

LONNIE HUTCHINSON
KOTAHITANGA
27 MAR – 26 APR 2025

Like many tangata whenua, Lonnie Hutchinson's whakapapa (Ngāti kuri ki Ngāi Tahu, Samoan (Faleilili), Celtic) is an expression of kotahitanga. Linguistically, kotahitanga contains 'tahi,' the reo for 'one,' which develops into 'kotahi' meaning 'single' or 'one in particular,' and further extends to 'kotahitanga,' typically expressed in English as 'unity.'ⁱ Hutchinson embodies this concept, similar to lawyer Tania Waikato who, in her oral submission to the Treaty of Waitangi Principles Bill select committee, described herself as a living expression of te Tiriti, saying "ko au te Tiriti, ko te Tiriti ko au" (I am the Treaty, and the Treaty is me).ⁱ

From the basic concept of 'tahi,' a complex understanding of unity emerges, bringing with it an entire value system. This value system emphasises reciprocity and is built on the principle of knowing yourself as a prerequisite to understanding others. Genuine unity requires skillfully navigating the tension between homogenising conformity and honouring diversity—recognising that meaningful cohesion emerges not from erasing differences, but from creating connections that respect and integrate the distinct qualities each person or group brings to the collective whole.

The work in *Kotahitanga* expresses unity by combining motifs drawn from Hutchinson's whakapapa. These include kowhaiwhai patterns, taro leaves, hair combs, birds, Te Ra, and more recently Celtic flower motifs. Throughout her work, these core motifs appear repeatedly in different compositions and within the concertina folds. Hutchinson describes the "folding of material as giving agency to the cultural corrugations" that are part of her whakapapa.ⁱⁱⁱ

This exhibition includes two large works on powder coated aluminium, two small patterned comb works, and four new large scale hand-cut builder's paper works. Hutchinson is well recognised for her use of builders' paper. As a material that is used for lining walls, there's a humility about the builder's paper. It's not meant to be seen; once in place it is covered and left in the dark. In Hutchinson's hands, the transformed builder's paper is compelling. It possesses a wairua that comes from the materiality of the matte black paper, the detailed motifs and compositions, and the subtle nuances of the handmade. As Stephanie Oberg writes, in Hutchinson's work "...black resonates. Black can be the shade of concealment, the lure of difference, passion, the time of creation and the presence of her ancestors, the politics of race... there are many, if not infinite shades and reflections of 'blackness'."^{iv}

Kotahitanga is about togetherness. In these socially and politically fractured times, with policies addressing discrimination and systemic barriers being rolled back, the painted aluminum works *Awhi* and *Aroha* are relevant reminders of our need for solidarity. This was powerfully demonstrated in November 2024 when the Hikoī mō te Tiriti (March for

the Treaty) united tangata whenua and tangata te Tiriti in collective protest against the Treaty of Waitangi Principles Bill.

To awahi is to embrace, surround, or cherish. Hutchinson describes her work *Awhi* as a blanket. It has a welcoming feeling, with the positive and negative detailing of the koru motifs and the blanket fringe detail at the bottom, the work feels like an embrace. Aroha has many meanings including love, compassion, and empathy. For Hutchinson, *Aroha* has a playful quality which is seen in the gentle exuberance of the rounded forms along the bottom edge of the work. Both works are painted with a colour called Kōkōwai (red ochre), a colour that comes from the whenua, creating connections that speak to our unity with the world around us.

Returning to whakapapa and kotahitanga, Hutchinson says "Whakapapa accounts for the way in which the earth, sky, oceans, rivers, elements, minerals, plants, animals and all people have been created. All things are linked through whakapapa, as well as having their individual place in the world. Ultimately, it is whakapapa that connects people to each other, to their ancestors, to the land, to the oceans and the universe."^v Hutchinson's kaupapa and her work stands as a powerful assertion that unity comes not from erasing our differences but from honoring the connections that bind us together through whakapapa, mutual respect, and te Tiriti.

— Charlotte Huddleston

Charlotte Huddleston is a freelance arts worker based in Ōtautahi Christchurch, Aotearoa New Zealand. Between 2010 and 2021 she was Director of Te Wai Ngutu Kākā Gallery (formerly ST PAUL St Gallery), Auckland University of Technology. Prior positions include Curator of Contemporary Art at Te Papa Tongarewa, Museum of New Zealand; Assistant Curator, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery; Gallery Manager at Enjoy.

ⁱ Global Oneness Project, and Trevor Moeke. 2007. 'Kotahitanga: The Maori Word for Oneness.' <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=upe36hTrll>.

ⁱⁱ Tania Waikato (@taniawaikatolawyer). 2025 'Treaty Principles Bill oral submission to the Justice select committee.'

<https://www.instagram.com/reel/DGfNyugxi9m/?igsh=MWNjdnk5MnNvYTh00A==>

ⁱⁱⁱ In conversation with Hutchinson, March 2025

^{iv} Stephanie Oberg, *Black As Exhibition 2007*, Jonathan Smart Gallery.

^v Bartley & Company Art, <https://www.bartleyandcompany.art/artists/lonnie-hutchinson>

* For te reo Māori words, see Te Aka Māori Dictionary: <https://maoridictionary.co.nz/>