

Ārai

Margaret Aull
Zena Elliott
Aimee Ratana



16 Mar–5 Apr 2018

Ārai breaking beyond

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I don't remember the first day I entered into an institution, but I do know that it was before I was born. I was held captive in my mother's womb, herself held captive, a prisoner of 'norms' about the difference between good mothers and Māori mothers.

I have been institutionalised ever since, as a way to educate me about what I need to do to be a good Māori. One day I'll learn...

Of course, the institution doesn't really know because it has become far too insular. The institution with all its knowing is forgetful like dementia. The institution has forgotten that it's held up by Māori whenua, the blood and bones of my tūpuna. Apparently I'm supposed to care about a language they speak in England, some German guy's ideas, or some Dutchman's art that he made whilst visiting my cousins around the Moana, the whole time appropriating their forms and calling it some new art movement. The institution forgets. It forgets its manners all the time too, and tells me that the theory in my timeless body of whakapapa is just some story. Well institution, research is story too, but when the institution story-tells research and theory, its intent is to control. The institution forgets that we've always known what it's been up to. It's time for you, institution, to learn some better stories. I want to learn about me, and I should be allowed to in Aotearoa institutions.

In the 1980s Baudrillard wrote about simulacra¹, describing everything as a re-hash of an originality long since dead. Baudrillard said that our bleak world of pastiche realities isn't even real anymore, but instead it's a simulacrum of a truth so distant that everything's a lie.

Well the truth is, the institution's a lie. And that's what I enjoy about the work of Aimee Ratana, Margaret Aull and Zena Elliott, all three artists are assertive about remembering beyond the lies.

Aimee Ratana remembers the resistance asserted by her tūpuna. Through her making, Aimee disrupts the lie that wahine Māori have been passive recipients of patronising domestic knowledge. Aimee asserts ways that an intimate connection with materials helps our bodies to remember truths about our inner workings. Aimee re-images reality, but instead of Baudrillard's empty simulacrum, she recreates pathways to our eternal selves – our most empowered and activist Hinenuitepo self who protects, nurtures and guides the continuance of whakapapa Māori. Margaret Aull remembers too, she remembers beyond the lie that before colonisation Māori could never journey the distance of oceans traversed by her tūpuna, the meetings of their memories her embodiment. In her assemblages and paintings, Margaret practices the mapping of terrains, opening portals between the profound and lost, helping Māori towards rangatiratanga. Margaret is a navigator, her artworks guiding us back to our Hinenuitama wonderment, where between the sacred and mundane we remember how enlivening it is to experience the freshness of the world, free of rebar and rust. Trust in being is the remembrance offered by Zena Elliott, her paintings remind us that we have the power to find ourselves in the seemingly confused world we occupy as Māori today. Zena's paintings signal the convergence of past and future within our bodies and our dynamic ability to form, shape and beautify any space we choose for life. Zena's artworks ask us to remember that within our urban landscapes we can escape the gridlock constraints – our beating Hineahuone hearts alive in colour, twinkling light and rhythmic movement.

Ārai speaks of obstructions, hinderances, barricades, blockages, barriers and insulating influences. The artists exhibiting work in this show argue that this is the context for mainstream arts education in Aotearoa. Through their works they

describe the sense of frustration loss and fragmentation they have experienced as Māori art students, where they often fought faculty to express Māori forms and knowledge. The denial of a person's identity within creative studies must surely have a detrimental impact, but for all three artists the assertion of Māoritanga uplifted them during their haerenga as tauira at Wintec.

The wero for mainstream education in Aotearoa today is to adopt new foundations. The outcome of such an education can only be generations of people living in our country, with strong and grounded identities. Aull, Elliott and Ratana argue for an arts education in Aotearoa that grows first from Māori knowing, where Māori forms, practices and knowledge are valued, respected and assist in evolving practices of Aotearoa life realness. Without the solidity of truly knowing and relating to place, a violating colonial intent continues for all arts students in Aotearoa.

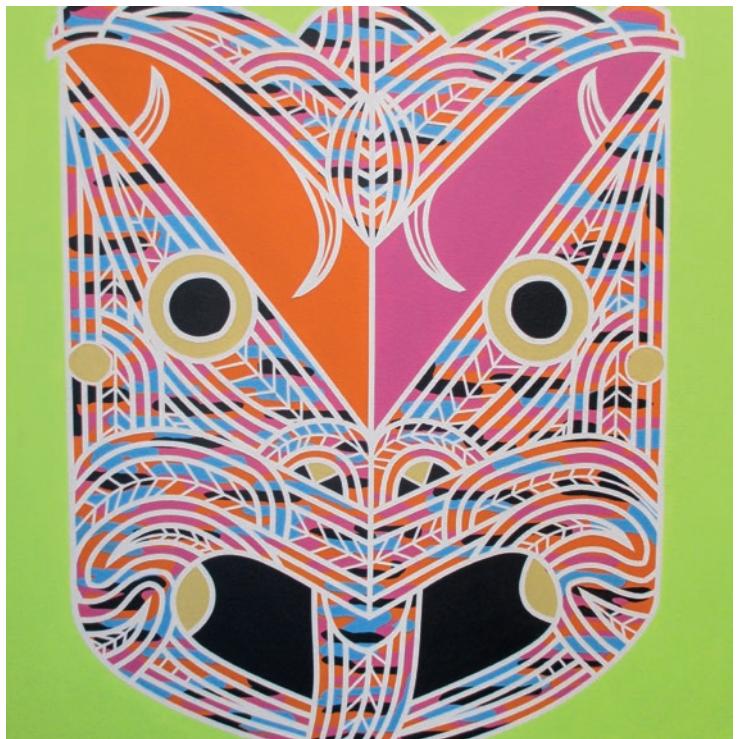
Taina Pohatu² speaks of mātauranga, a knowledge continuum from a Māori perspective, where rather than the emptiness of simulacra expressed by Baudrillard, a boundless future is supported by an expansive network of understandings. Mātauranga takes for granted the repeated generational patterns embodied in each person, allowing for firmly rooted individual and diverse expression. Rather than an Aotearoa arts education that inhibits, controls and regulates, the artwork in this show encourages us to cultivate a world of creative fullness and depth.

1. Baudrillard, J. (1968). The system of objects. In M. Poster (Ed.).(1988). Jean Baudrillard: Selected writings, (pp.10-28). Redwood City: Stanford University Press.

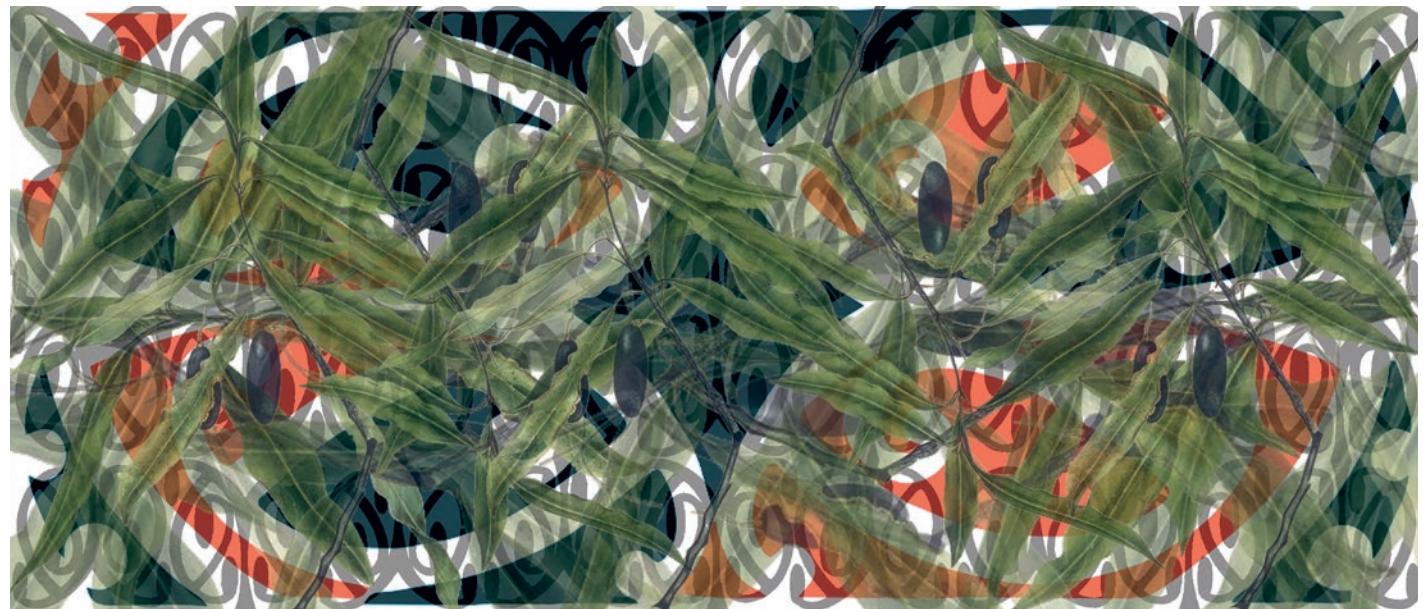
2. Pohatu, T. (2018). *Ka noho au i konei ka whakaaro noa – Tracing potential in Tipuna experiences*. Keynote presented at Kare-ā-roto: Decolonising emotions and thought space wānanga, Waikato-Tainui College for Research and Development, Hopuhopu.



Rongo
Margaret Aull
acrylic on board
2018



Kirihuna
Zena Elliott
acrylic on canvas
2018



Rautawa
Aimee Ratana
digital print on vinyl
2018

10 years since graduating with Media Arts degrees from Wintec – Aull, Elliott and Ratana return with an exhibition at Ramp Gallery that explores being and identity, and brings the activity of study for tangata whenua in a westernised educational system into focus.

Ārai examines the barriers and institutional frameworks that continue to colonise and allow a lack of visibility and cultural ignorance to surface. Absence opens up room for historical truths to be remade and re-invented through colonial mechanisms and institutional thinking. In an attempt to shift these imbalances, **Ārai** will provide opportunities for kōrero and exchange to occur, affording the artists and participants the time and space to reclaim their place and to lay down new paths for deeper connection and understanding.

Margaret Aull Tuwharetoa / Te Rarawa / Fiji

Margaret Aull is based in Te Awamutu, Aotearoa and has been an active agent in the community and Arts sector. She has been exhibiting work consistently for over a decade that has seen her exhibit solo and group shows in Aotearoa and the Pacific. She has presented her research and work in Hawaii, U.K and Fiji and was a graduate of Wintec in 2007, going on to do her Masters of fine Arts at Whitecliffe School of Art and Design.

"Aull is part of a generation of female artists who continue to challenge the status quo and the balance of power within their communities. Aull's work provides a platform for dialogue that contributes to contemporary Māori and Pacific arts discourse."

The Way Home – 2014

Zena Elliott Ngāti Awa

Zena Elliott was born in Whakatāne and raised in Te Teko and currently lives and works in Hamilton, Waikato. Elliott's large-scale paintings channel both the past and the present to provoke discussion surrounding indigenous culture and identity in contemporary rural and urban environments. Equally her works borrow from modes of contemporary urban culture, referencing both rural and contemporary society.

Elliott pays homage to graffiti culture and contemporary street murals through her use of commercial paints, applied with elaborate stencils on large-scale works. Her use of eye-catching, electric colours alludes to the culture of advertising and signage and is an attempt to magnify notions of indigenous culture and identity.

Aimee Ratana Tūhoe

Aimee Ratana currently lives in Hamilton. She gained a Bachelor of Media Arts, from Waikato Institute of Technology in 2003 and went on to complete a Masters in Māori Visual Arts at Massey University. Ratana contributed works to adorn Te Wharehou O Tūhoe, (the Tūhoe Tribal Building) which opened in 2014. Her works look to explicitly reinforce the principals of mana motuhake and rangatiratanga as aspirational future aims. Exploring notions of collective memory and presence and the importance of whakapapa (genealogy). They provide visual links to the past, present and future.