

Since 1984 – He aha te ahurea-rua?

Waikare Komene, Johnson Witehira, Tanya Ruka, Rik Wilson, Elisapeta Heta, Sarah Hudson, Will Ngakuru, Ammon Ngakuru, Rangituhia Hollis, Jeremy Leatinu'u.

Curated by Martin Awa Clarke Langdon

ST PAUL St Gallery One

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Since 1984 – He aha te ahurea-rua? is an exhibition prompted by recurring questions. These relate to the prevailing institutional structures that Māori operate within, and to the impact biculturalism has had – both on such institutions, and on a generation – since its conception. As the title suggests, the exhibition frames a period to reflect on, a generation to locate one's proximity to, as well as being the context within which many of the artists in this exhibition were raised.

Biculturalism as a policy was incorporated into Aotearoa New Zealand's political and social institutions in the 1980s. This was the result of many years of activist lobbying, leveraging the founding document of 'nationhood', Te Tiriti o Waitangi. This pressure was not limited to confrontational protest strategies but included wānanga and public gatherings, as well as artistic platforms from which momentum could be built, information shared and discussion take place. One such event was *Te Māori* – a monumental exhibition that toured America in 1984 – one outcome of which was to shift mainstream museum practices and public perception of so-called cultural 'artefacts' offshore, and in turn effect structural and perspectival changes back home.

Other events in this year contributed to an environment from which change could emerge. These included: a snap election resulting in a new Labour-led government; Eva Rickard's hikoi to Waitangi from Ngaruawahia, only to be prevented from crossing the bridge at Waitangi, and the Hui Taumata – Māori Economic Development Summit Conference, which recommended that the Māori Economic Development Commission be established.

After many years of protest by various collectives (of note are Ngā Tamatoa's efforts since its establishment in 1972), Māori became an official language of New Zealand in 1986. The fight to prioritise Māori language initiatives such as the kōhanga reo (Māori kindergarten) movement eventually received support in the form of allocated funding in 1989.¹

Such events, spearheaded by change-making leaders, were catalysts which in turn compelled the social structure to include and attempt to value a Māori worldview. Biculturalism was an idealised term that emerged from this period, and one that would seek to create an inclusive space within the established European structures where discussion and negotiation could take place.

Fast forward to 2015 and I find myself asking the question 'what is the bicultural?' or 'what is biculturalism?', which is the translation of second part of the exhibition title, *He aha te ahurea-rua?* The artists involved in this exhibition and I have discussed at length what it feels like to attend, be taught and graduate from university (and other institutional) structures which have bicultural mandates or Māori-specific initiatives. How has a 'kōhanga reo generation' coming through these artistic pathways been shaped, informed or discouraged from what they know to be Māori, and how have their resulting practices been supported by policies of biculturalism? Have we as a new generation of Māori engaged with the conceptual space of biculturalism, both on the terms set by those before us, and through new languages and modes of practice?

I'm aware that as a group of artists our understandings and depths of knowledge of tikanga and matauranga Māori vary, but this bicultural space is not for one specific Māori – or is it? The varied representations and freedoms of cultural identity, and of a Māori worldview should be explored and questioned within the space politically 'legitimised' by biculturalism. I feel that art has a role to play in contributing to discussions on the cusp of change – as this phase of formal iwi Treaty claims near an end, this exhibition acknowledges the historical paths our tupuna walked, to look towards the potentialities of the future.

¹ The first kōhanga reo opened at Pukeatua Marae in Wainuiomata in April 1982; by 1985 the number was approaching 400. See 'He Kupu Onamata mō te Kōhanga Reo The History of the Kōhanga Reo Movement': <http://www.justice.govt.nz/tribunals/waitangi-tribunal/Reports/wai-2336-the-kohanga-reo-claim/chapter-2-he-kupu-onamata-mo-te-kohanga-reo-the-history-of-the-kohanga-reo-movement#E2336.2.25> (Accessed 5 March 2015).

The artists in this exhibition are artists that I have encountered and connected with along my own journey in the arts. It seems as Māori we traverse similar creative trajectories, and whanaungatanga (relationship, kinship) is inevitable. The artists here exemplify a broad range of institutional backgrounds, cultural connections, and provide a glimpse of the spectrum of art methodologies and practices emerging.

The question remains – if this is a small representation of Māori who are passing through art and educational institutions in Aotearoa New Zealand, how are the broadening range of their concerns and cultural expressions being accommodated? How can we strategically prioritise such concerns within the conversations initiated by biculturalism?

1. To shift one making tradition into the realm of a new making tradition is fraught with slippage, mistranslation and often carelessness. **Johnson Witehira** however has trained and completed a PhD in the visual language of whakairo (Māori carving) and uses his sense of mark-making and skills within this tradition to assess implications of the most minuscule details when creating his digital compositions. In this work, *Those who live in darkness* (2015), he honours established traditions while continuing their growth by incorporating visual languages that have informed many Māori of the kōhanga reo generation.

2. Elisapeta Heta's work pivots on the practice of wānanga. Here wānanga is understood through the application and understanding of tikanga both in its formal and functional role within the Aotearoa New Zealand education system, and conceptually: as an open discussion to arrive at shared understanding. Heta's *Noho Symposium* (2015) will provide the occasion for a full weekend of korero among invited participants on the 2nd and 3rd of May, resulting in a publication post exhibition.

3. Multimedia artist **Rangituhia Hollis** presents a new work *O.P.P.* (2015). This double-screen work features a 3D constructed environment drawn from the artist's current residence, and his personal archive of digital imagery – both his own work and collected images – 're-materialised' here in an animation set in the front courtyard of his home. The juxtapositions of images form a complex narrative of new and old.

Hollis writes, 'I have questions regarding speaking of newness, in the context of a burgeoning digital future. Will the new frontier [of the virtual] continue to co-opt the narratives of old colonial visions? Or could decolonised spaces develop in response to all of this colonial sameness, in order to address and ameliorate such anxieties? And what form could they take?'

4. Waikare Komene's practice is informed by his training as an architect. He has designed shelters and buildings that incorporate the lens of a Māori worldview – bridging a consideration of the impact of architecture on the natural environment with the needs of inhabitants – while tailoring these concepts to the strict building code legislation. Encountering a site such as ST PAUL St Gallery, Komene looked at interventions that could alter the agency of the architecture from passive to active. Here *Mahau / Gable* and *Untitled (architectural site intervention)* (both 2015) provides a new dynamic where the site incorporates Māori methodologies into the given architectural formalities of a gallery space.

5, 6 and 11. Will Ngakuru and **Ammon Ngakuru** have been invited to produce their first collaborative work. Father and son, they have participated and held shows together as individual artists, and often help in the construction of each other's work, but have never produced a work or series that could be equally attributed to them both. This new blurring of boundaries – teacher/student, father/son – is akin to the exchange model of a tuakana/teina relationship, where both are equally important in the learning dynamic. The result of the invited collaboration developed as a series of works – *Untitled fish; Sanghua, Yunnan, Nihwan, Huiquan, Wutai Shan Anhui 44, Yangzi Hua 44 Trosky* and *Unperson* (all 2015) – from conversations, emails, drawings and photographs, as they established a central kaupapa (theme, intent, purpose).

7. Tanya Ruka's interests lie in Māori cosmology and mythologies. She regularly collects research imagery and sounds while travelling with her family, from the Hokianga in the North Island to Waipounamu in the South Island. Ruka describes her creative process as 'Wairua (spirit); the inherent interconnection between the whenua (land) and tupuna (ancestors) – I find myself continually drawn to this Māori concept of time, space and place. Liminal, the in-between, where past, present, future coexist.'

7 continued. At the request of the artist *History repeating itself / No Comment* (2015) is only to be accompanied by the following whakatauki (Māori proverb):

Whāia te iti kahurangi ki te tūohu koe me he maunga teitei.
Aim for the highest cloud so that if you miss it, you will hit a lofty mountain.

8. Jeremy Leatinu'u presents four still images, documents from his film series *Queen Victoria* (2013). These depict the artist contemplating the role and power dynamic of four Queen Victoria statues, located in Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin. Structures conditioned by the colonial attitudes of the past are politely confronted in the present, as Leatinu'u sits atop a ladder inviting onlookers to consider their own relationship to these symbolic and historical statues.

9. Rik Wilson finds interesting plays in the odd and disparate elements of suburbia, unified by their banality and lack of novelty. Often overlooked for this reason, this social territory provides his working material. *Handball* (2010) draws on formal compositional devices alongside real images of children at play, involving the negotiation of rules, chance and skills. Each character is unknowingly changing the orientation and focal point of the artist's composition as they go about the internal battle to be king of the court.

10. Manatū Ahu Matua (2014) is a project by **Sarah Hudson**, which explores the impact of introduced species and practices on the whenua (land) in Aotearoa New Zealand. This photographic series delves into the ethics and impact of primary industries – fisheries, forestry and agriculture – on the land, people and in turn, the atua (gods). The three images position consumers as active participants in the commodification of the land and sea. The aesthetic tropes from BDSM culture further invoke the notion of 'consent', with regard to Māori as stakeholders within the primary sectors.

– Martin Awa Clarke Langdon

Artist List

Elisapeta Heta

Ngāti Wai, Waikato, Samoan,
Tokelauan, English
Bachelor of Architectural Studies
Master of Architecture (prof.) (Hons)
The University of Auckland

Rangituhia Hollis

Ngāti Porou, Ngāti Kahungunu
Master of Fine Arts (Hons)
The University of Auckland

Sarah Hudson

Ngāti Awa and Ngāi Tūhoe
Master of Fine Arts
Massey University of Wellington

Waikare Komene

Nga Puhi, Ngāti Kahungunu
Master of Architecture
Unitec, Auckland

Jeremy Leatinu'u

Ngāti Maniapoto
Postgraduate Diploma of Fine Arts
The University of Auckland

Will Ngakuru

Te Roroa Te Rarawa, Ngapuhi, Irish
Certificate of Proficiency, Post
Graduate Diploma of Fine Arts.
The University of Auckland

Ammon Ngakuru

Māori
Bachelor of Art and Design (Hons)
Auckland University of Technology

Tanya Ruka

Ngapuhi, Waitaha
Diploma in Visual Arts, Bachelor of
Visual Art
The University of Auckland
Post Graduate Diploma in Art and
Design, Master of Art and Design
Auckland University of Technology

Rik Wilson

Ngāti Whatua
Postgraduate Diploma of Fine Arts,
Master of Fine Arts
The University of Auckland
Diploma of Fine Arts, Bachelor of Fine
Arts
Whitecliffe College of Arts and Design

Johnson Witehira

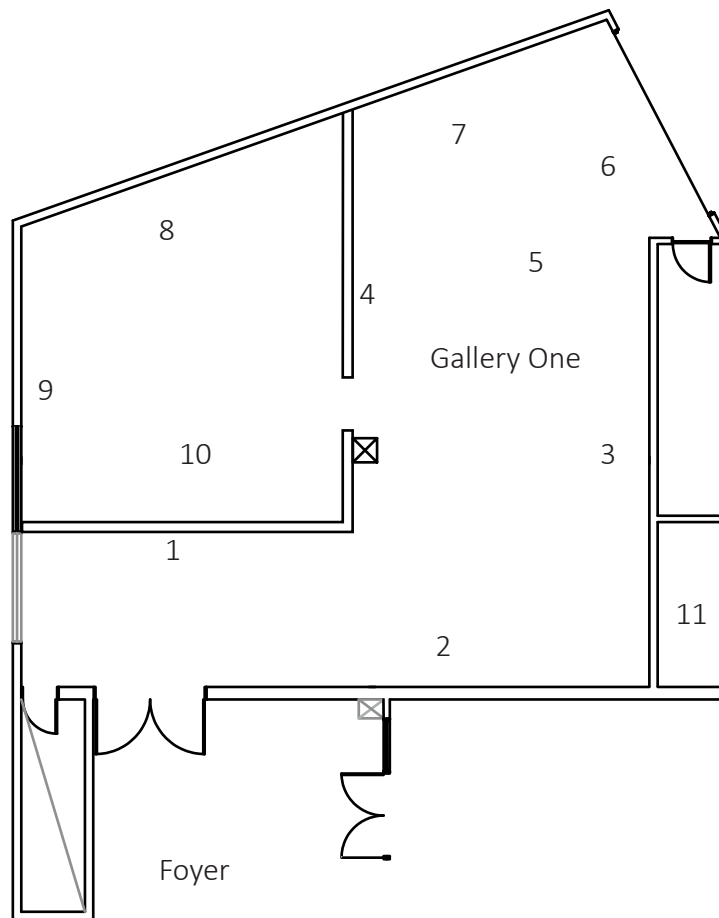
Tamahaki (Ngāti Hinekura), Ngā Puhi
(Ngai-tū-te-auru), Ngāti Haua, New
Zealand European
Master of Computer Graphic Design
Whanganui School of Design
Doctorate in Māori design
Te Pūtahi-a-Toi (School of Māori
Studies, Massey University)

Martin Awa Clarke Langdon

Tainui (Ngāti whawhakia, Ngāti
Hikairo), Kai Tahu (Kāti Momoe),
Pakeha
Bachelor of Visual Art
The University of Auckland (MSVA)
Master of Fine Arts
The University of Auckland

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Work List



1. Johnson Witehira
Those who live in darkness (2015)
2. Elisapeta Heta
Atamira/raised platform for Noho Symposium (2015)
3. Rangituhia Hollis
O.P.P. (2015)
4. Waikare Komene
Mahau / Gable (2015)
Untitled (architectural site intervention) (2015)
5. Will Ngakuru
Unperson (2015)
6. Ammon Ngakuru
Untitled fish (2015)
7. Tanya Ruka
History repeating itself / No Comment (2015)
8. Jeremy Leatinu'u
Queen Victoria (2013)
9. Rik Wilson
Handball (2010)
10. Sarah Hudson
Manatū Ahu Matua (2014)
11. Will Ngakuru and Ammon Ngakuru
Yunnan, Nihwan, Huiquan, Wutai Shan Anhui 44, Yangzi Hua 44, Trosky (2015)