

# From the collection



Square, triangular and rectangular units in sections of wood and chipboard are nailed and butted together in this relief sculpture, forming an integrated collection of diverse components.

The artist Paratene Te Moko Puorongo Matchitt was raised in Tokomaru Bay and is of Whanau-a-Apanui, Ngati Porou and Whakatohea descent. At Edgecumbe, near Whakatane, he was taught to carve by his father and grandfather. After leaving the east coast, he attended Auckland Teachers' College in the years 1955 and 1956 and then spent a year at the Training College in Dunedin where he became one of Gordon Tovey's art advisors. Tovey was the charismatic National Supervisor of Arts and Crafts from 1 February 1946 until his retirement in 1966. Tovey encouraged many artists such as Ralph Hotere, Clive Arlidge, Sandy Adsett, John Bevan Ford, Selwyn Muru, Muru Walters and Cliff Whiting to develop a studio practice alongside their teaching careers. Tikitiki (east coast) Ngati Porou tohunga

whakairo (master carver) Pine Taiapa (1901-1972) was also an important mentor, teaching customary carving methods and also publishing influential articles on adzing and other traditional techniques. Matchitt exhibited with Clive Arlidge and Fred Graham in Hamilton in November 1964, showing bold geometric forms styled after the abstraction and minimalism of European artists which delivered Māori content. Taiapa was initially dismayed, before reconciling himself with the notion that traditions had to evolve to stay relevant, and then pronounced that there was room for every kind of carving and sculpture in the world.

As the South Auckland Education Department's Art Advisor, Matchitt lived at 44 Mt View Road Melville in Hamilton from 1958 until 1974, the size of his work limited by the size of the garage at that house. Initially he made figurative paintings on board which revisited Cézanne's famous proto-Cubist Cardplayers image using Māori sitters. Playing cards remain a recurring feature of his work with the symbols found on the four suits, red diamonds and hearts, black spades and clubs, used as mnemonics for a Māori heritage when Western card signs were appropriated for Māori purposes. Māori prophets like Te Kooti and Rua Kenana in the nineteenth and early twentieth century made extensive use of the card emblem in their art for flags and meeting houses. The diamond painted on the wooden exterior of Kenana's Hiona temple at Maungapohatu was key to his prophecy. It would be discovered on the stone mountain itself, and usher in a new Māori millennium, being the precious stone

which would enable Māori to purchase back all the land appropriated by pākehā in the preceding century.

This sculpture is named for Te Kooti Arikirangi Te Turuki (c.1832-1893), a personal favourite of Matchitt's and an important nineteenth-century leader. Te Kooti's intense visions while in exile on the Chatham Islands led him to found the Ringatū (Upraised Hand) faith and he escaped to the Urewera, where he forged allegiances with Tuhoe leaders. Matchitt's sculpture shows five standing figures in the lower part, the central one standing on a plinth inscribed with the date, April 1986. Above are the symbols taken from Te Wepu or The Whip, Te Kōōti's triangular pennant flag which measured 16 metres by 1.2 metres. It was decorated with a crescent moon, a cross, a six-pointed star, a mountain representing New Zealand and a bleeding heart that was thought to have symbolised the sufferings of Māori people since colonisation.

Asked by the Principal of Hawkes Bay Community College, Peter Smith, to help design, build and administer an arts centre on the Otatara Hill at the Stables near Taradale, Para Matchitt moved to Napier in 1975. In 1993 he was commissioned by Robert Ellis, Professor of the Elam School of Fine Arts, to make a new artwork in cedar for the Tāmaki Campus. Entitled Rehua, this sculpture was linked to the learning environment, being envisaged as acknowledging Tane's deed at gaining the baskets of knowledge, Ngā Kete o Te Wānanga.

Linda Tyler

*Para Matchitt (b.1933), Te Kooti, 1986, wooden assemblage, 2535 x 3510 x 150mm*