

From the collection

Arts



Reuben Paterson (b.193), *Relax with Frankie's Whanau*, 2002, *Glitter on canvas*, 1000 x 1000mm
The University of Auckland Art Collection

Reuben Paterson's fabulous glittering designs may look glamorous and flamboyant but they are also imbued with memory and spiritual energy.

Whether he is invoking his ancestral home of Matata, the swirling water of Karangahake or the party frocks of his late grandmother, Paterson's work is an exploration of whakapapa, often viewed through contemporary Māori designs found in popular culture.

Translating traditional kowhaiwhai and other motifs into glitter-on-canvas compositions, Paterson

follows in the footsteps of artists Sandy Adsett, Cliff Whiting and Buck Nin by using non-traditional media to affirm Māori culture as a contemporary pursuit. Through the use of glitter, he also incorporates the medium of light to reference Māori creation stories of the void and the light that flooded the space created when Tane separated Rangī and Papa.

In reference to traditional weaving, many of Paterson's works draw their abstract patterns from decorative designs, especially retro prints sourced

from wallpaper and the clothing of his extended family, including Hawaiian shirts and his late father's ties, combining international paisley and floral motifs with elements of koru and melancholy for the past.

Paterson's eclectic interest in international motifs, both abstract and historical, grows from extensive experience abroad. Having graduated from Elam School of Fine Arts in 1997, that same year he became the youngest recipient of the Moët et Chandon Fellowship, aged 23, and spent two months in Avize, France, just an hour's drive from a first-hand experience of the world of Parisian fashion. Residencies in Greece, New York and Spain followed.

In 2000 Paterson completed a Postgraduate Diploma of Teaching (Primary) at Auckland College of Education. *Relax with Frankie's Whanau* was produced during his second year teaching at Westmere Primary School. It was at this time he became aware of marketing beginning to specifically target young Māori, including an anti-smoking campaign utilising young celebrities and catchy slogans. He noticed that not only did "educational catch-phrases attuned specifically to the students in the bilingual unit differ from those of the rest of the school... but also in the advertising surrounding Māori".

Other works of this period appropriate popular song titles, noting the after-life of pop marketing, such as the t-shirt for controversial single "Relax" by British band Frankie goes to Hollywood, and how "culture can be portrayed through advertising", such as slogans on T-shirts.

Paterson has just had a large, eight-square-metre work prominently displayed in the Asia Pacific Triennial held at Brisbane's Gallery of Modern Art – the painting is soon to go on display at the Tauranga Art Gallery, providing a first opportunity to exhibit near his ancestral home. This week an exhibition of his work opens at Milford Galleries in Dunedin and he has a series of works included in the Biennale of Sydney, which opened earlier this month and continues to 1 August.

Andrew Clifford