



Mark Adams (b.1949), 9.4.1992 Piopiotahi - Milford Sound, Atawhenua - Fiordland, 2006, *Triptych*, gold toned fibre-based silver bromide prints from black and white negatives, 510 x 610mm each. The University of Auckland Art Collection

On a Thursday before Easter in 1992, photographer Mark Adams put his large format camera up on a tripod in the wettest place in New Zealand. In three parts, he re-created the well-known panoramic view of Milford Sound looking northwest from Freshwater Basin. But something is missing from the resultant images. The centrepiece of this glacier-carved fiord (and its quintessential geological feature) is obscured by mist. Gone is the distinctive marker which elevates this landscape above the picturesque to iconic status as a World Heritage Site. The sublime Mitre Peak has become a haunting absence.

This triptych featured as the fold-out section of Adams' 1993 book with historian Harry Evison, *Land of Memories* (Whenua i maharatia, haehae nga takata/Land of memories, scarred by people). By design, the locality's privileged position in the

publication corresponded both to its place in art history and its economic significance to Ngai Tahu. Greenstone still glows on the beach at Anita Bay at the entrance to Milford Sound. Known as takiwai or teardrop because of its translucence, it was once the preferred stone for making jewellery, and traded widely. The Pounamu Vesting Act 1997 restored ownership of this resource, but *Land of Memories* predates this, and is strategic in its story telling. In an afterword, Adams explains how with "the arrival of the colonising cultures from the northern hemisphere...the old tribal economy was destroyed almost completely".

In the title Adams gives his photographs, Piopiotahi precedes Milford Sound, pointing both to European renaming and to the extinction of the native thrush or piopio, after the introduction of European mammalian predators. Mark Adams himself is European, "a South Islander, familiar

with this landscape, as the evolving relationship my culture has with the indigenous culture in its relationship with the land". As our guide and interpreter, he encourages us to look beyond the seen scene, while announcing where he stands in this continuum of history, his subjectivity foregrounded by the precise date which prefixes the title.

Precision is also perceptible in the details such as Bowen Falls on the right. This is achieved by enlarging from eight-inch by ten-inch negatives. In pursuit of even higher levels of resolution, Adams is also known to print directly onto light-sensitive paper without an enlarger. Five examples of Mark Adams photographs from the 1980s made using this technique are included in the group exhibition *Close-Up: Contemporary Contact Prints* at the Gus Fisher Gallery until 5 July.