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Several Degrees of Attention:
Thinking with the Collection

9 June — 7 November 2022

DEGREES OF

ATTENTION

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9 June — 7 November 2022

Kate Coolahan
 Turumeke Harrington
 Ralph Hotere
 Sonya Lacey
 Rozana Lee
 Maria Olsen
 Michael Parekōwhai
 W. A. Sutton

curated by
 Māia Abraham
 Elle Loui August
 Simon Gennard
 Amy Weng

Several degrees of attention features four curatorial projects, each one departing from a work or group of works in the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery collection.

The Govett-Brewster has been collecting contemporary art for fifty two years. The collection tells a story of artistic practice in Aotearoa as seen through the eyes of the people who have passed through this place: the values they lived by, their affinities, and the priorities they set for themselves and the institution in their own time. Like all institutional collections, this one contains gems and omissions, anomalies and loose ends, and stories that remain to be told.

Several degrees of attention proposes four ways into, and out of, the histories we live with. Rather than building toward a containable narrative of the collection as an entity, each gallery acts as a chapter, thinking closely with individual artists; the contexts they inhabited, the material and intellectual problems they worked through; and the stakes at play in approaching, and navigating, their practices now.

Contemporary artistic voices have been invited to open new points of entry into Aotearoa's art histories, and pose relationships between artists across generations. Each project is distinct in its approach, and in its own way, thinks with artists to pose the question: how do we make sense of what we inherit?

Māia Abraham's project *Tāheke* looks towards three generations of contemporary Māori artists: Ralph Hotere, Michael Parekōwhai and Turumeke Harrington. Speculating on what tuakana-teina relationships might be drawn between practices across time, Abraham examines how institutional logics have determined how the story of contemporary Māori art gets told, and what possibilities might exist for rethinking these narratives.

Elle Loui August reconsiders W. A. Sutton's life-long engagement with the Canterbury landscape, through his ambitious series of paintings *Te Tīhi o Kahukura* (1976–1978). Bringing together most of the series for the first time since its original exhibition in 1978, August poses questions about our relationship to language and place.

In *Thresholds*, Simon Gennard explores sculptor and painter Maria Olsen, whose dense, literary works produced in the 1980s evade easy readings or interpretation. Produced through a process of layering and concealment, Olsen's work encourages an encounter with art, thought and oneself beyond the rational. Olsen's work appears alongside new sculptural and moving image works by Sonya Lacey, which extend the artist's research into the metabolic, chemical and philosophical implications of sleep and sleeplessness.

In her project, *this hand that is every stone*, Amy Weng looks into printmaker and papermaker Kate Coolahan who, during the 1970–80s, created an eclectic suite of works reflecting migrant women and ideas in the South Pacific that was at odds with dominant artistic practices at the time. Through Coolahan's work, Weng offers a counternarrative foregrounding emerging diasporas in Aotearoa during the latter half of the 20th century. Coolahan's work appears alongside recent large-scale batik fabrics by Rozana Lee to propose at once a material affinity between two artists working across generations, and a conceptual interrogation of questions of encounter, identity and migration.

THRESHOLDS

Maria Olsen, Sonya Lacey
curated by Simon Gennard

Thresholds considers two materially and conceptually distinct practices, both of which take us to the margins of what is speakable, knowable or graspable. It includes a small selection of works by Maria Olsen, produced between 1983 and 1988, alongside a newly commissioned installation by Tauranga-based artist Sonya Lacey; and in it, we can see both artists departing from different positions to ask what understandings of ourselves, our bodies and the world might become legible when rational thought or measures of time are suspended, even briefly. What information passes through the body at certain times of day, in certain states of consciousness—distraction, daydreaming, in the haziness of fatigue—and how might we register these states of feeling outside of language?

This exploration begins in the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery collection, with a work by Maria Olsen, titled *Threshold* (1983). A large wall-based sculpture, over a metre and a half high, the work was produced through a process of layering gesso-soaked muslin into a shape that seems at once organic and foreign. An arch protrudes from the centre of the work, acting as some kind of passageway or architectural boundary. Around the arch, bones are scattered. Flecks of pigment—pinks, yellows—peer out from a dark, but slightly glistening background.

Olsen said little about individual works during her lifetime. Numerous writers have remarked on the privacy the artist maintained in relation to her work.¹ In the few interviews she gave, she was reluctant to distil her thought into literal readings, to constrain works into being containers for the representation of a single idea or a vehicle for an explicit politic.² Instead, she preferred to linger on process, or to gesture in the direction of a citation, without ever attempting to neatly illustrate an idea. The inscrutability of Olsen's work—her privacy, her relative silence—may be essential to consider when engaging with her practice. For it may be that through Olsen's work we are invited not into a relation of mastery, or to engage in a task of unlocking secrets, or unpacking a direct representation, but led into a different kind of encounter—more affective, indeterminate and fluid—than what we may be used to.



Maria Olsen in her studio on Shortland Street, Tāmaki Makaurau, Auckland, c. 1983, photography. Courtesy of Ruth Parry Williams.

1. See Cheryll Sotheran, 'Six New Zealand Artists for Australia,' in *Australian Perspectives* '85 [exhibition catalogue] Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, 1985, 148; and Christina Barton, 'Maria Olsen,' in *NZX* [exhibition catalogue] Auckland City Art Gallery, Auckland, 1988, 70.
2. Lita Barrie, Interview with Maria Olsen, Women's Art Archive Interview Project, E.H. McCormick Research Library, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, gift of Lita Barrie, 1984.

3. Merata Mita's film *Patu!* (1983) was also included in the film programme.
4. *ANZART: Australian and New Zealand Artists in Edinburgh* [exhibition catalogue], (Edinburgh: Richard Demarco Gallery, Edinburgh; Gallery; Wellington: Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council of New Zealand, Wellington; Canberra: Arts Council of Australia, Canberra, 1984), 85.
5. Anne Kirker, 'Maria Olsen' in *From the Southern Cross: A View of World Art c.1940-88* [exhibition catalogue], Biennale of Sydney, Sydney, 1988, 210.
6. Stephanie Britton, 'Maria Olsen: No Turning Back,' *Artlink* 5:3-4, August-September 1985, 28.

Threshold's arrival at the Govett-Brewster belongs to a series of episodes that helped set in motion an incredibly productive period of making and exhibiting for the artist. In 1984, Olsen was invited by curator Wystan Curnow to be part of the New Zealand contingent of the exhibition *Australian and New Zealand Artists at Edinburgh* at the Edinburgh Festival. The only woman involved in the exhibition, Olsen was given six weeks to prepare.³ *Threshold* appeared in the Edinburgh exhibition, alongside other wall-based sculptures and large drawings by the artist. In the catalogue, in lieu of an artist statement or explanatory text, Olsen offered three brief quotes: one from Beat poet Neal Cassady, one from herself, and one from Indian spiritualist Meher Baba.

Where Cassady writes of spectres and veils between life and death, and Baba writes of the capabilities of creative thought—"when man dives deep within himself he experiences the fullness of existence,"—Olsen writes, "The situation I like is the moment of mirth before the laugh."⁴ Here, as with elsewhere, Olsen tempers the spiritual, mystical, or morbid associations of her imagery with a sense of levity, locating her inquiry within everyday exchanges between people. But, even in laughter, there's an element of transformation at play. A humorous vision or comment takes time to land, as it works its way through the body and mind, before breaching the surface tension of conversational decorum as an outburst of joy. The feeling escapes language. To call something funny, in hindsight, doesn't quite capture the bodily mechanics at play. It's from within the space of delay, between feeling and language, that much of Olsen's thought seems to take place.

Though her treatment of her reading—of Jungian psychological thought, of poets, of non-Western spirituality—was no doubt sincere, there are traces, every now and again of a wit, humour and care which ground her other worldly visions in the realm of daily life. In her essay on Olsen's presentation at the 1988 Sydney Biennale, Anne Kirker quotes Olsen saying, 'I try and start with the idea that I think is the most ridiculous, perhaps the one that I find could embarrass me, the one I find most intriguing.'⁵ Elsewhere, in an interview with Stephanie Britton, she describes taking inspiration for her process of layering muslin from watching a nurse bandage and plaster her daughter's broken leg.⁶

Olsen was born in Ōtautahi Christchurch in 1945. In 1964, she graduated from Ilam School of Fine Arts in Ōtautahi and completed a Post-graduate Diploma in teaching in 1965. Between the mid-1960s and early 1970s, she lived between Ngāmotu New Plymouth and Australia, teaching, screen-printing fabrics, and raising her young children. During this time, she also travelled through the United States, Europe and to India. In 1974, Olsen settled in Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland. She held her first solo exhibition there in 1980 at Barry Lett Galleries, and from the early 1980s, she exhibited her drawings, wall-based sculptures and paintings, experimenting with egg tempera and acrylic mediums.

Following her initial shows in Tāmaki Makaurau, Olsen's reputation quickly grew. The presentation in Edinburgh was her first international exhibition, and upon her return to Aotearoa she began exhibiting regularly with Sue Crockford Gallery in Tāmaki Makaurau and

Peter McLeavey Gallery in Te Whanganui-a-Tara Wellington as well as being included in multiple institutional exhibitions surveying contemporary practice. In 1985, Olsen was included in the *Australian Perspecta* biennial in Sydney, and in 1988 her work *Sky* (1985), which is part of this exhibition, was included in the Biennale of Sydney.

A limited number of forms appear in Olsen's iconography from this period—the most potent of which was the cauldron. In *Sky* (1985) the cauldron, rendered in pigment suspended in a thick emulsion, appears within a densely applied scene of greys and purples, as if in the midst of an oncoming storm. With bones floating about, liquid spills forth from the vessel. Again, in *Cauldron in Landscape* (c.1987), liquid overflows, meeting the base of the form and coalescing with a red-brown earth. Here, the sky around the form appears as dense black, with the odd patch of grey suggestive of clouds or plumes of smoke. In *Untitled* (c.1987), we're met with an abundance of vessels—stretching back into the recesses of the image, while the image itself—built up in pigment over an irregular gesso and muslin base—seems to want to ripple off the walls. The latest work in the show *Bonestack* (1988) returns us to Olsen's process of layering, presenting, on a more-than-human scale, what seems to be an arrangement of bone-like forms, stacked up against the wall. As in *Threshold*, flecks of coloured pigment make their way through an otherwise gloomy surface.

The image of the cauldron is dense with cultural referents—associations with witchcraft, mysticism and fertility. As a symbol, the cauldron was, for some critics at the time of the works' making, easily aligned within the intense energy of feminist political organising occurring in Aotearoa in the 1980s. Olsen maintained an ambivalent position in relation to these readings, locating her archive of imagery in a quieter register, concerned with making sense of internal worlds.⁷ Several articles make reference to Olsen's reading of *The Great Mother*, Jungian psychologist Erich Neumann's 1955 study of the maternal archetype as it has appears across numerous cultures and religions. In Neumann's work, the cauldron surfaces as an ancient relic, deeply embedded within the histories of human development across multiple cultures, whose reverberations are lodged deep within the mind. The cauldron appears as the "form within which matter is transformed," whose purpose is to combine, cook or ferment; to hold against decay; to prepare either remedy or poison; something into which things are put to enact some kind of agency upon the world.⁸

Another key text that informed Olsen's practice is Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space*. First published in 1958, Bachelard's text is an extended meditation of the kinds of thought the domestic dwelling makes possible. Through a series of close, tightly bound studies of the house, the nest, wardrobes and drawers, Bachelard arrives at an expansiveness of thought on the particular poetry contained within the home. In the catalogue to the exhibition *Drawing Analogies* at City Gallery Wellington in 1987, Olsen provides an extended quote from Bachelard:

One might say that immensity is a philosophical category of daydream. Daydream undoubtedly feeds on all kinds of sights, but through a sort of natural inclination, it contemplates

7. Barrie, op. cit.

8. Erich Neumann, *The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype* [1955] (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 287–288.

Maria Olsen, *Sky*, 1985, pigment emulsion and oil stick on paper. Private collection.



grandeur. And this contemplation produces an attitude that is so special, an inner state that is so unlike any other, that the daydream transports the dreamer outside the immediate world to a world that bears the mark of infinity.⁹

Never didactic in her work, these references are held with a light hand, reading more as a determined curiosity to follow an idea, daydream, or flight of fancy to its exhaustion, than to impose a programme of transformation. Read together, the repetition of images and the process of refinement and abstraction—whether her wrapped bones rendered in thick emulsion and pigment, or her cauldrons suspended in desolate, timeless landscapes—Olsen's thinking and work seems to dwell on the creative act itself: what compels it, what precedes it, and the process by which an idea takes form, fades from memory, and resurfaces anew.

Sonya Lacey's new work marries several strands of her thinking over recent years. Furthering the artist's ongoing research into sleep disturbances, Lacey's project considers how—in the absence of clocks, measures or the rhythms of labour and rest—time is measured and felt in the body.

9. Quoted in *Drawing Analogies: Recent Dimensions in New Zealand Drawing* (exhibition catalogue) Wellington City Art Gallery, Wellington, 1988, 41.

Included in the exhibition is a printed text, *Chlorophyll script* (2020-22), which has previously appeared in several iterations in Lacey's practice. The text is a fictional script. In the account, a protagonist lies awake in an unfamiliar apartment, in a city close to the equator. The account—diaristic and unfurling—begins to dwell on the ingestion of common metals and the effects they may have on the body: magnesium, said to regulate circadian rhythms in humans and aid the timekeeping function of plant and animal cells; iron, to modulate disturbed sleep; zinc, which can aid slow-wave sleep. Scanning the room, the speaker begins to identify—or over-identify—with a sprawling bougainvillea plant growing in a corner by the window, as both protagonist and plant find commonality in the taking of metals, diluted in water, to aid in their adjustment to an environment. The passage has previously appeared as a spoken-word performance performed by the artist, and as a handwritten text in the context of an exhibition. In *Thresholds*, the text appears as a printed sheet, placed upon a steel bench.

Also included in the exhibition is a new three-channel moving image work titled *Chlorophyll (680–950nm)* (2022), which acts as something of an addendum or further abstraction of the script. Shot with an infrared camera, the film tracks the circadian rhythms of a bougainvillea as it grows in an artificially lit grow tent in the artist's studio in Tauranga. Isolated from the outside world and the earth's rhythms of day and night, the artist has, through an incremental process, altered the daily cycle of the plant's activity in line with the rising and setting of the sun in a tropical time zone. Chlorophyll, a pigment found in leaves which gives plants their green colour, enables the absorption of light through photosynthesis and reflects back most infrared light that hits it. In *Chlorophyll (680–950nm)*, Lacey has captured the plant in a frequency beyond that visible to the naked eye. In doing so, Lacey gestures to a world of energy transformation and evolutionary adaptation; to the elements of the world the plant has evolved to absorb and transform into energy for its sustenance, and that which is treated as surplus and cast back into the world. Where the text grounds itself in the phenomenological,



Sonya Lacey, *Chlorophyll (680–950nm)*, 2022, still, HD digital video, 10:00. Courtesy of the artist.

embodied encounter with the world summoned by its protagonist, *Chlorophyll (680–950nm)* abstracts and extends this inquiry into a realm just beyond the visible.

Alongside the new moving image work, Lacey's sculpture *Spill (for Olsen)* is inserted directly into the gallery walls. Based on the form of an overflow lip that helps maintain the water level in public pools, the work is here rendered in brass—an alloy of zinc and copper. Acting as an imaginary marker of a pool that doesn't exist, the sculpture, raised above a horizontal floor, appears as an illogical measure within the gallery's architecture.¹⁰ Again furthering and abstracting a prior investigation by the artist, the work draws upon previous inquiries into public pools and the relations between civic architecture, cultures of work and leisure, and social hygiene.

While the public pool and the circadian rhythms of people and plans may not, at first, seem directly related, considered within the context of Lacey's ongoing interest in questions of time—how time is measured or felt, and what happens when the body does not adhere to the regulatory measures of time—certain relationships between studies begin to emerge.

The history of the public pool—as a social amenity, a space of leisure, as well as a space of self-improvement—is entangled with the history of industrial labour. In his essay on Lacey's work, Allan Smith points to the emergence of public baths and washhouses in the quickly industrialising cities of mid-19th century Britain. These philanthropic ventures, Smith writes, provided a means of leisure and entertainment for the working classes, but did so out of paternalistic concern for social hygiene and how to keep the great 'unwashed masses' occupied and active citizens when not labouring away.¹¹ These same conditions congeal around the pool today. The boundaries between work time and leisure time continue to find themselves increasingly blurred. Rest time, if it can be stolen from within a steady stream of emails, texts and information, becomes an opportunity for self-improvement, self-regulation, or sustained activity. Lacey's work acts as a subtle reminder that the body has never adhered to such a neat parcelling of time. The body drifts. It organises itself around timescales and seasonal rhythms much older than the constant present of capitalism. And this drift is most keenly felt, perhaps, when the body's disturbances rupture the continuity of daily life organised around work, care and rest: when the body can't sleep when it's time to sleep, can't think when it's time to think, can't work when it's time to work.

Though separated by decades, and distinct in their chosen materials and the archives of thought informing each of their practices, both Olsen and Lacey follow a set of ideas through abstraction and iteration. Both use artmaking as a mode of enquiry to give material form to things that linger just outside a field of vision—whether, in Olsen's case, an investigation of ancient symbolism rendered in desolate, timeless landscapes, or in Lacey's case, the metabolic, chemical and social means by which time gets measured in the body, and what happens when we find ourselves out of sync with the world. Both artists are attentive to fleeting states—to daydreaming, to the mind's wandering in the haziness of fatigue—and draw down within them, not necessarily to reveal some essential truth locked within the body, but to insist that what passes, what escapes language or neat description, might be worth lingering on.

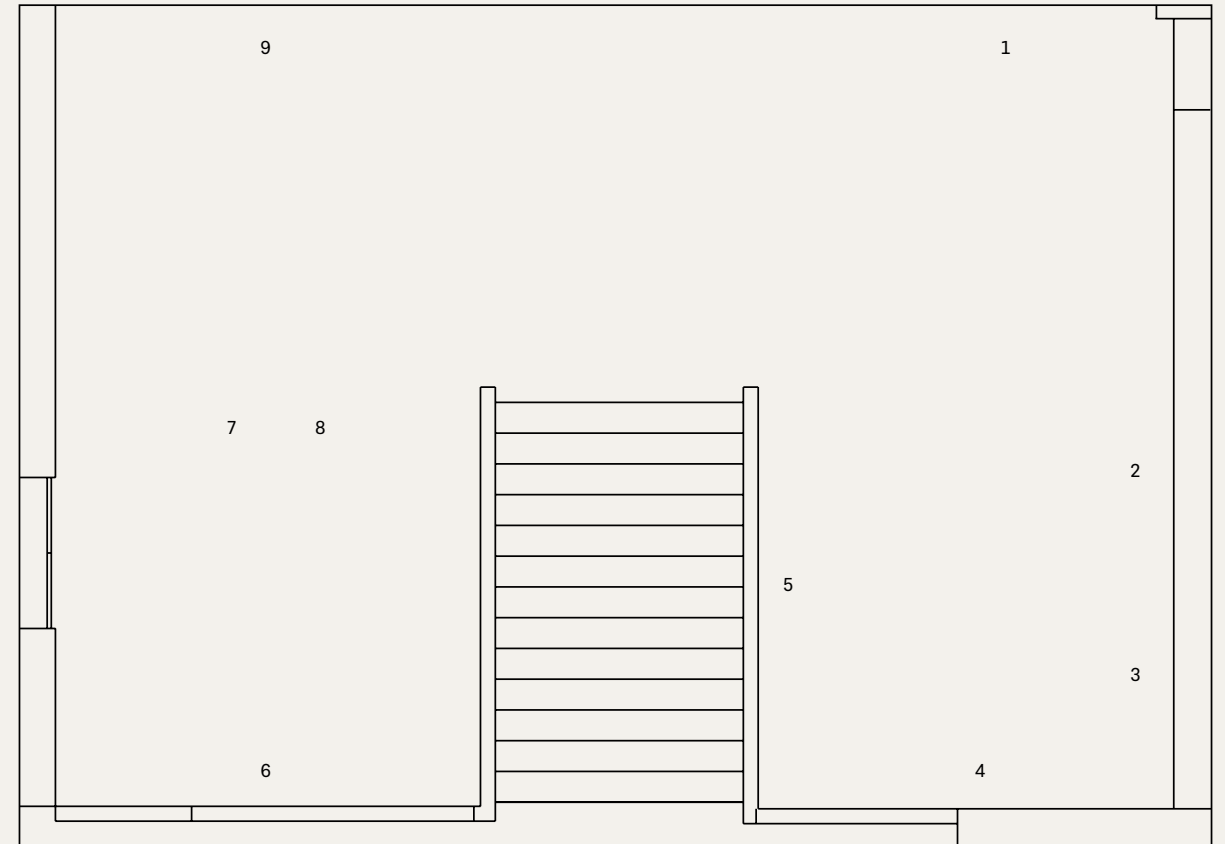
10. Natasha Conland, interview with Sonya Lacey in *The Walters Prize 2021* (exhibition catalogue) Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, Auckland, 2021, 25.

11. Allan Smith, 'Take Me to the Water: The Douleurs and Douceurs of Sonya Lacey' in Sonya Lacey, *Bathers/Lightweights/Weekend* (artist's book and exhibition catalogue), The Dowse Art Museum, Lower Hutt, 2021, unpaginated.

Sonya Lacey lives in Tauranga. She works with a range of media including moving image, sculpture and language. In 2021 she was the Dunedin Public Art Gallery Visiting Artist, a residency that culminated in the one-person exhibition *Totally Dark*. Her exhibition *Weekend* was nominated for the 2021 Walters Prize, exhibited at Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki. She has exhibited throughout Aotearoa at galleries including Artspace Aotearoa, Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland; Adam Art Gallery Te Pātaka Toi, Te Whanganui-a-Tara Wellington; The Dowse Art Museum, Te Awakairangi Lower Hutt; and Te Tuhi Centre for the Arts, Pakuranga. Her moving image works have been exhibited internationally including at the State of Motion Festival of Moving Image, Singapore, and the London International Film Festival. She has undertaken a number of international residencies, most recently with NTU CCA Singapore. Sonya is represented by Robert Heald Gallery, Te Whanganui-a-Tara Wellington.

Maria Olsen was born in Ōtautahi Christchurch in 1945. She graduated from Ilam School of Fine Arts in 1964 and completed a Postgraduate Diploma in teaching in 1965. During the late 1960s and early 1970s, she lived between Ngāmotu New Plymouth and Australia, teaching, screen-printing fabrics and raising her young family. She settled in Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland in 1974 where she held her first solo exhibition at Barry Lett Gallery. During the 1980s, her work was included in numerous major exhibitions of contemporary art including *Six New Zealand Artists: Perspecta '85*, Mori Gallery, Sydney, 1985; *Content/Context: A Survey of Recent New Zealand Art*, National Art Gallery, Te Whanganui-a-Tara Wellington, 1986; *Aspects of Recent New Zealand Art: Sculpture 2*, Auckland City Art Gallery, 1986; *Australian Biennale 1988: From the Southern Cross: A View of World Art c. 1940-1988*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, 1988; and *NZXI*, Auckland City Art Gallery, 1988. Her works are held in numerous collections in Aotearoa including Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Te Whanganui-a-Tara Wellington; Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki; Te Manawa, Papa-i-Oea Palmerston North; and the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, Ngāmotu New Plymouth. She relocated to Victoria, Australia permanently with her husband and daughters in 1989. Olsen passed away in 2014.

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1. Maria Olsen
Threshold, 1983
Fibreglass, chicken wire, gesso, roplex, muslin, linen and pigment
Collection of the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, Ngāmotu New Plymouth

2. Maria Olsen
Sky, 1985
Pigment emulsion and oilstick on paper
Private collection

3. Maria Olsen
Cauldron in Landscape, 1987
Acrylic on canvas
Private collection

4. Maria Olsen
Bonestack, 1988
Resin on muslin, plaster of paris on hessian
Victoria University of Wellington Art Collection, purchased 1988

5. Maria Olsen
Untitled, 1987
Mixed media
Private collection

6. Sonya Lacey
Chlorophyll (680-950nm), 2022
HD digital video; 3 channels, 08:00
Courtesy of the artist and Robert Heald Gallery, Te Whanganui-a-Tara

7. Sonya Lacey
Chlorophyll script, 2020-22
Printed text on paper
Courtesy of the artist and Robert Heald Gallery, Te Whanganui-a-Tara

8. Sonya Lacey
Stools and Sleep-metal pillows
Steel, copper, zinc, magnesium and iron
Courtesy of the artist and Robert Heald Gallery, Te Whanganui-a-Tara

9. Sonya Lacey
Spill (for Olsen), 2022
Brass
Courtesy of the artist and Robert Heald Gallery, Te Whanganui-a-Tara

AND THAT

THIS HAND

Kate Coolahan, Rozana Lee
curated by Amy Weng

IS EVERY
STONE

This hand that is every stone is adapted from a line in Édouard Glissant's 'Un champ d'îles' ('A Field of Islands,' 1953). In this early narrative poem, the French Martinican writer describes an illusory object of desire alongside his observations of the vegetation growing outside his room. The poem passes back and forth between the two scenes, such that the images of word and bough, clay and gaze, past and present, real and imagined unfold like the meandering flight of a bird or the surging growth of a tree. A series of entangled relations, *Every word an earth*.¹

Glissant was writing from the Caribbean, an archipelago with dual legacies of slavery and colonialism; and he was building a language of the islands, turning over rocks and vines and earth and roots—the very material of the land—stacking these to form a vernacular of relations. In later writing, Glissant situated the archipelago in opposition to the continent and fixed ideas of nationhood.² He identified the Caribbean's composite culture as an expression of hybridity, suggesting that identity, memory and the world itself were relational, fluid and intractable.

In my thoughts I rush through time and space: the rivers of China with their smooth silence that extends in archipelagoes and overflows onto the land, each time engulfing tens of thousands of men, women, and children...³

In 1987, my mother took a 48-hour flight from Hong Kong to Singapore to Fiji to Aotearoa. In my mind, I imagine her passing over the ocean like a needle, the continent giving way to the Indonesian Archipelago then the Pacific Islands, stretched out like an uneven seam of pale new flesh. By the time my mother set foot in her new home, Australian-born artist Kate Coolahan had just concluded her survey show, an 18-month tour around the country beginning at The Dowse Art Museum in Te Awakairangi Lower Hutt. Although Coolahan and my mother never met, the year 1987 has become pivotal in my personal mythology. Two endings before a beginning, the point at which all that came before is indistinct, and everything after, acts of recuperation.

To encounter Coolahan's work at the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery for the first time is to be unmoored by an unanticipated set of circumstances, an attempt to reconstruct a legacy, a life, from fragments left behind. Kate immigrated to New Zealand in 1952. By the 1980s, she had obtained a high degree of international success as a printmaker and paper-maker. She exhibited at the Venice Biennale in 1972, becoming one of the first New Zealand artists to show there, but was little recognised in her adopted home.

Coolahan's work, like that of many other women at the time, were erroneously considered craft rather than art. Her practice was process-driven and employed a number of innovative techniques. Throughout her career, Coolahan had opportunities to travel, learning from print and paper-making experts in Britain, Europe and Japan. She was the first in the country to use photoengraving and often employed multiple plates in one composition, resulting in grid or web-like structures. She experimented with plastics cast on etched plates to create low reliefs and combined organic and found materials in her later three-dimensional assemblages.

1. Adapted from Glissant, Édouard, 'A Field of Islands,' in *The Collected Poems of Édouard Glissant*, ed. John Humphries (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019), 40. The line reads: 'Every word is an earth'.
2. Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relations* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 60.
3. Édouard Glissant, 'From the Whole World Treatise,' *Review: Literature and Arts of the Americas*, Vol. 32, No. 58, 1999: 31.

4. Adapted from Glissant, 'A Field of Islands,' 45.

Her errant subject matter and eclectic style, a feminist and anti-capitalist strategy, was hard to categorise. Her work was often contrarian and sensitive to the ideological structures within society. Unlike many of her contemporaries, she was not interested in synthesising a new national identity. Nor did she invest in the religiosity of the landscape, although her work often incorporated natural motifs. Instead, Coolahan was searching for symbols, building a language of signs from her new environment, a visual language which she believed could communicate across cultures. For example, tamarillo and eggs, to which she ascribed a feminine meaning, appear in works such as *Egg geneology* (1976) and *Immigrants II* (1972). So, too, the abstracted image of migratory birds and fish, seen in *Signs, Nesting Kotuku* (1971).

Coolahan also printed on handmade papers which she made from a slurry of native and introduced plant fibres. She began experimenting with handmade papers in the early 1970s as a response to a global paper shortage and ecological concerns. Houhere (lace-bark), cotton and Mexican agave formed the substrate of many of her prints, allowing the artist to embed a unique set of hybrid cultural references. In this sense, Coolahan's materials echo Glissant's idea of endless difference emerging from the convergence between peoples and the natural world. Through papermaking, Coolahan brought these physical encounters together as the ground for her images and experiences.

Shall [s]he take root in the unknown, shall [s]he erase [her]self in pain like one who sings?⁴

Coolahan's prints often depicted immigrants, especially migrant women, amongst them Coolahan's own mother and friends, but also the women who arrived in and

Kate Coolahan, *Immigrants II*, 1972. Photo-etching with colour aquatint on paper. Collection of the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, Ngāmotu New Plymouth.



around Te Whanganui-a-Tara Wellington during the decades in which she taught and resided there. *Immigrant Women in the Wairarapa* (1978) shows two women separated by a fence. A clothesline suggests a domestic setting, but the women's faces are shadowed, down-cast. A pair of hands, one open, the other closed, suggest something offered or withheld. In this work, Coolahan seems sensitive to the struggles of immigrant women adjusting to life in Aotearoa.

Similarly, *Roots and Ties* (1981) shows a dream-like scenario of three women basking under the shade of karaka trees. They are the artist's friends but they also symbolise all women, differentiated by race through their hair and clothing, yet connected through a sense of kinship. The print is created using katazome and foil on washi. Katazome is a Japanese technique of resist printing which Coolahan learnt during her years on a government-sponsored cultural exchange. In Coolahan's works, material and technique are interwoven with global histories of encounter, providing a rare glimpse of the societal changes and diasporas that were emerging in the South Pacific, as well as the artist's vision for women's freedoms and camaraderie.

Almost half a century later, Coolahan's works seem like a rare placeholder, giving space to women, like my mother, whose experiences were hidden in plain sight. In bearing witness to their lives, Coolahan seemed to be indemnifying them against time, perhaps foreseeing that with distance, these stories would find their own voice. Her words were almost prophetic when she speculated that her works would not touch a lot of people, but they may touch others in a similar situation at a later date.⁵

From this work, however, you are absent. Absent, who are there, like a bay...⁶

Coolahan was socially, ecologically and philosophically attuned to the changes that immigration brought to Aotearoa. She embraced cosmopolitanism and solidarity through a feminist lens. She positioned herself as a constant observer, often framing her subjects through windows and screens in quiet acknowledgement of the filters through which we perceive. Perhaps because of this she remained distant. Or perhaps, I often wonder, was it due to her own feelings of isolation as an immigrant during these decades.

This sense of disquiet is felt in *Victoria in the Pacific* (1976) where Coolahan depicts the statue of Queen Victoria located in Albert Park in Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland. This park is historically significant as a site of multiple occupations. The statue is seen framed by windows and Venetian blinds, and surrounded by towering phoenix and windmill palms, specimens imported from Africa and Asia that line the formal English-style gardens. In depicting these, Coolahan seemed to be revealing the foreignness of her surroundings, offering a subtle critique of the misplaced scenery and colonial values governing the South Pacific. Yet by Glissant's reckoning, these strange juxtapositions were the very thing that enable new ways of thinking and being in the world.

5. Damian Skinner, "Things that have a long way to go" A biography of Kate Coolahan, *Art New Zealand* 104, Spring 2002.
6. Glissant, 'A Field of Islands,' 34.



In 1987, another journey was taking place. Rozana Lee left her hometown of Banda Aceh for good, departing for the city of Medan in North Sumatra to study English language and literature. In 1998, she left the Indonesian Archipelago altogether, settling first in Singapore, then China, and finally Aotearoa, another archipelago.

Lee's recent work uses the material language of batik to interrogate global histories of encounter. Batik is originally a Javanese artform of resist-dyeing and comes from the words *amba* meaning 'to write' and *titik* meaning 'dot.' Batik was originally used to mark transitional events such as birth, marriage and death. Geometric forms, an early Islamic influence, later gave way to floral and avian motifs introduced by Hindu and Buddhist cultures and Chinese trade. During the Dutch colonial period, batik was manufactured in Europe and exported to West Africa, where the technique was widely embraced. Lee brings these economic and social circumstances together with research into Hindu, Buddhist, Islamic, Chinese and Japanese symbolism in order to question notions of authenticity, originality and filial identity.

They make the bird, they make the foam
And the house of lava sometimes
They make the opulence of ditches
And the harvest of the past⁷

Like Coolahan, Lee is process-oriented. She seeks out symbols to express her own sense of being in diaspora. Her works are not precise copies of patterns, nor is her

7. Ibid., 41

practice rooted in tradition. Rather, she attempts to show how the practice and symbols found within batik are porous and migratory, sedimenting generations of cultural encounter.

Lee's work often begins with sketches that she traces onto silks and cottons with melted beeswax mixed with paraffin wax using a Tjanting, a traditional pen-like tool with a small spout. These patterns are never exactly repeated, each containing moments of difference and displacement. Traditionally, the wax is boiled off after dyeing, but here, the artist leaves the work 'incomplete' or 'non-integrated.' The beeswax remains enmeshed in the fabric as accumulations of the artist's hand. In turn, the wax renders the surface of the work rippled and gnarled and susceptible to cracks. Similar to Coolahan's paper experiments, Lee works with traditional techniques in unlikely ways. For the artist, disrupting this process acts as an assertion of in-betweenness.



Rozana Lee, *Birds from Another Continent*, 2021, installation view, Papakura Art Gallery. Photo: Raymond Sagapolutele.

They obey their hands

Manufacturing echoes without number

And the sky and its purity flee

This purity of rockwork⁸

8. Ibid., 40

In *Arrival of the Birds* (2021), Lee uses a repeating pattern of phoenixes and Garuda. The Garuda is a winged creature common to Hindu and Buddhist mythology that is also Indonesia's national emblem. Garuda often appear in batik too. Here, Lee places it alongside the phoenix to suggest analogies with traditions in other regions of the world, whilst signalling the complex histories of migration and encounter within Indonesia itself. In *Birds from Another Continent* (2021), Lee again uses bird symbols, but here they are interwoven with plant and flower motifs. For Lee, these are not specific species, but rather general symbols recontextualised to form a matrix of different rhythms, contours and coexisting experiences.

In both Lee and Coolahan's work, the artists look towards symbols and images that stretch across space and time in order to tell complex stories about the here and now. Coolahan was particularly sensitive to the changes that immigration was bringing to society within Aotearoa, and how successive waves could change and be changed by it. She herself had experienced it first-hand in her travels to Europe and Japan, and applied this new knowledge in her use of divergent materials and techniques. In interrupting the tradition of batik making, Lee acknowledges the vast history of itinerant peoples who have impacted Indonesia's cultural identity. This is exactly Glissant's archipelagic thinking, where notions of being and belonging are in constant flux, and always in relation.

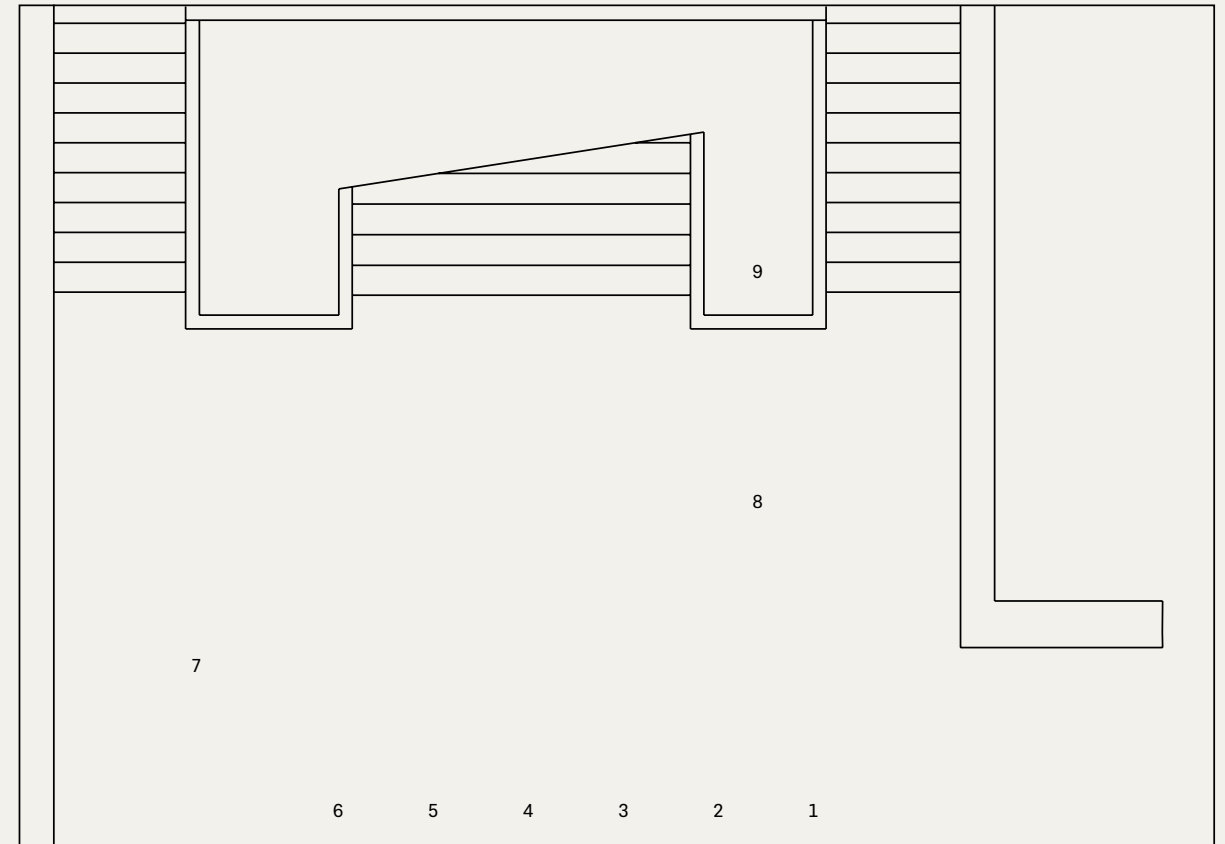
Perhaps this allows us to think beyond the binary of sameness and otherness, allowing difference and plurality to coexist. Glissant's ideas recognise and enable a relation between different people and places, animate and inanimate objects, visible and invisible forces, between the air, the water, fire, humans and vegetation. Branches entwined with stems, golden birds and exotic fruit, undulating waves forming oceans fringed by palms and shifting sands. Houhere and silk, pigments, line, cotton and wax. Gathering signs, like stones, building worlds of relations.

Kate Coolahan was born in Sydney in 1929. She is a printmaker, papermaker, designer and educator. Her practice is process-driven, often employing new and unusual materials and techniques. Coolahan often printed using multiple plates on hand-made paper made of both native and introduced plant fibres. Her prints are known for their cosmopolitan and heterogeneous subject matter, reflecting social issues such as immigration, the environment, and women's status. Many of her works address the oppressive gender roles within colonial societies, adopting eclecticism and material diversity to embody and respond to these issues. Coolahan attended East Sydney Technical College in 1945 where she studied illustration under the Bauhaus instruction of Jewish refugees escaping post-war Europe. She arrived in Wellington in 1952, joining the advertising agency J. Inglis Wright. Coolahan worked with the Architectural Centre Gallery, Wellington, to organise the exhibition *British Abstract Painting* in 1958.

In the mid-1960s, Coolahan began teaching at the Wellington Polytechnic School of Design, and began exhibiting paintings and prints. She learnt lithography and etching from Don Ramage and John Drawbridge respectively and began experimenting with her own techniques and processes. In 1972, Coolahan received a Q.E.II Arts Council Grant to study printmaking in London with Brigit Skiöld. That same year, she exhibited at the 36th Venice Biennale, becoming one of the first New Zealand artist (alongside Stanley Palmer) to show there. In 1976, Coolahan was invited to study washi with master Eshiro Abe on a Japanese Cultural Exchange programme, allowing the artist to develop her earlier experiments with papermaking. In 2003, Coolahan received an honorary doctorate from Massey University for her significant contributions to design education. In 2007, she was appointed an Officer of the New Zealand Order of Merit for her services to art.

Rozana Lee was born in Banda Aceh in 1970, and is of Indonesian-Chinese heritage. She moved to Aotearoa in 2010 and is based in Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland. She holds a Master of Fine Arts with First Class Honours from Elam School of Fine Arts, University of Auckland (2018), a Bachelor of Visual Arts from Auckland University of Technology (2015), and a Bachelor of Arts in English Language and Literature from The University of Methodist Indonesia (1992). Recent projects/exhibitions include *A Way of Being Free*, Northart Gallery, Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland, 2022; *Birds from Another Continent*, Māngere Arts Centre, Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland, 2022 and Papakura Art Gallery, 2021; *Crossings*, Adam Art Gallery Te Pātaka Toi, Te Whanganui-a-Tara Wellington, 2021; *Te Wheke: Pathways Across Oceania*, Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetū, 2020; *Home is Anywhere in the World*, Meanwhile, Te Whanganui-a-Tara Wellington, 2020; *New Work*, Melanie Roger Gallery, Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland, 2020; *Project 2020: Space as Substance*, Auckland Art Fair, 2020; *Future Flowering*, Play_Station, Te Whanganui-a-Tara Wellington, 2020; *Reconfigure(d)*, Making Space, Guangzhou, 2019; and *Two Oceans at Once*, St Paul St Gallery, Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland, 2019. Lee was the recipient of the People's Choice Award in the National Contemporary Art Award 2021, and the Estuary Art and Ecology Prize Awards 2018. She has undertaken artist residencies at Instinc, Singapore in 2016, and Making Space, Guangzhou in 2019.

Amy Weng is an art writer, editor and curator currently based in Ōtautahi Christchurch. She is the founder of *Hainamana*, a website dedicated to Asian New Zealand contemporary art and culture, and was the organiser of the inaugural Asian Aotearoa Artists Hui in 2017, a nationwide symposium for Asian diaspora artists. She is currently Assistant Curator at The Physics Room.



1. Kate Coolahan
Egg genealogy, 1976
Photograph and auto etching on hand-made paper
Collection of the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, Ngāmotu New Plymouth

2. Kate Coolahan
Immigrants II, 1972
Photo-etching with colour aquatint on paper
Collection of the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, Ngāmotu New Plymouth

3. Kate Coolahan
Immigrant women — Wairarapa, 1978
Photo-etching on handmade paper (rag and agave), artist's proof
Collection of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, purchased 1980

4. Kate Coolahan
Roots and ties, 1981
Aquatint and katazome
Collection of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, purchased 1999

5. Kate Coolahan
Victoria in the Pacific, 1976
Photo-etching with colour aquatint on paper
Collection of the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, Ngāmotu New Plymouth

6. Kate Coolahan
Greek bread in the Pacific, 1975
Photo-etching and aquatint on paper with deckle edges
Collection of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa

7. Rozana Lee
Birds from another continent, 2021
Wax on hand-dyed Chinese silk satin
Courtesy of the artist

8. Rozana Lee
Waves of migration, 2020
Wax on hand-dyed Japanese cotton
Courtesy of the artist

9. Rozana Lee
Arrival of the birds, 2021
Wax on hand-dyed silk georgette
Courtesy of the artist

Turumeke Harrington,
Ralph Hotere, Michael Parekōwhai
curated by Māia Abraham

TĀ-
HEKE

Embedded in the rauru carving pattern are ideas of unison and interrelation. Named after my ancestor, Rauru—who is credited with originating the art of wood-carving—the pattern is, in its simplest form, two spirals interlocking at the centre. The rauru can have multiple spiral lines running parallel to one another, united in their journey. Decorative notches may run along the spirals giving it a ribbed look and add to the complexity of the design. The rauru seems to spread from the centre as it links there, and then outward it spirals, stacking on top of the last spiral as it goes. There is duality in the rauru that is integral—without the other spiral there is no direction or support. Without both spirals, the rhythm and movement cannot be held in place. Without the rauru, there is no life.

My own whakapapa is held near to where the gallery stands. Ngā Rauru is the iwi of my father, his father, his father and his mother. Mostly occupying the small town of Waitōtara in the south, it is one of eight iwi in Taranaki. The name Ngā Rauru memorialises the eponymous ancestor, Rauru Kīitahi, who was a great traveller and explorer with many connections to iwi across the country. My great grandfather lived at Te Ihupuku with his mother before joining the First World War. On his return, he lived at Rātana Pā where my grandfather spent a lot of his childhood. When my grandfather was older, he became a bit of a traveller himself like Rauru Kīitahi. He eventually settled in Rangiora where a lot of my whānau still make home today. We are all as a whānau still on our journey of understanding these connections to Ngā Rauru and this place under the watchful eye of Taranaki.

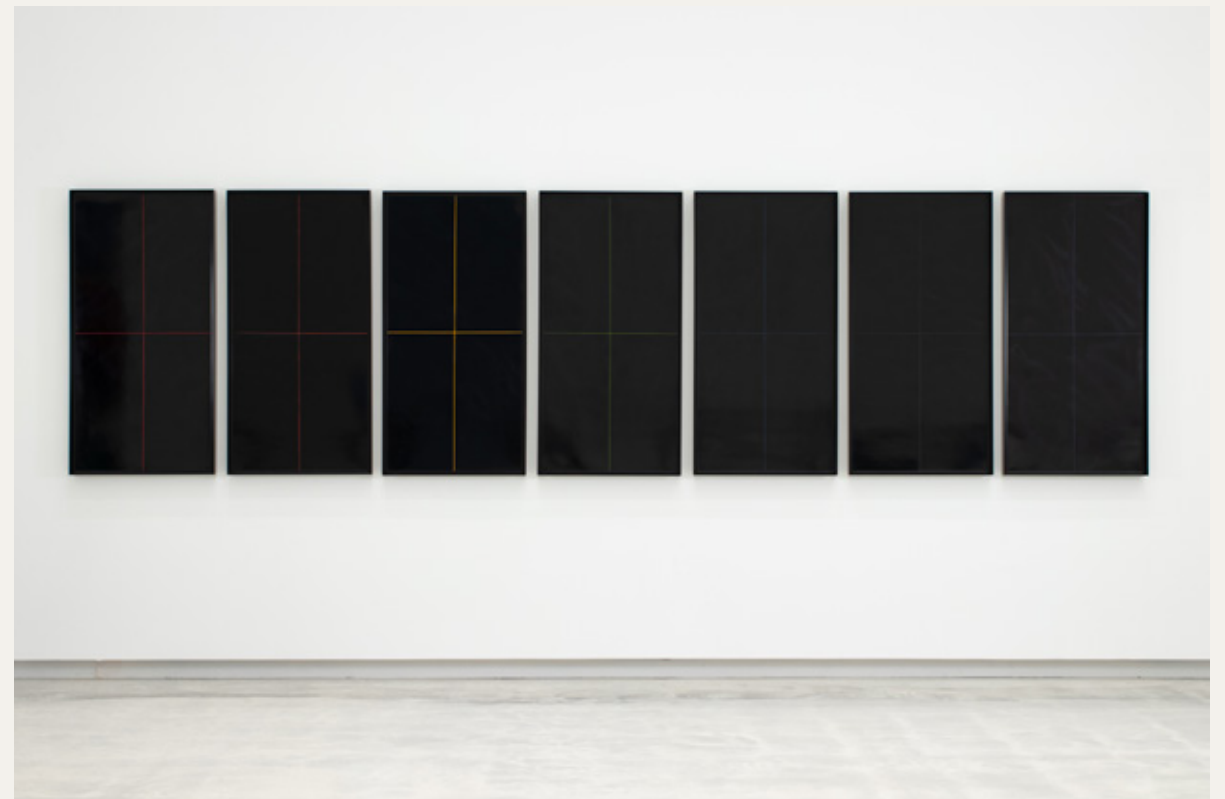
The flow of water on this land flows through me also. Before starting this project, I had not spent time in Taranaki. This return of sorts to the waterways that my ancestors were guided by was anticipated and timely. There is a sense of calm springing from the part of the brain that registers custom and familiarity when I walk, listen and think here. Being in this place has meant the connections within me can drift forward and lap at the foundation of my thinking. I feel suddenly the whakatauki *ka mua, ka muri* surround me as I dwell at the junctions of past and future; known and unknown; intrinsic and orchestrated. However, just as the river carves bended pathways, all will come into focus as needed. The time to know will come.

This exhibition uses the rauru as a guiding metaphor to consider three Māori artists from three generations: Ralph Hotere, Michael Parekōwhai and Turumeke Harrington. Starting with the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery collection and building outwards, the project imagines what tuakana-teina structures might exist between artists working in different times. As a collective people, Māori are well aware of the need to know oneself in order to understand our position in different places and amongst other people. The recital of pepeha is a statement of these natural connections that are passed on from generation to generation. The flow of water on this land flows through me. To connect with others is important. It ensures the responsibility of passing on what is known between generations. Tuakana and teina structures are models for this. Tuakana, used for those older and those who are often the teacher, while teina represents the younger counterpart who is more

often the learner. This duality brings together two forces, one with a lot to give and the other with a desire to learn. As with other natural cycles, the learning can happen holistically with the role of learning residing with the tuakana at times. There is, however, an innate understanding that knowledge is gained over time.

The earliest works in the exhibition are Ralph Hotere's (Te Aupōuri, Te Rarawa) 'Black Paintings 1-7' (1968-69). They are visions of black with an intensity that could swallow you whole. The void is broken only by the finest lines of colour that spread from the centre to form a cross. Hotere used broilite in these paintings, a lacquer for vehicles, making them highly glossed, acting almost as mirrors. Though these are some of the earliest of Hotere's 'Black' works, they demonstrate the refinement of a master painter who can hold your attention with minimal yet purposeful use of paint strokes.

Ralph Hotere: 'Black Paintings', 1968-69, broilite
lacquer on hardboard. Collection of the Govett-
Brewster Art Gallery, Ngāmotu New Plymouth.



Hotere was a natural teacher and leader. He travelled and worked far and wide and was particularly influenced by his time in Europe, where he studied on a New Zealand Art Societies Fellowship between 1961 and 1965. There, he was thrust into a world of modernist art, with artists such as Henry Moore, Paul Klee, Barbara Hepworth and Kazimir Malevich leaving great impressions on him and his painting style. This international foundation and his ability to merge the principles of modernism with his Aotearoa context and particularly his knowledge of Te Ao Māori set him well ahead of his contemporaries. He thought deeply and his paintings reflect that. The 'Black Paintings' series demonstrates a confidence and sophistication in his practice, a will to refine ideas and remain deliberate in artistic decisions.

We are generously offered so much through Hotere's abstraction. The fine-lined crosses act as reference points, particularly to his deeply Catholic upbringing in the Far North in the 1940s. This spirituality unites with a Te Ao Māori perspective—the velvety black relating to Māori creation traditions of Te Kore, the nothingness and potential—as well as being connected to Te Aupōuri histories. Hotere tended to be silent about his painting and what he was trying to achieve with them, preferring the works themselves to be the explanation. We can interpret this silence as an invitation to engage and contribute, a gesture that empowers the viewer to reflect their identity back through the work. The meanings held within them are suspended, waiting for the moment of viewership to be released. The exhibition asks, what can we learn from Hotere when he is placed alongside his teina, Michael Parekōwhai?



Michael Parekōwhai. "Everyone will live quietly" Micah 4-4, 1990, wood and laminate. Collection of the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, Ngāmotu, New Plymouth.

Born a generation later, in the year Hotere began his 'Black Paintings,' Michael Parekōwhai inherits what Hotere laid down. "Everyone will live quietly" Micah 4.4 (1990) is a sculpture that repeats the name Micah, four times in a row. The letters themselves are made out of wood, and covered with a laminate that resembles pounamu. There is a playfulness and sense of discovery to the sculpture that is characteristic of Parekōwhai's work. It tells many stories with clues and overlaps that lead to multiple ways of knowing.

The book of Micah in the Old Testament of the Bible follows the prophet of the same name and records his teachings to the people of Israel. His message was clear: a call for purity and idealism that allow no room for false gods or mimicry. The title of the work comes from Micah's prophecy for the establishment of Zion. In this new utopia, according to the prophet, everyone will live peacefully and quietly together under fig trees and beautiful vines. In his work, Parekōwhai is drawing the connections between New Zion and New Zealand, gesturing to nationalist myths told by the state of a visionary utopia in the Pacific. The work also resurfaces the feelings and concerns of Māori in the 1990s around questions of identity and reclamation from the colonial regime; and the space to be autonomous in our own country. Quite the opposite of living quietly.

Further, the work cleverly addresses ideas of hybridity. The puns embodied in the work compare and assess multiple ideas, but they also work to unite them as critique. Made to look like a stone carving, the work is a manufactured form. Beyond this, the connection to the Bible brings to the surface reminders of other major Māori religious movements that are deeply tied to this place of Taranaki. Māori prophets like Te Whiti-o-Rongomai and Tohu Kākahi of Parihaka and Te Ua Haumēne of the Pai Mārire and Hauhau movements were all drew from Bible stories to build their uniquely Māori religious movements. The name Micah also acts as a partial anagram for Michael, enfolding a personal element to the work, placing the artist right there alongside and within the narrative.

As an artist, Parekōwhai has contributed largely to the artistic landscape of Aotearoa and beyond. He, like Hotere, has been taking art with a Māori essence to the world for many years now. His manipulation of ideas, drawing on influences going far beyond his whakapapa, produces work that is sophisticated in its materiality and conceptualisation. Parekōwhai constructs work that invites you in to think deeply and look beyond what is on the surface, and to ask, What dwells below? When will the water clear so the river bed can be seen? While the works dwell here, they get to know one another, too, trusting that more will be revealed.

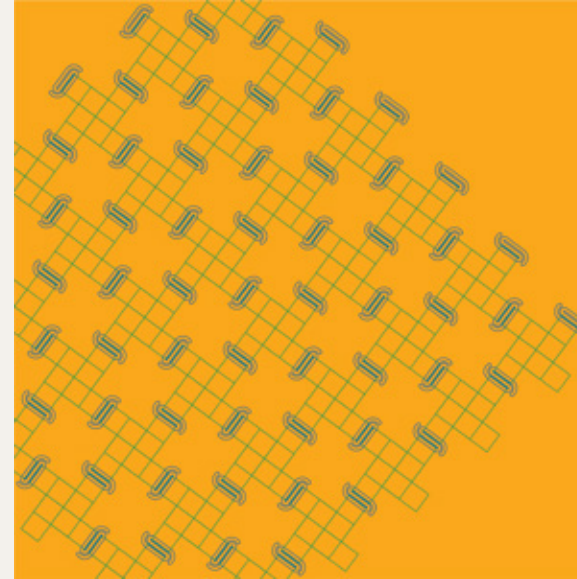
The voices represented in the collection are strong and established; the works can be familiar to us and each other. As I write this, the collecting of our teina artists is a gap, but this could change over time. Hotere and Parekōwhai have a lot to offer them. Their experience and skill reveal a stream of artistic practice that moves from the land and through our artists. Invited artist Turumeke Tui Harrington (Kāi Tahu) is pondering and extending the discussion through her work *For Hineateao, No U-Turns* (2022). Harrington is positioned

here as the next wave in the whakapapa of Māori artists, being supported by the work of Hotere and Parekōwhai while simultaneously sharing her artistic voice through her art. The work is a sculpture consisting of a powder-coated steel frame, tracing lines through space as it stands firmly on the floor. Draped over the frame is a U-shaped, net-like structure consisting of individually woven whetū made from polypropylene webbing held together by links that reference the spiral of the rauru pattern.

In many ways, the work is biographical, clearly identifying Harrington as a Kāi Tahu artist. The work is titled in honour of the atua Hineateao, who is the personification of a particular night and keeper of ancestral knowledge. Harrington's name 'Tui' is also referenced throughout the work as a visual manifestation of identity, making reference to Māori artists before her but reasserting in her own way the integral part it plays in Māori practice. Found more intimately in the work are the letters on the whetu that spell out Turumeke, the name of Harrington's ancestor Ema Turumeke and her own as she carries it on. The memory of whakapapa is woven so deeply into the fabric of the work. It is the position from which we see the world and allows connections to be formed and layers to be created. Evident throughout Harrington's practice and particularly in this work is the priority of whānau—and especially so for and through her daughter. The notions of intergenerational learning are embodied quite clearly in the work both materially and conceptually, as it opens itself up to be read from all angles and by all ages. As a collective society, these experiences are shared between young and old, learner and teacher: we're intrinsically connected to one another. The many whetū holding hands to form the net illustrate the importance of gathering and keeping good people around you whether they are whānau or friends.

Harrington stands here not just as an inheritor of knowledge from those gone before, but as someone forging her own path. All the artists are from different iwi and lands across the country, stretching from Te Aupōuri and Te Rarawa in the north to Kāi Tahu in the south. Harrington is the only female and mother in this part of the exhibition, which offers a moment to reflect. Her practice is intimately tied with whānau and raising a child, and her work departs from this place. These ideas are drawn from Te Ao Māori and they are considerations that aren't immediately obvious in the works of Hotere and Parekōwhai. They have a lot to learn from each other and many stories to share. The exhibition offers an opportunity for new ideas and connections to be created in the space and time between them, each artist alternating between tuakana and teina.

Rivers start as a trickle high up in the mountains, feeding out into the oceans. Water is drawn down through ancient pathways that cross the lands our ancestors lived on, whispering as it goes. The stream of whakapapa is replicated here also: the passing on of knowledge. We can learn by being observant, listening to the trickle and trusting in the natural qualities of being in a collective. *Tāheke* presents three Māori artists in wānanga, a forum for whanaungatanga that strengthens connections that have existed long before now and reveals those yet to be made.



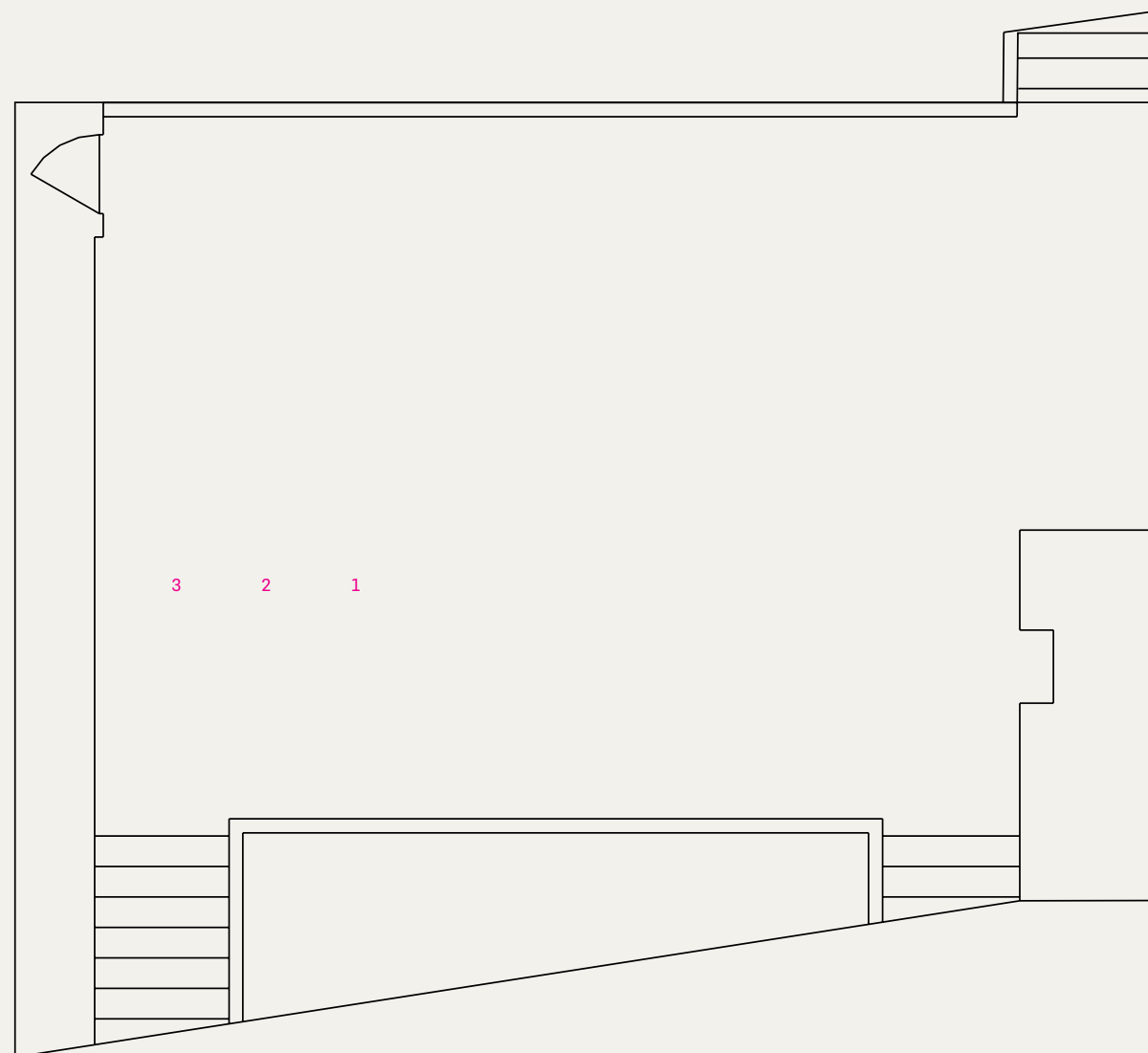
Turumeke Harrington (Kāi Tahu), guided by whakapapa and a practice of whanaukataka, asks how to make and live as a good person. Humour, play and bright colours are frequently used to soften and subvert sometimes tense and difficult subjects resulting in large sculptural installations at the intersection of art and design. Turumeke has recently completed an MFA at Massey University Te Kunenga ki Purehuroa. She holds a BFA from the University of Canterbury Te Whare Wānanga o Waitaha, and a BDI (Industrial) from the Victoria University of Wellington Te Herenga Waka. Turumeke has been the recipient of several major scholarships and awards including the Arts Foundation Tu Tumu Toi Springboard Wai-Toi-Moroki award (2022), a Te Rūnunga o Ngāi Tahu Kā Pūtea Scholarship (2021), the Colin Post Memorial Scholarship in Sculpture (2020), a Ngāi Tahu Research Centre Scholarship (2018), the Winston Churchill/Hawke's Bay Design Trust Fellowship (2017), and a Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Scholarship to undertake a MDes at Emily Carr University, Vancouver (2017). Recent solo exhibitions include (*Tikaro*) *Slowly dawning*, Page Galleries, Te Whanganui-a-Tara Wellington (2022); *Special Time (Ehara i te tī)*, Blue Oyster Art Project Space, Ōtepoti Dunedin (2021), *Help Yourself*, Enjoy Public Art Gallery, Te Whanganui-a-Tara Wellington (2021, co-authored with Grace Ryder), *Gentle Ribbing*, Toi Pōneke, Te Whanganui-a-Tara Wellington (2020), *Te Koretētāmaua Settle, Petal*, Corban Estate Arts Centre, Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland (2020) and *Mahoranuiatea Looking out in every direction*, Objectspace, Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland (2020).

Ralph Hotere (Te Aupōuri, Te Rarawa) is widely regarded as one of Aotearoa's most important artists. One of eleven children, Hotere was born Hone Papita Raukura to Ana Maria Daniels and her husband Tangirau Kirimete Hotere in Mitimiti, Te Tai Tokerau Northland in August 1931. In the 1950s, Hotere studied at Auckland Teachers' Training College, before relocating to Ōtepoti Dunedin to study at the Dunedin School of Art. In 1953, he worked in the Bay of Islands as a Māori Arts and Crafts Advi-

sor for the Department of Education. During this time, Hotere held his first solo exhibitions, and provided illustrations for the Department of Maori Affairs' journal *Te Ao Hou*. In 1961, Hotere was awarded a New Zealand Art Societies Fellowship allowing him to travel to Europe to study at the Central School of Arts and Crafts in London. His contact with Modernist artistic developments, as well as the political context of Europe in the 1960s, would have a lasting impact on his practice. Hotere returned to Aotearoa in 1965. In 1968, he exhibited his first 'Black Paintings,' Using translucent lacquers and thin strips of colour, they would go on to become some of his most famous works, and among the first to enter the Govett-Brewster collection prior to the gallery's opening. Following his Frances Hodgkins Fellowship in Ōtepoti Dunedin in 1969, he relocated permanently to the city. Hotere collaborated regularly with poets, fellow artists and composers throughout his career including Hone Tuwhare, Bill Manhire, Cilla McQueen, Bill Culbert and Jack Body. Though notoriously silent about his work, Hotere produced many works protesting racism, human rights abuses and environmental destruction. Recent considerations of Hotere's impact on Aotearoa include the exhibition *Ātete (to resist)* developed by the Dunedin Public Art Gallery and the Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetū (2020), and Vincent O'Sullivan's book *Ralph Hotere: The Dark is Light Enough: A Biographical Portrait* (2020, Penguin Books). Hotere's work is held in major public collections around Aotearoa and internationally. Hotere was appointed to the Order of New Zealand in 2012. He passed away in Dunedin in 2013.

Michael Parekōwhai (Ngāti Whakarongo) was born in Porirua in 1968 and lives in Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland. Parekōwhai draws upon an abundant range of both vernacular and collective vocabularies in his work. He re-manufactures these lexicons into complex narrative structures and formal languages, exploring perceptions of space, the ambiguities of identity, the shifting sensitivities of historical memory, and the fluid relationship between art and craft. Ideas of camaraderie, the tools of teaching and childhood learning, as well as references to modern art history and popular culture, also play out in many of Parekōwhai's stories. While his work is often described as emphasising the extraordinariness of the ordinary, each body of work has layers of potential for meaning and significance—they are open to any depth of interpretation and storytelling. Parekōwhai graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts from the Elam School of Fine Arts, Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland in 1990, followed by a Master of Fine Arts in 2000. Parekōwhai was selected to represent New Zealand at the 54th Venice Biennale in 2011 where he exhibited *On First Looking into Chapman's Homer* at the New Zealand pavilion. In 2015 he exhibited *The Promised Land*, a retrospective survey of his practice at the Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane. In 2018, Te Papa Tongarewa opened its newly expanded contemporary art galleries with *Détour*, a major solo exhibition from Parekōwhai. His work has been included in *Toi Tu Toi Ora: Contemporary Māori Art*, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki (2020); the *5th Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art*, Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane (2006); the *5th Gwangju Biennale* (2004); *The 13th Biennale of Sydney* (2002); and *Headlands: Thinking Through New Zealand Art*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney (1992). Michael Parekōwhai was awarded an Arts Foundation Tu Tumu Toi Laureate Award in 2001.

Māia Abraham (Ngāi Te Rangī, Ngāi Tuhoe, Ngā Rauru) is a curator and artist currently living in Ōtautahi. In 2017, he completed his BFA in Sculpture at the Ilam School of Fine Arts, University of Canterbury. He was one of three kaiwhakahaere of Ōtautahi Kōrerotia, a collective producing events and exhibitions for and by local artists based in Ōtautahi. He was the Toi Māori and Creative New Zealand Māori Art Intern at Blue Oyster Art Project Space for 2018, co-curating the exhibition 'Wā o mua,' September 2018. Curatorial projects include *Whitu*, Masterworks Gallery, Tāmaki Makaurau, 2019, and *UKU//UTU*, Blue Oyster Art Project Space, Ōtepoti Dunedin, 2019. Māia was also a participant in the Independent Curators International Curatorial Intensive in Tāmaki Makaurau at Artspace Aotearoa in 2019.



1. Ralph Hotere
Black Paintings 1-7, 1968-69
Brolite lacquer on board
Collection of the Govett-Brewster
Art Gallery, Ngāmotu New
Plymouth

2. Michael Parekōwhai,
*"Everyone will live quietly" Micah
4.4*, 1990
Wood and laminate
Collection of the Govett-Brewster
Art Gallery, Ngāmotu New
Plymouth

3. Turumeke Harrington
For Hineteao, No U-Turns
Polypropylene webbing,
aluminium, steel
Courtesy of the artist

KAHUKURA

W A Sutton
curated by Elle Loui August

O

TE

IHI

The history of Te Waipounamu is in the footprints our tīpuna left behind; and today the best evidence of these footprints are the names they gave to the places they lived, hunted, and visited as they moved about the land.

So we go back to the land, the whenua, and we put the names in place because that's where the history is. Academia has given us one part of history— we have a responsibility to take that other piece and put it together.¹

In July 2020, the Minister for Land Information Hon. Eugenie Sage announced the restoration of 13 te reo Māori place names around Te Pātaka o Rākaihautū Banks Peninsula and Whakaraupō Lyttelton Harbour. Following a proposal by Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu, on behalf of Te Hapū o Ngāti Wheke, dual names featuring both the te reo Māori and English names for significant sites on the peninsula were made 'official,' and described as such by Toitū Te Whenua Land Information New Zealand on their maps database.

Te Tihi-o-Kahukura Castle Rock was one of the names that was restored. A prominent rocky ridge on Te Pātaka o Rākaihautū Banks Peninsula landscape, it juts out above the Heathcote Valley. Tihi means peak or summit. The name Kahukura is shared by several atua, and in many narratives he is manifested physically as a rainbow. Within Ngāi Tahu creation stories, Kahukura worked alongside Tū-te-Raki-Whānoa and Marokura in adorning the land created by the wreck of Aoraki's waka (recognised now as Te Wai Pounamu South Island). Kahukura was responsible for establishing plant life, and populating the landscape with bird song. According to Teone Taare Tikao, Kahukura was also an often invoked guardian for navigators. He protected waka in stormy seas, using the rainbow as a sign to show the way and indicate favourable weather.² The significance of Kahukura is recognised within the names of two other sites on or near the peninsula: Te Heru-o-Kahukura Sugar Loaf and Te Iringa-o-Kahukura.³

The work by the New Zealand Geographic Board to re-establish traditional names follows decades of work by Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu toward the cultural mapping project, Kā Huru Manu. Through the development of this online atlas, over five thousand traditional place names were researched, mapped and referenced. What becomes clear when using Kā Huru Manu is that within a Māori world view, place names do more than identify a particular location. Rather, they are 'footprints' holding a "cargo of meaning and memory."⁴ Embedded within them are cultural values and narratives of people, language, and land. Maintaining these names ensures the presence of these histories in living memory.

Chloe Cull

1. Trevor Howse *We are Ngāi Tahu* (Ōtautahi Christchurch: Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu, 2015), 38.
2. Teone Taare Tikao and Herries Beattie, *Tikao Talks: Ka Taoka Tapu o te Ao Kohatu: Treasures from the Ancient World of the Maori* (Auckland: Penguin Books, 1990).
3. See *Kā Huru Manu*, Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu, <https://www.kahurumanu.co.nz/atlas>
4. Te Aue Davis, Tipene O'Regan and John Wilson, *Ngā Tohu Pūmahara: The Survey Pegs of the Past* (Te Whanganui-a-Tara Wellington: New Zealand Geographic Board Ngā Pou Taunaha o Aotearoa, 1990), 5.

William Alexander Sutton was an artist and educator based in Ōtautahi Christchurch and a key figure of twentieth century landscape in Aotearoa me Te Waipounamu. Throughout his life, Sutton aspired to apprehend the 'nature of things' in the environment around him, and he pursued this understanding via processes of close observation, study, and art-making. Whether walking high up in the back country or immersed in self-directed studies in his studio, garden or personal library, Sutton sought an intimate awareness of the patterns and forces intrinsic to his local ecology.

In 1978, then-director of the Govett-Brewster, Ron O'Reilly, purchased Sutton's *Te Tihi o Kahukura and Sky V* for the gallery's collection. The purchase was arranged following Sutton's exhibition, *Te Tihi o Kahukura and Sky* at the New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts in Te Whanganui-a-tara Wellington, which comprised ten paintings, each depicting a different view, weather pattern, or mood of a rocky outcrop high on Te Pātaka-o-Rākaihautū The Port Hills, above Ōtautahi Christchurch. At the time, this prominence was known in the parlance of Pākehā as Castle Rock, to Ngāi Tahu as Te Tihi o Kahukura.

Since O'Reilly's tenure, the work has seldom been on display, and as a collection object it is something of an anomaly, sitting uncomfortably alongside the vision of contemporary practice that the Govett-Brewster has subsequently pursued. But this discomfort isn't purely stylistic; one might ask what relationship this work has to Ngāmotu New Plymouth, and what stories does it, or can it tell by being here?

At the time of the original exhibition, reviewers saw little more than a return to neo-romanticism, exceptionally realised, occasionally making note of the glimmer of El Greco's influence. Yet by privileging what—to them—seemed obvious about Sutton's use of visual language, they elided the very thing that could be seen to be most unique about this series in Sutton's oeuvre. Of a lifetime spent observing and responding to the whenua of Waitaha Canterbury, in this one instance, Sutton chose to restore the Ngāi Tahu name for the object of his study.

This observation places a different emphasis on this ambitious series of paintings, that includes, but extends beyond Sutton's technical abilities and stylistic choices. It asks that we reevaluate the frameworks through which we see, discuss and exchange ideas around this series of paintings. Most critically, we must ask if Ngāi Tahu understandings of place are evident in the work. And if they are not evident, how might these meanings be restored through the way in which we handle these paintings and frame discourse around them? We might also turn toward the artist's own story to ask: how did he arrive here? Which questions had he posed to which these paintings were the answer?

W. A. Sutton: A Lover's Discourse

A favourite area for me to paint was up at the Bealey, this side of Arthur's Pass and the Upper Waimakariri. I'd stay at the pub there and walk across the river and up-stream several miles to Turkey flat and lie on the long grass and tussock there, the Nor'wester sweeping over it.

1. W. A Sutton interviewed by Damian Skinner, 15 April 1999. Visual Culture in Aotearoa Oral Archive compiled by Damian Skinner. Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa Archives.

2. A term Sutton used to refer to the transient atmospheres and surface effects of Impressionism.

3. As we know, Sutton wasn't alone in his ambition to find a new visual language. Even before his two years in England and galvanising return, he looked to the work of his friends and contemporaries Rita Angus, Doris Lusk, Rata Lovell-Smith, Leo Bensemann and Colin McCahon, whom he admired for a clarity of vision that was not yet his own. Mere months before Sutton boarded his ship home, *Landfall* published a short book review penned by Rodney Kennedy in which the author appears to raise a challenge to local artists to rebel against the imported niceties of English picture-making and instead return to the lucid simplicity of the earlier geologists, surveyors and botanists (Buchanan, Fox, Heaphy et al.), whose "vision was less befogged than ours with aesthetic preoccupations." (Rodney Kennedy 'A Century of Art in Otago,' *Landfall*, Vol. 2, No.2, 1948.) The La Trobe Scheme, too, had brought a wave of fresh ideas, informed by imported art teachers from Europe with a mind to the modern—including Christopher

That wind governed the whole of nature. The slope of the trees on the far side across the river, they were all moulded by the Nor'wester blowing; the ripple of the grass and tussock, the wind pattern it made was echoed in the shapes of the clouds in the sky, all caused by the same wind. Even the layer of shingle and boulders in the river offering its line of least resistance to the force of water that the Nor'wester released upcountry, up in the tops. That one thing governed it and by seeing the results of a force like that you infer the force itself, you paint the wind itself.¹

— W. A. Sutton in conversation with Damian Skinner, April 1999.

Of the many themes that animate the story of W. A. Sutton, one of the most consequential was his unlearning of 'appearances.'² In 1949, Sutton sailed home to Ōtautahi Christchurch, following two years of postgraduate study at St John's Wood Art School in London. When he arrived he found his sense of place had been sharply refreshed, and the language of his training was no longer adequate for the environment of Te Waipounamu. Soon followed his era of 'country church' paintings, in which the seemingly provisional nature of built structures he found scattered throughout rural Waitaha Canterbury and the suburbs of Ōtautahi are contrasted against the weighty permanence of mountains, riverbeds and restless grassy plains; each element cut with clarity and cast on the canvas as if suspended in the vicissitudes of the climate that had shaped them. This transformational period of Sutton's oeuvre includes two of the paintings for which he is most widely known, *Dry September* (1949) and *Nor'wester in the Cemetery* (1950).³

Sutton had been a keen observer of the natural world since childhood, so to a degree, his turn to more analytical methods of observation was in keeping with his preferred habits of mind. What was fresh to his intellectual and imaginative wingspan, however, were a wealth of powerful encounters he had experienced in the galleries of London and Paris. J. M. W. Turner's *Snow Storm: Steam-Boat off a Harbour's Mouth* (1842), and a selection of paintings by Paul Cézanne at the Courtauld made a particularly powerful impression, both of which he continued to speak of with deep feeling and critical acuity until the end of his life; Turner for his grasp of the thing in itself (the storm), Cézanne for his command of colour and compositional relationships, his restating of mass in space.

In the early 1950s, Sutton acquired a motorbike, a BSA Golden Flash, and began tearing about 'up country' and around Te Pātaka-o-Rākahautū Banks Peninsula. He had a preference for painting en plein air, having become ensconced with the practice while a student at Canterbury College School of Art (now the School of Fine Arts at the University of Canterbury). Painting in this way has the capacity to form a focused (and one could even go so far as to say quasi-magical) relationship between the body, image and place, fusing the senses and the canvas with a visual present-moment-in-the-world, achieved through the design of the intellect and deployment of technique. Or at least this was the way that Sutton came to approach it, fortifying his feeling for place with what he

Perkins and Robert Nettleton Field, whose influence lay beneath what would become a rich and fascinating period of art history in Aotearoa me Te Waipounamu. Of this time, much has been written. For present brevity we might look back on this moment as being much like the braided rivers of the Waitaha Plains; a series of individual artists and ideas flowing in parallel, oftentimes following the lines of thinking of their European predecessors, sometimes in fellowship, other times in fray, but ultimately pooling together in moments for a party, backcountry painting trip or the yearly exhibition of The Group.



knew—the intellectual and structural ideas gleaned from his love of art history, geometry and wider learning more generally.

For Sutton, painting was conscious organisation, a careful balancing of relationships. What he gathered out in the open air he took home to his studio, where he would prepare a more schematic approach to his larger works on canvas. From a preliminary, foundational skeleton of lines and geometric forms, he then worked through a process of subtle additions and readjustments until he felt each element of his image belonged to every other 'irrevocably.' Rather than composition, he preferred the term 'picture structure' to describe this process, as it emphasised the kinds of intrinsic relationships that he aspired to.⁴ Ever fond of a musical metaphor (and a lifelong devotee of the concert programme and live classical music) he likened this aspect of his working method to striking a chord, the allusion being to musical notes as equivalent to the mathematical principles that lay beneath a finished painting. Much like the composers he so admired, Sutton valued pattern and structure, at times with a kind of raw muscularity that can lend his paintings the sense one is witnessing the geomorphology of Te Waipounamu as it heaves and stretches. For a time, that was the story of place that he wanted to tell—its structure and climate—and by doing so, move toward the deepest knowledge in the land that he could access, and articulate that new awareness with sensitivity and precision.

Of the published writing and artist portraits on Sutton that consider his inner landscape during this period, one of the most insightful and carefully considered pieces was written for the Sutton retrospective catalogue by his friend and fellow artist, John Coley. Warmly titled 'Sutton and his Friends,' Coley's text introduces the reader to the upbringing, social life and philosophical outlook that shaped Sutton's personal life and attitude toward teaching. He also cautiously broaches the topic of Sutton's sexuality, of which discussion was allegedly beginning to circulate around the time that the exhibition *W. A. Sutton/A Retrospective* opened at Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna Waiwehtū in 2003. Coley structures his sentences in such a way that if you are familiar enough with Sutton's biography, you are able to follow the intimations he makes as he moves delicately around the lacunae that define this aspect of Sutton's story.⁵

In the centre of what remains of Sutton's world, on the second story landing of his former home and studio, a large timber-framed window looks out to a sprawling field of grass and parkland that is now characteristic of the area known as the 'red zone.'⁶ The Ōtākaro Avon river meanders close by, its presence felt in the autumnal dampness that settles in the air of the empty house. Further in the distance, through the haze of morning light and above the turning leaves of the urban canopy is Te Tihi o Kahukura Castle Rock, a prominent landmark of Te Pātaka-o-Rākaihautū which rises above the city on the Ōtautahi skyline. Sutton's series of paintings *Te Tihi o Kahukura and Sky* (1976–77) came into being



W. A. Sutton, *Te Tihi o Kahukura V*, 1977, oil on canvas. Collection of the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, Ngāmotu, New Plymouth.

4. Sutton and Skinner, *Te Papa Archives* (1999).
 5. It remains crucial to be mindful of the historical conditions of Sutton's lifetime—same-sex relations were deemed illegal in Aotearoa me Te Waipounamu until the Homosexual Law Reform Bill of 1986. And Sutton was an exceptionally private person, despite the open, gregarious side of his personality so sensitively framed by Coley. Quentin McFarlane writes of him being a "rather shy, scholarly and quiet person, who didn't stand out in terms of his personality but was exceptional in terms of his expertise (as cited in Pat Unger, *W. A. Sutton: Painter*, Christchurch: Hazard Press, 1994). Nevertheless, during his life, Sutton took on the role of something of a public figure and spokesperson for the arts, and as such, he enjoyed collegial relationships with a wide range of other leading figures. These facts beg the mention that one doesn't have to look far from Ōtautahi to uncover the instance of James Mack's effective dismissal from the Dunedin Public Art Gallery in 1971 on account of the then Director Charlton Edgar's outrage at his homosexuality. Nor to note that Sutton was a frequent dinner guest of the Edgar's whenever he visited Ōtepoti Dunedin. For further brief reading around attitudes to sexuality in mid-century Ōtautahi see Joanne Drayton '*LGBTQI 1960s marriage was the white noise of normality*,' in *Okay Boomer* ed. Ian Chapman (Auckland: Bateman, 2020).

6. A 600-hectare area which has been largely designated as unsafe for permanent habitation in the wake of the Canterbury earthquakes of 2010–11, and where almost all existing structures prior to the earthquakes have been demolished. Due to exceptional circumstances—largely the foresight and advocacy of individuals—Sutton Heritage House and Garden has been saved from this fate.

7. *Dry September* (1949) and the *Te Tihi o Kahukura and Sky series* (1976–77) could be seen as bookends for Sutton's thirty-year teaching career, both being preceded by a period of international travel. Sutton retired from the University of Canterbury's School of Fine Arts in 1979, and as a parting gift, bequeathed the University of Canterbury's Library an incredibly generous sum, enabling the purchase of an edition of Banks' *Florilegium*.

8. As Chloe Cull has written in her introduction, "The name Kahukura is shared by several atua, and in many narratives he is manifested physically as a rainbow. Within Ngāi Tahu creation stories, Kahukura worked alongside Tū-te-Raki-Whānoa and Marokura in adorning the land created by the wreck of Aoraki's waka (recognised now as Te Wai Pounamu/South Island)."

9. I note, while in Rome, Sutton visited the Sistine chapel a total of fifteen times.

10. W. A. Sutton interviewed by Deborah Shephard, 1982. W. A. Sutton Archive, Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetū. Tape 3.

11. Justin Paton, 'Sutton high-fives McCahon,' Behind the Scenes, Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetū, 2 September 2011. <https://christchurchartgallery.org.nz/blog/behind-the-scenes/2011/09/sutton-high-fives-mccahon>

in this house during a second transformational period in his life. Though one could easily position this series as being the summation of several lines of artistic thought and a lifetime of training, we can also think of these paintings more directly as beginning here, on the second-storey landing, with Sutton and the rocky prominence which carries the name Kahukura, facing one another through the picture window.⁸

Other tributaries flow behind the scenes. In 1972, Sutton travelled back to Europe, spending most of a sabbatical in Italy. His experiences during this year provide a backdrop for the *Kahukura* paintings, most notably his full-body immersion in the paintings of the Quattrocento and High Renaissance periods.⁹ The work of Piero Della Francesca and Michelangelo made an especially deep impression on him, and a remark he makes during an interview with Deborah Shepard is revealing:

Everything in his [Piero Della Francesca's] work is completely inevitable, as if it has been there for all time, is part of nature. Piero must have been very much in tune with whatever it is that formed nature in the first place to be able to invent these shapes that fit in so perfectly with it.¹⁰

It seems to me that this short reflection tells us a lot about what comes next. Although it is difficult to know precisely when Sutton's contemplation of Te Tihi o Kahukura began, a trail of preparatory drawings begins not long after he arrived home. What was he moving toward with his ambitions for this series? Was it solely to capture a sense of the residual volcanic energy of Te Pātaka-o-Rākaihautū? The sheer ambition of the project alone is astounding. And then, there is the title. In a career spanning over five decades, and dedicated primarily to the Waitaha landscape, it appears to be the only instance in which Sutton has introduced a Ngāi Tahu name, and its meaning, into dialogue with his work. These questions do call for some thought. As Justin Paton has written, "nothing made it into a W. A. Sutton painting by accident."¹¹ And there is evidence to suggest that Sutton was not naive, that he had a rudimentary grasp of the concept of *mana motuhake*.¹² While it's unclear at which point, or where, Sutton came across the name or decided it was a suitable title, or exactly how much he understood about Kahukura from a Ngāi Tahu perspective, it was Roger Duff, then the Director of the Canterbury Museum, who provided him with a translation and a much longer title, *Te Tihi o Kahukura (The Citadel of the Rainbow God) and a sky full of boiling clouds roaring around all over the place*.

Across each of the ten paintings, Sutton sustains a vision of a silent, primeval earth suspended between illumination and intimacy. His 'boiling clouds' not only roar but take on the array of moods and layered textures that the skies of Waitaha are so well known for. Built brushstroke by brushstroke into a series of complex atmospheric fields, the anatomy of each sky rewards close viewing. But are Sutton's skies a cipher for the divine? And if so, whose image of the divine precisely? On this, Sutton's biographer Pat Unger writes:



In Bill's paintings the rock became an empty fortress-like place, to be seen by humans but not for humans. Perhaps these were his religious works—New Zealand geomorphology and meteorology elevated to a higher level of thought.¹³

Language is a precise instrument, and while I sympathise somewhat with Unger's reading, 'elevated' is not a word I would settle on. There is an overwhelmingly earthy, almost bodily quality to these paintings that gives one the sense that land and sky are bound together by immense, eternal forces, that are born of the world and its consciousness of itself. The term, or rather, the sensibility I keep returning to is dialogue. In particular, the soft, receptive position of one who listens. Te Tihi o Kahukura, it seems, appeared in Sutton's consciousness as a question, attaching itself to his imagination with the same tenacity that grass seed purportedly stuck in his socks—very tough to get out. In turn he responded with a lover's attention, establishing a flow of intelligence between his sense of the whenua that arose in his present, and his scholarly perspective of a thousand years of art history and the myriad ways that artists and storytellers before him have listened to and framed the world.

12. See 'Comment on National Museum,' Appendix 2, Pat Unger, *Bill's Story* (Christchurch: Canterbury University Press, 2008), 213–215.

13. *Ibid.*, 131.

14. My notion of restoration here leans heavily on that of the late Moana Jackson and the pathway he outlines with the six values for a wider ethic of restoration; The value of place, the value of tikanga, the value of community, the value of belonging, the value of balance, the value of conciliation. Moana Jackson, "Where to Next: Decolonisation and the stories in the land," in *Imagining Decolonisation*, ed. Rebecca Kiddle, (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 2020), 152.

I come to these paintings, not as a Sutton aficionado, nor as a specialist in mid-20th century landscape painting, but as someone who has been thinking alongside art-making in Aotearoa me Te Waipounamu for a number of years. As a researcher, this series of paintings bring issues to the surface that are tender and complicated, and not so easy to untangle or resolve. In response, rather than turning away from what is difficult and complex, I have turned to them with questions, many of which originate in the early colonial era and the thorny relationships that were then established between representations of whenua and the Colonial Museum in Te Whanganui-a-tara Wellington. Those early works of the 19th century, as beautiful as some of them may be on the surface, played a role in the transfer of power, knowledge and land from Māori, and we should not shy away from addressing the violence of that fact.

The earliest Pākehā artists in Aotearoa me Te Waipounamu were largely self-taught geologists, botanists and surveyors, and, almost exclusively, self-appointed men of science. Therefore the link between artworks, knowledge, museum collections and place is neither new, nor superficial, but foundational. While artists working within those early scientific frameworks belong to an era before Sutton's time, and bear little direct relationship with his mode of working or concerns, they remain the background context for landscape painting in Aotearoa me Te Waipounamu.

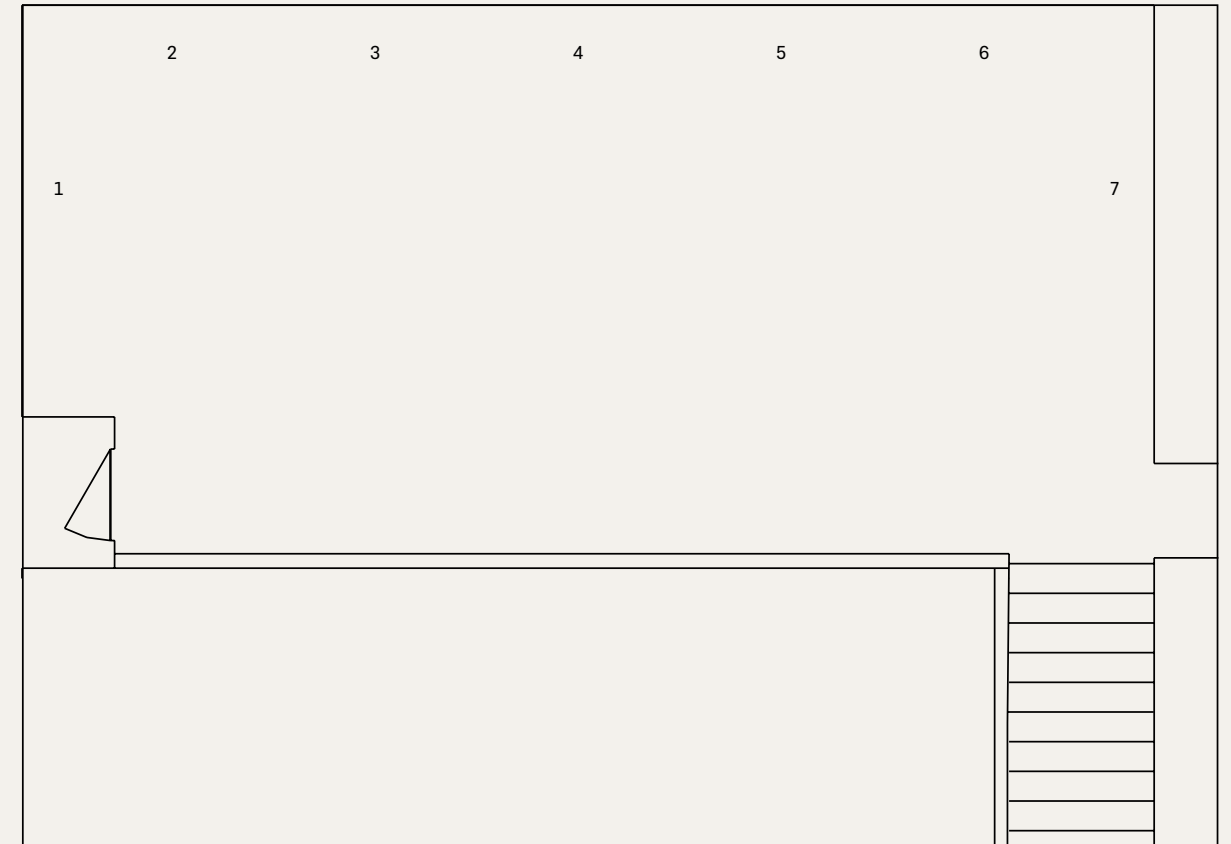
Presently, there is a metamorphosis unfolding in our galleries and museums. In Aotearoa me Te Waipounamu these processes of transformation are grounded in Te Tiriti o Waitangi and seek to redress and transform the values, practices and governance structures—that determine how knowledge is exchanged, how we engage with artworks and objects, how storytelling takes place, and from whose perspective—in a manner that seeks to honour and uplift the values of that document. In this moment, the question remains open as to whether there may be a role for the many representations of whenua that populate our museum collections. Can they too take on a transformative role as part of these processes? Can they find a way out of the storeroom to tell new stories, or restore those that may have been silenced?¹⁴

Art history, like history itself, is full of nuance and contradiction, pleasures and sorrows. Now, when I think of Sutton and his fine-grain work of listening to the world about him, manifesting his feeling of accountability to the places he loved in a form of visual storytelling that has outlived him, I feel a deep sense of fondness for his commitment to his own principles. The passage of his practice also shows by example that we can disentangle ourselves from ways of seeing and thinking we have outgrown, slough off our outmoded attachments, and return to the matters at hand, refreshed. It is also of undoubted significance that he has left us with a resplendent homage to Kahukura, beacon and guide, who adorned the whenua in birdsong and plant life in the wake of the wreck of Aoraki's waka. This too is a story to lean toward in our moment.

William Alexander Sutton (1917–2000) was a key figure of twentieth century landscape painting in Aotearoa me Te Waipounamu. Sutton, along with fellow artists based in Waitaha Canterbury such as Rita Angus, Rata Lovell-Smith, Doris Lusk and Leo Bensemann, developed a distinctive interpretation of the region's landscape, and are often referred to as the Canterbury School. A graduate of Canterbury College School of Art (now the University of Canterbury's School of Fine Arts), Sutton was also a skilled portraitist, fine calligrapher and influential teacher at the Ilam School from 1949–79. During his lifetime, Sutton volunteered time to a number of arts organisations; he was an active member of The Group (1946–1977), council member of the Canterbury Society of Arts (1949–67), a member of the Visual Arts Committee of the Arts Advisory Council and QEII Arts Council, and a trustee of the National Gallery, Te Whanganui-a-Tara Wellington. Sutton was awarded a CBE for services to art in 1980 and the Governor General's Award 1984.

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1. W A Sutton
Te Tihi o Kahukura and Sky I,
1976
Oil on canvas
Collection of Christchurch Art
Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetū,
purchased 1980

2. W A Sutton
Te Tihi o Kahukura and Sky II,
1977
Oil on canvas
Collection of the Wallace
Arts Trust

3. W A Sutton
Te Tihi o Kahukura and Sky III,
1976
Oil on canvas
The Alex Baird Collection, College
House, Ōtautahi Christchurch

4. W A Sutton
Te Tihi o Kahukura and Sky IV,
1977
Oil on canvas
Collection of Dunedin
Public Art Gallery

5. W A Sutton
Te Tihi o Kahukura V, 1977
Oil on canvas
Collection of the Govett-
Brewster Art Gallery, Ngāmotu
New Plymouth

6. W A Sutton
Te Tihi o Kahukura VIII, 1979
Oil on canvas
Collection of Christchurch Art
Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetū,
purchased 1980

7. W A Sutton
Te Tihi o Kahukura X, 1979
Oil on canvas
Collection of Dunedin Public
Art Gallery

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