

# Michael Parekōwhai

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Michael Parekōwhai  
Te Ao Hau  
2022

Installation view, Dreamhome: Stories of Art and Shelter  
Art Gallery of New South Wales  
Photo: Art Gallery of New South Wales, Mim Stirling.



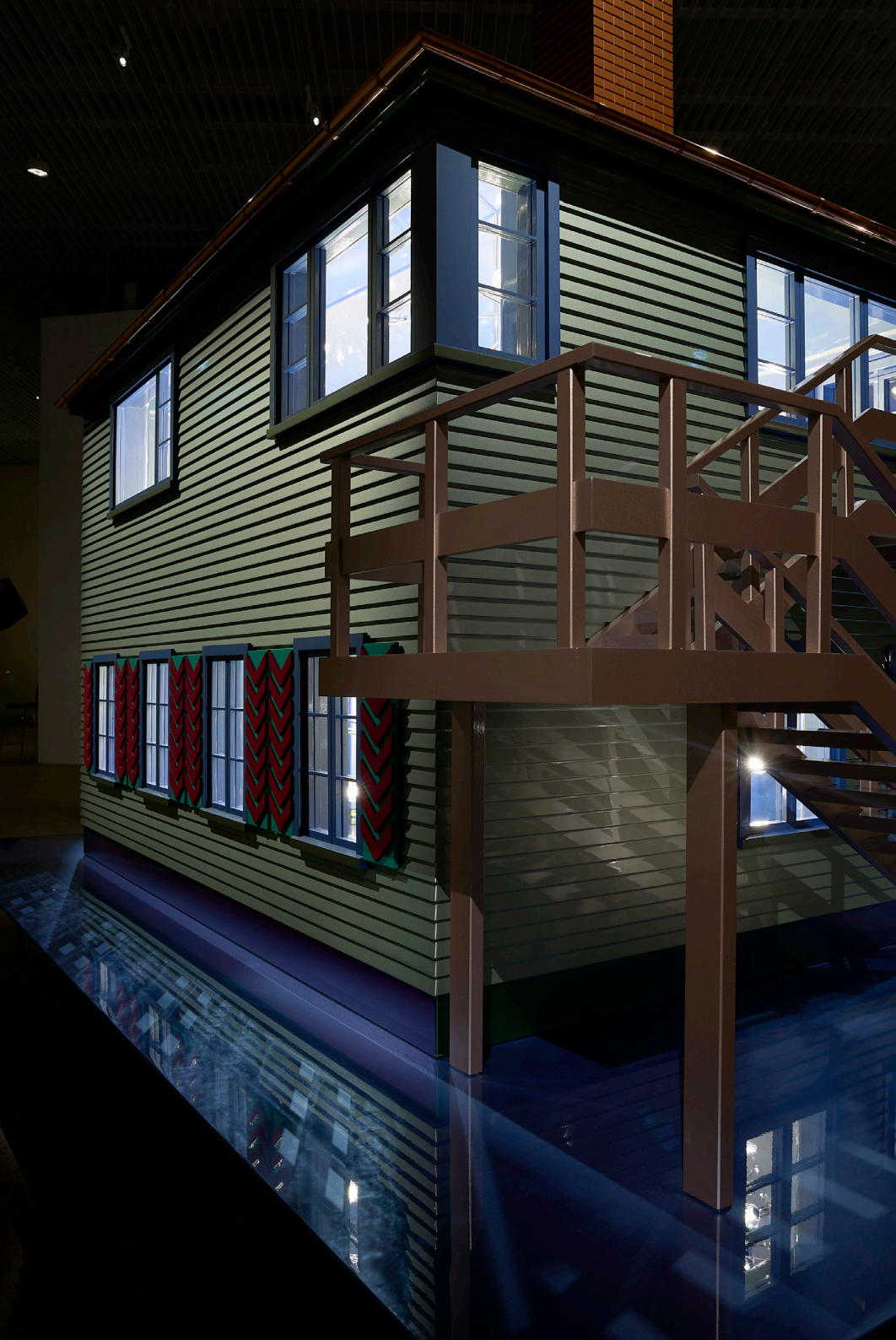


Michael Parekōwhai  
Te Ao Hau (detail)  
2022

Installation view, Dreamhome: Stories of Art and Shelter  
Art Gallery of New South Wales  
Photo: Art Gallery of New South Wales, Mim Stirling.



Michael Lett



Michael Parekōwhai  
Te Ao Hau (detail)  
2022

Installation view, Dreamhome: Stories of Art and Shelter  
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Michael Parekōwhai  
A Parekōwhai Project  
2022  
Installation view, Michael Lett, 3 East St





Michael Parekōwhai  
A Parekōwhai Project  
2022  
Installation view, Michael Lett, 3 East St





Michael Parekōwhai  
A Parekōwhai Project  
2022

Installation view, Michael Lett, 3 East St







Michael Parekōwhai  
A Parekōwhai Project  
2022  
Installation view, Michael Lett, 3 East St





Michael Parekowhai  
*Stand By Me*  
Installation view  
Michael Lett, December 2018





Michael Parekowhai  
*Encounter 1*  
Installation view  
City Gallery, Wellington, 2019





Michael Parekowhai  
*Mimi (fountain)*  
2018  
bronze, water recirculating system  
300 x 380 x 520mm  
edition of 5  
Installation view  
Michael Lett, December 2018





Michael Parekowhai  
*Détour*  
Installation view  
Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington, 2018





Michael Parekowhai  
*Détour*  
Installation view  
Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington, 2018













Michael Parekowhai  
*This is New Zealand*  
Installation view  
City Gallery Wellington, 2018





Michael Parekowhai  
*The Lighthouse*  
2017

wood, steel, stainless steel, ceramic, copper, resin, aluminium, glass,  
paint and electrical components  
Installation view  
Queens Wharf, Auckland, 2017  
Auckland Council Public Art Collection





Michael Parekowhai  
*The Lighthouse*  
2017

wood, steel, stainless steel, ceramic, copper, resin, aluminium, glass,  
paint and electrical components  
Installation view  
Queens Wharf, Auckland, 2017  
Auckland Council Public Art Collection





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*The Lighthouse*  
2017

wood, steel, stainless steel, ceramic, copper, resin, aluminium, glass,  
paint and electrical components  
Installation view  
Queens Wharf, Auckland, 2017  
Auckland Council Public Art Collection





Michael Parekowhai  
*The English Channel*  
2015  
stainless steel  
2570 x 1660 x 1580mm  
Installation view  
Art Gallery of NSW, 2016





Michael Parekowhai  
*Rules of the Game*  
Installation view  
Michael Lett, Auckland, November 2015





Michael Parekowhai  
*Over the Rainbow*  
2015  
fibreglass, automotive paint  
420 x 170 x 105mm each





Michael Parekowhai  
*Rules of the Game*  
Installation view  
Michael Lett, Auckland, November 2015





Michael Parekowhai  
*On Looking into Chapman's Homer*  
2011

bronze, stainless steel  
two pieces: 2510 x 2710 x 1750mm, 560 x 870 x 370mm





Michael Parekowitz  
*On Looking into Chapman's Homer*  
2011

bronze, stainless steel  
two pieces: 2510 x 2710 x 1750mm, 560 x 870 x 370mm  
Installation view  
54th Venice Biennale, 2011





Michael Parekowhai  
*Kapa Haka (Officer Taumaha)*  
2011  
bronze  
1820 x 600 x 450mm  
Installation view  
54th Venice Biennale, 2011





Michael Parekowhai  
*He Kōrero Purākau mo Te Awanui o Te Motu: Story of a New Zealand River*  
2011  
wood, brass, automotive paint, mother of pearl, paua, upholstery  
two pieces: 1030 x 2750 x 1750mm, 855 x 460 x 410mm  
Installation view  
54th Venice Biennale, 2011





Michael Parekowschi  
*Song of the Frog*  
2006  
fibreglass, automotive paint  
Installation view  
Beaufort, Belgium, 2006





Michael Parekowhai  
*The Big OE*  
2006

logs: polyurethane and two-pot paint; VW Kombi van, 1962, and Westphalia  
trailer, 1965: steel, automotive paint, rubber, glass, vinyl, and engine parts  
dimensions variable

Installation view

Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, 2006  
Commissioned by Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa



## Michael Parekōwhai

(Ngāriki Rotoawe, Ngāti Whakarongo)

Born 1968, Porirua (NZ). Lives and works in Auckland (NZ)

Michael Parekōwhai draws upon an abundant range of both vernacular and collective vocabularies in his work. He re-manufactures these lexicons into complex narrative structures and formal languages, exploring perceptions of space, the ambiguities of identity, the shifting sensitivities of historical memory and the fluid relationship between art and craft. Ideas of camaraderie, tools of teaching and childhood learning, as well as quotes from modern art history and popular culture, also play out in many of Parekōwhai's stories. While his work is often described as emphasising the extraordinariness of the ordinary, each body of work has layers of potential for meaning and significance—they are open to any depth of interpretation and storytelling.

Parekōwhai graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts from Elam School of Fine Arts, Auckland in 1990, followed by a Master of Fine Arts in 2000. Parekōwhai was selected to represent New Zealand at the 54th Venice Biennale in 2011 where he exhibited *On First Looking into Chapman's Homer* at the New Zealand pavilion. In 2015 he exhibited *The Promised Land*, a retrospective survey of his practice at the Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane. In 2018, Te Papa Tongarewa opened its newly expanded contemporary art galleries with *Détour*, a major solo exhibition from Parekōwhai. His work has been included in: *Dreamhome: Stories of Art and Shelter*, Art Gallery of New South Wales (2022-2023); *Toi Tū Toi Ora: Contemporary Māori Art*, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki (2020); the 5th Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art, Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane (2006); the 5th Gwangju Biennale (2004); the 13th Biennale of Sydney (2002) and *Headlands: Thinking Through New Zealand Art*, Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, Sydney (1992).

Parekōwhai was awarded the Arts Foundation of New Zealand Laureate award in 2001.

### EDUCATION

2000

Master of Fine Arts, Elam School of Fine Arts, University of Auckland, New Zealand

1991

Teaching Diploma, Auckland College of Education, Auckland, New Zealand

1990

Bachelor of Fine Arts, Elam School of Fine Arts, University of Auckland, New Zealand

### SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

2023

Michael Parekōwhai, Michael Lett, Auckland (solo)

Dreamhome: Stories of Art and Shelter, Sydney Modern, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia (group)

Te Hau Whakatonu, A Series of Never-Ending Beginnings, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, Ngāmotu New Plymouth (group)

2022

A Parekōwhai Project, Michael Lett, 3 East St, Auckland (solo)

Several Degrees of Attention, Govett Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth (group)

2021

Toi Tū Toi Ora: Contemporary Māori Art, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, Auckland, New Zealand (group)

2019

Encounter 1, City Gallery, Wellington, New Zealand (two person)

2018

Stand By Me, Michael Lett, Auckland (solo)

Détour, Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington (solo)

This is New Zealand, City Gallery Wellington (group)

2017

The English Channel, Art Gallery New South Wales, Sydney, Australia (solo)

2016

Light Switch and Conduit, Dunedin Public Art Gallery, Dunedin (group)

Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney, Australia (group)

2015

Rules of the Game, Michael Lett, Auckland (solo)

The Promised Land, Queensland Art Gallery / Gallery of Modern Art (GOMA), Brisbane, Australia (solo)

Implicated and Immune, Michael Lett, Auckland (group)

2014

Menagerie, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art (ACCA), Melbourne (group)

Black Rainbow: Michael Prekowhai and Ralph Hotere, Te Uru, Auckland (two person)

2013

The Past in the Present, Michael Lett at the Auckland Art Fair, Auckland (solo)

Michael Parekōwhai et al., Michael Lett, Auckland (two person)

Black Rainbow: Michael Parekōwhai and Ralph Hotere, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington, New Zealand (two person)



2012

Letter from Alice May Williams, Michael Lett, Auckland, New Zealand (group)  
Peripheral Relations: Marcel Duchamp and New Zealand Art 1960-2011, Adam Art Gallery Te Pataka Toi, Wellington, New Zealand (group)  
On First Looking into Chapman's Homer, Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetu, Christchurch. Also at Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa (solo)  
Sculpture is Everything, Queensland Art Gallery / Gallery of Modern Art (GOMA), Brisbane, Australia (group)

2011

The Far Side, Michael Lett, Auckland (solo)  
Toi Aotearoa, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki, Auckland (group)  
Te Ao Hurihuri, Jonathan Smart Gallery, Christchurch (solo)  
On First Looking into Chapman's Homer, 54th Venice Biennale 2011, New Zealand Pavilion; Also at Musée du quai Branly, Paris, France (solo)

2010

Play On, Adam Art Gallery, Wellington (group).

2009

The Moment of Cubism, Michael Lett, Auckland, New Zealand (solo)  
Seldom is Herd, Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney, Australia (solo)  
Jim McMurtry, Planet Festival, Onatrio, Canada (group)  
Jim McMurtry, The New Dowse, Lower Hutt, New Zealand (group)  
Yes We Are, One Day Sculpture, Wellington, New Zealand (solo)

2008

Jim McMurtry, Maori Hall / Michael Lett, Auckland, New Zealand (solo)  
Dateline, City Gallery Kiel, Germany (group)  
Dateline, City Gallery Sindelfingen, Germany (group)

2007

The Song of the Frog, Michael Lett, Auckland, New Zealand (solo)  
Love Chief, Auckland Art Gallery, Auckland, New Zealand (group)  
Dateline, Neuer Berliner Kunstverein, Berlin, Germany (group)  
Hei konei mai: We'll meet again, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki, Auckland, New Zealand (group)  
My Sister, My Self, Michael Lett, Auckland, New Zealand (solo)  
Liste Art Fair, Michael Lett Stand, Basel, Switzerland (solo)  
Cosmo McMurtry, NGV International, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia (solo)  
Reboot, The Jim Barr and Mary Barr Collection, Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetu, Christchurch, New Zealand (group)  
Jim McMurtry, Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetu, Christchurch, New Zealand (solo)  
Picturing Eden, Museum of Photographic Arts in San Diego, California, USA (group)  
Picturing Eden, University of Iowa Museum of Art, Iowa City, Iowa, USA (group)

2006

Eerst me fiets (First My Bike), Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney, Australia (solo)  
The Big O.E., Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington, New Zealand (solo)  
Toi Te Papa Art of the Nation, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington, New Zealand (group)  
Reboot, The Jim Barr and Mary Barr Collection, Dunedin Public Art Gallery, Dunedin, New Zealand (group)  
Asia Pacific Triennial, Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane, Australia (group)  
Beaufort Inside, PMMK, Museum of Modern Art, Ostend, Belgium (group)  
Beaufort Triennial 2006, Belgium Coast Line, Ostend, Belgium (group)  
Hei konei mai: We'll meet again, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki, Auckland, New Zealand (group)  
The Armory, Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery Stand, New York, USA (group)  
Melbourne Art Fair, Special Projects, Melbourne, Australia (group)  
Melbourne Art Fair, Michael Lett Stand, Melbourne, Australia (group)  
Phoenix, Gus Fisher Gallery, Auckland, New Zealand (group)  
Picturing Eden, George Eastman House, International Museum of Photography and Film, New York, USA (group)  
Random Access, McClelland Gallery + Sculpture Park, Langwarrin, Victoria, Australia (group)  
High Tide: currents in contemporary New Zealand & Australian Art, Zacheta National Gallery of Art, Warsaw, Poland (group)  
High Tide: currents in contemporary New Zealand & Australian Art, Contemporary Art Centre, 2006, Vilnius, Lithuania (group)

2005

Driving Mr. Albert, Michael Lett, Auckland, New Zealand (solo)  
Rainbow Servant Dreaming, Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney, Australia (solo)  
Letters to the Ancestors, Waikato Museum of Art and History, Hamilton, New Zealand (group)  
NADA Art Fair, Michael Lett Stand, Miami, USA (group)  
Commodity & Delight: Views of Home, Sarjeant Gallery, Whanganui, New Zealand (group)  
The Koru Club, Pataka, Porirua, Wellington, New Zealand (group)  
Small Town, Big World; Contemporary Art from Te Papa, City Gallery, Wellington, New Zealand (group)  
Te Hei Tiki, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki, Auckland, New Zealand (group)  
Gallery Artists, Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney, Australia (group)  
High Chair, St. Pauls Street Gallery, AUT, Auckland, New Zealand (group)  
Remember New Zealand, Artspace, Auckland, New Zealand (group)  
Te Moananui a Kiwa, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki, Auckland, New Zealand (group)

2004

The Consolation of Philosophy: piko nei te matenga , Govett-Brewster Gallery, New Plymouth, New Zealand (solo)  
Selected Works 1989 – 1994, Michael Lett, Auckland, New Zealand (solo)  
Remember New Zealand, Sao Paulo Biennale, San Paulo, Brazil (group)  
A Grain of Dust A Drop of Water, Gwangju Biennale, Korea (group)  
Melbourne Art Fair, Michael Lett Stand, Melbourne, Australia (group)



Earthly Delights, George Perry Gallery, Tauranga, New Zealand (group)  
 Art Showcase, Grace Joel, Auckland, New Zealand (group)  
 The Suter, Nelson, New Zealand (group)  
 IKI and thanks for all the IKA, Artspace, Auckland, New Zealand (group)  
 State of Art, George Perry Gallery, Tauranga, New Zealand (group)  
 In Flower, Pataka, Porirua, Wellington, New Zealand (group)  
 Animals in Art, North Art, Auckland, New Zealand (group)  
 35K, Artspace, Auckland, New Zealand (group)  
 Urban Legends, Bartley Nees Gallery, Wellington, New Zealand (group)  
 Paradise Now?, Asia Pacific Society, New York, USA (group)

2003

Kapa Haka, Michael Lett, Auckland, New Zealand (solo)  
 Judy Darragh & Michael Parekowhai, Jonathan Smart Gallery, Christchurch, New Zealand (group)  
 Traffic, Crossing Currents in Indigenous Photomedia, Australian Centre for Photography, Sydney, Australia (group)  
 Pacific Harbours, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki, Auckland, New Zealand (group)  
 Opening Exhibition, Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetu, Christchurch, New Zealand (group)  
 9 Lives, Auckland Art Gallery, Auckland, New Zealand (group)  
 Indians and Cowboys, ( touring Gallery 4A, Sydney, Australia, Canberra Artspace, Canberra, Australia) (group)  
 Thompson, Frank, Paterson, Gimblett, Parekowhai, Gow Langsford Gallery, Sydney, Australia (group)

2002

Michael Parekowhai, Gow Langsford Gallery, Sydney, Australia (solo)  
 All there is / The Consolation of Philosophy: piko nei te matenga, Jonathan Smart Gallery, Christchurch, New Zealand (solo)  
 Chartwell Collection: Recent Acquisitions, New Gallery, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki, Auckland, New Zealand (group)  
 Pataka Art Museum, Pataka, New Zealand (group)  
 (The World May Be) Fantastic, Biennale of Sydney, 2002, Sydney, Australia (group)  
 Katharina Grosse, Melinda Harper, Michael Parekowhai, Gow Langsford Gallery, Auckland, New Zealand (group)

2001-2002

All there is, Gow Langsford Gallery, Auckland, New Zealand (solo)

2001

Patriot: Ten Guitars, The Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh, USA (solo)  
 The Consolation of Philosophy: piko nei te matenga, Gow Langsford Gallery, Auckland, New Zealand (solo)  
 Good Work, the Jim Barr and Mary Barr Collection (touring Dunedin Public Art Gallery, Dunedin, New Zealand, City Gallery, Wellington, New Zealand)  
 Purangiaho: Seeing Clearly, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki, Auckland, New Zealand  
 Techno Maori, City Gallery, Wellington, New Zealand

Multistylus Programme, Recent Chartwell Acquisitions, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki, Auckland, New Zealand  
 Bright Paradise: the 1st Auckland Triennial, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki, New Zealand  
 Prospect 2001, City Gallery, Wellington, New Zealand  
 Let There Be Light, Gow Langsford Gallery, Auckland, New Zealand  
 Catalogue Exhibition, Gow Langsford Gallery, Auckland, New Zealand

2000

The Beverly Hills Gun Club, Gow Langsford Gallery, Auckland, New Zealand (solo)  
 The Beverly Hills Gun Club / True Action Adventures of the Twentieth Century, Jonathan Smart Gallery, Christchurch, New Zealand (solo)  
 Language Matters, Adam Art Gallery, Wellington, New Zealand (group)  
 The Numbers Game, Adam Art Gallery, Wellington, New Zealand (group)  
 Noumea Biennial, Tibaou Centre, Noumea (group)  
 Old Worlds/New Worlds, Art Museum of Missoula, U.S.A (group)  
 Melbourne Contemporary Art Fair, Melbourne, Australia (group)  
 Flight patterns, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, U.S.A (group)  
 Simpson Grierson Season - works from the collection, Auckland Art Gallery, Auckland, New Zealand (group)  
 Wonderlands, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth, New Zealand (group)  
 1999-2000  
 Patriot: Ten Guitars, touring exhibition (Ar (group) tspace, Auckland, New Zealand, Beyond the Future, The Third Asia-Pacific Triennial, Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane, Australia, City Gallery, Wellington, New Zealand, Govett-Brewster Gallery, New Plymouth, New Zealand, Dunedin Public Art Gallery, Dunedin, New Zealand) (solo)  
 Beyond the Future: The Third Asia - Pacific Triennial, Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane, Australia (group)

1999

Kitset Cultures, Djamu Gallery, The Australian Museum, Sydney, Australia (solo)  
 Home and Away, Auckland Art Gallery, Auckland, New Zealand (group)  
 Taonga Maori, Artstation, Auckland, New Zealand (group)  
 The Promoter, Auckland, New Zealand (group)  
 Who Do I Think I Am, Artspace, Auckland, New Zealand (group)  
 Wonderlands: views on life at the end of the century, at the end of the world, Govett - Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth, New Zealand (group)

1998

Recent Paintings, Jonathan Smart Gallery, Christchurch, New Zealand (solo)  
 Dream Collectors, Te Papa Tongarewa, Museum of New Zealand, Wellington, Auckland Art Gallery, Auckland, New Zealand (group)

1997

Recent Paintings, Gow Langsford Gallery, Auckland, New Zealand (solo)  
 Recent Paintings, City Gallery, Wellington, New Zealand (solo)

1996

The World Over / de wereld bollen: art in the age of globalisation, City Art Gallery, Wellington, New Zealand, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (group)



“Here I give thanks”, Dunedin Public Art Gallery, Dunedin, New Zealand (group)

1995

Cultural Safety, Waikato Museum of Art and History, Hamilton, City Gallery, Wellington, Ludwig Forum, Aachen, Frankfurter, Kunstverein, Frankfurt, Germany (group)

The Nervous System, Govett Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth, New Zealand (group)

Korurangi, New Gallery, Auckland, New Zealand (group)

1994

Kiss the Baby Goodbye, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth, New Zealand (solo)

Kiss the Baby Goodbye, Waikato Museum of Art and History, Hamilton, New Zealand (solo)

A Capella, Gregory Flint Gallery, Auckland, New Zealand (solo)

Art Now, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington, New Zealand (group)

Changing Signs, Artspace, Auckland, New Zealand (group)

1993

After McCahon, Cubism, Wellington, New Zealand (group)

Shared Pleasures, Waikato Museum of Art and History, Hamilton, New Zealand (group)

International Festival of the Arts, Wellington, New Zealand (group)

Stop Making Sense, Wellington City Art Gallery, Wellington, New Zealand (group)

1992

Homemade Home, Wellington City Art Gallery, Wellington, New Zealand (group)

Vogue/Vague, CSA Gallery, Christchurch, New Zealand (group)

Hit Parade: contemporary art from the Paris Family Collection, Wellington City Art Gallery, Wellington, New Zealand (group)

W.A.R Whatu Aho Rua, Tandanya Gallery, Adelaide, Australia (group)

Headlands: thinking through New Zealand art, National Art Gallery, Wellington, New Zealand (group)

Headlands: thinking through New Zealand art, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, Australia (group)

1991

Light Sensitive, Artspace, Auckland, New Zealand (group)

Cross-pollination, Artspace, Auckland, New Zealand (group)

1990

Kohia Ko Taikaka Anake, National Art Gallery, Wellington, New Zealand (group)

Choice!, Artspace, Auckland, New Zealand (group)

Light'arted, Artspace, Auckland, New Zealand (group)

## SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

## ARTIST MONOGRAPHS

2018

*Michael Parekowhai: Détour*. Museum of New Zealand, Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington.

2015

Maud Page (ed.) *Michael Parekowhai: The Promised Land*. Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane.

2012

Mary Barr (ed.) *Michael Parekowhai: On First Looking Into Chapman's Homer*, Michael Lett and Rosyn Oxley9 Gallery, Auckland.

2011

Mary Barr (ed.) *Michael Parekowhai: On First Looking Into Chapman's Homer*, Michael Lett and Rosyn Oxley9 Gallery, Auckland.

2007

Michael Lett and Ryan Moore (eds.) *Michael Parekowhai*. Michael Lett Publishing, Auckland.

2002

*Michael Parekowhai*. The Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh USA.

Helen Kedgley, *The koru & kowhaiwhai: the contemporary renaissance of kowhaiwhai painting*. Pataka Porirua Museum of Arts and Cultures, Porirua.

1999

Robert Leonard, *Patriot*. Auckland: Gow Langsford Gallery and Artspace, Auckland.

Maud Page, *Kitset Cultures*, Djamu Gallery, Sydney.

1994

Robert Leonard and Lara Strongman, *Kiss the Baby Goodbye*, Govett-Brewster Gallery, New Plymouth & Waikato Museum of Art and History, Hamilton.

## CHAPTERS AND CATALOGUE ESSAYS

2024

Ian Wedde, 'Michael Parekowhai: Yes We Are' in *Ian Wedde: The Social Space of the Essay*. Victoria University Press, Wellington.

2023

Justin Paton, 'Eleven ways of looking at Te Ao Hau' in *Dreamhome: Stories of Art and Shelter*. Sydney: Art Gallery of New South Wales.

Amy Barclay, 'Te Ao Hau: The World Breathes' in *Michael Lett Documents 2021-2023*. Auckland: Michael Lett Publishing.

2018

Robert Leonard, 'Michael Parekōwhai On First Looking into Chapman's Homer Venice Biennale' in *This is New Zealand*. Wellington: City Gallery Wellington.

Aaron Lister, '2006 New Zealand Government gifts to the Musée du Quai Branly' in *This is New Zealand*. Wellington: City Gallery Wellington.



2010

David Burnett, 'The Smiling Saboteur' in Maud Page, *Unnerved: The New Zealand Project*. Brisbane: Queensland Art Gallery.

2009

David Cross and Claire Doherty (eds.) *One Day Sculpture*. Kerber Verlag, Bielefeld.

2007

Justin Paton, 'The Big Ask: 20 Questions about Michael Parekowhai' in Michael Lett and Ryan Moore (eds.) *Michael Parekowhai*. Michael Lett Publishing, Auckland. pp. v-xv.

2004

Michael Parekowhai, Huhana Smith, *2004 Gwangju Biennale: a grain of dust, a drop of water*, Gwangju Biennale Foundation Gwangju.

2003

Ruth Watson, "Indians and Cowboys: Now and Here" *Indian and Cowboys*, Gallery 4A, Asia Australia, Arts Centre, Sydney.

2001

Ngahiraka Mason, Purangiaho Toku Mata, *Purangiaho (Seeing Clearly)*, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki, 2001.

1999

Robert Leonard, 'Michael Parekowhai: Ten Guitars', *Beyond the future: The Third Asia Art Pacific Triennial*, Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane, 1999, pp. 100-101.

1998

*Dream Collectors*, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington, Auckland Art Gallery, 1998.

1996

*The world over / de wereld bollen: art in the age of globalisation*, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; City Gallery, Wellington, 1996.

1995

Gregory Burke, *Cultural Safety*, Frankfurter Kunstverein, Frankfurt; City Gallery, Wellington, 1995.

Gregory Burke, 'Michael Parekowhai', Home and Away: Contemporary Australian and New Zealand Art From the Chartwell Collection (ed. William McAloon)  
Robert Jahnke, Korurangi, New Gallery, Auckland, 1995  
Alan Smith, *The Nervous System*, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth

1994

*Localities of Desire*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, Australia, 1994.

1993

Lara Strongman, *Shared Pleasures: The Chartwell Collection*, Waikato Museum of

Art and History, Hamilton, New Zealand.

1992

Jim Barr and Mary Barr, *Headlands: thinking through New Zealand art*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, 1992.  
William McAloon, *Vogue/Vague*, CSA Gallery, Christchurch, New Zealand, 1992.

## REVIEWS AND ARTICLES

2023

Nathan Pohio, 'Observations from the Arrival Lounge' *Art Monthly Australasia*, Summer 2023/24, Issue 337.

2021

Alanna O'Riley, 'The Colonial Elephant in the Room: Michael Parekōwhai's The Lighthouse and Captain James Cook' in *Back Story: Journal of New Zealand Art, Media & Design History*, Issue 10, December 2021.

2018

Michael Parekōwhai, 'MICHAEL PAREKOWHAI TALKS ABOUT HIS CURRENT EXHIBITION AT TE PAPA TONGAREWA, WELLINGTON' in *ArtForum*, Summer 2018.

Anthony Byrt, 'Rainbow Warrior' in *Metro*, March/April 2018

Priscilla Pitts, 'Caution: Artist at Play' in *Art New Zealand*, Issue 167, Spring 2018

2017

Robert Leonard, 'Michael Parekowhai: The empire of light,' *Art Monthly Australasia*, Issue 299, June 2017

Lana Lopesi, 'An Homage, A Beacon: On Michael Parekowahi's 'The Lighthouse,' *Pantograph Punch*, 13 February 2017

Anthony Byrt, 'House Rules,' *Paperboy*, 9 February 2017

'Sculpture Casts a Spell,' *Art News New Zealand*, Autumn, 2017

Michael Parekowhai and Greg Murrell, 'Michael Parekowhai' *Britomart*, 20 pp. 24-27.

2016

Peter Hill, 'Michael Parekowhai: Playing it Forward' in *VAULT Art Magazine*, Issue 13, 2016.

2015

Judy Wilford, 'Making Unexpected Connections' in *Ingenio*, Spring, 2015

2005

Jarrold Rawlins, *Flash Art*, Vol. XXXVIII, #243, pg. 132 – 133, July / September

Amanda Linnell, 'Michael Parekowhai', *Being Maori – A Journal of Articles About The Maori Culture*, p.9 – 10.

T.J. McNamara, 'First Shock Gives Way To Curiosity', *NZ Herald*, 3 August 2005

2004

Craig Judd, 'Gwangju Biennale 2004: A Viewer-Participant Memoir', *Eyeline* # 56, Summer 2004/2005, pp18 - 20



Marg White, 'Mike's World' *Metro*, March 2004, pp54 - 61

2002

Justin Paton, 'Special Agent, Michael Parekowhai's Generous Duplicity,' *Art New Zealand* 103, Winter 2002

Justin Paton, 'Michael Parekowhai' in *Frieze* #67, May, p. 95

2000

Mark Amery, 'Know Just Where You Are', Review, *Listener*, 24 June 2000

Barr, Jim & Mary Barr, 'The Indefinite Article', *Art Asia Pacific* 23, pp72-76

Christina Barton, Art Now, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington, New Zealand, 1994, p9, 11, 66-67, 90

Connie Butler, 'West of everything' *Parkett* 57, pp189-194

Gregory Burke, 'Michael Parekowhai', Review, *Art & Text*, No. 69, May - July 2000

Flight Patterns, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, U.S.A. 2000

Richard Dale, 'Reviews Third Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art', *Eyeline* 41, Summer 1999 / 2000

Blair French, 'Michael Parekowhai', Reviews, *Art Asia Pacific*, issue 26, p92

Gibson, Jeff, 'Third Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art', *Artforum International*, January 2000

Francis Pound, 'Topographies,' in *Flight Patterns*, p130

Michele Hewitson, 'On the Wild Side', *NZ Herald*, 19 June 2000

William McAloon, 'Sixty Strings Slowly Strummed', *Sunday Star Times*, 21 May 2000

T.J. McNamara, 'Plenty of fire power and a lot of serious questions', *NZ Herald*, 12 June 2000

1999

Jonathan Mane-Wheoki, 'States of Flux: The Third Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art', *Art New Zealand* 93, Summer 1999-2000

Ngahiraka Mason, 'The Bosom of Abraham, A recent Gallery acquisition', *Gallery News* 04, Dec - Feb 1999-2000

1994

Robert Leonard, 'Perverse Homages', *Planet*, #13, Auckland, New Zealand, 1994

Allan Smith, "Michael Parekowhai: Kiss the Baby Goodbye", *Art New Zealand* 72, Spring 1994, pp. 64-67

1993

Graeme Speden, 'Accent on Child's Play', *New Zealand Herald*, 20 September

Lara Strongman, *Shared Pleasures: The Chartwell Collection*, Waikato Museum of Art and History, Hamilton, New Zealand

1992

Susan Cochrane-Simons, 'Maori Custom is Worth Remembering', *Sydney*

*Morning Herald*, Sydney, Australia, 18 April 1992

*Hit parade: contemporary art from the Paris Family Collection*, Wellington, City Art Gallery, 1992

Joanna Mendelssohn, 'New Views of New Zealand: two versions of isolation', *The Bulletin*, Auckland, New Zealand, 21 April 1992

Rangi Panaho, W.A.R.. *Whatu Aho Rua*, Tandanya Gallery, Adelaide, 1992

Parekowhai, Michael, 'page work', *Pavement* 37, pp. 190-191

Stephen Zepke, 'Difference without Binary oppositions. A chance for a Choice!' *Antic*, #8, Auckland, New Zealand, 1992

1991

Robert Leonard, 'Against Purity: three word sculptures by Michael Parekowhai', *Art New Zealand*, #59, Auckland, New Zealand, 1991, pp. 52-54.

Robin Stoney, *Taonga Maori*, Circa 91, cover and p.63

1990

Intra, Giovanni, 'Being Brown, Making flutes and Dying', *Stamp*, #12, Auckland, New Zealand

## SELECTED PUBLIC & PRIVATE COLLECTIONS

Arario Museum, Cheonan, Seoul, Korea

Musee du quai Branly, Paris, France

Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch, New Zealand

Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia

National Library Gallery, Wellington, New Zealand

Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth, New Zealand

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki, Auckland, New Zealand

Chartwell Collection, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki, Auckland, New Zealand

Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetu, Christchurch, New Zealand

Dunedin Public Art Gallery, Dunedin, New Zealand

Jim Barr and Mary Barr Collection, Wellington, New Zealand

Les and Milly Paris Collection, Wellington, New Zealand

Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington, New Zealand

Saatchi & Saatchi Collection, Wellington, New Zealand

Sweeney and Vesty Collection, Wellington, New Zealand

Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane, Australia

Thanksgiving Trust, Auckland, New Zealand

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia

Saatchi & Saatchi Collection, Wellington, New Zealand

Sweeney and Vesty Collection, Wellington, New Zealand

Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane, Australia

Thanksgiving Trust, Auckland, New Zealand

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia





Left: View of "Michael Parekōwhai: *Détour*," 2018, Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington. Scaffolding: Michael Parekōwhai, *Forest Etiquette*, 2018. Counterclockwise, from top left: Michael Parekōwhai, *Standing on Memory*, 2018; Colin McCahon, *Northland Panels*, 1958; Marcel Duchamp, *Boîte-en-valise*, 1961; Michael Parekōwhai, *Tiki Tour*, 2018. Photo: Maarten Holl.

Right: Moon rock sample with presentation plaque and flag (detail), 1972, rock, wood, plastic, cloth, metal, overall 14½ x 10½ x 2½".



1000 WORDS

# MICHAEL PAREKŌWHAI

TALKS ABOUT HIS CURRENT EXHIBITION AT TE PAPA TONGAREWA, WELLINGTON

FOR EXACTLY TWO DECADES, New Zealand's national museum, Te Papa Tongarewa, has tried to map the country's vexed bicultural history—a history that began with the first contact between Māori and Europeans and continues, to this day, in the complex relationships between Māori and Pākehā (New Zealanders of European descent). To accomplish this task, Te Papa followed a distinctly 1990s logic, doing away with the separation between the national museum and the national art collection, and—under the shamelessly hopeful slogan “Our Place”—combining the two institutions in one grand, self-consciously post-modern building, complete with the interactive, Ralph Appelbaum–designed displays of the kind that were endemic in museums during that era. Ever since, art has played second fiddle at Te Papa, whether because

of inadequate gallery space; the impulse to instrumentalize artworks in the service of wide-reaching cultural-anthropological narratives; or the fact that, when it comes to a New Zealand tourism industry built on pristine landscapes, good wine, nineteenth-century stereotypes of its indigenous culture, and the *Lord of the Rings* franchise, the country's greatest art—which so often complicates simplistic views of its culture—isn't exactly a big visitor draw.

Aware that its art exhibitions have long fallen short, Te Papa has created new galleries within the existing building, increasing the space allotted to the display of works by 35 percent. The institution also invited Michael Parekōwhai—one of the country's most influential artists and a key figure in the evolution of contemporary Māori art—to produce the inaugural





Above: View of "Michael Parekōwhai: *Détour*," 2018, Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington. Photo: Sam Hartnett.

Left: Two of Theo Schoon's studies of *toi moko*, dates unknown, graphite on paper. Installation view, Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington, 2018. Photo: Sam Hartnett.

Opposite page, top left: Michael Parekōwhai, *Standing on Memory*, 2018, fiberglass, automotive paint. Installation view, Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington. Photo: Sam Hartnett.

Opposite page, top right: View of "Michael Parekōwhai: *Détour*," 2018, Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington. Scaffolding: Michael Parekōwhai, *Forest Etiquette*, 2018. Center: Four untitled works by Theo Schoon, dates unknown. Background: Michael Parekōwhai, *Constable Plumb Bob*, 2018. Photo: Sam Hartnett.

installation in the first of the new spaces. "*Détour*" is his response, and it takes as its starting point one of Te Papa's greatest art treasures: a 1961 edition of Marcel Duchamp's *Boîte-en-valise*, the French artist's famed portable museum containing miniature versions of his own works.

Parekōwhai, long in thrall to Duchamp, has taken *Boîte-en-valise*'s logic as a mobile exhibition frame and blown it out to create his own temporary structure: *Forest Etiquette*, 2018, an enormous construction of scaffolding wrapped with transparent plastic trees. For the duration of his exhibition, this structure becomes a provisional framework for several works from Te Papa's collection: Duchamp's museum; the multipart painting *Northland Panels*, 1958, one of Colin McCahon's greatest works; a pair of *poutoti*, traditional Māori stilts; a painting by Frances Hodgkins; and even a tiny piece of the moon, given to New Zealand by the Nixon administration in 1969 as a commemoration of the *Apollo 11* mission and a gentle reminder of who, globally speaking, was boss. Alongside these, Parekōwhai has included art from his personal collection—such as artist Theo Schoon's drawings of preserved Māori heads, or *toi moko*—and has mixed in his own works, too (all 2018), including a full-scale fiberglass elephant that stands atop the trees, high above the ground; a Duchampian waistcoat bearing his own name on its buttons; and fiend-

In forcing Duchamp—and Te Papa's history of ideologically driven display—through a postcolonial filter, Parekōwhai crashes the Frenchman's readymade institutional critique into the colonial legacies that museums like Te Papa are built on. "*Détour*" is both a celebration of Te Papa's renewed commitment to art and an excoriation of its postmodern platitudes, which confuse pluralism with progress. "Our Place" has never really been so, and Parekōwhai's temporary takeover highlights the museological myths and misrepresentations involved in trying to make everybody feel at home.

—Anthony Byrt

**WHEN I WAS GOING THROUGH** art school in the 1980s, we had slides: crusty glass slides that would make a thunking noise when they dropped into the machine. We didn't have the access to modern and contemporary art that we do today thanks to the internet and the growth of the art world here. I feel like Duchamp taught us from afar. And our national museum has this incredible work; it's like a portal through which you can understand contemporary art. So I based the show on Duchampian ideas: the idea of portability, the idea of the museum, and the idea of the gallery. Te Papa's biggest struggle has always been "How do we fit an art gallery into a national museum?" Perhaps it doesn't fit; perhaps you actually need a different kind of space. So on the one hand, my project acknowledges the shortcomings of

I wanted to include artists who came out to the antipodes to find a better life, whether that was after World War II or some hippie thing where they wanted to leave Europe and run around in the bush. I think this desire to find a new home is an interesting position. If we only played in our backyards by ourselves all the time and didn't let others come in to see what we have, we'd lose sight of what is actually of value to us. That's why I've included Theo Schoon, who made so much work about the Māori art he encountered here. His *toi moko* images push my own limits of taste and what's acceptable. It was OK at a certain point to preserve a Māori head, sell it, and then present it in a European museum as some sort of authentic, portable, "readymade" representation of a culture. That really tests me as an artist: What's up for grabs? If I pushed it and displayed a real head, that's all people would talk about. So you have to dial it back: With Schoon's drawings, I have the heads around, without actually having them in the show.

When Te Papa first opened, in 1998, they showed Colin McCahon's *Northland Panels*. So it seemed fitting that if I was going to be opening Te Papa's new art spaces, I would have that work front and center—not just to remind people of the past, but also to suggest there is a future. Because of how I'm presenting it, you can walk behind it. You can see the backs of the panels, where there are three more paintings, which McCahon





Te Papa's biggest struggle has always been "How do we fit an art gallery into a national museum?" Perhaps it doesn't fit; perhaps you actually need a different kind of space.



View of "Michael Parekōwhai: *Détour*," 2018, Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington. Scaffolding: Michael Parekōwhai, *Forest Etiquette*, 2018. Background: Colin McCahon, *Northland Panels*, 1958. Foreground: Michael Parekōwhai, *Constable Plumb Bob*, 2018. Photo: Sam Hartnett.

McCahon's iconic work to find this was a nice way to address the museum's very beginning, its current position, and to ask: Where to from here? Apart from that, *Northland Panels* is a fucking great landscape painting. The space I've built is also a landscape. The plastic trees were one of the most unnaturally natural things I could think of. I needed the structure to be clunky, mechanical, and representative of a "virtual" reality. It has a kind of *Minecraft* feel. That's why the trees are transparent; for me, it creates the sense of a 3-D digital walk-through of an exhibition. I'm asking the audience—which is a Duchampian trick—to finish the work: "This thing is a tree. Do you believe me?"

Being Māori, or a native of any space, comes with its own cultural weight, and this can pose challenges. I try to translate Māori ideas in a way that lets people take some of that on board, or just go, "Well, that's a pretty sculpture." Te Papa has some amazing Māori artifacts, but I've chosen a simple pair of *poutoti*, or stilts. The stilts are primarily for a kids' game, made to raise your feet up—to raise your spirits, your intellect, to let you stand above the ground. They also relate to an ancient story of a Te Arawa chief who used *poutoti* to steal some breadfruit and then had to run away from the Pacific Islands, eventually arriving here. So they have this amazing connection to this tale of travel, of portability, and of being above the ground. When you peel back the layers of the show, there's a whole lot going on, not about individual identity, but about how we got here, who we are, and where we're going. □



# Rainbow warrior

For almost 30 years, Michael Parekōwhai has been one of New Zealand's most influential artists. In a rare interview, he opens up about his work, the trauma of loss, and how he — with a little help from Marcel Duchamp — is about to transform Te Papa.

TEXT — ANTHONY BYRT / PHOTOGRAPHY — MEEK ZUIDERWYK

**O**n a stinking hot Saturday in late January, Michael Parekōwhai makes coffee in the kitchen of his Henderson studio. He feeds three pods into the machine rapid fire, pop-pop-pop, puts the cup in front of me, then bangs a bowl of fridge-cold watermelon down on the table.

He's dressed for the humidity: black singlet, grey sweatshorts and Allbirds sneakers the colour of a spearmint milkshake, his thick black hair held back by tortoiseshell sunglasses. He turns 50 this year, but has a shapeshifting ability to look, if not ageless, disconcertingly unplaceable.

"Making art is like smoking," he says, as he joins me at the table. "It's a bad hobby, it costs too much, and it's bad for your health."

Parekōwhai loves a good one-liner. But despite being arguably New Zealand's most visible contemporary artist (at least via his work), he is notoriously reluctant to give interviews. That's partly about staying in control. It's also about privacy: married with two kids, he's deeply protective of his right to a personal life outside of art — especially since the media fallout connected to *The Lighthouse* on Queens Wharf. He's rarely photographed either; Google him and the most recent thing you'll find is a portrait from 2011, when he was New Zealand's representative at the Venice Biennale.

This invisibility, though, has also had its benefits, giving him a kind of mythic status within the culture. By letting his work do the talking, he's left the rest of us to fight over its merits. He is also a trickster; an artist who revels in ambiguities, and loves the moment when one thing — whether it's a statement or a work of art — turns out to actually be something else.

Jenny Harper, the outgoing director of the Christchurch Art Gallery, calls Parekōwhai a magician. "Whatever he creates," she says, "he maintains an edge of drama and surprise. He engages with and jests about aspects of Māori and Pākehā culture, high and low. He has an individuality and self-assured sense of New Zealand identity, partnered with Duchampian wit and savvy."

"Duchampian" is an adjective you hear a lot in

relation to Parekōwhai: a reference to the French artist Marcel Duchamp — another trickster — who transformed the history of Western art by inventing the "readymade", taking manufactured objects such as bicycle wheels and urinals, putting them in galleries, and calling them art.

Parekōwhai likes Duchamp, a lot: a decades-long love affair that began when he was a student. "At art school, Duchamp was the portal that allowed us to start understanding contemporary art," he says.

Art school was also when Parekōwhai got his first break, with works that paid homage to the French master and catapulted him into the foreground of New Zealand's postcolonial debates. Now, almost 30 years later, he's about to unleash his fascination with Duchamp yet again, this time in Te Papa, in one of the most ambitious projects of his career.

The idea behind Te Papa — that New Zealand needed to throw off the colonial shackles and express its national culture in an independent, contemporary way — emerged at exactly the same time as Parekōwhai and his peers like Shane Cotton and Peter Robinson. "We were trying to smash doors down," he says of the way they began to take on Pākehā-dominated institutions and galleries.

By the time Te Papa finally opened in 1998, Parekōwhai's generation of Māori artists were already exposing the cracks in the idea of "Our Place". In March, as Te Papa lets him loose in its newly renovated art galleries, he may finally blow the national museum's doors all the way off.

**"I** remember our first meeting," Robert Leonard tells me. "Michael visited me at my mum's place on the Shore. He looked very clean cut and he brought my mum a huge fish — he said his brothers were fishermen. It threw me. I didn't know whether to take that fish literally or metaphorically. I sat there thinking about that fish."

In 1990, when Leonard was a young curator at the National Art Gallery in Wellington, he saw an exhibition at Auckland's Artspace of contemporary Māori art, curated by George Hubbard. It was called



**ABOVE**— In this rare portrait, Michael Parekōwhai references a series of black-and-white photos taken of Marcel Duchamp by Irving Penn in New York in April 1948.



*Choice!* There was Jacqueline Fraser, Diane Prince, Lisa Reihana, and a handful of others. Among them was a 22-year-old called Michael Parekōwhai.

"Michael's *Choice!* sculptures would really shape my thinking," Leonard says. "They did something new and surprising. They eschewed familiar Māori-art styles and references, yet asserted a Māori world view."

The best known of those works is *The Indefinite Article* (1990), Parekōwhai's giant wooden letters that spell out "I AM HE": a bold claim to greatness from a newbie, a reference to Colin McCahon's "I AM" paintings, and a play on the letters that make up his own first name, minus the ones — "c" and "l" — that aren't in the Māori alphabet.

A year earlier, Parekōwhai had made *After Dunlop*, a replica of Duchamp's infamous *Bicycle Wheel*, which was mounted on a stool as though it were a masterpiece on a pedestal. As Leonard wrote back in 1994: "Being an art student means immersing yourself in the great art of the past, all the while struggling to find a voice of your own. That's a tall order. Parekōwhai's response to this challenge was to cut Duchamp down to size by building him up. Parekōwhai lovingly fashioned a replica of the

of tradition or children of nature, representatives of the land and the past," she says, quoting George Hubbard and Robin Craw's catalogue essay from the exhibition. "And I think it showed Michael's significance."

Two years after *Choice!*, Leonard included Parekōwhai as the youngest artist in *Headlands: Thinking through New Zealand Art*, a seminal exhibition at Sydney's Museum of Contemporary Art. It was a pretty astounding rise for a kid who, a few years earlier, had dropped out of Northcote College to go to floristry school, a move that was disastrous. He failed with the flowers, went back to high school, and ended up at Elam School of Fine Arts instead.

Years later, though, in 2001, he made *The Consolation of Philosophy* — photographs of flower arrangements named after famous battles in which the Māori Battalion fought. "It's not about the fallen soldiers," he says of the series. "It's more about the land. It's turangawaewae. Whether I'm in Paris, or Venice, or West Auckland, my position is my position."

*Headlands* placed Parekōwhai and his peers at the heart of what would become a generation-defining debate. In the accompanying catalogue, young art historian Rangihira Panohe wrote an essay that criticised painter Gordon Walters' appropriation of traditional kōwhaiwhai. For some, like the late Francis Pound, this was an attack too far. Academic acrimony ensued. New Zealand art history got angry, and the country's art entered a new postcolonial moment.

Parekōwhai and his contemporaries were first caught in the headlights, then elevated into the spotlight: Cotton had his paintings that appropriated symbols and images from New Zealand's colonial past. Robinson had his "Percentage Paintings", which explored precisely how much Māori blood he had, and, a little later and even more infamously, his "Pakeha Have Rights Too!" swastika paintings.

"I never had sellout shows like Shane and Peter," Parekōwhai jokes, when I ask him what that period was like. "It was a slow thing. [The late art dealer] Greg Flint said to me once, 'You don't want to be a skyrocket, boy.'"

Parekōwhai's wry sculptures, though, have become icons of the time, including *Kiss the Baby Goodbye* (1994), a giant version of a Walters koru painting as a kitset. It's modelled on Walters' painting *Kahukura*, made in 1968 — the year Parekōwhai was born. One translation for its title is "rainbow". Parekōwhai whakapapas to Ngā Ariki Rotoaue on the East Coast near Gisborne, an iwi almost wiped out in the 19th century, whose mythology is rich with references to rainbows and the stars.

Since making *Kiss the Baby Goodbye*, the rainbows have never left him. His now-ubiquitous bowler-hatted men are collectively titled *Over the Rainbow*. And *The Lighthouse*, of course, is filled with star constellations in the colours of the rainbow spectrum. "My dad calls it the rainbow house," he tells me, smiling.

“His work felt like a break with the older generation of Māori artists; it was game-changing.”

*Bicycle Wheel* in wood, rewriting it as a Māori carving. Honouring Duchamp's critique of craft in a crafty replica, Parekōwhai trumped the Frenchman."

Clever, arch, and oh-so-postmodern, it's not surprising it lit up Leonard and other young curators emerging at that time: a small group of museum professionals desperate to break the shackles of (Pākehā-invented) nationalism in the country's public galleries.

And yet there was still something definitively local — and decidedly barbed — underpinning Parekōwhai's works. "They seemed to emphasise cultural difference because they spoke through appropriated forms and references," Leonard says. "His work opened up a new set of possibilities. It felt like a break with the older generation of Māori artists; it was game-changing."

Megan Tamati-Quennell, Te Papa's curator of modern and contemporary Māori and indigenous art, agrees. "Michael's work expanded the definition of contemporary Māori art. *Choice!* wanted to showcase art from Māori artists who were more than 'bearers



The intensity of Parekōwhai's familial connections are crucial to understanding the personal mythology at the heart of his work. "I'm the Māui in my family!" he lets slip as we talk. "The youngest of five. I'm also the one who lived."

Parekōwhai's parents were both teachers. "We learned from an early age that knowledge is everything," he says.

The Parekōwhais' role as educators, of Māori children in particular, was documented around 1963 by Ans Westra (who not long after would publish her most debated photo-essay of Māori life as she saw it, *Washday at the Pa*). At the time, the Parekōwhais were teaching in Parikino, on the Whanganui River.

"Dad found her sleeping on the side of the road in her car," Parekōwhai says, "and told her it wasn't safe there for a woman on her own, so he brought her home." Westra ended up taking photographs in the Parekōwhais' classrooms, including one of her best known, of a barefoot Māori boy called Matene standing on tip-toes and writing the time on the blackboard. In others, the Parekōwhais themselves

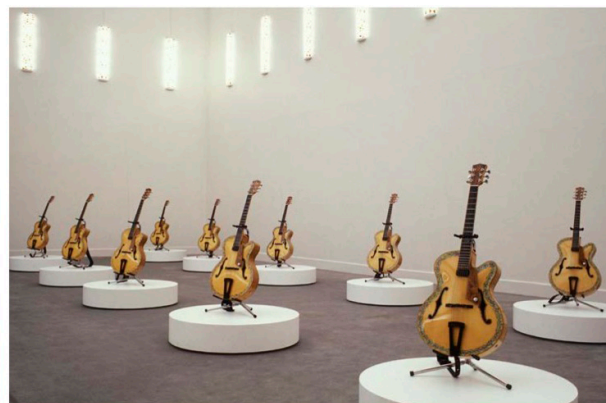
are shown teaching children.

Michael was born five years later in Porirua. By the time he was six, the family had settled in Northcote. Soon after, one of his older brothers, Thomas, was killed by a car at a pedestrian crossing. It was the defining event of his early life, and has been a subject he's periodically returned to in his sculpture ever since. "A lot of my work is about voids," he says. "And you can never fill that void of a lost sibling."

In his 2011 Venice Biennale exhibition, he included a pair of child's Crocs cast in bronze, in memory of his late brother and as a tribute to his own son. Other family members have been represented in his work too. His well-known "security guard" sculptures, collectively known by the title *Kapa Haka*, are modelled on another of his older brothers, Paratene. In his series *Poorman, Beggarman, Thief*, three identical mannequins stand in tuxedos, wearing labels that read "My Name is Hori". Hori, as well as being a hideous racial epithet, is the translation of his father's name, George (the mannequins' features are, Parekōwhai explains, halfway between his own and

ABOVE—  
In Parekōwhai's  
Henderson studio, the  
artist tests ideas for  
his Te Papa project.





**TOP, FROM LEFT**—*The Lighthouse* (2017), Queen's Wharf; *Patriot: Ten Guitars* (1999); *Portrait of Elmer Keith #1* (2004).

**ABOVE, FROM LEFT**—*From Over the Rainbow* (2015); *Chapman's Homer* (2011); *Kiss the Baby Goodbye* (1994); *The Indefinite Article* (1990).

his dad's). His older sister Cushla has also been a key figure for him throughout his career. When I ask him exactly what form that's taken, he shrugs. "She's my big sister," he says. Evidently, one never quite escapes being the baby in the family.

A "pare" is the bun or top-knot often worn by Māori warriors. The kōwhai is a bright yellow flower. Parekōwhai, the failed florist, likes the idea that his ancestors went into battle with flowers in their hair.

Parekōwhai's path has, at times, seemed paved with gold. He was made an Arts Foundation Laureate in 2001. Ever since New Zealand first went to the Venice Biennale that year, it was talked of as only a matter of time before Parekōwhai got the gig; sure enough, he went as our official representative 10 years later. Michael Lett, arguably New Zealand's most influential contemporary art dealer, launched his gallery when Parekōwhai jumped ship from Gow Langsford in the early 2000s, and since then, the ascendance of both men has been symbiotic. Parekōwhai's professorship at Elam

also gives him plenty of influence over the New Zealand art scene — his ex-students include Simon Denny, Campbell Patterson, Steve Carr, Luke Willis Thompson and Kate Newby, to name just a few of the high-profile ones.

He looms large, and for some, the shadow has become just a little too long. He's been accused of being a bit too easy on the Pākehā eye, and of making art geared for his vociferous market (open a contemporary art auction catalogue or a posh Auckland property magazine and there's a good chance there'll be a sprinkling of Parekōwhai works on show). Rangihira Panoho — the same art historian who kicked off the appropriation debate in 1992 — somewhat dismissively suggested in his 2015 book *Māori Art: History, Architecture, Landscape and Theory* that Parekōwhai's work was popular with curators like Leonard and Greg Burke in the 90s because it was internationally on-trend and built on his "fashionably-ambivalent identity".

In 2013, Christchurch Art Gallery launched a public fundraising campaign to help buy *Chapman's*

and his appropriation of the kuril water rat, an important symbol of the local Aboriginal people. The Queensland Minister for the Arts got in on the act, too, openly stating that, if they could have got out of the contract, they would have in a heartbeat.

That number — a million dollars — was the same figure that caused the proverbial to hit the fan when, in 2014, after a gift to Auckland from Barfoot & Thompson, Parekōwhai's plans for *The Lighthouse* on Queens Wharf — with an exterior in the form of a 1950s state house — were leaked. He refuses to be drawn on the controversy, just as he refused to give any interviews when it was unfolding. It's clear that the experience hurt him, though, especially when the work and the issues it was trying to address were misrepresented by certain corners of the media. There were even rumours of pressure from some at the council to return Barfoot & Thompson's gift — which would have been an incredible affront both to the company and to one of New Zealand's senior artists.

Even when the final work was revealed in February 2017, new mayor Phil Goff hedged his bets, acknowledging in a Radio New Zealand interview Barfoot & Thompson's generosity while making no mention of Parekōwhai before garbling that "art, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder... it's an interesting building. I think I'll leave my comments at that." Goff said he couldn't attend either opening event because of other commitments. He also pointedly said the decision to build it on Queens Wharf had been made before he became mayor.

As projects become bigger the stakes get higher, particularly in a small society like New Zealand's, and particularly in an environment where every cent spent on the arts is so brutally scrutinised. It's left plenty of artists gun-shy. Parekōwhai's silence on *The Lighthouse*, though, shouldn't be mistaken for a lack of fight — as his Te Papa project is about to show.

"Te Papa has a tricky relationship with contemporary art," curator Tamati-Quennell says, which, for those who've followed the institution's tribulations over the years, is an understatement. Te Papa's amalgamation of the national museum and the national art collection has been a consistent and persistent disaster for its art collection. Enter, then, Warren & Mahoney, with an \$8 million renovation of the institution's art exhibition spaces.

For Tamati-Quennell, Parekōwhai was the obvious artist to have first shot at the first space, the "threshold" to the main galleries. "I thought Michael would be able to create a project that was accessible to the everyday person," she says, "but also had the intellectual grit and weight that could offer new ways of thinking about how art operates in Te Papa, and perhaps shift the ground."

Parekōwhai's starting point to shift that ground is his old hero Duchamp. In 1983, the National Art Gallery acquired one of its most underrated treasures: a small,

*Homer*, one of Parekōwhai's bulls atop a piano from his Venice exhibition. Jenny Harper, the director, had also been the commissioner for Parekōwhai's Venice outing, and arranged the exhibition of his project in the city, including two bronze bull-and-piano sculptures and a playable Steinway, carved and painted a vivid red. Harper says the exhibition became an emblem for Christchurch's trauma and recovery. "[It] became the first reason many people came back into the centre of our city," she says. "As for the [carved] piano upstairs, people stayed and listened and cried as they looked out onto the red zone and the damage wrought ... I've believed in the power of art for a long time now, but who could have predicted how potent a presentation this would become when it was here? It was extraordinary and moving."

Other projects haven't been greeted so warmly. In 2011, Parekōwhai won a million-dollar commission from the Queensland Government for a major new sculpture outside Brisbane's Gallery of Modern Art. Prominent Aboriginal artist Fiona Foley criticised both the decision to give Parekōwhai the commission





**ABOVE—** In Parekōwhai's studio, his own works are mixed together with inspiration for his Te Papa exhibition, including a Christo print and Theo Schoon drawings.

green box. In that box is a miniature exhibition. It is Duchamp's *Boîte-en-valise*, an editioned case by the master of the readymade, which includes tiny reproductions of his best-known works. It came from New Yorkers Judge Julius and Betty Isaacs, close friends of Duchamp and, coincidentally, big fans of New Zealand. The *Boîte-en-valise* is Parekōwhai's chance to finally go full Duchamp in a New Zealand institution. "I didn't want to do a retrospective," he says. "That's boring. I wanted to make new work. The *Boîte-en-valise* is a portable artspace; you can unpack it, have an exhibition, then pack it all up again. I didn't want to rely on the walls of the institution. So I wanted to do the same thing: make a portable exhibition."

His "portable exhibition", though, is an awful lot bigger than Duchamp's: an enormous forest of plastic trees, wrapping around bespoke scaffolding, which will in turn hold some of Te Papa's greatest treasures — including Duchamp's box. And once its run is over, the massive structure will be packed down as though it was never there.

**W**hen we move from the kitchen of Parekōwhai's studio to his workshop, he really comes alive. There's another bull-and-piano, almost finished, which will stand sentinel outside Te Papa's main entrance, on giant tree stumps. There are stacks of the clear plastic tree trunks waiting to be assembled. And in the back corner is a model of the entire project.

"I know what I know," Parekōwhai says as he talks me through it. "And I understand space."

This is Parekōwhai's polite way of skirting around the fact that the new gallery is, architecturally, a dog. The walls are almost 8m high, meaning whatever gets hung on them, no matter how big or how impressive, will be lost in an ocean of white space. There's also a pre-existing bridge that slices right through the room. It is basically a big, vertically oriented box with a suspended walkway that cuts it in half. And there is a weird piece of wall that, inexplicably, wraps from outside the galleries into the exhibition space itself. Little wonder, then, that Parekōwhai wants to stay away from the walls and build his own structure.

In the middle of his constructed space will be McCahon's *Northland Panels*, one of the great 20th-century expressions of New Zealand landscape, suspended at the heart of Parekōwhai's forest, visible in the round for the first time, so the public will be able to see its back. Likewise a beautiful Frances Hodgkins painting. There are classic Parekōwhai games, too. In another part of the show, he will exhibit the maquette for Molly Macalister's *Māori Warrior*, that iconic modernist chief who stood at the bottom of Queen St being shat on by pigeons for decades, not far from where Parekōwhai's *The Lighthouse* now keeps watch instead.

The plaster maquette is fragile, so Parekōwhai has made a bronze replica of it. "You could kick that fucker," he says, "and it'd just hurt your foot." Both will be displayed with Parekōwhai's own "Māori warrior" — an identically sized version of his security-guard brother Paratene.

There are other warriors present, too. In 2014, a large group of *toi moko* (preserved Māori heads) was finally returned to Te Papa from the American Museum of Natural History. *Toi moko*, and the voracious trade in them in the early 19th century, which helped to fuel the Musket Wars and fed into museums around the world, are among our most problematic taonga. These particular heads had entered the New York museum's collection in the early 20th century after one of its patrons had purchased them from Horatio Gordon Robley, a soldier-artist who had served with the British in the New Zealand Wars and developed a lifelong obsession with Māori culture. Robley had first offered the heads to the New Zealand Government, but it refused to buy back our own taonga. It took another hundred years for the heads to find their way home.

Parekōwhai isn't using the heads themselves but instead illustrations of *toi moko* by Theo Schoon, like Ans Westra another European émigré who came to New Zealand in the mid-20th century and fell hard for Māori culture, and another artist who forms part of his own artistic heritage. Schoon's drawings are brilliant and exasperating problems: representing the thrill of modernist discovery on the one hand, and the horrors of colonial contact on the other.

Parekōwhai says that both Schoon and Westra — who, like Gordon Walters, have at various times been caught in the appropriation crosshairs — have been a little hard done by in New Zealand art history: "Without them breaking rules and protocol," he says, "we wouldn't have a lot of the things they documented... For me, *tikanga* relies on the way time and space change, including at museums." Which is, of course, an evolution his own project is trying to map, too.

As for that bridge, viewers who do cross it will find themselves eye-to-eye with a fibreglass elephant on top of the scaffolding. "Elephants are handy," Parekōwhai says, "because they fill up space. This one will be the elephant in the room that no one talks about."

On the ground floor, sitting on long park benches where viewers will be able to take a break and admire the art-forest view, are giant, nightmarish, bobble-headed monkeys, coloured after falcon eggs Parekōwhai found in Te Papa's collection. "Kids'll love it!" he says, as I stand there wondering whether the monkeys will just scare the shit out of my six-year-old.

All of this work will be compressed into one half of the room. In the other, occupying, by itself, one of those obscenely oversized walls, will be a tiny, pink storefront façade, modelled on a Christo work from the 1960s. And inside that storefront will be an even smaller object: a tiny chunk of the moon.

In 1968 — the year of Parekōwhai's birth and Duchamp's death — Richard Nixon was elected President of the United States. The following year, he sent tiny pieces of the moon all around the world, a way to commemorate the Apollo missions and an exercise in soft power. Parekōwhai loves the fact that Te Papa's piece was delivered in a cheesy 70s attaché case "probably by some CIA guy", like something out of a corny spy movie. It is a box, inside a box — the storefront — inside a box — Parekōwhai's exhibition — which is itself about Duchamp's box, made almost

**“**  
*Who else is going to put a piece of the fucking moon in their show?*

60 years ago, now kept in the giant box we call our national museum. Unpacking the project is like a game of pass-the-parcel that never ends.

If Duchamp was the bridge to contemporary art, Parekōwhai leads us across it into a surreal promised land, refusing to have us held back on that journey by the museological frame of "Our Place" or the clumsiness of its architects.

It is also a massive act of bravado. It is quite something to simultaneously beat up Te Papa, the legacies of colonialism and the impossible representation of our traumatic nationhood, while also performing an act of generosity that opens a new chapter in the museum's evolution.

As I leave Parekōwhai's studio and follow the Northwestern Motorway along the water and back into the city, I realise the project is also an embodiment of *The Lighthouse's* values — welcome, whānau, ahi kā, our place in the land and in the cosmos, and the forever battle-cry *Ake, ake, ake*.

Parekōwhai put the ambition more bluntly. "Who else," he said, "is going to put a piece of the fucking moon in their show?"





## Caution: Artist at Play

Michael Parekowhai's *Détour*

PRISCILLA PITTS

In 1942, for the vernissage of *First Papers of Surrealism* in New York, Marcel Duchamp installed his *Sixteen Miles of String*. Stretching between ceiling, floor and walls, Duchamp's intricate web complicated attendees' ability to view the other works in the exhibition; they were further hindered by groups of children throwing balls and playing hopscotch and skipping games.

In 1998 Maureen Lander's *String Games*, commissioned for the launch of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, referenced both traditional Maori string games or whai and Duchamp's provocative opening gambit. Suspended at the centre of her twine, light and video installation was a glow-green replica of an item from Te Papa's collection: Duchamp's *Boîte-en-valise*.

Twenty years later Michael Parekowhai picks up the baton. Duchamp has been a key figure in Parekowhai's thinking since art school and his work informs many aspects of *Détour*. Instead of a cat's cradle of string Parekowhai has constructed a maze of scaffolding, its uprights sheathed in clear plastic 'tree trunks', forming a forest of sorts. It is inhabited by

monkeys and an elephant so perhaps it is a jungle; or maybe a jungle gym, a place for (mental) exercise and play.

It is also a framing device, a structure within which to present what looks at first like a hodgepodge of wildly differing elements but turns out to be an artfully composed miscellany. Many are housed in vitrines, custom-made to Parekowhai's specifications, viewed by him as artworks in their own right and sharing the title *Ideal Landscape*. Here you will find *Boîte-en-valise* (the real one), a portable mini museum containing reproductions of the works Duchamp considered his most significant, including *Nude Descending a Staircase*, *The Large Glass* and *Fountain*.

Also in vitrines are several versions of Claes Oldenburg's *Geometric Mouse*, *Scale D 'Home-made'*. Another is mounted high overhead (keep your eyes peeled—Parekowhai expects the viewer to work hard). Oldenburg, I'd say, is included for a number of reasons. His adaptation of the features of Mickey Mouse is echoed in Parekowhai's cartoonish animals and policeman. Like several other key works in *Détour*, the Oldenburgs are editions or multiples. And of course they remind us of Oldenburg's *Mouse Museum*, a hold-all for a variety of items of the artist's choosing.

Parekowhai has sneaked in an art gallery reference too, in the form of *The shortcut gallery*, a 1:1-scale three-dimensional reconstruction of Christo's drawing

(opposite) Michael Parekowhai's *Détour* at Te Papa, March 2018 (Photograph: Sam Hartnett)

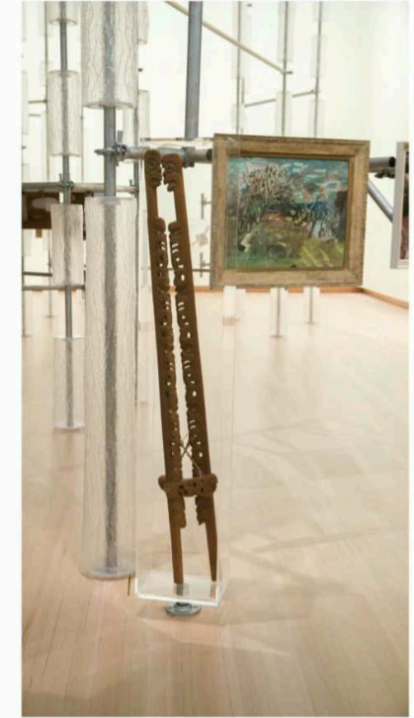
(right) Michael Parekowhai's *Détour* at Te Papa, March 2018, with *Poutiti* (carved stilts) (1964) & Frances Hodgkins' *Cherry tree at 'The Croft', Bradford on Tone, Taunton* (1946) (Photograph: Maarten Holl)

*Pink Store Front* (project) (1980).<sup>1</sup> As the *Détour* website notes, Parekowhai plays on the history of The Wrong Gallery which opened in New York in 2002 and where the single artwork on show at any one time could be viewed only from outside, through a glass door. And surely there's a nod to Oldenburg's *The Store* (1961–64), in which, interrogating the relationship between art and the marketplace, he displayed and sold sculptures of an array of everyday commodities.

Alice-in-Wonderland-like, we have to get down on our hands and knees to see what is inside: not an artwork but a gift from the Richard Nixon administration, a piece of moon rock mounted on a plaque above a tiny New Zealand flag that has been to the moon and back. In his pocket-sized shop front Parekowhai cuts down to size the museum, the space race and the nationalism within which Te Papa has always been framed.

It is pertinent to the opening of Te Papa's new 'art space' that Parekowhai invites us to think about the museum as a container, a frame, a portmanteau. The phenomenon of artists creating museum-style displays, often to critique the authority and bias of the institution, is not new. However, Parekowhai also challenges display conventions and the form of the gallery space itself. Like the Russian avant-garde artist El Lissitzky—but pushing things further—Parekowhai 'addresses directly the core of that architectural language—the false neutrality of the wall space with its seemingly universal white or monochrome surface and the false timelessness and immobility of the picture's place'.<sup>2</sup> For there are many paths we can take through *Détour* (the title itself sounds an alert) and the spatial and conceptual relationships between the artworks are complex and multifarious. Duchamp's influence can again be detected here—he is widely credited with the idea that it is the viewer that completes the work of art and Parekowhai demands our active mental and physical participation to make connections between the ideas, histories and imagery he has brought together.

Te Papa's history is recent and inescapable. Perhaps the most egregious decision in *Parade*, one of its opening exhibitions, was to display Colin McCahon's *Northland Panels* (1959), as what Paul Williams described as 'little more than a decoration—a painting on the living room wall of "our place" . . . sandwiched beside *Northland Panels* is an old television set playing advertisements and a Toby jug on one side, and . . . a 1959 Kelvinator Foodarama refrigerator on the other'.<sup>3</sup> Parekowhai affirms the significance of *Northland Panels* in the history of New Zealand art, not by hanging it on a spacious white wall but inserting it into a new, contemporary 'landscape' environment. As with other works in *Détour*, he has suspended it in space, allowing us to see the back of its eight



unframed canvases and showing us that several panels were painted on portions of rejected paintings. He exposes, both literally and figuratively, the flip side of how art is presented in the museum, where it is frequently contextualised by explanatory labels yet isolated from the processes by which it is formed.

Parekowhai's landscape also embraces three of Frances Hodgkins' late works—stereotypical English countryside scenes painted in a characteristically unstereotypical way. Next to one of these is a pair of wooden stilts, carved with Maori designs, offering perhaps a way to ascend to the stature of one of our most adventurous expatriate artists.<sup>4</sup> Hodgkins' works also intersect, unexpectedly, with the linear forms Parekowhai has enlarged from parts of Duchamp's 1913 drawing *Cemetery of uniforms and liveries* (No. 1)<sup>5</sup> and which are suspended overhead; their colours, like those of the park benches on which three of Parekowhai's own creations stand, are based on hues in Hodgkins' paintings.

Another, very different, response to landscape is seen in Theo Schoon's photographs of geothermal features. Parekowhai's inclusion of Schoon—and he's there in spades with 18 works, including copies of Horatio Robley's drawings of moko mokai—is ambiguous. Schoon's enthusiasm and admiration

Michael Parekowhai *Détour*  
Te Papa Tongarewa Museum of New Zealand, Wellington  
17 March–4 November





for traditional Maori art is indisputable but many of his practices were distinctly dodgy. Commissioned to document Maori rock art, he touched up some of the drawings with crayon and in his own drawings 'improved' some of the original images. He also added dye to mud pools to generate more spectacular photographs.

Parekowhai has suggested that Schoon has been unfairly dealt to by New Zealand art history: 'Without them [Schoon and Ans Westra] breaking rules and protocol... we wouldn't have a lot of the things they documented...'<sup>6</sup> Yet he is aware of the hubris Schoon exhibits at times, for instance in the photograph of the rangatira Anehana, whose moko Schoon embellished with coloured pencil and ink; and the 'enhancing' of the moko on a copy of Horatio Robley's *Studies*



(left) MICHAEL PAREKOWHAI *The shortcut gallery* 2018  
Mixed media  
(Photograph: Sam Hartnett)

(below) Michael Parekowhai's *Détour* at Te Papa, March 2018, with *Standing on Memory* (2018) & *Forest Etiquette* (2018)  
(Photograph: Sam Hartnett)

(opposite above) Michael Parekowhai's *Détour* at Te Papa, March 2018, with *Forest Etiquette* (2018), *Kapa haka maquette* (2014) & Molly Macalister, *Maquette for Maori warrior* (1964–66)  
(Photograph: Sam Hartnett)

(opposite below) Michael Parekowhai's *Détour* at Te Papa, March 2018, with *Hoodwinked*—detail (2018), *Forest Etiquette* (2018), Colin McCahon, *Northland Panels* (1958, purchased 1978 with Ellen Eames Collection funds with assistance from the New Zealand Lottery Board, courtesy of the Colin McCahon Research and Publication Trust)  
(Photograph: Sam Hartnett)

of Moko Mokai (*Halifax Museum*), which Schoon inscribed 'one side of the nose completed by myself'. Parekowhai doesn't take this lying down. On a print of Schoon's *Cracked Mud with added decoration* by Theo Schoon (1950, 1966, reprinted 2018) he has modified the drawing of a geometric three-fingered hand to mimic his own 1990 sculpture *Atarangi*—a work based on the colourful Cuisenaire rods formerly used as a te reo teaching tool. There are still, it seems, lessons to be learnt.<sup>7</sup>

Parekowhai lines up his work alongside that of another Pakeha artist, the sculptor Molly Macalister. He pays tribute to Macalister by copying the maquette for her dignified *Maori Warrior* (1964) in durable bronze while protecting the fragile wax and plaster original in a vitrine next to one housing his own bronze *Kapa Haka Maquette* (2014), a very different but also formidable Maori character (based on the artist's security guard brother Paratene). *Maori Warrior's* vitrine is titled *Ideal Landscape: Puna* (meaning a 'spring' or 'well'), while *Kapa Haka* inhabits *Ideal Landscape: Turangawae* ('a place to stand').

Parekowhai has always been a maker and in his own work has never subscribed to Duchamp's deliberate undermining, through his readymades and *Boîte-en-valise*, of the aura of the artwork and the value placed on the unique object. His sculptures are highly crafted, usually one of a kind (although sometimes he works in editions). He points up his own approach in the telling pairing of Duchamp's *Waistcoat* (Betty) (1961), a found garment with added buttons reading B E T T Y,<sup>8</sup> and his own version, not found but made for him by fashion designer Kate Sylvester, its buttons spelling out M I K E P, the artist's self-styled moniker, first seen in his 1989 neon work *Mike P, Sculptor*.

Even more conspicuously, he asserts his presence as sculptor through a number of large 'look at me' pieces: the two elongated park benches that serve as elegant, eccentric plinths for his outsize, high-gloss, toothy monkeys and comic policeman; and, hovering above, a life-size elephant.

*Constable Plum Bob* is a super-sized version of a 1950s child's toy. His white-gloved, upheld hand is, as I've previously noted,<sup>9</sup> a reminder of the infantilising red and blue 'thumbs up' and 'thumbs down' hands that disgraced *Parade*. *Plum Bob's* hand invites you to 'high-five' it (and wobbles in response); but it is also

a STOP gesture, alluding to the art museum's gate-keeping role and assumption of authority. This is playfulness with a pretty sharp edge to it.

The same is true of the clambering, grimacing monkeys, which also look like freakish, outsize toys. One is called *Tiki Tour*, which seems to sound a warning about tokenism, questioning, perhaps, the idea of biculturalism within what is still a fundamentally European-style institution. The other is named *Hoodwinked*. But who has been hoodwinked here? The artist? Those (Maori in particular?) who have been encouraged to believe that this is 'their place'? Te Papa itself? Is Parekowhai making monkeys of us all?

It has been suggested that Parekowhai is 'taking the piss' out of Te Papa and its approach to showing contemporary art, and that 'the elephant in the room' represents its failures in this regard.<sup>10</sup> We have seen Parekowhai's elephants before, sometimes standing on their heads (for instance, in *The World Turns*, 2011–12). Here, titled *Standing on Memory* and liberated from the plinths on which those other elephants were rooted,<sup>11</sup> this one balances upright on top of the *Détour* forest. It is said that the elephant never forgets. Parekowhai's elephant and his references to aspects of Te Papa's past act as reminders that a museum is or should be a bulwark against forgetting; a keeper of memories—painful, stirring, sentimental, joyful or shameful.

But remembrance is not the province, solely, of the museum. *Standing on Memory* is supported by a landscape that has been shaped here and, like the artist himself, it rests on the achievements of others. True, Parekowhai positions himself, if not as the magician creator, then as the magician's apprentice.<sup>12</sup> Yet there is generosity in Parekowhai's acknowledgement of those artists who have gone before. He locates himself firmly within a Western art tradition, at the same time as he enfolds his chosen artists, his mentors and heroes, into his own vision, practice and—as always—Maori world view. And unlike Duchamp's *Sixteen Miles of String*, *Détour* does not impede access to their work; rather it offers them to us, in the unlikely company of others, in a new, unaccustomed and often surprising light.

1. A limited edition collaged print of *Pink Store Front* (project) is included in *Détour*, with a label on the back that reads, in part, 'Reframed by Michael Parekowhai, 2018'.

2. Benjamin Buchloh, 'The Museum Fictions of Marcel Broodthaers', in A.A. Bronson and Peggy Gale (eds), *Museums by Artists*, Art Metropole, Toronto 1983, p. 51.

3. Paul Williams, 'Parade: Reformulating Art and Identity at Te Papa, Museum of New Zealand', *Open Museum Journal Volume 3: Policy and Practice*, May 2001, <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.508.4717&rep=rep1&type=pdf>.

4. The stilts or poutoti (Te Arawa, c.1964) are housed in a vitrine titled *Ideal Landscape: Te Kakega*, which translates as 'the ascent'.

5. The drawing is a schematic rendering of what would become the *Nine Mafic Moulds* and the Bachelors in *The Large Glass*. British artist Richard Hamilton's 1960 version of the drawing, made in consultation with Duchamp, is reproduced in the *Détour* handbook. Duchamp described one of the 'bachelors' as a policeman; Parekowhai has reproduced his 'hat' and given it the title *Out Amongst the Stars*. It is possible that *Constable Plum Bob* may be related to this character.



6. Michael Parekowhai, cited in Anthony Byrt, 'Rainbow Warrior', *Metro*, March / April 2018, p. 47.

7. Parekowhai has added a cheeky note to the label on the back of the work: 'One side of the hand completed by myself.'

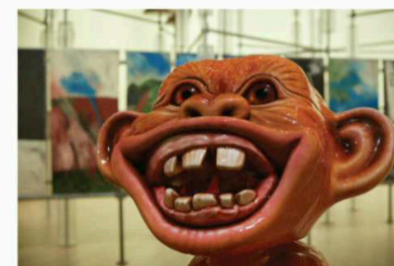
8. Betty was the wife of Judge Julius Isaacs who bequeathed both the waistcoat and *Boîte-en-valise* to New Zealand's National Art Gallery, now subsumed into the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa. The series' name 'Made to Measure' is ironic, given the waistcoats were all found items and only the buttons were customised. Isaacs also gifted another work included in *Détour*, Frances Hodgkins' 1946 *Spring at Little Woolgarston*.

9. Priscilla Pitts, 'Refashioned: Toi Art at Te Papa', *Art New Zealand* 166, Winter 2018, pp. 49–53.

10. John Daly-Peoples, 'A new beginning for art at Te Papa?', *National Business Review*, 20 April 2018, <http://www.nbr.co.nz/article/new-beginning-art-te-papa-jd-214877>. A Te Papa staff member also suggested to me a similar reading and Parekowhai himself described it as 'the elephant in the room that no one talks about'. (Anthony Byrt, *ibid.*)

11. The elephants were apparently based on Wedgwood bookends, that is, props for Western knowledge and—in Parekowhai's hands—symbolic of European colonisation.

12. The magician's apprentice is the title of another of Parekowhai's 'outlines' from Duchamp's *Cemetery of uniforms and liveries* (No. 1).





Below  
Installation view  
MICHAEL PAREKOWHAI  
*Rules of the Game*, 2015  
Michael Lett,  
Auckland 2015

Opposite  
MICHAEL PAREKOWHAI  
*The English Channel*, 2015  
stainless steel  
edition of 3

Photo: Jennifer French  
Courtesy the artist,  
Roslyn Oxley9,  
Sydney and Michael  
Lett, Auckland



## MICHAEL PAREKOWHAI: PLAYING IT FORWARD

Michael Parekowhai's larger-than-life sculptures and immersive neon installations act as looking glasses that challenge our ways of seeing, playing and being.

By Peter Hill

Michael Parekowhai represented New Zealand at the 2011 Venice Biennale. He also recently completed, as he put it, "one of the biggest shows I've ever tried to get my head around" - *The Promised Land* at the Gallery of Modern Art in Queensland (GoMA). Curated by Maud Page and featuring a catalogue essay by Thomas Sokolowski, former director of the Andy Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh, the exhibition covered the breadth of the artist's sculptural practice, which mixes racial identity and a sense of place with humour and keenly crafted moments of anticipation. *VAULT* sat down with Parekowhai to speak about artistic gestation, his fascination with neon and the power of play.

**TELL ME ABOUT YOUR INSTALLATION AT THE 2011 VENICE BIENNALE - *STORY OF A NEW ZEALAND RIVER*. I HEARD IT TOOK TEN YEARS TO CREATE AND WAS THE SIXTH OF YOUR PIANO SCULPTURES?**

The carved red piano *He Kōrero Pūrākau mo Te Awani o Te Motu: story of a New Zealand river* (2011) is the third sculpture I've produced that uses a piano. The other two are *The Horn of Africa* (2006), which is at GoMA in Queensland, and *The Story of a New Zealand River* (2001), which is at Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki. The three works are part of a larger series of works named *The Story of a New Zealand River* and reference Jane Campion's great film *The Piano*. I originally envisaged there would be around 11 in total. I might not get there. The carved red piano did take ten years in total to create but work was sporadic. It's been full-on for the last two years. It also formed one part of my Venice Biennale project, which included two bronze bulls, a security guard and an olive tree.

**YOU HAVE PREVIOUSLY SAID THAT "THERE IS NO OBJECT THAT I COULD MAKE THAT COULD FILL A ROOM LIKE SOUND CAN." CAN YOU EXPAND ON THAT?**

It's a different experience to hear work before you see it. When the piano is played, the sound pegs out a different kind of territory - one that isn't restricted by the architecture of the space. Like smell, sound can evoke memories, taking us to different times in our lives. Previously, I made a series of works titled *Patriot: Ten Guitars* (1999) - ten, semi-acoustic fat back guitars inlaid with paua shell. As the exhibition toured New Zealand and Australia, the guitars were played by local musicians at every opening.

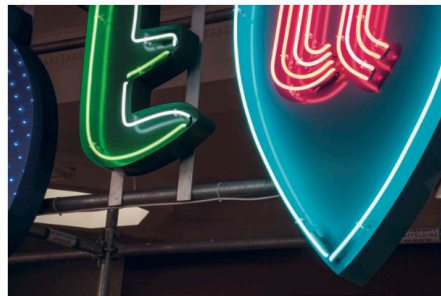
**I'VE SEEN AND ENJOYED YOUR WORK IN MANY GALLERIES AND MUSEUMS, ESPECIALLY THE QUEENSLAND ART GALLERY. YOU HAVE A STRONG RELATIONSHIP WITH AUSTRALIA AND I'D LIKE TO ASK ABOUT FORTHCOMING AND FUTURE EXHIBITIONS HERE?**  
I'm still getting over the last one. I think my next exhibition of new work will be with Roslyn Oxley9 in September. I want to make new work for that but I don't know what it will be yet. Early in 2016, I'm presenting work at Art Basel Hong Kong and I'm working on two public art projects based in New Zealand. That's the coming year and I'm not thinking much further ahead than that.

**AND WHAT WILL YOU BE SHOWING IN HONG KONG?**

It will be a new sculptural series with the working title *The Uglier*. It's sort of playing with the idea that 'nothing's really ugly', there's just varying degrees of what's beautiful. It's also about people's perceptions of what's beautiful. I'm not the handsomest boy myself, so ugly is beautiful as far as I'm concerned. I'm aiming to create an uncomfortable feeling, like when you are being scrutinised by other people and you have, say, a spot on your face and you think that the whole world is looking at it.







Left  
Installation view  
MICHAEL PAREKOWHAI  
*Rules of the Game*, 2015  
neon, LED light  
bulbs, aluminium,  
automotive paint  
158 x 569 cm

Opposite  
Installation view  
MICHAEL PAREKOWHAI  
*Rules of the Game*, 2015  
Michael Lett,  
Auckland 2015

Courtesy the artist,  
Roslyn Oxley9,  
Sydney and Michael  
Lett, Auckland

YOU MENTIONED PLAYING WITH IDEAS JUST NOW. I'VE ALWAYS BEEN INTERESTED IN THE DISTINCTION THE SITUATIONISTS DREW BETWEEN 'GAMES' AND 'PLAY', WITH THE DIFFERENCE BEING THAT GAMES INVOLVED RULES. YOU'VE BEEN EXPLORING SOME OF THAT TERRITORY YOURSELF LATELY.

My last exhibition was at Michael Lett in Auckland, titled *Rules of the Game*. The show explored ideas around economics and rules, the illusion of opportunity and traps as well as the trappings of traps. At the same time, it was another occasion to investigate some of the formal issues around light, colour, and sculptural objects in space. Games suggest fun and rules might imply the fun has been organised and controlled; yet the two concepts often have a symbiotic relationship.

AND YOU HAVE BEEN USING NEON IN SOME OF THESE WORKS?

The neon work *Rules of the Game* (2015) first showed in *The Promised Land* in 2015 at GoMA and light was a central element across both shows. At GoMA, the light led you through the gallery space: from the glow of *Memory Palace*, which housed the reflective sculpture of Captain Cook titled *The English Channel* (2015), to the illuminated light boxes of a pine forest called *The Forest Rangers* (2004) and finally to the shining neon 'closed' sign at the end of the show. Light is all about seeing and our brain interprets what our eyes see. We see the world through ourselves. We are our own looking glass. And the rules we play by are reflected in everything we do, in our relationships with people and with students when we are teaching.

ON THE SUBJECT OF TEACHING, NOW THAT YOU MENTION IT, YOU ARE A PROMINENT FIGURE IN ART SCHOOL CULTURE. WHAT ARE THE MAIN CHALLENGES YOU SEE IN FINE ART EDUCATION – LOCALLY, NATIONALLY, AND GLOBALLY?

I grew up in a classroom – both my parents are teachers and I always wanted to be a schoolteacher. Much of my work is about learning how to play. I don't see life ultimately as being about competing and winning, it's about participating. In a practical sense though, for students, I believe the cost of attending tertiary education makes it difficult for a number of students wishing to study art. When students graduate, some are able to create communities and collectives to support each other. However, showing work internationally is still difficult, especially from this part of the world. ▽

Michael Parekowhai will show as part of Art Basel Hong Kong, March 24 to March 26, 2016.

Michael Parekowhai is represented by Roslyn Oxley9, Sydney and Michael Lett, Auckland.  
roslynoxley9.com.au  
michaellett.com

