



Ayesha Green *Two Māori Boys in an English Field* 2022, acrylic on canvas, 2400 × 3800mm.

Ayesha Green *Self Portrait as Joseph Banks* 2022, acrylic on canvas, 2400 × 1600mm.

Ayesha Green *The Prince's New Toy* 2022, acrylic on canvas, 1700 × 2000mm.



Folk Nationalism

What are the stories we tell from our collective past? And how do they inform the lives we live in Aotearoa New Zealand today? These are questions posed by Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland-based painter Ayesha Green (Ngāti Kūhūngunu, Kāi Tahu) in her exhibition *Folk Nationalism* at Tauranga Art Gallery (27 August 2022–22 January 2023).

Green has become a familiar figure. In 2020 she was included in *Toi Tū Toi Ora*, the survey of contemporary Māori art at Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, and had a solo show at Dunedin Public Art Gallery. In 2021 she produced a public sculpture for the Octagon in Dunedin, a space previously dominated by colonial-era forms. Green described her sculpture as a 'gateway connecting us with our deep ancestral ecologies'.

Green's Tauranga exhibition is an outcome of winning the biennial Rydal Art Prize,

established in 2019 to acknowledge an artist who has made a substantial contribution to contemporary painting in this country. Green is the second recipient, receiving \$25,000 and a show at the Gallery.

As her subjects, Green often takes historical events, figures, and images, reclaiming and recontextualising them to question where power lies and where Māori can gain. Her stylised, figurative paintings represent a bold approach to issues concerning her Māori whakapapa—passed down through women over four generations. In *Folk Nationalism*, she invites us to revisit mythologies of nationhood and explore the possibility of restorative storytelling.

Centre stage is her reworking of Marcus King's 1938 painting *The Signing of the Treaty of Waitangi, February 6th, 1840*, which itself imagines a defining moment in our history

from ninety-nine years on. What does King's 'original' tell us about desire, authorship, and the dream of nationhood?

In an essay accompanying the exhibition, Elle Loui August says: 'Green's re-performance of King's work refuses misremembering, colonial amnesia and sentimentality. Rather it asks that we continue to bring these histories and artefacts to bear on the present.'

In other paintings, Green teases out conflicting histories that continue to inform our national identity. By inserting herself into the Anglo-American painter Benjamin West's portrait of Joseph Banks, she disrupts the original, and the intellectual authority and scientific cause it lays claim to. In *The Prince's New Toy*, the iconic buzzy bee stands as a cipher for sovereignty, while the pastoral scene *Two Māori Boys in an English Field* explores the nature of displacement and belonging.

