

The taonga within 'in Pursuit of Venus [infected]'

Taonga from the time of Captain Cook's voyages in Te Papa's collections that inspired Lisa Reihana's *in Pursuit of Venus [infected]*.



Adornment

HeruHeruornamental combs were traditionally used by Māori men to fasten their long hair, which was oiled and sometimes braided, up into topknots.



Reimagining the sounds of the past

Reimagining and recreating the sights and sounds of performance and cultural ceremonies were central to *in Pursuit of Venus [infected]*.

The koauau is a traditional Maori mouth flute usually made from native woods with a soft inner pith that was burnt-out using hot embers.

Koauau were sometimes made from bone, and when they were it was usually from the arm or thigh bone of a deceased family member or an enemy, or from the wing bone of the [toroa](#) (link is external).

Koauau made from the bones of enemies were often said to play the 'sweetest' notes.

Koauau were generally reserved for persons from families of rank and position within the tribe, and when not in use would be suspended around the neck.



Precious clothing

Reihana adorns her actors with clothing inspired by examples of kaitaka and other finely woven cloth from the past.

Historically, kaitaka fine cloaks with taniko borders (cloaks) were among the most prestigious garments for Māori, and they were also coveted by European collectors.

They were painstakingly produced from the most lustrous mukamuka flax fibre, sometimes taking many months to complete.

This kaitaka is unfinished, being short and lacking the taniko. Its weave, however, is exceptionally fine, with customary bark dyes along the sides. Records state that James Cook collected the kaitaka in 1777, on his third Pacific voyage.



Titre d'un Gravure de la Nouvelle Zelande.



An artist abroad

Sydney Parkinson is a key character in Reihana's *in Pursuit of Venus [infected]*.

A young artist, Parkinson was charged with picturing the peoples and places encountered on Cook's first voyage.

He sadly died on the return trip to England, but his drawings were made into engravings that have been widely reproduced.

This engraving shows how carefully Parkinson detailed the Maori man's adornment. He wears a facial moko and his long hair is oiled and coiffed in a topknot accentuated with an ornamental heruheru comb. He wears a pounamupounamu New Zealand nephrite ear pendant and a [rei niho parāoa](#) (link is external), which distinguishes him as someone of importance.



Chief mourner's costume

If you were living in the Society Islands in the late 1700s, and you saw someone wearing this costume coming in your direction, you'd know that: (a) someone important had died and (b) you'd better run away or hide smartly.

When a chief died, the bereaved family would arrange for a group of mourners to grieve publicly for the dead person. The chief mourner of that group would wear this 'heira tupapa'u. Other mourners in the group would be wearing maro, or loincloth, and would daub themselves with soot, often with red and white decoration painted on top.

The group's task was to go around the chief's territory, acting crazy with grief, and terrorising everybody in the process.

The mourners warned of their advance with special shell clappers. They carried weapons and could be expected to use them.



Feathered treasures

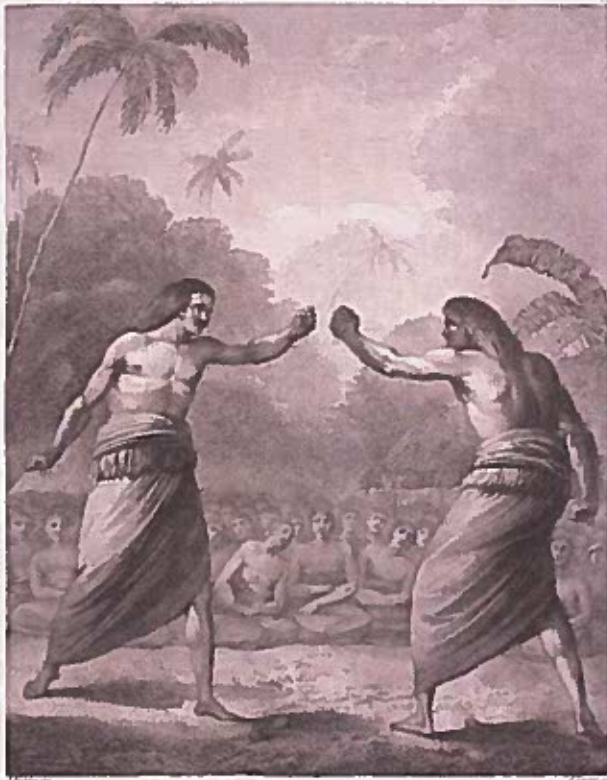
This cloak was worn by Kalani'ōpu'u, a high chief on the island of Hawai'i, when he greeted Captain James Cook on the beach at Kealahou Bay in January 1779. He gave Cook both the cloak and the helmet.

Garments like these were worn only by people of high rank. It was a mark of enormous respect to make such a gift, and to give it in such a way.

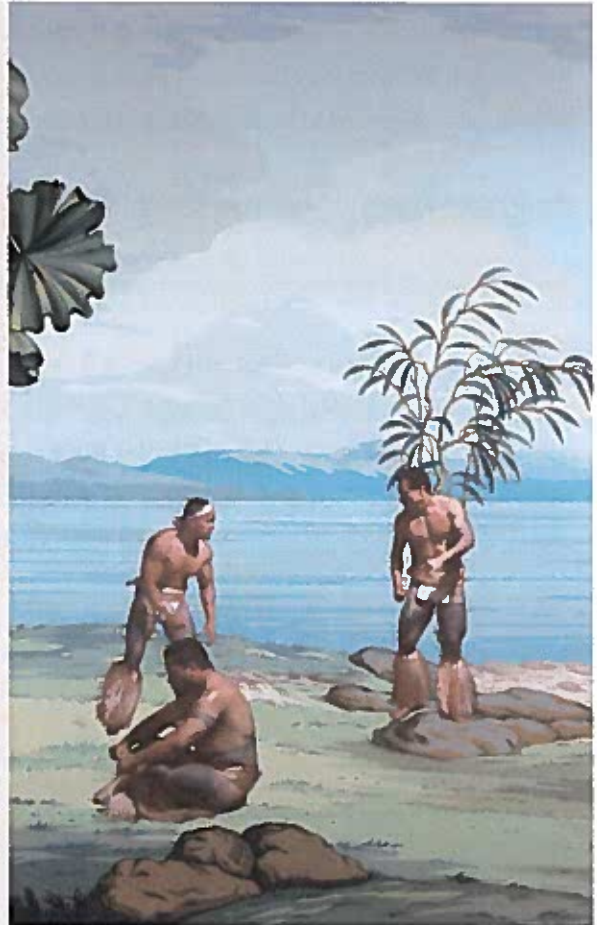
When Cook's expedition arrived at the island of Hawai'i, it became quickly apparent that the Hawaiians considered Cook himself as someone out of the ordinary – believing him to be the incarnation of Lono.

Expedition members were fascinated by the Hawaiians' feathered garments. They were a unique feature of Hawaiian culture. Some 30 cloaks and capes were brought back to England from the third voyage – six of those were laid as presents at Cook's feet.

Cloaks and helmets were beautiful in colour and design and intricately crafted. It is estimated that the richest feather robes, which explorer James Cook likened to 'the thickest and richest velvet', were made of half a million feathers. About 80,000 birds supplying 800,000 feathers were used for the making of a single full-length royal feather cape.



A BOXING MATCH, in HA'PAEE.



A boxing match

This image of boxing on the Ha'apai – a group of Islands in Tonga, South Pacific – was made after a drawing by John Webber, official artist for Captain James Cook's third and final voyage.

Cook was in Nomuka (Annamooka), Tonga, or Friendly Isles, 1–14 May 1777. As part of the reception of Captain Cook, afternoon boxing took place.

Webber's depiction of the boxers is that they are naked to the waist and wear long skirts that reach down over their knees. Their hands are bandaged with cord, and at places on their arms and legs are tattoo marks. Standing with legs apart they have both lifted their left arms, while their right arms are being held behind their bodies.

Just as Reihana looked to images from Cook's voyages to research her work, so too did artists of Cook's time refer to previous drawings for inspiration.



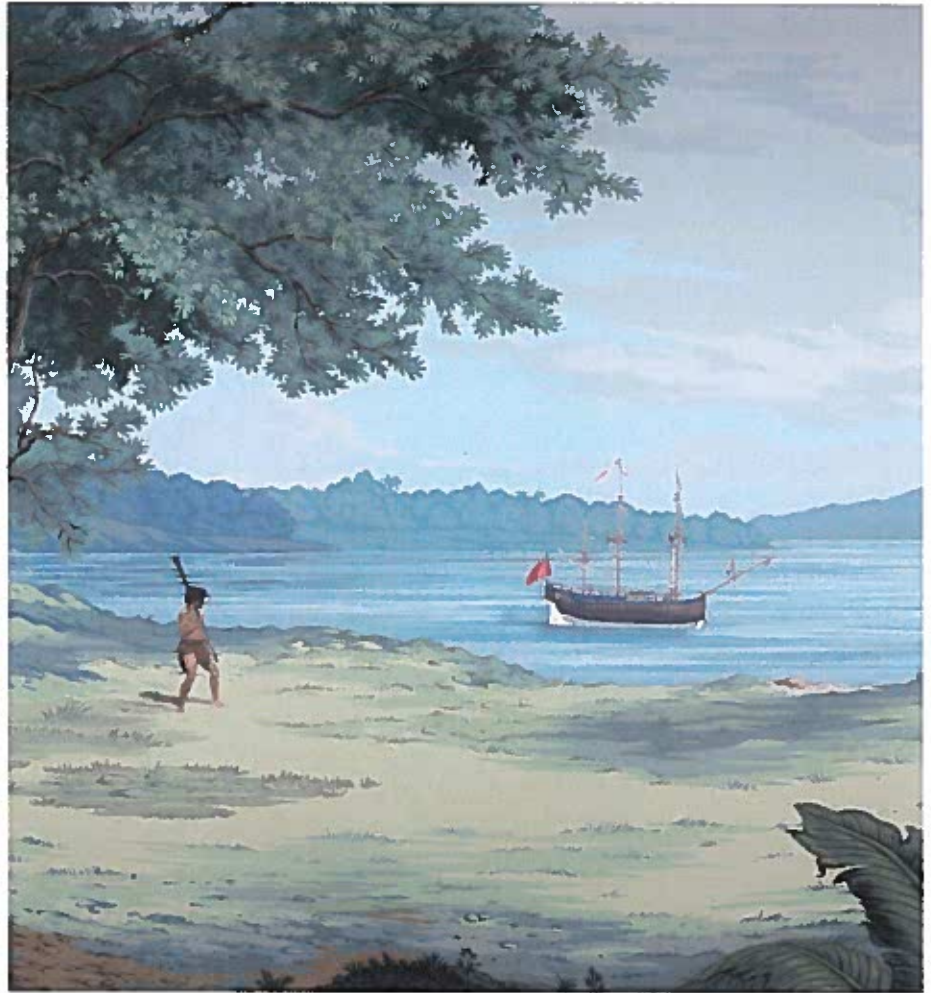
Mats: Utilitarian or ceremonial

This finely woven mat may have been collected in Tonga during the voyages of English explorer Captain James Cook in the late 18th century. However, the colour and patterning of the weaving suggests that this mat is more typical of the islands of Kiribati.

The mat is a natural pandanus colour on one side and features elements that have been dyed dark brown on the other. The decorated side comprises a diagonal grid of squares bordered with natural pandanus. Each square within this grid is further divided into four smaller squares, equal in size but distinguishable from one another by a patterning consisting of alternating horizontal and vertical lines of dark brown pandanus.

In the Pacific woven mats have a number of functions that range from the utilitarian to the ceremonial. For some Pacific Island nations, finely woven mats are exchanged as gifts at important cultural and social occasions such as weddings and funerals.

How many ways can you find Reihana using mats in *in Pursuit of Venus [infected]*?



War clubs

This club, thought to have been collected on Captain James Cook's second or third voyage, has been described as 'A beautiful short War-Club; presumed to be the finest ever brought from the South Seas'. Fighting clubs were the principal weapons of Tonga, Sāmoa, and Fiji. This Tongan club is completely covered with very fine carved decoration, including several miniature figures, and was probably done with a shark-tooth implement.

While beautiful, these were weapons, to be used in ceremonial contexts as markers of status, but more regularly in warfare. What role do props modelled after these clubs play in Reihana's work?

Watch [this episode from *Tales from Te Papa*](#) (link is external) to learn more about fighting clubs of this time.

Left: Maker unknown, ['akau-ta \(club\)](#) (link is external), 1700s, Tonga. Gift of Lord St Oswald, 1912. [CC BY-NC-ND licence](#) (link is external). Te Papa (FE000339) **Right:** Lisa Reihana, *in Pursuit of Venus*



Venus in focus

This is a Gregorian reflector telescope – the type of telescope that Captain Cook and his astronomer, Charles Green, used. These telescopes were invented in 1661 by Scottish astronomer James Gregory. They had two specially shaped mirrors inside to focus the image.

While using these telescopes to observe the transit of Venus across the sun, astronomers noticed that Venus had a fuzzy ring around it. This made it difficult for them to judge exactly when it began to pass the sun, and many of their measurements were inaccurate. The astronomers thought the fuzzy ring was Venus's atmosphere. But it was actually caused by the sun heating up the mirrors in the telescopes!

The telescope is central to *in Pursuit of Venus [infected]*, both in terms of the scientific ambitions behind Cook's voyages, as well as providing a metaphorical lens for looking into the past.

Find out more information about the challenges of European Pacific navigation and the role of astronomy in the Te Papa topic online, [Charting the unknown – European navigation in the Pacific](#)(link is external)



Joseph Banks' 'Grand Tour'

Many of the characters in *in Pursuit of Venus [infected]* were based on historical figures, one of the most charismatic of which was the young gentleman Joseph Banks.

When Banks proposed to take a scientific party on James Cook's first voyage of discovery, his family and friends thought that such a journey was far too dangerous. Why didn't he pursue the usual sort of OE for men of the time – a grand tour of Europe? He retorted that everyone did that. His grand tour would be one round the world.

Such was the stuff of the intelligent, adventurous, and self-possessed 25-year-old, who led his party on board the Endeavour in August 1768, at a cost of about £10,000 (more than NZ\$1.5 million today).

Banks energetically pursued his scientific duties on board the Endeavour, and his journal of the voyage reveals perceptive and humane observations of new peoples encountered and their cultures. Cook entrusted him with the management of trade and relations with local people during shore visits.



Trade and Exchange

Commerce underpinned Cook's encounters in the Pacific. Whenever he and his crew set foot on shore, they exchanged objects, such as nails, adzes, and beads, for fresh supplies of water and food, or taonga. It is possible this is one of five beads Cook offered to five friendly chiefs in October 1869 at Tolaga Bay. Reihana includes scenes that dramatise these encounters, reminding us of the often unequal nature of trade and exchange during that time.

Left: Maker unknown, [Blue head](#) (link is external). Te Papa (ME023319) **Right:** Lisa Reihana, *in Pursuit of Venus [infected]* (detail), 2015–17, Ultra HD video, colour, sound, 64 min. Courtesy of the artist and New Zealand at Venice