



Reuben Paterson, *The Hine Aotea Cat*, 2022, glitter on canvas.

## Resource Card *Reuben Paterson: The Only Dream Left*

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MINISTRY OF EDUCATION  
Te Tihiko o te Mātauranga



## Resource Card

# Reuben Paterson: The Only Dream Left

*‘Don’t think of glitter as glitter, think of it as reflected light...light comes from the stars and these have been a source of fascination for our people and other peoples of the world since time immemorial.’<sup>1</sup>*

### About the Artist

Reuben Paterson (Ngāti Rangitihī, Ngāi Tūhoe, Tūhourangi) makes dazzling artworks that harness the properties of light. As a young boy he used to play in the sparkling black sands of Piha beach, now as an artist he creates work in glitter, diamond dust, shimmer discs, and iridescent crystals. He uses light, pattern, and colour in his work to create mesmerizing optical effects.

His practice moves between painting, sculpture and animation, with subject matter ranging from kaleidoscopic compositions of kōwhaiwhai and retro floral patterns, to big cats, cloudscapes, and exploding fireworks. His art draws on memories and histories, and reflects on ideas around identity, spirituality, and whakapapa. The artist says “I honour and appreciate history ... in an unconventional way.”<sup>2</sup>

### About the Exhibition

*The Only Dream Left* is the largest exhibition of the artist’s work to date, spanning twenty-five years of practice. Works on show include two of the epic kaleidoscopic paintings from the *Whakapapa Get Down Upon Your Knees* series, in which kōwhaiwhai and floral patterns speak to Paterson’s dual Māori and Scottish heritage and unite his paternalistic and maternalistic lines. *Te Maiea*, is a digital animation with an array of transforming patterns endlessly scattering and reforming. In this work the shimmer of glitter—Paterson’s signature material—is sourced back to the glittering forms of the natural world through Hine Maheri, the personification of sparkling fine-grained sandstone. *The Golden Bearing* is a life-sized tree in sparkling gold. It connects to Paterson’s father who was a landscape gardener, and has its roots in the long tradition of sacred trees found in many cultures, including the pūrākau of Tane separating Papatūānuku and Ranginui to create Te Ao Mārama, the world of light.

### Curriculum Concepts

**Reflection**—the bouncing of light rays off a shiny surface. Or a flipped shape in a symmetrical pattern.

**Refraction**—the bending of light as it passes through a substance.

**Whakapapa**—a line of descent from one’s ancestors; genealogy. A fundamental principle in Māori culture that places oneself in a wider context.

### Pre-Visit Discussion

Where might you notice shimmering, glittering, gleaming, or refracting in the natural world? Recall a time when you’ve seen light play over or through something to create a beautiful optical effect. Describe the sensation.

### Post-Visit Activities

- **Compare and contrast exhibitions.**  
After experiencing Reuben Paterson’s work, visit *Mataaho Collective: Te Puni Aroaro* at Te Papa Tongarewa. Think about how the artists in both exhibitions incorporate light, pattern, and unconventional materials. Compare and contrast the methods and meanings in each.  
[tepapa.govt.nz/visit/exhibitions/toi-art/mataaho-collective-te-puni-aroaro](http://tepapa.govt.nz/visit/exhibitions/toi-art/mataaho-collective-te-puni-aroaro)
- **Collaborate to create an assemblage of patterns.**  
Find a pattern that reminds you of a member of your family. It could be one with personal or cultural significance, whatever feels like a good fit for the person you are honoring. Ideas might include patterns on treasured objects, items of clothing, or even wallpaper. Enlarge a detail of this pattern onto cardboard, then refine the outlines before painting with acrylic paint, or glue and glitter. Arrange different patterns together to create a whole class or school installation. Display the work alongside a couple of sentences about each pattern and the person it connects to.
- **Connect two artworks to create new ideas.**  
Reuben Paterson often connects different elements to create something new, perhaps painting two patterns in a single work, or exhibiting two unconnected works together to spark new narratives. Recalling the artworks in the exhibition, write an imaginative story that weaves together two objects or ideas you remember from the show.
- **Watch a documentary showing Reuben Paterson creating an epic artwork in sand.**  
[reubenpaterson.com/exhibitions/there-goes-the-moon](http://reubenpaterson.com/exhibitions/there-goes-the-moon).  
Notice how the artist modifies ideas when unexpected problems arise. What can you learn from this? Make your own temporary artwork using natural materials. Identify a site around your school or local area with naturally reflective materials. Eg fallen leaves around a tree, pebbles or sand on the beach. Think about simple ways to vary the tone or sheen to create a simple optical effect, perhaps by flipping or overlapping leaves, or raking sand. Experiment with materials, then design, create, and document a large pattern on site.

<sup>1</sup> Darcy Nicholas to Reuben Paterson cited in Vrede, A (2005) ‘Enlightened by kōwhaiwhai: the art of Reuben Paterson’, p.8

<sup>2</sup> Tauranga Art Gallery. Retrieved 02/23 from [artgallery.org.nz/whakapapa-get-down-upon-your-knees-reuben-paterson](http://artgallery.org.nz/whakapapa-get-down-upon-your-knees-reuben-paterson)