

Young Guns Reloaded: Evaluating Contemporary Māori Art of the 1990s

EDWARD HANFLING

Abstract

The “Young Guns” were an emerging generation of contemporary Māori artists in the 1990s. Their work was irreverent, and provoked uncertainty and controversy regarding its relationship to the genealogy of customary and contemporary Māori artists. This paper reviews notable works by Shane Cotton, Michael Parekowhai, Lisa Reihana and Peter Robinson, and their evolving critical reception, from complex readings through an internationalist, post-conceptual lens to accommodation within a vitalist Māori framework. The focus is on patterns of re-evaluation within Māori culture, whereby humour, belligerence, profanity and mundane materiality are mixed with the metaphysical, and “rubbish” becomes valuable art or *taonga*.

Introduction

Jonathan Mane-Wheoki (Ngāpuhi, Te Aupōuri, Ngāti Kuri) called them the “Young Guns.”¹ They were an emerging generation in the New Zealand art world of the 1990s whose work came to epitomise Contemporary Māori Art, but also provoked uncertainty and controversy.² Questions were raised about the extent to which this work—construed as conceptual, irreverent, individualistic and aligned with global tendencies in contemporary art—demonstrated continuity with both customary and modernist Māori art or was consistent with the “vitalistic” basis of *te ao Māori* (the Māori world).³ The dominant response of Pākehā curators and writers was to apply in-depth semiotic analysis and post-structuralist critique, celebrating the conceptual complexity of the work and its political edge in the context of the inchoate biculturalism of the time.

This article reviews notable exhibitions and works associated with Contemporary Māori Art in the 1990s, aiming to capture a significant art historical moment when the work of Māori artists seemed vital in the context of the art of Aotearoa New Zealand more generally. It also considers the (largely more recent) accommodation of the work within a *te ao Māori* framework and the extended narrative of generations of customary and contemporary Māori artists. An intriguing dimension of the latter is the way seemingly valueless—even distasteful—objects, images, signs or materials acquire value, not just on an aesthetic or conceptual level, but spiritually. While the transformation of everyday or banal items is a well-known characteristic of Western art since the beginning of the twentieth century (and this tradition undoubtedly informed the work of the Young Guns), it is also worth speculating on patterns of evaluation and re-evaluation within Māori culture and history, whereby humour, belligerence, profanity and mundane materiality are mixed with the metaphysical, and “rubbish” becomes valuable as art or *taonga* (something prized, a treasure).

First, a *dramatis personae* of the Young Guns:

Peter Robinson (b. 1966, Kāi Tahu), whose work is especially, and deliberately, divisive. His crude slogans about selling out and cashing in, dressed up in black, white and red, produce an uncomfortable realisation that he is not only commenting upon, but also exploiting, the art world’s enthusiasm for Contemporary Māori Art.

Shane Cotton (b. 1964, Ngāpuhi) demonstrates technical finesse and gravitas, but his paintings consist of disparate, decontextualised, disorienting image fragments—motifs uplifted from European-influenced paintings in East Coast wharehau, as well as gang insignias, mokomokai (preserved heads) and more.

Michael Parekowhai (b. 1968, Ngā Ariki Kaiputahi, Ngāti Whakarongo) also stirs the pot by appropriating the appropriations of Pākehā artists and, like Robinson, invoking the commodification of culture, though in Parekowhai's case through the industrial production and finish of his sculptures.

Lisa Reihana (b. 1964, Ngāpuhi, Ngāti Hine, Ngāi Tū): her film and photographic work re-imagines, as variously hip, twee and freaky, the figures of Māori mythology. Clunky animations, jarring in their treatment of symbols and stereotypes, eventually give way to a technical and visual sophistication that rivals Parekowhai for slickness.

The outliers are Brett Graham (b. 1967, Ngāti Korokī Kahukura), who uses power tools to carve up colonial histories and their ongoing presence in contemporary politics, but never wanted to be part of the Young Guns; and Jacqueline Fraser (b. 1956, Kāi Tahu), somewhat older than the others and reluctant for her work to be reduced to artefacts of cultural identity. Fraser's delicate adumbrations of figures, structures and landforms, largely using electrical wire, raise questions about the ability of such insubstantial forms and materials to bring te ao Māori to life.⁴

In terms of form and material, there is little that unites the work of these artists, while the “Young Guns” tag seems more apt for some than for others. The common threads are a willingness to probe contentious issues of biculturalism, prevalent in the 1990s, by way of humour, disjunction and provocation, and a detribalised position and refusal to adhere to qualities associated with customary Māori art. These commonalities were strengthened by two exhibitions curated by George Hubbard, who saw something of himself in the urban rebel sensibility of the artists and their alienation from sites of stability such as iwi and marae.⁵

Choice! at Auckland's Artspace (1990) featured seven artists, including Parekowhai, Fraser and Reihana, but not Cotton or Robinson. *Korurangi: New Māori Art* at the Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki (1995) had 12 artists, and there Cotton and Robinson entered the fray. Mane-Wheoki's “Young Guns” tag calls to mind the Young British Artists phenomenon emerging on the other side of the world around the same time. It had a more local significance, though, coming hot on the heels of an advertising campaign by Dominion Breweries, then sponsor of the New Zealand cricket team, which, following the retirement of Richard Hadlee and several other senior players at the beginning of the 1990s, re-branded the team as the “Young Guns” to distract the fans from an inevitable losing streak. However, the most evocative reference was to the 1988 western, *Young Guns*, with its Brat Pack actors directed by Christopher Cain, conjuring up an image of the young Māori artists as a tight posse of sharp-shooting renegades, riding roughshod over tradition and decorum with a brazen youthful swagger. That image is nicely evoked by the giant cowboy boot in Cotton's *Te Ao Hou* (1993, fig. 1).

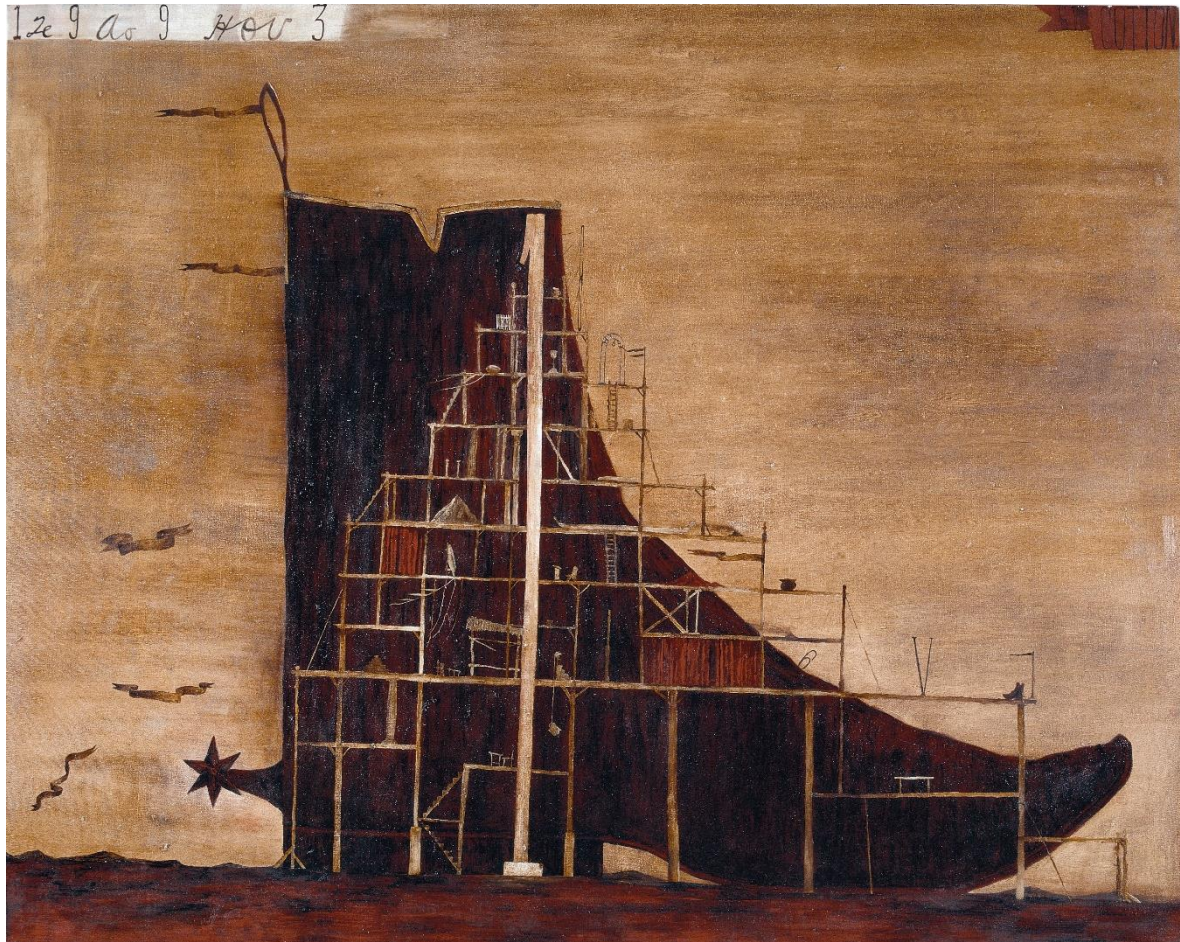


Figure 1. Shane Cotton, *Te Ao Hou*, 1993. Oil on canvas, 1220 x 1520 mm.
Private Collection.

The new Māori art of the 1990s may well have looked at the time like a decisive break with the past—not just with customary Māori art, but also with earlier innovators such as the so-called Māori modernists, including Arnold Manaaki Wilson, Paratene Matchitt, Selwyn Muru and John Bevan Ford, who from the 1950s deliberately absorbed into their work abstract or simplified forms and sometimes mundane, industrial materials, echoing tendencies in twentieth-century European art. Indeed, it was the perceived lack of connection of the Young Guns to previous generations of Contemporary Māori Art—a failure to acknowledge the elders either in the development of the work, the work itself or its curation—that raised hackles amongst Māori critics.⁶

Yet within the space of a decade, most of the artists under discussion here were happily accommodated within, for example, *Pūrangiāho*, an exhibition staged by the Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki in 2001.⁷ The primary concern became one of asserting the continuity of Māori art over time through an emphasis on whakapapa, both in terms of the lineage of different generations of Contemporary Māori Artists and the connections made by those artists in their work to ancestors and stories spanning time.

This article acknowledges the metaphysical dimensions of Contemporary Māori Art activated through its recontextualisation and reappraisal, most recently in another Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki exhibition, *Toi Tū Toi Ora*.⁸ However, the argument here is that such acknowledgement need not foreclose the irreverent, absurdist and provocative qualities that

gave the work its vitality in the 1990s. That argument also opens up the possibility that, within te ao Māori, spiritual qualities such as wairua (spirit or soul) or tapu (sacredness) might take up residence, more or less forcefully, in forms and objects that seem on the surface unprepossessing, prosaic or otherwise at variance with the forms and objects that customarily embody such qualities. It is not necessarily the place of a Pākehā art historian to claim that the work, or particular works, of the Contemporary Māori Artists of the 1990s should be regarded in this light or held in such esteem. Rather, I am content to raise this potential, while drawing attention to the (sometimes simple, crude or vulgar) material qualities of selected works that have tended to be downplayed in accounts of their conceptual complexity by, predominantly, Pākehā commentators.

Vitalism in te ao Māori and taonga

Mānuka Hēnare (Ngāti Hauā, Te Aupōuri, Te Rarawa, Ngāti Kahu) describes te reo Māori as a “vitalistic” language, “expressive of life forces, metaphysics, and cosmic energy.”⁹ And Māori art is, he writes, likewise “vitalistic in its expression of religion and philosophy, particularly where it is the intention of the artist to enhance vital potential. The art is said to be alive.”¹⁰ This life is most readily associated with things deemed taonga, particularly representations of ancestors, carved, painted or otherwise rendered, and it can take several distinct forms.

“Mauri,” for example, as described by Henare¹¹ and by Hirini Moko Mead,¹² is a “vital spark” that comes originally from the supreme being, Io, and from the “hau,” the breath or impetus that gives life. It inhabits, and is integral to, a person in life, but can also be transferred from person to thing, to a “talismán” made, say, of wood or stone, through the skills of an expert maker, a tohunga.¹³ Mead tells us that “abstracting the mauri and representing it in a talismán” is a way to “protect the real mauri from harm.”¹⁴ Taonga, then, are in a material sense substitutes, but they nonetheless embody mauri, which also acts to bind wairua to a body or material thing. Wairua differs from mauri in that it can become detached from a body, notably one that has died, either returning to Hawaiki or a spiritual homeland, or hovering close by and maintaining that person’s presence.¹⁵

Ancestors have status or mana, an attribute Paul Tapsell describes as varying in strength and cumulative in nature, becoming more elevated over time. Mana, he writes, is “instilled in a taonga through direct association with ancestors as it passes down the generations. The greater the ancestor who once used the item, the more powerful is the mana associated with it.”¹⁶ Mana is sustained by way of “the complementary presence of tapu”—loosely, a kind of sacredness, but one that can assume a dangerous level of potency or, preferably, be kept in balance with the contrasting condition of noa (a kind of ordinariness). Mead explains that a carved whareniui (meeting house) accrues a high level of tapu while it is being created by skilful and knowledgeable artists, but the tapu is reduced once it is complete, through a “kawanga-whare” ceremony often conducted at dawn.¹⁷ This ceremony is also a forum for critique or judgement, with the artists “held ritually responsible for their work and poor workmanship and errors in process and execution . . . targeted for attention.” Only when the ceremony is over can the artists be “free from the tapu of art and from the consequences of any errors they may have made.”¹⁸

Some common threads run through the distinct metaphysical qualities described above and their relationship to taonga. Firstly, it is not simply a matter of their presence or absence in a given item. There are degrees of presence; they can be more or less strongly felt and their strength typically increases over time. Secondly, the degree of vitality of a material thing is

contingent on a number of factors: the tohunga's or maker's intent, their ability to invest it with life; the conditions under which it is encountered or interacted with, the most favourable (according to Tapsell and Mead) being those of the marae and of customary ceremony; the knowledge, expertise and standing of those who encounter or interact with it; the extent of the connection between the item and an ancestor, and the relative mana of that ancestor; and the extent to which the item has maintained its spiritual value over time. Thirdly, these variabilities and contingencies pertain to the value of artefacts, which changes with time,¹⁹ and the status of taonga is also not absolute; something might be more or less a taonga, or in a transitional state of becoming taonga. Fourthly, the vitalism of te ao Māori is such that material bodies or forms, while not inconsequential, are at least subordinate to the spiritual realities they embody and, in a sense, seen through or past; for on their own, at face value, or when devoid of life, they are empty.

It is worth emphasising that these four points pertain to taonga, and that distinctions may be drawn between taonga and toi Māori or Māori art, and especially, perhaps, between taonga and Contemporary Māori Art. But it is also important to acknowledge that works of Contemporary Māori Art from the 1990s have been seen since to have accrued spiritual meanings and values, regardless of whether they are recognised as taonga, or partially or somewhat taonga, or on the way to becoming taonga, or simply as art. Moreover, these meanings and values have emerged despite the often profane intentions and actions of the artists, the unpropitious Western institutional conditions within which they were first presented, the identification of errors and flaws (including breaches of tikanga, principles or what is right within te ao Māori) by knowledgeable critics and kaumātua, the lack of direct contact with esteemed ancestors and, finally, the lowly nature of the forms and materials used. This last factor, I suggest, is the most conspicuous quality of the works themselves, and it invites the possibility that, in te ao Māori (as in contemporary art), rudimentary, makeshift, and mundane forms and materials can be brought to life.

The Redemption of the Young Guns

In the 1990s, the work of the Young Guns looked like it was deliberately disengaged from Māori spiritual beliefs—problematically so, for some Māori critics, productively so, for some Pākehā.²⁰ The artists projected (willingly or otherwise) an image of detribalised urban Māori, lacking connection to marae or iwi and, in the case of Peter Robinson, cheerfully doubting—even deriding—his own credentials by claiming to be merely “3.125%” Māori. This percentage Robinson paraded on numerous works in a range of media, including an *Untitled* work on paper (1993, James Wallace Arts Trust, Auckland) and a floor-based installation, *Untitled (plane, car, blanket)* (1994, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth, fig. 2). In the former, the numbers are embellished with spirals that nod towards the widely known koru form, as well as motifs found in rock art in Te Wai Pounamu (the South Island), and might be construed as token gestures of “Māori-ness.” In the latter, a red blanket points the finger at colonial British settlers who traded such items for tracts of land. In both works, an aeroplane or car suggests a contemporary reality of constant mobility and uprootedness, though it might also resemble a waka or, more disturbingly, a swastika, which carries the spectre of the Nazi rhetoric of Aryan rootedness to the soil of the homeland. Robinson's 3.125% is, of course, a blood quantum—a dubious means of determining cultural belonging, but one popularly used by recalcitrant white New Zealanders over the last few decades to accuse those who call themselves Māori of doing so falsely or opportunistically. Robinson's works of the early 1990s, then, contributed significantly to an image of Contemporary Māori Art as the deployment of black comedy, antagonism and a certain crude materiality to address the cultural politics of the moment: “forget deeply held spiritual beliefs,” the Pākehā critic Robert Leonard asserted.²¹



Figure 2. Peter Robinson, *Untitled (plane, car, blanket)*, 1994. Blanket, oil on wood, 2400 x 2500 mm (blanket). Govett-Brewster Art Gallery.

Subsequently, the work of the Young Guns—some of it, anyway—has been, as it were, redeemed. At the turn of the century came *Purangiaho*, curated for the Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki by Ngarino Ellis and Ngahiraka Mason in 2001, integrating all the artists under discussion here (barring Diane Prince, discussed below) into a broader whakapapa or lineage. More recently, at the same venue in 2020–21, *Toi Tū Toi Ora*, curated by Nigel Borell, presented an expansive, inclusive view of contemporary Māori art, weaving the earnest and the rebellious alike into an over-arching framework based on the Māori story of creation. The visitor encountered first spot-lit and self-illuminating works in the blacked-out galleries of Te Kore (the great nothingness) and then Te Po (the darkness), before witnessing the separation of Ranginui and Papatūānuku and entering Te Ao Mārama (the world of light and life).

From *Purangiaho* on, the Contemporary Māori Art of the 1990s was reconsidered and brought back into the fold, enlivened by a combination of curatorial contextualisation and the application of tikanga. In the 1990s, the Young Guns had been ragtag renegades, or at least, according to critics such as Robert Jahnke (Ngāti Porou) and Mane-Wheoki, their works were exhibited within the “white cube” as the products of disparate and fragmentary agendas, accentuating individualism and novelty in line with authorship in Western rather than Māori art.²² In *Toi Tū Toi Ora*, the significance of each artist’s contribution was in relation to the larger, unifying narrative and collectivist ethos. The exhibition fulfilled Mead’s description of Māori art as “a social art,” the work of artists “in touch with their tribal roots and with their people,” and with the sense of “belonging” that is whakapapa, without which “an individual is outside looking in.”²³

In the book published following the exhibition, Borell makes a point of debunking the idea that the Young Guns were as independent as they have been made out to be.²⁴ He reveals their involvement with Te Ātinga, an organisation set up in 1987 to foster contemporary Māori art,

particularly amongst rangatahi (youth), building on the work of Nga Puna Waihanga, the collective of Māori artists established in 1973.²⁵ Cotton, Reihana and Robinson (and also Chris Heaphy and Brett Graham) all “participated in Te Ātinga rangatahi hui alongside other art school and polytechnic students—most notably the Gisborne painting wānanga in 1994,” while Robinson had earlier contributed work to the Te Ātinga mobile exhibition series that toured South Island marae in 1990. Borell concludes: “To say that Reihana, Robinson and others were individuals who had no connection to the Māori art movement and its collectives misrepresents the conscientious decisions they made in navigating their art career prospects, and what they shared with others in the process.”²⁶ Borell’s revisionism, though, does not change the detribalised image of the Young Guns that took hold in the 1990s, nor the fact that by the end of that decade a couple of them had dialled back the “Māori-ness” of their work.

When Fraser and Robinson were the first artists to officially represent New Zealand at the Venice Biennale in 2001, the Pākehā curator of the New Zealand pavilion, Gregory Burke, declared that while both artists had become known for their focus on identity, they “now resist this classification, which they see as limiting the understanding of their work and the many contexts they address.”²⁷ Burke described them as “two of New Zealand’s most international artists”;²⁸ they had successfully “developed a layered and international language.”²⁹

Robinson’s installation at Venice in 2001, titled *Divine Comedy*, was about everything and nothing. Blobby models of a swelling universe and fragments of high-falutin existentialism hidden in grids of binary code contributed to the impression of glaring, gleaming emptiness, with a nod to the mute forms of minimalism. Twenty years on, this ensemble was swept into Borell’s Māori creation narrative, the zeros and ones of the binary system that produces digital data now suggesting more strongly than before the spark of life emerging from the void (fig. 3). Robinson’s ambivalence about where his work existed in the cultural landscape is evident from the way that “1” and “0” together look like the word “Io,” or the supreme god, but the coded text maintains, in words by Jean-Paul Sartre, “there is no god, only being and nothingness.” The exhibition *Toi Tū Toi Ora*, including such factors as the control of light in the gallery, brought to life a previously latent spiritual dimension to Robinson’s work, shifting it from the realm of representation or reference to manifestation or embodiment. This suggests that the reception of Contemporary Māori Art more generally in the mid-1990s, when conceptual cleverness trumped metaphysical presence, cannot be pinned solely on the works themselves, but arose because of a misalignment, in the moment, between the objects, the spaces or sites, the curation and other surrounding conditions. Works that were divisive at the time have gone on to spark spiritual connections, points of orientation with te ao Māori. But is there a danger, in such absolution, of losing the sparks of wit, vulgarity and bullishness that seemed so distinctive to Contemporary Māori Art of the 1990s? Or can we enjoy, together, in the same work, both lore and lawlessness?

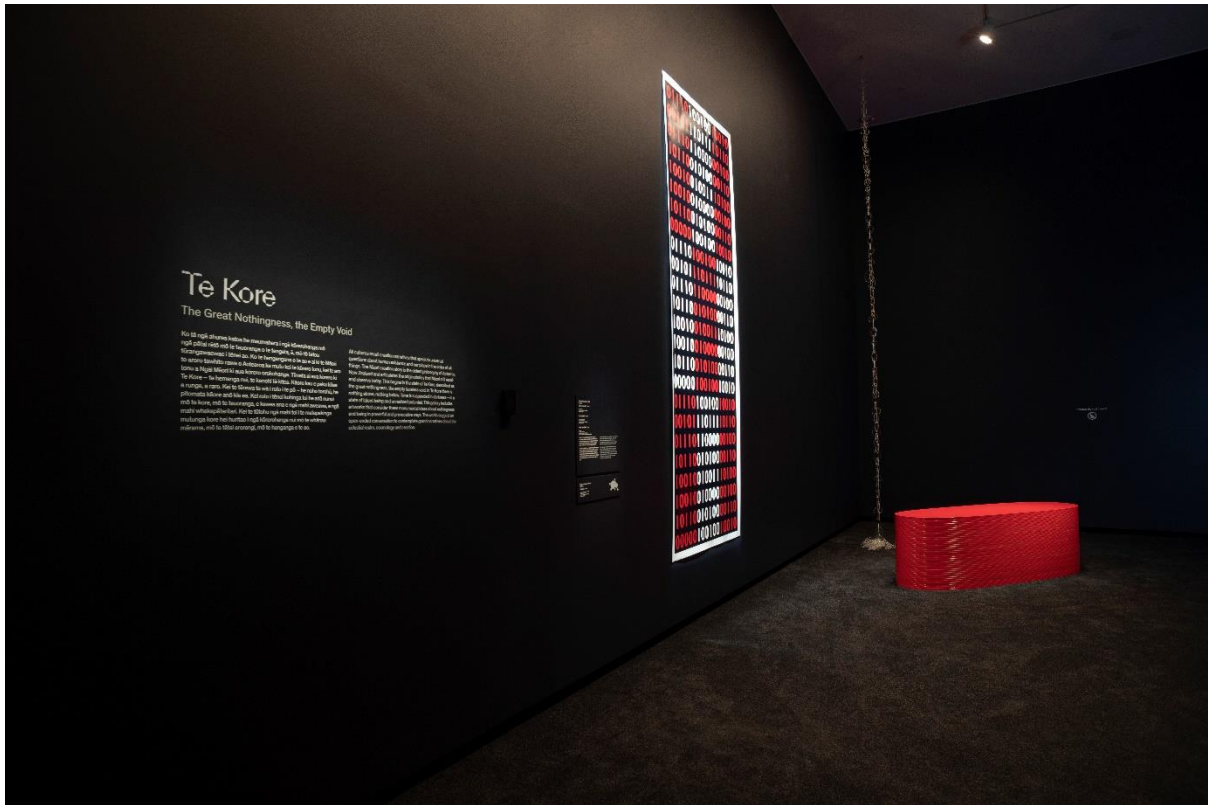


Figure 3. Peter Robinson, *Divine Comedy*, 2001 (detail). Mixed media installation, dimensions variable. In *Toi Tū Toi Ora*, curated by Nigel Borell, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, 2020–21.

“I Am Wrong”: *Choice!* and *Korurangi*

The most poignant instance of the outlaw in the New Zealand art world of the 1990s was George Hubbard, who curated the breakthrough exhibition, *Choice!*. He was cautiously admitted into the establishment through an invitation to curate a public gallery exhibition, *Korurangi*, for the Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, but was then sidelined from his own exhibition and effectively exiled, ultimately making a new life for himself in Australia. Displacement was central to his life from the start. He had been adopted by a Pākehā family as an infant, only much later discovering his Māori whakapapa and embarking on the time-honoured journey of dealing with his alienation from it. He found kinship with urban Māori creatives in various disciplines, music, dance and visual art, and became especially involved, as a producer, in the emergence of Polynesian hip hop.³⁰

Choice! was a fresh, challenging show of seven of Hubbard’s visual art acquaintances, staged in the year of New Zealand’s Sesquicentennial, with its variously well-meaning and superficial efforts towards biculturalism, in the dying days of Fourth Labour Government.³¹ The succeeding National Government perpetuated the financial policy of its neo-liberal predecessor, with money consistently being the focal point of Treaty negotiations. During the 1990s, the Government made substantial settlements with Waikato-Tainui and Ngāi Tahu, but also succeeded in angering many Māori with the abortive “fiscal envelope” policy, which placed a cap on the money available for such settlements in an attempt to, as it were, write off history.³²

Michael Parekowhai’s work has consistently exploited the hallmarks of commercial production and conspicuous consumption, in a manner not far removed from Jeff Koons and Damien Hirst.

His contribution to *Choice!*, the oversize sculptural words of *The Indefinite Article* (1990), could be interpreted as monumentalising the selfish “I am” of capitalism. The text certainly invokes the bombastic and Christian “I Am” of Colin McCahon, mixing a bloated, clunky materiality with spiritual transcendence. Parekowhai also conflates McCahon’s localised concerns with the clean geometric shapes of Robert Morris’s minimalism.³³ Much of the written analysis of the work has latched on to the ambiguity of the word “he,” potentially meaning “a” (hence, the indefinite article), “some” and also (most pertinently) “wrong,” “contaminated,” “in a bad condition,” a “fallacy” or “blunder.”³⁴ If Parekowhai *was* declaring “I am wrong,” he was not far off the money. And he was not the only one. While tikanga is about doing things in the right way, a conscious “wrongness” pervades the work of the Young Guns.

Included in *Choice!*, Lisa Reihana’s hard-hitting short film, *Wog Features* (1990, fig. 4), is a procession of racist figures and tropes in jarring stop-motion, including blackface and gollywogs, aspects of the children’s television show *Play School*, as well as whirling, dancing black and white skeletons and derogatory language, with the term “wog” repeated as a percussive hip hop beat (Hubbard contributed the soundtrack). Reihana’s own face becomes a shape-shifting screen for a succession of stereotypes, as if to suggest that, in line with post-colonial narratives of the time, these horrifying slurs might be owned, weaponised and lobbed back at the dominant culture.



Figure 4. Lisa Reihana, *Wog Features*, 1990. Single channel video, 7 minutes 50 seconds. Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki.

Earnest bicultural gestures were equally returned to sender with witty rejoinders. The concept of biculturalism emerged from political initiatives of the 1980s to provide space for Māori identity, knowledge and language, mainly within existing European institutions (it is less widely used today than, for example, “co-governance”).³⁵ When, on the back of the success of

Choice!, Hubbard was commissioned in 1993 by the Auckland Art Gallery to develop a statement exhibition of Contemporary Māori Art, he proposed the punning title “Brownie Points.” “[T]hat was what the Auckland Art Gallery was trying to score,” Hubbard later reflected.³⁶ Under pressure from the Gallery, he toned it down to “Niho Taniwha” (teeth of the taniwha), but it ended up as “Korurangi”—the form of two spirals locked together but not touching, perhaps symbolising biculturalism or the mutual reinforcement of Western and Māori art.³⁷ Hubbard, because he blithely resisted being managed, found himself increasingly shut out of his own exhibition. Auckland Art Gallery’s recently appointed Pākehā curator, William McAloon, was given the unenviable task of developing and staging the exhibition while dealing with the trouble-making Hubbard, on the one hand, and, on the other, a risk-averse Gallery management.³⁸

For Jonathan Mane-Wheoki, *Korurangi* played it too safe.³⁹ More damningly, he declared that “the exhibition (as distinct from individual works) lacked a heart, a pulse, a wairua.”⁴⁰ In refusing to blame the perceived failure of *Korurangi* on the works themselves, Mane-Wheoki directed attention to the curation, the cultivation of an environment or atmosphere, concluding: “any necessary connection between the spiritual ethos of marae rituals of encounter and the largely secular, urban ambience of *Korurangi* was difficult to discern.”⁴¹ He was critical too—as was Robert Jahnke—of the selection process, suggesting that the works were what Pākehā art commentators wanted to see;⁴² it allowed them to engage with Māori art on their own terms, using the tools of Western criticism and philosophy. In short, *Korurangi* appeared to pose a blunt question: “What is Māori art?” And, alarmingly, no context was provided to adequately respond to it—no guidance, care or kaitiakitanga.

At least one of the artists in the exhibition concurred with Mane-Wheoki’s assessment. Brett Graham, though lumped in with the Young Guns, kept himself a little apart, and was initially reluctant to be part of *Korurangi*.⁴³ At the opening powhiri and viewing, overhearing a kuia’s negative response, he agreed that “the art works felt cold and alienated in the space.”⁴⁴ Anna-Marie White has gone so far as to assert that the exhibition “was incommensurate with the practice of taonga.”⁴⁵ Note the wording: taonga as a “practice,” not just an object. White argues that Graham’s sculpture, *Kahukura* (1995), is, or has become, taonga. Though this value was evident, albeit inhibited, in *Korurangi*, it shone with full force under more appropriate conditions in *Patua* at City Gallery Wellington in 1996, helping to set Graham “apart from his Contemporary Māori Art peer grouping.”⁴⁶

Patua, curated by a veteran of Contemporary Māori Art, Sandy Adsett, established a generational structure or whakapapa, with the achievements of Kaumātua figures—“sainted ancestors,”⁴⁷ as Peter Brunt has described them—providing a context and easing the way toward the innovations of the younger generation. In fact, some of the artists included in *Korurangi* were elders relative to the Young Guns: Emily Karaka (b. 1952, Ngāti Tai ki Tāmaki, Ngāti Hine, Ngāpuhi),⁴⁸ Maureen Lander (b. 1942, Ngāpuhi) and Diane Prince (b. 1952, Ngāti Whātua, Ngāpuhi). But the artist whose work seemed to have been explicitly positioned in the space to signify his status, Ralph Hotere (b. 1931, Te Aupōuri), was an uncomfortable fit as a kaumātua figure, having famously declared himself an artist first, and the fact of being Māori as secondary.⁴⁹

The Gallery and the Marae

Korurangi contrasts with subsequent exhibitions, such as *Patua* (1996) and *Purangiaho* (2001), which transformed European-style gallery spaces into conditions that emulated a marae or whareniui, counteracting the negative space of the “white cube” with its illusion of

neutrality⁵⁰ and tendency to isolate and decontextualise.⁵¹ Yet some of the artists in *Korurangi* did try to co-opt or re-claim the site for Māori. Prince's *Flagging the Future: Te Kiritangata—The Last Palisade* (1995) staked out a papakāinga (home base), complete with kiritangata (inner palisade), marae atua (forecourt) and atamira (raised platform).⁵² Upon the latter sat the mischievous headless figure of Mr Marx Maui, part German political economist, part Polynesian trickster—a bicultural hybrid, perhaps, but one from whom one could expect a few fireworks, rather than assimilationist platitudes. Laid out in front of the occupation was a New Zealand flag printed with the words “please walk on me,” a rite of passage tempting manuhiri (guests) to challenge authority and commit to the cause of Māori self-determination. Prince's treatment of the flag, and the impassioned responses to it, contributed significantly to a popular image of Contemporary Māori Art as spicy, confrontational stuff.

In her installations of the 1990s, Jaqueline Fraser also, less belligerently, marked out coordinates for sites that transcended the physical gallery space. *Ko Aoraki Te Maunga* (1991) is a portable but grounding environment anchored by the Kai Tahu story of the waka, Te Arai-o-te-Uru, the crew of which were transformed into the peaks of the Southern Alps, including Aoraki.⁵³ *Te Wai Pounamu: The Burial of Our People* (1996 and re-staged at the Dunedin Public Art Gallery in 2012) consists of shrines for the Kai Tahu and Scottish sides of the artist's ancestry using fabrics, such as paisley, and electrical wire, and representing birds and plants, both endemic and introduced. Fraser carves a tenuous spectre of marae architecture out of the white space of the gallery, with wire figures in place of whakairo. She has been said to turn “flimsy materials—often associated with domesticity and femininity—into totemic power forms.”⁵⁴ Electrical wire, of course, can become live, its current switched on or off, without changing its external appearance.

Lisa Reihana's *Digital Marae* (fig. 5) is a flashier transformation of the gallery space, first developed in the mid-1990s, offering a parade of ancestors in unorthodox livery and illuminating a darkened room. Observing the prevalence of such “portable whare” in Contemporary Māori art since the 1980s, Deidre Brown writes: “The work created for exhibition is not always related to a specific marae as it is a reality of life that many Māori, including artists, must try to make transportable Māori space, or spaces, for themselves within urbanised, transient, or sometimes globalised contexts.”⁵⁵ For Rangihiroa Panoho, on the other hand, Reihana's wharenuī stage-set represents, rather than actually becoming, a spiritual space; however dramatic the spotlights, it fails to turn costumed actors into ancestors.⁵⁶ Interestingly, Panoho's assessment that a Reihana photograph can be no more than a “replacement”⁵⁷ for the presence of the ancestor does not seem far removed from Mead's description, referred to earlier, of a taonga talisman as “a substitute for the real mauri” of the ancestor.⁵⁸ Ultimately, the coming to life or activation of a thing depends not simply on its visual characteristics, or the extent to which it replicates previous manifestations of ancestral presence, but on conditions and contingencies. Panoho seems qualified to make this judgement of the lack of mana in Reihana's work. However, there are others, similarly qualified, for whom that work has apparently come to life,⁵⁹ and presumably circumstances in which it might yet do so.



Figure 5. Lisa Reihana, *Digital Marae*, 2001, in the exhibition *Purangiaho: Seeing Clearly*, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki. Digital photographs on aluminium and DVD. Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki.

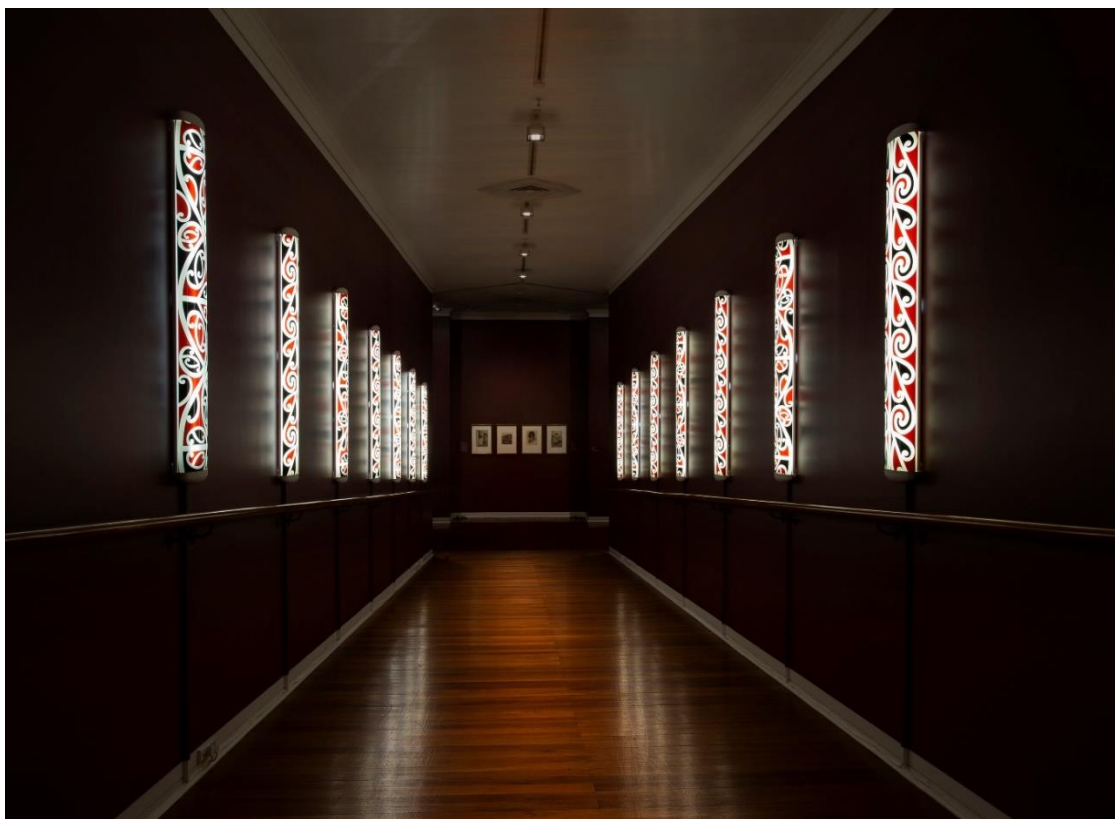


Figure 6. Michael Parekowhai, *The Bosom of Abraham*, 1999. Installation view, Dunedin Public Art Gallery. Screen printed vinyl on fluorescent light housings, 1320 x 210 x 80 mm each. Dunedin Public Art Gallery.

Similar uncertainties surround Parekowhai's series of kōwhaiwhai screen-printed lightboxes, *The Bosom of Abraham* (1999, fig. 6). Parekowhai invokes the biblical patriarch whose bosom, according to parable, equates to paradise or a state of peace and righteousness. The kōwhaiwhai also suggest the sanctity of the whareniui as the body of the ancestor, where the rafters are the ribs and the porch the bosom.⁶⁰ But these are “light-’em-up-with-the-flick-of-a-switch” kōwhaiwhai, even as they reclaim, illuminate and enhance the customary motifs, might also be construed as unashamedly tacky; the koru patterns are those that have been popularised and cheapened through endless reproduction. Profound or tasteless, sacred or profane, taonga or kitsch, or just Contemporary Māori Art or toi Māori or mahi toi? Again, this depends on the conditions and protagonists of the particular site and moment, as much as the material qualities of the things themselves.

Unlikely Taonga

For Paul Tapsell, taonga are more likely to be activated within a specific marae context, where they manifest as “time travellers,” connecting generations, activating iwi- and hapu-based histories and knowledge.⁶¹ But the things themselves are not always so animated. For instance, when taonga were gifted or transferred to Pākehā, they would often end up in museums as specimens of material culture, subject to aesthetic and academic analysis. This suggests that the non-material “content” of taonga is not necessarily stable, but comes and goes, and depends less on the physical form than on conducive conditions and people with the requisite knowledge and connections. In each of the instances of 1990s Contemporary Māori Art described here, the materials are irregular or insubstantial, mass-produced or downright crude, but they nonetheless have the potential to come to life in the right circumstances. Think of the veneration now shown to the portrait paintings of Charles Goldie and Gottfried Lindauer, which bring to life long departed ancestors despite the academic “deadness” of their painterly means (in Lindauer’s work especially).⁶² Consider what Aaron Lister has described as Fiona Pardington’s “wonky tiki”—the touristic and crude versions of tiki that she has been said to animate, or imbue with mauri, through her majestic, carefully crafted photographs.⁶³ Or witness the transformation and redemption of plastic tarpaulins and other synthetic hardware materials used in bulk by the Mata Aho Collective.⁶⁴ Recently, of the show *Paemanu—Tauraka Toi: A Landing Place* at Dunedin Public Art Gallery, David Eggleton suggested that some of the works “are enigmatic, talismanic objects,” and that “The exhibition is a form of reclamation of the land, seeking to restore its ‘mauri,’ its vitalism” and affirm “the animism of the tohunga in a secular context.”⁶⁵ Yet, however “enigmatic” and “talismanic” they might be, some of the objects, not least Peter Robinson’s 1991 *Untitled* crate, covered in slogans such as “CASH IN THIS WEEK ONLY” and “WHYTES LTD TRUSTED DEALERS,” seem (at least on the surface) banal, crass and unlikely taonga or sources of transcendence.⁶⁶

In the 1990s, Cotton, Parekowhai, Reihana and Robinson all favoured found or appropriated objects and motifs, at the time construed as post-modern representations of representations, not containers or vessels carrying a stable content or embodying mauri or wairua. The works, and interpretive responses to them, were shaped by the parallel controversy around the work of Pākehā modernist painter, Gordon Walters, and his appropriation of the koru motif, and the subsequent, more blatant, appropriation of tiki and moko forms by Dick Frizzell, first shown in 1992.⁶⁷ Rangihiroa Panoho wrote: “it’s not the form that’s being threatened but the values that underpin it.”⁶⁸ That debate too came down to whether forms or symbols should be seen as signifiers opening up a limitless chain of associations, or whether they hold intrinsic meaning and value. Either way, the Young Guns effectively demonstrated the power of seemingly

simple signs or emblems. Re-appropriating and re-claiming became the order of the day—but of methods and styles as much as forms and symbols.

The painterly sophistication of Cotton’s early 1990s work stands in contrast to Robinson’s cack-handed scrawl and caked-on bitumen or Parekowhai’s glossy industrial finish, but has its own kind of wrongness. All-over shades of ochre lend a bogus gravitas, akin to what Edouard Manet described as the “soups and gravies” of European nineteenth-century academic painting⁶⁹—heavy varnishes applied by some painters of that era to imitate, in turn, the look of “old master” paintings, the colours of which were distorted by time and mistreatment.⁷⁰ In works such as *Whakapiri Atu Te Whenua* (1993, fig. 7), Cotton also reclaimed imagery from the figurative paintings of North Island East Coast wharehau, which, due to the influence of the introduction of European art to New Zealand, had been dismissed as folk art devoid of cultural authenticity.⁷¹



Figure 7. Shane Cotton, *Whakapiri Atu Te Whenua*, 1993. Oil on canvas, 1772 x 1608 mm. Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa.

Cotton’s early paintings are canny studies in complexities and fluctuations of value and meaning. Consider his persistent use of a scaffold or platform structure that registers as variously banal and uplifting. Sometimes this structure is evident in the composition of the painting itself, as in *Daze* (1994), where the surface is divided into multiple compartments

containing the different pieces of the puzzle, the fragments that produce allegory. In other cases, Cotton provides a more literal depiction, as in *Te Ao Hou* (1993, fig. 1), where a structure akin to builders' scaffolding ascends a monumental cowboy boot, or *Compressed view* (1994), which features an object that might be a flimsy trestle or a warped chair, upon which disparate items rest, including a miniature cowboy boot. Each of these structures can be at once merely a utilitarian, supporting apparatus—frame rather than focal point—and a mechanism for transforming and elevating, holding something aloft. In this latter respect they suggest the Māori concept of the atamira, a raised platform or stage, including those customarily used to support the body of the deceased at a tangihanga (funeral or mourning ceremony).⁷² The atamira effectively consecrates or sets apart a person who has died. It might have a roof for shelter, be slightly inclined, so as to keep the head uppermost, and also be used to display certain of their possessions or taonga, such as pounamu or korowai.⁷³ This ensemble is designed to help the wairua of the person take flight from the body, first hovering above it, to ensure that the tangihanga proceeds according to tikanga, and then wafting away on its journey to Te Rerenga Wairua, Hawaiki, the underworld or some other spiritual resting place.⁷⁴ The atamira, on a more general level, might be a stage for kōrero (speech), a means of recognising the value of something by literally elevating it, a threshold or space of transition from one realm to another.⁷⁵ For Cotton, the atamira structure symbolises loss and ritual,⁷⁶ performing shifts in value and meaning between the material or mundane and the metaphysical. The artist himself puts on contrasting performances, equally inclined to revel in the renegade Young Gun image, stomping (or riding his Harley-Davidson) through the wild west,⁷⁷ cowboy boots and all, as to reverently recount an ancestral story.⁷⁸

Flags are another recurring feature in Cotton's paintings, particularly those designed by Māori leaders such as Te Kooti Arikirangi te Turuki from the late 1860s, repurposing forms and signs from European flags—regarded, as Cotton describes, as “prized symbols of European mana.”⁷⁹ The Tūhoe prophet, Rua Kenana, in the 1890s and into the first decades of the twentieth century, likewise designed intriguing flags featuring motifs uplifted from European culture, as well as arguably this country's most original and beautiful work of architecture, Hīona (1907)—circular, loosely based on the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, and decorated with blue and yellow forms based on the clubs and diamonds of playing cards. Such forms were charged with meaning for Rua and his community at Maungapōhatu, and were familiar, but at the same time utterly confounding, and therefore threatening, to Pākehā authorities.

Rua combined fervent spiritual faith with an irreverent sense of humour. As the self-proclaimed Messiah, he declared the miraculous ability, for example, to walk on water. The story goes that when asked to perform the feat, he asked his followers if they believed in him, and when they said that they did, Rua simply stated that there was therefore no need to demonstrate it.⁸⁰ A similar mix of faith and comedy runs through the work of the Young Guns. Parekōwhai, in particular, might be seen as a trickster, like the demi-god Maui, who needles and provokes and moves freely between the ancient world of atua and a contemporary urban vibe. Joan Metge recounts Tarutaru Rankin's description of Maui as “a virile adolescent, mentally not just sexually,” and added: “When he got that jawbone, he was like a young Māori teenager with a Mark II Zephyr or a ten-speed bike—he had to show off.”⁸¹

Perhaps it is more challenging to redeem Peter Robinson's swastika works, now looked at askance even by the artist himself, consigned to a phase of his career when he “stupidly” revelled in shock tactics and his notoriety as a “bad boy” of the New Zealand art scene.⁸² When the paintings were first exhibited, Pākehā art writer Tessa Laird was provoked to accuse Robinson of giving “kudos to racist sentiments by brandishing a bogus Maori identity,” making

“juvenile” “one liners” that amounted to “nothing more than Robinson plumping for a role in Dumb and Dumber.”⁸³ The paintings alternate between conflicting slogans, “Maori have rights too” and “Pakeha have rights too”; between rough scrawl on creased card or paper and stark black and white on unstretched canvas; between the clockwise swastika and the anti-clockwise swastika; between Hindu or Buddhist well-being or peace and Nazi racism and violence. In truth, Robinson’s efficient formal language reflects the mutual relationship of figure and ground that Ilam lecturer Riduan Tomkins drilled into in his students.

Robinson has said that his role as artist is to be “a peculiar type of entertainer.”⁸⁴ He elaborates: “It’s about offering an intellectual puzzle for the viewer to unpick or unlock. The pleasure is in the process of solving the puzzle—or maybe it’s not even *solving* the puzzle, it’s playing with it.”⁸⁵ What about something as blunt as (*Untitled*) *Pākehā have rights too!* (1996), a work that perfectly reflects Michael Dunn’s characterisation of Robinson’s work as “the visual equivalent of slang or swearing”?⁸⁶ “[E]ven with the swastika works,” Robinson maintains, “there was still a puzzle or conundrum in there. The message was highly ambiguous, as to whose voice was behind the thing.”⁸⁷ In declaring his intention to be “intellectual,” Robinson here might be seen to give credence to the belief of a dominant art world audience, during the 1990s and beyond, in the conceptual basis of art as a game of representation and interpretation. Yet the bellicose texts, puncturing the myth of bicultural harmony in New Zealand, signal that the works are about, and ultimately generated, dissonance and conflict.

Critical Reception, Collective Expertise

For Anna-Marie White, the controversy of Contemporary Māori Art centres on that art’s alignment with, and appropriation by, Pākehā commentators,⁸⁸ who celebrated its perceived rupture with the technical and vitalist basis, and the “enigmatic” and “talismanic” ethos, of what at the time was deemed traditional Māori art (customary Māori art). It was the provocative, even sacrilegious, nature of Contemporary Māori Art that made it comfortable and familiar for sophisticated Pākehā, in keeping with global art currents, but with a handy Māori twist that made it, so to speak, marketably different.⁸⁹ Brett Graham observed in 1996 that “The gap between what is acceptable to people on the marae and what is deemed tasteful to the art establishment is becoming wider. This is largely because Māori artists are creating for another audience and being promoted by voices outside the culture.”⁹⁰ Pākehā critics and curators, according to this view, colonised Contemporary Māori Art.⁹¹

In the 1990s, when the term “post-modernism” held currency, the work of the Young Guns was susceptible to detailed and multiple “readings,” and considered devoid of any deeper, essential truth (“not even solving the puzzle,” to repeat Robinson’s phrase). For Leonard, Cotton’s work is about “intertextuality”: “we read texts through other texts” and “signifiers are only provisionally linked to their signifieds.”⁹² Cotton thereby deconstructs, fragments and disturbs, in contrast to the inherent unity of “traditional Māori art”:

... the traditional whare is a holistic integrated structure, linking cosmology and whakapapa; community and place; past, present, and future. It provides turangawaewae, a place to stand. It embodies and locates collective values to focus identity and provide a bulwark against threatening values: us and them. But rather than reassuring and integrating, Cotton’s new works are confusing and disorienting.⁹³

Leonard means that in a good way. And he was not alone in the 1990s, in New Zealand as much as elsewhere in the world, in applying an interpretive framework that reflected the “linguistic turn” of the post-modern moment, characterised by American writer Charles Altieri

as an “inordinate faith” in “meaning,” “interpretation” and “philosophy.”⁹⁴ Indeed, the work of numerous contemporary indigenous artists might be regarded as inviting readings that suggest an alignment between the fragmentary and multiple meanings of post-modernist allegory, and the hybrid, non-essentialist sense of cultural identity associated with post-colonialism.⁹⁵ There is nonetheless the potential for the work of such artists, including the Young Guns, to transcend the dominant discourse of their historical moment, rather than being circumscribed by what Roger Berger describes as the “textural imperialism” of Western post-modern theory.⁹⁶

A 2002 analysis by Justin Paton takes Parekowhai’s floral photographs (fig. 8) as memorials to the soldiers of the Māori Battalion who died in France and Flanders in World War One, then maintains that “the images won’t be backed into that interpretation,” and proceeds to run off in all directions.⁹⁷ “The harder you look at these silky bouquets,” Paton writes, “the more they bristle with generous intelligence.”⁹⁸ High prose, no doubt, though limited to the cognitive faculties of a mortal mind, rather than aspiring or ascending to the spiritual realm. The significance of the works might be that they have the potential to generate a reverential response, while equally being just photos of tacky, fake plastic flowers. But it takes more than an individual to invest such mundane materiality with a transcendent life force.



Figure 8. Michael Parekowhai, *Boulogne*, 2001. C-type digital print, 1550 x 1250 mm. Govett-Brewster Art Gallery. Photo: Bryan James. Image courtesy of the artist and Govett-Brewster Art Gallery.

The life or vitality of a work is likely to depend on the collective expertise of Māori viewers or critics, *tohunga* or *kaumātua*. Of the 1996 *Patua* exhibition in Wellington, White writes: “The *kōrero* of the art works, and the dialogue within the show, were . . . privileged insights only conveyed at certain times to particular viewers in particular situations.”⁹⁹ To explain how art obtains value for Māori, White has also repeatedly referred to “connoisseurship.”¹⁰⁰ She believes Māori art is most authoritatively evaluated by Māori, particularly experienced artists, experts or *whānau*, and regards senior figures within the Māori artists’ network *Ngā Puna Waihanga* (1973–1993), such as Sandy Adsett and Kura Te Waru Rewiri, as examples of such connoisseurs. Their knowledge and *mana* reveal, in works by Māori artists presented to them for appraisal (including those clothed in Western art conventions), shades of quality unseen or misconstrued by *Pākehā*. In roguishly appropriating the term “connoisseurship”—utterly foreign to the climate of post-modern pluralism and relativism, weighed down with associations of discrimination and elitism, “taste” and the “old masters,” and white male scholars—White is surely acting up and being something of a “Young Gun” herself, albeit one who maintains a vaguely conservative attachment to notions of material quality and craft. She also, however, returns the discussion to the acknowledgement and discernment of immaterial qualities in Māori art, the vitalist or animist basis of *te ao Māori* described by Manuka Henare.

Conclusion

It is not within the scope of this paper, or within its writer’s capability, to adjudicate on the extent to which the artworks under discussion possess, or have acquired, such qualities as *wairua* or *mana*. The objective is to draw attention to those works’ material ingredients, which, I suggest, are distinctive to Contemporary Māori Art of the 1990s, appearing at the time to be a rupture with both the material and spiritual dimensions of previous Māori art (customary and contemporary). Quality crafting and highly prized materials do go some way, according to Mead, in the recognition of something as *taonga*,¹⁰¹ while the artists under discussion here, it seems, lacked either the intent or the *mana* to get away with such audaciousness. On occasions when their work was presented to Māori, when they were “held ritually responsible for their work,”¹⁰² as Mead again put it, the work was liable to be found wanting. However, this may have had as much to do with *how* it was presented, the conditions under which it was seen, as the stuff itself. With time, variously kitsch and prosaic materials, industrial and inept techniques, have come to life and been invested with value and *mana*. And since the 1990s, the highly detailed readings of the art of the Young Guns by *Pākehā* writers have come to seem insufficient, because they rely on the concept of representation—an untethered chain of signifiers—rather than material embodiment and metaphysical presence. Ngahiraka Mason may have had this distinction in mind when she wrote, in a 2005 article on Reuben Paterson:

It is hard to resist a suggestion that few writings on contemporary Māori practice acknowledge and accept the range of Māori philosophical thinking and interpretation of the worlds in which they live and move. The New Zealand contemporary art world can be a particularly dogged place of resistance when it comes to understanding why Māori produce artworks that challenge interpretations in Western terms.¹⁰³

I cannot claim an insider’s understanding of Contemporary Māori Art; I am not White’s “connoisseur.” But I suggest that the material qualities in the work of the Young Guns, sometimes lost or underplayed in existing interpretations, are crucial to its ongoing capacity to kindle and enflame, and to conduct a “vital spark.”

¹ Jonathan Mane-Wheoki, in Paul Bushnell, “Arts Week: Young Māori Artists,” Radio New Zealand Collection, Ngā Taonga Sound and Vision, 30 September 1995.

² In this article, “Contemporary Māori Art” is capitalised in line with Anna-Marie White’s distinction between those artists from the mid-twentieth century on, who explicitly engaged with Western art conventions, and contemporary manifestations of customary Māori art. See Anna-Marie White, “Contemporary Taonga: The Art Works of Brett Graham” (PhD thesis, Victoria University of Wellington, 2020), 19.

³ See Robert Jahnke, “Korurangi: New Māori Art,” in *Korurangi: New Māori Art*, ed. Chris Szekely (Auckland: Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, 1996), 40–47. See Jonathan Mane-Wheoki, “Korurangi/Toihoukura: Brown Art in White Spaces,” *Art New Zealand*, no. 78 (Autumn 1996): 43–47.

⁴ Another notable figure associated with the Young Guns was Chris Heaphy (b. 1965, Kāi Tahu), who was part of the 1995 *Korurangi* and 2020–21 *Toi Tū Toi Ora* exhibitions discussed in this article, though not the *Purangiaho* exhibition of 2001.

⁵ To some extent this text also inevitably reflects the relatively generic conceptions of te ao Māori and Māori art prevalent in the 1990s, when specific iwi histories and differences were less often acknowledged, though such histories and differences will be made apparent where they are central to the meaning of particular art works.

⁶ Jahnke described the relationship between the artists in *Korurangi* and earlier generations of Māori artists as at times “tenuous” and indicative of such attitudes and attributes as “self-consciousness,” “unfamiliarity” and “contempt.” “Korurangi,” 42. See also Mane-Wheoki, “Korurangi/Toihoukura,” 43–47, and Hirini Moko Mead, “Māori Art Restructured, Reorganised, Re-Examined and Reclaimed,” *He Pukenga Kōrero* 2, no. 1 (Spring 1996): 4.

⁷ *Purangiaho: Seeing Clearly*, curated by Ngahiraka Mason, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, 15 September to 25 November 2001.

⁸ *Toi Tū Toi Ora*, curated by Nigel Borell, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, 5 December 2020 to 9 May 2021.

⁹ Mānuka Hēnare, “Tapu, Mana, Mauri, Hau, Wairua: A Māori Philosophy of Vitalism and Cosmos,” in *Indigenous Traditions and Ecology: The Interbeing of Cosmology and Community*, ed. John A. Grim (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001), 199.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 198.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 207.

¹² Hirini Moko Mead, *Tikanga Māori: Living by Māori Values* (Wellington: Huia, 2003), 53.

¹³ Mead, *Tikanga Māori*, 54.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Mead, *Tikanga Māori*, 55.

¹⁶ Paul Tapsell, “The Flight of Pareraututu: An Investigation of Taonga from a Tribal Perspective,” *Journal of the Polynesian Society* 106, no. 4 (1997): 327.

¹⁷ Mead, *Tikanga Māori*, 65.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 72.

¹⁹ See Amiria Henare, *Museums, Anthropology and Imperial Exchange* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 3.

²⁰ Regarding the former, see especially Jahnke, “Korurangi,” 40–47, and Mane-Wheoki, “Korurangi/Toihoukura,” 43–47. For the latter, see Robert Leonard, “Shane Cotton: Cultural Surrealist,” in *Shane Cotton* (Auckland: Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, 2004), accessed 19 January 2023, <https://robertleonard.org/shane-cotton-cultural-surrealist/>.

²¹ Robert Leonard, “Peter Robinson’s Strategic Plan,” *Art Asia Pacific*, no. 16 (1997), accessed 15 November 2022, <https://robertleonard.org/peter-robinsons-strategic-plan/>.

²² Jahnke, “Korurangi,” 40–47; Mane-Wheoki, “Korurangi/Toihoukura,” 43–47.

²³ Mead, *Tikanga Māori*, 43.

²⁴ Nigel Borell, *Toi Tū Toi Ora: Contemporary Māori Art* (Auckland: Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, 2022), 15.

²⁵ See Borell, ed., *Te Ātinga—25 Years of Contemporary Māori Art* (Wellington: Toi Māori Aotearoa—Māori Art New Zealand and Te Ātinga Contemporary Visual arts committee, 2013).

²⁶ Borell, *Toi Tū Toi Ora*, 15.

²⁷ Gregory Burke, “Bi-Polar: Divine comedy and a demure portrait of the artist strip searched,” in *Bi-Polar: Jacqueline Fraser, Peter Robinson* (Wellington: Creative New Zealand Toi Aotearoa, 2001): 8.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 7.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 8.

³⁰ See Anna-Marie White and Robert Leonard, “The Hand that Rocked the Cradle,” *Reading Room* 8 (2018): 31–53.

³¹ For an extended discussion of *Choice!*, see Peter Brunt, “Since ‘Choice!’: Exhibiting the New Māori Art,” in *On Display: New Essays in Cultural Studies*, ed. Anna Smith and Lydia Wevers (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2004), 215–242.

³² It is significant that more recent Crown-Iwi reconciliations have shifted from material concerns to recognition of the vitality or “personhood” of the environment, with the status of legal personhood granted to the Urewera region in 2014 and the Whanganui River or Te Awa Tupua in 2017. See Katherine Sanders, “‘Beyond Human Ownership’? Property, Power and Legal Personality for Nature in Aotearoa New Zealand,” *Journal of Environmental Law* 30, no. 2 (July 2018): 207–234.

³³ The work seems to parody what Leonard Bell has described as the “outsized” reputation of McCahon, and the way that his work “continues to cast shadows.” See his article, “Let Us Possess One World: McCahon, Abstraction and Transversal Art History,” *Journal of New Zealand Studies*, no. NS31 (December 2020): 128.

³⁴ Te Aka Māori Dictionary, accessed 15 November 2022, <https://maoridictionary.co.nz/search?idiom=&phrase=&proverb=&loan=&histLoanWords=&keyword=s=he>. See also Robert Leonard, “Michael Parekowhai: Against Purity,” *Art New Zealand*, no. 59 (Winter 1991): 52–54.

³⁵ For a recent discussion of biculturalism, in the context of the 1980s and today, see Martin Awa Clarke Langdon, “Since 1984: He Aha te Ahurea-rua?” in *Unfolding Kaitiakitanga: Shifting the Institutional Space Within Biculturalism*, ed. Abby Cunnane and Charlotte Huddleston (Auckland: St Paul St Publishing, 2016), 10–17.

³⁶ George Hubbard, in Kura Te Waru Rewiri, “Brownie Points: An Interview with George Hubbard,” in *Korurangi*, 38.

³⁷ The title was provided by Arnold Manaaki Wilson. See *Korurangi* exhibition file, E.H. McCormick Research Library, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki. *Korurangi* was the inaugural exhibition at the NEW Gallery, a large modern space in a building across the road from the main Auckland Art Gallery building.

³⁸ See White, “Contemporary Taonga,” 53.

³⁹ Mane-Wheoki, “Korurangi/Toihoukura,” 47.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ White, “Contemporary Taonga,” 55.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 66.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 48.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Brunt, “Since ‘Choice!’,” 235. The generational model was not without its own controversies, however. When it was implemented in the exhibition *Kohia Ko Taikākā Anake* at the National Art Gallery, some women artists, including Diane Prince and Emily Karaka, withdrew from the exhibition in protest at its patriarchal basis, and the preponderance of male kaumātua.

⁴⁸ For an account of Karaka’s work that acknowledges both its embeddedness in the political moment of the 1970s–90s and its ongoing embodiment of mauri, see Hana Pera Aoake, “No Hea Koe? No Taamaki Makaurau Au: On Whakapapa and Sovereignty in the Work of Emily Karaka,” *ArtNow* (6 July 2021), <https://artnow.nz/essays/no-hea-koe-no-taamaki-makaurau-au>.

⁴⁹ Gregory O’Brien, *Hotere: Out the Black Window: Ralph Hotere’s Work with New Zealand Poets* (Auckland: Godwit, 1997), 76.

⁵⁰ See White, “Contemporary Taonga,” 83.

⁵¹ See Ioana Gordon-Smith, “The politics of Inclusion,” in Charlotte Huddleston and Balamohan Shingade, *Ko Au te Au: I Am the Ocean: St Paul St Symposium 2018*, Auckland, 2018, 9, accessed 31 August 2020, https://stpaulst.aut.ac.nz/__data/assets/pdf_file/0009/262557/Ko-au-te-au-I-am-the-ocean.pdf.

⁵² Diane Prince, unpublished notes, in email conversation with Edward Hanfling, 14 July 2016. See also Edward Hanfling, “An Affect Alien in Aotearoa: Diane Prince and the Flag Controversy,” *Third Text* 35, no. 4 (2021): 431–452.

⁵³ See Rangihiroa Panoho, *Māori Art: History, Architecture, Landscape and Theory* (Auckland: Bateman, 2015), 92. See also Francis Pound, “Jacqueline Fraser and ‘Māoriness,’” in *Distance Looks Our Way: 10 Artists from New Zealand*, ed. Mary Barr (Wellington: The Trustees, Distance Looks Our Way Trust, 1992), 47–51.

⁵⁴ “Jacqueline Fraser: He Tohu/The New Zealand Room,” (Wellington: City Gallery Wellington, 1993), accessed 8 November 2022, <https://citygallery.org.nz/exhibitions/jacqueline-fraser-he-tohu-the-new-zealand-room/>.

⁵⁵ Deidre Brown, “The Whare on Exhibition,” in *On Display*, ed. Smith and Wevers, 67.

⁵⁶ Panoho, *Māori Art*, 90.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Mead, *Tikanga Māori*, 54.

⁵⁹ See Cassandra Barnett, “What You See You Don’t See: Lisa Reihana’s Digital Marae,” in *Other Views: Art History in (South) Africa and the Global South: Colloquium Proceedings*, South African Visual Arts Historians (SAVAH) under the aegis of the Comité International d’Histoire de l’Art, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, 12–15 January 2011, 25–30.

⁶⁰ See Ranginui J. Walker, “Marae: A Place to Stand,” in *Te Ao Hurihuri: Aspects of Māoritanga*, ed. Michael King (Auckland: Reed, 1992), 20–21.

⁶¹ Paul Tapsell, *The Art of Taonga* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2011), 10.

⁶² See Roger Blackley, *Galleries of Maoriland: Artists, Collectors and the Māori World, 1880–1910* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2018), 12, 17–18, 77–107; Zara Stanhope and Ngahiraka Mason, “Introduction: Gottfried Lindauer’s New Zealand,” in Ngahiraka Mason and Zara Stanhope, ed., *Gottfried Lindauer’s New Zealand: The Māori Portraits* (Auckland: Auckland University Press and Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, 2017), 15; Leonard Bell, “A Perspective from New Zealand: Lindauer’s Painting in the Settler Colonial World,” in Mason and Stanhope, *Gottfried Lindauer’s New Zealand*, 50; Conal McCarthy, “Theorising Lindauer’s Māori Portraits: Rethinking Images of Māori in Museums, Exhibitions, Ethnography and Art,” *RIHA Journal*, no. 0195 (20 July 2018), n.p.

⁶³ Aaron Lister, “Love Never Faileth: The Shape of a Practice,” in Kriselle Baker and Aaron Lister, ed., *Fiona Pardington: A Beautiful Hesitation* (Wellington and Auckland: Victoria University Press, Baker+Douglas, City Gallery Wellington and Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, 2016), 10.

⁶⁴ See Cassandra Barnett, “Wave, whip, rise, roar: The art of Mata Aho Collective,” *The Spinoff*, 20 June 2020, <https://thespinoff.co.nz/art/20-06-2020/wave-whip-rise-roar-the-art-of-mata-aho-collective>.

⁶⁵ David Eggleton, “Mauri and the Spirit of Art in Te Wai Pounamu,” *Circuit*, 18 March 2022, accessed 9 August 2022, <https://www.circuit.org.nz/writing-and-podcast/a-restoration-of-mauri>.

⁶⁶ It is worth noting a 2011 Waitangi Tribunal report that challenged the arbitrariness of the age of an object (50 years) worthy of being considered taonga by the Crown, as well as its failure to recognise “genuine taonga items such as flints and middens”—that is, waste materials that with time assume value for Māori. Waitangi Tribunal, *Ko Aotearoa Tēnei: A Report into Claims Concerning New Zealand Law and Policy Affecting Māori Culture and Identity, Wai 262, Te Taumata Tuatahi, Volume 2*, (Wellington: Legislation Direct, 2011), 506.

⁶⁷ See Shane Cotton, interviewed by Luke Strongman, “Something in the Pot: Luke Strongman talks to artist Shane Cotton,” *Midwest* 5 (1994): 21. See also Shane Cotton, interviewed by Chelsea Winstanley, “Shane Cotton on collaboration, intervention, and Māori art,” *Metro*, 22 June 2021, <https://www.metromag.co.nz/arts/shane-cotton-on-collaboration-intervention-and-maori-art>.

⁶⁸ Rangihiroa Panoho, “A Search for Authenticity,” 24, quoted in White, “Contemporary Taonga”, 101.

-
- ⁶⁹ See Clement Greenberg, interviewed by Russell Bingham, “Edmonton Interview,” *Edmonton Contemporary Artists’ Society Newsletter* 3, no. 2 & 4, no. 1, accessed 8 November 2022, <http://www.sharecom.ca/greenberg/interview.html>.
- ⁷⁰ See Rowan Frame, “The Problem with Bitumen,” *Materia: Journal of Technical Art History*, no. 2 (2022), accessed 1 November 2022, <https://issue-2.materiajournal.com/frame/>. See also Catarina I. Bothe, “Asphalt,” in *Artists’ Pigments: A Handbook of Their History and Characteristics*, ed. Barbara H. Berrie (London: National Gallery of Art in association with Archetype, 2007), 112. See also Richard A. Redgrave and Samuel Redgrave, *A Century of British Painters* (London: Phaidon, 1947), 59–61.
- ⁷¹ Shane Cotton, email correspondence with the author, 31 August 2023. See also Leonard, “Shane Cotton.”
- ⁷² See William McAloon, “Making History: The Paintings of Shane Cotton,” in *Shane Cotton*, ed. Linda Tyler (Dunedin: Hocken Library, 1998), 40.
- ⁷³ Courtney Leone Taumata Sullivan, “*Te Okiokinga Mutunga Kore*—The Eternal Rest: Investigating Māori Attitudes towards Death,” (MA thesis, University of Otago, Dunedin, 2012), 58.
- ⁷⁴ Mead, *Tikanga Māori*, 147–148.
- ⁷⁵ See Elisapeta Heta, “Unfolding Kaitiakitanga,” in *Unfolding Kaitiakitanga*, 19–21.
- ⁷⁶ Cotton, email correspondence with Edward Hanfling.
- ⁷⁷ See Anthony Byrt, *This Model World: Travels to the Edge of Contemporary Art*, Auckland, 2016, 54, 75. See also Shane Cotton, interviewed by Edward Hanfling, “Painting the Multiverse: Shane Cotton Discusses the Creation of Pictorial Worlds,” *Art New Zealand*, no. 154 (Winter 2015): 46, in which Cotton talks of his approach to the sensitive subject of mokomokai: “I just waded my way through it, and put them out there.”
- ⁷⁸ See Cotton, “Painting the Multiverse,” 45.
- ⁷⁹ Cotton, “Something in the Pot,” 19.
- ⁸⁰ Paul Moon, “Rua Kēnana and Iharaira,” 2021, accessed 13 September 2022, <https://www.cdamm.org/articles/iharaira>.
- ⁸¹ Tarutaru Rankin, quoted in Joan Metge, “Time and the Art of Māori Storytelling,” *New Zealand Studies* 8, no. 1 (March 1998): 8.
- ⁸² Peter Robinson, interviewed by Edward Hanfling, “Creating a Language: A Conversation with Peter Robinson,” *Art New Zealand*, no. 150 (Winter 2014): 55.
- ⁸³ Tessa Laird, “2 Cents: Cultural Hasty,” *The Physics Room*, 6 May 1997, <https://physicsroom.org.nz/archive/2cents/hasty.htm>.
- ⁸⁴ Robinson, “Creating a Language,” 55.
- ⁸⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁸⁶ Michael Dunn, *New Zealand Painting: A Concise History* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2003), 198.
- ⁸⁷ Robinson, “Creating a Language,” 55.
- ⁸⁸ White, “Contemporary Taonga,” 99–100.
- ⁸⁹ Leonard states that Cotton’s work “meshed with where contemporary art was at” in the 1990s. Leonard, “Shane Cotton.”
- ⁹⁰ Brett Graham, quoted in *Mataora: The Living Face: Contemporary Māori Art*, ed. Witi Ihimaera (Auckland: Bateman, 1996), 58.
- ⁹¹ Indeed, as recently as 2011, a Pākehā reviewer distinguished between the different generations of Māori artists in an exhibition by contrasting the “bolder, more adventurous,” “experimental” work of Cotton, Parekowhai and Robinson—their “constant innovation”—with the “reverential” approach of “older Māori artists,” who effect merely a “cosmetic makeover of ancestral forms” extending “no further than well worked seventh form folio pieces, decorative and pleasant but little else.” These casually dismissed senior figures include Sandy Adsett, Paratene Matchitt and Buck Nin. See Peter Dornauf, “Looking at Koru and Kowhaiwhai,” *Eyecontact*, 26 November 2022, <https://eyecontactmagazine.com/2011/11/examining-the-koru>.
- ⁹² Leonard, “Shane Cotton.”
- ⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ Charles Altieri, *The Particulars of Rapture: An Aesthetics of the Affects* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2003), 2–3.

⁹⁵ See Lisa Roberts Seppi, “Postmodern Allegorists: Contemporary Native American Painting,” in *Double Desire: Transculturation and Indigenous Contemporary Art*, ed. Ian McLean (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2014), 157–184.

⁹⁶ Roger Berger, “Book Review of *Past the Last Post*,” *Postmodern Culture* 2, no. 2 (January 1992), accessed 20 January 2023, pomoculture.org/2013/09/26/book-review-of-past-the-last-post/.

⁹⁷ Justin Paton, “Special Agent: Michael Parekowhai’s Generous Duplicity,” *Art New Zealand*, no. 103 (Winter 2002): 62.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 89.

⁹⁹ White, “Contemporary Taonga,” 83.

¹⁰⁰ White, “Good Māori Bad Māori: Connoisseurship and Contemporary Māori Art,” in *Unfolding Kaitiakitanga*, 88–107. See also her “Redux: The Classical in Contemporary New Zealand Art,” in *Sleight of Hand* (Nelson: The Suter Art Gallery Te Aratoi o Whakatū, 2010), 45–64.

¹⁰¹ Mead, “Tikanga Māori,” 185.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 72.

¹⁰³ Ngahiraka Mason, “Open to Interpretation: The Art of Reuben Paterson,” *Art New Zealand*, no. 116 (Spring 2005): 105.