

ATĀTŪ

12 February – 26 March 2021
Toi Māori Gallery

Since the introduction of the press in Northland and the accompanying biblical tracts, Māori have been involved with the technologies of print on paper. We quickly recognised the advantage of the printed page to produce a different kind of 'kanohi ki te kanohi' to exchange ideas or send messages, and literacy among Māori surged.

There is another print tradition that came on waves through the Pacific, one of imagery and pattern, and story that give shades of meaning depending on where you begin...

At an arts wānanga in Heretaunga many years ago, Arnold Manaaki Wilson related the story of Tāne creating Hine Ahu One with Hine as the first artwork. His kōrero was about the reflection of Hine and Tāne and led one to imagine how the male and female element accommodate each other, and when the sky lowers itself to the earth there is a demarcation at the point where the two meet.

Making a print can be seen a little like that—as the substrate and paper meet, they are affected by one another. There is a transfer—a reflection—involving both an addition (of mark) and a subtraction (of ink).

The practice of making an impression of one surface to another can be traced through Polynesia and the wider Moana Nui a Kiwa, coming perhaps from those ancestors who emerged from where the sun rises.

With the import of Aute to these shores, came the tools to pound the fibre into cloth and impress the surface. There are at least two patu aute in the Auckland Museum closely resembling the i'e kuku used in Hawai'i today, with a patterned side to create a water mark on the finished kapa. One washed into the Whangarei Harbour during the early 1900s, presumably from ancient settlements upriver, another was found in Waiuku. The practice of applying colour to a stamp or with a stencil transferred then to the completed bark cloth is a form of print practiced with variations throughout the Pacific using techniques also found in Asia.

Taking the traditions of image transferral with what we know through the science of genetics, oral traditions, and cultural practices through the Pacific, print has roots that can be found in our own whakapapa through centuries.

As the whakatauākī says: 'Ehara, i te mea poka hou mai, nō Hawaiki mai anō—it is not a new thing here, it comes from Hawaiki'

Toi Whakataa (later renamed Toi Whakaata) was formed in 2006 and developed from the 2002 Te Atinga Glass and Print wānanga in Whanganui to support Māori printmaking and to encourage the acceptance of print as a process relevant to Māori expressing kōrero.

Some of today's printmakers are now working across various media, adding fibres, acrylics, metals, working with high tech equipment and mixing print processes to achieve their vision, while others continue to work with time honoured practices.

Regardless of process, there is an energy within the exhibition, a commonality of voyage, navigation, and land, where ink is activated by the voice of the artists reflecting on identity, place, and taonga, issues of the day, looking back and going forward.

Gabrielle Belz
Exhibition Curator