

**Toi Ki Roto, Toi Ki Waho - Art In, Art Out**  
**Breathing Through Contemporary Art Practices as Rongoā (Healing) Embedded in**  
**Kaupapa Māori Methodologies**

Research Question: What can contemporary art practices contribute to transforming experiences of anti-social behaviour within *Kāinga*?

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This Research Project entitled: Toi Ki Roto, Toi Ki Waho - Art In, Art Out Breathing Through Contemporary Art Practices as Rongoā (Healing) Embedded in Kaupapa Māori Methodologies, is submitted in partial fulfillment for the requirements for the Unitec Degree of Master of Creative Practice.

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Kī mai ki ahau, he aha te mea nui o tēnei Ao?

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*If you were to pluck out the centre of the flax bush, where would the bellbird sing?*

*If you were to ask me, “What is the most important thing in the world?”*

*I would reply to you, “It is people, people, people.”*

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*To my Warby Kohaorangi - This one is for you. Love Kuikui.*



Figure 1. Rotorua Arts Village (2023) *Moko & Kuikui*

## **Tuhinga Whakarāpopoto - Abstract**

He toi rongoa. He toi kaiao. He toi tairongo.

He toi tuku iho. He toi nō nanahi, nō naiānei mo apōpō.

Art is healing. Art is living. Art is sensory. Art is traditional. Art is contemporary. Art is our history, present and future.

(Whakatāuākī, Tonina Ngatai and Te Waimarie Ngatai-Callaghan, 2023)

As part of a larger conversation about contemporary art, culture and society, I explore a kaupapa Māori approach to the creative process of sculptural installations, investigating its potential for transformation in wellness. The underlying reason for this inquiry is a response to anti-social behaviours within communities that impact the personal space of *kāinga*. These research findings can lead to new developments in rongoā based on creative practices that promote overall health and well-being from a Māori-centered perspective. This study will employ whakapapa, pūrākau and rongoā as methods of enquiry, alongside those of contemporary art, informed by kaupapa Māori principles. The objective is to create three distinct, but related installation works that align with the research undertaking.

These works are tributes to the art of storytelling - pūrākau. In the realm of kaupapa Māori creative practice, the reclamation and revitalisation of our ancestral narratives are akin to awakening the mana of our tūpuna and breathing life into the whispers of our whenua. Through storytelling, we gather the fragments of our past, weaving them into our traditions and strengthening our identity. Everybody has a story - a narrative of life. Incorporating visual arts, stories of my ancestors and acknowledging the direct relationship to haukāinga weaves together

te ao Māori, te ao Pākehā and the symptomatologies arising from this encounter. It renders sensible a whānau and community experience of straddling both worlds while mapping rongoā healing pathways identified through autoethnographic reflection.

**Nga Kupu Matua (Keywords)**

Kaupapa Māori, Rongoa (healing), Kainga (home), pūrakau (stories), contemporary art, anti-social behaviour, autoethnographic reflection.

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- We did it!

## **Introduction**

*Footprints of the past to inform the future.*

At the beginning of my master's degree, it did not take long to realise that looking back into my past was a fundamental building block for my research and creative practice. A strong foundation was paramount to guide this academic journey as a wahine, mother of eight, grandmother of one, and creator of fine art installations using modern-day materials embedded in Māori methodologies. Starting this journey without being firmly rooted in whakapapa would be inauthentic as a contemporary artist who is fortunate to be *Māori*. In context, the research begins from the inside out - looking to the past to inform the future.

## **Tēnei Au**

Mai te kureitanga o te ihu o Tamatekapua

Ki te Pokarekare o nga wai o Te Rotorua nui a Kahu

Ki te tihi o te maunga ko Ngongotahā, ki te wai rere o te awa ko Utuhina,

ki tāku ukai pō, ko Te Koutu

Ki nga marae o Ngāti Whakaue ki Ohinemutu

Ka tau ki Tāmaki herenga waka

Hei tona wa ka hoki atu ahau ki te reo karanga o taku whanau, hapu, iwi

A-ha Te Arawa e!

Ko Antonina Mata Ngatai taku ingoa

No Ngāti Whakaue iho ake ahau.

From the bridge of Tamatekapua's nose (Maketū)

To the rippling waters of Lake Rotorua

To the mountain tops of Ngongotahā

To the flowing waters of the Utuhina River

To the place I grew up, my home, Te Koutu

To all my Marae within Ohinemutu

To Tāmaki Herenga waka (Auckland), where I reside until I hear the call of my whānau, hapu  
and iwi to return home to Rotorua - Te Arawa e!

My name is Antonina Mata Ngatai and I am irrefutably of Ngāti Whakaue descent.

Through whānau conversations and research projects back home in Rotorua, I am reminded of  
mana motuhake through whakapapa; I am reminded of haukāinga through pepeha. I am  
reminded of who I am through the name I carry, which was gifted at birth by my great-  
grandfather, Tupara Albert Morrison.

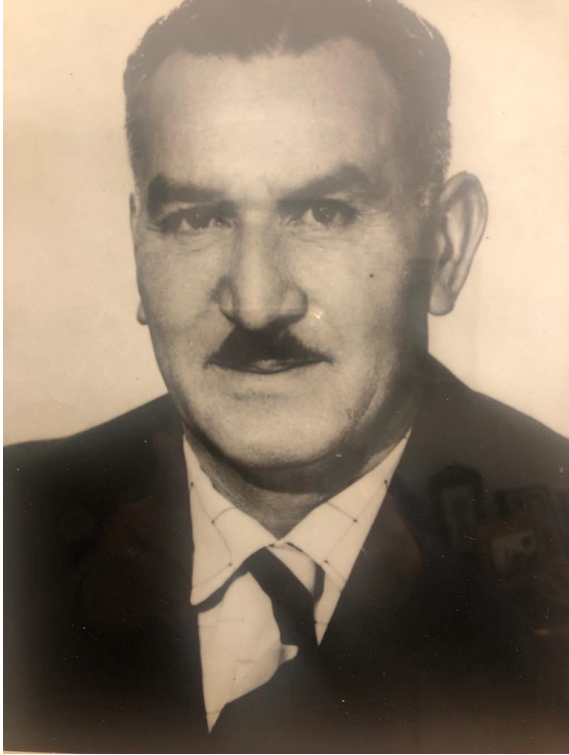


Figure 2. *Big Papa - Tupara Albert Morrison*

The day I was born, Big Papa walked to the top of Pukeroa Hill (where Rotorua Hospital is located) from his homestead, Whakatōringaringa in Ohinemutu, and said to my mother, “You are to give her the name Mata” (Erina Morrison, personal conversation, 2024). According to Mum, Big Papa did not ask; he told her. Without hesitation, Mum willingly obliged. She was honoured that her dear grandfather came to the hospital to meet and name her firstborn child and his eldest great-mokopuna (E. Morrison, Personal communication, 2024). Mata is a name that belonged to Papa Tupara’s beloved grandmother. Mum recalls conversations with Big Papa about his grandmother. As the story goes, Kuia Mata lived in a cave on the shores of Lake Rotorua in the suburb of Kawaha, not too far from Waikuta in Ngongotahā. Big Papa stayed with his grandmother when he was a child. They would often make tau kōura, a traditional Te Arawa fishing method using fern fronds and branches to catch freshwater kōura, set it overnight and

collect their catch in the morning (E. Morrison, 2024). This kōrero reminded me of a conversation with one of my whanaunga, Richard Wharerahi, who shared the original pepeha of Ngāti Whakaue, which our Amohau family gifted - It goes:

Ko Ngongotahā te maunga

Ko Waikuta te awa

Ko Te Rotorua nui a Kahu te roto

Ko kōura te kai

Ngongotahā is the mountain

Waikuta is the river

Rotorua is our lake

Freshwater crayfish is our primary food source

The landmarks of this pepeha caught my attention because they hinted toward a deeper whakapapa connection for Kuia Mata. The distance between Kawaha and the Waikuta area is a stone's throw. The pieces of the puzzle started to connect. You see, unfortunately, not a lot of written evidence has been recorded about Kuia Mata (that I am aware of), which is surprising given that written documentation was beginning to increase in the 1800s. According to Ben Manley, a researcher for the Rotorua District Council specialising in historical and land issues, Kuia Mata died around 1916. Ben discovered who Kuia's father and siblings were, but unfortunately, her mother remains unknown. The direct line of descent is as follows:

Hakaraia Pahika **Roka** (Ngāti Tura, Ngāti Te Ngākau)

## **Mata Te Tupara (Nee Roka)**

Ngapuia Teriana

Tupara Albert Morrison

Derek Mitchell Morrison

Erina Patricia Morrison

## **Antonina Mata Ngatai**

Ngāti Tura, Te Ngākau is within the Waikuta boundaries of Ngongotahā, which makes sense as to why Kuia Mata ventured to the next suburb over and settled in Kawaha.

This chapter of history remains a mystery, yet piece by piece, I am assembling the puzzle as fragments of knowledge come my way. It is heartening to witness a connection slowly emerge, taking shape at last.



Figure 3 Morrison, A (2020). *Te Whakaruruhau/Ana (Cave) o Kuia Mata raua ko Hemi Te Tupara. The cave of my ancestors.*

During our conversation, Mum mentioned Kuia Mataa was matakite - a seer of the spiritual kind. Coincidentally, I also share a connection to te taha wairua - spirituality.

From time to time, my Tupuna will send information, healing or otherwise preparing me for what lies ahead through dreams. These dreams occur on a need-to-know basis, not as day-to-day experiences, and that suits me just fine. Admittedly, this kind of spiritual sense of knowing has guided most of my creative methods.

Māori art and cultural historian Ngahuia Te Awekotuku (1991) informs us that taha wairua, the way of the spirit in matters Māori, permeates our world so profoundly that to isolate and analyse it is almost like threatening the very fabric itself. Te Awekotuku, continues to explain that spirituality and artmaking have formed an integral part of the Māori worldview from ancient times to the present day (Te Awekotuku, 1991, p.135).

Karakia and wairua are considered essential components in healing because they help us connect to our whenua, wairua, and Atua, which span the entirety of Te Ao Māori and unite us in our shared culture, physical location, social interactions, and spirituality. These connections form the basis of who we are and where we come from (Pihema & Smith, 2023). If we look into Te Arawa pūrākau, many such instances suggest our Tupuna had strong connections to Atua. In Māori mythology, Maui is the most famous demigod whose associations span Polynesia. Before the great migration, Te Arawa people were known as Ngāti Ohomairangi, named after the son of an Atua, Pūhaorangi and mortal mother, Te-Kura-I-monoa (Stafford, 1967. p 2). According to Ngahuia Te Awekotuku (1991), our Tupuna navigated from Hawaiki to Aotearoa, guided by creatures of supernatural beings and wairua (Te Awekotuku, 1991. p136). Tamatekapua, captain of the Te Arawa waka, brought Tohunga, Ngatoroirangi from Hawaiki, knowing that for their navigational journey to be successful, he needed a powerful tohunga who possessed a direct spiritual connection to the stars and Atua.

The intention for this project endeavour is to interweave two fluid sources of metaphysical and material realities that capture the wānanga of knowledge within the sculptural installation works.



## **Review of Literature and Precedents of Practice**

In the following review, I discuss a range of texts and examples of art/sculpture practice to contextualise my research question: What can contemporary art practices contribute to transforming experiences of anti-social behaviour within the space of *kāinga*? The body of this essay consists of three sections:

- Contemporary art
- Transforming anti-social behaviour
- Kāinga

### **Contemporary Art**

Moana Jackson articulates that, ‘In many ways, the Māori intellectual tradition is a navigational one, forged in journeys across the Pacific that looked back to Rangiātea while longing to know what lay beyond that distant point where the earth met the sky (Jackson, 2019).

In the above text, Jackson noted that our ancestors understood growth occurred from looking forward into the future but always remembering where they came from. Māori art has always had elements of innovation and practicality deeply embedded in customary knowledge. Our tupuna were highly conscious of their surroundings and adept at making the most of the available resources. I am in awe of their ingenuity, adaptability, and resourcefulness. Our ancestors’ capacity to test, trial and discover new pathways has inspired my own creative journey, which, like theirs, is a navigational one that looks forward while simultaneously remembering the past.

Renowned visual artist and educator Sandy Adsett described Arnold Wilson as ‘the godfather of Māori art’ and recognised as the leader of modern art (Adsett, 2012). Adsett remarks that, as a sculptor, Mr. Wilson was not afraid to experiment with using non-traditional materials, thinking outside the square and working with metal, vivid paint, and wood in various forms (Adsett, 2012). In the chapter of Taiāwhio (2002), Wilson relays that ‘in his mind, the challenge from his old Tuhoe koroua was to look at the essence of the content and form of Māori art and reconstitute them into new compositions relevant to the present’ (Wilson, 2002, p. 201). Adsett reflects on his own journey of challenging the art world by introducing his vision of contemporary Māori art into gallery spaces. Some kaumātua questioned him about these new images, which were not the traditional art-form practices. However, in most cases, kaumātua encouraged the exploration of modern art and the new offerings being created for our culture (Adsett, 2007). Explaining the equilibrium between traditional and contemporary art within installation pieces can be quite challenging. Bob Jahnke eloquently captures the essence of navigating these dual realms, offering a perspective that bridges both worlds, ‘The forms they [Cliff Whiting & Para Matchitt] created, within marae and meeting houses, are *trans-customary*: they take the original forms and pull and stretch and transform them, a distortion informed by the engagement with modern art’ (Jahnke, 2023. P.35).

Customary art can be defined as knowledge passed down and shared, imparting expert abilities and procedures to be preserved for generations. In Te Ao Māori, whakairo and raranga practices were brought to Aotearoa, New Zealand, with the arrival of our first Māori ancestors to settle and cultivate these lands. Focusing specifically on weaving, these practices were traditionally utilised for their functional and purposeful roles, often serving as essential tools for survival, such as

ropes, fishing nets, and baskets (Te Papa, *n.d*). These traditional weaving techniques are still practiced today, with weavers like Tanya White, the highly respected Hetet Whanau, Maureen Lander, Donna Cambell, Tina Wirihana, Karl Leonard, Shelly Bell and Te Rito o Rotowhio, School of Weaving at Te Puia, Māori Arts and Crafts Institute in Rotorua. All play significant roles in preserving customary methods and maintaining the integrity of sharing traditional knowledge, perpetuating incredible artifacts that appear timeless. In today's present history, Māori art interweaves customary and contemporary art forms, crafting a dynamic synthesis that celebrates modern-day expression while honouring the legacy and knowledge of our Tupuna.

The contemporary art world is an endless dance, ever shifting and flowing like the tides of the ocean, where we find ourselves *installed* into the harmonic rhythms of transformation and evolution. According to Claire Bishop (2005), “‘Installation art’ is a term that loosely refers to the type of art into which the viewer physically enters, and which is often described as ‘theatrical’, ‘immersive’ or ‘experiential’” (p. 6). The immersive three-dimensional environments of this genre of art today include a wide range of practices, often merging elements of sculpture, architecture, and performance and integrating objects and space into a unified whole. Installation art can range from simple to intricate, engaging audiences conceptually and encouraging them to think beyond a two-dimensional perspective. As artist Ilya Kabakov said, ‘The main actor in the total installation, the main centre toward which everything is addressed, for which everything is intended, is the viewer’ (Tate. *n.d*). Today, the proponents of this art form include Yayoi Kusama's installation work, Infinity Room. In one of her earlier exhibitions, *Infinity Mirror Room – Phalli's Field* (1965), the viewer (most memorably Yayoi herself, dressed in red) stands surrounded by a field of red-on-white phallus forms rising from the floor.

These forms are reflected horizontally in every direction, creating a kaleidoscopic confusion of images of self, edge, and colour (Bell, 2010, p. 86).

In the following discussion, I delve into the works of artists adept in customary and contemporary art who have influenced my visual language. These distinguished artists are Māori and non-Māori and exemplify academic integrity and a wealth of creative experience. Weaver Donna Campbell explains that fibre artists recognise the difference between traditional and contemporary materials. 'A Korowai, crafted from the land, embraced by the air and sky using muka and feathers, conveys a sense of mana and prestige, thus earning the name Korowai (Campbell, 2016). Dr. Hinekura Smith (2024) shares her perspective on this approach to contemporary soft fabric design, suggesting that a new terminology might be necessary to describe this modern form of *kākahu*. In an interview, Smith states, "We want people to understand that there are many different types of *whatu kākahu*, and *korowai* is just one" (Smith, 2024). Some of these modern designs are not *whatu kākahu* because they are not made using finger weaving practices; they may be sewn. If a *mokopuna* is graduating and the nannies get out an old blanket and sew it up, that is still beautiful. It is still a *kākahu*' (Smith, 2024).

This is where my creative practice locates itself in terms of *kākahu*. The intention is to merge a community of garments given with *aroha* (love). These *kākahu* will be constructed by hand into clumped formed nodules shaped like poi that retain DNA traits of human connection, creating a blanket of *kākahu aroha*.

Māori design is prominently featured in customary art forms such as whakairo and raranga, which have long histories dating back generations. Māori art also takes contemporary forms across the full spectrum of creative expression. Maureen Lander, renowned weaver and installation artist, discusses the material interchange between Māori and early settlers in Aotearoa, New Zealand. Lander asserts that Māori were drawn to the red fabric acquired via trade with early explorers (Lander, 2012). Lander explains how our ancestors repurposed materials, saying, “They would unpick the wool and use it in the cloaks. The red colour has the same mana as the red Kākā feathers,” Lander continues to say, “Red is a highly regarded colour because it symbolises prestige and a high position in society (Lander, 2012). Introducing these new materials changed the weavers’ methods by fostering the development of innovative knowledge systems, yet customary techniques remained deeply embedded in their processes. I draw inspiration from domestic and international artists in this section regarding contemporary art. There is a particular focus on those who recycle and repurpose waste, transforming materials into significant works of art.

Fast-fashion companies worldwide produce more clothing than the earth can sustain. In a Greenpeace article, Elliot Pryor (2024) states, “Today’s trends are tomorrow’s trash, with our clothes made cheaply and disposed of quickly”. Fiona Clements is a self-described ‘craftivist’ (craft activist) and uses commercial cut-offs and other textiles bound for landfills and recycling centres. Clements created a *kākahu* cloak made from tee-shirts and draped it over the Robbie Burns statue in Dunedin. The cloak was designed to draw attention to textile waste in the fashion industry. Clements hoped the Korowai would trigger conversations about fashion industry

sustainability and inspire the public to ask all designers associated with Fashion Week to be transparent about how their clothes were made (Chilton-Towle, 2015).

Artist Nick Cave created his first sound suit (1992) as a response to the Rodney King riots in Los Angeles. The sound suits are a reflection of what it might be like to be discarded and dismissed - less than. Cave picked up a twig in the park, collected a whole bunch, and began to make his first sound suit. Cave realised the moment he started to move in the suit, it made a sound. Cave explains he was building a suit of armour to shield him from the world and society. When it made a sound, he thought about the role of protest and that to be heard, you have to speak louder (Cave, 2022). In a similar context, my soft sculpture pieces are intended to provide a sense of protection from the noise and disruption of anti-social behaviour.

The artists mentioned have imparted profound lessons through their distinct practices and the deep concepts inherent in their work while acknowledging the customary use of natural fibres and the construction of contemporary materials. The goal is to ensure that, while honouring customary Māori art forms, my practice remains authentic and carefully weaves dimensions of mātauranga Māori and contemporary art to help transform healing and wellness respectfully.

### **Transforming Anti-Social Behaviour**

*Anti-social behaviour* can be defined as persistent behaviour that causes or is likely to cause harm or distress to people in the surrounding area (Anti-social Behaviour - Waka Toa Ora, n.d.). It is a significant issue in Aotearoa, New Zealand.

My primary motivation for investigating how to transform anti-social behaviour through contemporary art comes from my own lived experiences within my neighbourhood and community, specifically domestic violence. Dr Ian Lambie claims that despite the widely documented minimal presence of whānau violence before colonisation, Māori now face significant exposure to it. The trauma of colonisation has had intergenerational impacts, leading to disproportionately high rates of family violence among Māori, compounded by the adverse social effects of racism, discrimination, and dislocation (Lambie, 2018, p. 5-6). The impacts of anti-social behaviour deeply affect my personal space of kāinga (home) by raising anxiety levels and triggering mental and emotional stress. I often feel trapped in a small dark cave when such instances occur. Through my artistic practice, I discovered the simple rewards of repetition, connection, and meditation. Before long, I understood that these methods were having a positive impact on my well-being. Keeping my thoughts focused and hands busy for long periods of time provided a sense of accomplishment and elevated my state of being.

Speaking to the media, some of our government ministers recently expressed their concerns about the growing problems of anti-social behaviour in today's society. Cabinet Minister Christopher Bishop remarked, "New Zealanders are sick of hearing about terrifying and heartbreaking stories from neighbours of abusive and anti-social Kāinga Ora tenants. It is completely unacceptable that people should have to live in fear" (Bishop, 2024). ACT minister David Seymour shared his views in an interview (2024): "Threat of eviction is an 'essential incentive' to discourage malicious behaviour" (Seymour, 2024). Seymour continues to say, "Anti-social minority of Kāinga Ora tenants learned they could terrorise their neighbours without consequence... Today's change in tack will be a relief to residents subjected to ceaseless noise,

vandalism, and threats.” Seymour refers to the letter sent to Kainga Ora by Minister Christopher Bishop and Finance Minister Nicola Willis to end the Sustaining Tenancies Framework.

Experiencing this kind of behaviour first-hand, I am compelled to agree with Bishop and Seymour’s statements about anti-social behavioural issues. However, there are valid concerns about this administration’s threat to evict. This poses a real danger that the government’s new stance on anti-social behaviour will create new sets of problems with no actual resolution.

*Ka pō, ka ao, ka awatea.*

*From within the darkness comes light and a new day.*

The above whakatauki refers to moving from illness to wellness and, in the context of this discussion, recognises the internal conflict with *self* and the hope of a better day. Mason Durie (2003) discusses the symptoms of a distorted relationship with self that can affect social, spiritual and emotional connections. Durie (2003) observes that “Depression and anxiety, for instance, may not be viewed as isolated areas of dysfunction but as indicators that the balance between emotions, social relationships, spirituality and the body has become distorted’ (Durie, p.48).

This highlights the complexity of anti-social behaviour and the need for multimodal approaches that include mental health therapies, educational measures, and family assistance to address and mitigate such behaviours successfully.

There is a window of opportunity to create Māori-centered wrap-around services with a specific focus on contemporary art. I believe this can become an ‘essential *initiative*’ for supporting those impacted by anti-social behaviour. While there is no one solution to improving Māori health and



wellbeing, we may be able to identify practical solutions that enhance cultural competency and safety while achieving better outcomes if we begin by reflecting on the underlying causes of disruptive behaviours.

Customary and contemporary art is integral to healing from within and addressing underlying root causes of societal discontent. An article by Te Hiku Media reports, “The act of creating art itself holds therapeutic value. Māori artists often view their creative process as a spiritual journey to connect with their inner selves and the spiritual realm. This process can be cathartic, providing a means of emotional expression and release. Whether it is the rhythmic motion of weaving or the precision of carving, the act of creating art becomes a meditative practice that promotes mental and emotional well-being” (*Te Hiku Media*, 2023).

It is important to recognise artists who have paved the way toward incorporating elements of Te Ao Māori and artistic practices, enabling a holistic approach to *hauora*. Healthy relationships within a community and whānau can be modelled after the pā harakeke and its interrelated system. Weaver Tanya White and Leon Tan write, ‘The pā harakeke and its system of interrelationships is a model for healthy community and whānau relationships. The rito is the central shoot, child, mokopuna, and the heart of the pāharakeke’ (Tan & White, 2023, p. 271). It is remarkable how strands of wahakura (sleeping vessel) are woven into rhythmic patterns of sustainability deeply embedded in whakapapa. Re-defining health and well-being from all whānau ora aspects intrinsically connected to whenua.



Figure 4 Parr, E. *Weaver Tanya White*.

For many of our international creatives, artistic practice is a mode of treatment that reshapes and elevates the nature of *their* healing across physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual realms.

Japanese artist Yayoi Kusama is a renowned mixed-media artist who started painting as a child. Kusama began having hallucinations early in life, which featured fields of dots. Throughout her career, the motif of dots and those hallucinations would reoccur in her artwork. In a documentary, Tate explains that Kusama has been living in a psychiatric institution voluntarily since 1977. Much of her creative practice has been influenced by obsessiveness and repetitive methods that help to subdue her psychological trauma (Tate, 2012).

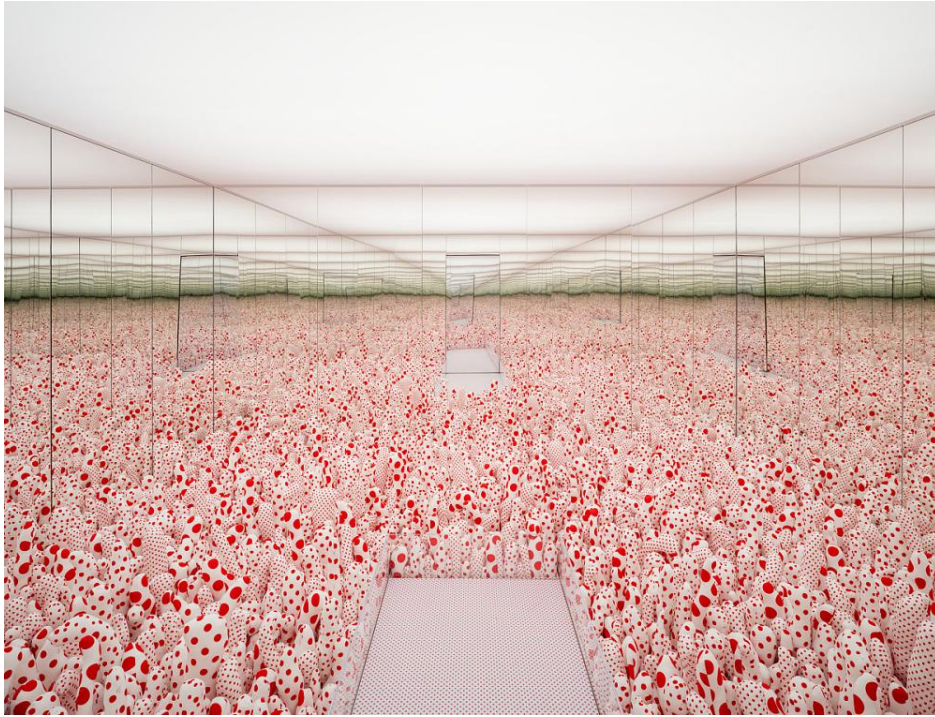


Figure 5 Yayoi Kusama (1965) *Infinity Mirror Room Phallus Field*

Gunnhild Boregreen (2001) writes, “It is misleading to regard her [Kusama] art as the product of a mad artist. It is much more rewarding to consider Kusama as an artist who, during her 50 years of artistic endeavour, not only has been highly conscious about her own creative processes and the origin of her ideas but also has interacted with great awareness and sensitivity to the leading trend of the international circle” (Borggreen, pg 43).

Mexican artist Freida Khalo used art as a form of therapy after a horrific traffic accident that saw the artist bedridden around the year 1925. Photographer Lola Alvarez Bravo observed that the artist (Khalo) had found new life through painting and that the accident had been followed by a sort of ‘rebirth’, by which her love of nature, animals colours, and fruits of anything beautiful

and positive had been renewed (Bravo, pg.19)

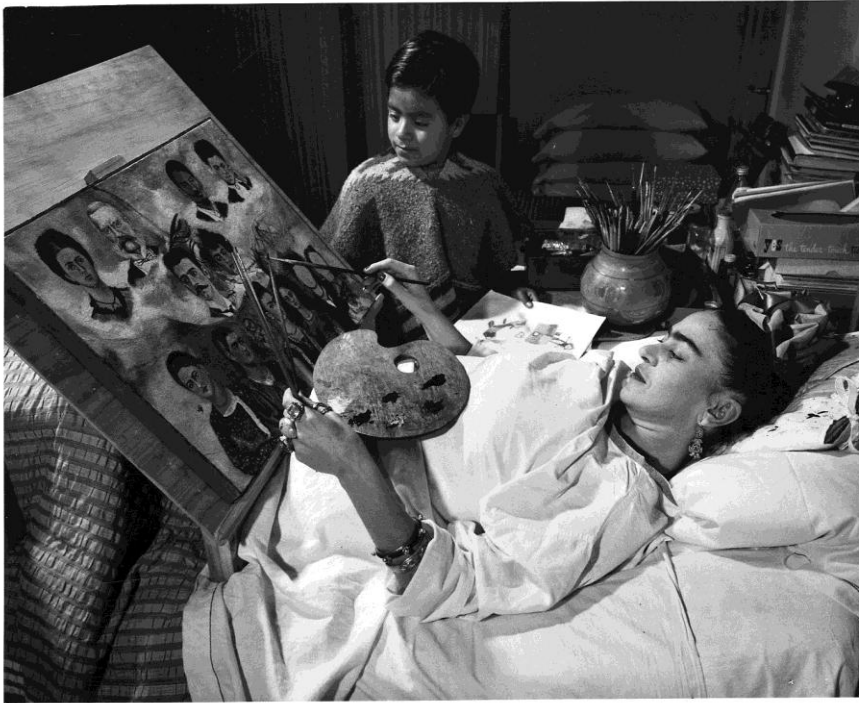


Figure 6 Frida Kahlo. *Painting in Bed*

My aspiration for this research is to expand the boundaries of peripheral knowledge, presenting an innovative expression of rongoa uniquely designed to transform anti-social behaviour into a pathway for positive change.

## **Kāinga**

*Ko te whare e hanga te tangata, ko te tangata e hangaia e te whare.*

*The whare builds the people, and the people build the whare.* (Boulton et al., 2021)

The human body served as the primary model for early Māori measurement standards, as in many other parts of the world. An article by Science Learning Hub (2011) informs us, ‘When

constructing a whareniui, the arm span (aronui) of a designated person, most often someone of importance such as a high-ranking chief, would be marked on a cord or rod (rauru) for measuring purposes' (Science Learning Hub, 2011).

According to a report in the Dominion (1918), European ethnologist Elsdon Best, details the traditional method of house construction among the Māori people. He describes how Māori builders would use an individual's arm span, typically a rangatira, using a rauru or measuring chord/rod for accuracy. Best notes that rauru were highly esteemed as taonga. Borrowing a rauru from a respected rangatira bestowed great honour upon the borrower, who could then proudly declare, "Na te rauru o [name], I tatai te whare nei" – "By the rauru of [name], this house was measured." This idea emphasises the skillful application of construction methods that involve measurement using different anatomical features.

Rau Hoskins (2022), a renowned expert in Māori architecture, remarks in an interview regarding the ingenuity of our Ancestors, "I also think about our Tupuna who, as architects of their time, as Tohunga whakairo, Tohunga hanga whare, they were agents in the physical environment. They were not limited to one particular aspect. They were planners, they were engineers, they were architects, they were master builders". Our Tupuna were apt in sustainable living that minimised environmental degradation. According to historian Ben Schrader, 'historically, Māori communities resided in familial kāinga or pā. Their dwelling places included wharepuni constructed from timber, rushes, tree ferns, and bark, featuring thatched roofs and earthen floors. Additionally, traditional structures such as pātaka, kāuta, and whareniui were integral to their communal life' (Te Ara, 2013). Rau Hoskins discusses further that "Māori have had the luxury

of building where from resources at hand. Our ancestors utilised the natural environment to build homes to sustain us, that could be built quickly with zero mortgage” (Hoskins, 2022). How modern Māori conceptualise “home” is also influenced by their right to claim rangatiratanga (self-determination) over cultural norms and to question Westernised ways of knowing and knowledge construction (Hoskins, 2022).

Kāinga, in the context of Māori culture, transcends the mere external structure that provides physical shelter. It embodies the essence of community, identity, and well-being. The interior of a kāinga holds profound significance, as it is the space where family relationships are nurtured, cultural values are practiced, and the sense of belonging is reinforced. Within my own kāinga, as humble as it may be, I strive to provide a safe space that is warm and inviting, filled with art, laughter, music, good food, creativity and education. After more than thirty years of motherhood, I’ve discovered that although life can be a roller coaster ride of challenges, if you instill core values and applied practices of - *tikanga*, you essentially create a nurturing environment of *purpose*, where whānau can thrive.

Sir Mason Durie offers a more comprehensive view of health and well-being. In 1984, Durie produced Te Whare tapa whā. In this paradigm, a wharenui is referred to as a model for *hauora* (health and well-being). The cornerstone of Māori health is our connection to the whenua (land). Each wall of the wharenui symbolises a different aspect. We can experience mauiuitanga (illness) when one or more of these walls are out of balance. These four pillars represent:

- Taha Wairua
- Taha Tinana

- Taha Hinengaro
- Taha Whānau

The pillars help the kāinga maintain internal balance, but what happens if they are not followed? It would be comparable to a chair with four legs, and if one of those legs is an inch off balance, then the chair cannot function at its total capacity - if at all.

Kāinga is, for better or worse, often the place where we encounter anti-social behaviour; in this context, we talk about the kāinga becoming sick. Low socioeconomic communities are scrutinised intensely under the lens of society. We could argue that actions taken by our nation's leaders have comparable effects inside the debating chambers of parliament. Minister Winston Peters demonstrated his lack of Tino Rangatiratanga when he berated the youngest Member of Parliament, wahine Māori, Hana-Rāwhiti Maipi-Clarke, by telling her to “hush up, show some manners and listen to her elders” (Peters, May 31, 2024). This remark makes me think of an idiom I heard as a young child: “Children should be seen and not heard”. It is an old-school term used to diminish a child's voice and establish dominance over another. Rāwhiti responded with a few choice words of her own. However, the most memorable was when she told Winston, “Moumou tō toto Māori, moumou tō toto Māori, moumou tō toto Māori!” which essentially means, what a waste of your Māori blood/DNA (Rāwhiti, May 31, 2024). Rāwhiti also used her social media platform (Instagram) to express her experience in Te Whare Paremata (Parliament House) that day: “Winston Peters started heckling and bullying me in his budget speech, as I was sitting there minding my own business, and members then heckled back to defend me. I have watched this man attack Wāhine Māori with his words, trying to belittle them in this debating

chamber so many times, so I gave it back and told him to go speak to my own elders before talking at me” (Rāwhiti, 2024).

Rāwhiti highlights that even at the highest echelons of government, symptoms of anti-social behaviour, bullying, and disrespect are evident within The Chambers of Parliament House. If our own leaders fall short in fundamental skills of communication and negotiating respectfully, how is it different from the walls within our kāinga and communities?

As a whole, my work incorporates traditional knowledge with modern forms of creative processes. I hope to create a tapestry of knowledge that reflects core aspects of contemporary art, the intricacies of anti-social behaviour, rongoā, and kāinga by exploring these intersections further. The goal of this project is to produce art that has a profound emotional impact, transforming the gloom of anti-social behaviour into healing strands of connection and self-autonomy.



## **Methods and Methodology**

As I reflect on my academic journey over the past few years, there have been times that I struggled to comprehend and articulate some of the academic writing and research assignments. The taka never kapa-ed, so to speak (kua taka te kapa, the penny has dropped, kīwaha or, idiom). In this regard, it took longer than usual to comprehend the totality of the academic requirements. Learning new terminology, phrases and expressions aligned with a mainstream conceptual framework of academia incited a familiar feeling of anxiety and doubt that started to bubble like a stewing mud pool, so I had to figure out a system that worked for *me*.

Centering the research within a Mātauranga Māori framework has enhanced my ability to produce valid and informed content while simultaneously highlighting additional dimensions of the metaphysical beliefs that are part of Te Ao Māori. Tuakana Nepe writes, ‘Kaupapa Maori, it is argued, has its origins in a metaphysical base that is distinctively Maori. This influences the way Maori people think, understand, interpret, and interact within ‘their’ world. The ‘relative validity’ of what is knowledge and what counts as knowledge within Māori society is accordingly shaped and reshaped epistemologically’ (T. Nepe, 1991). Te Ao Māori is immersed in a metaphysical fluidity of belief systems: the seen and the unseen. According to Nepe, ‘the distinctiveness of Maori metaphysical beliefs and body of knowledge may be demonstrated by Maori animism’ (T. Nepe, 1991). This implies that Māori believe everything has a life force—an essence of spirituality. Nepe states, ‘The concept of the relationship between the living and the dead; life and death; the Maori concept of time, history and development; the relationships between male and female; individual and group; and the implication of such relationships for social power relations. These knowledge types and their functions are the content and product of

the interconnection of the purely Maori metaphysical base and Māori societal relationships. Ensuring an effective partnership between metaphysical and sociological relationships supports this qualitative research inquiry. Māori pedagogy provides a unique approach to education, which includes traditional customs and values, such as Te Taiao, mahi-a-toi, pūrakau, whaikorero, karanga and waiata (marae-based learning). These are examples of a Māori learning environment tailored to the educational needs of students and teachers alike. A system that supports learning in all forms instead of the institutional framework of one-size-fits-all. Linda Tuhiwai Smith discusses kaupapa Māori research initiatives and summarises kaupapa Māori concepts as follows:

- 1) is related to being Māori
- 2) is connected to Māori philosophy and principles
- 3) takes for granted the validity and legitimacy of Māori, the importance of Māori language and culture; and
- 4) is concerned with the struggle for autonomy over our cultural well-being (Smith, 1999. Pg 185).

Ngā kōrero tuku iho, the Māori oral tradition, flourished in an era before written language, where all knowledge was absorbed by osmosis. This rich tapestry of instructive stories has been remembered and passed down through the generations. Whakapapa, the complex lineages; whakataukī, the thought-provoking proverbs; kōrero, the rich stories; and waiata, the echoing melodies and chants, are all found within the colourful embrace of mātauranga Māori. These components eloquently depict the historical and ancient worlds, detailing the epic journey of our Tupuna from Hawaiki and the life of their Māori descendants in Aotearoa.

*'It matters what ideas we use to think other ideas with' - Marilyn Strathern.*

Although the above idiom is not necessarily a Māori kīwaha, it does highlight a valuable perspective upon which I have engaged with this research and creative practice approach. To put it plainly, the expression suggests that one idea/strand could remain still long enough to justify further investigation. Within a Mātauranga Māori paradigm, every strand is a point of entry that shapes and forms knowledge pathways and networks. A basic idea of new development is illustrated by the rito of the pā harakeke bush, where the surrounding awahi rito supports and cares for the central stem, te rito. Within my artistic endeavours, a solitary clump multiplies into clusters, a solitary article of clothing becomes a wardrobe of garments, and a solitary cable tie develops into a terrain of shapes and forms. The making process continues with clumping techniques created and developed throughout the Bachelor of Creative Enterprise degree I completed prior to enrolling in this Master of Creative Practice programme. The clumps are made from used and repurposed clothing, stuffed and shaped into fist-size bulbous forms and clumped together as clusters of cells. These textiles reference nodules and soft toys, or cushions, which function as comforters, in a way, through haptic processes. The design aims to facilitate human interaction, allowing the observer to take centre stage in the exhibit. One of the reasons my installations encourage audience participation is to reflect an extension of *self*. The objective is to focus on self-care by exploring soft sculpture practices, primarily utilising pre-loved clothing and repurposed materials. This self-care approach involves engaging with the works, meditating through the repetitive making process, and discovering healing pathways by reimagining a domestic setting within *kāinga*.

## **Discussion – My Creative Practice**

My earliest memory of creating artwork was at kindergarten in Rotorua. There was a reused container (probably margarine) filled with crayons and a blank piece of guillotine-cut newsprint in front of me. I picked up a crayon and started to glide over the paper. I did not draw shapes to symbolise anything in particular; I scribbled. Round and round like a whirlpool, layering colour after colour, thinking somehow it would become the most beautiful rainbow river. When I finished the drawing, I remember feeling disappointed. It looked more like a mud pool from Kuirau Park—thick, bubbling porridge. ‘Dumb’, I thought and screwed it up. As the years went on, I developed a genuine interest in art but had no stickability, patience or discipline to pay attention to any one thing for long periods of time. I recognise now that some cognitive issues hindered my academic progress as a young child. I decided school was not for me, so I left at 16 and joined a band. Singing was my saving grace. It was healing, exciting, and soulful. I was surrounded by hard-working, talented musicians who could really jam. New Jack City - nei rā te mihi. I had enough talent to do well in the music industry, but once again, priorities were like my kindergarten artwork - a big scribble.

Looking back on my past, I have vivid memories of most events, some of them challenging, some of them beautiful, some of them painful, some of them unbelievable, but all of them necessary. There is a popular whakatauki (proverb) that goes:

*Kia whakatomuri te haere whakamua.*

*I walk backward into the future with my eyes fixed on the past.*

This whakatauki reminds me that the echoes of my *ance-story* are now *my-story* that ripple like the waters of Lake Rotorua into the future through my children and their children, which becomes part of *their-story*.

Cue motherhood. My ultimate saving grace. Having so many children (five girls, three boys) is unheard of these days, especially in this climate of cost of living, but I would do it all over again in a heartbeat. Through motherhood, I have learned patience, the ability to multitask, prioritise, organise, manage a household and understand what unconditional love feels like. I am not saying motherhood is the only way to gain these skills. I definitely played the long game, but for my personality and easily distracted characteristics, it was the continuous repetition, making do with what we had, creating something out of nothing, thinking on my feet and being resourceful while nurturing others that amalgamates these skills into my creative practice today.

In March of 2021, a COVID-19 lockdown compelled art students to use their home supplies and become creative. I was in my 2nd year of the Bachelor of Creative Enterprise Degree, and it was challenging to be productive during this time for some of us, especially being ill-equipped for resources. However, I embraced the challenge (which felt more like a ‘dare’) to make do with what I had. Guided by a question I asked myself repeatedly while foraging through my kāinga looking for resources: What would my Tupuna do with materials of today? This is where the idea for contemporary soft sculpture and cable tie kete originated.

I began to create soft sculptures out of pre-loved garments and materials by shaping, moulding and clumping fabric into nodules, enabling a creative pathway of re-purposing discarded textiles echoing traces of *ira tangata* (human DNA). As far as I am aware, this method of binding fabric into clusters does not have a specific Māori term because it is not traditional weaving; not even close. However, it does have elements of repetitive binding techniques, and if I were to offer a Māori name for this type of process, it would be *Paihere*, which means to bind together in a bundle.



Figure 7 Model, Mitchell Ngatai – Smith (2021). *Covid-19 Lockdown*

I also explored ways to handcraft everyday household items, such as cable ties, gutter guards and electrical wire, to re-imagine traditional *kete harakeke* (flax purse) with a modern-day twist. In the second year of the BCE programme, I used old curtain netting among the textiles used during

the pandemic. In the final year of the BCE programme, 2022, I used woollen hospital blankets and a kitchen chair. In the installation for the master of creative practice degree (2023-2024), I focus specifically on incorporating discarded clothing items that transform household furniture.



Figure 8 Model -Tammy Groves (2023). *Te Kahu Kotahi - The Throne*



Figure 9. *Clumping - Work in progress* (2024). Rotorua Arts Village.

## **Nga Kete Wānanga**

Tēnei au te hōkai nei o taku tapuwae

Ko te hōkai nuku ko te hōkai rangi

Ko te hōkai a tō tupuna a Tānenui-a-rangi

Ka pikitia ai ki te rangi tūhāhā ki te Tihi-o-Manono

Ka rokohina atu rā ko Te Matua-kore anake

Ka tīkina mai ngā kete o te wānanga

Ko te kete-tuauri

Ko te kete-tuatea

Ko te kete-aronui

Ka tiritiria ka poupoua

Ka puta mai iho ko te ira tangata

Ki te wheiao ki te ao mārama

Tihei-mauri ora!

This is the journey of sacred footsteps

Journeyed about the earth journeyed about the heavens

The journey of the ancestral god Tānenuiarangi

Who ascended into the heavens to Te Tihi-o-Manono

Where he found the parentless source

From there he retrieved the baskets of knowledge

Te kete-tuauri

Te kete-tuatea



Te kete-aronui

These were distributed and implanted about the earth

From which came human life

Growing from dim light to full light

There was life

The above karakia recognises the diverse strands of knowledge utilised by humanity in the pursuit of understanding. Dr Rāwiri Taonui (2006) recounts Tāne's journey to Te Tihi-o-Manono in Te Toi-o-ngā-Rangi, the highest of the 12 heavens, where he discovered three baskets of knowledge: kete-tuauri (basket of light), kete-tuatea (basket of darkness), and kete-aronui (basket of pursuit) (Te Ara, 2006).

During a supervisor hui, it became clear that my research findings contained numerous strands that needed to be synthesised into two or three main themes and organised accordingly into groups. Whaea Lynda Toki suggested calling the key points 'Nga Kete Wānanga' (Toki, Personal conversation, 2024). Instantly, my brain formulated each item in a coherent sequence, which fortuitously made a beautiful connection to my creative practice of cable tie kete and reinforced interwoven fabrication. This concept of ngā kete wānanga also connects to the three baskets of knowledge retrieved from the heavens, intended to aid in learning and improve a Māori focused way of life.

The three kete wānanga are:

- Kete Wānanga Tuahtahi - Mai Rangiātea ki Maketu

- Kete Wānanga Tuarua - Ahirā
- Kete Wānanga Tuatoru - Mataa

Each kete is named according to the research undertakings and overall body of work, interweaving a three-part installation series for the final exhibition. Much thought and consideration went into naming nga kete wānanga.

*Mai Rangiātea ki Maketu* - has a focus on whakapapa, pūrākau and *kāinga*.

*Ahirā* - concentrates on contemporary art and its place within the *kāinga*

*Mataa* - examines the underlying issues of anti-social behaviour and how contemporary art practices can perform as *rongoa* for overall well-being.

### **Kete wānanga tuatahi - Mai Rangiātea ki Maketu**

Discusses the navigational journey of my ancestors and their bravery to leave their homeland of Hawaiki to discover new islands of the great ocean of Kiwa (Waker, 1990). Following the stars toward the rising sun, my Tupuna first set their sights on Papatuanuku, now known as Aotearoa, New Zealand, approximately 1000 years ago. Papatuanuku - blanketed in a long cloud of mist, clothed in a rich landscape of mountainous terrain and crystal-clear waterways untainted by human exploitation. I can only imagine my Tupuna being in awe when their feet finally touched the sand and their eyes fixed on this new land that would receive and nourish them. Our ancestors acclimated to the surroundings and quickly became one with the environment, generating new stories weaved through time, leaving lasting physical and spiritual legacies forever ingrained in this land. Returning home to Rotorua over the summer period, I took the

opportunity to travel to Maketū to reconnect with the final resting place of the Te Arawa waka. It was low tide, and thousands of red rocks were spread across the beach.



Figure 10. Ngatai, T (2024). *Maketu*

As I watched the sea wrap around my feet, a thought struck me, almost like a whisper in my ear, 'I AM the body of water'. Our physical make-up comprises up to 70% water, so I decided it would be fitting to recreate forms and structures using cable ties to re-imagine the rock formation embedded in the sand, washed over by the rhythmic waters of the sea. Upon entering the exhibition, the cable ties will be strategically positioned throughout the gallery. Visitors will navigate these organic landscapes, integrating themselves naturally into the exhibition, *becoming* the flowing body of water.

Korean artist Sui Park describes her cable tie art as “3-dimensional organic forms and biomorphic shapes. They represent transitions and transformations in nature” (Lau, 2016). Park has been at the forefront of creative inspiration as she transforms cable ties, playing on the way in which man can mimic nature.



Figure 11 Artist, Sui Park, (2024). *Sprout*

Creating shapes and forms with cable ties is repetitive and time-consuming. It involves forming each tie into an oval-shaped loop and then connecting/weaving them to produce curvilinear structures that develop organically according to the size and tension of each loop. The forms evolve into a similar style of traditional weaving called *kupenga*. The hope is for these structures to mimic the re-imagined landscape and landing place of Te Arawa waka - *Maketu*.



Figure 12. Te Puna o Te Waiunuroa o Wairaka, (2022). *Cable Ties*

Over the summer of 2023-24, I was privileged to have been selected as an artist in residence at the Arts Village, Rotorua. It was an excellent opportunity to continue my research and creative practice for the master's degree and reconnect with my whānau, hapu, and iwi in an artistic capacity. During my residency, I caught up with my nephew, Tipene James. He regaled me with numerous pūrakau about our Ngāti Whakaue whakapapa and our ties to Tāmaki Mākaaurau through our ancestors, Tamatekapua and Ihenga. He also spoke about the land associated with the Arts Village and nearby landmarks, such as the Government Gardens and Sulphur Point. On another occasion, my Uncle Don Morrison said that when he was a child, his elders would warn them [children] 'not to go down there and play [Rotorua District Council & Government Gardens & Sulphur Point area] because there is a big taniwha' (Morrison, personal conversation, 2024). The intention was to deter children from going to the site where the great battle of Tawharakurupēti took place between three brothers, Tunohopu, Te Kata and Te Roro o te Rangi,

against Tuwharetoa. The kaumātua believed negative spiritual energy was connected to the land because of the significant loss of life during this battle.

After finishing the residency, I was invited by the Arts Village to do a pop-up exhibition, and of course, I accepted. I decided to create a cable tie installation called Te Taniwha o Tawharakurupēti. The work was made entirely from cable ties that spanned across windows and walls. From a creative perspective, what caught my eye was the way the light hit from different angles and shadows bounced off the walls, creating ever-changing patterns and forms that seemed to come alive with movement. The visual spectacle of shadow dancing can transform ordinary spaces into captivating scenes of kinetic art, emphasising the ephemeral beauty of light and shadow, which resembles the life of the invisible taniwha - just like our invisible Hawaiki. There may not be physical traces of existence, but spiritual connection prevails. I will discuss this further in kete wānanga tuatoru - *Mataa*.



Figure 13. Ngatai, T (2024). *Te Taniwha o Tawharakurupēti*

Going back home to Rotorua for two months was one of the best experiences I have had in a long time. It was a privilege to sit in our whare Tupuna, Tamatekapua, surrounded by my amazing Aunties, learning waiata and moteatea regarding Ngāti Whakaue. It was rongoa for the soul. I learned of our six Koromatua through a waiata tautoko called ‘Nga Koromātua o Ngāti Whakaue’ (Laurence Ehau & Rūkingi Haupapa, 2018).

Hurungaterangi

Taeotu

Rangiiwaho

Pukaki

Te Roro o te Rangi

Tunohopu

Nga koromatua o Ngāti Whakaue ki Ohinemutu

Tamatekapua

Te Papa i Ouru

Tunohopu

Paratehoata

Te Roro o te Rangi

Te Kuirau

Nga Marae o Ngati Whakaue ki Ohinemutu

This waiata explains who our six Koromātua are and mentions specifically all Mārae of Ohinemutu. The breath, the sound, the words, and the embrace of our past while sitting in our Whare Tupuna, Tamatekapua, reminded me of the rhythmic patterns of the ocean at Maketū. Looking back to the past and being present in the future - *I am home*.



## Kete wānanga tuarua - Ahirā



Figure 14 *My paternal grandparents, Rita and Richard Ngatai.*

*Ahirā* - is an acronym for Raiha, my paternal grandmother Rita *Raiha* Ngatai's middle name.

Within the name *Ahirā*, I also acknowledge my maternal grandmother's first name, *Tuhingarā*, which means writings of the day. Nanny Tuhi participated in a kete workshop I ran back home in Rotorua over the summer. Watching the artistic tides turn and sharing another creative medium with my first art teacher was a beautiful experience I will cherish forever. Nanny Tuhi is skilled in knitting, sewing, crocheting and tāniko weaving. Weaving the *aho* of matriarchy provides a sense of belonging and stability that interlocks with other strands and becomes layered in a rich tapestry of whakapapa, pūrākau and rongoā.

In te reo Māori, ahi means fire, and rā means day. Ahikā means ‘to keep the fires stoked.’ Ahirā is a personal definition of Nanny Rita and Nanny Tuhi’s genuine spirit of manaakitanga and aroha (hospitality and love). My grandmothers were renowned for being actively involved in hapu and iwi engagements. Anyone who knows my grandmothers would attest that they had an impeccable sense of fashion. Always dressed to the nines at every outing or formal engagement, their wardrobes were works of art in themselves.



Figure 15 *My Maternal grandparents - Tuhingarā and Derek Morrison*

As I sit and *paiheretia* (merge together) pre-loved clothing and materials, I am reminded of my nannies, their beautiful outfits, and how they have left some form of DNA imprint in their clothing. Weaver Donna Campbell presents a plausible discussion regarding the presence of DNA within kākahu. Campbell explains ‘the process of *miro*, a rolling method that uses the shin part of a leg. This technique produces a thin twined thread from Muka fibres extracted from the

Harakeke plant. Campbell evokes that ‘whilst practicing this process, which is called miro, I think about the kākahu that are locked away in the museums, their provenance unknown and their makers long forgotten. Perhaps DNA tests can be done on the hairs that are woven into these cloaks and the makers’ families identified’ (Campbell, 2005).

Campbell raises a valid point that sparked my deepest consideration about the construction of these clothing items. I could not bear to pierce these fabrics with a needle because it felt too damaging, almost like piercing skin. Instead, I considered poi-making as an alternative for binding the kākahu, keeping them intact with little to no damage and maintaining the DNA residue within the garments. Many people have commented that my soft sculpture installations look like clusters of poi - and they’d be right. They do look like poi; they feel like poi and the process of making is much the same. However, not all poi are intended for use on the kapa haka stage.

According to Curator Awhina Tamarapa, *Poi Awe* is a sacred ceremonial poi that is traditionally made from dog hair and muka. Tamarapa believes that because of the weaving techniques and fibres used to make poi awe, it is not your everyday poi and is intended for ceremonial formalities (Tamarapa, 2012). The pattern used for poi awe is called Papaki Rango which symbolically indicates it may have been used to ward off harmful influences (Tamarapa, 2012). These installations of soft sculpture clumping nodules find their place in the kāinga, prominently merging with the landscape around them. The intention of these works is to parry negative influences that may be lurking in the invisible space to keep everyone safe and offer a *kākahu* of protection.

The process of making soft sculptures offers meditative benefits. The sensation of the fabric and foam in my hands, combined with the intertwined twists of wool forming distinctive bodily shapes, stimulates a sensory experience and promotes relaxation. This task emphasises the importance of touch, evoking a sense of nostalgia and comfort. The installation captivates the senses and invites a deeper contemplation of the connections between human experience and the physical world.

Integrating artifacts into household furniture like couches and chairs provides a rich field for creative inquiry. My chosen piece of furniture is a couch I bought from an op shop for \$20. It is where I sit and create all my artwork, and occasionally, I experience the noise and discomfort of anti-social behaviour. Creating this specific soft sculpture brings a genuine sense of comfort as I gradually envelop myself in these clusters of material, which feel like a warm embrace.

Artwork within furniture bridges the gap between practicality and aesthetics. Historical movements like Art Nouveau and Bauhaus blurred the boundaries between disciplines. They applied arts and crafts techniques to design household objects in an increasingly industrialised world, demonstrating a seamless union of art and furniture. These movements have significantly influenced modern designs that prioritise both form and function. Consequently, art-infused furniture transforms bland living rooms into dynamic interior environments that honour personal space, adding interest and emotional resonance to a home.

Kāinga embodies the cultural and ancestral connections to the land and community, underscoring the significance of place in Māori identity and heritage. However, our initial whare of growth and development is within the whare tangata. In a report to the Waitangi Tribunal (2021), Dr

Ngahuia Murphy claims, “We are the centre point of creation, a cosmological tenet laid down by Hineahuone, the first human at Kurawaka’ (2021). Murphy continues to explain, ‘The whare tangata holds the mauri of the people. If the whare tangata is empowered and her mana and tapu are upheld, the whānau and hapū born from her body will thrive.’ (Murphy, 2021).

Another aspect of ‘Whare tangata’ is the physical manifestation of a building that also houses people. In Te Arawa history, pūrākau is a means to keep memories alive and document history. One such story speaks about a brave wahine who used a wharenuī to save her people. The courageous Te Ao-Kapurangi (circa 1750 - 1830), of Ngāti Rangiwewehi descent, is remembered as the woman who saved her people from imminent death by Ngāpuhi chief Hongi Hika (Don Stafford, 1999. Pg 76-77). Te Ao-Kapurangi was captured by Ngāpuhi warrior Te Wera Hauraki, who took her back to the Bay of Islands and made her one of his wives. Disgruntled chief Hongi Hika sought revenge on the people of Tūhourangi and Ngāti Whakaue for killing his irāmutu (nephew), Te Pae-o-te-Rangi and captives of the Ngapuhi tribe. When Hongi Hika and his war party arrived at Mokoia, Te Ao-Kapurangi asked if her people could be saved. Hongi Hika said that only those who pass between her thighs would live. Te Ao-Kapurangi hurried to the wharenuī Tamatekapua and sat on the roof atop a ridgepole, calling out to her people to go inside the wharenuī and save themselves. It did not take long for the whare to become crowded with her people. Impressed by her resourcefulness, Hongi Hika allowed Te Ao-Kapurangi's people to live, and peace was made between tribes, which has continued to this day. There is a popular saying in Te Arawa regarding any hui (meeting) that gathers many people inside a whare;

*‘Anō ko te whare whawhao o Te Ao Kapurangi.*

*Like the crowded house of Te Ao Kapurangi.’*

The soft sculpture pieces, in some ways, reflect the communal presence of ira tangata within the clusters of clothing gathered together, conveying a sense of belonging and community, highlighting the importance of relationships within whānau, hapu and iwi.

### **Kete wānanga tuatoru - Mataa**

Kete wānanga Mataa explores different elements of wānanga (workshops) and spirituality within the research and creative process. As mentioned earlier, Kuia Mataa lived in a cave, which was her *kāinga*. When considering a cave, descriptors such as dark, small, and cold typically come to mind. In contemporary discourse, these terms similarly evoke notions of anti-social behaviour. In this context, I intend to utilise cable tie kete and wānanga to explore rongoā pathways of transformation and meditation to uplift and empower an individual’s creativity.

For the final installation, the cable tie formations will be mounted on the walls of a dimly lit room. *Manuhiri* will navigate the room with a light source - either their phone or the provided torches to reveal the cable tie forms that resemble taniwha. I contemplated using a single, oscillating light in the centre of the space but decided that allowing the audience to hold and control their own light source would provide a more engaging experience. The space symbolises a cave, with a taniwha depicted on the walls representing kaitiakitanga. An invisible protector, shielding against the insidious energy of anti-social behaviour that can sometimes permeate our homes.

During my residency at the Arts Village, part of our responsibilities included holding wānanga (workshops). I decided to teach how to make cable tie kete, which I referred to as *faux kete*, at the time because they resemble traditional kete but are not made from natural fibres. These classes were well received and garnered positive feedback from participants. It was fascinating to see the process have a similar impact on people as myself regarding elongated focus and concentration. There was a genuine interest in the making process, amazement at using everyday household items in unexpected ways, and the realisation that no prior creative experience was needed to make these kete.



Figure 16 Ngatai, T (2023). *Faux Kete*

During the wānanga sessions, we sat around a large central table and had the materials, cable ties, gutter guard and electrical wire in the middle. Hence, the materials became the focal point of discussion and were a nice segue into starting conversations. We started with a small kete to demonstrate the techniques of joining the materials together, and once everyone got the jist, they were free to create their own kete. Throughout the wānanga, I played background music to help everyone feel relaxed and comfortable, had lollies on the table, and engaged in conversation by going around the table and introducing ourselves. By the end of the wānanga, participants not only took their kete home but also experienced a sense of accomplishment from crafting something unique with their own hands and made some lovely new connections, too.





Figure 17 *Faux Kete Workshops, Rotorua (2024)*

I conducted approximately six different wānanga at various locations with up to 60 or so people in total, and not one kete came out the same. Each participant created an extension of themselves, exercising the freedom to shape their creation in a personally meaningful way. It was beautiful to see how pleased everyone was. My favourite wānanga was the final one I hosted with my whānau. Even my 98-year-old grandmother, Tuhingarā Morrison, made a special appearance. Nan was so engaged with our activities that she decided to join in and make her own kete, with some assistance from my cousin Stacey Puha and me. Nan was thrilled with her brightly coloured kete!



Figure 18 Rotorua Arts Village (2024) *Whānau Workshop*



Figure 19. Photo, Tonina Ngatai (2024). *Nanny Tuhi. Oh, how I would love to clump Nan's Pants*

My observations regarding these wānanga indicate that there is undoubtedly a place within the creative sphere that aligns with contemporary art practices and a holistic approach to help elevate overall well-being.

On a final note, at a recent supervisor, hui Whaea Lynda Toki (2024), suggested I find a name to describe these kete made out of plastic materials. I have decided to settle with the name *Kirihou*. Just kirihou, not *kete kirihou* as to maintain the integrity of natural fibre, hand-woven kete.

Kirihou simply means plastic. It has a nice ring to it and explains what the entire creative work is made from.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this research illuminates the pivotal role of whakapapa and adapting to the ever-changing influence of contemporary art practices. By weaving Māori methodologies, this study reveals how traditional knowledge, and familial ties deepen the creative journey and cultivate a sense of identity and belonging. The crafting of cable tie kete, for example, not only serves as an artistic expression but also as a conduit for reconnecting with one's whakapapa and fortifying whānau bonds. The key findings reveal that engagement in cultural practices embedded in mātauranga Māori significantly enhances mental and emotional well-being. Wānanga provided a communal space where kaupapa Māori values and contemporary art practices intersect, promoting rongoā and personal growth.

In summary, integrating contemporary art and healing practices offers a promising avenue for enhancing well-being. This essay contributes to the ongoing discourse on the relevance of cultural traditions in modern therapeutic contexts and calls for continued exploration of these synergistic approaches. This research shows that the fusion of art and rongoā holds significant potential for nurturing holistic wellness in today's complex social landscape.



Figure 20 Final Presentation - *Kāinga*. Sustainability through recycling and repurposing discarded clothing, transformed into an installation piece that represents being part of a collective. (August 2024)



Figure 21. Dennis Ngatai - Dad. Demonstrates becoming one this with installation piece is becomes part of the fabric of society, wrapped in a community of aroha. (2024)



Figure 22 Myself, Whaea Lynda Toki and my daughter, Gia Hinemaea sending our mihi to Ngāti Ohomairangi Blue. *Cable tie Installation representing the navigation of my Tupuna from Hawaiki.*



Figure 23a

Final Presentation (2024) Two mediums converge, embodying distinct ecosystems of sustainability and accessibility. Soft sculptures crafted from discarded fabrics interweave with taut cable ties, creating a dynamic interplay of texture and tension.

(Figures 23a & 23b)



Figure 23b



As I come to the end of this exegesis, I must acknowledge one more esteemed mareikura and the most famous Māori love story of all – Hinemoa and Tūtānekai. Kuia Hinemoa not only braved the chilly waters of Lake Rotorua swimming from Ōwhata to Mokoia Island, but she also risked severe repercussions from her father, Umukaria, who disapproved of her love for Tūtānekai. calabashes tied around her waist, guided by the sound of Murirangaranga, Tūtānekai’s flute. It suffices to say that their love proved to be enduring, and her efforts that night culminated in a union that brought peace and many mokopuna who thrive to this day. Kuia Hinemoa’s actions demonstrated unyielding courage and determination, traits that I see reflected in many of our Te Arawa people today. Whenever I need courage and strength, as I most certainly needed throughout this writing endeavour, I remember that I descend from a long line of wahine who are as brave and determined as my kuia, Hinemoa.

Pokarekare ana...Nga wai o Rotorua

Whiti atu koe e hine...Marino ana e

E hine e... Hoki mai ra

Ka mate ahau...I te aroha e



Figure 24 Image taken from Tātai Street, Te Koutu, New Year's morning (2024) *Haukāinga. Lake Rotorua-nui-a-Kahu looking across to Owhata.*



*Figure 25 Whānau photo. Tātai Street, Te Koutu (2024) My 50th Birthday at the homestead. Hurō - We did it!*

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## **Papakupu - Glossary (English Alphabetical Order)**

Aotearoa	<i>The name Māori refers to our native country</i>
Aho	<i>Spiritual Thread</i>
Aroha	<i>Love</i>
Atua	<i>Spiritual Ancestors</i>

Awahi Rito	<i>Surrounding Branches</i>
Harakeke	<i>Flax Bush</i>
Hāukainga	<i>True Home</i>
Hauora	<i>Health</i>
Hawaiki	<i>Ancestral Home</i>
Kāinga	<i>Home/house</i>
Kaitiaki	<i>Guardian</i>
Kākā	<i>Native Bird</i>
Kākahu	<i>Clothing</i>
Karakia	<i>Prayers</i>
Kaupapa Māori	<i>Māori Topic or Purpose</i>
Karanga	<i>To Call</i>
Kāuta	<i>Cooking House</i>
Kaumātua	<i>Elders</i>
Kete	<i>Basket</i>
Kiwa	<i>The Great Ocean of Kiwa</i>

Kīwaha	<i>Idiom</i>
Korowai	<i>Māori Cloak</i>
Kuia	<i>Grandmother</i>
Kupena	<i>A Traditional Style of Weaving</i>
Mahi-a-Toi	<i>Art and Design</i>
Maketu	<i>The Final Resting Place of Te Arawa Waka</i>
Mana	<i>Spiritual Power</i>
Mana Motuhake	<i>Self - Determination / Autonomy</i>
Manuhiri	<i>Guest</i>
Mārae	<i>Māori Courtyard</i>
Mareikura	<i>Matriarch</i>
Matakite	<i>Prophetic Intuition / Psychic</i>
Mātauranga Māori	<i>Māori Knowledge</i>
Māuiuitanga	<i>Illness</i>
Mokopuna	<i>Grandchild</i>
Nei rā te mihi	<i>Acknowledgement of Thanks</i>

Ohinemutu	<i>Suburb in Rotorua</i>
Pā	<i>Village</i>
Papatuanuku	<i>Mother Earth</i>
Paihere	<i>Bind Together</i>
Pātaka	<i>Food Storehouse</i>
Pepeha	<i>Environment we are connected to</i>
Pūrākau	<i>Stories</i>
Rangatiratanga	<i>Leader</i>
Raranga	<i>Weaving</i>
Rito	<i>Central Strand of Flax Bush</i>
Rongoā	<i>Healing / Treatment</i>
Rotorua	<i>Township in Bay of Plenty</i>
Taniwha	<i>Guardian</i>
Tāniko	<i>Twining</i>
Taonga	<i>Treasures</i>
Te Ao Māori	<i>Māori Worldview</i>

Te Ao Pākeha	<i>White European Worldview</i>
Te Taha Wairua	<i>Spirituality</i>
Te Taiao	<i>Environmental Sciences</i>
Te Wahre Paramata	<i>Parliament House</i>
Tohunga	<i>Expert</i>
Tohunga Wahkairo	<i>Expert Carver</i>
Tohunga Hanga Whare	<i>Expert Builder</i>
Tūpuna	<i>Ancestors</i>
Waka	<i>Canoe</i>
Wahine	<i>Woman</i>
Waiata	<i>Song</i>
Wānanga	<i>Workshop</i>
Whaikōrero	<i>Formal Oral Speech (Male)</i>
Whakaaro	<i>Idea / Concept</i>
Whakairo	<i>Carve</i>
Whakapapa	<i>Genealogy</i>

Whakataukī	<i>Proverb (Author Unknown)</i>
whakatauākī	<i>Proverb (Author Known)</i>
Whakawhiti Kōrero	<i>Discussion</i>
Whanaunga	<i>Relative</i>
Whare	<i>House</i>
Wharenui	<i>Meeting House</i>
Wharepuni	<i>Sleeping Huts</i>
Whare Tangata	<i>Womb</i>
Whātu Kākahu	<i>Finger Weaving</i>
Whenua	<i>Land</i>