

# Representing community exhibitions at the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa

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**ABSTRACT:** Exhibitions at the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa (Te Papa) are represented and promoted through a title and ‘hero’ image. Te Papa works with external community advisors to determine titles and images for community-focused exhibitions. The authors analyse two exhibition case studies in terms of community consultation, the representation of complex communities, and authenticity of the images used: *The Scots in New Zealand* and *Tangata o le Moana: the story of Pacific people in New Zealand*.

**KEYWORDS:** community, exhibition, Te Papa, representation, authenticity, graphic identity, hero image, Pacific people, Scots.

## Introduction

In all that they do, museums are people dependent; yet they have difficulty predicting with a high degree of accuracy how people really respond. (Kavanagh 2002: 110)

In August 2007, the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa (Te Papa) opened its fifth Community Gallery exhibition called *The Scots in New Zealand*. In October that year, the Museum opened its second major Pacific cultures exhibition, *Tangata o le Moana: the story of Pacific people in New Zealand*. Both exhibitions fulfilled the statutory requirement that Te Papa has ‘regard to the ethnic and cultural diversity of the people of New Zealand, and the contributions they have made to New Zealand’s cultural life and the fabric of New Zealand society’ and that it ‘provides the means for every such culture to contribute effectively to the Museum’ (New Zealand Government 1992: s. 8(a) and (b)).

Both exhibitions were created by teams of museum staff who drew on the expertise of voluntary committees of advisors from around the country. Te Papa develops community exhibitions in consultation not only because of its statutory

mandate, but because it believes that communities should be able to speak with authority and share their taonga (treasured objects) on a national platform. Community exhibitions enable the national museum to ‘move away from the grand narratives of the history of the nation and ... give voice and authority to those who were formerly excluded’ (Crooke 2006: 183).

Community exhibitions are collective representations of communities through their material, visual and intangible culture. At Te Papa, these exhibitions are represented and promoted through graphic identities, including titles, tag-lines and key images called ‘heroes’. These graphic identities manifest in posters, pamphlets and advertisements, and other media. The ‘hero’ should be a ‘catching image that personifies exhibition subject matter in a positive way’ (Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa 2006c: 5). It must be ‘simple, direct, appealing, vital, and memorable’, and should express the key ideas of the exhibition: hence the idea of it being a ‘hero’ because of the extraordinary role it plays (Kotler & Kotler 1998: 220). It needs to act as a visual touchstone for the exhibition, conveying various meanings desired by the museum and its community advisors.

Te Papa exhibition teams work closely with their community advisors to determine these aspects of representation. The titles and hero images for *The Scots in New Zealand* and *Tangata o le Moana* were determined after much debate and iteration. In the case of *The Scots*, most of the debates were conducted internally between museum staff and community advisors, whereas issues surrounding the representation of *Tangata o le Moana* entered the public realm with unexpected and intense media interest. These two exhibitions will be analysed from a curatorial perspective as case studies on the complexities of visual representation of communities.<sup>1</sup>

## How does Te Papa create community exhibitions?

Community exhibitions are created by large internal exhibition teams and smaller external community advisory groups (CAGs). Exhibition teams consist of professionals from across Te Papa who are brought together for the development of exhibitions. Each member represents his or her own group of responsibility (for example, the curator represents his or her particular discipline). The core members of a community exhibition team are the project manager, concept developer, curator(s), interpreter, spatial designer, graphic designer, writer and community relations manager.<sup>2</sup> As the project develops, more staff members join the team and attend meetings when necessary. These members include the collection manager, conservator, loans officer, image researcher, and representatives of the museum's marketing, education, events, commercial and sponsorship teams.

Exhibition teams meet weekly throughout the development phase, whereas CAG meetings are less frequent, ranging from fortnightly to quarterly, depending on the type of project and where members live. That said, CAG meetings are usually milestone events, where work done to date is assessed, and work going forward is negotiated.

Neither Te Papa's exhibition teams nor the CAGs are homogenous entities. Exhibition team dynamics vary from project to project. Te Papa's staff is divided into groups of responsibility, such as curators, designers, educators and marketers. Different professional interests and experience are brought to bear on consultation processes. All team members are involved to a certain degree in brokering the complex cultural and conceptual issues that arise during the

exhibition development process. However, engagement with communities is uneven across the exhibition team, with some roles being closer to the consultation than others. Generally speaking, the concept developer, curator(s) and interpreter lead discussions on content and concept with CAGs throughout the exhibition development process. As scholars, curators are constantly in dialogue with community advisors, as these individuals are primary sources of cultural knowledge. Te Papa staff with other roles on the exhibition team will consult with the community advisors when required.

These separate roles and varying levels of engagement can be confusing for community advisors, who may expect to deal with a single entity. But they, too, vary in their engagement. Communities are complex and can be fractured by their multiple identities, hierarchies and politics. CAG dynamics vary from project to project, and each group will respond differently in how it engages with an exhibition team.

There is no clear hierarchy on either side. Exhibition teams are led practically by a project manager and led conceptually by a concept developer and lead curator. Decisions are negotiated between team members until a consensus is reached. CAGs usually lack a single strong leader, and each is essentially a group of disparate people representing diverse community interests, who meet face to face only in relation to the exhibition team, not independently.

CAGs consist of five to eight volunteers who are sourced either from workshops held at Te Papa or are 'shoulder-tapped' as suitable and respected people from their communities. Workshop sessions are generally one-day events, where invited experts from the community in question are brought to Wellington to discuss potential ideas for an exhibition at Te Papa. There is a degree of self-selection in this approach to forming the advisory groups. In the case of *The Scots in New Zealand* exhibition project, the seven members of the CAG originally attended a 'blue skies' workshop session where 20 invited experts met at Te Papa for one day to discuss what a Scottish exhibition might consist of. In the case of *Tangata o le Moana*, the needs of consultation were much broader, and three groups were convened, in Auckland, Christchurch and Wellington. Each of these groups comprised leading members of the seven largest ethnic populations from the Pacific Islands living in New Zealand. The most established group was the one based in Wellington, with several members consulting with Te Papa since its inception.

## The Mana Taonga principle

None of these relationships is formally cemented through contracts or policies, though *The Scots* CAG was provided with a terms of reference document as a guide for the project (Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa 2006b). However, the work of community exhibition teams is guided by the principles of Te Papa's Mana Taonga policy, which 'provides iwi and communities with the right to define how taonga within Te Papa should be cared for and managed in accordance with their tikanga or custom' (Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa 1992). In the context of community exhibitions, 'taonga' is defined in its broadest sense to include both material and intangible culture of any community in New Zealand, not just iwi (Māori tribal groups). At the time of writing, the Mana Taonga principle was under review.

## How does Te Papa represent its community exhibitions?

It is essential for museums to brand themselves and the products they wish to promote (such as exhibitions) through images and messages. Images are the most important element in attracting attention and act as shortcuts to understanding the product or experience on offer. Promotional material must be visually appealing and succinct, and must inspire a response, such as voluntarily picking up a pamphlet and visiting a museum (Runyard & French 1999: 61). When combined with a well-known and respected brand such as the Te Papa logo, it should inspire trust in the quality of the experience on offer (Kotler & Kotler 1998: 219, 227).

The title and hero image must identify and promote community exhibitions to all audiences in all formats during the life of the exhibition. Formats include exhibition signage, press releases, newspaper advertising, website presence, pamphlets, posters and banners. It should work effectively from a small black and white newspaper advertisement right up to a large-scale, full-colour street banner (Runyard & French 1999: 58).

Te Papa's marketing approach requires that exhibition titles are generally no more than five words and are usually supported by an explanatory tagline. The title 'should attract visitors and provide information on content. The title stands alone and is followed by the tagline, which should reflect

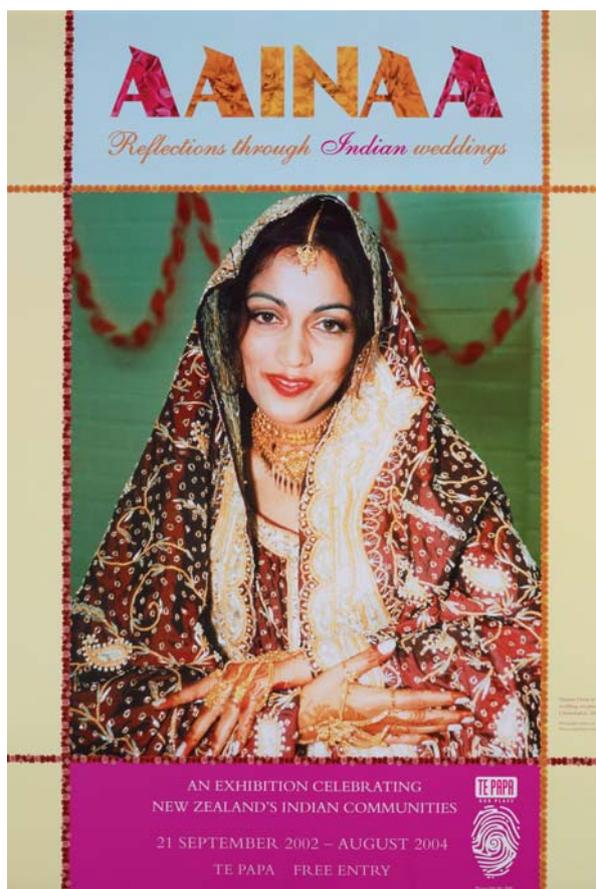


Fig. 1 The simplest and strongest hero image used in recent community exhibitions was the bride for *Aainaa: reflections through Indian weddings* (2002–04). The selection of this image was straightforward, as the exhibition's dominant theme was marriage, and this particular image was attractive and of high technical quality.

the essence of the show' (Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa 2006c: 5). In the case of community exhibitions, titles are often in the dominant language of the community being investigated, supported by explanatory English taglines (for example, *Qui tutto bene: the Italians in New Zealand*).

Selecting the title and hero image can be the most contentious elements of the exhibition development process, and can take several months to resolve amongst all the stakeholders. The selection of title and image is based on target audiences and what museum staff and community advisors agree is appropriate. Appropriateness includes whether the image is authentic and meaningful, whether it is graphically strong and has the correct technical properties, and whether it is effective enough for advertising purposes (Figs 1 and 2).

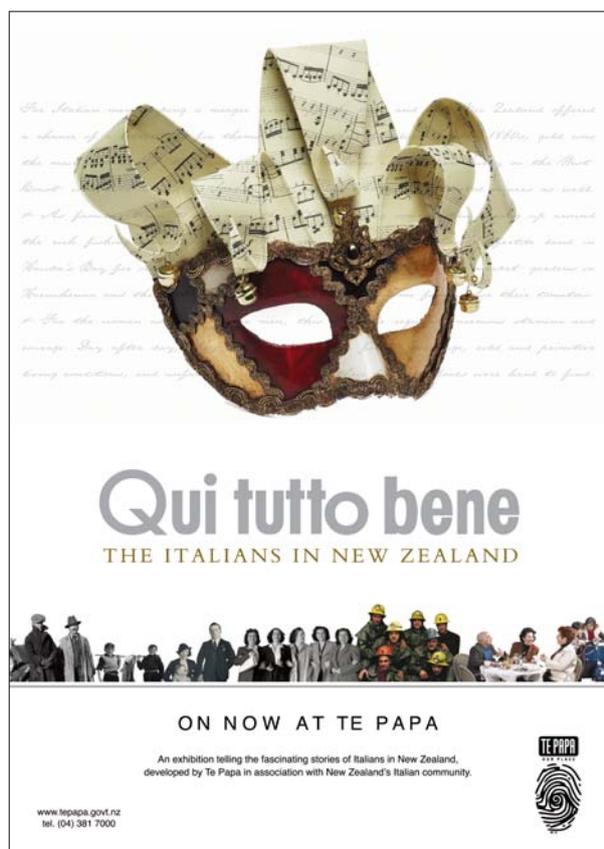


Fig. 2 The Italian community exhibition *Qui tutto bene: the Italians in New Zealand* (2004–07) was promoted with a composite solution featuring a Venetian mask as the hero image, accompanied by a suite of smaller images of people linked to the main themes of the exhibition. Finding one image to represent a community can be the hardest challenge of all, whereas composite images allow for more diverse expressions of culture and identity (Bayley 2008).

### Case study: *The Scots in New Zealand*

*The Scots in New Zealand* exhibition (September 2008 to February 2010) was a short-term exhibition developed in consultation with an external CAG.<sup>3</sup> This group consisted of seven volunteers representing the museum sector and special interest groups.<sup>4</sup> In all of Te Papa's community exhibitions, the CAG is 'the major point of contact between the community being profiled in the gallery and the Museum' and the intention is that the CAG is 'fully involved at all stages of the development of the exhibition' (Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa 2006b: 1). The main interface between the exhibition team and *The Scots* CAG took the

form of five meetings held at Te Papa between February 2006 and April 2007. Communications in between meetings were via email, telephone and posted documents. The core members of the exhibition team were present at all the meetings, with the marketing manager present at four of the meetings. Exhibition team meetings were held at Te Papa weekly to progress decisions made at the CAG meetings and to manage the detailed business of the exhibition project.

In terms of design and promotion, the CAG's role is to provide feedback on the proposed graphic identity for the exhibition, with the exhibition team incorporating or acting upon this feedback 'where possible' (Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa 2006b: 4). Ideally, museum staff act as facilitators who place their expertise at the service of community members, with the community as 'the final arbiter of content, text, and other key components' (Phillips 2003: 163). However, the realities of budgets, timeframes, attitudes of 'best practice' and demanding production standards have resulted in exhibition teams controlling final decisions, as acknowledged in the 'Terms of reference' for CAGs:

Te Papa has experienced, professional staff who strive to ensure that ideas, feelings and information are communicated effectively and to ensure that exhibitions capture the interest of its diverse audiences. Te Papa staff work within clearly defined exhibition guidelines (for example, a defined exhibition space, word limits, text, design parameters and budget). Accordingly, while the exhibition is developed in partnership with the community and community recommendations are sought, respected, and adopted where feasible, final responsibility resides with the museum. (Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa 2006b: 1)

### Representing the Scots in New Zealand

Both the exhibition team and *The Scots* CAG hoped to avoid stereotypes and clichéd notions of Scottish identity. But as with many other cultural and ethnic groups, Scottish identity is infused with stereotypical imagery, particularly symbols of Highland culture such as tartan and bagpipes. The challenge for the exhibition team and the CAG was to explore Scottish identity in New Zealand through a balance of well-known expressions and lesser known, unexpected ones (Townsend 2007: 6). Within the exhibition, these aims were evident in a wide range of items and experiences, with unexpected objects representing complex histories and ideals (such as a ram's-head snuff mull symbolising the wool

industry), balanced with expected stories and objects such as whisky, tartan and bagpipes.

In the second meeting between the exhibition team and CAG (May 2006), the marketing manager, graphic designer and writer assigned to the project sought advice from the CAG as to appropriate titles and images to represent the exhibition. One member of the CAG suggested the well-received title of *Unpacking the Kist*. It was a poetic way of indicating that the exhibition would bring out treasures and contain knowledge about the Scots, as the word 'kist' is the Lowland Scots word for 'chest' or 'suitcase'. A kist could relate both to the storage of treasure but also to the act of migration to New Zealand to start a new life. Such a title needed a tagline for clarification, hence *The Scots in New Zealand*.

After the meeting, the graphic designer created an identity around this title and tagline by including a hero image of an actual kist to help interpret the title (Fig. 3). Scotch thistles were included in the design as easily recognisable emblems of Scottishness. This graphic identity was presented at the third meeting between the exhibition team and CAG (July 2006), and was generally admired by all present, though there were doubts from the marketing manager as to the effectiveness of this subtle graphic identity when used on promotional materials such as banners and posters.

### Working together to represent communities

Te Papa has high visitor targets to achieve, and invests significant resources in understanding its diverse audiences and reaching out to them. Promotional material must be unique, instantly understandable and make exhibitions desirable; it must also be able to compete alongside profit-driven advertising in the marketplace. Exhibition posters, banners and pamphlets are essentially advertisements and must do the hard work expected of advertising, but they can also be considered works of art in their own right (Runyard & French 1999: 44). These elements need to be balanced with one another, and with how external communities wish to be represented. The graphic designer's work can act as a bridge between these needs (Bayley 2008).

In the case of the graphic identity for *Unpacking the Kist*, the marketing manager advised the exhibition team and the CAG that its subtlety would attract a specialist audience only, and that the image of the kist could not act as a 'hero' on its own. The mostly unknown word 'kist' would 'not

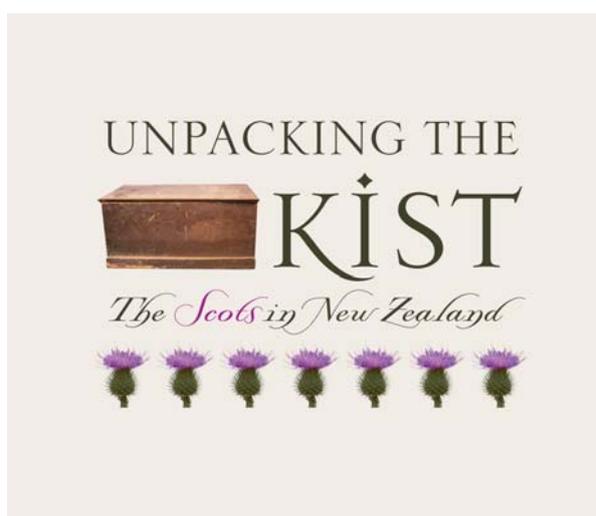


Fig. 3 The first graphic identity created for the Scottish community exhibition featuring a wooden kist (chest) (photo: Otago Settlers Museum; reproduced with permission).

yield enough easy information for the reader/viewer of the graphic identity' (Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa 2006d: 5). This argument was accepted by the exhibition team, who commenced brainstorming new titles and images. This process was undertaken without consultation with the CAG for two reasons: it happened at a very late stage in the project and consequently staff felt that there was not enough time for adequate consultation; and there was an underlying assumption that Te Papa had many years of experience in developing exhibitions and would know best how to resolve the issue. This is not an uncommon response by museum professionals who work to ideas of 'best practice' (Thelen 2005: 336).

This second attempt at creating a graphic identity and hero image for the exhibition featured a well-known expression of Scottishness: the Highland piper (Fig. 4). The gumbooted piper, reflected in a pool of water, was considered humorous and instantly recognisable, and most importantly, met the needs of the Te Papa marketing team which:

wanted to develop a hybrid image that reflected Scots in New Zealand. From a marketing point of view the image works as it represents Scots with iconic elements such as the bagpipe shadow and kilt combined with a New Zealandness represented by the gumboots. There is an element of humour in the image which strengthens its effectiveness. In addition, it is a strong, singular image and would reproduce well in marketing materials...

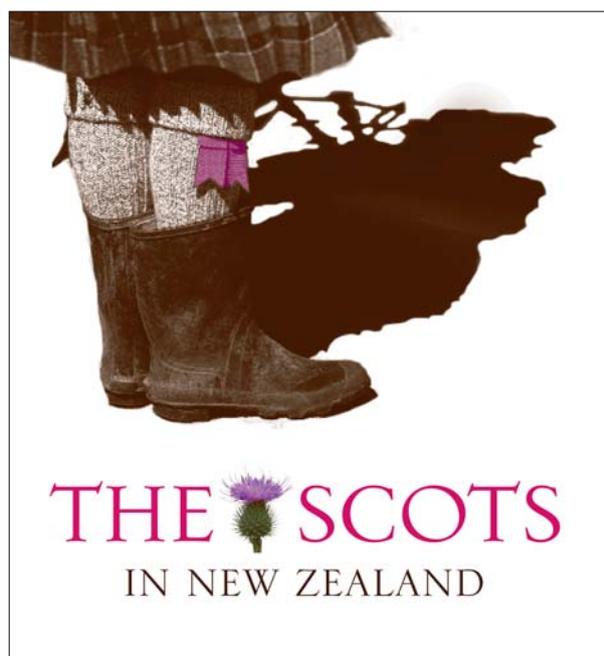


Fig. 4 The second attempt to create an image and title to promote *The Scots in New Zealand* exhibition. This image was sourced from *Canvas*, the weekend magazine of the *New Zealand Herald*, from an article titled 'Pakeha kilt', 23 September 2006 (reproduced with permission).

marketing is often not subtle or nuanced and needs to hook audience interest to sell the show and encourage visitors into the exhibition. (Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa 2007b: 2)

With this new image, the title *Unpacking the Kist* became problematic as the word 'kist' was no longer visually translated. The exhibition team agreed that the tagline would become a stand-alone title instead, so that the title became simply *The Scots in New Zealand*. This new title and hero image were sent to CAG members in preparation for the last meeting before the exhibition opened (April 2007). They reacted immediately with a mixture of surprise and hurt that not only had the exhibition team changed the title and hero image without warning or consultation, but it had chosen a problematic image.

At the meeting, the majority of the CAG members responded positively at first to the gumbooted piper and 'could see the humour in it' (Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa 2007b: 2). The image was acknowledged as an example of how New Zealanders of Scottish descent 'kept their identity alive'. The muddy gumboots could be seen to evoke the 'sheer hard physical work of the Scots

settlers and their wish to retain their identity in a new land' (Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa 2007b: 3).

On the other hand, two members felt very strongly that the image was inappropriate. One felt that it 'negated the subtlety and richness of Scottish culture in New Zealand'. She saw it 'as a cartoon image – not an image of pride'. The oldest member of the group (who was Scottish-born) was very firm in denouncing the image as clichéd and implying that the 'Scots were dirty' with 'no pride in dress', and that it would be offensive to people of Scottish birth (Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa 2007b: 2). Her opinion was respected and deferred to by the other members because of her seniority and innate cultural experience as being Scots-born. This illustrates the influence of the individual in group environments, particularly when that individual is respected as an elder and cultural expert.

Other causes for concern included the lack of gender balance in the image and its blackness, which could be considered 'menacing and alienating' (Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa 2007b: 3).

Though the CAG was disappointed by the lack of consultation, it acknowledged the exhibition team's dilemma in finding a suitable image that could 'represent the Scots who are not particularly distinctive apart from their well-known symbols and stereotypes'. And while it did not agree with the exhibition team that this particular image could be seen 'to reclaim the stereotype', the CAG acknowledged that 'while stereotypes can work against representing a culture it is very difficult not to make use of them in some way for marketing purposes' (Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa 2007b: 3).<sup>5</sup>

In hindsight, there was nothing wrong in suggesting such an image, but it should have been considered in a timely manner, so that it could have been part of the normal selection process. As the graphic designer later noted, 'We were just playing around with ideas. It's quite healthy to be throwing things around. It's not a bad thing getting that wrong. But we should have gotten it wrong early on. ... We really liked it and we assumed because we liked it, they would like it too. We were genuinely concerned when they didn't' (Bayley 2008).

Essentially, the exhibition team had left its partner behind in the decision-making process. When museums seek partnership, they must be sincere and honest in all dealings, and communities must feel rewarded by the relationship, and not overlooked (Spitz & Thom 2003: 18, 39). Once a partnership is formed between a museum and a community,

the museum should consult as agreed to ensure accurate representation and to safeguard the ‘community’s comfort level’, as a certain level of trust and decision-making will have already been achieved (Wilson 1999: 4). Ideally, project timelines should be adjusted to allow for review and revision, even when time constraints are extremely tight.

The exhibition team accepted the CAG’s criticisms wholeheartedly, and apologised for offending the members and for the lack of consultation. The team undertook to restore the original sense of partnership by reversing the process, and starting a new search for an image with the help of the CAG and its final approval. The new title remained in place (*The Scots in New Zealand*), as everyone agreed that it was clearer, even though there was some regret at the loss of the more poetic title *Unpacking the Kist*.

### Creating an authentic image for all stakeholders

Searching for a new ‘hero’ image proved easier said than done. Hundreds of options were considered. The most obvious ideas were stereotypical images that everyone hoped to avoid, or the use of composite images to cover the main themes of the exhibition, as had been used in the Italian community exhibition (Fig. 2).

Finally, as time was running out, an image taken at a recent Waipu Highland Games caught everyone’s attention: a group of children in a massed Highland fling (Fig. 5). At first glance, it appeared that the exhibition team and the CAG would fall into the trap of stereotypical imagery, with tartan and the Highland fling being summoned to represent the entire Scottish experience.<sup>6</sup> Regardless of how much effort was put into escaping such an image, it seemed to be the only solution. The graphic designer noted that: ‘It definitely does the job but it’s not edgy. It’s a little bit “chocolate box”. It could have been more contemporary, more unexpected. But it’s hard to do something unexpected with community shows – you don’t want to alienate anyone, which can mean you end up with something safe and inoffensive rather than something challenging and different’ (Bayley 2008). That said, it is a colourful and joyful image, and is a genuine scene of real children participating at a real event in New Zealand. It indicates hope for the survival of Scottish culture into the future through young people.

The strength of the image lay in two clearly identifiable protagonists in the foreground. Being male and female, they provided gender balance. They were dancing on bright green

grass, implying a New Zealand foundation. Their youthful exuberance enabled the exhibition team to present the Scots visually as an energetic migrant group (an idea that was reinforced by the marketing text on the poster).

The use of the image needed to be approved by the children in the photograph, their parents and the competitive dance community. The image of the Highland fling was authentic, being taken by a photographer for the *Northern Advocate* newspaper in Whangarei as documentary evidence of the Waipu Highland Games. However, it needed to be manipulated both for dramatic effect, and to meet the approval of the dance community in terms of what they deemed to be authentic.<sup>7</sup>

The young boy at the centre of the image looks like a strong, competent dancer, which he is, having won many national and international awards. His flying pose is accurate. The young girl alongside him is not so experienced, but her slightly awkward pose acts as a foil to his accuracy of movement. This contrast was commented on favourably by many in the Highland dancing community as indicating that anyone can participate in Highland dancing and, therefore, Scottish culture.

However, the boy’s competence and perfection as a dancer raised an unexpected issue. The grass was wet on the day the photograph was taken and his mother had made him wear socks over his dancing shoes so that they would not be damaged, the result being that he was wearing non-regulation dress. When one of the exhibition curators approached her to seek permission for the use of the photograph, she felt that she could not give it knowing that her son’s dance instructor would not be happy to see his non-regulation footwear. It was difficult for non-dance specialists to understand how such a seemingly small detail could hold back the use of the image. However, one of Te Papa’s photographers came up with a creative solution – to bring the boy to Te Papa to photograph him in the same pose, in the correct footwear. This correct detail could then be morphed into the original image so that no one could tell that the image had been manipulated. This solution was successful and ensured that the image was authentic to the competitive dance community. This was an example of ‘authenticity through participation’, whereby the museum understood and accepted the cultural knowledge residing in the dance community (Ames 2006: 182).

The exhibition team’s graphic designer then treated the image with atmospheric effects, bringing the two protagonists forward and fading the other children gradually into the



Fig. 5 Massed Highland fling at the Waipu Highland Games, January 2006 (photo: John Stone, reproduced courtesy of John Stone and the *Northern Advocate*).

misty background – thereby subtly implying that Scottish culture goes back in time, but continues into the future with the next generation. A locally grown Scotch thistle added a familiar motif within the title, and the pink lettering indicated the colour of heather, a flower also symbolic of Scotland (and an introduced plant in New Zealand) (Fig. 6). All elements may be charged with being stereotypical, but they all have a bona fide connection to New Zealand.

Whether the poster featuring this image encouraged people to visit the exhibition is a question that needs testing. One indication of interest is that Te Papa’s Visitor and Market Research team reported a moderate satisfaction rating of 7.3 out of 10 (Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa 2007c: 3). One problematic aspect of *The Scots in New Zealand* image is that it raised expectations that there would be more dance in the exhibition than there actually is. An image that is ideal for promotional purposes may not adequately represent an exhibition’s content or meet all the needs of the community involved. This is one of the risks that museums must consider when representing an entire community with one image.

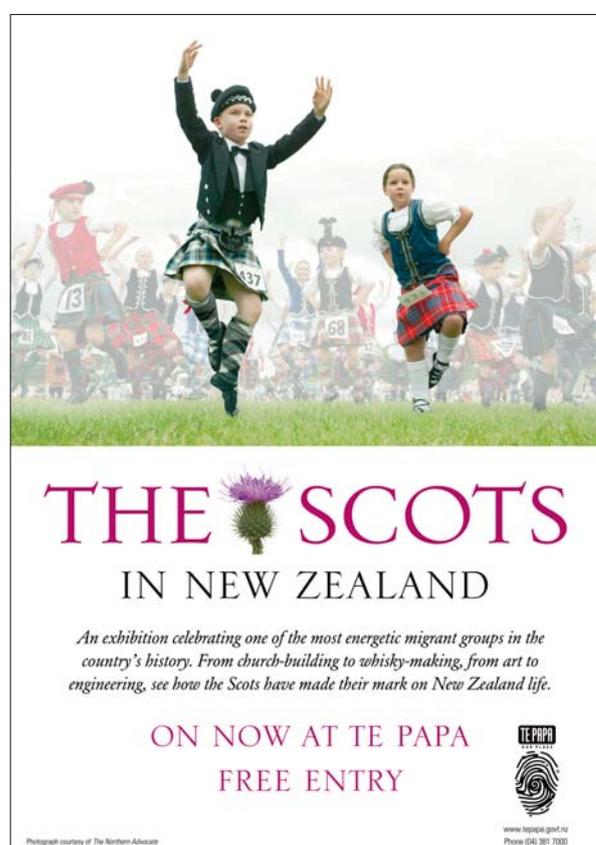


Fig. 6 The final graphic identity and promotional image for *The Scots in New Zealand* exhibition.

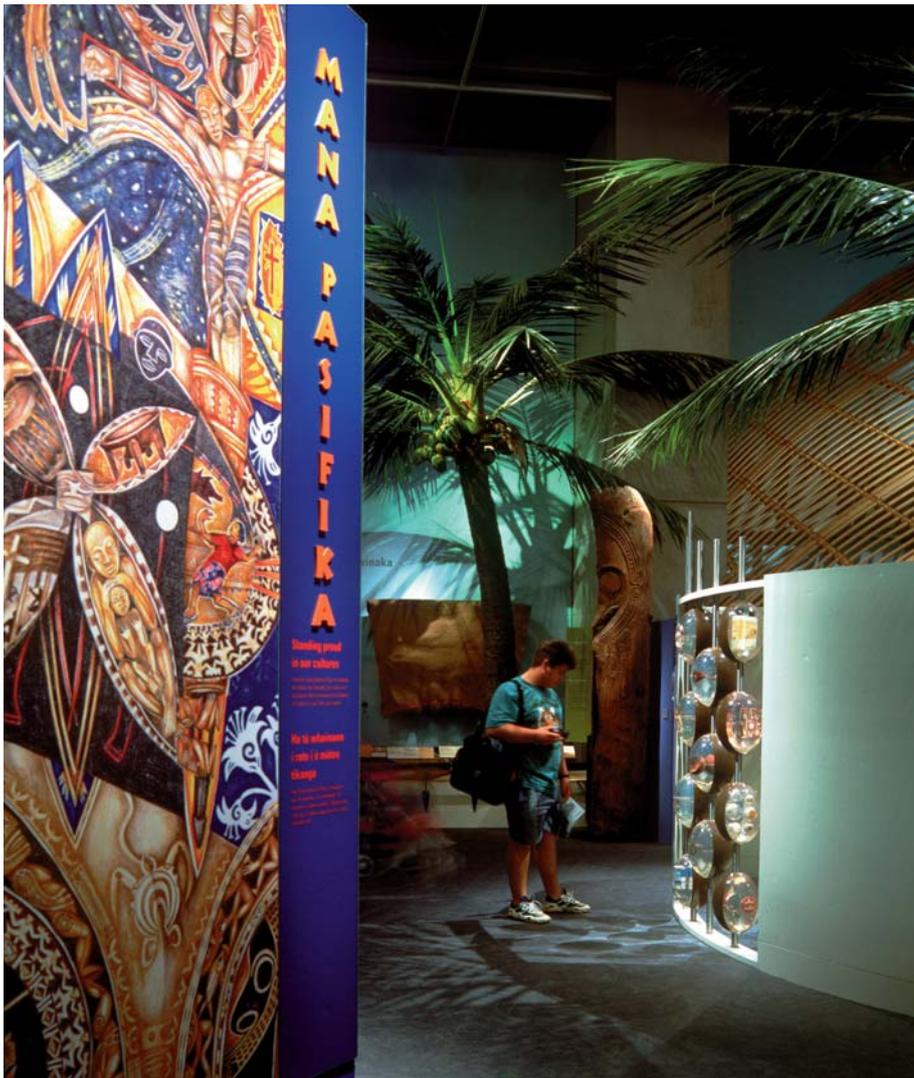


Fig. 7 *Mana Pasifika* exhibition view, 1998 (photo: Michael Hall; Te Papa MA\_F.004900/41).

### Case study: *Tangata o le Moana: the story of Pacific people in New Zealand*

Similar issues of representation and stereotypes were central to the development of the graphic identity for the exhibition *Tangata o le Moana: the story of Pacific people in New Zealand* (2007).

#### Representing Pacific Islanders in New Zealand

*Tangata o le Moana* is a long-term exhibition that was developed to replace *Mana Pasifika: celebrating Pacific*

*cultures in New Zealand* (1997–2007) (Fig. 7).<sup>8</sup> *Mana Pasifika* was the first Pacific exhibition when Te Papa opened in 1998. Structured around typical ethnographic categories such as ceremonies, religion, music and warfare, it featured examples of material culture from various island groups to represent current and past cultural practices among Pacific peoples. *Mana Pasifika* celebrated a sense of cultural survival – the persistence of specific cultural values and practices in New Zealand.

In the lead-up to the 10th anniversary of the opening of Te Papa, there was an opportunity to create a new exhibition drawn from the Pacific Cultures collections. The exhibition *Tangata o le Moana: the story of Pacific people in New Zealand* opened to the public in October 2007. It reflected the Pacific

Cultures team's desire to move on conceptually from celebrating the survival of Pacific Island cultures, to exploring and acknowledging Pacific peoples' historical and contemporary presence in New Zealand society and culture. Pacific peoples had long been in the museum as 'exotic cultures on display', but the curatorial team, who were of Pacific Islands descent, wanted to explore a new perspective: one highlighting the fact that New Zealand's relationship with 'Pacific people' had transformed, that New Zealanders were geographically and culturally part of the Pacific, and that Pacific Islanders were part of the social and cultural fabric of New Zealand society.

### Working together to represent communities

A wide consultation about the *Tangata o le Moana* exhibition concept, themes and storylines took place with three advisory groups in the cities of Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch, New Zealand.<sup>9</sup> These groups were mainly made up of community leaders and elders.<sup>10</sup> The Wellington-based Pacific CAG had been in existence the longest, with some individuals involved in an advisory capacity since the mid-1980s. In addition, consultation in the form of focus groups took place and engaged a cross section of the exhibition's various target audiences – local visitors, international visitors, Pacific Islanders and teachers. Discussions were held as to how the exhibition could be aimed at children. Fifty-four participants in all were included in the focus groups, which were held in late March 2003. By the time it came to developing a graphic identity for the exhibition, the concept and storylines were well established.

Agreeing on an exhibition title was problematic in that Te Papa needed a name that reflected the 'community' but did not favour one community over the other. The politics around naming 'Pacific communities' and identities has produced a number of terms with different degrees of acceptance in the New Zealand cultural milieu. For example,

The term 'Pacific people' has been used in New Zealand synonymously with 'Pacific Nations people', 'Tangata Pasifika', 'Tagata Pasefika', 'Pasefika people' and 'Pacific Islanders', though the latter carries with it pejorative connotations. Most commonly, the terms refer to people of Samoan, Cook Island, Tongan, Fijian, Tokelauan, Niuean, and Tuvaluan descent; these are the seven Pacific national categories disaggregated in the New Zealand census. However, there are also significant populations of migrants from other Pacific nations, including French

Polynesia, Kiribati, Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands. (Teaiwa & Mallon 2005)

The new exhibition was called *Tangata o le Moana: the story of Pacific people in New Zealand*. The term 'tangata', meaning 'people', was identified as a useful title common to several ethnic groups, including Samoans, Tongans, Niueans, Cook Islanders, Tokelauans and Tuvaluans. A slight variation in spelling occurs with the Samoan version of the term, where the 'n' is dropped for a spelling of 'tagata', although the word is still pronounced with the 'n' sound. Members of the Pacific CAG preferred to avoid the Samoan spelling as they felt Samoa was overrepresented in wider society and the 'tangata' spelling was shared by a wider group, including Māori, the indigenous people of New Zealand. 'Moana' was less problematic, as it is an indigenous term for 'sea' or 'ocean' shared by six of the seven ethnic groups the museum was representing. In addition, it is the main geographical feature that connects the island nations.

### Creating an authentic image for all stakeholders

Although the storylines and themes for the overall exhibition were discussed with all three advisory groups, the debate around the selection of a hero image for the exhibition was restricted to the Wellington Pacific CAG. This was primarily due to time constraints, although the group's familiarity with Te Papa processes and proximity to the museum would streamline the consultation process.

The initial approach to developing a graphic identity for the exhibition was based on that taken with other successful Te Papa exhibitions. There would be a single hero image for the *Tangata o le Moana* graphic identity selected from objects featured in the exhibition or the Pacific collections. Previous experience demonstrated that this approach could produce pleasing results. Two recent examples included the small-scale, temporary exhibitions *Jewelled: adornments from across the Pacific* (2002–05) and *Culture Moves! Dance costumes of the Pacific* (2005–06) (Figs 8 and 9).<sup>11</sup> The graphic identities for these temporary exhibitions utilised a hero image of a key object from the exhibition.

For *Tangata o le Moana*, the initial discussions around object selection did not progress very far because they identified a key issue: how does the museum use a single object to represent the many different ethnic groups that make up the 'Pacific community' in New Zealand? Of course, the museum collections offered a range of objects for

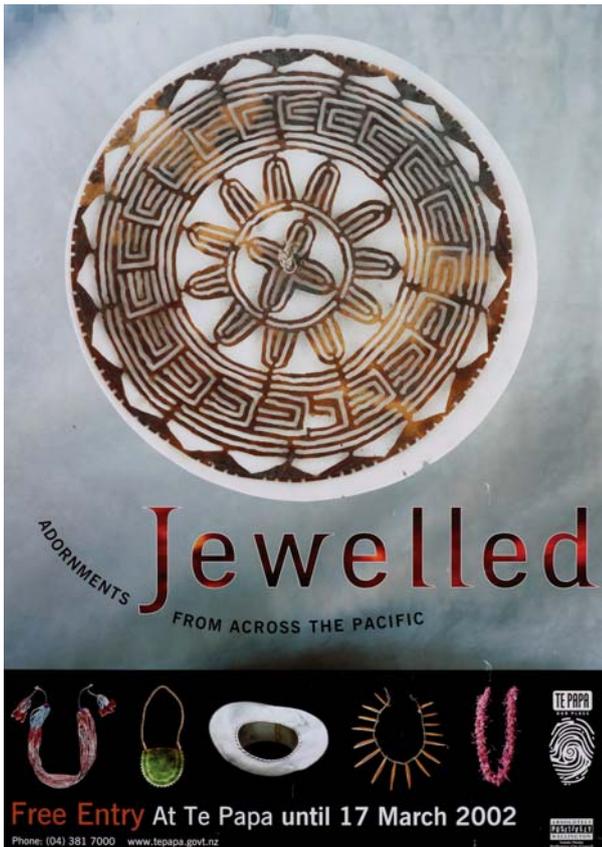


Fig. 8 Poster for *Jewelled: adornments from across the Pacific*, 2002–05 (photo: Te Papa).



Fig. 9 Poster for *Culture Moves! Dance costumes of the Pacific*, 2005–06 (photo: Te Papa).

selection. A rare and beautiful nineteenth-century cloak from the Cook Islands is used as a hero image for the Pacific Cultures section on the Te Papa website and on the cover of the book *Icons from Te Papa: Pacific* (Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa 2006a) (Fig. 10).<sup>12</sup> But this situation was somewhat different.

The Pacific Cultures team had been in this situation before with the development of *Mana Pasifika: celebrating Pacific cultures in New Zealand*. In that case it was equally difficult to select one object to represent all peoples. The solution developed for *Mana Pasifika* was to commission an artist to develop a mural that reflected all the cultures and themes represented in the exhibition. Artist Michel Tuffery, himself of Tahitian, Cook Islands, Samoan and European ethnic background, produced a mural that has done an admirable job of capturing the Pacific communities' cultural diversity and visual cultures (Fig. 11). However, this mural was not used on publicity material, and there was no poster per se for *Mana Pasifika*. Instead, the museum preferred

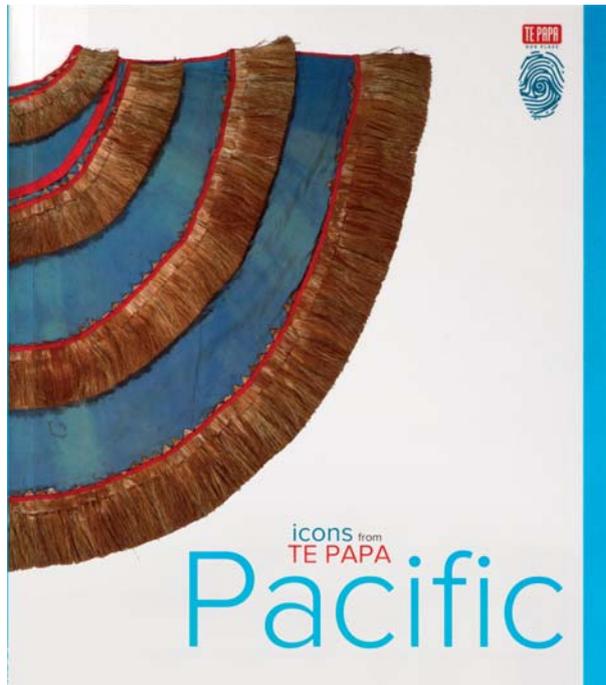


Fig. 10 Cover of *Icons from Te Papa: Pacific*, published by Te Papa Press, Wellington, 2006.



Fig. 11 *Mana Pasifika* mural, 1996, by Michel Tuffery (born 1966) (photo: Norman Heke; Te Papa FE011243).

another work by Tuffery: *Pisupo lua afe* (*Corned beef* 2000), which has been used in publicity material such as brochures and become part of the identity of the exhibition.

In the long-term context of a high-profile exhibition like *Tāngata o le Moana*, and in common with *Mana Pasifika*, a single image representing a single ethnic group was not acceptable to the Pacific CAG. *Jewelled* and *Culture Moves!* were short-term, small-scale exhibitions where consultations were with individual artists. The narratives were more focused on specific pieces and on artists' practices rather than broad sweeps of development history. In these two object-focused exhibitions, there was comparatively less at stake, and less investment on the part of the wider communities in what was being represented. In contrast, *Tāngata o le Moana* was a major restatement of the Pacific Islands communities' presence at Te Papa, and involved stories and objects associated with community groups as well as individuals. In

addition, sensitivities in the Pacific communities had changed to the extent that the use of common but stereotypical images such as the coconut tree, frangipani and hibiscus (all in common usage in the Pacific Island homelands) were unpopular in New Zealand for their homogenising effect. Therefore, none was considered seriously as a promotional image.

The Pacific Cultures team continued searching Te Papa's collections for images that would work in a hero role. Several photographs were identified, including a portrait taken by New Zealand documentary photographer Glenn Jowitt (Fig. 12). This image was initially attractive because it featured a Pacific Islander without the usual distinctive ethnic signifiers such as dance garments, tropical-flower necklaces or tattoos. It also appealed because of the inclusion of Otago – a New Zealand suburb with a high population of Pacific Islands people – at the bottom of a list of international metropolitan cities on the subject's sweatshirt. This key element aligned with the intention of the exhibition team to highlight the ways in which the Pacific Islands connected to New Zealand through history, but also the many ways in which New Zealand reaches out to the Pacific and connects to the wider world. The net effect of the slogan on this sweatshirt was one of locating New Zealand and Pacific Islanders in a global context – localising the global and, in turn, globalising the local.

The exhibition team was also drawn to the retro feel of the image. The subject's afro hairstyle and even the colour or tone of the image itself has the look and atmosphere of the time. It is as if the photograph has been lifted from a family album that has lain long forgotten in a cupboard or suitcase. Given that the 1970s and early 1980s were important in the establishment of Pacific Islands communities in New Zealand, the exhibition team hoped that this image would work to highlight the relatively contemporary elements of the exhibition, an approach that departed from the use of ethnographic photographs from the field, typical of Pacific exhibitions in museums. In consultation with the marketing team at Te Papa, it was decided to establish the identity of the person in the photograph and get his permission to use the image. Unfortunately, the photographer did not have records to facilitate this clearance.

A search was undertaken through the print media to try to locate and identify the person in the photograph. The search request appeared in newspapers and online. In early September 2007, Daniel Maaka was emailed by a former neighbour about the search and looked up the story online. He made himself known to the Auckland newspaper



Fig. 12 *Otara, Auckland 1981*, from the series *Polynesia here and there* (photo: Glenn Jowitt; Te Papa O.003175).

*Manukau Courier*, Te Papa was informed and the story made the national news – the headline in the *Dominion Post* read ‘Found – face of the Pacific, 25 years on and look how he’s grown’. It turned out that the photograph was taken in Mr Maaka’s last year of school, during a Māori and Pacific dance festival. Mr Maaka was ‘flabbergasted’ and wondered ‘why all the fuss?’ (Skerrett & Andrew 2007). It was soon established that Mr Maaka’s ethnicity was Māori. This detail posed problems for the exhibition, which intended to represent the recent arrivals of Pacific Islanders to New Zealand, particularly in the 1960s and 1970s. The original photograph fulfilled this, but the subject of the photograph needed to be a Pacific Islander from one of the ethnic groups featured in the exhibition. The image featuring Mr Maaka had to be replaced, despite its strong visual appeal. When this decision became public, it was controversial and featured extensively in the media over several weeks. Newspaper headlines read: ‘Maori are the



Fig. 13 Publicity poster for *Tangata o le Moana: the story of Pacific people in New Zealand*, 2007 (photo: Te Papa).

original PIs’ and ‘Now you see him, now you don’t’. As students of Pacific history, the curators on the exhibition team knew that the ancestors of Māori (and Mr Maaka) originated in the Pacific, and certainly the exhibition storylines covered this history. In fact, geographically Māori are still living on a ‘Pacific Island’ – an archipelago of islands in the South Pacific – although many New Zealanders are ambivalent about this association and the cultural and historical proximities it implies (Howe 2003; Teaiwa & Mallon 2005). However, some New Zealanders weren’t ambivalent. In a letter to the editor of one of New Zealand’s national newspapers, a correspondent wrote:

Daniel Maaka has an Afro, he has brown skin, a stout frame, lives in a large Polynesian community, was born on an island in the Pacific, and has Polynesian ancestry. In other words, if it walks like a duck, quacks like a duck and looks like a duck, it’s a duck. Te Papa should check with its history department – Maori are believed to be the original PIs [Pacific Islanders] of this country. The museum must reinstate this man as its ‘hero image’ or the egg on its face will remain a stain on ‘its place’. (Sua 2007)

Unfortunately, the contemporary cultural politics between Pacific Islanders and Māori meant that having a Māori as a hero image was not as appropriate as having someone who was a ‘Pacific Islander’. The exhibition storylines honoured Māori as the people of the land and as people with ancient

ancestry and connection to Polynesia. In addition, the content of the poster needed to 'represent' Pacific Islanders as recent immigrants with youthful and growing communities. The decision was made to reshoot the image but preserve the messages that the sweatshirt conveyed (Fig. 13).<sup>13</sup>

The process undertaken by the exhibition team to verify the identity of the subject of the original photograph and establish permissions to use the image was a sound one. The team sought information, verified it and consulted on the findings. They adjusted their approach on the basis of this information. Significantly, the controversy around the image highlighted some of the issues at the heart of the *Tangata o le Moana* exhibition and the general representation of Pacific peoples in New Zealand's national museum. What are New Zealand's historical and contemporary connections to the Pacific? Is New Zealand a Pacific Island? Do New Zealanders see themselves as Pacific Islanders?

Representing group identities to popular audiences not only requires an understanding of local expressions of these identities, but also of the politics influencing how they are created and put to use by people. It is all well and good to interrogate the issues from an academic or curatorial point of view, and certainly this perspective underpins the museum's work, but the conversations have to be articulated with popular understandings.

Even though the development of the *Tangata o le Moana* graphic identity and media questions surrounding the process created nationwide publicity, the final image used on the poster allayed the cultural sensitivities of the Pacific CAG and the curators on the exhibition team. The issues around its construction reflect the cultural politics of the time. Whether the poster and its hero image communicate the rationale or key themes of the exhibition effectively is a question that needs testing. One indication of interest is that the opening weekend of events for the *Tangata o le Moana* exhibition attracted nearly 21 000 visitors.<sup>14</sup>

## Conclusions

Effective partnerships between museums and communities provide access to community resources, deepen both internal and external world views, and ultimately help museums remain relevant to contemporary society (Spitz & Thom 2003: 12). Once engaged, community advisors expect to be involved in final decision-making regardless of museum constraints such as budgets and production deadlines, and they also expect to work with the museum as a cohesive entity.

However, community consultation is never a straightforward process. Managing the complex relationships and levels of consultation to which Te Papa's exhibition teams commit is extremely difficult, time-consuming and expensive. While the museum is viewed as a cohesive entity, it is a composite structure, split by priorities, access to staff and resources. CAGs can struggle to understand the overall needs of Te Papa, as museum staff themselves can struggle with internal needs, competing priorities and other constraints.

The politics within communities, issues of authenticity, who is representing who and what is being represented play out against curatorial intentions and institutional procedures. On occasions, museum staff 'struggle to accept that communities know best' about their cultures (Bayley 2008). But it is vital for museums to trust the expertise of community advisors and to keep them 'in the loop' at all times, even when time and money budgets are stretched.

In the first case study, it was seen that the tensions between the desire for active and meaningful partnerships and the realities of running a large and complex institution such as Te Papa were not entirely resolved, but constructive solutions were found. It is critical for museums to warn of such challenges when first engaging with CAGs. Museums also need to reduce tensions where possible and work more effectively by minimising bureaucratic impact and streamlining processes. Nevertheless, consultation takes time, and disagreements can be difficult to predict and plan for. Exhibition teams have learnt from such experiences and have actively developed solutions where possible, and will continue to do so.

In the second case study, the politics of representation within the communities consulted by Te Papa, and beyond them, were seen to influence museum processes greatly. Politics and oversensitivity can sometimes diminish the impact of a strong concept. However, it is important to resolve and work with these issues. The clearing ground for decisions such as these lies between two extremes, in a pragmatism that satisfies both parties and that reflects current sensitivities but is not overcome by them.

The tensions in creating representations such as exhibitions and the promotional materials that attract visitors to them are not adequately captured in the categories of 'community' and 'museum'. Communities are complex entities, fractured by their hierarchies, politics, gender and age concerns. Likewise, museums are not homogeneous entities either, despite how they may brand themselves. They are divided by groups of responsibility, such as

curators, designers, educators and marketers. Different professional interests and experience are brought to bear on consultation processes. The engagement with 'community' is uneven across the museum staff, with some groups closer to the consultation than others. Then there is the audience: the public and, ultimately, the consumer of the experience created by the museum.

Exhibitions and promotional material must communicate in a vocabulary that is understood by audiences. On occasion, the intelligent and careful conversations that take place around the table between CAGs and museum staff may not be transferable or understood by wide, non-specialist, popular audiences. The subtleties of the decisions made may reflect the genuine concerns of communities, but 'hero images', like real-life 'heroes', are often symbols or stereotypes of widely shared beliefs and values, and need to be considered as viable options for publicity as representation is negotiated.

## Acknowledgements

Stephanie Gibson is grateful to Emily Bayley (formerly of Te Papa) for her insightful comments on the graphic design process, and to Martin Lewis (Te Papa) for his in-depth literature search in preparation of this paper. Perceptive and rigorous comments from Tim Walker (Auckland) and Seán Brosnahan (Dunedin) were of great assistance and support to both authors. Sean Mallon thanks members of the Pacific Community Advisory Group and the Pacific Cultures team, particularly the co-curator of the *Tangata o le Moana* exhibition, Kolokesa Mahina-Tuai, and graphic designer Walter Moala. Many thanks go to Ricardo Palma for his detailed and careful editing, and to Dr Claudia Orange (Te Papa) for her support and review of drafts. Both authors acknowledge colleagues Susan Superville, Roma Potiki and Simon Garrett for their comments.

## Notes

- 1 The genesis of this paper was a short presentation by Stephanie Gibson at the conference *Making History in Public*, Wellington, 30 June 2007, organised by the Public Historians Association of New Zealand Aotearoa, the Ministry for Culture and Heritage, and Massey University. For an overview of Te Papa's Community Gallery, refer to Fitzgerald (2009).
- 2 One of the most important roles is that of the community relations manager, as this staff member stays in touch with

all of Te Papa's advisory groups before, during and after an exhibition exists. This role was created in 2003 in response to earlier disjunctions in the interface between Te Papa's complex team structures and external advisory groups.

- 3 Short-term exhibitions range from three months to three years.
- 4 The Scottish CAG's membership consisted of one university academic, three clan representatives, one cultural worker, and two museum professionals from Scots-focused institutions.
- 5 Interestingly, Air New Zealand made use of the stereotype in August 2009 when it launched a nationwide billboard campaign for the Waipu Highland Games featuring an almost identical image of a gumbooted piper.
- 6 It is also a slightly misleading image, in that Highlanders made up only about 10% of New Zealand's Scottish immigrants (Wilson 2009).
- 7 Authenticity in an image is critical. Once viewers identify mistakes, credibility is at stake. A particularly instructive example of this was experienced by the Labour Government in 2008 when it used a photograph of an American family in an advertising brochure to represent New Zealanders because it was cheaper and more convenient (Anonymous 2008).
- 8 Long-term exhibitions range from five to ten years.
- 9 The first consultation meetings with focus groups began in 2003. The CAG meetings continued until 2007.
- 10 On some occasions, younger community members were also included in the consultation process.
- 11 Temporary exhibitions usually range from six months to one year in duration.
- 12 An image of this cloak was also used on the cover of the catalogue for the *Traditional Arts of Pacific Islands Women* exhibition (1993–94), curated by Janet Davidson.
- 13 Uili Tanielu, a Samoan student at the Victoria University of Wellington, was chosen as the replacement.
- 14 The three-day celebration launching *Tangata o le Moana* attracted the highest visitation over a Labour weekend period since 2001 (Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa 2007a).

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