

Theorising Lindauer's Māori Portraits: Rethinking Images of Māori in Museums, Exhibitions, Ethnography and Art

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Abstract

This paper surveys 'representations' of Māori in connection with museums and international exhibitions from 1873-1925, in particular through works of art by painters such as Lindauer and *taonga* (treasures) made by Māori people themselves. It questions the postmodern analysis of objects and public display in terms of representation, along with the politics of identity that go with it, arguing instead that using a framework of visual culture, actor-network theory and indigenous agency illuminates these objects in a different, and altogether more complex way. In particular it draws on historical Māori accounts of their critical but enthusiastic engagement with western cultures of collection and display, and explores how this evidence might underpin new methods of analysis both in the study of colonial art and its histories and contemporary museum practice.

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Introduction: Opening Up the Art Gallery to 'Other' Lindauers

[1] Gottfried Lindauer's portrait paintings have recently been shown in different contexts, with major exhibitions and catalogues in Germany and Aotearoa New Zealand.¹ Therefore, I begin this chapter with a reflection on three different personal experiences of Lindauer. First, the splendid exhibition in Berlin which I saw in February 2015. Here the paintings were displayed as works of art in an art gallery. The second was the visit I made the week before to Woodville, the small northern Wairarapa town where the artist lived and worked for much of his life. In the main street we find

¹ Ngahiraka Mason and Zara Stanhope eds., *Gottfried Lindauer's New Zealand: The Māori Portraits*, Auckland 2017.

Lindauer enshrined as a tourist icon, with a bust in front of a replica of his studio which stood nearby (fig. 1). Third was my visit to the Whanganui Regional Museum, on the other side of the north island of New Zealand, where a series of Lindauer portraits hangs in a special room alongside *waka* (canoes) and ancestral carvings. In this case, the paintings are more than portraits — they are *taonga* or treasures, like the other objects they are displayed among, which are imbued with the *mana* (reputation, power, authority) of the sitter, and owned by the descendants, who work with the museum to look after them.



1 The Lindauer studio and portrait bust, Woodville, New Zealand (Author's photograph, 2015)

[2] So, it seems to me there are at least three Lindauers, and probably many more, each constructed through the ways in which the artist's work was collected, exhibited and thought about. The Whakamiharo Lindauer Online website² at the Auckland Art Gallery gives yet another impression of the portraits from the point of view of his sitters and their descendants, which determines the way the works are managed and cared for in line with *tikanga Māori* (Māori cultural practices). In this essay I attempt to join up these different Lindauers, and more particularly to question how the latter views, which are embedded in contexts outside the institutions of art gallery/art history, can inform the first. That is to say, how can we move beyond *representation* as a framework for the exhibition of art, and rethink these images within a wider cultural landscape that includes museums, exhibitions and ethnography, but also Māori ways of knowing and being?

[3] In theorising Lindauer's Māori portraits, this essay surveys 'representations' of Māori in connection with museums and international exhibitions in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, in particular

² Auckland Art Gallery, *Whakamiharo. Lindauer online*, <http://www.lindaueronline.co.nz/> (accessed 08 October 2017).

through pictures of Māori by Pākehā (European) painters such as Lindauer and *taonga* (treasures) made by Māori people themselves. It questions the postmodern analysis of objects and public display which tends to be framed by theories of representation, and the postcolonial critique of museum display as a tool of empire, along with the politics of identity that go with it. Rather, using theories of visual culture, Latourian sociology, and Gell's anthropology of art, which foreground the agency of indigenous people and things, I attempt to consider these objects in a different and more relational way. In particular I draw on historical Māori accounts of their critical but enthusiastic engagement with western cultures of collection and display, and explore how this evidence might underpin new methods of analysis for colonial art as integral to colonial cultures more broadly.

Colonial Cultures of Display: Exhibitions, Museums, Art

[4] There are many examples of international exhibitions which displayed native and tribal people in 'human zoos' as inferior colonized subjects of empire.³ At the 1886 Colonial and Indian Exhibition in London, the Māori carvings and portraits of Māori by Lindauer, collected by Walter Buller, have been interpreted as representations of a 'dying race'. The design for the New Zealand court aimed to 'picture the development of New Zealand's civilization by contrasting with the primitive condition of the Māori'.⁴ While New Zealand courts at these exhibitions in the mid- and late-nineteenth century are certainly not immune to evolutionary theories, or scientific racism, there are also surprising examples of Māori involvement in public display as exhibitors and visitors.⁵ Indigenous agency in exhibiting their culture is evident, if its traces are examined closely. This is more likely within New Zealand of course, for example Māori exhibitors at the New Zealand Exhibition in Dunedin in 1865, but there are examples overseas as well, such as at the New Zealand courts in the Sydney International Exhibition in 1879 and the Melbourne International Exhibition in 1880.⁶

[5] For example, it can be argued that the contents of the New Zealand court at the Centennial International Exhibition in Philadelphia in 1876 reflected the values of Māori exhibitors. As part of the Colonial Museum

³ Benedict Burton, "Rituals of Representation: Ethnic Stereotypes and Colonized People at World's Fairs", in: *Fair Representations: World's Fairs and the Modern World*, eds. Robert Rydell and Nancy Gwinn, Amsterdam 1994, 28-61.

⁴ Conal McCarthy, *Exhibiting Māori: A History of Colonial Cultures of Display*, Oxford and New York 2007, 41.

⁵ Philipp Schorch, Arapata Hakiwai and Conal McCarthy, "Globalizing Māori Museology: Reconceptualising Engagement, Knowledge and Virtuality through Mana Taonga", in: *Museum Anthropology* 39 (2016), no. 1, 38-69.

⁶ McCarthy, *Exhibiting Māori*, 33-50.

contribution, Resident Magistrate RW Woon from Whanganui organized a collection of “garments, ornaments, weapons etc.” on behalf of several prominent chiefs. Woon’s description of these objects, obviously obtained from the owners themselves, reflected a Māori value system, based on *tikanga* Māori (Māori cultural practices), in contrast to the “instructive ethnological series” arranged by the first director of the Colonial Museum, James Hector, in an upright show case.⁷ The tribal heirlooms were referred to in labels and catalogue by name, and their connection to *whakapapa* (genealogy) and historical events was intimately associated with the *mana* of the individual donor.⁸

[6] Exhibition design was as much the result of practical opportunism as policy or politics. In contrast to theories of social control popular in recent scholarly literature, the chaotic jumble of sights, sounds and experiences at these events could be both exhilarating and liberating for visitors and those exhibited, and suggests a contested colonial encounter rather than the straight-forward communication of the official messages of exhibits.⁹ Māori culture was displayed through several different paradigms – being seen as souvenirs, commodities, specimens, curios – which sometimes enabled Māori input or even direct participation. The contingent nature of these categories shows that colonial cultures of display were susceptible to intervention, and, as the archive suggests, Māori agency was a key, if often hidden, part of this enterprise.¹⁰

[7] The best example of Māori agency at work is the New Zealand International Exhibition in Christchurch 1906-1907. Despite the appearance of an ethnographic fantasy about Māori constructed by *Pākehā* (European New Zealanders), evidence from archival sources and Māori language publications reveals that the Māori who built the model *pā* (fortified village), lived and performed in the exhibition, and visited it, were very assertive, and had their own interpretation of the event, and their own motivations for presenting their culture and heritage to the world.¹¹ An example was the carver Hori Pukehika (fig. 2), who not only took a leading hand in carving the palisades and buildings in the *pā*, which

⁷ McCarthy, *Exhibiting Māori*, 35. For a comprehensive analysis of *tikanga* Māori see: Hirini Moko Mead, *Tikanga Māori: Living by Māori Values*, Wellington 2003.

⁸ McCarthy, *Exhibiting Māori*, 35-36.

⁹ Meg Armstrong, “‘A Jumble of Foreignness’: The Sublime Musayums of Nineteenth Century Fairs and Expositions”, in: *Cultural Critique* 23 (1993), 199-250.

¹⁰ Conal McCarthy, “Objects of Empire? Displaying Māori at International Exhibitions, 1873-1924”, in: *Journal of New Zealand Literature* 23 (2005), no. 1: Special Issue *From Maning to Mansfield: Writing New Zealand 1829-1920*, 52-70.

¹¹ Conal McCarthy, “‘Our Works of Ancient Times’: History, Colonisation and Agency at the 1906-7 New Zealand International Exhibition”, in: *Museum History Journal* 2 (2009), no. 2, 119-142.

was actually at odds with the vision of the so-called expert Augustus Hamilton (director of the Colonial Museum in Wellington since 1903), but actually ran the *pā* for much of the time when Hamilton and other Pākehā ‘supervisors’ were not present. He declared in a speech that he had come to the exhibition “so that the works of our ancestors may be revived”.¹²



2 *Hori Pukehika working on a wood carving at the Christchurch Pā., 1906.* James Cowan Collection, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand International Exhibition in Christchurch of 1906-1907, Ref: 1/2-005558-F (© Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington)

Another carver, Tene Waitere, declared that: “Our works of ancient times have been brought here so that the peoples of the earth may know that the Maori is still living”.¹³ Those Māori, ostensibly ‘on display’, who staffed this living village were certainly not passive objects of Pākehā fantasy but transformed it from an ethnographic exhibit to a showcase of Māori cultural vitality and survival.¹⁴ But undoubtedly the most remarkable example of Māori involvement in exhibitions was the well-known guide Maggie Papakura from Rotorua, who, after her experience in Christchurch, mounted and toured an exhibit of her own complete with performers in costume which visited Melbourne, Sydney and London before World War I.¹⁵

¹² McCarthy, “‘Our Works of Ancient Times’”, 141.

¹³ McCarthy, “‘Our Works of Ancient Times’”, 141.

¹⁴ Amiria Henare, *Museums, Anthropology and Imperial Exchange*, Cambridge 2005, 225-226.

¹⁵ Paul Diamond, *Makereti: Taking Māori to the World*, Auckland 2007.

[8] As with exhibitions, so with museums. The evidence shows that, while museums in colonial New Zealand were largely controlled by Pākehā, Māori were engaged with collecting and other museological practices from the late nineteenth century. There are several examples of Māori people and objects circulating around the Dominion (earlier Colonial) Museum in Wellington, for example. In the 1900s director Augustus Hamilton formed a national collection of 'Māori art' with the input of Māori politician James Carroll and the people of Pāpāwai *marae* (community center),¹⁶ which shows how Māori efforts to preserve tribal tradition received state support. In the 1920s and 1930s a remarkable Māori-led community/government research project grew out of this collaboration. The Board of Maori Ethnological Research was aimed at the collecting and recording of manuscripts, traditions, songs, and performing arts etc. by Māori anthropologist Peter Buck (Te Rangihīroa), politician Āpirana Ngata and others. Another related project was the School of Maori Arts and Crafts in Rotorua which fostered the preservation and revival of visual arts. This was not salvage ethnography, as the material collected was meant to foster the maintenance and development of customary culture and underpin contemporary tribal development including farming, housing, health, welfare and so on.¹⁷

[9] In figure 3, we see the Māori carver Thomas Heberley, who worked at the Dominion Museum from 1926-1936, overseeing the construction of the *pātaka* (food store house) in the Maori Hall. The Māori Hall was a feature exhibit situated on the ground floor of a new building which opened in 1936. It featured a restored meeting house *Te Hau ki Tūranga* at its center, itself the result of an intervention by Sir Āpirana Ngata, lawyer, Member of Parliament and scholar of Māori arts and culture.

¹⁶ Conal McCarthy, "Before 'Te Māori': A Revolution Deconstructed", in: *Museum Revolutions: How Museums Change and Are Changed*, eds. Simon J. Knell, Sheila Watson and Suzanne MacLeod, London and New York 2007, 117-133.

¹⁷ Damian Skinner, *The Carver and the Artist: Māori Art in the Twentieth Century*, Auckland 2008, and Conal McCarthy, "'Empirical Anthropologists Advocating Cultural Adjustments': The Anthropological Governance of Āpirana Ngata and the Native Affairs Department", in: *History and Anthropology* 25 (2014), no. 2, 280-295.



3 *Thomas Heberly at work in the Māori Hall of the Dominion Museum, 1935.*
(Courtesy Museum of New Zealand, Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington)

The Māori Hall effectively celebrated Ngata's vision of the revival of customary arts and crafts in communities around the country.¹⁸ But it was not just these people who acted on the objects – clearly the *taonga* themselves exerted a powerful influence on Māori visitors.¹⁹ Once again we see that objects, ideas and people move around in constant activity, back and forth, as part of networks of social and material agency. This suggests that we need a new theoretical framework to broaden our analysis of visual culture as part of wider social relations, a task which I attempt to sketch out in this paper.

[10] This brings us to the next case study: Māori art itself. It should be pointed out that there is no word for 'art' in *te reo Māori* (the Māori language), even though Māori people have long adopted this practice and developed a distinctive style of modern and contemporary Māori art.²⁰ How then can we conceive of customary Māori visual culture without reference to western notions of visual expression, but in the terms described above: as integrated with the social and not set apart from it; relational, agentic and networked? This new theoretical framework, which is the focus of an ongoing research project, is briefly described below in preliminary form.

¹⁸ Conal McCarthy, "'To Foster and Encourage the Study and Practice of Māori Arts and Crafts': Indigenous Material Culture, Colonial Culture and Museums in New Zealand", in: *Craft & Community: The Material Culture of Place & Politics, 19th-20th Century*, eds. Janice Helland, Beverly Lemire and Alena Buis, Aldershot 2014, 59-82.

¹⁹ McCarthy, *Exhibiting Māori*, 6.

²⁰ Roger Neich, *Carved Histories: Rotorua Ngati Tārawhai Woodcarving*, Auckland 2001, and Damian Skinner, *The Carver and the Artist: Māori Art in the Twentieth Century*.

Theory: Beyond Representation

[11] The work of Gottfried Lindauer and other colonial painters of Māori in New Zealand have been the subject of much research by art historians.²¹ Usually these portraits are displayed as art works, and, apart from the labels, photographs, video or other media, which provide some social and historical context, they are typically hung on (white) walls which create the impression of being sealed off from the world around them.²² Despite references to historical context and biography, they are generally analyzed in terms of their form, style and content. Even when their Māori connections are acknowledged, they tend to be treated as objects of fine art, constituted within an aesthetic discourse.²³ In art historical studies of visual media, objects are routinely taken out of their broader context and discussed in terms of their formal pictorial qualities, arguably at the expense of the lived social relations in which they were produced and consumed.²⁴ After all, as sociologist Tony Bennett puts it: artists don't make art, museums make art, just as they make nations, peoples and their identities which are constructed through the ways in which they were represented in museums which act as 'civic laboratories'.²⁵ James Clifford

²¹ Leonard Bell, *Colonial Constructs: European Images of Māori 1840-1914*, Auckland 1992; Leonard Bell, "A Perspective from New Zealand: Lindauer's Painting in the Settler Colonial World", in: *Gottfried Lindauer's New Zealand: The Māori Portraits*, eds. Ngahiraka Mason and Zara Stanhope, Auckland 2017, 39-50; Roger Blackley, *Goldie*, Auckland 1997, and Roger Blackley, "Taku Āhua i te Rākau Koura: Gottfried Lindauer's Māori Portrait Commissions", in: *Colonial Gothic to Māori Renaissance: Essays in Memory of Jonathan Mane Wheoki*, eds. Conal McCarthy and Mark Stocker, Wellington 2017, 189-203.

²² Whether or not these walls were and are actually white, and they mostly were (Mary Anne Staniszewski, *The Power of Display: A History of Exhibition Installations at the Museum of Modern Art*, Cambridge 1998), the point is that simple monochromatic interior design created a blank canvas for the disinterested aesthetic appreciation of objects for their formal qualities at the expense of any sense of social context (Charlotte Klonk, *Spaces of Experience: Art Gallery Interiors from 1800 to 2000*, New Haven and London 2009).

²³ The catalogues of the Berlin and Auckland exhibitions both contain more diverse approaches to Lindauer's work, which include aspects of historical photographs, clothing, personal adornment and exhibitions, but overall the portraits are still treated as works of art. See: *Gottfried Lindauer - Die Māori-Portraits*, eds. Udo Kittelmann and Britta Schmitz, exh. cat. Alte Nationalgalerie Berlin in collaboration with Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki, Cologne 2014; *Gottfried Lindauer's New Zealand: The Māori Portraits*, eds. Ngahiraka Mason and Zara Stanhope, exh. cat. Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki, Auckland 2017.

²⁴ Gordon Fyfe and John Law, *Picturing Power: Visual Depictions and Social Relations*, London and New York 1988.

²⁵ Tony Bennett, "Civic Laboratories: Museums, Cultural Objecthood and the Governance of the Social", in: *South Pacific Museums: Experiments in Culture*, eds. Chris Healy and Andrea Witcomb, Melbourne 2006, 1-21.

calls this the art-culture system,²⁶ while Stuart Hall refers to the 'circuit of culture', in which representation works as a signifying practice.²⁷ Theories like these imported from cultural studies have aided the critical examination of art and culture, through key concepts such as representation, textuality, discourse, identity formation, and modernity. This has led to important and fruitful work on the display of the Other, the exhibitionary complex, museum-going as civic ritual, and nations as imagined communities.²⁸

[12] The other approach is a postcolonial critique of images and texts of Māoriland, the imagined representation of Māori life made by Pākehā for Pākehā, which acted as a kind of fable for settler colonial society.²⁹ Lindauer's work is certainly caught up in the colonial project, projecting exotic views of Māori people and culture which, eventually, facilitated the dispossession of Māori heritage. There is no denying the complicity of culture in colonial politics. But there is a problem that over-theorised accounts of museums lose sight of the objects on the one hand and the audiences on the other. In the case of colonial portraiture, I find that postcolonial critiques of art tend to be over-determined and abstract, and do not deal with the specific materiality of the object itself nor the ambiguous relations of its production and reception.

[13] Surely it is possible to find a balance between these two approaches: one separating art from society, and the other reducing it to social forces?³⁰ An example of an approach is Beth Fowkes Tobin,³¹ who analyses little known eighteenth-century portraits of colonial subjects in the British

²⁶ James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*, Cambridge 1988, 224.

²⁷ Stuart Hall, *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices. Culture, Media, and Identities*, London 1997.

²⁸ Carol Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums*, New York 1995; Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics*, London 1995; Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine, eds., *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, Washington 1991, and Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. and extended ed., London and New York 1991.

²⁹ Leonard Bell, *Colonial Constructs*, and Jane Stafford and Mark Williams, *Maoriland: New Zealand Literature 1872-1914*, Wellington 2006.

³⁰ Indeed it has to be admitted that this rather schematic dichotomy may be a recent and retrospective phenomenon. Scholars have shown that knowledge, colonialism and politics were often closely intertwined in the history of art in ways which allowed for exchange, coevalness and hybridity. See: Christian Kravagna, "The Trees of Knowledge: Anthropology, Art, and Politics. Melville J. Herskovits and Zora Neale Hurston - Harlem ca. 1930", in: *Transversal Texts*, ed. Eipcp: European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies, <http://eipcp.net/transversal/0112/kravagna/en> (accessed 19 November 2017).

Empire in ways which illuminate both macro and micro processes at work. Her cultural history of art combines the analysis of the ways in which these works pictured imperial power, but also how they revealed 'strategies of accommodation, resistance and subversion' by colonized peoples in specific locations and circumstances.³² Tobin therefore analyses art as an integral part of *visual* culture, one of a number of objects, places and practices, rather than as something set apart from the social. Furthermore, empire is not seen as monolithic but is contingent and contested, and this complexity is evident in the pictures which can be read in variety of different ways. Borrowing from Bruno Latour's analysis of technoscience, in her reading of the paintings she links 'the universal and particular and the core and periphery of colonial relations'.³³

[14] Scholars are now challenging the idea that museums and exhibitions are merely representations, and objects and collections are always just texts, seeking to balance things and words, discourse and materiality, through new analytical frameworks.³⁴ Contra Foucault, for whom museums are essentially 'power houses' of discourse reflecting colonization, race and empire, recent scholarship has revealed the mediation and resistance of meanings, for example the identities and practices of colonized indigenous subjects who are not merely victims of empire.³⁵ The analysis of material culture, collections and exhibitions therefore needs to work *up* from objects as well as *down* from the theory, and scholars should not get too carried away with the abstract ideas and large social forces which are appended to art and culture. How can we take account of power relations without effacing the agency of objects, patrons, and audiences?

[15] One of these new frameworks is Latour's Actor Network Theory (ANT),³⁶ which stresses nonhuman agency, and indeed the symmetry of human and nonhuman. In much recent work, this is used to recast the image of empire as a series of nodes in a vast material-semiotic assemblage in which social relations are constantly made, remade and performed. ANT enables fresh interpretations of historic ethnographic museums, overturning the idea that native peoples took no part in

³¹ Beth Fowkes Tobin, *Picturing Imperial Power: Colonial Subjects in Eighteenth-Century British Painting*, Durham and London 1999.

³² Tobin, *Picturing Imperial Power*, 2.

³³ Tobin, *Picturing Imperial Power*, 25.

³⁴ Rhiannon Mason, "Cultural Theory and Museum Studies", in: *A Companion to Museum Studies*, ed. Sharon Macdonald, Oxford 2006, 17-32.

³⁵ Lara Kriegel, "After the Exhibitionary Complex: Museum Histories and the Future of the Victorian Past", in: *Victorian Studies* 48 (2006), no. 4, 681-704, and Saloni Mathur, *India by Design: Colonial History and Cultural Display*, Berkeley 2007.

³⁶ Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*, Oxford 2005.

collecting, and raising the possibility that objects collected people as well as vice versa.³⁷ In a study of that classic ethnographic institution, the Pitt Rivers Museum at Oxford University, Gosden and Larsen deploy the fruitful idea of the 'relational museum'.³⁸ It is relational because "neither humans or objects exist beyond the relationships that make them up" and indeed "take on values and histories given to them through their relations to others, a concept which plays down any notion of inherent or unalterable characteristics".³⁹ They argue that:

*Museums emerge through thousands of relationships [...] through the experiences of anthropological subjects, collectors, curators, lecturers, and administrators, among others, and these experiences have always been mediated by the material world, by artifacts, letters, trains, ships, furniture, computers, display labels and so on.*⁴⁰

[16] Another example is anthropologist Alfred Gell who refers to art as a technology of enchantment which mediates social relations much as a person might, and is therefore something that can be said to have agency in its own right.⁴¹ Nicholas Thomas argues that this is an important step away from representation and aesthetics, as art is no longer just about text and symbolic *meaning* but is also about *doing*. Art is theorized as social relations⁴² allowing us to better appreciate different ways of understanding it, such as indigenous ontological perspectives, for example how tribal people might view sacred object-beings as alive. The things that Māori people call *taonga tuku iho* (treasures handed down) are heirlooms which, as Paul Tapsell and Amiria Henare show, collapse the western separation of time and space, thereby connecting descendants to their ancestral landscapes and life-worlds.⁴³

[17] My own work has explored new theories, methods and sources like these for the study of colonial culture in New Zealand, in particular fields where European cultural practices were contested, exchanged and co-opted by Māori in productive ways.⁴⁴ In this essay I briefly analyze colonial

³⁷ Rodney Harrison, Sarah Byrne, and Anne Clarke, eds., *Reassembling the Collection: Ethnographic Museums and Indigenous Agency*, Santa Fe 2013.

³⁸ Chris Gosden, Frances Larson and Alison Petch, *Knowing Things: Exploring the Collections at the Pitt Rivers Museum, 1884-1945*, Oxford 2007.

³⁹ Gosden, Larson and Petch, *Knowing Things*, 6.

⁴⁰ Gosden, Larson and Petch, *Knowing Things*, 5.

⁴¹ Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory*, Oxford 1998.

⁴² Nicholas Thomas, "Foreword", in: Gell, *Art and Agency*, 1998, vii-xiii, here ix.

⁴³ Paul Tapsell, "The Flight of Pareraututu: An Investigation of Taonga from a Tribal Perspective", in: *Journal of the Polynesian Society* 106 (1997), no. 4, 323-374, and Amiria Henare, *Museums, Anthropology and Imperial Exchange*, Cambridge 2005.

⁴⁴ McCarthy, *Exhibiting Māori*.

visual culture employing these frameworks mixing post-representational theory with indigenous epistemologies and ontologies. Above I described displays in colonial museums and exhibitions where evidence of the Māori visitor experience questions the supposed power dynamics of the colonial project; and Māori experiments in ethnology which overturn dated observations about anthropology, empire and indigenous peoples. Drawing on theoretical tools which enable us to examine the circulation and mediation of things and people, I now turn to examine carved images of Māori by themselves, and portraits of Māori by European artists, using the theories of Alfred Gell, in which postmodern orthodoxies about the colonial subject as the object of the western gaze are re-examined.

[18] As mentioned earlier, anthropologist Alfred Gell's idea of art and social agency examines how 'actants' or people/objects mediate social relations and cause things to happen.⁴⁵ I argue this is analogous to the Māori idea that ancestral treasures or *taonga* are actually powerful living things which move through time and space and reconnect the present to the past. Thinking of objects as social agents puts the emphasis not on art as text/symbolic meaning but doing, theorized as social relations. Therefore these actants, which may be material entities like a carving, can be thought of as acting like people, motivating "inferences, interpretations and responses".⁴⁶ It may be objected that Gell denied objects themselves could speak, leading to criticism that writers/curators are engaged in a form of ventriloquism when interpreting what indigenous artifacts might be saying. As Gell emphasizes: "Visual art objects are objects about which we may, and commonly do, speak - but they themselves either do not speak, or they utter natural language in graphemic code."⁴⁷

[19] Gell went on to apply this theory to Māori meeting houses, drawing on the work of Roger Neich, formerly an ethnologist at the Auckland Museum.⁴⁸ In doing so he synthesized indigenous ontologies with his idea of objects/people as actants, or entities which enact or instantiate social relations, in a very fruitful analysis which has led to novel work on indigenous artifacts in colonial culture.⁴⁹ In the Māori world, carved meeting houses are literally the body of the founding ancestor - *whare tupuna* - so that when descendants are gathered in the house they are thought of as being sheltered in the bosom of their ancestor, with the rafters in the roof likened to the ribcage and so on.

⁴⁵ Gell, *Art and Agency*, 7.

⁴⁶ Thomas: "Foreword", ix.

⁴⁷ Gell, *Art and Agency*, 6.

⁴⁸ Neich, *Carved Histories*.

⁴⁹ Nicholas Thomas, *Possessions. Indigenous Art/ Colonial Culture*, London 1999, and Rodney Harrison, "An Artifact of Colonial Desire? Kimberly Points and the Technologies of Enchantment", in: *Current Anthropology* 47 (2006), 63-88.

[20] This concept is analogous to the notion of distributed personhood which scholars have interpreted in Melanesian carvings, referring to the ways in which the ancestor is 'spread out' in space and time in contrast to western ideas of individual, indivisible personhood. For Māori, Gell argues, agency "is collective, ancestral, and political".⁵⁰ With *whare rūnanga* (meeting houses) in Māori society, Gell argues that as traditional artifacts they are 'retrospective', looking back to the ancestral past, but as political gestures they are 'prospective' – they look out and forward to future relationships and networks. This parallels my own research into Māori heritage projects, like the Antiquities Act and the proposed National Maori Museum of the 1900s, or the Maori School of Arts and Crafts in the 1920s and 1930s, which saw art objects and practices not as nostalgic things from the distant past, that were symbols of defeat or loss, but powerful living tools for engaging with the present and reaching out to the future in pursuing their own political and social aspirations.⁵¹

[21] Non-western tribal and native peoples understand their visual and material culture through their own ontologies and epistemologies. The perspectival flux evident in Māori and Polynesian thought confound western conventions of time, tradition and innovation.⁵² With Māori, they tend to see their cultural and natural heritage as *taonga*, something that may come from the past but which is situated in a present becoming future, a continuum of space/time which keeps the past alive in the present.⁵³ Furthermore, objects are understood not as inert artifacts or representations *of* people but *as* those very people, living object-beings which can move, talk and act. The carvings in *whare whakairo* (meeting houses) are thought to be named individual ancestors who lived in the past but who are also ever-present – when people meet inside this space ancestral power is brought down into the present through ritual and performance to lend inspiration and energy to the tribe's deliberations about their future.⁵⁴

[22] Seen in this way, we can appreciate how voluntarily placing Māori carvings in museums, and even in exhibitions overseas, is not necessarily a submissive act of colonial capture, but could be seen as a way of colonial

⁵⁰ Gell, *Art and Agency*, 253.

⁵¹ McCarthy, "Before 'Te Māori'", 117-133, and McCarthy, "'To Foster and Encourage the Study and Practice of Māori Arts and Crafts'", 59-82.

⁵² Gell, *Art and Agency*, and Amiria Salmond, "Transforming Translations (part 1): 'The owner of these bones'", in: *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 3 (2014), 1-32.

⁵³ Henare, *Museums*.

⁵⁴ Neich, *Carved Histories*. Contra Gell, *Art and Agency*, and following Neich and Salmond, "Transforming Translations", I would argue that theorising Māori art means taking seriously and employing indigenous ways of being within analytical frameworks.

subjects speaking back, inserting themselves into the network and bending it to their own purposes, bringing people, places and institutions closer to their own spheres of power and influence. The carvings and other objects look out, not in, they are active and worldly, even expansionist, rather than being defeated and beaten down.⁵⁵ Paul Tapsell has called travelling *taonga* overseas 'envoys'.⁵⁶ Arapata Hakiwai describes the way that one tribe celebrates the presence of their house in the Field Museum in Chicago as their foothold in North America.⁵⁷

[23] With this approach we can also better appreciate how the things that Māori people call *taonga tuku iho* (treasures handed down) collapse the distance between here and there, now and then, effectively connecting descendants not only to their ancestors, but through them their ancestral culture, estates, resources, rights and responsibilities, which is obviously as much to do with contemporary politics as historical legacy.⁵⁸ Tapsell describes the carved gateway *Pūkākī* as a 'comet' passing through the sky, an ancestral presence moving across the land and over generations, connecting the living to the dead. *Taonga* are also described as a *tui* (native bird) flitting through the forest, appearing and disappearing, and returning home again after its travels – so *taonga* are bought and sold, disappear into museum collections, reappear in exhibitions, are repatriated and so on.⁵⁹

[24] Where heritage management practice today works to recognize indigenous agency and allow for its democratizing and decolonizing presence in the museum sector, my own contribution to academic debate is to push back the analysis of indigenous agency beyond the initiatives documented in the past thirty years to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and extend it beyond the confines of the exhibition to the formation of institutions like the museum and disciplines like anthropology and ethnology.⁶⁰ For the purposes of this essay, which deals with art and material culture, the implications of the ontological turn are

⁵⁵ Schorch, Hakiwai and McCarthy, "Globalizing Māori Museology", 38-69.

⁵⁶ Tapsell, "The Flight of Pareraututu", 323-374.

⁵⁷ Arapata Hakiwai, "Ruatepupuke: Working Together, Understanding One Another", in: *New Zealand Museums Journal* 25 (1995), no. 1, 42-44.

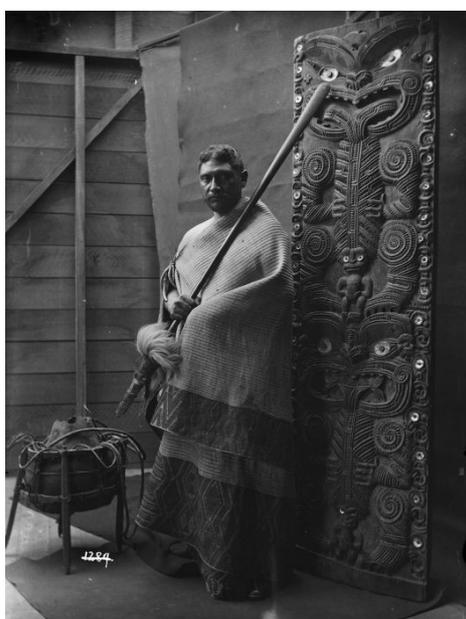
⁵⁸ Tapsell, "The Flight of Pareraututu", 323-374, and Henare, *Museums*.

⁵⁹ Paul Tapsell, *Pukaki: A Comet Returns*, Auckland 2000.

⁶⁰ Tony Bennett et al., *Collecting, Ordering, Governing: Anthropology, Museums and Liberal Government*, Durham 2017, and Conal McCarthy, "Historicising the 'indigenous international': Museums, Anthropology, and Transpacific Networks", in: *TransPacific Americas: Encounters and Engagements Between the Americas and the South Pacific*, eds. Eveline Durr and Philipp Schorch, London and New York 2015, 3-26.

far reaching.⁶¹ Whereas conventional art historical studies (the 'old' art history) see art objects as the expression of an individual artist who conveys meanings and feelings through the materials, forms and symbols to an audience, and whereas the 'new' art history, using a more up to date theoretical frame from the 1980s, sees the same process as one of representation, somewhat flattened and reduced to a discursive language, I would now argue that we can, drawing on ANT and Gell but moving beyond them to indigenous ontological perspectives, look at carvings and other artifacts as powerful things which have efficacy in their own right.

[25] Consider the carved figure in illustration 4 for example, a *poupou* from a carved house, which is shown in a museum collection in the early twentieth century. To me, an interpretation of this carving in terms of the artist's skill or intent, the beauty of the object, or the museum object as colonial trophy, would be predictable and limited. Let us look again using the ideas above as a guide.



4 Augustus Hamilton, *Portrait of Tureiti Te Heuheu Tukino V*, gelatin glass negative. Museum of New Zealand, Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington (© Museum of New Zealand, Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington)

Note the way the figure stands, legs askance and arms on his belly, in the posture of the defiant *haka* or war dance. Look at the over-sized head, with the mouth and tongue in the *pūkana* gesture, again signaling strength and

⁶¹ Amiria Henare, "Taonga Māori: Encompassing Rights and Property in New Zealand", in: *Thinking Through Things: Theorising Artefacts in Ethnographic Perspective*, eds. Amiria Henare, Martin Holbraad and Sari Wastell, London and New York 2007, 47-67; Christopher Pinney and Nicholas Thomas, eds., *Beyond Aesthetics: Art and the Technologies of Enchantment*, Oxford 2001; Robin Osborne and Jeremy Tanner, *Art's Agency and Art History*, Oxford and Malden 2007.

vitality. Notice the small figure between the legs, and the figure below, indicating *whakapapa* or lineage. The figure looks out at us, but he is not resident in some age long past, but in a continuous present, and part of our world. He projects forward into the here and now, a forceful presence among us today, connecting the Māori viewer to their tribal history, but adding his energy and wisdom to their actions in the present. Taken together the *pou* is a living embodiment of the power and vital energy of the *tupuna* (ancestor) depicted, a warrior chief of Ngāti Kahungunu. In fact, the carved figure is just like the man standing in front of it, the noted Tūwharetoa leader Te Heuheu. It is his equivalent, his index, an extension of his *mana* (power, authority, reputation) and *tapu* (sacredness, being). We should not therefore think of carvings like this as being any different from the person, but as part of the same collective ancestral spirit, what is referred to as essential vitality or *mauri*.

Projections of Ancestral Power: Lindauer's Portraits Seen Through a New Optic

[26] In this paragraph, I propose to analyse a portrait by Lindauer in the same way as the carving above, not as a work of art, but as an instantiation of ancestral presence and power (fig. 5). First I want to note some features of the production and reception of the painting which bear on this interpretation, which have been noted by Roger Blackley and others, before proceeding to discuss it.⁶² The circumstances of Lindauer's Māori portraits are very interesting in light of this lens brought to bear on them. These include: the fact that Lindauer had indigenous patrons who commissioned pictures of themselves for themselves; the involvement of these patrons and their descendants in the use of the pictures in homes, on *marae* (community centers), at *tangi* (funerals); and the composition which reflects not just western conventions but the Māori tradition of carved figures (see above). Moreover, we have numerous historical evidence of Māori audience responses to the portraits, in which viewers address the people in the paintings and even *hongi* them (greet by pressing noses).⁶³

⁶² Blackley, "Taku Āhua i te Rākau Koura", 189-203, and Leonard Bell, "A Perspective from New Zealand", 39-50.

⁶³ See for example Māori comments in the visitor book published in: J. C. Graham, *Maori Paintings: Pictures from the Partridge Collection of Paintings by Gottfried Lindauer*, Auckland 1965, 17-18. This lively interaction of Māori visitors with Lindauer portraits is a common feature of Māori exhibitions today.



5 Gottfried Lindauer, *Wikitoria Taitoko Keepa*, 1897, oil on canvas, 66,5 x 54,0 cm, in carved Māori frame. Private collection (reproduced by permission of the Wikitoria Keepa Mete Kingi Whānau Trust)

[27] Close examination of this painting reveals several important points. Compared to the sitters in Charles Goldie's portraits, another prominent New Zealand painter of Māori leaders of the early twentieth century, who often depicted elderly people in poses suggesting resignation or melancholy,⁶⁴ this woman is young, healthy, strong, indeed glowing with vigour. She looks directly out at us with an air of confidence. She is not afraid or subservient. When we look in her eyes, we do not see a 'dying race'. We see a spirited engagement with the modern world but on her terms. This is *te ao hou*, a vision of the new world imagined by leaders like Ngata and Pōmare and the leaders of the Young Māori Party.⁶⁵ This generation responded vigorously to the opportunities of the day, proudly maintaining their cultural heritage and distinct identity but eagerly grasping the 'things and thoughts' of Europe and the world.⁶⁶

[28] Notice that the woman is wearing a traditional *piupiu* (plaited skirt) on her shoulders, but underneath it is a white lace shirt fashionable at the time. She lives and moves between Māori and Pākehā society, and values both. Today we would call her 'bicultural', meaning two cultures within one country. This is not an ethnographic fantasy of the 'pure' pre-European Māori past projected by the artist or other Pākehā savants, as her mixed European/Māori dress suggests a contemporaneity which dismisses any

⁶⁴ Blackley, *Goldie*.

⁶⁵ Anne Salmond et al., "Te Ao Hou: Transforming Worlds in New Zealand 1900-1950", in: *Auckland University Research Proposal for the Marsden Fund* (2015).

⁶⁶ James Belich, *Making Peoples: A History of the New Zealanders from Polynesian Settlement to the End of the Nineteenth Century*, Auckland 1996, 271.

fantasy of the 'Māori as he was'.⁶⁷ Though the woman does not open her mouth to speak, she seems about to. To me, she seems to communicate through her direct and determined gaze, which speaks (or sings) of pride and strength, of retaining the treasures of their ancestors, along with their land and *rangatiratanga* (sovereignty).

[29] Around her neck she has her own greenstone *hei tiki* (human shaped ornament), a pair of shark tooth ear rings, and in her hair rare feathers of the now extinct *huia* bird, all chiefly heirlooms from her ancestors which suggest *mana* (reputation, authority) in the Māori world, and significant social status in colonial Whanganui. As Ngarino Ellis points out, the clothes, accessories and jewelry worn by Māori sitters in Lindauer's portraits show their agency, and reflect the idea of "staging the body, which was a key tenet of visualizing power in Māori society".⁶⁸ They might just appear to simply be beautiful objects but, as oral accounts show, these things are part of a "much broader and deeper theory of displaying [...] the body historically".⁶⁹

[30] The sitter's identity and heritage, like her clothes and body adornment, are not antithetical to modernity, they are a springboard for her claim on the present, her place in New Zealand society. She is Wikitoria Taitoko Keepa, the daughter and heir of a prominent Māori leader in the Whanganui region, Te Keepa Te Rangihwinui (also known as Major Kemp), who fought on the side of the government in the wars of the 1860s, but who later supported the Māori parliamentary movement and a land league resisting the sale of land to the crown.⁷⁰

[31] Wikitoria (Māori for Victoria, as in the British queen) also wears a *moko kauae* or chin tattoo. This is a whole topic which could be explored much further, as an indigenous way of wrapping the body in images which signals genealogy, rank, etc. and which is in turn depicted within a

⁶⁷ Elsdon Best, *The Maori as He Was: A Brief Account of Maori Life as It Was in Pre-European Days*, Wellington 1924 (= NZ Board of Science and Art, ed., *Manual*, no. 4).

⁶⁸ Ngarino Ellis, "He iti, he pounamu: Lindauer and Personal Adornment", in: *Gottfried Lindauer's New Zealand: The Māori Portraits*, eds. Ngahiraka Mason and Zara Stanhope, Auckland 2017, 241-246, here 246.

⁶⁹ For Ellis's work on Māori portraiture see Ngarino Ellis, "Maori Self-Portraiture", in: *Repositioning Pacific Arts. Artists, Objects, Histories*, ed. Anne Allen, London 2014, 18-29. For her ideas on indigenous biography see: Ngarino Ellis, "Te Ao Hurihuri O Ngā Taonga Tuku Iho: The Evolving Worlds of Our Ancestral Treasures", in: *Biography* 39 (2016), no. 3, 438-460.

⁷⁰ "Te Keepa Te Rangihwinui", <https://nzhistory.govt.nz/people/te-keepa-te-rangihwinui> (accessed 25 May 2017). Several members of the family were depicted in paintings and sculptures commissioned from Pākehā artists but kept in the family. For more on this portrait see Blackley, "Taku Āhua i te Rākau Koura", and Blackley, *Te Mata*, 23-24.

painting, a western sign system.⁷¹ These marks on her body link her unmistakably to *te ao kohatu* (the world of stone, the past), but, like the carving above, the woman seems to be projected forward into our space and time. Despite the exotic allure and primitive ethos of the *tā moko* (practice of tattooing) for the European viewer, Wikitoria is unmistakably present, in the here and now. She does not live in the past. Her *moko* is seen and recognized by her family in their own home, as a sign of belonging. Bathed in a soft light, the woman seems to stand out from the shadowy background, looking out at us the viewer, enveloping us and drawing us in to her own space/time, the continuous present that brings together descendants with their ancestors. The painting then, like the *taonga* discussed above, acts to bring down the past into the present. In that sense it can be thought of, not as a work of art at all, but as a *taonga*, a cultural treasure that has the same animate, in-dwelling spirituality as any other *taonga* whether artifacts, places or the intangible heritage of songs, stories and memories.⁷²

[32] Lastly, we note that the canvas is enclosed in a frame adorned with Māori carving in the local Whanganui style. This ‘reframing’, literally as well as metaphorically, shows how the work of art has been transferred into the Māori world, where it operates much like carving, weaving and other *taonga*, hung on the walls of meeting houses, appearing at *tangi* and other ceremonies, and passed down from generation to generation. As anthropologist Anne Salmond puts it, *taonga* are a “fixed point in the tribal network of names, histories, and relationships”.⁷³ The painting, for descendants of the woman depicted, connect the living to the living, and the living to the dead, in the shape of *waiata* (song), proverbs, heirlooms, or garments that materialize genealogical connections from the past in the present. As Salmond puts it “[t]aonga captured history and showed it to the living [...]”.⁷⁴

[33] So, like the carvings in the meeting house, portraits of Māori people are seen and understood as being descended from their line of ancestors. This may not be a matter of the artist's intention, as works were often painted from photographs, but is certainly the audience reception. These paintings may be art by birth, but they are *taonga* by use, that is to say,

⁷¹ Ngahuia Te Awekotuku, *Mau Moko: The World of Māori Tattoo*, Auckland 2007.

⁷² In this analysis, I am obviously modelling a subjective interpretation of the object, as opposed to a historical chronology of the art work or the artist, precisely to open up the reading to contemporary viewers, and descendants, not academic experts.

⁷³ Anne Salmond, “Nga Huarahi O Te Ao Māori / Pathways in the Māori World”, in: *Te Māori: Māori Art from New Zealand Collections*, ed. S. M. Mead, New York 1984, 109-137, here 118.

⁷⁴ Salmond, “Nga Huarahi O Te Ao Māori / Pathways in the Māori World”, 118.

their current meaning and interpretation is determined by the ways in which they are used within Māori cultural practices.

[34] This becomes clear if we consider another Lindauer portrait from a family collection which I have seen in person. The painting shows a Māori woman in mixed European/Māori dress, along with *pounamu* pendants and feathers of the extinct *huia* bird, both indicating rank and authority (fig. 6). In the top right corner, there was (until recently when the painting was conserved) a piece of paper with names written on it.⁷⁵ This was a *whakapapa* (genealogy) which had been stuck to the surface of the painting. The names come down from the past into the present, and the last name on the list is the sitter herself.



6 Gottfried Lindauer, *Portrait of a Māori Woman*, 1897, oil on canvas, dimensions unknown. Private collection (photograph: Carolina Izzo, 2015; reproduced by permission of the whānau)

The *whakapapa* shows us that the people who owned this painting were literate, and they recorded their family tree using the writing learned from missionaries. This did not make them any less traditional, or any less Māori. Indeed they, she, and the people who came after them today, all wanted to be modern, *and* Māori. They wanted literacy and technology, education and a cash economy.⁷⁶

[35] The portrait, I would argue, acts in the world through its relations with the descendants to achieve precisely this: justice, equal opportunity, the

⁷⁵ I first saw this painting in the Wellington studio of conservator Carolina Izzo who was treating the painting for the family. Thanks to Carolina for this image and to the whānau for permission to discuss the image.

⁷⁶ Conal McCarthy, "Carving out a Place in the Better Britain of the South Pacific: Māori in New Zealand Museums and Exhibitions", in: *Curating Empire: Museums and the British Imperial Experience*, eds. Sarah Longair and John McAleer, Manchester 2012, 56-81.

maintenance of culture and heritage, a decent income and good housing and welfare. It does so by sitting on the wall of family homes, or in the meeting house, being present at *tangi* and other tribal gatherings, bearing witness to community events and cycles of life and death. By acting in this way, the ancestor/painting lends her inspiration to the deliberations of her people who are getting on with their lives in the contemporary world, settling their Treaty⁷⁷ claim and the injustices of the colonial period, and now striking out to achieve their plans for cultural and social development.

Conclusion

[36] In this essay I have suggested that, rather than see Lindauer's portraits as representation, as art works that capture a likeness or convey a meaning, they can be seen as actants, living objects/persons which are a powerful expression of the kin groups's *mana*, *tapu* and *mauri*. I argue that the picture is not a window into an imagined realm, or into the personality of the sitter in western terms, but an unfolding of individual and tribal agency projected into the present becoming future.

[37] Moreover, these pictures/*taonga* act, as we can see in the way in which they have shaped and influenced the exhibition/workshop/publication associated with them – including me the author and this essay! The object is not just a work of art, it does things, causing other things and people to do things. The portrait, or should I say the *taonga*, moves around, changes hands, or sits in the meeting house looking down on the proceedings. It is little wonder that ancestral heirlooms like this are taken to hearings of the Waitangi Tribunal and court cases, to materialize the mandate of the people of the land and their right to claim what is theirs.

[38] An image reproduced in books and on websites, Lindauer's portraits gather (or collect) admirers, viewers, descendants, who look at it, speak to it, think about it. It is treated as a person would be, someones's ancestor, grandmother, mother, daughter. Its *tapu* is recognized and respected. It is treated with care, food and water are not brought near it, and prayers, songs and stories are told around it. It acts, then, like a talisman, a beacon of energy and *wairua* (spirit), which reconnect youth to their ancestors, the people today to their past, not in nostalgic reverie, but a confident and assertive looking forward into the past, with the future behind them. The least that we can do, I would argue, is to recognize this and include it in our academic analysis. I hope that this essay is a small step in that direction.

Special Issue Guest Editors

Alexandra Karentzos, Miriam Oesterreich and Britta Schmitz, eds.,
Gottfried Lindauer – Painting New Zealand, in: RIHA Journal 0189-0197

⁷⁷ The Treaty of Waitangi 1840.

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