

CHRISTCHURCH ART GALLERY TE PUNA O WAIWHEHU / 23 MARCH - 24 JUNE 2007

kelcytaratoa: myspace

KELCY TARATOA (NGAITERANGI AND NGATI RAUKAWA) WAS BORN IN LEVIN IN 1972. HE COMPLETED A MASTER'S DEGREE IN MĀORI VISUAL ARTS AT TE PUTAHI-A-TOI, MASSEY UNIVERSITY, PALMERSTON NORTH IN 2005. HE LIVES AND WORKS IN PALMERSTON NORTH AS A FULL-TIME VISUAL ARTS PRACTITIONER.

Sharp-edged, typically large-scale and loaded with identifiably local visual information – from familiar road markings to Tip Top and 'the golden M' – Kelcy Taratoa's paintings are upbeat, streetwise and engaging. In his work, the vernacular urban New Zealand landscape becomes the backdrop for self-portraits both past and present, joined by a sampling of disparate, hovering graphic elements. While comic book superheroes bursting into these urban settings deliver an immediate punch, the works offer multiple levels of impact and an illuminating degree of self-disclosure, an invitation to join a conversation without words.

Taratoa spent his childhood years in Levin and New Plymouth, starting in Levin in a middle-class, predominantly non-Māori neighbourhood, in a house built with financial assistance from the Department of Māori Affairs. With Government policy at this time aimed at easing low-income families into home ownership and seeing Māori established in urban centres (often evenly placed among their non-Māori neighbours), Taratoa's earliest years were devoid of Māori cultural reference. In New Plymouth, from the age of eight until his mid teens, home was a series of rented Housing New Zealand properties, and his experience one of constant dislocation and readjustment. Growing up without any particular sense of identification with his Māori ancestry, he was often also made

uncomfortably aware of his not belonging, or being acceptable, through the fact of his ethnic 'difference'. It was at this point that he first began to make connections with the mythologies of the Marvel Comics crew, characters who – through their difference and metamorphic abilities – found themselves marginalised within their own societies, despite their intention to participate and do good.

After leaving school, with his parents' encouragement, Taratoa went into painting and decorating with the idea that to have a trade was to have something solid behind him. In his late twenties, however, due to words from an uncle who recognised in him both frustration and untapped potential, and who advised the pursuit of a path with greater possibilities for achievement, Taratoa took the step of enrolling in the Māori Visual Arts programme at Te Putahi-a-Toi, Massey University's School of Māori Studies. By this time he was also married with two children (a third child was born during his early years of study).

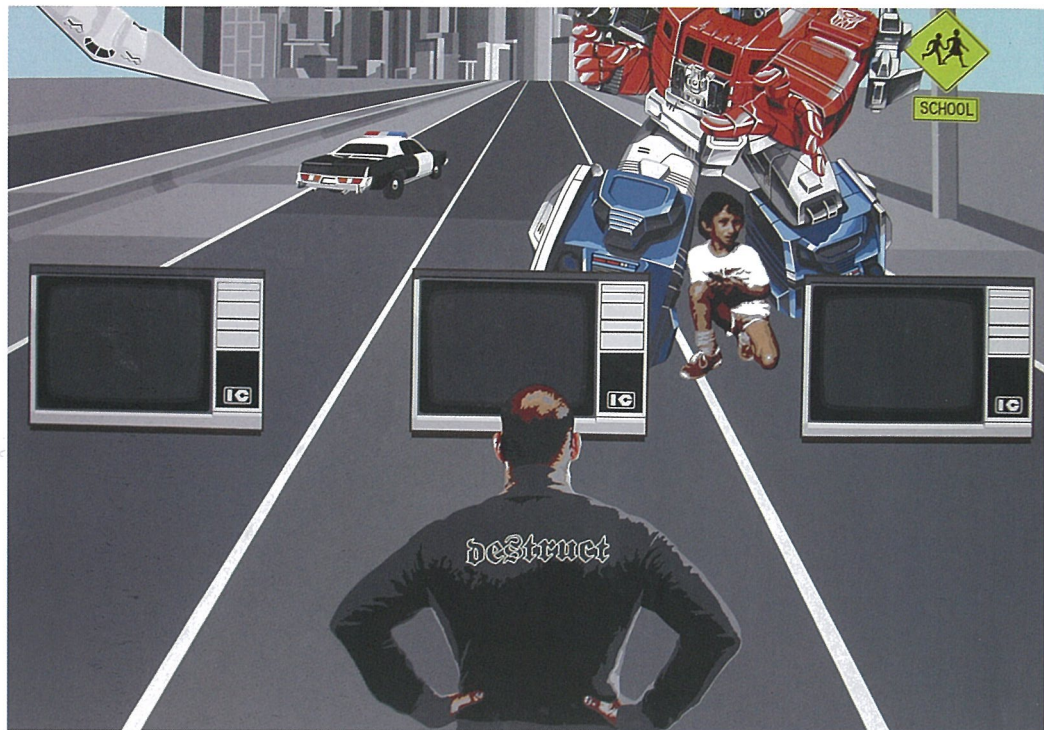
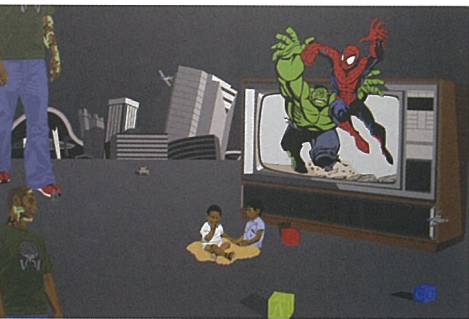
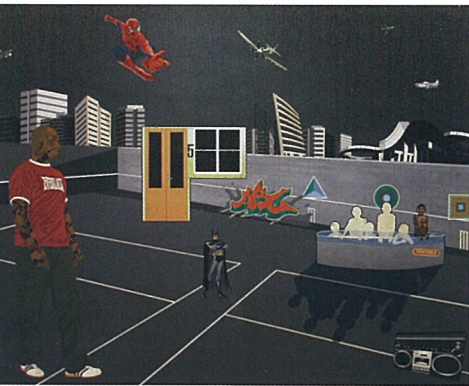
Taratoa's artistic and intellectual abilities flourished at Te Putahi-a-Toi. From 1999–2005, under the tutelage of leading artists including Robert Jahnke, Shane Cotton and Kura Te Waru Rewiri, he was encouraged to gain a better understanding of his own identity and background through a solid conceptual grounding in both traditional and contemporary Māori visual arts. In 2003 he was the recipient of a Creative New Zealand/Te Waka Toi Karahi A Te Waka Toi Award, and in 2006 he graduated with a Master of Māori Visual Arts (First Class Honours and Massey Scholar). Integral to Taratoa's development was the study of New Zealand history and the examination of broad themes with lasting implications. A particular focus was the question of how urbanisation had impacted on urban Māori identity, and what defined being Māori in contemporary New Zealand society.

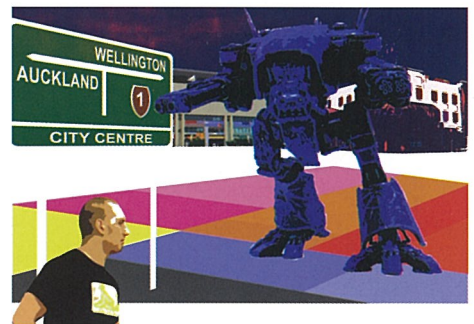
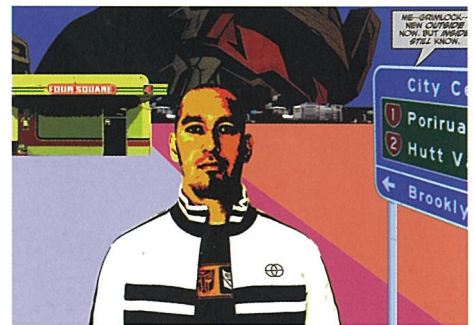
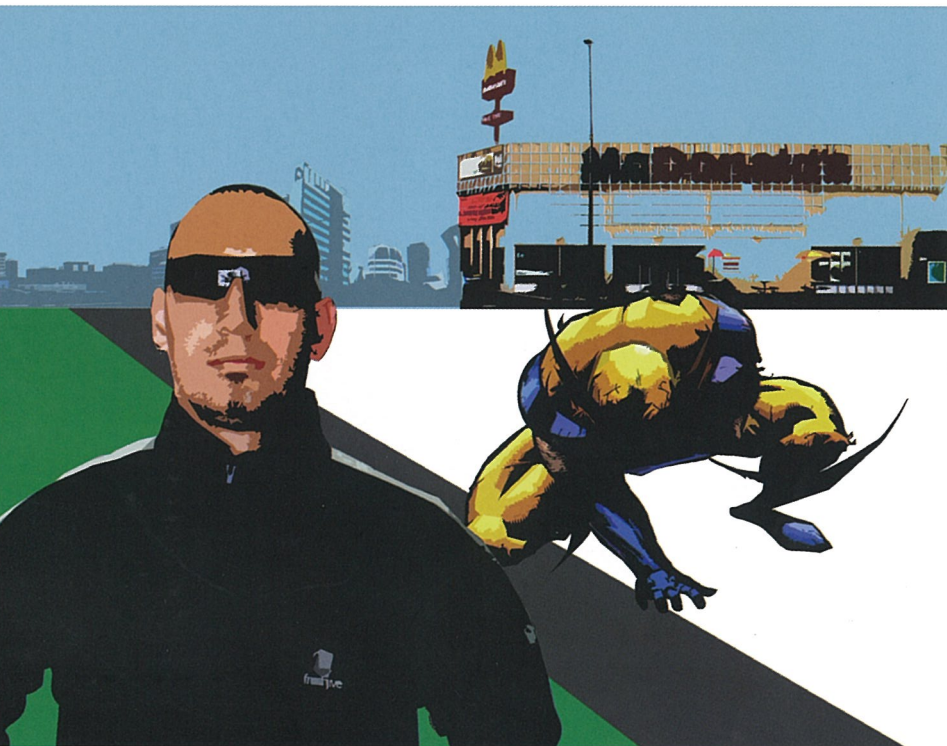
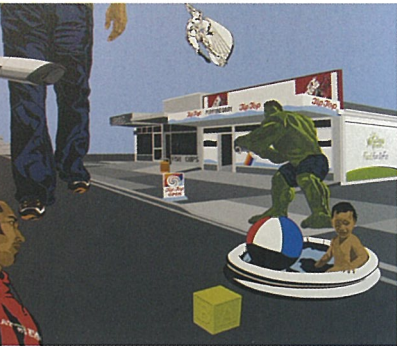
This exploration led to an increasingly assertive appreciation of the value of his own individual story and path.

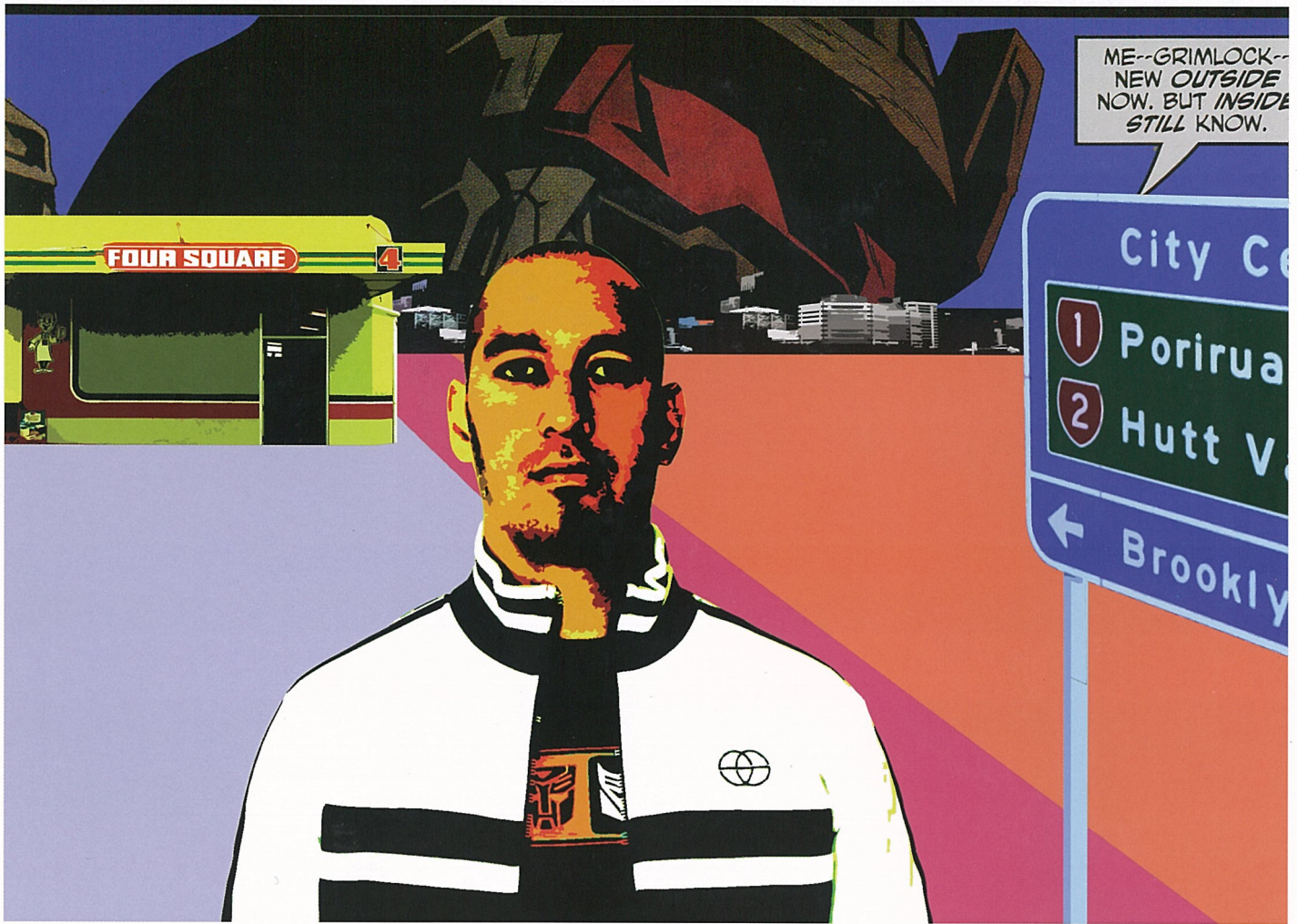
Taratoa's paintings are revealing as much for the imagery he has incorporated as for that which he has decided to omit. Unlike Māori arts practitioners such as Cotton or Te Waru Rewiri (whose influence and input Taratoa honours and acknowledges), he has not chosen to make any reference to whakapapa or traditional Māori forms. In his own story, Taratoa's turangawaewae – the place to stand that is specific to him – has been depicted as a soulless, even potentially menacing environment, where a sense of territoriality exists within a shifting series of neighbourhoods, each delineated by shopping strips and median barriers, and emblazoned with the enticements of western commercial culture.

While Taratoa acknowledges that the content of the work reflects his own experience and is directly personal – thereby in some ways running counter to the Māori approach of 'everything feeding back into the collective' – he is aware that his story is also part of a bigger picture. In this territory he joins others, including Reuben Paterson, Nathan Pohio, Rachel Rakena and Michael Parekowhai – all Māori artists who have connected in their work to the theme of colonisation and experiencing a forced 'otherness'. In his Master's dissertation, thinking about his place within a characteristically marginalised demographic, Taratoa cites John Tamihere's shocking assertion of seven in ten Māori males aged thirty and below being known to the New Zealand criminal justice system. With an early stated aim in his work having been 'to decolonise the mind', Taratoa's most recent self-portraits show him looking forward and standing his own ground, having shaken off the perceptions and misconceptions of others, and with further roads and highways to investigate and travel.

KEN HALL







“ I AM LIVING IN THE ERA OF HIP HOP, REGGAE, DUB, ACID JAZZ, HOUSE, DRUM ‘N’ BASE, LOUNGE, AND ALL FORMS OF ELECTRONIC MUSIC; IN AN ERA OF ANIMATED COMIC BOOK CHARACTERS; IN THE ERA OF BIG SPECIAL EFFECTS WHERE ANYTHING IS POSSIBLE; IN THE ERA OF BRAND WARS; IN AN ERA OF MERGING, BLURRING, BORROWING, ADOPTING AND ADAPTING, MIXING AND REMIXING, DECONSTRUCTING AND RECONSTRUCTING, CONTEXTUALISING AND RE-CONTEXTUALISING; AND IN THE ERA OF POST-MODERN THOUGHT. ”

KELCY TARATOA, *the who am I? episodes*, Master of Māori Visual Arts Thesis, 2005

This is Kelcy Taratoa's fourth solo exhibition at a public New Zealand gallery: *the who am I? episodes* were shown at The Dowse Art Museum in Lower Hutt and at Te Manawa in Palmerston North in 2005, and *Back to Mine: Urban Realities* at City Gallery Wellington in 2006. **kelcytaratoa: myspace** brings together works from these shows with new works including a projected digital installation.

Kelcy Taratoa exhibits with
Nadene Milne Gallery, Arrowtown.

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This publication has been produced with support
from Nadene Milne Gallery, Arrowtown.

Curator: Ken Hall
Catalogue design: Emma Vial
Printing: Spectrum Print, Christchurch

ISBN 978-1-877375-12-5

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Admission free
Daily 10am – 5pm, Wednesdays 10am – 9pm



CHRISTCHURCH
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All exhibited works are shown on cover.

ROW 1: *Episode 001* 2003, acrylic on canvas, 1677 x 2134 mm, collection of R. & H. Jahnke, Palmerston North; *Episode 003* 2003, acrylic on canvas, 1219 x 1679 mm, collection of Barry Pilcher, Feilding; *Episode 004* 2004, acrylic on canvas, 1219 x 1679 mm, collection of Brett and Fiona Shepherd, Auckland.

ROW 2: *Episode 005* 2004, acrylic on canvas, 1677 x 2134 mm, collection of Jenny Smith and Geoff Wylde, Wellington; *Episode 006* 2004, acrylic on canvas, 1677 x 2134 mm, collection of Nadene Milne, Arrowtown; *Episode 007* 2004, acrylic on canvas, 1524 x 2134 mm, collection of Shane and Teri Ta'ala, Auckland.

ROW 3: *Episode 008* 2004, acrylic on canvas, 1524 x 2134 mm, collection of Darryn and Angela Joseph, Palmerston North; *Episode 009* 2005, acrylic on canvas, 1219 x 1679 mm, collection of Jonathan Salter and Shona Kavanagh, Wellington; *Episode 0010* 2005, acrylic on canvas, 1219 x 1679 mm, collection of Tony Balfour and Sarah Bultitude, Australia, courtesy of Nadene Milne Gallery, Arrowtown.

ROW 4: *Episode 0016* 2006, acrylic on canvas, 1219 x 1679 mm, collection of Jonathan Salter and Shona Kavanagh, Wellington; *Episode 0022* 2006, acrylic on canvas, 610 x 915 mm, private collection, Christchurch; *Episode 0018* 2006, acrylic on canvas, 1219 x 1679 mm, collection of Peggy Scott and David Teplitzky, Bangkok, Thailand.