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Encounters in Vanuatu: Processes and Interactions in Visual Arts

A thesis submitted in (partial) fulfilment of the requirements
for the award of the degree

Master of Creative Arts - Research

From

UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

FACULTY OF CREATIVE ARTS

By

Catherine Kay

**Bachelor of Visual Arts Canberra School of Arts
Australian National University 1990**

**Graduate Diploma in Art History and Curatorship
Australian National University 1993**

**Master of Creative Arts- Studio Practice
University of Wollongong 1995**

2009

CERTIFICATION

I, Catherine F. Kay, declare that this thesis, submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Master of Creative Arts in the Faculty of Creative Arts, University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. The document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

Catherine F Kay

27 October 2009

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Glossary

Ni Vanuatu

General name for people from the islands of Vanuatu
Vanuatu Term invented by the Vanua'aku Party to replace New Hebrides. The term Vanua means "Land" and is often translated as "our land" or "abiding land".

Vanuatu

Officially the Republic of Vanuatu or *Ripablik Blong Vanuatu* (Bislama) since 1980 is an island archipelago of approximately 200 islands, 82 inhabited. Vanuatu stretches over 800 miles North to South.

New Hebrides

The colonial name for the nation of Vanuatu prior to 1980. It had shared sovereignty between Britain and France.

Kastom

The term Kastom is complex and has many variant definitions (Bonnemaïson 1994, Jolly 2003, Bolton 2003, Keesing 1982) throughout Melanesia. Accordingly to Geismar's research, it epitomises "indigenous possession in direct opposition to the practices and artefacts of 'the West' or of 'White men', and reflects a complex self-consciousness about history and development, for both indigenous persons and foreigners (Geismar 2005).

Laplap

Staple part of the Ni Vanuatu diet based on taro and manioc mixed with coconut milk and banana that are wrapped in coconut leaves and is cooked slowly on wood fire.

Nakamal

Traditionally a meeting place for men from the village to gather and talk about their concerns or current issues. The chief of the village is the mediator and make decisions for solving village disputes. Modern *nakamal* is a place where people drink kava.

Kato

General term for basket in the island of Futuna.

ABSTRACT

The Master of Creative Arts Research investigates cross-cultural interactions with Vanuatu between 2003 and 2008. Several fieldtrips to the island of Efate the main island, site of the capital Port Vila enabled meetings with the visual art milieu of craftspeople, artists, the Vanuatu Cultural Centre and Museum, the two Art Foundations Michoutouchkine and Susanne Bastien, as well as commercial outlets. It confirmed my interest in setting up conversations between my own art practice in Australia with individual artists in Vanuatu through two conferences, firstly the Pacific Arts Association IXth International Symposium Musée du quai Branly in 2007 in Paris and secondly, the Pacific International Museum Association in Port Vila in 2008.

My research, which includes two exhibitions, presents a working strategy based in artistic process for developing an on-going dialogue between artists from the Pacific and non-Indigenous Australian culture. Core concerns for island communities such those in Vanuatu include an understanding of the multiplicity within island cultures, a developing relationship between genders and a situation of constant change and development in relation to dominant external influences. ¶¶My research built on insights from recent exhibitions by indigenous and non-indigenous artists and curators, which included work from, mixed cultural backgrounds such as *Weaving the Murray* (Art Gallery of South Australia and Prospect Gallery, Adelaide 2002), *News from Islands* (Campbelltown Art Centre 2007), and *Woven forms* (Object Gallery, Sydney and Form Gallery, Perth 2006).

My collaborative research and exhibition document my encounter with two ni-Vanuatu artist/craftspeople Eric and Linda Natuoivi. Eric Natuoivi was already acknowledged as a leading Pacific artist through his involvement in the Asia Pacific Triennial of 1996, while his wife Linda is a highly regarded weaver within her community, but unknown outside Vanuatu. ¶Key issues that emerge are the interactions between artists and between artists and audience; the power relations between cultures and institutions, and facilitating the needs of artists from very different cultural situations.

The exhibition *Encounters in Vanuatu* (FCA gallery 2009) documents the processes of these interactions as well as presenting important examples of Eric and Linda Natuoivi's works. My artwork, in the adaptation of plaited structures and photographs, reflects the transformation that occurred as a result of being a catalyst between two worlds. Digital images and short films address the complexities of reading artworks outside their context of production, and in the artificial reality of the gallery space.

This essay proposes a model for cross cultural interaction and highlights the significance of artistic, intellectual and economic benefits for artists engaged in cross-cultural events.

I acknowledge with appreciation Professor Diana Wood Conroy, who acted as my supervisor and gave me the opportunity to undertake my research in Vanuatu. Diana encouraged me to apply for University Postgraduate Award at the University of Wollongong. This scholarship was granted and helped me to carry fieldwork in the islands of Vanuatu, to attend several conferences in Paris, Canberra and Brisbane and to pursue this research at the University of Wollongong

My particular thanks go to Ni Vanuatu Eric and Linda Natuoivi for their collaboration on the project *Encounters in Vanuatu*. Without them and the Ni Vanuatu basket makers (Tapani Lishi, Fishia Torbor, Kalwata Ronald, Tapani Saladi, Nyal and basket seller Estelle Collins) the project would not have come to fruition nor fully embrace the challenge of being real beyond academic requirements. Thanks to the support of their extended family and relatives.

Thanks to the Vanuatu Cultural Council for allowing my research in Port Vila and especially to Ralph Regenvanu, President of the National Cultural Council for facilitating my attendance at the PIMA conference in Port Vila. Many thanks to the staff of the VCC, in particular to the librarians at the Vanuatu Cultural Centre for finding theses and documents inherent to life in Vanuatu. Thanks to the Friends of the Museum VCC in Port Vila for facilitating Eric and Linda Natuoivi's travel to Australia.

Thanks to Helene Walsh as a friend who gave constant encouragement and enthusiasm. Helen contributed to make the 2008 trip to Vanuatu fruitful for all participants involved in the project *Encounters in Vanuatu*. I am very grateful to Helene for helping with technical support of the short films that bring the exhibitions alive. I thank her not only for her constant technical support but also her insight into the project and patience with my demands and particularly for raising the funds for Linda Natuoivi's travelling expenses.

Thanks to Jenny West and family for welcoming me in her home in Port Vila during my fieldtrip in 2008 and for encouraging the project in many ways by her passion for Vanuatu arts and people.

Thanks to Louise Maurer for her friendship, encouragement, knowledge for academic requirements, appreciation of indigenous arts and insight into visual art practices.

Thanks to all the staff of the Faculty of Creative Arts at University of Wollongong, in particular Associate Professor Brogan Bunt, Head of the Faculty of Creative Arts for facilitating my participation to the PIMA Conference in Vanuatu and, many thanks to Tanya Barton and Didier Balez for their invaluable technical and administrative support and many thanks to Jelle van den Berg and Jacky Redgate for their advice.

Thanks to Friederike Krishnabkadi-Vasilakis for documenting the closing of the exhibition *Encounters in Vanuatu: Processes and Perspectives*, FCA Gallery (20 February 2009). Thanks to Emily Purser from Learning Development Services for her experience in cross cultural projects and advice on the structures of the thesis, Margaret Burns and Christine Howe for proofreading of the thesis.

Thanks to all the staff and students of the Canberra School of Arts for facilitating Eric and Linda Natuoivi's residency in the Textiles and Ceramic workshops and for encouraging the project *Encounters in Vanuatu* in all regards. In particular, thanks to Gordon Bull, Director of the School of Art, Janet de Boos, Head of the Ceramic Workshop, Greg Daly, Anita Mc Intyre and Valerie Kirk, Head of the Textiles Workshop, and staff.

Thanks to the Australian Museum in Sydney for access to the Pacific collection, in particular to Yvonne Carillo-Huffman, Technical Officer and Kirk Huffman Honorary Member of the Australian Museum and Chief in Vanuatu cultures. Both agreed to open the exhibition: *Encounters in Vanuatu: Influence and Confluence* in the Long Gallery, Faculty of Creative Arts, University of Wollongong (October 2008) and in giving to the participants and audience insights in Vanuatu cultures.

Thanks to Smolbag Theatre (Port Vila) for holding my rag weaving workshop which contributed to cultural exchanges between young ni Vanuatu women and myself.

Thanks to the National Gallery of Australia for facilitating Eric and Linda Natuoivi's workshop (18 October 2008) to coincide with the exhibition " Gods, Ghosts and Men: Pacific Arts from the NGA Collection. Especially thanks to the Curator of Pacific Art collection, Crispin Howarth for opening the exhibition *Encounters in Vanuatu (I)* Foyer Gallery at the School of Arts ANU and Michael Gunn, Senior Curator Pacific Collection for providing information about Eric Natuoivi's art work in the NGA collection. Thanks to Maryanne Voyasis, Manager of Membership & Development Programs and, staff for facilitating Linda and Eric Natuoivi's workshop at NGA and thanks also to participants to this workshop for their feedback.

Thanks to Helene Kaminski f for closing the exhibition *Encounters in Vanuatu: Processes and Interactions in Visual Art* FAC Gallery UOW 20 February 2009

I warmly thank the people listed below who helped me, Eric and Linda Natuoivi, as providers of all sorts...

Liz Jeneid and Graham Bartholemew
Kay Johnson and John Passioura
Neil Duncan and Elisabeth Prax
Michele and Francis Cappe
Ian and Austra Hart
Ross Longmuir and staff

To my three daughters for their love and care.

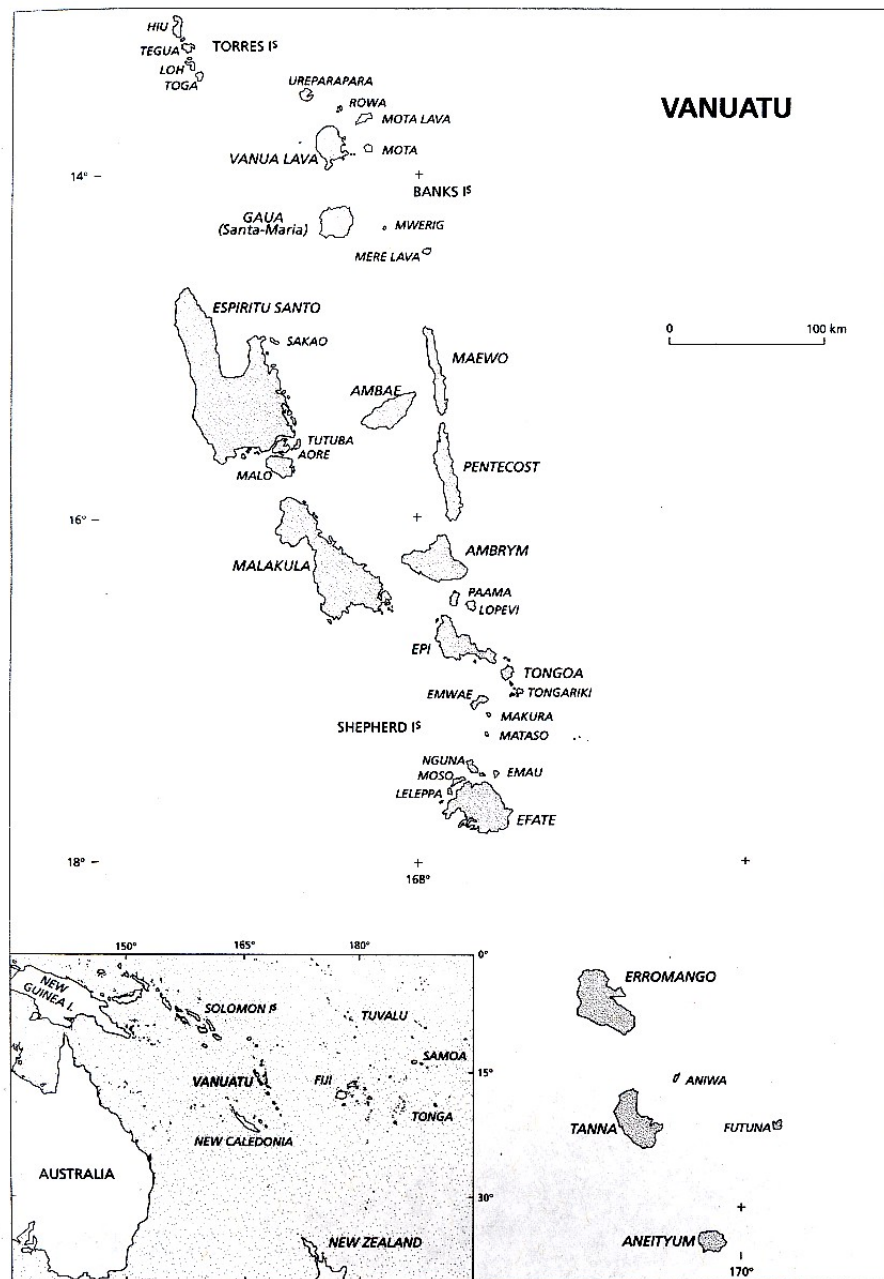


Figure 12 Map of Vanuatu (Bonnemaïson 1996)

“ L’art de l’Océanie, surtout celui de la Mélanésie, ne se donne jamais d’emblée. Il n’est pas pour le voyageur pressé’

Philippe Peltier, Conservateur Musée du Quay Branly

Since 2003 I have been sailing in the Pacific, in particular to Vanuatu.

The 2006 trip to Vanuatu was a significant point of departure for my Master of Creative Art Research as I used recordings of this particular trip to make the short films presented in the exhibition *Encounters in Vanuatu: Processes and Interactions in Visual Art*, held at the University of Wollongong 2009.

The concept of my artwork and project is explained as a journey with transitions, geographically but also in time. I am relating my personal story as a background to situate my approaches to some contemporary issues concerning the environment, globalisation and post-colonialism.

In 2006 I travelled to Vanuatu from Australia. As a voyager ready to explore a non-western culture and a third world country, I had to leave behind some aspects of western concepts of living in the twenty-first century. In particular, I stretched the limits of my comfort zone by sailing there on my yacht. The experience of vulnerability in strange isolation was sharp. The memories of sailing recorded in my travel diary present a series of images that are strangely disassociated from my later journey on land in Vanuatu:

The ocean had cut me off from civilization. I had on one side Australia, a continent standing apart from the rest of the world, a natural barrier in the oceanic world, and on the other side, Vanuatu and the Pacific islands with a plethora of cultures, small islands spread at random in the massive liquid world. I lived for a few weeks in a “transparent” world, among the clouds and all sorts of imaginary shapes that disturbed me. The moon played tricks, imitating the lights of a cargo ship ready to run into my fragile vessel. I lived in a theatre animated by the birds of the ocean playing with the waves. Being in the middle of nowhere, although this ‘nowhere’ is charted and divided and owned, I

contemplated human life from far away, as an outsider who had detached herself from the world's trauma. I attended to the urgency of the moment, such as securing that wild rope that flapped around the boat like a weapon. Time lapsed.



Figure 1. View from the boat, 2007 Photograph Catherine K, Collection of the artist,

My first point of transition in the journey was the Chesterfield Reefs which are situated in the eastern Coral Sea, some five hundred and fifty kilometers west of the northern tip of New Caledonia and north-east of Vanuatu, forming a collection of elongated reefs that enclose a deep, semi-sheltered lagoon. The overall structure of the reefs covers about one hundred and twenty kilometers in length and seventy kilometers across. It is a hazard for navigation and has accumulated an imposing collection of wrecks over centuries. It is possible to visit the Chesterfields Reefs with

X

the permission of the French authorities. The main recommendation is to attempt to reach these reefs only with a good weather forecast.



Figure 2. Chesterfield Reefs 2006 Photograph Catherine K

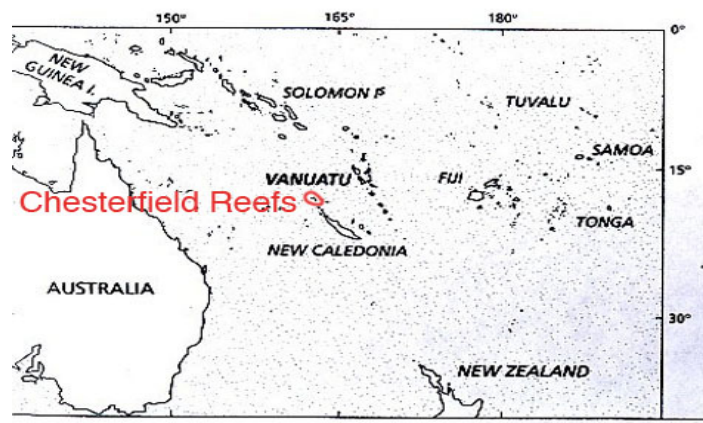


Figure 3. Map *Arts of Vanuatu* (Bonnemaizon 1996 p.9)
Location of Chesterfield Reefs in the Pacific Ocean



Figure 4. Width of the Chesterfield Reefs 2006 Photograph Catherine K

In my diary I recorded:

I have never been so far away in such a remote place. (As the following images and films on CD show: it is a sanctuary for birds). My landing provoked them and reminded me of Alfred Hitchcock's horror film *The Birds* although these birds did not really attack me.

The smell of guano was so strong that I walked on the windward side of the island. The meteorological patterns of the Pacific regions are changing significantly as the geographic and time zones of the cyclone seasons and wind directions become erratic. Meteorological stations are posted on Pacific reefs to analyse and control information but they do not always survive the local climate. While the existence of these stations brings controversial issues about territorial zones to the fore, they may, after all, be able to warn Pacific Islanders of cyclones and prevent human loss.

A turtle was part of my encounter and this symbol recurred several times during this voyage as an omen.



Figure 5. Catherine K and Turtle, Chesterfield Reefs, 2006. Photograph Catherine K

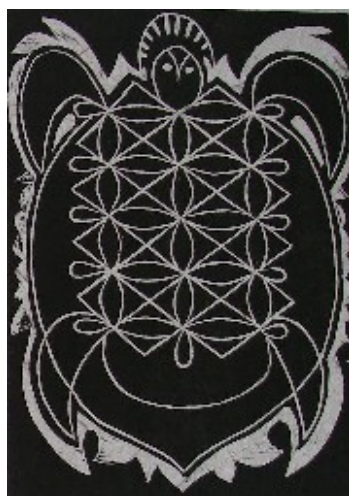


Figure 6. Eric Natuoivi, *Sea Turtle* 2008. Linocut from Sand Drawing 35cm x 25cm

I did not think that I would find any human traces but, unfortunately, there was plenty of rubbish on the other side of the island: fishnets in large quantities, ropes, plastic bottles, shoes and all sorts of things, parts of civilization that drifted for miles and were trapped there temporarily till the next cyclone arrived, vacuuming through the islands.



Figure 7. Door of the meteorologic station, Loop Island with the inscription in French: "I work for you day and night for your security FORBIDDEN ENTRY" 2006
Photograph Catherine K

A French meteorological station had been on the reef but now all that remains is an empty shelter that has been battered by strong winds. The meteorologists who built this shelter either had a sense of humor or were patriotic; they had stenciled inside the shelter the emblem of France, the French rooster and it stands still proudly on the wall accompanied by an obsolete sign forbidding entry to the meteorological station.



Figure 8. From the window, a French rooster 2006. Photograph Catherine K,

These signs of civilization were discordant in the natural environment however, stamps of imposed Western authority, and I was acutely aware of them.

The cleansing effect of the ocean prepared me for the openness which I needed to engage with Vanuatu culture. My humble way of travelling dissolved the barrier of authority that Western curators assume while entering other cultures through airports. Placed between two worlds, I was learning to shed my own assumptions about other cultures and the journey on the ocean allowed me to be more observant of different environments and cultures. My approach, although self-reflexive, presented a transformative experience which I advocate as a new curatorial approach: one that places more focus on fieldworks and the interconnections that occur as a result of primary exchanges between cultures.

In the years 2005-06 I set myself two artistic projects: *In Search of Laperouse* and *Any News of Laperouse*. These bodies of works which were completed for an Australia Council Fellowship, unravelled aspects of French exploration in the Pacific and were exhibited (respectively) at the Wollongong City Gallery and the State Library of New South Wales, Sydney



Figure 9 *Profiles Coastlines*, Watercolour
25cm x 35cm 2006 Catherine K



Figure 10 *Any News of Laperouse* Exhibition 2006
State Library of New South Wales
Photograph Catherine K

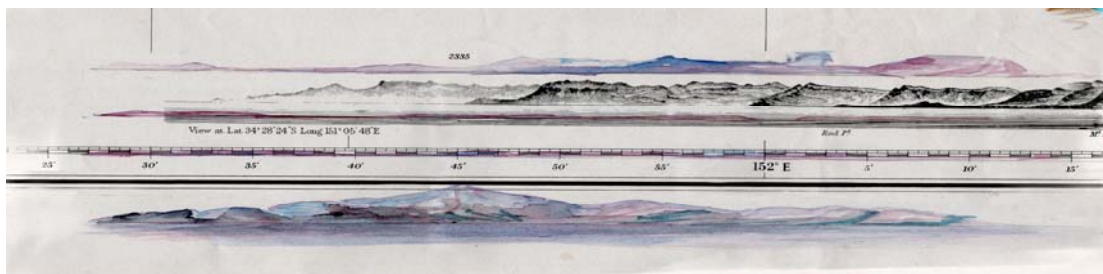


Figure 11 *Approaches to Wollongong* Digital Print 70cm x 20cm 2005 Catherine K

These projects led to research on some eighteenth century watercolours from the Pacific regions where French captain/explorer Jean-Francois Galaup de La Perouse (named Laperouse after the French Revolution in 1789) travelled after leaving Botany Bay on 10 March 1788. I questioned the way the artists of that time proceeded in recording life in the island and I wondered how I myself would proceed

with similar tasks. Therefore, I embarked on recording profiles of coastlines as seen from a boat, painting the land as an object to be observed and to be transcribed as a visual text. (Appendix 1) My research prompted several reflections on the way history is recorded and interpreted.

Intrigued by the disappearance of Laperouse's ships and willing to revive the story, I went 'in search of the islands' that I presumed Laperouse and his crew visited after leaving Australia (Appendix 2). The closest ones of these islands are New Caledonia and Vanuatu. I wanted to reach the islands by sailing boat possibly to emulate Laperouse's story and "rediscover" the land and its peoples with a fresh outlook. The Laperouse projects have been pivotal for my art practice as they formed the basis for new perceptions and ways for developing artworks. The projects allowed me to interrogate my personal sense of connections with the countries visited, and to question my exact role as an artist/participant in the life of Pacific islanders, and as an observer of their social reality. My position as woman /artist/ sailor has inevitably shaded my research and made me even more aware of the gender divisions that restrict any study of the art of the Pacific (Bolton 2003).

Although this research presents an ethnographic component, carrying out fieldwork and written report, my work proceeds in large part as an exchange of situations between two ni-Vanuatu artists Eric and Linda Natuoivi and myself that lead us to work collaboratively in our own terms. I engage in a dialogue with them and in a

broader sense with their culture as a strategy for facilitating a cross-cultural exchange. Models for fieldwork theorists are Kirk Huffman (1996, 2004), Ulli Beier (2005), Lissant Bolton (2003) and Susan Cochrane (2008).

Diverse aspects of key theories are considered and layered in the research analysing the making of art objects, the display and *raison d'être* of these art objects in and out of their cultural contexts. In particular, Paul Carter in Material Thinking, The Theory and Practice of Creative Research (2004) set up strategies for the makers of objects for presenting objects in different context. Importantly, the materiality of the objects as referred by Christopher Tilley in Metaphor and Material Culture (1999) is pertinent to this study. Other writing about gender and equity destabilised comfortable assumptions in regards to representation of the marginalized such as women's craft within the globalised art world as analysed by Louise Hamby in Re-Coil, Change and Exchange in Coiled Fibre Art (2003), and in the provocative exhibition co-curated with Diane Moon Art on the String, Aboriginal Threaded Objects from the Central Desert and Arnhem Land (2005), Hamby asked the viewers to consider Aboriginal women's baskets and necklaces as artforms and display them as such.

In his 1986 research The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective (1986), cultural theorist Arjun Appadurai considered the way objects can be read with their own "biographies". Appadurai has informed the reading of art objects

beyond the dichotomies between western and non-western worlds. In this thesis, a Vanuatu basket is used as a metaphor for human transactions and motivations.

Objects also embody a diversity of relations in regards to collections, display and bring perspectives on differences between western and non-western worlds. This thesis is informed by Clifford James's The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth Century Ethnography, Literature and Art (1988), and subsequent researchers such as Fred Myers (2002) and more recently by Howard Morphy in Becoming Art, Exploring Cross-Cultural Categories (2008). Through this awareness, I became more critical about the presentations of the collections at the Musee du quay Branly in Paris (*New Ireland, Arts of the South Pacific* (2 April-8 July 2007), curated by Michael Gunn, Philippe Peltier).

A Sense of identity across time and society is an important factor in this research, starting with the eighteenth century explorers such as French explorer Laperouse (Catherine K 's catalogues exhibition *Any News of Laperouse* State Library of New

South Wales Sydney, 2005 and *In Search of Laperouse* Wollongong City Gallery Wollongong 2005) to the present time with my encounter with ni-Vanuatu people. Re-imagining Laperouse's undocumented journey in the Pacific has been a vital strand in my own voyaging and creative work.

The rapidity of travel current in the global society may force us to consider art objects in a different way stripped of their western connotations that place them on a pedestal in museum, a position that heighten their economic value. This research considers baskets not only as aesthetic objects, but also as vehicles for transmitting cultural knowledge in a rite of exchange and encourages recognition and respect of other cultures. Furthermore, these considerations allow for contemporary artists such as Eric, Linda Natuoivi and myself to broaden the scope of making art and acknowledge not only differences between artists' aspirations but also similarities across cultures accentuated by globalisations and concerns for the future.

In particular, the process of making itself, as I have described in detail later in this thesis, is an integral part of the way the viewer considers objects. The innovation of the project *Encounters in Vanuatu* is *that it* takes on board these methodologies and provides a pathway for cultural exchanges between contemporary artists across cultures.

My primary research focused on the art of basketry in Vanuatu. The support of an institution such as the University of Wollongong has been of primary importance in allowing me to proceed with this particular research in Vanuatu. My approach was to encounter the basket makers and to engage in a dialogue between them and myself. These interactions are fundamental for analysing the western influences on

contemporary art in Vanuatu and for understanding the aspirations of the ni-Vanuatu basket makers and artists.

In June 2007, as part of this study, I made a fieldtrip to Vanuatu. At that time, I organized for two ni-Vanuatu artists, Eric and Linda Natuoivi to come to Australia for artists' residencies. These art residencies took place in September 2008 at the School of Art, Australian National University and in October at the Faculty of Creative Arts, University of Wollongong.

In July 2007, I attended the *Pacific Arts Association's IX International Symposium* at the Museum of quay Branly in Paris (5-7 July 2007). This enabled me to connect with a large network of researchers in the Pacific regions and in particular, researchers (Huffman, Bolton) that had contributed to a major exhibition and publication under the title Arts of Vanuatu (1996). My position as a visual artist researching contemporary basketry defined itself as a "facilitator of exchanges".

Following recommendations by my supervisor Professor Diana Wood Conroy, I began my research on Vanuatu baskets at the Australian Museum in Sydney. Through several meeting with Yvonne Carrillo-Huffman (Technical Officer, Pacific Collections, Australian Museum) and following our discussions over the hypothetical story of these baskets, it became obvious that a wealth of knowledge on basketry

could only be retrieved by consulting directly with contemporary basket makers in Vanuatu. (Appendix 4)

In May 2008, I attended the symposium *Assises des Arts Oceaniens /Oceanic Art Symposium* (Appendix 3) organised by the Vanuatu Cultural Centre and the Pacific Museum and Art Association (PIMA), funded by the French government and held in Port Vila. As a participant in several workshops, I was also part of the minority of the participants who were artists and makers. I also questioned why so few Pacific artists/makers have been selected for major international exhibitions although the Asia -Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art in Brisbane had included significant groups from Torres Strait and Samoa. In the Asia –Pacific Triennial Almanac *Today Art from Tomorrow’s World* 2007 there were none from the distinctive Vanuatu islands. As mentioned by Dr Pamela Zeplin at the Art Association of Australian and New Zealand (AAANZ) conference at the Queensland Art Gallery and Griffith University in Brisbane, 4-6 December 2008 (Appendix 6), Melanesian artists lack opportunities to show their artworks outside the boundaries of their islands in comparison to artists from Polynesia, New Zealand and the Pacific Rim (Zeplin 2008). This question also prompted me to organise the collaborative project *Encounters in Vanuatu: Processes and Interactions in Visual Arts* based in Vanuatu.

In order to begin researching in Vanuatu, I approached the Vanuatu Cultural Centre in May 2008. Ralph Regenvanu, President of the National Cultural Council and Marcellin Abong Director of the Vanuatu Cultural Centre led me through the procedures for undertaking the research. This involves respecting Vanuatu cultures and privacy by only visiting specific sites accompanied by a cultural officer and giving copies of documentation. A contract was signed and stipulated my engagement for facilitating the venues for two ni-Vanuatu artists Eric and Linda Natuoivi to come to Australia in exchange for my visual research in the island of Efate. (Appendix 7) Since my research was based primarily on cultural exchanges and sharing knowledge across disciplines, the impetus of this research was on encounters between objects (art forms) and observers (artists, researchers, viewers...) both in Vanuatu and Australia. This proposal is unusual as it encourages ni-Vanuatu artists to present themselves overseas as ambassadors of their cultures.

The Art Association of Australia and New Zealand annual conference held in Brisbane in December 2008 gave me the opportunity to present a Powerpoint presentation titled “What about that story...” as part of the session “Matters of Hierarchy and Order in Oceanic Art”.

(Appendix 6) This presentation addressed fundamental issues concerning the way Pacific cultures seek to represent themselves and asked questions about the

challenges negotiating representations of the marginalised such as women's craft within the global art world.

The aim of the thesis is to place emphasis on the recognition of likeness and differences within contemporary art practice in Australia and its neighbourhood. In particular, I underlined the desire for artists/craftspeople to be agents of social change and for indigenous artists to reclaim control over their art practices.

CHAPTER 1

Encounters with ni-Vanuatu traditional and contemporary art in Port Vila



Figure 13. View of Vanuatu, 2006. Photograph Catherine K

This chapter offers an overview of contemporary opportunities for viewing baskets in Port Vila, Vanuatu, in museums, markets and galleries and provides a background to the processes of my research. I demonstrate through my observations and analysis collected in the field on the art of basketry, how basic cultural exchanges between the ni-Vanuatu and visitors to the islands such as myself are able to contribute to a better understanding of Vanuatu cultures.

The baskets in themselves are objects of great aesthetic beauty and technical expertise. They are also a source of knowledge for transmitting cultural heritage, which is so important in Vanuatu. As key items produced by women, with material readily available in the islands, they contribute in a small but significant way to the

country's economy. Vanuatu's leading industry is tourism and cruising ships arriving in Port Vila can transform the town overnight. The market in Port Vila becomes a hub of encounters for locals and visitors alike. It is the site where local products, most importantly food, are sold and where prayers are sung early in the morning.



Figure 14. Port Vila Central Market, 2008. Photograph Catherine K

In the central market in Port Vila coconut fronds, banana leaf and pandanus are materials as common as plastic shopping bags in a western supermarket. Fibres are also plaited for use as sleeping mats, displaying products at the market, wrapping the local *lalap* food, and as containers in the form of baskets. The art of plaiting is central to the life of Pacific islanders and to their physical environment. A diversity of plants is selected for the production of different types of objects depending on the purpose: utilitarian or symbolic. The earliest form of plaiting was developed primarily for utilitarian reasons (Fig.15, 16, Birrell 1976). The technique of plaiting has been refined over the years to serve different purposes, as documented by

Wendy Arbett (1990). In particular, plaited mats are central to the Vanuatu indigenous cultures, as shown by Lissant Bolton's work¹ (2003).



Figure 15. Banana leaf basket with taro, 2006.
Photograph Catherine K



Figure 16. Banana leaf baskets
2006. Photograph Catherine K

It was in these markets in Port Vila that I had first encountered women basket makers and sellers in 2006. However, knowledge of basketry and provenance of the basket or name of the maker were offered reluctantly and with suspicion, until I explained the purpose of my research project.



Figure 17. Estelle Collins, Seller at the Craft
Market, Port Vila, 2008.
Photograph Catherine K



Figure 18. Craft Market, Port Vila, 2008.
Photograph Catherine K

The Vanuatu Cultural Centre and Museum is another important place for research about art and objects from the local culture. Although the Museum functions

¹ Since 1992, Lissant Bolton has been working closely with the women from Ambae on the Women's Cultural Project. With ni-Vanuatu project coordinator Jean Tarisesi, she analysed the process of plaiting as part of women's *Kastom* in Unfolding the moon: enacting women's kastom in Vanuatu, Honolulu, University of Hawaii Press, 2003.

primarily as a repository (Geismar 2003, Tilley 2003) for Vanuatu culture², the doors are opened for visitors to promote an appreciation for the diversity of Vanuatu cultures and to develop knowledge of Pacific culture. In particular, the relations between person and object in the context of Melanesian cultures are explained for an understanding of indigenous ideas through selected items of this cultural display. Although this museum was set up with financial support and the anthropological knowledge of the staff from the Australian Museum from Sydney³, the display is arranged by ni-Vanuatu fieldworkers⁴ from the diverse Island cultures and is intended to be a representation of living Vanuatu culture for foreign visitors and ni-Vanuatu alike.

On a regular basis, *Friends of the Museum*, a group of expatriates and researchers, invites speakers to discuss a particular theme relevant to Vanuatu culture or present an art exhibition. This provides an encounter with the indigenous people and non-indigenous inhabitants and visitors to Vanuatu. Furthermore, it also enables ni-Vanuatu residents of Port Vila who have moved to the capital from other islands, to keep in touch with the recent developments affecting their culture in their native islands. For example, some forums are set up on diverse subjects such as the impact of tourism in the islands, traditional techniques being re-used and taught as practical and economic ways of surviving in the islands. With the advance of the Global Position Satellite, ways of fishing are changing; however, the GPS tool is more

² Geismar, Haidy; Tilley, Christopher. 'Negotiating Materiality: International and Local Museum Practices at the Vanuatu Cultural Art Centre' *Oceania*. (2003 pp 170-186) These authors examined local practices of display and explained the relations between person and object in the context of Melanesian cultures.

³ Kirk Huffman first established the Vanuatu museum in the 70s.

⁴ Fieldworkers promote the culture from their specific regions. (Huffman, 1996)

available to tourist charter than to the local fishermen. Mobile phones in some areas are superseding High Frequency radio as a means of communication between communities. All these developments reach the islands of Vanuatu everyday and contribute to a rapid change in the way ni-Vanuatu either embrace or discard technology and therefore this creates active debates central to their views of globalisation. However, the role of women and their active participation in these debates remains minimal at this venue, but exists in the privacy of their homes or through the cooperation of women leaders and fieldworkers. In the Vanuatu culture, men's business and women's business exist separately.



Figure 19. Vanuatu Cultural Centre and Museum Port Vila, 2008.
Photograph Catherine K

On the other hand, ni-Vanuatu people are inviting tourists to share a “filtered” cultural knowledge at the cultural village of Ekasup⁵ where a constructed environment in the form of a traditional village evokes aspects of the cultural heritage of Vanuatu. Demonstrations of hunting, fishing, preparation of food, use of

⁵ Ekasup is also a Futuna village on the main island of Efate.

some medicinal herbs, art making such as plaiting, carving and canoe making are explained to visitors in a schematic format. Although Ekasup is on the tourist map, as shown in *Vanuatu tourist office brochure 2008*, it is also set up for the elders of the nearby communities to pass on knowledge to younger generations in order to keep some traditions alive. Despite this worthwhile intention, the artificial scene of a basket maker dressed in a grass skirt, working at displaying her skills to the tourists and selling the basket, lacks the authenticity of the contemporary living culture. This image reinforces a myth of exoticism and is set up to attract western tourism.⁶



Figure 20. Basket maker, plaiting demonstration at Ekasup village, 2006.
Photograph Catherine K

Another Museum in Port Vila privately run by a French priest, le Pere Rodet, also offered the opportunity to access aspects of the diversity of Vanuatu cultures. The

⁶ Most of the basket makers that I have met were wearing Mother Hubbard ⁶ dress or skirt and tee shirt on daily basis. A Mother Hubbard dress is a long, wide loose fitting garment intended originally to cover as much part of the woman body as possible. Introduced by missionaries in Polynesia and Melanesia, the dress embodies strong and symbolic traditional values in Vanuatu today. Women like to wear this cotton dress with colourful flower prints for its practicality in tropical weather.

information provided about the items on display is limited. For example, baskets from different provenances are on display but only one label specifies Pentecost baskets. No acknowledgement of other specific communities is spelled out. The museum curator has, through a selection of objects specifically classified and displayed in separate cubicles, recorded the history of the New Hebrides,⁷ shadowed by the Christian intent of the missionary. The collection is extensive and has rare artefacts; it can surprise the viewer with incongruous items such as old school books for teaching French language and French history or arithmetic, and newspapers recording encounters between westerners and indigenous cultures, such as a visit from the Queen of England.

⁷ Since the early days of colonialism in the New Hebrides islands (named first by Captain James Cook), the islands have been renamed by French explorer Bougainville 'les Cyclades' and finally by the native people as the territory of 'Vanuatu' meaning 'the country that stands up' according to some, or 'eternal land' according to others. These appellations seem to confirm the will of its people while at the same time defying the geological nature of the country. In 1980 Vanuatu gained independence from the French and British Condominium (a dual government which was established in 1906, often called pandemonium). The road to independence was not easily granted as land purchases, all subdivisions and alienated lands had to return to their customary owners. This created havoc among the native people while endless delays imposed by the representatives of the condominium contributed to an escalation of violence. Presently, Vanuatu is a peaceful place to visit. It has remained a tax haven for foreign investors. The confiscated land can be leased back again for up to 75 years at low rates in Port Vila or Luganville (the two main economic centres).



Figure 21. Inside the Musée du Père Rodet, 2008.
Photograph Catherine K



Figure 22. Baskets from the Pentecost Island,
Musée du Père Rodet, 2008.
Photograph Catherine K

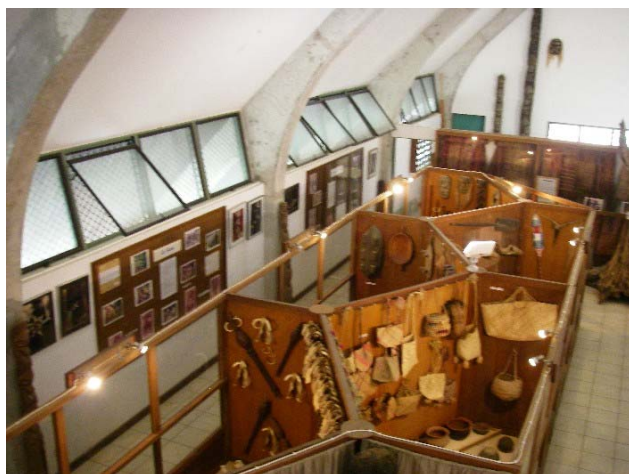


Figure 23. Compartments in the Musée du Père Rodet,
2008. Photograph Catherine K



Figure 24. Entrance to the Musée du Père Rodet,
2008. Photograph Catherine K



Figure 25. View outside Musée du Père Rodet, 2008. Photograph Catherine K

This Museum also has a separate *Nakamal* or ‘meeting house’ exclusively for men for drinking *kava*⁸ and attending to business matters.



Figure 26. *Nakamal*, 2008.
Photograph Catherine K



Figure 27. Inside *Nakamal*, 2008.
Photograph Catherine K

In Port Vila, The French Embassy and the Alliance Française are the main exhibition places for contemporary art apart from commercial galleries and the art foundations: Michoutouchkine and Susanne Bastien Art Foundations.



Figure 28. Exhibition opening at the Alliance Française Gallery, Port Vila. Ni-Vanuatu artists Jean Claude Touré Garaé (left) and Sero Kuautonga (right) with delegates of the PIMA Conference, May 2008. Photograph Catherine K

These places where contemporary art and some aspects of traditional art are displayed in Port Vila set the scene for my preliminary investigation on art in

⁸ Kava is a beverage made with the roots of the kava plant, and is particularly consumed throughout the Pacific Ocean cultures. Kava is fundamental to the Vanuatu culture. It is mainly consumed by the men but has ramifications in many aspects of life in Vanuatu.

Vanuatu. Port Vila is a place of interactions between ni-Vanuatu and westerners, and my research took place there strategically as, emerging from the logical difficulties (geographic) ⁹and human barriers (reticence from the locals to have another “outsider” looking in as mentioned before) encountered through exploring Vanuatu cultures.

In this chapter, I have highlighted the visibility of the art of basketry in Port Vila, and outlined my argument that a resurgence of traditional basket making activities coincides with a growing awareness of indigenous art in the Pacific, the development of tourism and more importantly with the encouragement of self-reliance and sustainability through the traditional economy of Vanuatu.

⁹ Vanuatu comprises about 200 volcanic and coral islands (82 inhabited islands) stretching over 900 kilometres in a Y shape on the central Melanesian chain.

CHAPTER 2

First Encounters in Vanuatu

In this chapter I return to my first visit to Vanuatu to document my first contacts with the islanders. I came to appreciate the actual differences and similarities between ni-Vanuatu artists and craftspeople and myself, thus developing a constructive approach for future interactions. I describe my first encounters with Vanuatu culture and explain the transformations that occurred over time in my understanding of this culture. I consider the positions of early navigators encountering Pacific cultures and question their colonial approaches through the visual documentation of their time. I also explain the importance of the role of a western cross-cultural researcher such as myself entering new territories in the Pacific and show the limitations of understanding and restrictions imposed on the western researcher by the local culture.

In the short fieldtrips to Vanuatu, the Vanuatu Cultural Centre (VCC) introduced me to the procedures for working artistic collaborations for interviewing ni-Vanuatu artists in the islands. A presentation at the AGNSW by Barbara Bolt (Art Gallery of New South Wales “Art and ethics in the Pacific Rim”) 19-20 September 2003 questioned “How can a non-indigenous person ‘speak’ about indigenous art without reducing it to a diagram, collapsing it into western modes of knowing or intruding into the domain of restricted cultural information?” I was careful of my own position and strategy for initiating the project. In particular, I followed Kay Lawrence’s advice whose collaborative project ‘Weaving the Murray’ with Aboriginal artists acutely demonstrated how protocol needs to be fully acknowledged from the start and how difficult it is to negotiate protocols regarding

the politics of power between westerners and Indigenous people (Kay Lawrence Weaving the Murray: Mapping Connection and Loss. Berg Textile, Vol 3, Issue 2 pp 130-149, 2005.)

In 2003 while sailing for a few months through the islands of Ambrym, Pentecost, Maewo, Espiritu Santo and Banks islands, I was able to interact directly with the local inhabitants and I felt privileged by their welcome. After anchoring in Ranon Bay (Ambrym Island), it was necessary to ask the chief of the district for permission to land: just as if you were to arrive in someone's backyard, you need to knock on the door. Unless there is an epidemic situation, permission is usually granted with restrictions on some locations for cultural reasons. Facilities such as waterfalls for swimming or access to fresh water for washing clothes are given either free or in exchange for tinned foods, tools or anything that the locals need on the island such as clothes or toys for children. On some islands, no monetary currency is handled but exchanges of food such as rice help the local inhabitants with the acquisition of scarce basic necessities. So reflecting on the visual commentary by Pacific researchers such as Bernard Smith, I considered early paintings representing the inhabitants of New Hebrides.



Figure 29. *Landing at Tanna*, William Hodges, oil on panel 24.1cm x45.7 cm, c 1775-76 National Museum London (Smith. p. 214)



Figure 30. *View of Malekula, New Hebrides* William Hodges (Port Sandwich, South East of Malakula) c 1775-76. (Bonnemaison p. 279)

Paintings such as *The Landing at Tanna* (Fig. 29) or *View of Malekula* (Fig. 30), both by William Hodges, revealed that the artist's representations of the islands visited were full of naturalistic details, but also seen within the limits of their conventions of paintings at that time (Huffman 1994 p279).¹⁰ I questioned the early navigators' approach to non-western countries and consequently my own personal 'zone of contact' with the locals and my personal construction of 'The Pacific'. As shown in Chapter 3, in my collaboration with artists Eric and Linda Natuoivi in the project *Encounters in Vanuatu* I was often critical of the way Linda was not acknowledged enough as an equal participant by her husband and how she was not used to take initiatives, for example for displaying her artwork. I realise in the light of this project that there was no point taking for granted what western women have achieved in regards to assertiveness. I had to understand that many western expectations and assumptions are irrelevant to life in Vanuatu and therefore it was new for Linda to behave differently in Australia. Kirk Huffman, in an interview in February 2009,¹¹ further explained these differences. 'Within the complexities of Vanuatu culture, ni-Vanuatu women have their own way of dealing with power issues between genders' he stated, and these issues are evolving constantly influenced by western standards. Furthermore, another important factor in Kastom life is that till early 1990, Kastom was related to men's activities. However, particularly under the influence of the women's cultural the project, "women have Kastom too", set up by the Vanuatu Cultural Centre, the status of women in the national context has been

¹⁰ Smith, B. *Imagining the Pacific in the Wake of the Cook Voyages*, Melbourne University Press, 1992. In particular, Peter Beilharz pointed out in his study *Imagining the antipodes: culture, theory and the visual in the work of Bernard Smith* how Smith 'thinks the Pacific' and shows how the European mind constructed the concept of Pacific. (p 84)

¹¹ Interview Catherine K and Kirk Huffman 10 February 2009

altered.¹² Lissant Bolton explained this factor in her latest book *Unfolding the Moon, Enacting Women's Kastom in Vanuatu*.

Again as an outsider, attending ceremonial Ambon dances on Ambrym in July 2003, the meaning of the rites often escaped me and I empathised with those first European observers.



Figure 31. Rom Dance Ambrym, July 2006. Photograph Catherine K



Figure 32. Beginning Rom Dance Ambrym, July 2006. Photograph Catherine K

The display at Ambrym overwhelmed me in its richness and made me feel inadequate in my lack of understanding of the Islanders' creative heritage. I also perceived at times that the story had evolved, that the artists /dancers were creating a response to traditions, and expressing themselves as critics of the uninformed viewers. For example, as the dancers moved towards the viewers, I could see the participation and excitement of the local people while the few westerners around were curious but devoid of informed understandings. My perception was that the dance almost invited the viewer like myself to join in. Kirk Huffman pointed out to me that while dancing Melanesian dancers often turned

¹² Lissant Bolton, in *Unfolding the Moon, Enacting Women's Kastom in Vanuatu*, (2003) explains the use and significance of Kastom.p.22-25

their back to the viewers (Fig.31 and Fig.32), as opposed to Polynesian dancers who stage their performance to the viewers facing them.¹³

Point of encounters with basket makers

While visiting the islands, my interest in the processes of making baskets created a novel set of social relations between the makers and myself. For most of the visitors to the islands the baskets are finished products made for economic exchanges.

Most of my time, however was focussed on interacting with the women who taught me basketry making. As an artist, my interest in the process of making art is as important as the end result but, in Vanuatu, my participation was even more important for cross-cultural purposes.

Through my contract with the Vanuatu Cultural Centre, (Appendix 7), I was allowed to meet the basket makers in Port Vila in the context of their homes. In Port Vila, in June 2007, I made contact with basket weaver Tapani Lish from the island of Futuna and I was most impressed by her plaiting skills and by the beauty of her baskets. Her ability to slice the pandanus with even width and to insert each strand tightly in a regular way was magic to the eye of the observer. I was fascinated by the movement of her hands in the texture of the created plaiting.

¹³ Interview between Catherine K and Kirk Huffman 10 February 2009



Figure 33. Tapani Lishi at home, 2007.
Photograph Catherine K

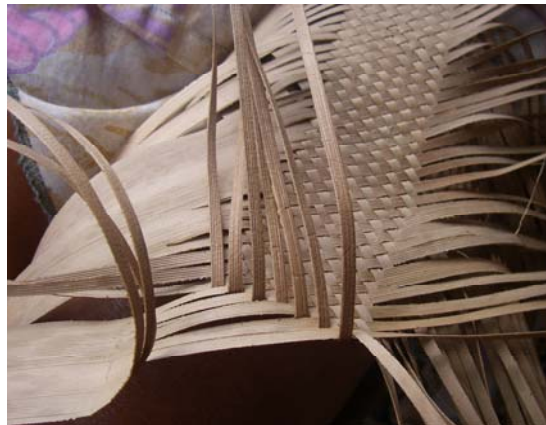


Figure 34. Detail basketry weaving, 2007.
Photograph Catherine K

Most of the women from Futuna are all kin and live in the poorest areas of town, at Olhen, a place on the island of Efate, granted by the local people (Efate) to people coming to Port Vila. Futuna basket makers work together in a cooperative fashion, selling the traditional Futuna basket that is recognizable as an icon (Keller 1988) in the Vanuatu landscape. The pandanus used in their baskets has been treated differently to the pandanus used in other islands. The fibre is soaked in seawater rather than being dried out directly in the sun. This explains some characteristics of the Futuna basket as being in lighter colour, more flexible and resistant to mildew (Keller 1988).



Figure 35. Basket from Futuna, (Thomas 1995 p 128).



Figure 36. (Acquisition E 82383 L. Bolton, 1990), details of the Futuna basket, Australian Museum 2008. Photograph Catherine K

On my first encounter in 2006, I met three generations of women all capable of weaving intricate patterns. They taught me basic skills in plaiting and I felt privileged to share their knowledge. While sitting on the mat, focussing on which strand of pandanus to fold next to construct my basket, life unfolded and stories followed. For hours, I sat on the woven mat with the ni-Vanuatu women and listened to the stories of their lives while creating my own object/container. I answered their questions about my own particular life as a migrant to Australia, as a mother of three daughters, a sailor and a nomadic artist. These interactions are essential and have an important role in crossing the boundaries of identity in Vanuatu. We shared the moment through the mutual creation of objects. Basket making was our point of encounter, our common language.



Figure 37. Fishia Torbor, Kalwata Ronald and Tapani Saladi, 2008. Photograph Catherine K



Figure 38. Nyal plaiting outdoors, 2008. Photograph Catherine K



Figure 39. Tapani Lishi, 2008. Photograph Catherine K



Figure 40. Cutting the pandanus with a bamboo stick, 2007. Photograph Catherine K



Figure 41. Working on each side of the basket, 2007. Photograph Catherine K

Interactions with Eric and Linda Natuoivi in Vanuatu

Eric and Linda Natuoivi, a well-known couple, were working respectively in the media of ceramics and basket making in Port Vila when I met them in 2007.

I initially met Eric in an art gallery. Eric is an art teacher trained in Australia and received two scholarships for undertaking Post Graduate studies in Australia. He was awarded a graduate Diploma in Expressive and Performing Arts from the Sydney College of Advanced Education in 1987 and a Master of Education in Creative Arts from the University of New South Wales in 1991. Eric is a ceramic artist and a printmaker specialising in papermaking and linocut. He exhibits his artwork on a regular basis in Port Vila and Noumea and was selected for the 1996 Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Arts, Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane, Australia.



Figure 42. Linda Natuoivi working at home, 2007.
Photograph Catherine K



Figure 43. Eric Natuoivi (early ceramic collection 1995)
Eric Natuoivi's photograph collection



Figure 44. Eric Natuoivi and fellow artist working at the fellow Vanuatu Institute of Technology 2008
Photograph Catherine K



Figure 45. Eric Natuoivi and with artist drying paper at the Vanuatu Institute of technology 2008
Photograph Catherine K



Figure 46. Entrance of the Vanuatu Institute of Technology, Port Vila 2008
Photograph Catherine K



Figure 47. *Bread Fruit*
Silkscreen on
handmade paper
Eric Natuoivi 2007
35cm x 25 cm
Photograph Catherine K

Figure 48. *Sea Turtle*
Linocut on
handmade paper
Eric Natuoivi 2007
35 cm x 25cm

Noticing my interest in basketry, Eric invited me to meet his wife Linda, born in 1958 in the island of Futuna, Vanuatu. I put forward the idea of collaborating with Linda, adapting her plaiting technique to sculptural forms. I suggested that she come to Australia. This would however take her away from her family responsibilities, which of course created difficulties. On the other hand, Linda would have the opportunity to expand her artistic repertoire in a new cultural and artistic environment.

Linda Natuoivi was originally from the south island of Vanuatu where the traditional *Kato* basket has become an icon of Vanuatu. Linda has become proficient in making this basket as part of her heritage. Still plaiting with the pandanus gathered from her islands, she has recently adapted her technique of plaiting for different hybrid forms of baskets for carrying books (Fig. 50), or even laptop computers and mobile phones (Fig. 49).



Figure 49. Linda Natuoivi mobile phone pouch
books 10 cm x 5 cm, 2008.
Photograph Helen Walsh



Figure 50. Linda Natuoivi, basket for carrying
40cm x 35 cm x 4cm, 2007.
Photograph Catherine K

Linda was selling her baskets through the market sellers in Port Vila market and her traditional Futuna baskets were anonymously presented to the buyers. The traditional basket is not identified with the maker but as provenance of specific islands. Some designs and patterns are also restricted for the makers outside these islands. The market sellers are suspicious of buyers asking the origin of the basket, wondering if the buyer will try to buy directly from the makers. More importantly, the market sellers work in a cooperative fashion and in this way can reinforce copyright not only in Vanuatu but also overseas. Therefore, in Port Vila, I felt reticence from the makers as they answered my specific questions. As I visited the islands in Vanuatu, I found that ni-Vanuatu basket makers were very happy to teach me the rudimentary skills of basketry, although I had to explain the reasons for trying my hand at the techniques.

In 2008 in Vanuatu, I had chanced upon a basket that I liked very much and asked Linda Natuoivi to teach me this type of plaiting. This basket came from the island of

Pentecost, and Linda did not know how to do this particular plaiting. Nevertheless, Linda learnt this plaiting over a few days with a relative, in order to teach me to replicate it. This act of generosity was much appreciated. It was also an invitation to reach beyond boundaries and open the possibilities for cross-cultural interactions between Vanuatu and Australia, acknowledging confluences of cultures.

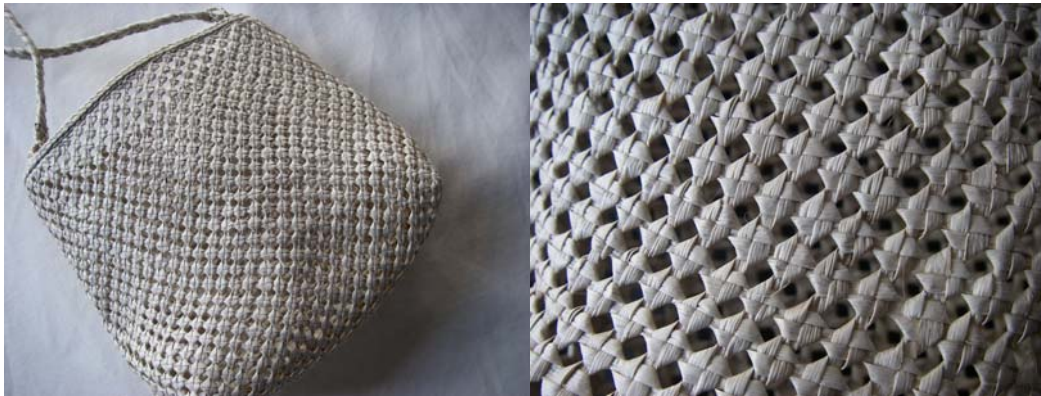


Figure 51. Basket from Pentecost Island
18cm x15cmx 4cm, 2007
Photograph Catherine K

Figure 52. Detail Windmill Knot
2007. Photograph Catherine K

This particular sample (Fig. 51) was on display in the exhibition *Encounters in Vanuatu: Processes and Interpretations* (Faculty of Creative Arts Gallery, University of Wollongong, 2-20 February 2009). My learning sample of the technique was on display in the same gallery on the floor among other plaiting samples that I produced in Australia and in Vanuatu.

Both, Eric and Linda Natuoivi have their creativity anchored in the living traditions of the arts of Vanuatu. Some of Eric Natuoivi's previous artworks are a reflection on gender equity in the culture of Vanuatu (Appendix 8), not so much intending to bridge the gap of differences between genders, but as a manifestation of the traditional culture of Vanuatu. Men and women lived there traditionally in a graded

society that encompassed the recognition of status based on merit for both genders, and on a division of tasks¹⁴ (Huffman 1994).

This overview brings to light the core concern of ni-Vanuatu artists and artisans in taking part in an opportunity to share their knowledge in a dignified and respected way. Influence and confluence in the art of contemporary basket making in the islands of Vanuatu are significant factors in the production of the baskets. While the availability of skills and knowledge encourage processes of creation, this thesis argues that the visibility of the “ubiquitous”¹⁵ ni-Vanuatu basket displays the pride of the local identity. Numerous visits to Vanuatu encouraged an accumulation of experiences that progressively made me aware of the needs of ni-Vanuatu artists.

¹⁴ Huffman. K. “History of Audio-Visual Documents: ‘Earliest European’ Paintings, Photographs, Films and Recordings of Vanuatu (Bonnemaison 1996, p. 248)

¹⁵ Geismar.Haidy; Tilley, Christopher. “Negotiating Materiality: International and Local Museum Practices at the Vanuatu Cultural Art Centre” Oceania.2003

CHAPTER 3

Setting up a collaborative project in Australia

The key issues of my project emerged as interactions between artists and audiences relationships of power between cultures and institutions, and working to address the needs of artists from a different cultural perspectives. This chapter describes the development of a collaborative project in Australia. It outlines my position as a facilitator of the project and explains the steps I took to avoid the pitfalls of power dependency that are often inherent in curatorial projects. In order to better understand the position of contemporary artists in Vanuatu, I facilitated a cross-cultural project, inviting artists Eric and Linda Natuoivi from Port Vila to come to Australia, where they ran workshops as artists in residence at three major art institutions: the Canberra School of Art /Australian National University, the National Gallery of Australia and the Faculty of Creative Arts/University of Wollongong.

Through a project titled *Encounters in Vanuatu*, the artists and the workshop participants have crossed several boundaries. The artists' encounters in Australia in 2008 enabled a reassessment of the difficulties and advantages of cross-cultural projects for all involved artists and participants. The participants shared skills and knowledge of their respective cultures and in this process they opened new avenues for indigenous artists. Through contacts with leading Australian galleries and curators the ni-Vanuatu artists were able to present their artworks directly to a diverse audience. They were inspired and discussed being involved with the outside art world and as a result, being able to teach and promote the possibilities offered

in the international realms to emerging ni-Vanuatu artists. Eric saw the possibilities of giving lectures in Vanuatu about the project on his return and Linda confirmed her new possibilities for teaching basketry to resident westerners in Port Vila.

For Eric and Linda, their engagement with the project through artist residencies, exhibitions and workshops in Australia, away from their usual social reality, enabled them to explain in their own terms the nature of the objects created in the Vanuatu tradition, either utilitarian or symbolic.



Figure 53. Eric and Linda Natuoivi's lecture, University of Wollongong, 16 October 2008. Photograph Catherine K



Figure 54. Master Printer of the Bebellic Portfolio, Tom Goulder with Eric Natuoivi at Duckprint studio, Port Kembla, Photograph Catherine K



Figure 55. Linocut inked
UOW Printing Workshop
Photograph Catherine K



Figure 56. Eric Natuoivi
rolling ink on linocut 2008
Photograph Catherine K

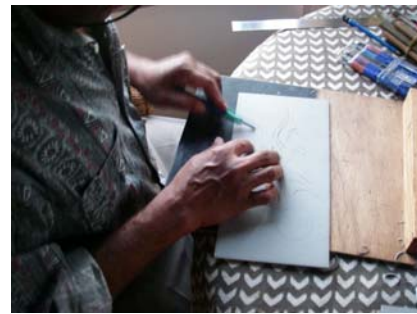


Figure 57. Cutting out the lino
2008 at Mt Kembla residence 2008
Photograph Catherine K

Both artists commented on the complex boundaries that divided women's craft from men's art in the indigenous world.¹⁶ This became obvious while attending the exhibition *Gods, Ghosts & Men: Pacific arts from the National Gallery of Australia* (10 October 2008-11 January 2009, Canberra) curated by Crispin Howarth. At the Australian National Gallery (18 October 2008), Linda offered a workshop on basketry. Eric helped her to set up the workshop and showed the participants (mainly women) how to plait pandanus. This was an unusual situation for Eric to assist Linda; it would be unlikely to happen in Vanuatu, where men are do not plaiting in the company of women. Later on, the participants indicated that they were fascinated by Linda's demonstrations of basketry making and enjoyed learning about Vanuatu cultures directly from ni-Vanuatu artists.¹⁷

¹⁶ Interview Eric and Linda Natuoivi with curator Crispin Howarth, National Gallery of Australia, 15 October 2008.

¹⁷ Workshop surveys collected during the workshop at the National Gallery of Australia.



Figure 58. Eric Natuoivi explaining the plaiting to a workshop participant (18 Oct 2008)
National Gallery of Australia
2008. Photograph Helene Walsh



Figure 59. Linda Natuoivi and participants of the workshop working sitting on the ground in the conventional Vanuatu way
2008. Photograph Helene Walsh



Figure 60. Participant plaiting pandanus
at National Gallery of Australia Workshop,
2008. Photograph Helen Walsh

Similarly, while in Australia, Linda spent time polishing Eric's ceramics and plaiting *buroa* for his artworks. The students of the ceramic workshop noticed her dedication to Eric's works and commented on her active participation in the process. Through the process of making things, participation in diverse tasks and sharing knowledge, the ni-Vanuatu artists demonstrated that their act of making

things and the way of doing these things are integral parts of the Vanuatu society in contemporary art.



Figure 61. Pots in the kiln
Photograph Catherine K
2008



Figure 62. Eric and student installing pots in the kiln
in the Ceramic Workshop Canberra School of Art,
Photograph Catherine K

These residencies enabled the ni-Vanuatu artists to work together for a concentrated period on the project in Australia. In particular Eric Natuoivi was able to construct his artworks with Australian clay, similar to the clay that he used in Vanuatu, which is imported from Australia. The firing of his large works was accommodated in the kiln in the workshop at the School of Arts and some of his ceramics were pit-fired at Strathnairn farm in Canberra to demonstrate the techniques that he is used to practice in Vanuatu. Eric was able to use a variety of clays, more than is available in Vanuatu, had access to computerised kilns for firing and received advice on glazing from Australian master ceramic artist Greg Daly.



Figure 63. Eric Natuoivi coiling in the Ceramic Workshop Canberra School of Art, Australia National University. 2008. Photograph Catherine K



Figure 64. Greg Daly Acting Head of the Ceramic Workshop, with Eric Natuoivi and students. Canberra School of Art, Australia National University, 2008. Photograph Catherine K

Eric's contribution to teaching in the Canberra ceramic workshop as part of his artist residency was memorable, especially his enthusiasm for sharing the stories of

his island. The participants understood the weaving of these stories into his works as integral to his artistic practice and the whole cross-cultural experience.



Figure 65. Eric Natuoivi explaining his artworks to students and staff in the Ceramic Workshop Canberra School of Art, Australian National University. 2008 Photograph by Catherine K

The concepts of 'influence' and 'confluence' also shaped the artists' responses to the challenge of shared identities. Importantly, the understanding of the making of an artwork rests on different types of assumptions depending on the discipline and background of the person looking at the artwork (Glen Adamson 2007).¹⁸ Glen Adamson looked closely at the contemporary practice of ceramics from the point of view of the maker and in relation to the new trend of re-evaluating the media.

In most cases, essential features of the art and the intent of the artist from a little known culture such as Vanuatu are lost or constrained to fit a particular perspective. Kirk Huffman points out that although ni-Vanuatu artists took their artwork out of the reality of production in Vanuatu where the work is understood in its full social and spiritual complexities, this does not mean that the artwork is stripped of its meaning and original purpose when it is developed in other contexts

¹⁸ Adamson, Glenn Thinking through Craft, Berg, 2007 p.78.

(Huffman 2008).¹⁹ However, Kirk Huffman also mentioned that the way objects are displayed in Western art Galleries are irrelevant to Vanuatu cultures²⁰

Eric Natuoivi In Australia

Eric's new work, produced during the residencies in Australia in 2008, is a testimony to island life and traditions. For example, he sees new growth in his country symbolised by the coconut, fruit of the islands, implanted there before new settlers and continuously offering nutrition; physically, spiritually and metaphorically (Fig.66).



Figure 66. *First coconut*, Eric Natuoivi, 2008, 22cm x 22cm x 35cm, (Collection K. Huffman)
Photograph Catherine K

¹⁹ Huffman, Kirk. Interview in Sydney 28 December 2008

²⁰ Huffman, Kirk. Interview in Sydney 28 December 2008



Figure 67. Eric Natuoivi presenting his work to Professor Diana Wood-Conroy, Faculty of Creative Arts, Long Gallery, University of Wollongong, 2008. Photograph Helene Walsh

By placing his artwork in a western gallery and not a museum, Eric invites the viewer to think about the work through a lens on Pacific art, most importantly sharing the story and acknowledging a specific Vanuatu identity. However, Eric has also been learning from western colleagues such as Greg Daly about handling different new materials, about shapes and decorative elements (Fig.68). Placing his work in the gallery asserts his position as ceramic artist who engages in a dialogue with viewers, whoever they may be.

More importantly, as he stated many times in his Australian workshops, through developing an awareness of the conceptual similarities and differences between his work and his Australian colleagues' artworks, he has embraced contemporary art as a challenge to his own discipline.



Figure 68.
Matau Ceramic 2008
 24cm x 15 cm x 28 cm
 University of Wollongong Collection
 Photograph Helene Walsh



Figure 69.
Foiro Ceramic 2008
 35cm x 28cm x 15 cm
 Ceramic Workshop Collection ANU
 Photograph Helen Walsh



Figure 70.
Mangassi, Eric Natuoivi, 2008
 28cm x 28cm x 60cm
 Collection Louise Maurer
 Photograph Catherine K



Figure 71.
Germinated Seed, Eric Natuoivi 2008
 24cm x 24cm x 20cm
 Photograph Catherine K

Linda Natuoivi in Australia

In her six-week residency in Australia, Linda introduced other materials such as aluminium and plastic to her repertoire of pandanus and played with a diversity of forms. The prospect of innovative possibilities and the recognition of her basketry as an artform on display in art institutional gallery spaces were sources of pride as well as empowerment. Despite a lack of public exposure, Linda had the confidence to pass on her knowledge as if she were on her island, by telling stories sitting on the floor and practising the folding of the pandanus. Through the library at the Canberra School of Art, Linda discovered recent developments in Australian indigenous art. In particular, she was most impressed by the works produced by women basket makers, members of the Tjanpi weavers group in Central Australia, who produced *Tjanpi Grass Toyota* (Fig.72) which won the Telstra National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Award in 2002.



Figure 72. *Tjanpi Grass Toyota*, Tjanpi artists, 2002, Australian Art Collector (Mc Culloch 2005 p. 107)

Linda could relate to the aboriginal artists' concept behind the production of this major artwork and its community spirit. She was also impressed to see weaving practice being in the spotlight of art magazines such as Australian Arts Collector (McCulloch 2005) and by the representation of baskets made by indigenous and non- indigenous artists in the catalogue for the exhibition *Woven forms: Contemporary basket making in Australia*, Object Galleries, Australia Centre for Craft and Design, Sydney 2005 (Fig.73, fig.74, Fig.75, Fig.76, Fig.77).



Figure 73. *Big Basket*
Wanatjura Bell (Ngaanyatjarra). 2005
Minarri grass, wool, emu feathers



Figure 74. *Coiled Basket*
Banbiyak(Djapu). 2005
Dyed pandanus



Figure 75.
Basket from Tibet
Nancy Duggan
2005, SA
Cordylina, NZ flax,
Wool, silk



Figure 76.
Basket (blue)
Jenny Mye (Komet)
2001 Darley Is (Torres Strait)
Packing tape



Figure 77.
Coiled basket
Munguluma Bidingal
2001. (Ritharrngu)
Dyed pandanus

Linda Natuoivi was given a space in the Textile Workshop at the Canberra School of Art for developing her artwork during her art residency. However, she created most of her works in the flat that was allocated for artists in residence, as she needed to recreate a home environment as in Vanuatu. As the flat was situated close to the

ceramic workshop where Eric was working, she could participate in the activities of this workshop, helping him to polish his pots and plaiting the sennet fibre, a binding element in Eric's artwork (Fig.78, Fig.79).



Figure 78. Binding of coconut fibre on
Eric Natuoivi's ceramic 2008
Photograph Catherine K



Figure 79.
Linda Natuoivi polishing a pot in the artists'
residency flat Canberra School of Art 2008
Photograph Catherine K

Linda offered challenging workshops in the Textiles Department of the Canberra School of Art, September 2008, explaining not only the techniques but also sharing knowledge from island life and explaining the implications of using certain designs. As she explained to students during her textiles workshop, Canberra School of Art October 2008, she was developing her individual creations but was rather hesitant to exhibit in Vanuatu as it made her stand out from the community. The basket

making process was controlled in community activities, and it has been difficult for traditional artists to adopt an individual artistic persona.

She carefully watched the students, who used different coloured materials and innovative designs. This inspired her to mix other materials such as plastic with pandanus. In particular, she liked using white plastic and golden and blue aluminium that I collected for her and she inserted these materials in her baskets as shown (Fig. 80. Fig.81, Fig.82). These interactions gave her confidence to explore her personal creativity further.



Figure 80.
Kato Linda Natuoivi 2008 Pandanus and white
20cm x 18cm x 3cm
Photograph by Catherine K



Figure 81.
Kato details plaiting pandanus and white plastic
Photograph by Catherine K



Figure 82. *Headband*, Linda Natuoivi, 2008, Pandanus and silver aluminium and details *Kato* with blue plastic strips, silver aluminium. Photograph Catherine K



Figure 83. Linda Natuoivi's demonstration Textile Workshop, Canberra School of Art, 2008. Photograph Catherine K



Figure 84. Linda's plaiting exhibited in the Library display cabinet, Canberra School of Art, 2008. Photograph Catherine K

It was the first time that Linda's works appeared on display in art galleries in Australia, arranged on plinths as art, not bundled together as in the craft market in Port Vila. Eric's ceramics were presented individually on plinths as artforms. This was not unusual for him to have this presentation, however it was the first time that Eric had exhibited his artwork next to Linda's baskets. Attending the opening of the exhibition *Eric and Linda Natuoivi* 25 Sept – 3 Oct 2008 at Canberra School of Art Foyer Gallery was momentous.



Figure 85. Exhibition Linda Natuoivi's baskets 2008 Library display cabinet Canberra School of Art, Photograph Catherine K



Figure 86. Exhibition Linda Natuoivi's baskets Canberra School of Art Foyer Gallery, Photograph Catherine K

Linda was surprised by the attention her work attracted and even more surprised to be interviewed or to read an article in The Canberra Times (Hinchliffe 2008) that emphasised the significance of her work "Traditional and Modern: There are Multi Layers of Meaning in the Works of two Ni Vanuatu Artists". (Thursday, October 2, 2008. The Canberra Times) (Appendix 10)



Figure 87.
Linda Natuoivi discussing her artwork with art critic Meredith Hinchliffe
in the Foyer Gallery School of Art, 2008. Photo Helene Walsh



Figure 88. Valerie Kirk, Head of the Textiles Workshop
with a student practising plaiting in the Foyer Gallery,
Canberra School of Art, 2008. Photo Catherine K



Figure 89
Linda's Natuoivi's baskets on display
Long Gallery Faculty of Creative Arts
University of Wollongong 2008
Photograph Helene Walsh



Figure 90
Opening exhibition *Encounters in Vanuatu*
Foyer Gallery, School of Arts Australian National University 2008
from left to right: Eric Natuoivi, Linda Natuoivi
Crispin Howarth and Greg Daly



Figure 91.
Linda and Eric Natuoivi with
Crispin Howarth, Curator Pacific Art
(National Gallery of Australia) at opening
Exhibition Canberra School of Art Foyer Gallery
2008. Photograph Catherine K



Figure 92.
Display at Canberra School of Art Foyer Gallery,
baskets and ceramics on plinth, 2008.
Photograph Catherine K

Eric's work acquired by the National Gallery of Australia²¹ was included as part of the exhibition *Gods, Ghosts and Men: Pacific: Art from the NGA Collection* at the same time that he and Linda came to Australia. This exhibition revealed for the first time the artefacts in the collection of the National Gallery of Australia presented in contrast to the work of a contemporary artist, to highlight the living culture. Because of the presence of Eric and Linda Natuoivi in Canberra, Crispin Howarth, Curator Pacific Art at the National Gallery of Australia, was able to ask Eric specific questions about his artwork directly, and in his turn, Eric had the opportunity to explain some aspects of his work in the context of Vanuatu culture. Better understanding of Pacific cultures by Westerners challenges contemporary ni-Vanuatu artists to express themselves in a global world as active participants. As pointed out by Haidy Geismar, ni-Vanuatu contemporary artists' works are more

²¹ *Gourd-Shaped Pot*, Eric Natuoivi (registration 96.874, 63.5cm x 34cm x 34cm, 1995, National Gallery of Australia). (Appendix 9)

often studied in the context of anthropological studies and are too readily classified as 'ethnic' or as craft, in the case of basketry (Geismar 2003).²²

During their time in Australia, and informed by their respective disciplines of ceramic and fibre, Eric and Linda Natuoivi were able to think differently about the purpose of their artworks to the way they did in Vanuatu. In turn, my own assumptions have been questioned, in particular, my concern about the role of women in the indigenous world and my own place as an artist traveller. This is revealed when opportunities are offered to artists from the Pacific to display their works and in doing so, challenges the current knowledge. Subsequently, the benefits flow to institutions and to individual artists alike.



Figure 93. Linda Natuoivi in front of the Canberra School of Art, 2008.
Photograph Catherine K

²² Geismar, Haidy. "Reproduction, Creativity, Restriction, Material Culture and Copyright in Vanuatu", *Journal of Social Archeology*, Vol 5, No1, 25-51.2005

This chapter describes the interactions of the ni-Vanuatu artists with western participants in Australia in diverse art institutions. It also outlines the challenges faced by all participants in the setting up of such a collaborative project. This experimental project demonstrates the need for artists to push the boundaries of their comfort zones and it also illustrates the benefits for the all participants to better understand others, sharing the responsibility for creating new possibilities, whatever, they might be, in the near future.



Figure 94. Eric and Linda Natuoivi in the Sculpture Garden, National Gallery of Australia 2008.
Photograph Catherine K

Chapter 4

Cross-cultural encounters: Processes and Interactions in Visual Arts and placing indigenous art in the gallery space

This chapter explores recent exhibitions by indigenous and non-indigenous artist curators, which included work from mixed cultural backgrounds such as *News from Islands* (Campbelltown Art Centre 2007), *Weaving the Murray* (Art Gallery of South Australia and Prospect Gallery 2002) and *Woven forms* (Object Gallery Sydney, Form Gallery Perth 2006). In particular, this chapter highlights my reasons for being a facilitator rather than a curator. I initiated the project but had no intention of giving it parameters, hoping to avoid the pitfalls of power dependency that I describe in these three curatorial projects. This chapter also outlines the responsibilities inherent in placing indigenous art in the gallery space.

The exhibition *Encounters in Vanuatu: Processes and interactions in Visual Art* Faculty of Creative Arts Gallery, UOW Feb 2-20 2009, presented the core component for this Master of Creative Arts Research and made use of several media: short films, digital prints, watercolours and sculptural forms. This exhibition followed the first presentation of the *Encounters in Vanuatu: Influence and Confluence* in the Long Gallery UOW in October 2008, which presented the full body of Eric and Linda Natuoivi's works and also provided a space for cross-cultural conversations, presenting objects in an ambivalence between tradition and contemporary art, displacing traditional context and reflecting on the position of art and craft specific to Vanuatu such as basket making.

In the 2009 *Encounters in Vanuatu: Processes and Interactions in Visual Art*, ceramics and linocuts by artist Eric Natuoivi and baskets made by Linda Natuoivi

were presented in conjunction with my own artworks. The exhibition included two ceramics of Eric Natuoivi's works from the Collection of the University of Wollongong.



Figure 95. *Matau*, Eric Natuoivi, 2008, white raku clay, hand built, burnished, stained, bisque fired and sawdust fired, 24cm x 15 cm x 28 cm (University of Wollongong Collection), 2008. Photograph Catherine K

Eric described the ceramic *Matau* (Chief 's luck Fig.95)²³: "This ceramic is a ceramic in a crescent shape. In traditional times it was a stone in a crescent shape that the chief used to achieve his aims in fishing and hunting, to ensure his luck in getting wild animals or catch a lot of fish. Usually worn as a pendant this could be interpreted as a natural stone provided by spirits. It was also a love charm, ensuring the love of women" (Wood-Conroy 2008).

²³ Information collected by Professor Diana Wood-Conroy University of Wollongong Collection Database September 2008



Figure 96. *Leadership in Harmony*, Eric Natuoivi, 2008. White raku clay, hand built, burnished, stained, bisque fired and sawdust fired
24cm x 15 cm x 28 cm
Photograph Catherine K

Eric described the second piece *Leadership in Harmony* Fig. 96: “This vessel is made by raku firing with twined coconut string and pig’s tusks. It is a traditional shape from Lapita pottery in Vanuatu. It represents harmony achieved through gender equity – women, youth, and chiefs living all in harmony. Pig’s tusks represent wealth and status. The twine represents the economy as coconut is the major source of food in the economy base of the Pacific islands”.²⁴ (Wood-Conroy 2008)

These ceramics manifest the presence of both traditional and contemporary elements in Eric Natuoivi’s work and reiterate the notion of identity and status which is so crucial to the Vanuatu culture.

²⁴ Information collected by Professor Diana Wood Conroy, Faculty of Creative Art, University of Wollongong (Collection Database September 2008)

Linda Natuoivi's display presented her traditional Futuna baskets with a series of new works, which traced her passage to Australia and, with the inclusion of western material, symbolised shared knowledge of techniques. Linda was less expressive in explaining her work than Eric. However, she said: " I like very much this plastic material. We have not such a range of fabrics in Vanuatu. I like the white colour of these plastic stripes. It symbolises purity, marriage. I like it with the pandanus. It is already cut in stripes, ready to use I don't have to prepare it".²⁵

The exhibition placed the artists' practices within a curatorial documentation. This approach emphasised clues for connections between the artists involved and created an unconventional juxtaposition of elements for the viewer to wonder about the artwork and the format of the exhibition. This approach presented the artists' work and yet simultaneously evoked what is distinctive about or has been omitted from their art practice, such as the context. The exhibition only staged aspects of the collaboration that has occurred over several months in Vanuatu and Australia. The artworks were exhibited as a *mise en scene* rather than a traditional exhibition of three separate artists. My intention for this project was also to engage in a dialogue and trace each of the artist's journeys.

At the Alpha Zulu AAANZ Conference in Brisbane in December 2008, Dr Pamela Zeplin mentioned that exhibitions involved with Pacific cultures have been generally

²⁵ Information collected by Catherine K, Canberra School of Art, September 2008

initiated in Australia under selective curatorship procedures²⁶. Curators tended to invite Pacific artists who are aware of provocative concepts dealing with environmental, globalisation or migration issues and therefore conform to familiar contemporary style and media. She also pointed out that few artists were selected from Melanesia as opposed to artists from Polynesia or artists from the Pacific Rim and New Zealand. However, as seen in the recent exhibition *News from Islands*, Campbelltown Art Gallery (Seeto 2007), several contemporary artists from Vanuatu were presented but, in this instance the ni-Vanuatu artists were barely mentioned as their “art production” had been commissioned by artist Newell Harry and collector Carl Amneus directly in Port Vila for curator Aaron Seeton. Harry commissioned a series of mats from ni-Vanuatu weavers from the island of Mataso (Fig. 95, 97, 99).²⁷ His personal design for these mats seems to me controversial, imposing on the Vanuatu artists sets of values and appropriations that seems to continue the process of colonisation. By negotiating his order through friendship with a ni-Vanuatu male relative of these women, Jack Siviu Martau, Newell Harry was able to commission the weavers to interpret his design for the mats. He ‘gave instructions’²⁸ to the weavers Auntie Maina, Aunti Mildred, Jessie Jacob and other artists from the Olhen community to inscribe text such as “ No point Being King Shit of Turd Island” and “Cape Malays Cape Malaise” (Newell Harry, in Seeto’s interview

²⁶ Pamela Zeplin at the AAANZ, *Matter of Hierarchy and Order in Oceanic Art*, College of the Art, Griffith University & Queensland Art Gallery, Gallery of Modern Art, South Bank Brisbane 4-6 December 2008 gave an overview of the focus of Pacific exhibitions and projects initiated in Australia.

²⁷ Interested by Newell Harry’s interactions with artisans in Vanuatu, I invited Harry on my sailing boat in Sydney harbour and interviewed him on his Vanuatu project. He confirmed the process of commissioning the artworks as described in Seeton’s *News From Islands* Catalogue from the Campbelltown Arts Centre, 2007. He confirmed that he would not have been able to proceed without Jack Siviu Martau’s intervention and did not consider his approach as an appropriation of indigenous artforms

²⁸ Seeton. A. *News From Islands*. Campbelltown Arts Centre, 2007pp 32-33

2007). This process is exploitative of cultural values and does not encourage a positive representation of Vanuatu. Newell Harry's intention aimed to bring together aspects of colonial history, although this points out the dark side of his own game through his provocative artworks and references to gift mats.²⁹ The notion of "the gift" is complex, as highlighted by many anthropologists such as Marcel Mauss (Mauss 1966). Nicholas Thomas has also discussed extensively the "Misreading of Other" perceptions and intentions in "the gift" (Thomas, 1991). So Harry was surely aware of this body of theories and has acted irresponsibly in regard to Vanuatu cultures.



Figure 97.
Untitled, gift mat pandanus and dyes
125cm x214cm 2006



Figure 98.
Untitled, gift mat pandanus and dyes
125cm x214cm 2006

Both mats were commissioned to Vanuatu weavers Auntie Maina, Aunti Mildred, Jessie Jacob and other colleagues from the Olhen community by Australian artist Newell Harry

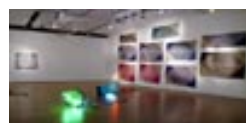


Figure 99. Overview of exhibition
News from Islands. 2008
Display of commissioned mats
Campbelltown Art Gallery
2008. Photograph Catherine K

²⁹ In *Entangled Object* chapter 5 "the Discovery of the Gift: Exchange and Identity in Contemporary Pacific" Nicholas Thomas 1991

The Bebellic Print Portfolio, also in the exhibition *News from Islands*, was commissioned by collector Carl Amneus and encouraged young men such as Saires Kalo and Simeon Simix from the Mataso community to produce a series of screen prints that have a striking immediacy (Fig. 101-102).



Figure 100.
Paw Paw/Coconut, 2007, 76cmx54cm
Simeon Simiz, Bebellic Print Portfolio,
Tom Goulder Printmaker, Duckprint

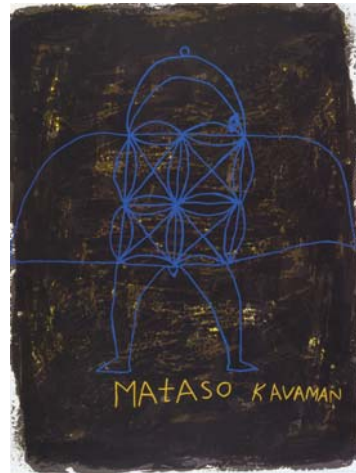


Figure 101.
Mataso Kavaman, 2007, 76cm x54cm
Saires Kalo Bebellic Print Portfolio,
Tom Goulder Printmaker, Duckprint

Australian master printer Tom Goulder printed this portfolio in Port Kembla, 2006-07. However, in this body of prints, a fresh outlook on Pacific Art is presented with the potential for further engagement. It also demonstrates that opportunities for exposure of Pacific art need to be given expression. The exhibition *News from Islands* was provocative and to its credit highlighted a range of issues about migrations and the “chaotic nature of the News” as mentioned by curator Aaron Seeto.³⁰ Furthermore, this exhibition encouraged the local community of migrants from the Pacific islands across Melanesia and Polynesia to participate in a diversity of workshops and other activities. For example, artist Keren Ruki of Maori heritage investigated the Mitchell Library, the Australian Museum (Carillo-Huffman 2008) as

³⁰ Seeton in *News From Islands*. Campbelltown Arts Centre, 2007pp9-15 described the project as “an open platform” debating on the context of the “News” and illustrated the manipulation of the News in the Pacific and globally

well as the Melbourne Museum and the Auckland Museum to research on the making of traditional Maori cloaks. In this process, Ruki “re-learnt” techniques such as making a cloak similar to the one her family ancestors made.



Figure 102. *Kahu Kuri* 2006
(Dog skin Cloak) Keren Ruki 120cm x100cm
Muka(flax fiber) dingo skin
News from Islands photograph Ian Hobbs

Ruki pushed the boundaries of her own practices by creating provocative cloaks made of plastic instead of using traditional pelt. Furthermore, she encouraged debates through her series of lectures at the Australian National University (19 April 2008), the Canberra School of Art (12 October 2008) and the NGA (4 December 2008). *News from Islands* was not just an exhibition; it was a project that built on interactions and connections with the Pacific in many ways.



Figure 103. *Tumohe's cloak*
Keren Ruki , 2007
Iron on transfer fabric and cane
30cm x60cm
News from Islands
Photograph Ian Hobbs



Figure 104. *Cultural Safety Vest*
Keren Ruki, 2007
plastic tubing, nylon, reflective tape
80cm x60cm
News from Islands
Photograph Ian Hobbs

In setting up the exhibition *Encounter in Vanuatu: Processes and Interactions in Visual Art* (2009), I was aware that the presentation of the process of basket making tends to change the perception of this artform by allowing a recognition of the minute labour and lengthy production time involved. In *News from Islands*, Harry never referred to the process of making the mats nor to the lengthy period required to make them, nor did he pay attention to the context in which they were made: by women in their homes. In the project *Encounters in Vanuatu*, the presence and display of Vanuatu basketry in Western cultural institutions was an opportunity to recognise ni-Vanuatu women's creative works as represented by Linda Natuoivi. When such artwork is presented within the cultural context of the islands, as in the Wollongong exhibitions, the sense of identity of the women can be highlighted. Exhibiting in Australia also allows for the opportunity for ni-Vanuatu artists to have their contemporary artworks valued, acknowledged and collected as important characteristics of traditional indigenous culture, linking the past to the present exchanges in response to shared knowledge and developing a personal sense of worth. My film *le Regard Entendu* presented a vivid demonstration of the making of basketry. It acknowledges the skills of the maker and the subtleties of the techniques and values of this artform beyond the boundaries of craftsmanship, as pointed by Lissant Bolton (Bolton 2003) instilling new meanings and reconnecting with traditions at a different level.³¹ Bolton mentioned the association of plaiting with all sorts of meanings connected with relationships with place and time, but

³¹ In Bolton's *Unfolding the Moon: Enacting Women's Kastom in Vanuatu*, Honolulu, University of Hawaii Press, 2003 p 35

also in a metaphorical sense: movements of the body while plaiting mats and linguistic associations.

The exhibition *Weaving the Murray* (Federation Project 2001) was an installation celebrating community collaboration along the river Murray. It included seven artists, Aboriginal (Ngarrindgeri) and non Aboriginal: Rhonda Agius, Nici Cumpston, Kirsty Darlaston, Sandy Elverd, Chrissie Zhouston, Kay Lawrence and Karen Russel, investigated the legacy of one hundred years of Federation in Australia. The exhibition “addressed the problems of past and present communities along the Murray by a visual documentation and dialogue: a metaphorical interpretation of weaving the Murray” (Lawrence 2005). In this project, there were miscommunications in the cross-cultural conversation relative to the dynamics of the group. I empathised with Kay Lawrence’s difficulties in negotiating different cultural dynamics, resulting in her “uncomfortable” position as leader of the project,³² as I have found myself leading the project at time and being a follower at other times. That is the reason for which I decided to be a facilitator of the project rather than curator. Several exhibitions such as *Carried Lightly* (Curator Diane Moon, Perc Tucker Regional Gallery 1998), *Art on the String, Aboriginal Threaded Objects from the Central Desert and Arnhem Land* (Co-Curators Louise Hamby and Diane Young, Object Gallery, 2001), *Re-Coil, Change and Exchange in Coiled Fibre Art* (Curator Louise Hamby 2006) showed that Australia has been a leader in showing indigenous works in art galleries rather than in an ethnographic context

³² Lawrence described in the article “Weaving the Murray: Mapping Connection and Loss” *Berg Textile*, (Lawrence 2005).

and in recognising the wealth of indigenous culture embedded in these artworks (Myers 2002, Hamby 2005, Young 2005). However, the artists were invited to display their artworks but the curators had the dominant role. The exhibition *Woven Forms* (Object Galleries Sydney, Form Gallery Perth 2006) also presented such characteristics, emphasising the basket as an artform rather than as a purely utilitarian object. This exhibition signalled curatorial innovations by including a mix of indigenous and non-indigenous traditional and experimental works, and included innovative workshops in Perth (Wood Conroy 2006). Through the project *Encounters in Vanuatu*, I have gained an appreciation of the subtleties and complexities of cross-cultural exchanges. The artists' involvement in an active participation is of prime importance in this innovative collaborative approach for exhibiting Pacific art. It demonstrates that the interactions between participants and the transformations that occurred, as a result of the challenges created by these interactions, are more important than the exhibitions that take place as the end result.

CHAPTER 5

Conceptual parameters of my artworks in *Encounters in Vanuatu: Processes and Perspectives in Visual Art* UOW 2-20 February 2009

This chapter raises the key issues that inform my own artwork. It shows metaphorically my sailing journey as a transformative experience that encouraged connections with the land and the people of Vanuatu. It reflects on the difficulties of communicating and engaging in a cross-cultural dialogue, and in particular, it poses the central problem of an outsider entering another culture assuming a position of authority (as seen in curatorial projects in Chapter 4). This chapter explains my decision to exhibit Eric and Linda Natuoivi's artworks (with their permission) in conjunction with my artworks for the practical component of my research for the Master of Creative Arts, acknowledging their contributions in the process of this research. I included a visual documentation of the production of their artworks, referring to the cross-cultural exchange of all participants.

My own work in the adaptation of plaited structures (Fig. 112, 117, 118, 119), and the use of digital prints reflects the transformation that occurred as a result of being a catalyst between two worlds. Digital prints (Fig. 106, 107) and short films aim to address the complexities of reading artworks outside their context of production, and in the artificial reality of the gallery space.



Figure 105. View of exhibition in the Faculty of Creative Arts Gallery University of Wollongong, 2008. Photograph Catherine K

The digital images *Conversation1 and 2*, *Man in a Canoe*, *Women and Children Fishing* (Fig. 106, 107, 108, 109, 110, 111) are a reflection of the ambiguity of an outsider's observations. In particular, they invite the viewer to pay attention to details in the analysis of the image presented. The stillness captured in the images is not only meant to create an atmosphere, but also to create a distance for the viewer who feels removed from the action and cannot comprehend the content of the images. I have selected images of people that are framed in the landscape, seemingly in communion with it or perhaps trapped within it. However, there is no particular definition about this particular landscape, no point of specific identification with Vanuatu. I am more concerned with the symbiosis of the landscape showing people and their activities as part of the whole environment.

QuickTime™ and a
TIFF (Uncompressed) decompressor
are needed to see this picture.



Figure 106.
Conversation I, Catherine K, 2008
150cm x105cm Digital print

Figure 107.
Conversation II, Catherine K, 2008
270cm x 105cm Digital print

(Fig. 106, 107) show two bodies framed by the trees within a triangular frame. A couple is conversing while sitting on a bench in Port Vila – conversation inaudible.

Conversation II (Fig.107) is not merely an enlarged image from *Conversation I*.

(Fig.106) was taken few seconds later, capturing a slight change in the inclination of one person's head. The juxtaposition of the two photographs demands the viewer's close observation. A ni-Vanuatu person told me later that these photographs represent two women and not a woman and a man as I thought I had observed. Furthermore, I was told that the woman on the right "had been in trouble".³³ Subsequently I discovered that her hair had been shaved as punishment for her involvement with a boy from a different community. This information, given on the basis of trust, gave me privileged insight into community social interactions and raised my awareness of the perceptual and cultural complexity of a seemingly simple image presented in an art gallery.

³³ Conversation with ni-Vanuatu woman in Port Vila May 2008



Figure 108. *Man in a Canoe* 150cm x Digital Image Catherine K 2008

The man in a canoe (Fig. 108) is waiting for the tide to turn. His net is ready in front of him as the canoe moves imperceptibly with the slack of the water. The man is immersed in the landscape, still and waiting, silhouetted against the luminosity. This idyllic image of a fisherman in a canoe has more to reveal: the fish has to be brought home. This image represents the reality of Vanuatu with the difficulties of the life in the Pacific and is linked inevitably with the reality of a global world.



Figure 109. *Women and Children Fishing a Low Tide.1*
Catherine K 2008. Digital print 50cm x 15cm



Figure 110. *Women and Children Fishing a Low Tide.2*
Catherine K , 2008. Digital print 50cm x 15cm



Figure 111. *Women and Children Fishing a Low Tide.3*
Catherine K, 2008. Digital print 50cm x 15cm

The third set of digital prints shows a special day at Pango near Port Vila at low tide (equinox tide): the tide is coming in. Women and children are working against time

to collect clams and pipis. Everyone is busy. No time for play. Fishing is a necessity of life. These are the photographs of an outsider, a *voyeur* in some respect, yearning to also belong to this landscape and claim oceanic connections. The reasons for this are that the photographer is also a sailor, a woman who as a child also went fishing at low tide in Brittany, her country of origin. This image serves as a sign of recognition and identification. In capturing these images I have a shared knowledge of the tidal movements that inform my reading of the image. However, the incommensurability of ever totally entering in another culture is a reflection on my background as a migrant in Australia. This experience is transposed as self-reflexive perspective in my participation in the project *Encounters in Vanuatu*.

In the exhibition I presented a series of short films: *Chesterfield Reefs* 2006-2008 *Fishing at Pango* 2008, *Le Regard Entendu* 2008 and *Water Drumming* 2008.³⁴

These were glimpses of life in Vanuatu as seen through my own lens which evoked my own rites of passage in terms of understanding important facets of life in the Pacific Ocean and particularly in Vanuatu. My intention in the making of the films was to pay homage to the continuity of traditions in the Pacific life. For example, *Water Drumming* evoked one of the roles of women in traditional Vanuatu life. The purpose of the drumming is to call the fish through the sounds and movements of the water. Connections with the fish were set up in these

³⁴ *Chesterfield Reefs* 2006-2008 (1 minute, 16 seconds)
Fishing at Pango 2008 (2 minutes, 59 seconds)
Le Regard Entendu 2008 (6 minutes, 9 seconds)
Water Drumming 2008 Port Vila (2 minutes, 37 seconds).

ritualistic dances. In these instances, the water drumming performance was staged for tourists as entertainment. This performance is a new means of making a living. Long gone is the time when this technique was used for fishing. The short film *Fishing in Pango* demonstrated the knowledge of a fisherman in casting his net and asked for the viewers' patience in observing his slow and methodical gestures. These short films echoed my personal response to the Pacific environment. However, in the context of the exhibition *Encounters in Vanuatu: Processes and Perspectives in Visual Art*, these short films were not just romantic or idealised documentaries but also played a role in presenting the complexities inherent in my interactions with this culture, brought out in Ross Gibson (Gibson 1990) and John de Heer's films (de Heer 2002). My short films subsequently helped me to understand afterwards my own perceptions and misconceptions about life in the Pacific and to reveal my blind spots. To the viewer in the gallery they asked questions, to which no specific answer was provided. These images have multi-layered objectives. One of them is to destabilise the rigidity of the field of research located in curatorial exhibitions which are based on western expectations. The other is to open the sphere of visual art as research with a strong component of fieldwork.

The artwork *Vita Vita* (Fig. 119, 120) was produced under Linda Natuoivi's guidance in Australia following her teaching of the windmill knot in Port Vila (Chapter 2) and resulted from my self-reflexive approaches to the Vanuatu cultures. I have also used this same knotting technique for developing the sculpture *La Pirogue*.



Figure 112. Detail plaiting aluminium
Photograph by Catherine K



Figure 113. *La Pirogue* Catherine K
aluminium wood 80cm x120cm 2008

This artwork is reminiscent of a model racing yacht. Through *La Pirogue*, I show my connections with Pacific cultures and evoke maritime cultural practices from the past and the present such as this particular sailing race (Melbourne-Mackay via Vanuatu 2007). This race is staged in Port Vila every two years, bringing a flotilla of ultra modern sailing boats. As shown in the photographs (Figures 114-115), their presence illustrated the reality of the present in sharp contrast to early eighteenth century navigators and the Pacific indigenous sailing canoes. Furthermore, the high-tech catamarans racing around the world owe a great deal in their performance to the design of the traditional Pacific double sailing canoe.³⁵

³⁵ <http://www.ellenmacarthur.com/default.asp?section=challenge&sub=3>. "On the challenge of sustainability racing around the world in a catamaran for 3 months".



Figure 114. View of the harbour Port Vila
Australian sailing race Melbourne-Mackay
Photograph Catherine K



Figure 115. Australian racing boats at quay
Port Vila 2007 Photograph Catherine K

La Pirogue demonstrated my direct artistic engagement with fellow art practitioners who, like myself, belong to an ocean environment. Maritime cultural practices are another point of contact/recognition that parallel the shared artistic impulses that inform the plaiting process and enhance a shared dialogue of seafaring and art making. The sculpture *La Pirogue* is made of aluminium found in a recycling depot in Sydney. In Australia this particular material is used for the insulation of houses.

In Vanuatu, natural material is used in the construction of houses and was used for the sails of the canoes in Pacific cultures.³⁶



Figure 116. Meeting House in Epi Island 2006
Photograph Catherine K

³⁶ *Vaka Moana Voyages of the ancestors*, Australian National Maritime Museum 6 December –12 March 2009

My purpose for choosing the material for this sculpture was to create a meaningful symbol for crossovers of cultural encounters through the use of materials and technique. In the island of Vanuatu, fiber such as *natangura* leaves is readily available and used in the construction houses as roofing material.³⁷ In the past Pandanus was also used as material for sails. In some of my artworks I used waste paper as it is an equivalent abundant source of materials in the Western world as pandanus is in the Pacific islands. I am concerned about ecological procedures and admire the islanders for continuing their building traditions using local and sustainable material, readily available in the Pacific environment.

For the sculptural form *Vita Vita* (Fig. 117-120) I also used paper from posters found at the recycling depot in Sydney. I shared this material with Linda who inserted it in her baskets and taught me to make tubular forms (Fig. 117, 18).



Figure 117. Tubular forms, Catherine K 2008. Poster paper, 60cm x 8cm

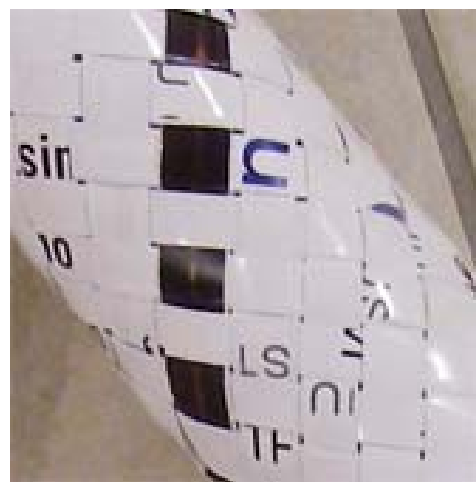


Figure 118. details plaiting 2008 Photograph Catherine K

Vita Vita (Fig. 119) is an exploration of craft-making skills associated with basket making as taught to me by ni-Vanuatu women, but using materials from my own western culture.

³⁷ Information received in an email from Kirk Huffman December 2008.



Figure 119. Details *VitaVita* 2008
Photograph Catherine K



Figure 120. *Vita Vita* twisted poster paper
400cm x 5cm 2008 Catherine K

The watercolours (Fig. 121, 122) are presented in a series as evidence of a form of documentation on basketry patterns and are inspired by the practice of learning these patterns.³⁸ In 1984 French Anthropologist Annie Walter created a step-by-step instruction booklet for making a basket from Pentecost Island in Vanuatu. In doing so, she proceeded by methodically numbering each strand in the basket and keeping records of each fold. Her meticulous work although suitable for anthropological studies, is rather difficult to follow when actually making a basket. Similarly, in the *Blues and Brown Series* watercolours, I documented the methodical art of basket making in a series of line wash drawings on paper. With practical drawings from observations, I rendered aspects of the plaiting techniques. I also

³⁸ Walter, Annie. "Les Paniers en Pandanus du Centre Pentecôte" Office de la Recherche Scientifique et Technique Outre-mer, Notes et Documents d'Ethnographie No 1, Mission Orstom Juillet 1984.

realised that the meditative aspect of drawing was akin to the actual plaiting of the real basket. My drawings can be seen as documentations of the plaiting techniques while still leaving room for interpretation and symbolising the plaiting itself.



Figure 121. 60 Watercolours: *Blue Series*, *Brown Series* and details, Catherine K 2008. 25cmx 35cm each. Faculty of Creative Arts, University of Wollongong

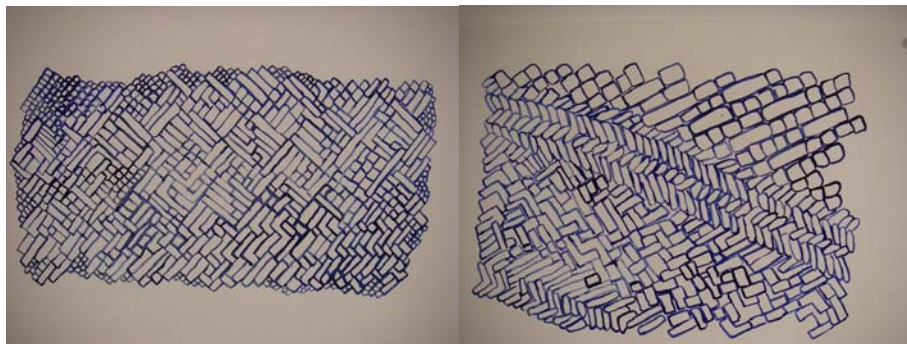


Figure 122. details watercolours *Blue Series* 2008 Catherine K

My intention in all the works produced for *Encounters in Vanuatu: Processes and Interactions in Visual Arts* is to pay homage to the living tradition and skills of the ni-Vanuatu, in particular the basket makers from the island of Futuna. The sharing of experiences and cultural crossover has been as important as the final exhibition in this gallery space. These works are all evocations of places and people with a desire to engage in a conversation that brings about some kind of connection. Transforming recycled materials into traditional forms means appropriating some aspects of that traditional culture. By contrast, in creating art objects, which refer to the processes of this particular plaiting, I expose my own limitations when my skills are set against the knowledge of indigenous culture.



Figure 123. Exhibition *Encounters in Vanuatu: Processes and Interactions in Visual Art* (2-20 Feb 2009) Faculty of Creative Arts Gallery University of Wollongong
Photograph Neil Duncan



Figure 124. Catherine K. with *La Pirogue*
Photograph Neil Duncan



Figure 125. Happening event for exhibition *Encounters in Vanuatu: Processes and Interactions in Visual Arts*, Faculty of Creative Arts Gallery
20 Feb 2009 life raft opened in the gallery - Speaker Helene Kaminski
Photograph Catherine K

Conclusion

This thesis in the form of art practice with an ethnographic component involving fieldwork enters a new field of research in terms of its situation between visual arts and crafts in Australia and Vanuatu. The primary research is grounded in the art of basketry in Vanuatu as a strategy to enter Pacific cultures. The project *Encounters in Vanuatu* proceeds in large part in a dialogue and collaboration with ni-Vanuatu artists Eric and Linda Natuoivi. Strong emphasis is placed on the combined efforts of the artists involved to be relocated in different geographic regions and on the difficulties experienced as a result of their engagement. Personally, I stressed the importance of sailing to remote area as a metaphor, emphasising that the ocean both connects and isolates. This transformative experience contributed to a self-reflexive approach to Pacific cultures.

Cross-cultural interactions between Australia and Vanuatu have been shaped by past histories. The present project has revealed that a flow of interchanges between artists from the Pacific and Australian artists can contribute to new developments. In this thesis, I clarified my role as artist/facilitator of cross-cultural exchanges rather than a curator. I deplored the lack of recognition and exposures for ni-Vanuatu artists in the western world and exposed a problematic case of cross-cultural exchange with ni-Vanuatu basket makers with their works exhibited in *News from Islands* in Australia. I propose *Encounters in Vanuatu* as a model for interactions with Indigenous artists in the Pacific. This project focussed on the

active participation of the artists involved and allowed them the opportunity to present their artworks in a different context, creating a different dynamic that encouraged and questioned the exchange of inherently creative and open ended ideas. As an artist working across many media, this research shaped my own participation through my identification with Linda as a woman. My artwork, which is grounded in textiles presented more influences from Linda Natuoivi's fibrework than from Eric Natuoivi's ceramics. This fact also reflects the importance of the hierarchy of genders in Vanuatu society and the interactions that occur as a result. To conclude, this Master of Creative Arts Research project *Encounters in Vanuatu* demonstrates the potential to engage with productive cross-cultural exchanges.

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Traditional “Arts” in Vanuatu. Kirk W. Huffman

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Ralph Regenvanu Represents Pacific in Expert Meeting of UNESCO

<file:///Users/catherinekay/vanuatu/For%20a%20culture's%20sake,%20chiefs%20sell%20sacred%20works%20-%20Arts%20-%20Enterta>

“ For a culture’s sake, Chiefs sell sacred works” Louise Schwartzkoff
25 July 2008. South Project

DVD

De Heer, Rolf; Ryan, Julie. Gulpilil. Ten canoes: One hundred and Fifty Spears. Producers, Rolf de Heer, Julie Ryan: written by Rolf de Heer in consultation with the People of Ramingining; directed by Rolf de Heer distributed in Australia & New Zealand by: Palace Films on DVD by The AV Channel PTY Ltd Container “MMA2550”

Robinson, Lee Walk into Paradise PNGAA and Kodak /Atlab, The National Film and Sound Archive 90mn 1950

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Gibson, Ross. Camera Natura. Director Ross Gibson produced with the assistance of the Creative Development Branch of the Australian Film Commission 1985

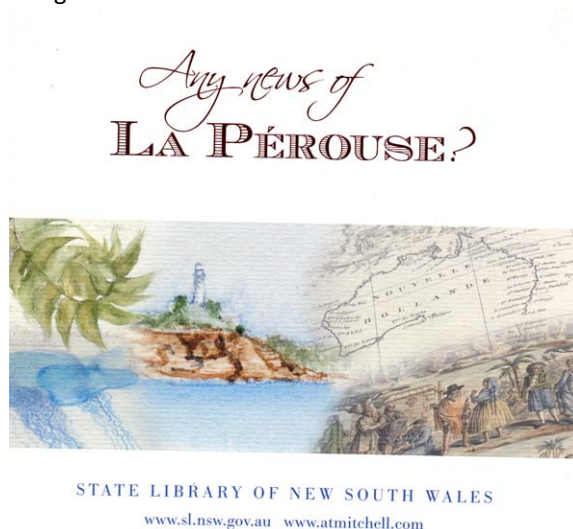
Gibson Ross. Dead to the World Director Ross Gibson Producer John Cruthers Huzzah Productions, Australia 1990

Appendices

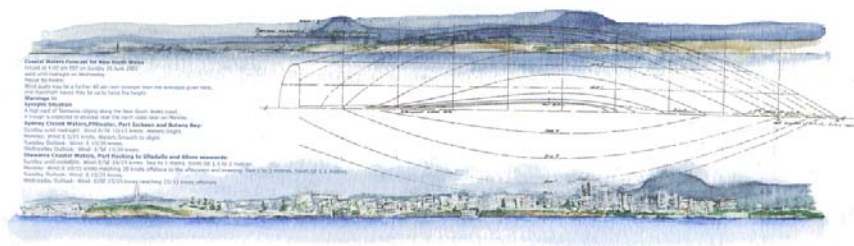
- Appendix 1:** Cover catalogue exhibition *Any News of Laperouse*
State Library of New South Wales Sydney, 2005
Cover Catalogue *In Search of Laperouse* Wollongong City
Gallery Wollongong 2005
- Appendix 2:** Research on late Reece Discombe, resident in Vanuatu till 2008.
Discombe found while diving, a brass stanchion from
Laperouse's ship *Astrolable* in 1958 and located the position of
the wreck in Vanikoro in 1964. The Independent/L'Independant
Sunday 24 June 2007
- Appendix 3:** Cover of the Pacific Arts Association IX International Symposium.
Musee du quay Branly Paris (5-7 July 2007)
- Appendix 4:** Report by Catherine K: Research on Vanuatu Basketry at the
Australian Museum with Yvonne Carillo-Huffman, Technical
Officer Pacific Collections Australian Museum
- Appendix 5:** Pacific Islands Museum Association (PIMA) Conference " Assises
des Arts Oceaniens/Oceanic Arts, in Port Vila (May 2008)
- Appendix 6:** Art Association of Australian and New Zealand AAANZ
Conference Queensland Art Gallery/ Griffith University
Brisbane 4-6 December 2008
- Appendix 7:** Contract for Catherine K with the Vanuatu Culture Council
- Appendix 8:** Report on Eric Natuoivi's artworks in Vanuatu and in Australia
- Appendix 9:** Catalogue exhibition *Gods, Ghosts and Men: Pacific Art in the
National Gallery of Australia*, May- September 2008
- Appendix 10:** Hinchliffe, Meredith. "Traditional and Modern: There are
Multi-layers of Meaning in the Works of two Ni Vanuatu Artists", The
Canberra Times Thursday, October 2, 2008.
- Appendix 11:** DVD 4 short films presented in the exhibition *Encounters in
Vanuatu: Processes and Interactions in Visual Art*

Appendix 1: Project *Laperouse* leading to the project Encounters in Vanuatu.

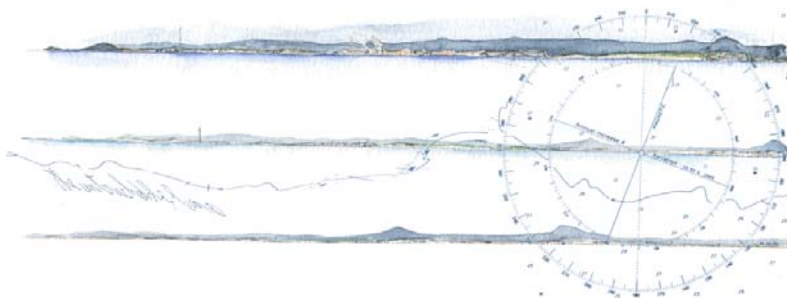
In 2005-2006, I received a Fellowship from the Australian Council for the Arts. This award enabled me to develop artworks based on my travels. In particular, the project *in Search of Laperouse* led me to investigate islands close to Australia from the sea. My objective was to “view” and “re-view” the land of Vanuatu from the perspectives of early eighteenth century navigators.



Cover catalogue exhibition *Any News of Laperouse*
The State Library of New South Wales, Sydney,
August –September 2005.



Weather or Not. Catherine K. Digital Prints on Hannemuhler paper, 61cm x 150cm, exhibition In *Footprints on the Water: In Search of Laperouse*, Wollongong City Gallery, June 2005.



Compass Rose. Catherine K. Digital Prints on Hannemuhler paper, 61cm x 150cm, exhibition In *Footprints on the Water: In Search of Laperouse*, Wollongong City Gallery, June 2005

Appendix 2: Research on late Reece Discombe, resident in Vanuatu till 2008. while diving in the island of Vanikoro (Solomons islands, North of Vanuatu islands), Discombe found a brass stanchion from Laperouse's ship Astrolabe in 1958 and located the position of the wreck in Vanikoro in 1964. The Independent/L'Indépendant Sunday 24 June 2007

Feature

The Independent this week concludes its serialisation of the last portions of "From Hudson Bay to Botany Bay, the Lost Frigates of Lapérouse" by Russell C Shelton. We have been printing these as a tribute to Reece Discombe, the finder of the last resting place of the Boussole at Vanikoro, in 1964.

In our pages a week ago, Discombe had been bodily towed over the water, backwards and forwards across the place where the Boussole, according to his calculations, had to lie. Reece's eye for the items which would have gone down with the ship, and knowledge of what they would look like after two centuries of encrustation, was rewarded by discovery of the Boussole's exact location. However, he had to return to Port Vila from Vanikoro, and took the secret with him, for the time being.

Discombe of Vanuatu



Reece Discombe holds a brass "stanchion" from the Astrolabe, the exact use of which remains a mystery. Photo taken 1958. From Reece Discombe's own collection.



Reece Discombe at home in Port Vila with a plaque awarded him by La Marine Nationale in recognition of his discoveries at Vanikoro.

While nobody doubted the fate of the Lapérouse expedition, the evidence as to which of the two wreck sites was the Boussole has been questioned the last few years. A portion of a letter from Admiral de Brossard dated May 29, 1984 replying to a number of the author's questions, revealed his own doubt at a time when he and Reece Discombe were corresponding and discussing the matter. He writes:

I formerly thought the ship in False Pass was Astrolabe and of course the other, about one mile to the east that struck the reef, should be Boussole; but now I am not sure because we know that it was not possible for Dumont d'Urville and de Lesseps to assert that the first ship discovered in 1827 was Astrolabe.

Nowhere in the enormous amount of writing, documentation, collected artifacts, opinions past and present was there absolute proof as to which ship was which. After all, if the ships' wreck sites were reversed, Lapérouse in False Pass might have escaped immediate death on the outer reef. Dumont d'Urville was the first to suggest that the Astrolabe had gone aground. A review of his reasoning finds that he felt Lapérouse to have held the "lead ship" position according to correct naval protocol. Because this would have been the Boussole, the Astrolabe might have attempted to provide a rescue from behind the reef by entering the lagoon. But since the crew could not sound the surf-free entrance of "False Pass" in the stormy darkness and heavy sea, the ship entered a shallow death trap.

"In a hurricane," says Reece Discombe, "it's everyone for himself." Considering that Vanikoro's outstanding feature is a high mountain, only at night in storm

conditions would Lapérouse's crews have failed to sight it and take the necessary evasive action. The added factor to be taken into account, since the 1964 Discombe discovery of the outer reef wreckage, is that there is one nautical mile between the actual wreck sites of the two frigates. If the two ships should for any reason, whether by good judgement or independent seamanship, have found themselves about a half-mile apart, the ship furthest out to sea, holding a northerly course, would unintentionally have encountered the surf-free water of False or Wreck passage, within a mile of sailing, while the landside vessel would have held to the collision course and suffered the instant disaster that appears to have happened.

How much could have been seen in the darkness? In the kind of storm described by the natives, no moon would have been shining through the thick, low cloud. For one ship's company to know that the other ship had struck a reef could not have resulted from their seeing a rocket, nor could they have heard a cannon shot. The roar of the turbulent sea and the noise from the howling winds would have drowned out all sight and sound between the ships. D'Urville's theory of one ship sailing into the lagoon to aid the other is clearly to be doubted.

Many objects recovered led to questions, therefore, about which ship carried them, and from which wreck site they had been retrieved. For example, did Discombe's finding a milestone in False Pass mean that the wrecked vessel there was the Astrolabe since de Langle was known to have milled wheat aboard it? Also if Dillon's claim was allowed that the arms of the Collignon family were on the silver candlestick he obtained from the natives, could it be the Boussole in False Pass, considering that Collignon was the gardener aboard that ship and the candlestick



Medallion commemorating the finding of the Astrolabe resting place by Discombe in 1958. The reverse side is seen on page 19.

had come ashore from the stranded vessel or been fished up from a shallow depth later? De Brossard commented on these questions in January 1985. His statement indicates that he had examined his earlier doubts and returned to his original 1964 hypothesis: About the coat of arms on the candlestick: nobody found the exact connection, but it is certain that they do not belong to Collignon. There it is not possible to say that the ship in False Pass is the Boussole simply because a crew member's candlestick may have been picked up there.

Appendix 3: Cover of the Pacific Arts Association IX International Symposium.
Musée du quai Branly Paris (5-7 July 2007)



The Pacific Arts Association's IX International Symposium at the Musée du quai Branly in Paris (5-7 July 2007) enabled me to connect with a large network of researchers from the Pacific Regions. As a visual artist, the highlights of the symposium were the performance *Taualuga: The Last dance* by New Zealand artist Shigeyuki Kihara (born Pacific Islander of Samoa descent), the exhibition *The garden of Love* created by Yinka Shonibare (2 April-8 July 2007) and the exhibition *New Ireland, Arts of the South Pacific* (2 April-8 July 2007), curators Michael Gunn, Philippe Peltier.

Appendix 4: Report by Catherine K: Research on Vanuatu Basketry at the Australian Museum with Yvonne Carillo-Huffman, Technical Officer Pacific Collections.

My primary research focused on the art of basketry in Vanuatu (Walter, Bolton, Corowa 1984, 2003). For the last twenty years, two anthropologists, Lissant Bolton and Annie Walter have studied the art of plaiting and the construction of basketry.

In June 2007, as part of this study, I made a fieldtrip to Vanuatu. During this time, I collected information related to my research on basketry working at the Vanuatu Cultural Centre. I also collected a diversity of baskets from the island of Futuna.

Over the years and on several trips to Vanuatu I have been drawn to the growing profile of fibre practice and, in particular, the art of basketry. In early February 2008, following recommendations by my supervisor Professor Diana Wood Conroy, Faculty of Creative Arts, University of Wollongong, I started to research baskets from Vanuatu at the Australian Museum in Sydney. Working with Yvonne Carrillo-Huffman, Technical officer, Pacific Collections, I selected some items in the collection of the Australian Museum that revealed the evolution of Vanuatu basketry. It appears that some models in the collection are very similar to contemporary models, in particular, baskets from Futuna (item E.73245 donation C.Ward 1979 or item 82383 collected in 1990 by anthropologist Lissant Bolton), and also very similar to photographic images of baskets researched by well-respected anthropologist Felix Speiser for his reference book *Ethnology of Vanuatu, An Early Twentieth Century Study* (published in German in 1910 and in English in 1990).

In 1988, anthropologist Jane Keller studied the construction of this type of basket in Futuna; she referred to it as “a neo-traditional symbol of unity in Vanuatu” and an icon (Keller 1988) of Vanuatu. This type of basket is currently made in Port Vila by the basket makers originally from Futuna and living in Port Vila.



Futuna basket Australian Museum Collection
Item 82383 collected by Lissant Bolton 1990
Photograph by Catherine K 2008



Basket 11 ref. by Felix Speiser 1910

A visual overview of the collection showed that design influences were apparent between baskets depending on their provenance among a diversity of islands. Although the Australian Museum has a collection of 294 baskets from Vanuatu, very little information is known about these baskets except for the date of registration, name of the donor and provenance as mentioned in the case of items collected by Robertson in the island of Futuna in 1910. No doubt that this lack of information can be attributed to several factors such as the negligence of the donor, time, art historians and till recently, the anthropologists' neglect of women's works as pointed out by Lissant Bolton (Bolton 2003). Through several meetings with Yvonne Carrillo-Huffman and following our discussions over the “hypothetical” story of these baskets, it became obvious that a wealth of knowledge on basketry could only be retrieved by consulting directly contemporary basket makers in Vanuatu. However, this study will have to benefit the basket makers themselves. During my stay in Port Vila, I was not encouraged by VCC to research in this direction as Ni Vanuatu Fieldworker Jean Tareisesi was compiling information on this subject. Hence, my research focuses on the possibilities of cross-cultural exchanges between Vanuatu and Australia

Appendix 5: Pacific Islands Museum Association (PIMA), Assises des Art Oceaniens/Oceanic Arts Symposium Port Vila (May 2008)

On regular basis PIMA organises forums and discussions for museum professionals of the Pacific. These events are beneficial to Pacific museums. Professional expertises advocated policies for preserving Pacific island heritage. Codes of ethics are revised. Island communities are encouraged to participate in the debates concerning their traditions. Specific researches are allocated for the needs of these communities.



Dancers performing at the opening PIMA Symposium (May 2008)



Pima Symposium held in the *Nakamal* (May 2008)



From left to right : Marcellin Abong (Director VCC)
Hon. Joe Natuman (Minister of Internal Affairs)
H.E. Kalkot Matas Kelekele (President and Head of State)
Ralph Regenvanu (President of National Cultural Council,
Member of the Parliament), 2008.



Intervention by Kirk Huffman,
Research Associate Australian
Museum Sydney, Honorary Curator
Vanuatu Cultural Centre (VCC), 2008.

**Appendix 6: Art Association of Australian and New Zealand AAANZ Conference
Queensland Art Gallery/ Griffith University Brisbane 4-6 December 2008**

<p>DR PRUE AHRENS University of Queensland, p.ahrens@uq.edu.au</p> <p>DANIEL WASWAS Melanesian Institute of Arts and Communication, Papua New Guinea, danielw@gallerypng.com.pg</p> <p>MAUD PAGE Queensland Art Gallery, maud.page@qag.qld.gov.au</p>	<h2 style="text-align: center;">MATTERS OF HIERARCHY AND ORDER IN OCEANIC ART</h2> <p>Many researchers have realised the futility of attempts to apply Western artistic frameworks to Oceanic art. Western distinctions between art, craft and design are irrelevant to the aims and methods of Indigenous cultural production. But is that to say there is no internal structure or hierarchy at all within Oceanic art? Pacific cultures are many and varied, but most operate within chiefly structures and social systems within the family and wider community which are deeply entrenched. Wouldn't it seem that the art produced in such societies would engage with its social orders? Is art one way in which Indigenous artists resist or challenge internal authority and hierarchical order? As the global community closes in on Pacific cultures, do Indigenous artists remain bound by local social frameworks? Have they adopted or adapted modernist artistic systems in an attempt to speak to a wider non-specialist Western public? Or have the conditions of Western postmodernism and the associated fracturing of hierarchy and structure within Western art established some preconditions for a global consumption of Oceanic art? This session will interrogate questions of hierarchy and structure within past and present Oceanic art.</p> <p>Prue Ahrens is an Art Historian and Reader in Cultural History at the University of Queensland. She has published widely on Pacific history and cultural production.</p> <p>Daniel Waswas is a practising artist and the Director of Melanesian Institute of Arts and Communication, University of Papua New Guinea. He is the founder of GalleryPNG, a non-profit art organisation, and his work has been collected by the Museum of Confluences, Lyon and Rochefort Museum, France.</p> <p>Maud Page is Curator of Pacific Art at the Queensland Art Gallery and, amongst other exhibitions, has contributed to the last two Asia Pacific Triennials of Contemporary Art in Brisbane.</p>
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What about that story ... was a powerpoint presentation on my research in Vanuatu. It addressed fundamental issues concerning the way Pacific cultures seek to represent themselves and asked questions about the challenges of negotiating representations of the marginalised such as women's craft within the global art world. I placed emphasis on the recognition of likeness within contemporary art practice in Australia and its neighbourhood. In particular I underlined the desire for the artists/craftspeople to be agents of social changes and for indigenous artists to reclaim control over their art practices offers new sets of possibilities for interactions between artists from diverse cultures. Visual images presented the interactions of the participants in the project *Encounters in Vanuatu: Processes and Interactions in visual art*. I proposed a model for cross-cultural interactions that seems to work and highlighted the significance of artistic, intellectual and economic benefits for artists engaged in cross-cultural events.

WHAT ABOUT THAT STORY ...

CATHERINE KAY

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This paper reflects on several field trips to the islands of Vanuatu. Drawing on encounters with ni-Vanuatu artists and craftspeople, it investigates the plurality of the traditional and contemporary art forms in the islands of Vanuatu. Addressing fundamental issues concerning the way Pacific cultures seek to represent themselves, the paper asks questions about the challenges of negotiating within the global art world, and about representation of the marginalised—such as women's craft.

Twenty-first century 'economies of scale' can result in unforeseen—indeed ubiquitous—ramifications with regard to intent and purpose of the art form. In order to understand the position of contemporary artists, I facilitated Eric and Linda Natuoivi, established artists from Port Vila, capital of the island of Efate in Vanuatu, to come to Australia. This paper is a visual documentation of a collaborative project that plays a participatory role in the exchange with artists through the practice of making art. My visual artwork is a personal response to the environment of Vanuatu and a respectful adaptation of plaited structures, taught to me by Linda Natuoivi, into Western material and forms.

Catherine Kay was awarded an Australian Council for the Arts Fellowship in 2005–06 for a major research and exhibition project focused on La Perouse.

PANDANUS: THE STUFF OF LIFE

LORRAINE LAMOTHE,

James Cook University, Townsville,
arentz@austarnet.com.au

Women's material culture in Papua New Guinea is not well documented. Despite years of anthropological research spanning well over a century, with a few exceptions neither women's rituals nor their material culture have received sustained focus. MacKenzie (1991) and Weiner (1976) have published on the *bilums* of Telefol and the banana bundles of the Trobriand respectively. Ohnemus has studied plaited objects in the Admiralty Islands. Otherwise, women have received tangential attention, usually warranting only a fleeting glance

in studies that focused elsewhere in their communities.

From 2001 until 2008, I pursued doctoral studies on the creative process of textile artists by deconstructing the use of entomological motifs in mat-making. The subjects in this study included myself as a Western artist as well as women in three villages of Morobe Province, two along the Huon Gulf coast and one on Siassi Island. The women in these communities make stitched Pandanus mats. It is these mats, their making and their place in the community that are explored in this paper. Issues and concepts canvassed include the allocation of time and effort to making mats; the impact of Western material goods and attitudes on mat-making; and the value of mats both in terms of economic units which may be sold and bartered, but also as culturally dense objects which are kept out of circulation.

Lorraine Lamothe is a practising textile artist. Her practice has included quilting, weaving and more recently hooking, and employs the use of insect motifs as metaphor for arbitrary standards and preconceived notions. She has recently submitted her doctoral thesis.

LEAPING SIDEWAYS: AUSTRALIA AND THE CONTEMPORARY PACIFIC

DR PAMELA ZEPLIN

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Zeplin@unisa.edu.au

While research on Pacific art has long focused on museum collecting and display, scant attention has been devoted to the ways in which contemporary artists conduct their practices and participate in cultural exchanges. This is particularly the case with Pacific artists residing in or visiting Australia, and concomitantly with Australian artists, writers and curators residing/working in the Pacific. Whereas art communities in Aotearoa New Zealand readily identify with a diverse 'Pasifeka' heritage, their Australian institutional counterparts have yet to seriously acknowledge the contribution of Pacific and Islander artists to contemporary visual culture. Indeed, with little mainstream Australian interest in art from this region, Pacific exhibitions and exchanges have tended to be 'brokered' through the curatorial expertise of Australia's smaller neighbour across the Tasman. Such agency, however,

tends to privilege artists from those regions (problematically) identified as Polynesia over those from Melanesia and Micronesia, even though such choices may be unreflective of Australia's proximity to, and experience of, Pacific history and culture.

This paper examines some recent events featuring Pacific artists that have been initiated in Australia. In acknowledging that a number of exciting new developments have taken place in regional communities rather than metropolitan centres—from Cairns to Campbelltown—the research addresses issues surrounding representation, curatorial selection and how these have been affected by Australian relationalities with the Pacific. Recent art endeavours that focus on, or incorporate, Islander culture include Campbelltown Arts Centre's *News from Islands* (2007), ongoing initiatives in Northern Queensland and The South Project (2004–10), an organisation based in Melbourne which facilitates exchanges and residencies throughout the Southern Hemisphere.

Pamela Zeplin is a writer, academic and artist based in Adelaide. A Senior Lecturer at the University of South Australia's South Australian School of Art (SASA), she heads Art and Design History and Theory. With a long-standing research focus in regional cultures in the Asia-Pacific and the Southern Hemisphere, Pamela published art criticism and scholarly articles, as well as regularly presenting papers on contemporary art, since 1985, with a particular focus on Australia–New Zealand relations.

Appendix 7: Research Contract for Catherine K with the Vanuatu Culture Council

Appendix 1 (Vanuatu Cultural Research Policy).

Research Agreement

AN AGREEMENT made the12th..... day ofMAY....., 200...8.....

BETWEEN : THE NATIONAL CULTURAL COUNCIL, representing the Government of the Republic of Vanuatu and the local community, (hereinafter called "the Council") of the one part.

AND : Catherine KAY

of (institution) Faculty of Creative Arts
University of Wollongong, Wollongong
(hereinafter called "the Researcher") of the other part. (Masters)

WHEREAS :

(1) The Researcher has applied to the Council to do research work in the Republic of Vanuatu, and agrees to the conditions placed upon her/him in this document and to compliance with the intent of the ethics described in the Vanuatu Cultural Research Policy.

(2) The Council has agreed to allow the Researcher to do such research, and has agreed to the obligations placed upon it by this document and by the Vanuatu Cultural Research Policy.

AND THEREFORE THE PARTIES AGREED AS FOLLOWS :

(1) The Council hereby authorises the Researcher to undertake research work in Vanuatu on the subject of *Influence and confluence in the art of contemporary basketry weaving in Vanuatu*
with the communit(y/ies) of
Port Vila only
on the island/s of

in the capacity of (if more than one researcher is involved)

Principal researcher

for the period up until (Specify if research will involve more than one visit)

October 2008 (June fieldwork ends)

(2) The Researcher has paid an authorisation fee of 25,000 vatu to cover all administrative costs incurred in the setting up and implementation of the research venture, or this fee has been waived by the Council.

waived

Page 2 of the contract with VCC

(3) The right to the products of research shall belong to the Researcher who shall be entitled to reproduce them for educational, academic or scientific purposes, provided that traditional copyrights are not compromised and the permission to use material has been obtained, through the Traditional Copyright Agreement, from copyright holders. The products of research shall not be reproduced or offered for sale or otherwise used for commercial purposes, unless specified under section 12 of this agreement.

• *Products = thesis (5,000 words) and exhibition (assoc. with products)*

(4) Copies of all non-artefact products of research are to be deposited without charge with the Cultural Centre and, where feasible, with the local community. Two copies of films and videos are to be provided, one for public screening and the other for deposit in the archives. In the case of films, a copy on video is also required. Any artefacts collected become the property of the Cultural Centre unless traditional ownership has been established in the Traditional Copyright Agreement. The carrying of any artefacts or specimens outside the country is prohibited as stipulated under cap.39 of the Laws of Vanuatu. Artefacts and specimens may be taken out of the country for overseas study and analysis under cap.39(7). The conditions for the return of the following materials are:

(Specify artefacts/specimens/other materials and conditions for return)

need to provide The Researcher has either

(a) provided a letter from the institution to which they are affiliated guaranteeing the researcher's compliance with the above conditions, or

(b) provided a retrievable deposit of 40 000 vatu to ensure their compliance with these conditions.

(5) The Researcher will be responsible for the translation of a publication in a language other than a vernacular language or one of the three national languages of Vanuatu into a vernacular or one of the national languages, preferably the one used in education in the local community. They will also make the information in all products of research, subject to copyright restrictions, accessible to the local community through such means as audio cassettes or copies of recorded information, preferably in the vernacular. The Researcher will also submit an interim report of not less than 2000 words no later than 6 months after the research period has ended giving a reasonable precis of their work. This will be in one of the national languages and in 'layman's terms' so as to be of general use to all citizens.

(6) There will be maximum involvement of indigenous scholars, students and members of the community in research, full recognition of their collaboration, and training to enable their further contribution to country and community. The Council nominates the following individuals to be involved in research and/or trained, in the following capacities:

Eric & Linda Natuvivi (principal counterparts)

→ Eric & Linda will be sponsored to travel to Australia and work in Wollongong & in Canberra (School of Art) and exhibit at Univ. of Wollongong (7-21 October '08)

Page 3 of the contract with VCC

(7) A product of immediate benefit and use to the local community will be provided by the Researcher no later than 6 months after termination of the research period. This product is:

Eric & Linda Natuoivi's artist-in-residence in Australia

(8) In addition to their research work, the Researcher will, as a service to the nation of Vanuatu, undertake to : (section 3(viii) of the Cultural Research Policy suggests possible services of benefit to the nation)

(9) In undertaking research the Researcher will:

- a) recognise the rights of people being studied, including the right not to be studied, to privacy, to anonymity, and to confidentiality;
- b) recognise the primary right of informants and suppliers of data and materials to the knowledge and use of that information and material, and respect traditional copyrights, which always remain with the local community;
- c) assume a responsibility to make the subjects in research fully aware of their rights and the nature of the research and their involvement in it;
- d) respect local customs and values and carry out research in a manner consistent with these;
- e) contribute to the interests of the local community in whatever ways possible so as to maximise the return to the community for their cooperation in the research work;
- f) recognise their continuing obligations to the local community after the completion of field work, including returning materials as desired and providing support and continuing concern.

(10) In all cases where information or material data is obtained by the Researcher, a Traditional Copyright Agreement will be completed by the Researcher and the supplier of data regarding this material. The Researcher has a responsibility to make such informants fully aware of their rights and obligations, and those of the Researcher, in the signing of the Traditional Copyright Agreement.

(11) A breach of any part of this agreement by the Researcher or a decision by the local community that it no longer wishes to be involved in the research venture will result in the termination of the research project.

(12) (Additional clauses/conditions) (This section will detail commercial ventures, extra costs incurred by the Cultural Centre, etc.)

Signed :

CK an
.....
The Researcher

.....
On behalf of the National Cultural Council.



Appendix 8: Report on Eric Natuoivi's artworks in Vanuatu and in Australia

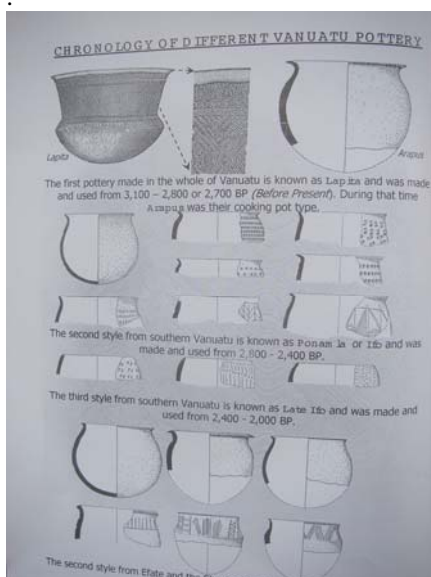
Presently, Eric Natuoivi is the only Ni Vanuatu ceramicist in Port Vila. His clay is imported from Australia where he has also learned his skills. Although there is no clay available in his volcanic island for the type of firing that Eric uses in his artwork, Vanuatu has a history of very distinctive potteries associated with Lapita people. These people (partly of Asian ancestry) arrived in Vanuatu around 3,100 BP (archaeologists can certify through the potteries found in diverse places in Vanuatu), from the Bismarck Archipelago in New Guinea and settled at different places in the Pacific over long period of time. Bringing with them this knowledge of potteries, these early settlers used the material they could find on in situ, especially as the ocean cut them off their original lands. In particular, Eric's interest in Lapita pottery developed as he witnessed over the years and since 2004 in particular, the Australian archaeologists working on sites Professor Matthew Spriggs's team from Australian National University. Some decorative elements such as.... from the Lapita pottery have influenced Eric Natuoivi's ceramic as seen in his early works (below). Lapita people brought with them pigs, chicken and crops such as taro, yam. Eric imprint on his pots, these essential features of his culture



Yam Eric Natuoivi 1988
18cmx18cmx35cm
Jenny West Collection



Taro Natuoivi 1988
18cmx18cmx35cm
Jenny West Collection



Lapita ceramic archaeologic drawings



Lapita Eric Natuoivi 1985 hand built bisque fire
45cmx45cmx50cm, Jenny West Collection

Eric Natuoivi's previous artworks are a reflection on gender equity in the culture of Vanuatu, not so much intent to bridge the gap of differences between genders but as a manifestation of the society of Vanuatu. Men and women live there traditionally in a graded society that encompasses the recognition of status based on merit for both genders and on a division of tasks.

In his vessel, the ceramic base is associated with the earth and land of Vanuatu while the sculptural parts in wood are representations of growing elements, of living matters. Tusks are important components of life in the islands symbolising power. (Huffman 2008) The binding of the different parts of the sculpture is made of Burao plaited



Equity Gender Eric Natuoivi,
Eric Natuoivi, 1998, ceramic, wood
pig tusks, 120cm x 34cm x 34 cm
Jenny West Collection



Love in Marriage
Eric Natuoivi, 1998
Ceramic, Wood, Pig tusks
Jenny West Collection
80cm x 55cm x 15cm



Chief's Power
Eric Natuoivi, 1998
Ceramic, Wood, Pig tusks
Jenny West Collection
40cm x 40cm x 80cm

Eric's new works (below) produced during the residencies in Australia is a testimony of island life that he shared with the viewer.



Lapita Pot, Eric Natuoivi 2008
Ceramic Pigs' tusks
Photograph Helene Walsh

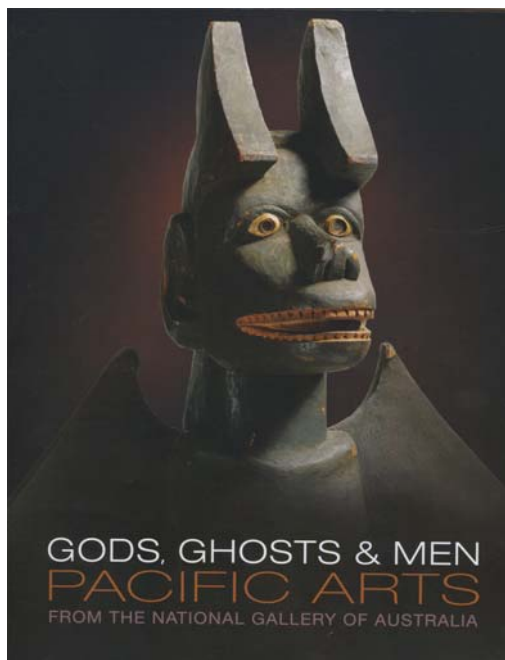


Spirit of Vanuatu
Eric Natuoivi 2008
Photograph Catherine K



Untitled
Eric Natuoivi 2008
Photograph Catherine K

Appendix 9: Catalogue exhibition *Gods, Ghosts and Men: Pacific Art in the National Gallery of Australia*, May- September 2008



Cover catalogue, Exhibition: *Gods, Ghosts and Men: Pacific Art in the NGA Collection*
Courtesy National Gallery of Australia 2008.



Eric Natuoivi and his work September 2008
National Gallery of Australia
Courtesy National Gallery of Australia



Gourd-Shaped Pot, Eric Natuoivi
(registration 96.874,) 63.5cm x 34cm x 34cm, 1995,
Exhibition *Gods, Ghosts and Men: Pacific Art in the NGA Collection*,
May- September 2008
Courtesy National Gallery of Australia

Appendix 10: Hinchliffe, Meredith. "Traditional and Modern: There are Multiple Layers of Meaning in the Works of two Ni Vanuatu Artists", *The Canberra Times* Thursday, October 2, 2008.

Thursday, October 2, 2008 Times2

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Traditional and modern

There are multiple layers of meaning in the work of two Vanuatu artists, **Meredith Hinchliffe** writes

Canberrans have the chance to view the work of two artists from Vanuatu, the island nation in the South Pacific. Catherine K, an Australian-French artist who works in mixed media, has facilitated a project titled *Encounters in Vanuatu*, which included a visit by two artists from Vanuatu as artists in residence in the Textiles and Ceramics workshops at the Australian National University School of Art. Linda Natuovi is a basket-maker and Eric Natuovi is a ceramic artist. A small exhibition of their work will be on display at the Foyer Gallery at the School of Art until October 6.

Eric Natuovi is one of only two potters in Vanuatu. He became interested in pottery in 1967 when he was in Sydney undertaking a Graduate Diploma in Expressive and Performing Arts at the (then) Sydney College of Advanced Education.

"Pottery was part of the expressive arts," he said. "I had not seen ceramics before - it was something new to me and I wanted to try it - I like a challenge! My teacher told me that I was a natural."

When he returned to Vanuatu, there was no clay and no equipment and he did not pursue his new-found talent. "I then met an Australian who was a potter and ceramics supplier. When he left Vanuatu, he left everything for me. Including the kiln he had built."

Eric continued potting part-time while holding a number of positions at the Vanuatu Teachers' College. He was a member of the local artists' society and in 2005 was one of a small group of 10 who broke away to form Red Wave Vanuatu. They held their first exhibition that year - he was the only potter.

Eric is showing 12 pots in the exhibition, all of which have been made while he has been artist-in-residence since September 8. They are coiled, burnished and bisque fired and then seawater fired. Due to occupational health and safety requirements, the pots were taken to Strathmain for the final seawater firing. The surfaces glow, partly achieved with the application of wax and partly through burnishing.

In Canberra Eric was shown how to use terra sigillata, a very thin liquid slip applied to unfired clay surfaces. When polished with a soft cloth or brush the surface gains a shine ranging from a smooth silky lustre to a high gloss. The polished surface can only be retained if fired within the low-fire range.

Several works include applied carved wood while others also have pigs' tusks, brought from Vanuatu - these symbolise values and family. The wood is eucalypt, and Eric was given assistance by members of the Wood Workshop to carve this unfamiliar timber.

Two basic forms are on display: large, full-bellied spherical forms - lapita - and taller works that taper slightly towards the top - mangessi. "They have recovered pots from about 3000 years ago," Eric told me, "and these are the names given to the forms and sites where they found the old pots."

One work holds the ashes of deceased family members.



Basket-maker Linda Natuovi at work, above and left. Inset: Ceramics by her husband Eric. Photos Catherine K and Helene Walsh



Another retells the legend of the snake, from which new coconut trees came. A tall pot with a worm, orange surface carries the name leaf, the national floral emblem which symbolises peace.

Eric sells his work mostly to the expat community and tourists to Vanuatu. It seems to be difficult to

convince the local population to accept a new medium of expression.

Eric's wife, Linda, is a traditional basket-maker. She brought a quantity of prepared pandanus - the main natural fibre used to make bags, basket, arm-bands and textiles that the women sit on

when preparing the pandanus and weaving - in addition to woven baskets and bags. The works that Linda brought with her are all from the pale, off-white dried pandanus, some embellished with strips of coloured paper or soft plastic. Pandanus dries unevenly and the weaving shows hands of deeper or lighter colours over the surface.

Linda and Eric are from the tiny island of Futuna, to the south of Vanuatu, although they now live and work in Port Vila. The women of Futuna believe that natural pandanus lasts longer than dyed pandanus.

The baskets and bags Linda has brought are fairly traditional, but show consummate skills in creating corners for squared baskets, and restoring the size of the pandanus and scale of weaving to create finer, tighter bands at the opening edges of the bags. Here the weaves become more complex with different patterns and designs.

"I learned to weave as a child. When the time is right [the pandanus is ready for splitting and weaving], the women come together and weave. We sit under a large tree all together and the young girls and older women all weave."

The girls pick up the skills by watching and following their elders. Linda herself is a now a senior weaver from the island. The use of coloured paper and soft plastic introduces a

contemporary Western approach, but this is not unusual in those societies which create their art for both a local and a tourist market.

Linda is concerned that when young people leave their homes and move to larger towns, such as Port Vila, they leave their skills behind. After one or two generations, the knowledge is lost. When she returns, Linda will begin teaching basket-weaving to young girls and women who live in Port Vila.

All art changes to absorb new technologies, new ideas and influences, and both artists meld traditional and contemporary cultures into their work.


For the students at the School of Art, they have seen the passion and dedication of two artists from another country.


"Eric worked all night to finish these pots," lecturer Greg Daly told me. "Students need to know that artists still do this, such is their commitment to their work."

The work in the exhibition has many connections to custom and traditional life, and there are multiple layers to each work which, as European bystanders, we cannot expect to have any knowledge of.

However, we can appreciate the skills of both weaver and potter and enjoy the works at the aesthetic level.

SCHOOL OF ART FOYER GALLERY
COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES





Eric and Linda Natuoivi
25th September - 3rd October

Please join us for the opening by:
Crispin Howarth
Curator Pacific Arts
 National Gallery of Australia
4^{pm} Thursday 25th Sept.

Linda will be in the Foyer Gallery Friday 26th Sept. demonstrating traditional natural fibre weaving and people are welcome to weave an armband from Pandanus or non-traditional materials.

Eric works on the issue of gender equity and traditions of Vanuatu as kastom. He incorporates into his sculptural artforms wood and pig tusks as symbols of value and family. He and Linda Natuoivi present their artworks as an essential expression of their cultural identity.

Invitation for the opening Eric and Linda Natuoivi. Canberra School of Art Gallery ANU 25 September 2008



Eric and Linda Natuoivi at the opening of their exhibition
 Canberra School of Art Australia National University 25 September 2008
 Photograph Helene Walsh



Eric and Linda Natuoivi's works in the exhibition Faculty of Creative Arts
 University of Wollongong, 2-20 Feb 2009, Photograph Neil Duncan