

Kia Ora Whaea

text by Turumeke Harrington

content warning: strong language

Kia Ora Whaea. I don't think I've said that out loud since I was at high school. I am not sure what that says about me, but I just whispered it to my computer and my friend's dog (underfoot constantly, maybe the only dog I like) and it sounded unfamiliar.

Kia Ora Whaea. One time at a party one of my best and most challenging friends exclaimed, "*you don't have a maternal bone in your body!*" I don't think she likes that I bring that up, it was certainly more a - funny - thing - to - say - in - the - moment rather than I - think - this - is - true - about - you, but some things have a way of sticking with you. Don't I? What's a maternal bone? I like to draw pictures of bones. I might have started using them in my work to sneak a bunch of dicks into an exhibition, but there's more than that. The skeleton, the frame. Heavy Bones. I made a work last year called Pink Mist (Māmā/Papa).. Viscera, grounding, *big and strong*.

Kia Ora Whaea. Damn, I was just thinking what it would be like if someone said that to me! Oi! I ain't a whaea. *Not me, not yet!* I'm almost pleading.

Kia Ora Whaea. I wonder if Pia has even said these words? Her school is modern, teachers with first names. Not a kura kaupapa but they're trying their best (should I have tried harder?). Should she have said these words? I am trying

to give her as much as I can (am I?) but maybe she needs to be in more places where she needs to use more words like, *Kia Ora Whaea*. It's complicated?

Kia Ora Whaea. Back to my maternal bone(r)s. Too much information, sure, but when I was pregnant (I'd like to use hapū but I wasn't, I was *pregnant*. It's *complicated*)... I don't actually know how to continue that sentence, I got distracted thinking about language and if I should apply *hapū* to my experience retrospectively...

Kia Ora Whaea. Faaaaaaaaaaaaarrrrr outtt, have you met my māmā?

Kia Ora Whaea. MY MUM IS WAY COOLER THAN ME.

Kia Ora Whaea. Faaaaaaaaaaaaarrrrr outtt, have you met my pēpē?

Kia Ora Whaea. MY BABY IS WAY COOLER THAN ME.

Kia Ora Whaea. What a sandwich to be in.

Kia Ora Whaea. I remember feeling incredulous (I just wanted to test that word out, I could just as easily use 'I remember thinking that's fucking bullshit') when people who'd given birth would describe the experience as transcendent, amazing, euphoric. *Have you tried getting really high?* I was young (I *am* young, not Whaea...) I was depressed, I was manic and I didn't really have a purpose.

Kia Ora Whaea. My māmā wasn't meant to be there, but she ended up in the room. Fuck that. Sometimes I think it was more disturbing to watch me give birth than to actually go through it. But she was there, ghost white by the end of it all. I was so angry that it was happening at all. I mean, I know *how* it happened. She came into the world as she meant to proceed. Full noise, big open eyes, ready to eat.

Kia Ora Whaea. Purpose. I think that's all any of us need, nē? A reason to be or to try? *A life worth living* (drinking the Kool-Aid is not the phrase I am looking for, eating the Raro straight from the packet maybe.)

Kia Ora Whaea. My friend reminds me that we live our lives in seasons. She is a tough fucking māmā. And so, as seasons go, I am coming to the end of another. Like Spring (though we're coming into Autumn) it followed a rough Winter and, like Spring, with it came all sorts of unexpected new life.

In 2021 I submitted the text *Playing nicely with others* as part of my MFA. I met someone last year, an unwitting shepherd (*spring, lambs*) and I gave it to them to read as a kind of shortcut. Even though it is publicly available it felt like a big thing to trust them with. Part of it records a few conversations I had with P. She must have been about 5 years old...

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Turumeke: So, I want to talk to you about the art show. This show I made for a lot of reasons. But I was thinking a lot about Kiri and I was thinking a lot about Jono

and I was thinking a lot about you when I made it. Do you remember that we went to Moeraki? And we talked a lot about our whakapapa and about our whānau and we went to look at where our land was... So I took you to Moeraki. And we went and we talked about whānau, and we went and we met David Higgins. And we went to the rūnaka office in Moeraki? We talked about Ema Turumeke and we talked about how she had her children there and how she lived there. And we went to the beach, we had a look at all of the shells. And we spent a lot of time in that place? Do you know why we went to Moeraki?

Pia: No.

T: So we went to Moeraki, because Kiri has been doing all of this research into our whakapapa and collecting all the



Pia on, what was, whānau land, Moeraki, 2021
Note the trailer skeleton and the tī kōuka.
Image by Turumeke Harrington.

stories from where we come from. And then I thought, I'm your māmā and I need to teach you about where we come from. And part of that is making sure that we listen to Kiri and that we have these cool opportunities to be all together, support each other and learn about it ourselves and spend some time in the place where we come from. And I just wonder what you thought about that. Trying to learn about where we come from?

P: Yeah, it was really helpful.

T: Helpful? What did you learn?

P: Well, I learned quite a lot of things. I made new friends.

T: So we had this hei tiki made –



Māheno, 2021.
Lewis Tamihana Gardiner

P: Do you know the story of the seven Matariki stars? Yeah, so one of them, Ururangi, the little sister. She made a kite, pāua shells are the eyes. Now, I like how this is like versioned the same as it –

T: Oh, coz Māheno's got pāua shell eyes?

P: Yeah.

T: She's beautiful, isn't it? But what do you think about the idea that this taonga, instead of just being the object itself, it's about what it represents. Like it's about looking after your whānau and it's about having something to give to you when I die or what you might have and then you will look after it for your whānau? And it's like a way of thinking about the future, where we're thinking 'okay, It's good to try and contribute. It's good to try and make for a better future because look at this. We can hand this down for our whānau, same with the song that they [Kommi and Marlon] wrote. That's another taonga that we can learn and pass down. What do you think about...

P: Sorry, I'm just getting a closer look into the eyes.

T: You like the eyes? Gorgeous eh. Pretty spectacular.

P: Like, so when you get it, it's a brand new one. Why are the eyes so dirty?

T: Because they're made of shell and she is made of whalebone. It's not like plastic or anything, it's not a new material. She's from the ocean, which is actually quite cool, right? Because we love kaimoana and we were in Moeraki and we were talking a lot about,

you know what seafood we get from there including kōura. So this Māheno, she's from the ocean. She's not pounamu. She's whalebone. Beautiful eyes, eh?

P: Yeah.

T: Actually, now that you've zoomed in I'm looking at them and I'm looking at her – look her eyes are kind of like the spiky, the beads, you know like the whetū [stars] and the tī kōuka in the front gallery with the red thread. You know how they're spiky and her eyes are spiky too, that's pretty cool. Look at this beautiful niho, the notches. What are you thinking about?

P: I just want a really big zoom into the eyes.

T: I guess with this conversation I'm trying to... Have you heard of a thing called accountability?

P: No, I haven't.

T: Do you want me to tell you kind of what I think it means? It's about taking responsibility for your actions. And it's about doing things. And when you say 'Hey, I made this artwork. I've been thinking about my daughter. I've been thinking about what I want to teach her'. It's all well and good to say that but is it actually achieving that?

Is it actually of interest or is actually helping my daughter learn about things in the world? So just in this conversation, and with the conversations I have with other people, it's about practising a kind of accountability, which is a funny thing to think about when you have an idea like artists can just make their own work and it doesn't matter whether other people like it or not, but it's not really about whether you like the artwork, it's more just when I say I made this artwork because I'm trying to learn about things and teach them to my daughter. Like are you learning things, do you think? Like, am I doing it right in your eyes?

P: (sigh) Yeah! You're doing it greeeat.

T: You just don't talk to me anymore.

P: I do!

T: It's a funny word though, accountability.

P: Accountability. Never heard of it.

T: I just described it to you, what it means.

P: Yeah, okay.

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*[Full exegesis can be accessed here:
<https://mro.massey.ac.nz/items/0415f15d-0de8-4537-9d12-8226b9cf6873>]*

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