

THE WELLINGTON SCULPTURE TRUST

The Wellington Sculpture Trust was established in 1982 to enrich Wellington through sculpture and public art. The Trust commissions quality, contemporary public sculptures, supports the creative arts in New Zealand and gives artists the opportunity to make large scale public works. It makes contemporary sculptures accessible to as large an audience as possible, to increase knowledge of New Zealand contemporary artists working in this art form.

The 28 sculptures the Trust has placed around the City and the Botanic Garden over the past 34 years have become an outdoor gallery of many of the most distinguished sculptors in New Zealand, and together showcase the country's contemporary sculptural practice.

The Trust is an independent voluntary organisation, with an established expertise in commissioning public art. It works in partnership with the Wellington City Council and other parties and raises funds from trusts, Wellington businesses, and individuals through donations and sponsorship arrangements.

Wellington Sculpture Trust Trustees:

Sue Elliott (Chair), Vivien Atkinson, Jane Black, Richard Burrell, Helen Kedgley, Julian Ludbrook, Richard Nelson, Neil Plimmer, Ross Steel

For more information please visit: sculpture.org.nz

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THE WORK

The artwork comprises four aluminium pieces, in pixelated "space invaders" icons, in the form of:

- a wharenui, representing the original Māori habitation of New Zealand;

- a mitre, representing Christian missionaries and early European settlement;

- a crown, representing the Queen and the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi in 1840;

- "The Beehive", representing our current government.

The large QR codes fixed to the sides of each plinth can be accessed with a QR scanner on any smart phone or tablet. These take the viewer to a space invaders game that uses icons similar to those on the sculptures.

The sculpture embodies the artist's interdisciplinary approach through the interface between the sculptural forms on the plinths and the interactive game.

THE ARTIST

Kereama Taepa studied for his Bachelor of Maori Visual Arts at Toiho ki Apiti, Massey University in Palmerston North, and continued on to gain his Masters degree. Taepa currently lectures at Waiariki Institute of Technology.

He has exhibited his art nationally and internationally, and has works in collections across New Zealand and abroad. He has created a number of public works including the Redwoods Shrouds, the Waipa Screens in Rotorua and "Tichi", a 2.5 meter bronze in New Plymouth.

Taepa's work primarily focuses on the fusion of indigenous Māori motifs with urban/pop iconography whilst referencing aspects of digital culture/technology.

kereamataepa.co.nz

THE PROJECT

The 4 Plinths Sculpture Award is an undertaking of the Wellington Sculpture Trust.

The 4 Plinths are the massive bollards situated on the waterfront between Te Papa and Circa Theatre. It is here the Trust has made a departure from permanent to temporary public art, and showcases New Zealand sculptural practice with biennial temporary sculpture installations. The project forms part of the New Zealand International Arts Festival's visual arts programme.

The aim of the project is to foster art, artists and audience interactions, and to provide an opportunity for established and emerging artists to work in the area of large-scale public sculpture.

It is a great opportunity to enable artists, through temporary sculpture, to realise a public artwork with all the challenges of scale, robustness and rigour that come with working in a tough environment and in a highly visible space.

The Trust acknowledges with warm appreciation its major sponsors, Wellington City Council Public Art Fund and City Shaper, as well as the support of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa and Seresin Wines.

MAKING A STAND

On the night of the launch for the 4 Plinths Sculpture Award, *A (VERY) BRIEF HISTORY OF AOTEAROA*, I arrived late. A lone mic stand was all that remained of the short run of speeches that had been forced indoors by the strong Wellington Harbour winds. It was dusk and the gathering gloom and blustery weather lent the scenario a certain significance. I came to the sculptures from the busy streets of the capital and saw them framed by the waterfront and the looming bulk of Te Papa Tongarewa. On top of each plinth was a dark, faintly reflective form. I tracked them from right to left, noting the familiar, yet faintly distorted shapes - whare, mitre, crown and beehive. Each pixelated silhouette, positioned loosely in chronological order, outline a suggested reading of Taepa's unique understanding of our country's past. I think about this and wonder at the incredible weight each plinth has to bear beneath this overwhelming responsibility the artist has channelled into the individual sculptures.

I think back to a discussion with Taepa about this project prior to the installation and launch. We met at a café in Tauranga where he and his young family are based. He talked about the origins for some of the ideas he has explored in his work, specifically the realisation as a young adult of how little he knew about New Zealand and in particular Māori history. His ideas became more consolidated when Taepa started his second year at Massey University in the Bachelor of Māori Visual Arts. He began exploring aspects of his own identity and in particular symbols that he felt represented his new found knowledge, presented in a way that those of his generation could relate to. While he is keen to raise awareness that there is an alternative history to the one many were taught at secondary school, Taepa

is also quick to point out that his version of history is 'a truth not necessarily the truth'. It is clearly evident that this installation is more than an art project. To a degree it mirrors an entire generation's understanding of Māori history, and by default the history of Aotearoa.

Taepa begins his account with a stylised depiction of a wharenui (Māori meeting house). Its outline, with peaked gable and negative spaces to suggest a door and a window, reference an architectural form that should be familiar to most New Zealanders. Positioned as the starting point in Taepa's abbreviated timeline, this simple whare motif emphatically states that the first phase of New Zealand's history should be with Māori, a time before European explorers, whalers and colonists appeared in the story. Although this symbol is a placeholder for pre-European occupation it also acts as an avatar of sorts representing the ongoing topics of importance for Māori moving forward.

The remaining three icons have at different times been associated with the way in which Māori have been marginalized, mistreated and manipulated throughout the process of, and as a result of, colonisation. The mitre, a traditional headgear of bishops from a number of Christian faiths and in particular a symbol of the pope, the senior representative of the Roman Catholic church, holds a lot of power for Taepa. He talks about how many of the early missionaries became focussed on educating and controlling Māori communities by converting their senior members to Christianity. This had a significant impact on both the loss of many customary practices but also on the sense of authority and agency Māori held over their own fate. A number of these European pastors also became leaders among the first colonial settlements

and at times represented the British government and monarchy in their dealings with local issues. Taepa includes the crown as a symbol to represent this period and in particular the monarchy's participation in the signing of, and ongoing responsibilities to, Te Tiriti o Waitangi (Treaty of Waitangi). The final symbol in the line-up and the one positioned closest to its namesake is the beehive, the executive wing of the New Parliamentary Buildings of New Zealand. This iconic edifice completed in the late 1970s has come to symbolise our Government and for many it also represents the injustices Māori have suffered in the years since the Treaty was signed. Taepa understands that this is a complicated relationship with multiple perspectives. He talks about his version of the beehive as a marker - a reference to the ongoing social, cultural and political issues that still exist for Māori today.

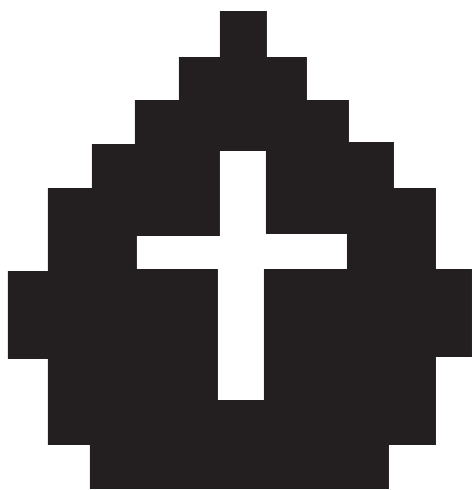
Taepa spent some of his formative years growing up in Upper Hutt. He speaks fondly of hours hanging out at Pluto's, a popular species parlour, and the Kingsize Burger Bar. He remembers when they used to have regional Street Fighter championships at the local fish & chip shop and unofficial competitions happened every other day. This nostalgic backdrop is one shared by many New Zealanders. It has not only influenced the popular culture of that time, it also led to many of these references filtering through to become iconic and highly fashionable symbols for current generations. Taepa has used this to his advantage, not only imbuing this work with his own memories from adolescence but by also making the work relevant to new groups of viewers who recognise and understand the iconography he has employed.

He takes this a step further by adding yet another opportunity for viewers to engage with the work. On the outward faces of each plinth, below the black matt, powder-coated, aluminium sculptures, are large QR codes. These digitised portals take the viewer, with the assistance of a smart device, to a web-based video game loosely modelled on the now famous Space Invaders arcade title from the late 1970s. Taepa describes the gaming format as 'something that is accessible to urban youth'. He wanted this element of the work to utilise modes that could present the issues in a subtle, non-confrontational way while focussing attention on what are incredibly topical and relevant aspects of our colonial past that are still being felt today.

I came back to see the sculptures a few weeks after the opening event. It was a sunny day and there were crowds of families moving to and fro between the national museum and the waterfront. In the distance were cranes, scaffolding and a complicated mix of maritime architecture. I stood talking to a friend about the work. She liked the way these graphic statements held their own in such a visually confusing setting. As I watched the children pointing at the works and talking to their parents I thought about the change in consciousness that this project represents, how the combination of technological and iconographic modes it employs communicate to this largely unsuspecting audience. I wondered whether one day they would make their own stand and maybe even carve out a place for themselves in the history of Aotearoa?

Karl Chitham, 2016

Director Tauranga Art Gallery



A (VERY) BRIEF HISTORY OF AOTEAROA

BY KEREAMA TAEPA

THE FIFTH INSTALLATION OF THE
4 PLINTHS SCULPTURE AWARD



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for a city of sculpture

