

## Punatoto – The Life Force

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A large-scale Maori carving is mounted over the front entrance of the Reserve Bank of New Zealand's Wellington office building.

The carving is named 'Punatoto – The Life Force' after an ancestor of Te Atiawa who lived for a time in the Wellington area known to Maori as Whanganui-A-Tara. The carving was commissioned by the Reserve Bank as part of New Zealand's commemoration of 150 years since the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi and was unveiled on 5 October 1990.



The work was done by Tuhoe carver Pita Rua Lagan.

Punatoto is in three panels, representing inter-related, balanced forces of nature moving towards a focal point of security and comfort.

Timber for the centrepiece came from a swamp on the Wairau Plains, while timber for the two side panels came from Tongariro National Park.

The central figure is Maui, the mythological hero who fished up the North Island. Wellington is recognised by Maori as the 'head of the fish of Maui'. The figure of Maui also represents Papatuanuku, the Mother of Tane, who in Maori cosmology provided totara wood for carving from the forest of Te Wao-Nui-A-Tane. The area above the carving represents Rangi, the Sky Father.

The stylised figures on the top of the panels depict parirau, the wings of a bird providing ruruhau, or shelter, from Tawhirimatea, the God of the Winds. The stylised pattern immediately below is Moananui A Iwi, a sea of people converging from both sides to the central ancestor, who will provide shelter, comfort and advice. The symmetrical circular pattern represents the ceaselessness of the waves of Tangaroa, the God of the Sea.

The sea monster, or Taniwha, depicted on each panel, is the life below Tangaroa, and identifies with local legends, such as that of the Taniwha called Hataitai, which lived in the waters of Cook Strait, or Raukawa.

The end of the Taniwha represents Nga Tai E Wha, the sea tides. The extreme ends represent Toroa, the Albatross, or bird life above the sea.

In-depth indentations signify moving from Te Ao Tawhito, the age of stone, into Te Ao Marama, the age of enlightenment.

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