

GBHS students' whakairo blend the traditional and unexpected



HORS DU PACIFIQUE: Maui and the stingray on his line explode out of the square as the Maori deity hooks the North Island out of the sea in Sacha De Wancker's part carving, part assemblage. From France, Sacha knew nothing about whakairo before he joined matua Kahurangi Faloa's classes at Boys' High last year. "It was hard to start with then I got to really like it," he said. "Mr Faloa helped me. I did the first sketches and he helped me with the traditional pattern and the meaning of the details." Inspired by the work of artist, heritage advocate and teacher Cliff Whiting, the work has a lot of colour in it, Sacha said.

The traditional, and unexpected variations on the traditional, featured in a showcase of Gisborne Boys' High students visual art and whakairo (carving) last night. Sacha De Wancker from France displayed an energetic work that was part carving, part assemblage and depicted Maui hooking the North Island out of the sea. Chinese student Jiayi Du's carved relief included calligraphic characters that stood for "long-life" and "blessings" but, like Sacha's work, blended Maori motifs with the imagery.

As inscribed in a square panel at the foot of his large work, Tairawhiti Services Academy student Ngametua Cummings' carving was dedicated to men who served with the Maori Battalion. The work was characterised by a striking pattern of ridged, curving veins called pakatu. The pakatu design represented everything the men went through, said Ngametua.

"The bloodshed, the coming home and the ones who didn't."

The red, poppy-like circles of the figure's eyes acknowledge those who lived with post-traumatic stress syndrome (PTSS) while the manaia-like forms in the figure's legs represent the men standing side-by-side, said Ngametua.

More pictures from the exhibition will be in Thursday's arts pages, The Guide.