

Tēnei te karanga	This is the call
Tēnei te tangi	This is the cry
Kia tūwhera ngā tatau	Open the doors
i te whai-ao	from te whai-ao
ki te ao Mārama	to te ao Mārama
Tihei mauri ora	

Ko Puketohunua te maunga
Ko Taumārere te awa
Ko Ngātokimatawhaorua te waka
Ko Ngāpuhi, ko Ngāti Hine, ko Ngāti Whātua ki Ōrākei ngā iwi
Ko Nayte ahau

The space for this show is a relatively large, rectangular room with a high ceiling. There are some large windows and three doorways but all are relatively blacked out/light tight. The room is dimmed and primarily lit by some small table lamps. There are a pair of speakers at one of the short walls of the rectangular room playing a soundscape with taonga pūoro, sounds of the natural world as well as some electronic sounding noises (there is a glossary of Māori terms at the end of this writing). It is an immersive space with a dimmed sensory feeling. There are numerous ropes hanging throughout the room. They appear to be made of muka as well as some piu. They are hung in a way which appears to be somewhat haphazardly but there is an underlying feeling of ‘organised chaos’. There is a chair with its back to the speakers. The chair is approximately one quarter of the way through the room. With the speakers behind it in the single quarter and most of the ropes in front of it, filling most of the other three quarters of space. While writing the draft for this essay, I am sitting in this chair. The sound work is behind me as I write and I look at the muka ropes in front of me.

I came to the project of writing this as someone who has not written about art or about someone's work before so I'm a little nervous. But it is such a privilege to be asked to write about Aroha's show. I have not been lucky enough to meet Aroha and hear more about the whakapapa or creation of this show and so I must note that the words here are my own feelings from being inside this space. In this way, they may not represent Aroha's intention (although I hope I can do your mahi justice, e hoa!). I also give thanks to my partner who is an excellent art writer and helped me hone some of this thinking and make sure I was remembering to honour the artist as best I can.

Heoi anō, ka timata.

Sitting amongst Aroha's work, I feel as though I am sitting in a space less affected by linear time than our day-to-day lives. The room is dimly lit and tucked away from natural light. The materials look earthly and the soundscape is both ancestral and futuristic due to the inclusion of pre-colonial inspired taonga pūoro as well as electronic sounds. Exiting the show, I have the feeling I get when I go to the cinema at daytime; as I walk out, I'm not 100% sure that the world has kept going while I've been inside. It feels like a womb, a moment before being birthed in to Te Ao Mārama. As I sit here, between these muka ropes (also historically used to sever the umbilical cord following birth), I feel that I am witnessing a moment following a release. After all of the slow and meditative mahi of creating these taura has occurred, they have now exploded out across the room. As if these ropes were, only moments before I arrived, balled up in a tight bundle. And now they hang, mid-air. Before I continue, I should emphasise the sheer amount of work that has gone into creating this mahi toi. If you have ever worked with harakeke or muka, you will know that creating even 1 meter of muka rope is a testament to determination. I can only imagine the patience, willpower and meditation it would take to create such an astounding amount of taura as is seen in this show (this is before we even consider the sound work that plays in the space). There is something about seeing ropes (and especially, ropes connected so heavily to our whakapapa as Māori) as art objects where we usually see them as purely practical, that makes me so happy. It is an undeniably decolonial practice to

take what was our traditional and everyday knowledge and bring it into the gallery space.

Rope as whakapapa

From Ranginui's tears meeting Papatūānuku's earth which blossoms in to the harakeke of Tāne-Māhuta; this harakeke is then seen as symbolic of whānau with the rito or pēpi in the center and ngā mātua on the outside. From the many hands which have harvested harakeke over generations, to the weaving of muka into kākahu to provide protection and beauty for whānau; whakapapa is embedded in working with harakeke and muka. When I see the taura in this show, I think about the generations of nimble and calloused hands which led to Aroha. I don't think it is any coincidence that Aroha re-uses pieces from previous shows in their new shows either. I can't help but think of where these ropes will be taken next and what they will look like as they continue their life. In this way, I come back to my considerations of this show being a moment in time, the ropes reaching out in mid-air, still in movement and still not in their final resting place. Still full of potential for new iterations.

Te kore

In the oral traditions of many iwi, we learn of the many nights during the creation of the world. Numerous taumata or ara which lead from Te Kore, to Te Pō and into Te Ao Mārama¹. In these traditions we often hear of Te Kore as the world before there was the world, the moment before 'the big bang'. A timeless moment which holds the potential for everything we know to exist. In this thinking, it can often be understood as a time before us, one which we cannot go back to. However, Mohi Ruatapu, a tōhunga from Ngāti Porou (and who lived among Aroha's tūpuna with Te Whānau ā Ruataupare²), penned a number of whakapapa lines in which he writes that Te Kore still exists within Te Ao Mārama³. As Peter Moana Nepia⁴ writes when considering Mohi's conception of Te Kore, "Te Kore is not only part of our whakapapa, part of what has already been established, but positioned within a genealogical continuum linking the past to the present." (pp. 45). In this way, Te Kore is not only a point in

¹ See page 5 for an explanation of these terms

² Nepia, 2012 (page 7)

³ Ruatapu & Reedy, 1993

⁴ Nepia, 2012

time, but a state. One which is accessible by us, those living in Te Ao Mārama. Knowing that we can access Te Kore, means knowing that we have access to the infinite potential held within it. It is this idea that I consider while amongst these taura. That I am in a space past the bare and infinite potential of Te Kore but still not at the final stages of Te Ao Mārama. A space where we can sit and contemplate the whakapapa of these ropes, where they come from but also where they can go.

Te Whai-ao

The tauparapara I shared at the beginning of this essay is an imperative for the doors to open between Te Whai-ao and Te Ao Mārama. In many oral traditions, Te Whai-ao is the last stage of the spirit world. These stages begin with Te Kore and continue in to Te Ao Mārama (with over a dozen taumata between those stages⁵). Te Whai-ao is the glimmer of dawn, the moment where the world of the living, Te Ao Mārama, is just visible on the horizon of the spirit world. It is at this moment, a doorway between the spirit world and Te Ao Mārama, that I feel I am within as I sit amongst Aroha's work. Facing outwards, with my back to the audio, I feel as though the taonga behind me are the tangi of the spirit world while the ropes in front of me are the tangible and touchable world of the living. The ropes here feel familiar. They bring up strong memories, both memories of places I have been and places I haven't, memories embedded in my whakapapa. As I walk around the ropes, in my peripherals, I think I see things I recognise. I think I see them leading somewhere. But when I focus my eyes, I'm brought back to seeing them as they are, temporarily immobile; until they are taken to their next space.

Te mutunga.

Ngā mihi nui ki a koe, e Aroha, mō tō mahi katoa. He mihi ki taku whaiaipo mō ō tautoko me awhina & a big thank you to Moya and Play_Station for thinking of me to write this ♥

⁵ See page 5 for a complete list of one interpretation of these levels

Te Kore
 (the void, energy, nothingness, potential)
 |
 Te Kore-te-whiwhia
 (the void in which nothing is possessed)
 |
 Te Kore-te-rawea
 (the void in which nothing is felt)
 |
 Te Kore-i-ai
 (the void with nothing in union)
 |
 Te Kore-te-wiwia
 (the space without boundaries)
 |
 Te Pō-nui
 (the great night)
 |
 Te Pō-roa
 (the long night)
 |
 Te Pō-uriuri
 (the deep night)
 |
 Te Pō-kerekere
 (the intense night)
 |
 Te Pō-tiwhatiwha
 (the dark night)
 |
 Te Pō-te-kitea
 (the night in which nothing is seen)
 |
 Te Pō-tangotango
 (the intensely dark night)
 |
 Te Pō-whāwhā
 (the night feeling)
 |
 Te Pō-namunamu-ki-taiao
 (the night of seeking the passage of the world)
 |
 Te Pō-tahuri-atu
 (the night of restless turning)
 |
 Te Pō-tahuri-mai-ki-taiao
 (the night of turning towards the revealed world)
 Te Whai-ao
 (the glimmer of dawn)
 |
 Te Ao-mārama
 (the bright light of the day)⁶

⁶ Royal, 2013

Glossary of Māori words

Ara	path
Tohunga	expert, scholar
Taonga pūoro	pre-colonial instruments
Mahi toi	artwork
Muka	prepared flax fibers
Ngā mātua	parents
Pēpi	baby
Piu	dried and curled harakeke strands
Rito	the young inner shoots of harakeke
Tangi	cry, sing, make a sound
Taumata	level
Taura	rope
Whakapapa	genealogy and history of all things

References

Nepia, P. M. (2012). *Te Kore-Exploring the Māori concept of void* (Doctoral dissertation, Auckland University of Technology).

Royal, T. A. C. (2013). Te Ao Mārama - a research paradigm. *He Pukenga Korero*, 4(1).

Ruatapu, M., & Reedy, A. (1993). *Ngā kōrero a Mohi Ruatapu = The writings of Mohi Ruatapu : tohunga rongonui o Ngāti Porou*. Canterbury University Press.