

Ata Polenisia fa'a onapo nei

3

POLYNESIAN  
ARTISTS



Fatu Feu'u  
Ioane Ioane  
Michel Tuffery



25 July — 28 August 1990

This exhibition brings together work by three artists who derive the primary inspiration for their images from the visual resources, ancient legends and contemporary concerns of Polynesia. While they can thus be identified as 'Polynesian artists', Fatu Feu'u, Ioane Ioane and Michel Tuffery share dual affiliations to the twin cultural heritages of, on the one hand, New Zealand as the 'European West', and on the other, *Fa'a Samoa*. Through their appropriation of skills, styles and subjects from the artistic traditions of both cultures, Feu'u, Ioane and Tuffery's work can perhaps be regarded as part of an aspect of contemporary New Zealand art in which movement towards a 'South Pacific synthesis' may be detected; a new crossing point between historically paralalled and now contiguous civilizations.

While educated use of symbolic motifs and traditional compositional structures denote Feu'u, Ioane and Tuffery as 'Polynesian artists', it could well be argued that the historical resources and signifiers of any culture are, for an artist, simply his or her means of expression; not the sum total of that expression itself. The artists in this exhibition all habitually examine and interpret traditional Polynesian art forms, yet we would not mistake their work for an actual length of *tapa* cloth; while each is committed to an extension of Polynesian culture, in the end it is the personal vision filtering through the cultural structure which is significant. Thus the concept of 'Polynesian' is both an entry point into the work and an exit from it.

McDougall Art Annex

Christchurch City Council

## Fatu Feu'u

### Selected Biography

- 1946 Born Poutasi Falealili, Western Samoa  
 1966 Emigrated to New Zealand  
 1983 *Manakau Series I*, solo exhibition, Massey Homestead  
 1984 *Spinning Frontier*, solo exhibition, Gallery Pacific, Auckland  
*Manakau Series II*, solo exhibition, Massey Homestead  
 Book cover design, *A Simplified Dictionary of Modern Samoan*, Polynesian Press, Auckland  
 1986 *Lithographs*, solo exhibition, Samoa House, Auckland  
 Assistant painter, Auckland University Marae  
*Solo ole Lupe*, solo exhibition, Muka Studio, Auckland  
 1987 Book cover design, *Tala o le Valau; the Myths, Legends and Customs of Old Samoa*, Polynesian Press, Auckland  
*Oil Paintings/Tapa Motifs*, solo exhibition, Samoa House, Auckland  
 Stacey, G., 'The Art of Fatu Feu'u', *Art New Zealand*, no.45, pp 48-51  
 1988 Artist in Residence, Elam School of Fine Arts, University of Auckland  
*New Oil Paintings*, solo exhibition, Tautai Gallery, Auckland  
*Lithographs*, Dowse Art Museum, Lower Hutt  
 Director, Tautai Gallery, Auckland  
 Art tutor, Manakau Polytechnic  
*Woodcuts*, solo exhibition, Massey Homestead  
 Commission for paintings, Papakura Church  
*New Zealand Expo '88*, Brisbane, Australia  
 Group exhibition, Frans Maserell Centrum, Belgium  
 Book cover design, *Gagna Samoa, A Samoan Language Coursebook*, Polynesian Press, Auckland  
*Pacific Masks*, Massey Homestead  
 Pacific Masks Workshop, Auckland Institute and Museum  
*Pacific Ceremonial Masks/Paintings on Flax Paper*, Tautai Gallery, Auckland  
 Commission for sculpture, Auckland Girls' Grammar School  
 1989 Ceramic/Pacific Motifs Workshop, Driving Creek, Coromandel  
 Solo exhibition, 33 1/3 Gallery, Wellington  
*Lavalava*, group exhibition, Tautai Gallery, Auckland  
 Commission, Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs, Auckland  
 Art tutor, Manakau Polytechnic  
*Fugalagi* (Floral Impressions), solo exhibition, Massey Homestead  
 Lithography commission, Peter Small Gallery, Christchurch  
 1990 *Mitiuliuli*, solo exhibition, Charlotte H Galleries Auckland  
 Polynesian Textile Printing Workshop, Elam

School of Fine Arts, University of Auckland  
*Specifically Pacific*, group exhibition, Massey Homestead  
*Pacific Ritual Masks*, solo exhibition, Lopdell House, Auckland  
*Songs of the Earth*, group exhibition, Hastings Arts Centre  
*Coromandel Calling*, group exhibition, Outreach Gallery, Auckland



Mitiuliuli, 1990

Fatu Feu'u's images are derived from the mythologies and ancient legends of Samoa and the Pacific. Using traditional motifs and forms from the visual resources of Polynesia, the arts of *siapo* painting on *tapa* cloth, *tatau* (tattooing), carving, ceremonial mask making, and *Lapita* pottery from early Samoa, Feu'u employs a vocabulary charged with symbolic meaning.

For the non-literate, pre-European society of the Pacific Islands, the sophisticated manipulation of visual symbols was a way to codify information relating to daily existence; each mark made by the painter or tattooist had a symbolic significance able to be read by the initiated. Thus, through his sensitive reinterpretation of traditional designs, Feu'u establishes a context by which his images may be decoded as 'authentically Polynesian' in both style and content; paintings take their grid composition and motifs from Samoan *tapa*; lithographs reinterpret the mask-like forms of *Lapita* pottery or the geometrical borders of *siapo* painting; the images as a whole tell stories of the Pacific, both ancient and modern.

With no written language, the stories of the Pacific traditionally reposed within graphic symbols and an oral tradition. Feu'u regards his work as a type of communication with his antecedents through use of shared motifs; a mutual understanding of significance in symbols. Feu'u's paintings in this exhibition, from his recent *Mitiuliuli* (Dark Dreams) series, provide a deeply personal evocation of the ancient stories of

the Pacific. He employs a number of symbolic motifs, such as the *Gogo* or Frigate bird which represents oceanic spiritual ancestors, the mask motif referring to the god of the sea, *Tagaloa*, and the frangipani flower providing an essential symbolic female balance to the male elements of spirituality. These motifs are combined with colours significant to ancient seafarers and navigators of the Pacific - pale blue/grey signifiers North, white East, ochre South and red West - to create Feu'u's own dream maps of ancient Pacific legends.

Feu'u's depiction of the contemporary stories of the Pacific deal with his deep concern regarding environmental issues such as driftnet fishing. He is committed through his art to the fostering of awareness regarding issues of management of the resources of the Pacific by its indigenous peoples. Written titles such as *Save a Fish for Damon*, *Ole Malau* (Red Fish), and *Sa Upega Tafea* (Ban Drift Netting) reinforce the visual message of these images; harm done to the physical environment of the Pacific has grave repercussions on the lives of its inhabitants.

## Michel Tuffery

### Selected Biography

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| 1966 | Born in Wellington   |
| 1986 | <i>YWCA Youth Exhibition</i> , Dunedin   |
| 1987 | Diploma in Fine Arts, Otago Polytechnic School of Art<br><i>Senior Fine Art Students</i> , group exhibition, Otago Polytechnic, Dunedin<br><i>Tautai</i> group exhibition, Mangere Community Centre, Auckland  |
| 1988 | Honours, Otago Polytechnic School of Art<br><i>Honours Students</i> , group exhibition, Otago Polytechnic, Dunedin<br><i>Works on Paper</i> , group exhibition, Southern Cross Gallery, Wellington<br><i>What is my Identity</i> , two-person exhibition, Samoa House, Auckland<br><i>Fa Samoa/Fa Palagi</i> , Honours exhibition, Marshall Seifert Gallery, Dunedin<br><i>Aids Foundation Group Exhibition</i> , Carnegie Centre, Dunedin |
| 1989 | <i>Polynesian Art</i> , group exhibition, Muka Studio, Auckland<br><i>Pacific Ceremonial Masks</i> , group exhibition, Tautai Gallery, Auckland<br><i>Tautai Artists</i> , 33 1/3 Gallery, Wellington<br><i>Fa Samoa/Fa Palagi</i> , solo exhibition, CSA Gallery, Christchurch<br><i>Fa Samoa/Fa Palagi</i> , Louise Beale Gallery, Wellington  |
| 1990 | <i>Recent Acquisitions</i> , Auckland City Art Gallery<br><i>Fa Samoa/Fa Palagi</i> , ASA Gallery, Auckland  |



*Tatua Pili*, 1990

My work this year is an extension from my *Fa Samoa/Fa Palagi* prints. It is mainly based on aspects from the Pacific natural environment, such as sea and forest, from which the traditional *siapo* and *tapa* designs come.

The two triptych prints are about the 'wall of death' drift nets. The two figures with helmets represent my father and I arguing about "whether they should extend the nets another twenty five metres". I felt a deep hurt when I interviewed MAF. They told me how much damage was being done in the Pacific. Even just visiting the island in December 1989, things had changed from my 1987 trip - the fish markets were much smaller.

I still keep using the lizard because it represents me as the observer. That's how I saw myself when I was in the Islands; watching and interpreting what I felt was happening.

Most of the work is concerned with symbolic motifs, all of which are slowly changing and taking on new forms from print to print. This is how I plan to continue working.

I am shortly leaving to further my studies in Hawaii.

*Michel Tuffery*

Michel Tuffery combines New Zealand's dual cultural heritages of Europe and the Pacific more succinctly than most - he was born in Wellington, his mother is Samoan and his father European. While his work reflects his commitment to and interpretation of *Fa'a Samoa*, it also contains strong Western



influences. (A series of colour reproduction woodcuts last year were based on images of the three crosses at Calvary, the arched tops of the prints and fractionated forms recalling the stained glass windows of European churches). His woodblock technique, combining large customwood (compressed cardboard) printing blocks with handmade *tapa* cloth, also abstracts elements from each culture.

The repetitive patterns which frame and decorate Tuffery's images are strongly symbolic. The linear weaving pattern, for example, refers to the woven mats important in Samoan culture, which in turn themselves represent the working together and interweaving of lives of the family with the matai, or chief. Other designs are taken from the traditional Samoan body tattoos which tell stories of time, place and genealogy through use of sophisticated graphic symbols.

Tuffery also imbues his images with a profoundly personal symbolism. A frequently recurring example is his use of the *pili* (lizard) motif to represent himself interacting within the scene he depicts:

In the islands there are always small lizards darting  
along the walls. Stopping and staring, then moving on.

That's like what I am: the observer.\*

Observing the recent depredations of the Pacific environment on a recent trip to Samoa, especially the inroads made into forestry, and into fishing via the 'wall of death' driftnets, Tuffery was strongly moved to comment through the medium of his artwork. His recent large woodcuts deal with the reaction of Tuffery and his family to the issue of driftnet fishing, a concern which is common to both Samoa and New Zealand.

\* Michel Tuffery, quoted in Vandenberg, M., 'Blending Pacific and European', *The Press*, 17 May 1989

## Ioane Ioane

Ioane Ioane was born in Christchurch in 1963, and moved to Samoa with his parents at the age of six months. Coming back to New Zealand aged six years, he had to learn to speak English as a new Language, having to that date only heard and spoken Samoan. The first Samoan to graduate from Elam School of Fine Arts at Auckland University, Ioane followed his degree with a year at Teachers' College. His first teaching position was at Nga Tapuwae College in South Auckland, where 98% of his students were Polynesian: Ioane encouraged them to express their feelings about their culture through visual representation, based around use of Polynesian ideas and symbols with which both teacher and students could identify.

Ioane held his first solo exhibition at the Tautai Gallery in Auckland's Samoa House in 1988. His showed works which explored his deep interest in Polynesian *tapa* cloth, using both the traditional stencilled and painted motifs of *tapa* as well as the material itself as a ground for overpainting in oils. Ioane's work thus combines the traditions of the Pacific with the techniques of European art, moving towards a synthesis of the two as a reflection of New Zealand's cultural heritage.

Ioane is currently teaching art at Hauraki Plains College, Ngatea.