

HE KARANGA KARAMEA

Raukura Turei's *He Karanga Karamea* explores essential structures and cycles: the creation of the world, the genesis of humankind, birth and death. Central to the exhibition is karamea (red ochre), a material that Turei first began using after the birth of her second daughter, Tōmairangi, when she was gifted a vial of whenua with which to record Tōmai's footprints. Karamea recalls and calls out to Kurawaka, the place where Papatūānuku's ikura flowed, and where Hineahuone was formed from the fertile red earth. With Tāne, Hineahuone gave rise to Hinetitama, from whom humankind descends, perpetuated through generations of wāhine in an unbroken chain. Hinetitama transformed into Hinenuitepō, ensuring that motherly protection would extend beyond te ao mārama.

Turei's paintings centre on forms that suggest layers of whakapapa, strata of whenua, and the bodies of wāhine—particularly the tara and the whare tangata. The gestures tend to be sweeping, expansive, made with the whole body. Turei uses not only karamea but also kerewhenua (yellow and orange ochre), papakura (blue, pink, and purple pigment), and ngārahu (kauri soot). These are mixed with gum arabic and acrylic medium to create a matte, gouache-like paint. She has delighted in the potential of this new medium, seeing how the different colours dance where they meet and how the paint binds to and separates from the substrate at different dilutions. She speaks of 'toying with fast wet brush strokes and slow layering, over and over, to create the desired level of blend and dissolve'.

In previous works, similar gestural, bodily forms were obscured with crusts of whenua pigment. Here, body and process alike are laid bare. Turei comments: 'I feel like I am exposing myself with these works, as they sit in a delicate balance of resolution and still in motion or production.' *Mai i Kurawaka* was the first work in which she brought to the surface what was formerly concealed.¹ It was intended to be presented in conversation with new paintings by Robyn Kahukiwa, whose explorations of atua wāhine and mana wāhine are of enduring importance to Turei. Kahukiwa's passing in 2025 meant that the exhibition could not take place. *Mai i Kurawaka* has become for Turei an acknowledgment of artistic whakapapa, 'the continuation of one practice alongside and after another, within the ceaseless cycle of beginnings and endings'.²

Another key reference point is Georgia O'Keeffe, whose influence is particularly felt in the four paintings in the sensual *Kurawaka* series, made with oil as the binder. Turei notes that her 'abstraction of the body and the vast red whenua



of New Mexico sit somewhere in the whakapapa of these works but are now drawn back toward our own sacred histories and the potency of our own red earth'. *Te Hā Pūtaketake* also relates to Kurawaka, referring to the first breath of Hineahuone. The whakataukī 'Me aro koe ki te hā o Hineahuone', a reminder to venerate wāhine, is evoked by *Me Aro ki te Hā*, while *Rere Kura, Rere Toto* draws on a karakia associated with a woman receiving her first ikura and thus the capacity to generate life.³

The primordial parents, Papatūānuku and Ranginui, are at the core of *Te Pō Kutikuti Kākarauri*. The work is named for the realm of darkness created by their embrace. Into this space emerged myriad atua tāne. Pale veins in the work, where the canvas shows through the paint layers, suggest 'the flickers of light seen beyond their parents' armpits as they moved, their first taste of a world of light beyond: te wheiao ki te ao mārama'. Growing tired of their cramped, dark confines, the children prised Papatūānuku and Ranginui apart, causing the blood of the sky father to collect on the earth mother at Kurawaka. An end can be a beginning and a beginning can spell an end. In the whenua, as in the body, there is constancy and flux, creation and transformation.

¹ It connects strongly with *Te Ara Uwha — Mai i Kurawaka*, Turei's presentation at the 36th Bienal de São Paulo (2025–26).

² A work of particular relevance to *He Karanga Karamea* is *Hineahuone* (1983) from Kahukiwa's celebrated series *Wāhine Toa*.

³ *Te Hā Pūtaketake* and *Rere Kura, Rere Toto* are also connected to the Whiti whakapapa for Hineahuone written by Turei for her monograph *Takoto ai te Marino: Selected Works 2018–2025* (Tāmaki Makaurau: Raukura Turei, 2025).