**What prompted you to write Poroporoaki?**

It began as an ekphrasis assignment at Vic [where she was studying for a Masters in Creative Writing]. I was in the prose stream and could have been expected to write in long form but poetry felt more appropriate given that James K Baxter was a poet.

There were so many elements that fed into the creation of this poem. I was already very familiar with McCahon’s work, and his personal struggles, and perhaps even more so with JKB. I had long pondered his somewhat contradictory but driven personality. He seemed to become convinced that Māori culture was spiritually more rigourous than his own, and publically embraced his perceived sense of Māori community with the incarnation of the Ngā Mōkai iwi. The romantic notion of a collection of anchorless people’s who considered themselves ‘fatherless’ appealed to me. And so did the fact that that word has been used to also refer to those on the periphery of society. There are many things I do not like about both of these men, in terms of their known personal histories, but there artwork has withstood the test of time (at least so far) and therein separated itself somewhat from the individuals who created it.

A poroporoaki is essentially a farewell. To someone known. It is a ritual of goodbye, and *Walk Series C* struck me as having that same slow, deliberate purpose. It also refers to the Via Dolorosa, the fourteen stations of the cross that Christ walked carrying said cross on his way to his own crucifixion. I wondered if McCahon considered his estranged friend to have courted his own death by being equally socially outspoken and advocating a similar life of harmony and peace. And perhaps that ‘walk’ toward the conclusion of your/his own making (as you walk along the canvas of McCahon’s work), could also make you, the audience, complicit, carrying the weight of your decisions, that led to your/his own death.

I don’t think it’s possible for me not to be political.

I wrote the poem as if McCahon was speaking to JK. But I also wrote it as if the ‘you’ in the text is you the audience. And the audience are being asked where the korowai is at their tangi? Were they chiefly in their lives? When things cracked the horizon did they cope? Do they still? It is also an encouragement to not give up. Don’t lose yourself underwater. And it is all those things I imagined one friend saying to another as they tried in vain to change their particular corner of the world.

And there is that line about kneeling at the foot of all that white. Sometimes it is so disheartening to try and change things. For me, discrimination in every guise, seems to be the evil of our time. So many before us have made attempts to change it. So many still are. It’s constant. Some of those attempts are large and public. Some are domestic and daily. I guess in terms of that, this poem is about a sense of the very communtiy that JK described and longed for. It is a letter of encouragement for all of those battling daily to not give up, no matter what the turbulence. And it is from two New Zealand men who tried their very best to do just that: James K Baxter and Colin McCahon.

**Were you a fan of McCahon and Baxter's work?**

I wouldn’t say I was a fan. I knew their work, I had studied it, and so I felt I had access to it.

**You’ve created art in many forms – dance, visual art and fiction as well as poetry – how do you know what form you want to explore an idea in?**

Each work I have produced (or been involved in producing), regardless of the form, has felt like a revealing. The only reason for choosing visual over performance, poetry over fiction, etc., was to create the level of revealing that would best evoke a sense of emotional truth. Though the narratives in each of the artworks I have made are not always mine (they are not autobiographies), they all contain emotional truths that ring true for me. I hope and think that’s normal.

In that sense I find that the idea chooses its own artform.

In prose, it’s like I’m going to take you on a journey. A road trip. It’s going to take ages. But it will be worth it. And we’re either going to be friends for life at the end of it or you’ll hate me. So if there’s a character who has a whole life story to tell, they might choose to tell it in prose.

Poetry is like music. Where there should be a lament, or party music, or a drum roll, that’s a poem. It’s visceral. I’m not taking you on a road trip, we won’t really get to know each other as people, but I will take you for a short ride on my bike cos it feels like flying and that’s worth sharing.

Visual art can mean so many varied things. However, regardless of whether it’s a realistic depiction, or an abstract installation, it’s like a snapshot of someone’s intensity. In this way you can get to know me intimately. But only about this one thing.

Performance is an art form that changes the proximity of the artist(s) to the audience. The audience is there contributing to the performance with every chip packet they open and breath they take. They bring all of the torments and journeys of their own lives into the space, and then arm them with real-time reactions. And that affects it, every time. It’s as though we write it together on the stage. So for me performance has an incredible power to confront. Here is a real platform for connecting with people. You can’t just put it down and pop to the supermarket like you can a book. So if I’m making a performance, you’re implicated in it.

**Is it important to you to explore Māori culture and stories in your work?**

Typically this question is asking about historical Māori culture and traditions, or I assume it is, otherwise it makes no sense. If it is referring to contemporary Māori culture then surely it’s just talking about exploring my life. Or is there a particular contemporary Māori culture that I could be exploring that is other than me? Do I choose to write stories about things that are perceived as Māori? About Māori people? No. I just tell stories. But I am Māori, so they have Māori things and Māori people in them. I don’t write to explain Māori culture either.

It’s super important for me to explore Māori concepts though. And how they may have functioned historically, and how they have become incorporated in everyday living now. The massive compromises people are making in order to straddle both Māori and Pākehā cultures. The complications associated with that. The loss associated with that. The whole gamut of emotions that can be associated with that. I want to explore all of them because the world is changing so fast. It’s racing. And that means Māoritanga is changing too.