

## ABOUT THE ARTWORK

**Artist:** Lisa Reihana (pronounced *Ray – hun – na*)

**Title:** *Marakihau* from *Digital Marae*

**Date:** 2001

**Medium:** Colour photograph mounted on aluminium

**Dimensions:** 200 x 100cm

*Digital Marae* is an artwork combining a video projection with five photographs mounted on aluminium. *Marae* is a Maori term for 'meeting place', and with this installation of digital imagery Reihana constructs a contemporary virtual meeting place that continues the mythological tradition. Each photograph represents a digitally manipulated interpretation of a female ancestor figure (see the artist's words below).

## ABOUT THE ARTIST

Lisa Reihana is a Maori artist born in 1964 in Aotearoa New Zealand. In recent years she has played a leading role in the development of film and multimedia art in that country. Her work demonstrates a keen interest in communicating complex ideas about indigenous identity and bi-cultural living, and a desire to address and engage with contemporary experience through diverse media. Her films, videos and animations, usually accompanied by contemporary soundtracks, are often visual collages drawn from diverse sources including cultural histories and popular imagery. Reihana's most recent work, *Digital Marae*, continues the concept of *wharenuī* ('meeting house') prevalent in her artistic practice. These dramatic large-format photographs refer to female mythological figures and pay homage to the significance of matriarchal lines of descent in Maori culture.

## SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS:

- What elements of the *Marakihau* photograph represent Maori traditions? What elements of the photograph make it appear as a contemporary interpretation?
- How do the background and colour in this photograph assist in conveying a sense of myth?
- What might this 'digital' interpretation of Maori mythology say about the role of tradition in contemporary society?



## ARTIST'S WORDS

'*Digital Marae* is about female ancestral figures and their stories. The work is comprised of five photographic images that are intrinsically linked to one another and a moving image artwork called *Let there be Light* in which some of the ancestors figure. *Digital Marae* references my family *marae* which has blue formica walls and no carvings in the *wharenuī* (meeting house), but many photographs of ancestors that cover the entire back wall.

*Marakihau* is an ocean *taniwha* which in the Maori language means a spirit or monster. In certain parts of Aotearoa New Zealand, *taniwha* are depicted in carved form as *Marakihau*. These ancestors are usually represented as 'mermen' with fish-like lower bodies and human heads. They are said to have hollow tongues from which, from the bottom of the sea, they can suck down fish, people and whole canoes. My representation of *Marakihau* blends contemporary signifiers such as the metal mask with imagery from descriptions passed down through our oral history'.

Artist's statement in correspondence with Maud Page, Associate Curator of Contemporary Pacific Art, Queensland Art Gallery, July 2002.

## References:

Page, Maud. 'Interdigitating Reihanamations: Lisa Reihana's video weavings'. *Art AsiaPacific*, no.21, 1999, pp.40–3.

Page, Maud. 'Lisa Reihana and the Pasifika Divas: Greed, lust, betrayal and rivers of fire'. In *Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art 2002* [exhibition catalogue]. Queensland Art Gallery, South Brisbane, 2002, pp.88–91.

Tamati-Quennell, Megan. 'Lisa Reihana: native portraits n.19897', *Photofile*. no.55, November 1998, pp. 46–9.

## Maori mythology

Maori Organisations of New Zealand.

<[www.maori.org.nz](http://www.maori.org.nz)>

Orbell, Margaret. *The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Maori Myth and Legend*. UNSW Press, Sydney, 1996.

## Digital art

Digital Art Source: Opening the World of Digital Art.

<[www.digitalartsource.com](http://www.digitalartsource.com)>

*Techno Maori: Maori Art in the Digital Age* [CD-ROM]. City Gallery Wellington; Pataka Porirua Museum of Arts and Cultures, New Zealand, 2001.

Whitney ARTPORT: The Whitney Museum of American Art Portal to Net Art.

<[www.whitney.org/artport](http://www.whitney.org/artport)>

## Contemporary art in New Zealand

Caughey, Elizabeth and Gow, John. *Contemporary New Zealand art*; 2. David Bateman, Auckland, NZ, 1999.

Over: Lisa Reihana Aotearoa New Zealand b.1964  
*Marakihau* from *Digital Marae* (detail) 2001 Colour  
photograph mounted on aluminium 200 x 100cm  
Collection: The artist

Left: Lisa Reihana Aotearoa New Zealand b.1964  
*Hinewai* from *Digital Marae* (detail) 2001 Colour  
photograph mounted on aluminium 120 x 140cm  
Collection: The artist



ASIA-PACIFIC TRIENNIAL  
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In Lisa Reihana's work *Marakihau* from *Digital Marae*, she combines film, video animations, sounds and models. In this way, the work combines moving and still images with music and sound. The aim of Reihana's work is to communicate complex ideas about her identity as an indigenous person within the context of contemporary New Zealand society.

### ACTIVITY

Research other artists that use sound and/or music as part of their art. Develop a soundtrack to go with your own artwork or with a favourite piece from another artist.

In your visual arts process diary or art journal, reflect on the way sound interacted with the visual presentation of your work.

### ACTIVITY

Although Reihana's work involves digital media and photography, she considers herself to be an installation artist. She likens her installations to traditional Maori gathering places, where people sleep and stand with their ancestors. In this environment everyone has the right to speak and a chance to be heard. How does this view of her art change the way she expects viewers to 'see' her work?

Maori culture has a strong and continuous link to local and traditional visual culture, stories and visual icons. *Marakihau* is a giant ocean monster which is said to have a human head and the body of a fish and which can suck canoes into its long tubular tongue.

Reihana's work depicts a Maori story that combines traditional and contemporary music and imagery. She views her work as a window to the outside world and this window both brings in light and promotes a sense of 'looking around'. Her work is based on traditional myths and stories she was told as a child which are both spooky and powerful.

Identify the traditional icons used in Lisa Reihana's work. What does she say about the influence of these icons on her work? How has she used these traditions as a bridge between traditional and contemporary cultures? In what ways do the messages in her artworks reflect issues and stories from your culture and your place in today's world?

Perhaps you would like to explore these ideas through drawings or an artwork.

### ACTIVITY

Although Reihana's forms of expression are very contemporary, her influences combine traditional beliefs with her experiences and personal life stories.

Think about stories you have heard from your own childhood. These stories often had moral or social values in the stories.

Record stories from your childhood on an audiotape. Perhaps you can get your parents or grandparents or an older family friend to tell the story. Try to use contemporary media (such as computer art, video, installation or wearables) to retell the story.

Display your work as an installation, with your artworks displayed and the audio playing. If you have access to the equipment, you can edit your voice telling the story into a digital video or still-image show. Save your files by burning them to CD-ROM or DVD.

### Websites

<<http://www.ihmcf.org/lifa/participants/lisa.html>>  
 <<http://fusionanomaly.net/tessa/reihanalog.html>>  
 <[http://www.msstate.edu/Fineart\\_Online/Backissues/Vol\\_16/faf\\_v16\\_n12/reviews/carroli.html](http://www.msstate.edu/Fineart_Online/Backissues/Vol_16/faf_v16_n12/reviews/carroli.html)>  
 <<http://images.google.com/>> (search for 'Lisa Reihana')

## ACTIVITY

Reihana's work is made up of a number of pieces that cover a range of media and forms. Yet Reihana views these as a single artwork.

Find other artists who work in this way.

Discuss the concept of a 'body of work'. How does this idea vary according to the ideas of different artists?

Use photographs and sketches of your own artworks to experiment with ways of forming a body of work.

## ACTIVITY

In traditional Maori culture, women do not carve. This is something only men do. But Reihana uses digital media and film and imagery as a way to 'carve' her stories.

Investigate the other visual and technical restrictions imposed on Maori artists. How do these influence both traditional and contemporary art making?

As an extension activity, you may want to explore the conventions and restrictions placed on artists in particular cultural or religious groups. It would be interesting to investigate and document the art conventions and restrictions that operate in Aboriginal, Islamic and contemporary Chinese art to influence visual expression.