

waka kuaka

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in a room, in a house, on an island, in an ocean



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Aotea (Great Barrier Island), Emily Parr, 2023, 35mm film.

CURATORIUM

REFLECTIONS ON *ENCOUNTERING AOTEAROA*

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ABSTRACT: This Curatorium piece reflects on a two-week sea voyage along the coast of Aotearoa New Zealand undertaken by the authors, artists Cora-Allan Twiss (Ngā Puhī, Ngāti Tumutumu, Niue—Liku, Alofi) and Emily Parr (Ngāi Te Rangi, Moana, Pākehā). From the journey, Cora-Allan produced a significant body of work, which exhibited as *Encountering Aotearoa* at the Dunedin Public Art Gallery in 2023 and is forthcoming at Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetū in 2024. Using hiapo (Niuean barkcloth), whenua (earth) pigment and other natural resources, the works document whenua (land) from the perspective of the moana (sea), engaging with histories of navigation and encounter, and in particular, the legacy of Captain Cook's eighteenth-century voyages of "discovery". Also included in the exhibition are moving-image pieces filmed by Emily, who accompanied Cora-Allan and her father, Kelly, on board to record the journey and Cora-Allan and Kelly's daily reflections. This piece includes excerpts from these reflections, stitched together with Emily's own observations from the voyage. It draws together threads that situate the project and Cora-Allan's research on the HMS *Endeavour*, captained by Cook, such as the role of the Tahitian navigator Tupaia, the documentation produced by artists and botanists on board and the extractive approach to whenua. Retracing sites of early encounter, Cora-Allan reorients the imperial imaginary to a decolonial one, creating works that record memory, history and the whakapapa (genealogical ties) and mauri (vital essence) of Aotearoa.

Keywords: hiapo, barkcloth, whenua/earth pigments, voyages, Tupaia, Captain Cook, decolonial imaginary

On the afternoon we left the docks, the colour fields were inverted around the horizon—bright sea, dark sky. After a karakia (blessing) to begin our journey safely, Cora-Allan went straight to the top deck with graphite and a little book in hand. Through my camera, I observed her observing, sketching the shape of the whenua (land) as we sailed from the Port of Bluff at the



Cora-Allan sketching Aotearoa (Great Barrier Island) from the ship's deck. Emily Parr, HD video still, 2023.



Kelly's map. Emily Parr, HD video still (2023).



Kelly and Cora-Allan reflecting on day 12 in the observation lounge. Emily Parr, HD video still, 2023.



Cora-Allan painting and Kelly journalling in their cabin. Emily Parr, HD video still, 2023.

southern tip of Te Waipounamu (South Island), Aotearoa New Zealand. Cora-Allan's pāpā (father), Kelly Lafaiki, was nearby, making reference snapshots for later. My footage from this first day tremors from the ship's vibration (there are tricks to filming on a vessel—I just hadn't learnt them yet). This is how some of our days on board the *Heritage Adventurer* began. On others, we greeted the dawn alone—she with sketchbook, me with camera—as we became familiar with the decks and their sheltering places. A year and a bit before we boarded this 124-metre-long expedition vessel, Cora-Allan was dreaming up the project Encountering Aotearoa from a tiny rowboat named *Koro*. Bought during her 2021 McCahon House artist's residency, *Koro* enabled a different way of looking at the whenua: afloat in the Manukau Harbour, she began to draw the land from the sea.

Cora-Allan is a celebrated hiapo (Niue barkcloth) practitioner, and in the last few years, she has expanded into painting with whenua (earth) pigments. She possesses the fierce dedication required for the revitalisation of ancestral practices and is also deeply research-driven. Cora-Allan's preoccupations include the voyages of Captain James Cook, the artworks and field recordings made by those on board Cook's ships and the role of the Tahitian navigator Tupaia on the *Endeavour* in 1769. It was these interests, and her desire to continue painting the whenua from the moana (sea), that brought us on board the *Heritage Adventurer*. Over a fortnight in March 2023, we sailed the eastern coastlines of Te Waipounamu and Te Ika-a-Māui (North Island), from Rakiura (Stewart Island) to Waitangi, crossing Te Ara-a-Kewa and Te Moana-o-Raukawa (Foveaux and Cook Straits), visiting significant sites from Cook's voyages. Pāpā Lafaiki was there to support Cora-Allan: his duties included preparing our schedule for each day and keeping records in his journal and Polaroid book. I was there to document our journey through moving-image pieces to accompany the body of work Cora-Allan was creating. Retracing places and events that were foundational in the colonisation of these islands, the resulting artworks powerfully reorient ways of seeing and storytelling, of encountering Aotearoa.

HE TOKA TŪ MOANA: A ROCK STANDING FIRM IN THE SEA

On our first evening on board, Cora-Allan and I sat together in the observation lounge to record. It was the quietest place on the ship, somewhere to welcome tranquillity after a long day. The windows gave an expansive view over the ship's fore: sea and sky were nearly the same shade of blue this particular dusk. Cora-Allan had chosen a whakataukī (proverb) that resonated with her, "he toka tū moana" (a rock standing firm in the sea)—a tikanga (practice) that continued each day of our journey. She shared that the whakataukī refers to a rock that is immovable, even as strong ocean currents and waves pass it. The process of getting here had felt like the rough waters, while her

practice and knowledge of materials was the rock. She said, “My dad being on board has kept the project and me strong as a rock.”

There were a few ways in which our contemporary voyage mirrored Cook’s earlier ones: like Tupaia had his apprentice, Taiata, Cora-Allan had her father to support her, and like them, we were the only people of Moana (Pacific) descent onboard. Tupaia, let alone Taiata, is not a well-known character in the Pākehā (New Zealand European) imagination (and certainly not among our fellow passengers, many of whom were international tourists). These are the kinds of histories, of Indigenous lives and experiences, that Cora-Allan takes an active role in resurfacing through her work. By the time we disembark, everybody knows of Tupaia. That evening, I asked Cora-Allan to expand on these parallel relationships—Tupaia and Taiata, Cora-Allan and her pāpā—and their connection with the whakataukī.

Experiencing some “interesting” historical narratives shared by the tour bus driver really made me think about Tupaia’s role, and how he would be sitting on a boat talking about these southern ocean spaces with all these British men, who were sailing those spaces as though they knew them and not really using or referring to him as a valid knowledge system on board. I find Tupaia’s role as an artist using Western materials beautiful because it was the beginning of documentation that was archived from Pacific knowledge holders on Cook’s voyages. I know that his painting of a Māori man trading a kōura (rock lobster) for tapa (barkcloth) with Joseph Banks is an important and widely seen image. One thing I think people may not have seen is the string around the kōura. When the kōura was being traded for the tapa cloth, the Māori pulled that string so that they could have that kōura back. I like that part of the story because it maybe explains a little bit of the cheekiness (whakatoī) of Māori, and their steadfastness in their roles as traders.

I find Tupaia’s role on board really interesting because in Taiata, he had a family member with him. Me having my dad mimics that. I think about Tupaia’s experiences of coming upon this new land and how it must look so similar but feel so different in regards to the coolness and the climate. Also, the sounds of te taiao (the natural world) would have been different. In regards to the whakataukī “he toka tū moana”, I can imagine that being able to hold on to knowledge systems that were important back home and not being heard during such an important trip would have been really hard. However, I do know that during the trip Tupaia spent a few days on land, and the crew didn’t necessarily know where he was. Maybe part of that strength was him having his own space to explore Aotearoa in that first contact period by himself, without Pākehā around him—for him to connect as a person from the Pacific with the local tangata whenua (people of the land).



Cora-Allan sketching Tamatea (Dusky Sound) from the ship's deck. Emily Parr, HD video still, 2023.



Kelly's Polaroid book. Emily Parr, HD video still, 2023.

DOCUMENTING A VOYAGE: DE/COLONIAL IMAGINARIES

Between the three of us, our journey generated a multitude of records and depictions: cyanotypes, phone photos, charcoal sketches, Polaroids, HD video, whenua (earth) pigment paintings, 35 mm film photos, journal entries, glitter-pen drawings, sea-soaked hiapo. Questions and practices of documentation permeated our trip. What distance lay between our documentation and that produced during Cook's voyages? How does our position as Indigenous people determine our ways of seeing and, in an expanded sense, of listening and feeling? Documentation is political, and Ngāti Porou/Clann Dhònnchaidh artist Natalie Robertson's reflection on the role of the camera comes to mind: "Telling stories through camera-based practices ... can motivate acts of cultural and environmental reclamation. Whose hands the camera is in reflects how the act of witnessing is undertaken—through whose eyes do we see?" (Robertson 2016: 134). This follows Ngāti Apa/Pākehā filmmaker Barry Barclay's argument that "the camera on the deck" operates within Western ideological landscapes, while the camera ashore, in the hands of Indigenous peoples, has an ancient—rather than nation-state oriented—outlook (Barclay 2003: 7–8). Without wanting to take Barclay too literally, what happens when this departure is reversed, the camera shifting from shore to deck, in the hands of an Indigenous woman? What might pass through the aperture—a portal—when it is opened to the relations and rhythms of *te taiao*?

Nearly halfway into our voyage, Cora-Allan and I were in the observation lounge again. She mixed soot from burnt resin of the kauri tree into ink, making sure I could hear the stickiness she aimed for. Some of the kauri gum came from McCahon House. The whakapapa (genealogy) of materials is important to Cora-Allan: she explained that each type of material she uses has a lineage and is connected to a person or place that has influenced her. This was a precious window in which to paint—spare time was rare on the expedition. Cora-Allan would wake early to paint and continue into the night. The ship was sailing from Whakaraupō (Lyttelton Harbour) for Tōtaranui (Queen Charlotte Sound) and we were bathed in sun, but our minds were on the atmospheric fiords of Tamatea (Dusky Sound).

Over the week, I began to share Cora-Allan's preoccupation with the documentation produced during Cook's voyages. After visiting Tamatea ourselves, it was clear that Cook's second-voyage artist William Hodges's renderings of the sounds, and the Māori inhabiting them, reflected a romantic European sensibility.¹ His soft light, delicate palette and rounded forms were alien to the depths of tone, cleft and emotion we experienced. The colonial imaginary was at work. Samoan scholar Lana Lopesi asserts that from the

sixteenth to twentieth century, this imaginary was “institutionalised through mechanisms like the census, cartography and museums. The Moana as an idyllic region of disparate and dislocated islands occupied by noble savages and dusky maidens is a prime example of a colonial imaginary” (Lopesi 2021: 64). Documentation from Cook’s voyages (and others like them) spread throughout Europe, furthering the settler-colonial project. Imaginaries have power: this one contributed to the expropriation of Māori land. As Cora-Allan outlined landforms with the freshly mixed ink, I asked for her thoughts on the paintings produced during Cook’s voyages.

As we were going through Tamatea, I was interested in the fact that the artists on Cook’s ship were so important to the documenting of space and to the archiving of their new “adventure”. The roles of the artists and botanists on board, especially Tupaia, the Tahitian navigator, played an important part in the objects and images that we see from that time. I’m really interested in how whenua was captured because those paintings were then used for colonisers to sell land and get people to settle here. Those paintings weren’t solely going to act as trip souvenirs—they were going to be used to monetise the whenua, to make it interesting and enticing for people to come and buy land that wasn’t their own. Being in the Tamatea area—where William Hodges painted the waterfall—and us seeing how the waterfall was just dripping—it wasn’t this bountiful waterfall that he painted—reaffirmed that what they painted was a fantasy place. They painted a land that would be easy to settle in. For Māori, this was very much a transitory space for fishing, for gathering materials, for gathering pounamu (greenstone), and so to publicise that space as liveable—all I think about is how it was very much a journey of money-making.

The paintings and the roles of artists on board remind me of the roles we still have as artists—how we make art, how we are talking about the whenua, how we as Māori and Pacific people want to engage with and document the whenua. It’s really interesting to have studied all these landscape images, and then to be here in the place where they were made and decide how I want to paint them myself. I don’t want to reproduce what’s been done. With all my works being from te taiao and natural materials, that in itself is an action of redeption. Using Māori pigment practices and Pacific cloth encapsulates a new journey, a new sense of self and being able to identify the whenua how I want to, how we want to, and to give my works names that will give the whakapapa back to these spaces. The Māori names should be used first because they were there first.



Cora-Allan's hiapo cyanotypes drying on her cabin window. Emily Parr, HD video still, 2023.



Cora-Allan beating fallen plant material into hiapo on Te Wharawhara (Ulva Island). Emily Parr, HD video still, 2023.

RETRACING SITES OF EARLY ENCOUNTER

On the *Heritage Adventure*, we retraced sites of encounter. The first few days still ring clear in my mind. We followed Cook's crew ashore at places renamed "Astronomer's Point", "Pickersgill Harbour", "Luncheon Cove", "Indian Island". We heard about the firsts that happened there: first beer brewed, first European ship and house built. The lasts were present through negative space: tree stumps without their trunks, a hāngī (earth oven) pit of a small whānau (family group), the absence of an abundant seal population. I did my best to not disturb the understorey, to move lightly, to greet the inquisitive birds. I pressed my hand to branches, rocks and mosses, meeting their mauri (vital essence) with my own. We cruised over hundreds of jellyfish in the Zodiac and trailed a pod of dolphins into the sun. I felt incredibly moved by the unfathomableness of it all as we flew across the sound.

It was easy to imagine a time before settler-colonisation in the ancient forests and fiords of Tamatea. According to researcher Anna Boswell, early voyaging accounts of European encounters on these shores indicate the visitors' inability to understand the systems of relation already in place (Boswell 2014: 37). Boswell describes the ensuing actions of settlers as the "unmaking" of a world: "felling the ancient forests of Aotearoa/New Zealand, draining the country's swamps, diverting its waterways, carving up its newly dried-out surface into alienable parcels of farmland, and sowing swathes of pasture in a place which hitherto had none" (Boswell 2020: 4). Before embarking on the journey, Cora-Allan had intended to harvest whenua pigments and beat plant life into hiapo. Rather than continue the legacy of extraction that Cook's ships left in their wake, she chose not take anything tangible from the whenua. Instead, she soaked hiapo in water that was returned to the moana. She used pigments already gifted or harvested herself. She placed plant life on treated paper and hiapo, letting the sun reveal their forms. Making cyanotypes became a process Cora-Allan described as "archiving without taking from the whenua". She engaged histories of empire expansion with decolonial practices: every stroke of whenua pigment or beat of hiapo was a kind of restoration.

Settlers definitely benefitted, and still benefit, from those spaces. So, in my painting and documenting of the area, it was really important that I didn't take from the space. I wanted to take whenua pigments, grind them down, use them for my paintings—but that's taking again. I wanted to take samples and beat them into hiapo, but then I didn't want to do that with live plants because that's taking again. Even though I know those things would have produced beautiful pieces, I didn't want to take again from the space that historically is just take, take, take, take, take. And that's what we learnt from that area. How much was taken.



Kelly reflecting on Cora-Allan's practice as we sailed Te Tai Rāwhiti (the East Coast). Emily Parr, HD video still, 2023.



Cora-Allan sketching Aotea (Great Barrier Island) from the ship's deck. Emily Parr, HD video still, 2023.

The beginning of my work, in regards to William Hodges's paintings and Joseph Banks's botany collections, was to look at ways in which to give the mauri back to that space. I think that's what the cyanotypes were, too. Taking photographic reliefs and prints on hiapo itself, but leaving whatever was giving that trace there where it lives. Not taking it, letting it exist continually in that space. These cyanotypes, for me, represent memory, history and looking at the whakapapa and the mauri of the space.

* * *

During a day at sea, with Te Tai Rāwhiti (the East Coast) visible through the cabin window, I asked Cora-Allan's father about his maps stuck to the mirrors, and his thoughts on the shifts we observed in her practice. "She can go on forever, I suppose. It's all up to the mountains." From the ship's decks, the world around us changed constantly. As Pāpā Lafaiki pointed out, the photos he snapped on his phone became vital documentation of the shifting light, clouds and colours for Cora-Allan to paint from later: "That's the way nature's gonna be. You've just gotta follow it. It just does its thing." This strikes the tenor of our voyage: we understood that the best way to "encounter" Aotearoa was with an open heart, and a responsive attunement to the ecosystems we were lucky enough to briefly inhabit.

On our final day on board the *Heritage Adventurer*, Cora-Allan conceived a whakatauākī (proverb): he tāngata he taonga; the people are the treasure. After visiting the Treaty Grounds at Waitangi, Cora-Allan and I sat on the beach at Kororāreka (Russell). Pāpā Lafaiki was on a nearby bench, guarding the model *Endeavour* his daughter had just purchased from the museum. That morning, our fellow travellers had heard the history of Te Tiriti o Waitangi (The Treaty of Waitangi) from a Māori perspective. They were welcomed into the meeting house with a pōwhiri (welcome ceremony), and Pāpā Lafaiki—who is more comfortable quietly observing from a corner near the coffee machine—was nominated as our "chief", taking up the wero (challenge) and speaking on our behalf. I can readily admit to a certain emotional permeability, but Cora-Allan and her dad are more like he toka tū moana. On this day, we were all moved. Reflecting on the trip and the significance of ending at Waitangi, Cora-Allan felt that the narrative on board had shifted. Our stories, as Māori, had come to the fore. She also felt ready to relinquish the painting plans she had made before we embarked on the journey and instead create a body of work that would hold the stories, names and mauri of our encounters: "Something else is going to happen. But I'm ready for all the stirring. This place has caused a stir."

NOTE

1. See Hodges's 1773 painting *A View in Dusky Bay, New Zealand*.

GLOSSARY

The terms in this glossary are New Zealand Māori unless otherwise stated.

hāngī	earth oven
hiapo	barkcloth (Niue)
karakia	blessing
kōura	rock lobster
mauri	vital essence
moana	sea
Moana	Te Moana-nui-a-Kiwa/The Pacific Ocean; people of Pacific descent
Pākehā	New Zealand European
pāpā	father
pounamu	greenstone
pōwhiri	welcome ceremony
tangata whenua	the people of the land
tapa	barkcloth (Samoan)
te taiao	the natural world
tikanga	practice
wero	challenge
whakapapa	genealogy
whakatauaāki	proverb (originator known)
whakatauki	proverb (originator unknown)
whakatoī	cheekiness
whānau	family group
whenua	land, earth

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