



M A N A M O T U

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Transcripts from the Contemporary Pacific Arts Festival Symposium held at the Footscray Community Arts Centre, Friday 5 April 2013.

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Cover image: *Self Portrait #37*, Colonizing the office, Salote Tawale 2012.

Mobilizing Pasifika:

Intersections of art, activism and community.

Panelists: Nic MacLellan, Ronny Kareni, Carlo Santone, Natalie Pa'apa'a

Chair: Lia Pa'apa'a

Nic: I would like to acknowledge the owners of the land. Always was, always will be Aboriginal land. I'd like to thank Lia, the Big Island Collective and Torika, for the invitation to participate today although I was a bit taken aback at first because I work as a journalist, which is really a craft rather than an art! I wondered why I was being asked to contribute to a discussion about art. I also wear the activist hat and I have been involved throughout my life with the Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific movement.

Today I want to talk about that intersection between cultural work, artwork and political activism. For me, it's also about looking at issues of time and place, of audience. As a waitskin from Australia who has worked in the Pacific for over thirty years, I've had to think about Australians and their place in the region.

A lot of this topic is about the imagery of the Pacific that's in the Australian conversation. After the Second World War, so much of this was driven by American culture. The American troops that were in Bora Bora, that fought their way through the Islands, came back with images about the South Pacific. Rogers and Hammerstein wrote music about it and right through the sixties there was the tiki culture, the bastardisation of Pacific iconography to represent the South Pacific. What we've seen over the subsequent decades is the commodification of a lot of Pacific culture for the tourist industry, for representation of the

Pacific and that's spilled over into political areas as well.

The 1970s was the age of independence for many Pacific countries, the era of Vietnam, a time of debate about 'black is beautiful', the Aboriginal mobilisation in Australia with the tent embassy and so on. This debate about the role of art in politics, in decolonisation, in self-determination was central to Pacific debates about culture. Famously Jean-Marie Tjibaou (the Independence leader in New Caledonia /Kanaky), established a festival in 1975 called Melanesia 2000. That cultural event was part of the renaissance of Kanak identity to say "we are a people, we are a nation", but still colonised by France. He saw that the political claims that were made through his political party in New Caledonia were intimately tied to notions of culture, identity and creativity. The assertion that culture plays a central claim in the nation's future has melded through Pacific art work since that time.

My engagement in this area was as an activist, working with a colleague Leonie Lane in the late 1970s / early 1980s. We made a number of attempts to try and move from intellect to emotion, and that for me is a really central part of activism. I'm a writer, I write books, I write articles and so on. However working in the Pacific, I've had to think about different modes of getting information across – this has been central for me, struggling with this as someone who writes for a living and for pleasure, how that information's translated through a variety of mechanisms. With Leonie and a colleague called Bob Clutterbuck in the early 80's, the quickest, cheapest way of getting stuff around was screen printing, so we set up a screen printing workshop in Sydney and here in Melbourne and mass-produced political posters. Some of the early ones were pretty basic but Bob was a beautiful artist and started doing a series of posters that I noticed recently sold for \$1,000 (and I threw all mine away!). The commodification of political art is another area that we might get into over the next day or so.

The whole series of art works done with both the Tin Shed in Sydney, with Bread Line posters, with Red Letter posters, were about trying to use quite beautiful pieces of imagery to get across messages about the struggle for a Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific. Right through the 1980s, we were involved in producing these sorts of images, which in pre-internet days were the cheapest way of getting things around. The iconography of that work however was very much geared to a palangi Australian audience and all the clichés were there - the palm tree, the threat of the bomb, the bula shirt and so on. Capturing iconography of the Pacific that would instantly resonate with an Australian audience or a New Zealand audience. was part of this. I think about that question now with the Pacific diasporas in Australia and New Zealand, in Guam and so on trying to also talk about their voice in the conversation - is this iconography still as relevant today?

I'll give you an example. Years ago I wrote a book with a French colleague about French nuclear testing and French policy in the region. We had a really boring cover and the designer said, "no, you need something that people will identify with instantly." So he chose a Gauguin painting, which was the quickest and easiest and most colourful way of saying "South Pacific". I fought against it, thinking that Gauguin was the ultimate cliché of "French in the Pacific" and yet every time this book was put in a bookstore, it was put face out rather than side ways! So there are commercial imperatives for this, for ways that iconography impresses. This is not just within Australia: Gauguin paintings have been used by Radio Tefana, a community run pro-independence radio station in Tahiti. They too have chosen Gauguin and re-interpreted Gauguin as a way of analysing their opposition to the bomb. But that iconography of the palm tree and the bula shirt is out dated: what does it mean now for urban youth in the Pacific, and indeed in Australia? Does the palm tree resonate as the ultimate icon of what their life and their politics are about?

I think when you look at the graffiti, from Nouméa for example, you'll find the images that people are putting up there are more about their life in the concrete city, about the role that money (or the lack of money) plays in their life. There's still a lot of iconography of the heroes: at the trade union headquarters in New Caledonia, you can see Chief Ataï, who led the 1878 rebellion against French colonisation; Eloi Machoro, famous independence leader who was shot down by French police sharp shooters in 1985; Jean-Marie Tjibaou was assassinated in 1989; Kikki Kare was an activist, broadcaster and musician who worked here at Radio Australia in Melbourne and died tragically in 2007.

The images of leaders are around everywhere. The famous triptych that you find everywhere in New Caledonia is Eloi Machoro, Bob Marley and Che Guevara. I suspect if you go to Port Moresby, to Jayapura and other places, the heroes are there on the walls. People are moving beyond leaders to think about community as well. As Lia said in the introduction, when we're talking about art and community art, it brings a whole different layer to this conversation. A famous handshake back in 1988 with anti-independence leader Jacques Lafleur and Kanak leader Jean-Marie Tjibaou, was reinterpreted with people saying "how do we as a community relate to this gesture of reconciliation in New Caledonia?" There was an artwork where you came with your friends and had a photo taken and then added it to the wall. Gradually they were filling a whole building full of images of people shaking hands together, effectively saying "We need to reconcile over the conflict." So more and more, art becomes a political battleground.

The centre of Nouméa, the capital of New Caledonia, is known as ville blanche – white city – and it was seen as an apartheid city when I first went there in the 1970s and 1980s. Today the Kanaks have been reclaiming that city and this image is of the Mwa Ka placed there a couple of years ago in the centre of Nouméa. A beautiful piece of work in which

the artist Narcisse Decoire worked with 8 young people from around the country to carve different parts of this twelve metre high totem. He said that this represents the 8 cultural regions, the customary regions for indigenous Kanaks. He said "We have to bring one nation together and we have the young people doing it, because the young people transcend all this political, spiritual differences of the past." That's reclaiming space from what's been a French city.

The Place des Cocotiers, the main square, has a statue of figure of General Olry. Olry is the ultimate colonial figure. He led the military operations against Chief Ataï in 1878. He's lauded by the French and there are streets named everywhere for him around the French Pacific. So over the generations people have seen this as the ultimate piece of creative art to work on! It's been an ongoing challenge for political art / activists:"How do we pervert the symbol of Olry and French colonialism?" Today it's done on the Internet. There's some colleagues who have set up a little program and you can add little captions to the picture of Olry. For those who can't read French, the caption says 'who farted? It was him sir.' You can turn him into Rousette Man (the rousette is the flying fox, the Pacific version of the bat/man). So people are using art to try and seize different images, different icons. I suppose what I'd like to throw into the conversation today – what are the icons that resonate, the icons that resonate with a younger audience in the Pacific? What are the ideas that resonate with Australians today and what are the icons that go beyond bula shirts and palm trees?

Ronny Kareni: I'd like to start by acknowledging the custodians of this land as well and its like the Indigenous West Papuans where I come from, we are also still fighting for our rights for self determination. The common stories that any other Pacific Islanders like colonisation that we have had to survive through and still now, we still going through that fight. Coming here in the last 10 years now, still trying to find my feet, but also promoting and carrying on with the campaign of the struggle of the people of West Papua and just in recent years that we've established a campaign called the Rize of the Morning Star, and its great to have Nat and Carlo here who have been helping and we have been trying to promote the issue, not to be politicising it but how we can use the arts and to pread the word through the music and preaching it to the audience there.

In history also we have realised, especially in South Africa, they fight for justice during the apartheid that lead to the western pop culture, to stand up and writing songs like Peter Gabriel, one of his songs called 'Biko', and other great artists and musicians use their music to spread the word and to help how the people in South Africa gained that self-determination or their freedom in the 1980s. That was one thing now in West Papua, we've been going through this 50-years of military regime that is very much close to the western world through media blockade and also no access to foreign NGO groups entering West

Papua. The voice of the West Papuans still speak through the music and it was in the 1960s and 1970s where one of the great musicologist, Arnold Ap, who went around West Papua and collecting songs and archiving it in the university and those songs are still much alive today and they were pretty much written very poetically to remind the West Papuans that the struggle needs to be united even though we've got more than 300 tribal languages, we need to learn to hear each others language and that's the one where we could overcome the military.

A lot of those message were sent and written through the songs and until today a lot of the younger generations still continue to write those songs in their language, whether its from the highlands or whether its from the coast, but still keeping it together to bring that nationalism together through this fight against the oppression, the military regime of Indonesia and that has been very much effective in the 1970s leading up to the 1980s where we have found that a lot of the political activists including Arnold Ap, who was imprisoned at that time, and one of his last songs that he wrote in prison at that time in 1984 was 'Mystery of Life' and its about how Papuans are living like prisoners in their own land. That song, he recorded on a reel to reel tape and hand it on to a prison guard who was able to pass it on to his wife, and from there we didn't hear from him and he was believed to be assassinated, or that they allow him to escape, but then that's the story about him, we didn't really know what happened but we believe that he was assassinated during that time.

That legacy has been pretty much been carried on later in the year when the other group called the Black Brothers and some of the singers in our band Tabura but also part of Blue King Brown as well. Black Brothers also revolutionised a lot of their traditional songs and they put in a contemporary context and they tour around the Pacific spreading the word about what's really happening and that really gone around in the Melanesian region and they were forced to flee because of the songs, a lot of their songs were very political and they were not safe in West Papua at that time and they travelled to PNG, Vanuatu, Holland and then later on they settled back in Australia. That music is growing very strong through arts and we are here today, part of the great campaign of musicians, film makers, going out there and trying to build this momentum. There has been great campaigns going around.

Last year we did the launch of the Rize of the Morning Star, that was our first appearance at the Womadelaide festival with Blue King Brown and that was the first moment where we could see the support from the wider community through arts who stand up and who truly believe that even though West Papuans still being oppressed and they could see the Australian government, PNG and other governments are still silent on the human rights issues and political rights issues of West Papua, we could see and realise that there is a greater support and sympathy by the wider community and the ordinary people who

believes that every human being deserves a right to live in a free country, in a space that they want to live. The image of the performance at WOMAdelaide went around West Papua, but also around Australia, and just within a few hours there was a response from the Indonesian authority through the Indonesian media asking why the Australian government allows such public support like that in Australia through music. We also realised that in some ways they were trying to censor the Australian supporters. It's the time now where we want to push boundaries where governments have built treaties and policies that stop people to continue to voice their concern about things that matter to us as human beings, like human rights issues, environmental issues and to bring us also change.

Also with the campaign with West Papua, its about cultural resistance as well that we have been also fighting and since the Indonesian occupation, our language has been deteriorating and not to mention the demographic as well. There was a research came out of Sydney University in 2010 that the Indigenous population is now less than 48% and if this rate continues, in 2020, the rate will be less than 30% so if we don't take action the West Papuans will be a minority in their own land. So that's one thing I have been actively involved here through music to raise this issue of West Papua, the human rights issues and also wanting to be the advocate as well of other Pacific Islanders such as the Kanaky where they are also fighting for their self-determination. Also other places like Moloka, another Melanesian island that hasn't been included in the conversation and they too are still fighting for their rights and self-determination.

There is also a strong community engagement through the Indigenous mob here in Australia and its been great that, through Uncle Kevin Buzzacott, he came to one of our community rallies last year on the 1st December and realising that we all share the common stories and the struggles as Pacific Islanders, but also the Indigenous society, we have survived through the colonisation and the westernisation of outside culture brought to us and forced on to us that we have to practice. We've got our own culture that we have practised 50,000 years ago and still practising it today through our language and songs and dreamtime stories. So there is this project which has been initiated to do a land and sea convoy from Lake Ayer up to Cairns and then with the flotilla up to PNG and then to West Papua and this is going to be a big project coming up later in the year. The Indigenous elders who are now in conversation with the West Papuan elders to come together and stand together and take on the fight and call on the government to recognise the rights of the Indigenous people because at one stage the land was one, Papua New Guinea, the island of New Guinea and Australia were one before the ice melts. So this is a cultural connection that they want to connect back, at one stage they shared stories and walked together on that land and its still the same that the Papuans and also in the Pacific that it's one people, one soul and we are one family.

And that is one of the initiatives on a community level in conversation now that the Indigenous mob and the West Papuan elders are talking about it and trying to get more involved in this great project that is coming up. Lastly, the Rize of the Morning Star have just recently released our digital album, some of the support is from established musicians and artists in the region here in Australia and also overseas and we've got Michael Franti from the U.S., also King Kapisi from New Zealand and other great artists in PNG – Telek, Vanuatu as well, Blue King Brown, from Chile and O-Shen from Hawai'i. So its great to have these musicians coming out to support the cause and being the voice of the people who have been voiceless like those in West Papua, and it would be great to extend this support to other Pacific islanders to have a greater voice here in Australia and the Pacific and to tell the government of the day that even though they can continue to establish the bi-lateral relationships through trade or other treaties, they have to also address the rights of the people. We as human beings shouldn't be living under oppression, we should be living freely and that's why we are here, to look after each other and we all as a international ambassadors, that's how we all play our role to bring peace and harmony to the society we are living in and I am proud to be part of the community here today and be the voice as well, to join with everyone to stand in solidarity.

Carlo Santone: I came across this image this morning and you mentioned the Black Brothers and I noticed the here manager here of the Black Brothers was the new Prime Minister of Vanuatu.

Natalie Pa'apa'a: What other regions of the Pacific have given outspoken support for West Papua and Melanesia?

Ronny: Just recently we have seen a shift in the support from the governments in Melanesia, so there's Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Solomons, Vanuatu and now we've got Kanaky - the transitional government. In Vanuatu a West Papuan tribal leader, Benny Wenda did his freedom tour around the world and he went to PNG and then to Vanuatu and it was a catalyst that really changed, in Vanuatu especially, that West Papua became a domestic issue in Vanuatu where we saw key members of the government voted out and the new Prime Minister came into office just in the last week. The current Prime Minister of Vanuatu is also a member of the International Parliamentarians for West Papua and now they are very supportive of the West Papuan cause. A group of people including the founder of the Black Brothers lodged an application to become and observer at the Melenesian Spearhead Group coming up in June 2013. They have to meet with the Prime Minister of Fiji, they have support from the chairperson, but the level of support is positive and looking very optimistic for the application.

Nic MacLellan: This is recreating links that existed before they were broken by the Indonesian occupation. In the 1950s when the South Pacific Conferences were held, symbolising the first movement towards self-government, representatives of Dutch New Guinea were there - Markus Kasiepo, Nicolaas Jouwe and other great leaders from the past were all represented at this meeting at the South Pacific Conference, where all of the pre-independence nations came together. Churches from Jayapura (the capital of West Papua) came to the founding meeting of the Pacific Conferences of Churches in Malua, Samoa in 1961. And it was only after the Indonesian occupation in 1962 and the Act of No Choice in 1969 that those organic links between the western part of New Guinea and the rest of Melanesia were broken. So this is rebuilding links that have existed historically, right through the post-war period. I think that's really important to remember and most Australians forget this history. People in the Pacific know it.

And that's one of the really important of things to come out of today. How do we carry these voices into Australia? In 1969, two West Papuan leaders, Clemens Runawery and Willem Zonggonau carried a petition to the United Nations saying they didn't support the Act of Free Choice. They were detained as they crossed the border into the territory of Papua and New Guinea by ASIO and were held so that they couldn't travel to the UN General Assembly to present that petition. Where did we hold them? In Manus. So today the resonance that Manus has as a detention centre for Australian asylum seekers resonates very differently for people in PNG and West Papua. No one in Australia knows that history. I think it's very important to think about how we can bring these sorts of stories out, as part of remembering the links that existed before those colonial breaks were created.

Audience question: West Papua is not represented in the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organisation (UNPO) in Geneva like some others, like the Malakas are, so has the Indonesian government prevented you from joining that organisation? There are a couple of Indonesian minorities that are in that international body.

Ronny: Yes, in West Papua, even the Red Cross or NGOs are on a red list and can't go in, so that shows the level of political barriers to West Papua. Because of the richness of the natural resources and the land mass, its not going to be likely that they are allowed or give the Papuans opportunity to have a voice and they have been held back through the years but as I said there is a shift in the regional leadership now and it's a positive step forward now. Even with the regional forums, it's been 50 years that West Papuans have been trying to make that representation. But there is a shift in the regional leadership now, and it's a positive step forward now.

Audience question: One of the issues that kept coming up there seems to be so many

different groups, and leaders and structure. How does that work? Because that confuses a lot of people.

Ronny: I'm here today to make it clear today that there was a congress, the first in 1961 and the second in 2000 and the third one in 2011. In terms of leadership structure, that's where the Papuans go back and regain working with a different leadership. At that time they were the West Papuan National Coalition but also the student movement was very strong in West Papua and we have seen that in recent years with mass numbers of mobilisation going down to the streets. There was the West Papuan National Committee and also the West Papuan National Authority so they all came together in 2009 and came up with the name Collective Leadership and that's where all the leadership agreed that in 2011 to have the third National Congress and so the outcome of the third National Congress, then there was the federated republic of West Papua, that was a nation state that was declared and so this is now the political body that has this political framework to go forward and as some of our West Papua coalition are applying for the application at Amnesty and also Benny Wenda through the Free West Papua campaign in the UK are pushing through international lawyers to get a legal pathway, to take the issue of the Act of No Choice. Everyone is playing a different role in this revolution but the clear leadership is now based in West Papua through the third congress that came out in 2011. The President and the Prime Minister are now behind bars serving 3 years for the outcome of that third congress. So the leadership structure is clear and there now and they are representing the people of West Papua back in West Papua so any West Papuans like me out here, I'm just a voice of the people in West Papua and we all hear from the leadership in West Papua.

Lia: Natalie and Carlo are going to be talking together, they are from the band Blue King Brown, have been really heavily involved in the Rise of the Morning Star campaign but also do a number of political movement campaigns globally.

Natalie Pa'apa'a: Thankyou and also we would like to acknowledge country and the Indigenous traditional owners. The connections to the land where they build and grow their hopes and dreams for future generations and keep in practice culture. World culture is really something that we are very passionate about. We love Indigenous cultures from around the world, it inspires our activism, our music, and it inspires our world view and I think that is something that we as musicians really try to do, to help shine the light on the current dark culture of the world and the way in which the world is run for the benefit of a few people. Indigenous people have been historically exploited, first, and the worst, and continue to be and as time goes on we realise that we are all part of the mass exploitation for the profit of someone else, and to me it comes under the bigger picture of justice and what I want to see is the globalisation of justice and for people to know why the world

is run the way it is, why the people of West Papua are struggling, daily, just to live, why are West Papuans being tortured, kicked out of their homes, why their land is being ripped open by Australian companies, why Indonesian soldiers are being trained in Australia by the Australian defence force, those very people are the ones that are going and committing crimes against Ronny's people.

There's a big part of the dialogue that is so missing from mainstream media and from news, which is why panels like this are so important, you've just heard it straight from the mouth of someone who is a freedom fighter from West Papua. You're not going to hear that on Channel 7 tonight, you're not going to hear it on the radio, you will hear it on community radio now and then but that's what we are part of, bringing that voice to the big stage, putting it in front of humanity for humanity to make their own choice. And we realise that when we, we work with a really broad cross section of NGO's and everything from the arms trade to education, Sierra Leone, West Papua, many aspects, climate is obviously a big thing for our community as Pacific Islanders, for Australians, for earthlings, and what we found was that when you do get a chance to talk to people on that human level, and say this is what's happening, do you agree with that? If you believe that human rights is deserved by all of us as human beings and if you believe we need to stop being patriotic about the country we live in and start being patriotic about the earth that we all share, then put your fist in the air.

And on more than one occasion we've had 10s of 1,000s of people put their fists in the air and we paused it and we took these images and to me it's such an obvious and powerful and accessible way through art, through music, through the stage and the microphone that we are able to instantly connect all those people with one issue, with one very important movement that's happening and to raise awareness about that in a two minute frame and to give people the tools to just go out and start talking about it. As with East Timor, with what happened there and obviously West Papua is longing to have independence as East Timor does now.

Carlo Santone: I wanted to show some footage to show what we're doing. I'm sitting in for Wantok Aireleke who we've been working with and also Ronny and others. We came together, as Ronny said, in Womadelaide in March 2012 for the first time and Aire and Ronny had approached us for support for their movement and organisation and Natalie and I thought that a great way to initiate that relationship would be to invite them onto our stage and create a performance-based action. We made sure it was captured and filmed and we could then go and share beyond the moment. So I'll just share some of that footage.

Natalie: So it's a real honour to share that story and it's so positive for people in West Papua who for so long have felt alone in their struggle, and that the outside community

doesn't hear them, so that has been a big driving force for us to help raise awareness and show them there is support for their cause. We also use our band's name to do a lot of online activism for different causes, we are very involved in the nuclear free movements and Carlo has actually put together an incredible website called nukefreefuture.com and basically its where music lovers can come and some of their favourite artists have donated songs which they can download but also they can learn about the nuclear cycle, you know what happens to nuclear energy, where does it come from, how is Australia implicated in that, how is the Pacific implicated in that. It touches on everything, climate change, the nuclear issue, very broad, and one of the biggest threats to civilisation, we have the changing climate and we have nuclear proliferation, we can see that's a very serious threat. In the news, even today, with Korea and America, investing in so much nuclear war fare and that propoganda and those rumours of war is still happening. So we wanted to be able to break it down and make it a really accessible, digestible way that everyday people can come into this website and find out what they want to know, there's films, there's images, there's an incredible Chernobyl gallery just showing people from Chernobyl 50 years later and their lives and its heart breaking and also really eye opening.

Carlo: The idea for this site came through us delivering information from other organisations through our networks and seeing the difference in interaction and engagement with the cause if it was delivered by us directly and it was a real noticeable thing, people would say, we really think you should support this and we would get some level of traction or if we really delivered something that was kind of branded if it was an obvious project of Blue King Brown's we would get more traction, and with the nuke-free issue there was a number of artists who were willing to jump on board and put their name to it and brand it a little different than a regular NGO, for example, but we still work very closely with as many of them as we can because that front line is really important. That came together as an idea quite a few years ago, and its taken so long to pull it together, but sometimes these things do but I'm really happy and proud of what we've got now and getting ready to launch it, I'd like to see Nic about some of those images (he has shown) and that's what its all about, little triggers that we connected with.

Aire and Ronny came over one day and explained what they were doing and a little trigger went off and we felt like we need to get behind this and we can, and all the years of building a foundation and being able to get to a stage and have that many people out there, and its like lets use that for something important and that we're passionate about and so that's what we're doing. With these days with the internet its so easy, we can draw people into our website and we've got a special page dedicted to the movements that we are supporting quite heavily at the moment. In the past year or two its sort of easy to support everything, there's just so much out there that's wrong, and we get asked daily to support

many worthwhile causes and in spirit we do, but to be effective we really have to chose our battles and focus on them, our website reflects that and what we do on stage reflects and what Natalie talks about reflects that.

We're just coming into a new album cycle as a band and that's when activity really starts picking up with media attention and all that sort of thing and on the media its interesting too, once we got those first photos from our performance at Womad, we sent it out, it was a historic moment, it was the largest showing of public support in history for West Papua outside of West Papua for their struggle and a lot of media didn't want to touch it. Mainstream music media were hesitant (to put it out there), its sad to see that, it is music news as much as it is international news and its really interesting to see the walls that people have about reporting this sort of stuff. So we hope to break through that ourselves and slowly but surely it happens and people come around and next minute you get some great organisations supporting this cause and one was that Natalie got a cover on a in-flight magazine, the Rex regional and they did a big story with that image and these were papers flying in and out of Indonesia, so that was quite interesting to see these papers make it in and out of the region.

Natalie: There's an amazing cross section of Pacific artists of all forms doing amazing and really different things, everything from visual art to body performance, painting, photography, flash mobs, its good.

Audience comment: I'm from New Zealand, I've been in Australia 30 years, I was running programs for Indigenous children in Wyndamvale. I'm sad to hear this because I've never heard it before. It saddens me to know that, there's still that – especially in your country – we in New Zealand, we're still fighting for our fishing rights and it saddens me to hear the struggle for your people. I'm an entertainer, I've worked with Australian Indigenous peoples and it saddens me to know that being from New Zealand, we don't have to struggle like you's do. I'm Indigenous from my country, I have my moments when I get upset with my country. My dad was one of the strongest leaders here in Melbourne, working with Indigenous peoples. His focus was on the Indigenous. Speaking Māori used to be illegal in my country, its only been allowed to be spoken now for 15 years and its compulsory in schools now. My father was a minister working with mostly Indigenous peoples and had a connection with Indigenous peoples. I'm happy to help if I can.

Audience comment: A lot of people that come to Australia think that it's the lucky country, this place still has black and white bars. Degradation and colonisation of Aboriginal people is I think, on an equal footing with these guys. Where else in the world can you actually destroy some of the oldest art galleries in the world? And they're doing it right now.

Lia: I love what Natalie says about being patriotic about not just your country but about the globe, it really kind of brings it home to one people.

Audience comment: I'm from Stella magazine, I was just listening to you talking about the media. We would love to regularly support. Not just a one-off, one-issue. The thing about activism is that it can be talked about and then the issue will die down, but this is ongoing. This is our first issue from Port Moresby, we're calling it a thinking-woman's magazine, we would love to talk about these issues.

Natalie: That would be great because news comes out of Papua daily, there's always things happening, they're not pretty, but there are some good stories too, like Aire was just in Papua New Guinea where they had an outdoor free concert with Telek and thousands came.

Ronny: The governor of Port Moresby supported it and shows how social media plays a strong role in bringing people together and within 24 hours nearly 3000-4000 people came to that concert. It would also be good to have West Papua women represented and have a voice through that magazine too. And especially with equality with women, having the voice of our West Papuan women represented in that magazine would be good too.

Natalie: We are really happy to have two of the daughters of one of the Black Brothers, the lead guitarist Augustus. Two of his daughters are singing for Blue King Brown at the moment and we're really happy to have them as ambassadors, female voices for their country and they are going to be doing our international tours with us and holding space for West Papua on stage around the world. So you should really get a hold of those ladies, they are really amazing.

Nic: I think that for me, a really interesting thing is finding spaces in the media. As someone who has worked both in mainstream media and in community media and alternative media, finding spaces to tell stories is a really important part of this work.

A few years ago, I was involved in a worldwide campaign to nominate a thousand women for the Nobel Peace prize. I went and interviewed a lot of women around the Pacific for nominations. I wrote a story that was published in a women's magazine in Germany profiling five women. Déwé Gorodé a Kanak independence activist was one of the five, and that German magazine sold 600,000 copies. It's not a place where I would have thought to put a story like that, but it sold really well. I think that's one of the interesting things about cultural activities. Where are the places to tell these stories, where we can reach different people in different ways, whether it be art galleries, or on the streets? There are different ways to

reach different audiences. Where are those intersections, where there are openings? It's very hard. There are limited spaces and once you start stepping over boundaries, talking about sensitive topics, those spaces shrink. I think that's what's interesting about community art: it opens up new spaces to let discussions begin.

Audience comment: I just was thinking about what you were saying earlier Nic about the screen printing, I'm from Sydney and I know the Tin Shed galleries, in fact I recently found some posters from the 1980s and 1990s that were made at Tin Shed. So looking at those images, I thought those are like the ones I just found a couple of weeks ago and I was thinking about the representation of Oceania at the Olympics last year where Wantok music performed in London as part of the Olympics opening festival. Funnily enough it was at the Royal Naval college in Greenwich which is where all those explorers left to come and explore and discover us again and again and again. I was drawing this parallel around this speed of which the images that went viral from the concert at the Olympics, the Sing Sing concert, because Benny Wenda was there, and what I know is that all the artists that were involved in that were told not to raise any political issues publically on stage and if they did, their fee would be forfeited. Of course that didn't make any difference and I think this is the importance of using the arts as a vehicle for activism, is that there has to be a level of risk, particularly if you are talking about a cause. So I'm wondering about how is that organised with you and the West Papuan movement, this level of online activity and how can we assist in sustaining that because I subscribe to the Rize of the Morning Star, so I am getting those really unpretty images that you are talking about. But I feel like if I don't see it frequently enough it's so easy to forget. So what else can people do from the security of their computer screen to help that along?

Ronny: There's a lot that people can do but it comes back to in what capital city those people are willing to help and for instance in our discussions with Carlo and Natalie couple of years ago. Of course we need more in terms of media, people who could write or translating and citizen journalism is one thing that we want more West Papuans to be trained in. To be the voice and write what is really happening there and putting up information out to the world, given that there is a media blockade and that's one level that we could ask anyone in that capacity to help. There are a lot of other things where we need help but, we've got a website and email, or we can just talk after this to people to see what capacity people could help. Music is one component of it, but there are other spaces we can use. There was footage of the Sing Sing concert at the Message Stick festival at the Sydney Opera house where the first footage showed the West Papuan flag dance and they talked about media blockage in West Papua and the second edition of the footage where that piece was edited out. It comes to what capacity you can help, we will always need more help.

Audience comment: The first attempt to use the museum platform was part of the Pacific Wave Festival in 1997. So we actually asked a group of West Papuans to come to the Pacific collections and use the West Papuan collection to choose objects from their own areas and then we have those on display. We also have a poem by Arnold App who was an anthropologist. It was a very powerful exhibition because it provided a platform to actually raise the issues of West Papua at the time. And as a result of that some of the West Papuan community were invited to SBS to talk about West Papua and then they were invited on a tour to Europe to raise awareness of West Papua.

I praise your work and courage to support West Papua, because some of us have been doing this for many years and we know that it has fallen on deaf ears because of the political agenda of the Australian government with Indonesia. But I also think that through artists the issue of West Papua can become stronger. It's happening in different satellite movements. And I think it's very important to consolidate this shift now to do something stronger within the arts. Through art galleries and museums. I've recently written a small article about the exhibition on West Papua, and that has huge media coverage. It's going to a lot of people, and it's about the contested identity of paintings in West Papua and how artists are trying to earn a living by consolidating and selling their artworks and how that has been contested by the Indonesian government. There are lots of different efforts that we can all do at different levels to raise awareness within the Australian public and also internationally. What's happening in West Papua is a genocide. A cultural genocide. It is a holocaust that has been going on for 50 years and it is the largest genocide for the 20th and 21st Century.

Natalie: Rize is also really getting active in getting initiatives out there so you can support in a easy way and that's what the compilation album is about. Scan it, get the compilation, all the profits, all the proceeds go to Rize of the Morning Star, so if it's as simple as doing that, this week, today, telling your friends about it, that's something, and they will always be coming up with ideas to make it easy for you to connect with support.

Carlo: I think it's also just patience and acknowledgement of a group like Rize who has a big scope, but a small organisation and if people do have ideas for supporting, it's about putting it forward directly and if it doesn't happen straight away, another nudge in a couple of months, another nudge in a couple of months, remembering that this movement is still real, it's now, it's happening, and there's a small group trying as hard as possible, but just that reminder that 'I'm just still here, whenever you're ready for that' and just that show of support is integral to building and evolving the movement.

Who will claim me?

Authenticity and Identity in Contemporary Art of the Pacific Diaspora.

Panelists: Léuli Eshraghi, Kirsten Lyttle, Jacob Tolo, Maryann Talia Pau

Chair: Torika Bolatagici

Torika Bolatagici: This is just a bit of a background to the title of this particular session and it's a quote from a New Zealand based artist, Janet Lilo whose work you might be familiar with. She's a mixed-media artist. And I just really love the way, that idea of 'who will claim me' and certainly in those circumstances on Crimewatch. And I thought it spoke so beautifully of that diasporic position and the tension of being pulled in all sorts of directions. That recognition of our ancestry but also our context within a cosmopolitan city and how we negotiate that position but also how we reconcile that within our work.

So I wanted to start by asking you as contemporary artists who reference your Pacific cultural heritage can you talk about how your materials, process or subject matters draw inspiration from the Pacific?

Maryann: I think as a weaver the materials that I like to use reflect where I come from, so the people which I hope will claim me, which is my Sāmoan mob, so that's materials like pandanus, flax, because I grew up in Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand. So those materials are really precious to me. Taking strands of mats that my mum would carry around with her for years, but I also love to incorporate new materials like raffia and plastic ribbon, satin ribbon – that's one of my favourite materials that I like to use. So the work that I make, the

weaving that I make, I hope, shows that I have this kind of mixed heritage and that I have lots of different communities that I am more into, that I'm loyal to and protective of and that I hope through my work and through my relationships will be proud of and kind of want to claim me.

Torika: What has that been the response when you use other materials?

Maryann: I think there's a genuine kind of surprise, I think that people are genuinely excited as well about what I can come up with and what I'm inspired or excited to weave. I think people, I hope, can just feel inspired with me and feel like they have the courage to experiment and play with materials to create something new.

Torika: Has that happened a lot where people do start experimenting with their own practice within the Pacific weaving context, but also, you do a lot of workshops with non-Pacific Islanders, so have you seen that sort of transfer as well into other artists work?

Maryann: Yeah definitely, people that come along to our workshops I think they like to see us as the facilitators and as the leaders kind of working and weaving with different materials. And that's the beauty of this craft - you can weave with anything. And the people that have inspired me, who I've grown up with in my mind are weavers, whether they are poets or writers or photographers. The way I see the world - I think and practice as an artist and everything comes back to weaving. And other artists as well, sitting on this panel for example, how they incorporate that craft or technique of weaving so that we can kind of engage with each other and build a community.

Torika: Kirsten, you have a work that you've made that you've photographed and woven together, can you tell us about that?

Kirsten Lyttle: I agree with you Maryann. What I love about weaving is the process, there's a lovely idea about two different strands going in different directions and coming together, and to me that almost acts like a metaphor for being a person of mixed race. I've got two separate elements within me coming together and I'm still building something to make a whole, complete thing, or a whole complete person, rather than being a fraction. I think a lot of people end up having a fractured identity or being confused about how to identify. As the quote you started with pointed to, it can often be hard to determine who we are or what we are or who is labelling us. So I'm currently working on a project where I'm weaving together photographs of representations of Māori. And to me I think too, having a camera. I think it's about time the natives took the cameras back. We've had a long time of anthropologists being the ones representing us, framing us in a certain way. For me,

the camera as a tool is really important in my practice, I think its time for us to start representing ourselves. I think it's about time the natives took the cameras back. Weaving has also come into my practice in a big way; I'm heavily influenced by Maryann who actually taught me my first weave. Materially, both weaving and the camera are a large part of my art practice.

Torika: Jacob, you draw a lot on those iconic Pacific motifs and your quite interested in that sort of tiki culture as well and your design works.

Jacob: I love this stuff. I'm influenced by a lot of things. I think my background in design has taught me to view things in that sort of graphic language way and I think our first motifs were our first visual language, and I look at it that way and I'm really fascinated by the patterns that we use to tell stories and things like that. Even with tatau stories and the malu with the women. I think growing up I felt really confined by the culture and I sort of related a lot of patterns to that confinement and order and I wanted to find the chaos in the patterns. That's what my work talks about as well. I'm also interested in the way people see us rather than the way we see each other so I talk a lot about other art styles that covet the exotic and the eroticising of the exotic as well, things like the romantic period. That sort of artwork really turns me on.

Torika: Léuli, in your recent series of paintings for the Potu Aiga exhibition, you talk about a space to share food in, to recollect childhood and long-gone shared living. Can you tell us a bit about this work and your ongoing exploration of transnational cultural memory – and the importance of collective memory for diasporic communities?

Léuli: I think its really important especially for a person of mixed heritage, I'm Persian and Sāmoan, to feel connected to a sense of history and there are signposts in different parts of the world, whether it be one tiki motif or one Persian carpet, whatever it may be in whatever context, little bits of acknowledgement that help you feel as though you're not entirely invisible and not entirely 'invisiblised' communities. When I was researching some of the history of my village and our land in the greater Āpia region in Sāmoa, for the exhibition I had in December, I came across a migratory element within the life of an ancestral figure, Apaula whose life is closely intertwined with two of the giants of yore, Va'a and Vaea, after whom one of the major mountains in Sāmoa is named. It just seemed perfect, and so in researching the story, history, I found the motifs kind of came to me as well as some that I had researched in traditional siapo and the way that I approach it is quite different, it's like trying to look at a cultural memory for my future children, for my cousins, my family and the family that are here, the family in North America, family in Asia, but then paring it back. So rather than chaos I need it to be quite minimalist. So it ends up being quite pared back and

sparse and it's an interpretation of that element of connection, that site of something historically significant happening and then that something is grounding. It's grounding for me as someone who has only spent two years in the village and go back every year or two years or so, but that is quite important to my sense of self.

Torika: So going back and learning those stories and then using those motifs in your work - how do you feel about, and all of you, how do you reconcile that use of motifs in your work and then when you see them being used out of context? We are all familiar with the tribal, ethnic fashion aesthetic that is so popular at the moment, - yet we as artists also use the motifs, so how do you reconcile that?

Kirsten: I think for me a lot of my work has really used almost the colonisers version. So some of the tiki stuff and there's some work in the Meleponi Pasifika show, where I used tourist representations of Māori people. They're actually quite offensive, I was really shocked when I went there a few years ago and how readily available it was. You would never find a similar kind of representation of Indigenous Australians, and yet, ironically, Māori have a treaty. You wouldn't find dolls, (you may still find the odd tea towel) but hopefully that's in a op shop rather than in the airport tourist shops. Whereas in New Zealand there are so many different tacky tiki representations of what Māori, especially Māori women are. I had a collection of them because I kind of love them too and I found it curious that the male dolls were darker skinned than the female dolls. I just thought, here we go again; paler is portrayed as being more attractive; it is another stupid coloniser myth. This is what I have highlighted in my work, rather than using pacific motifs (especially in my Pacific Idols series). In more recent work, I've been weaving photos together. In this work I am actually using traditional kete patterns but I've been very cautious about which patterns I use and how I use them. I have researched these patterns and attempted to be respectful to any source material.

Torika: And it comes back to intention doesn't it? Léuli, your feeling is a bit different?

Léuli: Yeah, I guess for somebody who grew up in rural New South Wales - Bundjalung country - and rural Queensland and the islands for a little bit of time, I've never been very connected to large diasporic communities other than in the last few years living in Melbourne. Islanders or Persians have always been a day trip or a weekend trip away and then go back where we live and so the experience of art making and researching identity and cultural memory is one of connecting to some kind of greater sense of belonging and so for me I'm trying to connect with something that is both my own personal and, but also a pre-Cook Pacific motif repertoire. So I purposefully won't try to incorporate things that have come through commercialised lens through popular

culture because I am interested in something that is pre-Christian, that is pre-colonial, pre-Cook, pre-Magellan.

MC: And Jacob, in your design work and your artwork?

Jacob: Can I just talk about the idea of, specifically to tiki art? I think the way I look upon it is that it has absolutely no relevance to me. I think that's why I laugh at it and I expose that idea that it is a mash-up of different cultures. Tiki art is a mash up of Mexican art, Filipino art and anything that seemed exotic to the West at the time. That's the way I see it and I think that's the way I portray my art, you know, sort of laughing at the idea that this could be me, and I think I'm more offended if people expect that of me rather than just enjoy the aesthetic of it.

Torika: Kirsten what was the response to the Pacific Idols series?

Kirsten: That show was shown both in Aotearoa and in Melbourne so I kind of had slightly different responses. In Melbourne, and it was few years ago, (2007), and it was shown in a Red Gallery in North Fitzroy - a bit lefty but still pretty white as far as suburbs go. People didn't know whether to laugh at it or not. People were nervous. Which I found strange, because it was okay for people to find the images I'd made amusing, because that was the point, it was supposed to be a playful look at some of the representations especially of Maori people in the tourist industry. In Aotearoa it was different, I was very nervous about showing there and I was in a show with two other Waikato Maori artists, so I was really, really nervous of whether I would be too white or I had that nervousness of not being brown enough maybe to be included in a show like that, and then nervous that, was I allowed to even make this sort of stuff? What was interesting, I was really honoured to meet the late Jim Vivieaere who was a mentor for me, sadly he passed a couple of years ago, but he looked at it, wanted to meet me, loved the work and just sort of turned around and said, 'girl it's a brown thing'. You know, we find it funny. So there was a sense of acceptance that was fantastic and I did have someone from the community sing Haere Mai at me, which almost reduced me to tears at the opening but yeah, in general in New Zealand the reaction was a lot more open.

Torika: How important is that context for viewing and talking and thinking about your work critically? I've talked to a lot of artists over the years who have sort of lamented the fact that when they went through art school, it just fell silent when they showed their work because no one had the vocabulary or didn't feel that they could engage with the work in any kind of critical way. What's your experience with that?

Jacob: I went through design school in the late 1980s so the only points of reference that I had were people like Fatu Feu'u and Jim. There was no way to articulate that in design school, that these were coming from my culture and I think it's changed a lot now because there's a lot more artists and I think New Zealand has grown as well and I'm not sure what it's like today, but back then it was incredibly hard to work the way I was. I was doing that sort of work back in the 1980s when nobody got it, you know, it's very hard to explain that sort of thing.

Maryann: I didn't go to art school, I'm mainly self-taught, but in terms of the community responding to my work as an artist, I went to Sāmoa last year for my grandmothers 80th birthday and I remember saying to my aunties, 'can you teach me how to weave?' I was so excited and they were like, 'oh, you just do this...' and I was, 'can you slow it down?' and I remember explaining to them this is what I do back home in Melbourne, 'this is my work, I'm an artist, I weave,' and their response was really interesting because that's what they do every day but as a younger islander woman living abroad, to be really fascinated with this cultural stuff, wanting to keep telling the stories, wanting to keep sharing the techniques, their response was like 'oh, okay, whatever makes you happy.' So it's interesting getting the different responses. It's a little bit of confusion, it's kind of laughing but it's also happy that it makes me happy.

Torika: And my experience is that it makes our families really proud, and there's this beautiful exchange that happens. Connecting with community and connecting communities is such an important element of your process Maryann. Can you tell us a bit about your head, heart and hands methodology and the importance of daily practice?

Maryann: When I talk about a head, heart and hand process, that's what weaving is for me, it just feels really natural. I don't have to think about anybody else or what anyone else is doing, it's very much about me kind of getting into the zone and doing what feels natural for me. I describe weaving as my language and to connect. I can't speak Sāmoan fluently, so this is my way to practice being a Sāmoan, and for me practice and processes are very much aligned.

You know, and my process is really slow, when I'm feeling it, and I'm a mother of three children, so it's when I've got time to do it. My materials are all over the place in my studio and my dining room table. So weaving when I can, weaving from my heart and my head, it sounds kind of airy fairy, but it makes sense to me, and people that see my work, that come and weave with me, they get it, it's therapeutic, it's healing. Often we'll have people just crying because there's something about using your hands, using your mind, returning home and recalling memories. That stuff means something, and I think

in Melbourne where there's lots of different craft communities, they get that as well, so its really nice to build and connect with all kinds of different communities.

When I made my first breast plate for an exhibition at Craft Victoria in 2009, that piece was called 'Please can I Weave with You' and I gave it a Sāmoan title, and I remember calling my mum and asking her to translate it for me and its called 'Fa'amolemole pe mafai ona tatou lalaga fa'atasi', and for the me the visual that I get when I think of that is two people coming together on a mat wherever, in park, on the beach, in the city, and really opening themselves. Almost making themselves vulnerable to say 'look this is what I know, I'm willing to teach you if you can teach me something in return.' And what I'm learning through weaving is that this whole idea of building community, I'm understanding that community is not just people that we like, its not just brown skins, it's all kinds. It's the people that will rip off our designs and our motifs, it's the wealthy, it's the privileged, but it's also those that we build relationships with. I understand more about stuff like tiki culture, I understand more about Māori culture, because of the relationships that I build with people and I am more accepting of things that I would kind of normally go 'that's just weird.' I'm more open to embracing it because of the relationship that I built with someone. So, how do we respond to people who are outside of our context taking patterns that are hot and kind of 'native-looking' and 'tribal-looking' and using them. I used to be really mad about that, but now I'm not because I think of people like Lisa Hilli, like Kirsten, like Jacob, like Léuli and like you, who understand the sacredness of this, and that's what it is for me, I actually pity them because like 'you don't understand the sacredness of this – that's okay, you go do your thing, we're going keep creating these sacred spaces, we're going keep imparting knowledge, we're going keep you know, pushing boundaries, and laughing and having a big feed, because, that's what's important to us, and building relationships.

Torika: How do you deal with that issue of non-Pacific Islanders coming in and perhaps turning what they have learned into a commercial activity? That happens doesn't it? So how does the Pacific Women's Weaving Circle deal with that or what's your thinking around that?

Maryann: That's a hard one. I think for us at the Weaving Circle, and this is something that Lisa and I talk about often and will keep trying to work through, because we don't know the answers. We can only do what feels right for us. Its important to have people acknowledged, that we've learnt this skill, this craft, in the Weaving Circle, and I think for me, its passing it on, that's what's important as well.

We don't own these weaves, that was a weave that I learnt growing up in Auckland and I hadn't done it for 20 years, but when I sat down with an aunty, from the Elcho Island she

said to me 'you were meant to weave Maryann' and that came back to me and that's what inspired my first breast plate, so I try find out the name of it and where I learnt it. It's the mekameka weave, and this is a weave that's very special to me and that I have gone on to manipulate and experiment with to make the white stars that I've made for Meleponi Pasifika, so I think its just different for all of us I think, just acknowledging where you learnt it and giving back.

Torika: So there is always a lot of discussion within the Pacific arts community about the representation of contemporary Pacific artists in our major art institutions. I think there's sort of a sense that the curatorial focus is moving sort of further towards Asia and away from the Pacific and always one of the Asia-Pacific category. Do you think that as a community we place too much emphasis on these larger institutions and should we be looking for them to validate our work? These are questions about margin and centre.

Kirsten: I think big institutions have got their own agenda and they always will because they've got their own funding bodies and all sorts of stuff so in terms of how as an artist trying to get validation from a big institution, even if I get validation, there is a chance it could be temporary because my art work may fall out of fashion, so I think that's the reality of being an artist. You have peaks and troughs in any career, especially the arts so I think looking to an institution for validation, well it's not necessarily the place for it. I think its great that we're getting represented. The fact that the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV) has bought Maryann's work, I think it was a coup for all Pacific artists that NGV actually purchased your work. It was great for the community in a way that institutions were actually taking notice, so its nice that they take notice, I don't think they can validate us necessarily though.

Léuli: Some institutions would like to think that they are perhaps trendsetting and they are usually catching up. I think something culturally-based arts practice and people who practice in the arts from across the ocean, we don't necessarily have one way, one source, one centre you know. There are multiple centres. There's this part of my family, there's this person who is significant, there's this person doing that, and whole families who are groups of people so its not necessarily a centre and periphery set up, it's a bit more diverse and a bit more plural than that. I think especially because a lot of these institutions, not so long ago, were classing Pacific artists and African artists and Asian artists in the folklore and anthropological ethnographic section of museums and only in the last 40-50 years have we gained human status. You know, that's all part of cultural memory, we remember all this kind of stuff. Blackbirding, all of these kind of really heavy, historical tangents and parts of what makes these institutions what they are through privilege, through colonisation. What I'm trying to say is that they are not entirely morally un-corrupt and it's not like when we are making work that we necessarily have to go beyond the community. If my grandma sees

my work and says that its good, then I'm excited, and sit down and have a cup of tea with her, and that's really important to me because she gave life to my mother and she gave life to me and that's artistic genealogy. But an institution has lots of stakeholders and lots of historical elements that are part of it and trends go very quickly.

Torika: So where do smaller galleries like Fresh Gallery Otara and Black Dot here in Melbourne, and community art spaces, where do they fit within this story?

Jacob: In the beginning we set up to just get contemporary art, contemporary Pacific arts and contemporary Indigenous arts noticed. I think we all work in that grey area where institutions don't want to touch or they are too afraid to approach. We're not kitsch and we're not ethnographic so I think we also need to look at ourselves as a culture or community to find our own people to talk about our artwork because nobody else is going to do it. I think that is really important. That's why we set up the gallery as well to try and hunt out people to talk about our artwork and there's that idea that if you talk enough about something somebody else is going to join you in the conversation no matter what, and I think that's the way we approached it.

Torika: Maryann have you found that to be a tension with your work, whether its described as craft or contemporary work and where it fits?

Maryann: I do often think about the tension of craft and art because when I talk with the crafters – 'oh no no no no, weaving is a craft, its not art' and vice-versa. I find that really interesting, I don't know if it's a Pasifika trait or just not being kind of bound. I think we want the freedom to explore and express and I think its nice that people in the craft and art and museum and local gallery kind of context can engage with it and just say oh, this is what I see that's what I hope my work can activate and inspire.

Torika: Do you think that we look to a lot of New Zealand institutions as well, to see what the contemporary Pacific art trends are? I remember hearing an article on the radio about the Unnerved exhibition and the journalist asked if artists from New Zealand look to Australia. I tend to think it's the other way, do you have any thoughts about that?

Jacob: I think New Zealand's done a lot of the groundwork in the last 20-30 years. I think its easier for institutions over here to go over there and start shopping because these are successful artists that have been supported and they've got the community base support networks, which is what we've been looking for here really. That's why it's so easy to go and grab artists and put them in shows over here rather than looking right under their noses. You hear stories about big galleries with money wanting to purchase some Pacific art and

the first place they'll go to is New Zealand.

Kirsten: I think it makes sense. Some of the ground work your talking about was done by people like Jim Vivieaere, you know, with Bottled Ocean, when that show opened, and that was the early 1990s, it brought a whole lot of new artists to the fore and in the end that's almost 20 years ago. So I think Australia is definitely behind but I think some of that has to do with – New Zealand has such a different history to Australia and such a different history with its Indigenous people. I think on top of that too, I think part of it's a numbers game. Auckland is the biggest Polynesian city in the world, you're talking about 60% Polynesian or Māori population. It's a brown city, you know, that is different; Australia doesn't have a city like that unfortunately. It has towns like that, but not a big city.

Léuli: I think it's demographics but it's culture as well. Within the Aotearoa multicultural context there's strong Pacific, strong Māori, strong Pākehā and maybe Asian and South Asian influences. In Australia add fifteen other influences. You know, when you travel overseas you realise how Asian influenced the cuisine is in Australia because you're really looking for some bok choy in Paris or something and you just can't find it, or whatever it may be. But then that all has an influence on us as well and it can never be the same because of numbers because of that experience here on Aboriginal country with lots of other influences, lots of other people. Different opportunities – different challenges, but different opportunities.

Maryann: I think it can be frustrating sometimes to look across the Tasman and go 'look they've got it so much more together' and it's like what Kirsten and Jacob said, but I think it's also exciting that we get to create new ways of expressing what it means to be from Oceania, like language, art, all of it, its there for us in our hands to weave some new magic.

Jacob: And just tell our Australian stories as well.

Kirsten: One of the downsides of the New Zealand art scene, as much as I think its fantastic, is I that it does seem heavily Polynesian focussed rather than looking across the Pacific. There seems to be a slight bias towards that, that's just my impression.

Jacob: New Zealand has so much influence. I guess a lot of the focus for support is on Polynesian countries like Sāmoa, Tonga, Rarotonga.

Léuli: I guess there's an opportunity for Australia who has a large and very strong connection to Papua New Guinea, West Papua, Vanuatu, Kanaky New Caledonia. Our closest neighbours.

Torika: I want to talk a little bit now about curating Pacific art and Jacob and Léuli, you've both curated Pacific themed shows. Can you tell us a little bit about your curatorial methodology, and your thoughts on current approaches to curating Pacific art. Is it enough for curators to curate based on geographic location?

Léuli: No.

Jacob: Yeah I think totally.

Audience member 1: I was the Performing Arts manager at the Māori arts centre in Auckland and my question for you guys is what is the relevance of Pacific art to Australia do you think?

Léuli: I would answer with another question on mapping and where Australia positions itself. Postcolonial theories on the table in Australia and that kind of thinking of where we are going as a nation, are we even a nation? Or are we going to acknowledge our own history and the ongoing connections with lots of neighbours and the traditions that are here. So I would say Australia is a Pacific nation. It is an Asian nation. It is an Indian Ocean nation. But it doesn't want to be. Not politically and not for the majority of the population. It's just frustrating I guess when you're trying to work to strengthen the connections that seem so obvious to you.

Audience comment: I come from Brisbane and you can walk and drive through suburbs where you see only Polynesians and I can live in Polynesian culture and think 'oh my god, which country am I in?' and I have to actually make a conscious effort to step out of Melanesia/Polynesia to go back into my Australian. In Queensland the new push for Pacific Islanders migrating to Queensland came with the 1988 World Expo which opened up Queensland to the Pacific. So for example, as a curator, I am doing a Pacific exhibition as an independent curator. I'm doing a Pasifika exhibition from Queensland because of the dominance of Pacific and Māori cultures there.

Léuli: I guess for that you're responding to your lived experience of a community or communities that are around you as well as the very strong historical context.

Audience comment: This exhibition is an Australia-wide Pasifika exhibition. It looks at what's in selections, what's in community and what you guys are doing. It looks at those interconnections between those three different groups and how that transforms your cultural expression in the diaspora.

Audience question: Why does it have to be between different groups? That's my issue. There's always reference to Polynesian, Micronesian, Melanesian. I don't see that separation in Australia.

Audience comment: I'm not talking about that. I'm talking about museums, community and artists. The exhibition is being supported by the youth of Australia. It's about what we have historically, what we have in our communities and what our artists are doing. It's not about Polynesia/Melanesia. It's about Pasifika.

Audience comment: Okay, I see the exhibition as encompassing all of Pasifika, all of Oceania planted here in Australia. I don't see the divisions that anthropologists have just come up with to label us. I think that what's happening here in Melbourne right now in terms of all the artists that we have here presenting the exhibition is really people put on display on how we actually all created our own identities, regardless of our divides, geographical divides and I think that's a great thing and that's to be celebrated. I'm wary of the labels in terms of Melanesia, Polynesia.

Audience question: How do you see yourself in the next two years, five years? What do you want to achieve with whatever medium or discipline you're working with. As an artist, who cares about the rest of the people that's evolving around you. But I just want to get a response from all of you guys - what do you want to achieve as a contributor to the art of the Pacific?

Maryann: I guess for me it's just creating more courage to just do your art, make your art, be your art and supporting others to do that. It's not a hobby for a lot of us, this is our full-time work, it's hard work. We're constantly deconstructing stuff and I just hope that we feel empowered to just keep doing it, we're not always going to get each others art and craft, that's okay, but I hope that we feel strong enough to just do it, because that for me is living culture.

Jacob: I guess for me it's manifold. I think my longterm goal for my artwork is just to become part of the Australian fabric. I think we're of the region and I think we should be included in a lot of that and I think in the gallery, I would like to think I could find that one Pacific Islander kid who doesn't have to take the office job and sees this as a career path and that it's a viable career path for our communities.

Kirsten: For me, probably in the next couple of years hopefully I'll have done by Masters thesis. I think similarly to what Maryann said in terms of a continued practice. And I love the fact that with art, there's that word art-practice, your always doing it, your always mak-

ing and I think that's incredibly important to do. At the moment I find that when I'm studying in my institution, it is in art school anyway in Melbourne, I think its very heavily white middle-class. You need some audacity to say yes, I'm an artist and I'm going to make art you need that kind of confidence can I think be harder at times for Pacific communities to have, that individual self-confidence. So hopefully I'd like to see that more represented in art schools. For me it's important to, as much as I find it difficult being the only brown face in a largely white institution even if the institution I am with is looking out towards Asia and doing things like that. I still think that its important that Pacific people are in still these art institutions and representing, just by being there, so I'd like to continue that, I also teach so, I think its important too to be doing that.

Audience question: How important is the concept of being able to inspire youth?

Kirsten: I would love to be able to inspire, I don't ever assume that I do. I just do what makes sense to me. For me making art is a way of understanding the world, but also retaliating against it at times so if that does happen to inspire, that's fantastic.

Léuli: I'd like to research the historical Sāmoan collections in museums around Australia and overseas and to explore what our old spiritual objects were and also the older styles of siapo making and carving and tell older and contemporary stories from my community in Sāmoa and also here through my work. I guess it kind of links into what you asked about youth. A lot of us have had discussions over the last few years about the art scene for Islanders in New Zealand, Aotearoa, in Hawai'i, in North America, and how to go about creating an ecology where it's conducive for an Islander who is 16 in high school to say yeah I'm going to go through to year 12, I'm going to art school, I'm going to keep drawing, I'm going to keep painting, and there will be some kind of opportunities out there. I'll have to fight like everybody else, but there'll be something, and we don't know but we're trying to create that.

Audience comment: I guess my point is that I been to quite a few symposiums all around the other side of the world there, people think if they exhibit there, they've made it, that's not true to be quite honest. I'm curious because the discussion is the same that I'm hearing that's actually going around everywhere, and I know New Zealand is probably the best example of the growth of Pacific art, but to be quite honest, there's not true because Pacific art evolves so every artist has different perceptions of what they are trying to convey through their art. But for the last 20 years I've been following the art movement and I'm more interested in what the individual is doing because in Pacific art an individual comes from family, your legacy, your ancestors, and when you look we all have something in common, all of a sudden we become brothers and sisters, you know we're all Sāmoans, we're

all Tongans, we're all Pacific Islanders. But I notice that the discussions are still the same and I'm waiting for that one person that's going to sort of marry everything together and that's going to bring some sort of power. Just kind of push the boundaries.

Léuli: Somebody like an Ai Weiwei from the islands? Somebody with a really high profile?

Audience member 4: No, not really. I mean I'm the biggest tutu out of this whole group. I make all sorts of things that inspires me as an individual but not necessarily driven because of commercial demand or whatever is out there. It feels right what you are saying, it feels good and not only that but inspires people. If you are doing something and it inspires people to seek, to research their true identity, I think your job is done. I was so interested in what Melbourne is like in the Pacific community. I'm starting to think that it's the same sort of discussions. I attend a lot of Pacific Arts Association conferences and I have been a guest speaker there and I was supposed to chair the discussions and its just the same old story to be honest and I don't want to be blunt...

Audience question: Which story exactly?

Audience comment: I think the diaspora experience of Pacific people in New Zealand is just the same experience as you have in Melbourne but its...

Léuli: It's not the same experience.

Audience comment: I disagree.

Audience comment: What I am saying is that the experience that we're having in Melbourne is probably similar to the experience that we had in New Zealand 20, 30, 40 years ago because no one recognised us then, and I think it all comes down to what, and that's why I asked what do you guys want to achieve, your direction, your individualism is very important because you are artists from unique backgrounds.

Audience comment: I'm from Darwin. I run a dance company in Darwin. I understand what you're saying about what's happening here. It's kind of like the beginning of a journey New Zealand started you know, how ever long ago. My question is, being isolated in Darwin the Pacific community is ridiculously small and the struggles that you deal with in the contemporary Pacific arts fest, it'd be really nice to hear a story from each of you, or whoever wants to share a story that epitomises one of the struggles that you've come up against working as a Pacific artist in Australia, like in your environment here.

Audience comment: Can I just say too that our stories that come from here are very different from the stories that come from New Zealand. We've got our own stories, we have different experiences, we don't always have the same opportunity, or funding opportunities.

Audience comment: I would say its exactly like New Zealand used to be when there was no funding but now people in government are able to speak on our behalf.

Léuli: It can never be that in Australia, because the position of Pacific Islanders and Asian artists is not privileged over all other migrants to Australia.

Audience comment: I'm sorry, but arts funding bodies have priority. In Queensland you are the fastest growing community so there is, Australia-wide and in certain states, there is a priority for Pacific Islanders.

Jacob: Yes, it would be different state to state.

Kirsten: I think Melbourne's a different example and I just thought of a kind of story, and again, I think this shows some of the difference from Australia to New Zealand. So when I was doing my undergraduate at art school, I had some Māori patterns coming into my artwork and a senior, a Head of School at the time, so this is a big Melbourne institution, asked me why I was using Celtic designs. Now, I'm not sure that would happen in New Zealand, I'm pretty sure it wouldn't. But the only connection that vaguely looked curved or rounded was Celtic, so I think that's the difference between, and that story is from under 5 years ago.

Léuli: From my exhibition in December, half of my friends asked me what Middle Eastern influence I had in my work, which was entirely about an ancestral figure from my Sāmoan village, so its kind of like 'you just don't get it do you?'

Jacob: Mine isn't a Pacific experience but an Indigenous experience but it ties into the same sort of thing that Janet Lilo was talking about, that at the gallery we are trying to push the contemporary aspect of our artists and we still get people coming in looking for dot paintings in Victoria, and I think that says a lot as well if you can't even communicate the Indigenous language here of contemporary art - the struggle that we (as Pacific artists) have to go through.

Maryann: One thing that I learnt, and that's from Aunty Sana Balai who is a curator at the National Gallery of Victoria, I heard her speak once about the art that was in the Pacific Gallery of NGV, and she said that all art was contemporary, so the objects that were made way back then, at that time it was made, it was contemporary. So I understand the feelings

of feeling isolated and that kind of external kind of voice saying that's not traditional enough, or that's not contemporary enough. You just got to push that aside and find your community, build your community, build your relationships. You know, you say. You have the authority to say that's contemporary.

Léuli: I just wanted to say through that - talking about authenticity and validation and affirmation of your status as Islander, as an artist. I was asked maybe a year ago, who gave me permission to use the motifs or to use language in my work. I said well, I'm not Aboriginal artist, I'm not tied into those moieties and those sets of customary structures, I'm tied into my own, but I'm pretty sure my mother gave birth to me and my grandmother gave birth to her and in the way that we run, as long as I do it and they wouldn't get offended, that's my permission. Obviously I'm not going to do something too crazy.

Audience comment: You talked a bit about the New Zealand movement and the diaspora movements, but there's now hubs of art practice in the Pacific, with funding, the Tjibaou Cultural Centre in New Caledonia, the Oceania Centre for Arts and Culture in Suva, a lot of work in Goroka and so on. How does that fit into these discussions? Because you have referenced, is Melbourne like Auckland? But is Melbourne like Suva? Because the same debate is happening about struggling artists versus living art. People in the North of New Caledonia regard the Tjibaou Cultural Centre as a French imperialist imposition, because they live their culture, they don't put it in a gallery. So the same debates are happening in the Pacific and I wonder how much of the discussion here is influenced by things that are happening in the Islands.

Léuli: I guess that comes down to a personal set of influences. I'm a Francophone, the French-speaking Pacific is part of my cultural radar and knowing what's happening in Nouméa, the north of Kanaky and Tahiti whichever is important and I am aware of what's happening but others will be switched into what's happening in the Philippines or Hawai'i or South Africa, so I think it's a personal case.

Audience comment: What's happening in West Papua, you can be a tapa artist who has earned the right to paint and be called an artist in a traditional setting. We're talking about a cross culture between an Indigenous, more traditional setting, and a western setting and the debate comes because of the because of Westernisation.

Kirsten: I think that it's even more complicated than that because the way that it was presented was like you've got binary exchange, you've got the dominant culture and then the Pacific diaspora. I think it's different in Australia, in that we are another group. We are a diaspora, there's also an Indigenous population here, so in terms of even going back to Nic's

question, it's hard to comment on those things because there is always the Australian/Pacific artist title. I was New Zealand raised but I clearly have an Australian accent, I have been here since I was 8 years old, however, I am Māori, I am Australian, I'm that simultaneously as well as being here, so it's more complicated, I think there are several things operating.

Léuli: I think perhaps the example of Suva and the Oceania Centre for the Arts where there are artists who come from around the region and there are these amazing moments where something that's workable will be created over that shot of kava or whatever it may be. The comparable sites across the ocean aren't that many, where there are people meeting from all over that might be Honolulu, it might be Nouméa it might be Auckland, it might be Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane, Port Moresby, lots of different cultural groups kinds of very different interpretations of history.

Audience comment: I just want to touch back on, when you spoke about art school institutions, as an artist not being able to have any feedback about your work. I think in terms of being an artist based in Australia and of Pacific heritage, where we actually have to straddle our cultural history or western art history and I think we are basically jammed into that western art history context. It's incredibly hard for institutions who have no reference in terms of our work, in terms of our ancestral history, in terms of our cultural heritage, so we struggle by going to those institutions, we struggle by validating our practices, people don't know how to comment on it because they have no idea. I have found that in our dialogues, our libraries, our research, our community, our family and that's something that I apply to my arts practice. Something to think about and I hope you guys think about – how do we solve that problem for the next generation because we're the ones pioneering it now.

Léuli: A whole bunch of us have been talking about a few books. We may need to write an introduction to Australian Pacific art or whatever in the last few hundred years. It's positioning some of this knowledge that is in all of us and that we have gained through our life in an accessible western context and that might need to take form of an e-book or something like that.

Kirsten: I think also being in the institutions, I think it's really important that we're there.

Torika: I agree. I'm a lecturer at Deakin University and just inherited a unit where I had to write some new essay questions, I put a question in there about Shigeyuki Kihara and another one about Brook Andrew. I think it's things like that where you raise awareness you make it a part of the vocabulary.

Jacob: Yep. It is one of those things we can't look at externally, we have to look ourselves

to do that sort of thing first. I think this symposium sort of starts it, if it starts happening in all the other states as well, this is good.

Torika: I think back to that workshop that we went to at Wollongong University a few years ago, and out of that came that issue of Art Monthly Australia, because there was an acknowledgement that there needs to be more writing about Pacific art and that's the way to kind of fill those blind spots that occur.

Audience comment: And more writing by Pacific artists. We're talking about fragmented identity, and I would like to raise a question of fragmented representation. I have been interested in Pacific contemporary culture for quite some time and I've been here for some time, I've lived in Australia for 28 years and all that time in Melbourne I've noticed that there are pockets of things. I remember speaking with Grace Vanilau about the Brown Roots Collective which was emerging at the time and starting to gain visibility and raise the profile of the Pacific community and Pacific creativity. I wonder whether the Big Island Collective is going to federate all these energies and keep going, please!

Léuli: I think there cannot be a messianic answer. We are very diverse, just as every part of humanity is very diverse. It's a human community so there's a lot of diversity and a lot of different visions of what should happen, but I think we're all pretty committed to sort of doing a lot.

Audience comment: I would just like to raise a question, whether you guys might possibly organise a international touring exhibition which starting off in Melbourne and touring overseas, so it would be quite a lot of ground work trying to contact certain institutions and art galleries in the U.S, Canada, and Europe and then trying to put together the first Pacific art works, which could be from Melbourne but also draw from other institutions and in that way you are independent and still have your individual art works and promoting them in your own way, so its very much in your own hands. The only groundwork would be contacting the institutions or the main cultural institutions overseas, and then just put the proposal to them and see what the response is. It was interesting I was talking to people when I was there and they were not interested in contemporary art works, only pre-European. The same response I heard again and again and again, not only from but also institutions and experts from Pacific culture.

Maryann: I agree, I mean this is a taster of what artists from Oceania can do here in Melbourne. So there's lots of excitement, there's lots of possibilities. I also hope that people don't take for granted that this stuff just happens, there's a lot of people that are actually working really hard, apart from their own normal practice and families to create spaces

like this where people can speak. I think people forget how hard it is for people to just say what's on their mind and not feel judged and be able to say like how you treat me in this institution is unacceptable and I also don't think it should be the responsibility of the Big Island Collective. I hope that this can show that it is possible for people to work together and that the possibilities are amazing. I love that we are wrestling with language, we want to name ourselves, that's a huge thing that I think we need to celebrate, for us to say look 'actually I'm not happy with that word' actually not everybody in West Papua does stuff like tapa, it's called something else, and for us to correct people, that's huge and I hope that we can continue doing that.

Audience question: Do you think that it's difficult to? Because this is all visual art, because I don't see much performance arts.

Audience comment: I'm from Sydney. I'm a performing artist, I'd just like to say I think that's a really important point that you make Maryann, because in my experience in Sydney we had the Contemporary Arts Festival, Pacific Wave which ran for ten years, which had stakeholders – museums, Sydney Opera House, you name it, and the difficult thing is when they no longer can support the amazing work that the artists are doing and the relationships that they are starting to find as Australian artists. So I think it's a really important point that you remember that because I think that it's really great that you bring it up today and that you as a collective remember that because sometimes it gets really difficult to pass up those great opportunities but then at the end of the day, you are they guys that are left there doing the work and holding up the community and funding it from your pocket, and that's when communities start to really become stretched and then become dysfunctional if they already aren't dysfunctional as a minority community. So I just want to highlight that. Also I want to say the question that you asked the panel I would like to answer as well. I think I want to answer it because I question whether we need to be called Pacific Arts, I actually don't any more. I am an artist, or I call myself punake which is composed of poetry and movement in my own language, which I feel fits all the different versions of me and my practice better than anything in English, so I prefer that. In response to the question asked, what do you think you will be doing in two to five years, I think for me I would say that this is what I am on the planet to do so the most interesting place in my practice is the intersection of the culture that I have inherited, and the one that I live and that space right there in the middle - high risk area. This word 'traditional', why use that? It just doesn't make any sense, so for me that's what I make now, that's what I will be doing in two to five years, because I feel it's a reflection back to the people the work is relevant to, including my own community, where I feel that we are our own enemies because we perpetuate some of the worst stereotypes and the arts gives us a freedom for a moment to do that, reflect back to our own communities, who we might want to be, who we are now, who we

don't want to be, and those that look at us, what they might think of us, and whether that's relevant for us or not.

Audience comment: I think what you touched on, is bringing into my mind an image that Jim Vivieaere always said, that 'Pacific art is like running a three-legged race that's a novelty as well as a hindrance.' I think what we're all striving for is connection, and that's what we're all here to do, in a living, breathing culture and just trying to understand each other. And I just love it.

Audience comment: I was just struck by a lot of labels and contemporary and Pacific, and really what excites me most is the artists' individual discoveries perhaps of their own histories, their own backgrounds, because we are all living in a world which we haven't chosen. We are all recipients of different things that we have to deal with. But I find it exciting that these artists in front of me now – they're on a journey to discover their own roots and perhaps find different ways of seeing the world, that Western histories and Western culture and Western philosophical traditions have ignored through colonialism of course and that's only one way of seeing the world and I'm really interested in hearing all the voices from around the world and from all different cultures and how they can see the world and how they compare the time the place, the changes, rather than just absorbing what we've been fed by mass media.

Audience comment: I have a socially engaged practice aka community cultural development, whatever you want to call it, participatory arts. Maryann and I do a lot of art work with young people, some from South Pacific Island communities but also from Pan African communities and Asian communities and so many of those young people whose talent is just off the hook, in terms of their creativity and ability but they are often very stuck in that dangerous place that is the intersection of their culture of origin and contemporary Australian youth culture, and they are very stuck there and I just think its important that you guys don't underestimate how powerful as role models you are and that they need more of that, they really do, and so I think there needs to be more partnership with young people and people like yourselves, some of whom have negotiated those institutions because certainly the young people that we are working with, they wouldn't even think about it, about that as a possibility. It just wouldn't even be on their radar.

Audience comment: And a small group of them are already doing it but they are not necessarily engaged as a model or to see how to operate in the world and may never have thought of having a career in the arts, but they're an artist.

Léuli: There will be a small compact exhibition that is going to open here at FCAC called

Pasifik Young Artists, which is the very first iteration of hopefully a series of national exhibitions featuring high school and TAFE-aged artists from across Oceania that live and work in Australia across art and design fields. But it's a big dream, and it's a small stepping-stone to get there, but there is stuff in the wind. The initial thinking about an exhibition and it's good that we get to have an exhibition with young developing artists but what is that going to do? Beyond that opening night, where does that go, what are we going to do? So we've paired four of the artists with visual arts professionals to have a mentor introduction to creating new work if they would like to, go to see some exhibitions and all that kind of thing, and all this as pro bono but we need to create that pathway.

Audience comment: I don't think we can put any sort of time line on it - because its woven into our contemporary practices and it is a very big part of where we actually come from and all of our spiritual beliefs come from that background. So what we actually practice now does have traditional content and it defines who we actually are, to each other and to our traditional home but here, I could definitely not put a timeline on tradition. Its like religion, it's an evolving thing, I mean Christianity didn't start out as what it is today and for the religious practice so we can't place timelines on it.

Audience comment: I think there are complications in the world around language in general. I'm struggling in my practice, and I think I'll just talk about myself to avoid any problems that might arise. Because tradition as I understand it is based on the time that you're in now and what happened prior to your existence and that is always a reference point that is going to be relevant to each person but is also very different for each person. The cultures that we might belong to have these varying traditions so when we are talking about tradition, I think we are also enclosing our own ideas of tradition at the same time which is really difficult then to define what traditional practice we are talking about. I think sometimes in my practice when I am trying to work out what that means, and what exactly am I referencing in terms of my cultural heritage, I start to look at the concepts and the practices that go with those concepts because that's the closest thing I think I can find to a tradition that may not be based on somebody else's sense of time or place. So I think it's massive. It's such a massive word to use, because we have assumptions around it. Because I look like I belong to the 21st century, everybody thinks I don't know a damn thing about my culture. I know shitloads, not enough, of course, but people assume that I don't know anything about my heritage and I do, I know what my dance practice is for my culture. I have a very definite differentiation between my contemporary practice. So I find difficulty when I'm making my work to constantly look at traditional, because what's traditional to me is not necessarily traditional to my mother, not traditional to my niece, so I think it's one of those ongoing conversations that's going to happen and I think a lot of that comes down to the languages and the concepts that we are speaking of.

Léuli: I think that we should remember that it's only been two, perhaps sometimes three generations that we are expressing our lived experience in English and French and Spanish, it's not centuries and centuries and centuries of lived experience. Of course it's going to be a circle or a sphere trying to go through. I love that you use the term *punake* to describe exactly what it is rather than finding a completely hyphenated term.

Maryann: I would be okay with the words traditional, contemporary and exotic if that was used on everybody, but they're not. And that's the problem, people don't want to interrogate why they use that kind of language. We're still trying to work it out, but we know that it doesn't feel good. Whether we can articulate it or not, we know that it's wrong. So there's some work to be done and it's going to take years.

Audience comment: In the traditional sense, were there artists as we know them now anyway? Art would serve a ritual purpose or a didactic purpose?

Léuli: It's the prism that you're reading the work through, from the beginning of your sentence – the context is entirely different. And in every individual case it would be different. Ritual is not distinct from didactic, is not distinct from practice, as far as I understand, my people from the Sāmoan archipelago. We don't have a term for 'artist' in Sāmoan, we Sāmoanised an English word – 'artisi' but there are a plethora of terms for somebody who carves, somebody who paints, somebody who weaves and those terms are still used and those terms carry weight, because it's more about the role of the person and what that activity does for the whole community. For that context for the village, the royal lines, for the empire, the ceremonies.

Kirsten: In some ways I think it's a different way of seeing the world. The thing that struck me about trying to figure some of this out, was when I made a work called 'He Was an Alien in the Pacific' I was struggling with this whole notion of authentic and contemporary and Pacific so I started doing research and what I loved, I found the meaning of the word Māori, which means natural, normal, every day, clear, and to me that just instantly set off a first contact scenario – if someone says who are you? I'm normal.

Léuli: Going back to the concept of exhibitions of the Pacific in Australia, we've always been the neighbours, it's not an emerging community. It might be an emerging immigrant community, but these traditions are centuries old just as they are in Western Europe. In regards to the use of the word 'artist', I would use that term for myself in English, but I wouldn't use it in Samoa, because I'm a maker and making is what everybody does so it's contributing to a living culture in that sense. The name of the Pacific before Magellan named it because

it had passive waters, in Māori is Te Moananui ā Kiwa, in Sāmoan it is Le Vā o Motu. Motu means islands and vā is a liminal space, so it's a liminal space between islands because it's a continent of islands.

Addressing the Archive:

Pacific collections in Australian museums and galleries.

Panelists: Aunty Sana Balai, Taloi Havini, Thelma Thomas, Lisa Hilli

Chair: Namila Benson

Thelma Thomas - There's 60,000 objects at the Australian Museum, they actually have these pop up displays, and the museum used to do that at Waitangi Day over the last decade but now we've gone out there and found out where different events are happening like Pacific Community days, Fiji Day, Samoa Day, even going out to football games now that are having Pacific Days, because you know, the community is really growing. So you know, there's the food stalls and we've got these pop up stalls with artefacts and some of the workers from the museum talking about the collections that we have and people are really surprised and we're getting a lot of visits from that and a lot of interest from a lot of young people and the issue of having objects that don't have much knowledge. I think that it's exciting and it is an opportunity for us (this is my artist hat) as a project to go in and research and then we have a responsibility to record that and give that information back to the museums, but also to record it in mediums that our young people can understand, so I see it as a great opportunity.

Aunty Sana Balai: If I could just add on to the provenance and identifying – it's fair to say the time is changing. For example in the Australian Museum in Sydney they already have the community involved in identifying cultural material. It's a slow process and again it comes down to finance.

Namila Benson: What is the process if you are not necessarily an artist, but would like to access a collection?

Aunty Sana: I cannot speak for the others and but I can speak for the institution I work with. What happens is, when someone sends me an email or rings up to say they would like to view a certain object. What then happens is I respond to say, 'give me the specifics of what you need and why you need to do that,' and once we establish what it is they are after, I then go through the copyright department, and we have to screen so we know that whoever is coming is not going to misuse or abuse the guidelines after they've come and viewed the work.

What I'm trying to establish with my department is to have the first priority given to the community. The difference between museums and galleries is, museums are for study and scientific research purposes, whereas the galleries are more for exhibiting artworks, working with contemporary art and art made now.

Namila: You mentioned contemporary art, and I want to talk about institutional displays of archived Pacific material in Australian museums. Is there a difference between how contemporary art is presented or represented versus archived material?

Aunty Sana: I have an issue with the word 'contemporary', for the reason that one of the meanings of contemporary is 'art made now by living artists'. And if you look at the classic example of Rosanna Raymond's work and a Vanuatu mask. They were both made in 1995; both incorporated the Western medium however one artist chose to use the modern or the Western form of artmaking - an outfit sewn from tapa cloth and denim, whereas the Vanuatu work is made the old cultural, traditional way of weaving. The interesting thing is when you ask someone to identify them, they say, Rosanna's outfit is contemporary whereas the Vanuatu one isn't. The issue I have here is - if both were made in the same year and if both incorporate Western mediums or paint, why should one be regarded as contemporary and not the other? We should be in a situation where we should celebrate that in this 21st Century we still have a culture that is still alive and people are still practising it rather than putting them in a category where they belong to the past or the primitive.

Namila: I guess as artists, being categorised as 'contemporary' or 'traditional' can mean being bound by those terms. Mainly because of the historical context of how our people are referred to; as doing "ancient" or "traditional" crafts?

Lisa Hilli: I personally think it's materials, and you can't have the contemporary without the traditional. I draw on traditional practices within my art, but its in a contemporary context.

If you walk into that exhibition tonight you'll walk into a video installation with tin foil banana trees. That's a perfect example of it. That's something that came out of a traditional cooking practice that my mother has done, and my grandmothers have done and my ancestors have done. So I'm just transcribing that knowledge in a different medium, in a completely different format that is current today and that's contemporary. So for me it is materials.

Taloi Havini: I completely agree with Lisa. I was just thinking that if you walk across into the *Meleponi Pasifika* exhibition, you will see that I've made an installation of ceramic coconuts and shell money - all out of porcelain. So I think that no matter what background you come from, artists are always informed by history. We are informed in a different way. Like our ancestors before us and carried down through our lineage, it is done in a unique way. I'm thinking in terms of the 'traditional' and 'contemporary' art labels.

When I first walked into the Australian Museum's North Solomon Island collections I was struck by the clay pots and how they were traditionally manufactured by the artisan potters of Buka. They would make these clay pots and then trade them with other clans for tightly woven soup-baskets. But I didn't know that until years later when I did an Honours thesis about it and was privileged enough to actually go and learn from the last surviving master potter. Being in the field and learning and making this craft with her, the last surviving master potter - I realised that she was making pots that were identical to those I saw in the Australian Museum.

So I think as artists, what we are doing today is not much different from what our ancestors were doing which is making and manufacturing things that have a purpose today. Although we may change and adapt the materials we use - many of us are still informed by home.

Thelma: And I guess I can add to that, as an MC, I always tell the young people it's like when our elders in the village - when they beat the lali drums and they are sending a message, today my DJ will come up and I'll speak about what I've seen around me so I am still continuing that practice that is happening by my ancestors but doing it within today's context which for me is hip-hop.

Namila: I want to talk to you about a project that you're involved with - working archives and young people, as you do. Tell me, what is the most compelling evidence of the success of access to archives for young people?

Thelma: There's one story that comes to mind and I have to shout out my manager Dion Peita, Yvonne, Keren and Logan who are part of the Cultural Collections team at the Australia Museum. We had this young person come in that was at a juvenile justice centre in

Sydney, so before I started he'd come in for visits and it was based on a project that started around 2009 where some juvenile justice workers were bringing in Pacific young people to visit the collection and to encourage them to explore their identity.

This young person came in for about 6 months and he was learning to categorise the pieces and learn more about his cultural heritage. Then we had to go and do a presentation so we got him to co-present, instead of us talking up there, we got him to speak alongside us and run the session. That was one of the most successful outcomes, and I've only been there since September, but this has been one of the more positive ones.

When we do the pop up stalls out in the suburbs he comes out with us during the day and speaks about his experiences as well, and we interviewed him about some of the pieces and he talked about this piece here and started telling his story, and with most of the young people, in the beginning, you can't get a word out of them, but towards the end you could feel him going through this transformation and recalling when he was quite young and a family member had made a piece like this and had given it to him. It's like we witnessed that connection and so for me that was one of the most compelling experiences when working with young people and seeing how effective the collections were and just the care that they develop while they are in there.

In the museum they are giving us time to develop projects, so it doesn't have to be just the one-day we can look at the pieces then go away, we can bring in the artists and let's try and recreate something. This photo was taken about 3 or 4 years ago but one of the young people in this group has now joined the reference group that we have at the museum now so we've got young people from all across Western Sydney some from juvenile justice, some from university, but they are informing the work that we do in our community and giving us ideas. *(referring to images in slideshow)*

An example of when we go out to some of the communities, this is a partnership with university of Western Sydney where they are mobilising Pacific students out in Western Sydney and then encouraging high school students so there is like a couple of hundred students there and about 60 university students all from the Pacific communities. This happened at the Fiji Day 2012, event celebrating independence in Lidcombe - being able to use the tanoa, the kava bowl, in the community by young people, seeing most of them Australian-born young people but they are reconnecting with their culture and being able to hold ceremonies like this. These are some of the stories and some of the positive outcomes that have come out of the project. I think this story tells a thousand words like 'what is this?' and 'can you tell me what this is?' and these boys dress up in full attire, and then going out and dancing and sharing the stories. That's some of the good stuff that's happening up there.

Namila: Lisa, I might get you to tell us a little bit about your current project with the Australian Museum. And what has been the most challenging aspect regarding access to information with it?

Lisa: I initiated a project with the Australian Museum which officially started in September last year but I remember submitting my proposal to Dion in 2011, so its taken that long to finally get in there. It's been a slow process, I'm on island time. I didn't even know there was a Pacific collection 3 years ago, didn't know there were artefacts sitting in the museums, Pacific artefacts and that was only because I had a touring exhibition in 2010 and I met a Bougainvillian woman in Adelaide and she told me about a woman called Taloi and she just gave me her email. I had no idea who this woman was, and I ended up meeting Taloi in Sydney one day and I walked into this incredible space, with all these artefacts sitting there lying dormant. I just wanted to breathe life into all of them. Three hours later I arrived in my area, Eastern New Britain (PNG) and I identify as a Tolai woman, that's my roots, and found a particular breast plate in my culture that has significance to shell money and just stumbled across it and its never left my mind since.

Its an incredible breast plate that I have a fascination and curiosity about so the email went to Dion and three years later I got in there. I'm now being mentored by Yvonne Carrillo and it's been an incredible journey because its so massive. I'm still trying to get a grasp on how to navigate this because museums are huge and the collections are huge and I only knew about this three years ago. So I have access to it and researching these breast plates, I have not much information, I've gone through receipts of the people who actually sold these items to the museum and its all written in old English language, and old English text, so that's just a fatigue itself, and there's very, very little information on them and that's when I have to rely on my community and that's when they come in in terms of helping me solve this mystery of one of probably a million objects that are in there and that's one museum. There are many more museums around the world that I am still yet to try and get some images and do that digital repatriation process which means bringing those items, photographically, back to my community.

The plan is to get back in August so I am so very excited to be finally doing that trip, I feel like a new missionary! Knowledge power information that's actually going back to my community, that's what it means to me, I'm bringing it back to my community. I showed my mum and she doesn't even know what it is; my uncles, my family, they have no idea. So there's issues around cultural protocol - am I even allowed to look at this stuff as a woman? Am I even allowed to remake them? And am I allowed to be touching them? There's so much knowledge that has been lost that I don't even know about, so I could come to a dead-end

very quickly. So it is a risk, but I'm still going to pursue it either way.

Namila: It's really interesting that you bring up the whole cultural protocol thing because Aunty, I often think of you and wonder about your challenges regarding this? You obviously have an understanding (and direct experience) of some of those difficulties being one of a very few brown faces, in what's predominantly white institutions. So, how do you overcome that and navigate through it?

Aunty Sana: It's a very huge challenge for me because a lot of the works we acquire in this present time are works made by men for men's ritual. It is the way it has been and we are hoping to include women's work in our collection as we've done with Maryann's work and the Ömie women's tapa cloth. How we deal with it? As for the Melanesian stuff I feel that 10-15 years down the track it is my responsibility to work with them and to see that these works are properly identified, provenanced and researched. The issue that I battle with is that these are men's stuff. In the place where the artworks come from, I wouldn't even view them; however the thing that makes sense to me, that allows me to work with them is the change of setting. It's no longer where it came from, but it's in an institution. Therefore the person who has access and more right to deal with them is probably me, not that I claim to be the owner of these works, but being one of the very few brown faces in such an institution also gives me the encouragement to work with cultural material and to make sure that when I leave at least these things are recorded. I also have to remember that these works wouldn't be here if, whoever collected these materials didn't bring them, whether you like how they were collected or not, the bottom line is - it's done, the cultural material is here now. My job is to properly research, catalogue and put them into community groups.

I was fortunate enough to go to Vanuatu in 2006 because I knew that the institution I work for was interested in acquiring work from Vanuatu. I could not (in my own mind) allow myself to work with these cultural materials, so I felt going to Vanuatu and actually seeking permission from the people from that area, to work with their cultural material. And even though I am Melanesian and I am part of that cultural group where these works come from, I have the right to work with the cultural material. Going to Vanuatu was an interesting journey because as we went into an area called Nasara where they perform this ritual, the setting was all the tourists, researchers and field workers had a place set up for them to sit down and the other side was for the community. An announcement came out and the chief said 'ok we are about to perform please take your position', and I automatically (because I was on a work field trip) went and sat down with the tourists. I could feel a million and a half eyes staring at me, not that everyone was staring at me, but the ancestors. Something didn't sit right with me, I then excuse myself from that group, bowed my head

and walked behind everyone and went to the other side (community area) just around the corner where the chief's brother met me, and said 'what are you doing there? You're one of us, you're supposed to be here', I explained what I was doing, my role and there on a field trip and to seek permission for what I was doing. The best compliment came from him (the Chief's brother), he said, 'it's so wonderful to see one of us come back and do what others have come to do. Your place is not here, your place is there with researchers and scholars' Each time a new item came on, they would look for me and if I wasn't there they would send someone to get me. And for me, that gave me the permission to handle cultural material reserved for men. I explained that while the work we acquire is done by men from a patriarchal system, I on the other hand belonged to a similar system to the chief there, the difference is - I came from a matriarchal system and my mother was a chief, therefore, I came from the lines of chiefs, and they gave me permission to work with their cultural material.

When it comes to Māori works (there was a lecture I did at the Melbourne Free University a week ago, and it was highlights from the National gallery), I chose an image of a Māori figure and what I said was - I included this one in this group because I wanted to highlight the fact that, one thing I do not do is speak on cultural perspective but from artistic view of the work. The reason is that I have not gained permission to speak on them. Therefore, I will leave the image for you to see, as part of the collection, but will not speak on about it. That is my own way of dealing with these issues.

Namila: Which brings me to my next point still on the subject of cultural protocol. I know this is a huge conversation but I think it's a really important point: We're moving increasingly into a digital world, so what do each of you think needs to happen to the actual objects that are sitting in gallery archives and museum collections?

Aunty Sana: I think the conversation has already started with digital collections because there is talk of putting everything online. We now have to identify where these works come from, but the thing is as you said before, cultural material came from Sepik. Sepik province or Sepik village does not have one tribe, so what we're doing to address copyright issue is -because we cannot trace back the original owners of these works, we are using the Code of Ethics and Protocols of PIMA, which is Pacific Island Museum Association. So, because we don't know the specific tribe and where it originates from (apart from the village and province), (and again, we need money for that and to travel to seek permission), we are now going by the PIMA). We are hoping to have community consultation before this goes online. Much as I would like put the blame on the institutions or point a finger at the institution, we as community members - now that we are aware that things are there in the museums and galleries, we also have to make an attempt to go there and connect

with these things and be part of these things, to connect with them.

Lisa: I think regardless of whether it's digital or public there's always, always, must be community consultation and that's it, full stop. And that's something that I advocate for whenever there's shows that require artefacts. I just think it's completely imperative that the community gets consulted because of those cultural protocols, and maybe now and in the past there has been reluctance to bring them up in the past because there has been uncertainty all around it, or just no knowledge.

Taloi: Yeah, I can give you an example of what went wrong once. It was brought to my family's attention that an art dealer had put on his collector website, what is known as an Upe which is a traditional ceremonial headdress specifically for young men. It's a very sacred headdress that was not intended for public or women's viewing. But because of history and how collections came to be - it's hard not to see them as they are on display in Western museum collections. So a protocol that my family suggested and some museum staff developed in the Australia Museum collections, is that we asked that the sacred materials of our ancestors be covered. So you can make changes like that, out of respect where you cover an area and make collection staff aware when community visit they can be warned. So that's one protocol that institutions should, with community consultation, come up with appropriate ways to store and present our material culture. This should also translate into the digital world. Let me go back to that example, where this collector had put a photo of an Upe on his website and labelled it as a basket. So not only did he get that completely wrong but it's also highly offensive and really inappropriate and disrespectful to people from home. Also, I question the real motivation why institutions want to put collections online if the argument is to give it access to communities. That's a very weak argument because looking at our collections online isn't access, it's a two dimensional representation of the work that's currently sitting in overseas collections.

So access is actually experiencing, coming into contact with our secret and sacred items. There's a whole lot of collections that are very old and were taken because missionaries wanted to stop our traditional beliefs, so in the context of how collections came to be, there's history and if today's museums want to just photograph and put them online without consulting, and going through a process, this could actually be very damaging - it gives more access to non-Indigenous people, artists and designers, who like to appropriate our material culture which does happen a lot. This raises issues not only with copyright, but intellectual cultural property rights as well.

Thelma: I know that at the Australian Museum I think it's about 85% of their collections that are on line and when issues do come up if there are certain images or objects that

can't be looked at I think there is a box that you check and that doesn't go out for public viewing. There's so many pieces there I think it will take at least another decade to get through most of those collections to find out exactly what they are and where they are from, so this is why it is so important for community to come in and maybe look at the images online. That's how I met the collections, by their VMP process that happened a few years ago and now I'm there as part of the whole process and I think that in some respects that it's important for some of us that may not be able to travel. People out in Western Sydney who can't afford to come into the city sometimes to have a look, so we tell them sometimes to go online or send them images and then eventually they'll make it in to the museum collections.

Aunty Sana: I think a couple of years back at the Australian Museum in Sydney there was a symposium to address issue like that. One of the things that needs to be discussed further is that, even though the image might be taken by an institution or the artwork now belongs to the public institution or wherever that institution is situated, the concept (intellectual property) does not belong to one person. The concept belongs to a community (tribe and clan) where the item comes from. This is because, unlike an artist in the Western setting where a copyright or a piece of art is owned by the artist as an individual, in communities it's collective, therefore every living soul that belongs to that community has the right to that concept. That's why we need to have more discussions to work out how we can move forward on this.

Audience member: I agree with you Taloi about the issues online and certainly this idea of putting everything on a computer, there'd be many Pacific Islander communities in the Pacific as opposed to in Western Sydney, who wouldn't even have computer access as we know it and certainly I know when I was at the Pacifica conference in Cook Islands, just trying to send an email, and to send two emails took half an hour that's because it was going by a satellite, so we are assuming that people have access to equipment and resources, that they may not even have at all.

Taloi: Yeah I think your right, in the case of the Cook Islands and we've all been 'home' and the internet we experience is really slow, painfully slow. It's getting better but it's probably suited only to mobile phone use. Also, with social media like Pinterest, Instagram and Facebook owning copyright to photographs, I think there are real dangers to putting people's most secret sacred items up there owned by institutions. Also what if people want copies? The institutions have to be aware, as well then don't they? If you are already under resourced and you already have problems with finance and there's issues with physical access to collections, won't online collections open up greater research requests as well?

I also wanted to ask or make the point that regarding protocols - I don't think that there are actually steering groups or Pacific advisory committees for the Pacific collections here.

Audience comment: I'm from Aotearoa New Zealand. I've been in the museum game for pretty much close to 20 years now, I spent 3 years working with the Auckland Museum, close to 13 years with the Te Papa and more recently with the Australian Museum. I just want to talk about a couple of things to do with control and access. At the Australian Museum we take what I would call a 'risk management' approach in regards to say, digital material that's been made available. I'm sure aunty Sana will agree with me that when we produce these things, these are assets paid for by the state, or whoever your funder is so in the case of the Australian Museum with all the material culture that we have there, assets are created and they are digital assets. So for instance there is material there that is secret and sacred so obviously we will take the best practice approach to ensure that that is not put out in the public domain and that is the case to this day.

In regards to access, I find it really interesting, everyone is talking about community, I still kind of grapple with what community is, because there are so many variables and my understanding of what community is. And community could be NGO through to what Thelma spoke to earlier, the young man who came in for 6 months and did an internship with us, so that to me is quite interesting. In regards to access, we are taking a pro-active approach in the Australian Museum, as you can see, can all you Australia museum staff please stand up, what you are seeing here is the museological practice of the 21st Century, I'm part of it and I hope I'm to proud to be part of it too, so I would say I plan to be here next week if anything. The importance of access to our communities is paramount, in its variables. We've seen artistic expressions occur, we've seen cultural revitalisation occur, we've even seen young people transform their lives. I'm all about the moment. And I'm glad Latai brought it up earlier, in regards to the youth section, because to me its about being in the moment, with the individual or the collective. For example, with the likes of the young man Thelma spoke about, it's about changing the trajectory of his life. Now he may go back to a life of crime, I don't know, but he may actually take a life that will be one which the NSW government will be proud of, they will no longer have to contribute part of the state coffers paying \$300 or \$400 a day to keep behind bars. So this is the changing face of museological practice. At the Australian museum I'm quite impressed at being able to take it by the horns because I don't know of any other institution that is grappling with these new age types of scenarios.

Audience question: I was wondering if you could speak on the anecdotes or ripple effects of the young people that you've been involved with and how that goes back to the community and with family relationships and that kind of thing, what are the changes that happen?

Thelma: One thing I'm really big on is mentoring so when I go and I'm in the position of doing something I make sure there is at least one other young person next to me that I'm mentoring or getting involved. Looking at the last few years, the young people that I have worked with are now youth workers out in different centres doing similar work to what most of us do, you know, planting the seeds there and then training others and that's one of those things that I show them, they continue to do that.

This youth reference group that we've got, there's six young people, we have brainstorming sessions we've had two because it's a newly formed group, but they've planned all these workshops and events for the rest of the year. So they want to continue to be involved with the collections, and rethinking their choices in education, what other things they could do in their lives and travel out of their comfort zones and so you could say we help them in their life choices and to become better citizens. Most of the young people that we work with do come back here and they continue to engage with the museum and other centres in their area and community centres, youth centres or education centres.

Audience comment: I just have one comment that's maybe more to do more with archives than museums. In my experience about openness and access, it is the opposite and there is still a culture of secrecy around certain areas and documents, and institutions are very protective of their collections and I suppose I'm very interested to hear the new trend in openness because my experience as a journalist has been the opposite - that there are areas that are still taboo. For example when I was in Fiji we wrote a history of the Fijian who went to the British nuclear tests, so we had the oral history but we wanted to get the documents to take with it and to chase those through the archives took five years because the public records office then they wouldn't allow us access. And the stuff in the Fiji museum was not complete and so on, and there division of archivists who are starting a digitalised collection but there is still whole areas about Pacific history that is still taboo and it's a really interesting thing for me because you look at the National Archives which have got a wonderful digitalisation program and they release a whole lot - but there are still a whole lot of piles that don't get prioritised for digitalisation and I am very interested in the politics of that – what is prioritised for copy and I understand the resource constraints but for me there's a bit of politics behind it as well, so this is a journalist speaking. But it seems to me that this is a really interesting area where there are still some boundaries for what is prioritised with limited resources.

Taloi: I think that's a really good point and in discussions with other Islanders who want to access their archives or their heritage, they have actually found it quite hard. Some people have been told no they can't. So it just feels like unless you know someone in the institution

who can help you through the system, it's just this big maze and often people are battling to make that point of contact. If you haven't got a PhD or your not a researcher - if you're an Indigenous person they are actually quite worried – what's going to happen? What does this mean for us (Museums)? This is a common experience and spoken about. When we (my family) were exiled from Bougainville one of the first things my father said to us children, was that seeing as we're a long way from home we should try and see our ancestor's material culture stored underground in the Australian Museum collections.

My father told me, 'I've heard about these collections, they're underground, we'll just call them up and see if we can go and see them'. We were told 'oh yes come down', but for other people wanting to see their ancestors collections I've heard that they've just found it incredibly intimidating as many institutions don't openly say, 'yes we provide Indigenous access.' You've sort of got to know someone and even then it's that old academic attitude that's been passed down, looking down on you; what kind of research is this they ask? What kind of researcher are you? If you're not at University, so this must be community access then? But the kind of research that Lisa is doing for example probably goes beyond academic research, it's highly anthropological, but she's an Indigenous person wanting to do it. For some reason it can make people working in institutions very apprehensive to see a rise in community research.

Audience comment: We do try and encourage community access to the collections but one of the realities is that there is just not enough staff there to provide the quality of access or the quantity of access so everyone in my department is trying to get as much access to community – Indigenous and non-Indigenous, as possible, but a lot of it has to do with staffing in the institution and certainly within the Indigenous cultures department where I work, I'm the only person working with the Pacific collections at the moment, and they constitute about a third of the collections whereas there's many more staff working with the Aboriginal collection.

Lisa: So if demand was increased for the Pacific collection would they put on more staff?

Audience member 2: I'd like to think so. We have been lobbying for about ten years to get an actual Access Officer on board who would handle access requests, and on the first day of her job someone plonked 100 access requests on her desk. Day one. That is the sort of volume access we are dealing with and there is just not enough staff. But it's worth a try.

Audience comment: I don't think its about staff, I think its about how you prioritise resources, its not about money, and maybe collectors and institutions and big businesses and bureaucratic structures so there are a whole lot of time consuming wasteful things around the bureaucracy that don't actually allow the museum to do it's work. I've worked with the

Queensland Museum, as a white person I'm allowed to go in, I do work on large collections that I do take back to the communities I work with so I actually take back, I take back a full list of all the items from their area to them and I am obliged to do that.

Audience question: So if you were faced with this issue of having the demand greater than your time, how would you resolve it?

Audience comment: I'd restructure the museum. If you are part of a large company of institutions which most museums are, I would try and restructure staff and staff time to actually do the job that they are there to do. Everyone is talking about access but it seems to me access is one of the last priorities of the mission statement at the museum so they don't actually work towards and what they say they are there to do.

Namila: So how does it feel to stumble across objects – archived or otherwise – that hail directly from your homelands? How do you explain to people that when you're not part of the dominant culture (where you are validated absolutely everywhere in everyday life), what it's like to see your faces, hear your stories, be able to just connect? What does that do for your sense of Self living in Australia? And how do you explain to others why this is so important?

Lisa: For me its just power. Instantly power - having that sensation of knowledge and history and I talk about this in the way that I found that breast plate in the museum, it was like I knew I was looking for something and I didn't know what it was, I saw shells, and there was something there and as soon as I saw it I just went 'yes, there is this link to my past, I don't know what it is but there is strength in this object, I need to know more about it' because it provides a solid foundation of who I am culturally. If I don't have that then who am I? And that's what it's about, it's about identity.

Thelma: Totally agree. Sense of belonging. Migrating here about 20 years ago when I was 13 I didn't see myself anywhere and that's why I became a musician and created my own video clips and music to try and put myself up there on the white walls that were around me. So now going into the museum, the first piece that Dion took me to without knowing where I was from was a bowl from my mother's island, I had only found her 10 years ago, and actually went to that island Bau 10 years ago and that was powerful and as many of you can imagine, you cant talk about that stuff, that's just powerful stuff. And that's what we try and harness I guess and encourage young people to have that similar connection.

Taloi: I just want to agree with Lisa, I remember that day very clearly. For me it was the first day (when I was a teenager) that I saw for the first time such ancient material culture from

our home. My father explained certain stories relating to the collections and the first was the most memorable experience - it just burnt images into my head that have never left and it was really a point of departure for me. It was an incredible experience, I was coming to grips with how these objects came here, but I knew that I just wanted to know more and that if you looked around the other collections or islands - you won't see the kinds of designs that come from Bougainville. It shows that we are very unique and it just shows you how strong our culture is and it's not back in the past. Sure there are items there that are not made today, but they are still very relevant and having gone home every year since then I can see how that translates through today's cultural activities like when I've attended funerals and reconciliations - out comes the shell money and our culture is still strong.

Knowing about collections in Australia and in my travels back home, I've digitally repatriated over the years including cultural mapping research. Doing this brings me back to my lineage and I am realising that I've learnt some knowledge that others aren't privileged to. I remember that first visit to the collections and I've seen lots of Islanders come and seen lots of different experiences. I really recommend anyone here from the Pacific Islands who are keen to get access and see what path it takes you on as well.

Aunty Sana: I guess my journey into the museum or art world is different from the panel here. My journey to Australia is similar to Taloi where we both came from an island, Bougainville when the war was on. The difference between Taloi and me, besides difference in age, is that I grew up in the 1950s and 1960s where a lot of the works that are in museums were made and used. I had the firsthand experience of seeing how they were made and what they were used for. Coming to Australia I didn't know much about museums because the only museums we had in Papua New Guinea was in Moresby, which is nowhere near Bougainville. In my mind there was no difference between a museum and a childcare because the first time we walked into (a museum) I saw mothers and fathers having coffees and a group of kids there, and in my mind I thought it was a kindergarten. One of the things I never thought would affect me that much is how much the Bougainville and Buka stuff in museums would link me back to my childhood, my mother, father, grandmother and grandfather and especially having been brought up with the idea that the Western setting and my scientific background was the way forward into the future. In my mind it was going to be my future, and it took me to come to Australia to actually acknowledge my identity because in doing that the journey to the museum, it was like Maryann's work, connecting with my family. The war was on in Bougainville, my son and the rest of my family were in Bougainville and my way of trying to make a connection with them was to go to the museum. The museum had saved me in a way in trying to console myself and search for my identity and answers as to why or how I got here or why things happen. I had to play mind games - that my great grandmother would sing to me songs, it wasn't until I walked into the museum and

saw this cape, *Sinsu*, I said, oh I know those designs. And for me stumbling across the capes brought me back to the happier times when sitting across from my great grandmother my grandmother, my mother and my father's sister I would watch them do/create these kinds of things. For me, it overrode the problems of harassment or being a victim of the war had done to me, and for me that was the journey of my healing.

So from there on and because of what happened, me stumbling across the things which belonged to my tribe and my family, it helped me to heal. It also drew me back to say to myself, you have been on a journey, the Western path of your life chasing the dreams. It brought me back to earth so I could reassess where I was going and where I came from, and for that reason I think my whole dedication in life is to give back to the museum, gallery and other institutions and the whole community what had been given me to make me a better person who I am now.

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