

Unearthing my toki: The artist who found an adze

Zena Elliott

“Ngāti Awa, te toki tangatanga i te ra.”

“Ngāti Awa, the adze that does not loosen in the sun.”

(Old Ngāti Awa Proverb, n.d (as cited in Mead, 1984)

I had a dream once where I was walking along a beach or river. I often saw a taonga (treasure) as toki (adze) submerged between the sand and the water flow. I remember not wanting to acknowledge that the toki was there and I would pretend I didn't see it. Coincidentally in my waking life, I was drawn to the art of Māori carving, I took up a journey of reconnection and rediscovery through toi whakairo (the art of carving). During my whakairo journey, between 2010 to 2018 I discovered research gaps in knowledge, specifically about wahine Māori carving and examples. My research enquiry investigates the experiences and perspectives of wahine kaiwhakairo (women carver) from a distinctive Ngāti Awa mana takatāpui position. The study contemplates the role of wahine in whakairo from a Māori worldview and the impacts of colonisation on contemporary Māori women carvers. This presentation is drawn from a Kaupapa Māori and practice-led Doctoral inquiry, activated through a pūrākau methodology. Pouwhare (2020) describes how a pūrākau methodology can synchronise a way of being Māori and artistic practice that enables a process of working from a distinctive ontological and epistemological position that recognises the role of the seen and unseen. This poster presentation will discuss the pūrākau methodology used to capture the narratives of what it means to be a distinctive Māori carver. Traditional gender roles and fluidity will be considered with references to takatāpui (an umbrella term for Māori diverse gender identities) and traditional Māori narratives. There will be a discussion on the creative research methods used to explore notions of gender fluidity within the practice of carving and the art form itself.

References

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Still image of tekoteko being carved by Zena Elliott. Home studio, Hamilton. 2022. Photography by Tia Barrett.