

## OzPacifica

THE IDEA FOR THIS ISSUE HAS BEEN BREWING FOR SOME TIME, triggered in part by attending last year's *Floating Land* ephemeral sculpture event, which involved a number of Pacific artists, and by the *Pacific Storms* exhibition, held at Bundaberg Regional Gallery around the same time and largely developed by Joycelin Leahy. 'Last year, a storm from the Pacific Ocean passed through Queensland,' begins Prisca Chant's article, rather ominously, on this exhibition that's now already rumbling towards its third edition.

It has been a while since *Art Monthly* produced an issue dedicated to Pacific arts. The July 1999 'Pacific vision at home and abroad' issue (No. 121), co-edited by Philippa Kelly and Susan Cochrane, was certainly welcome but, to be fair, it isn't completely dedicated to Pacific arts; in fact, less than half of the articles in this issue relate to Pacific arts and there is no real coverage of Australian-based Pacific arts practice, which is the particular focus of this month's 'Bountiful OzPacifica' issue.

In its broad sweep of thirty-plus Pacific artists *Pacific Storms* notably included the work of artists from Australia's Pacific Diaspora. This exhibition could be seen to launch the promising career of young Brisbane-based artist Eric Bridgeman whose photograph *Wilma Jr. (Blacky)* adorns our cover. The buff minstrel-like figure posing in this photo conjures a raft of racially charged meanings which can be read in a particular Pacific-Melanesian or OzPacifica context, or as a broader musing on – and 'entertainment' of – black/white relations. Coming from his *The Sport and Fair Play of Aussie Rules series* (2008-09), this work examines the ethos of Australian society through the prism of sport, and as such this particular image will come to the fore even more dramatically as a life-size sculptural installation for the 2010 *Basil Sellers Art Prize* exhibition at Melbourne's Ian Potter Museum of Art which opens this month. In interview with the 'Potter's Bala Starr, for this issue's OzPacifica Profiles section, Bridgeman comes across as a clear-thinking artist whose unique cross-cultural aesthetic is as much about the nature of his collaborations as his conceptual intent.

Of course, spotlighting Pacific arts talent in Australia has many precedents. As our lead article by Adelaide art historian Pamela Zeplin points out, Murri artist/curator Jenny Fraser has been a veritable pioneer with her two *other APT* exhibitions since 2006, conceived as a

riposte to the dwindling Pacific presence at Queensland Art Gallery's *Asia Pacific Triennial*, and as a counter-definitive inclusion of Indigenous Australian voices within the contemporary Pacific arts parasol. This definition is shared by Auckland-based collector-curator Giles Peterson (in interview here with Billie Lythberg) and in the overall scope of this issue, with articles relating to recent developments in Torres Strait Islander arts, the *Pallingjang Saltwater* exhibition (South Coast NSW), recent photographic portraits of Gary Lee, and the politics of cultural (re)appropriation for Aboriginal Australia – but with wider implications for Pacific cultures and beyond – in Jane Raffan's thoroughly crafted essay.

Timothy Morrell's diagnosis of the APT's bill of health on Pacific arts is measured and cautiously optimistic. As he sees it, building on its Pacific connections is what will save this mega-show from lapsing into mega-show homogeneity.

Another key catalyst towards the initial idea and subsequent development of this issue was a relatively small but formidable workshop, *The Big Island: Promoting Contemporary Pacific Art and Craft* in Australia, held at the University of Wollongong in November last year (and convened by Pam Zeplin and Paul Sharrad). Most of the Editorial Board for this issue came from this meeting, many of its participants are reflected herein through their writing and art (and input as referees), and the workshop itself galvanised the need for this issue's OzPacifica focus.

This issue necessarily looks outside of Australia as well, both in its content – in aiming to elucidate and enlarge the perception of contemporary Pacific art – and in anticipation of the issue's launch at the 10<sup>th</sup> International Symposium of the Pacific Arts Association, Rarotonga, Cook Islands, 9 to 11 August. It will be interesting here to note the reception of Jacqui Durrant's article on the current Cook Islands arts vibe. This issue will also find its feet at the Melbourne Art Fair (4 to 8 August) where *Art Monthly* will proudly fly its independent arts publisher flag as always.

While mindful of the omissions in our expansive but hardly exhaustive coverage of this theme – despite pushing the pages to a bountiful number 96 – I am especially grateful to the Pacific navigational skills of the Editorial Board for this issue – Susan Cochrane, Jacqui Durrant, Pamela Zeplin, Joycelin Leahy and Jim Vivieaere – and to those academics (listed on page 3) who contributed as referees for a number of its articles.

Yours (with a Canberra-cum-Rarotongan beat)

Maurice



Figurine, date unknown, Lospalos (Lautem province, East Timor), wood, 122 x 12 x 13cm. Collection: National Collection of East Timor. From the 2009 exhibition *husi bei ala Timor Sira Nia Liman: From the Hands of Our Ancestors*, Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, Darwin. Photograph by Regis Martin. Such figurines served as grave markers in East Timor's Lautem province. An article on this exhibition written by James Bennett specifically for the OzPacifica issue will, due to lack of space, be published in our September 2010 issue.

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