order to satisfy the taste of each and every Pacific expert. One needs to keep in mind that the author hardly seeks to appeal to an audience of specialists. Rather, Lansdown presents us with a work aimed at Pacific neo-phytes and as such it is immensely satisfying. While experts might want to keep the volume on their bookshelves as a reference work for prominent quotes uttered and written by Western observers on the Pacific, *Strangers in the South Seas* will ultimately find application in the classroom setting. In particular, the present work is most useful to burgeoning history and literature classes on the Pacific Ocean. The author’s nine sections allow for easy inclusion in the instructional activity of additional sources, such as the missing indigenous voices. Likewise, the wealth of illustrations, thirty in all, enables class discussions to move beyond the textual document. In its attractively priced paperback edition, *Strangers in the South Seas* is destined to find a permanent place in Pacific instruction for some time to come.

Rainer F Buschmann
California State University, Channel Islands

* * *


Disparagingly told that Pacific Island art would never secure an exhibit at prestigious venues like the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles, painter and multimedia artist Jewel Castro responded by curating her own shows of diasporic Oceanic art. Castro’s latest curatorial effort is “Island Affinities: Contemporary Art of Oceania,” highlighting the work of fourteen Pacific Islander artists from island and diasporic locations like Papua New Guinea, London, and Orange County. It is the second significant art exhibit in Southern California in the past two years, following Castro’s curatorial debut, “Turning Tides: Gender in Oceania Art,” a smaller exhibit held at the University of California–San Diego (UCSD) Graduate Art Gallery in February 2006.

Unlike New Zealand/Aotearoa, Australia, or the United Kingdom, where Pacific Islanders have realized solo or group shows at private galleries and state-sponsored museums, the US continent has not afforded contemporary Pacific Island art significant visibility. Although 260,000 of the nation’s one million Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders live in California (the second largest segment after Hawai‘i), Pacific Islander artists working here face a “space and time” obstacle: they are perceived as being too far removed from the islands and as using aesthetic practices that are either too “modern” or too “traditional.”

Yet Castro and other artists featured in this exhibit are concerned with reaching through time and space to reconcile Pacific Island artistic practices and forms with the realities and temporality of contemporary life, whether in American Sāmoa or Oakland, California. A granddaughter of the founder of the Samoan Congregational Church in San Diego, Castro’s
background illustrates the trajectory of other diasporic Islander artists. She was formally trained in painting within a metropolitan art center—earning an MFA in studio art from University of California–San Diego under the direction of eminent African American painter Faith Ringgold—but is keenly interested in exploring histories of off-island settlement and her own family’s arrival in Southern California in the 1950s.

While this exhibit and its predecessor provided opportunities to invite larger audiences, they have more importantly opened up conversations among artists who are grappling with similar ideas on different continents and islands. Some of the artists met at meetings of the Pacific Arts Association, where discussions turned to creating Oceanic artistic languages. As Castro explained to me (interview, 15 Feb 2007), “Many of us use traditional arts to figure out where we were in the past and where we’re going in the future.” Reggie Meredith and Tupito Gadalla, for example, rework Samoan siapo (bark cloth) into mixed media pieces (photo 1), while Filipe Tohi interprets Tongan lalava (sen nit lashings) as modernist rock and wood sculptures. But artists are also using contemporary artistic forms like photography, video art, and theatrical installations to explore the past.

Anne Keala Kelly’s short video, Wish You Were Here, layers audio news reports about the desecration of Kanaka Maoli (Native Hawaiian) remains by commercial development, along with images shot from the point of view of a grave. Shigeyuki Kihara’s large-format photographic portraits in her series, “Fa’a Fafine: In the Manner of a Woman,” are stunning and sophisticated reconstructions of nineteenth-century colonial postcards, with the artist posed as a fa’a fafine (transgendered male) in place of the iconic bare-breasted Samoan woman. Along with Kihara’s series of portraits, Castro’s installation Red House, the Daughters of Salamasina is the most impressive artistic achievement, anchoring the rest of the individual pieces. A brilliant red sanctuary merging generations of Samoan women, Red House invites us into an interior where the most ancient of these women convene. They are like red islands sitting stoically in an ocean, suggesting that Samoan women are connected through water, despite the passing of time and migration to points afar.

Given the lack of sustained institutional support for contemporary Pacific Island art in California, exhibits are necessarily collaborative and experimental. For “Turning Tides,” Castro wrote grants and obtained ucsd gallery space from her alma mater in early 2006. The artists also paid to ship their own pieces. Art historian Peri Klemm brought most of the original “Turning Tides” works to her institution (California State University, Northridge), and co-curated “Island Affinities” with Castro. Klemm’s students designed the exhibit space and Web site, solicited responses from artists, and wrote some of the copy; the exhibit subsequently shows signs of this co-production. For while the exhibit features many accomplished works, it also reveals the ongoing problem of making Oceania legible to California audiences, as well as the uncomfortable convergence of
two forms of museology: the “ethnological” displays of natural history museums and “artistic” displays of fine art museums. A familiar pedagogical device—a map of Oceania divided into its three cultural areas of Polynesia, Melanesia, and Micronesia—fills a wall and overwhelms the other pieces in the gallery. Another placard in the exhibit asks and answers the question, “What does it mean to be a Pacific Islander?”—revealing an impulse to narrate via the ethnographic rather than allowing the works to speak for themselves.

The next contemporary Oceania art exhibit in Southern California could be another grassroots group show that
allows for conversations to deepen further between Islander artists, perhaps framed by a more specific thematic. Alternately, single works could very well be merged into larger institutions. Some are ready to jump into the limelight. Castro’s Red House, in particular, deserves a permanent place in a major art museum. While the exhibit features uneven levels of artistic and professional maturity, it nevertheless represents a key moment for Oceanic art exhibition and production on the US continent. Castro participated in exchanges about diaspora and decolonization at a groundbreaking symposium, “Native Pacific Cultural Studies on the Edge,” at the University of California, Santa Cruz, in 2000, jumpstarted by scholars Vicente M Diaz and J Kēhāulani Kauanui (see TCP special issue 13:2 [2001]).

An argument can be made that the artists herein represent a movement analogous to Native Pacific Cultural Studies, one that is crafting visual and performative discourses that can stretch the boundaries of indigenous diasporas and practices while remaining grounded in Native (is)lands.

ADRIA L IMADA
University of California, San Diego

* * *


Exhibits of the Oceania section of the Department of the Arts of Africa, Oceania, and the Americas (AAOA) are temporarily displayed in the African galleries of the Metropolitan Museum while the Rockefeller Wing renovation is underway. The current exhibition, “Coaxing the Spirits to Dance,” is the first to be dedicated to the art of the Papuan Gulf since Douglas Newton curated “Art Styles of the Papuan Gulf” at the Museum of Primitive Art in 1961. Like its predecessor, “Coaxing the Spirits” focuses predominantly on the figurative sculpture of ceremonial male culture in the gulf, with superb examples of dynamic Gope and Hohao boards, and powerful Iriwake, Bioma, and Agibe figures from throughout the region. However, the New York manifestation of the exhibition, which comes to the Metropolitan from the Hood Museum in Dartmouth (where it was curated by Robert Welsch), brings another level of visual material to these striking artifacts: Metropolitan curator Virginia Lee Webb has added photographs from the AAOA Photo Study Collection, many of which depict the actual objects in their original contexts. The juxtaposition of images and objects thus coaxes out several different narratives, some more explicit than others.

The primary exhibition narrative presents the rich vibrancy of the art of the Papuan Gulf, with the viewer’s aesthetic appreciation enhanced by seeing photographs of the objects in the places they were originally made, presented, and collected. The carved and painted boards on display are the home of important spirits, which must be coaxed into life through their continued activation in social and ceremonial life. These figures were carefully kept in longhouses, jostling among other such spirits, which in turn were understood to assist in local hunting, harvesting, health, fertility, wealth,