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Artist's Poi Reflect on Pain of Parihaka

City Gallery Wellington announces opening exhibition, Deane Gallery for Māori & Pacific art

On September 27, works by Parihaka artist Ngaahina Hohaia (Ngati Moeahu, Ngati Haupoto) will launch City Gallery Wellington's new Roderick and Gillian Deane Gallery, dedicated to Māori and Pacific art. Visitors will encounter hundreds of embroidered poi reflecting on interactions between the people of Parihaka and the colonial forces in the late 19th century. In particular, Ngaahina honours Parihaka's political and spiritual leaders, Te Whiti o Rongomai and Tohu Kākahi, and their vision to build a peaceful relationship between Māori and Pakeha.

"I am delighted that Ngaahina Hohaia's exhibition will open the Deane Gallery," says City Gallery Director, Paula Savage, "Ngaahina's whanau were instrumental in the creation of the 2000-2001 Parihaka exhibition at City Gallery, during which Ngaahina worked as a guide. It is fabulous to be able to continue this relationship."

The exhibition has been drawn together by Reuben Friend, recently appointed Curator, Māori and Pacific Art. Reuben notes that Ngaahina's works create giant patterns, with each poi pattern referencing a customary Māori design that has specific cultural and historic symbolism. The main work, *Roimata Toroa*, is made up of 392 poi embroidered with symbols of the Parihaka community's passive resistance against invasion by Government troops. One of these symbols is Roimata Toroa (the tears of the albatross) which references the three albatross feathers that represent the Parihaka movement.

In addition, the poi themselves are constructed from 100% New Zealand wool blankets symbolising the trade between Maori and Pakaha. They are also examples of products of the New Zealand economy that are built on confiscated Māori land. The blanket stands as a symbol for the land but also the historical imbalance of power. Te Whiti o Rongomai and Tohu Kākahi stated to the crown that they were willing to share their "blanket", but that sovereign independence must remain with Māori. *"Words recited by Tohu Kaakahi in 1895 form the textual statement embroidered in my works. Words that continue to resonate even today,"* says Ngaahina.

Ngaahina has a strong whakapapa of weaving and fibre work in her whanau and is rapidly establishing herself as an outstanding artist in her own right. In June this year she was selected for *Fibra Spirare*, an exhibition at Rydals Museum in Sweden that showcased five contemporary New Zealand textile artists. Ngaahina lives in Palmerston North where she is completing a Masters in Māori Visual Arts at Massey University.

The Deane Gallery is the result of the generosity of benefactors Roderick and Gillian, who created the Deane Endowment Trust in memory of their daughter Kristen.

For more information on City Gallery Wellington's development, including reopening exhibitions and events, see www.citygallery.org.nz

Ngaahina Hohaia at the Roderick and Gillian Deane Gallery

27 September, 2009 – 10 January 10th, 2010
City Gallery Wellington, Civic Square, Ph: 04 801 3021
citygallery@wmt.org.nz Admission charges apply.

For further information, images and interviews, contact
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City Gallery Wellington is managed by the Wellington Museums Trust with major funding support from Wellington City Council.

Additional Information on Reuben Friend

Reuben is of Pākehā and Ngati Maniapoto descent (Tainui) and currently lives in Featherston. He comes to City Gallery Wellington from *Toi Wairarapa, Arts, Culture and Heritage Trust* and is currently completing a Masters degree in Māori Visual Arts at Massey University. He was awarded the Creative New Zealand-Blumhardt Foundation Curatorial Internship for 2008-09, based at TheNewDowse in Lower Hutt, where his Plastic Māori exhibition is on display until September 2009. Reuben is fluent in Te Reo Māori, having completed a Level 4 Certificate at Auckland College of Education in 2000.

"I'm very excited about my new role at City Gallery," says Reuben, "It's an amazing opportunity to not only showcase the best contemporary Māori and Pacific artists, but to also create exhibitions that challenge our understanding of indigenous art forms."

Artist statement, *Roimata Toroa* (2006)

Roimata Toroa embraces the Taranaki tradition of Poi-Manu associated with the Taranaki iwi. Poi-Manu is the ceremonial application of poi that maintains the timing of reciting whakapapa (genealogy) and karakia (ritual incantation), with the movement of the poi carrying the story line. Poi-Manu is the female element; a vehicle of ceremonial movement and expression, and the messenger or the storyteller.

19th century Parihaka oratory was rich in symbolism, both ancient and contemporary. Symbolism, that expressed the Taranaki peoples struggle of passive resistance that intertwined both ancient Maaori and biblical identities into liberation theology.

The political and spiritual leaders of Parihaka, Te Whiti o Rongomai and Tohu Kaakahi, stated to the crown that they were willing to share their "blanket", but that sovereign independence must remain with Māori. Words recited by Tohu Kaakahi in 1895 form the textual statement embroidered in these works. Words that continue to resonate even today.

The 100% New Zealand wool blankets from which these poi are constructed are products of the New Zealand economy built on Māori land. As a comparison, in Taranaki the dairy industry is founded on over two and a half million acres of confiscated Māori land. Here the blanket stands as a metaphor for the land, but also as a symbol of historical imbalance of wealth and power upon the land.

*"Listen people gathered on this marae
My war which I fought throughout the many years
is one I fight for peace.
For the foundation of peace upon the land and upon the people.
I give over my resilience and my voice as a voice of leadership for you to this generation,
that you may cause to be an inspiration to the two peoples.
Your voices will never be suppressed by the great powers of this generation.
Your mouths will never be shut by the great powers and forces of this country.
Nor by the great powers and forces of the entire world will your voices be extinguished.
You provide the means to overcome evil with good."*

Tohu Kaakahi - 1895