



chrysalis seed trust



# Toi Te Mana

## An interview with Jonathan Mane-Wheoki

(Nga Puhi, Art Historian, Architectural Historian, The Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa)

*Nga maunga ko Puketi  
Te awa ko Waihou  
Ko Ngatokimatawhaorua te waka  
Ko Nga Puhi te iwi*

Secure within a storehouse of gathered and recorded knowledge, encompassing a number of disciplines, Jonathan Mane-Wheoki is well-positioned to influence change within the arts.

He is a scholarly man with considerable expertise at a number of intersections: where the arts meet education, architecture and ecclesiology.

His appointment to Te Papa in February 2004 as Director of Art and Collection Services was a landmark decision. It has proven one of a number of highlights in an already

impressive career as a scholar and arts educator.

### Early pathways

Jonathan Ngarimu Mane-Wheoki was born into Nga Puhi at (what he terms) 'the edge of a dying world'.

His father was Heteraka Mane Wheoki. His mother, Myrtle, was Pakeha. He talks about some of the memories that are an important point of connection with his whakapapa.

One early childhood memory is of his family moving to Titirangi, Auckland from Pongakawa near Te Puke, where his father had worked on a farm. Another memory is of family holiday. 'We traveled by Road Services bus up to Rahiri in the Waihou Valley, north of Okaihau, to visit the grandparents. We got off the bus at what I remember as a remote spot, father waded with us across a river and

*continued on p.4*

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### ***Toi Te Mana (continued from p.1)***

disappeared up a bush track. We followed along, coming to a clearing with a corrugated iron hut and dirt floor. This was where my grandparents lived.

'My Grandmother, Rahera (nee Lazarus from Te Aupouri) spoke no English and my Grandfather, Pouri Mane Wheoki, managed some English. I saw his tombstone last December inscribed in Maori, acknowledging he was one of the pioneers of the Ratana Church in Te Tai Tokerau. I hadn't known that. I knew my father was Ratana and that they all used to go down to Ratana Pa for the annual hui. In later life my father was a bus driver.'

Jonathan's English grandparents were both Londoners and he describes them as an odd couple.

'My grandfather, Frank Ferris, was clearly upper class; he spoke with an accent and had a pretty good schooling and education in the classics. He seemed to have a command of Greek, Hebrew and Latin, whereas my grandmother, Maude (nee Pickering) was a Cockney born in Shoreditch. Her father was a shopkeeper who dealt in art supplies.'

Jonathan recounts they were very involved in church life. His grandmother had been a church organist in the East End of London before they came out to Aotearoa.

While Jonathan had a very interesting upbringing influenced by these different faiths, he also remembers tremendous tension around two different world-views with domestic situations where parents were unable to cross the cultural divide. He and his sister, Moea, were caught up in that confusion.

At school things were not comfortable either. 'There was some kind of difference that was perceived in me by other children and it dogged me right throughout my school years – a sense of difference and not quite belonging. I gradually began to realize what that was - my father was Maori, and that seemed to be a problem for people who were not. Occasionally this erupted into taunting and this caused me to withdraw into myself; I became an introverted and highly self-conscious teenager.'

### **Creative influences**

Layering of creative influence came from many sources in the early years. Colin McCahon lived nearby in Titirangi. Jonathan, who was about ten years old, became friends at school with McCahon's children. He says:

'I practically lived in that house (McCahon's) and he became a very important mentor and role model for me'.

Amongst many experiences from that time, one stands out. 'I remember walking home from the McCahons' house and seeing something like a vision. I was half way home, it was quite a long way and Titirangi is a bush suburb. The clouds boiled over and looked ominous. I had heard the story of Balaam and the ass at Sunday School and I now fancied I saw that angel on the deserted road and was terrified. I must have recounted this to McCahon for he reminded me of this story (in later years) as he was inclined to believe the innocence of children.' In his 1966 essay<sup>1</sup> McCahon talks about angels.

'I saw an angel in this land (Otago). Angels can herald beginnings.' In those visits, Jonathan witnessed some of McCahon's iconic imagery developing that later formed a foundation for New Zealand's contemporary visual art history.

At twelve years of age Jonathan excelled at written expression as well as at music and field sports. While at primary school he became interested in the music of Bach, Beethoven, Brahms, Mozart, Offenbach and Vaughan Williams as well as the music genre of the day: rock 'n' roll and Auckland's Johnny Devlin. His art teacher, Garth Tapper, at Kelston High School in Auckland encouraged his attendance at exhibitions and concerts.

At 15, however, he left school to work as a grocery assistant.

He started thinking about an arts career and undertook preparatory arts study to help him towards his goal of becoming an artist. He undertook a preliminary Diploma in Fine Arts (1963), studying painting with Colin McCahon at Auckland City Art Gallery, and sculpture with Alison Duff. He also studied speech and drama with Gil Cornwall and singing with Beatrice Webster. He attended performances by the New

*The Angel of the Annunciation*,  
Colin McCahon, 1947, oil paint on canvas,  
Courtesy of the Colin McCahon Research and Publication Trust/  
Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa (1.006308)



Zealand Players, the New Zealand Ballet, the National Orchestra (conducted by John Hopkins) and local, amateur theatre productions (in some of which he acted).

At 21 he was able to enter university by what he terms 'the back door'. Following meetings with the Maori Education Foundation representative in Christchurch, and with Professor John Simpson at the University of Canterbury School of Fine Arts, he was quickly enrolled. 'A course was set and I have to say that if I hadn't received assistance from the Maori Education Foundation and the encouragement of staff in the University, this could not have happened.'

Russell Clark, Bill Sutton, Doris Lusk, Tom Taylor and Rudolf Gopas were amongst his teachers at

Canterbury. He did as well in academic study in his second and third years as he did in his practical work.

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Jonathan graduated from Canterbury University with a Diploma of Fine Arts with Honours in Painting and with a Bachelor of Arts in English Language and Literature. His inherited passion for music was translated into a Diploma of Fine Arts, Honours thesis<sup>2</sup>, which examined musical analogies with abstract painting. He was encouraged to further his studies by applying for admission to an undergraduate degree programme at the Courtauld Institute of Art in London - but was turned down. He was advised that his qualifications would give him a better chance of

'I have a continuing interest in the transmission of ideas around church architecture, theology, liturgy, stained glass windows, music, church vestments, embroidery, in fact, everything to do with the Victorian church and its expansion, both through the British Empire and globally. That's been a consuming interest for a long time now.'

In 1975 he returned to Aotearoa to an appointment as an art history lecturer at the University at Canterbury. His newly-acquired knowledge of Western arts established him as a valuable lecturer in this field. This would be the knowledge-base he would impart to generations of art history students.

His teaching has been wide-ranging across modern and contemporary Western art, 17th and 18th century European art traditions, Greek art, modern and



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Jonathan Mane Wheoki, photographed by Lloyd Park at the opening of *Rukutia! Rukutia!*, an exhibition of southern Maori art for the Christchurch Arts Festival Season, 1999 in association with Te Runanga o Ngai Tahu. Curator: Moana Tipa.

getting into the Master's programme. That was to be the next major step.

Looking at the range of options, a decision was made to study nineteenth century English and French painting. This included a series of six or so lectures on Victorian architecture. This study struck a chord with him when he realised the origins of 19th century New Zealand architecture. Thus he went on to complete a Master of Arts in Art History at the Courtauld Institute, writing his dissertation on the aesthetics of High Victorian Gothic church architecture.

He became an expert in the 'science' of ecclesiology, a hugely influential movement that had begun in the specifics of church architectural studies, in particular through the Cambridge Camden Society, which was established at the University of Cambridge, in 1839<sup>3</sup>.

contemporary New Zealand art and New Zealand architecture. He has involved himself in latter years with re-examining, writing and lecturing on contemporary Maori art.

Returning to teach in New Zealand, his internationalist, Eurocentric arts view acquired at the Courtauld Institute of Art in London, changed. The death of his father, Heteraka, created a profound shift in his world view and positioning about things Maori – about Maori arts and the pressing need to have an articulation through a Maori voice.

Jonathan began to see himself as anchored in the Pacific and began actively to include contemporary Maori art into his research and, subsequently, his teaching at Canterbury University.





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A third major shift would occur through his involvement with the 1993 Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art at the Queensland Art Gallery in Brisbane<sup>4</sup>. 'I had thought that the centre of the universe was Waterloo Bridge in London. I'd do a 360 degree revolve and everything was there; St. Paul's Cathedral, the Houses of Parliament, the South Bank Centre. Everything that gave my life meaning, and purpose and enlarged it, was encompassed. The Asia-Pacific Conference turned all of that on its head. I realised this when I saw art from Indonesia, thinking, "what do I know about art from Indonesia?" I didn't know anything, I'd never thought about art in what turns out to be the world's fourth most populous country.'

It was a major shift for Jonathan, both professionally and privately, and of that he says:

'I flipped right over to be absolutely anchored in this place, the Pacific.'

### **The modern Maori Art Movement**

Jonathan Mane-Wheoki has written extensively on this subject, on the pioneering artists of the contemporary Maori art movement, incorporating the findings of this research into his teaching of New Zealand Art History.

Sir Apirana Ngata was responsible for legislation in 1926 to preserve the arts skills of whakairo, tukutuku and kowhaiwhai, enabling the Arts and Crafts Institution to be built in Rotorua under Harold Hamilton. In 1944 Dr Clarence Edward Beeby, then Director of Education, set up visual arts education<sup>5</sup> and widened the scope by introducing plans for teaching Maori arts and crafts through ordinary school curricula. This came to fruition by 1957 with a course established at Auckland Teachers' College with a section on Maori Art. The following year *Te Ao Hou*, a journal circulated through the Ministry of Maori Affairs, reported 'At the request of the Director of Education, pupils of Northland College are sending samples of their Maori arts and crafts work for exhibition at the New Zealand Embassy, Washington.'<sup>6</sup>

'With the new Labour government in 1958, there was a further move forward with in-service hui for primary school art advisors at Ruatoria (where Cliff Whiting was one of the first trained) which progressed Maori art education. The exploratory art scheme was established and Gordon Tovey 'first appointed to look at the curriculum, 1946,<sup>7</sup> under Beeby, set forth concepts of art knowledge for teaching (practice), on Maori arts and crafts.'<sup>8</sup>

Artists in that first generation were Selwyn Wilson (attained his Diploma in Fine Arts at Elam in 1952), Fred Graham, Ralph Hotere, (Te Aupouri), Arnold Wilson (Tuhoe, who was probably the first Maori to complete a Diploma of Fine Arts (Honours) from Elam School of Fine Arts, Auckland)<sup>9</sup> Katerina Mataira, Muru Walters, Paratene Matchitt, (Whanau a Apanui), Cliff Whiting and from Ngai Tahu, Catherine Elizabeth Brown. They began to forge a distinctive, culturally-inflected art from their exposure to the forms and styles of European modern art—which was their first engagement with the art form. They were termed part of the Tovey generation, as they were Arts Advisers, and further trained through the Crafts Institute at Rotorua. Their knowledge and art practice

became one of a number of important influences in terms of Maori contemporary visual art today. Ralph Hotere held solo exhibitions at the Dunedin Public Art Gallery in 1952 and 1966. Arnold Wilson exhibited in 1962 at Auckland Art Gallery's Contemporary New Zealand Painting exhibition, then in 1968 featured with sculpture in *Recent New Zealand Sculpture*. Buck Nin exhibited at the CSA Gallery in 1965 (after his graduation from Canterbury with his Diploma).

In 1966 the Maori modernist movement was underway with *New Zealand Maori Culture and the Contemporary Scene* at the Canterbury Museum. This exhibition featured the work of Buck Nin, Selwyn Muru, Frederick Graham, Norman Lemon (Te Whata), Katarina Mataira, Arnold Wilson, Cath Brown and Jonathan Mane-Wheoki. The exhibition went on to the National Art Gallery, Wellington the following year and then '...left New Zealand 1967 to tour Australia, Western Samoa, Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong and Japan. Buck was to regularly exhibit with the New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts, Wellington, from 1966-1976.'<sup>10</sup> Cliff Whiting went on to create *Te Wehenga o Rangi Raua ko Papa*, 1969-76, a mixed media mural for the National Library of New Zealand.

The *Toi Te Papa* brochure notes:

'In 1943, R O Ross, President of the Auckland Society of Arts wondered: "Is a renaissance, a new flowering of the Polynesian genius for sculpture and painting so unlikely that we need do nothing about it, or is our outlook so insular, so parochial that we can't find interest or duty outside the narrower outlook of the European arts?"'<sup>11</sup>

During the next thirty years, answers to this challenge unfolded and coincided with a massive movement of the Maori population from traditional country homelands, to urban living and stimulating modern art environments.

*Whiti te ra*, Para Matchitt, 1962, gouache on board, 675 x 428 mm, Courtesy of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa.





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Above: Toi Te Papa: Art of the Nation  
exhibition space. Courtesy of the Museum of  
New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa.

Right: Jonathan Mane Wheoki  
at the opening of *Rukutia! Rukutia!*  
Photo: Lloyd Park.



## ***Toi Te Papa: Art of the Nation***

Jonathan's relatively new role as Director of Art and Collection Services at Te Papa (February, 2004) positions him at the forefront of a new set of challenges in the on-going dialogue about New Zealand's art history in the making. His experience well-fits him for this role by a deserved academic standing<sup>12</sup> and through his cultural heritage.

His first undertaking as Director of Art and Collection Services was to establish *Toi Te Papa: Art of the Nation* – an overarching strategy in relationship to the arts and art practice in New Zealand at Te Papa Tongarewa.

### **A thousand years**

The first component of *Toi Te Papa: Art of the Nation* was focused on the contemporary end of the New



Zealand art story beginning in 1940 and coming up to the present day. The second part opens in October 2006 and will feature European heritage art, taonga Maori, art from the period of European-Maori colonial encounter, European modern art, and New Zealand art up to the present.

'It's an exhibition of the visual culture of the islands of Aotearoa New Zealand, unfolded across a thousand year time-frame of human settlement in these islands, rather than the more recent time-frame of the Pakeha colonisers.'

### **Audience**

A key focus for the exhibition has been to place a

collection of art in front of people that belongs to all audiences of New Zealanders. Within that, audiences have seen and can expect to see a mix of icons, old familiars and new acquisitions that document and track the nation's cultural development and people's shifting taste.

### **The doorway of two very different art traditions**

The curatorial style of *Toi Te Papa* presents works that embody art movements or evoke statements in a developing New Zealand art history. It is an accessible reading style that is primarily aimed at the general public. The second stage of *Toi Te Papa: Art of the Nation* more critically, perhaps, will present the art of two paradigms; the Western art tradition, and what we know as traditional indigenous art. The project makes no statement beyond arriving at the doorway of these very different art traditions.

### **The emergence of the Pacific**

'New Zealand has an extremely lively arts culture, a tremendously dynamic Maori and Pacific arts culture, and an important Pakeha arts culture.

'Maori engagement with western art forms was beginning to be acknowledged between the 1960s and the 1970s. A notable contemporary Maori work by a woman artist, acquired in 1985 by the National Art Gallery in Wellington, was *Hei Purapura i ruia mai Rangiatea* by Robyn Kahukiwa. This was preceded by patronage from BNZ competitions and local galleries Dowse, Sarjeant, showing works by Maori and women artists, e.g. in 1981 Jacqueline Fraser exhibited in *Three Women Sculptors* (with Christine Hellyar and Pauline Rhodes) at the National Gallery. The National Art Gallery acquired a work by Selwyn Muru 1965 after his 1964 Auckland Society of Arts Exhibition which 'won him wide acclaim'.<sup>13</sup> A painting by Buster Black (Pihama) was also purchased around that period.

'By 1990 – our sesquicentennial year - Maori would no longer be excluded from representative exhibitions of New Zealand art. *Mana Tiriti - the Art of Protest and Partnership* that year brought together diverse artists, both Maori and Pakeha, to reflect upon *Te Tiriti*, at City Gallery Wellington Te Whare Toi. Later,

- 1 *Beginnings*, p 364, *Landfall* Vol. 20, No. 4, December 1966.
- 2 *The musical phase of modern painting*, University of Canterbury, Honours thesis, 1969.
- 3 *Ecclesiology Today*, *Journal of the Ecclesiological Society*, Issue 25, April 2001, published by The Ecclesiological Society, University of Cambridge.
- 4 September to December 1993, Australia, the first exhibition to focus on the contemporary art of Asia and the Pacific, with 200 works by 76 artists from South East Asia, East Asia and the South Pacific.
- 5 Brodie, Ann, *Like Writing off the Paper*, journal article for Ministry of Education, September, 2005.
- 6 *Te Ao Hou* No. 24, October, 1958
- 7 p 113, *Mau Mahara*, *Crafts Council of New Zealand* publication, 1991.
- 8 *The Arts in the New Zealand*, Curriculum Paper for Ministry of Education, April, 1999.
- 9 p 2, *Notes Towards a History of Contemporary Maori Art in Three Contemporary Maori Artists*, by Jonathan Mane-Wheoki, published by Christchurch City Council for McDougall Art Annex, June, 1990.
- 10 pp15-17, from an essay in *Forever Buck Nin* by Jonathan Mane-Wheoki, Senior Lecturer, Fine Arts, Canterbury, (editor of the catalogue, Darcy Nicholas, currently General Manager, Cultural Services, Porirua City).
- 11 *Toi Te Papa Art of the Nation*, brochure, 2004, Museum of New Zealand, Te Papa Tongarewa.
- 12 Jonathan held the appointment as Dean of Music and Fine Arts at Canterbury University, before taking up his position at Te Papa Tongarewa and was also Kaitiaki of Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetu.
- 13 *Te Ao Hou*, comment by Rosemary Vincent, issue, March, 1964, Ministry of Maori Affairs.
- 14 p 67 *Cultural Safety, Contemporary Maori Art in Germany* by Jonathan Mane-Wheoki, in *Art New Zealand*, No. 79, Winter 1996.
- 15 *A Recentred World: Post European, Pro-Indigenous Art From Aotearoa / New Zealand and Te Moananui-a-Kiwa / The South Pacific*, delivered at Second Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art, Brisbane, Australia, 1996.
- 16 pp123-133, *Headlands – Thinking Through New Zealand Art*, a catalogue (accompanying an exhibition of New Zealand Art) edited by Mary Barr, published by The Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, Australia, 1992.



Top: *New Zealand landscape* 1947, Gordon Walters, 1947, oil on cardboard, 325 x 425 mm, Courtesy of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa.

Above: *The red shed, Jackson's orchard, Mahana*, Sir Mountford Tosswill Woollaston, 1943-48, oil on cardboard, 590 x 597 mm, Courtesy of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa.

a representative exhibition of New Zealand art, which would travel overseas as *Cultural Safety*, included diverse Maori artists. They were not there because they were Maori, but because they were unavoidable; for the quality and interest of their art... however, we had also reached a point where, politically, "survey exhibitions of contemporary New Zealand art could hardly be considered authentic or complete without Maori representation".<sup>14</sup> Jacqueline Fraser, Fiona Pardington and Peter Robinson (Ngai Tahu), with Michael Parekowhai, (Nga Ariki/Te Aitanga) were four of the seven artists.

'I presented a Paper<sup>15</sup> at the *Second Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art* where I was able to predict that it was going to become impossible to exclude Pacific artists. Not long after: John Pule, Michel Tuffery and Ani O'Neill; that first generation began to come through.

'In the 1990's artists like Yuk King Tan and Denise Kum were making a strong impression and reflecting a living experience of being Asian in this land, as were Pacific and Maori. A critical question was raised in my mind – where does this leave Pakeha? I recalled Robin White, when she was delivering a floor-talk, based on remembering when she was a student at Elam School of Fine Arts in the mid-sixties, saying that her tutor Colin McCahon predicted that the Pacific would become the centre of the art world.

'The Pakeha majority (in 1993 around 80% of the then population of 3.6 million) have had to adjust to dramatically altered circumstances, including the re-

centering of art in their own country and in the Pacific region. Some Pakeha artists have already embraced this altered world view.'

## Maori art: 'at the centre on the margins'

Jonathan also cites an important essay by Rangihira Panoho *Maori: At the Centre, on the Margins*.<sup>16</sup> The Maori art historian asks, at the close of his essay: 'Given Aotearoa's geographical isolation from Europe and the presence of such a rich local tribal culture, the question to be asked is: shouldn't the idea of centre/margins be reversed?'

'Reversing the idea', Jonathan says 'would mean seeing Europe as geographically remote from Aotearoa/New Zealand, as New Zealand's antipodes, and positioning the Maori cultural presence as the core element in the country's national and cultural identity.'

One of the first 'formal' re-positionings of Maori art and culture was marked by the advent of Britain's entry into the European Economic Community and the Treaty of Waitangi Act of 1975 as the turning point for the development of New Zealand identity and culture.

'However the impact of *Te Maori: Maori Art from New Zealand Collections* at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York in 1984 established Maori art as one of the world's great art traditions and assured it of a place in international art discourse.'

## Future vision

Of a future and vision for the arts of this nation, he is measured. 'Before critical considerations are made for the future vision for the arts of these islands, I think it's essential that Maori and Pakeha look at our world views and values - they are seriously out of synchronisation. It's not anyone's fault but when I look at this land I cannot see the faces of my English ancestors in any form within it, but when I walk in Te Tai Tokerau, my ancestors are absolutely all there before me.'

**Moana Tipa** (initial interview)

**Juliana Venning** (additional research and writing)