



Tama Sharman in studio, photographed by Lisa White, 2019.



Tama Sharman, *Majic duo building stairs* (detail), 2019, Ink lino print and tape on paper.



## Tama Sharman Dark Sepia 21 January—22 March

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**Dark Sepia** is an exhibition that gives trust to listening between worlds. In constructing a new body of work built from recycled and found materials, artist Tama Sharman celebrates imagination as both ‘a tool for survival’ as well as ‘a universal treasure’. Born in Aotearoa, Tama explores a visual language that is respectful of Māori storytelling whilst weaving a personal lexicon into his art making, altogether creating an emotionally engaging space. Throughout his exhibition we are guided by places, people and creatures that reside in *Te Kore* (the void) where we encounter *toroa* (albatross), two cheeky *kurī* (dogs), many fish and birds, as well as Arika the *karetao* (puppet).

Notes on *Dark Sepia*—Ange Morgan

For millennia, the arts have been telling, showing, singing, dancing and giving vision to stories, histories and identities. The arts allow life to be explored in a wealth of depths and make it possible to convey emotional and experiential knowledge where words are neither possible, nor enough.

In creating this body of work for *Dark Sepia*, Tama refers to acts of listening and trusting. Throughout this exhibition, I feel that we as visitors are also called to listen—to listen with all our senses, to our own responses and experiences, and to trust ourselves as we do so. Listening can allow us to be open, to wait, not to rush to finish or conclude.

Cover image: Tama Sharman in studio, photographed by Lisa White, 2019.

Centre: Tama Sharman, *Matawai* (detail), 2019, Lino print on paper.

**ANGE MORGAN** *Can you tell me about listening and trusting in the creation of this work?*

**TAMA SHARMAN** Maybe trusting comes first...that making the work is a valid way to learn and make connections of meaning, communication and understanding. Listening is internal... it's about getting information, making an action, remembering. Listening in the process of art making is about allowing the information to come, receiving it, making the connections, considering, understanding and revealing what is happening.



**AM** *I wonder what listening and trusting in your making process has led you to know or discover...*

**TS** I learnt that it was the birds who taught us humans how to speak, and that it is our fish brain that keeps us quiet. The paintings and prints came from the initial dark sepia pencil drawings—they seem to show the building of relationships, social connections and understandings, frustrations, care, tenderness and joy... they show life. They guided me to think about shadow puppets, and then to learn about *karetao*, a traditional Māori puppetry. Arika is my first attempt at creating a puppet. My interest in this is related to *karetao*, and its use as a tool to teach and educate about *whakapapa*<sup>1</sup> and culture. The puppets are used to communicate difficult, complex narratives. I think that Arika in the future will be a way to bring to light the less communicated stories.

**AM** *When I come across the whare, the cans, the creatures, paintings and prints in the exhibition, I can see stories, investigations, hidden treasures of imagery, material, line, form and mark making...*

**TS** That *whare/wharenuī*<sup>2</sup> hasn't just popped up out of nowhere... I've been trying to make that for ten years... I've tried to allow it to be itself, instead of having to be 'correctly' Māori... it might be respectfully Māori... but, the arms ain't coming out of its head, and it ain't got a backbone... yet—but nor does a jellyfish. The *whare* in this case is named *Te Mana Toroa*—the *mana* of the albatross, the greatest navigator.

**AM** *As an artist, there is the action of listening to materials, processes and the developing work, and alongside this perhaps, listening to the self. I wonder if these sometimes weave together, to allow one to inform the other... to know, lose and form again one's identity when parts of the information are not accessible.*

**TS** These are the real things that everyone must struggle with... the uncensored things... the human feelings about inadequacy, rites, respect... people tend to show the prestige... rather than the fumbling of learning. These creations show my perceptions from listening in the world and a learning about myself. It all started off as dark sepia... pairing back all the chaos and taking one pencil and a paper to the laundromat. That pencil is named dark sepia.

Ange Morgan is an art maker, from a dance and fine art background, living in Naarm/Melbourne. Ange works with mixed media, painting and installation. They are interested in the possibilities of art for social change, health, inclusion and transformation. Ange and Tama are collaborators in an ongoing studio drawing project.

**1. whakapapa (noun)**  
genealogy, genealogical table, lineage, descent—reciting *whakapapa* was, and is, an important skill and reflected the importance of genealogies in Māori society in terms of leadership, land and fishing rights, kinship and status.

**2. Whare/Wharenuī (noun)**  
meeting house, large house—main building of a *marae* where guests are accommodated. Many are decorated with carvings, rafter paintings and *tukutuku* panels.

Source: [maoridictionary.co.nz](http://maoridictionary.co.nz)