

## **Michael Parekowhai**

### Artist Statement and Biography

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#### **Artist Statement**

*'There is no object I could make... that could fill a room like sound can.'*

*He Korero Purakau mo Te Awanui o Te Motu: story of a New Zealand river* is the central work of Michael Parekowhai's 2011 Venice Biennale installation for New Zealand's official presentation. It is his sixth piano sculpture and took more than 10 years to create.

Performance is key to the work, which aside from being a spectacular sculpture is also a perfectly tuned instrument – a Steinway concert grand piano. Parekowhai recounts hearing it played at its debut: 'The object disappeared – the actual piano just kind of melted away.'

Many other ideas are also at play. The title refers to a 1920s New Zealand novel, which in turn inspired Jane Campion's 1993 film *The Piano*. As curator Justin Paton has noted, Parekowhai 'reverses the direction of these narratives'. No longer is 'culture' imported from Europe. In transforming the piano, Parekowhai shifts the perspective, boldly making New Zealand the source.

## Artist Biography

### **Michael Parekowhai** **New Zealand**

Lives and works in Auckland, New Zealand.

Michael Parekowhai's narratives can be complex; he draws on an abundant range of both vernacular and collective vocabularies that he re-manufactures into the narrative structures and formal languages of his work. Although key themes of his practice could be described as deliberate takes on notions of introduced species and culture, any potentially overt political dimensions, however, are downplayed. Ideas of camaraderie, tools of teaching and childhood learning, as well as quotes from the canon of modern art history and popular culture openly play out in many of Parekowhai's stories. While his work is often described as emphasising the extraordinariness of the ordinary, each body of work has layers of potential for meaning and significance- they are open to any depth of interpretation and storytelling.

Michael Parekowhai is one of New Zealand's most important contemporary practitioners. In addition to an extensive exhibition history, his work is held in all significant public and private collections throughout New Zealand and Australia, as well as major works in permanent collections across the Asia-Pacific region and Europe. Michael Parekowhai has been included in many important exhibitions, including the Asia Pacific Triennial (2006-2007), the Gwangju Biennale (2004); Sydney Biennale (2002), Headlands, MCA, Sydney (1992); and the major art fairs in Basel, Art Basel (2006, 2007) and LISTE (2007). A major volume cataloguing Michael Parekowhai's practice was recently published by Michael Lett, Auckland (2007). Parekowhai's work has been reviewed in most major international art periodicals, and covered by every major art periodical in Australasia.

Michael Parekowhai was born in Porirua, New Zealand in 1968, of European and Maori (Ngati Whakarongo) descent. Parekowhai graduated with a BFA (1990) and MFA (2000) from Auckland University's Elam School of Fine Arts, and in 2001 was awarded Arts Foundation of New Zealand Laureate. Michael Parekowhai currently holds the position of Professor in Fine Arts at the University of Auckland. His exhibition history spans almost two decades of practice.

### **Selected Solo Exhibitions**

- 2013      \*The Past in the Present, Michael Lett at the Auckland Art Fair, Auckland  
Michael Parekowhai et al., Michael Lett, Auckland
- 2012      Letter from Alice May Williams, Michael Lett, Auckland, New Zealand  
Peripheral Relations: Marcel Duchamp and New Zealand Art 1960-2011, Adam Art  
Gallery Te Pataka Toi, Wellington, New Zealand  
\*On First Looking into Chapman's Homer, Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o  
Waiwhetu, Christchurch; Also at Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa

- 2011 \*The Far Side, Michael Lett, Auckland  
Toi Aotearoa, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki, Auckland  
Te Ao Hurihuri, Jonathan Smart Gallery, Christchurch  
\* On First Looking into Chapman's Homer, 54th Venice Biennale 2011, New Zealand Pavilion; Also at Muses du Quai Branly, Paris, France.
- 2010 Unnerved, Queensland Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane, Australia
- 2009 \* The Moment of Cubism, Michael Lett, Auckland, New Zealand  
\*Seldom is Herd, Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney, Australia  
Jim McMurtry, Planet Festival, Onatrio, Canada  
Jim McMurtry, The New Dowse, Lower Hutt, New Zealand  
Yes We Are, One Day Sculpture, Wellington, New Zealand  
Evolution, Max Lang Gallery, New York, U.S.A.  
Mind Games: Surrealism in Aotearoa, Hastings City Art Gallery, Hastings, New Zealand
- 2008 Jim McMurtry, Maori Hall I Michael Lett, Auckland, New Zealand  
Dateline, City Gallery Kiel, Germany  
Dateline, City Gallery Sindelfingen, Germany
- 2007 " Song of The Frog Part 1, 2, Michael Lett, Auckland, New Zealand  
Love Chief, Auckland Art Gallery, Auckland, New Zealand  
Dateline, Neuer Berliner Kunstverein, Berlin, Germany  
Hei konei mai: We'll meet again, Auckland Art Gallery, Auckland, New Zealand  
"My Sister, My Self, Michael Lett, Auckland, New Zealand  
\* Uste Art Fair, Michael Lett Stand, Basel, Switzerland  
Cosmo, NGV International, Melbourne, Australia  
Reboot, The Jim Barr and Mary Barr Collection, Christchurch Art Gallery, Christchurch, New Zealand  
\* Jim McMurtry, Christchurch Art Gallery, Christchurch, New Zealand  
Picturing Eden, Museum of Photographic Arts in San Diego, California, USA  
Picturing Eden, University of Iowa Museum of Art, Iowa City, Iowa, USA
- 2006 Erst me fiets (First my bicycle), Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney, Australia  
\*The Big O.E., The Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington, New Zealand  
Toi Te Papa Art of the Nation, Te Papa, Wellington, New Zealand  
Reboot, The Jim Barr and Mary Barr Collection, Dunedin Public Art Gallery, Dunedin, New Zealand  
Asia Pacific Triennial, Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane, Australia  
Beaufort Inside, PMMK, Museum of Modern Art, Ostend, Belgium  
Beaufort Triennial 2006, Belgium Coast Line, Ostend, Belgium  
Hei konei mai: We'll meet again, Auckland Art Gallery, Auckland, New Zealand  
The Armory, Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery Stand, New York, USA  
Melbourne Art Fair, Special Projects, Melbourne, Australia

Melbourne Art Fair, Michael Lett Stand, Melbourne, Australia  
Phoenix, Gus Fisher Gallery, Auckland, New Zealand  
Picturing Eden, George Eastman House, International Museum of Photography and Film, New York, USA  
Random Access, McClelland Gallery + Sculpture Park, Langwarrin, Victoria, Australia  
High Tide: currents in contemporary New Zealand & Australian Art, Zacheta National Gallery of Art, Warsaw, Poland  
High Tide: currents in contemporary New Zealand & Australian Art, Contemporary Art Centre, 2006, Vilnius, Lithuania