

28 June - 22 July 2023

Wormhole Gallery and Studio, Riverslea Mall, Edgecumbe

Whakaahua

Now I sit as Pounamu on Papatūānuku

Tia Barrett (Ngāi Tahu, Ngāti Māmoe, Te Rapuwai, Waitaha, Ngāti Tamainupō, Ngāti Maniapoto)

Israel Randell (Mangaian, Tainui, Ngāti Kahungunu)

Whakaahua: Now I sit as Pounamu on Papatūānuku is a series of transformational still images by Tia Barrett. The stills are taken from earlier moving image works by the artist. "These photographs traverse stages of change. They depict my creative mauri and explore how my mauri was affected by environments that held trauma and potential." She speaks of shifting between states of mauri ohooho (when creativity felt like a place of vitality and potential) and mauri noho (where self-doubt and disempowerment prevailed), both in childhood, and in returning to creative practice at art school.

"The shifts between the different stages of mauri were not linear, and my creative mauri began in a glowing space of mauri ohooho. My whānau and Māori upbringing nurtured the vitality of my creative potential. However, Western education systems slowly exhausted my glow and discriminated against my unique Māori art practice. This moved me into a space of mauri noho, self-doubt, abandonment, disempowerment and depression. I spent a long time sitting in this space. It was a normal familiar, and I grew too comfortable within it. These environments of trauma succeeded at dimming the glow in my mauri.

This space all changed when I was confronted with a new opportunity to believe in my potential again. The hope of possibility and the process of mauri ohooho nurtured my creative mauri back to a whole state of mauri ora. It reawakened a fresh potency - that of a mana wahine Māori perspective. I healed my wellbeing by looking to Mātauranga Māori, which helped me formulate my creative method: embodying the strength and whakapapa of pounamu and weaving that mauri into my lens-based practice. Therefore, when the camera works with me, we see and experience through the lens of pounamu."

When Tia looks through her camera's metaphorical lens of pounamu, her identity - as both mana wāhine and artist - is validated. She captures environments from the perspective of her tīpuna, submerging her camera in bodies of water to enable her to literally see the world as if she were a piece of pounamu settled on the riverbed. She also captures herself in the act of making. Shots of her hands and face are layered over the liquid and stone bodies of her ancestors. Her stills are layered like whakapapa. Tia is transformed: *He pounamu ko āu*. The creative process has enabled Tia to recognise herself in the land and water, and experience a state of mauri ora.

Tia's works are accompanied by pieces of tapa, beaten by Israel Randell. They float in the gallery space, in different stages of completion. If you look closely, you can see the marks of the tools and processes Israel learnt to use with other oceanic wāhine in Whakatāne, under friend Sue Pearson's guidance. One

piece has a watermark of short, diagonal lines; others have horizontal stripes where the outer bark was removed; or smooth surfaces from their time drying on window panes. From certain viewpoints, they overlap each other. The little holes in the tapa (where branches would have been) can be used as spy-holes, adding a fuzzy vignette to Tia's photos and Wormhole's green walls. Another layer, another lens. Israel's mahi shows us a physical, process-based approach to maintaining creative fires and connecting with mātauranga.

Tapa requires the maker to spend extended periods of time with the materials. Harvesting, soaking, and beating all have their own rhythms: "you're on ancestor time." She is learning to care for the aute trees in her backyard, trim the branches, harvest the bark, soak it. When the bark is ready, you beat, before it dries out! Israel often works at night-time when her kids have gone to bed (though sometimes they help, too). Oftentimes tapa is beaten with community. Larger projects require many hands, and so the practice is passed on. For Israel it's a motivating medium. Soaking the bark means you're gearing up to dedicate some time to creativity and reconnection.

Further down the track, single sheets of tapa are laid on top of each other, head to tail, and beaten again with a specially marked tool. This is the watermark, which helps the layers fuse, and leaves a pattern on the cloth. Israel's practice, like Tia's, is connected to a kind of wet whakapapa. Water carried tapa practices - and both Israel and Tia's tīpuna - to Aotearoa. It falls on the soil, and feeds the aute. It hydrates the bark, moves the maker, and helps the fibre take the mark of her beater.

Whakaahua celebrates the transformative potential of art making. Materials and artists grow together. Pieces are re-soaked and stretched, remixed and layered. *Whakaahua* presents living practices. The lens flexes; the story continues.

Artist Bios and Works List

Tia Barrett (Ngāi Tahu, Ngāti Māmoē, Te Rapuwai, Waitaha, Ngāti Tamainupō, Ngāti Maniapoto) is an emerging Māori moving image practitioner and photographer. Tia's art practice is firmly grounded in celebrating her wahine Māori identity and deepening her connection to whenua me o ngā tūpuna through her lens-based practice. She draws on mōteatea, pounamu pūrākau, and a methodology developed by her mother Dr. Alvina Jean Edwards for inspiration. Tia's art practice allows her to see the world and herself "through the lens of pounamu." Tia is a recent MVA (first class hon) graduate from AUT, and a current recipient of the Arts Foundation Springboard 2023. Her MVA thesis film *He Pounamu Ko Āu* is on show now at CoCA Toi Moroki, Ōtautahi/Christchurch.

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Whakaahua: Now I sit as Pounamu on Papatūānuku (2023)

Series of four digital photographs on acrylic

Israel Randell (Mangaia, Tainui, Ngāti Kahungunu) is an artist, curator, writer, and māmā based in Matāta.

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Tapa (2022 - 2023)

Beaten aute inner bark

