Nonhuman Persons

A Photographic Love for Aotearoa's Natural Environment

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Exegesis in Support of Practice Based Dissertation

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Figure 1. Chervelle Athena, Trounson Kauri Park, (2018), Northland

Abstract

Nonhuman Persons: A Photographic Love for Aotearoa's Natural Environment focuses on how photography and an intimate perception of spirituality can establish connections with the indigenous flora of Aotearoa. Through a photographic image's ability to produce a sense of heightened self-awareness, this project explores how photography can be utilised to invoke a love and connection with the natural environment. This research takes the position that plants have a life force and questions how emotional and spiritual connections can be formed through photographs. This project asks how photographs can be used to establish a deeper reflective connection between humans and plants, thereby promoting a more caring and responsible relationship towards Aotearoa's endangered whenua, especially when considering the looming extinction of kauri.

Figure 2. Chervelle Athena, Waipoua Forest, (2018), Northland

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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.

12 October 2018

Acknowledgements

This project would not exist without the unwavering dedication and support of many special persons. I would like to graciously express my gratitude to both my supervisors, Dieneke Jansen and Fiona Amundsen, for their loving guidance and determination to push me as a developing artist. I am eternally grateful to my friends and whanau for their listening ears, our many existential conversations, and their unconditional desire to see me flourish. Lastly, I would like to acknowledge Mother Earth and God. Through this journey I feel even more love, and support, and connection than I ever thought possible. Thank you, Universe.

Figure 3. Chervelle Athena, Trounson Kauri Park, (2018), Northland

Introduction

At the heart of this research project is the question – how might photographs communicate a sense of spirituality in relation to the life force of plants and their invisible energy? Guiding my project is the unwavering belief that plants are nonhuman persons and possess an energy and life force. This extends from my recognition "that the world is filled with persons, only some of whom are human."[1] In addition to the significance of the unification of humans and nature, the concept of nondualism is also important to my project. Nondualism, deriving from Vedic origins, means 'not two' and is the theory that everything is interconnected.[2] This idea further helps to address my own spirituality which holds the sacredness of Mother Earth and nature at my very centre: I see myself as part of nature and not separate from it or superior to it. These ideas form the basis of my project in which photography may be utilised to invoke a love and connection with Aotearoa's natural environment.

This exegesis begins by discussing how my background, my childhood, my spirituality, and my identity as a Pākehā woman have informed this project. In relations to interspecies ethics, I discuss the significance of this idea on my thesis and the nonhuman persons I photograph. As the rāhui on the Waitākere Ranges has had a substantial impact on my project, this chapter examines the cause for this rāhui, which is linked to how kauri dieback disease is affecting these tree-persons – my friends. As a result of this destructive disease, my personal rules and rituals which I practice, ensuring that I work in a morally appropriate way when photographing nonhuman persons, are important. This chapter also considers how these rules and rituals inform my photographic methods.

Chapter Two centres on photography's capacity to arouse emotion – *to feel*. By addressing my own emotions when photographing, I discuss how these ideas may manifest in the resulting images. Specifically, this discussion focuses on how my images may assist in emotionally and spiritually connecting viewers and references several supporting photography theorists. The last chapter explores how Māoritanga provides insight on how tradition and ancestral knowledge inform my project. Furthermore, I examine and critique the parallels between my project and the works of two contemporary Aotearoa artists and how they relate to and inform my thesis, specifically concerning concepts of spirituality, interconnectedness, the native bush, and life force.

[1] Graham Harvey, *Animism Respecting the Living W*orld. (New York: Colombia University Press, 2005), Xi.

[2] George Feuerstein, *The Yoga Tradition*, 3rd ed. (Arizona: Hohm Press, 2008), 4.

Figure 4. Chervelle Athena, Rāhui Sign, (2018), Waitākere Township

CHAPTER ONE

Connection to Whenua and Nonhuman Persons

This chapter addresses my personal background and how my childhood has informed this thesis in relation to my spirituality and connection to whenua. Through this, I also position myself as Pākehā and acknowledge tāngata whenua. This chapter will additionally describe interspecies ethics and address their importance to my methods, thesis, and the persons I photograph. Furthermore, I will examine the concept of Mauri and respond to this concept of life force with regard to my own spirituality. I will also discuss the rāhui on the Waitākere Ranges and what the threat of kauri dieback disease means for these nonhuman persons, my friends. Through addressing the rāhui, I will acknowledge the struggles I initially faced when it was first implemented regarding my connection to site,[3] and describe the personal rules and rituals that I follow, allowing me to work in morally and ethically appropriate ways when photographing nonhuman persons. Lastly, the photographic shoots I have undertaken during this thesis year will be explored by considering the development of my photographic practice.

To understand the core of my practice, there must be a basic level of comprehension regarding who I am as a person and an artist. I am a woman, sister, daughter, and friend with strong feminist values and I am passionate about the arts and spirituality. I was born and nurtured in a small, coastal community west of Auckland City, Aotearoa, in a female dominant social dynamic. I spent the majority of my childhood exploring the shoreline and dunes of Lake Wainamu and Te Henga (Bethells Beach) and the native bush bridging the two.[4]

At an early age, ideas were planted in my mind regarding the spirituality of nature. Inspired to push against the limitations of perception associated with childhood and psychological development, my mother would challenge us (my elder sister and I) to enquire about the purpose of our natural surroundings and the purpose of human beings, as well as encourage us children to investigate their divide. As an adult, I can still recall this questioning of being and the awareness of a spiritual presence. The works of various individuals and religions concerning universal consciousness, reincarnation, visualisation, prayer, angels, God, Gods, Goddesses and saints were the basis of many of my bedtime stories.[5] None of these ideas were presented to us as gospel but rather as ideas that we were to consider

[3] The works of Aotearoa photographer Mark Adams' and my own work share similar qualities. Adams focuses on the relationship between Aotearoa's colonial history and landscape, and produces work from extended, intimate attention to site, often living and sleeping near specific shoot locations.

[4] Chervelle Athena, *The Being of Nature*. Honours thesis, (Auckland University of Technology, School of Art and Design, 2017).

[5] Mary Summer Rain, *Mountains, Meadows and Moonbeams: A Child's Spiritual Reader* (Charlottesville, VA: Hampton Roads, 1992).

and examine. This encouraged me on a potentially lifelong journey to discover what my perception was on such topics.[6] Not only has my upbringing directly influenced my worldview, it has influenced my spiritual understanding of the natural world. The beliefs that I hold, specifically regarding my connection to Mother Earth and that plants are nonhuman persons, impacts and informs this thesis because they are at its core; this project is an exploration into the spirituality of our natural environment.[7]

I am a second generation Pākehā woman of European decent, raised in Aotearoa, and identify this country as my home. Deriving from a place of profound respect for Aotearoa, along with my position as a citizen and artist, I recognise that Māori inhabited this land long before my ancestors arrived.[8] Furthermore, as an artist connected to Aotearoa's whenua, my practice aims to extend paramount respect towards Te Ao Māori and the tāngata whenua of the Waitākere Ranges, iwi Te Kawerau a Maki.[9] My project aims to respect indigenous people, especially with regard to their own spiritual connection to whenua.[10] This intention has been informed through my education and exposure to Māori traditions and teaching stemming from my upbringing in Aotearoa. I find important parallels between Māoritanga and my own spirituality, specifically those concerning Māori worldview on creation and nature's life force. Due to the nature of this thesis and its exploration into the spirituality of the natural environment of Aotearoa through photography, I recognise that this is a delicate subject of which my practice must be mindful.

Without appropriating indigenous thought but rather drawing on it as a source of inspiration and enriched understanding, I examine environmental ethics. Many indigenous and animistic philosophies and world views present philosophical counterexamples to the extreme Westernised separation from the natural environment. In contrast to Western thought and practice regarding the natural world, in his book *Plants as Persons* (2011), Dr. Mathew Hall, a research scientist at the Royal Botanic Gardens of Edinburgh, suggests that "indigenous responsibilities to and for the natural world are based on an understanding of the relatedness, or affiliation of the human and nonhuman worlds."[11] To understand this more clearly in the context of Aotearoa, I can consider mauri to be a core concept within Māoritanga. Understood as vital energy, all things, both animate and inanimate, either possess or have

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[6] In my family home, we have a library filled with these many ideas which have informed how I live life and see the world.

[7] These concepts have also helped to determine how I interact with a camera and the environment around me, encouraging me to establish a deeper connection with Mother Earth and the persons that I photograph.

[8] It is also important to mention that, having grown up and lived in two countries that were inhabited by indigenous people (Aotearoa with Māori and Sri Lanka with Sinhalese), I am accustomed to and place significant importance on cultural sensitivities and thus acknowledge the world views of others and recognise how these can differ from my own.

[9] *Ngā Tohu a Ngā Tūpuna: Ancestors of Te Kawerau a Maki as Represented at the Arataki Visitor Centre, Auckland, New Zealand* (Auckland, NZ: Regional Parks Department, Auckland Regional Council, 1994).

[10] Although I aim for my work to be respectful, I recognise that I cannot control its impact or interpretation.

[11] Matthew Hall, *Plants as Persons: A Philosophical Botany* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011). Chapter: "Indigenous Animisms, Plant Persons, and Respectful Action" (pp. 99).

the potential to possess mauri, the life principle.[12] Furthermore, it is important to emphasise that all things are regarded to have mauri. Even inanimate things (as they are viewed from a Western perspective) such as the land, have life energy in Te Ao Māori. [13] [14]

Through an awareness and knowledge of creation and respect for the evolution of all living things, in mātauranga Māori even inanimate matter, including rocks and mountains, are regarded to possess whakapapa.[15] Furthermore, due to Māoritanga and the profound appreciation for the powers of nature, this reverence has manifested throughout generations as it is passed down in oral histories, some of which relate directly to the Waitākere Ranges. Robin Taua-Gordan, a member of iwi Te Kawerau a Maki states: "The way that Māori people look at the forest is the way Māori people look at all of nature. In that everything has a mauri, everything has an essence, so if we look after our forest and our natural resources, in turn they will look after us. It's a reciprocal relationship between the natural world and tāngata Māori."[16]

In Māoritanga, plants and people are united through whakapapa, where human beings are embedded within the natural world by recognising a shared ancestry. Māori are not separate from nature but, rather, are direct descendants of Papatūānuku; the resources of earth do not therefore belong to humankind, but instead human beings belong to the earth.[17] This Māori framework serves as a means to inaugurate a more respectful engagement with plants in a contemporary colonised context such as Aotearoa. Treating other beings as 'proper' persons develops an awareness of the communicative capacities of plant life and requires openness, knowledge and compassion.[18] Interacting with nonhuman persons calls for varying degrees of reciprocity. For example, persons may be spoken with, whereas objects are typically spoken about.

My research explores how I may convey the expression of the life force of nonhuman persons through the means of photography. Throughout the duration of this project I have come to understand that it is how the camera (and the photograph) invites viewers into a relationship, a relatedness with nonhuman persons that is significant. By using a camera to invoke a spiritual connection, I am guided by my heart

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[12] Cleve Barlow, *Tikanga Whakaaro: Key Concepts in Maori Culture* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2016).

[13] A. W. Reed, *An Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Traditional Māori Life: Taonga Tuku Iho* edited by Buddy Mikaere (Auckland: New Holland, 2012).

[14] Although everything has mauri, it can at times sleep or become lost. Through spiritual rites and charms, mauri can once again be restored to its ideal status.

[15] Peter Alsop and Te Rau Kupenga, *Mauri Ora: Wisdom from the Māori World* (Nelson: Potton & Burton, 2016).

[16] *The Forest of Tiriwa*. Produced by James Littlewood. Performed by George Taua and Robin Taua-Gordan. Wireless Docs: The Forest of Tiriwa. July 18, 2018. Accessed July 22, 2018. http://thewireless.co.nz/articles/wireless-docs-the-forest-of-tiriwa.

[17] Matthew Hall, *Plants as Persons: A Philosophical Botany* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011).

[18] Some religions and cultures believe that human beings and trees can communicate with one another. The Bella Coola of north-western North America have stories of such a time. This common language has now gone, but it is understood that trees can still understand human speech. Hall, Matthew, *Plants as Persons: a Philosophical Botany*. (New York: State University of New York Press, 2011), 108.

Figure 5. Fiona Pardington, Still Life with Albatross Feathers, Pounamu and Coral Hearts, (2014)

and compassionate intuition. Hence, I intend to promote an embodied understanding that the plants I photograph are indeed persons too. This thinking is also evident in the work of Aotearoa artist Fiona Pardington in which she reveals the life of human beings and additional matter such as flowers, shells, feathers and deceased birds. Rather than framing her approach in terms of humanisation or anthropomorphism, Pardington explains her thinking as an animistic Māori perspective of the world that illustrates her own embodiment of the "…belief of Te Ao Māori in the potential for consciousness to reside, take residence or remain in objects."[19] As Pardington is led by intuitive guidance, she is seeking to photograph the residual consciousness, the spiritual life energy of her subject matter. Although this may be invisible to the human eye, it is nevertheless capable of being captured photographically.

After all that I have seen, heard and felt, I always find myself returning home, back to Waitākere, and I can only attribute this to my deep-seated connection to place. I have an immense connection to the Waitākere Ranges and the surrounding area. I recognise that when I am there, I am at home and my soul feels complete – a relationship that is echoed in my photography.

The biggest threat to not only the Waitākere Ranges, but to all kauri and native forests throughout Te Ika a Māui, is kauri dieback disease. Kauri dieback disease is a pathogen caused by a fungus-like water-based mould called *phytophthora agathidicida*. This mould contains spores that attack the roots of the kauri, eventually damaging tissues that carry nutrients (food) until the tree slowly starves to death. [20] The disease has been found in many areas including the Waitākere Ranges where one in five kauri are currently infected.[21] Additionally, kauri dieback has affected kauri in Aotea (Great Barrier Island) and Waipoua Forest in Northland. There are seventeen other known plant species that depend on the kauri to survive; hence; if the kauri were to become extinct, so could the forest.[22] If kauri die, so too does Aotearoa's native bush. However, this issue is more complex than only the collapse of a forest's ecosystem. Not only would the extinction of kauri lead to the demise of Aotearoa's native bush and the animals that live there, but these deaths would also unimaginably negatively impact Tāmaki Makaurau and Te Ika a Māui as a whole since they rely on the natural ecosystem for clean air and water. Furthermore, the loss of Tāne, his children, all living persons and my friends would be greatly grieved by Papatūānuku, Māori, myself and many others and be detrimental to their physical, emotional/mental, and spiritual health and wellbeing.

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[19] S. Best, "Fiona Pardington's Photography: Life, Love, Libido" in *Fiona Pardington: A Beautiful Hesitation* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2016), 28–33.

[20] "What Is Kauri Dieback?" *Kauri Dieback*. Accessed March 20, 2018. www.kauridieback.co.nz/what-is-kauri-dieback/.

[21] Edward Ashby, "Auckland Council Vote on the Rāhui." *The Spinoff*. February 21, 2018. Accessed February 23, 2018. https://thespinoff.co.nz/atea/21-02-2018/auckland-council-vote-ae-on-the-rahui/.

[22] "Kauri Dieback" *Forest and Bird*. Accessed April 30, 2018. www.forestandbird.org.nz/campaigns/kauri-dieback.

In an understanding that is similar to tāngata whenua, I too hold the native bush as a spiritual and sacred space. This disease is killing all kauri it infects, spreading by just a pinhead of contaminated soil, and there is presently no known cure for the disease. For local iwi Te Kawerau a Maki, they are the forest and the forest is them; if the forest dies, they die.[23] In December 2017,[24] a rāhui was placed over the Waitākere Ranges which I suspect will be in place for a very long time, until the forest is healed. A rāhui is like a cloak, forming a layer of protection which may be considered as an entity with its own life force. At present, tracks are closed and they will open again when kauri are safe but until then, it is tapu to enter a place with a rāhui on it. Every single kauri that gets infected dies, and at the current rate of infection, it is estimated that in thirty years all kauri in Waitākere will have died.[25]

This rāhui was placed by iwi Te Kawerau a Maki as a protective precaution and to allow time for Papatūānuku to heal herself. When the rāhui was first placed on Waitākere, I initially felt deeply bereaved and confused with regard to both my spiritual practice and this project. Prior to this year, my relationship with Waitākere was core to both of these things, but with the rāhui in place, I was no longer able to physically visit the native bush of Waitākere. However, I have since come to understand that it is primarily a Western construct to be attached to a certain location and that my photographic practice need not be dependent on or limited to the Waitākere Ranges. In accordance with my nondualistic beliefs, which are premised on the idea that all persons are connected, I started to realise that my relationship with and care for all trees extends beyond my hometown of Waitākere. Indeed, I have a connection to this specific place, but in a broader sense, I have a connection to all living persons, not just those that I have become familiar with due to my repeated return to Waitākere.[26] In the early stages of the rāhui's implementation, being unable to go into Waitākere was devastating; however, gradually I came to recognise and embody that this rāhui would allow my nonhuman friends and this sacred space the time they required to heal.

I have implemented several deeply personal rules and rituals that allow me to work in morally and ethically appropriate ways when photographing nonhuman persons, especially considering their fragility during this period of trauma. With the premium optical quality of a digital medium format Hasselblad X1D-50 camera, I am able to capture delicate details.[27] The quality capture enables large scale printing which is critical to my practice.[28] Another element that is integral to this project is my

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[23] "Waitākere Rāhui." *Te Kawerau a Maki*, November 30, 2017. Accessed December 05, 2017. http://tekawerau.iwi.nz/node/13.

[24] Mark Shadbolt, Melanie Ataria and James Ataria. "Why Aren't People Listening? Māori Scientists on Why Rāhui Are Important." *The Spinoff* February 02, 2018. Accessed February 05, 2018. https://thespinoff.co.nz/atea/02-02-2018/why-arent-people-listening-maori-scientists-on-why-rahui-are-important/.

[25] Mels Barton, "Close the Ranges to save Waitākere Kauri." *The Tree Council*, August 07, 2017. Accessed December 05, 2017. http://treecouncil.webfolio.co.nz/close-the-ranges-to-save-waitakere-kauri/.

[26] The whanau of these trees extends beyond the Waitākere's.

[27] "This is X1D," Hasselblad, accessed May 16, 2018, http://www.hasselblad.com/x1d.

[28] Therefore, requiring a greater number of pixels, ensuring the image is sharp when enlarged.

relationship with editing. It has become highly acceptable in today's society to edit a photograph.[29] However, in an attempt to convey my authentic relationship with nonhuman persons to the viewer, my images are left unaltered.

I have worked solely with this camera for two years and I am therefore very familiar with it. This is an advantage when considering that the basis of my work is intuitive in nature. Regarding my approach when shooting, I do not seek a specific location in the bush. Instead, my photographic proficiency allows me the opportunity to work unpremeditated, so I may engage with the light and respond to the environment organically. By almost 'losing myself' within the moment of capturing an image, I pass into a state of mind not unlike what Yogis refer to as *samadhi*; a state of heightened awareness.[30] By doing so, the duality between myself and other persons dissolves, deepening my understanding of personhood and spirituality. When I am in the forest photographing by intuition, my understanding of the connection between myself, nonhuman persons and the camera is paramount, and there is a moment when we are all one.[31]

Additionally, there is a set of rituals I have become accustomed to when shooting. This integrative process originated organically and is a result of my direct intuitive and experiential relationship with Papatūānuku. I notice that I repeatedly return to the same routines each time (even if the location is different), as though carrying out a sacred ceremony. I begin by gently and slowly walking through the native bush with the rising sun.[32] As I do so, I notice a shift in myself whereby I eventually arrive at an internally calm, meditative state. Through this mode of being I essentially 'hang out' in the bush without taking photographs, becoming better acquainted with the nonhuman persons I am surrounded by and observing the changing light. As I continue to move through the bush, I intuitively connect with the nonhuman person I think I may like to photograph and invest considerable time with them. Before photographing them, there is a sacred conversation between us through which we come to know one another; I express my admiration and gratitude for them, and ask their permission to take their photograph.

I have considered the ethics of photographing the native bush of Aotearoa with all the tragedy and death that is currently happening, and debated whether or not it is a violation. Through the relationship that I have with the nonhuman persons, they communicate with me whether or not they are willing to be photographed. It is the ceremony and communion that the nonhuman persons and I share that is vitally

[29] In relation to social media, graphic design, and digital photography.

[30] Desikachar, *The Heart of Yoga*. (Vermont: Inner Traditions International, 1995) 241.

[31] Chervelle Athena, *The Being of Nature*. Honours thesis, Auckland University of Technology, School of Art and Design, 2017.

[32] Ibid.

Figure 6. Chervelle Athena, Tāne Mahuta, Waipoua Forest, (2018), Northland

important to this ethical dilemma. It's about respectfully asking these nonhuman persons, my friends: *"Do you want me to photograph you today? Is this ok?"* By allowing their voice to be heard, seeking their permission before taking their photograph, and by respecting their decisions regardless of the outcome, my relationship with these fragile friends is able to continue and this body of work to exist.

When the rāhui was first implemented, there was some confusion around what geographical locations it covered. I wanted to photograph at Mokoroa (Goldie Bush), in Te Henga Regional Park, so I called DoC (the Department of Conservation) and they confirmed that it was not under the rāhui. With this knowledge, in early March 2018, I went to Mokoroa, hiked, meditated, and shot two analogue films, then had them developed and scanned. However, two weeks after my visit, DoC posted on their website the closure of Mokoroa in support of Te Kawerau a Maki's rāhui. With this new information, I contacted Arataki Visitors Centre and they informed me that Mokoroa was under the rāhui, that it had been so since December 2017, and that it was tapu to enter. Feeling ethically uncomfortable and deeply ashamed that I visited Mokoroa while under a rāhui (let alone photographed there), I felt that these negatives needed to be protected and never shown because they are (in my view) tapu. Therefore, I have placed the negatives in a sealed archival box with a personal apology letter and a prayer.

Due to the immense sorrow I felt for my friends that were now in serious risk of endangerment, I drove to Mokoroa track entrance late March 2018, and said a karakia aloud. I placed light sensitive photographic paper on the ground just outside of the rāhui's perimeter and exposed each paper for a different length of time. I knew that this paper would not capture an 'image' from this exposure, but I was guided intuitively and was moved to do something. I have since developed these exposed photographic papers and they are completely black[33] with a few speckles. This ritual was an important stepping stone in my practice and is very necessary to my core beliefs. Although the image is black and may visually appear insignificant, this ritual and the end result hold spiritual importance to me; a spiritual energy, an essence of Mokoroa.[34]

With no direct access to my nonhuman friends in the Waitākere Ranges due to the rāhui, in the beginning of this year, not only was I suffering mentally, emotionally and spirituality, I also struggled to find a way to move forward with this project. Due to kauri dieback and the rāhui in the Waitākere Ranges, my only option was to look elsewhere to develop my practice, so in April I decided to travel north to Waipoua Forest. I had many phenomenal experiences during this trip that are deeply special

[33] I notice how this blackness from the exposed photographic paper is symbolic of Te Pō. In Māoritanga, Te Pō was the nothingness, the night that existed until Tāne separated his parents and allowed the light in. It is fitting that I have these images of black nothingness taken on the outskirts of a sacred space where Tāne is suffering and potentially struggling to maintain the light.

[34] The rāhui was still very new and confusing at this time and, in the face of this challenging experience, I was helpless. The energy there was so powerful; like nothing I have felt before. It was therapeutic for me to visit my nonhuman friends and recite a karakia.

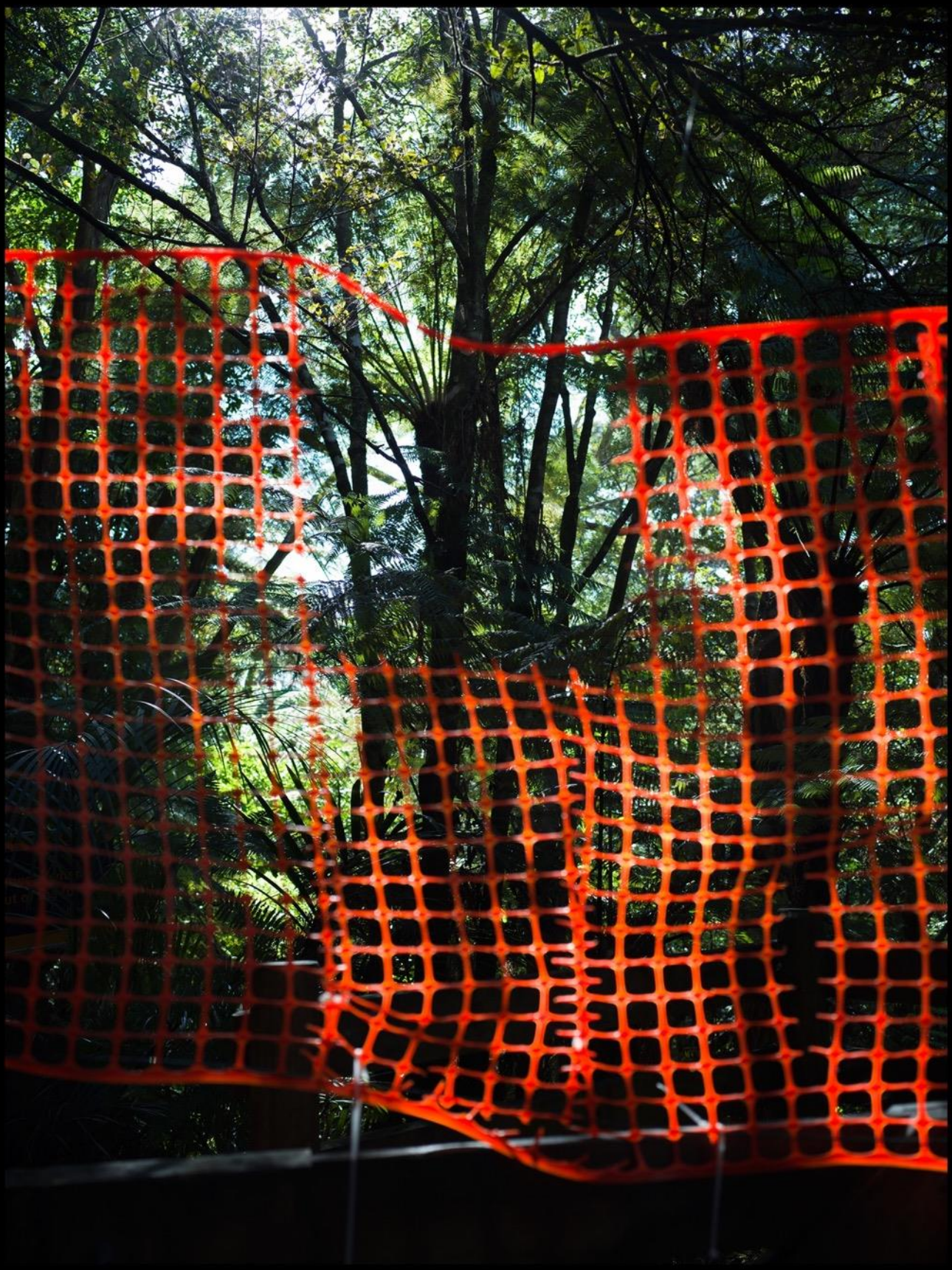

Figure 7. Chervelle Athena, Mokoroa, (2018), Waitākere

and sacred to me and here is one in particular that I feel comfortable enough to share. Early one morning, I witnessed the sunrise while sitting at the feet of Tāne Mahuta – see Figure 6. All around, the wildlife was waking up in the bush. To listen to the native birds and to see the sunrise on Tāne's trunk was a magical and spiritual experience and signified a turning point in my project. The energy of this space was extremely positive and welcoming, and all of a sudden, I found a new lease of life. My project, which had been at a standstill for months, suddenly had a new and hopeful direction.

Although my trip to Waipoua Forest was immensely affirming, I could not deny the part of my core that was still connected to and mourning for Mokoroa and the greater Waitākere Ranges. In early May, I returned to the entrance of Mokoroa track. The sun was bright, and the bush entrance had an undeniably palpable vibration. I felt both unwanted and needed simultaneously. I felt happiness in visiting my nonhuman friends, but I also felt uneasy. I knew cognitively that access to this land was tapu, but I felt in my being that I had permission to be there with my camera. I recited a karakai for Mother Earth and my nonhuman friends that were suffering, and with all of my being, blessed this land. An obtrusive orange fence formed a flimsy barricade between human visitors and the native bush. Although it was ugly, aggressive, and falling over, it still served a purpose in protecting my friends. Soft ethereal sunlight was falling on the fence, so I photographed it while staying on the dirt track (outside of the rāhui). I shot the confronting fence with my nonhuman friends focused in the background – please see Figure 7. I received their permission to photograph them.

In addition to visiting Mokoroa Track and Waipoua Forest regularly,[35] I also spent time at Trounson Kauri Park – Northland,[36] and Long Road Track – Waitākere. The Cascades Kauri Regional Park is native bush that I would frequently have visited before the rāhui was implemented and closed. At Long Road Track, much of the path crosses farmland before entering the bush and the farmland section does not fall under the rāhui. I have shot at Long Road Track (farmland only) with views of the Cascades Kauri Regional Park in the background. It was a surreal experience standing in a paddock overlooking the native bush, noticing all the dead and dying kauri canopies. This year I have frequently visited for prolonged periods of time, meditated, prayed and cried. Although I have at times visited these closed tracks with the intention of shooting outside of the rāhui, there have been many occasions where I have not felt it ethically appropriate to take out my camera. My awareness of a harsh and

[35] When I visited Waipoua Forest for a second time, it was a sacred experience for me to reconnect with some of the nonhuman persons I connected with and photographed on my last trip. Because I have been unable to visit my friends in the Waitākere Ranges, it was incredibly special to have a similar consistency and ritual that in the past had been so core to my practice.

[36] When at Waipoua Forest and Trounson Kauri Park, I always follow all protocols of toitu te whenua, (leave the land undisturbed). Furthermore, I remove all dirt from my boots using the cleaning stations before and after, and at all times stay to the boardwalk and gravel tracks.

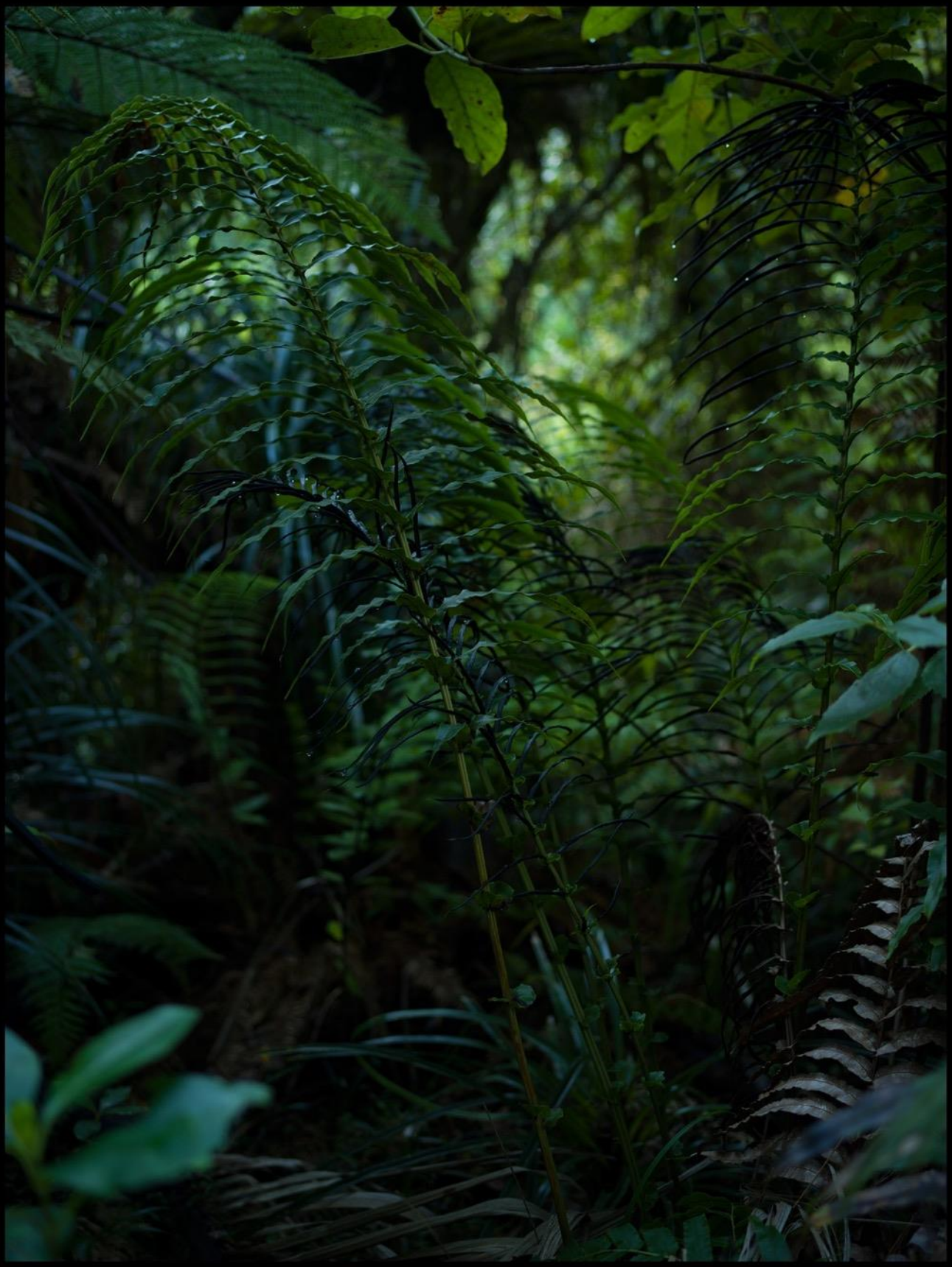

Figure 8. Chervelle Athena, Cascades Kauri Regional Park, (2017), Waitākere

vulnerable energy and my intuition instead would guide me to contemplate and meditate with my grief; to show my respect through prayer, sometimes reciting 'Ehara i te mea'.[37]

These personal experiences and my approach to this thesis are informed by my spirituality and connection to whenua, whilst acknowledging tāngata whenua. By outlining interspecies ethics and the concept of mauri, their role and importance to my practice and my own spirituality is affirmed. The rāhui on the Waitākere Ranges and the threat of kauri dieback disease on my friends has been incredibly challenging with regard to my spiritual connection and my relationship to the site. The deeply personal and intuitive rules and rituals that I follow have allowed me to continue photographing nonhuman persons and encouraged me to take my practice in a new and hopeful direction.

[37] The Bella Coola of north-western North America believe that trees can be spoken to through prayer. Although plants may not be able to verbally speak human language, they are aware, and they have their own methods of communication. Matthew Hall, *Plants as Persons a Philosophical Botany* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2011) 108.

Figure 9. Chervelle Athena, Mokoroa, (2018), Waitākere

CHAPTER TWO

Feeling Photography

Apart from photography's ability to critique socio-cultural ideology, the medium also has the capacity to arouse emotion – *to evoke feelings*. This chapter explores how photographs can incite emotion and honesty with reference to theorists Roland Barthes, Susie Linfield, and Susan Sontag, as well as the methods I have developed throughout this project. Despite photography's historical scientific and pseudo objective applications, [38] the medium offers ways to feel and think "about what it means to see and be seen."[39] This idea encapsulates my desire to communicate a sense of spirituality to viewers with regard to how they might perceive plants and their life force.

Spirituality and feeling inform the way I photograph; my images are an expression of my relationship with nonhuman persons. I am interested in how photography may communicate the invisible life force of plants. My images invite relationships between myself and plants, and viewers and plants. I use a camera to invoke a spiritual connection through my relationship with nonhuman persons and my rules and rituals of photographing. By doing so, I gather and share evidence of these persons that may otherwise go unnoticed – to recognise that these trees are persons. Although viewers may not share the love that I have for my nonhuman friends, the viewers are still human beings with their own capacity to feel and have emotions. I love these trees, and to imbue this love into my photographs is fundamental to my research. My methods enable this love to be expressed in a way which viewers may then experience and feel. Viewers have the potential to feel the tree, through me and also through the photographic print.

Because photographs are indexical, they establish a unique connection to whatever has been photographed. A photograph contains a trace of the life that was happening when it was taken. This is even more crucial and sacred when considering the political context of kauri and kauri dieback disease. My photographs aim to speak of the love I have for these dying persons. This is both emotional and political. As I listen, feel, and cry for these persons, the camera witnesses. The resulting photographs are potentially imbued with these feelings and this is reinforced by the intentionality of my methods. This positioning of photography is explored in Linfield's *The Cruel Radiance: Photography and Political Violence* (2011) in which she questions whether the medium is "a form of science, or of

[38] Glossy scenic photography seen as picturesque; advertising and glamorising Aotearoa landscapes.

[39] Robert Hariman and John Louis Lucaites, *The Public Image: Photography and Civic Spectatorship*. Chapter One, "Climbing out of Plato's Cave". (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2016). Accessed February 7, 2018. ProQuest Ebook Central, 28.

Figure 10. Chervelle Athena, Waipoua Forest, (2018), Northland

magic? Was it an expression of creativity… or even that of a parasite?"[40] Linfield recognises that photography transcends other forms of art by presenting an "immediate, viscerally emotional connection to the world."[41] Furthermore, she identifies that people look at photographs for a glimpse of what strangeness, or beauty, or agony, or love, or natural wonder looks like.[42] Linfield suggests that through photographs people desire to learn intuitively about themselves and others, and that the photographer and viewers approach photographs primarily through emotions.[43] This is crucial to my research and links to my aim to move viewers emotionally.

Sontag's *On Photography* (1977) investigates ideas concerning the depiction of reality, authenticity, and the intentions of the photographer. The latter, while not necessarily visible, should not be underestimated. Photographs are not only a record of what is really there in front of the lens, but rather, what the artist perceives.[44] My images aim to reveal what I believe to be hidden or unnoticed by the world by imparting my reality and knowledge to viewers. Through my self-awareness, and rules and rituals in making exposures, I aim to lessen the divide between what I see and what is present in a photograph. For example, in Figure 10, my photograph of a sunbeam shining on the trunk of a kauri clearly depicts a scene that I am very familiar with, but others may not be – it is *my* reality. In this photograph, like all my photographs, I am aiming to share my reality and ideas in an honest way that may invoke a new perspective in viewers.

Barthes's concepts of studium and punctum, from *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (1980), are also influential to my research. Studium is the aspect of an image that entices viewers towards it. "Studium is the order of liking."[45] Permeating studium is punctum, a more complex and subjective dimension of photography that cannot be predetermined and is unique to every viewer. Likened to the "…piercing of an arrow through the heart,"[46] punctum can be thought of as the ability to move viewers emotionally. It is the presence of punctum that I most desire and seek to achieve in my photographs.[47] Utilising large-scale photographic prints[48] is one way that my methods encourage the enabling of

[40] Susie Linfield, *The Cruel Radiance: Photography and Political Violence* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011). Accessed February 7, 2018. ProQuest Ebook Central,13.

[41] Ibid. 22.

[42] Ibid. 22.

[43] Ibid. 22.

[44] Susan Sontag, *On Photography*, (London: Penguin Books Limited, 2010), 153-182.

[45] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*. (London: Hill and Wang, 1993) 27.

[46] Ibid 43-47.

[47] Permission was asked of my nonhuman friends before taking their photograph, and by respecting their decisions regardless of the outcome, my relationship with these fragile friends was able to continue and this body of work to exist.

[48] The measurements of my large-scale photographic prints are 1100 x 1470 mm, which has become my preferred size.

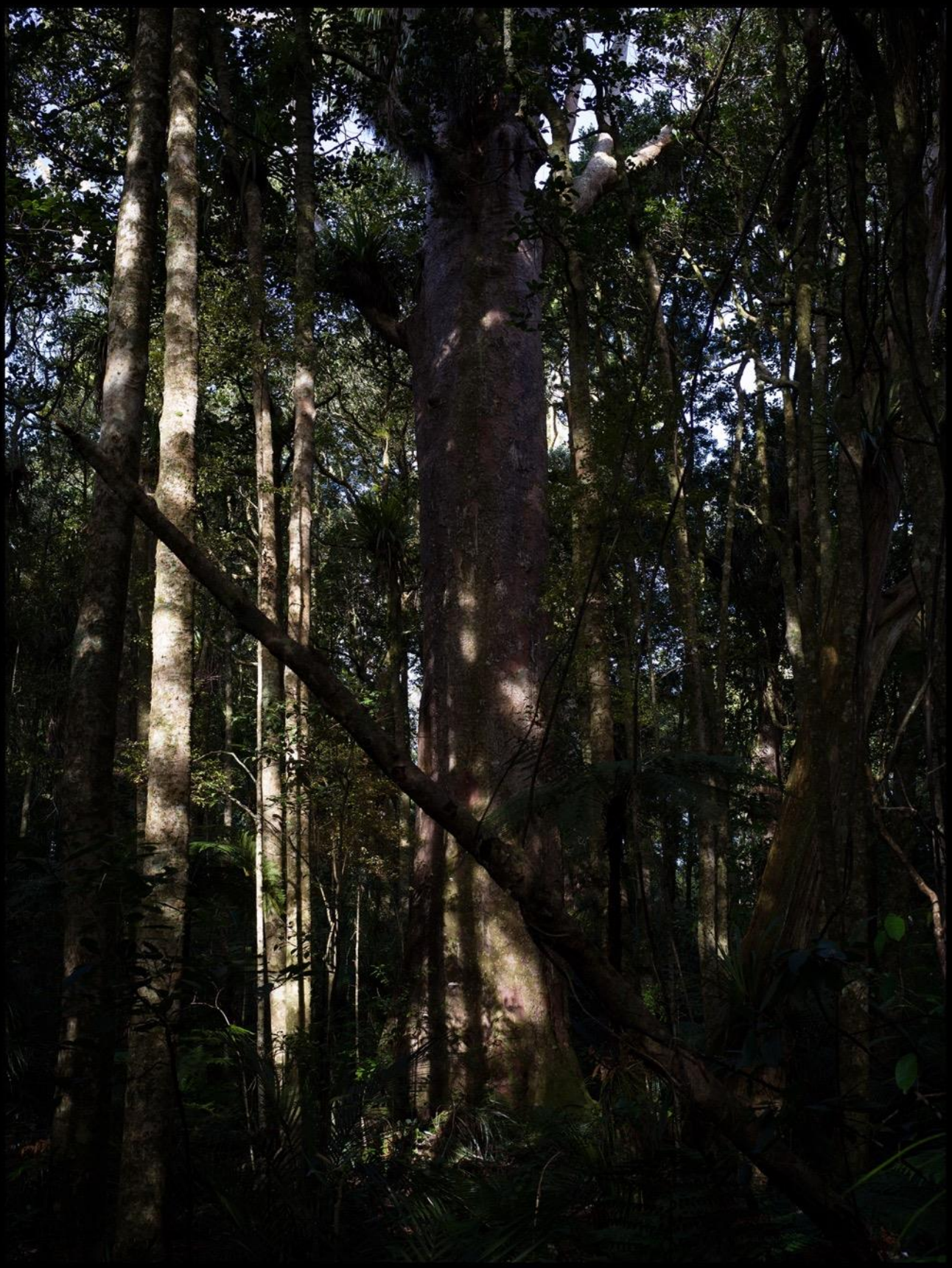

Figure 11. Chervelle Athena, Trounson Kauri Park, (2018), Northland

punctum due to their all-encompassing and immersive qualities, which operate to potentially invoke a deepened emotional response.

At their roots, nature and photography are in parallel because of their absolute dependence on light in order to exist.[49] Light is crucial to this thesis when considering the nonhuman persons I photograph in relation to photosynthesis. The true disposition of light is further emphasised when considered beyond its function for visibility and it is instead understood that light transforms everything within its reach, enhancing the life force of nature. My attunement and affinity with light, and the absence of light, is core to my practice. Many of my photographs capture both sunbeams shining through the bush canopy onto the persons, and the shadows and dankness of the bush simultaneously. It is this depiction of light, and the absence of light, that has the potential to be most affecting. By offering the potential for punctum through the attention to light, this intentional aspect of my work may bring to viewers' awareness the importance of light to both photography and the life force of persons.

A key concern of this project is how my methods of making translate into methods of viewing. When I photograph, and when I print, I treat every aspect with respect. With the aim of exploring how different methods inform the relationship with viewers, I have considered, tested, and developed a variety of display approaches including scale, matt paper, mounting, and positioning. Scale is crucial in the viewing experience of my images. My images attempt to place viewers in an 'out-of-body-experience', where they are enveloped in my photographs.[50] My larger prints are all-encompassing and promote a bodily relationship. This enhances the viewing experience and enables these nonhuman persons to be felt.[51] My methods encourage a heightened self-awareness for viewers and seduce them into the impression of physically existing within and being present to the image itself.

Due to the one-dimensional physical nature of a photograph, the audience is alerted to the flatness and the material quality of the paper it is printed on.[52] I work with matt paper because it gives the ink a velvety quality, thereby adding another layer of texture to the photograph that lessens the divide between image and viewers. The paper and ink's non-reflective quality and absorption of light allow viewers to walk up to the paper and not see their own reflection but instead be immersed into the photograph, thereby supporting the potential for punctum.

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[49] William Henry Fox Talbot, photography pioneer, claimed that photography is literally 'writing with light'. David Eggleton, *Into the Light: a History of New Zealand Photography.* (Nelson: Craig Potton Publishing, 2006) 9.

[50] When I test out a scale I must consider: *"Is this a powerful size? How does this effect the viewing relationship?"* In regard to small photographs, the image may call viewers in, creating a private and intimate relationship. Different messages are given from different sizes and whilst both are valid and have been critically explored throughout this year, I find that I am predominantly drawn towards large scale.

[51] Additionally, with larger prints, my images are at times almost true to size, reflecting how grand these persons are.

[52] I am acutely aware of what the materiality of paper means to this project; specifically, what paper is in relation to the persons I photograph.

Figure 12. Chervelle Athena, Trounson Kauri Park, (2018), Northland

Aspects of framing and mounting are core components of my practice that I have also considered. Although I previously framed my images for protective reasons,[53] I found the reflective properties of glass to be problematic because the majority of my photographs have dark tonal values. This makes the image challenging to view and creates a separation and disconnect between viewers and the photograph. Additionally, I find that when my images are behind glass they have an 'imprisoned' quality. Although glass protects the print, it also creates an 'object-ness' to the photograph. I feel this stifles the life force of the nonhuman persons in the image. In a frame, with or without glass, the persons in the image are contained. I have found that directly pinning the prints to the wall is most effective as it allows viewers to merge with the image.[54] This method invites a stronger emotional connection for viewers with the life force of the nonhuman persons of Aotearoa.

[53] Photographic prints on their own are fragile and prone to damage. They also crease or buckle when too dry and curl in humidity.

[54] The positioning of the photographs on the wall is also something I have considered. I pin my photographs at average sight-line so as to create a balanced bodily relationship between viewers and image. If the image is too high or low, this creates a power dynamic and disrupts the potential for viewers to connect emotionally with the image, undermining the aim of my practice.

Figure 13. Chervelle Athena, Trounson Kauri Park, (2018), Northland

CHAPTER THREE

Aotearoa Interconnected Life

This chapter explores how relationships between whakapapa, interconnected life and a Māori worldview of creation inform my own relationship to plants and the world at large. I use this exploration to discuss the impact kauri have on Aotearoa and their importance in current culture with regard to my project, and the threat of kauri dieback disease. Furthermore, I will respond to two texts by Anne Salmond and Cassandra Barnett. Lastly, this chapter will examine the works, methods and ideologies of two female Aotearoa artists, Kate van der Drift and Aroha Gossage, and how they relate to and inform my thesis, specifically concerning concepts of spirituality, interconnectedness, the native bush and life force.

Whakapapa is the genealogy of all living things from the conception of the gods up to the present time. As a fundamental principle tightly interwoven into Māoritanga, Whakapapa provides insight on kōrero tuku iho, mātauranga, and pūrākau.[55] In respect to this understanding, there are several ideas and traditions that my research draws on in relation to the theoretical framing of my photographic practice. The origins of Whakapapa stem from Māori world view derived from the Tale of Creation. The beginning of all existence grew out of nothingness and the womb of the night where Te Pō, Ranginui and Papatūānuku emerged. However, while lying in a close embrace, Rangi and Papa trapped their children in a land of darkness. Growing frustrated, their strongest child Tāne Mahuta pushed his parents apart to bring light to the land and by doing so, Te Ao Mārama, the world of light, came into being.[56] Ranginui and Papatūānuku's many children later gave birth to more children, including birds, fish, winds, and water, becoming the ancestral root of all natural phenomena. Tāne then adorned his mother with plants and trees, and finally created from her body the first woman. The trees in the forest hold apart the earth and sky, so that light may enter.[57] I highlight this Māori worldview of creation because it positions all of life as interconnected; everything descends from the children of Rangi and Papa.[58] Furthermore, as a Pākehā, living and working in Aotearoa, and because this thesis was undertaken in Te Ika a Māui, this tale of creation has influenced and directly relates to my project. I have a very strong relationship with Mother Earth and all living things on it with regard to my own spirituality. Plants and

[55] "Mātauranga Māori." Research in Māori and Indigenous Development. Accessed March 01, 2018. https://www.aut.ac.nz/study/study-options/maori-and-indigenous-development/research/research-expertise/matauranga-maori.

[56] "Kauri Forest – Legs like Tree Trunks" *Te Ara Encyclopedia of New Zealand*. July 13, 2012. Accessed May 01, 2018. https://teara.govt.nz/en/kauri-forest/page-3.

[57] This connects to how photography can only exist in the presence of light. Trees allow light to exist and also allow my photographic practice to exist; I am literally photographing the very thing that allows me to photograph.

[58] A. W, Reed and Dennis Turner. *Māori Myths and Legendary Tales*. (Auckland: New Holland, 2007).

trees all stemming from Tāne are core to my own world view, and through this Tale of Creation, this only adds to my personal belief that all aspects of life are interconnected.

Kauri are significant and sacred to Māoritanga and, as the tallest of trees in the forest, are given chiefly status. Giant kauri trees are customarily considered to be the kings of Aotearoa's forest by Māori and are taonga, connecting them to the spiritual world. This is especially evident when considering that the Te Roroa iwi, whose rohe includes the Waipoua Forest (where the largest kauri Tāne Mahuta lives), believe that Tāne's legs are the giant trunks of kauri.

For over a millennium, Aotearoa was isolated and free from humans, where its unique fauna and flora flourished.[59] Tremendous forests blanketed the whenua and were home to a multitude of native creatures. It was an ecosystem of extraordinary diversity and abundance. When Māori arrived, the forest was seen as significant and considered as the core of life.[60] However, when Europeans later arrived, they shared no such respect, bringing a different world view. After having stripped bare their own homelands, without respect for Māoritanga, they promoted the whenua of Aotearoa be utilised for farming and cities.[61] In just over a century, European logging had transformed the landscape of Te Ika a Māui from forest to farmland.[62] [63]

Kauri first appeared about twenty million years ago in Te Ika a Māui and there are seventeen plants that depend on kauri and are only found within a kauri ecosystem.[64] Kauri are a keystone of the native forests of Te Ika a Māui. Not only are they one of the largest tree species in the world, they are also one of the longest-surviving, living for more than one thousand years.[65] Recently I was asked why I do not and will not photograph kauri killed by the dieback disease and the question was thought provoking. Although I felt very strongly about this provocation and knew that I would not photograph dead kauri, I had to ask myself why not and consider my reasoning. I thought about how I would not feel spiritually, ethically or morally comfortable photographing a dead or murdered human being, a corpse. I extended this belief to encompass all persons. *How could I photograph a dead kauri, a person that literally starved to death?* In the last ten months, there have been many newspapers and articles with images of sick or dead kauri. These images seem to be used for their shock value. For me, this feels like a major

[59] John T. Diamond, *Once the Wilderness* (Auckland: Lodestar Press, 1977).

[60] Charles Royal, Te Ahukaramū. "Te Waonui a Tāne Forest Mythology" *Te Ara Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, September 22, 2012. Accessed July 02, 2018. https://teara.govt.nz/en/te-waonui-a-tane-forest-mythology/page-1.

[61] Joanna Orwin, "Kauri Forest - Using Kauri" *Te Ara Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, September 24, 2007. Accessed March 15, 2018. https://teara.govt.nz/en/kauri-forest/page-3.

[62] Finlay Macdonald and Ruth Kerr, *West: The History of Waitakere* (Auckland: Random House, 2009).

[63] For example, in the Waitākere Ranges alone, approximately three hundred million feet of kauri timber was removed and exported overseas.

[64] John Dawson and Rob Lucas, *Field Guide to New Zealand's Native Trees* (Nelson: Craig Potton Publishing, 2012).

[65] Keith Stewart, *Kauri* (Auckland: Penguin/Viking, 2008).

violation. I have no control over this disease, but I can decide how I choose to interact and respond to such a sensitive topic.[66]

Since the detection of kauri dieback disease in 2009,[67] there have been many attempts to educate the masses about the potential epidemic through public consultation. These include but are not limited to The Kauri Karnival, full page announcements in the *Western Leader*, and a range of informative websites, chat forums, and community meetings. One such approach to help spread the word is *The Kauri Project: Poster Series*.[68] For this project, a variety of contemporary Aotearoa artists were commissioned to create works concerning the cultural and historical value of kauri, and to raise awareness of the imminent threat of kauri dieback disease on this most beloved native species through art and activism.[69]

In *The Tears of Rangi*: *Experiments Across Worlds* (2017), Aotearoa theorist Anne Salmond writes about the Cartesian split between mind and matter and discusses how human forms of life are undoubtedly entangled with the natural environment, even though Europeans work so hard to create a separation, a divide. Through viewing parks and reserves as 'wild' spaces, and with Western lives being lived mostly indoors, there is a growing detachment from the ecosystems that make our lives possible. The absurd European notion that the planet was created to serve human purpose, that earth is a servant and humans must be dominant over all other living things, has led to devastating losses of biodiversity, the degradation of freshwater, and climate change, just to name a few.[70] Salmond cites nineteenth century Māori philosopher Nepia Pohuhu, who said: "All things unfold their nature [tupu], love [ora], have form [āhua], whether trees, stones, birds, reptiles, fish, quadrupeds or human beings."[71] Pohuhu does not differentiate between humans, animals and whenua; he recognises that all fates are tied together, as everything is interconnected.

Additionally, through a desire for deepening understanding, relational ways of comprehending and appreciating interactions between people and whenua, other forms of life can be explored. Aotearoa

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[66] I believe that working together will help to educate people and prevent the spread of kauri dieback. Therefore, as a way to care for my nonhuman friends that are sick, I have handed out flyers educating others about the rāhui and am a volunteering with the Waitākere City Council to help with planting and track maintenance.

[67] "What Is Kauri Dieback?" *Kauri Dieback* (2016). Accessed March 15, 2018. https://www.kauridieback.co.nz/what-is-kauri-dieback/.

[68] "The Kauri Project: Poster Series." Te Uru Waitakere Contemporary Gallery. (2014). Accessed April 20, 2018. http://www.teuru.org.nz/index.cfm/whats-on/calendar/the-kauri-project-poster-series/.

[69] I notice similarities between the artwork for *The Kauri Project: Poster Series* and my own. However, their project primarily aims to raise awareness of kauri dieback disease through activism and this is only a component of my project.

[70] Salmond, Anne. *Tears of Rangi: Experiments Across Worlds*. (Auckland, NZ: Auckland University Press, 2017), 343.

[71] Matorohanga, Te, Nepia Pohuhu, H. T. Whatahoro, and S. Percy Smith. *The Lore of the Whare-wānanga or Teachings of the Maori College on Religion, Cosmogony, and History* (New York: AMS Press, 1978).

Figure 14. Kate van der Drift, Young Kahikatea, (2018), Northern Large Pond

writer and art theorist Cassandra Barnett writes in Kei Roto I Te Whare / On Housing (2015)[72] about her exploration into the limits of Western philosophical frameworks with regard to responding to art. Barnett argues that if she does not know herself and the cultural multiplicities she houses, then how can she understand and respond to what an artwork is doing to her, let alone write about it. Complementing this notion, British anthropologist Victor Turner (1979) writes; "The deep bonds between body and mentality, unconscious and conscious thinking, species and self – have been treated without respect, as though irrelevant for analytical purposes."[73] I respect this notion because it shows exactly what is often missing from academia and addresses the complex nature of contemporary human-earth interactions and connection.

Understanding the effect colonisation has had on the indigenous people of Aotearoa and this whenua, and highlighting the reconstruction of power systems, is an important element of my thesis. Additionally, a consideration of my research and practice is how to critique and reflect on the effects of art and how this translates academically. While recognising my privileged position[74] and how this relates to me as a Pākehā artist in bicultural Aotearoa, and by considering my own internal response to art and theory, these ideas construct the foundation of this body of work, provoking new ways of thinking for me with regard to nature, art and academia.

Aotearoa photographer Kate van der Drift has an ongoing project which investigates the fragile ecology and layered past of the Hauraki Plains – please see Figure 14. In van der Drift's essay "To See, Know and Picture the landscape" (2017), she extensively addresses her own and Māori relationships to whenua.[75] I highlight this because the understanding and recognition of tāngata whenua has been a vital consideration throughout my practice and this project. Furthermore, van der Drift discusses how, as Pākehā, she "cannot possibly see the landscape in the same way as Māori, but can look at it in a different way."[76] These words also resonate with my project. Additionally, van der Drift recognises how Pākehā have traditionally placed value upon land by considering its commercial worth and what it can provide/produce, in contrast to the holistic approach of Māori with regard to tāngata whenua and mauri.[77]

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[72] Cassandra Barnett, "Kei Roto I Te Whare / On Housing." *St Paul St Gallery 2015 Curatorial Symposium: Practice, Place, Research*, (August 22, 2015), 12-30. Accessed March 15, 2018. https://stpaulst.aut.ac.nz/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/14988/2015-Curatorial-Symposium-papers_ST-PAUL-St-Gallery.pdf.

[73] Rinda West, *Out of the Shadow: Ecopsychology, Story, and Encounters with the Land* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2007) 81.

[74] The privilege of a white person when considered in a Western context can also be viewed as handicap relative to dualistic thinking.

[75] Kate Van Der Drift, "To See, Know and Picture the Landscape" (2017). Accessed July 15, 2017. http://www.katevanderdrift.com/to-see-know-and-picture-the-landscape.

[76] Nina Seja, "Kate Van Der Drift Reviewed." *Photoforum* (July 2018). Accessed August 2018. https://www.photoforum-nz.org/blog/2018/7/16/kate-van-der-drift-reviewed-july-2018.

[77] Ibid.

Figure 15. Aroha Gossage, Patupaiarehe, (2018)

Figure 16. Aroha Gossage, Te Kiri's Pa, (2017)

Positioning her perspective on the conditions of Aotearoa's Anthropocene,[78] van der Drift's images bring a voice to the concerning relationship between humankind and the natural environment, and the individual and collective strain on Earth. Even though colonisation mandated systematic domination over nature, van der Drift recognises that humans are not supreme.[79] Instead of viewing a separateness to nature, humans are part of nature and therefore, nature is not something to be controlled and conquered. Furthermore, van der Drift introduces the concept of 'liquid view' outlining the default perspective predominately upheld by Pākehā and Western thinking, in which landscape is viewed as 'picturesque' and detached, separate from the human form and experience. By distinction, van der Drift suggests that there is a connectedness between human and nonhuman, and that fluid thinking understands things to be inseparable from one another.[80] This is comparable to my own spirituality and world view with respect to nondualism. Additionally, although van der Drift recognises a connectedness between human and nonhuman, my own perspective and photographic practice expands on this theory, viewing plants and the natural environment as not only connected to us, but as persons like us.

Aroha Gossage, an Auckland based painter, focuses on conveying her personal and spiritual relationship with Aotearoa's living landscape. However, as a Pākehā, my relationship to whenua differs to Gossage's because Gossage's spiritual connection to whenua is through her Māori ancestry. Drawing from and articulating her indigenous heritage, Gossage instils into her paintings a deep sense of wairua and mauri.[81] When I saw Gossage's solo exhibition *Wairua* at Artis Gallery (2018), I was struck by the spiritual themes she communicates and how clearly her paintings were imbued with mauri[82] – see Figure 15 and 16. Although Gossage and I differ in our preferred choice of medium, the principle of capturing and conveying life force is core to both our art practices. In my own practice, my objective of communicating the life force of the plants I photograph is core to my practice and is embedded in every step of my methods.[83] Both Gossage and I desire to use our methods to convey life force, by capturing the spiritual essence of the natural environment. Gossage further taps into this core notion through her emotionally spiritual heritage and kinship with whenua.[84]

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[78] Anthropocene recognises that human activity is the dominant influence on the environment and climate.

[79] Maria Walls, "Sea of Echoes, Kate Van Der Drift." *Sanderson Contemporary* (August 2017). Accessed September 2017. https://www.sanderson.co.nz/ExhibitionDetails/465/Kate-van-der-Drift/Sea-of-Echoes.aspx.

[80] Kate Van Der Drift, "To See, Know and Picture the Landscape" (2017). Accessed July 15, 2017. http://www.katevanderdrift.com/to-see-know-and-picture-the-landscape.

[81] "Aroha Gossage, *Whenua*, *Artis Gallery* (March 2017). Accessed April 2018. http://artisgallery.co.nz/exhibitions/aroha-gossage-whenua/.

[82] Ibid.

[83] From the process I go through before taking the image, to capturing the photograph itself, even to how my images are then printed and displayed, are all carefully considered with the intention to preserve and articulate the invisible energy of plant persons.

[84] "Aroha Gossage, *Whenua*. (Artis Gallery. March 2017). Accessed April 2018. http://artisgallery.co.nz/exhibitions/aroha-gossage-whenua/.

Figure 17. Chervelle Athena, Waipoua Forest, (2018), Northland

Exploring whakapapa and Māori world view of creation creates a meaningful connection to my own spirituality and the way in which I relate with the natural environment. A deep understanding of the unity and entanglement of humans with the natural environment frames my research and invites me to better know myself and the multiplicities I house. It allows me to understand, respond to, and write about art as in Barnett's Kei Roto I Te Whare / On Housing. Furthermore, van der Drift's acknowledgement and respect for Māori within her art making serves as a guide. These examples direct and support my own moral and ethical compass and my connection to whenua. Lastly, artists van der Drift and Gossage and I communicate our relationship between woman and nature and our responsibility as artists to give a voice to the voiceless – whenua. Through drawing upon the human connection with land, we practice from an understanding and embodied knowing of the spirituality and fragility of our Mother Earth as we aspire to capture the heart of Aotearoa's whenua.

Figure 18. Chervelle Athena, Waipoua Forest, (2018), Northland

Conclusion

This exegesis has expanded upon the capacity of photographs to emotionally affect viewers. I want viewers to profoundly feel the concerns of our endangered whenua and the crying of the bush. This desire is premised on the fact that I care about these trees, I care about what is happening, and thus, I think we have a responsibility to spend time with them – to look, and to feel. Through this project, I have explored the spirituality of nonhuman persons and how this may be communicated through photography. I have found this to be incredibly delicate but crucial when considering the current endangerment of Aotearoa's whenua. Furthermore, my methods have elaborated on the sacredness of my relationship with nonhuman persons and the responsibilities this project encompasses.

Through the photographs in this project, I attempt to articulate the spirituality of nonhuman persons and invoke a connection with the viewer; to make something that is invisible visible and create an image that alludes to much more than rational knowledge. This project recognises Māoritanga in a way that allows the indigenous voice to come first and not be silenced by my own. Facing a great challenge at the start of this year with regard to the rāhui on the Waitākere Ranges and the threat of kauri dieback disease on my friends, I came to deepen my understanding and relationship with my spirituality and nonhuman persons. From feeling lost and disempowered, my practice, and emotional and spiritual connections, reached unexpected and hopeful new heights.

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Te reo Māori – English

Aotearoa – New Zealand

Iwi – extended kindship group

Karakia – prayer

Kōrero tuku iho – oral tradition

Māoritanga – Māori culture

Mātauranga – knowledge

Mauri – life force

Pākehā – person of European origin

Papatūānuku – earth mother

Pūrākau – ancient legend

Rāhui – temporary prohibition

Ranginui – sky father

Rohe – territory

Tāmaki Makaurau – Auckland region

Tāne Mahuta – the god of the forest

Tāngata – person

Taonga – treasure

Tapu – prohibited/sacred

Te Ao Māori – the Māori world

Te Ao Mārama – world of light

Te Ika a Māui – New Zealand's North Island

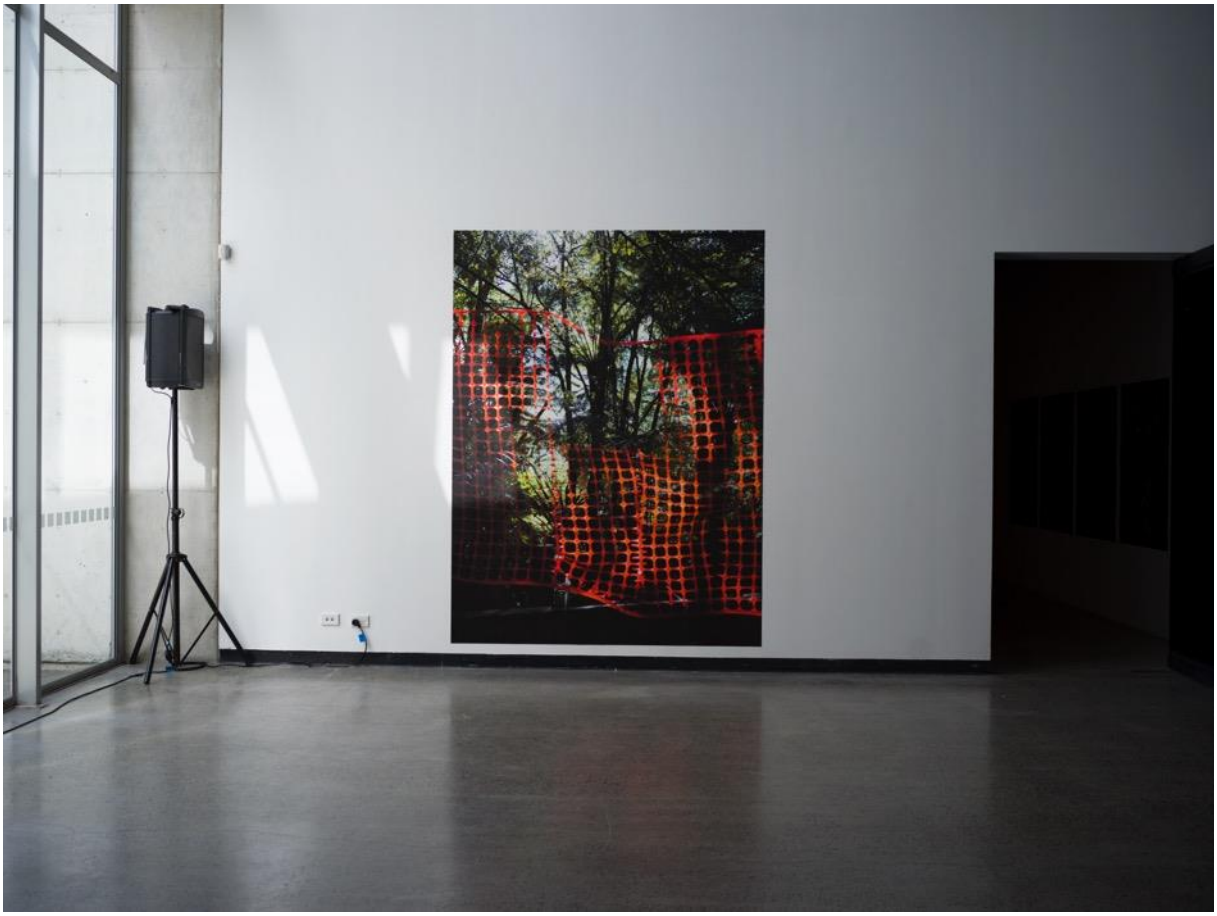
Wairua – spirit

Whakapapa – genealogy

Whanau – family

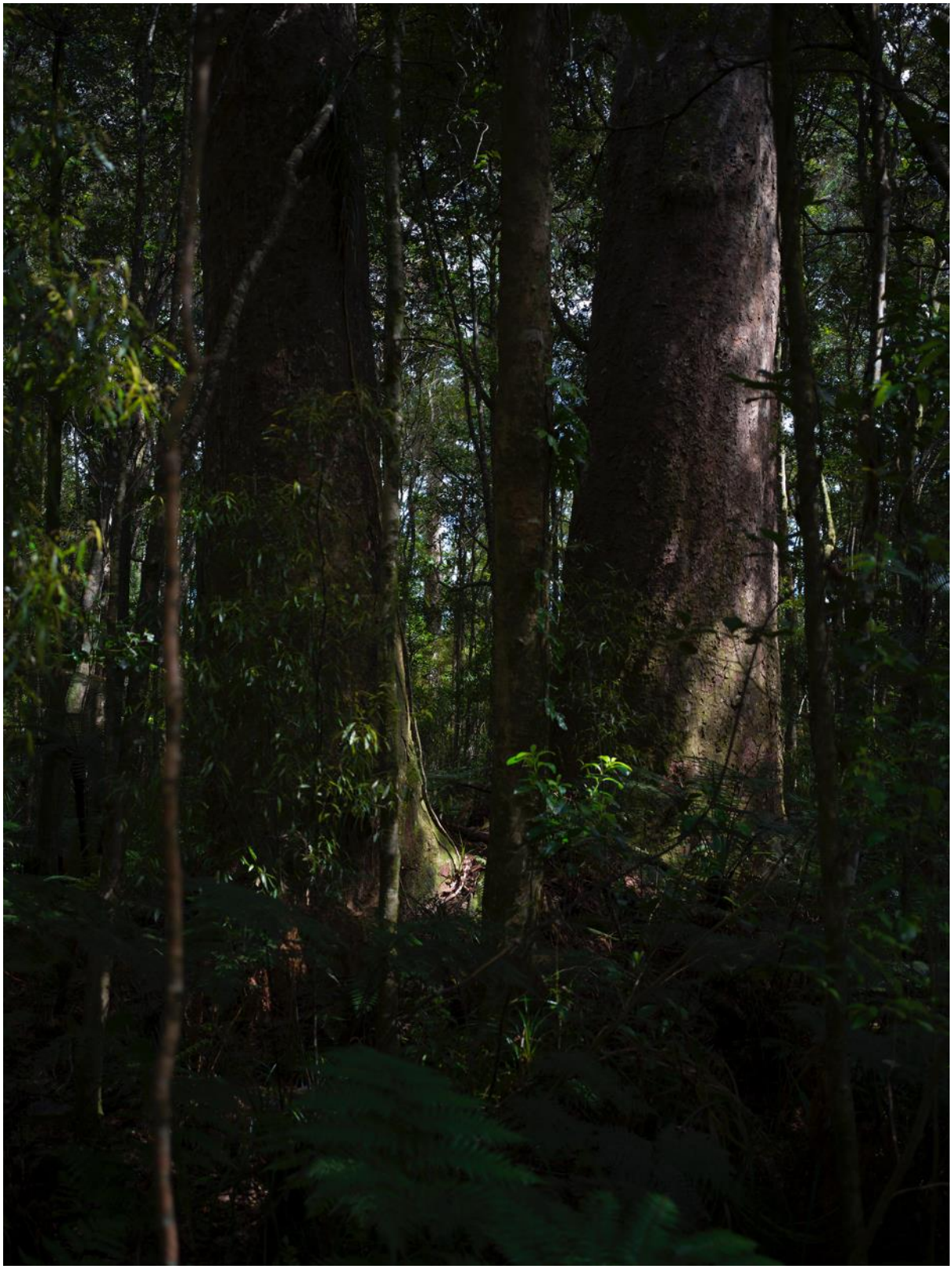
Whenua – land

Mokoroa, Waitākere / Inkjet Photograph, 2000 x 2670 mm

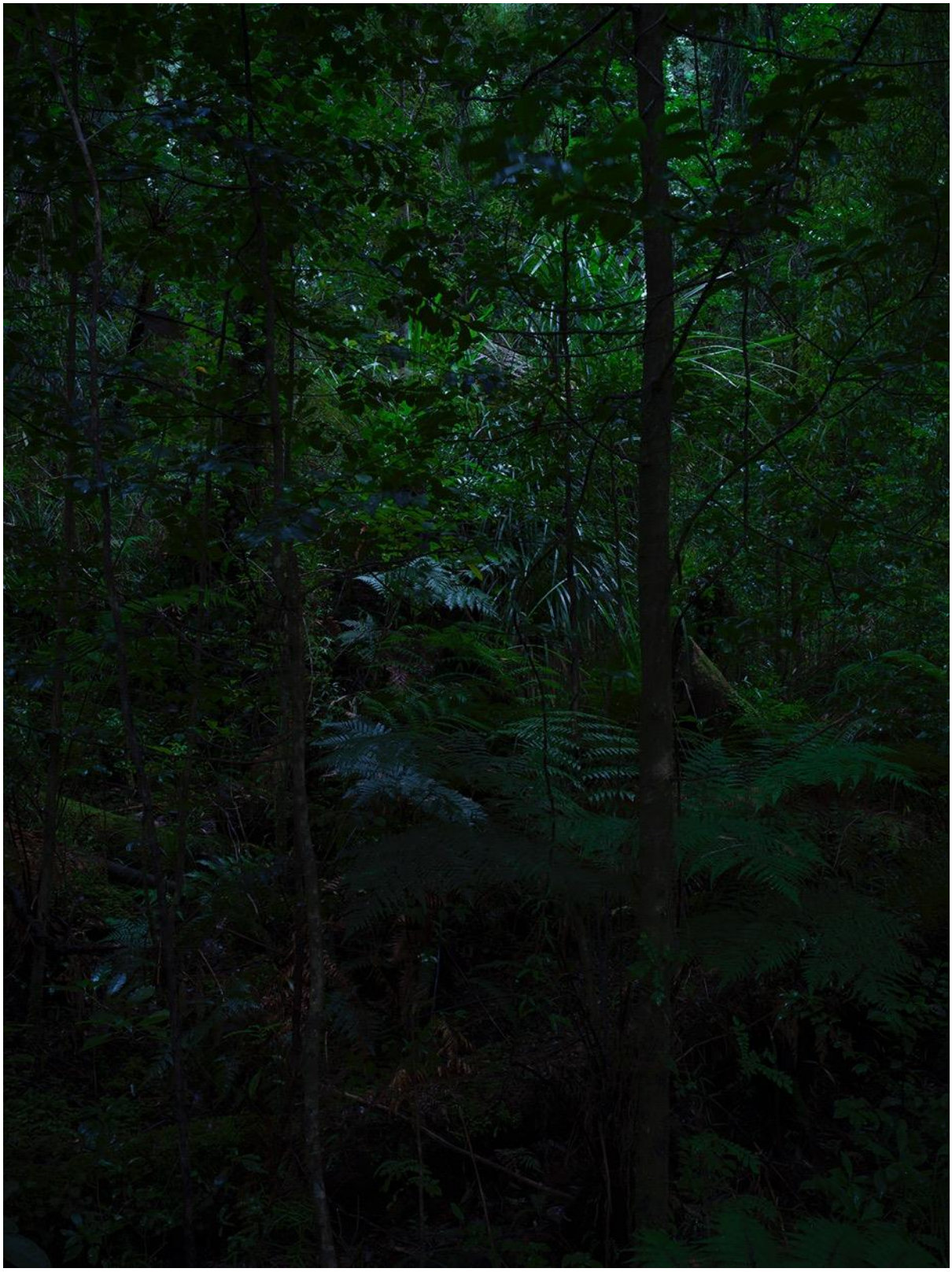


Chervelle Athena, Nonhuman Persons, Installation view, St Paul Street Gallery Foyer, AUT, 2018

Trounson Kauri Park, Northland / Inkjet Photograph, 1000 x 1334 mm



Trounson Kauri Park, Northland / Inkjet Photograph, 1000 x 1334 mm



Waipoua Forest, Northland / Inkjet Photograph, 1000 x 1334 mm

Trounson Kauri Park, Northland / Inkjet Photograph, 1000 x 1334 mm

Chervelle Athena, Nonhuman Persons, Installation view, St Paul Street Gallery 2, AUT, 2018

Trounson Kauri Park, Northland / Inkjet Photograph, 2000 x 2670 mm

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