

TAHU FM

Paemanu

Transcript of an interview held on 13 September 2017. Tahu FM with Jason Phillips

I had been to the opening the night before and interviewed the rōpū the next day. We played phone tag because they were very busy and slightly hungover after an awesome opening, when we finally caught up I was able to interview a few of the artists involved on speakerphone.

Jason: Kia ora guys how are you today after the big opening?

Paemanu: Kia ora Jason.

Jason: How was it last night? I was blown away by it, its exceptional, I love the space.

Paemanu: Great, Thanks

Jason: I think I went somewhere that I wasn't supposed to go, are you using the whole space? I walked into where you are all sleeping.

Paemanu: [laughing] You were meant to go in there, you were meant to find that place. The room that at the back has the food truck.

Jason: Yeah I saw that food truck it reminds me of something that Otis Frizzell does. I'm going to ask you a few questions about the exhibit. Firstly, can you explain to those of us that aren't familiar with the term Nohoaka, what one is? and how/ why it is significant in Ngāi Tahu culture/Ngāitahutanga.

Paemanu: A nohoaka or nohoaka toi? (the exhibition itself)

Jason: Lets start with a nohoaka.

Paemanu: A nohoaka is a place that our tūpuna visited for various reasons at different times of the year, so usually seasonal, to gather kai and mahika kai and also to gather resources like special rocks and things that we needed at different times of the year.

In terms of the kupu toi, that is the Māori word that is used for art, generally, and so for us a "Nohoaka Toi" was based on the idea of a seasonal camp where we literally camped out in the gallery and turned this gallery's spaces into a nohoaka, so that's why you found that room where the mattresses and the bags and everything were because we have been here occupying the site.



Jason: Now traditionally I know our tūpuna used it to share ideas, visually, oral, performance ideas. Do you think Paemanu has added a new element to it for this day and age?

Paemanu: I hope we have. It's an idea that inspired us, and when we were developing the concept for this exhibition we talked about white walled art galleries from an art institution, what they represent for us as contemporary artists as well and we sort of drew some parallels and we wanted to bring those ideas together.

I know last night [at the opening] they talked about how the galleries of our tūpuna were the rock faces and the limestone caves, the environment and we were trying to bring that idea in. And we brought the idea in that we would repeatedly return to this exhibition, to add to this exhibition, change it so more people could come and add to it as well. It's an open fluid exhibition, not set.

Jason: So you guys will occupy the space for entire exhibition, until the end of November?

Paemanu: No, we Are not going to live in continuously, we will go and revisit. We'll go away and forage (laugh)

Jason: I just want to ask. There are a whole diverse group of you contributing to this exhibition. What are you personally bringing to this kaupapa?



Paemanu: Well a lot of this has been tuakana/ teina relationship with our more famous (laughing) and established artists sharing their knowledge and our stories together and collaborating.

Some of the work was print making using a tirewa structure which is a traditional drying rack for our mahinga kai. So, all the work on that was put together this week, from all the artists. When we got here the space was empty and so we collaborated. Us the younger artists, shared our skills and ideas and got it done. The whole idea was to respond to the idea of nohoaka and create work based around that.

Jason: If I were to ask, what would you think our Tīpuna, if they could see your mahi at CoCA would say about it? If they could see how you have conceptualised the concept of nohoaka.

Paemanu: I think they'd be stoked (laughing), no we think they would. You know Ngāi Tahu culture has been made invisible and we're bringing it back and we're referencing There's a piece of rock art here that we're referencing and being inspired by and we're making our culture visible, were creating it! Now! Together as Ngai Tahu Ngāi. And that's such a special experience it's been amazing experience, unique and it's been so worthwhile and enriching and we want our whānau to come look at the work and respond to it and feel it and be empowered by it.

Jason: Now that piece of rock that you were talking about? Where is it from?



Paemanu: Look we are so privileged to have this mauri stone here. It completely grounds our practice. It puts it with the continuum of innovation, from the earliest mark makers, the ancient mark makers.

Te Ana Māori Rock Art Trust supported by The Rūnaka at Arowhenua, Moeraki and Waihou, have leant us this kōhatu to visit with at this nohoaka. And in 3 months time after hui-a-iwi it will go back to the rock art trust in Timaru again.

That piece was excavated by archaeologists who removed some of our cultural heritage and it was supposed to be shipped off to America but didn't make it and has been in the Whanganui museum.

And finally it has been returned back to the takiwā or close enough but it came from Takiroa, Takiroa is where it came from. So it's spending a bit of time with artists, but yes it absolutely grounds us, grounds our practice today. We are blessed to have that with us. Every day there's images there for us from that Mauri.

Jason: I love that the stone brings you all together because you share the common bond of Ngāi Tahu ancestry but not all of you live in the Ngāi Tahu takiwā at the moment.

Paemanu: Correct, I'll hand you over to one of our whānau who has come down from Palmerston North.

Jason: You have a Mauri stone that brings you all together because you share the common bond of Ngāi Tahu ancestry but not all of you live in the Ngāi Tahu takiwā at the moment. What's it like being all together in this nohoaka space and sharing as whānau – how is that feeling – that wairua at the moment?



Paemanu: From my personal view or perspective I have been living in the Wairarapa as I am also Kahungunu ki Wairarapa so this is a new experience for me being down in Christchurch as Ngāi Tahu and also as a Ngāi Tahu artist. It adds another dimension to it so a lot of these people, although whānau, I am meeting them for the first time and we do share whakapapa and also our practice as well as Ngāi Tahu artists. It's been really special actually, that I have been able to participate, this is my first nohoaka, although there were wānanga before this. I have just been joining in on the little nohoaka within the gallery, there was one on print making, there's been drawing on the walls and text on the tiwera. Doing what I can and contributing and having these wānanga with different artists. While drawing on the wall I'm having wānanga with Ross Hemara, and working on the tiwera talking to Ephram Russell, Martin Langdon and Tamanuhuri Russell, and Simon and doing some print making with Emma. I've loved it. And I think that sleeping and eating together in that space has been an integral part of it

Jason: I love how the paemanu roopu, how you all get together in that tuakana/teina and tautoko everyone. I felt that at the opening last night. So today is the official opening from 12 o'clock?

Paemanu: Yep kia ora the doors are open now. Because we have all been here together it's a great chance to share with the public the dynamics of being together and talking. People will be able to engage with us as a collective being formed under the banner of nohoaka toi.

Jason: How do you expect the visiting whānau, Ngāi Tahu, Manuhiri, to respond what do you expect? Will they be visitors looking at what you are doing or can they get involved?

Paemanu: First and foremost it's for people to feel present: that by being here they are active— the work is in response to the kōhatu and we have been engaging with the kōhatu, with each others work and with each others kōrero and we made work as we've gone along and it will continue to be occupied and added to and Ross is booked to come 3 times to do more drawings on the wall so the space will evolve and shift and I would encourage people to come back and use it as a contemplative space to engage in different ways whether its re-orientating with the different works, or seeing something new or in a different way. Just having time and space like this wānanga and nohoaka toi has really helped us evolve the exhibition even in that short space of time. I would hope that visitors would get the same thing that by spending time gaining new appreciation of the work and our Ngāi Tahu tangata

Jason: To prepare for this exhibition did you go and visit some of the original sites of nohoaka in Te Waipounamu.

Paemanu: A lot of us had those experiences and shared those experiences – one part of our exhibition is a live feed to the site where that kōhatu has been taken from – it's history of where it was removed – to have it digitally repatriated and have it in situ to its home, so there'll be a live feed in the gallery to that site so people who can't get to those sites themselves can at least contemplate those two connections which is the physical, the mauri coming directly from that kōhatu and then contemplate its disrupted space where it had come from.

Jason: Have you heard any stories, perhaps from your tīpuna or other people of what thoughts went into nohoaka and what came from the tupuna, the stories that came down. This concept is relatively new to me. How did you research the idea of nohoaka.

Paemanu: Matua Ross Hemara was our key guiding point for what those sites were for, or how they could be used. He has been visiting and studying and exploring those forms and places for... since he was six years old! In places that are now under dams and he knows those sites intimately. So he is our best guiding point for how we should format an exhibition in relation to them. We are guided by our Rangatira Toi!

Jason: I understand that the term Paemanu is derived and inspired by an image that was found at an original site? Is that right? Of a bird man?



Paemanu: Yes the name Paemanu came from an image that Ross developed that was based on the drawings that he had studied, and we took the idea of the collar bone, the Paemanu is the collar bone, but also of the birdmen and the various drawings that you will be familiar with. We were thinking of ourselves as manu, or as artists who would fly, who live all over the place, all over the world, not just all over the country and are constantly traveling for our art practice. So we fly together; we gather together on this perch on this nohoaka! We gather together to hui, so that's why we took that name. It was like a pae for us to meet but also to take flight from. It was one of the key concepts, supporting each other; that hold us together.

Jason: It must be a big task holding all the artists together; logistically. How do you coordinate an exhibition like this?

Paemanu: We have an artist co-ordinator but it's been a collective vision, a collective task, not person has done this by themselves. We meet regularly through digital media, phone calls, chance meetings in airports, over cups of coffee, sharing train trips with each other! We have been working on this project for nearly a year. People have come in to the project in staggered form, but the lead curatorial artists have anchored the project. We want to grow the whānau, and we really hope that Paemanu grow as a whānau as well. We want more Kāi Tahu artists to come in. Ngāi Tahu visual culture is developed by Ngāi Tahu visual artists, and it's never a static thing, it's been evolving from the get go. Our tupuna drew and drew and drew... and each of those tuhituhi taoka on our nohoaka sites have many hands involved in those works: it's not the work of one person, it's the vision of the entire iwi. And that's what we want achieve, we want our whānauka to feel part of the vision, and contribute to the vision, and when they come into CoCA and see our nohoaka toi each member of our iwi will respond in a slightly different way, some will feel like they want to contribute, and there are avenues for that. And I don't want to lock that down by describing it, I want whānau to come in and see it. It's a child friendly space, it's a Taua and Poua friendly space. It's an Iwi space!