Mnemonic Sculptures: Crafting Pūrākau with the Tools My Tūpuna Gave Me

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Abstract

Pūrākau have always kept company with craft. From woven panels that adorn marae walls to intricate carvings in wood or skin, twisted cords and braided fibres are all visual expressions of realities turned stories. The past in te ao Māori is to be learnt from, by those of us in the present, to guide our descendants into a thriving future. Stories are the lens through which I see life, and crafting is the mouthpiece I have available to me to delineate them to the next generation.

In this practice-based research project, I have explored how crafting from a Kaupapa Māori paradigm can visually secure and further pass on our oral histories-become-story to our future successors. Stemming from my research into how Indigenous pedagogies utilise storytelling to communicate essential knowledge, as well as the role that physical taonga undertake in conveying ancestral memories, I have developed my own processes of engaging with these customs via my art practice, through soft sculptures.

By experimenting with ways of communication through a craft that documents differently from Māori verbal records or Pākehā written formats, I have developed new ways of securing oral histories within story quilts and through deliberate action in collaborative net-making. Materials rich with personal connections, generational crafting skills, and body movement as note-taking all contribute to the layers of story in each of my artworks.

Collaboration with family, friends, and tūpuna has grounded the research and continually centred my art practice to where I needed to be to answer my questions. My artwork is made with our stories: for them, for us, for who is to come, to prevail forever.

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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.

Signed

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Introduction

Mihimihi

I am Te Ra Awatea Arikihana Kemp, and I come from a long line of storytellers. Pūrākau (story) is in my blood, and the stories of my tūpuna (ancestors) live on in my sculptures.

My forename comes from my father's kuia, my great-grandmother Ra Awatea Rikihana (fig. 1). Although she had passed before I was born, I have always felt a strong connection to her, to our iwi (tribes) Ngāti Raukawa, Ngāti Koroki, Te Āti Awa ki Whakarongotai, and Ngāti Toa, and to Ōtaki, the place where she raised her children. Its whenua (land), moana (ocean), and awa (river) are a deep part of our lifeways, survival as a hapū (large kinship group), and identity as people. However, my surname is from my mother, Aileen Kemp. My dad, Inia Taylor, has a complicated relationship with the surname Taylor, as it was assumed to protect his Jewish father, Kerk, upon fleeing England as a young boy during the Second World War. Grandpa's missing original last name came to represent both a sore point of separation and a loss of the Jewish culture he never quite connected to. His new identity was also a badge of survival for his life as a whāngai (foster child) immersed in Māori culture. When I was born, I was given Kemp instead, a surname without all the mamae (pain) attached.

Figure 1
Ra Awatea and her husband Raniera Hoani Paranahia (Mick) Rikihana, ca. 1945-50. Courtesy of the family, Inia Taylor and Aileen Kemp.

My whakapapa (genealogy) is both Māori and Pākehā, with each side of my family having strong matriarchal lines. The women who raised me (grandmas, aunties, cousins, godmother, and mother) have all shouldered the role of supporter and guide, nurturing me with stories and giving me the reo (language) to tell my own.

Between tales of 'Rikiville' from down the line, whānau (family) anecdotes from before I was born, and kōrero ingoa (naming stories) about myself and my relatives, pūrākau have formed my very perception of reality. They are the easiest point of connection for me with others; they are like breathing.[1]

Artist as Storykeeper

Professor of Indigenous Studies and fellow Ngāti Raukawa iwi member Paul Tapsell (also of Ngāti Whakaue) affirms that in Te Ao Māori (the Māori world), "no story was complete without taonga."[2] In Māori culture, oral storytelling is how knowledge is passed down through generations of people. Alongside oral storytelling, our arts, such as whakairo (carving), tā moko (tattoo), tukutuku (lattice weaving), and kōwhaiwhai (painted scroll ornamentation), are all understood as taonga (treasures). However, our concepts, techniques, resources, and phenomena also fall under the definition of taonga.

Storytelling forms the foundation of my artmaking, so I innately became a storykeeper as an artist. My mind is an index of every story, account, and experience of my own, and those shared with me by my loved ones. Through creating my own taonga, I reinterpret these oral stories, transforming them into visual representations of textiles and thread via my soft sculptures.

"Taonga-framed ancestral memories" are stories that are passed on surrounding our treasures, allowing people to know the history of the taonga—who is connected to it, as well as its connection to place or whenua.[3] The taonga provides physical contextual information that generations can look after and cherish, over many lifetimes. Taonga safeguard these stories, providing a physical anchoring to our day-to-day lives. Without which, these stories could be lost to time. Applying this thinking to contemporary art practices has the potential to make any artwork a type of taonga, with its own accompanying stories embodied in the materials, processes, and form. By transforming from storykeeper to teller, I aim to pass on information and knowledge, protecting a story's teachable moments within my sculptures, turning them into what Tapsell terms "mnemonic embodiments" of the once immaterial.[4] In this way, these stories can become taonga tuku iho (heirlooms): sculptured treasures to pass on.

To do so, the stories I tell through my sculptures must outlast my lifetime. Therefore, I want to find ways to keep telling these stories through taonga creation for a time when I can no longer pass them on.

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[1] Joeliee Seed-Pihama, "Naming our Names and Telling our Stories," in *Decolonizing Research: Indigenous Storywork as Methodology,* ed. Jo-Ann Archibald Q'um Q'um Xiiem, Jenny Bol Jun Lee-Morgan, and Jason De Santolo (London: Bloomsbury Academic & Professional, 2019), 108, ProQuest Ebook Central.

[2] Paul Tapsell, *The Art of Taonga,* Gordon H. Brown Lecture Series 9 (Wellington: Victoria University of Wellington, 2011), 9.

[3] Tapsell, *The Art of Taonga,* 10.

[4] Tapsell, *The Art of Taonga,* 24.

As the years pass, memories falter, and our minds decline. Eventually, family members pass on. I only know my grandpa's kōrero ingoa about his surname because I serendipitously happened to interview him for history class in high school. Without that interview, it is possible that the painful story of how he got to Aotearoa and the people he left behind could have vanished upon his passing. Leonie Pihama, Donna Campbell, and Hineitimoana Greensill assert in their chapter "Whānau Storytelling as Indigenous Pedagogy: Tiakina te Pā Harakeke" that our stories are our histories and are the most effective pedagogical tool we have to teach our tamariki (children), as well as each other—paramount in the survival and succession of Māori culture.[5]

Māori oral history—stories that are passed down from ancestor to descendant, belonging to their whānau as much as the genealogy they are born with—has long been viewed by Western academics as "unreliable" or the "imaginings of the 'other'."[6] Māori historian Nēpia Mahuika (Ngāti Porou) explains that, as an Indigenous researcher, he came to understand "the significance of that process [the sharing of oral history], and how it is connected to control, ownership and power."[7] This is a position other Indigenous and decolonial scholars hold. I turn to decolonial theorist Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, a Kenyan author whose writings on decolonisation have been foundational in the field of Indigenous research.[8] Thiong'o uses the African proverb, "until the lions have their storytellers, the story of the hunt will always glorify the hunter," which powerfully conveys the importance of who tells the story.[9] I see translating my family's oral histories, kōrero, and stories into taonga becoming a personal process of "glorifying the lions," ensuring that our pūrākau are passed on from our perspective to our descendants. By maintaining narrative control of knowledge, I can provide these descendants with what Linda Tuhiwai Smith calls "diversities of truth."[10] These are different, family-specific versions of our stories, not just one—forming a vast pool of Indigenous knowledge that they, and perhaps all people, can draw from.[11]

The word 'pūrākau' stems from the Māori words 'pū' and 'rākau,' the core and the tree.[12] Just as trees flourish together in a forest, pūrākau thrive when accompanied by many other versions of the same story. When learning the basics of history, historians teach that secondary

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[5] Leonie Pihama, Donna Campbell, and Hineitimoana Greensill, "Whānau Storytelling as Indigenous Pedagogy: Tiakina te Pā Harakeke," in *Decolonizing Research: Indigenous Storywork as Methodology,* ed. Jo-Ann Archibald Q'um Q'um Xiiem, Jenny Bol Jun Lee-Morgan, and Jason De Santolo (London: Bloomsbury Academic & Professional, 2019), 137, ProQuest Ebook Central.
[6] Nēpia Mahuika, *Rethinking Oral History and Tradition: An Indigenous Perspective*, Oxford Oral History Series (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 1.
[7] Mahuika, *Rethinking Oral History,* 5.
[8] Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (London: J. Currey, 1986).
[9] Noenoe K. Silva and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *The Power of the Steel-Tipped Pen: Reconstructing Native Hawaiian Intellectual History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 5.
[10] Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, 2nd ed. (London: Zed Books, 2012), 146.
[11] Seed-Pihama, "Naming Our Names," 112.
[12] Jenny Bol Jun Lee-Morgan, "Pūrākau from the Inside-Out: Regenerating Stories for Cultural Sustainability," in *Decolonizing Research: Indigenous Storywork As Methodology,* ed. Jo-Ann Archibald Q'um Q'um Xiiem, Jenny Bol Jun Lee-Morgan, and Jason De Santolo (London: Bloomsbury Academic & Professional, 2019), 151, ProQuest Ebook Central.

perspectives help gain a general understanding of the past. Still, it is encouraged to prioritise primary perspectives, those that hold a more faithful account of what occurred—in other words, to seek out knowledge straight from the source, stories from the people who lived them and are as close to the 'truth' or reality of the past as historians can find. By combining secondary perspectives with many versions of primary accounts, by 'growing a forest of stories,' a cross-referenced and gap-filled understanding of historical events can be formed.

And so, my research path becomes clear: to discover how my sculptures can be a way of sharing knowledge between myself and future generations, with the hopes of providing knowledge that can help them navigate te ao Māori, which is shaped by those who came before us and those who altered our relationship with it (Indigenous and Coloniser). By experimenting with ways of communication that document differently from Māori verbal records or Pākehā written formats, I can utilise the tools my family has given me to steward our past for our future. I craft quilts from our pūrākau and record our voices through braiding, weaving, and netting.

Part One: Getting on the Path

A Lot of Memory to Work Through

When I began my research journey, at the start of the Master's programme in 2024, I was working through a mixture of memories in my 'mind repository,' trying to decide which stories to work with. This was before I considered working with my own family's stories. At the time, I wanted to capture and share the knowledge of living through a cost-of-living crisis in Aotearoa with a government that actively tries to reduce the rights and support structures of Māori people. This resulted in sculpting with tales from my time as a support person at a Māori nonprofit organisation, where I was a Digital Kaiārahi (guide) who answered phone calls of people reaching out for help. I would listen to their raw and real-life stories for most of my workday, five days a week.

My artworks operated like part-fictional accounts, because they comprised many amalgamated memories from my time helping predominantly Māori people to get food, warm clothing, or financial aid. I thought that by staying impersonal, the stories could be about almost anyone in this situation. The intention for this visual approach was that the viewer could better relate to the story and even see themselves or their whānau members in it, rather than a stranger.

Figure 2 & 3 Detail views of *Provide*, March 4, 2024, industrial rags, laundry bags, hospital socks, MSD forms, my childhood Te Reo school book pages and drawings, storybook pages, masking tape, fabric tape, woollen stitching, satin ribbon, sewing pins, 2000 x 1500mm.

Figure 4 My first artwork of MVA. *Provide*, March 4, 2024, industrial rags, laundry bags, hospital socks, MSD forms, my childhood Te Reo school book pages and drawings, storybook pages, masking tape, fabric tape, woollen stitching, satin ribbon, sewing pins, 2000 x 1500mm.

As a sculptor, with any work I make, I ensure the mediums and methods of making I use build upon the story I am telling as much as the visuals themselves. However, with these blended memories, it was hard to land on a medium or method of making that felt right (fig. 2, 3, 4, 5). At this time, nothing I was making was reflective enough of the 'truth' I was feeling, which I now see is because I wasn't working with one set truth. Telling vague stories meant that they weren't really about anyone, and a disconnect occurred for me, as an artist who cares deeply about the pūrākau I tell.

Figure 5
One artwork from a series of three. *Hard To Digest*, March 22, 2024, ceramic plate, stainless steel cutlery, cotton tablecloth, acrylic paint, adhesive, printed imagery.

With every decision around the art I was making feeling like a battle, I knew it was time to change courses and move onto a new path.[13] In May of that year, I went home to the family farm in West Auckland, where I grew up, to learn how to make a hīnaki net—something that had been calling to me for a long time (fig. 6). A hīnaki is a woven, basket-like pot with a lid at one end and a funnelled entry at the other, used for catching eels. Customarily, they were woven from kareao (supplejack vine), akeake (shrubby trees), mānuka (evergreen tree) rods and other similar plant materials. In more recent generations, Western materials have also been used, such as wire netting or plastic, which has been more accessible than native plants for Māori who have relocated to urbanised zones.

The hīnaki (eeling net) had always held metaphorical value for me. I pictured the whole process of being a support worker as part of putting out a net with the family I was helping. The eels they caught looked different, taking the form of foodbank applications and care packages. However, they produced the same result: providing security and sustenance for the people who pulled the net back to shore. To learn to build my own hīnaki was to face my fears as a sculptor and as a Māori-Pākehā person who, for as long as I could recall, felt some uncertainty in my understanding or relationship to either side of my cultural heritage.

[13] Around this time, I had an illuminating kōrero with my Studio lecturer Dieneke Jansen, regarding my turmoil. Dieneke proposed that I think of the "scariest thing that I wanted to make" and start there, letting the problem-solving and hurdles that came with creating be indicators of what stories I wanted to tell, and how to tell them.

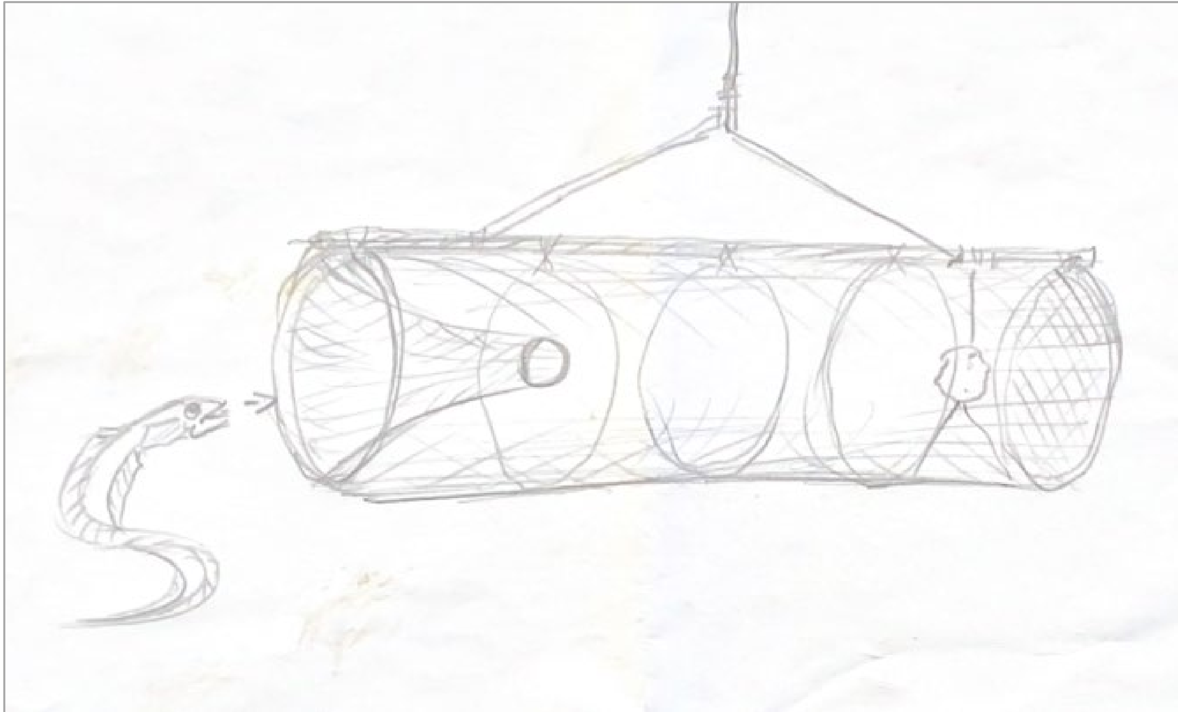

Figure 6 Hīnaki concept art of Rikihana Whānau customary chicken wire net, drawn from memory. Illustration by Inia Taylor, 2024, courtesy of artist.

Storytelling: A Method to Decolonise

Returning to the kitchen table at my family's farm and discussing with my parents how to create our hīnaki net resulted in unexpected pūrākau shared with me through whakawhiti kōrero (open conversation). My father told me how he made hīnaki with his dad and Koro (grandfather) Mick, using chicken wire, a kānuka 'strongback' or central supporting rod, and a whole rooster as bait (fig. 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12).

Figure 7 Materials assembled for creating a chicken wire hīnaki. May 3, 2024, Woodhill Farm.

Figure 8 Hewing a kānuka strongback, freshly harvested from the grove. May 3, 2024, Woodhill Farm.

Figure 9 Completed chicken wire hīnaki. Created with my parents, Aileen Kemp and Inia Taylor. May 3, 2024, Woodhill Farm.

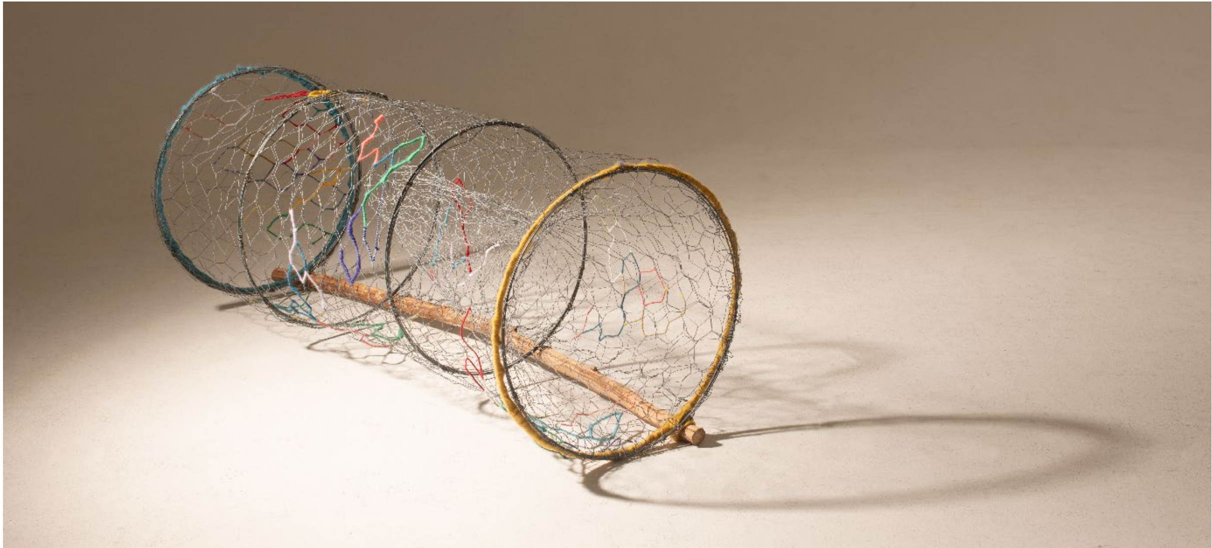

Figure 10 Made with my parents Aileen Kemp, Inia Taylor, *Whaitake,* 2024, kānuka, chicken wire, recycled wire, wool and acrylic yarn gifted from family members, 400mm x 1700mm. Photography by Natalie Robertson.

Figure 11 Made with my parents Aileen Kemp, Inia Taylor and my partner Mason Corbett, *What You Pull Up*, 2024, kānuka, cane, recycled wire, rope and seagrass cord, 600mm x 2000mm. Photography by Natalie Robertson.

Figure 12
Photo of my great grandfather Mick Rikihana and his daughter, my grandmother Diana Wellwood, ca. 1942, Courtesy of the family, Inia Taylor and Aileen Kemp.

During that time (the 1970s), between both parents providing separate incomes and with access to alternate kai (food) sources, like eeling, they could always make sure that they had money spare to pay for rent, essential utilities, and clothing. While they fished, Grandma Diana, my father's mother, would weave tāniko pari (finger-woven bodices), tātua (belts), and tīpare (headbands) as a side business for the local Kapa Haka (Māori dance) performers in the town (fig. 13). This was the first time I had heard these stories about my whānau, about the vital role eeling had played in the survival of my immediate tupuna (grandparents), and how my Kuia (grandmother) was a master weaver. Sadly, she could not impart that skill to me, as she passed on when I was fifteen. These shared histories were more than enough pūrākau to guide me forward in my art practice.

Figure 13 Tāniko tīpare woven by my Grandmother Diana Wellwood, the only woven work we have of hers left. Created ca. 1970-80. Courtesy of the family, Inia Taylor and Aileen Kemp.

Pihama et al. examine how pūrākau, especially those which arise from whakawhiti kōrero with tamariki, pass down contextual historical knowledge in a natural and applied way. This information "aligns to our desire to and need to understand our past in order to locate ourselves in the present and shape our dreams for our future."[14] It is through these processes of relating to one another that pedagogical family stories continue to exist and teach us in this modern time, entirely outside Western ways of educating. It is also how many of our most precious taonga, mātauranga Māori (traditional knowledge), were kept safe after the signing of Te Tiriti o Waitangi on February 6, 1840, and after the colonisation and subsequent assimilation through Christianising of Aotearoa by the British.[15]

As a Māori person raised within Pākehā schooling systems, my most instinctual way of relating was relegated to 'being able to tell a good yarn' with widespread Māori pūrākau reduced to myths and legends: tales to be amused by, but not histories to be heard from its descendants.[16] It was when I began reading the teachings of Linda Tuhiwai Smith (Ngāti Awa, Ngāti Porou, and Tūhourangi), Professor of Indigenous Education, that I could start to turn the mirror on myself and question my own colonised identity. Decolonising oneself is work that I feel is never complete but addresses ingrained ways of thinking that occur as needed. It is the first step to re-indigenising and is a goal for many Māori with similar upbringings to my own.[17]

Within "Twenty-Five Indigenous Projects," Chapter 8 of *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, the method of storytelling oral histories is considered an integral part of Indigenous research. Smith explains that personal and inter-generational memories passed on can contribute to the collective cultural narrative, transcending time and space, connecting those who came before them with their descendants through age-old custom.[18] A lineage of knowledge, fine-tuned by family member contributors, delivered directly to their successors, is a perfect method for researchers to work with, not against.

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[14] Pihama et al., "Whānau Storytelling as Indigenous Pedagogy," 143.
[15] Judith Simon, Linda Tuhiwai Smith, and Fiona Cram, *A Civilising Mission? Perceptions and Representations of the Native Schools System* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2001).
[16] Mahuika, *Rethinking Oral History,* 6.
[17] Mahuika, *Rethinking Oral History,* 6.
[18] Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 143–164.

Sculpture: Intention, Medium and Generationally Learnt Skills

American sculptor and lecturer Julie L. Green once taught their pupils to "match medium with content," asking students to be thoughtful in how they convey messages or reasons for making art, urging them to let all elements contribute to the broader reading of the artwork.[19] The materials my sculptures are made from contribute to telling the story. The context of what they are made of, the histories of certain materials, or how those materials respond to being reshaped by my hands are all part of the story weave.[20] A piece of fabric is not just fabric; its woven fibres, textures, colours, and patterns have their specific language that communicate, that can be read and understood. In a Kaupapa Māori (Māori way of thinking) understanding, wood is not just wood. It is an extension of the rākau it came from, the whenua and soil that nurtured it, with its own mauri (lifeforce), cultural roles, and whakapapa related to particular iwi. Working as a sculptor within Kaupapa Māori guidelines requires that I actively challenge my Western thinking around the materials I use and follow proper tikanga (customary practices) to make sure the mana (spiritual power) of the materials and all the connections and history they hold are upheld and respected throughout the processes of art making.

These two ways of thinking led me to develop an art practice of soft sculpture installation from textiles, including sewing "story quilts," a term coined by African American artist Faith Ringgold. [21] Her story quilts are assembled and sewn with layers of repurposed fabric, written text, and painted imagery (fig. 14). To Ringgold, they are the "visual art form of [her] ancestry."[22] Ringgold learnt how to quilt from her grandmother, a practice carried over to the United States of America by her enslaved ancestors and passed down generationally. Quilting was a way to preserve pedagogical knowledge when her people were silenced; quilts were the cultural tools that gave a voice to marginalised people. Ringgold felt that artists were responsible for creating from their lived experiences and that to ignore provenance is to create from a space inauthentic to the maker. Ringgold's story quilts were a culmination of herself as both "black and woman."[23]

[19] Dark Rye, "The Last Supper," July 2, 2012, video, 6 min., 11 sec., https://vimeo.com/45077339.
[20] Green was alluding to this sort of thinking, which my lecturers repeated when I chose Sculpture and Ceramics as my major for my bachelor's degree at the Dunedin School of Art (2019–2021).
[21] IWL Rutgers, "Taking Flight: An Interview with Faith Ringgold," January 31, 2017, video interview, YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n-K1Wtq0I94.
[22] IWL Rutgers, "Taking Flight."
[23] IWL Rutgers, "Taking Flight."

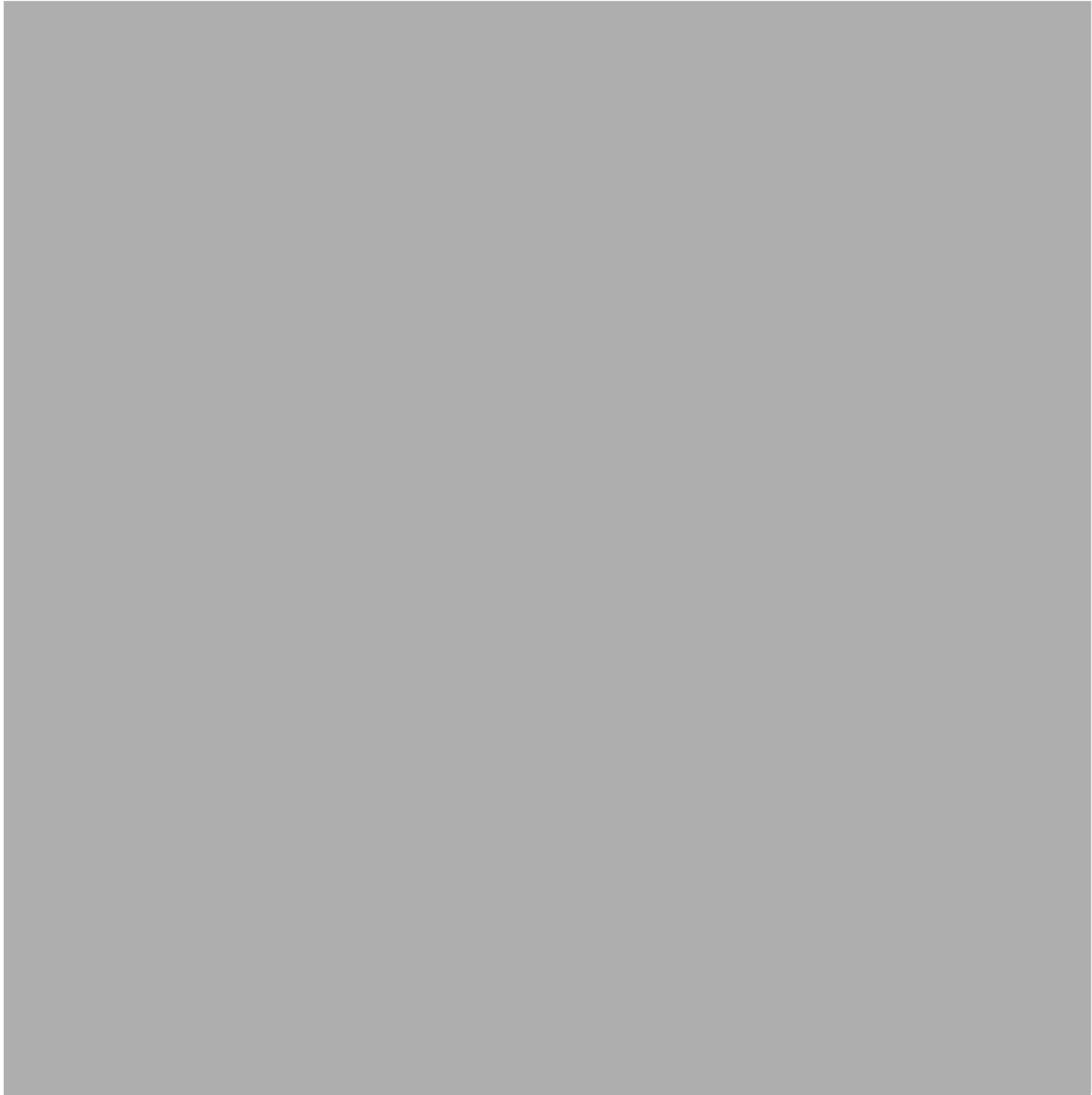

Figure 14 Faith Ringgold, *Church Picnic Story Quilt*, 1988, Tie-dyed, printed fabrics and acrylic on cotton canvas, 74 1/2 x 75 1/2 inches, Jack Shainman Gallery. This image/artwork does not have copyright permission.

Creating art with textiles, drawing through thread, and crafting fabric collages were all skills taught to me from an early age by the women in my family. Alongside toys, my mother gave me fabric scraps, needles, and thread as a child. While my mother would craft large projects from home for her work in the film industry, ranging from leatherwork on saddles to intricately embroidered throws, I would sit beside her and create my own projects—mostly sewing outfits for dolls or making a stuffed animal from scratch (fig. 15). Sometimes, my cousins, aunties, and grandmothers would join us, and even when my mother and I weren't 'working,' we would all craft as a family for times of celebration.[24]

[24] To make a string of bunting longer than life itself is a birthright bestowed upon all Kemps.

There was never self-doubt or thoughts of "I cannot make that!," there was only "let's give it a try together." And so, ingrained in my very being from the beginning of my life were all the sculpting tools I ever needed: determination to finish a project, a love for the craft of making it, and absolutely no sewing rule left unbroken. My lived experiences have always connected craft and storytelling; it just took time for me to understand what that means in terms of creating art as a Māori-Pākehā woman. Like Ringold with her quilts, I see my soft sculptures as the culmination of my existence in this cultural intersection, as someone who also grew up within female binaries.[25] Although crafting has historically been associated as a woman's work and dismissed as such, I do not consider it inferior to other art practices, and, to me, it is the most authentic way I can pour myself into my artwork. If I am to ask how sculptures can pass on knowledge to generations of people who are not yet born, I must look to my generational toolkit for the answer. Only through my lived experience of crafting can I share truths, stories, and knowledge from myself and my family.

Figure 15
My mother's sewing room that has been the same configuration all my life, featuring her faithful industrial sewing machine and the expansive view out to the back lawn. Woodhill Farm, April 28, 2025.

[25] TED, "The Urgency of Intersectionality: Kimberlé Crenshaw," December 8, 2016, TEDtalk video, YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=akOe5-UsQ2o.

Craft in Te Ao Māori and Te Moananui-a-Kiwa

In the Māori language, there is a word for art: toi, which is modified by the disciplinary practice under discussion, such as toi whakairo (art of carving) or toi raranga (art of weaving). There is no distinction between craft and art to many Indigenous people, because our people have had to be resourceful to keep customary arts alive throughout colonial history. Craft is creative expression and, therefore, a way for our stories, histories, and lives to be expressed in an economically accessible way. The "legacy of craft passed down through whānau" is usually accompanied by whānau anecdotes and whakawhiti kōrero.[26] Learning how to make something together, such as a large quilt or a fishing net, generates a supportive space for personal pūrākau to be shared and learnt from by family members. From Aotearoa to the islands of the Pacific, it is an inherently Indigenous space to create from, and, subsequently, the reason many artists from Te Moananui-a-Kiwa (the Pacific Ocean) engage with craft within their art practices.

In her 2012 thesis, "Ritual in the Making: Critical Exploration of Ritual in Te Whare Pora," Rose Te Ratana (Ngāi Tūhoe) describes the customary Te Whare Pora as the ancient house of weaving, which in pre-colonised times was a building on the pā (village) where members of the iwi (usually women) would go to learn the arts, specifically raranga. Te Ratana explains that, with the introduction of the Tohunga Suppression Act 1907, Te Whare Pora emptied, the buildings were neglected, and the arts nearly lost, due to the rituals and Māori priests required for them being made illegal by the government of the day. These rituals and the sacredness surrounding the passing on of weaving practices, as well as the knowledge/stories weaving contains, were crucial to toi raranga. Weaving did survive the Act, and some customary rituals became standard family practice, passed on generationally in Māori homes from kaumātua (elders) to mokopuna (grandchildren). Te Ratana learned from her kuia not just how to weave but why: "a kairaranga (weaving teacher) is also responsible for the weaving together of people," no matter where they come from or who they are.[27] In recent years in Aotearoa, there has been a resurgence in rebuilding Te Whare Pora and continuing its sacred practices. Te Whare Pora has also taken on a conceptual existence—somewhere for Māori craft practitioners to access regardless of where or when, collapsing time and connecting them with their tūpuna, who were also crafting long before they were born.

Fabric artist and storyteller Maungarongo Te Kawa (Ngāti Porou) is one of these creatives, whose whakapapa quilts utilise many different methods of making, from machine stitching to appliqué, taking inspiration from Pākehā miner's quilts and guidance from Māori weavers (fig. 16). Te Kawa's quilts hold a mixture of pūrākau from his personal life and broader Māori

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[26] Maungarongo Ron Te Kawa, "'Craft Is Creative Thinking Made Material': Maungarongo Ron Te Kawa On Connection & Quilting," Viva, *New Zealand Herald,* October 24, 2021, https://www.nzherald.co.nz/viva/culture/craft-is-creative-thinking-made-material-maungarongo-ron-te-kawa-on-connection-quilting.

[27] Rose Rebecca Te Ratana, "Ritual in the Making: Critical Exploration of Ritual in Te Whare Pora" (Master's thesis, Auckland University of Technology, 2012), 11, http://hdl.handle.net/10292/4787.

history. They range from love letters to friends and portraits of family members to the reimagining of traditional stories, such as the Ngāti Kurī pūrākau about the migratory journey of the kuaka (bar-tailed godwit). Te Kawa creates within a conceptual Te Whare Pora from start to finish when working on a quilt. As he explained in his 2024 Artist Talk at Objectspace gallery, in his understanding, Te Whare Pora was somewhere creatives were nurtured but also pushed and constantly challenged to make. For Te Kawa, Te Whare Pora is a state of mind, a nonbinary place he can access, unrestricted by earthly distractions but connected to the wairua of the art, himself, and his surroundings.

From this conceptual standpoint he directly calls back to his ancestors, asking them for guidance, support, and encouragement as he embarks on creating a whakapapa quilt. By being in a state of Te Whare Pora, where no negativity or self-doubt can enter the sacred mind space, Te Kawa makes intricate works with only joy and love poured into them.[28]

Figure 16 Maungarongo Te Kawa, *Hineteiwaiwa*, 2023, Mixed media quilt, Objectspace. Courtesy of Objectspace, photography by Sam Hartnett.

[28] Maungarongo Te Kawa and Zoe Black, "Coffee & Croissants: Maungarongo Te Kawa and Zoe Black," artist talk at Objectspace, Ponsonby, Auckland, October 6, 2024.

According to Te Kawa, “in te ao Māori, art and craft hold each other’s hands … the love of the story will inform the craft.”[29] This explains how Te Kawa and other craft artists can put enormous amounts of labour and hours into an artwork, ranging from days to months or even years.

Figure 17 Mike Kelley, *More Love Hours Than Can Ever Be Repaid* and *The Wages of Sin*, 1987, Stuffed fabric toys and afghans on canvas with dried corn; wax candles on wood and metal base, 306.7 × 385.4 × 80.6 cm, Tate Britain. Courtesy of Tate Images, photography by Matt Greenwood.

This labour is articulated in the term ‘love hours,’ featured in the title of the 1987 fabric banner work by American artist Mike Kelley, *More Love Hours Than Can Ever Be Repaid* (fig. 17).[30] An assemblage made up of hand-crafted dolls and blankets sourced from second-hand stores, the work poses the question of how time spent equated into love is freely given by family members to children, and how that time turned love can be unrequited.

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[29] Te Kawa, “Craft Is Creative Thinking.”

[30] Mike Kelley, *More Love Hours Than Can Ever Be Repaid and The Wages of Sin*, 1987, stuffed fabric toys and afghans on canvas with dried corn; wax candles on wood and metal base, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, https://whitney.org/collection/works/7317.

'Love hours' are also evident in the appliqué *tivaevae* (patched quilts) sewn by Pacific Mamas exhibited in *Pacific Threads* (1989), which are described by curator Ane Tonga as an integral cultural activity in the many islands of Te Moananui-a-Kiwa. In Cook Island custom, tivaevae-making skills are taught generationally, from elder matriarchs to their female descendants. The histories and ways of making are kept safe by familial lines, knowledge, and stories contributed to the quilts visually by patches and stitching. They are usually a collaborative practice between multiple people, and years consisting of 'love hours' of their time could be required to complete a complex quilt.[31]

In my story quilts, I see my hand-stitching of every element as a process of honouring through labour those the story is about, and a way for my actions to match the love I feel for them. The 'love hours' I put into my artwork and the physical exertion required to complete it make creating a quilt a feat of endurance. I believe these nuances can be understood and seen as they are read by a viewer of the work, primarily through details like the natural irregularities in my embroidery or the edges of hand-cut textiles. The sewing processes combined with the histories of the textiles I use, either gifted material, handed-down sewing projects, pre-loved clothing, or well-worn fabric needing a second life, contribute to a rich reading of layered memories that depict a story.

As Te Kawa has said, craft holds "the story of humans evolving, learning, growing, while expressing themselves"[32] and so, as a making tool, it situates itself perfectly alongside the pedagogical nature of pūrākau. I experienced this in my childhood when I was taught by Cook Island-Irish artist Ani O'Neill (Ngāti Makea, Ngāti Te Tika) how to crochet, a skill that had been passed down to her by her family members.[33] I remember that she tried to teach me on a few different occasions before her lessons stuck. I finally understood the simple chain stitch after many cups of tea, one stiflingly hot Rarotongan afternoon (fig. 18). The hours of conversation and specific stories shared with me during this occasion may be lost to time. Still, the general lessons they taught me remain. I know how to crochet and love the process of learning and teaching others. Just like Ani, it is as ever-present as the yellow crochet hook she gave me that day (which is still in my craft kit in 2025). Growing up, watching Ani effortlessly create large-scale crochet works or collaborate on other craft-based projects with her Pacific Sisters instilled in me the idea that regardless of how many 'love hours' an artwork requires, it will always be visually rewarding and such a powerful expression of the worthiness of Indigenous storytelling in all art spaces: local and global.

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[31] Ane Tonga, "Pacific Threads: An Exhibition Celebrating Traditional and Contemporary Cook Island Tivaevae," Te Tuhi, 2020, https://tetuhi.art/exhibition/pacific-threads/.
[32] Te Kawa, "Craft Is Creative Thinking."
[33] Ani had also learned the skills and colourways of tivaevae from her grandmothers and the Mamas.

Figure 18 Whaea Ani and I having a hot drink, ca. 2006-08. Courtesy of Ani O'Neill.

Even though crochet is different from the crafting methods I now use in my art practice, it formed the basis of my understanding of how something is built stitch by stitch. Over time, each movement or stitch constellates into something immense, yet, when examined closely, it can still be perceived as individual stitches in time. To me, crafted works can become physical metaphors of the process of passing down traditional pūrākau from parent to child, visually representing stories that exist in defined moments in history, then expand with every transference of teller to a listener, just like the many stitches that become an image in a quilt or the long layers of a fishing net.[34]

[34] I only recently managed to describe and name this concept of recording through action, be it moments in time or voices telling stories, because of the practice-based research I have been undertaking.

Part Two: Pūrākau to Guide Me

Ngāti Koroki Oral Histories and My Whaea: Quilts Past

Quilt-making became a creative avenue for my art practice in the final year of my Bachelor's degree, in 2021. The COVID pandemic marred my schooling, and I was at the start of my reconnection journey to my Māori roots, so I focussed on making what came naturally to me: quilts—specifically, quilted portraits of my great-grandmother Ra Awatea and her daughter, Grandma Diana. Before sewing the quilts, I had many phone calls and interviews with my great-aunt Queenie, Diana's sister, to inform my research.

Whaea (aunty) Queenie Rikihana Hyland (Ngāti Raukawa, Ngāti Koroki, Te Āti Awa ki Whakarongotai), journalist, author, and iwi historian, had many pūrākau of our family, specifically of her mother, to share with me. Alongside these kōrero, I had the 2017 *Ngāti Koroki Oral History*, compiled by Queenie and her daughter Mishy, that was presented as evidence supporting the Ngāti Raukawa Treaty of Waitangi claims process. This oral history provided photographs and written accounts that would back up our kōrero. I learnt how our iwi came to fall on hard times due to the yearly double taxation by the government for living on their own land.[35]

Figure 19 Front of *Loss Legacy*, 2021, mixed textiles, acrylic paint, upholstery backing, embroidery thread, 200cm x 170cm, Dunedin School of Art.

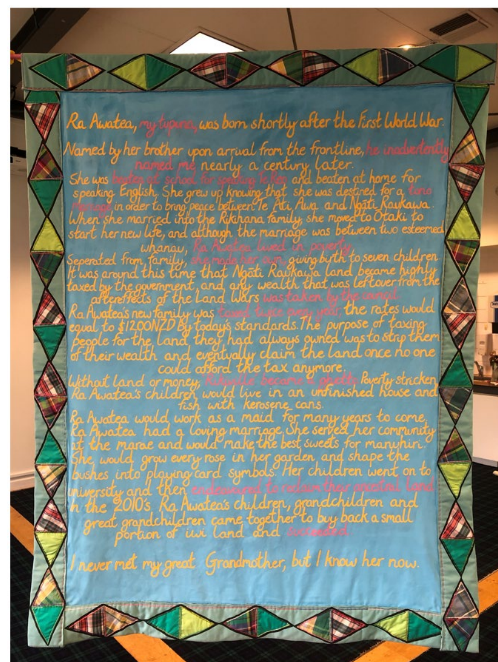

Figure 20 Back of *Loss Legacy*, 2021, mixed textiles, acrylic paint, upholstery backing, embroidery thread, 200cm x 170cm, Dunedin School of Art.

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[35] Queenie Rikihana Hyland and Mishy Vieira, *Ngāti Koroki Oral History* (Ōtaki: Te Hono ki Raukawa Claims Trust, 2017), 24.

The many phone calls and the book were precious taonga that I have kept coming back to over the years. I did not know at the time, but our conversations occurred just as Whaea's mind was starting to decline with a degenerative disease, and so were as timely as they were treasured. Armed with this knowledge, a desire for justice for my tūpuna, our hapū, and myself spurred me to create large story quilts.[36] With portraiture on one side of the quilt and written pūrākau on the other, they were a visual testament to what had happened to us (fig. 19, 20, 21).

Figure 21 Detail view of *Loss Legacy*, 2021, mixed textiles, acrylic paint, upholstery backing, embroidery thread, 200cm x 170cm, Dunedin School of Art.

To create from that place of love but also rage is not sustainable. After completing one of three planned quilts, my mind was burnt out and my hands deteriorated. It was three years later that I began quilting afresh. Again, instigated by love and rage, my wairua (spirit) was compelled to capture the stories of the Toitū te Tiriti (Honor the Treaty) movement. These were stories of how the government was once again moving against tangata whenua (people of the land), threatening the legitimacy of Te Tiriti in present-day Aotearoa and undermining the rights of Māori. I made these story quilts with appliqué imagery from my photos taken while marching in the hīkoi (protest march) combined with tukutuku/tāniko woven patterns (fig. 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28). Because of this choice, they exist in a place of protest, not quite pūrākau as I consider it.

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[36] Justice for severing the connection to the whenua that was attempted before I was born.

Figure 22 Mokopuna Decisions, 2024, textiles gifted to me by my mother, upholstery backing, embroidery thread, cotton thread, 550mm x 850mm. Photography by Natalie Robertson.

Figure 23, 24 & 25 Detail views of the quilt *Mokopuna Decisions*, 2024, textiles gifted to me by my mother, upholstery backing, embroidery thread, cotton thread, 550mm x 850mm. Photography by Natalie Robertson.

Figure 26 Toitū Te Tangata, 2024, textiles gifted to me by my mother, upholstery backing, embroidery thread, cotton thread, 550mm x 850mm. Photography by Natalie Robertson.

Figure 27 & 28 Detail views of the quilt *Toitū Te Tangata*, 2024, textiles gifted to me by my mother, upholstery backing, embroidery thread, cotton thread, 550mm x 850mm. Photography by Natalie Robertson.

This revelation was made clear to me through a conversation with Objectspace Deputy Director Zoe Black (Ngāpuhi, Ngāti Hine, Pākehā). I appreciated meeting Zoe as part of the 2024 Talk Week for AUT Toi Ataata BVA/MVA/PhD students. Here, I presented the two quilts inspired by the hīkoi. At this time, I was most interested in the idea of what Patricia Monture Angus describes as a "double understanding" taking place upon viewing the quilts.[37] I hoped to unite viewers through intimately feeling together while also conceptually understanding a story's core ideas, regardless of their cultural background. I thought that the key to passing on pūrākau was accessibility, to translate Māori stories for tauiwi (non-Māori) listeners. Kōrero and pātai (questions) with, and tautoko (encouragement) from Zoe and my kaiako Natalie Robertson (Ngāti Porou, Clann Dhònnchaidh) and Dieneke Jansen, as well as with my fellow students, led me to question this role of translator between Māori and other people that I had assumed throughout my life and now into my art practice. This broader discussion allowed me to question further whether being a translator is what I want to be, *and it is not.* Putting the translator misstep to rest, I could then focus on the other point of discussion raised by Zoe: how the stories of the quilts were becoming lost, due to their protest nature. The conversation culminated in the question of who the quilts were made for, and by deciding that, I could choose how to tell a story or protest a point (not muddle the two).

[37] Patricia Monture-Angus, *Journeying Forward: Dreaming First Nations' Independence* (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 1999), 10.

On further reflection, and freed from internalised translatory obligations, I was able to let go of the rage that fuelled my protest and bring my quilt-making back to the heart of what I set out to achieve: to tell stories for my descendants, and to provide knowledge of our familial past (my today) with which to navigate the future (their present).

Cultural Hybridity and Me: Two Stories in One 'Book'

The Talk Week conversation also drew attention to the elements in my protest quilts that effectively told a story: the use of the accumulated textiles my mother had given me, combined with specifically chosen pounamu-coloured (jade-coloured) thread, held together with copious amounts of hand stitches, all worked in cohesion. Alongside those quilt-related techniques, the tukutuku/tāniko weaving turned appliqué patterns provided a Kaupapa Māori layer to the story's reading, supporting the story's feelings in each quilt. For the quilt *Mokopuna Decisions* (2024) (fig. 22), I stitched on the double poutama, representing the tie between descendants and ancestors and the pursuit of knowledge or growth as we connect to them. For viewers familiar with the pattern, it solidified the story's message within the quilt. For those unaware of the pattern's meaning, it provided an entry point for them to ask about it and learn, to want to decipher its relation to the English text and sewn imagery of hands holding a sign. The observation was that in combination all these storytelling components held within the quilts worked together in bicultural interrelatedness.

By incorporating tukutuku/tāniko weaving patterns and their associated meanings into my quilts, I felt I was working alongside my Grandma Diana. Even though she did not teach me to tāniko weave in life, I felt her now guiding my research into each pattern, her presence as I traced the geometric shapes onto the fabrics, her hands working with mine as I cut and stitched their forms. The visual language each pattern holds is as powerful as they are ancient. They have been telling pūrākau long before I existed, and for me to work with them in my figurative story quilts is not unique to me as an artist. However, it is a deliberate choice that becomes representational of the cultural hybridity I come from, as a Māori-Pākehā person. To mix Western materials with Indigenous practices is to reflect myself authentically within my artwork. Artists whose practice derives from similar combinations of culture, media, and ways of thinking are Lisa Reihana (Ngāpuhi, Ngāti Hine, and Ngāi Tū), Jade Townsend (Ngāti Kahungunu, Te Āti Haunui-a-Pāpārangi) and Mataaho Collective.

Figure 29 Installation view, *GLISTEN* by Lisa Reihana, National Gallery Singapore, 2024, accessed March 27, 2025, https://www.nationalgallery.sg/sg/en/exhibitions/glisten.html. Image Credit: National Gallery Singapore.

Reihana, an artist whose art practice ranges from film and photography to costume and sculpture, has employed the visual language of tāniko weaving and its connection to storytelling. Her recent sculptural installation, *GLISTEN* (2025), comprises 114,000 shimmer discs arranged in Songket (Malaysian hand weave) and tāniko patterns (fig. 29). Commissioned for National Gallery Singapore's Ng Teng Fong Roof Garden Gallery, the installation honours the longstanding role of woman weavers as knowledge holders and orators in Indigenous communities.[38] Reihana spoke at the AUT Te Ao Mahora Wānanga symposium (June 27, 2025), explaining that one of the ways she begins formulating an artwork is by matching concepts from traditional pūrākau to present-day environments. By engaging with ideas from the past, she can recontextualise them into the present, normalising Indigenous ways of thinking through physical representations in her artwork.[39] Reihana combines customary Māori art forms and contemporary art practices to explore the impact of colonisation on Māori culture and identity. She challenges viewers to understand Māori art as an ever-expanding, vibrant, and diverse practice that did not stagnate upon imperial introduction to Aotearoa.

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[38] Sam Gaskin, "Lisa Reihana Weaves with 114,000 Shimmer Discs at NGS," *Ocula Magazine*, June 13, 2024, https://ocula.com/magazine/art-news/lisa-reihana-weaves-with-114000-shimmer-discs/.
[39] Lisa Reihana. (discussion at Te Ao Mahora Wānanga: A Symposium for Researchers in Art and Design, Auckland University of Technology, Auckland, March 27, 2025).

Figure 30
Jade Townsend, *Alloy*, 2024, polished stainless steel, stripper's pole, rock, resin, 2220 x 510 x 120mm, Season. Courtesy of the artist.

Townsend, painter, sculptor, and co-director at Season Gallery, creates artworks to explore the complexities surrounding her bicultural whakapapa.[40] Also a speaker at the Te Ao Mahora symposium, Townsend spoke about her upbringing in Whanganui, her formal painting training in Manchester, England, and her art practice now in 2025, in Tāmaki Makaurau (Auckland). Concerned with answering what cultural hybridity can look like within art, Townsend's paintings combine Western techniques and "mauri-led" decision-making and imagery.[41] The infinity symbol, a motif existent throughout her art practice and present in how she installs works, becomes a fleshing-out of her internal duality or "dual consciousness," her life as native and foreigner, colonised and coloniser.[42] In her *Thin Spaces* exhibition (Season, 2025), the sculpture *Alloy* (2024) began as a collection of drawings (fig. 30). Townsend started the process of sculpting by drawing many versions of the concept. This method is similar to mine, establishing a translation of thoughts to the physical plane in pencil and paper. Townsend makes material decisions from the drawings, like whether to use real pounamu or imitation resin, stemming from ideas around "re-indigenising Western motifs" and how she can best contribute to that history.[43] Her investigation into cultural hybridity provides inconclusive results; she says that with each enquiry explored, the less she feels she understands.

[40] Jade Townsend. (discussion at Te Ao Mahora Wānanga: A Symposium for Researchers in Art and Design, Auckland University of Technology, Auckland, March 27, 2025).
[41] Townsend. (discussion at Te Ao Mahora Wānanga).
[42] Townsend. (discussion at Te Ao Mahora Wānanga).
[43] Townsend. (discussion at Te Ao Mahora Wānanga).

However, this is not to say that she is on the wrong track; instead, she is in pursuit of tackling a significant question with many facets to consider as an artist researcher. Despite these facets, it remains clear that operating as an artist through combining Māori and Pākehā methods, techniques, and materials is a valuable starting point.

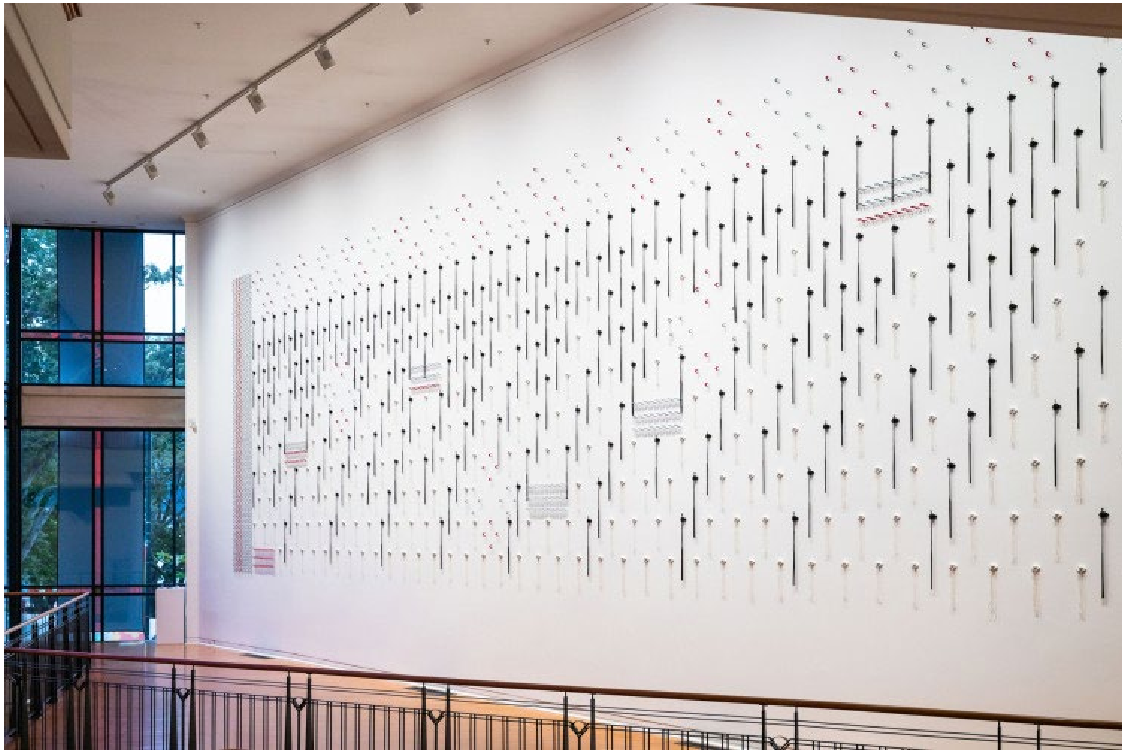

Figure 31 Installation view, Mataaho Collective, *Hautāmiro,* 2025, wool, harakeke, muka, plastic insulators, steel fencing staples. Courtesy of the artists, photography by Alex Lovell-Smith.

Mataaho Collective, comprised of Dr. Terri Te Tau (Rangitāne ki Wairarapa), Bridget Reweti (Ngāti Ranginui, Ngāi Te Rangi), Sarah Hudson (Ngāti Awa, Ngāi Tūhoe, Ngāti Pūkeko), and Erena Arapere-Baker (Te Ātiawa ki Whakarongotai, Ngāti Toa Rangātira), also engages with customary weaving practices made in conjunction with Western materials. The collective's large-scale woven installations are, by nature, culturally hybrid. *Hautāmiro* (2025), recently installed in the Dunedin Public Art Gallery large wall space, is built around the pūrākau of the four winds and how they came to be separated by Ranginui (Sky Father) and Papatūānuku (Earth Mother) (fig. 31, 32).

The woven elements represent adornments of kākahu (garments) and interact in a similar weaving language to the traditional korowai (cloak). Kārure (twisted muka cord) and harakeke (processed leaves of the flax plant) are installed alongside sheep's wool-wrapped

fencing staples and plastic insulator claws from electric fences.[44] An example of mātauranga Māori combined with agricultural components, the customary story told by the artwork is affirmed while reviewing the other discourse of adaptation and experimentation due to colonialism.

Figure 32 Installation detail, Mataaho Collective, *Hautāmiro,* 2025, wool, harakeke, muka, plastic insulators, steel fencing staples. Courtesy of the artists, photography by Alex Lovell-Smith.

These examples only touch the surface of how contemporary Indigenous artists combine the traditional with their lived realities as descendants of a colonial past. For an art practice that centres around crafting, it is also intrinsically Indigenous to create with multiple people. In 2024, I learnt the depth of the saying 'Many hands make light work' when I collaborated with other Māori artists for the first time in my professional art practice.[45]

Challenged by the exhibition concept of *RELAY* (2024), Jeorja Duffy (Ngāti Kurī, Sa'fanene, Pākehā), Ngahina Belton-Bodsworth (Te Ātiawa, Rangitāne, Muaupoko, Ngāti Toa, Pākehā), and myself came together to craft an artwork that records stories like ephemeral traces within an artwork.[46] Conceptually exploring how something immaterial like a voiced story could be recorded within an artwork, we asked, 'How might braiding a cord hold moments in time,

[44] Dunedin Public Art Gallery, "Mataaho Collective," accessed March 26, 2025, https://dunedin.art.museum/exhibitions/present/mataaho-collective/.
[45] To quote my mother, who quoted her mother, who undoubtedly quoted many others before her.
[46] *RELAY: Toi Ataata Visual Arts* was held at Te Uru Waitakere Contemporary Gallery, Auckland, August–Septemb cer 2025.

memories as story, through its relation to labour-intensive hand-made work and material make-up?' The answer we received came in the form of *Whiriwhiri* (2024).

Recording Story Through Action

To create the work *Whiriwhiri*, which translates in English to 'plait' or 'discuss,' we used textiles that we had been given and that we had collected or upcycled from loved ones' washed clothes, domestic linens, and sentimental scraps to braid into an ongoing length of three-strand cord (fig. 33). The textiles already held their own associated (his)stories, connected to us (the makers) through a relational network. A circumstance of the exhibition was a social making event at the gallery, where we encouraged *RELAY* collaborators and the public to talk to us as we braided, securing our ongoing conversations within the action of the braiding process (fig. 34).

We asked people to choose from our precut textiles—fabrics they felt might connect to their stories—to ensure that each person's section of cord would genuinely reflect their voices. We also braided with this same logic when recording our own conversations, knotting new strips of fabric onto the three strands of cord as we ran out of lengths to braid. Each fabric strip joined in braid would create unique colour, pattern, texture, and pre-existing story combinations, which all would visually harmonise and then reconfigure in the next knotted length of alternate harmony.

Figure 33
Detail view of *Whiriwhiri* prior to installation, 2024, family member's clothing, family and personal bed linens, reused sewing projects from my mother, donated fabric scraps from friends, upcycled textile artworks from MVA cohort. Photography by Mon Redmond.

Figure 34 Whiriwhiri making day at Te Uru Waitakere Contemporary Gallery. Featuring myself (top left), Jeorja Duffy (bottom left), Ngahina Belton-Bodsworth (right). Courtesy of Jeorja Duffy and Ngahina Belton-Bodsworth. Photography by Mon Redmond.

Figure 35 Installation view of *Whiriwhiri*, 2024, family member's clothing, family and personal bed linens, reused sewing projects from my mother, donated fabric scraps from friends, upcycled textile artworks from MVA cohort. Photography by Ziggy Lever.

With all 160 metres of the cord installed in the exhibition space, its length could be observed and witness the shifting stories, narratives, and ideas evolve or be added to through this experiential nature of aesthetics (fig. 35).[47] For Monique Redmond, RELAY artist collaborator and my Master's degree co-supervisor, the relationality of these elements was a quality that could be connected to, especially through touch, which was a joyful experience. A beautiful outcome of the installation is that a community of people, those who partook in *RELAY*, could all experience these same feelings and speak to the work, pointing out large sections of it, recalling through colour and actions the conversation while that section was recorded (braided). Once *RELAY* concluded, Jeorja and I agreed that we were not done with this making/recording process we had developed. 'To record story through action' is how we began to refer to our cord-making process. We had the starting point for a new methodological attribute of our crafting practice at our literal fingertips, and we knew that it could be developed further through collaborative practice.

[47] Like the varying cord thickness, colours, patterns, and textures.

Part Three: Looking After to Share Later

Our Net Called *Taura Here*

Over the duration of *RELAY*, we observed how the entire process (from material preparation to the conversation connections we secured in a braid) was wholly sustainable. Not only from a materials standpoint but as sculptors working together collaboratively, we weren't drained by the requirements of the work, unlike other aspects of our separate art practices. Having undertaken the cord-making together, and because it was a naturally sociable activity, we felt reinvigorated to keep the practice going. In the collaborative video work *Whatuora* (2020) by Emily Parr (Ngāi Te Rangi, Moana, Pākehā) and Arielle Walker (Taranaki, Ngāruahine, Ngāpuhi, Pākehā), this type of sustainable art practice is noted and discussed by the artists in action (fig. 36, 37).

Figure 36 Emily Parr & Arielle Walker, *Whatuora,* 2020, single-channel video/audio. Courtesy of the artists.

When interviewed concerning the work, Parr reflects on how learning to whatu (weave) has become a resting practice to her, a "replenishing act."[48] It does not require her academic mind but instead taps into "generational memory working through [her]," akin to muscle memory but deeper, as it is guided by "tūpuna present-ness."[49] Both Walker and Parr connect to the conceptual Te Whare Pora when engaged in whatu, this mind space breaking down the

[48] Thomasin Sleigh, Arielle Walker, and Emily Parr, "A Conversation with Arielle Walker and Emily Parr," Circuit Artist Moving Image, February 3, 2022, https://www.circuit.org.nz/writing-and-podcast/a-conversation-with-arielle-walker-and-emily-parr.
[49] Emily Parr and Arielle Walker, *Whatuora*, 2020, digital video, 12 min.

barriers of time and allowing both artists to learn stories, histories, and knowledge intrinsically from their tūpuna wahine (women ancestors).[50]

Figure 37 Emily Parr & Arielle Walker, *Whatuora,* 2020, single-channel video/audio. Courtesy of the artists.

When Jeorja and I began collaboratively researching our new craft methodology, I was coincidently reading *The Maori Craft of Netting* (1926) by Te Rangi Hīroa, which inspired us to investigate customary net-making practices.[51] By taking our already established (re)cording process to the next step and weaving cords into fishing nets, we could learn from tūpuna who had provided their taonga nearly a hundred years ago in the form of technique and information. Together, we had Te Rangi Hīroa research and development days, where we worked together to recreate the netting knots illustrated on the book's pages (fig. 30, 31). Eventually, we found the knot that felt right for us, the here poito tāruke (clove hitch knot).[52] At first, it was so simple that it was difficult for us to memorise the netting steps, but once we took the time to help each other, it became second nature. Instead of having one continuous cord we would work with for the net, we made many strands of cords, all roughly four metres long, which we joined with knots as the net expanded.

This new cord-making process recorded voices as *Whiriwhiri* did, but instead of other people's conversations, we recorded our own, between the two of us. Our discussions shifted and took on new topics, as did the colours and materials in our cords, meaning each cross-section of the net is a microcosm of intertangling dialogues. Working with those same

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[50] Parr and Walker, *Whatuora*.
[51] Te Rangi Hiroa and Peter Henry Buck, *The Maori Craft of Netting*, Transactions and Proceedings of the Royal Society of New Zealand, vol. 56 (Wellington: Government Print, 1926).
[52] Hiroa and Buck, *The Maori Craft of Netting,* 602.

upcycled fabrics shared from our lives, we saw the braiding of the different materials as a representation of our combined lives, the merging of varied past/present experiences, cultures, and families.

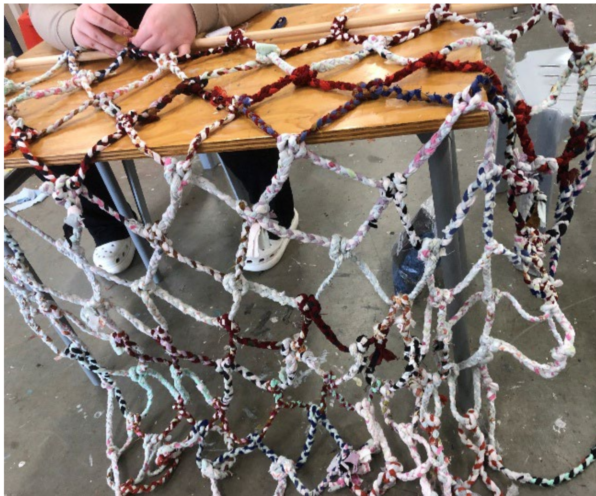

Figure 38 Taura Here research and development day in studio with Jeorja Duffy (hands pictured). September 11, 2024.

Figure 39 Detail view of *Taura Here* during one of our research and development day in studio.

Figure 40 Taura Here research and development day in studio with Jeorja Duffy (left) and myself (right). September 10, 2024. Photography by Nikita Hesketh.

Making the net became an addiction; when we worked on it together, we were entirely in the flow of growing our net's length and ensuring that each word we said was present via braided movement in the colourful layers. Often, while working, preparing and cutting fabric, braiding, and weaving the net, we would consider Germaine Koh's ongoing piece *Knitwork* (1992 to present).[53] Begun in 1992, Koh's life-long work would inspire us to keep creating through sore fingers and conversational lulls. *Knitwork* consists of a vast array of donated and well-worn 'undone' knitted clothing/pieces (fig. 41).

[53] Germaine Koh, "Germaine Koh Knitwork," accessed April 6, 2025, https://germainekoh.com/works/knitwork.

Koh's making process gives them a second life; in an interview, she details how "reknitting items that have been given to [her] imbues the piece with a sense of collectivity."[54] To Koh, the more 'people' she can incorporate into the work, the better. In our net, which we came to call *Taura Here* (the ties that bind people together), the donated fabrics we worked with consolidated into a collection of the people in our lives, mostly our families, through their clothes and bedding, with the overarching narrative of our growing friendship as artist collaborators, and together with our wider circle of friends and iwi connections. *Knitwork* is an attempt to "give form to the invisible," translating ideas surrounding the time people spend but take for granted into a physical representation that is too large to go unnoticed.[55] Similarly, in our ever-expanding net, we give form to our conversations and embodiment to our stories, letting it grow in size with our ever-growing friendship.

Figure 41 Germaine Koh, *Knitwork*, 2002-04, unravelled used garments, with text and photographic documentation. Approx. 2m x increasing length, The British Museum. Courtesy of the artist.

[54] Bethany Lyttle, "Knitwork Giving Form to the Invisible," *Interweave Knits*, 2005, 6.
[55] Lyttle, "Knitwork Giving Form to the Invisible."

As we learned to net, we understood that the actions and protocols we were intuitively carrying out in the net-making process were pre-established tikanga: to work long hours together, to hold the tension in certain areas for the other to work, for one to weave the net while the other makes the cords, to keep the net making space tapu (sacred) when working, and to break for kai together when the work was done, returning to noa (ordinary life). We did these things without prior agreement or planning; we somehow knew them to be the right way to work. This phenomenon could be understood as ancestral knowledge manifesting through us, our tūpuna guiding our hands and teaching us our ancient customs.

Weaving *Taura Here* was Jeorja's and my first attempt at crafting with mātauranga Māori in our art practices. We both come from extensive Western craft backgrounds with foundational knowledge in many different forms of crafting. So, we can understand our intuition regarding netting as working with tacit knowledge in conjunction with something like parallel play. Regardless of how we understood the phenomena methodologically, it reminded me of Walker's reflection on the haerenga (journey) of learning how to whatu. She had never woven before, nor had her immediate family, but she had always been surrounded by craft and her nana's intricate lace works. When she told a whatu kaiako (weaving teacher), Whaea Rose Greaves, about this, kaiako Greaves replied that her Nana's lacework was "tūpuna teaching your nana to weave in any way she [could]."[56] Ostensibly, my family's comprehensive craft legacy could all be tied back to the crafters who came before us. Perhaps Jeorja and I were already tapping into Te Whare Pora, along with all the other generations who came before us, without knowing, because it was an imperceptible, wairua-bound instinct.

Figure 42 Detail view *of Taura Here* uninstalled, family member's clothing, family and personal bed linens, reused sewing projects from my mother, donated fabric scraps from friends and supervisors, upcycled textile artworks from MVA cohort, cotton thread, 1.5m x increasing length.

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[56] Parr and Walker, *Whatuora*.

As we continue to reach new lengths with *Taura Here* and contribute new narratives in shifting colours, textures, and patterns through the fabrics, I see our mahi tahi (collaboration) revealing to me much more than an answer to that initial question of 'How can we pass on our stories?' Although distinct details from the stories we tell hide in the braids of our net,[57] what remains for viewers of the work are broader, all-encompassing stories: growing friendship; kōrero connections; the labour of our craft; our feelings of care and aroha (love) for the taonga we learnt and for the moments in time we felt necessary to hold fast. The heart of each story is embedded in the textiles given to us from the people who mean the most to us in this world (fig. 42, 43).

Figure 43 Installation test of *Taura Here*, January 29, 2025, family member's clothing, family and personal bed linens, reused sewing projects from my mother, donated fabric scraps from friends and supervisors, upcycled textile artworks from MVA cohort, cotton thread, 1.5m x increasing length, AUT School of Art + Design foyer, Auckland.

[57] Only available to us makers for passing on to listeners in the customary way of oral storytelling or accompanying written texts.

Quilting Hands, Hīnaki and Eels

What We Pull In, What We Give Back

What was told to me by my parents as I learnt to create my hīnaki (eeling net) was the pūrākau (story) of how these nets had saved the lives of my tūpuna.

When my great-grandmother (and namesake) Ra Awatea Rikihana was raising her young tamariki (children), my eventual grandmother and her siblings, she had to be resourceful to provide for them. This was when the New Zealand government would tax our iwi (tribe) members of Ngāti Raukawa twice a year for the offence of residing on their ancestral land of Ōtaki. Taxing was one of the many ways colonial rule was enforced to slowly strip the iwi of their wealth and, eventually, their whenua (land).

As devastating as these taxes were, my great-grandmother pushed on, assuming extra jobs while hunting and gathering to feed all her dependants; children, nieces and nephews. One of her nephews, Wi Taepa, once told me he would stay with his "Aunty Ra" in the unfinished house in 'Rikiville' and go fishing with his seven cousins in the awa (river) nearby. A joyous activity for children, a duty of survival for Ra Awatea.

However, they did not fish with hīnaki nets, and that mātauranga Māori (customary knowledge) was not available to them at the time. Instead, they used refuse like old kerosene cans. The fish they caught with their makeshift nets were a lifeline for her and presumedly the rest of the community, their river and the ocean it fed into being the last accessible kai (food) gathering sites as their land was taken from them.

Regardless of how much Ra Awatea and her family struggled for survival, their bellies still got filled, and a roof was over all their heads. Working multiple jobs did not stop her from being a mother, nor did it stop her from being a community member. She still made time to care for tamariki and manuhiri (guests) at the marae (meeting site), nourishing all with her love in the form of the rare and sort after Rikihana pudding.

1

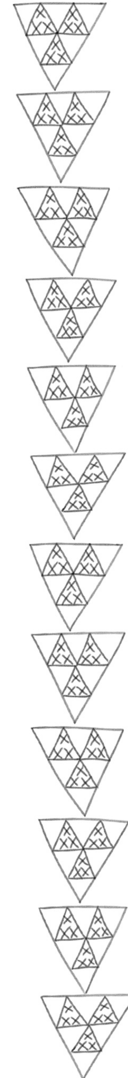


Figure 44 First passage from my exhibition booklet for MVA Graduating Exhibition, featuring the story *What We Pull In, What We Give Back*. Written and illustrated by myself, Te Ra Awatea Kemp, 2025.

When her daughter grew up, my grandmother Diana lived far away from the whenua, following where the work was but separated from the iwi and marae. Fishing was a constant, however; yet again, it was relied on to feed the next generation. It was the way to feed everyone and have rent still be paid. Instead of using cans, they fashioned hīnaki nets out of chicken wire and kānuka (evergreen tree) supporting rod or 'strongback'. The trap would be set with pesky roosters and placed in the stream that ran alongside the suburbs. There were still enough eels to catch, and between catching those frequently and Diana selling her tāniko (finger weave) crafts, my father and his siblings could grow up housed and fed as well.

My parents taught me to make the chicken wire hīnaki, not because we needed to fish to feed our whānau (family), but because I asked to learn so I could hold that knowledge for future use. We no longer survive week to week; we live with bounty and financial freedom. When we do pull up our recreational fishing nets, we let our tuna (eels) free. We don't need to eat them, so we let them continue their long lives, releasing them to go onto the Pacific Sea.
All these interwoven stories and histories stitch together an elaborate whakapapa (genealogy) quilt that explains how I came to be. Three generations later, I do not know the recipe for great grandma's pudding or how to tāniko weave, but I do know how to make a net.

And how to carry all these pūrākau in my net, secure and safe, for future storytelling to descendants not yet with us so that they may know how they came to be. These stories are necessary for understanding where we came from and how we got to where we are now, which is so distant from our original whenua. They also guide us back, informing us that we can one day return to our communities, reo and tikanga if we want to.

Eels have come to mean more than sustenance to us; they herald survival and symbolise resilient protection, providing for those in need. They are family connections through time manifested alongside their stories.

2

Figure 45 Second passage from my exhibition booklet for MVA Graduating Exhibition, featuring the story *What We Pull In, What We Give Back*. Written and illustrated by myself, Te Ra Awatea Kemp, 2025.

Thinking back to this story and considering the elements that communicated in my previous hīkoi quilts, I began conceptualising my family's histories if they were to take quilted form and become taonga tuku iho (fig. 44, 45). Through pencil drawings, I translated my thoughts about the selected story into figurative imagery, answering questions of scale and pattern through the many drawn iterations. These processes also developed an allegorical library of visuals for me to work with in my quilted storytelling. For instance, drawn hands often represented ancestors or myself as an ancestor. Hīnaki nets stood in for the idea of support structures that provide or for ancestral knowledge being passed on. Finally, eels came to mean many things to me, ranging from lifelines of survival to protective kaitiaki (guardian) and connections to seafaring voyages, and the islands that ancient tūpuna travelled from on their way to Aotearoa. Once landing on the drawn design that I felt best represented the pūrākau, while being simplified enough to maintain its format through the next steps of making, I would digitally-trace the patterns for future ease of printing. These printed digital drawings became my quilt patterns, sized 850mm by 550mm; I could cut out the drawing directly and use the cut-outs to trace onto fabric for appliqué (fig. 46, 47).[58] Before cutting the appliqué, I decided which textiles to use for each pūrākau from the mountain of collected fabric gifted to me by my mother, family members, and close friends.

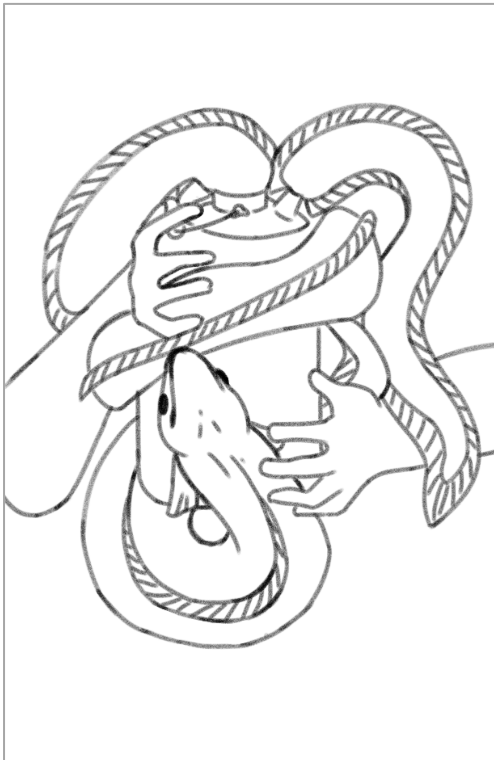


Figure 46 Digital illustration of the pattern for the quilt *What She Gave*. Designed in 2024.

Figure 47 Digital illustration of the pattern for the quilt *Kaitiaki.* Designed in 2024.

[58] These measurements are intentionally similar to customary tuktukuku panel sizes. My quilt installations on a gallery wall are inspired by tukutuku panels installed along the walls of a marae (meeting house).

In this colour/texture decision-making process, my train of thought began with trying to represent the feelings of the pūrākau through varied hues. Velvet reds, swirling oranges, and glistening golds equated strength in one quilt, while deep blues, variegated greens, and floral purples symbolised protection in another. From these initial colour decisions, I then decided on a limited colour/fabric palette for each work, based on what fabrics were left and the required amounts. Additionally, I carried some of those same textiles over to the next quilt, where they functioned like the joining paragraphs of a storybook. The result of selecting colour/fabric in this way is that once I have cut the pattern out and rearranged it to mirror the original drawn design, a visual hover occurs, as a viewer searches for the imagery through the swaths of 'tone on tone' and 'pattern on texture.' More colour decisions followed, and I chose which threads would hold the appliqué in place while acting as drawn outlines of an image, detailing over the cut shapes. I established a stitching language in metallic golds and hand-dyed blue, deliberately using them in contrast to outline an image or to tonally build up levels of detail.[59] I used three specific stitches in my quilts as part of this same language. The first is the chain stitch, which expresses the ties that bind a family together. The second is a cross-stitch, evocative of the lattice weaving in tukutuku panels. Thirdly, the freehand line stitch is a line drawing using a needle and thread. With colour and stitch type combined and deliberately applied, I could decide which combinations to use, following a logic that accommodated fabric or personal aesthetic decisions intuited in the moment of stitching.

The final steps of creating a story quilt include stitching a tāniko pattern-inspired border and hewing kānuka branches. Because tāniko takes significant time to make a small length of the weave, it is customarily used as decorative borders for a garment or cloak. Although not woven, my quilt borders contain the same tāniko patterns through appliqué and embroidery. I chose which pattern to use by considering the themes of the pūrākau carried by the quilt. An example borders the quilt *What She Gave* (2024). The pattern Niho Taniwha (teeth of the monster) encompasses the edges, symbolising the passing down of my family's history from my Tūpuna Ra Awatea to her daughter, her grandson, and me (fig. 48, 49, 50). Also symbolic of strength and stability, the pattern encompasses the central point of the pūrākau: how eeling became a lifeline for our whānau. For the hanging supports of my quilts, and in homage to the hīnaki nets that the visual language draws upon, each quilt is supported and weighted by two whittled kānuka 'strongbacks.' These were harvested from the new growth kānuka grove that my mother and I have been planting and looking after for many years on the family farm, and we ensured that proper tikanga was followed when cutting branches.

[59] The hand-dyed thread was the result of an experimentation in colour from 2018 that I had held onto for years until the right time to work with it came along. When I was looking for my ideal blue thread in my threads box, its perfect tone stood out to me, and I knew it was time to finally work with it in my soft sculptures.

Figure 48 What She Gave, 2024, textiles gifted to me by my mother, upholstery backing, embroidery thread, cotton thread, kānuka, 610mm x 830mm. Photography by Natalie Robertson.

Figure 49 Detail view of *What She Gave*, 2024, textiles gifted by my mother, upholstery backing, embroidery thread, cotton thread, kānuka, 610mm x 830mm. Photography by Natalie Robertson.

Figure 50 Detail view of *What She Gave*, 2024, textiles gifted by my mother, upholstery backing, embroidery thread, cotton thread, kānuka, 610mm x 830mm. Photography by Natalie Robertson.

Figure 51 Kaitiaki, 2024, textiles gifted to me by my mother, upholstery backing, embroidery thread, cotton thread, kānuka, 630mm x 930mm. Photography by Natalie Robertson.

Figure 52 Detail view of *Kaitiaki*, 2024, textiles gifted to me by my mother, upholstery backing, embroidery thread, cotton thread, kānuka, 630mm x 930mm. Photography by Natalie Robertson.

Figure 53 Detail view of *Kaitiaki*, 2024, textiles gifted to me by my mother, upholstery backing, embroidery thread, cotton thread, kānuka, 630mm x 930mm Photography by Natalie Robertson.

Due to the limited colour tonal range of my quilts, the pūrākau they hold may be elusive at first glance (fig. 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53). They require the viewer to immerse themselves in the visuality, colours, and texture, to search amongst the material and visual readings in order to unpack the story slowly. This dynamic allows the pūrākau to be narratively protected at times, to only fully share itself with those who spend time with it. Alongside this ability, the quilt is still a mnemonic embodiment and, therefore, can be spoken to and passed on through customary oral storytelling, which is something that can be done when I, the storyteller, am present with the artwork.[60] For the occasion of an exhibition, where my family pūrākau is presented to a range of people, I have made hand-bound books which hold versions of these stories that a viewer can read alongside the story quilts. These booklets are crafted to ensure that I maintain narrative control over my interpretation of my family's history. My insider knowledge of my family is written exclusively from my unique perspective as a Māori-Pākehā whānau member.[61] As a storyteller and Indigenous researcher, I must be selective about what I share. By guarding, omitting, or altering specific knowledge, I can protect my whānau in an academic or exhibition space. This is not to say that the version of pūrākau provided is not truthful, but rather that a different version is intended for those who are not related to me, nor are my descendants.[62]

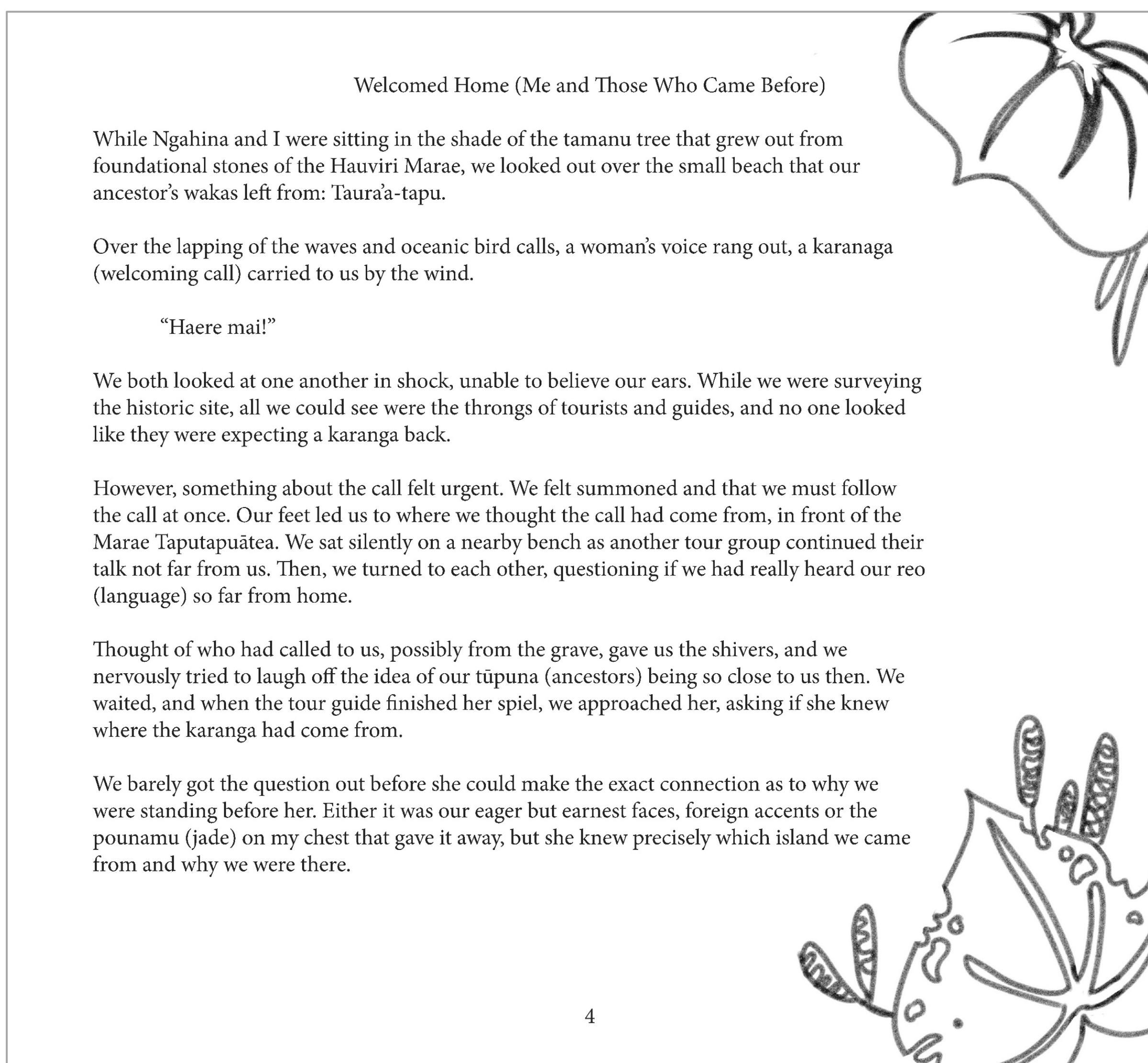
Listening for My Tūpuna

There have been unmistakable moments of "tūpuna present-ness" across my research.[63] Their presence has been felt in all aspects of my art practice. It has been confronting yet comforting for me to acknowledge and lean into their involvement. Their repeated presence has affirmed to me that I am on the right path in my research journey. It feels like a full circle now, to be guided by ancestors in my efforts to record pūrākau for our descendants. I felt them most profoundly when Ngahina Belton Bodsworth (collaborator on *Whiriwhiri,* artist and friend) and I followed their seafaring waka back to Hawaiki (Pacific homeland), to Marae Taputapuātea, on our research trip to Ra'iātea, French Polynesia, in November 2024. Our five-day pilgrimage to the marae (meeting grounds) came about due to generous funding granted by the AUT Te Aronui Postgraduate Research Scholarship that we both received. Our stipends enabled us to fly to Tahiti and take a ferry past the smaller islands to the beaches of Polynesian origin, where our waka Tainui left for Aotearoa.

[60] Tapsell, *The Art of Taonga*, 24.
[61] Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 140.
[62] Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies,* 146.
[63] Parr and Walker, *Whatuora*.

Interestingly, until a specific incident occurred on the marae grounds, I had not felt my tūpuna anywhere on the island. Our reo was similar to Tahitian. Our customary practices echoed one another. The locals were welcomingly kind. Yet, I did not immediately feel at home as I had anticipated. I felt increasingly that perhaps my 'homecoming' had been misguided.

And then, as sudden as a karanga (welcome call) on the wind, I was welcomed by generations of ancestors, spanning as far back and ancient as the whenua we stood on—what follows is an account of this in the form of my pūrakau, *Welcomed Home (Me and Those Who Came Before)* (Fig. 54, 55, 56).



Welcomed Home (Me and Those Who Came Before)

While Ngahina and I were sitting in the shade of the tamanu tree that grew out from foundational stones of the Hauviri Marae, we looked out over the small beach that our ancestor's wakas left from: Taura'a-tapu.

Over the lapping of the waves and oceanic bird calls, a woman's voice rang out, a karanaga (welcoming call) carried to us by the wind.

"Haere mai!"

We both looked at one another in shock, unable to believe our ears. While we were surveying the historic site, all we could see were the throngs of tourists and guides, and no one looked like they were expecting a karanga back.

However, something about the call felt urgent. We felt summoned and that we must follow the call at once. Our feet led us to where we thought the call had come from, in front of the Marae Taputapuātea. We sat silently on a nearby bench as another tour group continued their talk not far from us. Then, we turned to each other, questioning if we had really heard our reo (language) so far from home.

Thought of who had called to us, possibly from the grave, gave us the shivers, and we nervously tried to laugh off the idea of our tūpuna (ancestors) being so close to us then. We waited, and when the tour guide finished her spiel, we approached her, asking if she knew where the karanga had come from.

We barely got the question out before she could make the exact connection as to why we were standing before her. Either it was our eager but earnest faces, foreign accents or the pounamu (jade) on my chest that gave it away, but she knew precisely which island we came from and why we were there.

4

Figure 54 First passage from my exhibition booklet for MVA Graduating Exhibition, featuring the story *Welcomed Home (Me and Those Who Came Before)*. Written and illustrated by myself, Te Ra Awatea Kemp. Auckland, 2025.

She embraced us with hongi (sharing of breath) each. Letting us know she had called out, reenacting a pōwhiri (welcoming ceremony) from the day before for her current tour group. She explained that she had welcomed a group of Māori students onto the marae and guided them to the altar. At this point, we introduced ourselves and explained our reason for visiting the site. Tāra, the guide, then gave us her first gift, she told us:

> "Welcome home."

Uncontrollably, the tension we didn't know we had in our chests left our bodies in big, bawling tears. We were overcome with relief, aroha (love) and some other unnameable but primal feeling. It wasn't just the three of us in that space at that moment. I felt surrounded by so many people I did not know were with me, unseeable but familiar. I felt that my ancestors were standing with me on that hallowed ground, all feeling the same, collectively welcomed back after the longest generational voyage.

It was hard to pull ourselves together, making it all the more challenging with Tāra's happy tears. She then gave us her second gift and invited us to be welcomed onto the marae ourselves. We couldn't believe we were allowed; we could only nod and sob, "Yes."

She led us to a tiare bush and handed us a flower each. Then, barefoot, we stepped onto the blackened volcanic rock of the Marae Taputapuātea. Tāra called out her karanga again, leading us in a procession to the altar on the far side of the marae. I was vaguely aware of the watchful eyes of the tourists. Still, at that moment, we weren't a novelty performance for them; we were connecting to something so much deeper than that, and it was just for us. As we proceeded, I was keenly aware of my senses, the reo I was hearing, the hot tears I was trying to slow down, and sniffles that I could not stop. All the while, over the ocean's distant roar and foreign bird song,

> "Haere mai, haere mai, haere mai..."

5

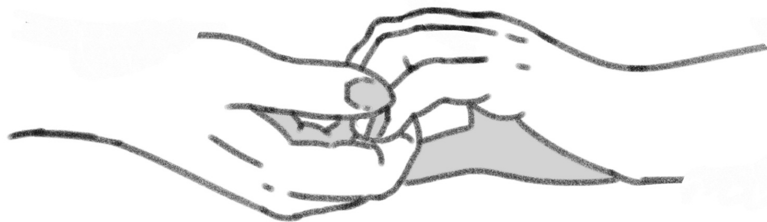
Figure 55 Second passage from my exhibition booklet for MVA Graduating Exhibition, featuring the story *Welcomed Home (Me and Those Who Came Before)*. Written and illustrated by myself, Te Ra Awatea Kemp. Auckland, 2025.

My body wasn't my own as we approached the altar. Just behind it stood large basalt stones, inexplicably moved so long ago by ancient tūpuna, leaning against those were carvings of the gods whose domain we were standing in. The marae of the god of war and peace, 'Oro, son of Ta'aroa or in Māori: Tangaroa (God of the Sea).

Tāra encouraged us to follow our gut, placing our offerings wherever it felt right on the altar. She then had us put our hands on the large stone wall, connecting us to the power of the marae and so on to the island itself. I became a point of connection between stone and stone, my hands and feet burning as they touched the sun-baked rock. I pushed through the pain, completely embracing the sensation, in awe of the wairua (spirit) I felt surrounding me. And then, the moment came to an end. We were guided back to where we started, feet on cool grass. We thanked Tāra profusely, saying goodbye through hongi. She slipped back to her tour group, and that was that.

Alone to collect our thoughts, we wandered again to the beach, stepping into the shallows, allowing the moana (ocean) to cleanse us of the tapu (sacredness). I felt all those people surrounding me before had left; it was just us two again. But it wasn't sad or profound; it felt like we were home, atop whenua (land) on which we hadn't been born. The strangest, most comforting feeling.

Only later did we learn from a local that the day we visited the marae was when, in Tahitian belief, Te Pō (the realm of spirits) was closest to the living world. I wonder if that is why everything aligned the way it did. Or why I felt so crowded by my whanaunga (relatives), unfamiliar to me yet still known deeper and more intimately than by name, recognised by whakapapa (genealogy), spirit and story.



6

Figure 56 Third passage from my exhibition booklet for MVA Graduating Exhibition, featuring the story *Welcomed Home (Me and Those Who Came Before)*. Written and illustrated by myself, Te Ra Awatea Kemp. Auckland, 2025.

I did not know when I set off on the research trip to Raʻiātea that the souvenir I would bring home to Aotearoa would be my own pūrākau. Knowing that everyone will be someone's tūpuna in time is one concept; it is another to consider what that requires of you, what stories of your own you will want to tell others. Until that journey to French Polynesia, I felt that I did not yet have any personal stories with pedagogical worth. I had anticipated they would make themselves known to me when I was older and possessed more hindsight.

What stands out to me now is how Indigenous spiritual knowledge, not to be confused with religious knowledge, has been relegated by colonialism to something misunderstood at best and severed from its origins at worst. To be Indigenous and to be connected to spiritual knowing has been to face ridicule in Western spaces and to invalidate research in academia. Yet to be in tune with spiritual knowing and a researcher is to pursue a wider understanding of why we do what we do or make what we make. To quote Dr Manulani Aluli-Meyer: "[knowledge as spirit] merely points you to a frequency that if heard will synergise with your courage when you write without fear after asking questions that search for a deeper meaning to an act, an idea, a moment."[64] After my experience at Raʻiātea, I feel it is vital to record the moment I most felt that synergy. By marking it as real within a taonga, I can provide conceptual bearings for descendants to follow in understanding how it feels to be on the correct path of learning and to know when it is not just intuition but enduring, "spirit driven" knowledge making itself known to you.[65]

A new series of quilts would need to be sewn, which sought to embody the pūrākau of my experiences. Following the previously established methodological steps for my quilts, these new works came pre-configured with a set stitch, colour, and texture-based language for which to read them. The main differences from the earlier quilts are the figurative imagery inspired by Polynesia and the patterned textiles sourced from locals on the islands. In the final Master's exhibition, I plan to install a story quilt of this experience (the first of the research trip series) as my way to explore how the method of story quilting can also secure contemporary pūrākau (fig. 57). By combining the contemporary stories with historic taonga-empowered narratives, the exhibition installation can collapse "genealogically ordered time," joining all of the quilts together as mnemonic embodiments coexisting in a familial forest of pūrākau.[66]

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[64] Manulani Aluli-Meyer, "Indigenous and Authentic: Hawaiian Epistemology and the Triangulation of Meaning," in *Handbook of Critical and Indigenous Methodologies*, ed. Norman K. Denzin, Yvonna S. Lincoln, and Linda Tuhiwai Smith (Los Angeles: Sage, 2008), 219, https://doi.org/10.4135/9781483385686.n11.
[65] Aluli-Meyer, "Indigenous and Authentic," 218.
[66] Tapsell, *The Art of Taonga*, 10.

Figure 57 Digital illustration of the pattern for the new quilt *Welcomed Home (Me and Those Who Came Before)*. Designed in 2025.

Conclusion: Weights to Share

Providing future generations with the knowledge they may need for cultural reconnection and generational prosperity is work that was never meant to be undertaken alone. From the beginning of my postgraduate journey, even if I pursued a research avenue individually, I was always quickly joined by my family, friends, and ancestors in my endeavours (company that I am happy to have). The weight of literal, cultural, and spiritual survival knowledge is far too heavy for one person to carry alone, as is the great weight of weaving a monumental fishing net or the responsibility of quilting one's family history. By sharing these loads, they are halved, no longer impossible individual feats but opportunities to bring people closer, strengthening connecting ties and turning sometimes burdened responsibility into creative rejoicing.

Collaboration made my practice-based research possible, so it is only right that it informs how the fruits of my art practice are installed in the final exhibition. Together with Jeorja Duffy, we have been given the opportunity to turn a whole gallery space into a living network of relationships and stories. Through installing artworks from our separate art practices and our collaborative work, *Taura Here*, we will create an exhibition installation built with our Whanaungatanga Kaupapa (fig. 58). This collection of principles and ideas has informed our collaborative practice and is the foundational thinking behind our mahi tahi.

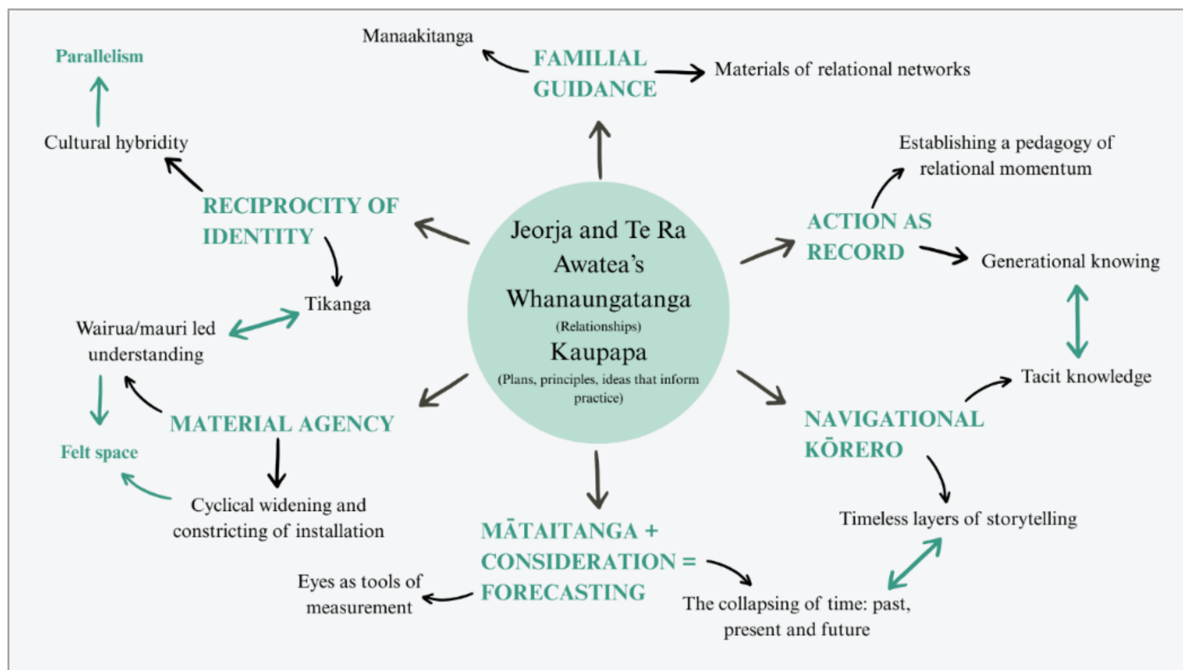

Figure 58 Jeorja and Te Ra Awatea's Whanaungatanga Kaupapa diagram. Created by Te Ra Awatea Kemp, Auckland, 2025.

Reviewing this diagram has allowed me to recognise that our collaborative practice has permeated all aspects of how we relate to one another as artists and how we have made our artworks (together and separately) after our first work, *Whiriwhiri*. All pillars of this kaupapa have been operating long before we named them, making themselves known in our separate practices, as well. However, only through further reflection could we name and understand the role each plays in how we create, consider, decide, and install. Regarding our final installation of our postgraduate haerenga, these six foundational concepts will encourage us to create an installation that reflects us as sculptors and conceptual creatives, our values, and our families, communities, and cultures.

Taura Here, the actualisation of this kaupapa, will wind through the gallery, connecting all ‘islands’ of work and ‘forests’ of stories like a replenishing and steady river, affirming these ideas on the shores it laps. Due to the restful nature of our collaborative work and its foundational concepts being second nature, we do not see the end of our degree and time together studying as the end of our collaborative art practice. For as long as we are friends, our net will grow. And for as long as our conversations flit, meander, and land, so will endless possibilities for future artworks. The excitement of what’s to come in the future is leading our present and securing our past in braids and cords.

For me to feel that I have answered my research question, I must abandon my Pākehā comprehension of what a story is and embrace my Māori understandings of what pūrākau can be, when utilised as a learning tool. The artworks created during this practice-based research have become personal taonga, gaining their own taonga-framed stories, which can still be shared traditionally from storyteller to receiver. Besides that ability, these artworks consist of material readings, labour-informed understanding, and colour ways and scales, all characteristics a viewer can read and engage with individually. The fruition of our stories being passed on is not measured by the number of details conveyed in these works but by what someone, like a descendant, may learn from experiencing them as a whole and how that makes them feel as the receiver of the pūrākau. Perhaps my quilts, hīnaki, and our net will support viewers and, one day, descendants in their courage to tell and add their parts to the stories for themselves.

Glossary: Te Reo Māori to English

Definitions are adapted from Moorfield, *Te Aka*, Hiroa and Buck, *The Maori Craft of Netting*, and Archibald et al., *Decolonizing Research*.[67]

akeake. *Dodonaea viscosa*, a small tree with long, sometimes reddish leaves. Flowers greenish to reddish. Akeake wood is black, variegated with streaks of white and is very hard. It was used for making patu (clubs).

Aotearoa. North Island—now used as the Māori name for New Zealand

aroha. loving, affectionate, caring, compassionate, kindly, sympathetic, benevolent

awa. river, stream, creek, canal, gully, gorge, groove, furrow

haerenga. journey, trip, parting

hapū. kinship group, clan, tribe, subtribe

harakeke. New Zealand flax, *Phormium tenax*. An important native plant with long, stiff, upright leaves and dull red flowers. Found on lowland swamps throughout **Aotearoa**/New Zealand. It has straight, upright seed pods.

Hawaiki. ancient homeland—the places from which Māori migrated to **Aotearoa**/New Zealand.

here poito tāruke. clove hitch knot

hikoi. to step, stride, march, walk

hīnaki. eel trap, wicker eel basket, wire eel pot

hongi. to press noses in greeting

iwi. extended kinship group, tribe, nation, people, nationality, race—often refers to a large group of people descended from a common ancestor and associated with a distinct territory.

kai. food, meal

kaiako. teacher, instructor

kaiārahi. guide, escort, counsellor, conductor, escort, leader, mentor, pilot, usher

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[67] John Cornelius Moorfield, *Te Aka: Māori-English, English-Māori Dictionary and Index* (Auckland: Pearson Longman, 2009); Hiroa and Buck, *The Maori Craft of Netting;* Jo-Ann Archibald Q'um Q'um Xiiem et al., eds., *Decolonizing Research: Indigenous Storywork as Methodology* (London: Bloomsbury Academic & Professional, 2019), ProQuest Ebook Central.

kairaranga. weaving teacher, a person who is a weaver of family connections

kaitiaki. trustee, minder, guard, custodian, guardian, caregiver, keeper, steward

kākahu. garment, clothes, cloak, apparel, clothing, costume

kānuka. white tea-tree, *Kunzea ericoides.* Leaves similar to **mānuka** but soft to touch. Taller than **mānuka**. Has small white flowers. Leaves are soft, unlike **mānuka** leaves, which are prickly.

kapa haka. concert party, haka group, Māori cultural group, Māori performing group

karanga. formal call, ceremonial call, welcome call, call—a ceremonial call of welcome to visitors onto a marae, or equivalent venue, at the start of a pōwhiri.

kareao. supplejack, *Ripogonum scandens.* A high-climbing, woody native plant with tough pliant stems used in the construction of **hīnaki**. Longish leaves are opposite, toothless, with obvious lengthwise parallel veins and round, bright red fruit. Stem is usually finger-thick, smooth and almost black.

kārure. two strand cord or rope

kaumātua. adult, elder, elderly man, elderly woman, old man—a person of status within the whānau.

kaupapa Māori. Māori approach, Māori topic, Māori customary practice, Māori institution, Māori agenda, Māori principles, Māori ideology—a philosophical doctrine, incorporating the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values of Māori society.

kōrero. speech, narrative, story, news, account, discussion, conversation, discourse, statement, information

kōrero ingoa. naming story

Koro. elderly man, grandfather, grandad, grandpa—term of address to an older man.

korowai. cloak—in modern Māori this is sometimes used as a general term for cloaks made of muka (New Zealand flax fibre).

kōwhaiwhai. painted scroll ornamentation—commonly used on meeting house rafters

kuaka. bar-tailed godwit, *Limosa lapponica.* A brown-and-white migratory wading bird with a long, slightly upturned, black bill and a pink base, which breeds in the Northern hemisphere and summers in the Southern hemisphere.

Kuia. elderly woman, grandmother, female elder—term of address to an older woman.

mahi tahi. working together, collaboration, cooperation, teamwork

mamae. ache, pain, injury, wound

mana. prestige, authority, control, power, influence, status, spiritual power, charisma—mana is a supernatural force in a person, place or object. Mana goes hand in hand with **tapu**, one affecting the other.

manuka. tea-tree, *Leptospermum scoparium*. A common native scrub bush with aromatic, prickly leaves and many small, white, pink, or red flowers.

marae. courtyard—the open area in front of the wharenui (meeting house), where formal greetings and discussions take place. Often also used to encompass the complex of buildings around the marae.

mātaitanga. test, examination, inspection, investigation

mātauranga Māori. Māori knowledge—the body of knowledge originating from Māori ancestors, including the Māori world view and perspectives, Māori creativity, and cultural practices.

mihimihi. speech of greeting, tribute

moana. sea, ocean, large lake

mokopuna. grandchildren, grandchild—child or grandchild of a son, daughter, nephew, niece, or other relative.

niho taniwha. saw-edged pattern used in **tukutuku** panels and in the **tāniko** weaving on the hems of cloaks.

noa. to be free from the extensions of **tapu**, ordinary, unrestricted, void

pā. fortified village, fort, stockade, screen, blockade, city (especially a fortified one)

Papatūānuku. Earth, Earth mother and wife of **Ranginui**—all living things originate from them.

pari. bodice, bra, brassiere.

pātai. to ask, question, enquire, cross-examine, provoke, challenge

pounamu. greenstone, nephrite, jade

pōwhiri. invitation, rituals of encounter, welcome ceremony on a **marae**, welcome

pū. core

pūrākau. myth, ancient legend, story

rākau. tree

Ranginui. sky, Sky Father, and husband of **Papatūānuku**—all living things originate from them.

raranga. to weave, plait objects such as mats and baskets

reo. language, dialect, tongue, speech

tā moko. traditional tattooing—Māori tattoo designs on the face or body applied under traditional protocols.

Tāmaki Makaurau. Auckland

tamariki. children—normally used only in the plural

Tangaroa. god of the sea and fish, he was one of the offspring of **Ranginui** and **Papatūānuku** and fled to the sea when his parents were separated. Sometimes known as Tangaroa-whaiariki.

tangata whenua. local people, hosts, Indigenous people—people born of the whenua

tāniko. to finger weave, embroider

taonga. treasure, anything prized—applied to anything considered to be of value, including socially or culturally valuable objects, resources, phenomena, ideas, and techniques.

taonga tuku iho. heirloom, something handed down, cultural property, heritage

tapu. sacred, prohibited, restricted, set apart, forbidden, under spiritual protection

tātua. belt

tauiwi. foreigner, European, non-Māori, colonist

taura here. binding ropes, urban kinship group, domestic migrants, kinship link

tautoko. to support, prop up, verify, advocate, accept (an invitation), agree

te ao Māori. the Māori world, way of life

Te Moananui-a-Kiwa. Pacific Ocean

Te Pō. realm of the spirits

Te Tiriti o Waitangi. the Treaty of Waitangi

tikanga. correct procedure, custom, habit, lore, method, manner, rule, way, code, meaning, plan, practice, convention, protocol—the customary system of values and practices that have developed over time and are deeply embedded in the social context.

tīpare. band worn around the head, headband

toi. art, knowledge

toi raranga. art of weaving

toi whakairo. art of carving

toitū te Tiriti. honour the Treaty

tukutuku. ornamental lattice-work—used particularly between carvings around the walls of meeting houses. Tukutuku panels consist of vertical stakes (traditionally made of kākaho, toetoe stalks), horizontal rods (traditionally made of stalks of bracken-fern or thin strips of tōtara wood), and flexible material of flax, kiekie and pīngao, which form the pattern. Each of the traditional patterns has a name.

tuna. eel of various species, including the longfin eel (*Anguilla dieffenbachii*) and shortfin eel (*Anguilla australis*)

tupuna. ancestor, grandparent. Western dialect variation of tipuna.

tūpuna. ancestors, grandparents. Western dialect variation of tīpuna.

tūpuna wahine. female ancestors, grandmothers, great grandmothers

wairua. spirit, soul—spirit of a person which exists beyond death. It is the non-physical spirit, distinct from the body and the mauri (lifeforce).

whakairo. carving

whakapapa. genealogy, genealogical table, lineage, descent

whakawhiti kōrero. open conversation

whānau. extended family, family group, a familiar term of address to a number of people—the primary economic unit of traditional Māori society.

whanaunga. relative, relation, kin, blood relation

whanaungatanga. relationship, kinship, sense of family connection

whāngai. to feed, nourish, bring up, foster, adopt, raise, nurture, rear

whatu. to weave (objects such as garments and baskets), knit

whenua. land

whiriwhiri. to discuss, decide, consider, negotiate, or to weave, plait

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Appendix:
EXHIBITION DOCUMENTATION

Master of Visual Arts Graduating Exhibition
Te Wai Ngutu Kākā Gallery Three

Mnemonic Sculptures: Crafting Pūrākau with the Tools My Tūpuna Gave Me

View of Te Ra Awatea Kemp and Jeorja Duffy's MVA exhibition installation from the entrance of Gallery Three. 2025. Photography by Paul Chapman.

Room sheet/Titles, p1

Te Ra Awatea Kemp
Mnemonic Sculptures: Crafting Pūrākau with the Tools My Tūpuna Gave Me

<u>Story Quilts</u>

What She Gave, 2024, 610 x 830mm

Kaitiaki, 2024, 630 x 930mm

*Welcomed Home, 2*025, 610 x 880mm

Materials: textiles gifted to me by my mother, local-made textiles from Tahiti, upholstery backing, embroidery thread, cotton thread, kanuka.

Story Books, 2025,
Two pūrākau, Stack of 10 storybooks (for reading alongside the quilts)

<u>Hīnaki</u>

What You Pull Up, 2024,
Kānuka, cane, recycled wire, rope and seagrass cord, 600 x 2000mm

Whaitake, 2024
Kānuka, chicken wire, recycled wire, wool and acrylic yarn gifted from family members, 400 x 1700mm

Room sheet/Titles, p2

Jeorja Duffy & Te Ra Awatea Kemp

Taura Here
2024-ongoing
Collaborative durational work

Taura Here, which translates to 'the ties that bind people together,' is a collaborative artwork that has become a record of the overarching narrative of our growing friendship as artist collaborators. Each taura, rope strand, is made from donated lived-in fabrics from important people in our lives—mostly our families and friends, to form a clove hitch kupenga.

As we weave, our conversations flow through the making process. In doing so, we have developed a method of recording through weaving— embedding our stories in the very fibres of the net, while also intuitively carrying out pre-established net-making tikanga. The net is an ongoing durational work that will continue as long as we continue to collaborate, kōrero, and support one another. The current installation is an expression of the collaborative haerenga we have undertaken over the past ten months and is the first iteration toward the future of our whanaungatanga kaupapa.

Material List:

Sister's bed sheets
Brother's bed sheets
Mum's shirts
Mum's pants
Supervisor's sewing project
Partner's jeans
Friend's artworks
My socks
Friend's wedding bunting
Coworker's off-cuts
My bachelor's quilt leftovers
Mother's fabric collection
Friend's coworker's patchwork collection
My duvet cover
Mum's curtains
My old work project
My pyjama pants
My t-shirt
Mum's jeans
Mum's dress
Friend's gift ribbons
My Crochet chain
My baby blanket

Benches, 2025
Reclaimed wood, custom cushions (bamboo fibre batting and hand-dyed textiles)

View of Te Ra Awatea Kemp and Jeorja Duffy's MVA exhibition installation from the back corner of Gallery Three. 2025. Photography by Paul Chapman.

At the culmination of our Master of Visual Arts degree, nine graduating artists from the MVA cohort were brought together to exhibit at Te Wai Ngutu Kākā Gallery, from 1–5 July, 2025. Jeorja Duffy and I were allocated Gallery Three to install our individual practices and our ongoing collaborative work, *Taura Here.*

Before starting install, we had discussed with our supervisors the idea of introducing an exhibition (furniture) element that would allow a viewer to sit with the artwork. I required a structure, that would encourage people to spend time looking at my story quilts to divulge their layers of pūrākau and to offer a comfortable space to read their accompanying story books. Jeorja similarly needed a component that would allow viewers to sit with her artwork and interact with its tactile, hand-held nature. In the lead up to the installation period, Jeorja and I collaborated again to design and build two custom benches with small 'bump-out' tables attached, which would offer supports for our respective requirements. Jeorja designed these benches, and I provided the reclaimed wood and tools to build them. Together, we built the benches, and as a final touch, we sewed long flat squabs for each seat. These benches were elements of the exhibition but also identical fixes to our separate installation challenges: another example of synchronicity of our collaboration.

When it came to installing our artworks in the gallery, we were advised by supervisors to consider the flow of the room, specifically with our collaborative net, *Taura Here* (a fabric net of significant scale and length) and my two hīnaki, making sure they were positioned in such

a way that they 'catch' and then move on those who enter the space. Our starting point was that we would each utilise the opposing long walls to install our separate artworks, and that the middle space of the room was designated for our collaborative work and benches. However, as we worked together and spent time with the works and the space over the three install days, we developed a more intuitive and natural-feeling way of installing. There were moments during this time when we would both sleep on certain installation decisions and come back the next day to share with each other our thoughts, to which either of us would reply with the same feelings: totally in sync.

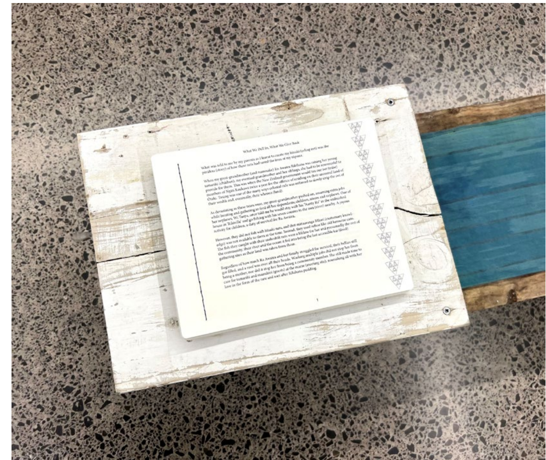
We ultimately decided to split the room diagonally, each positioned on the opposite-facing long walls, as well as a parallel corner and adjoining short wall. This decision allowed us to give our separate practices their breathing space. My three story quilts were positioned off-centre on the walls to further create a sense of flow through the space, with both benches placed in front of them to provide that comfortable area to rest on for observation. Nearby each story quilt, I positioned a hīnaki, corresponding to the two different pūrākau in the quilts, angled in such a way that they 'caught' viewers who took the time to sit with them on the benches.

For *Taura Here*, our supervisors had advised us to install her once we had figured out where the rest of our works would be placed, making sure to give each work its due space equally alongside such a large-scale artwork. Working with the existent gallery ceiling struts as a suspension framework, we installed sections of the net, taking turns on the manual scissor lift to suspend her from the struts. At the same time, the other person remained on the ground, measuring by eye and communicating what tensions, hang and the amount of suspended net felt right. Jeorja and I both agreed that we wanted to emphasise the size of the artwork, while also revealing its weight through gravity and highlighting the different colour sections through tension.

While installing our separate artworks and collaborative piece, we made these placement decisions through the guidance of our Whanaungatanga Kaupapa, (which Jeorja and I had developed prior to the exhibition over the 10 months of working collaboratively.) Between our six installation principles of Familial Guidance, Navigational Kōrero, Reciprocity of Identity, understanding of Material Agency, utilising Action as Record and our Mātaitanga + Consideration = Forecasting equation, we worked through each section of the gallery together until the installation felt right and fitted with our kaupapa.

The result of adhering to these shared guidelines was that by the time our supervisors came to check in with us on the last install day, their feedback was that the installation felt resolved, balanced, and every work was where it should be. Feedback we received from fellow artists and visiting curators on the opening night was that our space seemed 'like its very own exhibition,' alongside the graduating show. We had set out to create an installation in Gallery Three that felt like an environment based off our Whanaungatanga Kaupapa, with islands of work and forests of stories that were connected by our river of a net, and that is exactly what I feel we created.

View of my Story Quilt, *Welcomed Home,* my Hīnaki, *What You Pull Up,* Jeorja Duffy's *One Garment, One Circle (Crochet circle series)* and our bench. 2025. Photography by Paul Chapman.

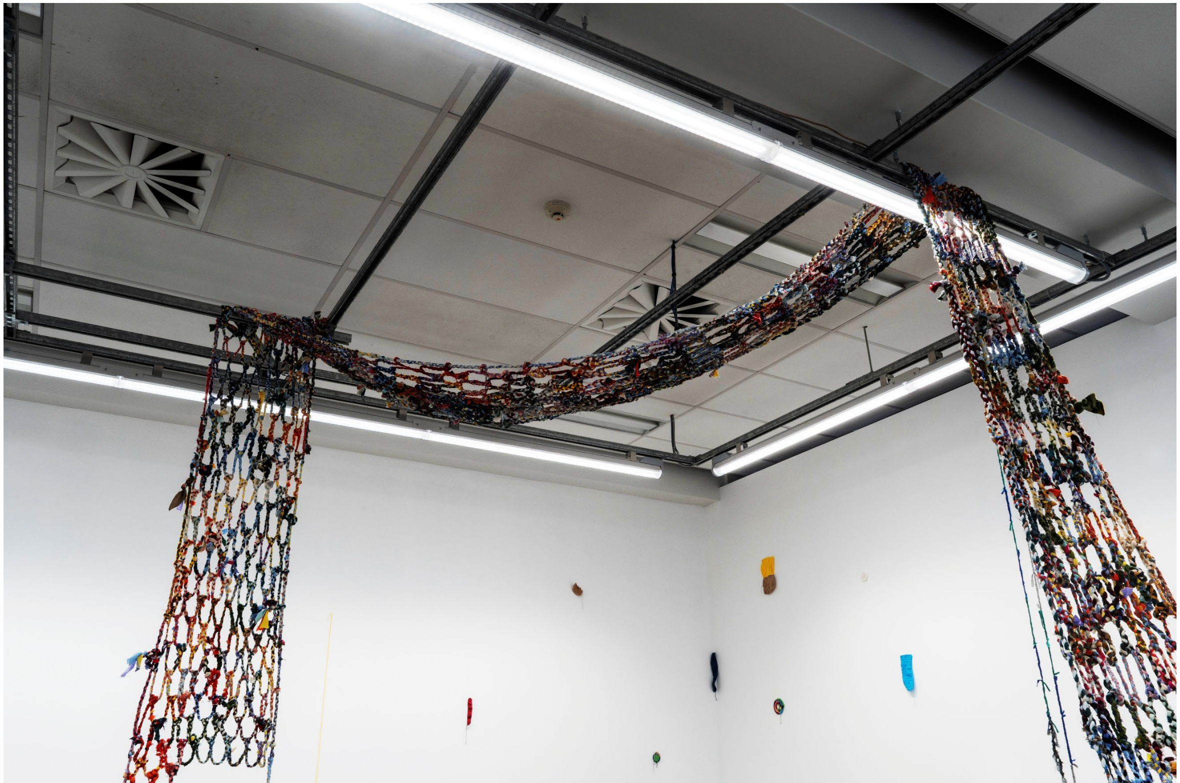


Close-up of my hand-stitched, risograph-printed Story Book. 2025. Photography by Mon Redmond.

View of my two Story Quilts, *What She Gave* and *Kaitiaki,* with my Hīnaki, *Whaitake* and the Story Books stacked upon a bench. 2025. Photography by Paul Chapman.

Close-up of my Story Quilt, *Welcomed Home*. 2025. Photography by Paul Chapman.

Close-up of *Taura Here*, including Jeorja Duffy's works *Intensities of her (Three Sisters: Crochet chain, crochet column, sewn patchwork)* and *Pattern Studies (Durational Crochet).* 2025. Photography by Paul Chapman.



Close-up of *Taura Here*, including Jeorja Duffy's works *Pattern Studies (Durational Crochet)* on wall. 2025. Photography by Paul Chapman.

Taura Here, collaborative work by Te Ra Awatea Kemp and Jeorja Duffy. 2025. Photography by Paul Chapman.

Installation view from the corner opposite Gallery Three entrance. 2025. Photography by Mon Redmond.

Close-up of *Taura Here.* 2025. Photography by Paul Chapman.