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Bronze as a non-customary intervention
in the interpretation of insects from the natural world
of Māori

VOLUME ONE

An exhibition report presented in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Fine Arts

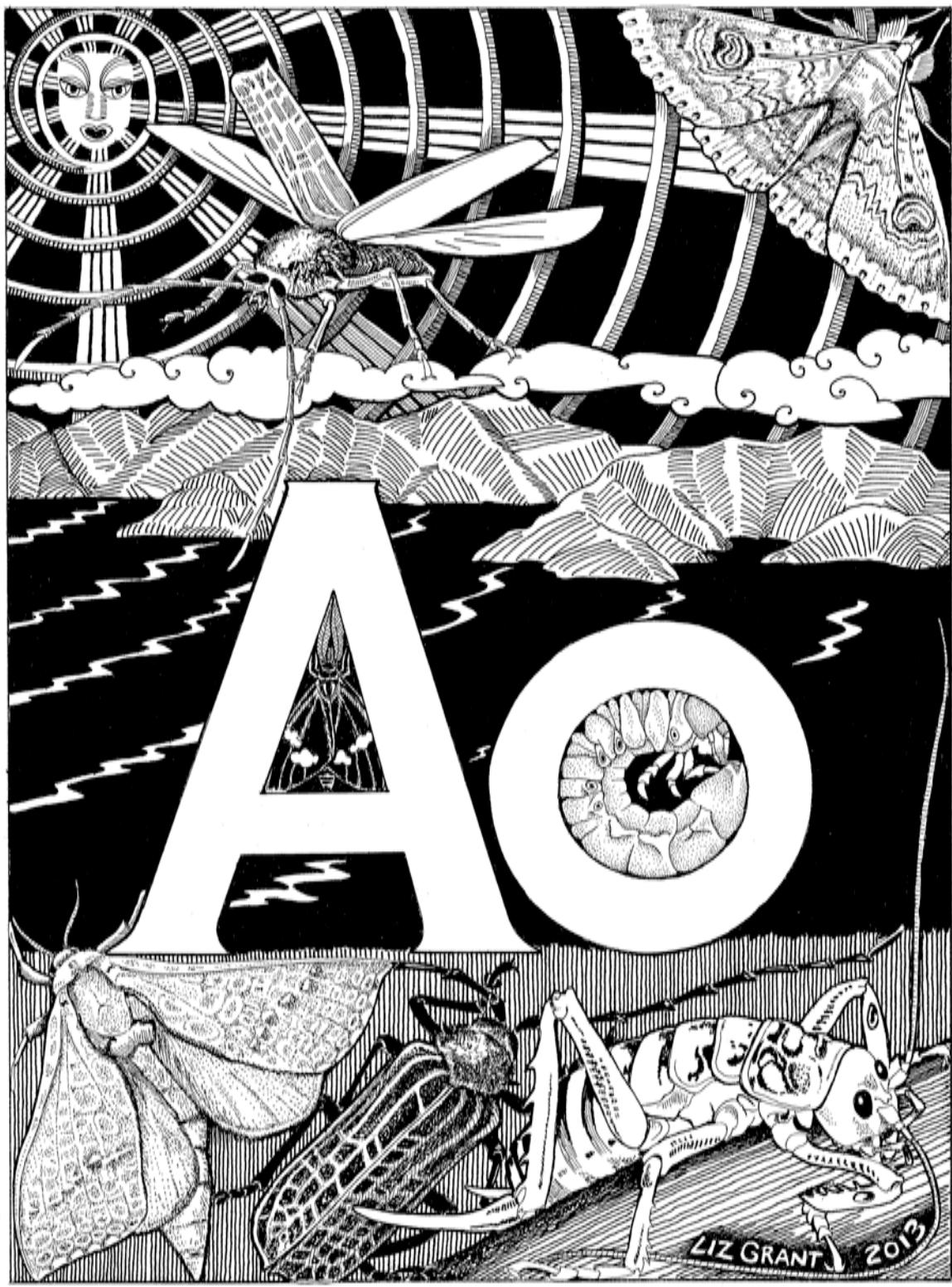
at Massey University, Palmerston North
Aotearoa, New Zealand.

Elizabeth Anne Grant

2014

Art lies in nature

Dürer



Abstract

Without insects the world as we know it would not exist. Insects are essential for life on earth, and yet they invoke from us, a gambit of emotions ranging from fear to fascination. The way in which insects impact on our lives is both surprising and diverse, and yet, in spite of their importance, insects are primarily overlooked as members of our natural world because they are small and inconspicuous.

For Māori, insects are part of ngā tamariki a Tāne, borne from the union between Tāne Mahuta and Punga. But, the distraction associated with colonisation, has faded much of the mātauranga (knowledge) and oral story telling associated with insects from Te ao Māori.

For this reason, this thesis focuses on insects recognised by Māori and considered significant to Māori around the time of European colonisation as based on written documentation (mostly European) derived from colonial field work observations, dictionaries, missionaries and researchers both Māori and non Māori during the nineteenth, twentieth and twenty first centuries. Set within a scientific framework, the topics covered, range from cosmo-genealogical entomology, through to entomophagy.

Using bronze, the thesis exhibition will visually present the diverse ways in which insects were significant to Māori. Given the inherent fragility of the invertebrate fauna and the strength and durability of bronze, this constitutes an ideal medium to interpret their life histories. Concurrently this work seeks to promote an aesthetic appreciation for insects by displaying their diverse forms and colours.

The intended outcome is to be both informative and visually stimulating.

Preface

The perceived value of insects in a modern world is small. For early Māori, who relied heavily on the surrounding world of nature to survive, insects played a great and varied role in sustaining the people both physically and spiritually.

This thesis will consider the importance and significance of insects within the natural world of Maori around the time of European colonisation. It will conclude with an artistic interpretation that processes insects in a colonial New Zealand manner, but will particularly reflect the perspective of a cultural Aotearoa. The work also aims to promote an aesthetic appreciation of insects. This ethno-entomology will necessarily include considerations and discussions of entomophagy (eating insects), academic entomology (scientific entomology) and cultural entomology where insects are associated with musical, cosmo-logical and traditional story telling.

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Chapter One

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the interpretation of insects from the
natural world of Māori

