

face value

TEACHER NOTES



Turumakina Duley - *Tuhoē, Ngāti Awa, Ngaiterangi, Ngāti Hōkopi* and his niece Ashley Duley

face value
photography and film installation
by Serena Giovanna Stevenson
14 February – 7 June 2009

Face Value reveals the intimate relationships integral to the process of giving and receiving Māori facial ta moko.

Education resource compiled by the Education team at Pataka Museum of Arts and Cultures, 2009. Pataka Education programmes are supported by LEOTC (Learning Experiences Outside The Classroom) and funded by the Ministry of Education.

FACE VALUE

"My photographic/film work is about intimacy, and simultaneously, is about challenging people's perceptions." SERENA STEVENSON

Ta moko is the Māori art of tattoo on the skin.

Explore ta moko in a very intimate and human way with Serena Stevenson's photographic exhibition ***Face Value***.

Ta moko is a living art that is very unique to Aotearoa. Serena Stevenson spent eight years documenting the intensely personal process of ta moko kanohi, Māori facial tattoo, recording the profound moments experienced by Māori recipients and their families. Her images portray their commitment to a living culture and the strong relationships she developed with the people she photographed. The exhibition consists of a multimedia 37 minute film and 36 hand-printed photographic images.



Hori (George) Tamihana Nuku - *Ngāti Kahungunu*

Artist's Statement

I started the *Face Value* project in 2000 after a year of traveling and photographing a number of cultural social documentary stories. One of my aims was to counteract the fascination held by the international media and popular culture with stereotypical portrayals of Māori wearing 'fierce' facial tattoo that repeatedly highlighted a public misrepresentation of the art form.

I was not interested in the generic context of moko, nor in the history or politics of the process. I am neither an anthropologist nor an academic specializing in such things. My intention was to find out what the traditional facial tattoo meant to the individual and how it came about in this fast changing world.

These images are personal, with each person sharing their knowledge pertaining to their experience with the moko. This is not a body of work that covers the whole Māori perspective of facial moko. It is six personal stories presented exactly as they are.

I have discovered that there are political and cultural issues attached to the idea of what moko is today, and the points of view are varied depending on age, gender, tribal affiliation, knowledge and personal experience.

The subjects did not choose to discuss regional differences, political acts or approval from elders. We talked about the experience within their own process - each uniquely personal and special.

The work is about the relationship between the artist and the recipient; it is about the individual's connection to their own personal reasons for taking on the facial moko.

I have spent eight years working closely with the people featured and with others. I feel reassured that they all appreciate how their stories are represented. This has been achieved by building trust, taking time and paying attention to detail in the communication process and by the mutual respect that developed. It was a great privilege to be able to photograph and film this human interaction.

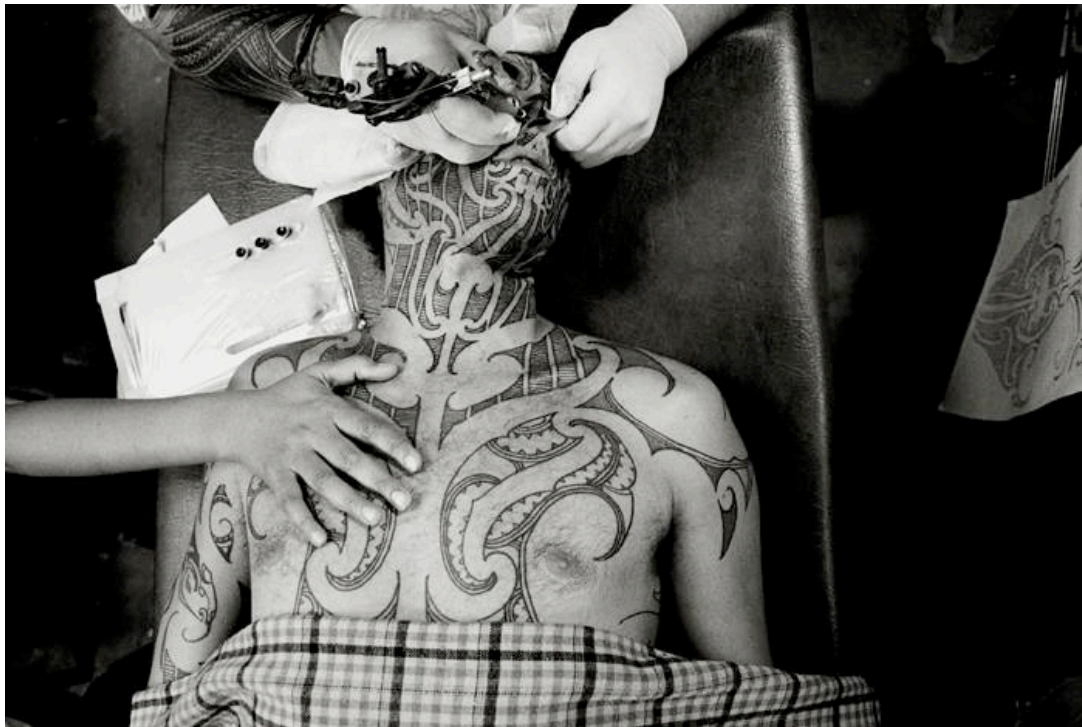
Serena Giovanna Stevenson
February 2009

Artist Information

Auckland-based photographer Serena Giovanna Stevenson has travelled extensively around the world; Asia, Europe, Egypt and the South Pacific, communicating with people through her photography and filmmaking and working on humanitarian assignments with the aim to celebrate and enjoy the multicultural society we live in. Whether it's an advertising brief or a music video, human emotion is strong in Serena's work. With the evolution of digital media Serena has embraced this technology, incorporating moving image and photography. In 2004 Serena won the Cathay Pacific Travcom Travel Photographer of the Year Award. Her work is seen on the internet, TV, cinemas, magazines, music concerts, and mobile phones.

"Where do we come from? Where do we belong? We all have our own identity, our own place. Through our senses our faces are where we receive the world, they are our characters, they tell us who we are in nature, where we can revel in who we are. Audio visual communication connects us together with an understanding that binds and sends forth a path of knowledge and a respect for all of humanity." Serena Stevenson, 2005.

All info from Serena's website - <http://www.serenastevenson.com>



Hori (George) Tamihana Nuku - Ngāti Kahungunu



Mera Penehira, *Ngāti Raukawa ki Otaki* and *Rangitāne*



Mark Kopua, *Ngāti Ira*, *Te Aitanga ā Hauiti* and *Ngāti Porou*



Tia Taurere, *Ngapuhi*

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MOKO

What is it?

Moko is the Māori form of tattoo on skin. There are many forms of traditional tattooing practised throughout the Pacific, for example Samoan Pe'a', and Kiribati Taitai. Maori ta moko, however, is the only traditional art form in which the designs were not merely tattooed or punctured onto the wearer, but chiselled finely into the skin involving a process of scarification.

The following information contains sections and paraphrases from:
Tattoo-Gallery.org



Traditional Maori Moko

In the Māori culture, it was a symbol of strength and high rank to display various tattoos. The most common location for them was on the head. A full facial tattoo was very common. [*The head was believed to be the most sacred part of the body so a full facial moko was the ultimate statement about one's identity*] This took a great deal of [*healing*] time to complete.

Ta moko is very different compared to how most of us view tattoos today. Moko were embedded deeply into the facial structure of the individual, and not punctured like tattoos are done today. The particular tattoo on an individual said a great deal about his power, beliefs, family, and his achievements.

[www.polynesiantattoojewellery.com]

Moko were also used to signify the onset of puberty. Traditional *Māori tattoos* also signified the various rites of passage, bravery, and special events that took place in a young man's life.

Moko identified the **rank** of the males in the tribe. The authority a tribe member had could be told by their moko. This was generally found on the chin area. The sides of the face often indicated the **whakapapa** of the tribe member. Māori without tattoos were seen as belonging to a lower social caste.

Ta moko specialists (***tohunga-ta-moko***) who crafted tattoos in the Māori community were very highly respected in the tribe and usually male. They used a range of chisels (***uhi***) made from albatross bone and took the time to create unique designs for the individual. The bone structure of a person was carefully studied before the art was started.

The process of carving a moko was quite painful. A handle was attached to the bone chisel and struck with a light mallet to cut into the skin. The chisel was dipped into various types of vegetable pigments and then placed into the skin. The warriors had to endure a very painful healing process. They were put under very strict taboos while they healed and because of the ***tapu***, could not feed themselves. Selected friends or relatives dripped liquids for them between swollen lips using wooden funnels.

In modern times tattoo guns and needles have replaced the bone chisels because they are faster and less likely to cause health problems. Over the last couple of years there has been a revival of the use of the uhi.

Ta Moko Designs

While the main locations of ta moko were on the face and head, they were not limited to these places. Another common place for Māori tattoos were the buttocks and the thighs. The designs for these areas were mainly double spirals which could extend down the back of the legs to the knees. The place for a woman's moko was usually the chin and the lips, occasionally appearing on the nostrils and throat.

Ta moko consists of detailed designs that include lines, symbols, and distinct marks. To the average person, they don't mean much, but to the people of the Māori culture, the tattoo, especially the facial tattoo, is a very important part of who they are. Therefore, those who complete them need to have the right skills and knowledge.

A couple of years ago there was a controversy when pop singer, Robbie Williams, had a Māori tattoo done on his arm. Pita Sharples, a Māori cultural authority claimed the designs were the intellectual property of his ***iwi***. Genealogy is very important to Māori and their tattoos are the tale of their family history, so copying their designs is seen as an insult. Copying a Māori design is a kind of identity theft (***appropriation***).

Māori Tattoo Art

In 1907 it became illegal to have a moko, but today we see a revival. Young people are interested in their cultural identity and regard moko as a way of expressing this. Ta moko can still hold significant meaning relating to the rank, beliefs, heritage, and accomplishments of those who receive them.

<http://www.tattoo-gallery.org/tattoo-designs.html>

"Banned and forced underground by colonial governments, the ancient art of ta moko was kept alive by older woman who lived in remote areas beyond the pale of European condemnation. In the 70s, young urbanised Māori in search of powerful symbols of ethnic identity rediscovered the art, and moko found a new generation of skin."

Pita Turei, 'Moko- Maori Tattoo'

Ta Moko - Contemporary

- Nowadays *Moko* are being worn by Māori from many different facets of society including political leaders, teachers, gang members, artists, Rastafarians, and lawyers to name a few.

- Intensely personal; *ta moko* for modern day wearers is a symbol of pride:

- Pride in their identity as Māori,
- Pride in their Māori heritage and traditions,
- Pride in their *whakapapa*
- and often a symbolic reflection of the wearer's spiritual beliefs.

The decision to get a moko often marks an important event in a person's life, for example overcoming hardship, or dedicating their lives to learning te reo rangatira (the Māori language.) A living art form, Ta moko becomes an integral part of who the wearer is. It lives and dies with them.

"There are as many meanings for *moko* as there are people who wear it... Few take the decision to wear it lightly. The recipient first prepares for *moko* by thinking long about it, sometimes for years, and then talking at length with one's family and tribe, a dialogue that continues often for months. Usually permission must be granted from the elders, and the family agrees upon the design. Sometimes the pattern is inherited from an ancestor; other times it is created specifically for the wearer by a close relative or a *ta moko* artist who researches the patterns of the recipients *whakapapa*."

Nicole MacDonald, 'Moko- Maori Tattoo'

GLOSSARY

appropriation - the use [or taking] of a cultural item/design that does not belong to your own culture.

iwi - tribe.

Kiri tuhi - "writing on the skin" - a term used to describe markings that are not moko but inspired by Māori design.

moko - traditional Māori body and facial tattoo. It is also a name used for lizards throughout Polynesia, and it carries all of the mythical associations attached to such creatures.

rank or **mana** - a person's status, largely determined by their genealogy and gender but often enhanced by prowess or acquired skills.

tapu - considered sacred, set apart, involving rituals and restrictions.

te reo rangatira - the Māori language.

uhi - chisel made from bird bone and strapped to a handle.

whakapapa - family ancestral line, genealogy.

Education Notes

CURRICULUM LINKS

Learning Areas:

VISUAL ARTS: Understanding the Arts in context, Developing Practical Knowledge, Developing Ideas, Communicating and Interpreting.

SOCIAL SCIENCES: Identity, Culture and Organisation, Continuity and Change.

PRE VISIT

FIND OUT: the symbols of koru patterns and forms.

FIND a person with a traditional *ta moko* and then a person with a contemporary *ta moko*.

DISCOVER what tools were used to perform traditional *ta moko*.

DISCUSS how 'identity' is shown in the 8 different sections of a male *ta moko*.

FIND OUT what the word 'appropriation' means in the context of Non-Māori having *ta moko*, for example Robbie Williams.

LEARN about 'Mataora' in Māori Mythology.

DISCUSS why *ta moko* has become a revived tradition.

* What does it mean to take something/ someone at 'Face Value'? Why do you think Serena Stevenson has called her series of photos this?

* Are some of the photos similar to your own family photos? How?

Everyone is very relaxed and comfortable in front of the camera as though a family member has taken the pictures. Stevenson works hard to build up a rapport with those she photographs.

References/Sources

WebLinks

* **The Origins of Ta Moko - The Legend of Mataora and Niwareka:**

see ' <http://www.collectionstepapa.govt.nz>'

* '<http://www.serenastevenson.co.>'

* '<http://www.tattoo-gallery.org/tattoo-designs.html>'

* **Ta Moko – FAQs** see 'http://www.maoriart.org.nz/noticeboard/te_uhi/faq'
[Developed by Museum of Te Papa Tongarewa and Te Uhi a Mataora for an event 'Ta Moko – A history of skin', March 2004]

Books

* **Moko – Māori Tattoo**

Photographs by Hans Neleman

Texts by Tame Wairere Iti, Pita Turei and Nicole MacDonald

Edition Stemmler, NY, 1999.