

TALES FROM THE MĀORILAND: THE SCOUTING PARTY

Bruce Jackson



FROM 17TH NOVEMBER, 2023

 KINGSROY

106 DEVON STREET WEST, NEW PLYMOUTH

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My heartfelt gratitude to Whaea Te Rau Oriwa Davis (Ngāruahine Rangi) whose bountiful enthusiasm, generous korero, and huge aroha has helped me navigate this project and helped with my understanding that history is a many faceted thing.

Te mauri ki runga
Te mauri ki raro
Te mauri ki roto
Te mauri ki waho
Rire rire
Hau Pai Mārire

Ngā mihi, ngā mihi, ngā mihi kia koe Kui Te Rau Oriwa mō to awihi, tō manāki mai kia au.
Whāia te iti Kahurangi, ki te tuohu koe, me te maunga tītōhea o Taranaki.

Nau mai, haere mai

TALES FROM THE MĀORILAND: THE SCOUTING PARTY

An exhibition of paintings by Bruce Jackson

It is truly an honour and privilege to bring you this collection of paintings to Kingsroy Gallery. Not only are these works significant to our shared history and culture, but they showcase the unique and extraordinary talent of Bruce Jackson as a visual narrator and artist.

At Kingsroy, I like to present shows and artists that are provocative. As visitors step into my space I wish for them to be engaged, delighted and even challenged. Jackson's series of paintings fit this brief precisely, as they explore alternative narratives of colonisation in Aotearoa.

The Tales from the Māoriland collection began in 2007 when Bruce returned to Taranaki and began to paint. Content up until now to paint for himself and his family, Bruce has now decided to share his work to a wider audience. This will be the first time any of his work has left his private studio and I am honoured to dedicate the closing months of this year to an extended showing of the collection.

I invite you to learn more, both from this catalogue and in the gallery, as you examine the paintings and read about the artist who has dedicated many years to bring these paintings so beautifully to fruition.

Luella Raj
DIRECTOR, KINGSROY GALLERY

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From the artist

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

Tales from the Māoriland, is a series of paintings which reimagine the colonial history of Aotearoa in various ways. The social intricacies of the land wars in the 1860's are a particularly crucial aspect of the work. The paintings speculate on documented relations between the colonial government and allied Māori on one side, and Māori and Māori-allied settlers on the other. Over the past decade, this (sometimes undocumented) period of history has become, a unique artistic opportunity to reimagine pre-settled land. Through predominantly large scale paintings, the interweaving of histories, pictures and stories from this period, as told by both local Iwi and Pākehā, become rewritten.

The namesake of this series, Māoriland, was a term used by Pākehā in the colonial period as an advertorial slogan. Māoriland misrepresented Aotearoa as a place of racial harmoniousness where both Pākehā and Māori lived at ease under a colonial government; however the paintings in this series signal otherwise.

The unifying theme of this series is the enchanted natural landscape of Aotearoa, a landscape that has an accompanying mythos that is alien to Pākehā colonisers. Pākehā settlers act as a violent introduction to Enlightenment thought and action. Throughout the series, Māori and the primordial bush of Aotearoa enchant the icons and ideas of Pākehā, even as Pākehā exert their slow profanation of the wild. This theme of enchantment is explored through naive pictorial practices as found in early settler art and the figurative art within the painted Marae of the prophetic Māori faiths.

Bruce Jackson
2020

The Scouting Party

The Scouting Party is the third collection of works thus far in Jackson's Tales from the Māoriland. A key thread in the series is exploring the shifting nature of relationships that can occur with internal conflicts/civil wars. With wars between nations, the definition of the enemy is more well defined. With civil war however, the enemy is less easily defined, alliances can shift over time – Māori fought against Māori, and some Pākehā fought against Pākehā. At times there is peace and an uneasy truce across the land, at other times localised conflicts will flare up.

This series follows the journeys of Thomas McDonnell and Charles Heaphy, colonial soldiers traversing across the land, here again presented as both a Garden of Eden and Canaan – the promised land of the Israelites. McDonnell and Heaphy are presented as stand-ins for the viewer. Their faces are turned askance, towards the landscape, or present symbolically, allowing entry into the wondrous landscape of the myth infused pre-settled Aotearoa.

Once again, Archangels are used to represent Pai Mārire peoples and faith, however in this series perspective shifts between McDonnell/Heaphy, and Pai Mārire. This shifting of perspective centres the question of otherness present within this clashing of cultures, focusing on the unfolding nature of the relationship. At times this relationship is depicted as simmering with violence, at other times peace and union hover on the horizon.

The biblical story of Joshua and Caleb runs through this series as a theme that highlights the shifting of perspectives and plays with the opaque shield of othering present in the colonial wars. Pai Mārire's unique understanding of and identification with the Israelites becomes manifest in their imagined status as Archangels. The Scouting Party, however, muddies this reference by establishing McDonnell and Heaphy as uneasy stand-ins for Joshua and Caleb, scouting the land, and in the realm of giants.

Throughout Jackson's work, the Pai Mārire faith has been linked with the Israelites. In The Scouting Party this link has been inverted, now the Scouts are traveling a new land, up and down New Zealand. This series documents these travels, presenting them as an odyssey, filled with strange and ambiguous encounters with the Māori and the new land. This odyssey is not presented as a straightforward story, instead, moments are captured that exist inside the story, gaps that open out onto the ambiguous and ambivalent relationships that enact the land wars. In many ways The Scouting Party is a departure for Jackson, the paintings move out of Taranaki, with the scouting party themselves operating as vehicles to traverse landscapes both imagined and real.



Left bank, Waikato River – 2018/2020

Acrylic on canvas, 95 x 146cm

Sounds emanating from the inky darkness draw the scouts to the edge of the awa.



Arapae, Waikato, 2008/2020

Acrylic on canvas, 95 x 145cm

The rise of a new way in response to strangers walking the whenua. Cause and effect.

Roosting tree, Waikato, 2017

Acrylic on canvas, 95 x 145cm

Literally a celebration of a simple natural phenomenon. Below the scouts are oblivious to the wonderment above.





Ambuscade, 2020

Acrylic on canvas, 112.5 x 125cm

Sinister intent or a watching brief? Their scouts are oblivious to the dangers above.

Ongarue, 2021

Acrylic on canvas, 160 x 240cm

A wonderful hillside north of Ongarue. Easily missed.



Dawn, 2021

Acrylic on canvas, 85 x 145cm

A scene from north of Uruti. First noted on a change of light in winter where the white tree trunks shone.



Book of Numbers, 2022

Acrylic on canvas, 150 x 163cm

The scouts arm gives us the quandary. Wonderment or banishment.





The War Party, 2022

Acrylic on canvas, 92.5 x 134.5cm

Mainly assembled from scenes west of Lake Taupō, now peopled by marauding angels.



Dusk, 2022

Acrylic on canvas, 130 x 140cm

Like Dawn, the sinisteress that can come with a change of light



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