

Star Talk

Maioha Kara's practice is grounded through a commitment to living systems—systems of life—as they are observed within te ao Māori. Kara's interests span Māori philosophy, cosmogony, and political thought. Whakapapa, te taiao and the pursuit of creative processes inform some of the corresponding responsibilities within Kara's practice. These are enacted within her work through the varied material processes that define each specific work's objecthood and the potential for each to carry intentionally layered meanings and symbolic function. Said much more plainly, Kara's works mean multiple things at once and they enable thoughts to travel along multiple corresponding lines. They are *tohu* to be received in layers.

In his paper "The Natural World and Natural Resources" Māori Marsden speaks of the complete diffusion of the secular and the spiritual within Māoritanga. Within Marsden's worldview the oppositional binary laid out by such a division is completely fraught. This is a recurring theme in Marsden's body of writing. He poses a fundamental critique directed towards "the compartmentalisation and isolation of one institution from another, and the piecemeal approach to problem and conflict resolution."¹ He goes on to describe a more dynamic, agile, and holistic sensibility:

Māori perceived the universe as a process. But they went beyond the New Physicists idea of the Real world as simply 'pure energy' to postulate a world comprised of a series of interconnected realms separated by aeons of time from which there eventually emerged the Natural World. This cosmic process is unified and bound together by spirit.²

Kara's works can be viewed as operating in correspondence with Marsden's expanded perspective. Each work maintains a clearly defined material organisation that represents and connects aspects of our lives that are completely intangible.

Tracing the production processes of the work prompts the navigation of tightly orchestrated organic and inorganic materials directed through a series of digital and handmade processes. Coloured stains enhance the atmospheric and tidal rhythms captured within the grains of Birch and Rimu. Circular recesses—*ira*—are plotted across surfaces in patterned clusters that carry an inherent logic. Designs that enact symmetry and asymmetry in equal measure are eventually defined within circular and elongated circular forms as if they have been split and then peeled open to reveal something else. At times forms are paired and accumulatively, this body of work suggests an order of overlapping dynamics. The macro and micro perspectives, spatial and material aspects not only co-exist but all interrelate. The results conflate sensorial experiences. There is something synaesthetic provoked by Kara's works. One's tactile senses, as they are primed through the material nature of the work, lead one to consider experiences detached from the physical.

Maioha has told me that the forms within this body of work with reference to portals and *waha*. This tickles the armchair astrophysicist in me. The universe as it is observed through Western science's

¹ Marsden, Māori, "The Natural World and Natural Resources: Māori Value Systems and Perspectives," in *The Woven Universe: Selected Writings of Rev. Māori Marsden* (Masterton: The Estate of Rev. Māori Marsden, 2003), 31.

² *Ibid.*

frameworks is simultaneously explicitly immediate—we are literally made of space dust—and expansive beyond reasonable comprehension. Modern terms like *spacetime* and *wordline* also conflate temporal and spatial dimension in a way that enriches my understanding of where and *when* I am.

Within te ao Māori this calibration is completely natural and even more expansive. Whakapapa, pepeha, and karakia all connect us to past, present and future; the tangible geographies laid out through the events and actions of our lives, and also the intangible potential held within our narratives, memories and imagination. The same can be said of the possibility in art especially toi Māori. We often tap into this awareness without having to think about it. Provoked through our engagement with artworks like Kara's which act to suspend multiple states and open more space for meditation around one's own positioning. Luckily we can access this sensibility in ourselves without having to articulate or verbalise the details. As it often is with art, the best experiences are often internalised and difficult to describe, let alone share—often I prefer to simply be there within my thoughts— to feel them rather than speak to them.

Shannon Te Ao