



THE LIGHTSHIP

TAMSEN HOPKINSON
NEW WORK ON 'THE LIGHTSHIP'
13 Jul-31 Aug, 2026

PRESS RELEASE

- TheLightship is pleased to present *Gates of Heaven* - a new piece by Tamsen Hopkinson.
- The commissioned site-specific artwork will be displayed from 13 July - 31 August 2026.
- Presented during Matariki, the installation considers how Māori oral knowledge is transferred through typographic, archival, and digital forms, and how these systems shape what is recorded, omitted and made visible.



Gates of Heaven

Tamsen Hopkinson's *Gates of Heaven* examines translation as a process through which language moves between systems. Presented during Matariki at The Lightship, the installation considers how Māori oral knowledge is transferred through typographic, archival, and digital forms, and how these systems shape what is recorded, omitted and made visible.

The work is situated within the Waitematā Harbour, a space shaped by movement, settlement and histories of occupation. Having grown up between Auckland's North Shore and the city, Hopkinson approaches the harbour through its crossings and divisions. The Auckland Harbour Bridge connects two shores while maintaining their difference. It becomes a structure of adjacency rather than assimilation. Positioned at the waterline, The Lightship extends this relationship between movement and orientation. As mokopuna of Te Hapuku, a signatory to He Whakaputanga o te Rangatiratanga o Nu Tirenī (1835) and Te Tiriti o Waitangi (1840), Hopkinson's position is informed by tino rangatiratanga and an examination of how colonial systems organise language, history and representation.

Gates of Heaven takes Colin McCahon's 1969 text painting *The Lark's Song* as its point of departure. The painting transcribes "Ka Tahi Tī" from Matire Kereama's *The Tail of the Fish*, translating an oral chant into a written composition. This movement from voice to text raises questions about what occurs when knowledge passes between systems of transmission. Hopkinson returns to this act of transcription by restoring passages absent from McCahon's version. The work examines how editing, formatting, and recording affect the transmission of language. The archive is not treated as a neutral but as a system that shapes what remains available.

The repeated dashes in *The Lark's Song* provide the formal basis for *Gates of Heaven*. Within McCahon's

vertical composition, the marks trace the movement of the lark's flight. Hopkinson rotates this structure horizontally. The dashes move across the LED matrix as lines of passage, recalling flight paths, maritime routes, and movement across the Waitematā Harbour. The asterisks shift from typographic markers into stars, moving between punctuation and navigation.

Through this reorientation typography becomes a spatial system. Text operates as both language and movement, connecting the page, the harbour, and the night sky. Presented during Matariki, the work situates the oriori within practices of observation and wayfinding.

The reconstructed text is rendered through the custom typefaces PICA NO 1 and PICA ERASED, developed by Dennis Grauel and Therese Keogh. The typefaces draw from nineteenth-century printing conventions associated with correction, amendment, and redaction. They reference the systems of printing and administration through which colonial institutions produced written records. In *Gates of Heaven*, these typographic systems are applied to Kereama's text, creating a relationship between the technologies of colonial record-keeping and Māori systems of transmission.

The text is presented as an LED installation comprising approximately 8,500 lights. The display operates as text, image, and signal. The movement of light corresponds with the oriori's reference to the night sky: Kai ana te whetū, te mārama i te rangi. *Gates of Heaven* enters into dialogue with Michael Parekōwhai's *The Lighthouse / Tū Whenua-a-Kura* on Queens Wharf. While Parekōwhai works through architecture and national narratives, Hopkinson works through typography and display to examine how cultural memory is produced and circulated.

Gates of Heaven positions the oriori as a form that moves between oral, written and digital systems. The work considers translation as a process through which language is reorganised, transmitted and understood.

About Tamsen Hopkinson

Tamsen Hopkinson (b. 1986, Ngāti Kahungunu, Kai Tahu, Irish and English Pākehā) is an artist and curator from Aotearoa based in Naarm. She is interested in systems of measurement, language and the application of these systems to ideas of Tino Rangatiratanga and te ao Māori.

Recent exhibitions include *Le Coel*, La Trobe Bendigo (2025), *BOOTLEG*, The Physics Room Ōtautahi (2025), *The Wishing Well*, CONNORS CONNORS (2024), *Signal Detection*, Mejia (2024), *Octopus 23: THE FIELD*, Gertrude Contemporary (2023), *Open Glossary* with James Nguyen, Australian Centre of Contemporary Art (2023), *Neighbourhood Contemporary Arts Festival* co-presented by Footscray Community Arts and The Substation (2022), *CONNECT I & CONNECT II*, Footscray Community Arts (2021)

About The Lightship

The Lightship, is a space for contemporary art, launched by Port 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 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.

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

This was followed by;

1. Come Up For Air: Sorawit Songsataya
2. Skylined: Tyson Campbell
3. Broken Embraces: Sione Tuívailala Monū
4. Pūtahitanga kura: Abigail Aroha Jensen & Georgina Watson
5. Onepanea: Natalie & Sam Tozer
6. Kupesi Sisi Huelo 'oe Taulanga Waitematā moe Funga Tāmaki Makaurau: Sione Faletau
7. Whakakiwi: SINŌ
8. EVERYTHING: Fiona Jack
9. Broken Sovereignty: Parasite
10. Emma's Rain: Andrew Beck
11. Heavy Frame (wairua): Turumeke Harrington
12. The Long White Cloud: Jae Hoon Lee
13. Sky Sculpture: Andre Hemer
14. Frequency Colour: Clinton Watkins
15. Slow Fever: Nicola Farquhar
16. Sky Sculpture: Andre Hemer
17. White Collar Eclipse: Oscar Perry
18. Cut Line: Alex Chambers
19. Untitled: Esther Stewart
20. I Have No Body and I Must Move: Jess Johnson and Simon Ward
21. Fathom, Furlong, League: John Ward Knox
22. Colour Function 3:30: Jack B Hadley
23. Ko au eni: Kalisolaite Uhali

The site is programmed by curator Simon Bowerbank, 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.

www.thelightship.co.nz
hello@thelightship.co.nz IG
[@the_light_ship](https://www.instagram.com/the_light_ship)

About the Car Handling Building

The car handling building was developed as part of Port 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. With this purpose maintained, the building is set for a transformation and additional function as Te Waharoa, Auckland's International Cruise Terminal. Construction is already underway and from early 2027, the Quay St elevation and ground floor of the building will become Te Waharoa. The new space is being delivered in collaboration with architects RCG, Ngati Whatua Orakei, Guadians and construction partner, Hawkins.

ENDS

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