

Works reproduced above (clockwise from top left): Fiona Hall, *Split Infinitive*, 2011, tin, c.260x130x40mm; John Pule, *The Home and the World*, (detail) 2011, oil on stretched canvas, enamels, ink, varnish, polyurethane, 2000x2000mm; Phil Dadson, from *Pax*, 2011, video installation; Gregory O'Brien, *For Rangitahua, an orange orchard, a flying fish*, 2012, acrylic on canvas 1200x870mm; John Reynolds, *Numbering Waves*, 2011, oil, rainwater and pohutukawa leaf on canvas, 7200x3200mm; Robin White, *Braveheart*, 2011, etching, 400x300mm; Elizabeth Thomson, *The Ocean of Eden I*, 2012, acrylic, optically clear epoxy resin, glass spheres on wood panel, 1200mmx1540mm; Jason O'Hara, *Crucible*, 2011, colour photograph; Bruce Foster, *Mapping the Pacific*, 2012, colour photograph.

THE SHIP SAILS ON

Maybe the voyage never ended and we never got off the ship. As the 'Kermadec' exhibition makes evident, the week-long voyage in May 2011 has lingered in the lives and work of all the artists involved—a point of reference, a catalyst and a mother lode of imagery and energy. For the group, the political and environmental issues encountered have also remained alive, unresolved and, if anything, gaining in poignancy. The ship sails on. Because it wants to, and because it needs to.

The initial challenge facing the group was to find ways of imaginatively/conceptually responding to the physical and psychological environment of the Kermadec region. In the ensuing months, works began to emerge as if from the after-glow of the experience. Beyond the artists' studios, the works were soon travelling far and wide. The 'Kermadec' exhibition was shown at the Tauranga Art Gallery and then at Voyager—New Zealand Maritime Museum in Auckland. In May this year, a smaller version of the exhibition was seen by thousands of visitors at the New Zealand High Commission in Nuku'alofa, Tonga. Two months later, that exhibition travelled, via Chile, to Rapa Nui/Easter Island. A satellite exhibition, 'Kermadec—Expeditions and Connections' opened at the National Library Auckland Centre in April. The project has been enriched and reinvigorated at each port of call, accruing new meanings and significances, and making new connections—not only between New Zealand and the greater Pacific but also between the contemporary art world, the environmental lobby, the Royal New Zealand Navy and many other parties.

Nineteen months after the artists set sail for Raoul Island, the 'Kermadec' exhibition now reaches Wellington. During the intervening time, new works have been added, notable among them Bruce Foster's photographic sequence derived from a return voyage to the Kermadec region—this time on the HMNZS Canterbury in August 2012. John Pule's translucent series of Kermadec-inspired paintings continue to find new points of contact between biology and mythology, as well as between the terrestrial environment and that of the deep undersea. As various in approach as they are in scale, Fiona Hall's intricate miniature, *Split Infinitive* (2011), and John Reynolds' homespun epic, *Numbering Waves* (2011), both embody ways of responding to, and inhabiting, this recently encountered island/ocean reality.

Bringing the 'Kermadec' exhibition to Wellington has particular significance for the artists. It is in this city that Pew Environment Group's New Zealand office is located; it is also the centre of the Department of Conservation and other involved organisations. Most importantly, it is the seat of the Government, upon whom falls the task of legislating on behalf of the environment and a sustainable future for our nation. In recent months, on- and offshore mining, over-fishing and pollution have never been far from the public mind. The wreck of the container ship *Rena* off Tauranga last October struck a cautionary note about the vulnerability of our natural environment.

Inadvertently, these issues have informed and shaped the 'Kermadec' project. Like a bottle cast into the ocean, the exhibition contains a message—perhaps most clearly stated in Fiona Hall's strident works, with such apposite titles as *Spill* and *Ghost Net*. Yet this environmental impetus is also present in Robin White's meditations on ocean voyaging—works which hint at responsible, empathetic ways of inhabiting the Pacific environment. In a similar vein, the photographic works of Foster and Jason O'Hara allow us to know more of this region, that we might feel some connection with—and responsibility towards—it.

The 'Kermadec' exhibition also attests to the beginning of an artistic engagement with New Zealand's northernmost territorial waters and its only subtropical landmass. It takes us somewhere new. It also measures how far the artists have travelled—after, as well as during, the voyage—while acknowledging that the project is not over yet. Like the central character in Derek Walcott's epic poem *Omeros*, the artists are destined to continue walking across this stretch of ocean floor for many months, if not years, to come, awaiting that moment when, like Walcott's character they surface once again:

...then his head broke clear and his neck; then he could see his own shadow on the coral grove...

Through art we see reality with fresh eyes; we are immersed and we resurface, and sometimes we are awoken as if from a deep inertia or sleep—as John Reynolds suggests, channelling New Zealand naval custom, and striking a poignant note in the present political climate: 'Wakey, wakey, wakey.'

—Gregory O'Brien

KERMADEC—A TRANS-PACIFIC STORY

For Māori, the Kermadec Islands mark both the entrance and departure points from Aotearoa. In the early days of Polynesian migration, these scattered islands punctuated the final passage from Eastern Polynesia to Aotearoa, with Rangitahua (Raoul Island) being one of the key stepping stones along the journey. Here water, food and shelter could be found while repairs and maintenance were carried out on waka. Hibiscus, cabbage trees, taro and other plants transported during this early period still grow there today. Conversely, these islands also mark the path back home for the souls of the dead as they navigate the ocean floor on their return hikoiki to the land of their ancestors. It was along this ancient highway that the 'Kermadec' artists voyaged. Exposure to such a significant region elicited from the group an immense, if at times surreal, sense of connection – of the past meeting the present, of crossing a passage between the land of the living and that of the dead.

As co-curator for the City Gallery Wellington showing of 'Kermadec' and a smaller version of the exhibition which travelled to Rapa Nui/Easter Island, I joined the team on the trans-Pacific leg of the tour in July. With my knowledge of te reo Māori and John Pule's knowledge of Niuean, together we were able to piece together conversations with the people of Rapa Nui, who speak their indigenous language.

The experience reminded me of the story of Tupaia, the Tahitian tohunga and artist who joined Captain Cook on his early voyages across the Pacific. Here we were in Te Pito o te Henua (The Naval of the World), presenting our tohunga mahi toi (expert artists), all of us attempting to translate and piece together the histories of, and connections between, people and places in the Pacific. Talking with the Rapa Nui people, I learnt that I had a direct genealogical link to the island through their ancestor Hotu Matua, a tuakana (elder) of Hoturoa, captain of the Tainui waka. This journey of awareness brought to life a very real sense of the physical and spiritual attachment we have to these seas and islands.

The Kermadec project, however, is only a small part of a greater adventure, one which stretches beyond the Pacific and across the planet to include all people and places, reminding us of our connection to the earth, sea and sky. While, on one hand, the project has provided an opportunity to relive, and be awe-inspired by, the amazing abilities of our ancestors to navigate these vast waters, on the other hand it has made us painfully aware of the detrimental effects our actions have on this ocean.



Pihu Huke with Reuben Friend at Tongariki, Rapa Nui / Easter Is. photograph by Bruce Foster

Despite its isolation, Rapa Nui is in the direct path of the Pacific garbage patch, a giant mass of floating refuse that moves across the ocean, dumping its waste upon sacred spots of the island. Plastic is particularly evident as it breaks down into small particles, suffocating the sea life and littering the ocean floor. Shamefully, some of this debris has come all the way from New Zealand.

Looking at Elizabeth Thomson and Phil Dadson's works, I am struck by the intensity of colour and diversity of forms upon the seabed. The imagery makes me think of what the souls of the dead must see as they make the return home to Hawaiki. How different might it be were we to make this same journey in fifty years time? Would we see what Thomson and Dadson saw, or would we be walking on a path of plastic?

Like many of the 'Kermadec' works, John Reynolds' *Wakey Wakey Wakey* is a call to attention. Fiona Hall's concern for driftnet fishing, O'Brien's ponderance of the individual within the greater picture, the oceanic demons of Pule's works devouring life, they all express the duality of this story, an awe-inspiring yet cautionary tale of human activity on this planet.

—Reuben Friend, Curator, Maori and Pacific Contemporary Art, City Gallery Wellington

Wakey, Wakey, Wakey

In 1887 New Zealand created Tongariro National Park, it was the world's fourth National Park (the first was Yellowstone in 1872). Today there are more than 1,800 National Parks worldwide.

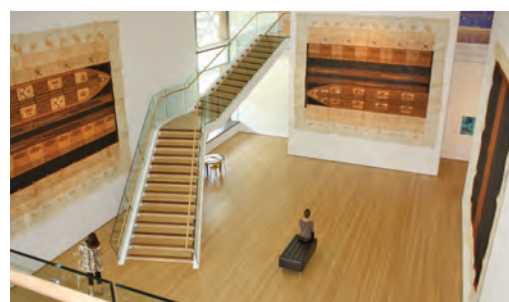
One hundred and twenty five years after the creation of Tongariro National Park it is time for the New Zealand Government to protect 620,000 km² of the rich marine biodiversity of our Kermadec region. Currently less than 1% of the New Zealand marine environment is fully protected. Beyond the twelve nautical miles limit from land, none of it is protected. The Kermadec marine environment, from White Island to the waters of the Kingdom of Tonga, has been identified by scientists from around the world as being as close to pristine as it is possible to find anywhere in the world.

Declaration of a Kermadec Ocean Sanctuary will see New Zealand join a handful of countries that since 2006 have protected large areas of their marine environment. In another one hundred and twenty five years those marine sanctuaries will be hailed as the inspirational generation of large marine parks. A Kermadec Ocean Sanctuary will be one of the world's largest, most complex and diverse marine parks for all time.

—Bronwen Golder, Director, Kermadec Initiative
Pew Environment Group

When we, the 'Kermadec' artists, became involved in this project, our intention was to make the most, artistically, of the extraordinary opportunity with which we had been presented. As it happened, the initial voyage and our subsequent involvement came to affect all of us in ways we never imagined. In the two years since the project began, we have come to a deep and unequivocal awareness of the need for marine sanctuaries, such as the one proposed for the Kermadec waters. We would like to state our support, collectively and as individuals, for the concept of a Kermadec sanctuary that extends to the boundaries of New Zealand's economic zone.

—Phil Dadson, Bruce Foster Fiona Hall, Gregory O'Brien, Jason O'Hara, John Pule, John Reynolds, Elizabeth Thomson and Robin White



Robin White's 'Si u Moana' at the Tauranga Art Gallery Toi Tauranga, November 2011



Frieze painted by Pule, O'Brien, Friend and White, with enlargements of Kermadec etchings displayed on Rapa Nui / Easter Is., July 2012
Bruce Foster



The artists on Raoul Island, May 2011
Bronwen Golder



KERMADEC
October 4th - February 10th



in association with Tauranga Art Gallery
www.citygallery.org.nz www.thekermadecs.org

front: John Pule and Gregory O'Brien, *What I did and did not have* (detail), 2012, relief etching 255x345mm, printed at Cicada Press