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## HEIDI BRICKELL

Incorporating indigenous knowledge systems with contemporary art practices, **Heidi Brickell** is rapidly emerging as one of Aotearoa's most compelling artists. With major institutional acquisitions and forthcoming solo exhibitions, Brickell's trajectory signals an important new voice in contemporary art.



Viewing an exhibition of **Heidi Brickell's** recent work is something like hearing a chorus of voices. Not that it is loud in any aesthetic sense, rather language is at the core of this subtle yet fiercely articulate practice. The work moves fluidly between painting and sculpture, between cultural reference points relating to Māori knowledge and forms, those relating to global lineages, and between modes of mark-making. Play, exploration, and engaging freely with new technologies are vital to this work; in the artist's words, "embracing novel processes and materials as a means to explore and reinterpret indigenous relationships to the contemporary world."

Two formats register in the recent work: the rimurapa sculptures, freestanding or suspended, and stretched canvases in paint and pigment pastel, often detailed with cotton thread. In the former the artist foregrounds a relationship to the sea and land, to the ecological functions of plant-life, and the meanings in specific forms such as the koru (spiral motif). The wall-based works are often compositionally looser, with forms appearing to swim, wheel, or oscillate within a diamond-shaped field.

OPPOSITE: Heidi Brickell, *Wrestling for Whakawhētai*, 2024. Canvas, fluid acrylic, cotton thread derived from canvas edge, rabbit skin size, pigment pastel, egg tempera, 57.5 x 57.5 x 3.8cm

COURTESY: LAREE PAYNE GALLERY, KIRIKIRIROA/ HAMILTON.

RIGHT: Heidi Brickell, *Ahi and Fists with Iro*, 2023. Rimurapa, rākau (tree stump), cotton twine hand-dyed with acrylic, shellac, woodglue, cyanoacrylate, kōhatu, 153 x 53 x 40cm.

COURTESY: LAREE PAYNE GALLERY, KIRIKIRIROA/ HAMILTON.

Brickell, whose ancestral connections are to Te Hika o Pāpāuma, Ngāti Kahungunu, Rangitāne, and Ngāti Apakura, has a background in Māori language education and revitalisation, and a Master of Fine Arts from Elam at The University of Auckland. Represented by Laree Payne Gallery, Brickell has been featured in major contemporary surveys at Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki (2024) and Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetū (2023), with recent acquisitions by the latter, as well as The Dowse Art Museum, Te Wānanga o Aotearoa, The University of Auckland and Te Haerenga Collection. She has substantial future projects in progress with Te Whare Toi o Heretaunga Hastings Art Gallery (2025) and Tauranga Art Gallery (2026). This is a practice with powerful momentum.

Brickell's work builds enduring relationships with its audience, perhaps because of its considerable material interest, its capacity to awaken our physical senses, and generosity of interpretation. A classic example is found in *Ahi and fists with iro* (2023), made from gleaming brown shellacked rimurapa (bull kelp), acid-green cotton twine, a carved tree stump and stone. The title refers to fire (ahi), fists (holding fast, or clenched in anger) and to the maggot (iro) from which the Māori term for carving (whakairo) is derived. Invoking the intensity of flame, the insect's digressive course, while remaining as poised as skilled hands, the work's title and materiality combine to suggest the ways that language both holds and frees meaning. Or more simply, that words themselves are agile bodies.

ABBY CUNNANE

