

A koru is a trajectory

Heidi Brickell

A koru is a trajectory is an exhibition originating from Heidi Brickell's 2023 Rita Angus Residency, jointly organised by Enjoy and the Rita Angus Cottage Trust. During Brickell's residency, she spent time connecting with her whenua, researching her legendary tūpuna Kupe and Tara and collecting rākau from Ōtaki and rimurapa from the shores of Te Raekaihau. In utilising these offerings from Tangaroa and Tāne, the artist has collaborated with the atua, whenua and moana.

Te Moana-nui-a-Kiwa is the great connector for people of the Pacific. The great Tongan/Fijian academic Epeli Hau'ofa posited the idea of the ocean being a way for us to connect instead of an impediment we need to overcome. Viewing the moana as “a sea of islands” rather than “islands in the sea”¹ radically alters our relationship to this place by emphasising the importance of the moana as our home. Brickell's mahi toi validates this idea as inherently Indigenous. She began the residency by learning pūrākau pertaining to her iwi and studying various places named by or after her tūpuna Kupe and Tara, however became increasingly concerned with ongoing ecological and economical disasters. Flooding in her home city Tāmaki Makaurau and Cyclone Gabrielle sweeping her rohe in Te Ika-a-Māui brought about an examination of the micro and macro.

In this exhibition, rākau sanded by Tangaroa has been lovingly twined by Brickell in varying shades of blue and green, resulting in contorted sculptural forms that embody the relationship between sea and land—Tangaroa and Tāne. The state of rimurapa in the moana is linked to that of rākau on land. New Zealand Geographic writer Bill Morris asserts that,

Once, the forests in New Zealand's ocean were mirrored by lush forests on shore. When those trees were felled, soils began eroding. Since World War II, the intensification of farming—and its expansion into more marginal areas of hill country—has increased the amount of sediment running into the ocean.²

This pollution causes a lack of light in the moana, adversely affecting the rimurapa.

Rimurapa washed ashore has been taken into the artist's care and warped to reflect its tumultuous journey from the moana to the whenua, much like tūpuna Māori who navigated Te Moana-nui-a-Kiwa. Artworks in this exhibition are spirals, anthropomorphic forms and twisted masses. At times, works Brickell has moulded into an ideal shape seem to have grown a mind of their own and warped the way they want to. They are suspended midair—some thick and dense, while others are thin and dark. Their tendrils reach outward, mimicking their life at sea. The rimurapa that Brickell works with has important ecological functions including feeding and housing marine life and cooling the ocean. Arranged in sequences that allow for manuhiri to weave in between artworks, the artist has transformed Enjoy's gallery to reflect the rimurapa forests in the moana that are steadily declining.

¹ Epeli Hau'ofa, “Our Sea of Islands”, in *The Contemporary Pacific* 6, no. 1, (Spring 1994): 152.

² Bill Morris, “The Kelp”, in *New Zealand Geographic* issue 176 (July-August: 2022).

A koru is a trajectory is a phrase that came to Brickell as she considered how the koru form that pervades mātauranga Māori is the fundamental shape of physics that the body comes to learn how to weather.