

What We Do Have: A Response to the work of Ruby Te Ata Marama Brown
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Tangible is from Latin tangere, "to touch,". Touch, both a verb and a noun. To touch with one's hands, and the emotion of being touched.

Ruby Te Ata Marama Brown's process offers refuge from her conscious reasoning. Through repetition of caulking and intuitive movements, namely squeezing out and then touching with fingers, she builds up texture on the canvas. In *Longing* (2019-2020), an arduous accumulation of gap sealant marks, this repetition is a means for connecting to a land that is "not mine".

Squeeze / touch / squeeze / touch / squeeze / touch / squeeze / touch / squeeze / touch
Squeeze / touch / squeeze / touch / squeeze / touch / squeeze / touch / squeeze / touch Squeeze
/ touch / squeeze / touch / squeeze / touch / squeeze / touch / squeeze / touch Squeeze /
touch / squeeze / touch /

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There have been times where I've wanted to offer condolences or kind words to others in te reo Māori but (and I'm certainly not unique here) I possess inadequate knowledge of te ao Māori. If I do know *something*, I've probably picked it up from observing a friend or through someone I follow on Instagram. I often feel whakamā about it all.

I feel like I should have a lexicon of waiata or karakia on hand. Of the few waiata that I do know, my favourite is *Whakaaria Mai*, a Māori translation of the Christian hymn *How Great Thou Art*. Though it conjures up new memories since my Grandad's tangi, as I attempt to illustrate below:

At Nuhaka
I got out of the car and
slept under a tree
Mum's cousin who just got out of jail
took us to a beach in his boy racer car
And bought us *Monster* energy drinks
Grandad's tangi
I wore his best cowboy hat
We sung the bittersweet *Whakaaria Mai*
We sprinkled water over our heads
When we entered and exited the marae
To cast away any bad juju
We used umbrellas so we didn't get wet
when we walked to the urupa
I wasn't wearing any shoes
On the way home
we stopped in Taupō
to get some KFC

...Then sings my soul.

We sang *How Great Thou Art* at my pākehā Nana Joan's funeral in Mangere too. This waiata to me represents adaptation, resistance, transcendence.

It makes me feel close to my tūpuna; those that are living and those that have passed, those that are Māori and those that are Pākehā and those that are tauiwi. I talk to them and see them everywhere in everything. I've never needed a verbal language for that.

It's impossible to disconnect from a colonised understanding of language. The necessity to explain, an excess of information pre-loaded with predetermined parameters, that the reader, the writer have been conditioned with. We have ALL been conditioned. Colonisation is insidious.

There are things we have though. We know we are Māori. If it can be traced in our whakapapa, even a single relative, then we are indisputably Māori. We continue to exist.

When I go to Nuhaka, I feel a sense of belonging. I've been exactly twice in my lifetime. My Grandad helped to construct the bathrooms there. Distant "rellies", nannies, aunties and cousins alike work on the marae, making kai and cleaning up, whenever anyone has a significant event there. They will welcome you if you have a connection.

I don't know why but the whenua *feels* like it is mine too. Ours. There are no words.