

Muchel
Marin
SCOTT

WRITING

Wānaga as process
2025.

In:
Women's Research
Wānanga

CONSUMED
[Exhibition Catalogue]

Catalogue design:
Caitlin Shepherd

ARTWORKS

Proof and Permit
2011

Coming of Age
2006

Pepeha
2009

Sion Ditons
2016

Self Portrait as a Nomad
2023

Nature/Nurture
2024

Say goodbye to
the too good mother
2025

Wānanga as Process

Rychèl Thérin Scott

Wānanga is a process of exploration, deliberation, learning, sharing and creating in commune with one another. This is a māori methodology, a way of working and a learning process, from Aotearoa New Zealand.

I am a Māori and Jèrriaise artist based in Vienna, Austria. Over the last three years, I have been employing wānanga methodologies within European art research projects and contexts to see if this methodology fosters positive outcomes outside of its community of origin. I will use māori terms throughout this paper, please find their english explanation in the glossary.

Wānanga is a process, an action, a sandbox, a place of learning, a community, a meeting, a workshop, a seminar, a discussion, a group task, a working bee, an exchange, a path of discovery (Mahuika & Mahuika, 2020).

For Māori, the use of the word wānanga is deeply rooted in learning - *te whare wānanga* refers to the customary “house of learning” (Smith S. P., Te Whatahoro H. T., 1913) and

many māori tertiary education centres take the name “*Te Wānanga o [Aotearoa / Raukawa / Awanuiāraangi...]*”.

Aotearoa New Zealand based artists Mataaho Collective talk about how they “wānanga” ideas out in their artistic practice (Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, 2021) - this refers to the act of exploring, discussing and deliberating an idea or subject in a group to reach a new idea, pathway, decision or outlet:

Kei te wānanga te hui i te take.

The gathering is considering the matter.

Wānanga is considered here as an activity, an active process of exploring and considering.

Further, we can say that the general purpose of the activity called ‘wānanga’ is the creation of new knowledge and understanding. When some one or some people are conducting wānanga, they are going through a process whose outcome is a new idea, a new understanding, new knowledge. This idea is reinforced in everyday parlance. For example, when we use a phrase like:

Wānanga as Process

I te ahatia e koe taku taonga?

kei te wānanga tātou i te pātai nei.

we are saying that:

we are considering/debating/analysing/exploring the question (before us).

The intention, of course, is to find out something new, to come to a new understanding or realisation.

Whilst the sense of ‘finding’ or ‘seeking’ is not made explicit in the term wānanga, it is nevertheless implied and well understood throughout the community of Māori language users. Hence, we can say that at a very simple and everyday level, wānanga is used to stand for a process by which we can come to some kind of new idea or understanding

I grew up going to wānanga of all kinds: whanau wānanga at Nanapop’s house to fix up the shed. Wānanga on the marae to plan the next family reunion. Wānanga weekend at another marae coz mum was teaching kindergarten teachers from all over Auckland how to speak māori. Wānanga at Aunty Pani’s house to make poi for everyone so we could

sing Paikea at the reunion. Wānanga for the adults because Uncle was redesigning the Wharekai which means us kids got to play out by the water tank and hunt for hōiho in the ngāhere.

These examples of wānanga are communal events, workshops, and group tasks, where people come together for a shared goal or purpose - fixing the shed, sharing te reo, making poi, learning a song, sharing and debating ideas, etc.

Being in Commune

These wānanga could be for one day or up to a few weeks long, depending on the project. If the wānanga runs into multiple days, it would often be held at a marae, enabling everyone to live, work, sleep and eat altogether as a family, with everyone in the group pitching in to help with cooking, tidying up and childcare, alongside accomplishing the primary purpose of the wānanga as a group.

Wānanga as Process

Rychèl Thérin Scott

The practice of being in commune to be in dialogue with one another, to make community decisions, to complete tasks, and to share and gain knowledge is normal within Māori communities where working together within and across whanau, hapu and iwi networks is part of the way we do things. Many whakataukī speak to this practice of community in action, here are a few of my favourites:

Nāu te rourou, nāku te rourou, ka ora ai te iwi.

With your food basket and my food basket the people will thrive.

Mā whero, mā pango ka oti ai te mahi.

With red and black the work will be complete.

He rau ringa e oti ai.

Many hands make light work (Inspiring Communities, 2022).

In my experience of living in Europe, the level of communal engagement and practice across familial and professional networks of connection which occurs within Māori spaces is unusual and alien to many Europeans.

I think it is fair to say that the nuclear family, religion, work, education models, neoliberal economics and patriarchal influence have all contributed to people and families becoming isolated from community practices and hindered from living connected, shared lives (Mikaere, 1994).

I returned to Aotearoa New Zealand from the UK to complete a Masters in Māori Visual Art at Toioho ki Apiti, Massey University when I was in my early twenties.

It was a revelatory experience to learn via wānanga methodologies, whilst being housed in a university whose primary educational methodology was borrowed from the British system. The course had an independent, decolonial punk aesthetic grounded in te ao Māori and I was very happy to be in the mosh pit, cooking cleaning, eating, talking, creating and learning from and alongside the Toioho whanau. Recent Toioho graduate, Aroha Matchitt-Millar reflects on her time in the BMVA programme:

The more time I spend outside of Toioho ki Apiti, the more I miss

Wānanga as Process

I te ahatia e koe taku taonga?

our style of community making and kōrero. The safe space that Toioho facilitated has followed me into my mahi outside of university and I find most of my art practice prioritizes community learning and making space for connection between ringa toi Māori. (Toioho ki Apiti, & Matchitt-Millar, 2025)

Matchitt-Millar's reflections on art practice, community building and knowledge sharing echo my own feelings about the programme and take my thoughts to a quote Te Ahukaramū Charles Royal uses to open his paper "Exploring Indigenous Knowledge":

*I te ahatia e koe taku taonga?
What did you do with my treasure?
(2005)*

As a Māori + Jèrriaise artist living away from my homelands, there came a point where I wanted to wānanga out my ideas in commune and relation with my art whanaunga. I yearned to make art with my mates. Creating communities, networks of support and care; and safe spaces for collaboration and exchange was integral to how I wanted future

projects to develop.

Since 2022 I have been sketching out a path towards wānanga working, laying foundations, and building temporal nests for wānanga practices in foreign environments.

I te ahatia e koe taku taonga?

I want to thank Les Filles des Viel'yes (JSY), QM&A (AUT), Monica C. LoCascio (USA/ AUT), the Salit Crew (AUT), Art House Jersey (JSY) and Women's Research Wānanga (EUR) for being a part of my quiet experiments to see how wānanga methodologies can work outside of a Māori context.

If I was asked, *I te ahatia e koe taku taonga?* I would say I have been able to show my friends, colleagues and contemporaries how we can create space and time for inspiration, care, support, production and

“There is nothing new under the sun, but there are new suns.” — Octavia E. Butler

Wānanga as Process

Rychèl Thérin Scott

encouragement in a way that supports the collective and enhances the individual, through employing wānanga methodologies.

At the end of the Women's Research Wānanga's January 2025 Residency at Art House Jersey, I asked each of the participants to tell me what "wānanga" meant to them.

These are their answers:

Wananga as a method of sharing and working for me, has been a very precious intimate experience. Sharing life, knowledge, experience, care, space, food, emotions, exercise, professional respect and consideration and ultimately enduring friendship and creation artistic structures.

A way of learning, exchanging, building, working and producing that includes the participants living, cooking, eating and sleeping under the same roof.

Providing space and support to each other to allow work to be produced - living together to complete and project.

Community, living together, giving and receiving, doing so intentionally,

***Wananga:
a very
precious,
intimate
experience***

*making an effort to co-create a community of everyday life and work practices; a community where there is less separation between the two. Time to be together, not alone.
(Women's Research Wānanga, 2025)*

Let's revisit Te Ahukaramū's quote again: *I te ahatia e koe taku taonga?* What did you do with my treasure?

I shared a valuable māori methodology which disrupted european methods and hierarchies of working. This way of working changed participating artists preconceived ideas of what group work and collaboration could be like and participating artists

Wānanga as Process

valued being part of the project immensely.

I have personally struggled with the responsibility of holding and using matauranga māori, and māori methodologies in a European context, with European people. This way of working is a gift, and is based in community building practices, which stands in contrast to the individualistic focus of European and western ways of working.

Guiding participants firstly into the experience, then creating living examples of why wānanga is specifically matauranga māori; framing wānanga not as a marketable experience, rather a blessing to be invited into has been a challenge because it involves a level of decolonial questioning and unlearning from both the facilitator and the participant (Mejia Jaramillo, 2018 & Tucker, 2019).

***I invited
my friends
in...***

I te ahatia e koe taku taonga? I opened my heart, my mind and my kitchen with my feet anchored to home.

***They came
we
Dreamed***

I invited my friends in. They came, sat, shared, learnt, ate, laughed, cleaned, hugged, slept, dreamed.

They left with cups full. Some felt changed. Others accepted the gift but remained the same. I shared a taonga with people who were open to receive it. Being māori is my superpower; I want to share our unique worldview to encourage the people I value to begin to see there is another way of living with each other where we are not at the centre.

"Through wānanga we are able to reflect and [be] reminded of our place in the universe". (Pohatu & Warmenhoven, 2007).

"There is nothing new under the sun, but there are new suns." — Octavia E. Butler

Wānanga as Process

References

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki. *Extended interview with Mataaho and Maureen Lander*. *Youtube*. 2021. (Retrieved February 3, 2024) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P6lIPuM5IUo>.

Inspiring Communities | Supporting Community-Led Development. *Inspiring Communities: Whakatauki Information sheet*. (n.d) (Retrieved 2022, December 19). https://inspiringcommunities.org.nz/blog/ic_resource/te-reo-resources/

Jaramillo, Juliana Mejia. *Decolonial-Feminist Account of Yagé*. 2018. Masters Thesis.

Kidman, J., Te Rito, J. S., & Penetito, W. (n.d.). Te Ahukaramū Charles Royal. 2005. Exploring Indigenous Knowledge. (Retrieved 2025, August 25). <https://www.etuwhanau.org.nz>.

Mahuika, N., & Mahuika, R. “Wānanga as a research methodology.” *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples*, 16 (4), (2020), 369–377. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1177180120968580>

Mikaere, Ani. “Māori Women Caught in the Contradictions of a Colonised Reality.” *Waikato Law Review*, Issue 2, 1994, 125-150

Pohatu, Pia and Warmenhoven, Tui Aroha. “Set the Overgrowth Alight and the New Shoots Will Spring Forth: New Directions in Community Based Research,” *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples* 3 (2), 108–27, <https://doi.org/10.1177/117718010700300208>.

Smith S. P., Te Whatahoro H. T. “Introduction: The lore of the whare wananga.” *The Journal of the Polynesian Society*, 22(85), (1913), 1–24.

Tucker, Kevin. *Cull of the Personality: Ayahuasca, Colonialism and Death of the Healer*. Black and Green Press, 2019.

Toioho ki Aipiti, & Matchitt-Millar, A. Toioho Ki āpiti on Instagram: “ihu puta 09 – Aroha Matchitt-Millar ngāti rangitīhi, Whakatōhea, Tūhoe BMVA graduate, 2023 Aroha Matchitt-Millar is a maker whose practice moves between jewellery, textiles, and Taonga - adorning herself and the world around her with stories of her TĪPUNA. influenced by urban māori ‘Hori chic’ style, her work reimagines customary practices of manu skinning and pelting - once a step in the making of Kākahu Huru hūru - into powerful forms of wearable art. feathers, feet, wings, and bones are transformed into contemporary jewellery. ✨ what’s she doing now? Aroha recently exhibited at enjoy contemporary art space alongside her brother, Frankie Matchitt-Millar, and two other artists. her work featured silver and copper manu pōria that measure her own body, exploring the connections between Tinana, Tikanga, Tīpuna, and Manu. this kaupapa was shaped through open studio sessions, where she used Muka prepared with the support of the community to install the works. alongside the exhibition, Aroha hosted Muka and Manu skinning workshops and drop-ins, sharing mātauranga through collective making and exchange. visitors were gifted Muka ratstails, extending the cycle of connection and reciprocity that underpins her practice, which centres on community, hands-on processes, and keeping alive the links between material, memory, and whānau. we’re proud to spotlight Aroha Matchitt-Millar as part of our #TOIOHO30 celebrations. #ihuputa #toiohokiāpiti #toioho30 #MāoriVisualArts #manu #jewellery #whakairo #muka #manawāhine #māoricontemporaryart.” Instagram, August 20, 2025. <https://www.instagram.com/p/DNkXwxrBFsf/>

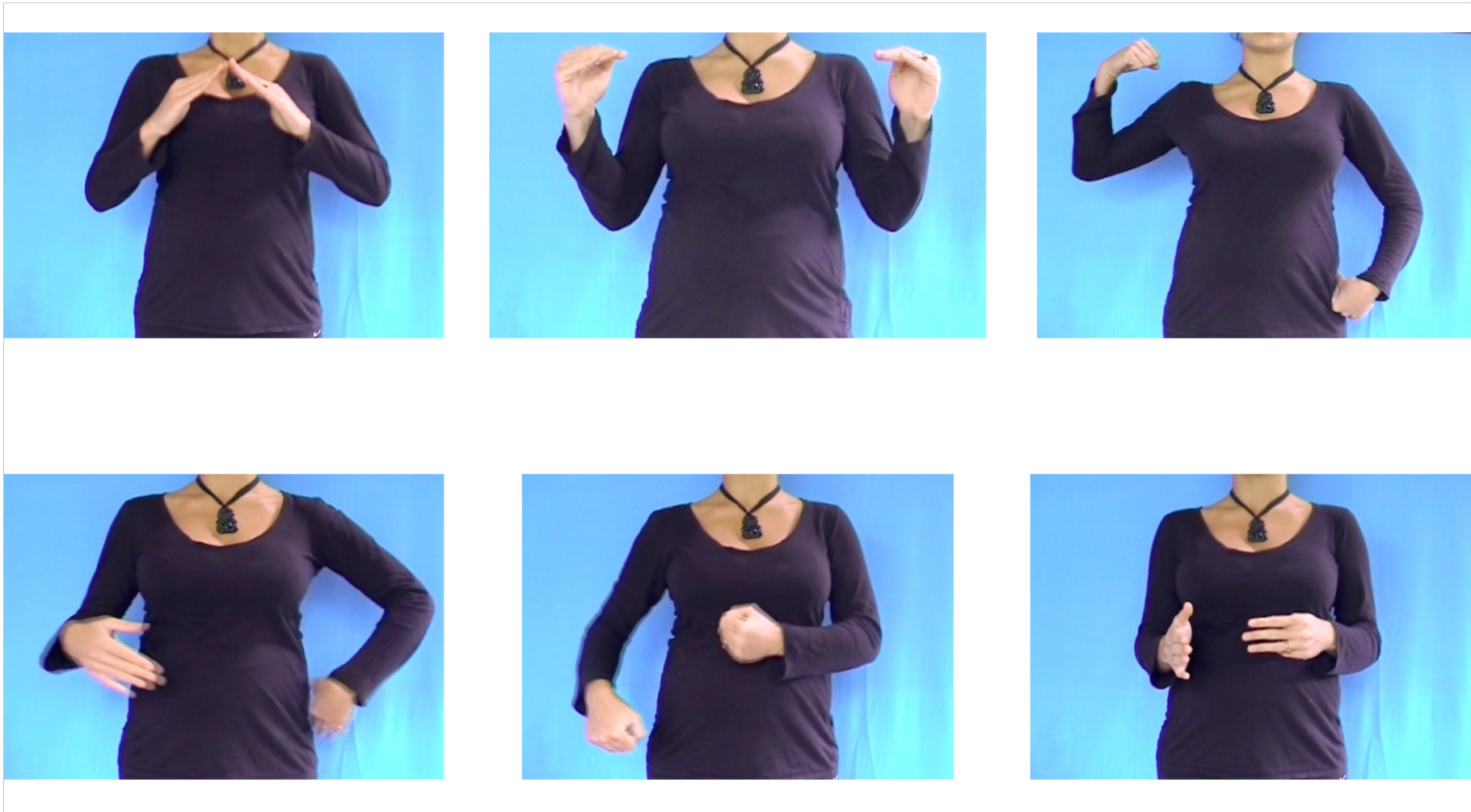
Women’s Research Wānanga, Huddle 3 feedback form responses. (Personal communication, February 2025).





Coming of Age, 2006. Oil on canvas









Silhouette self portrait from Stage, Expectation and Time (2006), Salvaged carved wood phoenix frame, gifted embroidered patch, woven velvet kaokao sampler

Self Portrait as a Nomad, 2023







Say goodbye to the too good mother, 2025
Nanny's wedding bodice. Jersey granite, jersey oysters, vermicelli. Spirit and plaster skull, bovine bones. Lenses, mirror, pedestals, Semmelweis metal work, candles

