

THE PHYSICS ROOM

CONTEMPORARY ART SPACE

Te puku o te taniwha

Aj Fata, Kahurangiariki Smith and Tyrone Te Waa

Curated by Aj Fata

Exhibition runs: 4 August – 3 September 2023

What does a taniwha feed on? What does a taniwha listen to down the Waikato awa? What dance moves does a taniwha have? And what if that taniwha swallowed The Physics Room?

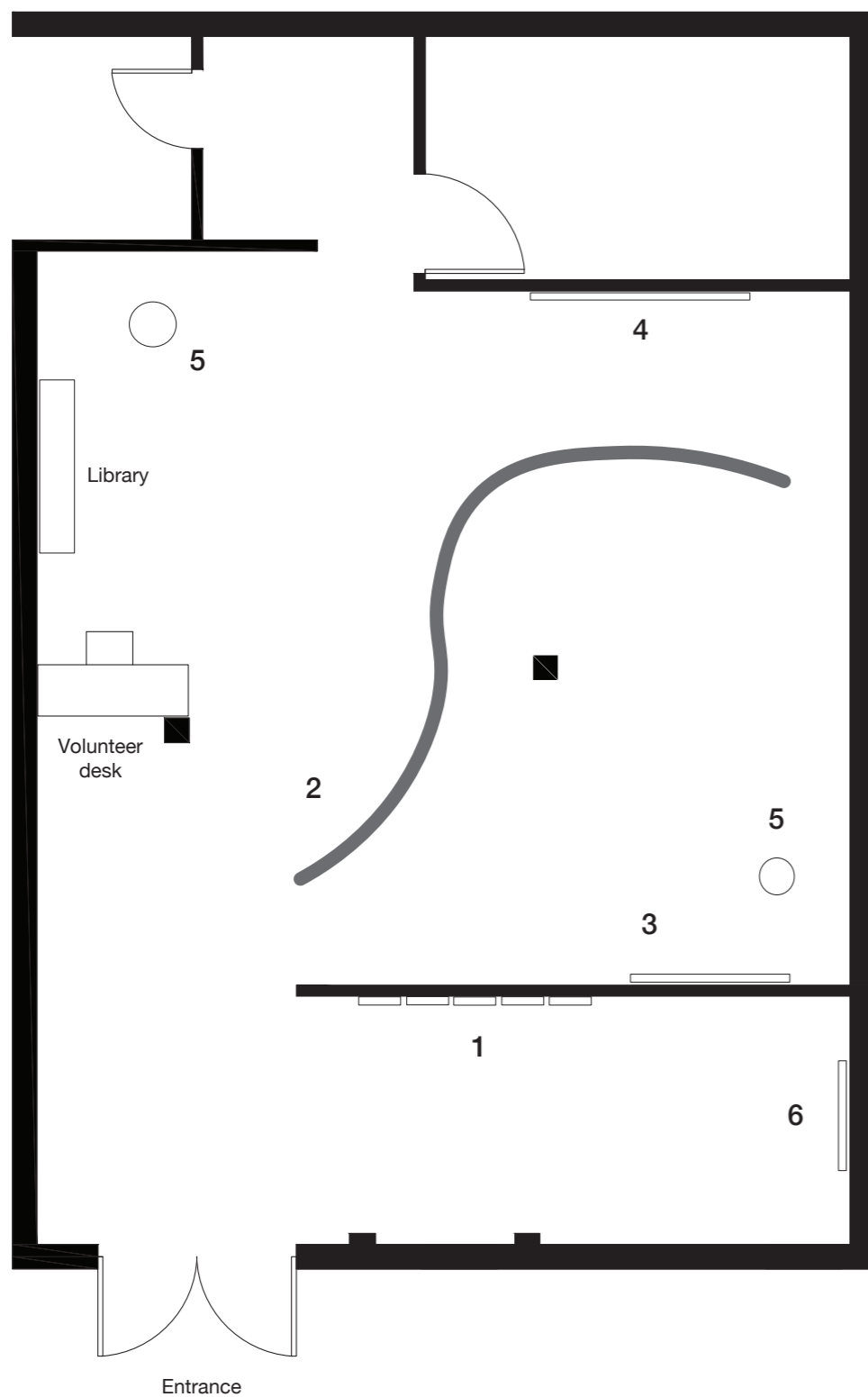
These are some of the pātai underpinning this exhibition, initiated by Aj Fata, whose work sits alongside that of Kahurangiariki Smith and Tyrone Te Waa. The three artists inhabit the gallery as a space of transformation: where states can shift, collective energy and intimacy can build, and difficulty can be processed. “The puku, where sinking intuition creeps from the inside out. An embodiment of our conscience. It is a place of constant movement and sound. A dance between mauri and waste”, writes Fata. Influenced by club culture, dance music and other forms of popular media, and grounded in mātauranga Māori, Fata, Smith and Te Waa’s practices propose a present and future where shapeshifting and fluidity of identities are an expected and accepted part of life, and where the puku is at the centre of our being, physically, spiritually, and psychologically.

This puku is a place of motion. The exhibition includes a video game and LED light work (Kahurangiariki Smith), a moving image work, an audio track and wire sculpture (Aj Fata), and the many-limbed tinana of Tyrone Te Waa’s *Fleapit*, who meets you at the threshold and arcs through the gallery. Watching over the space, moving through it like a backbone, *Fleapit* was initially

made for a club night at Basement Theatre in Tāmaki Makaurau. For this project *Fleapit* has grown longer, and is suspended in the air so that as you walk through the gallery you move between limbs, some of which prop or lean themselves against the architecture of the room.

Fata’s *Wairepo* is a grounding work for the project. The video tells a story of whakawhanaungatanga between Fata and whenua. The work brings the whenua into the space through a fast-paced stream of images which acknowledge the presence and vitality of the wetlands and awa. *Wairepo* is located to the right as you enter the gallery, beside a window which opens onto the carpark outside; a point of meeting and ongoing interaction with the swampy whenua of Ōtautahi, and the awa Ōtākaro. Five felted works by Te Waa, also in the gallery’s green-walled first space, suggest different modes of taniwha-being: *Taniwha Guru*, *Healing waters for our Sissy Taupiri*, *Swamp Hen*. *Kānga Pirau*, referring to fermented corn porridge, completes the series.

Smith’s work, *What if my best friend was a taniwha?*, a video game developed and coded by the artist, is a quest for hauora or wellness. The game is one outcome of the artist’s regular walks along the Waikato awa where she lives, and offers different ways to think about what contributes to being well: rongoā, soju, friendship, and the awa



itself. You are invited to play the game, collecting tokens (soju, kawakawa, wai) to increase your hauora. Facing the video game, on the opposite side of the room is *Hina*, a pink-glowing LED work, a mata or face. Smith has written (of an earlier iteration of this work),

Hina is [a] constant throughout time and across oceans. Hina has known many names: Hina, Ina, Sina, Hine. As Hine, she is known as the female element embodying mana wāhine.¹ As Hina-i-fa'auru-va'a she is the OG navigator, daring to travel beyond the moana to the skies and become Hina-aa-i-te-marama.² Hina, also called Hinauri, is one of the many names for the moon³—she's watched over us mai rā anō. Hina—the constant, the ever changing, who pushes and pulls the moana, who ripples across the water on a dark night. No doubt our tūpuna looked up at her in those quiet moments, as the waves licked at the waka, and she looked back. He mihi aroha tēnei ki a ia.

Fata's audio work intermittently fills the space like water, moving through different phases of energy. An invitation to shift your focus from looking, reading, understanding things in external ways, this is a koha to the body and other senses. Stand, sit, or lie still in the space and you can feel the sound in your body: a form of listening with more than your ears. Completing the space, *Hinaki Taniwha Hikuroa*, sparkling in silver threads and raw grey wire, is suspended in both corners—or perhaps it snakes through the ceiling by the library, to reappear at *Hina*'s side. Based on the form of the hīnaki or eel trap, this sculpture could also reference a portal, a chrysalis, or an oesophagus. These are structures that enable change—digestion, morphing, resting—in anticipation of powerful re-emergence. As a whole the show recognises the deep connection between the puku and the heart, as held in the whakataukī, *Ahea kua kī te puku, kua kī te ngakau hoki*.

LIST OF WORKS

1 From left:

Tyrone Te Waa
Swamp Hen, 2023
wool, stretcher
460 x 240mm

Taniwha Guru, 2023
wool, stretcher
325 x 230mm

Healing Waters our Sissy Taupiri, 2023
wool, stretcher
450 x 310mm

B1 and B2, 2023
wool, stretcher
340 x 310mm

Kānga Pirau, 2023
wool, stretcher
260 x 310mm

2 Tyrone Te Waa

Fleapit, 2023
stockings, work gloves, fabric, thread, bells,
foam chips, wool

3 Kahurangiariki Smith

Hina, 2022
8mm LED neon, acrylic, aluminium and mixed
media
1400 x 1000 x 20 mm

4 Kahurangiariki Smith

What if my best friend was a taniwha?, 2023
video game

5 Aj Fata

Hīnaki Taniwha Hikuroa, 2023
two parts: wire and silver thread

6 Aj Fata

Wairepo, 2023
moving image
3:12 mins, looped

Aj Fata

Puku playlist, 2023
samples
E mihi ana ki a Rāhara Tito-Taylor mō ngā
tāonga pūoro
E mihi ana ki a Te Kaahu mō te waiata "Te Kaahu
Rangi"
single channel audio
12:04 mins

1 Aroha Yates-Smith, *Hine! E Hine!: Rediscovering the feminine in Maori spirituality* (Kirikiriroa: University of Waikato, 1998).
2 Nālanī Wilson-Hokowhitu, *Ka Makana* (Kirikiriroa: Hālawai Publishing, 2019).
3 Aroha Yates-Smith, *ibid.*

