



TOI TE MANA

AN INDIGENOUS HISTORY OF MĀORI ART

Deidre Brown and Ngarino Ellis, with Jonathan Mane-Wheoki

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NGĀ UPOKO – CONTENTS

He kupu whakataki – Preface	ix		
Tīmatanga kōrero – Introduction	1		
Part 1 – Te Kete Tuatea	17		
1 Ngā momo waka: Moana, migration and Māori	21	4 Ngā whare: Architecture	109
Ngarino Ellis		Deidre Brown and Ngarino Ellis	
Tā Hekenukumaingāiwi Busby, KNZM MBE (1932–2019)	38	Pakaariki Harrison, QSO (1928–2008)	128
Ngarino Ellis		Ngarino Ellis	
2 Ngā toi whakairo: The arts of carving	41	5 Ngā toi whenua: Rock art	131
Ngarino Ellis		Deidre Brown	
The Taiapa brothers: Carving in the twentieth century	62	6 Ngā taonga o Wharawhara: Body adornment	143
Ngarino Ellis		Ngarino Ellis	
Morelli and the nineteenth-century papahou artist	66	Areta Wilkinson	182
Ngarino Ellis		Deidre Brown	
Māori art and archaeology	70	Pounamu	186
Deidre Brown		Ngarino Ellis	
3 Ngā kākahu: Textiles	73	7 Mana wāhine, mana tāne, mana takatāpui: Depicting gender in Māori art	189
Ngarino Ellis		Ngarino Ellis	
Tahuaroa, pākūwhā and hākari: The display and gifting of taonga	104	Men and weaving	200
Ngarino Ellis		Ngarino Ellis	
Tihei mauri ora: The remaking of cloaks from museum collections	106		
Ngarino Ellis			

Part 2 – Te Kete Tuauri 203

8 Taonga, Māori and museums	207
Ngarino Ellis	
Tāngata mamae: The tragic story of Te Maro, Ranginui and Te Kuku	221
Ngarino Ellis	
Joseph Banks and the forty brass patu replicas	224
Ngarino Ellis	
Tupaia	226
Ngarino Ellis	
9 Māori art and the Christian missions	229
Deidre Brown	
Hongi Hika's self-portraits	250
Deidre Brown	
Hone Heke's 'collar'	252
Deidre Brown	
He tikanga hōu? Figurative art in Rangitukia in 1838	256
Ngarino Ellis	
10 The art of utu	259
Deidre Brown	
The Mātaatua whareniui	272
Jonathan Mane-Wheoki	

11 Transforming cultures and traditions: New materials, ideas and technologies	275
Ngarino Ellis	
Moko signatures and tino rangatiratanga	292
Ngarino Ellis	
Early Māori drawings	296
Deidre Brown	
The second age of iron	298
Deidre Brown	
12 Ngā toi mōrehu: The arts of survival	303
Deidre Brown	
Māori flags and banners	324
Deidre Brown	
13 Ka whawhai tonu mātou: Taonga and museums since 1900	333
Ngarino Ellis	
Trick or taonga: The mysterious case of the green-painted patu pora	345
Deidre Brown	
Fakes in the collection	347
Ngarino Ellis	
Collecting the ancestors	350
Ngarino Ellis	
Enrico Giglioli and the taonga collection in the Pigorini National Museum of Prehistory and Ethnography, Rome	353
Ngarino Ellis	

Part 3 – Te Kete Aronui 355

14 The art of social reform: Te Puea, Ngata and Rātana	359
Deidre Brown	
Te Araiteuru pā at the 1906 New Zealand International Exhibition	386
Deidre Brown	
15 The emergence of contemporary Māori art 1950–1975	391
Jonathan Mane-Wheoki	
Oriwa Haddon (1898–1958)	406
Deidre Brown and Jonathan Mane-Wheoki	
Ramai Hayward (1916–2014)	408
Deidre Brown and Jonathan Mane-Wheoki	
Pauline Kahurangi Yearbury (1926–1977)	412
Deidre Brown	
16 Urban Māori art and architecture	415
Deidre Brown	
Street art	433
Deidre Brown	
17 A new tradition or old disruption? Contemporary Māori exhibitions 1990–2021	437
Deidre Brown	
Māori architects and architectural designers	467
Deidre Brown	
Māori designers	477
Deidre Brown	
<i>Māori Moving Image</i> exhibition	480
Ngarino Ellis	
Wairau Māori Art Gallery: The first public Māori art gallery	483
Deidre Brown	

18 Māori art in Western Europe and Australia	485
Deidre Brown	
Ngāti Rānana and Hinemihi	501
Deidre Brown and Ngarino Ellis	
Māori art as a cultural property	505
Deidre Brown	
19 Haumi ē! Hui ē! Tāiki ē! Māori and Indigenous art on the global stage	509
Ngarino Ellis	
Ngā taonga uku: Māori ceramicists and clay workers	525
Deidre Brown	
Contemporary Māori clothing	529
Deidre Brown	
Advice to Māori artists	532
Jonathan Mane-Wheoki	
Whakamutunga – Conclusion	534
Ngā pitopito kōrero – Notes	538
Kuputaka – Glossary	567
Rārangi pukapuka – Select bibliography	573
Kuputohu – Index	590



TĪMATANGA KŌRIERO

– INTRODUCTION

Any history of Māori art begins in darkness, before the separation of Ranginui (the sky father) and Papatūānuku (the earth mother) by their son Tāne. The night is generative, a time in which anything and everything is possible, in which creativity is everywhere. The stories that descend from the separation onwards form the basis for the emergence of different art forms. They are associated with ancestors whose exploits produce ongoing cycles of creativity.

Core narratives stretch from Te Korekore – ‘the realm between non-being and being: that is, the realm of potential being’¹ – through to cosmological ancestors, then ancestral stories in the more recent past and on to today. The relationship between ancestors and their deeds attached meaning to art forms: central to this were concepts such as tapu (sacredness), whakapapa (genealogy), tikanga (protocols) and whenua (land). Anglican minister Māori Marsden describes this as a ‘woven universe’.² The metaphor of weaving is apt here: time moves back and forth, as exemplified in the making of kete (baskets). The act of plaiting or weaving a kete symbolises genealogical ascent and descent, moving back and forth in perpetual cyclical motion across the generations that brings together time as dynamic.

Cosmological and ancestral narratives are central to the story of Māori art. As descendants of Ranginui and Papatūānuku, Māori artists shift back and forth in relation to time. The natural resources they use also have their origins in the lives of atua (gods, supernatural beings) descended from Ranginui and Papatūānuku. These stories are often



Rangi Kipa, *Haukura*, 2023
solid surface media, mother of pearl, photograph by Sam Hartnett, private collection

Opposite: For Te Atiwei Ririnui, the poutama design personifies progression and elevation in the pursuit of higher attainment.
Te Atiwei Ririnui, *Poutama Ahurewa*, 2020
kiekie, muka, synthetic dye, Te Papa Tongarewa Museum of New Zealand, ME024648, purchased 2020



1 NGĀ MOMO WAKA MOANA, MIGRATION AND MĀORI NGARINO ELLIS

E kutangitangi, e kutangitangi / how the canoe flies
E kura tiwaka taua / how the fine paddles sound
E kura tiwaka taua / all together!
E kura wawawa wai / my grand canoe
*E kura wawawa wai-i-i! / a treasure of the waters!*¹

Waka – iwi – hapū – whānau: these concepts shape how we as Māori identify ourselves. They are an integral part of our mihi (greeting) to explain who we are. Waka as canoes are both a physical and a metaphorical manifestation of identity. Māori ancestors travelled from Hawaiki in the Pacific on oceangoing waka pahi, and they created a number of other waka forms for navigating lakes and rivers. In a mihi, descendants of those ancestors identify as a group with the waka their ancestors arrived on. Waka were recorded in several narratives about deities whose vessels are historically significant because of the relationship with those atua.

The rise and fall of different waka traditions mirrors the ebb and flow of Māori culture. Waka taua are an important example. This waka form originated in the 1700s with the rise in inter-hapū warfare, but their construction waned after a hiatus in conflict in the 1850s, when hapū and iwi patrons commissioned carvers to build meeting houses as icons of mana instead. The seizure and destruction of hundreds of

waka by colonial forces in the New Zealand Wars, because of their role in maintaining Māori mobility and their cultural significance, reduced the number of active waka in use. From the 1930s the waka taua re-emerged as a statement of survival, driven by influential Māori leaders. From the 1980s, a renaissance in building oceangoing waka and in traditional wayfinding has created exciting opportunities for tohunga tārai waka (expert canoe builders). It has also brought a reconnection with the Pacific, as one example of the ongoing cycles of Māori art through time and space.

Celestial stories of waka

A number of kōrero tell the origins of waka. One of the best-known cosmological narratives is the story of Māui, who used his grandmother Murirangawhenua's jawbone to fashion a matau (fishhook). He travelled out to sea with his brothers on a waka and hooked a large fish that was later named Te Ika a Māui; this became the North Island, while his waka became Te Wai Pounamu (the South Island), and the punga (anchor stone) became Rakiura (Stewart Island). Other tribal narratives offer alternatives, embedded in their particular landscape: Ngāti Porou maintain that Māui's waka was named *Nukutaimemeha*, which now rests upside down on the top of their ancestral mountain Hikurangi.²

For Ngāi Tahu, their tribal lands of the South Island are called Te Waka o Aoraki after their ancestor Aoraki, son of Ranginui and Papatūānuku, who descended from the heavens with three of his brothers to visit their mother. They went fishing but could not catch anything so decided to

Tairāwhiti and Hinemoana (in the background) at Panepane, Tauranga Moana as part of the opening ceremony to commence Te Hau Kōmaru National Waka Hourua Festival 2021.

Te Ao Mārama – Tauranga City Libraries, photograph by Nathan Pettigrew



2 NGĀ TOI WHAKAIRO THE ARTS OF CARVING NGARINO ELLIS

He toi whakairo, he mana tangata.

Through artistic excellence, there is human dignity.

Whakairo is an integral part of who we are as Māori. For hundreds of years, different forms of carving surrounded our ancestors and were a normal part of their visual landscape. These works ranged from waka taua and large, intricately carved pātaka to rākai (adornments). Traditions in whakairo have come to shape what we now know as Māori art. Tohunga whakairo (master carvers) in the past enjoyed a breadth of practice across different media and art forms; they often worked in groups on larger projects, but also by themselves on individual projects, sometimes on commission. The sheer volume of work over the past few centuries is staggering – there are as many as 30,000 taonga in existence today that have been made by carvers,¹ primarily before 1900.

This chapter unravels the history of carving, from Pacific origins through to contemporary practice. It outlines the training of carvers, their styles and motifs and their patrons, and it tracks major shifts in whakairo, largely as a result of external factors. Throughout, important values and concepts of whakairo such as mana, tapu and tikanga have remained central, and artists have continued to experiment with new materials, tools and ideas in their practice.

Poutokomanawa inside Ruatēpupuke II today.
photograph by Diane Alexander White and Linda Dorman

Ngā tūpuna o whakairo – celestial ancestors of carving

There are many stories associated with the origins of carving. One of the earliest relates to the atua Tānemahuta (deity of forests and birds), son of Ranginui and Papatūānuku, who travelled with his brothers to Rangitāmakū (the eleventh heaven); they took with them the measurements of a whare that included poupou (carved posts). When Tāne arrived, he and his brother Tangaroa carved a whare whakairo called Huiteananui, described as ‘matawhā’ (having four windows), including work on the tāhuhu (ridgepole), heke (rafters), maihi (bargeboards) and poutokomanawa (central posts).²

Many generations later, stories about Māui referred to houses adorned with whakairo rākau. In one of the first kōrero Māui is asked to prove his whakapapa by his mother Taranga – who thought that he was stillborn and had set him adrift on top of a nest made from her hair. To demonstrate his whakapapa, Māui stood on the tāhuhu of his grandmother Hinenuitēpō’s house. In this case the tāhuhu is significant as it is, quite literally, the backbone of his grandmother Hinenuitēpō. Later in life, Māui fished up the North Island with a matau made from his grandmother’s jawbone. However, the ‘fish’ became stuck in the door of a house belonging to Tonganui:³ this whare was fully carved with a tāhuhu, heke, maihi and poutokomanawa.



4 NGĀ WHARE ARCHITECTURE DEIDRE BROWN AND NGARINO ELLIS

He whare maihi tū ki roto ki te pā tūwatawata, he tohu nō te rangatira; whare maihi tū ki te wā ki te paenga, he kai nā te ahi.

A carved house standing in a fortified pā is the mark of a well-bred man; a carved house standing in the open, among the cultivations, is food for the fire.

—Mohi Tūrei, 1913¹

Whare (buildings), whether on the marae or in the kāinga, represent the whanaungatanga, mauri and rangatiratanga (right to exercise authority, autonomy) of hapū, iwi and, collectively, Māori. Whare design had a strong connection to waka design; this relationship is visible in the corresponding whakairo rākau and kōwhaiwhai of waka and of certain classes of whare, and in waka-rigging technologies that, when transferred to whare, literally pull them together. In this way, the whare can be associated with waterborne migration, exploration and, ultimately, the Polynesian homeland of Hawaiki.

Different types of whare have developed within kāinga according to their function. Among them are: the wharepuni (sleeping house) as a tapu place of sedentary activity and rest; the noa whare kāuta for cooking and informal discussion, which varies widely in construction; the pātaka, a symbol of mana and rangatiratanga through its role as the community storehouse of both noa and tapu resources; and the elaborate whare whakairo form of wharenuī, which developed to meet the demands of hapū and iwi



Wharepuni, with long side and front gable entrances, and raised pātaka (centre right), around a marae at Te Wherowhero's village on the Waikato River, with Taupiri mountain in the background.

George French Angas, *Tukupoto at Kaitote, Tewherowhero's pah*, 1844

watercolour and gouache, 232 x 323mm, National Library of Australia, nla.obj-134524320

Opposite: Interior of the wharenuī Te Whaioranga o Te Whaiao, Te Rau Karamu Marae, Massey University Pukeahu campus, opened 2021 and designed by Te Kāhui Toi collective and Athfield Architects. The wharenuī's design concept is based on the spiritual and natural creation of Te Rākau Tipua (the Cosmic Tree). The integrated concept was created by Te Kāhui Toi, a team of artist-designers, supported by tohunga and tribal leaders, and guided by experts in their specialist knowledge. Artist-designers included Wi Taepa, Saffronn Te Ratana, Ngatai Taepa, Kura Puke, Hemi Macgregor and Stuart Foster. The neighbouring wharekai, Te Whaioranga o te Taiao, features toi whakairo by Israel Tangaroa Birch and Robert Jahnke.

photograph by Russell Kleyn



13 KA WHAWHAI TONU MĀTOU TAONGA AND MUSEUMS SINCE 1900 NGARINO ELLIS

*Ko tō rourou, ko taku rourou, ka ora te iwi.
With your food basket, and my food basket,
the people will be well.*

By 1900, thousands of taonga had been removed from Māori communities into public institutions, both in Aotearoa New Zealand and overseas. The ramifications of this were numerous. A direct correlation could be seen in the dismal statistics for Māori at this time: Māori were a minority demographic in their own lands. Their political status on a national level within the government structure was minimal at best. In addition, forced relocation of many hapū away from their ancestral lands meant no access to spiritual sites of significance, including urupā, no access to physical materials necessary in their art making (timber, fibre, pigments), no access to earlier models/templates for the artists to draw inspiration from. Despite this, ka whawhai tonu mātou – Māori endured. Museums became crucial repositories of private collections, long ago removed from Māori, together with their own acquisitions. The challenge then became how to display these collections, and for whom.

Neil Pardington, *Taonga Māori Store #2, Whanganui Regional Museum 2006*
Lambda / C-print, dimensions variable

A Māori museum?

Since the time when taonga were removed from their whānau and hapū, there have been calls for their return. Raharuhi Rukupō petitioned the government in vain for the return of the whare whakairo Te Hau ki Tūranga in the 1860s. He explained that he had not given consent for the removal of the whare, and that in any event he had no power to grant any removal as the house was communally owned. Māori members of the House of Representatives were concerned enough at the turn of the century to lobby for legislation to stem the mass removal of taonga Māori out of New Zealand.

The Maori Antiquities Act was passed in 1901 after lobbying by Augustus Hamilton (who in 1903 became director of the Colonial Museum); it was presented in Parliament by James Carroll (Ngāti Kahungunu, 1857–1926), member for Eastern Maori and native minister. In effect, the legislation supported the museum’s constant and by now difficult search for taonga Māori for its collection.¹ Carroll called on whānau to place their taonga, along with their stories, in the proposed museum ‘as a constant reminder to the coming generations of the capabilities and taste of the Maori race’.² The Act made it illegal to export taonga (‘Maori antiquities’) without first offering them to the governor or his agent.

Certainly, there was concern that gifts of ancestral treasures to overseas-based dignitaries would be lost to New Zealand forever. In 1901, when the Duke and Duchess of York visited New Zealand, iwi had competed to present memorable and important taonga to the royal couple. These



16 URBAN MĀORI ART AND ARCHITECTURE

DEIDRE BROWN

Karanga, rangatahi, whakarongo, whakarongo.

We're ngā tamatoa, so we must light te ahi.

Don't get led astray by Babylon, kia mau ki tō Māori.

—Dean Hapeta/Te Kupu, excerpt from original lyrics for 'E Tū' by UHP, 1988

Selwyn Muri created the impressive gateway *Te Waharoa o Aotea* (1990) that welcomes manuhiri to Aotea Square, imbuing the largest outdoor public space in inner-city Auckland with a mauri that is not provided by the surrounding environment dominated by concrete and glass. The gateway is embellished with images of native and introduced animal life, Māori atua, celestial and mōrehu icons, tapa barkcloth patterns from elsewhere in Te Moananui a Kiwa, and the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament symbol.¹ Its situation at the place where the Waihorotiu Stream (now under Queen Street) once flowed from the Aotea wetland (now Aotea Square) is a reminder that nineteenth-century Pākehā town settlement and urban growth led to the destruction of wetlands and waterways – once the hunting grounds and highways of Māori – and the progressive exclusion of Māori residents, builders and traders from central Auckland. Artworks like Muri's seek to reclaim these spaces. They are part of a Māori art and architectural movement that has sought to represent the challenges of maintaining the enduring mana of Māori on lands that have become cities.

In the fifty years after World War Two, almost half of the entire Māori population moved from rural areas to cities to seek better employment and educational opportunities.



Selwyn Muri, *Te Waharoa o Aotea*, 1990
Auckland Council Te Kaunihera o Tāmaki Makaurau,
photograph by Marlaina Key

Opposite: Shane Cotton, *Maunga*, 2020
photograph by David St George, courtesy of Britomart Art Foundation



19 HAUMI Ē! HUI Ē! TĀIKI Ē! MĀORI AND INDIGENOUS ART ON THE GLOBAL STAGE NGARINO ELLIS

Being Māori is a political position and a place from which to draw empowerment.

—Ngahiraka Mason¹

Māori artists have always travelled. As they moved across Te Moananui a Kiwa they took with them their tools, techniques, materials and ideas; they used these to reflect the changing dynamics of their peoples, and in doing so they constructed innovative meanings and histories embedded in new lands. These knowledges and practices played out in different ways once the ancestors arrived in Aotearoa. The excitement they felt for the unfamiliar transformed the type of art they produced: from tatau to moko, from tapa to whatu, from geometric to curvilinear. The artist had a central role within their community in articulating important social, political and economic issues for the people.

Māori artists in the twenty-first century are navigating a complex and ever-changing landscape and in this way their role as agents of change has not changed. One of the biggest shifts in the past couple of generations has been their audiences and patrons, ranging from the nannies at the pā through to curators in international art fairs and biennales. Māori artists are now engaging with their Indigenous counterparts overseas in exhibitions and art projects and are part of this global Indigenous art world.

Brett Graham, *Wasteland*, 2023, as exhibited at the 60th Venice Biennale, 2024

steel, found wagon wheels, macrocarpa wood, paint, photograph by Ben Stewart

Our tools of survival are rooted in our ability to work in collective methods and Indigenous methodologies.

—Heather Igloliorte, Julie Nagam and Carla Taunton²

The nature of Indigenous

Most of this book has been concerned with art made here in Aotearoa, shaped by the dynamics of culture as it shifted from identities located firmly in Hawaiki, towards those located in specific communities. Today, arguably, most Māori artists – indeed most Māori – refer to themselves in relation to their tribal affiliations. But this book is entitled *Toi Te Mana: An Indigenous History of Māori Art* for a reason. While it is by, for and about Māori, we do not exist in isolation. Indian literary critic Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak calls this ‘strategist essentialism’; as she explains it: ‘The ways in which subordinate or marginalised social groups may temporarily put aside local difference in order to forge a sense of collective identity through which they band together in political movements.’³ This deliberate kind of reaching out to our Indigenous cousins across the waters of Te Moananui a Kiwa recognises that we are part of a wider Indigenous network of peoples who are joined under shared histories and experiences – a ‘global collective consciousness among First Peoples’,⁴ as Métis scholar David Garneau puts it – that includes lived responses to colonisation by European powers. Yet this is not our only connection; indeed, Indigenous peoples have so much more in common, ranging from descent from the land to approaches to family and reverence for elders.