



the creative dynamic in carving. Knowledge and understanding of tradition and development in early carving are essential to the younger generation of carvers; ignorance is the primary source of conservatism and restricted creative vision. No apprentice carver should be without a thorough education in the Maori cultural tradition: no carver should be regarded tohunga whakairo rakau who is without such a background and the capacity for transmitting both the reality of the art and its traditions — along with the will to inspire younger carvers in the creation of an evolving, living art.

However, despite failure of the truly creative process, despite failure in culture education, the fact remains that Maori carvers are highly skillful exponents of a distinctive art. All that is needed is creative freedom, strength of purpose and awareness of a uniquely flexible carving tradition, for the realisation of an inspired contemporary art.

As a personal view of meeting house carving, this essay would be without meaning if it was without observations on alternative carving to that under discussion. First then, Maori carving should reflect its times. Today, it should mirror a society on the threshold of the 21st century — a period of intense scientific development and social change. Consequently, the dynamic experience of necessary change in Classic Maori society should be drawn on; particularly those changes in the art of

carving that relate to the present and are identifiable.

Archaic or early western Polynesian Maori wood carving was essentially naturalistic, while Classic carving was highly stylised in form and decoration. However, common to both periods was a remarkable tradition in abstraction, observable, particularly, in waka hoe or canoe paddles. A relatively recent European preoccupation in art, the concept of abstraction was well understood by early Maori and is best defined as an art in which pure form predominates over surface decoration. Ap-

plied to meeting houses, abstraction would powerfully relate a past creative tradition to the present; the pure lines of abstract ancestral panels, for example, harmonising imaginatively with the best in contemporary assembly house design.

Finally, abstraction in modern Maori carving is not unknown. Several carvers-sculptors such as Arnold Wilson, Cliff Whiting, since the 1950's have successfully and creatively adopted the style. Hopefully, their work will extend to the decoration of meeting houses.

