

Arts in Asia  
UNESCO Observatory  
Multi Disciplinary  
Journal in the  
Arts

2016

Volume 5 Issue 2

'Arts in Asia'  
UNESCO Observatory  
Multi Disciplinary  
Journal in the Arts  
Vol. 5 Issue 2 2016

# UNESCO Observatory Multi-Disciplinary Journal in the Arts

Volume 5 | Issue 2 | 2016

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ISSN 1835 - 2776

Published in Australia

Published by  
The UNESCO Observatory Melbourne  
<http://unescomelb.org>

In conjunction with  
The University of Melbourne,  
Parkville, Victoria 3010.

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Volume 5 | Issue 2 | 2016

## ABOUT THE E-JOURNAL

The UNESCO Observatory refereed e-journal is based within the Graduate School of Education at The University of Melbourne, Australia. The journal promotes multi-disciplinary research in the Arts and Education and arose out of a recognised need for knowledge sharing in the field. The publication of diverse arts and cultural experiences within a multi-disciplinary context informs the development of future initiatives in this expanding field. There are many instances where the arts work successfully in collaboration with formerly non-traditional partners such as the sciences and health care, and this peer-reviewed journal aims to publish examples of excellence.

Valuable contributions from international researchers are providing evidence of the impact of the arts on individuals, groups and organisations across all sectors of society. The UNESCO Observatory refereed e-journal is a clearing house of research which can be used to support advocacy processes; to improve practice; influence policy making, and benefit the integration of the arts in formal and non-formal educational systems across communities, regions and countries.

# Editorial

**Shalini Ganendra**

BA, MA Hons (Cambridge.), LL.M.

Director, SGFA

Guest Editor

## INTRODUCTION

The 'Contemporary' embraces the dynamic of the current. Thus, contemporary thought should also ideally encourage multidisciplinary curiosity, encounter and engagement. This multidisciplinary dynamic, fuelled by creativity, is the platform for the Vision Culture Lecture program ('VC Lectures'), launched in 2010 by Shalini Ganendra Fine Art ('SGFA'), in Malaysia, with the endorsement of the UNESCO Observatory. Over this short and enriching period, the VC Lectures have developed an informing presence in the region, fostering meaningful global discourse and cultural encounter, to inform the Contemporary.

SGFA is a pioneering cultural organization, embracing an eclectic and quality sensibility for collecting, consideration, capacity building and place making. We value new visuals - whether for materiality, concept or culture - and multidisciplinary processes in their creation. In addition to the VC Lectures and exhibition program, SGFA has: an artist residency program (the 'Vision Culture Art Residency'); an arts management residency for university students (the 'Exploring East Residency'); and the PavilionNOW project which celebrates local architects, contemporary design and materiality. Through these programs and a growing interest in emerging regions, we delight in the increasing international engagement with our represented areas of South East Asia and Sri Lanka.



Over twenty three speakers have participated in the VC Lectures since their inception, each invited because of eminent reputations and notable contributions within respective fields. The lecture module involves free public talks at the SGFA's award winning green space (designed by Ken Yeang), Gallery Residence, with external lectures often hosted by other local institutions and organized by SGFA. Participating curators generally conduct portfolio reviews with local artists, learning more about regional geopolitics and art practices. Strong press coverage enables outreach beyond the urban populace, as does active social and digital media. Speakers stay at the Gallery Residence and enjoy vernacular space that embraces natural ventilation and cooling systems, elegant aesthetic and greening philosophies. The VC Lecture program is as much about cross-cultural and multi-disciplinary encounters as it is about content – all defining platforms for SGFA's exhibition programming as well.

The eleven luminaries published in this peer-reviewed UNESCO Observatory journal were selected for a variety of reasons including expertise. They are: Sir Roy Calne (award winning surgeon and artist, UK); Christopher Phillips (Curator, International Center of Photography, NYC); Anoma Pieris (Associate Professor at the Department of Architecture, University of Melbourne); Susan Cochrane (curator and authority on Pacific Art); Volker Albus (Professor of Product Design at the University of Arts and Design Karlsruhe, Germany); Michiko Kasahara (Chief Curator at the Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography, Japan); Matt Golden (Artist/Curator); Gregory Burgess (Architect, Order of Australia); Beth Citron (Curator, Rubin Museum NYC); Oscar Ho (curator and academic, HK); and Brian Robinson (Torres Island artist and curator, Australia).

Sir Roy Calne speaks of personal experiences using art to nurture empathy in his medical practice and his own passion for creating. Christopher Phillips, the pioneering curator credited with introducing Chinese contemporary photography to the United

States, writes about an important exhibition that he curated at the International Center of Photography. Anoma Pieris considers the impact of modernism on architecture in South Asia, and analyses supportive political and social ideologies, while Gregory Burgess tackles the place of architecture in creating a sense of individual and community belonging. Volker Albus, playfully but seriously asks us to consider the role of designers as technical and social mediators. Michiko Kasahara adeptly reviews challenges faced by successful contemporary Japanese photographers in addressing and reflecting Japanese culture, real and perceived. Susan Cochrane explores cultural ownership of Pacific Art through the use of terminology and context. Brian Robinson writes about his personal cultural narrative as a Torres Island artist. Beth Citron shares insights on Francesco Clemente's acclaimed *'Inspired by India'* exhibition which opened at the Rubin Museum in 2014. Oscar Ho speaks to the challenges of curatorship and requirements to sharpen its impact and discipline. Matt Golden shares the visual journey of his art alter-ego, Juan Carlos, with special focus on experiences in Malaysia. We bring to you a wonderful mix of multi-disciplinary and cultural discussions that show the exhilarating impact of this program.

The Vision Culture Program enters its sixth year and we look forward to its continuing impact as a pivotal program to foster meaningful global discourse. We have forged strong friendships and benefitted from cross cultural discovery thereby building platforms for more informed understanding and appreciation of our world.

Many thanks to Lindy Joubert, Editor-in-Chief of the UNESCO Observatory journal, and her marvelous team, for supporting this project from its inception; to SGFA's Exploring East Residents who assisted with editing these texts and most importantly, the amazing Vision Culture Lecture participants who have fostered knowledge, encounter and consequently, the Contemporary.

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# Art in the Contemporary Pacific

**AUTHOR**                      **Dr Susan Cochrane**

**ABSTRACT**                      At present there is a deficiency of clear assessment and critique of the genres of art created across the Pacific region. The art market has focused international attention on works with the highest monetary return and has concealed the great diversity of artistic practices which occur in the Pacific islands. Personalities and profitability dominate the art scene as individual artists become celebrities and the virtues of collective enterprise are undervalued. This paper describes contemporary Pacific art using concepts developed by Pacific philosophers and terms in the vernacular languages that are commonly used to signal cultural ownership of particular creative forms. This paper also investigates some significant shifts that have occurred in the Western conceptualization and categorization of Pacific arts since the 1960s. Recently the increased presence of Pacific artists in Western institutions has challenged the institutionalized vision of Pacific peoples and their cultures.



## BIOGRAPHY

Susan Cochrane is an independent researcher, curator and writer, specialising in Pacific art and art history since the 1980s. She has conducted extensive fieldwork based research, commissioned exhibitions and consultancies in Papua New Guinea, New Caledonia, Australia, Taiwan and many Pacific Island countries. Her publications include *Contemporary Art from Papua New Guinea* (1997), *Bérétara: New Pacific Art* (2001), *Art and Life in Melanesia* (2007) and an enhanced E-book, *Living Art in Papua New Guinea* (2013).

## SECTION I

### FROM THE PAST TO THE PRESENT

There is a great diversity of physical environments within the vastness of Oceania, and even more in the cultural, social, economic and political circumstances of the people who inhabit it. This incredible diversity dramatically affects the way the peoples of Oceania value art and participate in their communities' cultural life. How then can we discuss 'Oceanic' art or culture? What links all these various peoples together?

The great diversity of peoples and cultures within the region are the result of distinct waves of migration and settlement. The Aboriginal peoples settled the continent of Australia over 50,000 years ago. About the same time, Papuan people settled the large island of New Guinea. The many diasporas of Austronesian peoples, who are the ancestors of today's Micronesians and Polynesians, occurred much later, from 4,000 to less than 1,000 years ago. New Zealand was the last major Pacific Island to be populated by Polynesians, some 1,500 years ago.

Figure 1  
Brett Graham  
(Maoir, New  
Zealand). 'Lapita'  
A suite of three  
stone sculptures  
reflecting the  
three regions  
of Oceania–  
Polynesia,  
Melanesia and  
Micronesia.  
Commissioned  
by the Tjibaou  
Cultural Centre,  
New Caledonia.  
Photo Susan  
Cochrane



1.  
K.R. Howe 2007.  
Vaka Moana:  
Voyages of the  
Ancestors was  
also a major  
touring exhibition  
originating at the  
Auckland Museum  
in New Zealand.

Over many centuries, the Austronesians made voyages across Moana Nui a Kiva (the Pacific Ocean) in large ocean-going canoes called vaka. They were expert navigators who had developed sophisticated sea vessels that enabled migrations all across the Pacific.<sup>1</sup> As each island group was settled, their new communities developed distinctive languages and cultural traits while retaining basic shared forms of social organization and a specialized material culture designed to sustain life on the islands. For example, archaeological studies of the ancient Lapita cultural complex indicate that distinctive Lapita pottery played a major role in the expansion of Austronesian speaking populations to numerous Pacific Island groups. Scarlett Chiu summarizes the results of Jim Specht and other scholars' research on the environmental constraints that affected migrating populations and their patterns of settlement:

[They] might have sustained themselves by relying on larger neighboring islands for foods and materials, 'either by

2. Scarlett Chiu, 2012:4 direct access or through exchange relationships'. . . Specht (2007:62) proposed that the small offshore islands might have been used not only as suitable and preferred locations to build stilt houses over the flat reef with plenty of marine resources (Kirch 1997b:163-165), or to provide a safe harbor away from aggressive neighboring groups (Spriggs 1997:88) and diseases (Kirch 1997b:110-113; Spriggs 1997:120), but also for particular ceremonial or ritual functions (Specht 2007:60).<sup>2</sup>
3. ibid 5
4. Precip from background document, UNESCO Towards a Culture of Sustainable Diversity <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0013/001322/132262e.pdf>

Chiu continues her investigation, surmising that in the social system of the Lapita people alliances, marriages and family on other islands linked homeland communities with outliers.<sup>3</sup> Although the Lapita people and other precursors of modern Pacific cultures may have long disappeared, they established patterns of behaviour that remain in the cultural memory and social practices of contemporary Pacific Islanders.

The genealogies of early Austronesian peoples stretch into prehistory. From the earliest records, Oceanic art in all its forms, expressions and ceremonies links people to their creations, their ancestors and to the supernatural world. Throughout the Pacific, art was and is inseparable from celebrations of major events in the human life cycle: birth, death, marriage and great achievements. The ancient arts of indigenous people, transmitted from generation to generation, bear witness to their profound knowledge of island environments, their flora and fauna and resources, social hierarchies and the spiritual realm that ordered and gave meaning to everything else. Despite the infiltration of consumer goods and a paper money into village communities throughout the Pacific, economies remain largely traditional. The way of life of many indigenous peoples still depends on the sustainable use of their environment. Indigenous spiritual values often prize sustainable interaction with the local environment.<sup>4</sup>

Figure 2  
Women from the  
Nggela (Florida  
Island), Central  
Province, Solomon  
Islands dressed  
in their elaborate  
costumes, which  
incorporate  
many valuables  
such as dolphin's  
teeth necklaces  
and kap-kap  
(circular shell  
disk with filagree  
turtleshell).  
Performance at  
the 2012 Festival  
of Pacific Arts,  
Solomon Islands.  
Field research  
photo by Susan  
Cochrane.



5.  
Epeli Hau'ofa,  
1994:150

Since the 1970s, Oceanic communities have paid increasingly careful attention to their own world views. Epeli Hau'ofa, a Tongan philosopher, described the self-image of Pacific Islanders as relating to an interconnected 'Ocean of Islands.' He contested the prevailing view of Western social scientists and economists that the island states and territories of the Pacific are too small, too isolated from centers of economic growth and too resource-starved to ever be able to rise above their present condition of dependence.<sup>5</sup> Hau'ofa refocused attention on unifying principles:

If we look at the myths, legends, oral traditions and the cosmologies of the people of Oceania, it becomes evident that they did not conceive of their world in microscopic proportions. Their universe comprised not only land surfaces, but the surrounding ocean as far as they could traverse and exploit it, the underworld with its fire-controlling and earth-shaking denizens, and the heavens above with their hierarchies of powerful gods and named stars and constellations that people could count on to guide their way across the seas. The world was anything but



6. tiny. They thought big and recounted their deeds in epic proportions.<sup>6</sup>  
ibid 152
7. Hau'ofa describes European colonialists who drew lines across the map to join dotted groups of islands, defining borders in the interests of Western imperialism, dismembering Pacific peoples' widespread and interconnecting systems of exchange and cultural enrichment. He urged Pacific islanders to adopt the mantra 'the Ocean in Us' and to believe in 'a new sense of the region that is our own creation, based on our perceptions and our realities, it is necessary for our survival in the dawning era'.<sup>7</sup>  
Epeli Hau'ofa  
1998:33
8. Keynote address at The Big Island Workshop, University of Wollongong, 26 November 2009.

## CONTEMPORARY PACIFIC ART

Strictly speaking, the term 'contemporary art' refers to art made and produced by artists living today. Contemporary art in the Pacific is produced by a great diversity of indigenous people living in different socio-economic circumstances, with disparate cultures and sets of resources. There is no recognized canon of 'contemporary Pacific art.'

In a keynote address in 2009, Tahitian scholar Karen Stevenson raised critical concerns about the concept of 'contemporary' Pacific art: to what extent are problematic paradigms of primitivism and authenticity implicit in Western understandings of contemporary Pacific art? How can the phrase 'contemporary Pacific art' accommodate the region's plethora of tradition-based practices as well as artworks in introduced media? What criteria can be used to answer these questions?<sup>8</sup>

Drawing from her long association with both rural and urban artists in Papua New Guinea, Jacquelyn Lewis-Harris argued that:

The works [of the New Guinean artists] are intellectually contentious as they challenge both western and indigenous notions of art. They do not fit neatly into the art historical

9.  
Jacquelyn Lewis-  
Harris 2004: 273

Figure 3  
Michel Tuffery's  
mobile bulls,  
which are  
fabricated from  
corn beef cans,  
comment on the  
changed diet  
and consumer-  
driven habits of  
Pacific Islanders.

Michel TUFFERY  
New Zealand/  
Samoa/  
Rarotonga/Tahiti  
*Povi tau vaga (The  
challenge)* 1999.  
Two sculptures:  
190 x 308 x  
96cm (irreg.,  
approx., each);  
two sculptures:  
59 x 109 x 38cm  
(irreg., approx.,  
each)Aluminium,  
pinewood, corn  
beef tins and  
rivets with Mini  
DV: 2:43 minutes,  
colour, stereo.  
Collection:  
Queensland  
Art Gallery.  
Image courtesy:  
QAGOMA. ©  
The artist.

nor anthropological descriptive categories, contesting definitions of fine arts and crafts, group identity and material culture.<sup>9</sup>

Since the 1960s, when Pacific Island countries gained their nationhood and minority indigenous populations asserted their identity, contemporary art movements have emerged and multiplied across the region, especially in urban areas. Artists struggle to balance new media and ideas about art with traditional practice as they attempt to turn a critical eye to their environment. Across the Pacific, many urban artists work in and respond to a global environment that is culturally diverse and technologically advanced. In New Zealand, leading Maori artists like Michael Parehowkai and Emare Karaka are city-based, individualistic practitioners whose work engages with global concepts of the modern and contemporary. Other 'contemporary Maori artists' like weavers Christina Whirihana and Veranoa Hetet operate within traditional media but innovate formally and stylistically. In remote areas of Melanesia like Malekula in Vanuatu (which is famous for ritual objects and complex ceremonies), a definition of 'contemporary art' as the marketable product of professional artists working with introduced media would exclude extraordinary artistic achievements in indigenous art forms.



10.  
Jutta Malnic  
and John  
Kasaipwalova  
2000:60 on ideas  
of beauty and  
adornment in the  
Trobriand Islands.

Exhibitions and publications on so-called 'contemporary' Pacific art often favor artworks in introduced materials like oil and acrylic paints, plastic, metal, digital media and photography. Perhaps this is done deliberately to emphasize that Pacific art is not the stereotyped 'tribal art' favored by artifact shops and interior decorators or the 'traditional art' seen in museums. At international venues like the Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art at the Queensland Art Gallery and New Zealand's Pasifika Festival, the 'new wave' of Pacific painters, sculptors, conceptual artists, performance artists and video artists (like John Pule, Lonnie Hutchinson, Michel Tuffery) have shown themselves to be distinctive, sophisticated, witty, critical and very individual. As it continues to get more international exposure, this vibrant and compelling side of Pacific art has become increasingly popular in international biennials.

There are many other aspects of current artistic practice in Pacific communities which are less widely recognized. Every community has its own artists who are skilled, imaginative and inventive in their respective traditional media. Inherited knowledge of the properties of each type of wood, stone, shell, clay, ochre, cane, leaf and plant fibre, plume and animal skin insures that artists throughout Oceania engage with a long and complex tradition of art production. Each clan group has specific and often complicated techniques for processes as diverse as carving, painting, weaving (plaiting, knotting, tying), making bark cloth, grinding shells, and preparing oils, dyes and pigments. Local more than Western audiences are mindful of the skillful applications of these techniques required for ceremonial occasions and more critical of the aesthetic effect achieved.<sup>10</sup>

Implicit in the phrase 'contemporary Pacific art' is the idea that this art is being contrasted with or opposed to some sort of 'traditional Pacific art.' To avoid this dichotomy, I prefer to refer to both as 'living art.' Admittedly there are clusters of urban based artists who distinguish themselves as 'contemporary artists,' the Nawita Group in Vanuatu and Fiji's Red Wave Collective, for

Figure 4  
Ratu (Chief)  
Joni Duikete  
Nagatalevu,  
descendant of the  
Chief of Kadavu  
who ceded  
Kadavu Province  
to Queen Victoria,  
and his wife Bulou  
Lavenia Lakabuka  
Yavala in the  
chiefly costume  
of Tavuki Kadavu.  
Chiefs headed the  
Opening Parade  
of the Melanesian  
Festival of Arts  
and Cultures in  
Fiji in 2004. Field  
research photo by  
Susan Cochrane  
with permission  
of the Chief.

example, whose artistic output and agenda distinguishes them from their tradition-oriented contemporaries. These artists are *choosing* to contrast their practices with the customary practices of their respective societies, but this does not mean that art production which makes use of new media and art production that relies on traditional methods are *necessarily* opposed. Living art can function in any number of ways: the term is designed to reflect that the different practices do not have to be opposed, not that they can never be.



## LANGUAGE FOR ART

Pacific artists and intellectuals aim to overcome the lack of a nuanced vocabulary for discourse on art in the contemporary Pacific and to improve the language used to conceptualize it. English lacks the complete vocabulary necessary to understand



11. Wedding costume and funeral lengths of ngatu illustrated in exhibition catalogue 'Talking Tapa: Pasifika Barkcloth in Queensland' 2006

12. In Taiwan Atayal tribal woman and men wore facial tatoos as a symbol of maturity; the last tattooed Atayal woman was 104 in 2011 when she participated in a staged tableau composed and photographed by Pasifika artist Greg Semu. Semu, of Samoan heritage, has extensive tattoos which were of great interest to the elderly woman who had thought she was the last person in the world to be tattooed. Pers. com. Pei-ni Beatrice Hsieh, Taiwan 10 October 2013.

and assess works of art arising from Pacific cultures. This makes it difficult for the living art of the Pacific to break into the global art scene.

The first examples of inadequate language I want examine are the words tapa and tattoo. Both are examples of generic English words used to discuss art despite the fact that there are words in Pacific languages that capture the specific subtleties of various practices much more accurately. Beaten and decorated barkcloth is a pan-Pacific material that is still widely made and used across Melanesia and Polynesia. While all such barkcloth is called 'tapa' in English, Pacific peoples have many specific names for the various types of plain and decorated barkcloth they produce; in Fiji, decorated bark cloth is called masi, in Tonga it is ngatu, in Hawaii kapa and in Samoa siapo. Tapa is a high status fibre art in Tonga, Samoa and Fiji, where groups of women make the cloth from the beaten bark of paper mulberry and breadfruit trees then paint it with symbolic designs and motifs generations old. In Tonga, great lengths of ngatu, some over 50 metres long, are required for royal occasions. The regalia worn at the investiture of chiefs in Fiji includes a specific costume created from several types of plain and decorated masi for each chief. Commoners wear tapa for special occasions like weddings and funerals.<sup>11</sup>

Tattoos (tatau) are a significant marker of personal and cultural identity for Polynesians, some groups of coastal Melanesians and, until recently, Aboriginal Taiwanese.<sup>12</sup> European explorers were amazed by the practice of tattoo art and recorded the appearance of Polynesian men and women with full body tattoo; it was Captain James Cook who introduced the word 'tattoo' into the English language along with records and images of its practice.<sup>13</sup> Distinctive patterns, each belonging to a particular clan, have been handed down through generations and can only be used by the people of the clan who own the particular pattern. Since the 1970s there has been a widespread cultural revival of the practice of full body tattoos in Tahiti,



13.  
Judith Levin,  
2009:26–64

the Marquesas, Samoa, Tonga and among the Maori people in New Zealand. In the 1990s-2000s, a number of leading artists of Samoan heritage in New Zealand decided to get the full pe'a as an affirmation of their cultural identity. Greg Semu, Michel Tuffery and Fatu Feu'u proudly wear their heritage on their skin. The Maori artist George Nuku wears the moko, including a facial tattoo. Rosanna Raymond has stated that costume and body art are essential to her performance and that they form a sort of self-portrait.

Figure 5  
Sopolemalama  
Filipe Tohi  
(Tonga–New  
Zealand). Detail  
of his installation  
in the 7th Asia  
Pacific Triennial,  
Queensland Art  
Gallery–Gallery of  
Modern Art, 2009.

Tohi is an expert in the ancient Pacific lalava, the lashing traditionally used for joining and binding everything from seafaring vessels to buildings. In the absence of writing, Tohi says, patterns of lalava encode philosophical concepts, ancestral stories and genealogies. Photo Susan Cochrane, permission of the artist.



Since the 1980s in New Zealand, it has been an established practice to incorporate Maori words and phrases into English text. Hirini Moko Mead applied this practice to the arts, helping to culturally reclaim 'Toi Maori' (Maori arts):

In summary, Toi is a Maori word that refers to knowledge, origins and sources and to art in general. Toi Maori is now used to cover the wide range of creative activities that Maori artists engage in... Toi Maori is also used to refer to all the art forms that contemporary Maori artists are exploring in

14. theatre, music, writing, and visual arts.<sup>14</sup>  
 Hirini Moko  
 Mead, 1996:3  
 Maori have strict sets of protocol, as explained by Tui Te Rito Mahi with regard to weaving:
15. *Nga Kaupapa Here Aho* (fibre Interface) website of exhibition, Introduction by Tui Te Rito Maihi. Te Taumata Gallery Auckland 9Oct–5 Nov 1992. Accessed 12/08/09 since deleted.  
 The coming together of Maori and non-Maori works and their makers could be seen as a symbolic hongi, an exchange of the breath of life, for the works reveal much – not only of the individual artists but of their cultural whenu (warp). There are many aho connecting essentially pakeha divisions of contemporary and traditional. Such divisions, through Maori eyes, seem superfluous when one realizes that every maker of contemporary Maori works also makes traditional pieces; which by their very nature enhance our lives today in much the same way as they did for our tupuna for hundreds of years.<sup>15</sup>
16. Artist's statement, Commonwealth Arts and Crafts Awards, May 2008  
 Maori and Pasifika artists continue to value the history and practice of traditional arts, learnt from masters and interpreted in new ways by younger artists. As Semesi Fetokai Potauaine points out, it is easy to be locked into cultural conventions and simply maintain the status quo. Potauaine is a Tongan citizen residing in New Zealand who has been educated in both Western and Pacific culture. He has explained his art practice, which is steeped in Tongan tradition:
- In Tonga, art is classified into three types, viz. material arts (tufunga), performance arts (faiva) and fine arts (ngaue fakamea'a). . . My work across all material art forms have been informed by the Tongan tufunga lalava . . . As a master art, tufunga lalava is concerned with the production of a huge range of elaborate, complex and beautiful designs (kupesi), involving the abstraction of concrete objects. . . [A]rt can be defined as a transformation from representation to abstraction, engaging in the production of symmetry, harmony and beauty.<sup>16</sup>

17.  
John Waiko  
unpublished  
paper, Pacific  
History  
Association  
Conference,  
Canberra,  
July 1985.

18.  
Michael Mel  
2002:42



Figure 6  
Brian Robinson  
(Torres Strait  
Islands).  
*Navigating  
narrative –  
Nemo's encounter  
in the Torres  
Strait, 2012.*  
Linocut printed  
in black from  
one block; image  
size: 56 x 10.9cm.  
Editioning printer:  
Elizabeth Hunter.  
Published by  
Djumbunji Press  
KickArts Fine  
Art Printmaking;  
image courtesy  
the artist and  
KickArts.

In many Melanesian languages, no single words exist for the Western cultural concepts like 'history' and 'art.' Nevertheless myths, legends, poetry, songs, incantations, objects and images reveal cultural values, spiritual beliefs, and social customs. The Papua New Guinean historian John Waiko described the mourning customs of his Binandere people as 'crying:' this act transferred the personality of the deceased into rhythms that were incorporated into the clan's repertoire. Drums and dance and melodies for solo voice keep the memory of the dead present for the survivors. Another way to transform history into songs and vice versa is 'crying' for a lost stone club, which then became the story of how it was made, where it came from, how it was exchanged and the battles and hunting expeditions of which it was a part.<sup>17</sup>

The contrast between Western concepts of art and history with relevant Melanesian concepts is a recurring theme in the work of Papuan scholar and performance artist Michael Mel.<sup>18</sup> In one article on the theme of indigeneity, which is recurrent in his writing and performance art, he claims that, 'art from an

19. indigenous context cannot be transferred wholly into another  
Michael Mel context for reading'.<sup>19</sup>  
2000:5

20. Mel identified three categories in the PNG lingua franca Tok  
Michael Mel Pisin that lead Melanesian people towards a sense of shared  
'Introduction' in culture: *kastom* (our ways), *taim bilong masta* (the time of  
Cochrane 2007:1–9 masters, colonial era) and *yumi iet* (our future). He noted that  
for many Melanesians 'one of the most popular categories has  
been the notion of *kastom*; this refers in many ways to a sense  
of shared culture.' The second category, *taim bilong masta*,  
'relates to the colonial experiences of being treated differently  
by the colonial masters because we were different in language,  
behaviour, skin colour and custom.' Mel explains *yumi iet*, the  
final category, in this way: 'the new Pacific is an admixture of  
confluences ... Western influences combined with those of our  
own hamlets and villages produce a cornucopia that articulates  
Pacific differences within the Pacific and without'.<sup>20</sup>

*Kastom* is loosely translated as 'our way'; it refers to the social systems, cultural activities, knowledge and values inherited from the past. It is not just nostalgia for village life and cultural pride in the ancestors but encompasses indigenous power relations, customs and life styles. *Kastom bilong ples* signifies attachment to a particular group whose cultural practices are bound to their own laws, society and environment. It is commonly employed in the lingua franca of Vanuatu, the Solomon Islands, PNG and the Torres Strait Islands; in New Caledonia, Kanak people have their equivalent 'coutume'. For Torres Strait Islanders, the phrase is *ailan kastom* (Island Custom). The Commonwealth Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Act (1989) defines it as 'the body of customs, traditions, observances and beliefs of some or all of the Torres Strait Islanders living in the Torres Strait Area.'



21.  
Bernard Narokobi  
1983:12

Figure 7  
Kwoma Arts  
group, Iatmul  
people, East Sepik  
Province Papua  
New Guinea.  
Si (ceiling) and  
Kwat (support  
posts), part of  
an installation  
for the 7th Asia  
Pacific triennial,  
Queensland Art  
Gallery–Gallery  
of Modern Art,  
Brisbane 2012.  
Photo Susan  
Cochrane with  
permission of  
the artists.



Since the 1970s there has been a continual emphasis on keeping *kastom* alive in Papua New Guinea. In the 1980s philosopher Bernard Narokobi called it a priority, arguing that ‘with the establishment of our political independence, our first task is to restore our self-respect, pride and dignity.’<sup>21</sup> The country’s leaders expressed concern that because of the dramatic social change and upheaval brought on by the influences of modernization and economic development, Papua New Guineans risked losing or devaluing their traditional knowledge, customs and cultural activities.



22. It was held under the patronage of Dame Carol Kidu, who was then the only female Member elected to Papua New Guinea's National Parliament. Following a concerted campaign, three women were elected to National Parliament in 2012.

23. Symposium program and Exhibition Program posted on Nicolas Garnier's blog <http://nicolasgarnier.com/> Viewed 12/03/2012 Blog since discontinued.

Kastom has inspired artists throughout the Pacific Islands. The interaction of kastom and contemporary culture (and conversely the rejection of kastom as inappropriate to contemporary culture) energizes artists and creates tensions in all kinds of artistic expression.

Kastom is appreciated and employed with a selective eye throughout Papua New Guinea today as citizens of the new nation continually evaluate their emerging national identity. In May 2011, an important symposium, 'Women, Kastom and Modernity' was held at the National Parliament House.<sup>22</sup> Simultaneously, an art exhibition called 'Rethinking the Role of Women in Papua New Guinea' was held at the National Library, where prominent artists (only one of whom was female), were invited to reflect on issues of gender equality.<sup>23</sup> Following a year of concerted effort to increase the representation of women in Parliament and other leadership roles (a move hotly contested by some men in influential positions), the symposium provided the opportunity to critically discuss changing perspectives on kastom and how traditional values may continue to empower or dis-empower women in Papua New Guinea today.

## SECTION II

### VILLAGE CITY WORLD

Each indigenous artistic system operates within its own framework. Throughout Melanesia, distinctive art forms express characteristic local cultures in village communities that are linked by language, kinship and environment. In the urban zone, principally in the metropolitan centers of New Zealand and Australia and the capital cities of island nations, artists extend their chosen genres of painting, sculpture, digital media, installation and performance to new dimensions. Urban artists' creative work may also reflect contested loyalties to tradition and

Figure 8  
Micheline  
Neporon (Kanak  
people, New  
Caledonia)  
holding her  
engraved  
bamboos and with  
her painting in  
the background. Engraved  
bamboos were  
traditionally  
used for carrying  
messages or story  
telling, Micheline  
uses this medium  
for images of  
contemporary  
Kanak life.  
Photo provided  
by the artist.

modernity. Globalization pulls all the peoples of the world into closer orbits. Pacific artists from village and urban backgrounds have been displayed at international biennials and reached new audiences for their art.



This is not to say that villagers' horizons are particularly limited: there are pathways between rural, urban and global settings that works of art frequently travel. The discussion of festivals provides a lens to view the interaction between *kastom* and contemporary art in rural, urban and global settings. Festivals can have agendas apart from their program of performances: Melanesia 2000, for example, which was developed by Kanak leader Jean-Marie Tjibaou in 1975, was a crucial event in

24. <http://www.alastairmcintosh.com/general/resources/1983-Bernard-Narokobi-Melanesian-Way.pdf>

25. Objects made for ceremonies may be sold after their use, for example the Tubuan Kamut Mut masks collected by the Queensland Art Gallery from the National Mask Festival, Kokopo, East New Britain in 2011 and subsequently displayed in the Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art 7 in 2012. There are also established market places and outlets where artists and artisans sell works made for sale, an important source of income.

claiming the recognition of Kanak people and their culture in New Caledonia.

Alistair McIntosh remembered a Bernard Narokobi quote that was pasted on his office wall in Port Moresby:

Welcome to the University.  
The ancient, timeless, eternal  
University of Melanesia.

The village  
where courses are offered in living.<sup>24</sup>

In Melanesian village communities where *kastom bilong ples* remains the basis of community life, the chief motivation for art making and performance is ceremonial rather than commercial.<sup>25</sup> Communities stage elaborate ceremonies with social and spiritual dimensions that entail sustained performances and the creation of complex sets of art objects. Some ceremonies serve to ensure the continuing fertility of the land and its harvests, others to mark major life events like coming-of-age, marriage and death.

Members of a community (or specific groups within a community, like men's secret societies) employ a shared vocabulary of forms, patterns and symbols. Whether permanent or ephemeral, the art forms they produce to mark special occasions contribute to a sense of well-being and belonging among the members of the society.

Each of the distinctive *culturo-linguistic* groups of New Britain, one of the major islands of the Bismark Archipelago in Papua New Guinea, creates elaborate sets of masks for coming-of-age ceremonies. Certain places on clan lands are designated as specifically for the secluded production of art objects. The inter-generational creation of sets of special objects is at once an instructive experience and an affirmation of values and beliefs. For example, men of a Tolai tubuan group (men's society)

Figure 9  
Tolai tubuan groups arrive by canoe for the Wawargira ceremony, which heralds the opening of the Kokopo National Mask Festival, East New Britain, Papua New Guinea. The dukduk masks are exclusive to initiated men of the tubuan (men's secret societies) of the Tolai people. Field research photo by Susan Cochrane, with permission of the artists.

who are involved in staging a complex ceremony spend many hours in their place of seclusion making tubuan and dukduk masks. Novices are instructed and mentored by their seniors. The disciplined system of creating art is also a process for the transmission of principles, laws and rituals considered sacred and inviolable, and those who rise high within the system attain great honor. At the 2008 Kokopo National Mask Festival the Duke of York's group of Tolai tubuan performers was led by the president of the local government, Issac Ilom, who, as a big man in the Island's society, also holds the principal rank of the tubuan. Albert Buanga, the Mayor of Kokopo, also holds these civic and kastom ranks.



Secular mini-festivals also occur frequently in other local contexts: every school has its culture day, every church its fete, every family celebrates events in the life cycle. Local, regional and national festivals are events that celebrate the resilience of valued traditions and the eclectic mix of contemporary culture in Pacific societies. In these forums of cultural pride there is no need for Pacific Islanders to confront the difficulties of aligning their ideas, interests and forms of creative expression with those of the Euro-American art world.



26.  
Teulia Festival  
2013 at  
[http://www.  
teuilafestival.  
com/](http://www.teuilafestival.com/)

Since it was established in 1991, Samoa's Teulia Festival has grown to become one of Samoa's most celebrated annual events and one of the South Pacific's biggest cultural festivals. The program for 2012 highlighted the interaction between fa'a Samoa (Samoan ways, similar to kastom) and activities introduced from elsewhere that are now integrated into Samoan contemporary culture, including the choral exhibition, traditional Siva Samoa and upbeat dance competitions, Chief's Fiafia Polynesian spectacular, Ailao Afi/Fire Knife dancing, Umu (Samoan ground oven), tattooing and carving demonstrations, International Paddling, Celebration Concert and the Miss Samoa Pageant.<sup>26</sup>

Some festivals celebrate turning points in Island history, like the annual Coming of the Light, which heralds the arrival of Christianity in the Torres Strait Islands in 1873. The the clothing and moral codes that strict Christian denominations introduced to South Pacific communities fundamentally changed social organisation and modes of expression, including dress, dance and festivals. Today's modest attire does nothing to arrest the expertly choreographed dancing and choral singing. Some sets of dances require ingenious 'dance machines' that clap open and shut with hand movements; other groups of performers sport elaborate head-dresses made by experts that clearly denote their island of origin. The scarcity of resources means that the TSI are often innovative creators: plywood, flattened tin, chicken feathers, wire and fishing line are incorporated into masks and dance machines; bottle tops tied together make good leg rattles; blue plastic strapping removed from freight is expertly woven into baskets.

Figure 10  
Ken THAIDAY  
Sr. Meriam Mir  
people, Torres  
Strait Islands,  
Australia.

*Beizam headdress*  
(*Shark with  
bait fish*) 1995.  
Plywood, enamel  
paint, wire,  
feathers, shark's  
teeth, string

Collection:  
Queensland  
Art Gallery.  
Image courtesy:  
QAGOMA. ©  
The artist



In the 1970s in New Caledonia, some Kanak leaders felt the need to revitalize elements of cultural life that had been diminished or discontinued after more than a century of colonial administration, mission influences and the incursion of increasing numbers of immigrants to New Caledonia. The Kanak people did not yet have a presence in the political regime of their own country. The leader of the FLNKS, Jean-Marie Tjibaou, realized that 'culture is the key element in regaining Kanak esteem.'

27.  
Tjibaou, Jean-  
Marie. 1985: 1

The Melanesia 2000 festival organized by Tjibaou was considered a formative moment in the assertion of Kanak identity in New Caledonia.<sup>27</sup> It was one of Tjibaou's first appearances in the public arena and it is significant that he made this a cultural drive, rather than a political one. The timing of Melanesia 2000 coincided with independence celebrations in neighbouring PNG, which allowed Kanak leaders to reinforce just how far they were from achieving the same goal. Tjibaou moved to have Kanak culture made known and recognised by the French and other inhabitants of the country, who were mostly ignorant

28.  
Bensa, Alban,  
1995:18–19

of Melanesian realities. As he said, ‘the profound motivation behind this festival is the belief in the possibility of commencing a deeper ... and continuing dialogue between European culture and Indigenous culture.’<sup>28</sup>

29.  
FoPA originated  
as the South  
Pacific festival  
of Arts in Fiji in  
1972, when the Fiji  
Arts Council and  
the South Pacific  
Commission (now  
the Secretariat of  
the South Pacific  
Community)  
facilitated the  
first festival.

The Festival of Pacific Arts (FoPA) is arguably the world’s largest indigenous arts festival. Across the Pacific, FoPA is a highly anticipated event, the primary international festival designed by Pacific people for Pacific people.<sup>29</sup> For the host countries, especially small island states like Palau, the Cook Islands, Western Samoa and the Solomon Islands, holding the festival has been the largest cultural event ever to take place in their country. As Pacific Islands became sovereign nations in the 1970s and ’80s, their leaders expressed concerns that the dramatic social change and upheaval arising from modernization, political change and economic development might somehow destroy or devalue their traditional knowledge, customs and cultural activities; young people especially were attracted to new forms of entertainment and urban culture; traditional customs and ceremonies disappeared among the urban, the poor, the marginalized. While recognizing the dynamic of change on all forms of cultural activity, Narokobi expressed the desire for cultural resilience:

30.  
Narokobi 1983:5

Will we see our own true size images, or will we see ourselves in the images and the shadows of others? . . . Like the fruits of our mother earth, we, the potters and the weavers, can and should shape our own history.<sup>30</sup>

Up to 3,000 participants from twenty-seven Pacific countries arrive in the host nation, with thousands of locals contributing to the festivities as participants, hosts and enthusiastic spectators. The theme of the 2012 FoPA hosted by the Solomon Islands, ‘Culture in Harmony with Nature,’ emphasized the desire of indigenous people to retain their tangible and intangible culture and social values. John Wayne, a notable sculptor and one of the leaders of the Solomon Islands Western Province delegation,

31.  
Pers.com. Honiara  
10 July 2012.

said the theme was an accurate reflection of the contexts and recurring patterns of the cultural life of small communities like those of the Marovo Lagoon, which have a symbiotic dependence with their environment and all it provides.<sup>31</sup>

32.  
Karen Stevenson  
2008:160

FoPA is a massive showcase for all art forms, a valued meeting place for exchange and dialogue. More than an arts festival, FoPA is a huge celebration of resilience and sharing, an incubator of future talents and repository of precious memories in what Hau'ofa called 'our Ocean of Islands.'

## PASIFIKA

A strong collective Oceanic identity called 'Pasifika' has been growing in popularity since the 1980s. Initially it described New Zealand-born Polynesian artists trying to make their voices heard among a multitude of Maori and Pakeha (New Zealanders of European and other heritage) artists. Stevenson commented that 'the concept of urban and Polynesian is one frequently used in New Zealand. The combination of an urban lifestyle with a Polynesian mindset is the reality of many as they forge an integrated, yet distinctly different, life.'<sup>32</sup>



Figure 11  
Nikki Hastings  
Mc-Fall (New  
Zealand/  
Samoa). Bringing  
Pacific lifestyles  
into living  
room spaces.  
Installation in  
*Pasifika Styles*,  
2006. Cambridge  
Museum of  
Archaeology and  
Anthropology.  
Photo Susan  
Cochrane with  
permission of  
the artist.



Pasifika rapidly became popular throughout the home islands and spread among diasporic communities in Australia and the USA. By the end of the twentieth century, identifying as Pasifika was widely acknowledged as a vehicle to escape the racial, linguistic and cultural confines imposed by Western

33.  
Jim Vivieaere  
1996:57

theorists who imagined Pacific islands societies as ‘hybrid’ and ‘post-colonial’ and questioned their ‘authenticity.’

At the time of the second Asia-Pacific Triennial at the Queensland Art Gallery in 1996, curator/provocateur Jim Vivieaere, of Cook Islands/New Zealand heritage, commented that:

Contemporary Pacific Island art in New Zealand is like a three-legged race. It is both a novelty and a handicap event, with the Pacific Island artist facing the demands of partnership and timing. The artist is tied to his community on one side, and his new audience on the other, uncomfortable about working alone in the Western tradition of individual statement, and at the same time constricted by the art world itself, which offers only a narrow opening – a vision of an imagined Pacific Island world – through which the work is admitted to a public space.<sup>33</sup>

What does Pasifika mean to the Pacific artists who are continually inventing and re-inventing it? Current issues move beyond race and place, beyond the post-colonial and the post-modern: they interpret new technologies, attitudes and ideas. The continual reappraisal and redefinition of Pasifika art has enabled the steady growth in the number of artists referencing a Pacific identity and developing their art into a distinct movement.

Pamela Zeplin, an Australian art historian with a strong commitment to promoting contemporary Pacific artists, commented on Pasifika artist’s innovative use of digital media, the internet and social media as forums for their art:

Pacific ‘territory’ may be dynamic, multiple and fluid but it’s also fraught with complicated theoretical, cultural and practical considerations of identity, authenticity, place, power, and community protocols that sometimes prove incommensurable with capital A art systems. Although

34.  
Pamela Zeplin  
2000:72

Figure 12  
Lily Laita (Samoa/  
Maori). *Vahine  
Pasifika*. Oilpaint  
on tar paper,  
400 cm x 150cm.  
Many Polynesian  
women who  
migrated to New  
Zealand's urban  
centres may  
have high status  
and important  
roles within their  
communities  
but work at  
menial jobs in  
urban centres.  
Laita portrays  
one who has the  
ceremonial role  
of mixing kava,  
but is reduced to  
cleaning kitchens  
and toilets to  
earn a living.  
Collection Tjibaou  
Cultural Centre  
(c) the artist.

'tradition' is now acknowledged as continuing and contemporaneous, how is a metropolitan gallery full of fine mats, bilums and/or performances – as in 'Pacific Storms' – curated and/or understood? Or, how do specific local references – as in Eric Bridgeman's transgressive videos referencing PNG masks, or Keren Ruki's Maori cloaks of dingo skin – navigate the consciousness of new audiences?

Ignoring official 'boundaries,' younger artists are already bouncing work and ideas around the Internet, promoting, curating, archiving and critiquing through blogs like Pacific Arts Alliance, Masalai Blog, Urban Viti, iCi, Beyond Pacific Art and Colour me Fiji.<sup>34</sup>

Pasifika artists do not shy away from global issues, especially issues that present real and present danger to their home communities: climate change, HIV-AIDS, violence and conflict, corruption. Pasifika deconstructs clichés of 'romantic islands, noble savages and dusky maidens.' Juxtaposing tourist clichés with traditional Pacific art forms, Rosanna Raymond, Ani O'Niell and Niki Hastings-McFall highlight the cross-cultural contradictions of what iconic Pacific objects symbolize to Pasifika people and Western audiences. As Stevenson commented on Hastings-McFall's series featuring the popular Pacific flower lei (garland of flowers given in greeting also frequently worn as part of dance costume):



35.  
Karen Stevenson  
2011:9

36.  
Due to perceived occupational health and safety risks for museum curators, permission was not given for them to undertake fieldwork in Papua New Guinea until 2010. The changed attitude to fieldwork and direct contact with artists in remote communities undertaken by QAGOMA is evidenced by the representation of Pacific art in the Asia Pacific Triennials in 2012 and 2015.

Flowers, so benign yet so aesthetically pleasing, embody a tourist icon, a cultural reality, and a conflict of interests. In some islands, the church prohibited the wearing and intertwining of flowers in young women's hair. They believed that this might have rendered them too attractive. In contrast the myth of the dusky maiden - always with a flower in her hair - available and consenting, is a Western perception that has survived missionisation. Using a discarded tourist icon -- the cheap \$2 lei. ... The colours are rich and sensual and scream 'Pacific.' The contradictions abound. The unreal synthetic nature of tourism is highlighted and Hastings-McFall asks her viewer to draw the line between the myths and realities that make up the Pacific.<sup>35</sup>

## SECTION III

### PACIFIC ART ON THE WORLD STAGE

Multiple challenges face metropolitan art museums' engagement and collaboration with Pacific cultural organizations and creative partners. Foremost among these problems is the limited Western critical vocabulary for analyzing the relationship between Pacific art and Pacific social and cultural structures. Many developing Pacific nations, even large ones like Papua New Guinea, lack a government-funded support system for the arts like Australia's Council for the Arts or Creative New Zealand. This is a significant hurdle: without the contribution of a major corporate sponsor or philanthropist, opportunities for Pacific artists rarely present themselves. Artists must also struggle with Western perceptions of the Pacific as isolated, dangerous and generally third-world.<sup>36</sup>

Pamela Rosi, a curator who has consistently found ways to present and promote PNG artists in the USA, has commented on the agency of contemporary artists as 'cultural ambassadors.'



37.  
Pamela Rosi, 2006

38.  
German curator  
Eva Raabe has  
commented on  
how difficult it  
is in Europe to  
get the work of  
urban-based  
painters Martin  
Morububuna and  
Joe Nalo accepted  
as contemporary  
art, rather than  
as merely of  
ethnographic  
interest.  
See Eva Raabe  
1999:21

39.  
The Melanesia  
Project ran  
from 2005–10.  
'Focusing on the  
important but  
largely unstudied  
Melanesian  
collections in the  
British Museum,  
this project aims  
to bring new  
perspectives to  
both the study  
of indigenous  
art, and the  
understanding  
of ownership,  
heritage, and  
relations between  
museums and  
communities'.

In the 1980s and 1990s, several artists, including Larry Santana, whose paintings depict topics related to tensions between modernity, tradition, and social alienation, received limited support from the PNG government and to represent their art and culture in the US. Rosi commented that while American audiences received artists like Santana enthusiastically, critics initially raised doubts about the authenticity of contemporary art as a valid expression of PNG culture. In turn, this led to her questioning of the role of 'Western gatekeepers' to categorize, stereotype, and devalue contemporary PNG art in the global market.<sup>37</sup>

In Australia, Europe and the USA, public institutions have lagged in developing collection policies for the living art of the Pacific and there has been little interest among leading private galleries in promoting the work of the artists mentioned here. New Zealand is the exception as it has a highly geared 'art machine' for the presentation, promotion, and publication of Maori and Pasifika artists.

In comparison with the high status of older masterpieces of 'Oceanic art' in museum collections, contemporary Melanesian art has made little headway in the international art world up to the end of the twentieth century.<sup>38</sup> 'Oceanic art' in European and American museums and private collections usually consists of so-called 'traditional' art (previously designated 'primitive' art), and valued by its 'authenticity,' which is characterized almost exclusively by a lack of outside influences. Preferably old and rare, 'traditional' art objects suit Euro-centric notions of ethnographic authenticity, with their desirability confirmed by Western scholarship, connoisseurs, and the art market. Many renowned 'authentic' pieces became highly valued because of their connections with artists and movements of modern European art and the collectors who acquired such 'masterpieces.' Pacific Islanders and their cultures were spoken for and written about by Western experts: museum collections

[https://www.britishmuseum.org/research/projects/melanesia\\_project.aspx](https://www.britishmuseum.org/research/projects/melanesia_project.aspx)

40.  
See participating artist's profiles on Pasifika Styles website <http://www.pasifikastyles.org.uk/artists/>

became remote from their source communities and stereotyped concepts evolved around them.

Since the 1990s, residency programs for Pacific artists have developed in several major Western metropolitan museums with important early collections of Oceanic art, including the British Museum in London, Musee Quai Branly in Paris and the de Young Museum in San Francisco. Indigenous visual artists, performers and writers were invited to these museums to research their historical collections and look for connections with objects from their modern communities. Each artist brought their singular vision to the task of reconnecting the neglected objects of early ethnological expeditions to the living cultures of their communities. Artists like PNG's Denis Livinai and Vanuatu's Ralph Regenvanu have centered their work around the some of the objects they engaged with at the British Museum's Melanesia project.<sup>39</sup>

In 2006, a group of Pasifika artists self-curated the exhibition *Pasifika Styles* at the venerable Cambridge University Museum of Anthropology and Archaeology,<sup>40</sup> inserting their pieces in new media alongside ancient masterpieces of Oceanic art. *Pasifika Styles* used media prevalent in contemporary Pacific art like performance, installation, body art and digital media to challenge notions like the 'ethnographic present,' 'authenticity' and the 'anonymity of tribal art' implicit in CUMAA's classic nineteenth century displays. The challenge for these Pasifika artists was to establish a relationship with their ancestors while presenting themselves as individual artists. Visitors entered the CUMAA through George Nuku's clear perspex 'Out of Space Marae,' an ethereal simulation of the entrance to a Maori whareniui (meeting house). Lisa Reihana placed headphones on a carved Maori figure in a display case, with dramatical digital projections as a backdrop. Rosanna Raymond created a cosy 'Living Room' in the mezzanine defying the concept of the museum as a place preserving dead cultures. *Pasifika Styles* was a pivotal exhibition that explored how artists' collaborations

41.  
Petelo Tuilalo  
2012:21–24

with museums could break through clichéd approaches and achieve new understandings of Pacific cultures.

42.  
KMFA has  
been active for  
two decades  
to promote  
indigenous  
Taiwanese artists  
at the local and  
regional level. In  
2006 it initiated  
the Austronesian  
Contemporary  
Art Project to  
unite Taiwanese  
artists with their  
Pacific cousins  
and developed  
a long term  
collaboration  
with the Tjibaou  
Cultural Centre

Another type of residency program gives invited artists the opportunity to work in a different cultural setting, experiment with new ideas and/or material, meet and perhaps collaborate with local artists and create experimental works on site. A large-scale residency project was devised for the inauguration of the Tjibaou Cultural Centre (TCC) in 1998, for which twenty-five artists from Pacific countries joined with New Caledonian artists in the creative encounter Wake Naima (Creating Together). TCC is now a hub for contemporary art, music and performance in the South Pacific.

Increasing opportunities for artists and host institutions are assisted by access to cheap flights and the universal use of computers and the internet. As a result of this increased capacity for communication, the Pacific arts community is becoming increasingly interconnected. Pasifika artists Michel Tuffery and Jim Vivieaere were the Kaohsiung Museum of Fine Art's (KMFA) first artists-in-residence in 2007, a program which has emphasized exchange between Aboriginal Taiwanese and Pacific artists who enjoy the challenge of art making in a new context.<sup>41</sup> Creative interaction with local artists and viewers in a totally new context is the point of such projects.<sup>42</sup> Lin Chih-Ming and Kulele Tapiwulan were artists in residence at the Tjibaou Cultural Centre in 2008 and held an exhibition of their completed art, *Sur la trace de nos ancêtres austronésiens* (*Following the traces of our Austronesian ancestors*). What seemed most remarkable to the New Caledonians was the ancestral links between the Austronesian peoples across the vast Pacific Ocean: no-one had imagined that the Kanak people shared a cultural heritage with Aboriginal Taiwanese. A reporter asked whether after such a long passage of time, there were still some commonalities between them, to which Kulele responded that '[although] once lost to each other we are now reunited, hand in hand. Art has no frontiers, neither does humanity.

Sharing is always possible.<sup>43</sup>

Figure 13  
Greg Semu  
(Samoa/New  
Zealand). *The  
Battle of the  
Noble Savage 1*  
2007. Pigment  
print on  
Hahnemühle gloss  
baryta. Edition  
of 10. 150x200  
cm. (c) Musee  
Quai Branly and  
Greg Semu.

Semu designs the  
tableau vivant,  
directs the actors  
and participates  
in the action  
himself (kneeling  
figure on right),  
as well as being  
the photographer.  
Created while  
Semu was artist-  
in-residence  
at Musee Quai  
Branly, Paris,  
exhibited at  
Kaohsiung  
Museum of Fine  
Arts, Taiwan,  
Tjibaou Cultural  
Centre, New  
Caledonia and  
selected for the  
7th Asia Pacific  
Triennial at the  
Queensland Art  
Gallery-Gallery  
of Modern  
Art, Brisbane,  
Australia, 2012.



World stages like the Asia Pacific Triennial (APT), hosted by the Queensland Art Gallery-Gallery of Modern Art since 1993,<sup>44</sup> are points of intersection between the living art and culture of Pacific communities and the outside world. Despite occasional success stories, relatively few Pacific artists have made their name internationally.

Although the APT is only one among many international biennials and triennials, it has hosted more Pacific artists than any other similar event, and accepted the diversity of their indigenous art practices.<sup>45</sup> Pasifika artists have been invited because they have established 'name artist' reputations: John Pule and Michael Parewhokai have made repeated appearances. For others from PNG and Vanuatu, their renown in their local community is the key factor for their selection. While QAGOMA's APT may only be a blip on the world's art radar, over its twenty-year history it has established a significant presence in the Pacific region and raised considerable interest



43.  
Kulele cited in  
Les Nouvelles  
Caledonniens  
6/10/08 (my  
translation).

44.  
The institution  
was formerly  
the Queensland  
Art Gallery;  
the Gallery of  
Modern Art was  
added in 2006,  
and the name  
changed. Initially  
called the Asia-  
Pacific Triennial,  
the hyphen was  
symbolically  
dropped when  
Pacific voices  
spoke out  
about being  
an appendage  
to Asia.

45.  
Queensland Art  
Gallery, APT2:  
Wendi Choulai  
Egu Rami Artist  
Performance', 27  
September 1996,  
QAGOMA APT  
Archive (video),  
[http://tv.qagoma.  
qld.gov.  
au/2012/11/08/  
apt2-wendi-  
choulai-egu-  
rami-artist-  
performance/](http://tv.qagoma.qld.gov.au/2012/11/08/apt2-wendi-choulai-egu-rami-artist-performance/).

for the region's art by courageously presenting the unknown and the unexpected alongside high-profile artists.<sup>46</sup>

Reviewing successive APTs, Lisa Chandler discerned an 'Asia-Pacific Effect,' finding that in the 1990s, the APT series helped to 'create an alternative art circuit for practitioners who may have been excluded from similar events in Europe and America, while also providing a conduit to such prestigious international exhibitions.'<sup>47</sup> Michael Wesley underscored the attitudinal shift which occurred from 1990s to 2010s, noting that the rebalancing of art politics in the Pacific region follows the geo-political dynamic of the rise of Asia and the worldwide technological revolution of the Internet and mobile devices.<sup>48</sup> Rex Butler suggested that in its twenty-year history, the APT has effectively removed the blinkers of Western art history and demonstrated that 'art today is absolutely global and contemporary . . . there is no longer any centre of art against which we can judge the rest of the world and no history of art against which we can measure the present.'<sup>49</sup>

Influential academics, art curators, and museum directors now concur that, throughout the world, communities of people live differently and employ different ways to express their experiences and visions. The arts and cultures of all peoples of the world are constituent parts of the human story, a worldwide cultural history rich in diversity and interconnections. Adventurous art museums and astute curators are opening their doors and minds to the vibrant Pacific and their audiences are attracted to compelling art that brims with sensation and spectacle.

Although the phenomenon of globalization has pulled all the peoples of the world into closer orbits, multiple realities exist under the umbrella of 'world art.' The contemporary Pacific takes its place within world art with the continuity of its own custom that reflects the past, envisions the present, and shape its future. In the words of the philosopher Bernard Narokobi,

46. QAGOMA Asia Pacific Triennial Exhibition Archive online [https://www.qagoma.qld.gov.au/research/library/about\\_the\\_qag\\_library/apt\\_archive](https://www.qagoma.qld.gov.au/research/library/about_the_qag_library/apt_archive)
47. Lisa Chandler, 'The Asia-Pacific Effect', 41. In the 1990s, international biennales spread to non-Western centres, such as Beijing, Seoul, Havana, Johannesburg, and Noumea, each with a widening field of local artists.
48. Michael Wesley 2012:65
49. Rex Butler, ABC Arts Blog, Friday 23 November 2012.
50. Bernard Narokobi 1990:21
- 'our art should be seen and enjoyed and our artists appreciated for what they are and not for what or whom they resemble.'

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