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WHARE NGARO

Ashleigh Zimmerman

Ko au te whare ngaro,
a broken whakapapa,
a lost house

Masters in Māori Visual Art



TE KUNENGA | MASSEY
KI PŪREHUROA | UNIVERSITY
UNIVERSITY OF NEW ZEALAND



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An exhibition report presented in partial
fulfilment of the requirements for the
degree of

Masters
in
Māori Visual Art

Massey University,
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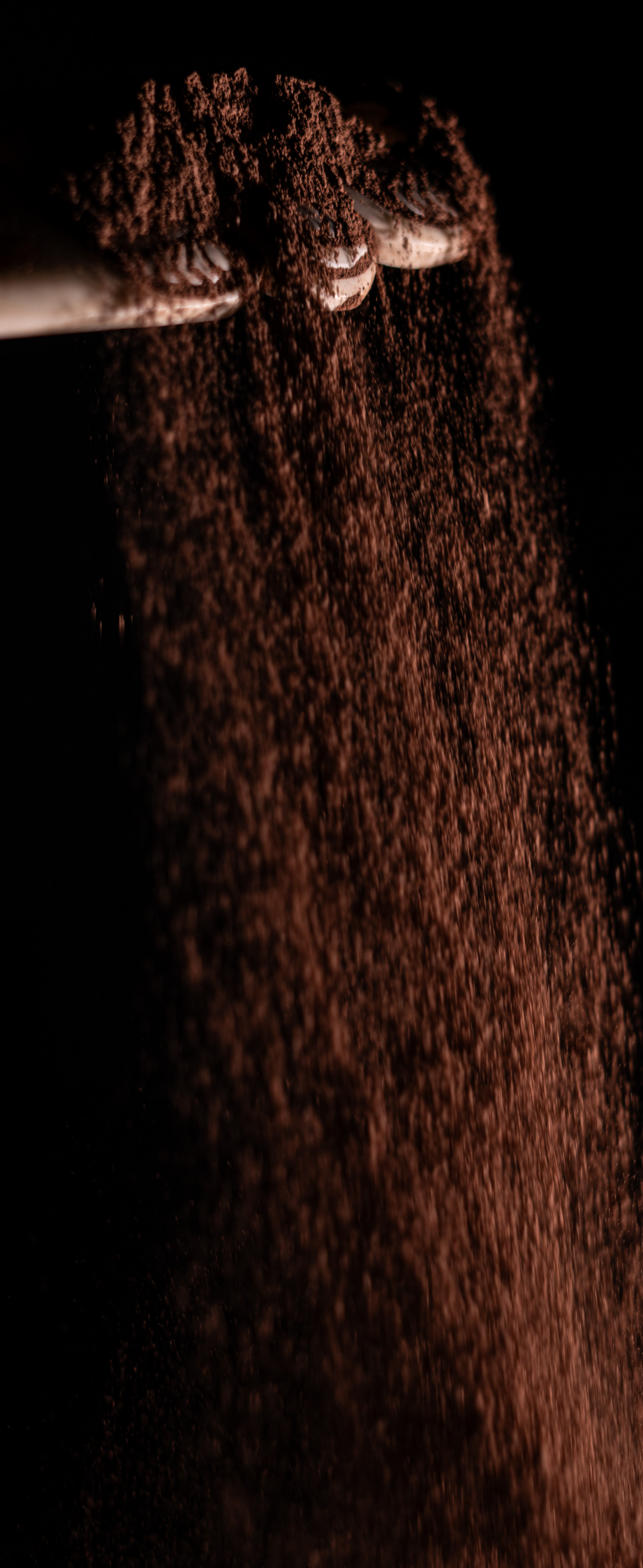
Ashleigh Elizabeth Zimmerman
2024





ABSTRACT

This exegesis contextualises the exhibition *Whare Ngaro*. It addresses the grief, *mamae*, and *whakama* of infertility through a *wahine* Māori lens. The research, methodology and practice that produced the exhibition are woven throughout this thesis. The works of a selection of contemporary indigenous photographers are referenced because they recontextualise the camera within a Māori framework to express notions of *whakapapa*. Other contemporary trans-disciplinary artists using *whenua* are linked to my use of *kōkōwai* to reference *Papatūānuku*. Both conceptual and technical links are established between the concept of conception, Māori creation narratives, and photographic processes. *Whare Ngaro* explores multiple visual *tohu* to communicate the human experience of being trapped in a perpetual state of *Te Kore*. Curatorial considerations and decisions are explained through the development process in relation to the Geoff Wilson Gallery at Whangārei. The impact of this exhibition and *kaupapa* is then reviewed through shared *kōrero* and *pūrakau*.



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Ko Maungatere te maunga.
Ko Rakahuri te awa.
Ko Tūāhuriri te tangata.
Ko Tuahiwi te Marae.
Ko Maahunui Te Tuarua te whareniui.
Ko Ngāi Tūāhuriri te hapū.
Ko Ngāi Tahu te iwi.
Ko McLean te clan.
Nō Ōtautahi ahau.

Ko Maungatapere te maunga e rū nei taku ngākau.
Ko Hatea te awa e mahea nei aku māharahara.
E mihi ana ki ngā tohu o nehe o Whangārei e noho nei au.

Ko Steve rāua ko Penny ōku mātua.
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Ko Ashleigh tōku ingoa.

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INTRODUCTION

MY HAERENGA

*Ka Pō te uha
Mohura, mowairaka
Ka pō te uha, te uha
Me paka ki whea
Te piro, te uha
Te rae, te uha
Te uru, te uha
Te tukemata, te uha
Te ihu, te uha
Te konohi, te uha
Te taringa, te uha
Te waha, te uha
Te kakī, te uha
Te kēkē, te uha
Te ū, te uha
Te poho, te uha
Te kaokao, te uha
Te tuarā, te uha
Te pito, te uha
Te hope, te uha
Te papa, te uha
Te kumu, te uha
Te tīnana, te uha
Te io, te uha
Te pona, te uha
Te waewae, te uha
Mohura, mowairaka Ka pō te uha*

Ko au te Whare Ngaro, a broken whakapapa, a lost house.

My existence is a perpetual cycle of Te Kore through to Te Pō and withdrawal back into Te Kore. Each cycle begins with mate marama, a visceral experience of uha. This mate is the tohu of the lost potential of the marama before, while simultaneously connecting us to the uha of all things, Papatūānuku. The whare tangata returns to a dormant state, the realm of nothingness. Te Kore embodies the tension between potential and manifestation, a void where everything that could exist is formless. The kākano for life is present in separate entities yet to be united and called into physical reality. The ihi of ovulation sparks the intention of the whare tangata to hono the whakapapa of the wahine and the tāne. Entangled in the same tight embrace as Rangī and Papa, this act of creation is older than all of us.

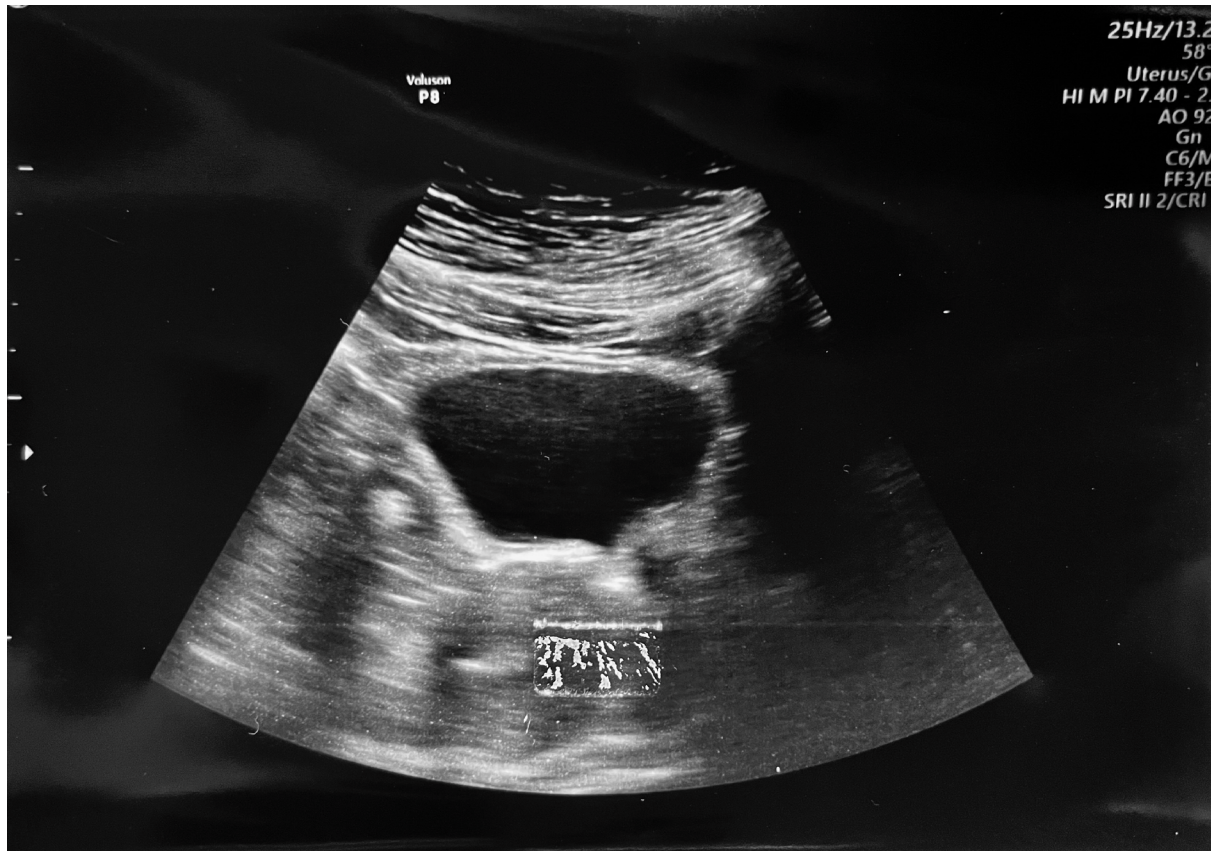


Figure 1 Sonogram, 2024

The potential of Te Kore transitions to a space of growth and gestation, Te Pō. Within the familiar darkness, the forces of creation stir, unseen. The body is neither empty nor full, but suspended in the profound unknown. The whare tangata nurtures the kākano in the depths of its darkness, veiled from the world of Te Ao Mārama. The ihi of life may be taking root, but remains within the dark uha, awaiting its time to emerge and be known. The mārama of motherhood is both distant and achingly close.

Yet not all cycles lead to Te Ao Mārama. Although the seed was sown in the uha of the whare tangata, it does not always bury itself in the whenua. The cycle withdraws back into Te Kore, the realm of nothingness, where potential once again retreats. The whare tangata, once brimming with ihi, now moves into a state of dormancy, echoing the emptiness of Te Kore. For those facing Whare Ngaro, this recession can feel like an ever-deepening loss. Each failed cycle carries the weight of a broken line of whakapapa, and the potential for life dissolves again with the next mate marama. As these cycles continue, the once vibrant hope that accompanied each new marama begins to fade, eroded by the cumulative ache of waiting in the dark. Mourning the echoes of a life that never took form, grieving what could have been. Whare Ngaro speaks to the house that should be full of life but instead remains empty, where the kākano fails to take root and grow. I fear I will never be an ancestor.

This Ngāi Tahu oriori (Rahui, n.d.), with its intricate expressions of creation and the sacred connection between the physical and spiritual worlds, is my karanga to whakapapa. Each verse calls forth the tīnana, piece by piece, as a vessel of uha. A karanga for the kākano to take root, journeying from the unseen depths of Te Kore through the hidden phases of Te Pō and into the light of Te Ao Mārama. This act is an echo of the oriori's ancient plea for life to stir, for whakapapa to be carried forward, bringing with it the promise of new life and the fulfilment of the sacred role of the whare tangata.

Ka Pō te uha.

CHAPTER ONE

LITERATURE REVIEW

As we walk into the future with our eyes firmly affixed on the past, it is important to place my kaupapa within historical and cosmological contexts. By reviewing the literature on The Maori creation narrative, Whakapapa, Whare Ngaro and Whakatō Rite, with a focus on their influence on wahine maori, a foundation can be laid for my own mahi toi practice.

HISTORICAL/CONTEXTUAL REVIEW

Te Kore, Te Pō, Te Ao Marama

*Ka pō, ka ao, ka awatea.
From within the darkness comes light and a new day.*

The Māori creation narrative lays the foundation for the integral role wahine hold in Te Ao Maori. The significance of our creation from darkness into light acts as a metaphor on many levels that I draw upon in the methodology for developing the series Whare Ngaro. The purpose of this section is to contextualise my experiences of whare ngaro as trapped in Te Kore, and decisions made around lighting in the studio for intended effect.

Te Kore is the realm between non-being and being: That is the realm of potential being. It is described as a period without sound, light or movement. A realm of primordial, elemental energy or latent potential. Te Kore is the creation seed from which all things grow. Thus for Māori it connects the allegories of plant growth, and the gestation of life in the womb. In relation to whakapapa, Te Kore acts as metaphor for conception, the time when the mauri of a tāne and a wahine are entwined and a spark of life transcends into Te Pō (Mikaere, 2017, 7).

Te Pō was born from the infinite realms of Te Kore. Referenced as 'The long night,' Te Pō continues to be characterised by long periods of darkness. These references to the dark are likened to a womb where initial sparks of life, energy, and mauri are gestated. This is the womb in which Rangi and Papa were conceived and lived in deep embrace. They produced many children and found great fulfilment in their union as one. For them it was a natural and beautiful relationship, a place of warmth and safety.

As some of the children became restless within the deep embrace, they separated Rangī and Papa. Some versions state that as the children became restless within her, Papa experienced discomfort like that endured during labour. Some children made their way out Papa's urinary tract as she passed water. Rangī and Papa cried wild floods in anguish of their separation and the world passed from the darkness of Te Pō into the light of Te Ao Mārama.

Te Ao Mārama, the world of light, is the land of the living we are all born into. The kupu 'Mārama' also means 'knowledge', and is intrinsically linked to the heightened intensity of love and purpose experienced by those who become parents.

"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" (Marsden, 1992, 3). The female essence at the beginning of the world is therefore all encompassing. The whare tangata provides the framework within which the world comes into being, and the cycle that is repeated with each and every birth.

The Creation narrative is not conceived to be merely an historical account, but can allude to our current realities. The phases of Te Kore, Te Pō and Te Ao Mārama, that brought the world into being, maps onto the birthing process and onto women's bodies. What this narrative highlights is the way in which whakapapa is embodied in and through te whare tangata.

Whakapapa

*Mō tātou, ā, mō kā uri ā muri ake nei
For us and our children after us*

In Te Ao Māori, whakapapa binds all things and is crucial to assertions of Māori identity, mātauranga and mauri. Through whakapapa, generations collapse into each other. We are at once the past and future, our mokopuna and tūpuna, existing in the present. This is how we understand, and travel through, time. (Burgess & Jones, 2023) Each and every thing in existence is a fleeting embodiment of the meeting of past and future generations, in what Moana Jackson describes above as a "series of never ending beginnings" (Jackson & Waikato University, 2014). The preservation and transmission of whakapapa through the generations is intimately connected to the role of wahine reproduction and the creation of life.

As wahine, our ability to create life is our most important contribution to Te Ao Māori. It connects us to our tūpuna and gives birth to our future. This is deeply ingrained in Ngāi Tahu through use of the guiding whakatauki above. Wahine are given tapu status in relation to their cycles, interconnectedness to Papatūānuku, and their role as mothers.

When the components of the kupu whakapapa are broken down, 'whaka' can be interpreted as 'to create/to become' and 'papa' can refer to layers. When combined, whakapapa embodies the notion of creating layers, or placing within layers. While this can be interpreted as layers of ancestry in a whānau bloodline, whakapapa should be considered more holistically as the binding mechanism or the 'lifeblood' through which everything is connected: the physical and metaphysical (Rarere, 2022, 2). 'Papa' also references Papatūānuku, the earth mother. Whakapapa therefore describes the action of 'becoming Papatūānuku', the "generative foundation of all life" because "all things are born of her and nurtured by her" (Royal, 2007).

The significance of the relationships between wahine reproduction/fertility and Papatūānuku, is also reflected in many other te reo Māori concepts. For example, Whānau is often translated as 'family' but also means 'to birth'. Hapū generally refers to a 'sub-tribe' but also means 'pregnant'. The term whenua means both land and placenta. Whare tangata, literally translated means house of the people. The symbolism between the womb space of women and the physical building of a whare is significant. Clearly, whakapapa has a much broader and deeper set of meanings than that connoted by the term fertility—the production of offspring (Weeks, 2016).

At the core of my kaupapa, I acknowledge the importance of all interpretations of whakapapa and the role wahine assume within it. My work questions 'what happens when the ability of whakapapa is taken away?' What is my purpose and what will I leave behind as a wahine Māori who is whare ngaro?

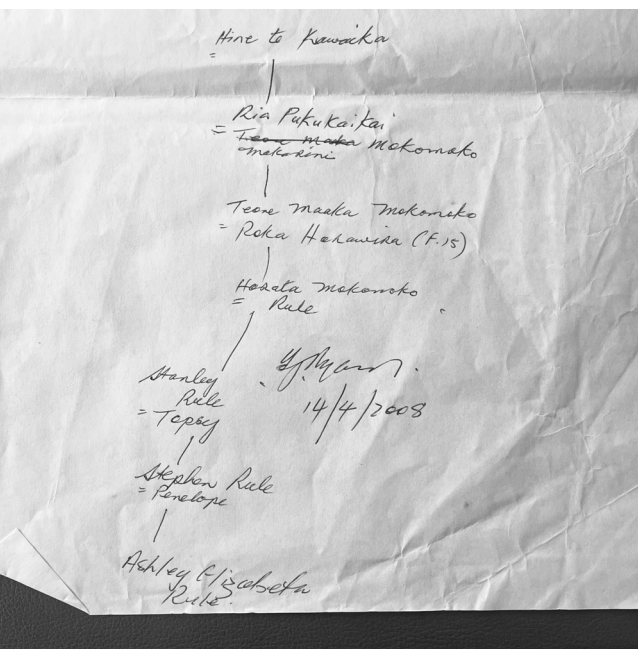


Figure 2 Whakapapa Documents, 2008

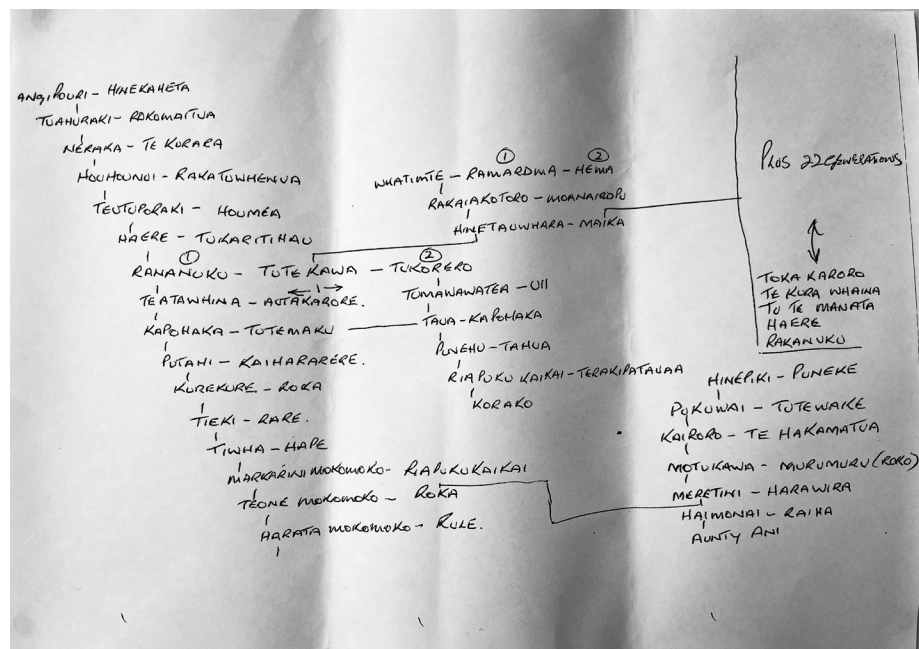


Figure 3 Whakapapa Documents, 2008

Whare Ngaro

Kāhore he uri, he tangi

Without descendants, there are lamentations

The whakataukī “kāhore he uri, he tangi” speaks to the grief that infertility brings to those affected. For Māori, children are not only seen as the manifestation of their ancestors, but also as the seeds of the future generations. Given the importance of whakapapa to Māori, coming to terms with being unable to create life, can invoke feelings of whakama (embarrassment, shame) and mamae (hurt, pain).

Whare Ngaro is a term used to describe wahine and couples that find themselves unable to have children. The whakapapa of the kupu whare ngaro speaks to the capacity of the whare tangata being lost. ‘Ngaro’ can be interpreted as lost, broken or destroyed. The concept of a lost/broken house, physically references the reproductive system, but more holistically references a broken ancestral line (Tupara, 2010). Ngaro can also reference something that is unseen, hidden or invisible, when read within the context of ‘whare ngaro’, speaks to the notion of the private journey that couples struggling to whakapapa internalise. It also represents the hidden nature of the forces at work when trying to conceive, much like the darkness of Te Kore, Te Pō. Once placed within the papa of ‘hinengaro’ the ‘unseen’ becomes related to the intangible notion of thought. When connected with ‘hine’ (the female essence) it speaks to creation, life and essence. This perpetuates the narrative that ‘to whakapapa’ is the core of the wahine experience. The concept of whare ngaro is often heightened for the wahine and developing into a sense of failure in her role.

Since whakapapa interconnects generations, fertility and reproductive issues are often seen as not just that of the couple, but that of the whānau and hapū too. Colonisation put Māori survival at risk, and consequently, high fertility became an important aspect of Māori cultural identity (Webb & Shaw, 2022). The colonial construct of the ‘nuclear family’ reinforced the significance of ‘having your own children.’ When transitioning from a communal living paradigm on the Marae to suburban communities with individual homes, the Māori whānau structure was affected. Couples now lived in their own homes and were supposed to be the sole carers for their tamariki. This intensified the desire for couples to whakapapa and fill an empty home, as there was less sense of shared responsibility for the next generation of the wider hapū. This pākehā structure also impacted on Māori couples’ ability to practise ‘puna rua’ (a Māori version of surrogacy) or whāngai (a Māori version of adoption) arrangements. These contributing factors have led to heightened pressure on couples from themselves, their whānau, and hapū, to whakapapa.

While there is little literature on the topic of Whare Ngaro, there are a few accounts of Whakatō Tamariki and taonga that were performed/used by tohunga to encourage conception. The first part of the karakia would be a plea to rid the woman of her wrong doings from the past or hara (indiscretions), so that she may be absolved of offences against tapu and morality, and no harm would come to the foetus if the outcome of the karakia was successful. This view perpetuates the narrative that women have committed some breach of kawa and being whare ngaro is a punishment. This in my view, is a byproduct of western ideology influenced by Christian values of the history writers at the time. Continuing the rite, the tohunga would stand above her and refer to Io-matangaro and ask for him to bestow upon the woman the mana and the power of Hine-ahu-one.

Across the limited research there are consistent references to wahine atua to bring on reproductive capabilities of Māori. Wearing Hei Tiki were worn to encourage conception in reference to Hine-te-iwaiwa. The tiki is representative of an embryo and often bare figurative representations of female genitalia. There are few geological taonga that have been incorporated in similar ceremonies, including a hīnau tree in Tūhoe, and a rock in Kāwhia by the name of Uenukutuwhatu, that have been recorded through oral histories. (Victoria University of Wellington Library, 2016, 2) Similar to kōkōwai, these landmarks draw connections between Papatūānuku and fertility. Rongoā has also been used to assist fertility. Kohekohe tea has been used to treat and regulate female hormones and kawakawa was used ceremoniously within this context too. Compared to the vast resources on traditional Māori birthing practices, the Whare Ngaro kaupapa still exists in a place of Te Pō within academia. What we do know is that despite the Māori view that all wahine play an important maternal role within the hapū, there remained pressure on wahine to add to whakapapa, and rites were in place to aid in conception.

Traditional Māori rongoā has few recorded treatments for couples experiencing infertility. One rakau that was often turned into a tincture for this purpose was kohekohe. It has hormone balancing properties and relieves menstrual pain. Whare tangata clearing practices such as steaming were regularly performed for the same purpose. Using te taiao to heal physical illnesses was integral for Māori and strengthened bonds to Papatūānuku.

Ko au te Whare Ngaro.

My husband and I have been trying to conceive a child for the past six years. Being a mother is something I always wanted and assumed I would be able to do. Being a father is something I wanted to give to my husband. The most special way to hono our lives.

During our first marama (month) of trying, I fell pregnant. I felt the connection immediately. Three weeks later I experienced whakatahe (miscarriage). The kukune (swelling/growth) ceased and the blood spilled.

Six years later, my whare is empty and our whare is without additional papa.



Figure 4 Whakatō tamariki rite, 2024

ARTIST MODEL REVIEW

This section offers a review of artists who have influenced my practice. Beginning with the development of a wahine Māori visual language with Robyn Kahukiwa's Wahine Toa series. This is followed by a critical reflection on contemporary wahine artists that use whenua as source in their mahi toi. Kezia Whakamoe, Maraea Timutimu and Tessa Williams each consider their relationship to Papatūānuku and use the camera as a tool for documenting this. Lastly, it is important to acknowledge the conventions of Māori Photographers, Fiona Pardington, Lisa Reihana and Rachael Rekena that influenced my photographic approach when creating my exhibition, Whare Ngaro.

The beginning of a Wahine Visual Language

Robyn Kahukiwa's seminal series Wahine Toa articulates and affirms her identity as a Māori Wahine and mother. This series is influential in New Zealand Art History as a feminist interpretation of Māori mythology that redresses the conventional portrayal of women as less important than their male counterparts (Kahukiwa & Friend, 2014). Kahukiwa's



Figure 5 *Hinētītama*, 1980

paintings combine traditional Māori iconography with representational figures to depict wahine histories. Hinētītama is one of eight works in the Wahine toa series which celebrates the essential female element in Te Ao Māori. She was the first human born from the union of Tane and Hineahuone. This painting incorporates several symbols that reference her whakapapa as well as the trauma that she experienced as a wahine. Hinētītama is the mother through which all of humanity whakapapa, represented through the foetus connected to her umbilical cord. A stylised tiki is superimposed on top of Hinētītama representing Tane. She became Hine-nui-te-po, the Goddess of Death, after discovering that Tane was not only her husband, but also her father. The female form is represented part way through her transition through the papa of the ten underworlds. Kahukiwa includes the lizard that references Māui. In this pūrākau Māui tried to defeat death by entering her vagina, but was crushed, bringing morality to humanity. In her foreword, Kahukiwa explains that "each painting is not merely an illustration of the myth, but an attempt to embody the entirety of its narrative" (Grace, 2018, 4). This ambitious approach distances Wahine Toa from many earlier attempts to visualise these stories, and also results in dense, evocative paintings that combine literal and figurative imagery. Kahukiwa's mahi toi has paved the way for distinctly wahine iconography in mainstream art. Her commitment to centralising the female experience is essential in my practice. In the development of Whare Ngaro I embodied these wahine atua in efforts to manifest their mauri.

Whenua as Source

In Te Ao Māori, whenua pigments have been used for a multitude of purposes: artistic, ceremonial, and domestic. A highly localised medium, whenua is inherently political, cultural and sacred. The use of whenua in contemporary art by Māori artists speaks to the historical legacy of the resource. In particular, a connection with Papatūānuku and the wahine experience. This section critically reflects on the influence that Kezia Whakamoe, Maraea Timutimu and Tessa Williams mahi have resonated with my practice in the development of Whare Ngaro.



Figure 6 Aukati, 2021



Figure 7 Aukati, 2022

Kezia Whakamoe's raw and unapologetic aesthetic confronts the issue of grief, providing a space for reclamation of body sovereignty. Her approach to art making provides a unique framework for wahine to process tapu issues through empowering reclamation actions. Whakamoe's work *Aukati* is a creative ritual intervention in transformative justice, born of embodied rage as a response to crimes against wahine. A central pou in Whakamoe's mahi toi is self portraiture or performance as an open invite to a shared experience. Whakamoe explains "as wahine Māori, it is vital for our own healing to be in our own hands; this is what mana motuhake looks like" (Hudson & Whakamoe, 2021). Recognizing that many of our tūpuna had their photographs taken and used without their consent, recontextualised for the takers benefit, Whakamoe photographs herself. She asserts "I own my image" (Whakamoe, 2022, para. 6). Adorning herself with *kōkōwai* acknowledges her collaboration with elements of Papatūānuku and Ranginui framed within a *rongoā* practice. Similarly, when burying her canvases, Whakamoe commits her mahi toi to the bosom of Papa, into the hands of Hine-nui-te-pō. Whakamoe explains "I bury them because that's one thing we have in common, we're all going to die. Hine-nui-te-pō levels it for us" (FitzGerald, 2022, para. 5). By letting the forces of the whenua leave their mark on the canvas (or body), they become an extension of her own and our collective trauma. Whakamoe retrieves the canvases with care while reciting *karakia*, much like birthing a baby. The canvases are an extension of herself and handled with the *mana motuhake* one should expect. "I stitch them back together if they've got holes in them, rub them with homemade balm. It's really like I'm doing that to myself, to anyone I can't reach physically." (FitzGerald, 2022, para. 10) Whakamoe's contemporary exploration of trauma through *rongoā* practice using herself as the vehicle, informs my practice through use of confronting imagery, Papatūānuku pigment and notions of reclamation of body sovereignty. The intention behind *Whare Ngaro* is to visually confront my trauma and present it as an act of acceptance for myself and others similarly affected.

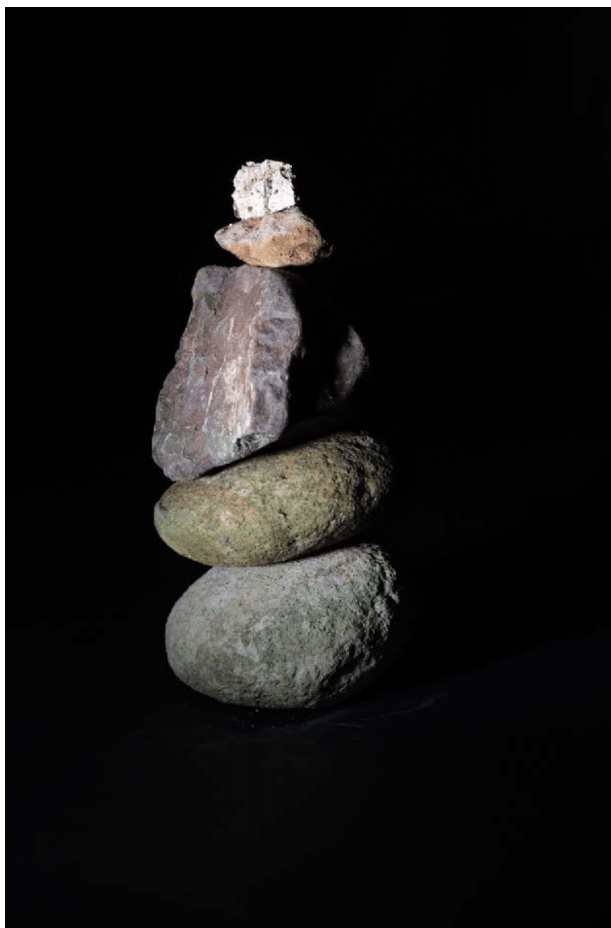


Figure 8 Te Pu, 2022

Maraea Timutimu uses whenua as a source to explore whakapapa in geographical and ancestral terms. Her 'He kāwai whenua He kāwai whakapapa' exhibition presents a series of large scale photographic works that transform whenua into portraits. Stones and rocks are collected from the waterways of her maternal and paternal kāinga at Matapihi, Tauranga Moana, and Rūātoki, Eastern Bay of Plenty. The images are composed through stacking of these artifacts of Papatūānuku, resembling pou forms. By referencing the duality of the kupu 'whakapapa' Timutimu places whenua back into layers as ancestral taonga. She explains: "These layers all have whakapapa, derived from the natural pigments of Papatūānuku connecting it to place and time. It depicts us and the makeup of our individual genealogy" (Maraea Timutimu Exhibition Opening at Tauranga Art Gallery, 2022, para. 3). Timutimu's mahi toi provides a contemporary lens to view whenua as a source when creating a visual language for whakapapa and pushing the boundary of portraiture in photography. Her photographic investigation abstracts the stones through placement into a foreign setting. This promotes investigation from the observer and highlights the natural forms' mauri beyond geographical interpretation. This concept heavily influenced my development of Whare Ngaro. Through similar isolation of the kōkōwai in the studio, it generates conversation about the tapu properties of the pigment and the narratives it carries. Following the methodology of using whenua of geographic significance to my whānau, I directly draw on the mauri of the whenua, Papatūānuku, and our whakapapa.



Figure 9 The Ancestor, 2020

Tessa Williams explores her expressions as a mother using whenua to unapologetically declare the relationship Māori have with their environment. Her work explores delicate balance of forces and is temporal in state. Williams creates impressions in kōkōwai mounds to communicate the fragility of Papatūānuku and wahine alike. The imprints contrast this fragility with strength, being able to self support the form in the face of inevitable destruction (Sanderson Gallery, n.d.). The unfixed nature of the pigment is temporal, however, Williams gives the ethereal artworks a permanence through the vehicle of the photograph. This speaks to the power of the photograph to preserve the mauri of a moment and extend its impact. This balance of fragility and strength is a duality that I have explored in my own practice. The nature of the Whare Ngaro images speaks to the notion of the permanent impermanence of time. My own existence in a perpetual state of Te Kore, unable to conceive a child through Te Pō into Te Ao Marama, is reflected in my methodology. Using shutter speed to freeze time and wild movement gives visual permanence to an uncontrollable existence. The kōkōwai forms depicted in Whare Ngaro can never be exactly replicated and therefore only the ihi of that moment is left behind in the photograph. Williams combines the temporal nature of Papatūānuku and her experience of motherhood to speak on resilience. Comparatively, Whare Ngaro embraces fragile whenua pigments to emphasise the aggressive, uncontrollable trauma of infertility.

Māori Photographers

When considering using the camera as a tool for indigenous expression, it is important to reference indigenous practitioners. This section acknowledges the reclamation of the camera within a Te Ao Maori view in the mahi toi of Fiona Pardington, Lisa Reihana and Rachael Rakena, and critical reflection of the techniques that influenced the production of my series, Whare Ngaro.



Figure 10 *Still Life with Balanced Albatross Feather on Headlight with Barnacles and Bubbles, Ripiro, 2014*



Figure 11 *Still Life with Albatross Feathers with pounamu and coral hearts, Ripiro, 2013*

Fiona Pardington has a long history of photographing taonga and artefacts to reinvigorate their mauri and draw awareness to these forgotten objects from the museum vault. Her documentation of these taonga reflect a critical focus on the qualities of light and its ability to invoke memories and ihi in the viewer. The low museum lighting Pardington observed manifested in poignant arrangements in the tradition of the 17th century Vanitas Still Life paintings. The drama created by the quality of light in the photographs remind the viewer of the transience of life and the inevitability of death. The richness of the material world is undermined by the dark appearance of imminent decay. The images generate a low hum of directional light that skips across the scene allowing details to hide. Life, death, longing and loss are all present in these photographs. The light and colour are controlled in such a way as to make the viewer linger over their velvety surface and question whether they are really looking at a photograph. “I’ve always liked velvet because it’s the imagined interior of the womb. I use it in an ironic way—for me it’s this Freudian, sexualised, great, dark lover. I like it because it takes you immediately into an imaginative space. It cuts off a lot of the three-dimensional references around the objects. That makes it easier for people to slide straight into the mind of the work” (Were, 2013, para. 14). Pardington also heightens our awareness of the photographic frame to abstract the images and blur the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion. “The edge,” says Pardington, “rather than the centre appeals to me. The edge is still the centre and it unwinds forever, whichever distance covered or turn taken. East to west, north to south, the horizon is inexhaustible, unknown, and unreachable. Much like a rainbow, you chase it but will never catch it” (Fiona Pardington | Te Taha O Te Rangi | STARKWHITE, n.d., para. 5). While her works are heavily reliant on negative space to draw attention to the subject matter of her photographs, her work is also characterised by the zoom she employs to crop the objects. This concentration on the frame departs from typical documentation of artifact, alluding to the parts of subject matter that hide beyond the field of vision. This also communicates about the qualities of the object outside of the living world: the whakapapa of the objects and the mana imbued in them by their previous owners. The low and suggestive quality of Pardington’s mahi toi and her intimate cropping of subject matter has heavily influenced the conventions of Whare Ngaro. By employing a singular directional studio light I wanted to bathe parts of my body in shadow. This combined with the cropping in of areas to isolate them from traditional form, abstracts the subject matter and invites the viewers eyes to transverse the photographs for their pictorial qualities.



Figure 12 *Ihi*, 2020

Lisa Reihana's lens-based mahi commands attention through production, scale and the impact of expression created by the performers. Reihana's productions envelop space and draw focus through size and intention. Her works are designed to swallow and flood the viewer's experience through large scale screens that project characters on an unrelatable scale. Reihana's work *Ihi* depicts the pain, the separation and the power of the Māori creation story. In the work, performers use their bodies to tell the story of Ranginui and Papatūānuku as light and energy converging under tension. Incorporating elements of kapa haka and a revolving platform to create a dynamic and changing viewpoint, the viewer can feel the push and pull of life's force. Though the dancers represent our Atua, they also use their bodies and gestures to communicate the relatable human experience of this pain. This quality of performance is characteristic of Reihana's productions. *Ihi* reminds us that we too are bodying our Atua, in real time. In her article *Seeing and Feeling the Essence of Lisa Reihana* Jahra Wasasala describes the relationships evoked by the figures in *Ihi* and how they evoked a deeper connection to Te Ao Māori. She explains, "*Ihi* reminds us that we have the ability to share the same full-throated voice of our Atua. *Ihi* reminds me that my friends' tūpuna walk and breathe and move within

them, and that my tūpuna converse with theirs when we are in relationship with each other. As they do when I am in relationship with them through Lisa Reihana's work" (Wasasala, 2022, para. 13). Reihana curates an experience of shared whakapapa while simultaneously disconnecting the viewer from the work through a sense of awe. Her use of scale and the human form to create *Ihi* and empathy within the work, has influenced decisions I have made in the production of *Whare Ngaro*. Choosing to use my body as the vehicle, combined with the dynamism of movement observed in Reihana's work, communicates the human toll of being *whare ngaro*. Deciding to take the hidden and whakama subject of infertility and printing my works unapologetically large, forces the audience to confront the kaupapa and reflect on their own human experiences in the way that *Ihi* does.

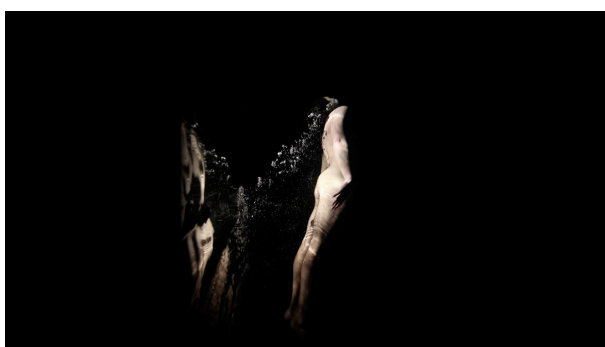


Figure 13 *Te la Tangata*, 2016

Rachel Rakena is a lens-based artist that explores concepts of fluidity of time and wai (water) using video media. Rakena focused on the importance of water in Māori identity. Water is used as a metaphor for a set of mobile relationships concurrent with the digital age and as an alternative to the concept of connectedness through turanga whenua (a place to stand). (Borell & Auckland Art Gallery, 2022) It also operates metaphorically, providing a kind of amniotic fluid for the protection of culture. Rakena uses the immersive experience of water to communicate the feeling of 'otherness', alienation, immersion and "narratives of creation, desire, consumption, bellowing, connection

and ownership." (Rakena & ADA's Indeterminate Infrastructures programme, 2021, para. 3) Rakena claimed a space within the digital and electronic media, giving it the name *toi rerehiko*. The term is given to art that employs electricity, movement and light; to indicate a way of thinking about video art that is distinctly Māori. Rakena compares the dynamism and visceral qualities of water to the movement of video. This coining of the kupu *Toi rerehiko* is similar to the work of Natalie Robinson when developing a Māori framework for photography. Rakena similarly uses hyper contrast between Te Ao Marama and Te Pō lighting techniques to further abstract figures and enhance the sense of isolation in her mahi. Despite my mahi remaining as still photographs, Rakena's mahi *toi* has been influential in my exploration of wai, perspective, and lighting. In the development of *Whare Ngaro*, I explored many iterations of water as a way of cleansing the body of tapu. Water is used in *Whare Ngaro* as a reference to blood (menstrual blood and whakapapa bloodlines), tears, cleansing, and amniotic fluid. I also explored the light-conducting properties of the water to enhance the visual language of light and dark inspired by Rakena's works.

CHAPTER TWO

METHODOLOGIES

Photography as the Medium

This section outlines the Māori Methodology that contextualises Photography and the camera as appropriate vehicles for creating my own expression of whare ngaro.

Along with Whakairo, rāranga, and kōrero, Photography has brought another dimension to maintaining tribal records of history and whakapapa. Māori language activist, Huirangi Waikerepuru highlights the value of Photography in cultural identity, asserting that “photography is like writing stories, recording stories, recording history” (Robertson, 2017, 47). In my view Photography as an experiential artform. It requires the photographer to be in the world of the living, in the moment, creating the actions that produce a document of that experience. The photograph is the record of this, and a tool to relive it.

When introduced, Māori experienced a troubled relationship with the camera. Images taken of indigenous peoples living in the path of rapid colonial expansion were often ethnographic and particularly evocative. Many of the images were exploitative and voyeuristic, produced from a British lens, for the British audience as a way for them to vicariously experience the world beyond drawn or verbal accounts. The camera is sometimes likened to the gun as an instrument of colonial repression (Graham-Stewart & Gow, 2006). In Aotearoa, it was used to establish and reinforce a stereotypical view of Māori, turning them into a salable commodity. It is assumed that these subjects were rarely in a position to exert control as to how they were portrayed and the result was a perception evolved and nurtured by the photographers. John Turner noted that in the early photographs of Māori “the degree of blur of some of the sitters indicates that the photographer had more difficulty than usual in controlling subjects for the long exposure time” (Turner, 1970, 17). This suggests that the relationship between the photographer and the subject was not mutual. It is not until the 1890’s that we see evidence of Māori embracing photographs of the deceased in tangihanga practices. This is where we see a shift in the relationship Māori have with the photograph. They became taonga and acted as the connective tissue between generations and a visual representation of whakapapa.

Erena Baker considers the inclusion of photographic imagery as the fourth *toi māori* of the whareniui alongside whakairo, raranga, and tukutuku. These portraits are now an integral part of how we visualise whakapapa on the tuarongo, valued for their ability to capture the mauri of a person. Photographs of the mate (deceased) were woven into tikanga, particularly in relation to tangihanga (funerals) where they were directly addressed as if they were physically present. Over time these lined the interior walls of whareniui. When displayed in this manner it acknowledges the whakapapa of those pictured with their carved tīpuna. “When we view portraits of our ancestors along with those who have recently departed this connection is carried through to us in the present day.” (Baker,

Figure 14 *Maori Study, Circa 1870.*



Figure 15 *Group of Maori girls outside Whare. Circa 1865.*



Figure 16 *Mourners at Tangi Natanahira te Umutapu Wi Parata Whakarongotai Marae, Wakanae, 1932*

Figure 17 *Interior, Ngati-Manu Wharenui, Karetu Marae, Northland, 2014*



2010, 13) As Māori, we have always been early adopters of new technology. In terms of Photography, Baker implies its status as a tool for capturing mauri is integral to Maori visual expressions of whakapapa. This kōrero is important to my practice when developing the series *Whare Ngaro*. Each photograph in my exhibition embodies the mauri of lost kakano and the potential of whakapapa.

In Te Reo Maori the kupu for Photograph is Whakaahua. Whaka activates the word āhua into becoming, or being. This kupu asserts from a Māori perspective, that photographs are not dead or lifeless objects, but are constantly in a process of becoming form as things with their own agency and interconnected relations in the phenomenological world (Robertson, 2017). They may be repositories for the energies present at the moment of the film negative/digital sensor's exposure to light. As taonga, photographs are activated through kōrero with the viewer. It is through interactions such as viewing, hongī, kissing and touching of the photograph that it transcends the material world and activates concepts of ihi (awesome presence), wehi (tingling feeling of excitement) and wana (unquestioned competence and authority) (Mead, 1984). Thus, Māori's relationship with the photograph developed through reconceptualisation of the material object's ability to extend beyond representation of form, time and place. When activated with individual and collective experiences of mana, wairua, and mauri, the photograph exists in the state of continually becoming: whakaahua.

Through a Maori perspective, the Camera can be viewed as a tool for artmaking that emulates the Māori creation narrative. Natalie Roberston reimagines the camera by drawing parallels between Te kore, Te Pō and Te Ao Marama and the traversing of light through dark in the process of becoming (Robinson, 2012). Before a photograph is taken, the chamber of the camera is devoid of light and in a state of Te Pō. The digital sensor is poised to receive light and therefore is charged with the latent potential for an image to be conceived. This reflects the realm of Te Kore. Light is let in through the lens at the moment of creation. The light of Te Ao Marama that floods the darkness of the camera can be considered the ihi. Behind that spark of potential, is the agency of the person operating the camera. The photographer observes their subject from Te Ao Marama, and frames their perspective within the viewfinder. They compose the settings on the camera to control the variables of shutter speed, focus and aperture. Beyond this, the photographer becomes passive to the elemental process of exposure within the camera. From this perspective, photographs are not 'taken' or 'made' by the artist, rather, they are 'received.' The aperture of the camera replicates the aperture of the photographer's eye and therefore captures their world view.

When considering this Māori perspective, Photography is an appropriate vehicle for my practice. It draws comparisons to the creation narrative in multiple papa. The birth of the world from darkness into light is intrinsically linked to the birth of a child from the whare tangata. This speaks to my kaupapa on the level of wanting to whakapapa, however, existing in a perpetual space of Te Kore. My selected tool, the camera, harnesses the energy of Te Kore and Te Pō to its advantage. Careful control and limiting of light through the opening of the lens, parallels my perspective from inside the metaphysical womb, yet to be birthed into Te Ao Marama as a mother. At the moment of creation, a photograph records the ihi of the moment and the mauri of both the photographer and sitter. In my self portraiture approach, I am both parties. An internal dialogue of experience is captured in between the forces of light and dark. These photographs are later reactivated through interactions with the viewer, becoming a larger conversation about collective experiences of trauma, grief, whakapapa, motherhood and whare ngaro.

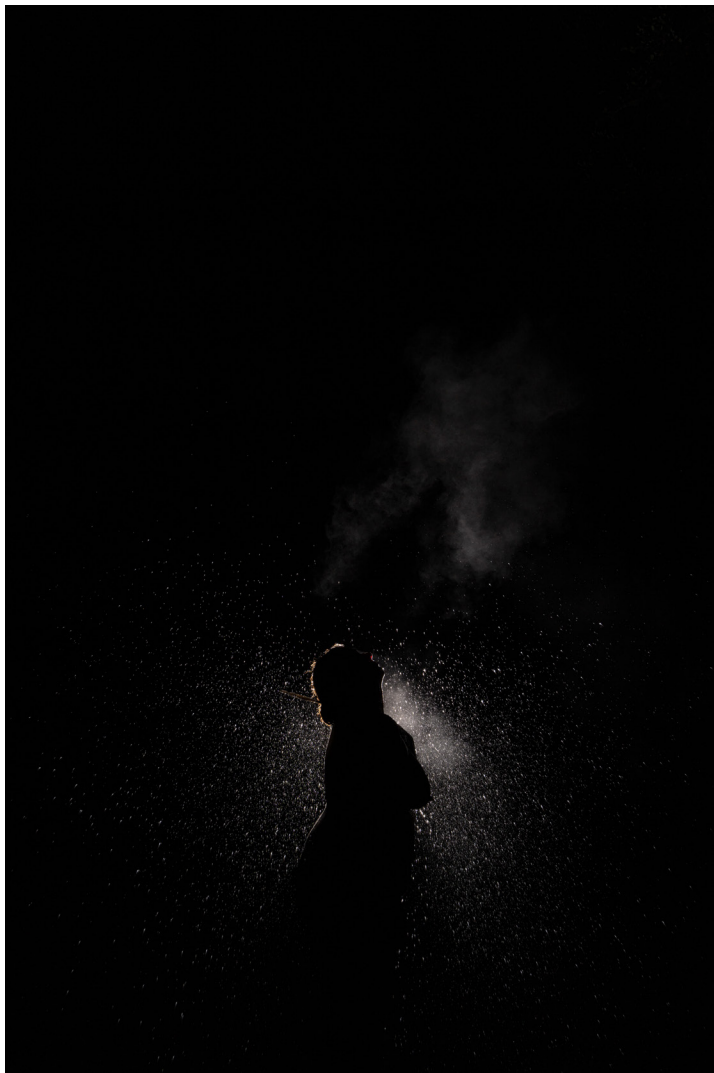


Figure 18 Te Pō, 2024



Figure 19 Studio Setup with TV monitor, 2024

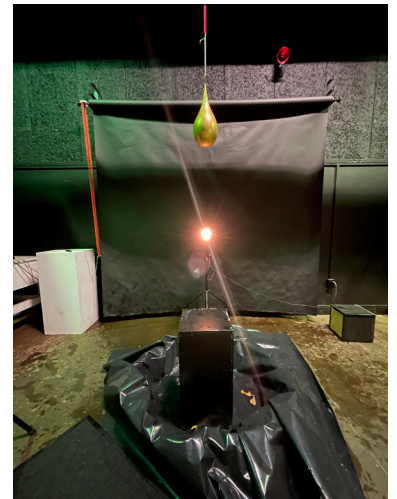


Figure 20 Studio Setup with water balloon, 2024

Studio Lighting

Te kore is an influential framework for Whare Ngaro that encapsulates my hinengaro, my whare tangata, my camera, and my studio practice. This concentration on the essential elements of light and dark are central to my lighting decisions in the studio.

Within this body of work, the darkness of black, the lack of light is central to my depiction of the uha. This is a flipped narrative in photography. Traditionally the measure of light is what determines the exposure. In my work, the lack of light is central to the kaupapa within which I am working. This dynamic interaction between light and dark, negative and positive spaces in the picture plane, also reference the balance between ira atua and ira tangata. As seen in other examples of Māori art such as whakairo and kōwhaiwhai, the 'cut out' areas of the design are integral to the overall form. In Whare Ngaro the exposure is calibrated for the depth of negative space (the ira atua of the spiritual realm), in balance with the depiction of the human form (ira tangata of the physical world). To achieve this intensity of black, a high amount of light 'fall off' is needed. For this, I required a strong singular flash studio lighting unit and a controlled lighting studio.

The studio I worked in had the ability to be completely blacked out. This was critical for the exploration of light painting, strobe and harsh directional lighting in my mahi. In the beginning of time there was nothing in Te Kore, and everyday when I walked into the studio there was darkness. This directly links to Natalie Robinson's Māori Camera methodology. The black-out studio adds an additional papa to Robinson's metaphor by encapsulating the Camera within a larger Te Kore. The camera can begin an exposure, however, without the ihi of the studio light, the potential for an image is unrealised.

Figure 21 Studio Setup with paddling pool, 2024



Figure 22 Studio Setup with glass, 2024



Figure 23 Wai Study, 2024



An additional metaphor that can explain the significance of the studio is its relationship to the whareniui. Shades of light and darkness emphasised in traditional architecture of the whare are important in whakapapa kōrero narratives, as evidenced by the names given to the various shades and intensity that exist between total darkness and total daylight. This convention is reminiscent of the view from inside the whare, observing the light from Te Ao Marama through the aperture of the kūwaha and the pihanga. In this analogy the frame of the photograph is observed in the rectangle of the window and door. During daylight the intensity of the darkness from the back wall gradually receded to the front wall, to the shaded daylight of the porch, to the full daylight of the open marae ātea (Smith, 2019).

With the additional papa of reference to the whare tangata, the all encompassing black-out studio acts as a security blanket like the womb. Despite western narratives about the 'nothingness' and 'negativity' of black, it also soothed me as I embraced the kaupapa of whare ngaro.

As my mahi toi developed over the course of the year, I explored silhouette as an unconventional approach to portraiture. Other effects that were essential in my visual journey were the light conductive power of water, and the strobe technique. By illuminating a variety of water sources with back lighting, I was able to visually depict the ihi of creation. Strobing was explored as a technique to manually layer multiple exposures in a single image. This was used to communicate the collapsing of time within the whare ngaro experience. A small series of images exploring the use of a Go-Bo focusing lens on the front of the light, flipped the narrative and allowed the ihi of the light to be the subject matter. Upon critical reflection, these images felt too precise and controlled for the narrative I am trying to communicate.



Figure 24 *Multiplicities*, 2024 *Figure 25* *Pare Kawakawa*, 2024 *Figure 26* *Steam Study*, 2024

Through these lighting-focused dissociative portraits, I developed the confidence to move into frontally lit images that are highly directional. These images for the base of the Whare Ngaro refined series. To enhance the contrast of the light and deepen the shadows I used a snoot attachment on the light. This narrowed the field of the beam of light. When this was placed off center, it emphasised the natural curves of the body and allowed shadowed areas of the form to melt into the darkness of the background.

Self portraiture

He aha te mea nui o te ao? He tangata! He tangata! He tangata!

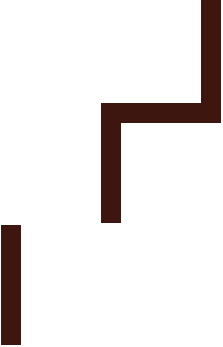
What is the most important thing in the world? It is people! It is people! It is people!

Self portraiture is an important methodology in my practice. As a woman experiencing a troubled relationship with my body, it is appropriate that I use it as subject matter to visually communicate this. Navigating the concept of Whare Ngaro due to the inability of my body to become hapū like the atua Papatūānuku and Hinetitama, causes me to confront my purpose as a wahine. Self portraiture allows me to critically explore this duality of experience. As the photographer, I construct narratives from behind the camera through careful consideration of the visual elements inside the frame. As subject matter, I create dialogue with my body from my position in front of the lens. In essence, I collaborate with myself to develop a personal visual language.

When creating this series of photographs, I worked completely alone in the studio. This methodological approach of working in isolation was appropriate for my kaupapa. Conceptually my work centers around the mamae and isolation that couples experience when struggling with infertility. Taking photographs of myself embraced this isolation and presented challenges that produced some unexpected results. Using a tripod, the self timer feature, and the continuous shoot function on my camera was essential to my process. It allowed for a balance between concepts of matau and maui when taking the images. Traditionally, photography is a measured artwork that relies on combinations of settings to achieve 'correct' focus and exposure. By selecting my camera settings and framing ahead of time, then adopting the submissive role in the photograph, meant I had to relinquish elements of matau (control). I had to embrace the spontaneity of maui and search for the ihi moments when scrolling through the hundreds of photographs taken in each session. This divine balance between matau and maui is also reminiscent of the uncontrollable factors of infertility. Placing the camera on a tripod, offered different angles of view of my body that I am not used to seeing. Critically reviewing these different perspectives was confronting and difficult at times.

My photographs are atypical portraits that conceal the face of the subject. This is designed to create a sense of tension and anonymity, reflecting the commonly held notion that a woman is not whole until she becomes a mother. Although my kaupapa is about my own journey, it communicates so much more universally about body autonomy, trauma and grief. I represent all women and our vastly differing relationships with our whare tangata. The positioning of my face in darkness also symbolises thoughts of being mentally stuck in a perpetual state in Te Kore. In these images Te Ao Marama represents the land of the living, the birth of a child, the becoming of a mother, and therefore it is appropriate that all my portraits are turned away from the singular light source.

These photographs embrace the female gaze through a wahine Māori lens. My nude body is exposed and presented to the viewer devoid of sexual connotation, instead creating quiet intimacy through close up framing and abstraction. When creating these images, I focused on the areas of the body related to motherhood, my belly, hips and thighs. The closeness achieved in the photographs engages the viewer on a personal level and creates a safe space to be vulnerable in front of them. The level of abstraction achieved renders the body parts almost indistinguishable. The sense of scale in the images is disrupted when the body envelops the frame. The lines of my body become landscape forms inside their own world, drawing comparisons to Papatūānuku.



Using a 50mm prime lens and aperture of F1.8 when taking these photographs created an extremely shallow depth of field. The illusive small areas of focus force the viewers eyes to track over the whole photograph and explore my body. These areas of reprieve that are in focus often land on an unexpected fold, curve or texture of the skin. The self portraiture process affected my ability to control the focus of the photographs. Without having myself in the frame when setting the focus prior to the photograph being taken, it wasn't until reviewing the images that I would be able to see where focal points were created. To provide variety and opportunity for different focal points, I would create micro-movements backward and forward within the depth of field during the continuous shooting session. This relinquishing of control embraced the maui of the moment and produced results fit the kaupapa appropriately. The focus of these works is rarely centralised, creating unbalanced compositions, adding to the visual tension of the image.

The choice to work within the convention of self portraiture when developing this series, is appropriate to my kaupapa. Using my body as the subject matter and intimate abstraction techniques, communicates the complex emotions evoked by Whare Ngaro.



Figure 27
Shutter speed
Study, 2024

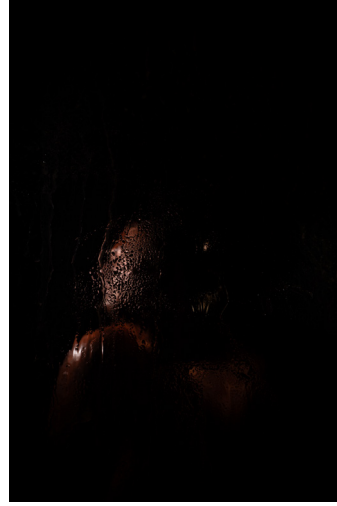


Figure 28 *Glass and*
Wai Study, 2024



Figure 29
Underwater
Study, 2024



Figure 30 *Untitled*
Close Up, 2024

Kōkōwai

*Manawa mai tēnei i Ahuone mai
Manawa mai tēnei i whenuatia
Manawa mai tēnei he kapunga oneone
Tēnei te mauri
O Papatūānuku
O Tūparimaunga
O Parawhenuamea
O Ukurangi
E whakaata mai nei e*

Kōkōwai is an important pigment for Māori and is deeply embedded in kōrero relating to wahine reproduction cycles and birthing practices. This red ochre is deeply symbolic in Te Ao Māori and is associated with rituals of tapu. Kōkōwai is found and processed to appear as a multitude of shades that all bare reference to blood. The whakapapa of kōkōwai originates from the separation of Ranginui and Papatūānuku's tight embrace. When they were torn apart by their children, blood spilled from Rangi and soaked into Papa down on earth and manifested as kōkōwai. (Furey, n.d.) Obvious connotations can be drawn between the blood and tearing when compared to a woman's experience of childbirth. When we also consider the vital role of Papatūānuku's kurawaka in the forming of Hineahuone, stronger connections are formed between kōkōwai and a woman's whare tangata. The kurawaka was said to be a pool of water at Papa's fertile area that ran red. There he found her uha, the female essence that would compliment his maleness and create humanity. Tāne formed Hineahuone and breathed the Hā of life into her. It is from this relationship to menstrual cycles and Papatūānuku that kōkōwai inherits its tapu status.

Māori used the pigment to adorn tapu objects, places and persons of status as dictated by whakapapa. Full coating of the body with kōkōwai, with or without oil, was described in accounts from Captain James Cook's voyages. "They paint their faces with a coarse red paint, and oil or grease the head and upper part of the body" (Mitchell & Mitchell, 1994, p.180). Dr Shortland remarks that "a reason for some persons painting their body and clothes was that they might leave a mark behind them, that people might know where their sacred bodies had rested." (Walsh, 1903, p.8) An example of this was found in a swamp below a pā at Kauri Point in the western Bay of Plenty. Numerous small wooden hair combs and other wooden artefacts were found in an enclosure. The combs were stained red and had thick deposits of kōkōwai remaining between the teeth, probably from being in hair that was coated with kōkōwai and oil. Many of the combs appeared to have been

Figure 31 Tomb of Huriwenua, a Late Cheif of the Nga Ti Toa Tribe, Queen Charlotte Sound, 1847

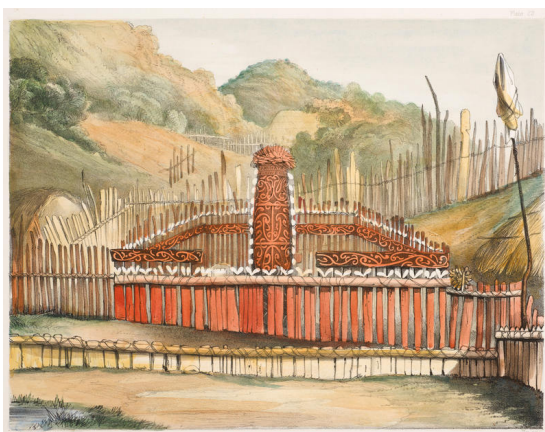
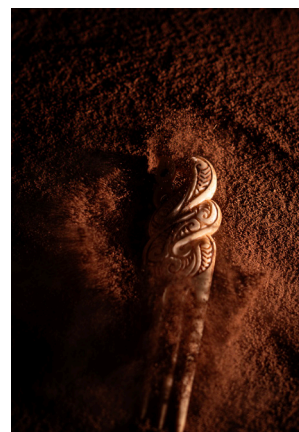


Figure 32 Heru and Kōkōwai Study, 2024



deliberately broken, perhaps to remove the state of tapu before being placed in the swamp. (Furey, n.d.) After death, the place where a corpse was rested prior to burial was daubed with kōkōwai to signify a tapu state. This can be seen in the Tomb of Huriwhenua, a late chief of the .. Ngātii Toa Tribe, Queen Charlotte Sound painted by George French Angus in 1844. In the case of secondary burial when the bones were prepared for interment, they were often coated in kōkōwai. (Furey, n.d.) The use of kōkōwai in ceremony and adornment was also a way to hono iwi and support turangawaewae. Using pigments from Papatūānuku that are geographically significant to particular hapū and iwi, honor the relationship they have to the whenua. Recalling that the whareniui is a symbol for the whare tangata, many were stained with kōkōwai. If the whareniui is the womb, the pare is over the kūwaha is the opening in which we pass into the living world. Painting elements inside and outside the whare with kōkōwai directly references our entry into the world through our mothers.

The significance of kōkōwai in customs and practices relating to wahine atua, the whare tangata, and death; contextualises the use of the pigment in my practice. Covering my own body with kōkōwai is an effort to manifest a state of tapū. Following in the footsteps of Tāne by staring into the kurawaka, I draw on Hineahuone and her motherly energy. I overcompensate for my perceived inadequacies as a woman and literally place myself within layers of Papatūānuku.

I harvested the kōkōwai used in these images, with my husband, from Maunganui Bluff on the West Coast. (Figure 33) This is where my husband lived as a child. His whānau are deeply connected to this landscape. As part of my methodology, it was important for me to recognise that my experience of whare ngaro is not just about my relationship with my body, It also involves my husband. When a child is conceived it involves the intertwining of the mother's and the father's whakapapa. When this doesn't happen, it is natural to consider how this might affect the wahine, however, it is also important to consider the impact this has on the tāne. When visiting and collecting the kōkōwai, we reflected on how this is also the whenua where my husband's younger brother was buried. He had suffered from a brain tumour and passed away at the age of two years old. This spoke to our own experience of trauma, and the kōkōwai harvested that day carries with it the grief of that experience for his whānau.



Figure 33 Brett Zimmerman
Harvesting
Kōkōwai from
a natural seam
in the cliff at
Maunganui Bluff,
Northland, 2024



Figure 34 Processing the kōkōwai, 2024



Figure 35 Processing the kōkōwai, 2024

Across the different images presented in my final exhibition, kōkōwai is represented in a variety of different states. Some images utilise kō (the pigment in its dry state), others use kōkōwai where the pigment is combined with water or oil. The varying states of kōkōwai physically interact with the body and water differently to achieve a full range of visual effects. What unifies my approach across the images is the capturing of the kōkōwai in a state of movement. The methodology of using kōkōwai that was collected, after doing karakia, from a significant whenua, and with the understanding of its tapu references, contextualises the Whare Ngaro series.

It was with whenua that Tāne formed the first woman, Hineahuone. Pulled from the earth, kōkōwai has the ability to convey our links to the geological and spiritual past, uniting tāngata, atua, and whenua. Kōkōwai speaks to these traditions and meanings while also emphatically placing my work within the world of contemporary toi Māori.

Oriori 'Ka pō te uha'

This oriori continually references back to 'te uha.' Te uha represents the strength and tapu nature of the whare tangata of the wahine toa during birth. This oriori connects my rangahau and my wahine Māori lens in the development of Whare Ngaro. As a Ngāi tahu woman, it also speaks to my whakapapa while simultaneously challenging my emotions as a wahine unable to add to this lineage.

'Ka pō te uha' meaning 'the femininity is darkened,' refers to the safety of the darkness of the womb. This is where the unformed kākano becomes formed by the power of te uha acting as te Pō. The oriori addresses the pēpi into being, into the realm of Te Ao Marama. As each line references a different body part of the child, it speaks to the ability of the whare tangata to create life. Within the context of my kaupapa, these references to the tinana, draw attention to my own relationship with my body and its inability to perform this sacred ritual (Rahui, n.d.). It grounds the oriori in the human form and speaks to the visceral qualities of womanhood and birth. This is reflected in focus and intimate self portraiture in the exhibition. When recontextualising this oriori to incorporate it in Whare Ngaro, I considered it a karanga to conceive. Calling the ihi into my perpetual existence in Te Kore and to progress through these stages of development to create a child. Instead of speaking to the pēpi in my whare tangata, I call into the void to manifest the spark of potential whakapapa.

Jahnke describes the disproportionately negative connotations of the female gender in early European records, which regarded females as inferior, destructive and the origin of disease. By embracing te uha in this oriori, it takes back the power of the cervix. Jahnke's perspective elevates te uha not just as a biological contributor, but as a critical spiritual and cultural element that sustains whānau, iwi, and the broader Māori worldview (Jahnke, 2006). This is intrinsically linked to the notion of ira tangata (the essence of humanity), which emanates from Papatūānuku. It was the red earth at the kurawaka that conveyed the fructifying power necessary to imbue Hine-ahu-one with the potential for life and the essence of ira tangata. (Jahnke, 2006). Our Ira tangata is returned to our collective māmā, Papatūānuku upon our death, as our body is returned to the whenua. This physical manifestation of the Māori experience is paralleled by the existence of ira atua (the essence of the atua). When we die, our ira atua, in the form of wairua, returns to the spiritual domain of Te Pō. Therefore, when we die, we are never ngaro, we are simply returned to the cosmological states from which we were conceived.

The cyclinic notion of the ira tangata is closely linked to the grieving process expressed during the forming of uku tangi as described by Ruby Solly. Her research around taonga puoro describes the act of expressing grief through performance by forming a uku tangi from ancestral whenua of the deceased. Due to the nature of the unfired, wet uku, the performer's hā is needed to warm the instrument before a clear sound can be heard (Solly, 2022). By sharing our breath of life into uku, we are connecting back to Papa and our ira tangata. Once we have performed our grief into the uku, we return the uku tangi to the whenua to symbolise the returning of the ira tangata to Papatūānuku. Solly's research inspired my use of the whenua to talk about grief, and how the ira tangata is intrinsically linked to wahine.

Although my ira tangata may never carry a child, my ira atua will still impact future generations to come. Whare Ngaro focuses on the female experience of infertility, however, it represents a wider audience due to our elevated relationship with te uha. The incorporation of 'Ka pō te uha' is critical to the unpinning rangahau and methodologies of this exhibition.

Figure 36 Self Portrait
Playing Uku Tangi,
2024

Figure 37 Detail of
Ukutangi, 2024



CHAPTER THREE

BODY OF WORK

Whare Ngaro

Kua hua te marama
Something has completed a full cycle

Artwork Descriptions:

Whare Ngaro explores ritualistic application of kōkōwai to the wahine form. The large scale of the works draw on this source of whakama and mamae and presents it on a confronting scale for contemplation. The rawness of the wahine body is uncomfortable, yet intimacy is generated from the close proximity to the subject matter. The wahine Māori gaze gives mana to this depiction of women in their most vulnerable and tapū state. Empathy is demanded, not sympathy. The imagery is explicit while simultaneously being abstracted to point of ambiguity. This allows the form to represent the viewers' mother, wife, daughter, tipuna and Pāpātuanuku. The photographs become a connection point for all our maternal whakapapa. The red ochre of the kōkōwai is visceral and immediately communicates blood, menstruation and trauma. Wai is captured cleansing the body. It speaks of bathing, baptism and tears. Water is comforting. We all enter the world through our mothers waters. The narrow field of focus invites the eye to trace the curvature of the body as if it were a landscape before anchoring on a gritty point of focus. These contemplative flesh landscapes are complimented by the dynamism of the kō (kōkōwai without the addition of oil or water) portraits. The kō is unfertilised kōkōwai and visualises a primal existential scream. The tapū of the wahine experience is rejected from the body from the head, the source of the hinengaro. The images perform grief through an expelling motion that is endless. In the final image the heru is cast from the position in the tikitiki (top knot). Traditionally symbolising status, heru acted as an extension of the tikitiki to the atua above. It is broken in this gesture, exiting the frame of the photograph. A broken connection to the atua, removal of tapū, and a broken whare.

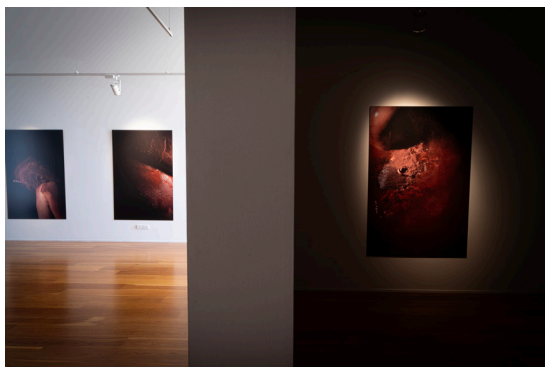


Figure 38 Installation Photograph of Whare Ngaro Exhibition. Geoff Wilson Gallery, Whangārei, 2024

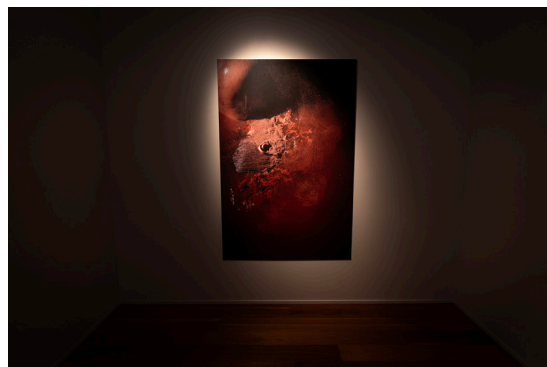


Figure 39 Installation Photograph of Whare Ngaro Exhibition - side room detail. Geoff Wilson Gallery, Whangārei, 2024

The central image in the exhibition space pulls back in perspective and relinquishes the kō upwards as breath exhaled. The hā of life is released back into Te Pō to be recirculated and the wiri of the hand references the heat of 'ngi' rising.

This final image has been included in the small darkened corner of the gallery space that departs from the cyclic nature of the Geoff Wilson Gallery. The other images in the gallery are presented with a sense of symmetry and designed to be read as one collective work. This small dark space offers a unique experience that interjects in the reading of the exhibition as a whole. The inclusion of this artwork departs from the intention of the remainder of the artworks. It is a wharemate that is enveloped in darkness and viewed as separate. This artwork is about my miscarriage in 2018. The whakaahua is more visceral than the other images and is gritty in its honest interpretation of kōkōwai/blood. The portrait is inverted and seconds before complete submersion. This work is my most emotionally charged image and for this reason it has not been included in the exhibition catalogue. I was only prepared to be this emotionally vulnerable in front of audiences that viewed the work in this safe reflective space that I have curated.



Figure 40 Installation Photograph of Whare Ngāro Exhibition - Facing Entrance. Geoff Wilson Gallery, Whangārei, 2024

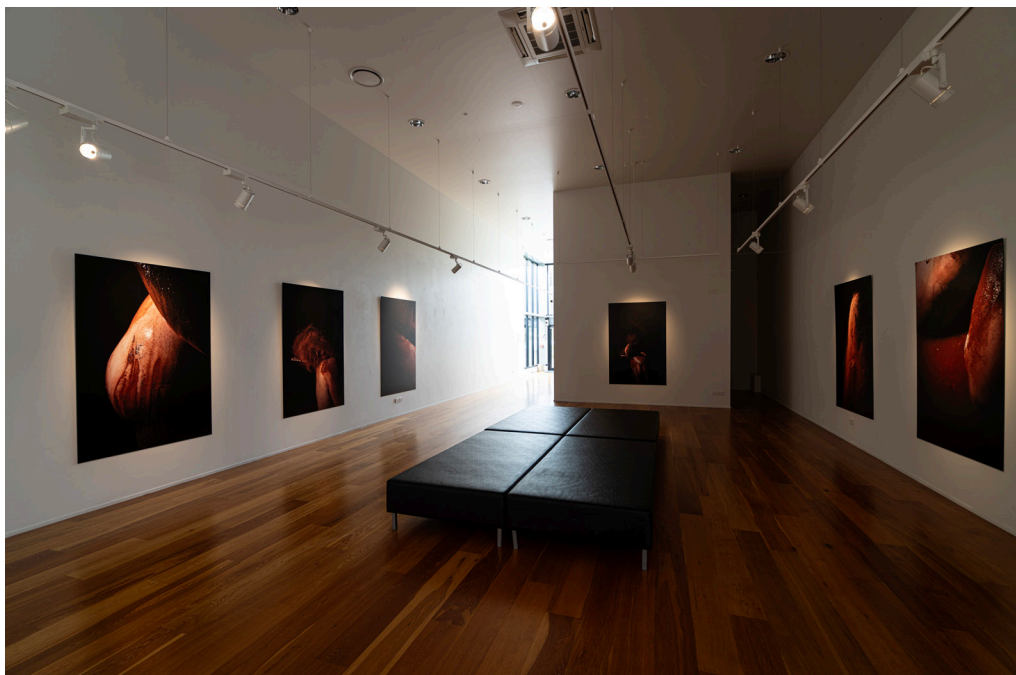


Figure 41 Installation Photograph of Whare Ngāro Exhibition. Geoff Wilson Gallery, Whangārei, 2024

Gallery Features and Curatorial Decisions:

The Geoff Wilson Gallery bares qualities that compliment my kaupapa and the metaphors within which my practice is conceptualised. When entering the Gallery you proceed from a glass-walled area where Te Ao Marama floods in, through a narrow passage into the belly of the gallery. This space is enclosed for the most part, acting as a shroud of protection, a whare tangata for my mahi. Towards the back of the gallery, a narrow corridor leads to a full length glass wall where natural light spills into the space. When reflecting on my kaupapa, this beam of light represents the exit from Te Kore and Te Pō, into Te Ao Marama of motherhood. My relationship with motherhood dictates that my mahi toi does not enter this space and instead is curated to read in a circular motion to keep within the comfort of the darkness of the whare tangata. The walls of the traditional meeting house have always been a protected space, a refuge for the vulnerable during disputes. The interior of the wharenuī is also the domain of Hinenuitepo. When Tāne and Hinetitama separated, she told him to remain in Te Ao Mārama, and take care of their offspring, as she would care for their wairua in the world of darkness, Te Pō. The protection of the wairua in Te Pō includes the protection of the ngākau or internal system within the human body, where the wairua is located during daylight (Smith, 2019). My photographs carry much whakama and mamae (both mine and the collective experience of the audience) but within this Māori framework, the Gallery and all the mauri of the work within the walls are protected by Hinenuitepo.

The positioning of the artworks within the space is also related to the interior of the wharenuī. The prints are positioned symmetrically across the mirroring walls of the gallery to visually relate to the position of Tukutuku panels. Traditionally, Tukutuku are positioned along the interior walls of the wharenuī between the poupou and epa carvings. These panels typically depict Māori mythology, iwi narratives and whakapapa. Poutama is often depicted as a reference to enlightenment and genealogy. This links appropriately to my kaupapa. This placement of these large dark works on the gallery wall creates Poupou vertical lines in the negative space. In the wharenuī Poupou alternate with tukutuku wall panels and are usually carved to represent ancestral figures. Leaving these spaces devoid of imagery, speaks to the concept of absence and my concerns about never being an ancestor to future generations in the traditional sense. By drawing parallels between the placement of my photographic prints and that of tukutuku panels, the gallery space is made safe for this kaupapa.

As the audience exit the whare tangata of the gallery, a plinth with a bowl of wai is positioned on the smallest wall. This gives viewers the opportunity to whakanoa through the practice of cleansing, before returning to Te Ao Marama (the place of the living) of the foyer. The kaupapa and imagery in these photographs can be confronting and tapu in nature. This use of wai draws reference to the practice of cleansing upon exit of a urupa. At the exhibition opening the practice was widely adopted and the connection was apparent. A stone mortar and pestle of the kōkōwai was placed alongside this bowl of water. The combination of kōkōwai of Papatūānuku and the tears of Rangī, connect with my kaupapa on a literal and metaphorical level.

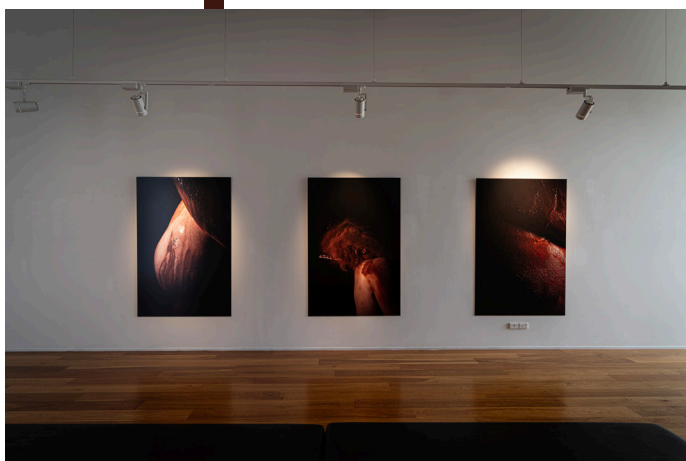


Figure 42 Installation Photograph of Whare Ngaro Exhibition - View of first wall, 2024

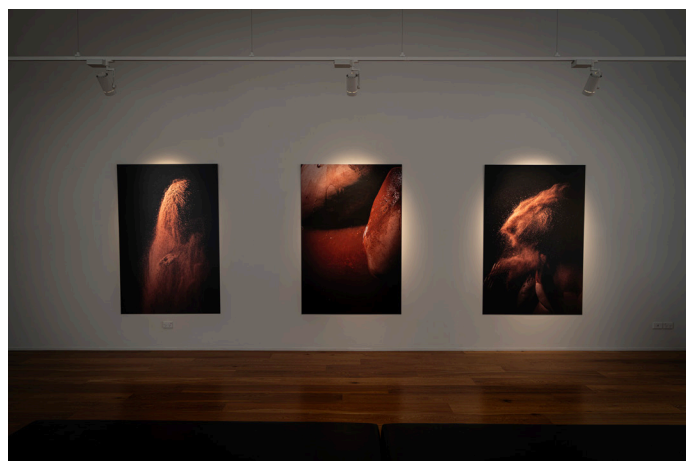


Figure 43 Installation Photograph of Whare Ngaro Exhibition - View of Last wall, 2024

Exhibition Promotion:

When creating the exhibition poster, I considered how design elements could reinforce the kaupapa of Whare Ngaro. Placing the text with a vertical alignment provided an opportunity to look at a graphic line element. The final design depicts a broken line extending from a section of poutama. This broken line is a metaphor for a 'broken' whare and a 'broken' whakapapa.

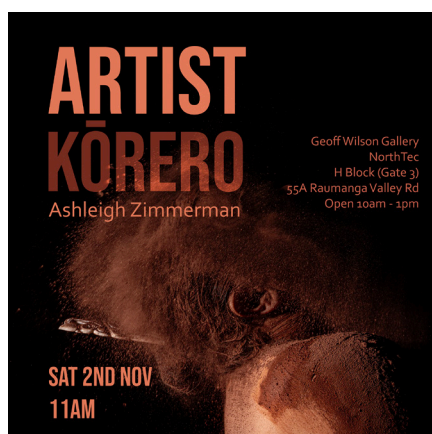
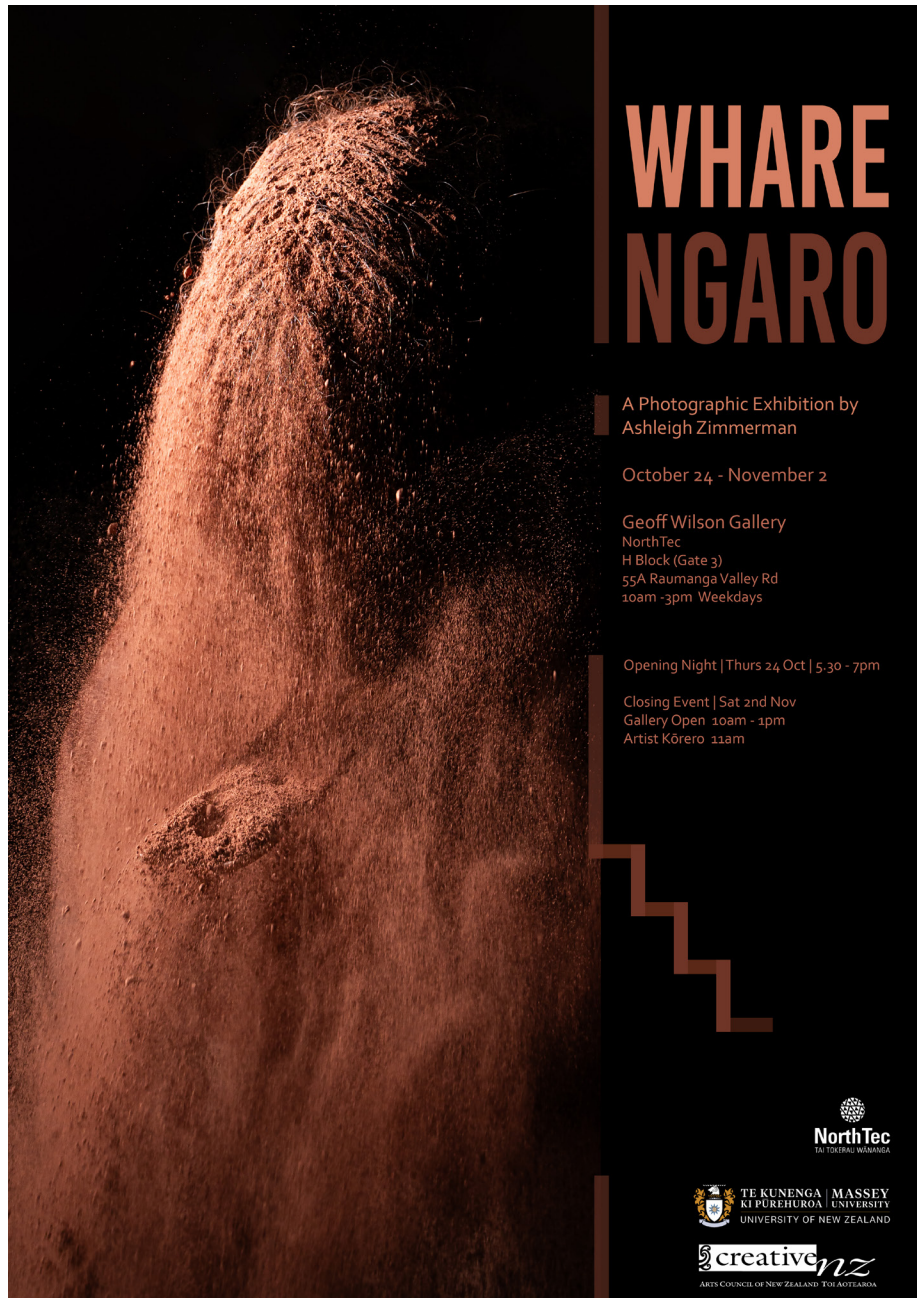


Figure 44 Whare Ngaro
Exhibition Poster design, 2024

Figure 45 Whare Ngaro Artist
Kōrero Instagram Post, 2024

Exhibition Catalogue:



Figure 46 Whare Ngaro Exhibition Catalogue Design - Front and Back, 2024

Figure 47 Whare Ngaro Exhibition Catalogue Design - Interior Spread, 2024

Vinyl Text and Graphics:

In development of the exhibition catalogue and poster, I continued to integrate the design element of the broken poutama line. The vinyl designs work in unison with the artist statement to act as visual cues to the narratives explored in the series. At the entrance to the show the line wraps around the title to create the maihi of the wharenui. As the visitors weave from the light to the darkness of the gallery, the oriori is placed high on the wall to draw the viewer's eye upward toward the atua. As they read, line by line, their eyes work down the wall in the same way that papa are created and whakapapa is recited. The poutama line graphic elements parallel this direction and communicate the Whare Ngaro kaupapa by being 'fractured' or 'broken.' The poutama can also represent steps towards enlightenment. When placed within the papa of the exhibition Whare Ngaro, the broken journey towards enlightenment speaks to the inability to reach motherhood. Careful consideration has been given to the design elements of the publications and signage of the exhibition to reinforce the emotive and conceptual underpinnings of the mahi.

Figure 48 Whare Ngaro
Entrance Decal, 2024

Figure 49 Installation
Photograph of Whare Ngaro
Orioi and Introduction Text,
2024



CHAPTER FOUR

IMPACT AND REFLECTION

*Nā te kukune te pupuke
Nā te pupuke te hihiri
Nā te hihiri te mahara
Nā te mahara te manako
Nā te manako te wānanga
Nā te wānanga te mātau*

As artists, we reach back into Te Pō as part of our process of creation. We look into this realm of becoming as we search for and refine forms of expression for our ideas. Although I am not a māmā to a child, I have gestated and birthed this exhibition from every fibre of my being. The kaupapa has swelled within me, I have researched, I have critically reflected on the emotional impact, I have formed all its physical properties, and I have carefully guided it from te uha into Te Ao Marama.

Presenting this exhibition to an audience has been an extremely emotional experience. There has been nowhere to hide behind these whakaahua. Whare Ngaro is unapologetically raw, honest and confronting in its depiction of infertility and its impact. In many respects it is much braver than myself, and speaking to the mahi made me feel incredibly vulnerable. At the Exhibition Opening, I recognized the importance of contextualising my mahi toi by sharing my own personal haerenga. I am the heart of this kaupapa. I shared my mihi and whakapapa, recited the oriori, and as soon as I got to the sentence 'Ko au te whare ngaro,' te kukune te pupuke, and I cried. I stood in front of friends, whanau and strangers, completely silent, completely exposed. I finished my korero and through their tears, the crowd sang Te Aroha as the waiata tautoko. That moment was powerful. That moment affirmed the impact of this kaupapa.



Figure 50 Opening Night, 2024
Figure 51 Opening Night, 2024

Whare Ngaro was well attended over its short exhibition period. Although it was only installed for nine days, over one hundred viewers went through the exhibition. I personally manned the gallery during this stretch and was privileged to many of the reactions to the mahi.

On the last day of the exhibition I hosted an Artist Kōrero. During this, I shared more about the impact of being whare ngaro and the development of the exhibition. A large portion of the attendees were NorthTec Maunga Kura Toi students. With them in mind, I wove my research methodologies and artistic developments to show the audience how the exhibition evolved over the course of the year. This was well received and many of the students spoke about how my kōrero made the work come to life upon second viewing. My husband's parents also made it to the gallery to hear my kōrero. This was the first time they heard me acknowledge the journey we had been on for the past seven years. Despite their knowledge of art being limited, they cried during the presentation and afterwards said 'everything made sense now.'

At the heart of Whare Ngaro is my story, however, I believe the power of this kaupapa is in its humanity and humility. By being emotionally vulnerable in front of others at the exhibition opening and my artist kōrero, people felt endeared to me and shared their own kōrero and pūrakau. What became apparent is that I elicited empathy from viewers, not sympathy. No one said 'sorry', but rather they thanked me for shedding light on the kaupapa and told me how the exhibition spoke to them personally. Whare Ngaro relates to a wider community across many different situations. The following are some of these pūrakau.

A variety of viewers' experiences related through the fear of not having children and continuing whakapapa. I met six other wahine that were unable to have children with their partners; four who are older now and have come to terms with the concept of being whare ngaro, and two are still trying to conceive. They shared similar sentiments and how they felt seen in the work. Other women approached me and shared about how the kaupapa spoke to them on a different level. They had either split from their partner later in life, or never found a partner to have children with. This is another way in which they feared being alone and not continuing their whakapapa. A nursing student also shared that she and her life partner struggled with these ideas as a same sex couple. These pūrakau all shared a common grief for the absence of opportunity to have children and what impact that may leave behind when their ira tangata returns to Papa.

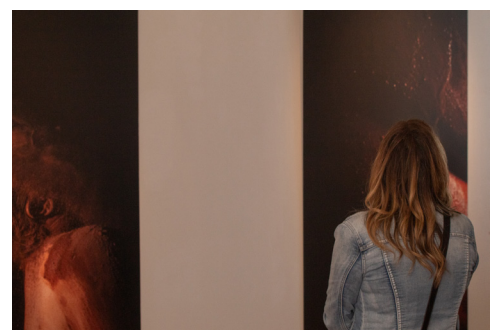



Figure 52 Opening Night - Tamariki interaction, 2024


Figure 53 Opening Night - Viewer, 2024

Figure 54 Artist Korero, 2024



On a different level, despite my personal haerenga being about the inability to be a māmā, it is apparent that the kaupapa also speaks to parents. These are some additional experiences shared with me that explore a parents perspective on Whare Ngaro.

Two wahine shared that they had experienced infertility, however, they had been able to whakapapa through IVF treatments. It was noted that this process also carried whakama and mamae for them. The health system and treatments had been alienating and disconnected them from Te Ao Māori. A tāne spoke to me about how my kōrero had been felt as the father of a still born son. He shared about the impossible position he felt as a husband trying to support his wife through a profoundly life changing experience. Their next pregnancy ended with a miscarriage and his wife made the decision to protect herself and not try for another child after that. Even as parents, the experience of whakapapa can be grieved. This was echoed by a different pūrakau offered by a quiet wahine. Her only son committed suicide early last year at the age of eighteen years old. She spoke about how his death broke her heart and how these images captured her primal pain. She is now whare ngaro even though she was a māmā. One kuia came into the gallery after just leaving the NICU where her mokopuna was being treated for meningitis. She cried and said it struck right to the core of her fears as a mother, trying to be strong and support her daughter to be a strong mother. She allowed herself to feel the intensity of that situation and said it was healing to have this space to do that. Another thread that was woven into these reactions was that of a young Māori māmā. She shared how the exhibition made her think about the shame and fear she experienced when she fell pregnant at age seventeen. She felt societal shame in a familiar way as I do as a wahine in her thirties without children. What all these insights tell me, is that becoming a parent is not a guarantee of continued whakapapa. It too can be shrouded by the mamae represented in Whare Ngaro.



Ko au te whare ngaro, but I am am pou for this conversation. Representing this kaupapa through a wahine Māori lens has empowered me to be brave, to take a risk. On Jhanke's continuum of Māori Art, Whare Ngaro is trans-customary. The kōkōwai is a visual indicator of an indigenous practice, however, the use of photography and self portraiture places it within a contemporary approach. Representing infertility within this framework, offers myself and the viewer the opportunity to depart from western views on the subject, and instead come from a place of rongoā and whakaora. The gallery becomes a place for quiet meditation, to reflect on the kaupapa in a safe space. Yet, at the same time, the scale of the whakaahua, unapologetically screams the visceral reality of this experience. Multiple dichotomies weave through the exhibition exploring the ebbs and flows of the human condition and lastingness of whakapapa. Light and dark, precedence and absence, pain and peace, loud and quiet. Whare Ngaro communicates universal experiences beyond my kaupapa. It has been healing for me and my whanau, and I hope more get to benefit from this conversation in the future.

CONCLUSION

Throughout this thesis I have demonstrated a commitment to Māori research methodologies and authentic art practice. In Chapter one, I provide a literature review that investigates the limited academic writings on Māori infertility and the whare ngaro experience. Moving forward, I outline seven wahine Māori artists that have influenced my photographic practice and the use of whenua as source. Within my own practice, I draw comparisons between Te Ao Māori creation narrative and Photography. Te Kore, Te Pō and Te Ao Marama are intrinsically linked to the Camera, lighting techniques and the infertility kōrero. These are outlined in the methodologies chapter and connected to my preparatory imagery towards the final iteration of Whare Ngaro. Within the chapter that outlines the completed body of work, I further discuss the effects of these processes, including the intimate relationship between self portraiture and the scale of these works, through intentional curatorial decisions. Finally, I share some of the reactions that Whare Ngaro has stirred within viewers. What becomes clear is that this exhibition has only just started to build momentum towards something greater.

This year, alongside this decision to take on the wero of representing my biggest insecurity in my art, I also started IVF treatments. The ups and downs of both journeys have fuelled my practice and demanded a balance between mātau and mauī, the controllable and the uncontrollable. In May, our first egg collection resulted in embryos able to be cryogenically frozen. They too exist in Te Pō, existing but formless. Despite our first two embryo transfers being unsuccessful, I still exist in the in between... traversing Te Kore, Te Pō, Te Ao Marama and back with each new treatment round. I still see light in the darkness, but if this is not to work, I am in a better place to accept it. I may be broken, but Whare Ngaro has the power to heal.

Looking forward, this exhibition needs to be seen by wider audiences. Its next iteration will be in February, 2025 at the Hihiaua Cultural Centre in Whangārei. Here the exhibition will be displayed within a kaupapa Māori setting. Alongside the whakaahua, The Hā Project will run a kōkōwai making workshop for Māori mothers and midwives, learning about the practice and pūrakau that connect the pigment to the kaupapa of Whare Ngaro. With the guidance of Te Warihi Hetaraka, this intersection of art and wananga is sure to reinvigorate the Whare Ngaro conversation and build a stronger following.

This work is too important not to share. Having taken this step, it is important to keep the momentum moving forward.

Mō tātou, ā, mō kā uri ā muri ake nei
For us and our children after us

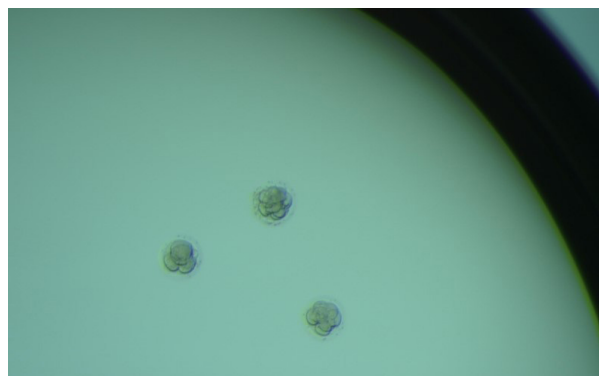


Figure 55 Embryos, 2024

APPENDIX 1:

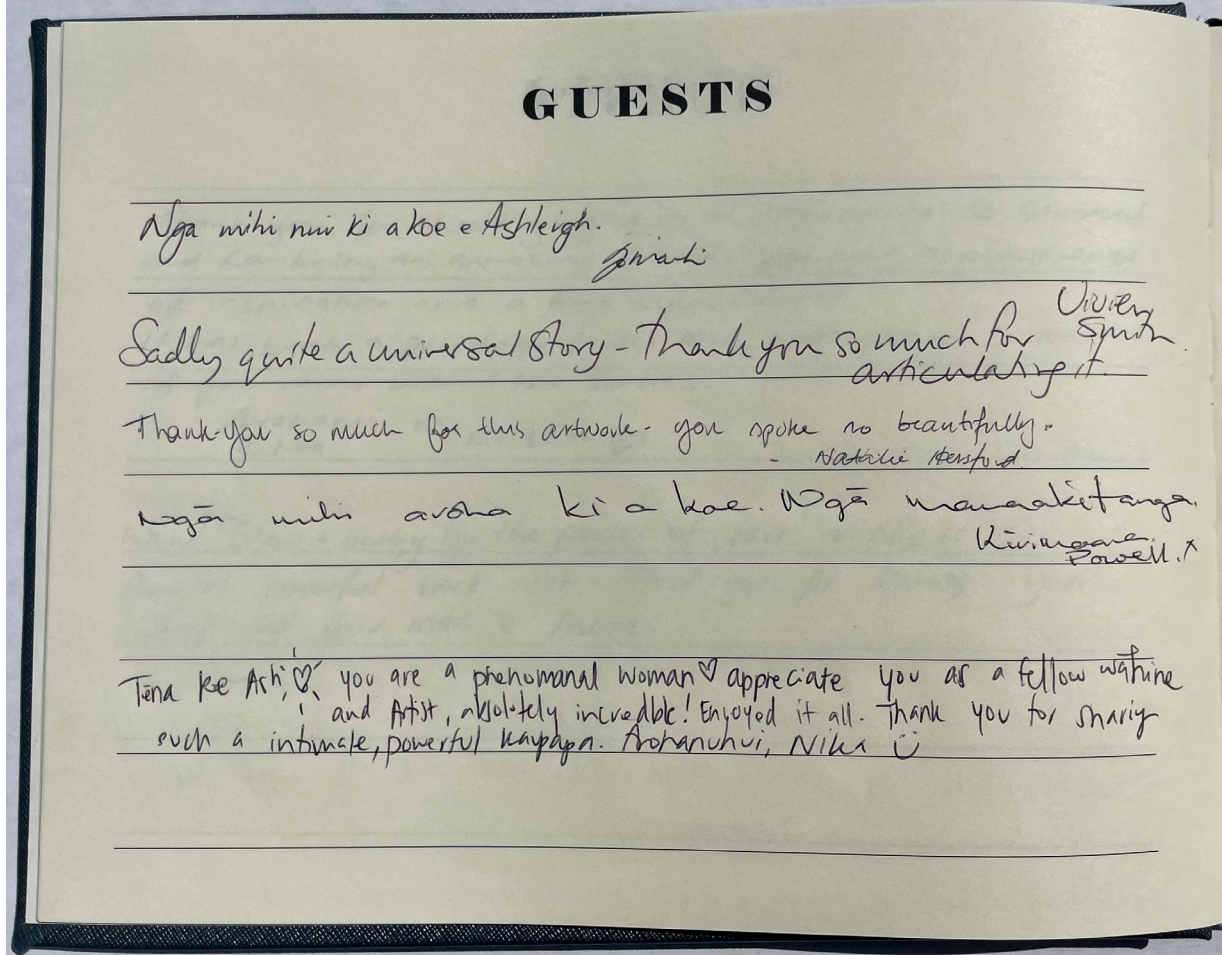
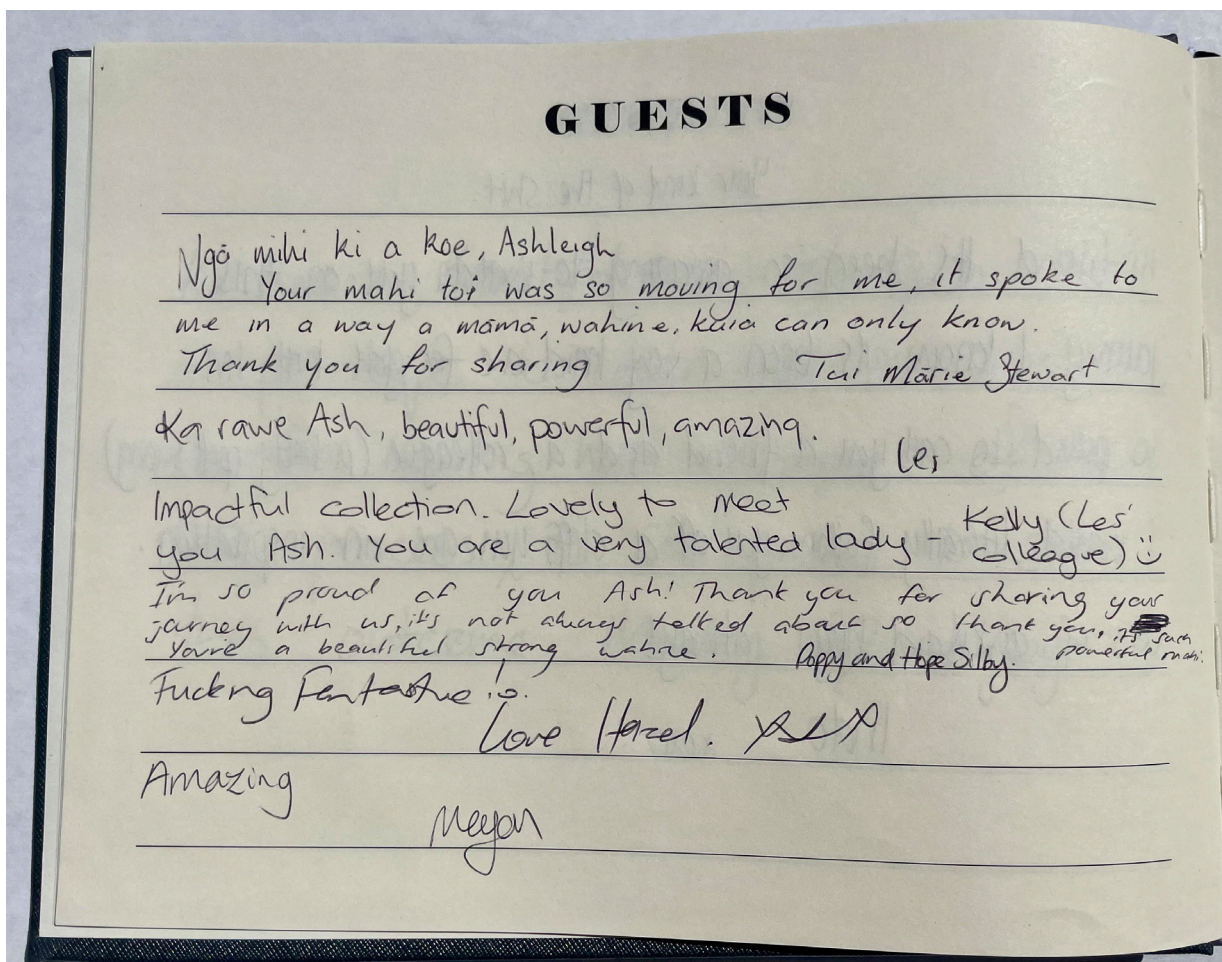


Figure 56 Guest Book Page, 2024

Figure 57 Guest Book Page, 2024

APPENDIX 2:

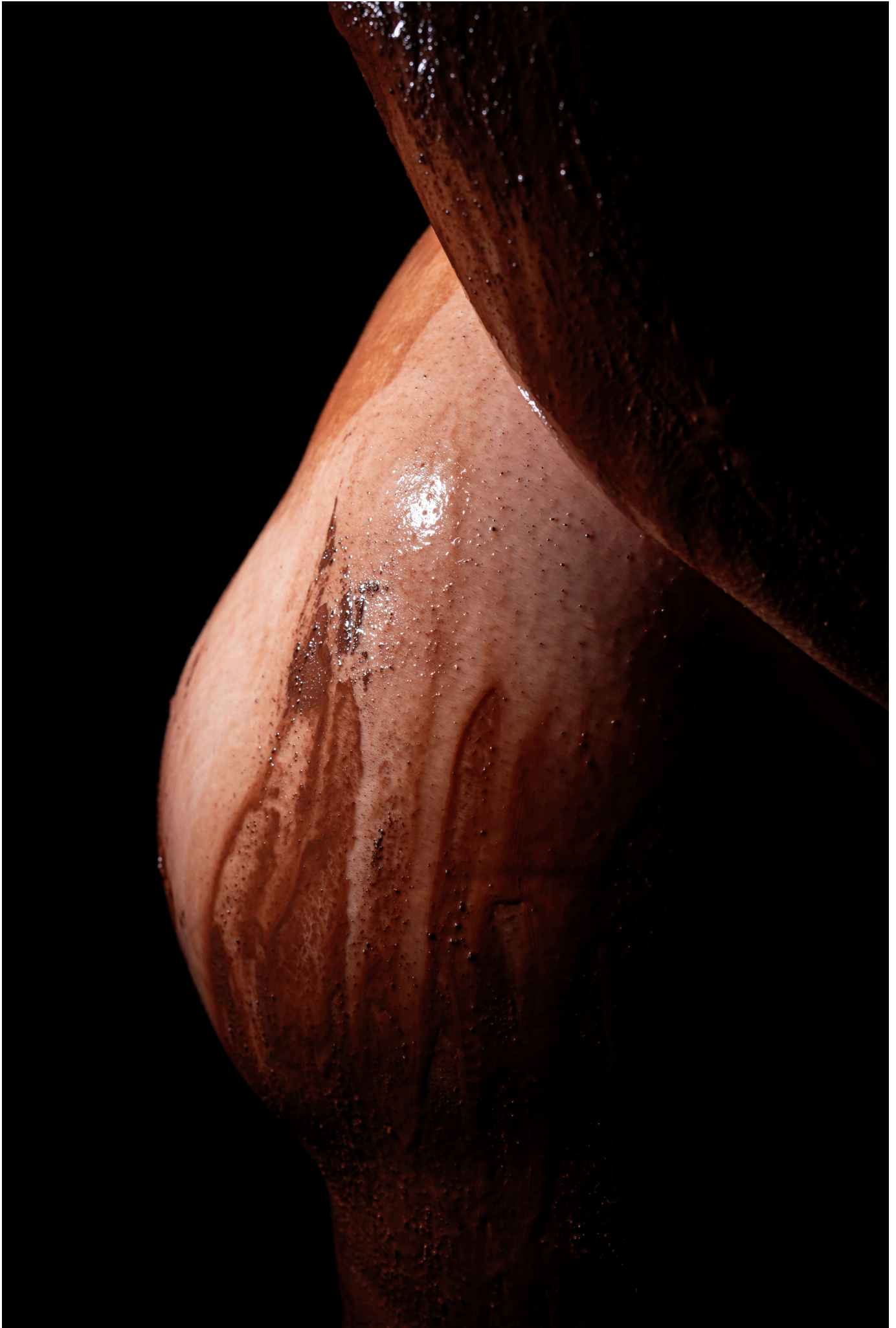


Figure 58 Whare Ngaro - UntitledTahi, 2024



Figure 59 Whare Ngaro - Untitled Rua, 2024

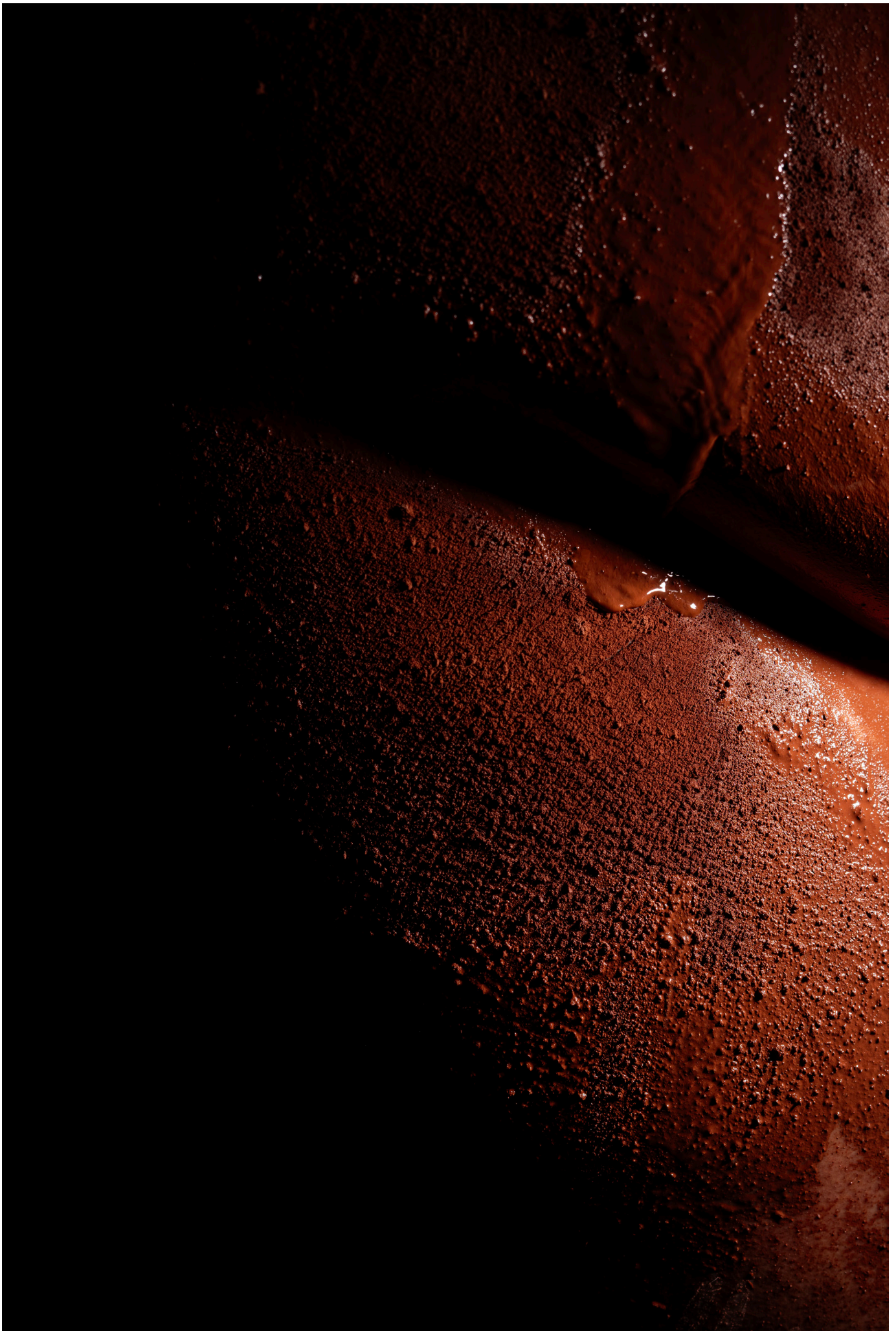


Figure 6o Whare Ngaro - Untitled Toru, 2024



Figure 61 Whare Ngaro - Untitled Whā, 2024



Figure 62 Whare Ngaro - Untitled Rima, 2024

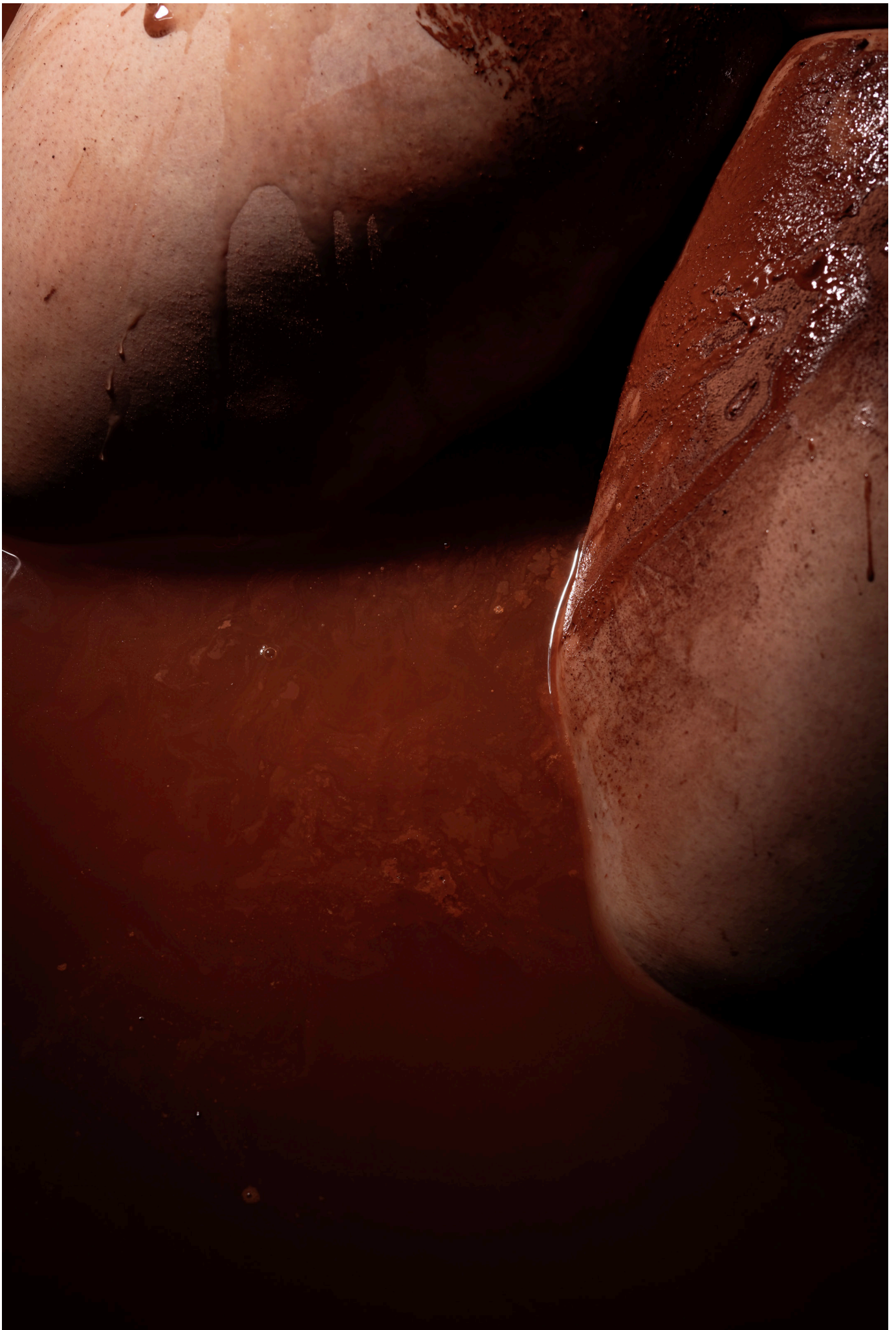


Figure 63 Whare Ngaro - Untitled Ono, 2024



Figure 64 Whare Ngaro - Untitled Whitu, 2024

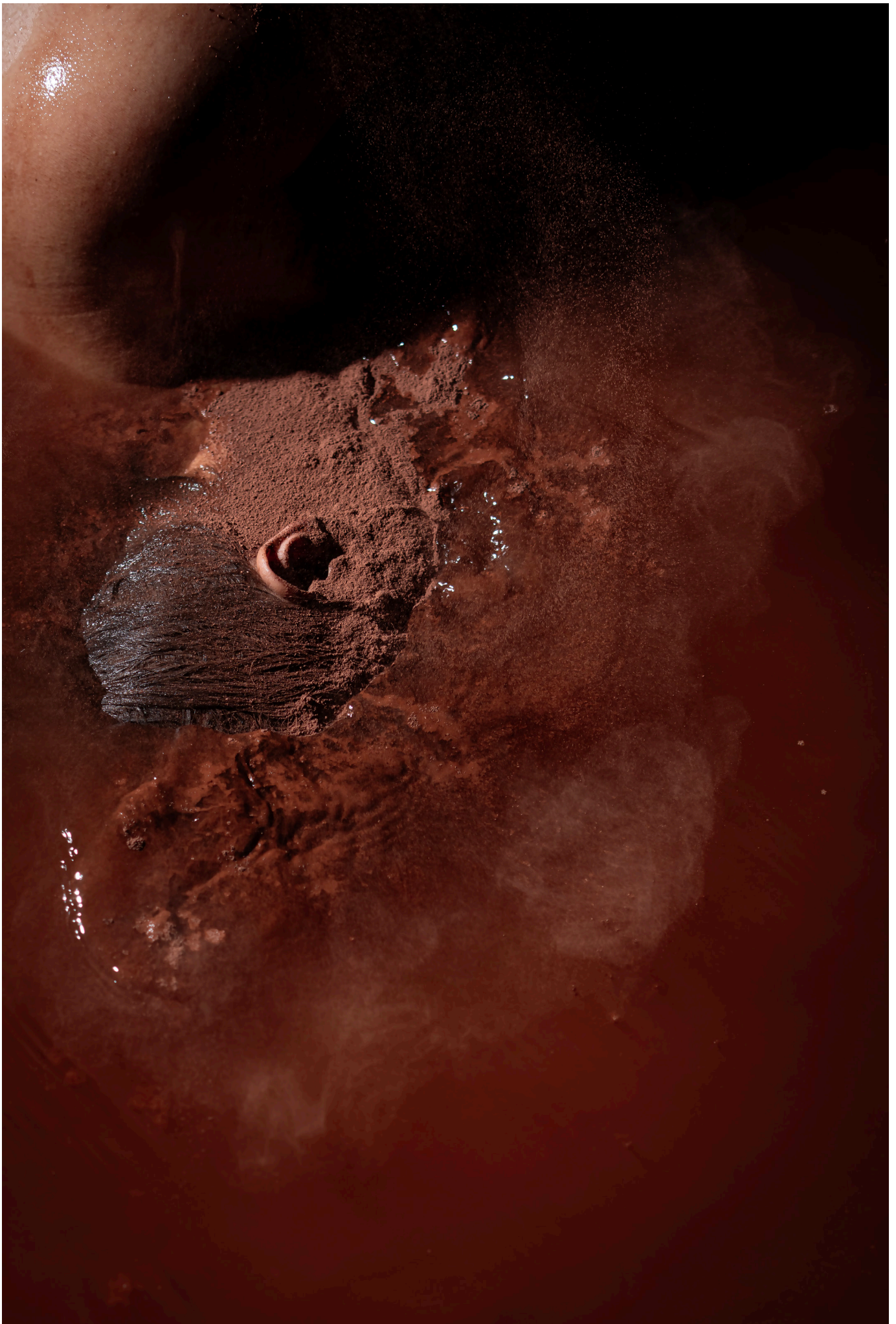


Figure 65 Whare Ngaro - Untitled Waru, 2024

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