

Amokura o te Maori

The first international exhibition of contemporary maori weaving has opened in London and will then tour Europe for another two years. Entitled Amokura o te Maori, the exhibition consists of 15 items by eight artists.

The weavers are Nora Pikia of Kawhia, Te Aue Davis of Auckland, Puti Hineapounamu Rare of Auckland, Diggeress Te Kanawa of Oparure, Florrie Berghan of Ahipara, Riria Smith of Ahipara, Emily Schuster of Rotorua and Eddie Maxwell of Whakatane.

The exhibition was organised by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Aotearoa Moana-nui-a-Kiwa Weavers and the Council for Maori and South Pacific Arts. A variety of woven pieces are presented with two korowai, two piupiu and two wall hangings, a whariki and eight kete made from harakeke, pingao, kiekie, tikouka and muka.

Diggeress Te Kanawa, Aromea Te Maipi and Te Aue Davis were present at the September opening at the Commonwealth Institute in London and also for the two weeks of workshops that followed.

Raranga — maori weaving

Raranga evolved out of adapting the polynesian weaving of pandanus leaves to that of the harakeke, New Zealand flax. The similarity of the two leaves enabled the weaving of kete and whariki to be continued. When harakeke was scraped and treated it was found to contain a strong fibre for ropes and after pounding by stone, it made a fibre as soft and lustrous as silk.

Even the arrival of pakeha technology did not greatly affect the methods used by Maori weavers, although ideas for extra patterns were absorbed. New tools were tried and used where applicable.

However nothing has been able to improve on the traditional tools used in the preparation of the raw materials for raranga. The kuku shell is still best for stripping the muka from the harakeke. Wool was used for patterns in korowai but was eventually discarded because it lacked the durability and texture of muka. Dyes from tree bark have proved more durable and are still preferred to the brighter commercial alternatives available.

The weavers represented in this exhibition watched their mothers, grandmothers, aunts and elders working with traditional materials using age-old skills. From this observation they gained a love and respect for the materials used and the craft they chose to follow.

They learned to tend and carefully harvest the chosen materials. From the forest came kiekie (*freycinetia banksii*) and bark for dyes, the plains provided harakeke (*phormium tenax*) and tikouka (*cordyline australis*) in plenty

and along the sand dunes grew pingao (*desmoschoenus spiralis*). Before gathering the materials weavers paid their respects to Tane, God of the Forest, and this practice still continues today.

In recent years there has been a major revival in all craft areas and it has occurred in Maori weaving as well. Raranga fulfills a spiritual need in many people and, because of the desire to retain or regain this part of their cultural heritage, is once more gaining prominence throughout Aotearoa.

Te Aue Davis

Te Aue Davis was born at Waitomo and lived most of her life there. A member of the Ngati Maniapoto and Ngati Maru tribes she now lives in Auckland. Over recent years she has been heavily involved in the conservation of natural materials used for raranga as well as the repair and upkeep of old woven articles in museums.

She says "Because of this my weaving has taken a new direction. I'm concerned with the old patterns and techniques which are now not seen outside of a museum. They need to be brought back and retaught to our people."

Nora Pikia

Nora Pikia lives at Kawhia and is a member of Ngati Hikairo and Ngati Apakura tribes. She was brought up



surrounded by the old Maori traditions and is a tohunga (expert — with special skills) in both raranga and waiata (songs and chants).

She says "I have been weaving for as long as I can remember. I'm eighty three now and getting older so I must teach my crafts to the younger people". And she is doing just that.

