



THE LIGHTSHIP

ABIGAIL AROHA JENSEN & GEORGINA WATSON LAUNCH
NEW WORK AT 'THE LIGHTSHIP'

17 June 2021

PRESS RELEASE

- Abigail Aroha Jensen & Georgina Watson present *Pūtahitanga kura*, the commissioned site-specific artwork which will be displayed from 17 June – 18 July 2021.
- The Lightship is a 110-metre-long, 13-metre-high light wall that Ports of Auckland built into the western façade of their new car handling building. It can be viewed from Quay Street, city wharves, local buildings and the water.



[High Res Photos](#)

Time and space are connected for us through our given names. In their ability to share meanings and stories across generations, given names gather and group us together. The act of giving and, in turn, receiving a name is a materialization of kinship and identity. One might also choose one's own name. The erasure of a given name can be an act of self-determination. But a name can also be forcibly obscured, lost to time, or removed as a means of survival or assimilation.

The coercive process of colonization in Aotearoa New Zealand, saw a mechanized suppression of te reo Māori and the forced anglicization of names as a part of this. 'Our names can both mark and mask heritage. They can betray us, affirm, and perform us.'¹

Lucy, Kathleen, Katherine, Karen, Hinemoa, Maata, Marina, Lily, Carlotta, Miringa, Agnes, Loretta, Abigail, Elizabeth, Hori, Sonny, Tataingaoaterangi, Andrew, Georgina

Pūtahitanga kura opens with this list of names. They are whānau, ancestors, and literary figures; a constellation of identities whose names have graced, confined, or augmented self-hood. Names that arrive to us presently having gathered the events, losses, and meanings of those who bore them.

The name given to this artwork puts together the kupu; *pūtahitanga*: confluence, junction, joining place, convergence, and *kura*: to be red, scarlet red, glow. Together these kupu led us to think of a meeting of redness. Papatūānuku's red. Perhaps a meeting of force, heat or fire. The forging of iron - wrought redness.

Pūtahitanga kura: where thoughts and forces converge and re-emerge awakened to a new reality of movement through time and space.

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A red wrought iron fence runs across the Northern side of Quay Street marking, and periodically enclosing, the Ports of Auckland and its numerous wharfs from the public spaces of the downtown city. Erected in parts across the last century, the fence has tactfully 'kept off' and 'let in' a changing milieu and sometimes tense socio-political relation to both port and harbour.

The wrought iron gate recurs as a figure of interest for the artists, as 'a symbol linked to imperial power, proprietorship, and the divide between common good and privatised stakeholders'.² Here, their work stands behind and in direct relation to this iconic, charged, ornate boundary line.

Pūtahitanga kura mirrors the design of the port's fence, drawing out its redness and its horizontal, vertical, and diagonal lines into what they represent: the Union Jack. Three crosses in red, white and blue make up the Union Jack which emblems the upper left corner of te haki Aotearoa. This convergence of lines, symbolisms and histories signify this nation's belonging and non-belonging to the British Empire.

Encountering these lines of empire are those of Kōwhaiwhai. Often painted in red, white and black, Kōwhaiwhai depicts and describes genealogy, 'authority by descent, or genealogical mana.'³ These designs and colours - though digitally rendered on *The Lightship* - carry stories of origin. Red, of the earth and source. The designs, koru and kape, of connection and growth.

Layering these decorative and descriptive traditions, the artists merge languages for, and understandings of, history, genealogy, ownership, place and people. Forming in semblance a kind of Victorian-era shadow play; a series of vignettes play out against the backdrop of the dimly glowing stars of Matariki. Taniwha and waka arrive across the harbour. A European sailing ship enters the wrong way up - upside down as if floating on the sky. Things can be the wrong way round in the Antipodes. Inheriting the calendar practice of England, the settler colonies of the Southern Hemisphere have come to celebrate Spring in Autumn and Winter in Summer.

Under the midwinter constellation Matariki as the time of new year *Pūtahitanga kura* traces bi-cultural lines - ancestries, boundaries, histories and stories - marking these as they confluence in our urban environment, the stars above us, and in the names we hold.

Pūtahitanga kura: where thoughts and forces converge and re-emerge awakened to a new reality of movement through time and space.

¹ Georgina Watson, artist in conversation

² See *Manawa i te Kāniwha*, Artspace Aotearoa:
<https://www.artspace-aotearoa.nz/exhibitions/manawa-i-te-kaniwha>

³ Kōwhaiwhai tuturu Māori, Auckland War Memorial Museum education kit:
http://maori-arts.com/securesite/MMA/Maori_02Kowhaiwhai.pdf

The Lightship, is a new site for contemporary art, which was launched by the Ports of Auckland in October 2020. The large-scale digital light wall on Quay Street provides Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland with a unique place for public art to be enjoyed.

The Lightship is a 110-metre-long, 13-metre-high light wall that wraps around the western façade of the port's new car handling building. It is made up of seven panels with nearly 8,500 individually programmable LED lights and is visible from busy Quay Street, city wharves, local buildings and the water.

The Lightship's inaugural commission was a new artwork by Janet Lilo entitled *ISLOVE* which was live from 8 October – 3 December, 2020.

This was followed by;

1. *Come Up For Air* by Sorawit Songsataya
10 December 2020 – 4 February, 2021
2. *Skylined* by Tyson Campbell
11 February – 8 April, 2021
3. *Broken Embraces* by Sione Tuívailala Monū
15 April – 17 June, 2021

The site is programmed by curator Bridget Riggir-Cuddy, and sits near another significant public artwork, *The Lighthouse* by Michael Parekowhai on Queens Wharf – cementing the area as a destination for contemporary public art.

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About Abigail Aroha Jensen

Abigail Aroha Jensen is an artist based in Tāmaki Makaurau. Her whakapapa is traced from coastal regions - Ngāi Tāmanuhiri - Rangiwaho, Muriwai - Ngāti Porou, Ruataupare, Tūwhakairiora, Ballyclare, Count Antrim and Belfast. Abigail recently graduated with honours from Toihoukura School of Māori Visual Art and Design in Turanganui-a-kiwa.

Recent work includes *Ngā Haki o te Tangata; Whiri Whiri Muka Tangata* (2020), *Occupied Territories* at RM Gallery with Avigail Allan and Naomi Allan (2021) and *Maniwa i te Kāniwha* in collaboration with George Watson at Artspace Aotearoa (2021).

About Georgina Watson

Based in Turanganui-a-kiwa, with Ngāti Porou, Moriori and Ngāti Mutunga whakapapa, George Watson is an artist and writer. George graduated with a Masters in Fine Arts from Elam School of Fine Arts in 2016, and a Bachelor of Media Arts Majoring in Painting and Sculpture at Wintec in 2009.

George returned to Aotearoa in 2019 after completing the Maumaus Independent Study Programme in Lisbon, Portugal. Recent work includes the group show *They Covered the House in Stories*, curated by Amy Weng for Te Tuhi (2021), *Eternal Girlhood of the Settler State*, presented by May Fair Art Fair in collaboration with Tyson Campbell (2020) and *Mānawa i te kāniwha*, in collaboration with Abigail Aroha Jensen at Artspace Aotearoa (2021).

With special thanks to Design Technician, Jim Haung.

Pūtahitanga kura is presented in concurrence with [Manawa i te Kāniwha](#) – a mural work by Abigail Aroha Jensen and Georgina Watson, on Artspace Aotearoa’s external East Street wall.

About the Car Handling Building

The car handling building was developed by Plus Architecture as part of Ports of Auckland's 30-year master plan. It is designed to reduce the space taken up by imported vehicles and better integrate Auckland's port into the surrounding community.

The car handling building is no ordinary 'car park'. It is a harbour-saving building, which removes the need to take more of the Waitematā harbour for reclamation by stacking cars vertically. On its southern wall, facing Quay Street, it has the world's largest soil-based vertical garden, which was created by local company Hanging Gardens.

The western wall, facing Queens Wharf, holds The Lightship and a public park is currently being designed for the roof, giving Aucklanders a beautiful new green space with outstanding views of the harbour, the central city and their port at work.

It is a remarkable building, weaving the functional and the aesthetic together to create a building that works both for the port and the city. There is nothing like it anywhere else on earth.

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