

Buried but not gone

"There are some things which are above art and which should remain sacred,"
Catherine Morin-Desailly, French MP

History

May 2010 The French parliament has voted to return the mummified heads of at least 15 Maori warriors to New Zealand.

The heads, taken by European explorers in the 18th and 19th centuries, were on display in several museums in France. The decision ends years of debate and is part of a wider discussion in the US and Europe on the restitution of artefacts taken centuries earlier.



The museum of Rouen Maori

The museum of Rouen had a tattooed Maori head on display since 1875. Before the re-opening of the museum in 2010, the decision was made that the head should return for a decent funeral. To still preserve the head and the tattoos, the head was scanned. However the problem remained on how to be able to show the scan. Our French partner organization VirtuaSense proposed using our Digital Heritage Presenter

MuseumSolutions in the French Senate

In September 2010 the official return was celebrated in the French Senate, attended by the chairman of the French parliament, the ambassador of New Zealand and representatives of the Maori.

VirtuaSense and Museum Solutions were asked to brighten this event by bringing the Digital Heritage Presenter to the French Senate and show the virtual Maori head.

Visitors were allowed "hold" and study the digitized Maori head using the Digital Heritage Presenter.

Maori tattoos are a sign of courage and strength

Critics had voiced concerns it might set a new precedent, putting other collections at risk.

Pita Sharples, the New Zealand minister for Maori affairs, said the decision was a "matter of great significance".

"Maori believe that, through their ancestors' return to their original homeland, their dignity is restored, and they can be put to rest in a peace among their families," he said.

The heads will be sent to the Te Papa museum in the New Zealand capital, Wellington, and then returned to tribal groups to be buried.

In the process the heads will be lost.

Digital Heritage Presenter explained

In the Digital Heritage Presenter users are given arbitrary objects in their hands and when they move the object the digitized artifact on the 3D screen mimics this. The Digital Heritage Presenter tracks the movement of the objects in 3D.

Controlling 3D objects become as simple as picking up a block and rotating it in the hands. Anyone can do it.

Added to this are additional tools like pointers and magnifying glasses. And they work exactly like you would expect. The devices are made of simple materials and do not contain any electronics. Replicas of the original art can also be used for the interaction.

However this is not a requirement.



Mrs. Rosemary Banks
Ambassador to France of New Zealand

The Opportunity

Whether art is stored in depot, destroyed, on loan or had to be returned, it is still possible to show it everywhere around the world. Without costly transport costs and the risk of damage!

Museum Solutions can help you with Digitization, Storytelling and the technologies to show and let people interact with it in a way they have never seen before.



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