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# **Te Maori Past and Present: Stories of Te Maori**

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## Abstract

Te Maori has been acknowledged as an exhibition of great power, an event that had tremendous impact on New Zealand museums, Maori, and New Zealand in general. It generated a lot of comment, both at the time and in subsequent years. This thesis examines the story of Te Maori. It begins with the telling of the story of the event - the dawn opening ceremonies, their impact on the popular imagination of the American and New Zealand public, and the impact of the taonga themselves. The thesis then argues that, while this account is 'Te Maori', Te Maori is also wider than those events. Te Maori is also the stories and accounts and attempts at analysis that accompanied and followed those events. In that vein, those stories are examined - the story of Te Maori, the story of the stories. The articles discussed are more than just accounts of an exhibition, they are also part of that exhibition - part of the tradition and momentum generated. The thesis then moves on to document the story of someone who was involved with the Te Maori Management Committee, Mina McKenzie. This story shows that the process through which things were done, and the energy so generated, were essential to the success of the exhibition. Finally, a more 'anthropological' story is offered, which situates the issues raised by the various accounts within anthropology. By presenting many different perspectives on the one event, it is suggested that a more accurate, more complete telling of Te Maori is rendered.

## Acknowledgements

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## Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
Table of Contents	iv
List of Figures	v
<b>Prologue: The Story of Te Maori</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Chapter One: The Story of the Stories</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Chapter Two: The Story of a Key Participant - Mina McKenzie</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>Chapter Three: The Anthropological Story</b>	<b>63</b>
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>80</b>
Glossary	84
References	87

## List of Figures

*following page*

<b>Figure 1.</b>	Guests outside the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.	1
<b>Figure 2.</b>	The Maori delegation outside the Metropolitan Museum.	1
<b>Figure 3.</b>	Inside the Te Maori exhibition hall, New York.	3
<b>Figure 4.</b>	Te Maori on display in New York.	3
<b>Figure 5.</b>	Tamati Wharehuia Roberts speaking at St. Louis.	3
<b>Figure 6.</b>	The Takitimu cultural group in San Francisco.	5
<b>Figure 7.</b>	The two burial chests.	6
<b>Figure 8.</b>	Uenuku.	6
<b>Figure 9.</b>	Tutanekai, gateway of Pukeroa Pa.	6
<b>Figure 10.</b>	Pukaki.	6
<b>Figure 11.</b>	Canoe bow cover, haumi.	48
<b>Figure 12.</b>	Stockade post top, pou.	48
<b>Figure 13.</b>	Pendant, hei pounamu	58

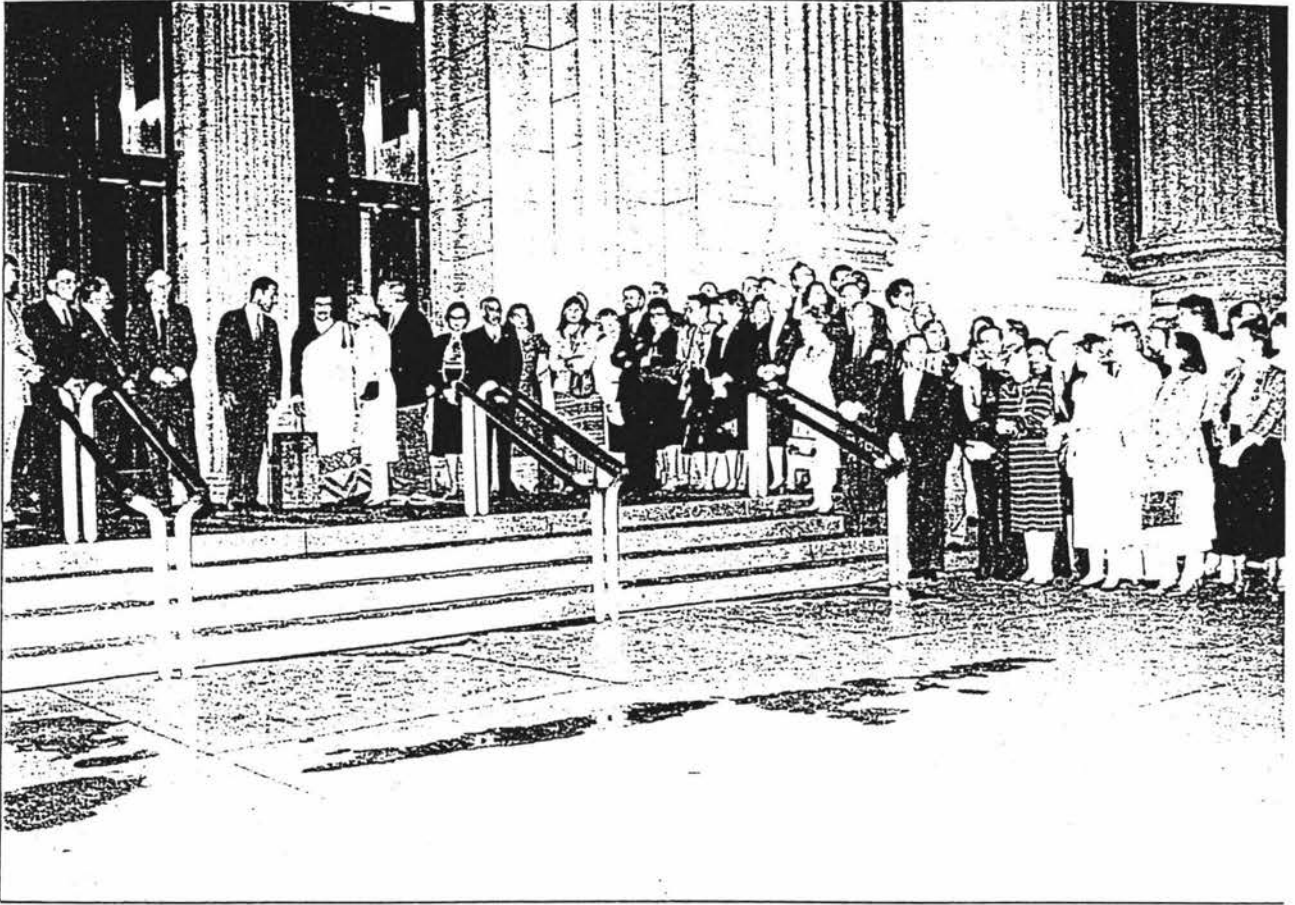
<b>Figure 14.</b>	Club, kotiaki paraoa.	58
<b>Figure 15.</b>	Club, patu paraoa.	58
<b>Figure 16.</b>	Pendant, hei matau.	59
<b>Figure 17.</b>	Club, wahaika.	59
<b>Figure 18.</b>	Weapon, tewhatewha.	59

## Prologue: The Story of Te Maori

Imagine a cold, dark morning, before dawn. It is the 10th of September 1984, New York, the beginning of autumn. Many people are standing on either side of the steps leading up to the imposing Metropolitan Museum of Art. Huge columns loom above the group. At 6:32 am, the official time of dawn, an eerie, discordant cry comes from further down the street where the Maori delegation are waiting to begin the ceremony. "Haere ma-a-i-i": the call rises to a crescendo then fades away. The Maori group, led by several elders wearing feather cloaks over business clothes, advances slowly to the steps of the museum. "Haere mai!" comes the short, powerful response to the cry from the street. Two warriors, one in a short grass skirt and the other wearing a loin cloth, dance in front and to the sides of the people, leading and containing the group, warding off the spirits, clearing a path for the elders. They both have pendants around their necks and are carrying patu and taiaha. Both have their faces painted in full moko, the lines and spirals designed to make them appear fierce and war-like. They gesture with spear and club, their eyes rolling and tongues darting. A continuous rumble of chant can be heard under the piercing karanga, the call of welcome.

One elder, a tall, striking, white haired man - Sonny Waru - takes up the chant as the party moves slowly up the steps, past the silent and watchful American guests. About two hundred people are gathered: museum staff, foreign dignitaries, corporate officials, scholars, representatives from the New Zealand consulate, the American Federation of Arts, and the press. Cameras flash and click constantly. The guests appear tense and excited, unsure of their role in the ceremony and hoping not to breach protocol in any way.

As the Maori group advances into the museum, the guests turn and follow. They walk through the hallways, the warriors flitting and darting ahead - like fantails. Their dramatic gestures and expressions create a fiercesome presence. The Maori pay their respects to the ancestors of other cultures and times as they go past, on



**Figure 1.** New York - Guests and officials wait on the steps of the Metropolitan Museum of Art for the beginning of the opening ceremony (Photo: Mobil. In Mead 1986b:12).



**Figure 2.** New York - The Maori delegation advance up the stairs to the Metropolitan Museum, led by Sonny Waru (Photo: Mobil. In Mead 1986b:14).

their way to the entrance of the Te Maori exhibition hall. At every step they are flanked by camera crews and photographers.

The Maori and their guests progress around the exhibit, looking and touching and speaking to the taonga. Green branches are laid at the feet of the objects. For many, it is the first time they have seen objects normally kept in museums in New Zealand - places not often frequented by Maori. The atmosphere is one of pride and overwhelming emotion. The karanga has increased in volume and intensity; a woman's voice dominates, rising and falling with the emotion of the moment.

A marae, a place of meeting where important discussions occur, has been created in front of the Pukeroa gateway. The people gather here for the exchange of speeches. The American dignitaries speak of their great privilege, the Maori elders speak of their great pride. The speeches bounce back and forth, one side to the other, interspersed with songs and karakia. At one point a haka is performed by the men, expressing their courage, their emotion, their readiness for the challenge Te Maori brings to Maoridom. The people are sitting amongst the other exhibits, which are displayed against plain white backgrounds. The room is light and airy, and the atmosphere is one of welcoming.

At the end of the formalities, there is silence. The room is still. No one quite knows how to break the solemn mood after the powerful ceremony. The guests are then asked to move through to a formal breakfast: a ceremony or ritual must have its secular counterpart. During the breakfast, people begin to relax. There is laughter and tears.

\* \* \* \* \*

The description by Kuru Waaka of the New York opening brings us inside the emotions and experiences of the participants in a way that viewing the ceremony on videotape never could. His story is reproduced below:

The ceremony in New York commenced at 6:15 am with our large delegation assembled about 100 yards from the front steps of the Metropolitan Museum. The karanga from the women was the signal to move along the pavement accompanied by a karakia from Henare Tuwhangai which lasted to the foot of the steps where it was taken up by Sonny Waru. At the top of the steps Jimmy Henare carried on with the karakia to the foot of a flight of stairs to the large double doors opening into the Exhibition area. The air of mild curiosity at the commencement of the walk had now built up to a pitch of high expectation, and the impact of the sight of the magnificent waharoa of (Tiki [= Tutanekai, gateway of Pukeroa Pa]) in the centre of the hall surrounded by works of similar vintage and magnificence not least of which was Pukaki was enough to make one hold one's breath for a moment of sheer wonder. The ultimate exhalation was one of pure relief in the immediate realization that Te Maori was a resounding success. As we circled the hall the chanting was now taken over by Ruka Broughton, the joy and exhilaration of being surrounded by the incomparable works of one's ancestors all assembled in the one confined space complementing each other in their artistry was almost impossible to describe. When we finally came to a halt one could only speak in whispers or in muted tones until at last, familiarity brought relaxation. One could not expect a similar reaction in the future because from then on one knew what to expect but the similarity of the feeling of wonder in St. Louis, Auckland and in Wellington still brought a sense of pride and joy in being possessed of a heritage unlike anything else in the world.

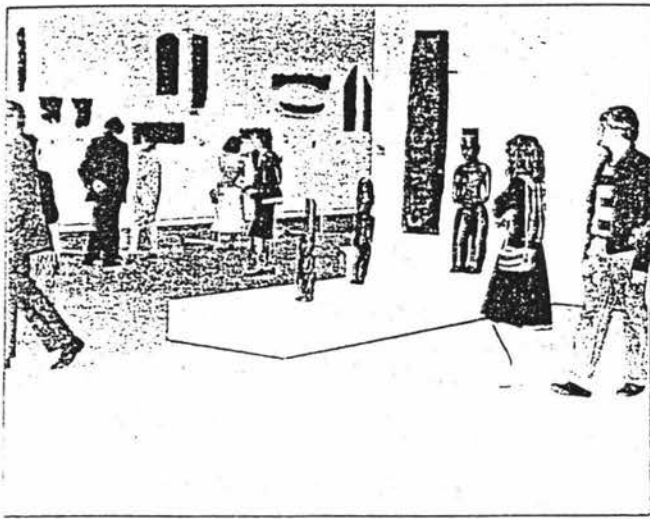
(Kuru-o-te-Marama Waaka, personal communication to Paora Tapsell, 21 August 1995, cited in Tapsell 1996:31-32).

\* \* \* \* \*



**Figure 3.** New York - Inside the Te Maori exhibition hall during karakia (prayers). Peter Sharples is standing beneath the Pukeroa gateway (Photo: Mobil. In Mead 1986b:10).





**Figure 4.** New York - The exhibits and contextual material (Photos: Rodney Bicknell (left), Metropolitan Museum of Art (right). In Mead 1986b:18).



**Figure 5.** St. Louis - Tamati Wharehuia Roberts during his speech at the St. Louis Art Museum (Photo: St. Louis Art Museum. In Mead 1986b:47).

Five months later, we are in St. Louis, Missouri, before dawn on the 21st of February 1985. The taonga have finished their stay in New York, and have moved on to their next stop. It is winter. It is raining and cold. Hundreds of invited guests line the steps and the entrance foyer of the St. Louis Art Museum, waiting for the Maori party to begin the opening ritual. Just after 5 am, at dawn, the karanga begins as the elders lead the Maori delegation up the steps of the museum and into the huge entrance hall. A similar ceremonial format is being used to that in New York. The lead kaumatua is dressed in a cloak and holds a ceremonial adze, which he uses to punctuate his chant. His cries are answered by the group: "haere ma-a-i-i ... haere mai!" They are flanked by one warrior, in a cloak and loin cloth and carrying a taiaha; his presence is low-key and inconspicuous.

The Maori group leads the guests into the museum, and to each room holding the exhibition, maintaining a ritual chant as they go. The sound swells to fill the place, adding atmosphere, transforming the event into something sacred. The American guests look a little tense and uneasy. They are very silent. At the entrance to each room, rituals involving chants, water and greenery are performed to disrupt the tapu surrounding the taonga. It is thus reduced to safe levels for the duration of the exhibition. As in New York, it is the first time many of the Maori present have seen the taonga - even been in a museum. There is wonder, awe, familiarity on the faces of the Maori as they look at and speak to their taonga.

After the group has been to each of the taonga, warmed and reassured them, both Maori and Americans gather in front of the wharenui, or meeting house, where a marae space has been created by the exhibitors. During the formal speeches the Maori look relaxed, at home: they are standing about or sitting beneath the installation. In contrast to the Maori group, the Americans appear unsure of what is going on, and sit making little movement.

First to speak is James Burke, the director of the St. Louis Art Museum. It is his role to announce the other speakers. Both Maori and American stand to address the people present; they speak of welcome, of gratitude, of the significance of the

event. The past is evoked, and united with the present. The key Maori speaker, Tamati Wharehuia Roberts, attempts to convey to the American audience the importance of the taonga; that they are still living; that they have a powerful role to play in the contemporary world as well as recalling the past.

Interspersed with the speeches are waiata, karakia and haka. The rhythm and force of the haka create a powerful atmosphere in the room - the audience cannot help but be moved by the experience. The gestures - eyes rolling, tongues darting, feet stamping - issue a challenge to all present: honour the taonga.

A distinct difference can be noticed between the Pakeha and Maori speakers: the Pakeha speak quietly and are more reserved than the Maori, who project well and have a rhythmic, paced quality to their address. At the end of the speeches, the people hongi one another, then all move through to a formal breakfast. As the elders leave the exhibits behind, they sprinkle themselves with water to lift the tapu gained by being in the presence of the taonga.

At the breakfast gifts are exchanged, action songs are performed, and everyone begins to relax back into the everyday world. The sense of fun, the enjoyment of the occasion comes through. An emotional, euphoric atmosphere takes over.

The dawn ceremonies demonstrate to all present the power of Maori culture. The excitement, dignity and solemnity created by the rituals give a social dimension to the taonga, and emphasise that the taonga are part of a living, dynamic society. All present, Maori and American, are greatly moved by the experience.

\* \* \* \* \*

Everywhere the taonga went, in America and in New Zealand, they were accompanied by opening and closing ceremonies, associated cultural events, and in America by lectures on Maori art and society, given by Sidney Mead, the co-curator of Te Maori. These events were ways through which Maori could assert control over the shape the exhibition took, and could lay claim to their taonga.



**Figure 6.** San Francisco - Te Kapa Haka o Takitimu, the Takitimu cultural group outside the MH de Young Museum (Photo: New Zealand Consulate, San Francisco. In Mead 1986b:61).

Instead of thinking the exhibition pieces were owned by the museums from which they came, Maori wanted the world to know that moral and spiritual ownership belonged to the taonga's Maori descendants.

The dawn ceremonies were not the only aspect of Te Maori to have an emotional impact on those present. Audiences found the taonga themselves deeply moving. The 174 taonga of the exhibition fall into several major categories. There are pendants, clubs: patu and taiaha, pieces from canoes, fishhooks and sinkers, adzes: both practical and ceremonial, combs, pataka panels, flutes, house panels, post or gable figures. They are made from several different media: wood, stone, pounamu, or bone. All are decorated by carving - the exhibition as a whole represents examples of Maori sculpture and carving; other areas of Maori material culture - mostly those created by women, weaving for example - are not represented. An arbitrary cut-off date of 1860 was set when the taonga were selected, so the exhibition taonga have nothing to say about contemporary Maori art.

For me, the most visually powerful, looking through a medium of the photograph, are the two burial chests. They are very evocative, and look fierce and spooky. Designed to contain the bones of chiefs, and stand in burial caves to scare away intruders, their grimacing mouths and crossed hands have a strong impact.

Of course, the most famous of the pieces are Uenuku (war god), Tutanekai (gateway from Pukeroa Pa), and Pukaki (a gateway figure). They were replicated on the posters and flyers used to advertise the exhibition. Uenuku (or Uenukutuwhatu, Uenuku who stands as lord), is a very stark, very elegant carving. The piece is a tall post - two and a half metres - that rises to a loop, with four fingers of wood reaching up from the top of the carving. Uenuku is the tribal and war god of the Waikato iwi, and was asked at times to inhabit the post so the elders could communicate with him. At other times, Uenuku can appear as a rainbow, or inhabit other carvings. The piece has always had incredible spiritual significance for the Waikato people - their ariki, the Maori Queen, Te





**Figure 7.** St. Louis - The two burial chests on display  
(Photo: St. Louis Art Museum. In Mead 1986b:52).



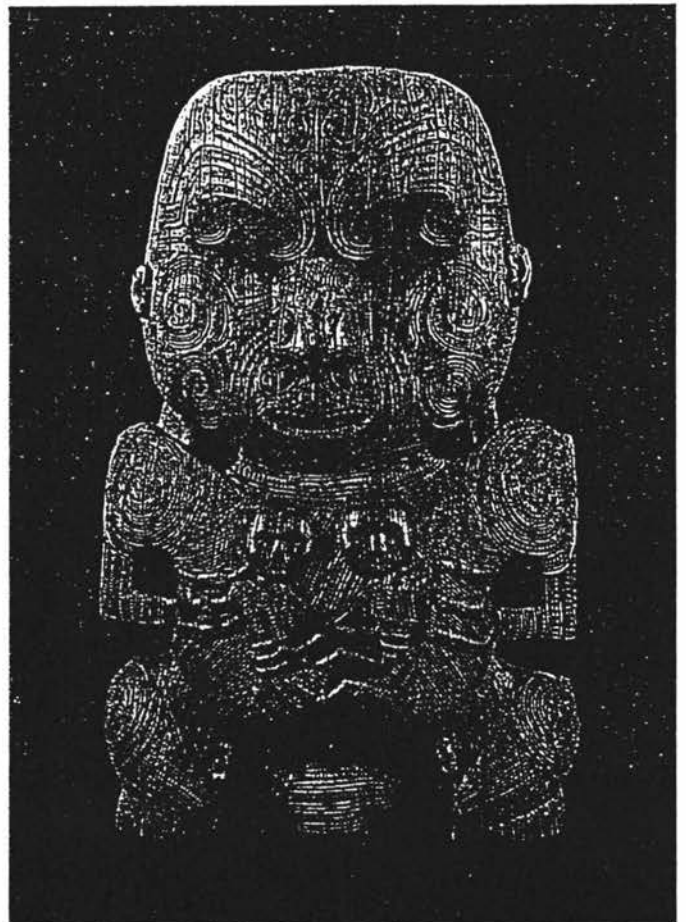
**Figure 8.** War god,  
Uenukutuwhatu, from  
Lake Ngaroto,  
Waikato. Catalogue  
Number 28 (Photo:  
Athol McCredie. In Mead  
1984:183).



**Figure 9.** Gateway  
of Pukeroa Pa,  
Tutanekai, from  
Rotorua. Catalogue  
Number 64 (Photo:  
Athol McCredie. In Mead  
1984:195).



**Figure 10.** Gateway  
figure, Pukaki, from  
Lake Rotorua.  
Catalogue Number 66  
(Photo: Athol McCredie. In  
Mead 1984:196).

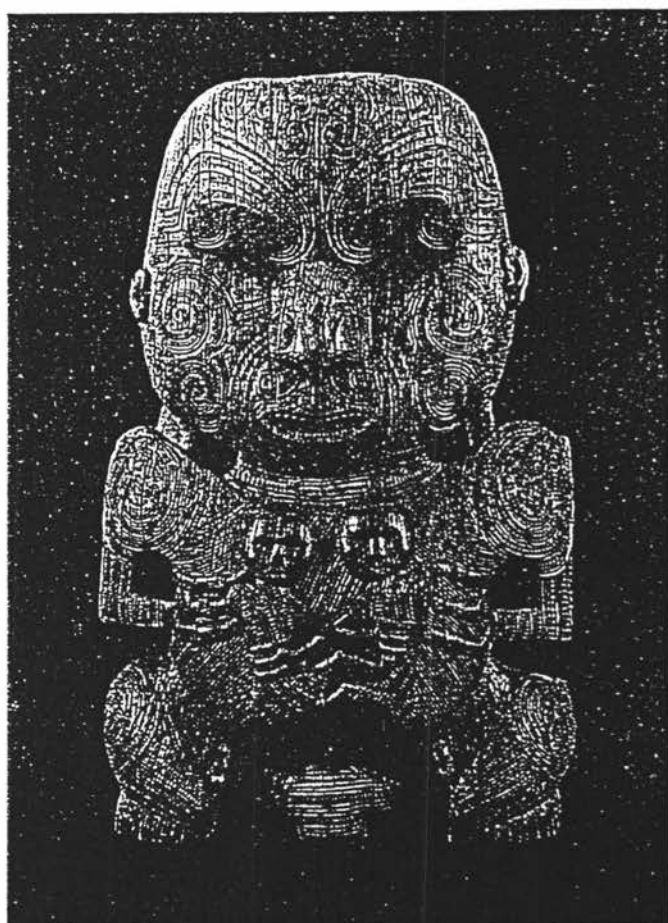




**Figure 9.** Gateway of Pukeroa Pa, Tutanekai, from Rotorua. Catalogue Number 64 (Photo: Athol McCredie. In Mead 1984:195).



**Figure 10.** Gateway figure, Pukaki, from Lake Rotorua. Catalogue Number 66 (Photo: Athol McCredie. In Mead 1984:196).





Atairangikahu insisted Uenuku lead the exhibition to America, as it was he who led the Maori people to Aotearoa.

The piece named Tutanekai is the gateway figure from a pa on the shores of Lake Rotorua. Tutanekai stands so that his legs embrace the gate. His body and face are heavily tattooed, his body painted red, green and white, his face red, black and white. He wears a tiki and carries a patu. His eyes stare out, watching all those who approach. It is he who stood over the formal speeches at the New York opening.

The third of the trio who became the icons of Te Maori, is Pukaki. He once stood atop the gateway of another pa on Lake Rotorua, but the lower part of the gateway has been lost. Though about two metres tall, Pukaki looks squat and compact. His face and body are decorated with spiral tattoos, the whole of him a rich red-brown colour. He is clutching two children to his chest; the story goes that this carving represents a chief named Pukaki, his wife and two children.

\* \* \* \* \*

This then was Te Maori - a collection of taonga taken from New Zealand museums to America in 1984. After a widely acclaimed tour of both America and New Zealand, the taonga were taken back to their museums of origin, where they are held in trust for their tribal owners. During the time they were on show, the carvings had a profound emotional impact on the Maori and Pakeha who saw them. This was Te Maori - and yet it is not Te Maori. Though the exhibition has been dismantled, it still lives on through the stories that have been created around it. Te Maori is present. It still exists; it still continues.

## Introduction

“The exhibition took on a life of its own.”

- Mina McKenzie, in an interview with the author.

“Te Maori as an exhibition is finished. But what is free, is now free to move mysteriously amongst us, be powerful in what it does for us and in what it does with us. We will never be the same again.”

- His Excellency, the Governor General, Sir Paul Reeves, at the final closing ceremony for Te Maori, Auckland, 11 September 1987.

“The collections will no longer be king. The stories will.”

- Brian Rudman (1996:C2) in the *Sunday Star Times*, discussing exhibition focus for the new Museum of New Zealand in Wellington.

*Te Maori: Maori Art from New Zealand Collections* was an exhibition of Maori material culture taken specifically from museum collections within New Zealand. The idea for the exhibition came in 1973 through discussions between the American Federation of Arts, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the New Zealand Government, and New Zealand museums, in order to promote New Zealand and Maori culture internationally. Although the project was put on hold by an economic crisis in New Zealand during 1974 and 1975, in 1979 it was taken up again by the American parties, who felt the exhibition was of major importance. From this point onwards, events started moving quite quickly. The taonga were chosen by Douglas Newton, Curator of Primitive Art at the Metropolitan Museum, and in April 1981 a Management Committee was set up by the New Zealand Government to oversee the organisation of the exhibition.

Hui were held around the country to inform Maori of the proposals, and to gain their support. Towards the end of 1982, a registrar and a conservator came to New Zealand from America to prepare condition reports on each of the chosen pieces, and to arrange for their packing and travel to America. Three American venues had at this stage been organised: New York, St. Louis and San Francisco, with the provision that the taonga travel around New Zealand when they returned from overseas.

Te Maori opened in New York on 10 September 1984, with a dawn ceremony led by a Maori delegation who had travelled from New Zealand for the occasion. After five months, the taonga moved to the St. Louis Art Museum where they were again welcomed, this time by a different group of elders and cultural performers. Whilst Te Maori was in St. Louis, negotiations went ahead between the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago, the Te Maori Management Committee and the American Federation of Arts to extend the tour to include Chicago.

From St. Louis, Te Maori moved to the MH de Young Memorial Museum in San Francisco, then to Chicago, accompanied at every stage by similar opening and closing ceremonies performed by various Maori groups. Te Maori closed in Chicago on 8 June 1986. Over the sixteen months Te Maori was in the United States, 621,000 people visited the exhibition, excluding tours by school children.

Under a slightly different rubric, *Te Maori: Te Hokinga Mai* (the return home), the taonga came back to New Zealand in mid 1986. There, they toured Wellington, Dunedin, Christchurch and Auckland. Te Maori finally closed on 10 September 1987<sup>1</sup>, exactly three years after it opened in New York. Te Hokinga Mai was seen by 917,500 people, or 28% of the population of New Zealand. Following the disbanding of the exhibition, the taonga were returned to the museums from whence they came.

I have called the Prologue 'the story of Te Maori', but the above is also a story of Te Maori, describing the chronology of events surrounding the exhibition. Both

these accounts represent Te Maori, yet individually they in no way capture the fullness of experience that was (and is) the exhibition. In this thesis more stories are told: the story of what has been written about Te Maori (Chapter One), the story of someone who was involved in the Te Maori Management Committee (Chapter Two), and a story which situates in anthropology some of the themes, issues and ideas raised by Te Maori (Chapter Three).

By representing a multiplicity of accounts, a variety of stories, a 'thick description' (Geertz 1973) of an event or phenomenon, my hope is that we gain a more layered understanding of that event. When looking at Te Maori, we see that there are many different stories of what went on, from many different perspectives. While each different story is a valid and accurate version of the exhibition, separately they give only one layer of what occurred. Together, as a whole, they give a sense of the power and majesty of the event.

While this is not necessarily a new idea, it certainly is the first time it has been applied to Te Maori. Renato Rosaldo (1986), Edward Bruner (1986) and Russell Bishop (1996) are quick to caution that standard anthropological accounts, where the power of speech is taken out of the hands of the actors, have limited appeal. As Bishop argues,

"Researchers in the past have taken the stories of research participants and have submerged them within their own stories and retold these reconstituted stories in a language and culture determined by the researcher. Increasingly, indigenous people, such as the Maori people of Aotearoa/New Zealand, who have been the focus of much research, have expressed concern that power and control over research issues such as initiation, benefits, representation, legitimation and accountability have been traditionally decided by the imposition of the researcher's agenda, interests and concerns on the research process" (1996:23).

It must always be remembered that anthropological descriptions are only representations, not 'truth' (Bruner 1986). By making the people involved central to the account through telling their stories, anthropology gains 'human

significance' (Rosaldo 1986). Focusing on the stories told by participants brings a more complete, full account.

The stories of Te Maori give meaning and depth to the exhibition: they clothe it, give it context and become part of it. The stories about it are as much a part of Te Maori as the physical presence of the taonga. This is a concept which is familiar to Maori. For Maori, an object is meaningless when dislocated from its history. It is that history, the stories that are built up around it, that put it into context, and enable it to be understood. As Sidney Mead (1984, 1990) has explained, over time an object becomes clothed in talk, in *korero*. As more and more words are added, as the stories associated increase, the object gains meaning and mana. The audience needs to understand the *korero* attached to an object in order to understand it, and receive a true sense of the power emanating from it.

The exhibition Te Maori is like an object - over time it has been clothed in *korero*. Many stories have been told, and those stories have become part of Te Maori. In order to understand the exhibition, that *korero* needs to be articulated and understood. That story - the story of the discourse, the story of the stories told about the exhibition, needs to be told. It is the role of this thesis to discuss Te Maori in its wider sense: its talk, its *korero*. But, in the end, it is yet another story to be added to the other stories. I pay homage to those stories; my story relies on them.

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<sup>1</sup> Te Maori closed to the public on 10 September 1987. The official closing ceremony was on 11 September, and a final celebration was held at Ngaruawahia on 12 September.

## The Story of the Stories

*Te Maori: Maori Art from New Zealand Collections* was on show, in the United States and in New Zealand, from 10 September 1984 to 10 September 1987. Narrowly, that is the time frame of the exhibition: exactly three years in duration. *Te Maori*, however, extended much further into the past - the idea was first proposed around 1973 - and extended far into the future. Today, *Te Maori* still has currency for both museum staff and Maori, and literature either specifically on the exhibition and its implications, or literature that makes mention of the exhibition in some context, is plentiful.

There has been a lot of writing and thinking about *Te Maori* over the past ten or so years. At first, articles tended to be specifically about the exhibition, its impact and implications. Later, though, links to *Te Maori* became more and more tenuous, as authors started to be more concerned with situating their work amongst the korero of the exhibition than with discussing the exhibition itself. Authors today tend to speak the words "*Te Maori*" at the beginning of any discussion of museum practice or Maori art or Maori political activity, and they can be assured of a positive reception amongst their audience. In so doing, they have associated themselves - whether or not their work would otherwise have anything to do with the exhibition - with the *Te Maori* story. *Te Maori* has thus become a ritual, an invocation, a talismanic spell.

The talk about *Te Maori* is, in terms of time span, infinite. There is no real beginning, and certainly no end. Yet in order to conduct a discussion of this body of literature, it is necessary to choose a date at which to start. Any such date cannot help but be arbitrary, but you have to begin somewhere. The date I have chosen is 1984. This suits my purposes well, for it is the year in which the exhibition itself went public, and it is the year in which articles began to be published in great number. Information on the years before the exhibition is available, but it tends to be in the form of reminiscences included in articles written after the event, or it is archival material - letters, telegrams, proposals, and

so on - that does not so well capture the mood, the flavour, the story of the event. I have also, for this chapter, limited myself to publicly available accounts - to that written on paper or recorded on video. There was a great deal of conversation about Te Maori - many discussions and debates and tellings of stories, but this, being spoken, has vanished into thin air.

So, then, to begin in 1984. In this year, Te Maori opened, on 10 September, at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. The exhibition was covered by some of the most well-known of American publications - the *New York Times* ran articles on the run-up to the opening and the dawn ceremony (McGill 1984a, 1984b); *Time Magazine* provided an overview in its art pages (Blake 1984); and *National Geographic* contained a brief description and photo-essay authored by one of the key American organisers, Douglas Newton (1984a). These three publications provided accounts of the exhibition and its opening in New York from an American perspective. It was hailed as a 'ground-breaking exhibition' - of which the Americans were very conscious, and proud of the role they had played in bringing the 'Maori carvings' to the United States, thus opening in that country a debate over ownership of cultural heritage, and the right to control and speak for cultural property. Te Maori was called part of the 'Maori renaissance', part of a Maori political agenda of claiming recognition amongst the world at large<sup>1</sup>. This was an agenda which made some sense to Americans, in light of the politicisation of their own indigenous population, the American Indians.

These accounts also performed a useful function for the American audience of Te Maori. Beside basic descriptions of the objects (for which the articles seemed to delight in adopting the Maori terminology - *taonga*), attempts were made to explain the meaning of taonga - the meaning of Maori objects in general for Maori people - in order to facilitate the Americans' understanding and appreciation. Taonga were described as mediators between the living and the dead, between the sacred and the profane. The rarity of the pieces - their exotic nature - was emphasised. As an article in the *New York Times*, run one week before the exhibition opened, said,



many experts believe that the striking and sophisticated quality of the Maori works will surprise visitors and give them an appreciation for the native art of the remote Polynesian islands (McGill 1984a:3).

To coincide with the opening of the exhibition, a book containing the catalogue and background information on Maori history and Maori art was released (edited by Mead 1984). Under the same title as the exhibition, *Te Maori: Maori Art from New Zealand Collections*, the book was an opportunity to discuss Maori art both historically and in the present, and the meaning of taonga for Maori. Claims were also made that through Te Maori, Maori were using art to identify themselves ethnically, and to raise their mana Maori (pride).

This concept of 'taonga' is in contrast to any Western understanding of 'artefact' or 'art object'. Mead's chapter in the book, "Nga timunga me nga paringa o te mana Maori" (1984), provided a definition of taonga from a Maori perspective. This was, of course, a very different definition from that which a Pakeha author, writing with the authority of the art establishment, would have given. According to Mead, *taonga* can be glibly defined as 'treasures', 'cultural artefacts', 'property', but a true sense of the word carries far more meaning than that. Taonga have *korero* - stories which give meaning and cultural significance. They can be *taonga whakairo* - 'art', an object transformed from nature to culture. They can be *taonga tuku iho* - objects passed down, valued for their antiquity. They have a *taha wairua* - spiritual force. It is here that a sense of the difference between 'taonga' and 'artefact' can be felt. They have *whakapapa* - genealogy or history or lineage. Taonga *are* the ancestors: they are more than just a representation. They have *mana* - power, prestige; and are *tapu* - sacred, forbidden. Taonga are imbued with *ihi* - power, *wehi* - fear or awe, and *wana* - authority. The *ihi* and the *mana* of an object speak to the people who see it; they are moved to make a physical, an emotional response. What Mead does not make clear is that taonga are more than just material objects. Taonga can also be features of the landscape: a hill or river, or something less tangible: a story or a song, or people who have special knowledge or are of high standing in the community.



Taonga whakairo are the triumph of culture over nature, and a bridge between the two. "Some speak to the taonga as though they are the bridge between the living and the dead and have the power to mediate between the two worlds" (Mead 1984:23). This is not all the taonga serve to mediate. They stand between people and gods, the profane (noa) and sacred (tapu), animal and human, crudity and elegance. All this means the taonga are powerfully tapu - hence the need for the dawn ceremonies of Te Maori to welcome, reassure and warm the taonga. During each ceremony the tapu was lifted, but as Mead points out,

The ceremony of lifting the tapu...does not remove the mana and the tapu from the art. What the ceremony does is 'subjugate' and 'overcome' their danger; that is, it reduces their potency to a level that is safe for the use of society at large (1984:36).

Douglas Newton, in an article for *Archaeology* which also draws its title from the exhibition's name (1984b), offered an American, academic, museological description of Maori art. He divided Maori carving into two distinct phases: 'archaic', that period which lasted until 1500 AD in the North Island and until the 1800s in the South Island, and 'classical', from 1500 to the present day in the North Island. Newton also pointed out that carving is mostly the domain of men.

The Art Galleries and Museums Association of New Zealand (AGMANZ), devoted considerable space in one 1984 issue of its journal to comment on or around themes raised by Te Maori. The contributors' concerns were varied: one asked 'where to from here?' (Gorbey 1984), others claimed mana Maori had been added to by the exhibition (O'Regan 1984) or by museum practice in general (Walker 1984). Maui Pomare (1984) wondered if the new exhibition style made evident in Te Maori would make a substantive contribution to plans for a new national museum, the Museum of New Zealand. Rodney Wilson (1984) called Te Maori 'a case for the re-evaluation of Maori art'. In these accounts, Te Maori was again described as a mediator, this time building bridges between Maori and Pakeha, and between different tribes. Maori culture and taonga Maori were recognised as an important element of New Zealand society as a whole. Because of increasing concerns among Maori about questions of control and explanation,

calls were made for an appropriate institution to be developed to properly house and care for taonga, and for there to be Maori representatives on museum staff. The exhibition was also integral to the redefinition of objects of Maori material culture from 'artefacts' to 'art' - a conceptual shift that helped taonga to be valued by the Pakeha world as objects of beauty, and moved away from the old 'relic of a bygone era', 'preserved specimen' explanations which had previously been popular.

The exhibition was also widely called the 'introduction of Maoridom to the international stage' - where, through international exposure, Maori art would gain the recognition it was thought to deserve. Wilson, however, disagreed strongly with the claim that it took the Americans to discover Maori art. He wrote,

From my childhood on I have known Maori art at first hand in our museums and enjoyed ready access to it. What "Te Maori" does offer us, however, is the ability to stop, pause for a while and ask some fundamental questions about our perception of Maori art and the propriety of showing its highest expressions in an ethnographic context (1984:18).

This is an interesting statement, coming as it does from a Pakeha New Zealand museum professional. Of course he is going to argue that Maori objects have been available for viewing in New Zealand museums for many decades - but on who's terms? As was made clear in the years after the exhibition, it was the first time many Maori had ventured into a museum setting - previously museums had been cast as tools of Pakeha colonialism and oppression, and irrelevant to Maori perceptions of their culture. Those displays that Wilson saw as a boy would have been constructed in a way that many Maori could have found insulting and removed from their cultural context and ways of explaining phenomena.

Newspapers in New Zealand raved about the opening in New York, frothing at the mouth over the taonga's reception by the supposedly tough and unemotional American public. Victoria Leachman (n.d.), in an unpublished undergraduate essay for Museum Studies at Massey University, has provided a useful bibliography of such material. Newspapers as diverse as *The Dominion*, *The*

*Evening Post*, *The Christchurch Press*, the *Nelson Evening Mail*, the *New Zealand Times*, and the *Listener* (a weekly magazine), all described and commented on the events. No doubt every other newspaper in New Zealand carried similar items.

In 1985, *Te Maori* left New York and moved to St. Louis (where it opened on 21 February), and then to San Francisco (opening on 9 July). In this year, two videos emerged, one which carried an account of the dawn ceremony in New York, and Maori art in general (Horton, Horton and Selwyn 1985), and the other which showed the dawn ceremony in St. Louis (Jenke, Winkle and Michaels 1985). The former was a New Zealand production, and the latter an American production, complete with narration about the 'May-oo-ries' and their 'ta-oo-na'.

In both these accounts, taonga were seen as historical and religious records in place of written records, which, as was stressed, the Maori could not keep as they had no form of writing. The wonder, the pride, the emotion of the Maori participants at each occasion came through very strongly - the audiences, Maori, Pakeha and American alike, were very moved by the events. For many Maori, it was the first time they had been inside a museum. *Te Maori* was also called the beginning of a new era, and a way of teaching young Maori about their heritage. The videos also stressed that taonga are immediate for Maori, not relics of the past, as they may appear to Pakeha or American. The comment is made that "For the Maori, the future is the past. The past is now in the future" (Horton et al. 1985).

1986 saw *Te Maori* move to Chicago, where it opened on 6 March, and then closed for the last time in America on 8 July. The taonga then returned home to New Zealand under the slightly different title *Te Maori: Te Hokinga Mai*, which travelled to Wellington (opened 16 August), and then Dunedin (where it opened on 29 November). This was a prolific year for the literature.

Official memorabilia became available, in the form of a book of photographs of the taonga (Brake 1986), the 'checklist' or catalogue for the New Zealand tour (Simmons 1986), *Te Hokinga Mai* posters and flyers (Te Maori Management

Committee 1986), and the 'official story' of the American tour (Mead 1986b). This last publication, *Magnificent Te Maori: Te Maori Whakahirahira*, not only described events in the various US venues from the perspective of Maori participants, but also made sweeping claims as to the importance of the exhibition for Maori. Chapters covered such diverse themes as "From obscurity to international art", "Building bridges of understanding", "Te Maori: a journey of rediscovery for the Maori people", and "Taha wairua: the spiritual power of Te Maori". If we are to believe the message inherent in these headings, then Te Maori was the vehicle through which the Maori people gained international recognition, had their material culture recognised as 'art', were able to form an equitable relationship with overseas societies as well as the Pakeha sector of their own, were able to 'rediscover' themselves, their culture, and their carving skills, and were able to convey to the world their spiritual strength. Read in another way, Mead's account - which is his stories of the time Te Maori spent in America - gives a sense of the chain of events at each venue, and the fun and excitement experienced by the Maori participants in the dawn ceremonies and accompanying cultural displays.

*AGMANZ Journal* put out another special issue (1986), containing an editorial by Mina McKenzie, profiles of important people, such as Douglas Newton, Carol O'Biso, Piri Sciascia (a interview conducted with Jan Bieringa, the journal's editor), and Rodney Wilson - all museum staff; David Lange - the Prime Minister; Peter Tapsell and Koro Wetere - New Zealand government ministers of the time; and Te Arikinui Te Atairangikahu (the Maori Queen) and Mattie Wall (New Zealand diplomat in America) - other interested parties. The issue also included a letter forum, through which people with opinions on or stories of the exhibition could express their views. Many did - the journal received letters from Manu Bennett, Trevor Maxwell, Tipene O'Regan, Tai Pewhairangi, Tilly Reedy, Patariki Te Rei, Hohua Tutengaehe, and Marjorie Rau-Kupa.

Throughout this issue, several themes became apparent, and were reiterated by several authors. It was felt that Maori approval and participation had been necessary for the exhibition to work. By combining live performances with

exhibits, Te Maori had a huge impact on its American audience, and Maori were able to give more expression to the depth and range of their culture.

According to Newton (1986:15), Maori were "now in their rightful place of equality among the achievements of the great civilizations of the past" - a statement that relegates Maori activity to the past alone, and that most Maori would find offensive. In contrast, Wetere (1986) believed that Te Maori showed Maori culture as alive and present. This statement I find just as problematic as that of Newton, because the exhibition contained only taonga made before 1860. The exhibition was designed (by Newton, I might add) to showcase only those objects which had gained some kind of status and currency as examples of Maori work, by their age. Newton is right, Te Maori did firmly place Maori in the past, but he is wrong in thinking this is a good thing. More in keeping with Wetere's opinion, Te Maori should rather have enabled Maori to express their living culture, perhaps by the inclusion of contemporary art.

It was Newton who selected the taonga that would travel overseas, based, we can assume, on their visual power, their age, their exotic nature, and their conformity to some pre-conceived notion of what 'proper' Maori art should look like. Maori had the right only of refusal: they could choose not to have an object sent. It was interesting, therefore, to find him reinventing his past actions and motives for this 1986 issue of *AGMANZ* - after, one would suppose, he had come in contact with some of the criticisms of the exhibition. He claimed "It was clear to me that Te Maori should not be just an exhibition of beautiful objects randomly selected for their looks but a voice for which we supplied the theatre" (Newton 1986:15).

Other contributors believed Te Maori signalled the end of old museum practice, and would lead to new procedures, protocols and methodologies. A new sense of pride was gained - in being Maori, and in being a New Zealander. Pakeha were made aware, in a very tangible way, of Maori history, and it was felt that the exhibition could facilitate understanding between Pakeha and Maori, and be a nice gentle way through which political issues, such as Maori sovereignty, could be raised. Questions such as who has the right to judge, understand and interpret

taonga were made important, and the concept of spiritual ownership was raised as an issue amongst the museum profession.

The irony of Mobil Oil's sponsorship of the event was highlighted, in view of the pollution to Maori fishing grounds caused by their Synthetic Fuel Plant at Motonui on the Waitara River, Taranaki. Not only were shellfish beds on the coast being polluted by toxic effluent discharged into the river, but urupa (cemeteries) were under threat by proposed pipelines which would take the effluent directly out to sea. Marjorie Rau-Kupa was vehement in her lobbying against Mobil's sponsorship - and against Te Maori - for this very reason. She argued that

Petrocorp did not care for our values and spirituality, they wanted us there as a public relations gimmick to improve their image...Mobil claims to honour the Maori people and have an interest in the people of New Zealand...They are sponsoring Te Maori purely to improve their public image...Our taonga have been degraded to artefacts by the way Mobil has dealt with them and us (1986:25).

In other forums, debates continued over Maori participation in museum work. At the Museum Education Associations of New Zealand and Australia 1985 Conference on 'Interpreting Cultural Diversity', Sidney Mead spoke about the history of museums in New Zealand. This is a history about which he was very critical, arguing that "museums were not founded to serve the needs of the Maori people but rather to entomb us and our material culture. We were to become the prize exhibits of the 19th Century now safely 'domesticated' in museums" (1986a:16). By placing Maori culture in museums of natural history, as tended to occur, Maori people were made "part of the animal world and they too are 'stuffed and frozen in time and movement'" (Mead 1986a:17). Te Maori has been instrumental, according to Mead, in making this history visible, and in finding new ways to redress the damage done. He advocated a national museum of Maori culture and art be established and staffed with Maori museum professionals.



Te Maori was critiqued for not representing women's art - textile art. Only carvings were included in the exhibition, which are men's work. Ngahuia Te Awekotuku (1986) made the argument that women's work was just as important to Maori as men's - it has only been since colonisation that women's work has been denigrated. The common excuses offered for not including pieces of weaving do not in her opinion hold up. Examples of textile work from the period covered by Te Maori *have* survived, and they are no more fragile to transport than some of the other pieces that did go to America.

The exhibition was also described for the business audience of its corporate sponsors, in *National Business Review*. Sian Robyns (1986) argued that now, the art world will have to rethink its definitions of 'art'. Her argument, drawing from comments made by Wellington artist Darcy Nicholas, is complicated by issues of exoticism and appropriation. It seems that 'ethnic' or 'tribal' objects held more currency as art objects than pieces produced by Pakeha New Zealanders, at that point in time. In her view, 'art' needs redefinition, and Maori art needs international recognition, because any art work that wants to claim the label 'New Zealand art' must, if it is to be 'worthwhile', have Maori overtones. Until Maori work is seen internationally as 'art', the work of the rest of New Zealand's artists cannot also be seen as 'art'. Not only is this gross appropriation on the part of the 'other artists' who want their work to be called 'art', but it assumes value can only come through some sort of primitivistic adoption of 'native' motifs. Robyns went on to say that Te Maori was a good advertisement for tourism to New Zealand, and that sales of Maori art have soared. She criticised the exhibition for not containing any contemporary Maori art, but pointed out that the focus was decided by Americans.

In 1987, the exhibition moved to Christchurch, where it opened on 14 March, and finally to Auckland, opening on 27 June. It closed there on 10 September, three years to the day since it was first staged. This was the year of 'reviews', of the mass of additional written korero that had begun to surround Te Maori.

Carol O'Biso, from the American Federation of Arts and who acted as registrar of the exhibition, told the story of her experiences of coming to New Zealand to assess the condition of each of the pieces, and then travelling with the taonga to each of their American and New Zealand venues. She also talked about the emotional impact of the individual taonga and the exhibition as a whole. Her book, *First Light* (1987), is a useful account, as it captures the atmosphere of the time, as well as being a very readable story in its own right. The book was reviewed by Leslie Max (1987) for the *Listener*, and in an accompanying interview, O'Biso made it clear that the Americans underestimated the political dimension of Te Maori both for New Zealand museums and for Maori. At first the American museum staff involved with the exhibition tried to treat it as just another staging of yet another travelling collection of artefacts, but they quickly learned that Maori wanted to be involved at every point in the process, and wanted the right to control what occurred.

Sidney Mead's book, *Te Maori: Maori Art from New Zealand Collections* (1984), was also reviewed, by Janet Davidson (1987) for *Archaeology*, and by Karen Sinclair (1987) for *Pacific Studies*. They pointed out that Mead's book discusses 'Maori art' as distinct from 'Pakeha art'. Art for the Maori can be a mechanism to react to and cope with colonialism, as well as being a mediator of boundaries. The articles in the book show a 'new confidence' among Maori intellectuals, and the participation of the elders in the exhibition itself also demonstrates, in the reviewers' opinions, Maori's assertiveness.

The New Zealand *Listener* was prolific in its reviews of various aspects of Te Maori. Brett Riley (1987b) reviewed the exhibition in New Zealand, along with 'Maori Art Today', an auxiliary exhibition which was supposed to fill the gaps left by Te Maori, and show the contemporary side of Maori art. Meredith Money (1987) reviewed a television programme, *Koha*, which looked at the team of young Maori guides at the Auckland City Art Gallery, the last venue, and the final closing of the exhibition. Riley (1987a) looked at the radio coverage in Christchurch: Henare Te Ua from 'Te Reo o Aotearoa' broadcast continuously from outside the Robert McDougall Art Gallery, interviewing anyone who



happened along. Merrill Coke (1987) described four James McDonald films of tangata whenua, taken between 1919 and 1923, which were shown in conjunction with Te Maori in Auckland. Diana Wichtel (1987) provided another review of O'Biso's *First Light* (1987). Finally, Mattie Wall (1987) used a review of O'Biso (1987) and Mead's *Magnificent Te Maori* (1986) as a chance to state that Te Maori had served to raise Maori pride.

*Art New Zealand* reviewed Te Maori (Smart 1987), arguing that Western distinctions such as art-artefact-craft had been exploded by the exhibition. For Smart, the taonga needed to be classified as 'art', not 'artefact', because they occupy a ritual space and speak across boundaries. Te Maori was again critiqued for not including any weaving or tukutuku - women's work. In another article for the same journal, it became clear that Maori art had become a trendy topic for the New Zealand art world (Brown 1987). Here it was claimed that the exhibition encouraged and enabled artists to express their creativity. Other publications got in on the act - *Touch Wood* reviewed Te Maori and called it a "catalyst and symbol of a cultural renaissance" (MacPherson 1987:23).

The time was now ripe for *AGMANZ Journal* to reflect on the return home of the taonga. Bernie Kernot (1987) was critical of the exhibition, saying it was representative of only pre-1860 Maori art, the taonga were selected only for their visual impact, the exhibition legitimised tradition while hiding creativity and innovation, women's work was excluded, and Te Maori projected a romanticised image of Maoridom which stood in contrast with the political, social and economic experience of many contemporary Maori. He did however recognise that the exhibition was designed by and for Americans. Henare Te Ua (1987) described the atmosphere at each of the four New Zealand venues, from the perspective of a radio journalist.

Te Maori had, by this stage, also begun to turn up in discussion of other museum activity. Doreen Bridgeman (1987) reviewed an exhibition of Maori garments at Taranaki Museum, New Plymouth, saying it consciously filled the gaps left by Te

Maori. She also made the claim that, because of Te Maori, old techniques were being rediscovered and preserved.

Personal stories were by now finding their way into the literature. Elsie Roder (1987) told of her experience at the opening ceremony in Christchurch. For her, the occasion was important as it brought young and old, Maori and Pakeha together “to share time and knowledge, and to observe the culture and traditions of the tupuna” (1987:25).

1988 saw the publication of the official report of the Te Maori Management Committee, which contained planning documents, descriptions of the events, a timeline, and so on. This is a very useful resource, for it contains factual information on every aspect of the exhibition, from administration details to lists of the people involved at each of the opening and closing ceremonies. Amongst other recommendations the Committee had coming out of Te Maori, they proposed that a trust be established to enable Maori to be trained in museum practice.

Te Maori was sponsored, amongst others, by Mobil Oil. *National Business Review*, apologist for the economic community, set itself the task of telling everyone just how clever Mobil was (Barrie 1988; Irving 1988). These authors made it clear that Mobil contributed financially, but not to the shape the exhibition took. Mobil became involved in Te Maori specifically to enhance its own corporate image. The company’s directors wanted to give the company an identity, to show its ‘human side’, to enhance its ‘public persona’, to show its ‘soul’, to ‘construct a corporate personality’, to enable it to be ‘accepted as a citizen’. As Irving said,

The sponsorship of ‘quality’ events gives a company’s directors the chance to mingle with the small group of exclusive decision makers that run a country and in a setting that the company feels will enhance its public persona (1988:29).

Mobil’s agenda was clear.

I find all this rather disturbing. Mobil was very deliberately portraying itself as a 'person' - a self-aware, moral, living being. Yet Mobil is a company, a business, a corporation. It is a non-living collection of resources that is staffed by people. That collectivity cannot think, cannot feel. The people employed within its structure can do these things, but that is not what Irving and Barrie are claiming. They say it is the company itself which is doing these things, not people.

In other, now often strictly 'academic', literature, Te Maori began to be invoked overseas as an example of how an exhibition should be run. According to James Clifford (1988), writing for an American academic audience, the politics of collecting and display, and questions of cultural ownership were made visible in America by exhibitions such as Te Maori. In New Zealand also, Te Maori had become well and truly part of the academic discourse, with the submission of a thesis by Greg McManus (1988b). This thesis, *Nga Whare Taonga me te Tangata Whenua o Aotearoa: Museums and the Maori People of New Zealand*, claimed that Te Maori was a pivotal event in redefining the relationship between the Maori community and New Zealand museums. Because of Te Maori, museums were critically re-evaluating the ways in which they have dealt with Maori, and New Zealanders in general had a better understanding of the value of Maori culture.

The New Zealand public was still trying to make sense of the exhibition and its implications. In an article first written for the magazine *Metro*, and later re-published in the *Pacific Arts Newsletter*, Jan Corbett (1988) sought to highlight some of the conflicts and contradictions generated by Te Maori - which mainly hinge around the issue of biculturalism in New Zealand. Te Maori was here seen as a meeting ground for Maori and Pakeha: a safe environment where learning about one another could be facilitated.

In this year, AGMANZ held a conference, and Te Maori was a hot topic of discussion - and an issue of the journal was devoted to recording the views of the participants. For this issue, John Bevan Ford (1988), Georgina Kirby (1988), Arapata Hakiwai (1988) and Ngahuia Te Awekotuku (1988) all reflected on questions raised by the exhibition, and the growing awareness that museums need

to properly deal with Maori culture. What should the role of museums be? To whom do they hold responsibility? Who has the right to interpret? The solution most offered is that there is a need for Maori personnel in museums, properly trained to look after the taonga.

Greg McManus (1988a) also contributed to the discussion on museums and the interpretation of Maori culture. One of his main points centred on the 'primitive' versus 'high culture' debate - the argument that museums had helped to create the notion that Western objects were somehow 'better' and more 'advanced' than those objects created by other, supposedly 'less well developed' societies. Te Maori was supposed to be breaking down such barriers, yet it was displayed in the Hall of Primitive Art at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, and at the Chicago Field Museum of Natural History. The taonga to be exhibited were also selected on the basis of 'ethnographic' models of Maori culture and history. Instead of debunking the 'primitive art' preconception, Te Maori served to reinforce it.

Reviews of O'Biso (1987) continued: Douglas Newton (1988) believed that O'Biso's involvement and identification with the exhibition became 'obsessive'. He went on to say that Maori fears for the safety of their taonga - that they would be damaged on the journey or never return to New Zealand - were 'naive'. Yet how 'naive' were those fears, when that was the colonial experience of the Maori?

The New Zealand art world had by this stage begun to love Maori art and Maori artists, as articles in *Art New Zealand* (Panoho 1988) and *Pacific Arts Newsletter* (1988) will testify. Contemporary and women's Maori art were discussed, as these were gaps left by Te Maori, along with the need to recognise Maori art as ongoing and changing, not merely what is historical.

In 1989, the talk about the exhibition dropped away. This year marked a turning point in the literature. By this stage Te Maori itself, and all the books about it, had been discussed and reviewed; the issues and critiques that it raised had all been brought to the attention of the interested readership. From this point

onwards, the literature stopped explicitly discussing Te Maori, and instead focused on other aspects of museum management or Maori art, where the name of the exhibition was invoked in order to make these written works part of the growing tradition of Te Maori.

In 1990, a 'Taonga Maori Conference' was held to continue the heritage of Te Maori. The conference, which toured marae and museums around the country, brought together museum personnel from institutions around the world that hold Maori material in their collections. Throughout the conference proceedings (1990), Michael Ames, Adrienne Kaeppler, Sidney Mead, and a panel incorporating Arapata Hakiwai, Barbara Moke-Sly and John Takarangi all wrote about the meaning of taonga for Maori, their visions for the ideal museum to deal effectively with taonga Maori, and who should have the right to interpret and explain taonga.

British academia was also by this stage interested in Maori comment on Maori heritage - Stephen O'Regan contributed a chapter to Gathercole and Lowenthal's *The Politics of the Past* (1990). In this, O'Regan claimed that issues of Maori sovereignty and cultural autonomy became attached to the momentum created by Te Maori. Maori were calling for control over their taonga to be returned to them, and were vocal in discussions over who should care for taonga. He also pointed out that, due to Te Maori, Maori leadership "had to confront the fact that people with little or no mana in Maori terms insisted on a role in appreciating and interpreting cultural heritage" (O'Regan 1990:103).

By 1991, Te Maori was invoked in any discussion remotely connected to Maori heritage. In an article for *Archaeology in New Zealand* on archaeology and the green movement (Allen 1991), it was claimed that the principle of cultural ownership was established by the exhibition.

Te Maori was the impetus for other displays - Robert Jahnke (1991) reviewed 'Nga Tupuna', an exhibition of Auckland Museum's Maori artefacts, and strongly critiqued the New Zealand art world for seeing Maori art as static, and believing

that 'traditional' art equals 'real' Maori art. He also made the observation that Te Maori has made Maori art fashionable:

Since *Te Maori*, several books on 'traditional' and 'contemporary' Maori art have emerged and *Art New Zealand*, the aesthetic adjudicator of art and artists, has discovered Maori art. One only has to survey the articles prior to 1984 and after to discover a dramatic change in cultural focus (1991:20-21).

American academia was still in dialogue with itself over ownership and interpretation (Lavine and Karp 1991). Te Maori was invoked in such debates as having made valuable contributions to the discussion of problems of representation.

The British, too, were still interested in the New Zealand experience, though, if two books (Gathercole and Lowenthal 1990; Pearce 1992) indicate a trend, unlike the Americans they invited *New Zealand* comment on New Zealand issues. In 1992, Greg McManus contributed a chapter to Susan Pearce's *Museums and Europe*, entitled "The Te Maori exhibition and the future of museology in New Zealand". In this, McManus discussed change since the exhibition, which for him fell into three categories. First, museums now recognised that Maori objects are not simply 'artefacts' or 'art', but represent a tangible link between people and their ancestors. Secondly, there was a growing awareness that Maori should of necessity be involved in the care of taonga and in planning for their display. Thirdly, tribal groups were challenging museums' rights to the possession of objects. McManus was also critical of Douglas Newton's selection of the objects to be included in Te Maori:

His choices were based solely on aesthetic quality and artistic excellence as he perceived it, not on any significance they may have had in Maori terms. He chose only objects from the period before 1860 (an arbitrary date chosen presumably to predate any significant European influence in Maori art); and he chose only objects in wood, stone, and bone, thus effectively excluding the work of women...In



addition, no attempt was made to provide geographic or tribal coverage (1992:193).

By 1993, a new element or spirit entered the 'Te Maori' discourse: a kind of sentimental nostalgia. This year saw the publication of a second book in the 'Te Ao Marama' series, *Regaining Aotearoa: Maori Writers Speak Out*. This book included a section on Te Maori, with reprints of Rau-Kupa (1986) and Bennett (1986) and an extract from Mead (1984), alongside two other pieces which reminisced over Te Maori in New York (Mead 1993) and the closing of, and the promise inherent in, the exhibition (Te Atairangikahu 1993).

The *Listener* chose, in this year, to revisit Carol O'Biso, now a resident of New Zealand (Tolerton 1993). This was also an article full of reminiscences - about Te Maori, and about the differences between a hectic New York lifestyle and the more laid-back New Zealand approach.

The art world was still intent on showing that it had changed its perception of Maori art, because of innovative events such as Te Maori. According to Richard Wolfe (1993), Te Maori was a stage in the process of the art world's coming to terms with, and challenging, its identification of non-European art as 'primitive'. This process involved ideologically removing such objects from the ethnological specimen cabinet and elevating them to the status of 'art'. 'Artefact' had become 'art'.

By 1994, Te Maori had become part of the museum and identity discourse. It was one example of how museums can help to shape and reinterpret cultural identity (Kaepler 1994). Through Te Maori and its associated talk, Maori people were able to assert their demands for a voice in what happens to their taonga. Newton (1994) agreed that the exhibition led to a new way of expressing cultural heritage in museums, and that it brought to light the issue of ownership. "The museums might nominally own the objects, but the Maori had never relinquished their spiritual ownership of them and their right of control" (1994:281).



By 1995, Te Maori had entered the realm of fable. Its power of change was unquestioned - it was claimed to have assisted a great renaissance of Maori art, which in turn had assisted Maori to find a strong identity within a Pakeha-run country. It was Jonathan Mane-Wheoki's belief that "Maori art plays a crucial role in the reclamation and affirmation of Maori ethnicity and identity" (1995:2).

Amongst academic discourse, Maori art had become important to explaining New Zealand history and society. Nicholas Thomas (1995) believed that art is an important part of a people's imagining and reinventing of its history; in its forging of an identity as a nation. It was through their art works that the different sectors of New Zealand laid claim to the land, and reimagined that land. Through its art, a people could assert and describe its traditions to other groups in the society of which it was part. This was, so Thomas argued, what occurred through Te Maori. At the time, "a political and cultural indigenous renaissance was under way but awaiting consolidation, and 'Te Maori' seemed not only to proclaim Maori tradition, but insist that it be upheld by the nation" (1995:29).

In 1995, as well, the first Te Maori Manaaki Trust scholarship for the training and education of Maori museum personnel was awarded (*Te Maori News* 1995). Eight years after the exhibition was dismantled, the funds it generated were put to use.

1996 saw Te Maori being invoked over the new Museum of New Zealand in Wellington. An article in the Sunday Star Times claimed that it took the 'euphoria' generated by Te Maori's success to focus the necessary political powers on the project, in order to bring the MONZ to fruition (Rudman 1996). Moira Simpson also in this year invoked Te Maori in her discussion of the repatriation of indigenous cultural items held in overseas museums. She held that part of the rationale for Te Maori was to develop overseas a sense of appreciation for Maori culture, so that taonga held in foreign museums might be treated with respect.

Te Maori's influence on New Zealand museums was still an issue to be examined in depth. Paora Tapsell claimed that Te Maori

contested American and New Zealanders' entrenched museum understandings of the 'other'. By allowing 'living-first-person' narratives to come to life, this exhibition provided Maori the opportunity to show to Pakeha audiences that they, the 'other', were living, vital, interesting, and important people (1996:31).

Tapsell also documented other changes to Maori-museum relations that have occurred. Maori culture was no longer seen as timeless and static, and objects were redefined as 'taonga' rather than 'artefacts'. In specific relation to Auckland Institute and Museum, collection management and display policies were reassessed, the education of the public on Maori issues became a goal, object interpretations began to reflect Maori history and stories, Maori staff were employed, storage techniques were updated, and further research was carried out into various objects' tribal histories.

We have now reached our arbitrary ending date, 1996. There is no doubt, however, that this is not really the end of any discussion on the story of Te Maori, that story is unfinished and will continue to grow over time. Witness this present piece of writing - a conscious addition to an already abundant field.

Following the course of the literature available so far, several themes have become apparent. Te Maori forced many museum professionals to realise Maori feelings towards their institutions. Maori have been very critical of museums' role in the history of New Zealand colonisation. Museums were seen by Maori as tools of oppression, as means through which Pakeha took away Maori control and sovereignty. In fact, for many of the Maori members of the delegations sent to each American venue of Te Maori, it was the first time they had been inside a museum, and the first time they had seen their taonga displayed in such a setting.

Through Te Maori, Maori were able to make clear the meaning their taonga hold. The depth of emotion was evident at each of the opening and closing ceremonies,

when the wonder and pride and feeling was visible on the faces of the Maori participants.

Te Maori was instrumental in reinterpreting 'artefacts' - Maori artefacts at least - as works of 'art'. As such, taonga could now be valued by Pakeha as objects of beauty, not as relics of the past. While this is an advance, in helping to remove Maori from the natural history unit, there are still problems involved. Accepting taonga as 'art' still devalues the meaning that Maori associate with the pieces. For Maori, taonga are not simply beautiful, but have power.

Taonga, in Maori understanding, stand between various oppositions, and serve as a pathway between the two, or as a meeting ground through which the two can communicate. They mediate nature and culture, living and dead, people and gods, sacred and profane. Not only did Te Maori bridge such ideological gaps, but it also served as a neutral meeting place between Maori and Pakeha. Through the exhibition, Pakeha could advance a little, in a safe environment, into Maori ways of being, where their pre-conceived notions could be contested, and wider understandings of maoritanga fostered.

While at first, the exhibition was the child of a few interested museum personnel, it was quickly taken over by Maori as a means through which they could take their political concerns to a wider, more general audience. Te Maori was widely acclaimed as part of a 'Maori renaissance' - a reclamation and assertion of identity and rights. Mana Maori - pride in being Maori - was supposedly raised and supported by the recognition Maori culture gained in New Zealand and overseas through the exhibition. Certainly, issues of Maori sovereignty and cultural autonomy became attached to the momentum created by Te Maori, and through this Maori were able to assert their demands for a voice, not only over the treatment of their taonga, but in all aspects of New Zealand society.

Many claims were made that the exhibition brought issues such as the right of explanation, interpretation, control and spiritual ownership to light. Questions like who should care for taonga, and who should speak for taonga, became topical.

Maori elders were confronted with the knowledge that up until this point, museums had taken on this role for themselves, with little or no consultation with the Maori community. It was decided that this was no longer acceptable, so demands were made that Maori have a controlling voice in what occurred in Te Maori, and that this control be extended into everyday museum settings. Such was their success in making the issues public, that Te Maori is now invoked in debates over interpretation, ownership and problems of representation, as an example of how the represented can have their say.

Te Maori was critiqued by commentators and members of the Maori community for a number of reasons. The taonga selected were from a period before 1860 - a decision which relegates Maori achievement to the past, legitimises tradition, obscures the experimentation and innovation in carving that was occurring at that time, and fails to show that carving is ongoing today. Many commented at the absence of contemporary art in the exhibition. Another criticism was that no women's art was represented. The absence of tukutuku panels, weaving and other textile work, led to the projection of a very limited view of Maori artistic achievement. There were also reactions against Douglas Newton's criteria for selection of the taonga. This was based more on their visual power, age, exotic nature and conformity to pre-conceived notions of what constitutes 'real' Maori carving, than any meaning they might hold for Maori. Tribal groups had the right to veto the inclusion of any piece, but they could not choose what was to travel overseas.

Mobil's sponsorship also came under fire from members of the various Taranaki tribes, who saw it as a gross contradiction with the company's polluting activities in the region. Mobil, too, were quite specific in saying that their sponsorship was not for any altruistic purposes, but to project its image and 'personality' into the public domain, and to look good by associating with something successful.

Te Maori supposedly heralded the end of old museum practice, and the beginning of a new era of culturally appropriate procedures, protocols and methodologies. In order to bring these dreams to fulfilment, an ideal museum was described. In

this museum, taonga would be properly cared for and represented, and Maori staff would be employed with the appropriate knowledge to make this possible. The new Museum of New Zealand currently being built in Wellington is claimed to be part of this tradition, and to have been made possible by the success of Te Maori - and the re-focusing on museum issues that it brought.

Changes have occurred since the exhibition. Maori culture and objects are no longer viewed in the same way. Auckland Institute and Museum has extensively revised its collection policies and display and storage techniques in order to bring them more into line with the philosophies coming out of Te Maori. Maori staff are being employed in museums around the country, and the Te Maori Manaaki Trust has begun awarding scholarships so that young Maori may be trained in museum practice.

The biggest change in the literature is the way in which 'Te Maori' is used. While at first the literature described the exhibition in some form or another, later Te Maori was invoked in discussions of other museum issues. People are no longer concerned with the reality of the exhibition, but with its success, its grip over the public's imagination, its near-mythological transformative power. Te Maori has become much more than just a collection of taonga from New Zealand that travelled to America and made that country aware of the Maori people of New Zealand. It has become a ritual of success (mention it and your argument too will be a success), a pivotal point in New Zealand's history. Before Te Maori we were a little unrecognised country at the bottom of the Pacific with an even less recognised - both within New Zealand and overseas - indigenous population. While that still may substantially be the case, in the popular imagination that has changed. Boundaries between Maori and Pakeha have been lowered by Te Maori, and movement is occurring between Maori and museums.

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<sup>1</sup> The 'renaissance' occurring at the same time that Te Maori went on show had many facets. Along a slightly more radical vein than merely claiming recognition for Maori, was a movement

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which called for full autonomy and sovereignty. Between 1982 and 1984, Donna Awatere wrote a series of articles on Maori sovereignty for the publication *Broadsheet*. She defines Maori sovereignty as “the Maori ability to determine our own destiny and to do so from the basis of our land and fisheries [one might also add taonga - some authors certainly agreed that the more extreme sovereignty issues became associated with Te Maori (eg O’Regan 1990)]. In essence, Maori sovereignty seeks nothing less than the acknowledgement that New Zealand is Maori land, and further seeks the return of that land” (1982:38).

## The Story of a key participant - Mina McKenzie

Turning from an account of the published stories of Te Maori, it seems valuable to now examine the story of someone who was intimately involved in the exhibition, through membership of the Te Maori Management Committee.

In April 1981, once it had been confirmed by the New Zealand Government that an exhibition of Maori art would travel to the United States, Cabinet set up a Management Committee to oversee its organisation. The committee was in operation for more than seven years. It was chaired by the Secretary for Maori Affairs, and had as members representatives from the Department of Internal Affairs, the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council, the Art Galleries and Museums Association of New Zealand (AGMANZ), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the lending museums, and the Maori and South Pacific Arts Council (MASPAC), as well as the co-curators.

The representative of AGMANZ was Mina McKenzie, at the time vice president of the association, the director of the Manawatu Museum in Palmerston North, and the chairperson of the New Zealand National Committee of the International Council of Museums. During the time she was on the Management Committee, Mina was also a member of the Maori Sub Committee, a group organised out of the Maori members of the committee to ensure Maori concerns and opinions were heard, and to determine how Maori would participate at each of the exhibition venues. Another part of her role on the Management Committee was an involvement with the negotiations with the Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, when the latter requested that Te Maori travel to it after the rest of the planned American tour. In addition, she was present at the opening of Te Maori in St. Louis.

Since the exhibition, Mina has been the chairperson of the Cultural Conservation Advisory Council, on the project development team for the new Museum of New



Zealand - opening in Wellington in 1998, and is currently on the board of the Wanganui Museum.

Mina is an important identity from the exhibition not only because she was instrumental - amongst others - to its planning and execution, but for her position within the management team. She was a museum professional, a Maori and a woman - the only woman on the team. With a foot in all camps, her role was complex and pivotal.

Fortunately for me, Mina is a resident of the same city in which I study, so I was able to interview her on her experiences of Te Maori. I asked her to tell me *her* story of the exhibition: what happened from her perspective. What she told me ranges across a number of themes, from the initial planning of the exhibition and the context in which it occurred, to the Management Committee and her role within it, to the opening in St. Louis, and then to the aftermath of Te Maori. As well, she touches on a number of academic issues that were raised by the exhibition, including the meaning of taonga, the role of Maori in museums, and the tension between Maori and museum explanations.

The story that follows is my story of Mina's account. I have inserted materials that make clear some of the references that fill Mina's account. They are bridges which link Mina's story to the larger story of Te Maori.

The account begins with the initial genesis of the idea and the steps taken to choose which objects would be included.

When Hamish Keith was member of the Arts Council, Ken Gorbey and Hamish announced that the American Federation of Arts was interested in an exhibition of Maori art being mounted in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. Douglas Newton, the curator of primitive art - which made my hackles rise<sup>1</sup> - had requested [that it go ahead]. Ken had been round all [the New Zealand] museums virtually - he was then the director of Waikato Art Museum, and I think he was also president of AGMANZ at the

time<sup>2</sup>. [This was in the] early 80s, I think. [Ken] came back with folders and folders of slides of material he'd taken at all the museums. Douglas was going to choose. He and Douglas, I presume, did choose between them, but Douglas was to choose.

Newton's criteria for the selection of the taonga was based on an 'ethnographic' understanding of what 'indigenous art' (as opposed to 'western art') should be. As such, he selected objects from pre-1860 - in order, it is assumed, to limit any European influence on Maori art styles, and objects visually powerful and exotic. He chose only carvings, thus excluding the work of women. Newton's selection has been critiqued by authors such as Kernot (1987) and McManus (1992).

Mina continues:

After it got to that stage, there was a Maori element that had to be taken into account. They had to think about funding, they had to think about Maori boards of trustees, and they had at that stage to think very closely about the Maori community. It was going to be an enormous exercise.

The Maori community in those days had very little contact with museums. Many Maori with material in museums were very angry about what was happening there; they felt that in some cases museum collections had been made up by ripping Maori off. They felt that things that had gone into museums, had gone there on the pretext of them being deposited there for safe keeping, because of the depopulation of the Maori community, but found that when they came to get them back, or were interested, that [their things] had actually been accessioned into the collections, and were no longer theirs. They were also only vaguely beginning to be aware of the trade in Maori artefacts.

Before Te Maori, Maori tended to avoid museums, calling them institutions of colonial power which stole their material treasures. This is a history which is currently being critiqued and redressed. Museums have also come under fire for displaying Maori life and artefacts as ethnographic specimens, thus objectifying

Maori culture and making it appear timeless and static. Mead (1986a) has been vocal on this subject.

In the following section of her interview, Mina situates the exhibition historically, giving it context.

The Antiquities Act had been enacted, and the Treaty of Waitangi Act had been enacted and then amended up to 1980 - the second part of the Act, and the Historic Places Act had also been amended in 1980. So there was a whole raft of legislation affecting Maori generally, that was beginning to raise the consciousness. But Maori had made very little contact with museums. The Antiquities Act still sorted out that, *prima facie*, anything that was found either during the course of an archaeological excavation or a casual find, was the property of the Crown. *Prima facie* the property of the Crown. [It] had to be reported to the Department of Internal Affairs and get its Y or Z number, and so in some respects, Maori material, in both museums and material that was found during the course of archaeological investigations and casual finds - farming, was lost to the Maori community. There was only just this vague awakening. [Also] in those days, there was a rise of land claims. People were beginning to realise that there might be some hope for some resolution of claims that had been made since the 1850s or since the 1860s - the event of the colonial government. It needed to be redressed. As well as that, the Government was becoming very sensitive<sup>3</sup>. Aligned to that, the consciousness [of Maori] was being raised about lots of things and the government itself was very conscious of the very bad and very poor Maori statistics: Maori health statistics, Maori crime statistics, Maori and justice, Maori education statistics. [This was in part due to] the boom of the 50s, the post-war boom, that had brought Maori into the cities to become unskilled labourers for the great growth in industry, coupled with the policy not to fund Maori development for individuals in the country - in other words you couldn't build a house on your tribal land because it was plurally owned: you could never get a loan. There were all kinds of events which were shaping up to what happened when the Te Maori exhibition became a possibility.

Once it was adopted in principle, it became apparent that this was going to be a fairly interesting exercise. There was a great deal of fear amongst the museums. A great deal. They were very protective of what they thought were their material. They talked about ownership, and the museum was very much hoping to close all doors. Maori people were talking about being the guardians of these things, being kaitiaki, and passing them down to next generations and making contact with them. This was not just happening here, [there was a] bit of a genesis in other parts of the world with indigenous people. There was the beginning of stirrings in Canada, the First Nations people, and in the States. There was quite a lot of work going on with sacred sites in the United States.

At the same time that Te Maori was on display at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, another important exhibition was held at the Museum of Modern Art, also in New York. Called “‘Primitivism’ in Twentieth Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern”, the exhibition showed modernist art alongside the African art from which it borrowed its ideas and motifs (Clifford 1988; Jones 1993). The curators of the exhibition intended it to be a comment on the west, in relation to the west’s love affair with the art of other societies. The ‘Primitivism’ exhibition came in for a lot of criticism, however, for failing to check its assumptions against available empirical data (Torgovnick 1990), for being an imperialist exercise that reminded the ‘primitives’ how wonderful the west thought they were (Araeen 1991), and for treating non-western art as timeless, anonymous and outside cultural context (McEvelley 1984, cited in Jones 1993). This exhibition has its parallels with Te Maori, which was seeking to break down barriers between ‘primitive’ and ‘modern’.

Other exhibitions had their similarities. In 1988, the Glenbow Museum in Calgary, Alberta, Canada staged an exhibition called “The Spirit Sings” which attempted to convey the First Nation people’s cultural complexity, diversity and creativity at the time of colonial contact. The museum was challenged by local Cree Indians, who questioned its right:

(1) to borrow or exhibit Indian artefacts without Indian permission...;

- (2) to use money from private corporations (Shell Oil) involved in public dispute;
- (3) to ignore contemporary political issues, such as land claims, even when presenting an exhibition of the past history of Indian peoples;
- (4) to employ non-Indians to curate an exhibition about Indians; and
- (5) to claim the right to political neutrality (Ames 1990:31).

The Lubricon Lake Cree Indian Nation boycotted the exhibition. As a result of the controversy, Canadian museums began to confront and react to Indian concerns over their practices (Jones 1993).

Te Maori should be understood in this broader world-historical context. The above themes can also be discovered in the events leading up to Te Maori: the controversy over Mobil Oil's sponsorship, and the need to meet Maori demands to be involved with the planning and execution of the exhibition.

[Through] all of this, an energy developed. Then they had to put together this exhibition, so they had to choose the objects. They had to find out whether the museums would lend them. It became very obvious, politically, that you had to consult with the Maori community. The Ministry of Maori Affairs came in on this - I think it was called Maori Affairs in those days and it was a department. [There] began an enormously long process.

Now I sit on both sides. I'm a Maori, I was a museum director. We [ie Manawatu Museum], fortunately, didn't have anything that they wanted. They were looking at 'good better best' and a lot of people were really quite furious about that, because the objects were chosen - and these words were said to me; I don't know whether they've been recorded anywhere - chosen for the excellence of their sculptural form, on Douglas' [terms], as the curator of primitive art. So, already we were having a western or anthropological or ethnographic or art historical judgement being placed on things that came from a totally different culture. The objects were chosen, and a great deal of negotiation had to go on in two fields, with the Maori community and with the museum community. Then they had to bring together a group of people that would guarantee the indemnity of the

objects, because they were going to be travelling overseas, and the government had to be involved in that. We had the Department of Maori Affairs and the Department of Internal Affairs and the Department of Foreign Affairs, all with their interests, and the interests of the exhibition, to deal with. We had the Museums Association - AGMANZ it was called, Art Galleries and Museums Association - and we had the New Zealand Arts Council. Then, on the other side, we had the Maori community, and we had museum trust boards. Thirteen museums were targeted - or the objects chosen came from thirteen museums. Actually they came from fourteen, but thirteen in the end. Fourteen was Wanganui. The Wanganui *people* refused. They are still very cautious because they have had some problems over there with the Maori community. I mean, it's the Maori community that's had problems with the museum, not the museum that's had problems with the Maori community. It was the *Maori* community who wouldn't let things go.

From this point, Mina goes on to discuss the finance and management aspects of the exhibition.

Then it had to be funded. An estimate had to be made of the cost of mounting the exhibition, the cost of crating, of the conditioning - in terms of environmental controls. The objects had come from museums that had no environmental controls, but as New Zealand has a temperate climate there were no extremes, and most of the material had stabilised within its environment. It then became an enormous exercise for conservators to actually create cases that had their own internal climate, and to condition the objects to go into a country where there were environmental controls in all the institutions, as well as the extremes of a continental climate. These objects hadn't [previously] travelled by bus or coach or plane all over the place, so everything had to be crated in such a way that no damage would accrue. Some things couldn't go because they were too frail, and they would have shaken apart. There was the problem of getting some of this enormous stuff into a plane. Then there was the problem of finding trucks that were going to cart these things all over the American sub-continent. From a logistical point of view it was a bit of a nightmare.



The Government decided they would have to have a Te Maori exhibition Management Committee. They decided they would have Foreign Affairs, Internal Affairs, Maori Affairs, Arts Council, Maori Community, lending institutions, and AGMANZ. At that stage I was vice president of the Art Galleries and Museums Association of New Zealand, and I was conveniently a Maori and a woman. The person who was chosen to be the museum representative was from the largest museum, and the one that was contributing the most number of objects. That was Stuart Park. He was director of Auckland Museum. So they got two from the museum profession. The Arts Council provided our secretarial and management services: all the back-up. Piri Sciascia and his team became the administrative arm of the Management Committee, with support from all the departments.

Funding had to be sought, and so they found Mobil. That caused a hell of a problem. At that stage Mobil, according to Taranaki people, were exploiting the oil fields and damaging the kaimoana, and all together, they felt, ripping off the landscape and ripping off Maori. So, [from] the Taranaki people, there was a little bit of tension. In the end Mobil contributed \$750,000 to publicity for Te Maori. That was to their political advantage, because they don't have a high profile in the States. For them to get this sponsorship from New Zealand, where they've got a high profile in New Zealand, to get a higher profile in the States, from their point of view was money well spent. So they gained a great deal of publicity and air-time, on their 750,000. That was New Zealand dollars. When [the exhibition] came home they did the same.

The other sponsors of the exhibition were numerous. The New Zealand Government indemnified the exhibition whilst it was on its New Zealand leg for \$NZ44 million. Various Government departments also provided support and personnel, including the Department of Maori Affairs, the Department of Internal Affairs, the Education Department, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Tourism and Publicity, and Trade and Industry. The US Government indemnified the exhibition for \$NZ60 million whilst in America, and provided grants through the National Endowment for the Humanities and the National Endowment for the



Arts. The American Federation of the Arts also provided support and personnel. Air New Zealand carried the taonga back and forth to the States, and flew staff and kaumatua to America. The QEII Arts Council gave financial and administrative support, and funded artists to go to America as part of the exhibition (Te Maori Management Committee 1988:19-21).

Mina's story now turns to issues of process. This seems to be, for her, the most important aspect of Te Maori. The exhibition could not be a success without the correct process (or 'protocol'). It was not that already established channels *had* to be followed, but that new ones could also be created, provided the correct process was followed.

The negotiations were taken over [for] the Maori community by the Department of Maori Affairs. All the district offices and various offices in the Department of Maori Affairs then consulted with all the Maori communities to which these objects had been identified. A lot of to-ing and fro-ing went on, a lot of negotiating. It was decided that elders from every tribe contributing would go to one of the openings, thirty at each, and that they would take over the Maori ceremonies. So right away they gave the Maori community the opportunity to see something and to filter something through and to be involved in something they'd never, ever had the opportunity of being involved in before. This was a very good policy of the Department of Maori Affairs. The Minister of Maori Affairs<sup>4</sup> saw the potential. At the time the Minister of Internal Affairs was also a Maori - was Peter Tapsell. So we had Koro Wetere and Peter, both, part of the team, heading two of the ministries. We had a push for Maori issues from two of the ministries, and that was really important.

I was chosen [for the team]. I wasn't the president of AGMANZ, and in fact you would have thought that the president would have gone, but because I was Maori, and because I was a woman, they thought it was very important that *I* go, because I would be able to straddle the Maori element in the management team and the museum element in the management team, and I would have a foot in both camps. I also was a personal friend of the

Minister of Internal Affairs, Peter Tapsell. In some respects, they thought that I personally was in a pivotal position to see what was going on. Often, a lot of Europeans going into a Maori situation haven't a clue what's going on, don't understand the interplay, don't understand the tribal tensions, don't understand what's happening when people say something, and don't understand the way we think.

We had a Maori sub-committee, and I was on that as well. I was the only museum person on it, which was *very* interesting. Tamati Reedy was the Secretary for Maori Affairs in those days. In the very early days, when we started the negotiation, before all this<sup>5</sup> was put together, Kara Puketapu was Secretary. Sid Mead was the co-curator and the writer of the catalogue. Bob Cater was Department of Internal Affairs. Ian Cochrane was the chairman of the Arts Council. I was Manawatu Museum, all those things [ie AGMANZ, New Zealand National Committee of the International Council of Museums]. Ministry of Foreign Affairs was Neil McLeod. Stuart Park was [the lending institutions]. Piri [Sciascia] was Maori [and South Pacific Arts Council]. Dave Simmons was another co-curator. Kuru [Waaka] was chairman of Maori and South Pacific Arts Council. Rodney Wilson was the co-ordinator of the exhibition team. He actually wasn't a member of the Management Committee. Bill Cooper was the executive officer [of] Te Maori in the end, when Piri came off. The whole thing was a very interesting exercise because the numbers of people involved in this were horrendous. In terms of funding it was a logistical nightmare, and in terms of management as well. It was very interesting for me, because I was the only woman on the management team. I found it very difficult. I had to be careful about Maori protocol and women. I had to be all the time professional, because I was a museum director, and I also had to be very careful that I was representing the profession. I also had to be able to contribute positively. This became quite an interesting exercise.

We had to get conservators on board, exhibitions officers on board, crate makers on board, consultants about trucks. We wanted trucks in the States that had air shocks so that, [with] all this long travelling, you wouldn't open a crate and find something was in a thousand pieces, and the crates had to be made very carefully as well. It was decided that the exhibition would

assemble in Auckland, at the Museum, and then fly [out]. Right away tension developed between Maori members of the team and the museum people, because the Maori members of the team were pretty angry about museums. [It was] political. Professor Mead, as an anthropologist, and who was teaching anthropology and Maori studies at Vic[toria University], had seen quite clearly that there were problems in cross-cultural understanding, and cross-cultural interpretation. It began to emerge that most things Maori had been researched and described within the framework of somebody else's culture. The Maori idea and the Maori view of the world was not being taken into account. What we had was cultural imperialism, and colonialism - colonial capture almost. [Others claiming to be] the experts of Maori material, of writing about Maori material. Archaeologists were the ones who knew everything about the past, and could reconstruct the past from an archaeological perspective. I sat this fine line. Because I was Maori, and I went on the Maori sub-committee, if anything happened that displeased the Maori community side of the management team, I was the one that bore the bad news. I was often going backwards and forwards. When things went wrong with the exhibition team - sometimes [it was] felt that they were being insensitive - I was the one, once more, that had to bear the message. I was the one that, in some respects, everybody loved to hate. It wasn't personal. People were really lovely, and I knew them all. I'd known most of them for years. There was no problem about that. There were no personalities in this. There were issues that needed to be really deeply analysed, I guess, and understood. There was a lot of fear in the Maori world, about what was going to happen, and a lot of [fear on] the management team's side, because we'd never done anything like this before - going to the States, and being in an exhibition, put together by a curator of primitive art.

Our Maori community out there didn't understand any of this. They weren't politicised, anthropologically, to understand what was going on inside. The elders began to see that this was a very important event, and that they should go. The Department of Maori Affairs did a really good job to make sure that kaumatua from everywhere that the exhibition had been drawn from, would be represented, and would be able to say the right karakia and carry out the right protocols to make sure that the exhibition was safe over there,

that the people who saw the exhibition over there were safe, and that it went warm. There's this business about being *warm*, it's very important. That was what was happening, internally, here while the exhibition was being organised.

In an article written for the German journal *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie* (1994), Mina further explains this concept of 'keeping the taonga warm'. When taonga are connected to their people and their history and stories about them are known, then they are 'warm'. "The so called 'warmth' signifies that there is an unbroken thread between the people and their past, present and future. When the people are alienated from their taonga, the thread is broken and the taonga are 'cold'" (McKenzie 1994:79). By going with their taonga to America, the elders were able to settle them in and keep them warm. Mina also points out that 'taonga' are not necessarily material objects. Taonga can also be intangible, such as stories or songs, they can be features of the landscape, or they can be people.

It became a much bigger thing than had been envisaged in the original concept and proposal from Douglas, and the Federation of Arts. Once the Maori community was involved, and the New Zealand Government - because it was a very politically important thing they didn't [make a mistake] - this became an *enormous* exercise. Enormous. We had Foreign Affairs working over there, doing lots of work. We all became very fond of Mattie Wall, she was just wonderful. She was in the New York office, but she worked around the whole programme. She was really such a wonderful person, and very, very supportive and really good. It became a very emotional exercise.

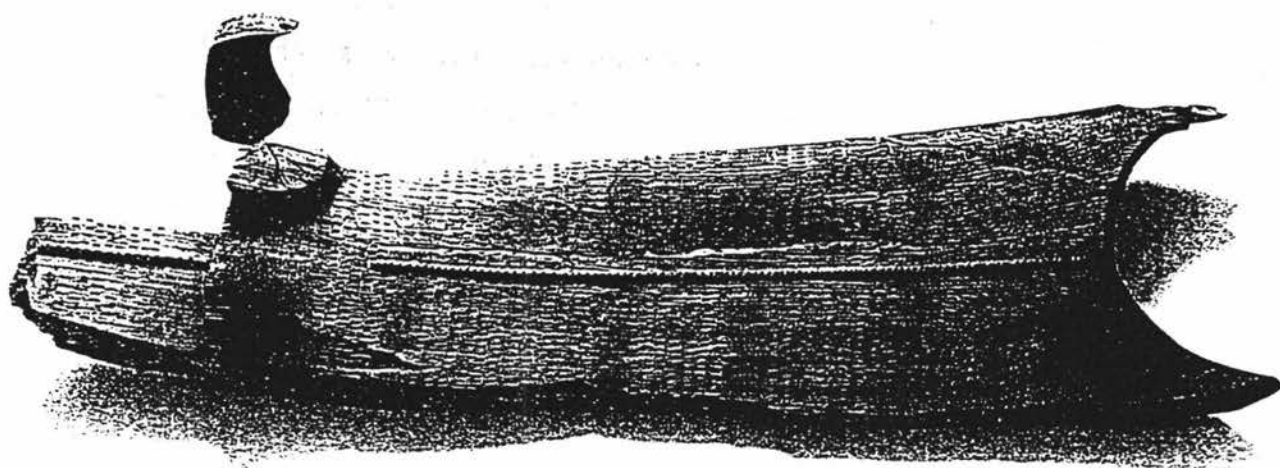
While this was going on, David Simmons and Professor Mead were busy writing the catalogue. They invented a time scale for the [taonga]. I suppose they were putting out a classification system, in the time-worn way of anthropologists. It actually wasn't consistent throughout New Zealand. Their dates, that they had put on, could be proved to be questionable, and in

fact one of them was completely wrong, according to carbon dating (Fig. 11). [But] it had to fit their theory. While they were preparing that, I asked them to amend this particular [mistake]. They wouldn't, because their theory fell apart. Or to put an erratum in, but they wouldn't do that either. So the other element in here was scholarship, [of] a very interesting variety. Professor Mead, of course, not being a museum person, was working as an anthropologist and a Maori, and thinking through a lot of issues that hadn't been thought through before. David Simmons was the anthropologist, or the ethnologist, at Auckland Museum. He'd been working with material all his working life, and had developed a particular body of opinion, I guess, about the nature of things. They seemed to work well together, but as time went by, there were little bits of disquiet moved into the scene.

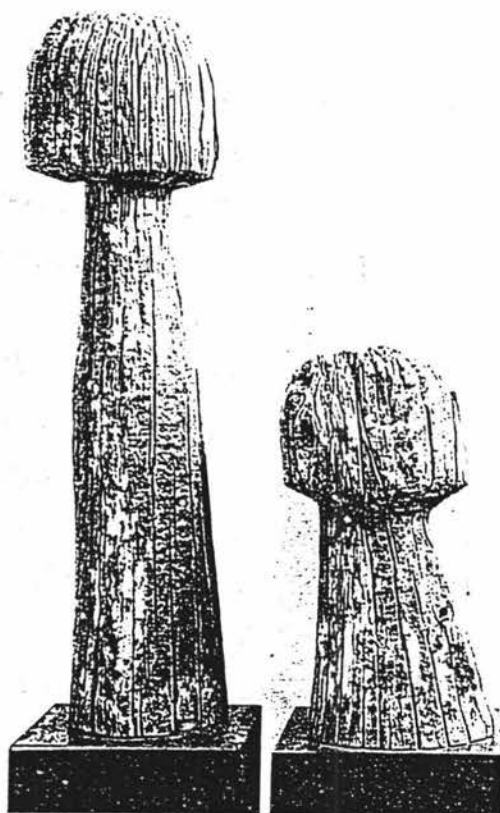
The catalogue's editor, Sidney Mead, stated that the purpose of the publication was to provide a context for Te Maori, to give (some of) the korero of Maori art and Maori culture. By so doing, the taonga of the exhibition would be illuminated and clothed (1984:34-36). The contributors explained the history and roots of Maori art, and what makes objects taonga.

The Maori committee<sup>6</sup> knew nothing about any of what was going on internally, [and] had no idea of the academic arguments or the academic imperatives that were driving the thing. They had no idea where primitive art sat in the art historical genre, and within that body of knowledge. They were, in some respects, innocent. They were wonderful, because they were the ones who made it real. There was a lot of to-ing and fro-ing going on within our academic field, and in the upper echelons of the policy team.

The kaumatua themselves brought that wonderful thing you only get when you get a group of Maori people and a group of elders together. Something happens. I don't know what it is. Something happens, and that gave this exhibition its unique quality. Without them, it would have just been another exhibition of objects, being carted around and people going 'ooh, ah'. But, because of the unique nature of how this exhibition came together, it ended up being [more] - the living, breathing elders, their voices, the calls, the karakia, the emotions. We all stood streaming with tears, at many of the



**Figure 11.** Canoe bow cover, haumi, from Waitore site near Patea, Taranaki. Catalogue Number 136. This is the piece that was falsely dated (Photo: Athol McCredie. In Mead 1984:220).



**Figure 12.** Stockade post top, pou, from Oringi Pa, Dannevirke. Catalogue Numbers 134 and 135. These are the posts from Piri Sciascia's home region (Photo: Athol McCredie. In Mead 1984:220).



things. One day I came into the exhibition at St. Louis and Piri Sciascia, who was working so hard - everybody was exhausted - was standing in front of two very simple palisade posts from his area (Fig. 12), and he was just weeping. He said, somehow having them dislocated even more in time and space, from where they'd been before: in a museum as a humble bit of wood with a knob on top, they had assumed another role, in the exhibition, that was so powerful, that he was overwhelmed by it. Yet the exhibition was not tricky in any way, in terms of its exhibition design. It was a very simple exhibition, in some respects. The exhibition took on a life of its own. Nobody, who was involved in that exhibition, could have ever [forgotten it].

Given the nature of my account: stories within stories within stories of Te Maori, it is not surprising that Mina's story should have stories within it. Here she gives a particularly vivid account of the story of Carol O'Biso, a story already told by the protagonist herself, but now told by another. As we shall see, buried in it is yet another story, of Piri Sciascia.

Nobody could have foreseen the energy that was going to be expended, and the emotion that was going to rise up around this exhibition. It took on an identity and a being and a life of its own. Around the exhibition, and each place it went in the States, came myths. Carol O'Biso was the registrar from the American Federation of Arts. She was in charge of the American part of the exhibition. She was in charge of making sure that everything in the exhibition from the American point of view, and from our point of view, was right. She travelled with the exhibition, organised the condition reporting at each place, made sure things were packed and unpacked properly, had learnt about some Maori protocols, and was very careful that things were treated properly. She developed a most amazing relationship with the objects, that some people felt was a bit funny, and almost felt that she was over the top. But from the Maori perspective, she was doing nothing more than we thought should be done. She's Italian origin, her parents came from Italy. Italian people are warm and open, they haven't got the Anglo-Saxon, or the British, reticence, and they are able to express emotions, verbally and visually, with wonderful body language and with wonderful voice. Carol was one of those warm people. She suffered and



she was exalted and she was worried and she was all those things, and they were all visible. Europeans - western people and New Zealanders - don't do that normally. She was a very, very vital ingredient in the exhibition, and in the American side of it. She developed a relationship with some of the objects that the Europeans thought was absolutely wacky, but Maori thought 'well, that's great, she understood that'. She became intimately worried about some of them. She felt some of them were telling her things. And every time that she got worried about something, and she felt that something was happening, she was right. Something needed to be done. They travelled through the snow, and they did all kinds of things. She was a very important ingredient. We had to fight to keep her, because she wanted to resign from the American Federation of Arts. We fought to keep her on until the end of the exhibition because she was a very important part of it by then. She knew everything, together, more intimately than anybody. The Maori, on the whole, took her to their hearts. One of the most lovely little stories came out of it. Piri Sciascia: of course, Sciascia is an Italian name. Piri's ancestor was an Italian sailor who jumped ship, and married into a prominent Maori family, and the Sciascia family are noted among our Maori community. When they went to New York, Carol said to Piri one night 'oh do come home and meet my parents'. They'd talked about his name, but I don't know what he knew about his name. When they got there, Carol's parents were delighted to see this person with a name like Sciascia, and they discovered that Carol's parents and his ancestor came from the same village. Absolutely wonderful. So, all the time during this exhibition, there were these amazing links being made. Of course, at the same time, Carol met somebody, and came back to live in New Zealand. Relationships were made during the Te Maori exhibition between people. It was amazing. I think just about everybody developed new relationships, except the management team. We were very firmly set in our ways! But amongst that other group, it was really quite interesting. From that point of view, Te Maori became a really vital catalyst. And I think that it was a great turning point for museums.

Mina's story now turns to the impact of Te Maori.

It had a profound effect on two communities. It certainly had a profound effect on the Maori community. When Te Maori came home, there was already that climate for Maori and museums to make full partnerships, [for Maori] to be involved in many ways that museums had [previously] felt was not appropriate, [and] for Maori people to come and look at the things that they owned. Not the Maori owned, but the museum owned. [There was this claim] that the museums were the experts and the museums had saved all these things. 'If we hadn't saved them, they wouldn't be here today'. [It] was often said that museums were the saviours of Maori art, and Maori culture, because they had entombed all these things in their basements. That may have been true to a certain extent, yes, because, as it turned out, [the objects] were open then to be re-united in some way with the community out of which they'd grown. The opportunity [was there] for a renaissance, for all those threads that had been broken to be re-united so that we were all open to the future again. The things from the past were speaking with a new voice. Many of them were simple things, some of the whakapapa of the things were not known, but that didn't matter, they embodied something special about Maori community that could be seen as a body, that hadn't been seen before. As Maori were necessary to carry out the protocols, so it became obvious to both the Maori community and their museums, or the museums in their constituent Maori community, to form relationships. It's not been easy over the years, and in some respects it's still not very good. In some cases, the new constitutional boards and advisory committees are really only a token. I'm a museum person, and I do believe that many things wouldn't have survived without museums collecting them. Certainly not when the Maori population dwindled to forty something thousand, during that terrible period. Things might have been collected as curiosities or as remnants of a dying race, but they took on a new form. In spite of how they had got there, they were now performing another function, in the museum world, New Zealand as a whole and the Maori community. By going to the States, that reinforced all that, and that was the important thing about Te Maori. While the things hadn't been seen in the same manner as they had been in the States - they hadn't been seen in New Zealand like that, or in any museum - it changed the view that museum professionals had had of the purpose of these objects. Things took on a new meaning.

We had this business of 'good better best'. In the Maori world, there is no such thing. If you're looking at iwi, what came from ones own iwi is *it*. You can't compare the stylistic form of this thing, from this iwi, with that. Because neither one is better than the other, or the other than the one, because to the iwi, they're it. We know that western science has this passion for classifying and, particularly in an art historic perspective, of looking at things for the excellence of this, that and the other thing. You have easel paintings, sculpture and works on paper, as a hierarchical thing. Maori material fitted into the sculptural form thing. We had to have two fields of thought about these things. While the Americans and Douglas were looking at Te Maori for the excellence of its sculptural form, Maori people were being re-united with their ancestors. Energy was flowing between the two concepts.

For the Pakeha and Americans involved in Te Maori, the exhibition raised the issue of what is 'art' and what is 'artefact'. Conceptualising the objects as 'artefacts' - remnants and examples of a culture and time other than their own, was discarded in favour of their being works of 'art'. This, it was hoped, would diffuse the tendency of the past to elevate western creations as 'art' - objects of beauty and intrinsic value, and diminish non-western creations as curiosities of no 'real' value.

For the Maori involved in the exhibition, the value of the objects was considered on completely different terms. They were taonga, objects which got their meaning through their links to ancestors, their life and their power.

While many of us who were thinking these things through, had been thinking it through as part of our life work, and were pretty angry about quite a lot of the things, in fact, the event of Te Maori, the fact of Te Maori, and the energy that came, overcame all that. Women were very angry that there was no women's work at all in Te Maori, the excuse being that fibre's fragile - can you believe it?! There are materials made of fibre sitting in museums all over the world, some of it from the eighteenth century, so what are they talking about? Fragile! It was because of the primitive art thing.

In the end even that didn't matter. That didn't matter. None of it mattered. Because Te Maori took on a life of its own. Post Te Maori we have had wonderful exhibitions of fibre. Auckland Museum's magnificent exhibition of cloaks, put together by the women weavers section of Te Waka Toi<sup>7</sup>, [was] a wonderful exhibition of cloaks which travelled round museums and galleries in New Zealand. We've had special exhibitions of material, that encompassed both women's and men's work, that went to various museums.

In fact, the spin-off of Te Maori has been enormous. Much bigger than anybody could ever have envisaged when the whole idea was first mooted. There was that continuity of experience, too, that went to looking at a concept for the Museum of New Zealand<sup>8</sup> that would encompass the things that we had discovered during Te Maori. Very important. Kuru Waaka: Uncle Kuru, Sid and me - and Hamish: Hamish wasn't on the management team, but he had been part of it - went on to be the project development team to write the concept for the new Museum of New Zealand. We carried over the Te Maori experience, and the things we learnt from our elders during Te Maori. All that knowledge we had by being there and doing it and talking and agonising and being miserable sometimes, and furious at others, but nevertheless being positive, was carried forward into the project development team for the Museum of New Zealand. It was really quite an interesting thing. We worked for six months on this. Out of that then came the next stage of the Museum of New Zealand.

The new Museum of New Zealand was an opportunity for Wellington museum staff to change the conceptual framework under which they operated to be more in line with current museum philosophies of interpretation, display and care. In a newspaper article about the MONZ, Brian Rudman explains that "In the new museum the focus will be on the exhibitions being the supporting props in telling New Zealand's story. The collections will be used as illustrations. The collections will no longer be king. The stories will" (1996:C2).

The whole concept of taonga was to be re-visited in museums. Out of the dialogue with the elders that went on during the pre-Te Maori negotiations, during Te Maori when elders were present at everything, and then back in

Aotearoa, developed the idea that there were no Maori staff. None. There was no Maori viewpoint being brought to bear in policy making on the boards, no Maori viewpoint or Maori care being taken within museums for Maori material, and no Maori input into exhibition design and interpretation. Generally. The post Te Maori spin-off was that AGMANZ developed a Maori curator scholarship, and the money that was left over from Te Maori was put aside as a fund, to promote and train Maori curators. So there was a move to move Maori into museums, [at] more than one level. AGMANZ itself, when it saw what was the response from the Maori community, when I became the Chairperson we developed a bicultural framework for the profession. It was the first in New Zealand, and it was a direct result of the experience of Te Maori. AGMANZ changed itself to MAANZ, Museums Association of Aotearoa New Zealand Te Ropu Hanga Kaupapa Taonga. It changed itself constitutionally into a bicultural organisation where half the members of the Council are elected from the membership, and the other half are appointed by Maori members of staff. That was another spin-off.

So, some of the things we had learnt in Te Maori became part of the concept for the new museum. There was a push then to have more Maori working in museums, and to train Maori to work in museums, and, at that stage also, Peter Tapsell set up the Cultural Conservation Advisory Council. I became its first chairperson. We had a push in the Council to train Maori conservators, because we realised that all the conservators that had worked on Te Maori were western trained, with western ideas of conservation of art. There were all kinds of things that you didn't do, and conservators were trying to stop people touching things, and didn't want leaves<sup>9</sup> and didn't want this and that, and of course Maori people were so angry about that, that a lot of the Maori protocols about how you behave and what you do were being broken by conservators, [that] conservators became very nervous. They were even told by some Maori that they'd never work on Maori material again. So, we had some nervous conservators. It was my opportunity as the Chairperson of the Cultural Conservation Advisory Council [to help make it] policy for us to train Maori conservators. I think we trained five, and they're still working in New Zealand. We've got a textile conservator at the National Museum, and two objects conservators,

and a paper conservator, and two women's objects conservators. No there's six. All this was because of the opening the doors and letting the light in that Te Maori enabled us to do.

Since [Te Maori], it's [been] ten years. In that ten years we've made a lot of progress, but I think at this stage we've come to a bit of a halt. Now [to explain] what happened with Wanganui when they didn't want anything going from Wanganui Museum. It was very interesting, and I'm not criticising Wanganui because I come from Wanganui too. I have strong Wanganui whakapapa, and I'm part of a trust that cares for one of our most important taonga. I'm not criticising my people in Wanganui, because their experience with the museum had not been good. But, once they saw what had happened with Te Maori - when Te Maori came home, they wished to add some things, for New Zealand. But Te Maori was Te Maori, and we couldn't do that. An exhibition has gone from Wanganui since then, to Australia. That was an exhibition designed for the Art Gallery by a young Maori conservator, Rangihiroa Panoho, using material from the museum collection and contemporary Maori artists. That created a dialogue about continuity, and the threads [were] being rejoined and opened to the future, [showing] that we are not looking at being cut off into chunks by anybody else's culture or academic discipline, but [are] looking at ourselves as continuity. The people of Wanganui have taken a new look at the museum, and we're in the process of writing a whole new legal structure and administrative structure for the museum. It's happening all over Aotearoa.

The story now returns to a previous theme: an account of process.

In terms of the Te Maori experience, I was exhausted. I just about died, I think, a few times, with exhaustion. We were all exhausted, because for the management team, if anything went wrong [we had to sort it out]. I witnessed the most interesting, interesting day and night. When we went to St. Louis, we had this business of Maori protocol and the way western people open exhibitions and deal with things. The chairperson of the American Federation of Arts, which was doing a lot of the funding of the work in the States, was coming to the St. Louis opening, and the chairperson



of the St. Louis Art Museum [as well], were both women. They didn't understand the role of women in Maori society. They were very angry that they weren't going to be able to speak, during the first ritual of encounter, which is very important - that's the sacred, ancient Maori protocol. They didn't understand at all. (Peter Tapsell came to that opening. Ministers came to different openings, so that everybody had a chance.) We sat up all night, and tried to talk about how to do it, what was going to happen. The kaumatua were all really upset. They were very angry when the messages came back, that this was America and it was their museum and they were going open it. We all sat round very quietly because the kaumatua were having a discussion. I laughed at Sid one night, it was lovely. He was so funny. He had an idea, you see, and so he spoke up. But his elder was there. And his elder said to Sid, 'be quiet Sid, you're too young', and Sid said to me 'that's the best news I've ever had'. It just shows you we were in a totally different world suddenly. We were in America, and we were discussing protocol, and Sid - part of the management team and experienced with other openings and other tribal groups - was putting forward an idea as you might do. But, if we were in a meeting house, Sid probably would have had to get permission to speak from his elder, or his elder would have asked him to speak. He wouldn't have dared to speak. We were living in several worlds. The way he said it was such a relief. It was so funny, it brought the house down and we all managed to work. The elders were going home, they were so upset. If the Maori protocols couldn't be observed, the exhibition was not safe, the objects were not safe from *these people*. It wouldn't be safe in their gallery, and neither would the visitors, and our taonga would be most unhappy there. It wouldn't be good. So, we worked and worked and worked. The only way we could do it was have, in this case, two openings. We broke protocol: Peter Tapsell spoke twice. The opening went ahead, but it took us a day and a night. We were *exhausted*, by the time the opening came. Absolutely exhausted. The other thing was that you wanted somebody special to go through the door first. It was a woman always. We didn't have any little virgins with us, as you would for opening your new house. We didn't think that anybody would be safe, at their age and all our age, so we had to have another protocol. [The kaumatua] chose a special lady, Glen Rowling. He<sup>10</sup> was the ambassador at that stage. She got all nervous because she only had a red suit, and she was meant to wear black.

She found a black coat to put over her, and she went through the door first. We were all thrilled with that, because people really respected Bill and Glen. They were not Maori, therefore there were no tribal [politics]. Because there were more than one tribe there, if it had been any tribal woman that had gone through, everybody else would be furious, and all the old battles would take place again in the korero, and we would remember old insults and old hurts and old alliances and goodness knows what. We could be fighting our boundary problems of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Choosing Lady Rowling was perfect. It was just lovely. We were all thrilled with that. Those were the sorts of dialogue we had to have for hours and hours and hours every night while we were planning things.

One of the other amusing things was in the hotel in St. Louis. Bob Cater smokes a pipe, and he kept setting the fire alarms off and emptying the hotel. Several times we had to evacuate the place in a terrible hurry, and it was that jolly Bob Cater and his pipe. Then the women discovered this sort of Warehouse type thing, that they had in the States then but we didn't have here. They went shopping! It was amazing! I think we needed an extra plane to come home! The whole experience was just marvellous. Between the group, there was just this amazing energy. It was the same at every opening, who ever was there. But it was at St. Louis that this great dialogue went on about the opening itself. It was really quite touch and go, until they decided that AFA would just have to respect the protocols. Once they were told what the Maori community felt about the whole thing, they understood that they were dealing with another cultural perspective that needed to be taken into account for the success of the exhibition. I hope the American people who were involved with Te Maori officially took another view point [away with them]. I think, in terms of the First Nations people of the States, it has had an effect, and I think for those people who experienced it, it certainly has had a profound [effect]. The only thing I can say is that I think that we still have got a long way to go.

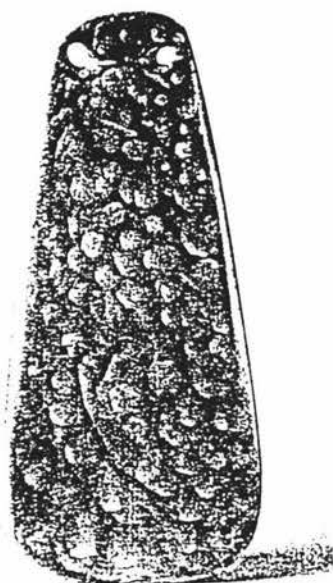
[The Taonga Maori Conference was] a spin-off from Te Maori as well. When I was chairperson of the Cultural Conservation Advisory Council, we were asked to have a 1990 project. Nobody could think of anything, [so] I said I can remember something that was said at the end of the Te Maori

exhibition by the elders, when we had a big meeting in Wellington at the National Museum. What they were worried about was who was going to keep the taonga warm. I said, 'wouldn't it be a good idea if our 1990 project was to bring people who are conserving the taonga, in more ways than one - the essence of taonga as well as the physical attributes of the taonga - in museums around the world together'. Bring about fifteen key curators and key museologists together, to give them an understanding of how the Maori world works. That's what we did. The words of those elders were always ringing in my ears. 'Who was keeping the taonga warm?' I just felt that that was terribly important.

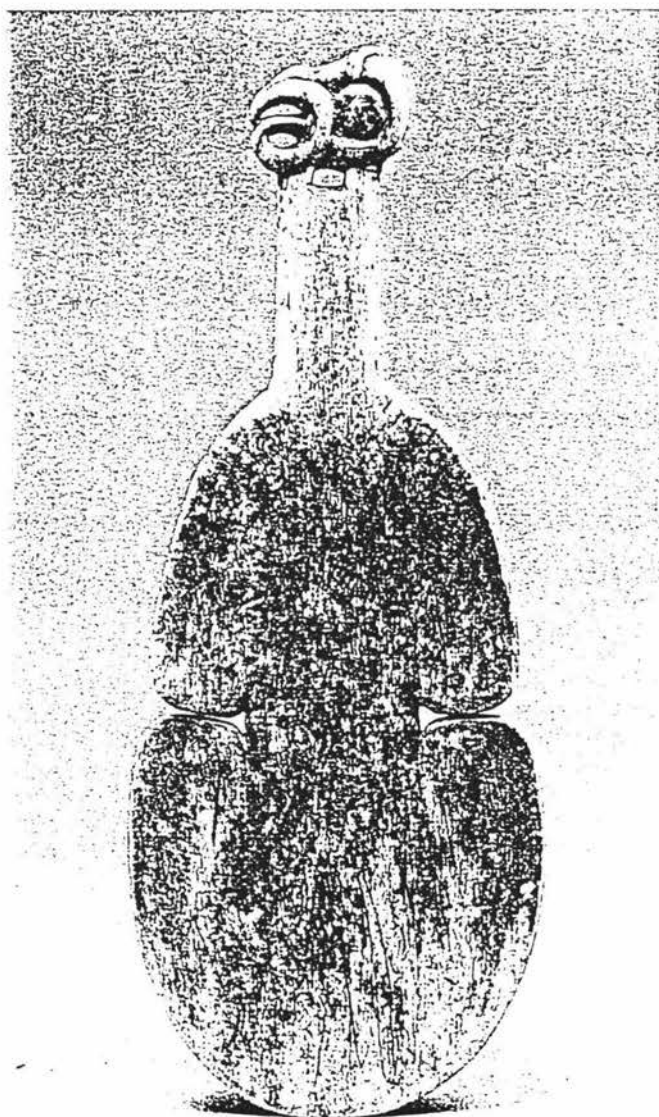
In 1990, New Zealand celebrated 150 years since the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi. As a mark of that event, the Taonga Maori Conference was organised by the Cultural Conservation Advisory Council to bring together people involved with Maori taonga around the world. The conference participants travelled around New Zealand visiting many marae, discussing ways in which they could better look after the taonga in their care, and establishing relationships with the Maori community.

Mina now alludes to some aspects of the exhibition about which she felt uncomfortable. Though the concerns are expressed in terms of substance, the fundamental issue is that the correct process was not followed.

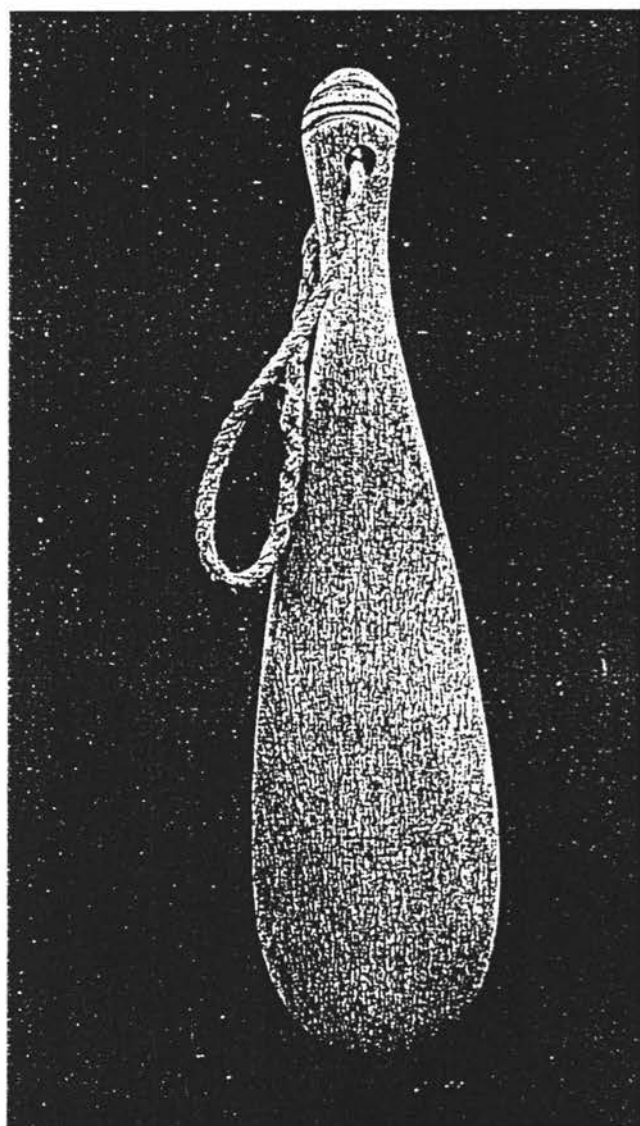
There are a couple of things in the Te Maori catalogue that really worried me. Some of the images I was against, I was really quite angry about. It was something that I had thought of for years, working in museums, but quite a number of the exhibition team, and even our Maori people on the [management team] never thought of it, because they never had to encounter it and think about it. It's the presentation of the images. One of the concepts that one tries to promote in an exhibition, of any sort, is to make sure that the object is presented in a way that it would have been seen, that it was expected to be seen, so that it would convey the message that it was expected to convey. So, here is a pendant (Fig. 13), and it's photographed as a pendant. If it had been hung, it would have hung like that. The obverse



**Figure 13.** Pendant, hei pounamu, from Kaipara. Catalogue Number 48. This pendant is photographed as it would look if suspended (Photo: Athol McCredie. In Mead 1984:189).



**Figure 14.** Club, kotiate paraoa, from Te Kaha (?) Catalogue Number 96 (Photo: Athol McCredie. In Mead 1984:206).



**Figure 15.** Club, patu paraoa, from Te Kuiti. Catalogue Number 62 (Photo: Athol McCredie. In Mead 1984:194).

Two clubs “hanging on the wall like pictures”.

side was the same, so there was no right or wrong side to that pendant, I remember it well. There were two things that I found interesting. The first was the presentation of the weapons. The taiaha and the weapons are presented in such a way that they're either at rest or they're in the attack position. Some of these weapons were hung as though they were meant to hang on the wall like a painting, [whereas] they should have been free, because [hanging up was] not how they were presented (Figs. 14 and 15). They did this so you could see the image. Dialogue hadn't gone into the presentation of the photographs, and the way that the photographs of the objects were actually presented. There was another one, a hei matau, that was actually photographed on its side (Fig. 16). It's a fishhook. I mean it's not really a fishhook, it's not a real fishhook, but it's a representation. It represents the relationship between the children of Tangaroa and humans. I believe they should have actually suspended them the way they were meant to be. There was a lot of dialogue that didn't go on. I don't know how it would have ended up, if we'd had the dialogue, but we didn't have the dialogue. That was the thing that really worried me, and neither Sid nor David thought of it, so I was in a constant state of anxiety. The taiaha too - in some cases they were represented in the attack position, rather than the rest position, so they were challenging you (Figs. 17 and 18). I don't know whether that was deliberate, but I don't believe that the curators and the exhibition team ever had the dialogue. The exhibition was presented the way a museum would present an exhibition. Some Maori protocol was adhered to, but very little in terms of [exhibition presentation]. I was alerted to that by the photographs. Unfortunately, when it came to actually doing the evaluation, people got very angry, and I had to be very quiet and careful that I wasn't hurting people's feelings. But we weren't into hurting feelings, we were into working on new concepts.

There was a lovely story about Uenuku. The people of Te Awemutu, where Uenuku belongs, didn't want it to go, [but that] was overridden by Tainui people. By Te Arikiniui<sup>11</sup>. Wherever Uenuku went, the next morning, no matter how much dusting, there was this spider web. All around the States, there was always this spider web, the next morning. When the conservators would go to check the exhibition, there would be this spider web up in the feathers of Uenuku. It was amazing. It went everywhere. We don't know





**Figure 16.** Pendant, hei matau, from Te Ati Awa tribe. Catalogue Number 157. This is the fishhook pendant “photographed on its side” (Photo: Athol McCredie. In Mead 1984:227).



**Figure 17.** Club, wahaika, from Ngapuhi tribe. Catalogue Number 45. A club (rather than a taiaha) in the attack position (Photo: Athol McCredie. In Mead 1984:188).



**Figure 18.** Weapon, tewhatewha, from Ngapuhi tribe. Catalogue Number 36. This piece Mina said “looks like a tomato stake!” (Photo: Athol McCredie. In Mead 1984:185).



whether it was the same spider, but in every venue, there was a spider web. It was just marvellous. It just happened, and people got quite entranced by this appearance - right across the States, in quite unrelated places, removed from each other by thousands of miles - of the spider web. People got a bit spooked by it all the time, by this spider web. It was really wonderful. [There were] lots of little stories like that.

I suppose from my perspective, [change hasn't] happened quickly enough and deeply enough. There's [an increase in the use of] the word kaitiaki that [is] happening because we started with Te Maori. The Maori staff members feel that they're kaitiaki - 'kaitiaki Maori' they call themselves. Of course, they can't be. They can only be delegated the role of kaitiaki by the real kaitiaki - those are the people whose objects they are, who were the kaitiaki in the first place. We haven't worked through that yet, but it's an issue that I'd like to explore a little further, that Maori people who work in museums are delegated to be kaitiaki on behalf only of the [real kaitiaki], and everybody in the museum has that same delegation. The Maori staff members have a special responsibility to make sure that those particular issues are met. There's a lot of work to do yet. Each tribe, each iwi and each hapu will work out its own unique relationship with its own museum. There'll be no formula - 'there will be three Maori members on this board' - that's a Pakeha way of doing it. Nobody will know what will happen until the Maori community has had its dialogue with itself, with its members, and the museum community understands it has to wait, and not expect the Maori people to fulfil the role of one Maori member on a trust board, where you're a token and you're voted out. The ways Maori people deal in the Maori world with issues, needs to have some sort of relationship with the way western people deal, in a formal sense, with issues. Some agreement [needs to be reached] about how this shall happen. It'll be different throughout New Zealand, because people are different, and have different aspirations and different experiences. At one stage at Wanganui Museum, one of the tribal people borrowed a painting from the museum, and then wouldn't take it back. The museum would have looked damn stupid if they had taken the people to court, because record keeping was pretty poor in those early days. Museums have moved a long way since then, though. I'm very proud of the

way we're working, and what we're moving towards, but being successful, that's the thing.

From Mina's account, a real sense is gained of the energy and emotion that went into planning and carrying out the exhibition, and the power and fun that resulted. It is a story that is much more free and real and whole than that carried in the literature. Mina's story covers the context out of which the exhibition arose - in America with the interest professed by museum staff in Maori art, and in New Zealand with poor Maori statistics and the alienation felt by Maori towards museums. She speaks about the choice of the taonga and the problems encountered when the taonga were being prepared for travel, and gives her experiences of being on the Te Maori Management Committee and at the opening in St. Louis. Finally, she discusses some of the outcomes of Te Maori. Maori and museums are forming partnerships, there was input into the new Museum of New Zealand, museums' understanding of taonga has changed, groups are forming bicultural constitutions, Maori conservators are being trained, the Taonga Maori Conference was held, and there are now more Maori personnel in museums. Change has occurred, Mina concludes, but not yet enough. We must keep working towards a better understanding between museums and Maori.

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<sup>1</sup> Mina mentions three times that Newton was the Curator of Primitive Art at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. What 'makes her hackles rise' is the label 'primitive art', and the fact that taonga Maori - because it was produced by an indigenous people - was immediately classed as 'primitive'.

<sup>2</sup> Ken Gorbey was certainly president of AGMANZ between August 1980 and December 1981 (*AGMANZ News*).

<sup>3</sup> The Government had in the past been criticised for its treatment of Maori issues. During the 1970s and 1980s, especially, Maori were thrusting their concerns into the public domain. Maori claims for the return of their land under the Treaty of Waitangi, and the increasing readiness on the part of Maori to speak out against inequality and against the high representation of Maori in negative social statistics, all meant that the Government was becoming wary of upsetting Maori.

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<sup>4</sup> Koro Wetere was the Minister of Maori Affairs at this time.

<sup>5</sup> Mina is here referring to the Report of the exhibition compiled in 1988 by the Te Maori Management Committee. For this part of the interview, she was leafing through the Report and discussing the parts that caught her eye. The list of the people on the Management Committee appears on page 45 of the Report.

<sup>6</sup> I wonder if here Mina means 'community' rather than 'committee'.

<sup>7</sup> Te Waka Toi is the Maori name for the Council for Maori and South Pacific Arts.

<sup>8</sup> The new Museum of New Zealand is currently (1996-1997) being built on the Wellington waterfront, and is due to open at the beginning of 1998.

<sup>9</sup> It is a Maori custom to leave a piece of green foliage beside an object, to keep the taonga company, and to clothe and warm it.

<sup>10</sup> Sir Wallace Rowling, husband of Lady Rowling.

<sup>11</sup> The Maori Queen, Te Arikinui Dame Te Atairangikahu.

## The Anthropological Story

So far we have heard the story of Te Maori, the story of the stories written about it, and the story of someone involved in the planning and execution of the exhibition. What has not yet been told is how *I* came to be involved in this project, and what I see as the important issues arising from it.

I began this thesis in the hope of somehow finding a space between the disciplines anthropology and museum studies where I could be comfortable. I wanted to explore the ways in which anthropology connects with museums. My first, broad idea was to look at the ways in which museums make concrete, for the viewing public, the notion of culture, which anthropology claims as its special province. In other words, how museums shape culture. By choosing a particular exhibition on which to focus, it was hoped that a manageable thesis would result. Te Maori seemed the obvious choice, as an exhibition that looms large in the popular imagination of New Zealand, and as a defining moment for other countries' understandings of what New Zealand is all about.

At first, the way to go seemed to be to look at why Te Maori occurred, and why it happened when it did - what the context of the exhibition was. As my reading and thinking progressed, however, what emerged was a story: an account of the exhibition and its continuing effects, that incorporated many other themes and reasons and meanings within the one story.

Te Maori interests me on two levels, as a New Zealander and as a student of anthropology. I was only just eleven when the exhibition was on in New York, but I remember seeing the opening ceremony on television and hearing all the hype and excitement that accompanied it around America and followed it back to New Zealand. I never actually saw it on display in New Zealand - we lived in New Plymouth and didn't manage to get to any of the main centres - but the images of the taonga were very familiar to me. The images were on display around the country in posters and newspapers and magazines, in classrooms and

on TV. You couldn't help but bump into it at some point. New Zealanders as a whole were very proud of the reception 'their' taonga gained in America, and delighted to talk about Te Maori in the public domain - on the News, current affairs programmes, newspaper editorials, in schools - and in the private domain - at dinner parties and family conversations. That is how I remember it.

As an anthropologist, Te Maori revisits all the ground I covered whilst doing my degree. It was made up, on the surface, of the material culture of Maori - an indigenous people, who are, after all, the traditional subject matter of anthropology. It presses all the right buttons: exotic objects, ethnic people, ritual, and theoretical explanations after the fact. It also raises a lot of questions which for me have always been the most important issues dealt with by anthropology. Of course, what I see in the exhibition is completely shaped by my anthropological biases; that should be acknowledged at once. Someone else looking at the same material but coming at it from a different background will see as important something completely different. I also tend to notice 'academic' or theoretical issues above practical details when I read about Te Maori - a product of my training.

Looking through the themes and issues that occur over and over again in discussions of Te Maori, it is obvious that an analysis could be based on any number of points of view. I could have chosen to discuss corporate sponsorship or gender or the internal politics between the people involved. I could have looked at the context of the exhibition, occurring as it did in a time of increasing Maori nationalism, or I could have focused on the impact and implications of Te Maori, the aesthetics of the exhibition as expressed through display techniques, lighting, space, labels and so on, or the politics of inclusion and exclusion. There are other possibilities as well. None of this, however, seemed to me to capture the essence of what the exhibition was all about, or seemed to explain the conflict I sensed between the differing views the participants had of what the exhibition had to offer.

As far as I can see, the key issue is the self-other dichotomy, as expressed through the forces of colonialism, primitivism and display techniques in institutions. The reasons for this are several. *Te Maori* was an exhibition of objects produced by people the west have formerly termed 'the primitive', and who the west sees as inferior to them. Much of the exhibition's material was gathered into museums on an understanding that the objects' producers were not capable of properly looking after them. Of course, it would be wrong to say that all the objects arrived in museums through a process of colonial appropriation and the disempowerment of their producers. The stories of some individual pieces illustrate a good relationship between Maori and museums. However, in the majority of cases, this is not so, hence the generalisation. The express purpose of the exhibition was not to support such attitudes, but show that they are wrong, and how far we have come since those days. Whether or not shifting the focus of museum display of Maori material from an ethnographic model to an art model has been successful, is a matter of debate. I feel the answer does not lie in changing one western type of display for another, but rather in a more collaborative approach incorporating the ideas and values of Maori.

In order to understand how all this relates to *Te Maori*, I think it is important first to describe what the self-other dichotomy and primitivism are all about. One of the most prevalent ideas in the western world is the notion of self and other. This holds that 'we', the 'west'<sup>1</sup>, are separate from and different to the 'other' - everyone else. The west defines itself in opposition to this 'other': it is everything that the 'other' is not. 'Self' and 'other' are only relative concepts, they do not exist independently of one another, or independently of a person or group, and do not have any inherent value of their own. The 'self' of the west cannot exist unless the west identifies itself as a separate group and, similarly, the west cannot think of itself as 'self' unless it can conceive of someone else as 'other'.

Not only does the west cast itself as different from the other, but superior as well. As such, the west seeks to control and dominate the other. The west, however, does not seem to recognise that it is equally an 'other', from someone else's perspective. Or alternatively, it cannot recognise that other people are 'selves',



from their own perspective. There tends to be evident the notion, 'the west versus the rest': that the west is more distinct from all other cultures, than each of the individual cultures that make up 'the rest' are distinct from each other.

Intimately tied up with the west's conception of what the other is like, is the idea of primitivism. Arising out of nineteenth century evolutionism, where various human groups are situated on a hierarchical scale of progress and advancement, it claims that 'we'<sup>2</sup>, the west, are superior to 'them', everyone else. 'We' call 'them' the primitive, the savage, the other. 'We' think of 'them' as below us on a scale of evolution, in all ways different from ourselves, and in all ways in need of our help and salvation.

'The primitive'<sup>3</sup> has been variously described - I have found over 80 synonyms in my by-no-means complete reading in this subject area (eg Price 1989, Torgovnick 1990, Araeen 1991, Coombes 1991, Coutts-Smith 1991, Howell 1991, Miller 1991, Rhodes 1994, on primitivism in art). The primitive is singular, universal and undifferentiated: any one primitive is no different from any other, and barely exists on the level of the individual, rather as part of a group. Primitives are called childlike, promiscuous, unevolved, irrational, innocent and wild. They exist outside the forces of history that move the west, and as such are static and timeless. They represent our own past, showing us what we (as the west) were once like. On a more positive note, the primitive has also been called mystic, in tune with nature, free, whole, ideal, morally superior, natural and pure - all that we would wish to be. These terms, of course, do not reflect what 'the primitive' is actually like, nor are they a static description, but change over time. It is not really important what the other is like in reality. What matters is the vision of ourselves we gain through the projection of our negative out onto something else. As Marianna Torgovnick puts it, "the needs of the present determine the value and nature of the primitive...the primitive can be - has been, will be (?) - whatever Euro-Americans want it to be. It tells us what we want it to tell us" (1990:9).

In order to fully understand the western category 'the primitive', I believe it is important to acknowledge where such ideas originate. Primitivist thought, as it

exists in western philosophy, is a product of nineteenth century evolutionary theory. This holds that all species on earth, humans included, evolved from original simple organisms to more complex, contemporary forms through a process of natural selection, where the strongest survive to reproduce. When these ideas are applied to the realm of human society and culture, they result in the conclusion that human groups evolve socially the same way that various species evolve biologically. Human groups have, according to this scheme, changed over time from being less complex technologically, politically, economically, religiously and mentally to being advanced in all these areas. Victorian England, at the time when theorists interested in such ideas were working, was considered the pinnacle of evolutionary achievement.

Overriding all these ideas was a sense of linearity, of hierarchy. The goal was to progress along a series of pre-ordained steps, always improving, until ultimately perfection and salvation were achieved. The steps through which a society progressed could be seen manifested in other cultures around the world. Travellers and missionaries had brought back to Europe stories and examples of the 'primitives' in Africa, Oceania, and the Americas. These societies were obviously different from their European observers, who saw their differences in technology and organisation and religion not in terms of another form of cultural expression, but in terms of a hierarchical scale. These newly encountered people were, logically, less advanced than the Europeans, because they didn't display those attributes which Europe had decided indicated advancement. In this way, Victorians justified their sense of themselves at the apex of a great chain of being. This also gave them the mandate to 'help' the primitives up the ladder towards perfection by attempting to turn them into good little westerners, images of themselves.

Having justified its desire to conquer, colonise and change every society it saw as inferior, the west proceeded, during the nineteenth century especially, to do so with great abandon. As Rasheed Araeen terms it, "What is singular about western civilization is its grotesque ambition to supersede every other culture or civilization in its schizophrenic desire to expand, dominate, control, and rule

everything on earth" (1991:168). Colonialism should not, however, be considered a singular or uniform event. This particular type of colonialism is qualitatively different from the colonialism in existence before the nineteenth century. Nicholas Thomas (1994) argues that nineteenth century colonialism works out of a racist discourse, where the 'other' was seen as savage and lower on a scale of humanity. Difference was cast in terms of physical attributes. This is in contrast to pre-nineteenth century colonialism, which was characterised by a concern with religious difference. In this form of colonial discourse, the other was constructed as pagan or non-Christian, and thought of as essentially human, though lacking in civilised attributes as a child is lacking. In order to bring about salvation, a goal of these colonisers, the people they encountered had to be considered at an equivalent level of humanity as they, otherwise they could not be brought to God.

It has been extensively argued (eg Trouillot 1991) that the development of primitivist and evolutionary thought was no accident. The west needed the primitive in order to be complete itself. As the west defined itself in opposition to the primitive, as everything the primitive was not, then without that something else, that other, to stand against, the west could not push itself forward as something unique and better. The west's sense of identity in the world is inseparable from its belief that it is superior to everyone else.

Michel-Rolph Trouillot (1991) puts forward an interesting and compelling argument regarding the position of the other in western thought. He shows that contemporary to exploratory expeditions like those of Columbus in the fifteenth century and before those of Cook in the eighteenth century, the west already had a notion of the other, which was described and developed through literary works on a 'utopian' elsewhere. Thomas More's *Utopia* (1513) and Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1702), as two examples, show that Europe was trying to describe an 'ideal state', another place that was physically and ideologically different from their own.

With the 'discovery' of America, Europe discovered an actual place that could be its "alter ego, its elsewhere, its other" (Trouillot 1991:23). This new elsewhere

was described negatively: peopled with savages, it was rough and uncivilised. What this shows is not that Europe contradicted itself with an other that was both positive and negative, but that the other had two sides: utopia and the savage. "It has often been said that the savage or the primitive was the alter ego the West constructed for itself. What has not been emphasized enough is that this Other was a Janus, of whom the savage was only the second face. The first face was the West itself, but the West fancifully constructed as a utopian projection and meant to be, in that imaginary correspondence, the condition of existence of the savage" (Trouillot 1991:28). Both utopia and the savage are necessary to the construction of the west, for together they form a complete picture of what the west is not.

Though the enlightenment, with its emphasis on finding a scientific 'truth', enabled more information about the other to be gathered, the search for the other was not a product of the enlightenment. "Ever since the West became the West [an event Trouillot (1991:30) situates with the renaissance, when Christendom became Europe], Robinson has been looking for Friday" (Trouillot 1991:26). What the enlightenment did was to shift the search from one with a religious basis - looking for the pagan in order to bring salvation, to one based on science - looking for the savage in order to bring technology and progress.

Johannes Fabian's work on the social construction of time (1983) also has some useful elements to add to the debate. Fabian argues that social evolutionists saw time as active. Time accomplished things. For these evolutionists, stages of time led to civilisation. 'Primitives' merely hadn't passed through the correct stage, so hadn't advanced. Time had become conflated with distance. Those people far away were thought to typify earlier stages of human development. These ideas are still prevalent today: difference is equated with distance, and distance in space is equated with distance in time. Thus difference is thought to signify temporal distance - the primitive is backwards and old-fashioned.

Understanding how the west views the primitive enables us to recognise the effect this category of thought has on the way the west handles the physical presence of 'primitive' people, accounts of their social structure, and their material culture.

The relics of contact with the primitive - objects of their material culture - found their way back to Europe and into private and public collections. At first, these objects were regarded as curiosities, and displayed amongst a jumble of other items from other societies in 'cabinets of curiosities'. As more information about their societies of origin became available, as anthropology began to carve out its territory in the academic world, such objects were displayed as representatives of their entire culture of origin, with an eye towards the object's function and towards educating the public. Individual creators of the pieces were not recognised; the pieces were said to be produced by the cultural group or the region from which they were taken. Later developments which saw the decolonisation of many societies from which ethnographic material was drawn, fostered an atmosphere where the west tried to treat the primitive as equal in status. People realised that ethnographic objects could be viewed as art, and could be displayed for their aesthetic qualities. In this 'art gallery' model of display, individual artists were acknowledged (where known), and cultural context was considered irrelevant (Ames 1986; Hiller 1991). Needless to say, this is a simplified account. To give it full depth, one would have to explore this issue in the context of the development of the semi-autonomous field of cultural production in western societies and the creation of an 'art' world.

In ethnographic displays, objects were arranged either typologically or geographically. Any evidence of contact with Europeans was edited out, so, as a result, a 'timeless' culture was on show. The curators of these collections felt they were doing the primitives a favour by 'saving' their material. As Annie Coombes points out, "the rhetoric often employed was one of the necessity of conservation and preservation in the face of the inevitable extinction of the producers of the material culture in their custody" (1991:199).

Displaying objects from other cultures as western art objects are displayed isolates them from any context or function, but highlights their aesthetic qualities. In so doing, however, some fairly basic assumptions are being made. It is supposed that human emotions are universal, and that people will react in uniform ways to a piece of art. If this is correct, then anyone should be able to understand art from



other cultures; in other words, meaning is universal. This is, quite obviously, not the case. Westerners do not understand the depth of meaning alluded to by a Maori carving, for example. We cannot assume our interpretation matches the intentions of the creator or the responses from people of the originating culture (Howell 1991:217-219).

The west has no difficulty in justifying its appropriation and classification of 'primitive' objects. Part of the west's identity is its belief that it has 'culture', in a high, capital C, going to the opera sense of the word. The west has, in this scenario, a monopoly on what is art, because it is the only group developed and civilised enough to know what constitutes art. Logically, if the other is everything the west is not, then the other has no culture or art. If that is true, then the products of the other are open to be interpreted and displayed as the west sees fit. As Torgovnick puts it, "A group without an 'art' and 'aesthetics' can be thought to lack 'culture' and 'political integrity'; it can then be 'discovered' and 'developed' by 'superior' groups, that is, those who possess both 'art' and 'culture'" (1990:83).

The art world of the west admires the work of 'others' for its exoticism, not for its comment on the social processes of modernity, as it would admire the work of western artists. Observers don't look beyond the cultural origin of the artist, instead equating western with innovation, decoration and social comment, and non-western with tradition-bound functional items that look strange. Rasheed Araeen, an artist living in London but born in Pakistan, has experienced such belittling of his work first-hand. This, he says, is a racist attitude on the part of the art world, arguing that "the idea that the creative abilities of black people are 'fixed' or can only be realized, even today, *within* the limits of their own traditional cultures is based on the racist philosophy of 'ethnic determinism' in art developed during the late nineteenth century" (1991:179).

Araeen's work, and the work of those like him, fits into the category 'primitive art'. Primitive art has been defined by the art world as the work of 'primitives' - to be exact, those without technology, those at a geographical distance to the west,



those representative of an earlier stage of human evolution. Even Douglas Newton, who selected the objects included in *Te Maori*, is guilty of such a definition: "Properly, it is the art of those people who have remained until recent times at an early technological level, who have been oriented toward the use of tools but not machines" (Newton, cited in Price 1989:2).

According to western understanding, any piece produced by an other "must have been produced by an unnamed figure who represents his [sic] community and whose craftsmanship respects the dictates of its age-old traditions" (Price 1989:56). Thus artists become anonymous and timeless, in opposition to the 'modern art' of the west. The use of such temporal metaphors serves to distance non-western peoples, and assert 'our' superiority over 'them'.

A result of this type of thought is that it is only when western experts recognise primitive objects as having artistic merit, that they become art. "[T]he Western observer's discriminating eye is often treated as if it were the only means by which an ethnographic object could be elevated to the status of a work of art" (Price 1989:68). 'Naturally', in their view, as it is the westerners who know what is 'art', then it is they who are able to describe and interpret the meaning and significance of a piece produced by non-westerners. The aesthetic criteria of the producers are dismissed as irrelevant or non-existent.

Especially in the early twentieth century, western artists began to use objects in ethnographic museums as inspiration for their own work. By adopting primitive motifs, these 'primitivist artists' sought to challenge their society with its decadence and rampant industrialisation, and called for a return to 'purer' values as epitomised by non-industrial societies. Such goals did nothing to end conventional notions of what is the primitive, they just cast them in positive terms, as something valuable to strive for. These artists expressed their discontent through a utopian vision of an ideal state of the world.

As this demonstrates, art is a political tool. It can be used by those trying to subvert the social order, as above, but it can also operate as part of the mechanics

of social control. Through it, hegemonic ideas and ideals can be expressed, along with new concepts which aim to subvert the old. Art is a particularly effective way of clothing political and social mores for, as Kenneth Coutts-Smith (1991) argues, there is an assumption "that art somehow represents the embodiment or the concretization of basic values and fundamental truths that exist somewhere outside of history, beyond social mutation, external to political and economic reality" (1991:14).

Recently, facilitating the transition from curio to functional object to work of art has been an important part of the work of museum professionals, interested academics, and art historians. On this trend, Torgovnick writes,

Within the dominant narrative as told by art historians, the 'elevation' of primitive objects into art is often implicitly seen as the aesthetic equivalent of decolonization, as bringing Others into the 'mainstream' in a way that ethnographic studies, by their very nature, could not. Yet that 'elevation' in a sense reproduces, in the aesthetic realm, the dynamics of colonialism, since Western standards control the flow of the 'mainstream' and can bestow or withhold the label 'art' (1990:82).

Of course, as Torgovnick's critique makes clear, the concern is still with a hierarchical scale of value, with 'elevating' objects. Nothing has changed since the days of evolutionism, except that we're now condescending enough to allow the primitives and their objects to be raised to near our level. For all this elevation, however, it is still the west who decides what is mainstream. Sally Price agrees, "Much of the recent 'valorization' of Primitive Art has simply been a matter of removing selected Masterpieces from one realm and depositing them in the other, without in any way narrowing the great divide that separates them" (1989:99).

Te Maori is intimately caught up in this whole tradition of comment on primitivism and primitive art. It was an exhibition of objects produced by non-westerners. Those objects were selected by a western curator of primitive art, based on their conformation to ethnographic models of what a 'good' Maori piece is. They were displayed as objects of art in art galleries and art museums. The

exhibition was described as bringing Maori art to the world, and hailed as breaking down the barriers between artefact and art object, and as redefining Maori artefacts as art.

Bridging the divide between art and artefact was acclaimed as an important and ground-breaking element of Te Maori, at least in the eyes of the professional, academic people involved. It was the first time Maori objects had been displayed as art, where their aesthetic features were prioritised. This goal was compromised, however, by the fact that the taonga were chosen by a curator of 'primitive' art, based on ethnographic criteria, and displayed in the Hall of Primitive Art at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and at the Chicago Field Museum of Natural History. Instead of challenging the tendency to assign Maori objects a place in ethnographic displays, where they are called 'artefacts', Te Maori in fact helped to reinforce such definitions. The rationale behind the choice of taonga and the places in which they were displayed did nothing to help redefine taonga as 'art', in a western understanding of the word. The waters of the debate were muddied by the extraneous messages viewers were receiving. How could these pieces be simply accepted as art, as the exhibitors wished, when they bought in to every stereotype of what 'proper' - ie traditional - Maori objects look like, and were housed in places labelled 'primitive' and 'natural history'?

As this indicates, and as Mina McKenzie made very clear in her interview, Te Maori was not a straightforward phenomenon. There were a variety of different groups involved, all with their particular interests to protect. If the parties are split into two camps, then two agendas that were operating concurrently can be seen: that of the art, museum, academic world, and that of the Maori world. The first was trying to bridge the art-artefact divide, to ideologically shift 'ethnographic material' from the museum to the art gallery. They were also interested in challenging popular understandings of the 'other', and attempting to show that Maori culture was not timeless or static, but living, vital, interesting and important. While these last goals were important to the Maori community as well, they were also concerned with reclaiming their ancestors, with re-establishing a relationship with their taonga, and with asserting their rights of ownership and

control. For them, taonga is neither art nor artefact, but a link between people and their ancestors.

I suspect that the museum and academic people have missed the point somewhat. It's not a matter of art or artefact; I think there is merit in both approaches. Nor is it as simple as finding a middle point on the supposed continuum between the two. We need to break out of such restrictive viewpoints and look at what other ways of thinking about the problem have to offer. Michael Ames (1986) has an alternative: representing the insider's point of view from the perspective of the insider. In so doing, it must be recognised that there is not just one insider perspective, but a multiplicity of views which change over time; museums must never become complacent, thinking they've done their duty with one exhibition. He continues his argument,

"Secondly, we must admit that we cannot easily characterize the insider perspectives, because to do so would be to transform them into our comparative and international languages, thereby reconstructing them like our fabricated exhibitions. Perhaps it is sufficient at this point to learn to listen to them" (1986:45).

Just as there were different agendas and concerns associated with the actual staging of the exhibition, so there are several conflicting voices amongst the literature. Douglas Newton, curator of primitive art at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, was concerned with the international recognition of taonga as artefact. The Maori community wanted international recognition of their taonga and culture as living and powerful. Sidney Mead, co-curator of the exhibition, wanted taonga recognised as art, in order to redress the damage done by colonialism and 'ethnographic' displays. The Americans saw the taonga as exotic and surprisingly sophisticated. The New Zealand art world fell in love with Maori art, which became very fashionable.

To state the argument another way, the concerns of the 'Pakeha' or art gallery, museum, American audience side are located within the primitivism and art-

artefact debates, as already described. The concerns of the Maori are more to do with ownership of cultural, spiritual and intellectual property.

Te Maori has been widely acclaimed as one of the first exhibitions for which the cultural owners of the pieces were consulted, and whose wishes were integral to the exhibition proceeding (Ames 1990; Mead 1990; Tapsell 1996). Contemporary trends in both America and New Zealand had shown that the cultural and spiritual owners of pieces held in museums should be included in negotiations and discussions regarding those objects. The political ramifications otherwise could have been very destructive<sup>4</sup>. The planners of Te Maori did not intend to include Maori, but as the project gained momentum, it became obvious that the exhibition could not go ahead without the full consent and participation of the descendants of the taonga. The Wanganui example is illustrative. There, the Maori community, with a history of bad relations with the local museum, decided not to allow any taonga from their region to be included in Te Maori. The museum could have gone against their desires, but it was not in the museum's best interests to do so and risk further alienating the local Maori. If museums in other parts of the country, and the exhibition organisers, had been insensitive to Maori concerns and wishes, they would have jeopardised the entire exhibition. Some of the taonga might still have travelled to America, but without the support and participation of Maori, Te Maori would not have had the same impact, or left its mark on the popular imaginations of New Zealand and America in quite the same way.

The Management Committee, with its bicultural focus, consulted with Maori throughout the entire process of planning the exhibition, and declared that Maori were the spiritual owners of the taonga with the right of veto over the inclusion of any pieces (Tapsell 1996). Maori were also included in the staging of the exhibition, through the dawn opening ceremonies and their participation in various 'cultural displays' throughout the duration of the exhibition.

Since Te Maori, museums have tried to continue this atmosphere of partnership. Interpretations of objects have attempted to capture their descendants'

explanations as well as those of the west. Maori staff have been employed and trained in museum techniques so they can care for their taonga.

In a broader context, Maori, in union with other indigenous peoples from around the world, have been party to a declaration of indigenous cultural and intellectual property rights, the Mataatua Declaration. This document sets out what the concerns are that Maori (and other indigenous communities) have over their rights within a nation governed by another ethnic group. It asserts that the world's indigenous people<sup>5</sup> "have the right to self determination; and in exercising that right must be recognised as the exclusive owners of their cultural and intellectual property" (Commission on Human Rights 1993). The declaration upholds that indigenous peoples have the ability and right to decide what becomes of their material culture and knowledge, and should be given the power within western institutions to exercise such rights. The ramification for museums in New Zealand is that they include Maori in the decision making over taonga Maori. Steps have already been taken in this direction, with the training of Maori conservators to work with Maori material.

The real power of Te Maori comes from the combination of approaches offered by the two groups. The critique of primitivism given by the western exhibition planners and commentators when combined with Maori demands for control, generates the potential for discovering a new way of looking at 'ethnographic material' that is not as artefact nor as art. This is a theme hinted at in the stories of Te Maori - the exhibition doesn't make sense unless the many different stories from a variety of perspectives are considered as a whole. Mina puts it a little more explicitly: in her words, "While the Americans and Douglas were looking at Te Maori for the excellence of its sculptural form, Maori people were being re-united with their ancestors. Energy was flowing between the two concepts". As this comment suggests, the energy and vitality that Te Maori generated came *because* of the different approaches the groups were taking, not in spite of them. Te Maori would have been weaker and had less impact if one of those approaches had been missing.



Museum professionals and academics are right, displaying taonga as 'artefacts' renders them static and ahistorical. But so does displaying them as 'art', especially when it is as 'art' defined in western terms. The objects of non-western peoples are never evaluated simply as art, but as 'primitive art'. Such art is admired for its exotic features, its difference to anything produced in the west, for the way it taps into age-old traditions and spirituality. Defining taonga thus, as 'art', is equally static and abusive, and divorces the pieces from their meaning. The attitude of the Maori community, in trying to recover the korero - history, stories - of various pieces, is far more likely to change our perception of the objects and add depth and meaning and history to them, than changing the way they are lit and the type of label they are given in a museum. What is needed is for Maori explanations, aesthetic ideals and histories to be given value, and made explicit in display.

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<sup>1</sup> Semantics is always a problem. For the purposes of this chapter I have chosen to use *the west* to stand for the world's elite: western Europe, North America, and other so-called 'First World' (ie capitalist) nations such as New Zealand or Australia. More specifically, that elite is typically white, middle-class or above, educated and privileged in a society where power and wealth indicate success. *The west* controls the world's resources, and dictates what is hegemonic - what is 'proper' or 'normal' or 'natural'.

<sup>2</sup> I say 'we' because 'the west' (as described in note 1) is the socio-economic group to which I (and I suspect most of my audience) belong.

<sup>3</sup> Where I use the word *primitive* to describe a group of people other than a western group, I do not mean to support such terminology. I use it only because during the period in question *primitive* (or one of its many synonyms) was the acceptable term. As for putting quotation marks around such words, I am undecided. Sometimes it seems more appropriate than others. I am however conscious of Marianna Torgovnick's comments on the matter, which I think are worth reproducing in full:

In the late twentieth century, whether one uses *primitive* with or without quotation marks often implies a political stance - liberalism or conservatism, radicalism or reaction, shame over what the West has done to non-Western societies or the absence of shame. When we put *primitive* into quotation marks, we in a sense wish

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away the heritage of the West's exploitation of non-Western peoples or at least wish to demonstrate that we are politically correct. But the heritage of Western domination cannot be abolished by wishing or by typography. In fact, funny things begin to happen when *primitive* goes into quotation marks. The first thing is that all other constructed terms - especially terms like *the West* and *Western* - seem to require quotation marks as well, a technique that despite its seeming sophistication ultimately relieves writers of responsibility for the words they use. In the absence of such ubiquitous marks, treating *primitive* differently from abstractions such as *Western* implies that the societies traditionally so designated do not, and perhaps never did, exist - are *simply* a figment of the Euro-American imagination (Torgovnick 1990:20).

<sup>4</sup> The 1988 exhibition, "The Spirit Sings: Artistic Traditions of Canada's First Peoples", was held at the Glenbow Museum, Calgary, in conjunction with the Winter Olympics. The Lubicon Lake Cree Indian Nation did not support the exhibition because one of its sponsors, Shell Oil, was drilling for oil on land the Canadian Government had confiscated from the Lubicon. They boycotted the exhibition and the Olympics, as did the Canadian Ethnology Society. The protest forced Canadian museums to take Indian demands seriously, and change their exhibition practice accordingly (Jones 1993).

<sup>5</sup> By *indigenous people* is meant the original inhabitants of a country.

## Conclusion

All interpretive stories are heteronomous - they participate in the world they seek to interpret. The stories that I have provided are heteronomous, because they tell of people and events that were so caught up in what Te Maori became, that in a profound sense, they are Te Maori itself. They are further elements of the korero that has begun to both clothe and be the exhibition.

These concluding words are not some kind of final attempt at the totalisation of a totalising discourse. Te Maori cannot be reduced to one absolute statement: it is far more complex and layered than that. This conclusion attempts only to reflect on and draw out ideas about what I have learnt from this multi-storied story.

From the different accounts in the literature, it can be seen that Te Maori was designed to challenge the art-artefact distinction by moving taonga Maori into the realm of the art gallery. The organisers were intent on gaining international exposure for New Zealanders and for Maori culture. As a result of the exhibition, museums professionals were forced to take seriously Maori calls for the recognition of their cultural and spiritual ownership of taonga, and their right to decide what will be said about their taonga. Western understandings of the 'other' were contested by the ways in which the taonga were displayed, and by the things that were said about the exhibition. The literature also highlighted that while the Te Maori exhibition might have been dismantled, Te Maori is still alive in the stories that are told about it, and is still having an impact. Twelve years after the exhibition first opened, people are still discussing it. In fact, it seems that Te Maori has become some kind of charm: invoke its name at the beginning of an article in order to situate any comments made with the mana of Te Maori.

For Mina, it was the *process* which was important in Te Maori: not the end result so much as the way in which the end result was achieved. New procedures and techniques could be invented, provided the proper dialogue went on and the correct channels were followed. She also made it clear that there were many

different voices clamouring for their perspectives to be used when Te Maori was being planned. Each group had its own vision. Put together, however, these several visions combined to create one whole, eclectic vision, out of which the energy, that so many people noticed about the exhibition, was generated. Ownership - and Maori people being kaitiaki (guardians) of their taonga - was another theme Mina felt was brought to the fore by Te Maori. She also hinted that issues such as primitivism clouded some people's (for example Douglas Newton's) perceptions of what Te Maori was all about.

For myself, I feel that Te Maori can only be understood in relation to the west's notion of 'the primitive'; that the exhibitors were trying very hard not to fulfil the stereotype that Maori objects are merely ethnographic artefacts. This is an opinion that, in a way, I could not help but reach. I am a Pakeha New Zealander: Te Maori is part of my national identity, and to make sense of it I need to relate it to the society in which it occurred. I am a student of anthropology, and as such, the forces I see affecting that society are colonialism and primitivism and racism. I also believe that Te Maori was instrumental in shifting - be it ever so slightly - New Zealanders' opinions on taonga Maori. Because of Te Maori, museums have transformed the ways in which they display cultural objects in reaction to critiques offered by the cultural owners. Recognising that they don't know what all the answers are, that they don't fully understand the context of all the pieces, museums have opted to display the objects as art, thereby accentuating their beauty (and appeasing critics who complain that westerners cannot accept such objects as equal to their own cultural products) and playing down their cultural context. However, what is supposed to be an advance is in reality returning us to where we once were. While the west is prepared to accept taonga Maori as 'art', it still persists in calling it 'primitive art'. A distinction is still drawn between Maori art and art by other (ie Pakeha) New Zealanders. The west cannot seem to think itself out of its supposed superiority over everyone else.

There were other directions I found interesting, and could have taken, but didn't fit in with the overall framework of the thesis as I envisaged it. I could, for example, have focused on the lack of representation of women's work, the

corporate sponsorship and some of the controversy it generated, or looked more closely at the actual structure and design of the exhibition displays in each of the different venues. No doubt other story tellers, working from different points of view, would have highlighted these, or other, issues and backgrounded the ones I felt were important.

There are many stories which have been told, and are yet to be told about Te Maori. Of course, my story of the exhibition is just one such account. While I do bring together many of the other stories, and so give my version body and texture, it would be wrong to claim that mine is authoritative or complete.

In the talk about Te Maori, calls are always being made for *change*: change to museum focus and handling of taonga, change to power structures so that Maori have an equal voice in what happens to their taonga. The rhetoric has changed: people now talk about the aesthetic qualities of ethnographic material and how it should be displayed under the umbrella 'art', but in reality much is as it ever was. There is still a separation between art gallery and museum. It is still thought that an object has to be one or the other; it cannot be both. What Te Maori showed was that by taking multiple perspectives and combining them in new ways - though still working through the same processes of consultation and dialogue - steps could be taken towards forging new relationships between Maori and museums, where both could be happy.

In the end, the actual event of Te Maori - the actual physical presence of the taonga in the exhibition halls - was not very important. In the literature, the taonga are not most people's focus. What they discuss is what went on in and around and behind Te Maori, or the ramifications and impact after it closed. Even Mina, when she does discuss some of the exhibition pieces, is more concerned that the taonga were not treated properly, than with describing how they looked in an exhibition setting. What is of ultimate importance is the stories that have been created around it, as each person who was involved, or who is now observing Te

Maori, tries to make sense of the exhibition. Te Maori had an impact on New Zealand and America - everyone agrees on that point. It up to each individual story teller to decide why that is so.



## Glossary

**Aotearoa:** “land of the long white cloud”, New Zealand.

**ariki:** chief.

**haere mai:** welcome!

**haka:** dance, song accompanying dance.

**hapu:** clan or section of tribe, subtribe.

**haumi:** cover for the bow of a canoe.

**hei matau:** fishhook pendant.

**hei pounamu:** greenstone pendant.

**hongi:** press nose in greeting.

**hui:** meeting, gathering, ceremony.

**ihi:** power, authority, rank, essential force.

**iwi:** nation, people, tribe.

**kaimoana:** seafood.

**kaitiaki:** guardian.

**karakia:** incantation, spell, worship, prayer.

**karanga:** call, welcome, hail, summon.

**kaumatua:** adult, old man or woman, elder.

**korero:** talk, story, narrative, discussion.

**kotiate paraoa:** flat weapon with a lobed blade made of whalebone.

**mana:** influence, prestige, authority, power.

**mana Maori:** pride in being Maori, dignity.

**Maori:** New Zealander, ordinary, belonging to New Zealand.

**maoritanga:** explanation, meaning, Maori culture, Maori identity.

**marae:** enclosed ground in front of a meeting house.

**moko:** tattooing on the face or body.

**noa:** free from tapu or other restrictions, ordinary.

**pa:** fortified village, stockade.

**Pakeha:** foreign, a person of predominantly European descent, non-Maori.

**pataka:** elevated storehouse.

**patu:** one-handed weapon, club.

**patu paraoa:** club made of whalebone.

**pou:** post.

**pounamu:** greenstone, jade.

**taha wairua:** spiritual essence or force.

**taiaha:** weapon, long staff with pointed tongue and narrow blade.

**Tangaroa:** God of the sea.

**tangata whenua:** people of the land, original inhabitants, the hosts.

**taonga:** possessions, valuables, treasures.

**taonga tuku iho:** taonga associated with ancestors, taonga passed down through generations, heirlooms.

**taonga whakairo:** cultural treasure, artefact, work of art, carved object.

**tapu:** forbidden, inaccessible, not to be defiled, sacred, under religious restriction.

**Te Hokinga Mai:** "the return home": New Zealand phase of Te Maori exhibition.

**Te Maori:** "the Maori": exhibition of Maori art from New Zealand collections that toured USA and NZ between September 1984 and September 1987.

**tewhatewha:** weapon shaped something like an axe.

**tiki:** neck pendant usually made of pounamu.

**tukutuku:** decorative reed panels of a whare.

**tupuna, tipuna:** ancestor, grandparent.

**urupa:** cemetery, burial ground.

**wahaika:** asymmetrical club.

**waharoa:** gateway, entrance to a pa.

**waiata:** song.

**wairua:** spirit.

**waka:** canoe.

**wana:** authority.

**wehi:** to fear, terrible, awe-inspiring.

**whakairo:** transformation from natural to cultural, to ornament with a pattern.

**whakapapa:** genealogical table, ancestral lineage.

**whare:** house.

**wharenuī:** meeting house on a marae.

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