

He toi whaakairo, he mana tangata Where there is art, the people flourish ...

An interview with Megan Tamati-Quennell (Te Atiawa, Ngai Tahu)
Curator, Art and Visual Culture, Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington, New Zealand

In the first interview with Megan Tamati-Quennell (*CS News* July 2005 issue) she talked briefly about movement in her life towards nga toi o te ao Maori (the arts of Maori world) and a role she might play to broker a place for Maori visual arts language within the national arts institution.

Underpinning this, she offered another important notion, that already within her, and continually evolving, is an internal reader, an intrinsic response to the life, the creativity and the art of an art work. Within the second part of the interview, we see those and many other skills and qualities being outworked, in analysing, reviewing and simply appreciating artists and their chosen language of expression.

Part 2 continues

The Maori Prophetic Movements

Reflecting on the Maori Prophetic Movements of Te Whiti o Rongomai, Te Kooti, Rua Kenana, Ratana (who was the last of the Prophets) and others from that period, a lot of their thinking was based in the Old Testament. Those movements signify Maori response to, and relationship with, faith and Christianity.

It was a time of creative renewal, and I suppose for us it was like developing a new way of operating because of colonisation in a new and changing world.

Whakaoratia, Te Papa

For the opening of Te Papa I put together an exhibition called *Whakaoratia* which looked at Maori innovation and creative genius. The brief for the exhibition was really 'art as an agent of change' so the exhibition was my take on that. I focused on that period of major change in Maori history, with a time frame of 1860 through to about 1930, and our adoption and innovative use of new and introduced technology. So it was a slice of time and some of the events and movements happening then.

The Prophetic Movements became part of the exhibition as they were such potent and important examples. They were highlighted in the exhibition as highly political movements, as well as major spiritual movements that created new ways of being and operating in a rapidly changing world. New religions created new Maori iconography and art.

Some of the symbols from those new religions were universal forms, adopted and given Maori application and meaning. They included the symbols on Te Kooti's flag, the symbols of Te Manawa, (the heart), Te Ripeka (the cross) and Te Maunga (the triangle). Paratene Matchitt picked up these symbols in his work in the 1980s. Other symbols were the painted houses on the East Coast (discovered by Cliff Whiting and documented by Roger Neich), the architecture of Parihaka, the playing card symbols on Te Kapua and the two storied house at Parihaka.

The people of Parihaka adopted some European ideas and technologies and Pakeha were employed to teach skills so they could build their houses; state of the art houses at the time with running water, gas lamps, a bank. . . The colours and symbols of Ratana, the whetu-marama (star and moon), again universal symbols translated through whakaaro Maori (Maori thought). Similarly the colours used by Ratana – his visions of the archangel Gabriel, the angelic realm and the temple he dreamed about – were all part of that vision and of his faith and beliefs.



Megan Tamati-Quennell and son Taniora.
Photo: Moana Tipa.





Drawing of Te Whiti and Tohu, George Sherriff, 1881, pen and watercolour, 100 x 75 mm (irreg.), Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa.

Lying in the Black Land, Shane Cotton, 1997–98, Oil on canvas, 2000 x 3000 mm, Collection Jane Vestey and Brian Sweeney.

Deidre Brown and Ratana

Dr Deidre Brown (Nga Puhi) in her thesis *Buildings of Nga Morehu* studied the Prophets, Prophetic Movements and architecture (See p.7-9).

Deidre used a concept of counter-colonisation that looked at Maori appropriation of European symbols of power. I really liked both the terms she used and how she framed it. We signalled tino rangatiratanga at that point, by appropriating European symbols that represented status and authority; we took the symbols that European culture recognised and interpreted them through Maori life and values and reflected them back. That idea could be seen in the clothes we wore, like Te Rauparaha wearing a Naval/Captain's uniform (there are paintings of him dressed that way); in our architecture, the type of houses we built. There was increased building of meeting houses illustrating the ownership of land through occupation; there was the adoption and creation of Maori flags, ideas like the 'aukati lines' that marked boundaries. Similarly with

religion we retained some of our own practices but expressed them through the principles of Christianity. Art became iconography for a new world. In recent work there are references to those movements. Peter Robinson used a plane in *My Marae, My Methven*, after discovering Ratana's symbolism of a plane, car and a stepladder. The car represented every day existence; the ladder was the connection between the car and the plane (the spiritual realm). Peter's plane was about the mobility of culture, about it not being static, and his humorous connection to his tipuna. He used that plane image in other works, his *Percentage* works.

Shane Cotton also looked at that period in his work - the painted houses of Te Kooti on the East Coast, and then Papahurihia and Te Atua Wera from an earlier time. Cotton's *Blackout* series with the use of the serpent, mixes Christian and Maori from his northern perspective.

Moana Tapa

