About the Artist: Ralph Regenvanu

Ralph Regenvanu’s first public art was unveiled at the time of Vanuatu’s independence in 1980, when he painted the country’s new coat of arms on the wall of Central Primary School, in the capital city of Port Vila. He painted his most famous piece, *Las kakae (The Final Feast)*, when he was taking formal art classes in grade twelve in Australia. Among several inspirations for his art is the storyboard style popular in neighboring Papua New Guinea. From this style he has created a number of drawings, including those in this volume, that highlight custom stories from his family’s home island of Uripiv, off the northeast coast of Malakula.

*The Melanesia Project*, featured on this issue’s cover, is the result of Regenvanu’s time as an artist-in-residence at the British Museum in 2006. Regenvanu states, “The painting is about aspects of my cultural heritage that are no longer available in my own community but are available overseas, particularly in London (where this painting was produced) at the British Museum and the Royal Anthropological Institute. I have called the painting *The Melanesia Project* because it is through this project’s activities to try to create more contemporary ‘connections’ between the Melanesian collections of the British Museum and people in Melanesia that I have been able to produce this artwork.” The piece includes a nasara, or ceremonial ground, from his family’s home island, as well as artifacts from Vanuatu that currently reside at the British Museum.

The first Ni-Vanuatu to have qualifications in archaeology and anthropology (from the Australian National University, Canberra), Regenvanu began his work with the Vanuatu Cultural Centre in 1994 as the curator of the National Museum. He was the center’s director from 1995 until December 2006. As a member of Vanuatu’s contemporary arts community, Regenvanu contributes to a body of vibrant artists who are working together to make Vanuatu’s name known throughout Oceania.

Sara Lightner

*University of Hawai‘i, Mānoa*
The Melanesia Project
Acrylic on canvas, 2006, 50 cm x 100 cm.
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The Story of the Eel
Ink on paper, 1992, 40 cm x 27 cm
The Killing of the Leseerrkab
Ink on paper, 1994, 40 cm x 27 cm

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The Journey of the Dead
Ink on paper, 1992, 40 cm x 27 cm

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The Two Children Left Behind
Ink on paper, 1992, 40 cm x 27 cm
Detail from The Two Children Left Behind, by Ralph Regenvanu. 1992.
The Lebon Brothers
Ink on paper, 1995, 40 cm x 27 cm
Detail from *The Lebon Brothers*, by Ralph Regenvanu. 1995.

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