

**A** SOCIETY  
DOES NOT  
BECOME A NATION  
UNTIL THAT SOCIETY  
INDICATES ITS INDEPENDENCE  
AND CELEBRATES ITS OWN CULTURE . . .



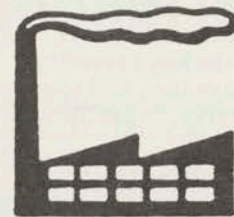
**O**UR TRADE  
AND TOURISM  
POLICY PLANKS MUST  
BE NAILED IN PLACE BY A  
STRONG AND COURAGEOUS  
POLICY OF CULTURAL IDENTITY.

HON. MIKE MOORE;  
MINISTER OF TOURISM  
AND OVERSEAS TRADE AND MARKETING



**PAKEHA  
MYTHOLOGY**

**curated by Robert Leonard**



**Govett-Brewster Art Gallery  
New Plymouth.  
May-June 1986**



# PAKEHA MYTHOLOGY

---

## INTRODUCTION

*The greatest single illusion we have  
is that we have no illusions.*

Gordon McLauchlan

### the land

We pakehas stole our land from the maoris, stole the material base of their culture to provide one for our own.

Before colonisation the maoris lived in their own cultural world, accepting their view of the world and ways of doing things as commonsense, as correct and natural. We, meanwhile, living in a different place, in a different cultural world, similarly accepted our view of the world and our ways, our culture, as correct, as transparent, as nature.

When we met up with maori culture, we saw it as odd, irrational, mystified, opaque, simply because it was at odds with our view of the world, a view we didn't dare or think to question. The maoris undoubtedly saw our culture similarly.

As we appropriated more and more maori land, increasingly reorganising their reality in accord with the

prescriptions of our culture, ours became the dominant culture. Our ways became the key to reality, became the ways they had to adopt if wanting to survive, to get things done, to get on.

Maori culture debased by this abstraction from the land has come to seem to the maoris increasingly at odds with reality, because the reality, the social reality, the common sense, is now a pakeha one. Maori culture is unemployed; it no longer works. Maori culture has been denaturalised, and our culture crowned nature in its place.

Today, when we say we have no culture and lament the fact, lament our lack of poetry, of spirituality, it attests to the strength of our culture, the fact that our culture is the reality.

Today, when maoris celebrate the poetry of "maori culture," its spirituality, they do so from outside,

as strangers, as foreigners. You simply cannot celebrate your own culture as such, for to see your culture as culture is to have another culture.

To act as if one could turn back the clock, to act as if "the pakeha" could be deposed and traditional maori culture reinstated on the throne by an act of will on the part of maoris, is naive, is not only to underestimate the dominance of pakeha culture, the transparency of pakeha mythology, but also to underestimate traditional maori culture, to see it as a thing, as a thing that can be chosen, and valued, deemed "better," rather than simply "the way things are."

A recognition of all this is necessary if radical political change is to take place in this place. We must premise political action not on a notion of what culture we want, but on a sense of loss, a recognition that our world is shrinking, that possibilities, that ways out, are being shut off.

### national identity

Pakeha notions of national identity — of what makes this place what it is, and of how it makes us who we are — invariably confuse the distinctive with the essential, a part with the whole; involve the privileging of that seen as distinctive about us or this place as somehow more real than that which is not. Such notions are fictions, but very real fictions: they affect the way we act, and thus the shaping of our world.

Nationalism is the practical assertion of a notion of national identity, necessarily involving the suppression of that which is not seen to confirm it, as if such did not matter, never was, or should not be. Through this suppression, which can be physical as well as ideological, nationalism threatens to stage the fiction as if it had been the case all along.



# SOME EXTRACTS FROM THE ANNALS OF PAKEHA MYTHOLOGY

Strictly speaking, New Zealand doesn't exist yet, though some possible New Zealand glimmer in some poems and on some canvases. It remains to be created - should I say invented - by writers, musicians, artists, architects, publishers; even a politician might help.

Alen Curnow Dialogue by way of introduction *Yearbook of the Arts in New Zealand* H.H. Tombs, Wellington, 1945, page 2.

My approach to politics has tended to be pragmatic as I believe that New Zealand is unique and that theories and policies that originate in the major industrial countries will not necessarily work (here) ...

Sir Robert Muldoon *The rise and fall of a young Turk* Wellington, 1974, page 31,

Daily experience — for all the painters considered here, the New Zealand landscape and its chill, black-shadowed, light — fills the psyche, informing its inscape. As his mind is or is made, so will a painter see. And so will he modify, by a reflexive reaction on that which has acted upon him, the quotidian world that he inhabits. And so will the painter

remake the bare white field of virgin canvas in front of him : this is his reaction his praxis.

Patrick E. Hutchings Eight New Zealand abstract painters *Art international* Vol 1: January 20 1975, page 18

There's no room for self doubt. It's not always a clear vision or anything like that, but it has to be done. The reason why I paint is never questioned. I've never given it up. Six weeks would be the longest. The main thing is to bring out the essence of the object for the viewer. The reality behind the surface of appearances.

Philip Clairmont quoted in Jim and Mary Barr *Contemporary painters, A-M* Alister Taylor, Martinborough, 1980, page 48.

I watched the colours change on the mountains across the lake, wondering at the depths which lie between the hard brilliance of noon and the tender drift of shadows in the dusk. I noticed once again the way in which the peaks and ridges that are so obviously barren and remote in full daylight come nearer to the senses in twilight and move on the insinuations of tonal change — contrived by the sunset, the

stillness of the lake and the lucid quality of mountain air — towards a moment of irresistible union with the submerged shapes of mind. At such times, pondering the curious extensions of spirit and soil, the individual can experience the demonstration of an idea. He is able to know, with a proof expounded by the senses, that the body and its environment have merely an illusory separateness. The margins grow indistinct, and the spirit has command of a larger self, mysteriously preserving its identity even in the moments of renewal and surrender. I thought that in this experience there lurked the beginnings of a journey which might be travelled in a search for truth as it exists for New Zealanders in the affirmations of their hills, in the silences of the land that received their fathers, and in the sounds of their own restless activity. These are hopes for a work that might not be obtained in this generation. Yet I believe, with a conviction fed daily from the evidence of a culture which stays too long among the shallows, that some of us must try, within the limits of our strength, to escape from the easy and superficial ways of thinking and make a new journey into the wilderness.

M. H. Holcroft *The deepening stream* Caxton Press, Christchurch, 1940, pages 85-86.

Her work is in no way connected with regionalism. It is not the depiction of particular landscape elements which interests her but the making of images which convey, by searching out underlying realities, the landscape's universal significance as metaphor or emblem. Blackened and bleached burnt trees; the wineglass-shaped nikau palm; and above all, the cratered volcanic cone. Such themes explored in depth and painted as thematic material become, for the

artist, symbols of human states of mind. She sees the landscape as being animistic in the sense that "the spirit which is in human, and bird, and rock, animates and energises the universe and all its parts". Every landscape is charged with inner life. In the particular lies the universal. Thus a visionary approach pervades her work.

Gil Docking of Shay Docking, *200 years of New Zealand painting* A. H. and A. W. Reed, Wellington, 1971, page 190.

Moreover, the forms are revealed starkly and geometrically in an astonishingly crystalline clarity of light and this coupled with her transcendent emotional involvement with the area, resulted in a highly subjective depiction of this particular landscape. Through her rhythmic treatment of the structure this landscape discloses its quintessential qualities. . . .

Melvin Day The years 1908-1958 *Rita Angus* National Art Gallery, Wellington 1982, pages 47-48

Driving one day with the family over hills from Brighton or Taieri Mouth to the Taieri Plain, I first became aware of my own particular God, perhaps an Egyptian God, but standing far from the sun of Egypt in the Otago cold. Big hills stood in front of the little hills, which rose up distantly across the plain from the flat land: there was a landscape of splendour, and order and peace. (The crucifixion hadn't yet come: perhaps this landscape was of the time before Jesus. I saw an angel in this land. Angels can herald beginnings.) I saw something logical, orderly and beautiful belonging to the land and not yet to its people. Not yet understood or communicated, not even



really yet invented. My work has largely been to communicate this vision and to invent the way to see it.

Colin McCahon Beginnings *Landfall*  
No. 24, December 1966, pages 363-364

You will also, if you hear the story right, feel a warm admiration for the courage and determination of the Maoris against whom we fought in some of the Maori wars. It is because of our great respect for the Maoris that white man and brown man now live side by side as friends and fellow citizens of New Zealand. . . . Mrs Leigh (wife of a Wesleyan preacher) was shocked to find that Maori mothers often killed their babies, and she set out to do away with this dreadful custom. At last she thought out a plan. She set to work and made clothes in which she dressed the little brown babies. The mothers, seeing how attractive the little ones looked in their fine clothes soon became proud of them; and in this way Mrs Leigh saved scores of lives. . . . At first some of the chiefs did not wish to sign the Treaty, but one of them, Tamati Waka Nene, made a splendid speech in which he told the Maoris that he was sure the Queen wished only to be their friend. . . . You will understand how important was the Treaty of Waitangi in the story of New Zealand. By it, our country became a British colony; and by it the Maoris remained the real owners of the country. To this day it remains the fairest Treaty ever made between Europeans and a native race; indeed, in many ways, it was much fairer to brown man than to white.

*Our nation's story (standard 3)*  
Whitcombe and Tombs, Auckland (192?)  
Pages 11-20

It is doubtful whether he has escaped altogether from the general decadence of English (and for that matter, European) art in this century. The root of this decadence lies in isolating the aesthetic, removing it from its necessary and traditional involvement with other modes of experience, and making it a pure end in itself. The work of art thus ceases to have any relationship with anything outside itself — it ceases to have a 'subject'. It becomes, in fact, its own subject. At a low level, this leads to an obsession with effects of texture, and to the production of those rootless abstractions which have become so modish in our time. Looking at some of the more abstract works of Moore's middle period, we may be forgiven for wondering whether their real 'subject' is not merely Moore's own style hypostatized, conceived as end-in-itself. One notes, indeed, in these works a sort of narcissism — a tendency for the sculptor to imitate himself.

A. R. D. Fairburn The sculpture of Henry Moore *The woman problem and other prose* Blackwood and Janet Paul, Auckland 1967, page 184.

The temptation to take a soft line has still to develop, but there are signs that a growing atmosphere of permissiveness is encouraging the second rate, the safely "moderne", the fashionable and the modish. Art criticism barely exists at the moment and unless it develops as rapidly as the arts, what has begun with such promise might end in a fashionable disaster. The art scene has had its first real flowering and the crop looks good, but now is the time for a little judicious pruning to toughen the roots.

Hamish Keith The art scene  
*New Zealand Vogue* Summer 1968.

The plains are nameless and the cities cry for meaning,  
The unproved heart still seeks a vein of speech  
Beside the sprawling rivers, in the stunted township,  
By the pine windbreak where the hot wind bleeds.

Man must lie with the gaunt hills like a lover,  
Earning their intimacy in the calm sigh  
Of a century of quiet assiduity,  
Discovering what solitude has meant

Before our headlong time broke on these waters,  
And in himself unite time's dual order;  
For he to both the swift and slow belongs,  
Formed for a hard and complex history.

So relenting, earth will tame her tamer,  
And speak with all her voices tenderly  
To seal his homecoming to the world. . . .

He will walk with his shadow across the bleaching plain  
No longer alone. . . .

Charles Brasch The silent land  
*The Penguin book of New Zealand verse*  
(ed. Allen Curnow) Blackwood and Janet Paul, Auckland 1966, page 84.

We have no tradition, we have had no "schools", and it is only recently that we have produced any New Zealand paintings at all. As a far flung province we have stood not in isolation from, but in nostalgic attachment to, our cultural origins. We continue to gawp lovingly at a mythical horizon. Our people do not know what land the knows, for we have not grown up to seeing. Indicative of our provincialism is the confederacy of small-town Royal

Academics that crowd our islands; an army of women painters; the impotence of our art schools. . . . (However) to see the country as McCahon does, to recognise in the brute fact of his paint the harsh blue skies and the sour greens of the North, is to learn a little more of ourselves as New Zealanders and as men.

Wystan Curnow New Zealand painting  
*Kiwi 1960* Auckland University Students Association and The Pilgrim Press, Auckland 1960, Pages 31-32.

At that stage no one was painting the bush from the inside. I was always inside my subject; it was more intimate, more dramatic.

Michael Smither quoted in Jim and Mary Barr *Michael Smither, an introduction* Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth 1984, page 34.

His paintings don't come from 'looking at' scenes but from being in them. . . .

Chris Parr of Dean Buchanan, No more flags in the valley *Art New Zealand* No. 25, 1982, page 21.

New Zealand. A land of ever-changing scenery. Incredible contrasts. No other country in the world packs so much variety into such a small area. Scientists and travellers from all over the world come to New Zealand to learn, explore and to discover the secrets of our unique and beautiful country. A country we take for granted. This land is your land. Do you know it? Have you seen the sun set over Mitre Peak or Mt Cook? Walked on a living glacier? Watched a volcano or geyser erupting? Have you travelled to the far north? Or the deep south? The East Cape? The West Coast? Have you panned for gold?



Explored fascinating underground glowworm grottos? Seen a kiwi feeding? Or a myriad of trout? Do you know where to find a breathing lake? A forest of giant kauri trees? Do you know our big cities? And our country towns? Do you know the people and places in this wonderful land we call home? Newmans offer the most comprehensive range of New Zealand holiday options. Holidays to suit your time, your budget and to take in all you want to see. There's nothing we enjoy more than sharing our country with others, sharing the delight of seeking out new places and showing off the scenic grandeur. This is Newmans New Zealand. And your New Zealand. Let's discover it together.

Travel brochure.

New Zealand is a crude little hole, without doubt. But... I'd like to go back to New Zealand and be a New Zealander. Not a wistful student of French Impressionism and Post-Impressionism, as some of our young artists would apparently wish to be. Not a follower of the Bolshevik Revolution... Not a student of Anglo-Irish decadence — of Virginia Woolf, James Joyce and co. But just a New Zealander. I would like to live in the backblocks of New Zealand, and try to realise in my mind the real culture of that country. Somewhere where I might escape the vast halitosis of the Press, and the whole dreadful weight of modern art and literature. Because we really are people of a different race, and have no right to be monkeying about with European culture.

A.R.D. Fairburn *The Letters of A.R.D. Fairburn* (ed. Lauris Edmond) Oxford University Press, Auckland, 1981, pages 62-63.

Only in New Zealand's most acclaimed setting can one find gourmet cuisine and continental charm comfortably tucked into the world's most magnificent wilderness.

Travel brochure.

The best way to see the matte black Hoteres is to wake up to them in a bedroom whose plain white muslin curtains filter the first cold light of a New Zealand summer, some two and a half lines of latitude from Antarctica.

Patrick E. Hutchings Eight New Zealand abstract painters  
*Art International* Vol 19, No. 1,  
January 20 1975, page 18

OILS BRUSHED ON BOARDS.  
BLACK SINGLET! BLACK  
BATONS! A DARK SIMPLICITY.  
BUT I AM FLESH AND BLOOD AND  
THE RIOT POLICE ARE COMING!  
STILL THIS IS A SNUG LITTLE  
COUNTRY AND THESE THINGS  
ARE QUICKLY FORGOTTEN.  
SOMEONE'S YET TO BLEED FROM  
ART. NED KELLY ON TV WOULD  
HAVE UNDERSTOOD. SHAME!  
INJUSTICE! WOMEN ANGRY FOR  
NEW RIGHTS WOULD HAVE  
HEADS ON PLATTERS. EVERY  
ARTIST NEEDS AN AXE! IMAGINE  
ARTISTS WITH A CUTTING EDGE!  
THE HACKING OUT OF  
UNDERSTANDING. AFTERWARDS  
A SKULL, SOME ART, AND THE  
REMNANTS OF A MYTHOLOGY.

Nigel Brown *Random Notes* (a one-off artist's book) 1985. Unpaginated.

... you bury your heart and as it goes deeper into the land you can only follow. It's a painful love, loving a land, it takes a long time. I stood with an old Maori lady on a boat from Australia once — a terribly rough and wild passage. We were both on deck to see the Three Kings — us dripping tears. It's there that this land starts. The very bones of New Zealand were there, bare yellow clay-slides running to the sea, and black rock.

Colin McCahon Necessary protection  
*Art New Zealand* No 7, August/September/  
October 1977, page 45.

Dean Buchanan paints the remarkable coastline west of Auckland. Here the forest gorges pour down to the lush valley floors. It is wilderness, menacing, dark; only the ridges and high tracks give any view. The gorges, even in summer, are cold and inhospitable to man. I have always felt that the New Zealand bush terrifies the majority of pakehas. We're always intruders in its dark interior. It waits willingly for our death. It offers no substance if we are lost. Every stream looks the same, and when night comes, so do the spirits. In the Waitakeres are many places of tapu, death and failure. Nothing's worked except weekend baches. The Maoris fought one another until only a handful survived on the whole west coast. The first disease-ridden Europeans put an end to them and got to work on the trees until they were no more. Bush timber mills flourished briefly, then crumbled into bankruptcy. I suppose most people think all this can happen and then vanish overnight, but it's still there, in the glades, in the more remote valleys. Dean Buchanan knows this and he paints it bold, and that's his fascination. He's not your weekend painter. He walks the Waitakeres 27 miles at a time. He's taken a few friends along, but they soon pack it in.

His walks take eight hours, often in the heavy rainstorms which lash the ranges, through the mud and slush of the Whatipu and Huia tracks, down the coast and back to Karekare, often wearing only his favourite black togs, sandals and a World War II water bottle. He picks the light and colours of the bush in the different valleys he strides. The Anawhata mauves, the dark rich purples of the rock faces, the greens and oranges of the bushed hinterland. In some glades he sees nikau groves that have not been seen by anyone for 100 years and he paints them like Roman columns, in the distance often a glimpse of the Tasman — a viridian sea settling under a viridian sky, waiting its moment... Mangere Mountain on a wet May Saturday afternoon: a kick at some rubble reveals one of the finest adzes I've ever seen. Later in the afternoon he finds a volcanic bomb, hidden by sheep dung, beautifully shaped, but not by man: waiting for him to pass by. I felt this was some kind of gift, a reward from the New Zealand landscape. I'm sure the ancients had a name for people who have such powers. Some these days would say "lucky bastard" and leave it at that, but he acknowledges this gift like a talisman that he has. In a way, it's a special reward for his involvement and his art. Nature has a way of repaying the faithful with tokens of her affection.

Bob Harvey Painter Dean Buchanan,  
power and urgency *Metro* August 1985,  
pages 138-142



# CATALOGUE

## COLENZO COMMUNICATIONS LTD, AUCKLAND

Apple computers TV ad 1984  
videotape  
60 seconds

Dominion Breweries cinema ad  
1985  
videotape  
90 seconds

Dominion Breweries cinema ad  
1985  
videotape  
90 seconds

## COLENZO COMMUNICATIONS LTD, WELLINGTON

Nilverm TV ad 1985  
videotape  
60 seconds

Toyota TV ad 1983  
Videtape  
60 seconds

Toyota TV ad 1984  
videotape  
60 seconds

Toyota TV ad 1984  
videotape  
60 seconds

Toyota TV ad 1985  
videotape  
60 seconds

## COLIN McCAHON (1919 —)

CRUCIFIXION WITH LAMP 1947  
oil on board  
770 x 910mm  
Hocken Library, Dunedin

## CHRISTOPHER PERKINS (1891-1968)

FROZEN FLAMES c1931  
oil on canvas  
689 x 613mm  
Auckland City Art Gallery

## DOBBS WIGGINS McCANN ERICKSON LTD, WELLINGTON

National Party TV ad 1981  
videotape  
180 seconds

National Party TV ad 1981  
videotape  
180 seconds

National Party TV ad 1981  
videotape  
180 seconds

## MacHARMAN/AYER ADVERTISING LTD, AUCKLAND

Lion TV ad 1979  
videotape  
60 seconds

Lion TV ad 1981  
videotape  
30 seconds

Lion TV ad 1981  
videotape  
30 seconds

Lion TV ad 1981  
videotape  
30 seconds

## M. D. A. McKAY KING ADVERTISING LTD, WELLINGTON

Griffins wine biscuits TV ad 1986  
videotape  
30 seconds

Mainland cheese TV ad 1984  
videotape  
30 seconds

National Bank TV ad 1983  
videotape  
120 seconds

Tree shirts TV ad 1984  
videotape  
30 seconds

## RIALTO ADVERTISING LTD, WELLINGTON

Appletise TV ad 1985  
videotape  
30 seconds

## RITA ANGUS (1908-1970)

CASS 1936  
oil on canvas  
375 x 474mm  
Robert McDougall Art Gallery,  
Christchurch

## SAATCHI AND SAATCHI COMPTON NZ LTD, WELLINGTON

Buttermark TV ad 1981  
videotape  
30 seconds

Buttermark TV ad 1985  
videotape  
60 seconds

Buttermark TV ad 1985  
videotape  
60 seconds

## TELEVISION NEW ZEALAND, AUCKLAND

New Zealand Cancer Society TV  
ad 1984  
videotape  
60 seconds

## UNKNOWN

Government Tourist and Publicity  
Bureau TV ad  
videotape  
30 seconds

# THANK YOU

**PAKEHA MYTHOLOGY** was curated with the assistance of Anna Bibby, Mary Barr, Jim Barr, Wytan Curnow, Garth Maxwell, Roger Horrocks, Francis Pound, Ian Carter and Nick Perry. Thanks also to the advertising companies, and their clients; the Auckland City Art Gallery, Auckland; the Hocken Library, Dunedin; and the Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch.



