

MUSEUMS AND MĀORI

HERITAGE PROFESSIONALS
INDIGENOUS COLLECTIONS
CURRENT PRACTICE

CONAL MCCARTHY



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He mihi

‘He whare tū ki roto i te pā tūwatawata, inā te tohu o te rangatira.’

Kaati, e hika, Konere, tēnā koe. Nāu ra ēnei kōrero i tuhi hei whakaaroaro mā te katoa, huri noa i te ao. Ae, titiro mai e te iwi whānui tonu: anei a Aotearoa me āna nei kōrero mei kore pea he painga o roto whāngai atu. E ora ai ngā iwi taketake o te ao, e huri pai mai ngā mana whakahaere i te kaupapa toko i ngā tikanga ā iwi. Kaati, anei ētahi kupu mā te tangata koi hei ātawhiriwhiri, he tapuwae nō rātau mā.

Ngā mihi hoki ki ngā kaiwhakautu i o pātai, tū ki roto i āu ngā mahi rangahau. Tēnā koutou kei ngā kaimahi, kei ngā kaitiaki e whakatinana nei i ēnei kaupapa taukite, ngā kōrero e mārama mai ai ngā hikoinga o nehe, o nāiane, tēnā pea mo te wā ka tū mai.

Tēnā tātau e te iwi; tātau katoa ahakoa nō whea, huri noa te ao, tēnā tātau e rapu nei i ngā ara tōtika e mau ai te mana, te tau, te mīharo o tātau taonga – tōna kite, tōna hanga, tōna whakaatu, āna kōrero, te tuku, te tauawhi, te whakahau rangatira. Te tūmanako ka puritia ēnei tūāhuatanga. Anei ētahi tuhituhi whakaohoho i te ngākau pūmahara, i te ringa kakama, i te kaitiaki, he ahakoa nō whea mai. Kei te tautoko ake i ngā whakaaro kia anga nui ake tātau ki tō tātau tino rangatiratanga e puawai ai ēnei kaupapa i a tātau anō – tā te ngākau Māori, ta te ringaringa Māori anō hoki.

Mauriora ki te iwi.

Haere e te pukapuka, haere me te manawaroa.

It is with great pleasure that I write these few words in acknowledgement of this publication. In thanking the author for his scholarly discourse, I am mindful of the

global interest that these views invoke. I am grateful as a Māori for being able to read something of 'our story', something we share dearly and generously with other indigenous nations from a position of relative advantage, but nonetheless shared concerns.

May I also extend gratitude to those who have assisted Conal in this research-based publication. Thank you to our workers and guardians, for all that you accomplish on a daily basis, and in a way that honours past duty and stewardship, as well as provides exciting potential for the way ahead.

And to us all, wherever we may be, let us continue, with the assistance of the sort of ideas expressed herein, to revere the heritage of the taonga that has been given to us in our time. By a shared and collaborative effort we may assist one another to retain the genius, the creativity and the wonder of our treasures. I welcome the discourse around self-determination in regard to taonga Māori. Our awakened presence is, I believe, the most fruitful way forward for now: this, plus the opportunity to participate fully, with humility, in a way that enables deep consideration of the ideas presented in this book.

Life to the people.

Professor Piri Sciascia
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Preface

E tipu, e rea, i ngā rā o tōu ao
Ko tōu ringa ki te rākau a te Pākehā
Hei oranga mō tōu tinana
Ko tōu ngākau ki ngā taonga o ōu tūpuna Māori
Hei tikitiki mō tōu māhanga
Ko te wairua ki te Atua
Nāna nei ngā mea katoa

Grow and flourish during your days on this earth
Your hand grasping the material things of the Pākehā
[to sustain your body]
Your heart buoyed up by the treasures of your ancestors
As a diadem for your head
And your spirit with the God who made all things

Āpirana Ngata, Ngāti Porou

Translated by 'Aunty Marj' (Marjorie) Rau-Kupa, Ngāti Mutunga
(Rau-Kupa 1988, 22–3; 'Ngata's last message' 1958; Mead and Grove 2001, 48)

Introduction:

Museums and indigenous people

While working at the National Museum in Wellington in the 1980s, I learned a lesson I have never forgotten. There was a social function and I was carrying a tray of food. The route to my destination passed through the Māori Hall, the cavernous space in the centre of the building that contained the Māori taonga, or treasures. These carved and woven artifacts are revered for their spiritual nature. As I entered the door to the hall, I stopped suddenly. I recalled something about food but couldn't remember it exactly and didn't know what to do.

I was, I suppose, a typical Pākehā, a New Zealand European, in a predicament not uncommon for many museum professionals in a Māori situation. I did not want to offend. I wanted to do the right thing but was not sure what that was. I was brought up in the South Island without much contact with Māori people, until I went to university in Christchurch and then taught in a high school in the suburb of Porirua outside Wellington. Someone had told me that kai, or food, and taonga shouldn't go together, but I had to get the kai to the function, and I couldn't see any other way than through the hall.

I stood there awkwardly, looking around for help. One of the security guards, Peter Rewi, walked along. A gruff man then in his sixties, Peter and his wife Betty had been a forceful Māori presence among the Māori exhibits for several years. I spluttered out my dilemma – what should I do? Peter looked at me gravely, and then said quietly but firmly: 'Just do it with respect.' He walked off, leaving me to get on with it. No big deal, no mucking around. Slightly chastened yet relieved, I covered the food, and walked quickly through the hall to my destination.

This is a simple story but what struck me at the time and has stayed in my memory ever since was the pragmatic solution to a difficult predicament. What I learned from this incident was a feeling for doing the right thing according to the situation, and not to over-analyse it. This book seeks to do the same thing: to provide practitioners from differing backgrounds with a framework to think critically about their practice in relation to indigenous peoples. All over the world, cultural organisations are having to take account of native and tribal peoples in

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what they do. *Museums and Māori* is intended to empower museum professionals to work in a way that is informed by Māori perspectives. It is also a piece of research in its own right for students who are learning about the industry they want to work in, and for scholars who are interested in the relationship between museums and indigenous people everywhere, but particularly in former settler colonies.

Scenarios such as the following occur every day in New Zealand museums:

- You are a collection manager and you have Māori objects in your storeroom. How do you care for and manage them in accordance with Māori values?
- You are a candidate for a museum job in a region where there is a large Māori population and significant Māori involvement in the museum's activities. How do you prepare for the interview and what questions do you expect to be asked?
- You are a curator developing an exhibition on a Māori topic. How do you engage with the local Māori community to secure their input?

How do professionals today deal with indigenous objects in museums on a day-to-day basis? How do they engage on a practical level with indigenous communities? There is intense international interest in issues such as representation, cultural property and the politics of display, but little work on museums and source communities is thoroughly grounded in current museum practice or includes the voices of indigenous people.

Regardless of their geographical settings, museums are at the centre of arguments about culture, identity, history, restitution and social inclusion. Debates about the ownership, collection and display of material culture are an unavoidable reality in countries with multicultural populations affected by colonisation, migration or conflict. Working in an environment that operates according to different cultural norms is complex, and while it may seem a simple solution to follow rules and protocols, there are underlying principles that can guide professionals in devising, modifying or maintaining museum practices in ways that validate indigenous perspectives on cultural heritage and museums. *Museums and Māori* addresses these generic problems through interviews with and documentation and observation of the work of indigenous professionals and community representatives who were and are involved with the transformation of New Zealand museum practice in the last three decades.

As New Zealand society went through a process of internal 'decolonisation' in the 1980s, once monocultural museums were transformed into avowedly 'bicultural' institutions. The famous *Te Maori* exhibition played an important role in this transformation. In recent years, further changes have occurred due

to external pressures from tribal development, and internally from the ‘new museology’. Now indigenous professionals along with their colleagues are moving from ‘biculturalism’ to ‘binationalism’, exploring ways in which Māori as a ‘nation within’ can manage their own heritage either inside or outside the walls of museums.

When referring to the changes that museums make in order to incorporate Māori values and practices, many people use the term ‘biculturalism’. At its most simple level it means *two* cultures or ways of doing things within a museum. Despite problems with the concept of biculturalism, I employ the term because it is what most practitioners use on a regular basis. This study is a critical analysis of a biculturalism whose time has passed but which nevertheless retains useful elements. *Museums and Māori* is an historical assessment of biculturalism’s legacy in the museum context, and an assessment of what might come next as the relationship between museums and Māori moves into a new phase.



Figure 1: New Zealand museums hold rich collections of Māori material culture, including objects in wood, bone, stone and fibre. These heitiki, human figures carved in pounamu or greenstone, are worn as pendants.

International context: Museums and source communities

The relationship between indigenous people and museums is part of a worldwide debate that has been the subject of much discussion, research and writing in the last 30 years. These debates are briefly surveyed here to provide a context for local issues and to point out how a detailed case study investigating the complexities of museum practice can actually contribute to the international literature. Museums in plural democracies, and particularly in former settler colonies, have a lot to learn from New Zealand.

Museums and Māori takes as its focus internal museum practices, especially management, collections and display – the things that actually drive innovation on the ground. Simply put, radical changes in governance, exhibition development and collection management in New Zealand museums did not come out of the blue, but as a particular response to a transnational phenomenon – namely a debate about the politics of collecting and exhibiting the culture of colonised peoples.

From the 1980s, scholars in anthropology and cultural studies carried out postcolonial critiques of the ways museums collected and represented the material culture of the ‘Other’.¹ The issues were familiar then to many New Zealanders because the successful *Te Maori* exhibition on display at the Metropolitan Museum

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of Art was caught up in a debate raging in the New York art world about the infamous exhibition *'Primitivism' in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* held at the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA). While downtown at MOMA 'primitive' art was hung alongside modern masters like Picasso to suggest 'affinities' between the tribal and modern, on the other side of Central Park, Pacific material was displayed in the American Museum of Natural History as 'art/artifacts' in the Margaret Mead Hall of Pacific Peoples. Were these objects 'art' and should they be displayed in museums frozen in an ethnographic past or 'liberated' in art galleries by being placed on par with Western fine art? Whether displayed as art or artifacts, anthropologist James Clifford was critical of both art museums and anthropology museums for overlooking the ongoing existence of tribal cultures 'in the name either of constituting authentic, "traditional" worlds or of appreciating their products in the timeless category of "art"'.²

Meanwhile, back at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, critics were divided about the reclassification of wood carving as art in *Te Maori*. A lot of New Zealanders were flattered by the attention from American media, but others were not so sure. Canadian museum director Dr Michael Ames described the exhibition as an

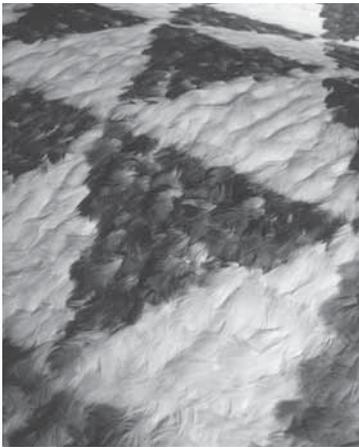


Figure 2: This kahu huruhuru, feather cloak, comes from the collection of the Canterbury Museum in Christchurch. New Zealand museums sometimes loan cloaks for use in important ceremonies and events.

example of 'romantic primitivism' due to the fact that it did not pay attention to the 'continuing existence of Maori people'.³ The remarkable thing about the *Te Maori* exhibition, which had the input of Māori leaders like Kara Puketapu, scholars such as Dr Hirini Moko Mead, and extensive community participation in opening ceremonies, was that the experience went far beyond the limited critical analysis of the politics of display to result in real, concrete changes in New Zealand museum practice in terms of collaboration, staffing and decision making.

The critique of museums as instruments of colonial power and nation building has obscured a long history of indigenous adaptation and exchange while inhibiting museum professionals' engagement with contemporary indigenous societies because of the dangers of theoretically incorrect 'isms', including essentialism and nationalism. Recent scholarship on the Pacific moves beyond the

politics of identity and representation, providing more useful models for former settler colonies to make sense of their multiple and contested pasts, particularly through an awareness of the productive interaction of indigenous people with Western cultural practices.⁴

Museum history in New Zealand is characterised not just by its implication in the colonial project and the resulting alienation of indigenous land and culture, but also by a paradoxical resistance to and collaboration with this process. Likewise, academics Ruth B. Phillips in Canada and Howard Morphy in Australia recognise how indigenous peoples engage with European institutions and use them to their own ends.⁵ Fred Myers has written persuasively about the process of 'culture making' with reference to the Aboriginal acrylic painting that has moved from the margins to the centre of the Australian art world, an analysis that avoids the radical scepticism of art critics who undervalue indigenous creativity and agency.⁶

In contrast to the separation of settler and native in many studies, James Clifford's idea of museums as 'contact zones' is useful in taking account of the constant interchange of Māori with European heritage organisations both in the past and today. Clifford's concept of contact zones, as adapted from Mary Louis Pratt is:

. . . the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, racial inequality and intractable conflict.⁷

As opposed to the view that museums are simply powerful institutions of Western empire and native peoples merely passive victims, this analysis suggests the museum is a 'space where different cultures and communities intersect, interact and are mutually influenced by the encounter'.⁸ Despite the inevitable conflict in such asymmetrical situations, Clifford shows how these relations can be productive, as seen in tribal museums in the United States and Canada, where 'newly traditional' cultures have been reinvented from museum resources.⁹ In post-settler states this mutual engagement is even more marked because indigenous peoples are not distant in time and space, 'over there and back then' as it were, but assertively present in the here and now.

Another important contribution to recent scholarship on contemporary relations between museums and native peoples is Laura Peers and Alison Brown's concept of 'source community'.¹⁰ They argue that it is important to acknowledge source/originating communities not only as the groups *in the past* from whom objects were collected but also their living descendants *today* who are often the audiences for exhibitions of these very same objects. Increasingly, the relationship between the museum and source communities has moved beyond consultation and collaboration to explore new ways of working that ask 'for partnership rather than superficial involvement', in which both parties share power. Rather than the traditional curatorial and managerial approach that maintains power within the authoritative

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institution and its disciplines, in this scenario the community are seen as ‘heritage stakeholders’ in a negotiated process that has mutual benefits for both.¹¹

Peers and Brown’s invaluable survey of new developments highlights an urgent need for further research:

More publications, which both reflect and explain the new ways of thinking about and working with collections, are needed by museums as a starting point to begin developing relationships with source communities . . . These relationships are the most important manifestation of the new curatorial praxis, but the process of establishing them has not received much attention in the critical literature.¹²

Museums and Māori responds directly to this call for new research to fill gaps in the literature. Most existing accounts of these topics are positive, tend to skip over problems and omissions, and do not deal frankly with failures that are perhaps even more instructive than successes. Despite a dearth of serious literature, there has been some new work that grapples with issues of knowledge, tribal museums and curatorial practice.¹³ The most common articles and books deal with cultural property, protests about particular exhibits and other controversial issues, but these outsider accounts are usually not grounded in current museum practice. Reforms within the museum sectors of Australia and Canada have been formalised in important policies, but often these well-meaning statements are not accompanied by meaningful change at institutional level (see Box 1).¹⁴ There is a substantial amount of unpublished ‘grey’ literature in the form of institutional documents and policies that are confidential or not widely disseminated. Peers and Brown point out that relations between museums and source communities have changed most dramatically in countries ‘where indigenous populations now live among settler-founded, modern nation-states’. This includes Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the United States.¹⁵ It is important to recognise that many of these changes in

Box 1: International policy and legislation on indigenous people

United States: Native Graves Protection and Repatriation Act 1990

Canada: Joint Task Force Report on Museums and First Peoples 1992

Aotearoa New Zealand: Mataatua Declaration 1993 [see Appendix]

Australia: Previous Possessions, New Obligations 1993, Continuous Cultures, Ongoing Responsibilities 2005

United Nations: The UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous People 2004

Source: International Council of Museums.

practice are significant not simply in their own specific locations but in the broader context of museums themselves. Peers and Brown note that the shift to recognising source communities results in a 'radical re-envisioning of the nature of museums'.¹⁶ Anthropologist Christina Kreps goes further and argues that:

Liberating culture is not only about giving back or restoring a people's right to or control over the management of cultural heritage. It is also about liberating our thinking from the Eurocentric view of what constitutes a museum, artifact and museological practice so that we might better recognise alternative forms. The liberation of culture allows for emergence of a new museological discourse in which points of reference are no longer solely determined and defined by the west. This 'new inclusiveness' acknowledges that those who have been marginalised as 'the others' are central to the creation of new museological paradigms.¹⁷

National context: New Zealand and/or Aotearoa?

Museums need to be placed in both national and international contexts. New Zealand's history is short but dramatic, especially that of the last 150 years, which echoes major world developments. The indigenous Māori people had been living in Aotearoa New Zealand for perhaps a thousand years when Europeans began making regular contact in the late eighteenth century. New Zealand became a British colony with the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi between the Crown and Māori chiefs in 1840. This founding document importantly recognised Māori rights and guaranteed a measure of self-government (see Appendix). After land wars and gold rushes in the 1860s and 1870s, the predominantly English and Scottish settler society expanded rapidly, and by the early twentieth century New Zealand had become an affluent agricultural producer for the 'Home' market – Britain. New Zealanders saw themselves as the 'better Britons of the South Pacific'. An independent national identity did not emerge until the 1960s and 1970s when the UK joined the European Economic Community and thus denied New Zealand a guaranteed market. Since then, New Zealanders have gone through a process of external disconnection from Britain and an opening up to the world, which occurred at the same time as a turbulent internal crisis of identity brought about by economic change, new constituencies, migration and other social forces – or what historian James Belich calls a 'domestic process of decolonisation'.¹⁸

Māori people and culture, and the Māori experience within New Zealand history, have been described at length by many scholars.¹⁹ There is no denying the pain, loss and destruction of the colonial period, which had a devastating impact on land, language and culture, so it is little wonder that academic Dr Ranginui Walker's