

18.04.2024

Robert Jahnke

Te Wepu MMXXIII

Aotearoa Art Fair
Viaduct Events Centre



PAULNACHE in association with the Aotearoa Art Fair invites you to experience *Te Wepu MMXXIII* - a stunning new installation from one of New Zealand's leading contemporary Maori artists, Prof. Robert Jahnke.

Recently named as one of the Arts Foundation's 2023 Laureates, Jahnke is a highly respected educator who works as an historian, teacher, researcher, writer and advocate for Maori and indigenous arts, nationally and internationally.

In *Te Wepu MMXXIII*, Jahnke references elements of Para Matchitt's iconic *Te Wepu* Installation, using layers of triangular and diamond light to frame its signature motifs while creating iterations of pattern into infinity - cloaked by reflections embracing star, moon, heart, mountain and cross, reverberating enlightenment as light emerges out of the darkness.

Our Aotearoa Art Fair presentation coincides with Jahnke's invitation to participate in 'Personal Structures 2024', the 7th edition of the Biennial of International Art held at the Palazzo Bembo in Venice from the 20th April - 24th November 2024, alongside the Venice Biennale.

Catalogue of available works:

1. *Wepu Kopio Series*, Marama (Moon); Ripeka (Cross); Maunga (Mountain); Manawa (Heart); Whetu (Star), 2023, Powder-coated mild steel, aluminium, neon, mirror pane, mirror, electricity, 60cm dia. × 20cm \$35,000 ea. / \$175,000 unique set of 5
2. *Ikura Manawa Whero (Bleeding Heart)*, 2023, Powder-coated mild steel, aluminium, neon, mirror pane, mirror, electricity, 117cm dia. × 21cm, \$60,000
3. *Purehuroa Ma*, 2021, Powder-coated mild steel, aluminium, neon, mirror pane, mirror, electricity, 117cm dia. × 21cm, \$60,000
4. *Mata Whero*, 2021, Powder-coated mild steel, aluminium, neon, mirror pane, mirror, electricity, 140 × 140 × 16.5cm, \$50,000
5. *Kowhiti Rua Whero*, 2021, Wood, paint, neon, mirror pane, mirror, electricity, 85 × 85 × 16.5cm, \$35,000
6. *Kowhiti Tahi Whero*, 2021, Wood, paint, neon, mirror pane, mirror, electricity, 85 × 85 × 16.5cm, \$30,000
7. *Kowhiti Tahi Kowhai*, 2021, Wood, paint, neon, mirror pane, mirror, electricity, 85 × 85 × 16.5cm, \$30,000
8. *Kopiko Kikorangi*, 2021, Wood, paint, neon, mirror pane, mirror, electricity, 85 × 85 × 16.5cm, \$30,000

Other available works include:

- *Ata Kahurangi II*, 2022, Lacquer, wood, MDF, neon, mirror pane, mirror, electricity, 118 x 40 x 17cm (D), \$30 000
- *Ata Kowhai I*, 2022, Lacquer, wood, MDF, neon, mirror pane, mirror, electricity, 118 x 40 x 17cm (D), \$30 000
- *Taimana Kikorangi*, 2022, Wood, paint, neon, mirror pane, mirror, electricity, 50 x 50 x 16cm, \$12,500

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Artist statement:

Te Wepu *MMXXIII* is the name of the project and the name of the main work in the proposed exhibition 3-21 October 2023. The show will then travel to Tūranganui a Kiwa to be shown at Paul Nache Gallery. It is a tribute to the genius of Te Kooti and the honorific tradition of Paratene Matchitt. The objective is to reinvest the symbols of Te Wepu with multi-layered significance through neon illumination, chromatic juxtaposition, and reflection to reinvigorate the symbols of resistance within the neo-colonial present. It is often suggested that we live in a post-colonial age; nothing could be further from the truth. This suite of 14 works is a homage to the power of image to reconnect a mnemonic tradition through space and time.

Te Wepu *MMXXIII* reconfigures elements from Matchitt's Te Wepu Installation in the Auckland University Collection minus the stylised human forms holding the flag aloft. The choice of this composition over others allows for a series of triangular and diamond interactions to frame the signature motifs of Te Wepu while allowing the core motifs to resonate iterations of pattern into infinity, cloaked by reflections embracing star, moon, mountain, heart, and cross reverberating enlightenment as light emergences out of the darkness. These iterations of light are a metaphor for understanding the message of the prophet, perceiving the vision of the artist, and comprehending the narrative of the orator. In the layered tiers of patterns of light whakapapa is evoked as a connector that links a tradition of transcultural practice in which motif evolves through space and time in two-dimensions, three-dimensions, and multi-dimensions, albeit through illusion in the latter. In the end it is the metaphor of light that reigns supreme because without light perception is impossible and one must rely on the other senses to navigate in the darkness.

Chromatic reverence to the customary tradition of red, black and white aligns with the cosmo-genealogical relevance of Te Kore, Te Pō and Te Aomarama, the heke of whareniui associated with Te Kooti, and Matchitt's painted tributes to Te Kooti as a prophet and a visionary leader whose iconographical charter heralded one of the most creative periods in *Toi whakawhiti* beginning with Te Tokaanganu a Noho at Te Kuiti in 1873 and culminating in Rongopai in 1887. The use of blue together with white and red in *Te Wepu MMXXIII* alludes to the persistence of a colonial predisposition within New Zealand society in which Māori are dominantly subaltern in Aotearoa New Zealand society.

Mātauranga Māori exists in the re-articulation of the graphic vocabulary that constitutes the mnemonics of Te Wepu in its original form as a fabric flag through to the mixed media assemblages of Paratene Matchitt and the illuminated neon motifs in *Te Wepu MMXXIII*. This project aligns with *He Tātaitanga kaupapa Toi* (Jahnke 1996) in which the whakapapa of artistic legacy and form is used to reinvigorate the visual language of Te Wepu in the 21st century. Within the paradigm of *He Tātaitanga ahua Toi* the images from Te Wepu were *Ahua rerekē* at the time they were created which comes as no surprise because they were created by Catholic nuns.

From its original function as a pendant for Ngāti Kahungunu chiefs with its Catholic mnemonic charter of Christ's sacrifice for humankind, Te Kooti's capture of the flag in 1868 shifted the sacrificial intent to the suffering of Māori under colonial rule and the expansionist colonial regime of land alienation. The cross as the symbol of crucifixion became the 'fighting cross of the Archangel Michael' (Tupara 2017) while the bleeding heart represented the suffering of Māori.

In the 1980s Te Wepu was activated once more by Matchitt to honour Te Kooti, not only as a prophet but also as a creative genius whose liberal iconography and polychrome painted carvings activated the exterior and interior of tribal houses in the Uruwera and East Coast regions. In 1990 each of the motifs in Te Wepu assume the form of individual free-standing sculptural assemblages of corrugated iron and wood; scaled to confront the viewer. It was also the period when Matchitt created a series of wall assemblages in which monumentality activated the symbols of Te Wepu while subtle polychromatic contrast was achieved through the juxtaposition of different shades of recycled rough sawn timber and strategically positioned serrated timber edges. The 2020s saw the Te Wepu symbols migrate to Matchitt's iconic motif of Te Kooti's 'white' horse in which the pennant is clasped in the hand of Te Kooti astride his charging steed.

In the 19th and early 20th century the juxtaposition of the crescent moon and the star spoke of contrast, or transition between old and new; the Old and the New Testament or a new regime supplanting an old. Within the context of Christianity, the six-pointed star God it represents peace and harmony for Buddhism. Ripeka, the cross remained firmly anchored within the crucifixion tradition and the sacrifice of Christ for humankind until it was usurped for a period as the battle cross of Gabriel. The mountain is synonymous with Gethsemane but was meant to signify sacred mountains of Ngāti Kahungunu but assumed a more pan-tribal significance as Aotearoa under Te Kooti. In the hands of Matchitt it assumes the form of an aronui transforming the original naturalistic reference *Toi Rerekē* on the flag to one anchored within the visual vocabulary of *Toi Tūturu*. The signature symbol of the bleeding heart is always about sacrifice as opposed to love when the arrow is from the bow of Cupid. In the original Te Wepu the bleeding heart motif shows the arrow penetrating the heart from the right hand side; entering at the bottom and exiting at the top. In *Te Wepu MMXXIII* the arrow enters the heart on the left with the point remaining embedded within the heart; a testament to the ongoing suffering of Māori as they seek to break free of the shackles of colonialism.

The *Tūtika* and *Kōpio* series complete the tribute to Te Kooti and Matchitt with the order of marama, ripeka, maunga, manawa and whetu aligned in accord with the order on the battle pennant of Te Kooti but the arrow remains embedded in the heart.

— PAULNACHE has represented Robert Jahnke since 2008 – in Aotearoa and abroad —