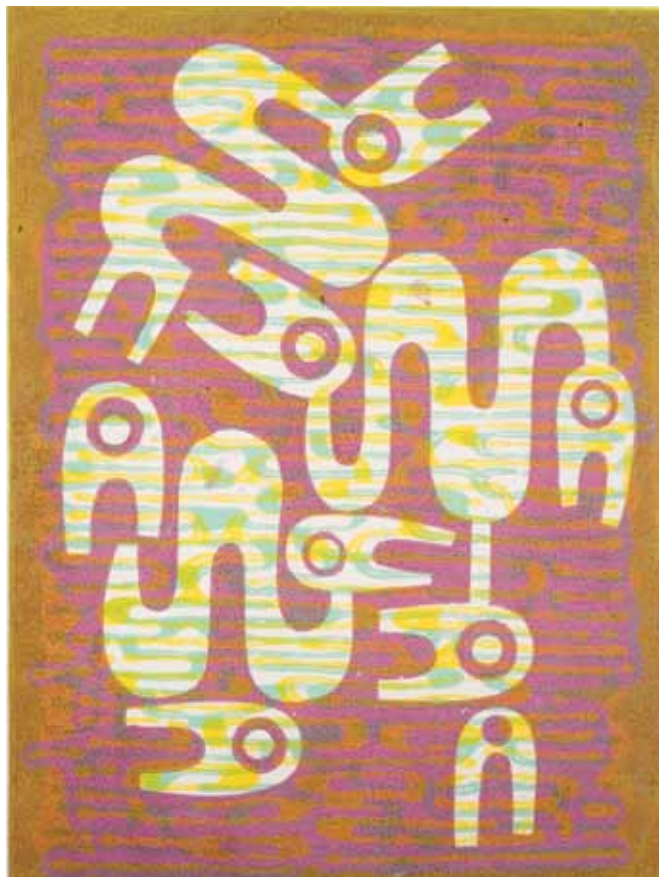


From the collection

Printed by Theo Schoon in Kees Hos's studio in Auckland in 1965, this collograph was made by gluing the cut-out patterns onto wood, and then applying ink with a paintbrush before pressing paper down on top. Captured by Bauhaus ideas which emphasised the equality of art and craft, Schoon had studied only briefly at the Rotterdam Art Academy and Canterbury College School of Art, before beginning his own journey of intrepid exploration of artistic media. Throughout 45 years of living and working in Australia and New Zealand, he experimented with ceramics, photography, painting, sculpture, drawing and carving jade and gourds.

Schoon had a fractured youth, living in both Holland and Indonesia before World War II precipitated his immigration at the age of 24. He left his home of Java in 1939 and arrived with his family in Christchurch as the war began. Dutch Indonesia came to an end with the Japanese invasion in 1942, and Schoon never returned, but his early exposure to Indonesian culture and religion, particularly Buddhism, was a formative experience. As his friend, psychologist John Money observed, Schoon was expert in Balinese dance, and could perfectly replicate the stylised movements with his upper body and arms. Figuration in Schoon's images, Money believed, was always directed towards conveying the movement of a body responding to music.

While the psychedelic colours and syncopated rhythms of this print do dance across the page evoking the energy of the explosion of youth culture and pop music in the 1960s, Theo Schoon's principal interest here is in developing new patterns from the ancient form of the Manaia. In 1960, he had studied with the Ngati Porou carver Pine Taiapa, who had begun



publishing on the art of adzing in *Te Ao Hou*, the Māori magazine. Derived from Māori carving, and usually depicted in profile, the Manaia customarily has the head of a bird complete with beak, and a human body. Its role is intercessory, shuttling communications between the living and spiritual worlds. Whichever way you turn Schoon's image, mouths and eyes assert themselves amongst the jazzy green and yellow relief printed shapes at the centre.

Schoon's interest in Māori design had first been piqued by an article on rock drawings by an amateur ethnologist in the *Journal of the Polynesian Society* in 1943 and he had approached the Canterbury Museum with a

proposal to copy them to preserve them for the historical record. A grant was sought from the Department of Internal Affairs to pay for the work, and he travelled up the Opihi River in South Canterbury with his friend John Money, publishing a description of the drawings in a 1947 article in the *Listener* he titled "New Zealand's Oldest Art Galleries". Later criticised for judging Māori art by European standards, Schoon published his thoughts on the interaction between the two cultures in art in New Zealand in his 1973 book *Jade Country*: "For many New Zealanders the interaction between Māori and European art remains little more than an embarrassing academic question, but open-minded understanding leads to appreciation, and this guides the creative mind to use this knowledge constructively. The more I have learned from Māori art, the more I have become convinced of its importance, viability, and potential

in New Zealand's contemporary art. The unprejudiced designer emerges with a deep respect for the achievements of many primitive art forms and is invariably inspired by them."

Linda Tyler

Director, Centre for New Zealand Art Research and Discovery

Pictured: Theodorus Schoon (1915-1985), Manaia Mania B, 1965, collograph on paper, 560 x 405mm