

Mokopōpaki

JOHN HODGSON

KIRIKŌPUNI

6/12/17 – 10/2/18

KIRIKŌPUNI. Auckland prov. Locality in Hobson County. Farming. Twenty-two miles by road from Whangārei. 17 miles by road from Dargaville. Road from Parakao and Kaikohe junction here. Railway station 13 miles from Waiotira Junction, 19 miles from Dargaville. Altitude 17ft. The name is that of a variety of eel.¹

Artist's Statement

PERSONAL GEOGRAPHY

If you are looking for the farm at Kirikōpuni first find Paradise Road. Start here. Off Paradise Road is the no exit Māpuna Road. At the end of Māpuna Road, there is a level crossing. Big white gates protect the railway. These are the gates to the farm. Trains pass through. A little boy opens the gate. He crosses over. A little boy closes the gate. Land this side of the track was farm. Locked in by the main trunk line

to Dargaville (not to be confused with the Kirikōpuni Loop) the block went all the way up Māpuna Road to the West. Most of the property, probably two thirds of 500 acres, was contained by a big horseshoe bend in the river.

Māpuna Road was not really a road; more of a dusty, unsealed, farm track. On one side of the track Tangihua loomed from across the river and in the distance, the bush-clad ridge of Tangowahine sprawled out along the other.

My Grandparents lived on a low hill in an old wooden villa known as the *Big House*. Below this, on an elevated flat, Mum and Dad, older sister, younger brother and me lived in a 500 sq ft *Cottage*. The house had been used to store hay but Dad fixed the place up with materials scavenged from other derelict buildings on the farm. Halfway between the *Big House* and the *Cottage* was the

barn. Down a bit further was the cowshed – almost at the end of the gravel where the track stopped and the river flats began.

The river ran behind both the *Big House* and the *Cottage*. It was yellow-brown and thick with mud. The turgid, murky river-water swirled in dark, cocoa-coloured currents that would rise and fall depending on the tide.

Bush grew along the deeply rutted banks of the river. Tall, ancient mānuka, tōtara, nīkau, supple-jack, lancewood for bow-making, raupō and toetoe with stands of kahikatea down on the flats that often used to flood.

There were eels in the river. I was not allowed to get up close but I knew eels would bite. When I saw them, slimy and writhing, swarming the sack of sheep guts, I was entranced.

Near the river was the rubbish

heap. This was where my paternal Grandmother dumped loads and loads of empty bottles and threw them down the bank. Lotion and cream bottles, drink bottles, make-up and medicine bottles. The lot. When we stayed up at the *Big House* we would go into the bush round the back and dig the bottles out. Brown ones (beer) were common, green prized, blue rare and usually small.

There was constant digging on the farm. Post holes and drains mostly. Sometimes excavations for buildings like the big pit needed for the new herring-bone cowshed. Holes all dug by hand including the ones in the bush down by the river to empty the dunny. Stink.

As a child, I had no view of the use or misuse of the river. It was just there, a friend to nobody. Not often spoken of but always a present danger especially in the winter, when the water rose and

the drains filled and the flood
gates groaned.

In mid 1960 at the end of the
dairy season, we walked off the
farm at Kirikōpuni. I was 7 ½
years old.

—John Hodgson

Red Series

MILKING BEFORE DAWN

In the drifting rain the cows in
the yard are as black
And wet and shiny as rocks in
the ebbing tide;
But they smell of the soil, damp
and steaming, warm.
The shed is an island of light
and warmth, the night
Was water-cold and starless out
in the paddock.

Crouched on the stool, hearing
only the beat

The monotonous beat and hiss of
the smooth machines,
The choking gasp of the cups,
the rattle of hooves,
How easy to fall asleep again, to
think
Of the man in the city asleep; he
does not feel
The night encircle him, the
grasp of mud.

But now the hills in the east
return, are soft
And grey with mist, the night
recedes, and the rain,
The earth as it turns toward the
sun is young
Again, renewed, its history
wiped away
Like the tears of a child. Can the
earth be young again
And not the heart? Let the man
in the city sleep.²

—Ruth Dallas (1947)

Works ^(all 2017)

The Hills in the East Return
(I), (II)

Along Paradise Road

Dargaville Summer

Always the Heat

Glory Days

Prejudiced Ephemera

Two Canoes

Untitled

Blue Painting

In Memoriam

R.J.R.

b. 6 July 1927

d. 17 September 2009

Work

And you my father ⁽²⁰¹⁷⁾

Land Forms Series

Out where the river broke
The bloodwood and the desert
oak

Holden wrecks and boiling
diesels

Steam in forty five degrees

The time has come

To say fair's fair

To pay the rent

To pay our share

The time has come

A fact's a fact

It belongs to them

Let's give it back

How can we dance

When our earth is turning?

How do we sleep

While our beds are burning?³

Beds are Burning by Australian
post-punk rock band Midnight

Oil was a 'brisk dispatch from geographical and moral places' most people 'prefer not to visit.' Released on 26 January 1988, *Beds are Burning* became the alternative soundtrack for the Australian bicentennial celebrations. Performed by political activist Peter Garrett, *Beds are Burning* reminds non-indigenous Australians that since the arrival of the 'First Fleet' in Sydney harbour in 1788, the shameful history of their country is founded on genocide and grim, environmental pillage.⁴

Works ^(all 2017)

Land Forms (I), (II)

Institutional Concrete

Worldly Goods

Pork Barrel

Diesel and Dust

Burning Land

Time Has Come



Pink Painting

KŌPUNI

1.

(verb) in a body, all together.

Kia kōpuni te haere, kaua e takitahitia. Go in a group, not singly.

2.

(modifier) dark, black.

He tuna kiri kōpuni. A dark skinned eel.⁵

When adult eels mature and

prepare for migration downstream their appearance has changed. Their eyes have enlarged and are surrounded by a distinctly bluish ring. The pectoral fins grow large and black. The muscular dome shaped head of the LONGFIN EEL flattens and becomes more streamlined.

Migrating eels or TUNA HEKE congregate and gather together in large numbers. They are fat and do not feed but store the energy resources needed to sustain them on their long journey out to sea and across the Pacific Ocean to spawning grounds in the warm waters of the subtropics. Māori knew the 'downstream migrations of pre-spawning eels were pulsed' or 'most intensive' during HINAPŌURI or on 'dark nights with little moon.' Eels taken at this time are in the best condition for eating.⁶



Longfin Eel (*Anguilla dieffenbachii*)

Work

*Hinapōuri: Dark Night with
Little Moon* (2017)

Tractors, Truck & Agricultural Architecture Series

"I'd walked the length of Rideout Road the night before, following the noise of the river in the darkness, tumbling over ruts and stones, my progress, if you'd call it that, challenged by farmers' dogs and observed by the faintly luminous eyes of wandering stock, steers, cows, stud-bulls or milk-white unicorns or better, a full quartet of apocalyptic horse browsing the marge. . . . Yes almost happy. . . shouting Kubla Khan, a bookish lad, from the seat of the clattering old Ferguson tractor, doing a steady five miles an hour . . . getting to the bit about the damsel with the dulcimer and looking up to see

the reputedly wild Hōhepa girl perched on the gate, feet hooked into the bars, ribbons fluttering from her ukulele. A perfect moment of recognition. . . in spite of the belch of carbon monoxide from the tin-can exhaust on the bonnet.”⁷

Works ^(all 2017)

Kirikōpuni

*Blue Truck, White Gate, Black
Eel*

Ballad of Buster O’Leary

Ysgubor n. barn. Welsh.

Free Range

Bottle Bank

Riparian Rites

THE PROBLEM OF INTERPRETATION

Mike Kelley (1954–2012) is considered one of the most influential American artists of the late twentieth century. Kelley was ‘very particular’ about the importance of artworks having titles with ‘function.’ Although Kelley conceded that if he felt an artwork didn’t need a title he ‘wouldn’t give it one’ he nevertheless ‘really hated’ leaving an artwork untitled and ‘open to all interpretation.’ Kelley enjoyed making the question of how to interpret an artwork a problem by providing titles that limit interpretation. For him, ‘Not just any interpretation is good.’ He thought his audience should not be ‘free to do what ever you want’ and argued that those who have come to look at his work enter into a ‘pact’ or agreement with him as the artist. According to this understanding the audience is ‘free’ to respond to the art and

‘do certain things’ but ‘only within a range of freedoms’ that the artist allows. Where Kelley thought the audience is responsible for their interpretation or understanding of an artwork he would also say this process cannot be ‘totally free’ or up to them entirely. If this were the case, and interpretation of an artwork left open, Kelley believed the audience would be in a position to realise or make the art for themselves and therefore not need to engage with him as the artist at all.⁸

–Mokopōpaki

John Hodgson is an Auckland-based artist in his final year BFA (Hons) at Elam School of Fine Arts, The University of Auckland

Solo Exhibitions

T.A.W. (The American Wars) (Depot Artspace, Auckland, 2014)

Selected Works and Group Exhibitions

Auckland Palimpsest, Hello Ākarana (2016) ('Salon Selection', Mokopōpaki, Auckland, 2017); **A Hundred Lovers** (2016) ('Korekore Whakapiri', Mokopōpaki, Auckland, 2017); **Play #1: 7.37 PM, Play #2: Saturday, Play #3: Softbait** (2016) ('I Live For That Energy', Studio One Toi Tū, Auckland, 2017); **Play #1: 7.37 PM, Play #2: Saturday, Play #3: Softbait, Longer Boats** (2016) ('Supra-Liminal', George Fraser Gallery, Auckland, 2017); **On Ponsonby Road II, On Ponsonby Road III** (2013) ('Reaching the Horizon and Beyond', Studio One Toi Tū, Auckland, 2015); **On Ponsonby Road IV** (2014), **On Ponsonby Road V** (2015) ('Reaching the Horizon and Beyond', Uxbridge, Malcolm Smith Gallery, Auckland, 2015); **On Ponsonby Road I, On Ponsonby Road II, On Ponsonby Road III** (2013) (ELECTICA, Depot Artspace, Auckland, 2013)

LIST OF WORKS

RED SERIES

1.

The Hills in the East Return (I), (II), 2017

Oil on canvas on board
50 x 50 cm JH44, JH45

2.

Along Paradise Road, 2017

Oil on canvas on board
120 x 120 cm JH33

3.

Dargaville Summer, 2017

Oil on canvas on board
50 x 50 cm JH38

4.

Always the Heat, 2017

Oil on canvas on board
50 x 50 cm JH46

5.

Glory Days, 2017

Oil on canvas on board
50 x 50 cm JH40

6.

Prejudiced Ephemera, 2017

Oil on canvas on board
120 x 120 cm JH39

7.

Two Canoes, 2017

Oil on canvas on board
120 x 120 cm JH35

8.

Untitled, 2017

Oil on canvas on board
120 x 120 cm JH32

BLUE PAINTING

1.

And you my father, 2017

Oil on canvas on board
120 x 120 cm JH41

LAND FORMS SERIES

1.

Land Forms (I), (II), 2017

Oil on canvas on board
50 x 50 cm JH29, JH37

2.

Institutional Concrete, 2017

Oil on canvas on board
50 x 50 cm JH27

3.

Worldly Goods, 2017

Oil on canvas on board
30 x 30 cm JH31

4.

Pork Barrel, 2017

Oil on canvas on board
50 x 50 cm JH30

KIRIKŌPUNI

5.

Diesel and Dust, 2017

Oil on canvas on board
50 x 50 cm JH22

6.

Burning Land, 2017

Oil on canvas on board
30 x 30 cm JH36

7.

Time Has Come, 2017

Oil on canvas on board
30 x 30 cm JH25

PINK PAINTING

1.

Hinapōuri: Dark Night with Little Moon, 2017

Oil on canvas on board
120 x 120 cm JH34

TRACTORS, TRUCK & BUILDING SERIES

1.

Kirikōpuni, 2017

Oil and charcoal on stretched canvas
30 x 30 cm JH16

2.

Blue Truck, White Gate, Black Eel, 2017

Oil and charcoal on canvas on board
50 x 40.5 cm JH3

3.

Ballad of Buster O'Leary, 2017

Oil and charcoal on canvas on board
36 x 43 cm JH2

4.

Ysgubor n. barn. Welsh., 2017

Oil and charcoal on canvas on board
42 x 34.7 cm JH4

5.

Free Range, 2017

Oil on canvas on board
50 x 50 cm JH24

6.

Bottle Bank, 2017

Oil and charcoal on stretched canvas
30 x 30 cm JH11

7.

Riparian Rites, 2017

Oil on canvas on board
50 x 50 cm JH21

Sources

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Beds Are Burning by Midnight Oil from the album **Diesel and Dust** (1986)

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