



ROBERT JAHNKE

LAMENTATION

20 JULY — 27 OCTOBER 2019

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BOB JAHNKE: LAMENTATION  
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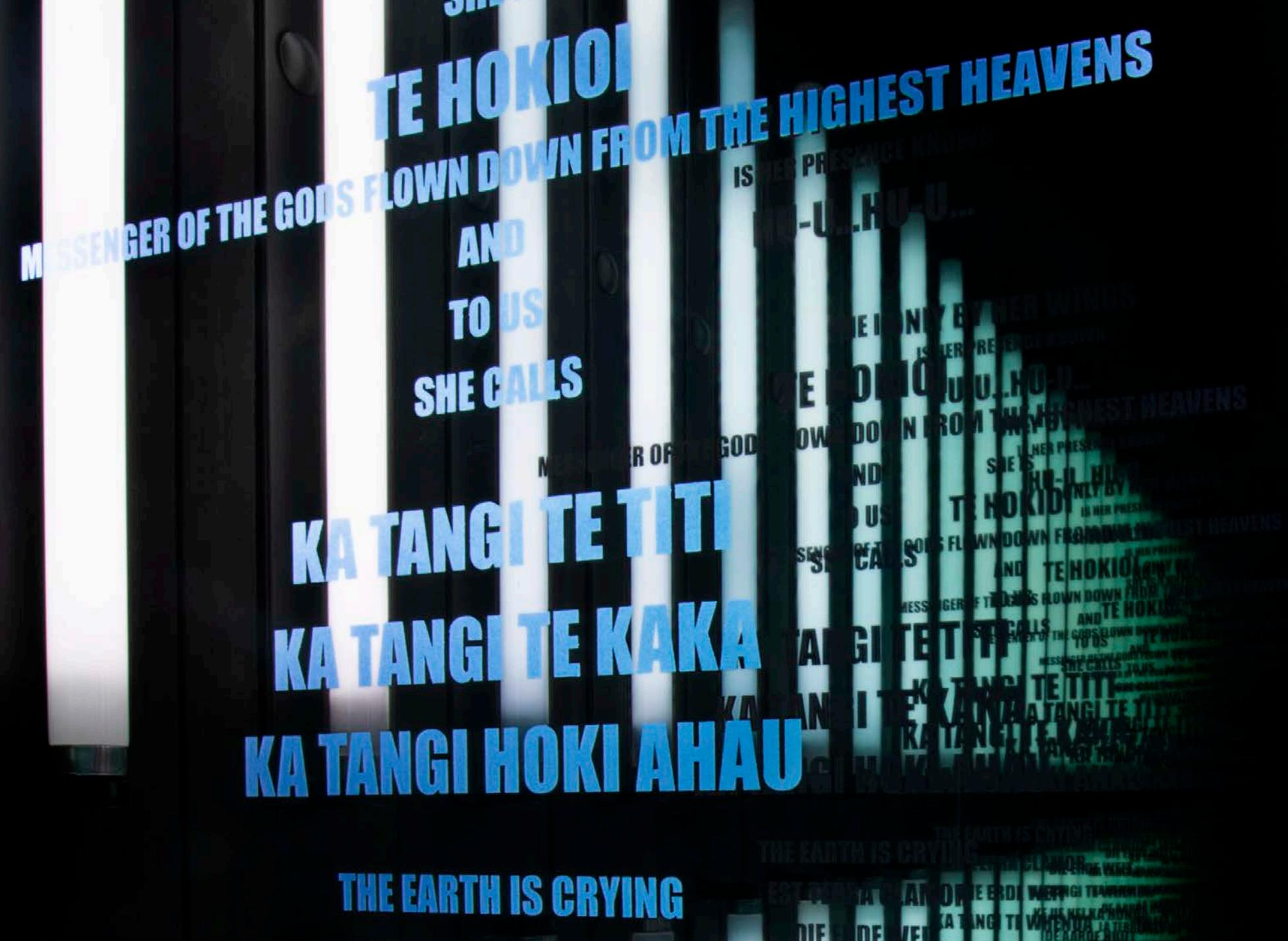
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Cover: *Ngā Pou o Tanetokorangi II*, 2019  
Right: *Lamentation I*, 2019 (detail)



## Foreword

In Lamentation Jahnke has commissioned new work by six indigenous poets, each voicing urgency in relation to the devastation of our environment in these times.

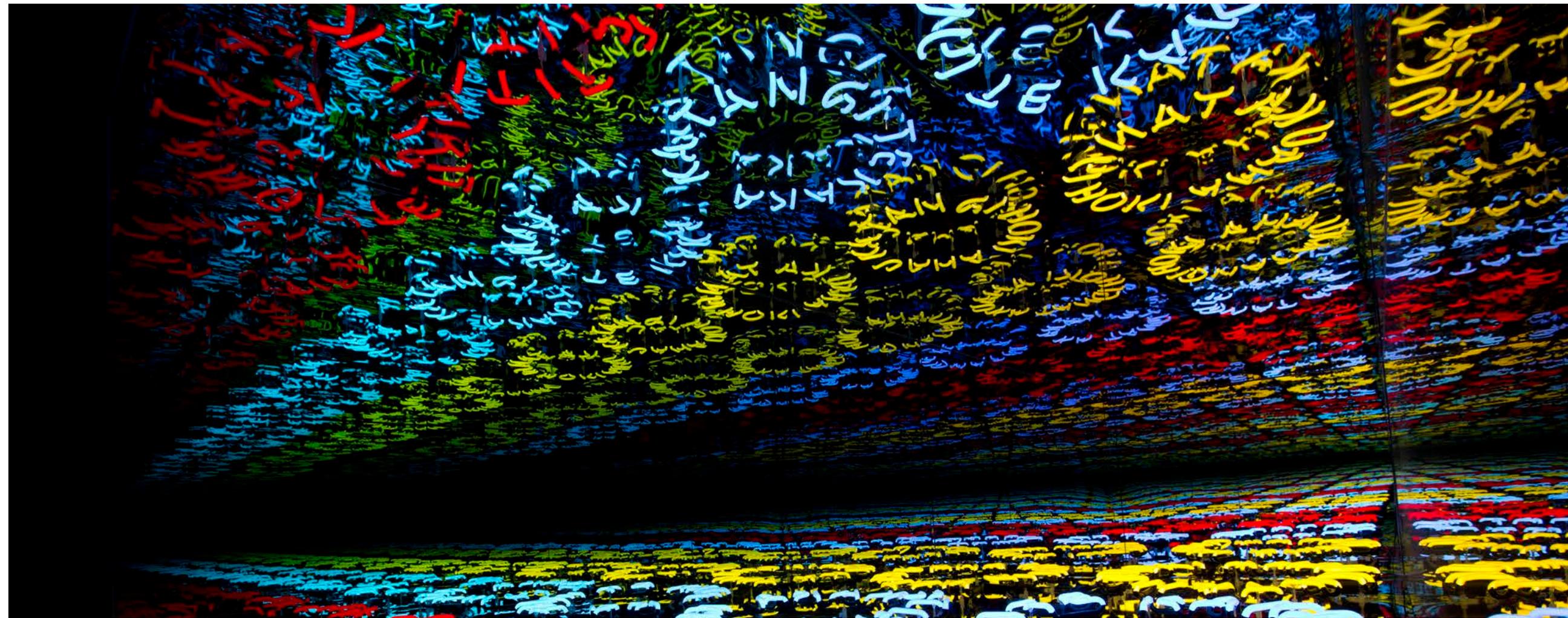
Anchoring this collaborative project is Hone Tuwhare's poem 'Making holes in the silence' which appears on the tomokanga (entranceway) to the exhibition. This visceral work of Tuwhare echoes Jahnke's reference to roimata toroa (tears of the albatross). In the world of Te ao Māori the toroa (albatross) is sacred and the bird's remarkable ability to drink salt water by expelling the salt out of its nostrils is referenced in the phrase. Roimata toroa also refers to the fact that the toroa travels great distances and the roimata (tears) that are shed by the great seabird pining for its distant homeland and breeding ground.

Roimata toroa is a traditional pattern used in tukutuku (lattice work) within the whareniui. The pattern is derived from the Ngāti Porou story of the two sacred albatrosses of Ruakapanga that accompanied ancestor Pourangahua

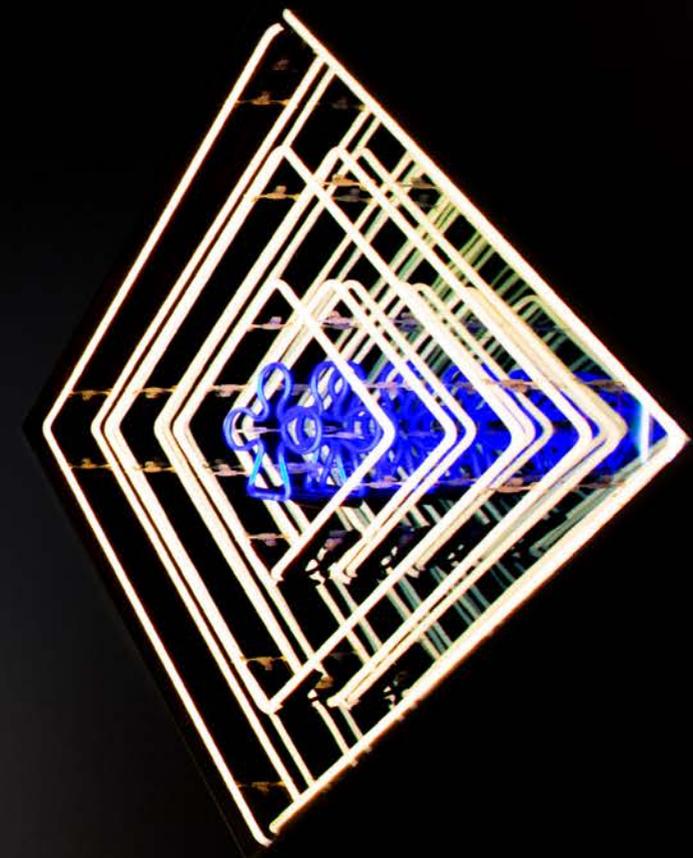
in bringing the kumara (sweet potato) to Aotearoa New Zealand. The pattern speaks of the misadventures of travellers who take shortcuts in haste to get to their destination. Its pattern is formed with stitches that fall vertically, like albatross tears, representing impending catastrophe.

Jahnke stacks tubes of light both physically and illusionistically referencing the roimata pattern while extending the genealogical context of the pattern to embrace the narrative of earth and sky. He frames the words of the indigenous poets giving their poems material form through visual repetition, creating an echo of their lament that goes back to the ancient times when our ancestors spoke to the truths of our natural world.

Toni Mackinnon,  
Former Hastings City Art Gallery  
Director



*Ka tangi hoki ahau, 2019*



## Essay by Dr Huhana Smith

(Ngāti Tukorehe,  
Ngāti Raukawa ki te Tonga)

‘I want to say something too’

In Robert Jahnke’s last compelling touring exhibition *ATA: a third reflection*, he expanded Māori conceptual spaces in wood, glass, neon, paint and mirrors. Elegant sculptural plinths and wall works were underpinned by sophisticated Mātauranga Māori knowledge systems and visual devices that were re-contextualised from the historic Māori prophetic movements of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Using mirrors and limitless reflections, Jahnke referenced Māori cosmological and genealogical narratives emerging from indigenous environmental concepts, particularly those located within the interstitial spaces of lashed tukutuku panels between ancestral poupou of whare tupuna or ancestral houses. In *ATA: a third reflection* Jahnke’s sculptures were highly captivating inter-dimensional ‘cosmoses’ that renewed and activated Māori

cultural paradigms of significance, whilst simultaneously mesmerizing audiences who came to engage with his works, in regional art museums and galleries across Te Ika a Māui (North Island) from 2016 to 2017.

For *Lamentation* 2019, Jahnke continues his reflections on tukuku and lamentation. In particular he muses,

‘Perhaps the most familiar form of Māori visual representation of lamentation is expressed graphically in the tukutuku pattern roimata toroa (tears of the albatross). The pattern recalls the mistreatment of the pet albatrosses of Ruakapanga. Porangahua during his recovery of the kumara tubers from Hawaiki placed his carnal desires before his promise to Ruakapanga to perform the appropriate karakia for the safe return of his birds after alighting in Aotearoa.’

He continues that

‘Beyond the graphic representation, lamentation is invariably associated with the tangihanga where deceased are farewelled and grieved. Historically the grieving process extended to lacerations of the female body with

haehae; cutting of the flesh. The term extends to one of the most prominent carved surface patterns in whakairo rakau, the haehae, a surface pattern that acts as a visual pulse directing the eye in its engagement with ancestors and spiritual entities. It is an evocation of lament; of memory for those who have passed; of a world that was once considered sacred and innately part of our reality as Māori.

In continuing the visual link to his tukutuku-inspired works, Jahnke includes two previous works - *Karapu Kikorangi* and *Karapu Ma*. They face each other as initial sentinels to the tomokanga or minimalist entranceway leading to his new series. These works, which act as a whakaaraara pā or visual sentinel chant, herald the visitor to the space, not only maintaining a connection but creating an ongoing homage to the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century prophetic movements, but also to Jahnke’s signature device of appropriating other art and design elements.

However, *Lamentation* resonates on a different level.

Aligned with the Tomokanga o te Ua (The Portal of Rain),<sup>1</sup> the female

karanga of Tina Makareti’s poignant poem in *Lamentation I*, proclaims the relationship to the underpinning exhibition whakatauki - ‘Ka tangi te tītī, Ka tangi te kākā, ka tangi hoki ahau: the shearwater or mutton bird sings, the kākā sings, I want to say something too...’<sup>2</sup>

Whilst her silent words in text are read in the mind, as a karanga or call to other realms, they reverberate profoundly – both strident and disturbing to the impacts that we are having upon the natural world. In supportive amplification on the opposite wall, an echoing whaikorero by Witi Ihimaera, interlocks with her voice as a co-joined sentiment, which together powerfully draws the gallery visitor, through the illuminated Tomokanga o te Ua into the bosom of the exhibition.

Hone Tuwhare’s ‘Making holes in the silence’ reverberates on Jahnke’s minimalist entranceway, a structure configured on the power pattern of the chevron. Stacked fluorescent tubes recreate the roimata or tears of the albatross pattern that reflect in infinite repetition within the structure into Te Po, and up and down - uniting Ranginui and Papatūānuku despite their physical separation from each

other, an allegory of tears as ritual cleansing.

Leading indigenous poets/writers mourn the impacts of climate change; ecosystem destruction and biodiversity loss; plastic and all forms of pollution, and uncertain energy futures. The lamentations of Tusiata Avia and Selina Tisitara Marsh, implore us to change our destructive human behaviour. While Greg Perez parodies plastic’s indestructible and toxic properties, Te Kahu Rolleston cries up a storm of vitriol against senseless capitalism that damages us all. Each poet offers indelible imprints upon Jahnke’s spatially transformative poupou, repeating ancestral cries that rise from the past/present/future. They too are calling to us.

‘Ka tangi te tītī, Ka tangi te kākā, ka tangi hoki ahau: the shearwater or mutton bird sings, the kākā sings, I want to say something too...’

The birds of the natural world cry out to us via discordant melodies. They demand that we humans transform ourselves fundamentally via ‘systems-wide reorganization across technological, economic and social factors including paradigms, goals and values’,<sup>3</sup> in order to make a difference

to them as our non-human relations within precarious times.

All humans stand within this house of lamentation, Te Whare o ngā Rukerukenga Taiao, where rukeruke means to bring waste, pollute and completely disregard the world and the natural environment – te taiao.<sup>4</sup> This is a house built by our own complicity in how we live our lives today. We have contributed to the global travesty of environmental decline that is our contemporary reality. As members of the 21<sup>st</sup> century population we are grieving. In many ways, our distress is our complicity in constructing this house of lamentation. Whatever our personal level of responsibility to this insecure world of global species extinction statistics, with the rate of species extinctions accelerating with subsequent grave impacts on people around the world,<sup>5</sup> we can either see ourselves as immobilised bystanders within this unprecedented period in human history; or powerful, active kaitiaki working as environmental warriors dismantling destructive structural arrangements. We can reimagine new modalities of research, dialogue and actions that bridge gaps between disciplines - all possible within our demands for a better

future. We can work across cultures and be informed by social and natural sciences, humanities, lore in local indigenous knowledges, and the law. Moreover, tackling these problems necessitates innovative approaches to bridge the realities of science-policy-praxis divides.<sup>6</sup>

As the viewer circulates from Makareti’s karanga - right to left of the gallery space - we read - we pause - we reflect - we wonder - then we draw breath at the double Ngā pou o Tanetokorangi I and II. Rods of light shoot skyward and downward into whenua or lands, reuniting while separating Rangi and Papa via these cleansing salt water tears. We stop, read, ponder, and reflect in silence. We stop. We look around the space again.

Within this house, resonating poetic imprints are endlessly repeating cadences for us. They are illuminations so that we might reach deep into ourselves to seek renewed relationships between spirit and matter and rekindle our human connections with our non-human kin, as our ancestors did before us.

Throughout *Lamentation* Jahnke’s restricted physical spaces are deceptively limitless voids. They

mirror deep personal concerns and despair. They drive home the reality of what our global non-human kin are facing. All the while, the indelible voices of poets, like engraved ancestral poupou, are overviewed by the 'Ka Tangi hoki ahau' plinth – the atamira or funerary platform that is located at the base of the poutuarongo or back post of the whare - a position in the ancestral house dedicated to Hinenui te pō - the entity of night and death.<sup>7</sup>

In all this reflection and peering into infinite depths, we must ask. What has become of our Māori narrative and whakapapa systems, whereby humans are considered interdependent and interrelated relations to all within the natural world? Are we recognising enough the disfunction and impacts on Māori, Pacific and other cultures' human conditions that are caused by severing our kinship with the natural world? Are we mobilised enough as kaitiaki to mobilise against the destruction of mauri?

In 2019 in Aotearoa New Zealand, indigenous knowledge keepers, scholars and research leaders converged at the NAISA conference at Kirikiriroa/Hamilton from 26-29 June unanimously calling for change. Recently, in Sydney, a small workshop

of indigenous and non-indigenous scholars, researchers and indigenous community leaders from across Australia and the Pacific came together to interrogate the 'failure of modern human societies to effectively govern our relationship with the natural world...'<sup>8</sup> As attested by the first panelists - an indigenous legal scholar and non-indigenous earth matters lawyer – transformation requires,

'a systemic analysis; an analysis that enables us to see the underlying causes behind our insatiable consumption of nature and to rethink the very foundations of our legal, political, economic and cultural worldviews. This systemic analysis requires us to focus on the structures we create in human societies, and the logic and power imbalances that have brought us to where we are.'<sup>9</sup>

In *Lamentation*, Jahnke's visual systems are anchored by pulsing poetic texts illuminated by light. Despite the metaphoric anguish released, they allude to how more indigenous knowledge-led alliances are being forged by many across major institutions, land-based community organisations and research entities to create new global teaching

and learning opportunities that harness new mobilised modes of transformative knowledge. Such acts of *whakakotahitanga* (working as one) are critical to lead accelerated global actions on ancestral and other land holdings - for the sake of *all* beings who share the same realm, or the same material and spiritual domain - 'te ao marama' - the world of light.

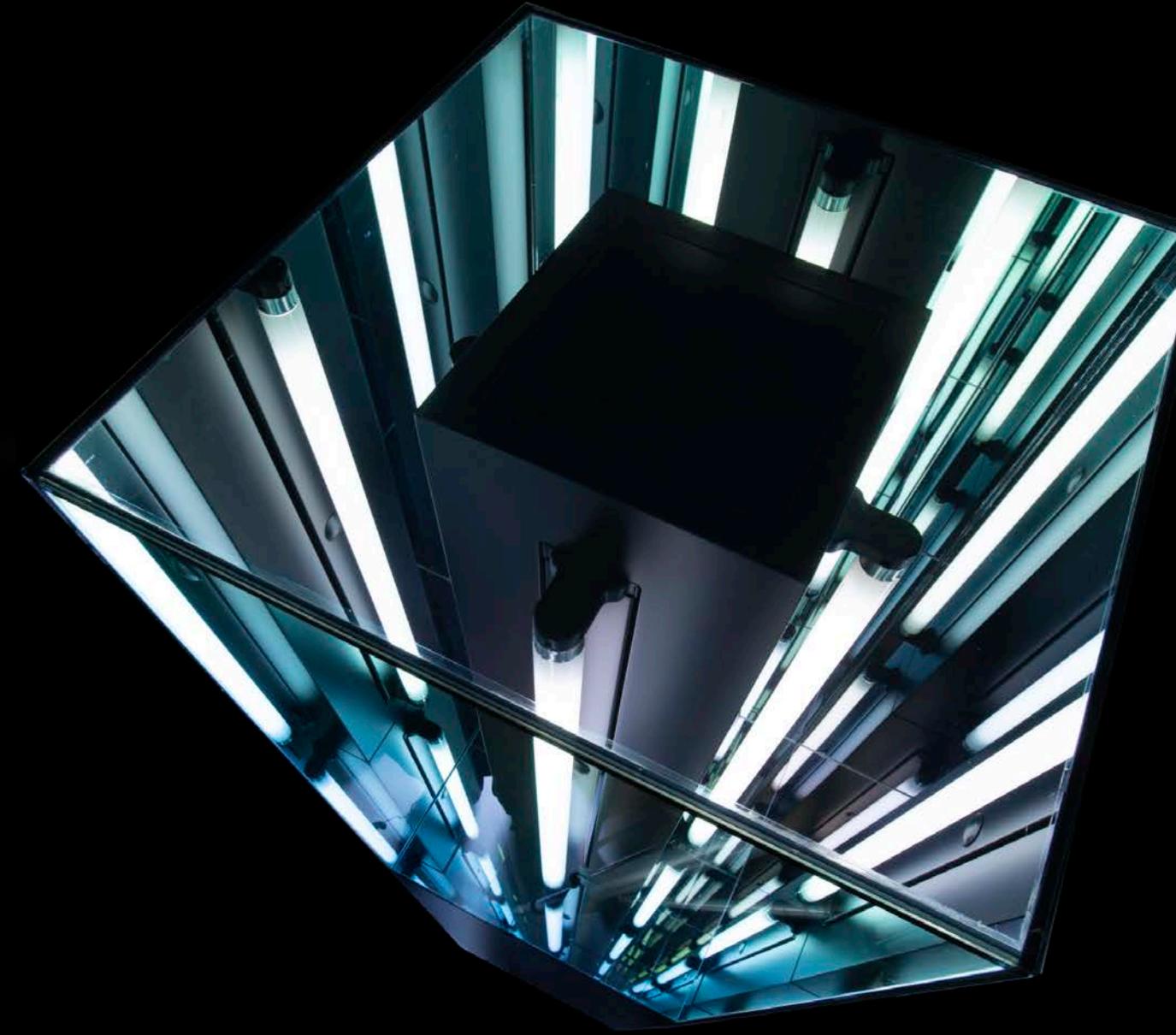
- 1 The entranceway was originally named Te Tomokanga o Te Pouritanga; the Portal of Sadness. It was changed to the Te Tomokanga o te Ua, the Portal of Rain with the decision to include Hone Tuwhare's 'making holes in the silence', a poem about rain, which also acts as an allegory for the sky fathers' tears for the earth mother captured in the stacked tubes of light in the portal jamb.
- 2 Expressed alternatively as 'the mutton bird cries, the parrot cries and I too weep'.
- 3 Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystems, <https://www.ipbes.net>
- 4 In February 2018, Hona Black kindly provided a Māori version of the concept of Anthropocene, when this author as part of a cross-college Massey research group developing ideas to establish a new Centre for Anthropocene Studies. This proposal aimed to position Massey University at the forefront of transdisciplinary applied research and capability building, and which focused on tackling the major problems of the Anthropocene. These are critical global problems of great significance for Aotearoa New Zealand and Pacific island nations, and include: overconsumption and human population growth, climate change, ecosystem destruction and biodiversity loss, pollution, environmental conflict, uncertain energy futures and transitioning to sustainable food production.
- 5 Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystems, <https://www.ipbes.net>
- 6 Research brief by a Massey and research entity team, *Initial concept note: A new Massey CoRE in Anthropocene Studies*, 23 March 2018.
- 7 In the Taitokerau this is the final resting place of the tūpapaku before burial.
- 8 *Re(e)mergence of Nature in Culture II*, Sydney Institute for the Environment, University of Sydney, 11-12 July 2019.
- 9 Sourced from closed Re(e)mergence of Nature in Culture II workshop programme by Dr Christine Winter, Sydney Institute for the Environment, University of Sydney.



Lamentation installation, 2019

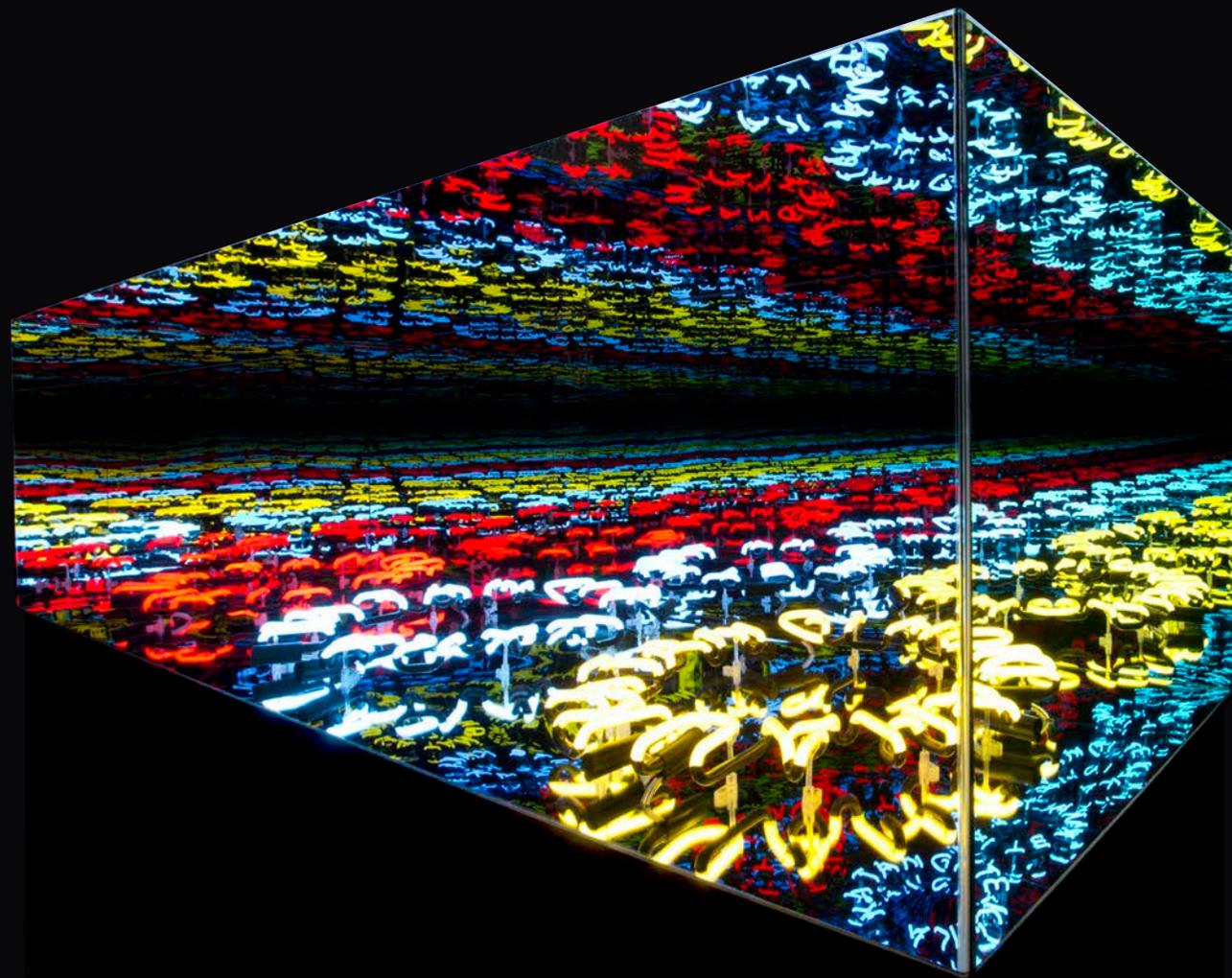


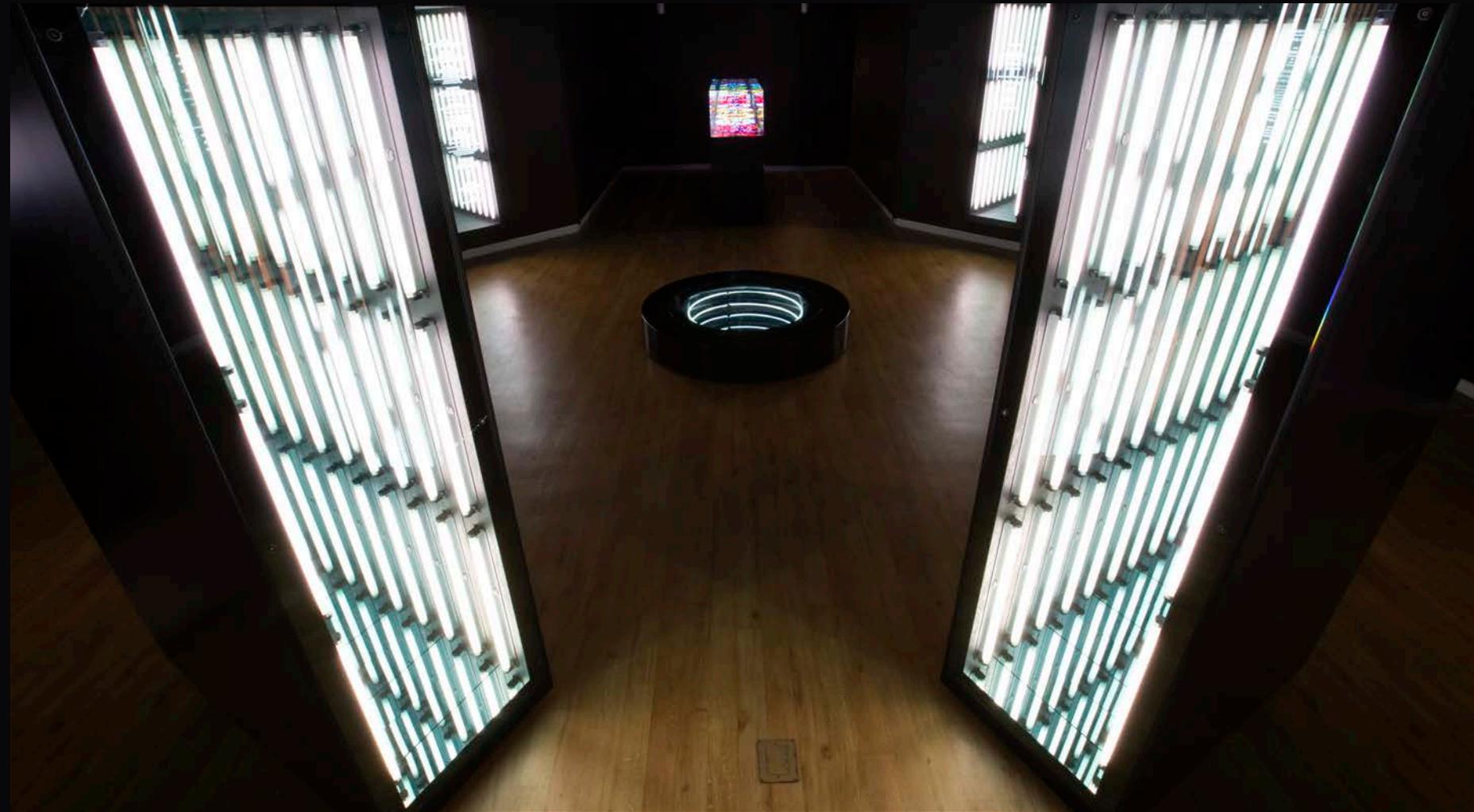
*Ngā Pou o Tanetokorangi I, 2019 and Ngā Pou o Tanetokorangi II, 2019 (details)*



*Ngā Pou o Tanetokorangi I, 2019*





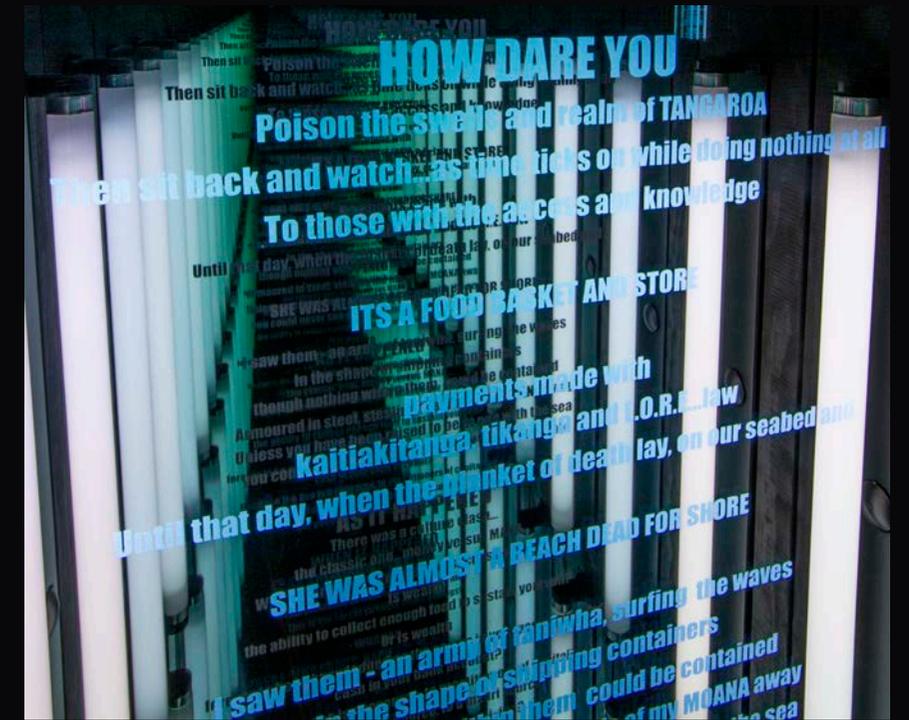
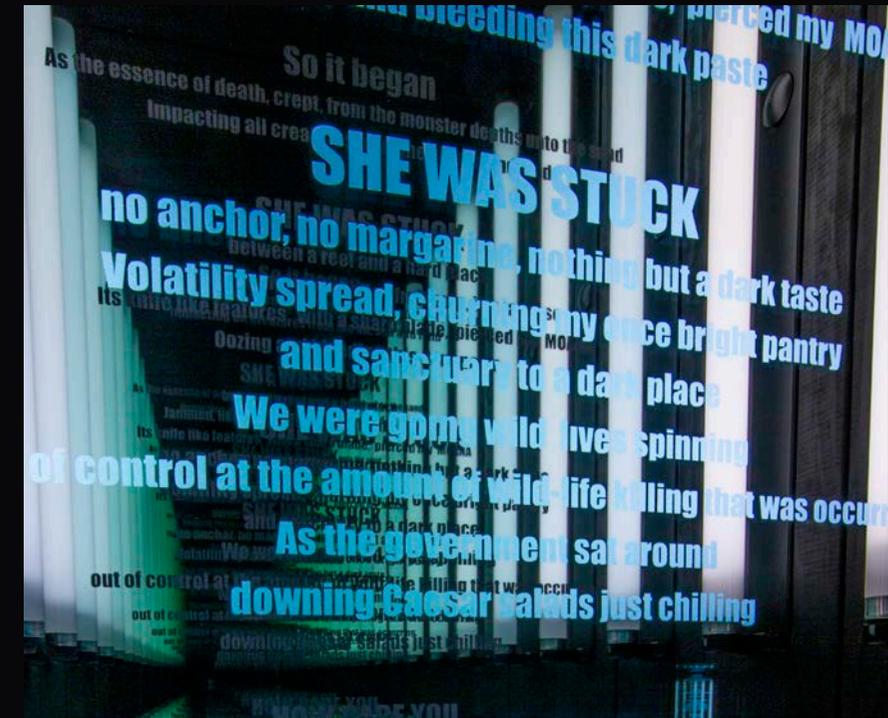


*Lamentation installation, 2019*



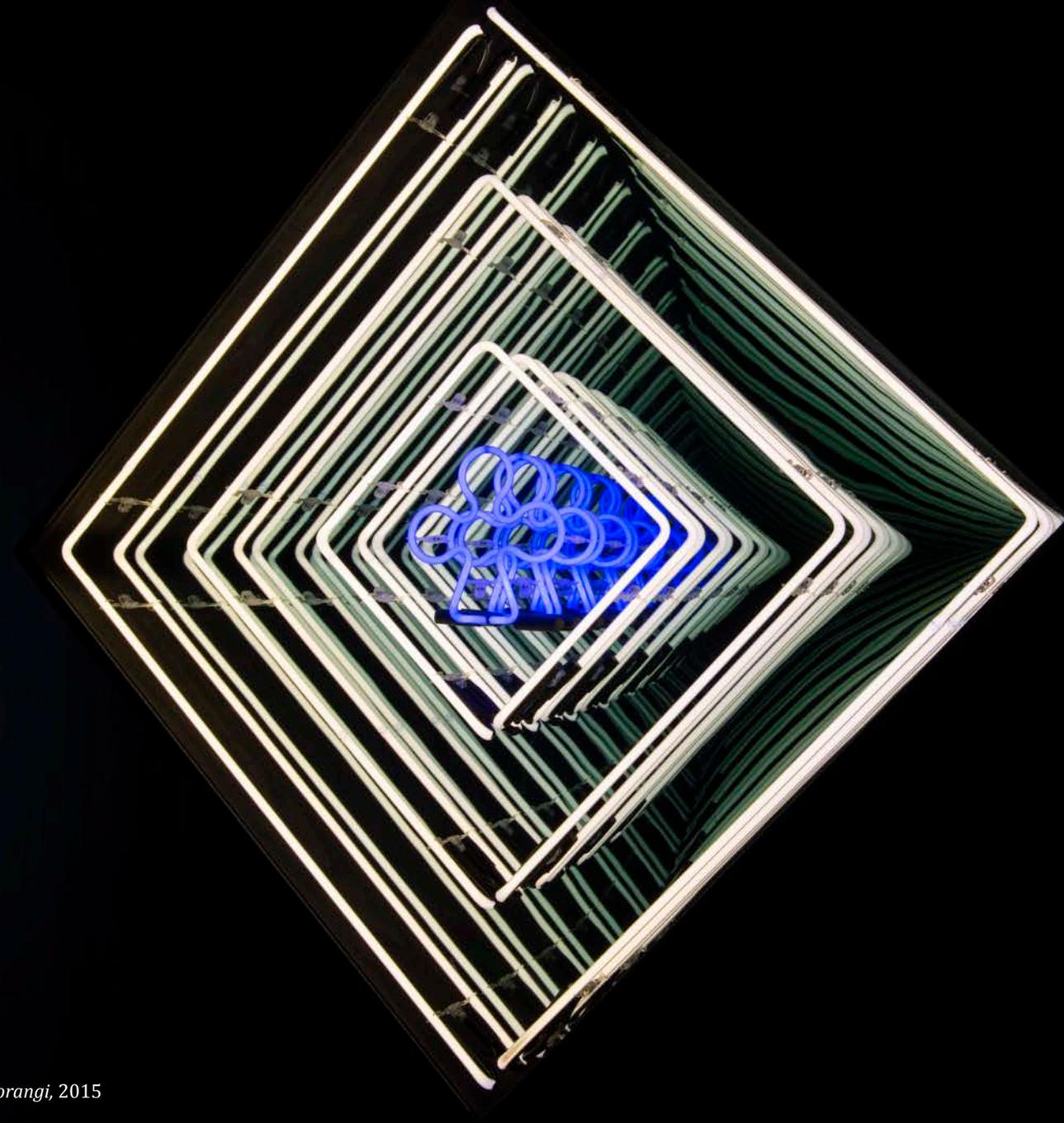
*Whenua kore, 2019*





Lamentation VI, 2019  
"Rena" A poem by Te Kahu Rollerston  
The Wallace Arts Trust Paramount Award Winner 2019

Lamentation VI, 2019 (details)



Karapu kikurangi, 2015

## List of Artworks

### **Karapu ma, 2015**

Wood, paint, neon, one-way glass, mirror, electricity  
 Courtesy of Chris Parkin

### **Karapu kikurangi, 2015**

Wood, paint, neon, one-way glass, mirror, electricity  
 Courtesy of Chris Parkin

### **Te Tomokanga o te ua, 2019**

Wood, MDF, paint, vinyl, one-way glass, mirror, fluorescents, electricity  
 Courtesy of the artist and Paulnache Gallery

### **“Making holes in the silence”**

A poem by Hone Tuwhare  
 Courtesy of the Tuwhare whānau

### **Lamentation I, 2019**

Wood, paint, one-way glass, mirror, fluorescents, electricity  
 Courtesy of the artist and Paulnache Gallery

### **“Only by her wings”**

A poem by Witi Ihimaera;  
 Writer, playwright  
 Te Whānau a Iritekura, Te Whānau a Ruataupare, Te Aowera, Ngāti Ira, Kahukuranui, Te Āitanga a Hauiti, Te Whānau a Kai

### **Lamentation II, 2019**

Wood, paint, one-way glass, mirror, fluorescents, electricity  
 Courtesy of the artist and Paulnache Gallery

### **“Ko ngā manu o ngā manu”**

A poem by Tina Makereti;  
 Writer  
 Te Ātiawa, Ngāti Tūwharetoa, Ngāti Rangatahi

### **Lamentation III, 2019**

Wood, paint, one-way glass, mirror, fluorescents, electricity  
 Courtesy of the artist and Paulnache Gallery

### **“Titi Treaty”**

A poem by Selina Tusitala Marsh;  
 Commonwealth Poet, NZ Poet Laureate

### **Lamentation IV, 2019**

Wood, paint, one-way glass, mirror, fluorescents, electricity  
 Courtesy of the artist and Paulnache Gallery

### **“Everything is calling”**

A poem by Tusiata Avia;  
 Poet, performer

### **Lamentation V, 2019**

Wood, paint, one-way glass, mirror, fluorescents, electricity  
 Courtesy of the artist and Paulnache Gallery

### **“Age of Plastic”**

A poem by Craig Santos Perez;  
 Guam poet, Chamorro

### **Lamentation VI, 2019**

Wood, paint, one-way glass, mirror, fluorescents, electricity  
 Courtesy of the artist and Paulnache Gallery

### **“Rena”**

A poem by Te Kahu Rollerston;  
 Slam poet

### **Whenua kore, 2019**

Lacquered mild steel, powder coated aluminum, mirror pane, mirror, laminated glass, toughened glass, neon, electricity  
 Courtesy of the artist and Paulnache Gallery

### **Ka tangi hoki ahau, 2019**

Wood, MDF, paint, one-way glass, mirror, neon, electricity  
 Courtesy of the artist and Paulnache Gallery

### **Ngā Pou o Tanetokorangi I, 2019**

Wood, MDF, paint, one-way glass, mirror, fluorescents, electricity  
 Courtesy of the artist and Paulnache Gallery

### **Ngā Pou o Tanetokorangi II, 2019**

Wood, MDF, paint, one-way glass, mirror, fluorescents, electricity  
 Courtesy of the artist and Paulnache Gallery

## Acknowledgements



He kōrero aumihi

I begin by acknowledging Toni MacKinnon, former curator of the Hastings City Art Gallery, for the invitation to exhibit in the Holt Gallery and the Hastings City Council for resourcing the exhibition.

The outcome is the solo exhibition 'Lamentation'; a project that allowed me to create work in collaboration with seven indigenous poets and writers: the late Hone Tūwhare (courtesy of his son Rob Tūwhare); Witi Ihimaera (tuakana and whanaunga); Tina Makereti (former student), Selina Tusitala March (Poet Laureate); Tusiata Avia (poet & performer); Craig Perez (poet from Guam), and Te Kahu Rollerston (slam poet). Rollerston's poem 'Rena' about the beaching of a tanker in the Tauranga harbour and the ensuing pollution constituted the textual component for 'Lamentation VI', which won the Paramount Award at the 28th annual Wallace Awards 2019.

My thanks to the Wallace Trust for the award and a six-month residency at the International Studio and Curatorial Program in New York.

The Lamentation exhibition would not have been possible without funding support from Creative NZ, the Massey University Research Fund and the Massey University Strategic Research Excellence Fund, which resulted in 'Ground Zero' for headlands Sculpture on the Gulf (2019) and 'Whenua Kore' (2019) for the Auckland Art Fair and subsequently for the Lamentation exhibition.

A special thanks Professor Huhana Smith for writing the catalogue essay without having seen the completed works. Thanks also to Clayton Tansley, our Toioho ki Āpiti technician and the staff of the Hastings City Art Gallery, especially Jonathan Brown for his patience and perseverance during a taxing installation.

Finally, hats off for Norm Heke for the photography and Ebony Holt for the catalogue design.

Ngā mihi maioha ki a koutou katoa  
Bob Jahnke





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