

Two Rooms

Peata Larkin

Between Two Pou

30 November – 22 December 2018

Peata Larkin operates in a space between binary constructions – Māori/Pākehā, past/present, art/science, matter/spirit – weaving cultures and spheres of knowledge together in new hybrid forms. *Between Two Pou* extends Larkin's exploration of her dual Māori (Tuhourangi, Tuwharetoa, Ngāti Whakaue) and Pākehā ancestry in new work that combine painting, textiles and light, in which the act of painting and the symbolism of weaving take centre stage.

While *Between Two Pou* references the artist's personal heritage and history, it opens to incorporate a multitude of wider concerns. Though *pou* can act as carved posts which frame an entrance, they also take on a number of other meanings, connecting the open-ended space between them. Further, the reference to *pou* draws the large columns of Two Rooms' downstairs gallery which anchor the space in to conversation with the work.

Larkin's work employs raranga and tukutuku patterns used, in part, as mnemonic devices in traditional Māori storytelling. These patterns act as containers for knowledge and wisdom, tracing tribal lineages and continuing the memories, stories and teachings of ancestors in to the present.

Larkin's body of work also demonstrates a longstanding interest in contemporary technologies and digital networks. She borrows from the visual display strategies of science, medicine and digital data. Her works often resemble genealogical charts, binary codes, pixels and computer circuit boards, for example. In this exhibition, the artist cites developments in genealogical science, where the 'POU domain' acts as a bipartite DNA-binding structure. Larkin describes this domain as "apt in terms of the linkage of two separate entities, and I also enjoy the visual connections between my paintings and scientific and digital imagery."¹

The first series in the exhibition is painted on open mesh embroidered silk organza, the light azo yellow paint binding to the hexagonal grid composed of lines of woven thread, and across the void between them. Larkin cites the use of this yellow as of therapeutic value for both artist and viewer.² The monochrome nature of these works reference the history of modernist painting, particularly geometric abstraction – a largely western, male dominated sphere – while the organically shaped dollops of paint soften this grid. This also reflects the artist's interest in the work of Agnes Martin and Bridget Riley who share this strategy yet employ it in very different ways. In a nod to the complexities and tensions at play in the history of painting, Larkin notes, "the brush is already loaded before it touches the canvas."³

Larkin continues to utilise light as a material, for example in the construction of luminescent lightboxes, creating works which evoke associations of celestial objects: stars, constellations, galaxies and interstellar clouds. Here the transparent materials invite ambient light into the work by creating an open space for it to enter, where it further envelops and reflects the golden yellow paint and its crisp white ground – even the gallery wall behind it.

¹ Peata Larkin, email correspondence with the author, November 13, 2018.

² Ibid.

³ Peata Larkin, conversation with the author, November 8, 2018.

Another series of work features paint pushed through the porous mesh of tapestry fabric from behind the picture surface. The paint gathers organically, clumping in pools – its fluid, organic textures overflowing beyond the grid of the fabric. Her brushstrokes are filtered by the warp and weft of the material, creating a visual push and pull.

Larkin's work weaves a complex tapestry of contemporary culture in Aotearoa. Noting the cross-cultural histories of textiles, the artist asserts, "weaving *is* our DNA."⁴

⁴ Ibid.