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Other Identities: portrayals from the past and what remains in the present

An extended essay presented in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the post-graduate degree of

Master of Fine Arts

At Massey University, Wellington, New Zealand

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the Massey University School of Fine Arts faculty for their support during the last five years, particularly the dependable assistance from Jane Wilcox and Mike Heynes. I commend my fellow MFA candidates for their diligence and thank them for their friendship. This project would not have been conceived or completed without my whanau. Thank you to my grandmother, Polly Charlotte, for giving me the photograph of my great grandmother which incited this journey. The time we have spent talking about Nanny Pare has been invaluable to the development of my work and me as a person. Thank you to Jenna, Tamati, and Hamish for your encouragement and unconditional love. To my parents, Jan and Henry Hudson, none of this could have been possible without your guidance, love and support. You are my inspiration. Finally I would like to acknowledge the unwavering dedication of Lachie McLaren thank you for sharing this experience with me.

Abstract

How can the reintroduction of colonial depictions of Maori women in early twentieth century postcards engage a modern audience in a dialogue concerning the aestheticisation of Maori women, both past and present?

Drawing on questions incited by the visual representation of my own family, the constructs of photographic depictions of Maori women in early 1900's postcards will be examined. The correlation between the past and present will be the focus of this essay as the research considers whether the romantic, ancient ideals imposed onto Maori women by male colonialist photographers are still apparent in the present.

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Figure 1: Pare Rarotapuhikura Thrupp & Hiria Tuhoro

Encountering Family History

The inspiration for my research was sparked by a single image. I found this photo while I was looking through my grandmother's photo collection. It is a portrait of my great grandmother Pare Rarotapuhikura Thrupp and her cousin Hiria Tuhoro.

This photo stood out from the others in her album as it seemed unusually posed. My nana told me that it was staged for a professional photographer and that Tuhoro, the woman holding the book, was illiterate. Whilst the artificial circumstances behind this image are recognised by my family, the photograph is still relied on as an acceptable form of representation. The discovery of this image has resulted in a deep concern about the misrepresentation embedded in other historical portrayals of Maori women. Uncovering this photo has brought about many questions around colonisation and the aestheticisation of Maori. This image has made me consider what has happened in the three generations between Tuhoro and myself, as she could not read, and I cannot speak te reo.

My MFA research is interested in the relationship between past and present; historical portrayals of Maori women and the perception of Maori women in

modern society. In the first half of this essay I will examine aspects of the history of visual representation of Maori women in early twentieth century postcards. I focus on colonial postcards because there are many examples of exploitation and misrepresentation by postcard photographers. The question guiding this research is,

How can the reintroduction of colonial depictions of Maori women in early twentieth century postcards engage a modern audience in a dialogue concerning the aestheticisation of Maori women, both past and present?

I want to communicate the misrepresentation of the aestheticised postcards of the past to an audience of the present, so that these ideals can be considered, and compared to the way Maori women are represented currently. I am not alone in my interest in colonial postcards, as the influence of this type of imagery has effected the art practices of other indigenous artists such as Aimee Ratana, Fiona Foley and Shigeyuki Kihara.

It is with reflection on this research that I analyse the development of my own practice.

Governor Grey's Recommendation: Colonial Representation of Maori Women

Since the first contact with European explorers, images of Maori have been created in the interest of ethnography. However, Maori were not particularly sought after as a fine art subject until 1851, when Governor George Grey put out a recommendation to artists and poets in Aotearoa “to recover some traits of their terrible lineaments... of their softer outlines... that either a stern grandeur, or the romantic glow of a primitive state of existence might be imparted to some works of art” (Bell, 1992, p.147). From the 1880's, the number of artists using Maori culture and tradition as subject matter heightened for two main reasons. At the time some artists saw it as a duty to capture the ancient ways of a dying race, and, as New Zealand was striving to find its own national identity, many settlers saw Maori as a unique way to set themselves apart from the motherland.

Artists such as Louis Steele, Charles Goldie and Gottfried Lindauer endorsed Grey's proposal of Maori as subject matter. The resulting paintings experimented with the different aspects of ancient Maori culture that Grey suggested; the romantic, exotic and violent notions surrounding the noble savage ideal. Whilst these artists became noted for their depiction of 'old time' Maori, they did not depict the contemporaneous Maori living conditions. The status of these paintings positioned Maori as “territory to be exploited” (Bell, 1992, p.150) by other artists who were witnessing the success of the painters involved. Photographers were quick to emulate the popular themes and soon there were images of Maori being sent all over the world in the form of postcards. Maori have been the subject of photographers since 1852 (King, 1983), when Daguerreotypes were first used in New Zealand. This type of technology was scarce, so there are few images of Maori at this time. One of the earliest photographs of Maori is a portrait of the Barrett Sisters, believed to have been taken in 1852. This image is of interest to this project as it depicts the sisters in European dress. Since this daguerreotype was taken, photography

has been available to capture the effect of colonisation of Maori, though this was not always the case. In terms of commercial photography, popularity lay in the traditional portrayal of Maori women. The mid 1800's saw a development in wet plate technology which meant photographers could carry their equipment and chemicals with them into the field – at this stage photography was still quite limited and most images of Maori were taken in urban areas. The 1860's saw the introduction of Carte de Visites, which was the first photographic imagery to be printed on paper. Carte de Visites were popular because they were cheap and easy for settlers to send to distant relatives all over the world. But it wasn't until the 1900's that lithographed imagery in the form of postcards appeared in New Zealand, and this was the first instance where photography was inexpensive and accessible. The trading of postcards was a highly popular past-time in early New Zealand. Postcards hit craze proportions in 1909, when over nine million cards were circulated by a population of only one million people. (Jones, Herda & Suaalii eds., 2000). I am interested in historical

postcards because I think there may be parallels between their widespread nature, and prejudicial stereotypes that are still apparent today. The imagery typically portrayed Maori as primitive, sexualised and ignorant. This way of thinking about Maori became common place as there was no other access to knowledge that said otherwise. Michael King (1983) talks about the effect of postcards in his book “Maori: A Photographic and Social History”,

“The most damaging effect of these photographs arose from the fact that few Europeans encountered Maoris in their daily lives. Their experience of them and their attitudes towards them tended to be conditioned by the photographic images they saw. So that stereotypes which arose from ignorance or prejudice tended to feed further negative stereotypes and lead to subsequent instances of prejudice.”

(p. 3)

With my MFA research, I hope that by reintroducing colonial depictions of Maori women to a contemporary audience, it a dialogue is created between past and present and these misunderstandings of misrepresentations can be challenged.

Postcard portrayals of Maori Women in the Early Twentieth Century



Figure 2: The Barrett Sisters



Figure 3: "A Maori Lily"

The postcard format was typically the same across the Pacific; a sexualised rendering of the exotic island girl stereotype. Patty O'Brien explores the foundations of these types of representation in her book, "The Pacific Muse", "What stereotypes of Pacific women did, and still do, is reduce women to one dimension: a passive sexuality that revolved around pleasing white men." (O'Brien, 2006, p.12). New Zealand author, Jacqui Sutton Beets analysed postcards depicting Maori women in the Ephemera collection in the Alexander Turnbull Library. Her essay, "*Images of Maori Women in New Zealand Postcards after 1900*" argues that the visual content has contributed towards "racist and sexist attitudes which have persisted throughout the twentieth century" (Jones, Herda & Suaalii eds., 2000, p.31). With this analysis, Sutton Beets (2000) has identified five key themes of representation that underpin these postcards:

1. Maori women as sexually inviting and or immoral
Images such as these show that the photographer arranged the traditional Maori costume to expose bare skin and positioned the model to emphasise her

sexuality. "Images such as these served to reinforce a generalised stereotype of native women as sexually liberated, and the colony as a newly-opened 'paradise' of enjoyments for the Pakeha male." (p.23).

2. Representations of women being intrinsically violent
Maori women were often posed with both traditional and colonial weapons. Sutton Beets (2000) analyses the effect of this colonial construct, "Not only is the model reduced to the level of the artefacts surrounding her, but the image of nubile maiden clinging to the tools of bloodthirsty barbarism creates an aura of violenteroticism which may titillate the male viewer" (p.24).

3. Portrayals of ignorance
This was often implicated by way of composition or a caption on the postcard. A specific postcard is the example of this notion in Sutton Beets' (2000) essay; A Maori Lily is presented as a type of parody of the white feminine ideal: "Because the 'joke' exists only between the Pakeha photographer and the postcard's buyer/viewers, the model's true 'innocence lies in her ignorance; although not expected to understand the scenario's innuendoes, her expression nevertheless suggests a baffled

awareness of degradation" (p.21).

4. Representations of Maori either in a process of civilisation or unwilling to change and be assimilated
This was typically expressed through costume with either native or ill-fitting European dress. Models were placed against exotic or romantic landscapes or scenarios depicting characteristics of poverty. "The women and children wear second-hand European clothes and blankets, and their living conditions (hinted at by background settings of primitive wooden huts, miscellaneous tin utensils, sacks over hāngi, and clothing items draped across fences) are clearly substandard in comparison to contemporary European dwellings." (p.28).
5. Maori depicted as a dying or conquered race
This ideal was typically portrayed through an image of a Kuia with a pipe in her mouth, and also exemplified through imagery of poverty. "The representation of old women or kuia in early postcards likewise owes much to a prevailing culturally ideology of Maori facing an unwelcome civilising influence." (p.28).



Figure 4: examples of anonymity



Figure 5: sexualisation of a young model

In my own study of the postcards of Maori women in the Te Papa collection and on public display at the Alexander Turnbull Library, I identified three additional aspects important to my analysis:

1. The anonymity of the women depicted. Early twentieth century postcards of Maori women did not give the name of the women featured. Instead the postcard was labelled with a title such as “MaoriBelle”, “Maori Beauty”, or “Maori Princess”. These titles dehumanised the model and emphasised her as a superficial commodified object to own. Stereotypical assumptions were promoted by the exclusion of the names giving a notion that all Maori were the same.

2. They often featured subjects. Visually, Maori women were not represented by a wide range of ages. They were either young and portrayed in a sexualized sense, or elderly to convey the perception of a dying race. Images of young girls were utilised to represent vulnerability, innocence, virginity and the idea of assimilation and intermarriage.

3. These also featured original postcards. The historical postcards are much smaller than modern day postcards, the average size of the cards being around 8cm x 13cm. The small scale of the postcards reminded me more of contemporary trading cards, thus exemplifying their commodifiable nature. After viewing the original postcards at Te Papa and the Alexander Turnbull Library, I gained a greater understanding of how the popularity of these postcards grew to such a proportion. The size made it easy to think of the postcard as a commodity and to not think further into the implications of stereotypical ideologies.



Figure 6: unidentified woman photographed by the American Photographic Company, circa early 1860's



Figure 7: tangi near Wanganui, circa early 1900's



Figure 8: example of the custom of hanging photographs on the back wall of a whareniui at Mangamaunu. Taken in the late nineteenth century.

*From Taipo to Taonga: the
currency of photography
with Maori contexts*

Maori were initially hesitant about photography, referring to the photographer and his camera as 'taipo' or goblin.

Many Maori believed the capturing and reproduction of one's image depleted mauri. (King, 1983, p.2) Over the next forty years photography gradually became accepted by Maori as the use of photographs became popularised.

One particular way the photographs became conventional was through Maori tangi, or funerals. Since the 1890's, images of the deceased were highly regarded and addressed during ceremonial speeches. This tradition has continued through to the twenty-first century with a heavy importance placed on photographs during tangi. Another instance of photography's influence is evident in the interior of wharenui. Images of important tipuna adorn the walls; their purpose is equivalent to that of carvings, to provoke recollections of the past. Amiria Henare (2005) responds to this notion in her book *Museums, Anthropology and Imperial Exchange*, "Ornate wooden panels, photographs and carved figures do not merely represent but *are* ancestors" (p.7). The author also goes on to express that taonga such as photographs are the 'connective tissue between generations' (p.47).

It is this positive aspect of the historical photography which resonates with the attitudes of many Maori today.



Figure 9 & 10: detail of Aimee Ratana's installation, Taku Tuhoctana

Aimee Ratana: unfaltering lineage

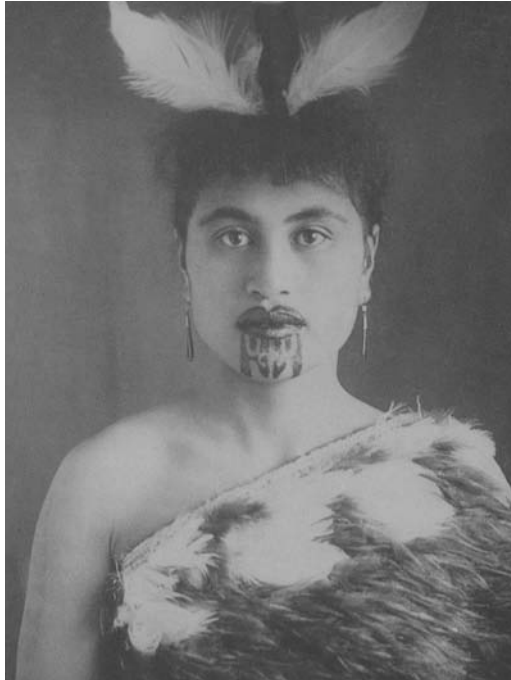


Figure 11: image deemed “unidentified but elegant” by Te Awēkotuku

Tuhoe artist, Aimee Ratana acknowledges the intent of the colonial photographer but sees the images left behind as representations filled with integrity. Historical imagery is an important influence in Ratana’s installation, *Taku Tuhoetana*,

where she drew inspiration from the predecessor of postcards, the *carte de visite*. Her exhibition was an articulation of self identity and an exploration of the portrayal of Maori in the historical format. The artist specifically sought out *carte de visite* imagery of her own *iwi* in order to encapsulate a context pertinent to her identity.

Taku Tuhoetana is not entirely a celebration of historical portrayals of Maori. The artist has appropriated the classical lighting and oval format of the nineteenth century, but she has also used her contemporary eye to create a personal study of her body as a representation of her identity. Her self portraiture is much more intimate than any typical historical image of a Maori woman. The artist’s tightly framed images draw the audience into her personal proximity; she is allowing the viewer to experience intimate details of her body. Through this specific concept of her work, Ratana refers to the voyeuristic and exploitative content of the past.

Aimee Ratana expresses an appreciation of historical imagery which is a common position among modern Maori. I find this occurrence very interesting. It is difficult

for me to fully appreciate imagery of Maori which have been marketed to the world as a tourism tool, but the majority of people cannot see these historical pictures as corrupted. To others, the images appear to be a compliment as a colonialist photographer thought that their ancestor was so beautiful that he captured her image. A sense of pride seems to block out any further questioning as to the reasons why such a photograph would have been taken. One such example of this is given in Ngahua Te Awēkotuku’s (2007) book *Mau Moko* where a postcard image of a Maori woman taken by George Iles of Rotorua is described as, “Unidentified but elegant” (p.199). Some historical photographers used to rub a type of oil into the moko of their sitters to make it stand out more for the camera. In this image it looks as though the entire *kauwae* is drawn on, and I do not find much elegance in this act. It is an interesting notion to negotiate, whereby I find it difficult to ignore the residue of the colonial photographer, others can only see the beauty and essence of the individual portrayed. I want my work to create awareness around how and why these images came into existence.

Repossession of the Gaze: Foley and Kihara

Fiona Foley and Shigeyuki Kihara are two artists who have specifically explored the realm of colonial representation of indigenous women through historical postcards.

Like me, Australian Aborigine artist, Fiona Foley, found inspiration in historical imagery which she found depicting her own ancestors. In her 1994 series, *Batjala Woman*, Foley used artefacts from museums to recreate the aesthetic of historical portraits. The foundation of this work is centred on appropriation of iconography and technology as a statement of empowerment, relinquishing anonymity and reclaiming the colonialist gaze.

Shigeyuki Kihara, an artist of Samoan and Japanese descent, explores similar concepts through a photographic triptych, *Fa'a fafine: In the Manner of a Woman*. Kihara uses the same ethnographic aesthetic as Foley and pushes her images even further extracting kitsch characteristics. The attribution of kitsch into the images is valuable because it opens up issues around stereotypes. This is a difficult area to navigate as it is important to

confront stereotypes but highly detrimental to perpetuate them. There are hundreds of twentieth century postcards in which their only subject matter was portraying Maori as stereotypes. Finding a balance between confronting or promoting stereotypes is something that I struggle with in my own work. It is Kihara's finesse that centres this image. She is so poised that I, as a viewer, am immediately drawn to her. With the modern technology that she has utilised there is much more detail than in the postcards from the twentieth century, which shows off the articulate composition. The backgrounds of historical postcards have always interested me as they are a clue as to how the image was taken. If the photograph was taken outside in a type of natural bush backdrop, it is more than likely that the women portrayed lived rurally, while a portrait taken in a studio suggests the Maori wahine lived in an urban environment. Within Kihara's composition there is a dualistic disharmony. There seems to be a sense of making up for what isn't really there with the ripped mats and variety of plants being viewed as at the same standard as that of the chaise longue on which she poses. With this sense of over compensating in

an attempt to discuss the issue of balance, I see integrity within the work. Kihara is going to all efforts to bring the issue of aestheticisation of her people to the forefront of the audience's attention.



Figure 12: Fiona Foley, "Batjala Woman", 1994

Positioning my art practice

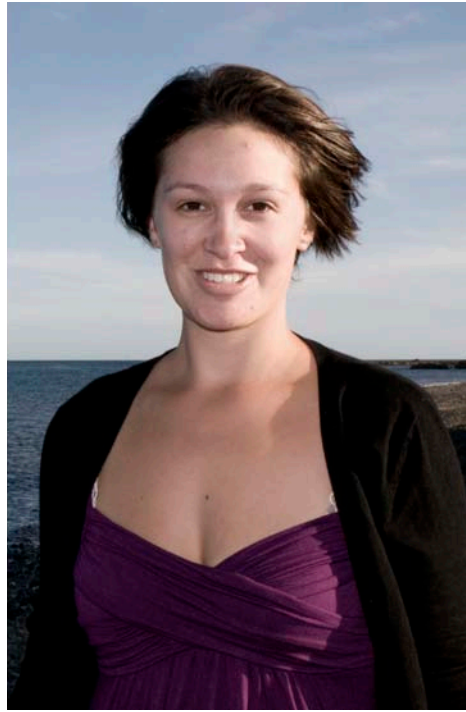


Figure 13: Shugiyuki Kihara *Fa'a fafine: in the Manner of a Woman*, 2005

I have investigated the practises of other indigenous artists who have worked with themes involving colonialism, representations of women, culture, and contemporary life in order to strengthen my own position.

Where Aimee Ratana has concentrated on her own *iwi*, my interest lies in the broader representation of all Maori women. I do not want to glorify colonial representations but to critique them and gauge their relevancy in contemporary New Zealand. My aim in doing this is to have open themes for the audience to access.

Shigeyuki Kihara and Fiona Foley have created work in connection to colonial ethnographic portrayals of indigenous women. Both artists work within the realm of self-portraiture to give identities to anonymous depictions. My aim is to create photographic portraiture in reaction to historical injustices and modern prejudices. It is this investigation of the past and present that sets my photographic practise apart.



Figures 14: participatory portrait trial

Figures 15: historical comparisons



Finding my way: The initial approach

The beginning of my MFA art based research started out with the development of participatory portraits of contemporary Maori women. The women that were photographed were all contacted by me, either via an advertisement or through a personal relationship. I did not show any of the sitters the historical postcard imagery,

as I was concerned that the action would effect the way that they decided to portray themselves. Even though I did not show them any images, it was made clear that I was interested in the relationship between the aestheticiation of Maori women, past and present. From the beginning, it was made clear to the sitter that this was a project about empowerment. This was about enabling her to choose how she wanted to be portrayed. It was my intention to create a photographic process in which there was an open dialogue about creative direction. The first action was dependant on the sitter; she decided where we would take the photograph. In creating a space in which the sitter was making primary decisions, I hoped that the participant would feel a sense of control in being in an environment where she is comfortable and in turn relay confidence to the camera. This work was driven by the research question, *How might contemporary participatory portraits create a reactive dialogue when compared to historical portrayals of Maori women?* It was an urge to go against the self portraiture modes utilised by Kihara, Floey and Ratana which encouraged the idea of taking photos of other women.

Throughout my five years at Massey University School of Fine Arts my practice had been predominantly determined through self portraiture. I was apprehensive about continuing with this medium as I wanted my work to have no aesthetic parallels with anyone else who has used historical postcards as motivation. Where some contemporary artists have explored historical and ethnographic representation of indigenous people I have not seen anyone discuss these themes specifically by way of participatory portraiture. In an attempt to reference the hundreds of women who were photographed in the early 1900's I wanted this project to consist of a wide range and vast number of contemporary wahine. One of the key elements of this work was the comparison of historical postcards to the modern participatory portraits. The contemporary photographs were placed directly next to the postcards and the work was presented in this manner for the first MFA critiques in May 2009. The feedback that came from this critique promptly altered the course of my photographic practice. The content of the three portraits that I presented were of three young, beautiful, Maori women, who were

photographed in the way that they wanted to be portrayed. The most problematic aspect of the work was that the images were almost too slick. They could have been advertising campaigns that one would see in a teen magazine. This was an interesting result and comment on colonisation as these women have been surrounded by imagery supplied by Westernised media all their lives; this is what they are told that they should look like. As it turns out this project was talking more about ideas around Eurocentric feminine ideals in the modern era, and I definitely think that this body of work has the potential to be extended further. More importantly this line of investigation was not referencing postcards that are the central concern of my research. After viewing hundreds of the constructed images of the past, I would never feel comfortable making someone pose in a specific way, or wear a particular type of clothing. Earnestness is a value that is of high importance to my practice. In order to critique the injustices of the male colonial perspective, I turned to self portraiture. As a young, Maori, female photographer I am working with the aim of inciting awareness about the aestheticisation of Maori women.



Figure 16: self portrait example one

Facing the Camera: Self Portraiture

First Trial: Mirroring, Reflecting.

It was my aim to create a body of work that juxtaposed the issues of the past and present with particular attention to contemporary aesthetics and subject matter.

This first attempt at self portraiture

consisted of a type of endurance / time based pieces in which I mimicked the facial expressions and body language of the women in the postcards. This was a performance based project where I spent a lot of reflection time recreating the appearance of historical imagery in order to imagine how the women would have felt whilst modelling for the camera one hundred years ago. Where this approach was similar to that of Kihara and Foley, my work differed aesthetically. In this series of works where there are no ornate backdrops or costumes, I appear in my everyday clothing, and it is with the considered position of my body that I aim to draw the audience's attention. This process had an intense effect on me. I could imagine what it was like for the models to enter a foreign environment, and to be told to pose awkwardly. Spending hours in front of the camera enabled a greater understanding and a sense of empathy towards the sitters. Even though this was my first trial of self portraiture in reaction to historical depictions of Maori women, I gained a greater personal understanding of the wahine involved which subsequently fed into the development of further work.



Figure 17: self portrait example two



Figure 18: self portrait example three



Figure 19: final resolved self portrait



Figure 20: projection example one

Second Trial – Attempting Intimacy

This self portraiture process was developed to oppose the constructs of historical postcard representations of Maori women. The contradiction is first seen with the composition. No longer is the image presented as a formal head and shoulders portrait format but drawing on inspiration derived from the intimacy of Aimee Ratana's exhibition *Taku Tuhoetana*, this work has focused on the subject's direct relationship with the camera. Through different critiques I have found the most successful portraits that I have produced this year to be those which emit a definite emotive connection

with the camera/ viewer. This has primarily been achieved through the exploration of this intimate portrait format.

These images were created in direct relation to early twentieth century postcard imagery. Deciding how best to represent this work was difficult as the scale and status of the postcard is integral to its dismissible nature. Projection was utilised because of the ability to greatly enlarge the image and the medium was embraced for the intangible qualities it brought to the work. This is an attempt at consolidating the historical problems of the inexpensive, extensively circulated postcards. The projector enabled elevation of the image from a commodifiable print, to something that cannot be owned by anyone, something that cannot even be touched.

The portraiture was developed further through the introduction of digital processes. The crisp digital image, combined with a raw colour palette, changes the previously subtle confrontation into a more blunt experience for the viewer. There is no glamour; exhibited is my bare skin and unwavering gaze. Unlike the historical imagery there are no studio

back drops, lavish costumes or sexualised poses – the audience has nothing else to read but my face. I want them to witness an uninterrupted image of a contemporary Maori woman.

This work can seem quite overwhelming due to the projection. This creates a great effect in which the audience become increasingly aware of their own bodies in relation to this image. It shifts the way people view the work, as on entering the space one's shadow is cast onto the image and the viewer is required to move back in order to see. I appreciate this characteristic of projection as it creates an opportunity for the viewer to physically engage with my work through awareness of their own shadows.

Standing alone, these portraits may communicate issues around modern Maori women but they do not express the significant position that historical postcards hold in terms of being a driving concept of this project. In an attempt to create a correlation between past and present, I started to experiment with imagery derived from the original postcards.



Figure 21: erasure of the individual example one

Dark but Comely: digital manipulations of historical postcards

*“He kai na tangata, he kai titongitongi;
He kai na tona ringa, tino kai, tino makona
noa”*

You can only nibble at another’s food, but with food you have cultivated yourself, you can satisfy your appetite.

(Reed, 1974, p.107)

It was not enough to simply show the historical images to the audience, and this was made evident in the reaction to the first participatory portraits and historical comparisons. I not only wanted to exhibit the postcards but wanted to extend the viewers comprehension of the impact of the early twentieth century postcards. In order to do this I utilised digital technology and began a significant period of practical trials. The results of these digital manipulations have been dramatic. It took courage for me to alter the images of people’s ancestors. It is my intention with this method to maintain the utmost sincerity as I understand that I am working with photos of real people, women who are more than likely to have living relatives. I acknowledge these women and their families and hope that one day there is an opportunity for them to see this work.

Trial One: Erasure of the individual
This was an attempt to play with the notion that the individual sitter was of little importance to the photographer. When the person in the photo has been erased, all of the different elements of the composition are highlighted. One surprising effect of this erasure was how sometimes the viewer seems to fill in the blank space with an ideal of their own. At first, this image is quite startling; almost ghost like, but, with the engrained knowledge of what a stereotypical Maori Maiden looks like, it is not hard for the audience’s imagination to take over. I have deemed this work to be unsuccessful because I am not confident that I can ensure the reading of this work as a positive one. This may make a statement about how the individual was not of importance to the colonial photographer but my digital manipulations has failed to create a sense of consequential empowerment for the sitter. She has been faded out, and she is the reason why I am so passionate about this project. Informed by the reflection of other people’s feedback, I deem this type of erasure imagery to fuel pessimistic responses instead of instigating open discussion about the issues involved.



Figure 22: masking trials



costume placed over their normal, everyday clothes. There is little attempt by the photographer to hide this fact, their European dress being easily visible. This is a clumsy way of primitivising the individuals and to further this ad hoc aesthetic I chose to enhance it by adding a type of mask. I wanted to discuss their anonymity but I also wanted to heighten the notion of exoticisation. Some viewing this work have described the two figures as voodoo dolls, opening up undercurrents of superstition and black magic. Others saw the masks as making the women look even more like hay stacks than they already do. Both these readings express that they do not see the two people in the postcard as individuals, and through my digital manipulation they are transformed even further into some form of imaginative ideal. In my search to elevate the individual, these trials have moved further away from revealing and appreciating the women's personal identity.

The masking created a scary, uneasy tone within the work. If I was setting out to confront the audience by frightening them, this would be a great way of going about it, but I have never intended my work to effect the viewers in such a manner.

Trial Two: Masking

Furthering the extent of the haunting effect of the previous test, I have found this image to receive a strong response from the audience. It is clear from the postcard that the original models have had traditional

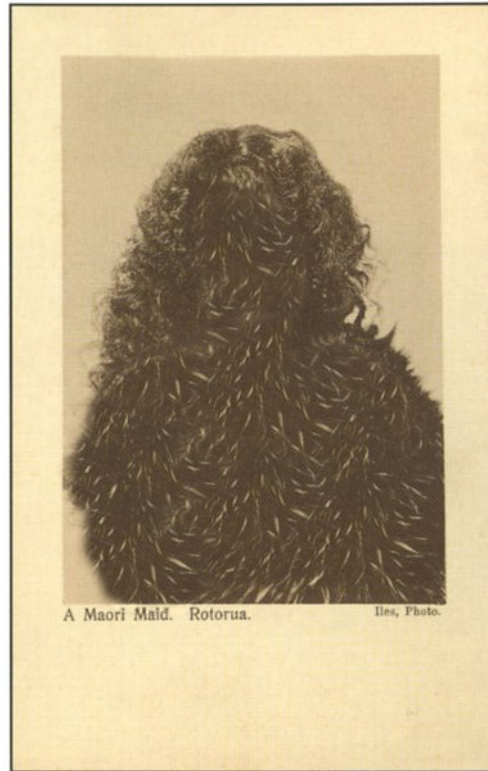


Figure 23: costume example

Trial Three: Looking at the Significance of Props and Costumes.

“He māhiti ki runga, he paepaeroa ki raro
koia nei te kāhaku o te ranatira”

-A dog skin cloak over the shoulders, a fine taniko
cloak round the waist, these are proper garments for a
chief. (Eriksen-Sohos, 1995, p.38)

Here I wanted to express the essential role that costumes and props play in the construction and comprehension of the postcards. Dressing the models up in traditional garments is aesthetically pleasing to the historical viewer as a distinct sign of exoticism. With this work I was interested to see what would happen if the costume was the only thing that you could see. Would it become a confrontation of overwhelming otherness? Digital manipulation has taken this image to a place that is no longer safe and easy to view. The sitter has been engulfed and what remains has to be deciphered by the modern day viewer. This was a seemingly simple exercise but it opened up further questions about the motives and actions behind the scenes of the creation of these postcards.

I would also like to address the issues surrounding the costumes that the sitters are dressed in. From many perspectives, a cloak like this holds an esteemed appearance which gives the notion that it must have belonged to someone very special. Maree Eriksen-Sohos (1995) talks about the traditional acquisition of such taonga in *Iwi*, “Personal adornments, weaponry, implements, and musical instruments were all objects of art

and could be individually owned. Ariki and rangatira commissioned the most talented artists and craftspeople to create the possessions which were theirs. These things added quality to their lives and dignity to their outward appearance. The masses, (tūtūā), owned little of quality.” (p.38)

This may be the way that the majority of people think about such garments but from as early as the 1870’s Maori paraphernalia were being produced in Rotorua solely for the tourist market, “They also sold carvings, woven bags and cloaks, and manufactured these articles specifically for the tourist industry” (Henare, 2005, p.193). It is difficult to know if the costumes we see in early twentieth century postcards were traditionally significant or a commodified costume. It is just another point which calls for consideration when viewing this type of loaded imagery.

These three trials are indicative of the copious amounts of different manipulations that I experimented with during the course of my MFA. From these I have developed three final works that represent all of the imperative aspects that I would like to bring to the attention of my audience.



Figure 24: Kanohi ki te Kanohi na Wairua

Figure 25: detail of Kanohi ki te Kanohi na Wairua



Kanohi ki te Kanohi na Wairua

“As things that bear vital aspect of the people who made and used them and that have their own vitality, taonga act as a particularly enduring form of social bond, allowing generations separated in genealogical time to come together.”

(Henare, 2005, p.25)

Kanohi ki te Kanohi na Wairua is a title given to this series of images by my parents, Jan and Henry Hudson. The literal translation is, face to face with spirits; but this title is also open to different interpretations. Kanohi is the word for face and also eye, kanohi ki te kanohi is stative, meaning face to face, in person. Wairua can be translated as someone’s soul, spirit or essence – it is considered to be immortal, it is present in all people when the eyes first form in the foetus (Te Kōhure, 2004).

I believe *Kanohi ki te Kanohi na Wairua* expresses a notion of connecting with the historical sitters by standing eye to eye with them. It is through looking into these women’s eyes that there is no confusion that they are all distinct individuals.

With this work I wanted to strip away all of the contrived constructs imposed onto the sitter and reveal the individual from behind the modes of stereotype. This work is about empowerment of the historical model, pulling away the clutter around her and giving the audience a place to connect with the historical sitter. This is difficult to do with an 8 x 13cm print. The piece exists as a series of fifteen images; I use the work as an opportunity to suggest the huge scale of the postcard industry that utilised Maori women as subject matter. *Kanohi ki te Kanohi na Wairua* extracts the individual and acknowledges the masses. This methodology of removing all of the possible falsities has given an element of esteem back to the women.

The format of my self portraiture has always been to photograph in a manner opposite to that of the colonialist photographer. This

emphasis was also placed on the historical postcard imagery – not only were the background, costumes and poses taken away but there has also been a shift from the standard portrait format to landscape. This move was initially derived from a rejection of the colonial constructs but once the format was combined with the imagery, the landscape format began to gain more significance. Maori are connected to their tribal lands through their ancestors. “A Maori had a great affection for the land that was owned by his people. Its boundaries were clearly defined and carefully taught to young people. Ancestral rights of ownership were termed take tipuna.” (Reed, 1978, p.86). This work is presented in landscape format as a gesture to show how important this take tipuna correlation is to the work.

This exercise/ exorcise revealed the women as the ancestors that they are, and it made me think about the fact that these women are likely to have living relatives in New Zealand today. No longer are these women “Maori Maidens” for all. For their families these images would never be considered generic models, as their faces would have always been known as tipuna.



Figure 26: Dark but Comely

Dark but Comely

“At times of great emotion, when mourning or at the meeting of old friends, the head was covered with a cloak.” (Reed, 1978, p.76)

The anonymity of the models has always been a strong point of personal distaste and it was interesting to experiment with erasing the individual from the postcards completely. What was left were exaggerated of otherness, and the theatrical quality of the costumes and back drops highlighted again, that the individual was not what was of value in these images. The intention with this work is to create a space for the audience’s imagination, and to play with

the viewer’s notion of the dusky maiden stereotype.

It is within this work, *Dark but Comely*, that I have been able to address many of the different issues that have driven this project. The image as a whole is easily recognisable as a postcard, but it appears unlike anything that would have existed one hundred years ago. The scale has shifted from insignificant to almost totemic, larger than life size. Most significantly, this piece opens up dialogue about anonymity and identity. The black void is a space for the audience to call on their imagination and past knowledge in order to decipher their own account of what is being portrayed here.

It is this exercising of the viewer’s personal perceptions that has been most rewarding. I wanted this work to be thought provoking and some of the readings that have come back from people viewing *Dark but Comely* have been more stimulating than I ever had expected. The most significant response to the work came from Eugene Hanson. The first thing that he did when entering the exhibition space was to greet the image. Hanson then went on to explain that he

saw the wahine to be so important that we cannot / (are not able to) see her face. This was such a seminal gesture; it is a huge sign of recognition towards the sitter, something that I have been striving to achieve throughout this project. Amiria Henare (2005) has written about these expressions of outward respect, “It is not unusual in certain settings, including museums, for Maori to greet taonga as long-lost relatives, to sing or weep over them and acknowledge them as living people” (p.47) This statement shows that within this work there has been an elevation from widespread commodity to an image that deserves respect.

The audience’s engagement with my visual work has always been of central concern. The subject matter has proven to be accessible to people from a wide range of different backgrounds. Just as my photographic background has fuelled the creative process of this project, my Maori heritage intrinsically feeds into the work. Emphasis on the head as a focal point has been a reoccurring theme throughout this body of work; the head carries much symbolism when examined in a Maori context.



Figure 27: detail of Dark but Comely

Tapu and the Human Head

Ever since I can remember, I have known that the human head is tapu. You should not ever hit someone on their head, anything that goes on your head should not go on any food preparation or table surface, do not cut your hair at night – all of these rules are considered in everyday life. Tapu is a complex notion and the most clear and concise explanation comes from Hiwi and Pat Tauroa, the following being an excerpt from their book *Te Marae – A Guide to Customs and Protocol*,

“Tapu is often translated as sacred but is better explained as something

that has a value that is to be respected. It places a sanction on a person, an object, or a place. Tapu is largely a matter for the individual because it requires protective and disciplinary responses. It is more than a mere native superstition, it acts as a means of social control. People’s possessions carry their tapu and in the past, would not have been stolen – the greater the mana of the person, and the higher the value of their possession, the greater the tapu.”
(*Tauroa & Tauroa, 1986, p.127*)

Tauroa and Tauroa (1986) also have a very simple description as to why the human head is considered in such a manner, “The head is tapu because it contains the brain which controls everything about a person’s being – a person’s mana, a person’s tapu” (p.90). The imagery that I have created from the historical postcards and the self-portraiture has been fixated on the heads of the subjects. In a practical sense this is where I am the most likely to express the individual features of each identity, and looking at it from Tauroa and Tauroa’s perspective I am also encompassing the mana as well as the essence of tapu. *Dark but Comely* is a work which is particularly effected by many

Maori values, especially when contemplating about the importance of hair. Reed talks about hair in *The Concise Maori Handbook*, “Because of the sacred nature of the head, a number of beliefs centred around human hair. It represented the mana of noble men and women, it was used as a medium in black magic, and was also the aria of certain atua” (Reed, 1978, p.76). Traditionally it was the Maori men who had their hair long and women who wore it short. If an ancient wahine was presented in the manner of *Dark but Comely*, she would have been of a very high rank. Some readings of the work is that her hair resembles that of Rua Kenana and/or his followers, and this is relevant as this whole Masters project was incited by imagery of Tuhoe women, Pare Thrupp and Hiria Tuhoro. It is an exciting layer of meaning for the readings to come back to the Tuhoe prophet. Robinson writes about how the higher soul can emit warnings and prophetic dreams through the hair roots of a person in his book *Tohunga* and also expresses, “The hair roots are linked to the hamano or higher part of the soul, but also begin the connection with the hamano with that of the manawa or consciousness” (Robinson, 2008, p.227).



Figure 28: Maori Beauty Actual Size

Maori Beauty- Actual Size

This work has been created with the intention of achieving two objectives.

The first, is to reference the scale of the original postcards, and the second is to draw attention to the notion of commodification. During the development of this project, my work has eventuated at different scales. My self-portraiture, *Kanohi ki te Kanohi na Wairua*, and *Dark but Comely* are all presented as larger than life size. I wanted to reference the small scale of the historical postcards as I believe it is an important way of understanding the commodifiable nature of this imagery. It was through viewing the original postcards at Te Papa and the Alexander Turnbull Library that I realised just how these images could have reached such extensive circulation. The diminutive scale of the historical postcards is an issue that I want to address and rectify through changing the way the audience views the work. *Maori Beauty- Actual Size* exists as a light box. This form of representation is used as I want to change the perspective of the cheap, flat prints. The effect created pushes the ghostly feel exhibited by earlier trials to another level. The work is similar to *Dark but Comely*, as it plays with the possibility that the dusky maiden stereotype may be so deeply engrained in the consciousness of modern viewers that they

may see an apparition of something that is not actually there. What is displayed within this light box, are aesthetic devises that are strongly white colonialist. The font is in a Gothic type style and the ornate decorative elements do not appear to have originated in New Zealand. With this image blacked out, the only indicator of Maori culture is the word in the title. Previously I have taken out all of the information that tell the audience specifically about the original postcard, and only used the imagery imperative to the historical sitter. On encountering the ornately decorated “Maori Beauty,” my thoughts turned to the idea of images of tipuna as export goods for another culture. This postcard specifically showed me that the original intentions of these photographs were not of Maori for Maori. Because one hundred years have passed since the trading of these types of postcards were at their most popular, it is my hope that the historical sitters have been found by their families and their image used as a token of lineage. Throughout this project I have discovered a great amount about the injustices of the past – I hope this body of work conveys that.



Figure 29: the pairing of Dark but Comely and Maori Beauty Actual Size

Final Presentation of the Work

The most cohesive and coherent way I have found to present this body of work is to split the four individual pieces into two separate groups. The first pairing is made up of *Kanohi ki te Kanohi na Wairua*, and a projected self portrait. I now consider these images to be one work. The second pairing is *Dark but Comely* and *Maori Beauty*.

Presenting the two series separately has been a step towards further clarification of the audience's consideration of the work.

Dark but Comely and *Maori Beauty* express notions to the audience of my initial reaction of distaste when first viewing the original postcards at the Alexander Turnbull Library in early 2009. *Maori Beauty* shows the audience the reality of the insignificant historical scale. The two works have been constructed to consolidate the injustice of the 13 x 8cm printing process; *Dark but Comely* exists as an almost totemic, larger than life size image and *Maori Beauty* incorporates three-dimensionality to step away from the original postcard format. *Dark but Comely* knowingly illustrates the digital manipulation process to the contemporary audience, and the historical viewer is up for discussion as *Maori Beauty* reveals clues as to the target market for which these postcards were originally intended. This dichotomy of past and present has been a fundamental premise throughout my research and it is also evident in the other set of images, *Kanohi ki te Kanohi na Wairua*.

Imagery derived from early twentieth century postcards and my self portraiture are projected facing each other, the audience

stands between them. The viewers become increasingly aware of their own bodies in the space, as they may or may not want to interrupt the projections. It is with the work *Kanohi ki te Kanohi na Wairua* that I believe I have addressed the research question most succinctly. The question proposed is,

How can the reintroduction of colonial depictions of Maori women in early twentieth century postcards engage a modern audience in a dialogue concerning the aestheticisation of Maori women past and present?

In this work, my self portrait signifies the idea of contemporary wahine and when this projection is seen in comparison to representations of the past, correlations are formed. It is an important component of this project that it is ultimately up to the audience to draw their own conclusions about this body of work – my obligation is to foremost express the emotions that have been conjured up during this process of researching the representation of Maori women- and I place just as much value on leaving the work open and accessible to any viewer.



Figure 30: finalised self portrait



Figure 31: installation view of self portrait

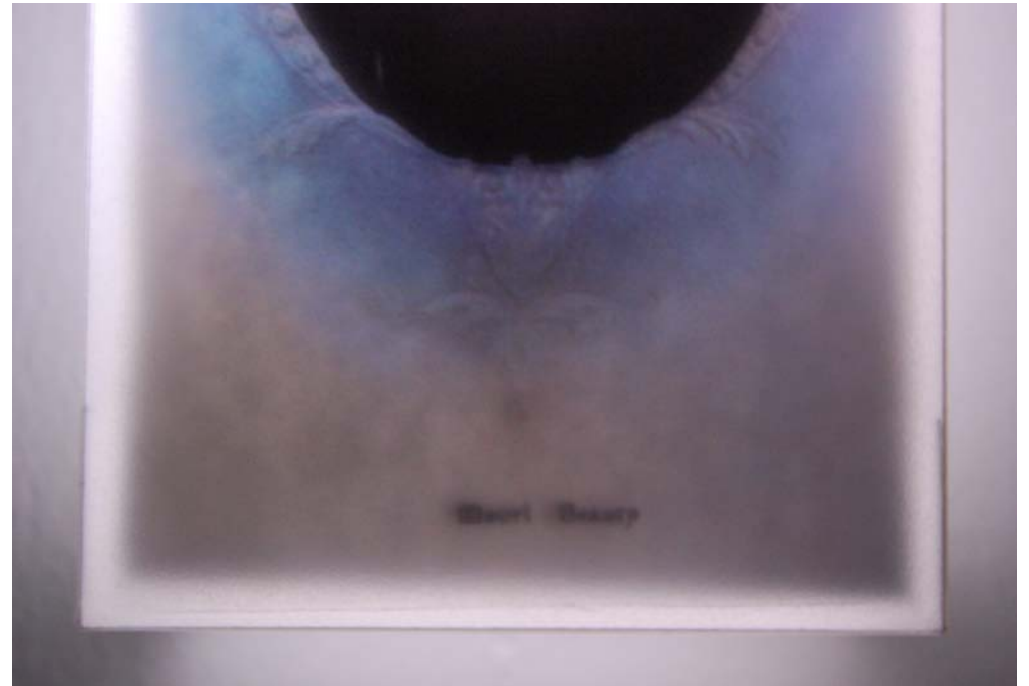


Figure 32: Maori Beauty Actual Size detail



Figure 33: Maori Beauty Actual Size



Figure 34: installation view of Kanohi ki te Kanohi and Dark but Comely

Summary

From early ethnographic portrayals, the aestheticisation of Maori culture snowballed into the existence of early twentieth century postcards. It was through postcards that stereotypical ideals became an easily accessible and cheap commodity. The buyers and viewers of these postcards did not typically encounter Maori in day to day life, and the only way they experienced the culture was through the romantic and exoticised misrepresentations depicted by postcard imagery. Because there was no other access to knowledge that opposed this ideal, it led to the belief that all Maori were the same as these postcard portrayals. Even though these portraits were taken by colonialist photographers for a predominantly settler market, the images are valued by the descendants of the historical subjects depicted. Contemporary Maori artist Aimee Ratana

drew on historical imagery of Ngai Tahu as a way of reconnecting with her iwi. The exhibition *Takutuhonetana* was pivotal to my own practice as I drew on Ratana's intimate style of self portraiture as a way to represent myself. This approach to photography suited my strategy of going against the colonial constructs of postcard portrayals. Two other indigenous artists who have found inspiration in addressing postcard depictions of their people are, Shigeyuki Kihara and Fiona Foley. Kihara's 2005 triptych, *Fa'a fafine: in the Manner of a Woman* and Foley's 1994 series, *Batjala Woman* focuses on the issue of anonymity by putting themselves in the place of the historical sitter as an act of re-empowerment. My research has centred on the question:

How can the reintroduction of colonial depictions of Maori women in early twentieth century postcards engage a modern audience in a dialogue concerning the aestheticisation of Maori women past and present?

The areas of colonial aestheticisation that I have chosen to focus my attention

towards are attempting to consolidate the problems of the anonymity of the historical sitters, and the confrontation of the constructs of commodification utilised by colonialist photographers. My approach was different to Ratana, Kihara and Foley as I employed digital manipulation of the historical images as a way of reintroducing this material to a contemporary audience. Through methods such as covering the face of an historical sitter to heighten the awareness of the stereotypical constructs around her, stripping away the props and costumes to reveal the individual women in the postcards and creating a work that gives an example of the small scale of the commodified prints. I have initiated an installation which challenges the audience to reflect on the representations of Maori from the past - in the present. This body of research was incited by the discovery of an image depicting my Nanny Pare. It is my hope that the audience for this work may one day be the descendants of the women in the postcards. It is important to me that those who view this work are given an opportunity to connect (or reconnect) to the imagery with a greater sense of consideration and comprehension.

Glossary

Maori Terms

Ariki	chief, first-born in notable family; priest
Hangi	earth oven that cooks food with steam and heat from heated stones
Kauwae female	chin tattoo
Kuia	female elder
Mauri	life principle, life force
Marae	enclosed ground used as a meeting place
Rangatira	chief, noble
Taonga	possessions; valuables
Te Reo	the Maori language
Tipuna	ancestor or grandparent
Wahine	woman, women
Whareniui	meeting house on marae

Photographic Terms

- Carte De Visite

This technology was the predecessor of the postcard; carte de visites were produced in New Zealand from around the 1860's to the 1900's when it was replaced by cheap lithograph prints. The cartes were printed on paper and then pasted onto card. It involved a process of exposing a

glass negative and then contact printing the image onto albumen paper by way of sunlight.

- Daguerreotype

Daguerreotypes were prepared by exposing a sheet of silver-plated copper to iodine vapour, causing it to become light sensitive. Named after Louis Daguerre, this type of photography was utilised in New Zealand before 1855. It was an expensive technology which had two main drawbacks – the image was a one-off and it was difficult to view because of its reflective surface.

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