



*Kura Koiwi: Bone Treasures* by Brian Flintoff. Nelson: Craig Potton Publishing. RRP: \$39.99. Pb, pp132. ISBN: 9781877517396. Reviewed by Cassandra Fusco.

Brian Flintoff is a *rara avis* – a pakeha whose work magnets respect within both the Māori and European worlds where his carvings are treasured as *taonga*. *Kura Koiwi: Bone Treasures* verifies why this should be so. Conceived as a sister publication to *Taonga Puoro Singing Treasures* (Flintoff's earlier book on Māori musical instruments) *Kura Koiwi* is another elegant and insightful contribution to the literature about Māori art, well served by the publisher, particularly through the photography, translations and annotations.

Domestic and ceremonial artefacts held in various museum collections have long provided Flintoff with inspiration. "The wealth of carvings from earlier times," he says, "gives us a real link to the past, and to other cultures. A 40,000 year old vulture wing-bone flute from Europe sounds just like an albatross wing-bone *kōauau* that can be heard today. One piece, that's in the Otago Museum, has been an inspiration to me since I first saw a drawing of it. I feel very humble when I consider the detail that was achieved by carvers using tools made only from bone and stone."

Flintoff's work and commentary are seamless.<sup>1</sup> Using specific and exquisite examples of his work and that of others such as Owen Mapp, Flintoff talks to readers about the mythology and symbolism behind each bone carving. Referring to a specific Tangaroa (sea god) carving, he writes: "A carving from the jawbone of a sperm whale showing

Tangaroa inspecting the artistry of a *hei matu*. The hook was let down to impress him so that he would reward the fisherman with a good catch of his children, the fish." This flow of image and text result is a cumulative celebration and rejuvenation of an ancient art form, its power and beauty. And, in the final chapter, Flintoff connects many Māori carving patterns and symbols with other ancient cultures: Chinese, Japanese, Indian, Inuit and South American.

In his Foreword, Tā Tipene O'Reagan (Upoko, Awarua Kāi Tahu) says that Flintoff "has taken an ancient art form and has renewed its spirit." A pendant carved for O'Reagan, and one carved for Bill Solomon by Flintoff, grace the front and back covers where they immediately communicate something of this rejuvenation. Indeed every page in this book carries work that is imbued with its own *korero* or story; each piece is a fresh interpretation of the traditions Flintoff has immersed himself in – "old stories, old symbols, emerging in a fresh light through the prism of his imagination and artistry" (O'Reagan).

A resource for the specialist and the general public alike, *Kura Koiwi: Bone Treasures* is both a personal account of one carver's career *and* also an important exploration of Māori art and culture.

---

<sup>1</sup>: A Foreword by Tā Tipene O'Reagan, an Introduction and six chapters: 1: "NA TE HINENGARO, Abstract and Conceptual Designs", 2: "TE WAO NUI A TANE, the Realm of Tāne, the Forest God", 3: "TE AO NUI A TANGAROA, The World of the Sea God, Tangaroa", 4: "TAONGA PUORO, Musical Treasures", 5: "NGA PURAKAU, Carvings from Mythology", and 6: "TAONGA KOIWI NA NGA HAU E WHA, the International Tradition of Bone Carving."