

17 april – 3 june 2001

the wharenui that dad built



reuben paterson



a past, present and future

The glitter paintings of Reuben Paterson are extremely seductive, attracting viewers like magpies to shiny objects of promise. They hint at the ideas of beauty as a magnet for visual attraction. The sparkling glitter enables the artist to explore much more than merely the twinkling light qualities of the material. It's intrinsic character transcends the everyday, the mundane or the worldly, and now implies the celestial, the spiritual and the celebratory.

The material is important for generating and supporting metaphysical ideas about the light it produces. It is a medium which will not be at its potential until guided by light, and light as the source has been used throughout history to symbolise the spiritual, which in turn represents something which we may not be able to make define.

The spiritual realm, because of its personally emotive qualities, has long been fertile ground for artistic expression.

It is also considered one of the most difficult areas for an artist to represent.

Meyer Schapiro in 1978 found that the problem for artist's working in a realm which is concerned with expressing the spiritual is the pressure on the artist 'to create a work in which he transmits an already prepared and complete message to a relatively indifferent and impersonal receiver.'¹

Due to the limitless number of possible definitions involved in personal belief, as notions of spirituality are not strictly limited by culture and science and taxonomy, but are expanded and understood by the individual. Of the many cultural and individual interpretations, the English Thesaurus denotes a myriad of words associated with spirituality, selectively including: spiritual, holy, sacred, blessed, celestial, divine, godly, pure, metaphysical, ethereal, heavenly, unearthly.

In Maori, words which may reference the notion include: taha wairua, tapu, whakapapa, mauri, ihi and wehi.

Paterson intentionally avoids the attempt to be all things to all people, distancing himself from the scientific approach to the spiritual arriving at a work which references the past, focuses on the present and celebrates the future.

'The decorative art of kowhaiwhai (painted scrolls) his panels of traditional Maori designs in glitter dust suggests, at first glance, the assured defiance of Maori culture in the face of loss. But all that glitters is not gold, and Paterson's work also emits an air of melancholy. The obvious awareness of this young artist, of what has been lost, however opens the way for a confident present and perhaps a glittering future.'²

The Wharenui That Dad Built was created at a time of great personal loss for Paterson, but this also offered opportunity for him to reflect on gifts passed on.

'While loss is often a painful conduit for deeper learning, it can also offer new channels in which to flourish and grow. In this context, the painting is as ritualistic and cleansing as it is a loving chant and celebration of life.'³





artist's commentary

The work becomes celebratory, and in turn aroha. It reminds not of what is lost, in the physical, but what is now existing spiritually.

The kowhaiwhai ribs are the inner body of a whare, ethereal and physical symbol of ancestors and people in a new past. Maoridom is past down through the father from the ancestor to create a new whare in which the Paterson's reside. It is a house of culture built by the father but also a person whose raring built the family.

His artist's commentary sketches the construction of *The Whareniui that Dad Built*, as new ancestral house, a place in which his father and ancestors inhabit.

Rhoda Fowler

1. Myer Schapiro 'Recent Abstract Painting' 1957 in idem, *Modern Art, Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries: Selected papers*
2. David Broker 'eyeline' vol 44 summer 200/2001 Chic Pacificque
3. Ngahiraka Mason, Biennale D'Art Contemporain de Noumea, 2000 p23

A karakia made you weep. Go on, feel it

Pause

You walked, removed the shoes, and placed them as a pair at the opening.

You are returning

One breath inhales you inside, and you can't help but look up, as if ... immortally.

The beams in your whare nui are ribs, but you already knew.

Now you chose to feel them breathing between you.

Remember this, you are never alone.

And you knew them as the oratory, beholding you.

A sigh and then a breath come from a Man, who without, I could not be, eternally.

Our family's whare nui is Rangiohia, on Matata's stretch of coast. I visit there as he tells me to. I listen.

There, I take a step into the opening of Rangiohia, and looking up, I enter the inside. I've become well versed to looking up for explanation.

The kowhaiwhai will tell me that I am also entering the outside, that space out there, as I look up and beyond into the heaven.

This space is the oratory of my father.

This painting is an oratory of my father.

Kowhaiwhai are the ribs of construction inside our family's whare.

Phrases of Maori pattern that may tell you about journeys. These phrases are his birth land, his sea, his incarnation and his birth.

Places of light and beauty, no doubt.

This painting is an oratory of my father.

Kowhaiwhai: painted rafter panels on the ceiling of the whare nui.

Whareniui: the main house on our land.

The history of our people lives in the carved, woven and painted panels within the house.

The whare nui is a body, where we meet, protected.

reuben paterson

Born 1973
Ngati Rangitihi, Tuhoë

education and training

1992–1995 Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA)
Elam School of Fine Arts,
University of Auckland



selected group exhibitions

- 1995 'Salute Pierre et Gilles', George Fraser Gallery
'Pilot Error', 23A Gallery, Auckland
- 1996 *Quartet Four to the Fore*, 23A Gallery, Auckland
- 1997 Peter Hills, *The Art Fair Murders*, a novel and installation,
New Gallery, Auckland Art Gallery, Toi o Tamaki
- 2000 Biennale D'Art Contemporain de Noumea

selected solo exhibitions

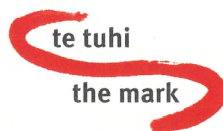
- 2001 *The Whareniui that Dad Built*, Cameo Project,
te tuhi – the mark, Pakuranga, Manukau City
- 1997 Space, Lister Building, Auckland

grants and awards

- 1997 Moët et Chandon Fellow,
Residency in Moët et Chandon's Chateau, Avize (France)

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