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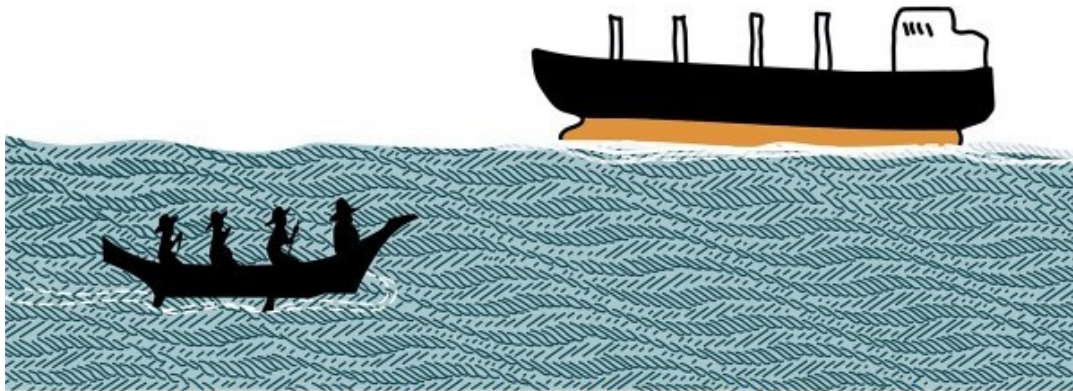
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The Social Fabric: Deep Local to Pan Global



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A Local Motif; Use of *kōwhaiwhai* patterns in printed textiles

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The curvilinear decoration known as *kōwhaiwhai* is just one of the art forms created by Māori, the indigenous people of New Zealand, but it is perhaps the most ubiquitous in New Zealand's graphic identity. Visual shorthand for "New Zealand-ness" in a global setting, *kōwhaiwhai* designs appear in sports uniforms, international beauty pageant outfits, wearable art costumes, and in the uniform of the national airline. The scroll-like forms are evocative of other conventional styles of ornamentation, such as art nouveau and rococo, and naturally lend themselves to print and pattern. Denotative meaning of the symbols is not often retained in this context, but *kōwhaiwhai* patterns have nevertheless been utilised in shifting ways over the past 120 years to speak strongly of both New Zealand and Māori identity.

In the context of traditional Māori art, *kōwhaiwhai* is typically a form of surface decoration based on curvilinear elements. The form known as the *koru*, or *pītau*, is a curved stalk with bulb which evokes the unfurling fern frond; the *kape* form, sometimes described as an "eyebrow" shape, is a crescent interspersed with circular indentations; and the *rauru* is a spiral. The artist may employ these elements individually or combine them to form complex patterns with a broader frame of reference to the natural world, such as the *Mangopare* design which represents the hammerhead shark. Today, the colours most commonly associated with *kōwhaiwhai* are red, black, and white; a convention which stems from the mid-19th century use of pigments made from soot and ochre on unpainted timber.

Some of the earliest examples of *kōwhaiwhai* designs can be found on *hoe* (canoe paddles); however, we see the pattern applied with the greatest frequency on the *heke* (rafters) of the Māori meeting house. The *wharenui* is the central meeting house on the *marae* - the communal area of an individual tribe – and is often a rich showcase of Māori art in the forms of *whakairo* (carving), *tukutuku* (a form of weaving), and painting. More than this, the *wharenui* can be the literal embodiment of a tribal ancestor, and the placement and subject of the art contained within is carefully planned to reflect this.

Customary forms of representation in the *wharenui* include a carved face (*koruru*) at the apex of the front gable which represents the head of the body; the central ridgepole (*tahuhu*), the backbone; the bargeboards (*maihi*), the arms spread in welcome; and the painted rafters (*heke*), the ribs. The art forms of *whakairo*, *tukutuku* and *kōwhaiwhai* all have coded meanings which reflect the genealogy of the tribe, and according to historian Roger Neich, "must be considered in concert, as they all bring their contribution to the total message of the house."¹

Although *kōwhaiwhai* designs in are site-specific and vary from region to region, in the collective New Zealand psyche one particular "style" or "look" predominates. *The Art and workmanship of the Maori race in New Zealand* published by ethnologist Augustus Hamilton in 1896 and 1900, was for many years the most widely-reproduced reference for *kōwhaiwhai* and is largely responsible for this narrow understanding of the art form. The study contains colour reproductions of 29 *kōwhaiwhai* designs drawn from *wharenui* by the Reverend Herbert Williams. Williams' sample was biased toward one particular area of the country, and Hamilton selected for reproduction examples which he believed were "genuine patterns",

¹ Roger Neich. *Painted Histories: Development of Maori Figurative Painting*. (Auckland, N.Z.: Auckland University Press, 1994), 1.

favouring symmetrical repeating motifs.² As Neich has discussed, this distorted the public reception of *kōwhaiwhai*, as it captures only one phase in the history of the art form. Nevertheless, it is these patterns which have had a lasting influence on the graphic identity of New Zealand.³



Plate from *The Art Workmanship of the Maori Race*. Includes Mangopare design (number 25) from the wharenui named Tamatekapua of the Ngāti Whakaue subtribes Ngāti Tae-o-Tū and Ngāti Tūnohopū, of Te Arawa descent. Collection of Auckland Museum Tāmaki Paenga Hira.

Soon after its publication, designs copied from Hamilton began to appear on everyday goods. In 1907, English ceramic manufacturer Doulton & Co produced a china pattern featuring a transfer-printed *Mangopare* border closely resembling a rafter pattern copied by Williams. Known as “Maori Art”, the popular pattern was in production until 1939.

² Rev. Herbert Williams in Augustus Hamilton, *The Art Workmanship of the Maori Race in New Zealand* (Wellington, N.Z.: New Zealand Institute, 1901), 120.

³ Neich, *Painted Histories*, 29.

Similar use of indigenous iconography emerged in domestic craft. In a 1940s placemat sewn by a member of the North Shore Embroiderers Guild, the maker has with some inventiveness simplified Hamilton design number eight (from *Ngāi Tūhoe* tribe) into geometric and *koru* forms suitable for applique. Most domestic sewers at this time were working from pre-printed designs, many of which featured Māori figural imagery combined with native flora. This placemat, however, appears to be an original design, suggesting that the Hamilton illustrations were a familiar reference for middleclass Pākehā (European descent) women who would otherwise have had very little contact with Māori culture.



Table mat, 1940s. Collection of Auckland Museum Tāmaki Paenga Hira, 2002.31.1

Pākehā textile designers also began to recognise the potential in Māori art to create marketable patterns with a recognisable New Zealand character. A 1946 visit to the *Rongowhakaata* tribal house named Te Hau Ki Tūranga, on display at the national museum, proved influential to commercial textile designer Avis Higgs. In her 1949 portfolio she produced 31 designs based on Māori motifs which reveal a familiarity with printed resources of the time; in particular, a 1942 pamphlet by W.J. Phillips which reproduced text and imagery from Hamilton. Design *Maori Motifs* (D67) utilises a geometric ball-and-bar form very like an illustration from Phillips, which in turn is drawn from a photograph published in the Hamilton study. Higgs organises the element into a grid, creating an abstracted pattern that art historian Douglas Lloyd-Jenkins argues is “a re-ordering and reconstruction of those elements as a new modernist art” – some years before artists like Gordon Walters absorbed Māori art forms into abstract modernism.⁴ In this example, we see how the forms of *kōwhaiwhai* have been reinterpreted to reflect the mode, yet are still drawn from the same limited source material.

⁴ Douglas Lloyd-Jenkins, “Avis Higgs and the Maori Motif Textile”, *Art New Zealand*, no. 86 (Autumn 1998): 76.

The mid-century period saw an overabundance of household textiles using *kōwhaiwhai* patterns, part of a developing graphic language which reflected the nationalistic identity of the time. Enthusiasm for Māori imagery had been bolstered by the Pākehā “discovery” of early Māori rock drawings, sketched by artist Theo Schoon in the late 1940s. These were added to the catalogue of New Zealand motifs used both by artisans and commercial manufacturers. Blanche Wormald was one of a group of artists at this time creating hand-printed linens and dress lengths from lino blocks which featured native flora and fauna alongside Māori carving, *kōwhaiwhai*, and rock art designs. A 1959 New Zealand Women’s Weekly article on Wormald writes of the importance of her subject matter, saying: “After all, in most countries in the world, every effort is made to preserve historical, traditional designs, folk-lore, and native handwork. If New Zealand does not follow suit, much will be lost, and in years to come our nation will be considerably poorer.”⁵ This suggests a more noble intention than was probably true of the many other commercially-produced textiles of this nature. New Zealand imagery was indiscriminately thrown together on tea towels and scarves for a souvenir market, and 1960s-1970s fashion prints reinterpreted *kōwhaiwhai* and *koru* forms as bold, pop-art style graphic prints.



Dress, circa 1970, Lynne Graye by Faulkner, and scarf, 1960s. Collection of Auckland Museum Tāmaki Paenga Hira. T1429 and 1996.74.1

The Women’s Weekly quote does, however, reflect the underlying tension behind the Pākehā adoption of *kōwhaiwhai* as a decorative motif to denote “New Zealand-ness.” In spite of the treaty commitment made in 1840 by the British crown to give Māori people full rights and protections as British subjects, Māori have suffered loss of land and alienation from their cultural heritage. The appropriation of Māori imagery into mainstream New Zealand design can be interpreted as a further form of colonisation. In a 1977 article, Professor Sydney Moko Mead suggests that “The Pakeha are reaching into Maori culture and pulling out features with which they can identify, taking hold of quite generous portions which they then try to fit into

⁵ Margaret Lewis, “Artistry Abounds in our Souvenirs”, *New Zealand Women’s Weekly*, (October 1959): 76.

a Pakeha cultural world. Our Pakeha colleagues now argue that Maori art is really New Zealand art and is thus part of the New Zealand image.”⁶

Developments in the national education programme helped foster a more genuine understanding of New Zealand’s bicultural heritage. Gordon Tovey, the first supervisor of art and craft for the Department of Education, was instrumental in inserting Māori art into the school curriculum. His 1961 book *The Arts of the Maori* was issued to every schoolchild, and identified *kōwhaiwhai* patterns as an ideal way to introduce children to Māori art; he suggested the use of crayons and full arm movements to create “large and well rounded work.”⁷ Tovey also trained a new generation of arts advisers such as Ralph Hotere, Cliff Whiting, and Sandy Adsett, who went on to become leading contemporary Māori artists.

The 1960s and 70s brought a period of Māori nationalism and political engagement which went hand in hand with the reclamation of Māori cultural heritage. No-one better recognised the potential in *kōwhaiwhai* to visually assert Māori identity than politician Whetu Tirikatene-Sullivan. She used her platform as a Member of Parliament to advocate for the rights of Māori and women and, through her choice of wardrobe, brought Māori art into government spaces typically dominated by Pākehā men.

The first of Tirikatene-Sullivan’s iconic shift dresses was designed from a piece of fabric printed with a bold black and white *Mangopare* pattern by Sandy Adsett, an artist of the Tovey generation. The pattern’s association with the hammerhead shark emphasised characteristics of strength and tenacity, those which she herself embodied. Tirikatene-Sullivan went on to work with artisans such as Pākehā fabric designer Fanny Buss and established a boutique called Ethnic Art Studio in Wellington, selling high-quality handmade garments patterned with Māori iconography. This meshing of traditional Māori art with contemporary fashion was done in consultation with her elders, who permitted this form of cultural adaptation.⁸



Photograph of politicians including Whetu Tirikatene-Sullivan. Archives New Zealand reference ABGX 7574 W4969 3e

⁶ Sydney Moko Mead, “Should Maoritanga be Shared?”, in Sydney Moko Mead, *Landmarks, Bridges and Visions: Aspects of Maori Culture*, (Wellington, N.Z.: Victoria University Press, 1997), 92.

⁷ Gordon Tovey, *The Arts of the Maori*, (Wellington, N.Z.: Department of Education, 1961), 46.

⁸ Elizabeth Wratislav, “A Signature Style”, in Elizabeth Wratislav, Lucy Hammonds, & Tryphena Cracknell, *Whetu Tirikatene-Sullivan: Travel in Style*, (Napier: MTG Hawke's Bay, 2014), 11.

In the latter half of the 20th century there was a growing Pākehā awareness of the cultural implications of using Māori imagery, and a discomfort with unfettered appropriation of these patterns without consideration of their significance and meaning. Drawing on the expertise of practitioners helped to ameliorate this concern. The authors of *The New Zealand Quilters Handbook*, first published in 1989, consulted with master woodcarver Dr Pakariki Harrison to develop *kōwhaiwhai* designs appropriate for use in stitching, each of which was given a name in the Māori language and in English. Harrison also wrote a foreword to the book in which he encouraged the use of *kōwhaiwhai* in this medium, observing that “the designs and patterns lend themselves admirably to the gentle plying and coaxing of needle and thread, and the creativity of the craftsman.”⁹

Enterprises which do not incorporate genuine bicultural consultation are therefore held to account. In 2010, national airline Air New Zealand launched new range of uniforms by Trelise Cooper, a high-end Pākehā fashion designer. The dress fabric, designed for Trelise Cooper by firm Saatchi & Saatchi Design Worldwide, combines *koru* shapes with silhouettes of native plants to create a busy pattern repeat. The *koru* has been associated with Air New Zealand since the company adopted it as their logo, and has become so entrenched in their branding that their elite frequent flyer programme is named “Koru Club”. By incorporating the *koru* in their uniform, Air New Zealand relied on the visual shorthand of *kōwhaiwhai*-like motifs to reinforce their New Zealand identity for an international market. The new uniforms were nevertheless critiqued by Māori academic Rawiri Taonui who publicly called out the company for the busy and inelegant composition of elements which had “obviously been drawn by someone who doesn't appreciate the culture or understand the deeper symbolism.”¹⁰ Previous uniforms designed for Air New Zealand by fashion house Zambesi had included a merino wrap with a pattern designed by Māori artist Derek Lardelli, but faced criticism of a different kind as they were considered drab and unflattering.

Questions of ownership when it comes to iconography derived from Māori art – and who is able to sanction its use – are widely contested. In 2011, the New Zealand government issued a report on Māori cultural and intellectual property rights, which recognised that current laws “allow(ed) others to commercialise Māori artistic and cultural works ... without iwi or hapū acknowledgement or consent.”¹¹ A 2016 resource, *Protecting Intellectual Property with a Maori Cultural Element*, was produced by the Intellectual Property Office of New Zealand. It covers both the legal restrictions and moral rights relevant to use of this imagery, and recommends that “owners should consider using an artist or designer who is familiar with traditional Māori culture and tikanga to ensure that the trade mark or design is represented correctly and is culturally appropriate.”¹²

A landmark example of these efforts came in 1998, when New Zealand swimwear manufacturer Moontide produced a bikini with an all-over print of brown and white *kōwhaiwhai* based on the *Mangopare* pattern. Moontide signed an agreement with Pirarakau, a subtribe which had developed the design and trademarked it under their company Kia Ora Promotions. This non-exclusive agreement allowed Moontide to market the design in

⁹ Paki Harrison in Sue Hodge & Gwen Scrivener, *The New Zealand Quilter's Handbook*, (Auckland, N.Z.: David Bateman, 1989), 2.

¹⁰ Rawiri Taonui in Sam Sachdeva, “Air New Zealand's New Uniforms 'Disrespect Maori'”, *The Press*, February 2, 2010, <http://www.stuff.co.nz/life-style/fashion/3272904/Air-New-Zealands-new-uniforms-disrespect-Maori>

¹¹ New Zealand Ministry of Justice, “Ko Aotearoa Tēnei: Report on the Wai 262 Claim Released”, <https://www.waitangitribunal.govt.nz/news/ko-aotearoa-tenei-report-on-the-wai-262-claim-released/>

¹² Intellectual Property Office of New Zealand, *Protecting Intellectual Property with a Maori Cultural Element*, (Wellington, N.Z.: New Zealand Government, 2016), 16.

exchange for a percentage of the profits from the swimsuit. Although lauded as example of a Pākehā company going about it “the right way”, there were still questions raised about the true ownership of a design shared by multiple tribes, and the sometimes uneasy association of cultural property with commerce.¹³ *Tā moko* (tattoo) artist Julie Paama-Pengelly asserts the Māori right to utilise their art in this way, arguing that “if Maori don’t use their art in a commercial manner they’re not only likely to starve, but some less deserving Pakeha or foreigner comes along to feast on the advantage.”¹⁴ This perspective isn’t merely profit-driven – it asserts the right of Māori to have control over their artistic inheritance, and to make it visible in all aspects of New Zealand society, including commercial design.



Bikini, Moontide Ltd, 1998. Collection of Auckland Museum Tāmaki Paenga Hira, 2018.20.1

This view is shared by fellow artist Rangi Kipa, who undertook a commission from underwear manufacturer Jockey to create a design based on both their existing logo and *tā moko*. Kipa took the *rape*, or spiral, for his base design. He believed this to be an appropriate pattern for underwear as this form is often used on the buttocks in *tā moko*. Although Kipa had some freedom in creating the design, the nature of the product meant he had little control

¹³ Tania Waikato, "He Kaitiaki Matauranga: Building a Protection Regime for Maori Traditional Knowledge", *New Zealand Yearbook of New Zealand Jurisprudence*, 344 (2005)
<http://www.nzlii.org/nz/journals/NZYbkNZJur/2005/25.html>

¹⁴ Julie Paama-Pengelly, “Commercially Māori”, *Tū Mai; Offering an Indigenous New Zealand Perspective*, (June 2000): 30.

over the public dissemination of his work; an image featuring All Black Dan Carter appeared on a 26m-high billboard at a central Auckland intersection. Nevertheless, Kipa reflected positively on the experience: “I am always wanting to lift the visibility of Maori design languages in the mainstream platforms and I always see it as an opportunity to exercise my agency to influence the people involved in these types of cross-cultural transition(s).”¹⁵

Because they are available in the public domain, Augustus Hamilton’s rafter designs are easily accessible and require no copyright permission to reproduce. Users of online marketplaces like [zazzle.com](https://www.zazzle.com) are able to load designs straight on to the website and sell them as clothing, accessories, and home furnishings like shower curtains, allowing ancestral art to hang alongside a toilet.

Napier artist Raewyn Tauira Paterson was mindful of this when she chose to sell her designs through [redbubble.com](https://www.redbubble.com). Developed through her Masters in Professional Creative Practice, Paterson wanted to create new patterns appropriate for use in every aspect of the suburban home, so that Māori visual culture was embedded in every surface, much as it is in the interior of the *wharenui* on the Marae. The inspiration for her designs came as the result of an investigation into contemporary textile design, with particular attention to the garments of Whetu Tirikatene-Sullivan. In consulting with a focus group of Māori women, Paterson found that they were not seeking designs that specifically linked to their tribal identity, but wanted to wear patterns that were “undeniably Māori and elegant, and made them feel proud in (their) identity” – echoing the sentiments of Tirikatene-Sullivan.¹⁶ Her final *Kape* collection referenced traditional Māori textile forms through use of the cloak silhouette, and she organises her *kōwhaiwhai* motifs in a geometric layout which evokes *tāniko* hand weaving.



Pattern and Cape - Earth, Raewyn Tauira Paterson, 2016. Image courtesy of the artist.

¹⁵ Rangi Kipa, email to the author, 1 August 2018.

¹⁶ Raewyn Tauira Paterson, email to the author, 14 June 2018.

Everyday objects featuring *kōwhaiwhai* designs have been embraced for their cultural resonance, even when mass-produced outside of New Zealand. The original denotative role of *kōwhaiwhai* – to illustrate tribal genealogy – is retained in the context of the marae, but the transition from the *wharenui* rafters to textiles has brought this art form into day-to-day life. These transitions are also occurring in other Māori art forms. *Kapa haka* dance costumes which customarily feature geometric *tāniko* weaving have begun to incorporate curvilinear *kōwhaiwhai*-derived patterns. Contemporary examples render these patterns through cross-stitch which mimics the materiality of *tāniko*, or use commercial cotton fabric printed with *kōwhaiwhai*. From familiar patterns which have been in use for over 100 years, to new interpretations by contemporary Māori artists, *kōwhaiwhai* designs have been used in textiles project indigenous identity even at some distance from their original context.

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