

KIMUA,  
KIWINBI



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## 25 years of Toioho ki Āpiti

Edited by Cassandra Barnett and Kura Te Waru-Rewiri



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## LIKE A RIVER, FLOWING PURPOSEFULLY

Te amorangi ki mua; te hāpai ō ki muri

In 2020 Toioho ki Āpiti, the Māori visual arts degree programme at Massey University, held an exhibition at Te Manawa gallery in Palmerston North titled *Toioho XXV — Ki Mua Ki Muri*, designed to celebrate and record the founding vision of Toioho ki Āpiti. The phrase ‘Te amorangi ki mua; te hāpai ō ki muri’ is often abbreviated as ‘ki mua, ki muri’ — ‘looking backward to move forward’, or ‘looking forward and back at once’.<sup>1</sup>

And so we begin by looking backwards, to consider some of the pivotal events that prompted the development of this ambitious, aspirational university programme. In 1984 one significant moment was the international celebration of traditional Māori creative genius: the exhibition *Tē Maori: Maori Art from New Zealand Collections*. As the late Archdeacon Kīngi Matutaera Īhaka) said of them:

Ataahua ana te ngāo o ngā toki ā ngā tohunga — he ngāo pae, he ngāo iti, he ngāo matariki . . . Tenei kā tukuna, hei mātakitaki, hei whakamīharo mā te tini, mā te mano. Toitū ngā tāonga, whatungarongaro ngā tangata.

Forms shaped by the ancient artists were beautiful — rough, small, or refined . . . Let them be sent out, to be seen and marvelled at by the multitudes; because people always perish, but their art lives on.<sup>2</sup>

Over two years, *Tē Maori* gripped the collective arts sector and curatorial imagination of four major American cities. Opening in New York, the show later concluded with a triumphal tour of the four metropolitan centres in Aotearoa from 1987, raising public awareness of the iconic beauty and importance of traditional Māori art (although it consciously excluded textiles and fibre arts).<sup>3</sup>

Another meaningful outcome was the inclusion of Māori art history as *art*, not material culture or anthropology, in the university curriculum, with the introduction of a major in Māori and Pacific art history at the University of Auckland in 1987, followed by a similar initiative at the University of Canterbury. At that time, both institutions included the intensely competitive elite art schools of Elam and Ilam, respectively, which engaged noticeably few Māori enrolments. Teachers' colleges, particularly Auckland, Palmerston North and Hamilton, attracted more Māori students, and offered visual arts courses with some Māori content. Parallel to the university system, the polytechnics and technical institutes were developing arts and design programmes which were seen as a sound vocational option in the emergence of a growing creative industries sector. Otago and Carrington in Auckland are enduring examples.

More Māori and Pacific content was presented by Whitireia in Porirua, Manukau in Ōtara, and Waiariki, later to become Toi Ohomai, in Rotorua. Other provincial institutions, including Gisborne, Whangārei and Whanganui, followed. In 1984, Te Wānanga o Aotearoa was established at Te Awamutu, and eventually developed a sophisticated visual arts programme, which included the exploration of contemporary forms.

By the early 1990s, 20 years — a generation — after the first gathering of Māori artists and writers on Tukāki Marae at Te Kaha in 1973,<sup>4</sup> Māori artmakers and academics were discussing the possibility of an independent 'by Māori, for Māori, about Māori' (kaupapa Māori) tertiary programme. It proposed to claim space within the orthodox academy.

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The initiative was debated avidly at a historic conference at Massey University in 1996 alongside a well-curated and memorable contemporary exhibit, which was dismissed by one conservative stakeholder as not being Māori art. A range of speakers and participants reflected on their current environment and described the evolution of the Māori Artists and Writers Society into Ngā Puna Waihanga, and the patchy and unpredictable support provided by Crown agencies, including the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council, the development of the Māori and South Pacific Arts Council (MASPAC), and then its total restructuring to produce

Te Waka Toi, a partnership entity with Toi Aotearoa, Creative New Zealand. Having successfully established international indigenous networks that connected closely with Māori, in 1996 many of the former MASPAC staff, supported by highly regarded Māori artmakers, set up a charitable trust. As Toi Māori Aotearoa, its aim is to support, develop, promote and nurture the arts of the Māori world.<sup>5</sup>

This aligned with the visionary and dynamic visual arts degree programme proposed by Sir Mason Durie and his supporters within the School of Māori Studies, Te Pūtahi ā Toi, at Massey. The proposal became a reality. Named for the awakening (oho) of visual art (toi) at Āpiti, the gorge of Manawatū, the first Toioho ki Āpiti degree was promoted in 1995. It was followed by a masterate in 1999, and a PhD in fine arts in 2008. Like the nearby river, it flowed purposefully. The first student cohort is described later in this volume as ‘academically inquisitive, challenging, and mature learners’; they set the standard. Despite a recent relocation to Toi Rauwhāangi, the College of Creative Arts, the integral degree structure of the programme has been retained, driven by a transformative and enduring conceptual framework.

Four themes form its scaffolding, each one informed and reinforced by Māori language and Māori visual arts, which sustain a living continuum of both the customary and the contemporary — again, ki mua, ki muri. They are Mana Whakapapa (inheritance rights and issues), Mana Tiriti (treaty rights and issues), Mana Whenua (land rights and issues) and Mana Tangata (human rights and issues). This is noted by former lecturer Shane Cotton, who recalls:

We wanted to retain that (teaching) territory and deliver art knowledge from a Māori perspective, through Māori eyes. Our paradigm was very different from the programmes being run by the established art institutions . . . It was exciting, it was unknown. Every day it felt like a new pathway was opening up.

One vital element of this unconventional approach (compared to the mainstream tertiary system) was the annual marae visit and live-in, a wānanga held at Waipiro Bay, the home ground of Professor Robert Jahnke. One of the original designers of the programme, and a highly successful practitioner, he describes how the wānanga ‘cultivated a sense of whanaungatanga while exposing them to what they would learn: a strong focus on understanding cultural roots, and the Māori visual arts



language within the marae environment . . . to revitalise it within a contemporary context’.

Whanaungatanga — the Māori principle of human interaction, community and relationships — is a key element of two of the course themes, Mana Whakapapa and Mana Tangata. It requires the building of trust, of compassion, of aroha, of caring for each other; it manifests in the purposeful attention given to collaborative and collective artmaking and creative projects. The process of working together and assisting each other is encouraged and exemplified by the staff’s own practice.

Mentoring of students by the staff, as well as senior students as tuakana helping teina, is an almost unconscious activity, ingrained in the Toioho ki Āpiti system. This also creates a safe space in which to disagree, to compete, to openly question the teachers and other students. Israel Birch, a graduate and talented artist who became a lecturer, considers his learning time, saying, ‘I felt safe to speak my truth with them’, and Terri Te Tau observes, ‘The influence of other students felt as integral to developing our art practices as the guidance we received from our teachers.’

Rachael Rakena, another inspiring staff member, describes their particular environment as ‘a place . . . where the majority were Māori, rather than in a separate little pocket’. From within this place, the notion of ki mua, ki muri flourished; it was considered, talked about, redefined, argued over and celebrated. Hemi Macgregor comments, ‘We can get stuck in the binaries of “This is where you should be” versus “This is where you are”. For me, it was good to realise “Where you are is where you should be” . . . Looking both forward and back.’

This process also required the effective and unbiased interrogation of Māori art practice, traditional and customary processes, and the understanding of what it all means; what it used to mean, what it means now and what it could mean for future generations.

One pivotal aim of the programme is to cultivate in the students the confidence and the ability to critically inquire and discuss contemporary issues of art and society, especially when those issues seem problematic or overwhelming, or are having an immediate and unpleasant impact.

As Ngataiharuru Taepa muses, ‘Creatives are used to sitting in relative chaos and creating solutions’. Israel Birch reminds us, ‘Māori art . . . is conceptually driven. Our people have always been innovative, adaptive, critical thinkers.’

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The two other paradigm themes apply at this point. They raise the necessity of social, ethical and relational responsibility, to each other, to the future, and to the planet: Mana Tiriti, issues of the Treaty and contemporary Aotearoa; and Mana Whenua, issues of the land, the earth, as an enduring source of physical materials and spiritual inspiration, as a tangible relationship with those who came before, and those yet to come.

Definition, interrogation, expansion and innovation follow the pathway opened by the introductory wānanga. Choices that sit beyond the whare tupuna are gently revealed. Caution is inevitable; courage also has a place. This is where, and when, critical thinking and creative insight merge. Intersectionality, variations wrought on traditional materials, the exploration of new media, invention, new technology, innovation, or experimentation with different techniques, materials and approaches are known to flourish at Toioho ki Āpiti.

Just as the orthodoxy of the conventional art school academy was challenged in the 1990s by the founding of the Toioho ki Āpiti, the original teachers and course designers also bravely confronted the conventions of established Māori art teaching. Described by many as taonga in their own right, these conventions were defined by gendered practice, customary prohibitions and adherence to traditional materials. Toioho ki Āpiti practitioners queried this rigidity, attempting to extend and dissolve those perceived limitations.

The reaction was predictable; other Māori art schools within the polytechnic system, such as Toihoukura, Toimairangi, and Toi Ohomai, have remained committed to restrictive customary expectations as a matter of honour. This position has been strengthened by the formidable achievements of the kōhanga reo and kura kaupapa Māori systems in education, and their students who continue on to tertiary level, and may be interested in studying visual arts unavailable at school.

Kura Te Waru-Rewiri, a celebrated painter and tirelessly nurturing teacher, considers the situation: ‘Toioho made me really realise my political responsibilities as an artist and an educator . . . Art is not really taught in kura kaupapa. So we’re feeling that responsibility, too. [The need] to get into the kura, get them the art resources and bring our offerings, the art and the politics in there, at that level. That is what’s important now.’

Ironically, the kura kaupapa sector is boosted by a strong curriculum that focuses primarily on mātauranga Māori. This promotes a fiercely independent and Māori-defined perspective, often without exploring those creative disciplines which question or critique the kaupapa itself. The risk here is a growing fundamentalism. For Toioho ki Āpiti, this has become a vital point of difference. By the multiplicity of materials, techniques, media and technologies, this supple approach may be seen as revolutionary, because it boldly reaches beyond the noble parameters of Māori artistry, design and creativity that were applauded by the arts world, and particularly te ao Māori, in the *Te Maori* exhibition.

By the multiplicity of materials, techniques, media and technologies, this supple approach may be seen as revolutionary, because it boldly reaches beyond the noble parameters of Māori artistry, design and creativity that were applauded by the arts world, and particularly te ao Māori, in the *Te Maori* exhibition.

Orthodoxy must be interrogated, as the sublime artmaker and former lecturer Brett Graham reflects: ‘You can’t rely on your Māoritanga as a crutch to make a great artwork. It has to stand on its own . . . Whenever art becomes prescriptive, it’s a kind of orthodoxy. Artists hate rules . . . The new-generation fundamentalism is a little dangerous. It can limit your openness to new ideas . . . Even if [the new generation] have the reo, and are steeped in te ao Māori, they could use that to absorb other things, rather than see exterior influences as degenerative . . . Traverse two worlds.’

He encourages emerging artists to engage beyond orthodoxy, to always be open to new ideas, to ask the crunchy questions. By doing so, by moving out into the world beyond Aotearoa, they may enrich their own practice, and understand their own Māori world in a different and more flexible way. They may consider the meaning of excellence, and its critical relativities in the actual understanding of power illustrated so effectively by the Toioho ki Āpiti teaching and learning paradigm.

As Rachael Rakena considers, ‘It’s to do with excellence as well as opportunity . . . It has meaning beyond our borders.’ Students are encouraged and guided to produce a corpus of work throughout their first degree course, as well as the higher levels. This trains and prepares them to install their work, understand the gallery, museum and dealership contexts, and to develop the skills and understanding required for successful local and international practice. Marketing one’s work, and for some the distasteful and sometimes confusing realm of careerist art production to make a liveable income, are also sensitively approached and patiently unravelled.

Completion of a university degree programme is a major achievement, and to advance to a teaching or curatorial position in the visual arts sector is even more impressive. In this instance, as a tertiary course, Toioho ki Āpiti demonstrates yet again its singularity and its specialness — most of the artists who contributed to the exhibition, and this book, are graduates at some level of the programme. This proves its success.

All of the teaching staff are renowned for their ongoing contribution to the transnational indigenous arts scene; their work enhances and enriches the students’ experience, as the latter attend related events here in Aotearoa and are also exposed to other tribal traditions, diverse ethnicities, and the limitless and dynamic possibilities of creative excellence, change and inquiry in the world of producing, thinking about, marketing and celebrating art.

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A pēhea hoki te pae tawhiti? Āmuri mai? What of the future? Every artmaker, mentor and lecturer contributing to this volume has simultaneously looked backwards and forwards, and contemplated the place between — te wā — where work is happening now. Over the past two decades, they have developed a radically different, effective and successful programme, while sustaining their own art practice. As they have ensured a vibrant succession plan in their own graduates, and sustained ongoing overseas contact, Toioho ki Āpiti is well placed to flourish, and to meet any challenges that may arise. Shane Cotton contends: ‘We have some major questions and challenges before us as we continue to grow as a nation. Identity, iwi, whānau, hapū . . . We’re going to need a lot of art to help us navigate these questions and positions. We’re going to need different ways of understanding and expressing

these new challenges. We need art to reflect these issues back to us. We will need a lot of Māori artists!’

The future promises more challenges, more choices, more changes; they will be encountered and enjoyed by the creative generations yet to come, mokopuna who will make art, reflect their world, and compose enduring statements that echo these words:

Whāia te iti kahurangi; ki te tuohu koe, me he maunga teitei . . .

Pursue excellence; pause only at the highest mountain. Then climb over.

*Ngāhūia te Awekōtuku*

*Te Kuirau*

*Poutūterangi*

*July 2023*

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1. This phrase was eloquently explained by the late Wiremu Tawhai in the Education Council resource *Te Hāpai Ō*, published online in 2015.
  2. Kīngi Ihaka, in S. M. Mead et al., *Te Maori: Maori Art from New Zealand Collections* (New York: Heinemann, 1984), 13. Translation by NteA.
  3. Ngāhūia Te Awekōtuku, ‘Ngā Mahi Huatau a Wahine Māori: Reflections on Māori Women and Art’, in *Te Puna Waiora: The Distinguished Weavers of Te Kāhui Whiritoi*, eds Ngāhūia Te Awekōtuku, Donna Campbell, Nathan Pōhio and Awhina Tamarapa (Christchurch: Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetū, 2021), 35.
  4. Katerina Mataira, *Maori Artists of the South Pacific* (Auckland: Nga Puna Waihanga NZ Maori Artists and Writers Society, 1984); Sandy Adsett and Cliff Whiting, *Mataora The Living Face: Contemporary Maori Art* (Auckland: David Bateman, 1996); Nigel Borrell (ed.), *Toi Tū Toi Ora Contemporary Māori Art* (Auckland: Penguin, 2020).
  5. [www.maoriart.org.nz/about-toi-maori.html](http://www.maoriart.org.nz/about-toi-maori.html) (accessed March 2023).

## THE QUIET REVOLUTION IN MĀORI ART

The 1990s was a decade of powerful strategic development in Māori health research, education and the visual arts. To mark 150 years since the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi in Aotearoa New Zealand, 1990 was a year of official sesquicentennial celebrations in which arts and culture played a prominent role in articulating our identity as a bi-cultural nation.

It was an era built on the extraordinary cultural and political change of the previous two decades: the Land March and the establishment of the Waitangi Tribunal in 1975, the occupation of Bastion Point in 1977, the Springbok Tour protests of 1981, the ongoing French nuclear tests in the Pacific and associated protests, and the privatisation of government assets after the Fourth Labour Government was elected in 1984. Informed by these events, the 1990s was a decade of ambitious vision. It was also a time of significant growth in Māori art and, in particular, Māori art education. Radical leaps were made with the emergence of two distinct Māori art programmes in the tertiary sector.

The first came in 1994: a three-year Diploma in Māori Art at Tairāwhiti Polytechnic's Toihoukura art programme in Gisborne, under the leadership of Derek Lardelli, Sandy Adsett and Steve Gibbs.<sup>1</sup> The second, in 1995, was a four-year Bachelor of Māori Visual Arts programme at Massey University's Palmerston North campus, led by Robert Jahnke and also taught by Shane Cotton and Kura Te Waru-Rewiri.

The Toioho ki Āpiti Bachelor of Māori Visual Arts (BMVA) programme was located within the university's Te Pūtahi ā Toi School of Māori Studies. It was the first indigenous four-year fine arts degree programme of its kind in the world. Nestled within the Manawatū region and with an initial intake of seven students, this was a quiet yet revolutionary moment for Māori and indigenous arts education. The BMVA programme cemented major pedagogical changes in art education by centring kaupapa Māori and mātauranga Māori at the heart of visual arts learning.<sup>2</sup>

It offered a long overdue alternative to fine arts training for Māori, particularly at the established art schools of Elam and Ilam, and directly intersected with the politics of how fine arts and the Western art canon had dominated conversations about the scope of this discipline in Aotearoa up until that point. It also proposed a new place to locate Māori visual art within a conversation about broader national visual arts development. In 1999 the Toioho ki Āpiti programme also began offering a Master of Māori Visual Arts (MMVA), followed by a PhD in 2009.

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In 2023 we celebrate nearly 30 years of the Toioho ki Āpiti programme and can make a clear assessment of its contribution. It was, and still is, a modest programme, with no more than 10 students entering per year and a maximum of 40 students across the four years of the degree. However, the 90 graduates since 1995 have made significant contributions in all facets of contemporary Māori art: its visibility, discourse, leadership and the scope of academic scholarship. Its graduates are active across New Zealand's arts and culture sector today as leading artists, both nationally and internationally, academics and university professors, curators, art educators, museum professionals and arts-sector advocates.

This publication shares that story and gives context to its beginnings, to its shape and to its development. It brings overdue attention not only to the way Toioho ki Āpiti and its people have been influential on Māori art and Māori art education but also to the way they have championed and led pedagogical shifts in Māori learning.

The structure of the BMVA — with its core requisites in te reo Māori, Treaty of Waitangi and Māori art history alongside electives in museum studies and Māori culture, and with a major component being twice-weekly art studio papers — provided a level of conceptual knowledge, rigour and critique that asked questions of both Māori culture and the academy. The BMVA programme

worked to unfold Māori art, to think critically about the ways in which Western art and knowledge had colonised Māori forms of knowing, and to empower students to centre themselves within their own understanding of these considerations.

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Much of the art discourse throughout the 1990s was preoccupied with the debate around what is Māori art and who is a Māori artist. It was at times a polarising debate that often leaned on dated discussions about authenticity and radical essentialism.<sup>3</sup> The irony was that due to the nature of the Toioho ki Āpiti programme, students were empowered to make their own decisions about what these conversations represented and where to position themselves within it.

The first graduate of the programme was Huhana Smith, in 1998. Smith took up a curatorial role as Curator Māori at the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa the following year and later moved into senior curatorial roles during her 12-year career at the museum. Smith was the lead curator on seminal projects such as the large survey show *Taiāwhio: Continuity and Change* (2002) and *E Tu Ake: Māori Standing Tall* (2011).

In many respects, the development and profile of the earliest BMVA graduates went hand in hand with the rise of Māori curatorial representation in the 1990s, when the first specific Māori curatorial roles began to appear at both Te Papa and Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki.<sup>4</sup> Contemporary Māori art curators such as Ngahiraka Mason, Megan Tamati-Quennell and Huhana Smith presented exhibition projects and writing that gave visibility to this growing wave of new Māori artists.

The first large exhibition project to profile Toioho ki Āpiti graduates occurred when Ngahiraka Mason guest-curated the Māori representation to the



Nouméa Biennale at Tjibaou Cultural Centre in 2000. Saffronn Te Ratana, Isiaha Barlow, Huhana Smith, Hemi Macgregor and I were included alongside Elam graduates Reuben Paterson and Dion Hitchens (among others). This introduced the programme and its potential to a wider art audience. Mason followed this exhibition in 2001 with *Pūrangiabo: Seeing Clearly*, a survey of contemporary Māori art at Auckland Art Gallery that included both students and teachers of the course: Robert Jahnke, Kura Te Waru-Rewiri, Shane Cotton, Saffronn Te Ratana, Ngataiharuru Taepa and Isiaha Barlow.<sup>5</sup> Both *Pūrangiabo* and *Taiāwhio* employed a mātauranga Māori lens and the beginnings of an emerging kaupapa Māori framework to consider the connected and enduring nature of Māori art.

Another significant moment of change occurred in the early 2000s, when the Toioho ki Āpiti programme welcomed its first enrolments from students taught within Māori-medium kōhanga reo, kura kaupapa and wharekura. They brought a level of fluency in te reo Māori and an understanding of Māori cultural concepts that enriched their visual arts studies and the programme. Another was the introduction of moving image and digital media under Rachael Rakena. Students embraced this new technology, applying this conceptual thinking and making personal shifts in their own investigations.

At the very essence of kaupapa Māori methodology is recognising the importance of whakapapa as a philosophy that expresses the interconnectedness of all things, from the natural environment to the realms of humankind. The way in which Māori make familial connections to whenua and to tribal or whānau whakapapa, or through more contemporary expressions of collective Māori identity, it is the power of seeing and understanding one's holistic connections that is central. The power of the collective is present in the legacy of contemporary Māori art also.

We see it in collectives such as Ngā Puna Waihanga, formed in 1973 by the leaders of the first generation of contemporary Māori artists. We also see it in groups such as Te Ātinga Māori Contemporary Visual Arts Committee, formed in 1987 under the leadership of Sandy Adsett. Toioho ki Āpiti artists have worked collaboratively in a similar way over the years. Saffronn Te Ratana, Hemi Macgregor and Ngataiharuru Taepa collaborated to create two exhibition projects, *Tū te manu ora i te Rangī*, in 2008, and *Ka Kata Te Pō*, in 2011, the latter selected

to participate in the 5th Auckland Triennial in 2013, curated by Hou Hanru. We also see this powerfully with Mataaho collective, a rōpū of four women — in Erena Baker-Arapere, Bridget Reweti, Terri Te Tau and Sarah Hudson<sup>6</sup> — who collaborate to create large-scale installations informed by customary weaving and textile mātauranga.

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Mataaho presented its first collaborative work in 2013 at Enjoy Public Art Gallery, Wellington, where their signature piece, *Te Whare Pora* (2012), attracted keen interest. An invitation to exhibit at documenta 14 was followed in 2017 with the work *Kiiko Moana*. A flurry of invitations came their way, and installations were included in *Oceania* at The Royal Academy of Arts in London (*Kiiko Moana*, 2018), the Honolulu Biennial (*Mabuika*, 2019), and *Abadaone | Continuous Fire | Feu continuel* at the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa (*AKA*, 2019). In 2020 they created *Atapō* with Maureen Lander for *Toi Tū Toi Ora* at Auckland Art Gallery. The collective won the Walters Art Prize for *Atapō* that year; the judge, Kate Fowle, director of New York’s MoMA PS1, noted ‘their sustained collective practices’ and ‘collaborative thinking and generative processes’ as significant and *distinct*.<sup>7</sup>

Mataaho’s international success continued post-pandemic with showings at the 23rd Biennale of Sydney (*He Toka TU Moana: She’s a Rock*, 2022) and The Gwangju Biennale, South Korea (*Tuakirikiri*, 2023). They were made New Zealand Arts Foundation Laureates in 2022. Their success shows not only how far graduates of the Toioho ki Āpiti programme could reach but also the power of the collective. Mataaho recently presented *Te Puni Aroaro*, a survey of its monumental installations from over the past 10 years alongside a new site-specific installation *Takapu* (2022), at Te Papa.

But perhaps the most important contribution is from those graduates who teach art in New Zealand classrooms, taking their experiences in the programme with them and reflecting some of the pedagogical changes in their teaching.

These teachers are arguably even more important because they are shaping the next generation of learners and further normalising those paradigm shifts in the next generations of Māori artists.

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As a graduate of this programme, I cannot articulate the story and journey of Toioho ki Āpiti without reflecting on my own experience. Within the disciplines of art education, curating and Māori art scholarship, the Toioho ki Āpiti programme has shaped and informed my positionality to these conversations and to the wider New Zealand art discourse. The large survey exhibition *Toi Tū Toi Ora: Contemporary Māori Art* that I presented as the Curator Māori Art at Auckland Art Gallery in 2020 was shaped by the theoretical positioning of a kaupapa Māori methodology and the importance of privileging mātauranga Māori within the site of the art institution.

The exhibition's thesis and political will to centre a Māori framework and cultural paradigm as a way to discuss contemporary Māori art was directly shaped by the theoretical and conceptual teachings of the Toioho ki Āpiti programme. The large collective ambition of the exhibition was also made visible by seeing Māori art and artists as a connected whakapapa in which the power of the collective took precedence over style, genre and the lopsided considerations of the Western art canon.

Like so many Māori movements, the Toioho ki Āpiti programme, with its 94

bachelor's graduates, 62 postgraduate diploma graduates, 84 master's graduates and six PhD graduates, today demonstrates that quiet beginnings can have revolutionary outcomes. Small regional programmes like this can have a huge impact. It's hard to visualise the Māori — or indeed the New Zealand — arts landscape today without the influence of these programmes. These graduates have become leaders, backing each other up in these paradigm shifts. Much like Māori culture itself, their art careers have been diverse and dynamic.

It is challenging to pin down in any definitive manner the sheer reach of this small art programme across such a broad spectrum of Māori culture. Perhaps this reach and influence was — and still is — the goal of its leaders, Professor Robert Jahnke and Sir Mason Durie, when the vision of the programme were developed back in the early 1990s: to see Māori visual art as connected to the wider aspirations for Māori identity, diversity and cultural development. Many of its graduates continue to forge influential careers and make powerful contributions, and they will eventually step into senior leadership roles themselves. Some already have. This publication shines a spotlight on the first 30 years and provides a greater context in which to understand this moment in Māori art and art education.

*Nigel Borell*

*Curator Taonga Māori*

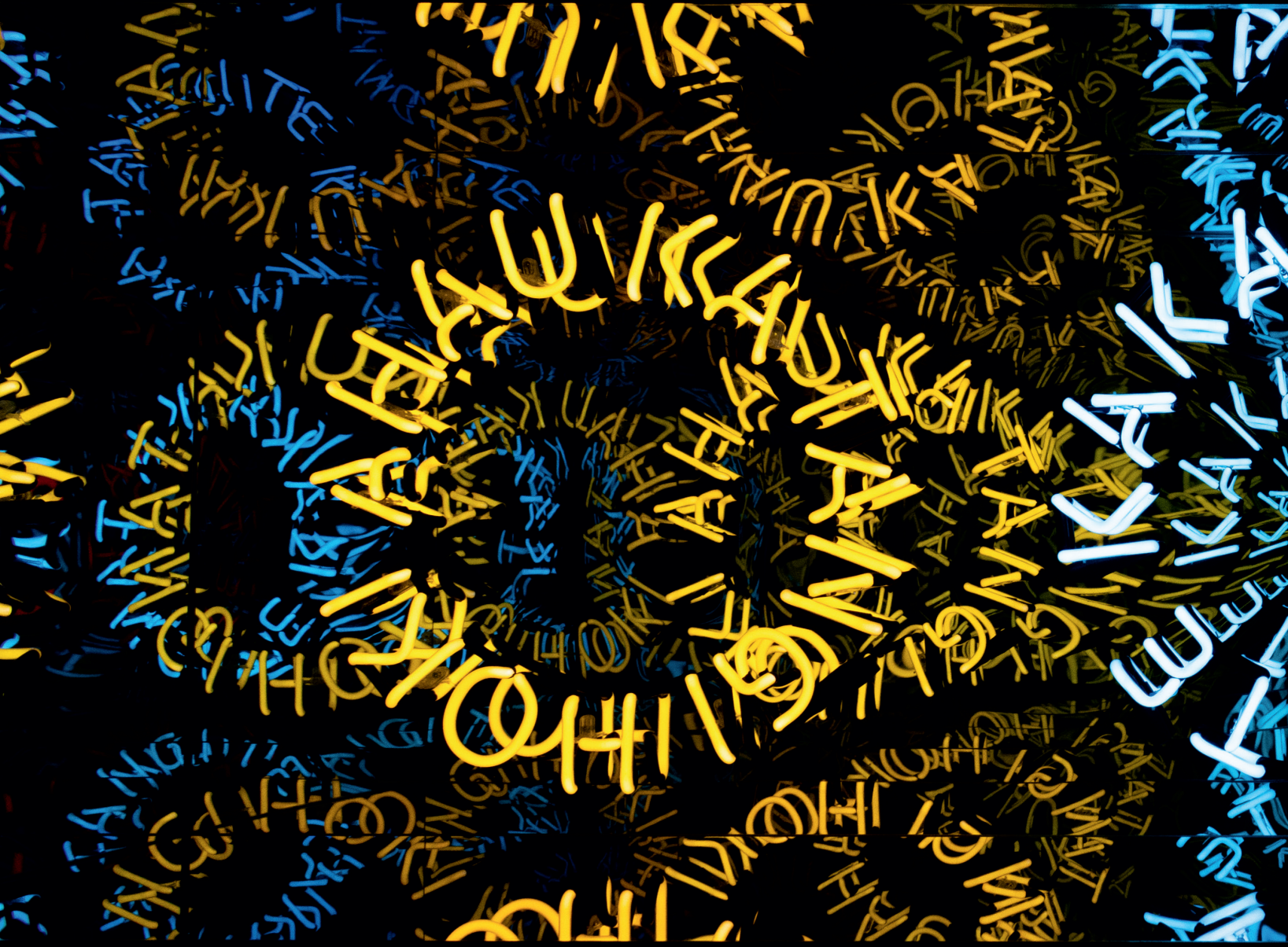
*Tāmaki Paenga Hira Auckland War Memorial Museum*

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1. This programme was originally created under the leadership and vision of Ivan Ehau, who passed away in 1992, at which time Sandy Adsett was approached to help lead the programme in 1993.
  2. Kaupapa Māori can be understood as the expression of a Māori episteme informed by Māori genealogical and cosmological beliefs, which may or may not be tribally distinct.
  3. I reference here Hirini Moko Mead's keynote address 'Māori Art Restructured, Reorganised, Re-examined and Reclaimed', presented at the Toioho ki Āpiti Māori Art Conference, Massey University, Palmerston North, 26–28 June 1996.

4. With the guidance of its Māori art advisory group, Haerewa, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki established the role of Assistant Curator, Kaitiaki Māori, appointing Ngahiraka Mason to the position in 1999. In 2000 the position became Curator Māori Art. At the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Megan Tamati-Quennell began as a curatorial intern in 1990 and then progressed to Trainee Curator, Assistant Curator and Curator Visual Art and Culture. She has been the Curator of Contemporary Māori, Indigenous Art at Te Papa since 2004. Also at Te Papa, Huhana Smith was first a Curator Māori and then Concept Leader Tangata Whenua (2000–2003) and Senior Curator Mātauranga Māori (2003–11).
5. Saffronn Te Ratana became the first Toioho ki Āpiti artist to be collected by a major art institution when Ngahiraka Mason purchased *Untitled* (2000) for the Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki collection.
6. Sarah Hudson graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts from the College of Creative Arts at Massey University in 2011.
7. Walters Prize Media Release, Auckland Art Gallery website, accessed 1 July 2023, [www.aucklandartgallery.com/page/mata-aho-collective-and-maureen-lander-win-walters-prize-2021](http://www.aucklandartgallery.com/page/mata-aho-collective-and-maureen-lander-win-walters-prize-2021)



# NGĀ RINGATOI THE ARTISTS







ROBERT JAHNKE

Ngāti Porou

*Ka tangi hoki ahau (detail), 2019*

Painted MDF, neons, mirror pane, mirror, electricity  
2000 × 1500 × 600 mm  
Courtesy of Te Manawa



**PROFESSOR ROBERT JAHNKE ONZM** is a sculptor, installation and digital artist, writer and curator. He joined Massey University as a lecturer in 1991. He is the founder and creator of Toioho ki Āpiti.

I'll start with a story. I had no intention of ever going to university. I was formally exposed to art while I was at Ardmore Teachers' College, and I fell in love with it. I resigned from teaching to pursue art. After I finished my master's at Elam I applied for, and was awarded, scholarships and ended up going to California Institute of the Arts in the United States in 1979.

I had always thought I was Robert Frederick Jahnke, but when I applied for my passport I discovered that I was Hans George Robert Jahnke, which is my father's name. He was obviously the one responsible for filling in the birth certificate, and it appears that he had entered his own name twice! So I ended up with his name, but shifted Robert in front of Hans. The name Jahnke is German; my grandfather was full German. And my father's mother was Samoan and Tongan. I was brought up in Waipiro Bay, the home town of my mother, who is Te Whānau a Iritekura, Ngāi Taharora and Te Whānau a Rākairoa, all from that area. We have three marae back home associated with the three hapū. So, I was born and bred on the East Coast, mostly at Waipiro Bay, and spent some time in Te Puia Springs before I went to Hato Paora College in Feilding.

Our marae include Iritekura; Hau (son of Porourangi), associated with Te Whānau a Rākairoa; and of course Taharora, associated with Ngāi Taharora. The latter is particularly important to me because it was built by my tupuna Riwai Pakerau, a carver who practised during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and built that house probably around the 1920s. I was subsequently responsible for its refurbishment, along with the dining room. It's the only blue house on the East Coast, so it's reasonably famous!

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Professor Robert Jahnke

Photograph: Jane Ussher

Before Toioho ki Āpiti began, I was working at Waiariki Polytechnic with Ross Hemera, who was responsible for establishing a Diploma in Māori Craft Design at Waiariki. Ross asked me to create a Māori visual arts paper for the theoretical component, which I duly developed and taught at Waiariki.

In 1988 or 1989 I was approached by Professor Mason Durie, head of the School of Māori Studies at Massey University. He invited me to apply for a lecturing position left vacant by John Bevan Ford, to teach two Māori art papers John had developed: one on ‘traditional’ and the other on ‘contemporary’ Māori art. John had established these two elective papers as part of the Māori Studies undergraduate degree. The traditional paper looked mainly at whakairo. Much of the programme was structured around John’s strengths as a carver and as a writer — he was especially strong on the traditional carving of Taranaki and Te Ātiawa.

The contemporary paper looked at the artists of John’s own generation. My condition for considering the position was the creation of a new Māori Visual Arts programme. A further condition was a postponement of the appointment until the completion of the interior of Taharora in Waipiro Bay. I started teaching at Massey in 1991.

I was committed to introducing te reo Māori as a compulsory component of the Māori Visual Arts degree. No other visual arts degree in the country at that time had a Māori language component as part of a bachelor’s degree. The idea was to anchor the programme within a kaupapa Māori paradigm capitalising on John Bevan Ford’s papers. In 1991 I restructured John’s papers, incorporating my approach and philosophy.

The contemporary paper, Ngā Momo Whakairo, began with a review of the impact of ngā poropiti Māori (the Māori prophets) on Māori visual culture of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It was important to anchor the contemporary period within that innovative earlier period as a platform of understanding the contribution of the forerunners of the contemporary Māori art movement.

The traditional paper, Ngā Hanga Whakairo, was reasonably straightforward. I broadened the focus to incorporate a comparison between different tribal styles while examining the chronological changes in form and technology through time. Ultimately, the focus turned to the arts associated with the whare whakairo.

I also introduced a 300-level paper examining contemporary issues in Māori visual arts, like appropriation, which was rife in the 1990s. The paper was eventually replaced by Te Kawenata o Waitangi: The Treaty of Waitangi in New Zealand Society, which became a compulsory paper within the degree programme alongside Te Reo Māori and the two Māori visual culture papers, Ngā Hanga Whakairo and Ngā Momo Whakairo. It was critical that there was a te reo Māori component to the degree. It was also important that visual culture was aimed at Māori, not Pākehā. We wanted our students to engage with their Māori artist models, Māori history and Māori visual culture.

They would debate specific paintings and exhibitions, like Dick Frizzell's *Goofy Tiki* work, which generated a whole discourse and counter-discourse from Professor Ngāhuia Te Awekōtuku and others. Shane Cotton was there and he was engaging with appropriation, too. And there was the Gordon Walters affair, generated by Rangi Panoho's essay on cultural appropriation in art, 'Maori: At the centre, on the margins'.<sup>1</sup>

It was interesting to hear the response to Rangi's article, particularly from Māori artists like John Ford, Para Matchitt and others who did not have a problem with Walters' borrowing of the koru form. There were two sides to that debate. It made students aware that when there are contentious issues, you need to consider all sides of the argument — beyond the author responsible for generating the discourse.

In the studio component of the Visual Arts programme we broadened the approach, encouraging students to consider not only Māori artist models, but also international artists and other indigenous artists. The core kaupapa was conceived around a series of thematic, evolutionary steps. Over time, we divided the four-year programme into Mana Whakapapa, Mana Tiriti, Mana Whenua and Mana

Tangata. And each paper was structured around the notion of ‘mata’ as a vehicle of perception.

The first year was named Matapuare; literally to open one’s eyes. The second year was Mataoho, the awakening of the senses not only of perception but also of every sense, including those of smell, taste, touch and hearing. The third year was Mataaro, which relates to knowledge associated with te kete aronui<sup>2</sup> — the knowledge of the arts and the interaction with te taiao (the natural world). Implicit in aro is the notion of facing the future with an understanding of what has gone before. There is also an extension of the search for knowledge towards a navigation of sense perception beyond the material realm (tuaui). The final year was Matatau, referencing the attainment of proficiency and mastery: to become knowledgeable. It was obviously aspirational, of course! Whether or not we ever reach the state of matatau is debatable, but that was the conceptual basis of the Māori Visual Arts programme.

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There were a couple of elective papers that you could select from disciplines outside of Māori Studies, like anthropology or even the sciences. However, I did encourage students to consider Ngā Tirohanga o Mua,<sup>3</sup> because it focused on te ao Māori past and present.

I felt that the programme needed to have this theoretical underpinning, encouraging students to anchor their visual art practice within research and literature reviews. It was aimed at a familiarity with academic engagement. We weren’t always successful, but academic engagement was critical because the programme was located within a university. Even today, the new staff are maintaining the structure within the studio programme that is now 25 years in the making.

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