

Brett Graham

Properties of Peace and Evil

July 12–July 29

Parlour is pleased to present a solo exhibition of new work by Brett Graham from July 12 through July 29, 2017. Titled *Properties of Peace and Evil*, the exhibition thematically explores the Battle of Ōmarunui that took place in Hawke's Bay on October 12, 1866.

Properties of Peace and Evil responds to Jono Rotman's recent exhibition at Parlour, *Ōmarunui*. Here Graham looks to historical correspondence and artefacts to provide an alternative account of the events that shaped Ōmarunui.

On October 12, 1866, 200 militiamen and a similar number from local hapū surrounded a party of approximately 100 Pai Mārire followers, comprised mainly of Ngāti Hineuru. After an invitation to surrender was rebuffed, the occupied kāinga was besieged. Many Ngāti Hineuru were killed with the balance taken prisoner and exiled to the Chatham Islands, along with whānau who were taken prisoner at Herepoho near Pētane. Those events and the subsequent outcomes remain contentious, and many conflicting perspectives still exist.

Throughout his practice, Brett Graham has abstracted complex historical and cultural ideas into formally strong and compelling sculptural forms. His work engages in a dual dialogue of Maori and European histories whilst exploring materiality and form. Working at the intersection of ancient and contemporary beliefs, Graham's work investigates the transmission of culture and power relations.

Two five-metre tall paneled structures that occupy the main gallery floor are reminiscent of 'niu' poles that were the totem of the Pai Mārire faith. The site-specific works call to mind the stone obelisks that were erected at Pētane and Ōmarunui in 1916 by the veterans of the 'One Day War' and subsequently knocked over in the 1990s in an act of protest.

On the main viewing wall, four works on paper represent Archangels Michael Riki (Āriki) and Gabriel Rura (Ruler) as punisher and pacifier. Riki and Rura were often carved on the 'niu' cross arms or represented by flags as the deities of peace and war.

The public are invited to attend an opening reception for *Properties of Peace and Evil* on Wednesday, July 12 from 5.30pm—7pm at 306 Eastbourne Street East, Hastings.

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BRETT GRAHAM is a highly regarded New Zealand artist of Ngati Koroki iwi tribal Maori descent. Graham graduated from Elam School of Fine Arts in 1988 and subsequently completed an MFA at the University of Hawaii in 1991. He holds a PhD in Fine Arts from the University of Auckland. His work is held in prominent public and private collections.

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ARTIST STATEMENT

“To Mr. McLean,—

Te Rapaki, October 5, 1866.

We have received your letter brought by Noa and Edward (My Hamlin); we see that you are asking Yes. Do you listen, Peace is a property and evil is also a property. This is the answer to your question: One thought it that we have not yet been judged by you and the chides, since while we were on the road we were sent back by you. Now talking is at an end.

To Mr. McLean.

From us all.”

The elusive words above were written by the Pai Marire prophet Panapa of Ngati Hineuru, before the ‘Battle of Ōmarunui’, on the 12th, October 1866. The arrival of his party of Pai Mārire/Hauhau followers had raised the ire of colonial Napier and Donald McLean, as Superintendent of the Hawkes Bay Province had sent him a message asking him if the purpose of his expedition was for “evil or for good”.

The enigmatic nature of his statement has intrigued me and become the focus of these works, ‘monuments for the properties of Peace and Evil’. ‘Hauhau’ is synonymous with ‘evil’ in New Zealand history, it is difficult for me to reconcile this view with the practice of the ‘Pai Mārire’ (‘good and peaceful’) incantations which offer spiritual solace to my home marae of Pōhara and Maungatautari in the Waikato. Every player in the so called ‘battle’ of Ōmarunui made conscious choices, the consequences of which have been interpreted to be ‘good’ or ‘evil’, and every historian and artist who has engaged with this story has made choices too, whether or not to believe the dominant narrative or seek a new truth.

McLean chose to invite Ngati Hineuru to Napier and then to treat them as dangerous hostiles when they arrived. Panapa and his followers chose to put their faith in their religion and the good will of the authorities not to attack them when they chose not to surrender. Historians such as Cowan and Battersby chose to ignore the earlier correspondence between McLean and Panapa and perpetuate the myth that Panapa’s party had come to attack Napier. The Militia veterans of the affair chose to erect monuments in the belief that they had defended the town from a great ‘evil’. The mythology that the ‘kawanatanga’ chiefs and the crown had unified to crush a common foe lives on, and that the confiscation of Ngāti Hineuru land and that the survivors should be exiled to the Chathams was justified.

The two towers are reminiscent of ‘niu’ poles that were the totem of the Pai Mārire faith but also serve as reminders of the stone obelisks that were erected at Pētane and Ōmarunui in 1916 by the veterans of the ‘one day war’ and later smashed in the 1990’s. Rather than the gravitas of granite, they are clad in wood reminiscent of houses from the period, symbolic of the fact that the ‘Hauhau’ had occupied not a redoubt or fortified position but were in a ‘papa kainga’, a domestic dwelling unsuitable for defense. As monuments to ‘Peace and Evil’ they not remarkably different, reflective of how dichotomies can often look the same depending on one’s perspective.

The pendent images represent Archangels Michael Riki (Āriki) and Gabriel Rura(Ruler), as punisher and pacifier, that were sometimes carved on the niu cross arms or represented by flags, as the deities of war and peace. Acceptance of the dual nature of man has also been used to explain Panapa's elusive description of the 'properties of peace and evil'.

Panapa's response to McLean was originally written in Maori and reads quite differently to the summary English translation that was seen by McLean and Whitmore.

"Kia ma

te Rapaki 8 Oketopa /66

Tenei kua tae mai tau reta na noa raua ko & Rueti i kawe mai kua kite matou e na ana koe, ae kia rongo mai koe he taonga tonu te pai & he taonga tonu ti kino, moto iu te na ki, ta matou mahana hoki kaore ano matou kia whakawahia e koutou ko nga Rangitira k ate mea i te ara ano matou kia mai e haere ana awhakahoki noa koe he oi kua mutu te korero.

Na matou katoa"

The last line 'kua mutu te korero' which is a colloquialism akin to 'that is all for now' was translated as the definitive 'now talking is at an end'. The unequivocal finality of the english was 'tantamount to a declaration of war' (p191 The Mohaka Ki Ahuriri Report) and sealed the fate of Panapa and his followers, who were either killed or exiled to a distant island.

How we choose to remember them is up to us.

Kua mutu te korero,

Brett Graham. Ngāti Koroki Kahukura.