

## Museums and Maori

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Conal McCarthy, 2011. [Museums and Maori: Heritage Professionals, Indigenous Collections, Current Practice](#). Te Papa Press/Left Coast Press

Museums and Maori follows on the heels of McCarthy's previous book, [Exhibiting Maori](#), which traced the history of indigenous museum collecting, collections and display in Aotearoa New Zealand. This second book is more of a primer for contemporary practitioners and details the policy and practical environment in New Zealand for dealing with Maori collections and Maori people in Museum. Tracing the legacy of the famous Te Maori exhibition, the implementation and constitution of ideas about biculturalism and the complicity of museums in the forging of a bicultural national identity in the 1980s and 1990s, the book is an important resource for those interested in understanding a national museum culture from the vantage point of many different kinds of institution, and the intersection of policy and practice in them. Each chapter is grounded in case-studies that evaluate the history and practice of a wide array of different museums from the National Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa to smaller regional museums such as the Gisborne Museum or the Rotorua Museum. It is refreshing to hear the voices of curators and other museum practitioners whose options are often muted within museological studies.

For readers less knowledgeable about New Zealand, the book provides a succinct overview of national and local policies and practices and an overview of a critical and emergent national museum studies that has been examining these museological issues in the context of national debates about culture, identity and indigeneity for some time.

There is however something lacking in the book - a level of critical analysis and a comparative effort (both within New Zealand and internationally) that makes it less useful in terms of building up a critical picture of the role of museums, and of museology, in national debates around indigenous sovereignty, in broad practices of collections management and care, and in issues of museum accountability, not only for source communities but for many different constituents. At times the book feels as though it is talking to a relatively narrow audience (those interested in or familiar with New Zealand, or people currently working with New Zealand museums). A chapter connecting some of these issues to an international framework would have been helpful for other kinds of reader to recognize the strengths and idiosyncrasies of New Zealand and Maori museologies and the ways in which these might (or might not) be used as templates for other settler-colonies or other indigenous groups.

In turn, I would have relished reading about more of the poetics of contemporary museum practice in New Zealand - the experiences, tensions, creative practices, artwork, and other happenings, that embody the relationship between Maori people and museums. Exhibitions such as [Ko Tawa](#) at the Auckland Museum, which also travelled around the country to smaller museums, instantiate not only a particular, and inspiring, museological stance but a particular way of doing research and aestheticising ideas about cultural property. More information about these kinds of projects as well as about the institutional frameworks that surround them would have brought more life into the

sometimes dry discussion.

In all, *Museums and Maori* is a great resource for those seeking to map national museum cultures and understand how they are implemented in diverse settings. It provides a comprehensive summary of the literature around Maori and Museums that will be very useful for research scholars and activists working in museum studies, museum anthropology, colonial history and the politics of representation.