

From the art collection

In 1986, Merimeri Penfold, Senior Lecturer in Māori, had just published the groundbreaking Penguin book *Women and the Arts in New Zealand* with Elizabeth Eastmond in the Art History department. Reproducing works by forty women, of whom six were Māori, this influential book took an unashamedly feminist approach, redressing the absence of women (and Māori) artists from previous histories of New Zealand art. The authors' statement on the imprint page stated the political intent of the project explicitly: "We should also like to acknowledge the crucial importance of the women's movement for the basic conception of this book and for many of the perspectives adopted."

Merimeri Penfold commissioned Emily Karaka, one of the artists in the book, to make a work for the opening of the new Māori Studies Department in August 1986. Karaka's art, like her anti-tour and Bastion Point protest activity, needed words. Her art communicates her sense of outrage at historical injustices to Māori and women, and aims to create a vision for a more equitable future: "The issues that I'm always discussing are economic, social and environmental. Land rights tie back to the basis of justice in our country, the covenant of the country, the korowai of the country."

She drew inspiration and strength from her family. Both her father, and her brother Dilworth, one of the original members of the reggae band Herbs, were watersiders, and delivered a pro-Māori message in the lyrics of every song they sang, while her mother was an advocate for the urban arts centre Te Whare Tapere. For the title of the Māori Studies mural, she quotes one of her ancestors who fought to retain land for his iwi after the introduction of the Auckland Waste Land Act of 1858. Mita Karaka was outraged that "native title should be extinguished" to allow



the Crown to take "waste land". In a speech he said, "Maumau tangata, maumau whenua", which means "Waste the man and you waste the land."

Basing her imagery around connections between the history of universities in New Zealand and expropriation of Māori land (in 1869 Otago University was given 100,000 acres of pastoral land as an endowment, for example), Karaka reminds the viewer of the context of place and space. The University of Auckland was founded on land that was part of the 3,000 acres block sold by some Ngāti Whātua for goods worth a few hundred pounds on 20 October 1840. Recurring across the painting like a chant is the phrase, "holes in the ground" and at the top right hand corner, the complete lament, "making holes in the ground for the purse gold" recalling the Biblical parable (Matthew 25) where the servant who buried his bag of gold is punished. This seems to implicate Christianity in shaping the attitudes of the colonizing pākehā: "whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them".

Formally, the painting blends expressionist paintwork with cubist collage. Numerous tiki with attendant koru and spiral forms are painted

in hot pinks, yellow, green and brown with highlights of white, blazing through the overlaying tracery of words. Their bursting energy is contained within a wooden waka taua or war canoe, carved by Karaka's partner at the time, Norman Te Whata. Sailing north, the waka has a carving of Te Uenuku, Tainui's god of rainbows as its taurapa or stern post while a manaia (profile bird or lizard) crouches at the prow. A rod with four sets of suspended scoria tied to it at intervals joins onto one of the waving verticals to bring in elements of Papatuanuku, the earth goddess, creator of the volcanic cones which structure the local landforms. The pictorial symbolism and text offer talismans for a long journey of education, warning against the wasting of talents, and show how the future for Māori will be conditional upon righting the wrongs of the past.

Emare Karaka (b.1952, Ngāti Maniapoto, Ngati Wai, Ngai Tai, Ngāti Hine) *Waste the man, Maumau whenua, Maumau tangata Wasteland, wasteman*, 1986, acrylic on board, relief wooden carvings with suspended volcanic rock, 2120 x 4800mm