



# PUAKI

*based on work by Michael Bradley*

Some people say they always had a tā moko just under their skin, waiting to be revealed. Photographer Michael Bradley liked this idea. He became even more interested after he heard of an unusual problem with some of the first photographs of Māori: their tā moko couldn't always be seen. When the photos were developed, sometimes the tattoos appeared faded; others times, they were completely gone. Because of this, tā moko were often drawn onto the photos afterwards.

"In the 1850s, taking photos was a tricky process," Michael explains. "Certain colours were difficult to capture." This was a challenge when it came to photographing Māori with tā moko. The blue-green tones that made up their tattoos often didn't show up. "An important cultural tradition was being erased by the limited technology of the time," he says.

The word puaki means to come forth, to reveal, to give testimony. It was the perfect name for the project Michael began to plan: interviews with Māori who wore tā moko. He would take their photo and record their story. He wanted to learn about the various ways tā moko had been visible and invisible across the generations.

## THE TĀ MOKO TRADITION

The tradition of tattooing is found across the Pacific. Each culture has its own designs, rituals, and tools. Māori believe the tradition was a gift that came from the underworld and the ancestor Uetonga.

Māori call a tattoo on the face or body a tā moko, although tattoos on particular parts of the body have their own names. The tattoo women wear on their chin is called a kauae. A tattoo on the thigh is called a puhoro. Each design has its own meaning and significance. Some designs are universal, such as the spirals worn on a person's nose, cheek, and lower jaw. Other parts of a tattoo are carefully chosen to suit each individual.

Some of the first tā moko were done to mourn the dead. Women would cut themselves (called haehae), then add soot to the wound. The act of haehae was a way to express grief; the soot helped to create a permanent reminder of the person who had died. Some tā moko tell the story of family connections. Tā moko also express a person's mana – some rangatira signed the Treaty of Waitangi by drawing their tā moko.

As Pākehā began to colonise Aotearoa, the number of Māori with tā moko became smaller. This trend finally changed in the 1980s, when Māori began to rediscover and reassert their traditions. Tā moko was reclaimed as a unique way to express identity. As Gary Te Ruki says on page 19: "I am the people of the land, the spirit of the land, the essence of the land. This place is mine, so my moko speaks to that."



Sketch of a rangatira by Sydney Parkinson (1784)



# KAANGA COOPER SKIPPER

*Waikato-Tainui*

## *We felt we were being blessed*

The day I got my tā moko, it was pouring with rain. The wind was blowing, the trees were rustling – we told many stories about why. All of my family were there. Spiritually, we felt we were being blessed. It was a wonderful day, a beautiful afternoon. I'll remember it for the rest of my life.

As a family, it was important to prepare properly for my moko. First we had to visit my ancestors, including my grandmother, on Taupiri maunga. Then we had to decide who would do my moko. I was honoured when the name that came up was Inia Taylor. We have a big family, and we all went together. My granddaughters, my grandson, my son ... everyone. Of course we went through the traditional parts first: pōwhiri, karanga, mihimihi. It was our day, and Inia allowed us the time to do whatever we needed before we got down to business.

Inia explained everything he was going to do. He'd done a lot of research. He wanted to use the traditional chisel as well as the modern needle machine.

This was his decision as an artist, and I agreed. I felt blessed to be a part of what used to happen in the old days. Then he did the drawing for my moko, which was to be the same as my grandmother's. There was a lot of wiping off and starting again. He was being careful to follow every detail in the photo we had of my grandmother. I thought I'd really feel the pain of the chisel, but I didn't. Inia began with the traditional method and finished the modern way. Within an hour, it was all over for me. We closed with prayers.

My grandmother died when she was ninety-four. She had her moko done when she was a young girl – this was in the early years when all the people had their moko kauae done by a chisel. I've now released her moko from the past and brought it into the future.

I hope everyone in my family will carry on the beautiful tradition of the moko kauae. I'm proud to have done this for my grandchildren and for future generations. I just want to encourage them not to wait as long as I did.



## GARY TE RUKI

*Ngāti Unu, Ngāti Kahu, Ngāti Maniapoto, Waikato, Ngāti Porou*

### *I am tangata whenua*

I can still see myself at school, forever scribbling moko. I'd draw over faces in magazines, put moko on them. It was always a part of something I wanted ... something right at the very heart of me. Now it's a statement of who I am and who my people are.

I come from the Waikato. Ōrākau is fifteen minutes from my marae, Te Kōpua. A battle cry was heard there: "Peace shall never be made. We shall fight you for ever." I have a rebellious nature, and my moko is a part of that. It tells the world that I won't bend to the status quo. I am Māori. I am Ngāti Unu, Ngāti Kahu, Ngāti Maniapoto, Waikato, Ngāti Porou. I am tangata whenua. I am the people of the land, the spirit of the land, the essence of the land. This place is mine, so my moko speaks to that.

My moko was done on my marae over three days. My first encounter with the world afterwards was at a gas station in Ōtorohanga. We wondered why no one was coming to help us. I could see people talking at the counter. It was a very new thing back then – no one else in the district had a full-facial moko.

There were people I'd known for some time who crossed the road when they saw me. That was strange, but it had nothing to do with me – it was all to do with them. Maybe they had feelings of inadequacy. But I was the same person I'd been the week before.

In the city, I had a different reaction. People came up to admire the artwork and ask questions. Overseas, my moko is received in different ways. In Japan, no one raises an eyebrow. South Korea, I had people run from my presence but also older people bowing.

I see so many faces without markings. I think, "Let us be Māori. Let's not be held back by society's way of doing things." I look at my friends who are beautiful speakers of te reo, very knowledgeable, and I think, "What are you waiting for? There's no special moment coming. You make the moment." It's a simple thing: a contribution to our tribal life, to te ao Māori, to our way of living. It's a renewal, a repatriation, a taking back – repossessing something that's been gone for too long. Those are my thoughts.



# PRISCILLA RUHA

*Ngāti Uepohatu*

## *Something solid, something unshifting*

I had my moko kauae done when I was twenty-one. It was a natural progression of my lifelong pursuit to express my cultural identity. My first love was haka, which I did at school as a little girl. We would have moko drawn on our faces for competitions. It was a powerful moment. I felt connected to my culture. Afterwards, the moko would be rubbed off, but as my knowledge and education about moko grew, so did my desire to have one on my face permanently.

Other women in my family wear moko kauae. I wasn't the first, which is never easy. I'm lucky I had other people paving the way, right from the beginning of moko's inception ... all the way through to today. I had many fearless and brave tribespeople before me take up the taonga and wear it. So for me, tā moko wasn't something foreign. Growing up on the East Coast, it was the norm. You would walk into the hospital, and you'd see auntie with her moko kauae, working in the A&E. We had doctors who wore facial moko, judges in the Māori land court. My auntie – who

was an exceptional caterer at the marae – she wore moko. So it was a normal part of my youth; now even more so.

On the East Coast, more and more young people are wearing tā moko. They've grown up in a society in which it's familiar and demystified. A growing number are deciding for themselves and their families to wear this treasure, and much earlier than the generation before them. Moko was driven to the edge of the cliff, to extinction. Without those brave people who are spirited, who have moral courage, we run the risk of losing certain aspects of our culture to the history books.

Moko is a powerful repository for the worldviews of our people. Without those magical expressions of who we are, it's easy to be lost in the wind, especially in the modern context, when there are so many ideas competing for attention. I think it's important to have something solid, something unshifting that our children can cling to. Moko is a physical reminder of who they are, where they come from, and where they're headed.



# RANGI MCLEAN

*Tūhoe, Ngāti Porou, Waikato, Ngāti Maniapoto*

## *The world is changing*

My journey began when I was eighteen. I dreamt about a moko. I could still see that moko in my mind three weeks later, so I drew it, not knowing what it meant. My parents said to take the drawing back home to the elders.

We had a big meeting on the marae. The elders asked what the moko meant to me. All I could say was that it came in a dream; I just wanted their blessing to get it done. But my elders said I wasn't ready. They wanted to test me. I was a bit of a rebel in those days. They wanted to make the point that the moko wasn't just for me or my family. It was shown to me on behalf of my iwi.

I really wanted a moko, so I decided to wait out my time, listen to whatever my elders had to say. Over the next twenty years, whenever I went home, they'd pull me aside to share their knowledge. They mentored me. I'd just dreamt about a moko, but they knew what it meant.

I was shocked when they finally said I was ready. I thought I'd need to get my moko done back home, but my elders surprised me. They said because it came from a dream, the wairua should

dictate who would do it. I searched Tāmakimakaurau – I went to seven tā moko artists. Six of them were my own people, but the wairua didn't feel right. Then I visited a tattoo studio in Papakura. A Pākehā was there. When I shared my story, he said it would be an honour to complete my journey. I said we'd need to follow protocol, do the right blessings, and he said not a problem.

Our plan was to do half of the moko, let it heal, then I'd go back for the other half. But the pain was so severe, so hard to take, that I was thinking of stopping. The blessings helped me to carry on, but still, I wasn't going back, so the tattoo artist did the whole lot in one go. Bending over me nine hours straight took a toll on his strength, but he said there was something there, telling him to keep going.

He was the right one to complete my tā moko, and he was a Pākehā! When I hear people having a go at Pākehā, I say hang on a minute, let me tell you a story. That soon changes their perception. I have Pākehā mokopuna now. The world is changing. We have to adapt and change with it but hold on to our old ways too.

# Puaki

based on work by Michael Bradley

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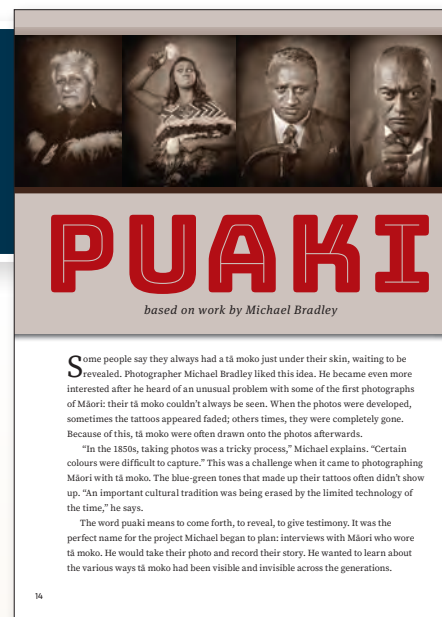
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