

TE MOEMOEĀ NO IOTEFA

(The Dream of Joseph)



A CELEBRATION OF PACIFIC ART AND TAONGA

Features interviews with 10 contemporary Pacific Island artists

SARJEANT GALLERY, WANGANUI. DECEMBER 15, 1990 – MARCH 3, 1991

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(The Dream of Joseph)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Sarjeant Gallery gratefully acknowledges the following for the loan of taonga for the exhibition.

INSTITUTIONS

Auckland City Art Gallery, Auckland Institute & Museum, Betty Wallis Gallery, Fisher Gallery, Manukau Community Foundation, Pacific Island Educational Resource Centre, University of Auckland – Main Library, Auckland; Hawkes Bay Cultural Trust, Napier; Taranaki Museum, New Plymouth; Te Arawhanui Learning Centre, Wanganui Regional Museum, Wanganui; Manawatu Art Gallery, Palmerston North; National Art Gallery, National Museum, 33 1/3 Gallery, Wellington Public Library, Music & Fine Arts, Wellington.

INDIVIDUALS

Tom Burnett, Peria; Gretchen Albrecht, Annie Bonza, Ron Brownson, Tai Carpentier, Denis Cohn and Bill Vernon, Fatu Feu'u, Matarina George, Kuki Airani Angaanga Tupuna Trust, Miles Hargest and Sue Gee, Sally Gordon, Malcolm Harrison, Robert G. Holding, Sale Jessop, Louis Johnston, Mrs Marama Erutea Lineen, Iosefa Leo, Ruth and Barry Lett, Toi Maihi, Myra and Eric McCormick, Graham McGregor, Tai Ngaata, Terry Nicholson, Mick Pendergraast, John Pule, Mrs Te Aukata'i Mii Richard, Mrs Te Kura Tauma'a Smyth, Jim Vivieaere, Auckland; Ioane Ioane, Ngatea; Don and Shari Cole, Robert Leger, Jenny Tutavaha, Tina Wirihana, Rotorua; Roger Smith, Napier; Peter Lambert, Filipe Tohi, New Plymouth; Pani Hemaloto, Russell Marshall, Brian and Cathy Walls, Anne Pluck, Wanganui; Rose Griffin, Nelson; Mark Lander, Christchurch; Lyle Peninsula, Dunedin; Johnny Peninsula, Invercargill; Michel Tuffery, Honolulu, Hawaii.

In particular the gallery acknowledges the assistance of Jenny Doole, Sandy Leyland, Masina Maher and Ruth Fala. Fale Fono construction – Taliaoa Vaotu'ua (supervisor), Iosua Anae, Filipo Leugaimafa, Pea'lo Iosefo, Hay Vagana, Asa Ta'ala. Valerie Carson and Rose Evans, Natural History Unit, National Museum, Janet Davidson, Ethnologist, National Museum. Kay Noble, Archivist, Wanganui Regional Museum. Mick Pendergraast, Assistant Ethnologist, Auckland Institute and Museum. Chris Arvidson Smith, Registrar, Roger Smith, Director, Hawkes Bay Cultural Trust. Etuati Ete, Pacific Island Officer, Gary Nicholas, Executive Officer – Te Toi Waka. Christina Barton, Assistant Curator, Auckland City Art Gallery.

SPONSORSHIP

We pay special tribute to Te Toi Waka – for their very generous sponsorship of the catalogue, support of contemporary Pacific Island artists contributing to this exhibition and their ongoing support of Pacific art and culture in this country.

Pitzac Wood Enterprises Ltd and B. Bullock and Co Ltd — provision of timber for the Te Moemoea No Iotefa dome installation FALE FONU.

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front cover:
Te Aukata'i Mii Richard,
Te Moemoea No Iotefa design,
(Genesis 37 : 5-11) tivaevae manu,
2460 x 1970mm.
Collection: Mrs Richard

back cover:
Kapa, detail, Hawaii, eighteenth century,
Cook's third voyage (attributed),
hand painted pattern. 1280 x 600mm.
Caretakers of taonga: National Museum (B17597).
Photo: National Museum.



Thomas Andrew, Dancing Women c. 1895, 253 x 202mm.
Collection: Ron Brownson.

INTRODUCTION

In 1989 Rangihiroa Panoho, our curator, gathered an exhibition titled *Whatu Aho Rua* (weaving together of traditional and contemporary pieces of taonga) as an introduction to *Te Ao Maori*, an exhibition which I had been organising with a number of Maori artists. The companion exhibition received considerable attention and *Whatu Aho Rua* has provided a valuable early model for shaping *Te Moemoea No Iotefa*, which will fill our total exhibiting space for the next three months.

Rangihiroa has spent much of this last year developing the vision and format of *Te Moemoea No Iotefa*, sorting out its scope, selecting works, and negotiating loans and interviewing artists. For the Sarjeant Gallery the project extends our committed involvement with the communities that people this country. The South Pacific, with its diverse cultures and their traditional arts and cross-cultural interaction, offers us an incredibly rich meld of material and images. In world terms it becomes increasingly important for the Gallery to be responsive to the art and cultures relevant to being in the South Pacific. The material gathered in this exhibition provides a lively and visual expression of the cross-cultural interaction.

I draw attention to the acknowledgments, on the inside cover of this catalogue, to all who have contributed taonga, advice or other resources to make the exhibition possible and wish to express my appreciation for the overwhelming support we have received.

In particular I would like to thank the local Polynesian community and all their supporters from further afield who have directly assisted with the exhibition installation and the activities that will extend its cultural experience.

Finally I wish to thank Rangihiroa for his vision, commitment and achievement of the project, his wife Adrienne for her support to him through it and all of the rest the gallery staff for assisting in the practicalities of bringing *Te Moemoea No Iotefa* (*Joseph's Dream*) to life.

Bill Milbank

Director

Sarjeant Gallery

BACKGROUND

Research on *Te Moemoea No Iotefa* began in late 1989. The South Pacific is Aotearoa's most immediate historical, geographical and cultural context. This exhibition seeks to examine and explore the visual side of this context and the ways in which artists in this country are exploring it. In the following visual section four strands of art activity are represented.

1. The wealth of material culture from the Pacific Islands found in museums, libraries, private collections – taonga such as historical writing, photographs, tapa, tivaevae, weaving and carving.
2. Work currently being produced by Pacific Islanders living in New Zealand such as weaving and tivaevae.
3. Work by palagi artists in this country (e.g. Fomison, Shepherd, Lynn, Lett, Hanley, McMillan, Adams and Jowitt) which constitutes a response to Pacific Island subject and motif.
4. Work by contemporary Pacific Island artists utilising a Western aesthetic – to draw on and interpret their particular island cultures.

Te Moemoea No Iotefa is an assemblage of these various strands. The first three areas are seen as the context for the recent development of contemporary Pacific Island art in this country which essentially is the focal point of both this catalogue and its accompanying exhibition.

Ten contemporary Pacific Island artists responded early on in 1990 to an invitation to be involved in the exhibition. The interviews/text at the back of the catalogue following the visual section contain their responses to issues which can be read against the backdrop of illustrations.

Rangihiroa Panoho

Curator

Sarjeant Gallery

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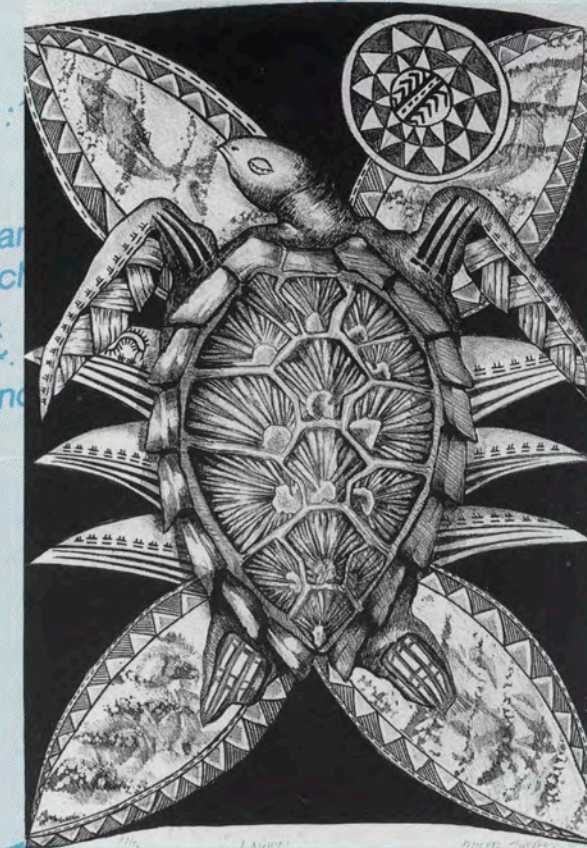
Introductory Essay: Rangihiroa Panoho

7–19

Images: Our Pacific Context

20–40

Text: Interviews with Contemporary Pacific Island artists



Michel Tuffery, *Laumei*, 1988,
lithograph, 713 x 478mm.
Collection: Manawatu Art Gallery,
Palmerston North.

Top: Tapa beater, wood, 45 x 305 x 40mm,
Tapuinikau, Warea, Taranaki.
Caretakers of taonga: Taranaki Museum,
New Plymouth.
Owners: Nga Mahanga hapu, Taranaki.

TE MOEMOEA NO IOTEFA

You enter the dim interior of the Pacific Hall. The sounds of your feet on stone carry around a high ceiling space.

A cold winter afternoon at the Auckland Museum. Outside you stand between exposed pillars – neo classical architecture and a view of the harbour. Inside are objects from Oceania. Carvings, painted barkcloths, clubs, masks and costumes are stashed behind glass in old display cabinets – controlled environments. At other locations round the country such taonga quietly reside in the dark, on storeroom shelves or carefully rolled with acid free tissue, within bleached calico. A stored culture.

When seen these things speak. You speak excitedly of a world at our backdoor – Te Moana nui a Kiwa – the huge expanse of ocean behind Rangitoto, the numerous islands dotted like stars across vast blue. Inlays of whale tooth in star patterns strewn across the hardwood patina of Fijian headrests and clubs. Stars on masi.

These taonga transport one to another world, a past of legends and feats unsung – here. A past enveloped in a type of mystery. To a time when Maui, not Cook, fished Aotearoa out of the unknown. To the journeys from Hawaiki. How did we get here? The surging of waves. Manilua – a tapa motif on Fijian masi – birds circling around fish out at sea. Karakia before the stars, wind and moon ensured your arrival here. Eke, eke. Eke panuku. Hue e – Taiki e. The coming of the Maori. Man at the mercy of elements – a painting by Goldie and Steele. This is a material culture fashioned in the sublime.

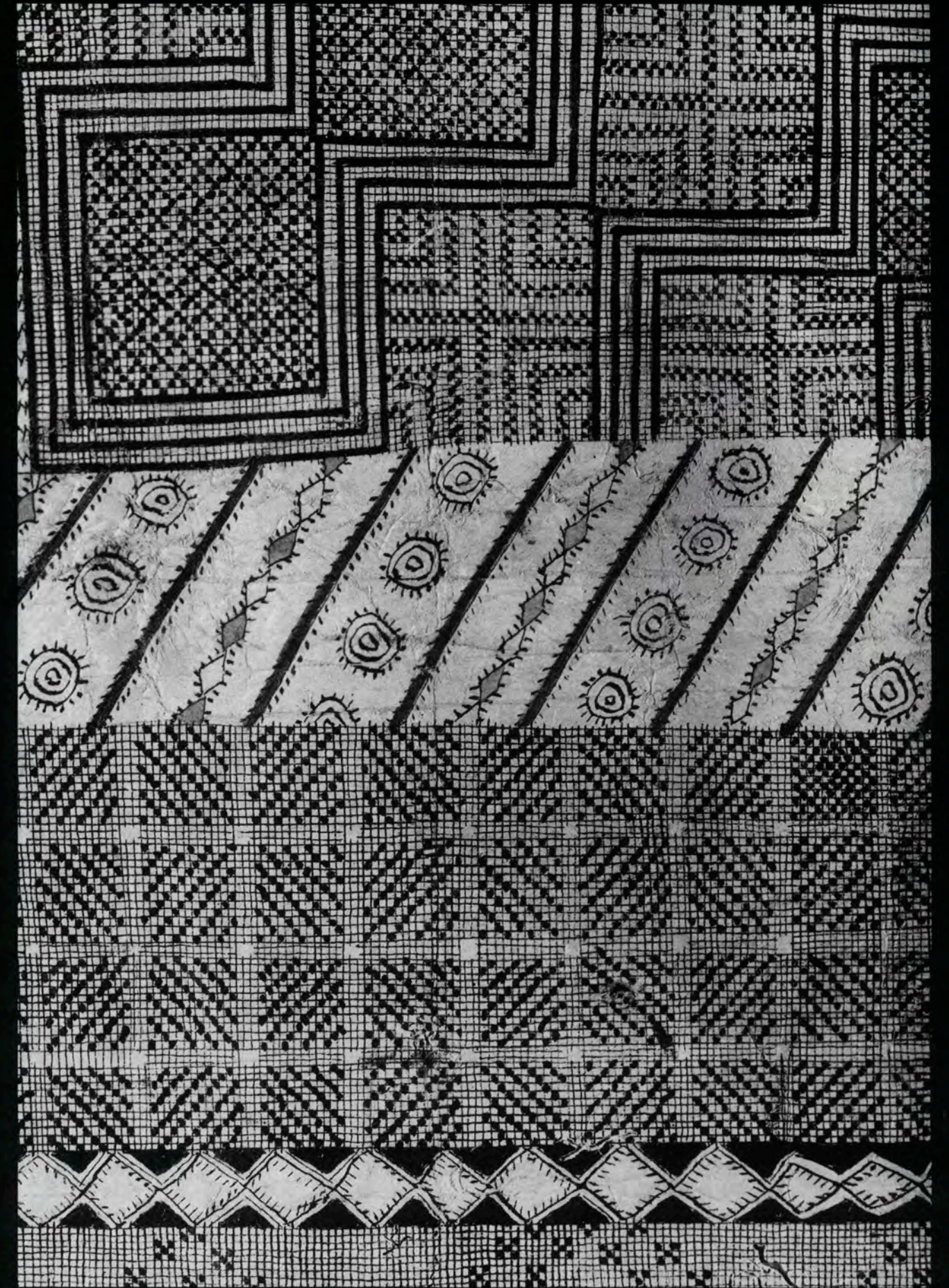
Turn to the left after the entrance foyer, navigate oneself to the Pacific map. Every New Zealander should take this lesson in geography. Wall illustration – the Polynesian triangle. At a touch, bright yellow lights set on fire various Pacific Islands. Roots. The ocean scaled down to a manageable human size. This is our homeland. Ngataangia, Savai'i, Savaiki, Havaiki, Hawaiki. 'Avaiki, Ra'iatea. Hawaiki nui, Hawaiki roa, Hawaiki pamamao. 'Is this where we embarked from? Not simply Portsmouth and Plymouth? There is some history that needs rewriting' said the elderly Professor.

Meanwhile back at the upper end of the Polynesian triangle cultural similarities are being more elaborately examined. A green wordscreen and speaker at the Bishop is busy pumping out information on language parallels, around the Pacific. One is drawn into a web of intricate connections. One marvels at the amount of common information dispersed over such vast distances. Information required to replant the culture. What stories and skills, did they lock away in their memory, guarded knowledge, recited knowledge? These taonga in museums are the tangible remains of the spread of those ancient cultures and their collection and recording by the palagi.

Today a voyage to Rarotonga or Papeete is only a flight booking away. These taonga have come alive with the influx of large numbers of people from Samoa, Tokelau, Tonga, Fiji, Niue and the Cook Islands. A second arrival from modern day Hawaiki. Landings in Mangere, Otara, Ponsonby, Grey Lynn and Porirua – Pacific Island suburbs. We are enriched by the presence of these stunning and vibrant cultures.

One remembers growing up with Tongan neighbours. Neatly planted rows of taro down one side of the house. The root. The smell of pale pink/purple taro boiling in the big metal pot with coconut creme. Plastic lei around Catholic pictures in the living room and sometimes huge woven mats on the floor. The drooping leaves of banana trees outside the kitchen window. Bamboo canons at Guy Fawkes. Big extended family meetings around Christmas and mass in a strange language. Samoan fine mats wrapped around waists and jandals on hot church Sundays. Congregational singing behind stained glass windows. Loosely hanging tapa used like wallpaper around bedroom walls. Rich rust brown patterns stained onto a strange fabric – ngatu.

Samoaan cricket in a Grey Lynn park in summer. Heavy body tattoos, lavalavas and people, always lots of people. Minutes away through cracks in a fence Cook Island tivaevae manu and taorei can be seen drying in a local backyard. A garden of designs and colours feature on these quilts – lying flat under the shade of some apple trees. There are new designs – carnation, chrysanthemum, pansy, rose, orchid, grape and arum lily – the

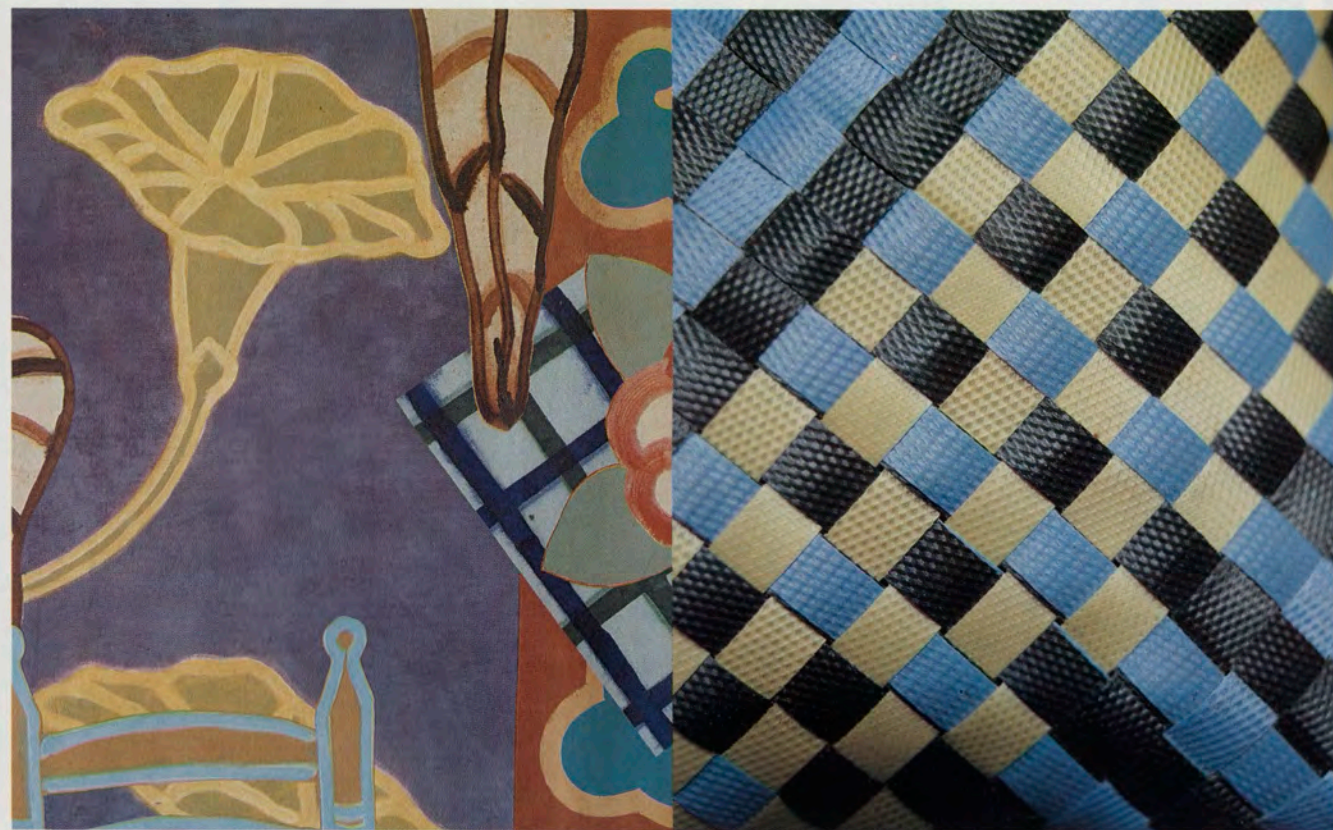


Barkcloth, detail, Futuna Islands, 1580 x 980mm.
Caretakers of taonga: National Museum (FE 111).
Photo: National Museum.

local equivalent of taro, breadfruit and frangipane. Senses, colour, patterns, smell. An evening walk down a frangipane lined street – even in downtown Honolulu the pungent aroma fills the air.

Down at Freemans Bay, Niuean women are busy cutting and assembling large amounts of different coloured plastics. Fertiliser, lunch bag wrappers, drinking straws, polybubble lei. Industrial wrapping plastic band is woven skilfully into mats, kete and hats. The umbilical cord with the islands has not been severed. The traditions are still there – the visual vocab has simply been extended.

There are the same old rhythms in the patterns. Colour heightens visual activity and senses. A dispersement of coloured squares in alternating arrangements. Solid bars of bright yellow, blue and red. Aitutaki percussion on a 44 gallon drum. Mondrian's painting *Boogie Woogie* — late night Thursday on K Road.



Barry Lett, *Hanly's Chair*, 1981, detail, acrylic on calico with diluted P.V.A., 2005 x 1990mm.
Collection: Pat and Gil Hanly.

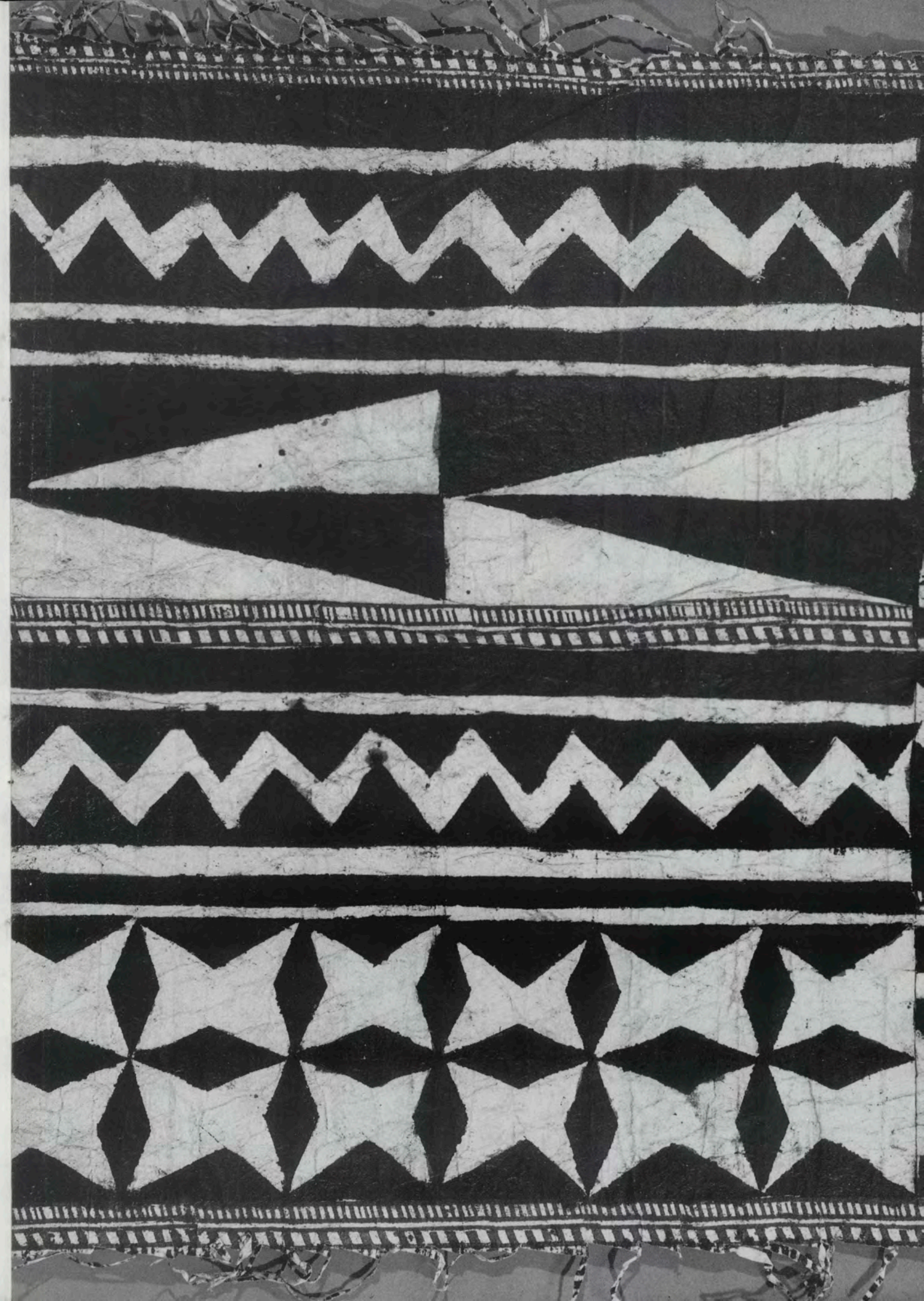
Niuean kete, detail, New Zealand, industrial plastics, 580 x 415 x 130mm.
Collection: Gretchen Albrecht.





Michel Tuffery, Tianigi, 1988, woodcut on tapa cloth 765 x 540mm.
Collection: National Art Gallery. Photo: National Art Gallery.

Previous page (clockwise from top left):
 Filipe 'Onevela Tohi, Hakalo (Coconut Scraper) 1989, totara, steel, coconut husk, 835 x 199 x 257mm.
 Collection: Peter Lambert. Siapo mamanu, detail – pandanus motif, Western Samoa, diameter 895mm.
 Collection: Myra and Eric McCormick. Tivaevae manu, detail, rose pattern, Cook Islands, casement cotton and
 embroidery thread, 2010 x 2380mm. Collection: Jim Vivieaere (family heirloom). Tivaevae manu, detail, orchid
 pattern, casement cotton and embroidery thread, 2585 x 2585mm. Kuki Airani Angaanga Tupuna Trust, Otara.
 Collection: Matarina George.





Fatu Feu'u Stained Glass Windows.
Collection: Graham McGregor. Photo: Gil Hanly.

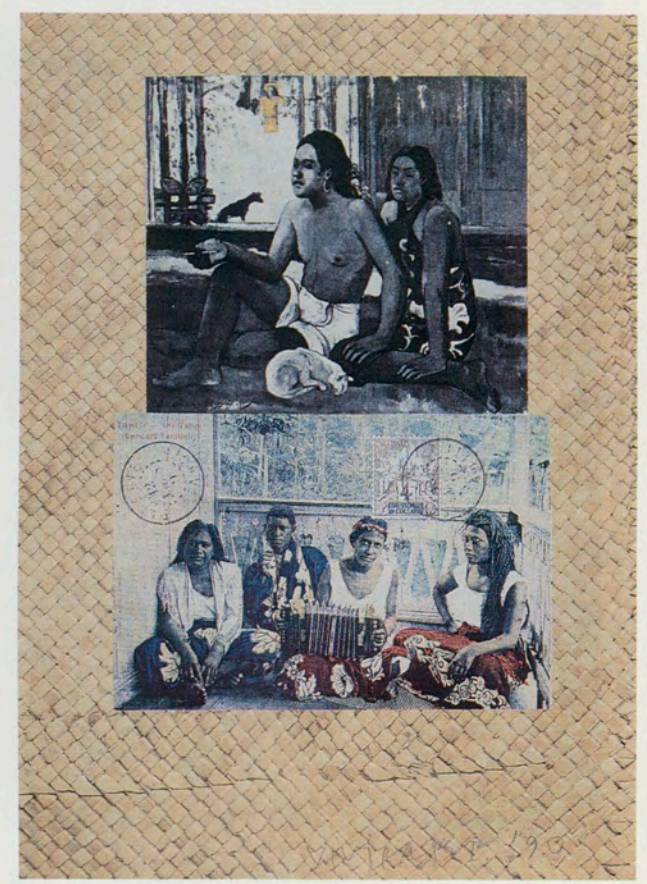
Previous page: Masi, detail, Fiji, 3480 x 580mm.
Caretakers of taonga: National Museum (FE 269). Photo: National Museum.



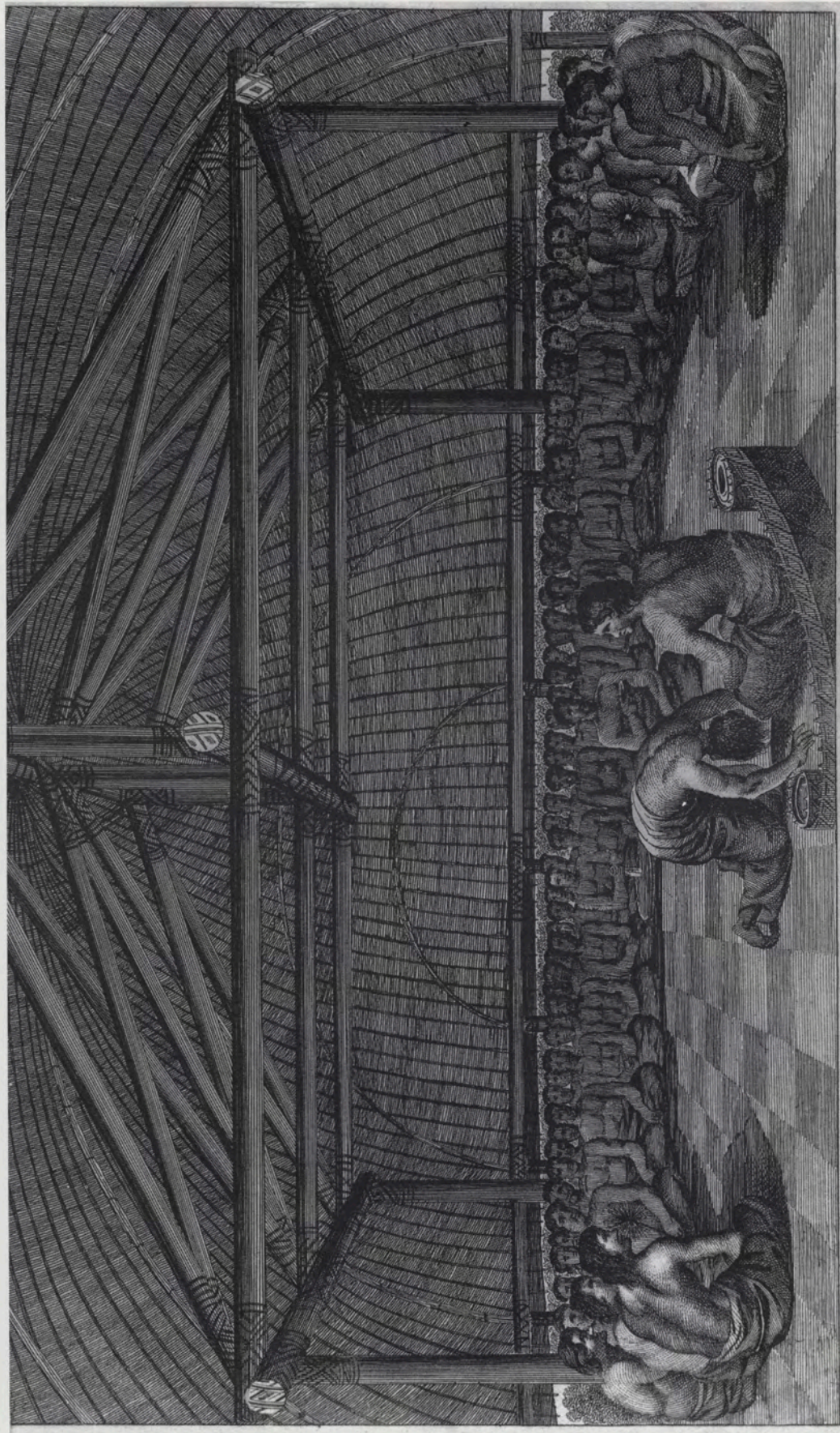
Tom Burnett, Taravao, 1988, screenprint, 563 x 750mm.
Collection: Artist.



Glen Jowitt, Ngatangiaa, Haircut Ceremony,
Rarotonga, Cook Islands, 1982,
cibachrome photograph, 260 x 390mm.
Collection: Sarjeant Gallery, Wanganui.



Jim Vivieaere, 6 Tahitians, 2 in Leningrad, 4 in
Papeete, 1990, collage – colour xerox,
405 x 285mm.
Collection: Rangihiroa Panoho.



POULAHO, KING of the FRIENDLY ISLANDS, drinking KAVA.

Unknown after John Webber, Poulaho, King of the Friendly Islands, Drinking Kava, engraving 200 x 343mm. Photo: Auckland City Art Gallery.



Melvin Webb, Pacifica Magnifica, 1982, watercolour on paper, 760 x 1670mm. Collection: Sarjeant Gallery.



Top: Barkcloth, detail (dugong motif), Solomon Islands, 1650 x 670mm.
 Caretakers of taonga: Wanganui Regional Museum.

Bottom: Barkcloth, detail, Samoa (attributed), 1540 x 1870mm.
 Caretakers of taonga: Wanganui Regional Museum.



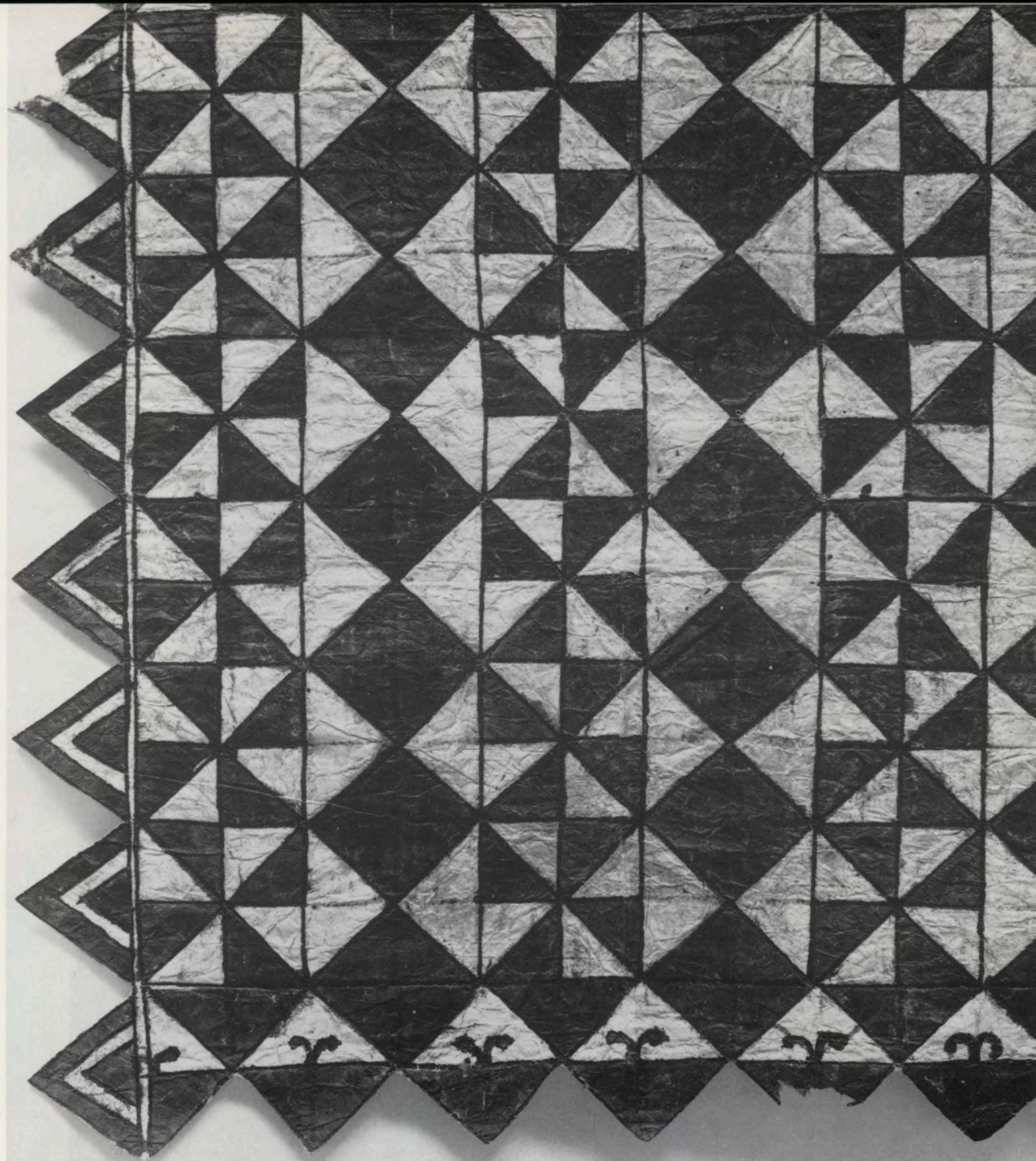
Niuean lei, detail, New Zealand, coloured plastics.
 Collection: Sally Gordon, Gretchen Albrecht.

fakaue kehe
matua ha kua hoko
mai kehe
Aho nei

ne fanau au he limagofulumaua tau kua mole, mo e koe fanauaga he matua taane
haaku koe vahajoto he veliveli he fua lalolagi moe laa. Kua fakahigoo ko Polenesia.
mai he maala Simala he vao kua logona e leo he haaku a matua Fifine ne pehe kua kai e
au e tau mena mitaki oti he lalolagi moe e kua logona foki e namu oela ne hahaiari oti, e tau
mena he matakavi na ne fata atu kehe maaga ko Liku, he maga hala ata. Kua veveheua e motu
kehe ha laua a tau magafaga kehe toto ne kua aalo e au e tau vaka ne ua, taha ne seg i lalo he
heata he laa, taha ne uli ki lalo he mahina, ne leveki e au a laua tokoua, koe tau mahani
kua tatau, ka ko e ailelo ne kua fakatai kehe kalase ko e tufugatia he laa. koe
mahakitaga he fuaki ka ko e tugaane he lapatoa makauho. Ne pehe au, koe
heigoo e mena kua tupu ko e Lekia, ne kua nakai fai tagata ne iloa koe heigoo
e tau, tau ia. Lanu Lauvuti i lalo he puhala tu sea, mo e lanu uli i loto he faioaga kili
uli. Kua tutu ki mua he maala, melehi ha maua. Ko e tau lauulu he haaku matua
fifine kua tutala mo e matagi, koe haana a leo koe haaku Matutakiaga mo e
Atua, Petē ni ne kua fakatonu au kehe tau akau mo e pehe kua mohe au kehe
agaaga he haaku kapitiga. ne maeke he magafaga haaku ke to e tau sega
akau i loto he gutu he manū lele, mo e fakapuloa haaku tau manatu ha
ko au koe tupua nofo he lalolagi kiliiku mo e kua lata ke fakatukuogo.

J.PULE

John Puhiateau Pule, Liku, 1990, acrylic on canvas, 1850 x 2593mm. Collection: Artist.



Ngatu, detail, Tonga, 1660mm x 1770mm.
Caretakers of taonga: Hawkes Bay Cultural Trust.



Mathias Kauage, Pilot with Aeroplane, 1979, screenprint, 720 x 530mm.
Collection: National Art Gallery.
Photo: National Art Gallery.



Ngatu, detail – bicycle motif, Tonga (c. 1890s), 2135 x 2045mm.
Caretakers of taonga: Hawkes Bay Cultural Trust.



Masi, detail, Fiji (attributed), 480 x 6840mm.
Caretakers of taonga: National Museum (FE 7727).
Photo: National Museum.



Barkcloth, Solomon Islands (attributed), 2180 x 590mm.
Caretakers of taonga: National Museum (FE 7738).
Photo: National Museum.



Masi, detail, Fiji (attributed), 720 x 4000mm.
Caretakers of taonga: National Museum (FE 7749).
Photo: National Museum.

INTERVIEWS

The following text has been drawn from interviews made with artists during 1990. Dialogue covers areas considered important in assessing the development of Pacific Island art in this country.



Thomas Andrew, Samoan Chief, c. 1895,
253 x 202mm. Collection: Ron Brownson.

Iosefa Leo

BIOGRAPHY

Born: Letogo, Upolu, Western Samoa, 1963.

Lives: Auckland, New Zealand.

Education: Vaimauga Junior High School.

Work: Banana, taro plantations, Letogo and a cattle farm, Sugavailele, Upolu.

Travel: Emigrated to New Zealand in 1987.

EXHIBITIONS

1990 *Stone Symposium*, Western Springs, Auckland

1990 *New Pacific Artists*, Proba Gallery, Auckland

1990 *Beginnings: Pacific Peoples Pottery*, Maota Samoa, Auckland.

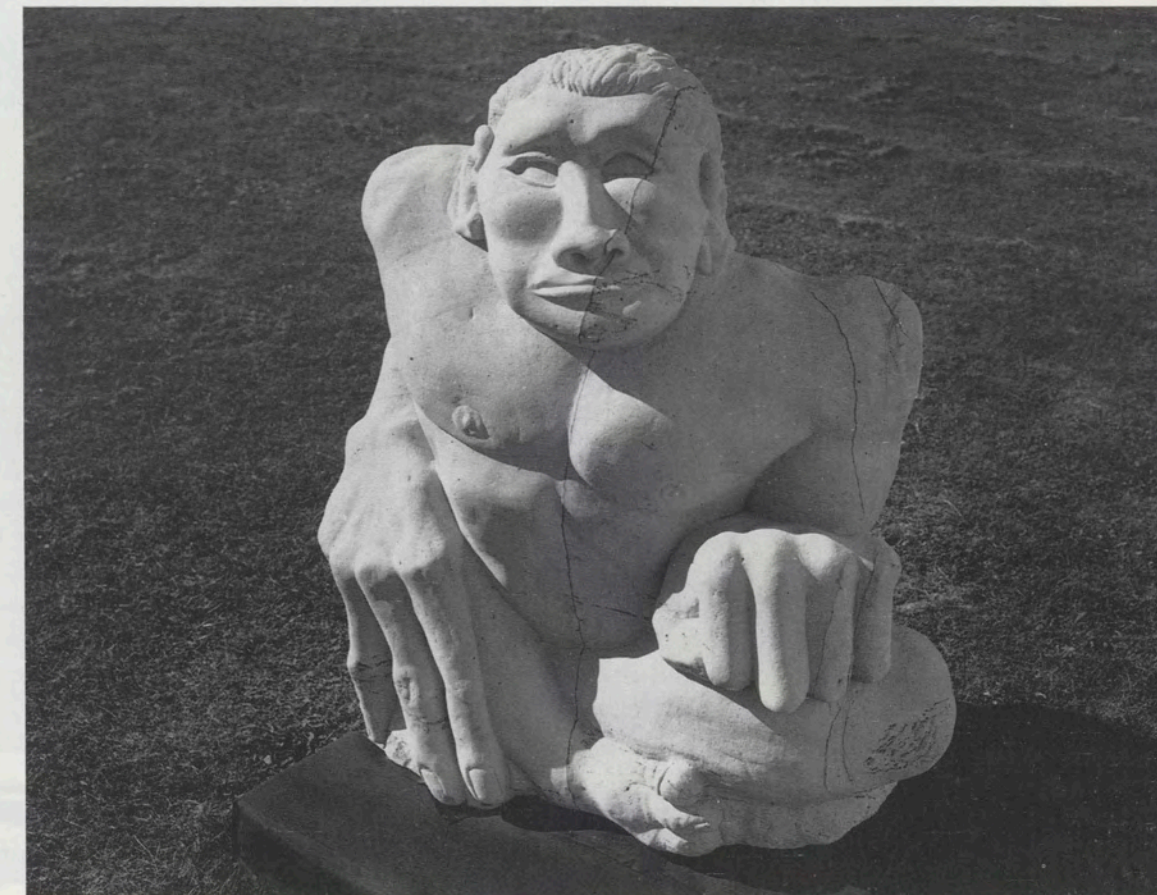
STATEMENT

“O a’u ma la’u fa’atagata. Se’iloga ’ou te va’ ai muamua i le ma’a ma lona tu mai, ma ona foliga, ona ’ou mafaufau loloto loa lea i se ata e fa’auiga i ai foliga o le ma’a. Fa’atau atu a’u tala i tala fa’ale Tusi Pa’ia, tala Fa’a Samoa, alaga ’upu ma tagata ta’uta’ua.

Fa’atusa e ao ona ta i o’u lagona. ’Ou te fiafia tele i la’u galuega. ’Ou te le fiafia ile talanoa, na ole musika ou te fiafia i ai ile taimi o a’u galuega.”

“It’s me carving the figures. First I look at the stone as it stands; the shape, and I concentrate, to feel the image, the meaning in the form of the stone. I refer to the stories of the bible, of Fa’a Samoa, the proverbs and the legendary people.

I carve what I feel and perceive; all that is part of my life. I am very happy carving. I don’t like to talk – it’s only the music I like while I am working”.

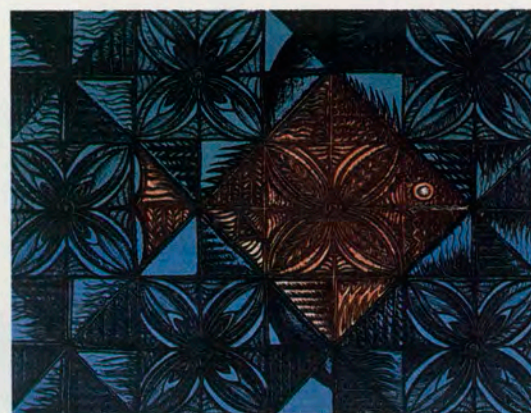


Iosefa Leo, Matai, 1990,
hinuera stone,
1190 x 1110 x 650mm.
Collection: Artist.

Fatu Feu'u

BIOGRAPHY

Born: Poutasi Falealili, Western Samoa, 1946.
Lives: Auckland, New Zealand.
Education: Samoa College, Western Samoa.
Work: Design and colour consultant for textile company.
Director, Tautai Art Gallery. Part-time art tutor,
Manukau Polytechnic.
Travel: Emigrated to New Zealand in 1966. Australia and
U.S.A., 1989.



Fatu Feu'u, Fia Laui'a, 1987,
lithograph, 540 x 700mm.
Photo: Polynesian Press, Auckland.

EXHIBITIONS

- 1983 *Manukau Series I*, Massey Homestead, Manukau, Auckland
- 1984 *Spinning Frontier*, Gallery Pacific
- 1985 *Manukau Series II*, Massey Homestead
- 1986 *Lithographs*, Tautai Gallery, Maota Samoa, Auckland
- 1987 *Oil Paintings/Tapa Motifs*, Tautai Gallery, Maota Samoa, Auckland
- 1988 *Pacific Ceremonial Masks*, Tautai Gallery, Maota Samoa, Auckland
- 1989 33 1/3 Gallery, Wellington
- 1990 *Three Polynesian Artists*, Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch.

STATEMENT

'I want to modernise Polynesian/Pacific art/Samoan art because I believe if it's not done then the artform will die. A lot of contemporary Maori artists seem to feel the same way. It's our heritage that we're worrying about. If we do it right maybe 15-20-50 years from now the next generation will modernise what we do and they will probably call our artwork 'traditional'...

With Picasso he got a lot of his inspiration from art from Oceania and Africa and yet my ancestors developed those forms so many hundreds of years ago. I used to try and paint like Picasso... but then I found out that Picasso copied aspects of Oceanic art. That made me think I'll paint like my ancestors.'

INTERVIEW: Upper Queen Street, Auckland 12/7/90

RP You started painting in the 1970's. Can you explain how you came to use Fa'a Samoa in your work?

FF I think it was 1978/1979 when I started meeting up with Tony Fomison and Philip Clairmont. At that time I started to paint very commercial things... Tony and Philip asked me if they could come and have a look at my paintings. They didn't like the commercial work I was doing, they preferred the work with Polynesian images like tapa, tattoo patterns, black/red/yellow colours, simple lines.

It's very difficult to find your place in the arts. Through the encouragement of people like Clairmont, Tony Fomison and Pat Hanly I was able to keep on painting. But also with Fomison I know that some of his images were derived from Polynesian things and Maori art... That is encouragement to myself and Polynesian art.

RP So it was a positive thing despite the fact that these artists were appropriating motifs and subjects from an outside culture?

FF No. I cannot see it as a negative thing at all. I thought they were doing justice to the Polynesian origins of the art forms.

RP You see yourself as extending siapo, tattoo and Lapita pottery motifs in your work. Is there a conservative response from Samoan people which says you've gone too far?

FF The well educated Pacific Islander now can understand the innovation that's coming through. I can only talk about the Samoan elders and chiefs that I associate with. They are a little bit cautious. They ask me 'Why does that have to look like that, it doesn't look like our old artworks of the past?' I have to explain that we have to modify some things to make them understood by the people today. They can understand if we explain why that change needs to come through. I want Pacific Island art to be accepted as a whole new emphasis coming through from the Pacific, as an artform thousands of years old but still alive now and in the future will keep on going.

RP You seem to consistently refer to legends in your work. What are your reasons for using these stories?

FF I don't think I've done a lot of work based on current events, contemporary themes. But certainly things pertaining to the spiritual feature a lot in my work. I dream a lot about unity and harmony. That's why I like working with the qualities legends have. I'm interested in the ideal situation which can work, but very often doesn't work, in today's society. I think it's good to use legends. You're not only educating the public but your own people to know about their background, their history in terms of story telling, mythologies, and artwork.



Fatu Feu'u, Nuanua Malama (Light of the Rainbow) 1988,
acrylic on canvas, 2610 x 1750mm.
Collection: Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs, Auckland.
Photo: Polynesian Press, Auckland.

Jim Vivieaere

BIOGRAPHY

Born: Waipawa, Hawkes Bay, New Zealand, 1947. Travelled and studied in Australia, Cook Islands, Japan and Taiwan.

Lives: Mt Albert, Auckland.

Education: Napier Boys' High School. 1971-1973 Graphic Design Course, Ilam School of Fine Arts, University of Canterbury, Christchurch.

Work: Caterer.

EXHIBITIONS

- 1979 *Documents*, Little Maidment Theatre, University of Auckland
1980 *Exhibition of Paintings*, Hawkes Bay Cultural Trust, Napier
1981 *3 Hour Exhibition*, Club XS, Auckland
5 Hour Exhibition, DB Waitemata Tavern, Auckland
1981 *Exhibition*, Women's Federation Rooms, Rarotonga, Cook Islands
Works of Art for Sale, Outreach Gallery, Auckland
1983 *2 1/2 Hour Exhibition*, Last & First Cafe, Auckland
1984 *Vivieaere Art*, RKS Gallery, Auckland
1985 *Jim Vivieaere*, RKS Gallery, Auckland
Exhibition of Collages, Artis Gallery, Auckland
1986 *60 Items at \$50 each*, Studio Show, Mt Eden, Auckland
1988 *Jim Vivieaere Exhibits*, Tautai Gallery, Maota Samoa, Auckland
1990 *18 Collages*, Blue Angel Gallery, Auckland.

INTERVIEW OVER MUSSELS AND SQUID RINGS: Mt Albert, Auckland 13/7/90

RP What is it that is Polynesian about the work contemporary Pacific Island artists are doing now?

JV Well they've got the freedom and the liberty to use the Polynesian motif.

RP How about papa'a artists who use Polynesian motifs?

JV Yeah well I remember in the beginning... I was looking over the fence seeing these people flourishing on motifs and ideas which Polynesians take for granted. I mean I actually think it's great because they bring a twist to it... they form a bridge because they learn something about the other culture. So what do I think? I think it's okay.

RP What about your using your Polynesian heritage in your own work?

JV I was born in NZ, raised by Europeans and my contact is very recent: I was given an Arts Council grant in 1982 to research tapa in the Cook Islands – this was my first full blown interaction. The sound of Palm trees, the strata of Blues in the reef, gardenia scent, the drums and dance, and then I met my father. I guess it was all those initial sensations and resonances that I began to involve in my work. I've learnt to give some Polynesian reference point, I'm aware of letting someone in, a motif, a title or a band of colour to contemplate on.

RP Can you explain the assemblage process in your work?

JV I'll gather materials that have some meaning for me and just put them together. There's a constant refinement, days, weeks will pass and I'll do something, add, shift, subtract. It's like a diary, recording an experience from then to there, changes in my work are in accordance with the changes in my lifestyle... Push it out, have a little rest, then do it again – you could run a line through it.

RP How do Pacific Islanders respond to the work you do?

JV I don't know. I had a show in Samoa House (Maota Samoa) involving a large representation of the Cook Island community who came to perform and support. I like to think that my work was integral to the event, prayers, speeches and dancing. A backdrop.

RP ... and the papa'a response?

JV I'm just fitting into a papa'a system of the artist/buyer. I think people look at me and expect something Polynesian. There seems to be a new interest in the South Pacific and I'm... I'm coming to the PARTY.



Jim Vivieaere, *Message from the East, Going South*, 1990, collage, 1330 x 998mm. Collection: Artist.

Lilly Aitui Laita

BIOGRAPHY

Born: Auckland, New Zealand, 1969.

Education: Orewa College, Elam School of Fine Arts.

Work: Currently studying B.F.A. in painting at Elam.

EXHIBITIONS

1988 *Tautai*, Tautai Gallery, Maota Samoa, Auckland

1989 *Outcrop*, Govett Brewster Gallery, New Plymouth

1989 *Tautai Artists*, 33 1/3 Gallery, Wellington

1990 *New Pacific Artists*, Proba Gallery, Ponsonby, Auckland.

STATEMENT

'In my second year (at art school) I made a conscious effort to understand my cultures and where I do (and didn't) fit in. My background is one where my grandfather withheld Maori from my mother and my father withheld the Samoan language from me. I grew up in a white area (Hibiscus Coast) with no Polynesians. I first met Pacific Islanders while at varsity – I left home in order to gain knowledge about my Maori and Samoan cultures. But now, nearly three years later, there is still a lot I've got to do (i.e. go to Samoa)... I can wait for the right time to go although the sooner the better.'

INTERVIEW: Elam School of Fine Arts, Auckland 9/7/90

RP Your materials.

LL I use builders paper. I'm not rich. And acrylic's quick and cheap. I like paper because you can do it then roll it up, take it away, it's really quite durable. I work with my hands. I like touching it. There's so many different surfaces.

RP Words.

LL I paint to music. Sometimes you get off on a song and it's really nice to put the words down, it may have nothing to do with the meaning of the painting. I like to put things together like that to capture what's happening around me at the time. It may be lazy but it's really direct because usually there are three or four different meanings. Using words gives the work one meaning...

Sometimes if Pacific Islanders see something in my work they go 'oh' because they have the (Samoan) words to go by even if they don't understand the painting. It's like a clue but often it's a distraction because it's more often than not only a small part of the painting.

Where is Pacific art in New Zealand going? It's riding on the crest of the Maori 'renaissance'. Renaissance is not a good word as it insinuates something coming alive that's rediscovered, whereas Maori culture has always been there. It's just that people not of Polynesian and Maori descent are just discovering it so it's all education.

There's more of an awareness of Pacific culture now. Some of the people I sell my paintings to have got this glassy eyed, erotic, exotic look. 'It's Pacific Island art and it's really colourful.' And I think 'Oh God you've got no idea.'

There's been an acknowledgement of indigenous art around the Pacific but it's always been there – it's a part of everyday life in the islands. I think it's hard for a lot of Pacific Islanders to understand art, in the European sense, because it's taken aside and kept separate. Art isn't a separate thing in the culture. It's one and the same. It's everything you do.



Lilly Laita, *Pari'aka*, 1989, acrylic on builders paper, 1255 x 3405mm.
Collection: Gallery 33 1/3.

John Puhiatea Pule

BIOGRAPHY

Born: Liku, Niue Island, 1962.
Lives: Auckland, New Zealand.
Education: Mt Albert Grammar, Auckland.
Work: Poet/Painter.
Travel: Emigrated to New Zealand in 1964.

EXHIBITIONS

1988 *First Gold Rain*, Fale Liku, Parnell, Auckland
1988 *Omai Kemesi*, (Come to Dream), Proba Gallery, Auckland
1988 *Restless Spirits*, Ika Lologo, Auckland
1988 Tautai Gallery, Maota Samoa, Auckland
1989 Proba Gallery
1990 Blue Angel Gallery, Auckland.

PUBLICATIONS

1981 *Winter the Rain*, Fragrance on Earth Press
1982 *Sonnets to Van Gogh/Providence*, FOE Press
1984 *Flowers AFTER THE SUN*, FOE Press
1985 *Bond of Time: epic poem*, FOE Press.

STATEMENT

'I am a giant in a small world. That's my cheekiness coming up because I'm in such a big world. I'm a small person in a great big world made up of superficial art and money and material wealth. So what I have to do is stand up. I see myself as a giant in a small world.'

INTERVIEW: Parnell, Auckland 12/7/90

RP So your painting is projecting what you feel out large. Writing the language large.

JP Writing it so people can see it so they can be more aware, enrich their life. I've seen what their culture has to offer. I like some of it. I don't like some of it. Being brought up in this society you can get all your inspiration from things here. Fleeting images of your culture come into it in bits and pieces – you can definitely tell the English influence. Suddenly you want to throw it all away and turn and look towards your own culture, go into it, get what you want from it, bring it back, embellish it, add more to it.

This writing on canvas – it's all new to me. I haven't shown it in public yet but have written in my own language. That's what I want to do – have all my poetry in my own language on canvas. So people come in and look around and see all these strange languages.

RP When did you start involving Niuean language in your poetry?

JP About four years ago – about the end of 1986. I wanted to try something different. After that time I started painting and giving Niuean titles to my paintings.

RP What are the ideas behind your Word paintings?

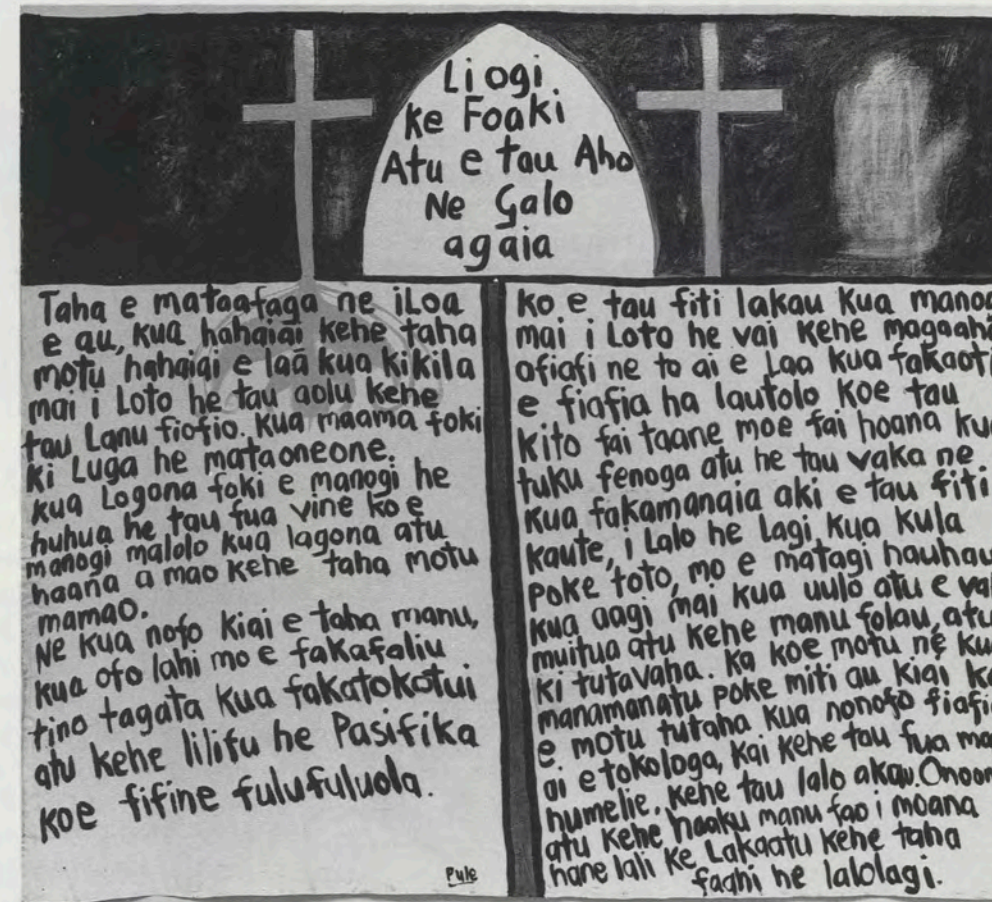
JP To break the English. No one would read a poem in Niuean on paper unless they've got some interest in Pacific literature or they have to look at it to understand an object. So what I do is get a

big huge canvas write my poem in my language put it up there. It's aimed at English people but not in an angry sense – so the English person can stand there and look at it and don't understand it at all. Then he has to go to the corner of the canvas for the little piece of paper translated for him.

So he's come from a very big concept and I narrow it down to a little piece of English in the corner. And then he'll go back and look at it. To understand it he/she should learn my language.

RP You also seem keenly aware of the problems (socio-economic) facing Niueans in the islands and in New Zealand. Does this surface as anger and frustration in your painting?

JP I don't think I've got to the anger/frustration period. A lot of my stories, I call them legends, are about spirits. Every time a plane or ship is leaving – they all come out and climb the Te-Mata-Alea



John Pule, *Born in Paradise*, 1990, acrylic on canvas, 1810 x 2050mm.
Collection: Artist.

tree which the Niueans believe we come from. They climb the tree right and they're watching and talking about people leaving Niue. On a nice fine day they can see New Zealand – Aotearoa. They see their cousins and their uncles working in factories and they just talk.

RP How do people respond to your work?

JP As I said before Polynesian art is quite young. A lot of barriers need to be broken down before we're accepted as Polynesian artists. From my experiences of having shows a lot of my support comes from my own colour, my own people. I'm used to going to art galleries and it's all white and then suddenly there's all these brown faces.

RP Do they support you even though they don't understand what you're doing?

JP They support me by being there.

Michel Tuffery

BIOGRAPHY

Born: Wellington, New Zealand, 1966.
Education: Newlands College, Wellington. Honours – Fine Arts (Printmaking), Otago Polytechnic School of Art, Dunedin.
Work: Teaching, part-time tutor, Mana College, Porirua. Tutor, Whitivae Polytechnic, Porirua.
Travel: Western Samoa, American Samoa, Tokelau Islands, Rarotonga, Cook Islands.

EXHIBITIONS

1988 Tautai Gallery, Maota Samoa, Auckland, C.S.A. Gallery, Christchurch
1989 Tautai Artists, Gallery 33 1/3, Wellington, Louise Beale Gallery, Wellington
1990 Three Polynesian Artists, Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch.

STATEMENT

'The images I want to produce now are my interpretation of how I see Fa'a Samoa. But I want to go further than that and start looking at my father and my mother's background. And from there start speaking about myself.'

INTERVIEW: Sarjeant Gallery, Wanganui 20/7/90

When I was at Polytech I started questioning my tutors. Is there much on Polynesian art? There were only a couple of books that would give me any depth at all. So I said to the head of the school I'm going to the islands to find out more about where I'm from. I felt it was really important that if I was going to produce something I should find out more about it.

I'm a bit disappointed about art schools – why don't we get taught about tattoo designs, siapo designs, Polynesian art, Oceanic art? We need more teaching. There weren't any Polynesians at art school. Where I was living (Dunedin) there was no contact with the north. I reckon that's what made me look at myself, my background.

In Dunedin I used to spend a lot of time down at the Carnegie Centre where Robin White's prints used to arrive all the time. I followed her work quite closely for a number of years. I found it really useful when Robin started doing her interpretation of the islands. I felt there was something missing in her work – well she was a palagi and I felt it didn't have that depth, that spiritual feeling but it did give me a motive to look at my background and how she was interpreting what she saw in Kiribati.

I had to teach myself Samoan. I found it a real struggle using my image like how Robin White's done it and drawing my interpretation of how I see Fa'a Samoa. During my fourth year at Polytech I spent time with the artist Mark Lander. I'd heard about his hand made paper I wanted to find out more about this flax paper he was using. He helped me to look at printing on tapa.

I went to the islands in 1987. Mainly what I was looking at was the pe'a and one or two of the tattoo designs which I was really fascinated with because of some of the stories and legends behind it. I felt that could be something I could base my work around. I mostly draw from Samoan designs but if I see something that I like



Robin White,
Florence sits in the shade
beside the lagoon, 1985
woodcut, 415 x 270mm.
Collection: Graham McGregor.

from the other islands I'll try and incorporate it somehow because a lot of us are all related. A lot of my work is symbolic. I've looked at the motifs in siapo and tattoo and how and where they've got their motifs from – the shells, the pandanus plant, little centipedes, the frigate bird. It made me look at my environment and see how I can interpret it.

When I went to the islands I had all these obstacles I came up against – Fa'a Samoa. I questioned people about the legends and siapo designs. People were turning me away. *Laumei* talks about using the turtle's back as a map. That's about me, it's talking about the journey through my life and the obstacles I had to go through to try and find out things.

I went through this anti-missionary stage. I found out that a lot of the pre-European designs I was looking for had been lost because of the missionaries. A lot of the designs had gone through that stage. Some designs (siapo) are actually from stained glass windows – ones I actually saw in Leone and in Savai'i and Sautaulo. The ones I was actually after were the pre-European designs. I've felt there's still something there that we've looked straight past.

I found a lot of Samoans were using the church as part of a tradition. It's traditional to go to church. With *Tiagnigi* I wanted to question the Samoans about why they go to church for spiritual or traditional reasons. One Samoan minister up north questioned my crucifixion. He noticed I hadn't shown Christ circumcised. It's really good when you get people asking questions.

There's not that many Pacific Island artists and it's probably really odd seeing a Pacific Islander doing work and trying to interpret that culture. A lot of Pacific Islanders are becoming fascinated with it. Pacific Island people can relate to my work because they start picking designs out and try and figure out why I use such and such. A lot of them laugh at it but they respect what you're trying to do.

A lot of palagi people look at my work trying to understand something that's been living with them for years and years and years. Now we're starting to produce something. It's out in front of them now. You can't shut the door on it.



Michel Tuffery, Pili Siva, 1988,
lithograph, 566 x 755mm.
Collection: Artist.

Johnny Peninsula

BIOGRAPHY

Born: Malu, Upolu, Western Samoa, 1939.
Lives: Invercargill, New Zealand.
Education: Diploma in Recreational Art.
Work: Part-time tutor, Southland Polytechnic, Invercargill. Studying towards Diploma in Craft Design.
Travel: Emigrated to New Zealand, 1962. Had 21st birthday on banana boat between Samoa and Fiji on way to New Zealand.

COMMISSION

1990 *Te Horo o Murihiku*, Southland Regional Arts Council, Invercargill.

TELEPHONE CONVERSATION: 6/7/90

RP How would you like to describe your work?

JP My work is contemporary Polynesian design. I call myself a contemporary artist. I do what I'm happy with.

RP What Samoan traditions do you involve in your work?

JP Actually there are a lot of different areas of culture I work with – Samoa, Maori and Pakeha. But I have this other area to help me to give my work depth. When I first started carving I wondered how can I put myself into my work? I started with my origins. I was asking questions about myself. Why am I called Samoan? What is the meaning of Samoa? I started putting this name into my work. Lu's tapui. I'm basing all my work on the name of the country where I was born. Ole tapui a Lu is another way of saying Samoa.

RP So in what ways does this story involving Ole tapui a Lu come out in your work?

JP Lu banned the chicken and put a tapu on it. I'm involving lines on the chicken, not only the skeleton but the feathers and body shape as well, in my carving. I like to explore the idea behind the story. I could go a little deeper.

RP What sorts of ideas are you exploring?

JP Well, in Samoa when they put a tapu on something they hang strange things up on a coconut tree, often pieces of tapa are used. When Lu put the tapu on chicken (nobody was to eat chicken) – what tapu did he use? This is my question.

RP So the answer is in the stone or the chicken is the tapu?

JP Yes. There's a lot of humour in my work. I call art fun. If it's not fun I'm not interested. You see Samoans were once forbidden chicken. Now every time you go back to the Islands they eat chicken every day!

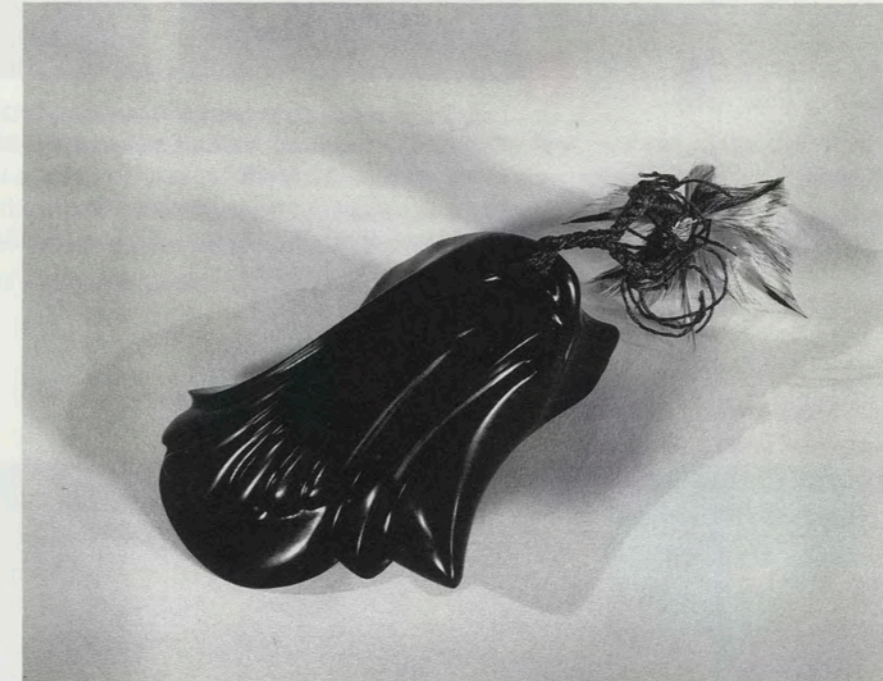
RP Is this chicken design a traditional Samoan theme in the visual arts?

JP No. I'm just exploring the legend.

RP You also use Maori designs and names in your work such as the koru form.

JP I like my freedom as a Polynesian to share with other Polynesian carvers. I believe all our ancestors came from the same place. I don't want to be tied in one area. Look at what you can get from both cultures and get rid of what you don't need.

I was last in Samoa in 1979 – I miss it in a lot of ways. But I'm living here. I'm thinking both ways – Polynesian and European.



Top: Johnny Peninsula, Ole Tapui Lu, 1990, argilite, wax thread and chicken feathers, 73 x 205 x 130mm. Collection: Artist.

Bottom: Johnny Peninsula, Omaui, 1990, argilite, 100 x 155 x 90mm. Collection: Artist.

Ioane Ioane

BIOGRAPHY

Born: Christchurch, New Zealand, 1962.
Lives: Ngatea, Hauraki Plains, New Zealand.
Education: Avondale College, B.F.A. (Painting), Elam School of Fine Arts, Auckland.
Work: Art teacher, Hauraki Plains College, Ngatea.
Travel: Western Samoa, 1977.



Left: Tapa, detail, Cook Islands (Mangaia), 2900 x 1630mm. Caretakers of taonga: National Museum (FE 2319). Photo: National Museum.

Right: Tapa, detail, Tikopia, 4300 x 390mm. Caretakers of taonga: National Museum (FE8344). Photo: National Museum.

EXHIBITIONS

1985 *New Paintings*, Stack Gallery, Mt Eden
1986 *Us There*, Outreach Gallery, Ponsonby
1987 *The Emergence of Order*, Hastings
1988 *Ioane Ioane*, Tautai Gallery, Maota Samoa, Auckland
1989 *Tautai Artists*, 33 1/3 Gallery, Wellington
1990 *Three Polynesian Artists*, Robert McDougall Gallery, Christchurch.

TELEPHONE CONVERSATION: 4/10/90

RP You use barkcloth in your painting?

II I like the material itself, the fibre, its colour, texture, the smell of frangipane used to scent it and the way it soaks dyes, the strands when you tear it and the way it feels when it's wrapped – it's really nice. It's a very earthy, natural material... I thought about making it but I don't have the time and motivation. I started using it in my second year at Elam. To be honest I was pretty poor at art school and tapa was a substitute for canvas. The tapa was used from my mother's collection. She travels to the islands and receives these gifts of barkcloth from family and friends. She hasn't got any tapa any more (laughs). The cloth I've used is all recent work though. She wouldn't let me touch the old siapo.

The good thing about my use of it is I process it and you don't recognise it as tapa cloth. I know of some artists (palagi) that use tapa in its original form and Samoan people, who hold fast to traditions, have got upset. I've never had that feedback... but I'm not looking forward to the day when someone comes up to me and says they don't like it.

RP What qualities in your painting do you consider derived from your Samoan heritage?

II Apart from the material I don't deliberately go out to paint something Samoan. Whatever is Samoan in me comes out. It's inevitable my cultural background reveals itself, maybe in the colours. I enjoy working with bright colours.

I don't really refer to our legends. I don't feel I'm competent enough to use the material to make figurative or symbolic images. I'm a student of material. I look at the materials, work with them, other things come later. I don't use the traditional symbols. I leave that to other artists. I think the only traditional thing is I don't sign my work. Polynesian carvers, weavers and tapa makers leave their names out of their work.

RP The scale of your work?

II I'm experimenting on a small scale so I have small problems. When I solve them, I can gain confidence and work on a large format.

RP How did you find the art school experience?

II I was green. I was going through an identity phase (being Samoan). I'm more laid back now – no worries.

RP Your work at the moment?

II At the moment I'm looking at landscape. It's my first year out of the city. I'm fascinated by the vastness of the Hauraki Plains and the colours – oranges and greens – which I try and bring out with the tapa. I actually use clothes dyes. I soak the tapa for two days in concentrated dye. It's no secret. Loud colours. My works are non-political. Unlike Michel, whose work I really like, I try to stay away from deep meaningful paintings.



Ioane Ioane, Eddie, 1985, oil and tapa on board, 995 x 1195mm. Collection: Main Library, University of Auckland.

Sale Jessop

BIOGRAPHY

Born: Auckland, New Zealand, 1966.

Lives: Mangere, Auckland.

Education: Orere College, Papatoetoe. B.F.A. (Photography), Elam School of Fine Arts, Auckland.

Work: Part-time tutor, Carrington Polytechnic.

EXHIBITIONS

1988 Massey Homestead, Manukau, Auckland

1989 *Tautai Artists*, Gallery 33 1/3, Wellington

1990 *New Pacific Artists*, Proba Gallery, Auckland.

STATEMENT

'We can look through these pictures and learn something about another place thousands of miles away – another culture with people who live in a society just like us. It's a learning resource which people can learn from.'

INTERVIEW: Karangahape Rd, Auckland 9/7/90

RP You travelled to the islands in 1988 with Fatu Feu'u and later Albert Wendt and used the trip to document what you saw with your camera?

SJ It was autobiographical. It was like being a tourist but not actually taking tourist snapshots. I like showing a whole range of life in the Pacific, not just one side of things. I'd rather do that because I'm a lot more concerned about it because I'm living closer to it. I photographed people I knew or were beginning to get to know. I was photographing everyday things. I'd like to select a few of these photographs and focus on the people. To let the images express what these people are like, what they're on about and what conditions they live under – just their daily routine, normal everyday things.

RP Why are people so important in your work?

SJ Through photography you get to learn more about other people, you get to meet them... People talk to you about their experiences. I like taking photographs of families. In contrast to a palagi point of view the family is most important.

RP You also use your work to talk about your own experiences particularly with your assemblage and drawing. They're all about your life.

SJ Yeah. Someone will probably think this guy is vain. But then again when I was young my parents never told stories or explained what they were doing while they were young. That's something I really wanted to know, how they thought. When I get older, get married and have kids I've got these records to represent myself with.

RP With the medium of photography you're moving into an area that not a lot of Pacific Islanders are aware of.

SJ Although they're just ordinary snapshots that they're used to. So if I can get a mixture of taking a snapshot but giving it a lot more depth, using a style they can relate to, they'll go 'oh yeah' and actually know what the photographer's about even though they're not in it. I mean one time I showed my photographs at Massey Homestead and all I could hear was old ladies saying 'but where's my boy, didn't you go through our village?'

RP They didn't understand your work?

SJ No, they didn't like the photograph because they didn't know anybody or it wasn't their village. And there's a lot of jealousy if there's a lot of exposure.

RP We're hitting something really interesting here. You're doing your work in a way that will be easier for Pacific Islanders to identify with and understand. That's why you're using snapshots?

SJ Yes. So they can understand what I'm going through. I can't take photographs of landscapes or abstract things. I want some form of easy communication, something they already know. So hopefully, if they keep looking at photographs they can get onto something more abstract I guess. Drawing and photography are something visual that are an alternative to legends and traditions – literature and song being passed down. The visual side is another narrative to keep traditions alive.

RP Do you see other Polynesian artists as involved with similar concerns?

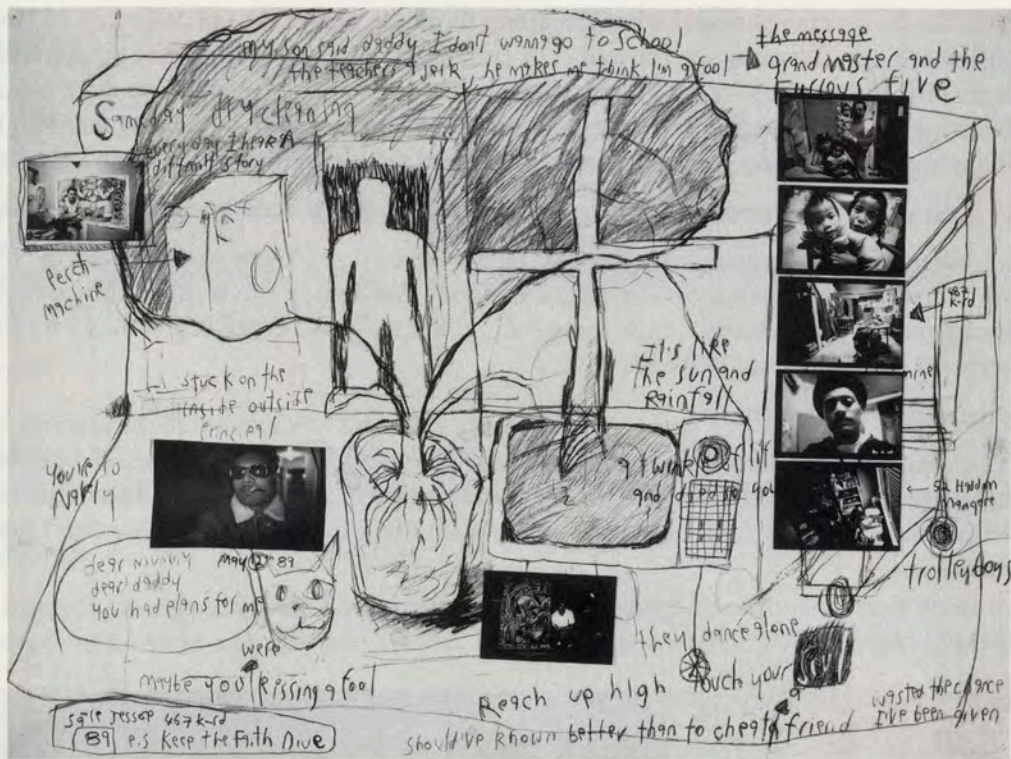
SJ I think most of the contemporary Pacific Island artists that I know were all born in New Zealand. I know the majority of them are frustrated that they don't know anything much about their cultural backgrounds. They haven't experienced it. I think each and every one of us are trying to find a personal and individual language that...

RP expresses your identity...

SJ Yes, that's true but for me because there's no prominent Niuean artist here. I'd like to find a visual language so that you could say that's definitely a Niuean style. Not that I want to discover it I just want to contribute to it. I just hope that the main thing for our art is that we don't lose the traditions.



Sale Jessop, Primrose, 1989, black and white photograph, 326 x 212mm. Collection: Music and Fine Arts, Wellington Public Library.



Sally Jessop, *Untitled*, 1989, charcoal, pencil and cibachrome on paper, 760 x 1020mm. Collection: Louis Johnston.



Barkcloth, detail, Samoa (attributed), 1280 x 1580mm. Caretakers of taonga: Hawkes Bay Cultural Trust.

Filipe 'Onevela Tohi

BIOGRAPHY

Born: Ngeleia, Nuku alofa, Tonga, 1959.

Lives: New Plymouth, New Zealand.

Education: St Andrews College, Kolofo'ou, Nuku alofa.

Work: Maori carving tutor, Rangimarie Arts and Crafts Centre, New Plymouth. Part-time tutor, New Plymouth Prison.

Travel: Emigrated to Auckland, New Zealand, 1978. Moved to New Plymouth, 1982.

EXHIBITIONS

1986 *Matala* (flower bud) T.A.C.O. Gallery, New Plymouth

1989 *Filipe Tohi* Govett Brewster Gallery, New Plymouth

1990 *Guest Artist*, The Gables, New Plymouth Art Society.

COMMISSIONS

1987 Carved panels, New Zealand Embassy, Saudi Arabia

1988 Carved panels, New Zealand Employment Services, Labour Department, New Plymouth

1989 *Maui pulling gas from under the sea*, wall assemblage, Mitsubishi office, Tokyo, Japan

1990 *Navigator*, wall assemblage, Inland Revenue Department, New Plymouth.



Filipe 'Onevela Tohi, *Hafekasi* (Halfcaste), 1990, detail totara, stainless steel, paua shell, 1805 x 475 x 643mm. Collection: Artist

INTERVIEW: Rangimarie Arts and Crafts Centre, New Plymouth 19/7/90

RP You became interested in your Tongan culture when you started carving at Rangimarie?

FT Yes. I wasn't interested in Tongan culture and the stories I'd heard as a child until I came here. It changed my attitude. They started talking about the past and they taught me to look back. I became interested in things Maori. I came to see the similarities in beliefs about nature – like the stories about Fa tonga, Kupe, Tane, Maui, the lizard, birds and the eel. I used to look after my 92 year old great grandmother for five years. She used to talk about similar legends and sing waiata like the Maori. When I came here I felt like it was a similar experience. She's since passed away.

I started looking at books on Maori culture and this helped me understand Tongan culture more – it made me think back to the islands.

I've been back to Tonga three times but mainly to see my family. It was only last year when I went to research my artwork. I think definitely the Maori comes from somewhere in the islands because the carving patterns are so similar.

RP When did you decide to bring your Tongan background into your work?

FT Just last year. I went to a Nga Puna Waihangā conference. I looked into the work of Maori artists there... I thought I wonder if I should go back to Tonga and do something about using my Tongan background in my art. The structure of Tongan culture is there in my work even if the materials have changed. I came from the islands to Auckland – things we're changing all the time. The environment had changed but my Tongan background was still there.

RP In your work you've been looking at the similarities between Maori and Tongan approaches to design?

FT The particular Taranaki style which features the mountain in its design reminded me of lots of Tongan designs – tokelau feletoa, manilua. The pointed head in Taranaki carving reminded me of that in Tongan wood carving and the Tongan carved figure with its sharp shoulders and use of triangles, elbows, knees everything pointing. I looked at the peak in Taranaki carving and I wondered if I could mix up the Tongan and Maori styles I'm just trying to familiarise myself with them.

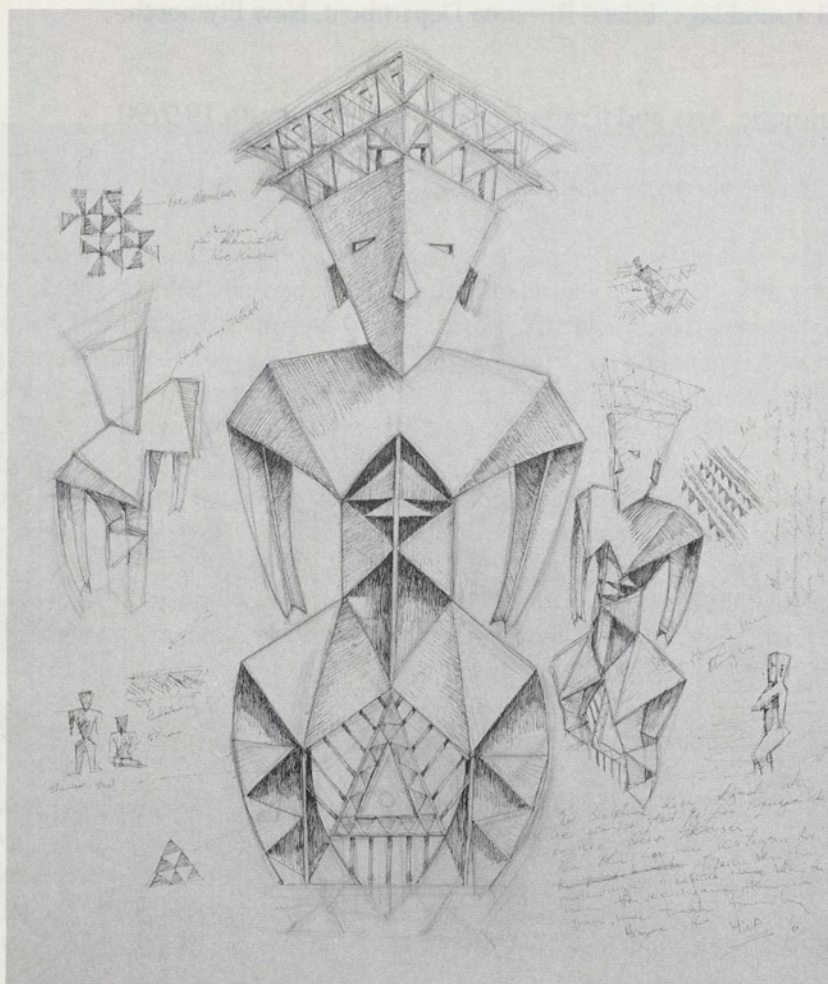
RP What sorts of Tongan designs feature in your work?

FT I use the Norfolk pine – it's a symbol of the Tongan monarchy and stars have become more important in my work. In Tonga they use the stars and the wind to fish. They know exactly where to go.

RP You're also exploring Tongan perceptions of things such as time.

FT Every time I think about working I think about time – it was getting to me. It all came together in Tonga. There's a monument on one of the islands which is to measure time. All the tourists go to see it. It got me thinking.

In our language we talk about time. We measure it with the sun and that's what I'm trying to bring out in my work. The Tongan knew exactly what the time was according to the fall of the shadow and the feel of nature.



*Filipe 'Onevela Tohi, Untitled (sketch), 1990.
pen and pencil on paper, 497 x 425mm. Collection: Artist.*

*This pocket is for
a complete catalogue
listing of works featured
in the exhibition*

