

MATARIKI WILLIAMS
A PERSONAL RESPONSE

HIRIA ANDERSON
WAIKUA
19 MAY – 11 JUN 2022

There is a convergence that occurs when viewing the work of Hiriā Anderson (Rereahu, Ngāti Maniapoto, Ngāti Apakura). Anderson's work can swiftly transport the mind, the heart, elsewhere as it was when I first came across her work. While seeking nothing except the decompression that social media can afford a tired mind, her vignettes of marae life arrested my scrolling. There I was, a perpetually homesick Māori living in an urban centre geographically distant to my ūkaipō and in that moment, Anderson alighted me home. This theme of convergence is one that Anderson herself has acknowledged, noting that "I like that coming together of ancestor and person, but I also like the separation of time between them. I collect those for the next generation, it is not like 'this is what you do' but 'this is what we've done'."¹

In reflecting on the title of this exhibition, *Wairua*, I note an explanation of this word that I heard during a wānanga from Darcy Nicholas (Te Ātiawa, Ngāi Te Rangi, Taranaki, Ngāti Ruanui, Ngāti Hauā). Nicholas described wairua as being a reflection of oneself, evoking both the reflection we can see in water and our co-existence with this reflection. Hearing this definition was a revelation as it made real how I had understood wairua, a cultural concept that has been superficially defined as a 'spirit'. Understanding wairua as your reflection, an entity that exists outside of your corporeal self that remains ever-present, we can appreciate it as something that needs care and that we must remain conscious of.

It is no accident to me that this show may be titled as such, wairua being a subtle presence in Anderson's works though it is up to the viewer to query whether the presence of wairua is that of their own, or of those depicted. Anderson's work indeed leaves the possibility with the viewer to fill in the gaps. Her vignettes are so closely tied to her own whānau and pā but are depicted in a way that leaves enough space for me to find reflections of my own home. I see our whare tīpuna in the extreme close-ups of the dehumidifier adjacent to the tukutuku, I see my nephews up to mischief in the kids waiting at the side of the road for Santa. So too do I see the markers of time passing in the scrapes of keys along a door frame as fumbling hands seek to unlock whare on cold mornings.

As always in Anderson's mahi, I see what has been and gone, her innate ability to capture the implacability of time to ever stop. The passing of time and people are visible in the subtle details, a hole where a doorhandle used to be, portraits on sitting room walls, layers of blankets that provide not just material texture to her work but the tangibility of people's lives that she has depicted. Latterly, the documentary aspect of Anderson's mahi has seen the emergence of the pandemic years with the ubiquitous facemask making an appearance alongside 1pm briefings. Their inclusion in *Wairua* does not exist without question as they are shown alongside works depicting dead birds and

¹ Excerpt from the artist's profile recorded as part of the *Toi Tū Toi Ora* exhibition,
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Twle8mCTxfw&ab_channel=AucklandArtGalleryToioT%C4%81maki

taonga. These more specimen-like treatments give the affect of a sort of stasis with the taonga and manu portrayed as if they have been frozen in time. It is the elastic nature of time in Anderson's work which is perhaps the most speculative aspect, her works being both close and distant, nostalgic and ever real.

No answers are clear but I'm grateful for the exercise as it provokes a deeper consideration of the features in her more detailed works. Here it is the architecture of small-town Aotearoa that remains in place while their bigger city counterparts have been usurped by apartment buildings, the stucco for flat roofed art deco giving way to the tell-tale stucco of a more recently built leaking building. I continue to ponder what Anderson is telling us, that this too shall pass? Or that this too shall remain the same?

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She was previously Curator Mātauranga Māori at Te Papa Tongarewa and is an independent writer and editor. She is co-founder and co-editor of [ATE Journal of Māori Art](#) with Bridget Reweti and co-wrote the award-winning book [Protest Tautohetohe: Objects of Resistance, Persistence and Defiance](#) alongside Stephanie Gibson and Puawai Cairns.

She recently relocated from Te-Whanganui-a-Tara to Whakatāne with her partner and tamariki.