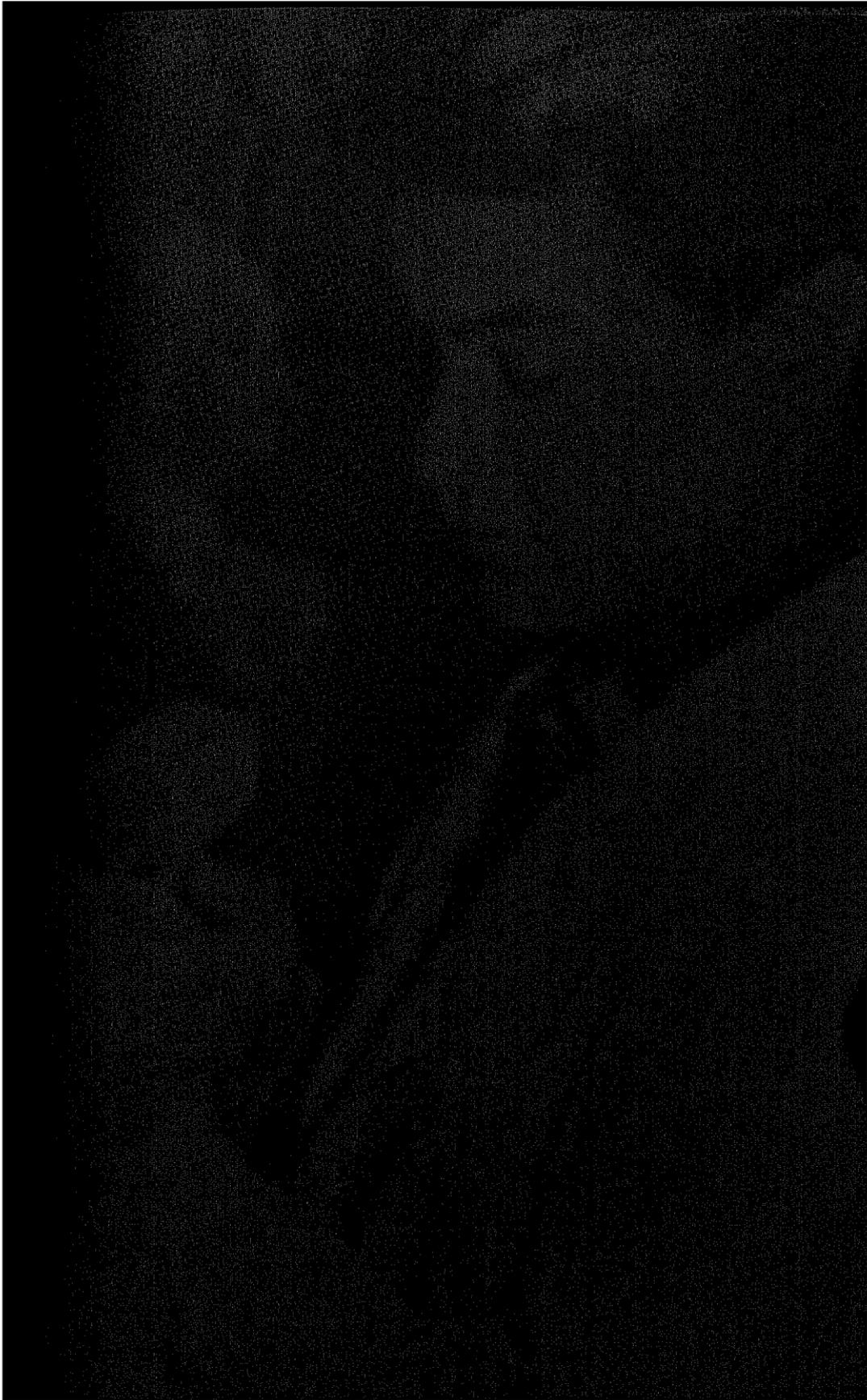


**ARNOLD  
MANAAKI  
WILSON**

NGĀI  
TŪHOE  
NGĀTI  
TARAWHAI





Arnold Manaaki Wilson:  
Te Wakaunua

By Ngahuia Te Awekotuku  
*He iti na Tuhoe, e kata te po*

fig 1

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Ringatu  
1958  
Arnold Wilson  
Kauri  
Auckland Art  
Galley  
Toi o Tamaki  
Purchased 1992

Arnold Manaaki Wilson was born in 1928, in Ruatoki, a community which nestles beneath the misty Taiarahia hills, following the curves of the Ohinemataroa river valley – known to others as of his tuhoe people. They know him there as Te Wakaunua, after a provocative late 19<sup>th</sup> century political visionary. From Such radical Tuhoe ideas fused with the sculptural genius of his father, a renowned carver of the art-making Ngati Tarawhai of Te Arawa, Arnold Wilson emerged.

Growing up in te Wharuarua o Ruatoki, Arnold experienced the harshness and the sensitivities of life in those early years: his world included the vivid marae ritual of Te Rewarewa, Otenuku, Tauarau and the many other hamlets in the valley. He was nurtured in an environment where “families would look after each other; do whatever they could to help out.” He went to the Ruatoki School, described as “down the road”, where speaking Maori was severely condemned by teachers intent on preparing their pupils for a supposedly better future, yet the latter took it literally in their stride, as he recalls, “we would jump from leg to leg, and change languages as we jumped!”.

Intellectually curious by nature, the young Te Wakaunua was awarded a prestigious scholarship to attend the Methodist board-ing school, Wesley College at Paerata. His years there in no way compromised his sense of who he was, where he came from; his



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Fig 2

inner confidence reflected and grasped yet another opportunity. His creative potential was recognized and encourage, and he was eager to take on the world, and explore those various elements that moved him, and moved within him – the incandescent energies of Tuhoe and Tarawhai Maori, fused with mystical, fierce Celtic Highland Scot, an irresistible mix.

Filming at Ruatoki,  
Te Rewarewa Marae  
Te Ao Hou No. 13  
(December 1955)

He attended the Elam School of Fine Arts, graduating in 1955 – an achievement singular for that particular era, and that elitist place, where anything native (except Arnold) was rigorously ignored. He was the first Maori to come out with a Diploma of Fine Arts; he attained first class honours in sculpture, a triumph which continues to motivate those many aspiring Maori students who have followed him. After Elam, he studied at Teachers' Training College. Among his friends and relatives were members of the "Tovey generation", with whom Arnold established life long colla-borative art-making relationships. This talented group of Maori artmakers include Ralph Hotere, Para Matchitt, Marilyn Webb, Fred Graham, Mere Lodge, Muru Walters, Katerina Mataira and Cliff Whiting; Gordon Tovey was the national supervisor of arts and crafts, and with this cohort, he designed an integrated arts-based programme which worked effectively with Maori children.

At the same time, Arnold continued to produce highly provocative work, boldly challenging orthodoxies in both the Maori and

fig 3



Arnold Wilson  
n.d  
Courtesy of  
Arnold Wilson

Western art traditions. Conscious of the misconstrued academic judgement of the Pakeha art establishment, he sought out nga tohunga whakairo, and quietly absorbed what they offered. He also contributed energetically to the development of an art movement unique to Aotearoa New Zealand – modern Maori / modernist Maori, the visions and creative envisioning of a twentieth century indigenous people confronting hostility and change with resilience and opportunity. His work assimilated and yet extended nga mahi a nga tipuna; he understood and articulated their legacy of ancestral insight, powerful aesthetics, and measured discipline; this legacy resonates in one kaumatua's words to him, "Leave me in the back of the meeting house in te ao kohatu; you people go out to the front, towards the light. You have all the world in front of you. Kei a koutou te ao. Gather all the knowledge you can, and work with it."

For six decades, Arnold's art has delighted, intrigued, annoyed and puzzled Maori and Pakeha. He has never been boring. He has manipulated a wide range of media; his earliest derivative efforts – portrait busts poignantly cut from stone with a sharp eye and sharper chisel; finely layered plaster of Paris heads that still catch the viewer so many years later; and that elegant acrylic mural, *Te Tu a te Wahine* at Queen Victoria School, swirling images that smoothly uplifted the consciousness of hundreds of young Maori women. His engagement with vertical totara – like the *Sons of Tane* series, sometimes called painted telephone poles – still



fig 4

hold your attention. Yet not all his lines are vertical – the iconic talking chiefs, Te Kai a te Rangatira, he Korero, their raw diagonals spliced across cloaked figures, beaked heads alert, still grip the public imagination, resonant with the impact of a February summer day of heavy debate in 1840. This is exhibited in the National Archives; yet some of Arnold's most powerful work is also his most private, most intimate – in a Maori sense, with Maori sensibility. And purpose.

Maharaia Winiata  
Memorial  
Te Ao Hou no. 47  
(June 1964)

One example concerns Maharaia Winiata of Ngati Ranginui, Tauranga, was a beloved Wesley College teacher, mentor, and fellow tribesman, also born in the Ruatoki Valley. He too was a significant "first", graduating with a Doctor of Philosophy degree from Edinburgh University in 1954, the original trail-blazing Maori PhD. He died suddenly in 1964; four years later, his memorial stone was unveiled at Huria marae, in Tauranga. This was Arnold's tribute, a massive stone cast warrior, sturdy knees relaxed, one leg extended, the other bending forward in watchful stance; one hand clasps a patu close to his chest, while the other raises, flourishing, jubilant, the new weaponry, he kete a te matauranga, an academic diploma. (fig 4)

With his career in arts education firmly established, he continued to return to the han kainga, and his new approach to whakairo including Ins expansive ideas about the wider art world excited or intrigued some of the Tuhoe leadership; he was thus invited to



fig 5

Marquettes for  
Carvings 2008  
Arnold Wilson  
Photo by  
Ngahiraka Mason

Submit designs for a carved house proposed for an urban marae. They were sensational, an invocation of light and texture, a canny and colourful embrace of Te Urewera and Waiariki, alas, “too way out” for the venerable Tuhoe conservatives residing in suburban Rotorua.

Yet this celebration of fluid moving forms in wood, glass, paint, metal, stone, has persisted, and its culmination is a current project, the astonishing city marae complex at Awataha, on Auckland’s North Shore. Rangitinihi, his wife and subtle muse of many decades, is also a driving force behind the project. This house will encompass the world, as that nameless kaumatua predicted. It promises the puawaitanga, the efflorescence, of Te Wakaunua’s creative vision, extending beyond his gallery and exhibition offerings.

Among these we remember Recent New Zealand Sculpture (1968) at Auckland City Art Gallery, Ten Maori Artists (1978) in Palmerston North; the Waikato Museum’s Haongia Te Taonga (1986), the sesquicentennial Kohia te Taikaka Anake (1990) at the National Art Gallery, and the haunting solo show, Ode to Tana Mahuta (1997) at Auckland Art Gallery. In that last installation, this voice from Te Urewera asked one poignant question, “Kei whea na tamariki a Tane o na nahere nei? Where have all the trees gone?”, though they grow in his soul. Te Wakaunua taught art at many levels in many schools, as diverse as Kaipara College and Mt Albert Grammar; his commitment and humour infected everyone.

Tane Mahuta  
Arnold Wilson  
kauri 1957  
Auckland Art  
Gallery  
Toi o Tamaki  
purchased 1992

Wentoo towelling  
herself dry  
Arnold Wilson  
kaurii 1964  
Collection of the  
Museum of New  
Zealand Te Papa  
Tongarowa

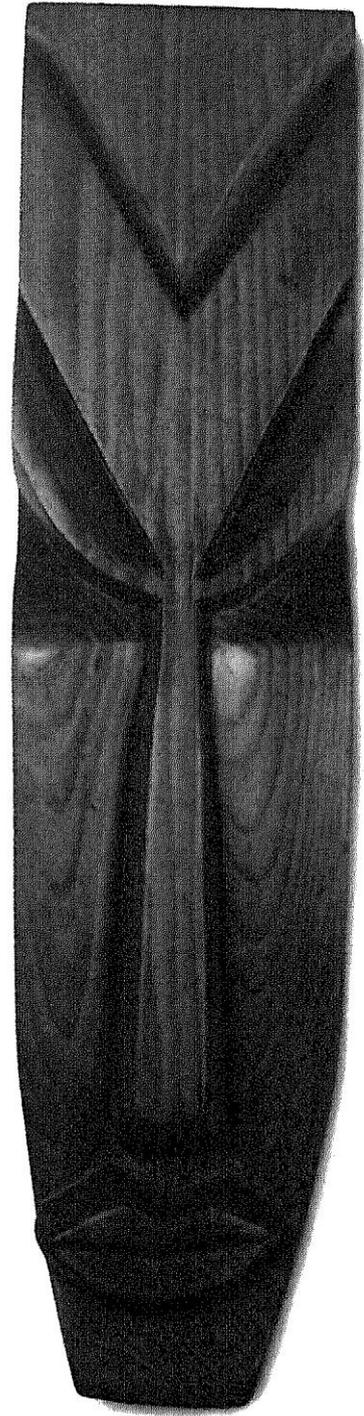
Mask  
Arnold Wilson  
pine, 1955  
Auckland Art  
Gallery  
Toi o Tamaki  
purchased 1993

fig 6

fig 7

fig 8





On his retirement from the Directorship of Te Mauri Pakeaka, the awesomely successful Cross Cultural Community Involvement Art Programme for the Department of Education, he continued to work as the founding kaumatua for the Haerewa consultant Maori group to the Auckland Art Gallery, and he remains an active cultural consultant for a number of public arts initiatives. He was awarded the Queen's Service Medal for his work in the arts. In 2001, he received Te Tohu Mahi Hon a Te Waka Toi, the Te Waka Toi/Creative New Zealand Award for new directions in Maori art, for his many productive years of dedicated and courageous innovation. This was followed by a further honour in 2007 when he was presented with one of the Arts foundation of New Zealand's illustrious Icon Awards, confirming him as a pre-eminent and treasured artist, and a distinctive and inspiring leader.

*Iti rearea, tei tei, kahikatea, ka taea.*

– Ngahuia Te Awekotuku (Tainui, Te Arawa, Ngai Tuhoe) is Professor of Research and Development at the Centre for Maori and Pacific Research and Development at University of Waikato

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Fig 9

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Head  
Arnold Wilson  
perlite, 1958  
Auckland Art  
Gallery  
Toi o Tamaki  
Purchased 1993