

KARANGA KARANGA

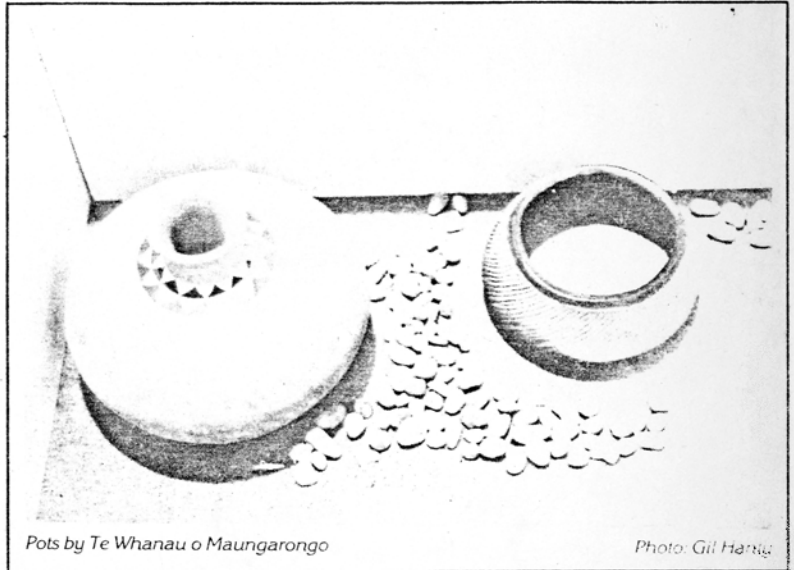
THE EXHIBITION OF CONTEMPORARY WORK BY MAORI WOMEN SHOWING AT THE FISHER GALLERY, AUCKLAND, DURING MAY WAS ONE PART OF A THREE-VENUE EXHIBITION. THE OTHER VENUES WERE THE GISBORNE MUSEUM AND ART CENTRE AND THE WELLINGTON CITY ART GALLERY. KATERINA MATAIRA AND ARAPERA BLANK SPOKE OF THE AUCKLAND EXHIBITION.

ARAPERA BLANK

Tribal affiliation: Whanau-a-Hunaara, Whanau-a-Takimoana, Whanau-a-Hine-pare. Ngati Porou, Rongowhakaata, Ngati Konohe, Kahungunu.

Toi Maihi got a call to select about two of us to go to Wellington to join forces with the Maori group there called te Haeata in producing exhibitions simultaneously. Toi and I went to Wellington at their invitation, they funded our fares, to discuss the possibility of setting up these exhibitions, hopefully one in the South Island, one in Wellington, one here and one in Gisborne. The one in the South Island never eventuated. I have been involved with just two, the one in Gisborne and the one here, I didn't have time to do the Wellington one. I opened the Gisborne one, they had their own style, I think the Auckland group is the biggest one, naturally, because there are more Maoris here. Although we had some people from outside the region, like Cath Brown, who's from the South Island and Ngapine Allen who's actually from the Gisborne lot. She was the organiser of the Gisborne show, but she exhibited here too. And Toi exhibited in all three.

To get the exhibition going in Auckland, first we had to form the group — get the people together. I didn't know who the artists were, they just weren't exhibiting. We knew about Kura Rewiri-Thorsen



Pots by Te Whanau o Maungarongo

Photo: Gil Hanu

and Emily Karaka Pace, because they had exhibited before, but they were the only two women. We knew some Maori women artists and they knew others and so it grew. It was mostly through people knowing other people that we got the group together.

We all knew about Katerina Mataira, of course. In my opinion she's one of the foremost, she's one of the first multi-media artists Maori people have had. She was a teacher of art. She's always been good at language. Such a diversity — from painting to weaving to singing to book making — the woman's incredible.

What I like about the exhibition was that these women have come out into a world that has been dominated by male artists. Also that we were invited to exhibit. It

isn't as though we went along and drummed on the door, they invited us to the Fisher Gallery. People say, why the Fisher Gallery, out in Pakuranga, well it was because Maori women were asked to exhibit there. The director of the gallery rang the director of the Wellington City Gallery, who is a woman, to let her know that they wanted to exhibit Maori women's work. When I was asked why we weren't exhibiting at the Auckland City Gallery I said, "Because we haven't been asked. Simple."

The Fisher is a lovely gallery, and I love the cultural centre next door. It's a beautiful gallery, nice and large and it's got plenty of light. The directors are very nice young people.

For me, I'm not a painter, but I know these women are sitting

around with all this talent. When it came to the exhibition what I could offer was my poems. To exhibit as a group is the best way because it's a bit hard when you're on your own and everybody's sort of looking at your work and it's just you, and not everybody appreciates you. Whereas with works in lots of media you get this cross section of people moving round and about and their tastes might become multi-media by the end of it.

One thing about the exhibition is that there are pieces that will really rack your brain and pieces which are very peaceful, that's the lovely thing about it, you can take your pick. If you want to spend an argumentative ten or 15 minutes you go to a particular piece, if you want peace you go to another one. Waiata Koa is a group that has been formed by some women that were involved in the exhibition. We copied the Wellington group te Haeata, the group that did the Haeata Herstory Diary in 1985. They described themselves as a loosely knit group. When Toi asked them about finances, they said "Oh well, we just ring around each other and decide that we're going to do this and that with our money." We have appointed a treasurer in our group, Erena Barrett.

When we went to Wellington I saw where Robin Kahukiwa paints, in her son's bedroom, and we looked at the video of the display of water and clay. The men's studios were out of this world, beautiful buildings with rows where they could stick up their pots and the women laughed when they saw it — most of them work squeezed up in half a garage or no garage at all, but in the sitting room. Toi works in her sitting room.

She's like a lot of artists — you're sitting there and you get this idea and a whole lot of other ideas trigger off from that, like dropping a pebble into a pool. I went to Toi's house and I saw all these things and I thought, "When is this woman going to paint?" But that's just me. She's done a lot of painting, and she just wanted to do something different and she's going crazy with flax.

I suppose they're all like that.

Freda Kawharu, who did the tukutuku panel told me when I asked if she was painting that she was growing flax all round her house. She said, "I don't paint any more, I'll soon branch out into writing." They're a multi-talented lot. I can't do that because I'm not good with my hands. You see, Toi's got some haiku poetry, which one day she'll get published. They're lovely pieces.

Some of the women in the exhibition had never exhibited before. One woman said she hadn't slept all week because it was so beautiful. They were thrilled to bits. The whole show has been marvellous, it really has. And I thoroughly enjoyed the Gisborne one.

We had to have someone to do the welcome so we got a school involved. We had Edgewater College. They're setting up a marae at the college and the marae committee did the catering. Okay they'll get something out of it and it's exciting for them because it leads to all kind of things.

There were a lot of people at the opening. But then, we had 300 at the opening in Gisborne and that's only a small place. My kids at school said to me "You're always going away." But I wasn't going to miss the opening at Gisborne for the world. It was a real privilege. As far as I was concerned I was only playing a minor part in the whole thing. Mind, that's where I come from, but there's hundreds of other women come from the same area.

KATERINA MATAIRA
Tribal affiliation: Whanau-a-Takimoana, Te Whanau-a-Rakairoa, Te Whanau-a-iri-Te-Kura.

The exhibition for me is just a manifestation of the release of Maori women from the constraints that have been placed upon them, traditionally as Maori women, but universally as women. *Karanga Karanga* is almost symbolic of their realisation that they have strengths and talents which for too long have been hidden. These women now have the confi-

dence and the joint awareness that they have a unique contribution to make in this day and age.

That contribution has for some of them grown out of their traditional experiences as Maori women but also their experiences as women reaching for their rightful place alongside men.

If you look at the traditional question it is perfectly acceptable, even desirable that they be experts at weaving, experts at waiata, but not really free to explore any other traditional media like carving, since that particular art form has traditionally been designated as the prerogative of men. Some women do carve, some do a lot of bone work.

One of the things that really angered me in respect of the Te Maori exhibition was the exclusion of the traditional women's art forms. There was no weaving at all in the Te Maori exhibition — no cloaks or any other of the art forms that traditionally belong to Maori women. I was particularly angered by the comments of some of the people I discussed this issue with, who intimated that weaving was a craft and not an art form and didn't measure up to art forms like carving.

The work in the exhibition that really excited me was Maureen Lander's installation and Kura Thorsen's paintings. Both of these women really express for me this notion I have of release from the binds of tradition. The other work I accept as being a part of the growing up stage, a part of the search, a part of reaching back to one's identity, a part of attempting to satisfy both the traditional and social expectations of what art is about. Some of them were beautiful — the taaniko and the tukutuku, they really were beautiful, and I see them as part of that reaching back into one's identity to find a way of expression. My hope is, that those people will ultimately grow out of that, and while they are still drawing from it, create anew.

There are of course people like Te Aue Davis, who is an acknowledged weaver, and very very important to Maori women for her total devotion to traditional form. She will probably not move from

that and yet she's terribly important as an artist — and I use that word unreservedly — who is necessary for the new generations in terms of establishing the links and the basis of their uniqueness as Maori women, with a very real commitment to the arts of our predecessors.

So, in totality I think the exhibition expressed, for me anyway, three things. Firstly, the solidarity, and commitment of the traditional women artists. Secondly, the striking of new frontiers and the exploration of new forms of expression of some of our more confident and boldly assertive women. And thirdly, the search of those who are still exploring, still reaching for some kind of expression that ultimately should lead them towards unique statements in the arts about themselves, about their past and about their future.

For me it's terribly healthy that we have this variety. Very often art circles become very elitist. You either belong to some very special group or you sit outside of it. You either have achieved a certain status, or you haven't.

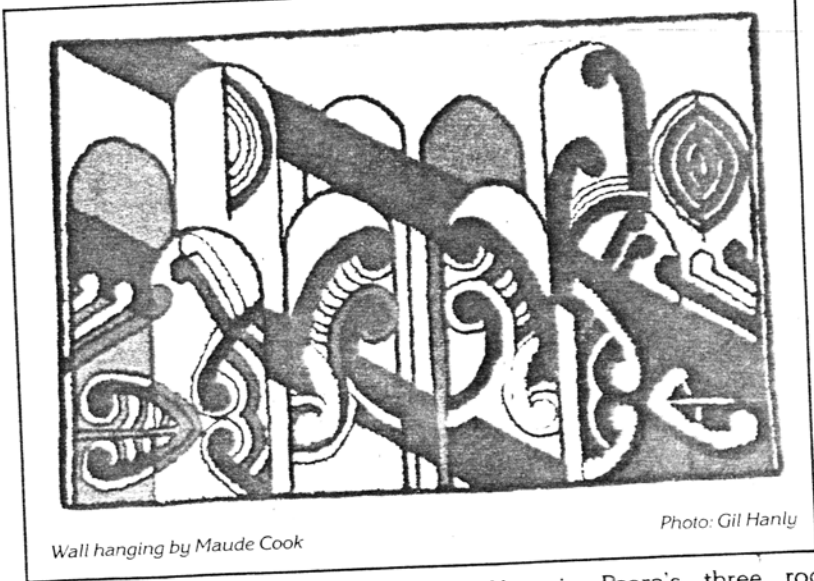
A nice thing about *Karanga Karanga* is that all the works were given a place, a dignity, that they all deserve. This expresses for me one of the Maori values that I hold very dear, which is essentially a sharing of one's skills, one's knowledge, one's search in the whole process of life. Like most group shows it is a little uneven, work going from absolutely stunning to ordinary.

What it exemplifies is what can happen when women gather together and support each other's endeavours. The resultant taonga, treasures, art works, crafts — call them what you will — have arisen out of the creative endeavours of individuals, stimulated by group support.

Amy Brown reviewed *Karanga Karanga* for the New Zealand Herald.

This is a shortened version of that review.

If there is one thing that the exhibition shows it is that there are major differences in thought, ways of seeing, art forms, style and so on. Maori people are different from Pakeha people. This should be no surprise. Perhaps the supremely beautiful tukutuku panel in the



Wall hanging by Maude Cook

Photo: Gil Hanly

foyer, *Te Korimako*, by Hinemoa Harrison, shows this best. I know of no other culture that weaves in this particular way. You can find koru and kowhaiwhai forms in American Indian and pre-Columbian pottery and weaving, but tukutuku exists in a world of its own.

This particular panel is not without humour. Based on the symbol of the korimako for the orator and the audience, the subtle difference in shading and pattern on the right side of the panel suggests that what is heard by the audience is often different to what is said by the orator. The other beautiful tukutuku panel, *Punga O Te Ao* is the work of Freda V. Kawharu. Also in the foyer is the deceptively simple eight-stranded rope weaving of New Zealand native fibres completed by the women just before the opening. Look carefully at this offering. It has a lot to say, not only about the entwining of lives and feelings, but almost a ritual karakia or prayer of thankfulness, accompanied as it was by a waiata composed by Katerina te Hei Koko Mataira.

The feather cloak or kakahu, and kete whakairo by Puti Hineapounamu Rare are extraordinarily beautiful and again accentuate the differences between the cultures that abide in New Zealand. This kind of work may be learnt by non-Maori, but in the learning, the very nature of the weaving changes and becomes cross-cultural and invested with new meaning. I am not against cross-culturalism.

Merania Paora's three rock-drawing paintings are a modern depiction, rendered most faithfully, of the most ancient rock art in New Zealand, much of it in caves now swallowed by water. They're very good.

Toi Te Rito Maihi is a talented artist who can work in many mediums. From her simple shell jewellery, with its plaited and knotted muka fibres, to her rimurapa or kelp-knotted sculptures, she shows an affinity with the materials of nature. Her two kites, based on a manuscript of traditional designs, are quite beautiful and her painting *Harakete III*, based on the inter leaving of flax in delicate shades of pink and green is a fine example of her artistry.

I think the work of Maureen Lander most appealed to me. Her installation of flax fibre, flax seed, scoria and plastic strips is highly contemporary, the luxuriousness of the flax seed and the starkness of the scoria is quite startling. One of her other wonderful contributions is *Nga Kete O Te Wananga* — the three baskets of knowledge.

There are many other exhibits, all interesting to see, some challenging, especially the burnished pottery of Hiraina Polson and Paparangi Reid.

There are indications in this exhibition of the rich and fertile stories of Maori Philosophy and creation, a philosophy not often spoken of or written about. There is much to learn here about Maori, much to be proud of. □