



Image: Wai Ching Chan

South Auckland 'born 'n' bred' **Bronte Perry** has an artist practice based in Tāmaki Makaurau, Perry's work is invested in utilising the notions around whakapapa, whanaungatanga to analyse religious trauma. They have recently graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts Honours, from the Elam School of Fine Arts at the University of Auckland. Throughout their practice Perry has drawn from their lived experiences to explore socio-political contexts through immersive installation and sculpture.

The River Remains; ake tonu atu

Bronte Perry

[3]

A desire for elsewhere

mild steel, river rock, oioi, carex, muka, soil, linen.
2018

A desire for elsewhere reflects Perry's ongoing research into the role of Christianity as a contemporary apparatus of the settler state that folds past and present trauma into one another. Focusing on three on convergent threads, they aim to understand the connection between the establishment of the first inland Christian mission at Te Waimate, the building of a Kingdom Hall at Waima and leaving the religious order of the Jehovah's Witnesses in their early teens.

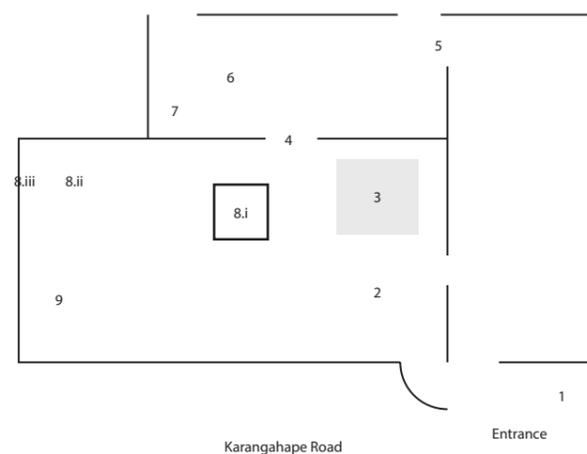
Public Programme

Saturday 16 September 2pm - 3pm

Group Artists Talk

Thursday 11 October 6pm - 9pm

Artweek: *Electric Night*



Artspace NZ
Level 1 / 300 Karangahape Rd.
Newton, Auckland
Aotearoa New Zealand

A desire for elsewhere

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My heart is like stagnant water, that which is unlike the streams that flow down to feed the kumera.¹

In the small valley of Waima, Tamati Wharerau, along with his cousin, lead the construction of a hall for a growing congregation in the south Hokianga.²In that moment of placement when the timber slabs met concrete and earth, the Hall initiated a new relationship between the body, whenua and architecture for all those that would pass through it.

Te Tai Tokerau had already felt the burden of 136 years of church missions before the Kingdom Hall at Waima was built, the permanency of this alternate domination weaved both new and existing threads of religious trauma amongst already wounded bodies. The ideologies of these institutions did not emerge from the architecture itself, it operated as a critical site in the implementation of structural settler violence. They instigate a dissonance between the flesh and soul, between the desire for a good heart³ and the love of an existing one. The American evangelical routine of the Jehovah's Witnesses differed little from the previous missionaries. They attempted to translate inherited mamae into sinful desires and apocalyptic anxieties. It's forms and functions continued a generational dislocation which had manifested itself into the evolving structures of the wider 'Christian Mission'. Armageddon and heaven on earth were offered as gifts in exchange for hegemony. Door to door publishers would say, "worship not your dead, nor swallow pebbles".⁴

I want to be buried back through the waters.

A small distance from the hall, Wharerau's congregation would come to stand in their bare feet on the banks of the awa. Dressed in their best wears, they would watch as a congregant would be buried beneath the waters of the Waima. It was a symbolic burial. A gesture that gave to the water a part of the self that was lost to a momentary death. As those subjects were resurrected from the river they were forced to consider which heart they kept, for an annexation had occurred. The river had become an extension of the Kingdom Hall as an assimilative apparatus. A site of performance that attempted to 'civilise' those bodies through a ritual settler cleansing.

From our baptism, we walk uprightly before you, then the words of God will spring up within us: for you desire us to live as in the presence of God.... [yet] How am I to be rid of this distracting native heart?⁵

The heart is held at ransom in exchange for the end of days when they say the dead will rise again to greet us.

¹ Extract from a letter written by a man named Wariki To the Rev. W. Yates of the Te Waimate Mission in 1836.

² First Kingdom hall to be built in New Zealand.

³ An old western conception relating to a form of Christian consciousness.

⁴ Early missionaries believed Māori to have feed pebbles to their pēpē in order to make their hearts hard and cold.

⁵ Extracted from a letter sent by Sarah Waru to Rev. W. Yates of the Te Waimate mission in 1836.