THE KERMADECS | 2011


05:59 | 12/05/2011

THE KERMADECS

29°15’S 177°55’W

In May 2011 the Kermadec initiative of the Pew Environment Group invited nine artists and broadcaster Marcus Lush to join them on a voyage through the Kermadec region of New Zealand. As seariders on HMNZS Otago, the Kermadec artists voyaged from Auckland to Raoul Island and then on to Tonga.

The Kermadec Islands are the most remote part of New Zealand. Despite their natural and historical significance, our awareness of the islands and surrounding waters is slight. The Kermadec artists' voyage provided some of our finest communicators an opportunity to document a unique encounter with one of the greatest, least known, pristine ocean sites on the planet.

What follows are the early thoughts and imaginings of the HMNZS Otago Kermadec seariders.

From left to right: Jason O'Hara, Phil Dadson, Fiona Hall, John Pule, John Reynolds (The Swamp Creature), Marcus Lush, Bronwen Golder (from Pew Environment Group), Robin White, Elizabeth Thomson, Bruce Foster and Gregory O'Brien.

THE PEW ENVIRONMENT GROUP

OCEANS COVER MORE THAN 70 PERCENT OF THE WORLD'S SURFACE, AND THEIR HEALTH IS ESSENTIAL TO THE WELL-BEING OF THE HUMAN POPULATION. OCEANS HELP REGULATE OUR WEATHER, FILL ONE OUT OF EVERY TWO BREATHS WE TAKE, PROVIDE A CRITICAL SOURCE OF PROTEIN FOR MILLIONS AND OFFER CORRIDORS FOR TRANSPORTATION AND COMMUNICATION.

Our oceans also offer a place of imagination and inspiration. In May 2011, artists from the South Pacific embarked on a journey to such a place – the seas around the Kermadec Islands. For six days, they followed in the path of explorers before them, from the earliest Polynesian voyagers to modern-day conservationists, to experience this extraordinary place, where globally significant marine life co-exists with underwater volcanoes and the deepest ocean trench in the Southern Hemisphere. Their voyage of discovery resulted in the creation of striking works of art, which now inspire us.

Throughout the early 20th century, most nations recognized the need to establish great national parks. Currently, more than 10 percent of our terrestrial landscape has been set aside and safeguarded in parks, refuges and sanctuaries. Our relationship with the sea has been vastly different so that today, less than half of one percent of the world's oceans, including the seas around the Kermadecs, is highly protected. This can change, now that we have begun the process of creating ocean-scale marine reserves.

Global Ocean Legacy, a project of the Pew Environment Group, was established in 2006 to focus on creating great parks in the seas to help safeguard the Earth's marine environment. We achieve this in collaboration with local residents, governments and scientists around the world. Since Global Ocean Legacy's founding, our partnerships have doubled the amount of ocean habitat worldwide that is protected comprehensively. If designated, a Kermadec Ocean Sanctuary could become the newest, largest and most spectacular of a new generation of global marine parks.

Jay Nelson

Director – Global Ocean Legacy
Pew Environment Group

Do you have any apprehensions?

Until the moment of Vicki’s question (Lt. Commander Vicki Rendall, our Navy liaison and wonderful voyage collaborator), I wasn’t aware that I had any. Voyaging to the Kermadecs with the Royal New Zealand Navy was going to be an adventure. Travelling with nine celebrated artists – communicators whose talent and impressions would surely bring the Kermadecs to life – was going to be nothing but a privilege.

We were in the familiar surroundings of a Wellington café, talking about the Kermadec initiative. I was about to head to the Kermadec region with the Navy, the contemporary artists, broadcaster Marcus Lush and the Minister of Conservation, Kate Wilkinson. We were going to experience a place that National Geographic has called one of the last ‘pristine ocean sites’ on the planet; a place others have called a Hope Spot; a place the Pew Environment Group’s Global Ocean Legacy project hopes will soon be fully protected.

To Vicki’s question I replied: ‘I am a bit apprehensive about being out of sight of land for days on end.’ What would that be like? How would it make me feel? I hadn’t really thought about it until that moment. Suddenly, I discovered, it was on my mind.

Every day, from my Wellington office, I work on behalf of the Pew Environment Group to raise awareness about 620,000 square kilometres of Kermadec ocean. We had invited the artists to journey to the Kermadecs because, like scientists, artists have an ability to absorb and communicate both the detail and context of places and things in ways that make the rest of us think anew about the world around us. Yet, while we believed passionately in the artists’ ability to convey the wonder of the Kermadecs to the world, here I was, acknowledging over coffee that I found the idea of being in the middle of this vast ocean just a little daunting.

Weeks later, after the voyage of a lifetime, Vicki gently enquired how I had found life without land. Over our pre-voyage cup of coffee she had said that being beyond sight of land was one of the things she loved most about going to sea; that it was calming and endlessly compelling.

I told Vicki she was right. Voyaging across the Kermadec region had been a profound experience. Being at sea, far from land, encouraged endless imaginings – of past voyagers, of lives and cultures lost and found, of communities that flourish beyond our sight, of the simple power and wonder of nature and of the sustained and continually changing beauty of the colour blue. Knowing that beneath all that Kermadec blue was a marine and volcanic wilderness of unknown diversity had made contemplation of the surface all the more compelling.

We took artists to the Kermadecs so that they could experience its scale, see its surface and imagine the diversity of its depths. From the deck of HMNZS Otago, we all looked out to an ocean that commanded attention, inspired our imagination and invited our reverence. We all stared at the Kermadec waters for hours and hours. We discovered a sense of connection – from island to island – from species to species – from past to present to future. I watched the artists gather impressions and emotions from the Kermadec ocean and its islands and with them begin to conjure words and images. As I watched, any apprehension about being out there, in the middle of 620,000 square kilometres of blue, evaporated. It was replaced by a certainty that protecting the Kermadecs would be a shared ambition. A natural imperative.

Bronwen Golder

Director – Kermadec Initiative
Global Ocean Legacy
Pew Environment Group

Fiona Hall *Shooting the Breeze* (2011)

TO THE ISLAND—ARTISTS IN THE KERMADECS

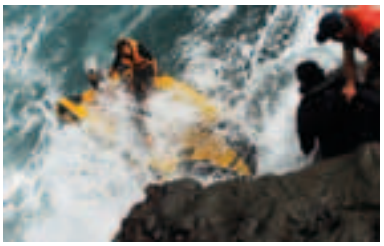
GREGORY O'BRIEN

'All personnel will need to be able to ascend and descend ladders with ease, and need to be able to grip, reach, pull, push, squat, lift, carry, climb and jump in order to participate safely.' Such are the physical requirements for 'seariders' – non-naval staff – seeking passage on an offshore patrol vessel. In May this year, having ticked the necessary boxes and satisfied the powers-that-be that all were of sound body and mind, we sailed northwards on the HMNZS Otago from Devonport Naval Base to the Kermadec Islands, then on to Tonga.

Approaching Raoul Island at dawn, after two days at sea, we all tried to align what we were seeing with our preconceptions, which had been shaped by a variable combination of Elsie Morton's *Crusoes of Sunday Island*, Janet Frame's 'To the Is-land', the volcanic island in Peter Jackson's King Kong, and some of the places so brilliantly itemised in Judith Schalansky's *Atlas of Remote Islands (2010)*.

Landing on Raoul – which has no harbour or wharf – involved clambering aboard an inflatable, scudding in through a three metre swell, then crashing the boat head-on into a rocky outcrop, at which point each of the party had to leap through a wall of spray onto a steep rock-face and grab a dangling length of yellow rope – a comprehensive use of virtually all the physical capabilities mentioned earlier. (What's more, getting off the island, two days later, in a five metre swell, was even more dramatic.)

Once on dry land, the artists set to solving the creative problem of how to place themselves in such a situation, mid-ocean, amidst an unfamiliar environment. The Kermadecs are a place of extremes. Barely a month after our visit, news came through of an earthquake, 7.8 on the Richter Scale, centred near Raoul Island. The eight conservation workers based on the island (on a six month rotation) were a little shaken, but unhurt. (Remarkably, the island's native trees seem to have evolved root systems that enable them to hang on through this sort of thing – although a cyclone that ripped through the place only a few days before our visit did a lot of damage, upending a good many Kermadec nikau palms.)

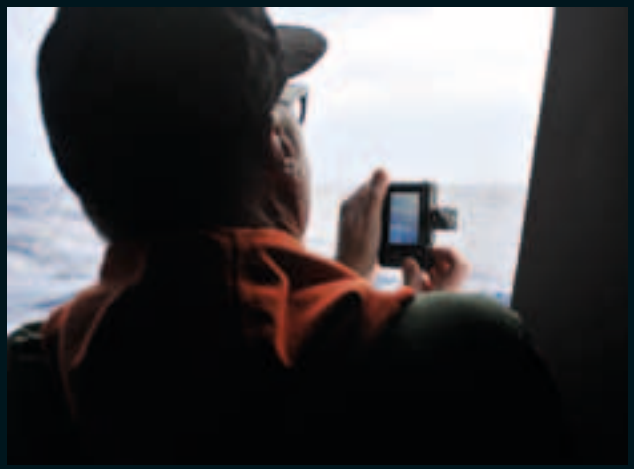


Bearing in mind the notion of 'Nature as a Cathedral' which influenced New Zealand art history particularly in the 19th century, on Raoul there was a far more apparent sense of 'Nature as a Laboratory'. Beneath both island and surrounding sea, we were aware of a rumbling, simmering, many-storied underworld. With its potent mix of the familiar and the utterly strange, the island had a quality not unlike that which you find in the magic realism of South American writers, from Pablo Neruda to Gabriel Garcia Marquez. Our two days ashore were a lesson in attentiveness. Time was spent looking, walking, filming, sound-recording, sketching and writing. More than anything, however, these were days and nights devoted to *being there*.

Some made it all the way across the island to Denham Bay and back – a venture which involved abseiling and rock climbing as well as some tenacious tramping. Among the group was Robin White, who undertook the four-hour hike barefooted. When we rendezvoused later in the day in the cloud forest on Mount Campbell – one of the highest points on the island – I remember looking at Robin's feet and wondering what messages the forest carpet had passed up to her, what secret knowledge and intimations of the past her bare feet might have registered. It's the kind of island that makes you think those kinds of thoughts.

Although the Kermadec region has been identified as one of the very few pristine marine areas left on the planet, jandals (puzzlingly, always left-footed) still wash up on the stony beach – a phenomenon which has given rise to many outlandish but no plausible explanations. That one of the world's twenty 'pristine marine environments' should still have to deal with such detritus makes you wonder about the quantity of such waste that must be swilling around more populated waters. With this theme in mind, Bruce Foster worked on a photographic sequence titled 'Invasive Species', acknowledging the negative impact of humanity on the environment, but also registering the fact that Raoul Island was now pest-free and native vegetation was re-establishing itself because of the enlightened ideas and hard labour of 'invasive' men and women.

As well as investigating sound and filmic potentials on the island and at sea, Phil Dadson continued his 'Rock Records' project – a series of 'ozone depletion recording discs' incorporating direct impressions he has taken from sun exposed rocks – a sequence begun in Antarctica and also including Rangitoto Island, Gobi and Taklamakan deserts in



China. The interface between scientific procedure and artistic endeavour was explored rather differently by John Reynolds on a north-facing headland. There he staged an impromptu piece of performance art, involving the meteorological balloon which is launched daily from Raoul Island (relaying climatic observations back to Head Office in Wellington). Another of Reynolds's projects involved the faux-taxonomic numbering, with crayons, of rocks on Oneraki Beach – one to 10,000.

On our second morning ashore, John Pule and I walked around the headland and beheld a sky of the most extraordinary, blazing redness. (This explained, in part at least, why the Maori name for this island is Rangitahua – 'fire in the sky'.) John and I had made some etchings prior to the voyage (these were subsequently printed at Cicada Press, Sydney), anticipating the voyage – but this redness was far, far beyond our earlier imaginings.

Wellington-based Elizabeth Thomson had also started exploring the Kermadec region prior to setting sail. Begun earlier in the year, her relief-sculpture, *Inner Raoul* – made of acrylic, resin and lacquer, with blown glass extrusions – anticipated the surrealistic, exaggerated beauty of the island. Liz's art is particularly tuned to the notion of Nature as an ongoing experiment, with its processes of adjustment, reinvention and occasionally – as volcanic Raoul Island is prone to do from time to time – self-destruction. On the island, Liz made extensive photographs of the cloud forest and the steaming crater-lake (the waters of which are so alkaline that, if you immerse your hand for ten minutes, your fingerprints will vanish).

Continuing the northward voyage on the HMNZS Otago, the artists resumed the creative conundrum of how to make art about something as vast and unfathomable as the ocean. Time spent on the ship's bridge offered fresh perspectives and possibilities – either from talking with the captain and crew, or poring over the vessel's charts, radar scanners, depth sounders and other devices. Jason O'Hara documented the many layers of shipboard life, capturing both the claustrophobic interior of the vessel and the agoraphobia of mid-ocean gazing from the deck.

One of the most resonant moments of the voyage was when we reached the Tropic of Capricorn, 18 hours south of Nuku'alofa, and the engines of the HMNZS Otago were switched off. At the command 'Hands to Bathe', crew and seariders were allowed to leap from the decks into the blue-black waters (under the vigilant watch of one crew member with the 'shark gun' – a required naval precaution). It was floating on our backs here in the middle of nowhere, that most of us really sensed that we had arrived somewhere. At this point, a sense of connectedness with the ocean counterbalanced the sense of wonder and otherness we had felt earlier. When, 45 minutes later, the command was issued, 'Cease Hands to Bathe', it was as if a spell was broken. In the weeks since then, the swimmers and non-swimmers in our party have all kept returning to the great fact of the Pacific

Ocean. If you hold to novelist Epeli Hau'ofa's belief that Pacific peoples are all 'Oceanians' then, quite possibly, mid-ocean is a most natural place for us to be. That was certainly how it felt to us.

Arriving in Nuku'alofa, we were hardly off the boat when we heard the thunk of mallets beating tapa. It was this sound which announced the next phase in the art project. Robin White had already initiated a tapa-making collaboration with Tongan women – a project linking Tongan culture with her own Pakeha/Maori background. (Incidentally, Robin was born in the Bay of Plenty, the part of mainland New Zealand where the Kermadec Ridge begins its subaquatic trajectory, to surface again at the southernmost of the Kermadec islands, L'Esperance Rock.) Robin is developing a three-by-fifteen

meter tapa, which references the Kermadecs and takes, as she says, 'the fault line that connects New Zealand and Tonga as a metaphor that allows us to explore a human story of island life'. She will return to Nuku'alofa late in August to work for two months on the piece, using the traditional method of rubbing patterns and images into pieces of tapa, layer by layer, exploring, as she says, how new ideas and forms can be folded into the existing frameworks of the tradition.

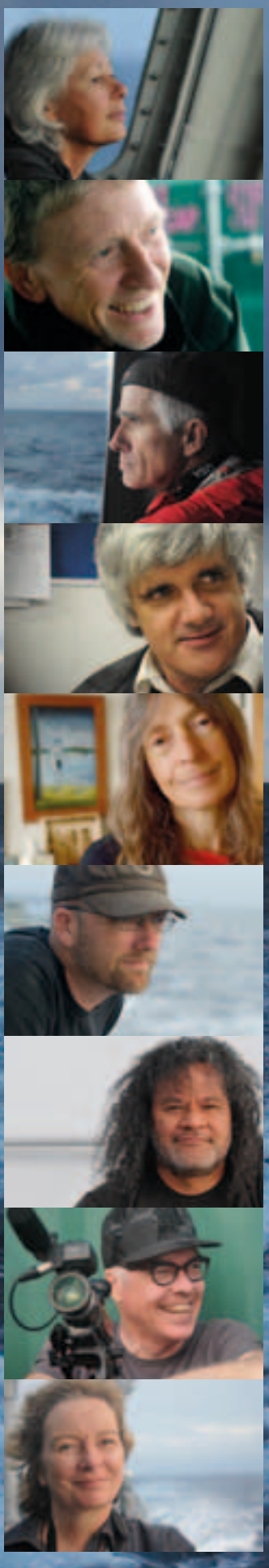
As well as producing a number of video pieces and devoting many hours to a knitted glass-bead work based on a form of underwater life known as a 'sea pen', Fiona Hall devised and, once the ship reached Tonga, started painting two large tapa works, both of them strewn with barbed references to the fishing and mining industries which could threaten the pristine Kermadec environment.

In the weeks since the voyage, we have all continued to sift through what we have brought back from the Kermadecs – a place lodged in our consciousnesses like a stone embedded in the sole of a shoe. Importantly, we have begun to explore what remains of that vast, intractable, ineffable subject, the Pacific – recorded in our minds and hearts, as it is in the digital memories of our cameras, and in our sketchbooks and diaries. Talking with John Pule, I'm aware of a headful of poetic phrases he has brought back – and an agitated, angular rhythm which I recognise clearly in his painting, *The Home and the World*, with its sense of intricate connectedness, and also its oceanic writhing and tossing. Looking at that canvas,

I feel both the containment of the ship and the animated, flying-fish speckled space beyond.

Yet Raoul Island is also very much a part of John's painting. Since the voyage, the challenge for all the artists has been, in essence, finding ways of getting back onto the island and – by way of our art – of reinhabiting that situation, rephrasing and reanimating it. While works in the forthcoming 'Kermadec' exhibition will focus very much on the ocean, we are also mindful of how it was that, in the midst of such a vast expanse of air and water, we leapt towards and clung to that ocean-blasted rock.

This essay is an expanded version of a piece commissioned for Artist Profile magazine, Sydney. It is used here with their kind permission.



THE ARTISTS

ROBIN WHITE

PAINTER / PRINTMAKER

'Go to Denham Bay.' That was one of the options offered to us by Mike, a DOC worker, on the morning of our one full day on Raoul Island. 'What about the slip that covered the track after recent heavy rain?' Mike said we'd be able to get over that, no worries. 'How long will it take?' 'Well, just a walk up a gentle slope, then across the island and down a bit of a steep climb and you're there – about an hour and 20 minutes, maybe an hour and a half. We'll be back by three.' Yeah right...

Half way up the narrow track carved out of the 'gentle slope', already out of breath and with aching legs, I was wondering if I should call it a day. And then, after crossing the island, scrambling across the mud slip and clambering over fallen trees (it must have been quite a storm) we came to the 'bit of a steep climb' down to the beach, a near vertical drop managed with the use of a rope tied to a sturdy tree. Standing on that beach with its narrow strip of flat land hemmed in by formidable cliffs, with impassable bluffs to the left and right and miles of ocean between me and my home, I marvelled at how the Bell family – Tom and Frederica and their 6 children – ever managed to survive when, in 1876, they were put ashore at Denham Bay.

So what do you say to people who argue that Raoul Island is an inhospitable and unpredictable tinder box in the middle of the ocean, abandoned by the folks who attempted to live there, who struggled against extraordinary odds, and who eventually were forced to give in to the insurmountable obstacles to settlement? Why all this effort to protect such a place, and why worry about the ocean when there's plenty of it? Why not exploit it? These were the questions we pondered on our return from Denham Bay. How do you get across to people the need to have a 'base-line', a place where we can learn about how nature, unmediated by human intervention, manages its own dynamic of destruction and reconstruction, how a place heals itself when devastated by powerful natural forces? Where do we go to find out how life begins and how creatures can survive in spite of seemingly impossible odds? If knowledge is central to society then this place is surely a frontier of wonders to be discovered and invaluable lessons to be learned. Let's not trash the classroom.

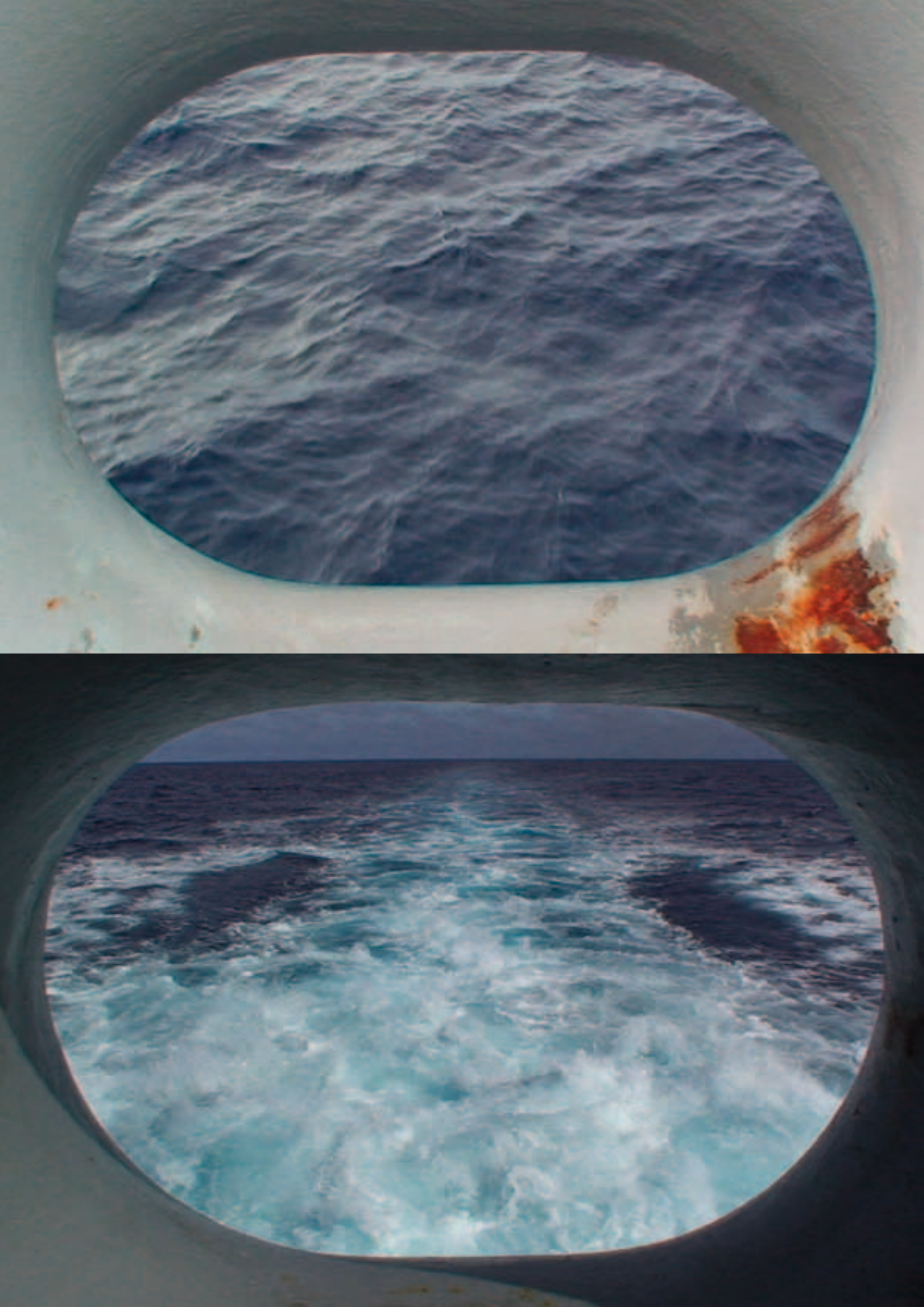
PHIL DADSON

INTER-MEDIA ARTIST / SCULPTOR / MUSICIAN

There's something very deeply moving and instinctive, in a deep-essence kind of way, about the action of an ocean when you're right there, in the immensely deep middle of it. It triggers, at one and the same time, a deep-water sense of awe and an electric thrill for the pulsing current of the intelligence we're part of. And arriving on the Pohutukawa canopied Raoul Island was all the more impressive for experiencing and intuiting such raw ocean forces that pound and sculpt it's tangled shoreline. 60% to 70% of the body's content is after all water, with tidal rhythms that connect us to the ocean...

The sun sets earlier through May and after dusk on the HMNZS Otago, all hands are confined below deck for safety reasons. With no portholes to the outside world the experience is submarine, and rather than being confined to a lounge or a bunk I wander the labyrinthine corridors in endless loops that bring me back to where I began. I find a hatch that takes me directly out on deck, a thick steel door sheltered by a grey steel porch, cold and wet. Standing within it, all the sounds of the engine and the surging sea amplify as if my ears have expanded to form an acoustic shell within which all the frequencies of the ocean become audible. There is no moon but the night sky sparkles with boundless light reflected in the fluorescence frilled chop of the ocean. I sing to the sea and the sea sings me, wave upon wave of surging swell infused with the droning throb of engines dark and low, the rising and falling of the ocean's immensity, up through my feet into the coil of my inner ear, a curtain of blackness up and down on galaxies of light.

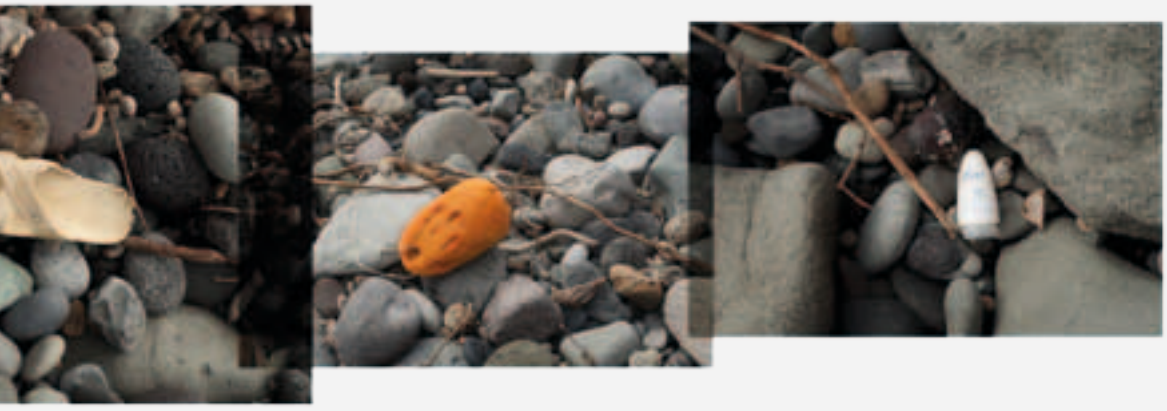
ABOVE **Phil Dadson** *Rock Records* (2011) | RIGHT **Phil Dadson** *From a work in progress* (2011)



BRUCE FOSTER

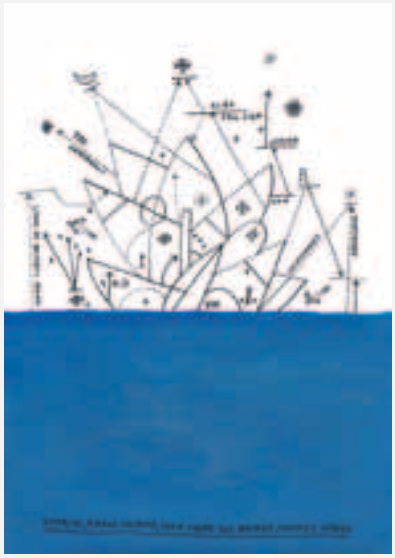
PHOTOGRAPHER / DOCUMENTARY FILMMAKER

The maths | Raoul Island is 980 kilometres from New Zealand and about halfway between Auckland and Tonga. It is anvil shaped, roughly 10 kilometres along the face and 6 kilometres to the base – an area of around 30 square kilometres. Raoul is surrounded by an ocean that spreads over 1/3 of the world's surface – the Pacific Ocean is vast – it covers 165,000,000 square kilometres. The island is a drop in the ocean. The size of Raoul compared to that of the ocean it protrudes from roughly equates to that of a rugby ball alongside 3000 rugby fields. (End to end the fields would stretch from Wellington to Wanganui and halfway back again).



On a 25 metre length of stony beach on Raoul (equivalent to almost half a millimeter on the surface of the rugby ball), I found 5 pieces of rope of various thicknesses, 4 sections of different fishing nets, 3 bottles, 2 sandals (both left footed), a section of plastic crate, an empty margarine container, a bottle of moisturiser and a rat trap – all freshly washed up. | **You do the maths.**

ABOVE **Bruce Foster** *'Invasive Species' photographic series* (2011)



A schematic analysis of the first and only book of the explorer Raoul H. Rangitahua

(page numbers in brackets).

In the ocean, he encounters a rock that can speak (15), a plume of smoke that could be a cloud (or, surely, a cloud that might be a plume of smoke?) and an assortment of volcanic stones on a headland, arrayed as if they have been scattered or thrown randomly (24). He meets a nymph (25), who leads him through a grove of uprooted trees (27). In the ruins of what appears to be an ancient civilisation, he encounters green parrots (31) and a great many seabirds nested beneath the ground upon which he walks (33). He watches a balloon go up and feels he is observing the passing of a world (38). Because there is no livestock on the island, the shepherds oversee empty fields (41); some inadvertently become expert at the identification of sea turtles or whales in the far distance (42). He is ceremoniously joined to his new home through encounters with the last rat on the island, a mechanical replica, kept as a cautionary presence (43); two iron bed-frames left on a clifftop, possibly to memorialise the tragedy of two lovers (44); a dog kennel with the name 'Tui' above the entrance (45). To his dismay, he realises that the mules he was expecting to transport him, and his not inconsiderable luggage, around the rim of the volcano are, in fact, vehicles with four wheels and internal combustion engines (46). He heads off into the bush to regain some equilibrium (49) and encounters a crater containing a green lake and a blue lake (49). Everywhere he walks, he encounters graves (62). A well-mown lawn memorialises a cherished precursor (66). He ponders the sacrifices and triumphs of earlier inhabitants (67). With his companions, he struggles to erect a tent – a reprise of an engagement, on an earlier voyage, with a giant, mythological bird (80). After a crisis, he finds solace in the sunrise, a redness he likens to the complexion of an embarrassed deity (86). He is eventually led by a nymph back down to the edge of a strong, running sea (139). On Cupid's boat he is taken out beyond the breakers (142). The singing nymphs can be heard above the crashing waves (143). The winged boat is particularly at home amidst the flying fishes. His narrative ends with a grey vessel on a grey sea (148). He is enfolded in sleep (151), the dream preceding the sleep, the sleep preceding the dream.

LEFT **Gregory O'Brien** *Three working drawings* (2011) | ABOVE **Gregory O'Brien** *In anticipation of seamounts, flying fish* (2011)

Listing to starboard.

Sea level. Only, level it wasn't. The sea of our journey along the Kermadec Trench was wind-blown and wave-flecked and shifty. As unsteady on my feet on the Otago as was the sea beneath, I took the advice that was given on the ship's bridge and stared ahead to the horizon. At the outset the expanse of ocean and sky and the rolling of the ship had a nauseating, yet mesmeric effect. It didn't take long to register that looking out to sea was not only the most obvious pastime on board, it was the intoxicant of our voyage. Sunsets and rises were main events; each dawn on the bridge I caught the last light of the morning star as it faded out over the water, and watched the Southern Cross flying on the ensign shoot its red stars high into the breeze above. And red again at night: as dusk fell about our ship it switched its incandescent lighting to an infra-red twilight. It continued its passage through the night; our dimmed grey hulk was a shadow-ship crossing the inky sea. During daylight hours I spent considerable time watching from the bridge as small and sometimes bigger waves pitched into our prow, causing us to slope into a trough and then set to rights again. Somewhere I found my sea legs. Another occupation I discovered was to lie headlong on the lower deck at the stern, looking down over the edge into our wake, which spewed out behind the engine. The white line slicing through the water was ruler-straight, precisely drawn by our ship-shape ship on the unruly ocean. Steady as she goes.

I imagined that the line of our wake on the surface of the sea might, from below, look like a scratch in the thick glass-green bottom of a bottle. It was an image in reverse, and made me reflect that our lives are lived in a world composed largely of water, in which we are all passengers sailing on the model ship marooned inside the bottle, tossed about in the sea of our dreams and wild imaginings. In my mind I drew a vertical line from our ship to the bottom of the Kermadec Trench below, down to a crack in the molten eggshell of the Earth's core. The line drew deeper than the lowest limits where daylight could possibly reach, and slipped in the darkness from the firm grasp of science. It descended through a galaxy of bioluminescent, living things, still swimming as they once did in the depth of life's dawn. And then the line I drew sank from my mind's view, beyond the farthest, darkest fathom that I could ever reach by my imagining. Ten thousand metres from the sea floor to its surface.

Falling up. On the ship, on the bathymetric Trench map I saw the long gape of the Kermadec's jaw and its set of volcano teeth, each identified by name; the clan of 'Rumbles' at the Southern end I thought of as a band of renegades in a generally mutinous dynasty. The only way to the Trench's surface is inescapably through its subterranean mouth-minefield. The whole place smokes like a chimney: its sulphurous breath pours out through hydrothermic vents. It constantly blows its stack. And habitually it gets the shakes, having a geomorphically unstable disposition. At the top level of the Trench swim the top predators of the deep; whales and sharks. And now, although nowhere (as yet) visible to the eye, other subversive life (or death) forms are circling in the water: fishing and mining interests. The ocean is not quiet; new hunts are on, greedy for a kill. New breeds of corporate pirates have their spyglasses trained on the Kermadec treasure chest below. To them, it looks like a submerged bank vault: the volcano teeth have gold fillings. Lying in the sunlight on the deck on the surface of the sea, I shut my eyes to better picture the volcanoes. Blood flows. Behind my eyelids I see red.

Rock the boat.

Fiona Hall *Ghost Net* (2011)

JASON O'HARA

PHOTOGRAPHER / ARTIST / DESIGNER

I am haunted by the memory of Raoul. It invades my everyday thoughts... summoning me to return. It isn't finished with me yet. I could feel it watching, as we explored. A great visitor from the depths that has risen to our world, tolerating our presence as it has so many others. But at any moment it could flick us off when we cease to amuse.

And what lies below? If a chain of volcanoes and the second deepest scar on the planet can be concealed by this unyielding cloak of seawater what else lies undetected in the inky blackness?

We should tread lightly here. Respect is required.

ABOVE **Jason O'Hara** *The crossing* (2011) | RIGHT **Jason O'Hara** *Tom's track #1* (2011)

For Phil Dadson

(Saturday 14th May, Raoul Island)

Be generous with your life
drink rain from the heavens,
not from cup of uncertainty.

There are moons that create shadows
that you have journeyed
and about to journey again.

There are suns that illuminate
doorways and enter the house
of the imagination, furnishing
the rooms with memories
and unfaltering
beauty from Gods.

You have seen a beautiful stone
and the songs that come from it
will always wait for you

The Beginning

after years of watching
it is my heart being carried
up a mountain
followed by an ambulance
in front were wings hauled by several men

I dreamed those wings were for me

When I was born, capillaries grappled
for a hold onto the world: trees, stones,
fire felt my pain
but never rain

Rain is what my uncles and aunties
carried in their pockets

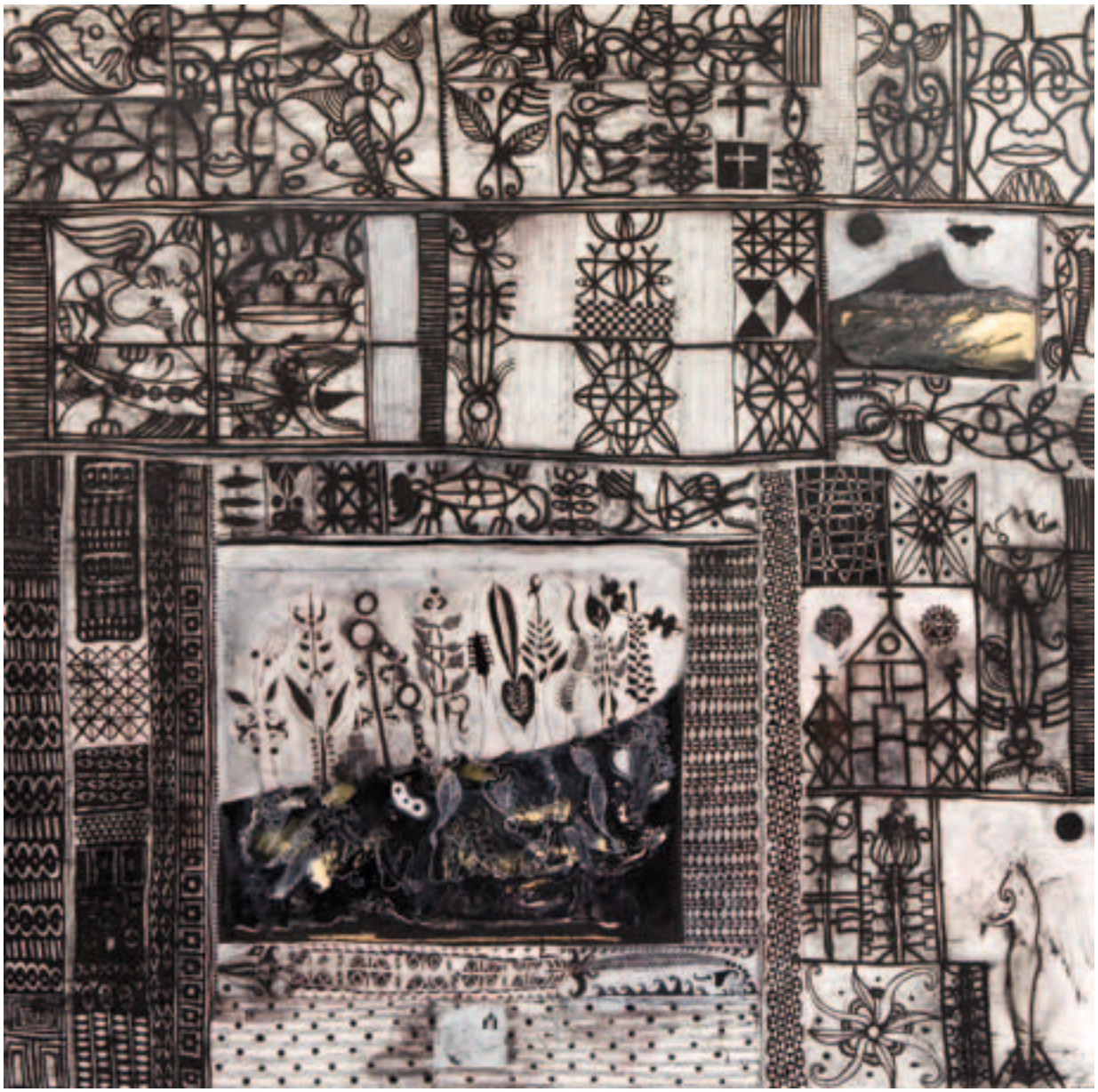
Then the sea became a great issue

The sea must be simple
like maths to understand the beginning of the aorta

From here onwards my mouth became busy
catching the cascade of water from the pituitary
I stood up for the first time as the ship
pushed the horizon away from my tongue

With my mother we boarded the Tofua
and desperately the mucus of my body clung to Liku

The sea secretes leukocytes into the body
and brings the stars closer to the eyes



John Pule *The Home and the World* (2011)

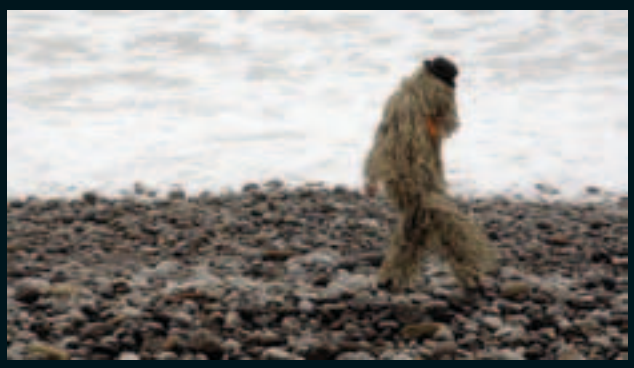
JOHN REYNOLDS

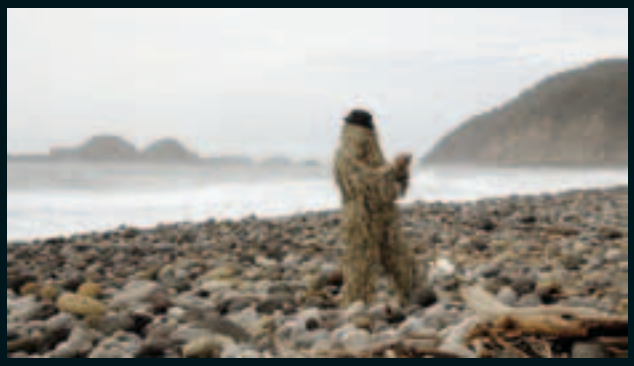
PAINTER / INSTALLATION ARTIST

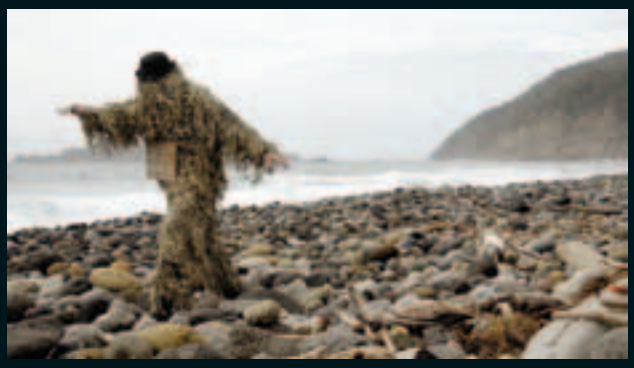
With the Ship of Science moored a few hundred yards offshore, and the tree-green conservation workers high on the hills above, who is this scraggly interloper at high-tide mark? An unruly element; something washed up, perhaps, or a more purposeful presence? John Reynolds would like us to savour these questions. Ascending the incline, his countenance is that of Captain Cook in the South Seas, a stranger in a land that is also strange. He sets to numbering the rocks on the beach – an act of love quite possibly, of endearment to a place. Or is it an exercise in faux-taxonomy, a parody at the expense of Joseph Banks and centuries of shipboard scientists who have lived and died trying to record what lies out there?

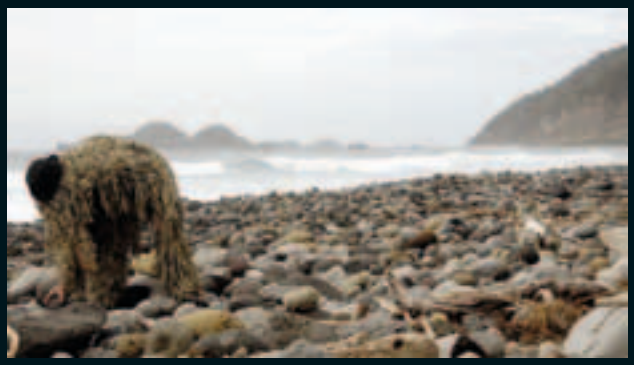
Perhaps his true identity lies between Samuel Beckett's theatre of the absurd and the Greek legend of Sisyphus, who is condemned, for eternity, to carry a rock up to a hilltop then watch it roll back down. It was Beckett who placed the bowler on Reynolds' head (with a doff of the hat to Joseph Beuys and Rene Magritte). Beyond those antecedents, we might detect a salty whiff of Robinson Crusoe or the 1970s DC comic character Swamp Thing – an unlikely hero bent on saving his swamp-home (and the environment more generally) from evil doers.

In his shaggy suit, Reynolds might be deemed a piece of human flotsam – part seaweed, part person – and also the mascot of our expedition in the South Seas. On behalf of the other artists, he is leading the charge into the unknown, claiming the beach on behalf of the human imagination. With the Ship of Science moored a safe distance offshore, the artists take the island.





SOON, YO
YOU WILT BE





ELIZABETH THOMSON

SCULPTOR

I feel as if I have inhabited the Kermadecs in my mind and my work since the 1970s, when a Scottish ornithologist friend who had spent time there, told stories of the wildness and beauty of its isolation, its history, and bird populations. So, much of Raoul Island felt familiar to me. Similar bush and birds, but everything was shifted somehow – affected by vast elemental forces that sweep over and churn beneath the island.

Before this voyage, I had been working on images for a joint exhibition (with Megan Jenkinson), 'The Mystic Garden'. These images were of cellular structures and botanical magnifications – I was thinking about light, colour, texture and the mysteries of simple life forms and their transcendence into the otherworldly.

When I was away in the Kermadecs, I didn't think about these works-in-progress particularly. However, returning to Wellington, I found that they were very much aligned with what I had seen and felt on Raoul Island.

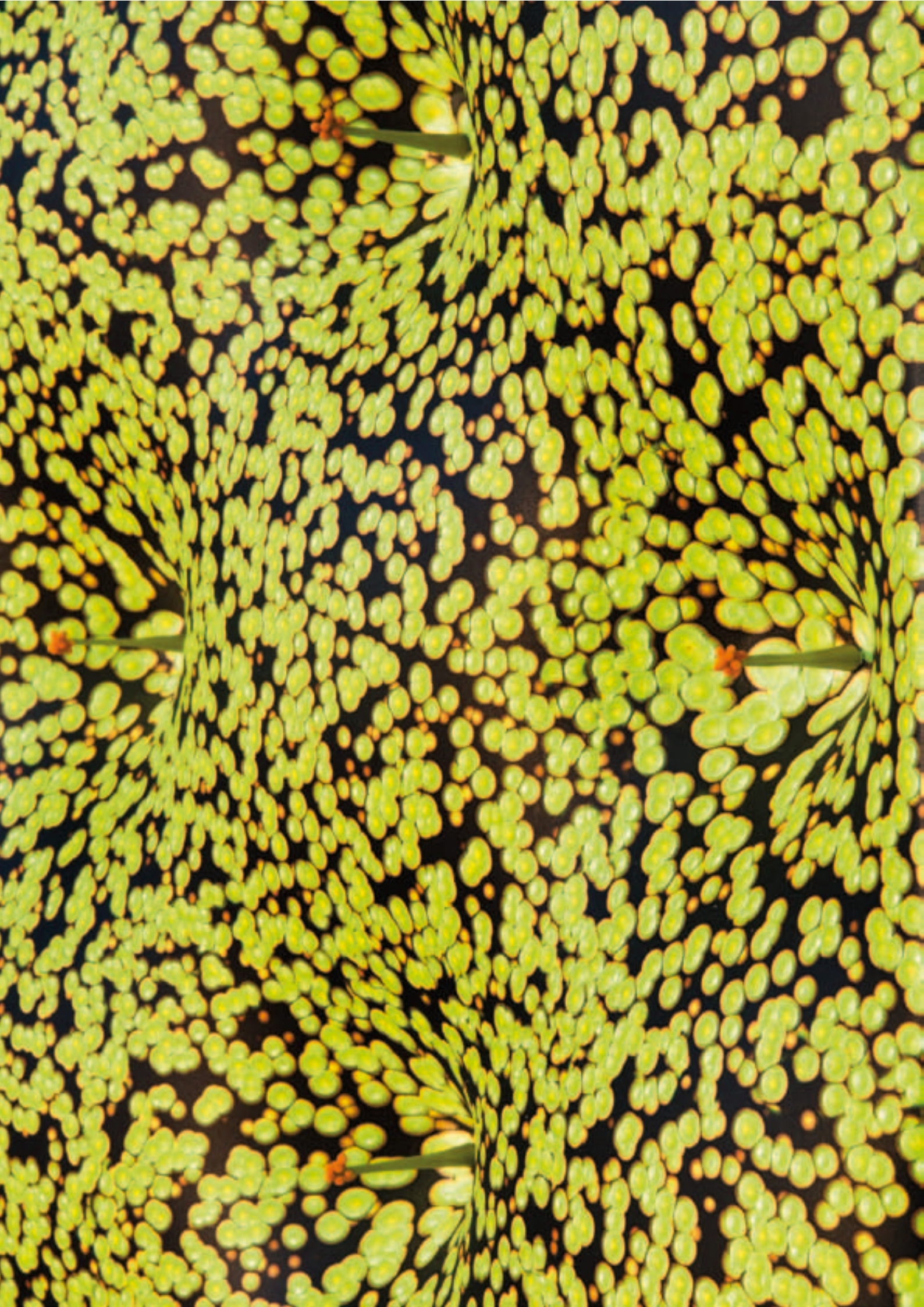
While walking up the Denham Bay track for a closer view of the Caldera, I found myself drawn to photographing close-up: mosses, lichens, fungi and also petrels nesting deep inside burrows.

I was struck by the contrast between the vastness of the setting – being on a remote speck of land, on the rim of an ocean canyon- and the intimate of what was in front of the lens, between tenacity and fragility in everything that surrounded us.

I realised that 'The Mystic Garden' I had been exploring before the trip was, in essence, a projection of the sensations and atmosphere of the exact place where we had been standing (looking out at the mysterious caldera and the Blue and Green Lakes from within the bush). The experience gave resonance and relevance in a new way to the images I had been working with.

To me Raoul Island is very much the mystic garden. Wonderful and frightening.

RIGHT **Elizabeth Thomson** *Inner Raoul (detail)* (2011)




Viti Levu
Vava'u
Tonga
Tongatapu
Lau Ridge
Lau Basin
Tonga Trench
Fracture Zone
Hunter
South
Fiji
Basin
Zone
Raoul Island
Colville Ridge
Kermadec Ridge
Kermadec Trench
Osbourn

With thanks for their support, hospitality, partnerships, curiosity, enthusiasm, patience and humour.

The Royal New Zealand Navy,
particularly Lt Commander Vicki Rendall and the Captain and crew of the HMNZS Otago

DOC staff on Raoul:
Jess B. Clark
Tim Butcher
Sian Potier
Toby Shanley

Departing Raoul volunteers:
Maree Roberts
Nigel Hubbard
Terry Beddek
Nicki Atkinson

Arriving Volunteers:
Danielle Pearson
Amy Hamilton
Edward Jenkins
James Maunder

DOC Staff lending a hand on Raoul:
Paul Rennie
Mike Ambrose
Zarak Harford-Reid
Pieter Tunider
Gavin Rodley

Other Raoul volunteers:
Sue Bennett
Ian Scott
Paul Swanson

Matt Jolly and Broughton Lattey, skipper and crew of **Braveheart** who helped get many of us on to Raoul Island

The NZ High Commission, Tonga

WWF New Zealand – for the provision of tents for Raoul Island nights

Hon Kate Wilkinson, Minister of Conservation

Tyler Eddy – WWF NZ

Karen Baird – Forest & Bird

Amelia Cornell – Pew Environment Group Kermadec Initiative

Sandra Lee-Vercoe – Pew Environment Group Kermadec Initiative

Retired Admiral Peter McHaffie

Marcus Lush, broadcaster

Insight

City Gallery Wellington, our co-hosts for the event Kermadec Encounters

The Tauranga Art Gallery and Auckland Maritime Museum for their support of the exhibition *Kermadec*. *Kermadec* will open at Tauranga Art Gallery in November 2011.

THEKERMADECS.ORG

THE PEW ENVIRONMENT GROUP