



# MAORIMADE

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ROBERT JAHNKE

**I AM  
WHITE**

By the end of the 19th century the use of text had spread to lattice panels that lined the walls of the tribal house Porourangi at Waiomatatini in 1888 and featured in cryptic form among the rafters of Rongopai at Waituhi in 1887. In most cases, text was used to identify ancestors in keeping with a culture that privileged whakapapa (genealogy) as an essential aspect of being and belonging.<sup>1</sup> Text has maintained an indelible role in genealogical continuity validating its use in contemporary Māori art as customary practice. *Ko te Kai a te Rangatira he Korero – Talk is the Food of Chief's*. In this instance, words are the food of discourse.

I AM  
BLACK



trans-cultural interlocation... is used to capture the notion of change where influence from outside the culture results in either trans-customary or non-customary change to form... trans-customary modification results in a form that has visual empathy allowing for a visual relationship between the customary model and its trans-customary modification. However, trans-cultural modification can also result in non-customary form where no visual relationship exists between the customary model and its non-customary modification. For all intents and purposes, the final product appears to have been created by an artist / carver from outside the culture.<sup>2</sup> My recourse to trans-cultural interlocation is not driven by post-colonial empathy but by an acknowledgement of the non-customary inflections within tribal visual culture in the late nineteenth century when tribal houses accessioned images and text of the settler population to reflect a changing worldview. In the 1950s, a further trans-cultural interlocation resulted from a collusion of 'modernism' with customary form and pattern resulting in trans-customary art.<sup>3</sup> Trans-customary and non-customary practices coexist with customary practice, where 'traditional' models continue to have currency as valid forms of cultural expression for Māori.

# I AM COLOURBLIND

the termination of Creative New Zealand funding support for the Toi Iho ‘māori made’ mark passed without a ripple, despite the outcries of excessive pandering to Māori interests and exclusivity levelled at Māori during the development and launching of the mark.<sup>4</sup> The Toi Iho ‘māori made mark’, launched in 2002, emerged as a badge of identity and quality that privileged work created by Māori over work created by non-Māori.<sup>5</sup> It now remains for a Māori non-government organisation to take up the mantle and ensure that toi iho continues as a brand of identity and quality. Ironically, any Māori organisation that accepts this responsibility will need Creative New Zealand funding to make this a reality. *I am māori made* not only recalls the toi iho incident, but also calls into question the ethnic labelling of art and essentialism. The Toi Iho Kaitiaki Trust (TIKT) has been established to facilitate the transfer of the Toi Iho mark and all associated intellectual property rights (IP) from Creative New Zealand on 30 June 2010. The future of the *Maori Made* Mark appears secure.

I AM  
MAORIMADE

the question that presents itself with respect to my practice as an artist, and its non-customary nature, is whether or not the work is Māori art? For many such a proposition is an essentialist position.<sup>6</sup> As argued previously I would contend that I am neither hybrid (at least not in the ideological sense of the term) nor diaspora. Rather my whakapapa (genealogy) anchors me firmly to this place or more specifically to an East Coast village known as Waipiro Bay... my recourse to a Māori identity is a construction that is reflectively and experientially conditioned by the context of my upbringing within a rural community within Aotearoa / New Zealand. It is critical to remember that, '[a]boriginal history cannot be equated with diasporic history'.<sup>7</sup> Consequently, my position as an [artist] naturally privileges aboriginal history over diasporic history, and invariably, colonial history is inseparable from aboriginal history in Aotearoa / New Zealand.<sup>8</sup> Consequently, the work exhibited in *Māori Made* and previously in *Bed of Roses* navigates contemporary issues relevant to Māori identity, sovereignty and customary rights. Although the works may be viewed as non-customary in a perceptual sense, they are Māori-centric in terms of content, and have been created by an artist who has the right to self-identification as Māori. From a fundamentalist position the non-customary nature of the work would certainly appear incongruous, if not sacrilegious as ethnic production. However ethnic capture of non-Māori imagery is endemic in the latter part of the nineteenth century as menageries of foreign animals paraded on the barge boards of a tribal house on the East Coast and painted images of pot planted trees graced interior house panels.<sup>9</sup>

I AM  
KIWI



while wanga is a non-existent Māori word. Michael Laws, the Mayor of Wanganui City led an opposition to local Māori, which bordered on hysteria, exemplifies a Pākehā backlash toward Māori claims for respect for their taonga (treasured possessions), including the Māori language. Laws, is not only an advocate of cultural insensitivity, but is also infamous for introducing a law banning the wearing of gang patches in the city of Whanganui. His discriminatory 'laws' are recalled in the text work entitled *Mayoral decree*. For Laws, and his supporters, it is irrelevant that wanga does not exist as a Māori word and that Māori Language has been one of the official languages of New Zealand since 1987. Land and Information Minister Maurice Williamson decreed in 2009 'that both spellings would be official and residents could choose to use the controversial *h*... All Crown Agencies will be required to use the Whanganui in signage, publications and other official documents. But the Wanganui District Council will remain *h*-less'.<sup>10</sup>

I AM  
A LAW UNTO MYSELF

unstable and the text indeterminate. *I am a quantum native* laments the imposition of quantum measures of 'native' or 'indian' over self-identification pertinent for Māori in Aotearoa New Zealand. Consequently, the exhibition is not so much about identity, as it is about the instability of identity construction and cultural mores that inform notions of affiliation; personal, social or cultural.

# IAM

## AQUANTUMNATIVE

*I am a strategic essentialist* acknowledges Indian theorist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's coining of the term 'strategic essentialism', which 'is about the need to accept temporarily an "essentialist" position in order to be able to act.'<sup>11</sup> In 2002, Spivak, cautioned Māori, 'to avoid donning the essentialist yoke since cultural fossilisation engenders cultural stagnation and that any perpetuation of a traditional mindset is a sign of an incapacity to translate customary cultural values and beliefs into relevant contemporary codes of practice. Previously, however, Spivak signalled her support for 'strategic essentialism'. Her reassessment of essentialism should not be misconstrued as a contradiction of her earlier position, since Spivak views 'strategic essentialism' as a strategy that one must adopt in order to critique anything, not as a description of the way things are.'<sup>12</sup>

**I AM  
A STRATEGIC ESSENTIALIST**

Colin McCahon's *I AM* text in *Victory over Death* (1970) that acts as the referent. In this respect, *I am māori made* proffers a post-modern reappraisal of cultural assumptions and 'truths' both critically and complicitly. It is, concurrently, a call to identify, and a reaction against democratic angst, rendered contradictory by the constructed nature of the conjoined 'māori made'. Further contradiction is evident in the constructed word 'māori' that homogenises the discrete indigenous polities of whānau (extended family), hapū (sub-tribe) and iwi (tribe) as a slogan for essentialist solidarity. In a final irony, the branded graphic slogan is translated in paint on metal as mimicry of pristine 'authenticity' of the painting genre. *I am a Postmodern disciple* toys with idea that a post-modern reading is possible, beyond the specificity of the author's intention, as the 'death of the author' renders the signifier unstable and the text indeterminate.

**I AM**  
**POSTMODERNDISCIPLE**

LIST OF WORKS

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I

*Some of my best friends are coloured*  
2010, lacquer on stainless steel, 4 @ 1 × 1 m

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II

*Mark of authenticity*  
2010, lacquer on stainless steel, 1 × 1 m

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III

*A brash statement*  
2010, lacquer on stainless steel, 1 × 1 m

IV

*A Mayoral decree*  
2010, lacquer on stainless steel, 1 × 1 m

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V

*Only in the USA*  
2010, lacquer on stainless steel, 1 × 1 m

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VI

*Spivakian speak*  
2010, lacquer on stainless steel, 1 × 1 m

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VII

*Like lambs to the slaughter*  
2010, lacquer on stainless steel, 1 × 1 m

## ENDNOTES

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- [1] Text also functioned a form of welcome and preached the goodwill of the new God.
- [2] JAHNKE. (2006). pp. 24–5.
- [3] Skinner has coined the term ‘Māori Modernism’ to describe this phase. SKINNER, D. (2008). *The carver and the artist: Māori art in the twentieth century*. Auckland: Auckland University Press.
- [4] In December 2009 a group of supporters of Toi Iho met with the Arts Council to discuss the possibility of transferring the administration and management of the ‘māori made’ trade mark to an external Māori Agency independent of Government.
- [5] While the Australian Aboriginal mark of authenticity was based on indigenous descent, the toi iho™ ‘māori made mark’ was awarded on the basis of descent (authenticity) and quality.
- [6] The sterility of political correctness hangs about Korurangi – New Māori Art... It is an impotence inherent in the misconception that art can be exclusively Māori in contemporary New Zealand, delivered here in a show that lacks collective energy and spirit in spite of the impressive credentials of its artists... Such racial arguments are more in keeping with Boer apartheid and facism, and there should be no need to debunk them in modern New Zealand... The concept of Māori art in New Zealand is proven specious by this very exhibition, by its failure to show any coherent theme other than the pervasive presence of Eurocentric art history and theory’. STEWART, K. ‘*Cultural Arpartheid create ghetto*’. Sunday Star Times. 15 October 1995. ‘[The] ‘essentialist’ approaches to... race-specific art have theoretical pitfalls and political dangers. Theoretically, they disregard the fact that artistic skill is culturally, not biologically acquired... Māori are buying into the biologicistic fallacy and thereby reinforcing the very kind of stereotyped thinking of which they are usually victims’. BEATSON P D. (1994). *Art in Aotearoa, New Zealand*. Palmerston North: Sociology Department, Massey University. Pp. 70–1.
- [7] Jan Jagodzinski, ‘*Thinking Through / Difference / in Art Education Contexts: Working the Third Space and Beyond*’ in DOUG BOUGHTON and RACHAEL MASON, *Beyond Multicultural Art Education: International Perspective*, Waxman Munster: New York. 1999. p. 315.
- [8] [www.victoria.ac.nz/adamartgal/artforums/2001/robert-jahnke.html](http://www.victoria.ac.nz/adamartgal/artforums/2001/robert-jahnke.html)
- [9] Lions, wolves and a monkey appeared on the bargeboard of the tribal house Rongomaianiwaniwa in Tikitiki in the 1890s and painted potted plants adorned the house panels of Rongopai at Waituhi in 1887. Both houses are located on the East Coast of the North Island of New Zealand.
- [10] ‘Land and Information Minister Maurice Williamson said yesterday that both spellings would be official and residents could choose to use the controversial ‘h’... All Crown Agencies will be required to use the Whanganui in signage, publications and other official documents. But the Whanganui District Council will remain h-less’. The Dominion Post. Saturday, December 19. 2009. p. A2.
- [11] [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gayatri\\_Chakravorty\\_Spivak](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gayatri_Chakravorty_Spivak) (Retrieved 20 September 2009).
- [12] [www.victoria.ac.nz/adamartgal/artforums/2001/robert-jahnke.html](http://www.victoria.ac.nz/adamartgal/artforums/2001/robert-jahnke.html)

MAORIMADE

Robert Jahnke

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PAULNACHE is one of Australasia's foremost dealer galleries, established in 2004, specialising in contemporary New Zealand painting and contemporary Māori art while showcasing a diverse range of works by leading national and international artists. The opening of *MAORIMADE* coincides with Matariki, the star cluster that heralds the start of the Aotearoa Pacific New Year, which is important to Māori and other cultures around the world. Professor Robert Jahnke is of Te Whanau a Rakairoa, Te Whanau a Iritekura, Ngai Taharora, Ngati Porou descent. PAULNACHE has represented the artist since 2006.



ARTS COUNCIL OF NEW ZEALAND TOI AOTEAROA



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