

TOI NGĀPUHI

FEATURED TOI NGĀPUHI CREATIVE



FEATURED: TOI TE RITO MAIHI
NGĀTI KAHUNGUNU, NGĀPUHI NUI TONU

Toi is a noted artist in many different fields of creativity. She is a painter, a printmaker, a writer and an educator but is probably best known for her weaving.

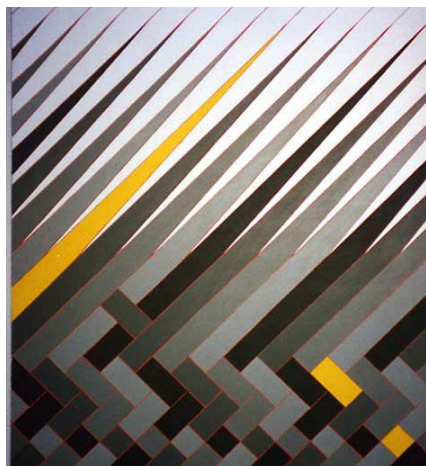
Toi is now in her 80s and throughout her life, she has faced many challenges and had many opportunities. Toi's philosophy on life is, 'there is always more than one way..' and she has always chosen to keep working through adversity and make the most of her opportunities. After one of those opportunities arose, Toi recounts, 'so began a pattern of invitations and my responding. It has continued to this day.'

Toi was born in Hastings, was raised in Auckland and the Wairarapa and boarded at Queen Victoria School in Auckland for her secondary schooling. She trained as a primary school teacher at Auckland Teachers' Training College where she met the late Berry Maihi. They married in 1957, had five children and they both taught in schools in Northland, Taihape and Auckland.

Toi's interest in weaving developed at a very young age when she began to watch her father weaving. 'Ever since I caught sight of Dad weaving, smelt and heard the rustle of the flax, that was it. It just fascinated me.' In more recent years, she wrote a poem about this love of flax:

FLAX

the scent and sound and touch of you
is part of my being.
Without you I am incomplete,
vulnerable...
But
when we are together
your diversity, your complexity,
excite and entice
toward a merging of self and plant,
a moulding of mauri of both
in a voyage of respect, of intrigue,
of speculation, of creativity,
wherein another possibility forever beckons
my fingers following multiplying images within my
mind.



Toi's love of all of the creative arts and their interconnection with nature comes from both sides of her whānau and creativity has always been a major force in her life, through her early years, schooling, teaching practice and then as she gained confidence, into making and exhibiting.

A life-changing experience for Toi was attending the South Pacific Arts Festival in Rotorua in 1976 when she was 39. Toi's mother wanted to go and asked Toi to accompany her. On the second day of the festival, as they looked for an exhibition of Pacific weaving, they took a wrong turn and found themselves in an exhibition mounted by the Māori Artists and Writers Society, later renamed Ngā Puna Waihangā. As Toi would later say, 'that exhibition totally blew my mind' and after going back to it every day and catching the attention of society members such as Fred Graham and Heather and Cliff Whiting, Toi accepted their invitation to join the society. She returned home from that exhibition determined to make art more central to her life.

Since that time, Toi has exhibited widely using many different mediums. In New Zealand her work has been shown in galleries and museums in many places ranging from Napier, New Plymouth and Whāngarei in the provinces, to major centres including in the Auckland City Art Gallery and Parliament Buildings in Wellington. Toi also has an international profile with her work being shown in places such as Australia, Utah, Germany and Hawai'i.

Toi believes that the arts are all various forms of storytelling. 'If we consider every culture on earth, we can see that the teller of stories whether in prose, chant, mime... drawing, painting, carving, sculpture... body painting, scarring, tattooing... are all a form of storytelling.' For Toi, storytelling has been with her since infancy. 'When I look back, I realise just how much part of daily life it was - as natural as breathing.'

It's no wonder that Toi has used so many different media ranging from her schoolgirl days when she designed and made her own pare, taniko headbands and belts through to more recent large-scale works using materials such as steel and paving stones.

As well as her life-long and on-going work as a weaver, Toi has often been called upon to contribute as a designer and artist to major works for public places and events. In 1990, Toi was invited to be co-designer with Carole Sheppard of the Commonwealth Quilt. She travelled to Canada with Carole and the Tongan designer, Luseane Koloï to formally hand the quilt over to the City of Victoria, the host of the 1994 Commonwealth Games. Another significant project that Toi was asked to contribute to, was the ANZAC Memorial, New Zealand's sculpture honouring the ANZAC troops in Canberra. The New Zealand Government had held a competition open to both New Zealand and Australian designers to design a memorial and out of over 100 entries, Kingsley Baird and the Studio of Architecture won. Kingsley then asked Toi to work on the paving area around his design, which was based on the words, 'Mau tēnā kiwai o te kete' or 'Each of us at a handle of the basket'. Toi attended the opening of this beautiful, soaring memorial in Canberra in 2001.

One of the other large projects that Toi is very proud of and which goes to the heart of Ngāpuhi territory is her work as a weaver and designer for the Kohewhata marae, just south of Kaikohe. The marae had been under construction for many years when efforts were made for a final push to complete it and Allen Wihongi, who was to be the carver for the project, asked Toi to be involved. Working on this project was to take a year, a massive undertaking involving many people, but Toi was delighted to be involved. Toi wrote in a letter to her mother, 'This is a happening that is in every weaver's wish list - to be in charge of the weaving in a marae.'

Toi continues to write and create and teach. For many years she has taught weaving in Kaikohe and she is currently working on books, one of which is about her life and the other about returning the mana to weaving, based on the panels that were completed for Te Puia in Rotorua.

Toi's drive and commitment are legendary and as an artist she is a role model in terms of the quality of her work, her prolific output and the way she has collaborated and worked with others over a lifetime.





TOI NGĀPUHI

Inspiring excellence in
Ngāpuhi cultural and
creative expression
across Te Taitokerau

Te whakaoho i te ihiihi,
mō te kounga o ngā
tikanga, me ngā
auahatanga o Ngāpuhi,
puta noa i Te Taitokerau.

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