

# community spirit

Amiria Puia-Taylor is creating a tapestry of colour, culture and community in South Auckland.



**Above:** Amiria creates colourful community murals in her role as a cultural arts manager.

**Above left:** The Firefly Films mural project took Amiria's art to new heights with colours including Resene Resolution Blue and Resene Belladonna bringing the wall to life.



It's easy to find The 312 Hub in Onehunga – follow the trail of colour. Visitors on their way to the youth arts centre wander down Selwyn Street, past the magenta mega mural *The People's Weaver* – in Resene Centre Stage – and onto Payne's Lane. There, Onehunga's vibrant community comes together to crowd the room with colour – literally. Mural portraits of locals stretch across every surface of the hub – from ancestors and family to images of the young artists who call The 312 Hub home. At the centre of it all sits Amiria Puia-Taylor, aka the People Weaver. But Amiria is no ordinary weaver – her tapestries aren't from thread or flax but people themselves.

As a cultural arts manager, Amiria has a single goal; to weave people together through art. Her community projects include staging a 'Painting for the People' mural painting event at the Māngere Town Centre Library using energetic Resene Dizzy Lizzy. She's also worked with Resene to create a manu aute (kite) design to celebrate Matariki.

"Art is such a crucial part of the fabric that makes up society; it's our way to tell stories," Amiria says.

Part-youth mentor, part-artist, she runs her arts management business, The People Weaver, from The 312 Hub. She says her work is inspired by her ancestor and original People Weaver, Huakaiwaka, a paramount chief and unifying figure in Tāmaki Makaurau. Huakaiwaka was known for connecting people through kindness, feeding both his iwi and his enemies.

"He would feed everyone, no matter their circumstances. Through that food, he would learn who everyone was and find ways to ensure everyone was woven in."

It's not just Amiria's ancestors who inform her work, but her family as well. Amiria's grandmother watches over her in The 312 Hub in the form of a larger-than-life portrait on the back wall.

"My nan and my koro are my driving force. My kaumatua are my 'why'," she says. From a young age, Amiria's family encouraged her creativity and championed environmental protection.

"I used to use spray cans, but my nan said to me, 'You can't call yourself a kaitiaki – a guardian – if you're using those.'" Resene paint is now Amiria's go-to for her community murals.

Amiria has been an artist since she first picked up a paintbrush at kōhanga reo. Although she has done huge murals of her own, such as the Māngere East Soccer Club mural, The 312 Hub is a community effort.

Amiria's latest project involves painting a road that leads into Manukau as part of the 'Innovating Streets for People' initiative. Her abstract design of a bird landing on the water symbolises those who live in Manukau.

"For us, the moana is the life force of those who have travelled far to be here. That's the commonality between being not just Māori or Pacific, but all the different people that choose to live in Manukau."

Amiria will bring the mural to life with light blue hues, including her favourite colour Resene Riptide.

"I usually do the outlines, and then everyone gets an area to paint," she says.

"Once a mural is complete, we have a community event."

Amiria believes awareness and belonging are just some of the benefits community art offers. "My role is to find the right people to tell the land's history, connect them with people who manage the land, and then teach young people who need guidance.

"Knowing your home's history changes the way you treat the environment. I can facilitate that learning and love of history and cultural art forms. I think that's truly where the weaving of people comes together." **H**

See more of Amiria's work at [www.thepeopleweaver.co.nz](http://www.thepeopleweaver.co.nz).

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