



Beyond the world of sense perception:

Manifesting the life force of materials through principles that guide actions

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2020

Exegesis in support of practice-based Thesis
Master of Visual Arts
Auckland University of Technology, 2019

Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge, 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 accepted for the award of another degree or diploma of a university or institution of higher learning.

Signed

10th May 2019

Acknowledgements

A huge thanks to all of those who have supported this research journey. A special thanks to my family whose consistent support and encouragement provided a foundation of practical support for the daily challenges and the ability to laugh when things got tough. To the many friends, colleagues, weaving teachers and mentor who each contributed unique gifts making my life, and art, that much more vibrant. To the staff at AUT who have supported this research and in particular Monique Jansen and Monique Redmond whose ever-present feedback kept this creative practice flowing. Lastly, an acknowledgement to the materials that have provided insights and knowledge throughout this research project; every feather, fibre and stone has been a gift.

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ABSTRACT

The central enquiry of this thesis is to examine the role that 'principles that guide actions' could play in manifesting life force of materials. This object-based installation project works principally with harakeke (NZ flax), stone and water, exploring the concept of a life force of materials, with specific reference to 'Spiritual Materialism', a term coined by Klaus Ottman. A process-based practice such as this, places primacy on materials, actions and events through establishing durational processes that drive the making. A diffractive methodological approach frames the project, discussing agential realism theories in relation to a Māori view of mauri (life principle) in order to explore the life of materials beyond the world of sense perception, thus recasting the viewer's relationship to the material world.

1 INTRODUCTION



Figure 1. *Te Noho Kotahitanga Marae* (2011), Unitec, Tāmaki Makaurau/Auckland. Photo credit: Michelle Mayn.

Beyond the world of sense perception: Manifesting the life force of materials through principles that guide actions...

My art practice and research interest developed out of a community class in Māori weaving. A deeper understanding of these traditional practices and associated tikanga¹ developed during a year of full-time study on Te Whare Pora² at Unitec (Tāmaki Makaurau/Auckland) in 2011. Different techniques for making kete, whariki, piupiu, tukutuku, tāniko and whatu were studied, incorporating natural fibres such as harakeke, kiekie and pīngao. This learning involved time spent gathering, harvesting and preparing materials and developing an intimate relationship with the natural environment. Land, plant, people and process are understood as inseparable and entwined in responsibilities to the other.

This idea of interdependence between all living things is encompassed within the concept of kōtahitanga.³ The deep respect when working with the harakeke plant and material acknowledges the

¹ Ella Henry, "Te Wairua Auaha: Emancipatory Māori Entrepreneurship in Screen Production (PhD thesis, Auckland University of Technology, 2012), <http://hdl.handle.net/10292/4085>, 24. Tikanga in the words of Ella Henry, comes from the word tika meaning true or correct, or "doing the right thing". Tikanga are viewed as the 'ethics' in the philosophical sense, which inform traditional Māori ontology and underpin Māori epistemology. Tikanga encompasses the concepts of whanaungatanga, kōtahitanga, wairuatanga and kaitiakitanga - among others.

Te Ahukaramū Charles Royal, ed., *The Woven Universe: Selected Writings of Rev. Māori Marsden* (Otaki: Estate of Rev. Māori Marsden, 2003), 66. Reverend Māori Marsden believes kaupapa and tikanga are juxtaposed and interconnected in Māori thinking. In considering a course of action the kaupapa (ground rules) and principles that would guide them would be considered. In this context Marsden notes the word "kaupapa is derived from the words, kau and papa, where 'kau' means to appear for the first time, to come into view, to disclose; 'papa' means ground or foundation. Hence kaupapa means ground rules, first principles, general principles." Kaupapa would be discussed first, alternative options considered and a course of action (tikanga) adopted.

Tikanga Māori or Māori custom are "customs and traditions handed down through many generations and accepted as a reliable and appropriate ways of achieving and fulfilling certain objectives and goals".

² Erenora Puketapu-Hetet, *Māori Weaving*, (Lower Hutt: Hetet Press, 2016), 34-35. Te Whare Pora (The House of Weaving) is not only a place where physical skills are acquired, but a 'state of being' that raises the level of consciousness of the weaver so that mind, body and spirit are in tune with each other. The student is then "ready to receive and retain knowledge" and the weaver "seeks deeper knowledge and a greater depth of understanding in all matters relating to weaving, including the spiritual concepts".

³ Henry, 24.

role the weaver takes as guardian of the natural world and is an expression of the concept of kaitiakitanga⁴.

Weaving is considered as having inherent mauri or life force.⁵ Reverend Māori Marsden defines the concept of mauri⁶ as "the energy within creation which impels the cosmic process onwards". Wairuatanga⁷ expresses this intimate relationship with the spiritual dimension, and it is this underpinning spiritual philosophy within Māori weaving that has most strongly influenced my art practice.



Figure 2. Maureen Lander, *Mataaho/Sightlines* (1993), installation, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington. Material: korari (flax flowering stems), flax leaves, muka, copper wire. © Maureen Lander, Courtesy Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa.

Figure 3. Maureen Lander, *Kīt-Set Whanaungatanga*, (2017), installation, The Dowse Art Museum, Lower Hutt. Material: harakeke, teri dyes. © Maureen Lander, Courtesy The Dowse Art Museum. Photo credit: Mark Tantrum.

Figure 4. Toi Te Maihi Rito, *Kelp Work* (2016), Village Arts Gallery, Kohukohu. Material: kelp.

Deep bodies of knowledge exist within weaving, including material processes and technical skill - with social and cultural meanings associated with each. The depth of knowledge becomes apparent through conversations and building of community through relationships expressed as

⁴ The concept of guardianship expressed within the concept of kaitiakitanga portrays a sense of care and responsibility to the natural world. As a weaver "when we take from Tāne Mahuta, we have a responsibility to this life-force." (Puketapu-Hetet, 15)

"Kaitiakitanga was the word used by Māori to define conservation customs and traditions, including its purpose and means, through rāhui (temporary ban)." (Royal, 71)

Tiaki, meaning to guard, can also mean "to keep, to preserve, to conserve, to foster, to protect, to shelter, to keep watch over". Kai as a prefix conveys the "agent of the act". Therefore kaitiaki is a guardian, keeper, preserver, etc. The suffix tanga, as a suffix, transforms the word to mean guardianship, preservation, conservation, etc. (Royal, 67)

Kaitiakitanga is frequently translated as stewardship. Marsden considers this incorrect as stewardship often denotes "the responsibility of looking after property". (Collins Dictionary) This holds a connotation of ownership over the earth's resources, while Māori view differs in that "the resources of the earth did not belong to man but rather, man belonged to the earth". (Royal, 67)

⁵ Puketapu-Hetet, 11.

⁶ Marsden defines mauri as inherent within all creation. It is the life force which "generates, regenerates and upholds creation", the "bonding element that holds the fabric of the universe together". The word hau (breath) can be used in some situations for mauri. "Hau-ora - 'the breath of life' is the agent or source by and from which mauri (life-principle) is mediated to objects both animate and inanimate. Mauri-ora and hau-ora as applied to animate objects are synonymous. Mauri without the qualifying adjective 'ora' (life) is applied to inanimate objects; whilst hau is applied only to animate life". (Royal, 44)

⁷ Wairua refers to spirit or soul. It is the non-physical spirit, distinct from the body and the mauri. Wairuatanga translates as spirituality. (Te Aka Online Māori Dictionary 2003-2019) Within his essay, 'The Natural World and Natural Resources', Marsden describes wairua or hau as the "source of existent being and life", while mauri is "the elemental essence imparted by wairua". (Royal, 47)

whanaungatanga⁸. As a Pakeha woman with an art practice that looks to traditional methods and knowledge, I hope that this research project will lead to a deeper understanding of Te Ao Māori⁹ and demonstrate a deep respect for this taonga. My practice would not exist without those who have generously shared their knowledge and friendship; in particular the mentee relationship with Dr Maureen Lander which began in 2012. As my mentor, Maureen has encouraged the merging of traditional weaving and installation in my art practice. Her own practice, which stems from an in-depth knowledge of fibres and processes used in Māori weaving¹⁰, merges traditional methods, sculpture and multimedia installation.

From 2015, my participation in wananga¹¹ at Pa Te Aroha Marae in Whirinaki (South Hokianga) and Piritahi Marae (Waiheke Island) has built relationships with weavers. Weaving is as much concerned with the body of knowledge contained within the processes of making as it is about the technique or skill required to make something. These groups reflect a community of diverse knowledge holders¹² who freely share their learning and skills to keep the traditional knowledge contained within the practice of weaving alive. These relationships, ongoing learning and sharing of knowledge informs my art practice.



Figure 5. *Pa Te Aroha Marae* (2016), photograph: Maureen Lander, Jane Randerson and Jan Barratt studying the inside of a kahu kuta made by Heather Randerson, Pa te Aroha Marae, Whirinaki. Photo credit: Michelle Mayn.

⁸ Whanaungatanga can be defined as “relationships, kinship and a sense of family connections - a relationship through shared experiences and working together which provides people with a sense of belonging.” It serves to strengthen each member of group and can also extend to other friendships or reciprocal relationships. (Te Aka Online Māori Dictionary, 2003-2019)

⁹ For the scope of this research project Te Ao Māori, Māori worldview, is considered in regards to the material world. One description given by Marsden includes a view whereby Māori conceive of a universal system in which the “material proceeds from the spiritual, and the spiritual interpenetrates the material physical world...”. (Royal, 20) The “universe is dynamic and the earth is not simply Papa (rock foundation) but Papa-tua-nuku (rock foundation beyond expanse, the infinite), the universe itself is a process or event within the cosmic process by which Io orders creation”. (Royal, 22)

¹⁰ Developed through Lander’s art practice, research projects and time as a Senior Lecturer in Māori Material Culture at Auckland University.

¹¹ Wananga has multiple translations (see glossary). In this context it refers to meeting to learn and discuss traditional skills associated with all aspects of weaving.

¹² At Piritahi Marae conservation staff working with taonga Māori from Auckland Museum join the wananga. By attending these wananga staff are learning to understand better the taonga that they work with as part of the ‘Te Awa’ initiative. This project aims to reorganise and improve the care of over 10,000 taonga Māori held in the collection. Enriched database records, correcting and standardising terminology, along with care and housing of items, will allow greater access and visibility to weavers and others.

During studio classes I attended at the Art Students League of New York (United States) in 2016 and 2017, I continued to work with readily found materials as a means of developing a relationship with a new environment.¹³ This led me to question more deeply the idea of mauri or life force present in other materials and to consider what the tikanga could be for my practice in an urban environment. From this questioning a set of 'principles that guide actions' developed that included daily karakia¹⁴; separating work practice from food and drink; engaging in deep contemplation of the materials I was using, and a disciplined focus on the task-at-hand.



Figure 6. Michelle Mayn, *A Study in Mink* (2016), object-based installation, Phyllis Harriman Mason Gallery, New York. Material: mink, harakeke, copper wire, diamanté, glass beads, driftwood. Detail on left.

The combination of self-determining principles that guide actions and a view of material as having life force underpins the ethos and all processes within this research project. A key question for the practice is, 'what role do underpinning actions that integrate guiding principles play in manifesting the life force of materials? How might these actions be evident in the completed work?'

While defining this area of research, I came across the term 'Spiritual Materiality' coined by art critic and independent curator Klaus Ottman. The term considers art where the role of material acts as a "means of transcendence", with the ability to recast our role and responsibilities as humans within the 'material world'. Using artist Wolfgang Laib as an example, Ottman suggests this may include a new

¹³ Studying mixed media under US-based artists Bruce Dorfman, Mariano Del Rosario and Silya Kiese.

¹⁴ Karakia can mean a prayer, chant, blessing or incantation. (Te Aka Online Māori Dictionary, 2003-2019)

Traditionally, as a beginner, each weaving session would commence with karakia. The intention here is for the mind and spirit of the taurira or student to be cleared for the learning about to be undertaken. Karakia on completion would also be made to "reflect, assess and be thankful" for the progress that has been made. (Puketapu-Hetet, 14)

Marsden discusses the purpose of karakia in the context of kawa. Kawa (including some karakia) relates to the custom of removing tapu before freely utilising something that, to some degree, 'partook' of mauri. (Royal, 48) The Māori concept of tapu holds similarities to the Jewish terms of holy and sacred. Rather than indicating a moral righteousness, it signifies a religious and legal connotation where "a person, place or thing is dedicated to a deity and by that act is set aside or reserved for the sole use of the deity. The person or object is thus removed from the sphere of the profane and put into the sphere of the sacred. It is untouchable, no longer to be put to common use. It is this untouchable quality that is the main element in the concept of tapu." (Royal, 5) In regards to kawa, this custom holds the idea of "a sense of reverence for life", a correct way of handling things, an awareness of the "spiritual essence" of all animate life. These perceptions prevent the resources being used in a wasteful, careless or extravagant manner that causes exploitation, pollution or destruction of the environment. In this context the intention of karakia is to allow time to "pause and reflect upon the intention and outcomes" and to consider the "responsibilities involved and the personal discipline required" to achieve the anticipated outcome. (Royal, 48)

way of viewing the human condition, a transition toward responsibility to ‘other’ or an opportunity to participate in nature through a material experience.¹⁵ My research project explores the term spiritual materialism through a material-based installation practice, to consider how a durational view of materiality might change our relationship to the material as it exists in the natural world.



Figure 7. Wolfgang Laib sifting hazelnut pollen, (1992). © Wolfgang Laib, Courtesy Sperone Westwater, New York.

This research draws on my personal experiences of traditional Māori weaving and is instructed and enlightened by the writings of Reverend Māori Marsden, a tohunga¹⁶ and scholar. Marsden describes that within Māori worldview “everything depends for its existence, whether in this world, or the world behind it, upon mauri (life-force) ...”. He discusses the idea of a “real world” that exists beyond that of what we perceive (or experience) through our human senses, a world of processes and complex patterns of energy, alongside the discoveries of New Physicists.¹⁷ It seems fitting in this context to look to feminist theorist Karen Barad’s diffractive methodological approach and theories on agential realism on which to structure and inform this research project. It should be said early on that attempting to understand and paraphrase the ideas of Karen Barad is no easy task. Her theories are of

¹⁵ Klaus Ottman, “Spiritual Materiality: Contemporary Sculpture and The Responsibility of Forms.”, in *Thought Through My Eyes: Writings on Art, 1977-2005* (Connecticut: Spring Publications, 2005), 183-189.

¹⁶ Often translated as expert, Marsden clarifies the word tohunga is derived from the stem tohu which as a verb means a “sign or manifestation”. Tohunga more accurately means chosen one or appointed one and tohunga were chosen because of signs indicating talent for a particular vocation. (Royal, 14) See glossary.

¹⁷ Royal, 95. New Physics is a term that refers to a range of fundamental developments and paradigm shifts that occurred in the physical sciences during the last half of the twentieth century. (Encyclopedia.com, 2019).

interest in this research as Marsden saw these quantum¹⁸ discoveries as coming close to the understandings of the universe found within Māori worldview.

This practice-based research aims to critically consider the term Spiritual Materialism parallel with the idea of life force within materials. A set of self-governing principles that guide actions underpins research methods and the making of artwork and considers what role these might play in manifesting life force in materials and objects within an installation practice. Furthermore, it will discuss the relationships between the spiritual realm that sits beyond our ability to see in the quantum world of phenomena and intra-actions; the material world that is perceived, experienced and understood through the physical senses; and the role of weaver/maker as a conduit between these two worlds.

¹⁸ Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglements of Matter and Meaning* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 108. Quantum refers to the smallest quantity or discrete amount that exists.

Quantum theory is the theoretical basis of modern physical theory concerned with the emission and absorption of energy by matter and with the motion of material particles; necessary for situations where very small quantities are involved, i.e., on the scale of molecules, atoms, and elementary particles. (Encyclopedia.com 2019)

2 TUA-URI – BEHIND THE WORLD OF SENSES

Reverend Māori Marsden tells a version of the Māori legend of how knowledge was brought into the world by Tāne¹⁹ contained within three baskets of knowledge²⁰. The first of these kete concerned ‘Tua-uri’ the ‘real world’ which operates behind the world of sense perception in a complex series of rhythmical patterns of energy.²¹ This is where I will begin.

2.1 PHENOMENA



Figure 8. Michelle Mayn, *Cascade* (2018), installation, Saint Paul Street Gallery Three, Auckland/Tāmaki Makaurau. Material: cellulose acetate, cable wire (aluminium), music wire (carbon steel).

“Reality is composed not of things-in-themselves or things-behind-phenomena but of things-in-phenomena.”

Karen Barad²²

Barad’s diffractive methodological approach repositions the researcher as an observer from seeing oneself as ‘separate from’ to understanding the world from within. Diffraction refers to the spreading of waves around obstacles and the resulting phenomena that occurs.²³ In physics, the two-slit

¹⁹ Te Ahukaramū Charles Royal, Te Waonui a Tāne – forest mythology, Te Ara - The Encyclopedia of New Zealand, 2007, accessed September 10, 2019, <https://teara.govt.nz/en/te-waonui-a-tane-forest-mythology>. In the Māori creation story, Tāne is the son of Papatūānuku (Mother earth) and Ranginui (Father sky). Tāne, as god of the forest, let light into the world by separating his parents.

²⁰ Royal, 56-57. Tāne travelled to the realm of Io, the creator, where he received the three Baskets of Knowledge and brought them to the Whare Wānanga (House of Learning or Wisdom) on his return.

²¹ Royal, 60.

²² Barad, 205.

²³ Barad, 74. Diffraction can occur with any wave such as light, water and sound.

diffraction experiment showed that light (considered as a wave) could behave both as a wave and a particle and, under the right experimental circumstances, matter would also behave as a wave. Known as the "wave-particle duality paradox," this discovery not only revolutionised physics but questioned the dominant Eurocentric epistemology about the physical laws of the universe. How can matter, that we see as a solid inert material, also act like a wave? In resolving this conundrum, the relationship between knower (as human), things (as non-human) and words (as the foundation of conceptual understanding) had to be challenged. Barad draws from Neils Bohr's physics and philosophies to create a framework that addresses this paradox through an agential realist theory where "the primary ontological unit is not independent objects with innate boundaries and properties but rather phenomena. ...phenomena are the ontological inseparability of intra-acting agencies."²⁴ This schematic shift of perspective brings us close to a Māori worldview that understands the universe as process, "comprised of a series of interconnected realms...unified and bound together by spirit".²⁵

Diffraction, when used as a methodological approach, supports understandings arising from the researcher/artist being *within* the world as opposed to a reflective approach that distances the researcher from the subject of investigation. This approach places the focus on connections and relationships among 'things' both human and non-human, *intra*-acting within the world as opposed to the notion of *inter*-acting separate entities.²⁶ It studies the phenomena of how subject and object emerge as a result of intra-actions and allows for multiple polysemic meanings that are appropriate for my research. These ideas support an exploration of the role that actions, guided by principles, might have on manifesting an 'intangible' life force in my art practice. Could this life force be manifest as phenomena in my art practice?



Figure 9. *Pataua Bay* (2018), photograph: observation of light on water as phenomena, Whangarei. Photo credit: Michelle Mayn.

²⁴ Barad, 33.

²⁵ Royal, 31.

²⁶ Barad, 88-90.

2.2 INTRA-ACTION



Figure 10. Olafur Eliasson, *Notion Motion* (2005-2006), Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, Rotterdam, Accessed May 4, 2019, <https://olafureliasson.net/archive/exhibition/EXH101144/notion-motion>. Photo credit: Jens Ziehe.

A principal method used within this practice-based research is material exploration which attends to materials and allows observations of differences that informs my practice and research aims. Experimentation began using light as a means of understanding what intra-actions and material phenomena might look like in practice and within the context of a material-based installation. The idea of working with ‘light as material’ draws on the practice of Olafur Eliasson who uses light not just as a tool for visibility, but as a material element that is both affective and effective. Eliasson works in the inter-related terrain of temporality, movement and perception through large-scale installations that allow the viewer to experience the materiality of light.²⁷ In his work *Notion Motion* (2005-2006) a loose plank sets a ripple in motion that is visible through the projected light, allowing the viewer to understand their positioning as a participant within the experience through a bodily encounter. Eliasson’s methods often use a phenomenological response, so the viewer is engaged in ‘seeing themselves seeing’, whereas I explore the idea of intra-actions and the resulting phenomena. Experimenting with an intangible element such as light might lead to ideas or methods that manifest an intangible life force.

²⁷ Mieke Bal, “Light Politics,” in *Take Your Time: Olafur Eliasson*, ed. by Madeleine Grynsztejn (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2007), 166-168. Olafur Eliasson work destabilises the viewers’ sense of perception to create a phenomenological response often using optical techniques and processes that stem from mechanical devices and cinematic techniques.

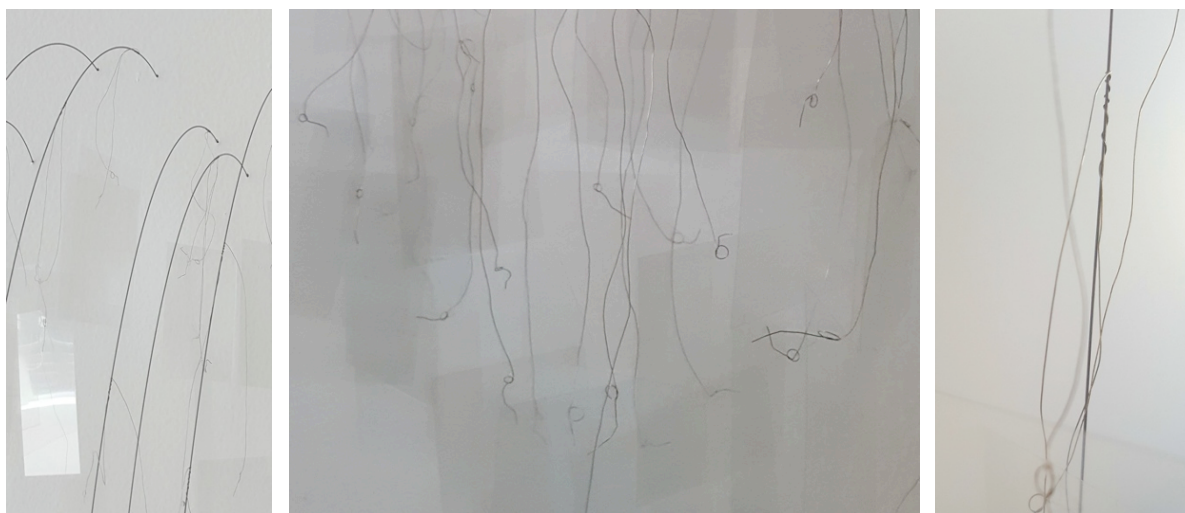


Figure 11. Michelle Mayn, *Cascade* (2018), installation detail. Left to right: high tensile music wire; cellulose acetate tag and knot detail; attachment method using a Fibonacci sequence.

Cascade (2018) developed from a series of experiments that examined different properties of light. Small squares of hand-cut overhead projector film (OHP, cellulose acetate)²⁸ were pierced, threaded with a single strand of aluminium cable wire²⁹ and secured with a simple knot. These tags were attached to high tensile music wire using a Fibonacci³⁰ sequence. Each downward foundational wire, inserted directly into the wall, one by one, creates a multitude of individual tags that sway and dance. The unpremeditated nature of the installation process allowed for the form of the work to emerge; responding to space, light and other elements within the gallery. Slowly, intra-actions became visible. Reflected light shivered and vibrated from the movement between high tensile music wire and delicately strung tags activated by air currents and the movement of people walking past.

The effects of the hanging tags in *Cascade* (2018) utilised a similar method of activation to New Zealand installation artist Kate Newby. *I'm actually weirdly exciting* (2018), is both a “response to and a result of its site”. Activated by gusts of wind or people’s movements through the gallery, the suspended components respond to the conditions to “promote a heightened perceptual awareness”. Using the viewer’s movement to bring the work to life acts as a method of making visible the relationships

²⁸ Working with materials at hand, the decision was made to cut OHP film into square tags to follow weaving protocol and principles of minimising waste.

²⁹ Aluminium wire has been extracted from discarded and recycled printer cables in a similar method to that of processing muka fibre. A shallow cut is made on the outer plastic sheath which is then peeled and stripped away to reveal the wire aluminium threads. Individual strands are then separated by gently teasing apart across the knee.

³⁰ "Fibonacci Sequence ." The Gale Encyclopedia of Science . Encyclopedia.com. (May 6, 2019). <https://www.encyclopedia.com/science/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/fibonacci-sequence>. Fibonacci sequence is a series of numbers in which each succeeding number (after the second) is the sum of the previous two. The most famous Fibonacci sequence is 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, 34, 55, 89. . . . This sequence is said to be visible in many naturally occurring relationships in the plant world that, as a phenomena, may represent nature's inherent efficiency. For example the radial growth of seeds from the centre of a sunflower or pine cone allows the maximum number of seeds (or scales) in the smallest space available.

Attention to details such as knots and Fibonacci sequence is incorporated into methods of making. This method acts as a means of ‘attending’ to the materials and qualities found in nature, for example winding wire five times to secure and placing 8, 13 or 21 tags along the length of wire.

between viewer and environment through material relations.³¹ The idea of intra-actions, used as a notion beyond the microscopic level, talks to the very nature of “being”³² As such, intra-actions between agents, humans and materials create specific phenomena that can be explored as a method of activating (bringing to life) materials using elements such as air/wind, water, light, gravity and magnetic force. This concept may provide some answers or evidence to a central research question for this project - how can the life essence of material manifest through my art practice?

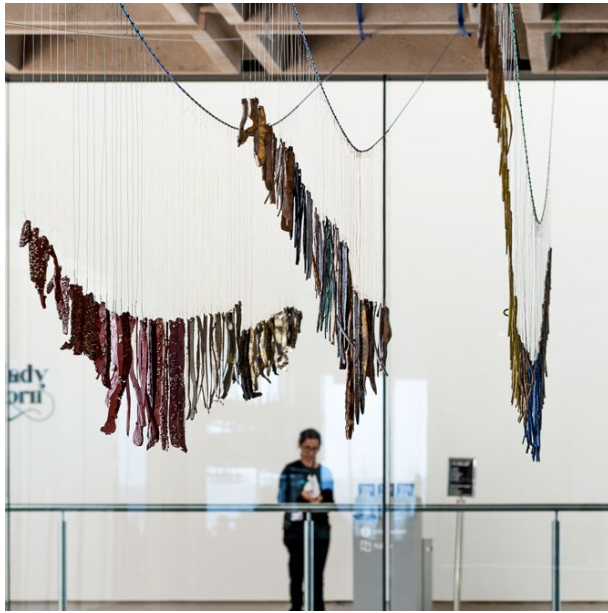


Figure 12. Kate Newby: *I'm actually weirdly exciting* (2018), Biennale of Sydney, Sydney, accessed April 8, 2019, <https://www.biennaleofsydney.art/artists/kate-newby>. Material: bronze, white brass, brass, silver, wire, PVC coated wire. © Kate Newby.

Figure 13. Kate Newby: *I'm actually weirdly exciting* (2018), Michael Lett Gallery, Auckland, accessed May 7, 2019 <http://michaellett.com/exhibition/juliet-brightman-kate-newby-parbhu-makan-henrik-olesen>. © Kate Newby.

³¹ Biennale of Sydney *Kate Newby*, installation Biennale of Sydney 2018, Accessed March 25, 2019, <https://www.biennaleofsydney.art/artists/kate-newby>.

³² Barad, 408.

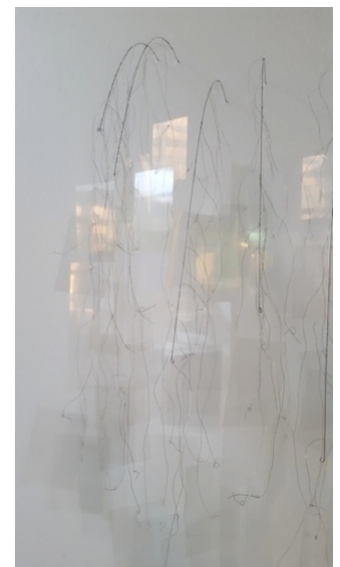
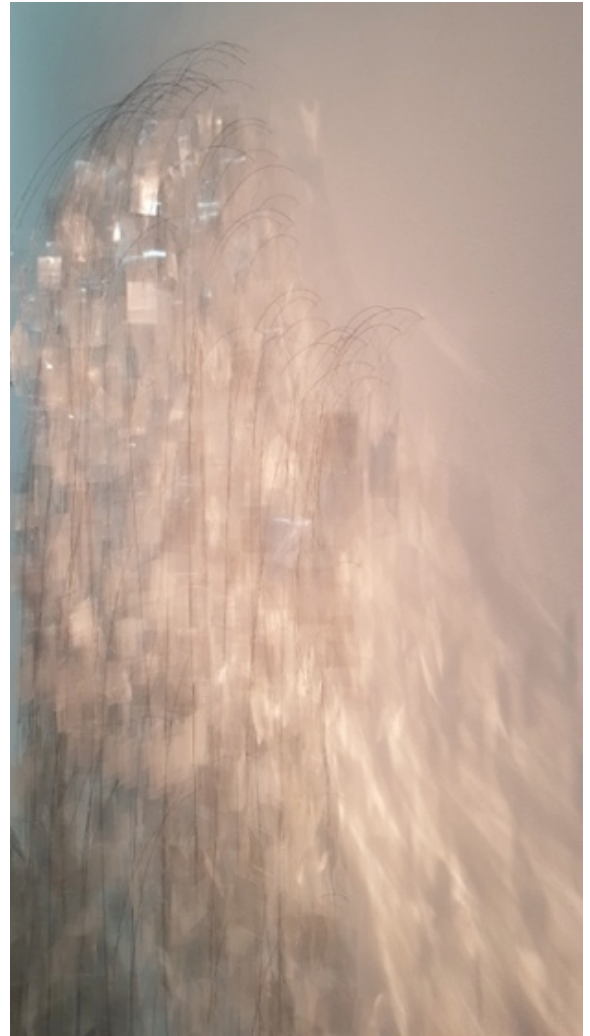


Figure 14. *Cascade II* (2018), installation, DSA Gallery - Otago Polytechnic, Dunedin. Material: hand-cut cellulose acetate, cable wire (aluminium), music wire (carbon steel). Photo credit (bottom left): Pam McKinlay.

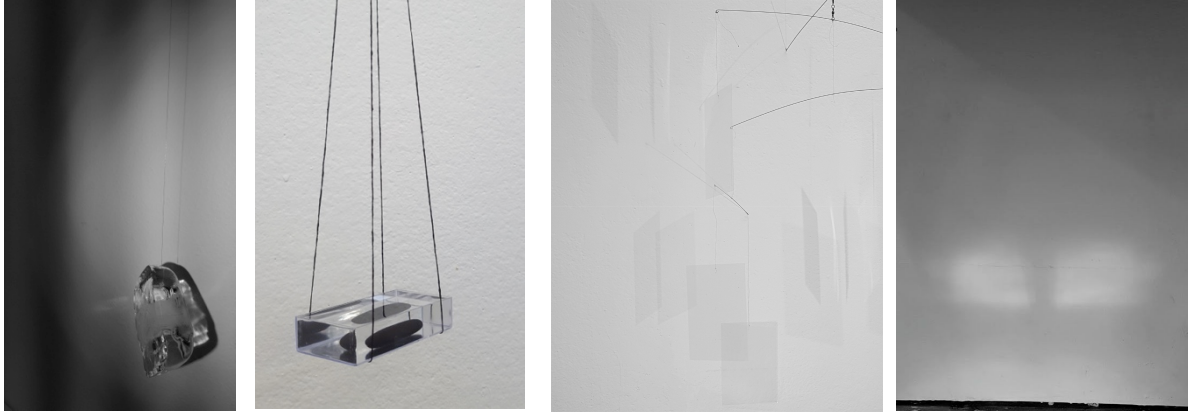


Figure 15. Michelle Mayn, *Experimental series on light* (2018), studio experiments exploring the verbs: reflect, refract, filter, shade, dapple, dazzle, sparkle, glitter, illuminate, luminesce, gleam, glow, flicker, glare. Materials left to right: ice and copper wire; perspex box, riverstone, water, acrylic coated thread; cellulose acetate sheets, music wire (carbon steel) and swivel; light reflection off water.



Figure 16. Michelle Mayn, *Experimental series on light* (2018), studio experiments using found materials. Materials left to right: harakeke, muka, riverstone, copper wire, quartz bead, threaded beads; wooden frames, tissue, acrylic coated tissue, copper wire and riverstone (frame on left), muka thread and feather (frame on right).

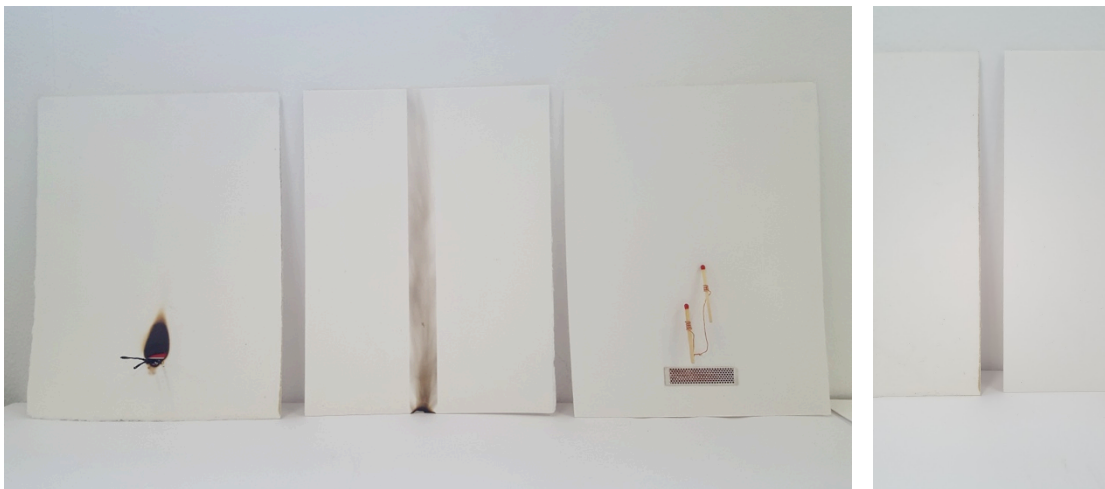


Figure 17. Michelle Mayn, *Experimental burn series* (2018), studio experiment with materials. Materials: Cotton rag paper, matches and copper wire.



Figure 18. Hasitha Jayasinghe and Michelle Mayn, *Untitled Installation* (2018), Saint Paul Street Gallery Three, Auckland/Tāmaki Makaurau. Material: cotton and projected animation. Photo credit: Sait Akkirman.

"I am interested in subtle cues that are not really at a conscious level, it catches you a little..."

Michelle Mayn (March 2018)



Figure 19. *Pataua Bay II* (2018), photograph: observation on light as reflection, Whangarei. Photo credit: Michelle Mayn.

3 TE ARO-NUI – THAT BEFORE US

The second kete of knowledge is Te Aro-nui, which translates as “that before us”, meaning what we can perceive through our senses in the natural world around us.³³

3.1 MATERIAL AND THE NATURAL WORLD



Figure 20. *Te Atatū Peninsula* (2019), photograph, Auckland/Tāmaki Makaurau. Left to right: harakeke bushes in flower; kuruwaka. Photo credit: Michelle Mayn.

Weaving practice is grounded in the physical world of materials. When working with harakeke, the transformation of material through different methods of preparation develops sensitivity and understanding of materials that assist in manifesting its inherent qualities within a sculptural form. The relationship between maker and material begins during the time-consuming process of gathering and preparing. This practice leads the maker to becoming deeply attuned to the qualities of the material and natural world.³⁴

³³ Royal, 61.

³⁴ Manaaki Whenua cares for a collection of 50 varieties of harakeke donated by Rene Orchiston of Gisborne. This collection of flax was cultivated by Māori weavers for their special leaf and fibre properties and selected to suit the project at hand such as making a kete, whāriki, piupiu or cloaks. (Manaaki Whenua: Landcare Research 2019) The leaf blade can be split into strips and hāpine (to soften and remove moisture by scraping) and dried to a firm fibre for weaving baskets. When cut on the underside, muka fibre can be extracted by applying pressure with a mussel shell to scrape and remove the surface layer. Small sections of fibre can be exposed with the unprocessed section rolling into a hard cylinder as it dries, creating ‘pokinikini’ tags for making piupiu. Working with the plant’s growth cycles and using sustainable harvesting practices ensures a continuing supply of fibre. Understanding climatic and other environmental conditions allow the weaver to extract the fibre with the least amount of effort.

Multiple factors are involved in the success of extracting muka fibre or when making pokinikini. Factors include the variety of flax used; the amount, and strength of the fibre it contains; the amount of moisture in the leaf blade. Moisture will vary due to seasonal cycles and weather conditions for example the fibre can be harder to extract cleanly during dry months and is harder to work with if cut on a windy day. Once cut, the length of time before scraping and storage conditions will also change the outcome. Using freshly cut blades; storing cut and bundled blades in a cool place; immersing prepared strips in water or a damp towel, are all methods used to improve the results for extracting or exposing the muka fibre. When extracting fibre a cut is made on the underside of the leaf-blade. The depth of the cut will vary depending on the age of the leaf (older blades are thicker with more fibre), the section of the blade (the base and middle of the blade have stronger, thicker fibre) and the health of the blade (diseases and pests can weaken the fibre). Each of these variable factors is considered and understood when harvesting and preparing material.



Figure 21. Maureen Lander, *Hongi's Red Cloak - Deconstructed* (2015), installation, Turnbull Gallery – National Library, Wellington, accessed June 11, 2018, <https://www.thebigidea.nz/news/columns/mark-amery-visual-arts/2015/jun/164899-tails-that-bind>. Material: muka, tanekaha dye, kokowai, cardboard labels. © Maureen Lander, Photo credit: Mark Beatty.

Maureen Lander's installations frequently focus on the materials and processes involved. In *Hongi's Red Cloak - Deconstructed* (2015), Lander highlights the process by using a handwritten 'artefact' type museum label to describe the preparation for each suspended bundle of thread: "muka extracted using a mussel shell, then rolled on the leg, washed, hanked, beaten (3x) and rubbed between the hands to soften".³⁵ Through the deconstructed nature of the work Lander illustrates that the knowledge used in weaving is not purely associated with the skill required to make something, each process contains multiple layers of knowledge.³⁶



Figure 22. Unknown weaver, *Whakatipu* (1850-1900), Museum of New Zealand - Te Papa Tongarewa. Material: muka, harakeke. Detail on right. © Photo courtesy: Museum of New Zealand - Te Papa Tongarewa.

³⁵ Mark Amery, "Tails that Bind", The Big Idea, accessed June 11, 2018, <https://www.thebigidea.nz/news/columns/mark-amery-visual-arts/2015/jun/164899-tails-that-bind>.

³⁶ *Hongi's Red Cloak - Deconstructed* (2015) shows an understanding of the wide variety of threads that can be created by different methods of rolling the fibre on the leg. These prepared threads have then been coloured a deep red hue using tanekaha (a tannin based bark) and an ochre pigment. The knowledge related to dyeing fibre with tanekaha includes: knowledge of suitable plants; how to remove bark without harming the tree; methods of extracting the dye from the bark (by steeping in boiling water); the use of wood ash as a mordant to enhance the colour and fix the pigment to the fibre.



Figure 23. Michelle Mayn, *Translucere* (2018), critique installation, AUT Studio. Material: tissue (protective lining from cellulose acetate), tissue (acid-free), acrylic medium, stainless steel pins, vinyl. Detail on right.

Translucere (2018)³⁷ draws on the construction of a traditional Whakatipu (raincape) and continues material experimentation as a method of exploring working with ‘light as material’. Using white acid-free and remnant tissue follows a weaving protocol of utilising all material harvested.³⁸ Thin layers of an acrylic medium are applied to the tissue making it durable and resilient. Similar to taking a firm green blade of harakeke and changing its material qualities, this process accentuates the tissues’ translucent and ephemeral nature. The process of installation is a repetitive action of piercing and pushing the pin into the wall in a slow process of layering, using a painted thread weighted with stone as a rough guide. Bodily proportions and a blush pink undertone create a sense of vulnerability, while the artwork’s low installation height aims to bring an intimate physical relationship to the viewer.

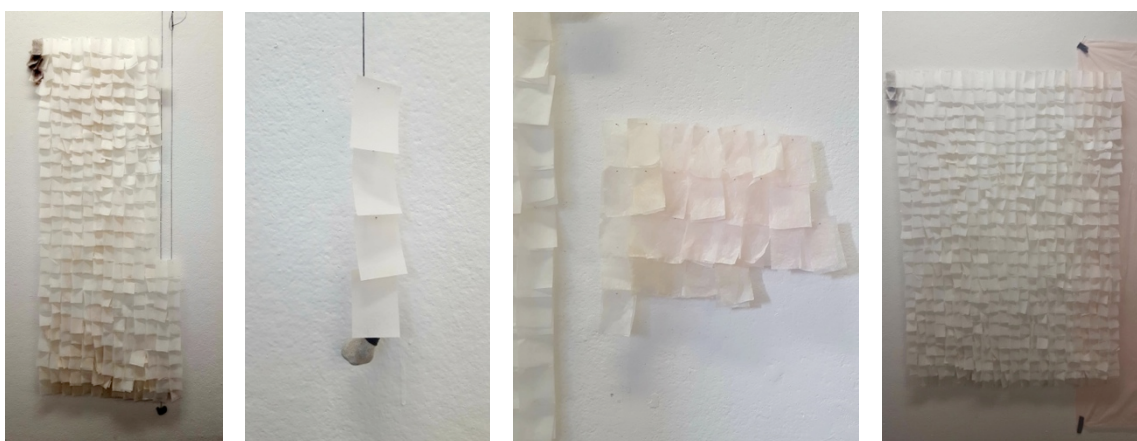


Figure 24. Michelle Mayn, *Translucere* (2018), installation process. Left to right: tissue and guide; weighted thread as a guide; tissue and pink vinyl underlayer; experiment with layering.

³⁷ Which translates from the Latin definition to “shine through”. (Collins Dictionary, 2019)

³⁸ Using the discarded protective layer of tissue from between each sheet of Overhead Projector film used in the work *Cascade* (2018) is similar to a weaving protocol that encourages the weaver to use all material harvested. When preparing the harakeke leaf blades, the outer edges not suitable for weaving are removed and set aside for plaiting handles.

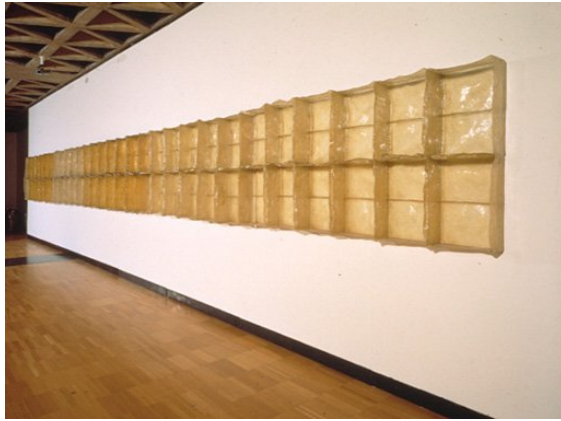


Figure 25. Eva Hesse, *Sans II* (1968), installation at Yale University Art Gallery 1992, Connecticut, accessed July 29, 2019, <https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibition/eva-hesse/eva-hesse-exhibition-guide/eva-hesse-exhibition-guide-4>. © The Estate of Eva Hesse. Courtesy Hauser & Wirth.

Figure 26. Eva Hesse, *Accretion* (1968), installation. Materials: polyester reinforced with fibreglass. © 2019 Collection Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo, the Netherlands. © The Estate of Eva Hesse. Courtesy Hauser & Wirth.

My practice and in particular the work *Translucere* (2018), sit in close conversation with a process artist such as Eva Hesse. For Hesse, working from the raw material “shaping and adding layers until the proper substance is obtained...material, process and concept are inseparable”. This notion became a present consideration in the process of making and installing *Translucere* (2018). Process art allows for an emergence of ideas during the physical act and processes of making. Change and transience, through the choice of material, their placement and methods of construction, take precedence over the finished product. Intentionally retaining evidence of this material process becomes a sign of the maker’s hand, as a trace of the artwork’s creation. This process raised the question for Hesse, “Do materials consist of mind or matter? Are they lifeless till given shape by creator or by their own potential create the end.”³⁹

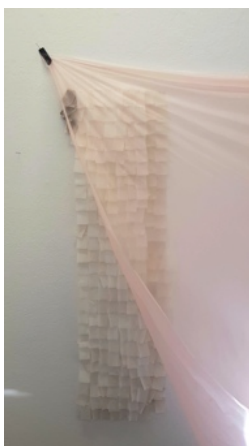


Figure 27. Michelle Mayn, *Experimental series on light as translucent* (2018). Left to right: experiment with tissue and vinyl layers; colour sketch (acrylic and gesso on paper); experiment of layering tissue with acrylic, watercolour, acrylic medium, pins and high tensile wire.

³⁹ Lucy R Lippard, *Eva Hesse* (New York: New York University Press, 1976), 209.

3.2 MATERIAL PHENOMENA

The idea of material agency, where ‘agency’ implies an ability to cause some kind of change,⁴⁰ requires some consideration when exploring the idea of a life force of material. Ottman’s term ‘Spiritual Materialism’ focuses on the role material plays in acting as a “vehicle for transcendence and responsibility to other” which stems from New Materialist ideas like those of Jane Bennett⁴¹ and Karen Barad. For this discussion, I have also drawn on the writing of anthropologist Tim Ingold, who brings a helpful perspective on the role the maker might play in this.

New Materialism is a field of enquiry challenging the fundamental notion of materials as a passive resource for humans to use or ‘act on’. This questioning stems from a growing sense of urgency about ethical and ecological consequences that arise when viewing human life as separate from the natural world.⁴² In Māori worldview, humans are considered to be “the conscious mind of Mother Earth” playing a vital role in sustaining natural life. Seeing earth as a commodity to be exploited, rather than as taking a role as part of the natural order, fails to recognise this integral relationship between nature and humans.⁴³

In regards to material having life force, and therefore agency, Marsden clarifies the idea of *mauri* not as an animistic concept where a natural object possesses its own spirit, rather all things are open to this life force.⁴⁴ Barad also supports the ‘aliveness’ of the material (or matter), derives not from a spirit or energy embodied in the material as such, but rather through its intra-action with multiple elements and forces, including ourselves but not derived from us. This requires a shift in our understanding of material from a ‘thing’ to ‘phenomena’.⁴⁵ Agential intra-action also requires a rethinking of the concept of agency not as a property of an entity but as an “ongoing ebb and flow” of intra-actions.⁴⁶ Our perspective shifts from a view of material as a fixed independently existing object to one of material as an intra-active ‘becoming’ where matter, in Barad’s words, is not a “thing, but a doing, a congealing of agency...a materialisation of phenomena”.⁴⁷

⁴⁰ Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2019.

⁴¹ New Materialist Jane Bennett’s research into the area of vibrant matter considers nonhuman bodies, forces, and forms, as having a vitality and a life that she describes as “thing power”. For the scope of this research project I have chosen not to delve into this area and focus instead on the relationships between maker, material and non-material forces from an agential realism perspective.

⁴² Barbara Bolt, *Carnal Knowledge*, ed. Barbara Bolt and Estelle Barrett, (London: I.B.Tauris & Co Ltd, 2013), 3.

⁴³ Royal, 69.

⁴⁴ Royal, 6. Marsden differentiates an animistic view where a natural object is animated by its own spirit from the Māori view where there is a differentiation between the “essence (*mauri*) of a person or object and the distinct realm of the spirit which stood over the realm of the natural order and was indwelt by spiritual beings”. All “created order partook of *mauri*” and the “natural order” could be infiltrated and interpenetrated by the spiritual realm.

⁴⁵ Barad, 32-33.

⁴⁶ Barad, 140.

⁴⁷ Barad, 210.

Tim Ingold supports this view and draws on artist Paul Klee's 'Creative Credo' and the writing of philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. He argues that the artist does not impose an image held in the mind on to passive matter to create an object, but rather "seeks to join with those very forces that bring form into being". He describes this as diverse materials, with multiple fluid qualities "enlivened by the forces of the Cosmos", coming together in the generation of things.⁴⁸ Ingold uses a kite to understand agency in relation to material objects. A kite can be seen as a static, inert object until we introduce wind. It is through these relationships *within* the world that things are alive, in a constant process of formation, not because they have agency.⁴⁹



Figure 28. Janet Echelman, *Water Sky Garden* (2009), permanent installation, Richmond, B.C., Canada, accessed April 27 2019, <https://www.echelman.com/project/water-sky-garden>. © Janet Echelman, Photo Credit: Peter Vanderwarker.

The aliveness of material deriving not from a spirit (as an animate life force), but through a combination of elements that manifest as 'aliveness' through their intra-actions is beautifully evident in the work of artist Janet Echelman. Echelman mixes 'ancient craft' with technology to create installations based on simple net structures. Strung between buildings, they appear to come to life as the material responds to rain, wind and sunlight.⁵⁰ Here the combination of form and its fluid structure allows the material to interact freely with the environment. This work provides an example of how agential realism could be understood and utilised as a method in my work to make visible (as phenomena) intra-actions in my material practice.

What interests me, in considering the agency of material, is the notion that my material practice is shaped by how I perceive material. Taking a Western hylomorphic perspective where form is imposed

⁴⁸ Tim Ingold, *Bringing Things to Life: Creative Entanglements in a World of Materials*, National Centre for Research Methods, July 2010, accessed September 17, 2018, <http://eprints.ncrm.ac.uk/1306/>, 2.

⁴⁹ Ingold, 6.

⁵⁰ Janet Echelman, *Janet Echelman – Biography*, 2013, accessed November 6, 2017, <http://www.echelman.com/about>.

on a material with a particular concept in mind, I view myself as imposing my individual human agency on to something passive and inert with a belief in having power over matter. From this perspective ideas become limited to what can be pictured in the mind. Shifting this viewpoint to seeing agency as what emerges from the relationships between material, maker, environment - and all the intangible elements that ‘intra-act’ within this process - creates a far more dynamic perspective. Intentions and actions shift from attempting to impose a preconceived idea on to the material to attending to the processes that are occurring. It is through these “flows and transformations of materials as against states of matter” from which an outcome, an art object or installation, emerges.⁵¹ This position informs an approach to my art practice that supports the manifestation of the life force of material.

“The physical phenomenon of diffraction makes manifest the extraordinary liveliness of the world.”

Karen Barad⁵²

3.3 DURATIONAL PROCESS



Figure 29. Michelle Mayn, *Unfoldment* (2018), installation, Te Kōngahu Museum of Waitangi, Waitangi. Material: muka, cotton, feather, river pebble and river stone.⁵³

“The objects I make in cloth speak, shout, whisper, breathe in a language of silence.”
Jane Whiteley⁵⁴

⁵¹ Ingold, 2-3.

⁵² Barad, 91.

⁵³ Exhibition, X-Marks: Conversations in Cloth, Bay of Islands, Aotearoa New Zealand. Curated by Maureen Lander, Jo Torr and Caitlin Timmer. Responding to research by Vivien Caughley on some of the earliest bicultural exchanges between Māori and Pakeha through the medium of textiles. The exhibition explored the relationships established principally by women, and the shared stories between local iwi and Church Missionary Society mission families based in Rangihoua, Bay of Islands.

Much of my art practice is based on time-intensive processes beginning from gathering and preparing material to the methods used in making and forming works. The term ‘durational process’ is used to describe the lengths of time taken to complete a specific (sometimes repetitive) task that includes bodily involvement with the material. This should not be confused with durational artwork. Methods used are not performance based; however, the process of making contains elements of duration, endurance and stamina. Duration, in this context, is the physical length of time in which a particular action is carried out, but the focus is not on time taken (as labour) but on what is occurring throughout the durational process. This is an important distinction within my practice. Karl Marx theorised that labour as a commodification creates an alienation from task, each other and the labourer.⁵⁵ Time as labour shifts our attention to externally driven outcomes, outside of the work, the now, into future results. Thus, I believe, challenging our position of being within the world, or present to the material.



Figure 30. Ann Hamilton, *Event of a Thread*, (2012), installation, Park Avenue Armory, New York, accessed April 22, 2019, http://www.armoryonpark.org/programs_events/detail/ann_hamilton. © Ann Hamilton, Photo Courtesy © James Ewing/OTTO.



Figure 31. Ann Hamilton, *corpus • paper dropper* (2003/2006), installation, MASS MoCA, Massachusetts. © Ann Hamilton, Photo credit: Thibault Jeanson.

Ideas of a durational practice and attentiveness to making are present in artist Ann Hamilton’s installations that connects touch, motion, cloth and sound. Hamilton often uses body and repetitive acts to create multimedia installations that connect back to the sense of touch as the main medium of understanding. In *corpus • paper dropper* (2003/2006), machines inhale and exhale translucent paper timed to the slow pace of the breath. When working with cloth, Hamilton likens it to a responsive layer of skin, sensitive to the movement of air and the pull of gravity. For Hamilton, the act of making calls for attention and it is this attention that acknowledges the thought present in the attending. Attention to detail, as a durational process, is significant in my work. It is through this time-consuming

⁵⁴ Jane Whiteley is an Australian textile artist whose art practice draws from research on the social history of cloth and mending.

⁵⁵ Helen Molesworth, *Work Ethic*, (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), 138.

manual process that the unfolding of previously unconceived conceptual ideas occurs without effort. This creative process connects back to Hesse’s inseparability of material, process and concept.

This attention to detail is evident in the knotted and bound tags of *Cascade* (2018) and the 49 metres of handstitched cotton that forms the body of *Unfoldment* (2018). Barely visible, each stitch in the work *Unfoldment* (2018) marks the physical presence of the maker and retains the evidence of the intensity in the making. Small pebbles float in space suspended on fine muka threads, while bound feathers respond to the slightest breath of air that passes by. Each material component frames the conceptual exploration that considers the veiled space between the earthly/natural and spiritual realms. Like Hamilton’s work, duration is also experienced through the viewer’s physical encounter with the installation. The viewer is physically implicated in the work and required to form their unique relationship between things in the space. This attention of the viewer “expands its temporality beyond the time of the exhibition” through the viewer’s remembering.⁵⁶ The gossamer-like fabric gently opens as the viewer moves through the space to create a gradual unfolding – the role of the viewer’s body movement in the unfolding becomes evident.



Figure 32. Michelle Mayn, *Unfoldment* (2018). Left to right: feather and muka; river pebble and muka; hand-stitching.

Attending to materials through focus, attention, discipline, time and endurance are all encompassed within weaving tikanga. I believe being present to material, through these durational processes, supports a state of being where the maker/weaver becomes receptive and open, with the ability to act as a conduit between the metaphysical and physical world.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Siun Hanrahan, “Poesis”, in *Thinking Through Art: Reflections on Art as Research*, eds. Katy MacLeod and Lin Holdridge (London: Routledge, 2005), 45.

⁵⁷ Journalled observation on a ‘state of being’: there is a maximum physical speed at which a stitch can be completed - a ‘hurried/stressed’ state does not alter that speed. This requires a letting go of the association of task in connection to time. This is not easy with a looming deadline and demonstrates the challenge and intention of te whare pora. Tikanga that encourages the separation of daily activities of eating, drinking and using cell-phones from weaving practice supports the separation from this idea of time.

4 SPIRITUAL MATERIALISM

The term 'Spiritual Materialism' asks us to conceive of a merging of the physical/natural world and the spiritual domain. This requires a schematic shift in how we understand the material world. For Ottman spiritual materiality in contemporary sculpture is a “renewed involvement in the question of being, transcendence, and the social *by way of its materiality*” (my italics). Ottman is not talking here of a transcendent human state of being, but a “transcendental beyond” that requires a “responsibility for the other”. In essence, the term collapses the boundaries that separate the material and spiritual realms to describe a new role that material can play in art practice.

The definition of the term spiritual has a multitude of connotations beyond the scope of this research project to discuss. Drawing on the Latin origin of spirit, which is breath, I will consider the term spiritual as referring to a non-physical life force, essence or energy.⁵⁸

“Thus am I, like a feather on the breath of God.”

Hildegard of Bingen⁵⁹



Figure 33. Michelle Mayn, *Experiment* (2018). Material: feather and muka.

⁵⁸ Interestingly, in te reo Māori the word for breath is hau. Hau (vital essence) can also be used in some situations as a synonym for mauri. Hau-ora, which translates as ‘the breath of life’, refers to the “agent or source by and from which mauri is imparted to animate and inanimate objects”. Mauri is the term used specifically for inanimate objects, mauri-ora is the term used for animate life. (Marsden, 44)

⁵⁹ “St. Hildegard.” Encyclopædia Britannica, September 13, 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Saint-Hildegard>. Saint Hildegard of Bingen was a 12th Century, German-born mystic and visionary.

4.1 TE AHO TAPU - (THE SACRED FIRST LINE)



Figure 34. Michelle Mayn, *Translucere II* (2018), critique installation, AUT Studio. Material: tissue, silk thread, acrylic.⁶⁰

In Māori worldview, the universe is understood as process, an “open system” where the spiritual dimension is not considered separate from the natural world. Therefore, humans, as part of this process, have the ability to be spiritually cognisant of the processes that occur in both the sensory world Aro-nui and the realm of invisible energy Tua-uri.⁶¹

Weaving reflects the essence of Māori spiritual values and in traditional Māori weaving the weaver is said to be a conduit between the material and spiritual worlds.⁶² The term *te aho tapu*, or sacred first line, acknowledges the importance of attending to material and focusing on the task at hand. Attuned to the material’s inherent qualities through a focused attention, the relationship is one of response-ability *to* the materials and the world around them. A simple thread has hidden complexities in regards to gathering and preparing of natural fibres and records the evidence of a durational process. After preparing the *harakeke*, individual strands of *muka* fibre can be twisted together by rolling on the leg,⁶³ creating a fine strong thread (*aho*) that holds the potential to be extended indefinitely.

⁶⁰ The decision made to thread the uninstalled ‘*Translucere*’ on to a white silk thread opened up multiple installation options that allowed the work to respond to space.

⁶¹ Royal, 60-61. Marsden refers to specially trained and gifted *tohunga*, known as *matakite* or seers, who have developed faculties other than natural senses alone that “when properly trained can penerate into the ‘beyond’”.

⁶² Puketapu-Hetet, 12-14. The ancient Polynesian belief is that the artist is a vehicle through whom the gods create; the first row of *taniko* weaving was traditionally done from memory without the use of graph paper, the more common practice now. The need for privacy and a great deal of knowledge and concentration was required as this is where the pattern was set.

⁶³ A process known as *miro* in weaving terms.

Fred Sandback is an artist working with fine yarn that, when extended through the gallery space, creates a tangible interplay between the thread and the space in which it is situated. It appears to draw in space creating vertical lines with “invisible connections that shimmer like sheets of energy”. Conceptually Sandback looks at his work process as holding a balance of control. While his installations are often carefully planned, he works “in the area in which the mind can no longer hold on to things, the point at which all ideas fall apart.”⁶⁴ This suspension of thought allows the emergence of something not known or visible to enter the mind and sits close to the concept of *te whare pora* as a ‘state of being’. It is in this state where the weaver becomes receptive to both the physical, sensory world of material and the non-physical, spiritual realm. These ideas opens the possibility of understanding the unseen life force present in the materials.



Figure 35. Fred Sandback, *Untitled (Seven-part Vertical Construction)* (1987), installation, David Zwirner Gallery 2016, New York, Deichtorhallen Hamburg/Falckenberg Collection. Material: yellow, red, blue, and black acrylic yarn. © 2019 Fred Sandback Archive, Photo Courtesy: David Zwirner

⁶⁴ Thomas Micchelli, “The Point at Which All Ideas Fall Apart: Fred Sandback’s Grand Illusions,” *Hyperallergic*, September 24, 2016, accessed March 25, 2019, <https://hyperallergic.com/324976/the-point-at-which-all-ideas-fall-apart-fred-sandbacks-grand-illusions>.

In the experimental installation *Aho & Whittled Pole* (2018), the muka aho acts as the method of activating connections through minimal intervention in space. The precarious propping and stringing of the thread draws attention to the relationships between elements. The hand-whittled pole, made of broken dowelling bound together, serves to prop up the suspended thread creating a point of tension.⁶⁵ The fine aho has a discreetly obstructive presence that viewers could almost walk into, but the intention is not to take over the space, like a Duchampian cat's cradle, but to reveal it. The aim is to bring a delicate balance between exhibition space, materials and the hand of the maker.



Figure 36. Michelle Mayn, *Aho & Whittled Pole* (2018), critique installation, AUT Studio. Material: muka, wooden dowel, twine, cotton, river pebble. Detail on right



Figure 37. Michelle Mayn, *Aho & Whittled Pole* (2018) AUT Studio.

⁶⁵ Originally constructed as a basic tool to be able to install and uninstall *Unfoldment* (2018) during experimentation phase, without the need of a ladder.

4.2 BEING WITHIN THE WORLD



Figure 38. Michelle Mayn, *Inanga I* (2018), critique installation, AUT Studio. Material: Inanga, wood, stone. Dimensions: 26 L x 18 H x 8 D cm.

Experimenting with material-based works that engender a sense of finely tuned balance between the maker, materials and environment becomes a method of developing relationships to the natural landscape. Putting to use materials collected during time spent in different locations develops a deep connection to place. These connections are explored through a series of small experimental works that communicates a similar sense of the landscape to the work of Australian artist Rosalie Gascoigne.

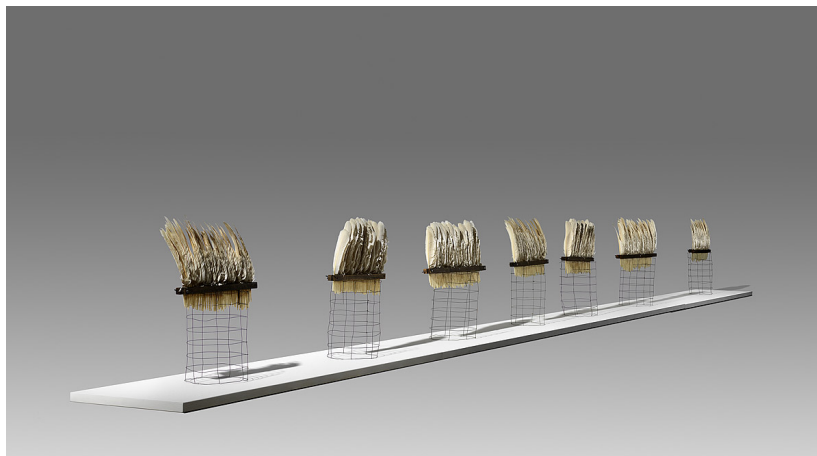


Figure 39. Rosalie Gascoigne, *Feathered Fence* (1979), installation, SoftSculpture 2009, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra. Material: sculptures, white swan feathers, galvanised wire netting, synthetic polymer paint on wood. © Rosalie Gascoigne/Copyright Agency, 2019.

Gascoigne combines a deep feeling for material with a strong connection to landscape. Assemblages of found materials, collected on frequent drives across the country, carry the marks of time, land and environment. Her work transforms these found and rejected materials in ways that evoke an experience of the Australian landscape where the materials were collected. Humble materials reflect the everyday, and follow her idea of clearing the mind to “free your vision, and get to a place where

everything is in synchronisation: your hand, your heart, your eye, your mind.”⁶⁶ Close observation of the natural environment is a method used to inform my art practice. In *Inanga II & III* (2018), found materials collected during time spent in the Hokianga and the South Island are incorporated into a series of experimental works; rusted nails and softened driftwood carry a sense of the materials forming over time through natural and human forces.

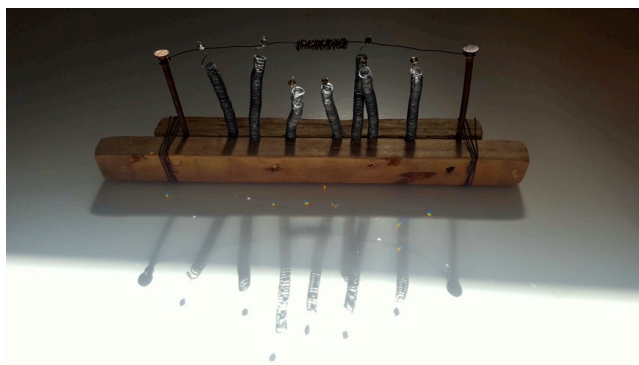


Figure 40. Michelle Mayn, *Sprung* (2018), critique installation, AUT Studio. Material: found wire, driftwood, nails, rusted wire, Swarovski crystal. Dimensions: 26.5 L x 9 H x 4 D cm.



Figure 41. Michelle Mayn, *Inanga II* (2018), critique installation, AUT Studio. Material: Inanga, driftwood, rusted wire. Dimensions: 27 L x 9.5 H x 4 D cm.

Figure 42. Michelle Mayn, *Inanga III* (2018), critique installation, AUT Studio. Material: Inanga, driftwood, rusted wire, found hook, cable staple. Dimensions: 26 L x 2.5 H x 2 D cm.



Figure 43. Michelle Mayn, *Long Pods* (2018), critique installation, AUT Studio. Material: unknown pod, copper wire.

⁶⁶ Vici MacDonald, *Rosalie Gascoigne*, ed. Steve Bush (Paddington: Regaro, 1998), 38.

Time acts as a means of understanding a material's intrinsic nature and forms an intimate and ongoing relationship to the natural world. Traditionally, when weaving, protocols for understanding the cycles for seasonal harvesting could take as long as three or four years to learn.⁶⁷ Maureen Lander, who works primarily with traditional materials and fibres in her installation practice, describes how the value of processes which occur outside of the studio or gallery space are connected. Art historian and writer Kirsty Baker summarises Landers' approach:

The act of collecting flax seeds is more than a simple gathering of materials, it is an act of guardianship and care for natural resources such as harakeke and muka ... This guardianship of resources also broadens the concept of collectivity, extending its reach into the past and future simultaneously.⁶⁸

This accumulated time spent with material shapes outcomes and informs the development of the work, both materially and conceptually.



Figure 44. Wolfgang Laib, photograph: Wolfgang Laib collecting pollen in a dandelion meadow. © Wolfgang Laib, Courtesy Sperone Westwater, New York.

Figure 45. Wolfgang Laib, *Pollen Jars on a Shelf* (2003), three jars of pollen: buttercup, hazelnut, moss, dimensions variable. © Wolfgang Laib, Courtesy Sperone Westwater, New York.

“It is a very quiet work, here in this environment...which means a lot to me”
Wolfgang Laib

Wolfgang Laib is another artist whose processes demonstrate a close relationship between material, nature and maker. Laib spends several months each spring gathering pollen from various blossoms such as the hazelnut and dandelion, from around his home in Biberach, Germany. This time represents a dialogue with nature “from which the artist emerges imbued with a rare and profound knowledge, gleaned from intimate contact with the elements.” The pollen is then used in installations that by their very material, share this knowledge and potential of life, leading the viewer to reconsider

⁶⁷ Kahutoi Mere Te Kanawa, “Toi Maramatanga: A Visual Māori Art Expression of Meaning” (master’s thesis, Auckland University of Technology, 2009), 147, <http://hdl.handle.net/10292/883>.

⁶⁸ Kirsty Baker, “Art: Before Words Get in Between”, *Pantograph Punch*, 28 September 2018. Accessed: December 23, 2018. <https://www.pantograph-punch.com/post/before-words>.

their relationship to things.⁶⁹ Laib uses pollen, as a material, to create a “concentrated experience” for the viewer; it has “no distractions, nothing else”.⁷⁰ It is from this experience of material that Ottman derives the idea of an artwork as not purely a visual experience, but where “spiritual reality and material are embedded together and cannot be separated”.⁷¹

Gathering, preparing and processing natural materials is fundamentally core to my practice. Time spent *with* materials, through accrued actions, is a method used to observe, understand and manifest its inherent qualities, what Ottman describes as the materials “ideological nature” or “essence”. Explored through a series of experimental works combining found materials, I see this time taken with material as where an essential element of process takes place. Consolidating the role of maker in the process of materialising phenomena through an intimate relationship with the material world.



Figure 46. Michelle Mayn, *Experimentation on Kowhai Yellow* (2018). Left to right: critique installation, AUT Studio. *Untitled* (2018). Material: muka, river pebble, cotton, turmeric, kowhai seed and glass jar; photograph, turmeric dyed cotton drying; photograph, fallen ginkgo leaves.

4.3 SPACE-TIME-MATTERING

For Barad, the notion of time as an entanglement of space-time-matter calls for ethical responsibility in our material engagement with the world.⁷² Space and time do not exist as a bounded notion; they are phenomenal and “neither space nor time exist as determinate givens outside of phenomena”.⁷³ This idea of time is not as a succession of evenly spaced moments or an external measure that tracks the motion of matter in space. It is comprised through the world's repeated cycles of intra-activity in

⁶⁹ Wolfgang Laib, *Wolfgang Laib: Somewhere Else*, (Ostfildern-Ruit: Cantz Verlag, 1999), 25-26.

⁷⁰ Sarah Tanguy, “Making the Ideal Real: A Conversation with Wolfgang Laib,” *Sculpture Magazine* 20, no.4 (May 2001). www.sculpture.org/documents/scmag01/may01/laib/laib.shtml.

⁷¹ Ottman, 2005.

⁷² Karen Barad, “Quantum Entanglements and Hauntological Relations of Inheritance: Dis/continuities, SpaceTime Enfoldings and Justice-to-Come,” *Derrida Today* 3, no.2 (Edinburgh University Press, November 2010): 265. <https://doi.org/10.3366/drt.2010.0206>.

⁷³ Barad, *Quantum Entanglements*, 261.

which matter, and its dynamic nature, plays a part. Rather than an unfolding of time it is an enfolding of matter.

As the rings of trees mark the sedimented history of their intra-actions within and as part of the world, so matter carries within itself the sedimented historicalities of the practices through which it is produced as part of its ongoing becoming - it is ingrained and enriched in its becoming.⁷⁴

It is the forming of the material through time-based actions that are of interest as a maker

Weaving is often based on a predictable pattern and form, so the idea of working with time as a non-linear 'enfolding' progression, as intra-active phenomena, feels somewhat unpredictable. During an experimental exhibition project at Corban Estate Arts Centre, I explored this enfolding notion of time by stepping into the space with some materials, but no premeditated plan.

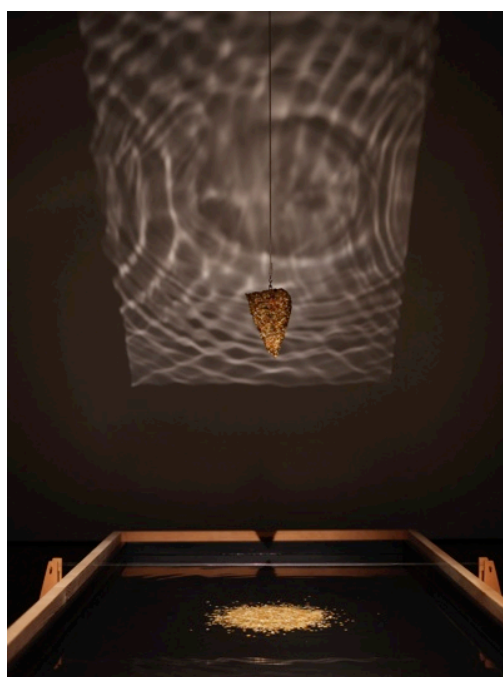


Figure 47. Mineko Grimmer, *Remembering Plato* (1992), installation, Menil Collection, Houston. Material: paint, plywood basin, fir trim, nylon cord, steel hook with chain, spotlight, pebbles, brass rod, piano wire, and steel tensioning hardware. © Courtesy The Menil Collection, Houston, Gift of the artist and purchased with funds contributed by Ned Rifkin, Director of the Menil Foundation (2000-2001), in honor of the dedication of the staff of The Menil Collection. Photo Credit: Paul Hester.

Space, time and movement are all elements used within the sound-producing kinetic sculptures of Mineko Grimmer. Pebbles frozen in ice, are suspended over a shallow pool of water. The slowly melting ice randomly releases the pebble, with no two drops sounding the same as they fall. The sound of pebbles striking the water and piano wire brings a quiet meditative quality to the work.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 180. See page 439 for an alternative example using dye colouring in dough that is kneaded, broken apart, a different dough added, kneaded, broken apart, etc, to describe the term enfolding as an imagined example of what this concept might look like.

⁷⁵ David Colker, "Sculpturing With Sound: Mineko Grimmer uses ice, pebbles and other materials to create work that are as pleasing to listen to as they are to look at," *Los Angeles Times*, August 9, 1992, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1992-08-09-ca-6224-story.html>.

These elements are present in the installation, *Stone Melting* (2019). The release and fall of each pebble as the ice melts, contains an element of suspense and inevitability, while the trace left by the dried pooling of water speaks of something that once was. The understated size of frozen blocks of river pebbles creates an intimate experience where changes in the work, occurring through time, can be observed. The decision to add a new block of frozen riverpebbles each morning accentuated the idea of time through the changing nature of the work. This eroding and building over time collapses the notion of past, present and future, stimulating a new experience each time the work is viewed. The work's self-forming nature, sculpted by slowly moving glacial-like forces, generates a sense of the materials in action. Activating the material as a time-based happening⁷⁶ places material at the heart of the action, where it appears to be acting from a sense of autonomous agency, thereby bringing the material to life.



Figure 48. Michelle Mayn, *Stone Melting* (2019), Corban Estate Arts Centre, Auckland/Tāmaki Makaurau. Material: river pebbles, water/ice. Left to right from top: day 1 to day 6 of installation.

The idea of time as a sedimentary history, happening at a quantum level, is described by Barad as the repeated cycle of the “enfolding of specific materializing phenomena” in a non-linear, ongoing process of matter becoming. Material, as matter, is continually forming. How it is being formed is affected by how it has already been formed, in an ongoing cycle. Enfolding is a non-linear process at work that we see as phenomena. What we might understand as cause and effect can no longer be construed in this way, because there is no beginning or end point or separation, only a continual cycle of (enfolding) intra-activity at play.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Sarah Jenkins, “Allan Kaprow: Artist Overview and Analysis”, The Art Story, November 21, 2011, <https://www.theartstory.org/artist/kaprow-allan/>, accessed April 3, 2019. Allan Kaprow coined the term “happenings,” to describe a form of spontaneous, non-linear action. During the 1960’s Kaprow’s happenings challenged the definition of the art object as something hung on a wall or set on a plinth – or could include the viewers experience of movement, sound and scent.

⁷⁷ Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 180.

This idea of a 'sedimentary history' is visible in Richard Long's interventional work *In A Line Made by Walking* (1967), where time is visible in the transient path of flattened grass formed by walking back and forth. The accumulated effect of his actions on the environment makes evident his role in changing the landscape through traces left by his everyday bodily action of walking.⁷⁸



Figure 49. Richard Long, *A Line Made by Walking* (1967), photograph. © Richard Long/DACS. Copyright Agency, 2019.

The accruing mass of *Kuruwaka* (2019), whose changing nature was barely discernable, also captures the gist of Barad's ideas of material as enfolding in a non-linear formation of matter. Daily addition and accumulation of material build the scale, volume and mass of this work. *Kuruwaka* were gathered, dried and dehiscid⁷⁹. The idea to add a small amount of material daily came about while tending to the other works in the Barrel Store. With the human hand not visible, the work registers as being in its natural state with each seed and pod retaining its original scale. Here the visual effect of accumulation as both a gradual gathering of something and growth (by repeated additions) shaped the work in a spontaneous enfolding.

⁷⁸ Ruth Burgon, *Richard Long, A line made by walking, 1967*, (Tate, January 2012), Accessed April 27, 2019, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/long-a-line-made-by-walking-ar00142>.

⁷⁹ The seeds are removed from their pods by lightly splitting along the natural line of the pod.

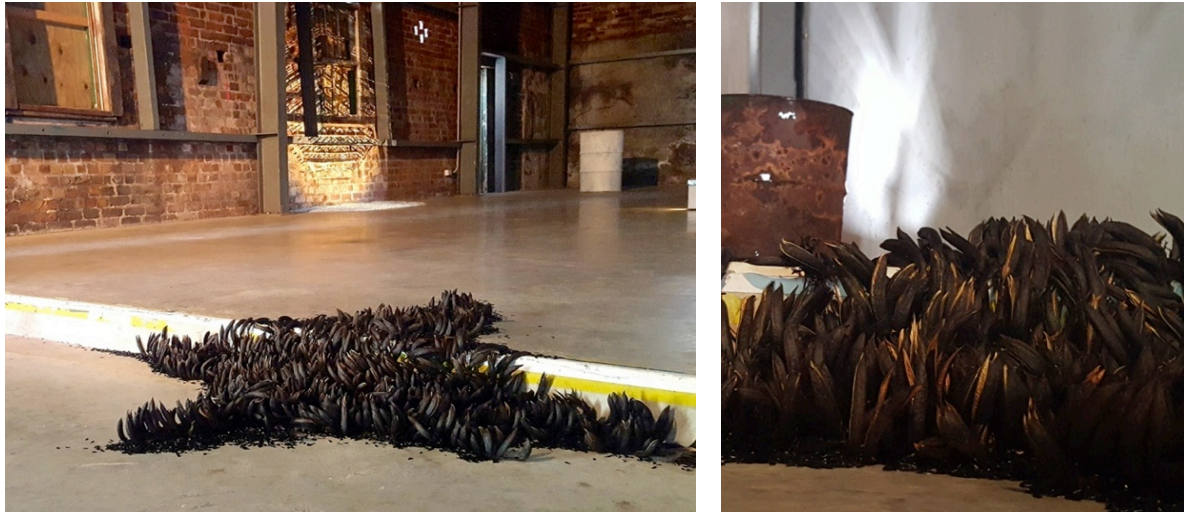


Figure 50. Michelle Mayn, *Kuruwaka* (2019), Corban Arts Estate Centre, Auckland/Tāmaki Makaurau. Material: kuruwaka and harakeke seeds. Detail on right.

In her work *Pō Atarau - Now Is The Hour* (2017) Maureen Lander reflects on Māori involvement in World Wars I and II using a method of accumulation to communicate a non-linear notion of time. Harakeke is used to bind silver crosses, forming a pattern known as kara atua or God's eye to symbolise the idea of being watched over and protected. Incorporating reflective mirrors serves a dual purpose of multiplying the 35 crosses while generating a sense of the viewer looking back in history and forward to the future, as they see themselves reflected.⁸⁰

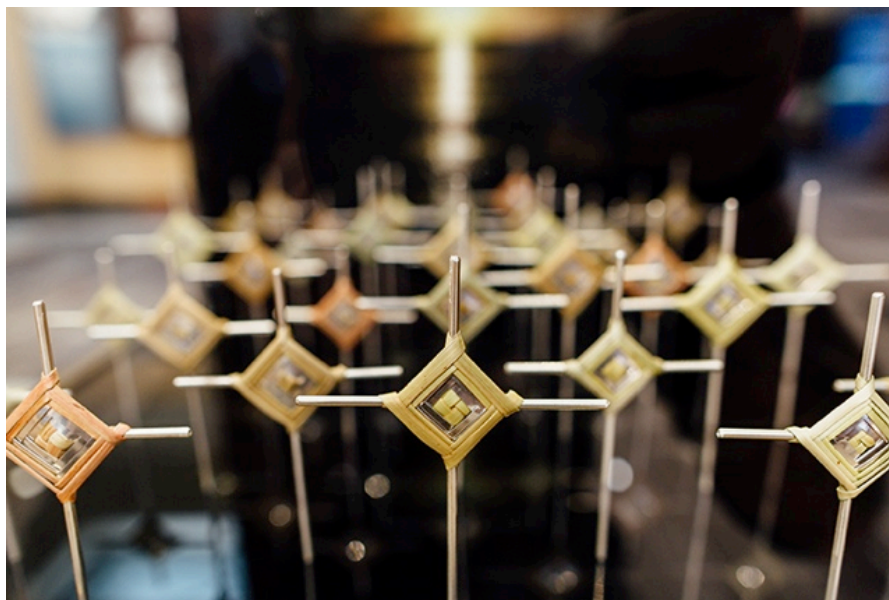


Figure 51. Maureen Lander; *Pō Atarau - Now Is The Hour* (2017), Auckland War Memorial Museum-Tāmaki Paenga Hira, Auckland/Tāmaki Makaurau. Material: harakeke, silver. © Maureen Lander, Photo Courtesy Auckland War Memorial Museum - Tāmaki Paenga Hira.

⁸⁰ Dionne Christian, "War stories told for a new generation," *nzherald.co.nz*, October 10, 2017, https://www.nzherald.co.nz/entertainment/news/article.cfm?c_id=1501119&objectid=11931068. The work's title references the customary practice of singing waiata to bless and spiritually protect those preparing for battle. The crosses multiply to the number 70, which represents Te-Hokowhitu-a-Tu, a Māori war party.



Figure 52. Michelle Mayn, *Kuruwaka* (2019), Corban Estate Arts Centre, Auckland/Tāmaki Makaurau. Material: kuruwaka and seeds. Right: muka and stone.

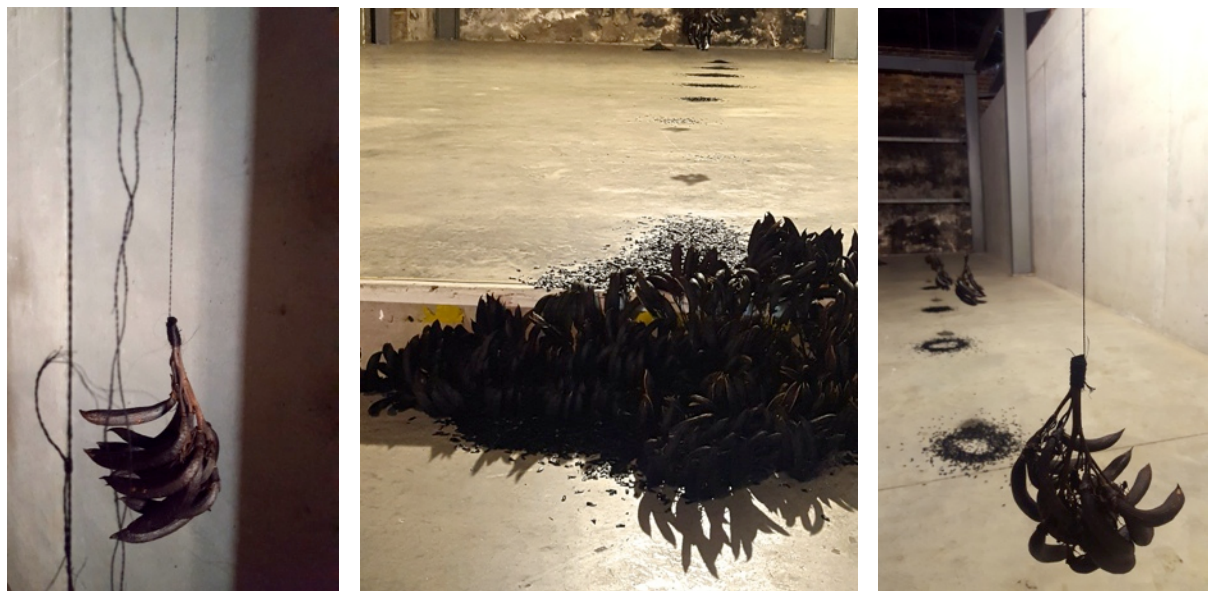


Figure 53. Michelle Mayn, *Experiment on kuruwaka* (2019), Corban Estate Arts Centre. Material: kuruwaka, seeds, muka.

4.4 WHAT WE DO MATTERS

A core research interest considers, what role do underpinning principles that guide actions play in manifesting life force in a material installation practice?

A Cartesian worldview of materials, while suited to getting things done, asks us to separate ourselves from the world in order to understand reality, whereas weaving tikanga asks us to consider each associated action.⁸¹ My experience of tikanga is not a ritualistic prescribed set of actions to be

⁸¹ Puketapu-Hetet 1989, 13-14. There are many varying intentions contained within weaving tikanga and these protocols may vary among different weavers and iwi.

performed, rather tikanga function as a set of guiding principles, incorporated into daily practices that can be revised and revisited to consider what is the “right thing” to do in each situation. Ella Henry states “tikanga can be viewed as ‘ethics’ in a philosophical sense, which inform traditional Māori ontology... and underpins Māori epistemology”⁸² Marsden describes the schematic shift from a ‘know how’ (skills and knowledge) to an ontological ‘know why’ that is bridged by cultural values. These values “are more than mere formulae or dogma, they are instruments by which we view, interpret, experience and make sense of the world”.⁸³

Barad also positions humans “of the universe - there is no inside, no outside”. For Barad, this creates an accountability for our participation in the material world and the role we play as humans in these material entanglements calls for an “epistemological-ontological-ethical” framework.⁸⁴ These entanglements do not equate to interconnectedness (which implies individual entities), we are “of the universe”, and therefore entangled, at a quantum level, with material/matter. From this understanding of our role in the material world, Barad theorises, it is impossible to separate ethics from knowing and being.⁸⁵ Barad states, “intra-acting responsibly as part of the world means taking account of the entangled phenomena that are intrinsic to the world's vitality and being responsive to the possibilities that might help us and it flourish.”⁸⁶

It is this relationality between actions and matter and how this might affect a *material* outcome that sparks my curiosity. This research has considered this relationship by applying a set of self-determining principles that guide actions throughout the practice. This underpinning method has been one of the most challenging aspects to implement. When writing about ethics and doing the right thing, it could be misconstrued as a moralistic thread running through my practice when, in reality, it falls far short of this ideal! To follow a guiding principle when time is limited, and distractions are ever-present, is not an easy task. The focused and clear-minded state of te whare pora can be elusive. Following a guiding ethos is not unlike the slow durational process of stitching, it takes discipline and commitment to the task at hand. The writing of Reverend Māori Marsden has been a great source of inspiration, and he offers this encouragement:

Spiritual values are always beyond the full grasp of mortal man. There is always a gap between the ideal and practice; between becoming and being; but towards that excellence all things strive.⁸⁷

⁸² Henry, 24. Expressed in the concepts of whanaungatanga, kōtahitanga, wairuatanga and kaitiakitanga.

⁸³ Royal, 92.

⁸⁴ Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 396.

⁸⁵ Barad, *Quantum Entanglements*, 265.

⁸⁶ Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 396.

⁸⁷ Royal, 39.

A guiding principle can be like an act of faith, committing to an action with an outcome not immediately evident. It is only later the effect of these accumulated actions becomes visible. In my practice I have a role in materialising the world, but to understand that this same process is occurring at a quantum level is less easy to conceptualise. However this could be seen as no different from the many daily tasks we carry out that go unseen but make a difference. I believe it is these small daily accumulated actions that are a vital part of the life force that shapes a material outcome.



Figure 54. Mierle Laderman Ukeles, *Washing/Tracks/Maintenance: Outside*, (1973) detail, photograph, Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Connecticut. In honour of Andrea Miller-Keller, Contemporary Art Purchase Fund, 1998.25.4. © Photo Courtesy Wadsworth Atheneum.

Mierle Laderman Ukeles practice revolved around the importance of maintenance labour. For Ukeles, the unseen, unvalued work and small everyday tasks of living are the “invisible work that makes all other forms of work possible”.⁸⁸ How do these underpinning acts of care and responsibility contribute to ‘manifesting the life force of material’ in an art work? In his essay *Spiritual Materiality: Contemporary Sculpture and the Responsibility of Forms*, Ottman defines Spiritual Materialism as a work that “calls for an involvement in the question of being and a responsibility to other”. Each invisible act such as cleaning, caring and attending contributes to the works becoming. Furthermore, it is this tending to, that places the maker *within* the world, each action an intra-active contribution to manifesting life force, as phenomena.

⁸⁸ Molesworth, 135.

Weaving is an experience of entanglements. The physical world of material and senses, in which material is understood and experienced, is never separate from the world that lies beyond those senses. It is evidenced in the encounters described by a kaiako as “the feathers will come”⁸⁹. This truth that things occur that make possible the work’s becoming, and requires no effort or energy on my part, comes to be understood through the material practice of weaving. Responding and attending to material plays a part in its physical/material and non-physical/ spiritual materialisation. Being open to this idea in our thinking, it becomes a tangible thread that runs through all things within the physical realm. These ideas form my understanding of the universe *as* process and the concept of life force. It is more than being in the flow of material...this is the flow of energy/life force that breathes life into the material world.



Figure 55. Wolfgang Laib, *Milkstone* (1987-1989), installation, Kunstsau Bregenz, Bregenz (1999). Material: marble and milk. Photo credit: © Wolfgang Laib, Courtesy Sperone Westwater, New York.

So the very material itself calls for this deep care, and as such, the respect and care for harakeke as material is intrinsic to the finished work. Like the Milkstone sculptures of Wolfgang Laib that require cleaning and replenishing each day, the material itself calls for ongoing responsibility. For Laib, this responsibility is connected to the sacredness of the material, because it holds the potential for life.

This journey has led me to a very simple two-ply rope made of remnant harakeke. Understanding more deeply the ideas of a life force present in material, I could conclude the purpose of the rope lies simply in its coming into being. Fibre from the rib and outer edges of the harakeke leaf blades, collected as part of weaving tikanga, makes use of all material harvested. The fibre connects back to

⁸⁹ In conversation with weaving kiako, Herapia Cairns, a student asked her “where will I get the feathers for the kākahu?” Herapia replied “the feathers will come”. Not long after, the black feathers required to complete the weaving arrived with the unexpected death of her chicken. Of course this sounds far-fetched and without any scientific basis, yet most weavers, like myself, will have experienced something similar many times.

many harvests, cleaning and caring for the harakeke at Rangimarie Pa Harakeke,⁹⁰ Pa te Aroha and Piritahi. Holding the power of whanaungatanga; the many voices talking of ways of viewing our relationship to the material world as guardians through kaitiakitanga; interdependent with all living things (kotahitanga), and connected to a spiritual dimension (wairuatanga). The simple method of construction, a twist and counter-twist locks the material into place through opposing tensions and holds in its material being the presence of my hand as maker - visible in the small binding that marks the end of each day's work, and in the daily practice of washing the rope. This daily washing removes the flaking epidermal layer of the flax, softens the fibre and continues the material process of transformation. The pegged end of the rope signals a holding and a continuance for another day. The twisting of fibres, dripping water and smell of moist harakeke reminds the viewer of its earthly origins. Weaving tikanga and my own self-determining 'guiding principles' have underpinned the making of the work, beginning from its harvest, preparing fibre, making and final installation. *Harakeke Rope* (2019) contains evidence of all of the relationships between material, maker and the invisible forces in its simplest form and the responsibilities that are implicit within these relationships.

“Mauri - the life-force which generates, regenerates and upholds creation.”⁹¹



Figure 56. Michelle Mayn, *Harakeke Rope* (2019), Corban Estate Arts Centre, Auckland/Tāmaki Makaurau. Material: harakeke, stone, peg and water.

⁹⁰ Te Noho Kotahitanga Marae, Auckland - Tamaki Makaurau.

⁹¹ Royal, 44.

5 CONCLUSION

Meeting each moment, being alive to the possibilities of becoming, is an ethical call, an invitation that is written into the very matter of all being and becoming. We need to meet the universe halfway, to take responsibility for the role that we play in the world's differential becoming.

Karen Barad⁹²

Our participation in the material world requires an attentive and responsive approach to material entanglements through ethics. The importance of these connections and entanglement at a quantum level is pretty mind shattering! Time, space, mattering are not how we perceive it! This is what calls for transcendence; to see what is beyond our ability to perceive. This is not seeing ourselves seeing – it is understanding reality beyond our sensory perceptions. That is the intra-active phenomena I attempt to work with, in the entangled flows between the physical (material) and non-physical (spiritual) realms.

Spiritual Materialism is a term that supports a schematic shift in how we view our relationship to the material world. While many of the ideas discussed were present through my weaving practice prior to this research project, my cognisance of this boundary-less reality of life being empirically evidenced by quantum physics, is quite profound. How we engage with materials matters; the role of principles that guide actions shapes not only a material practice but ways of knowing and being in the world. The term spiritual materialism offers a transcendent possibility to understanding material beyond the physical world of our senses, as a vital part of the entangled web of life force that makes up the universal process.

Te Harakeke / The Harakeke

Te Korari / The flower

Ngā taonga whakarere iho / the treasures gifted to us

O te Rangi / Of our Sky Father

O te Whenua / Of our Mother Papatuanuku

O Ngā Tupuna /and Our Forebears

Homai he oranga mō mātou / bless us with wellness

Tihei Mauri ora / and the sneeze of life....⁹³

⁹² Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 396.

⁹³ A karakia used before harvesting harakeke.

6 EXHIBITION



Figure 57. Michelle Mayn, Matariki Graduating Exhibition (2019), St. Paul Street Gallery, Auckland/Tāmaki Makaurau.

This research project culminated in a final exhibition that responded to the foyer site between the St Paul Street Galleries 1 & 2. It included three object-based installations, *Harakeke Rope* (ongoing since 2019) *Kuruwaka* (2019) and *Stone Melting* (2019).

In reflecting on this exhibition, I return to the concept of mauri found within weaving practice. Like any philosophical view, I may come to an understanding that is true for myself that may not necessarily be true for others. As such, I will not attempt to define mauri but rather summarise my thinking and understandings that followed my experience of this exhibition.

While each installation began with time spent gathering and processing materials; washing pebbles until the water ran clean; dehiscing kuruwaka and sifting the seeds; stripping green blades of flax to reveal silken muka fibre; twisting the harakeke fibre into rope - it was the daily tending throughout the exhibition that became most significant to me.

In my practice, making is usually a quiet, durational act with the work only revealed to the viewer in its completed state. Here these boundaries collapsed – there was no before and after, rather a continuation through the daily attending to material and space. Beginning with the careful preparation of the foyer; sweeping, scrubbing, wiping, dusting - then tending to each installation. In *Stone Melting* (2019) a daily depositing of frozen pebbles activated a slow process of self-formation. The

dark, amassing formation of lustrous harakeke pods and accumulating drifts of breath blown seeds of *Kuruwaka* (2019) – contained and uncontained by the display cabinet; abseilers traversing the 35 metre atrium to ascend the *Harakeke Rope* (ongoing since 2019) in the sunlit void. Although these actions transpired daily in front of the viewer, my presence, while visible, was not the focus.

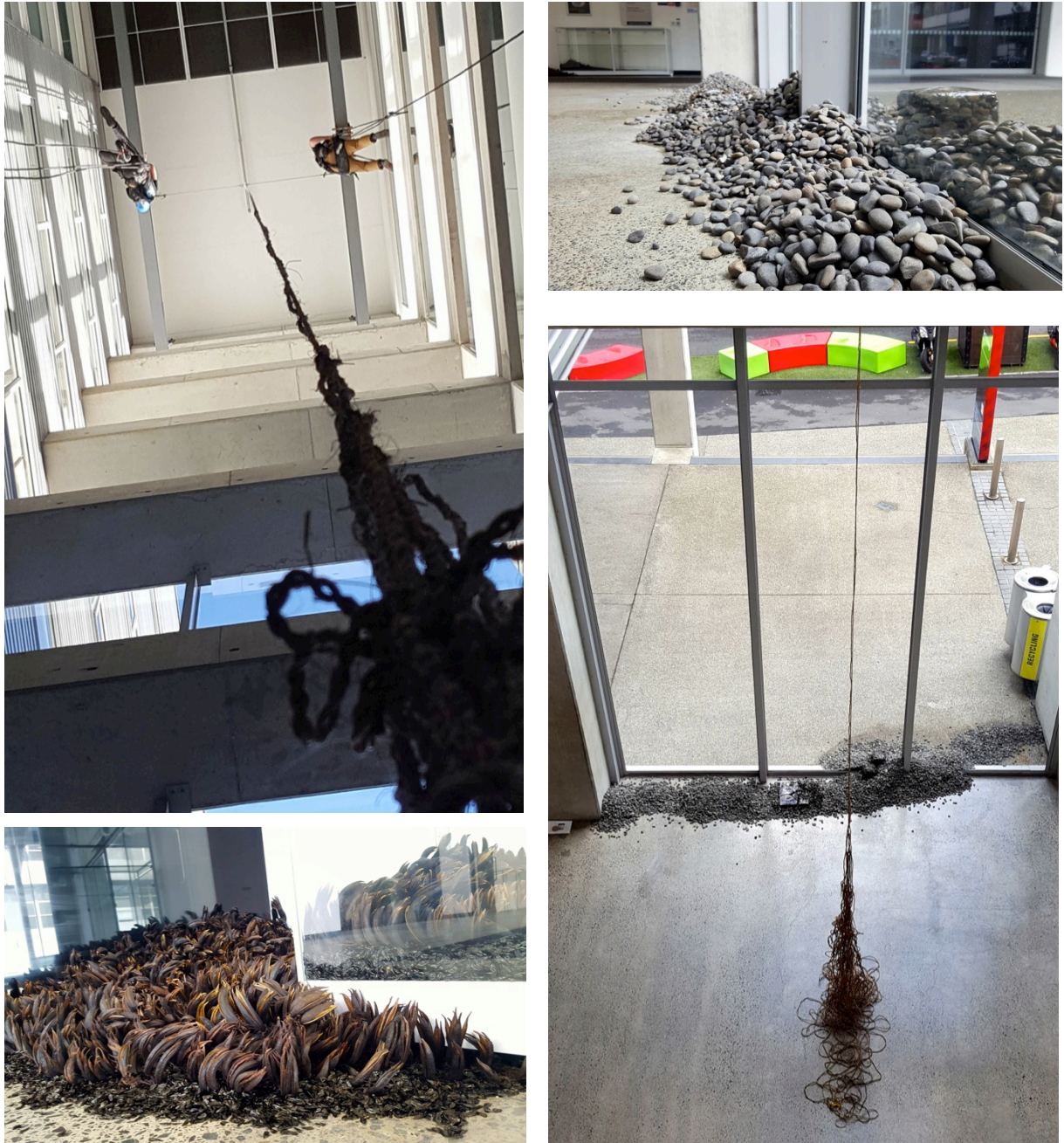


Figure 58. Michelle Mayn, *Harakeke Rope* (ongoing since 2019), *Stone Melting* (2019) and *Kuruwaka* (2019, St. Paul Street Gallery (foyer), Auckland/Tāmaki Makaurau. Left to right top – abseilers installing *Harakeke Rope* (ongoing since 2019); *Stone Melting* (2019) with newly placed frozen pebbles outside. Left to right bottom: *Kuruwaka* (2019) installation detail of kuruwaka and seeds inside and outside of cabinet.; view of *Harakeke Rope* (ongoing since 2019) and *Stone Melting* (2019) from Level Two landing on day 19 of installation.

The gradual material accumulation and evolving nature of each installation seemed to take on a powerful flow. The momentum determined by the qualities of each material element that quietly responded to the currents and forces surrounding it. The tumbling fall of stone on polished concrete in *Stone Melting* (2019) echoed throughout the architectural space, breaking a moment of silence. The feather-light seeds of *Kuruwaka* (2019) disbursed and settled to mark the swing of the gallery door. Gravitational forces formed a perfect line in the suspended muka section of *Harakeke Rope* (ongoing since 2019). The silken white rope gently transitioned to a twisted tangle of coarse flax, evidence of the opposing forces of each twist that bound the rope together.

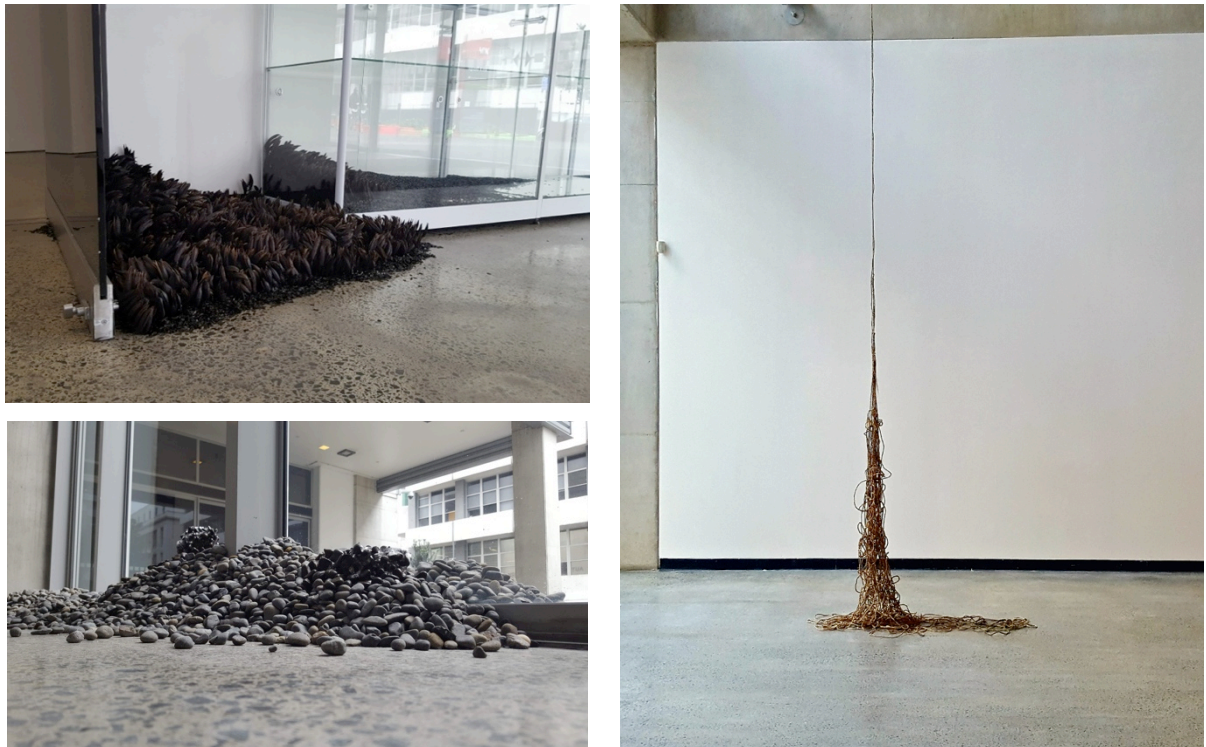


Figure 59. Michelle Mayn, St. Paul Street Gallery (foyer), Auckland/Tāmaki Makaurau. Left to right top: *Kuruwaka* (2019), *Harakeke Rope* (ongoing since 2019). Bottom left: *Stone Melting* (2019).

These daily activities of tending to materials became both a central focus, as a method of manifesting life force, and a conceptual manifestation of the generating, regenerating and self-forming nature that is mauri. I came to understand how each considered action forms a vital element of not just the works' formation, through material and durational processes, but is an intrinsic part of manifesting a universal life force. As a maker this involved allowing things to flow of their own accord, responding to what was happening in each ongoing moment - things became evident, and decisions clear as the work unfolded. Choosing a course of actions guided by principles, served to create a moment to moment awareness of my role in this universal process.

Mauri or life force, became visible in these relationships between myself as maker and the material world. In utilising atmospheric conditions of the site to activate the work, such as light, air currents and gravity - the material responded not like inert matter but as a fluid part of the process. Throughout the exhibition mauri became evident to me in the unexpected moments outside of my direct involvement, such as the gentle twisting movement of a single fibre, stirred by the atmosphere and illuminated by the northward facing light. Or the delicate white feather that settled among the pebbles for the final three days of the exhibition. Through the experience of this exhibition I came to see that 'process', by its very nature, makes evident that my actions shape the material world and manifest the mauri, life force, of materials.



Figure 60. Michelle Mayn, *Stone Melting* (2019), St. Paul Street Gallery (foyer), Auckland/Tāmaki Makaurau. Left to right: day nine of installation; detail with ice and balancing pebble.

Reverend Māori Marsden provides a philosophical perspective where mauri "was originally regarded as elemental energy...out of which the stuff of the universe was created".⁹⁴ Is the philosophical concept of mauri the same as Barad's agential realism theories? The nuances contained within Māori philosophy and the complexities found within quantum physics may always be beyond my full understanding. However both speak to a world beyond our sense-perception, a universal process at work in the material world, with our actions playing a part in the world's becoming. Marsden talks of man's position in the 'continuous creation' of a dynamic universe that is a "stream of processes and events" where "each man is an event within the one ongoing procession of nature and so is each created object".⁹⁵ Life is process, my actions are a part of this process. I play a part in this dynamic universe and consider right actions are those that support and work with this universal life-force.

⁹⁴ Royal, 6.

⁹⁵ Royal, 21.



Figure 61. Michelle Mayn, *Stone Melting* (2019) and *Harakeke Rope* (ongoing since 2019), installation detail of midday sun lit rope, St. Paul Street Gallery (foyer, atrium and outside entrance), St. Paul Street Gallery (foyer), Auckland/Tāmaki Makaurau.

HARAKEKE ROPE (ongoing since 2019)

Material: Fibre extracted from harakeke leaf blade by scraping with mussel shell. Harakeke rib and outer leaf blade flax fibre stripped. Gathered during annual harvests from 2011 to 2019 from Pa Harakeke, Te Noho Kotahitanga - Unitec (Tamaki Makaurau/Auckland), Pa te Aroha (Whirinaki), Piritahi (Waiheke Island), Auckland Botanic Gardens and o Te Iwi, Waitakere.

Hand-worked rope, suspended 35 metres in length from muka to harakeke mass. 150 metres approximately, pegged - and ongoing throughout the exhibition

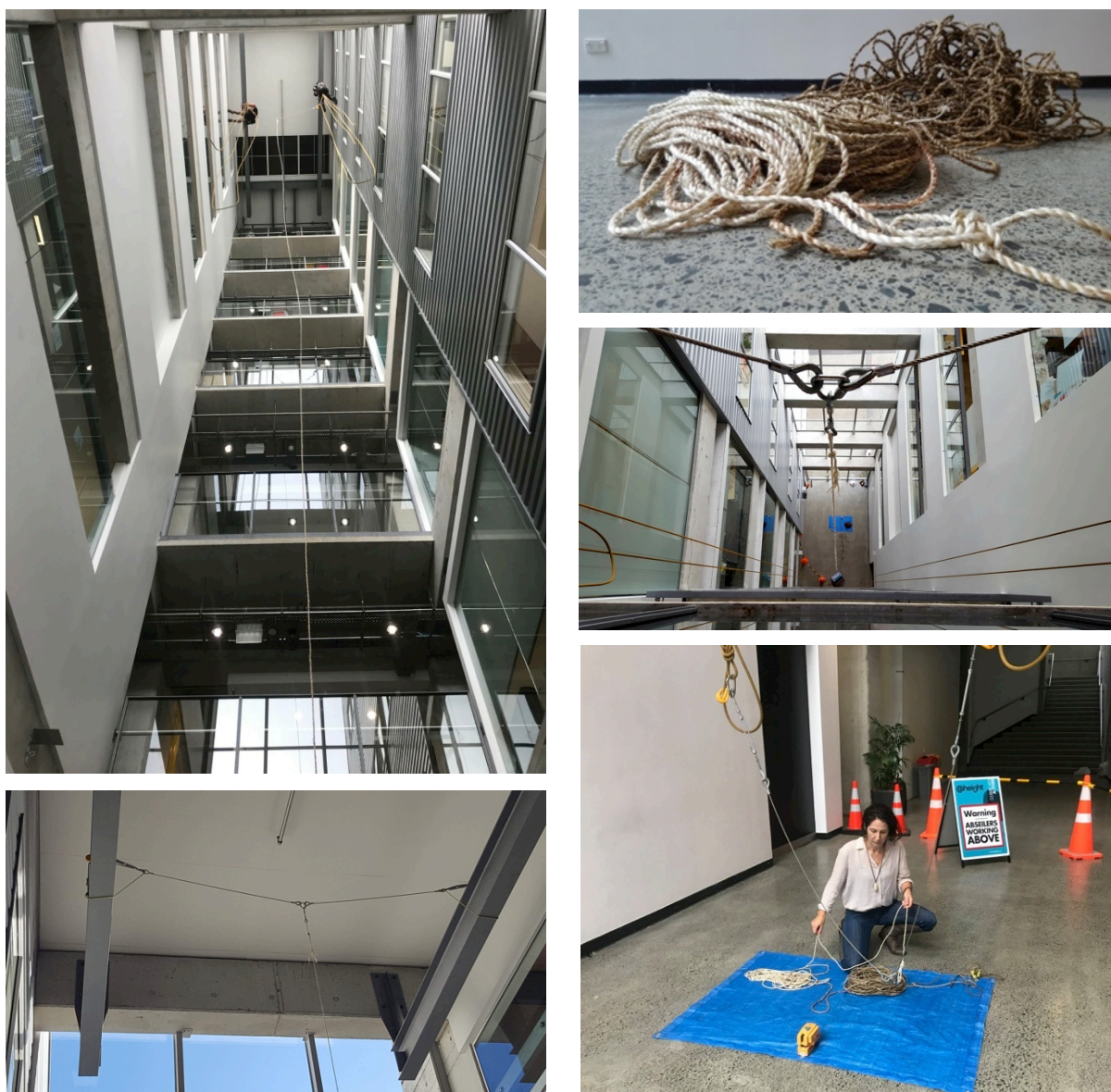


Figure 62. Michelle Mayn, installing *Harakeke Rope* (ongoing since 2019), St Paul Street Gallery (foyer and atrium), Auckland/Tāmaki Makaurau. Left top to bottom: abseilers installing in atrium; installation completed with rope attached to rigging and secured using grapple hooks. Right top to bottom: muka and harakeke sections prior to installation; installation in progress with rope and rigging view from Level 7; artist uncoiling and ascending rope during installation.



Figure 63. Michelle Mayn, *Harakeke Rope* (ongoing since 2019), installation, St Paul Street Gallery (foyer and atrium), Auckland/Tāmaki Makaurau.

KURUWAKA (2019)

Materials: Sun-dried kuruwaka/seed capsules and harakeke seed extracted from kuruwaka, sifted and chaff removed.

Installed with the artist's own breath. Ongoing over 18 days



Figure 64. Michelle Mayn, *Kuruwaka* (2019), installation, St Paul Street Gallery (foyer), Auckland/Tāmaki Makaurau.



Figure 65. Michelle Mayn, *Kuruwaka* (2019), installation, St Paul Street Gallery (foyer), Auckland/Tāmaki Makaurau. Photo Credit: Steven Park

STONE MELTING (2019)

Material: Hand washed River Pebbles, frozen in rain water.

Dimensions area variable – ongoing



Figure 66. Michelle Mayn, *Stone Melting* (2019), installation, St Paul Street Gallery (foyer and outside entrance), Auckland/Tāmaki Makaurau.



Figure 67. Michelle Mayn, *Stone Melting* (2019), installation, St Paul Street Gallery (foyer and outside entrance), Auckland/Tāmaki Makaurau. Photo Credit (top and middle): Steven Park

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9 GLOSSARY

The following glossary uses Te Aka Online Māori Dictionary 2003-2019 for translation of Māori words to English. Weaving terms have been sourced from Whatu Kaakahu: Māori Cloaks, Awhina Tamarapa (ed), Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, 2011. Where additional information is supplied source has been included.

Weaving terms

aho weft threads; line of descent; connection; also applies to a single weft stroke and a weft row.

A fine weft weaving thread made of muka fibre. Made using two lots of two strands (four in total). These are spun around one another to form the thread by rolling on the bare leg. (Puketapu-Hetet 1989, 59)

aho tapu first weft row, literally meaning 'sacred thread'.

atua ancestor with continuing influence, god, demon, supernatural being, deity, - although often translated as 'god' and now also used for the Christian God, this is a misconception of the real meaning. Many Māori trace their ancestry from atua in their whakapapa and they are regarded as ancestors with influence over particular domains. These atua also were a way of rationalising and perceiving the world. Normally invisible, atua may have visible representations.

hāpine to remove moisture from and soften weaving material. (Puketapu-Hetet 1989, 111)

harakeke New Zealand flax, *Phormium tenax*; fibre from its leaves are used to make most cloaks.

hau vital essence, vitality - of a person, place or object; wind, breeze, breath.

hau-ora the breath or wind of the spirit which was infused into the process of birth to animate life. (Marsden 2003, 60)

hihiri pure energy, a refined form of mauri that is manifested as a form of radiation or light, and aura that radiates from matter but is especially evident in living things. (Marsden 2003, 60)

Io supreme being - some tribes have a tradition of a supreme being, which may be a response to Christianity. However, Io occurs in a number of traditions from Polynesian islands, including Hawai'i, the Society Islands and the Cook Islands. This suggests a more ancient tradition.

Root cause or creator (Marsden, 181)

kākahu generic name for a cloak.

kaiako teacher, instructor.

kaitiaki guardian, custodian.

kaitiakitanga guardianship, stewardship.

karakia recite a prayer, chant; incantation, ritual chant; prayer, blessing.

kaupapa platform, layer; topic, theme; main body of a cloak.

kete bag, basket. Traditionally, there were as many as 70 styles of baskets, each made for a specific purpose including varieties used to carry, cook or prepare food, ceremonial or ritual baskets and patterned baskets. (Puketapu-Hetet 1989, 73-74)

kiekie *Freycinetia banksia*, a many branched woody vine, with tufts of long leaves. It is arguably the most valued weaving plant after harakeke. Often used in the making of whariki and in tukutuku panels. (Manaaki Whenua: Landcare Research 2019)

kōkōwai red ochre.

kōrari Far North word for harakeke (Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa 2011) ; flower stem of the flax. (Māori Dictionary)

kōtahitanga unity, togetherness, solidarity, collective action.

kuruwaka seed capsule. (Ngā Tipu Whakaoranga database 2019)

māuri life principle, life force, vital essence, special nature, a material symbol of a life principle, source of emotions - the essential quality and vitality of a being or entity. Also used for a physical object, individual, ecosystem or social group in which this essence is located.

māuri-ora is the life-principle. It is that bonding force which is further refined beyond pure enegry (hihiri) to make life possible. (Marsden 2003, 60)

miro to ply, or roll threads together.

muka/whitāu flax fibre.

neinei The species called neinei and inanga (inaka in the south), *Dracophyllum latifolium*, are widespread. Their long, stiff, gleaming leaves are used by weavers for decorative features, such as tags on cloaks. (Manaaki Whenua: Landcare Research 2019)

ora to be alive; being alive; life, health, vitality.

pā harakeke a grove or plantation of flax, often denotes a number of cultivated plants.

Pākehā New Zealander of European descent - probably originally applied to English-speaking Europeans living in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

Papatūānuku Earth, Earth mother and wife of Rangi-nui - all living things originate from them.

para rain cape; vegetable matter; flax-leaf cuticle.

pīngao golden sand sedge, *Ficinia spiralis*. Orange to gold leaves used for patterning highlights often used in tukutuku panels combined with other fibres such as kiekie and harakeke. The leaves are also used on their own or with other weaving materials to make fine plaited kete, whāriki, pōtae (hats), pare (headbands), belts and raincapas. (Manaaki Whenua: Landcare Research 2019)

piupiu waist garment. A skirt style garment composed of multiple strands of prepared harkakeke that is woven or plaited onto a band. The strands hang freely and oscillate with the bodies movement. (Puketapu-Hetet 1989, 42)

pokinikini cylindrical, dried harakeke strands with regular intervals of black-dyed muka.

rāhui to put in place a temporary ritual prohibition, closed season, ban, reserve - traditionally a rāhui was placed on an area, resource or stretch of water as a conservation measure or as a means of social and political control for a variety of reasons which can be grouped into three main categories: pollution by tapu, conservation and politics.

raranga plaiting. A Māori term used by weavers to describe the technique used in making baskets and mats. (Puketapu-Hetet 1989, 69)

Tāne In the Māori creation story, Tāne is the son of Papatūānuku (Mother earth) and Ranginui (Father sky). Tāne, as god of the forest, let light into the world by separating his parents. (Royal 2007)

Tāne-mahuta atua of the forests and birds and one of the children of Rangi-nui and Papa-tū-ā-nuku.

tāniko weft-twined patterned borders on fine cloaks featuring geometric patterns; the technique used to create these.

taonga property, possession, object; treasure, anything prized - applied to anything considered to be of value including socially or culturally valuable objects, resources, phenomenon, ideas and techniques.

tapu be sacred, prohibited, restricted, set apart, forbidden, under atua protection.

tauira student, pupil, apprentice; weaving sampler.

Te Ao Māori Māori worldview.

Te Aro-nui 'that before us'. The natural world around us. (Marsden 2003, 61)

Te Tua-uri 'beyond the world of darkness'. "The real world of the complex series of rhythmical patterns of energy which operates behind this world of sense perception." (Marsden 2003, 60)

Te Tua-ātea the world beyond space and time. It is infinite and eternal. The transcendent eternal world of the spirit which is ultimate reality. (Marsden 2003, 62)

Te Whare Pora literally meaning the 'House of Weaving', this is traditionally where weaving was conducted and also refers to the conceptual state of being an accomplished weaver.

te reo language, dialect, tongue, speech.

tihei mauri ora sneeze of life, call to claim the right to speak.

tikanga method, plan, reason, custom, the right way of doing things.

Tikanga Māori Māori custom.

tohunga proficient, adept; skilled person, chosen expert, priest, healer. Tohunga mediated between the atua and the tribe, gave advice about economic activities, were experts in propitiating the atua with karakia and were experts in sacred lore, spiritual beliefs, traditions and genealogies of the tribe.

tukutuku wall panels of lashed latticework, a customary art form within a wharenui.

wānanga school of knowledge. (Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa 2011) Meet and discuss, deliberate, consider; conference, forum, educational seminar. (Te Aka Online Māori Dictionary 2003-2019)

wairua spirit, soul. It is the non-physical spirit, distinct from the body and the mauri.

wairuatanga spirituality.

whakairo carving; symbolic patterns.

whanaungatanga relationship, kinship, sense of family connection.

whare wānanga university, place of higher learning - traditionally, places where tohunga taught the sons of rangatira their people's knowledge of history, genealogy and religious practices.

wharenuī meeting house; main building of a marae where guests are accommodated.

whakatipu type of rain cape.

whāriki floor mat.

whatu finger weft-twining technique that forms the basis of Māori cloak weaving.

whenu warp thread. Note: lengthwise threads of a woven flax garment.

whiri to plait or braid; twisted rope, plait.