

WHO ARE YOU KO WAI KOE

ATHENS,
AOTEAROA
& THE ART OF
MARIAN MAGUIRE



HELLENIC
MUSEUM

EXHIBITION COMPANION
NOVEMBER 2022 — MAY 2023

The Hellenic Museum acknowledges the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation as the Traditional Owners of the lands and waters on which we meet and work. We recognise Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander peoples' continuing connection to land, place, waters and community, and pay our respects to their Elders past and present.

The Hellenic Museum respectfully recognises the unique role of Māori as Tangata Whenua and embraces Te Tiriti o Waitangi recognising Māori as tino rangitiratanga of Aotearoa/New Zealand.

Cover: *Ko wai koe? (Who are you?)*
2003, lithograph from series
The Odyssey of Captain Cook

Right: *Herakles writes Home*
2007/8, lithograph from series
The Labours of Herakles

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History and myth come to us intertwined. All our ancestors shared stories, memories, histories and explanations by way of our earliest tradition – oral storytelling.

As writing emerged, these oral accounts were written down but not all were consolidated into a single accepted narrative, and as a result, myths and histories continued to merge and evolve. From this milieu, history as a field of inquiry evolved. Speaking in 1961, historian E.H. Carr maintained that,

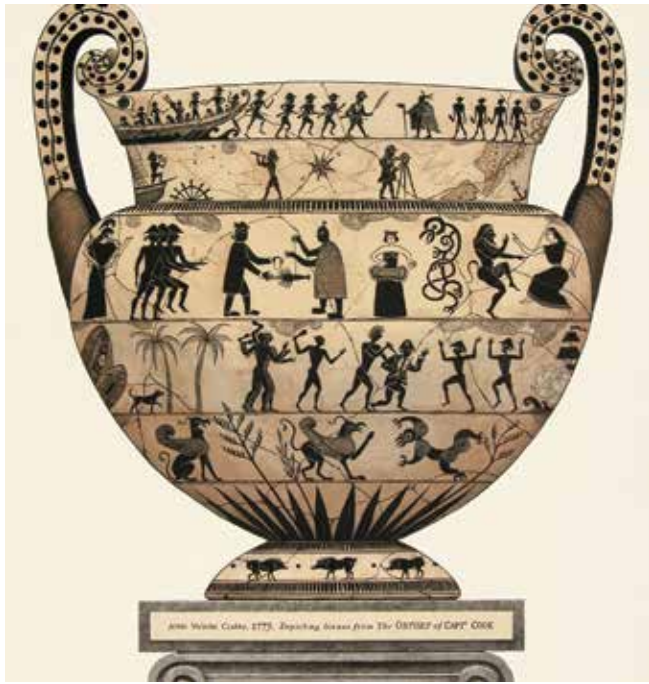
“History consists of a corpus of ascertained facts. The facts are available to the historian in documents, inscriptions and so on, like fish on a fishmonger’s slab. The Historian collects them, takes them home, and cooks and serves them in whatever style appeals to him.”

Historians interpret the facts based on the material available to them. But what happens when they have been given false, skewed or biased information? Both written and visual history is often created by those in power, and as such the narrative belongs to them.

In many instances, the recipe for history includes: a dollop of social conditioning, a drop of misinformation, a pinch of propaganda, a drizzle of political ideology, a smidgen of misogyny, a dash of racism, and just a hint of self aggrandisement. The resulting dish is one that serves the purpose of its author.

Ancient Greece straddles both history and myth. History in that it existed and we have the material culture to prove it, but simultaneously it has been mythologised by successive Western societies as the foundation of their own origin stories.

Marian Maguire’s works in this exhibition create their own mythos – one where ancient Greece, colonial Britain and Māori culture collide.



Left Attic Volute Crater, 1779, Depicting Scenes from the Odyssey of Captain Cook 2005, lithograph from series *The Odyssey of Captain Cook*

Right Ko wai koe? (Who are you?) 2003, lithograph from series *The Odyssey of Captain Cook*



Chronologies and annals from ancient cultures like Egypt and Mesopotamia sought to record the past, but it was the ancient Greek historian Herodotus of Halicarnassus (ca. 484–425 BCE) who wrote the earliest extant historical account using scientific method in an attempt to systematically and objectively record the Greco-Persian wars in his *Histories*.

Written discrepancies remained; in the case of the growing Greek colonies in the ancient Mediterranean, the reality

of the interactions between the Greeks and the local populations, which were complicated, messy and hostile, was seemingly rarely addressed. In his account of the Greek colony of Cyrene in Libya, Herodotus is one of only a few surviving sources that mentions the perspective of the local population (IV.159).

Beyond writing though, it is material culture, such as pottery, that functions as a vessel for culture, history and memory. As ancient Greek city-states (*poleis*) developed, so too did their

visual culture. Importantly, the introduction of black-figure ware into the Greek ceramic corpus in the 6th century BCE included the addition of narrative scenes.

For the ancient Greeks who produced these ceramics, understanding the presented narratives was straightforward – and you did not need to be literate. This style of visual communication not only reinforced shared cultural values, but strengthened Hellenic identity. As the ancient Greeks ventured to foreign shores, these new

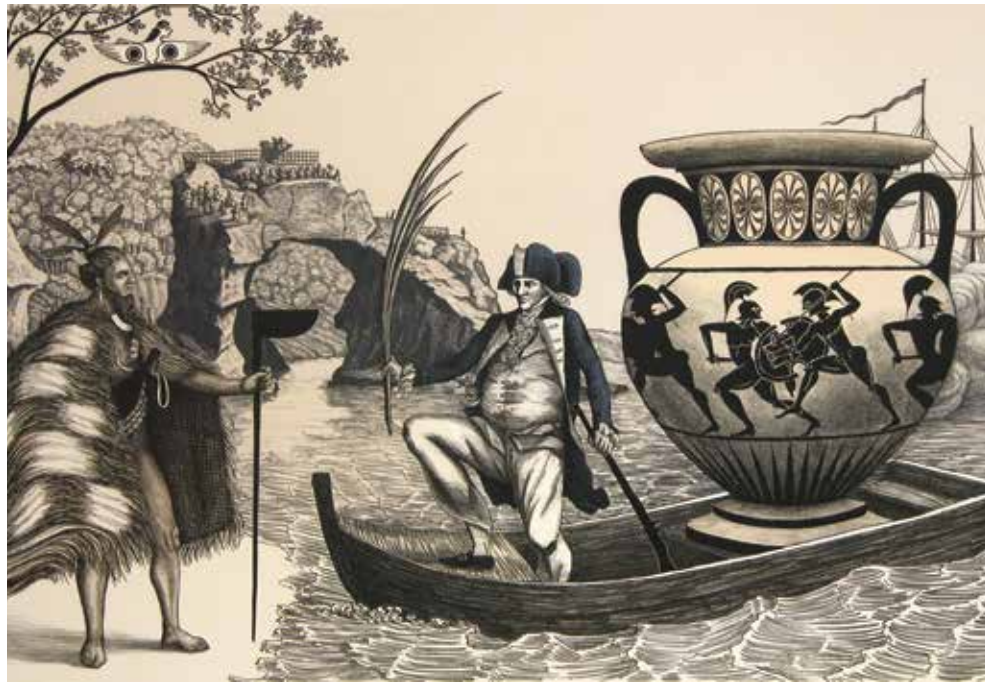
encounters were reflected on their pottery. More monsters began to appear, as did depictions of foreign animals and people; all conveying a sense of danger, caution and curiosity, but more predominantly, the Other.

In Plato's *Phaedo*, the philosopher Simmias, in dialogue with Socrates, states that, "**the earth is very large and that we [Greeks] [...] live in a small part of it about the sea, like ants or frogs about a pond, and that many other people live in many other such regions.**" (109a–b).

Our perception and understanding of the world and people around us is influenced by our own background and experiences, and while the ancient Greek world encompassed and encountered many diverse peoples and groups, to the Greeks, they fell under the umbrella of 'barbarian.'

In *Ko wai koe? (Who are you?)* (2003) two figures face each other; on the left is Māori chief Natai, and on the right a Greek hoplite – but the encounter is multilayered.

Natai's depiction is derived from a 19th century lithograph by Antoine Maurin, after a print by Louis Auguste de Sainson. He is shown with his *tā moko* (traditional Māori tattoo) however the overall image is Europeanised. The *hoplite* helmet decoration loosely mirrors Natai's *moko*, translating the unfamiliar through the familiar.



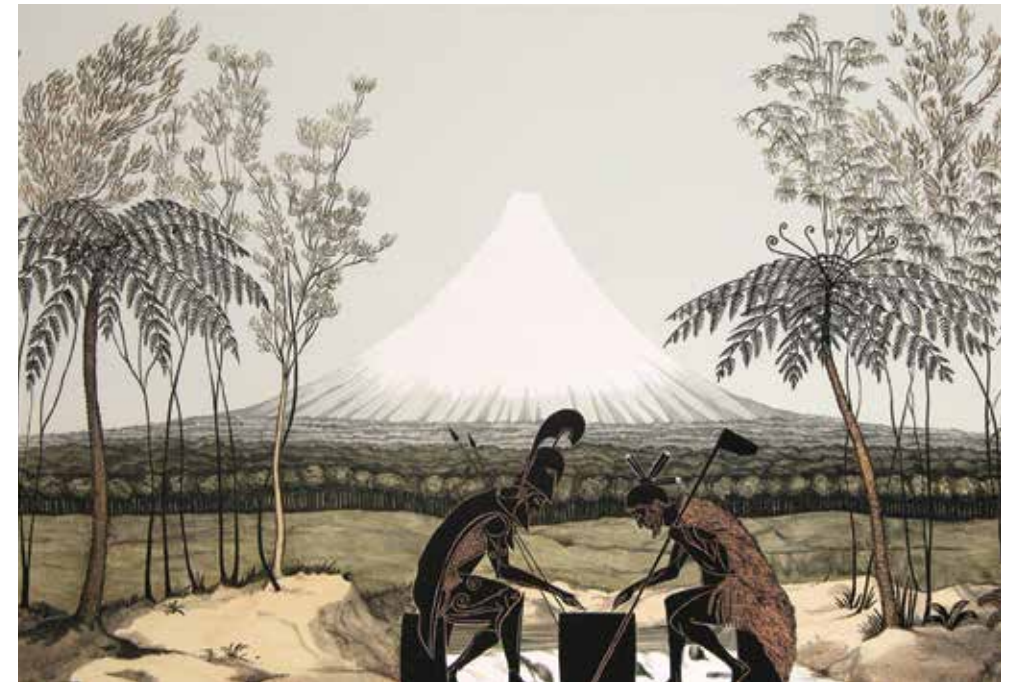
As he approaches land in **Captain Cook makes his Approach from the West** (2005), Cook brings with him an ancient Greek amphora depicting *hoplites*, an ominous foreshadowing of future events, particularly as he carries a partially obscured musket in one hand. In the other, and more dominantly is a palm frond, a signal of peace which according to Polynesian custom, is offered when approaching another's territory. Similarly, palm fronds also represent peace in Christian tradition.

The Māori chief is the protagonist of this image, and Cook is in the subordinate position of requesting permission, or what the Greeks called *xenia* (hospitality). As a *tangata whenua*, a person of the land, the chief has a place to stand whereas Cook, approaching from the side, is supported only by the cultural baggage he brings with him.

The image may also allude to the modern mythologisation of ancient Greece, in part instigated

by the experience of the 'Grand Tour' and propelled by the Romantic Movement. The work of poets such as Byron, Keats and Shelley helped to promote an idealised notion of Greece, its cultural legacy, and the British Empire as its natural heir in the modern world.

Here, we can see Cook literally carrying this embroidered inheritance onto new shores.



The concept and process of colonisation is an ancient one. The Phoenicians in the 10th century BCE and later the Egyptians, Greeks and Romans all extended their borders, setting up colonies that drew on the people and resources of the lands they had conquered.

Trade routes and land expansion brought the ancient Greeks to the world stage in the Archaic Period (ca. 800–480 BCE) as they began to migrate and establish their own

colonies. The succeeding centuries saw the Greek world expand, with colonies located from Spain to Colchis (Georgia), North Africa to Ukraine. Instructed by the gods and led by the *oikistēs* (founder), who brought fire from the hearth of the *metropolis* (mother city) to the new *polis* (city), the migrating diaspora took up citizenship in the new colony, but ties of kinship and cult with the *metropolis* remained through language, culture and religion.

Opposite Captain Cook makes his Approach from the West 2005, lithograph from series *The Odyssey of Captain Cook*

Above Mount Egmont from the Southward 2004, lithograph from series *The Odyssey of Captain Cook*



Top *Herakles signs the Treaty of Waitangi* 2006/7, lithograph from series *The Labours of Herakles*

Bottom Left *Herakles dreams of Arcadia* 2007, lithograph from series *The Labours of Herakles*

Bottom Right *Herakles writes Home* 2007/8, lithograph from series *The Labours of Herakles*

In 1840 the Treaty of Waitangi, New Zealand's founding document was signed, as a way for Britain to protect and regulate her subjects and secure interests, commercial and otherwise.

British missionaries had translated the Treaty document from English to Māori. As a result, the two versions differed, and while Māori sovereignty (*tino rangatiratanga*) was guaranteed in the Māori version, in the English it ceded to the Crown. The terms applied to everyone, including the tribes that had not signed.

The situation is echoed in *Herakles signs the Treaty of Waitangi* (2006/7) where the hero, a representative of colonialism backed by Queen Victoria under the Union Jack, faces a Māori chief across a table, himself supported by a *poupu*, a traditional Māori wall panel that were typically carved to represent one's ancestors. In Western art, the narrative composition of an image reads left to right with extra value imparted on the first thing the viewer sees. As a result the power within this narrative is granted to the British Crown.

In the ancient world, foundation myths and inscriptions, set out after a colony's founding, worked to legitimise new communities and presented an idealised view of their origins. This continued into the Age of Discovery which marks the beginning of the modern colonial period. Writing in 1513, Niccolo Machiavelli, with his typical amoral flair, stated that the value of colonisation is that it is a relatively inexpensive method to maintain power in a country where the language, customs and laws differ from one's own. He maintained that,

"these colonies are not costly, they are more faithful, they injure less, and the injured...being poor and scattered, cannot hurt."

By crushing the indigenous and settled communities there was no one to speak out against the prevailing narrative shipped home, allowing oppressors to frame themselves as liberators and heroes.

In Maguire's *Herakles dreams of Arcadia* (2007) and *Herakles writes Home* (2007/8) from her *The Labours of Herakles*

series, we see Herakles entrenching himself in the colonised environment. Herakles either dreams of, or is enclosed by European visual imagery, framing him – in these images at least – as a settler rather than a conqueror. However we know that colonisation in New Zealand, Australia and beyond, is inherently imposed by force.

Returning to Machiavelli, whose blueprint for colonisation has been used across many generations by governments and partisan powers alike:

"men ought either to be well treated or crushed, because they can avenge themselves of lighter injuries, of more serious ones they cannot; therefore the injury that is to be done to a man ought to be one of such a kind that one does not stand in fear of revenge."



Bilingual belly amphora, 1867. Titokowaru ponders the embers.

Opposite *Bilingual Belly Amphora, 1867, Titokowaru Ponders the Embers* 2009/10, lithograph from series *Titokowaru's Dilemma*

Right *Herakles discusses boundary issues with the Neighbours* 2007, lithograph from series *The Labours of Herakles*



The works *Bilingual Belly Amphora, 1867, Titokowaru Ponders the Embers* (2009), *Curio from the Colonial Era* (2011) and *Titokowaru and Te Whiti discuss the question 'What is Peace?'* (2010/11) all reference a pivotal figure in the history of Aotearoa: Riwha Titokowaru.

Born in South Taranaki in 1823 and son of a local chieftain, he was well-educated in both Māori and European culture, hence the reference to bilingualism in the title of the work seen to the left. He constructed an ideology of peacemaking and cooperation with the settlers, largely influenced by Christianity, until fighting broke out between the Taranaki Māori and British

forces in the Taranaki War of 1860–61. When the fighting resumed in 1864, Titokowaru lost an eye to an English rifle shot.

The continual confiscation of land by the British, even after the end of open warfare and the ostensible arrival of peace, starved Taranaki communities and made it difficult to maintain independence outside of reservations set up by the colonial government. This deepened Titokowaru's life-long struggle between his desire for peaceful reconciliation, and the apparent necessity of violent resistance.

Titokowaru's patience during this time was immense, but it eventually

showed its limits. In 1868, he abandoned non-violent resistance and launched what became known as Titokowaru's War. Among the tactics he used to intimidate the British was propaganda. In a letter to the colonists he claimed cannibalism, knowing it to be absolutely abhorrent to Europeans. The threat was effective in raising fear and provoking attacks on prepared positions.

Despite some successful battles that made Titokowaru legend among the settlers, his war was lost. He again became an advocate for nonviolence after its close, and remained so until the day he died.



Following their inception as cabinets of curiosity, and later shift into private galleries belonging to the wealthy in the 16th and 17th centuries, museums gradually became accessible to the general public. By the 18th century museums were considered a useful tool to

civilise the masses as well as a place to display the spoils of colonisation taking place throughout the world.

Museum curators classified objects within a historical framework that popularised a narrative of Western superiority, both historically

and contemporarily. The result was that museums were no longer simply a site for the display of art and artefacts but for the production and control of knowledge used to educate by exhibiting narratives that served a larger social agenda.

**Opposite
Left Column**

1 Socrates asks the Mountain, 'What is Wisdom?' 2010, etching from series A Taranaki Dialogue

2 Socrates said, 'An Unexamined Life is Not Worth Living' 2011, etching from series A Taranaki Dialogue

3 Socrates asks the question, 'What is Victory?' 2010, etching from series A Taranaki Dialogue

**Opposite
Right Column**

1 Socrates asks the question, 'What is Justice?' 2010, etching from series A Taranaki Dialogue

2 What is History? 2011, etching from series A Taranaki Dialogue

3 What is Myth? 2011, etching from series A Taranaki Dialogue

Right Curio from the Colonial Era. Artisan Unknown. Dated 1860-1880. Taranaki origin. 2011, lithograph from series Titokawaru's Dilemma



The silent narrative, however, is that of the 'colonies' whose treasures were stolen, and land and people despoiled. By stripping a people of their material culture they are dispossessed of their identity, heritage and history. Written on the

base of the vase in **Curio from the Colonial Era. Artisan unknown. Dated 1860-1880. Taranaki origin** (2011), in minute letters that can barely be made out, is a question that Titokawaru had addressed to George Whitmore, the colonel in charge of the colonial

troops in Taranaki: **"To whom does this upon which you stand belong?"**

In the piece opposite, the figures of Te Whiti and Titokowaru are modelled on a vase painting by Exekias (ca. 540–530 BCE) depicting Ajax and Achilles hunched over a board game during a lull in the fighting of the Trojan war.

The prophet Te Whiti was a major influence on Titokowaru's renewed pacifism after the wars of the 1860s, and together they governed Taranaki in the 1870s.

In 1879, the British again appropriated Māori land during peacetime. Taranaki populations, directed by Titokowaru and Te Whiti, dismantled British surveyors' camps and ploughed up the settlers' fields. For these non-violent protests, many indigenous people were arrested. These arrests created controversy among humanitarians in New Zealand and Britain, who were doubtful of their legality.

Opposite Te Whiti and Titokowaru discuss the question, 'What is Peace?' 2011, lithograph from series *Titokowaru's Dilemma*

Titokowaru and Te Whiti were eventually arrested during a raid by British forces. Titokowaru protested with a hunger strike, which he broke only after the British threatened to forcefully pump porridge into him through a tube. After his release, he found that the British had confiscated yet more land.

Maguire has said that the lesson from Titokowaru's career is that peace is **"a relationship that must be perpetually built and built over again."**

Much as we might admire the ancient Greeks, they are no role models here: Ajax and Achilles fought at Troy for 10 years, in a war that ended only after the total destruction of the city.

During the 5th century BCE, Athens was at war for a total of 81 years. After these conflicts, the Greeks seemed no closer to rebuilding a lasting peace, and their glorification of war meant peace was only ever an interim state.

Titokowaru was faced with a colonial force that inherited and perpetuated this glorification, but he learnt that even when violence ceased, peace was not guaranteed.

Today, even as we seek to eliminate colonial violence both overt and systemic, Titokowaru's question is one that is continually relevant.



Further reading

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Marian Maguire

Marian Maguire is a practising artist from New Zealand, best known for her lithographs and etchings. From the late 90s her work began to include motifs which melded diverse mythologies with recent historical and social events. The amalgamation of ancient Greek vase paintings and New Zealand colonial history culminated in a set of etchings titled ***Southern Myths*** (2002) which reflected the narrative development of the *Iliad*.

Her subsequent works have expanded to themes which place landscapes and figures from 19th century colonial prints within the framework of past and ongoing tensions within New Zealand biculturalism, using ancient Greek mythology as a vehicle for discourse.

Marian has exhibited across New Zealand, Australia and Europe. Her works hang in significant public and private collections around the world.