

NGĀ KĪ O TE TAI AO  
THE CARVINGS CARRY THE STORIES OF THE WORLD

# TE WHAKAIRO



TWO CARVERS TAKE THEIR ANCIENT CRAFT TO ANTARCTICA



Presented by ELANTI MEDIA Edited by EMMA SMART

Sound Design by CHRIS SINCLAIR Graphics by MICHAEL BOULDEN Music by BEN LEMI

Produced and directed by VANESSA WELLS

# Te Whakairo

## Ngā Kī o Te Tai Ao

### *The Carvings Carry the Stories of the World*

#### Synopsis:

Two talented carvers from each end of Aotearoa take their whakairo (carving) to Antarctica in response to New Zealand's kaitiakitanga (guardianship) of the world's largest marine protected area - The Ross Sea.

James York and Poutama Hetaraka are tasked with creating a traditional Māori entranceway for Scott Base, the New Zealand Research Station in Antarctica. As we learn about their experiences in Antarctica we discuss the meanings in their traditional and ancient carving techniques. In a gentle and lyrical way, we look at how an indigenous world view can collaborate with western science and why it is so relevant today.

#### Further information

The filmmaker, Vanessa Wells, travelled to Antarctica with James and Poutama in February 2019 as part of the mātauranga Māori perspective (led by Manaaki Whenua – Landcare Research) of the five-year Ross Sea Marine Protected Area monitoring programme and the Community Engagement Programme with Antarctica NZ.

Most of the underwater sea life footage in the film was taken on an underwater drone (the Boxfish ROV) developed by New Zealand ROV specialist company – Boxfish Research. The Boxfish ROV was designed to work in tough conditions (they were in waters of -1.8°C!) and with lighting to shoot at depth especially underneath the ice.

#### Film Specs:

Run time – 14mins

Ratio – 16:9

Language – English (no subtitles yet)

Display – 4K, 25fps

Format available – DCP, MP4 or .MOV

Sound – 5:1 or Stereo

#### Dropbox for Media Photos:

[www.dropbox.com/sh/fvd14eyctnkdmir/AADxvIhQ4\\_nT12gNacTPgEHaa?dl=0](https://www.dropbox.com/sh/fvd14eyctnkdmir/AADxvIhQ4_nT12gNacTPgEHaa?dl=0)

#### Social Media:

[www.facebook.com/ElantiMedia/](https://www.facebook.com/ElantiMedia/)

#### Website:

[www.elantimedia.com](http://www.elantimedia.com)

#### Trailer:

<https://vimeo.com/elanti/tewhakairo>

<https://youtu.be/clsagRtKKBE>

**“Whakairo isn't just there because it looks cool...  
there's always a story, a purpose” – James York**

## **Director's Personal Statement:**

Following a trip to Antarctica in Nov 2018, I was lucky enough to be asked to step in as a field director and camera-person for a project in February 2019, when a previous team member could no longer travel to the Ice.

This opportunity was to provide some straightforward media coverage, however, I quickly realised that there was an amazing story to be told here. And a film idea germinated. This kaupapa (project) was a unique opportunity to tell a story with an different perspective on the climate change narrative.

The Antarctic environment is a dream to work in, but it was the connection to people and place that really struck me as special. And this project, to carve the whakawai and pare (door surrounds) for Scott Base (NZ's research station beside the Ross Ice Shelf), was a wonderful way to highlight these connections.

My instinct was that it would be a cinematic short film that would appeal to a wide audience however once James and Poutama began working, it was the wildlife and environment that conveyed such a strong a sense of connection. The larger narrative of indigenous mātauranga (knowledge) and the Māori world view is subliminal and runs as a strong thread throughout the imagery and soundscape. There is also much to be learned by the audience, in a gentle way, about the traditions and values of whakairo.

It has been a truly treasured journey to create this film, and I am forever indebted to the generosity and grateful for the collaboration of those who took part.

**“He waka eke noa – *We are all in this together*”**  
Ancient Māori proverb

## **Festivals:**

- **Show Me Shorts Festival 2019 (NZ)** – Officially Selected. World premiere - 7th Oct 2019
- **CSFF 2019 (Shenzhen, China)** - Semi Finalist
- **The Explorers Club Polar Film Festival 2020 (New York, USA)** - Officially selected
- **FIFO 2020 (Tahiti)** - Officially selected
- **Melbourne Documentary Film Festival (Australia)** - Officially selected

## Cast:

**James York** - carver - Ngāi Tahu, Ngā Puhi

**Poutama Hetaraka** - carver - Ngāti Wai, Ngāi Tahu

**Te Warihi Hetaraka** - tohunga whakairo - Ngāti Wai, Ngā Puhi, Ngāti Pāoa, Te Uri o Hau

**Fayne Robinson** - tohunga whakairo - Ngāi Tahu, Ngāti Apa ki te Ra To

**Dr Priscilla Wehi** - conservation biologist - Manaaki Whenua Landcare Research

**Dr Regina Eisert** - Antarctic marine mammal expert - @TPA (Top Predator Alliance)

## Crew:

Producer/Director:	Vanessa Wells
Editor/Colourist:	Emma Smart
Writers:	Collaboratively written by all cast and crew
Audio Post Production:	Chris Sinclair
Score composed and performed by:	Ben Lemi
Camera:	Vanessa Wells
Additional Camera:	Ben King (Boxfish Research)

## Filmmaker Bio:

Vanessa Wells has worked in the arts industry for almost 20 years, mostly in front of the camera or on stage - until a few years ago. In 2018 her debut documentary film East to East was officially selected for NZIFF 2018 and FIFO Tahiti 2019. In 2019/20 Vanessa directed film content (in collaboration with Vanishing Point Studios) for the award-winning Living Flowerwall, an interactive website with NZ On Air, and Radio New Zealand. Give Kate A Voice, which Vanessa co-directed in 2019, was an interactive film created with NZ On Air to mark women's suffrage in New Zealand, and has been an honouree in the international Webby Awards, won Silver at the Best Design NZ Award, and Best Costume Design at the NZTV Awards. Vanessa has also twice been nominated for Best Female Director in the 48 Film Competition Grand Finals.

Over the summer 2018/19 Vanessa travelled to Antarctica twice, supported by Antarctica NZ's Community Engagement Programme. The November 2018 trip to the Ice was to produce a children's play and also to create content for Sesame Street. The February 2019 trip to Scott Base has resulted in the short film Te Whakairo, which is currently touring the world in festivals.

Vanessa has another climate change documentary The Climate Canary in development, is collaborating on a humanitarian documentary filmed in Afghanistan, directs the local social media profile series Braveheart Christchurch, and is creating more content for Sesame Street. Vanessa is also on the board of WIFT NZ (Women in Film and Television).