

The Emic Avenue; Art through Talanoa

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Contents

1. ATTESTATION OF AUTHORSHIP	2
2. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	3
3. ABSTRACT	4
4. INTRODUCTION	5
5. INSTIGATE WITH <i>TALANOA</i>	6
6. EMIC EPISTOMOLOGY	
6.1. The Emic Viewpoint	9
6.2. Knowledge via Collectives	13
7. PERFORMING THE <i>TALANOA</i>	
7.1. Politics of Performance	19
7.2. The Power of Mundane Movements	22
7.3. Transform <i>Talanoa</i> into Art	26
8. POLITICS OF SPACE & SPECTATORSHIP	
8.1. Spectators Reaction	29
8.2. Artist Employing the Alternative Space	33
8.3. Activating Space through Selective Spectatorship	35
9. MTG HAWKES BAY EXHIBITION PROJECT	
9.1. <i>Talanoa</i> with Lucy Hammonds	38
9.2. RSE Work	38
9.3. Two-week research	44
9.4. Applying <i>Talanoa</i> in Hawkes Bay	45
9.5. Creating the Social	46
9.6. Creating the Social Doesn't Work	48
9.7. Parking Meter	49
9.8. Auckland Install	50
9.9. MTG Hawkes Bay Install	53
10. <i>TALANOA</i> IS NEVER-ENDING...	57
11. LIST OF IMAGES	58
12. BIBLIOGRAPHY OF REFERENCES	61
13. APPENDICES	
13.1 Links to written texts and publications about my art practice	63
13.2 Images of the exhibition in MTG Hawkes Bay <i>Talanoa</i> Colloquies of the Unrecognized Worker	64
13.3 Research images for the End of Year Handed to The Examination Panel	73
13.4 End of Year Installation	83

ATTESTATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award of another degree or diploma or a university or institution of higher learning.

Signed  _____ John Veal

7 October 2015

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Before I begin, I would like to acknowledge recent AUT, Art & Design Doctorate graduate Talita Kiume Toluta'u and her research on Talanoa.

ABSTRACT

To *Talanoa*, you have a personal encounter with another person in conversation. To begin this project, the process of *Talanoa* is used in a respectful journalistic mode and sensibility for collecting stories of the everyday. This project enacts narratives that have been collected through everyday interactions with people, both within my community and abroad. In reacting to the prevalent issues gathered from minority groups, such as the working class, migrants and religious groups; and by exploring tropes of migration and their subsequent interaction with hegemony; the desire is to bring these overlooked realities of the everyday people into visibility through art. By enacting these stories through performative and material practice the outcome offers a sometimes humorous, and possibly powerful symbolic, emic viewpoint to the Western metanarrative.

INTRODUCTION

In this exegesis, I discuss the use of *Talanoa* and how it is used to create an artwork. First I will talk about Dr Timote Violeti's essay on *Talanoa*, and how it is employed in the Pacific as a means of communicating. I will also discuss the term *Emic*, and how it is applied in my research gathering and the importance of sourcing stories from within. A chapter in Claire Bishop's (2012) book "Artificial Hells", entitled "Delegated Performances: Outsourcing Authenticity" will be discussed in relation to the politics that comes with performance. I will also talk about the use of mundane movements collected from *Talanoa* and transforming the movements into a powerful metaphoric performance. Epistemology is also discussed in this paper but through Dr Manulani Meyer's seminar on "Ike 'Āina: Sustainability in the context of Hawaiian epistemology" discussing how organised collectives utilise epistemology in their practice (Keahou-Kahalu'u Education Grp, 2011). I also discuss how *Talanoa* is used not only in exchanging words but also in exchanging objects and how *Talanoa* is transformed into Art through Performance and Material practice. Then I will talk about the involvement of the spectator and how the artwork generates *Talanoa*. Lastly I will discuss the Hawkes Bay MTG project where I utilise *Talanoa* in an etic approach.

INSTIGATE WITH TALANOA

Talanoa is a universal method which most Pacific cultures are built on; to *Talanoa*, you converse with another intimately. Ideas of trading, gathering, personal, and dissemination are all aspects that I explore in my project and which are used in the process of *Talanoa*. The project discusses social politics of the everyday, with *Talanoa* as the interconnecting concept and methodology. The process of *Talanoa* is extensively used in my research methods in the beginning stages of this project. To employ *Talanoa*, I will be gathering information, and publishing through art as a journalist would do, telling their stories through words.

In his 1996 essay about *Talanoa*, Dr Timote Violeti discusses ideas of *Talanoa* as a research methodology in the Pacific culture. Dr Violeti highlights the key aspects that are used in the process of *Talanoa* as being, personal encounters, exchanging stories and the legitimacy of a story. He also talks about *Talanoa* being the best way to gather information from the Pacific community. This method of face-to-face communicating, makes it more personal with a typical social group; as opposed to having a third party conversation like a telephone conversation or writing/reading a letter.

Most of the stories, that I have collected are a-story-within-a-story variety, and some from random conversations with people around me. In order to collect these stories, you have to submerge yourself within a community, and through this process of *Talanoa*, there is empiric evidence of the specific community from which the stories are gathered. In Jorge Satorre's exhibition '*Emic Etic?*' at Artspace, Auckland he talks about the ideas of etic and emic, the terms coined by American Linguist Kenneth Pike. Etic is to look into a culture from the outside, and emic is to look into a culture from the inside. The emic viewpoint is evident in this project from the stories being drawn from within a community I come from. I will elaborate more on the use of the Emic Avenue later on in this present work.

My first use of the *Talanoa* process was in a work I made in 2006, responding to the rise of murders within South Auckland (*figure 1*). I wanted to honour the murdered people by making a memorial sculpture with materials that were temporary in their original intended use, to reflect how it is that we occupy this world. These temporary sculptures were placed in the spaces where the murders had occurred. It wasn't until the end of this work while documenting the sculptures, a bunch of youths walked past and wanted to know what I was doing. They knew the person who had died in this area and the *Talanoa* we subsequently had, gave me more understanding of the person that the memorial sculptures were intended to commemorate. Prior to this *Talanoa* with the youths, my information only came from reading newspapers and listening to radio stations.



Figure 1

Meme theory is another possible context for my research, meme theory originates in the coining of the word by Richard Dawkins in his 1976 book, 'The Selfish Gene'. Meme theory seems to be a recent echo of the ancient process of *Talanoa* that creates a community by the gathering and distribution of information. Dr Violeti mentions the notion of legitimacy of a story from the process of *Talanoa*, but he doesn't discuss how a story travels through people, and therefore might lose its truth. For example, the game of Chinese whispers where one person whispers a message to another, which is passed through a line of people until the last player reveals the message to the group. Quite often, the message is changed throughout the journey of the message. People unconsciously add and change the original message, as they transmit the message. This idea of addition, retraction and exaggeration of information is interesting to me. The changing of a story through its transmission.

Participation by default is another idea this research investigates as a result of *Talanoa*. *Of interest is* the idea of the accessibility of a differing or varying type/s of information that people can gain without noticing it, for example, through the exaggeration of a story. Also, people can learn without consciously knowing, due to advertising or through the meme process, or just by the way a story is communicated to them. As a result, my research aims to further create a visual/aural art *Talanoa* in the community and promote the continuance and furthering of methods of disseminating cultural information.

EMIC EPISTIMOLOGY

The Emic Viewpoint

To look into one's living area, you must immerse yourself into the culture to really understand 'the mechanics of how our society works. In Janet Lilo's installation *'Right of Way'*, (figure 2) commissioned for the 5th Auckland Triennial, you get the sense of that, she is viewing her community from within. When you walk into Lilo's installation, she takes you right into her neighbourhood in Avondale, with her large scale images overtaking the walls of the Artspace gallery, which gives you a sense of being somewhere else, other than the gallery. The photographs are constructed from standard 6x4 images you get from the usual photo print shops. Each 6x4 image is a tile used to form a very large scale single, yet immersive image, a photo montage of roofs, fences and everyday suburban objects taken from Janet Lilo's viewpoint of her driveway. A key part of the artwork is Lilo's video and sound installation collected from her community, moving images and sounds of people, music, ambience and diverse spoken dialects in her neighbourhood, which evidences the multiculturalism in her local suburb (Janet Lilo Art, 2013).

The entire installation of Janet Lilo's (2013) artwork *'Right of Way'* is built on visual and audio material collected by herself, and from her driveway as a space between an interior and exterior, giving Lilo's perspective from inside her space looking outside. This is a key aspect that I am interested in for my research project; the terms emic and etic 'lifted' from the anthropological and social and behavioral sciences are apparent in Janet Lilo's installation. As touched on earlier, 'emic' involves analysis of cultural experience from the perspective of one who participates in the culture being researched, and 'etic' involves analysis of cultural experience from the perspective of one who does not participate in the culture being researched, an outsider. In Janet Lilo's case her perspective is through the emic sense, information has been gathered from inside the culture she comes from and participates in.



Figure 2

The emic viewpoint is also evident in local Tongan/New Zealand artist Kalisolaite Uhila with his work *'Mo'ui Tukuhausia, 2012'* (figure 3). Uhila was part of a group exhibition entitled, 'What do you mean, we?' which took place at Te Tuhi gallery in Pakuranga. In his work *'Mo'ui Tukuhausia'*, Uhila lives homelessly around the art gallery, Te Tuhi's buildings and the surrounding areas for the duration of two weeks. After living homelessly for two weeks, Uhila and the curator of the exhibition Bruce E. Phillips have a conversation about Uhila's homeless living experience. In the conversation, Uhila mentions, he crossed paths with a local homeless person during his endeavor. Uhila explained to the homeless person about his experiment of living homeless as an artwork. The homeless person acknowledged what Uhila was doing and in his own words, he says, *"Bro, I am glad you are doing that, man, it is good that someone is doing this to understand us better"*. In a way, the homeless person recognises how the emic viewpoint is important to understand a culture, which the artwork *'Mo'ui Tukuhausia"* and its processes are about. Uhila delves inside the culture of being homeless; his viewpoint from being homeless also gives an etic response from the outsiders of homeless culture (Te Tuhi, 2012).



Figure 3

I have already established the importance of the concepts of emic and etic to my research practice. With the process of *Talanoa* and the way it is traditionally used, it is necessary to establish how accurate and genuine a story gathered is. For this to happen, the process of *Talanoa* has to be gained through the emic viewpoint, gathering information from the inside of a society. However, as I have said earlier there is a tacit understanding that this is a flawed process, which develops subjectivities within a cultural context. As a result of this particular process of gathering information, a story comes to light, within a story being gathered. The idea of a story within a story is common in my research. The term etic comes into play once the artwork is created and shown to outsiders (viewers/audience), their reaction to the artwork, and how they will interpret the artwork to others. Through *Talanoa*, the artwork, then becomes *Talanoaic*!

Knowledge via Collectives

At the beginning of Dr. Manulani Aluli Meyer's documented seminar on 'Ike 'Āina: Sustainability in the context of Hawaiian epistemology', she mentions going into ancient Polynesian systems and speaks about how those systems work can be compared to western systems (Keauhou Kahulu'u Education Grp, 2011). Dr. Meyer's research is epistemologically filtered through the Hawaiian indigenous sense, which is similar to that of the South Pacific. Epistemology is the study, or a theory, of the nature and grounds of knowledge, especially with reference to its limits and validity. Dr. Meyer talks about the difference between knowing and knowledge. How knowing is something you gain from experience and knowledge is something you gain from theory, or as she describes it a 'left hemispheric experience'. The knowing aspect she refers to is evident in this project, and works hand in hand with the term emic. Which leads to my next topic, researching *Talanoa* from a collectives of people belonging to certain social groupings such as working class, migrants and religious groups (Keauhou Kahulu'u Education Grp, 2011).

In my art making, collectives are greatly involved in my research gathering process. A *Talanoa* usually begins with an individual, and by the end of collecting these conversations, I would have talked to a group of people belonging to a particular culture or sub-culture. This process of interacting with a particular stratum, society or community, gives me an understanding of how they function collectively. The emic sense employs an observational approach. Utilising the epistemological approach focuses on the action, collecting through doing. Knowing through experience is a common pedagogic tool, especially with migrants, who are coming into hegemonic realms such as New Zealand.

Collecting *Talanoa* through epistemology is a key aspect to this research project, not only do I gather information through exchange of words, but through experiencing the actions involved in the story being told. With this, I have discovered other organised collectives that work in similar environments, working in response to issues involving working class and migrants in Aotearoa. I have attached myself to other organised collectives to gain the emic and epistemological viewpoint of how they work with these societies. Here are examples of three collectives that I have worked with, not only in the interest of research but for the promotion and development of my/our practice in the public domain—which of course is a good place for *Talanoa* to occur.

Phoenix Performing Arts/Phoenix NZYP (*figure 4*) a West Auckland-based Theatre Company using theatre as a mechanism for community healing and social change. This collective employs troubled youths who have experienced the struggles of life, which are then portrayed through their performances. Again, this focuses on the use of people who have an '*experience through knowing*' perspective in understanding the issues involved with social changes and healing.



Figure 4

PARLOUR (*figure 5*) is a collective group project. Their approach involves setting up exhibition spaces and situations for artist to show fresh, challenging and thought provoking contemporary art. Their final Parlour show in 2013, was showcased at a house in South Auckland, Otahuhu. The interesting aspect to me of this exhibition wasn't the exhibition itself, but the hand-out map of restaurants in the Otahuhu area that was more intriguing. The majority of the visitors to the exhibition were from the central and west area of Auckland, so the mapped out restaurants gave the viewers an insider experience of Otahuhu cuisine and social life, which would have been unknown to them beforehand. Therefore, this added to the process of art *Talanoa*.

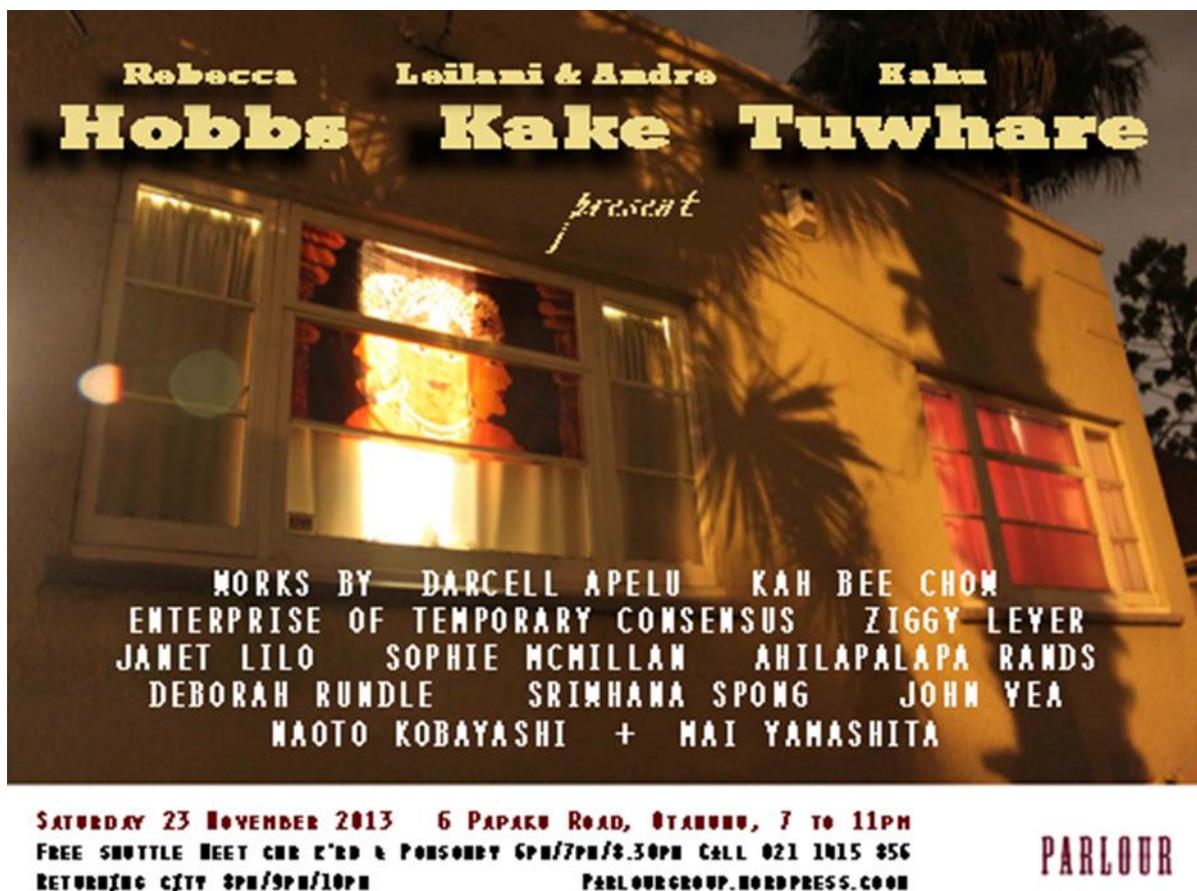


Figure 5

H.E.P.T. (*figure 6*) is a very active collective. Working together since 2008, their main focus is to enable others to succeed. They originally formed as a response to the individualistic studio culture prevalent in arts institutions. The name, Help Each other Pass Together, speaks to the whakapapa of the founders known by their alias names Eagleman, Stallion and Wolfman. The collective has grown over the years, their facilitatory practice is kept intentionally broad to enable responsive and adaptive methods of working. For a lot of the projects, identities are obscured and attempts are made to neutralize the culture of the bodies at work through uniformity and anonymity. The culture of H.E.P.T. is inclusive, collaborative and beyond self. This method of working provides a prototype in opposition to the common individualism prevalent in western artistic culture.



Figure 6

The ideology these three collectives have in common is the way they work with societies using different methods, using epistemological thinking: The Phoenix collective with the use of individuals who have experience through knowing and using that experience in performance. The Parlour group with their strategies of involving the community wherever their impromptu gallery is situated, and giving the spectators of the exhibition an opportunity to experience and interact with local people in the area. The H.E.P.T. collective with their unusual anonymous approach to helping people by nominating skilled individuals from the group to help artists.



Figure 7



Figure 8



Figure 9

PERFORMING THE TALANOA

Politics of Performance

In Claire Bishops (2012) writing on 'Delegated Performances: Outsourcing Authenticity' from her book 'Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship', she explains the selection process of performers or actors that are being employed by artists for their artworks. The artists don't just employ any random performers, they employ people connected to a certain type of social group, or a profession, which highlights a political agenda to their works.

Bishop mentions, in passing, the term 'identitarian politics' (p. 220) in regard to political arguments, which focus their identity in a social context. Professor of Sociology, Richard Sennett (2012) discusses these ideas further in his book 'Together' which he wrote in 2012. This project talks about and is based on ideas around identity politics. Most stories collected from this particular art process of *Talanoa* are from individuals belonging to a minority group looking for acknowledgment and power in their adopted society. Bishop also refers to the performers deployed by the artists, as "These bodies are a metonymic shorthand for politicised identities", (p. 222). The idea of using a person, who is from a particular society, to symbolically reflect on a social political issue is an aspect that this project will explore in further and critical detail.

One of the stories collected for this project, involved a group of migrant males from Gujarat, India, working as cleaners, for a cleaning company contracted to a local government institution. We talked about the issues they face being migrant workers in New Zealand. As we talked, an idea came up in our *Talanoa*; I asked the cleaners about employing them to do a performance with me as a response to this conversation. The idea being to use the workers in a symbolic way to represent a minority, their real identities as migrants from India would provide a socio-political impact in the performance, almost regardless of its form.

They declined to take part in the performance; afraid of the repercussions it might have with their employment. Bishop (2012) talks briefly, about viewers seeing the artist's works as being exploitative of the performers. This is a common problem that this project faces, when discussing ideas of how the Story Teller, and the people in it, will be involved in the artworks. Like the cleaners, all Story Tellers are fine with telling the story, but when it comes to acknowledging how and who these stories are collected from, the Story Tellers would rather not say, or can't say because they themselves want to remain anonymous—or because, the line of transmission of the story is not clearly recorded (figure 10, 11).

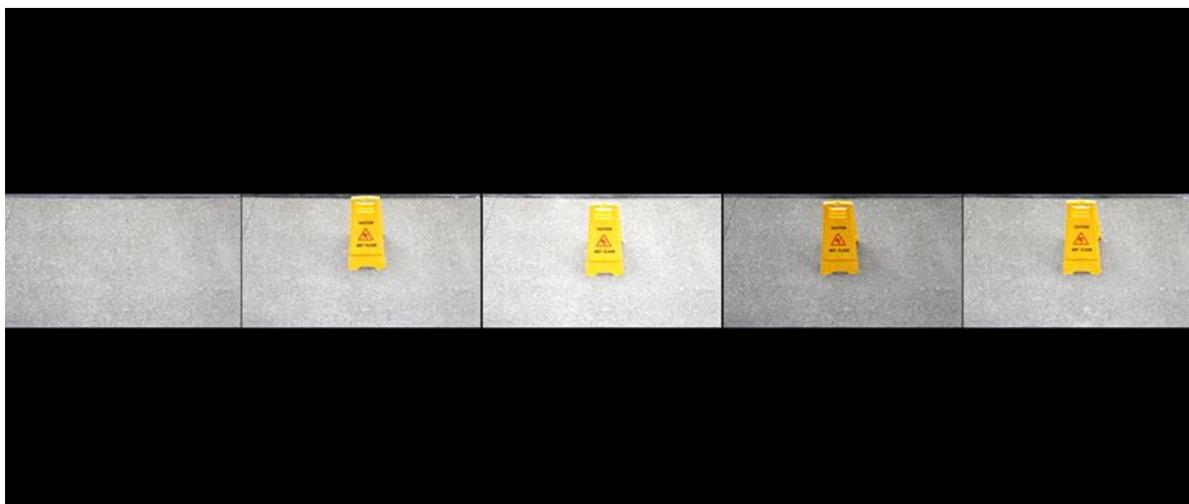


Figure 10



Figure 11

You can see this problem of exploitation of performers, being discussed in Shigeyuki Kihara's solo exhibition 'Culture for Sale' (figure 12). Kihara's responds to a form of colonial theatre in the 19th century called 'Völkerschau' which is commonly known as a 'human zoo'. During the German administration of Samoa from 1900 till 1914, Germany would use Samoan men, women and small children to tour all over Germany for entertainment (Kihara, 2012).



Figure 12

As a way of counteracting this issue of exploitation of the Story Teller and the people involved, this project only documents their participation in either the process of making the artworks and the discussions of a performance. The performances are executed, solely on my own, or with other artists. In a way, the Story Teller is abrogating to me (the performer/art maker) the responsibility of how to acknowledge, or not, the source of the stories collected through the process of *Talanoa*.

The Power of Mundane Movements

The first video I would like to reference in regard to mundane movements, begins with sounds of bells ringing, the camera tracks a concrete sidewalk. In the video you begin to see traces of water on the concrete path, but judging from the dryness of the concrete it doesn't seem like rain. The camera starts to track towards the traces of water, well-worn faded red shoes start to appear into the shot. From the angle of the video camera, it looks like the person in the red shoes is in the process of pushing something. The person in the red shoes is artist Francis Alys in his work 'Sometimes Making Something Leads to Nothing' (*figure 13*). Alys pushes a large block of ice the size of a suitcase in a Mexican town until the ice dissolves into the earth he passes by (Alys, 1997).



Figure 13

In the second video, Francis Alys re-enacted an artwork from a previous performance, which he performed in Sao Paulo 1995 (*figure 14*). In 2004, Alys walks with a leaking can of green paint leaving a residue, or trace of his journey through the divided city of Jerusalem. He walks with his leaking can of green paint drawing a line as if he is again dividing Jerusalem into sections (Alys, 2004).



Figure 14

The term metaphorical movements come to mind when you think of Francis Alys's documented action. Alys's actions are very political and at the same time poetical, with the use of simplistic actions applied to a futility endurance performance. The two videos in discussion are constructed in a journey-like method, with a simple endurance or metaphoric action being employed by Alys, he uses these gestures at the beginning, middle and end of his performances.

Metaphorical actions are fairly obvious in artist Darcell Apelu's art practice. Apelu often uses her body and specific movements in her performances; she creates beautiful gestures through simple mundane movements and accentuates these movements with the use of time and endurance, a reference to her other artistic endeavour of wood chopping. The endurance part of her practice often leaves an impression not only on the viewer but on herself as well. Apelu puts herself in situations, which not only she endures, but the spectator does also.

In Apelu's video work titled 'Slap 2012' (*figure15*), she appears on the screen sitting with her back facing towards the viewer. The upper half of her body is exposed, which has a tatau (tattoo) between her shoulder blades, and her lower body is covered by a sarong. At first you think this video is a still image until someone comes from the left of the screen and slaps Apelu's tatau on her back once and exits the screen. The slap was only a brief action, but her back starts to welt with the handprint of the slapper where her tatau sits, which evidences that a slap leaves a longer impression than the action of the slap (Circuit, 2012).



Figure 15

This work is a response to some of her family disapproving her tatau (tattoo). Apelu wanted to reflect this using an action to show the disapproval. The term Slap is an action often used as a metaphor, when one is confronted and insulted verbally by another, one would respond as if he/she has been slapped in the face. Apelu literally uses the term Slap in the action sense, and the after effect of the action of the slap, visually becomes a temporary tatau. In a way, Apelu wears the slap with pride with the same reverence as her actual tatau. Of course, there are further symbolic readings of the slap as referring to the after affects of abuse, which last much longer after the initial abuse, be it racial, emotional, sexual, etc. It also refers to the comic term slap-stick, which currently occupies a lot of contemporary artists, who want to use humour as a vehicle for saying something else other than what appears to be being said. It is also used as a device to create distance from what is really being communicated by the work.

Like Francis Alys and Darcell Apelu, the use of metaphorical movements is identifiable in my own art practice. With the stories collected through *Talanoa*, I observe the process and movements involved in the stories. Not only do I collect stories, I collect the actions involved as well. The people I *Talanoa* with, also have a say in the movements involved in my art practice. The actions collected are used not only through performance but in the process as well, so the outcome of an artwork is a result of the action being used.

Transforming *Talanoa* into Art

With all of the stories collected through *Talanoa*, the actions or materials involved are transformed into an artwork, through either performance or installation. *Talanoa* is used in both trading aurally and in objects. So far in this writing, I have explained how *Talanoa* is used by exchanging words.

In an artwork titled, '*unemployed shoes*', 2013 (Figure 16), I applied *Talanoa* through the trading of objects with objects. This artwork was a response to a conversation I overheard with some relatives in an event that happened with a packaging company called 'Carter Holt Harvey' in Mangere. The company advertised seven positions in the factory on their website. More than a hundred people had turned up for the positions, all waiting in a line to submit their applications. This had created a buzz in the working class community, with the story spreading from Mangere to Penrose, where I first heard it; this is an example of how the meme works within *Talanoa*. The most interesting part of this work was not so much the installation, but the process of making it. At first the process started off as *Talanoa* with words and progressed into *Talanoa* with objects, exchanging shoes with currency or new shoes from individuals, who were unemployed at the time.

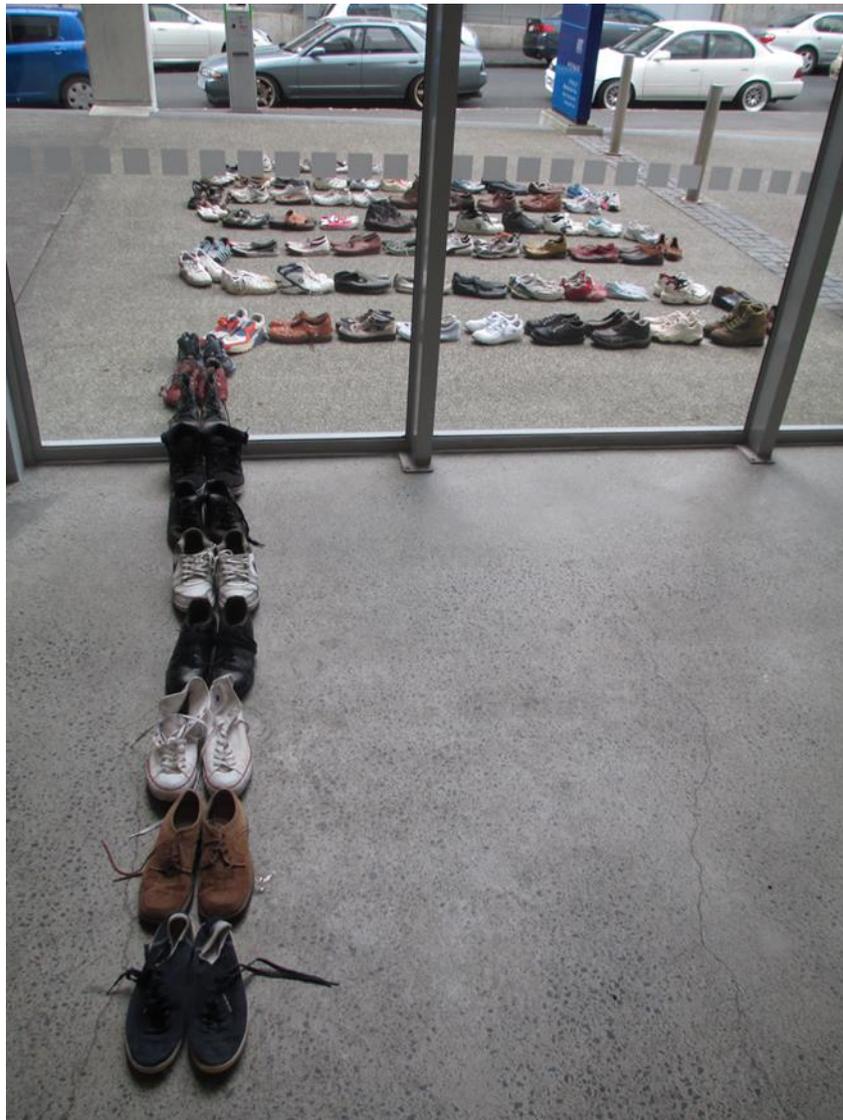


Figure 16

Performance is a method that's often used in this project, usually due to material practice or installations failing to implement an idea of a story. Often the performances are documented through video and usually in a space that is in the context of the story being told. Documented performances can be used in a heterotopic sense, connecting two spaces through one projection or a monitor. In a way, the documented video acts as a visual portal for the spectator, visually transferring the spectator into the documented space being displayed.

One of the advantages of documented performances through video is the durational aspect that comes with this method of recording. Movements with endurance is an approach often used in this project, usually to mimic the laborious activities of manual labourers, using insider information, that I have sourced in the act of *Talanoa*. This project employs film as a visual tool to give the spectator a sense of durability and heaviness, which is often discussed in the *Talanoa* sessions, that I have had with differing sections of working class New Zealand society.

Another necessary process is archiving. These documented performances automatically become historical once they are recorded. The idea of archiving these videos is an aspect that this project may venture into in the future.

In a recent exhibition, that I was part of, called '*Welcome*', I re-made an artwork that was a response to the global financial crisis in 2009 (*figure 17*). In that year, a lot of manufacturing industries were laying off workers in order to keep their companies afloat, and a friend of mine had just experienced being made redundant. I made an artwork in reaction to his experience, and the process of being laid off. For this exhibition '*Welcome*', I gathered more information via *Talanoa* from foreign workers in the cleaning industry discussing issues they faced living on the minimum wage. In doing so, the re-made work is updated from the *Talanoa* collected in 2009 with the recent *Talanoa* collected in this year, 2015, like an ongoing reportorial.

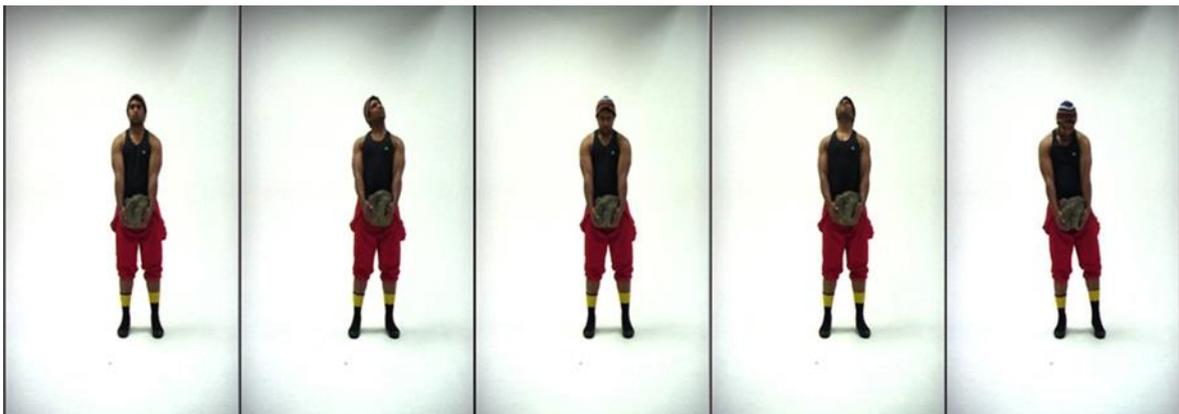


Figure 17

The re-made work titled *'Finish this week off and that's it!'* (Figure 18) is made up of five life size projections filmed a week apart of myself holding a large rock for as long as I can (25min) before disappearing out of view. Then, each of the projected footage, loops and instead of five of me returning back to view, only 4 return, while one projected screen has the rock still positioned on the ground. This process continues every 25 minutes: one image/recording of me disappearing sequentially until only one figure is lifting the rock on his own. For the duration of the filming, I ate below the poverty line (\$2.25 per day?), and tracked the changes of my body and strength. By highlighting the physical impact of eating to this budget, this work reminds us that those who are limited to this budget, often have physically demanding jobs. The figure disappearing each time the footage loops on the projected screens emphasizes this aspect of redundancy.



Figure 18

POLITICS OF SPACE & SPECTATORSHIP

Spectators Reaction

A spectators' reaction causes a certain type of *Talanoa*, a personal experiential response in the etic sense. The spectators' reaction is hardly ever what 'I' the artist might expect, most times it's the completely opposite response. A pedagogic moment of transmission between the artist and the spectator occurs in these situations, where sometimes I get a response that gives me, an outsider's viewpoint, into the spectators' perspective. This enables me to realise a different aspect of what the artwork could also talk about. Often responses are both humorous and powerful, and sometimes there are differences between viewers. Pedagogy occurs between 'me' the artist and the spectator, it also happens between spectator and spectator, creating a teaching and learning environment within the act of *Talanoa*, which still continues after the work is made.

For a work in response to the Tsunami disaster in the Pacific in 2009, titled '*29.09.09 Tribute to Samoa, American Samoa and Tonga, 2013*', (Figure 19) I filmed a 32min video of myself trying to construct a wall out of cinderblocks in the rolling surf of Piha. Frequently overwhelmed by the waves, I continue to build the wall until it stays standing. Often when the spectators begin to view the video installation, they found the work amusing at first, but the longer they watched the video the more powerful the performance became, anticipating the futility of the actions in the video. One female spectator, who viewed the work, broke down in tears in response to the work. A gallery assistant asked her why she reacted in that way, she replied that her family members had died in the 2004 Indonesian tsunami and she related to the action in the video with the rebuild of not only her village, but also her life.



Figure 19



Figure 20

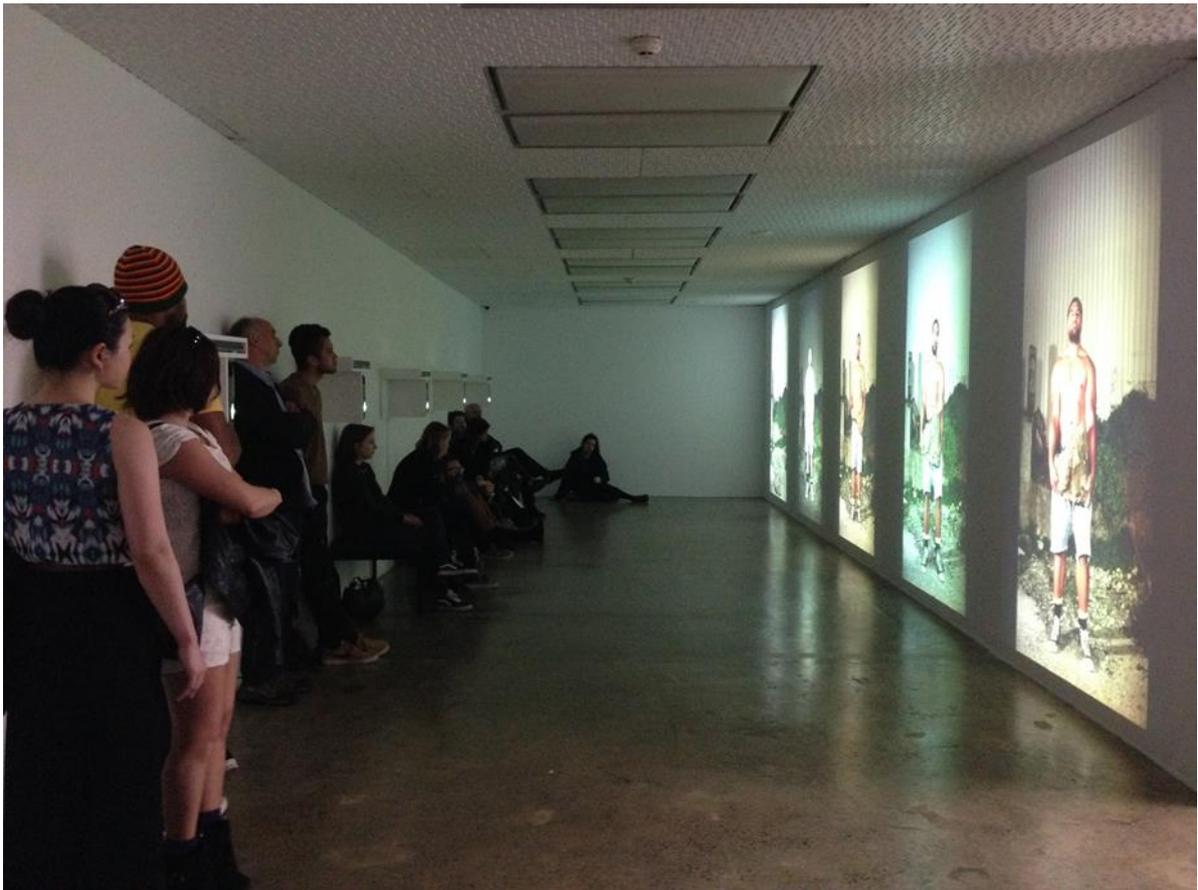


Figure 21



Figure 22

Artist Employing the Alternative Space

I often take civilian friends into the art world on a gallery hop. One comment from one of my friends mentioned that 'the gallery seems like a prison for the artworks', this made me question my approach with space and spectatorship in my art practice. With an emphasis on art dealing with social politics, the Art Gallery has become a distant stranger, when it comes to presenting works dealing with this subject. The art gallery space is often seen as the neutral zone where artists utilise these areas, as if the space is its own sovereignty. Once you enter into the space, the art presented becomes the main focus, and the space that accommodates it, becomes an empty void. In my opinion the space the artwork is presented in, and its associations, is an integral part of the conversation.

In Luke Willis Thompson's '*Inthisholeonthisislandwhereiam*, 2012' (figure 23), viewers are driven by taxi from the artist's central city gallery, Hopkinson Cundy, to a Victorian style house in Epsom where they are left to roam around the exterior and interior of the house. Though this work begins inside the empty space of the gallery, the artist uses the gallery as bait luring the unwary spectators to an unknown journey to an alternate space. Thompson's strategy in dealing with the gallery space is to remove the spectator from that space entirely, by transferring the spectator to another place.

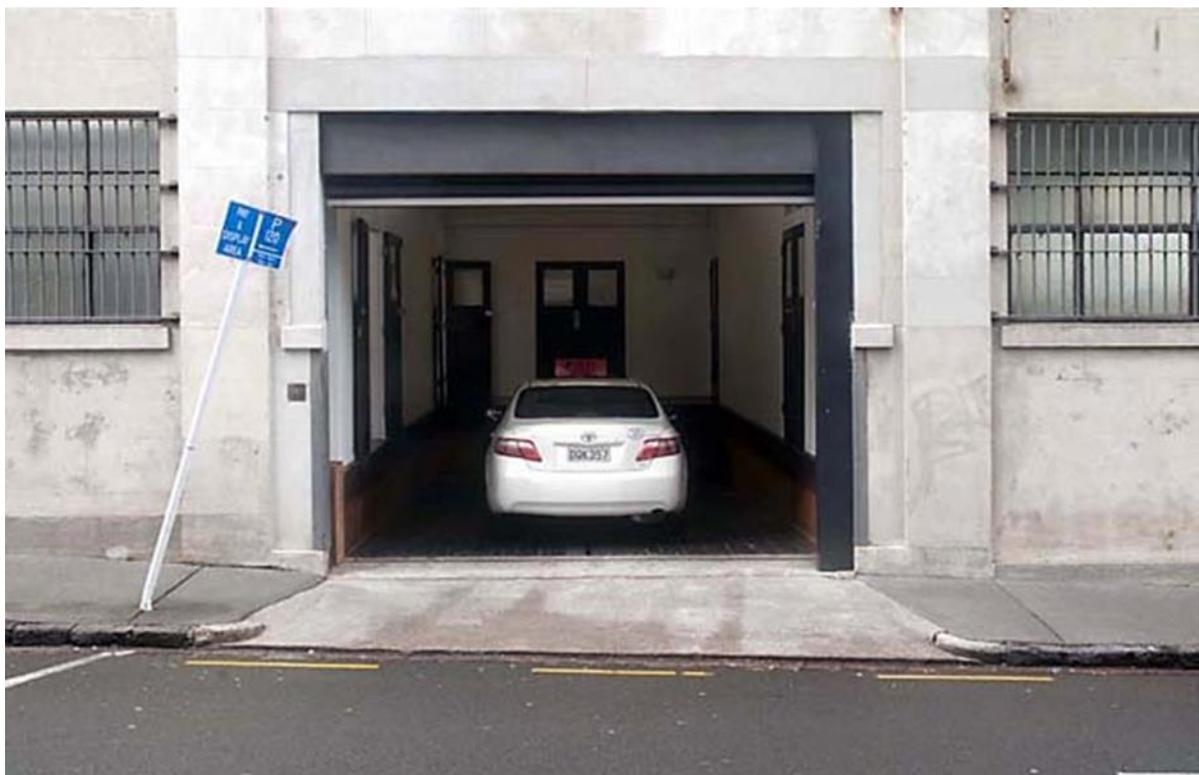


Figure 23

With the current issues around escalating house values and the gentrification of residents that have lived in these areas for their entire lives, Thompson's work confronts the viewer about these issues even though they may not be aware of it themselves. In an interview with Luke Willis Thompson says:

"if the gallery helps makes a work, how far and for how long does that power extend? Do above or below the gallery count, for example" (Art News New Zealand, 2014).

The artist himself questions the gallery and its authority to brand art. Is it art, because it's in a gallery? Or can it still qualify as art if the work is in a different space other than the gallery?

Uhila's approach with his work '*Mo'ui Tukuhausia*, 2012' (figure 24), substituting the gallery with an alternate space is achieved through an external space (the surrounding area of Te Tuhi). Like Thompson, he too is questioning the authority of the gallery by using an alternate exterior space, rather than the internal gallery space itself. Dealing with homelessness culture and acting as a voice for the voiceless, Uhila employs the exterior of the gallery as a platform for his endurance performance acting as the correspondent between the two cultures of the *haves and have nots*.



Figure 24

Activating Space through Selective Spectatorship

These spaces or art works do not exist, or become active, unless certain spectators activate it. The idea of using a person, who is from a particular society to symbolically reflect on a social political issue, is something I find interesting. In both Thompson's and Uhila's case, it's an extension of this idea. Rather than selecting bodies to reflect a society, they select a society to reflect a space.

I think Thompson's artwork was aimed at a specific culture of people, that are not familiar with this lifestyle. It felt like a trap for that particular society, participating in a joy ride to an unknown destination, and then suddenly, being confronted by this living space, which is common to Pacific migrants growing up in the 80s (*figure 25*).



Figure 25

Uhila's performance was intended for the everyday people, interacting with the locals of the Pakuranga Township. Experiencing the work personally from an etic viewpoint, the locals were the anticipated spectators. Unlike Thompson's work, which reflected the alternate physical space to a selected spectator, Uhila's approach is where the performer activates a society and confronts the local society. The alternate space doesn't have to be a physical one, I guess the social gap between the 'performer' and 'local' becomes the alternate space (*figure 26*).



Figure 26

My approach with using alternate space, is through selective spectatorship, that is, installing artworks in areas, where a certain society or organisation will be exposed to it. In 'Caution Cleaner' (figure 27), I projected video onto the ground in the entrance of a council building. Confronting the council workers to acknowledge the projected cleaner. Too often, we walk into cleaners without acknowledging their presence. In this work titled 'Caution Cleaner, 2014' the viewer is inevitably in a dominant position. The cleaner's face is not exposed to the viewer; he scrubs the concrete floor while in a kneeling position which gestures obediently towards the viewer. We recognise the wet floor signs more than we recognise the cleaner. The cleaners are anonymous, yet they are in our lives almost every day.



Figure 27

As artists, we often exhibit in spaces without questioning the space itself. I often ask myself these questions: who is associated with this space? What is the history of this space? Who will be the spectators? Will the integrity of the work change in the space, etc.? I consider the following contexts from a personal and critical perspective:

- Looking at awards such as the Walters Prize and how the artwork can change the integrity of the works, in terms of its re-installation in another space
- Galleries associations, such as Benefactors. Or for example the last Sydney Biennial issue and its association with the organisation TRANSFIELD handling of refugees at Nauru, where artists pull out in protest for asylum seekers
- Collectives and their use of alternative space such as, Parlour collective and D.A.N.C.E art club.

MTG HAWKES BAY EXHIBITION PROJECT

Talanoa with Lucy Hammonds

Earlier this year in January, I was approached by former MTG Hawkes Bay Curator Lucy Hammonds, to discuss the possibility of having an exhibition there in October. Lucy became interested in my artworks from reading about them via internet; again this is evidence of how others who have been involved in the *Talanoa* with myself or my artworks, disseminate their responses from our personal exchange through modern technology, e.g. the internet and social media. We consequently discussed ideas that influenced my art practice with the emphasis on 'migrant labour'.

Hammonds proposed an idea to have an exhibition following the notion of migrant labour. The exhibition would include my earlier artworks, as well as a new artwork commissioned by MTG Hawkes Bay, which would reflect the Hawkes Bay community.

RSE Work

A recent topic important to migrant workers is the Recognised Seasonal Employment (RSE) scheme. Under this policy, migrant workers - with priority given to those from select Pacific Islands - are granted temporary entry to plant, harvest and pack crops. The seasonal workers come, work hard and are promptly sent home after being paid the minimum wage. Hawkes Bay is an area that has connections with the RSE scheme. During the season, there can be up to 12,000 RSE workers in the region (Immigration New Zealand, 2015).

Over the past few years, since 2008, I have responded to the scheme by producing what I call 'urban taros' (*figure 28*). Shaped and sized like a simplified version of this common root vegetable, these forms are cast in plaster using road cones. They allude to the presence of Pacific workers in both the agriculture and construction industries, and to their significant, but overlooked contribution to the prosperity of New Zealand's economy.

The RSE scheme still continues to this day and the artwork has reflected that. With the addition of *Talanoa*, the artwork has evolved through several iterations with the stories gathered from previous RSE workers, who I have had an exchange with here in Auckland. I still utilise the urban taros I have made in 2008 and every time I cast new taros, they act as an update to the work, furthering the notion of currency. The artwork changes over time, reflecting the current story being gathered (*figures 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35*).



Figure 28



Figure 29



Figure 30



Figure 31



Figure 32



Figure 33



Figure 34



Figure 35

Two-weeks research

These time frames gave me a chance to employ story gathering methods through *Talanoa* with an etic approach. This was a new approach for me, that is, utilising *Talanoa* outside of Auckland, where I am essentially the outsider investigating an unfamiliar space. Up until now, Auckland has been the only place where I have conducted this method of story gathering.

I was invited to Hawkes Bay by MTG to do 2 separate one-week residencies, to conduct research for the new artwork that Lucy proposed for the solo exhibition. At this point Lucy Hammonds had been newly appointed to the role of Curator for the Dunedin Public Art Gallery, so Hawkes Bay MTG curator Taonga Maori, Tryphena Cracknell had stepped in to curate the exhibition that Lucy had initiated.

Applying *Talanoa* in Hawkes Bay

I've had this text buried in my archives since 2006 but I didn't get to read it until now. I found it still sitting under all my papers. I'm glad someone reminded me about it. I guess my thinking has evolved since 2006, and at this moment in time, I am probably in the right state of mind to read it. Thanks Natalie Robertson for reminding me of Epeli Hau'ofa's essay, '*Our sea of Islands*'.

In general, the living standards of Oceania are higher than those of most third world societies. To attribute this merely to aid and remittances -misconstrued deliberately or otherwise as a form of dependence on rich countries' economies-is an unfortunate misreading of contemporary reality. Ordinary Pacific people depend for their daily existence much, much more on themselves and their kin, wherever they may be, than on anyone's largesse, which they believe is largely pocketed by the elite classes. The funds and goods that homes-abroad people send their homeland relatives belong to no one but themselves. They earn every cent through hard physical toil in the new locations that need and pay for their labor. They also participate in the manufacture of many of the goods they send home; they keep the streets and buildings of Auckland clean, and its transportation system running smoothly; they keep the suburbs of the western United States (including Hawai'i) trimmed, neat, green, and beautiful; and they have contributed much, much more than has been acknowledged. (Hau'ofa, 1993, p. 157).

Still fresh from reading Hau'ofa's writing on '*Our sea of Islands*', in relation to the Hawkes Bay RSE workers, I wanted to highlight a paragraph from his text that discusses the issues that Pacific people encounter when coming into hegemonic countries such as New Zealand. In Hau'ofa's writing he reminds us of how Pacific migrants, like my parents who have migrated here, are ushered into working in these laborious jobs, and are made to believe that this is the only way for them to make a living here. And often that same psyche continues with their children through selective education in lower decile schools, which mould their children's minds to believe that working in laborious jobs is the only way forward. The *Talanoa* with the Hawkes Bay Pacific community talks about these barriers, where they are seen as orchard workers, who will never amount to anything higher. Just because the colour of their skin is darker, doesn't mean they are just only good for picking fruit. The same goes for the Maori, with whom I have had an exchange of *Talanoa*, they face the same barriers also.

While exchanging *Talanoa* with the Pacific community in Hawkes Bay, I came across some old men sitting outside of a community hall in Flaxmere. I couldn't help but stare at their faces. You can see the marks of hard labour embedded into their skin of their faces and hands. I have become familiar to these hard laboured embedded faces of the elders; they remind me of my father's expression. I remember going to work with my father in a container yard when I was kid. I could tell he'd been doing this for years, from watching him get into a robot-like state, when he filled up these containers. Sometimes, he would bring that same mentality home, forgetting to clock off when he left his work site.

During the two weeks in Hawkes Bay, my only interaction with the RSE workers was for a brief moment on my arrival. I drove past a van load of Pacific men heading to the Napier airport. It looked like they were leaving the country. I had got confirmation from one of the locals that the orchard season had just finished. My *Talanoa* was limited to migrant workers, who have adopted Hawkes Bay as their new home. The majority of them talked about how Hawkes Bay is very 'White', and how the locals are oblivious to the culture of the Pacific community.

Creating the Social

The idea was to create an artwork to highlight the difficulties that the workers expressed and also to invite the Pacific Community to interact with and respond. My initial reaction, after my first conversation with Lucy at the very beginning of this project, was to create a social pedagogy between the local and the Pacific community, a concept that is a foreign idea to my art practice.

From the research I gathered on my two weeks of residency in Hawkes Bay, I had already come up with some possible ideas, as to utilising the car park space right outside the Hawkes Bay MTG. What was interesting about this space was the “old school” coin parking meter that gave authority to the space. The action of renting the space for time, reflected the renting of the bodies for a time with RSE scheme. Another aspect was the \$10 entry fee to the gallery, this is where the notion of selective spectatorship comes into play. This fee is a barrier for people, who are in the lower socio-economic group, as they can't spend \$10 just get into this gallery. Therefore, I proposed to the Hawkes Bay MTG to have either an existing work, or the commissioned work, installed outside of the building in order to counter that financial barrier.

Back in Auckland, and having time to reflect from the two separate week residency, I was still trying to figure out how to make a connection with the Pacific community through a social setting. I observed market stalls in Otara and Mangere flea market (*figure 36*), and looked at possibly of setting stalls up outside the MTG building where migrants could sell their craft. Another idea was PARK(ing) Day, first initiated by San Francisco Art and Design Studio, Rebar, where they transformed parking meter spaces into a temporary public art space. Again, this would utilise the parking space outside the MTG. And again I wanted to employ migrants to occupy the space (Rebar, 2012).



Figure 36



Figure 37



Figure 38



Figure 39

Creating the Social Doesn't Work

Creating the social was not working for me at all. Every time I thought about it or attempted to construct something, I kept on referring to Shigeyuki Kihara's solo exhibition 'Culture for Sale', where the artist responds to a form of colonial theatre in the 19th century called 'Völkerschau', commonly known as a 'human zoo'. If I carried on with the idea creating the social, in this setting, for migrants to interact with locals, I felt like I was creating that human zoo approach, which I did not want.

Parking Meter

I have realised that creating the social was no longer the focus point, and that I had become more interested in the parking meter itself. I started to break down the functions of the parking meter, comparing it to the body of a RSE worker, looking at how it controls the time, the temporary space, and the rent of space, how it generates currency and when time expires, waiting for the next car to occupy its space. The functions of the parking meter in some ways reference the purposes of the RSE worker: the time that they work, how temporary the seasonal work is, how they not only generate currency for themselves, but also the Hawkes Bay economy, and when the orchard season expires there will always be someone else from the Pacific next in line to take over that role of the RSE worker.

Trying to make an artwork within Auckland, but reflecting the Hawkes Bay was difficult. I found it hard producing an artwork for a space that I wasn't physically in, especially artworks that deal with the social politics of the Hawkes Bay. So the artwork was adjusted to the hegemonic perspective of Auckland, still using the same ideas with the parking meters from Hawkes Bay, but catering for the Auckland culture.



Figure 40

Auckland Installation

The Hawkes Bay parking meter idea started to cater for the Auckland society from the result of producing the artwork in the hegemonic space of Auckland. Talk Week is an example of this, Talk Week is a week where AUT Visual Arts invite art savvy people from around New Zealand to conduct a group critique session with Visual Arts students for that week. In my Talk Week session, I had set up my installation reflecting the social politics of Hawkes Bay outside the Visual Arts building beyond the AUT estates border line area onto council property, which was the public sidewalk.



Figure 41

I had made 7 card boxes and stencilled them with the words, 'seasonal worker' and 'small umu'. This referenced the traveling culture of the Pacific people when they come into New Zealand from the Islands bringing with them 'umu' parcels of food delicacies you can only get from the Pacific. Inside these boxes Braeburn apple trees were planted, these types of apple trees were a common species in the Hawkes Bay Orchards. I had tagged all of the apple trees with instructions of how to take care of them, and on the other side of the tags I had inserted a purchased parking tickets from the parking meter on St PAUL Street (figure 43). The parking tickets authorised my use of the council space, renting the space until the tickets expire at 2:29pm. I displayed the boxes in a row, in council property, (figure 42) alongside the border line that separated public property and AUT estates. My critique session started at 1.59pm, and during this session, the time that I had 'rented' expired on the parking ticket. On expiry, I had volunteers shift the boxes from the council sidewalk over the border to AUT estates (figure 44).



Figure 42



Figure 43



Figure 44

MTG Hawkes Bay Installation

At this point the install only exists as ideas and images on paper. I proposed an idea to MTG Hawkes Bay, where I wanted to borrow 5 parking meters from the Napier Council. I wanted to rephrase the labels on the parking meters, where the labels reference the migrant workers in the Hawkes Bay (figure 45,46).

The show will include existing sculptural and moving-image works alongside a new piece based on interactions that I have had with the people in Hawke's Bay. The fundamental thread of the exhibition is the notion of *Talanoa*. The name of the exhibition is called '*Talanoa, Colloquies of The Unrecognised Worker*' (figure 47, 48, 49, 50).



Figure 45



Figure 46



Figure 47



Figure 48



Figure 49



Figure 50

TALANOA IS NEVER-ENDING...

My practice is based on the fundamentals of experience through others, and I show that in the works that I produce. *Talanoa* is the central apparatus that drives this project, often executed with the exchange of words or objects but always in a personal encounter, never through a third party or impersonal medium (i.e. phone, email or letter). Where the idea of looking inside a culture, and experiencing it from within, gives me a platform to honour the stories of the story tellers, with whom I have *Talanoa*. This project has more topics to explore through a further, and perhaps more self-conscious, investigation of the post-colonial situation, migration and subsequent *gentrification*. The act of *Talanoa* is ongoing throughout this project: it begins with *Talanoa*; it is produced with *Talanoa*; and it generates *Talanoa*.

LIST OF IMAGES

Figure 1 - *Murder site Memorial (installation)*, 2006 New Zealand. John Vea

Figure 2 - *Right of Way (video installation)*, 2013 Artspace, New Zealand. Janet Lilo

<http://theyshoot.files.wordpress.com/2013/08/cornerdoor.jpg>

Figure 3 - *Mo'ui Tukuhausia (performance)*, 2012 Te Tuhi, New Zealand. Kalisolaite Uhila

<http://www.tetuhi.org.nz/images/clientupload/exhibs/Kalisolaite%20Uhila.jpg>

Figure 4 - Phoenix Performing Arts/Phoenix NZYP, play rehearsal, 2014

Figure 5 - PALOUR Flyer. Group Exhibition I was part of in 2013

Figure 6 - HEPT collective, performing in response to Import/Export. 2013

Figure 7 - DANCE Art Club, kava ceremony performance at Snake Pit, 2012

Figure 8 - Pacific Performers collective, Kalisolaite Uhila performance, 2013

Figure 9 - Roots Creative Entrepreneurs, Matariki Light Festival, 2013

Figure 10 - *Caution Cleaner (video still)*, 2014 NZ John Vea

Figure 11 - *Caution Cleaner (video still)*, 2014 NZ John Vea

Figure 12 - *Culture For Sale (performance installation)*, 2012 City Gallery, New Zealand. Shigeyuki

Kihara <http://www.citygallery.org.nz/sites/default/files/Shigeyuki%20Kihara%20web.jpg>

Figure 13 - *Sometimes Making Something Leads to Nothing (video)*, 1997 Mexico City. Francis Alys
4:59 min

http://i.telegraph.co.uk/multimedia/archive/01663/PD37124036_019_ALY_1663004c.jpg

Figure 14 - *The Green Line (video)*, 2004 Jerusalem. Francis Alys 17:34 min

<http://static.guim.co.uk/sys-images/Arts/Arts/Pictures/2010/6/14/1276535849395/The-Green-Line-by-Francis-006.jpg>

Figure 15 - *Slap (video installation)*, 2012 New Zealand. Darcell Apelu 3:24 min

http://www.ngataonga.org.nz/assets/Images/Events_13/6-Tautai.jpg

Figure 16 - *Unemployed Shoes (Installation)*, 2013 New Zealand John Vea

Figure 17 - *Finish this week off and that's it! (Video projection)*, 2009 NZ John Vea

Figure 18 - *Finish this week off and that's it! (Video projection) remake* 2014, NZ John Vea

Figure 19 - *29.09.09 Tribute to Samoa, American Samoa & Tonga* 2013, NZ John Vea

- Figure 20 - Close to Home Exhibition 2013, Artist Floor Talk. *Unemployed Shoes*
- Figure 21 - AUT PGDiploma Visual Arts Critique, Welcome Exhibition 2014. *Finish this week off and that's it!*
- Figure 22 - AUT Masters Visual Arts Critique, *Import/Export* 2015
- Figure 23 - *Inthisholeonthisislandwhereiam*, 2012 Hokinson Gallery Dock. New Zealand. Luke Willis Thompson <http://eyecontactsite.com/2012/03/thompson-installation#ixzz3oG0MwXUP>
- Figure 24 - *Mo'ui Tukuhausia (performance)*, 2012 Te Tuhi, New Zealand. Kalisolaite Uhila <http://www.tetuhi.org.nz/images/clientupload/exhibs/Kalisolaite%20Uhila.jpg>
- Figure 25 - *Inthisholeonthisislandwhereiam*, 2012 Epsom House. New Zealand. Luke Willis Thompson <http://eyecontactsite.com/2012/03/thompson-installation#ixzz3oG0MwXUP>
- Figure 26 - *Mo'ui Tukuhausia (performance)*, 2012 Te Tuhi, New Zealand. Kalisolaite Uhila <http://www.aucklandartgallery.com/media/6530956/moui-tukuhausia.jpg>
- Figure 27 - *Caution Cleaner*, 2014 New Zealand. John Vea
- Figure 28 - *Urban Taro Plantation (installation)*, 2008 Myers Park, New Zealand. John Vea
- Figure 29 - *Import/Export (sculpture)*, 2008 AUT, New Zealand. John Vea
- Figure 30 - *Import/Export (sculpture)*, 2013 Papakura Art Gallery. New Zealand. John Vea
- Figure 31 - *Cultivate (performance)*, 2013 Papakura Art Gallery. New Zealand. H.E.P.T.
- Figure 32 - *Cultivate (performance)*, 2015 Wynyard Quarter. New Zealand. H.E.P.T.
- Figure 33 - *Urban Taro Plantation (installation)*, 2015 Wynyard Quarter. New Zealand. John Vea
- Figure 34 - *Import/Export (sculpture)*, 2015 AUT ST Paul St. New Zealand. John Vea
- Figure 35 - *Import/Export (sculpture)*, 2015 AUT Visual Arts. New Zealand. John Vea
- Figure 36 - Hawkes Bay MTG Research: Observing the social at Otara Markets 2015
- Figure 37 - Hawkes Bay MTG Research: Studio wall, mind map.
- Figure 38 - Hawkes Bay MTG Research: Studio Wall, parking meters.
- Figure 39 - Hawkes Bay MTG Research: Seasonal Work Available Sign
- Figure 40 - Hawkes Bay MTG Research: Parking Meters Napier City
- Figure 41 - *Seasonal Worker Survival Kit (installation)*, 2015 AUT Visual Art Talk Week Critique
- Figure 42 - *Seasonal Worker Survival Kit (installation)*, 2015 Boxes situated on Council Area

Figure 43 - *Seasonal Worker Survival Kit (installation)*, 2015 Tagged with Parking Ticket till 2:29pm and Care instructions for apple trees

Figure 44 - *Seasonal Worker Survival Kit (installation)*, 2015 Boxes shifted into AUT Estates area when Parking Ticket expired

Figure 45 - Hawkes Bay MTG Research: Changing text on Parking Meters referencing RSE workers

Figure 46 - Hawkes Bay MTG Research: Changing text on Parking Meters referencing RSE workers

Figure 47 - Hawkes Bay MTG Research: Marquette design layout of the Gallery with artworks

Figure 48 - Hawkes Bay MTG Research: Marquette design layout of the Gallery with artworks

Figure 49 - Hawkes Bay MTG Research: Marquette design layout of the Gallery with artworks

Figure 50 - Hawkes Bay MTG Research: Marquette design layout of the Gallery with artworks

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APPENDICES

LINKS TO WRITTEN TEXTS AND PUBLICATIONS ABOUT MY ART PRACTICE

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**IMAGES OF THE EXHIBITION
IN MTG HAWKES BAY
*TALANOA COLLOQUIES OF THE
UNRECOGNISED WORKER***

















**RESEARCH IMAGES FOR
END OF YEAR HANDED TO THE
EXAMINATION PANEL**



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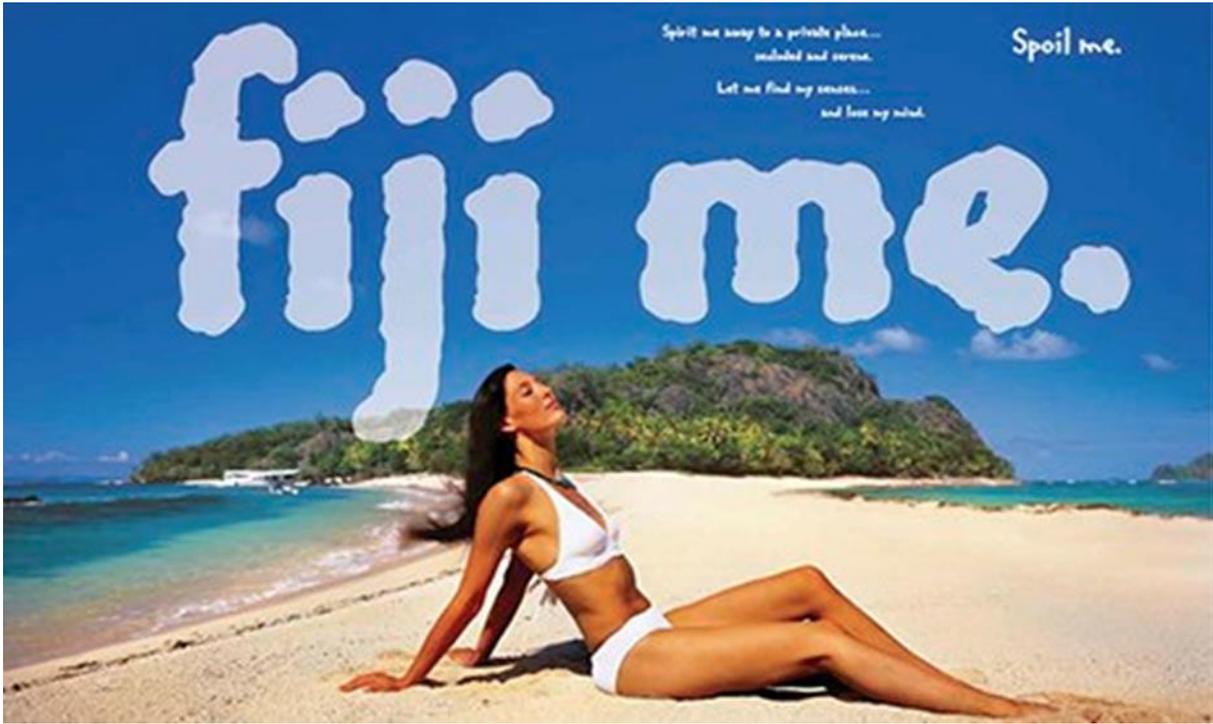




Tonga.
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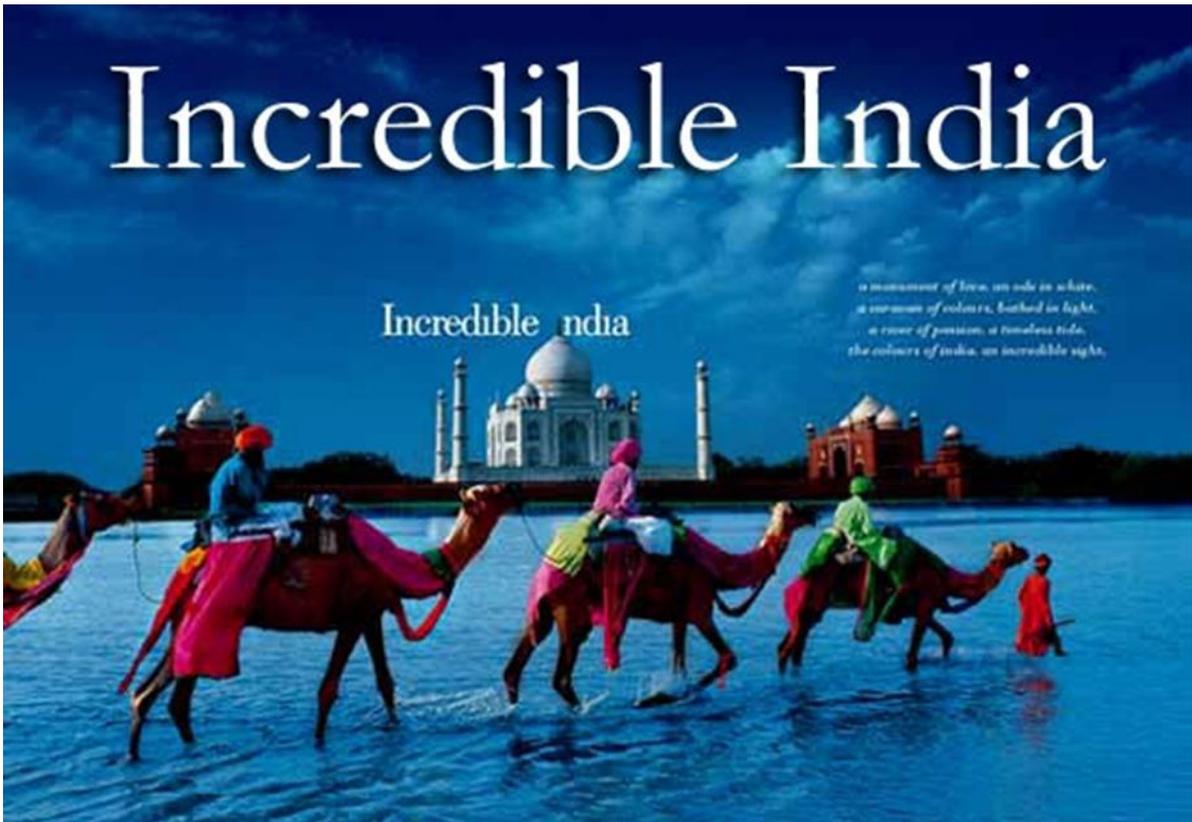
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XXX THE TRUE SOUTH PACIFIC XXX



Incredible India

Incredible India

*a monument of love, an ode to white,
a museum of colors, bathed in light,
a river of passion, a timeless tide,
the colors of India, an incredible sight.*





BRITONS

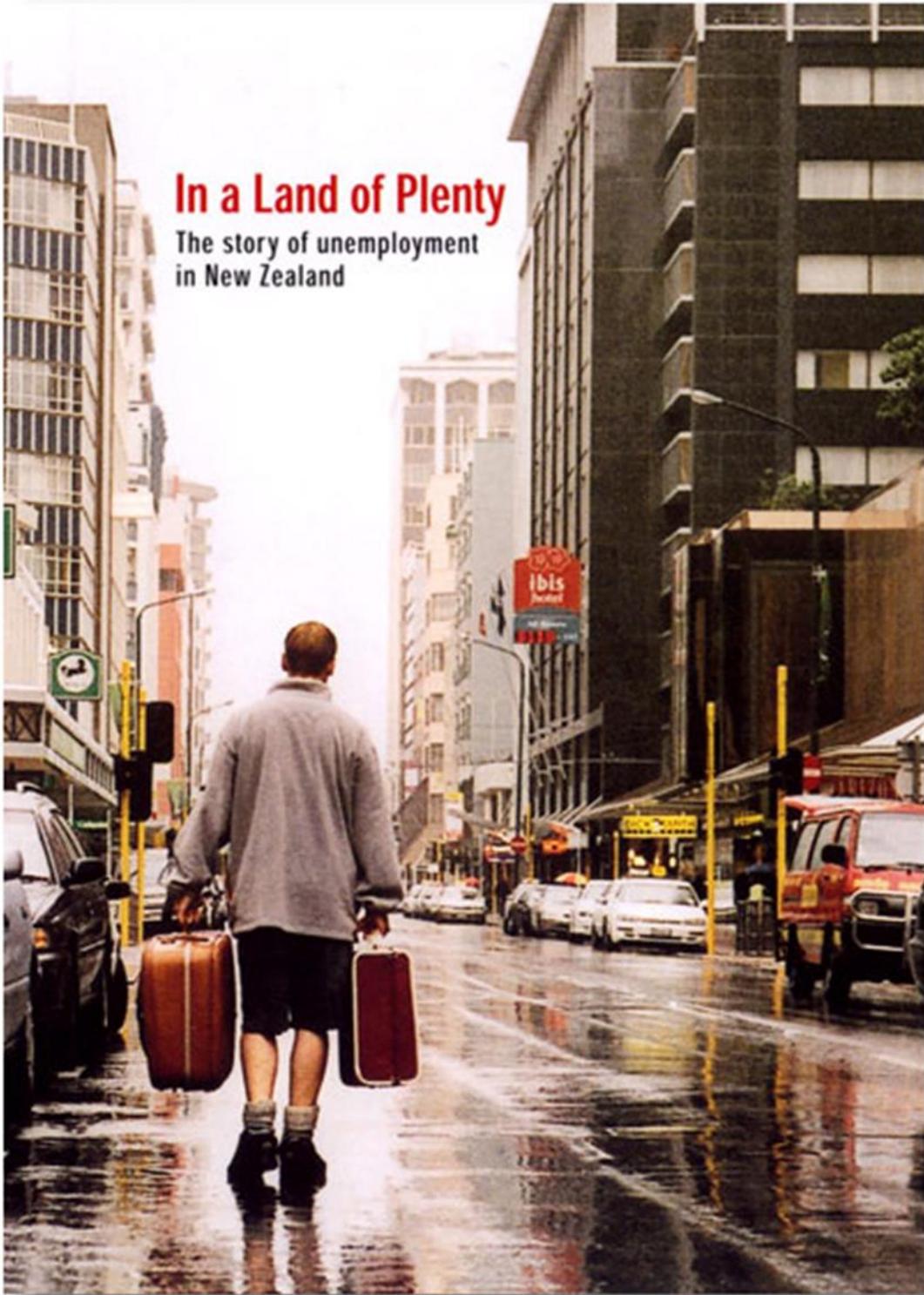


"WANTS
YOU"

JOIN YOUR COUNTRY'S ARMY!
GOD SAVE THE KING

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In a Land of Plenty

The story of unemployment
in New Zealand

END OF YEAR INSTALLATION

The end of year installation titled '*Land of Plenty*' is a continuous iteration from the emic experiences I have had during my research in Hawkes Bay. From the result of the Parking Meters in my commissioned work for MTG Hawkes Bay, I continued to explore the interaction aspect of the work but through an advertisement format. Rather than the spectators inserting a coin into a meter, I wanted to gesture in the advertisement where they can have a photo opportunity with the installation and they become part of the work.

While waiting for my flight to Hawkes Bay in the departure lounge, I couldn't help but be fixated to the numerous advertisement boards promoting the South Pacific Islands in the domestic airport. Most advertisement billboards used a back drop of a beautiful beach and in big bold letters gesturing the viewer to come and experience the 'Island life' of the South Pacific. In '*Land of Plenty*', I wanted to switch it up and have it vice versa, advertising aimed towards a South Pacific audience using a typical back drop of New Zealand and in bold letters gesturing to the islanders to come experience the 'horticulture and viticulture life' in New Zealand.



**MAXIMUM VISA
7 MONTHS LIMIT
\$14.75 PER HOUR
MONDAY - FRIDAY 8am - 6pm
PUBLIC HOLIDAYS: 1.5**

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RENTING BODIES**















- Look for an open spot in the yard.
- Check the drainage in your planting area.
- Dig a wide hole.
- Position the apple tree in the hole.
- Press soil around the roots.
- Add compost to the soil if necessary.
- Stake your apple tree if needed.
- Cover the soiled area with a layer of organic mulch.



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