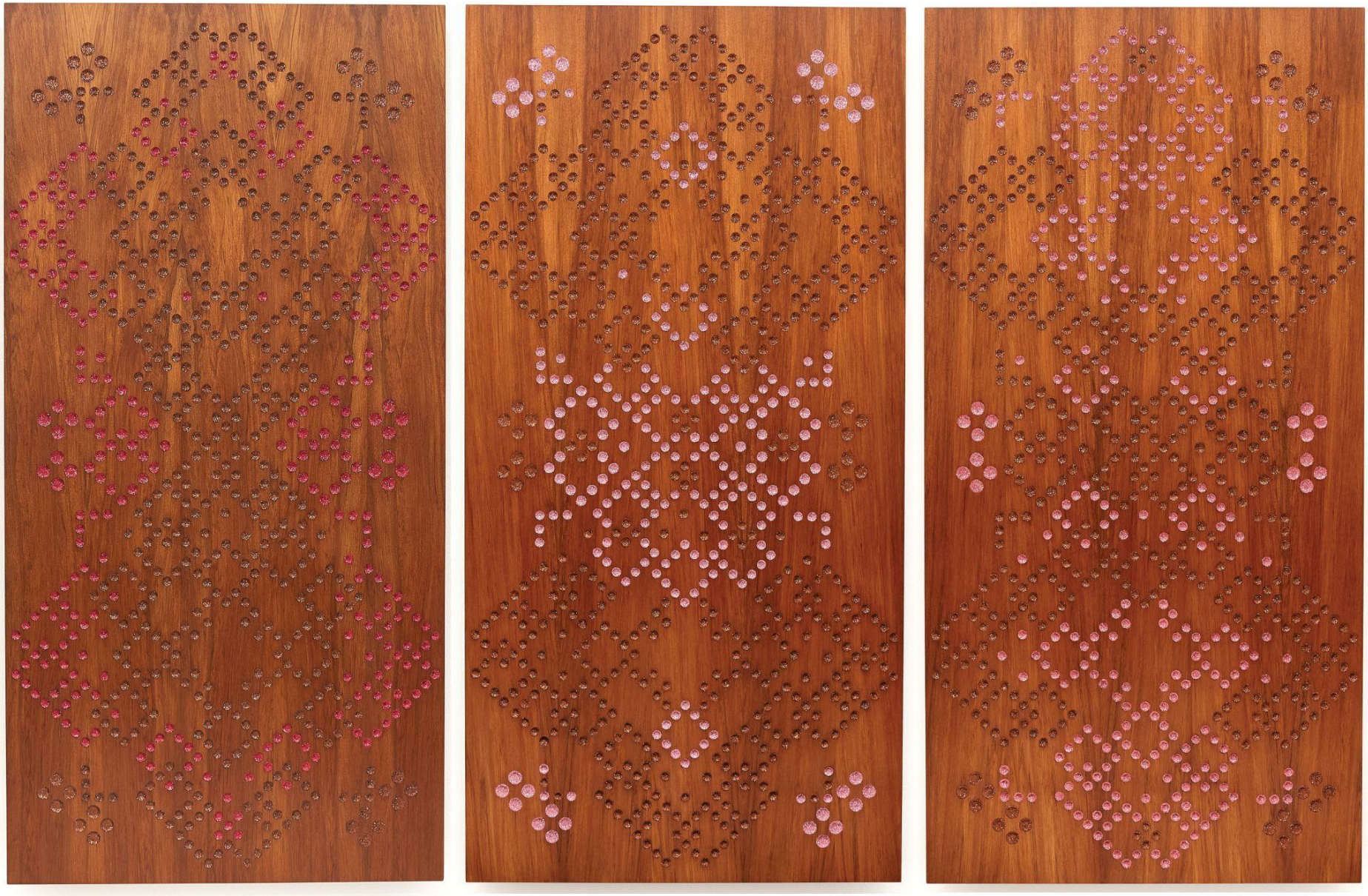
my practice in that it adds another layer of understanding the overlaps or oneness of spirituality and science.

If energy cannot be destroyed or newly created, instead transformed and always moving; it makes sense to me for it to be likened to the motion of the infinity symbol. As a cycle of continuous movement, it is a mathematical symbol that represents an infinitely large number or the concept of infinity[46]. A notion I have developed is this idea of infinity within the realms of creation. With Marsden's[47] knowing of creation as my basis; in place of *Te Kore, Te Pō and Te Ao Mārama* it is instead, *concept, development and realisation*. I think we are in a constant state of renewal, especially when working creatively. Moana Nepia has made significant developments in this area, completing his

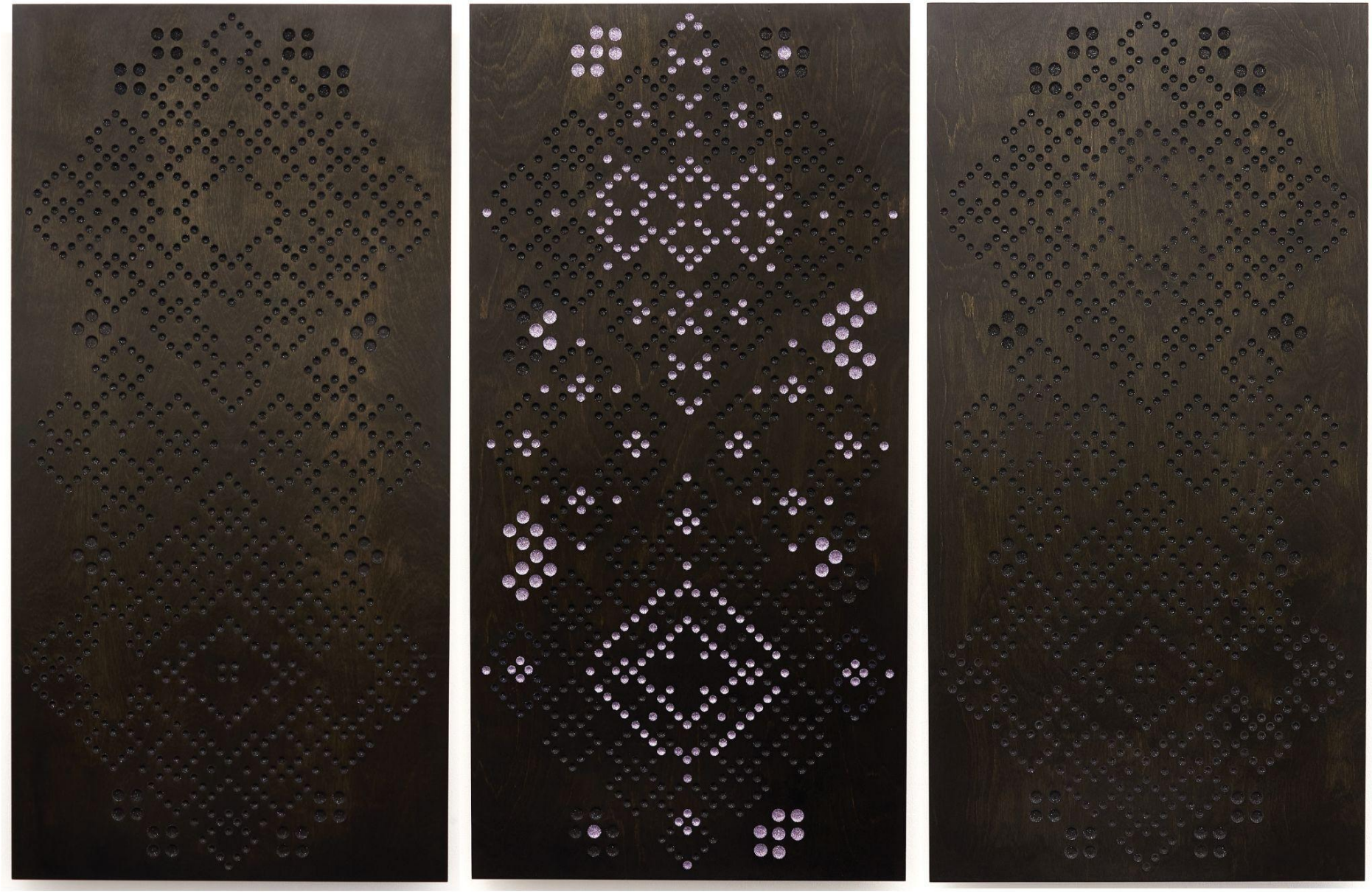
[46] "infinity, n.". OED Online, Oxford University Press.
[47] Marsden, *The Woven Universe: Selected Writings of Rev. Māori Marsden,* 13.

PhD in the exploration of Te Kore[48]. Nepia's writing aligns with and supports my own thinking with his proposition of *Te Kore as a Foundation for Creative Process*[49] and has been a means to understand the whakapapa or connection present within the intangible (Te Kore) and tangible (creative practice) realms of creation. While the dictionary definition of void defines it as unoccupied or vacant[50], mātauranga Māori offers extended meaning to the phrase.

[48] Nepia, "Te Kore: Exploring the Māori concept of Void", 32.
[49] Nepia, 32
[50] "void, adj. and n.1". OED Online, Oxford University Press.



Rākaunui, Takirau, Rākau matohi, 2021



Korekore piri ki tangaroa, Tamatea a aio, Korekore, 2021

Meyer[51] furthers the conversation of science throughout indigenous cultures and also reiterates how this holistic way of understanding is interpreted in different practices. She reveals commonalities that lie within the foundations of cultural practices; and colates them into a table of three columns, each listed words of major concepts and their origin. Headed as Mind, Body, Spirit, an example of a listing is from Māori and the words read “Tinana, Hinegraro, Wairua” and another, “Hearing, Thought, Meditation” from the Buddhist practice. A considered way to understand the true beauty of indigenous practice, knowledge and ways of being. Meyer skilfully articulates all these really specific points that cover all the areas I embrace which I think is what I enjoy most about her work. This sense of higher consciousness and knowing that there are many ways of interpreting this interwoven relationship between mind, body and spirit; and that these values present themselves in different cultural practices and knowledge as well as in the realm of western science and research. That indeed there is this understanding that no one thing can work without the other[52]. I feel like this perspective comes dangerously close to being perceived as whimsical and idealistic, which I wouldn’t entirely deny nor say is that it isn’t. I feel it's important to acknowledge we are not only in our environment;

[51] Manulani Auli Meyer on Indigenous Epistemology: Native Common Sense

[52] Aluli Meyer, 96.

we are part of it and should navigate in such a way that acknowledges this. And I think it's through tikanga Māori that we see this quite literally at the forefront of our identity, in our pepeha. The first things we introduce are our maunga and our body of water. We should develop this awareness and presence within ourselves. This is also another layer of thought where I find myself connecting the realms back into the narrative as they feel inherently versatile and applicable. Like Meyers, three light beams, Te Kore, Te Po and Te Ao Marama also operate as a trio and echo much of what Meyer has established. Diving deeper into these states or phases and thinking about them as more intimate, almost tangible concepts within our own human experience leads me to interpret the realms in a system. I relate back to the creative process (as relevant to me, but could easily be applicable to lots more things). Te Kore: a concept, where we establish a time for generating aspects of an idea and thoughts, where we are finding the motivation and inspiration for what we are looking to achieve. Te Pō; the development, a time of establishing these pieces of ideas as one cohesive something and the refinement of this idea. Te Ao Marama: as a release, publishing, exhibition; as release after time spent in this intensive period of making to present the articulation of your idea to the outside world.

It’s these thoughts, understandings and experiences that have informed and I guess led me to this way of interpreting my knowing of iraira and what I try to imbue through the motif. Also the foundation on which I launch from in my practice as a whole. When in the process of making my works I like to think of the iraira as an orb or a ball of light energy. My understanding of an orb is also that of spiritual nature. I was raised associating them with spirit wanting their presence to be known which again ties into my interpretation of light energy as the intangible being realised in a tangible form within my work.

The excavations within my work lend themselves to the process of whakairo. While there are many things that inform the way I make my work, I think it’s important to establish the origins of what I do and know now. Being raised with an artist/sculptor as a father and uncles who are carvers, it makes sense that hints of these familiar processes and memories present themselves within my work. What is interesting about this learning is the way in which it presented itself. Previously accustomed to abstract, minimalist acrylic painting and leaning into the style of Ralph Hotere, to then shift entirely to this different way of drawing works that aren’t entirely paintings nor entirely carvings was a significant jump.

Within whakairo[53] this reductive process is what reveals the design or pattern beneath the surface and is a quality I warm to when thinking and making my work. A common query or observation made about my work is the materiality of plywood and my reasoning of its use. What I find satisfying in this material is the accessibility and versatile nature of this product as well as the processes it goes through before arriving to me. This is a natural resource being unravelled in thin sheets and processed into a layered mass of stacked wood kind of departs the notion of "natural" in the material and replaces it with a manufactured natural[54]. This paired with the use of CNC milling acts as a kind of contemporary mode of carving.

There is a balance that I seek to achieve within my work within the aesthetic and concept. I think about this balance of feminine and masculine energy that we all possess within us and how this balance is present within many toi Māori such as whakairo, kōwhaiwhai and tāniko. Pere was a keeper of truly life-changing knowledge, and through her work I have been shown so much of what I know and am able to ground my understanding while still being able to connect to other cultural practices and knowledge. In one of her papers, she assesses herself against her framework of

[53] Graham, "An art of subtraction", Te Ara, 2014. https://teara.govt.nz/en/whakairo-maori-carving/page-2
[54] EPA, "10.5: Plywood Manufacturing"

Te Wheke, one section speaks to the area of “Taha Tinana / The Physical World” and refers to our bodies as vessels for spirit to have this human experience[55]. What I found particularly special is that as well as our spirit, our bodies also house the divine energies of the Mother, Child and Father moving from the left of our body to the right - Much like how the harakeke plant is grown with the child/new shoots at the core of the plant. This is something I am actively thinking about: that balance of feminine and masculinity within the composition, colour and form within my work.

[55] Pere, *“Te Wheke Kamaatu - The Octopus of Great Wisdom.”*

While establishing the visual influence tukutuku provides (geometric pattern, symmetry, asymmetry, repetition, colour), my father and I also talked about the functions and practicality of tukutuku within the wharenui/whare whakairo. He told me about how tukutuku was used as a tool of learning and as a place to practice various knots, plaits and tying methods. He talked about this in relation to my use of birch wood, and while I had established the qualities I enjoy in its surface aesthetic, he went on to provide a means to connect to tukutuku in another layer. Like tukutuku, birch lends itself to this practical use. It is a material that is favoured when making furniture and possesses a utilitarian quality that is not unlike the purpose of tukutuku. While being visually stimulating and decorative, it also served in a very practical way much like the use of birch in furniture making. Though this tactile nature isn't so much present in my work, I like the relationship as subtle as it may be, that's at play within the layers of my work. Establishing whakapapa within each aspect of my work has been a really enlightening journey. With my fathers expertise I have been able to unpack many of the ideas and conclusions I have developed through my practice; he has come to be my point of reference for all things, offering counsel and advice on the works that I make.

The contemporary Māori art scene is abundant with new and exciting artists constantly developing ways to

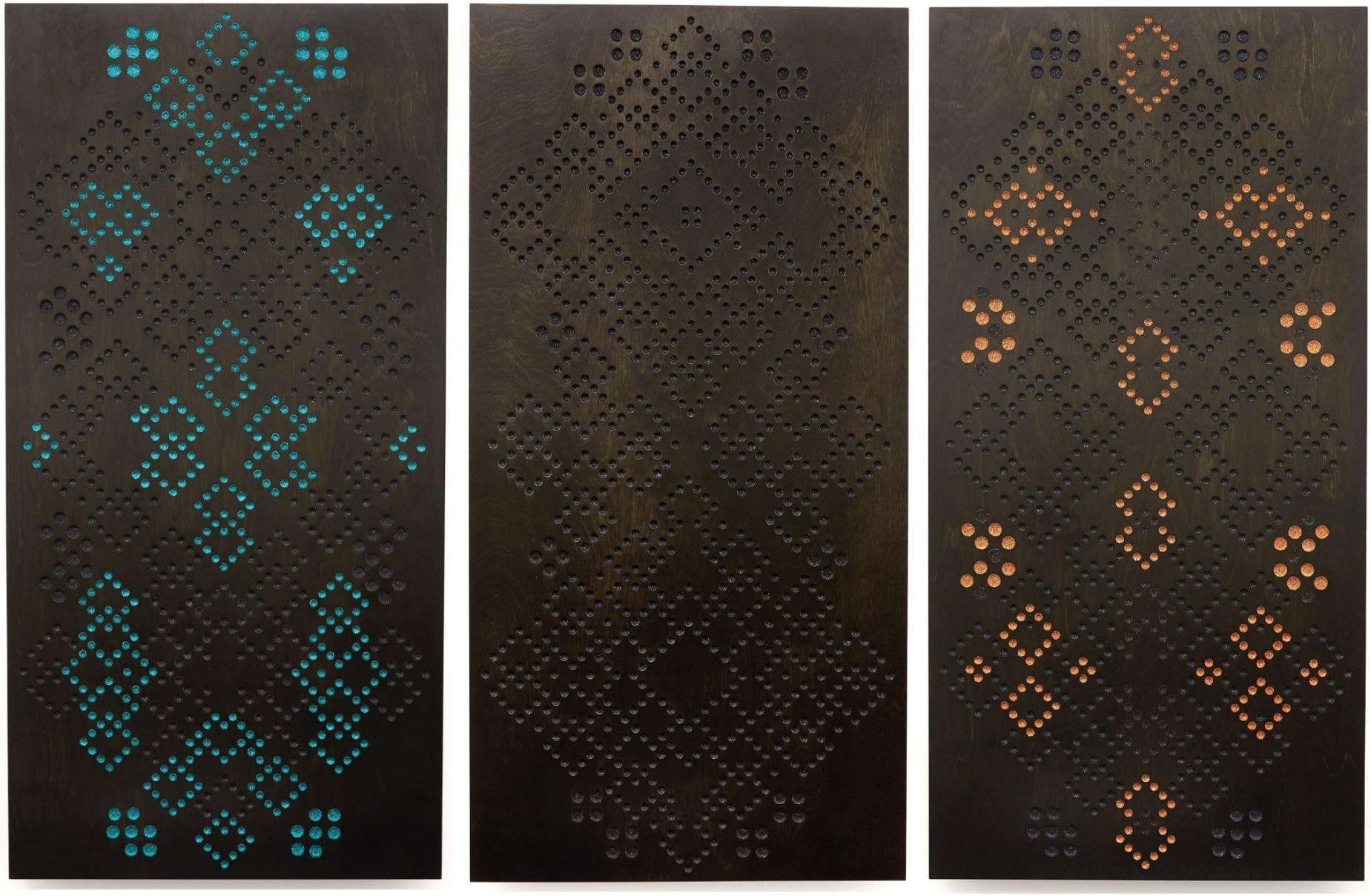
interpret customary artforms which I think is incredibly encouraging for the future of toi Māori. Especially so when we have collectives like Mata Aho creating beautiful enormous works made in familiar materials that speak to the pūrakau and atua of our creation narratives is so inspiring and also in a way offers support for me in what I choose to make with[56].

March 2021 our MFA cohort had the privilege of being invited to attend and be part of the blessing ceremony for the new campus Marae, Te Rau Karamu[57]. On the morning of the blessing the excitement was palpable among everyone who had gathered, a mix of 4am delirium, being around a mass number of people in the dark and genuine excitement for what we were about to be part of. I remember vaguely attending big special things like this as a child and so to carry that memory into my adult life and to be able to experience it in a much more present and appreciative state, heightened my sensitivity and gratitude to this moment. Once the blessings and formalities were completed, the marae was open for us to go in and take a look. The whare, named Te Whaioranga o Te Whaiao, is nothing I have experienced before, a beautifully intimate space filled with an array of different visual outputs. An amalgamation of abstract and figurative forms, it felt nourishing to be

[56] Mata Aho Collective, *Te Whare Pora*.
[57] Te Rau Karamu was blessed by Whanganui and Te Ātiawa tohunga on the 27th March . The marae is located at Massey University Wellington.

surrounded by such exceptional toi and also amazing to see the breadth of what contemporary Māori art can look like.

Te Rau Karamu Marae will be a lasting example of what toi Māori can be. It is so exciting and made me reflect on the journey of toi Māori thus far. In that moment I felt immense gratitude not only to be standing in this new whare, but also to the likes of Robert Jahnke, Derek Lardelli, Cliff Whiting and Sandy Adsett who have paved the way for so many of us with their contributions as leading innovators for the arts. It's important to remind myself often that without these instrumental figures I may not be where I am in practice nor creating the way I do. The afternoons that turned into long evenings spent in an Uncle's shed and the hideously long hours at exhibition openings have established the position I am in now. It is only with my curiosity and the unconditional support I have received that I am able to explore so freely.



Tamatea kai ariki, korekore whakatahehe, Tamatea a nganga, 2021

Korekore piri ki tangaroa, Korekore, Oike, 2021

Summer Days and *Summer Nights* , were presented by Laree Payne Gallery at the Auckland Art Fair 2021. Each body of work consists of six pieces. Summer days was created with Rimu and Summer Nights was made with Birch, each set with a pair of designs shared among the six surfaces. The beginning of the works closely followed by the completion of kānapanapa. I had decided to take these home to my dad's studio and work on them over the Christmas period. What I imagined to be a 2 week job to get this body of 12 works over the line turned into a crispy 5 almost 6 weeks. As it happened I had revealed to myself what creative burnout looks like for me. As much as I harp on about the holistic understanding of self and environment, I didn't take time at all to consider the effects of the year nor the well-being of my whole self. I had mental exhaustion and was trying to operate pretty much as a robot. In order to give the work my whole self and to be fully present in the process, I had to take time to fill my cup. It was a timely reminder I think for me to actually put into practice all these things I feel so passionate about within my work, into action in my life and my routine.

Nearing the completion of the two bodies of work, I began thinking about the phases of the moon that had lapsed while making these works and all the various aspects of each day that contributed to each piece. It was through naming them that I came to a better understanding and a step closer in my relationship with maramataka. Some of the names provided insight to the energies that were present/active whilst in the makings of each work. Making connections between the feelings of high energy and motivation to the full moon phases of Rākaunui and Rākau matohi as well as very calm, balanced evenings of slow but steady progress in various nights of Tangaroa. It felt really special, a full circle moment to be able to connect my own personal experience back to these systems our tūpuna utilised each day.

Reflections

As mentioned in the introduction, I often neglect the expansion of ideas and concepts that have become integral threads in the fabric of my practice. Most times being left either totally unexplained or very quickly brushed over. This exercise has shown me the value of writing, through this process I have been able to resolve, reflect and practice immense gratitude for the vast many experiences and opportunities that have flowed to me throughout this MFA journey. I have been afforded the space to extensively develop my making processes within my practice as well as the time to seek out, pick apart and digest words from so many incredible indigenous researchers, theorists and artists, some of whom I have been lucky enough to have spent time with, and others (my mother & father) who have had no choice but to accept my thousands of calls, texts and questions at every and all hours of the day.

It is a privilege to be able to pursue higher education, a responsibility I have not taken lightly. I recognise the uniqueness of my upbringing and am so appreciative of the opportunity I have to embrace this in sharing my experience. It's my hope that through this work, my whānau, friends, colleagues and wider community may be able to see some of their understandings reflected in my own or otherwise encouraged by this to then consider the expansion of their own potential.

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Appendix: Projects completed in association with my MFA, 2019 - 2021

Solo Exhibitions:

Peacocke roundabout development, 2020, Hamilton NZTA

Salutations, 2020, Govett-Brewster Open window

Frank kitts park flags, 2019, Wellington city council

Sweet Taste of Numbness, 2019 Laree Payne Gallery (prev. Weasel Gallery)

Group Exhibitions:

2021:

He Taura Here, Laree Payne Gallery, Hamilton

Auckland Art Fair 2021

2020:

He Tohu, Jhana Millers Gallery Wellington

2019:

Fresh 2019, Jhana Millers Gallery (prev. Millers O'brien Gallery) Wellington

The Garden, Precinct 35 Wellington

Manawataki, Te Puia Rotorua

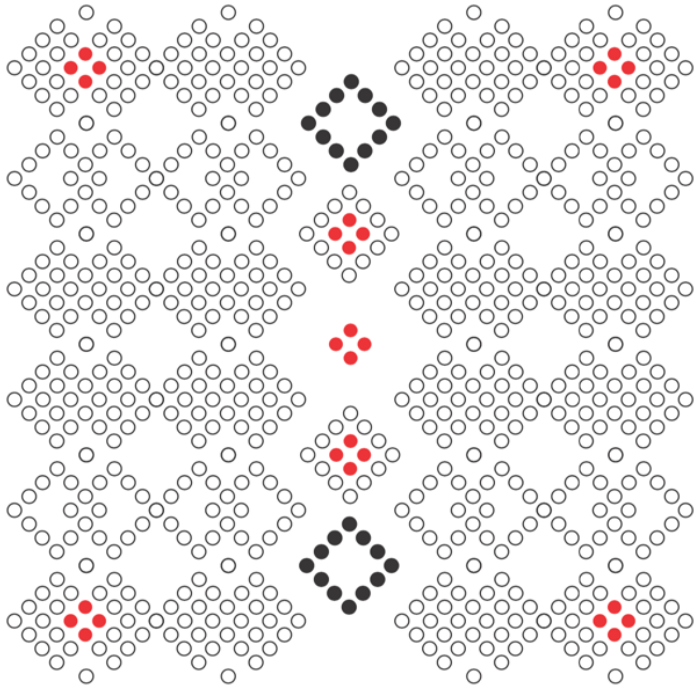
Puhoro o mua Puhoro ki tua, Waikato Museum, Hamilton

Puna, Whakatane city library

Publications artwork:

Pono, for Te Rito o Harakeke, 2019

Peacocke roundabout development, January 2021



Pono, 2019

Waituhi Frank Kitts Park Flags, 2019