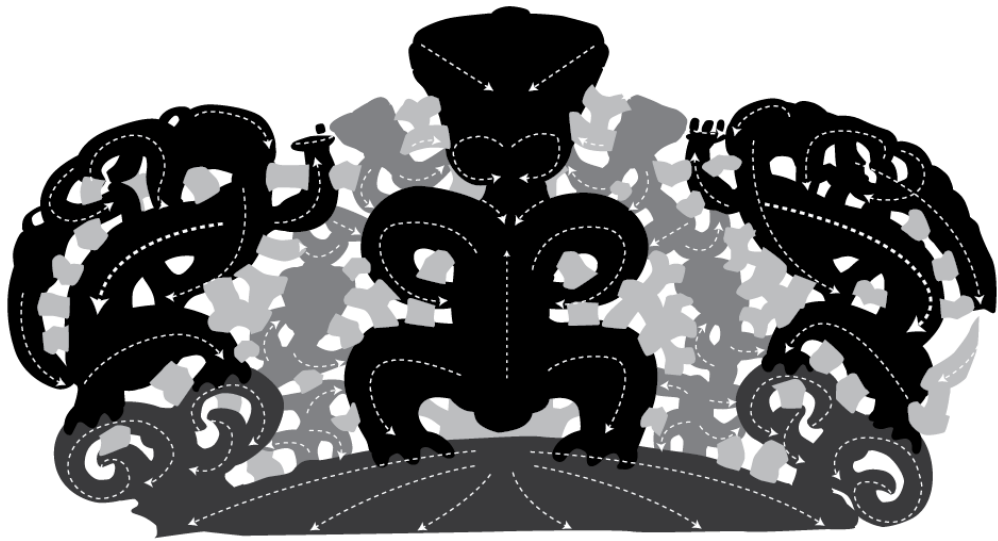


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Tāra Kōrero Toi

Articulating a Māori Design Language



Toi Runga

Part 1

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
in
Fine Arts

at Massey University,
Palmerston North, Aotearoa New Zealand

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Ngāti Hinekura, Tamahaki, Ngāti Hauā, Ngai Tūteauru, Ngā Puhi
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Thesis structure

The thesis is divided into three parts: *Toi Runga (Part 1)*, *Toi Raro (Part 2)* and *Te Hononga Toi Māori (Part 3)*. *Toi Runga* and *Toi Raro* allude to *Te Kauae Runga* (the upper jaw) and *Te Kauae Raro* (the lower jaw), a Māori *wānanga* system associated with the Wairarapa *wānanga* (held in the nineteenth century at Greytown) that divided knowledge into celestial and terrestrial knowledge, that is, the knowledge of the gods on the one hand and knowledge of humankind on the other.

In the case of the thesis, the division refers to the two types of knowledge explored within the thesis. *Toi Runga (Part 1)* examines knowledge that is derived from a review of ‘old’ knowledge associated in particular with *pare* (door lintels). This review of customary Māori carving practice, and subsequent *pare* analyses, resulted in the development of a Māori design language pertinent to contemporary Maori design practice. In *Toi Raro (Part 2)*, the ‘new’ knowledge (Māori elements and principles of design) derived from the analysis of ‘old’ knowledge, were then applied to three design projects within a contemporary context.

Te Hononga Toi Māori (Part 3) was developed by the author as a reference for Māori terms, the Māori design elements and principles, and customary Māori surface pattern. When used in tandem with *Toi Runga (Part 1)* and *Toi Raro (Part 2)*, *Te Hononga Toi Māori (Part 3)* acts as quick reference to understanding Māori terms and relevant design terminology. Māori terms are introduced using a convention of Māori term followed by the English translation in brackets and thereafter only the Māori term is used.

Abstract

This research explores eighteenth and nineteenth century Māori carving and more specifically, *pare* (door lintel). The goal of this research is to develop design guidelines for Māori designers, based on customary models. Consequently, the research seeks to answer the research question: how might the visual language and *tikanga* (conventions, protocols, customary practice) of customary Māori carving inform contemporary Māori design practice?

This research topic responds to the dearth of Māori informed guidelines for designers, both Māori and non-Māori, when working with Māori content, form and imagery. In view of the increased use of Māori iconography in design industries both locally and globally, there is a need to develop guidelines that help maintain the integrity and intent of the Māori form and content, while enabling designers to express culturally significant messages. As a project by Māori, developed in response to Māori needs, the notion of *tinorangātiratanga* (sovereignty) is reaffirmed. While the customary, and to some extent contemporary Māori arts are helpful, the connection of design with commerce also highlights the need to develop guidelines that recognise this distinct crossover between culture and commerce. Thus, the Māori elements and principles of design have been articulated through an extensive literature review of eighteenth and nineteenth century Māori carving, and a linear diagrammatical analysis of *pare* informed by elements of Māori visual culture and epistemology with European design concepts and ideas about art.

The interdisciplinary nature of this project also demanded an innovative framework and methodology. This resulted in the development of the linear diagrammatical method for analysing carving, which combined *mātauranga Māori* (Māori knowledge) and knowledge about important cosmo-genealogical narratives, with western design conventions. This intersection between two-world views, that of design and that of customary Māori arts, is at the core of this thesis. It is critical to remember that the Māori terms developed to name the Māori principles of design evolve out of a conceptual engagement with the terminology and access to the language expertise of Dr Darryn Joseph. The terms therefore are not customary, but modern terms developed specifically for this study.

The elements and principles of Māori design were trialled through three design projects, a design exhibition *Ko Aotearoa Tēnei: This is New Zealand*, a Māori alphabet block set, and *Whakarare*, a Māori typeface design. Each of these offered insights into how the Māori elements and principles could be applied within contemporary design practice. At the same time, these projects demonstrated some of the limitations of this customary-informed approach to contemporary design. Importantly, these

projects established how the Māori elements and principles could potentially allow designers to create multi-layered works that express Māori ideas, and Māori design sensibilities, in the absence of literal Māori iconography in a variety of design contexts. The Māori elements and principles bring Māori design closer to *Te Ao Māori* through the connection of design with customary Māori arts practice.

Acknowledgements

This research is a manifestation of my love for two things, Māori culture and graphic design. I have always maintained a keen interest in the Māori arts. However, as a graphic design student I remained reticent to undertake Māori projects because I had little knowledge about both Māori arts and culture. My 2007 Masters project, an exploration of Māori art through gestalt theory, presented an opportunity to rectify this problem. After I completed the Masters at the Whanganui School of Design, my supervisor Professor Hazel Gamec encouraged me to meet with Bob, and enrol in a PhD. Hazel's advice had always resulted in positive outcomes, so in November 2007 I headed over to Palmerston to *Te Pūtahi-a-Toi*, Massey University's School of Māori Studies.

Bob was Professor Robert Jahnke, the Head of the School and Coordinator of the Māori Visual Arts Programme, to whom I am indebted. Throughout my time at Māori studies Professor Jahnke's guidance and knowledge has been inspiring. As the key supervisor of my research, his input has also been invaluable.

Special thanks must be given to Dr Darryn Joseph, the co-supervisor of my research. His insightful commentary and feedback on the writing has been enriching. Joseph's knowledge of Te reo Māori was critical where Māori terminology was used, and new terms created. His light hearted and witty annotations also made the difficult latter stages of the thesis bearable.

I would thank a number of friends and teachers from Te Pūtahi-ā-Toi whose support and *kōrero* (discussions) at the Māori arts school, *wānanga* (knowledge dissemination gatherings), or over dinners, contributed to the ideas in my thesis, and also in the design exhibition. Two teachers in particular, Rachael Rākena and Israel Birch, provided me with much advice over the course of my studies. Reweti Arapere, your quiet reflections and insightful responses to my ideas helped me to better understand my research from a Māori worldview, enabling me to make better decisions within the research and in the design projects.

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Much of the research in this thesis is based on carvings found within New Zealand and overseas collections. I would like to pay tribute to the many carvers, and the incredible artistic legacy they have left, not only for Māori but for all New Zealanders and the world. The development of Māori design within this thesis could not have been achieved without the artistic platform that you have laid.

I dedicate this thesis to my parents, Beverley and Geoffrey Witehira.

Contents

Part 1: Toi Runga

Chapter 1 The Syntax and Grammar of Māori Design	1
Chapter 2 <i>Tirohanga ki Mua: A History of studies into Māori art</i>	7
From the late Eighteenth century to the mid-1980s.....	7
Into the 21st Century: A Survey of Studies into Māori Art from 1984 to the Present:	11
Conclusion.....	17
Chapter 3 Three Key Studies of Carved <i>Pare</i>.....	19
Gilbert Archey's <i>Pare</i> Analysis	19
Archey's <i>Pare</i> Groupings	20
The Stylistic Evolution of <i>Pare</i>	29
Conclusion	31
Michael Jackson's Aspects of Symbolism and Composition in Māori Art.....	32
Jackson's Structural-Anthropology	33
A working definition of <i>Pare</i> Types and Styles	35
The significance of the grouping of three elements in Māori art	39
Jackson's principles of <i>pare</i> composition.....	40
The role and function of relief in <i>pare</i>	43
Kinesic, Chromatic and Sexual Symbolism.....	45
Conclusion	50
David Simmons (2001) <i>The Carved Pare: A Mirror of the Māori Universe</i>	51
Questionable Sources: Christianity, Te Riria and The Ahupiri Council of Elders	52
Major and minor themes in <i>pare</i> design	53
Simmons' categorisation of <i>pare</i> types:	58
<i>Pare</i> anomalies: Important pieces of the puzzle.....	63
Figure composition, relief and symbolism in <i>pare</i> design	68
Conclusion	71
Chapter 4 The Linear Pare Analyses.....	72
Design Theory and Terminology.....	73
The Elements and Principles of Design.....	74
The Six Elements of Gestalt Theory.....	76
The Law of Proximity	76
The Law of Similarity	77

The Law of Closure	78
The Law of Symmetry.....	79
The Law of Continuation	79
Figure Ground Relationships	80
The Linear Diagrammatical Pare Analysis.....	82
<i>Pare Analysis 1</i>	83
<i>Pare Analysis 2</i>	95
<i>Pare Analysis 3</i>	106
<i>Pare Analysis 4</i>	115
<i>Pare Analysis 5</i>	123
<i>Pare Analysis 6</i>	131

Part 2: Toi Raro

Chapter 5 Review of Māori design projects.....	137
Ko Aotearoa Tēnei! This is New Zealand	138
Te Ao Tūroa (Māui-tikitiki-a-Taranga).....	141
Seventeen Twenty Eight (Captain James Cook)	145
Early Nineteenth Century (Raharuhi Rukupo).....	149
Eighteen Forty Seven (Kate Sheppard)	153
Eighteen Seventy Two (Michael Joseph Savage)	156
Eighteen Seventy Four (Sir Apirana Ngata)	159
Eighteen Ninety Five (Dame Whina Cooper)	163
Nineteen Nineteen (Sir Edmund Hillary)	166
Nineteen Forty Two (David Lange)	169
Nineteen Forty Eight (William James Te Wehi Taitoko)	171
Nineteen Fifty (Helen Clark)	174
Māori Alphabet Block Set	177
The Māori alphabet blocks, a collaborative project with American company <i>Uncle Goose</i> , were officially released in October 2012.....	182
Whakarare – Māori Typeface Project	183
Chapter 6 Conclusion	190

Part 3: Te Hononga Toi Māori

Appendix The Elements and Principles of Māori design	193
The Elements of Māori design.....	195
The Elements of Māori design: <i>Te Tinana</i> (the human body)	196
The Elements of Māori design: <i>Te Manaia</i> (the profile figure)	197
The Elements of Māori design: <i>Te Takarangi</i> (the spiral)	198
The Elements of Māori design: <i>Te Tauira</i> (pattern)	198
The Elements of Māori design: <i>Te Ata</i> (light) and <i>Te Atakau</i> (shadow)	198
The Principles of Māori design.....	199
The principle of <i>tātai rahinga</i> (arrangement by scale).	199
The principle of <i>tātai mokowā</i> (spatial interconnectedness).....	200
The principle of <i>tātai hikuwaru</i> (disrupted symmetry).....	200
The principle of <i>tātai hangarite</i> (arrange symmetrically)	201
The principle of <i>tātai whakapapa</i> (proximal <i>tiki</i> arrangement).....	201
The principle of <i>mana wahine</i> (the female element).....	202
The principle of <i>tātai manawa</i> (heart pulse)	203
Patterns and Spirals in Māori carving	204
Paama-Pengelly's Māori Design Conventions.....	212
Glossary	214
Bibliography	218

List of tables

<i>Table 1. Simmons' minor themes in pare</i>	55
<i>Table 2. Simmons additional themes in pare</i>	57
<i>Table 3. Simmons' single figure scheme</i>	60
<i>Table 4. Simmons' two-figure scheme</i>	61
<i>Table 5. Simmons' three-figure pare scheme</i>	62
<i>Table 6. Single figure anomalies from Simmons' study</i>	63
<i>Table 7. Single figure anomalies continued</i>	64
<i>Table 8. Three-figure pare anomalies</i>	65
<i>Table 9: Three-figure pare anomalies continued</i>	67
<i>Table 10. design and gestalt terminology</i>	81
<i>Table 12. Notching and ridged lines in Māori carving</i>	205
<i>Table 13. Surface and perforated patterns</i>	206
<i>Table 14. Common spiral forms in carving</i>	208
<i>Table 15. Key design conventions, Paama-Pengelly (2010)</i>	212

List of figures

Figure 1. Archey's Simple Figure Sequence; Auckland Museum (Ethnology number: 202), width 82cm.	21
Figure 2. Stylized Tiki and Manaia Designs from Archey's pare grouping: Text Fig. 2. Auckland Museum (ethnology number: 9758) width 75 cm; Text Fig. 3. Auckland Museum (ethnology number: 18681); Thornton's Bay pare, width 76.2 cm; Text Fig 4, Dominion Museum Photo.	22
Figure 3. Design Grouping of Tiki: Text fig. 6. Presented to the British Museum in 1854 by Sir George Grey. 54. 12-29. 89. 98 x 76 cm. Text Fig. 7. Liverpool Museum, Ascension number R1 26-16/30, width 81.2cm.....	23
Figure 4. Pare, Text Figure 8, unearthed at Patetonga, Hauraki Plains, 1919, Auckland Museum (ethnology number: 6189) 233.8 x 76.2 cm; Pare with spiral rhythm, Text Fig. 9, pare, Auckland Museum (Ethnology number 184), 127cm width.	24
Figure 5. Tauihi examples from Archey (1960).	25
Figure 6. Taranaki Design: Text fig. 10, Paepae, Canterbury Museum (E141.783); Text fig. 10.a, paepae, Taranaki Museum (A77.338) 1730 x 500mm.	26
Figure 7. Taranaki Pare, Waitara (Archey, plate 43A); Auckland Museum (33737). 550 x 120 mm.	26
Figure 8. Taranaki Pare, Oruarangi (Archey, plate 43B); Auckland Museum (33309), width 690mm.....	26
Figure 9. Taranaki pare [paepae]. Discovered at Waitara (Archey, plate 43C), Te Papa Tongarewa Museum (M.E 4657), 1500 x 280mm.	27
Figure 10. Sui Generis – Archey Text Fig 11: Pare, The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Canada. 104 x 25cm.....	27
Figure 11. Sui Generis Archey Text Fig 12. Kaitaia pare, Auckland Museum (6314).	28
Figure 12. Archey's double spiral scheme (Archey, 1955, fig.14).....	30
Figure 13: Pare Whakapapa (Genealogy).....	35
Figure 14. Jackson's Pare classification: A. (i) Full figure; takarangi spirals on either side; manaia at either end of the pare (Linear isolation based on Jackson's photographic example).....	36
Figure 15. Jackson's Pare classification: Two pare examples of pare type A. (ii) Full figure; interlocking manaia forms on either side; manaia at either end. (Linear isolation based on Jackson's photographic example).....	36
Figure 16. Jackson's Pare classification: A. (iii) The Kaitaia lintel. (Linear isolation based on Jackson's photographic example).....	37
Figure 17. Jackson's Pare classification: B (i) Two full figures separated by a single large takarangi spiral; two half-size takarangi spirals on top of each other at either end of the pare, (Linear isolation based on Jackson's photographic example).....	37
Figure 18. Jackson's Pare classification: B (ii) Two full figures separated by a two adjoining takarangi spiral; two half-size takarangi spirals on top of each other at either end of the pare (Linear isolation based on Jackson's photographic example).	37
Figure 19. Jackson's Pare classification: C (a) Three full figures, arms upraised with fingers usually close to the ears, separated by takarangi spirals; with two half-size takarangi spirals on top of each other at either end of the pare (Linear isolation based on Jackson photographic example).....	37
Figure 20. Jackson's Pare classification: C (ii) Same as C (a) except that the takarangi spirals between the central and adjacent figures become two small takarangi spirals in each case, one on top of the other (Auckland Museum).....	38
Figure 21. Jackson's Pare classification: C (iii) Three full figures, arms upraised with fingers usually close to the ears, separated by takarangi spirals; no spirals at the ends of the pare (Peabody Museum, D1343).....	38
Figure 22. Jackson's Pare classification: C. (b) Three full figures as in C (a) separated by interlocking manaia forms or mata-kupenga designs; manaia at each end of the pare (Linear isolation based on Jackson's example).....	38
Figure 23. Jackson's Pare classification: C. (c) Two manaia forms at left-hand end of the pare, followed by three sineuwy semi-manaia forms (Taranaki type) (Linear isolation based on Jackson's photographic example). Today this is considered to be a paepae pataka.	39
Figure 24. Jackson's principle of symmetry (Bi-lateral).....	40
Figure 25. Jackson's principle of transposed profiles.	40
Figure 26. Jackson's principle of alternating rhythm – Spiral.	41
Figure 27. Jackson's principle of fission and fusion.	42
Figure 28. Isolation of smaller interstitial figures in East Coast pare.	43
Figure 29. Jackson's levels of relief demonstrated.	44
Figure 30. Merging of elements across pare (Liverpool Museum, Accession no: RI 26.16).	45
Figure 31: Central Figures with hands placed on the rib cage.....	46
Figure 32. Central Figures with hands in varied positions.	46
Figure 33. arrangement of hands of central pare figures.	47
Figure 34. Pare with interstitial manaia facing inwards, mouths to shoulders of central tiki.	59
Figure 35. Pare with interstitial manaia outwards, mouths to shoulders of central tiki.	59
Figure 36: Pare anomaly 2.4 with abstraction.....	66
Figure 37. Pare anomaly 2.4 - terminal figures in continuum.....	66
Figure 38. Pare from Tawhitinui (carved late 1880s) and Huriwhenua (carved late 1870s)	68
Figure 39. Simmons' levels of relief in two- and three-figure pare.	70

Figure 40. Example of the law of proximity	76
Figure 41. The law of similarity (brightness, shape, spatial orientation).....	77
Figure 42. The law of similarity.....	77
Figure 43. The law of closure	78
Figure 44. The law of symmetry	79
Figure 45. The law of continuation.....	80
Figure 46. Figure-ground differentiation.....	80
Figure 47. Figure ground differentiation continued.....	81
Figure 48. Pare Auckland Museum Ethnology number (202), width 82cm.....	83
Figure 49. Interstitial tiki and manaia isolated.....	83
Figure 50. Pare from Porourangi (Te Ara New Zealand Encyclopaedia: Ngāti Porou Story, 2012).....	84
Figure 51. Figure 51: left, Te Hauke pare (Photo, Auckland Museum); right, Liverpool pare (Merryside, Accession no: RI 26.16).....	84
Figure 52. Simplification of elements within the pare.....	85
Figure 53. Law of continuation expressed through contours of bodies and limbs.....	86
Figure 54. Detail of tiki with downward ure design. Left, pare (Auckland Museum, 202). Right, Pukehina pātaka (Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa).....	87
Figure 55. Detail of Te Oha pātaka. Illustrates central tiki and manaia composition with manaia biting at the ear.	87
Figure 56. a. Manaia head detail. Pare Auckland museum (ethnology number 164). Figure 56.b Pare Manaia head detail. Pare. British Museum, Oc.1854,1229.89. Figure 56.c. Manaia head detail. Liverpool Museum (Merryside, Accession no: RI 26.16).....	88
Figure 57. Two images demonstrating currents of movement with the pare.....	89
Figure 58. Visual devices used to draw attention to the central tiki.....	90
Figure 59. Figure-ground relationships and principle of tātai mokowā (spatial interconnectedness).....	91
Figure 60. the principle of tātai hikuwaru (disrupted symmetry).....	92
Figure 61. Pare Auckland Museum (Ethnology number: 9758).....	95
Figure 62. Main design elements and areas of interest isolated.....	95
Figure 63. Pare. Te Hauke pare. Photograph within Wellington Museum.....	96
Figure 64. Detail of manaia form on Te Toki-a-Tapiri (Auckland Museum).....	97
Figure 65. Detail of manaia head on body of interstitial manaia (Peabody Museum, accession no: E5501).....	97
Figure 66. Early Ngāti Porou poupou with figures between legs of large central tiki.....	98
Figure 67. Detail of central tiki heads from single figure pare.....	99
Figure 68. Simplification of figure-ground relationships.....	100
Figure 69. Detail of terminal manaia with hands wrapped through upper frame element.....	100
Figure 70. Detail examples of interlocking mouths of terminal manaia with frame manaia.....	101
Figure 71. The manawa line within the pare.....	102
Figure 72. Distribution of ponahi and piko-o-rauru.....	103
Figure 73. Ngā Ponahi o Te Tairāwhiti pattern.....	103
Figure 74. Pare. Detail of disrupted symmetry of pattern.....	104
Figure 75. Pare. Kokiri whare. Photograph within Wellington Museum.....	106
Figure 76. Pare. National Library of New Zealand (Ref: 1/1-019372-G).....	106
Figure 77. Pare. Detail from photo of Kokiri revealing pare. National Library of New Zealand (Ref: 1/1-019372-G).....	107
Figure 78. Sectional components of Kokiri pare isolated.....	107
Figure 79a. Maihi pātaka detail. Te Tairuku Potaka (Auckland Museum, 22064.3). 79b. Maihi pātaka detail. Te Oha pātaka. Rotorua Museum.....	108
Figure 80. Subsidiary tiki and basal element isolated.....	108
Figure 81. The principle of tātai manawa isolated within the pare.....	111
Figure 82. Simplification of figure-ground relationships.....	112
Figure 83. tātai hikuwaru design principle (disrupted symmetry).....	112
Figure 84. Pare detail, the principle of tātai hikuwaru (disrupted symmetry) in pattern on arms of central tiki.....	112
Figure 85. Pare. Auckland Museum (18681). From Simmons, p.75, 2001.....	115
Figure 86. Thornton Bay pare simplified.....	115
Figure 87. Pare detail. Examples of Tairāwhiti design convention whereby the terminal manaia heads rest atop the central basal element.....	116
Figure 88. Pare detail. Examples of Hauraki convention with inward facing manaia head biting the central basal element.....	116
Figure 89. Hauraki pare comparison. Newman pare top, Thornton bay pare centre and Patetonga pare bottom. In these examples the area rendered black indicates the absence of pattern.....	118
Figure 90. The principle of tātai manawa isolated within the Thornton Bay pare.....	120
Figure 91. Thornton Bay pare. Distribution of ponahi spirals.....	121

Figure 92. Pare. British Museum (Oc.1854,1229.89).....	123
Figure 93. Frame merged manaia and the principle of tataitanga (spatial interconnectedness).....	123
Figure 94. Left images, detail of poupou figure from Te Tairuku Potaka pātaka. Right images, detail of manaia form.	125
Figure 95. Top pare, Penn Museum (18129). Second from top, Liverpool Museum (R1 26-16/30). Third from, pare from Waiapu Valley, now in Auckland Museum (164). Bottom, photo of pare from Horniman Museum, London (8.363).	127
Figure 96. Principle of tātai manawa.	128
Figure 97. Principle of tātai hikuwaru (disrupted symmetry).	129
Figure 98. Pare. Liverpool Museum (Merryside, RI 26.16).	131
Figure 99. Unique elements of Liverpool pare isolated.	132
Figure 100. Principle of tātai mokowā (spatial connectedness) and the principle of tātai whakapapa.	132
Figure 101. Distribution of piko-o-rauru spirals isolated.	133
Figure 102. Principle of tātai manawa.	135
Figure 103. Ko Aotearoa Tēnei! This is New Zealand. Composition demonstrating stacked reversed poutūārongo structure. The base figure of the poutūārongo is Māui. At the top of the poutūārongo is Helen Clark.	140
Figure 104. Detail of Te Ao Tūroa. Jawbone motif, mokomoko motif, lizard spiral, and pīwaiwaka motif.	141
Figure 105. Te Ao Tūroa. Portrait of Māui Tikitiki-a-Taranga.....	144
Figure 106. Detail of Seventeen Twenty Eight. Compass and rope spiral, Endeavour ship motif, and rose motif.....	145
Figure 107. Seventeen Twenty Eight. Portrait of Captain James Cook.....	148
Figure 108. Detail of toki (adze). Left image, toki from carved poupou in Te Hau ki Tūranga which supposedly represents Raharuhi Rukupo. Right image, toki held by Rukupo figure in Early nineteenth Century.	149
Figure 109. Early Nineteenth Century. Portrait of Raharuhi Rukupo.	152
Figure 110. Detail of motif and pattern from Eighteen Forty Seven. From left to right, Woman's Christian Temperance Union ribbon, moko kauae pattern, crucifix pattern, The National Council of Women of New Zealand (NCWNZ) emblem.	153
Figure 111. Eighteen Forty Seven. Portrait of Kate Sheppard.....	155
Figure 112. Detail of motif and pattern from Eighteen Seventy Two. From left to right, Ratana pendant, eucalyptus leaves pattern, penis rendered through negative space, original sketch showing outline of Savage's glasses.	156
Figure 113. Eighteen Seventy Two. Portrait of Michael Joseph Savage.....	158
Figure 114. Detail of motif and pattern from Eighteen Seventy Four. From left to right, taratara-a-kae spiral, taringa aute (ear lug), pakake (whale) motif and spiral, poutama kōwhaiwhai pattern.	159
Figure 115. Eighteen Seventy Two. Portrait of Sir Apirana Ngata.	162
Figure 116. Image demonstrating transposition of design element from Kaitaia carving into new takarangi spiral.....	163
Figure 117. Eighteen Ninety Five. Portrait of Dame Whina Cooper.	165
Figure 118. Details from Nineteen Nineteen. From left to right, ice-pick, icicle, poutama cloud, bee and honeycomb.	166
Figure 119. Nineteen Nineteen. Portrait of Sir Edmund Hillary.	168
Figure 120. Nineteen Forty Two. Portrait of David Lange.....	170
Figure 121. From left to right, tekoteko from King Koroki's whare, head of Billy T as seen in Nineteen Forty Two, uenuku rainbow motif, head pattern design that is associated with Waikato and Hauraki carving.....	171
Figure 122. Nineteen Forty Eight. Portrait of William James Te Wehi Taitoko (Billy T James).....	173
Figure 123. Details from Nineteen Fifty. From left to right, huia feather, taratara-a-kae spiral, moko kauae, vagina.	174
Figure 124. Artist Card with supporting information.....	181
Figure 125. Final product shots of Māori alphabet block set.....	182
Figure 126. Poster of Joseph Churchward's, Churchward Māori, typeface. Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa.	183
Figure 127. Parihaka typeface designed by Aaron McKirdy and Neil Partington in 2000.....	184
Figure 128. Poutokomanawa in front of Heretaunga at Taradale Photo taken in by William Williams in 1889. Ref: 1/1-025857-G. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand.....	186
Figure 129. Examples of Whakarare typeface in use (2012).....	189