



chrysalis seed trust



## Crossing the threshold

**An interview with Baye Pewhairangi Riddell** (Whanau a Ruataupare, Ngati Porou, Ceramicist)

I went back to Tokomaru Bay in 1979 to find tribal roots. We'd moved away from the East Coast in 1956 with the urban drift, to Hawkes Bay to a farm where my father worked. I was brought up in Taradale and didn't retain relationship with Tokomaru Bay except for occasional tangi. People didn't travel as much in those days as they do now.

I'd gone back to Tokomaru in 1974 for a family reunion, decided that's where I wanted to be and started the journey back in 1975. It was a journey that took four years. I set up a pottery in an historical homestead called Ashcott near Waipukurau. In 1977 I moved to another historic homestead called Waipare at Anaura Bay and set up another pottery.

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***Crossing the threshold* (continued from p.1)**

Finally in 1979 I went back to Tokomaru Bay.

My pottery making started a few years earlier in Christchurch in 1973/1974 with Paul Fisher, whom I met whilst doing a stint on the railways. We used to party and play music and when I went to his place he'd be throwing pots at the wheel. This appealed to me as a means of being self-sufficient in my intended move back to the East Coast. At that stage he'd been making pots for a year. I was with him for 18 months learning and had my first exhibition in Christchurch. In those

days it was domestic ware. Pots sold for between \$30-\$40, which was quite a lot in those days. I had begun to put tentative and very clumsy Maori design on my pots, and in the potting fraternity in Christchurch I was consequently nicknamed 'the native'.

Life in Christchurch had become increasingly aimless and messy. The damp smoggy winters further added to my resolve to seek a better life back in the warmer climes of the East Coast. People were going back to the land in the seventies to sort out their values in simple uncluttered lifestyles. Pottery was to me a wholistic means to sustain my family and myself. Even in those days there wasn't a lot of work on the Coast and I had the vision of living and producing from the land, as did many others.

Going back to Tokomaru Bay and exploring my taha Maori was like my feet were connected again. The studio was producing well and there was a group of us living at Waima. Helen Mason, a well known craftswoman, potter and weaver, had a house there and I had one down the road from her. There was a collective of arts people - weavers, Maori weavers, potters and itinerants coming in and out. Yet despite the achievement of a high degree of self-sufficiency from my craft it came at a cost. My marriage broke up and I was heavily into dope.

My work began to incorporate Maori mythology and symbolism to a greater extent. I became involved with Nga Puna Waihangā in the early 1980s; Para Matchitt, Cliff Whiting, Ross Hemera, Bob Jahnke, Georgina Kirby, Toi Maihi, Darcy Nicholas, Fred Graham, Sandy Adsett and many others. For me it was a very inspiring time. In terms of my work, Nga Puna Waihangā encouraged and enabled me to legitimise in my own

*Tihei Mauriora*, Baye Riddell, 2002 (detail).



*Nga Korero a Kawari - Conversations at Calvary*,  
 Baye Riddell, April 2004, wood fired terracotta clay,  
 height: 940 x length: 700 x width/depth: 470 cm,  
 courtesy of Museum of New Zealand Te Papa  
 Tongarewa (I.006108).

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mind and in my practice as a Maori. Within Nga Puna Waihangā we were going through the same kinds of things, validating Maori expression through new media. Maori response to the use of clay has always been good, there is the connection to the earth, Papatuanuku. What came out of that period was a strengthening of my own work. Initially I was the only clay artist and then in the mid eighties Manos Nathan, Colleen Ulrich, Paparangi Reid and Hiraina Marsden came in. They had been working with Robyn Stewart up North.

### Role models

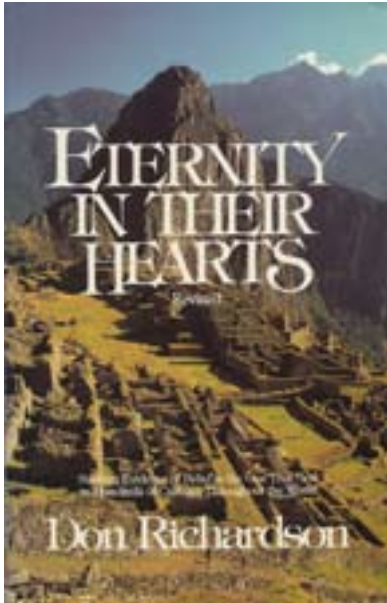
Meeting Manos and Hiraina Marsden provided a major link in my Maori/Christian interface. Hiraina's father was Maori Marsden, an Anglican minister, kaumatua, philosopher and writer, (*The Woven Universe*). Having given my life to the Lord in 1985, I was looking for role models to help me synthesize my new Christian faith and my taha Maori. It was wonderful to sit with Maori and bounce ideas, to glean nuggets of understanding from his scholastic and spiritual knowledge of both worlds. I had also

talked to Anaru Takarua, my kaumatua at Tokomaru Bay, an Anglican minister. He had encountered similar struggles in resolving the two. The deeper I went into Christianity, or my taha Maori, the more it seemed I had to choose one or the other, which I didn't want to do. When I talked to him about this he laughed knowingly and said, "when you find the answers, let me know". Yet over the years I saw his Christianity lived out in his Maoritanga and simply expressed in his aroha and service to the people. He retained the things vital in te ao Maori, wairua and whakapapa; the vitality of expression of Maori culture, a love for life.

### Atua

Prior to crossing the threshold into a living relationship with Christ I had been exploring Maori spirituality. This included the atua, gods. I had made clay figures of relevant atua, which I hung around my garden. Then I noticed they started disappearing, which quite perplexed me. Years later some members of my (Maori) Christian community told me they'd taken them down. I thought this was ironic and rather humorous as they were just then going through the





To see reviews of, or purchase *Eternity In Their Hearts* visit the following link: [www.amazon.com/gp/product/customer-reviews/0830709258/ref=cm\\_cr\\_dp\\_pt/002-3933576-0593630?%5Fencoding=UTF8&n=283155&s=books](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/customer-reviews/0830709258/ref=cm_cr_dp_pt/002-3933576-0593630?%5Fencoding=UTF8&n=283155&s=books)

process of resolving their Maoritanga and Christianity and were happily fashioning carved figures for the local kura kaupapa.

### Arizona and 'eternity in their hearts'

In 1989 a Fullbright Scholarship to go to Arizona and New Mexico, to the main ceramic areas, was important for me as a Maori. Manos and I went over and it was interesting to find we were facing the same kind of political issues in terms of land, resources, government policy and so on. I met a Hopi Christian potter whom I still keep contact with, Al Qoyawayma. He is a remarkable person. He's a scientist with a background in electronics and designing navigational systems for aircraft. As an artist, he is accomplished culturally and is involved in education initiatives for his people.

He related to me that within his own Hopi tradition there was a prophecy of the coming of the gospel message. The priesthood of his tribe held this knowledge and so they were in a sense waiting, and aware of what was going to come to their land. However when the Spaniards came with their brand of Christianity, it soon became evident that they wanted gold and the wealth of the land. While we were there we heard accounts of how they were forced into slave labour to build the churches of the Spaniards. The pain and suffering of that time is still felt keenly, and the hurts retained are still in many ways a barrier to receiving the true gospel.

In the Maori experience similar disenchantment with these unholy religio-political alliances prompted the caustic remark: "You tell us to look to heaven, and whilst our eyes are fixed on heaven you steal the land from beneath our feet".

According to my Hopi brother, when the Mennonites came (a branch of the Quakers, a group of people who lived and worked quietly according to their faith) their gospel was a stark contrast to that of the Spaniards who had pillaged and committed atrocities under the guise of Christianity. So it was the Mennonite community that began to speak to, and be accepted by, the Indians.

Al Qoyawayma sent me a book by Don Richardson *Eternity in their Hearts – the Prophecies of Christ within Indigenous Cultures* which could also be looking into our own culture.

"Kei muri i te awe mapara he awe, he ma". As far as I know this is a pre-European prophecy. It has been translated as – "Behind the tattooed face there is another face – a white face". This has been interpreted to mean that one day the face of rangatiratanga or governance would be a white face – predicting the arrival of, and government by, the pakeha. Whilst this may be a valid interpretation at one level, I believe that at another level this prophecy foretells the arrival of the Kingship (Rangatiratanga) of Christ. The word "ma" can also mean bright, shining, and radiant. So a bright, shining, radiant face – a divine visage.

### Te Papa: The Three Crosses

By cross-referencing my cultural beliefs and other cultural accounts with the Bible, the only logical conclusion I can come to is that Christ is the fulfilment of every cultural path. As Maori, we come as far as

Maui in our quest for eternal life and then the path ends. Our tipuna, I believe, also knew this and that is why they were receptive to the gospel message. They were a highly intelligent, astute, culturally intact people and I don't believe they were duped into Christianity. I think they also concluded that Christ was the way to eternal life.

Having said that, I personally don't feel the need for a cultural or intellectual justification of my faith – that is just a bonus. I have a personal relationship with a living God that has changed my life. And whilst I struggle in many areas to live out my faith, I have no need of a cultural framework to validate this simple yet deeply profound conviction that Ihu Karaiti is who He says He is, the Messiah, the Son of God – the utu – payment for my sins.

Along with other Christian artists I am in a position to proclaim this message through my work, and indeed the message and cultural cross-referencing provides a wealth of artistic possibility. Three recent works at Te Papa are three crosses, *Nga Korero o Kaware Conversations at Calvary*. The three crosses represent Christ, the penitent criminal and the unrepentant criminal. The two criminals represent our response even today when Christ confronts us – we recognise His divinity and the price He has paid for our salvation. We either ask His forgiveness or we reject Him. The choice is still the same today as it was then.

### Moana Tipa



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