

**Te Ao  
Huri Huri /  
The Turning  
World**

**— Becky Cameron**

**“Moving in or through a given place, the body imports its own emplaced past into its present experience... Orientation in place ... cannot be continually effected de novo but arises within the ever-lengthening shadow of our bodily past.”**

Edward Casey, *Phenomenology of Memory*<sup>1</sup>

**A**s a recent graduate of the Dunedin School of Art, Becky Cameron’s ‘Te Ao Huri Huri | The Turning World’ explores ideas about landscape, belonging and home. These are recurring themes for Cameron, their relevance and significance deeply rooted in her life.. Settled far from her original home in England, Cameron’s work examines her own familiarisation with— and interpretation of— the new, as well as the reinterpretation of the old within different contexts. In this way, Cameron’s work also provides another perspective on what local Dunedin residents may naturally view as ‘familiar.’

‘Te Ao Huri Huri | The Turning World’ represents an intersection between Cameron’s own evocations of memory and the past, as well as those that exist in the wider context of Puaka Matariki. The kinetic light pieces featured in the exhibition are made from an eclectic range of found materials such as aluminium cans and black builders paper. Once the lanterns are turned on, light moves from the bulbs through hand cut holes in sheets of black builder’s paper. The holes’ shapes are based on shadows of trees and plants that Cameron has drawn or photographed. Quickly after the lanterns are switched on, heat emitted from the bulbs rises through a sliced aluminium can causing them to rotate slowly—creating a rich glow that in turn creates a dance of stretched patterns across the floor and walls of the Athenaeum. The paper screens that hang from the ceiling of the Athenaeum are used to reveal different aspects of the work. Catching the light as the lanterns move, the screens bring patterns into focus, providing an analogy for conscious memory. However, the screens also conceal the lanterns, which alludes to the largely unconscious workings of the mind.

These patterns of light symbolise stars in the sky, moving and changing to create sky maps through light. “As the lanterns turn,” Cameron explained, “the design comes in and out of focus, serving as a visual analogy for how memories of place are built up through repeated paths taken through a landscape.” The patterns also interact with the dark, enigmatic textures of the Athenaeum teasing and questioning the history of the very place the viewer stands.

It is the experience of viewing these lanterns together in the Athenaeum that provides the viewer with a literal and metaphorical pathway, moving between Cameron’s own unfolding practice and her explorations into the wider context of Puaka Matariki. As the viewer is guided through the darkness of the Athenaeum, light from Cameron’s installation beckons, moving, turning, slowly swirling throughout the vast corridor of space. Following the call, the viewer moves past the first lantern and becomes immersed in the changing stories of the cosmos—the cycles of life and death—the atua Rangi and Papa. “The journey through the artwork is an allegory for the journey of life with its cycles of loss and growth,” stated Cameron. In this journey, the viewer is invited to move down the vaguely spiralled pathway, which references the tradition of the labyrinth as a contemplative device, towards a centre point. When this is reached, the viewer then moves out again, affording time for reflection on the year that has been and the year to come. Thus, as the text scrawled across Cameron’s studio wall reads, in experiencing and interacting with these kinetic light pieces “the inner seasonality of being human” is reflected on.

‘Te Ao Huri Huri | The Turning World’ represents the aesthetic qualities of Matariki—a cluster of blue, luminous stars, which have formed within the last 100 million years and are a part of the larger Taurus constellation. Looking into the night sky, Matariki—after disappearing for two months—reappears in late May or early June low on the north-eastern horizon of the southern hemisphere. Although there are differences regarding the timing for celebrating Matariki, festivities most often begin at the next new moon after Matariki has risen. “Matariki is associated with the time of the midwinter solstice, the darkest time of the year—but also the turning point when the days begin to lengthen again,” Cameron explained. “The turning of the lanterns with their patterns of light and dark reflect the turning of the world as it goes





through the daily cycle of day and night, as well as the larger annual cycle of the seasons.”

While the Matariki star cluster is part of an array of histories for cultures around the world—including its use for navigation particularly by the ancestors of Māori when they migrated across the Pacific Ocean to Aotearoa, the discourse most significant to this display is that of Puaka Matariki.

Although Māori have never been homogeneous in their approach to the New Year (which is symbolised by the reappearance of Matariki), generally, Matariki was observed at the end of harvest, remember the dead and celebrate new life since the cluster last appeared. As Māori education and development advocate Hohaia Collier writes for the journal *Indigenous Voices Indigenous Symbols* Māori “did not have a written language by which they preserved their historical narratives. What they did have was a gift of observation that allowed them to establish and build an empirical foundation of knowledge based on the activity of natural phenomena.”<sup>2</sup> It was the signs or symbols within nature, like that of Matariki, that provided guidance on what Māori could do, as Collier noted, the appearance of significant astral bodies was observed as being “coincident with tidal flows, the flowering of certain trees and the appearance of game birds.”<sup>3</sup> Māori astronomy was therefore focussed on astral bodies “as symbols of survival, of guides to us that allowed us to regulate those activities that ensured our survival. The symbolic appearance of Matariki then was to foretell the nature of the coming season and to determine and regulate the cycle of food gathering.”<sup>4</sup>

The first sighting of Matariki was acknowledged by a tohunga (priest) with karakia (prayer) to celebrate the new year. If the star cluster was clear and easily visible straight after the first new moon of June, it was a sign that there would be good crops to follow; however if only six or seven stars were seen the following year was predicted to yield poor harvests. Matariki therefore became a time to reflect on past seasons and plan for the new one—preparing and mending the necessary tools to do so. Celebrations occurred at the end of this harvesting. During this time pākau (kites) were often flown in an attempt to get close to the stars.

For Cameron, growing up in England meant that Christmas was the big winter festival but even so, Cameron has found links between Matariki and Christmas. “Many of the traditions around that time in the Christian tradition are actually adapted from earlier traditions—ones that were much more closely linked to the natural world through cycles of death and growth. For example the holly and ivy and evergreen trees reflect a pagan festival celebrating the continuing life of the natural world even when it seemed at its lowest and darkest point. The Celts also used the rising of Matariki as a season marker. These pagan connections were repressed by Christianity, and the festivities of Christmas (and Easter) are also dislocated from their original seasonal significance when transposed to the Southern hemisphere – so nearly completely losing that vital connection to the earth.” These festivities and histories that Cameron described add further depth to the themes found or suggested within Cameron’s own work.

In the 21st century, observing Matariki has become popular again. In this way, it is surprisingly fitting that the very space Cameron’s work is displayed in the Athenaeum, which has (until recently) been left unused for approximately 40 years. This awareness and revitalisation of the past in both ritual and physical respects is part of a process that helps viewers to be more conscious of their own cultural identities. “I feel it is vitally important to have celebrations that link into the natural world, and I’m really excited by the revival of Matariki,” Cameron stated. “I’m interested in deepening my own connections to the natural world around me through this experience during Matariki.” Immersed in the melodic dances of light, “Te Ao Huri Huri | The Turning World” participates in a national interest to give these ideas and traditions momentum.

### Loulou Callister-Baker

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<sup>1</sup> Edward Casey, *Remembering: A Phenomenological Study* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997): 194.

<sup>2</sup> Hohaia Collier, “Matariki, a symbol of survival” in *Indigenous Voices Indigenous Symbols* (2009): 10. [http://www.win-hec.org/files/WinhecJnl\\_v6\\_030809.pdf](http://www.win-hec.org/files/WinhecJnl_v6_030809.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

**Te Ao Huri Huri | The Turning World**  
**Becky Cameron**

**Athenaeum, The Octagon**  
**8 – 13 July 2014**

**Blue Oyster art project space**  
**in association with Puaka Matariki Dunedin**

Based in Dunedin, Becky Cameron holds an MA Distinction in Art Conservation, and recently completed a Bachelor of Visual Arts with Honours from the Dunedin School of Art in 2013. Cameron has been exhibiting since 2008, her most recent project *Shadow Aspects* was shown as a part of the DSA Honours exhibition in November 2013. Cameron's practice explores landscape, memory, belonging and home.

Loulou Callister-Baker is an emerging writer based in Dunedin. Studying Law, Chinese and Visual Culture at the University of Otago, she has reviewed exhibitions for Otago Polytechnic magazine Gyro, and assisted with OUSA initiative *Art on Campus* and is currently the Features Editor for Critic Te Arohi. Over summer 2013-14, she completed a research internship at the Adam Art Gallery, Victoria University Wellington, and has been volunteering at the Blue Oyster since 2011.

Centrefold: *Shadow Aspects* 2013 (detail), DSA Gallery, Dunedin.

**Blue Oyster**  
**art project**  
**space.**

16 Dowling Street, Dunedin  
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