

A dazzling crystal waka by artist Reuben Paterson to be presented at Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki in July



Image credit:
Reuben Paterson at his studio,
2021. Photo: Jennifer French

Made from hundreds of shimmering crystals, a 10-metre-high waka by artist Reuben Paterson will be revealed at Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki on Thursday 8 July.

Commissioned by Auckland Art Gallery and Edmiston Trust, Reuben Paterson has created the major new sculpture that will rise vertically out of the Gallery’s forecourt pool.

Paterson (Ngāti Rangitīhi, Ngāi Tūhoe, Tūhourangi) says the sculpture, made of 595 iridescent crystals, navigates a spectacular journey from Papatūānuku into the embrace of Ranginui and will cast a galaxy of stars over the pool.

‘As the crystals illuminate the Gallery in rainbow refractions, the waka appears to venture skyward, seemingly levitating above the forecourt pool,’ says Paterson.

Paterson says his inspiration for the crystalline sculpture originated in the well-known legend of a phantom waka that appeared at Lake Tarawera 10 days before the eruption of Mt Tarawera in 1886.

‘In the early hours of 10 June 1886, our ancestral mountains Wāhanga, Ruawāhia and Tarawera split apart, spewing forth millions of tonnes of ash and debris.

By floating this crystal waka above the Gallery’s pool, he appears magical – an apparition that floats in the sky while having a narrative linked closely to our own history. He guides us as an escort into unknown or unmapped territories, in much same way as the waka of our very descent and the migrational journeys to Aotearoa,’ he says.

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Hovering above the Gallery's forecourt pool like a compass needle in vertical orientation, the magnificent waka suggests navigation to worlds beyond our own. It also refers to navigators' use of stars to traverse the vast Pacific Ocean to Aotearoa.

Combining references to natural and supernatural realms, the sculpture draws upon Māori cosmology and creation narratives. It also has as a personal resonance for Paterson as his Ngāti Rangithi kaumātua describe their iwi, who descend from the Te Arawa waka of the Bay of Plenty, as 'Te Heketanga-a-rangi', those who descend from the celestial heavens, in reference to their tūpuna, Ohomairangi.

Gallery Director Kirsten Lacy says Reuben Paterson has created an exceptional new work.

'This ambitious commission, created with the generous support of Edmiston Trust, is the latest development in the artist's career-long fascination with the scientific, material and metaphysical properties of light,' says Lacy.

Lacy says it was always intended that a sculpture would be located in the Gallery's pool, welcoming visitors at the entrance of the gallery.

'This work will create a spectacular display of refracted light right across the Gallery's forecourt, and complete the entrance to our much loved Gallery,' she says.

Chair of Edmiston Trust, Dayle, Lady Mace, says the Edmiston Trust is committed to supporting local and international artists to create major sculptural works for the people of Auckland.

'The Edmiston Trust is delighted to enable a leading New Zealand artist to create a significant new work, and we're thrilled that Reuben Paterson's work will greet visitors to Auckland Art Gallery for years to come.'

**For more information, high-res images
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