

Maori towards Chinese is not new. In the late 1920s Sir Apirana Ngata conducted a campaign for racial purity directed against the Chinese, believing that mixed marriages would lead to the 'racial contamination and moral degradation of the Maori people' (p.109). This helps put in context recent statements by people such as Ranginui Walker and Winston Peters. It is an important issue and it is pleasing to see that it receives some attention here.

There are a frustrating number of minor typographical and grammatical errors throughout the book, errors that could easily have been avoided with more careful editing. There are also times when Ip's interpretations of an interviewee's comments jar or are misleading. To call a centralized bureaucratic state like late imperial China 'feudal' (p.48) strips the term of any real analytical value it has for the historian. But these are minor quibbles. It is a valuable book, in which we encounter the experiences and opinions of a group of people from whom we have heard too little. I wonder, though, where the transcripts of the interviews are held. No indication of their location is given in the text. It is probable that the role of the Chinese in New Zealand's history will receive increasing attention in coming years, not least because of the stimulus provided by Manying Ip's own work. It would be useful to have such a valuable resource made available to others.

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All Our Own Work: New Zealand's Folk Art. By Richard Wolfe. Viking, Auckland, 1997. 152 pp. NZ price: \$36.95. ISBN 0-670-87551-1.

IN THIS AGE of global mass consumption of manufactured goods the making something-out-of-nothing ethic is a diminishing part of our culture. Watching television is now the most popular leisure pastime; the leisure skills of the folk artist have largely disappeared. Most folk art items made by previous generations have also disappeared. Richard Wolfe's book is probably just in time, to rescue, document, and discuss the social history of New Zealand's folk art.

Wolfe's work examines both the context and practice of the home-made, hand-made, quirky, idiosyncratic folk object tradition in New Zealand. He tracks the origins of hand-made craft objects to the recycling practices of the whalers, who used whale vertebra for chairs and stools, and whale teeth for scrimshaw; the make-do ethic of the earliest settlers; and the kauri gum objects that emerged from the gum fields. Their makers' processes of retrieval and hockism — creating hybrid objects from materials to hand — boldly express individualism, while symbolizing the remoteness of the makers, geographically and economically, from purchasable resources.

Once the settlers had permanent shelter they could turn their energies to creating home comforts: hearthrugs from rags, kauri breadboards and humble accessories for every day use. Abundant raw materials enabled a huge range of crafts to develop. Many of these objects were not made from recycled scraps, but from timber off-cuts and left-over wool, and followed local fashions. Wolfe tells us of a craze for making tea cosies in the 1880s and 1890s, when commercial patterns became available. The Auckland Museum collection includes one in the shape of a Maori whare.

Unlike cottage industries, folk art is not about making saleable articles, but about

making objects for creative pleasure, and for the usefulness and decorativeness of the final product. For instance, soldiers in the New Zealand wars of the 1860s spent their spare time carving their own rifle butts. Wolfe also refers to trench art from World War II, and the large collection of these objects at the Army Memorial Museum at Waiouru.

Artisans saw aesthetic potential in materials the original manufacturers never perceived. The lamp shade of wooden TT2 (ice block) sticks and the matchstick model cathedral are ironic commentary on the industrial age. Factories manufactured the components that the artisan then recycled by the most low-tech transformative process of all: by hand. Competitions for hobbyists were extremely popular in the New Zealand Exhibitions and at Agriculture and Pastoral Shows.

These objects, like the whirligig constructed from recycled automotive parts, used materials defined as rubbish, a category outside the standard consumer categories of ownership, aesthetic appeal, economics, culture and social control. The finite life span of the original functional object over, the items made of recycled materials carry visible evidence of their prior existence, enacting a nostalgia for old machinery, redundant commercial products, and worn-out clothing. The objects invite the viewer to a game of identifying components from vaguely remembered objects of consumer culture and material history. The rag rug gets particular attention as the quintessential piece of folk art, popular in many cultures. In New Zealand these followed the English cottage style, localized by the inclusion of cut-up bush singlets and old farm jerseys. The most distinctive, colourful and controversial folk art, Wolfe suggests, is that which represents both Pakeha and Maori worlds. He discusses the work of Jacob Heberly in particular, who pioneered the use of Maori carving as an appropriate gift or official presentation object. The Maori motifs used by Pakeha folk artists are a long way from the ubiquitous mass-produced Maori souvenir of today.

The pleasure of this book is in part admiration for the innocent ingenuity employed to make the objects described and photographed, and nostalgia for a range of objects that we are unlikely ever to see again — except in occasional marvellous exhibitions like the Not Bad, Eh! folk art exhibition a few years ago. At that show reverential gallery behaviours were irrelevant: the response from many viewers was delight in recalling that my grandmother had one of those. In this way these objects connect the biography of the viewer/reader to the social history of the evolving domestic life of a nation.

Wolfe's achievement is not just in methodical historical research of mundane social objects, contextualizing them by their imperialist associations and place in the evolving colony. He also notes contemporaneous values to colour his tale. He tells us, for instance, that knitting — another dying craft, if the dearth of suburban wool shops is an indicator — was once credited with an effect on the female nervous system similar to that of tobacco on the male's.

The production values of this book are, alas, of modest quality compared with Wolfe's research and good humoured text and the photographs by Haru Sameshima and Mark Adams: the publisher's economic decision in a country with a regrettably small market for this kind of book.

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