

Kura Rewiri Thorsen :

A spirituality rooted in the land



There is a spirituality which issues from our land. It is a spirituality which rises like the mist from the valleys. It is heard in the song of the tui and is seen in the unfolding fronds of the fern. It is a spirituality of the land, of Turangawaewae, of Aorangi and Parihaka. The guardians of this spirituality are the tangata whenua, the original inhabitants of the land. Through their myths and legends they have kept alive an understanding of the dignity and sense of human worth which lies at the heart of all true spiritual searching.

Mawhero whero Kakariki

In this painting I am depicting myself in red, which is a sacred color. Between my legs are patterns taken from the treasure box of the Ngapuhi. I feel, as a Maori artist, that I have a role to play as protector of things Maori, and also as an initiator of things to come. I use spirit forms because I do not think I could say what I am trying to by using people of today. I feel that to put actual human figures would be inadequate. I would not be able to capture the spirit of the people. I have had experiences of a strong spiritual presence in particular places which I have been unable to explain at the time. Only later, when seeking to know the history of that place I have discovered that it was a place of sorrow and suffering and death for Maori ancestors. With this knowledge comes an aware-

ness of the spiritual significance of that particular piece of land, and the acknowledging of this spiritual presence brings me peace. Nightmares which haunt me after my careless intrusion, turn to warm embracing feeling. In Maori tradition if you treat something sacred in a careless way then you suffer afterwards. I recognize the responsibility I

have, as an artist, to help Pakeha appreciate the Maori culture.

About the artist: Kura Rewiri Thorsen, a contemporary Maori artist whose work affirms the spiritual roots from which she comes, is a Ngapuhi from the Tai Tokerau area. She grew up near Waitangi. She received a scholarship to the Ilam School of Fine Arts in Christchurch, graduating in 1973. She taught art until 1985 and is presently working fulltime as an artist.

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