

## A COMMUNITY PROJECT: THE MAKING OF TE MOANANUI Ā KIWA

OTAGO POLYFEST 2012, DUNEDIN SCHOOL OF ART, DESIGN SCHOOL, OTAGO POLYTECHNIC

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Early in 2012, the Polyfest Committee took a look at the banners that had been used as the stage backdrop for the 19 years since the festival's inception and, with great sadness, realised that they would need to undergo at the very least some major repairs and alterations, and that perhaps it was time to time look at seeking replacements.

### THE PROJECT TEAM

They proposed a joint project with the Art and Design Schools at Otago Polytechnic to develop professionally designed and produced banners for display at the annual 'Otago Early Childhood and Schools Māori and Pacific Island Festival' known colloquially as Otago Polyfest. The initial team consisted of Pam McKinlay from the Dunedin School of Art and two artists, Tere Moeroa and Heramāhina Eketone, known through their histories with the Tautai Fresh Horizons programme, who were approached to come up with new concept artwork for the replacement banners.<sup>1</sup>



Figure 1. Nexus Dimension design crew Madison Henry, Thomas Te Whaiti Henry, Madison Henry, Caleb Dudley and Heremahina Eketone pose in front of their newly installed banner on day 2 of Polyfest 2012. Photo: Ashleigh Jarvis.

*Te Moananui Ā Kiwa* speaks of the significance of the spiritual waters that connect Aotearoa to her sisters and brothers of the Pacific ocean. In acknowledgment of the ancestral highways in the tides of *te moananui ā kiwa*, the meeting, trading and journeying places of our tupuna, tangata whenua o Aotearoa and the relationships of the people of the Pacific. Tangaroa, Tagaloa, Hinemoana, Hina, Papatūānuku.

*Te Moana Nui Ā Kiwa*, also symbolises the embrace that these oceans hold us in, particularly at the exit and entrance ways of the Te Tai Rāwhiti. From Te Rerenga Wairua and the merging of the two oceans at Te Taitokerau to the southern most points of Te Tai Tonga.

*Te Moananui Ā Kiwa* honours te iwi Māori, as tangata whenua of Aotearoa and pays homage to our close connections to the home lands of each of the Pacific nations. This collaborative piece combines strands, styles, flavours and aspects of culture and art from te ao Māori and from various Pacific nations. As a representation of the many Māori and the Pacific cultures presented and represented on the performance stage of Polyfest.

The centre piece is a representation of each of the cultural influences that reside here in Aotearoa. It highlights the marks, rhythms, melodies and the harmonies of Tonga, Fiji, Samoa, Cook Islands, Rarotonga, Hawaii, Tahiti including the koru being the acknowledgement of te iwi Māori. It acknowledges our tūpuna and those who've paved the way, from the ancient ones who sailed *te moananui ā kiwa* for the first time. The design gives an impression of seeing into the past and bringing forward to the present and future.

Symbolising strength and the journeys of the ancestors, the ngaru or iro gives the footprint image of the waves and hints towards flow and tides but also challenges. Waves are also an interpretation of consistency and repetition but also waves of change, evolution and creativity. The tides are those that cleanse, heal and create - the blending of wairua within the vibrations of *Te Moana Nui Ā Kiwa*. The tīare Māori or Frangipani, displays an essence of the grace and beauty contained in the art forms, the dance and the complete shared cultures. The coconut leaves, spread out as do the arm and legs and facets of dance, but also the whakapapa of generations and extending and growing capacity within a family tree.



*Te Moananui Ā Kiwa*

The shape itself, being representative of the sounds, vibrations and the echo's heard within the shells and shields of *Te Moananui Ā Kiwa*, also portrays the protective energies of Tangaroa. The outer borders are the posts or pou that represent strength and sustainability. The myriad of designs and colour incorporate features of Māori arts and culture through traditional and modern art styles. They reflect the many cultures, the many performers, the groups, schools and communities who have graced the Polyfest stage over the past 19 years.

Within the specifically Māori designs, inspired by whakairo, raranga and tāniko interpretations, there is a symbolic weaving together of strengths, passion, creativity, people and music, in a unity that blends yet retains individual beauty and style. The pātiki represents

whakapapa, genealogy, history of Polyfest – including students, tutors, schools, past, present and future. The putama provide a visual framework of striving for enlightenment and knowledge, acknowledging education, performance, families, reaching milestones growth and future development. Roimata or tears of remembrance and release, recognise the travels of our ancestors across the oceans, and the repositing of cultures. Niho Taniwha symbolises our leaders, mentors, rangatira, ariki, ancestors and guides.

No Ngāti Maniapoto, Tainui, Waikato, ko HERAMĀHINA EKETONE

No Rarotonga, Mangaia, ko TERE MOEROA



Figure 2. George Street Normal School Pasifika Group performance, day 1, Polyfest 2012. The drummer; back left, is Tere Moeroa. Photo, Pam McKinlay.

Joining the project team from the Design School were Caroline McCaw and three Design students in Year 2 of the communication course: Thomas Te Whaiti-Henry, Madison Henry-Ryan and Vincent Egan. Key components of the artworks were provided by the artists as sketches; the designers were required to interpret these key components as vector-based, coloured designs, and then develop print-ready files suitable for printing onto large banners at newSplash<sup>2</sup> studio. The results were the digital paintings that became *Te Moananui Ā Kiwa*.

Reitu Cassidy, a Polyfest committee representative with a background in fashion design, facilitated the artist/designer negotiation. Reitu's professional eye kept a high level of expectation and a focus on the bigger picture as well as the details. Reitu was a valuable overseer and connection between the client and the creative process. Her fine eye for detail ensured that the quality of the final images was exceptional.

## THE PROJECT – THE PROCESS BECAME COLLABORATIVE

The banner artwork had significance, both personal and cultural, for artists Tere Moeroa and Heremāhina Eketone. The artists, whose focus was on the meanings being visually portrayed, would under their normal art practice, control the whole process of making their designs. Both artists would usually develop their ideas from preliminary drawings directly through to their chosen media (print, tātau, graf, whakairo, tāniko). The scale of the new works, however, meant that traditional or handmade media were not the best options for making new banners within the time and budgetary constraints of the project.

Rather, in this project key components in the artworks were provided by the artists, as concept sketches. The designers were required to visualise these key components as vector-based coloured banner designs, and then develop print-ready files. The files were extremely complex at two metres tall (one quarter of the final print size of 8m) and included hundreds of layers of digital lines, shapes and colours. The collaborative development of the designs required many face-to-face meetings, orchestrated between the various workplaces of those involved around Dunedin, and emailed communications. During this period of interchange the artist/designer roles and expectations shifted as the designers were required to take on more of a leading role. The demands of working



Figure 3. - Collaboration process. Artists and designers worked together to refine elements of the vector drawing.  
Photo, Pam McKinlay.

in modern graphic technologies and the tight deadline of the project saw the young designers' capabilities extend. Their hands and eyes contributed significantly to the development of the artworks as they were transformed from simple pencil sketches into large-scale and complex banner graphics. The final designs are the result of an iterative process developed within a team of creative professionals.

The breakthrough moment for these various groups – artists, designers and client – came when they managed to come together as a whole group. Sitting together around the computers in the final days, each member of the team was able to communicate their processes, vision and strategies as the banner artwork became a whole. The design evolved quickly at this stage in a collaborative process, and the art team could appreciate first-hand the level of effort required to change even small details, while the vision of the artists became clearer for the designers.

## REFLECTING ON THE PROJECT – LEARNING OUTCOMES FOR THE DESIGN STUDENTS

For the design students the project was hard work – at times stressful with a deadline looming– and involved a big learning curve, both in terms of software and in working in new ways collaboratively with the art team. Each design student spent between 60 and 80 hours on the project, sharing times and working on files. The project helped the students to identify their valuable design languages, cultural as well as technical. They gave their design group a name – *Nexus Dimensions* – and included Year 1 student, Caleb Dudley, along the way, ensuring their learning was being passed on. They have since been signed up with newSplash<sup>2</sup> studio for further part-time work.

Reflecting on the project after the opening and dedication of the banners at the festival, the students were tired but really proud of the outcome. They were able to reflect on how much experience that they had gained through the project, along with the chance of possible employment. They had had a taste of 'designer culture' and loved it!

They really enjoyed working as a team, all participating on one set of files and contributing to the design solution. They reflected, too, on the many personal rewards. Their comments reflect this pride:

"It's very motivating to work with cultural projects. There is more of a sense of history and relevance."

"I feel we are honouring our ancestors."

"Projects like this make my work relevant to my family."

They are looking forward to more opportunities like this. And new opportunities are likely to grow out of the success of the Otago Polyfest banners, with enquiries for new work coming before the end of the three days of the festival.

## CONCLUSION

The project offered a practice-based learning opportunity for the design students that was community-driven and culturally relevant. This followed on from previous student involvement in professional and culturally relevant Design projects, with filming of the *Haka Peepshow* (2011) and Puaka Mātāriki poster design (2011, 2012).

In terms of designing for culturally based outcomes, Māori communities and Pacific Island communities need designers like these who can span traditional design processes, values and aesthetics and connect these with contemporary digital media processes and output. The project has been an opportunity for staff and students to reflect upon the processes and learn to develop new processes and tikanga that help artists and designers to bridge this gap with valuable input from the commissioning communities.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In approaching the Dunedin School of Art and Design School, the Otago Polyfest Committee recognised that Otago Polytechnic offered a specialised knowledge and technical skills base in their staff and students, which made a valuable contribution to achieving the new look and enabling production of the new banners. Special thanks to Lynda Henderson and the staff at newSplash, who oversaw the final printing of the banners which ran over two days. The project was largely able to be realised thanks to Otago Polytechnic, which agreed to sponsor the costs of printing associated with the banners, in recognition of the importance of this key community-driven event that celebrates Māori performing arts and Pacific Culture. Photography by Iolana Feleti-Ivala.

## OTAGO POLYFEST OPENING AND BANNER DEDICATION

The resulting banners were dedicated on the opening night at the Otago Early Childhood and Schools Māori and Pacific Island Festival held at the Edgar Centre in August 2012. The opening ceremony included karakia from kaumātua Karaka Roberts, Reverend Tokerau Joseph, Foalima Lemalu and supporting performances from Te Kura Kaupapa Māori o Otepoti, Queens of the Pacific and Kia Orana Performing Arts. The opening ceremony concluded with a blessing of the new taonga by kaumātua Karaka Roberts.

**Heramahina Eketone** (Ngāti Maniapoto, Tainui, Waikato) has a long involvement with Polyfest, first as a performer, then as a tutor, and now as part of the Festival Committee. She graduated from the University of Otago, with a BA in Māori and Diploma for Graduates in Social Work in 2007, and also studied for her Postgraduate Diploma in Social Work which was completed in 2009. She is on the committee for the refurbishment of the whareniui at Araiteuru Marae, Dunedin.

**Tere Moeroa** (Rarotonga, Mangaia) graduated from the Dunedin School of Art with a BFA in printmaking in 2007. He participated in Tautai Contemporary Arts Trust workshops, held in Christchurch, as a student and most recently in Tautai workshops, held in Dunedin, as an artist mentor. His interests include traditional Polynesian art, *tātau*, graffiti and design.



**Madison Henry** (Ngāi Tahu and Cook Island Māori) is a communication design student at Otago Polytechnic. He worked part time as a commis chef at the Crowne Plaza and as a snowboard instructor at Coronet Peak before studying tertiary-level design. He is passionate about film and graphic design, and has also worked on the film set (special effects crew) on Rachael Rakena's *Haka Peepshow* 3D film and artwork in 2011. He is one of the founding members of the *Nexus Dimensions* design crew.

**Vincent Egan** (Ngāti Ruanui and Nga Ruahine), alias Strate Winnix, is a Communication Design student at Otago Polytechnic. He is a descendant of the proud Ngāti Ruanui and Nga Ruahine people still dwelling beneath the vista of Mount Taranaki. He is interested in drawing and graphic design, but is keen to follow up many creative pursuits along his path. He is one of the four founding members of the *Nexus Dimensions* design crew.

**Thomas Te Whaiti Henry** (Cook Island and Ngāti Kahungunu) is a Communication Design student at Otago Polytechnic, and is of Cook Island and Ngāti Kahungunu descent. He hails from the creative city of Dunedin, where he has worked as a joiner and a builder in the past, and attended Logan Park High School. He is passionate about projection (digital media) and graphic design, and worked on the film set (special effects crew) on Rachael Rakena's *Haka Peepshow* 3D film and artwork in 2011. He is one of four founding members of the *Nexus Dimensions* design crew.

**Pam McKinlay** works in the Dunedin School of Art as an editorial assistant on *Junctures: the Journal for Thematic Dialogue* and the journal *SCOPE: Contemporary Research Topics in Art and Design*, maintains the School of Art websites and the DSA Art Collection. She has an applied sciences and arts background and graduated with a Dip H.Sc in Clothing/Design and Textile Science and a BA in Art History from the University of Otago.

**Caroline McCaw**, academic leader (Communication), teaches across a range of courses in the Otago Polytechnic Design School, from design culture and context, graphic design and interaction design, through to interdisciplinary and studio projects. She is a member of the Aotearoa Digital Arts network, sits on various community arts committees, and is currently writing her PhD through Queensland College of the Arts, Brisbane.

- 1 Tautai Pacific Contemporary Arts Trust, Fresh Horizons Programme. The Fresh Horizon workshops have been run by Tautai since 2001. Tautai engages established Pacific artists as tutors at the workshops and also engages senior Pacific students from the host tertiary institutions to assist them. Secondary schools in the nominated area identify and nominate students to take part. By putting known artists in as tutors, backed up by senior tertiary students as assistants, Tautai is giving the secondary students visible role models. The aim is to give the students a stimulating art experience under the eye of positive, enthusiastic role models, and reinforce the value of continued education. The Dunedin School of Art hosted a series of Tautai workshops in April of 2010 and will be hosting a new series in 2013. See <http://www.tautai.org/fresh-horizons/>.
- 2 newSplash is a communication design studio based in Dunedin as a project of the Applied Design Research Centre. This studio connects emerging designers with commercial or not-for-profit clients. newSplash matches clients' requirements to the skills of the Art School's design students and graduates, and students gain valuable work experience in a learning environment.