

experience overall. Moreover, boards on which visitors can leave comments overflow with positive responses. Some comments indicate that the exhibition has succeeded in creating a sense of communal ownership for the region's past. Yet the question remains: are the implicit white settler narratives of 'Never a Dull Moment!' diverse enough, or inclusive enough, to create the desired depth of communal re-imaginings?

'Never a Dull Moment!' bursts with stories and paraphernalia taken from Hamilton's past, but displays associated with communal identity are often a 'paint by numbers' affair, and unfortunately much of this exhibition falls under this category. It is possible to see in this exhibition not 'Hamilton Stories' so much as national tropes fractured through a regional lens. A more innovative exhibition may have resulted from avoiding the use of national mythologies as the backbone from which the exhibition was hung. As it stands, 'Never a Dull Moment!' provides an accessible, quirky and visually enticing experience, but it also offers an exhibition depicting white settler progress reflective of national mythologies that might have been more fruitfully undermined for the sake of diversity, inclusiveness and innovation. While it will surely satisfy requests for settler history, it would be nice to see an exhibition more inclined to unsettle public expectations about communal identity.

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Tales from Te Papa. <http://www.tepapa.govt.nz/ResearchAtTePapa/Pages/TalesfromTePapa.aspx> and <http://tvnz.co.nz/tales-from-te-papa/ta-ent-tales-te-papa-index-group-2922277>.

Created and maintained by The Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa and TVNZ6. Sites accessed 20 January 2010–3 February 2010.

THE COLLECTIONS OF BIG MUSEUMS and galleries are like icebergs: only the tip of them is on display. Self-described 'cultural curmudgeon' Hamish Keith recently applauded what he saw as a return to core business in such places — showing their collections rather than touring blockbuster exhibitions.¹ Te Papa has come in for its fair share of flak about this over the years, as one critic after another has demanded to have one collection or another put on display. Whether or not it was designed to counter such criticism, *Tales from Te Papa* certainly exhibits more of its collection to the public.

Tales is a set of 50 mini-documentaries, each three or four minutes in length, that focus on some of the two million pieces in Te Papa's collection. They were made in conjunction with TVNZ6 and screen daily on that channel (Freeview 06 and Sky 16). For viewers without these television options, Te Papa's own website will take you to their 'channel' on YouTube where the episodes can be downloaded.² They are also available 'on demand' at TVNZ6's site.³

The mini-documentaries are a superb way of using material culture and objects to tell good stories, especially stories that expand outwards from the object to touch on broader or contemporary issues. An assortment of horrid objects associated with dental nursing becomes the vehicle for talking about women's employment in the 1920s and 1930s (episode 25); we are told about the process of identifying Mht, the Egyptian mummy, but also why she is no longer on show and how attitudes to displaying human remains have changed (episode 14); Guide Sophia's hei tiki is not only a chance to discuss the Tarawera eruption, but also the stories crafted into and carried through hei tiki (episode 2).

The pattern of each episode is straightforward. One of the two upbeat presenters (Simon Morton from Radio New Zealand's *This Way Up* and *Why We Buy?* and Riria Hotere from *Korero Mai*) lead off, taking us into the bowels of Te Papa or providing a context to the episode as they wander the corridors and stacks of the museum. This is the hook — connecting the object to something going on now (showing a digital camera as a way

into James Bragge's photographic work in episode 21), or hitting the nostalgia button (the stuffed cast of *Play School* in episode 36), or showing something that is out of the ordinary (the helmet made from the skin of the poisonous puffer fish, worn by Kiribati men, along with long johns made from coconut fibre in episode 8). Then there is a cut to the object and the relevant Te Papa expert, often interwoven with a variety of still and moving images (perhaps from the Te Papa collection, perhaps not, for there are no credits in the episodes).

Engaging communication, a sense of excitement, a good soundbite, a personal connection — these are all key to delivering history in this way. So is the ability to impart the nuts and bolts of a matter without turning it into a history lesson. These are essential skills in public history in the media, and ones that some historians too quickly spurn while at the same time quibbling perplexedly when their kind are not used on screen.

Some of the Te Papa experts come through well: they are engaged with the object, they can tell a good story, they are relaxed and they can soundbite. Others cannot, and the least successful episodes feature white-gloved experts standing primly alongside objects, giving history (or other disciplinary) lessons woodenly to camera.

I watched the episodes on the TVNZ6 website, by far the easiest and most user-friendly internet choice; I also chose this over watching TVNZ6, simply because I could view episodes at my leisure. The site has a bit of information about the show and presenters, a featured episode complete with teaser blurb, and all episodes named and relatively easy to browse through and select once you hit the option 'View All Full Episodes'. Te Papa's YouTube 'channel' has all the usual clicking and options associated with YouTube more generally, and the teasers are shorter than on TVNZ6, although you can sort these into any order you like and get a sense of the whole. Te Papa's own website does virtually nothing for and with the Tales — once you manage to find them. There is no link on the home page and no mention of it among the clutch of new media developments listed on the home page (Facebook, Twitter, Flickr). I found it two or three clicks down, under 'Research at Te Papa' and 'Online resources': a 'search' on Te Papa's website brought it up at number 23. Apart from information about the show, the material on this site is poor. A list of 'popular picks' offers a selection of episodes, but these are just stills with a brief title that tells you nothing about the episode. The stills showing all 50 episodes have neither title, nor teaser, nor mouse-over text.

The combination of television and the internet is a great way to explore Te Papa's collection. Not only do we get to see some of the objects that are not on display, but it puts Te Papa's collections on the road — in New Zealand and overseas — for anyone with a computer to enjoy. I am not sure the mini-documentaries will appease those who think too much of Te Papa remains 'hidden' from view, but Tales from Te Papa is a fine way of bringing our place into my place.

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NOTES

- 1 Hamish Keith, 'The show must not go on', *New Zealand Listener*, 23–29 January 2010, http://www.listener.co.nz/issue/3637/artsbooks/14776/the_show_must_not_go_on.html
- 2 <http://www.youtube.com/tepapamuseum#p/c/EB4697535B2E563F>
- 3 <http://tvnz.co.nz/tales-from-te-papa/ta-ent-ales-te-papa-index-group-2922277>