

RALPH HOTERE

The sound you hear is the sea – Kaitawa

1964

Acrylic on canvas

Collection of Charlotte Courtenay

On the evening of 24 May 1966 the last radio signal was received from the MV *Kaitawa*, a collier that was passing Cape Reinga en route to the Portland cement works in Whangarei. In heavy seas and gale winds the *Kaitawa* hit the Pandora Bank, then capsized and sank. All 29 crew members lost their lives.

The tragedy occurred close to the Hotere whānau home at Mitimiti and *The sound you hear is the sea – Kaitawa* was a gift from the artist to his sister, Charlotte. There is a discrepancy between the date inscribed on the work and that of the *Kaitawa* wreck, perhaps because Hotere signed and dated the work some time after its completion.

RALPH HOTERE

Untitled (London '64) 1964

Oil on canvas

Fletcher Trust Collection

Hotere was one of a number of Aotearoa New Zealand artists in London in the early and mid-1960s, including Marilyn Webb, Bill Culbert, Matt Pine, Pat Hanly, Billy Apple, John Parker, Don Peebles and John Drawbridge. In a letter to curator James Mack on 21 May 1964, Hotere described the difficulty of understanding and navigating London's art world and questioned his ability to find a space within it. Despite this personal struggle, he had a number of exhibitions, including *The London Group* at RBA (Royal Society of British Artists) Galleries in 1963, the solo exhibition *Ralph Hotere: Recent Work* at Middlesbrough City Art Gallery and *Young Commonwealth Artists* at Whitechapel Gallery, both in 1964. In the four years that Hotere lived and travelled in London and Europe, he produced over 400 paintings, a number of which found their way back home.

RALPH HOTERE

Polaris 1962

Oil and mixed media on hardboard

Private Collection, Auckland

Heavily layered, textured, scratched and scraped, Hotere's *Polaris* paintings carry a fighting spirit. *Polaris* (1962) was created in France while he held a residency at the Michael Károlyi Memorial Foundation and during the Cuban Missile Crisis. The title refers to the establishment of the British nuclear missile programme, announced that year. These paintings are early examples of Hotere, who had participated in anti-nuclear demonstrations in London, using his work as an act of protest. As the *Guardian* noted, when the *Sangro* and *Polaris* works were exhibited in London in 1964, 'In their own quiet, occasionally hard-edged way, many of these are undemonstratively anti-war, as are other pockets of resistance, set up in gallery 5, where Hotere shows his ten-strong tachiste "white writing" Polaris series....'*

*Guardian, 28 March 1964, p. 6.

RALPH HOTERE

Black Painting 1964

Acrylic on wood

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, purchased 1965

RALPH HOTERE

Long Red Line 1964

Acrylic on cardboard on plywood

Chartwell Collection, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, gift of
Bill Cocker (1939–2011) and Finola Cocker (1936–2019)

RALPH HOTERE

Black Painting: Human Rights Series 1964

Acrylic on wood

Collection of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery. Purchased 1983 with funds from the Dunedin Public Art Gallery Society

Black Painting 1964

Acrylic on wood

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, purchased 1965

In series such as *Algérie* (1962), *Polaris* (1962) and *Sangro* (1962–3), Hotere's political voice was carried through his expressive, gestural brushstrokes. By 1964, his formal language had shifted, with works such as the *Human Rights* series of that year, which explored the potential of hard-edged geometric abstraction. The title reflects Hotere's feelings about social crisis, injustice and prejudice.

In the *Human Rights* works, which are constructed from reused wooden television packing crates (between three and seven panels each), the surfaces are free of gesture, removing any sense of the artist's hand. In the restricted colour palette of red, blue and matte and gloss black, we see Hotere's first experimentations with black – the colour that would come to define his work. The use of shaped canvases or painting supports was a dominant form of abstract painting in the 1960s, pioneered by American artists such as Jasper Johns, Frank Stella, Ellsworth Kelly and Barnett Newman, among others.

These works were first shown at London's Whitechapel Gallery in the 1964 *Young Commonwealth Artists* exhibition. They were also included in his first exhibition after returning to Aotearoa New Zealand, *Ralph Hotere: New Paintings* at Barry Lett Gallery in Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland in 1965.

RALPH HOTERE

Untitled (mural design) 1965-66

Mixed media on board

University of Otago Embellishment Collection

In 1965, when a new University of Otago library was opened on the corner of Albany and Cumberland streets, five artists were invited to submit proposals for a large-scale mural to be permanently housed in the building. Among them were Colin McCahon and Ralph Hotere. Although the commission was ultimately awarded to McCahon, with his painting *Waterfall theme & variations* (1966), this study for Hotere's mural, *Untitled (mural design)*, is also housed in the University's Embellishment Collection.

MARTI FRIEDLANDER

(1928–2016) England, New Zealand

Ralph Hotere – The Artist's Studio, Port

Chalmers 1979

Black and white photograph

Collection of Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetū,
purchased 1998

RALPH HOTERE

Godwit/Kuaka 1977

Enamel on board

Chartwell Collection, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki,
gift of Auckland International Airport Ltd, 1997

RALPH HOTERE

Black Painting 1967

Enamel on metal with perspex

Collection of Dame Jenny Gibbs

Black Painting is one of several breakthrough works created by Hotere between 1967-1968. Over this time he settled on the colour black as a principal source of inspiration and began developing his *Black Painting* series, which would occupy him over the following years. The use of thin strips of glowing perspex in this painting anticipate the precisely painted vertical and circular pinstripe lines that pierce the black backgrounds of future series. *Black Painting* highlights his move towards a refined minimal style that he resolved after his return from Europe in 1965. From then on black would become a favoured theme.

RALPH HOTERE

Requiem 1973-74

Lacquer on hardboard

On loan from the Arts Council of New Zealand Toi Aotearoa (Creative New Zealand)

Requiem is the mass to farewell the dead in Roman Catholicism, the faith in which Hotere grew up. His *Requiem* series began in 1973 with *Requiem for A.W.*, a tribute to mark the death of his friend, the composer and musician, Anthony Watson (1933–73). The *Requiem* paintings are contemplative and reflective. The repetitive vertical lines recall the rhythm of the mass as the congregation prays together. When this series was first exhibited in 1974, Hotere acknowledged his use of text, both the Latin of the traditional mass and a Māori translation from the Psalms.

Many paintings in the series feature highly polished black lacquer surfaces overlaid with repetitive vertical pinstripe lines. The interplay between these elements creates complexity, with some lines reverberating into the background and others pulsing forwards. In this work Hotere focuses on a muted blue, indigo and violet colour spectrum, creating a sombre energy. This subdued field is pierced with a single bright orange stripe on the left-hand panel, expressing the contrast between darkness and joy that characterises this series.

RALPH HOTERE

Black Paintings 1968

Brolite lacquer on board

Collection Govett-Brewster Art Gallery

One of Hotere's most significant works, and among the largest he made at this time, the seven-panel *Black Paintings* was completed in 1968. It combines his growing interest in darkness and light. Each black panel holds an elegantly painted pinstripe cross representing the spectrum of red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet – the seven colours that collectively make up light. This contrast between black and colour sits at the heart of this series of works, reminding the viewer that Hotere's *Black Paintings* are as much about light as they are about darkness.

RALPH HOTERE

Black Sculptures 1969

Brolite lacquer on steel

Collection Govett-Brewster Art Gallery. Purchased with the assistance of Fitzroy Engineering Ltd, Taranaki Savings Bank and the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council of New Zealand in 1970

During the late 1960s and early 1970s, Hotere was preoccupied with line, from his *Zero* series through to his *Requiem* paintings. These two perfectly formed steel columns, *Black Sculptures*, were built by an engineering firm to Hotere's specifications. Their steel surface has been spray-painted with colour and pinstripe lines. The vertical columns, with their emphasis on straight edges and sharp lines, have a factory precision. Order and exactness reign.

Although there is a minimal quality to Hotere's *Black Paintings* and *Black Sculptures*, his long-time friend and collaborator, the poet Bill Manhire, felt 'uncomfortable with the word minimalism, which seems to imply a closing down of options. A sparseness of utterance that produces endless potential and possibilities.'*

*Bill Manhire, quoted in Gregory O'Brien, 'Some paintings I am frequently asked about: talking with Bill Manhire about Ralph Hotere', *Landfall* 191, March 1996, p.191.

RALPH HOTERE

**Black Painting: From 'Malady' a poem by
Bill Manhire** 1970

Acrylic on canvas

Collection Te Manawa Art Society Incorporated

A range of artworks and other projects was borne out of the friendship between Bill Manhire and Hotere, including works on paper, paintings, poems and limited edition books. *Black Painting: From 'Malady' a poem by Bill Manhire* is part of a series of works based on concrete poetry. Manhire's *Malady* poems consist of the words 'Malady', 'Melody' and 'My Lady', which, when reset, take on permutations of meaning. *Malady* is a person suffering in love; *Melody* is the expression of the condition; *My Lady* is the person yearned for.

RALPH HOTERE

Black Painting 1969

Acrylic on canvas

Collection of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery. Given 1997 by Mrs Marion McQueen in memory of Ewen Garth McQueen

Black Painting 1969

Acrylic on canvas

Collection of Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetū, purchased 1969

RALPH HOTERE

Malady Panels 1971

Acrylic on canvas

Collection of Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetū,
purchased with assistance from the Queen Elizabeth II Arts
Council, 1979

Black on black – *Malady Panels* comprises seven canvas panels of light-absorbing darkness. Each supports a scribed circle, the width of the canvas, in a colour from the spectrum of a rainbow. The bottom third of each panel includes a column of repeated text in which the stanza-like columns ‘Malady’ and ‘Melody’ alternate along the work, creating a rhythm. The final panel ends with the singularly placed ‘My Lady’.

Part of a series that uses the work of poet Bill Manhire, *Malady Panels* demonstrates Hotere’s ability to expand the practice of both poet and painter, and provide a space for contemplation. In 2017 *Malady Panels* were exhibited at *documenta 14*, in the Neue Galerie, Kassel, Germany; Hotere was one of only three artists/art collectives from Aotearoa New Zealand to have work selected for this international show. His inclusion sent a strong signal about the international relevance and stature of his work. This was not the first time Hotere had been a presence in Kassel. In 1999 he and Bill Culbert had collaborated on *Blackwater* (1999) for *Toi Toi Toi: Drei Künstlergenerationen aus Neuseeland, Three Generations of Artists from New Zealand*, at the Museum Fridericianum.

RALPH HOTERE

Yellow Triptych 2001-03

Paint on zincalume with lead-headed nails

Collection of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa

Tongarewa, purchased 2004

Yellow Triptych is the most recent work in *Ātete*, representing a major series from the last phase of Hotere's oeuvre. The works from this period build on the formality of the *Black Paintings* of the late 1960s, bringing the use of black, the colour spectrum and the cross motif together with his employment of industrial materials and techniques. Across three sheets of corrugated steel, sections of metal have been peeled back to reveal two vertical crosses. As in many of Hotere's works, there is an interplay between light and dark, the solid and the void.

Hotere first used corrugated iron in the early 1980s, to carry messages of protest in response to the proposed smelter at Aramoana. As time went on, he peeled, ground and torched this commonplace industrial material, to create a variety of textures and finishes. The abstract potential of this coated corrugated steel became one of the abiding concerns of Hotere's late works, connecting him to his past and opening up new artistic opportunities.

RALPH HOTERE

Sangro Panel 1962-63

Acrylic on board, photograph

Collection of Charlotte Courtenay

Whakapapa is generally recognised as meaning genealogy or the reciting of genealogy, and extends to include the reciting of histories and cultural narratives. It is vital to understanding te ao Māori, the Māori worldview, and relating to it. It gives meaning to life.

This modestly sized but potent *Sangro Panel* encapsulates the focus of a particular whakapapa. It is a lament for Hotere's older brother, Jack, who has been taken from the world and is clearly missed. The numbers listed in this painting – 23, 12, 43 – represent the day, month and year of Jack Hotere's death. This painting, which has been loaned by Hotere's sister, is unique in the use of an applied photograph of the artist, taken in 1962 at his brother's grave.

RALPH HOTERE

Sangro Panel 1962-63

Acrylic on board on card

Dunedin Public Art Gallery loan collection. Private
Collection, Christchurch

Sangro Panel #14 1962-63

Acrylic on panel/board

Private Collection

RALPH HOTERE

Sangro River Landscape 1962

Acrylic and found material on board

Seifert Family Collection

RALPH HOTERE

Sangro Triptych: panel no. 7 1963-64

Synthetic polymer paint on plywood and cardboard
Hocken Collections Uare Taoka o Hākena, University of
Otago. Purchased from Dawson's Gallery, Dunedin, 1973

In this work, one of the final paintings from the *Sangro* series completed in 1964, Hotere assembled three found panels he had been working on individually. With its minimal approach and emphasis on just red and black, *Sangro triptych: panel no. 7* links this first *Sangro* series with Hotere's *Human Rights* series, which occupied him throughout 1964. The numbers representing the ages of the buried soldiers at the Sangro River War Cemetery have a subdued presence in this work; the focus is instead placed on the colours black and red, representing mourning and blood.

RALPH HOTERE

Winter Landscape, Sangro River, Italy 1963

Acrylic on masonite

Collection of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery. Purchased
1972 with funds from the Dunedin Public Art Gallery Society

Winter Landscape, Sangro River, Italy departs in form from other paintings made following Hotere's first visit to the Sangro River War Cemetery, where his brother Jack is buried. Although the work shares elements with other Sangro paintings, here text is introduced as a major feature – the word 'SANGRO' repeated across the centre of the work in a percussive, almost violent rhythm. The composition of *Winter Landscape* centres on an abstracted Union Jack, which has been described as a 'parody',* or could be seen as reflection on the British command under which these soldiers from Aotearoa fought and died.

* Gregory O'Brien, *Hotere: Out the Black Window: Ralph Hotere's work with New Zealand poets*, Godwit in association with City Gallery Publishing, 1997, p. 27.

RALPH HOTERE

Sangro painting 1963

Acrylic on canvas

Hotere & Naish Collection, Auckland

RALPH HOTERE

Sangro No. 30 1963

Mixed media and oil on board

Fletcher Trust Collection

RALPH HOTERE

Untitled (XXII) 1964

Oil on canvas

Hocken Collections Uare Taoka o Hākena, University of Otago. Purchased from the International Art Centre, Auckland, 2017

RALPH HOTERE

Port Chalmers series #8 1972

Acrylic on canvas

Private Collection

Port Chalmers Painting '72 No.16 1972

Acrylic on canvas

Collection of The Suter Art Gallery Te Aratoi o Whakatū:
purchased with the assistance of the Queen Elizabeth II
Arts Council in 1974

Port Chalmers Painting No.10 1972

Acrylic on canvas

Collection of Dame Jenny Gibbs

The paintings in the *Port Chalmers* series are among Hotere's most minimal. As these three *Port Chalmers* paintings demonstrate, Hotere used restriction to explore the potential of the stripped back composition. The canvas surfaces absorb light and slowly reveal their subtleties. These works reflect his interest in American painter Ad Reinhardt (1913–1967), whose own abstraction was defined by severe restriction.

Although the *Port Chalmers* paintings are grounded in a resolute abstraction, the title also anchors Hotere's works to the landscape, which perhaps can be glimpsed through the smallest hint of a horizon, or the trace of light across dark water.

RALPH HOTERE

Black Phoenix 1984-88

Burnt wood and metal

Collection of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa

Tongarewa. Purchased 1988 with Mary Buick Bequest funds

RALPH HOTERE

Lo negro sobre lo oro 1992

Mixed media on glass

Collection of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa.

Purchased 1997 with New Zealand Lottery Grants Board funds

Hotere first used recycled window frames in his paintings in the 1980s, marking a 'view out' from his studio at Observation Point, Port Chalmers. Carrying this formal device forward to the 1990s, Hotere returned to exploring the nuances of light and dark, through works dominated by black and gold. This approach, represented here by *Lo negro sobre lo oro* (Spanish for 'the black over the gold') and *Night Window, Careys Bay*, speaks strongly of place and spirituality. Painted on glass panels from the reverse side, these works are activated by their environment – reflections, of viewers and of spaces, exist temporarily within the void Hotere has created in black and shimmering gold.

RALPH HOTERE

Night Window, Careys Bay 1995

Acrylic on glass, gold leaf, gold dust, window frame
Collection of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery. Purchased 2000
with funds from the Dunedin Public Art Gallery Society

‘[B]oth Hotere and Manhire recognise that darkness also happens to be a space in which people live – it is the darkness of night-time, of sleeping and dreaming, or of sitting around a household lamp, talking and drinking in the company of others.’*

In this work, *Night Window, Careys Bay*, Hotere takes his title from Bill Manhire’s poem of the same name, which reflects on time the two friends shared in Hotere’s home.

* Gregory O’Brien, *Hotere: Out the Black Window: Ralph Hotere’s work with New Zealand poets*, Godwit in association with City Gallery Publishing, 1997, p. 119.

Night Windows, Carey’s Bay

*You write a long poem
about how you are sorting yourself out at last
and how at last you say
there’ll never be another word
about departure. Look
around you how the moon
tattoos the spaces all around you,
it isn’t even dark. In the house
of doors, the doors are open.
In the house of glass, the glass lets in the light.*

Bill Manhire: Selected Poems, Victoria University Press, 2012, published with permission.

RALPH HOTERE

Paperchase 1984

Acrylic and paper on stainless steel, wood
Private Collection, Christchurch

Polaris 1962

Oil on canvas
Harte Family, Waiheke Island

Hotere's *Polaris* series were produced in response to the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962. The *Polaris* nuclear submarine operating system, which became operational in the United States in 1960, was later used by the British from 1968 to 1996. The earlier of these two works is a strong example of Hotere's early painterly abstraction and was included as a key example of this series in his 1974 exhibition, *Ralph Hotere: A Survey 1963–73*, which toured galleries across Aotearoa New Zealand. The later work seen here, *Paperchase*, evidences Hotere's continued anti-nuclear position. It was made in 1984, the year Prime Minister David Lange banned nuclear-powered or nuclear-armed ships from New Zealand ports or waters. The 1987 New Zealand Nuclear Free Zone, Disarmament, and Arms Control Act made this the only country in the world to successfully enshrine the anti-nuclear campaign in legislation.

RALPH HOTERE

Cruciform II [From: *Human Rights* series]

1964

Acrylic on wood

Collection of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa.

Purchased 1981 with New Zealand Lottery Board funds

The 1960s was a turbulent and divisive decade, defined by moments of global protest and social activism, including the civil rights movement and the opposition to American involvement in the Vietnam War. In his *Human Rights* series Hotere explored repression, prejudice and racial inequality using colour, geometric forms and shaped painting supports. He often worked in series, exploring a concept across multiple unified forms. The choice of red, blue and black can be seen as a political statement. Red and blue carry political connotations of left- and right-wing ideologies. And, as art historian Kriselle Baker suggests, these are ‘arguably the only works within Hotere’s oeuvre in which his use of black might be taken as a political statement’.*

* Kriselle Baker, ‘A World of Black and Light: Ralph Hotere 1968–1977’, PhD dissertation, University of Auckland, 2009, p. 33.

RALPH HOTERE

Black Painting: Requiem for M.L.K. 1969

Brolite lacquer on hardboard

Collection of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery. Purchased
1970 with funds from the Dunedin Public Art Gallery Society

Black Painting: Requiem for M.L.K predates Hotere's *Requiem* series, which he began in 1973. It marks the death of the American civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr, who was assassinated in April 1968 before Hotere took up his Frances Hodgkins Fellowship at the University of Otago in 1969. The actions and words of King who, along with others, 'fought to end the long night of racial injustice',* resonated with his own strong opinions on social justice and equal rights here in Aotearoa New Zealand. These were most effectively articulated in his *Human Rights* and *Black Union Jack* series.

*Martin Luther King Jr, Nobel Peace prize acceptance speech, Oslo, 10 December 1964.

RALPH HOTERE

This is a Black Union Jack 1979

Synthetic polymer paint on canvas

Hocken Collections Uare Taoka o Hākena, University of Otago. Purchased from Ralph Hotere, 1980

Painted two years before the 1981 Springbok tour of Aotearoa New Zealand, this large banner, dedicated to the New Zealand Rugby Football Union, subverts the Union Jack and what it symbolises for Hotere. The crosses of England, Scotland and Wales that make up the flag's design have been combined with the initials 'NZ' painted in black and white, reminiscent of the graphic design for the 1974 Commonwealth Games. *This is a Black Union Jack* relates directly to the NZRFU's decision to proceed with two All Black tours to apartheid South Africa during the 1970s, in which Māori players were defined as honorary whites. For the 1960 All Black tour to South Africa, the NZRFU had selected no Māori players, which meant that the team complied with the republic's segregationist policies. This series of works also, more broadly, addresses bicultural relations here in Aotearoa, particularly Māori grievances about honouring the Treaty of Waitangi.

RALPH HOTERE

Untitled (South African Flag) 1981

Mixed media on South African flag

Collection Govett-Brewster Art Gallery. Purchased from
Monica Brewster Bequest in 1981

When he heard, in prison on Robben Island, that protests in Aotearoa New Zealand had stopped the Springbok–Waikato rugby game in Hamilton in July 1981, anti-apartheid leader Nelson Mandela said it was ‘as if the sun had come out’.

Hotere had attended anti-Springbok tour demonstrations and this work continued that protest. It features the poem ‘O Africa’ by his close friend Hone Tuwhare, whose own work reflected many similar concerns and issues. The flag, *Untitled*, had an interesting journey through different contexts and locations in challenging times. It was held for a time in the Hocken Collections Uare Taoka o Hākena at the University of Otago before Hotere donated it to the 1981 Parihaka Centennial Exhibition and Art Auction, where it was purchased by the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery. That this work came to support and celebrate one of this country’s paramount symbols of peace, Parihaka, in such a politically charged year demonstrates Hotere’s commitment to human rights.

RALPH HOTERE

This is a Black Union Jack 1980

Acrylic on paper

Collection Te Manawa Museums Trust

In *This is a Black Union Jack*, Hotere's suggested flag design for the New Zealand Rugby Football Union, a swastika emerges from the letters 'NZ' and the composition of the traditional flag. The work is a blunt commentary on Hotere's views about the NZRFU's collusion with South African apartheid that meant Māori All Blacks could tour that country only as honorary whites.

RALPH HOTERE

February, May and the Birds of Ice. The Moon Drowns in its Voices of Water 1970

Pigment dyes on alkyd resin on canvas

Collection of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery. Purchased 1974 with funds from the Dunedin Public Art Gallery Society

Hotere has often been quoted as saying: 'There are very few things I can say about my work that are better than saying nothing.'

Elegant, spare and powerful, *February, May and the Birds of Ice. The Moon Drowns in its Voices of Water* takes its name from an untitled poem by Bill Manhire. In this monumental painting, Hotere lays out basic human values in the simplest terms – the words 'LOVE' and 'HATE' gradually emerging from a composition of shape, line and tone.

RALPH HOTERE

Comet over Mt Taranaki and Parihaka

c.1972

Acrylic and ink on paper

Collection of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa. Purchased 2000 with New Zealand Lottery Grants Board funds

On 4 October 1882, a year after the attack on Parihaka, a comet suddenly appeared in the sky. Auahi roa and auahi tūroa, meaning long smoke trails, were two names for comets. The striking vision was a tohu, a signifier, a blessing upon the people of Parihaka and a suggestion of better times under the guardianship of their tūpuna (ancestors). Hotere had seen a photograph of the comet above Parihaka – the phenomenon was photographed all over the world – as had his friend Colin McCahon. Both artists made works in response to the event; Hotere's pays modest homage to McCahon's mode of abstraction.

RALPH HOTERE

He waka eke noa. It is a canoe which belongs to no one 1972

Acrylic and ink on paper

Collection of The Suter Art Gallery Te Aratoi o Whakatū:
gifted by the Botting family in 2012

The whakataukī ‘He waka eke noa’ has several variations of meaning, depending on the context. Hotere uses ‘it is a canoe which belongs to no one’, indicating an absence of authority of one person over another. For a community, this establishes an understanding of accountability towards one another in the present, despite past grievances. By 1881 the population at Parihaka, founded in the 1860s, had grown into the thousands, due to the wars, confiscations and colonial occupations that had driven Māori throughout Aotearoa New Zealand from their own lands. Putting grievances aside as a matter of survival also established a new strength and mana through unity. In Hotere’s composition, the suggestion of a horizon and the earthy palette may allude to the whenua, the land that will sustain the people if they work together.

RALPH HOTERE

**Ka ngaro reoreo tangata kiki e manu. No
human voice – Only the voice of birds** 1972

Acrylic and ink on paper

Collection of The Suter Art Gallery Te Aratoi o Whakatū:
gifted by the Botting family in 2012

RALPH HOTERE

Te Whiti o Rongomai c.1972

Graphite and ink on paper

Collection Waikato Museum Te Whare Taonga o Waikato

RALPH HOTERE

Te Whiti drawing–painting 1972

Acrylic and ink on paper

Collection of Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetū,
William A Sutton bequest, 2000

Throughout the *Te Whiti* series Hotere worked alongside writer John Caselberg and poet Cilla McQueen to select texts from John White's *Ancient History of the Māori: His Mythology and Traditions* (1887), Dick Scott's *The Parihaka Story* (1954) and Caselberg's own *The Voice of the Māori* (1969). The text in *Te Whiti drawing–painting* comes from a lament in Caselberg's book concerned with acknowledging past grievances. The writer also looks to a future where 'Darkness will not always cover Waitara'. Throughout the series a thick sweeping of black overlays and smudges the purer colours, denying that which exists underneath, fighting to reappear.

**Te Whiti Series – Tukua mai he kaponga
oneone ki au. Hai Tangi. Send me a
handful of soil that I may weep over it** 1972

Synthetic polymer paint and black ink on paper

Collection of Bridie Lonie

RALPH HOTERE

The Parihaka Song 1972

Gouache on paper

Collection Waikato Museum Te Whare Taonga o Waikato

The Parihaka Song was composed by Te Whetu Moehau during the construction of the whare runanga Miti Mai te Arero, a European-style council chamber, for Te Whiti in 1882. As a rangatira within the leadership at Parihaka, Te Whetu held a significant position, and the song is his response to a slight against his name. He had remained at Parihaka to welcome Ngāti Ruanui leader, military leader, prophet and peacemaker Tītokowaru, while other family members attended his niece's tangi in Waitara. However, gossip said it was an affair that kept him away from Waitara. The song was his response to the slander and a plea to reflect on one's own actions.

RALPH HOTERE

**Te Whiti: The seagulls cry mournfully over
Tapu-te-Rangi** 1972

Synthetic polymer paint and black ink on paper

Hocken Collections Uare Taoka o Hākena, University of

Otago. Purchased from Dawson's Gallery, Dunedin, 1973

RALPH HOTERE

Te Whiti 1971

Acrylic on paper on board

Private Collection, Dunedin

RALPH HOTERE

**Te Whiti Series – Tukua mai he kaponga
oneone ki au. Hai Tangi. Send me a
handful of soil that I may weep over it** 1972

Synthetic polymer paint and black ink on paper

Collection of Bridie Lonie

RALPH HOTERE

(1931–2013) New Zealand

BILL CULBERT

(1935–2019) New Zealand

P.R.O.P 1991

Corrugated iron and neon tube lights

Collection of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery. Purchased

1991 with funds from the Dunedin Public Art Gallery Society

RALPH HOTERE

Rosemary 1984

Acrylic on loose canvas

Collection of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery. Purchased
1985 with funds from the Dunedin Public Art Gallery Society

The landscapes of Aramoana and Port Chalmers were important to Hotere. In *Rosemary*, a series of red and green 'lights' disturb the darkness of the painting, evoking the port and starboard channel markers that connect Port Chalmers to the Otago Harbour entrance. This work expresses Hotere's opposition to a proposed aluminium smelter at Aramoana, evoked in an intense red column aggressively occupying the heart of the composition. 'Rosemary', the herb of remembrance, stands above the words 'Nineteen Eighty Four', referring to George Orwell's dystopian novel. This text operates both as title and date. There is a double message of caution in Hotere's painting, echoing the 'business versus community' overtones of the Aramoana smelter protests and the need to remember.

RALPH HOTERE

Dawn/Water Poem 1986

Acrylic on canvas

Collection of Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetū,
purchased with assistance from the Queen Elizabeth II Arts
Council, 1986

Painted in the wake of the 1985 Rainbow Warrior bombing, *Dawn/Water Poem* is a visual conversation with a poem by Bill Manhire. Hotere scrawls 'MURUROA' over his rendering of the poet's *Dawn/Water* – a political addition that connects the painting to a wider tide of protest against French nuclear testing on Mururoa Atoll and elsewhere in the South Pacific. With its searing colour, and the brutal X across the centre of the composition, *Dawn/Water Poem* seems borne out of the fury of protest and the threat of nuclear destruction.

RALPH HOTERE

Black Rainbow 1988

Stainless steel, wood, acrylic (screen)

Collection of Dame Jenny Gibbs

The *Black Rainbow* series builds on Hotere's response to the bombing of the Greenpeace vessel *Rainbow Warrior*. On one side of this *Black Rainbow* screen, the artist has noted the 1985 date of the attack at Auckland's Marsden Wharf, in which photographer Fernando Pereira was drowned. The 1987 date on the flanking screen marks the scuttling of the *Rainbow Warrior* at Matauri Bay, Northland. The recycled timber, stainless steel and acrylic paint are all materials that recur in Hotere's work, as does the sacred heart symbol depicted here. Also seen in *Rosemary* (1984), the heart has been described, in relation to Hotere's anti-nuclear works, as symbol of 'both the sacredness and the crucifixion of the landscape'.*

* Kriselle Baker, 'A World of Black and Light: Ralph Hotere 1968–1977', PhD Dissertation, University of Auckland, 2009, p. 192.

RALPH HOTERE

Aramoana – Pathway to the Sea 1982

Mixed media

Rotorua Museum Te Whare Taonga o Te Arawa

*The objectors are wearing gumboots and outdoor clothes in contrast to the executives who enter in business suits... The executives listen with abstracted expressions, fend off a few hecklers and escape in a black limousine.**

Throughout the 1970s several proposals were brought forward to develop an aluminium smelter on ecologically sensitive land near the coastal settlement of Aramoana. The most high profile of these emerged in 1979, and by the end of 1980 the South Pacific Aluminium consortium confirmed Aramoana as the preferred site. Until the proposal was largely abandoned in 1982, the smelter was a deeply polarising issue, pitting different factions of the community against one another.

Hotere, who lived in nearby Carey's Bay, was an active opponent of the smelter. This protest filtered into many of his works, with his series of corrugated iron paintings, of which *Aramoana – Pathway to the Sea* is the most striking. This series extended from single-panel works to a major ten-part installation that is now too fragile to travel for exhibition. *Aramoana – Pathway to the Sea* mingles spattered and stencilled paint, corroded iron, beaten lead-headed nails and weathered timber. This combination of elements helps to connect the work to a specific place and time.

* Cilla McQueen, 'Dark Matter' in *Ralph Hotere Black Light*, Te Papa Press, 2000, pp. 43–4.

RALPH HOTERE

Oputae, Blue Gums and Daisies Falling

1989

Blowtorch on corrugated stainless steel

Collection of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery. Purchased
1990 with funds from the Dunedin Public Art Gallery Society

In 1989 the Port Otago Authority set out to excavate the hill on which Hotere's studio, a place of communal warmth and great artistic output, sat at Observation Point, above Kōpūtai. A significant Ngāi Tahu reserve, Kōpūtai is also the burial place of the rangatira Kohi, cousin to the rangatira Te Matenga Taiaroa. The studio looked directly out past the mouth of Otago Harbour, flanked to the left by Aramoana and with Taiaroa Heads, which houses the pā Pukekura, on the right. Hotere fought to retain his property and the cultural heritage that surrounded it.

In many of his works at this time, Hotere uses the 'cut' as a formal and conceptual means of expression. The removal of the letter 'K' from Kōpūtai demonstrates the terror of stealthy capitalist intrusion on customary lands. Oputai/Oputae is not a word that exists on any given map, or in Ngāi Tahu cultural memory – it is not a name, it is a protest coming from an artist well versed in political action. Hotere named his sculpture garden Oputae. The house and studio are now gone, yet the cultural memory of Hotere and Kōpūtai remains significant in the minds of the surrounding papatipu rūnanga of Ōtākou, Moeraki and Puketeraki, and of all Ngāi Tahu.

RALPH HOTERE

Oputae 1989

Lithograph on paper

Courtesy of PaperGraphica, Christchurch

Oputae/Cut 1989

Lithograph on paper

Courtesy of PaperGraphica, Christchurch

Hotere had worked at Observation Point, overlooking Kōpūtai, Port Chalmers and the wider expanse of Otago Harbour, since acquiring his first studio on Aurora Terrace in the early 1970s. He later moved to a studio further along the terrace. Hotere came to identify strongly with this landscape and the expansive view up the harbour towards Aramoana. The battle for the preservation of Observation Point became a key subject of his work in the late 1980s and early 1990s; this series of lithographs carried his concern to a wide audience. Works on paper, including editioned prints and drawings, were always an important aspect of his practice.

RALPH HOTERE

Untitled 1965

Screenprint on paper

Courtesy of the University of Auckland Art Collection

Yellow on white 1965

Acrylic on paper

Private Collection, Auckland

On Vietnam II 1965

Acrylic on paper

Epsom Trust, Auckland

While in London and Europe, Hotere produced a large number of works on paper, including paintings, prints and drawings – media to which he would be dedicated to throughout his career. In this group of works he is experimenting with a new visual language that explores line, colour and abstracted geometric forms.

While he was overseas, seeing paintings by such artists as Ad Reinhardt, Henri Matisse, Antoni Tàpies and Rembrandt van Rijn, as well as the work of his Central School of Art teachers, Cecil Collins and William Turnbull, exposed Hotere to new and experimental approaches. The influence of Turnbull (1922–2012), his painting, etching and design teacher, was particularly important. Connections can be made between Turnbull's visual language, such as the depiction of geometric shapes, use of monochromatic colours (including black) and experimental use of materials (including corrugated iron), and Hotere's practice.

RALPH HOTERE

Untitled 1965

Acrylic on paper

Collection of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery. Purchased
2020 with funds from the Dunedin Public Art Gallery Society

Red Square Four 1965

Acrylic on paper

Collection of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery. Purchased
2020 with funds from the Dunedin Public Art Gallery Society

RALPH HOTERE

Vive Aramoana, pathway to the sea 1979-80

Watercolour, oil and ink on paper

Collection of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa.

Purchased 1981 with Ellen Eames Collection funds

RALPH HOTERE

Return to Sangro 1978

Acrylic on loose canvas

Collection Waikato Museum Te Whare Taonga o Waikato

A Return to Sangro 1978

Synthetic polymer paint on canvas

Hocken Collections Uare Taoka o Hākena, University of Otago. Purchased from Bosshard Galleries, Dunedin, 1979

RALPH HOTERE

A Return to Sangro 1978

Oil on unstretched canvas

Collection of the Eastern Southland Gallery

In 1978 Hotere received a Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council Fellowship, which allowed him to return to Europe, revisiting Italy, Spain and the South of France. Travelling with his then wife, poet Cilla McQueen, and their daughter Andrea, Hotere returned to his brother's grave at the Sangro River War Cemetery. Unlike the 1962–4 *Sangro* series, the *Return to Sangro* works are much larger paintings on unstretched canvas. Although each painting still includes a sequence of numbers representing the ages of the dead soldiers, these works are dominated by a large white cross, referencing the headstones at the cemetery. As McQueen notes in a diary entry from that time, the 'hundreds of impeccable white gravestones on the mown grass create strobe-like effects in our vision as we walk down the lines'.*

Expressionistic in their approach, these works include entries from McQueen's diaries as well as sections of the Māori poem used in the 1977 *Godwit/Kuaka* mural – a poem that speaks of journeys and cycles of departure and return. This is a poignant thought, considering those soldiers that never returned home from battle.

* Cilla McQueen, 'Dark Matter' in *Ralph Hotere Black Light*, Te Papa Press, 2000, p. 45.

Colour rough for Auckland International Airport Mural

1977

Lacquer and paint hardboard

Hocken Collections Uare Taoka o Hākena, University of Otago.

Given by the artist, Dunedin, 1978

Hotere created this schematic plan as part of his proposal for the mural *Flight of the Godwit* (later retitled *Godwit/Kuaka*). It includes alternative text for the work, which had changed by the time the artist realised the final mural for Auckland International Airport in 1977. Hotere also notes his planned materials, proposing nitrocellulose lacquer on hardboard. The large circles that occupy the centre of the final painting are absent from this plan, their position indicated by white lines on the black ground.

In this colour rough Hotere includes works from *The Song of the Shining Cuckoo* – a poem he learned from his father and featured in the Test Pieces completed in advance of the final mural. Hotere also shared *The Song of the Shining Cuckoo* with Colin McCahon, who would go on to use versions of these words in his own paintings. (Examples are presently on display in the exhibition *Colin McCahon: A Constant Flow of Light* at Hocken Collections.)

GARY BLACKMAN (b. 1929), New Zealand

Aramoana 1980

Gelatin silver on paper

Collection of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery. Purchased 2004 with funds from the Dunedin Public Art Gallery Society.

A 1974 proposal to build an aluminium smelter at Aramoana was met with strong and unwavering opposition and led to the establishment of the Save Aramoana Group that year. Ralph Hotere was a highly active participant in the protests of the early 1980s and the subject was present in many of his paintings from this time.

As part of the proposal process, a large sign outlining details of the smelter was installed on the site. This was eventually vandalised with a large splash of black paint that rendered it almost illegible – an act of protest memorialised in Gary Blackman's photograph *Aramoana* (1980). In a letter written on the back of an exhibition flyer that featured this image, Hotere wrote to his friend Bill Manhire that it was 'probably the best painting I've done in 30 years. It took me 2 seconds.'^{*}

^{*}Quoted in Kriselle Baker, *The Desire of the Line: Ralph Hotere Figurative Works*, Auckland University Press, 2005, p. x.

RALPH HOTERE

above left: **Drawing for *Port Chalmers Paintings: No. 1*** 1972

Pencil on paper

Hocken Collections Uare Taoka o Hākena, University of Otago.
Purchased with Hocken Endowment Funds from Dawson's Gallery,
Dunedin, 1973

below left: **Two Drawings: Working drawing for *Human Rights*
*paintings; drawing for *Black Painting, Human Rights series****
1964–65

Ballpoint, felt pen and pencil on card

Collection of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery. Given 1985 anonymously

centre: **Working drawing for *Malady*** 1970

Pencil on paper

Hocken Collections Uare Taoka o Hākena, University of Otago.
Given by the artist, Dunedin, 1970

right: **Working drawing for *Black Painting*** 1969

Pencil, fibre-tipped pen and ballpoint pen on paper

Hocken Collections Uare Taoka o Hākena, University of Otago.
Given by the artist, Dunedin, 1969

above left: **Untitled Drawing of Two Nude Women** c. 1971

Ink on paper

Collection of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery. Given 1985 by Mrs A. W. M. Hall

below left: **Projection slides for theatre set: Globe Theatre, Dunedin** 1970

Ink on acetate

Collection of the Eastern Southland Gallery. Gift of Patric Carey

above right: **Anatomy of a Dance** 1975

Pen and ink and Letraset on paper

Hocken Collections Uare Taoka o Hākena, University of Otago.

Given by the artist, Dunedin, 1975

below right: JOHN MILLER

Tukaki wharenuī, Te Kaha-nui-a-tiki marae, Te Kaha. Marilyn Webb and Ralph Hotere. Brown Rewiti (right) June 1973

Digital print, courtesy of John Miller

Although he is best known for abstraction, Hotere made figurative drawings throughout his life, amassing a major body of such works focused on the female figure. Among these is a discrete series of *Song Cycle* drawings: stylised sketches of dancers drawn from memory after viewing live performances. Hotere expertly captures movement, conveying the fluid energy of a body in motion. In some of the *Song Cycle* drawings bands of parallel lines both gesture towards garments and connect to the formal language of Hotere's abstraction.

Hotere includes examples of these gestural figure drawings in his poster and programme designs for Sound Movement Theatre. His *Song Cycle* banners, which are on display in *Ātete*, were developed as part of his planned set design, though this did not eventuate. Instead the artist contributed set of painted slides that were projected onto a backdrop at moments during the performance. Hotere's experimental painted projections were also a feature of other stage productions, including examples seen in this case, which were designed for a 1970 production of *Temptations of Oedipus* at Dunedin's Globe Theatre.

above left: **Ralph Hotere** 1994.

Digital print, photograph courtesy of the Otago Daily Times

centre left: BILL MANHIRE and RALPH HOTERE

Pine

Dunedin: Otakou Press, 2005

Courtesy of McNab Collection, Dunedin Public Libraries

above centre: HONE TUWHARE **Sap-wood & Milk**

Cover design by Ralph Hotere

Dunedin: Caveman Press, 1972

Courtesy of McNab Collection, Dunedin Public Libraries

centre right: **Ascent: A Journal of the Arts in New Zealand, vol.1, no.3, April 1969 Cover design by Ralph Hotere**

The Caxton Press, Christchurch. Collection of Dunedin Public Art Gallery library

below right: BILL MANHIRE and RALPH HOTERE

Malady 1997

Wellington [N.Z.]: Wedge Press. Private collection

Landfall 84, December 1967

Landfall 94, June 1970

Landfall 100, December 1971

Cover designs by Ralph Hotere

The Caxton Press, Christchurch.

Collection of Dunedin Public Art Gallery library

Throughout his career, Hotere produced many illustrations, cover designs and other printed material, as both commissions and collaborative projects with friends, fellow artists, poets and writers. The material in this case provides a glimpse into Hotere's exploration of the graphic potential of line and colour and highlights his sustained interest in illustration. He contributed to numerous issues of the literary journal *Landfall*, including the cover images for numbers 84, 94 and 100. He produced cover designs for books by Hone Tuwhare, Ian Wedde, O. E. Middleton and Bill Manhire, among others. In the early 1970s, Hotere's *Pine* series and his *Malady* works were both made in direct response to poems of the same name by Bill Manhire.

RALPH HOTERE

(1931–2013) New Zealand

BILL CULBERT

(1935–2019) New Zealand

P.R.O.P 1991

Corrugated iron and neon tube lights

Collection of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery. Purchased

1991 with funds from the Dunedin Public Art Gallery Society

Ralph Hotere 1974 [33 minutes]

Directed by Sam Pillsbury

Produced by The National Film Unit

Courtesy of Te Rua Mahara o te Kāwantanga | Archives

New Zealand

RALPH HOTERE

Untitled c.1964

Ink on cardboard

Collection of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa
Tongarewa, purchased 2006

Yellow on white 1965

Acrylic on paper

Private Collection, Auckland

On Vietnam II 1965

Acrylic on paper

Epsom Trust, Auckland

Untitled 1965

Screenprint on paper

Courtesy of the University of Auckland Art Collection

Red Square Four 1965

Acrylic on paper

Collection of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery. Purchased
2020 with funds from the Dunedin Public Art Gallery Society

Untitled 1965

Acrylic on paper

Collection of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery. Purchased
2020 with funds from the Dunedin Public Art Gallery Society

While in London and Europe, Hotere produced a large number of works on paper, including paintings, prints and drawings – media to which he would be dedicated to throughout his career. In this group of works he is experimenting with a new visual language that explores line, colour and abstracted geometric forms.

While he was overseas, seeing paintings by such artists as Ad Reinhardt, Henri Matisse, Antoni Tàpies and Rembrandt van Rijn, as well as the work of his Central School of Art teachers, Cecil Collins and William Turnbull, exposed Hotere to new and experimental approaches. The influence of Turnbull (1922–2012), his painting, etching and design teacher, was particularly important. Connections can be made between Turnbull's visual language, such as the depiction of geometric shapes, use of monochromatic colours (including black) and experimental use of materials (including corrugated iron), and Hotere's practice.

Sound Recording of Ralph Hotere Godwit/Kuaka Chant 2011

Plays daily on the hour, between 11am and 4pm
recording of Ralph Hotere ONZ by kind permission of
Mary McFarlane and the Hotere Foundation Trust Inc.

Hotere's father, Tangirau Hotere, taught his son the Te Aupōuri tauparapara (chant) stencilled at centre of this mural. The words reflect on the journey of the kuaka, or bar-tailed godwit, and its connection to Te Aupōuri history. Shortly prior to the artist's death in 2013 Hotere recorded a section of this chant to accompany the installation of *Godwit/ Kuaka* at Auckland Art Gallery.

Ruia ruia, opea opea, tahia tahia
Kia hemo ake
Ko te kaka koakoa
Kia herea mai
Te kawai koroki
Kia tatata mai
I roto i tana pukorokoro whaikaro
He kuaka
He kuaka marangaranga
Kotahi manu
I tau ki te tahuna
Tau atu
Tau atu
Kua tau mai

Scattering, gathering, forming a single unit
Death/exhaustion rises up
It is the rope, koakoa [the cry of the bird]
Binding you here to me
The cry/chattering of the flock
Come close together
From inside its throat – a marauding party
A godwit
A godwit that hovers
One bird
Has settled on the sand bank It has settled over there
It has settled over there
They have settled here

(Translation by Te Whanaupani Thompson, Ngā Puhi/Ngati Wai,
provided by Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki)

RALPH HOTERE

A Return to Sangro 1978

Synthetic polymer paint on canvas
Hocken Collections Uare Taoka o Hākena, University of
Otago. Purchased from Bosshard Galleries, Dunedin, 1979

Return to Sangro 1978

Acrylic on loose canvas
Collection Waikato Museum Te Whare Taonga o Waikato

Sangro Litany 1979

Acrylic on unstretched canvas
Collection of Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetū,
purchased 1981

A Return to Sangro 1978

Oil on unstretched canvas
Collection of the Eastern Southland Gallery

In 1978 Hotere received a Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council Fellowship, which allowed him to return to Europe, revisiting Italy, Spain and the South of France. Travelling with his then wife, poet Cilla McQueen, and their daughter Andrea, Hotere returned to his brother's grave at the Sangro River War Cemetery. Unlike the 1962–4 *Sangro* series, the *Return to Sangro* works are much larger paintings on unstretched canvas. Although each painting still includes a sequence of numbers representing the ages of the dead soldiers, these works are dominated by a large white cross, referencing the headstones at the cemetery. As McQueen notes in a diary entry from that time, the 'hundreds of impeccable white gravestones on the mown grass create strobe-like effects in our vision as we walk down the lines'.*

Expressionistic in their approach, these works include entries from McQueen's diaries as well as sections of the Māori poem used in the 1977 *Godwit/Kuaka* mural – a poem that speaks of journeys and cycles of departure and return. These soldiers, though, never came home.

* Cilla McQueen, 'Dark Matter' in *Ralph Hotere Black Light*, Te Papa Press, 2000, p. 45.

CILLA McQUEEN
Sangro River Cemetery

Homing In, John McIndoe Ltd, 1982, published with permission.

I glare up at the sun
from under my white stone
clean as a tooth.

SANGRO

Even now it's still
the same river, many-pathed,
spreading to the sea's tongue,

SANGRO, SANGRO

The same cryptography of
birds: illogical messages
of loss. I am bones,
alone

Clear as death and
close on the hill

SANGRO
RIVER

Where only some thin
memories waver and keen
still, like olive leaves.

RIVER
ROSARY

of olive trees against
the hillside:
landscape of windswept manuka.

RALPH HOTERE

Song Cycle: Wulf part 1 c.1975

Acrylic and dye on unstretched canvas
Hotere & Naish Collection, Auckland

Song Cycle 2 c.1975

Acrylic and dye on unstretched canvas
Hotere & Naish Collection, Auckland

Song Cycle – The Voyage 1975

Acrylic and dyes on unstretched canvas
Victoria University of Wellington Art Collection,
purchased 1977

Song Cycle – The Prayer, Part I 1975

Dye and acrylic on loose canvas
Collection of the Eastern Southland Gallery

Song Cycle – The Prayer, Part II 1975

Dye and acrylic on loose canvas
Collection of the Eastern Southland Gallery

Expressive and tactile, *Hotere's Song Cycle* banners have been described as a 'reaction against the perfectionist tendency' of his *Black Paintings* of the 1960s.* However, a relationship between the two series can be found in the questions about physicality and movement that each asks. Where the *Black Paintings* reflect the physical presence of the viewer in their glossy surfaces, the *Song Cycle* banners are designed to be moved through as an immersive encounter.

Hotere's *Song Cycle* banners began as an unrealised proposal for a set design for Sound Movement Theatre, where performers on stage would weave between the suspended canvases. Hotere draws excerpts from Bill Manhire's *Song Cycle* poems into his compositions – long stretches of darkness are punctuated by intervals of light and text. His weathering of the banners – some were left outside for days and weeks – creates a raw, elemental feeling, reinforcing connections to the world of sound, movement and experience.

* Gregory O'Brien, *Hotere: Out the Black Window: Ralph Hotere's work with New Zealand poets*, Godwit in association with City Gallery Publishing, 1997, p. 60.