ā tōna wā

indigenous experiences
with contemporary design

josh stables

ā tōna wā

1. at some time in the future, in due course, at an appropriate time in the future.

# contents

introduction to kōrero

As a form of data collection, I have spoken with designers from different experience levels within the design industry, from recent graduates to veteran multinational designers. Through these interviews, I collected valuable information about each practitioner's experience with design. These kōrero are insightful conversations into the vastly different lives of designers all over Aotearoa.

Synthesising these experiences allows them to be shared and heard and hopefully acts as an eye-opener to those who are truly blind to the modern effects of colonisation. These experiences inform the reader of colonisation's brutal effects on both professional and personal lives and can hopefully provoke an urge for change across New Zealand.

The Interviews

ngā kōrero

(Right): Renati Waaka. *Tino Rangatiratanga*
[Digital Illustration].
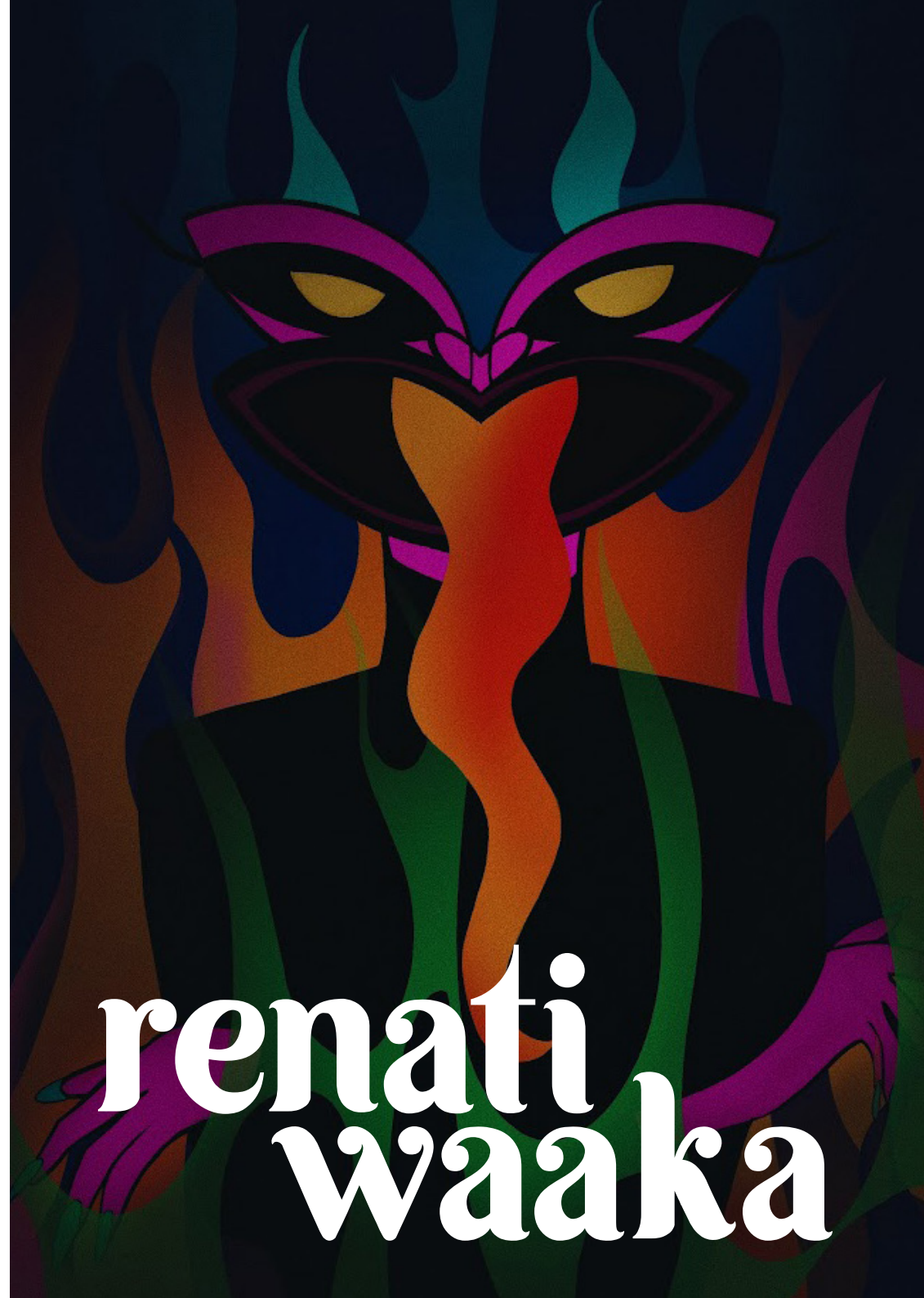
pepeha

ko tarawera te maunga

ko tarawera te awa

ko te arawa te waka

ko tūhourangi te
whare tūpuna

ko te arawa te iwi

ko tūhourangi te hapū

13.

renati waaka

Renati Waaka is from Rotorua and Waikato and is enrolled at Massey University doing a Master's of fine arts. Renati graduated in 2020 with a bachelor's of Design Innovation, majoring in communication design.

Renati considers themselves an interdisciplinary artist, focussing on photography, graphic design, and illustration. Although Renati has yet to emerge into the design industry fully, they have have had experience in freelance design throughout the course of their Bachelor's degree. Renati grades their design on how others perceive it.

In the first year of design school, Renati says they were taught about what is 'good' design and how it should look. *"I approach design in a very artistic way, those design rules can be used as guidelines, but I don't like to compare my entire process to what those principles are, especially with those rules stemming from old white men".* Māori culture transcends purely visual elements, and although Māori motifs and patterns are a huge part of Māori culture, storytelling is arguably the most influential aspect. Visual narratives and storytelling is a core part of Te Ao Māori*. When you see Māori motifs and patterns, know that every line, every colour, and every stroke tells a visual aspect of a bigger story. *"The use of storytelling and narrative within each project allows me to produce a cohesive, flowing body of work that I otherwise wouldn't have been able to create".*

15.

(Left): Renati Waaka.
Tuakana, Teina.
[Digital Illustration].

Renati's artwork is driven by community and representation and strives to see various minority groups proudly, positively and accurately represented through their work. It's about how their work is received and celebrated.

"If my work can make someone feel seen or heard, I've done my job. My work isn't about me all of the time; it seeks to help the suppressed accept themselves, make them smile or be curious to learn more. If people can see themselves through what I produce, that's very beautiful".

For such a rich, narrative-led culture to be appropriated and exploited for colonial benefit deems the efforts to decolonise ineffectual.
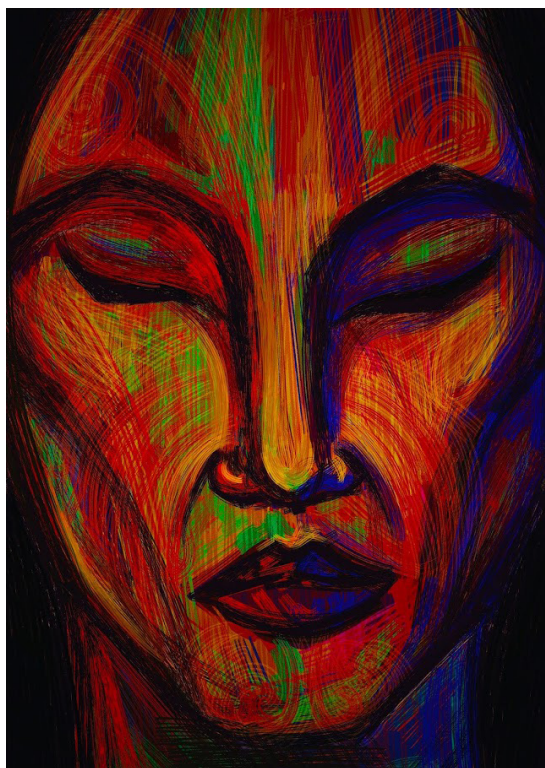
Renati Waaka.
Te Ao Marama.
[Digital Illustration].

When companies and businesses steal Māori designs and ideas for their own welfare, it enforces harmful behaviours and schemes. Māori design principles, techniques and visuals are being abused for a business's personal gain. Yet, they fail to employ the right indigenous practitioners to carry these tasks out correctly and appreciatively. Renati explains that Māori culture is so full of essence that every colour of each particular stroke portrays part of the narrative.

Learning about colonisation and how it is embedded throughout western culture pushes Renati to produce work that steps outside that narrative.*"Decolonising is a constant walk, not only in design but every day"*. Renati's experience with design colonisation is limited. However, Renati talks about one of the Māori courses within their institution, and although Renati was taught storytelling techniques and a few principles, Renati labels the course misleading. "*As one of the few Māori people in the course, I did not feel that it was an accurate teaching of Māori storytelling"*.

Renati's concern was that there wasn't enough kōrero regarding the whakapapa of Māori stories, patterns, materials, tikanga and Māori values. Which Renati felt, in a sense, misrepresents the rich history and sacred essence of Te Ao Mārama that students may have expected from the course. Although it was a relatively new course at the time, Renati believes that the course would benefit from discussing the treaty of Waitangi and our connection to Te Taiao (natural environment).

"A lot of the class was made up of international students, and I think everyone should take the time to understand our people and our histories before engaging in our conversations and practices".

Renati believes that before engaging in cultural conversations and practices, one must first understand the culture and history of its people. New Zealand has a rich history of culture and colonisation, and students should understand more about the history of Māori culture before engaging in the practices and tikanga of that culture.

Renati warns new designers of the confrontation that awaits them. *"Prepare to be confronted. A lot of the time, the younger generation will be the ones to recognise the 'flaws' of the institution and have every right to question it".* As young designers, you are impressionable that what the institution teaches you is correct. *"Trust your gut, question things, question professionals".* Renati believes that no one is too old to be wrong, nor too young to be correct, and if something doesn't feel right, then it probably isn't.

Knowing when to acknowledge, when to stand away and what isn't yours to accept allows someone more fit for that job to gain that valuable experience. The more you work, the more you learn. The design industry is more than just visual work; it's about connecting with others and indulging in all the available knowledge.

Aotearoa has such a rich visual catalogue and a massive history of appropriation. Many designers, storytellers and practitioners are Māori and can push the narrative and have been. Many of New Zealand's younger generations are dedicated to decolonising and unlearning colonial behaviours and processes, which gives Renati a lot of hope for our future and our ability to share our country and ideas more accurately and ethically.

Renati says that there are a lot of things that we can flip to become more ethical and more authentic to Māori. And that the mainstream companies that adopt aspects of Māori culture have been a considerable part of appropriation throughout the history of branding and advertising.

For businesses to use any aspect of Māori culture they need to *"uplift Māori, they have to actively decolonise and teach themselves to become a better treaty partner, as Tangata Tiriti it's their responsibility to Māori".* To further educate employees, businesses should employ cultural advisors to oversee indigenous projects. This educates the unknowing and actively reduces the risk of tokenism, says Renati.

Furthermore, Renati claims that these companies should be actively engaging in cultural competency courses, which would increase awareness of others and their cultural background. Additionally, it would help to understand the cultural significance of communication, consultation and interrelationships. To decolonise means to embody tino rangatiratanga actively. Tino rangatiratanga to Renati is:

"To uphold the mana of myself and the people I work with, having authority over our spaces, our whenua and resources. Subconsciously, tino rangatiratanga isn't something I reflect on when entering spaces; however, I naturally navigate spaces with a Māori worldview. This means to uplift people and understand the whakapapa of others".
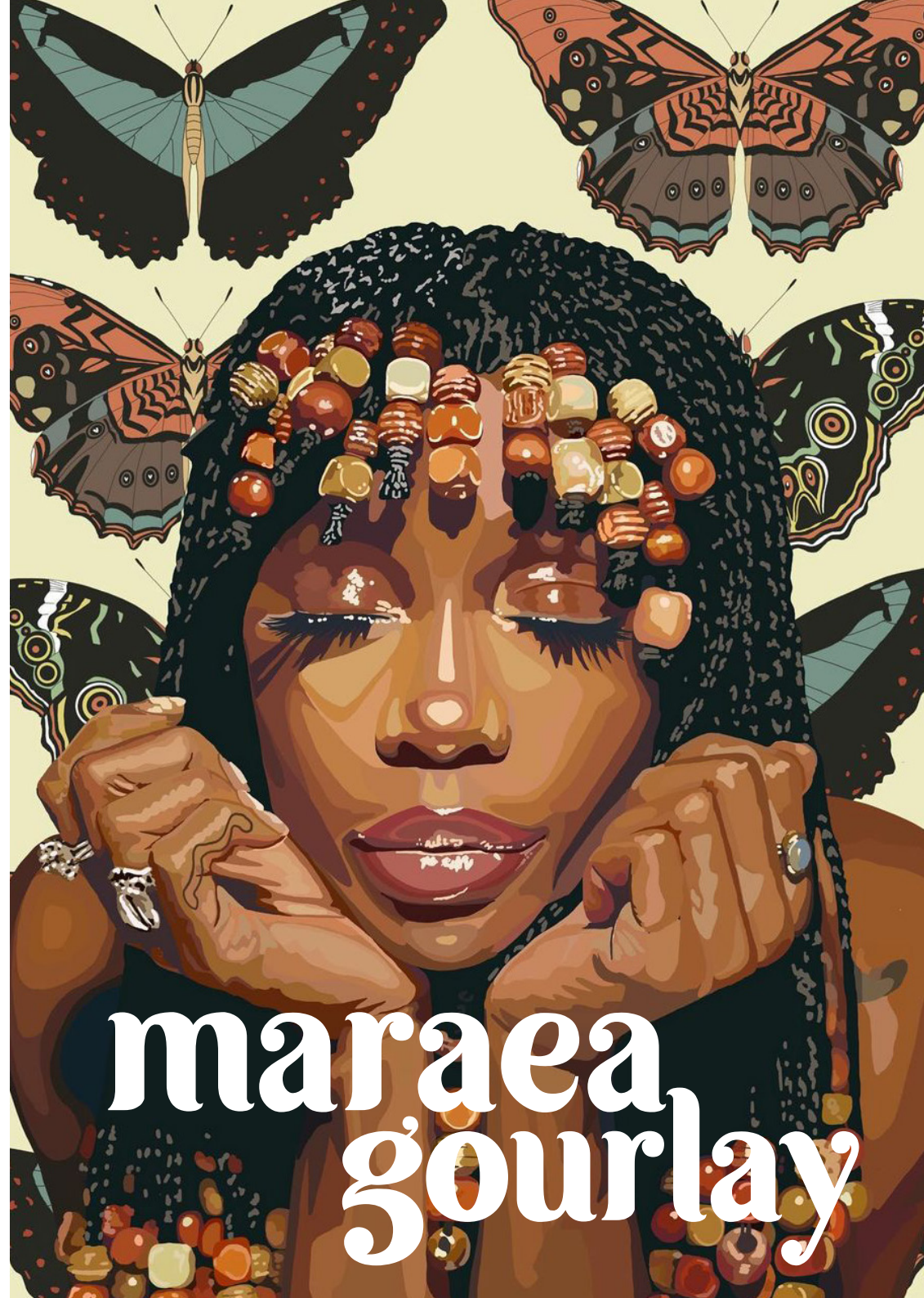
maraea gourlay

Maraea Gourlay (Tūhoe) is from Rotorua and travelled to Wellington to study at Victoria University of Wellington. She graduated in 2020 with a bachelor's of Design Innovation, majoring in Communication Design and minoring in marketing. Maraea now works as a designer for Ocean Design. Although Maraea predominantly focuses on client problem-solving work such as illustration, graphic design and branding. She also works on various filler projects, such as document design.

Being relatively fresh to the design industry, Maraea is very wary of stepping on any toes or creating something that's socially, culturally or sustainably insensitive or negatively impactful. *"I'm always conscious to appropriately reference when I feel inspired by a certain piece of work, and not ripping off another designer if my work is inspired by theirs".*

Maraea takes more of a strategic approach to her work than at university. Where now, instead of making something purely aesthetic, Maraea analyses the brief and responds to it in an exciting and involved way to engage with the client effectively. Design has always been something Maraea enjoyed. Designing not only something that looks aesthetically pleasing but also tells somewhat of a story is what she enjoys.

"If I hear a song lyric that I enjoy, I'm actively thinking of ways that I can visualise this to tell a story. It's the same with a project brief; I'll find

(Left): Maraea Gourlay. *Garage Project Beer.* [Digital Illustration].

something interesting and think of how it can build the narrative to tell a story. I enjoy creating all the little details that aid the storytelling of that project".

Companies will ask designers to craft a simple brand, and the designer will come back with all these intricate and interesting details that aid the brand narrative that the client wasn't expecting. This is what Maraea enjoys, designing and thinking of all those clever little ways to build a brand's story further. Success, to a degree, is relative. Everyone has their own unique definition of success. Maraea deems a project successful not only if it fulfils the provided client brief but in a unique and unforeseen way that both the designer and client are proud of.

"I did the HUD (Housing & Urban Development) document for MAHI Ka Ora. It's the Māori housing strategy document for New Zealand, and our Māori competency lead created this whole narrative and brought out a whakataukī. The client was taken back and didn't expect it. They expected us to create just a document, yet we put all this substance and meaning into the project and think and pick apart to try to communicate what we were doing visually. And I thought that was successful, and I was proud of it, which is why it's one of my favourite projects".

Throughout the entire project, Maraea was in conference with Ocean Design's Māori competency lead from the beginning of the project, who helped her understand how to bring more substance into the project rather than aimlessly drawing.

"For instance, I drew a fantail there, and our competency lead immediately corrected me, saying, 'oh, you can't put that there. It's tapu because

they represent death'. I also drew a harakeke next to a building, and she told me it must be at least 5 metres away. So the whole project was a real learning curve for me, and collectively we used a lot of mātauranga Māori for this project and didn't step on any boundaries. I owe a lot of the guidance to our Māori competency lead".

One of the most significant learning curves for Maraea in transitioning from studying into the workplace was learning to interact with her clients. This did not necessarily denote a project as unsuccessful. However, there was little to no communication for her first client brief; therefore, Maraea had no idea about their personality or brand. *"I ended up attempting to solve the brief myself, and it was a lot of going back and forth".*

This resulted in many unnecessary budget costs because there was so much trial and error. Communication is undoubtedly one of the most critical aspects between client and

designer, as good communication can show dramatically in the final output. "*I can attribute this to tino rangatiratanga, my ability to understand and learn from my past experiences and cognitively make decisions for change going forward*". Maraea explained that she hasn't always known the most about her indigenous heritage, so having those people available in the workplace to help her understand is helpful and informative to her work going forward.

Ocean Design has Māori values within their workplace that aid learning and understanding each other and Māori culture.

"When I was first introduced to the firm, they talked us through these values at an early stage, and those are something that positively informed my work from the start".

Being informed of these values at such an early stage of her career has opened Maraea's eyes to design colonisation and how she was unknowingly exposed to it throughout her education. The longer Maraea spends within the industry, the more she learns that it's essential to break the barriers that colonisation has built within design. "*Māori culture is so rich with storytelling and visual narratives, and this has been suppressed due to colonisation".*

rukuhia retotanga

Dive Deep. Is about creating an environment where you're comfortable asking questions, making mistakes and where you seek understanding and insights.

whakatangihia te putatara

Ring the bell. Is about pride, the celebration of projects; being proud of each other; and talking up your workmates to acknowledge the help they've provided.

hopuhia te hau

Catch the wind. Is inspiring ourselves, inspiring our colleagues and inspiring New Zealand as a whole, and questioning how we can do better?

ki te hoe!

Take the wheel. Be in charge. At Ocean Design, they're heavily focused on working as a team and standing behind colleagues' work.

tautoko tātau kia tātou

All hands on deck. All hands on deck. Feeling comfortable asking for help. Ocean's unwritten policy is to drop whatever they're doing when somebody needs help. The person you help today may be the person you need help from tomorrow.

26.

27.

Maraea explains design decolonisation as bringing indigenous principles and relationships into design practice. Māori already had indigenous ways of designing before colonisation, and since then, Māori ways of storytelling and designing have been swept under the rug. It's become quite difficult for anyone attempting to learn anything Māori today as there is a lack of resources. Those who try integrating Māori culture into their work have a lot to know to carry it out appropriately.

Maraea's advice to new aspiring designers is, *"you are going to make mistakes. No one can get it perfect in the beginning, so you need not be afraid".* Maraea urges the new generation to surround themselves with people you can go to for help and not be afraid to ask questions. *"If you are unsure of anything, it's not a reflection of you; it's a reflection of colonisation taking the accessibility of that information away from you".* Maraea believes that Aotearoa can play a leading role in decolonising

brand design. Claiming that *"I'm not as in touch with my culture as I would like to be, and as I said before, those who want to learn anything Māori have to actively pursue it and go out of their way."*

Aotearoa has only just begun teaching Te Tiriti o Waitangi at schools, and there's a divide between people who want to learn Māori and those who don't. Those who wish to know anything Māori must work hard and go out of their way. However, those resources are slowly becoming more and more accessible to everyone. *"We're a relatively small country, and I think if the world were to see what kind of example we can set, they would soon follow suit".* Working with a cultural advisor has helped Maraea understand her culture and want to discover and learn more.

Maraea now feels so much more comfortable asking questions because she was never exposed to her culture growing up. *"I felt embarrassed to ask questions because I always felt I should've known this. Having a cultural advisor is so comforting and reassuring because there's no judgement".* Someone goes into Ocean Design every week and gives lessons in te reo Māori. Maraea finds this progressive and claims that she feels that one of the first steps in re-indigenising Māori culture is to understand the language. Previously being more of an individual worker, having this knowledge accessible has made her comfortable working as part of a team, as they constantly bounce ideas and knowledge off each other, and collectively build each other up. *"If anything, being part of an indigenous team adds more substance and narrative to my projects, just because I am exposed to all this knowledge".*

The Māori competency lead for Ocean Design oversees each project that comes out of the firm; they focus more heavily on Māori-based projects. Occasionally there will be a Pākehā client that hasn't commented or explained their brief, and the Māori competency lead will propose all these Māori ideologies that could inform the project. These could be a myth, legend, or whakataukī, and they almost always resonate with the client; they don't expect it at all, but it adds so much substance and narrative to the work. It's not just throwing koru's on everything; crafting an elegant story and executing it.

"Our Māori competency lead is so full of all these pockets of inspiration that she walks around and sprinkles on our work, and then we take it from there". A cultural advisor can bring so much more substance to a project and can bring together a workplace. It increases the quality of work produced and allows a workplace to work better as a team who can inform and inspire others. Utilising the interconnectedness within the workplace and forming interrelationships between each other and the client can help build a strong bond between individuals and create unity between cultures. *"The main thing is that it brings people together, which is one of the biggest leaps in decolonising design".*

madeleine
bell

madeleine bell

Madeleine is a Ngāti Rangi, Te Ati Haunui-a-Pāpārangi, a designer with whakapapa to iwi around central north island, and has Scottish and English whakapapa. Madeleine has a Bachelor of Arts, completed her Masters of User Experience (UX) in 2020, and now works at Indigenous Design and Innovation Aotearoa (IDIA) as a UX Designer. IDIA was founded by Johnson Witehira, a leading figure in the charge for the decolonisation of design.

At IDIA, Madeleine mainly works from a Te Ao Māori perspective, focussing on bringing lived experiences to the workplace. Madeleine claims that being Māori isn't one homogenous experience and that we've all got a range of interactions with people across New Zealand, each dealing with different understandings of racism and colonisation. Madeleine works on the side of research and development, takes insights from the discovery stage, and creates systems and processes for that project.

IDIA employees are taught to work in a way framed around indigenous people, knowledge, and ways of being in the world. Putting indigenous people at the front of the design process and ensuring that each project is measured by its impact on people, culture, and our natural world rather than by design awards or other accolades. This process is called Culture Centred Design (CCD), an approach linked by tangata, mātauranga, and tikanga. Part of culture-centred design is acknowledging who

is missing from a conversation and how the mātauranga of projects could be enhanced. *"However, there is a time and a place for human-centred design processes and mainstream design. I think it depends on the audience and who's carrying out the research and design process".*

Kaupapa Māori is research done for and by Māori and acknowledges tikanga and Māori ways of doing things. However, it can be pretty restrictive regarding who can participate in kaupapa Māori. Madeleine claims that these processes can sometimes be quite extractive or dangerous for Māori because of the colonisation process and the systematic oppression that's happened historically, where spaces, people, and products front as Māori initially, yet are merely superficial.

Madeleine explained how designs are left with this facade of Māori-ness that doesn't whakamana *(empowerment)* all the way through, and the outcomes aren't achieved. *"Matauranga Māori needs to go all the way through to respect and acknowledge the culture and people in the process".* Without honestly acknowledging and respecting the culture, you're simply giving the appearance of cultural inclusion. This is called tokenism and is the process of making only a symbolic effort to include indigenous culture, most commonly to avoid public criticism. Employing Māori culture for the sole reason of appearing Māori to cater to the needs of shareholders.

"At work, we're constantly bouncing ideas off of each other, and we all bring that lived experience to things. Certain people have more specific Matauranga than others, as many of us are still on our reo journey".

Although Madeleine positions herself as a cultural practitioner, she lacks the background to advise others on specific tikanga or mātauranga. However, being a cultural practitioner, Madeleine can bring culture into what she does, yet must recognise that it is not yet her place to guide others. Madeleine advocates that anyone can become a cultural practitioner for their own culture.

Madeleine believes that in mainstream design practise, *"there's more of a distinction and compartmentalisation of those elements of self, whereas Māori culture is very holistic and interconnected".*

Madeleine works in a Tuakana-teina model *(relationship between an older and a younger sibling),* where everyone in the workplace learns from each other and doesn't participate in a classic hierarchy model. *"I think it's important for anyone, regardless of their cultural background, to have the space to be themselves and bring themselves and have ownership over how they move through a space and how they're represented in the space."* This can reflect tino rangatiratanga—Māori sovereignty—the right of sovereignty and self-determination.

Madeleine says that currently, the system is strongly weighed against Māori moving through it to achieve their outcomes and aspirations. Madeleine is now discussing how one would go about redesigning the system, what rules are fixed and those that are not set in stone, and what rules we think are there but aren't. Madeleine claims that designing systems is a bit different to creating art in and of itself, *"where*

self-expression is more the goal and outcome, or expressing an idea. Whereas, sometimes the work is focussed on achieving more tangible outcomes"—for example, improving Māori literacy rates or improved Māori immunisations.

There is a time and a place for artistic expression and ownership over your thoughts and identity. *"Who are you giving this to? Not only what they will do once you've given it to them. But how is this going to be used? What's the journey after the handover look like?"*

"Tino rangatiratanga, for me, is about the process. Being able to do things in a way that works for me. There are so many different things around Māori time, conversations and engagements versus how mainstream or human-centred design do those same things".

The process of how we get to the designed product, how each person involved engaged throughout the process, and if they have ownership over that process. Brand design is about engaging with the correct people along the way, and having the right and self-determination to do so.

Many new designers are nervous or unsure whether they should begin their journey to understand their culture and indigenous heritage. For Madeleine, her journey started when she began working at IDIA. *"It was a perfect space because it got me thinking about the impact I wanted to leave and who I want to be in a professional environment and how I could carry myself in that space".*

Ka mua, ka muri - a whakataukī that means to walk backwards into the future, is not exclusive to Māori culture. However, it means to look back at what's happened to understand who you are; and where you've come from and let that guide you into the future. Being a very Pākehā Māori, Madeleine finds the distinction between the effects of colonisation and the impacts of racism and systematic bias to be fascinating.

"Living and growing up in Wellington, I am very privileged in the way of systematic bias; I get none of that 'you're too stupid because you're brown'. Whereas I always felt supported and validated by my teachers, but I did feel that disconnection with my culture, and I think everyone is impacted by colonisation in different ways".

No one's experience of being Māori is the same as others. Everyone has their unique experience of what it means to be Māori, and the effects of colonisation impacts differently upon everyone.

"We're told growing up that because we're not brown, we're not Māori, and because we're told that at such a young and impressionable age, it sticks around until you're older, and then you realise, hang on. It is acknowledging that it is an effect of colonisation because I am Māori, and I wouldn't have been impacted the same way if I wasn't".

Part of decolonising not only design is the understanding that colonisation affects everyone and re-engaging in that space for a healthier, fairer society. It is important to note that the right for tino rangatiratanga belongs to all people, but foremost those living in a colonised reality.
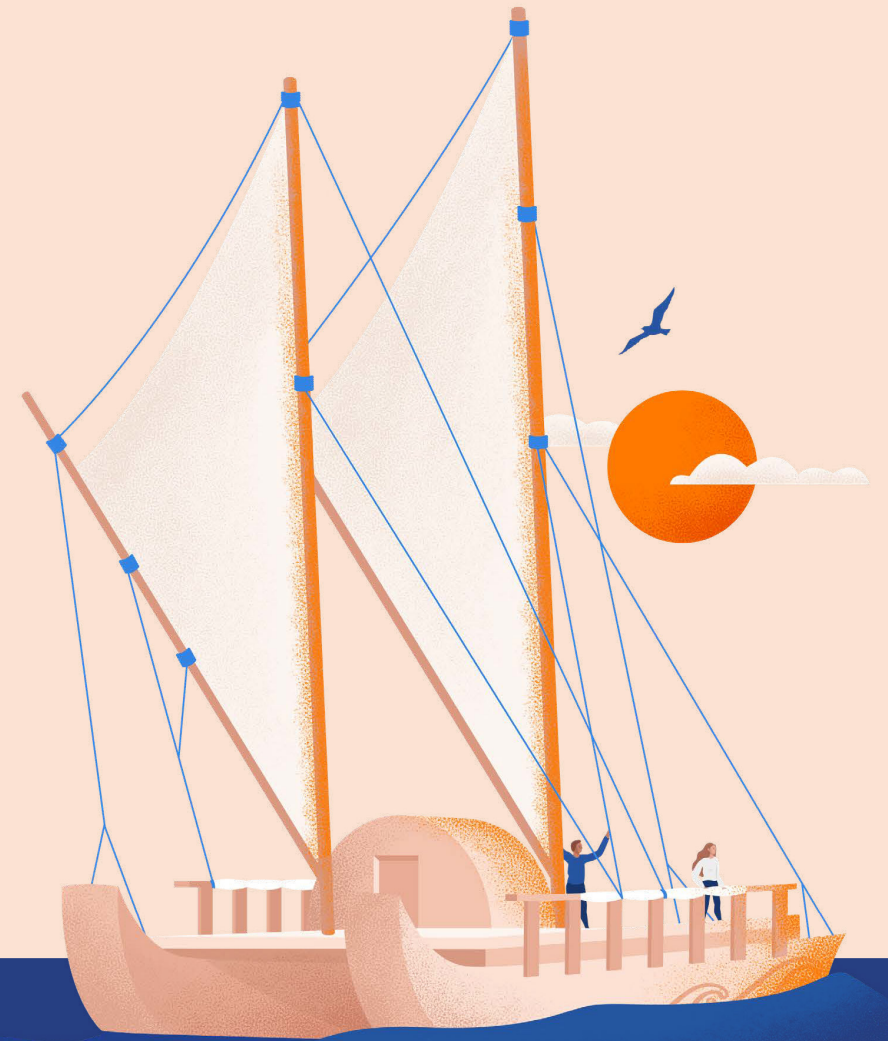
blair
mainwaring

blair mainwaring

Blair Mainwaring is a Pākehā designer and the owner of Ocean Design Group. Although Blair is a designer, these days, he's mainly focused on running the business, and nowadays best describes himself as a design strategist. Blair views design as different to advertising and a whole bunch of disciplines that have emerged recently. Since Blair has been in the design industry, many other design agencies and groups have branched off from the original group.

In its 35 years of operations, Ocean Design has been an essential part of the design agency family tree, allowing the industry to flood with all forms of agencies. Ocean design predominantly works in brand and design, as well as many other design communications. Before its time, there were different design and advertising schools that came out of European design, British design and likely the United States. However, from a te ao Māori, or bicultural perspective, there wasn't anything that existed back then. *"Private enterprise would run a mile if you talked about using any kind of te reo or any kind of Māori influences in terms of design, and that was twofold".* Businesses would fear getting it wrong and doing it in some appropriated way. Alternatively, people just thought, 'why should we do that'.

In the last five years, Blair has noticed that New Zealand seems to be waking up to itself regarding the surge in Māori culture popularity within Aotearoa. So Blair, rather than stepping away from or around it, thought to embrace and acknowledge and step towards the change.

(Left):
Ocean Design Group.
Taura Here Waka.
[Brand Identity].

TAURA HERE WAKA

The model of Māori design up until then had been that if a client approached an agency with a Māori idea or angle, the work produced had no depth, sincerity or authenticity to that process. Design groups would 'brown-wash' the work by finding a brown face and putting them in front of the client, and then the agency would tick the box and move on to the next client.

"Recognising the need to go deeper, they would find a Māori consultant and engage them for the length of the project, but they would only come to do the Māori strategy or the naming of the project, or whatever it might be, and then once their time was done they would exit stage left, and they wouldn't be seen again until another project like that came along".

With that, Blair thought there was space for an agency to engage in that space respectfully and correctly. Blair decided to bring on board Māori staff and try to grow their understanding and knowledge of Māori culture so that the mātauranga could reside within Ocean Design and attempt to immerse the agency in it.

"There was a real willingness towards it. Since then, we've tried to be conscious and deliberate in building our understanding and knowledge of the Māori world, given that both of us aren't Māori [Ocean Design Group]".

The critical starting point for Ocean Design was discovering their organisational values, understanding their culture and how they define that, and how they can work together with clients and each other? Working with each other, actively including cultural advisors within the

entire process, Blair looked at Ocean's values and looked at them from a Māori perspective and asked himself, 'how do they come to life?' This allowed Blair to dive deeper into what he wanted their brand to represent and how this would be developed. Blair started to think that he could revisit that and reframe that way of thinking from a Māori perspective so that he doesn't appropriate anything but can bring some of those insights and ways of thinking in a way that makes the work Ocean Design does deeper and more authentic.

The decision to transition to more authentic mātauranga work was ultimately Blair's decision as it is his agency, but it goes deeper than just him. Discussing with the team, taking a step back, and asking themselves, "What does this mean?" At the time of the interview, Blair was looking at his organisational purpose, why they exist and why they come to work, and for him, it was all relatively straightforward.

"We looked at our ambition or vision for Ocean in the future, and I painted a picture for the team the other day where I said, We're not Māori owned, and we can't pretend, and we wouldn't want to pretend to be a Māori agency, but could we be New Zealand's first truly integrated bicultural agency?"

By that, it means that half of Ocean Design staff are Māori or Pasifika, for example, and the way they think and what they do starts to reflect the society that we want to see in the future. Looking at it in this way allows Ocean Design to embrace and step toward that future society,

"If you want to change the culture in a business, you've got to change people. Because by changing

44.

45.

the mix, you change the way we think, the way we look at things and the way we do things; rather than us looking at it from the outside in and going, 'well, from an academic perspective, if we did this, this and this, then that will make us more authentic'. Well, it won't because it'll just be us trying to apply concepts that we don't particularly understand or can't understand because we're not Māori and go, 'we think we kind of know what that means, let's grab that and reinterpret it in a way that we think is not appropriation, but it kind of is'".

Appropriation is the idea of using a piece of Māori culture in a way that is not intended, or someone takes a design and misuses it for their gain. Blair explains how this is a real risk with brand and design agencies as they take ideas and use them willingly as they believe it makes their work better, but in reality, it disrespects a culture and mocks the rich history.

Blair claims that in terms of methodologies, in the future, we should aim to systemise the way that we work and the way that we think so that it's repeatable and those who join us can understand who they're entering and how we do things. We don't invent this system each time we do it. However, in doing that, Blair believes that you need to take some concepts and apply them. The risk is that if we start talking and using things that aren't ours to take and use, it's essential to bring those correct people in who can engage in the kaupapa and explore it further.

"If we can change the mix of the team so that it is, as I said before, truly integrated, then they'll do work the way they do work, and Ocean will be the richer for it, and so will the work".

Blair acknowledges that his business stemmed from the colonised Western world of trade, commerce and commercialism. However, Blair aims to step into the Māori world, and one way he envisions doing this is by acting as a bridge between cultures.

"We've got the understanding of the Western brand world, and we've got an understanding of a Māori approach to branding. We can then be the bridge to help our standard, New Zealand, predominantly white businesses understand that world more and the Māori world more and work with it".

Ocean Design Group. *Taura Here Waka.* [Digital Illustration].
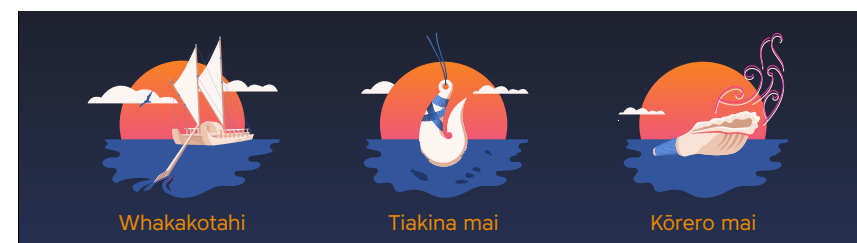
Conversely, there will be Māori organisations that Ocean Design would work with that wouldn't necessarily understand how the Pākehā world works. The idea of being a bridge would be a role that Ocean Design could play in its way. With this new way of thinking, Ocean Design is actively reducing the risk of tokenism and employing indigenous or Māori to enrich further staff understanding and the work that Ocean Produces. There are more than just designers within design agencies. Project managers, design strategists, writers, accountants, etc. "*It's not about only having a design team that is all Māori and neglecting the rest of the team. It's about how you bring that diversity deeper through all roles within the business*". Bringing on those cultural

46.

47.

advisors and consultants has changed how Blair and Ocean Design work together. It's quite a challenging role because, often, cultural advisors are brought into positions in agencies where they hadn't worked before because, as Blair stated earlier, there aren't many Māori design agencies out there. Blair gave one of their new cultural consultants as an example, an employee who is straight out of Victoria University, never worked in design, advertising or media before, yet has an excellent understanding of tikanga, Te Tiriti and te reo. With this, she brings all this mātauranga into the workplace and helps others understand. Getting someone in is quite a challenge because often, they don't necessarily have the experience or the context of what they're coming into.

"You get this tension between someone coming in who's got all this useful insider knowledge, but as an agency, we have to slow down and try and create space for them so we can learn from them".

Blair claims that it's important to bring in those people as it builds connections and support within the agency, which means the weight of the business isn't on one individual's shoulders. Overall, Blair claims that employing cultural practitioners to work closely within the company, not just the design team, has enriched the concept of whakapapa and that connection between everyone in the workplace.

"Whakapapa is not just genealogy; it's about that connection between where you come from and where you're going; and your role in the present moment to honour what's gone before and contribute to what's going to come after you".

Blair's understanding of whakapapa allows him to think proactively about how Ocean approaches branding. Not just thinking 'that was then and this is now', but by actually looking at where the business has come from, what your role within the business is, and envisioning what is next to come to ensure healthy longevity. Blair claims that this way of thinking is resonating with current clients well. Engaging in this way of thinking allows designers and clients to sit down and explore the whakapapa of the organisation together. If it's a small business where the owner or the founder is still involved in it, then it connects to their story. Then you understand who they are, where they came from, their values, their journey, and who they've associated with through, and then it starts to give you insights in terms of what the organisation is.

"We've got a long way to go regarding our understanding of tikanga and how we start to understand it more because, in a way, we're at the very beginning of what we do. I think the changes we've made at Ocean as a Western, white-owned agency, we're one of the first agencies in New Zealand to do that, and there've been a few that have followed in our footsteps".

Although Blair envisions himself as one of the first design agencies to act as a bridge between cultures, he doesn't see his business competing with other Māori-owned and operated companies or agencies. Blair's goal is to act as a fusion between the best of both worlds in a way that respects both cultures. *"It's not about using it for commercial gain; it's about doing it because it's the right thing. Because I think my experience is that when you do things for the right thing, then success follows".*

To do this, however, it is vital to ensure each staff member is actively engaging in that culture and deeply understands the culture they're working in. Blair claims that some staff may not always know what or how to do something, yet the more they practice, the more they can learn from those who do it right. Blair and Ocean Design are actively trying to use te reo in the way they work and learn the culture together by having weekly workshops and te reo Māori lessons.

These activities aim to create opportunities, space, and connections for all staff, clients, and the public to learn about Māori culture.

One thing Blair urges for newcomer designers is always ask the question. All too often, Blair has found himself in a situation where he's talked to designers after a meeting with a client where they said they "felt too uncomfortable" to ask any questions because they didn't quite understand what was happening in the situation. However, Blair urges designers who ever feel uncomfortable to embrace it, ask questions, and talk about it immediately rather than go with the flow.

"We're not doing things for the wrong reasons, but you can do things wrong. It's about making sure that people feel safe to voice their concerns, then talking with the team and going, 'okay, right, if we did this, would that be okay? Can you see any issue with that?' and it's a good opportunity to clear the air with any misunderstanding they might have had".

Blair has solidified his position within the brand and design industry, and has a revolutionary plan for his business going forward. Acting as a bridge between cultures, and actively working toward decolonising design within the workplace. Blair believes in working from and with one another to increase the depth of the work produced and is a prime example of how everyone can participate in the decolonisation of brand design.

darryl
roycroft

pepeha

mataatua, mamaru,
ngatokimatawhaorua ngā waka

ko tangitu, ko taratara oku maunga

kaingapipiwai te whēnua

awaroa te awa rere atu ki te
wahapu o whangaroa

te rarawa, te aupouri, ngāti kuri, ngapuhi
me ngāti kahu o whangaroa ngā iwi

ngāti uru, ngāti pakahi, te
whānaupani ngā hapū

ko parata te tangata

ko kahu-kura-ariki o waitaruke me
ranginui o kenana ngā marae

nō waitaruke ahau

ko don roycroft rāua ko ihapera
bella roycroft aku mātua

darryl roycroft

Darryl Roycroft is a designer from Ngāti Kahu, Rārua and Te Aupōuri. Brought up in Tokoroa, he attended Hato Petera college, graduating in 1971. Darryl studied a design Diploma at Waikato Polytech and entered his first advertising agency in Hamilton; he was arguably one of the first Māori in advertising during those times. Since then, Darryl has worked across a range of multinational agencies and exited the global world in 2008 when he had an epiphany and embarked on a journey to rediscover his Māori roots.

When Darryl first got into advertising, it was a horrible place to be Māori. *"It was misogynistic; it was sexist, extremely racist, openly so in front of staff".* Darryl was labelled as "*useless Māori, lazy Māori, typical Māori and every type of Māori you could expect*". Through that process, Darryl began to assimilate into the industry. Part of that assimilation process was to let go of his reo, let go of his tikanga, kaupapa approach to everything and to be as *not-Māori* as he could be, which is a real contrast to the life Darryl was brought up with. Darryl's mother is fluent in te reo Māori and has a master's degree in Mātauranga Māori and a bachelors degree in te reo Māori. Out of seven siblings, he and his older brother are the only two that don't speak te reo.

Darryl had to give up a lot of being Māori, and 12 years ago, he had a realisation and began to think that there's more to great work than simply making money. As such, Darryl exited the multinational branding industry and started

57.

(Left): Darryl Roycroft. *Pou toko mana wa.* [Digital Illustration].

his own small business, yet only mimicked what everyone else was doing at that time. Darryl moved from the art direction into a more strategic creative space, where he was exposed to values-based organisation modelling. This excited Darryl because he saw that combining those elements creates compelling brands.

"*Being Māori is not about material things; it's about wairua, spirit, and the essence within those things that people are drawn to, and that's what powerful brands are*". Once Darryl started thinking about that and embracing his own culture and life experiences, he realised that the real "nuggets" sit within our cultural world. Darryl believes our world revolves around a cycle of order and relevance. Currently, the world we live in is circling back to indigenous solutions. When we look at this cycle of relevance for solutions within the environment, you'll find that they're indigenously-led solutions for society. "*They're solutions for a community, not products, not technologies; they're ways of being as opposed to brand purpose, which is a way of operating*". Darryl used a lot of that knowledge and worked in that space of Māori and education to create methodologies that can decolonise branding processes. He created approaches to build more powerful outcomes for brands, customers, and stakeholders. Strategies that touch deeper than just a fiscal result at the end of each quarter and some of those things are starting to prove truths. Darryl claims that several practitioners are talking about appropriation and misappropriation, not understanding what it genuinely means in the context of Ao Māori and the context of business. That scares a lot of brands away from the Māori world because everyone fears cultural blunders. They fear making a cultural faux pas.

"The more you start to position a culture as this completely fenced off, unapproachable taonga that nobody should be able to see other than Māori, then brands start going 'well, that's not our space to play in. But the reality is, it is our space to play in, as brands and organisations".

Darryl emphasises that brands can engage in te ao Māori. They need to understand the playing field, the rules, the intricacies and nuances of what Ao Māori brings to the table, and what all those design elements are and mean. The distinction must be made between what is Toi Māori art and what is Pūrākau Māori stories are. Design elements that Māori create are derived from nature; they're there to tell stories.

"I believe that the appropriation of Māori design is not bad; it's progressive". Darryl outlines that the appropriation of Māori elements needs to be understood from the point of view of all those design elements and needs to unpack that background knowledge. Darryl's methodology is to create a whakapapa that defines origins and understands the pūrākau. and whakatauki to support that whakapapa and the origins of that brand. Then a visual story is made in a Māori sense, using traditional Māori tohu to tell that brand's story.

From there, each of those designed elements are unpacked, understood where they originate, what each of those elements are there to say, and then are given a modern and contemporary skew. The end product is a Māori-inspired, appropriated piece of work, but it's not traditional Māori; they're not in that space. They are understood, then modernised, and contemporised to be

relevant to the brand's story without directly displaying and claiming traditional Māori patterns or motifs. The work produced is inspired by them, but Darryl claims it's changed dramatically whilst still talking to the overall story or that brand and remaining respectful to traditional Māori.

"*There is appropriation where you've taken inspiration from tradition and given it a modern skew to own it, and then there's misappropriation where you've just completely unpacked and it and thrown it on the label, and the worst part of misappropriation is the lack of understanding the tikanga and kaupapa of what all those elements mean.*"

Taratara a kai, in particular, talks to the story of Tinirau and his whale, so there is a whole story to where that pattern comes from, but that pattern can mean multiple things within the context of the story, says Darryl. "*It could talk about Mana Wahine, relationships, and reciprocation (utu). There are many stories that a particular pattern can tell.*"

Darryl questions how you can change the pattern so that it is not a direct rip-off of a Māori tohu and how you can change that particular design to take into that space so a brand can own it. Drawing inspiration from Māori designs and stories adds a modern twist to those so that they're not a misappropriation of that art, but talk to that space as they're relevant to it. You can see that they're inspired by Māori, but they aren't to the heart of those people.

Darryl believes we are now in this place where we are picking up from our tūpuna, who created these patterns, and questions how a pattern, or a specific tohu, relates to technology in the internet space. To even begin to tell that story, you need to go back to figure out where it fits within the 'deriving from nature' ideology.

"*We may need to look at other stories within our backgrounds as Māori that may talk to a specific pattern that could ladder or lend itself to today's technology*".

Darryl begins questioning how traditional stories can pivot and be applied to current societal situations. Examples include businesses and organisations leaning on Te Tiriti o Waitangi and claiming to be a treaty partner.

Still, Darryl says too many of his clients that "*there was no such thing as IT back in 1840. So what does the treaty of 1840 mean in the context of this modern business you're running*". Therefore from a branding perspective, how do all of those elements of a colonised partnership need to be taken into account to understand how to tell that story to create something new and fresh.

Māori is over an $80 billion economic development business, and Darryl believes that design from a Māori aspect has a massive part to play in the future of Aotearoa. "*Purely by proxy and default, the culture of this country is Māori culture.*"

Darryl describes New Zealand as a unique colonised country, where we are in a position where we have a phenomenal partnership, and we have a foot in multiple camps where we can bridge numerous gaps. Darryl describes three layers to Māori storytelling. "*We tell these stories because we are here to: Interrogate the past, so we can Analyse the present and Manifest the future*". Through this, Darryl started to question what the future would look like from a design point of view through the lens of Māori. "*That lens can't just be Māori; it can come from Māori, but it needs to, at some stage, encapsulate non-Māori, and that is very important*".

Darryl's mother talks about the shoulders on which we stand, the actions of the past defining the direction we take our future. This

is also important from a design point of view because it gives you a guide to where you need to push things from a design point of view, but also where you need to pull things from.

Each of Darryl's tūpuna had their own issues that they each had to deal with in vastly different ways. Darryl's great-grandfather was given a 'colonised name' as the teachers at school couldn't pronounce his birth name, which undermined the family history of that name. The council rated Darryl's grandfather out of his farm in the far north. He ended up losing that land because of the colonial laws in place to steal Māori land. Darryl's mother is from a generation who were forbidden to speak te reo Māori within schools and were caned if she were to. These experiences broadened their shoulders for the next generation to stand on. Darryl claims his shoulders were built in 1981 in his last year of college when he marched Queen Street with all the seniors of Hato Petera against apartheid. *"We're not here to March against apartheid. We're here to march because all these white people are marching against apartheid and wanting to save black kids in South Africa. But what about us?".*

These shoulders and those issues that built them are things that Darryl believes provides mana and bread for his children to stand on. *"This is part of interrogating the past to understand all the issues that went through to give power to a design".* Genuine and authentic Pūrākau Māori is storytelling. Darryl brings to question how we are to tell and express our stories? Prior to the Tohunga act, every Māori child could walk into a whare, feel the po, and know the story of that po. They were able to recognise the story as someone's Tā moko, their whakapapa.

Being Māori in New Zealand at the moment is so relevant, and on a global scale. Darryl warns us of the irony that decolonisation of Māori and branding could lead to a stronger sense of colonisation. "*If we don't own that capacity to execute and share it in open source, then all it will end up being is corporatised, not only by brands but by Māori themselves".* Balance is everything, and being able to ensure that there is a set of ethics that get wrapped around a brand from a Māori perspective, and how those have to be entrenched and understand that deep connection to those particular design elements. Darryl claims that many clients want an Ao Māori perspective, but they fail to realise that Ao Māori isn't just in New Zealand.

"*An Ao Māori point of view on the environment encapsulates the entire earth, and when organisations say "we're gonna do this, we're gonna do that", and then they wrap it in plastic and ship it off overseas, that's not Ao Māori. You're still damaging the earth, you're just damaging it somewhere else, it's still Papatūānuku".*

Darryl proposes to bring organisations onto this bridge and step them towards an understanding of Ao Māori, not competency, just understanding and giving them an overview and letting them know that tikanga Māori values are not mutually exclusive to Māori. Then on the other end of the bridge, getting them to step off and remind them that every nation is an indigeny. There were Britons and Welsh in pre-Romanic Britain, and they were all indigenes of different sorts. They have Gaia, Mother Earth. We have Papatūānuku. If you can give them some parallels that they can weave into the Ao Māori story, it gives them a sense of comfort and understanding.

Darryl explains from there; you can start bringing Ao Māori onto the bridge and give them some levers to understand how to pull these people across and push themselves to meet in the middle. Those levers are letting them understand that we have Te Tiriti o Waitangi that talks about this partnership, and it's important to remember that every Māori in this world has some other culture blended within their whakapapa. It's about going back to that whakapapa which is the core root of all Māori.

Darryl explains that most brands and organisations have four or five values that they work by. However, in the world of Māori, you can't leave any of the values behind. It's about understanding which is crucial for decolonisation,

"*But if we don't have people coming into the space and understanding all these nuances around design and brands, then that decolonisation will become colonisation because it will just end up being owned by ABC Limited. Just look at Air New Zealand, for example. They've already tried to trademark kia ora".*

If that escapes into places like America, they'll just ring-fence it. Darryl explains that we need to either make them ubiquitous, so they are everywhere, or we need to have protections, guides, and rules embedded within the comms and branding industry; to have a balance of not being too restrictive but also not being too loose in giving.

Darryl outlined that the first thing he had to do when dealing with a client who wants to include traditional Māori elements is to return to the

client and ask, *"who do you have within your organisation that deals in this space in Ao* Māori?" Because *"I'm not going to move without them being on board and the journey."* By using a co-design process, Darryl can sit down with the key stakeholders and those who will be impacted by the work and not look at solutions but problems. When everyone brings a problem to the table, everyone shares the solutions to those problems. From there, it's simple to question how you can roll it out. Darryl explains that the real trick to dealing with this type of client is not to rush them and to give them the time they need to have those hui. If they don't have that internal Māori view within the client's organisation, then you need to acknowledge that 'it takes more than just me, I am not the lead on this', and you have to measure the client's appetite. If the client doesn't have the appetite or that genuine drive, then you disengage.

You can do things such as giving the client a design that leans toward a story so that they understand what the stories and design are and what goes into it. But suppose the client wants something more profound. In that case, that's going into whakapapa and defining and creating a narrative which is when brands need that internal Māori view within their organisation.

"*There is a meme from the movie Boy, and I say this is the biggest fear of every non-Māori client when looking at Māori-inspired or Ao Māori branding and design elements. A photograph of Boy underneath it says, 'Fuck up bae, you don't know'. And that is the fear. The fear of doing something and some Māori comes in and says, 'fuck up bae, you don't know. What the hell's this shit?'. That is the fear.*"

Darryl claims that it is crucial to understand that guidance gets them to the end game. The input that the client wants to put in is okay. They've just got to understand the output; what comes out at the end of the design process isn't necessarily what they see in their head. When you take the client through the journey of the power Ao Māori can bring to their brand and the design elements they understand, their brand is richer for it. It awakens their mind because they see suddenly how their brand fits into the context of their design category. It's about bringing the client on the journey of modernising these elements; for example, they'll look at it and go, 'well, actually, we think that roro is more relevant because we're all about building strong relationships with clients'. We'll take that and move it into the space, but we'll add this bit in because it represents this, which demystifies it for them along the way. At the end of the process, the client is left with their own story. Correctly appropriated Māori artefacts and tohu to tell a story unique to that brand. *"You'll never get a 'fuck up bae, you don't know' because it is yours."*

Many Pākehā Māori New Zealanders are unsure if they're accepted as Māori because of the colour of their skin. In a discussion with one of his old coursemates, Darryl talked about what it means to be Māori. Darryl's coursemate spoke about how because his kids have fair skin, they need to learn te reo Māori and do this. Darryl turned around and said, "*Nah, bro, just Whakapapa. Whakapapa is enough, end of story.*" Just Whakapapa to Māori was enough because that's what Te Tiriti o Waitangi is all about, Māori openly engaging with non-Māori. We must be highly cognisant as Māori to realise and be aware that every Māori has an entirely different experience of what

it means to be Māori. *"My experience of what it means to be Māori is completely different to yours, completely different to my kids, different to my parents".* We can't judge Māori because they look different. It doesn't matter if you speak or don't speak te reo; you still are.

What we do now will have a massive impact, and how brands see that will have an enormous effect. It's less about controlling Māori design and Māori views within brands and design. It's more about understanding because the more we understand, the more design practitioners are out there, and brand practitioners understand how Māori operates, what it means and the deeper nuances of Māori.

Darryl was asked to give one piece of advice to any new designer.

"Don't fear it. It's yours. It's from your tūpuna. They created it for you. Don't fear it. Just understand it, learn a little bit more about it, and then use it the way it's meant to be used. It's telling stories; it's not tapu."

There are many designers out there who fear it because there are so many other Māori out there who are only too prepared to knock it. Because they want to ring-fence it for themselves, they want to be seen as the experts. *"If you are Māori, it's in you, it's yours. It's been gifted to you by birthright."*

We all have different experiences as Māori that can lend to the overarching picture, but we all have the same objectives. And that is to take these beautiful things that we can create, that people

have only just come to realise are champion to the New Zealand brand, and make sure they're not bastardised, overused, and keep that continuum so that we as Māori don't end up colonising it or allow it to be colonised by corporate.

ā tōna wā

ngā mihi mō ngā
tau kei mua i te
aroaro.

Good luck for the future.