

*intouch*

**Te Tirohanga Hou**  
*contemporary Maori weaving*

SATURDAY 5 SEPTEMBER - SUNDAY 25 OCTOBER 1998



**Koro Pureki, flax, muka, cabbage tree 1998**

*a project in partnership between Owairoa Marae and Fisher Gallery.*

**FISHER GALLERY**

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<http://nz.com/webnz/fishergallery/>

# TE TIROHANGA HOU

## NEW VISION OF THE FUTURE

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*Written by James King Tainui Garden of Memories Liaison Officer*

*Ehara taku toa I te toa takitahi  
Engari takimano no aku tipuna.  
My prestige comes not from  
me alone, But descends  
from my ancestors.*

(Maori saying)

Te Tirohanga Hou is the message in this show, it means to have a new vision of the future, perhaps signalling a new impetus in the way young Maori address their own arts, crafts and culture. The weavers challenge old colonial notions of the role of weaving by breaking technological and conceptual boundaries while maintaining important traditions, acknowledging and respecting strong links with a whakapapa that serves to give a sense of identity.

Te Tirohanga Hou is an exhibition of works from a group of Maori weavers based in the Waikato/ Tainui region. A number of the weavers are members of a group known as Toi Arianga. This group promotes contemporary weaving practices and trains young weavers as



Syd, Korowai, mopstring, pheasant feathers 1996

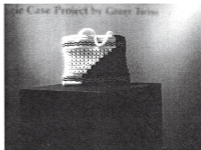
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well as participating in exhibitions and demonstrations. What makes this group of talented weavers special and interesting, is their use of contemporary fibres and the development of new techniques in the weaving process.

This exhibition focuses attention on the development of traditional weaving. Young Maori participants regenerate the art, and in doing so, express themselves in exciting new, colourful and interesting ways. The Toi Arianga weavers are young and talented. The group of students from Toi Arianga graduated from Waikato Polytechnic and decided to set up a cottage industry-like association doing

contract work for local marae, making items such as Tukutuku panels, Korowai, Piu Piu, Whariki and Kete. The group was founded in 1997.

The work in Te Tirohanga Hou includes traditional and contemporary pieces, bringing the past into the future - in keeping with this, garments in the exhibition reflect both traditional and



Untitled,  
wool, embroidery  
cotton  
1998

contemporary methods of weaving; a variety of materials have been used like raw flax, muka, kiekie and cabbage tree. Contemporary fibres have been used as well: embroidery cotton, wool and mop string in tandem with modern dyeing and drying processes.

There are korowai in the exhibition, one traditional and two contemporary. As well as kete and contemporary kakahu, the traditional work is the keystone or origin for the other works. For this, Toi Arianga's first public exhibition, the group has been working on the experimental use of colours: oranges, blues, greens, browns and other "non traditional" elements to explore new concepts in weaving. What makes this group of talented weavers different and special is their development of weaving techniques and the use of contemporary synthetic fibres.



## Maori Weaving

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The art of weaving is an expression of whakapapa (genealogy), a language of skill and tradition that breathes life into the garments created. The connection with ancestors extends to the connection with the land, Papatauanuku, the intrinsic bond that shapes Maori society. Weaving permeates all aspects of traditional Maori existence, from functional expendable items such as kete (baskets) and whariki (mats) intended for everyday use and then replaced, to ceremonial garments given personal names and intended to inhance and demonstrate the mana of the wearer. In modern times these garments are worn with similar purpose and are physical expressions of Maori prestige and pride.

In reference to Maori art, the colonial view has always given the art of carving prominence over other arts, men's art over women's art. The exhibition Te Maori which excluded women's art embodied this colonial perspective. History has often masked the role women's art has played in Maori society driving a wedge between the art practices which are intrinsically interwoven. We can gauge the status of weaving in relation to carving by documented examples of cloaks being exchanged for waka taua (war canoes). For example the waka taua on display at Auckland Museum "Te Toki a Tapiri", built in the 1840s by the Ngati Matawhaiti hapu of Ngati Kahungunu and presented to the chief Te Waaka Perohuka of Rongowhakaata, for the famous cloak "Karamaene".



**Sam, Korowai**  
wool, pheasant  
feathers, cotton  
1994

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The Maori Renaissance which started in the 1960s saw a purist view to Maori arts and a strict return to "traditional" designs and methods after the earlier half of the century saw representational motifs and the inclusion of modern fibres such as macrame twine and fishing line. The Renaissance asserted Maori identity in a seemingly fragmented, progressively urban Maori existence. While this process heightened the profile of the "traditional", it also served to alienate the non-traditional as not authentic, as "pseudo" Maori. If culture is to develop and survive it must keep evolving and growing, to remain static is self defeating and denies the dynamics of Maori society.



From left to right

**Kete Whakairo,**  
kete, harakeke  
1998

**Te Oranga,**  
natural whenu,  
pheasants feathers  
1998

**Kete Whakairo,**  
kete  
1998

The range of weaving documented in post contact times is testimony to the innovation of Maori in response to their environment. With the introduction of previously unavailable fibres such as wool, weavers quickly incorporated the new materials into garments such as ngore (cloak ornamented with pom poms) while retaining the traditional wairua of the art. The korowai (cloak ornamented with black rolled cords) rose to prominence in the period between 1830 and 1850 and as a versatile garment, lent itself to great experimentation. By the 1840's coloured wool had become a fully integrated element in the design and weaving of the classic korowai.

Prior to contact times the most prestigious cloaks were those made from dog skin. As the kuri was bred out with introduced breeds of dogs, the fine fur of the kuri was lost. The given accepted "traditional" styles are part of the evolution not the end word. Maori responded to new materials and the influence of European fashions. An example of this is a muff, traditionally made of fur in Europe, made of kiwi feathers last century and is housed at Te Papa. Another

example is the development of the kete muka which was developed in response to tourist demand but now considered a traditional art and functional form.

Kahu huruhuru (feather cloaks) evolved in the 19th century and have become the most prestigious form of cloaks in modern times. Early contact writers who detailed forms of Maori dress in their writings and drawings made no mention of feather cloaks, the earliest recorded cloaks being dependent on the fineness of the weaving as opposed to the more decorative elements of later developments. An early documentation of the use of feathers was by Cook at the end of the eighteenth century where he recorded seeing a woman wearing an apron of red feathers, highlighting the innovation and diversity of practice in "traditional" times.

Contemporary use of fibre ranges from the traditional to non traditional, both art forms woven together by a shared history, both as legitimate and authentic as the other. Contemporary works speak of contemporary experience incorporating modern materials with traditional materials and techniques. The weavers exhibited in Te Tirohanga Hou meet the challenge of weaving past with present using materials accessible in their domestic surroundings. Not a new story but a new chapter, adding to the multiplicity of expression in the diverse range of Maori arts.

Away from traditional forms and operating within an art framework in fibre art, installation artists such as Maureen Lander, Jacqueline Fraser and Diane Prince push out the boundaries of expression through fibre acknowledging traditional methods and protocol of weaving while exploring the possibilities of modern and traditional fibres and the art gallery as an arena for these expressions.

Erenora Puketapu-Hetet best explains the kaupapa of weaving-

"In our concept of time we cannot separate ourselves from our ancestors or the generation in front of us. Our past is our future, and also our present, like the eternal circle. This concept is very important to the weaver, who sees herself as a repository, linking the knowledge of the past with that of the future"

*Written by Katrina Smit Education Assistant*

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SUGGESTED READING

Pendergrast, MJ. *Te Aho Tapu - The Sacred Thread, Traditional Maori Weaving*, Auckland 1987

Pendergrast, MJ. *Maori Art and Culture*, Auckland 1996

Adsett S, Whiting C & Ihimaera W. *Mataora - The Living Face, Contemporary Maori Art Te Waka Toi*, Auckland 1996

Mead SM. *Maori Art on the World Scene*, Wellington, 1997

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