Tia Barrett
Pātaka Wā
14 January – 21 February 2026

Pātaka Wā embodies notions of time through the lifecycle of tuna (eel). Drawing on the maramataka, the Māori seasonal calendar, the installation suspends ideas of tuna, time, and transformation within the gallery space. Through moving light, shadow, and materiality, *Pātaka Wā* considers zones of negotiation between the flexibility and density of rubber through the behaviour of light and the flowing nature of time.

The skins of what appear to be tuna hang suspended in a transitional sequence, arranged along a line in the gallery like wairua (spirit) caught mid-migration. Paused in dim light, they move visually from dark to light, from renewal to decay, suggesting a form of time that shifts backwards, forwards, and sideways all at once. An experimental film projection simulates a river of skin, pushing light, time, and movement through latex-imprinted tuna skins. This transforms the installation from static suspension into something more alive; a cyclical, time-based organism. Sculptural rākau (wood) representations of tuna emerge and fade across the gallery walls, as though distorting dimensions and mapping intervals between each dangling skin.

My response to *Pātaka Wā* was Māori-dimensional. It was not static, nor was it simply about looking or observing. Instead, the work invited a relational encounter: an interruption and reconfiguration of semiotic codes within the dynamic installation itself. To engage with the work is to enter a process of decoding and reassembling meaning in order to make sense of what is placed before us. This discourse began through a sonic kōrero activation during the exhibition opening, using technological devices to respond to the Indigenous scientific advancement embodied within the material and semiotics of the installation, as well as otherworldly entities, both tangible and intangible.

The sonic discussion began with ko wai au (who am I) and whakawhānaungatanga (relationships), unfolding through a kaupapa pāorooro (sonic, resounding, echoing, reverberating) methodology. The tuna skins in the installation were created from organic latex, a material often labelled synthetic, yet its whakapapa predates the arrival of humankind. Latex can be understood as the sweaty, rubbery milk of Tāne, growing in particular climatic environments on the other side of the world before being processed and repackaged. In this context, the installation activates multiple codes of the signifier and the signified through symbolic structures of time, space, and place, shaping how meaning is transmitted and interpreted. The material and sensory languages Barrett uses in this installation share two important qualities: the speed of sound and the speed of light, both of which change according to environment, temperature, density, and pressure. We sometimes forget that our presence within a space, where artworks are strategically composed to invite response, creates a liminal field of negotiation between object, space, intention, and energy. Through the body, we

generate and express pūngao (energy), something that may not always be seen but can be manifested through movement.

Within the installation, Barrett offers light as projection. It reads like a flickering, translucent digital river-skin that speaks to the tuna whakairo imprint of the original tuna skin, with latex holding a liminal wā between the two. What forms is a multilayered juxtaposition of material, surface, and time, folding into one living plane. The shifting light produces an illusory space, pulling the skins back toward Indigenous understandings of time, where renewal moves in cycles rather than straight lines. Barrett presents time as cross-current, interpreted through line, light, shadow, and the visual transmission of sound through the currents of projected water. Streaming forms of light create the sensation of river movement, resisting the fixed tempo of institutional time. Under the subtle light, the skins seem to move, as if motion has returned through the energy of light, memory, and futurity.

The sonic kōrero activated an intensified discourse between life, death, and renewal. Sound moved between the suspended skins and projected light in a rhythmic wave pattern, creating connections with the kiri tuna whakairo and the layered surfaces of the work. The tuna skins reveal an architectural intricacy of pattern, carrying lineage through the markings of the skin itself. In this way, the exhibition presents the viewer with something more than renewal and decay. It offers a glimpse into how relationality is a vast threshold of wā, and how time is not only constantly flowing but also parallel and braided, moving through skin, sound, light, memory, and wairua.

Author: Dr Zena Elliott is a transdisciplinary artist, independent curator, and creative researcher working across whakairo, painting, and sound activation.