

Many Australians will be familiar with Paul's work through the annual Archibald Prize for Portraiture at the Art Gallery of New South Wales. He has been a finalist on many occasions and was awarded the People's Choice award three times. In 2009 his portrait of the comedian Paul Livingston (aka Flacco) won the Art Gallery of New South Wales's Packer's Prize.

Paul's paintings present a distorted realism, utilising his considerable skills in precision painting and grisaille technique to depict imagined subjects. He uses symbolism and historical referencing to express wider concepts, such as his concern for the land and customary rights of Maori and the history of human interaction in New Zealand.

Paul Jackson was born in Auckland in 1950. He migrated to Australia in 1976 where he has lived and painted for 34 years and exhibits in both Australia and New Zealand. His exhibition at Boutwell Draper Gallery – 11 March until 17 April 2010 - coincides with this year's Archibald Prize and will relate to his Archibald painting.

PAUL JACKSON

FAUX

“These are not portraits, they are faux”

Although, through my successes in the prestigious Archibald prize for portraiture, I have gained some status as a portrait painter, I do not claim to be one. These paintings are not the ruminations of polite society or historical records, but the “incomprehensible meeting the implacable”. This is the reawakening of the gaze of first contact with pakeha (non- Maori). In paintings and drawings, such as *Faux Moko 2009*, *Wolf 2008* and *Mako 2008*, the ‘ploughed’ and resolute visage of the faces presages, with the edginess of a wolf, the end of a feudal and arcane society. They have known and survived conflict and the retirement of old age. It is a mistake to think that Maori were unwilling to sit for their portraits. As I do not have the advantage of direct contact with my subject, after thirty years of ‘study’, I have invented my own forms that act as simulacrum to true anatomies and moko (tattoo). These paintings express morphological equivalency and distortion, contrariness, visual conceit and juxtaposition, wrestling in the ‘arena of difficulty’ and await a ‘face-

off' between the chosen subjects, myself and the viewer. These works are something to do with the attempt to extend an impermanent life, false hopes and supplications to the great gods of permanence, but who is listening? These may be portraits in another sense. These are examples where the subject is driven by my interest in the interplay of social and environmental dynamics. *The Tohunga 2009*, for example, carries within it resignation, or is it diffidence, to a more advanced European culture?

The visit of the Duke and Duchess of York, later King George V and Queen Mary to New Zealand in 1901, was celebrated throughout the land and at an official Maori welcome in Rotorua. A Maori guide took a Huia feather from her hair and placed it in the band of the Duke's hat as a token of respect. This action is the premise for the painting called *The Tohunga 2009*. The question here arises whether the faux chieftain's gaze is diffidence to the royal visitor or resignation to the fate of his own culture and the demise of the Huia? Soon many people in England and New Zealand wanted to emulate this royal fashion and wear Huia feathers in their hats. The price of feathers was soon pushed to one New Zealand pound each and some sold for as high as five pounds. Shooting season notices ceased, listing the Huia as a protected species in 1901 and a last-ditch attempt to reinforce government protection failed when the Solicitor General ruled that there was no law to protect feathers. Although the Huia's range was restricted to the southern North Island of New Zealand, its feathers were valued highly and were exchanged amongst tribes for other valuable goods such as greenstone and shark teeth or given as tokens of friendship and respect. Through this trade, the feathers reached the far north and the far south of the country. They were stored in intricately carved boxes called *waka huia* which were hung from the ceilings of chief's houses. Huia feathers were worn at funerals and on other important occasions and were used to decorate the heads of the deceased. The *marereko*, described by Tregear as an 'ancient war-plume' consisted of twelve Huia feathers. The *pōhoi*, an ornament made from the skin of the Huia, was highly valued. The bird was skinned with the beak, skull and wattles attached, while the legs and wings were removed. The skin was carefully dried and the resulting *pōhoi* ornament was worn from the neck or ears. In Māori culture, only persons of high rank wore Huia feathers. In some legends, the Huia was one of the birds attained from the heavens by Tāwhaki so that his wife could decorate her hair with its feathers. This celestial origin meant that the feathers were treated with the greatest respect. As both the female and male Huia were reliant on each other for their mutual feeding, due to the great difference of their beak shapes, to kill one

was to kill its mate and so the bird's extinction was inevitable. The last confirmed sighting was on 28 December 1907 when W.W. Smith saw three birds in the Tararua Ranges. Further credible sightings were reported as late as 1922.

As the New Zealand government has passed a law allowing an attempt to clone and therefore return the Huia to its rightful place in the biosphere, are we to suppose that there is also a renewable place for ancient Maori belief ritual?

It has always been my contention that if a subject is handled with the respect and dignity it deserves, then anything goes. The culture of the moko should not be mistaken for the tattoo carried upon the bodies of today but is an arcane record of lineage, status and accession. There were various levels that a Tohunga might achieve throughout his life. These teachings are sadly mostly lost to Maori youth and replaced by American hip hop where the needle, in more ways than one, replace the Albatross bone chisels of the tattooist's art.

The procedure to make a suitable black for facial moko involved the burning of Kauri and White- Pine resin or Kapara. Awe or soot made from the burning of Awheto or vegetable caterpillar (Sphinx Convolvuli) was considered only suitable for body moko. These pigments, being sacred were highly prized. Men chosen for this task were for that time tapu (inaccessible; sacred). Fine Wharanui flax meshes were placed over a kiln vent to entrap the rising smoke and soot. After the especially prepared kiln or Ruangarehu had cooled and the carboniferous matter collected from scabrous mesh fibres, it was then mixed with bird fat. Maori dogs, which had hitherto been fasted, were fed the mixture. Bird oil and water were kneaded with the dog's evacuated faeces.

THREE GRACES

'In Greek mythology, the three goddesses of joy, charm, and beauty are generally referred to as the three graces. The daughters of the god Zeus and the nymph Eurynome, they were named Aglaia (Splendor), Euphrosyne (Mirth), and Thalia (Good Cheer). The Graces presided over banquets, dances, and all other pleasurable social events, and brought joy and goodwill to both gods and mortals. They were the special attendants of the divinities of love, Aphrodite and Eros, and together with companions, the Muses, they sang to the

gods on Mount Olympus, and danced to beautiful music that the god Apollo made upon his lyre. The Graces were rarely treated as individuals, but always together as a kind of triple embodiment of grace and beauty. In art they are usually represented as lithe young maidens, dancing in a circle.' In some legends Aglaia was wed to Hephaestus, the craftsman among the gods. Their marriage explains the traditional association of the Graces with the arts; like the Muses, they were believed to endow artists and poets with the ability to create beautiful works of art.

I have found, over many decades that reverting to classic themes, including those of the moko, has helped me to build an argument for the psychological approach to the 'portrait'. The three examples in this body of work are, *Grace with Pearl Earring 2009*, *Fast Woman 2006* and *The Unknown Woman and Feathers after Grigori Soroka 2009*. These examples form a small part of many works that have gone before and an extension of this broad approach that will ensue over the next few years. I call the marring of beauty, through ageing, narcissism and exigencies of life, "the beautiful deadly". The common element between these afore mentioned pieces and the faux chieftains is the scarification of the flesh and its social significance. The feathers in the latter example above are like voice bubbles or pointers to the marring and float lightly above the faces surface, threatening to expose the temporary nature of beauty. Flowers also act out the part of the 'bride's gift and adornment', the suggestion of fertility being a condition of youth and beauty soon to wilt and die. In the water colour, *Grace With Pearl Earring 2009* I have allowed the painted flowers to run with the, 'happy accident of gravity and lightness of touch', to signify time passing, like the dribbling candle clock, to it's end; so beauty is temporal but grace divine.