

Uenuku, the war-god of the Waikato tribes. According to tradition, the post is the dwelling place of Uenuku, the guardian spirit, and is said to have been brought to Aotearoa by the first Maori ancestors. The carving is an eminent example of the immense spiritualism of Maori art.

The exhibition's most aggressive figures and most challenging, defiant gazes belong to those carved on waka tupapaku. Maori mourners upended these chests in caves to scare off intruders.

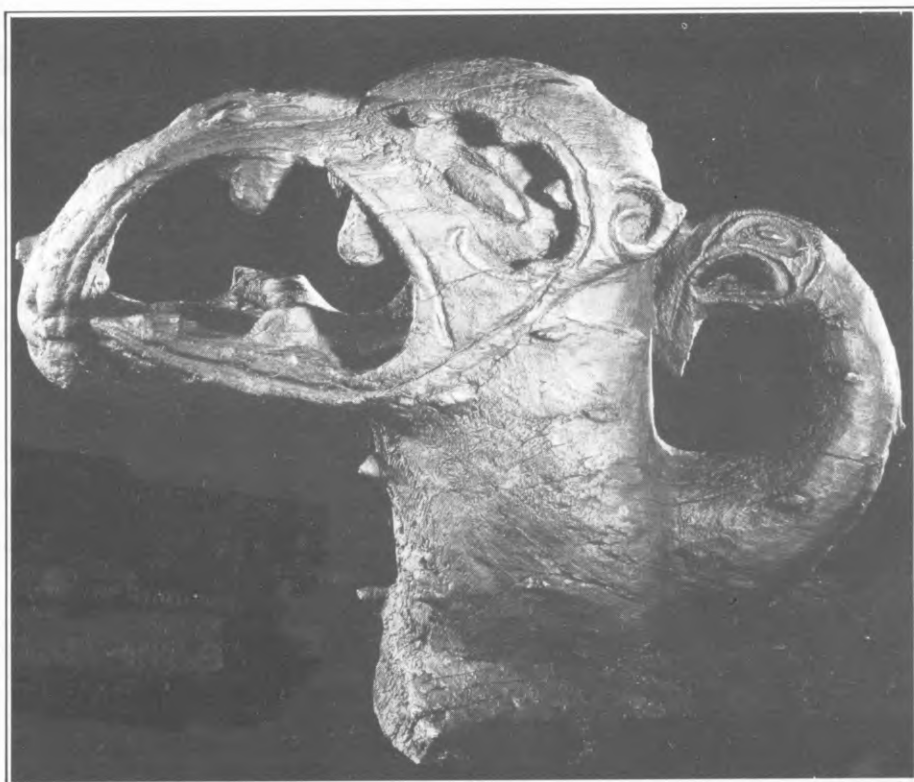
How valuable is Te Maori?

"Well, you cannot put a price on your heritage but the United States Government insured it for Aust\$40 million," said Professor Mead.

Professor Mead sees the exhibition as having two main results.

"Maori art, already recognised as one of the great forms of primitive art in the world, will be given greater international recognition. In turn, it will increase the awareness of New Zealanders to the true value of their national artistic heritage."

Te Maori was largely funded by Mobil Oil, New Zealand Government grants and the four art museums in the United States where it is exhibited. Mobil Oil contributed about three-quarters of a



million dollars and produced a magnificent limited edition 410mm by 590mm Te Maori calendar/portfolio depicting a

selection of the artifacts at a total cost of \$300,000.

The vital role of the waka is exemplified in the elaborately carved canoe prows and sterns as displayed in Te Maori.

Sidney Moko Mead, professor of Maori studies at Victoria University in Wellington said art serves two functions for the Maori.

"It provides a direct, immediate portrayal of the ancestors and it also functions as myth, depicting how people relate to their environment, other people and to the natural world. Even in areas where the Maori have forgotten the myths, art still has ancestral meaning – it is spirituality or the essence of the ancestors," said Professor Mead.

"Landscape and artifacts are one in Maori life. The association between people and art is closer than what is usual in contemporary western culture.

"The exhibition does not have all our best pieces. There are some which are so valuable that no one in his right mind would suggest they should go. But the exhibition is representative."

It is estimated 750,000 people visited Te Maori during the 20 months in the United States. Extensive television coverage like the ABC "Good Morning America" show has taken Te Maori into the homes of many millions of Americans.

Despite enormous interest from European and Australian art connections, Te Maori will not be exhibited elsewhere, at least in the near future.

Te Maori is not something that is ongoing. Maoridom were on tenterhooks with the exhibition in the United States and they regard the whole idea as a one-off situation.

