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## **Fabricating Activism**

Suzanne Kiri Tamaki

This is a partial fulfilment of the Masters of Fine Arts (2021)



*Suzanne Tamaki, 1994, Auckland, NZ. Photography, Vivienne Haldane.*

**Abstract**

This writing explores the effect of colonisation on Māori culture, art and, in particular, my own art practice. It explores the impact on Māori health and wellbeing and how I can address that in art. I investigate my whakapapa inspirations, the mediums that have informed my work, as well as the materials and mechanisms that I use to share the narrative.

During my study at Massey we experienced two lockdowns due to Covid, which changed how I created work and how I would present it. I was looking at social media and online platforms with fresh eyes, and new skills.

In the past I have collaborated with other Māori artists to show activist work in public spaces while trying to remain safe. With the new body of work, I was able to include humour as a mechanism to diffuse some of the more politically charged issues, and create new personas and voices to share my thoughts and messages.

**Acknowledgements**

Seriously, where do you start. First, I'd like to thank my Mother, for giving me the gift of creativity and encouraging it as a child. My father for our Māori ancestry, and all the mana and inspiration it gives our whanau, and all the tupuna that embrace me and walk alongside on this journey.

My little sister blisters who have always been there and remind me to stay humble. My step mother, Raewyn Pasene, who helped me through the teenage years, to grow into the woman I am today.

Man, all those creative natives that have come in and out of my life, that I've had the absolute privilege to work with, drink with and laugh and cry with. The names would fill a dictionary so, sorry about it, I'm not even going to start. The Pacific Sisters, particularly Rosanna Raymond, Ani O'Neil and Nephi Tupaea who've stuck with me through thick and thin and help keep me sane.

Thank you Julieanna Preston for answering emails honestly and quickly, and for motivating me to keep going, Shannon Te Ao for your weird shoe choices, Huhana Smith for opening her house and heart, Bob Jahnke for being an inspiration and most of all Natalie Robertson –

who not only edited this writing, but showed me how to use google scholar and do footnotes.  
I wish I'd known that last year.

Finally I have to acknowledge my children, who inspire me to be a better person and give me unconditional love, even when I'm a dick.

Ko Matatua te waka  
Ko Pōhatu te maunga  
Ko Ohinemataroa te awa  
Ko te Rewarewa te marae  
Ko Tūhoe te Iwi.

Ko Tainui te waka  
Ko Kakepuku te maunga  
Ko Waipā te awa  
Ko Te Kōpua te marae  
Ko Maniapoto te Iwi

Ko Suzanne Tamaki toku ingoa.

# FASHIONISATION OF SOCIAL MEDIA MECHANISMS TO NARRATE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CHANGE

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## Chapter 1: Fabricated Histories

In 1834, a rectangular piece of fabric measuring 1930mm (width), 1390mm (height), 45mm (depth) held the mana of Māori, forged between New Zealand and England. Symbolising tribal rights as an independent nation, it was the first official flag of New Zealand belonging to *Te W(h)akaminenga o Nga Rangatiratanga o Nga Hapu o Nu Tireni*, known as the United Tribes. Designed by Te Wiremu (Henry Williams), it was selected out of three other designs, on 20 March 1834 by twenty-five Māori chiefs at Waitangi in the Bay of Islands, Taitōkerau.<sup>1</sup> Northern Māori believed it held significance as Britain had recognised New Zealand as an independent nation with its own flag. It was declared the ‘Flag of the Confederation of Chiefs of the United Tribes of New Zealand and the Crown of England’. As Taylor Annabell and Angelique Nairn state, ‘this flag alludes to the emerging power dynamics between Māori and British people, and the conceptualisation of New Zealand at the time as indicated by the name of the flag, The United Tribes of New Zealand Flag.’<sup>2</sup> It represented He Wakaputanga o te Rangatiratanga o Nu Tireni, a Declaration of the Independence of New Zealand. This piece of fabric forged our history and is now housed at Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa.<sup>3</sup> Several versions of the flag followed.

The New Zealand Company, whose aims of systematic colonisation were developed by Edward Gibbons Wakefield (while in Newgate Prison for abduction), raised their version of the United Tribes' flag at Pito One, or Petone, on 30 September 1839.<sup>4</sup> Commemorating their first purchase of Māori land by the New Zealand company, the New Zealand flag was hoisted on shore and saluted with 21 guns, and a great Māori war-dance and review completed the ceremonial portion of the sale.<sup>5</sup> Made out of wool bunting and linen on the ship *Tory* during the voyage to New Zealand from England, it was allegedly hand stitched by a sail maker on

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<sup>1</sup> Samuel D Carpenter, 2009. *Te Wiremu, Te Puhipi, He Wakaputanga Me Te Tiriti — Henry Williams, James Busby, A Declaration And The Treaty*. A report commissioned by the Waitangi Tribunal. Wai 1040 #A17

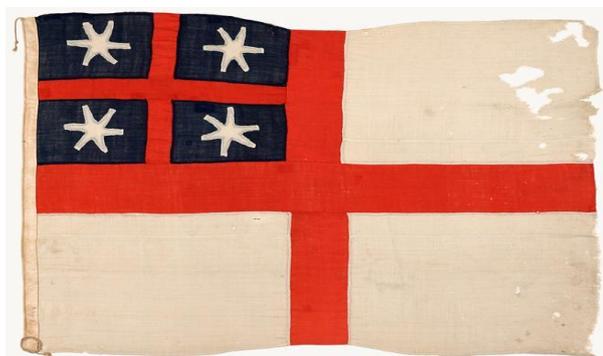
<sup>2</sup> Taylor Annabell and Angelique Nairn. 2018. Flagging a ‘new’ New Zealand: the discursive construction of national identity in the Flag Consideration Project. *CRITICAL DISCOURSE, STUDIES* 2019, VOL. 16, NO. 1, 96-111. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/epub/10.1080/17405904.2018.1521857?needAccess=true>

<sup>3</sup> [https://youtu.be/ZM4N\\_0WZNdw](https://youtu.be/ZM4N_0WZNdw)

<sup>4</sup> Steer, Philip. 2017. “On Systematic Colonisation and the Culture of Settler Colonialism: Edward Gibbon Wakefield’s A Letter from Sydney (1829).” *BRANCH: Britain, Representation and Nineteenth-Century History*. Ed. Dino Franco Felluga. Extension of Romanticism and Victorianism on the Net. Web. Retrieved 16 October 2021] [http://www.branchcollective.org/?ps\\_articles=philip-steer-on-systematic-colonization-and-the-culture-of-settler-colonialism-edward-gibbon-wakefields-a-letter-from-sydney-1829](http://www.branchcollective.org/?ps_articles=philip-steer-on-systematic-colonization-and-the-culture-of-settler-colonialism-edward-gibbon-wakefields-a-letter-from-sydney-1829)

<sup>5</sup> Robert McNab, 1913. *The Old Whaling Days: A History of Southern New Zealand from 1830 to 1840*. Whitcombe and Tombs, Wellington. 352. <http://nzetc.victoria.ac.nz/tm/scholarly/name-206479.html>

board. What an immense responsibility, forging the journey of a country by hand, with a needle and thread. For every stitch, an acre of Māori land, blood and tears was stolen under its name. I am both fascinated and repulsed by this flag.



New Zealand Company/United Tribes Flag, 1839, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa collections.<sup>6</sup>

In 2007, curators Amiria Salmond and Rosanna Raymond invited me to exhibit in the '*Pasifika Styles*' exhibition at the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology at Cambridge University, England.<sup>7</sup> I exhibited alongside Rosanna Raymond, Ani O'Neill, Maureen Lander, Shigeyuki Kihara, Tracey Tawhiao, Reuben Paterson, Rachel Rakena, Hemi McGregor, Natalie Robertson, Lisa Reihana, Michel Tuffery, Wayne Youle, George Nuku, Lisa Taoma and Niki Hastings McFall. It was a pretty impressive line-up. On the Air New Zealand flight to London, we were handed a navy blanket for warmth. The colour matched the left corner on the company flag. As I was travelling in a waka rererangi to the colonists home, I liberated the blanket. From it, I created '*Four Star Land Grab*', a 21<sup>st</sup> century response to the journey of colonial oppression. The stars and red cross were made from an old white Wellington hospital blanket, and a red Robin blanket, both found in a second hand store. The final detail was hand stitched bullet holes. Shot!



*Four Star Land Grab*, 2009, Wellington, NZ. Photography: Suzanne Tamaki

<sup>6</sup> <https://collections.tepapa.govt.nz/object/62255>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.otago.ac.nz/press/books/otago068829.html>

Following the United Tribes flag, the unmistakable Union Jack British flag was introduced to New Zealand. The flag was designed by King James I (James VI of Scotland) when he inherited the thrones of England and Scotland back in 1606.<sup>8</sup> King James wanted to combine the two crosses of the respective nations, therefore the Union Flag was born. The Union Flag offered protection by the British navy to ships but nothing else. It had no significance or benefit to Māori. After the Treaty of Waitangi was signed on 6 February 1840 the Union Jack became New Zealand's recognised flag, but the New Zealand Company continued to fly the United Tribes' flag. Governor William Hobson described this as high treason, and sent an armed party to lower the United Tribes' flag and hoist the Union Jack at Waitangi in June 1840.<sup>9</sup> This is indicative of the symbolic power of flags.

The Union Jack was raised on the flag pole to indicate British imperial rule. As Linda Tuhiwai Smith states flags are 'symbols of our loyalty' to the imperial-colonial project. She continues that 'Our orientation to the world was already being redefined as we were being excluded systematically from the writing of the history of our own lands.'<sup>10</sup>

Hone Heke cut the flag pole down four times on the hill above Kororāreka (Russell),<sup>11</sup> regarding it as a 'rahui', (to put in place a temporary ritual prohibition) - a post erected to claim possession of the land. This composition of cloth became a tohu or sign for disagreement, a precursor to the land wars that followed the New Zealand Company's role in colonisation.



New Zealand Flag<sup>12</sup>

<sup>8</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag\\_of\\_Great\\_Britain](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Great_Britain)

<sup>9</sup> [https://www.google.co.nz/books/edition/The\\_Treaty\\_of\\_Waitangi/-cDbNXHr6MEC?hl=en&gbpv=1&dq=the+treaty+of+waitangi+claudia+oranga&printsec=frontcover](https://www.google.co.nz/books/edition/The_Treaty_of_Waitangi/-cDbNXHr6MEC?hl=en&gbpv=1&dq=the+treaty+of+waitangi+claudia+oranga&printsec=frontcover)  
Page 100

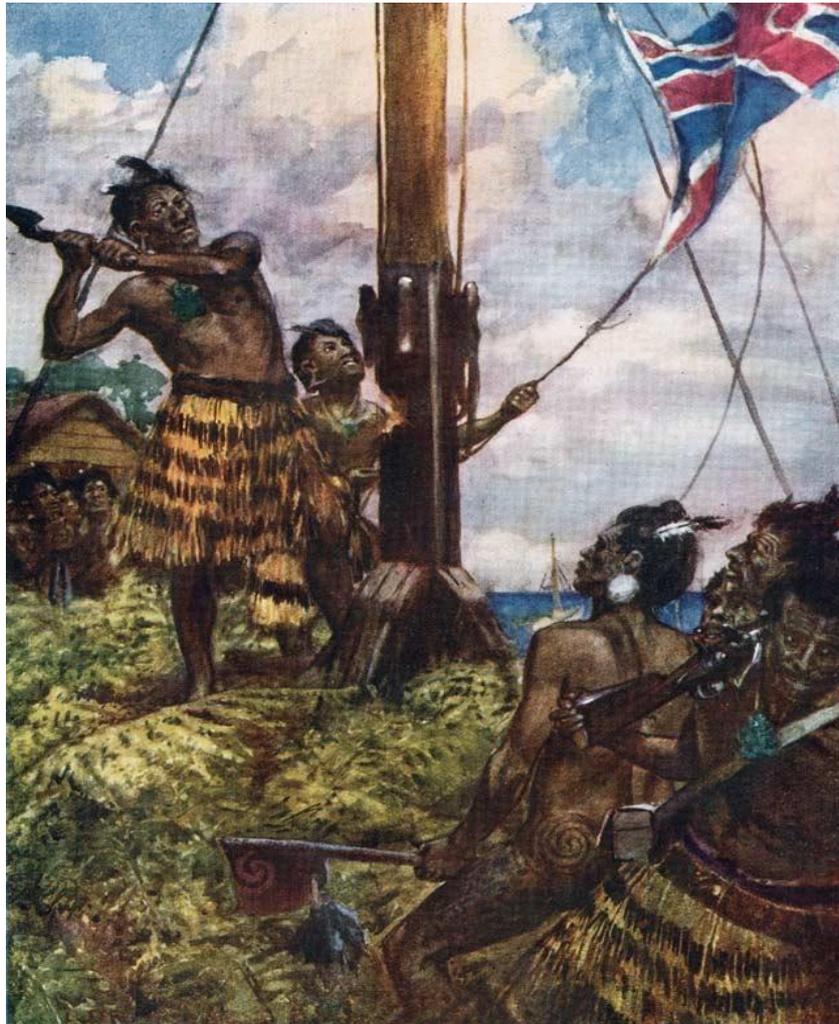
<sup>10</sup> Linda Tuhiwai Smith 1999, *Decolonizing Methodologies*. Zed Books. 33.

<sup>11</sup> <https://nzhistory.govt.nz/hone-heke-cuts-down-british-flagstaff-for-a-third-time>

<sup>12</sup> [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Flag\\_of\\_New\\_Zealand.svg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Flag_of_New_Zealand.svg)

*“So if you are the big tree  
We are the small axe  
Sharpened to cut you down  
To cut you down”*<sup>13</sup>

Bob Marley



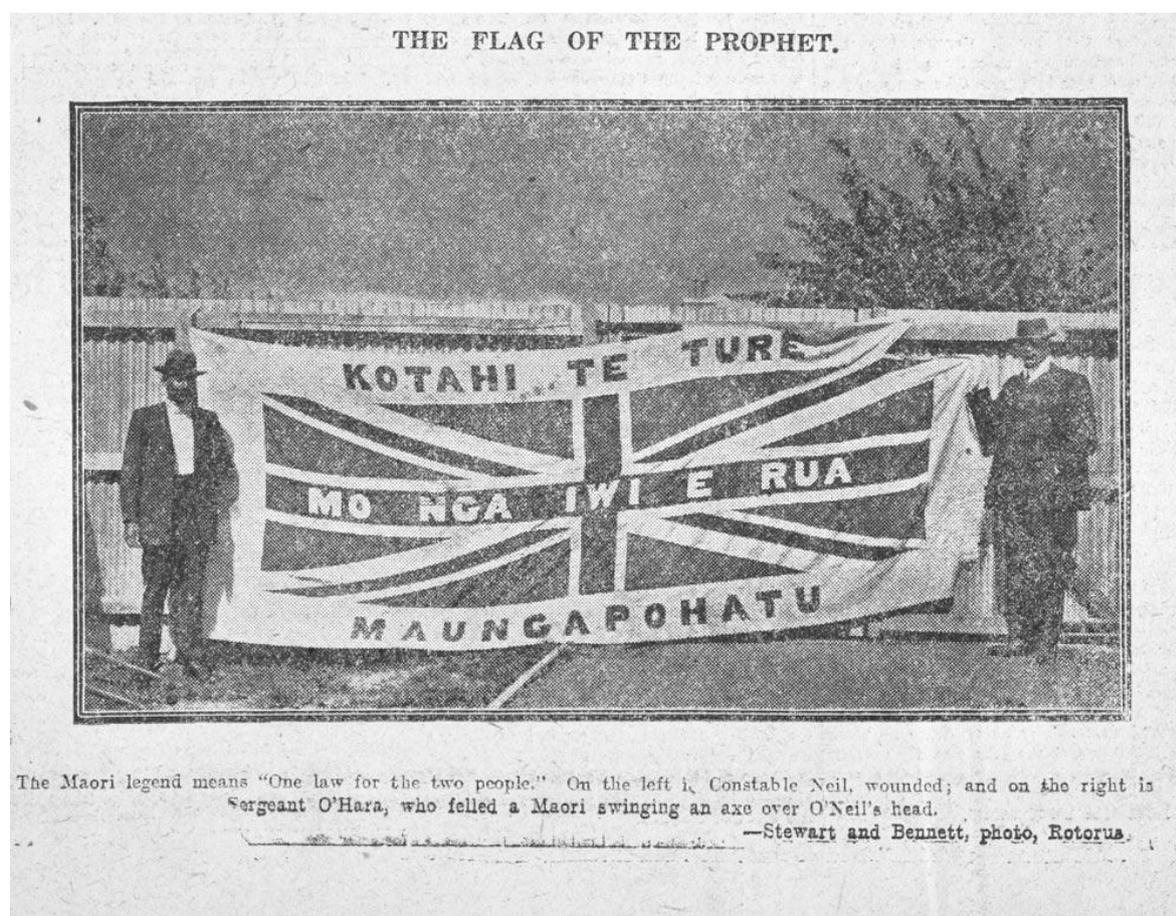
*Heke fells the flagstaff at Kororareka, Arthur David McCormick, 1908.*

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<sup>13</sup> Bob Marley, Small Axe <https://youtu.be/OnGBJAnYA9E>

## Tūhoe. My Land, My Iwi.

In 1894, Tūtakangahau, an elderly Tūhoe chief, requested the British flag from the government following Premier Seddon's visit to Te Urewera. He wanted the flag as a sign of peaceful relationships with the Crown.<sup>14</sup> At Tūtakangahau's request the words "*Kotahi Te Ture/Mo Nga Iwi E Rua/ Maungapōhatu*" (One law/ for both peoples/ Maungapōhatu) were stitched onto a large scale version of the Union Jack.<sup>15</sup> Judith Binney explains that for Tūtakangahau the words chosen "affirmed the important principle that the dominant culture should not pass laws discriminating against Māori." As stitches in fabric, these words of *kōtahitanga* or unity were effectively uniting two distinct world views into the same cloth. By 1897, the flag was flown at Maungapōhatu Marae, also known as Te Māpou.



Auckland Libraries Heritage Collections 7-A12123

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.ngaituhoe.iwi.nz/the-maungapohatu-flag>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.aucklandmuseum.com/discover/stories/blog/2014/the-maungapohatu-flag>

Rua Kēnana, Tūtakangahau's grandson, was declared a Tūhoe prophet.<sup>16</sup> He was also a faith healer and land rights activist. In 1908, he built a two storied circular temple of worship at Maungapōhatu, a sacred Tūhoe mountain in the Urewera. He called the temple Hiona (Zion), which was used as a Council Chamber and Court House. Rua advocated for pacifist action and opposed conscription of Māori into the armed forces for the First World War. In 1908, Rua Kenana met with Prime Minister Joseph Ward to agree to the principle of shared law. Following this "Ceremony of the Union", Rua Kenana adopted Tūtakangahau's flag. At that time, photographer George Bourne recorded the flag flying above three others, at Maungapōhatu. The adoption of ngā haki or flags as expression of political independence has, and continues to be, a symbol of Māori political independence. In this image you see four large flags, each one with a version of the Union Jack.



Maungapōhatu, Ureweras, NZ 1908, photographer, George Bourne<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rua\\_Kenana\\_Hepetipa](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rua_Kenana_Hepetipa)

<sup>17</sup> [https://www.aucklandmuseum.com/collection/object/am\\_library-photography-30038](https://www.aucklandmuseum.com/collection/object/am_library-photography-30038)

Less than ten years later, despite this stitched expression of *kōtahitanga*, Kenana's opposition to military conscription during WW1, drew the ire of the government. The Tohunga Suppression Act was designed to neutralise powerful traditional Māori leaders, another Pākehā political weapon.<sup>18</sup> In 1916, Rua Kenana was arrested and charged with offences of sedition, counselling others to murder or disable the Police and resisting arrest. The court case took 47 days and he was sentenced to one years imprisonment. This time, it was Kenana being stitched up. Police Commissioner Cullen, who led the Crown party, took the flag as evidence of sedition. Rua was not officially pardoned until 2019, with an apology by the Crown, 103 years later.<sup>19</sup> Nobody was killed at the signing.

*“Told his people not to go to war, let the white man fight the white man’s war”*

Lyrics by David Grace<sup>20</sup>



The Maungapōhatu flag before its return to Tūhoe.<sup>21</sup>

Auckland War Memorial Museum, NZ.

<sup>18</sup> [http://www.nzlii.org/nz/legis/hist\\_act/tsa19077ev1907n13353/](http://www.nzlii.org/nz/legis/hist_act/tsa19077ev1907n13353/)

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.parliament.nz/en/pb/bills-and-laws/bills-digests/document/52PLLaw26011/rua-k%C4%93nana-pardon-bill-2019-bills-digest-2601>

<sup>20</sup> <https://youtu.be/Jji3mPSWoew>

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.aucklandmuseum.com/about-us/blog/2014/the-maungapohatu-flag>

## Constructing Activism

Under the Flags, Emblems, and Names Protection Act 1981,<sup>22</sup> (administered by Manatū Taonga/Ministry for Culture and Heritage) the act outlines two offences with respect to the flag. As it stands today, altering the flag without lawful authority, and using, displaying, damaging or destroying the flag in or within view of a public place with the intention of dishonouring it, is an offence.

The New Zealand flag has been the conduit that has attracted protest and revolt since it first appeared in Aotearoa. Māori wilfully deface it in public spaces, requesting participation from the viewer, knowing that an act of rebellion against a textile (an inanimate object) can have you incarcerated.

In 1995, during protest action at the Waitangi Treaty grounds on Waitangi Day, Joseph Murphy trampled on a New Zealand flag. He was convicted of offensive behaviour.<sup>23</sup>

On 2 November 1995, as part of the *Korurangi: New Māori art* exhibition at the Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki, Ngā Puhī artist Diane Prince installed a work *Flagging the Future: Te Kiritangata – The Last Palisade (1995)*. Prince laid the flag stencilled with the words “please walk on me” on the ground, inviting visitors to trample on the flag. This was removed by the Gallery after complaints to the police and the threat of legal action, labelling her a 'Māori radical' and 'controversial artist'. Edward Hanfling states that:

“With the controversy surrounding her artwork, Prince gained notoriety as a ‘Māori radical’ in the eyes of the public and media. She became what theorist Sara Ahmed calls an ‘affect alien’: someone who conspicuously contravenes mainstream social values by holding on to past injustices. Prince, and other activists of the moment, sought to puncture the illusion of bicultural harmony in Aotearoa New Zealand, and refused to ‘move on’ from the losses and betrayals of colonial history.”<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/1981/0047/latest/DLM51358.html>

<sup>23</sup> <https://teara.govt.nz/en/flags/page-5>

<sup>24</sup> Edward Hanfling. 2021. An Affect Alien in Aotearoa: Diane Prince and the Flag Controversy. *Third Text* Volume 35, 2021 - Issue 4. Pages 431-452 | Published online: 05 May 2021. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09528822.2021.1917226>

It's ok to not be ok.

In 2005, Tūhoe activist Tame Iti shot the New Zealand flag during a Waitangi Tribunal hearing at Tauaarau marae in Ruatoki.<sup>25</sup> He told authorities he had substituted it with an Australian flag so he wouldn't be charged with damaging a New Zealand flag. Iti was convicted of firearms offences and this conviction was overturned in 2007. I asked him if he had shot the Australian flag and he laughed. It was the New Zealand flag, he lied to get off the charge. #truestory

### **A New New Zealand Flag**

In 2014, just before the 2015 New Zealand Parliament elections, Prime Minister John Key ratified a referendum to have the flag changed. There was a competition with a \$20,000 prize.

New Zealanders were invited via crowdsourcing to submit a design which were whittled down to a longlist of 40 designs then a shortlist of 4 finalists for the judges to vote on. In February 2015 the government announced the appointment of the Flag Consideration Panel, which would 'design and lead the public engagement process' around the flag.<sup>26</sup> The 12 members of the panel were chosen, none of which have a background in art practice or critique.

The public had no input or voting on the flag selection. After public disappointment with the official shortlist, economist Gareth Morgan<sup>27</sup> funded a social media campaign to include the Red Peak flag.<sup>28</sup> Unbelievably, a bill was passed to include the 5th flag. Once again a rich white man's money gives a position of privilege to sway politics in his favour. Talk about rigged.

The Wā kāinga/Home flag won the \$20,000 top prize.<sup>29</sup> The white diagonal represents the Maihi (meeting house), symbolising the coming together of Māori, colonial past and multicultural future. I challenge the colour white as the Maihi, and as the main colour

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<sup>25</sup> <https://teara.govt.nz/en/video/33991/tame-iti-shooting-a-flag-2005>

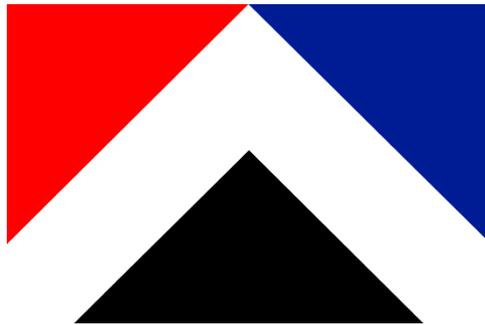
<sup>26</sup> <https://nzhistory.govt.nz/media/photo/flag-consideration-panel>

<sup>27</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gareth\\_Morgan\\_\(economist\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gareth_Morgan_(economist))

<sup>28</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Red\\_Peak\\_flag](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Red_Peak_flag)

<sup>29</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:NZ\\_flag\\_design\\_Wa\\_kainga\\_Home\\_by\\_Studio\\_Alexander.svg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:NZ_flag_design_Wa_kainga_Home_by_Studio_Alexander.svg)

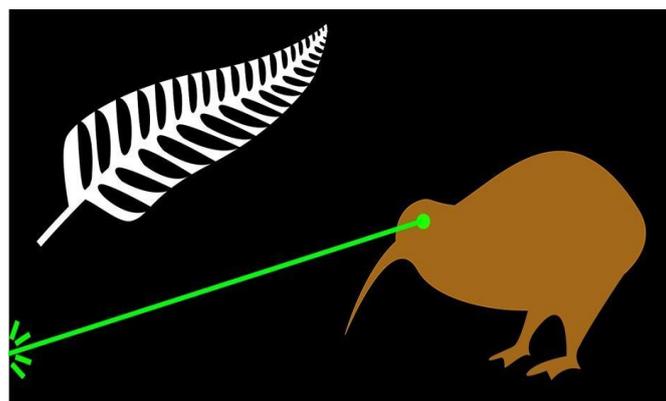
everything else co-exists around. Another colonist flag using Māori concepts to make it culturally relevant.



*Wā Kāinga Flag, Studio Alexander, 2015.*

An online petition opposing the flag referendum accrued 50,000 signatures. However former National Party official Grant McLachlan demonstrated that online signatures could easily be forged by recording himself signing the petition sixteen times and fraudulently impersonating members of parliament. He accused the campaign of having dubious credibility and chided the government for considering the petition without checking the details sufficiently.<sup>30</sup> The referendum lost by a vote of 57 - 43, with a cost of \$21.8 million to the tax payer. John Key resigned in 2016, without leaving a legacy of a new New Zealand flag.

Ironically, one of the designs, which didn't make the top 4 was picked up by New Zealanders and became a social media phenomenon. It features prominently on national, and international, paraphernalia. Key rings, T-shirts, mugs, memes and yes, flags. Meet Lazer Kiwi!<sup>31</sup>



*Laser Kiwi Flag, Lucy Gray, 2005.*

<sup>30</sup> [https://www.parliament.nz/en/pb/bills-and-laws/bills-proposed-laws/document/00DBHOH\\_BILL65995\\_1/new-zealand-flag-referendums-amendment-bill](https://www.parliament.nz/en/pb/bills-and-laws/bills-proposed-laws/document/00DBHOH_BILL65995_1/new-zealand-flag-referendums-amendment-bill)

<sup>31</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Laser\\_Kiwi\\_flag](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Laser_Kiwi_flag)

## Chaper Two: Fashion Warfare

The distinctive Union Jack on the current New Zealand flag is an authentication of our British heritage. In the 70s, British designer Vivienne Westwood<sup>32</sup> spearheaded fashion anarchy by cutting off the Union Jack and attaching it to a jacket, alongside a swastika, for punk band the Sex Pistols.<sup>33</sup> It was fashion warfare - England VS Germany. Westwood, alongside Malcolm McClaran and others, invented punk fashion and introduced poor, angry, working class ‘delinquents’ to the mainstream. Cutting up the flag and pinning it to clothes became an act of defiance and rebellion against the monarchy and British rule.



*Vivienne Westwood jacket, England, 1977, photographer unknown*

Incarceration and the punk fashion premise appeals to an art activism practice. Artists have gone to prison, using art as a vehicle to protest for human rights such as, Bastion Point. The protests and occupation resulted in the New Zealand Government returning the land to Ngāti Whātua in the 1980. Mike Smith took a chainsaw to the tree on one tree hill – similar to Hone Heke’s action of cutting down the flagpole, driven by his frustration at the Government’s fiscal envelope – limiting Māori treaty settlements to \$1 billion – led to his arrest for “interfering with a tree without resource consent”. He was convicted and sentenced to nine months periodic detention.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>32</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vivienne\\_Westwood](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vivienne_Westwood)

<sup>33</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sex\\_Pistols](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sex_Pistols)

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/warriors-chainsaw-massacre-rings-on/C2Z4XCDQAFWQ3IIVGP24ISR62E/>



God Save the Queen album cover, Sex Pistols ,England, 1977

*“God save the Queen  
 The fascist regime  
 They made you a moron  
 A potential H bomb  
 God save the queen  
 She ain't no human being  
 And there's no future  
 In England's dreaming  
 Don't be told what you want, you want  
 And don't be told what you need  
 There's no future, no future  
 No future for you, God save the queen”*<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> God save the Queen: Sex Pistols <https://youtu.be/yqrAPOZxgzU>

## Repurposing Taonga

In 2010, while working at Te Papa as an events producer, I was fortunate to uplift the Te Papa Tongarewa flags from the Museum forecourt flagpoles, which were decommissioned due to wear and tear. I approached the security team to ask what happened with them and they were stored in a box in a cabinet. They hadn't been given any guidance on how to dispose of the flags, so were pleased somebody wanted them. It states on the MCH website "The New Zealand flag should never be flying in a dilapidated condition. You should dispose of an old flag by burning it discreetly in some type of incinerator, not by taking it to a rubbish dump. It's important the flag is not destroyed in public view".<sup>36</sup> Challenge accepted!

I had effectively repurposed taonga from the national museum to create a sexy, savage fashion range that challenged colonialism and take back ownership of the flag, with a cursory nod to our shared Aotearoa New Zealand legacy.

In 1990, Robyn Kahukiwa did a five-colour lithograph work titled *Wai Tangi*, a word play on the name of the Treaty. In the painting a wahine Māori cuts off her long locks with the words "trick or treaty" skimming the edge of her hair. The Treaty is an often used subject for activists to rally and protest against.



*Wai Tangi*, 1990, Robyn Kahukiwa, NZ.

<sup>36</sup> <https://mch.govt.nz/nz-identity-heritage/flags/answers-common-questions#:~:text=The%20New%20Zealand%20Flag%20should,not%20destroyed%20in%20public%20view.>

In 2011, Reuben Friend, then Māori/Pacific curator at City Gallery Wellington, curated the exhibition “Maiden Aotearoa”.<sup>37</sup> The title Maiden Aotearoa has two meanings, a product that is made in Aotearoa, or a wahine from Aotearoa.<sup>38</sup>

Playing with the word Waitangi, similar to Robyn, I developed a portrait diptych “Treaty of Why Tangi” replacing the Māori place name in the Treaty of Waitangi with the false cognate, Why Tangi? (Why Cry). The primary subject of the portraits is Te Papa Tongarewa Māori taonga collections manager, Lisa Ward. Including her in the portrait as a representative of taonga in our national collections reinforces that Māori people are a treasure.

The work depicts Lisa dressed in the New Zealand flag (from the Te Papa flag pole) with a top hat, glove and pearls — a perfect colonised native. The title of the work ‘*For God, For Queen, For Country*’ speaks of Māori loyalty to the crown. Its counterpart is in stark contrast, with Lisa sans pearls and hat, brandishing a pair of scissors, like a club, in one hand and clutching a distressed flag in the other. She is defiantly eyeballing the viewer in her act of treason. Its title ‘*For Māori, For Sure*’ referenced the Foreshore and Seabed Act.<sup>39</sup> As well as the slang ‘For Sure’ meaning something is true.

The Government passed the Foreshore and Seabed act in 2004 declaring the Crown owned the foreshore and seabed. Māori can apply for “guardianship” of certain areas. In article 2 of the Treaty it states “Her Majesty the Queen of England confirms and guarantees to the Chiefs and Tribes of New Zealand and to the respective families and individuals thereof the full exclusive and undisturbed possession of their Lands and Estates Forests Fisheries and other properties which they may collectively or individually possess”. The act didn’t take into account Māori customary rights, and once again the Government stole Māori property, and dishonoured the Treaty. We marched in 2004 to protest against this legislation, but they passed it. I’m really tired of marching and shouting at a deaf Government. I choose to use art as a protest platform and give them the middle finger.

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<sup>37</sup> [City Gallery Wellington | Te Whare Toi](#)

<sup>38</sup> <https://www.degruyter.com/document/doi/10.1515/9780824847722-013/html>

<sup>39</sup> <https://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/2004/0093/latest/DLM319839.html>

*There's a movement, a movement on the street  
People moving, they shuffle to the beat  
I hear them talking, they're talking on the street  
Words like 'freedom from oppression'  
Cause that's what my people need  
Akuanei, maranga ake ai!<sup>40</sup>*



*For God, For Queen, For County.* Treaty of Why Tangi, 2011, diptych, Wellington, NZ.

Photographer: Norm Heke

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<sup>40</sup> Aotearoa, 'Maranga Ake Ai' [https://youtu.be/u20OF\\_1bHPA](https://youtu.be/u20OF_1bHPA)



*For Māori, For Sure.* Treaty of Why Tangi, 2011, diptych, Wellington, NZ.

Photographer: Norm Heke

This diptych exhibited in 2018 as part of the ‘*Native Eye*’ series in the Wellington City Council lightboxes in Courtenay Place, the original Te Aro pā site.<sup>41</sup> Working with a tech company I developed an app to add augmented reality to the image. Augmented reality superimposes a still or moving image, and sound, on top of another.

In the image of Lisa clutching the flag, the superimposed video sets it on fire.<sup>42</sup> Flames virtually burn the flag, the entire right hand side of the portrait and extend outside of the box. The sound of a koauau accompanies the image, lamenting the loss of Māori foreshore and seabed ownership. There have been two convictions in New Zealand for flag burning, Paul Hopkinson in 2003, and Valerie Morse in 2007.<sup>43</sup> I was hoping for either a conviction or a warning, I received neither.

<sup>41</sup> <https://eyecontactmagazine.com/2018/04/the-tupuna-of-courtenay-place-in-downtown-wellingt>

<sup>42</sup> <https://vimeo.com/241822790>

<sup>43</sup> <https://teara.govt.nz/en/flags/page-5>

## Militant Māori

The next iteration of flags was the *Militant Māori* series. Informed by 19<sup>TH</sup> century photographs of Māori wearing “the spoils of war”, I created wraps from the New Zealand flag with customised vintage military jackets. In this series, I was building a fashion army. One of the cut up flags was fashioned into a mask, a symbol of oppression and the Crown silencing our Māori voices. It is ironic that in 2021, the people of Aotearoa are wearing masks to protect themselves from a worldwide pandemic.



*Militant Māori*, Te Rauparaha Arena, Porirua, 2015. Photographer: unknown

One of the works, called ‘God Slave the Queen’, consisted of a chain face mask symbolically representing the chains that bind — authority where orders are passed from one chain to the next, while each link supports the chain of command. This was worn with a pair of khaki men’s army pants reconstructed into a dress. A domestic tea towel with the picture of the Queen is turned into a patch complete with safety pin eyelashes, pierced nose and pearls. The Queen got punked.



*Militant Māori*, Māori Market 2014, Wellington, NZ. Photographer, Norm Heke.



*Militant Māori*, Māori Market 2014, Wellington, NZ. Photographer, Norm Heke.

## The Māori flag

In *Tino Rangatiranga and Mana Motuhake: Nation, state and self-determination in New Zealand*,<sup>44</sup> the authors write that Māori activism is certainly diverse, but one factor providing some unity has been the general acceptance of the tino rangatiratanga flag as a rallying point for Māori claims to self-determination. According to website of the Te Puni Kōkiri Ministry for Māori Development, the flag was designed by Hiraina Marsden, Jan Dobson and Linda Munn. It was commissioned after disappointment in the designs from a 1989 national contest to find a Māori flag.<sup>45</sup> The colours and design represent: Te Korekore—potential being (black, top); Te Whai Ao—coming into being (red, bottom) and Te Ao Mārama—the realm of being and light (white, centre). The koru design is symbolic of a curling fern frond, representing the unfolding of new life, hope for the future and the process of renewal.<sup>46</sup>

Sadly, Munn is the only remaining living artist and still continues her art practice premised on protest. The Tino Rangatiratanga Māori flag is now present, and officially acknowledged, at every Māori protest and event. In Munn's work "not for sale" in the Waitangi Wahine exhibition,(2015)<sup>47</sup> which I co-curated, Linda displays the flag in the background with a copyright circle. Ironically the flag is reproduced and sold by the Wellington flag makers business, tourist shops and \$2 shops and she doesn't receive a cent, nor any acknowledgment.



Foreshore and seabed protest 2011, Wellington, NZ.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>44</sup> [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/313781366\\_Ti\\_Rangatiratanga\\_and\\_Manua\\_Motuhake\\_Nation\\_state\\_and\\_self-determination\\_in\\_Aotearoa\\_New\\_Zealand](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/313781366_Ti_Rangatiratanga_and_Manua_Motuhake_Nation_state_and_self-determination_in_Aotearoa_New_Zealand)

<sup>45</sup> <https://nzhistory.govt.nz/politics/flags-of-new-zealand/Māori-flag>

<sup>46</sup> <https://mch.govt.nz/nz-identity-heritage/flags/national-m%20ori-flag>

<sup>47</sup> <https://www.artgallery.org.nz/waitangi-wahine>

<sup>48</sup> <https://teara.govt.nz/en/photograph/36552/foreshore-and-seabed-protest-2011>



*Not For Sale*, Linda Munn, 2015, Waitangi Wahine exhibition, Whare Taonga, Upper Hutt, NZ.

## Blanket Statement

The same time the flag was being fought over, settlers and military were giving blankets as gifts and trade to Māori. Different areas had different colours, and wool mills were built around the country to create New Zealand's own blankets for national and international export. Kaiapoi (1878), Roslyn Mills Dunedin (1879), Onehunga Mills with its famous princess blanket (1886), and Bruce woollen mill in Milton (1897).<sup>49</sup>



*Princess Blanket Poi*, Ngāhina Hohaia, 2009, City Gallery, Wellington, NZ.<sup>50</sup>

There are instantly recognisable blankets with distinct colours and labels. Hospital cream, railways and army grey with its blood red border in blanket stitch. They are still popping up for sale in op shops around the country. The Kingitanga have a blue blanket still worn on the paepae.

<sup>49</sup> <https://teara.govt.nz/en/agricultural-processing-industries/page-3>

<sup>50</sup> <https://eyecontactmagazine.com/2009/10/ngaahina-hohaia>



King Tuheitia, 2008, Te Tokonganui-a-Noho Marae, Te Kuiti, NZ.<sup>51</sup>

Blankets are imbued with historical significance. Every stitch tells a story of oppression, sickness, pain, death and sorrow. Thousands of Māori died from smallpox,<sup>52</sup> influenza,<sup>53</sup> and tuberculosis,<sup>54</sup> sometimes spread through infected blankets. Germs and viruses are an invisible tactic in war and colonial takeover practiced with brutal efficiency on indigenous people on their own land.<sup>55</sup> Blankets were like a slow painful torture disguised as a scratchy gift, literally a gesture of warmth and protection followed by a cold hard coffin. Māori paid for blankets with land, food and human sacrifice. A quarter acre of pain and degradation. Would you like a nail with that?

There are a number of Māori artists that repurpose blankets in their work including Ngāhina Hohaia, Jeanine Clarkin, Rona Osbourne and Ron Te Kawa. In 2000, I constructed a series of works using full blankets and off-cuts as a response to the practice of wearing blankets to replace korowai and traditional clothing. Top hats and bowlers emphasise the influence of colonial dress. Oversized tiki made by Wayne Youle, exaggerate perceived Māoriness, and in parallel implies the biggest pounamu has the biggest mana on the paepape. The works won the

<sup>51</sup> <https://www.nzgeo.com/stories/kings-tour/>

<sup>52</sup> <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/parliamentary/AJHR1914-I.2.3.2.51>

<sup>53</sup> <https://nzhistory.govt.nz/culture/influenza-pandemic-1918>

<sup>54</sup> <https://teara.govt.nz/files/27772-enz.pdf>

<sup>55</sup> [http://www.andallthat.co.uk/uploads/2/3/8/9/2389220/colonial\\_germ\\_warfare.pdf](http://www.andallthat.co.uk/uploads/2/3/8/9/2389220/colonial_germ_warfare.pdf)

three piece collection at Auckland Style Pasifika in 2004 and one of the them was subsequently acquired by Te Papa Tongarewa, Museum of New Zealand.



*Bi-cultural Rap*, Māori Art Market, 2007, Wellington, NZ. Photographer courtesy Toi Māori.

## Art Collectives + Urban Tribes

Art collectives have a gang fashion mentality, acting like outsiders, on their own land, creating their own tribes and regalia to show their sense of belonging, their tūrangawaewae or place to stand.

Gangs, like armies, create their own insignia and patches. They create a uniform of bandanas, denim, leather and repurposed army uniforms. They move up the ranks, get better leathers, and a better patch. An assemblage of materials asserts their mana, their authority and status. I formed an Auckland collective of Pacific women in the 90s called Pacific Sisters.<sup>56</sup> We were tired of seeing white faces dominating main stream media via magazines, radio and television. We were part of a brown art, music and fashion explosion that was happening in Auckland, which was not being represented. Initial members of the sisters were Selina Forsyth, Nephi Tupaea, Rosanna Raymond, Lisa Reihana and Ani O’Neil. There was a strong emphasis in our work that highlighted multi-media. We did shows on streets, in clubs, warehouses and museums. We wanted to be seen and heard by the people, for the people. In July 2018, Pacific Sisters had a major retrospective exhibition which opened at Te Papa Tongarewa,<sup>57</sup> then went on to the Auckland City Art Gallery.



Ema Lyon from Pacific Sisters, 21<sup>st</sup> century cyber sister handover at Te Papa Tongarewa. 1997

Photography Sarah Hunter

<sup>56</sup> <http://www.nzfashionmuseum.org.nz/pacific-sisters/>

<sup>57</sup> <https://www.tepapa.govt.nz/about/past-exhibitions/2018-past-exhibitions/pacific-sisters-fashion-activists>

Rosanna Raymond went on from the Pacific Sisters to form the saVAge K’lub. Putting the VA in savage. The va is a Samoan concept of the space between.<sup>58</sup> It was a reclamation of an exclusive rich white men’s club that poked fun at indigenous people and lampooned their culture.<sup>59</sup>



Savage Klub insignia, 2020. Photo: Courtesy Rosanna Raymond

A more authentic, yet glamourised, view of gangs was thrust into the spotlight with the Mongrelism show by Jono Rotman.<sup>60</sup> Here he glorifies “the mighty mongrel mob” in larger than life glossy images, threatening tattooed faces eyeballing the viewer in their resplendent red regalia. Their icons include the British bulldog and the nazi symbol, the antithesis of Māori culture and pride. Once again the punk premise enters the fashion realm, with the gang giving the fingers to Pakeha colonists. Although Rotman gained permission to photograph the subjects, it smacks of the “noble savage” postcards, albeit larger than life, and the fierce nature of Māori people.

<sup>58</sup> <https://openrepository.aut.ac.nz/handle/10292/14325?fbclid=IwAR0Pg48U6CYfd2uShs60yAwyH5JV34rH-VsaRbZ2Iq7BiE9UVssQx2Gdn5Q>

<sup>59</sup> [Tuhi \(savageklub.com\)](http://Tuhi(savageklub.com))

<sup>60</sup> <https://jonorotman.com/MONGRELISM>



*Greco Notorious South Island RIP, Tapairu MMVIII, 2014, Mongrelism by Jono Rotman*

### Chapter Three: Reimagining portraiture and costume



*The Tui Sings To Me*, Native Eye Series, 2005, Photography, Greg Semu

The Native Eye portraits are a series of specially chosen Māori wahine living in Otaki in 2005. Some were born there, others moved for various reasons. I was living in Otaki with my children, and wanted to capture distinctive Māori wahine around me at that point in time. The costumes were reproductions from images I had sourced in the back of House Te Papa photographic catalogues, thanks to in-house photographer Michael Hall for giving me access. I replaced traditional materials with haberdashery and notions introduced by Europeans. Wool, buttons, safety pins, doilies, fabric, sequins, ribbon, bottle tops.

*'The Tui Sings To Me'* is a portrait of renowned Otaki weaver, Sonia Snowden. It displays a necklace fashioned from a dozen tui beer bottle tops, with quiz questions on the back about New Zealand. The kakahu features hand-stitched button detail to replicate taniko. Traditional patterns and motifs fashioned from haberdashery introduced to Aotearoa the same time as blankets. European skills and materials integrated to construct Māori costuming.

*'Aotearoa. Land of the wrong white crowd'* emulates possibly one of Charles F Goldie's most famous paintings, from 1905 of a laughing Te Aho-te-Rangi Wharepu of Ngāti Mahuta. Originally titled "all 'e Same t'e Pakeha" it was at some stage renamed "a good joke". The painting is owned by the Dunedin Public Art Gallery.<sup>61</sup> My work was produced a century later, to put a light on colonialism and its impact on Māori health and culture.



*A good joke*, Charles F Goldie, 1905.

<sup>61</sup> <http://collection.dunedin.art.museum/search.do?view=detail&page=1&id=38046&db=object>



*Aotearoa. Land of the wrong white crowd.* Native Eye series, 2005. Photography Greg Semu.

I replaced the tane with a wahine, to be precise, the infamous Aunty KK Blacker. Aunty KK, who was in her 70s at the time, moved to Otaki from Ruatoki, when she was 25, with her husband who was a shearer. She started off as a rousie then went on to establish the first Kohanga Reo in Otaki. Aunty KK has a cigarette resting languidly in her mouth, a white cloud

of smoke lingers on her shoulder and in her hand she cradles a bic lighter. The painterly image draws attention to tobacco, which was introduced by Europeans, and is responsible for the deaths of hundreds of Māori wahine, every year, due to lung cancer.<sup>62</sup> Eventually smoking will be banned in Aotearoa as we move from pockets of smokefree areas to the whole country.<sup>63</sup> Bic lighters will become museum artefacts. Aunty KK was challenged by this image, she said it promoted smoking and so she gave up. Sadly she died from cancer a few years later, leaving a huge hole in the Otaki landscape, and my heart.

The map of New Zealand is handsewn onto Aunty KK's coat with buttons from the military and various clubs and pubs from Aotearoa. The silk scarf has Māori tohu and the coat is a Burberry from England. The original image has been replicated with fashion labels and paraphernalia, introduced to Aotearoa in the 19th century, that are still worn today. The fob chain is made from safety pins and the subject sports the Ōtaki Māori Racing Club President's badge. The Otaki racing club<sup>64</sup> was formed in 1886 and is the only remaining Māori racing club in Aotearoa, and by default, the world. The first horses were brought to New Zealand by the missionary Samuel Marsden in 1814<sup>65</sup> and the earliest documented Otaki race meeting is said to have been on the south bank of the Otaki River in 1854, and winners won goods, not money. The portrait subsequently toured to the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology in Cambridge, London, and also featured on the cover of Capital Times during smokefree week. Ironic.

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<sup>62</sup> <https://journal.nzma.org.nz/journal-articles/the-most-commonly-diagnosed-and-most-common-causes-of-cancer-death-for-Māori-new-zealanders>

<sup>63</sup> <https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/preventative-health-wellness/tobacco-control/smokefree-aotearoa-2025#:~:text=Our%20Government's%20Smokefree%20goal%20is,New%20Zealanders%20will%20be%20smokers.&text=Smoking%20rates%20are%20decreasing%2C%20but,living%20in%20socioeconomically%20deprived%20areas.>

<sup>64</sup> <https://otakiMāoriracing.co.nz/>

<sup>65</sup> <https://www.horsetalk.co.nz/2014/12/22/horses-arrived-new-zealand-200-years-ago-today/>

## Practice, Practice, Practice

Traditionally, Māori and Pacific costume and art is created using organic materials sourced from the sea, the earth, local flora and fauna. Pacific Sisters were a catalyst to look past purchasing materials from stores, and were part of a movement towards recycling and reusing. Repurpose. Upcycle. Reimagine. The practice of creating costume and jewellery was all about using found and recycled objects. The everyday that is thrown away, instead of being viewed as a taonga, is added to our arsenal of materials. We would share traditional costume making skills, as well as reading, studying, attending workshops and researching techniques from customary knowledge holders and museum collections.



*Bite Me*, curtain hooks and wax cord, 2017, photography Suzanne Tamaki



*Woven Pick*, Plastic movenpic spoons and wax cord, 2017, photography Suzanne Tamaki



*Native Eye*, sunglass lenses and wax cord, 2017, photography Suzanne Tamaki



*Forkin' Taniwha*, Cocktail forks, plastic teeth, bird ribcage, 2016, photography Suzanne Tamaki

## TOI vs TOY: Play Time

In Wayne Youle's work he often uses Māori images and icons and turns them into playful objects and pop coloured artworks that look like marketing advertisements. Kitsch much?! In the Plastic Māori exhibition, Youle's work '*Often Liked, Occasionally Beaten*', 2004 he has a line up of resin hei tiki lollipops. Youle pokes fun at the New Zealand Frosty Boy ice cream logo, often licked, never beaten. There's an irreverence and playfulness to his work I admire. That Māori humour where we laugh at ourselves, sometimes rather disrespectfully knowing we can get away with it.

The style of cheeky graphic illustrative art resonates with works by other artists like Johnson Witehira, Reweti Arapere, Kelcy Taratoa, and the street art styles of Xoe Hall and Miriama Grace-Smith. The tiki work is reminiscent of Dick Frizell's Micky to Tiki, but talk about appropriation.

Hohepa Thompson, an Ōtaki based artist, has a 2021 work referencing the same slogan, with the word coloniser incorporated into the subject's face. His label is HORI, which he purposefully chose to develop awareness of significant racial issues, and create a platform for discussion about sensitive subjects. Mission accomplished.



*Often Liked, Never Beaten*, Wayne Youle, 2009. Plastic Māori, Dowse Museum, Lower Hutt, NZ. <sup>66</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> <https://dowse.org.nz/news/media-releases/2009/synthetic-authentic-plastic-Māori>



*Often Licked Never Beaten, The Hori 2021, Otaki, NZ.*

During the Pasifika Styles exhibition in 2007 at Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Youle graffitied a 5 pound note while we were sitting in a bar. He gave the Queen's face a moko and changed the amount to five pounds of bullshit. Indeed.

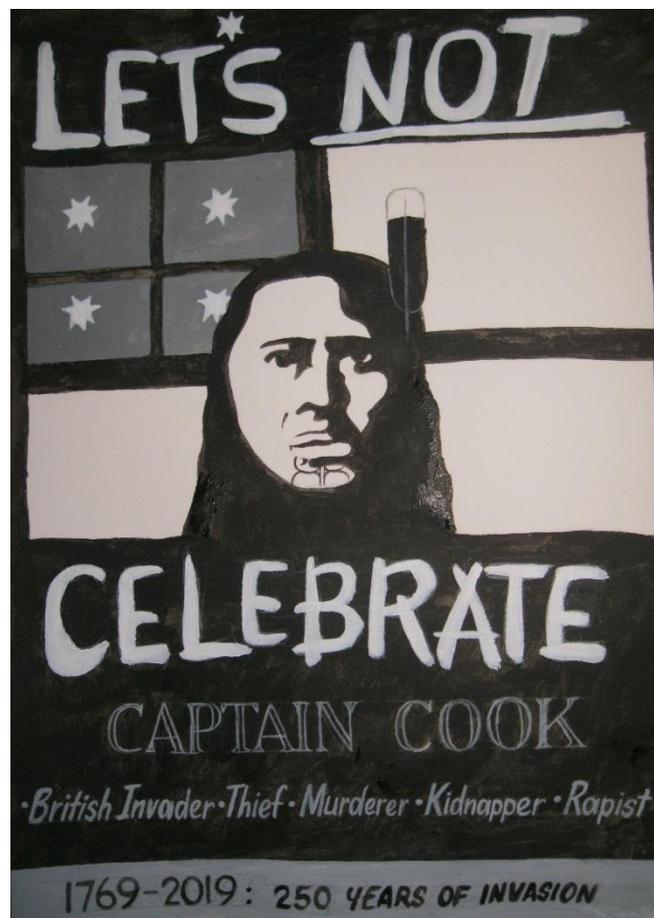
Disrespectful to the Queen and to Māori. She hasn't earned a moko, it's not her birth right. And I needed that 5 pounds to buy a drink. Dick.



*5 pounds of bullshit, Wayne Youle, 2007. Photography Suzanne Tamaki*

## History, Herstory Repeats

The history of racism and historical injustice is a long one for Aotearoa. A national art protest in November 2019 was co-ordinated in response to the NZ Government spending \$20 million on “Tuia” the First Encounters 250 year commemorations.<sup>67</sup> I curated a show in 2012 at Pataka ‘*A Bloody Encounter*’ to counteract Tuia 25.<sup>68</sup> The marketing poster was rendered from the hero artwork of the exhibition by Robyn Kahukiwa, with her permission of course. The first work walking into the gallery was Robyn’s work, which in the marketing poster said ‘*A Bloody Encounter*’. The work actually states ‘Lets not celebrate Captain Cook. British Invader. Thief. Murderer. Kidnapper. Rapist.’ Welcome to the show.



*Let's not celebrate Captain Cook*, Robyn Kahukiwa 2017, Porirua, NZ.

<sup>67</sup> <https://mch.govt.nz/tuia250>

<sup>68</sup> <https://pataka.org.nz/whats/exhibitions/a-bloody-encounter/>

## Chapter Four: Anti-Social Life and the Digital Economy

Stories were emerging that China had a contagious virus that was spreading throughout the world. New Zealand remained oblivious and carried on as usual. The history of viruses and the elimination of Māori as part of a colonisation strategy is part of Māori history. The Spanish flu in 1918 killed thousands of Māori and indigenous populations around the world.<sup>69</sup> It was one of the deadliest pandemics in human history. One hundred years later, in 2020, Covid was making headlines and we had no idea how severely it would affect Aotearoa. I wanted to respond with art so took the opportunity during a club tournament at the Newtown Bowling Club to make a video. Yes, we were still gathering in large groups. The white sports uniform could be mistaken for surgical whites, and possible preparation for a hospital visit. I'm standing on Newtown Bowling Club's perfect green manicured lawn at dusk. A shielded face with stenciled moko kauae white cotton masks, to add a tohu as a layer of protection and identification. Clutching the bowl like a crystal ball with long blue sparkling talons. The sailing ship, reminiscent of all the foreign visitors to our shores bringing their sickness. Wailing.<sup>70</sup>



*Whitewashed Wailing*, Newtown Bowling Club, 2020, photography Mikel Taylor

<sup>69</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spanish\\_flu](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spanish_flu)

<sup>70</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/suzanne.tamaki/videos/10220160986967863>

On 23rd March 2020, New Zealand went into COVID-19 Alert level 4 lockdown.<sup>71</sup> Life was through social media, zoom meetings, zoom parties, FB updates, news channels, you tube, instagram, tik tok. Conspiracy theories, misinformation, negativity, fake news and real time videos. What's going on?<sup>72</sup>

I showcased the *whitewashed wailing* video as a facebook live post. On a social media platform as opposed to a conventional gallery space. Guerilla art in a virtual world. An alternative space to reach the public. The work received 125 likes overnight, indicating there's engagement and an audience, not necessarily one that is interested in art or knows what they are viewing, but they are observing.

The age of internet. Social media is a space where an artist can feel validated with the number of likes and shares that appear. It's also a platform for comments, the good, the bad and the ugly. On social media spaces the viewer feels free to share their honest opinion without appearing smart. The opposite of an art gallery.

Anyone can upload images and art and add their own narration. Wikipedia and google give us information that often miss details and are not always correct. It's also a space to deliberately share misinformation and spread fear.

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<sup>71</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/COVID-19\\_pandemic\\_in\\_New\\_Zealand](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/COVID-19_pandemic_in_New_Zealand)

<sup>72</sup> What's going on, Marvin Gaye <https://youtu.be/o5TmORitlKk>

## Art in the age of social media

Social media allows us to reach people outside the exhibition space who cannot physically come to the gallery. Digitisation of artwork changes the objects from physical engagement to social. Dematerialising the object and deleting the interaction experience. Most people now view online, not real life. I came, I saw, I selfied. Enter a gallery or a live event and camera phones impede the view. If you don't film it, photograph it, share it on a live media channel it didn't happen, and you weren't there. People have stopped enjoying the real experience, and are more attuned to look at me, look what Im doing. Like me. Thumbs up.



Facebook like button<sup>73</sup>

It's not hard to associate classical art with social media. Vincent Van Goughs self portraits are drawn out selfies. On instagram everyone's showing off their food, flowers, wine or latest purchase. It's just a series of still lifes. Food porn vs food painting. As artists, or as humans, do we want the followers and the likes on our facebook and Instagram pages. Using art as a marketing commodity to boost our likes and followers. And curating the lens they watch us through.

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<sup>73</sup> [https://dl.acm.org/doi/abs/10.1145/2818048.2820066?casa\\_token=gal6DJrhFc0AAAAA%3A06dH95Ie0iaN-ghl209Wld7XxYF\\_ID5W4\\_VheUg0lZzjm8nuOdtonMXHksiPNxmWmp4W7b5N1C-G](https://dl.acm.org/doi/abs/10.1145/2818048.2820066?casa_token=gal6DJrhFc0AAAAA%3A06dH95Ie0iaN-ghl209Wld7XxYF_ID5W4_VheUg0lZzjm8nuOdtonMXHksiPNxmWmp4W7b5N1C-G)

## Talking Taonga

There's an empty space that needs to be filled with history and, by default, education. What are people protesting and polarised about. Not having discussions but posting racist, derogatory comments online and brushing it off as jokes, or not. How do you cut through the white noise to speak about history, and current affairs, without sounding like a lecture. Talking Taonga is a mouthpiece to share stories. Issues that are impacting Māori, the environment, the economy, health and well-being.

The concept of talking taonga started with a cat. An opinionated, rude cat. Gingerbread.<sup>74</sup>

Gingebread is a character created by Auckland comedian Tom Sainsbury in 2019. The semblance of Gingerbread's tabby countenance is superimposed on Tom's face which is unnerving and hilarious. It activates the framework how a cat could possibly be talking. And have such great teeth. He's so evil, he speaks about his plans to kill mistress's drop kick husband. And her family. #rollseyes. He kills native birds and is proud of it. Sainsbury imitates a number of politicians, e.g Paula Bennett and Judith Colins within a political context to discuss current topics.

Gingerbread is the perfect example of humour as a method of engagement. He appeals to millennials and boomers. Māori humour, however, has a darker edge where it allows the viewer to laugh at Māori culture and language, while also feeling slightly awkward. It can be used to diffuse a charged political situation and poke fun at serious issues affecting Māori.

Talking Taonga manipulates inanimate objects to give them a voice and facial expressions. Animating taonga from my personal collection provides them exposure in a public space without having to be in a controlled exhibition environment. The mechanics of talking taonga has been enabled through an existing phone app, accessible via iPhone or Google Store, to make your pets talk. I manipulated the app to take it outside of its intended parameters to act as a vehicle. It allows the head to turn, eyes to blink and mouth to move in time with your recorded dialogue. The pitch and speed of the recording can be adjusted which allows a range of "voices" from a young girl to an old man. However, the quality of sound and image is only as good as your phone. The rawness adds to the authentic nature and different image sensibilities

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<sup>74</sup> Gingerbread's birthday <https://fb.watch/978qRS5uE-/>

and it doesn't have to be high quality. It's one minute of madness. Photographs of the taonga are taken on my iPhone 7 with three cameras for extra definition (according to the catalogue). Photos of images from a newspaper, magazine or online article appear grainy and pixelated. Do I need permission to use these images in a public space? Do I need permission to animate the statues? Is it important or relevant to have a conversation with the whanau that own or created these objects? If they are alive? But would they say what I want to say? Would they approve? I doubt it. I'm talking about colonisation.



*Miss Tiki*. 2020, Resin tiki by Wayne Youle, Photography Suzanne Tamaki

Miss Tiki was the first work in the series.<sup>75</sup> This white resin tiki was made by Wayne Youle in 2001 and embellished with a white doily and silver chain to be worn as a neckpiece. In *Talking Taonga* she responds to mispronunciation of reo words, and how the mis-spoken word is also offensive. In her case tiki is often pronounced teke, which means female genitals. The video is 23 seconds in duration and I made her voice deeper to emulate a drag queen with a sort sharp sarcastic message.

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<sup>75</sup> Miss Tiki [https://youtu.be/RLj0\\_1X3GkQ](https://youtu.be/RLj0_1X3GkQ)

Next up was Manu. Manu is a vintage plastic female Māori doll from the 70s whose eyes open and close. On the Ministry of Education website it describes her as “an example of Kiwiana, an informal term used to describe things that are unique to, or strongly associated with, New Zealand and that help to define a sense of national identity”.<sup>76</sup> Manu’s kōrero spoke to cultural appropriation and making money from Māori culture and taonga.<sup>77</sup> In one month her video had 14,000 views and 200 shares on Facebook. Manu isn’t in pristine condition, her hands look like they have been chewed by a dog and her hair has bald spots. During Covid people weren’t able to visit their hairdressers, so it seemed appropriate to blame Covid for her crazy hair. Here’s an example of creating humour in a situation that isn’t funny, it’s actually deadly serious. Is it even appropriate to make jokes about Covid.



*Manu The plastic Māori having a Covid lockdown moment, July 2020, Wellington, NZ. Photograph  
Suzanne Tamaki*

<sup>76</sup> <https://artsonline.tki.org.nz/Teaching-and-Learning/Primary-teaching-resources/Units-and-sequences/Visual-Culture-and-the-New-Zealand-Curriculum/Representations-of-Aotearoa-New-Zealand/Souvenir-Māori-Doll-1950s-60s>

<sup>77</sup> Manu <https://youtu.be/gf0mnvtGyos>

Manu is reminiscent of Lisa Reihana’s ‘*Wog Features*’ video which uses sound, illustration and moving image, in a playful video, to talk about the derogatory word wog and its impact on indigenous people.<sup>78</sup> Reihana uses moving image to share stories of Māori history and identity, and wog features was an early precursor to use video as a platform to promote political art practice.

The second iteration of Manu has her in a new outfit complete with the pōtae she asked for in her first video to hide her covid hair.<sup>79</sup> Māori fashion designer Mere Keating requested her head measurements and made it to size. This work was released to coincide with Māori Language week in September 2020. Hell's Basement Brewery in Alberta, Canada called a beer Huruhuru, which means feather or pubic hair.<sup>80</sup> The response on line from Māori was cut-throat and hilarious. The brewery’s press release stated “We acknowledge that we did not consider the commonplace use of the term huruhuru as a reference to pubic hair, and that consultation with a Māori representative would have been a better reference than online dictionaries”. Cultural appropriation without engagement can backfire quickly. Their actions and words gave plenty of material to play with to write a script.



*Manu The Plastic Māori - Te Wiki o te Reo Māori*, August 2020, Wellington, NZ. Photograph  
Suzanne Tamaki

<sup>78</sup> <https://www.tepapa.govt.nz/learn/for-educators/teaching-resources/venice-biennale/lisa-reihana-emissaries/wog-features>

<sup>79</sup> <https://youtu.be/h0i6LUadciw>

<sup>80</sup> [Canada brewery apologises for beer named 'pubic hair' in Māori - BBC News](#)

The Māori Party started a petition asking for Aotearoa to be recognised as New Zealand's official name.<sup>81</sup> Our country was named Aotearoa by the first polynesian Explorer, Kupe, who discovered it in the year 900. It was named New Zealand, over 700 years later, by a map maker working for the Dutch navigator Abel Tasman.<sup>82</sup>

David Seymour, ACT party leader, responded on a twitter thread that it was a ban on calling our country New Zealand.<sup>83</sup> This was a really insulting comment, not only because he was incorrect, but David whakapapas to Nga Puhi and should be commenting from a Te Ao Māori lens. However, I did appreciate that he used a macron on the word Māori.



Rawiri Waititi, Co-leader for the Māori Party, responded by editing David Seymour's tweet.



<sup>81</sup> [Change our official name to Aotearoa - Te Pāti Māori \(Māoriparty.org.nz\)](https://www.māoriparty.org.nz/change-our-official-name-to-aotearoa-te-pāti-māori)

<sup>82</sup> [European Names – 1966 Encyclopaedia of New Zealand – Te Ara](#)

<sup>83</sup> <https://twitter.com/dbseymour/status/1437558204980817922>

Māori place names not being recognised as official, is racist and an ongoing problem. Councils are addressing the issue and beginning to make small changes. One example was the renaming of Te Wharepouri Street by Wellington City Council in 2020,<sup>84</sup> which for years had been wrongly named Warepori. Te Wharepouri was a Chief from Te Āti Awa, who signed the treaty of Waitangi.

For Te Wiki o Te Reo Māori 2021, the Aotearoa name debate, was a catalyst for Manu to launch another video, and showcase another outfit. In this iteration she is sitting in front of an Endeavour replica framed by two fragile white china statues with oversized hands.<sup>85</sup>



*Manu the Plastic Māori from Aotearoa, September 2021, Wellington, NZ.*

Photography Suzanne Tamaki

<sup>84</sup> <https://wellington.govt.nz/news-and-events/news-and-information/our-wellington/2020/03/te-wharepouri-street-gets-approval#:~:text=The%20new%20street%20name%20recognises,and%20was%20buried%20at%20Petone.>

<sup>85</sup> <https://youtu.be/tWVnhzhwZac>

## Statue Bro

During 2020 lockdown, people were scared. New Zealand was locked down for 6 weeks, England was in lockdown for one year. Black Lives Matter hit the world stage. The video of George Floyd on 25 May 2020 was a real life 8 minute 46 second horror movie. Black people in the USA were marching and protesting against a life-time of racism. The #BLM movement resonated with all indigenous and non-indigenous people around the world. Long overdue and everyone was paying attention. Super glued to phones and laptops as it rolled out. Statues were toppled, beheaded and drowned. Māori picked up on this as a genuine means of protest against the past. Statues, are by their nature, politicised and the response to them is relevant to New Zealand history, past and present.

There are a number of statues, monuments and memorials in Aotearoa that glorify colonisation and the rule of the crown. In Wellington, the political capital, these statues are figure heads. Famous spokespeople that dominated New Zealand politics and shaped our country.

In Albert Park, Auckland - the Governor Grey statue has been systematically vandalised. In one incident his body was splattered with blood red paint. I animated the image from a stuff newspaper article: June 2020.<sup>86</sup> Using current affairs to inform the work and to speak of his actions on behalf of the Government and the land grab. Western Media became the catalyst to tell the story and gives an opportunity to artistically engage with the publication. As the image is from an online newspaper article the quality is grainy, much like New Zealand history.



Stuff article, 15 June 2020, Photography Ricky Wilson

<sup>86</sup> <https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/300035275/sir-george-grey-statue-in-auckland-vandalised-smearred-with-red-paint>

The statue of British Army Captain John Hamilton was removed from the Hamilton town centre.<sup>87</sup> However, removing an effigy doesn't erase the histories or educate the masses. I used the image of Hamilton from a spinoff article informing about the removal.<sup>88</sup> They wrote about it and talking taonga spoke about it. At this time in New Zealand history when a seminal act of decolonisation was happening in Kirikiriroa, talking taonga was able to respond in real time with a Māori view – speaking with a plum in mouth voice.



*Hamilton Statue*, Photography Michael Bradley/AFP

Animating taonga provides the ability to tailor individual personalities for the viewer to engage with. The popularity of *Manu* ignited the idea she could have her own web series about Plastic Māori. She now has her own personal instagram page. Putting the cult in culture.

The Talking Taonga series was selected for exhibition at the Whakatāne Community Arts Gallery in September 2021, and the collective “Mischief Makers” exhibition at Pataka 27 November 2021. The Talking Taonga exhibitions continue the object discussion, and the online presence supports a physical, fleeting, exhibition. In the Pataka exhibition space, physical taonga from their collections will sit alongside the videos.

<sup>87</sup> <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/418904/hamilton-statue-s-removal-raises-debate-over-artefacts-of-british-colonialism>

<sup>88</sup> [Hamilton or Kirikiriroa? New poll on backing for a city name change | The Spinoff](#)

## Cultural Inclusion and Integrity

I wanted to include a local Whakatāne statue in the exhibition and started a kōrero with local iwi Ngāti Awa to animate the Wairaka statue at the Whakatāne Heads.<sup>89</sup> The statue was commissioned by Sir William Sullivan, a former Mayor of Whakatāne, as a memorial to his late wife. There were multiple issues around using the statue as a subject. Firstly, nobody had a photograph of the statue's face. They were all profile shots of her body side on. Secondly, it isn't actually Wairaka. It's a representation by artist Jim Allen, and he made her painfully thin and unrealistic. There's no way that woman paddled a massive waka ashore all by herself. I opened a kōrero with Ngāti Awa about animating the carving of Wairaka, on the whareniui at Te Whare o Toroa (Wairaka) marae.<sup>90</sup> The marae committee made a decision to protect the integrity of the work, so it wasn't approved. I was happy to accept their recommendations and was pleased to have an open and honest discussion with local Iwi about my intentions. I realised using colonial statues is a less complicated process, so in the short term, they will remain the subjects I use.



*Wairaka, The Lady on the Rock, Whakatāne, NZ. Photography Whakatāne District Council*<sup>91</sup>

<sup>89</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Statue\\_of\\_Wairaka](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Statue_of_Wairaka)

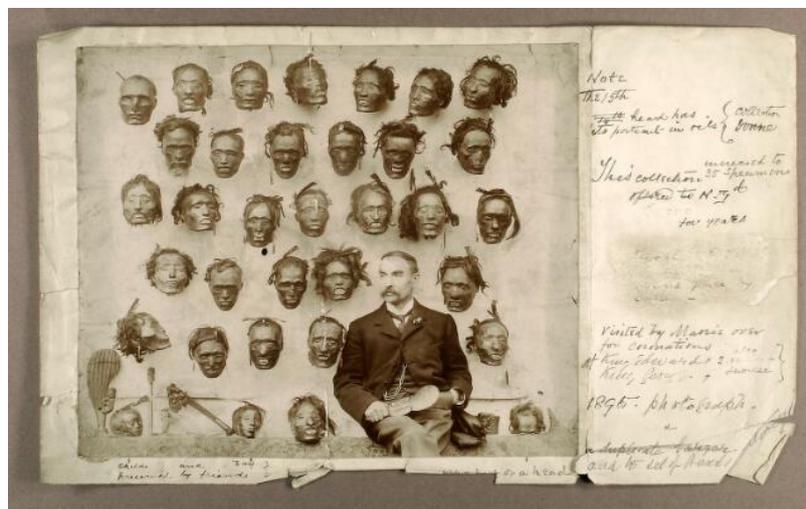
<sup>90</sup> [https://natlib.govt.nz/records/22499817?search%5Bi%5D%5Bsubject\\_authority\\_id%5D=-339671&search%5Bpath%5D=items](https://natlib.govt.nz/records/22499817?search%5Bi%5D%5Bsubject_authority_id%5D=-339671&search%5Bpath%5D=items)

<sup>91</sup> <https://www.whakatane.com/see-and-do/lady-rock>

## Cultural Preservation: Everything can be traded

Mokomokai, or Toi moko, are the preserved heads of Māori decorated with tā moko tattooing. They became highly prized as valuable trade items during the Musket Wars of the early 19th century. The act of collecting mokomokai is most infamously portrayed in the photo with Major General Horatio Gordon Robley and his collection of 35 mokomokai.<sup>92</sup> Robley wrote the book *Māori Tattooing*, which was published in 1896, displaying his detailed illustrations of preserved heads.<sup>93</sup>

There is a concentrated strategy by the Museum of New Zealand to repatriate to New Zealand the hundreds of toi moko, kōimi tangata, and kōiwi tangata held in museums and private collections around the world. The Karanga Aotearoa Repatriation Programme is the government mandated authority that negotiates the repatriation of Māori and Moriori remains on behalf of Māori and Moriori.<sup>94</sup> They remain in the Museum's guardianship until their Iwi can be identified.<sup>95</sup> They are not for display, and those that haven't returned to their whenua, sit silently in boxes, in an airless room waiting to be claimed. Museums and collectors are under pressure from the world to return stolen, and appropriated, indigenous collections to the people and their land. When they come home they will be greeted with both tears and aroha.



Major General Horatio Gordon Robley, 1895

<sup>92</sup> <https://rarehistoricalphotos.com/robley-Māori-tattooed-heads-1895/>

<sup>93</sup>

[https://books.google.co.nz/books?hl=en&lr=&id=hV8uAAAAYAAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PA149&dq=horatio+robley+mokomokai&ots=1ePfXqoLTy&sig=JxVtZY0-oLr9-2KFqkXDvdw1AQU&redir\\_esc=v#v=onepage&q=horatio%20robley%20mokomokai&f=false](https://books.google.co.nz/books?hl=en&lr=&id=hV8uAAAAYAAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PA149&dq=horatio+robley+mokomokai&ots=1ePfXqoLTy&sig=JxVtZY0-oLr9-2KFqkXDvdw1AQU&redir_esc=v#v=onepage&q=horatio%20robley%20mokomokai&f=false)

<sup>94</sup> <https://www.tepapa.govt.nz/about/repatriation/karanga-aotearoa-repatriation-programme>

<sup>95</sup> <https://www.tepapa.govt.nz/about/repatriation/repatriation-Māori-and-moriori-remains>

## Talking Heads

A talking head is a presenter or reporter on television who addresses the camera and is viewed in close-up. They educate, inform, evoke feelings, sell you something. Is talking taonga a gimmick, a trick or device intended to attract attention, publicity, or trade. It's marketing. A one minute advertisement about selling out.

'*Cultural Preservation*' is a work made for the Kingi Tuheitia 2021 portraiture awards at the New Zealand Portrait Gallery.<sup>96</sup> The work received a highly commended certificate and was chosen to tour nationally alongside 30 other works. Ironically, due to Covid, the work is currently sitting in a store room in the Wairarapa.

'*Cultural Preservation*' is a 3D portrait of my cousin Shane Te Ruki (Ngāti Maniapoto) printed on transparency paper, confined inside an artichoke heart pickle jar. The jar and paper allow light to pass through giving an ethereal quality. Eyes, ears and mouth are stitched up to retain the ha, the essence. It also references the Japanese proverb "see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil."<sup>97</sup> Kawakawa has been inserted into the jar to acknowledge pare kawakawa, a head garland worn at tangihanga.<sup>98</sup> If silence speaks volumes, this screams.

Cue the talking head. Shane wrote a tauparapara (incantation) to accompany the work which is the voiceover for his talking taonga. I created two recordings of his voice track - one low and one high. Mike Bridgeman, Massey technical supervisor, overlaid both voices. Male kaikorero blends with a female karanga. Ghostly and ethereal. A work colleague said it sounded like The Daleks from Doctor Who. Welcome to the Future Past. Ka Mua. Ka Muri.

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<sup>96</sup> <https://www.nzportraitgallery.org.nz/exhibitions/2021/5/28/kiingi-tuheitia-portraiture-award>

<sup>97</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Three\\_wise\\_monkeys](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Three_wise_monkeys)

<sup>98</sup> <https://teara.govt.nz/en/tangihanga-death-customs/page-4>

Tauparapara: Shane Te Ruki 2021

Ko au  
 ko Pane Kōtutu  
 kua turi aku taringa  
 kua pohe ngā karu  
 kua pōngahangahatia Ai taku waha  
 Te hoihoi o taku mū  
 Te hoihoi o taku mū  
 Te hoihoi o taku mū  
 Te hoihoi o taku mū

*It is I*

*T'is Pane Kōtutu (preserved head)*

*My ears now deaf*

*Eyes now blind*

*Mouth is muzzled*

*The noise of my silence*

*The noise of my silence*

*The noise of my silence*

*Deafening is the noise of my silence*



*Cultural Preservation*, 2021, Photograph: Suzanne Tamaki

I was intrigued by the discovery of holy relics in a steel box buried and sealed with concrete in 1975, under the floor of the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament, Christchurch.<sup>99</sup> The relics were collected by Bishop John Joseph Grimes SM, the first Catholic bishop of Christchurch and were contained in Gregg's coffee jars. One was filled with human bones, another with metal reliquaries. Relics are a form of physical memory, a direct and tangible connection to the divine.

Implanting Shanes 3D head in a jar, has given him the position of a reliquary, venerating the past. He has survived the passage of time, and is an object whose original culture, or customary practice, has disappeared. Like a carving of an atua on the Marae, he represents our culture in a modern space. He's now an art object cherished for historical value. And he's for sale. Like those original artichoke hearts that first inhabited the jar.

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<sup>99</sup> <https://thespinoff.co.nz/society/26-04-2021/saints-in-coffee-jars-the-relics-recovered-from-a-christchurch-icon/>

## QART Codes

COVID made the world scan QR codes. Everyone is using their phones to check in and check out. I learned how to embed content links into QR codes and made one to accompany the Cultural Preservation jar in the New Zealand Portrait Gallery, then a new one for the national tour. Technology made it easier to share work, and for the audience to engage without having to navigate online social media sites to find the video. The QR code also allows text or images to be embedded and to change the code to dots, dashes and even love hearts. Guerrilla art and marketing join together, with the central image of the work as a teaser for the viewer.



I realised I could put QR codes anywhere, not just exhibition spaces. They could be on lamp posts, public transport, elevators. Spaces where people pass or sit for a period of time. When they are scanned the public are exposed to a subliminal art exhibition. Lights. Camera. Action. Cue music. QART codes are the new ethereal art space. The only downside is my name is associated with the work so theoretically I could be charged with vandalism or graffiti. Flashback to those punk roots.

With the development of technology and online platforms the planet is becoming smaller and closer to Aotearoa, our tiny but incredible island on the edge of the world. More art institutions, museums, galleries, fashion houses, curators, artists and businesses are looking at New Zealand for inspiration. More importantly they are looking at Māori art as a genuine and authentic engagement with culture and place.

As we move in a 21st century space using technology to tell our stories, our art and narrative changes and evolves with time. Māori walk in two worlds, with the ability to take the best of both and combine them together in new, exciting mediums to influence the next generation. Māori are asserting themselves as a strong, empowered, collective voice speaking our truth.

We are sitting on the precipice of a major shift in thinking and action, and have the chance to influence change that will empower Māori now, and for future generations. Once upon a time we were arrested, now we are put into the story books of history for our children's children's children to read. We are the new myth, the 21st century tales of Aotearoa. Give them a story they will never forget.

**Whāia te iti kahurangi ki te tūohu koe me he maunga teitei**

*Seek the treasure you value most dearly: if you bow your head, let it be to a lofty mountain*