1. William Bakalevu, *Magimagi*, 2000, oil on canvas, 61 x 47.5 cm.
Biau Kula:
Space, Process, and Creativity at the Oceania Centre for Arts and Culture

A PORTFOLIO PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE DIVISION OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI'I
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ART
IN PACIFIC ISLANDS STUDIES

By

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May 2007

Project Committee:
Vilsoni Hereniko, Chairperson
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We verify that we have read this portfolio project and that, in our opinion, it is satisfactory in scope and quality as a portfolio project for the degree of Master of Arts in Pacific Islands Studies.

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2. Ledua Peni, *The Lady of Naisogolaca*, 2006, oil on canvas, 2 x 2m.
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Acknowledgements

There are countless family members, friends, faculty, and colleagues who have supported me throughout this project; I could not have done this without your collective encouragement and insight. Thank you.

My family has always been the source of my strength. Thank you all for believing in me, grounding me, and supporting my dreams no matter how far they take me.

Mom, I am grateful for the creativity you instill in me. There is nothing I cannot create and with flair. Thank you for the courage and goodness you have given me. It is because of you that I see goodness in all things.

Dad, thank you for your strength and generosity because of that constant generosity I have learned to think of others. I am grateful to have (a small bit of) your sensibility and determination.

To Kara, Jillian, and John for all of your patience and for always making me laugh and reminding me who I am; especially my brother, my best friend, my rock.

I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to the faculty members and staff of the Center for Pacific Islands Studies at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa who have patiently and thoughtfully offered guidance as I confused, changed, and questioned my ideas during the past two years.

Thank you Terence Wesley-Smith for always being available and reminding to recall what brought me to this point whenever I felt lost.

Thank you David Hanlon. I found direction and insight in your courses. Thank you for encouraging my first project on the Oceania Centre and my journey that led to this project. And of course I am extremely grateful that I had someone to ramble on to about the Red Sox.

I am especially grateful for the remarkable effort, care, and time that Vilsoni Hereniko has dedicated during my final year. Thank you Vilsoni for your incredible patience; when I felt that I could not write effectively you took the time to help me compose my thoughts. I appreciate that you always inspire and encourage me to imagine unique styles of presenting my ideas. Your guidance has given confidence and resonance to my writing and I will always recall that I learned to trust my ideas and share them during those many afternoons in your office.

Thank you Letisha Hickson for your enthusiastic interest in my research and for creating opportunities for me to share my passion for Oceanic arts.

Thank you to Julie Walsh Krocker. Thank you for your friendship, for getting me out of Hale Manoa to share afternoons with Miles. Most of all, thank you for reminding me that although the directions of my research changed that I am no less dedicated to my friends and the community in Kaven.

I am grateful to Dr. Byron Bender for overseeing my Marshallese studies while in Hawai‘i.

I would like to recognize the East-West Center for their support of my research.
My friends here in Hawai‘i have been generous and supportive. Thank you Sierra, Teri, Monica, Mymy, Arndt, and Marata.

I am grateful to Sue and Jacqui for their love and friendship regardless of geography. Thank you and may we always find our way back to Hull.

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A year ago, I knew little about the Oceania Centre for Arts and Culture aside from a few articles. These brief words can not adequately express my gratitude to the artists, dancers, musicians, and staff at the Oceania Centre; they are the heart and soul of this work.

You welcomed me into your home and shared your inspiration with me. You have all made my life more colorful and intriguing. Thank you for waking a creativity in me that had been hibernating far too long. Vinaka vaka levu Ann, Allan, Josaia, Irami, Jeke, Ben, Mason, Ledua, Calvin, Paula, Tex, Pita (both of you), Iliesa, Abraham, Josua, Sailasa, Nisi, Atetha, Katalina, Jaz, Tulevu, Pelu, and, of course, Mili.

I am grateful to Epeli Hau‘ofa, whose writing inspired me to embark on the journey presented here. I never imagined that I would meet such an exceptional person: generous, insightful, and witty. Malo au‘pito Epeli, for your vision, dedication, creativity, and heart. Thank you for welcoming me to share in the Oceania Centre. I appreciate your support, guidance, and friendship.

Malo au‘pito Barbara Hau‘ofa, for your kindness, your keen editor’s eye on my earlier work, and your encouragement as I worked on projects for the Centre and was not sure I was headed in the right direction.

This body of work is dedicated to Koni.

Nervously walking up the path that first morning I would never have imagined how vivid that memory would remain… Malo Koni for always inspiring me with your brilliant creativity and sharing your wisdom. I am grateful for your constant encouragement and motivation. You gave me the courage to finish this project; when I faltered and lost direction you reminded me of my purpose and to persevere when I could not see or understand my own purpose. Thank you for seeing my potential and helping me to see…

“This is the contemporary Pacific, there is no right or wrong. This is not the traditional Pacific…”

Lingikoni Vaka‘uta 17 February 2007
“This is a different version of how people first started in Tonga. Tangaloa Eitumatupu’a [god of the sky] decided to come down for sight-seeing. He turned into a kiu bird and as he was flying he got tired. Since there was no where to rest, he called to Tangaloa Tufunga [god of making or building] to put down some stones for him to rest on; Tangaloa Tufunga laid down his masonry stones and created an island. Out of this little island grew a vine and so the bird pecked on it. The vine broke and a worm came out of it and then he pecked on the worm and it broke into three pieces. From these three pieces emerged three beings: one was Kohai (Who), Koau (It’s me), Ko Momo’ (Momo), a man, woman, and a being with an essence of man and woman. They were the first humans.” - Tongan origin story told by Lingikoni Vaka‘uta

¹ Literal translation of momo is scrap or broken (Vaka‘uta per. comm.).
4. Lingikoni Vaka'uta, Kohai, Koau, Ko Momo (Who, Me, And Momo) The First Human Beings of Tonga, 2006, oil on canvas, 190 x 198 cm.
Preface: Connections

I have always been intrigued by art; especially the process of creation. My appreciation and understanding of visual arts has developed through interactions with artists and artworks to understand the methods and meanings present within the forms. My interests focus on spaces for art because the premier objects are often destined to a bounded existence in a museum. Through valuable experiences working in museums, galleries, and alternative spaces for arts, I have interacted with both artists and management to consider issues affecting the availability of visual culture (painting, sculpture, and mixed media works). I find that appreciation and understanding of art is developed through interaction, whether it is with the object itself, the artist, or projects, combined with the typical routine of observing artifacts in a museum. While interaction in museums is often a contradiction, it nurtures community involvement. A museum that achieves the delicate balance of an inviting space and educational experiences creates a reciprocal relationship with its community.

My interest in the relationship between visual culture and the spaces that house them became clear during my experience in the Marshall Islands. While passing through the capital of Majuro en route to the outer islands, I visited the national museum, the Alele, to discover more about the history and culture of the Marshalls. Entering the Alele I wondered if it was open to the public. The hallways were deserted and silent, a drastic change from the bustling streets outside where school children chased one another and men sat in the shade of the breadfruit tree challenging each other’s stories. I found my way up to the dust laden gallery which housed tangible representations of the Marshallese whose progeny were visibly absent from the museum. I gazed upon drawings of cq (tattoo) covered bodies before the arrival of the missionaries, photographs of European traders with the irioj, tools, weavings, and stick charts used to guide generations of navigators through the atolls. Wandering undisturbed I found dated exhibits with little
accompanying information causing me to form my own impressions of Marshallese history through imagery when I longed to hear real voices interpret those objects.

Hundreds of miles away from the neglected and dusty rooms of the museum, I found the connections I sought. Some time later, I recognized that the artifacts in the museum were part of daily life in my community on Kaven, Maloelap, the outer island where I lived during my year in the Marshalls. Living in this small community, I came to understand the bond between everyday life and the visual culture that I refer to as art.

Having daily contact with objects that were similar to those I saw at the Alele, I began to contemplate my discomfort in the museum and recognize the reasons it remained deserted. These objects were part of life, they did not need to be observed through a glass box; they have a place and purpose in contemporary life. However, interest in aesthetics and styles of craft is waning, even in outer island communities. The increasing accessibility to imported goods has been shifting the interests of youth. Foreign products bring foreign interests and diversions. I was concerned to see that young people valued animated movies more than the carvings produced by their grandfathers or weaving styles of their grandmothers. I discussed my concerns with my community in Kaven and realized that the knowledge associated with craft might soon be lost if an appropriate and effective space for the encouragement and continuation of arts is not introduced and fostered. I resolved to learn more about Marshallese and Pacific cultures so that I might offer suggestions for the future of the community in Kaven.

I highlight these reflections as a starting point for the research that follows. My experience in the Marshall Islands makes me consider the role of museums or cultural centers in communities;

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*There is no equivalent Marshallese word for *art*. *Amiŋkō* is derived from Japanese and refers to handicrafts. Therefore when I speak of 'art' in the Marshall Islands I am imposing my Western perspective of aesthetic objects, those that are creatively constructed onto Marshallese objects such as tools, weavings, and handicrafts. This is a continual contradiction in my research as Pacific island languages do not have words that are the equivalent of the Western word *art*. (See Kaeppler 1989, 24; Dark, 267).*
their potential to enliven and encourage indigenous visual culture in the Pacific region. When I arrived in the Marshall Islands I believed that art and culture could be accessible in museums; a year later I knew that creating a space for art and visual culture is not as simple as erecting a museum. While my experience at the Alele was disheartening, it fueled me to imagine and seek out alternatives to museums; spaces that nurture and promote creativity, a place to learn about, engage in, and celebrate the skilled craftsmanship of Marshallese.

Two years later, with the guidance of professors in Pacific Islands Studies, my exploration of arts spaces began. I found occasional references to a place called the Oceania Centre for Arts and Culture in Suva, Fiji. I soon discovered someone that had a vision for an Oceanic space for art. More than a decade has passed since Epeli Hau‘ofa began imagining a space and program for Oceanians to create, learn, and imagine their own styles and processes of art. I wrote and asked if I could visit to find out what this place that I could find little information on is really all about. A few months later, I showed up at the precise moment that Professor Hau‘ofa was departing for his first leave in ten years and so he quickly introduced me to one of the senior artists who guided me through the space and made all of the Centre’s resources available to me. Then I was left to do what every other artist there does: create. I quickly discovered the benefits of the open spaces and participative learning at the Oceania Centre; I found friendship and inspiration in my exchanges with the artists and worked beside them each day using magimagi (sennit lashing), wax casts, or just writing. The experience was unlike anything I had ever had before and I learned so much from the participants and staff at the innovative arts center that I returned to continue to create and reciprocate.

The artist biographies included in the Appendix are an example of one of my projects to reciprocate the Oceania Centre’s generosity.
The Oceania Centre is an innovative and welcoming home for artists. Art does not stand still there, it moves. The arts move in the form of creative exchange at the Centre; as the veranda hosts a jam session, luring the artists from their canvas to pick up their favorite instrument; or as the musicians keep a beat while the dancers and painters practice new choreography. I believe that the unique directions of the Oceania Centre are valuable in a number of ways and can be expanded upon to create models for museums and cultural centers in the Pacific that have become desolate, dusty rooms inaccessible to those whose lives are represented by the displays. Taking an in-depth look at the Oceania Centre I will highlight possibilities for spaces for art in Oceania using an interdisciplinary approach informed by Pacific and museum studies, anthropology, art history, and my experiences at the Oceania Centre.

This body of work is designed to be visually engaging; to challenge and inspire how we think about art and the spaces in which we engage with arts. I use the example of the Oceania Centre here in the beginning of my journey to imagine a creative and engaging space for arts for the community in which I lived in the Marshall Islands.

" See page 24: "I specifically focus on art (tangible arts such as painting and sculpture) because of my understanding of its process and production. I mention the dance and music programs at the Oceania Centre but do not elaborate on them because scholars with far more expertise and insight have and will write on these aspects. Nevertheless I use the term art freely and imply the combination of tangible art, music, dance, and occasionally oral and written arts because at the Oceania Centre the factions are inextricable from one another."
“The essence of my being comes from three basic principles: my culture, religious belief, and spirituality.

My existence, how I think, feel, and behave is my culture. If you go deep into the roots of a particular culture you see that it is universal. Culture comes from a particular cult that existed at a certain time and has been built from there. It is not a tangible thing, it is wide and integrated in the world itself. In the changing world we adapt to the change and grow onto another level of experience. This affects our culture, it draws from those before and adapts to our lives today. We can express our cultural values individually but as humans we share certain core values. Individual cultural values are rooted in where you are born; where I was born is part of who I am. Therefore my style of art is influenced by my cultural formation and makes me part of the Fijian and Oceanic communities. I am a proud Fijian because I understand my culture.

My religious belief has two parts. The first is cultural religious belief practiced by my ancestors. I learned about these rituals by living in my village. Certain elements exist today: sects of people, chiefs, priests, and warriors. Sacrifice is fundamental to these cultural religious practices, sacrifices based on nature... There are no boundaries between my [Fijian and Catholic] religious beliefs. Although these religions are seen as separate, I believe that there is fusion between these two religions.

Spiritual journeys depend on an individual’s knowledge of the existence of the unseen... To me, spirituality is universal; it is part of you and me and the whole universe. Spirituality is not limited to nature; it exists in all things... These principles are part of a transformation of the world. My art is a testimony to these beliefs. My art also speaks of gathering knowledge and enlightening your mind because that is who you are as a being. How I think and feel is what I am going to paint because that is part of who I am. My painting speaks to how and why I exist. Everything comes into existence for a reason and my art form is part of a vision.” - Josaia McNamara
I. Introduction: A space for creativity

The arts emerging from the Oceania Centre for Arts and Culture on the campus of the University of the South Pacific (USP) in Suva, Fiji, are distinctive because of the process of creation and the atmosphere in which the integrated arts program occurs. The combination of space and process at the Oceania Centre inspires and nurtures an organic, vibrant creativity that reflects Oceanians. The artists are not taught to paint, sculpt, or compose music or dance. The programs at the Oceania Centre are based on participative learning and experience. The artists draw from within to create; there are no classes or set practices to develop their skills. The shared learning is situated in and stimulated by contemporary life yet the artists invite tradition and history into conversation with the present through their art. This is unique because the artists are not attempting to imitate the styles of their ancestors, rather they respect and learn from tradition, incorporating that inspiration into their contemporary expressions.

The factors that contribute to the success of the Oceania Centre are inextricably linked to the history of Oceania and present-day life. To highlight those factors that affect the artists, I include examples of art throughout this project, paired with the words of the artists¹, intended to include reflections related to historical, cultural, social, and political issues in Oceania. Although the artists have recently come into the international art scene, they are all rooted in their families, villages, and communities; these are everyday people with exceptional talents. The art produced at the Oceania Centre reflects cultural, historical, social, and political conditions that affect Oceanians. These are not the commentaries of scholars or politicians, but the concerns and interests of those Pacific peoples who live a unique lifestyle; they travel to and from their village on

¹ The artists' quotes are from transcribed video footage taken between June and August 2006 and conversations during January and February 2007 at the Oceania Centre for Arts and Culture. The interviews were conducted for the purpose of producing a project based on the artistic space of the Centre. Other quotations are derived from notes taken for each artist's biography (see Appendix). They are reproduced with permission from the artists.
the same bus as their neighbors yet fly across oceans to participate in art exhibitions, always returning to their village. The artists are reflecting on the experience of living in a fluctuating world. Art is their medium to provoke consideration and conversations amongst members of their communities and between the past, present, and future. By surveying the art and listening to the artists we can learn about contemporary life in Oceania.

[Contemporary Oceania] is an area of interruptions; social, political, economic and artistic that is drawing greater interest from the wider world. This is no advertisement for globalism or even rubber-necking tourist-scholars, but a growing awareness that literature and arts from the Pacific remain a valid part of their lives as were once Oceanic myths and legends to explain origins, the past, present and future (Prasad, ii-iii).

Contemporary art is a generalized classification for art of the moment; visual expressions that reflect contemporary life. I review some of the literature about contemporary Oceanic or Pacific art. This demonstrates the vast array of creative expressions in Oceania. It is important to recognize the similarities and differences so that future arts programs and spaces can reflect this diversity yet focus on similarities to reinforce the shared elements of culture, traditions, and histories. The concentration of contemporary arts being produced in Aotearoa New Zealand and Papua New Guinea reinforces my belief that specific categories of contemporary Oceanic or Pacific art must be established in order to credit the distinct artistic movements occurring in Oceania. Therefore I have designated the genre of art being produced at the Oceania Centre as the Biau Kula movement (Fijian meaning tidal wave, literally red wave) to reference this artistic movement that has been steadily producing paintings and sculptures for more than a decade. *Biau kula*

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*I chose Biau Kula because during an interview Lingikoni Vaka’uta told me that the name of the artists’ collective Red Wave comes from the Fijian term biau kula or Tongan peau kula for a tidal wave (literally red wave). Rather than submit to the generalized term contemporary Oceanic art, I specify the Red Wave Collective’s artistic movement within its own category. The naming of an artistic movement based on a particular group is frequent in Western art history; consider Fauves/Fauvism (A group/style based loosely on naturalistic elements established by Henri Matisse and André Derain from 1905 – 1908), Der Blaue Reiter (The Blue Rider was an informal association of German Expressionists established in 1909 by Wassily Kandinsky), or Arte Povera (Based on open-ended experimentation by young Italian artists in late 1960s).*
metaphorically refers to the change in art happening at the Oceania Centre. This movement is strengthening with time, the artistic styles are becoming more distinctive and the number of artists involved in this movement is growing. The name is directly derived from the name of the artists' group at the Oceania Centre, the Red Wave Collective.

After identifying the external influences I focus on the Oceania Centre for Arts and Culture. The Oceania Centre has been quietly and steadily growing for a decade. Its success and significance is the result of the dedication and vision of Epeli Hau'ofa, the founder and director.

If this were a novel, the main character would be Epeli Hau'ofa, his presence would sit quietly beneath the surface of the daring and thrilling plots. If this were an action film, Hau'ofa would be the hero; the one we all love because he continually tries to detract attention from himself, unsuccessfully, because his integrity and advocacy, quiet as it may be, is moving. Although I consciously focus on the artists in this work, Epeli Hau'ofa is the catalyst and foundation of the Oceania Centre for Arts and Culture.

Hau'ofa was born in Papua New Guinea of Tongan missionary parents. He was raised in Papua New Guinea, Tonga, and Fiji. Hau'ofa studied in Canada and Australia, earning a doctorate in Anthropology. He worked in Papua New Guinea in the early 1970's, a time of rich creative growth and change. There he met Georgina and Ulli Beier whose work with artists would prove influential decades later.

Soon after, Hau'ofa returned to Tonga. One of his jobs during those five years was Keeper of the Palace Records, a unique if not odd position for an anthropologist. Not coincidentally Hau'ofa's creative writing blossomed during this time and Tales of the Tikongs was published in 1983. These short stories are prolific and introspective sketches of island-life wrought with "development". Hau'ofa's story-telling embraces the rich oral traditions of the Pacific with a

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* Lingikoni Vaka'uta personal communication July 2006; see DVD supplement.
contemporary satiric twist achieving realization through laughter. A writer whose work has always been sought, never peddled, the unforgiving yet compassionate humor reappeared a few years later in his first novel *Kisses in the Nederends*. Hau’ofa’s creative writing and poetry reveal the honesty of this humorous, compassionate, and insightful man.

While still in Tonga, Hau’ofa was recruited by the University of the South Pacific (USP) in Suva, Fiji. Since USP does not have an anthropology department, Hau’ofa taught in Sociology and, over time, became head of the School for Social and Economic Development. As a professor, Hau’ofa fell victim to the notions of belittlement instilled by the idea that the islands in the Pacific Ocean are too small and spread apart. For almost a decade Hau’ofa participated in the discussion and teaching of those prevailing notions. In 1993, Hau’ofa brought the insight of his earlier fictional, yet familiar, stories to academia with “Our Sea of Islands”, his appeal to colleagues to consider the strength of the Ocean as a starting point for the rejuvenation of the Oceania explored, embraced, and understood by their ancestors.

What followed were a series of essays proposing the challenge of a renewed vision of Oceania that invites traditions and histories into the present. The concepts from “Our Sea of Islands” and other writings from “Project New Oceania” are realized at the Oceania Centre for Arts and Culture and elaborated on in this project. Although Hau’ofa’s name is absent from many of the pages to follow his presence should be felt. In this contemporary legend, Hau’ofa is our modern day Maui drawing creativity out from the depths of the Ocean.
Hau'ofa has established programs and a space that reflects present-day life yet it is rooted in the histories and traditions of Oceania thus creating a comfortable and stimulating space for creativity. The Centre is a welcoming place where inspiration abounds. I describe the atmosphere of the Centre, its history, and introduce some of the artists currently working there.

As the Oceania Centre demonstrates, arts are an important and valuable outlet for commentary and inquiry into cultural, social, and political issues. Arts can also act as tools to create individual and regional connections with history and tradition. Contemporary art in Oceania is emerging as a technique for communication unrestricted by language. The Oceania Centre and the distinct genre of art that is being established there is an example of the potential for other prominent arts movements. It is my hope that a combination of elements derived from the Oceania Centre fused with local spaces and practices could be a model for a future network of arts centers exchanging, promoting, and perpetuating the artistic heritage that thrives in Oceania.
This is important to Pacific peoples because it offers a space and process for creativity and expression that encourages intuition and experimentation. The Oceania Centre is unlike Western educational institutions because it does not reflect hegemonic education practices.

When the mode of teaching or testing is primarily in the written form, indigenous ways of being are marginalized. Many island students fail not because they are stupid, but because the formal education system works against indigenous ways of learning or evaluating knowledge. I have often wondered why those students who excel at singing, dancing, composing, telling stories, and so on are rarely given the option of being tested in one or more of these modes (Hereniko 2000, 84).

Learning at the Oceania Centre is based on indigenous ways of knowing and being. The study of ways of knowing and learning is epistemology, defined by David Welchman-Gegeo as:

**Indigenous epistemology** [i]s a cultural group's ways of thinking and of creating, reformulating, and theorizing about knowledge via traditional discourses and media of communication, anchoring the truth of the discourse of culture... As a concept, indigenous epistemology focuses on the process through which knowledge is constructed and validated through a cultural group, and the role of that process in shaping thinking and behavior... It also recognizes that culture is variable, an ongoing conversation embodying conflict and change, shaped by the dialectic of structure and agency, inherently ideological, and prone to manipulation and distortion by powerful interests (Gegeo 2001, 58-59).

These concepts are fundamental to the Oceania Centre’s programs. There are no instructors at the Oceania Centre, there are no school fees, and there are no classrooms. There is participative learning, there are career opportunities, and there is freedom.

This is significant to Pacific Islands Studies because of the need to decolonize not only the Pacific but the scholarship associated with the region. In the keynote address of the 2000 "Decolonizing Pacific Studies" conference, Konai Helu Thaman highlighted the challenge to look at "[W]estern educational legacies, their philosophies, ideologies and pedagogies, which for nearly 200 years have not fully recognised the way Oceanic peoples communicate, think and learn; ideologies that sought to destroy the values and belief systems in which the majority of Oceanic peoples were and continue to be socialised... Decolonising Pacific studies is important because: i) it is about
acknowledging and recognising the dominance of Western philosophy, content and pedagogy in the lives and the education of Pacific peoples; ii) it is about valuing alternative ways of thinking about our world, particularly those that are rooted in the indigenous cultures of Oceanic peoples; and iii) it is about developing a new philosophy of education that is culturally inclusive and gender sensitive” (Helu Thaman, 2-3). The Oceania Centre is located at the Laucala campus of the University of the South Pacific, yet it has been marginalized by the academic community. Konai Helu Thaman attributes this marginalization to the separation of disciplines within the University or the separation of knowledge that is a part of Western knowledge systems. The originality, research, and discussion taking place at the Oceania Centre have not been recognized as an important contribution to academia because the Oceania Centre does not bestow degrees. This has actually been beneficial to the Centre’s growth because it gives the Centre freedom to nurture indigenous ways of creating. As Helu Thaman and Gegeo suggested, valuing indigenous ways of knowing is integral to decolonizing Oceania.

I begin and interrupt each section of this project with images and words from the artists at the Oceania Centre. The artists reflect on current events in their villages, church, national and international media, and around Fiji and Oceania. They draw from both indigenous and Western discourses. My process begins with voices of the artists in an effort to bring the artists front and center supported by scholarship but not overwritten by it.” It is my hope that this combination of...

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"The issue of gender at the Oceania Centre is one that I do not develop here because I am unable to adequately address the issue. All of the Red Wave artists that I introduce in this project are male. Although there have been and are female participants, there is an obvious gender disproportion in terms of painters and sculptors.

"Helu Thaman expressed these ideas during “Vaka Vuku: Navigating Knowledge Pacific Epistemologies Conference” at USP, Suva, Fiji July 3-7, 2006. See DVD supplement.

"This approach is motivated by the writings of Edward Said (1979), Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999), and Konai Helu Thaman (2000). “There is nothing mysterious or natural about authority. It is formed, irradiated, disseminated; it is instrumental, it is persuasive; it has status, it establishes canons of taste and value; it is virtually indistinguishable from certain ideas it dignifies as true, and from traditions, perceptions, and judgments it forms, transmits, reproduces” (Said, 19-20). “Too often literature and culture are presumed to be politically, even historically innocent; it has regularly seemed otherwise to me… that society and literacy culture can only be understood and studied together” (Said, 27). Said’s writings about hegemonic discourse assure me that my research and writing will never detach from my own
visual and textual presentation will initiate a discourse to imagine a productive and prosperous future for Oceanic arts.

The purpose of the supplemental DVD “A Tour of the Oceania Centre for Arts and Culture” is to provide a resource for the Oceania Centre. Although segments of the written and DVD components correspond, I do not cross-reference the two. This is a conscious decision with the intention that the written element can stand on its own. The DVD enlivens this project and can be utilized independently.

cultural perspective and past. Being that I became involved with the participants of the Oceania Centre, Smith and Helu Thaman’s writings reaffirm the implications of rewriting what I have observed, participated in, and listened to. I aim to recognize the multiple discourses that engage with and affect the artists and space of the Oceania Centre today but also in terms of historic, cultural, and social influences.
“Contemporary art to me is different from realistic art work because of the ways that they define the movements within the painting. For example eyes might be going up while a face is going down; you can fuse a person’s head with a lizard’s eye; and hair of leaves can represent an environment of animals, people, and nature. Contemporary in Oceania is joining culture and designs to represent the culture... Contemporary art to me is not a representation of what my eyes see but the images of those connections inside of me.”

– Pita Waqanuji Jr
"I enjoy contemporary sculpture because the only limitation is my own creativity, I can create whatever I imagine. If I tried to make traditional sculpture I would not be able to do any better than what has been done by my ancestors. I do not see the point of replicating the traditional tanoa, masks, cannibal forks, and weapons. With contemporary sculpture I challenge my imagination to produce something that no one has seen before." — Ben Fong
“Some people ask me why I am breaking away from the traditional styles of Fulanga. I am a new generation of Fulangan carver. I am not breaking away. What I am creating is just one aspect of carving; I continue to carve traditional forms but it is unique to work in contemporary forms. I am the first Fijian to work in this style. Through my sculpture I am opening up opportunities for others because I fear a loss of carving in Fiji. Carving has been passed through generations of men from Fulanga but now young men are not interested in what our grandfathers did. They think that carving is a job of the past and will not provide for their future. I share both the traditional and contemporary carving with my son and grandson to continue the practice of carving in my family. Tradition and contemporary influence my sculpture and [tradition] can be seen through the quality of work that my father instilled in me and [contemporary through] those creative ideas that reflect my world.” – Paula Liga
II. Oceanic Arts Movement

As with any process, the creativity at the Oceania Centre is dynamic and not limited to contemporary or traditional. The art evolves. It invites the ancestors into conversations in the present to dream of the future. It moves however the artist imagines it. For example, Irani Buli, who has been painting at the Centre since 2000, will not be bound to a category such as Realist, Expressionist, or Abstract that boxes in his art. He trusts in his own identity and shares it through creative expressions. His art moves like the ocean’s waves changing with each tide, predictable only to those who pay close attention. I see this as one of the strongest assets to the integrated arts program.

The artists at the Oceania Centre are defining a new and autonomous category of art. They do not judge themselves in relation to European, Asian, or American artists. As Hau’ofa affirms in “Beyond the Horizon”, the Oceania Centre is carving out its own space in the global system that assesses itself according to Oceanic values rather than a foreign yardstick (Hau’ofa 2001a). There is an exciting unpredictability at the Oceania Centre that is akin to the ebb and flow of the ocean.

“Contemporary” is the term used by the artists to describe their work, but there is always an implied or acknowledged understanding that the work is charged with a consciousness of traditions and histories. I refer to the unique and autonomous styles produced at the Oceania Centre for Arts and Culture as Biau Kula. This art cannot simply rest in the category of Pacific art.

Nicholas Thomas discusses the limitations of the terms traditional and contemporary in “Contemporary Art and the Limits of Globalisation” (1996). “‘Traditional’ and ‘contemporary’ seem, however, to have become words that we are stuck with. The dichotomy remains a problem, not because all dichotomies are necessarily bad, but because it suggests a linear progression from the traditional to the contemporary… ‘Contemporary’ could simply mean ‘of the present’, but often means ‘of the international art world!’” (Thomas 1996, 17). Also see Philip J.C. Dark “Of old models and new in Pacific art: Real or spurious?” (1999), “Many traditional arts persist though changed; others are reconstructions; others are traditional forms adapted and used to make new ones” (Dark, 268). And Karen Stevenson in the catalogue for Paradise Now? Contemporary Art from the Pacific writes: “Creating a cultural foundation supported by a traditional past and invigorated by the present, the island and the urban have come together in the creation of a spirited Pacific art movement” (Asia Society, 22).
But what is contemporary Oceanic/Pacific art? Certain similarities can be identified in the arts currently emerging from the expansive region of Oceania but considering that contemporary art is based on individual expression the differences often outweigh the similarities. When the differences are recognized the need for distinction becomes obvious. Distinction does not imply separation, rather recognition; acknowledgment that there is a range of categories within contemporary Oceanic art and across Oceania.

And how is it different from the widely recognized art being produced by Pacific Islanders in Aotearoa New Zealand and Papua New Guinea? Rather than differentiate the aesthetically distinctive factors I focus on creation and production. However it is not enough to simply state that these artists are creating innovative Oceanic arts that speak to and of Oceanians in the present-day with recognition of the past. Therefore I contextualize the Biau Kula movement at the Oceania Centre by introducing the categories in which they are often thrust.

**Contemporary art?**

Contemporary art has multiple definitions and interpretations. Literally:

Contemporary adj. 1. Belonging to the same period or time. 3. Modern: current. (Webster's Dictionary, 304)

Art n. 2.a. Conscious arrangement or production of sounds, colors, forms, movements, or other elements in a way that affects the aesthetic sense: production of the beautiful in a graphic or plastic medium. c. The product of these activities. (ibid, 127)

Similarly, contemporary Pacific art is enigmatic because of the diversity and difference of the region: culturally, socially, politically, and geographically. We must recognize the differences between contemporary Maori art and contemporary art of Aotearoa New Zealand; contemporary Polynesian art produced by diasporic Samoans and contemporary Samoan art; or contemporary art of Papua New Guinea and ephemeral ritualistic arts produced by tribes. These are only a few of the multifaceted factions of contemporary Pacific art.
Contemporary Pacific Art

I avoid the category of contemporary Pacific art for the art being produced at the Oceania Centre for several reasons. The most obvious reason that I avoid the label “Pacific” is because there is nothing pacific, calm, or conciliatory about the art being produced at the Oceania Centre. This art cannot be termed contemporary Fijian art because the artists come from different parts of Oceania. Additionally the Oceania Centre is the activation of Epeli Hau’ofa’s vision of Oceania and his ideals are its foundation, thus Oceanic is more appropriate.

The category “contemporary Pacific art” is most often linked (through publications, exhibitions, and media) to art produced by Pacific peoples in Aotearoa New Zealand. The attention on artists of Pacific ancestry in Aotearoa is warranted but we must recognize that their circumstances are different to those in Fiji. The infrastructure of government sponsored arts organizations, arts institutions, and arts enthusiasts and consumers provide an established and enabling platform for artists who might not otherwise succeed.

The vibrant contemporary art produced in Papua New Guinea has also received significant attention and acclaim due to encouragement and advocacy initiated by Georgina Beier and continued by the government. PNG’s art scene has experienced tremendous change since Georgina Beier’s art workshops in Port Moresby in the late 1960s and early 1970s. “Since the 1970s, in step with changing political and social circumstances, Melanesian people have created their own forms of contemporary culture which are now highly visible in the urban environment. Universities, art schools, museums and cultural centres play a conscious role in supporting the cultural development of Melanesian societies” (Cochrane 2001, 135).

Cochrane makes an important point about the role that institutions play in contemporary Oceanic life. Institutions have been the primary venue for “supporting cultural development”,

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implying that culture needs to be developed. I believe that freedom and interaction/relevance are more productive than “developing” something that is in a constant state of change.

Learning/Pacific/Identities?

There is a growing collection of literature on contemporary Pacific art. Each scholar recognizes that it is impossible to accurately represent the scope of contemporary art produced by Pacific peoples in a single volume. Therefore attention is uneven. Karen Stevenson cites the problem with the label “Pacific”, or even “Polynesian”, which does not even begin to reveal the inherent complexities and cultural dynamism (Asia Society 2004, 21). I agree with Stevenson and believe that a feasible and practical step is to differentiate by enacting more specific categories for contemporary Oceanic arts. She continues by suggesting that the Pacific stereotype, more specifically the renegotiation or destruction of it, identity plays a large role in contemporary Pacific art practice; thus much of the contemporary Pacific art exhibited in Aotearoa New Zealand, England, and the United States explores issues of identity and diaspora.

Identity is a complicated and integral aspect of contemporary Pacific art in Aotearoa New Zealand. Pacific peoples are the largest minority group in Aotearoa New Zealand, but as Teaiwa and Mallon suggest, theirs is a distinct migrant experience (Teaiwa and Mallon, 207). The article “Ambivalent Kinships? Pacific People in New Zealand” maintains that the Pacific experience in New Zealand is complicated by issues of precedence, rights, and inequality although there are shared histories and culture (ibid). The cross-cultural experience in New Zealand is visible in the artistic

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*Recent contemporary Pacific art exhibitions: “Paradise Now?” New York 2004 “This exhibition presents the work of fifteen artists from New Zealand and the Pacific Islands of Hawai‘i, New Caledonia, Samoa, Fiji, Torres Strait Islands, and Niue. Paradise Now? questions the historical and contemporary ideas of the Pacific Islands as a paradise” (Asia Society 2005); “Pakifica Styles” Cambridge, UK 2006-2008 “Pasifika Styles is an exhibition and festival celebrating contemporary art work inspired by Maori and Pacific Island culture. Showcasing selected works from New Zealand’s top contemporary and emerging artists” (Pasifika Styles); and “Island Affinities: Contemporary Art of Oceania” CSU, Northridge, California “This exhibition focuses on painting, installation, photography, and video art by contemporary artists of Oceania, who explore issues of identity, memory, and place through formal and conceptual affinities to Samoan, Tongan, Hawaiian, and Papua New Guinea culture” (Art Galleries of Cal State, Northridge). None of these major international exhibitions included artists working in Fiji.*
expressions of Pacific peoples creating arts there. They are not simply Cook Islander, Samoan, Fijian, or Tongan; they are forming new cultural practices, alliances, and identities. Arts have been and continue to be an avenue for the expression of these shifting identities. Fatu Feu’u, a Samoan artist living and working in Aotearoa, does not allow his success to belittle the difficulties that artists face:

We are expected to be self-reliant and strong, to strike out and make our mark as artists, and at the same time to defend ourselves against persecution and ill-treatment from the public, and sometimes even malicious and unforgiving criticisms by our own people (Feu’u, 60).

Being an artist in Oceania is emerging as a career choice. Creating paintings, sculptures, or dance for the appreciation of oneself and others does not always fit into the contemporary notion of “work” that has been enforced by missionization, colonization, and globalization. Therefore many artists attend a school for arts, perhaps legitimizing their career choice and most certainly providing a foundation for future career development.

In Aotearoa New Zealand and Papua New Guinea art institutions promote and provide space and instruction for artists. This has been beneficial and the arts reflect this. But what about

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I find it notable that nearly all of the artists exhibiting in Paradise Now? Contemporary Art from the Pacific, an important exhibition bringing Pacific artists to a prominent exhibition space in Manhattan, have fine art degrees. Of the four artists without fine arts degrees Denise Tiavouane is an art teacher and John Pule also teaches art at the university level. Affluent countries such as Aotearoa New Zealand have vibrant arts communities, museums and galleries, programs, and schools generously supported by the government. Creative New Zealand is dedicated to the promotion and development of New Zealand arts: excellent, distinctive and essential in the lives of all New Zealanders, a large population of which are Pacific Islanders. “Creative New Zealand receives major funding from the New Zealand Lottery Grants Board and the Government through Vote Arts, Culture and Heritage. In the 2006/2007 financial year, we received $21,310,000 (excl. GST) from the New Zealand Lottery Grants Board and $15,452,000 (excl. GST) from the Government through Vote Arts, Culture and Heritage” (Creative New Zealand). This is important because even though the foundation and mission of the Oceania Centre are based on participative learning, the artists do not have access to the resources available to artists in Aotearoa/New Zealand, this is primarily training and funding opportunities. Susan Cochrane recognizes that unless there is an external advocate, “Melanesian countries do not have the resources of developed nations. Large state art collections and programs of financial aid for artists are low on the list of economic and social priorities” (Cochrane 2001, 26). This is evident in Fiji where funding continues to be cut from the Fiji Arts Council and there are limited resources for artists. This is not to say that all artists in Aotearoa New Zealand have formal art training, for example John Pule is a self-taught artist. However he currently works in an arts school in Auckland, thus influencing his process because of the influences of a vibrant arts community that cannot be independent from the initial formation of museums, galleries, and schools in Aotearoa New Zealand which are based on 19th century European institutions. The European institutions were apparatuses of the state (Hooper-Greenhill, 25),
arts based on what a person already has? Creativity based on contemporary life in Oceania, not the precision of Mondrian, mystique of DaVinci, nor the decadence of the Mayans. If Oceanians look to Oceania for inspiration, listen to their family and community, connect with traditions and histories told in the village, not necessarily in schools, would the questions of identity be so fractious? Or could identity be empowering?

"[I realized] being an artist was what I wanted to do. It's a hard life. You have to really make a conscious decision to be an artist in the Pacific, in the islands, because the money doesn't really come in constantly but I guess it depends on your passion, if you really want to do it, because for a lot of people it comes from [the heart]." Lingikoni Vaka'uta

Foucault sees the museum as a characteristic of modern culture that exhibits or promotes the government's means of civilizing (and thus controlling) the population (Bennett, 19).
“My great-grandfather is from Vatusekiyasawa, near the mountain Nakauvadra. That mountain is the place where all the Vu (chiefs) of Fiji meet. The chiefs of Fiji symbolize the head; the strength of the body. I am connected to my great-grandfather; I feel it in my blood. We are connected because we are both communicators. He was a matanivanua and I am an artist; we communicate to our village. It comes into my artwork, when I am painting something, if something is wrong [incorrect representation], he will correct me. Paintings are a lasting representation and if I make up stories instead of preserving the memories, my ancestors would correct me because I have a responsibility passed to me from my ancestors. In the old days, there was no one to record the memories of the village; now I record the stories to preserve what has happened by transferring the memories of my village onto canvas.” – Pita Waqanui Jnr
10. Irami Buli, Jeke Lagi, and Pita Waqanui Jr, *The Sunrise of Tomorrow*, 2004, oil on canvas, 2x2 m
III. Biau Kula: An Oceanic Arts Movement

Setting the Scene

A *davui* (conch shell) sounds on a quiet, grey day on the Laucala campus of the University of the South Pacific (USP). Again, the call is carried by the breeze across the campus; the long, deep sound of the Oceanic horn wakes me from my urbanized existence, more attuned to car horns than *davui*. The sound wafts from an obscure building in the back of campus. I approach an open structure impertinently sweeping across a manicured hill behind the compliant classrooms, offices, and dormitories of the USP. Three roofs bend and curve into each other over the space. Walls are few; instead trees and bushes provide minimal cover and bring the sights and sounds from the Oceania Centre for Arts and Culture into the public domain.

An enormous blue sea creature of steel hangs as if it were a trophy. Metal and wood forms peek out from behind the bushes. Rhythmic sounds of the didgeridoo join the *davui* luring me up a path of stones that have found their way from the seashore to guide visitors into a different type of Ocean. Along the path, next to the striking ni-Vanuatu slitgong, I am stopped. Not from the formidable slitgong but from behind the towering figure, Beyoncé begins to compete with the sonorous horns.

I round the corner to find Ben Fong, a metal sculptor, with the *davui*, and Irami Buli, a painter, musician, and dancer, with the didgeridoo. They are keeping Abraham Lagi company as he paints on a panel propped against one of the large cement columns on the veranda. Artists drift in and out of the painting studio. Dancers sashay through the passage to the veranda, drenched in sweat, and beaming with smiles; Beyoncé’s voice fades away. A group emerges from an inconspicuous door; laughing and talking, the musicians are content with the progress of their album being produced in a sound studio hidden within this remarkable structure.
All the while, one person wanders around, discussing themes for an upcoming exhibition, trips to Tahiti and Auckland, dance programs, and music. Advising, telling stories, and listening, occasionally with a cigar, often with a smile, the director Epeli Hau'ofa engages with each of the artists and visitors.

This is one of the peaceful mornings at the Oceania Centre for Arts and Culture.

The Growth of the Oceania Centre for Arts and Culture

The Oceania Centre for Arts and Culture is the realization of Epeli Hau'ofa’s vision for a space to nurture contemporary creativity and invite Oceanic histories and traditions into dialogue through arts. As an anthropologist, writer, professor and now, for a decade, mentor to young artists, this humble Tongan has long held international recognition. Epeli Hau'ofa provoked colleagues when he offered his vision for a renewed Oceania in “Our Sea of Islands” (1993). He highlighted an Oceania that is an immense, far-reaching “sea of islands” traversed by ancestors who bravely embarked on voyages across vast expanses of ocean with a keen sense of cosmology. Hau'ofa reminded Oceanians about the accomplishments of their ancestors that included establishing and maintaining networks throughout the islands with sophisticated navigation and craft technology. He suggested then that rather than succumb to the prevailing notions of belittlement, they consider the strength and potential of Oceania as empowering (Hau'ofa 1993a, 5).

Oceania is vast, Oceania is expanding, Oceania is hospitable and generous, Oceania is humanity rising from the depths of brine and regions of fire deeper still, Oceania is us. We are the sea, we are the ocean… (Hau'ofa 1993a, 16).

Professor Hau'ofa’s vision for Oceania countered his earlier teaching at the University of the South Pacific, which fell victim to notions of belittlement and did not provide his students with much hope. Opportunity for hope and activation of his ideas arose out of a failed attempt to
recreate the success of Hawai’i’s Polynesian Cultural Center in Suva, Fiji.” In 1992, a directive by the governing council of USP called for the development of a cultural center inspired by the success of the Polynesian Cultural Center. A committee was appointed to develop a strategy for Suva’s own cultural tourist center but did not make much progress; they “unanimously rejected the idea of... becoming involved in tourism as entertainers. That was the only thing that it was united in” (Hau’ofa 2003b, 4). Eventually this committee disbanded because a plan could not be established. A few years later, the idea was revisited and Hau’ofa found himself appointed as head of the committee. Hau’ofa took action and formed a new group: “All those who held contrary views in the previous committee were uninvited” (ibid, 6). Hau’ofa was quietly embarking on what stands today as his realization and confidence in the strength of Oceanians to “cultivat[e] their ever growing universe in their own ways” (Hau’ofa 1993a, 15).

Since he was embarking on an uncharted journey into the arts, Hau’ofa invited Georgina and Ulli Beier to write a report and make suggestions based on their successful experiences fostering artists in Papua New Guinea (PNG) and Nigeria. The Beiers inspired Hau’ofa when they were all working in Papua New Guinea in the late 1960s and early 1970s. While in PNG Georgina Beier established art workshops, similar to those she initiated in Nigeria. Georgina went to the laborers to find artists. These artists often spoke no English and could not read or write. However, with support, encouragement, and perseverance PNG produced internationally renowned artists from those laborers (Beier 1974a, Hau’ofa 2003a). The Beier’s consultancy report for USP,

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* T.D. Webb writes that the Polynesian Cultural Center (PCC) has drawn criticism because of its superficial presentation of the Pacific as tourist art. “[I]t is preserving popular notions of Polynesia because the PCC is a business, its claims of cultural preservation notwithstanding... [Further, it] is an example of how tourist art can be endowed with more than economic values, and it has much to teach about the complex function of tourism in a developing society” (Webb, 80-81).
"Cultural Identity in Oceania" produced ideas and suggestions but there were still no firm directives when USP established the Oceania Centre for Arts and Culture on February 1, 1997.

Plans for the Oceania Centre moved through the University's bureaucratic process with unprecedented speed, thus beginning the Centre's marginalization and freedom. Hau'ofa was appointed director and provided with a program assistant and part-time cleaner. The Oceania Centre was allocated a building originally constructed in the 1940s by the New Zealand Air Force and more recently as housing for married students; this was a small and functional structure but not what one would call a creative space. That building is located at the back of the campus, behind the classrooms and library and past the cafeteria and dormitories.

Hau'ofa had a limited budget but plenty of time to imagine something unique: a home for Oceanian arts and culture. Establishing objectives was easy because it provided opportunity to activate his earlier ideas for encouraging an Oceanic identity. Along with his own ideas, Hau'ofa also considered Georgina Beier's art workshops in Papua New Guinea and Nigeria. He was also inspired by Futa Helu, founder of the 'Atenisi Institute in Tonga who once told him, "All the knowledge in the world we can teach without money" (Hau'ofa 2003a). These influences, combined with marginal funding and attention from USP fueled the Centre to find strength within.

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v This report is cited in Hau'ofa's essay "Our place within: Foundations for a creative Oceania" 2003. It is not available at the University of the South Pacific or University of Hawai'i, Manoa library.

vi Georgina Beier wrote a report on the viability of an alternative arts program in PNG based on apprenticeships with traditional artists and workshops at an arts center. She anticipated that the advantages of this program would be: 1) it gives the artist a thorough grounding in his own artistic tradition before exposing him to other cultures. 2) the emphasis is firmly placed on practical rather than theoretical studies. 3) it concentrates on techniques that could easily be carried out in most parts of Papua New Guinea. 4) it replaces the classroom atmosphere with a workshop atmosphere. 5) it tries to incorporate the virtues of the traditional apprenticeship system, while at the same time giving the student the varied techniques and the wider outlook that are required in the world today. 6) the scheme is tough on the students and success depends entirely on the student's own initiative and imagination... Thus the scheme might reintroduce the kind of natural selection process that has always operated on the village level, but which is being fuzzed over in the modern art school" (Beier 1974a, 12). These elements are apparent in the Oceania Centre.

vii 'Atenisi Institute in Tonga is named for the Greek capital Athens. The university is independent of both church and state. The educational focus is on classical and theoretical curriculum (unlike Hau'ofa's focus) inspired by the Greeks founded in classical languages, philosophy, art, and literature ('Atenisi Institute).
and appreciate its independence. The latter influence set the Oceania Centre’s cardinal rule: not to make insistent demands on the university especially on its financial resources. Hau’ofa felt that such demands “would attract unwelcome attention to what we were not supposed to be doing” (Hau’ofa 2003b, 7).

The objectives of the Oceania Centre remain the foundation to all that has developed there. The Centre strives to create Oceanic images that rely on traditions while incorporating contemporary life. In Hau’ofa’s words, “[Images] that speak to us, that speak of us in our place and time” (Hau’ofa 2003a). The space of the Centre is one imbued with reciprocity, cooperation, openness, and participation and within this collaborative environment the standards for creativity are established and applied by and for the participants. This invites an exceptional opportunity for experimentation because, in developing their own canons, artists develop new styles of expression because there are no fixed criteria; instead there is process. At the Centre, the artists aspire to create “forms, sounds, and movements people across the region would accept as theirs” (ibid).

These objectives provide inspiration for the artists to flourish in their own domain as others have in theirs (ibid). Through these objectives contemporary Oceanic arts emerge, reflective of present-day Oceanic life, inspired by the Ocean, traditions, and histories.

The Centre is relevant to contemporary Oceanic life because its participants are from within the community. Like Georgina Beier, Hau’ofa found artists in dropouts and unemployed. Those were the participants of the Centre’s first drawing and painting workshop led by Niuean artist John Pule. In 1998 Hau’ofa invited Pule to hold the first workshop to launch the applied arts program. A self-taught artist, John Pule lives and works in Aotearoa New Zealand. His early works, patterned with designs reminiscent of tapa, caught Hau’ofa’s eye. The workshop was the first of many that continue to be held at the Centre as a means of challenging the artists, demonstrating certain techniques (dance, painting, and paper-making among others), and
introducing different artists from outside of Fiji. Since the Centre never had the budget to hire a full-time arts teacher, the workshops and daily interactions amongst participants create a shared learning experience.

Sharing ideas was also fueled by the small building. Working within a narrow budget, Hau'ofa chose an open construction that allowed expansion at a limited cost. The original dormitory structure became offices and a single painting studio but over time the Centre gradually absorbed the surrounding land. Choosing the cost of a roof and floor over walls, Hau'ofa incorporated the openness of Oceanic architecture to make both the process and product of creation visible (Hau'ofa 2003b, 8). These open spaces invite communal sharing, learning, and stimulus among the artists. These elements are similar to the openness of a village, creating a familiar and comfortable space that nurtures the artists rather than confining them. Further, an open construction attracted an audience of laborers, students, and passers-by who feel comfortable venturing in to inspect the Oceanic arts.

Over the past decade, the structure of the building and programs has expanded. After the first workshop with Pule, Hau'ofa formed the Red Wave Collective, a group that is rooted in the ideals and space of the Centre while bringing Oceanic imagery to international attention. While painting and sculpture were the initial programs, interest in dance and music and Hau'ofa's open-door policy welcomed a dance program, led by Samoan choreographer Allan Alo, as well as music

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In the article “Have We Been Thinking Upside-Down? The Contemporary Emergence of Pacific Theoretic Thought” (2004), Elise Huffer and Ropate Qalo write: “Constructing a body of thought, much like building a Samoan fale (house), has significance in itself, but it must first and foremost be of use to the community it is designed for... In short, a body of Pacific thought should contribute to the establishment or affirmation of a Pacific philosophy and ethic – a set of applicable concepts and values to guide interaction within countries, within the region, and with the rest of the world” (Huffer, 89). Therefore we can associate the style of the structure with the processes happening within.

Epeli Hau'ofa, personal communication, January 5, 2007.

The Red Wave artists have exhibited as a collective as well as independently in places such as Australia, India, New Zealand, and, most recently, the United Kingdom.

For a more detailed history of the Oceania Dance Theatre's program see Vilsoni Hereniko's “Dancing Oceania” (2006).
composition, production, and performance, led by Fijian composer Sailasa Tora and Solomon Islander composer and sound technician Calvin Rore. The structural growth includes an open veranda, dance studio, sound studio, and sculpture area; these open and inviting spaces allow further growth rather than confining creativity within walls. This unconventional structure invites movement and creative cross-pollination within the space and programs of the Centre. The space has become a public space; those who come to visit often stay.

The Oceania Centre has overcome but continues to face numerous limitations and challenges. They have demonstrated an incredible capacity for improvisation in terms of materials, space, and financial resources. The benefits of their association with and marginalization by academia are a blessing in that the artists are free to experiment; if they were not being nurtured and supported by the Centre, they might succumb to market pressures and commercialization. The artist’s freedom to create is integral to the processes and unique imagery emerging. The exquisite variety of imagery and form might not exist if artists are forced to cater to the art market. This is not to say that the artists are not acutely aware of the local and international art market and clientele; after all, their work has been exhibited and sold in numerous countries, extending from the Pacific to Europe.

These artists have made the Oceania Centre a home; a place to dream, create, and thrive. Though there is a communal spirit of participative and shared learning there is also opportunity and encouragement for success whether through individual advancement and assertion or overall success as a collective.

The Oceania Centre has been quietly thriving for nearly a decade. During this time, Hau’ofa has imagined and nurtured an unprecedented space for creativity the likes of which have never before been seen in Oceania. His reward is the emergence of a unique style of contemporary
art that is attracting international attention. Most importantly, this art remains relevant to and reflective of the communities that it serves.

Moving art: creativity at the Oceania Centre

The Oceania Centre for Arts and Culture is an innovative space nurturing a movement of contemporary art that invites tradition into the present. By introducing its founder and history I establish the foundation from which the visual arts emerge. The artists express a burgeoning Oceanic identity infused with traditions and histories expressed in the contemporary through art. What is exceptional is the process encouraged by Hau'ofa which speaks to the potential of each individual while simultaneously forming a dedicated community of artists learning from one another. The process of creative exchange at the Oceania Centre is integrated throughout its painting, sculpture, dance, and music programs to produce expressions that move like waves with the fortitude and force of the ocean.

Valuing the journey of discovery, the Centre celebrates the identities of the artists. From the outset, the experience that they arrive with is valid and applicable. It is through the process of workshops and daily interaction that technique is developed with which they communicate their ideas, empowering themselves and other artists. Mason Lee, an artist at the Centre, explained it this way:

"[When I first came Professor Hau'ofa] just told [me], ‘Get a board and start.’ Instead of telling me ‘Where’s your sketch’, [or] asking ‘What did you sketch?’"

In other words, rather than beginning with what is lacking, such as deficiency in technical skill or art theory, participants are welcomed from a positive vantage point that recognizes each person has something valuable to contribute. Their experience is the starting point from which they draw
inspiration. This method of validating the participants from the beginning is unlike the evaluation required for acceptance into many higher educational institutions. Within educational institutions students are often reminded of what they need to learn, often putting aside cultural knowledge and experience to privilege Western models of education. This is evident in Lingikoni Vaka'uta's experience; revealing that the University is not the appropriate model or method for every person. The Oceania Centre provides an alternative for those who choose to look within themselves to produce creative expressions that reflect their experience of the world around them.

Within this valued experience is cultural heritage. The Centre respects the knowledge acquired in the villages and passed through families, further enacting Hau'ofa's early realizations of an empowered Oceania:

Only when we are culturally secure and autonomous and are confident in our varied heritage, in what we are, can we realize our full potential for sharing what we have, our selves, with others. We can create and subscribe to common cultural values while maintaining our differences (Hau'ofa 1993b, 132).

The most appropriate descriptions of the Oceania Centre are from those who are there each day. I have had the extraordinary opportunity to listen to, learn from, and know the artists, dancers, and musicians at the Centre. For the purpose of this project I focus on the Red Wave Collective artists because of my own knowledge of and experience with tangible arts. Although I interacted with all of the participants at the Centre, I focus on art (tangible arts such as painting and sculpture). I mention the dance and music programs at the Oceania Centre but do not elaborate on

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xiii Rather than reproducing their cultural knowledge and experience, the artists draw from it. James Clifford critiques imposed meanings associated with culture and art in "On Collecting Art and Culture" (1990). "Art collecting and culture collecting now take place within a changing field of counterdiscourses, syncretisms, and reappropriations originating both outside of and inside 'the West'... 'Culture' and 'art' can no longer be simply extended to non-Western peoples and things. They can at worst be imposed, at best translated - both historically and politically contingent operations" (Clifford, 155).

xiv Susan Cochrane discusses creativity in the Pacific in Beretara: contemporary art of the Pacific (2001): "Some of this artistic code is inherited, some of it learnt, some of it comes from experience and experimentation. But when the code is found it gives form to a vision and expression which can be shared with others" (Cochrane 2001, 43).
them because scholars with far more expertise and insight have and will write on these aspects. Nevertheless I use the term art freely and imply the combination of tangible art, music, dance, and occasionally oral and written arts because at the Oceania Centre the factions are inextricable from one another.

We’ve discussed their art, process, and aspirations. I introduce a few of these artists to demonstrate the innovative process which begins with the individual’s skills and integrates those strengths into the collective. These are only a fraction of those who have brought their own creativity, history, and vision to the Oceania Centre.

Voices of Biau Kula

Process

I have described the importance of space and process at the Oceania Centre in terms of Hau’ofa’s vision and the Centre’s mission, but none of that matters if it does not produce a creative and inviting space for the participants. I go to the artists to give further details to the experience at the Oceania Centre because they are part and parcel of this inspired wave of Oceanic art. These artists are producing individually striking works as well as a collective body of work that honors the diversity of Oceania.

These voices are also essential because they are the foundation of this artistic movement. Their aspirations and concerns come from experience, not institutional pre-requisites. Their success will empower the future of lateral artistic movements which will hopefully form a network of exchange throughout Oceania. Through this network, arts, culture, histories, traditions, and life can be shared, interrogated, inspired, and perpetuated. Through the following voices we can begin to imagine a future of arts and spaces to house the art and artist.
"[Professor Hau‘ofa] just looked at me and said, ‘Oh I think you are the right person’... That is why I felt comfortable [here], I felt that this was the right environment."

Mason Lee’s memory of Hau‘ofa’s welcoming reception epitomizes the ambiance of the open structure and accessible programs. Mason joined the Red Wave Collective in 2000. Over the past seven years, his style has transformed, thematically as well as technically. This transformation has been gradual but what has emerged is a distinct style. Mason’s intricate and enticing imagery is one of many examples of the success of the integrated arts program at the Centre. Describing his own experience, he explains:

"Being at the Oceania Centre for the past seven years has allowed me to share my art and learn. I share my art with other artists in hopes that they can take what they see in my work to another level and create a road for their own artistic journey."
I found my focus as an artist when Professor Hau’ofa told me to do what comes automatically [because] art is not only about seeing things and copying them. He told me to create from within using my inner voice to express what is important to me because that is what is really me. From that, my progress as an artist has been a learning process within me; learning from myself [because] it is no longer about teaching. I think art is an inner being in yourself. It is a never-ending story to try to explain about art or the way I think about art.”

Mason found focus in re-presentations of Fijian myths and legends. His familiarity with legends allowed his technique to flourish. This is can be seen through the trademark bodies whose muscular and heroic forms journey through Mason’s imaginative land and seascapes. Recently, Mason began re-presenting his own journey through life. His latest black and white series not only reveal the capacity of his technical skill but the single color on white canvas explores his inner-self in relation to the world he lives in. His use of contrasting colors challenges the familiar oppositions that are a part of everyday life: man/woman, day/night, good/bad. Through this process of returning to simplicity, Mason is realizing countless possibilities for new dimensions of color and form.
Lingikoni Vaka'uta is now a leading member of the Red Wave Collective. Tired of his Economics program at USP, he was looking for change. Lingikoni never imagined a career as an artist but he decided to give the workshop a try. He discovered something in himself that has continued to flourish. Perhaps it is a trait he has adopted from his mentor, Professor Hau'ofa, but Lingikoni is humble and prefers to let his art speak for itself. He might not offer his qualifications nor boast exhibitions in New Caledonia, New Zealand, Australia, and London but he will gladly discuss the important space, programs, and creativity at the Centre.
"I was schooling and ... just lost [interest]. I didn’t want to go back to academic work or schooling... and then I found this workshop that was advertised... and then I found something in me that I always wanted to do... It’s a hard life... you have to really make a conscious decision to be an artist in the Pacific, in the islands, because the money doesn’t really come in constantly. But I guess it depends on your passion, if you really want to do it, because for a lot of people it comes from [the heart].

I work with Tongan legends, ancient legends. I use a lot of the Tongan metaphors... [that have] two or three meanings in one sentence depending on how you use it. I use that so a piece of art work can... have a different name with different images [and] it can actually mean something else. But I also like to leave my art work to people’s own interpretation so...I use a lot of these... metaphors... I don’t want to copy the whole traditional Tongan designs because, it would just end up duplicating what our ancestors have done. So what I do is somehow create my own. And I may borrow a little bit but I just cut it up and twist it around... I guess that is what contemporary art is.

We sort of improvise, we have been improvising for a long [time]... We improvise a lot [at the Centre,] we paint where there is available space... As artists improvisation is a good thing.... We [improvise and] encourage the younger artists to find a space and just paint. If what is driving you is your passion for art [then] you can survive...

[Here at the Oceania Centre,] we borrow the Pacific concept. If you grew up in the villages... you watch the older people do stuff... sometimes they tell you what to do but most of the time you just watch and you do it...

It’s the same thing here, now we just bring in the new artists... we have the workshops... and then we just give them the canvas [and say] 'Here is your canvas, you have stories’... [We] just let them... explore. If they want colors we help them with technical stuff like colors, how to preserve your work... Technical stuff we can help [with] but the creative stuff... [we] let the artists create their own [ideas], that way it comes from inside and that way they feel close[r] to their artwork. If you tell them, this is how you should paint, this is what you are going to paint, well, then they’re not artists, they’re just people who do what you’re doing... But at the same time... we want to do our own contemporary thing... We have a little bit of Pacific but we don’t encourage painting a sunset with coconuts and a thatch house. That is not Pacific art that is realistic painting using a Pacific scenery... [We paint] stories... like a piece of tapa. But its not tapa it’s a story of figures...

To run a creative centre like this you have to have the space and, you also have to be able to be more lenient and [you can’t] run it like a business because [if you do] it’s going to turn out like a factory for producing artwork for tourists... I guess in order for a person to run a place like this [he] has to be creative. As a leader he has to look at stories from different angles and he has to address the problem in order to know there are different ways... [Because this is] creative art for a new wave of movement, you have to be creative and [not] just create for tourists... You have to create it for art’s sake as an artist. Because if you are just going to try to [make] it for selling, we might as well all go to town and sit [at the] flea market... and sell it for $20 and $10 a piece. But then, at the end of the day what are we?

For me, I want to be an artist. I want to travel. I want to share my culture with lots of people in the world... Here in this space... [we] need the physical space but the artists also just need their space... the space between artists. Everybody needs that space as well, you and me, as artists sometimes we need to talk and sometimes we don’t need to
talk, we also need that space, the infrastructure of space and the space between artists... A good example is Allan’s productions. [For] dance productions we all sit down and come up with a plan... [We] contribute and talk with Calvin and Sailasa and they come up with the music... I come up with the background art works and the art that they use in different scenes. Then we sit down and the sculpture gang comes... [and] makes some of the props... Everybody’s together in that we have to talk to each other... [In] the last production we did a massive backdrop... [it] was a big piece of cloth that [ran from one end of the stage to the other]... and we painted it in one week. Everybody is working, everybody paints with a brush... it’s fun and everybody is talking... [We] do the backdrop and we also help out in the backstage... moving around stuff... [Then] when we have an exhibition the dancers come and do the drinks and walk around; we help each other.”

Everyone at the Centre understands this cross-pollination of ideas and talents. The communal approach to creativity is rooted in the Oceanic value of reciprocity. Creativity is not limited here. An artist is never just a painter. Dancers are comfortable with paintbrushes and musicians will choreograph. It is a shared experience and a process of creating contemporary Oceanic arts.

Irami Bulimaivale Uluinasaravi: Process - Participation and experimentation

13. Irami Buli, The Emerge of My Being, 2006, oil on canvas, 1x2m.
Irami Buli thrives in the participative and integrated programs at the Oceania Centre.

When he first arrived at the Centre in 2000, he re-presented Fijian legends. He soon recognized that legends were a popular theme and so he challenged himself to find a new angle for his art. That is one of the only predictable aspects of Irami’s art, he will never settle for something conventional.

The process at the Centre suits Irami and encourages not only his painting but also his dancing and musical talents which he might not have discovered if not for the Oceania Centre.

“For me, art is generalist… art is not only painting. The reason why I feature painting, painting into dancing, and dancing into music…is because it gives me more knowledge not only about painting but to physically train [myself] is a form of art… [You can] create a painting [in your mind, then] you can come to music and come to [achieve] more knowledge in music; you can create something else in music. [You can] create something else in dance. [All these aspects] give you a more creative mind in this space…This is much more, although it is not a proper gallery; it [has] more freedom for an exhibition… I prefer that things are open…to have four walls is to be in a box. This is sort of like a wave…

[The workshops are] not really teaching, they do a demonstration of new art, new medias… [to]collaborate [and] work from that… to use [those] skills to start something else… it is amazing and it gives you more ideas. [Although we are] working in a small space… I think the mind is very powerful. We all have different minds… My mind is concentrating on what is really happening right now. [To] sort of change the view, change it, [and] change the concept of what I see. And [as] some minds [go] right down deep into the sea, some go back into the past. That is the way we can find our own identity. Rather than some of the other places [where artists] stay together and copy one another’s styles… That is how the mind works… My work is often based on a new angle, [the] way I see the world. [I] sort of take an idea and change it… It was really hard for me, the first time, to find myself, my own identity. But it came to a point where I found a new direction. I found new ways, I did follow this road and it took me somewhere else… And art to me, I believe it’s from the mind. It’s from the inside of you and that’s beautiful. You don’t have to go and learn about art and get a masters and a PhD in art [to] say you’re an artist. I don’t believe that. An artist is someone who creates something from their own mind and transfers it to a canvas.”
Josua Toganivalu has been a part of the Red Wave Collective since its inception. While he has pursued other endeavors along the way, he remains a contributing member. Besides painting, Josua is a skilled graphic designer and has used those talents in print media and teaching graphic design courses at Fiji Institute of Technology (FIT). Although he values the Western education system for particular disciplines, he finds inspiration in the process at the Oceania Centre.

"[M]y personal connection with the Centre is very... intimate... Because of that passion that I have for arts and painting my connection with the Centre is something... that I hold personally... the Centre is like a part of me. Being part of the Centre [is] also a source of inspiration. And just being here... sharing ideas and learning from other artists and respecting other artists’ work and just mingling here, you get that creative energy flowing... And so it... inspires me..."
There are no academics here [and] I have no problem with that because with painting it's about the individual creativity, what's inside an artist. So those types of creativity that [are] in an artist you will not get in school, you can go and get the degree or diploma in arts, but... the artist is within the artist. There are a lot of creative people around and... they don't have the opportunity to go and get the funding to go and get a higher education in arts. They just have it in them and with this place... offering painting workshops, it's okay for there not to be any academics because the artist's creativity comes from within the artist himself.

*Visual Expressions of culture, politics, and spirituality*

The artists are attuned to the Oceanic space and processes at the Centre. It nurtures their creativity and encourages Oceanic ways of knowing and being through which they consider their changing world. The artists pose deep and meaningful challenges to themselves, their colleagues, and audience; questions of cultural identity, political tensions, and spirituality. Each artist has their own beliefs and those are encouraged by Hau'ofa and the principles of the Oceania Centre. Here is only a sample of the messages that the artists express.

In *Towards a New Oceania*, Albert Wendt writes about the effects of trying to preserve culture and how it is essential to live as “creatively as possible” in the present rather than over-glorifying the past (Wendt, 12). Continuing on to the importance of cultural diversity, Wendt affirms:

> Self-expression is the prerequisite of self-respect... An intense artistic activity is starting to weave firm links between us... The recent literary artistic renaissance is enriching our cultures further, reinforcing our identities/self-respect/and pride, and taking us through a genuine decolonization; it is also acting as a unifying force in our region (Wendt, 17-19).
Ledua Peni began painting re-presentations of legends from his village in Lau. As he became comfortable with his style and skills he recognized that his culture is not simply in the past and that his present experiences are crucial for the future of Fiji and Oceania. This brought a change in his art.

"I paint Fijian legends because I do not want them to be lost. These stories are not written; as we lose our elders it becomes difficult to remember those stories. Then I realized how powerful it is when I paint the stories of everyday life, because that is what is happening today. Both of these styles have the same message: if stories and legends are lost, what about the next generation that wants to know about their traditions? And the same with my paintings of my present life, what will happen for the future generations of Fiji? Fijians now should recognize today to help them prepare for our future."

Ledua’s philosophy reveals the manner in which the artists are inviting traditions and histories into conversation with the present. Ledua considers those legends that are valuable representations of the past to imagine which stories are valuable representations for the future.
As an arts and culture center, the Oceania Centre is interested in the representations and perceptions about culture, not only Fijian but Oceanic culture. The benefit of being located on the main campus of USP is that the students and staff represent the breadth of Oceanic cultures; this generates exchange on and off campus. These artists’ works reflect the diversity of USP and Suva, where cultures intersect and adjoin to reveal similarity and disjuncture.

“Culture is a way of life. No matter how far I go, my culture directs me. It is something invisible, that we understand [through] the use of our senses. If I live with my culture I will live a prosperous life and future generations will reap that prosperity. That is why culture is central to my art because people are drifting away from their culture
because of the changing times. Culture represents stability but the changing times change the way we live our lives between generations.

[My painting] *The Power of the Mind* is about the developments of the world, from old times until today... [W]hat cannot stop is the powerful mind that creates things in the world. I painted two heads and a female body with mat lines because what I see, through my vision and through the mat lines, are related to technology because technology is all in lines. Technology is not new. When people weave they weave in lines. [This] shows something that does not end, like technology, [and] continues to develop. From that way of [traditional] life it is taken to another level [in modern times] but it comes to reality through the power of the mind. I also see [that] the powerful mind never stops. One generation comes and goes and [then] another, but the mind is something that never stops we can prove it through the development of the world today.

It is important to me because – I am doing it – it is like a current, the world going on nowadays and we are going on that flow, and that flow carries us.”

*Peni Saimone “Ben” Fong – Reflections on political strife and discontent*

Ben Fong has been reflecting on the ensuing political unrest in Fiji for more than seven years. He is not limited to political themes but as an indigenous Fijian he feels strongly about the suffering inflicted on Fiji by political tensions. Ben’s sculptures are not only provocative, they are exceptionally unique. Neither size, shape, nor material limit Ben’s imagination; his works range from the 8 meter The Way the World Should Be" to the caricature of Hau‘ofa that is less than 50 centimeters high.

"Now before I go into that I [should] explain a little bit about myself. I’ve got the name Fong... I am using that as my surname. That is a Chinese name, my mom is Chinese... [And] my dad, he came from the village [in Lau]. My dad was a sea man, he traveled the world... It is assumed that I am Chinese, I am not but I was raised around my mom’s family... For me being raised with my mom’s family I saw how Chinese people live their lives and I saw the things that matter to them the most. [But] I still attend my dad’s tribal meetings and all sorts of things, and I see how my dad’s family lives their life. I think that I am fortunate to have the best of both worlds... Some of my being raised in these two worlds, has to do with some of my work. One of those is the sculpture outside. That one, I was inspired for that one by the political upheavals that happened in Fiji... I just really don’t think that I, as an indigenous Fijian, want someone like George Speight representing my people. I don’t want him representing my people. He knows nothing about my people. He is a very well educated person. But still, I would prefer if there was anything to be done for the Fijian people, I would prefer that it was done legally, and it followed the due process of the law... George Speight did not fight for me, and he has not fought for me. Now he’s [brought] in race, he has played the race card, he said that he is doing it for the Fijian people. Well, for me, he’s never done it for me. If you see my sculpture, at the top - I’ve split it into two - there’s the top half which has an arm that is extending towards the front and there is an arm that he is standing on, the mouth of the fish is on the ground he is also standing on it. Now if you look at the eyes of the sculpture one is sunk in and one is popping out. I saw that like George, that some of our chiefs, some of our politicians influencing people in society. I saw them as having an eye out for an opportunity, whether it was legal or illegal, they’d take it. And the teeth of the sculpture I did that because I thought that when opportunity presents itself, be it legal or otherwise, these sort of people seize their opportunity and if anyone was to stand in their way they would chew that person up or would chew that group up and spit them out as if it was nothing. As long as their ends were met, as long as their agenda was met. That’s the way I saw it. And also the bottom half of the sculpture, also shows a bit of Fiji that is not shown, in tourism brochures, it is not shown in ads, it is not shown overseas, the poverty, the

Fiji has experienced four coups in less than twenty years: May and September 1987; May 2000; and December 2006.

"Fiji, the way the world should be!" was the famous slogan used by Fiji’s tourism industry during the late seventies and early eighties. (Hereniko 2003, 82)

Ben is suggesting that people do not realize that he is indigenous Fijian as well as Chinese.
discrimination the fighting for indigenous rights. I think we indigenous people have our rights. I think there are other elements, who are exploiting these rights, and I wouldn't want anyone exploiting indigenous rights but at the same time I would not want my people, indigenous people, asserting themselves illegally on other people for that matter, that is the bit that the bottom half of the sculpture shows. There are a lot of poor people, there is a lot of oppression, there are a lot of these things that's not shown. The top half of the sculpture it shows the Fiji the way the world should be: tall swaying coconut palms, long white sandy beaches, crystal clear blue waters. It shows paradise. It shows all the lovely things of Fiji. But beneath all that there is a whole lot of rumbling happening underneath and a lot of people are not willing to [acknowledge] it, I think it is being suppressed, and I for one am not going to have these things suppressed. Because I don't want my children growing up in a bad Fiji... Despite them being indigenous Fijians, despite them having their roots well maintained, having their indigenous connections. Despite all that, I would not want them supporting any upheaval. I would not want that. I would want them living in peace with everyone else. There is a lot of nastiness in Fiji, there is a lot of greed but it is all being hidden... That is basically what that sculpture means.”

This sculpture remains a constant reminder of the discontent, frustration, and anger of the Fijian people. In times of political unrest in Fiji, some create riotous stirs via media outlets. Ben’s commentary does not require media coverage; instead his response to the political tensions in Fiji is mute but compelling.

“I don’t think I create for an audience... I think I create for myself. I create what I want to. I create certain things that inspire me. I don’t create to make people happy... If I were to create to make people happy, to me, it would be meaningless because I wouldn’t be doing it for me.... For an audience, no. But I have done numerous sculptures which have been appreciated by other people. It’s been taken overseas, I’ve won national awards for them but creating for other people, no, I am creating for me and my family.”
Christianity has become a fundamental part of life in the Pacific Islands. Even if a person is not a practicing Christian, inevitably many of their family members and friends are. A number of the artists at the Oceania Centre cite religion and/or spirituality as significant to their life and revealed through their visual representations.

"My painting is influenced by religion. Religion is important to me and I show this through art by depicting love. The love I paint is from above; love between mankind. This love brings freedom. This love is based on my faith. When I was younger, I recognized how much suffering there is in the world. In my heart I felt that I could respond to this suffering through art, to paint my message of love. I paint humanity and emotions. Mankind shares certain needs and emotions. I hope that my paintings will show movement that explains my stories of how we face the same problems in life and that love gives us hope to forget sorrows, sickness, or stress."
Abraham Lagi - Christian messages

19. Abraham Lagi, *Your Friend is Your Worst Enemy*, 2007, oil on canvas, 2x1m.

At first glance, Abraham Lagi’s works may not appear to be religiously influenced but if you ask him where the inspiration comes from he will tell you:

“When I returned to the Oceania Centre in 2006 there was a change in me and in my art. I had been sick and when the sickness went away all the pride and anger that I had before was gone because I saw my second chance. I thanked God for this chance and saw that he chose me to pass on his messages to people in this world so that they may go to heaven rather than hell. Now I am painting Christian messages of which road we should follow. These messages are based on what is happening through time, in the past, present, and future, with themes such as *Your Best Friend is Your Worst Enemy*… because there are plenty of times people are betrayed in this world.”
Josaia McNamara’s paintings are distinctive. I describe them as spiritual. The complex layers of patterning and symbolism that he achieves are matchless. His avant-garde stylings are enigmatic if left untitled or without explanation. Josaia’s works draw from culture: his Fijian and Oceanic heritage; religious belief: a combination of indigenous Fijian religion and Catholicism; and spirituality: an ever-changing process that is universal. Josaia’s art works are undoubtedly contemporary but the underlying significance is timeless and bridges the past, present, and future.

“I see myself as a visionary artist... My works are very influential for me [and] my three basic principles in life, which I strongly believe in, [especially in terms of] my growing periods [are]... my Fijian cultural background.... my religious [beliefs] as a Christian [and] also my own... personal spirituality... These three basic principles [are] actually being formulated through me and in my works. It is a testament... [And these are] my foundation stones... My inspiration was long before this place. It is only here that we establish ourselves; this is the place that I actually established myself professionally...I think inspiration doesn’t only exist in this place... Here, we are pioneering into something greater than what [has] already been founded at this time [in terms of Oceanic arts]... I see...
that this place is [going to] become an institution... [But] being here [now,] at this level, we are really being creative, a creative force.

We have been working collectively and also collaborating with other artists... The Red Wave artists... want to bring in the creative artists, people from outside [and] throughout the Pacific to be part of this movement. So we [can] have a strong foundation to bring out our voice to this region and... to be strong.”

Josaia’s current paintings are philosophical representations of religious ideals. His work can be enjoyed for the essence of color or the veracity with which he replicates ancient alphabets that he has researched at USP. Although he always begins with Fiji, his culture, his roots, his final expressions become universal. Josaia is another example of the freedom and innovation at the Oceania Centre. But his art may have never reached this stage nor provoked so much contemplation if it were not for the program at the Centre which is conducive to his process of creation and inspires him as well.

“[My styles are] Oceanic styles. [It] goes back to my childhood... growing up with Fijian parents it is part of who we are in Oceania. We call ourselves people of Oceania. If you are born in this part of the world you feel part of this community, this place. I feel that the world itself is evolving; it is moving and everything is changing. But what [reveals] who you are is where you are born... It grabs from the essence of who I am in my being and I am trying to communicate to my audience that it does exist in them too... I believe that other people who are deeply rooted in their own culture or religion would see and sense the same things.”

Oceanic Identity

Hau‘ofa has created a space that values Oceanic culture, knowledge, and styles, inspiring William Bakalevu, Irami Buli, Ben Fong, Abraham Lagi, Philip Jeke Lagi, Iliesa Lee, Mason Lee, Paula Liga, Josaia McNamara, Ledua Peni, Tevita Sauliga, Pita Rokotuvuni, Josua Toganivalu, Lingikoni Vaka’uta, Pita Waqanui and others to compose powerful visual narratives using styles that reflect and integrate their Oceanic experiences. This validation of experience is a means of
privileging indigenous epistemologies.\textsuperscript{xvii} These artists communicate through a process of creativity anchored in Oceanic ideals, thus relevant and accessible to their community.

The Oceania Centre affirms Oceanic identity through processes of exchange and creation within the wall-less structure. The integrated arts program draws from cultural heritage integrating traditions into contemporary arts; therefore it is appropriate that the space is also a fusion of modern architecture with traditional elements. Lingikoni points out that the Centre borrows Pacific concepts such as its open design which is reminiscent of a Tongan or Samoan \textit{fale} yet constructed of concrete and metal. The space is adaptable as a communal structure should be; the veranda might host meetings, group lunch, or kava sessions and the dance stage transforms into an art gallery. Josua and others draw inspiration from "creative energy flowing" in these adaptable spaces and "the sharing and learning" that goes on there. The prominent elements of the Oceania Centre’s success stem from Oceanic life, practices, and architecture.

\textsuperscript{xvii} I am referring to indigenous epistemologies as explained in the introduction. In "How We Know': Kwara’ae Rural Villagers Doing Indigenous Epistemology" Karen Ann Watson-Gegeo and David Welchman Gegeo discuss the value of engaging in local epistemology that is a "cultural group’s ways of thinking and of creating, reformulating, and theorizing about knowledge via traditional discourses and media of communication, anchoring the truth of the discourse of culture… As a concept, indigenous epistemology focuses on the process through which knowledge is constructed and validated through a cultural group, and the role of that process in shaping thinking and behavior" (Gegeo 2001, 59).
“Being at the Oceania Centre for the past seven years has allowed me to share my art and learn. I share my art with other artists in hopes that they can take what they see in my work to another level and create a road for their own artistic journey.

I found my focus as an artist when Professor Hau‘ofa told me that art is not only about seeing things and copying them. He told me to create from within using my inner voice to express what is important to me. From that, my progress as an artist has been a learning process within me.

There are many things that go on around me, in order for me to go in the right direction I have to concentrate to see both sides of the world: this world and the world of the Creator. To me, we are part of Creation and that is how I am able to create. From this connection comes the reason for what we do here. This fuels my art and is revealed in my painting, although not everyone can see it. My idea of painting is not only for me, it is also for other people to see something of themselves in my painting. Each person sees my art from a different point of view and has their own understanding.” – Mason Lee
21. Mason Lee, *Tokairahe and Dakuwaqa, the Shark God (Legend)*, 2006, oil on canvas, 200 x 185cm.
V. Conclusions

The purpose of this project is to provide insight into an emerging arts movement that represents not only change in Oceanic art, but change in Oceania. This change resonates and empowers ordinary Oceanians whose knowledge is revered as the basis for creative expressions. Creativity occurs in familiar spaces and with participative learning. The success of the Oceania Centre demonstrates that employing foreign models is unwarranted when effective practices already exist.

The Biau Kula movement at the Oceania Centre for Arts and Culture is a single group of artists brought together by the vision and dedication of Epeli Hau'ofa and nurtured by the extensive family of all the Oceania Centre participants past and present. They have produced a vast and dynamic range of art works over the past decade. The paintings and sculptures created at the Centre have been exhibited extensively but this has not been an overnight success. It has been a decade of progression. The senior artists have devoted a decade to honing their skills and experimenting while remaining true to the Centre's purpose: to foster a home for the arts imbued with reciprocity, cooperation, openness, and participation. Theirs is a truly organic experience. The dance and music programs at the Oceania Centre have created equally impressive productions. This creativity is based on what is already present in the community, as evidenced by the combination of images and words from the artists.

I focused on the space of the Oceania Centre because it is a successful and transferable foundation that is relevant for the future of arts spaces in Oceania. The focus on space steers clear of grandiose architectural feats. The Oceania Centre has managed an aesthetically attractive structure at minimal cost. And since the creative processes begin with what is already present in the participants the costs are negligible. Over time the benefits of these programs reveal themselves, not only economically with the sale of art works, but through community interest and
involvement. I have contextualized the experience of those artists at the Oceania Centre within a wider context of contemporary art in Oceania to illustrate the potential for future art programs.

The Oceania Centre for Arts and Culture is a model for an engaging space for creativity that reflects contemporary Oceania. If museums and cultural centers commit to creating a network of relevant and engaging spaces for creativity, it would foster exchanges amongst artists, of artworks, and practices that distribute resources and strengthen regional collaboration. In “Our Sea of Islands”, Hau’ofa recalls the exchange networks of skills and arts that circulated from Fiji to Niue to Tuvalu amongst all of the island groups in that area of Oceania; networks extended to Kiribati and New Caledonia (Hau‘ofa 1993, 9). The skilled navigators to the north and west maintained networks of exchange amongst their neighbors. My theory of networks of arts spaces is not so far-fetched; one must simply look to traditions and histories of Oceania for inspiration.

Space and freedom set off this wave. The space for artists, structurally and figuratively, has been crucial for the success and endurance of the Oceania Centre’s programs thus far. Freedom in terms of self-determination; the artists choose how and what they create, they are not given instructions, they are given opportunity. The artists begin with what they have, what they know as Oceanians; their culture is a valuable tool.

The artists at the Oceania Centre are presenting visions and versions of their world to their communities and internationally. They have carved out a space for Oceanic art; a new genre that is not based on a particular aesthetic. It comes in many colors and styles but is united and rooted in Oceanic creativity. These artists have started a wave of movement that has the potential to be a tidal wave. Biau Kula is just the beginning. This wave has the potential to reach all corners of Oceania and I believe that the foundation established by Hau‘ofa will inspire and promote an exchange throughout Oceania.
The Oceania Centre gives us a foundation to build a network of arts centers for Oceania. This is a foundation to renew networks based on indigenous epistemologies, reflective of the contemporary world, and the product of Oceanians. The Oceania Centre reveals that ordinary people must be given the space and freedom to discover their extraordinary talents and they need a wise, generous, and talented catalyst of Epeli Hau‘ofa’s caliber leading the way.
22. Lingikoni Vaka'uta, *Meeting of the Fishes*, 2006, ink on paper, 1.5 x 2m.
Appendix:
Irami Bulimaivale Uluiinasaravi
Nausori, Fiji
Experience: Oceania Centre for Arts and Culture, Suva, Fiji
Artist in residence 2000 – present
Contact: irami.biu@yahoo.com.au or (679) 9481917

I was born in Nausori and raised on Bau Island, both on the eastern side of Viti Levu, Fiji. My first experience with art was drawing on pieces of wood in my basement. I used materials available at that moment, no brush or tools, just charcoal and pencil. From that point until now it is still in my mind to use what is available around me; rather than focus on the material, I focus on the art.

In 2000, I came to the Oceania Centre for Arts and Culture to join an arts workshop. From there on, I continued my journey to where I am today. By 2003 I reached another level with my technical skills and I began looking around me for inspiration. I captured faces in the moment when they change and reveal emotion. This series, exhibited in my first solo show, examines and evokes emotion. I challenge myself and my audience with questions: how many eyes do humans have? My answer: two sets. The external eyes and that inner eye, the one that you cannot see. In my work I convey what I see with the vision of my inner eye, this is the gate to the soul. This period of my work still takes from Fijian legends but now I use the traditional interpretation of Fijian words. Much of the traditional or ancient Fijian language has been lost and so I use those words as the root of my painting through which I express my ideas and share the meaning of the words with the people. The integration of external and internal vision brought me to my latest period.

My most recent series of paintings are inspired by a tree. One day on an island I came upon a massive tree with its roots exposed. The trunk and branches went up while the roots dug deep and meandered their way below; the exposed part of the tree moved towards the light while the roots went in search of the dark. It was an inspiring moment. The more I dwelt on the idea of the roots the more I began to think of it as a kind of metaphor for the journey towards knowledge. This dead tree revealed an idea to me to confront materialistic vision and dig into a wisdom within me. By looking at the tree as it was dead, I could visualize it alive, and therefore I saw the two worlds that I am looking at. This vision allows me to see beyond surfaces; not only the branches but also the roots.

This exploration of roots fuses with my earlier invasion of inner vision and I ask the questions: Can we see wisdom? Can we see it through the light? My paintings respond that it is not so much about seeing wisdom but more important is how wisdom is expressed. These ideas merge with my own journey from legends into emotional faces and now into my current series Waka ni Vuku (Roots of Profound Wisdom). My style journeys in search of knowledge in hopes that it will produce and inspire wisdom in the viewer. This allows me to express and connect with the elements that influence my life and my art. My motivation fuels me to express these things that are in me; my art is my passion.

Exhibitions:
Solo Exhibition Oceania Centre 2004
World Art Exhibition Bangalore and Delhi, India 2006
Waka ni Vuku Solo Exhibition Oceania Centre 2006

Collections:
National Museum Papua New Guinea, Port Moresby, PNG
Ashoka Art Gallery New Delhi, India
Ajay Kaushik, St. Petersburg, Russia
Ben Fong aspired to be the best professional welder in Fiji; he has succeeded just not in the way he expected. In 1997, he saw an advertisement for a workshop for professional welders. He saw it as a challenge to set himself against the best, even though he was not a professional at the time. At the workshop Georgina Beier gave 40 professional welders a practical interview: to create something that God has never done with nothing more than a piece of chalk in a 1.8 m² space on the floor. Surprised by the task, Ben feared that his ideas would not stand up to Georgina’s expectations. Eventually, Ben came up with a design for a stingray inspired by the shape of the Fijian fan on the 2 cent coin. He explained the way the sculpture would be constructed and how its parts would move by the bearings placed in the legs causing a chain in the tail to automatically sway from side to side. Georgina liked the idea and Ben constructed that stingray in the metal sculpture workshop with nine other welders. At the same time Georgina had been commissioned to design the logo for the recently established Oceania Centre for Arts and Culture. Ben assisted with that sculpture and soon after the workshop and exhibition were finished he began receiving calls from someone named Epeli at USP. Reluctantly, he went to find this person, not realizing that it was Professor Hau’ofa. Ben arrived at the Oceania Centre which was little more than a single building, a refurbished row of student houses with no signs of a welding studio or even art studios. A man was sitting in front of the offices smoking a pipe, he smiled and immediately that smile made Ben feel at home. Although it took some convincing on Professor Hau’ofa’s part, that was the beginning of Ben’s career as artist, technician, and inventor of anything that he can imagine.

Ben Fong continues to challenge his imagination and skills to create forms that no one has seen before. Through contemporary sculpture he expresses his commentary on life and those events which affect him. For seven years now, he has been reflecting on the political upheavals in Fiji. The Way the World Should Be is an 8 metre sculpture made from car bonnets, mild steel rods, and galvanized pipes and constructed against the side of a building using ropes. The sculpture represents the two sides of Fiji, opposing yet inseparable. The upper half represents the idyllic paradise of Fiji with tall swaying coconut trees. Free flowing arms of freedom split the massive creature. It stands on shark-like jaws representing the chiefs, politicians, and business people who are only conscious of their own well-being, always ready to chew others up and spit them out for personal gain. Discontent, frustration, and anger of the Fijian people rumbles from the lower half. One of the creature’s eyes pops out representing those politicians and chiefs with an eye always out for opportunity. This is a continuous conversation that has also fueled Ben’s other sculptures. His commentary does not require media coverage; instead his response to the political tensions in Fiji is mute and compelling.

Ben also reflects on his culture. In Tutu, he questions today’s loss of traditional knowledge learned through families, elders, and oral histories passed though generations. This sculpture is Ben’s appreciation of that knowledge passed on from his grandparents and parents that has contributed to his well-being and made him the person he is today, a man rooted in Fijian culture while conscious of his present world and changing community.

The other side to Ben’s varied body of work is intimate reflections of people. Mother and Child is dedicated to the demanding and devoted work of his wife, Elizabeth, and all mothers who care for families day in and day out. Another favorite caricature remains on the top shelf of his bookcase, a jovial character imaged in mild steel with an unruly beard of combed shoe tacks and a pipe, a memory of his first glimpse of Professor Epeli Hau’ofa. Ben focused on the Professor’s features and then put the pieces of metal together with those skills that have been developed and nurtured by the man who convinced him to imagine the possibilities for a small row of dormitories.

Ten years later those small offices are seldom used in comparison to the open and inviting verandas that have grown out of unobstructed visions of potential. The Oceania Centre is now sweeping structures covered by roofs that arc like waves and walls with wrought iron turtles swimming across them. The Oceania Centre and Ben Fong’s sculptures attest to his boundless imagination that was unexpectedly unleashed a decade ago. Ben Fong is undeniably the most innovative and creative welder in Fiji.
I have sketched ever since I was in secondary school. My cousin is an artist at the Oceania Centre and he knew that I enjoyed drawing and so he brought me to the Centre in 2002. Initially I struggled because I did not know much about contemporary art. Some of the senior artists introduced me to contemporary Oceanic art and from that I was able to understand contemporary art so that I could begin creating my own style. My early work was influenced by my cousin's work but by the end of 2003 I found my own style of sketching that is different because of the shading. At that time I was learning technique and colors and as I learned the elements of composition I would join my sense for the realistic with abstract contemporary designs by placing realistic figures in the forefront with stylized designs in the background. Seeing my art work taking on its own style made me believe in myself and my fever for art returned.

When I returned to the Oceania Centre in 2006 there was a change in me and in my art. I had been sick and when the sickness went away all the pride and anger that I had before was gone because I saw my second chance. I thanked God for this chance and saw that he chose me to pass on his messages to people in this world so that they may go to heaven rather than hell. Now I am painting Christian messages of which road we should follow. These messages are based on what is happening through time, in the past, present, and future, with themes such as Your Best Friend is Your Worst Enemy.
Jeke Viwalu Lagi (Philip)
Lami, Suva, Fiji
Experience: Oceania Centre for Arts and Culture, Suva, Fiji
Artist in Residence 2000 – present
Contact: jeke lagi@yahoo.com

I always felt different in my thoughts and being the person I am. I always do the opposite of others. At a young age, I fiddled with copper wire and plasticiine to create figures and scenes from Robinson Crusoe. I also began drawing, it was a small hobby of mine that really developed when I was in high school. Sketching is something that I feel is part of my family. As a carpenter my father sketches out his projects before he begins. My brothers and cousins are always sketching anything from comic figures to city scenes. As a student I got questioned when new graffiti appeared in the school but because of that same reputation I was awarded a prize for being ‘Senior Artist’. The prize was my first sketch book. By the time I was in Form 6, my mother recognized my skill and interest in art and she brought me to the Oceania Centre, I came to the Centre each day after school. My first impression of the artists was that they were genius and I was just a student, by far the youngest artist. When I received my first A3 piece of canvas I was awestruck; same with the first time I held a paintbrush because I had never experienced this kind of art. During my first workshop I tackled a 2x2 meter canvas; I was the last artist to finish because it took a lot of time to express my ideas on canvas. That painting was about the 2000 coup. A politically influenced piece, it represented how Fiji stood alone while other countries tried to tell us what to do. I painted this by a face with no ears. The wrinkled up face looks back suggesting the suffering of Fijian people at that time.

Since then I have been influenced by many different ideas. I see ideas in the intricate grain of the smallest breadfruit seed or piece of wood. Even a simple word from a conversation can create the feeling of a painting in my mind. I find ideas in the simple lines of nature; the colors I use are also reflective of nature. Since my first workshop my style and the colors I use have developed into another level. Most importantly, I have learned how to hold a paintbrush and, now, when I see a blank piece of canvas I have a feeling of what I am supposed to paint on it. When I get close to the canvas, my pencil does the talking. I still sketch as a hobby; it takes my mind off of my daily routines.

For a time I was only painting part time but then I realized that the other jobs were not taking me anywhere, I was simply sitting and watching people pass by me. I realized that my life has more meaning if I paint. Now I am committing to my art. I am concentrating on my painting and I hope that it continues to develop. I see myself doing more in the future, perhaps even some scultpure.

One of the moments that drives me is from my first exhibition with the Red Wave Collective when a top artist told me that I was not good enough. What I do now is a response to that; that response is developing in the sense that my pictures and style are never still. I am always thinking of different ways to apply my ideas so that I can explore new ways of projecting my images. I love seeing the expressions on people’s faces when they see my work. My greatest reward is to see their enjoyment. My art makes people wonder about how I create and causes them to ask me questions.

I continue to create and strive to develop my art to make my mother proud of me because she had the insight to bring me to the Oceania Centre to become the artist I am today.

Exhibitions:
Oceania Centre for Arts and Culture, Suva, Fiji 2000
Melanesian Arts Festival, Suva, Fiji 2006

Collections:
Professor Epeli Hau’ofa Suva, Fiji
Gary Apdat Suva, Fiji
And other collections around the world
I did not finish high school because my family moved from a rural village to find a better life in Tacirua, near Suva. When I finished vocational school for automotive engineering I realized that it was not the right career for me. I had a feeling burning inside of me to create something and so my cousin invited me to the Oceania Centre for Arts and Culture. At the Centre, I am able to release that creativity that lives inside of me. To me, art is a process of life.

The foundation of my art is my everyday life, nature, and the Creator of the Universe. My painting is influenced by religion. Religion is important to me and I show this through art by depicting love. The love I paint is from above; love between mankind. This love brings freedom. This love is based on my faith. When I was younger, I recognized how much suffering there is in the world. In my heart I felt that I could respond to this suffering through art, to paint my message of love. I paint humanity and emotions. Mankind shares certain needs and emotions. I hope that my paintings will show movement that explains my stories of how we face the same problems in life and that love gives us hope to forget sorrows, sickness, or stress.

I paint happiness but I also paint sadness. The way I paint is like the weather there are many sides. Sometimes you can see that I am facing some difficulty by the subject I am painting. Like the weather, life is not always the same; sometimes it is good, other times it is bad.

*Lifetime of a Human* is about our potential in life from inception through death. We all have talents that we are born with but we must find those talents; feel them and use them. The subject of my painting is a singer. He practiced music until he became a professional. My message is that singing, or developing a talent, is worth the work and by using our talents we can be happy and liberated from despair.

I have learned a lot from the senior artists at the Oceania Centre. They have showed me how to mix colors, paint lines and shapes so that I can create my own style. I also learn from observing nature. I find inspiration in the forest where I can let my mind go or meditate. I use earth colors in my paintings: black, brown, yellow, and red. It all depends on what I want to say. I am developing my own style through practice, listening to others, and socializing with many different people. I find my most of my ideas by thinking about nature and the spirit world.
In my journey as an artist I use paint to create a new world; one in which my vision allows my dreams to become a reality on canvas. I am an artist because this ability is a gift that has been with me since I was young; I come from an artistic family.

Being at the Oceania Centre for the past seven years has allowed me to share my art and learn. I share my art with other artists in hopes that they can take what they see in my work to another level and create a road for their own artistic journey. I found my focus as an artist when Professor Hau’ofa told me that art is not only about seeing things and copying them. He told me to create from within using my inner voice to express what is important to me. From that, my progress as an artist has been a learning process within me.

There are many things that go on around me, in order for me to go in the right direction I have to concentrate to see both sides of the world: this world and the world of the Creator. To me, we are part of Creation and that is how I am able to create. From this connection comes the reasons for what we do here. This fuels my art and is revealed in my painting, although not everyone can see it. My idea of painting is not only for me, it is also for other people to see something of themselves in my painting. Each person sees my art from a different point of view and has their own understanding.

There have been seven periods in my art at the Oceania Centre. Change is recognizable in my work but the transitions are gradual, they merge from one period into the next. My early work focused on legends and myths and has come to reflect on what is happening in the world, both within and outside of Fiji.

My latest works are black paint on white canvas. This method has changed the way I communicate. The story of my journey is a never ending story of explaining a hidden world within. I am not only an artist in this world; I believe that I will continue this journey through time. My art presents my journey looking at both sides of life, such as comparing the good and bad. I have been searching for a long time and what I am doing now is focusing my search and accepting the conflicting sides of life.

This is connected to my recognition of left/right and day/night. It is easy to understand these differences but can we understand the details between what is behind those opposites? Black and white has been an interesting challenge for me because it brought so many ideas to my mind. For example, while working with the simplicity of black and white I realized many possibilities for new dimensions and use in color. Throughout my life as an artist I have been interested in color. I like a colorful world. It took me nearly six years to understand the difference of working with black and white. At the moment I am trying to get to the simplest point of how I see colors and thus how I articulate my ideas.

Exhibitions
Melanesian Arts Festival, Suva, Fiji, 2006
Traveling exhibition in Papeete, Tahiti, 2006

Collections
British High Commission, Fiji
Patricia Podriscoll, Auckland, New Zealand
I have been carving since I was a young boy in Fulanga in the Lau Islands of Fiji. Fulanga is known through Fiji for a long tradition of skilled carvers and craftsmen. My father was a carver and I learned from watching him. For many years I carved tanoa, war clubs, and figures following the styles and designs of my father and Fulangan carvers. I moved to Suva in 1965 and continued carving for the tourist markets in Viti Levu. At times it was difficult to sell my work but I continued because carving is the work of my father and my people; it is my job and also my tradition.

While I was a part-time tutor in the School of Humanities at USP, Epele Hau’ofa invited me to the Oceania Centre to try creative arts. The change was a challenge for me because previously my carving was not individual. It took me some time to understand the concepts behind creative arts before I could begin to imagine an individual creative style. Breaking away from tradition was new in Fiji and when the Centre hosted my first solo exhibition in 2001 my creative carvings were well received. Traditional carving is common throughout Fiji but no one had seen anything like the contemporary carvings I produce. The carving itself was not difficult because I had been doing that for years and so I just began to incorporate my own creativity to produce an individual contemporary style of carving. Although the traditional tools are easier to use, it did not take me long to learn the fine detailing tools for the contemporary sculptures.

The first ideas for my sculptures came from books and conversations with Epele. I began by creating animals and figures linked into a single form. Now the ideas come from my own mind. I find that the more I imagine creative sculptures the more ideas I have. The process of carving gives me ideas. I also depict Fijian legends though sculpture. I choose images from stories that others share with me, The Vu of Bua, is a large rooster who comes down from the mountain at nighttime to look for food at the sea. This rooster stands looking into the sea; his powerful eyes search the night sea for fish.

Some people ask me why I am breaking away from the traditional styles of Fulanga. I am a new generation of Fulangan carver. I am not breaking away. What I am creating is just one aspect of carving; I continue to carve traditional forms but it is unique to work in contemporary forms. I am the first Fijian to work in this style. Through my sculpture I am opening up opportunities for others because I fear a loss of carving in Fiji. Carving has been passed through generations of men from Fulanga but now young men are not interested in what our grandfathers did. They think that carving is a job of the past and will not provide for their future. I share both the traditional and contemporary carving with my son and grandson to continue the practice of carving in my family. Tradition and contemporary influence my sculpture and can be seen through the quality of work that my father instilled in me and those creative ideas that reflect my world.

Exhibitions
Fijian Cultural Craft Fair, Suva, Fiji – First Prize, 1986
40th Anniversary of South Pacific Commission at the SPC Headquarters in New Caledonia, 1987
Fiji Arts Council – First Prize, 2002
The essence of my being comes from three basic principles: my culture, religious belief, and spirituality.

My existence, how I think, feel, and behave is my culture. If you go deep into the roots of a particular culture you see that it is universal. Culture comes from a particular cult that existed at a certain time and has been built from there. It is not a tangible thing; it is wide and integrated in the world itself. In the changing world we adapt to the change and grow onto another level of experience. This affects our culture, it draws from those before and adapts to our lives today. We can express our cultural values individually but as humans we share certain core values. Individual cultural values are rooted in where you are born; where I was born is part of who I am. Therefore my style of art is influenced by my cultural formation and makes me part of the Fijian and Oceanic communities. I am a proud Fijian because I understand my culture.

My religious belief has two parts. The first is cultural religious belief practiced by my ancestors. I learned about these rituals by living in my village. Certain elements exist today: sects of people, chiefs, priests, and warriors. Sacrifice is fundamental to these cultural religious practices, sacrifices based on nature; such as the offering of tabua, yagona and herbs to the elders of the father of a newborn child in an offering to the communities and ancestors to beslow a blessing on that new born life. This cultural religion is breaking apart because people are going to new religions brought over by the missionaries. When I was growing up I saw both these religions because I went to a Catholic school and was baptized as a Catholic. I developed as a Catholic over the years accepting the sacraments. There are no boundaries between my religious beliefs. Although these religions are seen as separate, I believe that there is adherence between these two religions.

Spiritual journeys depend on an individual's knowledge of the existence of the unseen. This knowledge does not come on its own: 'the master will come when the student is ready'. This is how my spiritual journey has developed; the master always comes when he knows that I am ready. I believe that every being has spirituality but we are born into one life and it depends on the individual how they live that life. We should know where we come from and where we are going. To me, spirituality is universal; it is part of you and me and the whole universe. Spirituality is not limited to nature; it exists in all things. While much of spirituality remains unseen, something that can be seen is the strength of family. It is the root of all humanity. For me, I see my family first and then venture into the wider world.

These principles are part of a transformation of the world. My art is a testimony to these beliefs. My art also speaks of gathering knowledge and enlightening your mind because that is who you are as a being. How I think and feel is what I am going to paint because that is part of who I am. My painting speaks to how and why I exist. Everything comes into existence for a reason and my art form is part of a vision.

Through the paintings that I exhibit, I am revealing to my community and my audience that there is unity amongst all humanity, no matter what culture, religion, or spirituality. I believe that humans strive for perfection; however it is limited for us. This perfection can be found in the unseen world. As an artist I strive for perfection, you will see that in my styles. My basic principles spring from the essence of my being and I try to communicate to my audience that it exists in them too. I believe that other people deeply rooted in their own culture, religion, and spirituality will see and sense those ideas that I am expressing.

Exhibitions:
Solo Exhibition Oceania Centre for Arts and Culture 2001
9th Pacific Festival of Arts, Koror, Palau 2004

Collections:
Professor Epeli Hau'ofa, Suva, Fiji
Mark Weidmer, Director Red Cross Society, Switzerland
Dr. Vitsoni Hereniko, Honolulu, Hawaii
I was born in Lau. My family moved to Suva so I could attend secondary school. I began drawing when I was 10 years old; from that time I knew that I wanted to be an artist. Although my sketching was mostly in my school exercise book, I managed to win two annual art competitions. From that time I knew that I could be an artist.

Back then, I never used a brush or paint. I would use a pen to draw what I saw: human bodies, birds, and flowers. I was not aware of the variety of art forms in the world; I just saw art as one thing.

When I finished Form 6 in 2000 there happened to be an advertisement for a workshop at the Oceania Centre. I completed the workshop and soon after I joined the Red Wave Collective and knew that this was the place for me to be an artist. My first assignment was to tell a story in pictures, so I used a story about yavirau (a fishing ritual for the chiefs) in my village. During my early years at the Centre I was still finding my contemporary style and I learned a lot from the senior artists. They encouraged me to create, to find my own ideas and style. From that time, each painting I have finished brings me to a new dimension.

I paint Fijian legends because I do not want them to be lost. These stories are not written and as we lose our elders and it is becoming difficult to remember those stories. Then I realized how powerful it is when I paint the stories of everyday life, because that is what is happening today. Both of these styles have the same message: if stories and legends are lost, what about the next generation that wants to know about their traditions? And the same with my paintings of my present life, what will happen for the future generations of Fiji? Fijians now should recognize the present to help them prepare for our future.

My recent paintings depict whatever I am thinking about. My painting The Relationship talks about the problems affecting youth today: a broken family, teenage pregnancy, and rape. Youth today can relate to these problems, I am communicating through painting.

Before I begin any painting I think of my motto: to create something out of nothing. I don't know what I will create before I begin, I find that if I try to recreate something, it doesn't work. I start with a line and from that line I find my story. In 2006, I threw away my pencil and now I just paint. It makes the process easier; the colours, lines, and shapes on the canvas reveal the story.

I was not sure why I became an artist. I asked my father and he told me that he was an artist, a carver; that blood is in me and my family has encouraged this career. That is why I continue to make use of my talent.

Exhibitions:
October Gallery, London, UK 2006
Melanesian Arts Festival, Suva, Fiji 2006
National Art Competition, First Prize, 2006 (First Prize)

Collections:
Professor Epeli Hau‘ofa, Suva, Fiji
Anthony Tarr, Vice Chancellor USP, Suva, Fiji
Fiji Times, Suva, Fiji
I am an artist because I love drawing. This love began when I copied pictures I saw in story books, that is how I learned to draw. I drew on anything I could find, even on my hands. When I first visited the Oceania Centre I saw all of the paintings and asked the artists how they came to work here, they told me that if I could draw I had a passport in.

Being an artist at the Oceania Centre is the answer to my prayers because I am able to do something I love everyday. I believe in what I do and this can be seen in my art. When I begin the process of creating an artwork I pray for God's guidance and that gives me my ideas.

I use black ink on white paper because the contrast brings out the lines and designs of my work. As I progress I will introduce color into my art. My art is religiously influenced. I connect ideas from religion, politics, and everyday life. As in my work, Mother Beast, based on a story from the Bible. I chose this particular story because it takes place in the sea. Most of my work depicts the sea because most of our income is from the sea and so the sea is part of my life. Mother Beast is about a time when a beast will rise from the sea and rule people. This beast also represents the country; many nations use the symbol of an animal on their flag. The large beast is one country controlling all others, leading to one world order. I painted this because it would be a terrible fate; there would be the loss of culture and beliefs and conflicts would erupt. Mother Beast teaches people what could happen but there is hope if we believe in the unseen God and commit to good things and work towards our next life.
As an artist I am inspired by vision and spirituality. My vision comes from my experiences in life; the other aspect of my art is spiritual. My art addresses the question: “Do you know where you are going?” This begins conversations about culture, spirituality, and our minds.

Culture is a way of life. No matter how far I go, my culture directs me. It is something invisible, that we understand with the use of our senses. If I live with my culture I will live a prosperous life and future generations will reap that prosperity. That is why culture is central to my art because people are drifting away from their culture because of the changing times. Culture represents stability but the changing times change the way we live our lives between generations.

My spirituality grows through the experience of my religion. Through spirituality I know what life really means because it is eternal. I see our spiritual life as priceless. I represent spirituality with colors such as yellow to show purity.

Culture and spirituality meet in our minds. Our minds make the decisions to follow or not our cultural and spiritual life. These ideas become visible on my canvas. Culture is shown by people, spirituality through colors, and our minds through the way I organize these forms on canvas.
Tangaloa Eitumatupu’a descends from the sky as a kiu bird. As Tangaloa Tufunga casts down the stones that created an island, the bird pecks on a worm emerging from a vine. His talons grip the beings that grow from that worm: Kohai, Koau, and Ko Momo (Who, Me, and Momo) a male, female, and being with the essence of both male and female, the first people of Tonga. The rest of this Tongan origin story is detailed within the forms like ta tatau (tattoo). As with all of Lingikoni Vaka’uta’s art, you have to explore the dexterous details to discover the connections. Get lost in the distinctive Oceanic designs based on metaphors and stories. Whether it is a legendary scene of Maui Kisikisi hooking the sun or a provocative metaphor, Lingikoni plays with us, touching upon our emotions, knowledge, and sense of intrigue.

Meeting of the Fishes is a stunningly intricate work that challenges the viewer to interpret the intertwined figures. ‘Obvious but in a hidden way’ is how Lingikoni describes this work about those indignities that everyone engages in. Lingikoni is one of the reasons that contemporary Oceanic art is flourishing; he is one of those exceptional artists whose imaginative mind, keen eye, and deft hand captures our attention and affection.

Lingikoni never imagined that he would become an artist. Although he was nearly finished his Economics degree, he was discontented. On a whim he joined the first workshop at the Oceania Centre for Arts and Culture. During that workshop Lingikoni recognized his natural ability; he is an innovative and endlessly creative artist. During that first workshop he was given a piece of canvas and told to create his own story and suddenly the Tongan culture that he took for granted during his youth became precious.

Lingikoni found a home at the Oceania Centre, he also found a mentor. When Lingikoni had a problem with his work he found answers with the guidance of Epeli Hau’ofa. Professor Hau’ofa would simply tell him stories, never telling Lingikoni what to do, but the stories would guide him to his own solutions. In the way that Epeli guides Lingikoni, so this artist guides us with images that tell us multi-layered and multi-meaning stories in which we find our own answers.

Lingikoni continues to find inspiration in Tongan stories and metaphors twisting and weaving them through each artwork to produce a range of interpretations. Although the themes often reflect traditional Tongan culture, the art is strikingly contemporary. Lingikoni’s style of art reflects contemporary Oceania while still conversant with legends, myths, traditions, and history. The stylized representations of gods, animals, and tattooed bodies are not imitating the work of his ancestors yet the themes rejuvenate cultural-connections because by relating to his past and traditions he connects with his ancestors and fonua (land).

Lingikoni has now been a leading member of the Red Wave Collective for a decade. He arrived at the Oceania Centre when contemporary art was a capricious career choice, yet he has succeeded because he is a committed artist devoted to arts and arts administration. To see him in his element at the Centre is to recognize a person fulfilling their destiny; Lingikoni listens to and supports his colleagues, he is often diverted from his own work as he facilitates the Red Wave Collective’s affairs. Lingikoni’s ability to balance and commit to the success of the Oceania Centre is simply in the background just as ta tatua fills up the background of his artworks. He will humbly say that he merely likes helping people, this charm is part of the reason he is indispensable to the Oceania Centre.
My great-grandfather is from Vatusekiyasawa, near the mountain Nakauvadra. That mountain is the place where all the Vu (chiefs) of Fiji meet. The chiefs of Fiji symbolize the head; the strength of the body. I am connected to my great-grandfather; I feel it in my blood. We are connected because we are both communicators. He was a matanivanua and I am an artist; we communicate to our village. Our connection comes into my artwork, when I am painting something, if something is wrong, he will correct me. Paintings are lasting representations and if I make up stories instead of preserving the memories, my ancestors would correct me because I have a responsibility passed to me from my ancestors. In the old days, there was no one to record the memories of the village; now I record the stories to preserve what has happened by transferring the memories of my village onto canvas.

My ancestors allow me to paint these memories because they believe in me and I believe in them. An example of the stories I paint is a waterfall in my village. Nai Dadara is now popular spot to visit but in the old days it was a legendary spot of two beautiful young women, called o rau naici. They are twins but opposites; domodoma vinaka kei domodomo ca (one is good and one is bad). If the good one appears to the village it is a good omen but if the bad one appears the village can expect a storm or a death. The women visit the waterfall during dry season because water remains in the pools even in the dry season. There are two ponds shaped like an 8, they represents the octopus. O rau naici can change into an octopus. This is the place where the octopus lives and it is protected there by the women. These pools are our hope during droughts. I paint this story now because I know that this place will not exist forever with the current development in Fiji, so I preserve the memory.

That is how I came to paint. I realized that these things are so important to my village and to Fijians but they are in jeopardy of being lost. In the old days village life was easy and peaceful because there were few worries. Now everything is about money, you must work hard to get anything. In the village it is an easier life because everything you need is there at the plantation or in the sea; that is where my stories are from. My art is about life, remembering the past and looking to the future. I translate that life into my paintings to show youth that we have to continue preserving memories for our culture. We must enliven our culture because in town the youth do not understand the respect that I understand. The respect that my grandfather taught me is to say ‘Bula’ to someone or help an older person who needs it. That is missing nowadays. People focus on themselves. We have different customs for occasions such as when someone dies, we bring food and mats but now people only bring money. Cultural connections and value are lost if these customs are forgotten. My paintings remind my village the right path to take so that they won’t forget their roots. Roots are where they came from and the connections to the culture, religions, and history. If we work together in our village I think that we will be better people and a better community for tomorrow.

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Hereniko, Vilsoni

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