

Article

He Whiringa Takatāpui: Weaving Māori Genderqueer Conversations Between Ancestors and Taonga

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Abstract

This article is a conversation-style paper between two takatāpui weaver-scholars presenting the creative praxis behind the 2026 exhibition in Kirikiriroa, Aotearoa, titled Whatua He Whiringa Takatāpui. The exhibition included five takatāpui weavers across Aotearoa who wove together queer Māori communities to reject the colonial binaries of traditional and contemporary, art and craft, and male and female. With multiple activations and ceremonies held in the gallery space, Whatua He Whiringa Takatāpui fostered mana takatāpui, and takatāpui community and thriving from the harakeke roots in Kirikiriroa. Some of the taonga created in this exhibition are inspired by taonga tawhito, or Māori ancestral treasures, which collapse space–time and allow descendants to connect to the ancestors of generations past. With two such taonga, a kuia’s kete and an 18th-century kaitaka, the authors meet their respective elders to share kōrero that could not—and did not—happen in their lifetimes. How does our creative practice allow us to theorize alongside our grandmothers and generations past?

Keywords: Takatāpui; Māori weaving; whatu; gender theory; creative practice

1. Introduction

In March 2026, the sounds of taonga pūoro, karanga, and pōkinikini invited the community into RAMP Gallery in Kirikiriroa, Hamilton, to step into a portal of takatāpui pasts, present, and futures. The exhibition, Whatua He Whiringa Takatāpui (Whatua translates to ‘weaving together a takatāpui braid’). This exhibition came together when the curator, Moana Murray, reached out to Te Aorere Ngātai-Tautuku to manifest a queer Māori weaving space in Kirikiriroa. From there, it flourished: Moana received funding from Creative New Zealand’s Creative Communities Scheme, and Te Aorere grew the group by inviting the Wellington collective, Cunt Cryptids Club (Ngāti Haututū), formed by Maia Wood (Te Rarawa, Ngāpuhi) and Lyss Cave (Ngāti Porou, Ngāriki Kaipūtahi), and the weaver-fashion icon Miriana McGechie (Ngāti Kahungunu ki te Wairoa, Ngāti Rakaipaaka, Ngāti Rongomaiwahine, Ngāti Porou). Whatua He Whiringa Takatāpui was an opportunity for our group of takatāpui weavers to actualize a takatāpui portal into Te Whare Pora, the sacred house of Māori weaving. Te Whare Pora is both ancient and new, constantly in flux, and in our case, acts as a metaphysical home for our takatāpui theorizing. One of the consistent and important discussions we shared in the lead-up to our exhibition opening was exploring the role of gender in Te Whare Pora. As students of Te Whare Pora, we have all individually experienced what it is like to weave in and with community. Many of us took weaving classes through Te Wānanga o Aotearoa, tribal wānanga, or



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learned techniques through relationships with mentors. We each have a creative Māori community around us; however, this exhibition was one of the first uniquely takatāpui weaving spaces we had access to. A key difference then was that we could all understand each other as takatāpui kaiwhatu. This allowed us to explore what takatāpui theorizing within a Te Whare Pora context can look like. This article shares some of the conversations and takatāpui theorizing that emerged from the exhibition.

The structure of this conversation-style paper will allow each author to write from their own unique perspectives about their respective works in the exhibition. First, we clarify some important Māori concepts in this introduction, then we focus on foundational literature to the craft of takatāpui theorizing. Highlighting the importance and limits of Mana Wāhine frameworks, Moana shares how the exhibition allowed for a Māori gender theorizing that pushes the boundaries of contemporary raranga, whatu, and Mana Wāhine theory. Next, Te Aorere writes about Te Whare Pora, how Māori weaving has been gendered historically, and how Whatua conceptualized a Whare Pora cared for and caring of trans and genderqueer people. Lastly, both Moana and Te Aorere reflect on their contributions to the exhibition and share poems that speak directly to their ancestors.

Whatua was an Indigenous weaving show for and by takatāpui. Takatāpui is a historical term that continues to be used in our contemporary context. Since its (re)discovery in the 1980s by takatāpui academics (Te Awekotuku 2001), the term has evolved to encompass both our cultural identity as Māori and identity with diverse sexualities and genders (Kerekere 2017). This term is part of our Indigenous reclamation that allows us to situate ourselves in Māori ontologies, rather than only in Western frameworks such as LGBTQIA+. Importantly, takatāpui cannot be reduced to a singular (that is, individual) definition because it is a concept embedded in the Māori world (Mika 2016), just as takatāpui people are inherently part of whānau, hapū, and iwi communities (Green and Pihama 2023). Takatāpui exists beyond Western terms. Our identities are complex and struggle to be describable in English. However, some of the weavers in our exhibition also use Western terms such as trans and queer; doing so does not make us any less takatāpui or decolonial. On the contrary, though we are limited by the English language, we continue to define ourselves on our own terms, in English, in te reo Māori, in silence, or otherwise. This article intentionally uses the term takatāpui to acknowledge the gender diversity of all five members of the exhibition, as well as the Indigenous theorizing about gender that our show embodied. In this sense, we are specifically focusing on Māori genders outside of the colonial binary, rather than sexualities.

In addition, we use the term ‘genderqueer’, by which we mean in our context the queer practice of resisting the colonial project of gender (O’Sullivan 2021). Queer is understood as more than an identity label but a radical politics, an analytic, and a framework that resists colonization (Byrd 2020). We extend this philosophy to our understanding and practice of takatāpuitanga. This includes countless discussions around the significance of a gender inclusive Whare Pora, and how we as takatāpui kairaranga and kaiwhatu could participate in the guardianship of this realm. Several of these conversations were in relation to wairua, such as how our relationship to our takatāpuitanga is directly connected to our wairua and the tūpuna that we call upon and bring into these spaces. Wairua is described by Ngāpuhi tohunga Māori Marsden as “the source of existent being and life” (Marsden 2003, p. 45). It is an inherent spiritual component that resides within all fabrications of the universe, and can exist long after someone or something has died. This process was quite natural to us, such as existing in our genderqueer bodies, with other takatāpui kairaranga and kaiwhatu, and sharing dreams of a future where takatāpui are free.

Within raranga and whatu, two different customary Māori weaving practices, the mauri of the weaver is inherently woven into the taonga (Puketapu-Hetet 1989), and it is for

this reason that our taonga exist as takatāpui beings. Mauri is a fundamental element within te ao Māori as it is an intrinsic, vital life essence that exists within all creations. It is the connecting element that weaves together the diverse fibers of the universe (Marsden 2003, p. 44). These taonga become portals to our ancestors (Murray 2024) and open space for our tīpuna to converse with us, their uri, and also for our ancestors to commune with each other. We utilized contemporary and natural materials such as muka, commercial dyes, beads, silk strings, paint, and chains in combination with our customary weaving techniques, which embodied our ancestors' legacy of innovation within raranga and whatu. Furthermore, our constant laughter and whimsical understandings of our world emboldened our takatāpui joy to flourish and thrive throughout the entire process. This exhibition paved a way for us to develop our collective takatāpui knowledge within our ancestral haven of Te Whare Pora. To begin, Moana turns to the ground from which takatāpui theorizing builds: Mana Wāhine.

1.1. Moana:

Mana Wāhine theory is an Indigenous framework of decolonial analysis (Pihama 2020) and has informed critical takatāpui research. Moreover, Mana Wāhine was developed to highlight the ways in which patriarchy, capitalism, and colonialism oppress wāhine Māori and destroy the sacred complementary balance in Māori society (Mikaere 2022; Pihama et al. 2019). As one of the instrumental theorists of this framework, Professor Leonie Pihama (Te Āti Awa, Ngāti Māhanga, Ngā Māhanga ā Tairi) explains, “The articulation of Mana Wahine theory then is essential in countering the impact of over 170 years of colonial gendered practices” (Pihama 2020). In Adjunct Professor Elizabeth Kerekere's (Ngāti Oneone, Te Aitanga a Māhaki, Whānau a Kai, Rongowhakaata, Ngāi Tāmanuhiri) wellbeing framework He Whāriki Takatāpui, Mana Wāhine theories form the preparation of harakeke that will weave the mat of takatāpui research (Kerekere 2017). Similarly, takatāpui scholar Benjamin Kauri Doyle (Te Kapotai, Te Popoto) also stresses the necessity of Mana Wāhine to takatāpui scholarship (Doyle 2023). And yet, Māori gender diversity has largely been ignored by kaupapa Māori research (Berryman-Kamp 2024) and underexplored in Mana Wāhine theory. In the Mana Wāhine research covering raranga, whatu, and Te Whare Pora that we explore in this article, there is little to no mention of takatāpui in our customary weaving practices. Mana Wāhine is therefore a necessary component to build critical Māori gender theory; however, alone, it is insufficient.

Pihama promotes Mana Wāhine as a method for disrupting the harmful impacts of the colonial gender project and for restoring the mana of wāhine that has been systematically diminished; however, Pihama also warns of mistranslating wāhine to palatable and reductionist colonial understandings of binary gender (Pihama 2020). Moreover, while “wāhine” includes women, it should not be reduced to biological markers and the body, and importantly, to colonial essentialisms of male/female, masculine/feminine. Berryman-Kamp (Te Arawa, Mātaatua) writes that “Mana Wāhine, a groundbreaking shift away from patriarchal Māori theory, has relied heavily on essentialist narratives of women as te whare tangata (August 2004; Mikaere 2011; Simmonds 2011), capable of birthing and deriving divine power from menstruation and vaginal imagery, including the consistent reference to Hinenuitepō.” (Berryman-Kamp 2024, p. 117). The reduction of Indigenous women's bodies to land and womb is not exclusive to Māori feminist scholarship, but has been criticized within Indigenous feminisms at large (Byrd 2020). Furthermore, in their review of many Indigenous Studies texts, Byrd (2020) gives examples of how Indigenous feminisms have “subsumed queer into Indigenous feminisms”, queered all Indigenous peoples via critique of heteropatriarchy, and flattened Indigenous women's bodies into land (p. 108). In our efforts to decolonize and reclaim our Indigenous creative practices and theories, Byrd

(2020) and Pihama (2020) warn against the essentializing that renders invisible Indigenous queer subjectivities.

The dominant perspective of whatu and raranga continues to be that it is a gendered and predominantly feminine practice. Weaver-scholar Hinekura Smith (Te Rarawa, Ngā Puhī) writes that whatu is a “maternal language” and highlights terminology, such as aho and whenua, that connect the weaving practice to “the feminine body and to childbirth” (Smith 2025, para 3). This comparison of whatu and the wahine body to the “feminine”, the womb space, child-rearing, and menses, risks marginalizing the plethora of weavers who do not bear children, or identify with womanhood, the womb, or the feminine. It also implies that a “feminine” body is necessarily one with a womb. Furthermore, this framing feels problematic for both authors who are genderqueer kairaranga and kaiwhatu that honor but do not center the feminine. While Smith acknowledges that whatu is not exclusively a wāhine practice, her Mana Wāhine approach focuses exclusively on the feminine, insisting that, “the very language of whatu continues to resonate deeply with the feminine and maternal body—as long as we use that language” (Smith 2025, para 3). Smith shows that mahi whatu is a practice that affirms the mana of wāhine, and in doing so is directly resisting the patriarchal narratives of our practices that have oppressed wāhine (Smith 2023). Similarly, weaver and Associate Professor Donna Campbell (Ngāpuhi, Ngāti Ruanui) conceptualizes a Whare Pora methodology as a Māori women’s framework that combines kaupapa Māori theory and Mana Wāhine theories (Campbell 2019). However, what if whatu told us even more of the Māori world alongside the importance of women and childbirth? Whatua He Whiringa Takatāpui was an exhibition that challenged the gendering of Te Whare Pora as a feminine or wāhine space. It opened worlds of possibilities by moving our gaze beyond “the feminine body” and the limiting definitions of what a feminine body is.

A Māori gender theory that embraces gender fluidity is necessary and incoming. We need theories created by takatāpui that grow beyond the limitations of Mana Wāhine theory and Western gender theory (Berryman-Kamp 2025). Our exhibition is one attempt at building a takatāpui gender theory on a foundation of Mana Wāhine theories. The creative practice collectively affirmed the mana of wāhine and acknowledged the fluidity of the weavers, materials, and atua such as Hineteiwaiwa. The writing that follows in this article is a glimpse at some of the takatāpui theorizing that occurred in this Whare Pora.

1.2. *Te Aorere:*

Māori research shows that historically our creative practices were more nuanced than the colonial gender binary (Ellis in Brown et al. 2024). Tāne wove and continue to weave, wāhine carved and continue to carve. For practitioners of traditional Māori weaving techniques, Te Whare Pora is a metaphysical domain that encompasses an institute of learning (Pere et al. 1997) and a transcendent state of mind (Puketapu-Hetet 1989, p. 25). Professor G. R. Aroha Yates-Smith (Te Arawa, Tainui, Takitimu, Horouta, Mātaatua) explains that Te Whare Pora is presided over by Hineteiwaiwa, a guardian atua whose extensive realm is composed of all feminine components, te whare tangata, the moon cycles, and our ancestral fiber arts (Yates-Smith 1980). Yates-Smith understands the feminine, or “hine”, as the creative power of the universe (Yates-Smith 1998), which is not exclusive of people without te whare tangata (Yates-Smith 2022). It is within this sacred space that the weaver’s being, thoughts, and ideas are nurtured, whether conscious or subconscious, as they are conceptually embraced within the sanctuary that Te Whare Pora provides. However, as one of the countless impacts of colonialism in Aotearoa, this space was infected with the colonial ideology of gender (O’Sullivan 2021).

Narratives of Te Whare Pora and our ancestral practices were distorted, subsequently belittling the significance of weaving to te ao Māori. Esteemed Te Āti Awa weaver Erenora Puketapu-Hetet (1989) explains the importance of our weaving practices to te ao Māori, which includes the life force these processes hold, as well as the respect that is contingent on the mana of the weaver and the merit of the weaving techniques. These ancestral processes have been developed over centuries of intellectual innovation, with our tīpuna adapting to different materials, environments, and techniques (Tamarapa 2019). A vast majority of which have been recorded by a significant body of work authored by distinguished mana wāhine weaver-scholars. These include Yates-Smith (1980), Puketapu-Hetet (1989), and D. Te Kanawa (1992), among many others. From documenting the dyeing of paru fibers (K. Te Kanawa 2022) to exploring Te Whare Pora and whatu methodologies in research (Campbell 2019; Smith 2023), these wāhine have formed a foundation of Te Whare Pora scholarship from which we continue to grow and develop.

Whatua created a Whare Pora that was an inclusive space for gender non-conforming people. For months, we met online and theorized about what this exhibition means for us, and what we wanted to share with our friends, whānau, and local communities. Eventually, we landed at opening a takatāpui portal into Te Whare Pora—a transcendent realm through which we could thrive and care for trans and queer people. This portal exists physically within the gallery space, ourselves and our taonga, and metaphysically through our relationships with each other, our tīpuna, our communities, and our future descendants. Within this domain, we are able to converse freely about the ongoing consequences of colonialism on our lives and continue to dream of collective takatāpui futures. Furthermore, the overall impact of this takatāpui portal and our exhibition massively contributed to the powerful takatāpui presence within Kirikiriroa. Hundreds of community members, including a majority takatāpui and Māori, attended the opening night activation, the Kirikiriroa Open Mic Night, and the whatu tāhei workshop held in the space. Although the Whatua exhibition is no longer on display in Kirikiriroa, the portal remains open as a space for Indigenous theorizing to occur and for takatāpui to thrive.

1.3. Moana:

The portal that Te Aorere is speaking to allowed us, as takatāpui weavers, to step into Te Whare Pora undeterred. Te Aorere and I both looked to the taonga of our ancestors from which to weave new wearable pieces out of contemporary materials. Te Arawa scholar Paul Tapsell explains that taonga, or Māori ancestral treasures, collapse space-time and allow Māori descendants to convene with their ancestors who are no longer living (Tapsell 2011). Anne Salmond refers to this as the “alchemy of taonga”, where the tangible taonga fuse present-day Māori descendants with previous generations (Salmond in Tapsell 1997, p. 330). As the ultimate “time travelers”, taonga have trajectories of their own (Tapsell 1997); although many remain in international museum storage, their stories and their movement are far from over. Taonga in museum archives continue to act as power portals of connection for descendants, hapū, and iwi (Murray 2024, p. 29). The woven, sewn, and wire pieces in Whatua exemplify how taonga open a portal for takatāpui to connect with themselves, their ancestors, and each other. Through the alchemy of these newly created taonga as well as the older taonga that inspired them, the exhibition opened a takatāpui portal that irrevocably grew the queer Māori community in Kirikiriroa.

Many Māori weavers seek out exquisite examples of whatu techniques and designs in museum archives in order to reconnect to the knowledge and the weavers behind them (Ellis in Brown et al. 2024). The kete, tāhei, and large-scale installation piece I created for this exhibition emerged from archival research into a cloak known to Māori weavers and archivists as the ‘Stockholm kaitaka’ (Unknown Māori Ancestor 1769, 1848.01.0063). This

cloak is one of the oldest in museum collections and one of the few known kākahu with this ancient geometric pattern. The Stockholm kaitaka is renowned for its unique pattern, which is woven using a three-directional whatu technique not widely used since these few 18th-century examples (Blackman 1985). A few weavers have published their samplers recreated from the Stockholm kaitaka with details on the directional whatu (McKendry 2019; Blackman 1985). I have not yet visited the Ethnographic Museum of Sweden, where the kaitaka rests. Consequently, I had to estimate the tāniko pattern from only photos.

Another similar kākahu with the unique geometric design and whatu technique is in the Pitt Rivers Museum collection in Oxford (Unknown Māori Ancestor 1886, 1886.21.19) and has been reinvigorated by my weaving mentor, Makareta Jahnke (Ngāpuhi, Ngāti Porou, Te Hikutu, and Tainui), and her mentor Toi Te Rito Maihi (Ngāti Kahungunu, Ngāpuhi). Toi Te Rito Maihi, a beloved weaver and multimedia creative, visited many international museums in the 1980s and documented tāniko and kākahu. Her painting, Uenuku, recently on display in Pae o te Rangi, a group exhibition at Wairau Māori Art Gallery in Whangārei, reinterprets the tāniko from the Pitt Rivers cloak (Maihi 1986). Makareta Jahnke also reimagined the design and shared her sampler at Wairau Māori Art Gallery (Murray 2024). As is apparent in the work of my mentor and her mentor before, the knowledge in museum archives lives on in so many different generations.

There are two large-scale installations in Whatua He Whiringa Takatāpui that similarly create the designs of our ancestors into different iterations so that the knowledge of these patterns can continue in our queer lives and beyond. Tūpuna Tāniko Translated is a wire installation featuring the central motif from the Stockholm kaitaka woven with purple ribbon onto a 2.5 m by 2.5 m wire grid. The direction of the ribbon on each 2.25 cm square correlates to the directional twist that exists on the original kaitaka. Additionally, there are two smaller pieces in the show woven from string and wool that use this whatu technique and feature segments of the tāniko on the kaitaka. Out of my archival research with the 18th-century kaitaka emerged a large wire grid with ribbon twists, and adornments such as a kete and a tāhei, each reimagining this early geometric pattern in contemporary, colorful ways. I would like to imagine my ancestors' delight at the pink, magenta, and green wool aho twisting in three directions onto silky, shiny threads. Tūpuna Tāniko Translated, Te Kete o Mua, and Tāhei Kōrekoreko show the Stockholm kaitaka's continuous renewal. They are evidence that taonga live on in the future works of their descendants.

Taonga allow for descendants to meet their ancestors, and Tūpuna Tāniko Translated and the Stockholm kaitaka did just that for me. When I first attempted the changing directional whatu that would become the tāhei and purple kete, the work was so awkward on my wrists that I developed carpal tunnel. The Stockholm kaitaka provided a challenge to access and to recreate. I had to imagine the hands of my tūpuna as they sat at the turuturu pegs and wove this kaitaka. How did they weave for thousands of hours and protect their hands? What was the movement of their wrists, the angle of their forearms, that both perfected the tension of the weave and avoided pain? In my experiment, I began to feel into my own body, and through this awareness, I found the movements that flowed. In weaving *with* my tūpuna, I could call forth their expertise and knowledge. I am able to converse with ancestors through the archives to embody my own genderqueer body and, as a consequence, create new adornments in Te Whare Pora.

Directly across from Tūpuna Tāniko Translated is Te Aorere's Ancestral Intelligence: a 2.5-m by 2.5-m wire grid on top of a canvas painted with purple squares. The Whatua weavers collectively installed both pieces before and after opening the exhibition. Figure 1 shows myself and Te Aorere standing in front of Tūpuna Tāniko, translated after we finished installing it. And as we took turns painting squares and weaving ribbon, we realized that so too were our tūpuna conversing with one another. As Tapsell explains,

“Taonga are also valued by their descendants for their capacity to communicate knowledge from ancestors on a non-verbal plane” (Tapsell 1997, p. 330). To capture this, all kaiwhatu—Maia Wood, Te Aorere, Lyss Cave, Miriana McGeachie and I—created the multimedia braid hanging from the ceiling of the gallery, Whiri Takatāpui. Whiri Takatāpui hung from a physical plane but sent the dialogue above, across, and among the generations. The braid was composed of five aho that hang from the beginning of the braid and are made from muka, silk string, gold chain, and white toroa feathers. These aho made from contemporary and natural materials—one for each of the kaiwhatu—act as karere, messengers, directly acknowledging each of our ancestral lineages and calling them into the gallery space. Whiri Takatāpui was strategically placed above and between our two wire installations—Tūpuna Tāniko Translated and Ancestral Intelligence—and this was where Te Aorere was able to converse with their kuia.



Figure 1. Moana and Te Aorere standing in front of Tūpuna Tāniko Translated. Photo credit: Micayla Were @55hueman 2026.

1.4. Te Aorere:

As my kuia, Heeni Hone Tautuku Ngātai-White, passed away two decades before I was born, I could not ask the myriad of questions I had for her. What does this whakairo mean to you, to our whānau? Who did you weave this for? How did you weave something so complex with no book or graphing paper? At the time, I was an on-again-off-again taura of Te Whare Pora, and I could not comprehend the creation process. Whakairo are intricate patterns and designs that communicate ancestral stories, knowledge, and worldviews. Her kete whakairo is 40 centimeters tall and 35 centimeters wide, with 120 whenu varying in widths from 1 to 3 mm (Ngātai-White, est. 1960s). Kete whakairo are bags that are woven with fine, intricate patterns created with the raranga technique and hold treasured significance. There are large bands of purple whakairo that wrap around her kete, and attached at the top are soft, golden muka handles. It is at least 50 years old and has been well-loved, as evident by the various areas of wear on the kete. I wanted so badly to learn from her, to hear her share stories of our tīpuna, and for her to teach me her

knowledge. As such, I wanted to ensure my kuia's whakairo would continue to live on, and to reimagine what that would look like for me as a takatāpui mokopuna and ringatoi.

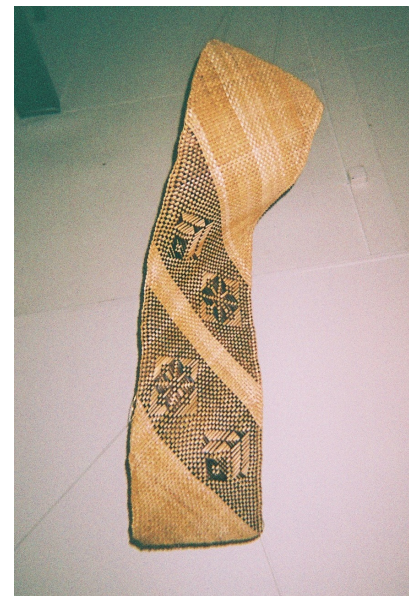
There are two distinct whakairo on my kuia's kete. One is based on the papakirango design, a pattern that represents a traditional fly swat and offers protection against harm (Pendergrast 2003). The other is inspired by putiputi, speaking to the beauty of nature. Both of these designs can be found in Mick Pendergrast's (2003) *Raranga Whakairo: Māori plaiting patterns* book. To some, my kuia's whakairo may seem identical to the ones located in this book. However, my kuia passed away long before this book was published. A key difference between hers and what Pendergrast documents lies within her papakirango whakairo, where, at the center of the pattern, there is an extra woven square, making this design asymmetrical. This, to me, was my kuia's signature and a message to her uri, as if she were hinting at us to find this little piece of her. Signatures within raranga whakairo and whatu taonga are a common yet secret element to identify ringatoi. I felt like I tapped into a realm to converse with my kuia through her kete whakairo.

After weaving different patterns that built up my raranga techniques, I was finally able to try her whakairo. I wanted to dive head first and weave a replica of my kuia's kete, but before I started, my Masters supervisor and raranga kaiako, Donna Campbell, explained to me the important concept of reading whakairo. She informed me that our tīpuna have always cultivated a rich visual language that communicates pūrākau of their experiences, environment, and worldviews (Donna Campbell, conversation with Author 1, 2 May 2025). Pūrākau are historical and contemporary narratives that inform our understandings of experience, environment, and ways of being in the world (Lee 2008). They often carry teachings and meanings that descendants can draw upon to affirm their mana, strengthen connections across generations, and sustain relationships with whānau, whenua, and whakapapa. Pūrākau that capture takatāpui experiences are particularly important because they affirm our place within these ancestral narratives, contributing to collective hauora and the ongoing flourishing of takatāpui people and communities (Ngātai-Tautuku 2025). This visual language also establishes an inseparable connection to our ancestors' mauri and wairua. As a result, I decided that not only did I want to reimagine my kuia's kete whakairo, I also wanted to enhance my connection with her through Te Whare Pora. This exercise was beyond weaving a physical taonga. This was a lot for me to think about while weaving, and I could only weave half of the papakirango design before my forearms and head started to writhe in pain. Like Moana and their whatu technique, I knew I would have to change my approach. Therefore, I followed the signs of the environment around me.

The tātua (Figure 2a) and tuwhara (Figure 2b) are two woven pieces that speak of the relationship with my kuia and our weaving practices. In the process, I spoke to my kuia whenever I could. When I drew up her whakairo on graphing paper, I ran through dozens of questions asking her opinion on my process and what she thought about my ideas with her design. When preparing my whenu for weaving, I would often make certain creative decisions based on the environment around me and my mauri. For example, when I started to weave the tātua, Awhi Rito, for our exhibition, I had planned to harvest and use harakeke from one of my marae in Rotorua. However, a series of extreme weather events prevented my travels back home, so I had to make use of the different types of harakeke I had prepared over the past year. Using these types of harakeke created a new spontaneous pūrākau for the tātua, and alongside it, more kōrero between my kuia, myself, and this taonga were able to emerge and transcend beyond physical boundaries. It was through the creation of these two taonga and kōrero with Author 2 that I started to think about my large installation piece—Ancestral Intelligence.



(a)



(b)

Figure 2. (a) Awhi Rito (across mannequin shoulder) made by Te Aorere Ngātai-Tautuku; Kahu Kōrekoreko: Purple kākahu made by Moana Murray; Ngā Tai | Tamāhine: Maro (waist of mannequin) made by Te Aorere Ngātai-Tautuku. Photo credit: Te Aorere Ngātai-Tautuku 2026. (b) Ngā Kōrero o Tōku Tipuna: Tuwhara made by Te Aorere Ngātai-Tautuku. Photo credit: Maia Wood. 2026.

My whakaaro behind Ancestral Intelligence (Figure 3) came to me after a kōrero with Moana. Both of us wanted to acknowledge the innovation of our tīpuna designs, while simultaneously creating an avenue for ourselves as takatāpui mokopuna to be in active conversation with our tīpuna through installation. We knew we wanted to have super-sized versions of these designs to capture these colossal intergenerational conversations. However, deciding the medium of Ancestral Intelligence came from reminiscing about my childhood. I was raised predominantly with my Pākehā mum and granny. My granny is a beautiful painter, and from a young age she taught me how to paint, alongside collage and sewing. She is the only grandparent I have access to in the physical realm, and so for this taonga, I knew I wanted to connect my two grandmothers through their respective mediums. My kuia through her whakairo, and my granny through painting on canvas. Granny and I have a very close relationship, and one of our favorite things to do together is to laugh and share inside jokes. Throughout the entire process of preparing this large taonga, I would speak with my kuia in the same manner that I would with my granny. Making inside jokes, laughing about serious and unserious things, and finding joy in sharing this relationship I developed with my granny, with my kuia. It was through both of these important and remarkable women that I felt confident in the creation of this taonga, to share the intelligence of my ancestors.

On the last day of our install, our exhibition was full of music, laughter, and an explosion of creative takatāpui energy. The wairua of our space was overflowing with the love and joy we share for each other, for our ancestral practices, and for our tīpuna. I could feel the mauri of each person in our Whatua rōpū, and with them the mauri of all our tīpuna. I could feel our tīpuna rejoicing in their mokopuna thriving. I could see the significance of our existences being seen, understood, and respected in totality by one another, that our taonga are conversing together, and that our tīpuna are (re)connecting with each other. It was at this moment, at 1 am on the last evening of installation, that I felt it was right to start painting my kuia's whakairo. As I painted, each of the Whatua rōpū came up to me and offered to paint parts of the pattern. This was probably the most special part

of the installation for me, because each of them contributed to Ancestral Intelligence. I felt like they were in conversation with my tūpuna and bringing in their ancestors to commune with mine. All our tūpuna are flowing in and out of this space—our takatāpui portal into Te Whare Pora—and each of them is remarking on their collective haututū mokopuna and their hectic antics. This is exactly what I was trying to capture within Ancestral Intelligence.

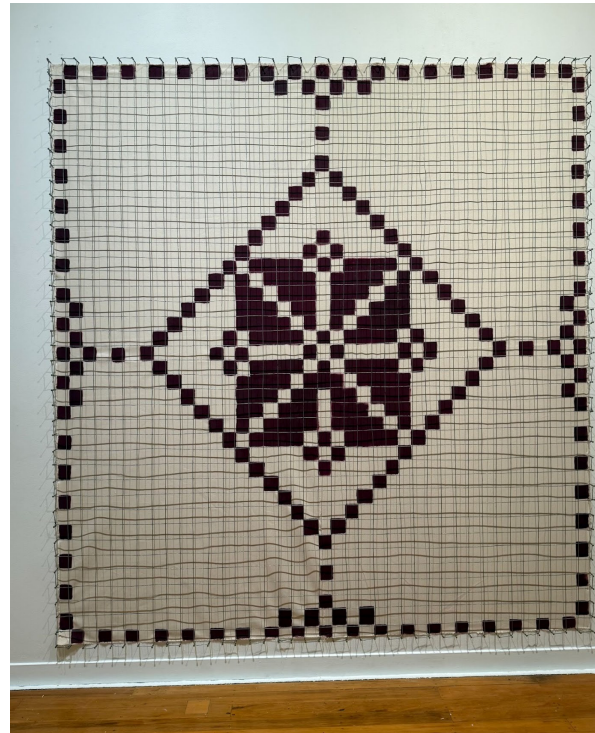


Figure 3. Ancestral Intelligence by Te Aorere Ngātai-Tautuku; Photo credit: Te Aorere Ngātai-Tautuku 2026.

Both Ancestral Intelligence and Tūpuna Tāniko Translated were collectively installed and empowered us to speak to our elders when we could not otherwise. We also wrote to them in order to share these genderqueer conversations with community members who attended Whatua He Whiringa Takatāpui. What follows are two poems that were used in the exhibition catalog; they are both love letters to the ancestors and to future mokopuna (Murray et al. 2026).

Tūpuna KAITAKA by Moana Murray

On the tūpuna time crunch
Twisting woolen threads to meet their hands
Fingers flow towards, across, away, S, horizontal, Z
I can only attempt to channel their movements in mine
at the point the twirl changes direction
Pink wool meets paru-dyed muka
&

Genderqueer mokopuna meets genius tūpuna

NANNY'S MEMORY by Te Aorere Ngātai-Tautuku

I see you Nan
In my mind
In my dreams

Smiling, holding, creating
 So effortlessly
 I wonder
 What kind of woman you were
 Everyone who knew you
 Tells me your story
 Of generosity, of selflessness
 But Nanny,
 Do you see me?
 This moko
 Born twenty years from your last breath
 Cannot fathom
 Being stuck in a tinana
 That has no resonance to their being
 I was born like you Nanny
 But I will never be like you
 I weave like you Nanny
 Yes, to tell the stories of you
 And all of our tīpuna
 But also so you can see me
 As I am too (Murray et al. 2026)

2. Conclusions

As we weave with our ancestors to create new taonga and reinvigorate their designs, the more we feel a sense of belonging in Te Whare Pora as takatāpui ringatoi. These conversations we have ignited around gender and Te Whare Pora are not new, but they continue to be crucial to the futures of takatāpui and our place within Māori creative practices. Our tīpuna have always embraced change, and more so, they created environments and realms for their mokopuna to thrive in. It is our responsibility as kaitiaki of this takatāpui portal into Te Whare Pora to continue engaging in critical Indigenous theorizing and embracing our collective diversity as future ancestors. This is the time for takatāpui to actualize the wildest dreams of our tīpuna, for us—their mokopuna—to freely thrive in our existence and to take our rightful place as practitioners of our ancestral customary techniques of raranga and whatu.

To close this paper, we cite a te reo Māori poem, which opened our exhibition in a ceremony and was included in the exhibition catalog. It asks, who are the weavers harvesting and preparing for whatu? It is takatāpui people, the mana that exists in the harakeke plant, and the mana that exists in each of us!

Hauhaketia kia hārō
 Mā wai e whatu?
 Mirohia he aho mōu
 Mā wai e whatu?
 Mā te hunga takatāpui!
 Mana tipua

Mana muka

Mana takatāpui e! (Murray et al. 2026)

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Glossary

Disclaimer: Te Reo Māori words often have multiple meanings for one term. The terms we have used in this article and translated below are how they were utilized in our context.

Aho	Horizontal or weft threads that are used in the <i>whatu</i> technique, also referred to metaphysically as the eternal thread (Evans et al. 2005)
Aotearoa	The Māori name of New Zealand
Atua	“Are transcendent celestial ancestors with particular influence over earthly and metaphysical domains. Their intrinsic connections to vast environments remain as guidance for their descendants.” (Ngātai-Tautuku 2025, p. 16)
Hapū	A section of a large kinship group, also known as a subtribe, which consists of a number of families that share the descent of an ancestor.
Harakeke	An abundant, versatile native New Zealand plant. The Latin name is <i>Phormium tenax</i> .
Hauora	Refers to health and vigor
Iwi	An extended kinship group, commonly referred to as a tribe, is composed of a large number of people who share an eponymous ancestor and are associated with a specific territory.
Kaiako	A teacher or mentor
Karanga	Ceremonial call often used in welcome ceremonies
Kairaranga	A term that refers to a practitioner of the customary Māori weaving technique <i>raranga</i>
Kaitaka	A highly treasured cloak made of the silky, inner fibers of the <i>harakeke</i> plant.
Kaitiaki	A custodian, or guardian over a particular realm and/or environment.
Kaiwhatu	A practitioner of the traditional Māori weaving technique <i>whatu</i>
Kete	Woven baskets. Can be made of natural and contemporary materials.
Kirikiriroa	The Māori name for Hamilton, New Zealand
Kuia	Grandmother, elderly woman.

Kākahu	<i>Clothing, commonly associated with Māori clothes and ancestral weaving practices.</i>
Kōrero	<i>Conversation, dialogue, discourse, communication.</i>
Mahi	<i>Work, practice.</i>
Mahi	
raranga/whatu	<i>To be actively weaving with raranga or whatu techniques.</i>
Mana	<i>The enduring supernatural power and prestige of a person, place, and/or object. It is in part determined by whakapapa, and can increase or decrease depending on certain influential activities or behaviors.</i>
Mana wāhine	<i>A theoretical framework of “Indigenous decolonial analysis” (Pihama 2020)</i>
Mauri	<i>Mauri is a fundamental element within te ao Māori as it is an intrinsic vital life essence that exists within all creations.</i>
Māori	<i>A political idea that collectively identifies the Indigenous peoples of Aotearoa New Zealand. The authors recognize that “Māori” as a people are composed of diverse whānau, hapū, and iwi communities.</i>
Mokopuna	<i>Grandchildren, descendants.</i>
Pākehā	<i>A term that refers to people who emigrated from Britain and/or Europe to Aotearoa and their descendants.</i>
Papakirango	<i>A pattern that depicts a traditional Māori fly swatter. A signal of protection and guardianship.</i>
Pōkinikini	<i>Curled dried harakeke leaves used in weaving and as an instrument.</i>
Putiputi	<i>A flower.</i>
Raranga	<i>A traditional Māori weaving practice that involves the leaf material of harakeke. The technique can also be achieved with contemporary materials.</i>
Raranga whakairo	<i>Intricately woven patterns that tell us pūrākau of our environment and cultural histories. They are visual repositories of knowledge that connect us with our tīpuna worldview.</i>
Ringatoi	<i>An artist.</i>
Rōpū	<i>A group of people.</i>
Tāhei	<i>Neck adornments, a type of necklace.</i>
Takatāpuitanga	<i>“The essence and/or spirit of being unapologetically takatāpui” (Ngātai-Tautuku 2025, p. 101)</i>
Tāne	<i>Māori men.</i>
Tāniko	<i>A type of whatu that embroiders geometrical patterns.</i>
Taonga	<i>Ancestral treasures, tangible and intangible.</i>
Taonga pūoro	<i>Customary Maori instruments.</i>
Tātua	<i>A type of woven belt.</i>
Tauira	<i>A term that we use in two different instances: 1: referring to a student of a subject 2: refers to an example or draft of something</i>
Te ao Māori	<i>The Māori world.</i>
Te reo Māori	<i>The Māori language.</i>
Te Taitokerau	<i>The northern part of the North Island of Aotearoa, New Zealand.</i>
Te whare tangata	<i>Commonly referred to as the house of humanity, te whare tangata is also known as a womb.</i>
Tinana	<i>A term that refers to the body, self, or person.</i>
Tīpuna/tūpuna	<i>Ancestors, grandparents. The ī/ū signal dialectal variations.</i>
Tīpuna/tūpuna	<i>Ancestor, grandparent.</i>
Tohunga	<i>A highly esteemed and sacred expert of a particular or multiple fields, often guided by atua and the natural world.</i>
Toi Māori	<i>The range of Māori creative disciplines.</i>
Turuturu	<i>The wooden pegs that were used to weave from.</i>
Tuwahara	<i>A large panel of weaving.</i>

Uri	Descendants
Wāhine	Māori women.
Wairua	an inherent spiritual component that resides within all fabrications of the world, and can exist long after something or someone has died
Wānanga	Wānanga has various descriptions in the Māori language. We use it in two instances: 1: as a gathering of knowledge, education gained through an institution of learning 2: to meet and deliberate, to discuss
Whakapapa	Genealogical connections to people, environment, ancestors, and cosmic beings.
Whānau	Family.
Whatu	An ancestral Māori finger twining technique that usually utilizes the inner fibers of the harakeke plant. It can also be achieved with contemporary materials.
Whenu	The harakeke strands that are prepared into sizes for raranga.

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