

# KERI WHAITIRI

[Ngāi Tahu, Ngāti Kahungunu, Nederlandse]

## Sticks [and stone] 2021–22

Plant materials, stone and stainless steel

Paemanu: Ngāi Tahu contemporary visual arts loan collection, Dunedin Public Art Gallery

---

Keri Whaitiri collected the rauemi, or materials, that make up *Sticks [and stone]* from different ancestral areas across Te Waipounamu; a mixture of indigenous flora, local stone, as well as plant species introduced by colonial settlers. Whaitiri has described how “A weaver’s materials are called rauemi; a weaver’s movements across the whenua are purposeful, inquisitive, observant, respectful; a weaver’s sensibilities are the impulse to locate and gather, to work and observe qualities.”<sup>1</sup>

Whaitiri works as an artist and designer in landscape and architecture, and she advises on preferred plantings for urban public spaces to support mana whenua aspirations and indigenous ecology, including in the Central Lakes region of Otago. The urban, peri-urban and rural landscapes of this area have been constantly reimagined since colonial settlement, and today tourism branding such as ‘Colours of Autumn’ and ‘Adventure Capital of the World’ can shape how local environmental policy and planning is developed.

Introduced plant species such as redwoods, wilding conifers, privet and hawthorn are sometimes granted heritage protection in urban areas but are considered invasive as they gradually spread beyond their intended boundaries across rural land. Sometimes smothering indigenous plants growing in conservation reserves some distance away. Whaitiri has noticed the growing, season-to-season presence of hawthorn in Punatapu (Bob’s Cove) and around Whakatipu, particularly its blooming white flowers in late spring. Its berries are very attractive to birds, who prolifically spread its seed.

Suspended from the ceiling and arranged on the floor, the individual rauemi and their source environments are gathered together in Whaitiri’s sculpture as a spare assemblage. A biogeography of environmental change is traced between the empty space held by the sculpture and the whakapapa interconnecting the materials through their human and non-human uses, such as materials for weaving, dyeing and cooking, and fruit, pollen and nectar eaten and dispersed by birds and insects.

---

1. Keri Whaitiri, *Paemanu: Tauraka Toi A Landing Place* exhibition wall text, Dunedin Public Art Gallery, 2021

# AYESHA GREEN

[Kāi Tahu, Ngāti Kahungunu]

## **In the extension of my feet** 2020

Acrylic on canvas

Collection of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery

Given 2022 by the artist

---

Poroporo and koromiko grow from the feet of the woman depicted in this painting, each indigenous plants that have properties that are beneficial for use as rongoā (medicine). Ayesha Green is interested in how colonial and hegemonic systems of power attempt to order an endlessly complex natural world. These are systems that support the collection and categorisation of different plants into families, genera, species and varieties, even into ‘useful’ resources and weeds; in this sense, defining plants by individualising them and isolating them from their surrounding environments and relationships.

Koromiko offers an example of this, as it is part of the hebe genus, which contains over a hundred species with many indigenous to Aotearoa. They are known to be bafflingly difficult for botanists to identify as they grow in a range of shapes and forms and hybridise freely. Similarly, poroporo, despite being indigenous, is often considered a weed, as it rapidly spreads throughout and becomes established in cleared or disturbed environments. Green, instead, explores the multiplicity and connections inherent in te taiao (the natural world) and emphasises how aspects of it, such as plants, can be understood in a variety of ways. *In the extension of my feet* embodies the connections between the human and non-human, and between tangata and whenua within te ao Māori; the earth as Papatūānuku and the vegetation of the forest as Tāne Mahuta.

# NOVA PAUL

[Ngāpuhi, Te Uriroroī, Te Parawhau, Te Māhurehure ki Whatitiri]

## Rākau 2022

16mm film, hand-processed, transferred to digital file, loop

Courtesy of the artist

---

*Rākau* was shot on 16mm film by Nova Paul and developed using a plant-based chloroform made by Paul from pūriri leaves – one of the trees in the film. This material process has led Paul to describe the film as being by trees, rather than about trees. Consistent and quiet attention is paid to the pūriri in *Rākau*, allowing the atmosphere and light of the trees and their surroundings to leave impressions on the film. Paul is interested in the writings of Reverend Māori Marsden (Te Aupōuri), a tōhunga, scholar, healer and philosopher, who recognised that photography had the capacity to capture the mauri of its subjects due to the medium’s sensitivity to light.

The word rākau has a root in rā, the sun, and through the sun photosynthesis, the sensitivity of plants to the sun’s energy. Rākau is also linked to the word pūrākau, a term for myths and stories. In *Rākau*, a space is opened in time for the self-determination of the indigenous plantlife Paul films, for herself as a filmmaker and for viewing; time that sits outside, and resists, its usual frameworks and rhythms within day-to-day society. Paul is interested in the multiplicities of language, whether human or non-human; the unique visual languages of artmaking and filmmaking, and the languages of te taiao (the natural world). She has written that “Another [idea] is that all language comes from trees. These stories overlap within us, collected and built together.”<sup>1</sup>

---

1. Nova Paul & Gwynneth Porter, ‘The Virtues of Trees’, *Form Next to Form Next to Form*, Auckland: Clouds, 2012, unpaginated

# LUCY MEYLE

## Little Enclosure (Temporary Parquet) 2022

Newspaper grid, bronze cat and dog footprints, papier mâché 'no dogs' signs, masking tape potato chips, pewter worms, various documents and ephemera (risographed and laser-printed), A4 and A3 painted plywood ramps, mouse and duck silicon trackways from Acorn Naturalists, milliput hat and nylon and leather bird leashes

Courtesy of the artist

---

Lucy Meyle is interested in how collective populations of animals are seen by people as belonging in a place or how they are sometimes seen as transgressing their 'natural' or human-designated boundaries, and how this 'transgression' can play out in small ways. Meyle recorded the tracks and traces of animal species around her neighbourhood in Tāmaki Makaurau, noticing where animals had crossed freshly laid concrete, leaving their footprints impressed in the pavement. She also noticed how signage polices boundaries for animals in other urban environments, such as in large cities like London and Rome, and recognised how dogs (in most cases) are banned from the area of the Octagon, outside Dunedin Public Art Gallery. In this way, imagined boundaries can be marked by the language of signs, but also physically, as with lines demarcated by leashes or doorways.

Even carefully delineated environments, such as the surveyed grids that order the layout of urban footpaths, streets, parks and green spaces, have a habit of fluctuating in unintentional ways as animals and plants join humans in making and remaking landscapes. George Malcolm Thomson noticed as much, how animals introduced for specific purposes, or simply on a whim, responded to new environments in 'transgressive' ways. He noted that sparrows introduced by Acclimatisation societies in the 1860s were soon being mass-poisoned because they were accused of eating commercial grain crops.<sup>1</sup>

Historically in Europe, Meyle notes, animals were sometimes brought into courtrooms to be put on trial – either individual animals, or a group of them so a species could be collectively trialled; for instance, a small number of caterpillars could be brought in as representatives of their species and held responsible for trespassing on and damaging agricultural fields, gardens and orchards. Some of this thinking is evident in the indignation colonial settlers often expressed about the unexpected, new behaviours of animals and plants they introduced to Aotearoa. The surprise, too, of seeing a line of shiny worms wriggling across an art gallery floor might show how the natural world breaks away from seemingly rigid, human-allocated borders.

---

1. George Malcolm Thomson, *The Naturalisation of Animals and Plants in New Zealand*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922, pp. 167-8

# GEORGE MALCOLM THOMSON

Science notebook commenced 22 April 1878 1878-82

Science notebook commenced January, 1883 1883-1917

Hocken Collections Uare Taoka o Hākena

**A New Zealand Naturalist's Calendar and Notes by the  
Wayside** 1909

Private collection

---

George Malcolm Thomson was a Scottish, India-born naturalist who lived in Ōtepoti from 1871 until his death in 1933. Thomson arrived in Aotearoa in 1868, a time, he later wrote, immediately before Acclimatisation societies, who were introducing hundreds of plant and animal species into the country, had managed to radically alter the natural environment. Acclimatisation societies were established by recently arrived colonial settlers throughout the 1860s across Aotearoa with the aim of introducing 'beneficial' plant and animal species, such as timber plants, fodder plants, ornamental flowers and game animals. Regarding Acclimatisation societies, he wrote:

“Most of these early colonists recked not of such things as cross and self-fertilisation, and those who did know were not prepared to recommend an insect invasion to secure the fertilisation of their favourite wildflowers ... In time some of the plants and animals which had been introduced not only established themselves securely, but increased at a rate which upset all calculations. Conditions were produced which had never been anticipated and the introductions became dangerous and expensive pests. Then public measures had to be taken to check the newcomers, and in some cases their natural enemies had to be introduced. This has led to further complication and unexpected results.”<sup>1</sup>

Thomson observed and recorded the natural environment around him, taking daily walks through Ōtepoti's Town Belt and noting which species were flourishing, which were becoming less common or locally extinct, and how he could see indigenous and introduced species interacting and changing in unusual ways. He also sought out earlier colonial settlers who had memories of what the natural environment around Ōtepoti was like in the decades before he arrived.

Some of his observations were published in a fortnightly column in the *Otago Daily Times*, and people across Otago and Aotearoa wrote to him with reports of the spread of new species and what changes they had noticed with the natural environment in their own neighbourhoods. He later published *The Naturalisation of Animals and Plants in New Zealand*, describing over 1,200 introduced species, including both those that were successfully 'naturalised' and the many that were not.

---

1. George Malcolm Thomson, *The Naturalisation of Animals and Plants in New Zealand*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922, p. 22

# GEORGE MALCOLM THOMSON

## [G. M. Thomson Drawings]

Hocken Collections Uare Taoka o Hākena

---

George Malcolm Thomson was working on a catalogue of crustacea species found in Aotearoa in the years before his death. Thomson's catalogue was left unfinished, and to this day a complete scientific catalogue of indigenous crustacea has not been completed. Many of these drawings are studies from specimens collected by him in the Otago Harbour and the surrounding ocean, as well as freshwater streams and pools around Ōtepoti. Thomson took up the study of crustaceans at the encouragement of scientist Frederick Hutton, and he wrote:

“Now it takes an enthusiast to appreciate and wax eloquent on the beauties of a wood-louse, and yet these creatures have been a source of great interest to many besides myself. I wonder if it is possible to communicate this interest to others.”<sup>1</sup>

Thomson also helped establish the Marine Fish Hatchery and Biological Station at Te Parihaumia Portobello, which later became the New Zealand Marine Studies Centre. After opening, the facility was used to raise introduced marine species that were hoped to support new commercial industries, such as herring, turbot, European edible crab and European lobster, and also to take samples from and study the local marine environment. However, none of the species introduced for commercial reasons were successfully naturalised.

---

1. George Malcolm Thomson, *A New Zealand Naturalist's Calendar and Notes by the Wayside*, Dunedin: R. J. Stark & Co, 1909, p. 108

# KATE MARY OGSTON

## New Zealand Game 1888

Oil on board

Collection of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery

Bequeathed 1970 by Miss Frances Ogston

---

*New Zealand Game* was likely painted by Kate Mary Ogston in 1888 when she was living in Ōtepoti. It was exhibited with a group of her watercolour paintings of indigenous flowers and trees in the *New Zealand and South Seas Exhibition* of 1889-90, where she was awarded a prize for third. Throughout the 1880s and 90s, there was a large amount of public attention on kea due to their much-publicised habit of killing and eating sheep on the high country stations of Te Waipounamu. They were seen as a serious threat to the success of pastoral farming, to the point that high bounties were paid to farmers for shot or poisoned kea. It is estimated that around 150,000 kea were killed from 1868 through to 1970, when the bounty system was abolished. The kea population today is estimated to be between 3000 and 7000.

Kea likely began eating sheep due to the widespread burning of their habitat by pastoral farmers, clearing land for pasture and livestock but also destroying bush and scrub that kea depended on for their predominately vegetarian diet. Swarms of introduced rabbits also contributed to this habitat destruction. Arguably, for kea, the newly arrived sheep were a convenient replacement source of food. In the mid to late 19th century, while kea were being killed and collected for payment by people in rural areas, people in Ōtepoti sometimes kept 'tame' kea as pets, and many stuffed specimens and skins were displayed, sold and exported from local businesses. Live kea were also displayed in the *New Zealand and South Seas Exhibition* in a grand aviary in the botanical gardens alongside kiwi, tūī, weka, korimako, blackbirds and thrushes.

# KATE MARY OGSTON

**Red Kowhai** 1890

**Yellow Kowhai and Taraire berries** 1890

**Clematis indivisa** 1890

**Rewa rewa** 1890

Watercolour and gouache on paper  
Hocken Collections Uare Taoka o Hākena

---

The flowers depicted by Kate Mary Ogston in these watercolours are all indigenous; ngutukākā, kōwhai, puawānanga, rewarewa, pekapeka and renga renga. Ogston exhibited paintings with the Auckland Society of Arts, the Otago Art Society, the *New Zealand Industrial Exhibition* of 1885, the *Melbourne Centennial Exhibition* of 1888-89 and the *New Zealand and South Seas Exhibition* of 1889-90. In the art historical record, she has been described as being known “mainly as a Dunedin flower painter.”<sup>1</sup>

Flower painting is a term often used as a contrast to botanical illustration, which conventionally describes a more scientific, rather than artistic, method and purpose. Ogston’s watercolours occupy the middle ground between these two fields, and her depiction of plants within a lush, vegetation-filled background in some of her works is a technique not common in botanical art. By the time Ogston moved to Ōtepoti from Tāmaki Makaurau in 1888, hundreds of new types of plants, including flowers, had been introduced into the local environment by colonial settlers, whether on purpose or accidentally. New animals had been introduced too, that either ate indigenous vegetation or the insects and birds they depended on for pollination.

Some of the flowers painted by Ogston, such as kōwhai and puawānanga, would have remained common around Ōtepoti at the time. George Malcolm Thomson noted that some indigenous flowering plants, such as kotukutuku, tātarāmoa and tororaro, were becoming more abundant because introduced blackbirds and thrushes ate their fruit and distributed the seed. Although many others, such as tutu and turutu, he recorded, were locally disappearing.<sup>2</sup> Ngutukākā, today, is threatened with extinction in the wild, despite being commonly cultivated as a garden shrub.

---

1. Una Platts, *Nineteenth Century New Zealand Artists: A Guide and Handbook*, Christchurch: Avon Fine Prints, 1980, p. 184

2. George Malcolm Thomson, *A New Zealand Naturalist’s Calendar and Notes by the Wayside*, Dunedin: R. J. Stark & Co, 1909, p. 26-7



**KATE MARY OGSTON**

**Olearia arborescens** 1890

**Ringa ringa lily** 1890

Watercolour and gouache on paper

Hocken Collections Uare Taoka o Hākena

---