



PATAKA EDUCATION
Art • Heritage • Culture

Mua ki Muri

Intergenerational Creativity
TEACHER NOTES



Ngataiharuru Taepa, *Te Pitau a Tiki #1* Collection of the artist,
Courtesy of Page Blackie Gallery

Education resource compiled by Fiona French, Linda Fordyce and Margaret Tolland, Educators, Pataka Museum of Arts and Cultures, 2009.

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Mua ki Muri

MUA KI MURI

Intergenerational Creativity

6 Contemporary Māori Artists

7 October 2009 - 7 February 2010

Mua ki Muri/ Intergenerational Creativity showcases the work of six leading contemporary Māori artists – Bob Jahnke, Shane Cotton, Kura Te Waru Rewiri, Ngataiharuru Taepa, Rachael Rakena and Israel Birch - all connected by teaching roles at Te Putahi-a-Toi, the School of Māori Studies at Massey University.

Working and mentoring alongside each other, the six artists have created a strong, intergenerational artistic community - diverse in whakapapa and art practice and informed by both local and global trends. These six full-time artists are conscious of participating in – and contributing to –the continuum of Māori art. Their art practice reflects the philosophy behind the teaching at Te Putahi-a-Toi – focussing on innovation and invention and experimentation with modern technology within a Māori conceptual framework. They, and the school, have become an influential force in New Zealand's contemporary artistic life.

The exhibition is designed to evoke the layout of painted meeting houses at the beginning of the 20th century where the organisation of the ancestors was aligned to the concept of mua ki muri (left to back and the past came first). The longest serving artists are at entrance leading to the work of more recent artists at the far end of the gallery.



Bob Jahnke, *Roses for Wittgensteini II*, 2009
Collection of Massey University Art Collection

Robert Jahnke

(Te Whanau a Rakairoa, te Whanau a Iritekura,
Ngāi Taharoua, Ngāti Porou)

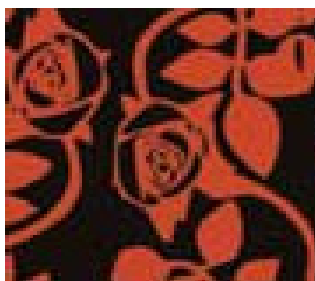


Professor Robert Jahnke, one of New Zealand's leading sculptors, trained at Elam School of Fine Arts, Auckland University, earning his Master of Fine Arts in 1978 before travelling to the USA to study experimental film animation at the California Institute of the Arts. As leader of Te Putahi-a-Toi, he has had a profound influence on a generation of emerging Māori artists.

Jahnke, who is committed to making a contribution to Māori culture beyond his own artistic practice, says, *'Because I am Māori first and foremost I see my role as an educator as far more important for Māori culture than my role as an artist.... For me personally this commitment is a cultural obligation.'*¹

Jahnke works in a range of different media, including lead and steel, to produce work with a strong political message. Often confrontational in content, his work focuses on the process of mutual cultural appropriation between Māori and Pakeha and the impact of Christianity on Māori culture.

Symbols in his earlier work, such as hatches, axes and classical columns refer to well-known icons of European domination, land clearance and oppression. Similarly the rose is a well-known symbolic icon for love, devotion and passion but it also represents the crown, sovereignty and power. The rose as national flower of England becomes a core motif in his stainless steel painted reliefs in the exhibition.



Detail: Roses for Wittgenstein 11,2009
BobJahnke, Massey University Col.

Roses for Wittgenstein suggests references to the 20th century philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein who investigated the crucial role of language, language games and the importance of social contexts for any understanding and real communication to take place between people(s).

¹ Jahnke, R, *Taiawhio11: Contemporary Maori Artists: 18 New Conversations*, Te Papa Press, Wellington 2007, p 117

Shane Cotton

(Ngā Puhi, Ngāti Rangi, Ngāti Hine, Te Uri Taniwha)

Over his fifteen year career, Shane Cotton, has played a major role in redefining the nature of contemporary Māori art. Born in Upper Hutt in 1964, Shane's mother's family are of Scottish and English descent and his father's family came from a small settlement called Ohaeawai in Northland. Northland landscapes – including the sacred maunga (mountain) Maungaturoto –often appear in his work.

Like Jahnke, Cotton trained within a Pakeha art school tradition gaining a Fine Arts Degree from Canterbury University and a Diploma in Teaching before taking up a teaching position at Te Putahi-a-Toi at Massey University in 1993 until 2005.



Shane Cotton, *Eden to Ohaeawai* 2000
Collection of the artist

There, his work underwent a radical change. Encouraged by Jahnke, Cotton immersed himself in Māori history and culture and, according to Jahnke, his work '*moved from the pan-tribal to the tribal and in the process he has affirmed his genealogy, his heritage and his identity as Māori.*'²

Cotton's early sepia-coloured work recalled the post-contact Māori figurative Folk Art paintings that had developed in nineteenth century meeting houses like Rongopai in Gisborne – reflecting the sudden impact of colonisation on Māori society. Māori biblical texts along with images and patterning drawn

² Jahnke, R. 'Voices Beyond The Pae' in *Shane Cotton*, City Gallery Wellington with Victoria University Press, Wellington, 2004

from traditional carving designs were then depicted in the late 1990s, dealing with Nga Puhī's interaction with Christianity. Cotton mixed historic Nga Puhī and Christian imagery as a kind of battle between sign systems. Cotton commented in 2000: *"I am interested in the power of words as they have come to symbolise and characterise changes in Māori belief and identity. For me the Christian word in Māori language is fraught with numerous questions in relation to Māori spiritual and cosmological belief. Words have come to be regarded by many Māori as having the same spiritual powers as traditional Māori iconography...- image has been supplanted by belief in words."*³

In **From Eden to Ohaeawai** [2000], the serpentine eel form of Nga Puhī and figure of Christ are weightless spiritual images suspended below a labelled landscape of Ohaeawai- that, with iwi symbols and biblical text referring to 'Genesis,' form part of a cross that dissects the whole canvas.

After 2000, brightly coloured targets with native birds, silhouetted preserved heads (*moko mokai*) filled in with army camouflage or rainbow patterns and gang patches are painted in a hard-edged style in starker colours against predominantly black backgrounds.

In **Broken Water** [2003], Robert Leonard observes that 'Images include a moko mokai in profile ...; a scratchy, barely visible image of Jesus, arms raised; the word TATAUERE (Broken Water) – the name of a sacred Nga Puhī plant, and a taniwha living under Lake Omapere –stencilled on in a Gothic face; there's a tui or parson bird – a native bird that could also represent a missionary; a bull's-eye; a bar of mystic light bridges the two panels, like a fluoro tube or Star wars light saber'⁴

For Cotton, the Māori leader Te Kooti Arikirangi has been a particular inspiration. *'Everything he did went against the norm. In that sense, he is inspirational. As an artist living in the here and now I can use [Te Kooti's innovation] as a licence to create difference.'*⁵

Cotton's recent work explores the idea of myth and transformation in the stories of Aotearoa New Zealand.

³ Catalogue text, Lara Strongman, Shane Cotton Survey 1993-2003, City Gallery Wellington, 2003

⁴ Robert Leonard –in a supplementary publication supported by Ernst and Young for the exhibition, Shane Cotton Survey 1993-2003, City Gallery, Wellington 2003.

⁵ Cotton, S, *Taiawhio1: Contemporary Maori Artists Te Papa Press, Wellington, 2007*, p 85

Kura Te Waru Rewiri

(Ngāti Kahu ki Whaingaroa, Ngāti Raukawa ki Kauwhata)

Kura Te Waru Rewiri, born in the far North in 1950, graduated with a Diploma in Fine Arts from Ilam in 1973. She spent most of the next decade teaching before taking up painting full-time in 1985, encouraged by two former teachers, Buck Nin and Rudi Gopas. She also has a Masters degree in Māori Visual Arts from Te Putahi-o-Toi and joined the teaching staff there in 1996. Te Waru Rewiri explores, in her work, issues of identity and spirituality - especially her lifelong experience with the Ratana Church through her grandfather Hapeta Renata. Fascinated with kowhaiwhai and carving designs, her brushstrokes often emulate the motions found in carving and weaving.



Kura Te Waru Rewiri, *Haere ki wiwi, ki wawa (Go wherever you like) 2009*. Courtesy of the artist.

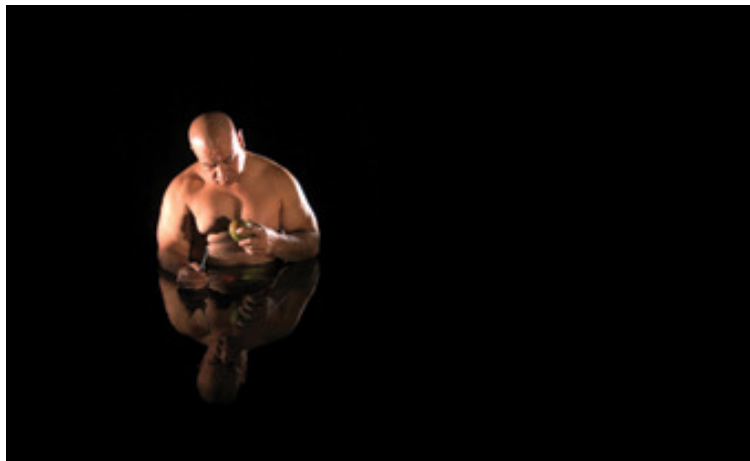
Te Waru Rewiri was also one of the first Māori painters to depict these designs in bright, vibrant non-traditional colours. Her works have linked political, cultural and spiritual themes relating to Māori people and have dealt with such issues as the Treaty of Waitangi, Māori land rights, Christian domination and the status of Maori people as the *tangata whenua* of Aotearoa. In recent works she has painted with a more abstract style, experimenting with colour and layering. As part of this development her colours have become more muted, and her themes more personal. Te Waru Rewiri successfully combines indigenous concepts and contemporary expression in her paintings. She has exhibited extensively within New Zealand and overseas and tutors Māori Art and Visual design at NorthTec in Whangarei.

Rachael Rakena

(Ngāi Tahu, Ngā Puhi, Ngāti Pākehā)

Rachael Rakena is a moving image artist who works, frequently in collaboration with others, to create richly-layered performative installations, dvds and digital stills.⁶

Rakena lives in Palmerston North and teaches at Te Putahi-ā-Toi. She completed a Masters degree in Fine Arts at Otago Polytechnic School of Art and a degree and post graduate diploma in Māori Studies from the University of Otago. She uses digital media art to explore both iwi and pan-Māori cultural identity. Rakena has coined the term 'Toi Rerehiko' to describe her practice. The word 'rerehiko' literally means electric brain and is a play on 'rorohiko', the Māori word for computer.



*Rachael Rakena, One man is an island (He Waiata Whaiapo Series) 2009
Courtesy of the artist and Bartley + Company Art*

Toi Rerehiko is a moving image art form immersed in Maori tradition, tikanga (custom) and values which uses digital and electronic media.⁷ Water, as a cultural site, is a feature of much of her work which she claims as 'the space where we come from both in terms of migration across the Pacific and a contemporary iwi space'⁸

⁶ [www.bartleyandcompanyart.co.nz/artists/Rachael Rakena](http://www.bartleyandcompanyart.co.nz/artists/Rachael%20Rakena)

⁷ [www.bartleyandcompanyart.co.nz/artists/ Rachael Rakena](http://www.bartleyandcompanyart.co.nz/artists/Rachael%20Rakena)

⁸ Rakens, R, personal communication with Helen Kedgley, 1 October, 2009

Ngataiharuru Taepa

(Te Arawa, Te Ati Awa, Ngāti Pākeha)



Ngataiharuru Taepa, *Te Pitau a Tiki #*
Collection of the artist,
Courtesy of Page Blackie Gallery

Ngatai Taepa completed his Masters in Maori Visual Arts in 2003 and is now a lecturer at Te Putahi-a-Toi. Taepa acknowledges his teachers Robert Jahnke, Shane Cotton and Kura Te Waru Rewiri as mentors. He says, 'I think going to study at Massey University opened me up to different ways of working, of expressing Māori art.'⁹

Taepa experiments with 21st century technologies - using computer-generated imagery, digital routers, acrylic laminates, PVC pipes and steel – to create his meticulously crafted work.

As a teenager attending Te Aute College, Taepa assisted with the making of kowhaiwhai panels for meeting house *Te Whare o Rangi* under the guidance of Mark Dashper. Since then he has been committed to preserving and giving life to traditional practices through his artwork. Taepa takes the intricate, interlacing patterns characteristic of customary kowhaiwhai and tiki designs and imposes on them a fresh, contemporary interpretation, introducing unexpected materials, techniques and colour combinations. His most recent work, made of layers of digitally carved treated plywood, combines abstract portraiture with tiki-inspired forms.

"I guess I've always been into kowhaiwhai, as far back as I can remember...I'm revisiting a lot of the customary conventions surrounding them. I really enjoy the surface, positive and negative space, line work, the pitau [plant shoot] and the kape [eyebrow] patterns, and the way they were originally laid down...For me, kowhaiwhai is an expression of the way our ancestors saw the world in their time. Their achievement, using positive and negative spaces, was to have the colours interact simultaneously – as opposed to how most people think now. Now we're taught to see the positive space ... and not the space around it. It's one of the simple conventions of kowhaiwhai, but for me it's achieving excellence through simplicity."¹⁰

⁹ Taepa, N, personal correspondence with Helen Kedgley, 6 June, 2009

¹⁰ Taepa, N, *Taiawhio 11: Contemporary Maori artists, 18 New Conversations*, Te Papa Press, 2007, pp. 228-243

Israel Tangaroa Birch

(Ngā Puhi, Ngāti Kahungunu)

Israel Birch holds a degree in Visual Arts from the Eastern Institute of Technology in Napier but completed his Master of Māori Visual Arts through Te Putahi-a-Toi. He says: *'What I love about the school is that as long as the heart is Māori and the work is grounded in kaupapa Māori, the artwork will be an outward reflection of this. Bob's programme pushes the notion of what Māori art is, and I think it is very important for us all to keep pushing the boundaries.'*¹¹

Birch's work explores new notions of sound and music within traditional Māori culture. During his study he became interested in the sounds of Māori instruments and translating these sounds into a visual format. Giving form to an abstract concept like sound was inspired by the late Hirini Melbourne who remarked that anything that moves vibrates and therefore anything that vibrates generates sound. Birch's series of convex orbs with concentric circles radiating from a core and repetition of forms and motifs generate rhythmic vibrations pulsating within his work. His unique lacquer and steel paintings are made by grinding and etching patterns into a stainless steel base. The etched patterns sit beneath layers of coloured lacquer, creating ripple effects that flicker across the surfaces of the works.



Israel Birch, *Tukurangi* 2008
Collection of the artist, Courtesy of Page Blackie Gallery

Birch also uses the concepts of Māori cosmology to underpin his work. 'Central to the understanding of Māori cosmology is the notion of a world in a state of perpetual 'becoming' - an endless state of transition – between the realm of potential being in Te Kore (nothingness, the void), to the realm of becoming in Te Po (the darkness, the night), to the realm of being in Te Ao Marama (light, the world).¹² His polished hemispheres – at once cyclic, halos, eclipses, celestial suns – oscillate between darkness and light.

The work, **Golden Oriori** is part of a series inspired by the imminent birth of Birch's first child. 'Oriori' is the Māori term for lullaby.

*"The inspiration first began just before our first daughter Cyan was born. We felt a need to compose an oriori for her, so some of the words from this oriori seemed to float into my practice ...based on the practice of oriori and the creation process."*¹³

¹¹ Birch, I, Personal correspondence with Helen Kedgley 10 June 2009

¹² Page Blackie Gallery artist profile – www.pageblackiegallery.co.nz

¹³ Kōkiri 08 2008, www.tpk.govt.nz/en/in-print/kokiri/kokiri-08-2008/israel-birch-golden-oriori

Curriculum Links

Visual Arts, Levels 1-6: Understanding the Arts in Context; Developing Practical Knowledge; Developing Ideas; Communicating and Interpreting
NCEA Levels 1-3

Key Competencies: Managing Self; Relating to Others; Using Language; Symbols and Texts; Participating and Contributing; Thinking.

Pre and Post Visit Activities and Discussion Points

- Discuss what symbols are and how important they are to an artist. Make up a symbols board using images from magazines, newspapers Etc. and how they are being used everywhere on a daily basis.
- Create symbols that have been used to help identify New Zealand and New Zealanders as a whole.
- Find symbols that have different meanings and are used differently by other cultures.
- Find out how the rose has been used as a symbol, both now and in the past - then look more closely at the skull?, - the cross?
- Look closely at the surface patterns and decoration on whakairo, kowhaiwhai – and find out what 'traditional' forms and elements have been included in the contemporary art works in the exhibition
- Find out the symbolism of the koru motif, its patterns and forms.
- Discover the work of the New Zealand artist Gordon Walters and find out why he had such an influence over contemporary Maori artists like Shane Cotton, Michael Parekowhai, Wayne Youle and Kura Te Waru Rewiri.
- Discuss the terms 'contemporary' and 'traditional' and how they apply to 'Maori art'.
- Think about what makes art Maori art and what doesn't.
- Discover what the term 'colonisation' means and how you think it affected the Maori population in the nineteenth century.
- Investigate the reasons and concerns behind the return of some '*moko mokai*' (tattooed heads) from private and public collections around the world.
- Create artist information files on both Shane Cotton and Robert Jahnke. Look at examples of their earlier work. What changes over time can you see if any?
- Discuss what 'digital' means and how it can be used in the art world.

References and Useful Resources

www.artsfoundation.org.nz > artists

www.bartleyandcompanyart.co.nz >artists > Rachael Rakena

www.pageblackiegallery.co.nz > Artists > Represented Artists (Israel Birch and Ngatai Taepa)

www.maoriart.org.nz>profiles>Visual Artist

Mua ki Muri – Intergenerational Creativity, Helen Kedgley, Senior Curator Contemporary Art, Pataka 2009

Shane Cotton: Artist Information Sheet <Teachers Resources< Education Resources<Education< Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/mokomokai>

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rose> under Popular Culture >rose symbolism.