

Is TE MAORI a recipe for respect?

na Michael Romanos

Sciascia enthusiastically says while Te Maori is shown at Wellington, Dunedin, Christchurch and Auckland over the next 12 months or so "the earth will rumble."

Sciascia who was the executive officer of the Te Maori management committee for four years (until 1985), said it is easier to love, respect, want and care for something or someone that you know about or have close and intimate knowledge of.

As the Te Maori exhibits were being unloaded in Wellington in preparation for their journey around New Zealand, I interviewed Piri Sciascia and Huirangi Waikerepuru, a tutor of Maori language in Wellington, on the value of Te Maori in relation to respect for the Maori people and their culture.

The environments of the two interviews were in stark contrast. Waikerepuru's took place in the dilapidated, cold and bare pre-fab building the Government had "kindly" endowed to the School of Languages in Wellington some ten years ago. Maybe this is a sign of the current official attitude to maori culture. What chance has Te Maori got as a cultural influence here? But the Sciascia interview was staged in Piri's well-appointed, relatively luxurious offices which are part of the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council premises.

In speaking of the Maori feeling of Te Maori and the exhibition's eminence in the United States where Te Maori lived for 18 months, Sciascia said Te Maori has restored to the Maori people their proper place next to their taonga. "Prior to Te Maori we had our taonga without the people to a large degree," he said.

"For years the taonga have been apart from the people. Te Maori has brought the people back together in a number of ways. The taonga have received all the ceremony, prayer, song, dance and korero. Talked in a way they have never been talked about before. We brought them our aroha and in return we have received their love and the power of our ancestors because we have got close to them again.

"The taonga have scanned the world and received respect amongst foreign people. I would measure that on what the people overseas have done and will do. As a result of Te Maori the level of professionalism that the Americans

Piri Sciascia, the director of MASPAC (Maori and South Pacific Arts Council) believes the ordinary Kiwi will treat his fellow brown-skinned New Zealander with more respect following the art exhibition: Te Maori.

