

References:

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I am indebted to Martin Mikaere for his thoughtful Maori interpretation of *Words of Ours, Nga Kupu e Rangona ai*, (literally 'words that are heard'): This acknowledges that Maori words which have become part of mainstream Kiwi English are often used with little cultural understanding.

© 2012 Daniel M. Kirsch  
screen printed acrylic on found wood  
51 words



Kirsch working on the project at his studio

Words Of Ours/Nga Kupu E Rangona Ai  
23. November 2012 to 31 January 2013  
Elim Gallery Of Fine Arts Rotorua

This is the second showing of the work.  
It was first on show as part of  
Reuse/Recycle/Rejoice by Daniel Kirsch  
at ArtsPost Gallery Hamilton  
2 December 2011 to 9 January 2012

# WORDS OF OURS

## NGĀ KUPU E RANGONA AI



DANIEL M. KIRSCH

2012





# WORDS OF OURS

## NGĀ KUPU E RANGONA AI

*Words of Ours/Nga Kupu e Rangona ai* explores some of the many linguistic and cultural cross-overs from te reo Maori into mainstream English which enrich our everyday language and define us as Kiwis. New Zealand English is very distinctive, largely because of these borrowings from te reo – estimated by linguists to be six words in every thousand.

Te reo Maori was the only language in Aotearoa/New Zealand for centuries, until the arrival of Captain James Cook and his crew aboard the HMS Endeavour in 1769. From that time first Cook and his crew, and then the early European traders, missionaries and settlers who followed, learnt enough of the majority language to communicate and survive. For the first time Maori words were written down, in the journals of Cook and the naturalist Joseph Banks; and they then appeared in print in Cook's and Bank's subsequent publications in England.

Thomas Kendall's 1815 Maori Spelling Book marked the first printing of te reo Maori in Aotearoa/New Zealand, and was followed in 1820 by a Maori grammar and vocabulary. Many Maori words became part of everyday English through this time, often because there were no equivalent English words to describe what the new arrivals saw; and conversely English words were adopted into te reo as Maori too encountered 'new' objects and concepts.

Maori began to learn English, and many were soon literate, in both te reo and English. Letter writing became an important mode of communication between Maori and Europeans and Maori and Maori, with all manner of materials used to 'write' on, including flax leaves and pieces of wood.

In the early colonial period there was an openness to borrowing from te reo Maori. However this shifted in the 1860s as more and more English-speaking settlers arrived and the 'British-ness' of New Zealand was emphasised. John Macalister gives examples in his *A Dictionary of Maori Words in New Zealand English* of the word for tui reverting to the 'parson bird', the weka becoming the 'Maori hen' and rimu, kahikatea and matai trees being known as 'red, white and black pines' during this time.

Over the next hundred years very few borrowings occurred. Then a constellation of events through the 1970s and '80s again saw large scale borrowings from te reo Maori into New Zealand English. These events included Britain's entry into the then-EEC which forced New Zealand to re-examine its relationship with the rest of the world, and the end of the geographical separation between Pakeha and Maori as more and more Maori migrated to urban areas (by 1975 Maori were 75 per cent rural, whereas 30 years earlier they had been 75 per cent rural). Increasingly Pakeha had to talk about Maoridom and they needed words lacking in English to do so.

The 1975 hikoi/land march highlighted land rights issues, and along with the political protest around the 1981 Springbok tour, focussed attention on institutionalised discrimination. Maori concerns became mainstream concerns. Through the 1980s the Waitangi Tribunal was established, Maori language providers were authorised (the first kohanga reo was set up in 1981, followed by legislation to create kura kaupapa and whare wananga), Maori became an official language of Aotearoa/New Zealand, and the Maori Language Commission was created (in 1987). Electoral reform in the 1990s meant more Maori representation in Parliament, increased opportunity to take part in mainstream political discourses and increased visibility.

Thus the te reo Maori renaissance coincided with the need for NZ to reassess our relationship with Britain, while Maori urbanisation created demand for Maori education and made Maori more 'visible' to non-Maori who were already predominantly urban. As a result, writes Macalister, "both the need for borrowings and the opportunity to acquire them existed."

English has always borrowed freely from other languages and continues to do so. In this second wave of borrowings from te reo Maori the emphasis has been on words to do with the social culture of Maoridom – on roles, relationships and concepts such as kaumatua, kuia and kaitiakitanga. Some culturally specific words like hui, taonga and whanau are now freely used in English (with varied shades of meaning) outside of their Maori-specific context, as are mana, kaupapa and aroha.

Here some of these 'words of ours' have been screen-printed onto boards made from different types of found timber – kauri, rimu, totara, black maire and pine – relating to the word's significance. While many of the words stand for powerful concepts; others are more descriptive or even light hearted.

As an 'outsider' Kirsch has immensely valued the opportunity to study te reo and begin to explore some of the richness of Maori language and culture. In this installation of Maori words used in everyday New Zealand English he challenges us to revisit the deeper meanings of the words, while at the same time delighting in the uniqueness they bestow on Kiwi English.

"With my mono-cultural background, it's exciting to think about the potential that the coming together of two rich cultures offers."