

Exhibition review

A Multiplicity of Voices

Celebrating the perspectives of Pasifika artists at Māpura Studios

3 November 2021 – 13 February 2022

Online exhibition – hosted by Māpura Studios and the Pah Homestead

Reviewed by Vic Segedin

On Wednesday 3 November, when *A Multiplicity of Voices* was due to open at the Pah Homestead, Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland was still in Covid-19 Alert Level Three – meaning no gatherings of more than ten people from only two ‘bubbles’, and certainly not indoors. Aotearoa New Zealand has fared relatively well during the Covid-19 pandemic, but the disruption from lockdown during the Delta outbreak has been immense. The art world has been hard hit.

I recall the opening of *Give Me a Minute – Celebrating 20 years of art at Māpura Studios* this time last year. It was a splendid showcase of Māpura Studios in all its vibrant and raw splendour – a powerful selection of current and past works by Māpura artists and a party, with multi-disciplinary performance, music, spoken word and dance. Scores of people attended – then, in pre-Delta days, the merriment was what was contagious.

And now, in 2021, it is an online exhibition... but just as worthy of celebration. Sacha Kronfeld, Cath O’Brien and Catherine Thompson at Māpura have curated, as the title suggests, a diverse and exciting exhibition of works by a number of Pasifika artists who work out of Māpura Studios.

Māpura, formerly Spark Studios, may be familiar to many JoCAT readers. Some may recall Istvan Csata’s 2018 interview with Māpura Studios’ Sacha Kronfeld and Stefan Neville about arts tuition with people affected by profound multiple disabilities, as well as Asha Munn and Wendy Lawson’s 2016 review of the exhibition *So much there is*. So to remind some and introduce others, Māpura Studios is a creative space offering “inclusive, multi-modal art classes and art therapy programmes for people of all ages, diversity and need, as well as the wider community” (Māpura, 2021a). The Studios provide professionally

run classes and programmes in person-centred visual arts learning, creative therapies and arts practice, led by a team of professional artists and arts therapists. In its 21 years it has built up a notable presence both in the disability sector and the arts therapy and creative well-being world. It is well respected by the wider community – the photo on their home page header is of a beaming Jacinda Ardern while on a visit there.

The twelve-week lockdown¹ has been particularly hard on the majority of Māpura artists. Only about 25 percent of them have been able to access the Zoom classes provided by the Studios. These have been a fun, creative, often spontaneous, and social arena with lots of exchange, including two birthday celebrations. But the lion’s share of artists have been hard to reach, even with staff trying to think up creative ways to precipitate engagement. Ululau Ama’s oil and soft pastel composition on paper, *Lockdown Stay Home* (figure 1), sums up what many must be feeling about the stay-at-home orders.

The exhibition statement of *A Multiplicity of Voices* proffers a Sāmoan proverb to encapsulate the theme of the show. “*Lupe sa vao eseese a ua fuifui faatasi*, when translated means, birds from all different forests are now all together” (Māpura, 2021b). The artists who have been brought together in the exhibition represent a multiplicity: a diversity of background, and a range of life experience and disability. Their creative expression is their voices.

I view the 25 works on my screen. I read the titles and the mediums used, and I comprehend the materiality of each work cognitively rather than as I would standing before them, seeing light reflect off thick brush strokes, or a smooth surface. I look at them one after another, and the gallery experience of seeing the works together, the conversations they have

with one another, the connections we as viewers make between the artworks, is largely lost. A hostage to the medium of photography, I don't know which work may have lost its intensity in translation, and in which the RGB 'color mode' has perhaps made it zing more.

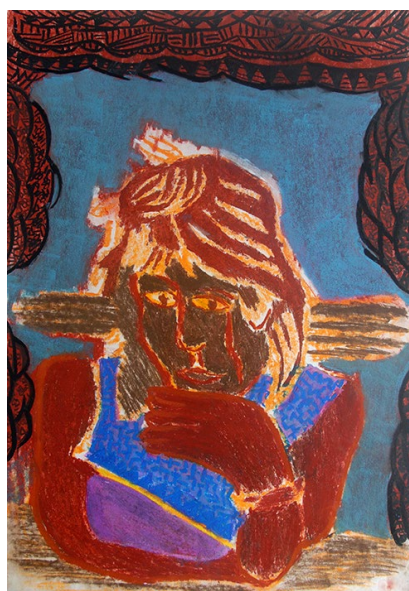
While I miss the materiality and intersubjective vibrancy of the gallery experience, an online exhibition can afford access to those outside of the city, or the country, or indeed those not able to access the physical space. And perhaps they allow for more revisits – to zoom in on favourite works, to share them with friends.

There is certainly a multiplicity of themes in the exhibition. The familiar Pasifika flower motif appears, but there are others: an urban 'street' sense, and one of love, the ocean, and a longing for island memories. As Maununu Ama puts it, "We remember where we come from. We remember families".²

Ela Tukuhaikaua's rich found-object-based works, with their colourful embellishing of plastic animals, evoke a Saturday morning amongst the vibrancy of stalls selling bright clothing and lei at Ōtara Market.³ Their playful titles are imbued with a sense of hopeful expectancy – *The Goat was Going to a Party*, *The Bird was Waiting for Her Friend* (figures 2 and 3), although the latter changes mood when reading the artist's narrative in her statement: "The bird was all dressed up because she was going on a date but he didn't show, so she flew to her nest to cry."

The two works by 2000lxmgx (Fa'amanuanga Lemaga's artist name) also place us in South Auckland, recalling its abundant street and graffiti art. Employing paint, stencils, spray paint and text, 2000lxmgx uses art as self-expression, and it gives him a sense of belonging as well as a way to connect with Sāmoan culture and his family and friends. *Boy Love* (figure 4) is a colourful spray-paint exploration of love and joy. As 2000lxmgx says in his artist statement, "often I will make artwork as gifts thinking of what colours, and shapes that person might like".

With coloured pens and inks, Sāmoan New Zealander Falefatu Enari creates stylised and compelling street scenes from his imagination – *A Street in Australia with 12 Houses* (figure 5) is in fantastical colours of vibrant blues, teals and purples, with an accent of yellow. For him, Māpura is clearly an important part of his life: "Being an artist makes me feel good... Coming to Māpura I enjoy myself – I enjoy the people – I enjoy making art".



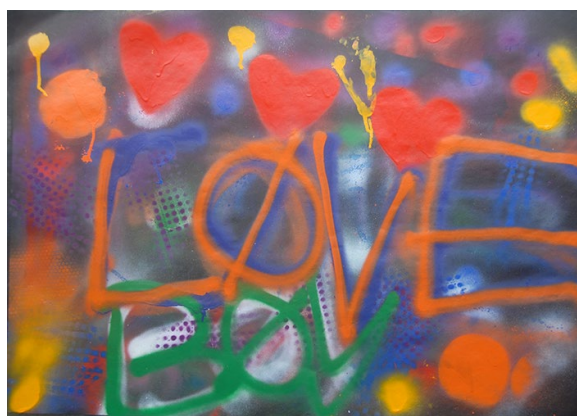
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In *Rock Down Waters* (figure 6), Salome Moeauga paints a wild coastal scene with a swirling and rushing sea from the vantage point of a cliff, using a painterly, expressive and free application of acrylic. A suggestion of water and oceans comes through in two of Paul Simi's works too – *Circles* and *Untitled* (figures 7 and 8). And in collaboration, Nigel Clunie and Leonie Brunt create an imaginary, perhaps longed for or remembered, island scape with a deep-blue waterfall and a fecundity of tropical flowers and palms in *Hibiscus Flowers and a Waterfall* (figure 9).

But for me, the standout works in this exhibition are the collaborations between mother and son Maununu and Ululau Ama. Ululau, a young man living with epilepsy, has been coming to the Studios for six years, since he still was at school. As Māpura encourages support people to make art alongside their people, Maununu started experimenting and developing her own practice. They create work on their own and in collaboration, deciding together on how to complete the artworks.

Ululau's work, from representative and narrative beginnings, has changed to become more about form and abstraction, and the sensory experience of painting. Sacha Kronfeld explains:

He now pours the paint on and carves out shapes, sometimes overlays with another piece of paper to print impressions. Nunu was also inspired by this shift in his work, and taking these works she reinterprets the shapes and draws into them with symbols and motifs. There is a beautiful sense of togetherness as they collaborate, both interested in how and what the other comes up with. (personal communication, 9 November 2021)

A significant aspect of the collaboration process is encouraging Ululau to try new techniques, bring his works to completion and to appreciate the beauty of his paintings. The result of this shared mahi⁴ is compelling, with an enchanting depth to the works. In *Cath* (figure 10), the loose but intricate mark making on the surface draws the eye in to discover more of the painterly abstraction in the background.

The featured work from exhibition is Maununu's *Moana* (figure 11). This work is also featured on the cover of this edition of *JoCAT*. Here she conjures a tropical sea, pools to gaze into and blue starfish. There is a watery depth in her use of the background ink wash and the forms, ambiguous in nature, painted in



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acrylic. Are they creatures or seaweed moving in the tide? Their design, recalling siapo,⁵ places them firmly in the Islands.

I will give the last words to Nunu, as for me they sum up the value of access to creativity for all and the ethos of what Māpura can offer its artists:

It's fun, relaxing, peaceful and full of creativity just playing around with the chosen resources.

The colours make me so in love with my artwork, my housework forgotten, stress released onto the artwork and I was always going home happy.

Endnotes

1. Auckland went into Covid-19 Alert Level 4 on 18 August 2021. At the time of writing, restrictions are being eased but Māpura Studios are still unable to open.
2. All quotes from *A Multiplicity of Voices* artists are taken from their artist statements unless otherwise referenced.
3. Ōtara Market takes place every Saturday in the South Auckland suburb of Ōtara, and is known for the celebration of all things Pasifika.
4. 'Mahi' is te reo Māori for 'work'.
5. 'Siapo' is the Sāmoan name for cloth made from paper mulberry bark, otherwise known as tapa.

Artworks

1. Ululau Ama, *Lockdown Stay Home*, 2021, oil and soft pastel on paper, 595 × 420mm.
2. Ela Tukuhaikaua, *The Goat Was Going to a Party*, 2021, found objects, beads.
3. Ela Tukuhaikaua, *The Bird was Waiting for Her Friend*, 2021, found objects, beads.
4. 2000lxmngx (Fa'amanuanga Lemaga), *Boy Love*, 2021, spray paint, ink on paper, 690 × 840mm.
5. Falefatu Enari, *A Street in Australia with 12 Houses*, 2021, pens on paper, 420 × 595mm.
6. Salome Moeauga, *Rock Down Waters*, 2017, acrylic on paper, 595 × 420mm.
7. Paul Simi, *Circles*, 2020, acrylic, ink on paper, 420 × 595mm.
8. Paul Simi, *Untitled*, 2021, acrylic on paper, 420 × 595mm.
9. Nigel Clunie and Leonie Brunt, *Hibiscus Flowers and a Waterfall*, 2021, ink on paper, 420 × 595 mm.
10. Ulalau and Maununu Ama, *Cath*, 2021, acrylic paint and ink on paper, 420 × 595mm.
11. Maununu Ama, *Moana*, 2021, acrylic paint and ink on paper, 500 × 580mm.

To access the exhibition on the Pah Homestead website:

[click here](#)

References

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Volume 16, Number 2, 2021

Published by *The Journal of Creative Arts Therapies*

Online and open access at <https://www.jocat-online.org/vol16no2page>

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ISSN: 2652-9459

Design and production Vic Segedin

JoCAT is produced by the School of Social Sciences, Western Sydney University on behalf of the Australian, New Zealand and Asian Creative Arts Therapy Association.

