

Cultural Guidelines for WOW Designers

The questions below have been developed in consultation with cultural experts, to help guide you toward a thoughtful, respectful, and original design process when being inspired by cultural influences other than your own.

Original Creativity

- What of your personal, ancestral or cultural stories / design language can you draw on?
- How does your lived experience inspire your design?
- Is referencing another culture essential for your design, and why?

Consider Your Intentions

- Why are you incorporating elements from another culture?
- Is it your story to tell?
- How does this approach respect the culture and align with your artistic goals?

Research and Understand

- Have you researched the cultural context and significance of the elements you're using?
- Who can you consult for advice or insight?
- How may the cultural community perceive your work?

Avoid Stereotypes

- Does your design simplify or misrepresent the culture?
- How does it avoid tokenism or harmful clichés?
- Are you showcasing the depth and diversity of the culture?

Inspiration vs. Imitation

- Are you creating original work inspired by the culture, or copying existing designs?
- Could the elements you're using be protected intellectual property belonging to another artists, group or culture, or may it be sacred?
- How does your work reflect your own voice?

Seeking Permission

- Do you need to seek advice or permission from cultural representatives?
- How will you credit or compensate them for their expertise?
- Are you ready to adapt your work based on feedback?

Credit the Source

- How will you acknowledge cultural influences in your submission?
- Have you documented your research and consultations and referenced them in your entry submission?

Māori Art and Culture

Māori are the tangata whenua, the indigenous people of Aotearoa New Zealand, where WOW is based. Māori art (ngā toi Māori) and design is inspiring to many of our local and global designers. Māori designs are deeply rooted in tradition (tikanga), imbued with spirituality (wairua), and life force (mauri) and serve as expressions of whakapapa (ancestral lineage), cultural identity, and the interconnectedness of people, land, and the spiritual realm.

If you are considering referencing Māori culture in your garment you should consider all the provocations above as well as these specific guidelines below:

- If reference to Māori culture is a fundamental part of your design, we strongly encourage you to engage with Māori cultural experts to seek guidance or permission, if you are based in Aotearoa it may also be appropriate to seek advice from the mana whenua (local tribe) of your area.
- If you want to access this expertise, consider what koha (contribution) you might offer in return for the expertise you seek.
- Avoid using sacred Māori symbols, such as tā moko (traditional tattoos), in inappropriate contexts or as purely decorative applications.
- Clearly credit Māori culture and, if appropriate, the specific iwi (tribe) or hapū (sub-tribe) from which your inspiration is drawn.
- Overall, remember that some symbols and stories are not yours to share or reinterpret without explicit approval. Recognise that Māori art is not an aesthetic; it is an embodiment of mātauranga Māori, the knowledge and worldview of Māori people.
- If you need initial advice from WOW, you can contact us, and we can work with our networks to guide you on the steps we recommend you take.

Nā mātou iti noa nei,

Te whānau o WOW.