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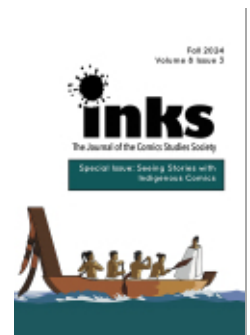
From Panel to Panel . . . Pou to Pou: Connecting Māori Art
Practices and Sequential Storytelling

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FROM PANEL TO PANEL ... POH TO POH

CONNECTING MĀORI ART PRACTICES AND SEQUENTIAL STORYTELLING



BY ZAK WAIPARA



As I undertook a practice-led PhD to transform traditional Māori narratives into picture book/comic hybrid forms...

...interesting threads emerged from discussions on comic making in New Zealand.



One opinion held that comics and Indigenous artmaking were mutually exclusive. Therefore, if comics were Indigenous, what form could that take?

This essay recounts my journey undertaken to answer this question, by reviewing the purposes of Māori art, the Indigenousising of introduced artforms...

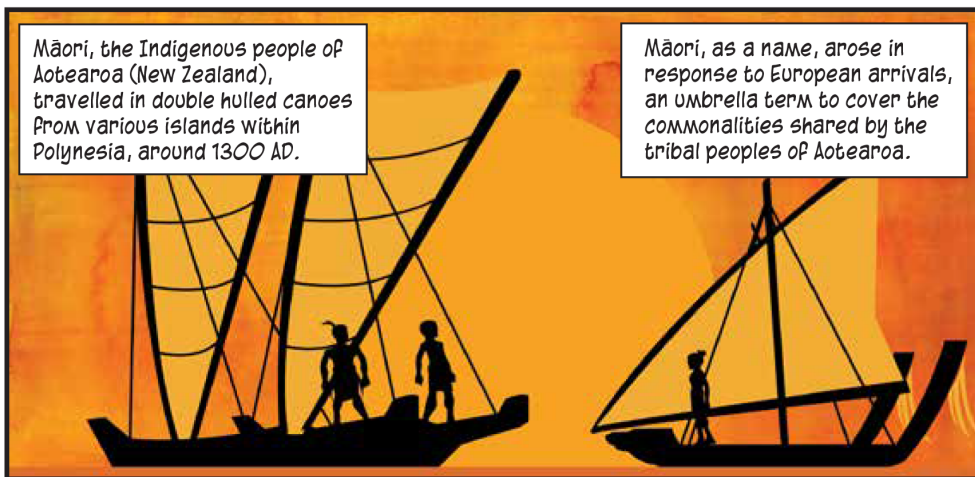
... and how these viewpoints might be expressed via the artistic processes in my PhD...



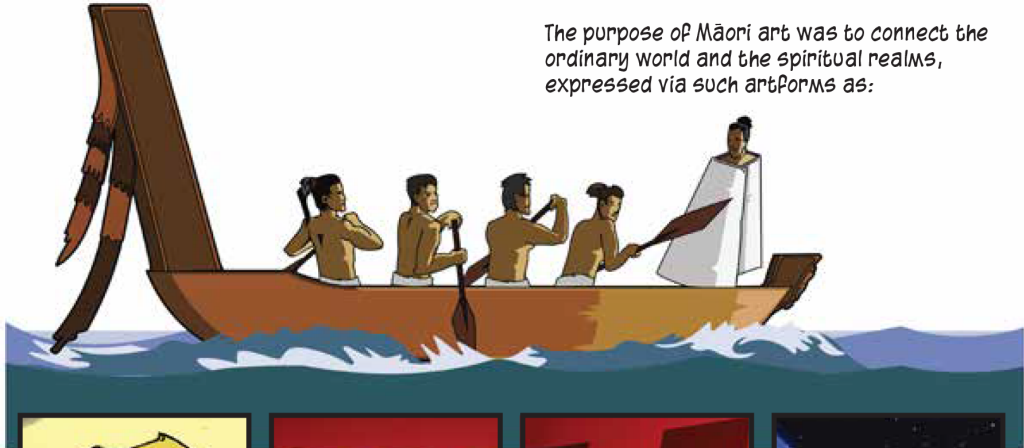
TE MANA A
MĀUI
THE MAGIC OF MĀUI:
TRANSFORMING & SHAPESHIFTING
PŪRĀKAU MĀORI

Māori, the Indigenous people of Aotearoa (New Zealand), travelled in double hulled canoes from various islands within Polynesia, around 1300 AD.

Māori, as a name, arose in response to European arrivals, an umbrella term to cover the commonalities shared by the tribal peoples of Aotearoa.



The purpose of Māori art was to connect the ordinary world and the spiritual realms, expressed via such art forms as:



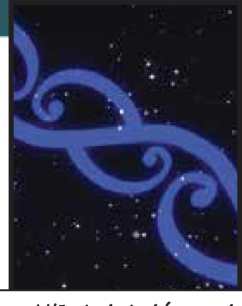
Whakairo (carving),



Tāmoko (tattooing),



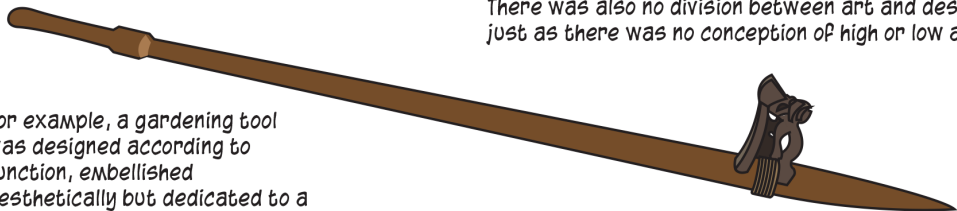
Tukutuku (woven wall decorations),



and Kōwhaiwhai (organic-inspired painted motifs).

There was also no division between art and design, just as there was no conception of high or low art.

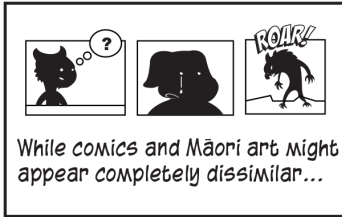
For example, a gardening tool was designed according to function, embellished aesthetically but dedicated to a deity, combining the mundane, the artistic, and the spiritual.



<p>European arrival was predicted by East Coast tohunga (priestly expert) Toiroa, who sketched their likenesses in the sand.</p>		<p>Colonisation wrought huge changes with dire consequences for Māori – death, war, disease, land loss, and culture loss.</p>
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<p>Contact also brought new resources and ways of thinking. Māori adopted these new materials and concepts into to their existing Indigenous worldview.</p>			<p>When Māori, an oral language, became written, type and letter forms were added to traditional art forms.</p>
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While comics and Māori art might appear completely dissimilar...



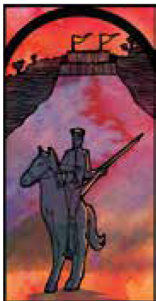
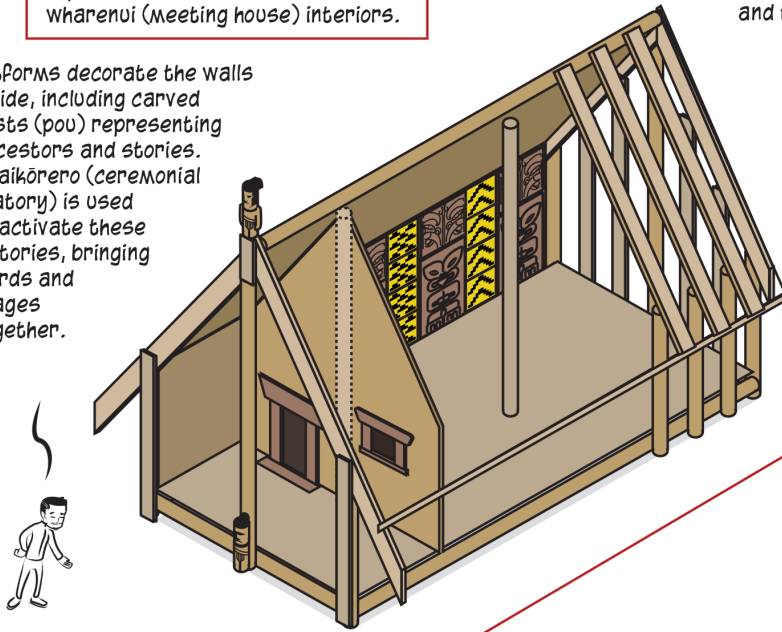
...broad definitions, such as stained-glass windows and woven tapestries mean...

...parallels can be made with Māori whareniui (meeting house) interiors.

Comics deal with space and time.

ArtForms decorate the walls inside, including carved posts (pou) representing ancestors and stories. Whaikōrero (ceremonial oratory) is used to activate these histories, bringing words and images together.

A meeting house also curates chronological time, events depicted in sequence internally.



During the Land Wars (1845-72), where the settler government wrested land and power from Māori tribes, a form of 'Polk art' arose. Carved houses were replaced by painted meeting houses, driven by political-religious resistance movements.

It was influenced by European figurative Polk painting, but also included icons, symbols, and Māori motifs.

A significant example in Tūrangi depicts historical events of the Tūwharetoa tribe in sequential, vertical form.



Māori also began using war flags as spiritual battle standards that adopted and reinterpreted iconic imagery.

Te Wepu (the whip): the crescent moon as portent of a new world, the fighting cross of the Archangel Michael, a mountain representing New Zealand, the bleeding heart, the suffering of the Māori people.



Comics can stage complex cultural ideas, including Indigenous language and traditional knowledge.



Otea is an original comic, built upon the bedrock of Māori traditions. Plot and themes emerged from cultural principles or tikanga (tika = right, correct).

Otea: Rock of Ages Part 1



Green geckos were evil omens, when emitting laughter-like noises. Mokokata was named from this belief: moko = lizard, kakakata = laughter.

Otea: Rock of Ages Part 2



Only in the sea god's house could the carved pou speak. Shavings could only be brushed off a carving not blown, lest the hau (breath) of the carver enter it. So a talking carving becomes the source of some mystery.

Pepeha: Words and Pictures

Nga kupu: Erana Foster, Nga whakatauhia: Zak Weipare

TUAKIRI Identify beyond the skin...	 WAKA	 MAUNGA	 AWA	 TANGATA	 WHENUA
TINANA The body is topa...					
WHĀIAU family, birth, the creation of the world...					
HINENGARO mind, intellect, awareness, and emotions - the hidden female...					
WAIHUA all life is physical and spiritual, the secret hidden					

A pepeha (tribal statement) uses geographical features to affirm tribal identity, such as mountains (maunga), rivers or bodies of water (awa/moana), and eponymous ancestors.



Page layouts are elemental in arrangement and use more abstract ancestor figures, in stylised, metaphysical, and iconic renditions.



PHD EXPLORATIONS

Discussion on comics often uses analogies of building and interior design. The panel has even been compared to a window. However, windows were not a focus of classic Māori architecture, as much as doorways.

Approaches to comic Framing vary in each book, according to themes of the narrative, and doors have been a guiding concept.

Book 1 is set within the world of the gods, hence the use of open panels formed by natural boundaries, such as plants, rocks, and water.

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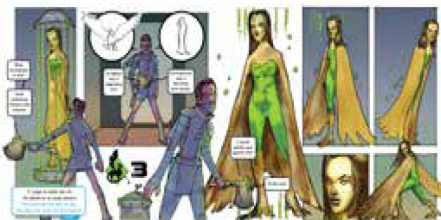


Book 2 begins at the threshold of te tatau o te pō (the doorway to night) and often uses material ephemera to form portal-like frames.



Landscape painting was never a feature of Māori art, with the world framed by Ranginui the Skyfather and Papatūānuku, Earth-Mother.

In Book 3, the architectural metaphor creates a contrast between the spacious, mostly open-panelled world of the people and the boxed-in, claustrophobic panels inside a technological pyramid ruled by a despot.



Since the thesis artefacts were experimental prototypes, it was not an endpoint, but rather a doorway to further creative exploration.