

*Toi Tū Toi Ora: Contemporary Māori Art*

Edited by Nigel Borell. Published by Penguin Random House New Zealand in association with Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, Auckland, 2022.

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*Toi Tū Toi Ora: Contemporary Māori Art* was published in March 2022, nearly a year after the exhibition of the same name closed following a five month run at Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki. The book acts as a comprehensive record of the exhibition – including installation images, reproductions of every artwork with short English and te reo Māori descriptions, and biographies of all the artists included (these are written by various authors, including myself) – and expands on it with contributions from Moana Jackson, Nigel Borell and Taraati Taiaroa. What an incredible treasure, to have a generous and lyrical introduction by Jackson, who passed away around the time the book was published. Underlying his text is an appreciation for the capacity of art to recall old stories and express new ones – looking, always, for the opportunity to imagine. Nowhere is this more evident than in Jackson’s citations - an unpublished paper delivered by Rangi Chadwick to a student arts hui at Tapu Te Ranga marae in 1982; published and unpublished stories by Patricia Grace, Hinauri Strongman Tribble, Hinewirangi Kohu and Phil Kawana; songs by Moana and the Moa Hunters and Te Kupu – which express his commitment to Māori artist practice over many years.

Jackson’s introduction echoes the conceptual framing of the exhibition – taking its structure from creation narratives – and unfurls much like a pepeha: beginning with waka, the sea, rivers, mountains, landscapes, iwi and hapū. It gives shape to what he, following Te Rarawa Kohere, describes as a ‘tūrangawaewae of thought’ that circles in and out of ancestral and human worlds, through landscapes and bodies, a complicated and ever-evolving set of histories bound together by a shared ancestry. The introduction acts a lucid evocation of *Toi Tū Toi Ora*’s ambition to place ‘the contemporary’ into a history that is not necessarily defined by chronological time, or formal and thematic concerns, but rather by whakapapa relationships – stretching far beyond an art historical framing of the mid-twentieth century.

The capacity of an exhibition of modern and contemporary art to actually do this – considering the artworks in the exhibition span a relatively limited period of around 70 years – is an interesting question. This seems to be the opportunity the book offers: to provide further context to the place these artworks hold in the wider narrative of Māori art. It is certainly what both Borell and Taiaroa’s contributions set out to do, both charting various developments in the wider Māori artistic world over the last 100 years. Unfortunately, Taiaroa’s chronology appears after Helen Te Hira’s afterword and five pages of image credits, allowing it to get lost in the various appendices. This is a shame, as it gives important background to many events mentioned in passing elsewhere in the book and with careful design could have easily held its own in the content proper.

As the longest and most in-depth text in the book, Borell’s essay performs a number of functions. It outlines the framing of the exhibition and describes how the creation narrative structure was a way of implementing a kaupapa Māori organising principle in a comprehensive survey of Māori art. It also acts as a record of the cultural progressions of the twentieth century – detailing key moments and changes, artistic movements and figures, milestones in art education and galleries, and the many administrative structures and organisations that have supported contemporary Māori art. To have this gathered in one place is a rich resource, even

if the history described feels at times (as histories always are) selective. The challenge Borell's essay seems to face is reconciling what is essentially a chronological history with the ambition of the exhibition to employ other systems of organisation and understanding. Additional thematic essays might have been able to address this and offer an opportunity to look more closely at some of the important themes that can't be closely addressed in Borell's text.

The record *Toi Tū Toi Ora: Contemporary Māori Art* provides, not only of the exhibition, but also of Māori art more broadly, is extraordinary. The artwork images, which occupy more than 300 pages, are a particularly precious addition to the scholarship of contemporary Māori art and will allow these artworks to continue to reach many more audiences than the exhibition ever could. The images – including a selection of installation shots – are arranged as the artworks were in the exhibition, allowing for unexpected and rich combinations across page spreads, such as Jacqueline Fraser's *Raupatu* (1980) beside Ana Iti's *Takoto* (2021).

It's in the images that the curatorial strategy of the exhibition is felt most keenly. For some readers, this may present frustrations: it makes identifying shifts across an artist's practice or broad cultural developments over time more difficult than a conventional chronological or thematic system would have, for example. At times I did miss this context – as with Selwyn Wilson's *Study of a Head* (date unknown), the first known contemporary Māori artwork to enter a public collection – which is easily lost at the very end of the 'Te Poropiti me te Whakapātari: Prophecy and Provocation' section. But that is not the work of this publication and what this desire for detail really does is ask for more: more exhibitions, more books, more commissions, more opportunities to remember and imagine together.