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Te Maori: Maori Art from New Zealand Collection.*

Te Maori: Metropolitan Museum of Art,
New York, September 10, 1984-January 6, 1985

UNPRECEDENTED TE MAORI ART EXHIBIT

Te Maori: Maori Art from New Zealand Collection



Ngati Kahungunu tribe, Heretaunga. DOORWAY OF STOREHOUSE. Te Huringa I period (early 1800's). Wood.

An unprecedented exhibition of 174 of the most prized and remarkable works of traditional art, created by the Maori people of New Zealand, has begun a United States tour in New York.

The exhibition called Te Maori marks the first time the Maori people have allowed their art treasures to journey abroad from New Zealand.

The art works are now on view at The metropolitan Museum of Art in New York until January 6, 1985.

Organized by the American Federation of Arts, in association with the New Zealand government, the Maori people and New Zealand lending museums, Te Maori will make an important contribution toward increasing awareness within the United States of the rich artistic heritage of the Maori people, the Polynesian original settlers of New Zealand.

Venerated

Although a great deal of Maori art is in the care of the New Zealand museums, it remains the property of the Maori tribes, who venerate these objects as recipients of ancestral powers.

Te Maori will present major sculptures and carvings in wood, stone, jade, bone, ivory and shell, from periods of Maori art—dating from about 1000 to 1880.

These works have been drawn almost entirely from the collections of thirteen New Zealand museums, with one object on loan from the University Museum, University of Pennsylvania.

They have been selected by Douglas Newton, Evelyn A. J. Hall and John A. Friede, Chairman of the Department of Primitive Art at The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, in collaboration with Sidney Moko Mead, Professor of Maori, Victoria University of Wellington, and David R. Simmons, Assistant Director and Ethnologist, Auckland Institute and Museum.

Background

Voyagers arrived in New Zealand before the 11th century in a fleet of canoes, which set out from the legendary land of Hawaiki, which must have been situated in Eastern Polynesia: the island groups including Tahiti and the Cook Islands. These became the Maori people.

Their subsequent artistic heritage is considered to fall into two phases: the Archaic, from the earliest times in both the South and North Islands of New Zealand, lasting to about the 19th cen-

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Ngati Porou tribe, Tuparao. PENDANT. Te Tipunga period (1200-1500). Greenstone.



Te Whanua-a-Apanui tribe, probably Te Kaha. CLUB. Te Huringa I period (early 1800's). Whalebone.

tury in the South Island, and the Classic Maori from about 1500-1850 in the North Island. Recently scholars have suggested a sequence of four periods. These are Nga Kakano: The Seeds 900-1200; Te Tipunga: The Growth 1200-1500; Te Puawaitanga: The Flowering 1500-1800 (Classic Maori); and Te Huringa: The Turning 1800-present.

Though the Maori shared an ancient and common heritage of Polynesian culture as a whole, distinctive Maori art styles developed early.

Scope

The art of the early period is notable for stone and ivory ornaments, particularly openwork pendants, carved from whale-teeth, a number of which are included in the show.

Adze blades, powerful abstract sculptures in themselves, and decorated bone and stone weapons are also displayed.

The vital role of the canoe in the early culture is exemplified by a group of canoe prow and stern carvings dating from about 1400 to 1650.

The decoration develops from simple incised patterns, typical of the earliest Polynesian cultures, to fully carved images of mythical beings.

The largest part of the exhibition is drawn from the Classic Maori phase (c. 1500-1850), and primarily from the North

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Island, where the art of woodcarving on a large scale flourished.

There are works from over thirty Maori tribes, representing about fifty types of objects; among them are monumental architectural sculptures such as gateways, ridge-poles, houseposts and lintels; elaborate canoe carvings and equipment, including fishing implements; weapons; musical instruments; tools; mortuary carvings; and objects of personal adornment.

Carving

Maori carving is almost entirely centered around the human figure, with bird, lizard, and monster-like forms frequently incorporated in the compositions.

Broad faces with open mouths and protruding tongues (a Maori posture of defiance and challenge), along with curvilinear designs, representing facial tattoos, specific to each Maori tribe, are common features of these carvings.

Eyes are often inlaid with iridescent paua (abalone) shells, thought to invest the figures with all-encompassing vision, and hands are shown with only three fingers, signifying birth, life and death.

Since the Maori had no written language, carving served to record history and legend.

The exhibition includes an important set of elaborately carved entrance panel and barge-boards (altogether 10 feet high and

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was found in a beach-midden burial site of a young girl. It is a 15 piece necklace of sculptured whale teeth, thought to date back 800 years, and is similar to pendants in ivory, stone and wood from other parts of the Pacific.

Exhibit Locations

Following the New York presentation, Te Maori will be shown at The St. Louis Art Museum (February 22-May 26, 1985) and the M. H. de Young Memorial Museum of The Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco (July 6-December 1, 1985).

Te Maori has been made possible by a major grant from Mobil, and the exhibition is being supported by the National Endowment for the Arts, the National Endowment for the Humanities, an indemnity from the Federal Council on the Arts and Humanities, Air New Zealand, the National Patrons of the American Federation of Arts and The Dillon Fund.



Ngati Manawa tribe, Whirinaki River, Okarea. MASK FROM GATEWAY OF A PA. Te Huringa period (mid 1800's). Wood.

19 feet wide) from the 18th century pataka or storehouse named Te Potaka, which is thought to tell the myth of Tinirau and his pet whale. The boards show human and mythical figures hauling a whale ashore, a powerful image of abundance.

The pataka, called Te Potaka, stood at Maraenui on the mouth of the Motu River in 1780. It was being renovated in 1818 when reports of musket raids were received. The carvings were hidden in a sea cave, recovered in 1912 and then placed in the Auckland Museum.

Highlights:

A highlight of the show is a carved wooden post known as Uenuku, the war god of the Waikato tribes.

According to tradition, it is the dwelling place of the guardian spirit Uenuku and is said to have been brought to New Zealand by the first ancestors. This carving is an eminent example of the immense spiritual significance of Maori art.

In dimension, the objects range from the monumental, such as the 12 foot high Pukeroa Gateway (an elaborately carved entrance gateway to a PA or Maori Fort which incorporates the full-length figure of an ancestor), to tikis (jade pendants carved in human form and treasured as heirlooms).

The carved gateway was standing until 1845 on the foreshore of Lake Rotorua, a popular tourist area on New Zealand's North Island. The site—Pukeroa Pa—a major village of the Ngati Whakaue tribe, is today occupied by the Rotorua hospital. The gateway incorporates a realistic tattooed face mask and the original colors—white with a red moko (tattoo)—have been restored for the exhibition.

A very ancient item from Fortrose, in southern New Zealand,



Waikato Tribe, found at Lake Ngaroto, 1906. WAR GOD. Te Tipunga period (1200-1500). Wood.