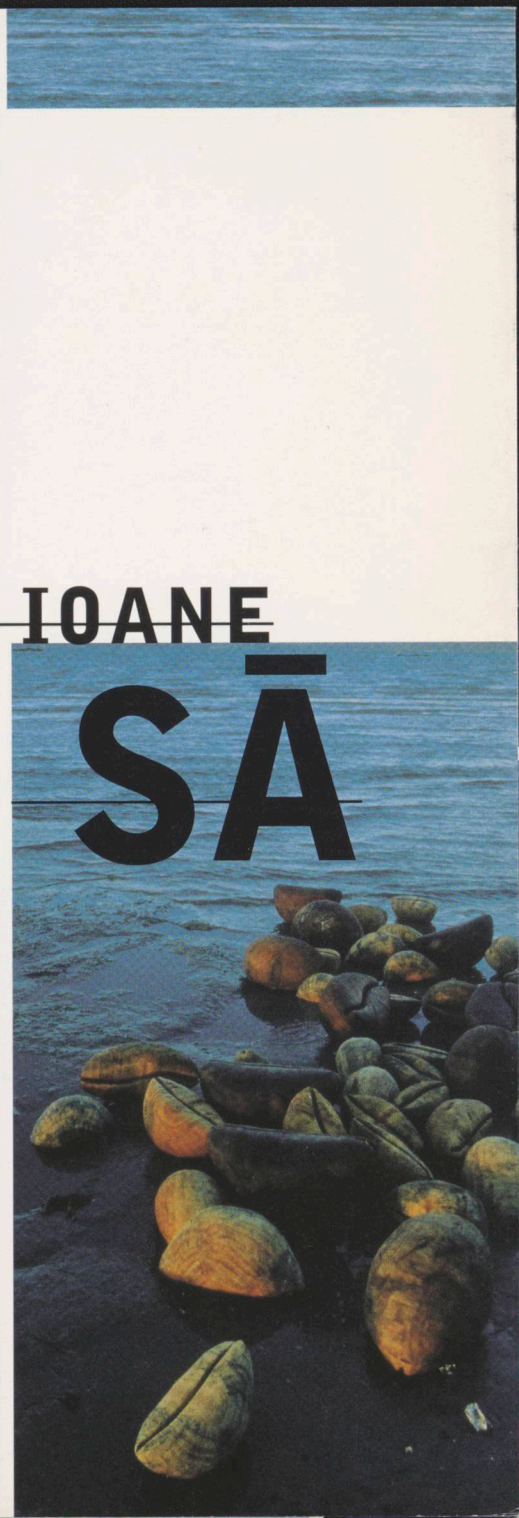



JOHN IOANE

FALE



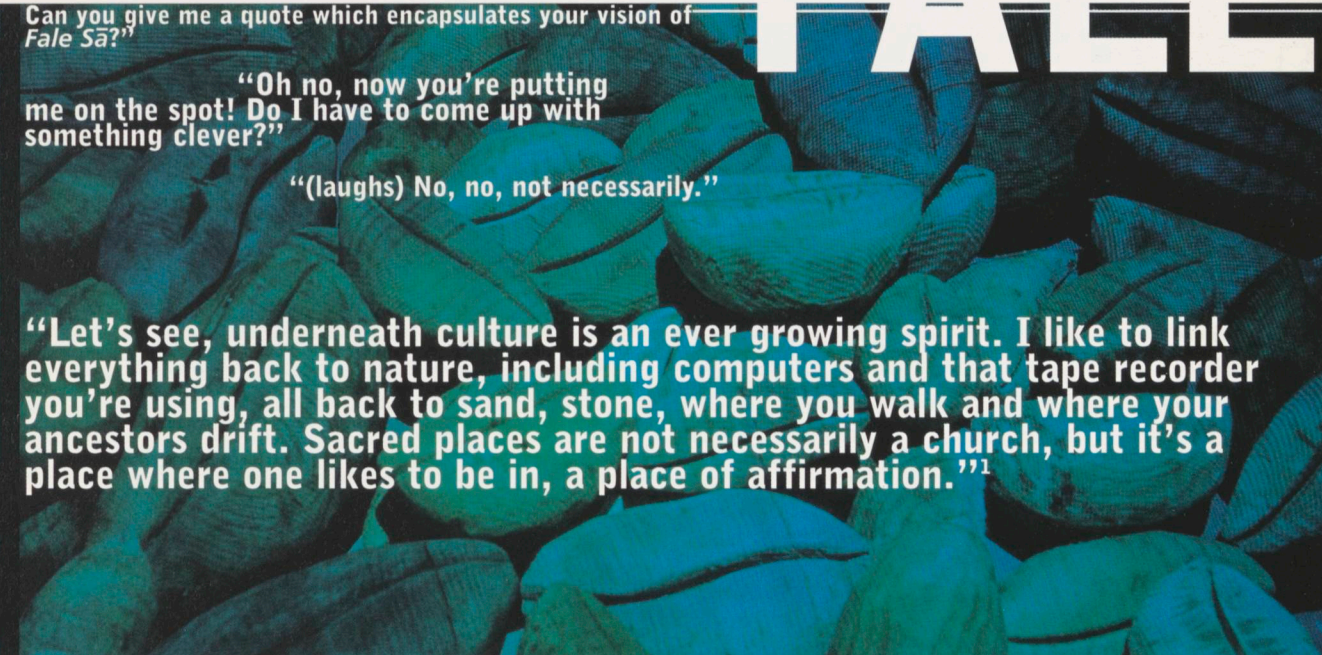
SĀ



“Toane. *Fale Sā* refers to a sacred place, a church.
Can you give me a quote which encapsulates your vision of
Fale Sā?”

“Oh no, now you’re putting
me on the spot! Do I have to come up with
something clever?”

“(laughs) No, no, not necessarily.”



“Let’s see, underneath culture is an ever growing spirit. I like to link
everything back to nature, including computers and that tape recorder
you’re using, all back to sand, stone, where you walk and where your
ancestors drift. Sacred places are not necessarily a church, but it’s a
place where one likes to be in, a place of affirmation.”¹

FALE

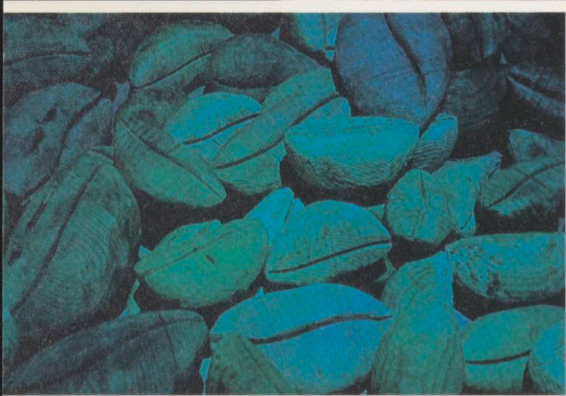
A collection of seashells and a piece of wood on a black background. The shells are in various shades of white, light blue, and grey, with some showing concentric growth lines. One large, light-colored shell is the central focus, with the text 'SĀ' overlaid on it. To the right, a piece of light-colored wood with visible grain is partially visible. The overall composition is artistic and textured.

SĀ

Ioane's art is characterised by an on-going attempt to explore and interrogate both his practice and his approach. These reflexive concerns can also be seen in the ways in which he articulates himself as an artist. Motivated by a desire to both express his cultural identity and to repress any signs of excess or ego, Ioane art is stylistically highly worked and 'finished' yet conceptually open-ended and questioning. This ambivalence often centres on the notions of journey - explored in a multi-faceted way, and of service, both to family and community, and to himself - attempts which in practice often become fraught in their working through.

Aligned with the desire to enunciate these concerns, is the need to situate one's voice within particular contexts. This dilemma is one which faces many artists who emerge from diasporic backgrounds and do not have ascribed positions 'to speak from'. Not surprisingly then, the experience of mediating between different spaces, and of reconciling and resolving one's subject position, often plays a vital formative role in artistic production. *Fale Sā*, a sacred place, represents such a space. It enacts sites of contemplation, reflection, introspection and transformation.

Fale
View
passa
carve
in a l
carve
are p
casti
work
Refle
dark
vide
over
view
An a
and
creat
of au



Fale Sā comprises two spaces.

Viewers walk through a darkened passage way lined with hundreds of carved wooden cowry shells, to emerge in a bright area featuring three large carved totem figures. Light ripples are projected throughout the space, casting shadows over viewers and works, which allude to the ocean. Reflection also features in the darkened passage, with a series of video projections cast from above, over the cowry shell objects and viewers travelling through the space. An audio track featuring atmospheric and musical loops also plays, thus creating a multi-media environment of aural, sensual and tactile elements,

combining to create two environments, one dark, one light. The darkened shadowy passage, lined with hundreds of objects alluding to shells creates the impression of moving across a river bed at night. Emerging into the lightened space, viewers are covered with ripples of light which also play over three monumental carved forms set in this brightly lit space. Each work is covered with patina and painted an orange-silver metallic sheen.

The movement created by the light ripples enhance the movement within the carved forms, suggesting encrusted shellfish on rocks, moving coral, in an underwater sea world.



Fale Sā is an...
an o...
wor...
mat...
the...
the...
sour...
thos...
pass...
river...
and...
allu...
refe...
afte...
Ligh...
begi...
Fale Sā...
conc...
dark...
The...
emo...
of *Fale Sā*...
inter...
As a...
phil...
rela...
to th...
idea...
Peni...
feat...
Con...
the i...
ocea...
emer...
perf...
appr...
last...
sma...
galle...

Fale Sā is rife with symbolism and allusion, creating an open-ended space to journey through. In previous works, Ioane has ascribed specific meanings to materials and forms used. River rocks have signified the constancy of cultural heritage; light has embodied the artist's presence and experience in the world; and sounds have referred to spiritual realms. Translating those ideas into a reading of *Fale Sā*, the darkened passage can symbolise a walk or journey along a river bed, evoking notions of the past, one's ancestors and the spirit world.² Light and darkness may also allude to emotional states. Po (darkness in Samoan) refers to a number of things - literal darkness, the afterlife or death and also to the state of ignorance. Light refers to daylight (malama), awakenings, new beginnings and enlightenment.

Fale Sā would seem to embody these liminal concepts - the viewer travels through shadowy darkness towards spaces of light.

The work also encourages viewers to react on more emotive levels, using as a point of departure the idea of *Fale Sā* as both a sacred place and a more internalized site of contemplation and redress.

As a whole, *Fale Sā* extends Ioane's personal philosophy that art is a creative process which relates to all aspects of living, that it is not exclusive to the gallery space. The installation also develops ideas and issues explored in previous works *Vā* and *Penina: The Fourth Window* which, like *Fale Sā* featured performance as part of the overall dynamic. Conceptually, *Fale Sā* occurs both outside and within the installation space. The work 'begins' at the ocean, Auckland's waterfront, from which the artist emerges and runs towards the gallery. Flanked by performers playing conch shells and wind pipes he approaches the gallery. Just outside the entrance, the last carved cowry shell sits encased in ice. The artist smashes the ice and carries the shell form into the gallery to place it within the installation proper.

The work is complete. After its life in the gallery, Ioane intends to re-site components of the installation back into public spaces. His intention is to place the shell forms around city spaces in an attempt to bridge the space between public and gallery sites and to disseminate and maintain his multi-layered and multi-voiced spirit of *Fale Sā*.

Caroline Vercoe
Department of Art History,
University of Auckland

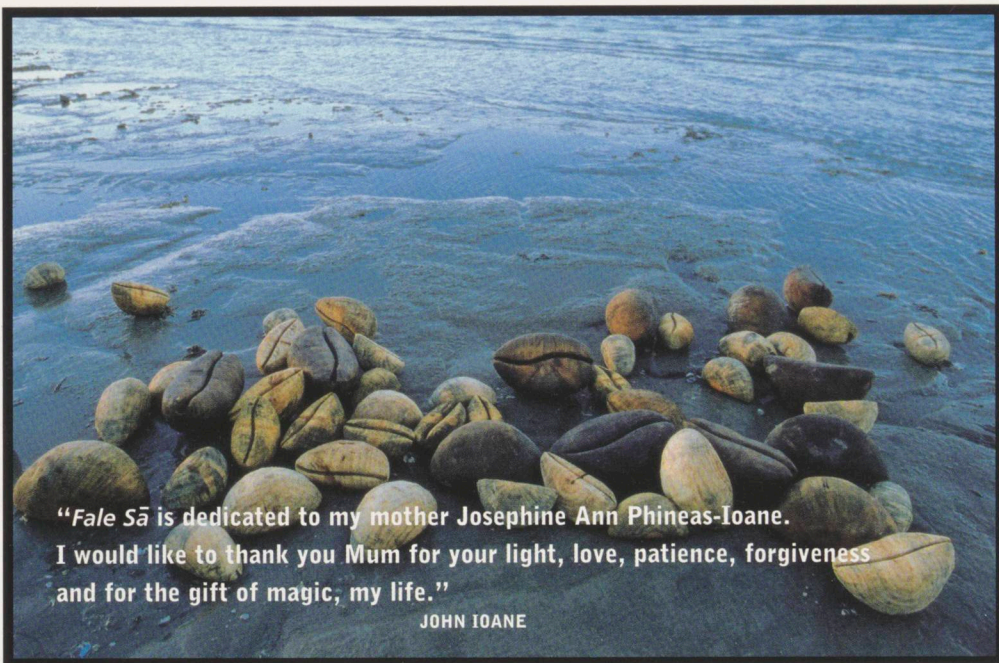


NOTES

1 In conversation with the artist. February 1999.

2 This journey is mediated by the narrow space and the object in one's way.





*"Fale Sā is dedicated to my mother Josephine Ann Phineas-Ioane.
I would like to thank you Mum for your light, love, patience, forgiveness
and for the gift of magic; my life."*

JOHN IOANE



Fale Sā, an artist project for Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki, was made possible by the generous support of Harriet Friedlander on the occasion of Soundculture 99

13 March - 16 May 1999

Director: Chris Saines Artist Project Sponsor: Harriet Friedlander Curator: Ron Brownson
Exhibition Designer: Fiona Wilson Publication Designer: Arch MacDonnell
Photographer: Jennifer French Video Stills: Gregory Bennett
Preparators: Rod MacLeod, Sam Ford, Mike Duffin, Glen Campbell, Jeremy Dart, Mei Hill

ISBN 0 86463 234 7

John Ioane is represented by Oedipus Rex Gallery, Auckland