

A wide landscape of a Kermadec island. The foreground is a grassy field with scattered rocks. A steep, rocky cliffside rises on the left, covered in sparse vegetation. The sky is filled with heavy, grey clouds. The word "KERMADEC" is overlaid in large, white, sans-serif capital letters on the right side of the image.

KERMADEC

FROM RANGITAHUA TO RAPA NUI

THE KERMADEC EXHIBITION VISITS EASTER ISLAND



THE
PEW
ENVIRONMENT GROUP

PACIFIC CONNECTIONS

Seventy-one percent of the earth's surface is blue. While we label different parts of that blue with regionally inspired names it is in fact a single ocean, seamlessly connecting all peoples of the world.

The Pacific Ocean is the largest identified expanse within our global ocean. At its northern reaches lie the Hawaiian Islands. At the south-western corner are the Kermadec Islands of New Zealand. At the south-eastern corner is the island group of Rapa Nui (Easter Island) and Sala y Gómez. All have been identified by the Pew Environment Group's Global Ocean Legacy Project as lying at the centre of three of the most important and unspoiled marine ecosystems on the planet.

In ancient times island voyagers crossed the Pacific giving shape to the Polynesian triangle. In later times whalers and sealers, explorers and settlers, crossed the Pacific to feed commerce and the yearning for new beginnings. Today trade, security, tourism and fisheries see the Pacific crisscrossed by vessels of increasing size and capacity. The largest ocean space on the planet is full of activity – and increasingly marked by our human footprint.

In July 2012, the Pew Environment Group facilitated transport of a travelling Kermadec art exhibition to Rapa Nui. Inspired by a voyage by nine artists to the Kermadec region in 2011, the Kermadec exhibition is challenging, inspiring and passionate. The works in it celebrate the wonder of the Kermadec ocean wilderness and its connections with the wider Pacific.

Over two weeks Kermadec artists, the Pew Environment Group, and the peoples of Rapa Nui discovered and explored the natural, linguistic and cultural connections that the waters of the Pacific have created. Building on those connections, the peoples of New Zealand and Rapa Nui celebrated the ocean, shared its stories and imagined its future.

The following visual record is a tribute to our ocean –
Mata U'i Moana Nui

—Jay Nelson, Ernesto Escobar, Bronwen Golder,
The Pew Environment Group



RANGITAHUA

Prow of HMNZS Otago approaching Raoul Island, May 2011
Photograph by Jason O'Hara

My canoe is large
It breaks open the waves....

I taste your soil
It is bitter
It has no sun
No moon
No starry saliva

John Pule



RAPA NUI

Prow of fishing boat with 'Kermadec' artists on board, off the coast of Easter Island, July 2012
Photograph by George Fyfe



'We reach out and touch

what is forever and what is

forever beyond reach.' Gregory O'Brien

Giant stone 'Moai' on Easter Island, July 2012
Photograph by Bruce Foster

BEYOND THE HORIZON

For the artists involved, the Kermadec voyage in May 2011 was just the beginning of a much longer voyage, one which has involved each of them exploring, questioning and coming to understand, in new and unexpected ways, the relationship between humanity and the oceanic environment. The exhibition on Rapa Nui added further resonance and meaning to the earlier experiences of making and exhibiting art, and of interacting with the peoples of the Southern Pacific.

When I came to your shore
I was a nobody
I had no name
I am what you call a stateless man

I was blind
but then I touched this soil

I saw a moon
I had an immense feeling...

John Pule



Tafa Tafa, Ornate (fakamanaia) 2012
John Pule
oil, enamel, ink, varnish and polyurethane on stretched canvas
1500 x 1500mm



John Pule on Easter Island, July 2012
Photograph by George Fyfe

OLD AND NEW TRADITIONS, RAPA NUI

On the morning of 10 July 2012, over 100 people gathered outside the Liceo Lorenzo Baeza Vega to celebrate, in traditional Rapa Nui fashion, the opening of the 'Kermadec' exhibition. By the time the guests arrived, a chicken had been baking for some hours in an underground oven directly in front of the entrance to the exhibition. The formal welcome comprised oratory, singing, drumming and dancing, preceded by a blessing from the island's Catholic priest. The Rapa Nui performers removed the cooked bird from the ground, placed it on a flax basket and offered it to artist Robin White, who tore off a portion and approved it. The chicken was then served to the other visitors and, finally, local people. On behalf of the artists, City Gallery Wellington curator Reuben Friend replied with a spirited mihi (ceremonial greeting).

Everyone was then invited into the exhibition, as White chanted a karanga (call of greeting). Drink and food were served outside while, inside the hall, there was much talk about the art on display, its role within a wider project

of oceanic conservation, and its particular relevance to Rapa Nui/Easter Island. In the days that followed, the exhibition proved both a catalyst and a platform for discussions about subjects as varied as marine preservation, cultural relationships across the Pacific, and both traditional and contemporary approaches to art-making. Robin White's huge tapa (stencilled bark cloth), Rangitahua, proved an inspiration for Rapa Nui artists such as Isabella Pakarati, who are devoted to keeping alive their own indigenous tradition of tapa making.



Rapa Nui ceremony, Hanga Roa, Easter Island's capital, 10 July 2012
Photographs by Robin White, except lower right
photograph by Bruce Foster



Installation of 'Kermadec' exhibition

Top left: construction of temporary wall in school hall; top right: Entrance to exhibition; lower left: Gregory O'Brien painting frieze inside hall; lower right: Bruce Foster, Reuben Friend, Luz Zasso Paoa (mayor of Rapa Nui), Gregory O'Brien, John Pule, Robin White. Photographed by Robin White, Bruce Foster and Gregory O'Brien

'Kermadec' exhibition

Top left: Robin White and Jose Cardinali with 'Oneraki'; top right: Works by White, Thomson, Reynolds and O'Hara; lower left: Works by O'Brien, O'Hara, collaborative works by Pule and O'Brien, and Foster; lower right: Bruce Foster filming (for Rapa Nui TV) Ernesto Escobar, Simon Pakarati Auila and Bronwen Golder. Photographed by Robin White, Bruce Foster and Gregory O'Brien

VOYAGE OF AN EXHIBITION

Following an immensely successful showing at the New Zealand High Commission in Tonga during May, Pew Environment Group decided that the 'Kermadec' exhibition should travel to Easter Island in early July. A school hall near the centre of Hanga Roa proved an ideal place to hang the works. Upon arrival on the island, the artists – accompanied by Bronwen Golder, George Fyfe, Reuben Friend and curator-coordinator Chris Cane – set to work transforming the hall into an art gallery. Local carpenters had been enlisted some weeks earlier to construct a freestanding wall to be placed in the middle of the hall. The visitors worked with local people (including some particularly energetic children) to paint all the walls white. When the exhibition was finally hung, local women placed exquisite flower arrangements throughout the space and maintained them during the period of the exhibition. With the Pacific Ocean just down the road, the hall was both an elegant and eloquent gallery-space, and offered an ideal environment in which to start thinking about – and, importantly, talking about – the ocean.



'Kermadec' exhibition in the school hall at Hanga Roa
Works shown here are by Robin White, John Pule, Elizabeth Thomson, Jason O'Hara, Gregory O'Brien and Bruce Foster
Photograph by Bruce Foster



Easter Island encounters

Top left: View of the Pacific from Orongo, an early ceremonial centre of Easter Island; top right: John Pule, Simon Pakarati Auila, Wilo Teao Lucero and Reuben Friend; lower left: John Pule, Jose Cardinali and Emily Owen visiting disabled artist centre, Hanga Roa; lower right: John Pule with Rapa Nui friends, looking back towards Orongo. Photographed by Robin White, Bruce Foster and Gregory O'Brien

Top left: Ernesto Escobar with Osvaldo 'Singa' Pakarati, outside exhibition; top right: At Rano Kao (from left): Chris Cane, Sally O'Brien and Josh Reichart (Pew Environment Group), John Pule, Reuben Friend; lower left: 'Kermadec' artists explore caves on Easter Island; lower right: The Pacific from Orongo

A DIVERSE CREW

Although famous for its ancient stone figures and petroglyphs, Rapa Nui is an unlikely location for an exhibition of contemporary art offered a lively and illuminating context in which the works could be seen. Local people and visitors had no trouble taking the exhibition to heart – they recognised the many ways in which the works spoke to earlier traditions, as well as to narratives of scientific discovery, journeying and of harvesting the ocean. They recognised in the work, as they did in their surroundings, the ocean’s immense potential as a source of creative inspiration and energy.

Among the hundreds of visitors to the ‘Kermadec’ exhibition during the nine days it was on display were representatives of the Chilean navy, clergy and government officials. There were also local fishermen and farmers, tourists, archaeologists, environmentalists and a great many children. Comments in the visitors’ book attested to the effectiveness of the exhibition and its capacity to provoke impassioned debate.

To complement the works in the exhibition, Robin White, John Pule, Gregory O’Brien and Reuben Friend painted, with local schoolchildren, a mural outside the hall – a celebration of ocean and island life. They also painted two friezes inside the building. Alongside a flying fish, painted by White, a lizard by Friend and an oceanic dragon-spirit by Pule, O’Brien inscribed a short poem:

My stone head	To’oko Puoko Maea
Your earthly body	To’ou Tino Henua
Our ocean	Mata U’i Moana Nui



Isabella Pakarati and Robin White
Photograph by Bruce Foster



Interior of school hall with painted frieze (above window) and enlargements of prints by O'Brien, O'Hara, Thomson, Pule, Foster and Hall
photograph by Bruce Foster



Children and artists at work on a mural outside
Liceo Lorenzo Baeza Vega, Hanga Roa
photograph by Bruce Foster

RETURN TO SENDER

Every day for the past 25 years, a local woman, Piru Huke, has been collecting detritus from around the coast of Rapa Nui. To coincide with the 'Kermadec' exhibition, she created an installation in the schoolyard behind the hall. Here she unloaded many sacks of coastal debris – fishing ropes, floats, nets, buckets and containers – all of it washed up on the shore of this, the most remote human habitation on the planet. To underline the fact that the world's oceans are all one ocean and all peoples are responsible for the management and conservation of these precious waters, she erected a placard naming all the countries where this refuse had come from.

The great voyages of Polynesian history, of Cook and La Perouse and Thor Heyerdahl's Kon-Tiki as nothing compared

to the everyday transit, by Southern Pacific Gyre of one bucket, a left-footed jandal and two plastic containers marked 'Property of Sanfords, South Island, New Zealand'.

Gregory O'Brien



Piru Huke with Reuben Friend at Tongariki, the largest assemblage of moai on Rapa Nui
photograph by Bruce Foster



Flotsam collected by Piru Huke from the Rapa Nui coastline, July 2012
Photograph by Bruce Foster



View from Orongo
Photograph by Bruce Foster