



Mahi Toi

Artworks from the Fletcher Trust Collection
at Fletcher Building

Mahi Toi

Mahi Toi was generated and formed within the Whakatupu Leadership Development Programme at Fletcher Building. Often, Māori meeting houses include carvings and displays of portraits that show the whakapapa of iwi and hapū, carrying stories that represent and bind the people together. Thinking of our Māori culture, whānau and tūpuna, our project vision has been to use artworks as a means of connecting employees across the Fletcher Building campus at Penrose.

Initially, the Rōpū Mahi Toi worked with Peter Shaw to develop a presentation in conjunction with Matariki 2019. Since the appointment of Francis McWhannell as curator of the Fletcher Trust Collection, the vision for *Mahi Toi* has expanded. From 2021, the programme will include recent acquisitions and temporary displays in response to significant events in the calendar, in addition to key taonga from the collection. There will always be a strong emphasis on works that embody or make reference to aspects of te ao Māori, with due prominence given to work by ringatoi Māori.

The Fletcher Trust Collection

One of Aotearoa New Zealand's most prestigious private art collections, founded as a corporate collection in 1962. Centring on New Zealand painting from the late 18th century to today, the collection continues to grow.

The Trust's purchasing policy supports the work of both emerging and well-established New Zealand artists. The collection is chiefly held within the offices of Fletcher Building in Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland. Specially curated exhibitions of works from the collection regularly tour Aotearoa art institutions.



THE FLETCHER TRUST

Brett Graham

(Ngāti Korokī Kahukura; Waikato-Tainui, b. 1967)

Te Piriti Puāwai

1997

Cornish granite

This sculpture—the title of which translates as ‘The Flowering Bridge’—was commissioned by the Fletcher Challenge Trust in 1997 in order to make use of blocks of Cornish granite that had formed part of the original Waterloo Bridge in London. Built in 1817, it was named for the famous 1815 battle that saw the final defeat of Napoleon by combined British and Prussian forces led by the Duke of Wellington.

The bridge was demolished in 1936. Blocks not needed in the construction of the new bridge over the River Thames were sent to the New Zealand Marble Company, at that time a subsidiary of Fletcher Construction. For many years they remained in the company’s Penrose plant yard until a sculptor willing to tackle the uniquely hard and difficult to carve granite could be found.

The metaphor of a deconstructed bridge is used to form three columnar structures, each alluding to the semi-elliptical arches of Waterloo Bridge. Upon each column sits a symbol of a particular epoch in the history of Aotearoa.

On the first column is a stylised rendering of the Duke of Wellington’s distinctive plumed bicorne hat, a potent symbol of British authority. Perhaps there is some ironic



significance in the fact that the sculpted hat is inverted. Its shape is also a reminder of the hat worn by Governor William Hobson at the time of the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi in 1840. Hats of the same type were later worn on ceremonial occasions by many succeeding male Governors-General of New Zealand.

The second column features a lone bird-like sentinel which refers to our guardianship of the land, the responsibility of all who live and work here. The third connects the present to the future. The flower depicts the blossoming of our forests and natural resources.

Te Piriti Puāwai was officially unveiled by Sir James Fletcher on Thursday 11 December 1997.

Michael Parekōwhai

(Ngā Ariki, Ngāti Whakarongo, b. 1968)

Atarangi

1990

Lacquer on wood

This is one of a series of related but different works called *Atarangi*. Megan Tamati-Quennell notes, ‘The title *Atarangi*, which in literal translation means ‘morning sky’, is defined more generally as ‘new beginnings.’ This particular sculpture formed part of the 1995 touring exhibition *Nervous Systems*, which explored tensions between conflicting patterns of identity in Aotearoa.

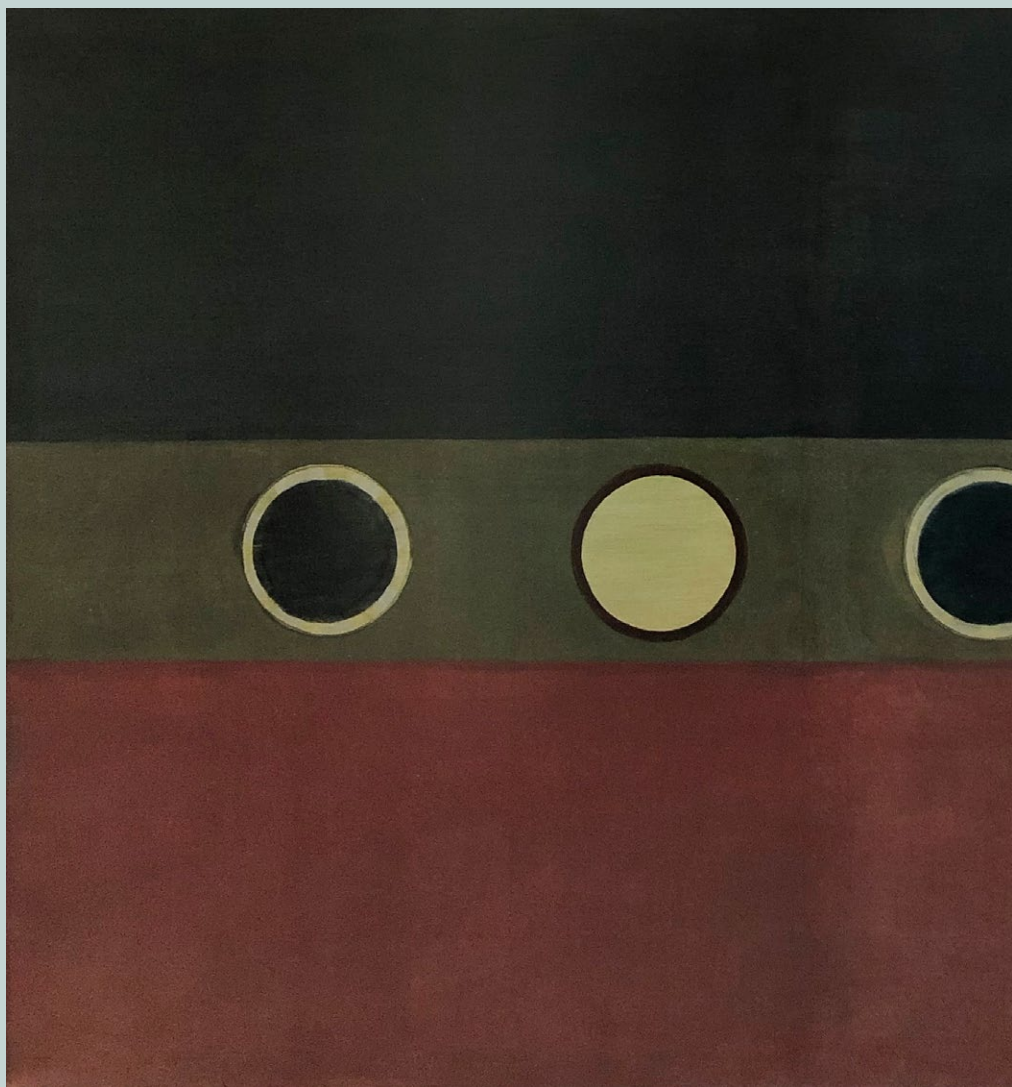
Robert Leonard has noted, ‘With minimal form and uninflected surfaces, *Atarangi* might be thought to side with American neo geo. A set of ten huge blocks—magnified versions of the Cuisenaire rods introduced into New Zealand schools in the late 1960s to teach basic maths—have been stacked to form the word ‘HE’, tipped on its side.’ The work can also be read as a stylised figure with arms raised, reminiscent of forms in customary Māori art.

Although originally used to teach mathematics, Cuisenaire rods were later incorporated into Te Ataarangi, a programme for teaching of te reo Māori. In this context, they serve as props around which conversations are conducted. The rods can thus be understood as a recuperation of Pākehā educational devices and an assertion of Māori culture and strength.



This sculpture poses a number of puzzles. Is the suggestion of a figure participating in a haka an indication that Māori identity is triumphant? Is the word 'he' to be read as the indefinite article ('a/an') in Māori or the singular, masculine, third-person pronoun in English? Does the turning of the word on to its side imply that Pākehā education has been an emasculation for Māori?

While each of these meanings is plausible, none is clearly preferable. In relishing such interpretative pluralities, Parekōwhai simultaneously asserts and displaces his identity, expressing a sense of ambiguity that was a significant issue in the 1990s for a number of younger artists of Māori and Pākehā heritage.



Kura Te Waru Rewiri
(Ngāpuhi, b. 1950)

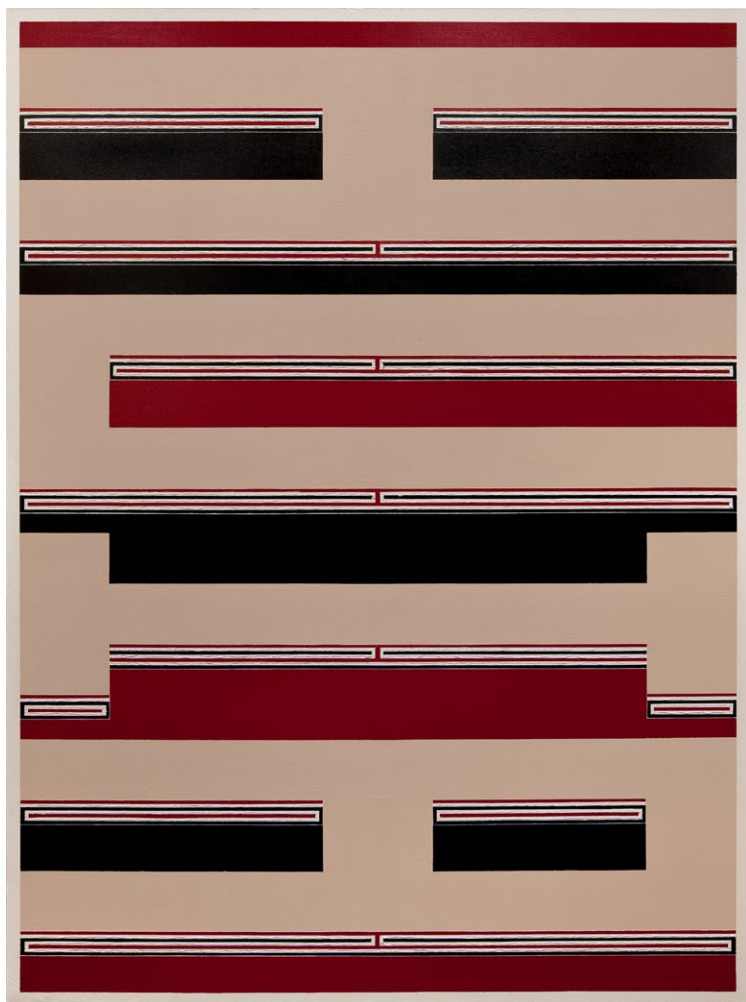
The Elements
1998
Acrylic on canvas





Ian Scott
(Pākehā, 1945–2013)

Bush House
1966
Acrylic on canvas



Darryn George
(Ngāpuhi, b. 1970)

Huia No. 2
2006
Oil on canvas

Milan Mrkusich

(Pākehā, 1925–2018)

Painting Green

1971

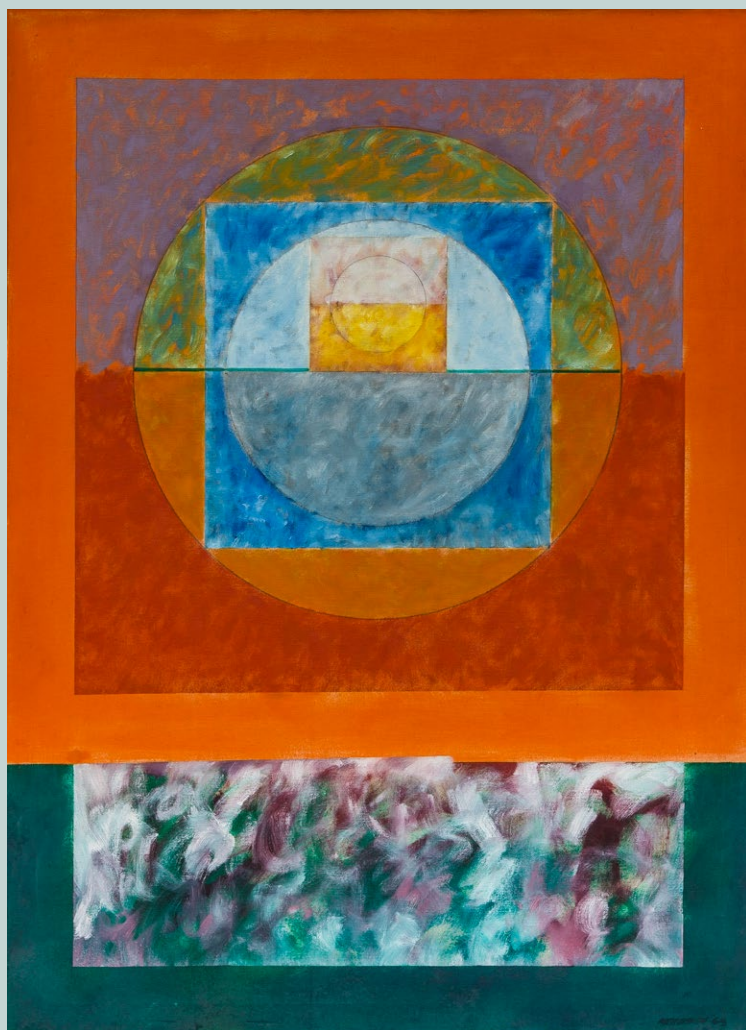
Oil on canvas

Milan Mrkusich is very well represented within the Fletcher Trust Collection. He is a favourite artist of Peter Shaw, who was the curator of the Fletcher Trust Collection between 1991 and 2019.

Mrkusich's first *Corner* painting, *Painting Red*, was produced in 1968. It was followed by a series of similar works. Each features a dense monochromatic centre and corners with clearly defined triangles of different yet closely related colours. In many works in the series, the monochromatic area is richly varied. This is the case with *Painting Green*, in which the central field is shot through with purples and blues that seem to glow from deep within the pervading green.

The corner paintings are austere non-compositional works in which colour is treated only as a physical fact without symbolic significance of any kind. The corners themselves have a tonal variation between them; they contain the field and generate tension.





Milan Mrkusich
(Pākehā, 1925–2018)

Earth Radiance
1963
Oil on canvas

From 1962 to 1964, Mrkusich worked on a series of paintings called *Emblems*, of which this is an example. He introduced circles, squares, isolated lines, and parallelograms over freely brushed areas. The works were very different from the 'action' paintings that had occupied him during the previous two years (*Deep Blue* is a late example). They had involved expressionistic gestural rhythms, in which geometrical rigour was sometimes suggested but never defined.

Mrkusich now introduced a greater degree of calculation into his work via the positioning of hard geometric and linear elements. It has been suggested that he was aware of the work of American painter Jack Tworkov, who at the same time explored the opposition between intellectual calculation and gestural techniques.

In 1963, he moved into symmetrical formats and began to make extensive use of the squared circle or mandala, a symbol of wholeness. His concern was the achievement of harmony between diverse elemental forces. In this brightly coloured work, he has set aside the predominantly dark colours of the series to produce a glowingly radiant work, the title of which makes explicit reference to the painting's elemental and colouristic intentions.



Milan Mrkusich
(Pākehā, 1925–2018)

The Contained Waters
1963
Acrylic on canvas

Like *Earth Radiance*, this work is part of Milan Mrkusich's *Emblem* series. The title *The Contained Waters* beautifully expresses the artist's intention—that of giving structure to the formless. Mrkusich has contained the light blue (watery?) sections of this painting. In the lower section, he has continued to use the fluid brushwork that characterised his earlier work from 1960, but now each colour area is bound within a tight compositional frame, rather than allowed to spread. The regularity of the brown, red, and gold circles in this work is something quite new for Mrkusich.

In looking at the painting, one can see him moving away from the influence of the often violently worked canvasses of American abstract expressionism towards a more linear style, which—one can recognise in hindsight—is where his work had always been leading. His next period refined the new rationalised approach. Circles and squares dominate his *Elements* series; gestural, expressionistic brushwork is replaced by smoother, less heavily worked textures.



Andrew McLeod
(Pākehā, b. 1976)

Kōwhaiwhai (triptych)
2007
Oil on canvas



Brent Harris

(b. 1956)

Untitled

2020–21

Oil on canvas

Although Brent Harris has been based in Australia since 1981, his work retains strong connections to Aotearoa. Motifs associated with time spent in the Manawatū and Taranaki regions in his youth, including trees, swamps, and mountains, recur in his paintings and prints. Also prevalent are references to the psychologies of familial relationships and sexuality, and to the history of art.

Bold, clean lines and blocks of broadly solid colour have long featured in Harris's works, lending them a certain cartoonish quality. This is only enhanced by his interest in distorted and bizarre subject matter: disembodied eyes and hands, curious puddles of liquid and puffs of gas, slippery forms that might equally be bodies or non-human elements of the natural world. As Robert Leonard has observed, many of his images are the result of automatic, or chance-based, image-making processes of the kind favoured by the surrealists.

Harris's work tends to be marked by sombreness, but it is not solely or overwhelmingly dark. Wit and kookiness balance psychological intensity. Over the past few years, he has increased his use of more atmospheric paint-handling, colliding this with the hard-edge style that dominates earlier pieces. There is great sensuality to his pictures, some even verging on the erotic.



Untitled is a grand and poetic work. The schematic heads that flank the central scene act both as formal elements, curtain-like frames, and as ever-present spectators. Similar entities are to be found in other paintings by the artist. He reuses his visual devices with enthusiasm. Iteration binds his works together stylistically and suggests that they might all derive from the one grand narrative or fever dream.

The core of *Untitled* shows a blue angelic figure and a more immediately human one, ostensibly atop a mountain. The silhouetted forms evoke shadow puppetry and Plato's 'Allegory of the Cave', while the expansive sky might recall works by the German Romantic painter Caspar David Friedrich. Harris notes that the angel is a nod towards depictions of the Angel of the Annunciation, including Colin McCahon's well-known painting of 1947. The emphasis is not necessarily on religion so much as on visionary or transcendent experience—experience that knows no name.



Ayesha Green

(Kāi Tahu, Ngāti Kahungunu, b. 1987)

Mum (May 1985)

2020

Acrylic on canvas

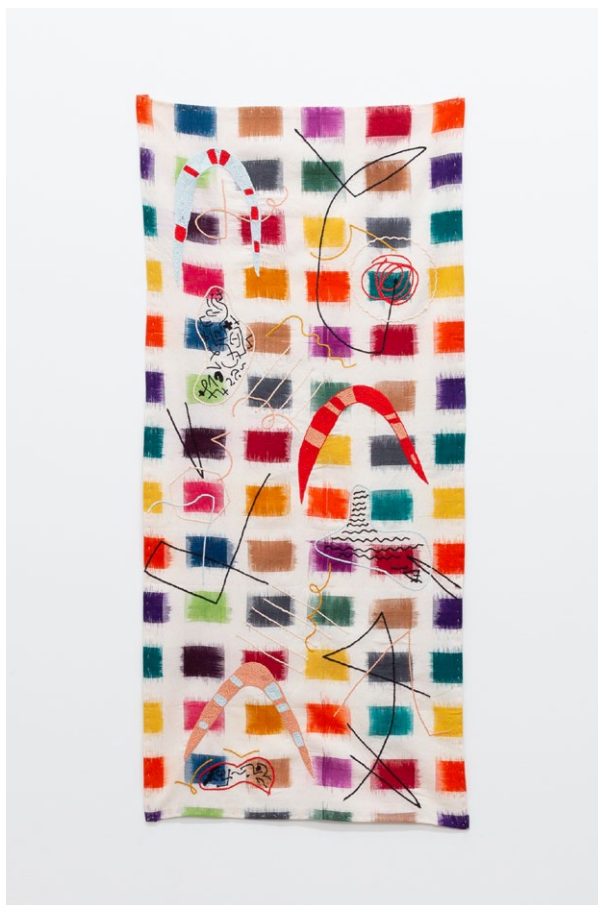
This painting was made for the landmark exhibition *Toi Tū Toi Ora* (2020), held at Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki. As the title indicates, the work depicts the artist's mother, Christina. It is based on a photograph that was taken during Christina's first visit to her ancestral marae, Ōtākou, on the Otago Peninsula. She stands in the doorway of the wharehau Tamatea. The work is imbued with excitement

but also tentativeness. The wall text from *Toi Tū Toi Ora* notes, 'Green depicts this moment of introduction to discuss an ongoing relationship to one's cultural heritage'.

Like her mother, the artist grew up disconnected by distance from her southern marae. Until recently, she was based in Ōtepoti, in close proximity to Ōtākou. She has been working to establish ties with the marae and to trace her whakapapa. The portrait underscores the central role of such processes in reclaiming one's identity. The wharenuī is an embodiment of Green's ancestors. A work that might initially seem to depict one family member in fact encompasses many.

Mum (May 1985) is in Green's typical style, in which colours are made homogenous and details distilled. There is little sense of depth, and brushstrokes are minimised, creating an image that is noticeably flat. This mode of working emphasises composition and line. Both are carefully worked out, and serve to counteract the apparent simplicity of the work. The painting possesses the graphic strength of cartoon or comic book imagery, children's drawings, and 'naïve' art. Green's mother is elevated to the status of a heroine.

The effect is reinforced by the large scale, and the use of a grand, black museum frame not dissimilar to those found on portraits of Māori by C. F. Goldie. Green has long been interested in the ways in which portraiture is used to express the importance and power of individuals and institutions alike. In the past, she has replicated paintings of, among others, Queen Elizabeth I, Queen Victoria and her family, Mākereti Papakura (or 'Guide Maggie'), and Rēnata Tama-ki-Hikurangi Kawepō, one of Green's tūpuna, who was famously painted by Gottfried Lindauer.



Areez Katki
(b. 1989)

Grasping (three anachronisms)
2020

Cotton thread hand-embroidery on handwoven
ikat khadi cloth



Michael Harrison
(Pākehā, b. 1976)

Things We Cannot See
2020
Acrylic on canvas



Rosalie Gascoigne
(Pākehā, 1917–99)

Orangery (triptych)
1998
Sawn-up cable drums



Shane Cotton

(Ngāpuhi (Ngāti Hine, Te Uri Taniwha), Ngāti Rangi, b. 1964)

The Plant

1995

Oil on canvas

The success of this painting lies in the puzzles that exist in its highly-patterned references, despite a relatively innocuous palette of pale yellows and whites, muted reds, browns and black.

For those of us Māori who identify closely with the northern rohe (tribal lands) of Ngāpuhi, the messages within it are reminders of a painful and frustrating past. The Dog Tax, for example, represented by the small and easily missed line of dog figures in the painting, is now embedded in our memories, reminding us of the efforts undertaken by government forces to oppress our tūpuna (ancestors). The heat of outrage at that punitive tax scheme which flows, lava-like, down through the generations, is obviously unabated as they burn in the heart of this artist and many other Māori alongside him.

And then there is the plant. Te Kooti Arikirangi and Rongopai always spring to mind at the mention of plants in relation to Shane Cotton's work. If the title refers to a factory, this painting extends beyond its Ringatū references into colonialist industrial capitalism, with all its



negative consequences for Māori culture and land. There is a similarity between the way a woven tukutuku wall panel can convey the history of Māori people's attachment to land and this work's abstracted form of story-telling.

If, for example, the viewer takes this painting as an abstract landscape then some sense of cultural disruption becomes clear. Loss has occurred at the same time as change; immoral land sales and confiscations had widespread socio-cultural implications for Māori. Both Māori and non-Māori cultures failed to remain intact as compromises, conflicts and degradations of environments and people took place. This artist offers us a chance to accept that convoluted and often tragic history through the patchwork of symbols in this painting.

Jo Diamond



Emily Karaka

(Ngāpuhi (Ngāti Hine), Waikato-Tainui (Ngāi Tai ki Tāmaki, Ngāti Mahuta, Ngāti Tahinga, Ngāti Tamaoho, Te Ahiwaru, Te Ākitai Waiohū, Te Kawerau ā Maki), b. 1952)

Moe Mai Rā, Tohorā

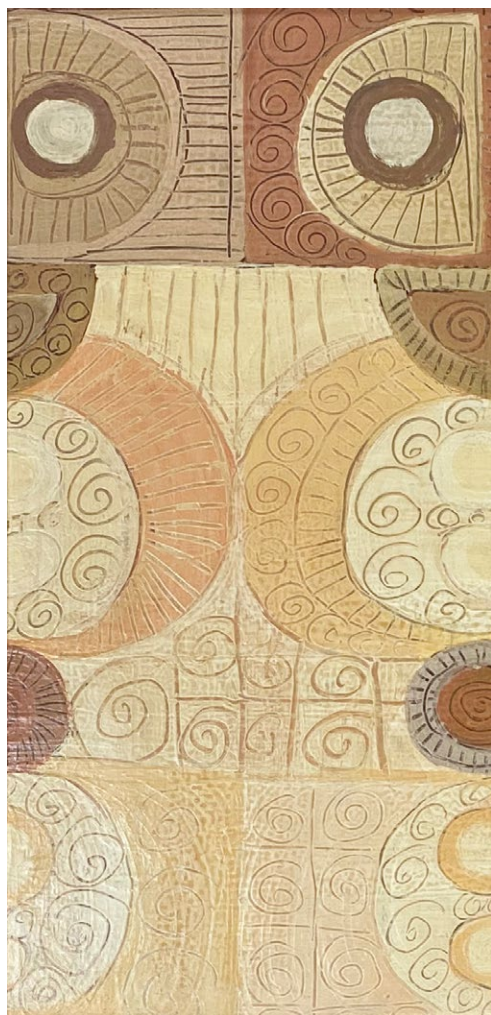
2021

Acrylic, oil and oil pastel on canvas

This work shows a large tohorā lying underneath Tāne Mahuta, a mighty kauri tree in Waipoua forest who shares his name with the god of the forest. In Te Tai Tokerau Northland, kauri and tohorā are understood to be siblings, children of Tāne. Long ago, they lived together on the land. Donna Kerridge has written:

‘One day Tohorā went to his beloved tuakana and asked him to come live in the ocean with him. Kauri, not wanting to leave the land, gave Tohorā his blessing as they exchanged parting gifts. Tohorā exchanged skin with Kauri, complete with scales so that he could grow tall and majestic above the tree canopy ... Tohorā’s skin was now smooth except for large callosities in place of the scales he had given to Kauri. Kauri in turn gave Tohorā his oil, so that he might have extra warmth as he traversed the ocean’s currents ... Kauri kept for himself only enough sticky resin to heal his skin, should he need to shed any of his newly acquired scales.’

Moe Mai Rā, *Tohorā* was made during Emily Karaka’s time as the first McCahon House Artist in Residence for 2021. It formed part of a major solo exhibition, *Rāhui*, which drew a connection between the *rāhui* (customary prohibition on access) placed by Te Kawerau ā Maki on the Waitākere Forest to combat kauri dieback and the lockdowns used to limit the spread of COVID-19. A remedy trialled elsewhere was the application of a blubber-based preparation to the roots of kauri, this concept being based both on the relationship between Kauri and Tohorā, and on the understanding that oils might help prevent the infectant from gaining entry to the trees via their root systems.



Paratene Matchitt

(Ngāti Porou, Te Whakatōhea, Te Whānau-ā-Apanui,
1933–2021)

Untitled

1965

PVA on board

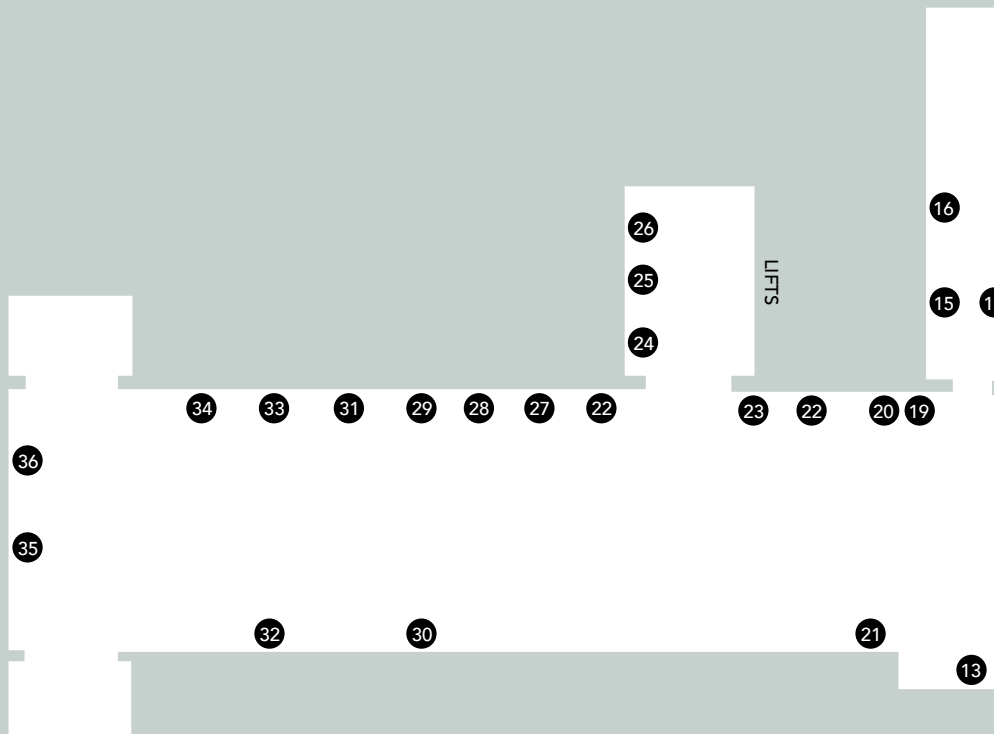


Mahi Toi

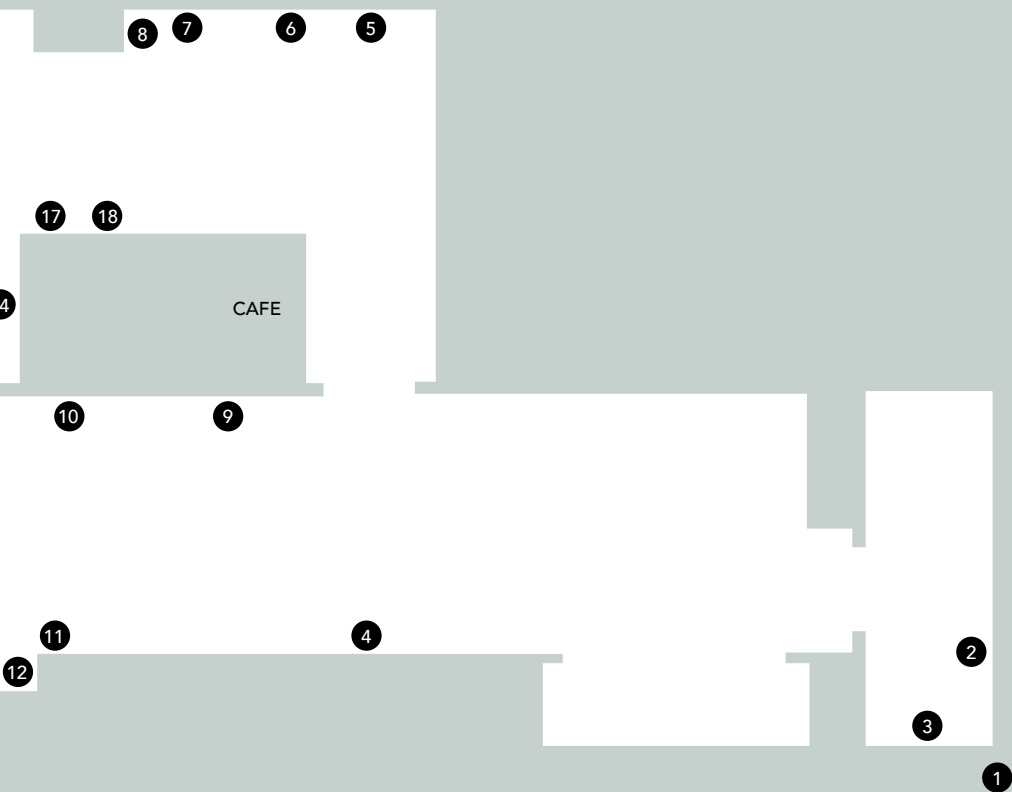
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Fred Graham

(Ngāti Korokī Kahukura, Waikato-Tainui, b. 1928)

Untitled (Te Ika-a-Māui)

c. 1965

Wood and copper

Fred Graham drew and painted sporadically throughout the 1950s, while working as a teacher and ‘art adviser’ in Te Ika-a-Māui, or the North Island. His interest in sculpture was sparked while he was living in Manawatū, where he lectured in art at Palmerston North Teachers’ College between 1957 and 1962. This carving was likely produced between 1963 and 1965, while Graham was working as an art teacher at Tauranga Boys’ College. During this time, he developed a strong interest in Māori histories and narratives, and these began to inform his work to a considerable extent.

Although this piece is untitled, its subject is known. It represents the fishing up of Te Ika-a-Māui by the eponymous demigod. Real-world elements are discernible: the tail of the fish (which is also fishhook-like), mountains, a bird. At the same time, there is considerable abstraction. The form on the right might refer to the fish or to Māui. A painting from 1970, titled *Te Ika a Māui* and featuring more immediately legible forms, is at Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki. Wall-based carvings that also centre on narratives include *Ngā Tamariki o Tangaroa* (1970) and *Māui Steals the Sun* (1971), both in private collections.

Jacqueline Fahey

(Pākehā, b. 1929)

In My Studio
2021
Oil on canvas

Last Summer
1971
Oil on board





Jacqueline Fahey is one of those artists encouraged by the women's art movement in its earliest years in Aotearoa to make unashamed use of her own domestic environment as a subject for painting. Her works are noteworthy for the skill with which they capture subtle moments of domestic psychological tension. She has described the home as the battlefield of the psyche.

In *Last Summer*, Fahey's daughter Alex is seen in passive-resistant conflict with her father, Dr Fraser McDonald. The ironic use of everyday objects, including a placemat made from neckties, contrasts with the significant objects found in still lifes by artists such as Frances Hodgkins and Rita Angus. Fahey revels in what Liz Eastmond has called 'the chaotic tidal wave of domestic clutter'.

Colin McCahon

(Pākehā, b. 1919–87)

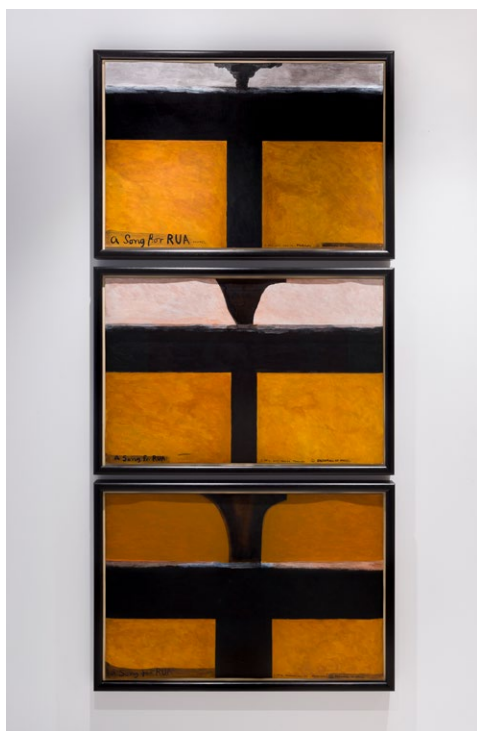
A Song for Rua, Prophet (triptych)

1979

Acrylic on paper

This work demonstrates the convergence of an individual artist's spiritual exploration and a Māori millennial movement of the late 19th century. The title of this painting holds the key to its multi-layered content and form. Its earthy palette, though contributing to the abstract form of the painting, clearly resonates with references to land, though the dominant dark cruciform shape provides at least a hint of a spiritual concept applied to the landscape. It is, however, the title that asserts the painting's Māori 'layer'.

The word 'Rua', to those familiar with social and religious history in Aotearoa, will be instantly recognisable as a Māori name as well as a number (two). It provides ample opportunity for wordplay, if not metaphor. It is the name of the prophet Rua Kēnana, whose religious order was based on the earlier work of Te Kooti Arikirangi, founder of the Ringatū faith. Rua's movement, centred in the small but vibrant community of Maungapōhatu, in the rugged Urewera mountain range, was millennial in that it sought a viable alternative to the religious and social order proffered by Pākehā Christian missionary efforts of the late 19th century. A Māori 'Moses-like' exodus from the 'Egypt' imposed by New Zealand's colonialist government provided powerful symbolic motivation for the Christian and Māori ideals of Rua's order.



This large-scale work pays a multi-layered homage. It acknowledges Rua's leadership in the face of great challenge and eventual belligerence from colonial forces. Given McCahon's many Old Testament-based explorations, it is also entirely feasible that Rua is employed in this work to 'speak' for more than Māori political concerns. Clearly, in the artist's mind, Rua represents human spirituality, of which Māori sensibilities are only a part. The work is about the recognition of human spiritual need, symbolised in one word: the name of a Māori prophet. Rua's 'song' comes to all of us in relation to our spiritual investment in land, and perhaps its final chorus asks not only for freedom from oppression, but also for justice and peace.

Jo Diamond



Emily Karaka

(Ngāpuhi (Ngāti Hine), Waikato-Tainui (Ngāi Tai ki Tāmaki, Ngāti Mahuta, Ngāti Tahinga, Ngāti Tamaoho, Te Ahiwaru, Te Ākitai Waiohūa, Te Kawerau ā Maki), b. 1952)

Kaitiakitanga: Shield I

1993

Mixed media on board

Kaitiakitanga: Shield II

1993

Mixed media on board

A shield of any kind usually has at least two functions: obviously one for protection and another to assert warriorhood, if not political conviction. While it can be raised or lowered to deflect harm away from the body, it can also be brandished ceremoniously in demonstration of armoured power. The shield form is better known outside Aotearoa in the African continent, in Papua New Guinea, and at various times in European military history. Given Karaka's well-known and valiant efforts to inject politics into her painting, this work should be interpreted as a political statement on local and global levels.

Karaka's paintings continuously refer to Māori culture as deserving of recognition and protection, and in turn they unflinchingly criticise colonialist misdeeds of the past. While the shields that she has constructed have obvious references to Māori cultural history, including that of the Te Waiohū iwi of which she is part, they also resonate with references to other political struggles, particularly those of many indigenous peoples around the world who have similarly suffered the 'downside' of colonialism.

Karaka's shields are both protective devices and emblems of the crusader for human rights, including those that directly affect Māori people. These are shields of Kaitiakitanga, a Māori language term that amounts to much more than mere 'guardianship' as it is usually translated. Kaitiakitanga is a multi-layered concept that can be applied within and beyond our shores. Karaka's shields testify, as history so often does, to the fact that that change and redress must be fought for, in the hope of a better, brighter future.

Jo Diamond

John Bevan Ford

(Ngāti Raukawa ki Kapiti, 1930–2005)

Combined Energies (Te Aitanga a Kiwa series)

1995

Coloured inks on Japanese paper

John Bevan Ford is well known for his use of inter-cultural indigenous symbols and references to raranga (Māori weaving). This painting is replete with both those symbols and also suggestions of weaving in the fibrous nature of the compositionally dominant spiral, its soft vertical lines suggesting open-weave fabric. Māori motifs are only subtly implied amongst the various bird-like figures, aquatic creature shapes and personifications that echo Pacific identities. This painting pays respect to the indigenous cultures of Japan and Australia, including them in a discourse about those who populate the Pacific rim.

The artist deserves the respect many Māori people pay him for his socially-based insights into many non-Western ways of viewing the world. His work encapsulates the ideal embedded in the Māori term ‘ngā hau e whā’. A literal interpretation is ‘four winds’, which refers to situations, including marae hui (meetings), where people from all corners of this country, if not the rest of the world, gather together for a particular kaupapa (reason, agenda or important issue). Their combined efforts toward beneficial change are invited on such occasions.

In this work, Ford champions just such a combined movement to guarantee the respect and preservation of



indigenous cultures, many of whom have lost languages and distinctive cosmologies as the result of European expansion into the Pacific. The artist's combined energies represented here are all nature-based, in stark contrast to the primarily commercial energies that drove colonialist activity.

Jo Diamond



Selwyn Muru

(Ngāti Kuri, Te Aupōuri, b. 1937)

Māori Rock Drawing

1966

Ink and watercolour on paper

Māori Rock Drawing is an early portent of an ara (path) of the innovative artistic style that Muru chose to assert in the 1960s and has maintained ever since. He introduces Māori references in the form of rock painting and also establishes his own artistic originality in a process that shies away from stereotyped Māori identification. The seemingly random yet well-controlled composition of this work reflects this aspiration, so that apparent ‘scribble’ is in actuality a well-deliberated part of this exploration of a unique style and form.

The work shows a youthful virtuosity in the making, one firmly based on rock painting of Māori ancestors. Later in his career, while still combining Māori cultural references with innovative artistic interpretations, Selwyn Muru’s work becomes more sophisticated. A well-known example is the waharoa (gates) in Aotea Square, Auckland, that incorporates old traditions from Māori culture enhanced by new and less expected angles and embellishments.

Jo Diamond

Charles Frederick Goldie

(Pākehā, b. 1870–1947)

Kapi Kapi or Ahinata Te Rangitautini

1909

Oil on board

He mihi aroha ki te tupuna whaea nei o te waka Te Arawa.

In reo Māori, I pay respect to this tupuna whaea (female ancestor) of the Tūhourangi, Te Arawa, and in doing so mirror the way many Māori people relate to Goldie's portraits of our ancestors, considering the pictures to be their personifications. Māori audiences at the Goldie exhibitions that toured Aotearoa and Australia in the 1990s found a rare opportunity to 'converse' with their ancestors, acknowledging that their spirit remains in this painted form. While the artist may be criticised for his stereotyped records of a 'dying race', it is clear that we have nevertheless survived as a people and many of us are grateful to Goldie for keeping our ancestors' memories alive.

We can marvel at the detail of this painting of a notable tupuna whaea. Her kauae chin moko and pounamu pendant ear ornament have been gracefully balanced with her deeply wrinkled face and grey-white hair, things that convey wisdom and experience more than declining old age. She reminds me of the lovely old nannies wrapped up in blankets and seen cracking jokes together on our marae. She is to be venerated at least for her survival through many years of human conflict and natural disaster. Her benign presence in this picture maintains her mana and inspires us onward toward our own challenges in life.



Goldie provides Māori people with an opportunity to reflect on the mana of women, despite dominant discourse in Māori culture that privileges men and excludes women. Such chauvinistic views continue to be held in both Māori and Pākehā social contexts and do little justice to the long lives of many of our tupuna whaea. In our national archives there are too many unidentified photographs of Māori women. Although it is unlikely that Goldie would have predicted such a feminist response to this work, I remain grateful to him all the same.

Jo Diamond



Darcy Nicholas

(Ngāi Te Rangi, Ngāti Hauā, Ngāti Ruanui, Taranaki,
Te Āti Awa, b. 1945)

Children of Tāne

1984

Oil and acrylic on board

This painting has the instantly recognisable artistic signature of Darcy Nicholas, with its distinctive palette and ‘washed’ paint effect providing an ethereal quality.

The mountain Taranaki, a distinctive feature of Nicholas's other works, is absent, suggesting that the artist's concern reaches beyond his own rohe towards a collective identification with wairua (spirit), rather than that of a particular individual iwi or person. The smudged effect of the painting attests to the holistic nature of Māori ways of seeing the world. Equally, the boundaries we set between deities and ancestors are also blurred, in keeping with a Māori convention that venerates both.

The painting provides a rich opportunity for multiple interpretations. The implied presence of a human face in the top right corner not only seems connected to the sky and earth but also to the indistinct figures in the foreground and another 'half-face' at the bottom left of the painting. The figures comprise two human and two tree-like forms; each is a 'child of Tāne', symbolising a variety of kindred relationships between human beings, land, sky and earth. The half-face mirrors the other face at top right, and appears to share a deified role. Maybe these are Rangi and Papa, long since separated by their recalcitrant son Tāne.

This cosmological reference sharply contrasts with another 'truth': the exploitative role human beings have aggressively asserted over their land. An ecological concern is overlaid with symbolic reference to the cosmology that preceded Christianity in Aotearoa. It is a concern that by definition places our survival in the hands of the gods and our responsibility for a pro-active stance against environmental destruction squarely at our feet. Māori cosmology provides ample guidance for a sustainable life, now and in the future.

Jo Diamond



Ngataiharuru Taepa

(Te Arawa, Te Āti Awa, b. 1976)

Whitiwhiti ora

2020

Acrylic on wood

The year 2020 has been marked by environmental, health, and social crises, many growing out of long-standing systemic problems. Ngataiharuru Taepa's *Whitiwhiti ora* responds to the state of tumult. Its pale colours echo those of the morning sky, while also alluding to kōwhaiwhai in a number of older whare, particularly in Te Urewera. The pītau forms are more immediately organic than those found in earlier works by Taepa, connecting strongly with elements of the natural world—whether fern fronds, clouds, waves, or unfurling embryos.

The fluidity of the design answers the rigidity of the interlocking pieces of wood that make up the work. Relatively low tonal contrast balances the hyper-hard edges, and produces a subtle effect of back-lighting. *Whitiwhiti ora* resists fixing in space and time, feeling by turns solid and porous, stable and generative, age-mellowed and crisply fresh. It affirms the cyclical return of the calm and potentiated dawn—not disconnected from the day before, but not immutably bound by it either.

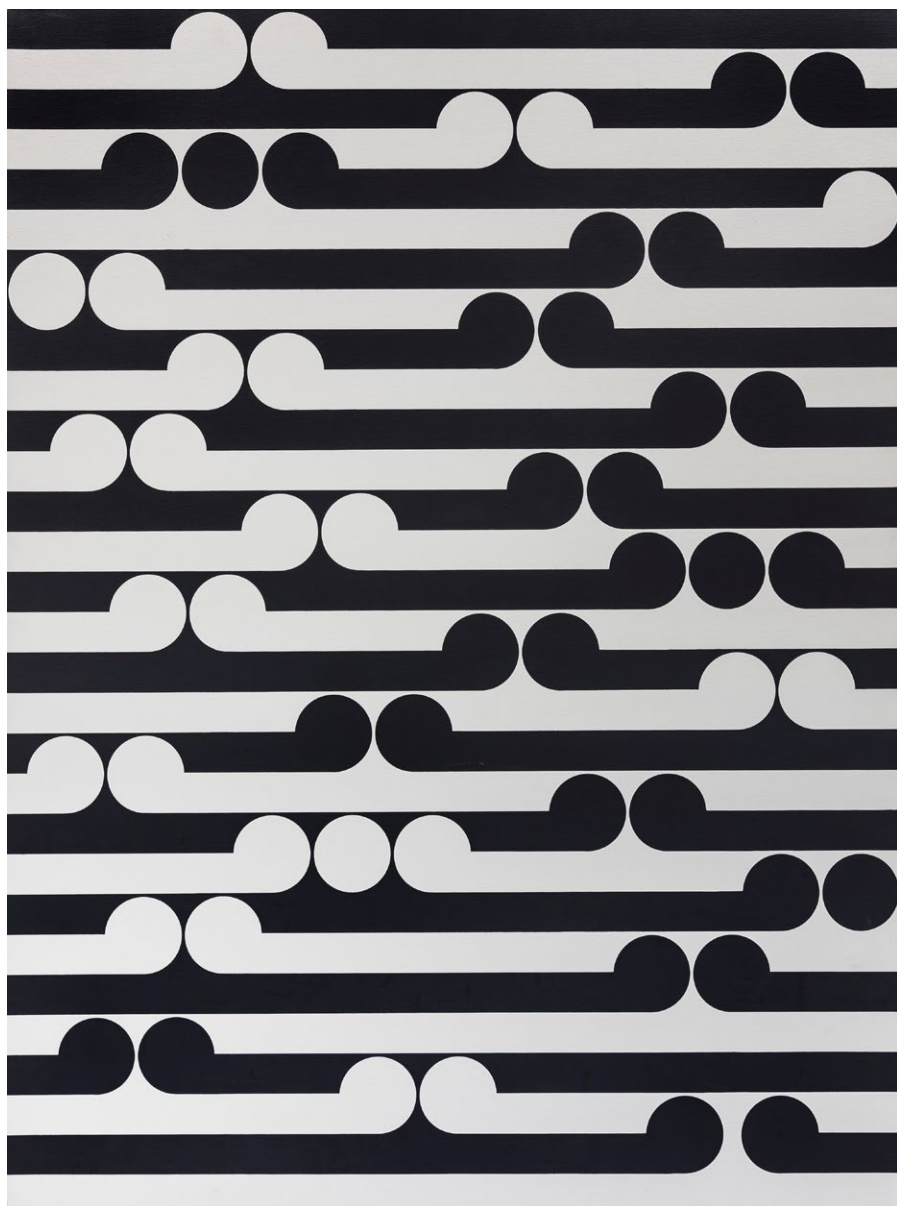
Gordon Walters

(Pākehā, 1919–95)

Karaka II

c. 1980

Acrylic on canvas

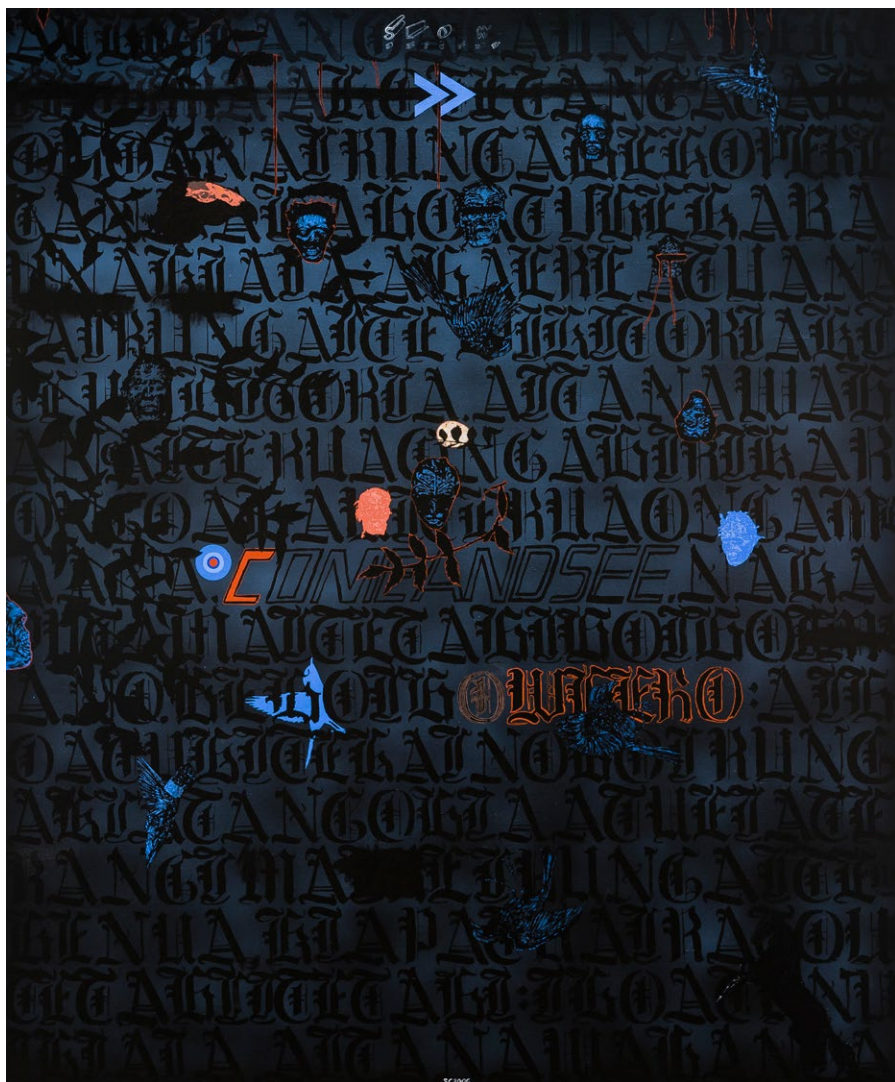




M. A. H.

A Drawing of the Head of Bola, a New Zealand Chief
 c. 1831
 Watercolour on paper

A Drawing of the Head of Bola, a New Zealand Chief
 1831
 Hand-coloured lithograph on paper



Shane Cotton

(Ngāpuhi (Ngāti Hine, Te Uri Taniwha), Ngāti Rangi, b. 1964)

Slow Descent

2006

Oil on canvas



Robert Ellis
(Pākehā, 1919–95)

Megalopolis
1966
Oil on canvas

Megalopolis is an early masterpiece by Robert Ellis. It clearly proceeds from earlier works like *City and River in Orange Landscape*, suggesting an urban environment seen from above. The work also points to his growing interest in motorways. Hamish Keith notes, ‘To him the burgeoning motorway was a new and stimulating mobility. From that, and his experience of Spain, came his first mature works.’¹

The brilliant lines that traverse the painting suggest long-exposure photographs of highways. The heavy impasto paintwork resonates with whakairo, customary Māori carving. In 1965, Ellis had ‘attended Pine[āmine] Taiapa’s Whakairo and Tukutuku Residential School in Tikitiki’.² In 1966, the same year that *Megalopolis* was painted, he married fellow artist Elizabeth Aroha Mountain (Ngāpuhi, Ngāti Porou). Over time, te ao Māori came to influence his work deeply.

It is interesting to note that the koru-like (or pītau-like) form at right appears in Ellis’s works as early as 1963. Such forms were referred to by the artist as rivers or river bends.

¹ Hamish Keith et al., Robert Ellis (Tāmaki Makaurau: Ron Sang Publications, 2014), 18.

² Ibid., 287.



Peter Robinson

(Kāi Tahu, b. 1966)

Untitled

1993

Wax, bitumen and oil stick on board

This work addresses the vexed question of cultural identity, one that remains as topical and contested today as it ever has. The need to quantify identity, especially for minority cultures has often been driven by governmental policies that reflect prevailing and often misinformed societal attitudes. All around the world, for example, governments have required various groups to turn their respective identities into percentages in relation to perceived 'Indian-ness', 'Aboriginality', 'Whiteness' and especially in this country 'Māori-ness'. This kind of quantification often feeds racist stereotyping and essentialism. Those people who identify as Māori are often pressured to do so, led by a strategic essentialism that responds to divisive bureaucratic procedures, such as



determining who gets what slice of the compensation ‘pie’ as redress for past land thefts by various agents, including the British Crown.

The contribution that Robinson makes to this discourse, through this painting, is important for various reasons, not least of which is a critique of complacent, uncritical iwi-based affiliation. Richness lies beyond tokenistic acknowledgement of Māori identity and over-simplistic understanding of Māori culture. Jumping on a race-based bandwagon is too easy and eventually short-lived as it helps to freeze a particular world-view, as if it cannot possibly exceed its current constraints. Culture and identity have often grown despite popular opinions that they can be regressive and should eventually die out. Hesitant steps to a more knowledgeable engagement with Māori culture and identity need not be due to lame indecisiveness. If such steps are Robinson’s, they lead us, through seven sticky references to the ‘great race debate’, to a future where all of us understand and respect the ‘other’ 100%.

Jo Diamond



Matthew Dowman

(Ngāpuhi, Ngāti Maniapoto, Ngāti Tūwharetoa, b. 1973)

Synthesis I

2004

Mixed media on canvas

This canvas buzzes with the city's constant humming of cars and crowds, the busy but low-pitched noise that underpins the louder, staccato accents of blaringly insistent car horns and shouts across streets. Visually, too, this work resonates with the material aspects of urban life: the plaster of buildings both new and used, soot of industry and exhaust fumes, rust of metal left over on construction sites from the last demolition, dripping paint graffiti under bridges and along suburban railways. Or is it spilt blood? Visual hints of computer screens and high-rise windows reflect big business and high technology. Half-faces looking out of the painting seem to refer to the way people's individuality is blurred in streets choked by day and night.

It is a highly-populated city, not a peaceful township, a melting pot of culture, a place where the routine of timetables is punctuated by violence and destitution, high and low-class prostitution, pedestrian frustration. Dowman introduces us to this environment through the perspective of his own culturally combined Māori and Pākehā ancestry. At the same time, he also speaks of our own identities and the various ways, both dramatic and mundane, that we might respond to a seething metropolis anywhere in the world.

Jo Diamond

Diane Prince

(Ngāpuhi, Ngāti Whātua, b. 1952)

Odyssey of a Sale

1996

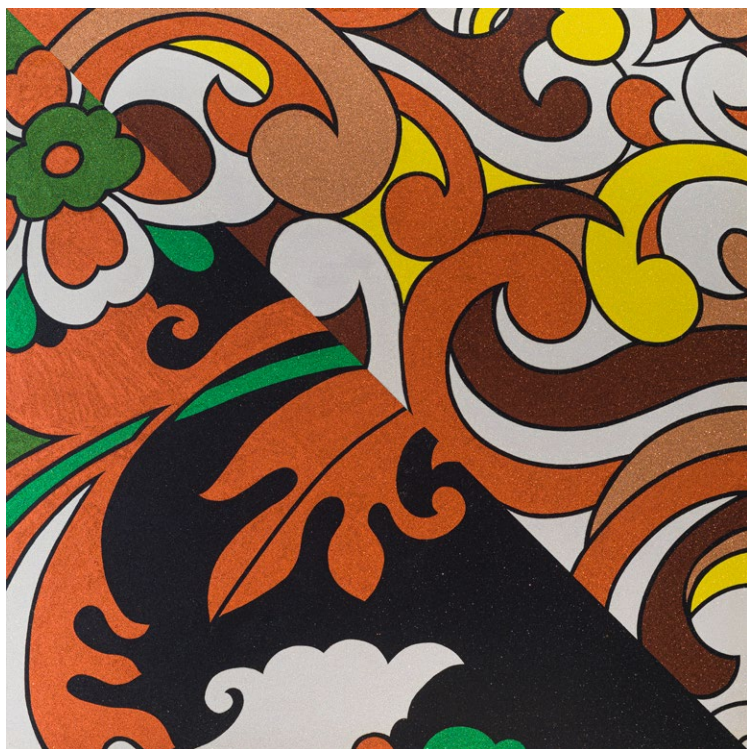
Acrylic on unstretched canvas

A deeply allegorical comment on colonialism in Aotearoa, this work uses bee-like forms to refer to this country's nexus of political power, the 'Beehive' Parliament building in Wellington, and its powerful inhabitants. Prince, a respected advocate of Māori rights and critic of that Pākehā hegemony that has brought numerous inequalities and injustices to Māori people, never illustrates Aotearoa as a land of blissful equality. In this painting, the overwhelming presence of politico 'bees' that enjoy disproportionate wealth and power is highlighted. It also reflects the fact of Māori people's continued struggle against cultural alienation and the inequity of a system that has harmed them in various ways.

Prince's work reflects the fact that many Māori people consider parliamentary busy-bees as complicit both in continued dubious dealings with off-shore enterprises and internal policies that directly and negatively affect Māori culture. Although this painting precedes the foreshore and seabed controversy, its relevance to that issue and many others that have taken place ever since the advent of British colonisation remains startlingly real.

Jo Diamond





Reuben Paterson

(Ngāi Tūhoe, Ngāti Rangitihi, Tūhourangi, b. 1973)

Whakapapa: Get Down Upon Your Knees II
2009

Glitter and synthetic polymer on canvas

Here, Paterson adapts and combines motifs from a range of sources, including kōwhaiwhai, whakairo, and mid-century textiles and wallpaper. He plays with the traditions of hard-edge painting and op art, using his signature glitter-based technique to create forms that are at once crisp and textured, saturated and sparkling.



Don Driver

(Pākehā, 1930–2011)

Deep Relief

1974

Acrylic and lacquer on aluminium and canvas

Driver is usually regarded as a sculptor with a painterly aspect. His painted wall reliefs of the 1970s, made up of bands of single colour, either on canvas or on aluminium panels, are a major contribution to modernist painting in New Zealand. From the mid-1970s, his work became more sculptural and frequently utilised found objects.

Maku e kī atu, he tāngata, he tāngata, he tāngata

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