

## [Copper Promises | Victoria Hunt](#)

Written by [Dione Joseph](#), Australian Stage

Tuesday, 05 November 2013 10:29



*Victoria Hunt. Photo – Heidrun Lohr*

There is no single word to address the depth and complexities of **Victoria Hunt's** work. Electrifying perhaps may do some justice: the work reverberates with personal narrative, political tensions and is technologically sophisticated.

**Hunt** is from Ngati Hinemihi, and can trace her whakapapa (genealogy) back to her ancestress Hinemihi, a woman of incredible strength and resilience. It is her name and spirit which continues to live on in the whare tipuna meeting house that is now located at Clandon Park, Surrey.

Hinemihi is not an it. She is she. And like **Hunt** who is Australian born, Hinemihi too has found herself on other people's whenua (land). Transported in 1882 by Lord Onslow, a British governor-general who bought Hinemihi as a memento of his time in Aotearoa (New Zealand), she is effectively a souvenir of the Antipodes. *Copper Promises* doesn't require an audience to be familiar with the story of Hinemihi, the story is irrevocably entwined in the performance.

This hour long solo dance piece is composed of different vignettes that reflect **Hunt's** decade long research and reconnecting, and segue effortlessly to chart a journey that began more than a hundred years ago. These poetic and highly specific sequences reflect the rupture experienced by those who were witnesses to the eruption of Mt. Tarawera in 1886, the geological and emotional tectonic shifts, the trauma and tragedy suffered by a people. But it also explores how bodies are suspended between earth and sky, the crushing weight of silence, a prophecy of inevitable disaster, the dilemma, a lamentation and ultimately the entwining two bodies, one story, one dance, one voice.

The lighting and soundscapes are vivid and with no set and a simple smock this is **Hunt's** dance of life, a celebration of living cultures in spite of adverse conditions, colonial conditioning and physical displacement. This is a form of witnessing not just for her but for her ancestress and filters across multiple levels. Projections flit, electronic vibrations erupt; dislocations are juxtaposed against deep yearning and desire, chance encounters and the use of traditional dance, contemporary movement and invocations of the land, sky and spirit create a myriad of stunning images. The 3D projection is a visual delight and used carefully, embedded into the landscape rather than merely making a statement of technological virtuosity. The use of te reo Māori on stage is powerful, potent and absolutely necessary, whether or not the audience understand the literal meaning; the emotional response that is evoked transcends semantics. **Hunt's** final moments are incredibly powerful as she asserts her identity, drawing the moko (tattoo) upon her chin.

Her methodology was one of immersion, listening, reacquainting and responding to the complexities of belonging, both for Hinemihi and for herself. The show's flaws are minor, it is a tad long and some of the sequences are longer than they need to be; in addition some of the vignettes are far superior to their counterparts, and as result the latter tend to lag just a little too long. Also, while the work is an independent chronicling of personal and communities histories it is worth considering whether in an international context how far removed has the story become for those who may have little or no knowledge of Hinemihi and her journey. The technology, as mentioned before, is one of the highlights of the show but the balance between the performer and what should be the supporting visuals and soundscapes seems to teeter on a rather precarious scale becoming consumed, at times, by the spectacle than the story.

It may seem a somewhat abstract claim, but **Hunt's** work reverberates with aroha (love) for Hinemihi. She is a highly skilled performer and has given much time and space to let the work breathe and evolve, and it will surely continue to do so.

**Venue:** The Place, Dukes Road, London WC1

**Dates:** 25, 26 October, 2013

**Tickets:** £15 – £12

**Visit:** [www.theplace.org.uk/victoria-hunt](http://www.theplace.org.uk/victoria-hunt)

**Thursday, May 17, 2012 - Copper Promises**

Performance Space presents COPPER PROMISES: HINEMIHI HAKA in Bay 20 CARRIAGEWORKS, Redfern. Victoria Hunt after nearly a decade of research and preparation presented COPPER PROMISES: HINEMIHI HAKA at Carriageworks under the auspices of the Performance Space season of curated works for DIMENSION CROSSING last week in Bay 20. This performance, this work, was truly remarkable. Truly, unforgettable. An artist transubstantiated into the living spirit of her ancestry. An artist's body transmuted into a traditional Maori meetinghouse, no, amazingly it was - Victoria Hunt, the spiritual female ancestor Hinemihi and the house itself - all three present - a holy trinity.

Hinemihi Bird; ears, feet and body parts, sprouting feathers from underside of feet; inside the body is forming quills which grow to the surface, playful, mysterious, curious. Inside, my torso catches the flight of a small bird, around the ribs, collar, pelvis; smack feather soles. Drawn to the memory of calling; confusion; insanity; disintegration; entrance through the aural, canopy of birdsong. There is a constant physical reminder of the hugeness of the mountain and the sky above. A heroic walk out, supporting the delicate load of brittle bones, walking away from the blizzard. Body abandoned by spirit. Lifting out of bones, flesh and skin like streams of smoke, floating into the atmosphere. a husk remains. becomes a person lost and searching for loved ones. Thick ash and mud cling to you, drawing you down. Being urged by unknown forces towards Te Arai. Become a protective mother with children buried in crushing weight. The most awful sound of silence ....

Victoria Hunt is an Australian artist of part Maori descent. Ms Hunt was grew up here, in Australia, and only six years ago visited New Zealand for the first time to meet her whanau (family). From the program:

THE BACKSTORY. I speak, the house speaks. I dance, the house dances. Victoria Hunt is from Ngati Hinemihi, a sub-tribe of Tuhourangi, Te Arawa. Hinemihi is one of Victoria's female ancestors - embodied in a traditional Maori meetinghouse. A meetinghouse is the community space on a Marae Atea (tribal land). It is a tapu (sacred) place where people gather for the important rituals in life. Where the core business is relationships. Where they are laid out in death. Where the living ritually engage with the dead who in turn provide guidance for the living.

Interpolated from an interview between Victoria Hunt (VH) and Fiona Winning (FW) recorded elsewhere in the program:

VH: [in the century before last] Chief Aporo Te Wharekaniwha of the sub-tribe Ngati Hinemihi commissioned the old carver Wero Taroi and his apprentice Tene Wairere to build Hinemihi. Both carvers existed at a time of explosive eclecticism and competing narratives.

FW: Hinemihi is a whare tipuna meetinghouse. So the architecture of the house is the body of Hinemihi.

VH: She's the architectural depiction of the body of an ancestor. She has 26 carvings that give a cosmological explanation for whakapapa, tribal history and concepts. She represents the spirit of the people, the spirit of the dead. The Poutokomanawa is the heart post that separates earth and sky. The Tuaha is the backbone. The Heke rafters are her ribs. The Pou inside the back wall is the symbolic Arai portal servicing the journey of the spirits. The Pare which is the carved door lintel around the entrance, is a threshold... into Hinenuitepo, where you move from the noa or profane into the tapu or sacred. All houses are designed to fulfill these cultural practices. waiting with potential to be ritually enacted.

...In the early hours of June 10th (1886), the mountains of Wahanga, Ruawahia and Tarawera split apart. Devastating! The most cataclysmic event in the tribes existence. Our scared mountain blew up! The ancestral bones in the caves turned to ash and scattered across the country.... ..

FW: So what happened to Hinemihi?

VH: I've been told parts of her were looted. Three of the outside carvings were removed by relic hunters. Including the pare or lintel carving.

FW: And that's resurfaced after years of being lost on the black market and is now in an auction house in Paris.

VH: She's been cut on both sides to fit as a mantelpiece for a fireplace surround..... .... The pare represents her pelvis..... (Three million for the Goddess of Death; three million for a carved house lintel; three million for my pelvis; looted, sold on the black market, caught in a separation ... a frozen marriage. REPATRIATE).

FW: And the rest of Hinemihi is in an English country garden.

VH: Lord Onslow, the British Governor of New Zealand bought Hinemihi as a memento of his time there and took her to his Clandon Park mansion in Surrey. She was his 'souvenir' from his time in the Antipodes..... .... She's now in the care and control of the UK National Trust with the rest of Onslow's estate. A spirit house in the grounds of an English country garden. The Nagti Hinemihi tribe, Ngati Ranana UK and the Trust are currently trying to recognise each other.

FW: ..... I notice in all the Trust's descriptions, Hinemihi used to be described as a house, a work of art, an inanimate object. But they've updated their language in the last couple of years to call Hinemihi 'she'.

VH: To acknowledge that to us, she's living, imbued with tribal memory and spiritual strength ... a physical pathway to another world.

Back to the Backstory: Victoria has created COPPER PROMISES: HINEMIHI HAKA after a decade of embodied research across three countries. She's traveled from Brisbane to Auckland, Rotorua to Minto and Sydney to Surrey -collecting video imagery, recording sound and interviews and making a series of short dance works. She's written, danced and dreamt this material and now has shaped it into a work that merges feeling and gesture as they echo across landscape and through time: "Very early in this process, my Uncle Wally told me my ambition to dance Hinemihi was actually bringing her back. I feel that's what I'm doing. Bringing Hinemihi back" (Victoria Hunt).

Ms Hunt has been a familiar figure, particularly in the work of Tess De Quincey with De Quincey Co. where BodyWeather, a form of Butoh training, is utilised as the centre of the dance practice. Here in this work COPPER PROMISES, Ms Hunt subsumes that knowledge and means of expression in an intense 55 minute series of sequences to explore and express the intense research of her direct heritage. This work, this performance seems to catapult Ms Hunt into an inspiration of creativity and magnificent possession. I have never seen Ms Hunt better.

The near ten year preparation of this work is shown in a compacted and intense act. The eloquence of every moment compels the audience to attend with unflinching awe. Tremendous risks of detailed, minute, but, deeply meaningful expression, challenges the audience to dare look away - some moments of longueur are set as a test in one incredible extended sequence, but such is the artist's knowing commitment that one does not. This work, in experience, is not just the dancer's achievement, for Ms Hunt has seemed to inspire all of the artists involved, and they, as empathetic and passionate collaborators, have honed the presentation of this wonder with the most compelling and supportive detailed contribution.

The Lighting Design by Clytie Smith (with fergos by, David Ferguson) often interacts as a fellow dancer and suggests a duet of enormous intimacy. Add the provocative and stunning Video Design of the floor projections and spinning disc (dripping with metaphorical power), by Chris Wilson, and the most intense and apt Sound Design by James Brown, to support, and, like the lighting design join Ms Hunt as an emotional partner - the slow exquisite pressure of the build of the quake explosion was deafeningly cathartic. The silence following shattering - The integration of all these artist's work was astounding and brilliant. Never to be forgotten the last coup de theatre gesture. The distillation of a shared catharsis and given to us, indelibly, to share and be held forever.

COPPER PROMISES: HINEMIHI HAKA is a work that reveals the laser like focus of learning and the engaging of emotional history into a political power of unforgettable urgency. Personal, societal,

cultural, historical and, hence, political traits of what it takes to be a journeyman in the complicated patterns of living. We are alive in the present, with a past and a future. These aspects of time, all weigh us down, and yet inspire us as well. Ms Hunt in this work deals with all of this. The time spent in arriving at this expression of a life and its search for truths enhances the quality and veracity of all the artists commitment. Fiona Winning, the producer, and guide to Victoria Hunt should be applauded for encouraging the persistent patience needed for the work to grow to maturity.

May COPPER PROMISES: HINEMIHI HAKA acquire a long history of its own. I speak, the house speaks. I dance, the house dances. Performance Space with this work and Yumi Umiumare's EnTrance last month seem to be resurrected. Welcome back, I say.

Posted by: Megan Garrett-Jones – fbi 94.5 FM - RADIO

Posted: 07 May 2012

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Dimension Crossing, the current season at [Performance Space](#), is a series of performances and installations considering transition and things-in-between. Victoria Hunt's [Copper Promises: Hinemihi Haka](#) delves into Diaspora and the pillaging of culture under colonisation alongside Hunt's own reconnection with her Maori family (whanau) and a "dancing back" of Hinemihi, who is both a female ancestor and the meetinghouse (marae) which embodies her.

Hinemihi is in pieces. Parts of her are missing. They intermittently turn up at auction houses and in rumours from the black market, and a large part of her lives in an English country garden where Lord Onslow took her as a souvenir of his tenure as the British Governor to New Zealand. This [Victoria Hunt](#) discovered when she reconnected with her Maori family after growing up in Australia largely unaware of her heritage. This solo dance work comes out of a decade-long journey of a kind of repatriation for Hunt, as well as continued research into the Hinemihi meetinghouse and familiarisation with traditional mythology and artistic forms. Hunt relates to the plight of Hinemihi, dispersed to others' countries, disconnected from her homeland. Yet, as told by her Uncle, Hunt is bringing Hinemihi back, in a contemporary context through this project.

Cultural plurality is the richness in Copper Promises. Hunt draws heavily on her training with founder of contemporary Japanese dance style 'Body Weather' Min Tanaka, and ongoing practice as a Body Weather dancer. Don't expect conventional choreography. In this style of movement, the dancer embodies landscape, images or instruction. The result is absolute specificity and focus from the performer, but nevertheless an openness for viewers to create their own stories, within the context of the work. The artist statement gives some clues to the score: "Hinemihi Bird [...] sprouting feathers from underside of feet; inside the body us forming quills which grow to the surface, playful, mysterious, curious". I remember thinking, is she animal, ancestor, both?

Ash falls from above, and in her little box of light, it feels like Hunt is being buried. She plays with her own weight and weight bearing, reluctantly collaborating with gravity. Despite the dire image, Hunt becomes a centre of power, enacting protective/ defensive spells. Throughout the piece she accesses more recognisably Maori movement and motifs.

I feel like Hunt's performance was itself buried by some of the technical elements of the show, overloading what is a very personal and sensitive choreography. Field recordings and traditional music deepened the connection to the material, but the relentless bass-heavy soundscape, strobe-lights, and lightning bolt video projections pushed it into a realm of tech-spectacle it didn't need to go. There is also the spinning hologram-effect coin. Which my friend thought was daggy but I was quite fond of, so I'll let you make your mind up about that one.

If you don't get all that prancing around and spinning etc, in dance, this one gives more than that to contemplate. If you go to dance, you will no doubt appreciate the skill and intention in Hunt's performance. If nothing else, **Victoria Hunt is an incredibly compelling performer presenting a generous and honest work.**

*What: Dance, Copper Promises: Hinemihi Haka  
Who: Victoria Hunt presented by Performance Space  
Where: Carriageworks, 245 Wilson Street, Eveleigh  
When: 5, 4 and 8-12 May, 2012. 8pm. 12 May, 2pm  
How much: \$20-\$30, \$15 student rush Fri 11th.*



## Electrifying opus transports to another place and time

Reviewed by Julia Cotton  
Published: May 9, 2012 - 3:00AM

### COPPER PROMISES: HINEMIHI HAKA

VICTORIA HUNT spent a decade researching and drawing on her rich Maori heritage in preparation for this performance.

It is a stunning production - a solo movement/butoh/dance performance with strong technical support in lighting, sound and projection. Hunt's dance is at once organic, suggestive of primordial times, and electrifying. It is as if she is channelling the spirits of her ancestors and the very land they come from.

Her movement skills are impressive, ranging from lightning fast to incredibly controlled, and the imagery takes the audience to another place and time.

She begins in a cross light with jagged lights projected behind her and at once we are made aware of the elements. In the next section, she is, at times, barely visible and we get only glimpses of her moving through long shafts of diagonal light along the floor.

As this gradually builds, her movement is mesmerising - she has the ability to isolate parts of her body and create a dislocated kind of physicality.

The seismic sound effects build from a deep rumbling to a terrifying climax and we feel the effect of a volcanic eruption before an eerie stillness and quiet descend.

Shafts of light from above, as dust gently floats downwards, create a beautiful effect, reminiscent of underground caves or thick forests, until, accompanied by a strange creaking, it seems as if the earth is still shifting.

These images and Hunt's ability to simultaneously be the force behind them and be affected by them creates an amazing synergy between the organic, visceral movement and the highly technical elements.

**Hunt has a powerful presence** and the fierce haka is a strong contrast with the serene composure of her final walk forward. **This final move is one of deep reverence, her connection with her heritage is profound and the final image is a true coup de theatre.**

*This story was found at: <http://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/dance/electrifying-opus-transport-to-another-place-and-time-20120508-1yaszh.html>*

**Performative Repatriation - by [pauline manley](#)**

VICTORIA HUNT'S COPPER PROMISES: HINEMIHI HAKA IS A 'THEN' MADE 'NOW,' A PAST CONJURED IN A PRESENT THAT WALKS THROUGH PORTALS INTO ONGOINGNESS. IT IS EPISODIC, WITH EACH ACT DETERMINED BY DISTINCTIVE BUT MUTATING LIGHTING STATES THAT ARE BOTH SHARPLY AESTHETIC AND THICKLY ATMOSPHERIC, AND BY AUTOCONVOLUTED SOUND THAT SPEAKS, SHATTERS, RUMBLES, ROARS, GRATES, GRINDS AND TRICKLES.

At the same time Hunt's body moves amidst light and sound as one of these elementals; sometimes swept along or drawn by light, sometimes tortured by compacted screeches, possessed of sound. But at other times it is her moving body that controls the skies.

Copper Promises: Hinemihi Haka is a condensation of Hunt's journey back into her Maori ancestry. [Hinemihi is a female ancestor and a ceremonial house connected with Hunt's cultural heritage. Eds] It is a lament of alienation and a celebration of repatriation. It is a finding, a gathering, a travelling, a wandering and a landing. It is a work built over "a decade of embodied research across three countries...collecting video imagery, recording sound and interviews and making a series of short dance works" (program notes).

So those voices and actions and images that elude specific understanding are still understood: clarity is born of heartfelt and rigorous research, stretching out across continents and generations and coming back to a body. Victoria Hunt's body as the human centre of Copper Promises becomes a place, reconciling the apparent conundrum of a cultural emphasis on "collectivity" and "community" (program notes) with this very solo work by dancing with ancestors and giving voice to ghosts which hang behind and around Hunt's fleshy contortions.

There were so many resonant moments: like the dust cloud that seemed at first like smoke but had the shape of a figure, haunting on invitation, or the ghostly bride who pads solemnly soft along an aisle of white, her hair gently steaming. But two crescendos screamed louder than them all.

After another train has rattled past Carriageworks' Track 8, after the slow lateral stalking of the stage by a nearly invisible body with only half a face, after the ghosts have whispered softly then echoed loudly on top of rumbles that gently shake space, after Hinemihi body has pushed itself into becoming rock, metal and rubber, after this molten non-body has bent, opened, twisted and sunk, Hunt, her skin glistening with sweat, spits gorgeous globules of beautiful saliva into the air and her hands become 'pois' (Maori performative devices which are swung by hand. Eds) that flick and twitch into a madness-trapped claustrophobia in a sharp white box of asylum light hanging in a sea of black, until a cloudy sky greyness drifts her and her madness into near invisibility again.

Later. After disappearing into a chasm of nothingness, Hunt's chin and mouth appear, tattooed and moving. Her mouth and the mouths of the soundtrack speak in strangled distortions that are electronic and ancient, now and then. Hunt is a mask made by light, speaking in tongues with the rhythms of sharpening breath and dog screams, a sonic mountain of intolerable cruelty that hurts with its disturbing and frantic energy. Then, it is gone.

Afterward, it took some time to leave the silences and roars of Copper Promises behind. The past had taken hold of the present, so the world became liminal, a neither here nor there, a then and a now.

Performance Space, Dimension Crossing: Copper Promises: Hinemihi Haka, concept, choreography, dance Victoria Hunt, lighting Clytie Smith, sound James Brown, producer Fiona Winning, Performance Space, Carriageworks, Sydney, May 4-12

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