

On Wet Ontologies, Fluid Hierarchies and  
Hope-Soaked Propositions at the 23rd  
Biennale of Sydney

by Emma O'Neill

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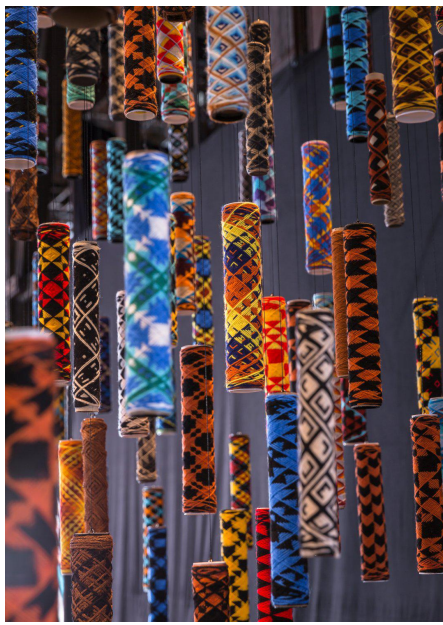
Foreground: Gal Weinstein, *Murray-Darling Basin*, 2022. Courtesy the artist. Produced in collaboration with the Centre for Sustainable Materials Research and Technology (SMaRT) at the University of New South Wales renowned for pioneering the transformation of waste for use as a new generation of 'green' materials and products. Commissioned by the Biennale of Sydney with assistance from Artis. Background: Mataaho Collective, *He Toka Tū Moana: She's a Rock*, 2022. Courtesy the artists. Commissioned by the Biennale of Sydney with generous support from Creative New Zealand. Installation view, 23rd Biennale of Sydney, *rīvus*, 2022, The Cutaway at Barangaroo. Photo: Document Photography.



Right to left: Nicole Foresheew, *YIRUNG BILA (SKY HEAVEN RIVER)*, 2022. Courtesy the artist. Commissioned by the Biennale of Sydney with generous support from the Australia Council for the Arts. Paula de Solminihac, *Fogcatcher*, 2018-2021. Courtesy the artist. Commissioned by the Biennale of Sydney with generous assistance from Graeme and Mabie Briggs and assistance from the Catholic University of Chile and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs | Government of Chile. Cave Urban, *Flow*, 2022 (detail). Courtesy the artists. Commissioned by the Biennale of Sydney with generous support from Andrew Cameron AO and Cathy Cameron. Mataaho Collective, *He Toka Tū Moana: She's a Rock*, 2022 (detail). Courtesy the artists. Commissioned by the Biennale of Sydney with generous support from Creative New Zealand. Gal Weinstein, *Murray-Darling Basin*, 2022 (detail). Courtesy the artist. Produced in collaboration with the Centre for Sustainable Materials Research and Technology (SMaRT) at the University of New South Wales renowned for pioneering the transformation of waste for use as a new generation of 'green' materials and products. Commissioned by the Biennale of Sydney with assistance from Artis. Installation view, 23rd Biennale of Sydney, *rīvus*, 2022, The Cutaway at Barangaroo. Photo: Document Photography



Sopolamalama Filipe Tohi, *Haukulasi*, 1995-2021. Commissioned by the Biennale of Sydney with generous support from Creative New Zealand. Courtesy the artist. Foreground: Clare Milledge, *Imbás: a well at the bottom of the sea*, 2022(detail). Commissioned by the Biennale of Sydney with generous support from the Australia Council for the Arts. Courtesy the artist & STATION. Installation view, 23rd Biennale of Sydney, *rīvus*, 2022, Pier 2/3 Walsh Bay Arts Precinct. Photo: Document Photography.



Sopolemalama Filipe Tohi, *Haukulasi*, 1995-2021 (detail). Commissioned by the Biennale of Sydney with generous support from Creative New Zealand. Installation view, 23rd Biennale of Sydney, *rīvus*, 2022, Pier 2/3 Walsh Bay Arts Precinct. Photo: Document Photography.



Will Benedict, *All Bleeding Stops Eventually*, 2019 (video still). Courtesy Will Benedict, DIS.ART & TBA21-Academy. Background: Ana Barboza and Rafael Freyre, *Waterecosystem*, 2019-2022 (detail). Courtesy the artists & Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Lima. Installation view, 23rd Biennale of Sydney, *rīvus*, 2022, The Cutaway at Barangaroo. Photo: Document Photography



Mataaho Collective, *He Toka Tū Moana: She's a Rock*, 2022 (detail). Courtesy the artists. Commissioned by the Biennale of Sydney with generous support from Creative New Zealand. Installation view, 23rd Biennale of Sydney, *rīvus*, 2022, The Cutaway at Barangaroo. Photo: Document Photography.



Installation view, 23rd Biennale of Sydney, *rīvus*, 2022, Museum of Contemporary Art Australia. Photo: Document Photography.

*This year's Biennale of Sydney, titled rīvus, included the work of Aotearoa-based artists Sopolemalama Filipe Tohi and Mataaho Collective. Emma O'Neill, a writer working on Gadigal Land, responds to the exhibition and some of the work presented by the 89 participants invited to interact with different forms and bodies of water.*

The opening of the 23rd Biennale of Sydney coincided with what politicians and news outlets termed a “rain bomb”. Across the country’s east coast, unprecedented torrential downpours saw rivers swell, dams bulge and entire towns left underwater. It was,

in fact, the release of an “atmospheric river” that had formed in the skies over Meanjin/Brisbane in late February containing almost 16 times the amount of water in Sydney Harbour.<sup>[01]</sup> Rainwater washed down sandstone walls, pooling at the perimeter of the expansive Cutaway at Barangaroo; cold, dank winds whistled through the nearby Pier 2/3 at Walsh Bay situated at the water’s edge—two of the exhibition’s five venues and the focal points of this piece. The potency of the Biennale’s aqueous theme, poignantly titled *rīvus* (meaning stream in Latin), was evident.

The term ‘rain bomb’ makes meteorologists twitch for its scientific inaccuracy. It also posits nature as enemy and extreme weather its terrorism, rather than a force we play a part in creating ourselves. In this case, human impact produced a La Niña “on steroids”.<sup>[02]</sup> The Sydney Biennale took a less combative approach than that embodied in the phrase ‘rain bomb’ by proposing the symbiosis of spiritual and ecological practice. Along with artists, architects, designers, scientists and communities, seven rivers were listed as participants: the Atrato, the Baaka/Darling, the Birrarung/Yarra, the Boral, the Burramatta, the Napo and the Vilcabamba. The North Sea was represented by an Embassy and each venue was situated as a ‘conceptual wetland’.

This curatorial approach arose from Te Awa Tupua (Whanganui River Claims Settlement) Act 2017, which recognises Aotearoa New Zealand’s Whanganui River and its tributaries as “an indivisible and living whole, comprising the Whanganui River from the mountains to the sea, incorporating all its physical and metaphysical elements”. In the last decade, legal personhood has been conferred on multiple waterways across the world, including the Ganges and Yamuna Rivers in India, the Vilcabamba River in Ecuador and the Atrato River in Colombia.<sup>[04]</sup> These legislative decisions are a way to both embed Indigenous knowledge in settler systems of governance and to invoke the rights of—and help protect—natural elements.

The Western ontologies that divide the human and non-human (as well as land and water) drive governance and management of the environment. Meanwhile, “Indigenous knowledges have long understood non-human entities as living ancestral beings with a right to life that must be protected. But only recently have

animals, plants, mountains and bodies of water been granted legal personhood. If we can recognise them as individual beings, what might they say?”, writes Colombian Artistic Director José Roca in the Biennale’s accompanying curatorial statement.

For the 23rd iteration of the world’s third-longest continuously running biennale, Roca took a collaborative approach to leading the exhibition, veering away from a directorship based on personality-cult in favour of a curatorium comprising Paschal Daantos Berry, Anna Davis, Hannah Donnelly and Talia Linz. Across the 330 works in the culminating presentation, the 89 participants shared Indigenous ancestral narratives, linked art making to practices of care and stretched between ecological dread and hope.





From left: Hannah Donnelly, Producer, First Nations Programs, Information + Cultural Exchange (I.C.E.); Anna Davis, Curator, Museum of Contemporary Art Australia; José Roca, Artistic Director, 23rd Biennale of Sydney; Talia Linz, Curator, Artspace and Paschal Daantos Berry, Head of Learning and Participation, Art Gallery of New South Wales. Photo: Joshua Morris.



Foreground: Leeroy New, *Flotilla*, 2022. Commissioned by the Biennale of Sydney with generous support from the Australia-ASEAN Council and assistance from Mirvac and Parramatta Artists' Studios. Courtesy the artist. Background: Cave Urban, *Flow*, 2022 (detail). Courtesy the artists. Mataaho Collective, *He Toka Tū Moana: She's a Rock*, 2022. Commissioned by the Biennale of Sydney with generous support from Creative New Zealand. Courtesy the artists. Paula de Solminihaç, *Fogcatcher*, 2018-2021. Commissioned by the Biennale of Sydney with generous assistance from Graeme and Mabie Briggs and assistance from the Catholic University of Chile and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs | Government of Chile. Courtesy the artist. Nicole Foreshew, *YIRUNG BILA (SKY HEAVEN RIVER)*, 2022. Commissioned by the Biennale of Sydney with generous support from the Australia Council for the Arts. Courtesy the artist. Hera Büyüktaşçıyan, *Fishbone IV*, 2019-2022 (detail). Commissioned by the Biennale of Sydney with generous assistance from SAHA Association. Courtesy the artist & Green Art Gallery, Dubai. Installation view, 23rd Biennale of Sydney, *rīvus*, 2022, The Cutaway at Barangaroo. Photo: Document Photography.



Tabita Rezaire, *Deep Down Tidal*, 2017 (still). Courtesy the artist & Goodman Gallery. Presentation at the 23rd Biennale of Sydney was made possible with generous assistance from the Embassy of France in Australia and l'Institut français. Background: Cave Urban, *Flow*, 2022 (detail). Courtesy the artists. Commissioned by the Biennale of Sydney with generous support from Andrew Cameron AO and Cathy Cameron. Installation view, 23rd Biennale of Sydney, *rīvus*, 2022, The Cutaway at Barangaroo. Photo: Document Photography.



Foreground: Ana Barboza and Rafael Freyre, *Water ecosystem*, 2019-2022 (detail). Courtesy the artists & Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Lima. Background: Jessie French, *The Myth of Nature—agaG1*, 2021-2022. Commissioned by the Biennale of Sydney with generous support from the Australia Council for the Arts and assistance from the Sustaining Creative Workers Initiative. The Sustaining Creative Workers Initiative is supported by the Victorian Government through Creative Victoria and Regional Arts Victoria. Courtesy the artist & Anaïs Lellouche. Cave Urban, *Flow*, 2022. Courtesy the artists. Leeroy New, *Flotilla*, 2022. Commissioned by the Biennale of Sydney with generous support from the Australia-ASEAN Council and assistance from Mirvac and Parramatta Artists' Studios. Courtesy the artist. DHarding, *Untitled (wall composition)*, 2022 (detail). Commissioned by the Biennale of Sydney with generous support from the Australia Council for the Arts. Courtesy the artist & Milani Gallery, Brisbane. Hera Büyükaşçıyan, *Fishbone IV*, 2019-2022 (detail). Commissioned by the Biennale of Sydney with generous assistance from SAHA Association. Courtesy the artist & Green Art Gallery, Dubai. Installation view, 23rd Biennale of Sydney, *rivus*, 2022, The Cutaway at Barangaroo. Photo: Document Photography.

Will Benedict, *All Bleeding Stops Eventually*, 2019 (video still). Courtesy Will Benedict, DIS.ART & TBA21-Academy. Background: Ana Barboza and Rafael Freyre, *Waterecosystem*, 2019-2022 (detail). Courtesy the artists & Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Lima. Installation view, 23rd Biennale of Sydney, *rivus*, 2022, The Cutaway at Barangaroo. Photo: Document Photography

Will Benedict, *All Bleeding Stops Eventually*, 2019 (video still). Courtesy Will Benedict, DIS.ART & TBA21-Academy. Background: David Haines & Joyce Hinterding, *Pink Steam*, 2022 (video still). Courtesy the artists & Sarah Cottier Gallery. Commissioned by the Biennale of Sydney with generous assistance from the UK/Australia Season Patrons Board, the British Council and the Australian Government as part of the UK/Australia Season. Installation view, 23rd Biennale of Sydney, *rivus*, 2022, The Cutaway at Barangaroo.

Among these academic underpinnings there are moments of awe.

In the cavernous open space of The Cutaway at Barangaroo Reserve on the water's edge, suspended boats constructed from recycled plastic catch glimmers of light beneath a large, undulating river of bamboo. These works, *Balete* (2022) by Leeroy New and *Flow* (2022) by Cave Urban, fill out the large space from top to bottom and weave together more discrete presentations that dot across the concrete floor. Upon arrival, both works also offer immediate representations of the overarching theme.

Less tactile but equally impactful video works force viewers to contend with murky histories and ominous futures. Tabita Rezaire's *Deep Down Tidal* (2017) uncovers "the ocean as a

graveyard for Black knowledge”. Across the 18-minute video essay executed in net.art style, Rezaire excavates the ocean as host to a complex set of communication networks.<sup>[05]</sup> Along the ocean floor, fibre optic cables direct the world’s data flow and mimic colonial shipping routes. The French-born Guyanese/Danish artist asserts that these cables are the hardware of new digital imperialism and will “download your secrets”. The sea also contains memories of great suffering, including sunken cities and drowned refugees. “Our Water Is Traumatized”, reads one flash of the video, emoji-like fire erupting from oceanic swell; animated lightning rods framing a 90s-era Windows, 3D WordArt arc of the words beyond the horizon. American artist Will Benedict’s *All Bleeding Stops Eventually* (2019) adopts a similar tone of dark humour. Across a suite of six 40-second videos, a cast of threatened animals is digitally ventriloquised to politely deliver messages of caution. “The humans simply pushed a button, and the skies are emptying out”, soliloquises Benedict’s snow monkey over the drone of Sydney’s rainfall.

Other works invite a quieter pause. Rippling in the breeze are swathes of looped nylon netting by Nicole Foresheew as part of *YIR UNG BILA (SKY HEAVEN RIVER)* (2022). Marked with gypsum, ochre and clay from her sacred homeland and exposed to rainfall and sunlight, this work by the Wiradjuri artist seeks to illuminate ancestral spirits that move through the sky, rivers, mountains and lakes.

Further along the edge of the space, light plays across Mataaho Collective’s site-specific *He Toka Tū Moana | She’s a Rock* (2022) backdropped by bare sandstone. White, heavy-duty tie-down webbing crisscrosses between two pillars. Eight 30-metre lengths of industrial strapping were tensioned and ratcheted in rows up to 14 metres high. Using readily available contemporary materials, the monumental installation draws on Mataaho’s research into kawē, woven straps used to carry heavy loads for long distances, customarily made from prepared harakeke (flax).<sup>[06]</sup> The artwork’s namesake draws from a whakataukī of a rock standing firm in the ocean current, while the directional flow of the webbing reflects Barangaroo as a meeting point for fresh and saltwater. “This whakataukī seemed appropriate due to the geographical position—the headlands of Sydney Harbour,” they tell me.<sup>[07]</sup> “This was



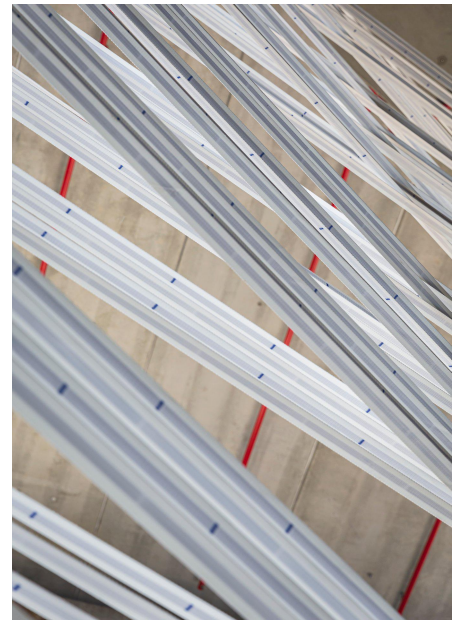
created with Hinemoana and Parawhenuamea in mind, they embody the realms of the sea and freshwater.<sup>[08]</sup> We wanted to create a work that referenced their meeting point, where the rivers meet the sea. That intermingling was the inspiration for the wrapping, weaving motion.” In line with the Barangaroo site, so named after a powerful Cammeraygal woman, they “wanted to create a work that spoke about the weight of cultural responsibility women often hold—to nurture descendants, share knowledge, uphold community—and that’s what this whakataukī does. It references the act of being a steadfast woman in a sea of influences which try to wear you down.”



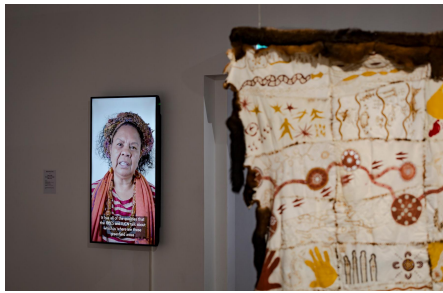
Foreground: Gal Weinstein, *Murray-Darling Basin*, 2022. Courtesy the artist. Produced in collaboration with the Centre for Sustainable Materials Research and Technology (SMaRT) at the University of New South Wales renowned for pioneering the transformation of waste for use as a new generation of 'green' materials and products. Commissioned by the Biennale of Sydney with assistance from Artis. Background: Mataaho Collective, *He Toka Tū Moana: She's a Rock*, 2022. Courtesy the artists. Commissioned by the Biennale of Sydney with generous support from Creative New Zealand. Installation view, 23rd Biennale of Sydney, *rīvus*, 2022, The Cutaway at Barangaroo. Photo: Document Photography.



Mataaho Collective, *He Toka Tū Moana: She's a Rock*, 2022 (detail). Courtesy the artists. Commissioned by the Biennale of Sydney with generous support from Creative New Zealand. Installation view, 23rd Biennale of Sydney, *rīvus*, 2022, The Cutaway at Barangaroo. Photo: Document Photography.



Mataaho Collective, *He Toka Tū Moana: She's a Rock*, 2022 (detail). Courtesy the artists. Commissioned by the Biennale of Sydney with generous support from Creative New Zealand. Installation view, 23rd Biennale of Sydney, *rīvus*, 2022, The Cutaway at Barangaroo. Photo: Document Photography.



Left to Right: Martuwarra River, *Voice for the Martuwarra Fitzroy river*, 2022. Commissioned by the Biennale of Sydney with generous assistance from the Australian Film, Television and Radio School. Carol McGregor with Adele Chapman-Burgess, Avril Chapman and the Community of the Myall Creek Gathering Cloak, *Myall Creek Gathering Cloak*, 2018 (detail). Courtesy the New England Regional Art Museum & the Myall Creek Gathering Cloak Community. Installation view, 23rd Biennale of Sydney, *rīvus*, 2022, National Art School. Photo: Document Photography.



Foreground: Carolina Caycedo, *Serpent River Book and Serpent Table*, 2017 (detail). Background: Yuma, or the Land of Friends, 2021. Courtesy the artist. Presentation at the 23rd Biennale of Sydney was made possible with generous assistance from the UK/Australia Season Patrons Board, the British Council and the Australian Government as part of the UK/Australia Season. Installation view, 23rd Biennale of Sydney, *rīvus*, 2022, National Art School. Photo: Document Photography.

The Biennale's knowledge-sharing curatorium model and wet ontological proposition are embodied in Mataaho's mode of making. Formed in 2012, the collective comprises Erena Baker (Te Atiawa ki Whakarongotai, Ngāti Toa Rangātira), Sarah Hudson (Ngāti Awa, Ngāi Tūhoe), Bridget Reweti (Ngāti Ranginui, Ngāi Te Rangi) and Terri Te Tau (Ngāti Kahungunu, Rangitāne ki Wairarapa).

Mataaho's "four heads, eight hands" approach centres on mana wāhine Māori, the power and integrity of Māori women. Foundational to every work is the goal to expand collective knowledge through a tuakana-teina approach, a reciprocal process of learning and teaching grounded in Te Ao Māori. "For this particular kaupapa, we visited taonga Māori at Canterbury Museum and Okains Bay Museum. We looked at examples of kawe ... We saw a parallel between industrial tie-downs and kawe, and are interested in playing with tension, load-bearing and travel with *He Toka Tū Moana*." Extending beyond its impressive materiality, the shadows of *He Toka Tū Moana* play across the concrete floor beneath and beyond the work, mirroring the way the work expands beyond the artists' individual capabilities.

Tongan-born Sopolemalama Filipe Tohi's work at the nearby Pier 2/3 is connected to Mataaho's *He Toka Tū Moana* in that it preserves ancient weaving techniques to different effect. A cluster of more than 60 columnal forms, bound in brightly coloured geometric patterns, are suspended at various heights. Responding to their peer from Aotearoa, Mataaho Collective tell me, "We were all drawn to Sopolemalama Filipe Tohi's work, the labour-intensive application of the coconut fibres and coloured wool that is grounded within customary fishing and building, installed in a way that emphasises the layers of meaning held within the patterns."

Created over 26 years, Tohi's work titled *Haukulasi* (1995–2021) redefines the Tongan lalava. The English-language equivalent of lalava, 'lashing', fails to translate the significance of the practice. "Because to the Western eye it's a binding and from the Tongan [perspective] ... it's about the expression of the language and all kinds of other things," says Tohi.<sup>[09]</sup> Customarily, coconut husk fibres are prised from the shells, soaked, dried and rolled into lengths of rope, which are then used to secure the structural frameworks of buildings, eschewing the need for glue or nails. Tohi's lalava bears no structural responsibility at Pier 2/3, but speaks instead to how the tradition functions to assert Pacific identity and bind communities.



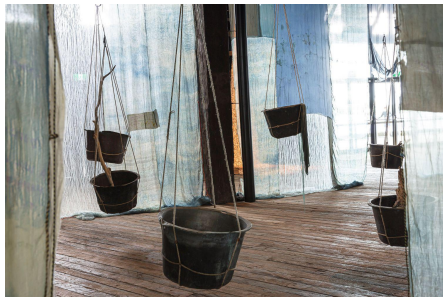
Sopoemalama Filipe Tohi, *Haukulasi*, 1995-2021 (detail). Commissioned by the Biennale of Sydney with generous support from Creative New Zealand. Installation view, 23rd Biennale of Sydney, *rīvus*, 2022, Pier 2/3 Walsh Bay Arts Precinct. Photo: Document Photography.



Sopoemalama Filipe Tohi, *Haukulasi*, 1995-2021. Commissioned by the Biennale of Sydney with generous support from Creative New Zealand. Courtesy the artist. Foreground: Clare Milledge, *Imbás: a well at the bottom of the sea*, 2022(detail). Commissioned by the Biennale of Sydney with generous support from the Australia Council for the Arts. Courtesy the artist & STATION. Installation view, 23rd Biennale of Sydney, *rīvus*, 2022, Pier 2/3 Walsh Bay Arts Precinct. Photo: Document Photography.



Foreground: Julie Gough, *p/re-occupied*, 2022 (detail). Commissioned by the Biennale of Sydney with generous assistance from Arts Tasmania and the Australian Museum. Courtesy the artist. Background: Clare Milledge, *Imbás: a well at the bottom of the sea*, 2022 (detail). Commissioned by the Biennale of Sydney with generous support from the Australia Council for the Arts. Courtesy the artist & STATION. Installation view, 23rd Biennale of Sydney, *rīvus*, 2022, Pier 2/3 Walsh Bay Arts Precinct. Photo: Document Photography.



Clare Milledge, *Imbás: a well at the bottom of the sea*, 2022. Courtesy the artist & STATION. Commissioned by the Biennale of Sydney with generous support from the Australia Council for the Arts. Installation view, 23rd Biennale of Sydney, *rīvus*, 2022, Pier 2/3 Walsh Bay Arts Precinct. Photo: Document Photography.



Yuko Mohri, *Moré Moré (Leaky): Variations*, 2022. Commissioned by the Biennale of Sydney with generous assistance from the Commonwealth through the Australia-Japan Foundation, which is part of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, The Japan Foundation, Sydney and the Pola Art Foundation, Yoshino Gypsum Art Foundation and assistance from the Nomura Foundation. Courtesy the artist, Project Fulfill Art Space & Mother's Tank Station Ltd. Installation view, 23rd Biennale of Sydney, *rīvus*, 2022, Pier 2/3 Walsh Bay Arts Precinct. Photo: Document Photography.

The work's intricate crisscrossing patterns are hieroglyphs of nets, fish, birds and sea, and serve as mnemonic devices. They are encoded with sacred stories to be passed through generations. Swapping coconut fibres for the multicoloured wool of his adoptive home of Aotearoa is one of the ways that Tohi innovates *lalava*, bringing his cultural DNA into a contemporary context. Indigenous Tongan cosmogony is inextricably linked to the ocean. In one of its creation narratives, much of the archipelago was hauled by the demigod Māui from the depths of the sea with a



special fishing hook.<sup>[10]</sup> Tohi smiles humbly when a member of the audience at his public talk, a fellow Tongan, describes him as the “Picasso of the Pacific”. Indeed, the artist’s four-decade resolve to preserve Tongan storytelling traditions has seen him described as the island nation’s “foremost art ambassador”.<sup>[11]</sup> Still, he reserves explicit translations of the stories told through the *lalava* for *fakatonga* (fellow Tongans). This careful balancing act between sharing and keeping is one of generative resistance—a theme that courses through the exhibition at large.

Tohi’s *Haukulasi* sways to the haunting vocals of British-Finnish Hanna Tuulikki’s adjacent video work *Seals’kin* (2022).<sup>[12]</sup>

Recorded on location in Aberdeenshire, Scotland, where the River Ythan meets the sea, the artist echoes the mournful cries of seals as they haul themselves onto the shore. Like the mythical selkies of Norse folklore, she transforms into a seal. A desire for kinship with animals and ecological grief resounds.

*Imbás: a well at the bottom of the sea* (2022) by Australian-born, New South Wales-based artist Clare Milledge invokes the more hopeful story of Sinnan, the woman in Irish mythology whose quest for knowledge released imbás/inspiration from the depths of a well, forming the River Sinnan/Shannon.<sup>[13]</sup> Shrouds of indigo silk inscribed with poetry house ephemera of watery magic: hanging cauldrons, shipping rope and suspended glass paintings. Beyond the sounds of Milledge’s collaboratively created poetry, one can hear the chime of Yuko Mohri’s *Moré Moré (Leaky): Variations* (2022) in the far corner, and the underwater crackle of *Ghost Reef* (2020–ongoing) by the collective Embassy of the North Sea at the threshold. The space is teeming with a plurality of artistic voices.

Taking in the minutiae of each artwork during my visits on the first and final days of the exhibition, there is an overriding relief that, unlike its predecessor and despite catastrophic weather, *rīvus* has remained open for its entirety. A thrust towards in-person programming leaned into the opportunity to see works in person and hear from artists directly. Whispers from peers pointed to some artworks as too literal in terms of their relationship to the Biennale theme. In fact, just as the exhibition platformed voices beyond the art world (and the human world, for that matter) Roca also ambitiously sought to translate nuanced ways of seeing the



world to the broad church of Biennale goers. In the current climate (both political and meteorological), unanimity with nature seems both radical and imperative. Through non-hierarchical leadership models, slow learning, and by foregrounding Indigenous voices, Roca's Biennale turns away from notions of fixity towards fluidity and flow, where the sacred and the scientific have equal footing. It demonstrates how a plurality of perspectives can reinvigorate and reshape current modes of governance, and in doing so, imparts a tenuous, though complex, hope for our future.

### Footnotes

01. Graham Readfern, "Anatomy of a 'Rain Bomb': Scientists Strive to Understand Phenomenon that Caused Australia's East Coast Floods," *The Guardian*, 4 March 2022, [www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/mar/05/anatomy-of-a-rain-bomb-scientists-study-phenomenon-2022-australia-east-coast-floods](http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/mar/05/anatomy-of-a-rain-bomb-scientists-study-phenomenon-2022-australia-east-coast-floods)

02. Ibid.

03. Parliamentary Counsel Office Te Tari Tohutohu Pāremata, *Te Awa Tupua (Whanganui River Claims Settlement) Act 2017*, 20 March 2017, [www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/2017/0007/latest/DLM6831607.html](http://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/2017/0007/latest/DLM6831607.html)

04. Alessandro Pelizzon, Erin O'Donnell, and Anne Poelina, "Australia's Rivers are Ancestral Beings," *Pursuit*, 18 October 2021, <https://pursuit.unimelb.edu.au/articles/australia-s-rivers-are-ancestral-beings>

05. "Net art emerged in the 1990s when artists found that the internet was a useful tool to promote their art uninhibited by political, social or cultural constraints. For this reason it has been heralded as subversive, deftly transcending geographical and cultural boundaries and defiantly targeting nepotism, materialism and aesthetic conformity. Sites like MySpace and YouTube have become forums for art, enabling artists to exhibit their work without the endorsement of an institution." "Art Terms: Internet Art," Tate, [www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/i/internet-art](http://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/i/internet-art)

06. "Kawe (Carrying Straps)," Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, <https://collections.tepapa.govt.nz/object/64802>

07. All quotes from Mataaho Collective are from email correspondence with the author, 6 July 2022.

08. Hinemoana was the second wife of Kiwa, one of the male divine guardians of the ocean. Her name literally translates as Ocean Woman and she was the ocean personified. Parawhenuamea was a daughter of Tāne and Hine-tū-pari-maunga, the Mountain Maid, and was taken as a wife by Kiwa, the guardian of the ocean.

09. Felipe Tohi, "Transcript of Video," <https://cdn.auckland.ac.nz/assets/auckland/on-campus/life-on-campus/pacific-life/felipe-tohi-video-transcript.pdf>

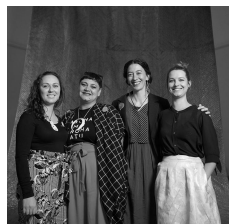
10. Futa Helu, *Critical Essays: Cultural Perspectives from the South Seas* (Canberra, ACT: The Journal of Pacific History, 1999), <https://openresearch-repository.anu.edu.au/handle/1885/132631?mode=full>

11. “Tongan-Kiwi Artist Reinvents *Lalava* as Language of Traditional Polynesian Wisdom,”  
‘Atenisi Institute, <https://atenisi.edu.to/latest/Tohi%20workshop.php>

12. “Hanna Tuulikiki – Seals’kin,” SoundCloud, <https://soundcloud.com/user-22994623/hanna-tuulikiki-sealskin>

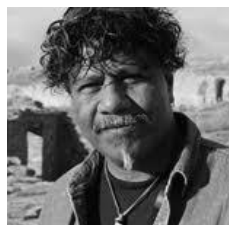
13. As stated on the artist’s website: “‘Imbas’ on its own is often taken to stand for ‘imbas  
forosna’, great knowledge which illuminates. As well as the name of a metre, it is also described as  
a technique associated with the highest grades of poets.” – Isolde ÓBrolcháin Carmody <https://claremilledge.com/imbasa-a-well-at-the-bottom-of-the-sea>

## Biographies



Mataaho Collective is a collaboration between four Māori women who produce large-scale textile-based work, commenting on the complexity of Māori lives. Their conceptual framework is founded within the contemporary realities of mātauranga Māori and together they produce works with single collective authorship that are bigger than their individual capabilities. Members are Erena Baker (Te Atiawa ki Whakarongotai, Ngāti Toa Rangātira), Sarah Hudson (Ngāti Awa, Ngāi Tūhoe), Bridget Reweti (Ngāti Ranginui, Ngāi Te Rangi) and Terri Te Tau (Rangitāne ki Wairarapa).

Recent exhibitions include *Océanie*, Musée du Quai Branly, Paris, France (2019); *Oceania*, Royal Academy of Arts, London, UK (2018); *Signature Art Prize* Singapore Art Museum, Singapore, (2018); *documenta 14*, Kassel, Germany (2017); *Making Space*, Centre of Contemporary Art, Christchurch, NZ (2017); *Noho 16*, Whau Art Centre, Auckland NZ (2016); *Disrupting the Narrative*, Thistle Hall, Wellington NZ (2015); and *International Artist Initiated*, David Dale Gallery, Glasgow UK (2014).



Born in 1959 in Nuku‘alofa, Tonga, Sopoalemama Filipe Tohi is an artist living in Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland. Spanning over 30 years, Tohi’s contemporary practice has its foundations in the traditional Tongan cultural practice of lalava (sennit lashing). Historically, forms of lalava lashings were both functional and decorative, and were used in the construction of houses around the Pacific. Tohi believes lalava patterns were a mnemonic device for representing a life philosophy, advocating balance in daily living, and were tied to cultural knowledge. He uses lalava motifs as the basis for contemporary works in a large variety of media: painting on canvas, carving in wood and stone, and designing abstract sculptural patterns in metal. The application of these patterns in new dimensional forms moves the traditional to a contemporary setting.



Emma O’Neill is a writer, reader and exhibition-maker based on unceded Gadigal land.

