

Copper Promises: Hinemihi Haka

By [Lynne Lancaster](#) artsHub | Tuesday, May 08, 2012



Copper Promises: Hinemihi Haka is a new solo dance work by Victoria Hunt, exploring the cultural and physical journey of a female ancestor of Hunt's and the history of a ceremonial house in New Zealand connected with Hunt's Maori *iwi* ('peoples'), Te Arara Tuhourangi.

Hunt visited the Tarawera ancestral mountain and lake and learnt the stories of the 1886 volcanic eruption that shattered her ancestor's lives and displaced them from their land. Hinemihi was the carved ancestral meeting house where many survivors gathered to shelter from the volcanic eruption. Afterwards, it was assumed that the area was abandoned; Hinemihi was dug up and acquired by the Earl of Onslow, and transported to his home in Surry, England. She remains there to this day. Thus the show is a protest for appropriated ancestral treasures, a lament, a pilgrimage through time and space, interweaving Hinemihi's story with Hunt's own life and experiences, blending gesture and feeling as they echo across generations.

Copper Promises is looming, ominous and eerie. As you enter there is only very low lighting; the lighting that follows in the show proper is gloomy but dramatic. A major aspect of the work is the computer imagery and effects, and the lighting by Clytie Smith and Chris Wilson. Clouds scud by and film flickers like lighting, evoking disjointed, angular movement. In one section we see Hinemihi's spirit trapped in an imprisoning square of light, trying to escape. In another sequence the lighting gives the impression of a time travelling spaceship, accompanied by James Brown's pulsing, shuddering and throbbing soundtrack deeply.

Hunt is a very strong, athletic performer. She wears a simple, short shift or petticoat-like dress, and stands at one point standing in a glittering silence. Her choreography is often sculptural, Graham-like, earthbound, with aspects of traditional Maori choreography visible. Sometimes Hunt is catlike, at other times she crouches or instead becomes a wading or flying

bird. In another section she is spider-like, contorted acrobatically. Sometimes she twitches nervously, Cunningham-like, or glides barefoot and pauses, posing on high demi-pointe.

At one point a mysterious 'creature' (the spirit of Hinemihi?) emerges very slowly, Butoh-like in a corridor of light; in another section, featuring a most atmospheric use of mist and rain, Hunt/Hinemihi goes to step through a 'window' (of light? Of time?).

Towards the end Hunt becomes the spirit of Hinemihi and is ghostlike in a golden light, lit from below, and she performs a monologue about the ancestral house, the economy and being transported, preservation of the land etc in a strange robotic voice while a computer generated image of a coin spins.

The finale, with the application of traditional Maori face paint, is absorbing and chilling.

This complex work is visually stunning and inspiring. It needs to be seen several times to grasp the many layers of meaning underlying it.

Rating: 4 stars

Copper Promises: Hinemihi Haka

Concept/Choreography/Performer: Victoria Hunt

Lighting Design/Production Manager: Clytie Smith

Sound Design: James Brown, with sound by Horomona Horo, Densil Cabrera and Bob Scott

Video Design: Chris Wilson

Costume: Annemaree Dalziel

Installation Design: Hedge

Choreographic Consultant: Tess de Quincey

Cultural Informant: Charles Koroneho Running time: 55 minutes (approx) no interval

Performance Space at Carriageworks May 4 – 12