



enced when he shaped the thrusting figure of the tau-ihu. There is a vitality in that figure which would have found pride of place in any Viking shipyard.

There is spirit of daring too in the figure carved underneath the tau-ihu. The artist who took that lithe body and added to it the enlarged head and the tongue that curled out in harmony with the breaking waves was expressing a deep feeling for movement.

Movement found expression in many ways but perhaps nowhere as expressively as in the whale on the maihi or in the linked manaia figures of Taranaki.

SUBTLE SKILL

The Maori wood carver was just as skilled at expressing the subtlety of human relationships. The embracing male/female carvings cast a spell over the observer. Obviously we have intruded into a very intimate relationship. For a moment we look at that relationship and all action is suspended. The tension of it is almost enough to dismiss us. And when we do turn our backs, what will ensue? Not only is there a sense of intimacy and privacy but in the strength of that embrace there is an eternity.

If Maori wood carving is to continue to develop, the question is can it move out of its private domain or preserve into the world where artists rub shoulders? In other words without abandoning the excellence of the past, can Maori carvers start again to express the vigour of life in their carvings?

NEW MESSAGE

There is perhaps one great strength to work from. Ironically, the forms and surface decorations which are now familiar to the point of contempt provide a symbolism which unobtrusively can be adapted to carry a new message. For example, where fear is to be portrayed about some threat of modern society, the symbolism of the three fingers in the mouth readily carries some of that fear. The takarangi spiral and the wakarere pattern still impart a sense of confusion. The concerns of family life could still find expression in the male/female and child relationships.

This is not to say that there should not be other innovations. For instance movement into three dimensional space could be used to heighten the sense of the emotion being expressed. But innovation should not outstrip the public by such a margin that appreciation is lost. Neither should innovation be an excuse from the painstaking search for excellence.

Either Maori wood carving is dead and as a society we are prepared simply to relive the past, or we are moved by the events of our time and are sufficiently moved to give our attitudes expression. To go on copying the past is intellectually dishonest. It is no good carving this and that. Surely the issues of today are so vital to the Maori race and humanity in general that if the wood carver is to be an artist, he cannot turn his back any longer.

The sense of adventure captured in the tau-ihu

