



Jeff Mahuika (Kāti Māhaki, Poutini Kāi Tahu) and Sasha Huber after the karakia, symbolically un-naming the Agassiz Glacier. Commissioned photograph by Tom Hoyle © Sasha Huber.

[Māori ceremony 'un-names' New Zealand glacier](#)

A South Island glacier has been "un-named" by an international artist accompanied by a representative of Ngāi Tahu.

Sasha Huber, an artist-in-residence at with a joint programme run by the Wellington City Council and Massey University's College of Creative Arts in Wellington, is known for her contribution to the long-term project Demounting Louis Agassiz.

Ms Huber, who is of Swiss-Haitian heritage and lives in Finland, says the project is aimed at removing the name of 19th century Swiss-born naturalist and glaciologist Dr Louis Agassiz (1807-73), from a peak in the Swiss Alps.

"Agassiz was a proponent of polygenism – the idea that races were created separately – and scientific racism," Ms Huber says.

Earlier this month she visited the area of Agassiz Glacier on the West Coast of the South Island. After a welcome at the local marae by Jeff Mahuika (Kāti Māhaki, Poutini Kāi Tahu), Ms Huber and her small production team travelled to the site, between Kā Roimata a Hine Hukatere (Franz Josef Glacier) and Te Moeka o Tuawe (Fox Glacier). There, Mr Mahuika offered a karakia blessing to symbolically un-name and cleanse the glacier of its association with Dr Agassiz.

The glacier was named, by German geologist Sir Johann "Julius" von Haast. "When, in the 1860s, von Haast explored New Zealand for coalfields and goldfields and examined geological structures with regard to railway tunnels, he did so in the interest of British and European colonial society," Ms Huber says.

"When von Haast named over 100 places after British, German, Austrian, French, Australian, New Zealand, Danish and Swiss scholars, poets, sons of emperors, explorers and scientists (and also after himself and his son), he did so to endear himself to the name-bearers and to solidly locate New Zealand within white European culture while at the same time ignoring the Māori perspective," she says.

Ms Huber is in contact with officials of Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu. In collaboration with Makawhio Rūnanga, they support research for new and appropriate Māori place names for Agassiz Glacier and Agassiz Range, as there are no known Ngāi Tahu names for them.

The artist-in-residence programme that hosts Ms Huber at Te Whare Hēra on Wellington's waterfront is jointly run by the college's Whiti o Rehua School of Art and the council. Te Whare Hēra Gallery will be the venue for the "Agassiz Down Under" project exhibition from July 7-22.

Associate Professor Heather Galbraith from the school says, "we are thrilled that Sasha Huber has been able to mount such an intriguing and successful project within her very busy residency. It is particularly exciting that through an art work, a space for dialogue with Ngāi Tahu has opened to consider Maori names for the Agassiz Glacier and Range."

Ms Huber has participated in numerous international exhibitions, including the 56th Venice Biennale and the 19th Biennale of Sydney, and has also been invited to artist residencies in Brazil, Sweden, Norway, Switzerland and Australia. She holds a Master of Arts from Helsinki's University of Art and Design and is currently undertaking doctoral research on racism through the lens of art at the Department of Art at Aalto University, Helsinki.

While in New Zealand, Ms Huber is also continuing a collaborative project with her husband, Petri Saarikko, exploring family-based knowledge of traditional folk remedies called "Healers: Action, Dance."

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