

THE ART PAPER



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Meet Hannah Ireland

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Twenty-two of Aotearoa's best ascendant artists and collectives are showing work at the Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki right now in *Aotearoa Contemporary*, an exhibition celebrating a new guard of creatives and ideas.

The Art Paper × Aotearoa Contemporary presents conversations with the artists, exploring the work they're showing and what they're drawing inspiration from. Here we speak to artist HANNAH IRELAND about her new paintings.

These works feel like a significant pivot from those for which you have become known—the paintings on glass with smeared and overbearing faces. They still have the same ethereal quality though. And something about the posing of the figures, the washy way the pigment sits on the canvases and the oxidised-teal colour you're using makes them look like daguerreotypes, with that mirror-like surface they have. What are some of the things that have stirred or contributed to this shift for you?

My father received a cancer diagnosis and around this time I had made the decision to move back home with my parents out in East Auckland / the haunting suburbs. Moving back to my childhood home felt oddly strange, as everything seemed as it



did all those years ago, yet our family had multiplied / we had welcomed new members; new faces pranced around the living room; and new voices / sounds echoed in the family home.

Two parallel roads ran side by side; life and death. I was jolted into a space of muddled emotions. This cascade of events lead me to revise the visual language / vocabulary my practice was housing. I suppose I was trying to negotiate my place within the world and couldn't articulate my thoughts through spoken word; I turned to the comfort of whakapapa and what I knew best. . . painting.

There's a visual language that emerges across these paintings with the koru/comma shape that often merges with the figures, becoming their head. This reminded me a little of Bill Hammond's birds. I've always hated those birds because they look so authoritarian, but making this connection did make me wonder about the role of alienation in your practice ...

I wouldn't say it plays a huge role in my practice. If anything I've tried to cultivate a safe relational space whereby the 'unknown' is used as territory to explore and set up camp.

Maybe you could also speak about that particular form, the koru—how and when it made its way into the paintings?

Traditionally the koru represents new life, strength and growth. The koru first made an appearance in my Aotearoa Art Fair presentation *Tossing & Turning*, during the lead up, while crafting together this particular showcase, I was treading new waters in reconsidering my place as a Māori painter. Up until this point, I think I somewhat shied away from using symbols, imagery or visual language that is recognisably Māori. I allowed myself the safe space to integrate and use the koru as an apt symbol to ground whakapapa. For myself, the koru speaks to those who have come before and stands for those who will come after; past, present, future.

What are three other things that have made their way into the paintings that you were surprised to find there?

Family members. If you had asked me a year ago whether I would consider painting family members I probably would have scrunched up my face. There's something quite scary in painting faces of people who have known you longer than you have known yourself.