

# A calling out, a gathering in

by Georgina Kamiria Kirby

ONE OF the most dramatic changes in the last decade of Maori development has been the blossoming of the women's creative talents. Of course such creativity existed before but the scene for talented Maori women to express themselves has traditionally been a non-Maori preserve.

The question of liberation or feminism, still raised in other circles, was never relevant in Maoridom. Traditional Maori craftswomen, writers, composers and singers have made a name for themselves in their own right, bringing out their own experiences as women and making a valuable contribution to the Aotearoa landscape.

The growth of a modern movement for Maori women's creativity was strengthened by the connections and acknowledgments which emerged from the three *Karanga Karanga* exhibitions held concurrently in the Wellington City Art Gallery (9000 people saw this one), the Fisher Gallery in Pakuranga, Auckland, and the Gisborne Museum and Art Gallery during May and June.

These exhibitions were a celebration of women working in the traditional and contemporary arts coming together to set the spirit of Maori women's talents free. There was a vision of the women working together other than on a marae or in their homes with their families, doing something different, exploring, musing on and sorting out why *Karanga Karanga* was an important event.

Seventy talented Maori women across the nation, named and unnamed, young and younger, trained and training, working in different media, were first brought together to combine their talents for these exhibitions in May last year. The karanga had begun:

*Tena i whiua!  
Taku pohiri e rere atu ra  
Ki te hiku o te ika  
Te puku o te whenua  
Te pane o te motu ki  
Te whakawhititanga i Raukawa  
Ki Te Waipounamu e...*

(Begin with the swing! My call has gone forth/To the tail of the fish/To the belly of the land/To the head of the island/And across the straits of Raukawa/To Te Waipounamu.) So begins the famed women's haka of welcome, "Te Urunga Tu, Te Urunga Pae".

As the *Karanga Karanga* catalogue for Wellington said: "This karanga is many things, a calling out and a gathering in, and from there a journey which is a start for some and a continuation for others. It is a call to people made public, and also a karanga for all those who join us with their art, including those who have gone before and those yet to come. The specific journey for this exhibition has been one of a community of women working in groups to make their art, an art in which Maori women represent themselves, their own culture and con-



"Rimurapa" by Toi Maihi, kelp construction.

cerns, an art in which we make the images and seek to redefine ourselves through them."

The collaborative process combined their minds, their disciplines, their wonder, their whanaungatanga and their talented breath, working from nothing to reproduce a work representing what each group wanted to say.

"Taranga", a piece made by Janet Potiki, Patricia Grace, Robyn Kahukiwa and Kohai Grace was a three-metre-tall cloak of natural materials on hessian, representing three of the things which are part of the wholeness embodied by Taranga, goddess and mother of the audacious Maui Potiki. The three things chosen were Taranga's korowai (cloak), maro (woman's private covering) and hair, which interconnect in their suggestions of femaleness, their connotations of birth and the struggle to retain life and the positive strength of woman.

Four young weavers, Kataraina Hetet-Winiata, Verenoa Puketapu-Hetet, Stephanie Turner and Rea Ropiha, produced an enormous three-dimensional sculptural woven and painted three-panel work, "Nga Puna o Te Ora". Kataraina encouraged the team to create and diversify from a strong traditional weaving base to produce the contemporary, innovative installation. The work embraced the life-force of Niwareka who brought the knowledge of weaving into the world of light, and Papatuanuku and other female life forces who answer many of the questions children ask about the world, making women/mothers natural storehouses of knowledge.

Robyn Kahukiwa and Ani Crawford combined in an assemblage which was a tribute to Hinematiaro, a woman of great mana. A whanau of Raiha Waaka, Melanie Cullinan, Jolie Gunson and Grace Warren made a work concerned with what world leaders are giving us in the name of peace; and a *papier-mache* sculpture within a firebox as a symbol of hope, "Papatuanuku", represented the feelings of Hinemoa Hilliard and Wendy Howe about nuclear war and its effects.

The choice of simple materials

highlighted not only the work of the groups but the women's resourcefulness.

"Wahine" was an exquisite piece of "word weaving" by Patricia Grace and Robyn Kahukiwa, "Tairawhiti Korero" was a stylish book of poetry on handmade paper by Keri Kaa, Robyn Kahukiwa and Ngapine Tamihana Te Ao, whose idea the exhibition was. "Women's strength and power is born of her womanliness" was the theme of the nobly sculptured gourds by mother-and-daughter team Eranora and Veranoa Puketapu-Hetet. Another whanau of three women whose grandmothers were sisters, Irihapeti Ramsden, Mihiata Retimana and Lee Retimana, and whose lives are interwoven, wove together modern media, perspex, flax, handmade paper and photographs in "Nga Whatu" to demonstrate the joys and anguish of their whanau.

In Gisborne and Auckland, work was shown by weaving matriarchs Rangimarie Hetet, Diggeress Te Kanawa, Puti Rare, Te Aue Davis, Eva Anderson, Matehonore Rickard, Cath Brown, Freda Kawharu and Aromea Te Maipi, already renowned for their own work and for helping Maori women to value the fibres in our own cultural garden, a place which breathes the joy of a natural, finite yet limitless world of tradition, independence and creative weaving.

As we do what we do, we are always aware of the marvellous power of language, of how Maori women are historians, storytellers, witnesses, singers and signifiers who speak truths, who curse, utter blessings, recreate, revitalise the language and add new lustre to their cultural literature. Arapera Blank describes herself as a creative writer who likes words that sparkle and that can emerge in prose or poetry. She contributed an anthology of poems, *Nga Kokako Huataratara*. Keri Kaa, writing in English and Maori, uses words "that jump out and bite you". Her poem "Kumeroa Ngoingoi Pewhairangi" is a tribute to a great woman. Ngoi always offered shelter, a true mother bird who understood the joy and pain of restless creative spirits, people like lost birds with nowhere to land.

Among Kura Rewiri Thorsen's paintings, the pou pou-like figures of "He Tohu O Te Tiriti" were compelling, Jolene Douglas's exploration of different dimensions with pastels was visionary, and Toi Maihi produced delightful and innovative bubble kites, kelp constructions and piu piu-like jewellery of flax fibre.

Ngapine Te Ao who made three quilted, dyed-silk cushions for Auckland, uses as design elements symbols of things vital to the ongoing spiritual wellbeing of Maori people. She believes inherited and intuitive elements should be used to show what they can offer, whether in lino prints, ink drawings, silk hangings or slab pottery.

Visitors entering the *Karanga Karanga* exhibition in Auckland were

With *Karanga Karanga* exhibitions on show at different venues, Georgina Kirby in Auckland and Darcy Nicholas in Wellington were asked to review the displays. Georgina Kirby visited and comments on the exhibitions in Auckland, Wellington and Gisborne; Darcy Nicholas visited and comments on the Auckland and Wellington exhibitions.

greeted by Hinemoa Harrison's beautiful korimako tukutuku panel, with feathers adding a new dimension. Suspended nearby was the installation "Waiata Koa", plaited strands woven together by eight women and draped from ceiling to floor where the ropes ended in an open spiral. It was a welcome to anyone who wanted to join in. Within the spiral were kohatu, stones with the names of each participant written on. This unifying installation, created at the opening to a waiata by Katerina Mataira, expressed the myriad thoughts and ideas that ran through the multimedia nature of this exhibition.

Hiraina Polson and Paparangi Reid worked at shaping the earth in their burnished pottery carved with inlaid pua, and in their ceramic gourds. Ngaio Wharekura created feather-box pottery and small gourd-like clay shapes which used her sister Toi's designs, and were suspended from a tree like little figures who have found a temporary home.

"E kore koe e ngaro, He kakano i rui mai i Rangiatea" (I will never be lost, I come from Rangiatea) was Maureen Lander's tribute to the flax plant and a tribute to cloakmakers. The co-operative installation, which spoke of the seeds of knowledge brought from Rangiatea, was a fine tribute to the harakeke.

Aotearoa is the home of taniko, distinctive to Maori women. Very fine fingerwoven headbands, belts, handpurses and dainty earrings were nimbly made by Pani Carruthers (belts and bookmarks), Hinerangi Puru (belts), Puti Rare (Muku taniko wallet) and Oonagh Marino and the Whaiora work skills group (belts, brooches, novelty items).

Looking forward into the 21st century rather than back to the 19th, we can see a new age in which interior decoration, fashion, furnishings, wallhangings, paintings and photography will bear influences of Maori design, finesse and sophistication, an extension of the skills we as Maori women can embrace worldwide.

Approximately 40 Maori women exhibited work in the Fisher Gallery with much energy, creating spiritual vibrations which touched the thousands of visitors who made contact with the works, or simply looked with reverence. *Karanga Karanga* was an exciting exercise done by Maori women, about Maori women, for Maori women.

*Kei te tu whakamihia kia koutou nga wahine Maori i roto i tenei te whakahirahira i nga taonga.*



Burnished pot with inlaid pua by Paparangi Reid and Hiraina Polson.