

Visual Feasts: Photographic Narratives of Belonging.

SLIDE 1: Naumai, hara mai. Welcome here today.

SLIDE 2: MIHI: Ko Hikurangi me Pohautea toku maunga, Ko Waiapu toku awa, Ko Ngati Porou toku iwi.

Hikurangi and Pohautea are my mountains, Waiapu is my river, Ngati Porou is my tribe.

I begin today by acknowledging my dear Uncle Arthur Britnell Hughes who passed away, not unexpectedly, this week. His funeral service is today. Moe moe, Uncle, moe mai.

I have been told that there are only two kinds of people, host, (tangata whenua) and guest (manuhiri). That we either being hosts or we are being guests. As a guest here (malihini) I offer my thanks to our hosts, the Kanaka Maoli, kanaka honua. Yesterday for the excursion, I visited the O'Kahana land where thirty-one families live and maintain their land from the mountain to the sea. It was an honour to see the extraordinarily bountiful tropical food gardens, tended to with love and no pesticides. The concept of Ki Uta, Ki Tai (from the inland area to the shores) shares a similar philosophical holistic base to the Hawaiian 'mauka, ki makai'. This holistic philosophy of harmonious relationship with, and intimate knowledge of the land and sea, is a central tenet to my project and research.

To be able to continue the centuries-old practices associated with hosting and generosity, we need to be able to access our resources. Manaaki, to support, take care of, give hospitality to, protect, look out for, is an activation of MANA. Our mana is uplifted when we are in a position to provide hospitality. Of course, as guests, we need to know not to become a burden on our hosts nor overstay our welcome.

SLIDE 3: (Orange Bay) The resources we need to be able to host, includes access to our land and seas. We must understand the natural world to be able to harvest and hunt sustainably. We need to know which rocks to collect and use for our hangi, in-ground ovens. We need to know when to put out the nets and when to pull them in. We need to have sufficient knowledge of the weather and seas to know when to go to sea for fishing and when to stay home. When can we gather seaweed and when do the mullet run? What blossoms on the trees indicate that the kina, the sea urchins are fat?

SLIDE 4: (Atkins whanau) The people who know this knowledge are those who practice it and who have been able to maintain their connections to the land. They are the MAHI KAI (those who hunt, gather and grow food) and the AHI KAA, those who keep the home fires burning. There are others

of us who are in reclamation mode, and like Maui the great navigator and fisherman, are reeling the land closer to us. Of course this is a long journey. I'm one of these people, not raised on the land but moving ever closer to a deeper connection. The use of social media, rather than operating in a de-centred way, is paradoxically assisting in creating narratives of belonging.

I'm starting my talk today acknowledging the person who has shared with me a great deal of knowledge, shared food, shared his family. People who are renowned for their hunting and gathering are often referred to as Mahi Kai. They generally know a great deal about their environment.

My cousin Graeme Atkins is what is called a MAHI KAI fulla. He, his wife Makere, their children Kimiora, Ashlee and Oriwa, have generously allowed me to share with you their MAHI KAI photographs from Facebook. The collective knowledge of the family deeply informs my understanding of the land and sea where they live and where I return to seasonally.

SLIDE 5: This project begins with my relationship to my family tribal land, Omaewa, on the most eastern point of the East Cape. It is Ngati Porou territory. My grandfather on my mother's side trained me in my role as a trustee of this land. This is part of the journey of my humble attempts to reconnect our family with the land my ancestors lived on. Our land is isolated. It is a ten-hour drive to get from where I live in Auckland, to our land. It is 4WD access only.

Today I will take you to the East Cape of Aotearoa, through photographs. My own practice and research is as a photographer and educator. This presentation is responding to a hunch that social media is providing us with a visual record of practices and activities associated with MAHI KAI. I will show my current projects and then look at visual material about food gathering and hunting collected from social media. I have permission to show the images from several Ngati Porou fellow tribes people, the Atkins family who live at home and as well as two people who live in the main cities but travel home regularly. I then want to undertake a group exercise to test my hunch about the potential of photography to be utilized to support our relationships to customary food sources. Like the vast ocean that surrounds these islands of fire, this is an open space of research, without conclusion.

Then we will end with sharing Pineapple Lumps and Whittaker's chocolates from Aotearoa, and local delicacies hunted and gathered at Safeways, Kapahulu.

SECTION 2:

SLIDE 6: Ka wera hoki i te ahi, e mana ana anō. While the fire burns the mana is effective.

I will start by discussing concepts of Ahi Kaa Roa.

This project seeks to photographically explore concepts of ahi kaa, approaches to food gathering and seasonal land and sea usage, by mapping sites that indicate a history of maintaining ahi kaa and manaakitanga.

SLIDE 7: The cultural landscape of Aotearoa dates back a thousand years and beyond. Over the millennium, the gradual but steady human modifications to land accelerated with European settlement. In an era during which urban drift and migration abroad depopulates small rural communities, the people who remain on tribal land continue the values of a centuries-old practice called *ahi-kaa-roa*, literally **the long burning fires of occupation**, a deliberate political maintenance of land title claims to ensure rights are not extinguished. I will discuss this in more depth shortly. Others return seasonally or when occasions call, to contribute to keeping marae 'warm' through usage. Urban life in cities is displacing the agricultural past of the NZ nation-state with increasing isolation from and declining empathy for rural ways of life.

As an organising principle in Te Ao Maori, Ahi Kaa Roa is being altered by the massive social and environmental changes over the past 200 plus years. This project seeks to photographically explore concepts of **ahi kaa**, approaches to food gathering and seasonal land and sea usage, by mapping sites that indicate a history of maintaining **ahi kaa** and **manaakitanga**.

A square metre (**use hands**) outdoor fireplace at Tikapa on the East Cape is one particular site where Maori cultural practices of Ahi Kaa, keeping the home fires burning, are enacted and maintained by tribal members of Te Whanau a Pokai, such as my cousin Graeme. The

intertwined relationship between water and fire is expressed in this site where water is drawn from the 'puna wai', a natural spring to be heated on the fire fuelled by wood washed up on the nearby beach. Practices of manaakitanga are manifested through this fireplace, as it is used for cooking, heating water and a hearth for guests.

While 'Ahi kaa' literally means 'site of burning fires', Te Ahi Kaa Roa, the long burning fires, is a concept of land tenure through continuous occupation or seasonal maintenance of customary rights. It is a deliberate political maintenance of land title claims to ensure rights are not extinguished. It is now often used to refer to the people who live all year round on tribal lands, who work to maintain cultural tribal practices, the Ahi Kaa, *the keepers of the fires*. The concept of Ahi Kaa ties into the term Ahi mataotao meaning to 'Die out or to be extinguished'. Implicit in these concepts are the threats posed by leaving tribal lands unoccupied for too long, where the customary rights are extinguished when one becomes the Ahi teretere, 'flickering fire', those who stay away for several generations after which claims to tribal lands are lost. At this time when the urban population outnumbers the rural, tribal members living on tribal lands are ever diminishing outside of urban centres and the recession is leading to an exodus of Maori to Australia, how are concepts such as ahi kaa, ahi teretere and ahi mataotao enacted? I am hoping to make links between my own photographic practice, my own experience of re-connecting with place.

My own photographic project focuses on indigenous knowledge of land and sea, and in particular explores deep knowledge of place. This manifests primarily in the creation of a body of contemporary art work depicting catching fish, cooking food using customary methods. This project asks what ahi kaa, the maintenance of connection to place, through close relationship to land and water, might look like? Te Mahi Kai refers to all the activities associated with finding, preparation and cooking of food. This includes fishing, hunting and

gathering as well as cultivating. The project is concerned with the use and self-determination of indigenous land and knowledge.

This series depicts fishing and seafood gathering along a stretch of beach about 30kms south of East Cape. Tikapa Beach is approximately 5km long stretching at one end from a headland known as Port Awanui to the south bank of the Waiapu River mouth, known locally as the Ngutuawa, the beak of the river. There is no road access and the nearest shop is 30 kms away on a windy gravel road.

Each summer, this isolated area becomes a temporary camp for a number of families.

Intergenerational knowledge of the land and sea is incrementally transmitted to the children through food gathering activities. The people in the images are my cousin Graeme Atkins, his wife Makere Atkins, their daughter Kimiora Atkins and my partner Lawrence Makoare.

SECTION 2: Social Media and Visual Feasts

AHI TERE TERE - During holiday seasons, many urban indigenous people return to tribal homes and post numerous photos of food delicacies to social media like Instagram. This produces an online visual feast of seasonal foods hunted and gathered, that reframed, creates contemporary visual narratives of belonging to land and sea. As an open research question, I am exploring how photography can be utilized to support our relationships to customary food sources.

As I mentioned earlier, this workshop is based on a hunch I had after spending far too much time on Facebook in recent years. As with many of us, I have used Facebook to post images of local food delicacies procured either in my tribal region, or when been hosted by people in other regions. On re-examination of this impulse to 'share', I can admit that my motives have

been less than noble. I admit that I have used images of seafood to boast to my friends and family that I am 'home', experiencing the best seafood our region has to offer. I know that there is a tiny degree of one-upmanship and narcissism that is at play on Facebook and Instagram.

Over this last summer in Aotearoa (Dec-Feb), I noticed a seasonal glut of images of locally harvested, gathered and hunted food. In reviewing these images, there is a tremendous amount of local knowledge evident in the snapshots of hunting and fishing. The seasons, the tides, the weather, the moon and the sun, the ecological contexts, the terrain, the movement of water, the plant life, the behaviour of animals, all work together, demonstrating a critical tribal resource. The narratives that emerge assert belonging, declaring I am here.

I now will free style the next section and speak to the slide show that follows. Slide show

Case studies: Three Ngati Porou families.

1. Atkins whanau - hunter gatherer lifestyle. When I looked at several years worth of Facebook images from the Atkins, I saw folders of images named Hunting and Gathering.
2. The photos portray the hunting skills of teenage woman Kimiora Atkins. Kimiora first started hunting with her father when she was seven. She has since become a skilled deer and pig hunter.
3. Tere Harrison - acts of resistance. Politicising the process.
4. Bailey Mackey - good to be able to feed the family.

Instagram 1800 plus images with hashtag #kaimoana.

CAN TRANSLATE FOR DIFFERENT INDIGENOUS PEOPLES. DIASPORA.

OTHER PARADIGMS IN DIFFERENT AREAS?

I'd like now to brain storm the names of your favourite delicacies and do hash tag word searches on Instagram on them on your clever phones.

In looking at FACEBOOK AND INSTAGRAM, similar stories of belonging emerge. I want to know if or how these can be framed as visual narratives and as tools for learning and education. How might the knowledge be transmitted between the country cousins and city slickers? CAN WE AS INDIGENOUS PEOPLES USE SOCIAL MEDIA TO CREATE VIRTUAL FIRES SO THAT WE NEVER EXTINGUISH OUR RELATIONSHIPS TO LAND? At the very least, our virtual flickering flames might create connections otherwise lost.

Conclusion:

Laws developed by urban politicians affect food preparation and exchange, building practices, and water usage, threatening our sovereign right to provide shelter, food and water. Practices in rural communities such as building temporary structures for summer fishing camps, provision of food for large gatherings, and unfettered access to water are all subject to new codes of compliances and laws. In Aotearoa/New Zealand, regions such as Te Tai Tokerau in Northland and the Te Tai Rawhiti (East Cape) where these photographs were made are becoming something of a blind spot when decisions are made by central government. The daily reality of life in remote rural communities, globally, is in sharp contrast to the city realm. Here, meat can be acquired through hunting and it's always organic; water comes from the sky to the rainwater tank or from a spring, no chlorine added; and if a camping shelter is needed, it can be made from driftwood logs washed up on the beach, found materials or locally milled timber. Environmental problems such as the impact of deforestation causing massive silting of

seafood sources, on diminishing land as it crumbles into the river and roads that shift and move, are oblique and out of frame, not easily discernable to the outside eye. Whenever it rains heavily, landslips frequently block roads, or roads crack open. In summer dust blows so thick and hard from the silt that it forms clouds that roll kilometres inland. These photographs take stock of the local cultural topography, through looking at food gathering and rural practices.

The threats to the ecology of traditional food sources and sacred sites through global warming, rising sea levels, post-Fukushima radiation, pollution, deep-sea oil drilling, over-fishing in addition to policies that continue to erode access rights, bring a degree of urgency to this project.

Today I am aiming to balance being both guest and host. As a guest here I am humbled by the manaakitanga, the care for us as guests. As a host for this presentation, I wish to share kai, food, with you.

Ka wera hoki i te ahi, e mana ana anō. While the fire burns the mana is effective.