

WHAKAPAIPAI: JEWELLERY AS PEPEHA

BY ARETA WILKINSON
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Hine-Āhua, he kura ahu i te one,
he kura aho ki te one.

Hine-Āhua, a treasure drawn from the soil,
a treasure connecting to the soil

HINE-ĀHUA (hei tiki form)
and HUIAREI (toggle)
24 carat gold (Tai Poutini), 22 carat gold,
legal ribbon, muka (flax fibre)
Actual size
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2015

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Within Māori culture pepeha are regarded as an integral way of introducing one's self to a wider group. Pepeha speak of connection to landmarks, locations, people and events that are tribally unique. Importantly they locate you within an interrelated Māori view of the world that reaffirms your relationship and place among *all* things.

For contemporary jeweller Areta Wilkinson of Te Hapū o Ngāti Wheke, Kāti Irakehu, Kāi Tahu descent, pepeha also indicate a strategic way to unlock a deeper conversation about jewellery practice today in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Whakapaipai: Jewellery as Pepeha represents six years of research as part of a recently completed doctorate in fine art, through Te Pūtahi-a-Toi School of Māori Art, Knowledge & Education at Massey University, Palmerston North. This enquiry considered an ethical Māori framework for New Zealand contemporary jewellery practice, informed by knowledge and methodologies of Kāi Tahu (Waitaha, Kāti Mamoe, Kāi Tahu). A crucial outcome of this research anchors Māori knowledge within the domains of New Zealand jewellery and craft practice.

A central personification of this thinking is the work *Hine-Āhua*, 2013. It is an evocative silhouette of the hei tiki form fashioned out of 24 carat gold. Here no visual detailing of face, arms or legs are present, instead it is the timeless simplicity of the form which carries the work. However this is where a conventional reading of the work stops. In keeping with a kaupapa Māori process we find that *Hine-Āhua* is a name that references the tribal creation stories and narratives passed down through generations. *Hine-Āhua* has also been gifted its own pepeha from Kāi Tahu descendants. In contrast to our Western jewellery knowledge and practice *Hine-Āhua* is not considered a mere inanimate object but rather is imbued with a mauri (life force) that treats it as a living entity in its own right. It places *Hine-Āhua* in a whakapapa (lineage) of thinking that has its own presence and narrative. Āhua can be broadly described as the shape, appearance, likeness of something in a visual sense, here *Hine-Āhua* goes beyond this literal reading to offer a metaphorical way to articulate the presence of something tangible that is made real. Through investigating early tribal documents relating to the 1860s Otago gold rush, the name *wherro* has been discovered that references gold in Kāi Tahu narratives. The *wherro* for this piece has been sourced locally from Marsden on the West Coast (Te Tai Poutini). Wider Māori oral histories do not mention the refinement of gold into precious metal, however as Wilkinson's research highlights, there are indeed narratives that identify and account for this material within a Māori world view and *Hine-Āhua* is an example of this. The plaited cord and gold toggle, upon which the piece sits, also has its own name and significance. Titled *Huiarei*, 2013 it literally describes the use of huia feathers to adorn the neck and body. However in another sense *Huiarei* is also a family name carried by the artist's mother and found throughout her whakapapa. Again we are reminded that research and practice are not just processes to achieve an outcome but also present a deeper investment and offering in themselves. The cord interweaves the gold muka fibres of the harakeke plant with the light red cotton cord sourced from historical legal documents. *Hine-Āhua* and *Huiarei* carry a contemporary narrative that is fresh and innovative yet is predicated by a range of customary knowledge threads, processes and colonial contact material. Together they offer a powerful Kāi Tahu statement brought forward by the artist. Through investigating latent knowledge Wilkinson has reinvigorated and revived understandings to make statements about materiality, presence and collective knowledge. What might this offer our understanding of locally mined gold and how might such considerations shift a reading of the material within the domains of New Zealand jewellery and craft practice and conversely what might a wider understanding of gold and its whakapapa offer to a broader understanding of the material to Māori culture?

The jewellery pieces *Hei Tupa*, 2013, *Hei Tio (Tio Paruparu)*, 2014 and *Hei Kaki*, 2014 reference early Te Wai Pounamu (South Island) adornment items from makers of another era. These early forms include; Moa bone reels, notched disc pendants and lobed pendant forms unearthed by archaeologists. These iconic adornment items are found in museum collections throughout New Zealand and are reimaged and exemplified here. These works echo a series of silver bromide photograms, created in collaboration with photographer Mark Adams, that capture the enduring forms of other Kāi Tahu taoka (treasured items). Here we are reminded that pepeha are a powerful way to collapse the idea of time; the past, present and future as an enduring practice that conveys a sense of continuity and connection. These works heighten, for the viewer, the power of the object, even in its absence. In this regard a sense of the work is still transmitted and made real. And as with *Hine-Āhua* the concept of mauri is evoked with these photograms telling us that even in image reproduction, an iteration of the works remain.

Whakapaipai: Jewellery as Pepeha is a milestone within the artists' oeuvre. As with the nature of pepeha, Wilkinson's investigation here engages in a claims-making process that advocates a new conversation within contemporary jewellery practice. It is predicated by an understanding of kaupapa Māori and Kāi Tahu methodologies. In this regard the work is speaking back to our understanding of New Zealand contemporary jewellery discourse and articulates how a greater understanding of Māori whakapaipai (body adornment) can potentially shift this understanding. This then has implications for how we discuss the nature of jewellery, body adornment and applied arts specific to Aotearoa New Zealand.

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