

## Transforming an Edwardian boarding house into an urban marae at Auckland University College in 1954

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**ABSTRACT:** In writing the history of art in Aotearoa/New Zealand, much attention has been focussed on the exhibitions and activities of painters and sculptors of the Māori Renaissance in the 1950s. Equally significant was the impetus given to reviving customary crafts through the Adult Education movement associated with the University of Auckland. The Maori Social and Economic Advancement Act of 1945 positioned the responsibility for preservation, revival and maintenance of "Māori arts, crafts, language, genealogy and history" with iwi, and led to the formation of the Maori Women's Welfare League in September 1951, with its agenda to perpetuate women's skills in Māori arts and crafts, and for these to be practised within an architectural context.

A Māori advisory committee was established in the Adult Education Centre at Auckland University College in 1945, tasked with mitigating Māori urban alienation through the teaching of Māori arts and cultural history to establish "pride of race and cultural achievement." In 1949, the first tutor for the Maori Adult Education Extension Programme was appointed, Maharaiia Winiata (1912-60), followed by a graduate of the Rotorua School of Māori Arts and Crafts, Master carver Henare Toka (Ngāti Whatua) and his wife Mere. They recruited students from the Auckland University College Māori Club and pupils from Māori secondary schools to decorate the entrance hall of Sonoma House, 21 Princes Street, with kōwhaiwhai and tukutuku. Thus an Edwardian building was reborn as the University's Adult Education Centre, and was acclaimed for its biculturalism in the spring issue of *Te Ao Hou* in 1954.

Now 60 years old, the tukutuku panels have been preserved by present day Deputy Vice Chancellor Jim Peters in the ground floor of the University's Clocktower following the disestablishment of Adult Education. Seven of these tukutuku panels have recently undergone extensive conservation treatment, and they are recognised as highly significant examples of twentieth century weaving, exemplifying the approach to reviving customary tukutuku at mid-century in terms of the materials and techniques as well as patterns: muumuu, or purapura whetuu roimata toroa), waharua koopito, whakarua koopito, niho taniwha and nihoniho. They have now gone on display in pride of place in the University Clocktower. This paper will contextualise the changing meaning of these tukutuku panels from interior décor to historic design within the evolving narrative of customary Māori weaving practices.

### Introduction

In writing the history of art in Aotearoa/New Zealand, much attention has been focused on the exhibitions and activities of (predominantly male) painters and sculptors of the Māori Renaissance in the 1950s.<sup>1</sup> This paper will argue that equally important as the revival of painting and sculpture was the

impetus given to reviving customary crafts through the Adult Education initiatives at Auckland University College in the 1950s. While tukutuku is the focus, there is documentary evidence that other forms of the fibre arts such as tāniko weaving were also practised at the Adult Education Centre from 1954 until the early 1960s.

which had 187 branches nationally by the time of its inaugural conference in 1951.<sup>2</sup> According to Aroha Harris, members "made pivotal contributions to preserving Māori arts by, for example, supporting workshops for the weaving arts during a time when few, if any, government resources were applied to the task."<sup>3</sup> This revival of customary women's

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<sup>1</sup> See for example Mane-Wheoki "The Resurgence of Maori Art" p 8.

Fundamental to the revival of women's craft was the Maori Women's Welfare League

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<sup>2</sup> Anderson et al. *Tangata Whenua* p 393.

<sup>3</sup> Anderson et al. *Tangata Whenua* p 394.

crafts was the culmination of work begun in the early part of the twentieth century, principally by the Ngāti Porou leader Sir Apirana Ngata. Ngata was elected Liberal Member of Parliament for Eastern Māori in 1905 and served until 1943, first as Minister of Native Affairs in Sir Joseph Ward's Ministry 1909-12 and then again from 1928-30, and finally under Forbes from 1930 until 1934.<sup>4</sup> Ngata saw to it that the Maori Arts and Crafts Act was passed by parliament in 1926, and this identified art and craft and its supporting knowledge and disciplines as the pillars of Māori tribal culture.<sup>5</sup> Ngata's dream was to establish centres of learning to maintain these customs under Māori tuition, and for Māori to retain their traditional cultural integrity through indigenous property rights and customary practices. Ngata coached Labour Prime Minister Peter Fraser who took over the Maori Affairs portfolio in 1946 but his death in 1950 meant that he did not get to see his vision come to fruition in the Adult Education Centre at Auckland University College.

While Apirana Ngata was Minister of Native Affairs between 1928 and 1934, a number of

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<sup>4</sup> Sorrenson "Ngata" np.

<sup>5</sup> Maori Arts and Crafts Act 1926 (17 GEO V 1926 No 48)

centres for Māori Arts and Crafts were established and the Māori Arts and Crafts Act of 1926 provided for a Board through which one or more schools of Māori art would be set up.<sup>6</sup> In January 1927 this newly appointed Maori Arts and Crafts Board decided that the carving school should be in Rotorua. It was established at Whakarewarewa with Harold Hamilton as Director. Hamilton was the son of Augustus Hamilton, author of the famous book on Māori art. From the first beginnings the school was linked to carved meeting house projects in Northland, East Coast, Taranaki, Waikato and Bay of Plenty.<sup>7</sup> Batches of ten students from selected areas were admitted at regular intervals. The administrative costs were borne by the government, while Māori monies from the Maori Purposes Fund assisted.<sup>8</sup> Living expenses of student-workers and the timber required for meeting-houses were the responsibility of the Māori communities concerned. Works in museums throughout the country and existing meeting houses were studied to give the students an idea of the variety of styles of carvings, and the so-called "Ngata revival" brought to an end the era of

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<sup>6</sup> Maori Arts and Crafts Act 1926 (17 Geo V 1926 No 48)

<sup>7</sup> Skinner *The Carver and the Artist* p 24.

<sup>8</sup> Walker, *He Tipua* pp 212-16, 219-20.

figurative painting in house decoration that had flourished in the 50 years from the 1870s.<sup>9</sup>

After the Rotorua School of Maori Arts and Crafts closed in 1937, Ngata promoted the Centennial Exhibition at Rongotai in Wellington in 1940 as an opportunity to showcase customary Māori art as part of the nation's achievements,<sup>10</sup> and it was during the period of the Second World War that he contributed to Auckland University College adult education courses.<sup>11</sup> Passed into law at the end of the Second World War, the Maori Social and Economic Advancement Act of 1945 positioned the responsibility for preservation, revival and maintenance of "Maori arts, crafts, language, genealogy and history in order to perpetuate Maori culture"<sup>12</sup> with iwi. Tipi Ropiha, of Ngāti Kahungungu and Rangitāne joined the Department of Maori Affairs in 1947, and, under Peter Fraser, became the first Māori to lead the department in 1948, continuing in the position until his retirement in 1957.<sup>13</sup> Ropiha worked closely

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<sup>9</sup> For example, Rongopai.

<sup>10</sup> Ngata "Maori Arts and Crafts" pp 307-335.

<sup>11</sup> Sorrenson "Ngata" np.

<sup>12</sup> Maori Social and Economic Advancement Act 1945 s12(a)(v), p 383.

<sup>13</sup> Anderson et al. *Tangata Whenua* p 388.

with Ernest Corbett, Minister of Maori Affairs from 1949 when the first National government took office led by Prime Minister Sidney Holland. According to Aroha Harris, Ropiha was responsible for "a number of social and cultural endeavours that may have otherwise escaped Corbett, such as the inauguration of the Maori Women's Welfare League [in September 1951] and the establishment of *Te Ao Hou* magazine – the "marae on paper.""<sup>14</sup>

The percentage of Māori living in urban areas more than doubled from 11 to 26 per cent between 1936 and 1945,<sup>15</sup> and so a Māori advisory committee was established in the Adult Education Centre at Auckland University College in 1945 tasked with mitigating Māori urban alienation through the teaching of Māori arts and cultural history to establish what was described as "pride of race and cultural achievement."<sup>16</sup> In 1949, the first tutor for the Maori Adult Education Extension Programme was appointed, Maharaia Winiata (1912-60), who had voluntarily assisted the early classes held at the manpower camp at

Avondale during World War II.<sup>17</sup> Winiata was responsible for setting up classes and learning centres from North Auckland to Christchurch, and in 1949 visited his tribal rohe of Ngāti Ranginui, Bay of Plenty, to lecture in history and genealogies. In the small community of Judea, his talk instilled the desire to build a carved meetinghouse. Winiata was joined in 1954 by the educator and urban leader Matiu Te Hau (1912-78) who became tutor-organiser in North Auckland.<sup>18</sup> Wiremu (Bill) Parker eventually became responsible for Taranaki, Hawke's Bay and Wellington.<sup>19</sup> After the appointment of Parker and Te Hau, Maharaia's particular responsibility remained the Waikato–Maniapoto district and the Bay of Plenty, and in the early 1950s, Parker and Winiata were followed by a graduate of the Rotorua School of Maori Arts and Crafts, Master carver Henare Toka (Ngāti Whatua) and his wife Mere.<sup>20</sup> At the Adult Education Centre, the Tokas recruited students from the Auckland University College Māori Club and pupils from Māori secondary schools to create painted kōwhaiwhai and woven tukutuku

panels to decorate the entrance hall of Ellesmere House, the Edwardian house at 21 Princes Street where they were accommodated, to make it a total environment for study of Māori art. The Maori Women's Welfare League assisted with tuition in the tukutuku work, and the Director of Adult Education was proud to announce "a Māori Institution" in 1949,<sup>21</sup> and later to report that the teaching was organised through local leadership to satisfy the needs and interests of communities.<sup>22</sup>

No. 21 Princes Street had been built in 1876 as a family home for James Cragg Sharland (1819-87) who in 1867 had established a chemist shop in Shortland Street called The Apothecaries Hall, which was a great success with its "fine subdued light" and a small fountain where "perfumed waters are in constant play." Sharland set up two bigger shops in Victoria Street and Lorne Street, and published *A Settlers' Guide and Household Companion* in 1878 which contained detailed recommendations about the benefits of early rising, tepid sponge baths, eating moderately

<sup>14</sup> "Te Ao Hou [editorial]" p 1.

<sup>15</sup> King "Between two worlds" p 290.

<sup>16</sup> School of Continuing Education *Adult Education Report* 1945 p 5.

<sup>17</sup> Winiata "Winiata, Maharaia" np.

<sup>18</sup> Walker "Te Hau, Matiu" np.

<sup>19</sup> Walker "Parker, William Leonard" np.

<sup>20</sup> School of Continuing Education *Adult Education Report* 1948

<sup>21</sup> School of Continuing Education *Adult Education Report* 1949 p 6.

<sup>22</sup> School of Continuing Education *Adult Education Report* 1951 p 5.

and plenty of exercise. After he died, his wife Louisa stayed on in no. 21 until 1889, and after her death it became "Sonoma" a boarding house.<sup>23</sup>

Someone tipped off the media that this grand old boarding house was being transformed for a new purpose, and an article with the headline "Ancient Maori Arts Practised in City" appeared in the *Auckland Star* on 21 July 1954. It shows Fay Reid, Judy Ruha, Grace Henare and Julia Ngare posing with some tukutuku that they have made. The accompanying text explains how the tukutuku and kōwhaiwhai was being made in temporary accommodation in Symonds Street in order to decorate 21 Princes Street:

Some of the most ancient Maori arts are being practised this week almost in the centre of bustling Auckland. Twenty keen Maori students are taking a course in carving, scroll and reed work. It is sponsored by the Adult Education Centre, which has done a great deal of work on Maori subjects. It has practical value because the work the students will do will be used to decorate the building which is to become the Adult Education Centre. Nearly all those taking the course are Auckland Teachers' Training College students, Mr R.A. Dickie, principal of the college, saw the value of the scheme and allowed selected students time off to attend. The course is being held at [Sonoma] House, Princes Street, which

<sup>23</sup> Jones "Sonoma, 21 Princes Street, Auckland" np.

will become the Adult Education Centre on August 28. At present, temporary buildings in Symonds Street are used. The new centre will be the only building in town decorated with Maori art work. Mr M. Te Hau who as Maori Adult Education tutor is supervisor of the course, points out the tremendous value it will have as the students eventually carry on the work as teachers. The course was conceived by the centre director, Mr S. R. Morison in association with Mr Te Hau. The tutors are Mr and Mrs H. Toka. Mr Toka belongs to the Ngati Whatua tribe Kaipara, and is one of the country's leading carvers. During the war he gained a commission at Sandhurst Military College and became a temporary captain with the Māori Battalion. Mrs Toka belongs to the Ngati Ruanui tribe, Hawera. She is an expert on tukutuku (reed) work.<sup>24</sup>

During their years at the Adult Education Centre, Winiata and Te Hau had worked with established community groups and local leaders to support, integrate and extend their existing initiatives and networks. In doing so, they were able to pool the skills and resources of voluntary associations such as the Maori Women's Welfare League and tribal committees to assist in the provision of materials and tuition towards specific community projects – mainly decorated meeting houses, wharekai and halls. The Maori Adult Education tutors supported each academy by providing administration,

<sup>24</sup> "Ancient Māori Arts Practised in City" p 3.

advocacy and simulation. They organised funding from the Maori Purposes Fund to contract part time instruction master carvers and makers such as Henare Toka and his wife Mere Toka.

In the August 1957 issue of *Te Ao Hou*, Maharaia Winiata positioned these Adult Education Centre Maori arts and crafts programmes as academies which were a continuation of the renaissance in customary arts started by Ngata and other Māori leaders in 1926:

In that 1957 article, Winiata wrote:

This first [Auckland] Academy continued for a limited period and met once a week, like any ordinary Adult Education class. The tutors were paid by Adult Education with a grant that was made by the Hon. E. B. Corbett from the Maori Purposes Fund. Material and equipment were supplied by the Waitemata Tribal Executive from funds it gained through functions held at the Maori Community Centre. Even in this first attempt, there was a connection with a scheme to provide decorations for the interior parts of the Maori Community Centre. Carvings and kowhaiwhai patterns were meant to be placed there when completed. In addition the Academy taught taniko work to some very interested pakeha and Maori students.

The reference here to a grant from Hon. E. B. Corbett is telling. Ernest Bowyer Corbett, a

Pākehā from Taranaki had been appointed Minister of Maori Affairs in the National Government in 1949, and in his first months in office had two abrasive encounters with Apirana Ngata, in which he was chided for racial arrogance.<sup>25</sup> Corbett developed considerable respect for Ngata as a result, and his entire term as minister was devoted to implementing Ngata's policies with the assistance of Tipi Ropiha as the Maori Affairs departmental head. Corbett was minister at a time when the government's aim was to assimilate Māori into mainstream New Zealand life, and although well-meaning, he was also paternalistic and stated that Māori should be given not what they wanted but what was good for them. Fortunately, he was of the opinion that the teaching of customary arts and crafts should be encouraged and funded from the government coffers.

Corbett fell ill towards the end of his term as Minister of Maori Affairs, and Ropiha retired in 1957, and it is therefore unlikely if either man ever saw the fruition of their policies in 21 Princes Street, the Edwardian building which had been reborn as the University's Adult Education Centre, specialising in Māori

arts and crafts. The interior of the building came to be acclaimed for its biculturalism in Erik Schwimmer's article "Towards a fuller life for the Auckland Māori" in the June issue of *Te Ao Hou* in 1959:

To the Maori, the Auckland Adult Education centre is a place of special significance. First and most obviously, because it is the only public building in Auckland to have adopted Maori features of architecture. The main hall, pictured above, is a model of richness, combined with subdued good taste. Adult education work for the Maori people is mainly done by the tutors Mr Matiu Te Hau and Dr Maharaia Winiata. Mr Te Hau is responsible for the Auckland area and Northland. He lectures to Maori or European or mixed groups, organised discussion groups, arranges for expert tutors as specialist subjects. He organises "activity" groups in such topics as Maori arts and crafts, floral art, fabric printing, pattern cutting, and clothing. Maori youth problems and leadership are some of the subjects on which he has conducted special schools. Exhibitions of work by Maori artists working in modern painting and sculpture media have also proved a valuable stimulus...Dr Winiata works mostly on more traditional Maori links. His area is south of Auckland and comprises the whole of the South Auckland education district. His groups are engaged in Maori carving, local histories and arts and crafts projects; to ensure a high quality for these studies. Dr Winiata conducts a good deal of his own research or collates material available in out of the way places. He also stimulates Maori local government and youth leadership activities, initiates new ideas of Maori gatherings and generally strengthens Maori respect for traditions. At the same time he is very interested in finding a bridge between Maori and European culture

and has organised weekend schools to bring about closer cultural understanding between the races. One important Maori adult education project due in Auckland in the near future is a conference of fifty of the younger Maori leaders. At this conference which will last a full week, the basic problems of the modern Maori will be discussed much along the same lines as a similar conference twenty years ago. As on that earlier occasion, Prof. C. Belshaw will play a leading part in the organisation supported by Mr S. R. Morison, Director of the Regional Council, and his staff.<sup>26</sup>

From reading this article it becomes evident how the adult education Māori arts and crafts initiative at Sonoma house in the 1950s was interwoven with an assimilation agenda, and also tagged as a means to solve what were seen as "the basic problems of the modern Māori."

One of the most celebrated aspects of the interior of Sonoma house were the tukutuku panels recently rediscovered in storage under the James Henare Centre at the University where they were placed once the Maori Studies Department opened in 1966. Tukutuku are usually placed between the carved ancestor figures on the interior of meeting houses as a form of thatched

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<sup>26</sup> Schwimmer "Towards a fuller life for the Auckland Maori" p 47.

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<sup>25</sup> Walker *He Tipua* p 212.

domestic insulation as Julie Paama-Pengelly explains in her book *Māori Art and Design*. She describes tukutuku as a cross-stitching technique, similar to lashing which evolved as a way of disguising the thatching of kākaho hidden directly behind the patterned panel.<sup>27</sup> The University of Auckland panels were woven with black and white kiekie and yellow pīngao on a lattice like frame of kākaho or the stems of toetoe flowers and wooden slats, the wooden slats being coloured with wood stain to make them red and black or painted white. The kākaho form the vertical weaving material, while the wooden slats are the horizontal wooden base. Pīngao, the yellow sand-binding sedge is used as a third colour here. These are very traditional techniques and materials, later superseded by more durable plasticised materials in more recent urban marae, which have survived remarkably well.

The intention of the panels was described in 1954 by the Adult Education centre director, Mr SR Morrison as being both aesthetic and to provide future educational instruction. Now 60 years old, these tukutuku have been rediscovered as highly significant examples of

twentieth-century weaving, exemplifying the approach to reviving customary tukutuku at mid-century in terms of the materials and techniques as well as patterns. No longer considered craft or elements of a decorative schema, they have been painstakingly restored by a materials conservator and entered the University's art collection to be catalogued as individual art works with the names of their makers recorded. After the earthquake strengthening of the University's Clocktower building was completed in mid-2015, they were installed in pride of place in the centre of the Lippincott building, a reminder of the origins of the University's Māori Department as well as the strength and endurance of Māori art.

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<sup>27</sup> Paama-Pengelly *Māori Art and Design* p 20.

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