

ART & AROHA: BUILDING CHANGE THROUGH CREATIVE COMMUNITIES

By Linda Blincko, Creative Director, Depot Artspace

On June 23, the Depot proudly hosted the opening of two exhibitions, each in its own way outstanding, moving and memorable, and together embodying the values the Depot aspires to represent in its own ethos and daily work.

LIFE is the second exhibition of Auckland City Mission artists to be held at the Depot, and it was wonderful to welcome back the tutors and artists previously involved in the 2016 show *I am the Art and the Art is Me: Ko Ahau te Toi, Ko te Toi Ahau*. Visitors who had previously attended the exhibition commented on the quality of the work and a 'lifting of the bar' as artists continue to significantly develop their practice.

The installation *MāoriGrl* during Friday gave us an opportunity to meet and spend time with artist Kahurangiariki Smith and her whanau, mother Aroha and brother Tai and the following day her dad Lloyd and brother Moko and friends.



Kahurangiariki Smith's *MāoriGrl*

Selwyn Vercoe's painting *Rangitoto in Life*

Over the period of the installation and during the opening the aroha was palpable, infusing the Depot from the outset; in the whakatau delivered by Jermaine Reihana, the mihi by CEO/City Missioner, Chris Farrelly, the speech and song by Kahurangiariki and Aroha, her mother and the music of the community choir, and it created a great bond amongst artists, invited guests, whanau and the large appreciative audience.

The Depot has held firm to its values of inclusiveness and acceptance and to its belief in the arts as personally and socially transformative; the creative mind transcends the dark prisons of intolerance and alienation and finds a new way or perspective. And we have noted from other exhibitions, recordings and events in the past, there is a thirst among people to find common ground/turangawaewae, mutual understanding and unity.





'Art for Change' member Brenda Liddiard speaking at the opening of *Where Shall We Call Home?*

The exhibition *Where Shall We Call Home*, organised by Art for Change, provided a similar sense of understanding and compassion as it offered an insight into the world of refugees and an opportunity to support their resettlement and in some cases, their creative practice. As an outcome of this exhibition was the first solo sell-out show of refugee and master calligrapher Sayed Ali Karam Jawhary, *The Reed Pen's Tale*.



The opening event for *Where Shall We Call Home?*

These are instances of art and the experience of art as transformative – art revealing a different dimension or perspective on the world.



When the Depot hosted *Lest We Forget* in commemoration of the 500 Cook Island Soldiers who trained at Fort Takapuna, Narrowneck during WW1, disparate communities were united in greater understanding by the experience and mutual respect for their service in war.

Visitors to *Lest We Forget* posting personal letters in the red envelopes



Lest We Forget the 500 Cook Island Soldiers

Tony McNeight's Giant Peace Poppy Project shared these attributes and similarly enriched our community through personal messages which joined to create a united voice for peace.

Here at the Depot our ongoing endeavour is to build and maintain this solidarity as a community which is diverse and but also unified by creativity and inclusiveness. These are our defining features.

Art provides different entry points to a rich shared experience of community. Art is the catalyst for bringing artists and audience to the Depot; it articulates experience, offers new perspectives, educates and embraces audiences.





Tony McNeight's *Giant Poppy Peace Project*

It is a last bastion of freedom. Art validates the point that nobody needs to see things in the same way; art is subversive in this way because it raises the question - if we all see things so differently, then why are we still reproducing the same society, decade after decade, century after century, where inequality dominates, where wealth and power are controlled by a few for their own benefit and at the expense of many others?