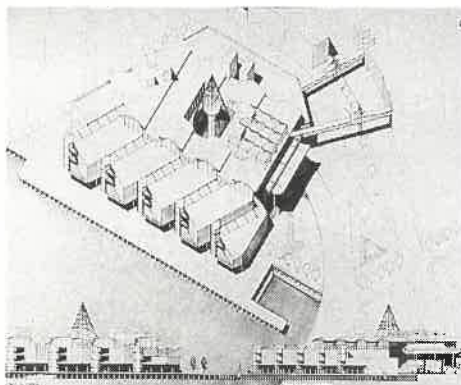
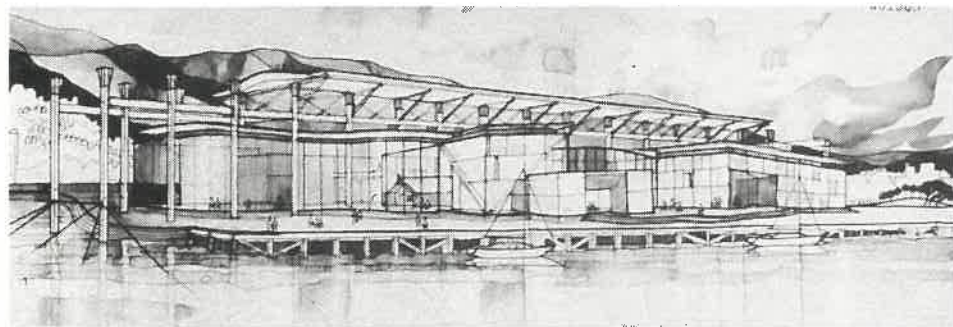


NATIONALISTIC EXPRESSION

What has the competition for the National Museum of New Zealand/Te Papa Tongarewa revealed about architecture in New Zealand? Nigel Cook and John Hunt (p20) discuss the nature of the profession's response to the competition.



Top: Craig Craig Moller Ltd. (1)
Above: Structon Group Ltd. (6)

The national museum competition is the first time for half a century that New Zealand architects have been asked to design a building of national significance. Beyond the interest of who won the competition there are other considerations which are more pertinent to us as architects working in New Zealand. So I am interested in teasing out some of the common themes from the mass of entries — themes that may represent what we do as architects when New Zealand expresses itself through us.

During the competition, I watched and talked to Architects as they worked through both stages. From them I got the briefs and saw the video of the verbal briefing. John Hunt loaned me the slides of the entries and the

notes of his talk on the competition. Two other facts. My father was for a time a Maori pastor and in 1972 I designed an urban marae. The Maori dimension is not strange to me.

The first and most dominant theme among the designs was the use of a broken cluster of shapes as the formal device around which the design was developed. To a degree this was encouraged by the brief; that constant emphasis on bi-culturalism and the four curatorial divisions. But of course a single shape could have been as appropriate. Even those, however, that produced single forms seldom allowed a harmonious balance to come through but rather exaggerated those aspects of the design that leaned towards asymmetry. (24) And even where some harmony was achieved, as in Architect's entry, the great glazed envelope enclosed three distinct shapes.

When I write of broken forms I do not include the repeated use of a single shape (37) or the articulation of a single shape but rather the use of asymmetry (26), jaggedness (15) and scattering (22) that produced a sense of change and restlessness; or the collecting together into a single mass of a variety of shapes. (17 & 6)

We are not apparently a group that finds it appropriate to express a national identity through grand and harmonious single shapes. It is as if in eschewing the clear geometries of modernism and, unable to plunder the past (thank God), as the 19th century and post-modernism did, we have moved on to an architecture of clustered suburban housing or suburban shopping centres. There are many examples around the world to add greater legitimacy to what appears to come naturally to us. Some are very clever in their mannered, fussy, and neurotic inability to let any space just be. (20)

I could put forward all the usual explanations — the expression of violence, or of constant change, or of the atomisation of the society, you name it. All these probably contribute. But I think that beyond those, it is more likely to be something as simple as a quite unconscious use of the architecture that we all, in New Zealand, first become aware of — collections of suburban houses.

The second theme was the use in one form or another — court (8), verandah (17), arcade (12), conservatory (1) — of a secondary enclosed space that was always designed for people rather than exhibits. At least two thirds of the entries assembled their buildings around such open spaces. Usually they were easy and informal, often taking in the left-over space around the

open platform. These high spaces were covered with glass or open, sailing roofs and were sometimes used to give direction and reference to the forms below. (14) As we went into these spaces that the designer chose to put the Maori ceremonial space. I think that this was, for most, probably the correct move. Dealing, as most, with rituals of which they had little knowledge and which in any case were under-determined, some kind of loose-space was an obvious solution. However, now the Maori judges were not satisfied with the approach of most stage one designs.

This use of what I shall call a conservatory (the word takes us away from enclosure of classicism and firmly into the 19th century and modern technology) over a loosely grouped forms below is, if one wants to talk about this competition expressing a New Zealand architecture, coming close to the nub of the matter. It is a form that has lingered in the background for years.

About 1955 the Architectural Centre in Wellington built an experimental house on a Maori ridge. It was not considered to be a success, the courtyard being gusty and the house expensive. In the 60s Goldwater used the form for the Auckland Synagogue and more recently in *ARCHITECTURE New Zealand* Thompson suggested the court as a formal idea worth pursuing in this country (*ANZ* 1989, Dec 89). I agree, except that the open form as recently used by architects is necessarily primitive given the things that are possible using modern glass, electronic heating and air-conditioning. Using these will increase our ability to modulate our environment and to create new types of spaces. Some of the possibilities were prefigured in some of the designs for the museum.

There was a significant third grouping (about a quarter), that looked for a bi-cultural expression by using a pre-European shape such as a fish-hook (10) or spiral (31). A few extended this to call up map shapes of the Wellington harbour and the Maui legend.

Firstly, one is always suspicious of the extent to which the user of a complex building can perceive the plan through the shapes of the building and therefore be aware of any meaning that may attach to the plan. The plan gains and gives power in a single volume like a church, but here I don't think so.

But beyond that intimate perception when viewing the building, which is an architectural problem, there is the question of whether the use of another culture's symbols in this way can ever be successful. There is no doubt that people may use another's forms. Lutyens' use of Moghul and Hindu forms in the Birla House is only a repeat of what the ancients themselves had done earlier with whatever they liked in Hindu architecture.

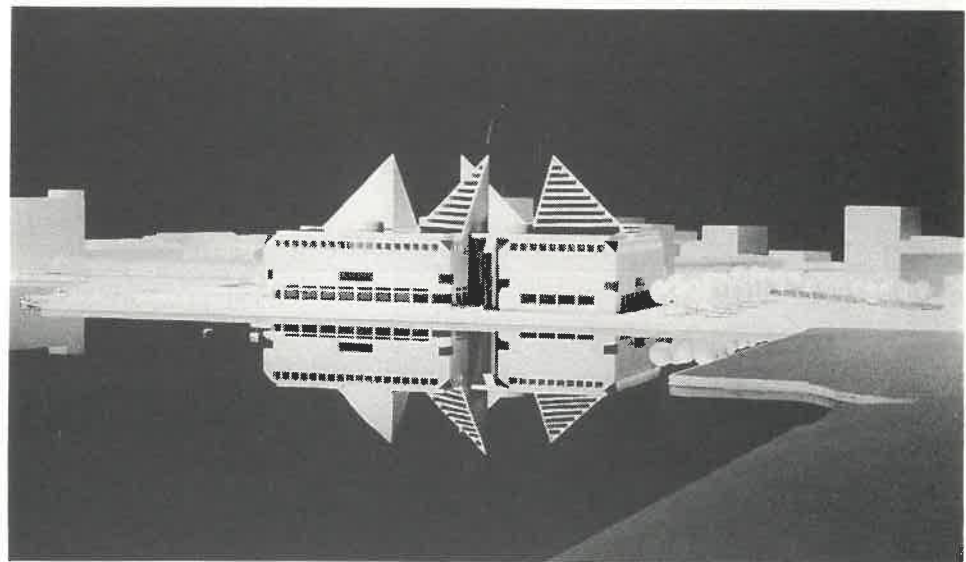
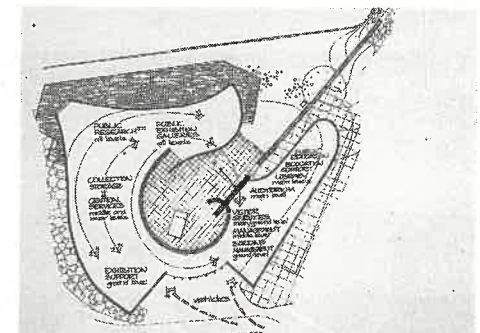
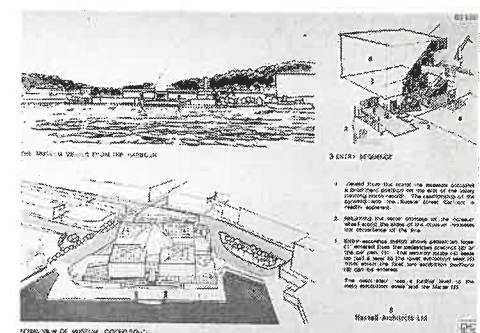
But this is the appropriation by the architect for their own use. The transformation was being attempted with the fish-hook form of quite a different kind. It is exactly the same as trying to talk to foreigners in a language which you don't understand — like the sound of. They are likely to laugh at you, or if the occasion is critical, you are laughing at them and take offence. Your goodwill or otherwise is lost in the foolishness of the project.

So it is with the fish-hook and Maui. What is a legend to us, shorn of most original meaning, is to a Maori an ancestral myth still containing power. And who knows if a fish-hook is always appropriate for the ceremonies in a museum? Who would have thought that a laid down feather meant bad luck for one tribal group or even that, for some, it was a woman's symbol not a man's?

So in New Zealand we not only have three cultures needing to understand each other, but also within those cultures quite large differences which can easily trip one up.

I feel as I write this that I have the Sydney Opera House and, say, Ronchamp snapping at my heels yelping "what about us?, what about us?, we did it". The difference is that these are inventive transformations within the same high culture. Mana status was not involved.

I don't have the space to develop the theme here but Flaubert in his journals suggests an algorithm of transformation which I believe is wholly relevant. He states that any art object is a symbol carrying an

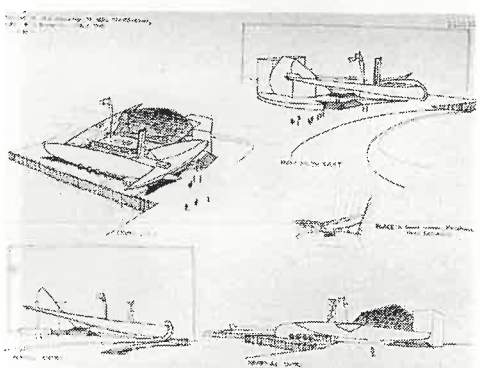


Top: Hassell Architects Ltd. (8)
Middle: Ampersand Ltd and Denton Corker Marshall Pty Ltd. (10)
Above: Comeskey Grant Ltd and Cameron Chisholm & Nicol. (15)
Below: A Paterson and Works Consultancy Services. (18)

idea using a technique. The best example I know of this is the way Le Corbusier took the masonry shapes of podium-portico-pediment (which is the classical symbol of the universal idea that a building has a base, a middle, and a top), and transformed them into the reinforced concrete shapes of pilotis, light cladding and roof garden which are such a powerful symbol of 20th century culture.

The whole nature of 1990 Maori culture as it affects architecture needs discussion. We have pitifully few Maori architects. There were no Maoris at the evening in Auckland when the five finalists explained their schemes. We have moved aside to make room for women students. It's about time we both moved aside to make room for Maori students.

Their culture, it seems to me, is at the moment a construct that is rapidly growing and mutating. It is not at all fragile but is in fact immensely strong and vibrant. The acute powerlessness of their lower socio-economic position often hides this fact. Nothing will now marginalise it, there is



Catalogue of Candidate's Submissions

STAGE 1

- 1 Craig Craig Moller Ltd
- 2 Warren & Mahoney Architects Ltd
- 3 Gray Hesselin & Baxter
- 4 Communications Design Consultancy Ltd
- 5 Lowe Architects
- 6 Structon Group Ltd
- 7 McCoy & Wixon and Stephenson & Turner Ltd
- 8 Hassell Architects Ltd
- 9 Cumulus
- 10 Ampersand Ltd and Denton Corker Marshall Pty Ltd
- 11 Boon Philip Cox Group Architects
- 12 Pascoe Linton Sellars and York Rosenberg & Mardell Partners
- 13 Hoadley Budge Olphert and Wenn Zerafa Meneks Howsden
- 14 Architectel International (Murray West)
- 15 Comeskey Grant Ltd and Cameron Chisholm & Nicol
- 16 Charles R Thomas & Associates Ltd
- 17 Jasmex Group Ltd
- 18 A Paterson and Works Consultancy Services
- 19 Calder Fowler Styles & Turner and Ove Arup & Partners
- 20 Hames Sharley International and Morphosis
- 21 Roger Walker Ltd
- 22 Athfield Architects with Gehry & Thompson
- 23 Peddie Thorpe & Montgomery Ltd
- 24 Willard/Harrison & Partners and Robert Matthew Johnson Marshall Group

- 25 Devine Erby Mazlin (NZ) Ltd
- 26 Peddie Thorpe & Aitken
- 27 David Armstrong and Ahrends Burton & Koralek
- 28 Swan Railey & Associates and Wallace Roberts & Todd
- 29 Michael Dysart & Partners Pty Ltd
- 30 Architecti (Cook, Hitchcock, Sargisson and Bowes, Clifford Thompson, John Scott and G Ross Jenner)
- 31 Beaven Gasson Royal Wilkie
- 32 Daryl Jackson Pty Ltd and Tony Bartley Architect
- 33 KRITA Ltd and Travis Partners Pty Ltd, Moffat Kinoshita Inc, and Lord Cultural Resources Ltd
- 34 Tse Group and Douglas Cardinal Arch Ltd (Canada)
- 35 Mike Barnes & Associates with Nikken Sekkie (Japan)
- 36 Fiona Christeller Architects Ltd
- 37 Jackson Teece Chesterman Willis Pty Ltd, Skidmore Owings & Merrill; Works Consultancy Services
- 38 The Sinclair Leezer Rizzi Partnership

STAGE 2

- 39 Architecti
 - 40 Boon Philip Cox Group Architects
 - 41 Jasmex Group Ltd
 - 42 Cardinal-TSE Architects
 - 43 Warren & Mahoney Architects Ltd
- THE SELECTED ARCHITECT**
- 41 Jasmex Group Ltd

◀ too much guilt, goodwill and insecurity in the white community.

That having been said, however, I do think that the failure of the first stage entries to produce satisfactory spaces was as much a failure of the Maori brief writers to find a way of expressing their needs as it was a failure of the architects to design adequately for those needs. In the second stage brief when the Maori needs were expressed in terms of universal global mythology (not just Greek and Maori as the Architecti writer stated),



Above: Jaxmax Group Ltd. (17)
Right: Peddle Thorpe & Aitken (26)
Below: Athfield Architects with Gehry & Thompson (22)



the problem of understanding became easier.

Jasmax's positioning of the Maori section in its own undetermined space, (in a special place separate but attached to the rest of the museum), seems in hindsight to be an obvious solution. It is one, however, which to me has no specific connection to Maori culture but does have a lot to do with their ongoing political situation.

A fourth group — perhaps three quarters of the entries — presented drawings that were below the standard appropriate to a competition for a building of this importance. Considering that the purpose

was to find an architect not a building I would have thought a show of graphic competence would have been a top priority. A number seemed trapped in the student fantasy that a strong idea will get you through and the drawing does not matter (18). Well that is rubbish. Anyway there were no strong ideas though some seemed to be confused between having one idea and having a strong idea. A lot of entries must surely have been ruled out the moment the judges looked at their sheets — bad drawing, clumsy and inelegant layout, space wasted on irrelevant information, or grossly exaggerated space given to a minor aspect — a parking layout of a street map. There is no doubt that this says something about us as architects but whatever that is, someone else can say it. It just depresses me.

I have often thought about the influence of incompetence on our architecture. I once mentioned this to an academic who began to talk of provincialism. The two are not synonymous but both must be major influences.

The competition was to choose an architect, we were told over and over and over again. That was the bureaucracy making sure they did not lose control. I worked for the government for seven years. I watched building after building ground down into ordinariness as the departmental committees changed their minds, or the personnel of the committee changed, or they altered the brief, or decided they didn't like the shapes, or found a new function that needed space, or reduced the budget . . . and they are all such nice people.

The museum process so far does not inspire confidence that things have changed. There were two written briefs during the competition as well as a verbal briefing and we were told all this was only tentative. I don't envy Jasmax their task. And don't expect the finished building to look anything like Jasmax's competition entry.

Finally, there are on the site two small wharf buildings. Given the nature of the project, failure to preserve these somewhere, somehow, would be barbarism.

Nigel Cook is an Auckland-based architect.

BICULTURALISM, NATIONAL IDENTITY AND ARCHITECTURAL SYMBOLISM

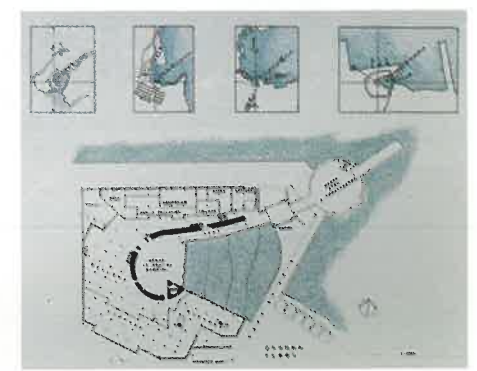
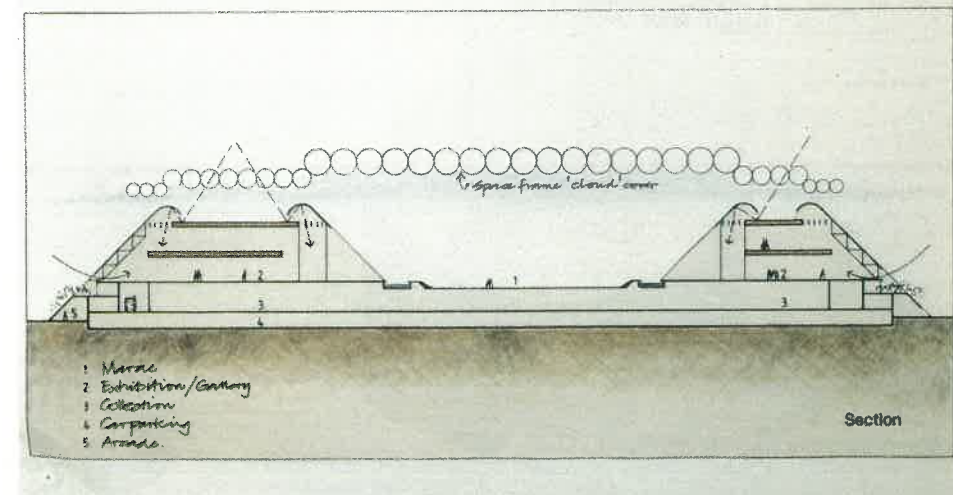
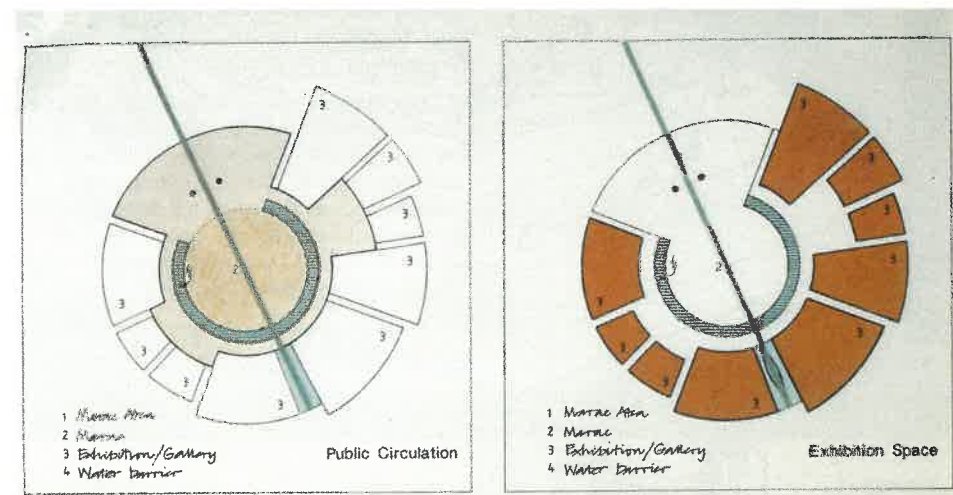
Regardless of the future of the Museum of New Zealand: Te Papa Tongarewa (and unlike Paul Walker's guest editorial ANZ July/Aug, if only for the realisation of the visions of so many associated with the project), there are a number of inferences that may be drawn from events to date. These relate to both the way in which the architect selection competition was devised and the 38 design concept submissions. I wish to point to just those elements that indicate the place accorded architecture (and architects) within the project, and the nature of the profession's response to this challenge.

Not only does the museum present a demanding functional program, but its architecture is required (according to briefing documents) to be a powerful expression of the total culture of New Zealand, a statement of national identity, a building which must house the very soul of this country in an invigorating and exciting way, always capable of moving with the times.

A tall order? Yes. Impossible?. Maybe. But that the briefing documents should view such matters as the legitimate concern of architecture, I see as positive. That they should do so without as much as a hint of how these aspirations might be architecturally achieved, is doubly positive. For if there is one criticism which could be levelled at the otherwise exemplary brief for the Canberra Parliament competition it is that it came perilously close to ordaining a preferred architectural response to the difficult question of symbolism and national identity. In the museum project the scope for interpreting such lofty aims was unlimited, and included the possibility of a critique of the very notion of "national identity" itself.

The concept of *biculturalism*, accepted as central to both the museum as institution and its architecture, provided architects with one approach to qualifying the idea of national identity. Yet a majority of submissions chose to draw back from such difficult and unresolved issues and seek refuge in the certainties of functional program or harbourside setting. In these schemes if there was an implicit position it was that architecture need not concern itself with the cultural issues that are tied to the idea of nationhood, past, present or future.

However, the question of the future nation and the museum is of particular concern, for the project locates itself at the very edge of cultural developments in this country. The shape of such developments remains uncertain, yet the museum is expected to anticipate, or perhaps to initiate them. This suggests the possibility that architecture may become a kind of crucible in which the agents of cultural change might come together — a "laboratory of culture", not all of it under glass slides. Such a view would stand in contrast to the more conventional argument that architecture can (or should) do no more than reflect established cultural realities. Comfortable though this position may be, it is easy to ▶



Top: Michael Dysart & Partners Pty Ltd. (29)
Middle: Architelier International (Murray West). (14)
Left: Beaven Gasson Royal Wilkie. (31)

see how adherence to it would place one at a profound disadvantage in conceiving of a significant architecture for the museum.

It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that those schemes which avoided cultural issues of national significance did so because their architects viewed these issues not just as problematic but rather as not legitimately the province of architecture. Quite rightly the Museum Project Development Board and its advisors do not share this view.

A second group of design proposals chose to link questions of national identity not to

emerging cultural patterns and to the experience of life and culture in this country, but rather to engage in the quest for some unequivocal symbolic architectural statement. Such a design approach offers a superficially attractive short-cut to an architecture for the museum and one that exploits a simple yet flawed logic: namely that the "unity of concept" by which the museum as institution has been described should be reflected in an equivalent unity of its architecture.

In every instance the singular architectural forms resulting from the imposition of some dominant symbolic motif proved to be just this — an imposition which constrained rather than liberated the subsequent development of the museum architecture. Principal sources for such symbolism included the long white clouds of Aotearoa (29), the landforms shared by Maori and Pakeha alike (34), a maritime setting translated into an abstract geometry of sails (15), and so on. Such approaches overlook the possibility that this country's different cultures might share (or aspire to share) more than their physical habitat.

Similar difficulties could be traced in those schemes organised around the forms of either of the dominant cultures. While the Eurocentric Museum was clearly an inappropriate model, a number of attempts were made to exploit forms significant to Maori culture — the spiral form of the koru (31), the curve of Maui's fishhook (10), or the museum cast in the image of a giant meeting house (13). In every case the strictures placed upon the shape and organisation of museum spaces became surprisingly introverted — the consequence of a singular building form imposed upon an architectural program which implied a formal recognition of its major parts (16). The temptation to do so can be recognised elsewhere, notably in the recent international design competition for Alexandria Library — here the first and second place schemes make a clear statement of architectural volume in the face of programmatic

complexity. But such oversimplifications need to be resisted.

The possibility that an architecture for the Museum of New Zealand might be of multiple rather than singular forms raises the question of the basis upon which such formal distinctions should be made. Many designs were tempted into demarcation of the four museum departments into which the total collection is to be organised. However, this four-fold structure is intended more to serve the organisation of the museum, while the architecture needs to support the broader curatorial objective of innovative mergings of collections presently separated. Potentially more significant than this departmental structure is therefore the three-fold framework in terms of which the concerns of all parts of the museum might be expressed. These are *papatuanuku* (the land to which we all belong), *tangata whenua* (those who belong to the land by right of first discovery) and *tangata tiriti* (those who belong to the land by right of treaty).

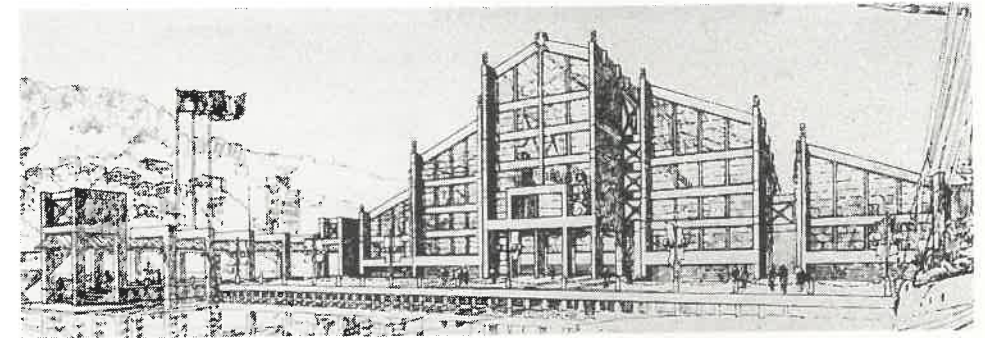
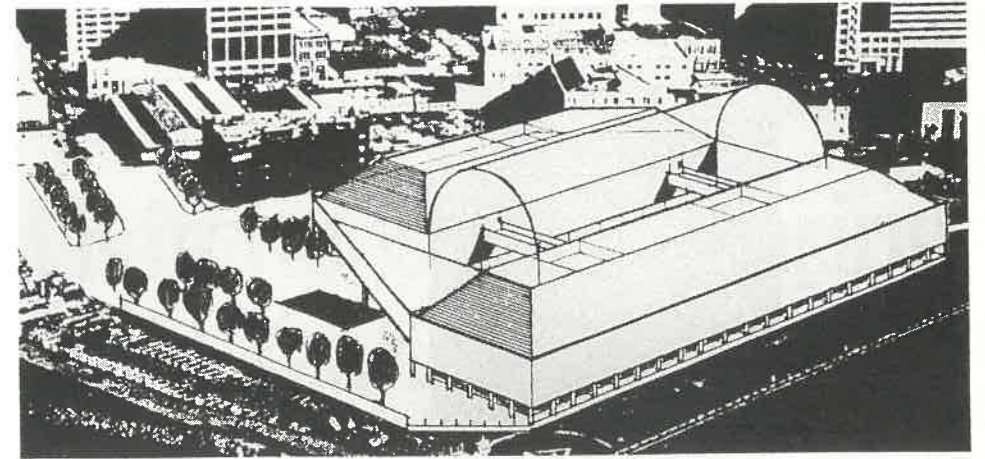
This "bicultural" framework was adopted in the final version of the museum institutional concept presented to the competitions and I suggest, holds the key both to the museum as institution and its architecture. And here the programme for the museum brings us back to the issue of national identity and how this might be symbolised.

The case for biculturalism as the public policy is now well established and cannot (as Paul Walker has suggested) be seen simply as a new jingoism. Richard Mulgan, in his recently published book *Maori, Pakeha and Democracy* observes that the term "multicultural society", while undoubtedly accurate, is also used as a means of denying the separate recognition of the Maori. As Mulgan points out, although this country contains representatives from many ethnic groups it contains only two peoples: Maori and Pakeha. Both find their identity here. Both are at home here, and unique to this country. Other groups, insofar as they see themselves as ethnically distinct, do so in terms of a people and a culture which is based outside New Zealand.

Thus the idea of "biculturalism" does not deny the existence of culture other than Maori and Pakeha — it merely denies them, and their culture, special recognition. Biculturalism and multiculturalism need not be mutually exclusive terms, therefore.

In the context of the museum project competitors were asked to "demonstrate relevant insight, understanding and conceptual ability" in response to the question of biculturalism. This called for some attempt to define, from an architectural viewpoint, what the term might mean. Few submissions attempted such a definition, with the result that they were emptied instead into an architectural emphasis upon one side of the cultural equation or the other, or a neglect of both.

Studies by Thelma Rodgers (described in her undergraduate thesis for the Bachelor of Architecture degree at the University of Auckland) have established the importance of encounter (symbolic and real) between the two cultural traditions as a key element of a bicultural relationship. Drawing from the



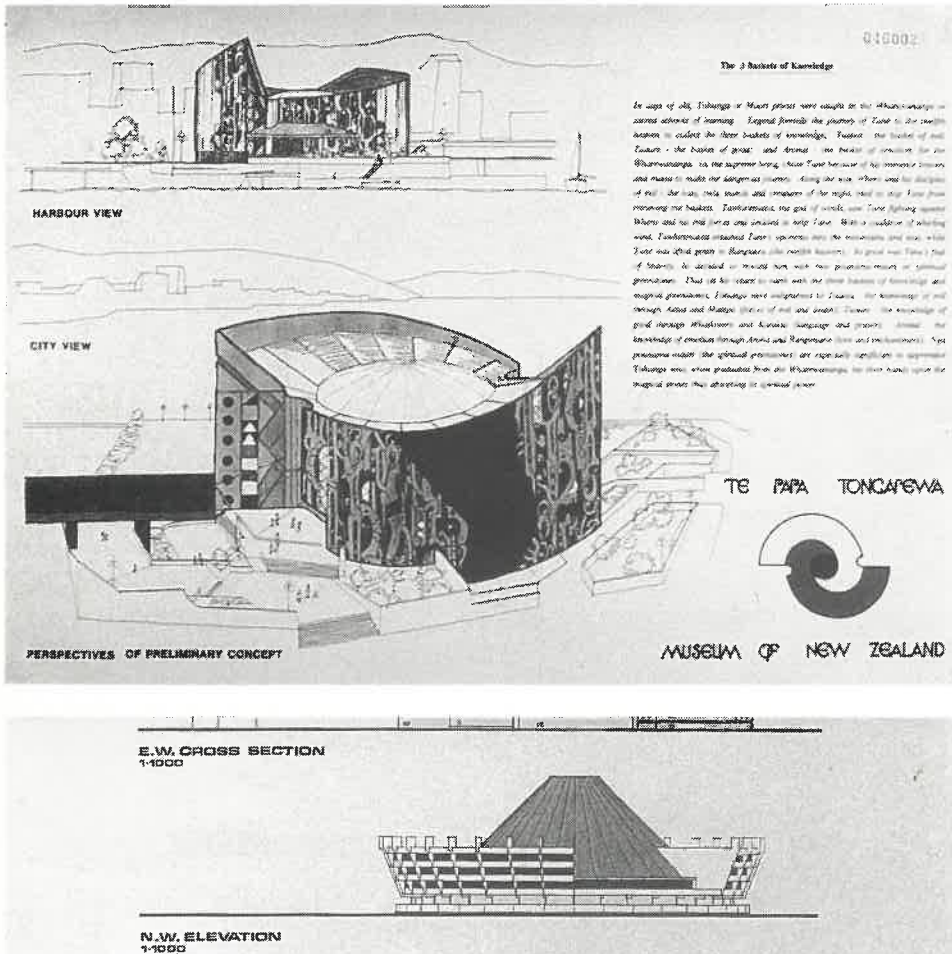
Top: Pascoe Linton Sellars and York Rosenberg & Mardell Partners. (12)
Middle: Hoadley Budge Olphert and Wenn Zerofa Meneks Howsden. (13)
Below: Hames Sharley International and Morphosis. (20)

anthropological studies of Anne Salmond (also of the University of Auckland) Rodgers suggests that ideas of encounter and meeting, threshold and edge, provide one approach to a museum architecture that might embody bicultural aspirations and thus become distinctively of this country. It is interesting to note that both the Jasmx and Architecti schemes included public spaces of meeting and encounter as key elements of their architectural concepts, while the Jasmx design was explicitly organised around the three-fold distinction between *papatuanuku*, *tangata whenua* and *tangata tiriti*. These two schemes suggest that the idea of biculturalism is not as resistant to architectural interpretation as some would suppose.

Several points should be made by way of conclusion. It would be regrettable if the architectural "community" (the profession, the two schools of architecture, and architectural associations) did not fully exploit the resource which the design concept material generated during both stages of the Architect Selection competition represents. There is a commitment to architecture in its broadest sense, in all of this work (and particularly in the work of the finalists) which is especially significant in a country that rarely invites its architects to collectively demonstrate such commitment.

There is also the opportunity for continuing debate about all of this work to inform future architectural directions here. For as the English commentator Alan Irvine observed nearly 20 years ago (in connection with the design competition for the Burrell Gallery in Glasgow), rejected competition schemes have often done more to advance the cause of architecture, and to indicate new directions, than many competition winners.

John Hunt was an assessor for the Architect Selection competition and is a senior lecturer in architecture, University of Auckland.



Top: Athfield Architects with Gehry & Thompson. (22)
Middle: Charles R Thomas & Associates Ltd. (16)
Below: Alexandria Library.
Right: Jackson Teece Chesterman Willis Pty Ltd; Skidmore Owings & Merrill; Works Consultancy Services. (37)

