

BOB
JAHNKE
ATA

a third reflection



Ata tuatahi 2016 (detail)

BOB JAHNKE ATA

a third reflection

21 Feb – 15 May 2016
PĀTAKA ART + MUSEUM



FORE-
WORD
By Reuben Friend

As the Director of Pātaka Art + Museum, as well as an alumni of Te Putahi a Toi Māori Visual Arts Programme at Massey University, it brings me great joy to reflect on this latest series of artworks by Professor Robert Jahnke.

Reflections upon past events, like reflections in a mirror, are always subject to the perspective of the viewer. *Ata*, meaning form or reflection in te reo Māori, explores these connections between light and perception, history and retrospection.

References to the light sculpture collaborations of Ralph Hotere and Bill Culbert remind us of the cultural overlap that occurred during the mid-twentieth century – when light was considered to be the defining trait of New Zealand art. During this period, light and darkness became subjects for bi-cultural engagement, being both religious and cultural metaphors for life and death, creation and fertility.

Painter Don Binney once said that this belief in the significance of light to New Zealand art was a myth worth believing. *ATA: a third reflection* emerges from this mythology, shining light on the silhouettes of our past to shape and inform the present.

Reuben Friend
Director
Pātaka Art + Museum



ESSAY

By Dr Huhana Smith

In *ATA: a third reflection*, Jahnke's ideas are incubated, then contained within cubes as plinths and within wall panels. They are conceptual spaces where Mātauranga Māori or depths of Māori knowledge inform inter-dimensional 'cosmoses'. They are also spaces where cultural paradigms of significance happen.

Jahnke translates neon forms into diamonds, triangles, crosses and clubs, and words such as ATA and TUKU, into illusionary, spatial reflections that appear endless and multi-dimensional. His approach uses rectilinear compositions associated with tukutuku, particularly the diamond. He revisits key iconographical devices associated with the Christian cross and the club that became part of the millennial religion of Rua Kēnana. Text remains a key element in Jahnke's work as sourced from key tribal houses as early as 1842, or from the gateway entrance to Hiona, Kēnana's roundhouse. When built in 1907-8 in the remote settlement at Maungapōhatu with support from both Tūhoe and Te Whakatōhea, this unique structure was embellished with clubs and diamonds. As Jahnke states in this respect, "the grounding of the work in relevant narrative context maintains my desire to locate my work within a cultural paradigm of significance".¹

Such paradigms of significance emerge from cosmological and genealogical narratives, which have been informing Jahnke's work since 1990. Along with his first solo exhibition named *ATA*, which was held at Fox Gallery in Parnell, this series of works was articulated by a nineteenth century Māori compositional approach based on "bilateral symmetry, offset by minor accents of asymmetry achieved through materials, imagery and counter balances of visual weight".²

In 1992, his next exhibition *TE ATA TUARUA: the Second Reflection* was held at the Dowse Art Museum, Lower Hutt where Jahnke expanded upon the initial *ATA* approach, by juxtaposing mass and void. Through the use of mirrors Jahnke created the illusion of forms in the round, with a series that featured

the negative Doric column as the signature motif within mirrors and reflections. Gallery lighting was also harnessed to create shadows in which the voids projected significant shape, while, as he recalls, “the mass proposed vacant and meaningless planes in an attempt to create form, or significant shadow out of a void”.³

ATA: a third reflection developed out of in depth research into a continuum of tukutuku, or the complimentary wooden lathe and fibre-bound panels found between poupou from meeting house interiors. For the new series, Jahnke revisits his 1992 exhibition concepts in an attempt to evoke the Māori transitional phases of ultimate potential or whakapapa, the Māori notion of the emergence of ‘i Te Kore’ out of nothingness or potential being, into the night realm ‘ki Te Pō’, and onto the twilight dawn, into the world of light, or day to day existence, ‘ki Te Ao Mārama’.⁴ Within whakapapa, ‘ngā tohu whakamahara ki ngā whakatupuranga tangata’ are arrangements of spiritual and physical transitions from various entities, particularly from those ancestors who trans-located from other Pacific island ‘homes’ such as Hawaiiki or Rangiatea, through time, space and generations.

Jahnke’s research also produced previous neon works for Māori Market, TSB Arena in 2014 and for the later *TUKU IHO: to bequeath* exhibition, held at Bath Street Gallery in Parnell in 2015. Both exhibitions were inspired by the practice of Paolo Scirpa, a renowned Italian artist working with neon and light, who was born in Siracusa in 1934. The work of Ivan Navarro, a Chilean artist born in Santiago in 1972, also provided impetus for Jahnke to employ similar techniques to create repeating patterns that appear infinite until disappearing into a void of darkness. Jahnke appropriates their reflection techniques to promote a Māori world view, where humankind emerges through Te Kore, Te Pō and Te Ao Mārama.

By translating a customary visual language of diamonds, triangles, crosses and clubs and the words ATA and TUKU, Jahnke reflects on whakapapa as the ultimate Māori system that orders and makes sense of a complex mix of interrelationships, whilst also echoing a philosophical perspective or Māori conception of continuous time. Jahnke mines a Māori cosmogony that views genealogical perspective as emerging from a space and time continuum of profound ontological significance. He ponders upon a Māori nature of reality as perceived within a universe as process - a postulated world comprising a series of interconnected realms separated by eons of time, from which eventually the natural world emerged. This cosmic process was unified and bound by spirit⁵ where ancestral Māori seers created a symbolic basis for their cognitive maps and models of understanding to portray each state or realm. Within this customary context, being and human existence emerged from an unfolding or evolving universe. Accordingly, a range

of tribal narratives on the conceptual origins of the universe postulated that Io was the originator of knowledge within Te Kore, an ultimate entity responsible for creating the whare wānanga or learning centre for spiritual powers and their activities. Io created the whakapapa reference system based on potential and a constant becoming, which highlighted sacred, philosophical explanations of the nature of the universe. Whakapapa then provided the essential expression of whānaungatanga between a wider cosmology, peoples, spiritual aspects, environmental properties and land. Such vital and respected knowledge for the current precarious world that we inhabit remains bequeathed to those who must ‘tuku iho’ or pass on this expression of interrelated and interdependent relationships between all entities.⁶

Jahnke transforms tukutuku into inter-dimensional extensions of pattern within and beyond the picture plane, to offer captivating, visualised knowledge dimensions for future generations. To this end, Jahnke was delighted that the greatest response to his TUKU plinth work came from Mana Tamariki or te reo Māori immersion school students based in Palmerston North, when they attended the Māori Market exhibition. He noted that they “...were all over the TUKU work leaving their fingerprints as they peered into the depths to find Tāne”.⁷

For *ATA: a third reflection*, Jahnke offers significantly compelling works based on profound Māori thought, which encompass views of being and not being and highlight relationships between spirit and matter. Jahnke makes it clear too that certain introduced structures and methods of logical entailment and causality cannot unravel indigenous or Māori processes of knowing. He ably draws upon these values and attitudes so that his current works might be regarded as cognitive maps of Māori reasoning, intuition and perception, developed over time.

Dr Huhana Smith (Ngāti Tukorehe, Ngāti Raukawa ki te Tonga)
Director
Te Rangitāwhia Whakatupu Mātauranga Ltd

¹ Sourced from a video by Paul Nache for *Te Hokinga mai* exhibition, 5 June - 11 July 2015 at the Paul Nache Gallery, Gisborne.

² Personal communications supplied from artist for the Pātaka, Porirua exhibition.

³ *ibid.*

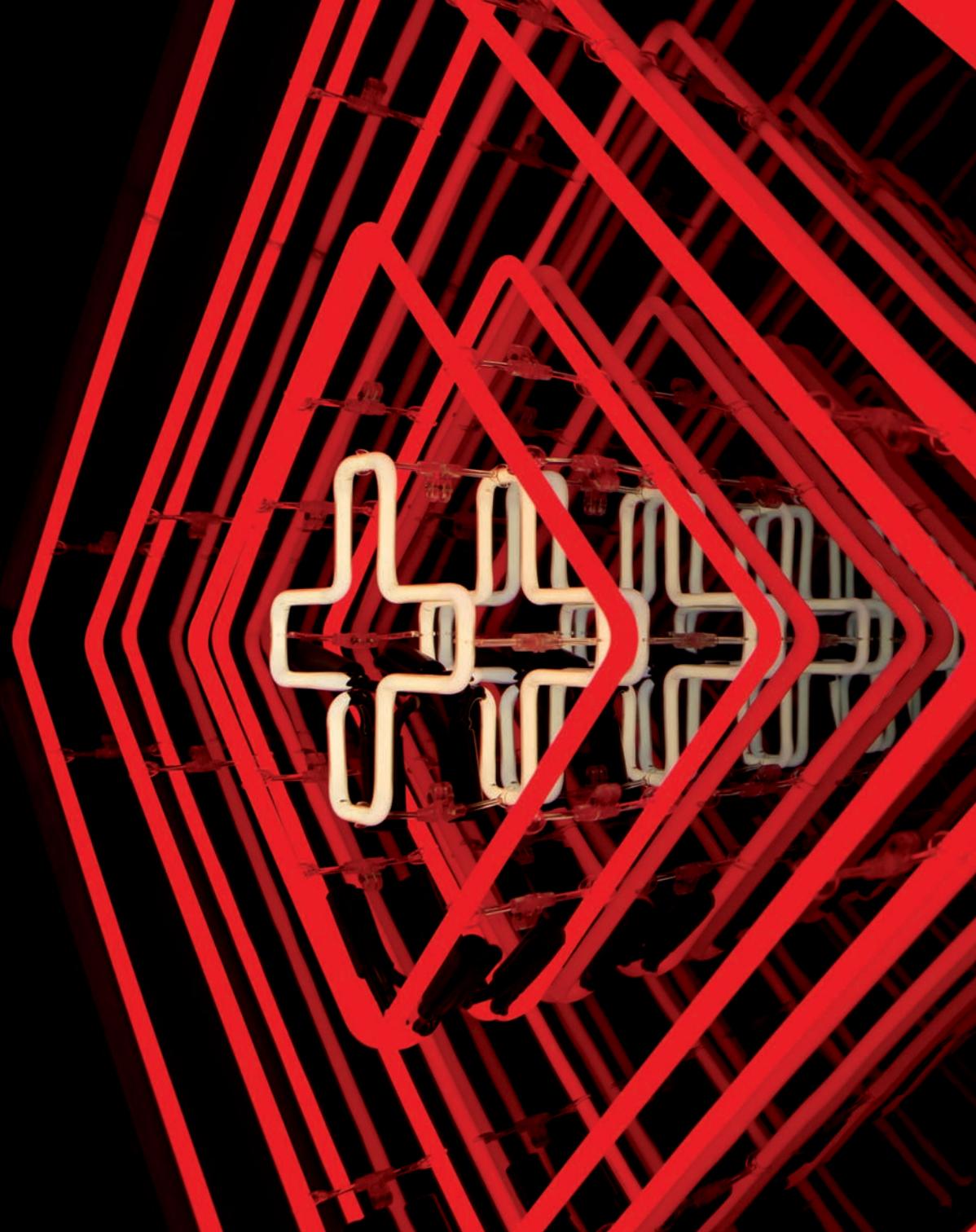
⁴ M. Roberts, W. Norman, N. Minhinick, D. Wihongi, & C. Kirkwood, 1995, 'Kaitaikitanga: Māori perspectives on conservation', *Pacific Conservation Biology*, Vol. 2, 8.

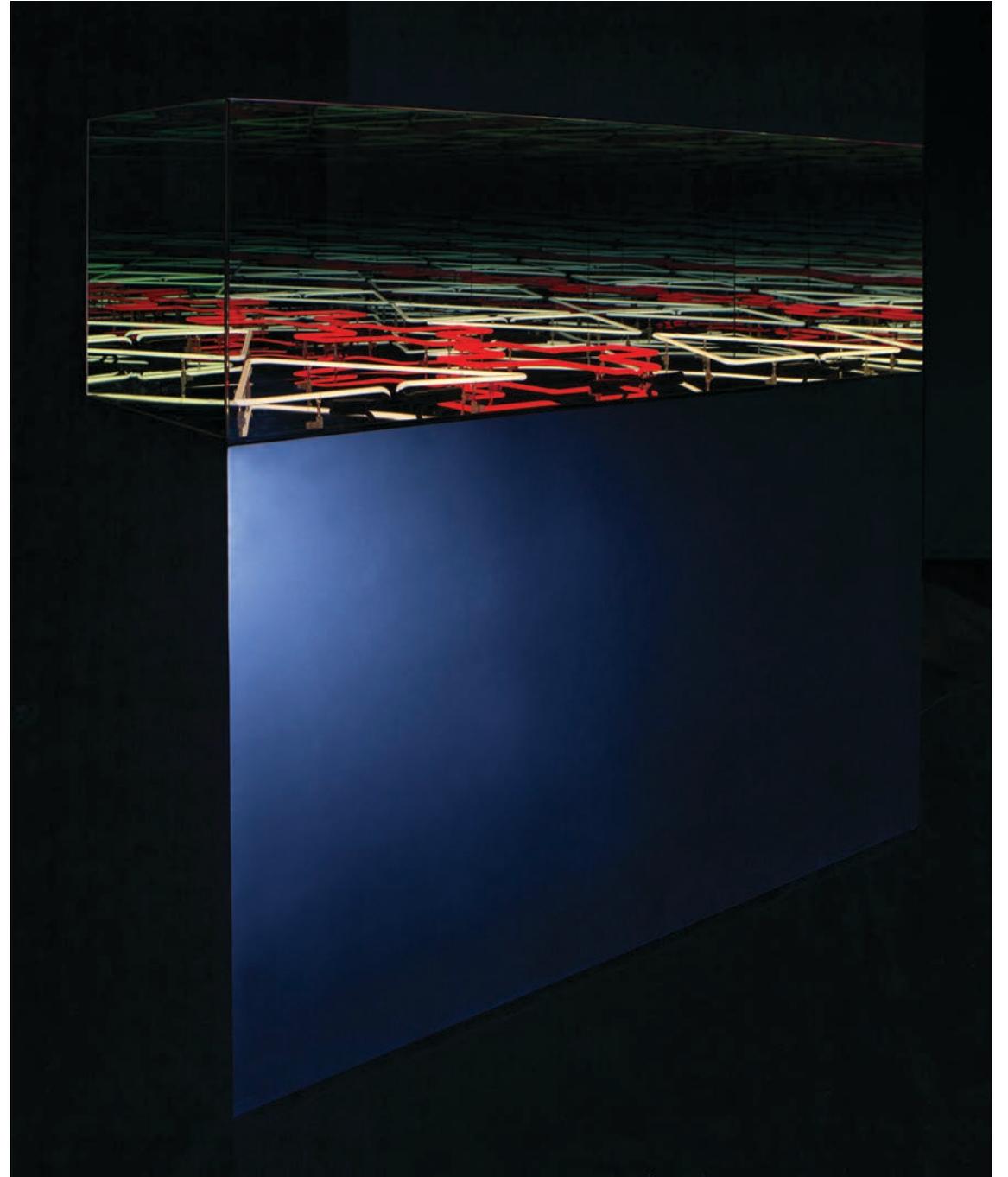
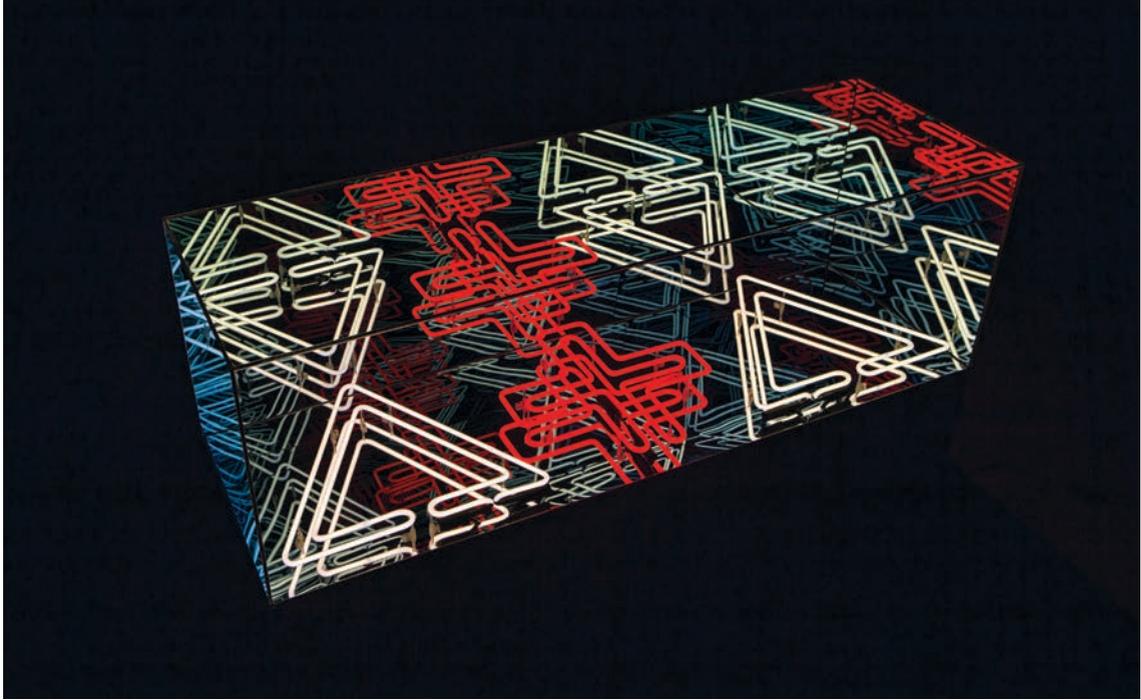
⁵ Rev. Maori Marsden, 1988, *Resource Management Law Reform Part A: The Natural World and Natural Resources* Māori Value Systems and Perspectives. No 29, 9.

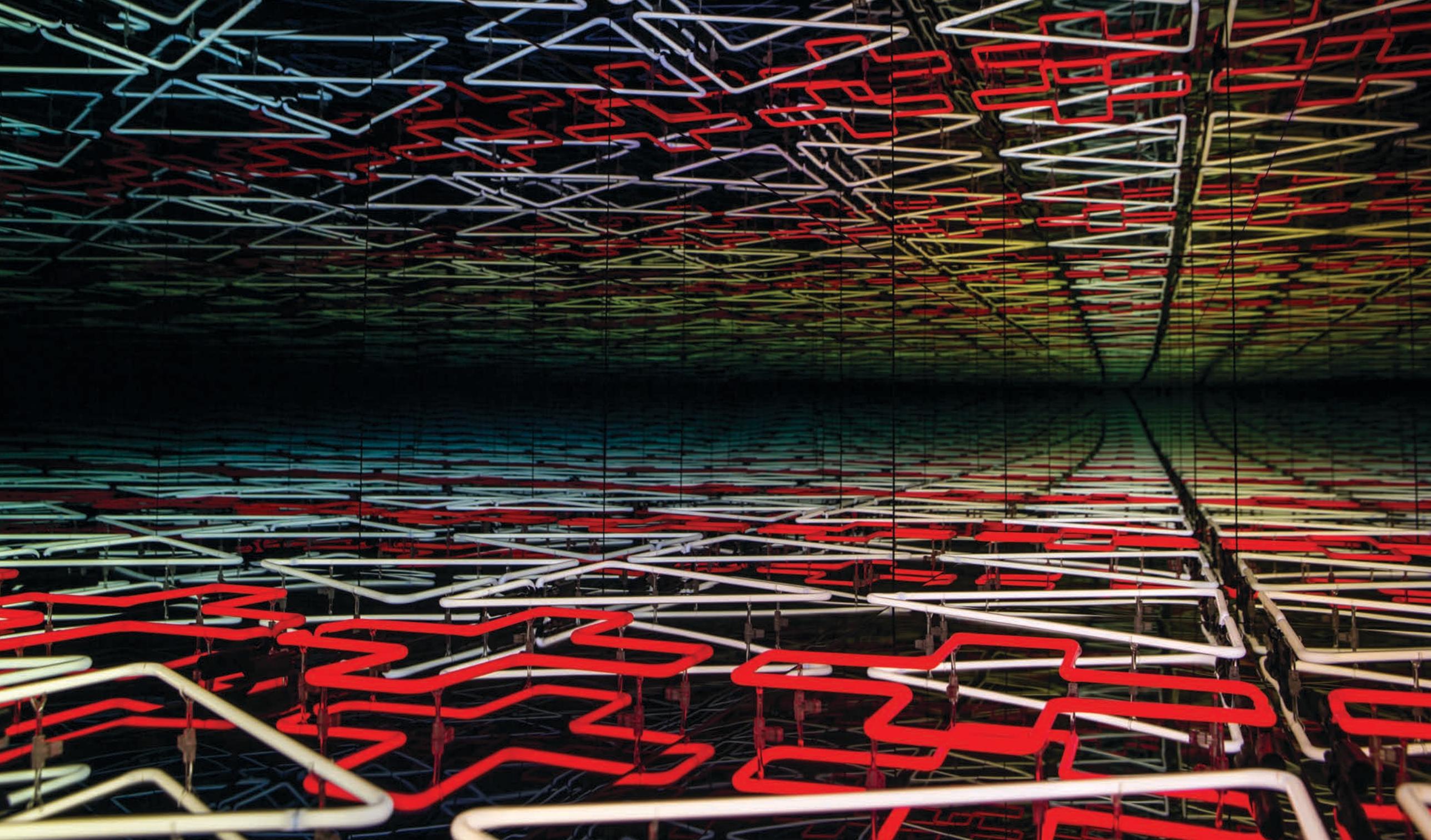
⁶ Smith, S.M. 2007, *Hei Whenua Ora: Hapū and Iwi approaches for reinstating valued ecosystems within cultural landscape*. Unpublished Doctorate of Philosophy, School of Māori Studies, Te Pūtahi a Toi, Massey University, Palmerston North, 39.

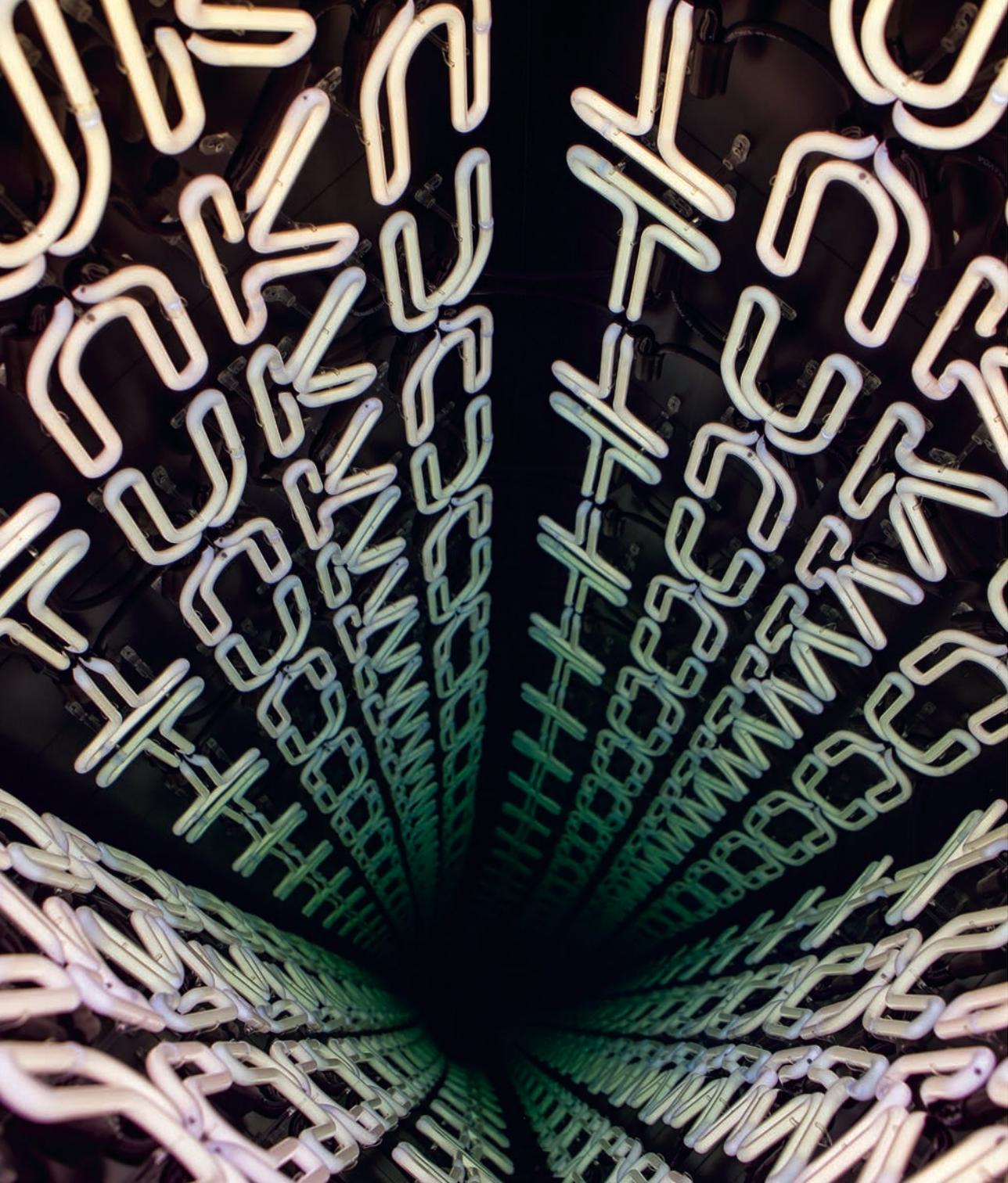
⁷ Personal communications supplied from artist for the Pātaka, Porirua exhibition.

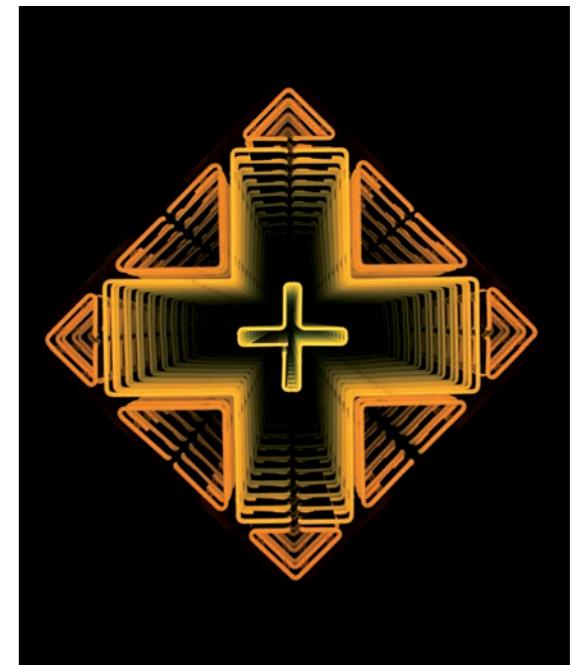
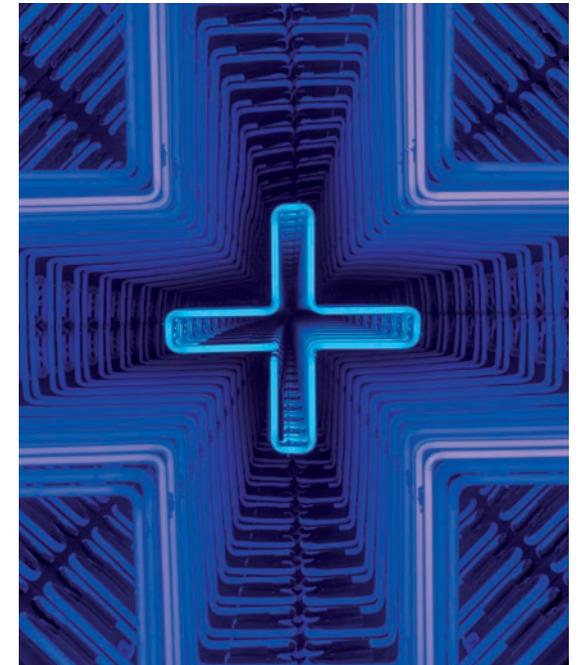
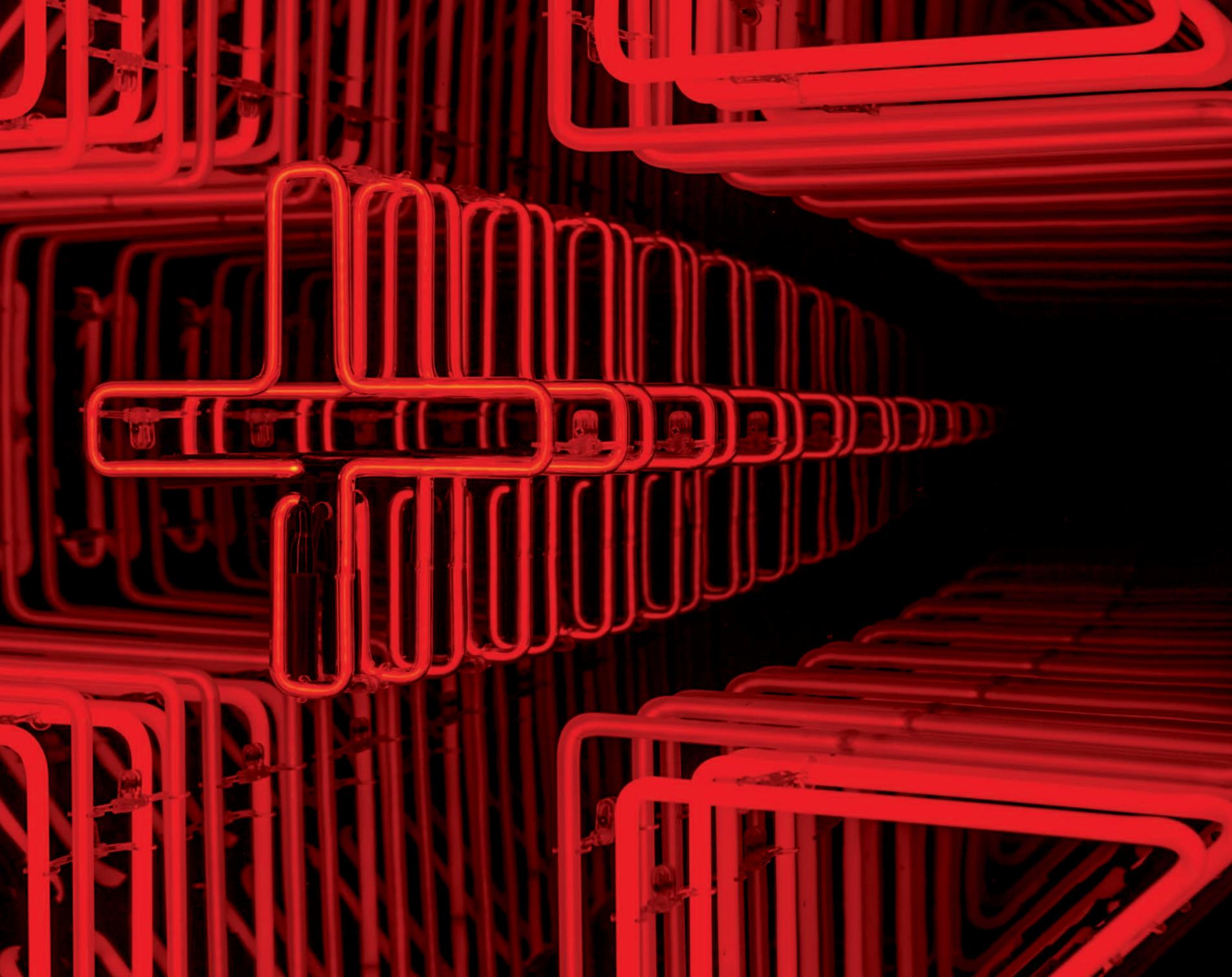
PLATES

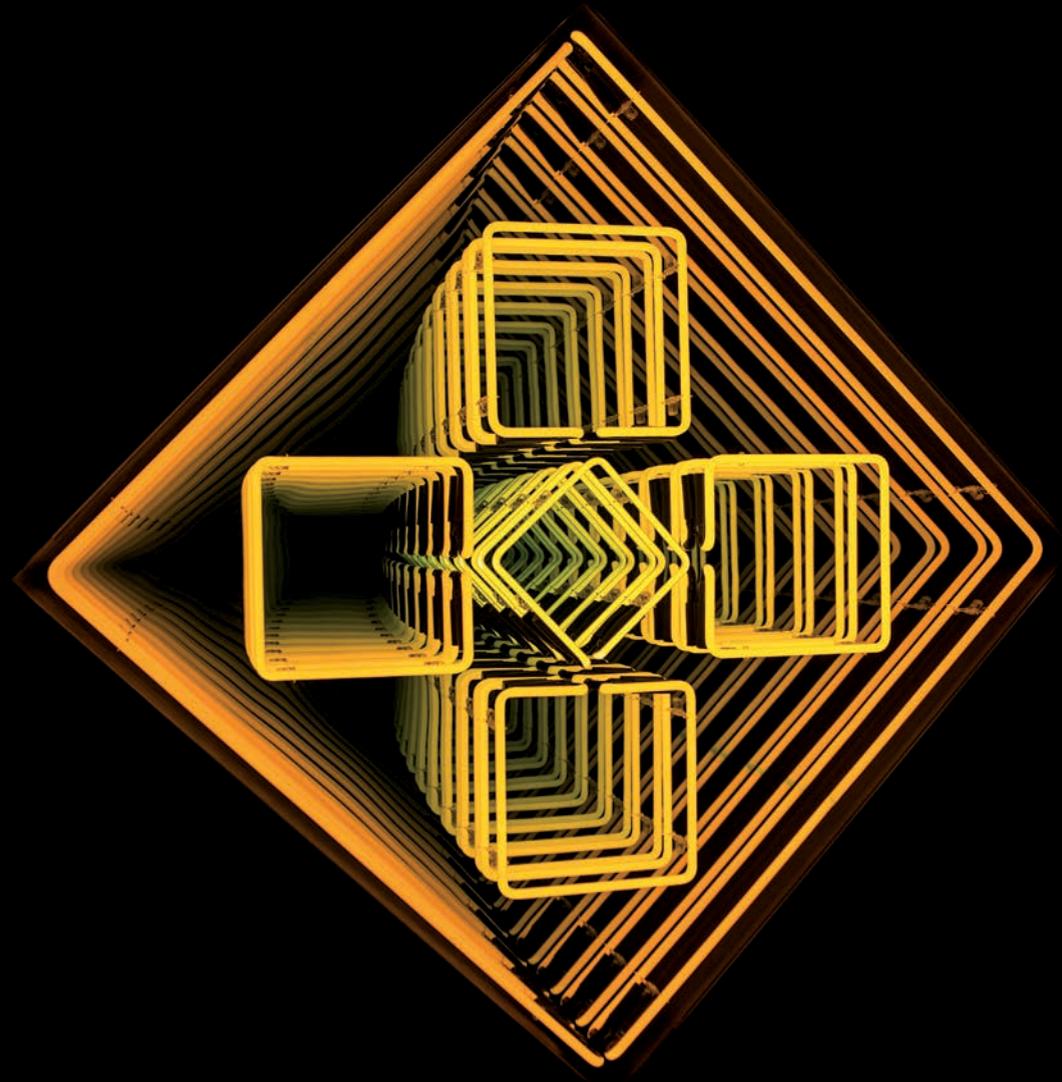
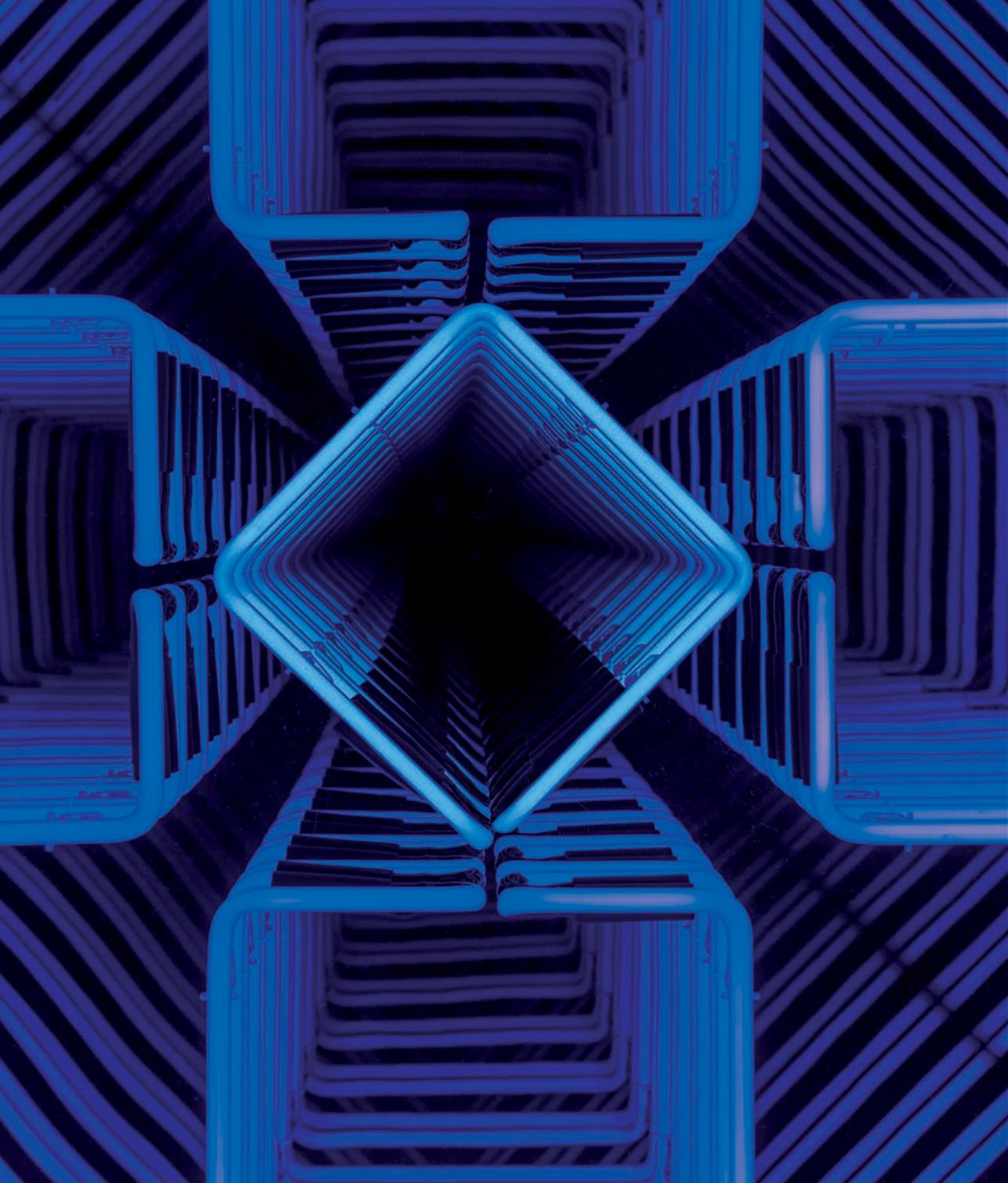


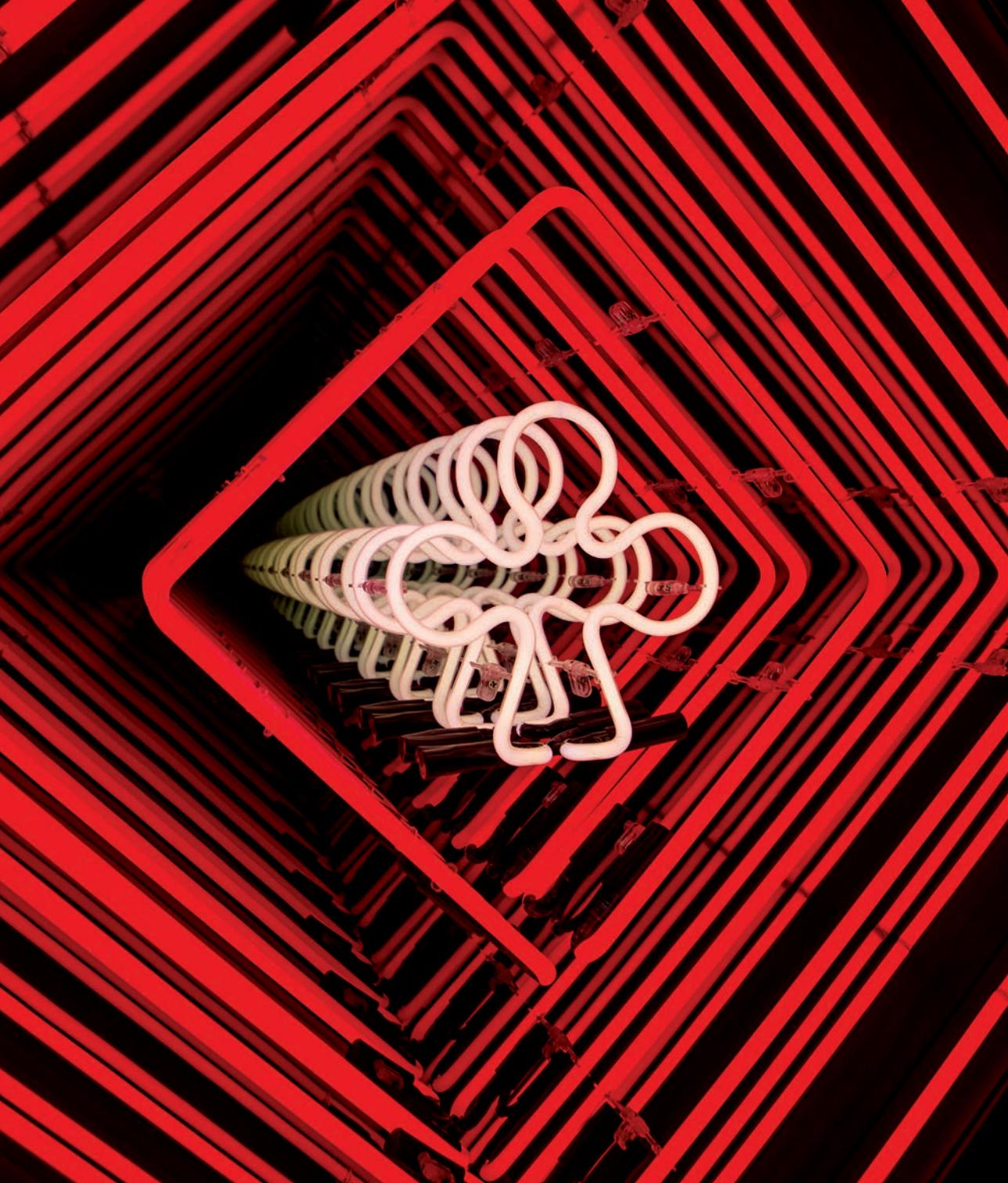












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Navarro patiki whero 2014

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Ata tuarua 2016

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Ata tuatahi 2016

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Navarro tukutuku 2014-16

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Ripeka whero 2015

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Ripeka kahurangi 2015

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Ripeka kōwhai 2015

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Taimana kahurangi 2015

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Taimana kōwhai 2015

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Karapu ma 2015



LIST OF
WORKS

Ata tuatahi 2016
MDF, paint, neon, one way
glass, mirror, electricity
1473 x 1506 x 1450mm
Courtesy the artist

Ata tuarua 2016
MDF, paint, neon, one way
glass, mirror, electricity
1473 x 1506 x 1450mm
Courtesy the artist

Navarro tukutuku 2014-16
MDF, paint, neon, one way
glass, mirror, electricity
700 x 700 x 1000mm
Courtesy the artist

Navarro patiki kikorangi
2014
Wood, paint, neon, one way
glass, mirror, electricity
1470 x 1470 x 140mm
Courtesy the artist

Navarro patiki ma 2014
Wood, paint, neon, one way
glass, mirror, electricity
1470 x 1470 x 140mm
Courtesy the artist

Navarro patiki whero 2014
Wood, paint, neon, one way
glass, mirror, electricity
1470 x 1470 x 140mm
Courtesy the artist

Karapu kikorangi 2015
Wood, paint, neon, one way
glass, mirror, electricity
1470 x 1470 x 140mm
Courtesy the artist

Karapu ma 2015
Wood, paint, neon, one way
glass, mirror, electricity
1470 x 1470 x 140mm
Courtesy the artist

Karapu whero 2015
Wood, paint, neon, one way
glass, mirror, electricity
1470 x 1470 x 140mm
Courtesy the artist

Ripeka whero 2015
Wood, paint, neon, one way
glass, mirror, electricity
1470 x 1470 x 140mm
Courtesy the artist

Ripeka kōwhai 2015
Wood, paint, neon, one way
glass, mirror, electricity
1470 x 1470 x 140mm
Courtesy the artist

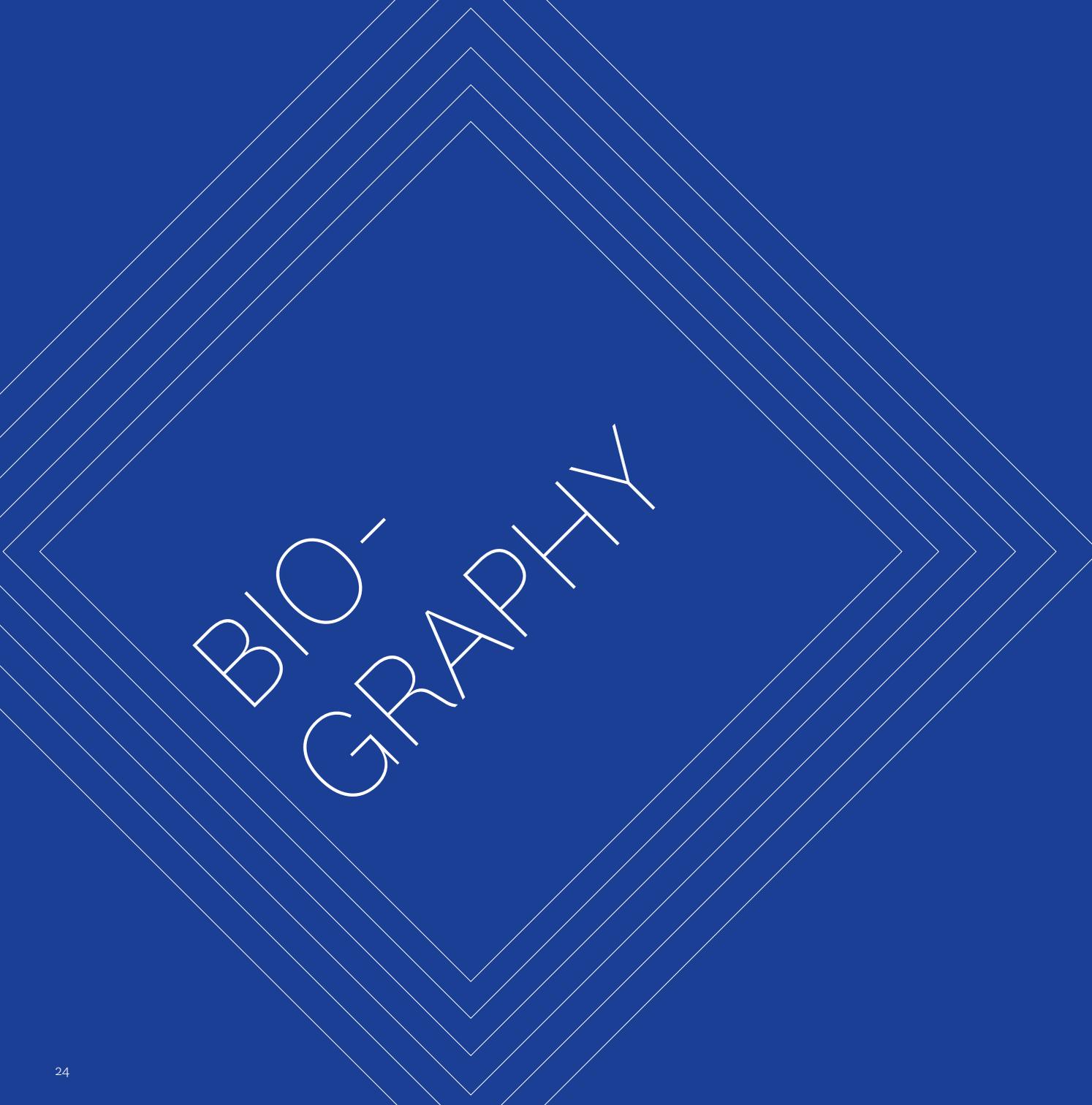
Ripeka kahurangi 2015
Wood, paint, neon, one way
glass, mirror, electricity
1470 x 1470 x 140mm
Courtesy the artist

Taimana kahurangi 2015
Wood, paint, neon, one way
glass, mirror, electricity
1470 x 1470 x 140mm
Courtesy the artist

Taimana whero 2015
Wood, paint, neon, one way
glass, mirror, electricity
1470 x 1470 x 140mm
Courtesy the artist

Taimana kōwhai 2015
Wood, paint, neon, one way
glass, mirror, electricity
1470 x 1470 x 140mm
Courtesy the artist

Te Ao Marama 2016
High definition video
Dimension variable
Collaboration between
Erena Arapere and
Bob Jahnke
Courtesy the artists'



BIO- GRAPHY

Professor Robert (Bob) Jahnke (b. 1951) is of Ngāi Taharora, Te Whānau-a-Iritekura, Te Whānau a Rakairoa o Ngāti Porou, Samoan-German, Scottish and Irish descent. He has a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Industrial Design and a Master of Fine Arts in Graphic Design from Elam School of Fine Arts, Auckland University and a Master of Fine Arts in Experimental Animation from the California Institute of the Arts. He has been the leading force in the establishment of the Māori Visual Arts Programme at Te Putahi-a-Toi, Massey University since 1991 where he earned his doctorate and subsequent professorship. As a significant figure in contemporary Māori art, Jahnke has an extensive exhibition history and has works in major public and private collections throughout Aotearoa New Zealand and internationally.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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I am grateful for the sponsorship of Creative NZ, Massey University and Chris Parkin.

I also acknowledge Paolo Scirpa (Italian) and Ivan Navarro (Chilean) whose reflection techniques inform this body of work. In the words of Dr Huhana Smith, *'Jahnke appropriates their reflection techniques to promote a Māori world view, where humankind emerges through Te Kore, Te Pō and Te Ao Mārama'*.

I owe a debt of gratitude to Erena Arapere whose collaboration has activated the neon illuminations into a moving reflection of the cosmo-genealogical phases of Te Kore, Te Pō and Te Ao Mārama.

Special thanks to Dr Huhana Smith for translating my intentions into words with an insightful essay aimed at shedding light on ATA as reflection and as *'cognitive maps of Māori reasoning, intuition and perception, developed over time'*.

Bob Jahnke

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toi iho
maori made

Ata tuatahi 2016 (detail)



