

artist statement

Te AWAHOU COLLECTIVE

ARTWORK

Te Wakahuia: Te Whare o te Wairua

The Treasure Box: The House of the Spirit

A Wakahuia is carved to hold precious things. This one holds the unseen—the wairua that flows through all of creation.

Woven across its surface is a lattice of unbroken strands. These are not just threads of whakapapa between people, but the spiritual connections that bind all things together. All of creation shares the same breath, held within the same woven embrace.

Nestled within the weave are the pāua eyes. Each one reflects a different light, representing the many faces of creation—the mountains, the rivers, the ancestors, the generations yet to come. Though distinct, they are bound by the same continuous strand. They are the witnesses to the journey of existence itself.

Carved from Rimu and inlaid with pāua shell, the Wakahuia is a reminder that we are not separate from the natural world. The earth and the sea are not resources—they are whānau. They carry the same wairua that moves through us.

This vessel is a physical manifestation of Kotahi Tonu Wairua o Nga Mea Katoa. It shows us that the seen and unseen, the past and future, the land and the people, the living and the departed, are not separate. They are woven into a single, unified breath—one spirit, moving through all things.

Te Waka Hourua: Te Wairua e Neke Ana

The Double-Hulled Canoe: The Spirit in Motion

Ngātōkimateawhao

Before you floats Ngātōkimateawhao, a 1.4-metre waka hourua suspended above a mirror. The mirror represents Te Moana-nui-a-Kiwa, the great ocean. The waka is fully carved on both its upper and lower surfaces. While the top represents the physical world carrying the crew, the true power of the journey lies beneath the waterline.

The Kōrero of Kupe

Around 550 to 600 AD, Kupe's elders in Rangiātea told him to go and look for this land to the south of Te Moana-nui-a-Kiwa called Te Ika-a-Maui.

Kupe replied, "How will I know where to go and when I have arrived at this new land they call Te Ika a Maui?"

The Tohunga answered, "We will send six Kaitiaki (6 Taniwha) to awhi and guide you on your journey."

The kōrero tells us that Kupe did not navigate alone aboard Ngātōkimateawhao. These six Kaitiaki were sent to ensure the safety and success of the voyage:

- Ngaru-nui, Ngaru-roa and Ngaru-Paewhenua will swim below your waka, they will lift your waka high above Te Moana-nui-a-Kiwa, and speed your waka to its destination.

- Araiteuru will be on the left-hand side of your waka, and Niniwa will be on your right-hand side, they will keep your waka upright in the turbulent waters and the speed that you will be travelling.

- Puhi-Moana-Ariki a Tohora (whale) will take the lead, keep the prow of your waka and your focus on him at all times.

You will know by the actions of Puhi-Moana-Ariki when you have arrived at your new destination, by the Tohora; Raising its tail skywards and disappearing into the moana, only then will you realise that you have arrived at Te Ika a Maui. Hence the name Ka Tu Te Hiku, the upstanding tail. Te Hikitu.

The Theme in Motion

Carved into the underside of the hulls are the Kaitiaki who made the voyage possible. Because the waka floats above a mirror, the unseen world is reflected beneath it. At the front of the waka, a carved whale tail dives into the mirror, depicting the exact moment Puhi-Moana-Ariki raised its tail skywards and disappeared into the moana.

Working together in one Spirit

Kotahi Tonu Wairua o Nga Mea Katoa

Anselm Perkins

(Ngāpuhi – Matai Aranui Marae, Hokianga, Wikaira Whānau by birth; Ngāti Raukawa ki te Tonga, Rangitāne o Manawatū and Muaūpoko – Motuiti Marae, Foxton, Renata Hemara Devonshire Perkins Whānau by adoption)

I have been carving wood, bone, stone and shell for over 35 years. I also hold a Level 6 Diploma in Art and Creativity (majoring in Portraiture) and work in acrylic on canvas. I am the founder of Learn to Carve Academy and am just beginning this journey — anyone wanting to learn is welcome to join my community on <http://Skool.com>.

I have created works in Australia, Switzerland, Japan, Mexico, England, and recently a commissioned carving now in Germany. I approach every piece with karakia so that each taonga carries its own mauri. Carving and drawing are both my passion and a form of meditation — each work becomes an extension of myself.

This installation is a physical manifestation of Kotahi Tonu Wairua o Nga Mea Katoa. It shows us that nothing moves alone. The spiritual realm (the Tohunga's guidance), the natural world (the Kaitiaki and the whale), and the human realm (Kupe and his crew) worked together in perfect harmony to achieve the impossible.

The waka relies entirely on the carved Kaitiaki beneath it. The journey above the water is dependent on the forces moving below. By floating the waka above its own reflection, we invite you to look beneath the surface. The seen and the unseen are intrinsically bound together. The Kaitiaki, the whale, and Ngātōkimateawhao are all moving as one spirit—guiding, lifting, and carrying the journey endlessly forward.

