

Arts in Asia  
UNESCO Observatory  
Multi Disciplinary  
Journal in the  
Arts

2016

Volume 5 Issue 2

'Arts in Asia'  
UNESCO Observatory  
Multi Disciplinary  
Journal in the Arts  
Vol. 5 Issue 2 2016

# UNESCO Observatory Multi-Disciplinary Journal in the Arts

Volume 5 | Issue 2 | 2016

## EDITORIAL TEAM

<b>Guest Editor</b>	Shalini Ganendra
<b>Editor-in-Chief</b>	Lindy Joubert
<b>Associate Editor</b>	Naomi Berman
<b>Designer</b>	Rosie Ren

Cover Image: Shalini Ganendra Fine Art  
with typographic treatment by Rosie Ren



ISSN 1835 - 2776

Published in Australia

Published by  
The UNESCO Observatory Melbourne  
<http://unescomelb.org>

In conjunction with  
The University of Melbourne,  
Parkville, Victoria 3010.

# UNESCO Observatory Multi-Disciplinary Journal in the Arts

Volume 5 | Issue 2 | 2016

## ABOUT THE E-JOURNAL

The UNESCO Observatory refereed e-journal is based within the Graduate School of Education at The University of Melbourne, Australia. The journal promotes multi-disciplinary research in the Arts and Education and arose out of a recognised need for knowledge sharing in the field. The publication of diverse arts and cultural experiences within a multi-disciplinary context informs the development of future initiatives in this expanding field. There are many instances where the arts work successfully in collaboration with formerly non-traditional partners such as the sciences and health care, and this peer-reviewed journal aims to publish examples of excellence.

Valuable contributions from international researchers are providing evidence of the impact of the arts on individuals, groups and organisations across all sectors of society. The UNESCO Observatory refereed e-journal is a clearing house of research which can be used to support advocacy processes; to improve practice; influence policy making, and benefit the integration of the arts in formal and non-formal educational systems across communities, regions and countries.

# Editorial

**Shalini Ganendra**

BA, MA Hons (Cambridge.), LL.M.

Director, SGFA

Guest Editor

## INTRODUCTION

The 'Contemporary' embraces the dynamic of the current. Thus, contemporary thought should also ideally encourage multidisciplinary curiosity, encounter and engagement. This multidisciplinary dynamic, fuelled by creativity, is the platform for the Vision Culture Lecture program ('VC Lectures'), launched in 2010 by Shalini Ganendra Fine Art ('SGFA'), in Malaysia, with the endorsement of the UNESCO Observatory. Over this short and enriching period, the VC Lectures have developed an informing presence in the region, fostering meaningful global discourse and cultural encounter, to inform the Contemporary.

SGFA is a pioneering cultural organization, embracing an eclectic and quality sensibility for collecting, consideration, capacity building and place making. We value new visuals - whether for materiality, concept or culture - and multidisciplinary processes in their creation. In addition to the VC Lectures and exhibition program, SGFA has: an artist residency program (the 'Vision Culture Art Residency'); an arts management residency for university students (the 'Exploring East Residency'); and the PavilionNOW project which celebrates local architects, contemporary design and materiality. Through these programs and a growing interest in emerging regions, we delight in the increasing international engagement with our represented areas of South East Asia and Sri Lanka.

Over twenty three speakers have participated in the VC Lectures since their inception, each invited because of eminent reputations and notable contributions within respective fields. The lecture module involves free public talks at the SGFA's award winning green space (designed by Ken Yeang), Gallery Residence, with external lectures often hosted by other local institutions and organized by SGFA. Participating curators generally conduct portfolio reviews with local artists, learning more about regional geopolitics and art practices. Strong press coverage enables outreach beyond the urban populace, as does active social and digital media. Speakers stay at the Gallery Residence and enjoy vernacular space that embraces natural ventilation and cooling systems, elegant aesthetic and greening philosophies. The VC Lecture program is as much about cross-cultural and multi-disciplinary encounters as it is about content – all defining platforms for SGFA's exhibition programming as well.

The eleven luminaries published in this peer-reviewed UNESCO Observatory journal were selected for a variety of reasons including expertise. They are: Sir Roy Calne (award winning surgeon and artist, UK); Christopher Phillips (Curator, International Center of Photography, NYC); Anoma Pieris (Associate Professor at the Department of Architecture, University of Melbourne); Susan Cochrane (curator and authority on Pacific Art); Volker Albus (Professor of Product Design at the University of Arts and Design Karlsruhe, Germany); Michiko Kasahara (Chief Curator at the Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography, Japan); Matt Golden (Artist/Curator); Gregory Burgess (Architect, Order of Australia); Beth Citron (Curator, Rubin Museum NYC); Oscar Ho (curator and academic, HK); and Brian Robinson (Torres Island artist and curator, Australia).

Sir Roy Calne speaks of personal experiences using art to nurture empathy in his medical practice and his own passion for creating. Christopher Phillips, the pioneering curator credited with introducing Chinese contemporary photography to the United

States, writes about an important exhibition that he curated at the International Center of Photography. Anoma Pieris considers the impact of modernism on architecture in South Asia, and analyses supportive political and social ideologies, while Gregory Burgess tackles the place of architecture in creating a sense of individual and community belonging. Volker Albus, playfully but seriously asks us to consider the role of designers as technical and social mediators. Michiko Kasahara adeptly reviews challenges faced by successful contemporary Japanese photographers in addressing and reflecting Japanese culture, real and perceived. Susan Cochrane explores cultural ownership of Pacific Art through the use of terminology and context. Brian Robinson writes about his personal cultural narrative as a Torres Island artist. Beth Citron shares insights on Francesco Clemente's acclaimed '*Inspired by India*' exhibition which opened at the Rubin Museum in 2014. Oscar Ho speaks to the challenges of curatorship and requirements to sharpen its impact and discipline. Matt Golden shares the visual journey of his art alter-ego, Juan Carlos, with special focus on experiences in Malaysia. We bring to you a wonderful mix of multi-disciplinary and cultural discussions that show the exhilarating impact of this program.

The Vision Culture Program enters its sixth year and we look forward to its continuing impact as a pivotal program to foster meaningful global discourse. We have forged strong friendships and benefitted from cross cultural discovery thereby building platforms for more informed understanding and appreciation of our world.

Many thanks to Lindy Joubert, Editor-in-Chief of the UNESCO Observatory journal, and her marvelous team, for supporting this project from its inception; to SGFA's Exploring East Residents who assisted with editing these texts and most importantly, the amazing Vision Culture Lecture participants who have fostered knowledge, encounter and consequently, the Contemporary.

# Sponsor the UNESCO Observatory Multi-disciplinary Journal in the Arts

---

In late 2015 The UNESCO Observatory Multi-disciplinary Journal in the Arts will be introducing sponsorship opportunities for values-aligned companies and organisations who wish to support the Journal.

The UNESCO Journal has a reputation for excellence in research in the Arts, Health, and Education. We are proud of our wide and engaged audiences in Australia and globally.

If you would like more information, please visit us at [www.unescomelb.org/sponsorship](http://www.unescomelb.org/sponsorship).

---



# Zenadh kes: Art is Life

## AUTHOR

**Brian Robinson**

## BIOGRAPHY

**Brian Robinson** is a full-time artist from the Torres Strait Islands, based primarily in Cairns, Australia. He specializes in printmaking and has collaborated with both the National Museum of Australia and the National Gallery of Australia. Prior to becoming a full-time artist, he served as the Exhibitions Manager and Deputy Director of the Cairns Regional Gallery.



Long before the white man came to the islands, the Islanders were the vikings of the Zenadh Kes (Torres Strait in English), a narrow waterway between the land masses of Zai Dagam Daudai (Australia) in the south and Naigai Dagam Daudai (Papua New Guinea) in the north, where the Coral and Arafura Seas meet in one of the most fragile and intricate waterways in the world. Situated in a triangular expanse of sea about 8000 kilometers square are hundreds of islands, islets, coral cays, atolls, reefs and sandbanks.

Torres Strait Islanders stand in a peculiar geographical position. To many, islanders are a people in-between: not quite Melanesian, not quite aboriginal, but squeezed in between those two worlds. Yet it would be a mistake to see Islanders in this way, for Torres Strait Islanders are of their own making, with rich in a social structure and their own unique cultural practices and worldviews.

The Torres Strait is generally divided into 5 main regions: the Eastern Islands, Western Islands, Central Islands, Top Western Islands and Lower Western Islands, each of which possess distinct environments and geographies. The Eastern Islands are the remnants of volcanic activity and are lush with vegetation; the Western and Lower Western Islands are granite rock extensions of the Great Dividing Range which runs along Queensland's east coast; the Central Islands are sand cays and

atolls that have built up over many centuries; the Top Western Islands are alluvial and are fringed by extensive mangrove systems.

The artistic traditions of the Torres Islands have developed over many centuries. Art production plays a vital role in everyday life. Traditional artisans use natural materials to visualize and express their ideas and their culture in the form of functional objects, ceremonial masks and ritual implements. With the introduction of Christianity (known locally as the Coming of the Light) in 1871 came the demise of the traditional lifestyle. The production of ceremonial icons was tabooed and eventually stopped. As a consequence, the skill and craftsmanship involved in the manufacture of these objects severely declined.

Over the past few decades, Torres Strait material culture has been displayed in large ethnographic and anthropological institutions throughout the world. Scholarly investigations into the remaining knowledge of ailan kustom during the 1960s may have contributed to the revival of interest in the 'old ways of life.' Links to this traditional work and access to the scholar's visual documentation have created new artistic energy and present day practitioners now draw from these works in order to reconstruct their pasts and express their unique culture.

Since the early 1990s, the one of the primary forms of artistic expression for this younger generation has been printmaking, particularly linocuts or relief prints, but also etching and intaglio prints. These skillfully refined prints, intricately detailed with traditional motifs, are an extension of an ancient art practice used to decorate functional items and ceremonial objects. This recent surge in art production has been aided by the establishment of art centres in remote indigenous communities as well as the development of courses specifically designed for indigenous people at both TAFE and university level.

Before the London Missionary Society arrived to spread the word of God among the Torres Islanders, traditional island life prospered. Island communities sustained themselves not only through hunting and gathering, but also fishing and even horticulture. Artistic practice played a vital role in everyday life, giving shape to the Islanders' gods and spiritually connecting them to the land, the sea and the sky. This spirit world was given form through the creation of ritual objects, in particular ceremonial masks used in dances. These magically charged objects were the bolts of lightning through which spirits and ancestors could interact with and influence the human world. The mask was the medium by which Islanders could evoke spiritual protection during war, hunting, initiation, practices and increase ceremonies; masks would also indicate a person's position in society.

The Torres Islands have few natural resources, but this did not hinder artifact production, a testimony to the skills of the Island artists. The Torres Islanders are a seafaring people, so it is unsurprising that their greatest achievements have been produced with marine materials harvested from the surrounding seas. Traditional artists introduced both raw marine material and manufactured items into customary exchange networks, allowing the Islanders to obtain food and artifacts that they could not produce. Goldlip pearlshell, coneshells and carapace plates from the Hawksbill turtle were the most precious commodities so exchanged. Turtleshell was the most sought-after commodity, as it was fashioned into elaborate ritual and ceremonial masks, hair combs, body ornaments, scrapers, spoons and fishing implements like hooks.

Masks constructed from turtleshell or wood were the most distinguished, distinctive and highly embellished of all the objects produced by Torres Strait artisans. Turtleshell masks were a central component to ritual observance throughout most of the islands in the Western, Eastern and Central groups, but even the Top Western Islands obtained wooden masks via trade

with nearby Papua New Guinea. Torres Strait masks generally fell into two categories: those made from carved wood in the Western Islands were known as mawa and those molded from the carapace plates of the Hawksbill turtle in the Eastern Islands were known as le-op .

The sculpting of turtleshell required extreme skill. Flakes of shell were heated in boiling water, molded into the desired forms while hot and pliable and then left to cool. Once hardened, the shaped plates were then assembled and strung together using sennit, a braided cord handspun from natural fibres, then ornamented with seeds, shells, cassowary feathers, human bones, ochres, natural fibres, human hair, fretwork and engravings. Wooden masks referred to as mawa, were used particularly in the Western Islands. It is possible these masks originated in Naigai Dagam Daudai (Papua New Guinea), as the Torres Islanders have a long history of importing objects, especially wooden ones like canoes and drums, from Papua New Guinea. Once obtained, the Islanders then refined these wooden masks before applying decorative elements. The influence of the missionaries had a

Figure 1  
August 23 1898



profound effect on pre-Christian art and their value systems. The production of traditional worship objects like turtleshell masks and ceremonial sculptures ceased after the introduction of Christianity to the Islands, resulting in the decline of ancestral knowledge and skills. A new art tradition developed in place of ancient art practices. Post-contact life involved much more than missionaries, with bêche-de-mer trepangers, anthropologists, ethnographers, pearl divers, poachers, refugees, colonialists and government officials all finding their way to the Islands. Outside influences quickly overran the Torres Strait and the Islands' traditional Melanesian culture fell by the wayside.

With the introduction of Christianity came new western attitudes, influences and implements, and it wasn't long before these new materials and tools were widely accepted. Two-dimensional painting emerged as the dominant form of artistic expression. The suppression of traditional religious practices in favour of Christianity altered the way Islanders expressed their culture. Dance now emerged as the pre-eminent cultural practice around which secular activities revolved. Island artists now redirected their energies into the creation of dance paraphernalia, the elaborate and articulated dance machines and percussion instruments. Weaving remained popular with

Figure 2  
Woven ware



Torres Strait women, who produced items such as fans, mats and baskets. The technical and artistic skill used in the production of such objects parallel the traditional sculptural practices that which had always been a part of the male domain.

The seeds of contemporary two-dimensional Torres Strait art were planted in the late 1960s. In preparation for the publication of her book *Myths and Legends of the Torres Strait*, Margaret Lawrie, an Australian historian from the Queensland State Library, collected a large group of watercolour illustrations. Lawrie travelled the Straits extensively, recording the creation stories, myths and legends of Zenadh-Kes. In preparation for the publication, Lawrie approached several local craftsmen. These men, who included Ephraim and Ngailu Bani, Segar Passi, Locky Tom and Kala Waia, were skilled practitioners with extensive knowledge of ailan kustom. Seeking illustrative artwork that would help individuals comprehend the indigenous mythology that was being recorded, Lawrie supplied these local craftsmen with the necessary materials and equipment to undertake the task. This new medium gave these craftsmen another outlet from which their creativity could flow.

On completion, the illustrations presented to Lawrie were naive depictions of landscape and human form. Painting in wildly vivid colours, the artists visualized certain aspects of traditional island culture, emphasizing the formation of the islands, supernatural beings and mythical warriors. These early two-dimensional works displayed for the first time the islanders' acceptance and interpretation of a western art tradition.

The early illustrations depicted only parts of some very lengthy Torres Strait creation stories, and it was not until the early 1990s that through the work of Islander students at the Cairns TAFE audiences were able to see an entire story in one work, a two-dimensional storyboard on paper, reminiscent of similar narrative scenes produced on wood by the indigenous artists of Papua New Guinea. The development of Torres Strait art over

the past 30 years has seen a gradual increase in its popularity. In recent years, works produced by Islander artists have been recognized by art institutions throughout Australia and in some cases internationally. Many museums have begun to actively collect the art of the Torres Strait Islands.

Torres Strait art can be roughly simplified into three basic subtypes: traditional community art, traditional urban art and urban art. Traditional community artists reside in the Torres Strait and produce artwork in accordance with established aesthetic protocols. These works include dance paraphernalia (like musical instruments and dance machines) and domestic items (like woven fans, mats and basketry), items which are still used in the communities throughout the islands and on the mainland. Traditional urban artists are flexible, with some artists gradually moving from traditional communities to cities and others experimenting with urban art concepts while remaining close to the traditional realm of the community.

The development of a contemporary Torres Strait art been for the most part led by island artists residing in mainland Australia. Over the past 30 years, these artists have reinterpreted the visual history of Torres Strait through the use of modern mediums and techniques. These artists seek traditional knowledge through interaction with community elders and individual research.

Many of these younger artists experiment with various media, including printmaking and painting. Traditional wood- and shell-carving skills have transitioned into a great ability to make intricate relief prints on paper. These have generated intense interest within art circles throughout Australia and other nations. In contemporary Island printmaking, one finds a relaxed mastery that allows the artist to realize complex, frequently geometric, highly expressive designs and motifs which form the background patterning of a print over which a primary subject is placed. Background colours are varied, moving from blue and green tints through various shades of reds and ochre to stark

black and white combinations. Elegant rhythmic, rippling strokes keep the viewer's eye engaged, and a fineness of line combined with flat tints and shaded areas results in spectacular effects. Themes from the legends and myths of the Torres Strait often form the print's narrative. The symbolism of these engravings is immediately obvious. The clear connection to tradition lends strength to the works, affirming the artist's cultural beliefs and affiliations. These artists are working not only in union with their culture, traditions and history but are also responding to their contemporary environment: urbanisation, western influences and the appearance of new techniques. Urban Torres

Figure 3  
Navigating  
narrative





Strait artists are invariably descendants of migrant islanders living in mainland Australia. These artists have acquired extensive knowledge of western art practices. They are driven to explore issues like the search for identity and the effects of political, colonial and religious limitations on the lives of Torres Strait Islanders and other indigenous people.

Torres Strait Islander artists are an important part of the cultural and intellectual life of Northern Australia. Judging by the interest in and popularity of their work both nationally and internationally, they have also claimed a place in the artistic and cultural life of Australia. Despite prolonged disregard of Islander values by successive regimes throughout most of the twentieth century, Torres Strait Islander artists have shown a remarkable cultural determination to which their art bears witness. To see the thriving reanimation of Torres Strait Islander art is also to acknowledge a manifestation of an inherently Melanesian continuum.

The word 'Melanesia' is derived from the Greek words melas (dark) and nésos, (island). This term, sometimes translated as 'black islands,' is said to refer to the skin of the Islander inhabitants in this part of the Pacific, although the mystery implied by the word black might also have been suitable from the colonial perspective. Although the concept of 'Melanesia' is not indigenous, it unites an ethno-linguistic region of the Pacific with shared attributes and cultural associations. The term in an anthropological context refers to the pre-colonial population as one ethno-cultural group formed as a result of centuries of seafaring migrations and a web of social relations.

The grounded tradition referenced in contemporary Torres Strait Islander art is the reanimation of a pre-contact Melanesian cultural identity. The works speak of homelands, enigmatic 'dark islands,' kinship and blood ties between Melanesian and Aboriginal peoples. A major theme in contemporary Torres Strait Islander art is a neo-traditional statement that evokes

continuity with common ancestors, with the stories of an ancient seafaring Oceanic culture.

A number of founding legends, Zenadh Kes myths and modern ethnographic and archaeological research support the theory that the Torres Strait Islanders migrated from Papua New Guinea. The distinctive graphic style of the contemporary block prints of the Torres Strait Islanders has its origins in Melanesian artistry, in the rhythmical forms of pattern and dance. The Zenadh Kes artists have given a kind of continuity to contemporary Melanesian art at a time when the successes and excellence of neo-traditional contemporary production from elsewhere within the Melanesian region closest to Australia appears diminished.

The Creative Arts Centre and later National Art School at the University of Papua New Guinea played a crucial role in creating this important period in Melanesian printmaking. Limited edition printmaking was introduced into Papua New Guinea in the late 1960s and reached the peak of its popularity in the 1970s. The practice began to fade in the 1980s and has now virtually disappeared.

Papuan artists like Timothy Akis, Mathias Kauage and David Lasisi produced prints that complement in both form and content the early neo-traditional work of Zenadh Kes printmakers. In order not to lose sight of the origins and identity of their neo-traditional aesthetic, many artists are happy to accept the label of 'New Melanesian Art.' My work and the work of many of my contemporaries fit stylistically, culturally and to some extent politically into this frame.

## THE ARTIST

As an artist, I try to apply my creativity to exploring and depicting the high spiritedness, excellence and authenticity of contemporary life associated with Zenadh Kes identity. My works do not belong entirely in the past because I am participating in a visual conversation about the essence and identity of the modern day Islander. Increasingly, innovations in form have propelled my artistic work deep into the territory of contemporary art. I create new iconographies and value markers that transform lived experience into a series of compelling graphical puzzles.

Emboldened by my hybrid positivist conception of the world, I happily create mashups by combining historical narratives with popular motifs and designs. Referencing famous works of classical art or icons of pop culture, I co-opt the familiar into the spirit world of Islander imagination. I still maintain the power associated with the neo-traditional Torres Strait contemporary print movement, however, even if the movement is male-dominated. My art school mentor Annabel Eglitis nurtured a generation of potent Islander artists. Eglitis identifies the gendered nature of the movement in its early days as she recalls, 'they were all ... young men,' a statement that remains true after twenty years.

Like a number of these young men, I seek to produce art that instils a sense of eternal spirit in the viewer, one that is beyond the earthly world and yet associated with the human condition. For me and many of my fellow artists, the finer points of meaning lie within the shared use of patterning that is a stylistic trait of contemporary Torres Strait linocut prints. Even when the artist intends his work to be straightforward, the meaning of these works can be difficult to comprehend. Patterning engulfs the negative space and in many of the prints runs off the edge of the artwork, appearing to go on forever and fill all the spaces of the world.

This patterning has been described as decoration by artists like Dennis Nona, but this description fails to capture the essence of the designs, which are strange and bewildering. Many of my print-based works use what is called thithuyil minaral, a kind of patterning defined by clusters of stars; I use thithuyil minaral to connect the spiritual present to the ancestral past. Many artists use the designs to refer to a general spirit called kaidaral. Many descriptions of early Islander navigational techniques include the ability to expertly interpret ephemeral patterns in the environment, not just stars, but cloud patterns and ripple patterns on the water which are created by the kaidaral spirit. This general spirit expressed as pattern is a phenomenon that contributes to the collective style of the Zenadh Kes lino block prints. It is the distinctive patterning that strikes the viewer at first glance; indeed arousing these emotions and creating this kind of spirit is one of the primary goals of contemporary Torres Strait printmaking. It is intended to win over and seduce the viewer by slowly revealing secrets and the depth of the soul.

The depths and complexities of my work surface over time: beyond the initial reading lies a deeper world of meaning. These deeper meanings are sometimes explicit, sometimes implicit, but ultimately I create works that stop on the verge of total recognition and maintain a degree of ambiguity. I want the audience to fill in the spaces left by my language. The interplay of complex geometric picture planes in my work is my most recognizable stylistic trait. Similarly, my linocut designs play with negative space as a central device in arranging subject and ground. Curtailing the incessant patterns into sweeping arcs allows space for breath. In a number of my prints straight edges and sweeping curves contrast with narrative figures.

The Torres Strait print movement's arabesque patterning loosely conforms to a combination of rhythmic attributes: conjoined ringlets, zig zags, intertwined wavy shapes, close parallel lines and triangles, all full of liveliness and shimmering movement.

The patterning appears at its strongest when the contrast between the dark pigments of black ink remains sharp and defined against rag paper. The patterns act as an abstract metaphysical space representing spirits of the sea, land and sky. Used in a tightly grained and intense way, they create dramatic vibrating effect similar to unrest created by contemporary optical artworks. The patterns are also used to disguise discernible shapes and motifs; this forces the viewer to spend ever-increasing amounts of time uncovering the intricacies of texture, shape and meaning. In any Zenadh Kes linocut block prints by any artist, the rhythmic patterning is a combination of symmetrical regular or semi-regular shapes that can expand in any direction without losing regularity. The effect emphasizes the importance of an orderly system of a complete world, full of wisdom and mythology, in which all its parts and motifs are contained, each with its own time, space and place. Each artist has a pattern shorthand and different approach to the frame.

There are strong conceptual differences between Torres Strait artists, however. This can be attributed to differing understandings of responsibility and the Melanesian way of reciprocity. My works tries not to reveal everything: myths and legends are not as fully exposed as they are in the works of Dennis Nona and Alick Tipoti. My ideology is subtle and less aggressive. I am sensitive to community or clan ownership of a particular story. These stories embody place and belonging in a collective community sense, making it morally problematic to exploit them for individual gain. The ethos of accumulation and the belief system that places all power in the hands of the self diminishes the collective responsibility, ownership and stewardship of traditional knowledge structures. This places traditional values somewhat at odds with the values of the Western art market, and makes me reluctant to reveal stories associated with deep sacred ontological understanding, ritual and spirituality.

Contemplating the meaning inherent of these works, I seek to explore and discover the social and moral boundaries they describe. The difficulty my fellow artists and I face is in trying to visually express the importance of the connection between traditional stories and modern life. Signs and symbols create a visual language/narrative based in personal experiences and engaged with shifting cultural paradigms. In my own work this language springs from two separate worlds that I try to fuse into a sort of visual creole rather than depicting as a violent clash of cultures. I have managed to assimilate cultural icons as representative spirits into the world of Zenadh Kes. A series of my prints follow this line of logic: *Bligh's encounter* 2012, *3 fishermen and a Lamborghini* 2012 and *As the rains fell and the seas rose* 2011. The creole analogy is not intended to undermine the intellectual sophistication of these works, but rather to contextualize their tacit, improvisatory and extemporaneous nature.

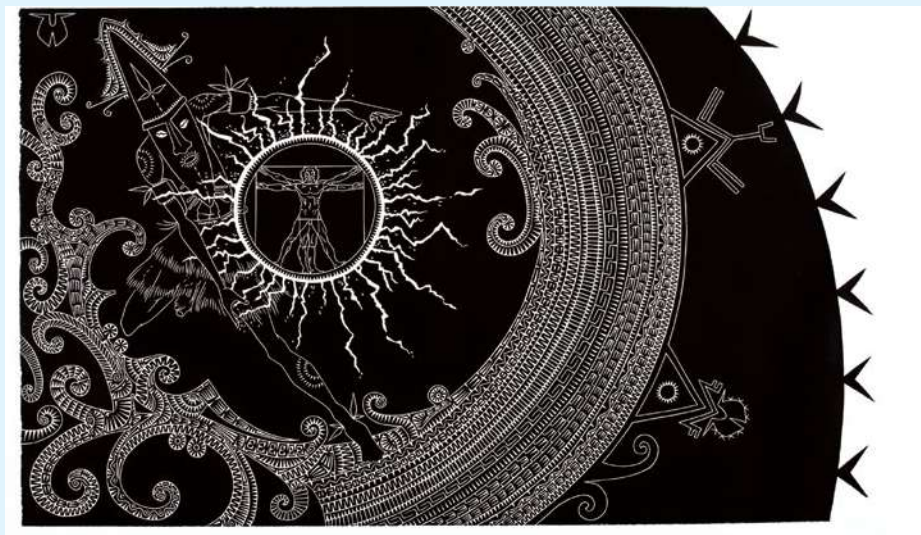
I mould the shapes, colors and shades of my materials with a distinctive flair for design that allows my imagination to invoke the enchantment of contemporary Melanesian art. My use of pattern extends from the two dimensional into the sculptural. Curl and ripple cut-outs perform the same function as the incised patterning of the block prints and carvings, representing the Melanesian spirit world as it swirls around, through and over the world. An ongoing series of semi-relief and high relief works literally protrude from rectangular boundaries, with forms aching to be sculptural yet bound within the parameters of the painting. Works such as *As sea gods have awoken* 1998 and *Taba naba norem II* 1999 are seminal examples of my formal innovations. These works also contain woven surface which allude to the role of basketry as a pivotal technology in traditional Islander lifestyles.

These pieces represent a transition into omni-dimensional works that position themselves free from the support of walls. Planar surfaces remain important structural building blocks,

however, as in the *Githalai* (crab) series of 2007–11 in which every surface is covered with lace, textile and printed paper. I have explored woven, plaited and folded construction techniques through significant public art works and a series of paper-based works which used print manipulation and paper engineering. Expanding the boundaries of conventional form should be achieved without sacrificing the truth of the materials being used. The innovations are delightful and surprising rather than startling or threatening.

The inclusion of Renaissance imagery in some of my works (*Midas touch* 2007, ... *And on the 6th day He created man* 2010, *Cast net*, *Waiben wharf* 2011) deals with the status of the classical body and the idea of anatomy as captured through hand and eye. These same cultural references take us to the age of Great Navigations that led Europeans to Oceania. This period in European history bridges the span between the middle ages and the modern era. Throughout those centuries imperious voyages from the capitals of Europe claimed for their respective crowns whatever significant terrestrial landmass they encountered. The Europeans left a legacy of names (like ‘the Torres Strait’) still used on maps today. The first full map of Australia, the Freycinet Map of 1811, was preceded by more than two hundred years by the voyage of the Spaniard Luis Váez de Torres, who sailed past islands in a shallow strait to the south of New Guinea and unknowingly spotted the Australian mainland in 1607.

Figure 4  
and on the 6th day



While the Europeans used sea charts and rhumb lines to navigate the oceans of the world, the Islanders of Zenadh Kes navigated by the stars. Nature provided markers for successful and accurate open sea navigation: the life cycle of the seasons and moon's phases, the rising and setting of specific constellations, the weather and the seasons, and the movement of animals in the sky and in the sea, gathering at particular locations. Islanders gained experience and familiarity with important phenomena, guided by ocean waves and their orientation, scale and velocity, the colours in the sea and sky, and the formation of clouds, which cluster over islands and reveal their location before they emerge over the horizon. My creativity is driven by connections like these and the resulting visual language of my work is a consequence of my Melanesian heritage. My art serves as a cartographic system, designed to produce and preserve knowledge of the traditional culture and sense of belonging of Island people.

Figure 5  
they spread  
their wings





My art has a curious logic: part puzzle, part tacit knowledge it reveals mysterious terrains that are dissected then disseminated as intriguing works of contemporary expression. I operate between the cartography of the map and the embodiment of the territory, between the creation of object and the magic of representation. My designs are a linguistic formation and my use of pattern a mnemonic association linking graphic structure to my Islander identity. Global culture and the classical body are references assimilated rather than appropriated and my works chart the physical, psychological and magical geography of a contemporary culture, more powerfully and convincingly than the lines on any European map.

### Diverse arts practice [about 7 strands] –

- Drawing|design as the foundation [since birth]
- Printmaking [linocut (relief printing) + etching (intaglio)] since 1992
- Sculpture [building with lego as the foundation] since 1995
- Installation [since 2003]
- Public art [civic spaces] initially started as an interest in architecture since 1997-98
- Curatorship + writing + Board representation [community arts organisations to state and national arts boards] + public speaking [since 1997]
- Hybridization [combination of mediums and art forms] printmaking and paper engineering [Japanese origami] since 2010

### Artistic influences –

- Albrecht Durer [German printmaker]
- Maurits Cornelis Escher [Dutch graphic artist, printmaker]

- Pablo Picasso [Cubist period]
- Leonardo Da Vinci [biblical narrative, human form]
- Michelangelo Buonarroti [biblical narratives, human form]
- Theodore Suess Geisel [freedom to explore, fantasy]
- Walt Disney [freedom to explore, fantasy]
- Stan Lee [creator of Marvel comics]

### Cultural influences –

- Ali Drummond [Athe]
- Ken Thaiday Senior
- Allson Edrick Tabuai
- Alick Tipoti
- Dennis Nona

## **WORDS OF WISDOM**

Big dreams are essential for nurturing creativity. When I am tentative, when I rely too much on the opinions of others, when I don't imagine greatness, I am wasting my skills and talents. I still find it difficult to speak my dreams aloud, but each time I gather my courage to actually name my longings I find that it is easier to make my dreams come true.