

Reviews (History in Other Media)

Slice of Heaven: 20th Century Aotearoa. The Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Cable St, Wellington. Reviewed 18 February 2011. Internet: <http://www.tepapa.govt.nz/WhatsOn/exhibitions/SliceofHeaven/Pages/SliceofHeaven.aspx>.

SLICE OF HEAVEN: 20th Century Aotearoa opened in Spring 2010 and is the fourth major, long-term exhibition examining aspects of New Zealand's past to be installed after the initial opening exhibitions. The first was *Made in New Zealand* (on display 2001–2008), which focused on the country's visual culture, followed by *Blood Earth Fire Whāngai Whenua Ahi Ka* about New Zealand's environmental history and *Tangata o le Moana: The Story of Pacific People in New Zealand*, which are both still open. As the welcoming label explains, 'Aotearoa New Zealand changed dramatically in the 20th century. Discover what united and divided us, and shaped our lives. Decide whether New Zealand really is a "slice of heaven".' I assume the title comes from the Dave Dobbyn song of the same name but its origins are not explained. In any event it is a welcome relief from that other celestial slogan: 'God's Own Country'.

Structurally, the exhibition is divided into four thematic sections. 'International Relations' explores New Zealand's links to Britain, the British Empire, the United States and the world. 'Social Welfare and the State' examines the role of the state in people's lives and the rise and fall of the welfare state. 'Diversity and Civil Rights' focuses on the late twentieth-century feminist and gay rights movements and the 1981 Springbok Tour protests. The last section concerns 'Māori in the 20th Century' and relates Māori experiences of discrimination, their quest for equality and their cultural resurgence. Much more space is given to the first two themes than the last two. There is another section situated outside the thematic structure titled 'Home Grown' comprising everyday objects — typewriters, sewing machines, children's trolleys — found in New Zealand homes during the twentieth century.

The exhibition's narrative and arguments follow a well-known path. There are no new big ideas or interpretations. The familiar story is enlivened not only through the artefacts and ephemera employed to relate accounts, but by the excellent use of archival film and sound sources, some of which are gems that I have neither seen nor heard before. The exhibition's architecture also enhances the experience — the illuminated First World War cross was particularly stark and moving.

Slice of Heaven begins in 1901 with the death of Queen Victoria and the visit of the Duke and Duchess of York — early footage of the royal visit is included in a film loop. Imperial ties are further stressed with a model of HMS *New Zealand* and a kettledrum presented to the ship by the Women's Patriotic League. The visitor is then taken through World War One battlefields; past a Christchurch influenza clinic (including an inhalation chamber used to spray zinc sulphate down people's throats); into a recreated 1940s living room (where a discussion ensues between a father and daughter about whether she can go on a date with a 'fast' American serviceman); before reaching 1950s exhibits devoted to Edmund Hillary's Everest conquest, the 1953–1954 Royal Tour, and the 'invasion' of rock and roll. This first section finishes with the Vietnam conflict, nuclear ship visits and the severing of ANZUS, completing New Zealand's path from loyal British colony to independent sovereign state. Analytically, this section is the strongest. The story is clear and robustly told.

The state and society section is weaker. It begins well with exhibits on Plunket, health camps, state housing and the school dental service. (The sight of a school dental chair and pedal drill sent chills down my spine as I recalled my own days at the 'murder house'.) An exhibit on the state's response to the 1930s depression focuses on relief work and the 1932 riots. But there are gaps here, not the least being education. There is nothing about the growth of both secondary and tertiary education, surely one of the most important state

interventions of all. Moreover, the last exhibit concerning the post-1984 downsizing of the state lacks analysis and interpretation. It comprises a stack of TV screens with archival clips about the sharemarket boom (including a clip of a youthful John Key admitting he was ‘making enough to be comfortable’), its collapse and the subsequent sell-off of state assets. Yet the viewer is left largely clueless as to the consequences of this course on society. This made for an unsatisfactory ending.

The two other smaller sections commendably achieve their brief. As might be expected, the stories told in the Māori section are both sobering and inspiring. But I wonder if they would have been even more powerful if this section had been integrated into the rest of the exhibition. For example, together with the story of the nation-building 1953 Royal Tour we could have also been shown the state-initiated destruction of Ngāti Whātua-o- Ōrākei’s papakāinga at Ōkahu Bay only two years before. Beside the story exploring the rapid adoption of modern American youth culture we might have also seen the contemporaneous experience of Māori struggling to retain their cultural traditions in the ‘Big Smoke’ of the city. I appreciate this would have affected the thematic structure of the exhibition and perhaps compromised Te Papa’s bi-cultural ethos, but concentrating Māori stories in a single section leaves the viewer with the impression Māori and Pākehā lived in completely separate worlds. While this may have been truer at the beginning of the twentieth century, it was certainly not the case by century’s end. Some of New Zealand’s most remarkable late-twentieth-century stories are about the impact the Māori ‘renaissance’ had not just on Māori culture and society, but on Pākehā culture and society as well. Such a theme might form the basis of a future exhibition.

All up, I spent an enjoyable few hours working my way around the exhibition, and the fact that it provoked the above responses shows it did its job to inform and raise questions. There is further information about the exhibition’s content and the objects on display on the companion website, and a link to Te Papa’s blogsite. Entries about aspects of twentieth-century history are posted there every month. So did I leave convinced that Aotearoa New Zealand was a slice of heaven? I have to confess that I have never thought of the place that way, but it did reaffirm for me that Aotearoa New Zealand was the place I wanted to live.

BEN SCHRADER

Ministry for Culture and Heritage

The 28th Māori Battalion website [<http://www.28maoribattalion.org.nz>]. Developed on behalf of the 28th Māori Battalion Association by the Ministry for Culture and Heritage = Te Manatū Taonga, in partnership with Te Puni Kōkiri, the National Library of New Zealand = Te Puna Mātauranga o Aotearoa and the Ministry of Education. Reviewed 12 and 16 February 2011.

‘MĀORI PERCEIVE THE WORLD IN A PARTICULAR WAY.’ For many in academia a statement such as this leads to innumerable questions. Most Māori, however, would agree that we are all in some way connected. This applies not only to whanau, hapu, and iwi, but to those entities with which we share this place. The often-recounted tribal creation stories, albeit with variations, highlight the importance of these connections. Such a worldview holds that all things have whakapapa and therefore an intrinsic mana. While this is very much apparent in the natural world, it is also applicable in the world of cyberspace.

The 28th Māori Battalion website was created on behalf of the 28th Māori Battalion Association to ‘record, honour and maintain information and knowledge [about the battalion’s] outstanding contribution to Aotearoa New Zealand’. It includes an historical overview, an interactive map, stories and memories contributed by veterans and their whanau, teaching resources, and audio and video footage. It also provides a roll call of the 3600 men who fought in the battalion.