

Āniwaniwa

Zena Elliott (Ngāti Awa)

Tina Tangiweto (Rongomaiwahine, Te Whānau a Ruataupare, Ngāti Kahungunu)

9 July – 20 August 2022

Wormhole Gallery and Studio

Mum's Info Sheet

Āniwaniwa is an exhibition of new paintings by Zena Elliott and Tina Tangiweto; two artists who use colour, pattern, paint, and rakau to express what they know about identity and mātauranga, and how they relate to the world around them.

In planning this show, Zena, Tina, and I discussed the ideas behind their art, what making looks like for them, and their dreams for the look of this exhibition. We also talked about access to art. It was important to Tina and Zena to have their mahi toi near home where their families would have an opportunity to see it, and to talk about the art in a way that honoured its complexity, while using everyday language.

Some great discussions took place during *Āniwaniwa* as a result, and I learnt a lot about what the art was saying from the mouths of our visitors.

There are many things to say about *Āniwaniwa*. There is the way it opens up discussion around gender, the flow of time, and fluxing identities. There is the feeling of the gallery packed with colours and textures; Zena's crisp flat layers and Tina's thick, overlapping swirls. I wondered, though, if we could circle back to the conversation about whānau. This is an info sheet I wrote for my mum, to help her feel equipped when she was minding the gallery. What language do we dress art in? How do we bring art home? Now these notes are yours to read through. What do you see? Have fun!

Nā,

Jordan Davey-Emms

Wormhole Gallery and Studio

Riverslea Mall, Edgcumbe

September 2022

Hi mum! Here is some info about Āniwaniwa, and some Q & As with the artists. These might help you understand their point of view, and give you a starting point for talking about the exhibition.

Zena Elliott (Ngāti Awa)

Zena goes by any pronouns (they, she, he, ze). Zena is gender fluid, which means they move between genders. Zena was born and raised in Te Teko, and went to Edgecumbe College in the 80s/90s ish. Zena is usually based in Hamilton now, where they are a full time artist.

A quick summary of Zena's mani toi for you mum:

Zena's work often touches on "rainbow" (queer) and Māori experience/identity. It's fun to think about the semi-industrial materials and processes Zena uses, the super bright clashing colours and contemporary patterns, and mātauranga Māori (maori knowledge). Zena loves pop culture and urban aesthetics, as well as traditional forms and patterns. Zena is a painter and a carver. Zena mashes up the patterns and shapes of Ao Māori with the visual language of contemporary life (I'm thinking of Zena's colours, processed wood, laser-cutters, and visual references like graffiti and sign writing, camo bush shirt patterns, road signs, packets, logos).

Q&A with Zena

How do you describe yourself (e.g. a painter? An artist? Or something more celestial?)

I am a multi-disciplinary artist positioned within contemporary painting and whakairo. My artwork explores notions of communication and the transmission of knowledge within the artwork and beyond. I have developed a particular carved painting style that stimulates discussion about gender, fluidity, visibility, language, culture and cultural identity.

Where do your forms/patterns come from?

My visual forms of expression come from my ancestors, intergenerational knowledge held within our whānau, and blood memory. I found inspiration from the in-depth knowledge and practices of our ancestors. Through my rangahau and understanding of matauranga, I have created a new body of work that speaks to each other and to wider audiences. It signals messages of visibility, resilience and wellbeing using colour, shapes and light together as a communication device.

Why do you use the colours you do?/ Why rainbow colours?

I don't specifically use 'rainbow colours,' but I have been incorporating bold, glow in the dark and bright colours into my artwork for decades. I use colour to signal and draw attention to the ideas and concepts that I am trying to convey through an artwork.

Ramaroa is a conceptual device and methodology used within my art practice. My work *Ramaroa* acts as a beacon or a light in the dark, a signal for location, which helps people from going astray, while also being a signalling/guiding device and a source of ideas, information and inspiration for future generations to connect with.

A translation of the word ramaroa is “beacon.” A beacon can be described as a device or signal, which is created to attract attention to a specific location, or something involved in the distant transmission of textual or symbolic messages. I think of sonic radar reflectors and coloured rotational patterns; not necessarily the object used to express, but more the substance projected through the beacon devices.

We talked about Hine-pu-te-hue while planning the show; the concept of taking in the chaos from the world, reflecting on it, and producing something that is restorative. I’m wondering about the function of making for you as artists/as people... The flow between the ‘studio’ and your world beyond that. How does your mahi toi relate to your everyday life?

My visual art practice is my first language. I express my thoughts, feelings, concepts and ideas through a creative visual language that is constructed from visual sentences and creative methods. There is a complex dimensionality in my work, and in my expression of my visual language. Some audiences may struggle to understand the communication, but there are ways in. The reason some people may struggle to understand is that the world (and education structures) have mainly focused on and generalised one form of language: written language. Imagine a world that embraced all forms of language and the unique visual dialects and individual styles of visual communication. How exciting would that be aye? I would love to see the visual language as an official language of Aotearoa and the world.

What does it mean for you to have your art in Edgecumbe?

I was born in Whakatāne and raised in Te Teko. I have a deep connection to the region through whakapapa. It is important to showcase my mahi toi to our people and increase audience participation in the arts. Creating spaces and places for that to happen is meaningful. It inspires our younger generation to nurture their true talents and move forward, knowing that there is space for them to express these talents in many different forms and grow their potential.

Tina Tangiweto (Rongomaiwahine, Te Whānau a Ruataupare, Ngāti Kahungunu)

Tina goes by a mix of pronouns (she, they, ia [ia is the Māori word for a person/they]). Tina was raised in Whakatāne, and went to Trident High School until 2011. Tina is now based in Te Awa Kairangi/Lower Hutt. Tina fits in art making around her day job as a community law communicator.

A quick summary of Tina’s mahi toi for you mum:

Each piece can be thought of as a page from a diary. Tina has painted each piece on a single phase of the moon. Painting is a way for Tina to process each day, reconnect with their body/get out of their head, and at the same time, get to know the rhythms of the maramataka (Māori lunar calendar). Tina paints intuitively – sort of like doodling expressively! - combining colours that look cool with dirt and clay from places that are special to Tina. Tina likes to work with found

stuff and accessible materials (Resene test pots!) This keeps making affordable for Tina, as well as being low waste.

I find it interesting thinking about how Tina's mahi toi brings together two systems of time. We have the Pākeha/Gregorian/Solar calendar that Tina's day job – and day to day life in the city – revolves around. We also have the Māori/Maramataka/Lunar Calendar that Tina learns by night, that brings Tina closer to the natural cycles of feelings and the world around her. These two things are reflected really strongly in the cardboard box works. Tina's fluid, gestural, organic lines dance over the industrial logo mark prints on the boxes!

Q&A with Zena

How do you describe yourself (e.g. a painter? An artist? Or something more celestial?)

Ko Rongomaiwahine, Te Whānau a Ruataupare ngā Iwi

Ko Rongomaiwahine te Tangata

Ko Scotland, England ōku Tūpuna hoki

I tipu ake ahau ki Whakatāne

E noho ana ahau ki Te Awa Kairangi naiane

I am a ringatoi rongoa [this translates to something like a healer, soother, someone who is active and hands on in that space... Tina's work is restorative]

Where do your forms/patterns come from?

The marama, the whenua, the matauranga Māori. I try not to think much when painting with the marama, it's something that helps me to get out of my hinengaro and honour the rest of me. I see my making as a necessary restorative practice in a time where the brain, the teina [younger sibling/student], is unnecessarily recognized as tuakana [older sibling/teacher].

Why do you use the colours you do?/Why rainbow colours?

They look cool and cheerful, and remind me of the colours I see in te taiao [the environment].

We talked about Hine-pu-te-hue while planning the show; the concept of taking in the chaos from the world, reflecting on it, and producing something that is restorative. I'm wondering about the function of making for you as artists/as people... The flow between the 'studio' and your world beyond that. How does your mahi toi relate to your everyday life?

The surfaces I paint are found in local everyday environments: nikau from the backyard, found boxes from work, the supermarket, and the nacho factory down the road. My practice involves the reclamation of maramataka, understanding space and time of the whenua. [Mahi toi and life flow into each other; both happen in real space and time!]

What does it mean for you to have your mahi toi in Edgecumbe?

Edgecumbe is close to where I was raised. I hope to inspire and re-activate mātauranga Māori and kaitiakitanga in the whenua, hāpori, and rohe I have learnt heaps in. We, the people, need to take care of the whenua and it'll take care of us.