

***Icons Ngā Taonga from the Collections of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa.* Wellington, New Zealand: Te Papa Press, 2004. 306 pp.**

***Treasures from the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa.* Wellington, New Zealand: Te Papa Press, 2005. 220 pp.<sup>1</sup>**

Reviewed by Moira Smith

Te Papa Tongarewa, the Museum of New Zealand, was created in 1992 by the merging of the National Museum (established in 1865) and the National Art Gallery (established in 1930). These two books are intended as an introduction to the museum's collections, or as "a gateway into a treasure house, inviting a glimpse of the riches within and giving readers a wider view of the objects and stories encountered at the museum" (*Treasures* p. viii). *Taonga* is Māori for 'highly prized treasure' and is used here to refer to the museum's collections in their entirety.

*Icons* is a handsome book of coffee-table size; *Treasures* is a scaled down version of the same book. Both books consist of handsome color photographs of objects from the collections of Te Papa (as it is universally known). The books are divided into five sections: Ngā Taonga (art and history); Art; Natural History; History; and Pacific (devoted to the art and history of the peoples of other Pacific islands). The objects featured "range from an internationally acclaimed art work to a starfish found every day on the coast" (*Icons*, p. viii). Each attractive photograph is accompanied by an informative description describing the item's provenance and significance, and where the subject is particularly relevant to Māori, the text is in both English and Māori.

The bilingual text reflects Te Papa's prevailing bicultural ethos. By Government mandate, Te Papa is required to emphasize biculturalism in the spirit of New Zealand's founding document, the Treaty of Waitangi, signed between Māori chiefs and the British crown in 1840. The two streams of this bicultural approach are Māori (*tangata whenua*, 'those who belong to the country by right of first discovery') and Pakeha (*tangata tiriti*, or 'those who belong to the country by right of the Treaty' (*Icons*, p. xi). In practice, this ethos is manifested in the museum's principle of shared governance: Māori are involved in the administration and management of Te Papa. More specifically, this principle of shared governance is reflected in the concept of *mana taonga*, according to which Māori have "the right to care for taonga, to speak about them, and to determine their use by the museum" (*Icons*, p. 2). Further—and more radically—research at Te Papa is explicitly informed by both western academic scholarship and Māori knowledge systems ('*mātauranga Māori*') (*Icons* p. xii).

While the introductory text to these volumes will draw the attention of anyone interested in New Zealand's unique approach to bicultural museum practice, the bulk of these books is given over to the gorgeous photographs. Along with the accompanying texts, they provide a fascinating glimpse into New Zealand's environment, history, and culture, as well as to the history of Te Papa and its collections.

---

<sup>1</sup> Posted to *Museum Anthropology Review* April 1, 2007. See: <http://museumanthropology.net/2007/04/01/mar2007-1-11/>. © 2007 Moira Smith.

*Moria Smith is a folklorist and the subject area librarian for the fields of folklore, sociology and anthropology at Indiana University. A native of New Zealand, her research concerns the topics of humor, witchcraft, legend and belief, and the ethnography of information seeking practices. She also edits the Journal of Folklore Research.*