From the collection

Little River Hei Tiki (female, Ngai Tahu) 2003, C-Type print, 1960 x 1600mm.

Pregnant with mystery, this huge image of a hei tiki glowing against a dark background is magnetically attractive. It is one of a range of Cinderella artefacts – those deemed by curators as too imperfect to exhibit – brought to light by Ngai Tahu photographer Fiona Pardington. Working towards her MFA at the Elam School of Fine Arts in 2002-2003, she trawled through collections of her iwi’s taonga at Auckland Museum and Okains Bay Māori and Colonial Museum on Banks Peninsula. It took her up to 18 months to seek and obtain permission from each relevant hapu to photograph their taonga for this project.

Making each image was also a complex process. Using 16 flashes during a single long exposure, she made a portrait of each hei tiki, which she hand-printed, then rephotographed it on a large-format colour negative which was printed commercially on a large scale as a C-Type. Known as coupler or chromogenic prints, C-types are made using a three-layered paper sensitive to red, green or blue light. Light selectively affects each layer to form a latent image, and each coupler in the paper can form a dye colour that is complementary to the layer when the print is developed using chemicals. Even though the image is black and white, this printing process brings warmth and subtlety to the contrasts of light and shadow, imbuing the pounamu with lustre and bringing the hei tiki to life. While her

subject remains ostensibly a still life, Pardington directs the viewer’s attention to the politics of museums and collections.

Presenting a suite of nine contact prints of hei tiki by Fiona Pardington to the Musée de Quai Branly in Paris was one of New Zealand’s first initiatives in cultural diplomacy in 2005. Billed as featuring indigenous art, cultures and civilisations from Africa, Asia, Oceania and the Americas, this museum’s creation marks a shift away from collecting and displaying artefacts from other cultures as the spoils of the colonies. Previously contained within the ethnographic department of the Museum of Mankind and the Museum of African and Oceanic Arts, its collections of hei tiki would once have been displayed with labels identifying them as neck pendants fashioned from adzes in the form of a human foetus, used as a fertility symbol and worn by women. Fiona Pardington’s work returns the interpretation to Māori, her process seeming to release the light held in the hei tiki, suggesting the mana that they develop after being handed on to successive generations of wearers.

It is on display in the Gus Fisher Gallery as part of the exhibition Close-Up until 5 July.

Linda Tyler

Art

On Creating a Usable Culture

Anthropologist Margaret Mead secured a unique and enduring place in the American popular imagination. In this book entitled On Creating a Usable Culture: Margaret Mead and the Emergence of American Cosmopolitanism, Professor Maureen Molloy (Women’s Studies) explores how she secured this enduring place and how she was influenced by, and influenced, the meanings of American culture.

Maureen Molloy considers this in relation to Mead’s four popular ethnographies (Coming of Age in Samoa, Growing Up in New Guinea, The Changing Culture of an Indian Tribe, and Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies), and to the academic, middlebrow and popular responses to them.

She argues that Mead was heavily influenced by the debates concerning the forging of a distinctive American culture that began around 1911 with the publication of George Santayana’s The Gentile Tradition. Mead drew on the vision of an “integrated culture” and used her “primitive societies” as exemplars of how cultures attained or failed to attain this ideal. Her ethnographies are really about “America”, with the peoples she studied serving as personifications of what were widely understood to be the dilemmas of American selfhood in a materialistic, individualistic society.

On Creating a Usable Culture, published by the University of Hawai’i Press, will be eagerly welcomed by those with an interest in American studies and history, cultural studies and the social sciences, and most especially by readers and scholars of American intellectual history and gender studies.

Fragmented Intimacy

Addiction is an important topic in the modern age. The health and social consequences of addictions contribute significantly to violent and property crimes, family and relationship discord, illness, injury, and other threats to physical and mental wellbeing.

Fragmented Intimacy: Addiction in a Social World, written by Associate Professor Peter Adams (Social and Community Health) and published recently by Springer in New York, steps outside traditional understandings of addictions and explores the potential of approaching them from a social perspective.

Traditional approaches are dominated by what the book refers to as “particle” perspectives where the focus narrows down onto the person experiencing the addiction. This is most commonly represented in medical or bio-psycho-social approaches that start out from a position that reduces personal identity to socially isolated individuals.

Particle-derived intervention approaches have yielded marginal gains in reducing levels of addiction. A shift in orientation may open up new possibilities.

A social perspective shifts from thinking in terms of particles to looking at the person in terms of relationships. People become, in many ways, defined by the array of connections that comprise their social world.

At one level, a person’s relationship to an addictive substance is seen to progressively strengthen at the cost of deteriorating relationships elsewhere. Accordingly, attempts at change involve reversing this process and gradually reintegrating fragmented relationships.

At another level, the dominance of the addictive relationships has consequences for the more intense types of relationship we refer to as intimacy. The challenges of reintegration will involve supporting a process of productive interplay between intimates.

At yet another level, relationships occur on a wider horizon involving networks of extended families, neighbourhoods, workplaces and communities. The strength and resilience of their collective linkages is a critical resource in responding to the fragmenting potential of addictive relationships.