Hirini Moko Mead and Te Macri

Story by Ben Manukonga

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Te Māori Exhibition

When we think of life-changing exhibitions in Aotearoa New Zealand, nothing comes close to Te Māori. Opened in New York on 10 September 1984, Te Māori combined the art of the ancestors with the strong message, often overlooked, that Māori culture continues to thrive in the modern era.

Initially, the exhibition moved across American cities - New York, St Louis, Chicago, and San Francisco. During this time, Te Māori was viewed by over 290,000 Americans.

In 1984, after the exhibition had pastoral global success, Te Māori returned home to New Zealand. It traversed a national touring through Wellington, Dunedin, Christchurch, and Auckland, where it was seen by almost one million New Zealanders.

Situated, which was created for Moko, by Moko, opened its doors for more Māori exhibitions in museums and art galleries for decades to come.

and at the National Museum

Hirini Moko Mead

Professor Hirini Moko Mead was one of the leading players in Te Māori’s conception. During his time at Victoria University, Mead was a lecturer and head of department, and founded Te Kaha a Moko (the School of Māori Studies).

Professor Mead, along with other important Māori figures such as Secretary for Māori Affairs, Kae Plunket, developed plans for Te Māori in the early 1980s and edited the catalogue which accompanied the exhibition.

In his role as co-curator, Mead was especially involved in selecting images (photographs) from collections across New Zealand to represent a diverse range of iwi.

At each venue the exhibition opened and closed with Māori ceremonies, including haka (war cry), kia māta (Māori call), and waka (canoe). Visitors were welcomed through pōwhiri (welcome ceremony).

Working with his wife, June, Professor Mead also wrote the teaching resources for young Māori who worked on kapa haka (Maori dance) in the exhibition, many of these students came from Victoria.

The resources, written in both Māori and English, covered topics such as marae protocol, personal adornment, Māori myths, and the meaning of tanga.

The pair encouraged visitors to learn about and share in Māori art so that they could appreciate the importance of indigenous heritage in New Zealand.

Following the return of Te Māori in 1986, Professor Mead organised a national tour that has seen Te Māori exhibitions open in cities such as Dunedin.

25 Years On

55 years on Moko Ekia

More on Te Māori

- To learn about Te Māori and Moana, visit Te Kaha a Moko
- To learn about the history of Te Māori, visit Te Kaha a Moko exhibition open in New York

More on Victoria’s Creative Legacy

- To learn about Victoria’s Creative Legacy