

MEDIA RELEASE 1st JULY 2016
For immediate release

PURA TE MANIHERA MCGREGOR

Whenua ki te Whenua | Alexis Neal
09TH JULY - 18TH SEPTEMBER

Pura Te Manihera McGregor - Whenua ki te Whenua is an intimate response to the life and legacy of Pura Te Manihera McGregor (1855-1920, *Nga Poutama, Ngati Ruaka, Ngati Rangi*), a mana wahine and prominent figure from the Whanganui community. An important part of Pura's legacy was the bequest of her personal taonga, now housed by the Whanganui Regional Museum. This new body of work created by Auckland-based artist Alexis Neal (*Te Ati Awa*) has its origins in Neal's first encounter with these taonga during her time as Tylee Cottage artist-in-residence from July - November 2012 leading her to further research Pura and her life. Although an artist who engages primarily in print this show includes woven and carved pieces blending contemporary and traditional practices.

Whangarei Art Museum is very fortunate to be able to include four of Pura's taonga in this exhibition which are on loan from the Whanganui Regional Museum. The taonga include a hand-coloured photographic portrait of Pura herself plus three of the items in it - a kakauroa (long-handled fighting axe), a mere and a waharua. Pura was born in 1855, to chiefly parents. In 1879 she married European Settler Gregor McGregor and the two lived interconnected lives. He became a great kaihoe (paddler), fluent in Te Reo Maori and a manager of Morikau station. As well as leading pre-battle haka for her Uncle, Major Te Rangihiwihui Kepa, Pura became stalwart of the Whanganui Beautifying Society. She was the first Maori woman to receive an OBE in 1919 for her efforts to raise funds for World War I soldiers.



Image Credit: Alexis Neal, Taonga Tuku Iho, 2015, Taniko Red Woven Kete with Mako Tooth Adornment, 250mm x 300mm, Collection of the Artist

The catalyst for this exhibition was Neal's first encounter of the taonga that Pura bequeathed to the Whanganui Regional Museum, "pieces that touched her body and held her human spirit...speaking of war, people, history and achievement". Neal discovered that Pura had been a 'wahine toa' (warrior women) who had accompanied her people during the Land Wars, leading the haka before the battle. As Pura lived in both Maori and Pakeha worlds, Neal chose to combine European materials and customary Maori techniques to honor her. A set of whariki (printed woven paper panels) represent her Whanganui contemporaries, and also recall the tukutuku (panelling) in the museum, where her taonga are usually housed. A series of small lithographs, printed on tea-stained paper to recall 19th century cartes de visite, combine images of the Whanganui landscape and quotations to suggest Pura's physical and spiritual world. Neal's artworks and Pura's taonga are on display in a contemporary whata - a special storehouse for displaying the personal belongings of a chief.

Visitor Information:

OPEN Daily – 10am -4 pm
Closed Christmas Day | Boxing Day | Good Friday
4304240

Press Enquires:

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