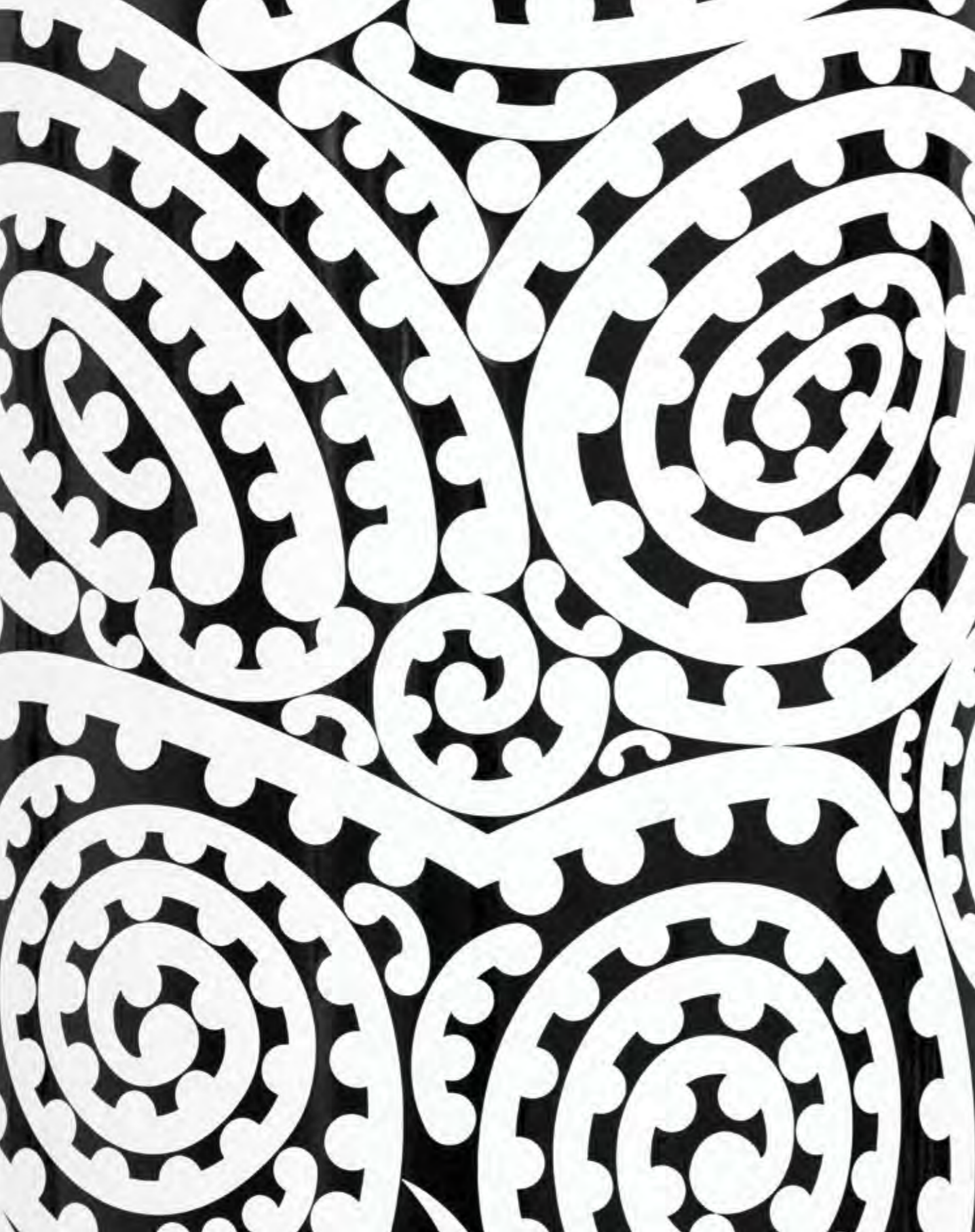


Te Tini a Pītau
NGATAIHARURU
TAEPA
12 years of kōwhaiwhai





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14 June – 6 September
2015

COVER IMAGE
Kanohi Kitea 2008

IMAGE LEFT
Tinakori 2006 (detail)

PATAKA
ART + MUSEUM

Introduction

Te Tini a Pitau: 12 years of kōwhaiwhai brings together twenty of Ngataiharuru Taepa's key works, selected from public and private collections throughout New Zealand. The exhibition offers a comprehensive showcase of the scope of Taepa's practice over the past twelve years.

One of New Zealand's most significant and innovative contemporary Māori artists, Taepa has produced an impressive and remarkably varied body of work that ingeniously combines indigenous concepts with contemporary expression. He has fashioned a unique identity for himself in his exploration of the relevance of kōwhaiwhai painting today.

Taepa's elegant, formal, abstract paintings and sculptures evoke the customary kōwhaiwhai designs associated with the heke (rafters) of Māori whareniui. While kōwhaiwhai painting has become an important source of inspiration for a number of contemporary Māori artists in New Zealand, including Kura Te Waru Rewiri, Darryn George and Wayne Youle, it has been the central focus of Taepa's work for over twelve years; his single-minded treatment of kōwhaiwhai gives his work a conceptual and aesthetic consistency. He wants to enrich our appreciation and understanding of the uniqueness, integrity and significance of kōwhaiwhai designs as a visual language in New Zealand.

Taepa has attained an extraordinary level of mastery of the art of kōwhaiwhai. His work responds not only to the sense of structure and order of the designs but also to their rhythm, spontaneity and dynamism. But Taepa goes beyond these, creating kōwhaiwhai for the twenty-first century. Using western techniques to interpret customary designs, he takes the characteristically intricate, interlacing patterns and gives them a fresh interpretation introducing unexpected materials, compositions, techniques and colour combinations. Taepa creates his designs on a computer and experiments with twenty-first century technologies – computer-generated imagery, digital routers, acrylic laminates, stencils on PVC pipes and steel and digitally carved plywood – to create crisp, elegant paintings. His aesthetic is minimalist – he tends to favour clean, graphic shapes and a restricted palette. His technical expertise is evident in the exquisite detailing of his meticulously painted and carved work.

Taepa tends to work in series often based on the materials he selects. Over the years his work has evolved from the high-gloss, minimalist aesthetic of curved PVC pipes and steel (where the shape of the PVC pipe replicated the curved shape of the heke in meeting houses) to his more recent multi-layered, digitally carved plywood using the latest jigsaw technology. He has also been investigating the relationship between kōwhaiwhai and whakairo (wood carving) and between kōwhaiwhai, hei tiki and portraiture.

One of a new generation of artists who continue to reinvent and reinvigorate Māori art, Taepa has as a central theme the privileging of Māori art forms and ideology in his work. He has been committed to sharing Māori customary practices through his art since he was a teenager exposed to the creation of the kōwhaiwhai panels for the meeting house at *Te Whare o Rangi* in Hawkes Bay.

Taepa plays with the binary aesthetics of kōwhaiwhai painting with their repeating patterns, and their negative and positive space. As he puts it: 'For me kōwhaiwhai is an expression of the way our ancestors saw the world in their time. Their achievement, using positive and negative spaces, was to have the colours interact simultaneously – as opposed to how people think now. It's one of the simple conventions of kōwhaiwhai, but for me it's achieving excellence through simplicity, subtle and thought-provoking while retaining a strong sense of identity and continuity with tradition.'¹

Of Te Arawa, Te Āti Awa and Pākehā descent, Taepa is the son of renowned ceramic artist Wi Taepa. Fluent in te reo Māori, he graduated in 2003 with a Masters degree in Māori Visual Arts from Te Pūtahi-a-Toi at Massey University in Palmerston North, where he lectured in Māori Visual Arts from 2002 until 2014. Taepa acknowledges as influences his fellow lecturers at the school including Kura Te Waru Rewiri, Robert Jahnke and Shane Cotton. Recently he was appointed Kaihautū, Toi Māori, Director of Māori Arts at Massey University, Wellington. Taepa is Chair of Te Ātinga, the contemporary visual arts committee of Toi Māori Aotearoa. In 2014 he was selected to travel to Monte Cassino in Italy as part of the 70th anniversary of the famous WWII battle there and in 2015 he was commissioned to create artwork for the *WWI Remembered: A Light and Sound Show* for the opening of Pukeahu War Memorial Park, Wellington. Recently he has been commissioned by New Zealand Post to create a logo and a kōwhaiwhai-designed stamp.

Pataka has had a long-standing relationship with Taepa, dating from his first inclusion in the exhibition *Fathers and Sons* in 2000. In 2002 Pataka hosted his Master of Māori Visual Arts exhibition, *Mangopare*. Since then his work has been included in two major exhibitions at Pataka, *Double Vision*, and *Mua ki Muri Intergenerational Creativity*. Pataka is delighted to present Taepa's first major survey exhibition bringing together work from the last twelve years of his practice.

Helen Kedgley

Curator and Director, Pataka Art + Museum

¹Taepa, N. quoted in Smith, H. (Ed.), *Taiāwhio II: Contemporary Māori artists, 18 New Conversations* (Wellington: Te Papa Press, 2007)

A voice from the pae

Ngatai, from the iwi of Te Arawa, has the fortune, or maybe not, of being the son of his larger-than-life artist father, Wi Te Tau Taepa (in Wi's mind "the great and powerful").

Along with his artist brother Kereama, he was nurtured, hauled and ensconced in the creative world of his father and friends. Fiercely loyal in acknowledgment of his tribal identity, Ngatai has challenged us with his own brand of Taepa humour.

In his arts journey Ngatai has constantly referenced the traditional images of Māori. His choice of kōwhaiwhai designs, splaying with ordered abandonment over curved and multi-layered surfaces, enhance dramatically his recent heke and pou forms. The restricted colour palette he often favours adds its own sharpness to the hard-edged images.

Ngatai's favouring of the kape design, a negative space kōwhaiwhai pattern, with its ability to multi connect on itself, suits the figurative images of his latest work.

The showing of the \$2 dollar shop kōwhaiwhai patterned plate installation at Te Manawa Art Gallery 2008, and his "heke" using \$2 kōwhaiwhai cups at the KIWA exhibition at Spirit Wrestler Gallery, Vancouver was received quizzically by some Māori trying to comprehend the "Hei aha te aha?". However to many in the arts fraternity... Wow! Wish I had thought of that.

Māori artists relish the engagement in whānau and tribal banter with each other. This not only keeps us connected as artists and close friends across generations but as reminders to the challenging responsibilities we have, to our vulnerable cultural identity.

Ngatai is proudly viewed by many younger Māori as an artist who has taken his right to contemporize his traditional arts identity, to speak an arts language needed for today. Art however, that is still inherently imbued with "Mauri", the life force of the culture.

Ngatai was commissioned by New Zealand Post in 2012, to create a logo featuring a kōwhaiwhai styled manaia image on all their stationery and postage items. A deserved recognition for this Te Arawa artist, who continues to engage in support for Māori endeavours in the arts world.

The present chair of Te Atinga, Contemporary Visual Arts Committee of Toi Māori Aotearoa, firstly set up in 1987 by the Māori and South Pacific Arts Board, under The Queen Elizabeth 2 Arts Council, Ngatai is driving this influential committee into exciting indigenous international connections for the next generation of Māori Artists. Many of these artists are emerging from tertiary institutions that offer in-depth study in Māori Art such as Massey University, Palmerston North, Toihoukura, Eastern Institute of Technology in Gisborne, and Toimairangi, Te Wānanga o Aotearoa in Hastings.

There is no doubt that the Taepa whānau will continue to put out there – art work derived from their heritage as a "wero" to challenge us all.

Kia ora tatou.

Sandy Adsett

Ngāti Pāhauwera
Professor
Toimairangi
Contemporary Māori Art School
Te Wānanga o Aotearoa
Hastings

PS: Also Ngatai is the artist to hang out with..... (well so his father says.)

Te Tini a Pītau By Professor Robert Jahnke

For many people kōwhaiwhai is probably the most recognisable form of Māori painting. For Henry Williams' it is the 'painted scroll ornamentation' associated with canoes, tribal houses and churches in the nineteenth century. Critically the scroll ornamentation referred to by Williams was a non-figurative art form where patterns represented an idea rather than depicting something in the natural world. At the end of the nineteenth century the most universal and significant pattern was the mangōpare. The pattern, with its lateral extension of terminal koru or koiri permutations, is associated with the head of the hammerhead shark. But while there is a visual link between the two, they are certainly not mimetically identical. What is significant from a Māori perspective is that the hammerhead shark quivers even in death. It is this tenacity and fighting spirit that is evoked in the use of the pattern in tribal houses of the nineteenth century as, after the establishment of the Native Court through the Native Land Acts of 1862 and 1865 – iwi were forced to attend Native Land Court hearings to prove their mana whenua to tribal lands.

Kōwhaiwhai within the nineteenth century context is most identifiable with Māori meeting houses, particularly with the heke (rafters) and tāhuhu (ridgepole) of the house. Within these contexts, kōwhaiwhai was genealogically encoded within the cosmology of the house to provide a visual endorsement of the interconnectedness of Māori and the Natural world. Consequently, many of the names associated with kōwhaiwhai include plant and marine references.

It is generally accepted that the names applied to kōwhaiwhai patterns, while culturally significant, are conceptually rather than perceptually grounded. That is, the relationship between the pattern and its natural referent is related to the cultural significance of the name rather than any visual correlation between the pattern and its natural referent.²

Ngatai Taepa's Master of Māori Visual Arts thesis exhibition at Pataka in 2002 used National Geographic footage of underwater marine life with a school of mangōpare trolling the seabed projected on to whitewashed half-round heke aligned the length of the gallery. In the foyer gallery Augustus Hamilton's 'Description of Maori Rafter Patterns' from the 1896 publication *The Art Workmanship of the Maori Race in New Zealand* collated by Rev. Herbert William's created eight lines of text across a row of vertically orientated heke. Five of the twenty-nine patterns that accompanied Hamilton's text were mangōpare – the most complex form coming from Te Poho o Rawiri (1849) that stood at Kaiti in Gisborne, painted by Natanahira Te Keteiwi who is also implicated in the development and refinement of the Pītau a Manaia figurative form. Another mangōpare is from Ngāti Porou and the other from Te Arawa to which the artist is genealogically affiliated.

With the advent of the missionary and settler community in Poverty Bay, and the influence of Reverend William Williams, a new form of figurative kōwhaiwhai emerged in the Manutūkē Church (1849-1863). It is associated with Natanahira Te Keteiwi who was responsible for the maihi of Te Poho o Rawiri, and whose hand is evident in the paintings for the church. While Roger Neich believed that the Pītau a Manaia pattern originated in 1849 the author³ argues for an earlier date on the heke of Te Hau ki Tūranga in 1842. Similarly the author has demonstrated that the Pītau a Manaia has a head, in contradiction to Neich's contention that 'the Pītau-a-Manaia never includes a head or face form'.⁴

Ngatai Taepa's kōwhaiwhai journey began with a conceptual engagement with the mangōpare projected on heke at Pataka. This was followed by a polemic installation of imported Chinese porcelain plates painted with appropriated kōwhaiwhai patterns, prior to engaging with the Pītau a Manaia in a painting entitled *Textual* for the *He Rereke* exhibition at Page Blackie Gallery in Wellington in 2003. This was followed by a switch to the negative/positive pītau and kape figurative paintings using the compositional vocabulary evident in the Pītau a Manaia to create two colour tiki and manaia forms using the koru, kape and rauru kōwhaiwhai patterns on half round and columnar structures from 2004 to 2006. The figurative form in *Textual* was created using painted text in contrast to *Tinakori* where the tiki is rendered in black on white lacquer.



Textual 2003

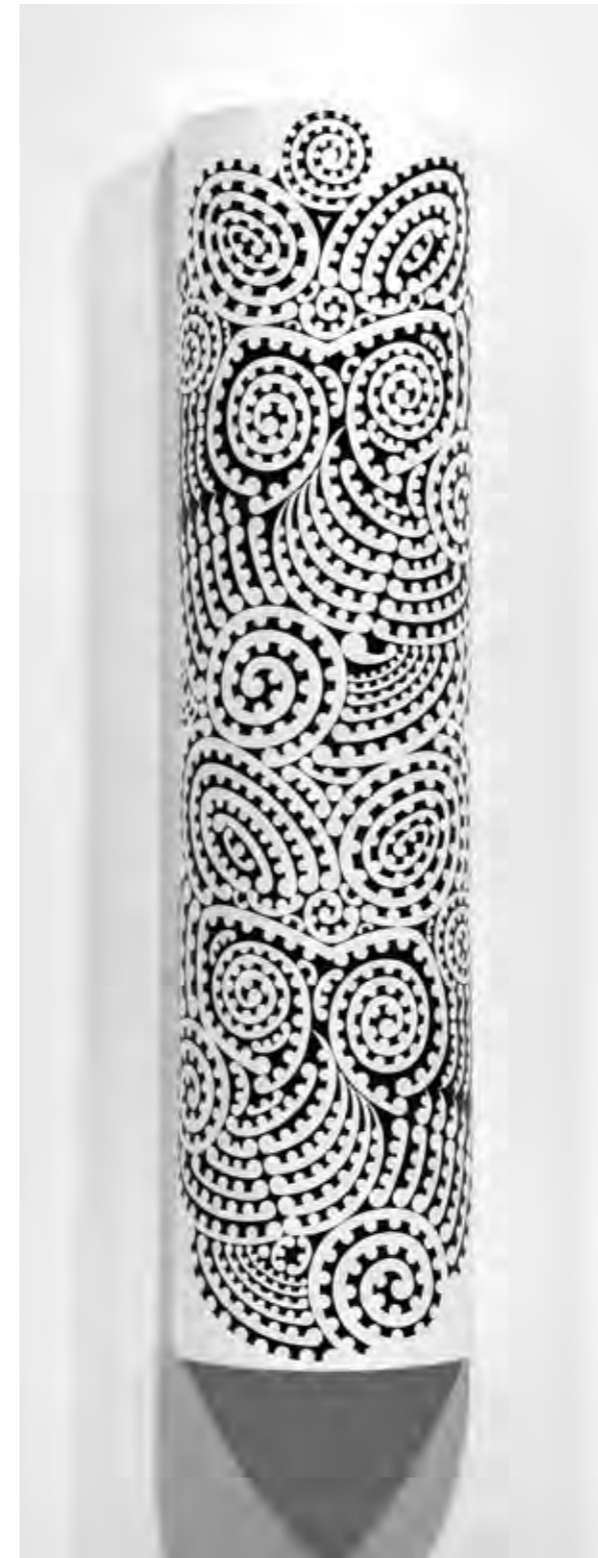
Taepa's encounter with both figurative and non-figurative kōwhaiwhai place him in a league of contemporary Māori artists whose commitment to kōwhaiwhai has evolved out of marae restoration projects. These projects brought the artists into contact with the art of the painted houses that remained largely inaccessible to the general public until Roger Neich's seminal publication *Painted Histories* in 1993. In Taepa's case, exposure to Neich's publication through the Māori visual arts programme at Massey University in Palmerston North and first hand encounters with houses like Rongopai and Te Poho o Rukupō has shaped his kōwhaiwhai explorations.

Sandy Adsett has been privileged in his access to the kōwhaiwhai treasure trove of the East Coast through his work as an arts advisor and his association with Toihoukura at Tairāwhiti Polytechnic during its early evolution. Adsett towers above all other Māori artists in his painted kōwhaiwhai, showing his mastery of curvilinear rhythms and colour in *Paikea* (1979) through to his more restrained combinations of rectilinear and figurative imagery in *Taki Toru* triptych (2000).

John Hovell comes closest to Taepa in his journey with the kape. However the influence of Rongopai pushed Hovell's kōwhaiwhai development towards a hybrid combination of naturalism and stylisation, evident in the 1976 mural in the Westpac Bank in Gisborne and the whare kai at Te Aute College in Hawke's Bay.

Buck Nin was inspired by the restoration experience of houses in Poverty Bay and Rongopai in particular. His kōwhaiwhai float like cultural banners in the sky; sometimes interacting with his signature waka pītau forms; sometimes grounded as topographical markers of Papatūānuku or a substrate reference to wāhi Māori beneath, or beside, the waka pītau striations across land. Koru, kape and three-finger motif dominate in red, black and white as banners of cultural dislocation in a colonised landscape. The manawa line of genealogical continuity is nowhere to be seen and the koiri of sub-generational interconnection is rarely present.

This political kōwhaiwhai is not without hope, however. The embryonic forms within it indicate that life prevails despite damaging counter forces. An artist, teacher, restorer of marae and organiser of exhibitions, Nin was a major force in contemporary Māori art from the 60's till his death in 1996.⁵



Tinakori 2006



In *Buck Nin Legacy* Taepa continues with the koru and kape elements, maintaining a link with the previous visual vocabulary from 2004, but here the composition of koru and kape elements are less reliant on the nineteenth century customary models. They are much more playful, even lyrical, in the stretching and pulling of koru and koiri, the placement of kape, right angle koru attachments, severed koru, bars and mangōpare permutations. There is an astute referential use of a double-ended mangōpare in an obliquely set head, with the upper the terminal koiri bulbs (circles) becoming the eyes of the tiki while the lower mangōpare describes a heart shaped mouth. Router technology, inlay and paint, together with contour shaping of head and body, introduce another dimension to Taepa's practice. The contouring was first seen in the *Manawarangi* series in 2008, where the contour was determined by a more organic compositional vocabulary of koru and kape that have a kinship with the earlier ngū shapes found on eighteenth century Poverty Bay hoe and the heke of Te Hau ki Tūranga in the National Museum Te Papa Tongarewa in Wellington. The patterns are not only defined by the colour of the acrylic but through relief layers. With the red *Tiki* the contour defines the head and upper torso while the negative and positive koru, kape and rauru patterns are used to define anatomical features and were achieved through relief layer contrast. This process carried over into the *Pitau a Tiki* series in 2009.

However the reliance on a two-colour relief layer contrast in the *Pitau a Tiki* series reveals in the compositional rigidity with its bilateral symmetry, rectilinear spirals, straight-line koru and pītau geometry reveal a calculated encounter with the constraints of technology culminating in tiki that are comical in appearance. By 2014 the constraints of symmetry and technology were replaced by asymmetry and a sophisticated jigsaw technology that elevated Tāne in his many guises in a cloak of multi-hued industrial board and acrylic paint contrasts.



Te Pitau a Tiki #5 2009

The 2013 *Kua Riro* exhibition at Page Blackie introduced a new direction to Taepa's engagement with the mangōpare pattern. In *Mango-Tu* three mangōpare patterns are arranged vertically with asymmetrical colour application. This disrupts the oblique placement of the manawa lines of the mangōpare exiting (or entering) at the bottom, top and bottom of the picture plane in a process of slide reflection. The colour system in this instance reflects nineteenth century Te Arawa kōwhaiwhai colour conventions, like the straight bar koru in one of the lateral head extensions of the mangōpare, akin to the idiosyncratic pūhoro. In *Mango-Rere* the synergy with Te Arawa pūhoro is more discernable in the inner straight-line sub-koiri, appearing to swing like a pendulum accentuated by the alternating colour rhythm of sea blue and earthen brown. In *Mango-Pae* (2013) the picture plane is divided into three horizontal sections. The composition is anchored by a horizontal centralised double-ended mangōpare with two upper and two lower mangōpare, connected to the outer koru and koiri with vertical manawa lines. The blue and brown colours, arranged asymmetrically, reflect the marine context of the hammerhead shark and the use of its oil for kōkōwai, generating an intuitive chromatic balance.

The Mango series introduces a novel approach to kōwhaiwhai composition where two or three bars of kōwhaiwhai merge together to create double or triple – even quadruple – thickness bars. This non-customary approach demonstrates the artist's capacity to respond to the negative and positive space in an intuitive manner that is innovative in its playfulness while aesthetically resonant as a kōwhaiwhai visual vocabulary of the new millennium. In this respect Taepa does not reiterate, rather he pushes the boundaries of kōwhaiwhai by stretching the customary visual vocabulary of koru, pītau, rauru, koiri, mangōpare, manawa and symmetry. Of course, asymmetry in kōwhaiwhai is not new nor is chromatic disruption of symmetry; it can be found on the heke of Te Hau ki Tūranga. What is new in Taepa's engagement with non-figurative kōwhaiwhai is an ability to create kōwhaiwhai with mood through innovative compositional strategies and chromatic panache.

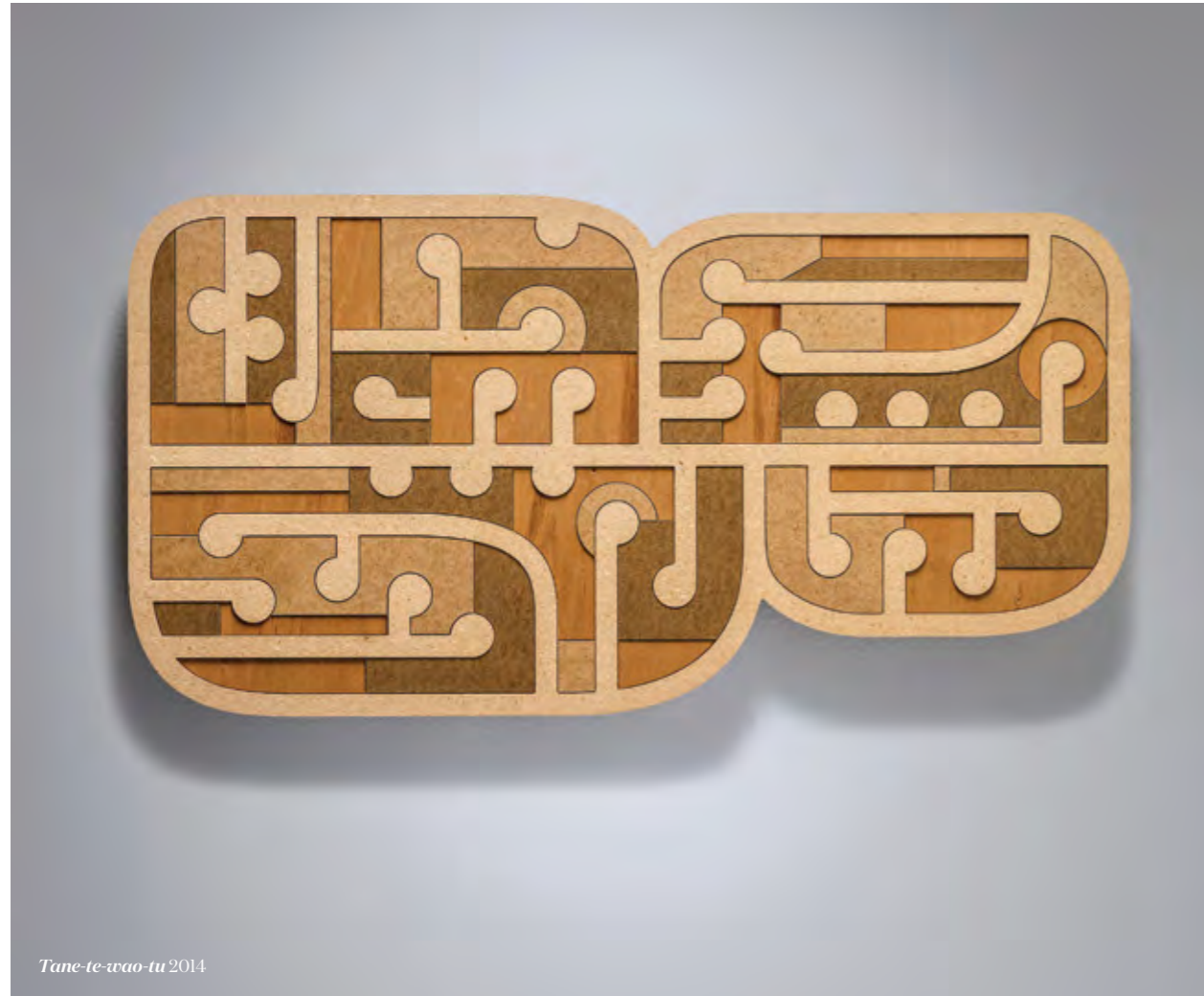


Mango-Rere 2013

Mango-Pae 2013



Mango-Tu 2013



Tane-te-wao-tu 2014



Maunga Nekeneke 2013

In *Maunga Nekeneke*, mountain peaks are variously composed with four manawa lines thrusting into the picture plane from the outer edge, with two straight-line elongated koru defining dart-shaped mountains. At the core of the composition is a double-ended dart form (a double headed mountain), with one of the koru providing a point of connection for a manawa line that thrusts diagonally out from the core into the bottom left corner, top left corner and top right corner in the triptych sequence. In fact if one spends time with these travelling mountains one discovers that it is an identical composition that has been rotated sequentially from left to right or right to left, depending on what side of the mountain you wish to ascend. It is possible that Te Kani a Takirau's famous quip about Hikurangi is implicated in the title for this wandering journey to find a Māori King that culminated in Pōtatau Te Wherowhero's coronation in 1858. Alternatively it is possible to see a connection to the Ngāti Tūwharetoa narrative of the battle between Tongariro, Taranaki, Tauhara and Pūtauaki over Pihanga, which is not beyond the realms of possibility in light of the artist's Te Āti Awa connection.

With *Tane-te-wao-tu* (2014) there is a return to the koru, koiri and kape with soft arcs supported by right angle emanations of geometric koru off a horizontal manawa line that divides the image of Tāne like a tāhuhu whare (ridgepole) or a tuaiwi tangata (spine). This tuaiwi tangata is also seen in *Tane-Turere* and *Tane-Te-Wananga* connected to an encircling contour. What is new in this exhibition is the jigsaw technology of plywood and hardboard inlays with a routed chipboard pattern. The natural colours of the industrial timbers generate an additional interplay of hue and pattern, while recalling the introduction of these materials into the marae context by kaumātua artist Cliff Whiting. Whiting stands tall as the genius of three-dimensional kōwhaiwhai evident in the Tāwhirimātea mixed media mural for Metservice New Zealand, not to mention his prolific use of kōwhaiwhai in illustration and print making.

Tane Pupuke offers a fitting point of egress for the retrospective *Te Tini a Pītau: 12 years of kōwhaiwhai*. It was a journey that began with documentary footage of a hammerhead shark swimming in the ocean, before transitioning through the cursive koru, kape and rauru compositions that pay tribute to the Poverty Bay Pītau a Manaia style. With the 2009 *Te Pītau a Tiki* exhibition, straight lines and rectilinear spirals surfaced alongside a change in technique as painting give way to relief. *Kua Riro* in 2013 was pivotal in introducing a more considered rectilinear kōwhaiwhai navigation, rendered in a more minimal vocabulary of right angled geometrically severe koru in the manner of Gordon Walters. The navigation of the manawa line in *Tane Pupuke* is like finding one's way through a maze of interconnecting manawa lines and koru, with right angle junctions, soft cursive right angle arcs and 'u' shaped arcs taking you to the end of the line – before forcing you to backtrack to find the right pathway to enlightenment. This is a much more difficult road to enlightenment than a poutama as one is confounded by the maze of potential pathways. Here and there the bulb of the koru is encircled with a painted halo or a double halo of paint and unpainted particle baseboard. This is certainly Taepa's most asymmetrical encounter with kōwhaiwhai to date, made even more complex by the chromatic punctuations of two shades of green and brown. It reads like a bird's eye view of the journey made by Tāne and his encounter with Io-matuakore, to receive the baskets of knowledge.

There is also figurative potential in the composition, as the bipolar attributes of Tāne appear to well up to generate a super tiki capable of giving form to a new entity energised by the kurawaka of Papatūānuku. These are earth bound colours encircled by the manawa line of *Tane Pupuke*. This is kōwhaiwhai of the new millennium.

Robert Jahnke

Professor

Toi oho ki Apiti

Massey University

¹Williams, H. W. (1975). *Dictionary of the Maori Language*. Wellington: Government Printer. p. 152.

²Jahnke, R. and H. T. Jahnke (2003). 'The politics of Māori Image and Design'. *He Pukenga Korero, Raumati* (Summer), Volume 7, Number 1. Palmerston North, Te Putahi a Toi, School of Māori Studies. p. 15.

³Jahnke, R. (1994). 'Painted Histories: Early Māori Figurative Painting'. A Review. *Landfall*. Auckland: Oxford University Press.

⁴Neich, R. (1994). *Painted Histories Early Māori Figurative Painting*. Auckland: Auckland University Press. p. 86.

⁵Gibbs, S. (2015). PhD Proposal. Unpublished. Unpaginated.



Tane Pupuke 2014



He kāwei hue, he kāwei tangata ***Descendants are like the runners of the gourd plant.***

This whakataukī (proverb) reiterates the importance of whakapapa and the ties that connect us to one another. It tells of the rapid growth of the hue (gourd) with its kāwei (tendrils) reaching ever outward and likens this to the growth of a whānau, hapū and iwi. Within the art of kōwhaiwhai we see some of the most stunning examples of this idea conveyed in the heke (rafters) of the meeting house *Te Hau ki Tūranga*. Symbolically this whakataukī speaks about prosperity and progressive development over successive generations. As such, this proverb is fitting as an acknowledgement of the development and progression of Ngataiharuru Taepa as an artist and exponent of kōwhaiwhai.

With this exhibition *Te Tini a Pītau: 12 years of kōwhaiwhai* we celebrate an important period exploring the language of kōwhaiwhai, and when we review the scope of this survey the growth has been rapid. However, like most artists fascinated by this Māori painting practice, these seeds were sown many years earlier and shaped by a range of formative experiences. For Ngatai Taepa, this includes working under art teacher Mark Dashper on the kōwhaiwhai panels of the wharenuī (meeting house) *Te Whare o Rangi* whilst a student of Te Aute College in 1992.¹ During this time he also attended a Te Ātinga Māori arts wānanga led by Sandy Adsett and Manos Nathan. Adsett, Nathan, Colleen Ulrich and others on the Te Ātinga-Contemporary Māori Visual Arts committee of Toi Māori Aotearoa have been running rangatahi focused arts wānanga since 1993. Ngatai attended one such wānanga at Ngatokowaru Marae, Levin, in September 1994, where he met other rangatahi artists including Saffronn Te Ratana. His greatest teacher and mentor has been his father, the clay artist Wi Te Tau Pirika Taepa. His father introduced him to a range of Māori art practices and has always been the reliable sounding board who offers perspective and balance when he needs advice. He credits his father's teachings as shaping the artist he is today.

Equally, Ngatai Taepa's ambitions as an artist took flight in 1997 when he decided to enrol in full-time study in the Bachelor of Māori Visual Arts at Massey University in Palmerston North. Here, he studied the language of paint in the broader sense, as his painting lecturer Kura Te Waru Rewiri was a comprehensive teacher who was able to encourage students to formulate new understandings in paint and art practice. This elevated the importance of painting as an art-form and had profound implications for how kōwhaiwhai could be informed by a painter's mind, rather than that of a carver or sculptor.

As a point of reference to this survey show, Taepa's Master of Māori Visual Art thesis exhibition staged at Pataka in 2002, signalled a turning point in his art practice. Titled *Mangopare*, it investigated the representational: the figurative and non-figurative, the literal and the intangible found within kōwhaiwhai, and in particular the mangōpare pattern. This study signalled a shift in thinking as it presented a mature and assured assessment that advocated, regardless of visual representation (a tricky argument given the nature of kōwhaiwhai), that the integral values of kōwhaiwhai practice are found in Māori oral narratives and the associated mātauranga that these patterns unlock.

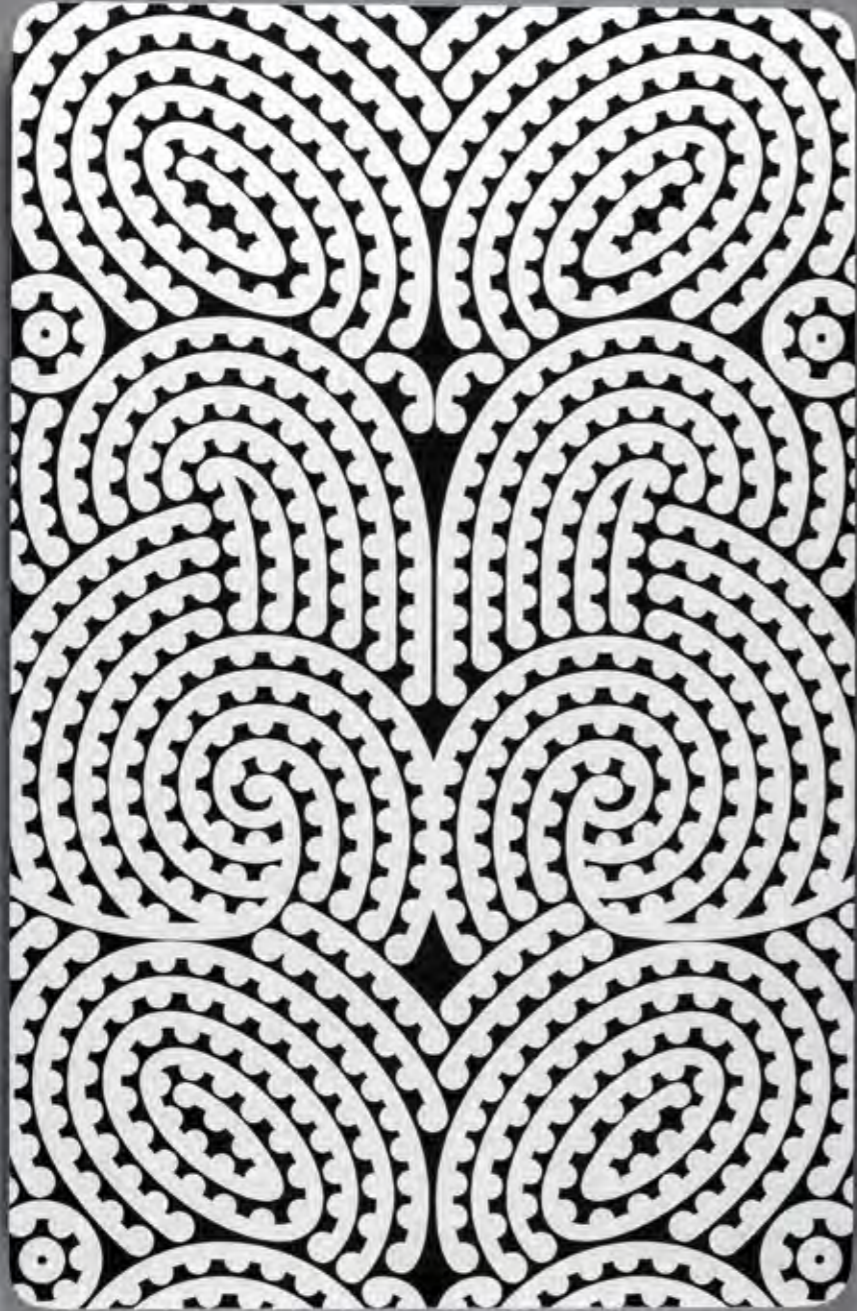
Articulating Kōwhaiwhai

Kōwhaiwhai is the distinguished painting practice of Māori culture, a beautiful yet mystifying art form that seems to leave you chasing a never-ending visual conversation. Here coded and abstracted forms referencing the Māori world are represented in patterns that convey tribal narratives, cultural truths and enduring practices that reflect Māori understandings of our place within them. Successful kōwhaiwhai conveys a sense of rhythm and flow in its telling. It plays on simplicity, colour and pattern to deceive, distract and ultimately immerse the viewer in another place. Patterns such as *Te Pītau-a-Manaia*, *Ngutu Kākā* and *Pūhoro* remain some of the most effective and complex patterns in kōwhaiwhai. Likewise, it is through drawing restraint that the power of timeless kōwhaiwhai is made most visible.

Characteristically, Taepa's kōwhaiwhai is slender and efficient, displaying a level of intricacy and complexity that is both delicate and considered. Punctuated by pītau and kape, such involved design and patterning references the enduring pattern *Te Pītau a Manaia*, where the figurative is made visible. Here the profile manaia figure is found sitting within a field of kape and pītau.² The full frontal tiki form is where Taepa extends this pattern, and it first appears in the work *Tinakori* in 2006 and later expanded in such series as *Te Pītau a Tiki* (2009) and *Te Hatete o Te Reo* (2010). The tiki form in kōwhaiwhai explores new territory in late nineteenth century meeting houses like *Te Poho o Hiraina*, Pātūtahi (1885), of Poverty Bay, with its very unique figures in the porch of the meeting house. Although Taepa's tiki figures are clearly informed by *Te Pītau a Manaia*, I find the tiki works echo a commonality with these unique kōwhaiwhai figures of this time.³



Left and right porch heke (rafters) of the wharenuī
Te Poho o Hiraina (1885-1949)
Pātūtahi, Poverty Bay
Image courtesy of Auckland War Memorial Museum (Ethnology object records)



Taepa's kōwhaiwhai practice observes the principles and conventions of the art form. Central to this is the articulating of space to create meaning, where positive and negative manipulation creates a pattern. However, the artist articulates the use of positive and negative space within his practice as active and passive space. Here, active and passive allows for colour and tone shifts to fulfil complementary roles and is a more accurate assessment. Interestingly Kura Te Waru Rewiri talks about the overlay of colour and pattern in kōwhaiwhai as the 'hum' of two energies vibrating and talking to one another. Māori artists like Taepa and Te Waru Rewiri are contributing to the ongoing theoretical and philosophical ways in which we can further appreciate and understand kōwhaiwhai scholarship and indeed the telling of Māori art. Over a sustained period of time Taepa has achieved a deeper understanding of the language of kōwhaiwhai, with the ability to extend upon this visual vocabulary, by examining the conventions and through testing its limitations. This has opened up endless possibilities in his kōwhaiwhai practice. Taepa's point of difference to other kōwhaiwhai practitioners is that he does not look to merely replicate patterns and revere them but rather to extend upon this visual vocabulary and knowledge.

For most contemporary Māori artists, the importance of mātauranga Māori and customary practice is a pivotal consideration. Nevertheless, this does not cancel out nor negate the desire to make use of all manner of technology and material innovation available to them. We only need to look at the meeting house innovations achieved under the nineteenth century prophet Te Kooti to see how Māori art and culture has always welcomed new ideas and approaches of expressing the contemporary of its time. In Taepa's kōwhaiwhai this is particularly true. Here, the artist incorporates computer design programmes, mechanical router systems, vinyl cut stencils and automotive paint treatments to surfaces. Indeed, kōwhaiwhai of today is no longer limited to just paper-cut stencils and a range of fine tip paint brushes. Taepa's arsenal offers a vibrant, crisp and meticulous quality with flawless execution in a landscape populated with countless kape and pitau.

Niho Mako - the teeth of the shark

Let us remember that not all is placated by kōwhaiwhai dreaming. A range of polemic concerns also underpin much of the work that Taepa has produced over the past twelve years. Here, a strong commitment to the revitalisation and practice of te reo Māori – the Māori language and the mātauranga (knowledge) it holds – is a concern the artist advocates in his practice. With the exhibition *Te Hatete o te reo* 2010, Taepa produced a series of works that referenced the importance of te reo Māori as a way of unlocking broader cultural concepts and learnings. Elsewhere we find other concerns. The 2011 exhibition *Colour, Value and Perspective* was a coded yet loaded critique of Prime Minister John Key and his government's reforms as much as it was an examination of the principles of 'colour, value and perspective' found within kōwhaiwhai:

With these works I wanted to mark this time, I knew this would come to pass: Welfare reform, Asset sales, Deep Sea oil drilling, a loss of Mana motuhake (self-determination) over New Zealand resources and how we see ourselves.⁴

This series marks the most drastic departure from the visible kape and pitau vocabulary that Taepa has become known for. In *Hierarchical Scale #1* (2011), we see an unsettling colour-blocked figure staring out with piercing eyes and sharp pointed teeth like that of the mako (shark). The figure appears throughout the show and is presented in particular colour combinations that apparently colour blind people cannot register in the same way as an able sighted person. This is about the viewer's perspective. For the first time since art school, the artist has incorporated frames in his work to reference the Western convention of 'framing' everything. The viewer registers the power of coded metaphor, since these paintings share a point of view and offer a perspective. Gold leaf surrounds the figure like a halo, a nod to the righteous and the right? The gold leaf is reflective like a mirror thus you see yourself reflected in the work, which itself is a comment on how we become implicated in these traps by politicians. Other works, like *Hierarchical Scale #3* (2011), are covered in black halos and foregrounds, and these refer to the artist's opposition to deep sea oil drilling.



Hierarchical Scale #1 2011
Courtesy of the artist and
Page Blackie Gallery

Another important early work is the confronting installation *RaHui: Principle of Regulation* (2005). While still incorporating the conversation of kōwhaiwhai, albeit via mass-produced Chinese dinner plates, Taepa weighs in on the New Zealand foreshore and seabed debate as he lays down a challenge to have an informed conversation about the issue with this art installation as the backdrop. Political debate was also most certainly the topic of the 2011 collaborative installation *Ka Kata Te Po*, with partners Saffron Te Ratana and Hemi Macgregor. This exhibition tackled, head-on, the Tūhoe raids of 2007 and the alleged paramilitary terrorist training camp claims that were used to justify them. This was a farce that resulted in four arrests, amounting to a charge of illegally possessing an unlicensed firearm at an estimated cost of \$6 million dollars to the country.

Taepa uses kōwhaiwhai as a tool in his art to talk about contemporary issues and concerns of New Zealand society today. The artist connects the viewer to his kōwhaiwhai world-view, making all manner of relational ties and associations. As such, he is an active agent to the whakatauki 'he kāwei hue, he kāwei tangata', and in doing so he is mapping relationships that tell of the interconnected nature of all things. Ngataiharuru Taepa and the career kāwei that continue to develop tell us that there is more to come and new connections to be made. While this survey charts the first twelve years of a solid professional art career, it also relates the personal growth and standing of a young respected artistic leader who demonstrates the wisdom of leading others with a sense of integrity and vision. It is a kāwei where experience and knowledge offer wisdom fitting of his achievements and abilities in contemporary Māori art.

Haere mai e te kāwei o te hue!

Nigel Borell

Associate Curator Māori
Auckland War Memorial Museum
Tamaki Paenga Hira

¹For further reading, see Ngataiharuru Taepa in *Taiāwhio II: 18 New Conversations with Contemporary Māori Artists* (Ed. Smith, H. 2007, Te Papa Press).

²For more information on *Te Pitau-a-Manaia*, see Robert Jahnke's essay, this publication.

³If we look at *Te Pitau-a-Manaia* (1849) and the kōwhaiwhai tiki figures from the heke (rafters) of *Te Poho o Hiraina* (1885), we see that they both originate from the Poverty Bay, Manutuke region, and most probably share the same whakakpapa (genealogical) craftsmanship in kōwhaiwhai, endured over an extensive period of time.

⁴Ngatai Taepa (Personal Communication, April 19 2015).



Textual 2003



Te Maia 2004



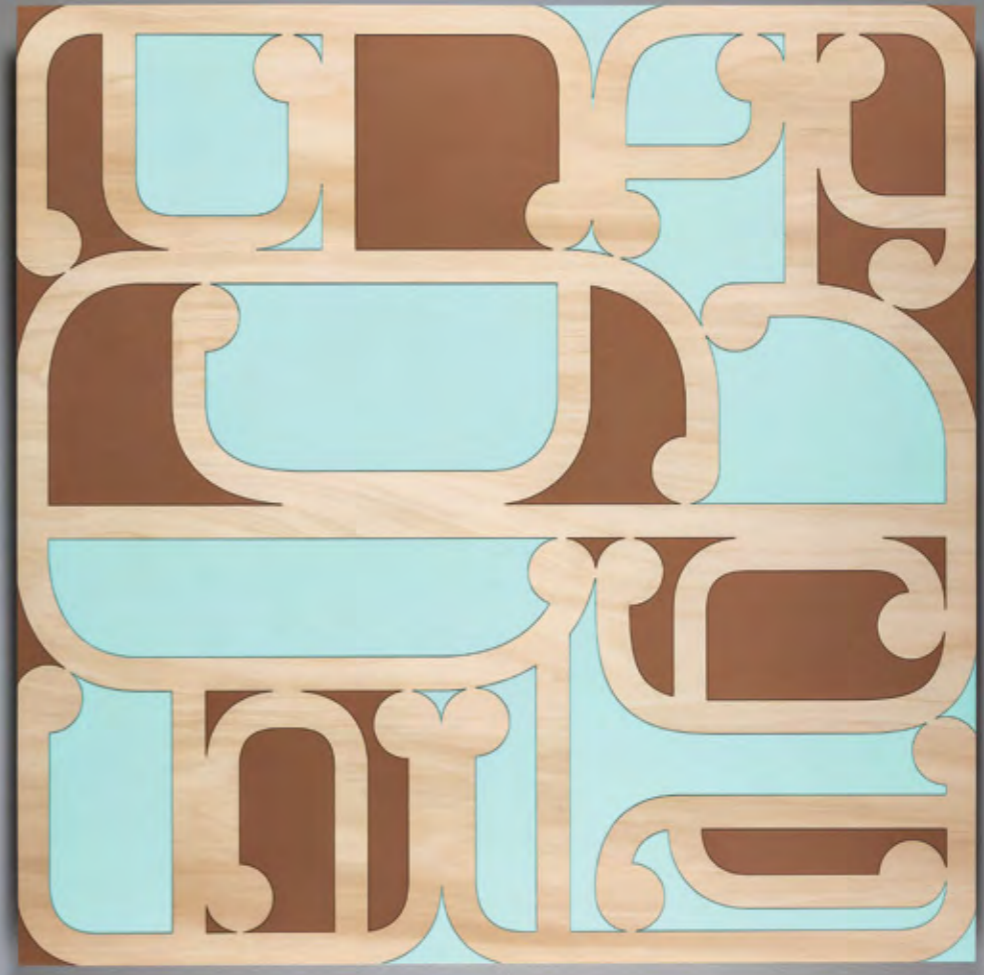
Nga Kaawai o Te Kupu #1 2005



Nga Kaawai o Te Kupu #2 2005



Mango-Rere 2013



Mango-Pae 2013



Te Pitau a Tiki #72009



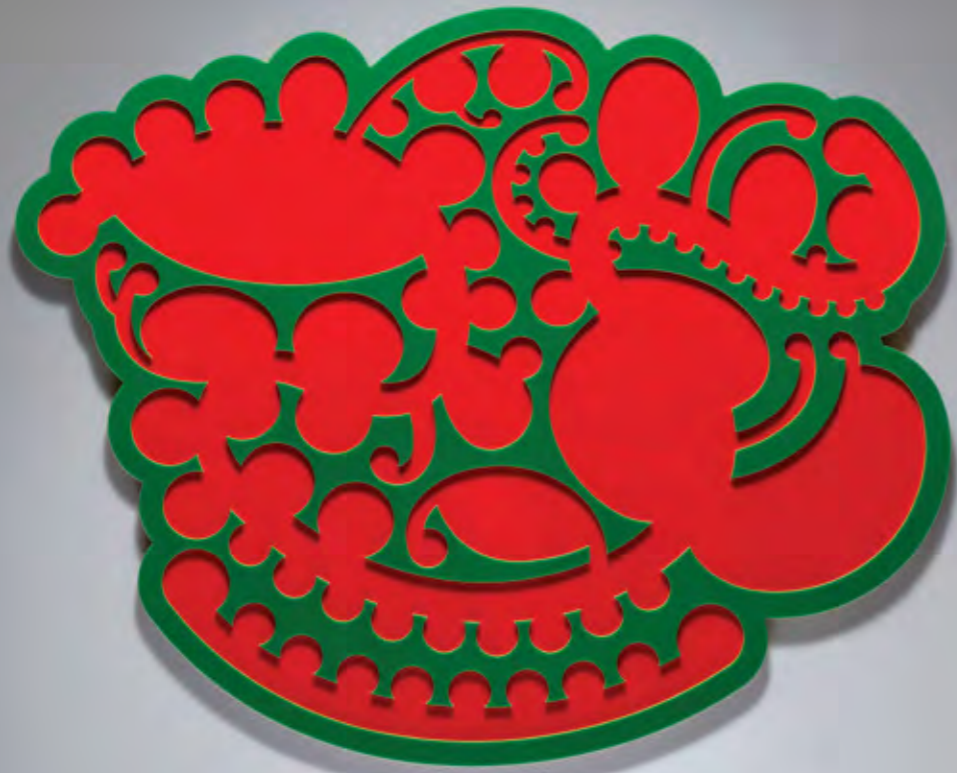
Te Pitau a Tiki #12009



Tiki #1 2009



Ka Marama 2007



Manawarangi #12008



Te Tini a Pitau 2015

LIST OF WORKS

Textual 2003
lacquer on PVC pipe
Private Collection,
courtesy of Page Blackie Gallery

Te Maia 2004
lacquer on PVC pipe
Private Collection,
courtesy of Page Blackie Gallery

Nga Kaawai o Te Kopu #1 2005
lacquer on PVC pipe
Collection of the Wellington City Council,
courtesy of Page Blackie Gallery

Nga Kaawai o Te Kopu #2 2005
lacquer on PVC pipe
Collection of the Wellington City Council,
courtesy of Page Blackie Gallery

Tinakori 2006
lacquer on PVC pipe
Private Collection,
courtesy of Page Blackie Gallery

Te Wai Tai, Te Wao Tu 2007
lacquer on steel
Private Collection,
courtesy of Page Blackie Gallery

Ka Marama 2007
lacquer on wood
Collection of Sven & Lara Baker,
courtesy of Page Blackie Gallery

Kanohi Kitea 2008
lacquer on wood
Collection of Ngataiharuru Taepa

Manaawarangi #1 2008
acrylic
Collection of the Museum of
New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa

Te Pitau a Tiki #1 2009
plywood
Collection of the Wellington City Council,
courtesy of Page Blackie Gallery

Te Pitau a Tiki #5 2009
plywood
Private Collection,
courtesy of Page Blackie Gallery

Te Pitau a Tiki #7 2009
plywood
Private Collection,
courtesy of Page Blackie Gallery

Tiki #1 2009
lacquer on wood
Private Collection,
courtesy of Page Blackie Gallery

Te Hatete o Te Reo #12 2010
lacquer on wood
Private Collection,
courtesy of Page Blackie Gallery

Buck Nin Legacy 2013
acrylic on plywood
Collection of Te Wānanga o Aotearoa

Mango-Rere 2013
earth oxides on plywood
Private Collection,
courtesy of Page Blackie Gallery

Mango-Tu 2013
earth oxides on plywood
Collection of Rose & Tim Duncan,
courtesy of Page Blackie Gallery

Mango-Pae 2013
earth oxides & acrylic on plywood
Collection of Sarah Botherway,
courtesy of Page Blackie Gallery

Tane-te-wao-tu 2014
chip board, hard board & plywood
Collection of Sven & Lara Baker,
courtesy of Page Blackie Gallery

Tane Pupuke 2014
earth oxides, acrylic on plywood
Collection of Te Manawa Museum
of Art, Science and History

Te Tini a Pitau 2015
plywood
Collection of Ngataiharuru Taepa

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ART + MUSEUM

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Ehara i te mea nā te ringa kotahi te kōwhaiwhai, engari kē, nā te aroha o te mano.
Nō reira aku rau ringa, tēnā koutou katoa.

Kōwhaiwhai is not fashioned by the hands of one person but by the love of many.
Thank you all for your love and support.

Nāku iti nei,
Ngataiharuru Taepa

