

# Art New Zealand

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Carole Shephard

Simon Denny & Karamia Müller / Glen Hayward / Yuki Kihara at 2022 Venice Biennale

Marian Maguire / *Several Degrees of Attention* at Govett-Brewster / Annie Mackenzie / Jon Tootill

Hannah Watkinson / Natasha Matila-Smith / Lewis Carroll's New Zealand Connection





## Christchurch

Heidi Brickell

### *PAKANGA FOR THE LOST GIRL*

The Physics Room

5 August–18 September

MICHELLE RAHURAHU

When Māori recall their ancestors' migration to Aotearoa, the navigation of it was based on the shape of the land, and its relationship with the puuraakau of Maui; what we call the North Island is Te Ika a Maui, and the South Island is Te Waka O Maui. The flanks of the fish, and the canoe, were points of reference for proceeding forward, the East was the left flank of Maui's fish, the West, his right flank. What is commonly referred to as the 'South' of the North Island today, is and was referred to as Te Tau Ihu, The Prow, the Nose.

The physical body is so important to Māori. It is an honest and practical philosophy, to understand your vessel as your main tool to comprehending the world. You can only see as far as your eyes allow, or walk as far as your legs can carry you.

Even an old mass of land, rock, water that moves so slightly over time that we cannot perceive its change has the ability to thrash against the wills of man. We acknowledge agency through anthropomorphisation,

attaching faces and bodies. Everything is related to the self, and extended outward to the hapuu, the iwi, the environment, all the way to Papa and Rangi. We see glimpses of this in the whakairo, puuraakau, mahi toi we have managed to cling to. The whare whakairo represents the space that housed us before the Great Parents were separated, the whareniui represents a body, even the old ways of measurement were calculated off a rangatira's handspan and disseminated through measured lengths of cordage.

Heidi Brickell's work *PAKANGA FOR THE LOST GIRL* is a navigational exhibition that embraces the ways we as Māori equip ourselves with tools to steer through a post-colonial world. It is all about where you are and where you have been. It calls to mind the whakataukii: Kia whakatoomuri te haere whakamua (I walk backwards into the future with my eyes fixed on my past). Space and time are relative, their position near the physical self matter. As you walk through the exhibition, you are subject to the ways your position in the rooms affects your understanding of the work. Large triangular sails are placed at angular positions around the gallery, so the colours and shapes painted in pigment on the canvas act like refracted light.

As I moved around, my mind drifted to memories of paddling waka on a flat grey lake, then to roaming the dark green bush with my cousins, then sleeping under the maroon-and-straw-yellow tukutuku panels of my marae, then back to the ocean, this time standing at the shore amidst bone-pale driftwood.

But most of all, I thought of how so much of the urban Māori experience is spent searching for our own humanity in the world around us, searching for a way to define ourselves now. Perhaps it is in the iron-oxide kookoowai, or in the wind whistling through holes bored into wood. I do this too, fiercely walking backwards into the unknown in the hopes that I will bump into my whakapapa. Fortunately, in our travels, we are also creating traces of ourselves for the next generation to follow. Let us hope they find their way.

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(above) Heidi Brickell's *PAKANGA FOR THE LOST GIRL* at The Physics Room, August 2022