

COROMIND



Issue 33

Claiming Title

When Validation comes from Within

WONDERING IN WAIKINO

The Life of Kuya the Cave Painter

COROMANDEL OPEN STUDIOS

Take the Scenic Route Through
Creativity this October

AHI KAA

Ngā Kaihanga Uku & Friends
Return to Driving Creek

Audio ||||
Version



Et voilà

When the first issue of Coromind came out, I already knew it would be something special.

I had been friends with Leo and Taylor for years, and watched them pour their creativity and energy into Altbays Table Talk, their podcast that sparked honest conversations and unexpected connections. So when they told me about their next adventure – creating a free magazine for the Coromandel – I knew whatever they made would have heart, vision, and personality.

Still, when I picked up that first issue, I was truly impressed. The design, photography and mix of voices all felt vibrant and alive. It was the kind of magazine you don't just flick through; you linger over it, page after page, meeting the people, places and stories that make this peninsula so unique.

I'm originally from France and have been lucky to call the Coromandel home for the past ten years. Moving halfway across the world meant swapping baguettes and raclette for pies and fish and chips, and learning that no matter the weather or temperature, you can wear shorts every day. Settling into this special part of the world has been a journey of discovery, not just of the landscapes and lifestyle, but of the rich creative community thriving here. That's where Coromind shines. It's more than just a magazine; it's a vibrant reflection of the Coromandel's spirit, capturing the quirks, talents and stories that truly make this place feel like home.

I kept following Coromind issue after issue, aware of the hard work behind the scenes: the late nights, endless layouts, and countless calls and emails required to bring each issue to life. Yet every edition always looked effortless. The magazine quickly became a showcase for the peninsula's talent: painters, sculptors, writers, musicians, and so on ... all sharing their work side by side, telling our collective story.

So when the magazine featured my art on Issue 14, I felt a genuine sense of pride. Having been there from the early days as a friend, now I was

stepping into the pages myself. Seeing my work printed alongside other local artists was a moment of connection and belonging I'll always cherish.

One of the first things I did was send a copy to my family in France. It wasn't just about sharing my paintings; it was about giving them a glimpse of the community that inspires me; the creative spirit flowing through this place. My parents could flip through those pages and see the Coromandel's beauty not only in landscapes, but in the people who call it home.

Since then, every issue has introduced me to someone new; painters who bring the Coromandel's landscapes to life with skill and passion, writers whose stories capture the everyday moments and unique spirit of this community. That's what Coromind does best: it brings us together and shows the many ways our diverse voices tell the story of this place.

Looking back, my relationship with the magazine reflects my own journey here, starting as an observer, then becoming a participant, and now feeling deeply proud to be part of the creative community it celebrates.

So next time you spot Coromind – in a café, a shop or a supermarket – take it home. Spend time with it. Let it open a window onto the Coromandel through the eyes of its artists and storytellers. You might just see yourself reflected there, too.

 Words by
Sebastien Pan



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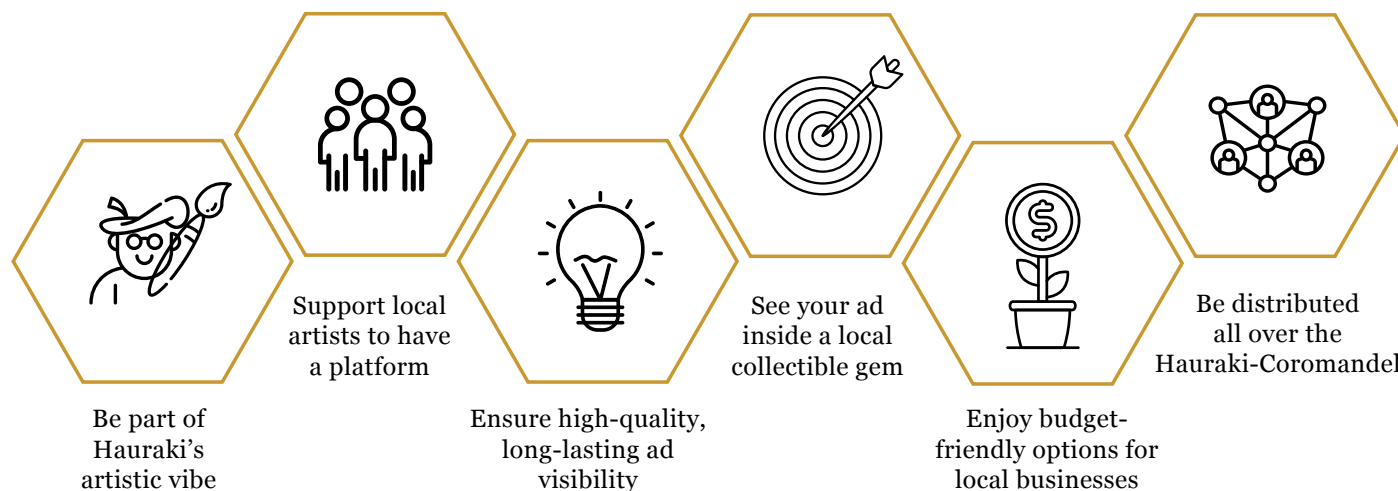
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Featured Artist Jude Calder

For the longest time, all I really wanted was a little cabin in the woods where I could draw, paint, surf, and maybe rock out to a party or three if the isolation got too much.

Fast forward to today and that dream still feels as far away as it did 30 years ago. Funny how the simplest things can be the hardest to achieve ... or maybe I'm just taking the long and winding road to get there.

Not that I'm complaining. I've been blessed with a healthy family, a thriving business filled with good humans, and I'm kaitiaki of a special slice of whenua we're shaping into our own version of paradise to share with others on the Coromandel Peninsula. It's an enviable lifestyle, and though there are times I could happily throw my phone deep into the Whangamaroro River, I feel like the hard graft is paying off – and I'm super grateful for where I am.

My interest in all things arty began at MBAS where our graphic design teacher, Mr Rowe, let us play the latest Red Hot Chili Peppers, Nirvana, or occasionally Rage Against the Machine on his converted car stereo hooked to a car battery. As 5th and 6th formers, we thought this was epic. The only catch? Do the mahi – and listen to at least one side of Mr Rowe's Creedence Clearwater Revival tape first. Genius in hindsight, as most of us were so focused (and loath to lose our listening privileges) that by the second half of class Mr Rowe could leave us to it and go catch up with his woodwork teacher mate.

Almost ten years after leaving school, I returned to study in Hamilton and gained a degree in visual arts, majoring in painting and sculpture. Wintec was churning out starry-eyed graphic designers by the hundreds, and I was behind the 8-ball learning Adobe Illustrator and Photoshop, so I pivoted to painting and illustration instead of graphic design.

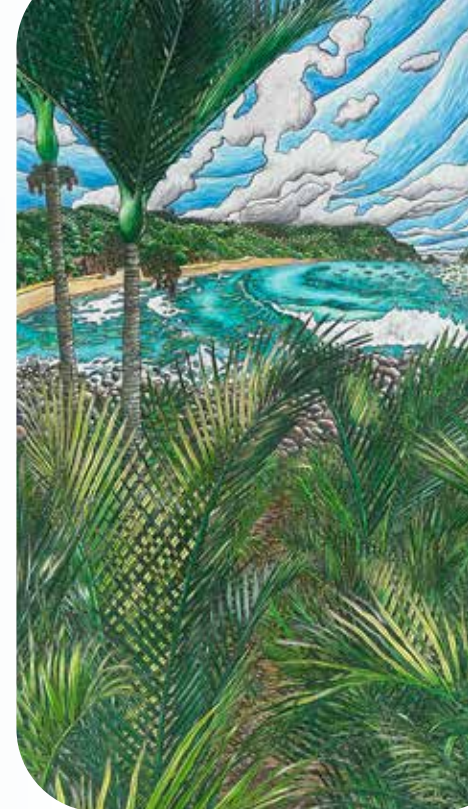
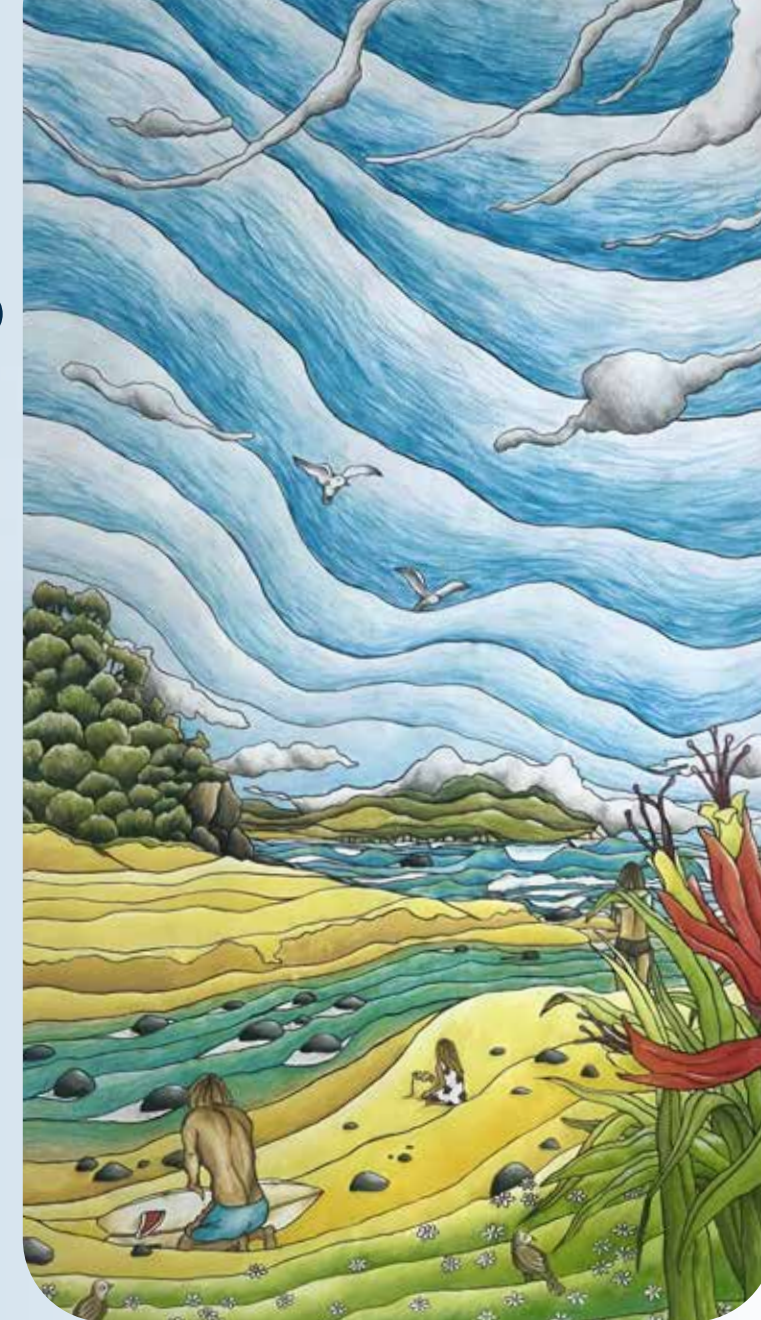
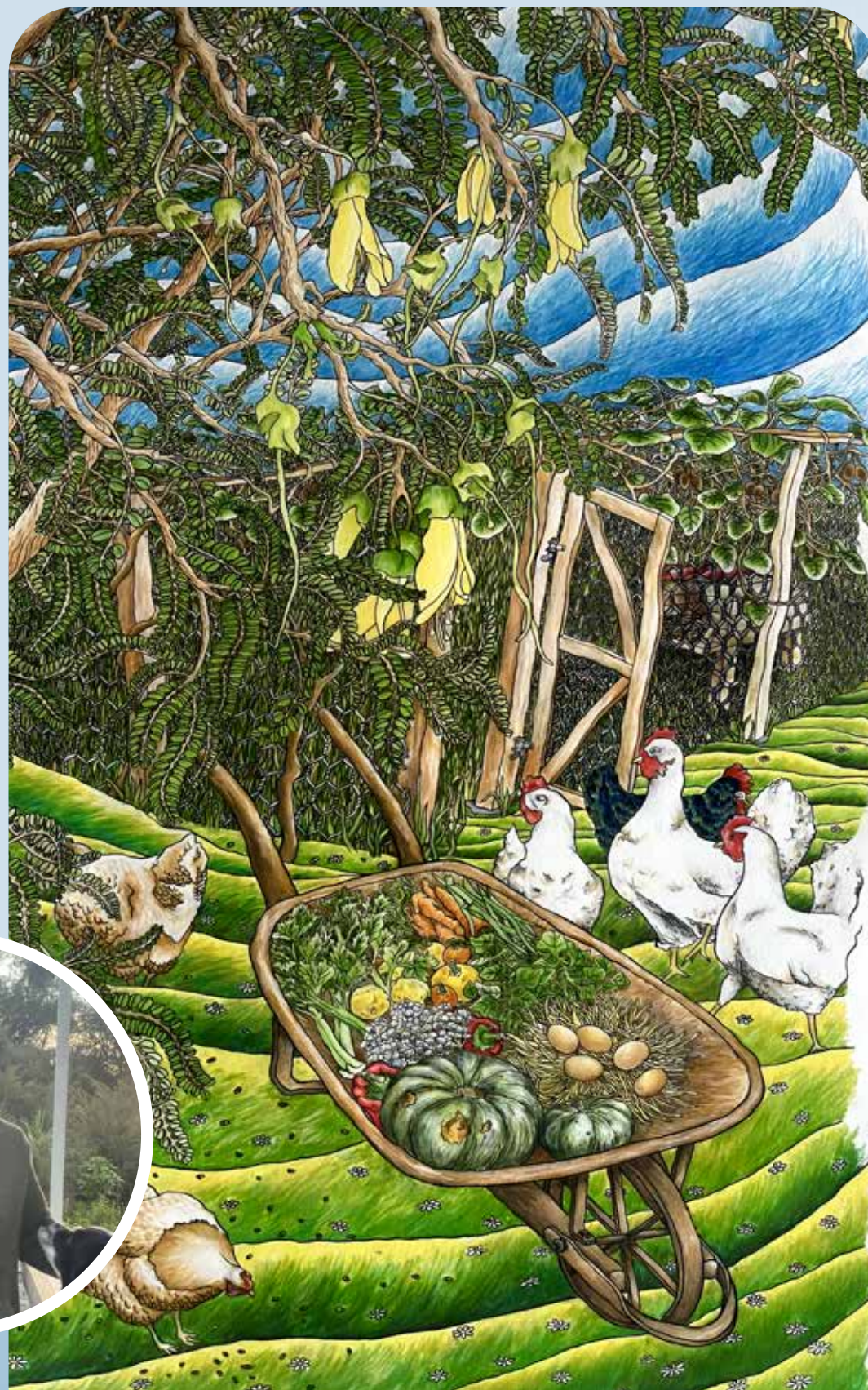
Coming back to the Coromandel was a breath of fresh air after my stint in the 'Tron, and I was determined to get off the tools and give my art career a decent crack. Life had other ideas. After a few carefree bachelor years, I had a young family and a mortgage, so I went out on my own landscaping – still illustrating and painting in the evenings.

I've always enjoyed illustration as well as the more 'high brow' world of fine art painting and admire artists who successfully blend the two.

It's an odd, eclectic mix of paintings, illustrations and half-baked propositions I've handed over to the Coromind team for this article – but they're a rock-and-roll kind of outfit, and I'm confident they'll pull something together from the rubble and make me look good.

Thanks for taking the time – and never forget: it's a long way to the shop if you wanna sausage roll.

 Words by
Jude Calder



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Jude's work

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MILLY MOON AND THE SPACES BETWEEN SERIES



Claiming Title

When Validation comes from Within

I wake early and busy myself with packing a bag, fussing over a layered outfit – Melbourne's weather can be more volatile than home – then anxiously sift through old writings in an attempt to reassure myself that I have at least a semblance of know-how, worthy of the weekend ahead. I walk through St Kilda Gardens, past old homes, bathing in the familiar and listening with reverence to 'The Facts of Life' reminding myself: I might as well love, I might as well love, I might as well love.

A dear friend of mine, Waihi multi-disciplinary artist, Theresa Brumder, always passionately introduces me as a 'poetess' to new connections and I shrink every time. In humble gratitude that she sees me so, and with the weight of expectation of an artist's title. It seems a clear validation then, that the news of a scholarship offered to attend the esteemed Pádraig Ó Tuama's poetry retreat in Melbourne, came while in Theresa's company.

"I told you you're a poet!" She laughed at my tears of unbelieving joy.

Even so, validation eludes me as I awkwardly fill the Australian customs card, scribbling multiple titles as my occupation. My lack of worth in the world without a 'career' title screams at me and I print something painstakingly vague – HOSPO / IN ARTS / TEACHING. (?? Sorry, I don't have an occupation, ha!)

Of course, I'm travelling from NZ; the officer barely glances at me or my card.

I arrive 10 minutes before entry time and meet the smattering of other attendees eagerly loitering at the gate. Kate, rosy cheeked with bright kind eyes, has travelled interstate as has Mark, youthful enthusiasm and wide smile calming the feeling of being out of my depth.

We step into the venerable old building, marvelling at the history and hospitality of the place as the crowd gathers, finding name tags, cups of tea, gingerly choosing a seat in the large conference room. Lovingly set up with cushions, tissue boxes (well used by the end), pencils and notebooks for our use, this room is our home for the weekend, and we settle in at the chimes call amongst the delicate vases of hyacinth and a sweet heady scent of incense burning ... the anticipation palpable.

Pádraig's presence is distinct. As an acclaimed author, poet, theologian and conflict resolution facilitator, among many other things, Pádraig's work has accompanied me for many years, and I am overwhelmed by awe. And my self-doubt. I fear the academy will regret giving me the scholarship. I fear reading my work aloud for its amateur immaturity. Pádraig immediately quashes my impostor however, by announcing "Comparison is a cancer" in his lilting Irish accent and asks us to simply be kind and honest with ourselves as we write this weekend. We should know our wonderful line may not surface, not this weekend, not this year even, but it will come, as long as we know we are seeking it.

I am reminded of Rilke's 'Letters to a Young Poet' where he states that knowing if you should pursue writing or not, comes from knowing if you must. If you must be an artist, you are an artist.

I open. I accept my ability and the fact I have much to learn and, slowly, I feel I belong here. The days in company with fellow writers are a beautiful, contemplative time. We explore connection and the space between us, as we learn, write, cry, laugh, share and debate, the intricate, all-encompassing world of poetry, our conduit.

In closing, someone names me in thanks for my openness and I find, not for the first time, I can give myself permission to weep, to speak and to open with the group, turning again my dark guilt, self-doubt and vulnerability into my great gift of authentic expression.

I didn't write anything wonderful during the retreat; however, returning home to Aotearoa, brimming with inspiration and a calm acceptance of my art and its ever-evolving purpose, I filled in my customs card, under 'occupation' printing clearly, ARTIST.

<https://onbeing.org/poetry/the-facts-of-life/>

Words by
Milly Moon



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WONDERING IN WAIKINO

THE LIFE OF KUYA THE CAVE PAINTER

The morning inside the cave was chilly and dimly lit. The only light was from a few coals still burning in fire pits from the night before. All was silent, save for the stifled moaning of a young mother giving birth to her second child while her daughter looked on in awe. The child arrived just as the sun rose, and his cries stirred and woke others in the cave who came to see him. He was much smaller than other newborns and fragile; his right arm was only half the size of his left, with a fingerless stump of a hand. While he snuggled in his mother's embrace, the rest observed with disapproval, eventually dispersing. The group was famished and parched, too preoccupied to worry about yet another delicate infant who might not survive. But survive he did, nurtured and protected by his mother and compassionate sister. This is the story of Kuya, the cave painter.

Over time, he grew into a fine young man, albeit small in stature and lacking physical strength. Judged as too frail to participate in hunting expeditions, he spent most of his days aiding the women and elders in gathering vegetables and trapping small animals like tortoises, rabbits, lizards and birds. Often teased and ridiculed by the other young men, he found solace in learning the art of mixing minerals with fluids to make red and black pigments, which they used to decorate their bodies and clothing. One morning, an idea came to him, but having only one useful hand he required aid and approached his sister Kaya for help. He asked her to place her hands on the cave wall, and using pigments, he outlined them – one with red and the other with black. While they sat there, gazing at the images, their mother summoned Kaya, leaving him alone, to ponder what he had created.

Later that afternoon, the men returned home with few spoils to show, citing adverse weather conditions. Disgruntled and hungry, the atmosphere in the cave was tense and aggressive. Kuya seized the opportunity, bravely stood up, and beckoned them to follow him. As usual, most ignored him, but some paid heed, so he grabbed a

flaming branch and led them to the hand paintings he had painted on the wall earlier. Upon seeing what he had done, they stood there momentarily mesmerised ... but only momentarily. Cold and hunger took priority. Little did they know that the following weeks and years would bring a new dawn, an evolution of the clan and a new path for Kuya.

The weather began to improve, and so did the success of the hunting expeditions. The clan felt at ease, and Kuya took the time to explore his new hobby. He began to experiment painting images of animals caught in the hunts, starting with a lizard and then progressing to birds, small rodents and eventually larger animals. As the weeks passed, his wall paintings began to attract attention and praise, with some even asking him how he did it. But it wasn't until he painted an imagined scene of a hunt that they finally took a genuine interest. He pleaded with them to allow him to accompany them on the next outing, promising to stay out of their way and watch from a distance. Initially, they were reluctant but finally agreed, for the first time, that he would be included in the entourage.

The next day brought perfect weather, and the returning scouts had found abundant wild game not far away. They set out just after sunrise and returned by mid-afternoon with an ample supply of game. The clan began preparing the evening's meal, except for Kuya. Inspired by what he had seen and heard that day, he immediately found a new cave wall and began to paint the scene of the hunt, and this time, he included clan members and their weapons. While the others retired, he continued to paint until finally he succumbed to exhaustion and fell asleep where he was. He awoke the following day to the sounds of the clan gasping, grunting and howling. At first, he thought they were under attack, but then the chief elder picked him up and held him above his shoulders in front of his wall painting. There were screams and cries of appreciation, and from then on, Kuya was no longer dismissed or ignored. In time, through his creations, he would be regarded as a highly respected elder and teacher – the keeper of stories and dreams.

 Words by
Amir Yussuf



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Rob Holding

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WITH OUR COMMUNITY AND GATHERING LOCAL STORIES. IN THIS PIECE,
WE SHARE A BIT MORE ABOUT ROB AND HIS JOURNEY IN RADIO.**

WHAT IS YOUR HISTORY WITH THE COROMANDEL AREA?

Sharon and I have holidayed here many times. We stayed a couple of times at Te Mata Lodge when the Wakelins owned it. Friends had a caravan-bach in Whangamatā that the whole family stayed at a few times. There's a lovely little retreat up in Wyuna Bay that Sharon and I really enjoyed, and our oldest daughter's in-laws have a bach in Coromandel Town where we've all stayed at least once. Sharon also ran the programme at a couple of Day Camps for Dave Sherriff in Whenuakite back in the early 2000s and was a big part of the children's camps at Waihi Beach from 2012 to 2017. Most recently, our youngest daughter and her husband have been involved in the New Year's Beach Missions at Shelly Beach for the last three years. So yeah, we have a little bit of history here.

SOUNDS LIKE YOU HAVE A BIG FAMILY

We have five children plus spouses and partners, and eleven grandchildren with number twelve due in December.

WHERE ARE YOU ORIGINALLY FROM?

I was born in Dunedin but haven't lived there since 1993. I've moved

around a lot - Invercargill, Alexandra, Christchurch, Sydney, Auckland, Tauranga, Auckland again and now Katikati. Sharon is a Bay of Plenty girl from Pikowai.

SO WHERE DO YOU LIVE NOW?

We still live in Katikati, where we moved 15 years ago. I stay in a little 2x4m cabin up behind the Thames hospital during the week and then head home on Friday night to remind my wife what I look like. We are looking at fully relocating to somewhere on the southern Thames Coast next year.

HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN IN RADIO?

I got into radio in 1987. Actually, it started a bit earlier as I went to Australia in '85 to get into radio but I wasn't really motivated and spent most of that year and a half selling lawn mowers and chainsaws during the day and sitting around a kitchen table in West Sydney smoking dope at night. So technically it was 40 years ago.

LAWN MOWERS AND CHAINSAWS? SO, YOU'VE HAD A FEW DIFFERENT TYPES OF JOBS?

As you do. I started life as an electrical comms technician trainee back in the mid 70s, sold outdoor power

equipment for a long time, DJ'd a nightclub, worked in a computer store fixing computers, pastored a church for ten years, narrated a handful of audiobooks, packed kiwifruit for two and a half years, and now very, very grateful to be back in radio.

YOU'RE ALSO A MUSICIAN?

You'll notice I'm being interviewed as a broadcaster and not as a muso. But yeah, I sing and play guitar and piano and write not nearly enough songs.

WHAT DO YOU LIKE MOST ABOUT WORKING IN THE COROMANDEL?

Most of the radio stations I've worked for were either city stations or nationwide. Everything had to be generic. You couldn't tell people to look out for the new pothole as you're coming out of Ngatea just before the 70 kph sign, or that there's been an accident at the roundabout in Pauanui. I love being part of the localness of the Hauraki-Coromandel region. And I love the fact that the people in Te Puru don't mind when I talk about stuff in Waihi.



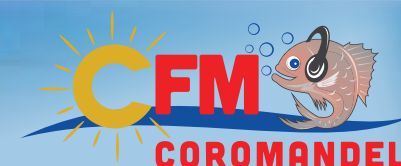
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THE STORY BEHIND COFFEE LALA

A 25-year journey of creativity, craft & caffeine in Kūaotunu

Coffee LaLa was born of a fortuitous string of events.

Surprisingly, roasting coffee is a lot like firing pottery. Potters and cooks make good roasters. From 1980 to 1996, the now Coffee LaLa roasting shed was the Kūaotunu Pottery shop. Where the roasters now sit, was the glazing room. The office desk and computer replaced the potter's wheel. Our coffee packing table is where floor to ceiling drying shelves were.

The 1980 arrival of a South African mining company made it increasingly difficult to run our pottery. By 1986, running a pottery was close to impossible. An average day's throwing might see a hundred mugs and jugs needing handles the next morning, or fifty bowls needing finishing. Making clay, stack-drying two tons of wood slabs, glazing the pots and loading the kiln, followed by a non-stop 51-hour firing, took a lot of time. Anti-mining protests, meetings with Council, the public, service clubs and schools stole this time. The pottery closed and Watchdog became a 24/7 unpaid occupation. We earned money working at the Coromandel Outdoor Language Centre.

'What hits you in the head' can lead to a new direction. Just after celebrating the year 2000 (the change of the century!), a friend came over with some green beans and asked if I knew how to roast them. I had never even seen a green coffee bean, like not knowing where eggs come from!

So, 25 years ago I grabbed our popcorn machine and fitted a baked bean can to it for a roasting chamber. The first roast took seven minutes. We listened, looked and smelled, then tipped it when it looked like coffee. It even tasted good. Thinking about how carefully we roast now, we were very lucky.

John Burton, green coffee importers, were super helpful on the phone, so I went up to Auckland for samples of different countries (origins). One popcorn machine became four. Our friends became test subjects. The coffee became an instant success.

There were only 30 roasters in New Zealand back then. It is estimated there are 192 now. Long black and flat white were new concepts. Nedilka suggested starting the business. Our pottery shop took a month of serious cleaning. I designed a simple LPG coffee roaster. My metal genius friend Alan Forbes (RIP) built it out of scraps we had lying around, such as a frying pan lid, Hillman Minx brake drum, barbecue burner and fan motor. It worked perfectly, the first time.

We won two awards at the 2001 NZ Coffee Expo with our funky home-made machine. On the way up to receive our medals, some guy shouted: "You must have some good roasting profiles". I said "Yep!", not even knowing what a 'profile' was!

Nedilka named us Coffee LaLa, meaning coffee crazy. I added 'insanely good' because it went with crazy.

Dave and Mel Johnston's TuaTua restaurant in Whitianga was our first café. Dave was, without a doubt, the best chef I have ever known. We were stoked when they decided to use LaLa. When Peppertree restaurant in Coromandel approached Geoff Marsland of Wellington-based Havana Coffee, he told them to use LaLa.

"You wouldn't get your fresh bread sent up from Wellington, would you?"

That was our second café. We were on a roll.

With the success of our 1 kg backyard roaster and increasing orders, we set out to build two 6 kg ones of the same funky design, rather than one big 15 kg. This has allowed us to roast more often, keeping it fresh. Accurate digital temperature meters improved our technique. Roasting single origins before blending makes it possible to maximise the flavour of each origin and to custom blend for our customers.

In the 11 years of NZ Coffee Expo competitions, LaLa won 18 awards, against as many as 100 companies, no cup of tea. These days, our sales are divided between home deliveries to loyal LaLa lovers, work places, café and small groceries, beach stores and local supermarkets. We roast two or three times a week and are blessed with a great staff of locals, two great roasters and three amazing office staff besides Nedilka and me — oh, and our incredible Rural Mail contractors. Without them all, there would be no LaLa.

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Words by
Mark Tugendhaft





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WE ARE SUCKAFISH AND WE PLAY PUNK ROCK. OUR STYLE IS LOOSELY BASED ON THE 90'S PUNK SOUND BUT ALSO DIPS INTO SKA, GRUNGE AND METAL.

How did you get started with music?

We'd all finished with school and found ourselves mincing around Tairua and Whitianga, not really sure what was next. Ghost and Grunta (our original guitarist) started turning up at this small open mic night in a cosy café in Tairua. At first it was just the two of them, then it grew – two became three, then four, and eventually settled back to three again. That's the same line-up we've got now.

What gets your creative juices flowing? What inspires you to make music?

Beers and darts, random jams with other bands, writing about things that matter but also things that don't matter. Knowing that anything can come from any riff if you just keep chipping away.

Who are your musical heroes or role models?

NOFX, Rancid, Pennywise, Bad Religion, Offspring and Sublime are just some of the bands that we love!

Back then, we didn't really know how to be a band. There wasn't much of a local scene to plug into, no roadmap to follow. So, we made our own. We started putting on our own shows around town, slowly getting spots in the city, and eventually organising our own tours and small fests. We were winging it, honestly – and in many ways we still are.

How has live music shaped your life and career?

It's everything. There's something special about a crowd of people showing up just to experience some art – even if that art happens to be three sweaty men yelling stink songs at them. It means something.

Playing with other bands is always a highlight. There's this instant connection when you meet people who are into the same scene, the same sounds, the same chaos. Those nights where there are five or six bands on the bill? Always epic. You never really know what's going to happen, but it's almost guaranteed to be a good time.

What does being a musician here in Te Tara-o-te-Ika-a-Māui (on the Peninsula) mean to you?

It's always great being able to mix and mingle with other local artists. There's a real sense of community, and everyone brings their own flavour to the table. We especially love playing gigs on the Peninsula – those crowds know how to bring the noise. Always a good rowdy ruckus. Just the way we like it.

What's been your most unforgettable moment in your music career so far?

It's wild to think that next year marks 20 years. Somehow, we've managed to keep the dream alive this long – and that still blows our minds a bit. These days, we're a bit more spread out, with a third of us based in Taranaki, but sending demos back and forth has been the lifeline. That's probably been the key to us still making music together after all this time.

If there's any advice we'd give, it's this: always share your ideas with your band – even the rough ones, even the half-finished ones. Don't wait for perfection. Just chip away at it. Not every song's going to be good, and that's totally fine. Some of them will be. It's a numbers game.

Where can we find your music, and how can people show their support?

Salty Platinum Vol 1 is out now on all streaming platforms.

Any exciting plans or projects on the horizon?

Salty Platinum Vol 2 is on the way. We are looking for another venue on the peninsula to record in August. Vol 1 was recorded in a log cabin in Hikuai.

We are planning to do an NZ tour of Salty Platinum 1/2 in 2026 for our 20-year anniversary.

 Words by
Donny Paton



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AHI KAA

Ngā Kaihanga Uku & Friends Return to Driving Creek

Driving Creek is thrilled to announce that Ngā Kaihanga Uku (the Māori Clay Artists Collective) and friends will be returning to Kapanga to rekindle their long-standing relationship with Driving Creek.

The rōpū will return to the iconic Coromandel railway and pottery from November 2 - 9, to host a series of public workshops and talks and open a major exhibition.

Born out of Ngā Puna Waihanga (the Māori Writers and Artists Society), Ngā Kaihanga Uku (NKU) first came together between 1987 and 1991. Founding members Baye Riddell, Manos Nathan, Colleen Waata-Urlich, Paerau Corneal, and Wi Taepa are collectively known as Ngā Tokorima.

Without a ceramic (fired clay) tradition in Aotearoa, NKU sought to “awaken and raise a Māori ceramic tradition,” in the words of founding member Baye Riddell.* Inspiration was close at hand: “Māori clay stories are intertwined with our creation narratives.”* The NKU kaupapa is to “work with clay from a Māori perspective, share resources and knowledge, and connect with other indigenous clay artists.”*

NKU members come together to learn and share in wānanga. Through these gatherings, Ngā Tokorima have passed their knowledge and skills on to the next generation of uku (clay) artists and NKU members. They have exhibited widely in Aotearoa and internationally to widespread acclaim, and have also formed important connections with indigenous clay artists around the world.

Baye first became involved with Driving Creek through his friendship with founder Barry Brickell. He acknowledges Barry’s influence on his own creative journey:

“His ‘Kiwi’ approach to pottery using local materials and exploring iconic New Zealand themes in his work, such as the freezing works and the New Zealand Railways, was for me an inspiring departure from the Euro-Asian influences I had previously experienced. This approach helped articulate and ratify my emerging Māori clay perspective.”

NKU members and friends will return to Driving Creek from November 2 - 9 for a wānanga. Alongside their gathering, members will host daily public workshops and talks. These will cover a range of making and decorating techniques - from using shellac resist and water etching to create textured surfaces, to making ipu whenua and ipu puehu (ritual vessels for placenta and ashes). Details and bookings at: drivingcreek.nz/ngākaihangauku

Ahi Kaa, an exhibition of work by NKU members and friends, will open on November 8 in the Driving Creek Gallery. Curator Chantel Matthews is bringing together a group show to “pay tribute to Driving Creek’s ethos, pioneered by Barry Brickell. Inspired by what it means to keep the fires burning as a potter/uku artist, we consider the hard work, determination, and love for the land and art that continue to burn today.”

Find out more at:
drivingcreek.nz/ngākaihangauku



Words by
Matilda Halley
With support from
Ngā Kaihanga Uku
and **Chantel Matthews**



L-R: NKU founding member Manos Nathan with Hirini Maika, Taihaere Maika, Hamuera Maika & Carl Bowman, Driving Creek, late 1980s



L-R: Boronia Riddell, Blue Corn (San Ildefonso Pueblo potter) and Helen Mason riding the train during a NKU visit to Driving Creek, May 1991.



Barry and Baye, with two of Baye's sculptures

*Quotes by Baye Riddell from his book Ngā Kaihanga Uku (Te Papa Press, 2023).

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Ross' Ramblings – Part 2

Between reforms and repression

SAUDI ARABIA

A DIFFERENT KIND OF PLACE

Continuing on from part 1 of my Saudi experience, the English School marketing fair I attended in Riyadh was held in the NZ Embassy, a compound only accessible by driving through a long maze-like road with machine gun posts at every corner to stop truck bombers from ramming the embassy. I am not sure but I would imagine that other embassies of western democratic countries took the same precautions at that time. The NZ Embassy is deemed to be NZ soil so alcohol can be consumed there and it was interesting to see a lot of Saudi language school agents making a beeline for the bar as soon as they arrived. In Whitianga I would ask my students why they went to the pub when Islam bans the consumption of booze. Many would tell me with a smile that in Whitianga it was okay, but when they returned home they would abstain. A few said that they drank secretly at home and that there were ways of obtaining alcohol.

It doesn't pay to come out of the closet in Saudi Arabia, unless you enjoy being stoned, flogged, imprisoned or beheaded, one of which will be the punishment following conviction. All the students I spoke to were 100% sure there was no homosexuality in their country, but when you consider the amount of time men spend in their own company due to the fact that they can't be alone with a woman who is not a close family member, I would be surprised if the 100% figure reflects reality.

One night I was invited by my ex-student Ahmed to visit his house and meet his father, to eat at a typical Saudi restaurant followed by a visit to a Saudi nightclub. Of course, I accepted his kind offer. On arrival at his home, I met his father and one of his five brothers. However, the women were nowhere to be seen, being sequestered in their own area of the house. I was very impressed by the wonderful food and generous hospitality offered by his father both at his home and at the restaurant. We ate delicious rice-based dishes with lamb, chicken, goat and camel meat and an assortment of couscous-like salads followed by dates and Arabic coffee. He told me that on weekends the family goes to their 'farm' in the desert outside Riyadh where they have a house with a swimming pool and a barn-like area where their 10 camels live. Money doesn't seem to be a worry in the kingdom.

Later, the nightclub Ahmed and I visited was a little different from the flashing strobe lights, loud music and mini-skirts found in a western one. Instead, there were lots of couches spread around outside in the open air with TV sets hung above them and young men lying around watching international football and smoking shisha through a hookah or waterpipe. Being a polite kind of guy, I tried one pipe of the flavoured tobacco, mainly to please my host. That was enough as I could feel that although the smoke was filtered through water, the stuff was definitely a health hazard. Later research backed up my hunch with one source stating that in 'an average shisha session (which usually lasts 20-80 minutes), a shisha smoker can inhale the same amount of smoke as a cigarette smoker consuming over 100

cigarettes'. And to make matters worse, the stuff doesn't even get you high!

Another form of entertainment in Saudi Arabia, especially for those with a death wish, is highway skating where a car pulls the 'skater' along at a relatively high speed. The 'skaters' wear smooth-soled sandals. They keep one foot elevated to cool down while 'skating' along the motorway on the other foot. When both feet get too hot at the same time, they jump onto the running board of the car momentarily, before they start to 'skate' again. If their shoes fall apart or if they catch an edge they would likely suffer from a case of fatal road rash. Imagine highway skating on New Zealand roads with their potholes. Fatal road rash, here I come!

My stay in Jeddah was a very relaxed time. This city has a more relaxed and liberal culture compared to Riyadh mainly because of its history as a cosmopolitan Red Sea port and its proximity to the religious pilgrim city of Mecca. It has a thriving arts and culture scene as well as a lot of marine activities like fishing, swimming and boating which many locals enjoy.

However, despite the more relaxed attitude towards dress codes and social norms, and the wonderful friendliness of the locals, basic rules, like a separation of the sexes, still applied. This affected our group on the last night of our stay when we enjoyed a farewell dinner at a restaurant. Unfortunately, our single female member Elizabeth was banned from joining us as women and families had to eat at a family restaurant around the corner. She was a good sport about it but must have felt a wee bit lonely eating by herself.

All this happened nearly 20 years ago and there have since been some reforms under the current leader Mohammed bin Salman Al Saud (MBS for short) concerning women's rights. They can now drive and yes they can even travel alone without permission from, or being in the company of, a male family member, and I believe some dress restrictions have been relaxed.

However other rights, like freedom of speech, are still extremely restricted, as demonstrated in 2018 by the MBS-ordered murder and dismemberment (in the Saudi embassy in Turkey) of Saudi journalist Jamal Ahmad Hamza Khashoggi. His crime was writing articles criticising the Saudi royal family. In the same vein, I doubt that opening a gay bar in downtown Riyadh would be good for one's health.

I imagine that despite the reforms of recent years, lasting meaningful change will be slow in coming in a religion-dominated autocratic kingdom like Saudi Arabia, especially when you consider the reversal in the direction of human rights that we are seeing in the religion-dominated, increasingly autocratic country, the USA. Let's hope we never see public executions on the front lawn of the White House on Truth Social.

Words by
Ross Liggins

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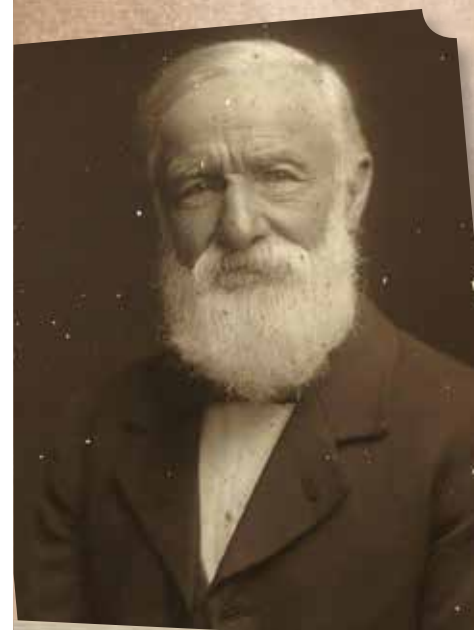
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JOHN READ & THE CYCLES OF THAMES

Gold Rush Economy and the Craft of Historical Writing




The process of researching a topic, and then turning the research findings into a narrative, is not a task to be undertaken lightly, if for no other reason than the writer's exposure to rabbit holes into which they might fall.

Some years ago, not long after I commenced to work for Read Bros Hardware, I felt compelled to research the history of the venerable old family-owned hardware business, thinking that I might author a brief history of the firm, perhaps in time for the 150th anniversary of the discovery of gold and founding of the Read Bros business.

The task appeared straight-forward enough. It turns out that this was not the case. John Read (1838 - 1922), the founder, was a product of the times in which he lived, the Victorian era; his business and personal life manifest a humanitarian ethos through, amongst other traits, a desire to improve the well-being of citizens. This made him an engaging and interesting character worthy of some deeper research – so the scope of the narrative was reduced and simplified but deepened.

However, to make sense of his business and personal activity he had to be situated within the economic activities of the town and its environs. This led to a more expansive research programme, more rabbit holes, and some conundrums. The deep-dive research, while revealing and amplifying components of the Read story, also revealed some research threads that made ordinarily tedious research less so; it became more exciting, and quite captivating – for me at least.

Read was, as we all are, a participant in the cycles of life, economic, domestic and personal. As the commercial and business activity of the town, and the physical infrastructure of the town itself, was built, grew, was sustained, declined and slowly rose again, so was Read's business a reflection of this cycle.

Wider reading on economic activity showed the predictability of economies based upon commodity exploitation – gold, timber and other natural resources being such commodities. But, with this awareness, intruded a reality – an ethnological reality, a reality of peoples – in this case, tangata whenua, tangata Māori.

The economic activity of the Kauaeranga tangata whenua prior to the Thames goldfield being proclaimed was clear enough – it was significant. But, with the establishment of the goldfield and the development of the necessary industrial, commercial, residential and business infrastructure, and its subsequent explosive

expansion, what was not clear was the disappearance of a long-standing way of life and the other Māori commodity-based economy.

This was indicated by the disappearance, over time, of Māori names from the news, from documents, from discourse. Some of these names would re-emerge later, in the Native Land Court and in the Resident's Magistrates Courts, or sometimes the Supreme Court, as redress was sought for many, and varied issues.

It is this predictable cycle that research spotlighted, not directly connected to Read, but a symptom of a bigger picture, and that especially resonated as some might see the cycle in evidence in contemporary New Zealand – as it has been since 1840?

Read emerges from the research as a thoroughly typical Victorian businessman, operating, initially, in an opportunity-charged business environment; he was responsive to the prevailing business dynamics, entrepreneurial, very situationally aware, and well-connected. But he was also a modest individual who did not seek the spotlight – he had ordinary expectations for his business, was grounded in a deep faith, and was driven by integrity and honesty with a strong desire to assist others. These things were easily seen in his business and domestic activities. Typically, Victorian.

If there is a take-out lesson from Read's story, it is that the fundamental values that drive successful and enduring business don't change, perhaps best encapsulated in the notion of 'service above self'.

Working on this historical text has sharpened my sense of perspective. Read was a microcosm of the world he inhabited, a reflection of the times and the circumstances in which he found himself. He exerted limited control and influence over his situation. He worked with what he had and made do, caring for those within his sphere of influence.

This perhaps is the lesson; that while things give the appearance of change, nothing much does. The constant is the values that actuate humankind – both good and bad.

Wisdom dictates that we citizens should recognise that fact and decide and act accordingly.

Thanks John Read, the founder.

Words by **Russell Skeet**

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The Ceramic Journey of Ashley Thor

From a family pottery to a gallery of his own

Ashley's journey began at the age of 12, when his parents launched a commercial pottery in the early 1970s. The business employed people from all walks of life and thrived for about seven years during a golden age of New Zealand ceramics. At the time, pottery wasn't just craft – it was fashion. A sales tax on imported ceramics made handmade pieces more accessible and desirable, and owning local pottery became a national trend.

When the family business was sold, Japanese ceramicist Nami Miyoshi suggested Ashley apply to live and work at Driving Creek Railway, then operated by the legendary Barry Brickell. The move would shape his trajectory as a maker. Ashley developed a strong passion for wheel work and explored clay as a sculptural medium. While at Driving Creek, he created a large ceramic chess set that was later acquired by the Waikato Museum (then the Hamilton Museum) in 1978, where it remains in the permanent collection. He later pursued a Bachelor of Applied Arts at Whangārei Polytechnic and continued developing his practice, balancing large sculptural works with functional domestic ware.

Throughout his career, Ashley has drawn inspiration from those he worked alongside – especially Barry Brickell, who became a key influence in his understanding of clay. Over time, ancient ceramic traditions and the work of New Zealand artists such as Graham Fraser, Warren Tippet, and Andrew Van der Putten helped refine his aesthetic. In the 1980s and '90s, Ashley's work evolved through colour and brushwork, allowing expressive surface design to emerge as a central focus of his ceramic language.

Having lived and worked in the Coromandel for over 40 years, the natural landscape continues to inform Ashley's practice. The ocean and forest appear throughout his decorative work – fish and sea forms acting as symbols of

place and connection. But it's not just the visual beauty of the region that keeps drawing him back.

"What is particularly unique about Coromandel, and what has brought me back here year after year," he says, "are the mountains, beautiful sandy beaches, and the pink, dappled light reflected on the hills as the sun sets into the ocean."

This October, Ashley is set to open his own gallery – Kōtare Ceramics – in Coromandel Town. The space will serve both as a dedicated showcase for his own work and as a platform for fellow local artists. Part gallery, part exhibition space, Kōtare Ceramics is intended to uplift the creative energy of the region and support a community that's long been rich in artistic expression.

Ashley hopes visitors to the gallery will experience a deep sense of connection to nature – sun, sea, forest, sky, and the land beneath it all. And for those who take a piece home, it becomes more than an object: it becomes part of a personal collection, a story told through form and fire.

As he prepares for the opening – timed to coincide with the Coromandel Open Studios Arts Tour in October, which Coromind is proud to be partnering with this year – Ashley is hard at work creating new pieces and planning future exhibitions. Looking toward 2026, Kōtare Ceramics will begin hosting installations and shows by well-known New Zealand artists, alongside Hauraki House Gallery.

For more information about his work and upcoming gallery, contact Ashley at: ashleyjthornz@gmail.com

 Words by
Genevieve Morley & Leonardo Magri



See more of
Ashley's work

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TURNING WASTE INTO OPPORTUNITY

Big news for Mercury Bay!

Wāhi Tukurua has launched Mercury Bay's first-ever resource recovery centre at 239 South Highway, Whitianga – right next to the Refuse Transfer Station! We're on a mission to rescue quality, reusable items from landfill and help our community cut down on waste. This new site is a huge step forward.

How it works – donated by locals, for locals

Got items too good to throw away? Everything we collect stays right here in Mercury Bay – supporting our community, not being shipped away. Drop items off at our site by booking a time via our website. We've also got a truck ready to collect from your home, whether it's a few bits or a whole house load. Your generosity directly benefits your neighbours and our shared environment.

We're a charity – not a business

We don't aim to make a profit, but to keep things running, we do need to pass on the actual costs of responsibly disposing of certain items. For example, e-waste and other tricky materials come with recycling fees – you simply pay what we pay. It's all about staying afloat while keeping things fair, transparent, and focused on reducing waste.

Shop online, Save resources

All rescued goods are sold exclusively through our online store: wahitukurua.co.nz/shop. Browse treasures from the Whitianga site and support waste reduction, all from the comfort of home.

Words by Tracey Bell - Chair Wāhi Tukurua



Setting up racking at Whitianga's resource recovery centre.



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COROMANDEL OPEN STUDIOS ARTS TOUR

Take the scenic route through creativity this October

On the first two weekends of October every year, Coromandel is host to an event that no art lover should miss! The Coromandel Open Studios Arts Tour is a time when many local artists in and around Coromandel Town open their studio doors to the public. This year the event falls on 4th-5th and 11th-12th October, with an exhibition spanning the full nine days.

This FREE, self-guided tour means art lovers can visit artists at work in their studios, whilst viewing their collection of art and purchasing pieces that they love. There are 34 local artists taking part this year with a wide range of mediums including painting, ceramics, glass, screen-printing, textiles, sculpture, jewellery, creative woodwork, and everything in between. We also have five new artists taking part: Matilda Halley (functional ceramics), Robyn Vinten (functional and decorative ceramics), Iona Matheson (ceramics and sculpture), Judy Wood (painting and jewellery), Libby McColl (painting). For those visitors short of time, some of our artists are also combining their 'studios' for the tour. 'Gallery 6' on Kapanga Road is host to four of our artists, as is Kōtare Art on Tiki Road. Both are situated in Coromandel Township. There are also several other artists who are sharing studios for the Tour. Almost all studios are within an easy 10-minute drive from the town centre.

The exhibition, held at Hauraki House Gallery on Kapanga Road, is the perfect place to start your 'tour'. Each artist has at least one artwork on display so visitors can pick up a guide and get a feel for who they would like to visit before starting out. It runs right the way through, from the 4th - 12th October and is open 10am - 4pm daily. Our artists take turns minding the gallery during the week, creating another opportunity for visitors to interact with the makers. There is an opening night on Friday the 3rd from 5.30pm, for those who would like to come and meet the artists in a more casual setting. All are welcome. We will also have a People's Choice Award and the chance to win a great prize pack for all visitors to the gallery.

If you're an art lover and are unable to make it on either of the official Tour weekends, some artists are open for the full nine days (look for the flags), and others are happy to receive visitors all year round. Just look for their 'open' signs or grab a Coromandel Open Studios artist guide and give them a call. Guides are available from Information Centres and galleries across the Peninsula, Bay of Plenty and Waikato. Or a digital version can be downloaded from: www.coromandelartstour.co.nz

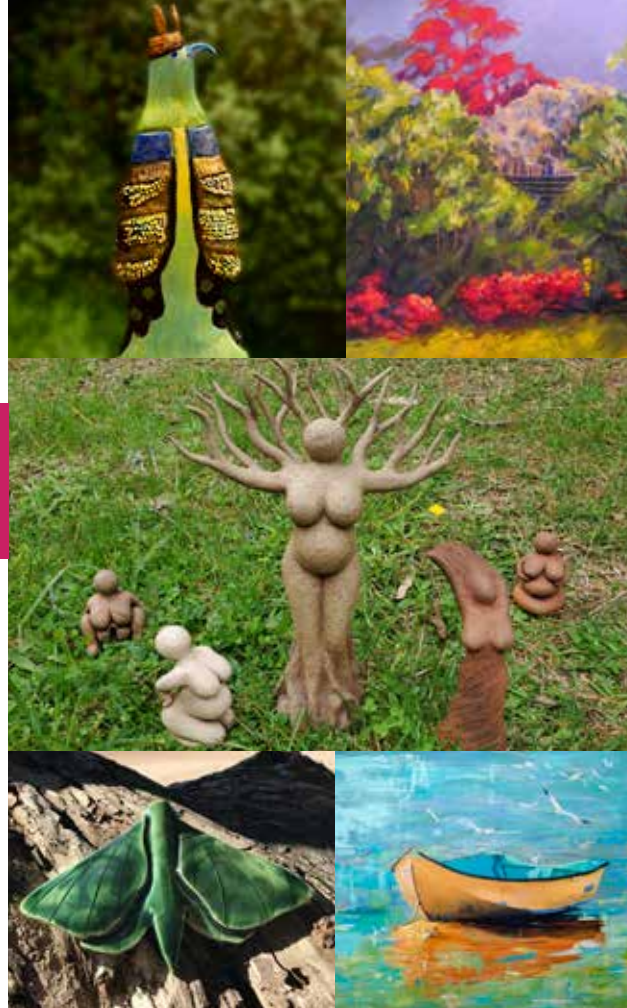
There are plenty of accommodation options both in and around Coromandel Town so why not make a weekend of it and enjoy all the great things Coromandel has to offer?

For further information on the tour, visit www.coromandelartstour.co.nz or follow on Facebook or Instagram (**CoromandelArtsTour**) to get regular updates.

We look forward to seeing you here.

Coromind is proud to be a partner of the Coromandel Open Studios Arts Tour!

COROMIND



Opening Night
Friday 3rd October, 5:30pm

Tour Weekends
Saturday & Sunday 4th-5th
October and 11th-12th October -
10am - 4pm

Location
Hauraki House Gallery + studios
around Coromandel Town
(self-guided)

Entry
FREE

Artists
34 local artists across painting,
ceramics, glass, textiles, sculpture,
jewellery, woodwork & more

For the full
guide, map &
artist details

Scan Here



Or visit: www.coromind.nz/coromandel-open-studios-arts-tour-2025/



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