

IN THE ABSENCE OF LAND, ALL WE HAVE IS EACH OTHER¹

Art, Culture and Climate Change in the Pacific GLOBAL MOVEMENTS | LOCAL INITIATIVES

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PACIFIC CLIMATE CRISIS AND ESD

Climate Change is an inevitable reality in the Pacific region. The resulting Climate Crisis extends beyond the primary concern of environmental impact. Loss of physical space has multiple implications for social, cultural, economic, political and spiritual dimensions of Pacific communities. This paper examines the potential of Art and Culture as an Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) effort to address these issues.

In the Pacific, the 2006 Pacific ESD Framework articulated the goal of ESD as a means *"...to empower Pacific peoples, through all forms of locally relevant and culturally appropriate education...to make decisions and to take actions to meet current and future social, cultural, environmental and economic needs and aspirations"* (PEDF, 2006:23). As such, ESD offers a transformative approach to progressive education that is premised on the pedagogy of HOPE (Holistic/Ownership/Partnership/Empowerment). ESD furthers the basic environmental education by providing opportunities for holistic learning about changing climates and realities that local communities in transition are facing in a globalized world order.

This paper presents a number of Pacific art and culture initiatives including festivals, collectives and individuals employing ESD principles and philosophies in their efforts towards raising awareness about changing climates and climate change in the region. The end is the beginning and in the spirit of *continuity and survival* as a shared Pacific notion of being, these examples show that the arts are creative forms of cultural expression creating possibilities for wider social discourse on society and the environment.

In Pacific oral tradition, I begin with a chant in the form of a poem entitled *Tuli, the dreamer*. In Samoan and Tongan Cosmology *Tuli*, a golden Plover bird is sometimes characterised as Tangaloa the creator and in others, a daughter or sister of Tangaloa. The Tuli is said to have flown about the early creation exploring what was. S/he is attributed with asking for a place to rest. This resulted in the creation of the first island. S/he then asks for a shelter from the sun, resulting in the first tree. Then when s/he pecks on this vine, it rots creating a worm. Tuli is then instructed to divide the worm which then forms the first three inhabitants of the earth. The Tuli features as a traditional motif in both Samoan Siapo and Tongan Ngatu. In the Samoan instance the

¹Title of a quadriptych painting by the author in 2009.

most common Tuli motif is an artistic representation of the footprint of Tuli (Fa'avae Tuli), sometimes mistaken for a four petalled flower.

*Tuli the dreamer
Plucks feathers from women
Carved into stone
Words
That reside in yesterdays
In which I will rest*

one day perhaps I will show you the heavens

*People move the sky like cloudlines
On mountain tops
Ancient chants
Of histories almost forgotten
Women birth
The gods into existence
Who become men
That conquer the world
With words*

*Filling empty spaces with dreams
black and green trees*

*brushing the earth from our faces
dousing the ocean on our brow
the moon Rests in the curl of lips
and gritted teeth*

*Tuli, the dreamer
Plucks feathers from women
Carved into stone
Words
residing in tommorow
In which I will rest*

one day perhaps I will show you the heavens

(c) Koya, 2008

A REGION IN TRANSITION: PACIFIC REALITIES Multiple Realities | Agendas | Tensions

The Pacific is in crisis. Crises exist in all spheres of life from social, economic, political and environmental. These crises are imminent and multifaceted and have become a beast, growing in magnitude exacerbated by both ignorance and a general lack of political will.

Historically, Christianity and Colonialism; and the education and development that followed these early periods of growth, in the region, changed the worldview of Pacific peoples. The shift from valuing and practicing indigenous knowledge and ways of being in harmony with the environment, to formal education resulted in a prioritization of individual success and personal gain. Furthering the 'civilisation' process advocated by the Colonial masters, western models of government and economies were also adopted. It is the global trend of the latter of these that has been attributed with the indiscriminate exploitation of the world environment for human progress and economic growth.

Although most Pacific Island Countries (PICs) have gained independence, they have struggled towards stable economic growth and development and autonomy. One of the problems faced by PICs as articulated in Lamour and Barcham, (2006) being that despite the independence period spanning over the "...1962 – 1983 period ...the majority maintain donor relationship ties with former colonial powers (Lamour, and Barcham, 2006). Additionally, modernization and globalization place a strain on local

communities, leading to changes in lifestyle, values, beliefs, behaviours and practices. All of which are driven by consumerism and commodification, inconsiderate of resource depletion and or socio-cultural, and socio-ecological costs.

The outcome, of this, is a society that is constantly in transition trying to keep up with the rest of the world; a society of people struggling between the reality of small economies and fragile environments and their desire for the luxuries of the developed world which are marketed as *easier, faster, and better*. Pacific leaders are aware that developmental models which have been used in the region have/are not premised on sustainable consumption. Leaders in the region note need for stable political economies but at the same time, the dual need for sustainable socio-cultural development that nurtures and replenishes communities and environments². Additionally, there is growing concern that whilst Climate Crisis is a Pacific reality as it is in other island nations worldwide, that resilience, or the ability to 'bounce back' through adaptive measures (Hilderbrand, R. H., A. C. Watts, and A. M. Randle 2005) is dependent on proactive commitment from the developed world.

SNAPSHOT: The Pacific Ocean which spans about a third of the earth's surface is home to a scattering of around 25,000 countries covering "...a land area of only 550, 073 km³" (Chandra, 1995). The reality of these island nations is one of instability caused by "...small size, scattered nature, remoteness from major centres of production and consumption, and ecological and economic vulnerability" (Ibid).

In response to the low economic growth recorded in the region, over the 1983-1993 decade, the World Bank (WB) coined the phrase 'the Pacific Paradox'. This was in direct reference to economic and political instability, donor dependency, limited resources and population growth. This reality remains true to-date with many common challenges shared by PICs such as smallness, isolation, dependence, ecological frailty, and vulnerability to external economic shocks, population sizes, policies and infrastructure in place since independence, health, environment, low economic growth, and political issues (Chandra, 1995; Maiava, 2006). Today this analogy holds true with the addition of social instability, health security and climate crisis thrown into the mix.

CLIMATE CHANGE:

The most widely known impending crisis facing small island nations is that of climate change and rising sea levels. It is a known fact that the nature of Pacific Islands is such that climate change poses a real and imminent cause for concern. Conservation issues, loss of land, enforced relocation and culture loss are a few of the related worries of low lying island communities. In Tuvalu, half the population is said to live just three (3) meters above sea level and in Kiribati, two islands in the Kiribati-chain are already lost to the sea. For the most part, environmentalists raise their concerns about the physical

² See Pacific Plan <http://www.forumsec.org.fj/pages.cfm/about-us/the-pacific-plan/>

degradation of these island homes, but within the island communities themselves where culture is so closely intertwined with the natural environment, concerns about loss of place and space, and displacement are of paramount concern.

According to UNEP, the United Nations Environment Program News (2006) the picture does not improve.

Studies, announced today by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), indicate that some islands in the region could see over half of the mangroves steadily lost by the end of the century, with the worst hit being American Samoa, Fiji, Tuvalu, and the Federated States of Micronesia. The study, which has assessed the vulnerability of the 16 Pacific Island countries and territories that have native mangroves, finds that overall as much as 13 per cent of the mangrove area may be lost.

Fig 1. Sea Levels are rising

January 12, 2001. Tuvalu's 10,500 people live on nine tiny atolls. They are densely packed; 403 people per square kilometer; Australia has 2.4, New Zealand just under one. Kiribati has 111 people per square kilometer

In places like Kiribati and Majuro (Marshall Islands), for example, the highest point above sea level is on bridges 11 feet and 20 feet high, respectively; virtually everyone lives about five feet above sea level.

One of the major concerns for indigenous communities is that loss of land raises the issue of relocation which has series socio-cultural implications. Loss of physical space and place for many will ultimately lead to culture and language loss. Inherent cultural beliefs and practices tied to the land, sea and its flora and fauna, as well as the language and skills attached to these are potentially endangered. For those in lower lying atolls and smaller/isolated Pacific Island Nations are now finding themselves in a position of this crisis and the ensuing short-term and long-term psychosocial effects of imposed migration and diaspora.

Moreover, the tsunami experience of 2009, demonstrated again the need to maintain mangrove sanctuaries, as environmentalists found that areas in Samoa which were protected by Mangrove were said to have been the least damaged areas within the ocean's path (Thaman, R. 2010). Other concerns include, over-fishing, excessive-logging and rapid clearing of forests to allow for urban development and growth..

ART, CULTURE AND ESD

ESD as a global movement has come about as a result of a rude awakening to the fact that continuous exploitation of the earth's resources cannot sustain life on the planet. ESD is a call for the rethinking of education and for social reform. It recognizes that in order “...to achieve sustainable development, we also need to cultivate the right kinds of values, attitudes and behavior which often defy our traditional social and cultural contexts” (Soetaert and Mottart 2004, cited in Lauman 2007, p1).

The Internationally accepted model of ESD is derived from the Sustainable Development Model which emphasises three pillars; *Society, Environment and Economy*. The ESD model however, advocates that culture underpins and connects these pillars to form a model that is cohesive and holistic.

Despite the diversity of heritage arts in the region, for the most part the arts have been defined by Eurocentric notions of high art with heritage art forms often considered crafts or expressions of culture distinct from high art in the form of paintings, sculpture, music and dance introduced from the outside. Additionally, the arts are relegated to the periphery of formal education with its temporal inclusion in the PEMAC subject comprising of Physical Education, Music and Art. In the early years, art classes in the form of crafts, dancing and singing are deemed relevant and are common place. In upper primary however, it is interesting to note the shift in focus towards ‘serious study’ with art classes reduced to ‘science’ model making and or the creativity of subject teachers (Koya 2008, p 17).

Constructively, however, this is changing both regionally and nationally. Particularly noteworthy are the efforts of the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS), in specific relation to the *Pacific ESD Framework, 2006* and the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) which facilitated the development of the *Culture and Education Strategy, 2009* and the *Regional Cultural Strategy, 2010*. Nationally, Pacific Island Nations are also recognizing the significance of the arts.

National efforts in education are also worth mentioning here. Using the subject approach, Tongan Studies offers students the opportunity to learn about Tongan Culture including an examination of various heritage art forms such as oratory, poetry, and dance, weaving and tapa motifs including meaning and history of these designs. Samoa offers students the arts; visual, graphic and performing at secondary level and in Fiji, a current review of the art curriculum is underway.

In the area of ESD, the *power of the arts* is recognised as a mechanism by which non-formal and informal learning opportunities exist. In this light, the arts are recognised as a social learning tool as well as valid forms of cultural expression. The arts provide a space for open dialogue on social commentary with a wide inclusive outreach extending beyond the confines of the school.

The convergence of the arts and ESD occurs in two main areas; *life learning* and *spirit-learning*. *ESD as Life-learning* encapsulates ideas about education for behaviour change and encompasses discussions about beliefs, attitudes and values. Here, the arts are seen as a means by which to develop and re-awaken notions of living in balance within the wider context of a highly commercialised, ‘selfish’ and ‘convenience first’ lifestyle of the globalised user-pay society we live in and the economic and political ‘power’ (Foucault 1980) structures that support this. Complementarily, *ESD as spirit-learning* draws the arts into a personal, spiritual and emotional dialogue that touches the heart and mind.

ART FOR AWARENESS, ADVOCACY AND EDUCATION ON CLIMATE CRISIS IN THE PACIFIC

This section provides an overview of activities taking place in the Pacific islands, excluding Australia and New Zealand. The discussion is by no means complete and simply offers examples of Pacific initiatives in the Arts premised on the philosophy of ESD as Life-learning and Spirit-learning.

PACIFIC ART FESTIVALS

The role of Art Festivals has been modelled from the Festival of Pacific Arts which was launched as the “South Pacific Arts Festival” in 1972. The roving festival, held every four (4) years in different locations across the Pacific, provides a platform for Pacific Island communities to participate in cultural and art displays both heritage and contemporary. More recent festival developments however, fall within the area of advocacy and awareness. Examples of this include the *Kava Kuo Heka Festival*, Tonga; *King Tide Festival*, Tuvalu and the *Wasawasa Festival*, Fiji.

Kava Kuo Heka, an annual festival celebrated with the Kings birthday week in Tonga was launched in 2008. The festival is described as a *cultural exhibition* organized by the Ministry of Education, Women Affairs and Culture (MEWAC) to “*protect and promote cultural diversity in Tonga and to celebrate the UN year of rapprochement of cultures*”. Festival highlights include seminars and symposiums in the Tongan Language on various cultural issues and the arts, art exhibitions and workshops.

Speaking at the opening of *Kava Kuo Heka*, 2010 entitled “*Au Mei Moana*”(Returning Tides), the Honourable Minister of MEWAC Tevita Hala Palefau affirmed that “*culture is not a hinderance to economic development but is in fact the foundation for the cultivation and nurturing of sustainable economic development*”. The Director of education, Dr. Viliamu Fukofuka in his key note also spoke at length on the cognizance between art and science. “*reject[ing] the artificial dichotomy between the arts and sciences [and]...recogniz[ing] the complimentary roles that each play in enriching the other, to provide a platform for the most dynamic economic development in the world*”(MEWAC, 2010).

Tuvalu which is globally used as the poster nation for Climate Change devised the idea of the *King Tide Festival* as a cultural festival celebrating the cultural heritage of the indigenous people including dancing, singing, story-telling, dramas, traditional games,

food, and heritage arts/crafts. The 2010 festival “*Tuvalu E! The Tide is High!*” aimed at raising awareness about what would be lost if Tuvalu were submerged by the rising sea level. Activities for adults and children included raising awareness about Climate Change and its impact in the Pacific and specifically to Tuvalu (Tangata Pasifika, 2010).

In Fiji, the annual *Wasawasa Festival* “Festival of Oceans” was launched in 2008 as a means to use art and culture to raise awareness about protecting the environment and strengthening communities through the arts. Engaging in all forms of the arts, the program includes contemporary arts from poetry, music, dance, visual arts, sculpture, poetry, installations, and competitions in the arts, story-telling for children, mural painting, tree-huggers and other activities. Wasawasa engages collaborations between environmental, community and art groups with NGOs, regional and international agencies and organisations. These include Worldwide Wildlife Fund (WWF), Fiji Museum, Fiji Arts Council, Laje Rotuma, Live and Learn Fiji, Pacific Voyaging Society, Mama Hanua, Kalanwasa Writing festival Fiji, Ocean Noise Initiative.

The second *Pacific Youth Festival*, 2009 supported by SPC and the Pacific Youth Council which was held in Suva at the University of the South Pacific (USP), also identified Climate Change, and the arts as areas of interest alongside youth mobilisation in the region, identity and leadership. The art component of the festival included workshops and skills for life sessions in the areas of poetry, hip hop, dance and art and activism including t-shirt art and the poetry recordings as a means of dissemination of creative ideas and expression.

ART COMMUNITIES

Art collectives are also emerging as ways by which interest communities may engage in the art, culture and environment conversation. An example of this is ‘*On-the-spot*’ a Nukualofa based Tongan group of artists led by Ebonnie Fifita, a Tonga youth advocate. The forty member group is comprised of 15 – 40 year old artists who organize themselves into small interest-based clusters in the areas of dance, film, visual arts, literary arts and music. With an emphasis on youth-issues and artistic expression, on-the-spot manages a Facebook Community page enabling members to share their works with other Pacific artists and similar art communities worldwide.

Mama Hanua (Mothers of the land) is a five-member women’s art group comprising four Fiji-based and one New Zealand-based professional with an interest and expertise in one or more art forms. The group which was established in 2008 currently comprises an educator, an art administrator, an environmentalist, a professional fashion designer and a writer, the group maintains an interest in the role of Pacific women in the community in direct relation to traditional knowledge with regard to the environment and the arts.

As part of the Wasawasa Festival of Oceans 2008, the *Mama Hanua* initiative organized a mural project which involved the participation of over fifty members of the

Pacific Centre for the Environment and Sustainable Development (PACE-SD) is the coordinating section of ESD initiatives at USP. Through the centre, a number of youth leadership workshops have been facilitated to provide a holistic learning experience to Pacific students enrolled at the University. At a *NZAID/USP ESD Youth Forum on Leadership and Governance* held in September 2009, participants were introduced to the use of Antagonist art or art for advocacy including rock art, t-shirt art and a poetry CD entitled “The Power of Words”. In December that same year, at the *UNEP/USP Pacific Youth Environment Network Forum (PYEN) on Pacific Youth Climate Leaders - Learning, Creating and ACTING*, art practitioners shared their skills and experiences in the use of visual, performing arts, music, poetry and recyclable arts to create environmental awareness in the Pacific.



Youth Workshops at PACE-SD, USP 2009.

The Oceania Centre for Arts, Culture and Pacific Studies (OCACPS) has participated in a number of focused Art and ESD initiatives over the 2009 – 2010 period. In collaboration with the Fiji Arts Council and supported by the French Embassy Suva, the centre coordinated a “Turtles and Birds” exhibition in conjunction with a “Lavalava Poetry” night held during the Pacific Youth Festival at the University. While the exhibition featured artists’ ideas about climate change, the poetry event featured Pacific writers sharing poetry and stories related to culture, youth, and the environment.

Art as a response to climate crisis in the form of natural disasters also featured in the work of the centre and in response to the September 2009 tsunami, OCACPS facilitated the Tsunami Feather Appeal. This initiative brought together over one hundred members of the art community in Fiji and at USP to participate in *sei*⁴ making (*Sei*’s of Hope), an art auction, and a night of entertainment. The Feather Appeal raised close to \$23,000 over a one-week period demonstrating the potential of the arts in raising awareness and as a means by which to respond to community crisis.

In April 2010, OCACPS launched *Tangata Fenua; Tangata Moana - People of the Land; People of the Sea*, in celebration of Earth Day. The centre used this opportunity to facilitate an art response to Earth Day and Earth hour, as a proactive way of engaging

⁴ Feathered head pieces common in Samoan and Tongan dance.

with the corporate community on the implications of climate change. The event was seen as a means by which to promote contemporary Pacific art and culture by localising internationally recognised events.

As part of its 2010 Tonga Outreach program in collaboration with the Kava Kuo Heka 2010, OCACPS focused on the use of the arts as an advocacy tool and included skills for life workshops in the arts including basic skills in dance, music and poetry. The climax of the Tonga outreach was the re-staging of “Silence and HIV: A Love for Life” supported in part by the UNAIDS, UNFPA, USP, SPC and PCC as well as local sponsors from Fiji and Tonga. The stage production which featured actors and dancers from Fiji engaged over seventy secondary school students from Tonga High School and thirty students from the University of the South Pacific Tonga Campus. These students participated as actors and the bulk of whom comprised the backdrop choir.

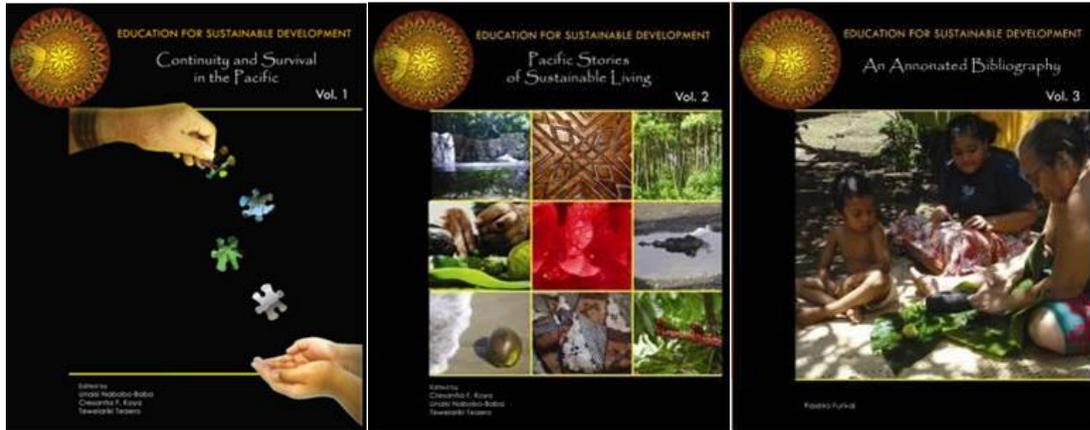


Princess Fatafehi 'o Lapaha Tuita' with the cast and crew of 'A Love for Life', Tonga 2010.

The Tonga production was the second restaging of a commissioned work for the Pacific Youth Festival in July 2009. The first Pacific restaging took place in September 2009 in Suva, Fiji. In conjunction with the performance, a curriculum-skills teacher workshop was also facilitated to assist local teachers in the development of culture-sensitive and faith based approaches in the teaching of sexual and reproductive health. The Visual Arts component of this program included a workshop and an art exhibition entitled “*Environmental Change: The work of man and the assault of nature*” it included over twenty beginner and emerging artists, aged sixteen to forty, many of whom had never participated in a program of this kind.

The School of Education (SOED) as part of a USP-Asia Pacific Centre for UNESCO funded project has produced a three-volume series on ESD in the Pacific. Volume one features

academic works examining cultural notions of ESD; volume two, uses story-telling, photography, visual arts, poetry, music and dance as creative cultural expressions of ESD and volume three comprises an annotated bibliography on ESD works. These works were released in March 2010.



Three-volume series by SOED, USP, 2010.

A wider regional project worth particular mention is the Ocean Noise Initiative (ONI) in conjunction with the Pacific Voyaging Societies in the region. ONI is advocated by Maori actor, director, writer and activist Rawiri Paratere who is currently working on a film “Cry from the Deep”. The film highlights the goal of ONI which is to create awareness about the effects of the United States ‘Green Navy’ project which uses sonar to detect enemy vessels underwater. According to Paratere at the launch of the Wasawasa Festival, 2009 *“The tests causes massive stranding [beaching] of whales and dolphins that have exploded ear drums or suffered bleeding from their eyes”*.



Paratere shares the Ocean Noise Initiative at the Festival of Pacific Arts, 2008.

The Ocean Voyaging Society has launched a series of traditional Vaka with the intention of creating a flotilla of ocean vessels which will present a petition to the US Base in Hawaii in 2011. In addition to raising awareness about human impact on the ocean environment, this initiative has enabled the reconstruction of traditional ocean vessels and marks the revival of traditional skills and arts associated with Navigation in the Pacific.



Launch of Fiji Ocean Vessel Uto ni Yalo, Heart of the Spirit at Wasawasa 2009.

INDIVIDUAL ARTISTS

There is a plethora of Pacific artists who use art to share cultural and personal ideas about cultural and environmental issues. In the interest of brevity, a selection of artists from Fiji, Kiribati, Tonga and Papua New Guinea are provided to show the diversity of art forms and highlighted issues.

In Fiji, environmental art and, in particular, recyclable art is almost synonymous with well known artist *Craig Marlow*. Marlow's work centres on the environment a focus on recycling and reuse of predominantly found materials. Additionally, his paintings depict various cultural and environmental scenes in particular the ocean and marine life. Similarly, well-known Fiji artist *Lambert Ho* uses his visual arts for social commentary and employs the use of plastic materials and seeds in jewellery making.



Jewellery made from plastic sprite bottle and seeds, Lambert Ho 2008.

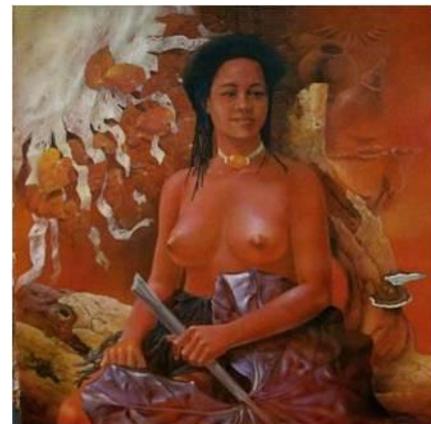
Fiji-based Tongan artist *Lingikoni Vaka'uta* chooses to reaffirm man's relationship with the environment through the use of traditional metaphors, myths and legends in visual arts and installations and PNG Visual Artist *Daniel Waswas* uses cultural themes to depict the resilience of various PNG cultural groups by painting individual and collective figures in traditional dress. Two other artists worth noting include Kiribati visual artist and poet, *Teweariki Teaero* and Indigenous Fijian artist *Anare Somumu* who both feature culture and the environment prominently in their works.



Pukepuke 'a Fonua (Holding the Land)
Lingikoni Vaka'uta, 2006.



Split face of Moana
Teweariki Teaero, 2009.



My Fiji Mona Lisa
Anare Somumu, 2009.

Ann Tarte and *Marie Koya*, both Fiji artists represent the small but growing number of female artists exhibiting at the national level. Koya's works in photography, poetry, painting and graphic art depict a youth perspective of socio-cultural and environmental

concerns. Her recent work featured at the Climate Change and Creativity Conference questioned the issue of climate change and impact on bio-diversity. Tarte's ongoing work on traditional tattooing in Fiji turns the question of climate change to culture loss as the loss of a people and their ways of life.



How do we protect our Children?
Marie Koya, 2010.



Liku 2.
Ann Tarte, 2009.

Individually and collectively, these artists and communities represent a small fraction of the diversity of work taking place in the region engaging in conversations about art as creative cultural expressions within the Climate Change discussion.

CONCLUSION

Despite a general lack of artistic encouragement in the formal schooling experience in the Pacific, individual and collective recognition of its potential role in ESD as a means of promoting greater awareness and advocacy is apparent. This paper has shown that with institutional support and individual perseverance, a collaborative approach to the effective use of the arts and culture within the wider Climate Change and Crisis discussion is both useful and necessary.

The arts provide a culturally relevant, social avenue for commentary and education in various art genres. Whether the message is in the medium used or in the subject matter depicted, these art initiatives demonstrate the resilience of the Pacific spirit to capture the essence of the holistic view of "Land, Sky and Sea" so clearly articulated in Indigenous Cosmology and stories of creation.

Through the arts the oral traditions of story-telling continue with a purposeful effort to engage dialogue within the wider Pacific community. The message is clear – Climate Crisis is a shared Pacific reality that threatens the very foundations of island life. As the King Tide Festival reminds us: *The Tide is High!*

swim the sky
in feathered dreams
and black ink
little sister.

let the moon
cover your skin
with her wet scales

the songs of trees
on your tongue
little brother

dream of love
in feathers and ink,
my daughter

yes,
even in bones and sweat

touch the hills
with your palms
gently, my son

and learn to sing
the song
that is yours alone

learn to move the dance
that is the blood of father sky,
the voice of sister ocean,
and the heartbeat of mother
earth.

(c)Koya, 2008/10

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