



# “TE AO MARAMA” — A festival of Maori Art

by Paki Cherrington

(Auckland Festival — 1982)

For the first time ever the Auckland Branch of the New Zealand Maori Artists and Writers Society were invited to provide a programme for full participation in the Annual Auckland Festival. This festival in the past has often given the impression that Auckland does not have the largest Polynesian population in the world. 1982 will perhaps be a forerunner of a future multi-cultural festival with input not only from Maori artists but also from Samoan, Niuean, Tongan, Rarotongan and all the other races who give a richness and variety to our city.

“Te Ao Marama” opened on Sunday 28 February and continued until Thursday 8 April — the date of the final performance of “Get the Hell Home Boy” — and provided a series of events giving cultural expression to aspects of social change which in turn gave form to a vision, using the age old forms of debate, music, poetry, drama and art.

The art exhibition opened at Waiatarau with the following speakers — Haare Williams, Tainui Stephens, Pat Hohepa and our Kaumatua Eruera Stirling — then came the hangi and wine prepared by Robin Kora and his band of workers, James Paki, Robert and our Pakeha chef Paul Johnson.

The exhibition was notable for being multi-media and having 28 contributors whose work ranged from bone, ivory and greenstone pendants, bronze sculptures, carvings both traditional and modern using wood, hardboard and chipboard, pottery, ceramics in clay glazed with gum, to canvasses which gave no hint of the artists Maori origins.

It is important Maoridom is aware of the people who toil to keep Maori art vital, relevant, and growing. Here is the full list of exhibitors:- Ross Hemera, Toi Maihi, Buck Nin, Fred Graham, Robert Jahnke, Sandy Adsett, Selwyn Muru,

Arnold Wilson, Haare Williams, Ralph Hotere, Para Matchitt, Don Salt, Rei Hamon, John Hovell, Darcy Nicholas, Merania Paora, Ramai Hayward, Robin White, Moka Puru, Robyn Stewart, Alec Musha, plus the following who are exhibiting with the Maori artists and writers for the first time:- Henry Murray, Ruka Hudson, Jewelle Dansey, Wiki Jacobs, Gary Nicol, and the Te Hapua weavers.

There was much work with a strong political content from contemporary Maori artists already well known in the wider New Zealand art scene but the many lesser known names present show that Maori art has a vigorous and energetic base for the future.

#### Established artists

Whilst I enjoyed very much the work of established artists such as Ralph Hotere with his intense but subtle “Rangi is my Ancestor”, Buck Nin’s impressive triptych inspired by the Land March, Selwyn Muru’s powerful anti-Springbok canvasses, Para Matchitt’s elegance, John Walsh’s sympathetic but strong portraits, Alec Musha’s pottery, Darcy Nicholas’ hauntingly beautiful eyes, Rei Hamon’s pointillism and works by people such as Toi Maihi, Sandy Adsett, John Hovell, Haare Williams and Arnold Wilson, I was

more excited by the works of artists new to me.

I refer here to Don Salt with his bronze “frog” and “Virgin Predator”, Robyn Stewart with her “raku” fired pottery which uses an ancient method of oxidisation involving cow dung, Henry Murray with his bone and greenstone pendants, Robert Jahnke with his “Te Utu” of hardboard and chipboard which prompted an Auckland art critic to write “The paradox of the works theme, the artist’s ‘revenge’, was shocking,” and Ross Hemera’s striking “Kahukura of Huriawa,” a relief sculpture or is it a painted relief?

I was amazed that the same art critic who commented on “Te Utu” made no mention at all of Ross Hemera’s “Kahukura of Huriawa” which is a departure from the tradition of public murals established by Para Matchitt, Cliff Whiting and then Arnold Wilson.

#### Graphic approach

The style is very close to graphic media. Whereas, in the painted sections, the strong colours make the line, in the carved section, the lines have been made by the chisel and thus sculpture can be said to have enhanced the graphic statement. In a sense the work should not be seen simply as sculpture but rather as an extension of graphic line. Shapes have been made by a derivative of the traditional “Koru” yet the relief figure of Kahukura has been given life using a Western ‘design and composition’ technique.

The rainbow and the canoe prow are balanced according to Western compositional conventions. The aesthetics of the design comes from a mix of the two.

The two ‘fighting’ figures have a similarity to traditional Maori rock drawings yet they are also similar to the figure of Kahukura but more flowing. The ‘fighting’ figures are solid,