

# A touring exhibition

# ALWAYS SONG IN THE WATER



## Art inspired by Moana Oceania

‘All of us in Oceania today, whether indigenous or otherwise, can truly assert that the sea is our single common heritage. The ocean that surrounds us is the one physical entity that all of us in Oceania share. It is the inescapable fact of our lives.... for us in Oceania, the sea defines us, what we are and have always been.

**EPELI HAU’OFA**

‘Always song in the water’ is a many-layered, many-voiced song in praise of Moana Oceania—the vast aquatic region of which Aotearoa New Zealand is a part. Featuring the work of over 40 contemporary artists, the exhibition explores—in images, words and sound—our connection with the wider Pacific region.

Acknowledging the imagination’s role in how we relate to and understand our environment, it encourages us to look outwards, to widen our horizons and to set sail. It also traces patterns of migration and history, drawing from cultures around the Pacific Rim into its orbit, as it does the island-nations that lie at the heart of the region.

Moana Oceania is a region of dreams, myths, deep cultural memory and poetry. It speaks to us and asks things of us. ‘We are the sea, we are the ocean,’ writes Fijian author Epeli Hau’ofa. The ocean is our shared inheritance, our great future. Rather than a resource to be exploited, it is a reality to be acknowledged, treated appropriately, and cherished. Taken in its elemental embrace, we all become swimmers, sailors, seafarers, deep sea divers and dreamers. In this together.

With Gregory O’Brien’s 2019 book *Always song in the water* as a starting point, the exhibition leads us on a voyage which is as personal and heart-felt as it is broad and far-reaching. We see the region through the eyes of artists from Aotearoa, Australia and the broader Pacific region. We visit islands, dive down into the ocean’s depths, consult maps and star-charts, and ride the waves. For the artists involved, Moana Oceania is a challenge as well as a gift. Confronting issues of the day such as global warming, over-fishing, pollution and the legacy of colonialism are a part of this voyage.

‘Always song in the water’ is an embrace of both what we hold close and that which lies over the horizon—the myriad life-forms, energies and unfathomed artistic potential of this great oceanic region. It is a few deep breaths of inspiration borne skywards on the roaring air currents of this, the planet’s cradle of life and powerhouse. The works in the exhibition are offerings placed beside the sea, in the hope that we might know and respect our oceanic environment more deeply.

Gregory O’Brien and Jaqui Knowles, Curators  
‘Always Song in the Water—art inspired by Moana Oceania’



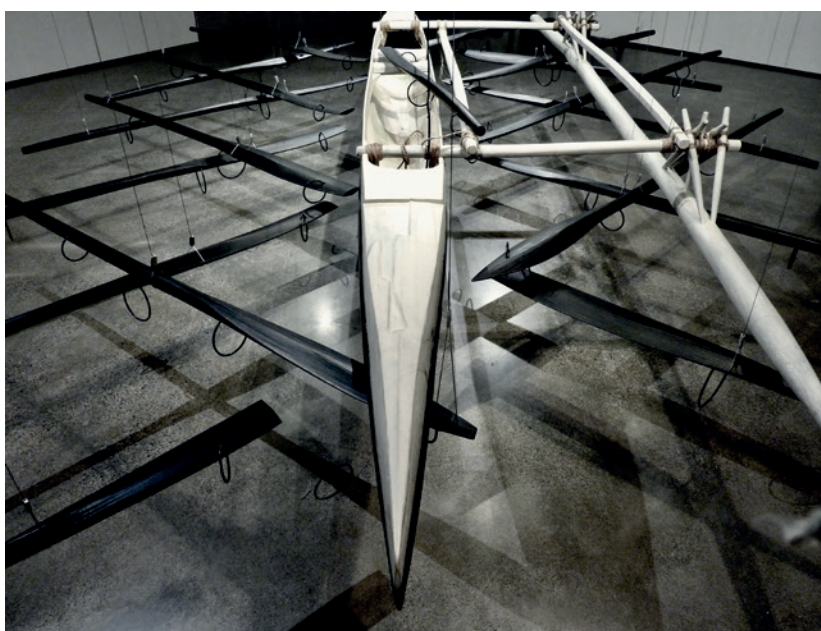
# ALWAYS SONG IN THE WATER

A sampler of works and texts from the proposed touring exhibition.

The images below comprise some of both key and accompanying works. The selection could be adjusted – expanded or reduced depending on the host institution.

This many-voiced exhibition is configured as a pan-Pacific conversation, evolving and ongoing.

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Kazu Nakagawa (Japan/Aotearoa)  
*Carving Water Painting Voice*,  
2016-2017  
5800 x 4100 mm

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By frigate and bird  
we came ashore

fresh-footed on the swaying  
headland, by balloon boat

and a piece of  
yellow twine....

~

...We followed

the flight paths of petrel and red-tailed  
tropic bird, of grey ternlet

and masked booby—and theirs was  
the song the island sang.



Fiona Hall (Australia),  
*Split Infinite*,  
2009-2011, sardine tin  
330 x 160 x 45 mm

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John Pule and Gregory O'Brien  
(Niue and Aotearoa),  
*What I did and did not have (Neruda)*,  
2012, etching and aquatint  
400 x 475 mm

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Denis O'Connor,  
*Oarnest*, 1985,  
Maheno stone  
365 x 880 x 600 mm

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Robin White, Ebonie Fifita  
and Tamari Cabeikanacea  
(Aotearoa/Fiji/Tonga),  
*In the Offing*, 2022,  
earth pigments, plant dyes,  
soot on masi (Fijian barkcloth)  
2000 x 1850 mm

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

David Trubridge, *Then and Now*, 2018,  
kiekie, hardwoods, pounamu  
785 x 1350 x 880 mm

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Haru Sameshima (Japan/Aotearoa),  
*Tidal Sequence, Pickersgill Harbour 1995*,  
Silver gelatin fibre based print

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Neke Moa (Ngāti Kahungunu ki  
Ahuriri, Kai Tahu, Ngāti Porou,  
Ngāti Tūwharetoa) *Hinemoana*, 2018,  
muka, kūtai, shell  
1050 x 900 x 150 mm

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John Reynolds, *The Pacific*,  
silver paint and acrylic on canvas  
890 x 660 x 35 mm

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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**



Elizabeth Thomson,  
*New Blue land*, 2014,  
glass spheres, optically  
clear epoxy resin, aqueous  
isolation, cast vinyl film,  
lacquer on wood panel  
1135 x 1640 x 40 mm

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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**



Jason O'Hara, *Untitled*,  
2011, photograph  
460 x 565 x 45 mm

'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**



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





Robin White, *Braveheart*, 2011, etching  
542 x 435 x 44 mm

tomorrow we leave  
this island  
  
a tree was planted on my tongue  
  
it grew to encompass  
my entire world

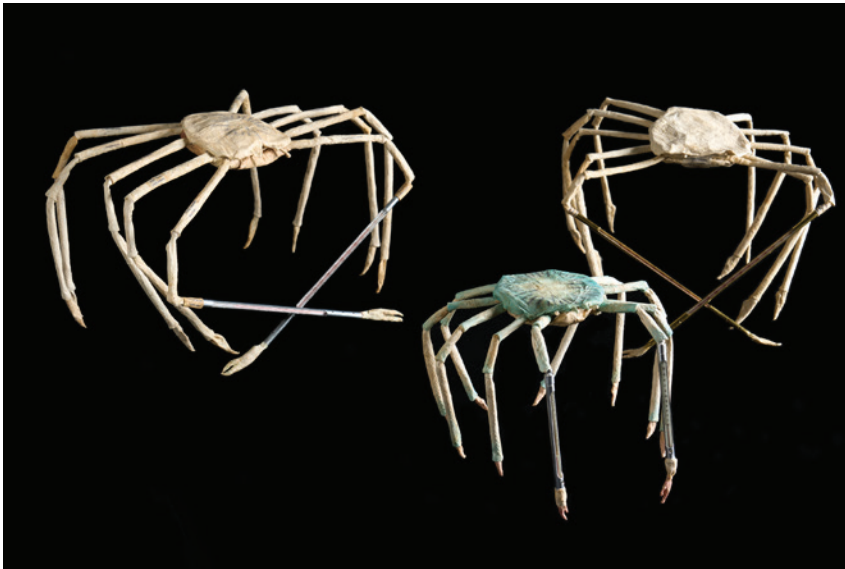
**FROM 'TOMORROW WE LEAVE'  
BY JOHN PULE**



Lianne Edwards, *Larval Form III*, 2022,  
brass encased thermometer, mother of  
pearl, fish otolith, albatross leg-band,  
knitted brass mesh, brass mesh  
870 x 780 x 35 mm



Lianne Edwards, *Flight Status I*, 2020,  
stainless steel bird leg-bands (used:  
Antipodean Wandering albatross),  
stainless steel, South seas pearl  
oyster, plankton net, inks  
845 x 845 x 38 mm



Lianne Edwards,  
*March of the Crabs*, 2020-22,  
barkcloth, thermometers, paint  
785 x 1350 x 880 mm

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Yuki Kihara (Samoa/Aotearoa/  
Japan), *Aquatic Centre*,  
*Tuanaaimato*, 2013,  
framed photograph  
825 x 1070 x 37 mm

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Denys Watkins, *Moorea 1*,  
2006, acrylic on canvas  
385 x 505 x 25 mm

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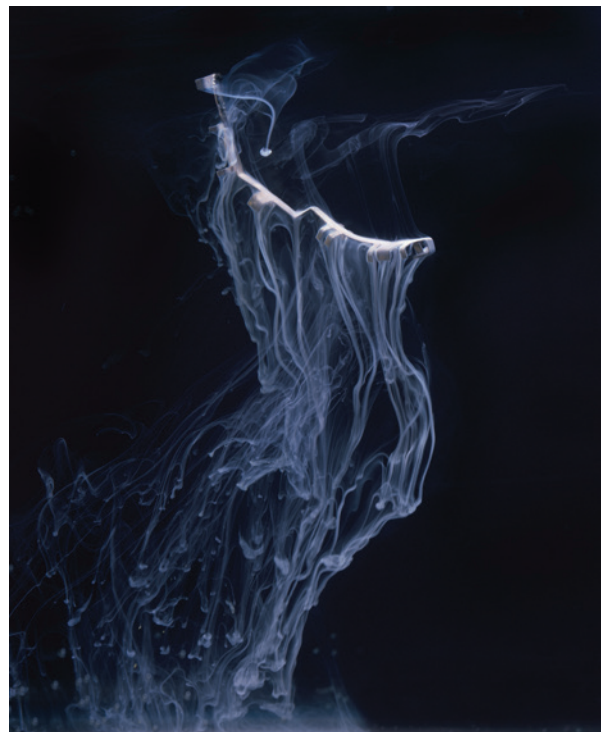
Elizabeth Thomson,  
detail from *The  
Fearless Five Hundred*,  
1989, wall installation,  
500 cast bronze  
fish electro plated,  
chrome, silver leaf,  
painted, patina  
1545 x 5330 x 70 mm

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Joyce Campbell, *Ryukyu I*, 2003-2020,  
Fujiflex crystal archive photograph  
1000 x 820 x 50 mm

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Joyce Campbell, detail from *Enceladus*,  
2003-2020, Fujiflex crystal archive photograph  
1000 x 855 x 50 mm

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Euan Macleod,  
*Boat above submerged figure*,  
2012, oil on canvas  
2030 x 920 x 35 mm

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

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## 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, edition 2/7  
605 x 770 x 45 mm

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Mariners can read the ocean  
as you would a book, each wave  
the upturned corner of a page



Lynn Kelly, *Blue Hydrangea*, 2023,  
aluminium, sterling silver  
300 x 400 x 180 mm

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Jo Braithwaite, *Coast Guard*, 2023,  
oil on canvas, 395 x 352 x 20 mm

‘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...’



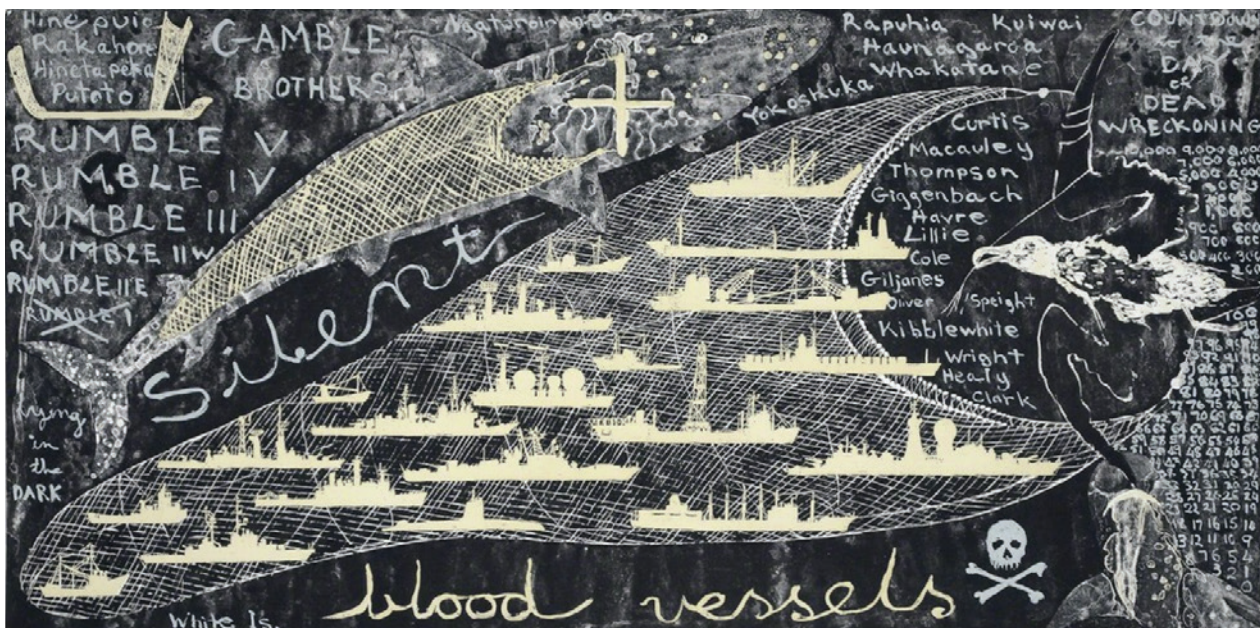
Chris Charteris (Aotearoa/Kiribati/Fiji), *Itutu*, 2023 Whalebone, harakeke, 1670 x 3940 x 340 mm



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



Noel McKenna, from *Hapless berth*,  
2023, ceramic tile  
Display board: 740 x 830 x 18 mm



Fiona Hall, *Lying in the Dark*, 2012, aquatint, open-bite, screenprint, 785 x 1255 x 40 mm

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

Angela Tiatia, *Lick*, 2015,  
single-channel HD video,  
colour, sound

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We reach out  
and touch  
  
what is forever  
  
and what is  
forever  
  
beyond reach.

Laurence Aberhart, *Last Light: Ship at Sea off New Plymouth, Taranaki, 27 May 2010*,  
2019, platinum palladium print, edition 1/2, 900 x 1040 x 35 mm

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Fatu Feu'u,  
*Pacific Ocean Voyage*, 2006,  
acrylic on canvas,  
1400 x 940 mm

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Phil Dadson, *Pax*, 2011,  
digital moving image

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Jason O'Hara, From '*The Deep*' series, 2011, giclée on archival rag  
Diameter: approx 307mm



Gregory O'Brien, *A crown for the Kermadec King / Approaching Raoul*, 2011, acrylic on hardboard  
600 x 600 x 50 mm

'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...'



Jason O'Hara, *Approaching Raoul*, 2011, photograph, 390 x 468 x 30 mm



John Pule and Gregory O'Brien, *Kautahi Maukoloa / Coastal Trader*, 2023, etching and aquatint, printed by Michael Kempson at Cicada Press, Sydney, 808 x 888 x 35 mm





Still from *Ala Hagatonu*, featuring song by Steev Laufilitoga Maka, choreography by Ruha Fifita, filmed by Bruce Foster



Installation image showing work from John Walsh, *Girl on a Bejewelled Rock*, 2023, oil on canvas, 1230 x 1105 x 48 mm

# Addendum:

'To Sea' – suite of 'Northland' works (in glass cases as well as mounted on wall)



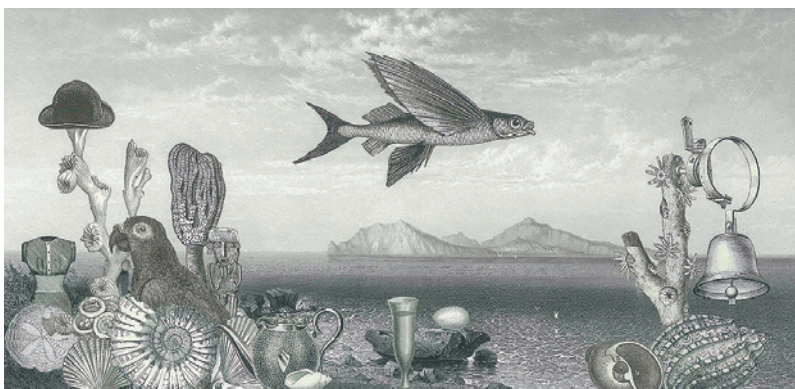
Noel McKenna, *Northland*, 2008, oil on plywood, 420 x 445 x 40 mm



Noel McKenna, *Felix and Carlo on beach at Russell*, 2009, ceramic, 333 x 333 x 30 mm



Florian Habicht, *Land of the Long White Cloud*, 2008-2009, 70-minute video



Brendan O'Brien, *A warm day in the South Seas*, 2014, etching, 250 x 420 x 40 mm



# Short Films

Several films are available to accompany the exhibition. The subject matter explores the voyage of nine of the exhibition artists to the Kermadec Islands, as well as profiles on artists Robin White, Phil Dadson and Kazu Nakagawa. There is also a classical musical performance *Pūhake Ki Te Rangi* (Spouting to the Sky) composed by Gillian Whitehead that incorporates the beautiful sounds of Māori instruments – taonga puoro.

## ARTIST PROFILES

Kazu Nakagawa: <https://vimeo.com/845126707?share=copy>  
Password: altair

Robin White: <http://www.brucefoster.nz/robin-white>

Phil Dadson: <https://vimeo.com/33811531>

## KERMADEC VOYAGE

In 2011 nine artists voyaged to the Kermadec Islands onboard HMNZS *Otago*:  
<http://www.airplane.co.nz/new-gallery-14>

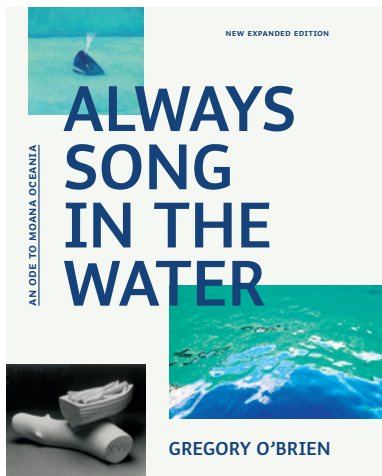
## PUHAKE KI TE RANGI' ('SPOUTING TO THE SKIES')

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



Nine-minute film of composition by Gillian Whitehead (Tuhoe), performed at Futuna Chapel, February 2023

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## The book

Written by Gregory O'Brien this book includes many of the works that are part of the touring exhibition.



## Audio trail

Gregory O'Brien recorded an audio trail that includes a commentary on 10 artworks. Visitors can listen to the trail by scanning a QR code.



## Trail for children

An activities book for children has been developed for use in the gallery or at home.