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THREE MUSEUMS OF THE ART OF THE PACIFIC AND THE FAR EAST: POSTCOLONIAL, MULTICULTURAL, AND PROSOCIAL

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Abstract: Three museums of the art of the Pacific and the Far East are described in the paper: National Gallery Singapore, Australian Art Gallery of South Wales in Sydney, and New Zealand's Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki. The institutions have a lot in common: they are all housed in Neo-Classical buildings, raised in the colonial times, and have recently been extended, modernized, as well as adjusted to fulfill new tasks. Apart from displaying Western art, each of them focuses on promoting the art of the native peoples: the Malay, Aborigines, and the Maori. Having been created already in the colonial period as a branch

of British culture, they have been transformed into open multicultural institutions which combine the main trends in international museology: infrastructure modernization, collection digitizing, putting up big temporary exhibitions, opening to young people and different social groups, featuring local phenomena, characteristic of the Pacific Region. The museums' political and social functions cannot be overestimated; their ambition is to become culturally active institutions on a global scale, as well as tools serving to establish a new type of regional identity of postcolonial multicultural character.

Keywords: museum architecture, the Pacific Region and the Far East, postcolonialism, art of the Malay, Aboriginal peoples, and the Maori.

Three major art museums in this region of the world, namely the National Gallery Singapore, Australian Art Gallery of South Wales in Sydney, and New Zealand's Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, have a lot in common. They are all housed in Neo-Classical buildings raised in the colonial times that have recently been extended, modernized, and adapted to new tasks. Each of them, apart from displaying works of Western

art, intensely promotes art of the indigenous peoples: the Malay, Aboriginal peoples, and the Māori. Their political and social functions cannot be overestimated: they all aspire to become culturally inspiring institutions of global impact and tools helping to form a new type of regional identity of postcolonial, multicultural character. This is the goal they target at achieving by the exhibitions and events



1. Singapore National Gallery: Supreme Court on the left, former City Hall on the right, at the back a rotunda over the new City Hall designed by Norman Foster

they hold, as well as through subsequent modernizations and extensions.

National Gallery Singapore

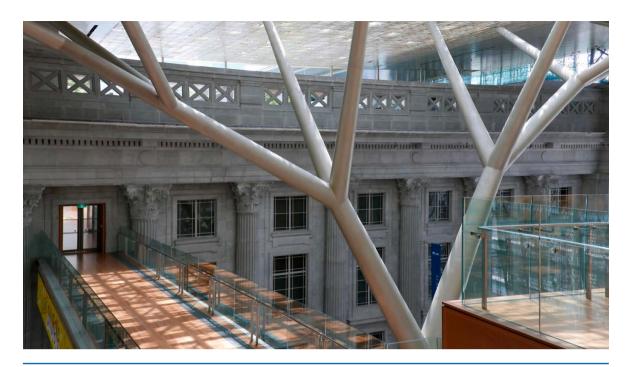
National Gallery Singapore houses the region's largest collection of Asian contemporary art. It is located in the very heart of a giant metropolis, in two historic buildings altered for the purpose, and combined: the former City Hall and the Supreme Court. It can be read in the Museum Catalogue that the phenomenon best characterizing Southeast Asia is change: a feature characteristic of the place in which various civilizations and religions used to meet, where the interests of colonial powers, which suffered turbulent transformations, marked by complex relationships between the local traditions and influences of the West crossed.¹

Singapore is a city-state of highly developed economy and a strict rule of law; in 2017, it boasted over 5.7 million inhabitants. It is the world's third most densely populated area. This multicultural city's population is dominated by residents of Chinese descent (74.3 per cent), followed by the Malay (13.4 per cent), and the Indians (9.1 per cent). Four official languages are spoken there: the vernacular is Malay, while English is the most widely used and taught; the other two being Mandarin and Tamil. Singapore is inhabited by followers of many religions: Buddhists, Muslims, Taoists, and Hindus.² A relatively low birth rate forces the Singapore government to apply open migration policy, this leading to the fact that a large section of the city population (almost a third) resides there without, however, enjoying civil rights.

Founded in 1819 as a trading post of the East India Company, it remained a British colony until 1965. The major colonial buildings were raised over/around/on? the Padang, a vast field that separated the city centre from the harbour bay. It was there that in 1929 the City Hall designed by the city architects: Alexander Gordon and Samuel Douglas Meadows, was built. Next to it, in 1939, the monumental Supreme Court building designed by Frank Dorrington Ward, and echoing



 ${\bf 2.}$ Artistic installation by Yakoi Kusama above one of the entrances to the Singapore National Gallery



3. Glazed courtyard of the Singapore National Gallery joining the historic buildings of the Court and City Hall



4. Latticework screen above the main entrance to the Singapore National Gallery – a "veil" shading the lobby created between the two historic buildings

London's Old Bailey Courthouse, was erected. Their Neo-Classical architecture based on symmetry, harmony, and monumental order, was to clearly symbolize the power of institutions representing the authorities of the British Empire. The buildings witnessed the most significant events in the history of Singapore: on 12 September 1945, it was on the City Hall stairs that the surrender act of the Japanese garrison

was received; the Supreme Court was where the Japanese war criminals were sentenced; it was there that subsequent Prime Ministers were sworn in. Classified as listed buildings in 1992, both became protected by law; meanwhile, in 2005, the institutions that had been housed in them left: the Court moving nearby, to a new edifice designed by Norman Foster, and the City Council to the complex of ministerial buildings.³

The latter half of the 20th century was a period of an intense economic development of Singapore, now ranked as one of the most powerful world economies: so-called Asian Tigers. The prosperity swing led to extremely impressive building projects, often resulting in spectacular architecture. The city skyline, having dramatically transformed, began to feature a forest of skyscrapers. In the ranking of the Globalization and World Cities (GaWC) Portal Singapore has been classified as a global city of the greatest impact, so-called Alpha+. Unquestionably, the city also has the ambition to become a regional leader in culture and art.

In 2007, an international architectural competition was held with the goal to select the best design for adapting the two buildings in order to transform them into a museum of modern art. The stipulations were that the façades and some of the interiors of the historic buildings were to remain unchanged, while it was allowed to develop the space between the buildings; a roof-storey superstructure was acceptable, and so was the alteration of the cellars.

Hundred and eleven teams from 29 countries made their entries in the two-stage competition, with the studioMilou Architecture of France (architect Jean Francis Milou) winning. The construction went on for four years, and the new museum opened in November 2015.

In the assumption of its creators, the National Gallery Singapore is to become the major institution presenting visual art of Southeast Asia. Its mission has been defined as *inspiration and commitment of the Singapore people, as well as building bridges between the art of Singapore, the neighbouring countries, and the rest of the world.* The collection core is made up by a private collection donated to the city in 1957 by Loke Wan Tho. In later years extensively enriched, this very collection was first housed at the National Museum Art Gallery founded in 1976, to be later transferred to the Singapore Art Museum created in 1996. The new museum complex of the National Gallery Singapore is massive, boasting over 64,000-sq-m surface, with several entries leading into it. Its central most impressive part is



5. Chua Mia Tee, National Language Class, oil on canvas 1959. The topic of the painting is teaching Malay – a group of Chinese students encircles the Malay teacher, the board features the sentences: what's your name (siapa nama kamu) and where do you live (di-mana awak tinggal). The painting shows a scene from the period when the new identity of the Singapore nation made up of numerous ethnic groups was being created, with the Malay language meant to serve as the binder; after: https://static.straitstimes.com.sg/sites/default/files/st_20151013_ng13_1753198.jpg

formed by a roofed courtyard created between the two historic buildings. The part of the display found the most attractive is the permanent exhibition arranged in the former rooms of the Supreme Court, in which the portraits of the British royal family are presented alongside the works of local Asian artists. These including the paintings showing the Vietnam Mỹ Lai massacre.

The Singapore museum cooperates with the major museum institutions in Europe and worldwide: together with the Paris Centre Pompidou, it prepared the 'Reframing Modernism' Exhibition, while together with Tate Britain, the Exhibition 'Artist and Empire' was held. In 2016, its permanent exhibition was visited by over 1.5 million people, with temporary exhibitions having been viewed by over



6. Wong Hoy Cheong (b. 1960, Malyasia), The Nouveau Riche, the Elephant, the Foreign Maid, or the Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie



7. Interactive artistic installation in which the public co-create the display



8. Art Gallery of New South Wales in Sydney - main entrance

a million; moreover, more than 32.000 individuals participated in learning actions organized for children and teenagers. During the visit of the Authors of the present article in September 2017, the National Gallery Singapore was offering, among others, three exhibitions of Chinese art, display of the Japanese Avant-garde artists Yayoi Kusama, display of Vietnamese painting, Singapore's art retrospective, an exhibition on architecture, and children's art biennial. Each was being visited by crowds of people, with the number of children and teenagers particularly surprising.

Art Gallery of New South Wales in Sydney

The colonial past of the institution is hidden not only in the classicizing costume of its architecture, but also in its very name: when during his first exploration trip around the Pacific in 1770 Captain James Cook discovered the eastern coast of Australia, he claimed it for Britain, naming it New South Wales. Currently, it is the most populated state in Australia, while its capital is the largest Australian city: Sydney boasts the population of over 5 million. It is also inhabited by the largest population of the indigenous Australians, namely native inhabitants of Australia who arrived here from the islands of Southeast Asia around 40.000 years ago, almost half of the native ethnic minority whose number presently reaches around half a million.

The dealing with the indigenous population is the darkest page in the history of the settlement in Australia. For over two centuries the apartheid policy, popularly referred to as the 'White Australia Policy', was in force, this targeted at

the indigenous population, as well as immigrants arriving from Asia. It was only its change in the 1970s that opened up Australia to the migration from non-European countries. In 1975, a new Racial Discrimination Act was adopted, this considering any manifestation of racial discrimination as unlawful. Currently, Australia is inhabited by over 24 million people, of whom a quarter (26 per cent) were born outside the boundaries of the country. The majority of them, namely 16 million of native Australians, are of British descent. Apart from the Aboriginal peoples, the biggest section of non-European ethnic minorities includes the Chinese, Indians, Filipinos, the Vietnamese, and Malays.

The story of the Art Gallery of New South Wales goes back to 1871, when the New South Wales Academy of Art, the first artistic school in Australia, was founded. In 1880, a gallery of art (National Gallery of New South Wales) was created there. In 1885, the local architect Walter L. Vernon designed a special building to house it. This construction was never completed: by 1909 the only fragments raised were the Neo-Classical front façade with the central portico in the lonic order and one south-western wing, today housing the gallery of European art. 9

In 1968, the state government decided to commemorate the Bicentenary of Captain Cook's landing by modernizing and extending the gallery. Following the design of the local architect Andrew Anderson, Vernon's axial layout was completed and added a building of Modernist architecture on a rectangular layout, made up of exposed structural elements of concrete hammered texture, complemented with limestone panels and large glass panes. The front façade

remained untouched, while the severe Modernist framing of the Museum interiors strongly contrasted with the classical costume of the main entrance. Thanks to the extension completed in 1972, the display space grew from 2.800 to 4.900 sq m.

The next extension was conducted in 2003, when an additional wing was added from the south-east, this structure designed by Richard Johnson; its highest part in a form of a glazed pavilion houses the Asian art collection. This fragment of the main Museum's mass towering over the Woolloomooloo port District on the edge of the city botanical garden stands out in the city's skyline like a lantern.¹⁰

The programme of Museum projects implemented at the Art Gallery of New South Wales emphasizes the input into Australia's history and culture of the immigrants arriving here from different European countries, as well as of the numerous Chinese Diaspora and other ethnic minorities. It was here that for the first time in Australia the art of the Aboriginal peoples was treated in the categories of an artistic and not ethnographic output. This took place during the 1981 'Prospecta' Exhibition when among the gathered works 3 large canvases by Aboriginal painters were presented. 11 Since then the art of the Aboriginal peoples has been permanently present in display rooms of Australia's museums and art galleries, while its way to the international popularity and fame it enjoys today was opened by the Exhibitions: 'Les Magiciens de la Terre' held at the Paris National Museum of Modern Art at the Centre Pompidou in 1989, and the 'Dreamings: The Art of Aboriginal Australia' displayed in museums of New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles in 1998–1990. Finally, it was here that works were

initiated on the ethical code related to art works and objects produced by the Aboriginal peoples, and which have reached Australian museum collection. The principles were worked out in the form of a document published in 1993 and called Previous Possessions, New Obligations: Policies for Museum in Australia and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People. 12 In the document the assumption was made that any action related to the Aboriginal collections and ways of their presentation should be consulted directly with the representatives of a given ethnic group. It was also decided that the original owners (communities) should be given back the human remains, objects of religious cult, as well as other items that in compliance with the beliefs of the Aboriginal peoples should not be viewed by unauthorised eyes. In due course, the majority of Australian museums have started employing curators of Aboriginal descent, these responsible for indigenous collections and the ways to present them.

The management of the Art Gallery of New South Wales are planning the Gallery's further development. In September 2014, an international architectural competition was adjudicated to design a new wing to be located amidst the park scenery, to the north-east of the main Museum's block. From among 12 outstanding architects invited to participate in the competition (the group included e.g. Herzog & de Meuron of Switzerland, David Chipperfield of London, Kengo Kuma of Tokio, as well as Tod Williams and Billie Tsien from New York), the design by the Japanese SANAA Studio (Kazuyo Sejima + Ryue Nishizawa) was selected. The ideological assumptions of the *Sydney Modern Project* read that the extended Museum, whose



9. Gallery of European art, Art Gallery of New South Wales in the so-called old wing



10. Captain Cook Wing created in 2007 and housing e.g. contemporary Australian art



11. Fragment of the Aborigine art collection at the Art Gallery of New South Wales



 ${\bf 12. \ Art \ Gallery \ of \ New \ South \ Wales-Jewish \ kids \ during \ a \ school \ class \ in \ the \ gallery \ of \ native \ art}$



13. The new wing of the Art Gallery of New South Wales seen against Sydney skyline; after: https://cdnimd.worldarchitecture.org/extuploadc/1_sanaa.jpg

opening is planned in 2021, will allow to mount globally most important temporary exhibitions; will provide room for cyclical presentations of contemporary art from the Pacific; and will house the largest in Australia permanent collection of Aboriginal art. Plans have been made for the extended museums to be visited by over 2 million public annually, while museum classes will be attended by over 200.000 children and teenagers a year.¹³

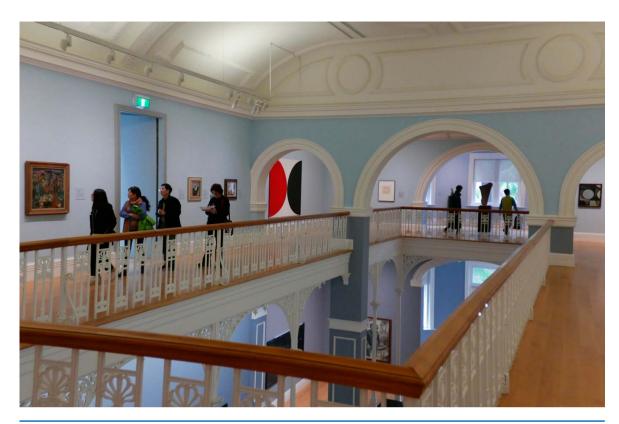
Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki

Auckland is the largest city of New Zealand with over 1.5 million population. It is also a multi-ethnic and multicultural city, almost half of the population of which was born abroad. Apart from the largest ethnic group of European descent (59.3 per cent), made up mainly of the English and the Irish, it is inhabited by numerous Asians (23.1 per cent), as well as the Māori (10.7 per cent), and Polynesians (14.6 per cent).14 The immigration regulations tempered in 1987, eliminating racial barriers, resulted in the fact that the number of population of non-European descent continues to grow. The next factor causing the inflow of immigrants from Asia and Oceania are universities. The most important of them, namely the University of Auckland, educates over 40.000 students, of whom a large section come from abroad. The largest group of them are Chinese, 15 with white students only making up a third. The multi-cultural character of the city is visible on Auckland streets everywhere, both in the facial features of passers-by, as well as in shop windows and signboards of the multitude of exotic restaurants. Attempts can be observed to strengthen the Māori language. In 1987, it was selected the second official language of New Zealand, and since then all the state institutions have been given double names. As late as this decision was made, it constitutes an attempt at saving the disappearing indigenous culture of the inhabitants of this country. Today, only a fraction of the Māori population, amounting to 750.000 individuals, can speak their native tongue.

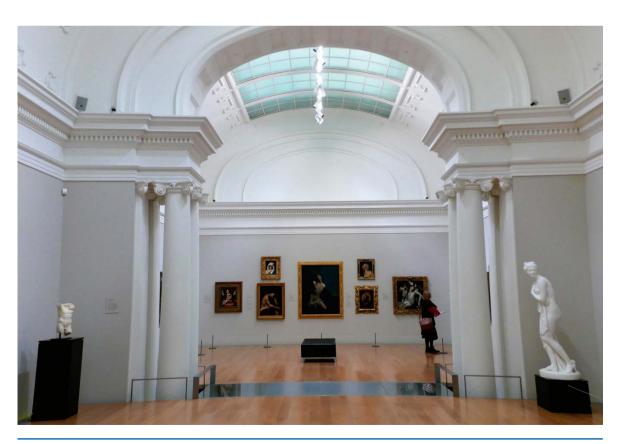
The Toi o Tāmaki Gallery, which in Māori means 'place of art', is located in the very heart of Aucklandd, between the central commercial district and the university quarter, on the verge of the picturesque Albert Park. In the building raised in 1887, the city council and a public library were originally housed. Eclectic in appearance, the structure combined motifs of Italian Neo-Renaissance and French palace style. It was designed by Melbourne-based architects: John H. Grainger (1854–1917) and Charles A. D'Ebro (1850–1920). Already a year later, in February 1888, the first in Auckland art gallery was launched there, based on the collection of Sir Geore Grey (1812-98), the first Governor of New Zealand. Interestingly, the collection was made up of both European masters and valuable collections of the Māori art.

In 1893, a new park section was added to the gallery, so-called Wellsley Wing, which had been included in the genuine design by Grainer and D'Ebro. It was home to the collection of art donated to Auckland by James Tannock Mackelvi, a local businessman and philanthropist who made a fortune on trade, and went to London by the end of his life; there, with his native city in mind, he gathered a valuable collection of paintings, sculptures, books, and artistic craftsmanship. From that time onwards the collection continued to grow, enriched with subsequent acquisitions and donations, while the building itself was remodelled and extended on numerous occasions. Moreover, its function also altered: in 1912, the City Council offices were transferred to a new Town Hall, while in 1974, the book collection was moved to the new Central Library building.

The collections of the Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki are extremely varied, ranging from the works of Old European Masters: Dürer, Rembrandt, and Bruegel, to contemporary



14. Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, painting gallery in the Wellsley Wing



15. Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, Mackelvie Gallery



16. Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, the main Gallery entrance

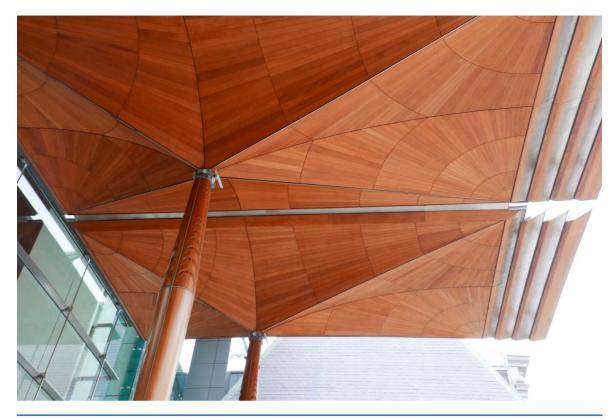
New Zealand art. The display is arranged in a manner characteristic of the museums in the Pacific: firstly, the works are presented without any chronological order, and old exhibits are accompanied by the latest ones; secondly, artistic outputs of the Māori and other indigenous peoples are treated as artistic not ethnographic phenomena. In 1995, the Gallery's Māori Advisory Group Haerewa, composed of outstanding artists and activists, was established; with time, also the position of a permanent Māori Curator was created, whose responsibility included the indigenous collections and the display manner of the indigenous art. ¹⁶

The Museum's current shape was given to it as a result of an extension conducted in 2008-11 following the competition-winning design by a consortium of architectural studios: Sydney-based FJMT and ARCHIMEDIA from Auckland (Richard Francis Jones, Lindsay Mackie et al.). The conception was for the new wing to harmonize two historic buildings with their park surroundings, to facilitate spatial orientation and circulation in the facility, as well as to provide additional functions that are prerequisites in contemporary museum: temporary exhibition space, a restaurant, and a museum shop. An important competition requirement was the reference to the cultural context: both the colonial one, already represented in the buildings' architecture, as well as the native one, expressed by nature that surrounded them. In Māori culture nature, and particularly the forest, plays an essential role. The Māori believe that in the forest, Tane Mahuta, man gains new spiritual and creative forces.

And it was precisely the park surroundings that constituted the strongest contextual inspiration for the design of the new wing formed in a way echoing a forest, with a wooden roof resembling wide-stretching tree crowns. The kauri tree that provided the material for pillars and interior finishing is considered holy by the Māori, and plays an essential role in their beliefs: its beauty, resistance, and utility symbolize the eternal bond of man with the forest. Since 1993 the kauri tree has been protected. Therefore in order to build the Toi o Tāmaki Gallery only recycled wood was used, or that coming from blowdown.¹⁷

The extension of the Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki has won a grand international acclaim, having received many valuable awards, these including the RIBA International Award 2012 and the World Building of the Year 2013.

The monumental building raised on the Pukekawa park hill towering over Auckland cannot really go unnoticed. Built in 1929, it was originally called the Imperial War Museum, serving as a mausoleum of New Zealand soldiers perished in service to the British Crown. Its story clearly reflects the transformations within New Zealand's society. In 2003–06, a new wing was added to the building, and it is where a big exhibition of the art of the Māori and the Oceania peoples was prepared, while the institution's name was changed to Auckland Museum - Tamaki Paenga Hira. Currently, the Museum boasts two entrances and as if two faces: from the south a monumental portico leads to the old part dedicated to the imperial history of New Zealand's armed forces, also covering the suppression of the Māori insurrections, whereas the northern entrance allows to enter the new wing housing the ethnographic and nature collection. Both exhibition sections are internally interlinked, which may symbolise the intricate history of Auckland and New Zealand.



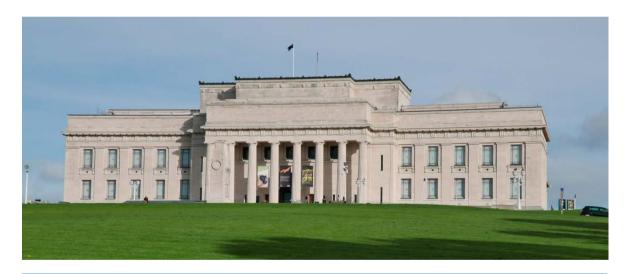
17. Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, wooden roof and kauri tree columns decorated with a traditional Maori ornament resembling feathers



18. Museum class in the park scenery on the terrace of the Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki



19. Charles Frederick Goldie (1870–1947), Maori portrait collection



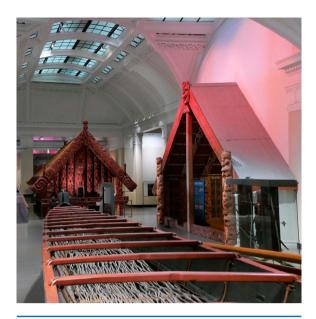
20. Auckland Museum – Tamaki Paenga Hira, formerly Imperial War Museum

Michel Foucault claims that history is the discourse of power; a 'great narrative', it is, however, the version of the past proclaimed by the victors. ¹⁸ In this philosophical approach, art is the material of which national identities are constructed. The essential criticism of West European imperial museums usually focuses on their narrative from the point of view of the higher classes, and exposing the importance of the elites. Valuable objects belonging to the rich stand a much higher chance of having been preserved than other more ordinary items, hence if only for this fact they predominate in museum collections, this in turn, giving a

distorted image of the past, neglecting or underestimating the fate of national minorities, worse-off individuals, and outsiders. The criticism of ethnocentrism and Eurocentrism is particularly justified in the case of colonial museums which for years constituted bastions of tributes to the imperial memory of selective character. The traditional colonial discourse denied 'primordial', 'native', and 'primitive' (etc.) people the right to have their own history and identity, attributing merely ethnographic, or aesthetic values at most to the artefacts they produced, placing these as curiosities, somewhere on the margin, outside the main narrative. ¹⁹

Currently, however, the situation has changed. The approach that museum collections and stories told with their

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21. Auckland Museum – Tamaki Paenga Hira, art of the people of the Pacific

(Fot. 1-4, 6-12, 14-21 - A. Jasiński)

use should reflect the pluralism of contemporary societies has taken root, and so has the view that museums should play the role of institutions integrating various groups, thus consolidating society as a whole.²⁰ In view of the increasing cultural and ethnic differentiation the capacity to dialogue among people coming from different milieus plays the key role in consolidating civil society. Thanks to it, members of previously marginalized or excluded groups can actively participate in public life, enriching the local culture with their unique experience. Postcolonial art museums in

the countries of the Pacific play an essential role in these processes, since they constitute widely accessible platforms promoting multicultural values, while also conducting learning and artistic activities, with special emphasis put on indigenous art. These institutions thus turn into popular centres in which people coming from varied social, ethnic, cultural, and age backgrounds are given a neutral meeting platform in order to become acquainted with their respective cultures, to exchange experience, to share emotions, without rejecting their own roots in order to assimilate. Thanks to it they can commonly share new multicultural identities and raise foundations for multiethnic societies, currently created in the postcolonial countries of Oceania and the Far East.

In her study Art Museums in Australia, Katarzyna Jagodzińska enumerates three typical features that define the essential turn which took place in Australian museology in the late 20th century. 21 These can unquestionably be also applied to all the above-described museums. The first of them consists in the narrative's perspective shift: from Eurocentric to the regional one; the second being a focus on the indigenous peoples; the third manifested in the abandoning of a historical museum in order to promote contemporary art, socially committed, of great importance particularly to young public. Museum institutions created in colonial times as a branch of British culture, have now transformed into open multicultural institutions, harmonizing the main tendencies in world museology: infrastructure modernization, collection digitizing, mounting of large temporary exhibitions, opening to teenagers and varied social groups, with local phenomena, characteristic of the Pacific. Their vitality and grand scale of tasks undertaken are impressive, particularly as seen from the perspective of Poland, namely the country which at the onset of the 21st century has entangled museums into the meanders of policies of inbred, provincial, and nationalistic character.

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