

## AROHA GOSSAGE / RA GOSSAGE / STAR GOSSAGE

TOHAINA Ō PAINGA KI TE AO / SHARE YOUR GIFTS WITH THE WORLD

30 JAN – 22 FEB 2025

The title of this exhibition expresses the generosity, creativity and whanaungatanga central to the lives and work of the Gossage family of artists. Three of the five children of the late Josephine (Tilly) and Peter Gossage are represented here: Star (born 1973); Ra (born 1980); and Aroha, (born 1987).

They whakapapa to Ngāti Wai and Ngāti Manuhiri through their grandmother Grace Brown, and to Ngāti Ruanui and Te Āti Awa through Grace's husband Joe Haddon. Grace was the pōtiki of her whanau; my grandmother, Jane, was its mātāmua. Jane, Grace and their brothers and sisters grew up on ancestral land in Pākiri, north of Auckland, a place of golden dunes and a green valley. Its broad beach gazes out to the misty peak of Hauturu (Little Barrier Island), a significant and contested landmark in iwi and hapu history.

The Gossage children grew up between Pākiri and Auckland's North Shore. The clay and mud of the river provided the girls with their first materials and a visceral connection to the whenua. Their marae is Ōmaha, near Te Hāwere-a-Maki (Goat Island), site of the old pā where Rahui Te Kiri and Tenetahi lived after they were expelled by force from Hauturu and where they are buried in the urupā. This marae is where Star, Ra and Aroha came together for a painting wānanga in the wharenuī, overlooked by images of tūpuna, to devise the kaupapa for this exhibition.

These places form a potent physical and spiritual papakainga, as nourishing as the fertile māra where they grow an abundance of food, with their older sister Marama and brother Tahupotiki. Pākiri is somewhere they can be 'safe and free,' Star says. 'Free to be ourselves.' This is rare, she acknowledges, for Māori and for artists.

In the work shared in this exhibition, place is explored on multiple levels: realist, psychic, schematic, organic. The landscapes are loaded, expressing beauty, mystery, loss, growth, and personal as well as iwi history. Human figures may be fully realised or spectral or disembodied, expressing a fundamental truth about papakainga as the centre of both daily life and the deep past.

The sisters are grounded by both whenua and whānau, finding sustenance in the histories of the place – 'our living history', Star says, which includes te taiao, the natural environment. 'The forms of the plants,' Ra says, 'and of the shells, animals, sea, islands and whenua provide the patterns and ideas which make up my kōwhaiwhai patterns.'

Aroha usually works from her studio in Northcote, but the work she does in the Pākiri māra, 'growing, planting, digging, harvesting', supplies a 'renewal of energy for when I return to my painting.' Like Ra, she is informed by the physicality of life in Pākiri, working on 'studies of the figures of my whānau when working in the garden. The vegetables and whole māra become part of the inspiration for my

paintings and compositions.’ The sisters are attuned to te taiao, the changing of seasons, and the rhythms of the landscape. This is part of their inheritance from their mother, an accomplished gardener and source of mātauranga, knowledge of the natural world.

From knowing, as Tilly did, ‘when the kahawai are running or when it is time to plant the kumara’, Ra finds herself growing in both knowledge and aroha and adjusting to the ‘slower pace’ dictated by nature. ‘This has helped my work to become more considered, informed and deeper in feeling and meaning.’ One of her pieces in this exhibition, the six-panel *Te Āniwaniwa, he tohu o tōku māmā* (*The Rainbow, a symbol of my mother*), is for Tilly. ‘At the time of her passing it was rainbow season. They were everywhere throughout her tangihanga. Now when they appear, we know it is her saying hello.’ All the Gossage children have a palpable emotional connection to their mother, a fierce guardian of the land, and to what Aroha recognises as her ‘taonga tuku iho, her treasures and gifts handed down to us.’

In this most intuitive of families, it’s unsurprising the works gathered here ‘speak to each other,’ as Ra describes it, ‘with a quiet knowing, a familiarity, a closeness of shared times, places and lives together as a whanau.’ Star says, ‘We just painted them and trusted they will all speak to each other.’ For Aroha, this group show made her feel ‘I have the mana of my sisters behind me. We are representing our whole whānau together.’ Since the wananga that began the process, Aroha felt supported, less solitary, with ‘more room for experimentation’ because her work was woven into that of her sisters.

I am immeasurably proud of my cousins and their commitment to lives that honour our shared history and nourish their individual creative practices. ‘Tohaina ō painga ki te ao’ fulfils the late Peter Gossage’s dream of a group show for this family of artists, and includes one of his distinctive works – gouache on paper, one of the most iconic images from his book *How Maui Slowed the Sun*. It is exhibited in public for the first time. ‘I see this exhibition,’ Ra says, ‘as a celebration of whānau and of art.’ ‘It is also a celebration of Pākiri, a place where Peter and Tilly also felt free to live in both the imaginative and physical world. ‘It’s our home,’ Star says. ‘It’s our everyday, it’s our heart. Words can’t really explain it. Maybe our paintings can.’

— Paula Morris MNZM (Ngāti Wai, Ngāti Whātua, Ngāti Manuhiri) is an award-winning novelist, short story writer, essayist and editor. She has been awarded numerous residencies and fellowships and is director of the Master’s in Creative Writing at the University of Auckland Waipapa Taumata Rau. She is founder of the Academy of New Zealand Literature, the Aotearoa NZ Review of Books and Wharerangi, the online Māori literature hub.