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‘Deidre Brown and Ngarino Ellis, with Jonathan Mane-Wheoki, Toi Te Mana: An Indigenous History of Māori Art’

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Deidre Brown and Ngarino Ellis with Jonathan Mane-Wheoki, *Toi Te Mana: An Indigenous History of Māori Art* (University of Chicago Press), 616 pp. Hardback. NZ\$99.99. ISBN: 978-0-2268-3962-2.

In recent years there have been several comprehensive volumes published on Pacific and Māori Art in Aotearoa (Lopesi 2023; Borell 2022; Chitham, Mahina-Tuai and Skinner 2019). Whilst each have made vital contributions to the fields of art history and art criticism none are as comprehensive or groundbreaking as *Toi Te Mana: An Indigenous History of Māori Art*. The book project, which started in 2012, is very timely in its publication as, at the time of writing, readings of the Treaty Principles Bill, which threatens the rights of Māori in Aotearoa, are heard, debated and protested in Aotearoa New Zealand. The authors explicitly state that the book is a response to the 2011 Waitangi Tribunal report *Ko Aotearoa Tēnei*, which recommended reforms to laws and policies affecting Māori culture and identity and ‘stressed that a greater understanding of Māori art- for Māori and non-Māori- is essential for the survival of Māori culture (p. ix). The book also fills a gap in art historical research as identified by one of the co-authors, the late Jonathan Mane-Wheoki, who at the 2008 CIHA conference in Melbourne stated that the definition of art needed to be broader, across cultures and time. The author’s state ‘While we draw on known art historical concepts, we understand these through a Māori lens in which concepts such as whakapapa [genealogy], whenua [land] and tikanga [tradition] are central’ (p. x).

The richly illustrated book covers the entire history of Māori art both in Aotearoa New Zealand and in the diaspora, including a discussion of Māori art in Europe, the United States of America, and Australia. Importantly it does not follow the standard linear approach of an exhaustive art history reflecting the fact that ‘for Māori, time is not a chronology’ (p. ix). The nonlinear approach lends itself to the accessibility of the book. At 616 pages it is not a book you can sit down and read in one go, rather it is a book that the reader will be able to dip into again and again, bringing fresh perspectives to our understanding of Māori art history. For example, you can read a two-page case study of an artist or art historian; a focused piece on a wharenuī or a faked taonga; or a detailed study of the arts of carving or body adornment. It is comprehensive, detailed, and clearly a labour of love that reflects the knowledge and relationships nurtured by the authors throughout the arts community to bring this content together.

The book’s three core themes of whenua, tikanga, and whakapapa are presented through the three baskets of knowledge, which the book uses as a means of dividing up the content, presenting it in three parts: Te Kete Tuātea, Te Kete Tuauri, and Te Kete Aronui. The three baskets of knowledge were brought back to earth by Tāne, son of Ranginui and Papatūānuku. For Māori these three baskets provide order in life and are necessary for the safety, care, and protection of mankind. The book is bilingual, privileging te reo Māori terminology in the main text and providing a rich glossary at the back of the book for those unfamiliar with te reo and who wish to learn more. This approach is important and embodies Mane-Wheoki’s call to broaden the way in which Māori art history is discussed for a national and international audience.

The book starts with the third basket, te kete tuātea, which contains ‘the continuum of Māori art that is from and within the customary world’ (p. 5). It starts with an introduction to the ‘Moana, migration and Māori’ (Chapter 1), breaking down what constitutes Māori art;

carving, textiles, architecture, rock art and body adornment and how they came to be. It reminds us that 'customary Māori art is not unchanging' (p. 9), that it is dynamic, and this sentiment is reflected in the entire content of the book. Whilst this section is very much about introducing the reader to the depth and breadth of Māori art and perhaps challenging the definition of what 'art' is, it is not historically static in its analysis. For example, within the discussion of textiles there is a visually stunning feature on 'the remaking of cloaks from museum collections' (p. 106). The feature considers museum collections as resources for contemporary makers who are inspired to experiment with older techniques to create new forms. The chapter on architecture is particularly reflective of the in-depth knowledge of the authors and the interconnectedness of Māori art as it provides not just discussion of different whare (buildings) and their construction but the individual elements such as kowhaiwhai patterns found not just in architecture but carving more broadly including wooden paddles.

The second basket forms the second part of the book, *te kete tuauri*, contains arts developed out of an engagement with Pākehā, and the consequential changing dynamics of Māori relationships with each other' (p. 5). The features in this section consider early relationships between Māori and Pākehā, discussing the tools and materials that were introduced and how these altered and were incorporated into Māori art practice. Focused pieces draw out relationships, taonga or materials such as Hone Heke's collar a feather garment which incorporates Māori and European textile techniques, currently held in the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge, reflects the relationship between Heke and the Crown. Acts of sovereignty and self-determination are discussed in a feature on Māori flags and banners which were adopted as early as 1834, whilst the ramifications of the removal of thousands of taonga into public and private collections is given a detailed analysis in the final chapter of part two.

The final section of the book is the first basket, *te kete aronui*, known as the 'basket of pursuit' contains 'the arts that humans seek' (p. 5). The authors state that this could be 'characterised as a survival kit equipped with the tikanga based arts knowledge needed to begin to repair the damage done by colonisation' (p. 356). This section provides a comprehensive history of key exhibitions from 1906 onwards as well as the development of contemporary Māori art and within that movements such as street art and the development of a ceramic practice in the 1980s which approached clay from a Māori perspective reflecting a deep relationship with the material. This section also includes a discussion of Māori art on the global stage with a focus on Europe and Australia. A section on Australia based Māori artist Keren Ruki, considers how Māori artists work when overseas. Ruki's practice reflects her experience living in Australia as demonstrated by her kahu kuri *Tuhono te Karangarua* made from harakeke from her marae and Australian dingo skins. The discussion of Māori art in Europe includes the important role of Ngāti Rānana (London Māori tribe) in the warming of Māori taonga in European museum collections and their relationship with the wharehau Hinemihi, located at a National Trust property in Surrey, whose whakairo rākau are due to shortly be repatriated to Aotearoa New Zealand.

The book, perhaps because of its size and because it covers an incredibly long and rich history, could be forgiven for being comprehensive and easily described as *the* Māori art history. However, the authors remind us that 'just as kete may have many strands that ultimately come together, so too do our stories. We respect the fact that these stories have come through the whakapapa and we encourage this multiplicity of readings' (p. 534). The

breadth and depth of the book reflect the commitment and dedication of the authors to this twelve-year project and means that it will be of interest to a wide range of audiences, such as students and researchers of art history, social and cultural history, and studies of Aotearoa New Zealand, as well as the public both Māori and non-Māori.

Prior to the conclusion is a poignant 'advice to Māori artists', written by Mane-Wheoki. It is an honest assessment of the opportunities that exist for Māori artists both nationally and internationally and outlines how to make the most of them to progress your career. Mane-Wheoki also cites a need for more people to write about Māori art. What this book is then, is a starting point and a call to action, a new way of presenting and thinking about Māori art that is written for Māori by Māori and actively encourages this work to continue. The opening line of the conclusion 'toitū te whenua, toitū te tikanga, ka ora ngā toi' (when we hold fast to our land and values, our art flourishes) (p. 534) is a reminder of the values that this art historical study is grounded in and that it could be regarded as a subtle form of protest in the current political climate. The book ends with a what next and one suggestion is the book be treated as a method statement for future Māori art histories, with iwi and hapū drawing on the material gathered for the Wai 262 claim to write their own art histories. A recommended read, this will no doubt change the way that all future authors write about Māori art.

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