

Emerging Earth Forms

**An embodied painting practice seeking a deep connection
with nonhuman companions in dynamic sites**

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Abstract

This practice-led research traces my deepening relationship with nonhuman companions in familiar and beloved places. Painting and drawing processes have developed in response to diverse materials and collaborations with the nonhuman on flexible and transportable substrates. Through exploratory modes of making, site, bodies, action and memory are integrated as a site-responsive choreography. This research fosters a non-binary, intuitive, and embodied approach to matter and spirit by incorporating non-Western and holistic approaches within contemporary artmaking. The agency of the nonhuman (trees, birds, rocks, and clay pigment) is acknowledged: their developmental growth over time is traced through indexical textures, which link to the genesis of their creation and constant transformation. Through playful and intuitive improvisation, the spaces between the indexical, my body, and site are activated through multi-vocal and rhythmic mapping, in an interplay between abstraction and representation.

Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the Acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Signed

15th May 2025

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Figure 1. Te Wairoa-Clevedon. March 2025. Photo by Ana Ter Huurne.

Introduction

This earth-centred painting and drawing project has manifested in response to my love for places where I have the freedom to live. Primarily, Te Wairoa-Clevedon, where I am constantly inspired by a remnant of indigenous forest adjacent to my home.¹ The name Te Wairoa (The long river) encompasses the Wairoa river and its wider surroundings.² The clay from this site is five kilometres from the Hunua Falls, where the Wairoa River cuts down a Faultline, exposing an ancient volcanic cone (dated 1.3 million years ago).³ The rugged coastline in Whangārei Heads provides a dramatic contrast to the project: Reotahi (the first speech) and Ocean Beach are surrounded by volcanic rocks (eroded andesite cone remnants); reminding me of how their forms continually respond and evolve within the environment.⁴ Time is playfully juggled in a relational configuration, interacting with the past, present and future. Indexical textures and traces from rocks and trees activate the past by capturing a material moment and are taken into the future through processual acts of making. I recognise site as having its own memory, as a sentient being impacted by human settlement, and the destructive impact of a colonial legacy when relationalities changed (naming, people, site). At the core of this project is my relationship to what I define as the ‘nonhuman:’ trees, rocks, birds, clay pigment, ocean-sand surfaces, fresh or salty air; and the conviction that by grounding my practice to the earth as a nurturing mother, Papatūānuku, I establish an authentic and spiritual connection in a co-creative relationship. Dialogical relations are created in these spaces, joining the site, human and nonhuman bodies with materials and media. The term ‘bodies’ refers to: the nonhuman, the site (as part of the earth’s body), or may include my own human ‘body.’ The primary motivation is to be immersed and open to the contingency of what occurs over a duration in each site’s geographical and spiritual space (sometimes I repeatedly return to continue a work). Thus, making the work in situ shapes the project’s methodology, as this is where the artwork’s initial or subsequent compositional layers occur, and different marks come into play with one another. I name my images ‘painting-drawings’ because through their making process they move between painting (liquid) and drawing (frottage) conventions. The sites function

¹ G. J., Murdoch, “Auckland Regional Authority Future Bulk Water Supply Study: Phase 4 Background Report No.54- Historical Perspectives On the Southern Kaipara, Lower Waikato and Wairoa Valley.” (Auckland, New Zealand, 1988), 30 Clevedon Historical Society. At the end of writing this exegesis, I have made a recent discovery (4th May 2025): the key site in Te Wairoa-Clevedon, historically known as the Eastern Wairoa block, is part of Ngāi Tai’s land of 58, 000 acres, confiscated by the Crown when conflict erupted (1865). Edward Brophy purchased Allotment 174 at the head of the Taitaia Valley in 1862. Given the context of making my painting-drawings, I feel challenged to work out how I might respond through my practice.

² Ngāi Tai ki Umupuia Marae and Ngāi Tai Umupuia Te Waka Tōtara Trust, “Ōtau: A Ngai Tai Cultural Heritage Assessment of Clevedon Village, Wairoa Valley,” ed. Green, Nat (Manukau City Council’s Clevedon Sustainable Management Plan, 2010), 5.

³ Lloyd Homer, Moore, Phil, and Kermxode, Les, *Lava and Strata : A Guide to the Volcanoes and Rock Formations of Auckland /* (Landscape Publications in association with Institute of Geological and Nuclear Sciences, 2000), 94.

⁴ Bruce W. Hayward, *Mountains, Volcanoes, Coasts and Caves: Origins of Aotearoa New Zealand’s Natural Wonders* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2022), 38. Ngāti Wai, Ngāti Kahu, Te Waiariki, and Parawhau are the tribes associated with Whangārei Heads.

as source material, an outdoor studio and place to appreciate and interact with the natural world, and its geological attributes. Through an embodied awareness of the site, I recognise the intrinsic value of the nonhuman, fostering a communal relationship over time. A rock or tree is approached haptically with hand and body; as a living being they are honoured, and their 'voice' is activated by using frottage, a technique of mark making.⁵ I recognise the autonomy of these entities by transferring a part of their surface textures, translating surface into the 'index', what I call an authentic imprint on a two-dimensional substrate.⁶ During the process, the tree is touched through the fabric (substrate) but left unharmed. I perceive the resulting marks as having real material effects, activating a relationship between viewing and being for the subject, the audience, and myself. I have a strong spiritual connection to these sites and the nonhuman elements that reside in these places.⁷

During my life, I have built and developed an understanding of an earth-centred spirituality which include the writings of visionary theologian, evolutionary theorist and Jesuit priest Teilhard de Chardin (b.1881-1955). An important aspect of my positioning is based on his philosophical reflections and meditations on science and spirituality: evolutionary development of the human and nonhuman and the interconnectivity of matter and spirit.⁸ Another facet of this has been engaging with the Māori creation myth through various life experiences and educational contexts. In this way, Te Ao Māori has assisted me in shaping this research towards an ethical and relational methodology, and provided me with a framework for considering a non-binary approach to matter and spirit.⁹ This notion underscores the project and has synchronicities with other artists who also engage with these appreciative considerations.¹⁰ Tohunga, scholar, minister and philosopher Māori Marsden contributes a deep understanding to the enquiry's relationship with each site; acknowledging mauri, the life force within the earth (whenua) in Aotearoa.¹¹ I consider the impact of colonial activities on indigenous trees in Te Wairoa and feel the grief of their loss during the processual acts of making (as an impetus towards an ethical relationship) and I sense a move towards a different future where they are valued in a heterarchical

⁵ Papers such as tissue were too delicate or disintegrated.

⁶ A rope is tied around the substrate in contact with the nonhuman. Over time I have come to sense them as collaborative companions.

⁷ My children were born here, and their placenta was buried under trees.

⁸ Pierre Teilhard De Chardin, *Le Milieu Divin: An Essay on the Interior Life* (London: William Collins, Sons & Co., 1965), 106. His works challenged traditional Christian theology, (based on the binary of spirit and matter) and he was forbidden to publish them during his lifetime by the Vatican and the Jesuits.

⁹ This contrasts to the dualistic idea of a machine-like dualistic earth, where plants are perceived as passive and non-sentient (Aristotle, Aquinas and Descartes) as embedded in Christian theological tradition (Matthew Hall); later challenged by Franciscan Naturalism.

¹⁰ Matthew Hall, *Plants as Persons: A Philosophical Botany*, SUNY Series on Religion, and the Environment (New York: State University of New York Press, 2011), 41–48.

¹¹ As both a tohunga and graduate of the whare wānanga and an Anglican minister, I think Māori Marsden (1924-1993) is in a unique position to critique traditional Western perspectives on the binary of matter and spirit and to integrate an in-depth earth centred spirituality to the discourse through a Te Ao lens.

relationship. The sound and movement of birds across the holistic environment naturally invigorate the collaborations, as my creative outpouring transforms the marks with tone and colour. While native birds are my main companions on site; the sound of introduced species, such as magpies and rosellas, cannot be ignored in the surrounding soundscape. They remind me of the inter-connections (ideas-flora-fauna) across the Tasman Sea and the contributions to discourse from Australian theorists: Barbara Bolt (artist), Paul Carter (interdisciplinary practitioner) and Brian Martin (indigenous scholar and artist). Their thinking led me towards a performative practice of configuring a new relationship with the geography of each location, one that is flexible, rhythmic, and open to change.¹²



Figure 2. Reotahi Beach. Submerging the substrate in the seawater over rocks. January 2025. Photo by Ana Ter Huurne.

¹² Paul Carter, *Dark Writing: Geography, Performance, Design* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009), 275.



Figure 3. Frottage with rocks. October 2024. Ocean Beach, Whangārei Heads. Photo by Ron Ter Huurne.

I consciously break away from the Western tradition of the horizon line (that demarcates land and sky) and maps (that equate to dividing the land for its economic worth) by applying non-Western values to deconstruct domination over the earth.¹³ Through my ancestral indigenous connections to Mexico, over my life, I have developed an interest in First Nations people's creative relationship with the earth expressed as an interdisciplinary rhythm (dance-drum). Hence, I am drawn to biologist and First Nations scholar, Robyn Wall Kimmerer's holistic approach. Her book *Braiding Sweet Grass* reflects how humans can learn from plants by cultivating gratitude with an "open heart and mind" as an act of reciprocity; the land (nonhuman) becomes the 'teacher.'¹⁴ Kimmerer's wisdom sits at the intersection of Western scientific knowledge and indigenous spirituality. I consider it critical now, when the extinction of plant species and indigenous forests threatens future biodiversity.

¹³ Barbara Bolt extends the definition of contemporary art practice through an Aboriginal framework where a non-representational principle is also relevant.

¹⁴ Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants*. Second hardcover edition. (Milkweed Editions, 2020), 215.

A process-based enquiry: Intuitive and Improvisational

Logic and intuition form the basis of this project's methodological structure. The practice utilises a series of processes enacted as a loosely applied set of rules, which I interpret as a way to embed logic and intuition (including a 'contra'-'dictory' element).¹⁵ The term 'phase/s' is used to talk about experimental periods where certain conditions were tested, and new learning and future direction occurred; 'layers' refers to the chronological development in each work's becoming and is included in the title to connect to the location. I understand logic not as rational, linear and mechanistic but as 'mind-wandering' through contemplative embodiment. Iterative mark-making develops as painting-drawings build from the last encounter into a set of cumulative substrates. In the making process, rules are considered adaptable and can generate future explorations. Through an instinctive process, I let go 'into the unknown' of how the image will release itself. Over time, a 'knowingness' has grown, and I intuitively know my mark by collaborating in a choreography of movement with my nonhuman companions. Innovative discoveries are made for the practice through the direct inter-relationships influenced by environmental changes.¹⁶

Embodied movements track the artworks beyond the boundary of representation through performance, defined as a use of multiple actions. Spaces or intervals in the painting-drawings are not conceived as 'empty' but as 'compositional spaces' filled with rhythm.¹⁷ Improvisation is activated by responding to sounds and environmental conditions through mark making with diverse materials as they answer to human or nonhuman bodies. The fact there is no definite endpoint (image) in mind, prevents the performance from being predestined towards a goal.¹⁸ In this way, the practice 'tracks' the methodological approach rather than ending at a destination, thus playing with a non-Western representation; that is, the making process deconstructs linear thinking and moves to the spaces in-between.¹⁹ Through a focus on experiment based phases, I am discovering how imagery emerges as a performative ontology following the trajectory of different bodies, including human and nonhuman, and how a holistic and non-Western framework can be applied in painting research.²⁰

I will now outline the three chapters that form the exegesis discussion: Chapter One, *Methodology: Site and Choreography*, examines the project's methodology and my

¹⁵ A rule may limit the palette, media, or use two layers; dry media placed next to fluid; contra-diction.

¹⁶ Traced on the substrate over one day or over several days.

¹⁷ Carter, *Dark Writing: Geography, Performance, Design*, 10.

¹⁸ Carter, 275.

¹⁹ Carter, 275.

²⁰ Stephen Davies, "Ontology of Art," in *The Oxford Handbook of Aesthetics*, ed. Jerrold Levinson (Oxford University Press, 2005), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199279456.003.0008>. "The ontology of art considers the matter, form, and mode in which art exists."

improvisational and contingent approach to media and materials. I explore the significance of the substrate and its relationship to making methods, and how I understand the recorded indexical connections. I then discuss choreographic performativity as a non-representational, non-Western principle, as interpreted by theorists Barbara Bolt and Paul Carter.

Drawing on a non-binary and relational ethic: Chapter Two, *Energy and Life Force (Mauri)* discusses my integral link to the nonhuman, referring to Māori Marsden's pivotal text, *The Woven Universe*. I discern aspects of the Māori creation narrative, Papatūānuku (life-force, mauri), as a helpful framework for establishing relations with nonhuman. I explore clay pigment as an active and versatile material. I discuss the practice of two Aotearoa artists, Raukura Turei and Chervelle Athena, finding parallels with the indexical. Further, choreography as a methodological structure is extended. My ethical standpoint is integrated by examining the relationship between humans and land (whenua) through guardianship (Kaitiakitanga) and spirituality (Wairuatanga). Finally, I reflect on how sharing my practice in a workshop format, (*Rimu Collaboration with Women in Te Wairoa*), created a sense of shared experience (Whanaungatanga).

Chapter Three, *Rhythm: The Spaces In-Between* begins by exploring the space between representation and abstraction activated by rhythm. I describe a significant work, *Piwakawaka Interacts*, the genesis of a rhythmic and creative collaboration. Gregory Minissale's concept of 'mind-wandering' is discussed and integrated with embodied awareness. Finding synchronicity with Aotearoa artist Sarah Smuts-Kennedy's practice, I draw connections with her intuitive artmaking. I extend the conversation with American artist Ellen Rutt's recent exhibition, *Strata Memory*, May 2025. I also investigate embodied memory in the landscape (Brian Martin). Finally, I review the conceptual parallels in Aotearoa artist Turumeke Harrington's creative practice.

Chapter 1 Methodology: Site and Choreography

This chapter focuses on methodological processes, strategies and media use. I outline the importance of the substrate's format, its relationship to my active embodiment on-site, and subsequent appreciation of the work. My approach to logical flexibility and intuition is discussed in the context of a collaborative choreography. I will also discuss how performativity as a non-representational, non-Western principle informs the practice.

Media: Painting - Drawing

My collaborative actions with the nonhuman in response to media and materials are integral to the research. Throughout the project's experimental phases, water-based media has performed as the most promising conduit for tone and colour.²¹ Its fluidity resembles my sensory-embodied approach to contingency in each location. Media includes ink, dye, acrylic, watercolour, gouache, salt, sand/ocean water from Whangārei Heads, and clay pigment from Te Wairoa. Easily transported, this media works at speed, dries and adheres to the substrates efficiently. Dye powder added unexpected effects from spontaneous actions. Black ink or watercolour effectively translates improvisational movement into simplified gestural marks; its colour and versatility complement the neutral-toned calico substrates. In contrast, graphite, charcoal, and conte crayons readily translate textures through frottage into what appears to me as a skeletal structure.²²



Figure 4. Ana Ter Huurne. *Bird movement in Te Wairoa*, (detail). Layers: 1 Clay pigment from Te Wairoa, 2 Responding to Birds. December 2024. 158 cm x 255 cm.

²¹ Key Phases: 1 Clay pigment/ frottage, (July 2024); 2 The Watercolour/gouache drawing-paintings (August 2024); 3 The Ocean Beach and Reotahi drawing-paintings (August- September 2024); 4 Recorded sound and movement (November 2024); 5 Responsive larger substrates (October 2024 to May 2025); 6 Accumulative Time Substrates (January to May 2025).

²² The media may be reversed/combined, i.e. frottage may be applied with hands/brush and wet or dry media.

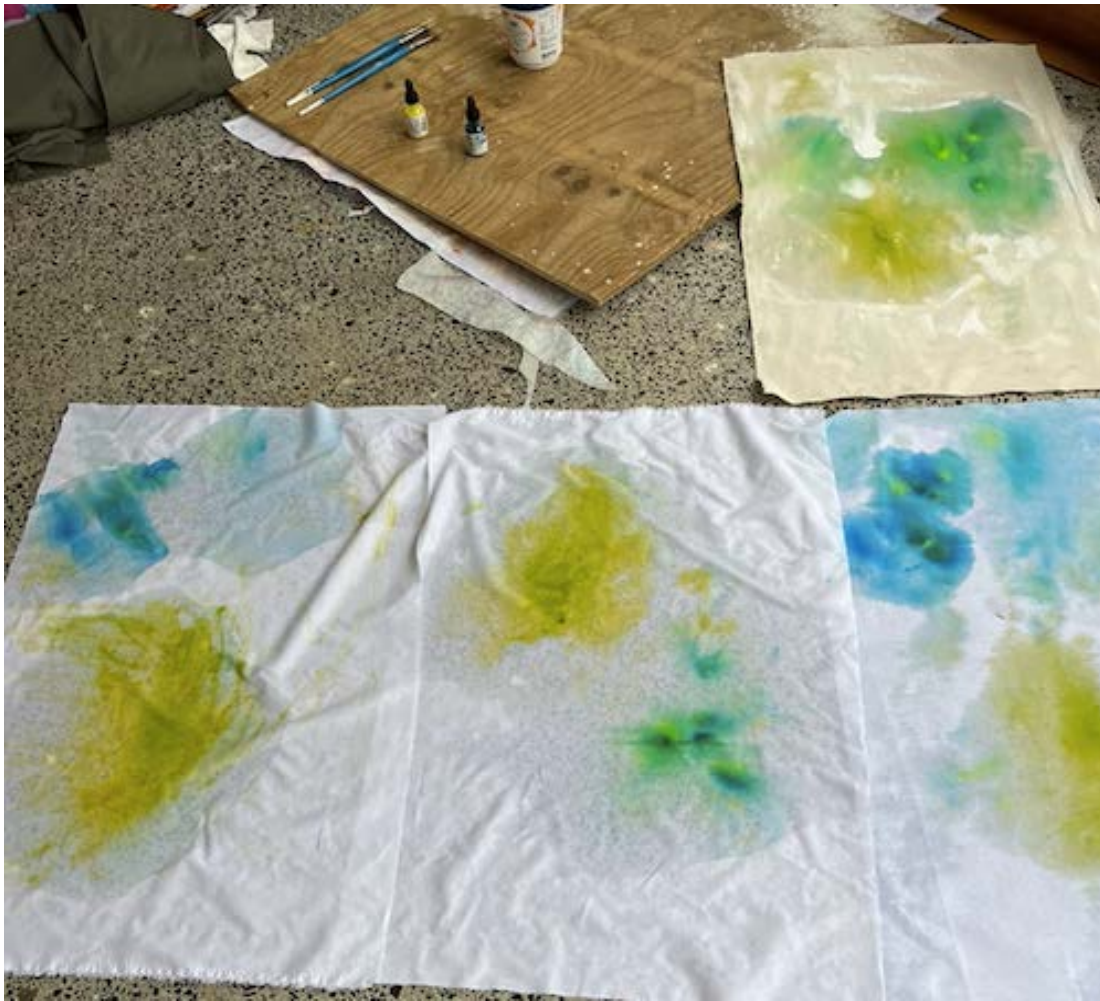


Figure 5. Process: Phase 2, working on the first layer of yellow and blue studies in Te Wairoa. August 2024.



Figure 6. Ana Ter Huurne. Phase 2, installing the yellow and blue studies. AUT WM studio. August 2024.
Each substrate 50 cm x 75 cm.

In initial experimentation, I used an easel, like that of 19th century French plein air painting approaches, looking for the simplified elements, such as dark and light forms in a landscape. I found inspiration in Sungsook Hong Setton’s practice and the spontaneous, calligraphic approach to Chinese ink brush painting techniques.²³



Figure 7. Early plein air painting studies. Te Wairoa, Clevedon. May 2024. Photo by Ana Ter Huurne.

²³ Sungsook Hong Setton, *The Spirit of the Brush: Chinese Brush Painting Techniques: Simplicity, Spirit and Personal Journey*. (Beverly, MA: Rockport Publishers, 2017), 35-40.



Figure 8. Ana Ter Huurne. Black ink studies. May 2024. 21 cm x 29.7 cm each.



Figure 9. Sungsook Hong Setton, *Living Ink, Rhythm 3*. 2008. New York. Ink and colour on paper. 45.5 cm x 35 cm. Image courtesy of the artist.

Each material has its own liveliness and potential to unveil itself over a flexible duration. This meaningful new learning occurred while trying out monoprints on Reotahi beachfront in August 2024. The monoprint did not transfer from the rock as its surface absorbed the acrylic paint.²⁴ A residue ensued from problem-solving, by pouring water onto the rock and

²⁴ I took the monoprint directly from the rock.

pressing it against the substrate. I then instinctively dipped the substrate into the salty sea water to test the frottage with a paintbrush, thinking how salt might impact the stain.²⁵ This subverted how the salt water and acrylic reacted with the rock, thereby extending the process. Additionally, I discovered that by pressing a part of the painted surface onto a second substrate sparked a new symmetrical relationship. Only on reflection and in discussion did I learn that these approaches would translate into a developing focus on experiential painting-drawing. In this work, frottage expressed a new type of terrain, coupled with red as an emotive colour (held together but not symmetrical), activating the space in-between. Here, these registers articulate two ways of materialising media through graphite, and in response to actions. While on-site, a process or new idea may contradict a rule when encountering the non-human; this is partly dependent on the unpredictable qualities of working in the natural environment.²⁶



Figure 10. Phase 3, testing monoprint on rocks. August 2024. Reotahi Beach, Whangārei Heads. 52 cm x 61 cm.

²⁵ A conversation ensued about being 'under-conscious' (intuitive, spontaneous action) while in the process.

²⁶ Upon running out of ink, I intuitively worked with clay pigment and charcoal, contradicting the ink rule in response to the piwakawaka.



Figure 11. Ana Ter Huurne. Phase 3, testing the Ocean Beach Blue sand and Reotahi Monoprint painting-drawings WM AUT studios, August 2024.

Substrate: Relationship to Site and Bodies

The substrate is integral to the painting-drawings' inter-relationships and has two lives: on-site, it traces nonhuman collaborations, and in the studio, I install and exhibit it in various formats. A significant consideration in the project has been how on-site methods translate into an exhibition format. Throughout the project, I have experimented, considered, and tested multiple materials as substrates, playing with scale in reference to my body, and its scale relationship to other nonhuman bodies (trees, rocks and site); and display approaches.²⁷ Across the project, I discovered that calico and cotton fabrics successfully translated my direct relationship with the nonhuman through their raw, simple, robust materiality, and neutral colours.²⁸ As a surface mechanism, the substrate is self-forming and records folds and creases, giving it a flexible presence in the collaboration between myself and the nonhuman. An extended landscape-format (more width than length) can activate a sense of temporality, enlivening the horizontal plane through the rhythm of its spatial register. In contrast, the substrate as a vertical field (suspended slightly touching the floor) activates height to gravity relations.

²⁷ I experimented with found fabric such as a bedsheet, but found it associated too strongly with its primary function.

²⁸ Earlier experiments utilised coloured fabrics: a green distracted from the marks; black fabric proved too opaque; the marks were divorced from the human-to-tree relationship.

Muslin as a painting surface transformed sound relations--visual layering the dialogical relationships between substrates (fragmented traces soaked through materials), while conceptually mimicking the indexical imprint. This material's delicate, transparent and translucent qualities activate the marks as floating objects; as kinetic. On viewing the movement of the substrate (when placed near an area of ventilation), I felt an empathy towards it through kinaesthetic awareness.²⁹ On encountering the work, I found it possible to feel immersed in the substrate, its rhythm, sensations and textures.



Figure 12. Submerging the substrate. Ocean Beach, Whangārei Heads. January 2025. 246 cm x 188cm.
Photo by Ana Ter Huurne.

²⁹ Kirsty Martin, *Modernism and the Rhythms of Sympathy: Vernon Lee, Virginia Woolf, D.H. Lawrence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 50.



Figure 13. Ana Ter Huurne. *Ocean Beach Rocks*. Layers: 1 Frottage Ocean beach, 2 saltwater. Whangārei Heads October. 2024. 246 cm x 188 cm.

Logic and Flexibility

During the process of making, a condition might be to employ different ways of working with a media, such as 'always' leaving compositional spaces for rhythm;³⁰ This condition became a continuous consideration in future based phases. These spatial pathways (lines) are neither deductive, reductive, nor dematerialised, but are like a 'lining' in the field of traces.³¹

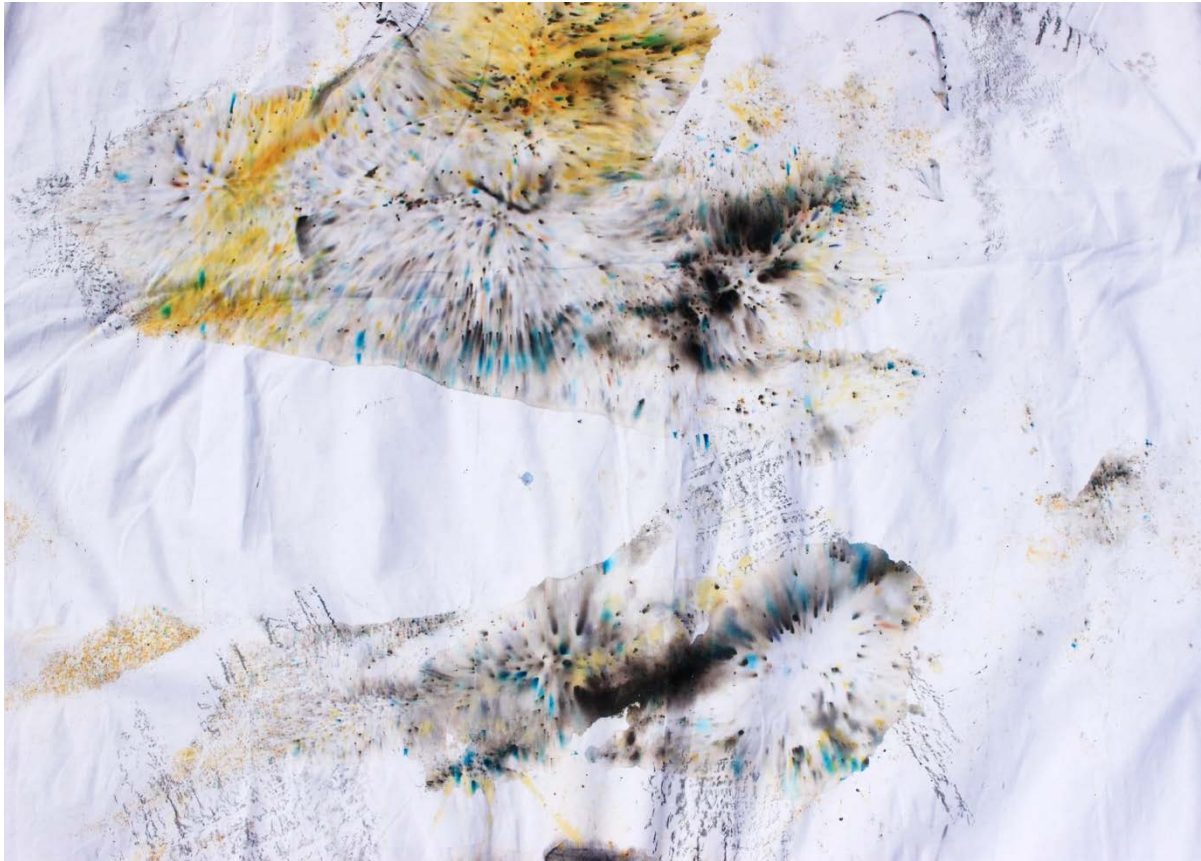


Figure 14. Ana Ter Huurne. *Remember the Nikau Whare in Te Wairoa, (detail)*. Layers: 1 Clay pigment and graphite frottage, 2 dye and water. Te Wairoa. April 2025. Two substrates (diptych) each 143 x 498 cm.

The simplicity of the emergent imagery is elemental, and I prefer to complete each layer within the boundaries of the broader site to create what I perceive as an interconnected but dynamic effect. I detach the substrate from the tree and move a few hundred metres from the initial encounter, placing the substrate on the ground, to activate bird collaborations responding to their movement and sound. I can then observe how the actions have contributed to the composition.

³⁰ Early work experiments used action verbs (ref. Richard Serra) as a rule to assist with the media application.

³¹ Carter, *Dark Writing: Geography, Performance, Design*, 14.



Figure 15. Ana Ter Huurne. *Kauri Plays with Piwakawaka and Hau II*. Layers: 1 *Kauri frottage*, 2 *Responding to birds*. Te Wairoa. November 2024. 150 cm x 120 cm.

The results can be surprising as the marks track the process in a playful choreography; *Piwakawaka Re-members Kauri* encounters the rhythm of the index as active graphite textures across a diagonal corner and clay pigment in a circular field. Improvisational swirling-coloured gestural marks respond to bodies in their unique space-place. Working with clay pigment from Te Wairoa for staining, creating frottage, or painting, actuates the earth element contributing to the broader logic of the project's methodology, activating the mauri.



Figure 16. Ana Ter Huurne. *Piwakawaka Re-members Kauri*. Layers: 1 *Kauri frottage in Te Wairoa*, 2 *Responding to bird sound and action. Te Wairoa*. March 2025. 158 cm x 255 cm.

Choreography: Collaborating with Nonhuman Companions via the Indexical

This painting-drawing practice cannot be categorised as either representation or abstraction but instead plays with a tension in challenging this binary distinction. It is not entirely abstract because a form of representation or imprint is ‘taken’ from the tree (rather like a photogram image) and sits alongside the looser and freer marks. In this way, the frottage is always and already, a close relation to the skin of a particular tree. However, this indexical aspect is not necessarily static: indigenous trees, such as Kauri, continuously shed their bark (to prevent a climbing plant from taking root).³² Similarly, rocks that perhaps appear static, are constantly transforming and responding to their environment. This is an exciting part of my collaboration with the nonhuman, as repeated visits to a site create different results. My working methods enable the process, relationships, and one-to-one interaction with the textures of nature to operate as one layer in the work. I am interested in how choreography can emerge from actions, responses (methods of painting), and the vitality of earthly matter as described by Paul Carter, as a “pattern danced on the ground.”³³ Barbara Bolt suggests that contemporary art practice can learn from a non-Western Indigenous Aboriginal framework, giving agency to “the performative power of the image.”³⁴ I am interested in Bolt’s idea of mapping a terrain through a non-representational principle (methexis) or “a concurrent, actual production,” where real effects are produced between bodies (human and nonhuman) to extend the practice.³⁵ For me, this means the practice is always open-ended and in the process of becoming.³⁶

³² Joanna Orwin, “Kauri Forest,” in *Te Ara Encyclopaedia New Zealand* (Wellington, New Zealand, 2007), <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/kauri-forest/print>.

³³ Paul Carter, *The Lie of the Land* (London: Faber and Faber, 1996), 84. I have participated in site-specific improvisational dance choreographies.

³⁴ Barbara Bolt, “Rhythm and the Performative Power of the Index: Lessons from Kathleen Petyarre’s Paintings,” vol. 12, 2006, 4, https://www.academia.edu/23153284/Rhythm_and_the_performative_power_of_the_index_Bolt.

³⁵ Barbara Bolt, *Art Beyond Representation: The Performative Power of the Image* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 136.

³⁶ Barbara Bolt acknowledges she has much to owe Aboriginal creative practice and does not wish to appropriate, but to learn. I take this position myself: having travelled to Australia (dance conferences), and I have developed an in-depth interest in the Aboriginal creation narratives (sharing them through drama-art in educational settings). I am interested in how the teacher Geoffrey Bardon worked with Aboriginal communities empowering them to keep their cultural practices alive in the 1970s, despite challenges. His collaboration with the Papunya community in the Northern Territory influenced Bolt, Carter & Martin in terms of the performative power of an image.



Figure 17. Ana Ter Huurne. *Te Mauri o te Whenua*. Layers: 1. Pigment from *Te Wairoa*, 2 *Pohutukawa frottage*, 3 *Responding to birds*. *Te Wairoa*. October 2024. 252 cm x 148 cm.

Chapter 2 Energy and Life Force (Mauri)

Drawing on a non-binary approach, this chapter integrates Māori Marsden's framework in relation to the nonhuman. I explore clay pigment as an active media and its relationship to the indexical, whenua and memory. I discern parallels with my practice through Aotearoa artists Raukura Turei and Chervelle Athena; and how an ethical relationality is extended. I then examine how 'choreography' integrates participation, site and body through theorists Barbara Bolt and Paul Carter. Lastly, I reflect on how *Rimu Collaboration with Women in Te Wairoa* brought a distinctive, holistic, and ethical dimension to the practice.

Māori Creation: Papatūānuku and Tāne-mahuta

Reciprocity and interconnectivity are key to the Māori creation story. This narrative is not simply a myth from a Western perspective; its layered meaning forms a central structure of humankind's relationship to the pattern of the universe across deep time.³⁷ Foundational is Papatūānuku, the primordial mother. Māori Marsden acknowledges her as "the personification of the natural earth" and humans are her conscious mind; she sustains all living systems in a reciprocal relationship within a natural environment, and deserves reverence.³⁸ In the narrative, only Tāne-mahuta succeeds in separating his parents, enabling space and light to enter the world (metaphors for knowledge).³⁹ Through an interconnective relationship, Papatūānuku relies on Ranginui (Sky Father) for warmth, rain, and light.⁴⁰ He is the ancestor of the trees, birds and humans, and is embodied by them (and vice versa).⁴¹ By activating awareness through stillness, presence and intuition, I have met and learnt to be guided by the nonhuman in a reciprocal relationship.⁴² I have noticed how my encounters with piwakawaka have increased since starting the project, they gravitate into my spaces individually or in groups while I paint (often at unexpected times). I feel they respond to my attention and support me in my practice. I think about the values held within Wairuatanga, the integral connection of humans to an environment, and Kaitiakitanga, the role of humans in protecting and caring for the land (earth).⁴³ These concepts help me to think in relationship with nonhumans as entities capable of sensing in a shared spatial world.⁴⁴ Recognising their autonomy and spiritual value has become increasingly important as the practice has evolved.

³⁷ Māori Marsden, *The Woven Universe : Selected Writings of Rev. Māori Marsden* (Otaki: Estate of Rev. Māori Marsden, 2003), 56.

³⁸ Marsden, *The Woven Universe : Selected Writings*, 45.

³⁹ John Patterson, *Pacific Parables: Learning from Māori Tradition* (Wellington: Steele Roberts Aotearoa, 2014), 70.

⁴⁰ Marsden, *The Woven Universe : Selected Writings*, 45.

⁴¹ Patterson, *Pacific Parables: Learning from Māori Tradition*, 71.

⁴² Animist worldviews allow the 'voice' of nonhumans to be heard, and therefore, to learn from them. Matthew Hall, 111.

⁴³ Ngāi Tai ki Umupuia Marae, 15. Kaitiakitanga links to the Cosmo-genesis of creation and all living things are related.

⁴⁴ Hall, *Plants as Persons: A Philosophical Botany*, 163.



Figure 18. The clay pigment was collected at this flood-damaged road in July 2024. This area is close to where there was a Ngāti Tai Māori settlement, abandoned in 1863 at the start of war. The road ahead to the left is adjacent to where bullock carts transported indigenous trees to the mill in the 19th Century.

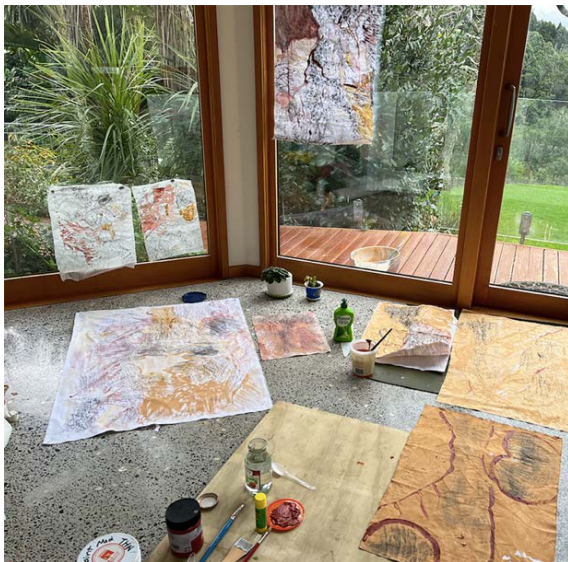


Figure 19. Phase 1, pigment and frottage studies. July 2024 Te Wairoa, Clevedon July 2024; (testing the studies on the studio wall. AUT WM level 5 studio space).

Clay Pigment in Te Wairoa

In July 2024, I collected the ochre-coloured clay from the roadworks site adjacent to my driveway in Te Wairoa, storing it in an airtight container to keep it damp and pliable.⁴⁵ I anticipated its potential to activate and embody diverse effects on the substrate, and therefore, mauri. Sifting the clay produced a smoother medium and created a range of tones when combined with varying quantities of water. It could be applied thickly with a brush, with fingers, or using frottage techniques. In one experiment, some areas of the surface/composition were left blank (to afford the possibility of adding in tree texture in the spaces). At the same time, the substrate was scrunched and dipped into a bowl of clay and water, leaving a range of impressions once dry. Clay is an active media, volatile and alive. I noticed the pigment formed a crusty, dense layer, which could flake off and change tone over time. New spatial relationships emerged as I began to understand how to accentuate its visual quality by reducing or augmenting the pigment (opaque flatness or transparency).⁴⁶ I note, I am not entirely in control of these phases, which interests me.⁴⁷ I recognise it as an always active process, embedded with life force and autonomy as it changes over time.

Nonhuman: Indexical and Memory

My painting-drawing practice finds synchronicity with two Aotearoa artists, Raukura Turei and Chervelle Athena, who both collaborate with nonhumans in significant personal locations.⁴⁸ Māori artist Raukura Turei explores her connection to a site through her whakapapa, and by incorporating raw elements from a site, such as onepū (black sand) from Te Uru, on the West coast of Tāmaki Makaurau. The surface texture of the painting reads as repetitive abstracted rhythmic marks in grey and black, and the sand used contributes to the meaning of *He Tukuna III*, one in a series of works made in response to her grandmother's accidental drowning at that location before Turei's birth.⁴⁹ She describes the process of making as profoundly personal and sees it as a way to connect to deeper parts of herself, her tipuna and her kuia (grandmother) to confront the painful memories and her family's disconnection to the whenua.⁵⁰ She comments that the work enacts and releases grief through Hine Moana (the personification of the ocean as a feminine deity). To Turei's surprise, her practice has assisted her whānau in dealing with these histories over time.⁵¹

⁴⁵ I was mindful of the quantity and collected only what I needed (kaitiakitanga).

⁴⁶ During a critique, a peer commented that when the substrate with earth-based pigment is placed near the ground, it drew her attention to the earth, which is the relationship I want to accentuate.

⁴⁷ Phase 1: Clay pigment from Te Wairoa. July 2024.

⁴⁸ I see the nonhuman as my 'companions' rather than 'persons' (Athena) or members of my whakapapa (Turei).

⁴⁹ *Pull Focus with Raukura Turei : He Tukuna III*, Art Collector (Auckland, 2020), <https://artcollector.net.au/video-pull-focus-with-raukura-turei/>.

⁵⁰ *Pull Focus with Raukura Turei : He Tukuna III*.

⁵¹ *Pull Focus with Raukura Turei : He Tukuna III*.

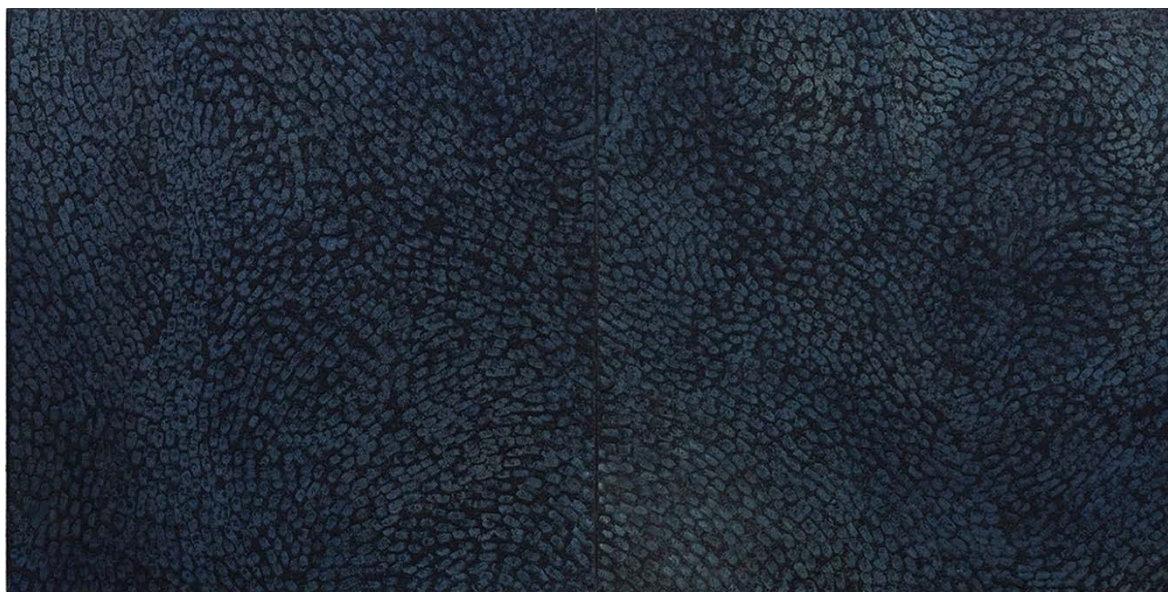


Figure 20. Raukura Turei. *He Tukuna III*, 2020. Oil, raw pigment and onepū (black sand) on linen, two panels, 90 x 60 cm width/120 cm overall. Exhibited in '*Takoto ai te marino horahia i waho rā*' ('Behold! the ocean calm that spreads outside'), The Dowse Art Museum, Lower Hutt. Image courtesy of the artist. Photo by Monique Redmond.

Similarly, in my practice, clay pigment or surface textures are pathways that give voice to the nonhuman in multiple ways. One understanding is that it expresses the earth's (whenua) grief regarding the demise of forests in Te Wairoa (one of the key sites for this project) and the historical impacts of colonisation.⁵² Over three decades of living in Te Wairoa, I am dismayed to notice how kahikatea and other indigenous trees have been abandoned in neighbouring properties or felled to make room for pylons or monocultural pine plantations. Surrounded by horses or cattle, they are unprotected, and there is no provision for their regeneration or sensitivity to their status as taonga in Aotearoa.

⁵² At the same time, clay pigment and textures honour the life force and spiritual essence and can dissipate and transform grief.



Figure 21. Abandoned kahikatea in Te Wairoa-Clevedon. May 2025. Photo by Ana Ter Huurne.

Comparably, Cherville Athena's practice is based on her love of kauri in indigenous forests. Exposed to various theological perspectives, Athena developed an interest in earth-centred spirituality during her formative years. She states that mauri influences her relationship to the site. In *Trounson (2979)*, the kauri are photographed in Northland, and their intricate details are captured.⁵³ Light traces the contrasting dappled elements, and sunbeams dance around the trunks. The deep, dark shadows present a mysterious tone and atmosphere, invoking the sacred time before sunrise in Te Ao Māori.

Is the work representational? Does the photograph of the kauri stand in for, or in place of the tree? I think it does more: mauri, as sensed in the forest, is activated through the indexical. The images release their life force into the world and affect a two-way relationship. The viewer is affected by encountering the subtle qualities within the photographs; they may sense something of what Athena feels by being immersed in the large-scale format of the image pinned directly to the wall, as they stand in front of it. My embodied haptic approach to the indexical is a raw recording. I, too, aim to release the tree

⁵³ Cherville Athena, "Nonhuman Persons: A Photographic Love for Aotearoa's Natural Environment" (Auckland: Auckland University of Technology, 2018).

or rock's life force. Māori Marsden provides a way to consider mauri's relationship to a site as a binding agent unifying all created matter within its wider diversity. He says mauri "generates, regenerates and upholds creation."⁵⁴ Additionally, each nonhuman (creature/thing) has a unique whakapapa (life/character) and deserves respect as a distinctive individual.⁵⁵ In my work, mauri interconnects with the continuum of time, the life cycle of the nonhuman revealed through the mark making and gestures embodied within the substrate.

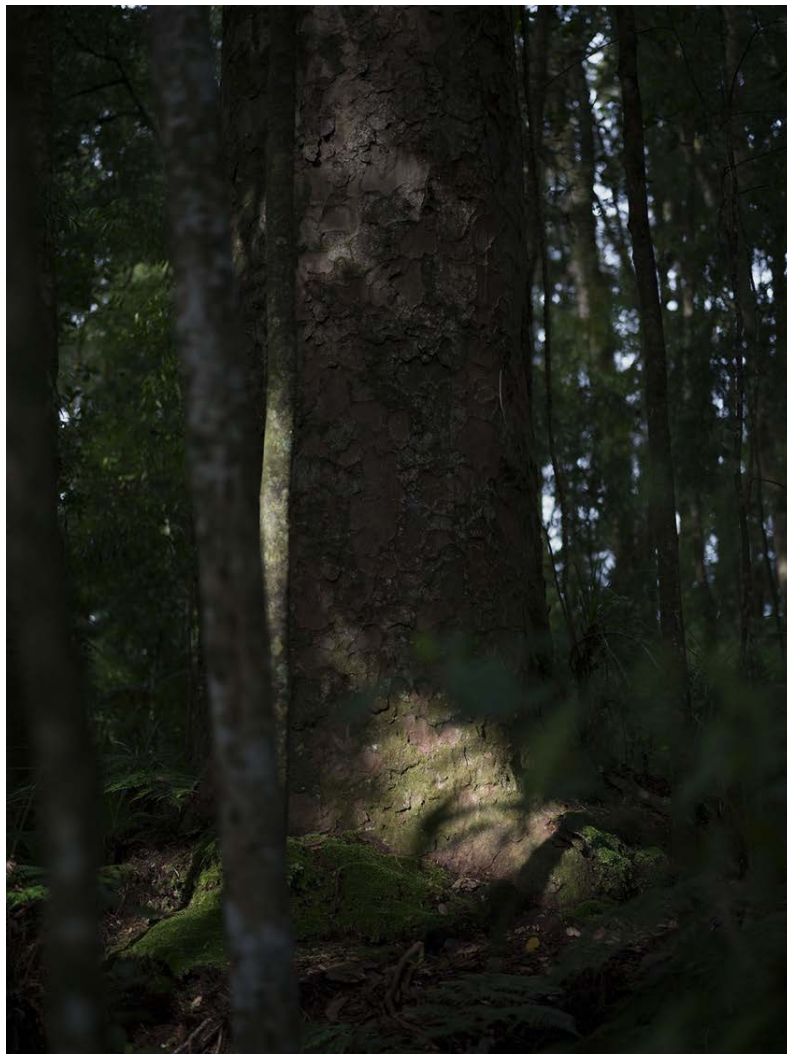


Figure 22. Chervelle Athena. *Trounson (2979) Northland* 2019, Inkjet print on Ilford Galerie Fine Art Smooth, 1000 x 1334 mm. Image courtesy of the artist.

⁵⁴ Marsden, *The Woven Universe*, 44.

⁵⁵ Patterson, *Pacific Parables: Learning from Māori Tradition*, 116.

Relationship as Kaitiakitanga (Guardianship) and Wairuatanga (Spiritual)

Like Turei and Athena my research is enriched by integrating a non-Western lens that perceives nonhumans as entities in their own right (kin) rather than objects for exploitation.⁵⁶ Both artists utilise scale to reference the body in relation to the image to activate mauri. However, Turei integrates her personal history (atua wahine) where her whakapapa is connected with the whenua and thus includes her tipuna through the scale-body relations (the invocation of the ocean becomes cathartic).⁵⁷ As Pākehā New Zealanders Athena and I seek to recognise the tree's mauri and the integral relationship between humans and nonhumans. Firstly, as responsible Kaitiakitanga protecting ecological sites.⁵⁸ Secondly, by fostering a spiritual awareness as Wairuatanga.⁵⁹ Athena employs light as chiaroscuro to activate an "out of body experience."⁶⁰ Whereas I intend to dissolve the binary between the physical and the spiritual (matter-spirit) by creating an 'embodied' experience through a participatory dimension in the making. For me, *Nikau Regenerates* and *Choreography in the Air* activates this non-binary space: the viewer is invited to participate and dwell between the two substrates and become an extension of the rhythm (sensation) of the work's materiality where there is this permeability between matter and spirit. These elements activate Wairuatanga by playing with the object and subject in an improvisational relationship.

⁵⁶ Molly Mullen et al., "Artistic Practice, Public Awareness, and the Ngahere: Art–Science–Indigenous Māori Collaborations for Raising Awareness of Threats to Native Forests," *Ecology and Society* 28, no. 4 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.5751/ES-14479-280413>.

⁵⁷ *Pull Focus with Raukura Turei : He Tukuna III*.

⁵⁸ Mullen et al., "Artistic Practice, Public Awareness."

⁵⁹ Marsden, *The Woven Universe*, 6.

⁶⁰ Athena, "Nonhuman Persons."



Figure 23. Ana Ter Huurne. Exhibition practice. *Nikau Regenerates*. Layers: 1 Nikau frottage, *Te Wairoa*, 2 Responding to recorded sounds from *Te Wairoa* with Clay pigment and watercolour. (diptych). AUT WM Level 3 foyer. November 2024. 110 cm x 404 cm.



Figure 24. Ana Ter Huurne. Exhibition practice. *Choreography in the Air*, (detail and full view). *Layers: 1 Responding to sounds in Te Wairoa with Clay pigment from Te Wairoa and watercolour.*(diptych). November 2024. AUT WM Level 3 foyer. 110 cm x 404 cm..

Collaborative Energy

Throughout my making processes, I sense trees or birds are my nonhuman companions, but not in an anthropocentric sense; each companion is unique, autonomous and sentient, and we share space.⁶¹ Like my art process, trees are not predetermined or pre-planned they adapt to different conditions through their organic plasticity.⁶² Kimmerer acknowledges the more-than-human intelligence within the forest by learning to listen to them.⁶³ This holistic approach and way of thinking was extended when I took the making process, and extended it into a collaborative format by inviting participation in two workshops. Namely *Contour Drawing in Immersive Space* as part of the AUT Relay event at Te Uru, Titirangi and *Rimu*

⁶¹ Hall, *Plants as Persons: A Philosophical Botany*, 14. (deconstructs an instrumentalist relationship; resource for humans).

⁶² Hall, 144.

⁶³ Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*, 291.

Collaboration with Women in Te Wairoa-Clevedon.⁶⁴ On both occasions participants engaged in a choreographic process of moving in response to either the installation, or to the Rimu's texture through a haptic encounter. In the latter at Te Wairoa-Clevedon, through a collaborative frottage process, the Rimu's sentience is recognised. In our collective making, I perceived we were honouring the tree's intrinsic value, translated by the mutual energy of marks through haptic and intuitive awareness: using sensory dialogue and empathy, solidarity with the trees ensued and this embodied kaitiakitanga (guardianship). On reflection, I noticed that this approach activated Whanaungatanga, a sense of belonging and participation through shared experience. In utilising 'active participation,' a new politics of land emerges on the substrate; the nonhuman is perceived as 'kin.' I anticipate that a reciprocal healing of the human-to-land relationship may exude beyond the site: the women spoke to me about how they were affected by the Rimu's encounter and thought about the experience, and it is possible they will take this out into the world.

⁶⁴ The participants are connected to the site: they have either lived, taught or brought up their family in Te Wairoa's surrounding district, and have engaged with aspects of Te Ao Māori. One is an AUT Fashion-Design alumni and teacher at a local high school.



Figure 25. *Rimu Collaboration with Women in Te Wairoa-Clevedon*. February, 2025. 600 cm x 240 cm.
Photo by Ana Ter Huurne.

Piwakawaka

Playfully fluttering

out of reach

in the trees' canopy

You elliptically dance from branch to branch

Creating circular patterns

Whether North or South,

you know each other (and me)

Wherever I am

I recognise your high-pitched and cheeky voices!

Constantly twitching or hiding

almost touching me,

Your presence fills me with joy and wonder

as you silently appear

in a sacred space to play.

Chapter 3 Rhythm: The Spaces In-Between

This chapter explores the liminal space between representation and abstraction. I describe a significant work, *Piwakawaka Interacts*, the genesis of a rhythmic and creative collaboration. Utilising Gregory Minissale's concept of 'mind wandering', spatial rhythm, sounds and memory are considered. I examine my intuitive approach and find synchronicity with Aotearoa artist Sarah Smuts-Kennedy's practice. Discovering resonance with American artist Ellen Rutt's 2025 recent exhibition, *Strata Memory*, I extend the conversation. I also investigate embodied memory in Te Wairoa-Clevedon (Brian Martin): the clearing of indigenous forests and the significance of its name to Māori. Finally, I discuss conceptual parallels with Aotearoa artist Turumeke Harrington's sculptural practice.

Choreography: Rhythmic Improvisation

In my practice, collaboration is where mark making entwines with nonhumans to create painting-drawings in time, place and space. Imagery emerges intuitively and establishes a dialogue of action and responsivity. For me, this engagement enacts a relationship of kinship to deconstruct domination over the nonhuman.⁶⁵ It gives them a distinctive voice, resulting in a multivocal image that affirms their presence. As mentioned in Chapter One, with reference to Bolt, movement can be mapped through participation. Therefore, "meaning is produced as an embodied situated event" rather than merely representing something.⁶⁶ All embodied movement is included, extending the image's power beyond speech acts.⁶⁷ In this way, it could be said that the land 'reveals' rather than 'represents' the landscape.⁶⁸

In October 2024, the making of *Piwakawaka Interacts* marked a moment of substantial recognition: in my hand, malleable clay with water reacted like pastel and translated as tree frottage for the first time.⁶⁹ Then, by placing the substrate directly on the ground, I responded in rhythm to a Piwakawaka's movement as it repeatedly flew backwards and forwards in a looped circular motion towards and above me. Surprised by the encounter, I instinctively kept time with the bird's movement, following the directional pattern of its body's action, and translating it gesturally with black ink. It struck me that the mauri of the location, Te Wairoa, is active (beyond the clay pigment) in the birds and how they participate in an improvised choreography, confirming the direct correlation or indexical link between

⁶⁵ Hall, *Plants as Persons: A Philosophical Botany*, 162.

⁶⁶ Bolt, *Art beyond Representation*, 142.

⁶⁷ Bolt, "Rhythm and the Performative Power of the Index," 59.

⁶⁸ Christine Nicholls, "Against Amnesia," *Asian Art News* July/August 2013 (n.d.): 43.

⁶⁹ Phase 5: Responsive larger substrates. October 2024 to May 2025.

body, site and movement.⁷⁰ The in-between spaces of the composition are crucial traces of my processual encounters through rhythm; replacing the familiar horizon line and subverting the objectification of landscape as an art historical genre. I see this as a reciprocal way of appreciating nonhumans as part of the earth (land).



Figure 26. Ana Ter Huurne. *Piwakawaka Interacts*. Layers: 1 Kahikatea, Ardmore, 2 Pohutukawa, clay pigment Te Wairoa. 3 Piwakawaka Action. Te Wairoa. October 2024. 126 x 196 cm.

My practice differs from that of earth-based artist Richard Long (whom I saw as an ally earlier in the research): even though *A Line Made by Walking*, 1967, traces Long's footsteps as a solitary pathway over a duration, it ignores the spaces where other encounters may have occurred.⁷¹ This reinforces the Western idea of a *tabula rasa*, which according to Carter was constructed as an individualistic colonial inscription: it ignored previous encounters (Indigenous people and nonhumans) and facilitated the misuse of the earth's natural gifts.⁷² Instead, I participate in a new spatial consciousness through intention and acknowledgement: active remembering.⁷³ I think awareness of the spaces 'in-between' has

⁷⁰ Bolt, "Rhythm and the Performative Power of the Index," 59. In the context of Aotearoa, I translate 'country' as a site and 'ritual' as choreography.

⁷¹ Tate, "Richard Long: Heaven and Earth," Tate Britain Exhibition, Tate, accessed September 25, 2024, <https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-britain/richard-long-heaven-and-earth>.

⁷² Carter, Paul, *Dark Writing: Geography, Performance, Design* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009), 84.

⁷³ Carter, *Dark Writing: Geography, Performance*, 84-85.

the potential to transform relationalities and consider multiple voices, it is a holistic approach that considers other bodies as active participants and recognises their intrinsic agency.⁷⁴



Figure 27. Richard Long. *A Line made by walking*. 1967. Photograph, gelatine silver print on paper with graphite on board, 37.5 x 32.4 cm. Provenance: ARTIST ROOMS Acquired jointly with the National Galleries of Scotland. The d'Offay Donator with assistance from the National Heritage Memorial Fund and the Art Fund 2008. Photo by Tate Gallery, London.

⁷⁴ These in-between spaces are manifested as compositional spaces as mentioned in Chapter One.

Rhythm: Sensing the Holistic Environment

Moving beyond a rational understanding, the research considers how the body, mind, and the nonhuman can create a symbiotic and creative relationship.⁷⁵ Over my lifetime, I have practised meditation in both Eastern (including Yoga) and Western traditions (contemplative). For me, it is a valuable way of moving beyond superficial thoughts. Thus, the concept of ‘mind-wandering,’ like meditation, allows me to be transcendently aware of the holistic environment, the sounds, smells, environmental changes and air quality through embodied movement, and lightly sensing thoughts. I am interested in how it can link abstract art and thought through “an engagement with earth materials and shape-shifting patterns.”⁷⁶ A scholar of modern and contemporary art, Gregory Minissale observes that movement builds rhythm through patterns of repeated components fluctuating across a duration.⁷⁷ As an artist, I respond to the range of tonal sound patterns using different media in the environment; and movement emerges through affective responses (all senses). In earlier project phases, I tested working in the studio with recorded sounds from Te Wairoa.⁷⁸ While it provided an auditory connection to the site, it still felt contrived, contradicting my key intention of being immersed in the liveliness of the site.

In the encounter with the nonhuman, I am entering a spiritual space, where I am open to the collaboration and what may eventuate. I wonder how trees shed their skin and organically shift their surface texture between repeated encounters. I reply to the flight of the piwakawaka as I encounter it/them fluttering through what I discover to be spontaneous and non-logical action. I notice that I am attuned to their voice even at a distance, in places other than the key sites. Always aware of the tree’s roots, I take my shoes off and carefully adjust my feet as I navigate around the trunk’s deep slope, affecting the substrate’s positioning around the tree and the translation of patterns. I then announce the phrase, *Tihei Mauri ora!* (sneeze, breath of life!) to acknowledge the life force present and active in the diverse nonhuman elements which mauri holds together. I see this phrase as activating a way of connecting to the earth and recognising it as a sacred space, while acknowledging the whakapapa connections of the flora and fauna to the site in Te Wairoa.

⁷⁵ Gregory Minissale, *Rhythm in Art, Psychology and New Materialism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 248.

⁷⁶ Minissale, *Rhythm in Art*, 51.

⁷⁷ Minissale, 6.

⁷⁸ Phase 4: Recorded Sounds. November 2025; see Figures 23-24, Exhibition Practice.



Figure 28. Collaborating with the Kauri/ index. August 2024.
Te Wairoa- Clevedon. Photo by Ron Ter Huurne.



Figure 29. Process: second encounter and layer on-site.
Remembering and Appreciating Kauri in Te Wairoa.
March 2025. Photo by Ana Ter Huurne.



Figure 30. Ana Ter Huurne. *Reotahi Beach*.
Layers: 1 Salt water & Rock frottage, 2 ink & acrylic on rock.
January 2025. Whangārei Heads. 118 cm x 400cm

I recognise a non-linear dance mapped in *Reotahi Beach*, which I perceive as pulsating between representation and abstraction. Translucent and dynamic marks such as lines, stains, textures and blots perform a vibratory rhythm, triggering a participatory dimension through oscillating patterns.⁷⁹ Akin to Ellen Rutt's 2024 banner-like textile work, *An Exhibition for No One in the Middle of Nowhere*, (installed in a dry field and attached to a simple two post structure) constructed in relation to a site; my painting-drawing emerges from multiple actions, responses, and waiting periods in relation to a site and space.



Figure 31. Ellen Rutt. *A Work for No one in the Middle of Nowhere*, 2024. Acrylic and graphite on canvas. Detroit. Dimensions unknown. Image courtesy of the artist.

Energy and Intuition

Aotearoa artist Sarah Smuts-Kennedy explores living systems and energy fields in her interdisciplinary art practice, which includes drawing, painting, video and installation. I am interested in her heterarchical relationships with nonhumans through intuitive routines and an ever-expanding ecological awareness. Smuts-Kennedy's film *Violet Light*, 2017, highlights her concern for kauri dieback disease; it traces her performance of a Vedic healing ritual or Agnihotra, recorded as a silent meditation over a duration.⁸⁰ She tunes in with the field of nonhuman energies and to her "inner tuition (deep listening): [stating] these energetic forces can be worked with, finding ways to allow something beyond myself to emerge. Something possible when I allow an expanded sense of self to find its own expression."⁸¹

⁷⁹ Minissale, *Rhythm in Art, Psychology and New Materialism*, 166.

⁸⁰ Robyn Maree Pickens, "On Reparative Practices and Intimacy with Nonhuman Life in the Work of Five Aotearoa Artists," *Artnow*, 2021, 7. A healing paste is applied to several kauri trunks every morning at sunrise for three months.

⁸¹ Gilbert, Linda, "Inner-Tuition' - Inside the Studio & Mind Of Sarah Smuts-Kennedy," *The Big Idea*, June 2023, <https://thebigidea.nz/stories/inner-tuition-inside-the-studio-mind-of-sarah-smuts-kennedy>.

With other media, Smuts-Kennedy translates relationalities into two-dimensional artworks that are applied to the surface as non-linear, rhythmic, and colourful marks.⁸² Although I am not directive towards divination (or the use of a pendulum), my approach is one of inner trust and outer collaboration with the nonhuman. My spiritual connection depends on my intention; each encounter has its nuanced alteration: I can ask myself how to approach a particular work, and through inner listening, a distinctive way of working ensues. Each bird, such as Tui, has a presence, and I acknowledge them as a material and spiritual link to the whakapapa (ancestors) on the site. They connect across time to Tāne as kaitiaki (spiritual guardian) of the forest.⁸³ Thus, I connect with matter as it attracts, renews, unites and grows in the site.⁸⁴



Figure 32. Sarah Smuts-Kennedy. *Soul Breath*, 2021. Soft pastel on 640 gsm smooth cotton rag, 145 x 152cm overall. Image courtesy of the artist.

Similarly, sensory awareness directs my movements, and I position memory as an embodied habitual practice or sedimentation in the body, reiterated in the indexical nature of my painting-drawings.⁸⁵ Therefore, my memories and knowledge of the site (Te Wairoa-

⁸² “‘Inner-Tuition’ - Inside the Studio & Mind of Sarah Smuts-Kennedy,” accessed February 27, 2025, <https://thebigidea.nz/stories/inner-tuition-inside-the-studio-mind-of-sarah-smuts-kennedy>.

⁸³ Marsden, *The Woven Universe*, 67.

⁸⁴ De Chardin, *Le Milieu Divin: An Essay*, 106.

⁸⁵ Connerton, Paul, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge University Press, 1989), 77.

Clevedon or Whangārei Heads) influence how I perceive and translate sound vibrations.⁸⁶ Thus, I always choose colours instinctively versus pre-planning in advance. Additionally, through rhythm, I am alternating action routines that structure themselves in innovative arrangements, producing original images.⁸⁷ I am interested in how Smuts-Kennedy draws from an intuitive inter-relationality between earth and humans, trusting the process and materials. In my project, I am interested in aiming for an attitude of abandonment or letting go of some control of rational thought by broadening my application of other knowledge systems.⁸⁸ Further, my research recognises that all life is interconnected and that there is no binary between the spiritual and the nonhuman that I value. Here, I define ‘spiritual’ as present and active within the inter-relationships of bodies in the site’s environment and their active development over time. I resonate with Marsden’s idea that by a “conscious awareness of Papatūānuku, humans move towards the “omega point” (a term inaugurated by Teilhard de Chardin in relation to the evolution of human consciousness in tandem with the earth);⁸⁹ the union of spirit and matter.⁹⁰ Intimately united to the earth and the nonhuman, humans are no longer at the centre but can interact in a holistic relationship to restore harmony and balance.⁹¹



Figure 33. Ana Ter Huurne. *Dancing in Te Wairoa*, (detail): Layers: 1 Recorded Bird Sounds from Te Wairoa, 2 Nikau & Kauri frottage. December 2024. 167 cm x 224 cm.

⁸⁶ In September 2024, I experimented with creating a work at Te Henga, another significant location. I felt a strong personal sense of embodied memory as this is where I had participated in an art community led by the late Allie Eagle, b January 1949, d. May 2022.

⁸⁷ Minissale, *Rhythm in Art, Psychology and New Materialism*, 98.

⁸⁸ Smuts-Kennedy with Vedic ritual and divination.

⁸⁹ Pierre Teilhard, De Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man*, second (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1959), 267.

⁹⁰ Marsden, *The Woven Universe: Selected Writings*, 46.

⁹¹ Marsden, *The Woven Universe: Selected Writings*, 46.

For me, it as a radical shift from traditional Western perspectives which separated earth (bodies) from spirit. In *Dancing in Te Wairoa*, two media effects are juxtaposed (contra-'-diction), improvising movement between the indexical and the relational.⁹² I see parallels between a love of the earth and the nonhuman and their relationship to memory in American artist Ellen Rutt's 2025 collaborative exhibition *Strata Memory*. She includes earth pigments from the surroundings and rock frottage/textures from the Mojave Desert, California.⁹³ Rutt states that remembering the ancient in the land can shift perceptions regarding how we relate to each other and the earth and reconnect with it.⁹⁴ Synchronic with my practice, is her statement: "we make things holy by the quality of attention we give them"⁹⁵ My 'attention' has developed a relationship with the nonhuman that I had not previously considered when painting 'landscapes'. However, I view my practice as activating the sacred already intrinsically present, where multi-vocal painting-drawings may sense a movement between matter (earth) and spirit.⁹⁶



Figure 34. Ellen Rutt, process in the Mojave Desert, San Bernardino Desert, California, 2025. Exhibition in *Strata Memory*, May 2025, Lobster Club Gallery, Los Angeles. Image courtesy of the artist

⁹² Ruminating on Amy Sillman's question in the video: add title that asked, "What is your [way of being]? For me, the word 'contradiction' (juxtaposing two different ways of being through media/action) jumped out.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BL0gc466nRk&t=31s>

⁹³ "Lobster Club," accessed April 10, 2025, <https://www.lobster-club.com/>.

⁹⁴ "STRATA MEMORY | 19 April - 20 May 2025 - Overview," lobster club, accessed May 12, 2025, <https://lobsterclubgallery.com/exhibitions/22-strata-memory-a-duo-exhibition-by-ellen-rutt-and-aaron/overview/>.

⁹⁵ "STRATA MEMORY | 19 April - 20 May 2025 - Overview."

⁹⁶ A binary inherited in the West from earlier Greco-Roman perspectives. I recognise Franciscan naturalism as a significant counterpoint when embodiment-matter became important.

Te Wairoa-Clevedon: Site and Memory

When I started this thesis project, I did not know how traces across time would emerge. I am invested in how ‘actively remembering’ the long-term impact of land clearing, and place name changes can counteract Western colonial memory. This is an apathetic forgetting of how other histories are part of a landscape, that reinforces the idea of the land as a *tabula rasa*.⁹⁷ Practising artist and scholar Brian Martin (Bundjalung, Muruwari and Kamilaroi) offers me a non-linear map, which honours changes over time as experiential memory, and challenges this apathy through activating a holistic view. His acknowledgement of the interconnectivity of site, bodies, actions and memory (drawing on Bolt and Carter) assisted me in developing this research. Martin’s 2013 exhibition, *Methexical Countryscapes* links these elements to re-experience the land through the artwork’s large-scale charcoal textures based on a tree from specific site (Paakantyi #2 is made in a site near the Darling River in NSW); each location is manifested through the haptic quality of the mark.⁹⁸



Figure 35. Brian Martin. *Paakantyi #2*, 2013. Charcoal on paper. Exhibited in *Methexical Countryscapes*, National Gallery of Victoria. 209 cm X 146 cm. Image courtesy of the artist.

⁹⁷ Brian Martin, *Immaterial Land & Indigenous Ideology: Refiguring Australian Art & Culture*. (Melbourne: Deakin University, 2013), 13.

⁹⁸ Martin, *Immaterial Land & Indigenous Ideology*, 18.

After photographing the tree he grids and cuts the photograph into mosaic-like components, to draw them at a larger scale.⁹⁹ In a closer encounter, the grid is visible and fractures the surface and 'Country' materialises through the physical textures in charcoal, which vary significantly depending on which site he is working on.¹⁰⁰ Installed on the wall and floor, the latter becomes immersive as the viewer can look down and walk around it.¹⁰¹



Figure 36. Installation view. Brian Martin, *Methexical Countryscapes*. 2013. Image, National Gallery of Victoria.

I consider ideas about site, body and memory are also evident in Aotearoa artist Turumeke Harrington's (Kāi Tahu, Rangitāne, Ngāti Toa Rangatira) laser-cut sculpture works, *Stumped I-IX*, exhibited as an outdoor installation on Waiheke Island's *Sculpture on the Gulf*, and inside in the Te Uru Contemporary Gallery.¹⁰² Harrington's work is a tribute to the indigenous kauri and conifer forest cleared during the 1870s and 1900s when the export of native timber became a key industry.¹⁰³

⁹⁹ Monash University, "Brian Martin," Monash University Museum of Art, February 9, 2022, <https://www.monash.edu/muma/collection/100-works-of-the-monash-university-collection/100-works/brian-martin>.

¹⁰⁰ "Country Is a Subject," *AWAYE* (New South Wales: ABC Radio National, 2013), <https://www.abc.net.au/listen/programs/awaye/country-is-a-subject/4514576>.

¹⁰¹ "Country Is a Subject."

¹⁰² Connie Brown and Robert Leonard, "Anything Could Happen," ed. Kriselle Baker, (Auckland: *Perpetual Guardian: Sculpture on the Gulf: Waiheke Island*, 2024), 24.

¹⁰³ Brown and Leonard, "Anything Could Happen," 24.



Figure 37. Turumeke Harrington, *Stumped I-IX*, 2024. Powder coated steel. Exhibited in *Perpetual Guardian Sculpture on the Gulf*, Waiheke Island. Photo by Peter Rees.

Curators Connie Brown and Robert Leonard comment on Harrington’s work as being a reminder of the land’s history, where the landscape was “tamed, harvested for profit” leaving the land barren or replaced by familiar urban structures.¹⁰⁴ As I walk around Harrington’s work, I think about colonialism’s continual legacy (Auckland’s original indigenous forest as a distant memory), and how the relationship to bodies is activated as one walks around the installed ‘stumps.’ I imagine how these visual traces were once part of an extensive forest, while I ponder the impact of land clearing and the possibility of changing the trajectory of their destruction. In the book *Auckland, Capital of New Zealand*, William Swainson described the Wairoa plains as “densely covered in kauri and other timber.”¹⁰⁵ This demonstrates how indigenous forests were perceived as a resource by the colonial settlers and I wonder about how this impacted Māori.

¹⁰⁴ Brown and Leonard, 24.

¹⁰⁵ Swainson, William, *Auckland Capital of New Zealand and The Country Adjacent* (Smith, Elder & Co., n.d.), 39.



Figure 38. Turumeke Harrington, *Stumped I-IX*, 2025. Powder coated steel. Exhibited in *Stumping Ground*, Te Uru Gallery, Titirangi, West Tamaki. Image courtesy of Te Uru.

This research has assisted me in confronting my neo-colonial memory and the importance of a name to Māori and to my practice. Recently, I learnt that a Ngāti Tai Māori settlement, which had about five houses (whare);¹⁰⁶ constructed from Nikau trees, had existed about six hundred meters from my home.¹⁰⁷ Te Wairoa (Clevedon's original name) is a reminder of the relationship of Ngāti Tai as Tangata whenua (linked in whakapapa to the Tainui migration).¹⁰⁸ The river's west bank is considered Awa Tapu (Sacred Waterway) and is of particular significance to Ngāi Tai as many of their ancestors were buried there.¹⁰⁹ To Māori, a name 'acts as memory' of the land and is embedded in an oral tradition, in contrast to a Western perspective where landscape invokes a 'landscape of memory.'¹¹⁰ Therefore, I have come to realise that the repetitive use of *Te Wairoa* or *Reotahi* in my titles reinforces the presence of the past through the act of speech.¹¹¹ According to Te Au Davis, "The names in the landscape were like survey pegs of memory, marking the events that happened in a particular place and recording some aspect of the tradition or history... and could release whole parcels of

¹⁰⁶ This memory has prompted me to create another Nikau work in recognition; not as a representation, but as an acknowledgement of other traces in the site. Fighting broke out in July 1863 on the outskirts of Wairoa South, and many Māori and Pakeha families left Te Wairoa.

¹⁰⁷ Hec Munro, *Clevedon Historical Society Tapes Re Skyhigh and Bush-Felling Teams.*, CDHS tape, vol. Tape 11, recorded 25 March 1982 (Te Wairoa-Clevedon, n.d.), preservingthepast@xtra.co.nz.

¹⁰⁸ Munro, Jessie, *Voices of Belonging: A History of Clevedon: Te Wairoa*, vol. 1 (Wellington: Steele Roberts Aotearoa Publishers, 2016), 25.

¹⁰⁹ Ngāi Tai ki Umupuia Marae," 33.

¹¹⁰ Te Aue, Davis, *Nga Tohu Pumahara = The Survey Pegs of the Past : Understanding Māori Place Names.* (Wellington, New Zealand: Toitū te Whenua, Land Information on New Zealand, 1990), 5.

¹¹¹ In addition to choreographic action.

history.”¹¹² Experiencing the indexical textures through an immersive installation reminds me of the destruction (potential loss) of forests and the changes in Te Wairoa over time. These marks act as ‘memory pegs’ of my collaborations linking memory and site.



Figure 39. Ana Ter Huurne. *Remembering and Appreciating Kauri* (detail). March 2025. Te Wairoa. 235 cm x 580 cm.

I am prompted to take notice of the ancient kauri stumps in the forest adjacent to my home (and consider the past traces of activities), which I had previously ignored. I wonder about these destructive occurrences, while I attempt to create frottage on two hidden and crumbling kauri stumps.¹¹³ I can see a clearing offering a trace of where the bullock teams and logs would have been taken to the mill in Te Wairoa, some to construct colonial houses.¹¹⁴ Through a verbal and haptic dialogue with the kauri tree stumps, I apologise for the historical felling and wastage. I recognise them as a gift (transforming colonial nostalgia into active participation).¹¹⁵ The compositional spaces activate rhythm as a ‘concurrent and actual production’ (a methexical principle of participation, previously mentioned in Chapter 1).¹¹⁶ Thus, real material effects or a transmutation between matter (materiality) and spirit may be sensed in the painting-drawings.

¹¹² Davis, 5.

¹¹³ Fluid media responds to the disintegration of kauri as stumps.

¹¹⁴ Rupert Waters, *References from CDHS Tapes Re Skyhigh and Bush-Felling/Bullock Teams*, vol. CDHS Tapes 1 & 2 (Side 1) recorded 24 November 1977, preservingthepast@xtra.co.nz.

¹¹⁵ I am a descendant of colonial settlers in the South Island and Victoria, Australia.

¹¹⁶ Bolt, *Art beyond Representation*, 136.



Figure 40. Te Wairoa, the crumbling kauri stumps. April 2025. Photo by Ana Ter Huurne.



Figure 41. *Remembering and Appreciating Kauri in Te Wairoa, Layers: 1 Responding to Birds, 2 & 4 Kauri Stump frottage in clay pigment and graphite, 3 Kauri frottage in Te Wairoa.* Testing installation. AUT Level 3 foyer. March 2025. 235 cm x 580 cm.

Conclusion

This research has transformed how I approach landscape painting, and my relationship to the earth (land), specifically Te Wairoa-Clevedon and Reotahi/Ocean Beach. Thus, my painting-drawing practice is no longer framed by traditional approaches such as 19th-century plein-air painting, rather indexical textures trace and recognise the agency of the nonhuman. Through the responsive experiential phases of making, choreographic mapping has been translated into multiple contingencies as I recognised occurrences in the site over time. Rhythmic patterns and marks emerge in relationship to the nonhuman in the environment; they manifest as earth centred forms on multi-vocal substrates. The painting-drawings translate and extend the experiences through a site-responsive practice; expressed in the calligraphic gestural marks and compositional spaces, that are the manifestation of the relationship of the living index in a spiritual space. Lightly held intentions, and an intuitive awareness have activated the painting-drawing processes, made visible in my collaborations which translated rhythmic participation with other bodies and sounds, such as Tui and Piwakawaka; thus, playing with a performative, non-representational principle. The research has sought a more profound connection with the nonhuman held within the earth; an intimate and living body. My understanding of the interconnectivity between past, present, and future has reconfigured how I think about my practice as an alternative recording. Concepts of memory, loss, and grief for the destruction of indigenous forests are juxtaposed with the lively joy of bird sound and movement. In my practice I aim to extend and invigorate gratitude and appreciation for the remnant of indigenous trees that continue to survive. These painting-drawings encapsulate time as a future focused trajectory, where humans and nonhumans co-create in a heterarchical relationship recognising their intrinsic connectivity to the earth as a spiritual space.

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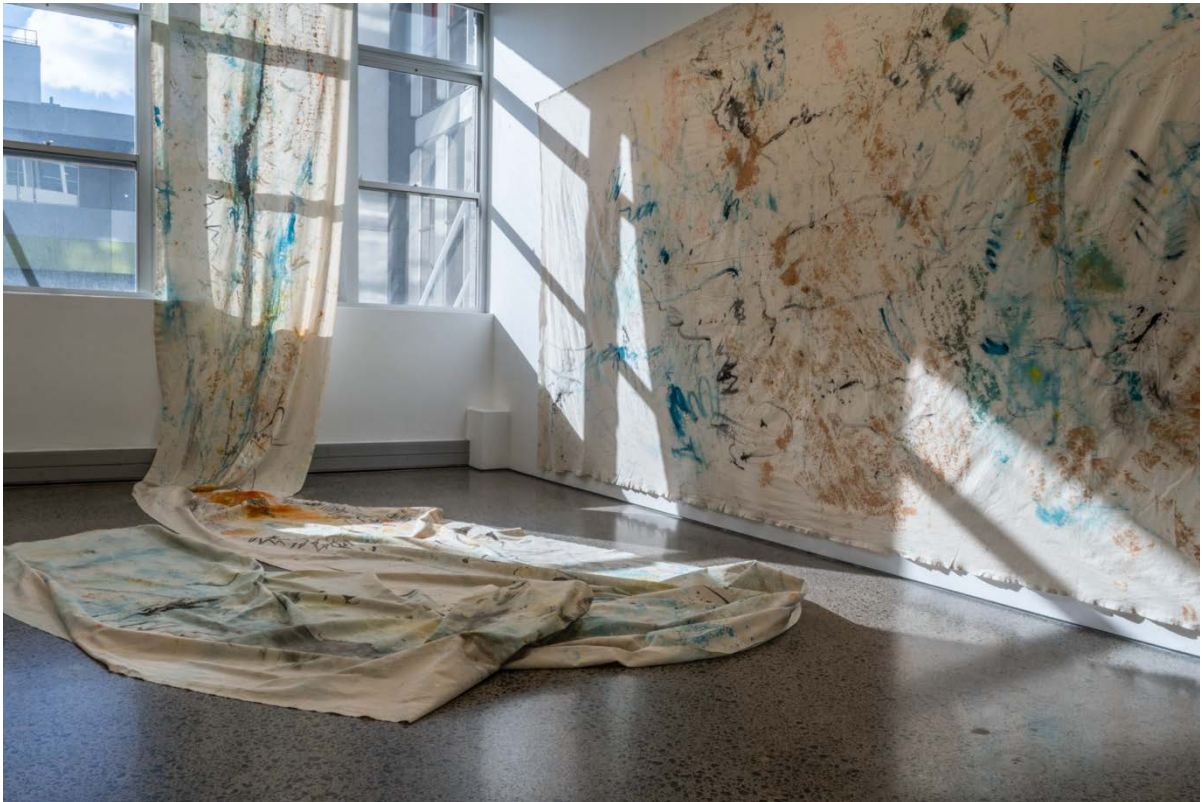
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Exhibition Documentation

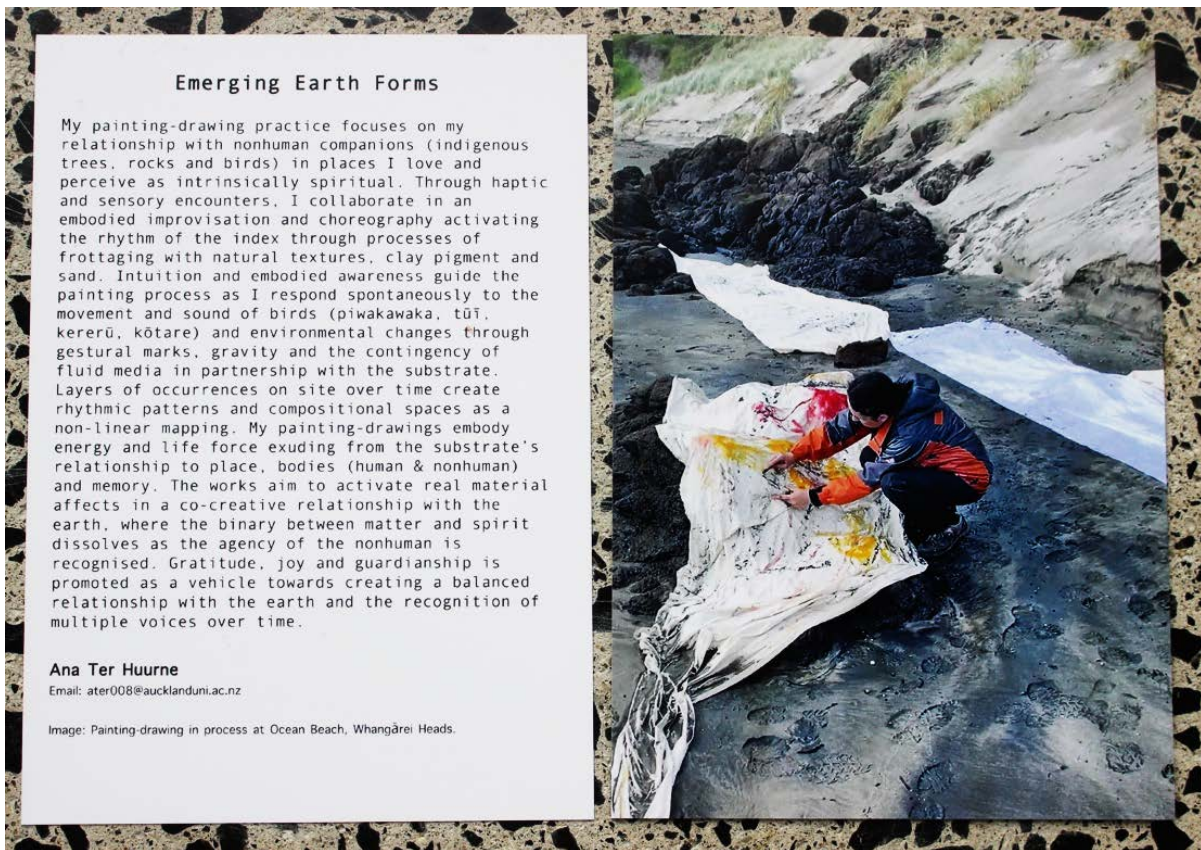
Emerging Earth Forms

Te Wai Ngutu Kākā Gallery, AUT University

21- 24th June 2025



Installation view from entrance, Te Wai Ngutu Kākā, Gallery 3. Photo by Paul Chapman.



Exhibition ephemera. Photo by Ana Ter Huurne.

Takeaway postcard ephemera text:

Emerging Earth Forms

My painting-drawing practice focuses on my relationship with nonhuman companions (indigenous trees, rocks and birds) in places I love and perceive as intrinsically spiritual. Through haptic and sensory encounters, I collaborate in an embodied improvisation and choreography activating the rhythm of the index through processes of frottaging with natural textures, clay pigment and sand. Intuition and embodied awareness guide the painting process as I respond spontaneously to the movement and sound of birds (piwakawaka, tūī, kererū, kōtare) and environmental changes through gestural marks, gravity and the contingency of fluid media in partnership with the substrate. Layers of occurrences on site over time create rhythmic patterns and compositional spaces as a non-linear mapping. My painting-drawings embody energy and life force exuding from the substrate's relationship to place, bodies (human & nonhuman) and memory. The works aim to activate real material affects in a co-creative relationship with the earth, where the binary between matter and spirit dissolves as the agency of the nonhuman is recognised. Gratitude, joy and guardianship is promoted as a vehicle towards creating a balanced relationship with the earth and the recognition of multiple voices over time.



Process for *Ocean Surf Energy*. Ocean Beach. June 2025. Photo by Ron Ter Huurne.

Emerging Earth Forms Room sheet

1. *Ocean Surf's Energy (WH1)*

Layers: 1 Substrate responds to ocean surge & sand, 2 Responding to waves, 3 Hand frottage, sand & saltwater, 4 Responding to ocean surf and seagulls, 5 Rock frottage & black sand. Ocean Beach, Whangārei Heads, May–June 2025. 1240 x 5560mm

2. *Rock Dissolves*

Layers: 1 Imprint from substrates *WH1* & *WH2* on Ocean Beach, 2 Rolling in sand, 3 Rock-seawater contingency, 4 Sun dries, 5 Rock frottage. Reotahi, Whangārei Heads, May–June 2025. 1200 x 9000mm

3. *Gliding Seagulls: Ocean Surge (WH2)*

Layers: 1 Imprint from *WH1*, Ocean Beach, 2 Responding to seagulls & sun, 3 Rock frottage & acrylic stains on Reotahi. Whangārei Heads, May–June 2025. 1240 x 5260mm

4. *Te Wairoa (Awa Tapu): The Long River*

Layers: 1 Water & residue from the West bank's estuary (Blundell's farm), 2 Responding to Piwakawaka, 3 Nikau & Kahikatea frottage, clay pigment from Te Wairoa, 4 Responding to Tūi & Piwakawaka. Te Wairoa (Clevedon), May 2025. 1170 x 11880mm

5. *The Storm's Rhythm: Te Orite o te Awhiowhio*

Layers: 1 Responding to Tūi's voice and the stillness of Kererū, 2 Responding to Rosellas on the ground, 3 Tanekaha & Kauri frottage, clay pigment from Te Wairoa. Te Wairoa (Clevedon), April–May 2025. 2230 x 4580mm

Materials: Ink, acrylic, graphite, watercolour, charcoal, conte crayon and dye pigments. Clay pigment from Te Wairoa, sand/salt water from Whangārei Heads. All works on calico or cotton substrates.

Through a constantly evolving process, a broad body of inter-relational work culminated in a selection for the final exhibition. The confirmation of Gallery 3 (including the window) contributed to the dynamism of the indexical textures by the natural shifting daylight over time. It echoed the vital link to the natural cyclical outdoors. Five works, from the possible eleven substrates, were chosen with consideration to scale relations and space (embodied feeling and thinking). In anticipation of the installation, I felt a directive towards boldly choosing pieces with concentrated textures. These functioned as a vital link to the sites and my collaboration with their particular indexical rhythm; giving voice of the nonhuman (articulated in the layers of the titles). Thus, *The Storm's Rhythm 5*, with its robust oscillating clay and concentrated graphite tree textures, took precedence over the alternative scattered textural piece of similar size. This substrate introduced the clay pigment surfaces immediately: it felt substantial on encounter at the entry point to the exhibition. Being perpendicular to the window, light could play with the indexical rhythm of the textures. *Te Wairoa (The Long River) 4*, being of a significant length, functioned as a solitary piece in the centre of the window frame, where daylight could activate its transparency. This work emulated its title: its length like a portion of the river. On encounter the viewer's relationship to the scale of the substrate (feet and body) felt as though they were part of the 'awa' through the watercolour, marks and dynamic positioning. Installed on a wall to the left of the entrance door, (without the distraction of other works beside it), *Ocean Surf Energy 1*, with its lively rhythmic textures, sand and dramatic gestural marks in colour, could breathe and be encountered on its own as the viewer approached it in the space. Emulating *Te Wairoa* (tucked under the ceiling tiles), the work continued in two directions: above and beyond the wall and also towards the ground. The dissolving marks and textures in relation to bodies in *Rock Dissolves 2* invited the viewer to be immersed in the substrate. Becoming one of the most performative works (magnets attached to a steel rod on the ceiling) and installed in the centre of the gallery, the viewer could experience it from different angles. Twisted along the ground and slightly open, it created multiple dynamic entry points and opened the three-dimensional space in relation to other works. On the opposite wall to *Ocean Surf Energy* and installed at a lower height, *Gliding Seagulls: Ocean Surge 3* created an arc-like viewpoint connecting to the other works through colour, texture and marks. Although diverse, the installed works felt interconnected emulating the dynamic sites, (the bush and river sites in Te Wairoa, Reotahi and Ocean Beach in Whangārei Heads) and activating the life force of the forest and ocean shores through the indexical.



Te Wairoa (Awa Tapu): The Long River. Layers: 1 Water & residue from the West bank's estuary (Blundell's farm), 2 Responding to Piwakawaka, 3 Nikau & Kahikatea frottage, clay pigment from Te Wairoa, 4 Responding to Tūi & Piwakawaka. Te Wairoa (Clevedon), May 2025. 1170 x 11880mm.



Te Wairoa. Detail. Photo by Paul Chapman.



Te Wairoa. Detail. Photo by Paul Chapman.



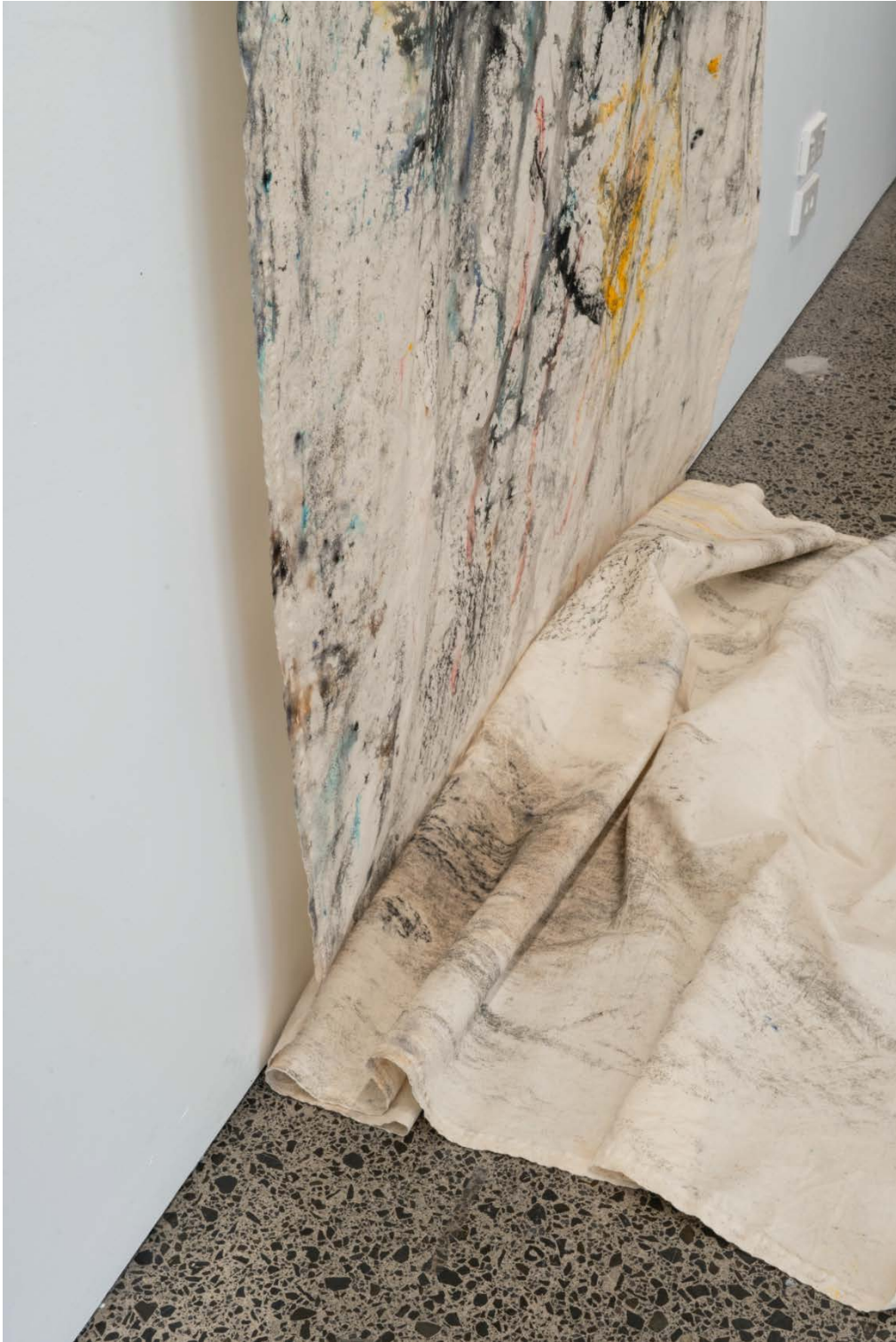
Te Wairoa. Detail. Photo by Paul Chapman.



Te Wairoa. Detail. Photo by Paul Chapman.



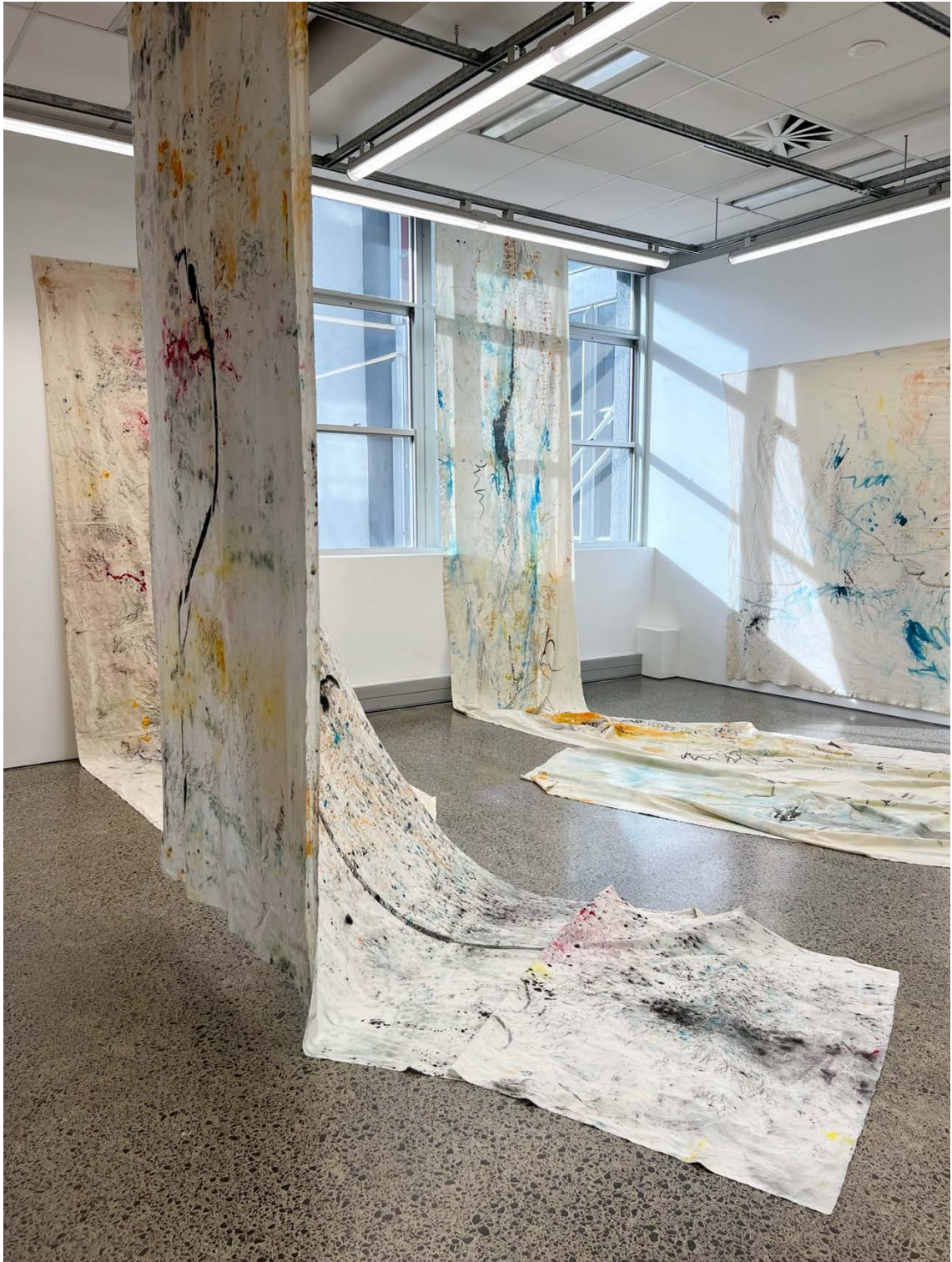
Ocean Surf's Energy (WH1). Layers: 1 Substrate responds to ocean surge & sand, 2 Responding to waves, 3 Hand frottage, sand & saltwater, 4 Responding to ocean surf and seagulls, 5 Rock frottage & black sand. Ocean Beach, Whangārei Heads, May–June 2025. 1240 x 5560mm. Photo by Paul Chapman.



Ocean Surf's Energy (WH1). Detail. Photo by Paul Chapman.



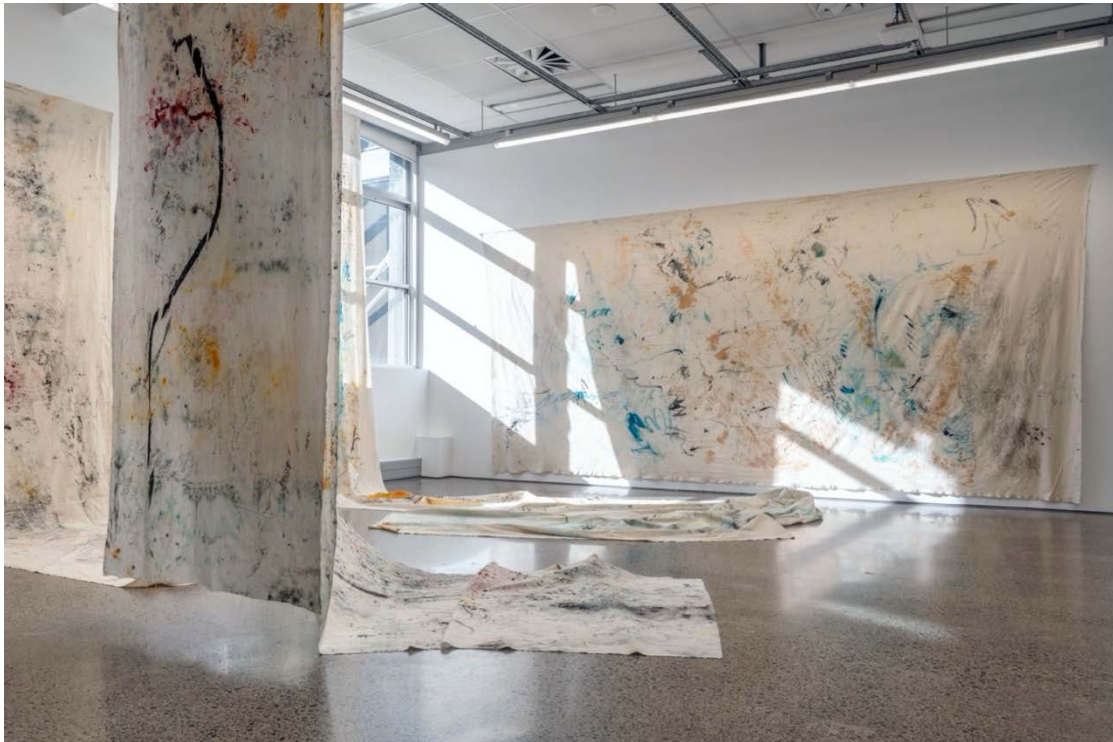
Ocean Surf's Energy (WH1). Detail. Photo by Ana Ter Huurne.



Rock Dissolves. Back view. Photo by Monique Redmond.



Rock Dissolves. Detail. Photo by Monique Redmond.



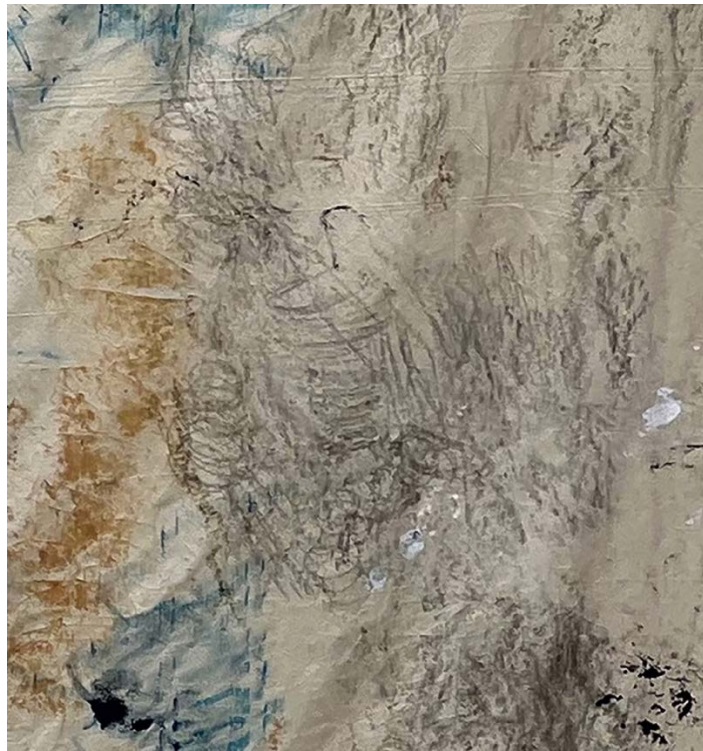
Rock Dissolves. Back view. and *The Storm's Rhythm*. Photo by Paul Chapman.



Gliding Seagulls: Ocean Surge (WH2). Layers: 1 Imprint from WH1, Ocean Beach, 2 Responding to seagulls & sun, 3 Rock frottage & acrylic stains on Reotahi. Whangārei Heads, May–June 2025. 1240 x 5260m. Side view.
Photo by Monique Redmond.



The Storm's Rhythm: Te Orite o te Awhiowhio. Layers: 1 Responding to Tūi's voice and the stillness of Kererū, 2 Responding to Rosellas on the ground, 3 Tanekaha & Kauri frottage, clay pigment from Te Wairoa. Te Wairoa (Clevedon), April–May 2025. 2230 x 4580mm. Photo by Monique Redmond.



The Storm's Rhythm. Detail. Photo by Monique Redmond.