



PARA MATCHITT

Born Tokomaru Bay 1933, Te Whanau a Apanui and Ngati Porou. Mainly self-taught, he is a tutor at Hawkes Bay Community College, Taradale. Has been responsible for many innovations in art forms for marae projects.

"Often we find if a person is an ar-

...tist we make him teach us. I think we ought to leave that person alone. We should get people who have some sort of empathy with art, people on the perimeter of art, to look at it, study it and become the teachers. Go, see, and then leave the artist alone."



What is Maori Art?

Is the carving on a pou pou telling the kaupapa of a tribe more authentic than a quarter acre rock mural across a Taupo cliff-face?

Or are they both relevant art forms from their respective areas each with a different story told in a different way.

Disputing what is Art is an age-old argument common throughout time.

Indeed without this conflict many art-forms would never have sprung. Criticism is healthy for art because it makes sure the art doesn't stulify, criticism keeps artists 'honest' in that they have to respond.

So what is the state of Maori art, is it alive and well and fulfilling its place in the culture it sprung from?

Last year the New Zealand Maori Artists and Writers Society gave an exhibition of their work at the Pipitea Marae in Wellington. It was obvious from their work that many of them have moved beyond traditional art and are expressing themselves through a different art form and process.

One look at the work of Para Matchitt as our cover shot shows, makes this clear. While incorporating some of the traditional symbols, these modern Maori art-forms are intensely individualistic perspectives of the artists rather than the Maori community.

It's here that there is the great difference between traditional and modern Maori art. Not only are the art-forms different but the art process has also changed.

Previously traditional art such as carving, tukutuku, kowhaiwhai, weaving, taniko was marae based and carried the living history of the people through symbolic representation in the art form.

The traditional artist had a home base to work from that supplied him with the form and meaning for his work. He also had a ready audience for his work who could identify with what was portrayed whether it was carving, kowhaiwhai or tukutuku.

Today that home base was largely gone and with it much of the audience and meaning of traditional art due to the absorption to the Maori into the modern world.

Because of this breakdown today's Maori artists have either sought an individualistic approach or else have delved back into what is known of traditional Maori art from those still willing to pass the knowledge on.

It is this challenge to produce traditional Maori carving in a modern world that Geoff Pryor, the writer of the accompanying, article addresses himself.