



Jonathan Mane-Wheoki



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*Te Hono Ki Hawaiki, 1997, Cliff Whiting, carved customwood, mixed media, acrylic paint, 8530 x 9960 x 8000 mm, collection of Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa.*

## Interview: Jonathan Mane-Wheoki

Jonathan Mane-Wheoki, of Nga Puhi and English descent, was educated in Auckland and the University of Canterbury and the Courtauld Institute of Art in London. He graduated in Fine Arts, English Language and Literature and Art History. He is also an Associate of the Trinity College of Music, London. In February he started as the Director Art and Visual Culture at the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa. He is responsible for the art and visual culture collections: painting, sculpture, works on paper, photography.

From 1993 to 2004 he was Kaitiaki Maori (Honorary Curator of Maori Art) at the Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna O Waiwhetu. In this role Mr Mane-Wheoki was active in initiating and curating exhibitions. He also presented lectures, seminars and floor-talks on art, museum, heritage and cultural topics nationally and internationally.

He has served on many national and international committees. Mr Mane-Wheoki was most recently Dean of Music and Fine Arts at the University of Canterbury and a member of the University's Senior Management Team. As an academic art historian, he specialises in nineteenth and early twentieth century European art and architecture, British colonial and imperial architecture, modern and contemporary New Zealand painting, and more recently the contemporary Maori Art movement.

Provided is a summary rather than a word for word account of a telephone interview between Jonathan Mane-Wheoki and interviewer Wendy Grace Allen.

**What are the unique challenges for you in your new role at Te Papa, and how do you feel about your responsibility to the New Zealand public in your role as an advocate for describing/informing past, present and future perceptions of New Zealand?**



Most people come to Te Papa for a museum experience, and are well satisfied with that, not an art experience but if I am to succeed in raising the profile of art at Te Papa so that Te Papa is seen as an art destination as well as a museum destination by visitors, then art must be respected as art and presented as art so it can be experienced as art.

A negative aspect about the current exhibitions at Te Papa, is that people often ask what happened to the National Art Collection that was displayed at the National Art Gallery before the inception of Te Papa.

**What is the impression you would like to give to overseas visitors to Te Papa about New Zealand's art and culture?**

Te Papa is a tourist destination for Wellington. Over one and a quarter million people visited Te Papa during the last financial year and 40% of those are overseas visitors. I want to give the impression of a diverse, rich, deep and generous art culture. Across Europe there is a perceived continuity of culture and art and culture having a much longer narrative than New Zealand. I would like to portray New Zealand as a thriving contemporary culture, a culture of excellence and innovation.

**What perceptions about the way New Zealanders view themselves do you want to foster and what perceptions do you want to discourage?**

New Zealanders seem to continue to need approval of older and more populous nations - to find out what others think of them, to see if what they're doing is ok. It's a kind of cultural insecurity, that is one of the unique challenges to my job, to challenge that inferiority, and deal with the cultural and colonial cringe prevalent in the way New Zealanders perceive themselves.

**What is your intention for the art collection?**

I want to highlight the collections strengths in an exhibition titled *Toi Te Papa Art of the Nation*. Phase one spans the period '1940 - Today'. Phase 2 opens in 2006. The exhibition highlights modern and contemporary art from Te Papa's collections, old favourites, taonga and new acquisitions. Many people will be surprised by the recent acquisitions. The next phase is *Cave to Temple*.

**What are the strengths of the current collection?**

Hirini Mead described the *Meeting House Te Hau-ki-Turanga* as our greatest national treasure. It is a pivotal item in the collection. It is the oldest complete Maori meeting house in existence. It bridges the ancient world and the time of European settlement (1840-43).

**How do you perceive your contribution to the movement of contemporary Maori art?**

I have written and curated a lot. I've provided a critical but positive point of view grounded in the knowledge of contemporary Maori art. I hope I

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**Interview: Jonathan Mane-Wheoki**  
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have been a support and encouragement to Maori.

I knew (artist) Shane Cotton (when he studied) in Canterbury, and I encouraged Shane to explore his identity as Maori (something he was unfamiliar with). Artist Peter Robinson is more ambivalent about being identified as a Maori artist. What I say, is that my ancestors can't be taken away from me.

**In your opinion, what are the major points of difference between the Canterbury and Wellington art scenes?**

In Canterbury there is a strong commitment to showcasing work of Canterbury artists. The Canterbury art scene is very supportive of local artists. To compare, there are more opportunities for exhibiting in Wellington - there are a greater number of local art galleries and a lively market for art. The Wellington art scene

has to live up to the image of being the cultural capital of New Zealand. It is very vibrant.

**What do you miss most about living in Canterbury?**

I miss Canterbury immensely. I miss the Canterbury landscape, the space, the quality of light, the smell of Canterbury. I miss my friends and colleagues, and in particular my church community of St Michael and All Angels. I enjoy the aesthetic formal style of worship that St Michael's has to offer. My time studying church architectural history overseas really affected my appreciation of architecture. St Michael's is unique in New Zealand and suited me when I came back to Christchurch. I was also Church Warden at St Michael's for eight years. I am currently worshipping at The Anglican City Mission chapel at Newtown.

**Wendy Grace Allen**

*The Scarlet Cord* (from *The Sudden Imperative* series), Allie Eagle, 2004, watercolour on gesso panel with pigment impregnated encaustic wax, 1200 x 1900 cm.

This is an image of Rahab and speaks of kindness, courage and contrition. Allie Eagle photographed in foreground (portrait by Mark Adams).

