

**MEDIA RELEASE**

## **New Acquisition**

***Hatupu and the Bird Woman c.1966***

**Pauline Kahurangi Yearbury**



Oil on canvas on board Whangarei Art Museum  
Collection 2009

The Whangarei Art Museum is delighted to announce an important new acquisition to the museum's modernist *maori* art collection. Based around the experimental Northern Maori Project by the Department of Education in the 1950's and focussing on *maori* youth, the Tovey Scheme was to foster many of the most famous contemporary *maori* artists of today.

The late Pauline Yearbury, who was to live most of her life in Russell, together with Katerina Mataira were the first *maori* women to study modern art at graduate level at Elam School of Art Auckland and became art tutors in Northland.

More significantly, in 1945 Selwyn Te Ngareatua Wilson from Kawakawa was the first *maori* student to enrol there. The art museum also recently acquired 14 works from his Elam graduate exhibition in 1951.

Pauline Yearbury (nee Blomfield) was a student at Elam at this time and both Wilson and Yearbury among others, were able to successfully synthesise their strict academic training in a Western *fine-art* tradition into their own cultural context – creating what was to become known as Maori Modernism 1950-70 in the process.

A ground-breaking exhibition of contemporary *maori* art, curated by another Te Tai Tokerau artist (and celebrated pupil of Selwyn Wilson) the late Buck Nin, was held at the Canterbury Museum in 1966. This was arguably the first of its type in New Zealand in a 'mainstream' public institution and also the first to controversially contextualise *avant-garde maori* art with traditional artefacts *toi whakairo* and *taonga* from the museum's rich resources.

The oil painting '*Hatupu and the Bird Woman*' became a signature work from this exhibition which included artists who became nationally and internationally famous only a decade later. The novel and controversial exhibition was widely publicised and this painting came to represent the new movement (see article below). *New Zealand Maori Culture and the Contemporary Scene* as the exhibition was titled included other Northland artists such as Cath Brown, Jonathan Mane-Wheoki, Selwyn Muru as well as Buck Nin and Pauline Yearbury. Other artists involved were Fred Graham and Arnold Wilson, Katerina Mataira, Mere Harrison and Norman Lemon.

Buck Nin states in the catalogue of this seminal exhibition 'if a true New Zealand school of art emerges the rich inheritance of the Maori people, here interpreted in modern forms, may well provide a major source of inspiration for the future' - prescient words indeed.

# Christchurch Exhibition of Maori Art

Photographs by William Gamble.

by Cherry Andrew



*Pauline Yearbury's painting of Hatu Patu and the Birdman*

An ambitious idea which began six months ago as a joke has now materialised into a great promotion scheme for New Zealand culture.

"What about an exhibition of Maori art and sculpture," joked Baden Pere, a flying instructor at Wigram and former administrator of the East West Cultural Centre in Hawaii, to his friend, Buck Nin, a Christchurch artist.

"Right, you're on," replied Buck Nin and the two Maoris laughed about it for three weeks.

But suddenly it became a serious thought and with the help of Dr Roger Duff, director of the Canterbury Museum, Buck Nin presented an exhibition of contemporary Maori culture—fifty paintings and ten sculptures—in the Museum on 10 November, 1966.

Contrasted with a collection of traditional Maori artefacts, the display included three of Buck Nin's own landscape paintings which combined the traditional figures of his race with modern colours and techniques.

There were also contributions from such well known Maori artists as Selwyn Muru, Arnold Wilson, Fred Graham and Pauline Yearbury.

All the works were by Maoris although Norman Lemon's wire presentation of "Christ in Agony" succeeded without any resort to traditional themes.

In opening the exhibition Mr R. J. Waghorn, a former president of the Association of New Zealand Art Societies from Wellington, said that in the Maori's own special heritage a modern artist could find almost endless inspiration for themes that, while being conceived in a modern idiom, relate directly to his own cultural background.

"Let the Maori borrow techniques and contemporary methods—invent some of his own if he can—but when he is looking for content and subject matter let him turn to familiar subjects; to those things that move him; those things that are essentially his own that no one else feels about quite as he does."

He said that apart from his concern for the

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***Further information can be obtained by contacting: Whangarei Art Museum  
Phone 430.4240 or email to whangareiartmuseum@wdc.govt.nz***