

# COROMIND

Issue 41

## SURE SHOT

Bella Muir Shares Her Love of the Sea Through Photography

## RED ROSES & RED TAPE IN NZ

The Most Expensive Love Story I've Ever Told

## Layer by Layer

An Intuitive Art Practice with Lisa Stent

## Kauri Forest Whānau

The Living Network of Kauri Forests



On Air



Watch & Listen

# INFORMATIVE AND CREATIVE

When we clapped eyes on the first issue of Coromind, it was like "WOW", such a beautiful, colourful and classy magazine in the cafe ... free to take. We did and the content was interesting, creative and informative.

To this day, Coromind continues to set a benchmark as a truly community focused publication, genuinely connecting with the people and stories of Whitianga and the Coromandel as a whole.

We appreciate the quality of the writing and visuals, be they in print or digital – always done with respect for the artists, makers and the local voices featured. Coromind plays a vital role in preserving local identity, especially in places where creativity quietly thrives.

Great work Coromind team, you have come a long way and are an asset to the community.

The magazine should definitely find a place on everyone's coffee table!



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# THE ULTIMATE COROMANDEL GIG GUIDE

Coromind now brings gigs and events from across the region into one place – powered by Eventfinda. From live music and exhibitions to festivals and community gatherings, our guide at Coromind.nz helps you stay in the loop.

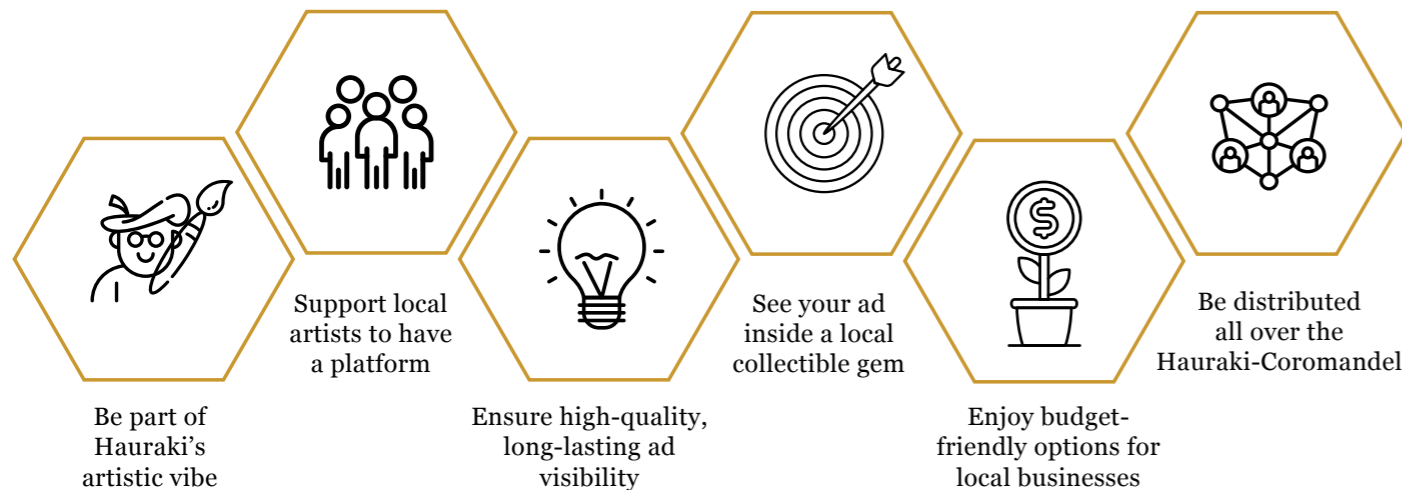
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Get in touch: ✉ [hello@coromind.nz](mailto:hello@coromind.nz)

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# John Quellin



Surfing inspired my affinity with the ocean and my motivation to paint it. I first surfed in Whangamatā, and it has always been a special place for me, so its world-class waves are a pleasure to paint.


I have worked in the surfboard industry as an airbrush, pin-line, and gloss-coat painter, and it was while working in Sydney in the late 70s and early 80s that I began to paint on canvas. The paintings were appreciated and sold, which was encouraging, and I enjoyed doing them, so I kept painting. I was using acrylic paint on the surfboards, so moving to acrylic on canvas was an easy progression.

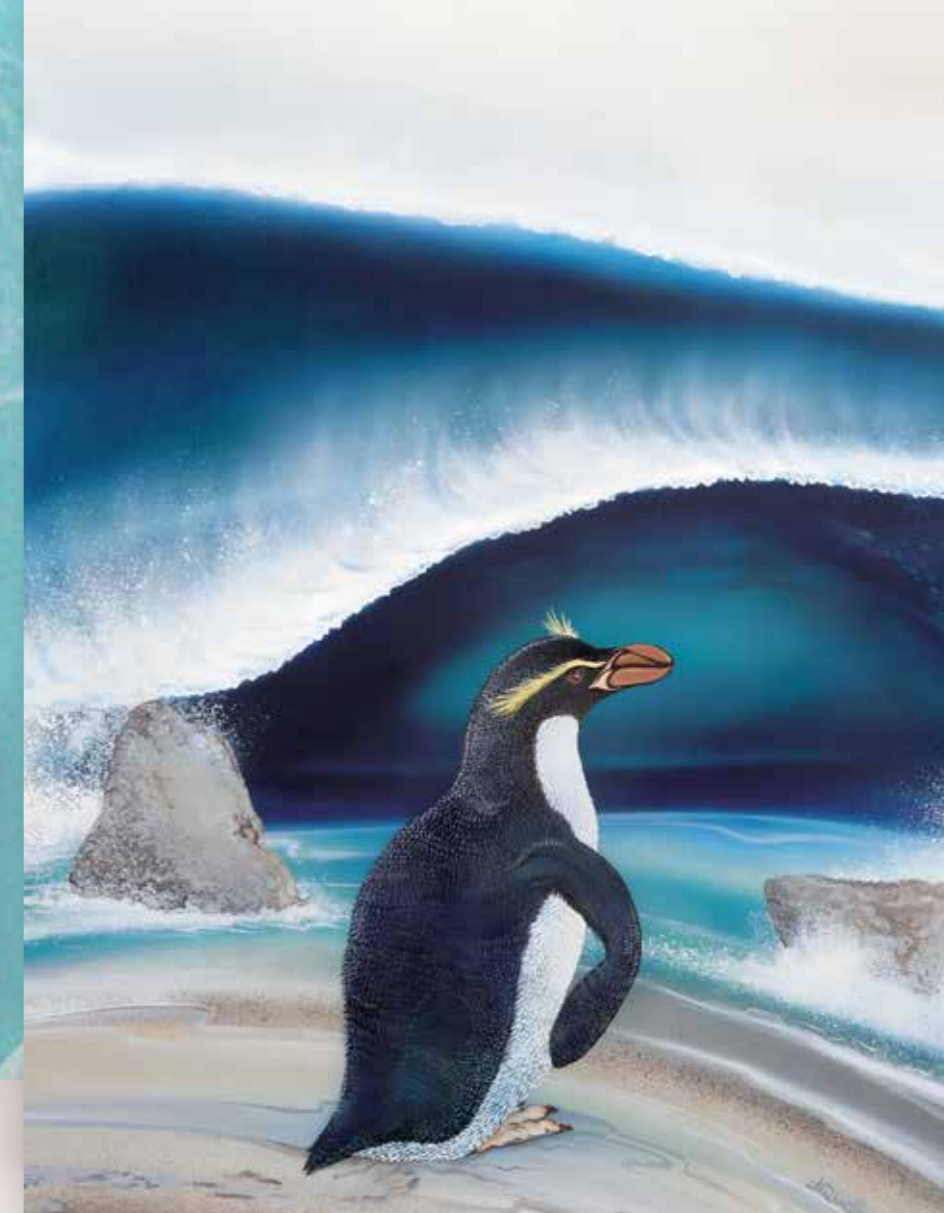
The combination of airbrush and pin-lines creates a contrast between hard edges and soft tones and defines my style. A wave is a reflection in the ocean of the seabed, where it meets the land. Each surf break has a unique character, defined by the nature of that land, the seabed, and the type of ocean swells that reach its shore. I paint waves for surfers and strive to capture the character of the break.

I produce prints of my work and enjoy seeing the high-quality reproductions that are possible with modern printing. This makes my work affordable to the people who appreciate it.

Living in Whangamatā and painting images of our coast is both a privilege and a source of inspiration. My work is available at Discover Whangamatā (the Information Centre), Saltwater Surf Shop in Whangamatā, and at Pohutukawa Gallery in Mt Maunganui.

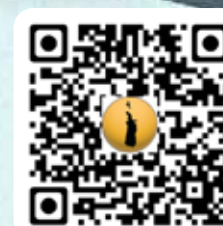
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 Words by  
**John Quellin**



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# EMPOWERING OUR PEOPLE TO GROW, COLLECT AND PREPARE KAI

## From Māra to Marae, Strengthening Whānau Ora



As a heavy rain warning loomed over Hauraki, a group of whānau (people) gathered at the waharoa (entrance) of Kerepēhi Marae, awaiting the karanga (welcome call) that would welcome them in. Today, whānau have braved the storm to attend 'Kai Symposium,' the most recent wānanga offering (learning session) from Whānau Ora services at Te Korowai Hauraki.

Tess (L) and Jo of 'Hue Kotahi' shared the different ways to collect, clean and store seeds for future use, and shared their knowledge around growing a māra kai

Delivered by Te Korowai throughout the Hauraki rohe (area), Whānau Ora is an individualised, wrap-around approach, drawing on the collective strength of whānau to create positive change. Grounded in tikanga, Whānau Ora puts our people in the driver's seat, making them key decision-makers over their own outcomes and empowering them to lead their whānau into a positive future. Kaiārahi (navigators) walk alongside whānau as they navigate life's challenges, and support them to achieve their economic, cultural, and social aspirations – whatever those may be.

Kiara Fisher shared the whakapapa of ngā tamariki a Tāne and their connection to kai we can harvest from our ngahere

Jamie Watson presented traditional kai, where it can be found foraged, how it can be preserved, cooked and eaten, and some of the different taonga surrounding kai

Dale McMillan took our whānau through the process of preserving left over kai from our māra by making a relish

The seed was sown for a kai-based wānanga when recurring needs were identified amongst enrolled whānau. "We work with a lot of whānau that are struggling with the cost of living," says lead facilitator Kiara Fisher. "One way that we can overcome those barriers for whānau is finding cheaper ways to gather kai, harvest kai, but also ways that they can use leftover kai, or kai that's out there given freely in our community."

Alongside co-facilitator Dale McMillan, they set out to facilitate a workshop that would connect whānau into some of the valuable sources of mātauranga (knowledge) that we have here in Hauraki, and ensure that it is passed on and utilised amongst our communities. Four different stations shared different areas of knowledge around kai: kākano (seed-saving and growing), traditional kai foraging and preserving, kai o te ngahere (forest), and modern preserving techniques.

Tess of Hue Kotahi Hapori Māra Kai (Community Garden) believes in the importance of knowing where our kai comes from: learning the whakapapa of our seeds, understanding how seeds are grown, and how to share and grow seeds for future generations to pass on. "It doesn't matter which culture you're from, everyone had seeds that they grew, they looked after and they passed on to their children, and to their mokopuna (grandchildren)." Her hope is that the more people get back to the māra, the more seeds will be freely shared and available for everyone.

Traditional kai facilitator Jamie Watson is passionate about keeping the knowledge and practices of our tūpuna (ancestors) alive, and believes in the importance of indigenous cultures maintaining the link to their traditional food systems. "Ko au te whenua ko te whenua au: If you are the land and you are the moana, then you have a connection with it, that's part of your identity. The stronger you feel in your identity, the more sure you are of who you are as a person."

He learns as much as he teaches in these wānanga about the traditional practices that happened in Hauraki. "I think it's really important to capture that, because within a generation or so that old thread of knowledge won't exist in memory anymore."

For Kiara and Dale, it's about introducing whānau who are struggling to some alternative kai methods and adding a few more tools to their kete. Through mātauranga Māori (knowledge) and connection to taiao (natural world), this wānanga gives our whānau options outside of the global food system that we rely on to provide food in exchange for money. But also, through whakawhanaungatanga (establishing relationships), it connects whānau with existing community groups and collective resources, building resilient communities that can continue to support each other into the future, on the pathway to kai sovereignty and mana motuhake.



To find out more about our Whānau Ora service:

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FROM CAPE COD SHORES TO COROMANDEL SANDS SERIES

# RED ROSES & RED TAPE IN NZ

THE MOST EXPENSIVE LOVE STORY I'VE EVER TOLD

After several years of applying for various visas, I'm now happily living in New Zealand, as a legal resident, with my Kiwi partner. I had to jump through many hoops to get here, and it cost a pretty penny – well, a lot of pretty pennies – but it's been worth it.

To date, I've spent \$9,204 NZD on visas alone. I still have another \$315 to go when I apply for Permanent Residency in 2027, and \$560 more if I decide to go for NZ citizenship in 2032. I knew it would be expensive, but it ended up being about \$4,000 more than I'd expected, thanks to both an extra, unexpected medical exam and Immigration nearly doubling its fees – with very little warning – in October 2024. As of August 2025, though, I'm officially a legal resident of New Zealand. Huzzah!

The first time I applied for the Partner of a New Zealander Work Visa (PWV) in March 2024, the application fee was \$860. But that was only the start. I needed an FBI background check (\$30), had to drive to and from Auckland for a medical exam (\$197 in petrol), then pay \$527 for the exam, chest x-ray, and bloodwork. Because of my medication history, Immigration also required a psychiatric evaluation (\$600). And since I wasn't allowed to work while waiting for my PWV, I had to budget for five months of no income while paying rent, bills, groceries, and all the usual expenses of being alive in the 21st century.

Three months after that first visa was approved in May 2024, Immigration quietly announced it would nearly double its fees that October. At the time, my partner and I hadn't yet hit the 12-month mark of living together – a requirement for applying for the Resident Visa – so I could do nothing but watch the \$2,750 I'd budgeted balloon to a jaw-dropping \$5,360. I only found out about the change thanks to a chance conversation with another American at a concert; Immigration never sent a heads-up email.

In January 2025, on the day my partner and I had officially lived together for 12 months, I submitted my Partner of a New Zealander Resident Visa application. Because that decision wouldn't come through until August and my original work visa expired in May, I had to reapply for another PWV – this time at the new price of \$1,630 – just to bridge the gap. I could have left New Zealand during that period, but an immigration lawyer strongly advised against it; since my visa was based entirely on the strength of our partnership, disappearing overseas wouldn't have looked great.



My second PWV was approved in March 2025, and my residency came through in August. My Resident Visa is valid for two years, allowing me to live and work here and travel freely in and out of the country. In August 2027, I'll be eligible to apply for Permanent Residency, which is the last step.

Of course, the costs of moving here didn't end with the visas. I had to buy a car, get car insurance, and get a NZ driver's licence. The latter required driving to Hamilton (the closest location that does overseas conversions), spending about \$200 in petrol, and paying \$53 for the licence. Medical costs added up, too. Because my original work visa was only valid for one year, I couldn't register as a patient at the local medical centre.

That meant \$190 every time I walked through the door, plus about \$25 per month per prescription.

These fees are the less glamorous parts of moving countries, but they show just how much effort it takes to build a new life from the ground up. Every dollar, every form, every bit of red tape has led me here: to a life and partnership I love. This is, without a doubt, the most expensive love story I've ever told – but also the best investment I've ever made.

Words by  
**Hilary Emerson Lay**

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## — WONDERING IN WAIKINO —

# THE VISITOR

*A Perfect World Looking for Imperfection*

I was exhausted, but I couldn't fall asleep. I tried meditating, which usually does the trick, but not this time. The day's challenges and residual issues still pervaded me. I lay awake while the full moon and stars filled the room with surreal and magical light, sedating me somewhat, but I still couldn't sleep. I was interrupted by a sudden urge to relieve myself, so I rolled out of bed and headed downstairs to the bathroom.

Relieved, I headed back upstairs. I noticed a strange glow filtering through the bay window in the living room. I was still wide awake; it was a beautiful night, so I grabbed a cigarette, a lighter, a double shot of scotch and a torch and headed out the back door, filled with a spirit of enquiry. And there IT was, motionless and glowing. IT was otherworldly humanoid, devoid of gender as far as I could tell. IT didn't appear aggressive, hurt, afraid, hungry or cold. My instinct was to turn and run back inside, but for some reason, I didn't. I just stood there, unafraid and mesmerised.

The moonlight and IT's own glow deemed using the torch unnecessary and intrusive. So, I approached IT and felt its presence. I wasn't sure how to be, so I lit my cigarette, swallowed half the scotch, and sat down. Time passed. I made the first move.

"Hey ... are you okay?" I asked.

Silence, just eye contact. I tried again.

"Can I call anyone?"

After another long, pregnant pause,

"Who are you, where are you from, and what do you want?"

Suddenly, my two dogs appeared, suspicious and irritated, and then the cat sauntered into the situation too. Within moments, they all settled down quietly next to IT. That was pivotal. Animals don't know how to lie. That's a human trait. And then ... IT 'spoke' again.

"Our world is functionally perfect. No one is suffering, no one is hungry, and no one ever gets sick. No one is ever wanting, greedy or angry. Everything is peaceful and serene."

"So why would you visit us where this is not so? What could you possibly learn from us? Have you come to control, colonise or harvest? Should I be afraid?" I asked.

IT replied, "I was sent to find something we have lost. Everything in our world is automated and provided. Everything is arranged and predictable."

Convinced, I rushed inside, refilled my glass and grabbed my guitar. I headed back outside and proceeded to sing IT a song. IT listened intently to the end, after which there was no comment, no appreciation ... no reaction at all. The fire suddenly extinguished and the next thing I knew I woke up in the garden at sunrise feeling incredibly well rested and refreshed. IT was nowhere to be seen ... and neither was my guitar.

Words by  
**Amir Yussuf**

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# Kauri Forest Whānau

## The Living Network of Kauri Forests

Kauri forests like those found in Coromandel are extraordinary places. Kauri trees are an awe-inspiring taonga species, but these giants are only part of a much bigger story, according to DOC Kauri Protection Lead Tracy Mezger.

“They are at the heart of rich, interconnected forest communities made up of plants, fungi, insects, birds and microorganisms. It is no wonder Māori see the health of kauri as a sign of general wellbeing of the ngahere (forest) and people.”

Kauri forests remind us nothing in life exists in isolation. They provide unique and important habitat for many native species with some found only in kauri forests, having adapted to the unique conditions kauri create.

Beneath the forest surface lies one of the forest’s greatest secrets: fungi. Fungi are essential to forest health. They form partnerships with kauri roots, spreading far and wide and acting as an extended underground network that helps trees absorb water and nutrients. In return, kauri share sugars made through photosynthesis. This quiet cooperation supports the entire forest. “Of the 189 fungi species found in kauri forests, 12 exist nowhere else on Earth. An amazing example of teamwork in nature,” Tracy says.

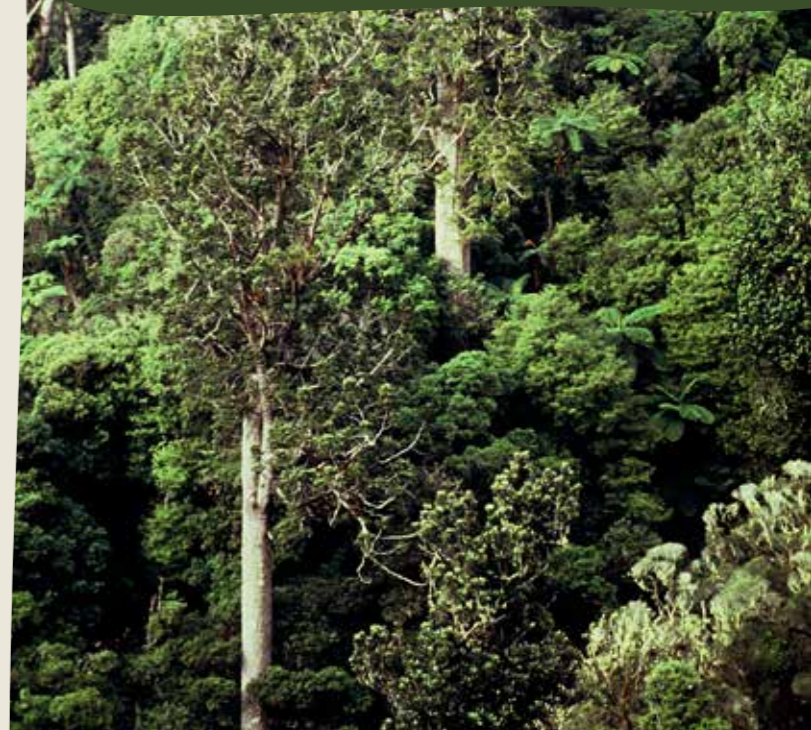
Kauri don’t just live in their environment – they shape it. Their long lives and massive size allow them to influence soil, water and climate over centuries. Their fallen leaves, rich in tannins, change soils and create specialised habitats where certain plants thrive. One of these is kōkaha, or kauri grass, which grows on the ground and in kauri canopies. Giants in their own right, these reach more than two metres in height and provide shelter for insects and berries for birds.

“Even the tiny plants have fascinating stories,” Tracy says. Delicate kauri orchids use clever traps to ensure pollination, proving that in kauri forests, nature is always working in wonderfully unexpected ways.

As we work together to protect these amazing forests from the invading PA pathogen causing dieback disease, it is much more than kauri trees we are saving. As scientists continue to look for answers to this devastating disease, our power lies in continuing to hold the line, cleaning all soil off gear and sticking to tracks in our very special kauri forests.

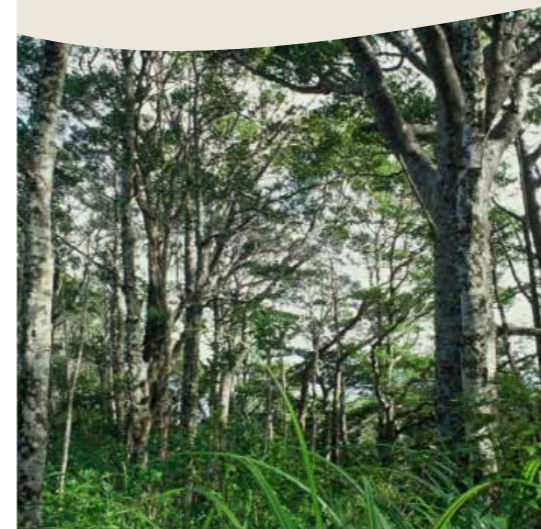


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### Photos

Kauri forest, Tiakina Kauri, Kōkaha/Kauri grass in kauri forest by DOC, Tracy Mezger, Regional Lead Kauri Protection, *Humidicutis mavis* fungi Coromandel by Brayden Burton, Greenhood orchid Whitianga by Indy Marshall



# Layer by Layer

## An Intuitive Art Practice



Some of my earliest memories of art are tactile ones. As a child, my sister and I often stayed with our aunty and uncle. My aunty worked for legendary Aotearoa artist Ralph Hotere when she was a student, and he paid her in paintings. I vividly remember running my hands over those textured surfaces, mesmerised by their depth and colour. These memories definitely influence my art practice today.

My art studio is my happy place, full of light, colour and music. It's where I feel most myself. Sometimes I enter with a vague plan, sometimes with no plan at all. Often it's just the music that takes me on a journey as I paint. The fun is seeing what evolves ... or sometimes what doesn't.

I usually begin with collage layered directly onto the canvas, then build colour and texture over time. My artworks often go through many layers and take drastic turns before arriving at a place where I'm happy. I've never documented a full work-in-progress, not because I don't value process, but because my paintings are constantly transforming. To pause and define them too early feels like interrupting their becoming.

I consider myself an intuitive artist. For me, that means never truly knowing what the outcome will be, even if I start with a plan. I feel like my best work happens when I don't think, when I just do.

I like to believe that my artworks reveal themselves slowly over time. That the viewer is continually surprised and delighted as they get to know a piece. I want my work to capture curiosity and invite personal interpretation. I want people to see what they see, not necessarily what I see.

My hope is that my art evokes memories, intrigue, a sense of discovery – and ultimately brings joy and uplifts. Art is deeply personal, much like how we dress, how we furnish our homes, or the aesthetics we surround ourselves with. I don't expect my work to appeal to everyone; I'm not drawn to every artwork I encounter either. But I feel truly honoured and grateful whenever a piece of my art (a piece of myself) finds its new home with someone who feels connected to it.

My practice is always evolving. I love playing with different techniques and participating in practical workshops to keep learning. Creativity isn't something I can turn on at will, I need the vibe to be right: a clear mind, an open heart, and good sounds. If I get to a point where I feel stuck or uninspired, I remind myself of what I love in my world; colour, vibe,



aesthetics, feelings, and I ask why I'm drawn to them. I try to transfer those feelings onto the canvas. Sometimes I do the opposite and reflect on what I don't like, and why. This process helps me find and refine my own art voice.

I was born in Aotearoa and am of English, Māori (Ngāti Pūkenga / Ngāti Awa), Scottish and Irish descent. I was raised in Tairua on the Coromandel Peninsula and for the past 30-plus years I've lived in a beautiful valley in Pūriri, near Thames.

Recently, I produced a series of seven artworks with the intention of exploring my Māori ancestry. The first piece, Wā, is symbolic of the connection between the people of Aotearoa and the spiritual realms. It is infused with lyrics from my favourite waiata, Mā te Kahukura, and includes the nine stars of Matariki. This work was a process of belonging. With mixed ancestry, a sense of belonging has often felt complex. My whakapapa is important to me; my creativity and who I am have been passed down through my ancestral line, and I am deeply grateful for that.

I am also grateful to have my work displayed on all the walls of Burton's Café in Thames, a much-loved local space. I'm a committee member at the Thames Art Gallery (604 Tararu Road, Thames), where my artworks are also available, and I was excited to be the Featured Artist there in April 2026.

My hope is simple: that my artworks find homes with people who are drawn to them, who enjoy living with them, and who allow them to reveal themselves over time.

[www.lisastent.co.nz](http://www.lisastent.co.nz)  
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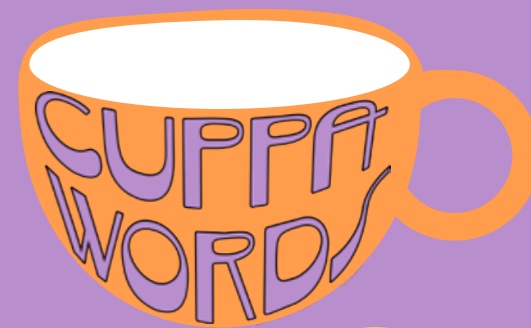
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## The Unkown

The unknown refreshes my soul  
saving me from regularly scheduled events  
that dare to creep in  
and turn into concreteness of being

The unknown greets me with a gentle hug,  
leading me away  
from correct and incorrect responses  
and instead,  
into a cosmic giggle of awareness  
welcoming signs and symbols  
that play in my heart  
a song of hide and seek  
where every moment comes  
with a smile and a prize

The unknown  
cheers me on my way  
in my infinite journey  
with the care of a best friend,  
with the intimacy of a genuine lover,  
and with a silence that speaks  
nourishing words of color, light,  
and a rich darkness of earthly soil  
birthing seeds of eternity  
that invite me to rest  
and to just be  
dressed in gratefulness

by Melissa Ireland

## Breath in the Forest

And the ngahere breathes  
sighing as another ancient symbol  
is felled  
whispers of timelessness  
Glistening drips slide from the kawakawa leaves  
And splash tenderly onto my skin  
And the ngahere weeps  
As the road snakes into her heart  
And the drill arrives on the truck  
The man from another place  
feels the weight of his wallet in his pocket  
He ignores the breath of wind caressing his face  
He denies the spirit, the mauri of the kauri  
as he imposes his will on Papatūānuku  
and the karakia is intoned  
The whenua wails and  
the whaikōrero winds among the ancient ones  
who have witnessed all  
and the passing of time  
like the wispy mist  
weeping for the loss of wairua  
as the ngahere exhales

by WORDsmith



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# The Strange Tale of Rachael the Scarecrow

## A Very Unusual Kiwi Christmas Tale



Mary and Donald are old friends from Wellington who have been coming to Wharekaho on holiday for the last 40 years. I first met them when I lived next door to their apartment at the northern end of Wharekaho and quickly warmed to their outgoing sociable personalities. They were both members of the New Zealand symphony orchestra and spent their month-long summer holiday at the beach every year. We were often entertained by them giving us impromptu concerts around the beach barbeque.

They were always there for Christmas and after a few years we decided to give each other funny, unusual presents. I remember receiving a giant condom called Big Boy one Christmas. Unfortunately, it was way too big, even for me, so it now sits in a drawer and serves as a conversation piece when guests visit with the predictable quirky comments from both sexes. I am hoping one day to find someone who could actually make use of it so I can finally get rid of it. Let me know if any of you fit that category.

Donald is a keen fisherman, so this year I gave him a T-shirt with the words 'Master Baiter' emblazoned on the front, with a proviso that he wears it to the next NZSO practice when he returns to Wellington. He didn't promise but he loves his new T. Perhaps he can wear it while fishing. Most fish probably can't read and shouldn't be offended.

The present that has left the most lasting impression though was a doll which we named Rachael. I first met Rachael about 15 years ago in a Whitianga op shop and immediately thought she would be a suitably weird Christmas present for Donald. Rachael was a large doll and was completely naked so you can imagine some of the looks and comments I got. "That'll make some little girl happy," chirped the old lady at the op shop. I didn't tell her it was for an adult. And while carrying her along Albert St to where my car was parked, "Have a good night" was one snide comment offered by one smiling local. We gave Rachael to Donald. He was underwhelmed but accepted Rachael in a good-humoured way. Mary, however, didn't take to Rachael at all, even though she was quite pretty and had nice hair.

Anyway, the Christmas holiday flew by, and Donald and Mary were preparing to return to Wellington. On their day of departure, we waved farewell and then rowed out to my boat which was anchored off the beach. After cooking up a tasty fish dinner, my partner and I prepared for bed. I noticed there was something under the covers, so I pulled back the duvet on my bunk in the aft cabin and lo and behold there lay Rachael with her slight smile and outstretched arms. Donald had abandoned her to a life on the ocean waves. There wasn't room for Rachael in the cabin, so I found a berth for her inside one of the hatches outside, which contained diving and fishing gear. I hoped she liked water sports.

Rachael occupied the lonely hatch for a few weeks until it was time for me to return to my temporary teaching job in Auckland. I sailed my trimaran *Jiwa* to Auckland where she occupied a mooring next to Northcote Wharf. Unfortunately, there were a lot of seagulls living there and after a few weeks *Jiwa* was a frightful mess covered in seagull shit which had dried in the sun and hardened like concrete. After unsuccessfully trying to stop their shitting by tying ribbons and music discs to the rigging, I came up with a novel idea. I decided to use Rachael as a maritime scarecrow. I opened the hatch and woke her from her dark slumber. Then I tied a cord around her neck and hung her halfway up the mast where she could sway in the wind and hopefully scare the seagulls away to shit on another boat. Well, on seeing Rachael hanging there my partner, who has an aversion to dolls anyway, immediately insisted that Rachael be given some clothes, so on arrival home she pulled out her sewing machine and made a beautiful dress with silver flecks shining in it. Decked out in her new garb Rachael looked very pretty. I wasn't sure if the seagulls would feel the same about her or whether or not she would attract or repel them. We definitely got a few unusual stares from people rowing out to their moored boats when they saw a doll hanging there. I must admit she did look a bit forlorn despite her new clothes, so I took the cord from around her neck and put it under her arms. I think that made her feel a little more alive and less self-conscious. Despite her good looks, Rachael actually succeeded in keeping the birds off *Jiwa*.

As the months passed and the storms blew through, Rachael's dress began to fade and tear, and her hair started to fall out. Strangely, her head also faded to a soft grey colour while the rest of her body maintained its warm pink hue. She began to look downright scary and if I had been a seagull I would definitely have performed my ablutions on a friendlier-looking boat.


Eventually, it came time to return to Wharekaho, so Rachael was once again relegated to her dark bed under the port hatch. It was summer and Christmas holidays were upon us. Mary and Donald were due to arrive again, and we hadn't managed to find any weird funny presents, so I thought, 'I know, Donald can have the new look Rachael back with her grey face, almost bald head and her torn faded dress.' She looked like a demon doll ready to sink her teeth into you. I was the gardener at Donald and Mary's apartments and had a key. The day before their arrival I entered Donald's bedroom and hid Rachael under the covers of his bed. Mary told me the next day she heard a scream from Donald when he went to bed and couldn't help laughing when she saw his old friend reaching out for him. In case you were wondering, none of us has had the heart to get rid of Rachael. It's almost like she's part of our extended family destined to spend her days stored in a plastic bin in the garage. Occasionally, we take her out to see if she looks any older but unlike us, she doesn't. A quiet solitary life free of seagulls and humans seems to suit her.

Words by **Ross Liggins**

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## MERCURY BAY'S WASTE STORY STARTS AT HOME


On a busy Saturday morning, the cars start lining up at 239 South Highway before the gates even open at Mercury Bay's Resource Recovery Centre – Wāhi Tukurua. Boots pop open, trailers creak under the weight, and out comes the story of modern life – broken chairs, unused exercise bikes, boxes of things once bought with good intentions.

For staff, it's not just about sorting waste. It's about people. Frustration builds when items can't be accepted. Some arrive expecting solutions for everything, only to be told "no". Those moments can turn tense. As one team member put it, "We feel like the ambulance at the bottom of the cliff – dealing with the consequences, not the cause."


And the cause? Simply, too much stuff. Behind every discarded item is a choice made weeks, months, or years earlier. A bargain that didn't last. A quick purchase that became clutter. Multiply that across thousands of households, and the scale becomes overwhelming – for communities, for the environment, and for the people tasked with managing it all.

But this isn't just a story about waste. It's a story about possibility. Because the most powerful solution doesn't sit at the recovery centre, it sits with all of us. It's in the pause before buying. It's choosing quality over convenience. It's repairing, reusing, sharing. Less really can be more.

And maybe, just maybe, we can start easing the pressure at the bottom of the cliff – by acting at the top.

 Words by  
**Tracey Bell**

*Pictured - Wāhi Tukurua staff*

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# PROUD TO BE LOCAL

## Gary Nevin

The twirled moustache strikes you first on the tall figure that frequents Coghill Street, New World Whitianga, and Thames Music and Drama productions – well, that's where I tend to run into Gary Nevin.

He coached me at Hot Water Beach Junior Surf 'Nippers', and his sculpted ladies and flying pigs have sat around my home since I was a kid. Growing up, a trip to his earth house felt like stepping into a mythical world. So, it's a privilege to feature this local artist here.

"When I was 20 I knew I wanted to be an artist," Gary says. "But I realised I needed somewhere to get established."

That somewhere became the Coromandel. After almost buying a \$1000 section at Little Bay, a phone call from his father alerted him to land at Cooks Beach, which he bought sight unseen.

By the late '80s, newly married with a baby on the way, he and Julie had built a house and opened a pottery business. "My favourite was the pukeko with chunky legs, which was copied all over NZ," he says. "Potters didn't have much imagination ... things have changed thankfully."

Gardening was also a passion, making up part-time and off-season work, including shaping trees into lollipop forms at Flaxmill Bay Resort. He spent 15 summers volunteering at Hot Water Beach 'Nippers', finding out years later

his own kids only went for the pies afterward!

There was also the Cooks Beach Film Society – "formed with other reprobates" – and often fuelled by feijoa wine. One night, Gary checked the projector mid-screening.

"It was going great," he says. "But the whole reel had spun onto the floor – just a pool of long black liquorice straps. The room emptied pretty fast that night."

Twenty-five years ago, Gary and Julie took on their biggest project yet: an earth house in Whenuakite. What began as a paddock piled with subsoil, after years of shovelling and determination, became home.

These days, his art materials have shifted to cement, concrete & corten steel.

"The best thing about any place is the people, and the Coromandel is full of all sorts of characters," he says.

He reflects on the environmental strain caused by the influx of people, citing the need for more marine reserves.

"Back in the 70s it was a great alternative lifestyle, but these days it seems to have become a great retirement village – and why not?! A great atmosphere and climate, to me it's the best place in the world."

Words by  
**Ayana Piper-Healion**

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My biggest goal is to share the ocean with as many people as possible. I've always been obsessed with it, and I'm deeply grateful for the time I've spent exploring beneath the surface. I know many people don't get the chance to experience the ocean this way, which is why I love capturing it through photos and video – to offer a glimpse into a world most never see. I believe that for people to care about the ocean in the way it needs, they first have to understand it. Photography is my way of helping bridge that gap.

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Words by **Bella Muir**



## Barrel Vision

**Settings:**  
f/5.6  
1/4000  
ISO 800  
Focal length 41mm

I took this photo last summer during one of the first swells of the season. I'd always wanted to capture someone fully covered in a barrel, and that summer I set it as a goal. After checking the forecast, I arrived early; by 5:30am the car park was already full, and I knew the surf was pumping before I even saw it. The waves were too big for me to confidently swim out, and I knew I'd be back later for my job as a lifeguard. During my morning rotations, I watched in awe as surfers sent it on massive waves. On my break, I decided to give it a go and swim out myself.

I was completely out of my comfort zone. I remember looking up at waves that felt as big as houses before diving under, gripping the bottom and hoping not to surface too early into the white water, or too late breathing in the next wave. When I finally made it out the back, it hit me for the first time that I could actually drown. Until then, I think I'd felt a bit invincible in the ocean. I stayed out longer than planned, almost late for my next rotation because I was too scared to swim back in.

Later in the day, when the swell eased slightly, I went back out with my camera. Without a long lens, I had to sit uncomfortably close to where the waves could break on me. Then a clean wave rolled through, and from the shoulder I fired the shutter as a surfer disappeared into the barrel. That afternoon, while sitting on the tower in my lifeguard uniform, I saw the surfer walk up the beach. I told him I'd captured a shot of him in the barrel, got his details, and later saw him post it. I remember thinking it was the coolest thing and felt really proud of the photo.

Now I'm driven to get more comfortable being pounded by waves, so I can sit closer in and capture even better shots right inside the barrel.

## Moray Eel

**Settings:**  
f/4.5  
1/200s  
ISO 800  
Focal length 30mm

This image shows a yellow moray eel (*Gymnothorax prasinus*) emerging from a crevice surrounded by long-spined sea urchins (*Centrostephanus rodgersii*). It's an environment that feels sharp, dark, and uninviting – home to two species that aren't exactly most divers' dream encounter. The urchins, whose numbers have been increasing in recent years, can form dense barrrens that strip reefs of life.

Yet in this moment, the moray appears almost curious, peering out from an otherwise hostile setting. When I first started diving, both of these animals were ones I gave a wide berth. Over time, though, I've learned that moray eels can be surprisingly playful, extending from their hiding places to investigate intruders while posing little real threat to divers. Even their two sets of jaws are simply an adaptation that allows them to feed efficiently in narrow cracks.

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A I E U I P O N C R T N O T N E E L A R O D T  
O V C O T P B T O T A E E N G F L L E A H I A  
R I A L N R X V E W I T X Y E U B I C T U C T  
D R E O E E J W N A N V I S I L A N N I T A I  
I P P C D C C J M A R A E O V N D A A O U T L  
N S A O I I M F J B D O S T N E R T D N K I I  
A E V A H A B I T A T S A O R S O I N X A O C  
R R E V I T A M R O F N I H D S F O U I W N A  
Y L A I C E P S L A Y E R P G V F N B B A E F  
I N D I G E N O U S C O F F E E A N A U N I E

- PHOTOSYNTHESIS
- EXTRAORDINARY
- GRATEFULNESS
- INFORMATIVE
- FACILITATOR
- IMMIGRATION
- COOPERATION
- POLLINATION
- APPRECIATE
- AFFORDABLE
- POHUTUKAWA
- INDIGENOUS
- COLLECTIVE
- MEDICATION
- COLOURFUL
- PRIVILEGE
- MEGAPHONE
- ABUNDANCE
- SCARECROW
- IDENTITY
- MAGAZINE
- PEACEFUL
- HABITATS
- DELICATE
- AOTEAROA
- SURFING
- SPECIAL
- UNKNOWN
- REUSING
- COFFEE
- FRIEND
- MARAE
- AWAKE
- LAYER

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# TRUST THE PROCESS

## KAIZEN: A TABLE WORTH SHARING THIS WINTER

The Coromind team had a chat with Ryan Laird, owner of KaiZen in Cooks Beach, about food, philosophy, and what keeps the restaurant thriving through the quieter months.

At KaiZen, the idea is simple: share the table. Sharing food is a timeless way to bring people together, and that's exactly what the team aims to do, encouraging guests to connect as they enjoy the same dishes, sparking memories and breaking down barriers.

That thinking extends to the name itself. Kaizen is a Japanese philosophy centred on continuous, small improvements that lead to long-term success. For Ryan, it's about evolving steadily without losing sight of the bigger picture. At the same time, the name reflects a local connection, with 'Kai' meaning food in te reo Māori, and 'Zen' representing presence. Together, it speaks to the kind of environment they aim to create – one where people can slow down, enjoy the moment, and simply feel good being there.

The way food is served plays a big role in that experience. Rather than everything arriving at once, dishes are brought out one at a time, allowing guests to focus on each plate as its own creation. While the shared plate concept has become more common in recent years, KaiZen has been doing it for a long time, not to speed things up, but to give each dish the attention it deserves. The result is something that feels close to a high-end degustation, but in a more accessible and social format.

Behind the scenes, the menu is constantly evolving. Seasonal produce drives many of the changes, ensuring quality and sustainability, even if it means that some favourites aren't always available. New chefs also bring fresh ideas into the kitchen, with Ryan embracing collaboration as a key part of the creative process. Some of their most successful dishes have come from that shared input.

There's also a strong connection between food and art within the space. Ryan's wife, Virginia,

has her artwork displayed throughout the restaurant, while his own creative outlet comes through the food itself. As he puts it, "If it moves or changes you, then it's art." At its core, the goal is simple: to make people happy. If guests leave in a better place than when they arrived, then the job is done.

While many think of beach towns as a summer-only destination, KaiZen has built a rhythm that carries well into winter. The quieter months bring a shift in focus, with Ryan putting extra energy into creating reasons for people to come through the door. A dedicated wine club, quiz nights that he writes himself, and a range of themed dinners, from spice nights to mid-winter Christmas, all help keep things lively. Over time, that consistency has helped establish KaiZen as a destination restaurant, with people making the trip to Cooks Beach specifically to dine there.

That connection to the community hasn't happened overnight. From early challenges when the restaurant first opened, to more recent moments where locals showed their support in very real ways, KaiZen has grown alongside the people around it. It's a relationship Ryan clearly values.

For those yet to experience it, the recommendation is simple: trust the process. The tasting menu offers a curated journey through what KaiZen does best, designed to showcase balance, creativity, and flavour.

And at the end of it all, the goal remains unchanged. As Ryan puts it, "Happy is enough." It's a feeling many guests echo, with some calling it the best meal they've ever had.

KaiZen is open five nights a week over winter, closed Tuesdays and Wednesdays. The team will also be taking a well-earned break from June 8th to July 9th, before returning refreshed and ready for the season ahead.

Words by  
**Leonardo Magri**



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