

TĀTAI WHETŪ: CLUSTER OF STARS

A world made up of symbols and time

Chantel Matthews

When I grew up, looking to the night sky for guidance wasn't a thing. Instead, indicators of time were visible in the suburban streetlights, signaling when it was time to go home for dinner after playing at the neighbour's until dark. Homes with a TV were greeted with "Goodnight Kiwi" to signal that broadcasts were coming to an end. Then, awakened by the clinking sound of glass bottles delivered by the morning milkman. These nostalgic memories of growing up in the 1980s are set against a turbulent backdrop, with the country in the midst of cultural reform.

Fast-track to today with the reclamation of Mātauranga Māori, and specifically with the recognition of our Māori New Year, signalled by Matariki, we can now view the sky with a wider mauri lens. Stars are now beacons from the other side, and time is a collapsing shield between us and our ancestors. It becomes a space guided by all things cosmic rather than systemic logic, but a metaphorical waka that connects us to our past, present, and future. Looking up has become a symbolic and ritualistic gesture of reflection and remembrance.

In *The Woven Universe* by tohunga, scholar, healer, minister and philosopher Rev. Māori Marsden (1924-1993) writes,

The World of Symbol is a deliberate creation of the human mind; man creates symbols to depict, represent and illustrate some other perceived reality. Words, formulae, forms, ritualistic ceremonies, legend, and myth are created by the human mind as maps, models, prototypes, and paradigms by which the mind can grasp, understand, and reconcile the worlds of sense perception and the real world behind that.

In every culture, there are exclusive groups who disseminate their knowledge using secret symbols known only to the initiates. Secret societies, professional groups and certain religious groups use secret signs, rituals and legends to safeguard that knowledge from the general public. And unless one knows and understands the keys to unlock that knowledge, then the reality to which the symbols refer remain a mystery. [1]

This exhibition explores Matariki as markers and makers across time that hold meanings and messages from the past, present, and future. In Te Ao Māori, Te Korekore refers to the realm between non-being and potential being, a floodgate that acts as a void, allowing the stars to coexist with us. It is the Nanny in the kitchen, listening to her Mokos' music or finding joy in the warmth that can only come from the

loving embrace between a child and mother. It is the landlord's chair, holding those accountable in a house that doesn't play by the rules. It is hidden in our patterns and symbols from the other side, the Karanga to the four winds blowing gracefully in the sky, calling to our ancestral stars: we are here, the waka is ready, and the moment to rise above and see the answers has never been more straightforward.

TĀTAI WHETŪ: CLUSTER OF STARS is a gathering of identifiably Māori metaphors and symbolic mysteries that are stitched together by nostalgic markers that not only transform my memories of clinking milk bottles but remind me of how far we have come. This is the power of symbols when met with divine timing and a space that brings such stories together. It is the ability to shift and evoke time. It is to awaken the old and embrace the new. It is, as artist Reuben Paterson notes, an opportunity to "lift our gaze skyward, inviting us not to remain beneath them, but to rise through them – reclaiming the stars as ancestral pathways, futures, and the realms of possibility."