

Christchurch Exhibition of Maori Art

Photographs by William Gamble.

by Cherry Andrew



Pauline Yearbury's painting of Hatu Patu and the Birdman

An ambitious idea which began six months ago as a joke has now materialised into a great promotion scheme for New Zealand culture.

'What about an exhibition of Maori art and sculpture,' joked Baden Pere, a flying instructor at Wigram and former administrator of the East West Cultural Centre in Hawaii, to his friend, Buck Nin, a Christchurch artist.

'Right, you're on,' replied Buck Nin and the two Maoris laughed about it for three weeks.

But suddenly it became a serious thought and with the help of Dr Roger Duff, director of the Canterbury Museum, Buck Nin presented an exhibition of contemporary Maori culture—fifty paintings and ten sculptures—in the Museum on 10 November, 1966.

Contrasted with a collection of traditional Maori artefacts, the display included three of Buck Nin's own landscape paintings which combined the traditional figures of his race with modern colours and techniques.

There were also contributions from such well known Maori artists as Selwyn Muru, Arnold Wilson, Fred Graham and Pauline Yearbury.

All the works were by Maoris although Norman Lemon's wire presentation of "Christ in Agony" succeeded without any resort to traditional themes.

In opening the exhibition Mr R. J. Waghorn, a former president of the Association of New Zealand Art Societies from Wellington, said that in the Maori's own special heritage a modern artist could find almost endless inspiration for themes that, while being conceived in a modern idiom, relate directly to his own cultural background.

'Let the Maori borrow techniques and contemporary methods—invent some of his own if he can—but when he is looking for content and subject matter let him turn to familiar subjects; to those things that move him; those things that are essentially his own that no one else feels about quite as he does.'

He said that apart from his concern for the