

Worklist

Commissioned by CIRCUIT Artist Film and Video Aotearoa New Zealand with the support of Creative New Zealand 2020

Rangituhia Hollis,
Across the face of the moon
10.33 minutes
Digital Video, Sound
2020

Ana Iti
Howling out at a safe distance
11.42 minutes
Digital Video, Sound
2020

Alex Monteith
Deepwater Currents
29.46 minutes
Digital Video, Sound
2020

Sione Monu
Only Yesterday
8.9 minutes
Digital Video, Sound
2020

Gary-Ross Pastrana
Rewilding
8.40 minutes
Digital Video, Sound
2018

Sovereign Pacific / Pacific Sovereigns

13 April – 18 May 2021

Rangituhia Hollis
Ana Iti
Alex Monteith
Sione Monu
Gary-Ross Pastrana

Artspace Aotearoa is pleased to present its third cinema programme for 2021, *Sovereign Pacific / Pacific Sovereigns*.

Organised and commissioned by CIRCUIT and curated by Singapore-based academic and curator David Teh, each artist in *Sovereign Pacific / Pacific Sovereigns* was given two concepts as prompts from which to create a new work. The first idea, Pacific Concretism, sought to explore 'errant modernisms' - artworks at junctions between traditional forms of visual art and other forms such as experimental literature. A second idea, Sovereignty, asks; what would a Sovereign Pacific artwork look like outside of traditional Western ideas of influence and form?

Sovereign Pacific / Pacific Sovereigns is the sixth edition of CIRCUIT's annual Artist Cinema Commissions. Over several months of research and dialogue with CIRCUIT's director and network, the curator selected five artists, each of whom were asked to respond to the curatorial brief with a work of 10-15 minutes for cinema presentation. While each artist was invited to make a short work for a captive audience, most showings of the programme (in Aotearoa and overseas) will take place in ad hoc settings, extensions or annexes to art spaces, rather than theatrical ones. All five artists are used to addressing their audiences adrift in the social ebb and flow of the gallery, or online. What might the more linear, 'cinematic' setting afford an artist today? And how might the cinema be reconfigured by the contemporary moving images of Aotearoa and the Pacific?

The opening on Friday 16 April will also include the launch of the *2021 CIRCUIT Reader: Sovereign Pacific / Pacific Sovereigns*, featuring texts and conversations from the *2020 CIRCUIT Symposium* by David Teh, Dr. Carl TH Mika, Sorawit Songsataya, Lana Lopesi, Dr. Greg Dvorak, Dr. David Chesworth, Ana Iti, Andrew Clifford, AURA Student Critical Forum (Meleseini Faleafa, Ilena Shadbolt, Kate Donald, Lucy Jessep, Matt Tini).

The reader is available as a free pdf download from artspace-aotearoa.nz/reading-room

Public Programme

Opening and Launch
Friday 16 April
6pm - 8pm

SOVEREIGN PACIFIC / PACIFIC SOVEREIGNS

David Teh and Mark Williams

Sovereign Pacific / Pacific Sovereigns is the sixth edition of *CIRCUIT's annual Artist Cinema Commissions*. Over several months of research and dialogue with *CIRCUIT's* director and network, the curator selected five artists, each of whom were asked to respond to the curatorial brief with a work of 10–15 minutes for cinema presentation. While each artist was invited to make a short work for a captive audience, most showings of the programme (in Aotearoa and overseas) will take place in ad hoc settings, extensions or annexes to art spaces, rather than theatrical ones. All five artists are used to addressing their audiences adrift in the social ebb and flow of the gallery, or online. What might the more linear, 'cinematic' setting afford an artist today? And how might the cinema be reconfigured by the contemporary moving images of Aotearoa and the Pacific?

The 2020 *CIRCUIT* Artist Cinema commissions set out some artistic positions from which we might explore the relationship between sovereignty and the moving image, in a regional (Pacific) setting. How is sovereignty communicated through moving images, and what might it mean for moving images to be sovereign? One senses a certain self-possession, an authorial sovereignty that is recognizably modern and liberal. But although these are individually authored works, they nevertheless touch on the *limits* of the autonomous person. Each broaches some history of displacement (formal, geo-spatial, material, semantic), estrangements that the individual, in order to live better, will need to *live with*.

We did not hold the artists to a unifying theme, nor aim for any focused statement. Instead, in our research and selections, we tried to watch and listen for mutations and modulations of sovereignty – not just that of animate beings but also that of *things*, including art works – and to remain sensitive to the *formal* registers of sovereignty. It was hoped that we might thereby pervert the course of a certain North-Atlantic historiography of modernism (called 'concrete'), by way of a 'Pacific' one; to bend it, pour it into a new shape. And with a little searching, we did uncover a preoccupation with text and language, even with literary modernism, in contemporary video-making in Aotearoa/NZ. We would not have anticipated that this search would yield such photogenic and *colourful* results!

Landing somewhere between a diaristic modernism and an oceanic orality is **Rangituhia Hollis's** rumination on the personal and political dynamics of urban working life. His life-writing has long served as a kind of video-engine, drawing together found or incidental 'real' footage with virtual vignettes and simulations. Recent iterations seem to leave behind what Bernard Stiegler called the 'analogico-digital' image, but for the persistence of *voice* – the voice of a personal sovereignty that depends as much on *abstraction*, these days, including machine-writing and machine-reading, as on what is too blithely called 'representation.'

Sione Monu is also invested in a kind of life-writing, but one drafted and iterated publicly, on social media platforms. In his first foray into the cinema, he pushes the picaresque rhythm of personal photo-blogging towards a more sustained narrative. There is nothing 'found' about these shots, although the pace is diaristic and unhurried. But while he suppresses hypermediation and text, captions lurk in gestures, hashtags are secreted in everyday banter. The horizons of sovereignty are opened up by way of a low-fi, speculative fiction, and subtle queerings of class, racial norms, and the artist's diasporic heritage.

Only **Ana Iti's** work fits the 'concrete' aesthetic, though she cleverly subverts our regionalist premise and whatever universalist pretensions it carries, by insisting on the visuality of writing but denying a coherent reading (at least for viewers not fluent in Te Reo Māori). Parsing editions of a hundred-year-old local paper, from before and after its adoption of a bespoke Māori typeface, the Māori-language *learner* is suspended between the desire to uncover a linguistic heritage, and changing protocols for its protection. The text is a mirror, reflecting her paradoxical isolation. But opaque though it may be to some, what it brings into focus is the consolidating formality of a graphic order – design, typography, the ratio of column and line – an act of kaitiaki, but less for the historical document than for the living language of Te Reo Māori

Gary-Ross Pastrana belongs to an academic tradition in the Philippines that is keenly attuned to the decolonizing potentials of language and modern media. Unlike the North American conceptualist, whose forms are dictated by ideas, the Philippine, tropical conceptualist is frequently led by materials, especially vernacular and 'indigenous' ones. The video *Rewilding* sprang from a sculptural conceit: to have termites 'perform' a real-time dematerialisation of the art object (a Readymade) in a gallery. Over the pulsing, equatorial insect hum, an instrument-maker, a termite scientist and a musicologist discuss the biopolitical premises of their work. The latter refers to formalism and organicism in music. (He is likely a descendant of pioneering ethnomusicologist and composer José Maceda, who after classical training in Europe encountered the concretism of Edgar Varèse in New York, before dedicating his career to indigenous sounds of the Philippines.)

This tropical entropy gives way to the low-frequency churn of **Alex Monteith's** video essay on the thermohaline circulation. This thousand-year cycle of water-borne energy and salt invisibly drives planetary systems and with them, our own, insect-like fates – like the artist's own passage to *Te moana nui a Kiwa* from her native Ireland. This great engine of animal, vegetable and mineral histories remains obscure and inscrutable in its oceanic depth, despite our monitoring – by autonomous seaborne devices and mundane handheld ones – and despite even our apparent ability to accelerate it. *Deepwater Currents* reminds us that the urge to understand and measure cannot be separated from the more odious effects of the frontier.

Though filmmaking is historically founded on a canon of complete oeuvres, not for the first time we find artists making the case for a more iterative cinema. Both Rangituhia Hollis and Alex Monteith continue to revise their works for future editions of *Sovereign Pacific / Pacific Sovereigns*, and opportunities elsewhere. Ana Iti's video has given rise to further iterations for the page and the billboard. Gary-Ross Pastrana's piece had previously been shown in various multi-screen configurations; while Sione Monu's work marks a successful migration from social media to the film festival, even as the latter evolves to meet the challenges of a global pandemic, online. In these diverse works, questions of personal and communal self-determination push us beyond the reach, beyond the experience, of the normative individual subject of liberalism. Yet however tenuous that norm may have become, its biographical and authorial paradigms endure.

Bios

Sovereign Pacific / Pacific Sovereigns was curated by David Teh and commissioned by *CIRCUIT* Artist Film and Video Aotearoa New Zealand with the support of Creative New Zealand 2020

CIRCUIT Artist Film and Video NZ

CIRCUIT is a New Zealand-based distributor of artist moving image works. *CIRCUIT* promotes its collection through online video streaming, and is a forum for discussion of contemporary work and artist practice. *CIRCUIT* has a growing catalogue that currently contains over 500 works by 90 New Zealand artists. *CIRCUIT* was established in 2009 by Mark Williams, an independent curator based in Wellington.

David Teh

David Teh is *CIRCUIT's* 2020 curator-at-large. He is a curator and Associate Professor at the National University of Singapore, specialising in Southeast Asian contemporary art. David's previous curatorial projects include Returns, a project for the 12th Gwangju Biennale (2018), Misfits: Pages from a Loose-leaf Modernity (Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin, 2017). His 2017 book Thai Art: Currencies of the Contemporary (MIT Press) examined the transition of Thai contemporary art from a nationalist subjectivity to a post-national one. His analysis is set against the backdrop of the Thai monarchy's waning sovereignty amidst political and economic turmoil.

Rangituhia Hollis,
Across the face of the moon
10.33 minutes
Digital Video, Sound
2020

Across the face of the moon is a poetic response to the precarity of brown lives in the urban South Pacific, the expanse of cosmological time, and a looming awareness of ecological peril to come. Rangituhia Hollis is of Ngati Porou and Ngati Kahungunu descent. Born in Napier, New Zealand, he has been exhibiting his art publicly for 20 years. He currently lives in South Auckland, and is a Teacher of Art and Digital Technologies.

Ana Iti
Howling out at a safe distance
11.42 minutes
Digital Video, Sound
2020

"Howling out at a safe distance uses four partial editions of the historic Māori language newspaper Te Pīpīwharauoa as a way to think about the grey areas in language and understanding. In the video I use A4 sheets of paper with

windows cut into them to isolate words and brief phrases from the articles found in Te Pīpī, which are about looking for something, translation, speaking to one another, and loneliness." – Ana Iti, Artist Statement.

Ana Iti (Te Rarawa) is an artist based in Te-Whanganui-a-Tara. Often employing sculpture, video and text, the artist's recent work explores the practice of history making through shared and personal narratives, attempting to open up space for more subjective experiences and feeling.

Alex Monteith
Deepwater Currents
29.46 minutes
Digital Video, Sound
2020

"Ocean currents arriving at Te Piha in Aotearoa have been circulating in waters elsewhere, prior to emerging and leaving again in its' renowned rips and sea-floor channels. The non-linear digital video grapples with formations and journeys of ocean currents as well as language traces from political or territorial claims in Tangaroa's domain... seabed mining permit applications, seafloor mapping, offshore oceanographic buoy measurements, global-tech, the blue economy and surfing... A winter of videography of sea-states of Ngā Tai Whakatū ā Kupe[1] is combined with a winter swell season at Mullach Mór, Éire[2] including during a record-breaking ocean storm. These vastly distant coasts are linked in the global ocean circulation of the thermohaline— currents that complete a journey of the oceans of the world in a cycle of around 1000 years. Waves, sea mists and deeper ocean currents, move onwards—unquiet."

[1] The upraised seas of Kupe, Tasman Sea, Aotearoa—New Zealand.
[2] Mullaghmore, Ireland.

–Alex Monteith, Artist Statement.

Alex Monteith is a new media artist and academic, born in Northern Ireland and resident in New Zealand. She is also a competitive surfer and has won national titles in the sport. Monteith's works focus on political issues surrounding land ownership, history and occupation. Many of her projects are located in large-scale geographies, such as the ocean.

Sione Monu
Only Yesterday
8.9 minutes
Digital Video, Sound
2020

"In an alternate world where queer indigeneity was never erased/lost,

we follow the daily lives of two leiti's whose sovereignty has come into its own in a fast changing, modern world. Set to the backdrop of an alternate Tonga untouched by western influence and with a wealth of mineral resources (particularly, crystals), you are presented with a subtle yet strikingly different modern world. The ingenuity of their adaptations to, and their cultural flourishes in their diaspora experience is captured in the mundanity of these two leiti's lives in Aotearoa."

–Sione Monu , Artists Statement.

"Sione Monu is an artist of the Tongan diaspora. He lives between Canberra Australia and Auckland who works across the mediums of photography, moving-image, fashion and adornment, performance and drawing exploring identity, family and Pasifika queer experience in the diaspora."

–Moana Fresh

Gary-Ross Pastrana
Rewilding
8.40 minutes
Digital Video, Sound
2018

"Rewilding (2018) is an attempt to reconfigure the power of process for both construction and deconstruction. Three protagonists are in conversation with the artist to render a fictional scenario of termites boring into a piano, how a piano in this state can be played and the conflicts between two species' habitations. Spoken words are mixed with the selected amplified sounds of the environment, producing a porous and poetic layer of documented reality which projects the circles of life and ruins while figuring various relationships crisscrossed between spheres of lives. Another immaterial layer of transformation is suggested by musical composition and performance, releasing a vibrant investigation toward perfection and chaos, interrupted by another beings' fight for survival. When such a complex structure of questioning is woven together, we may find ourselves losing means of measurement for a tuned world."

–Gary-Ross Pastrana, Artists Statement.

"Gary Ross Pastrana is a Filipino conceptual artist working with sculpture, performance, and photography. By combining unlikely and contradictory materials that often directly reference the human body, his images create a sense of tension and unease."

Museum of Contemporary Photography, Chicago.