

## Two Rooms

Mark Adams  
Hinemihi – Te Hokinga – The Return  
24 July – 29 August 2020

16 Putiki Street  
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Gallery Hours  
Tue–Fri 11am–5pm  
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### Context is everything

The announcement in December, 2019 that Hinemihi o te Ao Tawhito, one of New Zealand's most important offshore taonga, will return to Aotearoa after over one hundred and thirty years in England is cause for celebration, not just for the whare's ancestral iwi Tūhourangi, Ngāti Hinemihi and wider Te Arawa, but for the entire country. Until recently, Hinemihi stood in the grounds of the National Trust administered estate, Clandon Hall in Surrey which was sadly destroyed by fire in April 2015. Hamish Coney visited Clandon Park in September 2014 to gain an insight into Hinemihi's physical *and* cultural context.

Hinemihi - Te Hokinga- The Return features Mark Adams complete suite of Hinemihi images on exhibition for the first time. This body of work was created in 1999/2000 and published in Rauru – Tene Waitere, Maori Carving, Colonial History (Editor Nicholas Thomas and interviews with Lyonel Grant and James Schuster, published University of Otago Press, 2009). Two Rooms and Adams have for some time considered editioning the entire set of images for exhibition. The demise of Clandon House and the pronouncement of Hinemihi's imminent return, provided a timely opportunity to do so.

Since the 1970s Mark Adams practice has examined the intersections and fault-lines of the colonial experience in Aotearoa and wider Polynesia. His large plate photographic practice speaks to the traditions of image capture from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but does not privilege the lens as a neutral agent between subject and viewer. Whilst much of his practice places his camera 'back' into key moments of colonial and 'cross-cultural' history and exchange, his images require the 'present' to acknowledge and engage with colonizing tropes and assumptions. With the news that Hinemihi the whare will return to her ancestral homeland Adams photographs propose an active dialogue with the future; that tension or opportunity always being inherent in his wider practice.

The journey of the whare Hinemihi from the desolation of the Mt Tarawera eruption in 1886 to a new home in the grounds of a Palladian manor house in an English country garden is a grand arc that encompasses war, devastation and recontextualization. It is also the story of the enduring legacy of one of New Zealand's greatest carving schools, that of Ngāti Tarawhai and two of its most celebrated masters, Wero Taroi and Tene Waitere.

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Our destination is Clandon Park, the family seat of the Onslow family, amongst whose descendants was the fourth earl, William Hillier Onslow (1853 – 1911) Governor General of New Zealand from 1889 to 1892. It was Onslow who acquired Hinemihi in the early 1890s as a memento of his time in the colony, effectively saving the ailing whare *and* removing it from its homeland forever.

Hinemihi was not unknown to me, having first come onto my radar via both photographer Mark Adams peerless body of work focusing on the achievement of the Ngāti Tarāwhai master Tene Waitere (1854 – 1931) and the pre-eminence accorded Tene by Professor Roger Neich in his definitive history of Māori carving in the post-colonial era *Carved Histories* (2001, Auckland University Press).

Hinemihi was commissioned by the Tūhourangi chief Aporo Te Wharekaniwha (c.1810 – 1886) and opened in early 1881 situated at the village of Te Wairoa near the entrance to the Pink and White Terraces. Today this is the site of the Buried Village. Funded from revenues created by visitors to the Terraces (which at their peak topped 6000 pounds per annum or about one million dollars in present day terms) the whare was intended as a community centre for functions and performances. It was also very much intended as an assertion of Te Arawa commercial mana. Legend has it that Hinemihi o te Ao Tawhito (of the old world) was soon referred to as Hinemihi of the golden eyes in reference to the gold sovereigns that reputedly replaced the more usual paua shells used to represent eyes within carved figures – a ‘new world’ affectation, but tellingly an indication that Te Arawa were very much aware of the commercial power they had developed. In less than ten years Te Wairoa became one of the wealthiest villages in New Zealand.

That all changed early on the morning of 10 June, 1886 with the eruption of Mt. Tarawera, the destruction of the Pink and White Terraces and the scattering of the Te Arawa people. Hinemihi was one of the few surviving structures in a volcanic onslaught which claimed 153 lives including many of the residents of Te Wairoa. Tene Waitere and his family were amongst the handful of survivors who took refuge within Hinemihi which almost buckled under the weight of volcanic debris.

Hinemihi arrived at Clandon Park in April 1892 and has spent her last 128 years in relative seclusion on the grounds of the estate. In this time she has acquired a few odd additions including the thick thatch roof, believed to be an error arising from the appearance of the whare covered in ash immediately after the 1886 eruption.

This dramatic history preceded this visitor to Clandon Park in 2014. Hinemihi’s story and her place within the narrative of both New Zealand and the grand Ngāti Tarawhai tradition is both incredible and assured. Still, all of that does not prepare the New Zealand visitor for the almost surreal experience of encountering a Māori whare in the grounds of a Palladian mansion in rural England. The visitor sees the house first, surrounded by expanses of lawn and formal gardens. The house is the work of Venetian architect Giacomo Leoni (circa 1686 – 1746) and dates to the early 1730s.

Since 1956 The National Trust has managed Clandon Park. In recent years Hinemihi’s condition and future conservation requirements have become a priority and an active plan has been formulated to ensure that the 139 year old whare enjoys a long future as one of New Zealand’s most significant taonga outside our shores.

Perhaps the final word needs to come from Jim Schuster, Tene Waitere’s great, great grandson. Schuster is a Māori heritage adviser at Heritage New Zealand *Pouhere Taonga* and has enormous experience in engaging with marae and historic whare as both important artistic taonga and living buildings performing vital social functions within the daily lives of iwi. Schuster is also a key member of Te Maru O Hinemihi and uniquely placed to share his vision for the future of the displaced whare, “she needs people and to be able to cater for her visitors. When she is ready to come home she will. Probably that will not be in my lifetime. Today she is doing an important job for UK based Māori, their children and visitors.” He goes on to explain that in the course of time most marae houses are constantly upgraded to meet the needs of a marae and iwi, “You know she has survived two world wars when there were bombs dropping all around but today she needs a few basic upgrades.”

I spoke with Jim just before hitting send on this updated article. I reminded him of his comment that in 2014 he did not think that Hinemihi would return in his lifetime and asked him his reaction when he received the news of her imminent haerenga back to her tūrangawaewae, “I’ve always said that when she was ready to return home, she would. But when I heard the news I was dumbfounded. We’ve had so many knockbacks over the years, I’m not sure we were ready for good news. I called my Dad, you know he’s 87, and this will probably happen in his lifetime. Then I called my son and told him he wouldn’t need to pick up the taiaha and keep running with it, Hinemihi is coming home. It makes the heart beat a bit faster.”

Hamish Coney, July 2020