

**Michel Tuffery**  
*Te Moana Nui a Kiwa*  
4<sup>th</sup> February – 7<sup>th</sup> March 2021



*Star Compass for Matariki, 2021*

***Te Moana Nui a Kiwa, 2021***

In 2020, Michel Tuffery collaborated with Dr Karlo Mila to create the narrated and animated video *Mana Moana 2020 Meditation* playing on our east wall. This exhibition emerges from this co-creation, and from origins as ancient as the great sea of Kiwa.

Seven new works share stories of unfurling life and ongoing whakapapa, the unbreakable connections of past-present-future and ocean-land-sky. Prompted by stills from the meditation, each work has been hand-drawn, extended and reinvigorated at extraordinary resolution. Compulsory Covid-19 lockdowns gave time and pause for Tuffery to harness new creative and printing technologies. Details emerge from the blackest of black inks as though luminescent. The distinction between 2-d and 3-d cannot hold; these works pulsate, twinkle and spin.

Reaching out from the fertile darkness of the realm of potential being, here is our ever-turning world.

Michel Tuffery warmly acknowledges Dr Karlo Mila and the Mana Moana Cutarorial Aiga; Rachel Rakena, Michael Bridgman, Storybox, Manase Lua, Laughton Kura, Dr Billie Lythberg and CNZ.

All works are drawing, pigment inks on Hahnemühle Photorag 308 Cotton Paper.  
1020 x 1020mm, framed.  
\$6,500 each GST inc.  
Works are editions of 7, with only 3 more of each available. And each is sold framed.

1. *Whakapapa is Endless Beginnings\**

The ocean is central here, or is it the sky? Ancestors drove their waka across both, with star navigators placing signposts for their descendants on earth and sea. A twin-hulled blue-sea waka hourua breasts the swirling currents of Moana Nui a Kiwa and the great night sky, like a pair of whales in tandem. Tere tohorā, tere tangata—where whales journey, people follow—encapsulates the essence of this synergy, while a bronze whaler swims beneath and the sun rises and sets.

Fine fronds in the earthy colours of seaweed enclose a circle of chiefly figures in radial feather headdresses, pushing upwards like the arches of the heavens. Each holds a treasure—an eel, a turtle, a stingray, a tuna, a crab, a bird, a string of fish. Here are our responsibilities to our ancestors and to our environment, to a whakapapa of endless beginnings and irreducible currents and connections.

\*Quote attributed to Moana Jackson.

2. *Taro whakapapa*

Could anything be as verdant and vigorous as taro? Each plant grows pups from its own body, generation after generation tracing back to an ancient parent, each new plant a layering of regeneration and reconnection.

Taro whakapapa presents a richly coloured and voluptuous iris, its dark pupil ringed with the lashings of waka and buildings. Here is a lens onto carefully planned voyages, bringing gardens, families and fale across the Moana to islands newly hauled from the sea.

3. *The great ocean of Kiwa*

Te Moana Nui a Kiwa—the great ocean highway. Tuffery weaves together a navigational compass of moon cycles, constellations, frigate birds and glorious ancestors.

Chiefly figures bear clubs and dance paddles, equipped for battle, ceremony, or celebration. Their radial feather headdresses recall the armature of birds' wings and fish fins, suggesting motion and opening conduits to other realms, while moon phases and illuminated birds evoke finely shaped whale ivory. Both recall the iconography of elaborately incised and inlaid Tongan clubs (pōvai), so numerous they are the most common of all Polynesian objects in 18th century collections; yet so individual they often bore their own names and amassed their own mana.

The great ocean of Kiwa may be vast, but it is intimately known.

4. *Fanua*

The lush palette of *Fanua* bring sea forests to the shore. Michel Tuffery has a deepwater library at Tarakahau, 'the wind-eater', in Pōneke (Wellington), where he reads the patterns of seaweeds, and where birds wait for him to surface. Striving outwards and inwards, upwards and downwards, these floating branches are a softly turning vortex, stirred by the rhythms of tides and winds.

Circlets of manulua ('two birds') suggest a mat for feasting or to lay upon and dream, while the energy of *Fanua* strives beyond its border, patterning, repatterning, and rebirthing.

#### 5. *Star Compass for Matariki*

The rising of the Matariki star cluster announces the Māori New Year, a time of gratitude for fine harvests; short days and long night skies.

Here, time is a pathway without beginning or end, a cycle of turn and return. Moon phases and the rising of constellations punctuate changing seasons and suggest order. Marked with North, East, South and West, *Star Compass for Matariki* holds together wild and cultivated plants, the fine arts of the Moana and the star waka of ancestors.

#### 6. *Fanua in the beginning*

Fern fronds unfurl in deep reds and browns, the colours of seaweed—mana moana. We live on islands fished from the sea.

Michel Tuffery is a diver and explorer, finding whakapapa in the flora of land and ocean. Branches reach forwards into the light and backwards into darkness, recalling deep waters and forest shadows, connecting Te Ao Marama with Te Pō. A tessellating single band of manulua ('two birds') binds together the creativity of the world of Tangata o le Moana with the world of ancestors, bringing birds to fly between light and night skies, bearing the messages of the gods.

*Fanua in the Beginning* is the universe birthed vigorously into being, each branch a family, a new beginning.

#### 7. *Mother and Child*

An extraordinary Tongan deity\* holds the compass points of *Mother and Child*, defining the parameters of her world. Upright and purposeful, she bears past, present and future generations, a lifeforce spiralling outwards from the beginning of time. With a flower behind her ear, gently opened eyes, and an illuminated umbilicus, her power, once dimmed by Christianity, is reinvigorated.

\*She is in the collection of the Auckland War Memorial Museum.

Michel Tuffery  
*Handle With Care Series*



*Anga ofa, Nau Fesiofaki, Tonga “Be kind to each other, look after each other”, 2020*

The ‘Handle With Care’ project began in March 2020 in consultation with Pacific Health Plus (PHP), Porirua, and in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Michel Tuffery had only recently returned from China when COVID-19 came to international attention. He recalled being in Samoa during the 2019 measles and the tragic loss of so many young lives there. As COVID-19 ravaged Italy’s elders, Tuffery considered who would be most vulnerable if and when the virus arrived in Aotearoa New Zealand. The ‘Handle with Care’ campaign was designed to convey simple messaging directly to Māori and Pasifika communities, and frontline and ‘essential’ workers disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. The series adapts vintage postage stamps from Aotearoa and other Pacific Islands and adopts the familiar caution written on posted packages: ‘FRAGILE Handle With Care’. The images were initially displayed in public spaces as posters printed by PHP on their in-house printer—the only printing available during Level 4 restrictions.

Health Stamps, combining postage with a donation to charity in their purchase price, have a long history in Aotearoa. First appearing in December 1929, featuring a nurse and the inscription ‘Help stamp out tuberculosis’, they were issued annually until 2016 in support of charitable causes, and many have become collectible. While encouraging community members to “stamp out” coronavirus by staying home, washing hands, and wearing masks, Tuffery’s ‘Handle with care’ series also emphasizes ties to ancestry and culture as part of a holistic approach to healthcare. Mask- and glove-wearing ancestors urge their descendants to ‘protect all of our communities’, while the nostalgia of historical images conveys the need for particular care of elders and their wisdom.



All works are digital flatbed print, non solvent UV Ink on Magnani, Incisioni white cotton paper 185gsm paper.

Works are editions of 19. PLEASE ask staff for further availability.

\$850 each GST inc, framed.

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| 8. <i>Protect the Doctors and Nurses, Aotearoa, 2020</i><br>500 x 690 x 40mm fr<br>Ed. 5 of 19                           | 14. <i>The Returnee's, Petone Beach Te Whanganui a Tara, 2020</i><br>500 x 690 x 40mm fr<br>Ed. 6 of 19                              |
| 9. <i>Aiga Muamua, Samoa, 2020</i><br>690 x 500 x 40mm fr<br>Ed. 3 of 19   | 15. <i>Help stamp out Covid Porirua, Tokelau, 2020</i><br>500 x 690 x 40mm fr<br>Ed. 3 of 19   |
| 10. <i>Protect all of our communities Porirua, Kuki Airani, 2020</i><br>690 x 500 x 40mm fr<br>Ed. 4 of 19               | 16. <i>Fijian beating Covid, Fiji, 2020</i><br>500 x 690 x 40mm fr<br>Ed. 3 of 19  |
| 11. <i>Protect our Aiga, Samoa, 2020</i><br>690 x 500 x 40mm fr<br>Ed. 2 of 19   | 17. <i>Anga ofa, Nau Fesiofaki, Tonga "Be kind to each other, look after each other", 2020</i><br>500 x 690 x 40mm fr<br>Ed. 3 of 19 |
| 12. <i>Protect all of our communities Penrhyn, Kuki Airani, Cook Islands, 2020</i><br>690 x 500 x 40mm fr<br>Ed. 5 of 19 | 18. <i>Thank you Nurse Jenny, Aotearoa, 2020</i><br>690 x 500 x 40mm fr<br>Ed. 8 of 19   |
| 13. <i>Protect the Aiga, Samoa, 2020</i><br>690 x 500 x 40mm fr<br>Ed. 3 of 19   | 19. <i>Protect all of our communities Porirua, Niue, 2020</i><br>690 x 500 x 40mm fr<br>Ed. 3 of 19                                  |
|  | 20. <i>Protect the Whānau, Aotearoa, 2020</i><br>690 x 500 x 40mm fr<br>Ed. 5 of 19  |