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Themes in Māori Women's Art: How the Body 'Speaks' Within the Work of Māori Women Artists of the Seventies and Eighties

A number of shared themes in art by women in Aotearoa New Zealand have been identified by art historians and curators alike, particularly during the late-twentieth century. These themes, such as sexuality, motherhood, the body, and identity, can be seen within the art of Māori women as well as Pākehā women. However, the experiences of Māori women are unique and this needs to be acknowledged within art historical narratives that consider women's art practice in Aotearoa New Zealand.

This essay will consider themes associated with the body in the art of Māori women artists. In this essay I propose that Māori women's art is most productively discussed in relation to pre and post-colonial Māori history, te reo Māori me ona tikanga, mātauranga wāhine, Māori myth and Te Tiriti o Waitangi. Kaupapa Māori theory and Mana Wāhine theory (which places Māori women at the centre of research) provide foundations upon which Māori women's art histories can be developed.¹

While male Māori artists should feature in a wider discussion of Māori art history,

the overall aim of this essay is to redress the unequal gender balance within Māori art histories in which men's sculpture and painting has been privileged over the work of Māori women, so the focus will be primarily on women.

Following a discussion of the Aotearoa New Zealand art historical literature that considers women's art of the 1970s and 80s, this essay will focus on the theme of the body within works by Robyn Kahukiwa (Ngāti Porou, Ngāti Hau, Ngāti Konohi, Te Aitanga-a-Hauti) and Shona Rapira Davies (Ngāti Wai, Ngā Puhī). By writing about these artists' works, my purpose is to model art historical writing that considers the intersection of gender and Māori culture.

Drawing on Kaupapa Māori and Mana Wāhine theories, this essay proposes ways that Māori women artists and their understandings of Māori woman's bodies can be, in academic Wiktoria August's (Ngāti Kahungunu) words, 'kept safe' within art historical writing.² Specifically, this essay draws upon Aotearoa New Zealand's colonial history, traditional Māori practices and tikanga

Māori, Te Reo Māori and Māori myth in order to do this.

August argues in her essay, *Māori women: Bodies, spaces, sacredness and mana*, that 'Kaupapa Māori research provides a space where Māori women's bodies, knowledges surrounding bodies and the spaces they occupy, can be examined without being subjugated by dominant western knowledges'.³ Kaupapa Māori as a theoretical perspective refers to the use of Māori knowledge, history, tikanga and value systems in research and in practice. Kaupapa Māori theory celebrates and validates Māori knowledge with an emphasis on principles such as tino rangatiratanga, Te Tiriti O Waitangi, te reo me ona tikanga Māori and whakapapa.⁴

Mana Wāhine Theory is founded on the same principles as Kaupapa Māori, but with a focus on Māori women. Mana Wāhine theory aims for a return to complementarity between Māori men and women that, according to many Māori women, has been altered as a result of colonisation and the introduction of patriarchy to Māori culture. According to Linda Tuhiwai-Smith in 1992,

The challenge for Maori women... is to assume control over the interpretation of our struggles and to begin to theorise our experiences in ways which make sense for us and which may come to make sense for other women. In helping to determine how that interpretation might be advanced, it is worthwhile analysing the kinds of struggles in which Maori women have been engaged and to set them more explicitly within a Maori orientation of the world. This

does not mean rejecting all feminist theories. Rather it means that we, as Maori women, should begin with an understanding of our own condition and apply analyses which can give added insight into the complexities of our world.⁵

During the 1970s and 80s in Aotearoa New Zealand, art historical writing began to consider the nature of women's art practice. The women's art movement gained momentum during this time, and this, in turn, encouraged journals, magazines and art historical essays to be written about the relationship between second-wave feminism and women's art. The feminist magazine *Broadsheet* was established in 1972 and *Spiral*, an art magazine established by a collective of lesbian artists, was first released in 1976 and became a welcoming forum for women's creative expression. Into the 90s, several art historians began to consider women's art practices from the previous decades, retrospectively identifying key themes and events that characterised the artists and art of this time.

The identification of shared themes and concepts that characterised women's art became a common practice for curators and art historians in the 1970s. This was an important endeavour as it provided a foundation on which artists and historians alike could build a New Zealand women's art movement, even while techniques, practices and media remained varied.⁶ The writing of Juliet Batten, Merimeri Penfold (Ngāti Kuri), Elizabeth Eastmond, Anne Kirker and Christina Barton, among others, was significant in the development of Aotearoa New Zealand women's art histories.

The themes and subjects of women's art identified by these writers are similar. Anne Kirker notes the following in her introduction to *New Zealand Women Artists: a survey of 150 years*:

Several themes which are clearly pertinent to women, irrespective of dominant trends in art, have emerged in the course of writing this book. One of them, a predilection for expressing the figure and human relationships, has been treated in a separate chapter. Traditionally a woman's life has been measured in small acts, such as those of the domestic routine, which involve not only organisational ability, but a concern for the nuances of feeling among family members. It is not surprising that her art reflects this.⁷

Juliet Batten, writing in 1982, reiterates this, identifying eight key themes within art of the women's movement such as domesticity, 'what it means to be a housewife, to rear children, to give birth'; sexuality/spirituality, 'what it means to have a woman's body, to menstruate'; our connections with the moon cycle, with ancient mysteries; 'connections with the natural world through our sexuality, spirituality'; and collaborative/collective work, 'breaking down the isolation, creating sisterhood and a community of women.' Batten cites American and British women artists as being the origin of such themes, therefore identifying an international 'sisterhood' of women artists with shared values, issues and lifestyles.⁸

The themes identified in art historical literature were also reflected within women's art exhibitions during the 1970s and 80s. 'Mothers', an exhibition curated

by the Wellington Women's Gallery, toured the country in 1981 and 1982. 'Mothers' was about the experiences of being a mother and a daughter as told by a number of Aotearoa New Zealand women artists such as Jacqueline Fahey, Robin White and Robyn Kahukiwa. The Women's Gallery was responsible for several exhibitions focused on women's or feminist themes that, according to the 1983 *Herstory Diary*, were 'crucial to the women's movement'. These themes included women and the environment, sexuality, and women and violence.⁹

In 1993 Christina Barton and Deborah Lawler-Dormer curated an exhibition titled 'Alter/Image: Feminism and Representation in New Zealand Art 1973–1993'. Like Batten, Barton and Lawler-Dormer identified a number of 'subjects and strategies' that they recognised as being shared by feminist artists in Aotearoa New Zealand. These were,

'The recovery of alternative histories and particular experiences; the recognition of the ideological basis of representation, the politics of space and the gender-specific nature of looking; the colonisation of the body; and the interactivity of gender, sexuality and identity.'¹⁰

A recurring feature of this literature is an intentional distance placed by the authors between themselves and Māori women's art practices. Kirker and Barton and Lawler-Dormer include a 'disclaimer' in their introductions clarifying their cultural perspectives. Kirker writes, 'The work of Maori and Pacific Island women obviously deserves wider coverage in our accounts of the visual arts...' and later goes on to clarify,

'Writing within the limitations of a Pakeha perspective, I have only partially discussed the art of Maori women evolving within their own tradition, believing that there are more appropriate authors to do so.'¹¹

In the catalogue accompanying 'Alter/Image', Barton and Lawler-Dormer expand on Kirker's point, highlighting the role feminism has played in the lack of appropriate representations of the views of Māori and Pasifika women artists:

In our local context, feminist dialogue often occurred without recognising different concerns of Maori and Pacific Island women artists ... In reviewing feminist practice since 1973 we are conscious of the lack of visibility of Maori and Pacific Island women within the debates surrounding feminism, feminist theory and representation. We acknowledge that our selective attention does not address the differences within these communities and the struggles they face. We hope that this territory may be uncovered and exposed collectively in the near future.¹²

My point in highlighting these disclaimers is not to critique them, but rather to clarify my own intentions within this essay. I wish to propose some possible ways of writing about Māori women's art outside of the 'limitations of a Pākehā perspective' while using the thematic approach demonstrated by the authors discussed above. These writers do not actively omit Māori women artists from their texts, quite the opposite. Many significant Māori women are written about in these texts, and Penfold and Eastmond (1986) go as far as imposing

a selection ratio of Māori,¹³ Pasifika and Pākehā women artists based on population statistics of the time in their book *Women and the arts in New Zealand: forty works 1938–1986*.¹⁴ However, as the quotations from Barton and Lawler-Dormer and Kirker suggest, they acknowledge the lack of appropriate theory and perspective in their analyses of Māori women's art.

At this point it is also important to highlight the somewhat privileged position of a Pākehā or Western perspective in regard to writing about women's art practice in Aotearoa New Zealand. The literature above builds upon a solid foundation of feminist art historical literature from England and the United States, a resource that Māori art historians and writers do not have.¹⁵ During the 1970s in New Zealand particularly, Pākehā women artists responded strongly to the philosophies and ideas of American feminist artists, such as Judy Chicago. Batten reiterates, 'When the women's art movement began to appear in New Zealand in the 70s, it was a movement nourished by sources other than our own artistic past.'¹⁶ For writers and historians, they too had other sources to respond to such as the writing of American and British feminist art historians and critics like Linda Nochlin, Griselda Pollock and Lucy Lippard.

Māori women artists at this time, of course, had their own sources, both traditional and contemporary, to guide and inspire them.¹⁷ The 1970s and 80s saw an increase in feminist and politically active Māori women writers who responded to and critiqued the introduction of Western feminism to Aotearoa New Zealand. These included

Donna Awatere (Ngāti Porou, Whānau-a-Hinetapora, Te Arawa, Ngāti Whakaue), Eva Rickard (Tainui) and Rangimarie Rose Pere (Tūhoe, Ngāti Kahungunu). In terms of Māori art, women such as Ngahuia Te Awekotuku (Te Arawa, Tūhoe, Waikato), Katerina Mataira (Ngāti Porou) and Merata Mita (Te Arawa, Ngāti Pikiao) engaged with Māori art histories and produced critiques and analyses of contemporary and traditional artists, exhibitions and art objects.

Also, the 1970s and 80s saw an increase in exhibitions by and for Māori women artists, both working in traditional and contemporary arts. Haeata, the Māori women's art collective, was established in 1983. Based in Wellington, Haeata was responsible for the support of a number of Māori women artists as well as the development of several successful Māori art exhibitions. The collective was made up of a number of Māori women significant in the field of arts and education such as Keri Kaa (Ngāti Porou, Ngāti Kahungunu) Patricia Grace (Ngāti Toa, Ngāti Raukawa, Te Ati Awa), Robyn Kahukiwa and Irihapeti Ramsden (Ngāi Tahu), among others. The collective had a wide-ranging network of women from around the country who offered their support when they could: 'To us, anyone who turns up is Haeata.'¹⁸ The collective provided monetary support for up-and-coming Māori women artists as well as advice and organisational support for exhibitions, openings and book launches.

Haeata organised several significant Māori art exhibitions such as 'Karanga Karanga' in 1986, 'Whakamamae' in 1988 and 'Mana Tiriti' in 1990.

These exhibitions took place at the Wellington City Gallery and several other art institutions around the country. 'Karanga Karanga' was an extremely popular touring exhibition of Māori women's contemporary art that was exhibited at the Wellington City Gallery, the Fisher in Auckland and the Gisborne Museum and Arts Centre. Exhibiting artists engaged with both contemporary and traditional practice such as Robyn Kahukiwa, Diane Prince (Ngāti Whatua, Ngā Puhi, Ngāti Kahu), Kohai Grace (Ngāti Porou, Ngāti Toa, Ngāti Raukawa) and Veranoa Puketapu-Hetet (Ngāti Tūwharetoa, Ngāti Maniapoto and Te ātiawa) at the Wellington show. In Auckland, the show was comprised of work by Cath Brown (Ngāi Tahu, Ngāti Māmoe), Emily Karaka (Ngā Puhi) and Kura te Waru Rewiri (neé Thornsen) (Ngāpuhi, Ngāti Kahu, Ngāti Rangī, Ngāti Raukawa ki Kauwhata). In Wellington, most works in the exhibition were collaborative, combining weaving, painting, pottery and sculpture.

Responding to the Auckland show in 1986, the poet Arapera Blank (Ngāti Porou, Ngāti Kahungunu, Rongowhakaata, Te Aitanga-a-Māhaki), wrote in *Broadsheet*:

What I like about the exhibition was that these women have come out into a world that has been dominated by male artists. Also that we were invited to exhibit. It isn't as though we went along and drummed on the door, they invited us to the Fisher Gallery. People say, why the Fisher Gallery, out in Pakuranga, well it was because Maori women were asked to exhibit there...When I was asked why we weren't exhibiting at the Auckland

City Gallery I said, 'Because we haven't been asked. Simple.'¹⁹

Katerina Mataira also reviewed the Auckland show in *Broadsheet*, complementing the exhibition's ability to honour both traditional and contemporary women's art by placing them side by side. Like Blank, she commended the exhibition on its 'release' of Māori women from,

...the constraints that have been placed upon them, traditionally as Maori women, but universally as women. 'Karanga Karanga' is almost symbolic of their realisation that they have strengths and talents which have for too long been hidden. These women now have the confidence and the joint awareness that they have a unique contribution to make in this day and age...as women reaching for their rightful place alongside men.²⁰

However, the development of Māori women's art histories has still been relatively slow and art historians have often had to rely on Māori literature and theory that falls outside the realm of art history.²¹ This is, on one hand, very useful, as Māori women's art histories have the opportunity to be multi-disciplinary in their approach. However, on the other hand, Māori art historians within an academic setting can often be disadvantaged in comparison to their Pākehā colleagues, who have a wealth of art historical literature both within and outside of Aotearoa New Zealand to respond to and build upon.

The body as a theme is common to women's art practice, and encompasses many different ideas and issues

including menstruation, sexuality, childbirth, breast feeding, sexual abuse, and the objectification of women's bodies by men.²² It is a theme that can be highlighted particularly well within the contemporary art of Māori as well as Pākehā women in the 1970s and 80s, such as Robyn Kahukiwa. In 1983 Kahukiwa exhibited a series of illustrative works titled *Wahine Toa: women in Maori myth* that toured the country and resulted in a collaborative publication between Kahukiwa and Patricia Grace. This series of paintings focused on the significant role played by Māori women within Māori myth. *Wahine Toa* showcases Kahukiwa's vibrant use of oil paint and careful use of pencil in a particularly illustrative style. This style integrated Kahukiwa's experiences as an illustrator with traditional Māori patterns and motifs, such as kowhaiwhai and taniko, in order to create a style immediately recognisable as, and accessible to, Māori.²³

In these works, Kahukiwa reflects on the role played by women in the creation of life and death, or rather, the idea that 'man is born of woman and returns to woman'.²⁴ Kahukiwa begins the series with the narrative of Te Po: 'I am aged in aeons, being Te Po, the night, that came from Te Kore, the Nothing'.²⁵ In the womb of Te Po lay Papatūānuku, depicted by Kahukiwa in pencil on paper, *Te Po and Papatuanuku*. Here, Kahukiwa locates the beginning of time within the womb of a woman. The work is black and white, with Te Po framed by blackness and Papatūānuku sleeping within her. The work is silent and still: 'In my womb lay Papatuanuku who was conceived in Darkness, born into Darkness...'²⁶ Kahukiwa makes reference

to the woman's body as *whare tangata* in this work. *Whare tangata* means 'house of people/humanity' and refers to a women's ability to physically nurture future generations.²⁷ The writer Ani Mikaere (Ngāti Raukawa, Ngāti Porou) describes the significance of *whare tangata* in relationship to *whakapapa* and the origin of the world:

...the inherent *tapu* of each Māori person is sourced in their connection, through *whakapapa*, to the rest of humanity, to the gods and to the environment. The role of women, as bearers of past, present and future generations is therefore of paramount importance. The survival of the *whānau*, *hapū* and *iwi* is dependent upon the reproductive functions of women.²⁸

Kahukiwa places emphasis on these links throughout the *Wahine Toa* series. She equates respect for the body and the way it should be used with care and respect for the land and environment. Kahukiwa repeatedly depicts the land as a woman's body. This is exemplified in two pencil-on-paper drawings *The Earth Mother and Papatuanuku and Ranginui*. These softly modelled drawings describe a naked woman's body from behind, lying down. Shading and line place emphasis on the curves of her back, shoulders and buttocks which renders them as valleys, hills and mountains.

Kahukiwa ends the *Wahine Toa* series with the story of *Hine-nui-te-pō* and the death of *Māui-tikitiki-ā-Taranga*: 'When I have defeated Maui, I will thereafter welcome my descendants in death. But I do not cause death, and did not ordain it. Human death was ordained

when human life was ordained.'²⁹ *Hine-nui-te-pō* depicts the atua of the underworld, lying naked and asleep. Between her legs is *Māui* disguised as a lizard. This work tells the story of how *Māui* attempted to acquire eternal life for mankind. By working his way through the body of *Hine-nui-te-pō* from her vagina to her mouth, eating her heart on the way, *Māui* would have cheated death and therefore achieved immortality. However, *Māui*'s friend *Tiwaiwaka* (the fantail) woke *Hine-nui-te-pō* with his laughter at *Māui*'s enterprise. As *Hine-nui-te-pō* awoke, she crushed *Māui* to death between her legs, therefore ending his quest.³⁰ This vibrant and colourful work depicts several different moments in time. This compression of time is in keeping with Māori understandings of the past and the present as being linked through *whakapapa*. According to a Māori world view, in front lies the past and behind is the future: 'kia *whakatōmuri te haere whakamua*.'³¹

According to Mikaere, a key theme that underpins this myth is 'the awesome power of female sexuality... The process which brings each of us into being brought the world into being. Our very existence is centred around the sexual power of woman.'³² Also emphasised within this work is the nurturing role of women as mothers. While ultimately this work appears to be concerned with death, Patricia Grace's accompanying text suggests otherwise. Rather, Grace completes the narrative with the following from *Hine-nui-te-pō*: 'I will wait at this side of death for those who follow, because I am the mother who welcomes and cares for those children whose earthly life has ended.'³³

During the mid-1980s Kahukiwa began to experiment with a looser, expressionist painting style that moved away from the realistic, illustrative style demonstrated within *Wahine Toa*. In 1985 she received a Māori and Pacific Arts Council grant to research carved figures on the East Coast, which were then developed into several series of works. These works appropriated the carved poupou form, loosely based on those seen by Kahukiwa in *Te Hono ki Rarotonga*, a Tokomaru Bay whare whakairo carved by Pine Taiapa. This work links key Māori concepts with Kahukiwa's Ngāti Poroutanga. Like the *Wahine Toa* series, Kahukiwa's carving-inspired works demonstrate the influence of mana wāhine and the important relationships between whakapapa, whenua, and women. For example, Kahukiwa's 1985 work, *Ko Hikurangi te maunga, ko Waiapu te awa, ko Ngāti Porou te iwi*, does exactly that. Four poupou forms, two female and two male, stand at the forefront of the picture plane. The female forms are each breastfeeding a child, while another sits between their legs. Behind the figures is a mountain range, *ko Hikurangi te maunga*. The female forms nourish their children, as the land, Papatūānuku, nourishes hers.

A 1987 work of Kahukiwa's combines a female poupou form with abstract designs and an expressionist painting style. *Te whenua, te whenua, engari*

kaore he turangawaewae (Placenta, land but nowhere to stand) makes an overtly political statement about the colonisation of traditional Māori birthing practices. The work depicts a female poupou figure with a child in her womb, to the left of the painting. To the right, a new born baby depicted in poupou form stares out at the viewer. The mother and child are separated by a large red X. The title of the work refers to the traditional Māori practice of burying the placenta on ancestral land after each new birth.³⁴ Following colonisation, however, Pākehā hospital staff refused to honour such practices and, for years, placentas were burnt and Māori mothers were not allowed to take them home for burial. Kahukiwa's choice of title makes reference to the relationship between the Māori language and a Māori world view. In te reo Māori, whenua is the word for placenta and the word for land. This demonstrates the significance for Māori of having a turangawaewae, a piece of land to which they whakapapa from birth. According to Mikaere, 'The child's spiritual welfare was ensured by the careful returning of the placenta to the earth. In controlling the process, the whānau protected its collective well-being, for each child represented another sacred link in the chain of descent.'³⁵ This work makes a statement of protest about the changes enforced upon Māori ways of living post-colonisation.

Following pages: Shona Rapira Davies, *Ngā Morehu*, 1982–1988, mixed media, installation view at the Wellington City Art Gallery with Titahi Bay North School children. Collection of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington. Photograph taken by Ian Mackley (EP/1988/2416/4-F), from the collection. Further negatives of the Evening Post newspaper (PAColl-7327-2). Image courtesy of Alexander Turnbull Library, National Library of New Zealand Te Puna Mātauranga O Aotearoa.



... e no
... i ngala
... ma i ma i
... i fanga
Ka fe te ngau
Io Hata i rewalo
E haki kote i
he maki mo feti
Ka hira ho
he maki
Ka hore ia i
it e. Ti here Man i
... i te Atua
hura i te tano
Mero i te ao
... na rora
... hura i
Tera Vata e te hui
... i ma i
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... woman little one
... know you're much
... little one
... your eyes aren't blue
... Kie Tea
... someone's mouth you not
... little one
... little one



Shona Rapira Davies' early sculptural work from the 1980s explored some of the contemporary, post-colonial issues that affect Māori women. Her clay sculpture, *Ngā Morehu (The Survivors)*, was constructed over six years from 1982 to 1988. It was first exhibited in the 1988 Wellington City Gallery exhibition, 'Whakamamae', alongside works by Robyn Kahukiwa. This work focuses on the role colonisation and the Western gaze has played in the negative labelling and abuse of Māori women's bodies. Among these statements are messages of hope that acknowledge the significant role Māori women play within Māori culture, particularly those who karanga. The work portrays women of three different generations. At the back sit three kuia. Forming the substance of the work are eight younger women delivering a karanga. They stand facing forward with their mouths open in song. All dressed in shapeless, black dresses, they walk forward toward the child standing before them. The child is naked except for a poem, gifted to her by poet Christina Lyndon, written across her body. The women delivering the karanga also have derogatory words, racist slurs and sexist insults emblazoned on their bodies, which mark them like scars.

Originally, all of the women were supposed to be naked. According to Davies, 'I originally wanted them [*Ngā Morehu*] nude but after a number of obscene comments made by men, I knew I couldn't make them nude, so I put these black shapeless outfits on them to signify the covering up of Māori women and their sexuality.'³⁶ This covering up of Māori women's sexuality can be considered a result of the exoticisation of Māori women and

their bodies following first contact in the eighteenth century. The Western gaze that labelled Māori women as more sexually unrestricted, seductive and promiscuous in comparison to sexually oppressed European women has resulted in further restrictions placed upon Māori women since colonisation. Davies reiterates this: 'I wanted to challenge the Western idea of beauty... and to look at how Māori women have been denigrated because they didn't conform to the European ideal.'³⁷

In the catalogue for 'Whakamamae', Lyndon wrote clearly and critically about the position taken by Davies in *Ngā Morehu*. She is particularly critical of the role colonisation and European attitudes have played in changing perceptions of Māori, particularly of Māori women:

Recognition of the pain and sorrow on these women's [*Ngā Morehu*] faces articulates the life experiences of what has been for most women a series of painful experiences. For our men to recognise this pain means recognising their part in the oppression of our women. As long as they continue to molest and physically abuse us and our children, the questions the women of *Ngā Morehu* pose will never be answered.³⁸

Davies presents her sculptures not as victims, but as survivors, as their name tells us. With the karanga, the women call to their tūpuna and to the little girl, connecting the past and present. Davies describes the significance of this in the following passage:

When you do the karanga you are weaving a mat between the people

and Tumatauenga...I wanted to show the essence of Māori women... that has been submerged and suppressed for so many years, yet in spite of everything, these extraordinary women come into their own on the marae and all their beauty and gifts come out...³⁹

Like Kahukiwa's *Hine-nui-te-Po*, the whakataukī 'kia whakatōmuri te haere whakamua' is particularly representative of Davies' work. The child in the work looks back to her tūpuna for guidance for her future. The wahine toa that make up *Ngā Morehu* are also named after women from Davies' whakapapa. These names are known only by Davies, a secret that strengthens her own relationship with the work.⁴⁰ For a Māori woman viewer, the women in *Ngā Morehu* are symbolic of their own tūpuna and whakapapa. Another aspect of the work that maintains a connection with Davies' whakapapa is the unfinished whāriki on which the figures stand. Woven by Davies' daughter Rachel, the whāriki maintains the 'trans-generational kaupapa' of the work.⁴¹ The work is a rite of passage, for the little girl in the work and for Davies' daughter.

This concept of a rite of passage is continued in a 1985 painting by Davies, *Wahine Wahine*. The work was part of a 1985 exhibition at the Marshall Seifert Gallery in Dunedin. It depicts a naked female figure standing with her hands behind her head. The hips and breasts are emphasised and the woman is faceless. Davies painted the woman in the same way she shaped the bodies of her sculpted figures, 'in order to escape the conventional stereotyping of female beauty.'⁴² Davies painted the work

for her daughter's first menstruation, part of a series of works that explored aspects of her daughter's journey into womanhood. At the time, Davies spoke positively about the exclusively 'feminine' nature of women's art, arguing that art had been 'male-rooted for too long.'⁴³ The acknowledgement of her daughter's first menstruation as being special and worthy of painting is in keeping with traditional Māori beliefs about menstruation, in which a Māori woman is considered tapu when she is menstruating. This results in some restrictions being placed on a woman while she is in this tapu state. For many Māori women, these restrictions can impart a feeling of significance based upon a connection between women and Papatūānuku, and, according to Ngahua Te Awekotuku, being 'at the peak of her arcane power as a breeding female.'⁴⁴

Māori women, their bodies and protocols surrounding them have featured strongly in feminist and Mana Wāhine discourses in recent decades. Because they are in a state of tapu, menstruating women are restricted from being near certain people or at certain places and events such as on an urupā, around food gathering or food preparation.⁴⁵ Some Pākehā and Māori feminists argue that the restrictions placed upon women due to changes in their bodies are oppressing, not celebratory, and contribute to the labelling of menstruation as 'unclean'. However, these tikanga have been passed down by Papatūānuku to protect and honour the mauri of Māori women. For Māori, menstrual blood is symbolic of a loss of life, a substance from which people could be made. It therefore has a level of mauri of its own. It is the

belief of many that the application of tapu to menstruating women protects them from the 'vulnerabilities inherent in menstruation.'⁴⁶

In traditional Māori culture, women and their bodies are valued and 'inscribed by cultural practices and spaces'.⁴⁷ During the seventies and eighties in Aotearoa New Zealand, Māori women artists have explored and critiqued these 'inscriptions' through painting and sculpture, as shown in the work of Shona Rapira Davies and Robyn Kahukiwa. In this essay I have argued that Māori women's historical and contemporary experiences are unique and this should be acknowledged within art histories that consider Māori women's art. This can be achieved by opening art history up to Māori research theories and methods that are based on key principles such as tino rangatiratanga, Te Tiriti o Waitangi and te reo Māori me ona tikanga. Māori women's art histories should consider tikanga and practices directly related to Māori women such as the ability to whakanoa and whakatapu, karanga and tangi, as well as mātauranga wāhine, Māori women's myths, narratives and histories. These different perspectives and experiences can only enrich Aotearoa New Zealand's art histories.

1. See Leonie E. Pihama. *Tihei Mauri Ora: Honouring our voices. Mana Wahine as a Kaupapa Māori theoretical framework* (unpublished PhD: University of Auckland, 2001) for more information about Kaupapa Māori and Mana Wāhine theory.
2. Ibid.
3. Wikitoria August, 'Māori women: Bodies, spaces, sacredness and mana', 117–123, *New Zealand Geographer*, Issue 61, 2005, 118.
4. For a more in-depth analysis of Kaupapa Māori theory, consult G. H. Smith, *The Development of Kaupapa Māori: Theory and Praxis* (unpublished PhD, The University of Auckland 1997).
5. Linda Tuhiwai-Smith 'Māori Women: Discourses, projects and Mana Wahine' in Sue Middleton and Alison Jones eds. *Women and Education in Aotearoa 2* (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books Limited, 1992), 34–35.
6. 'The New Zealand Women's Art Movement', *Allie Eagle and Me: A multi-textual online resource*, 2008, URL: <http://www.allieeagleandme.com> (accessed 18/04/2014).
7. Anne Kirker, *New Zealand Women Artists: A Survey of 150 Years* (Sydney: Craftsman House, 1993), 2.
8. Juliet Batten, *Emerging from Underground: The Women's Art Movement in NZ*, Research Papers 1981, WSA, 1982. Reprinted in *Spiral*, 1982, 25.
9. Hamilton Women's Collective, *Herstory Diary* 1983 (Auckland: New Women's Press, 1982), 9.
10. Christina Barton and Deborah Lawler-Dormer eds. *Alter/Image: Feminism and Representation in New Zealand Art 1973–1993* (published on the occasion of the exhibition *Alter/Image*: Wellington City Gallery and Auckland City Art Gallery, 1993), 8.
11. Kirker, 2.
12. Ibid.
13. Penfold (Ngāti Kuri) was a significant Māori writer and educator in Te Reo Māori. Her perspective is obviously not a Pākehā one. However, her 1986 book *Women and the Arts in New Zealand: Forty Works 1936–1986* serves as an example of a particular way of considering Māori and Pākehā artists in the same text and is therefore relevant to my discussion.
14. Elizabeth Eastmond and Merimeri Penfold, *Women and the Arts in New Zealand: Forty Works 1936–1986* (Auckland: Penguin Books, 1986), unpaginated.
15. Kirker, 1.
16. Batten, 1.

17. Definitions of Māori 'art' in terms of traditional, modern and contemporary are extremely complex, rife with conflict and differ according to the commentator. In the mid-to-late twentieth-century the Māori Modernists were highly critical of Māori artists that resisted engagement with Western practices and materials and continued to produce art (carved and woven) that was considered 'traditional' in style. Vice-versa, Māori Modernists and contemporary Māori artists since the sixties and seventies have received significant criticism from traditional practitioners in relation to whether their art can even be termed 'Māori'. I am not in a position to label either party right or wrong and instead believe that labels and definitions of Māori art are open to the interpretation of those making it, writing about it and looking at it—as long as those people are Māori. In relationship to this essay, I use the term contemporary to describe Māori art that is (a) being produced for the gallery space and (b) engaging with both Māori and Western art making traditions and content. I am not attaching any criteria of 'quality' to definitions of contemporary or traditional.

18. Keri Kaa as quoted in Jane Collins, 'Streak of Light', *Listener*, August 20, 1990, 105.
 19. Arapera Blank, 'Karanga Karanga', *Broadsheet*, July/August 1986, Issue 141, 35.
 20. Katerina Mataira, 'Karanga Karanga', *Broadsheet*, July/August 1986, Issue 141, 36.
 21. Here, my definition of 'art history' is based on a Western one and I am referring to the academic practice of writing about art. This is not to say that other understandings of art history do not exist, particularly within Māori culture in the form of narratives myth and oral histories. Māori art histories are not slow to develop in terms of Māori definitions. However, given that I am studying art history at University where definitions and understandings have been pre-determined by Western criteria, and I am being supported, critiqued and marked according to these criteria, I believe it is appropriate that I refer to these criteria within this essay. I believe that definitions of what constitutes art history, what constitutes research and what can be considered 'academic references' need to be altered in order to make room for other cultural practices. I by no means think that Western academic literature is superior to other forms of research and information such as oral history, waiata, or myth. However, that argument deserves

a bigger space than this essay allows for and a more knowledgeable commentator than myself.

22. Barton and Lawler-Dormer, 8.
 23. Jonathan Mane-Wheoki, 'My ancestors are always with me', *Art New Zealand*, No. 75, Winter 1995, 61–63.
 24. Miriama Evans and Irihapeti Ramsden, 'Te Mana Wahine', *NZ Listener*, 30 June 1984, 23.
 25. Patricia Grace and Robyn Kahukiwa, *Wahine Toa: Women of Māori Myth* (Auckland: Penguin Books Ltd/Viking Pacific, 1991), 58.
 26. Ibid.
 27. Ani Mikaere, *The Balance Destroyed: Consequences for Māori women of the colonisation of tikanga Māori* (The International Research Institute for Māori and Indigenous Education and Ani Mikaere, 2003), 31.
 28. Ibid.
 29. Grace and Kahukiwa, 58.
 30. Christine Dann, 'Wahine Toa', *Broadsheet*, May 1983, 25.
 31. My past is my present is my future: I walk backwards into the future with my eyes fixed on my past.
 32. Mikaere, 23.
 33. Grace and Kahukiwa, 58.
 34. Auckland Art Gallery, Robyn Kahukiwa, 2001, URL: <http://www.aucklandartgallery.com/the-collection/browse-artwork/7056/te-whenua,-te-whenua,-engari-kaore-he-turangawaewae-placenta,-land,-but-nowhere-to-stand> (accessed 30/06/2014).
 35. Mikaere, 37.
 36. Shona Rapira Davies in conversation with Megan Tamati-Quennell, 1992, reprinted in Megan Tamati-Quennell ed. *Pū Manawa: A Celebration of Whatu, Raranga and Tāniko*, (Wellington: Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, 1993), 29.
 37. Ibid.
 38. Christina Lyndon, 'Shona Rapira Davies: Nga Morehu (the Survivors)' in Irihapeti Ramsden, Christian Lyndon and Keri Kaa, *Whakamamae* (Wellington: produced with the support of the Māori and South Pacific Arts Council, 1998), 10.
 39. Shona Rapira Davies in conversation with Megan Tamati-Quennell.
 40. Irihapeti Ramsden, 'Whakamamae', in Irihapeti Ramsden, Christian Lyndon and Keri Kaa, *Whakamamae* (Wellington: produced with the support of the Māori and South Pacific Arts Council, 1998), 4.

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41. Rangihīroa Pānoho, 'Kei hea te ngakau? Locating the heart: Shona Rapira Davies and reading Māori art', *Te Ngakau*, 27 October, 2010, unpaginated.
42. Joanne McNeill, 'The Arts', *The Northern Advocate*, March 1986, C6.
43. Shona Rapira Davies as quoted in McNeill, 1986.
44. Ngahua Te Awekotuku, 'Māori: People and Culture' in N. Te Awekotuku, R. Neich and M. Pendergrast et al., *Māori Art and Culture* (Auckland: David Bateman Ltd, 1996), 27.
45. Tapu and noa are very complex concepts and are therefore very challenging to write about. Many Māori and Pākehā academics and writers have approached definitions of tapu and noa from different perspectives. My own definition and approach is shaped by Mana Wāhine theory that therefore places Māori women as the centre of my definitions. I cannot begin to explain or define these concepts in their entirety, but instead I attempt here to demonstrate, on a very basic level, the roles tapu and noa play in understanding Māori women's identities.
46. Judith Collard, 'Locating Lesbian Activism in New Zealand Feminist Art, 1975–1992', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, Vol. 15, No. 2, May 2006, 320.
47. August, 117.

Glossary of Terms*

- Karanga:** formal call, ceremonial call - a ceremonial call of welcome to visitors onto a marae, or equivalent venue, at the start of a pōwhiri.
- Kowhaiwhai:** painted scroll ornamentation - commonly used on meeting house rafters.
- Mātauranga wāhine:** women's knowledge.
- Poupou:** upright slabs forming the framework of the walls of a house, carved wall figures.
- Tangi:** to cry, mourn, weep, weep over.
- Tāniko:** to finger weave, embroider.
- Te reo Māori me ona tikanga:** the Māori language and culture/customs.
- Te Tiriti o Waitangi:** The Treaty of Waitangi.
- Tūpuna:** grandparents, ancestors.
- Turangawaewae:** domicile, place where one has the right to stand - place where one has rights of residence and belonging through kinship and whakapapa.
- Urupā:** burial ground, cemetery, graveyard.
- Wahine toa:** strong, brave, warrior, woman.
- Whakanoa:** to remove tapu - to free things that have the extensions of tapu, but it does not affect intrinsic tapu.
- Whakapapa:** genealogy, genealogical table, lineage, descent - reciting whakapapa was, and is, an important skill and reflected the importance of genealogies in Māori society in terms of leadership, land and fishing rights, kinship and status. It is central to all Māori institutions.
- Whakatapu:** to place a tapu on something, make inaccessible, sanctify, consecrate, set aside.
- Whakatauki:** proverb, significant saying, formulaic saying, cryptic saying, aphorism. Like whakatauāki and pepeha they are essential ingredients in whaikōrero.
- Whare whakairo:** carved house, meeting house.
- Whāriki:** floor covering, ground cover, floor mat, carpet, mat.

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