

ROBYN KAHUKIWA TOHUNGA MAHI TOI

Robyn Kahukiwa's artworks have made a difference to Māori. They have provided not only beauty and strength but inroads into our mātauranga, and the multi-layered, inter-generational and ever-evolving stories that are part of our cultural landscape. That landscape is the mainstream of Aotearoa New Zealand. Robyn's work takes us on circular routes through time, with Māori accounts given proper currency and weight. Her work has become an alternate visual rendering of Aotearoa's history, through the lens of a Māori woman.

The title Tohunga Mahi Toi refers to Robyn's status and expertise as an artist, valued here and internationally. It is a form of recognition. Robyn has spent all of her adult life as an artist, and one of great distinction. Like Keri Kaa, Irihapeti Ramsden and Moana Jackson, her dedication has been unwavering.

Let us acclaim Robyn Kahukiwa. Let us celebrate her art. Let us celebrate the weaving of whakapapa and whānau that she presents us, and entwined with that, always the raising of the wide-reaching capabilities of women. Let us celebrate her gift and her great determination.

Curated by Roma Pōtiki
Te Aupōuri, Te Rarawa

Developed in partnership by: Te Manawa Museum of Art, Science and Heritage, and New Zealand Portrait Gallery Te Pūkenga Whakaata.



ROBYN KAHUKIWA WĀHINE TOA

WĀHINE TOA Omniscient Māori Women

'In the paintings which make up Wāhine Toa (women of strength) I have chosen to portray eight important female elements in the earliest myths, women who have starring roles in the myth dramas in which they play out their scenes.

Although the males are usually the protagonists, the females by their actions, hold the plot together and provide the knowledge and aroha necessary to enable the heroes to perform their deeds and fulfil their tasks. These wāhine all have a great strength and it is fitting they be accorded the awe and respect which is theirs.

The eight paintings all contain at least one element of traditional Māori art.' — Robyn Kahukiwa, 1983.

The Wāhine Toa series of paintings and drawings and the accompanying publication became iconic as soon as it was shown publicly and is still acclaimed today. There had never been an accessible representation of atua wāhine from ancient oral histories such as these. They were a revelation and validated Māori women within their own culture, countering colonising mythologies and the damaging overlay of misogyny.

Integral to the success of Wāhine Toa was the outstanding contribution of writer Patricia Grace (Ngāti Toa Rangatira, Ngāti Raukawa, Te Āti Awa). Keri Kaa in her foreword to the Wāhine Toa publication writes 'Patricia Grace in her delicate, moving and exquisite prose, has captured the strength and beauty of these extraordinary women.



Robyn Kahukiwa, *Hinetitama*, (1980)
Oil on hardboard

Wāhine Toa

PRE & POST -VISIT IDEAS

Spot the tohu: Explore the painting Hinefītama. Look for the black tiki, lizard, and foetus. What could these characters represent in the story of Hinefītama?

Behind Hinefītama are horizontal layers of colour. How many layers are there? What do you notice about these colours? What does it remind you of and how might they be linked to in the pūrākau?

What do you notice about the spiral behind Hinefītama – where have you see something like this before?

Think Critically: Explore the terms patriarchy and feminism within the context of Aotearoa New Zealand and its colonial history. What impacts did western patriarchal ideas have on Māori society? How did this change interpretations of atua wāhine in ancient stories? How is the representation of atua wāhine by Pākēha men such as Elsdon Best different from that of Robyn Kahukiwa and Patricia Grace?

Māori Oral Histories: Can you think of other pūrākau where atua wāhine are the main characters? Some examples of atua wāhine that you will see in this exhibition include Taranga, Mahuika, and Murirangawhenua. Choose a story or painting from Wāhine Toa and discuss what other messages it might have e.g. Mahuika – setting boundaries with your mokopuna. What do these pūrākau teach us?

Wāhine toa in your life: Think about the wāhine toa in your lives. This might be a family member, teacher, sports coach etc. What qualities do these strong women have? Can you tell a story about a woman you respect and admire then make a portrait of them using impactful, bold colours and patterns. What tohu could you use to represent this wāhine?

Recreate: Working in pairs, select a pūrākau from this book to re-enact. Make simple props to help set the scene, for example, Matau o Māui or ngā maikuku o Mahuika. Think of some other theatrical devices could you use to tell your pūrākau.

Kupu Māori

Wāhine Toa: Women of strength

Tohunga mahi toi: an expert or skilled artist

Peita: Paint, painting

Peita hinu: Oil paint

Atua wāhine: Female deity

Tohu: A symbol or sign

Whakapapa: Genealogy

Pūrākau: Myth / Ancient story

Ahi: Fire

Te Matau a Māui: Māui's Fishhook

Ngā maikuku o Mahuika: Mahuika's fingernails

Other Resources

[Kaupapa on the couch – Māori women rule](#)

[Mana Wahine Inquiry](#)

[Te Mana o te wāhine – Māori Women](#)

ROBYN KAHUKIWA IDENTITY

IDENTITY

Urbanisation, marginalisation, disconnection

The taking of land and resources from Māori control is central to the process of colonisation and its destructive influence. The loss of political and economic power includes the breakdown of traditional Māori structures and culture, and the effects of ongoing, systemic racism.

The consequences are intergenerational and continue to impact whānau today. These four paintings are small touchstones showing aspects of this through the lives of largely urbanised Māori in the 1970s and 80s.

There is still a connection to the land and back to marae for some, but others such as the young man in *Outcast* (1980) or the woman in *Tihei Mauriora* (1984) are displaced and marginalised. *The Choice* locates Māori on a checkerboard and foregrounds a broken tiki and a young Māori woman holding a mask near her face.

Is she making a decision about her identity, or perhaps that decision has already been taken from her? Writing about her work, Kahukiwa notes “This painting depicts the choice that faces every Māori at some time”. captured the strength and beauty of these extraordinary women.



Robyn Kahukiwa *The Choice*, (1972)
Oil on canvas

Identity

PRE & POST -VISIT IDEAS

Explore: Unpack the image *The Choice*, what can you see? What do you think is happening?

Robyn Kahukiwa says “ This painting depicts the choice that faces every Māori at some time”. What do you think she means?

Ko wai au? Your whakapapa is innately part of you. No one can take it from you, even if it is currently hidden and you are not consciously aware of it.

Robyn Kahukiwa was born in Australia and rediscovered her Māori heritage when she moved back to Aotearoa in 1955.

Have you ever wondered what makes you who you are? Explore your identity and whakapapa through a mind map. Put yourself at the centre and write/draw about what makes you who you are: family, language, where you are from, friends, traditions, the food you eat and places you go.

Read: Using the school Journal text [Fleet of Foot](#) (SJ L4 May 2021) explore the concept of urbanisation. Discuss the changes the family experienced after moving.

Extension: This story shows a romanticised view of life in the country. What perspectives or experiences might be missing from this representation e.g. extreme poverty, unemployment, racism.

Why do people leave? Investigate the urbanisation of Māori from the 19th century onwards. Look at push and pull factors of migration. In 1945 26% of Maori lived in towns and cities. By 1986 this had grown to 80%. Why do you think Māori may have left rural areas? Think about government initiatives, employment, money and housing.

Impacts: With such a large migration of people to the city, this had many impacts on rural communities and big cities. Investigate the impacts of this migration on these communities.

Create: In left her hand, the young woman in the painting is holding a mask next to her face. Have you ever felt like others want you to act or behave in a certain way. Create your own artwork exploring these ideas.

Kupu Māori

Tuakiri: Identity

Wharenui: Meeting house

Hongi: Pressing noses in greeting

Tiki: Carved figure

Kuia: Female elder

Whānau: Family

Papa Kāinga: Communal Māori land

Whaikīngi: Chess (game)

Kanohi kē: Mask

Hoa: Friend

Ko wai au? Who am I?

Other Resources

[Urbanisation - Te Ara](#)

[University of Canterbury student magazine – Identity as an urban Māori](#)

[Two friends ask: what does it mean to be urban Māori \(Preview before showing – some inappropriate language\)](#)

[The power of knowing who you are – Tame Iti \(Preview before showing\)](#)

ROBYN KAHUKIWA MĀORI NEVER CEDED SOVEREIGNTY

MĀORI NEVER CEDED SOVEREIGNTY TO THE CROWN

Dr Moana Jackson (1945-2022) was a visionary and a pioneering Māori lawyer and global authority on Indigenous people's rights. He once said that to accept that Māori surrendered sovereignty when they signed Te Tiriti o Waitangi in 1840 required "a profound suspension of disbelief". As he put it, no country anywhere in the world has ever guarded its independence for hundreds of years only to then relinquish it. He argued that "to assume that is what our people did flies in the face of human history, let alone Māori history, where the notion of giving away the authority to make independent decisions is not just culturally inconceivable, it is politically impossible."

Lawyer, Annette Te Imaima Sykes says of Robyn Kahukiwa, 'Her work has ensured that New Zealand's ongoing history of colonization, land dispossession, forced assimilation, racism and the contemporary consequences of these forces on, and for Māori, is never forgotten.'



Robyn Kahukiwa, Environmental Product, (2011)
Alkyd oil on canvas

Māori never ceded sovereignty PRE & POST -VISIT IDEAS

Vocabulary: Brainstorm your knowledge of the words activism and protest in small groups. As a class create a shared brainstorm for each word. Protest is often talked about in a negative way; activism would be a better word for us to use when talking about people working towards political and social change.

Te Tiriti o Waitangi: Much of Robyn Kahukiwa's work relates directly to Te Tiriti o Waitangi. Using the graphic novel *Te Tiriti o Waitangi* (SJ L4 March 2021), explore the differences between the English and Te Reo Māori versions of the treaty. The vocabulary used in each version resulted in very different interpretations and huge impacts on Māori then and now. What are the impacts of the treaty that we still see today?

Observe: Explore images of activism and protest (both historic and recent) in New Zealand history. For each image answer "what is going in this picture? What makes you say that? What else can we find? (see visual thinking strategy). There are many ways to be an activist. One of the ways Robyn Kahukiwa takes action is through her art.

Research: New Zealand has a rich history of activism and protest. Explore NZ examples of activism e.g. Parihaka, Land March, Springbok Tour, Foreshore and seabed, Ihumatao, Te Pati Māori protest etc. Research an event/movement independently or in groups and share back to the class through report writing, visual presentation, speech etc.

Explore: Examine the two paintings *Environmental Product 1975* and *Environmental 2011*. What is happening in each picture? What differences and similarities do you notice? Do you think the artists' ideas have changed? Do you think New Zealand has changed?

Create: Create a collaborative work that expresses what it is to be a young person in NZ today. What are the struggles you face, the issues you connect with, the images and references that have meaning to you. Think about symbols that could reflect your experience, words/slogans or phrases that are important to you, how would you express these ideas to your viewer.

Kupu Māori

Toi mautohe: Protest Art

Mautohe: Protest

Te tiriti o Waitangi: The treaty of Waitangi

Pārihirihi: Skull

Papatūānuku: Earth Mother

Ranginui: Sky Father

Takutai Moana: Coast, foreshore, and seabed

Moana: Ocean

Whenua: Land

Rangi: Sky

Whakaahua: Photograph

Other Resources

[Māori protest movements](#)

[Public protest](#)

[Tiny activism: the power of badges | Te Papa](#)

[Protest by design: the creatives performing acts of political sedition - Design Week](#)

ROBYN KAHUKIWA TANIWHA

PRE & POST-VISIT IDEAS

Taonga: In the story the boy has three treasures he collected, a white feather, red eartch, and green stone. Share one of your treasures with the class, explain why it is important to you.

Vocabulary: At the end of the story Koro says to the boy "How rich you are!" What do you think he means? Sometimes we use rich to describe someone with lots of money, what other ways can we use the word rich?

Taniwha: explore other stories of Taniwha. E.g. Whāngaimokopuna (Manawatū), Ngake and Whātaimai (Wellington Harbour). What images would you use to tell the story of these taniwha? As a class create illustrations for another taniwha pūrākau.

Describe: Using the images and what you already know, see how many words you can come up with to describe the taniwha in the story. Think about what she looks like, how she acts, and her friendship with the boy.

Create: Create an image of your own taonga. You could make a drawing, a painting, a collage, or a sculpture!
Create: In the story we see the faces of Tangaroa, Ranginui, and Papatūānuku. What other atua do you know? Create an image of an atua of your choice. What colours, patterns and symbols could you use to represent this atua.

Kupu Māori

Taniwha: Water spirits

Taonga: Treasure/prized possession

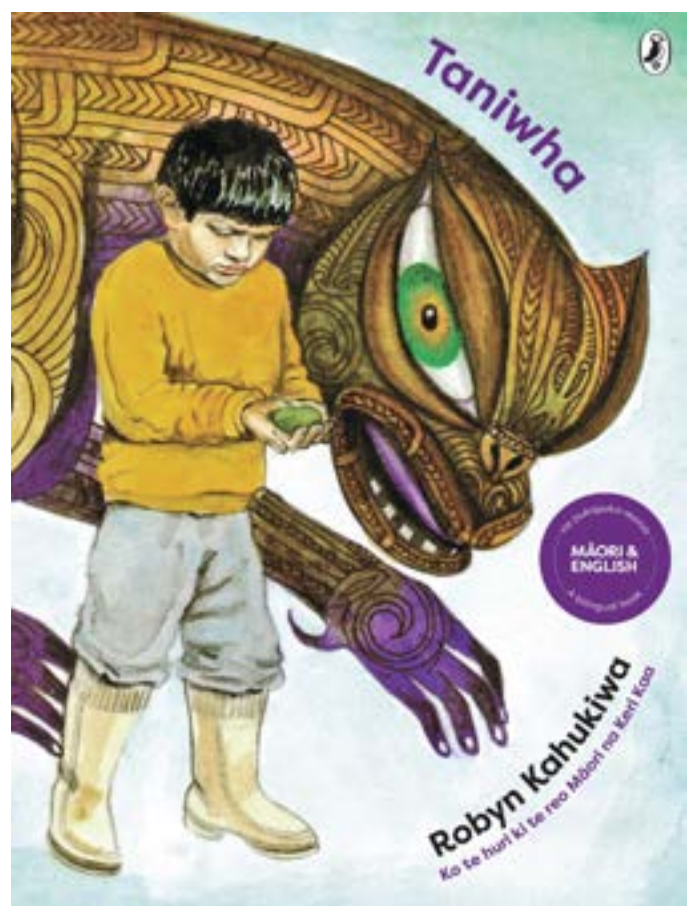
Koro: Grandfather

Tangaroa: God of the sea

Ranginui: Sky Father

Papatūānuku: Earth mother

Rūaumoko: God of earthquake



Robyn Kahukiwa, Taniwha
Penguin Books, New Zealand