

Mariam Tawfik

→ *THIS ARTWORK WAS BORN IN IRAQ IN THE YEAR 2095, 2026*

THIS ARTWORK WAS BORN IN IRAQ IN THE YEAR 2095 is conceived by Mariam Tawfik as a speculative text written by one of her descendants seventy years into the future. The work unfolds as the remembered voice of an elder, recounting a story in which the world's largest taniwha swallows the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, while its tail dams the Waikato. With no other option, she is forced to use the taniwha's back as a time-machine bridge to return home.

Passed down through generations, this story traverses time, memory, and identity—spaces in which meanings are both lost and found, entwining the storyteller and the reader. Uncertainty permeates the narrative: where does it begin? Does it ever end? And where, ultimately, is home?

The work is emblematic of the period following the Gulf War (1991), during Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq. It references the damming of the Tigris and Euphrates ordered by Hussein as a punitive measure against communities involved in uprisings against the Ba'athist regime.

Within Te Ao Māori, and through pūrākau, taniwha are understood as powerful supernatural beings that inhabit rivers, caves, and oceans. They are interpreted through multiple mātauranga: in some contexts, feared as dangerous; in others, revered as kaitiaki (guardians). In Tawfik's work, the taniwha operates

across both lenses. It becomes a symbol of cyclical systems of control and protection—structures that claim to safeguard some while inflicting harm on others, and that disregard Indigenous relationships with land and water.

The narrative ultimately shifts toward a cyclical timewarp of destruction, radicalism, and regeneration, engaging mana wāhine as a force that moves between, resists, and reshapes these dualities. Past, present, and future collapse into one another, mirroring the ongoing repetition of colonial, authoritarian, and extractive violences across geographies.

In a contemporary political landscape marked by a three-way coalition government in Aotearoa that compromises the integrity of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, alongside the ongoing crises in the Middle East, Tawfik's work underscores the urgency of art, sound, and language that respond to local environments. Such practices are vital in expanding audience perspectives on religion, sovereignty, migration, refuge, land, and the liminal, ever-shifting notion of home.

Artwork caption

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Te Tuhi Billboards (Pakuranga and Parnell Station)
inkjet billboard prints

commissioned by Te Tuhi, Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland

About the artist

Mariam Tawfik is a multidisciplinary artist, sound designer and filmmaker based in Aotearoa, whose work navigates the intersectionality of faith, memory, and land. Her sound designs serve as a drum for storytelling, inviting the listener to engage with the echoes of ancestral lands and spiritual realms. Her work calls for a reclamation of space and an invitation to collectively explore alternative narratives of our past, present and future.