

# Foyer Murals completed in 1982

## THE FOYER MURALS

Visitors to the Motueka High School are now greeted with a far more aesthetic and cultural entrance to the school in the form of an eight foot mural which decorates the foyer.

The mural, which depicts features of Maori life – fishing, hunting and food-gathering – was largely the work of a group of fifth form students. With a good deal of persuasion and encouragement from Mr Howell the art teacher, the students contributed their own designs and handiwork to produce a high standard of both decorative and educational work.

SAM STRINGER, 6th form

## WORK ON THE MURAL

I came to school for what I thought was going to be a boring week of art – I walked through the door of the art room, looked round the room and noticed some big sheets of customwood lying across the tables. We went and sat down and Mr Howell started explaining what we were going to do with the wood. At first I thought he was mad but he said you didn't have to do it if you didn't want to. We just mucked around that period drawing two Maori figures.

We had art again later that week and when I walked in the door I could see that somebody had been sawing out the figures. The extra pieces of wood that had been cut off were glued on to the parts of the carvings where the carving had to be raised up – like the faces and arms, legs etc. Then the carving started. This part of the project was the most trying!

I spent a lot of lunch hours sitting down, hacking away and finally it started to look something like two Maori figures. The more they took shape, the more determined I was to get them finished. It took untold weeks and elbow grease to get them ready for sanding. The sanding was about the worst part of the whole thing. The big holes everyone had hacked in all had to come out to make everything smooth, with no scratch marks. It took a week or more for the sanding to be completed and then the carvings were ready to be nuggeted.

The brown shoe polish was applied in a thin coat and then brushed in and left for around five minutes before it was brushed off. It was then polished with a rag until it shone. Every nook and cranny had to be polished and it wasn't until it was all shining that it was glued on to the back-board, which was painted in traditional colours. The figures were glued, the final coat of varnish was put on and then all the other pieces of carving, painting and weaving were erected.

They were all taken downtown to Supervalu to be displayed for a week, then back to the school where they were put up in the main foyer.

TROY DANDO, 4th form

## FASHIONING MAORI WOMAN'S HEAD

All the carvings were made from customwood layers. The woman's head (the project I was assigned to) consists of three layers, the nose and the forehead being the highest feature. Her face was carved with wide chisels mainly, then detail put in with smaller ones – for example, the eyes and lips. A traditional Maori Moko (copied from a book) was carved in on her chin and also between the eyebrows to show her importance. Paua shell is laid in the eyes of all the faces. This gives the overall project more life.

The hair of the woman is of a stylised design trying to capture movement from the wind swirling about her head.

Nugget shoe polish was used to colour the carvings (black for hair, brown on the skin) and then a thick coat of varnish finished the whole project off.

At first I did not want to tackle this assignment because it was so important (if it didn't work out . . .) though I felt more confident when the face took shape and started to work out. I am pleased with the finished product (the whole carving project) and it feels good to have yours at the top.

SHANE STRINGER, Fifth form



The second term started in its usual manner within the school. In our fifth form art class we were asked if we would like to put together a project, with the theme of education, for the school. We all agreed to make a Maori mural for the foyer of the school.

Then we slowly designed it and we picked our separate parts to work on. I chose the head of the male figure. At first I thought it would be quite simple but, after a week of designing I still hadn't made a start. I then decided I should try something so I formed the thickness of the face with three pieces of customwood. From there I slowly shaped the face, and then started to design the carvings. I was then carving for a month. By this time everyone was finished and the whole thing had taken shape.

Last touches were added to it and then it was mounted in the foyer – looking at it made me feel proud to be a part of its making.

RONNIE HARTSHORNE, Fifth form

## EDUCATIONAL THEME

This series of carvings and paintings is based on the theme of education.

The two largest side panels (poupou) portray parents with their children and they are shown with a number of simple symbols to show the practical areas of living that adults would have taught their children.

The mother with her baby on her hip, as the child rearer, is surrounded by flax plants, woven leaves, gourds and kumara vines. At her feet are both decorated gourds and a woven kit of kumara.

Her daughter empties eels from a trap (hinaki) to complete the idea of women's traditional roles of gardening and food collection.

The father with his full face tattoo (moko) stands defiant and warrior-like with his taiaha (long fighting club) and a wahaika (short carved wooden club) in his hands. One of his adolescent sons (shown with incomplete moko) holds a bird spear and a pair of tuis – prized for their sweet song and meat. His other son empties a fishing net with a mixed catch. Most prominent is a stylised hammerhead shark which figures in a saying "it is better to die like a hammerhead shark than to die like an octopus". In other words die fighting – never surrender.

Also prominent in this panel is the only realistic painting; fern curls or pitau. These were developed highly in Maori arts into the koru or spiral which is the centre of much painted design in rafters (kowhaiwhai) and decorative work.

The two linking panels show a mixture of kowhaiwhai designs and also a painted version of traditional tukutuku panels.

The central panel has been backed with a modern version of "tukutuku" which was a patterned reed weaving with a symbolic meaning. In this case the colours of the sunrise and sunset are shown in a repeating series of lines, behind the carved sun, Ra, who is used to symbolise the light of knowledge.

Beneath him sits a tohunga or tribal elder who had the formal role of education. In his hands he holds an adze (toki) to symbolise his skill in carving and a long flute (putorino) to show his ability in music. He is flanked by four young men who are the pupils surrounded by interwoven shapes of manaia or lizard-like forms, which represent the legendary tales of a tribe.

MIKE HOWELL



