

Reviews

Colonial Constructs. European Images of Maori 1840-1914. By Leonard Bell. Auckland University Press, Auckland, 1992. 291 pp. NZ price: \$69.95.

FROM THE BEGINNING the author makes it clear that his subject is the European representation of Maori for Europeans, and that they are never 'unproblematic "faithful" transcriptions of the visible'. However, 'ascertainable actualities of the person, thing or event represented' play a role in the representations. It is still possible, he stresses, to ascertain actualities from representations. Nevertheless representations of Maori, irrespective of the intentions of the artists concerned, are constructs not replications of the real. Because of this they must be interpreted. Bell provides an essential toolkit for interpreting the imagining of Maori.

It is quite a complex kit. First, there are the pictorial forms and codes the artist derives from European practices and traditions in drawing and painting. There are the artist's personal intentions, the circumstances in which the representations arise, their purpose, the expectations of patrons and commissioning bodies, and above all 'the social, political and religious ideas and values sustaining the artist' and the class and gender of the artist. 'Maoris could be presented as savages existing at a primitive stage of social development . . . as romantic beings, as noble, as ignoble, as relics of antiquity, as exotic curiosities, as picturesque, as hostile, as friendly or deferential, as objects of desire or display, as participants in a spectacle, as members of a dying race, as ethnological specimens, as marketable commodities, as antipodean peasants.'

By the 1850s most Maori had adopted Christianity; by the early 1900s Europeans occupied most of the productive land. Maori were to be assimilated into the European settler society. Representations of Maori were not only part of the colonizing process, today they constitute an aspect of colonization central to the understanding of colonial history, for colonists responded directly to the visual images of Maori available to them. The interpretation of the representation of Maori is a crucial part of New Zealand's colonial history.

Bell divides his study into six sections. The first deals with the artists of the 1840s, Angas, Brees, Oliver, Merrett, Clarke, Beetham and Carmichael. Angas displayed his New Zealand paintings in the Egyptian Hall, Piccadilly, a popular venue for exotica where they promoted (together with his *The New Zealander's Illustrated*) colonization projects. The work of Brees, a surveyor and engineer, who specialized in pictures illustrative of land-use, served a similar purpose. Oliver preferred to depict Maori women as sultry beauties, while repulsed by the smells of 'dirty natives' settlements. Most of the artists of the 1840s worked in pencil, crayon watercolour and wash, hoping to assemble a set of lithographed views of picturesque travel.

The second section is concerned with the work of Gilfillan and Strutt, the first two

professionally trained artists to arrive in New Zealand. They came — like John Glover to Tasmania — to settle and farm, and did not exhibit their work until they had left the country to live in Australia or Britain, where facilities for the exhibition of 'fine art' existed. But they did make on-site studies and sketches; Gilfillan in the manner of Scottish realist low-life genre, Strutt in the French 'oriental' manner, in which he had been trained — vast terrains, passionate action, violent scenes, hieratic portraiture. Bell's detailed interpretation of the complex factors involved in Strutt's portrait of Hare Pomare and family, now in the Rex Nan Kivell Collection of the National Library of Australia, is admirable — in its own way the portrait is a masterpiece, not so much of high art as of ideology at work in the processes of assimilation and colonization.

Bell's third section is devoted to the artists of the 1860s, the work of Horatio Robley and Gustavus von Tempsky, both amateur artists who served in the New Zealand wars. Robley was prolific and continued to work up his drawings in England after his retirement from the army well into the 1920s; scenes of Maori life for the *Illustrated London News*, that is to say, reportage and documentation, not high art. In England in retirement Robley became a Maori 'expert', especially on moko, and assembled an unrivalled collection of preserved Maori heads. Like Angas before him he visualized himself as much a scientist as artist, and his work and collections became historical artefacts much sought after by collectors as colonial New Zealand became conscious of its history.

Bell views Robley as a kind of social realist whose style was mediated by a late nineteenth-century desire for a visual reportage of social conditions comparable to the artists who provided sketches of Crimean war scenes for the British press. A comparison is made with the work of Constantin Guys, Baudelaire's favourite artist. Bell reveals how Robley's drawings were manipulated for newsworthy and ideological purposes. Nine out of ten of his sketches for the *Illustrated London News* related to the Maori-European conflict of those years. None of those submitted to the paper dealing with the ordinary conditions of Maori life were published. Yet the editorial policy of the *Illustrated London News* varied, critical of the British military presence at times, supportive at other times.

By contrast Von Tempsky, who also fought in the wars, sought to produce 'fine art' for the local New Zealand public. His paintings with Maori figures are essentially fictitious. He seeks to imagine war scenes from a Maori viewpoint drawing upon mid-nineteenth-century banditti imagery such as that popularized by Sir Charles Eastlake. Maori are invariably depicted in defeat which is all, the paintings seem to say, they can expect. But because work is conceived as 'fine art' picturesque, exotic and decorative conventions are called into play to attract and impress a growing circle of New Zealand 'art lovers'. Although Said's *Orientalism* does not appear in Bell's bibliography he does note the strong 'orientalist' convention determining Nicholas Chevalier's 'Hinemoa: A Maori Maiden' and the function of this image of desire in the colonial annexation of native land.

The fourth section of the book is concerned with the growth of nationalism towards the end of the century when writers and artists set themselves the task of appropriating Maori history to furnish New Zealand with a history longer than the history of an invasion. It develops in tandem with the growth of ethnography; the Polynesian Society assists this 'aestheticisation' of the Maori which is taken up by artists such as Louis Steele, working in the style of Meissonier to present erotic melodramas of Maori legend, as surrogate New Zealand history. The last two sections treat the nationalizing of the Maori in greater detail; in Gottfried Lindauer's tableaux, static and passive, of 'our Maoris'; and Wilhelm Dittner's representations of Maori as historic relics. Maori who were active energetic leaders among their own people are presented as 'immobile, dejected, more objects than persons'.

Leonard Bell has produced an indispensable book that should stand the test of time.

It is nothing less than a radical reworking of the existing interpretations of New Zealand colonial art to which a formidable amount of empirical evidence lends its support. Much of the material is highly relevant to the current postcolonial discourse, though that discourse would now, I suspect, seek to find increasing affinity between colonizer and colonized where Bell, rightly working within the terms of his central thesis, finds difference.

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The Vote, the Pill, and the Demon Drink: A History of Feminist Writing in New Zealand, 1869-1993. By Charlotte Macdonald. Bridget Williams Books, Wellington, 1993. 260 pp. NZ price: \$49.95.

THIS IS one of several publications which celebrated the centenary of the granting of woman suffrage to New Zealand women in 1893. The book is a collection of documents, beginning with the first public stirrings of feminism in New Zealand in the 1860s and finishing with an extract from a 1992 New Zealand parliamentary debate. Documents are grouped, and each chronological segment accompanied by an analytical commentary. Such divisions could be seen by some as arbitrary and artificial, but the commentator has been skilful in showing how one phase of feminism has merged, and is still merging, into the next. It is refreshing to see analysis of the 1970s and 1980s feminism in other than theoretical terms, although Macdonald admits to the problems faced when assessing the latest phase of any historical movement.

The documents present the public face of the women's movement rather than the private consciousness of feminists, and as such they chart practical demands for equality. The arguments vary as New Zealand moves into different phases of its history, but the underlying philosophy is the same: that women are entitled to have their demands met because equality with all, male and female, is their inalienable right. The style is rich and varied, and development of both protest and arguments devastatingly logical. New Zealand can be proud of the articulate and perceptive women who fought, and are still fighting for, their freedoms.

Four themes run through the documents and commentary: economic, political, legal and social. They show us how far women have come and how far they still have to travel.

Mary Taylor's 'Appeal to the Women of New Zealand' (1870) protested at the lack of training and employment opportunities which forced women to marry. The right of women to economic independence within marriage exercised the women of the 1880s and 1890s. Remuneration for women who are tied to child-rearing, and the concomitant one of eliminating penalties against working women because of the time out of the work force is still a concern. The first feminists asked for a living wage for women. Women have come a long way, but they still do not have economic equality in the work force: 'equal pay for equal work' is not 'equal pay for work of equal value'.

Mary Ann Muller asked for the vote in 1869, and when women gained it in 1893 they thought that it would give them strong political influence; that parliamentary membership could come in its own good time. Margaret Sievwright was soon disillusioned. She telegraphed Rose Scott in 1902 warning New South Wales' women against accepting the vote without candidature rights. This, she said, was 'the knife without the blade'. Women in both countries have now had the right of candidature for over 70 years, but many factors