

A touring exhibition

ALWAYS SONG IN THE WATER



Art inspired by Moana Oceania

‘Always Song in the Water is an imaginative exploration of the oceanic environment which links Aotearoa New Zealand, the islands of the Pacific and Japan. In the spirit of Gregory O'Brien's 2019 book of the same title, the exhibition celebrates—in images, words and sound—our connectedness with wider Oceania, its peoples, flora, fauna and the expansive waters which both inspire and define us.

Proposed touring exhibition—Japan, 2026

Curated by Gregory O'Brien and Jaqui Knowles, 26 March 2025

The following works represent a preliminary touring list with sample texts that can be incorporated into the exhibition design.

About the exhibition

- The exhibition is structured around 7 key themes.
- Works included are by prominent artists across Moana Oceania (New Zealand, Australia, Pacific Islands).
- The number and selection of works can be adjusted; works can be added, or removed, to suit the size and shape of galleries.
- Artworks range from large installations to smaller prints, paintings, jewellery, and photography. Artists' working drawings and ephemera could be displayed in vitrines or wall cases.
- The exhibition concept also includes poetry and text—an important element in the 'song' of the exhibition.
- Label and wall text will be in English and Japanese.
- Video works can be projected or displayed on monitors, depending on space available.
- The exhibition is many-voiced and ongoing; there is the potential to include Japanese artists/poets. (NB. Presently two Japanese-born artists are featured in the exhibition.)
- The New Zealand Maritime Museum can supply information about public programmes staged during the 2023 exhibition and also share resources that were developed.
- The exhibition fee will be set once venues have been confirmed, so that costs are distributed appropriately.



A 'welcome' to the exhibition. Still from *Ala Hagatonu*, 2023, eleven-minute music and dance performance on video produced for the exhibition

Steve Lauffilitoga (music); Ruha and Nisyola Fifita (dance; Bruce Foster (film))

The video can be viewed here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7D_xz_7L-u4&list=RD7D_xz_7L-u4&start_radio=1

1. *The Great Sea*



Sulieti Fieme'a Burrows and Tui Gillies, *Kahoa Heilala*, 2023, approx. 702 x 801mm on wall

Collection of the New Zealand Maritime Museum

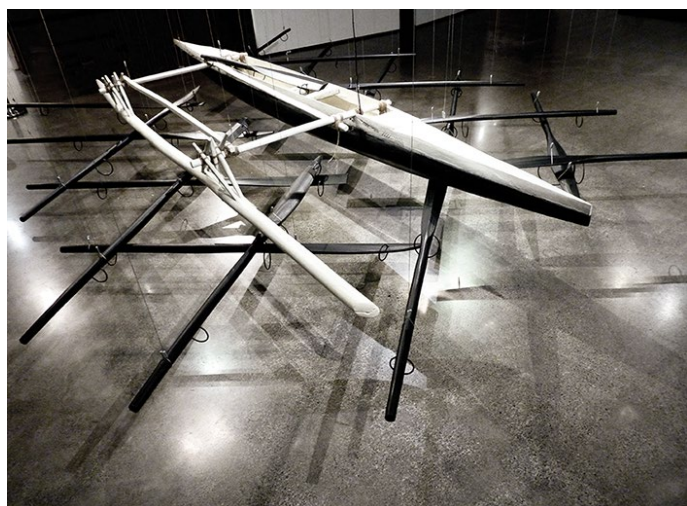
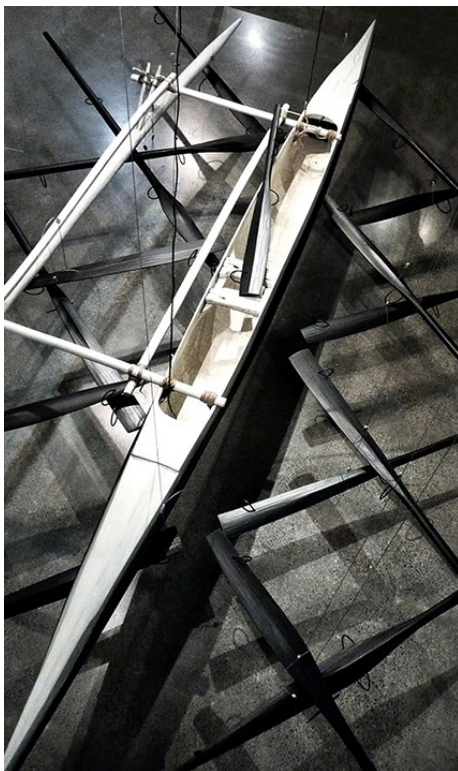


Robin White and Ruha Fifita

Rangitahua, 2011, barkcloth and natural dyes, 4600 x 5400mm

NB. this work can travel folded up like a blanket – so does not need large roller.

Collection of Robin White



Kazu Nakagawa (with sound component by Helen Bowater), *Carving Water Painting Voice*
Collection of the New Zealand Maritime Museum [gallery space required: 5800 x 5000mm]
(suspended)



Elizabeth Thomson, *The fearless five hundred*, wall installation, (detail: 500 hand-painted bronze fish)
 approx. 1545 x 5330 x 70mm
 On long-term loan to the New Zealand Maritime Museum



Phil Dadson, *Pax*, 2011, video work (installation view)
 Collection of New Zealand Maritime Museum

Great Sea

Speak for us, great sea.

Speak in the night, compelling
 The frozen heart to hear,
 The memoried to forget...
 You from whom we rose,
 In whom our power lives on.

All night, all night till dawn
 Speak for us, great sea.

Charles Brasch (Kona Coast, Hawaii, August 1939)



Fatu Feu'u. *Pacific Ocean Voyage*, 2006, acrylic on canvas 1400 x 940mm
Collection of New Zealand Maritime Museum

The sea

The sea is coming in friendship
with deep breathing and
an offering of small shells.

I love you like this, Pacific,
when you come bearing your name
and display
the full and final extent
of your self-possession.

(Dinah Hawken)

2. Crossing the line



Robin White, Ebonie Fifita et. al., *In the Offing*, 2022, paperbark with natural dyes, 2000 x 1850mm
Collection of the New Zealand Maritime Museum



Kazu Nakagawa, *Sextant*, 2023
Collection of the New Zealand Maritime Museum



Fiona Hall, *Listing to Starboard*, 2011, mixed media, 1450 x 880 x 70mm
On long-term loan to New Zealand Maritime Museum



Phil Dadson, *15rpm (Rock Records) Raoul Island*, 2011,
stone impressions on Dobson spectrophotometer charts
[variable dimensions. 2 metres width, 3-5 metres high, installed]



Kazu Nakagawa (with poem by Jenny Bornholdt), *Lost and somewhere else*, wood and paint, 2024,
approx. 1980 x 430 x 45 mm
Collection of the artist



David Trubridge, *Then and Now*, 2018
kiekie, hardwoods, pounamu, 820 x 420 x 160mm (base) sail 3060mm high
Collection of the New Zealand Maritime Museum

Such things the tapa notices

and records: common threads, each voyage
as it ends, and the dancing that will never stop—these

inexhaustible days of sail
as handed down to us—bright fabrics, swirling.



Bruce Foster, *Mapping the Pacific*, 2011, colour photograph, 1050 x 1550 x 60mm
Collection of Bruce Foster

Easy on the oar
Steady the sail
Hold the thought
Let go the hand

On Easter Island

The great voyages of Polynesian history, of Cook
and Laperouse and Thor Heyedahl's Kon-Tiki
as nothing compared

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



Bruce Foster, *Navigation*, 2011, photograph 605 x 770 x 45mm
Collection of the New Zealand Maritime Museum

'Like many New Zealanders, I was brought up on all kinds of maps: road maps, illustrated-postcard maps, and classroom maps which divided the country according to rugby provinces, land usage, parks, or scenic features... Just as you can't draw a line around a field of electrical or seismic energy, it is equally impossible to draw a definitive map of an aquatic nation. That was a central lesson of the 2011 Kermadec voyage. After a few days at sea, the artists involved in that expedition started to sense that our nation was losing its outlines... We were far from shore, yet still within the territory defined as 'New Zealand'. It felt like an unravelling, but also a coming together in some new, unexpected form.'



Gregory O'Brien, *A crown for the Kermadec King*, 2011, acrylic on board, 600 x 600 x 50mm
Collection of the New Zealand Maritime Museum



Nikau Hindin, *Kōkōwai ki Kōkōrangi*, 2019, paperbark, 1845 x 760 mm
Collection of New Zealand Maritime Museum

3. *Mid-ocean*



Lianne Edwards, *Flight status*, bird-leg bands, pearl oyster, plankton net, inks, 845 x 845 mm
Collection of the New Zealand Maritime Museum



John Reynolds, *Kermadec*, 2011, oil and marker on canvas, 890 x 660
Collection of the New Zealand Maritime Museum

‘Oceania is humanity rising from the depths of brine and regions of fire deeper still, Oceania is us. We are the sea, we are the ocean...’ (Epeli Hau’ofa)



Elizabeth Thomson, *New Blue land* 2014, Glass spheres, optically clear epoxy resin, aqueous isolation, cast vinyl film, lacquer on wood panel, 1120 x 1630 x 40mm
Collection of New Zealand Maritime Museum

The sea asks, 'How is your life now?'
It does so obliquely, changing colour.
It is never the same on any two visits... [Elizabeth Smither]

Tagaloa
swallowed
your old man

and in return
he gave you
the bluest of eyes

eyes that see things
eyes that know things
bluer than the sea...

(Leilani Tamu)

‘There’s something deeply moving and instinctive about the action of an ocean when you’re right there, in the immensely deep middle of it. It triggers, at one and the same time, a deep-water sense of awe and an electric thrill for the pulsing current of the intelligence we’re part of. (60 percent to 70 percent of the body’s content is, after all, water, with tidal rhythms that connect us to the ocean.)’ (Phil Dadson)



John Pule and Gregory O'Brien, *What I did and did not have*, 2012, etching, c. 600 x 450 mm framed
Collection of the New Zealand Maritime Museum



Jason O'Hara, *Untitled*, 2011, courtesy of the artist

We reach out
and touch

what is forever

and what is
forever

beyond reach.



Jason O'Hara, *untitled*, 2011

This many days
from shore
and the body already

an ocean in which
the bones
drift. And the mind

an island tucked
beneath
its horizon...

(A swim, mid-ocean..., Gregory O'Brien)

4. *Island time*



Sofia Tekela-Smith, *Savage Island Man with Pure*, 2003, colour photograph
Collection of the artist

**We sweat and cry salt water, so we know that the ocean is really in our blood.
[Teresia Teaiwa]**



Fiona Hall, *Split Infinite* 2011
sardine tin, 330 x 160 x 45mm
Collection of the artist



Jason O'Hara, *Approaching Raoul*, 2011,
photograph, 390 x 468 x 30
Collection of the photographer

‘We went ashore one morning. 11 May 2011. Robin set up a pinhole camera on the beach; Phil picked up two pebbles and, as he walked, began to extract a rhythm from them; John, wielding a coffee percolator and bag of beans, went in search of an electrical current; I sat on a headland and began a poem—‘By frigate and bird / we came ashore...’ Someone prodded the vegetation of the nearby bird-catcher tree with the lens of a camera; Robin took off her shoes and made the long walk to Denham Bay barefooted, so she could feel the warm, breathing, mammalian surface of the island every step of the way...’



Neke Moa, Various works, 2016 and 2022, pauashell, pounamu, shell and paint
displayed in single case, approx 1000 x 900mm
Collection of the New Zealand Maritime Museum

‘For all of us, travelling to the island had been a step—or, more precisely, a leap—from the known into the unknown. In the space of three days, we had gone from our ordinary lives, via the windowless interior of a storm-tossed naval vessel, to the northern face of a subtropical island... An island grants anyone who makes it there an exaggerated sense of everything, from the pleasures of tea drinking to their own mortality. You feel certain unprecedented *proximities*...’



John Pule, *Momoheaga*, 2020, enamel on canvas, 1503 x 1500 x 64mm



John Pule and Gregory O'Brien, *Kautahi Maukoloa*, 2023, intaglio etching with aquatint, 808 x 888 x 35
Collection of the New Zealand Maritime Museum



John Walsh, *Girl on a Bejewelled Rock*, 2023,
oil on canvas, 1230 x 1105 x 48mm
Collection of the artist

What keeps us here?
Islands in an ocean.
What makes us leave?
Islands in an ocean.
What calls us back?
Islands in an ocean
[Teresia Teaiwa, 'No One is an Island']

No island is an island. [John Reynolds]



Jason O'Hara, *Robin White walking to Denham Bay*, 2011, photograph 300 x 400 mm



Lianne Edwards, *Larval Form III*
thermometer, bird-leg band, mesh 845 x 845mm
Collection of the New Zealand Maritime Museum

**...tomorrow we leave
this island**

a tree was planted on my tongue

**it grew to encompass
my entire world...**

[John Pule]



Lianne Edwards [three crabs/installation on plinth]
tapa, aluminium, thermometer and inks, base approx: 400 x 1350 x 880mm
Collection of the New Zealand Maritime Museum

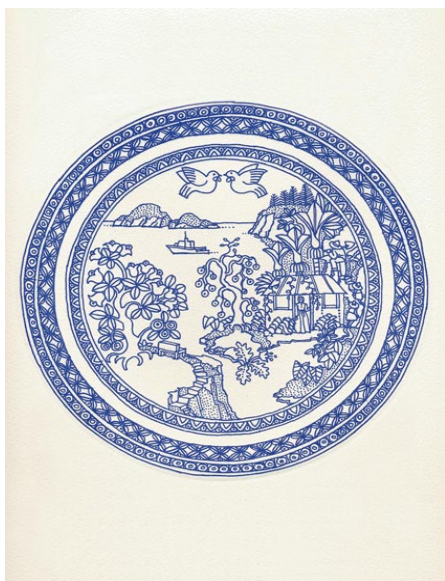


Two works by **Yuki Kihara** *Kamau Taurua Quarantine Island*, 2021 (if available) and *Aquatic Centre, Tuaraimato*, 2013 (Collection of NZ Maritime Museum) 825 x 1070 x 37mm

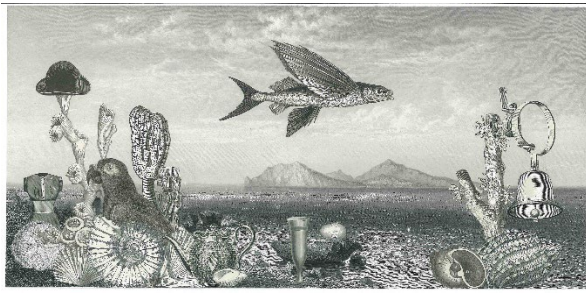


Group display of smaller paintings, works on paper and photographs (Photo above: as installed at New Zealand Maritime Museum)

This section includes a number of smaller works including sketch books, drawings, ceramic tiles, working materials and photographs in cases (see installation photographs at end of this document)



Robin White, *Braveheart*, 2011, etching, 360 x 280mm
Collection of the New Zealand Maritime Museum



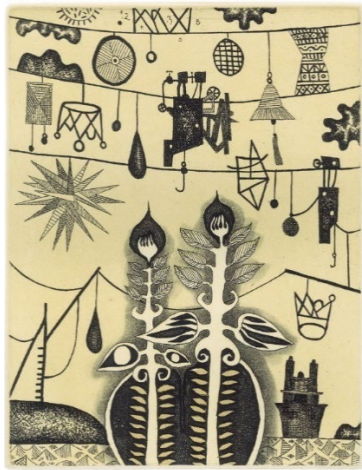
Brendan O'Brien, *A warm day in the South Seas*, 2012,
collage, 250 x 420 x 40mm
Collection of the artist



Robin White, *Denham Bay Takeaways*, 2011
paperbark with natural dyes, 563 x 535 x 45mm each
Collection of the New Zealand Maritime Museum



Noel McKenna, *Felix and Carlo on beach at Russell*, 2014, ceramic, 420 x 440mm
Private Collection



John Pule and Gregory O'Brien, *sailing to Raoul*, 2012, etching and aquatint, (sheet size) c. 520 x 320mm
Private Collection

5. *The undersea*



Denys Watkins, 2018, from suite of three paintings and ceramic
oil and canvas and ceramic, paintings c. 300 x 400mm, Wheki vase 350 x 240 mm

‘It is not the emptiness or expansiveness of the ocean that we should dwell on—rather the fact that the sea, as science keeps reminding us, is full of life forms, oxygen, nutrients and the soundings of a great many species, humanity included... We need to ask ourselves how it is, in the South Pacific, we perceive or understand oceanic space. Is it something that buffers and isolates our sense of ‘identity’? Or do we cast ourselves adrift upon it, locating it both in the world around us and within our deepest nature.’ (from *Always song in the water*)



Joyce Campbell, *Marineris*, 2003-20, Fujiflex crystal archive photograph, 1000 x 820 x 50mm
Collection of New Zealand Maritime Museum



Joyce Campbell, *Ryukyu*, 2003-11, Fujiflex crystal archive photograph, 1000 x 820 x 50
Collection of New Zealand Maritime Museum



Phil Dadson, *Fate of things to come – Conference of stones*, 2012
video work (on one or three monitors), variable format
Collection of New Zealand Maritime Museum

‘The stones roll out to shelter in the sea.’ W. S. Graham



Karl Fritsch, *Untitled* (rings), 2022 and 2018
sterling silver, carnelian, pounamu
[several rings in wall case, c. 400 x 400 x 400 mm]



Two photographs by Mark Smith
 colour photographs 400 x 600mm
 (upper: NZMM collection, lower: courtesy of artist)



Fiona Hall *Shooting the breeze*, 2011
 sardine tin and small video monitor, approx. 300 x 200
 Collection of the artist



Lynn Kelly, various pieces of jewellery, coral, pearls, silver
New Zealand Maritime Museum collection



Jason O'Hara, *The Deep*, 2011
[series of six porthole images, each 307 mm diameter]
Collection of the artist



Euan Macleod, *Boat above submerged figure*, 2012 [or painting from the same series]
oil on polyester 2030 x 925mm
Private collection, Wellington

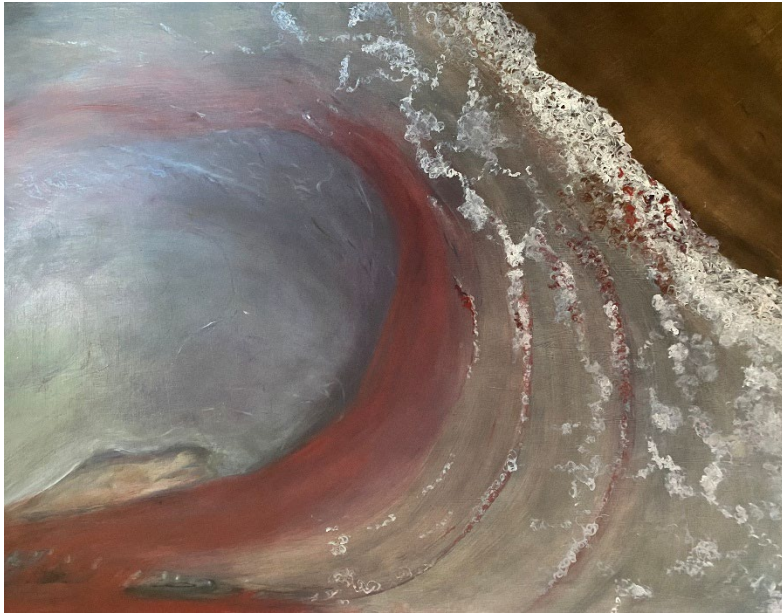
6. *Whale years*



Noel McKenna (Australia), *Untitled 2024*, oil on board, 1000 x 1000mm,
Collection of the artist



Shona Rapira Davis, *Job 41*, 2013
oil on canvas, 1350 x 1350 x 40
Private collection, Wellington



Shona Rapira Davies, *Tohora—incoming tide*, 2023, oil on board, 970 x 1270 x 50mm
Collection of the New Zealand Maritime Museum



Joanna Braithwaite, *Coast Guard*, 2023 (detail), oil on canvas, 395 x 352 x 20mm
(larger work also an option here)
Collection of the New Zealand Maritime Museum



Still from *Puhake ki te Rangi* ('spouting to the skies') Nine-minute film of performance at Futuna Chapel, February 2023

Bruce Foster (film), Gillian Whitehead (composer), Mahina-Ina Kingi-Kauī, Robert Oliver and Palliser Viols (musicians)

‘At times it almost feels as if humanity’s fate is inextricably tied to that of the whale. We look to them not only as a measure of the health of our oceans but also as a gauge of the condition of our planet. In numerous ways humanity feels close to them—they are mammals like us, with family structures, languages and even a sense of humour. Yet they are also geological in scale and shape. An island-like, mid-ocean mass, a whale is itself an ecosystem—teeming with bacteria, barnacles, colonies of lesser creatures, and myriad other life forms...’

Everything I heard or
did not hear: the ocean
peeled back, wave by
wave, sigh of a once
whale-laden ocean.



Chris Charteris, *Itutu* (from an ongoing series), 2017-23,
whalebone (displayed on wall: 1670x 3940 x 340)
Collection of the New Zealand Maritime Museum



John Walsh, *He whanaunga*, 2013
intaglio etching, 760 x 655 x 45mm
Collection of the New Zealand Maritime Museum



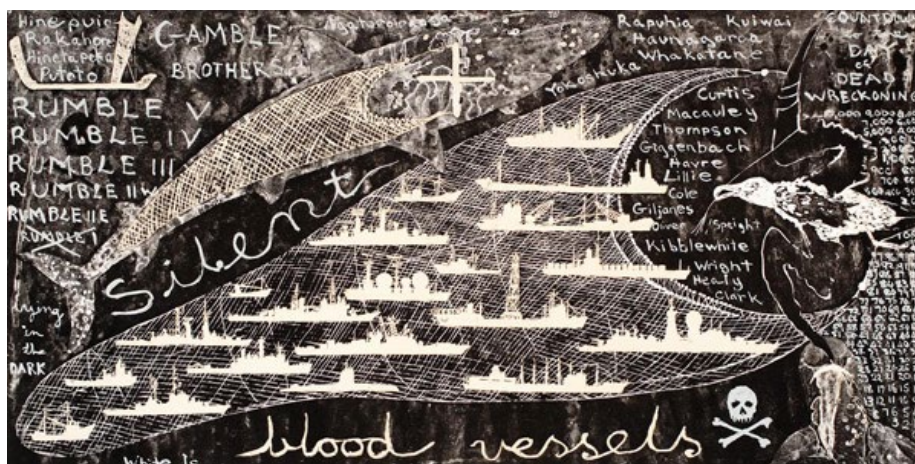
Fiona Hall, *Scrimshaw*, 2011, dye and ochre on canvas, 1885 x 2800 mm
Collection of the artist

Early morning spent 'getting the eye in'
velocity of clouds, sea conditions noted.

Breaching, logging, travelling...

If I stand still enough, I can see Wolverine Rock,
a water spout and, westerly, one cow and calf.

'Whale survey, Raoul Island, with Rosemary Dobson', Gregory O'Brien



Fiona Hall, *Lying in the Dark*, 2012, etching and aquatint, 505 x 1010mm
Private Collection

7. Sanctuary

'I kneel before the sea
bow to drink
nutrients at the first gulp
instantly I knew my genealogy...'
(John Pule)

According to the United Nations Convention for the Law of the Sea and the Global Biodiversity Framework, Aotearoa New Zealand has an obligation to protect and preserve its marine space out to 200 nautical miles. To meet the UN requirements, 30 percent of our territorial waters will need to be protected by 2030. Presently only 0.4% of Aotearoa's marine area has 'sanctuary' status..



Angela Tiatia, *Lick* (video-work), 2015, video monitor 895 x 1500mm (or could be projected... size variable)

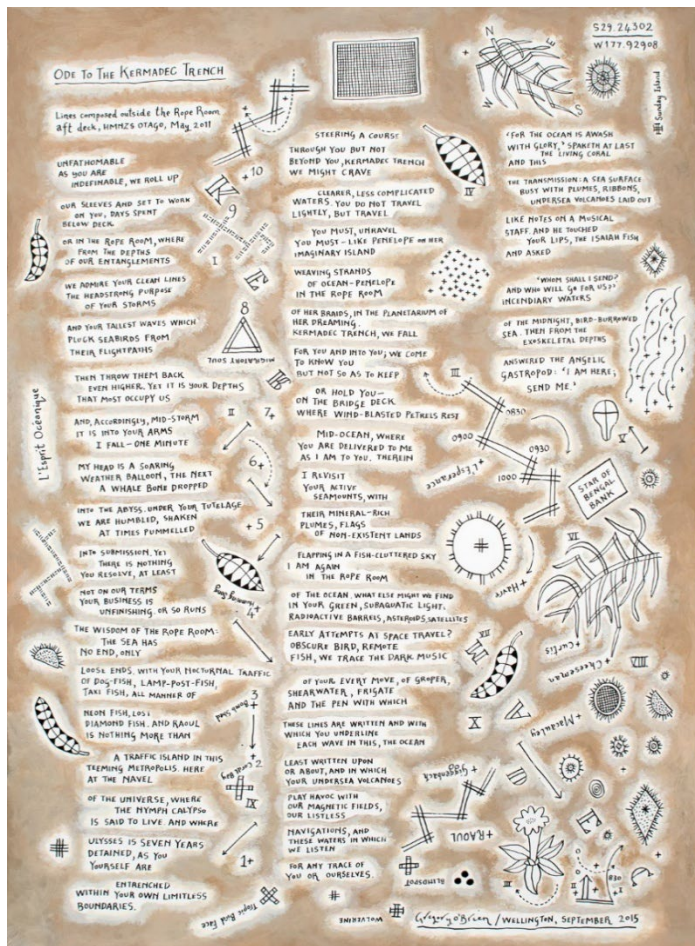
Your eyes were canoes, your brows
outriggers, your hair a wind-tossed
palm, and your bones
an ocean-polished whiteness.



Laurence Aberhart, *Last Light: Oshoro*, courtesy of the photographer



Laurence Aberhart, Sea of Japan, near Kamoenai, Hokkaido, 8 June 2001, photograph courtesy of the artist (sizes variable – minimum 300 x 400 mm in frame, each)



Gregory O'Brien, 'Ode to the Kermadec Trench' 2015,
ink and acrylic on paper, 885 x 685 x 50mm



Haru Sameshima, Tidal sequence, Pickersgill Harbour. Tamatea/Dusky Sound, 1995
Silver gelatin fibre based print, c. 700 x 700mm



Kaetaeta Watson and Louisa Humphry, *Te Tai* (head-dresses to suspend),
palm leaves, straws, ribbon, raffia, variable dimensions
Collection of the artists

How do you get across to people the need to have a ‘base-line’, a place where we can learn about how nature, unmediated by human intervention, manages its own dynamic of destruction and reconstruction, how a place heals itself when devastated by powerful natural forces? Where do we go to find out how life begins and how creatures can survive in spite of seemingly impossible odds? If knowledge is central to society then this place is surely a frontier of wonders to be discovered and invaluable lessons to be learned. Let’s not trash the classroom.

[Robin White]

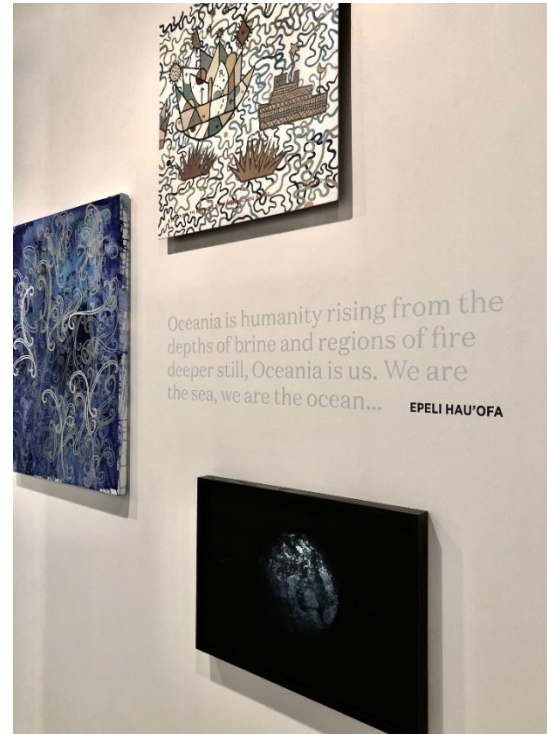
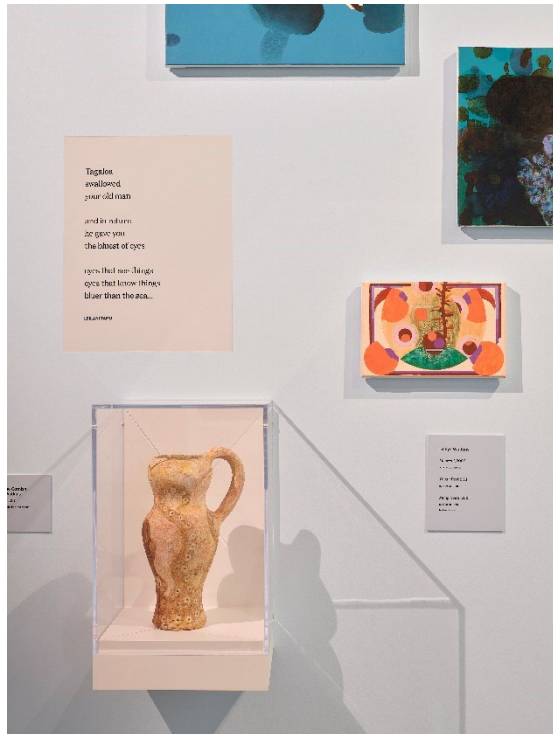
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Peace to the traveller and calm to the mind growing nearer to that radiance, to the vision that sees all earth as sacred. [Derek Walcott]

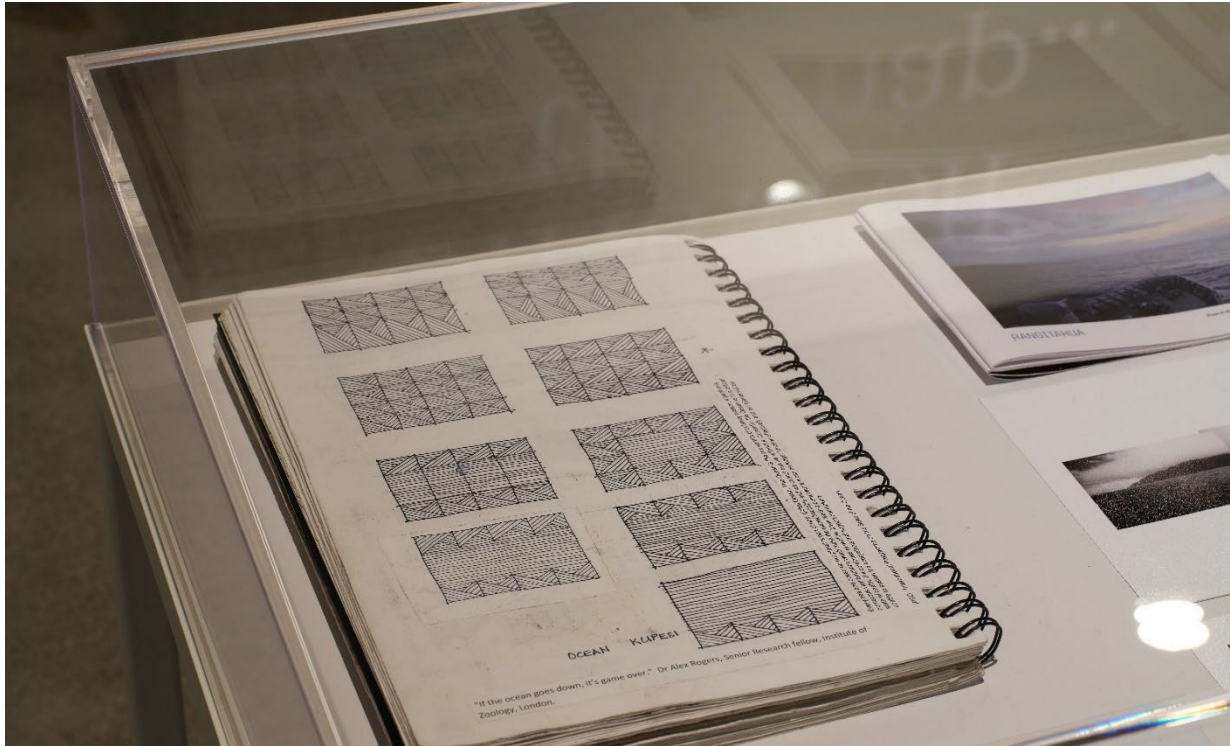
We invoke the spirit of William Blake, who wrote in 1793—the same year that Bruni d’Entrecasteaux sighted and named Raoul Island—‘everything that lives is holy’. That all humanity’s endeavours, on sea as on land, might be prefaced by such a statement.

Always song in the water!

Installation photographs from the New Zealand Maritime Museum









New Zealand
Maritime Museum
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