



***With the sun aglow, I have my pensive moods, 2017***

Two channel video, colour and sound.

Cinematography Iain Frengley.

Installation view, Gladstone Court

Edinburgh Art Festival August, 2017

Image: Johnny Barrington

*With the sun aglow, I have my pensive moods*, is a two channel video installation featuring footage filmed in three separate locations in Aotearoa New Zealand, documenting a dance, a highway and a farm. These visuals also contain a myriad of references that create a convergence between Te Ao's personal socio-geography, his tipuna and the imaginings of other artists, directors and musicians from distinct times and places.

The title and verse featured in the work quotes from the c.1846 moteatea, *He waiata mo te mate ngerengere* (*Song for a leprous malady*) by Te Rohu of Ngāti Tūwharetoa. The waiata was composed by Te Rohu to lament layers of personal and collective trauma such as the demise of her health after contracting leprosy from a potential suitor, a fatal landslide which killed her father Mananui Te Heuheu Tukino II along with over fifty others, and also the turbulent early era of colonial settlement.

*With the sun aglow, I have my pensive moods* grew as response to an imagined dialogue, locating Te Rohu within the context of the 1977 Charles Burnett film, *Killer of Sheep*. Filmed in 1970s Los Angeles, in the African-American neighbourhood of Watts, Burnett's film captures a rare moment of intimacy in the life of a slaughterhouse worker, where the protagonist slowly dances with his wife before abruptly resisting her embrace. Te Ao restages the scene to show two women dancing in a small clearing on a commercial hemp farm in New Zealand's South Island that propagates the plant for health products. In Te Ao's film the dancing women are surrounded by female plants have been pollinated and dying male hemp plants that have concluded their natural role.

This scene is paired with footage shot on a commercial dairy farm which directly encircles the urupa for Te Ao's whanau who also share their tribal affiliations with Te Rohu. Alongside this, Te Ao presents a sequence captured along the Rangipo Desert, commonly known as the 'Desert Road', a stretch of highway located near the boundaries of Te Ao's tribal lands. Known for its iconic barren landscape situated at the foot of the region's most notable volcanic peaks, the area is predominantly occupied as a training facility for the New Zealand defence force.

The amalgamation of these various references conflates the narratives and places beyond their original personal and socio-political contexts. By doing so Te Ao creates an enigmatic work that seeks out empathetic registers within the human condition such as the tenuous nature of relationships, communication, wellbeing and a sense of place or tūrangawaewae.

View video content here:

Pt. 1 <https://vimeo.com/228890888/b15ffeda43>

Pt. 2 <https://vimeo.com/228889206/31d348c844>

Pt. 3 <https://vimeo.com/228890233/796153113e>



*With the sun aglow, I have my pensive moods, 2017*

Two channel video, colour and sound.

Cinematography Iain Frengley.

Installation view, Gladstone Court

Edinburgh Art Festival August, 2017

Image: Johnny Barrington



*With the sun aglow, I have my pensive moods*, 2017 (video stills)

Two channel video, colour and sound.

Cinematography Iain Frengley.

*'The fever within, O sire, is like the flaming tussock!  
Brought (was I) from o'er the range, so that I might feel  
The (healing) gold plates unscale entirely  
The unsightliness from my body, now covered with sores.'*

**Te pūkawa rā o te whenua  
Ai auē, anā te hua  
He aha te take o te aroha  
Ki te kore e tohaina  
Ā, me he puehu  
Taku noho i te ao  
E ārai ana i te rōhi mumura  
He aha te take o aku mahi  
Ko wai ka hua**

**Aeha, te pūkawa o te whenua  
Kātahi te mākinakina  
Ka tangi te pītoitoi he pēpi tonu  
Ka tō te rā kua kaumātua  
Ahakoa e tangi tonu nei a Roto  
Kia mau ki te whakaaro  
Ka whakahokia mai pea he reo anō  
Kāti rā, ko te pūkawa o te whenua  
E kore rā e pūkawa i te mutunga**

*Te pūkawa rā o te whenua, 2017*

Commissioned te reo translation of the lyrics to 'This Bitter Earth' written by Clyde Otis (1964) and sung by Dinah Washington. Translated by Krissi Jerram. Series ongoing.



*Te huka o te tai*, 2017

Two channel video, colour and sound.

Cinematography Iain Frengley.

Installation view: Artspace Auckland

Image: Sam Hartnett

The work *Te huka o te tai* is a dual channel video work that depicts a split vision of physicality—as located within the environment and then enacted within the creative process. The footage depicts the geothermal active landscape in the mountains surrounding Taipei followed by a solitary figure scribing expressive gestures in charcoal on paper.

This pairing of a landscape teeming with energy and the kinesthetic flow of mark making suggests an innate human tendency to use the environment and objects around us for the task of memory retention and the creation of meaning—whether this be an attempt to retain the histories that a place is founded, or the ability of an artistic response to create a sense stasis within the incessant flow of space and time.

View video content here: <https://vimeo.com/219583422/8c38fdd113>



***Two shoots that stretch far out, 2013-14***

Single channel video, colour + sound

13:46min

Cinematography Iain Frengley

Installation view City Gallery Wellington,

Image: Shaun Waugh

View video content here: <https://vimeo.com/104976180/a6c36cd848>

In *Two shoots that stretch far out* Shannon Te Ao recites a pre-colonial Māori waiata in English to various animals, including a donkey, geese, a swan, rabbits and a wallaby. The central theme within the work hinges on a communicative gesture (the recital of a song) that explores an empathetic connection—an intimate relationship—a marriage.

The waiata is titled 'He Waiata Mo Te Moe Punarua' (The Song of the First Wife) and the author is attributed to Matahira a Ngāti Porou woman who was the wife of Te Kotiri a man of chiefly status. In the waiata, Matahira shares the emotional turmoil and faded intimacy caused by her husband taking on a second wife. The artwork's title references the pēpeha "E kimi ana i ngā kawai i toro ki tawhiti" (Seeking two shoots that stretch far out). Pēpeha are short sayings or idioms that are poetically and musically crafted to convey proverbial meaning. This pēpeha specially describes the creeping shoots growing from a gourd plant likened to someone "seeking to establish a distant relationship or seeking to rediscover his or her own roots".

The viewer is presented with a series of five video sequences between 2-3 minutes in duration and within each scene Te Ao is pictured reading various versions of the single text to different animals. In each recital,



Matahira's story of loss and pain from being emotionally and physically separated from her companion becomes all the more resonant as the animal audience respond with indifference or imagined compassion. By verbalizing the waiata Te Ao reaches out to connect with the minds of those past, blurs gender association and seeks the companionship of kindred animalia. Reflecting on the making of this work and contemplating this search for connection Te Ao writes:

I am ambling with a blind frail housebound Wallaby named Walloo, while sharing a lament by Matahira as she reflects on the tension arising from the actions of her polygamous husband. As I recite thoughts of loss and despair and through my voice I imagine Matahira listening to the muffled score of her estranged spouse and his new lover. Walloo is ushered around the small space of the training barn as he brushes the inside of my legs and feet. I anticipate and simultaneously shadow his movements while he uses my presence to plot his own bearings. Meanwhile, the voice of Matahira observes through the wall, the heavy breathing from the next room.



***A torch and a light (cover)*, 2015 (video still)**

Single channel video, and sound.

7min 33 sec

Cinematography Iain Frengley

Featuring text from

'He waiata aroha' (A song of love) Author unknown

Translation by Heni Turei and Matoroa Ngarimu

A mournful and meditative sentiment inhabits *A torch and a light (cover)* by Shannon Te Ao. The words of the pre-colonial waiata 'He waiata aroha' are spoken in an industrial space followed by a quizzical scene of a figure manipulating a mound of soggy towels that resemble mountainous terrains or bodily forms. This combination of poetic lyrics and ambiguous physical action suggests that feelings of loss may be considered subjective and intangible but are experienced as deep embodied pain, a sense of physical emptiness or a tension that needs to be exercised. As the waiata's unknown author expresses, through powerful metaphor, that emotion has an undeniable physical manifestation: "There was a while where the longing seemed to be but a lingering regret but now it utterly consumes my being leaving nought but dust within."

View video content here: <https://vimeo.com/118432813/d34d031a1e>



*Untitled (McCahon House Studies), 2013 (video still)*

Single channel video, colour + sound

4:34min

Cinematography Iain Frengley

In *Untitled (McCahon House Studies)*, Shannon Te Ao walks with and talks back to the proud artistic legacy and hard domestic reality that is associated with the painter Colin McCahon and his family. The video features Te Ao as he saunters about McCahon's former family home in Titirangi dressed in a wig and bathrobe performing nonsensical physical actions. In the 1950s, McCahon made much of his work there, while—almost unbelievably, considering its tiny size — raising a family of four, with his wife Anne also a notable painter. Now, it's a Museum with an artist residency, administered by a Trust. Te Ao was not invited into the House as an official resident, but entered of his own volition. His performed ritualised actions and absurd repetitive motions could be interpreted as an attempt to exorcise aspects of McCahon's life and the conflicting psychological demands of creativity and family that might be embedded within the fabric of the building.

View video content here: <https://vimeo.com/47923419/ed08741010>

**Shannon Te Ao** (Ngāti Tūwharetoa, b.1978 Sydney)

Shannon Te Ao is an artist currently based in Wellington, New Zealand. Working predominantly within performance and video based practices Te Ao's recent artistic enquiry has seen him draw from a range of existing literary material Māori lyrical sources found in whakataukī (Māori proverb) and waiata (Māori song). Using these as exploratory devices into various social and political constructs. Within moving image installation, live performances and other textual based output, language in the form of short poetic text, prose or song - offsets a given site or activity. Recitals or readings are also employed to locate imagery within an expansive, sometimes anachronistic and often tenuous domestic setting.

Recent solo exhibitions include: *With the sun aglow, I have my pensive moods* curated by Bruce E. Phillips for The Edinburgh Art Festival; *Tenei ao kawa nei* Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetu; *Two shoots that stretch far out* Taipei Contemporary Art Centre and *Te huka o te tai* Artspace Auckland. Recent group exhibitions include: *From the one I call my own: Susan Te Kahurangi King and Shannon Te Ao* City Gallery Wellington (2015); *Unstuck in Time* curated by Bruce E. Phillips, Te Tuhi Centre for the Arts, Auckland (2015) and *The 19<sup>th</sup> Biennale of Sydney: You Imagine What You Desire* curated by Juliana Engberg (2014). In 2016 Te Ao was awarded The Walters Prize.

### Education

BFA (Hons), Elam School of Fine Arts, University of Auckland, 2009

Graduate Diploma Teaching, Faculty of Education, University of Auckland, 2010

MFA (First Class Honours), College of Creative Arts, Massey University Wellington, 2016

### Selected Exhibitions

#### 2017

*With the sun aglow, I have my pensive moods*, curated by Bruce E. Phillips for The Edinburgh Art Festival

*Tenei ao kawa nei*, curated by Nathan Pohio Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetu

*Two shoots that stretch far out*, Taipei Contemporary Art Centre

*Te huka o te tai* as part of Singular pluralities: plural singularities conceived by Misal Adnan Yildiz Artspace Auckland

#### 2016

*Untitled (malady)*, 2016, Robert Heald Gallery, Wellington

*A torch and a light (cover)*, Hastings City Art Gallery

*To All the Contributing Factors* Forum (w/ ST PAUL St), *The 11th Gwangju Biennale: The Eighth Climate (What Does Art Do?)*

*Imagine the Present*, curated by Abby Cunnane ST PAUL St, Auckland

*The Walters Prize*, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki

*The Subject in the Land*, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki

*Trigger Points* curated by Heather Galbraith, Palitz Gallery, Syracuse University, New York

*Imaginary Date Line*, presented by Artspace Auckland, ifa, Berlin

*Six Artists Respond to the Poetry of Joanna Margaret Paul*, Len Lye Centre, New Plymouth

*The Future is a Do-Over* curated by Ane Tonga, Dunedin Public Art Gallery

## 2015

*From the one I call my own* Susan Te Kahurangi King and Shannon Te Ao, City Gallery, Wellington

*A torch and a light (cover)* as part of *Unstuck in Time* curated by Bruce E. Phillips, Te Tuhi Centre for the Arts, Auckland

*These stories began before we arrived*, curated by Charlotte Huddleston, Bruce E. Phillips and Jaimie Hanton Te Tuhi Offsite, Silo 6, Wynyard Quarter, Auckland

*Sights and Sound: New Zealand*, The Jewish Museum, New York

*Imaginary Date Line*, presented by Artspace Auckland at The Venice Biennale

*Language is a Virus*, curated by Jaimie Hanton, School of Fine Arts, University of Canterbury, Christchurch

*These stories began before we arrived*, curated by Charlotte Huddleston, Bruce E. Phillips and Jaimie Hanton WXY Gallery/Taipei International Book Exhibition, Taipei

*Menagerie* curated by Juliana Engberg, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne

## 2014

*Follow the Party of the Whale*, The Adam Art Gallery, Wellington

*Towards doing more*, The Physics Room, Christchurch

*Where do I end and you begin*, City Art Centre/Edinburgh Art Festival

The 19th Biennale of Sydney: *You Imagine What You Desire*, curated by Juliana Engberg, Art Gallery of New South Wales; Artspace; Carriageworks; Cockatoo Island & Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, Sydney

## 2013

*I made my own Teeth*, Papakura Art Gallery, Auckland

*Follow the Party of the Whale*, Blue Oyster Gallery, Dunedin

*Freedom Farmers*, curated by Natasha Conland, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki

*Puehu: Cultural Dust* curated by Anna Marie-White, The Suter Gallery Nelson Te Aratoi o Whakatu

*Moving on Asia: Towards a New Art Network 2004-2013*, City Gallery, Wellington

*Te Hiko Hou*, curated by Jenny Gillam and Eugene Hansen, New Zealand Film Archive, Auckland

## 2012

*New Artists Show* curated by Caterina Riva, Artspace, Auckland

*Te Hiko Hou*, curated by Jenny Gillam and Eugene Hansen New Zealand Film Archive, Wellington

*National Contemporary Art Awards*, Waikato Museum, Hamilton

### Awards/Residencies

Artist in residence, Taipei Contemporary Art Centre, Taipei 2017

Massey University Research Medal (Early career) 2017

The Walters Prize, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki 2016

Rita Angus Artist in Residence, Wellington 2013

### Public Collections

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki

Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa University of Auckland

Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetu

Wellington City Council

### **Selected bibliography**

*The 19th Biennale of Sydney: You Imagine What You Desire*, Sydney: Art Gallery of New South Wales; Artspace; Carriageworks; Cockatoo Island & Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, 2014, p.259

Barton, Tina, Riva, Caterina and Anna-Marie White, *Shannon Te Ao: I can press my face up against the glass*, Christchurch: The Physics Room, 2014

Byrt, Anthony, 'Shannon Te Ao, two shoots that stretch far out, 2013-14,' in Byrt, Anthony, *This Model World: Travels to the Edge of Contemporary Art*, Auckland University Press, 2016, pp.153-159

Kreisler, Aaron, 'Shannon Te Ao,' in Carey, Sorcha and Connarty, Jane (eds.), *Where do I end and you begin*, Edinburgh Art Festival, 2014, pp.100-102

Patrick, Martin, 'Shannon Te Ao's A torch and a light (cover),' in Lal, Rebecca (ed.), *Unstuck in Time*, Auckland: Te Tuhi, 2015, pp.53-60

Randerson, Janine and Yates, Amanda, 'Negotiating the Ontological Gap: Place, Performance, and Media Art Practices in Aotearoa/New Zealand,' in Adamson, Joni and Monani, Salma (eds.), *Ecocriticism and Indigenous Studies – Conversations from Earth to Cosmos*, London: Routledge

Were, Virginia, 'Materialising Ghosts,' *Art News New Zealand*, Winter 2014, pp.70-73

### **Press links**

<http://artasiapacific.com/Blog/AWakefulVigilProfileOfShannonTeAo>

<https://edinburghfestival.list.co.uk/article/94128-shannon-te-ao-with-the-sun-aglow-i-have-my-pensive-moods/>

<http://pantograph-punch.com/post/interview-shannon-te-ao>

<https://frieze.com/article/critics-guide-edinburgh>

[https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2017/jul/30/edinburgh-art-festival-review-douglas-gordon-black-burns-graham-fagen-slaves-lament?CMP=share\\_btn\\_tw](https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2017/jul/30/edinburgh-art-festival-review-douglas-gordon-black-burns-graham-fagen-slaves-lament?CMP=share_btn_tw)

<https://christchurchartgallery.org.nz/bulletin/187/a-torch-and-a-light>

<http://www.stuff.co.nz/entertainment/arts/84855156/wellingtonbased-artist-shannon-te-ao-wins-the-walters-prize>

[http://www.noted.co.nz/archive/listener-nz-2015/inside-out/?wmpmp\\_switcher=mobile&mobile\\_switch=desktop](http://www.noted.co.nz/archive/listener-nz-2015/inside-out/?wmpmp_switcher=mobile&mobile_switch=desktop)