

# KEREAMA TAEPA

## *Whakapī*

***Whakapī* is an exhibition of new work by Kereama Taepa that employs Virtual Reality and 3D printing to investigate the adoption of digital technologies within contemporary society. The work is informed by customary Māori knowledge of carving, focusing on the continual development of techniques and methods.**

The term whakapī invokes the act of a bee that produces wax to construct tightly-packed hexagonal cells that form its hive. It is an additive process, similar in nature to 3D printing and methods of construction. Whakapī is a play on the term whakairo, the Māori word for carving. Although any new language learner knows that dissecting words can only get you so far, 'to be or make like a maggot' is the literal breakdown of whaka and iro: whakairo. The act of carving is likened to how a maggot eats away and creates relief patterns in bone.

Whakairo is a subtractive sculptural process; the same process about which Michelangelo famously said 'The sculpture is already there. I just have to chisel away the superfluous material.' Yet the forms exhibited here are printed into being, and their reference to popular culture highlights the nature of their contemporary origin. The stylistic conventions of both Taranaki and Te Arawa wheku, a representation of the human face, ground the work within established Māori art histories.

As a student of Professor Robert Jahnke, Kereama learnt that the carved figures within the iconic serpentine style of Te Ati Awa, perform acts which are physically impossible but spiritually possible. Their figurative forms are not bound by our human laws of physics such as gravity or matter. They speak of a different realm. The Virtual Reality within the exhibition is also another realm, a type of terra nullius or 'no-man's land' with the ability to be created from scratch.

Kereama's chosen media touches on outdated beliefs like constructing a colony or terra nullius assumptions. Yet through his grounding within te ao Māori coupled with the deft employment of new technologies, he is continuing the long tradition of innovation.

Curated by Bridget Reweti

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Kereama Taepa is a multi-disciplinary artist of Te Arawa and Te Ati Awa descent. Kereama received a Masters of Maori Visual Arts from Toioho ki Āpiti, Massey University in Palmerston North and currently teaches on the Bachelor of Creative Technologies at Toi Ohomai Institute of Technology, Rotorua. He has exhibited both nationally and internationally, with work in collections in New Zealand and abroad. In early 2016 he installed *A (Very) Brief History of New Zealand* for the Four Plinths Sculpture Project in central Wellington, the latest of a number of public artworks.