Whales and men to protect the oceans
I kneel, cup my hands to drink the sea
and instantly I feel my genealogy
aquatic early stages my lungs live one night only
ultramarine spine stretches to become
part of the stars because that is where
our ancestors watch us

some say we are not from there
we are from elsewhere, from across the beyond
from countries long gone from memory
demigods, whales, dolphins, sharks
fall from our ribs, and we held them up
performed rituals so they comfort forever our fears
carve a likeness out of wood and stone
slept with them and the Offspring created myths
carried them across lands and journeys
over mountains, rivers, onto strange shores
we ask ourselves what are these desires

why do I dream of gods
what part am I that belong to them
am I lungs, cheeks, or hair
do I look like them or do they look like me?

I drink another cup, islands to islands,
ancient highways beckons me
waves throw history and vaka wrecks against the rocks
when gods swam around the Pacific sea
created nations out of trees, clouds, rain
created languages out of placentas
nurtured embryos on the tongue of whales
prepare vaccine from ambergris
hear the same story that all we had to do was chant names
of villages and we are transported back to the first country
know the fire in my veins are eyes of gods.

The further I go into the plateau of Polynesia memory,
dreams within dreams become blue.

John Pule, January 2017, Niue
"Tù" ! Tùùùùù !

Like the wind-blown sound of the conch shell horn calling the tribe together. Tù! Tùù!
Like the sound of a whale spouting a powerful column of spray from its blowhole, calling
the Kanak menfolk to work on the land in readiness for yam planting.

Tù! Like the tide swirling out so men can walk on the foreshore where once there was
water. Tù, a deep-seated bond between mankind and the ocean.

This exhibition showcases the work of Oceanian artists hailing from Tonga, Niue, New
Zealand and New Caledonia, who came together at artists residencies on Ouen Island
and at the Tjibaou Cultural Centre in August and November 2016 to create works inspired
by ocean conservation.

The aim was to give these artists freedom to make their “voices” heard, echoing the
songs of those iconic mammals inhabiting our oceans, the whales. Inspired by these
creatures of legend, and by the precious living environment the oceans represent for
both whales and humans in the Pacific, the artists threw themselves into conveying
their perceptions through their individual art forms. Installations, paintings, sculptures, dance, music and sounds, materials and mediums
rooted in globalisation and in tradition... All were brought into play to pierce, through
creative art, to the very heart of our society.

Like the whales themselves, sentinels of the ocean and ocean health, the Tù artists
are ambassadors bearing this message for us all: “The oceans are the temple of life on
Earth, we must strive to ensure their protection if we want to survive.”

* "Tù" means “conch shell” (locally called “toutoute”) and also “whale”
in one of the languages spoken in the South, Ouen Island.

Cyril Pigeau
Culture(s) en chantier
Project coordinator

Whales and men
to protect the oceans
We see this international art residency as part of a very specific initiative, the project to establish an “XXL marine reserve” in New Caledonia’s Natural Park of the Coral Sea. The Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) has put 2017 in the spotlight as the “Pacific Year of the Whale”. Could there be any more iconic species than these noble creatures to epitomise the conservation of the South Pacific’s most precious treasure, its oceans? In the South Pacific, whales are creatures of legend, revered as symbols of the oceans and the constant struggle to protect and preserve them.

We see nature-culture links as vital for addressing conservation challenges. Here, the artists are making their "voices" heard, echoing the song of these legendary mammals. With their Global Ocean Legacy program, non-governmental organisation The Pew Charitable Trusts is dedicated to preserving the marine environment and advocating the establishment of the world's first generation of vast fully protected marine parks covering areas of several hundred thousand km².

We strongly believe that art and culture have a key role to play in raising public awareness and involvement in ocean conservation. This exhibition highlights contemporary art as a vital force in driving our work to raise awareness. The artists taking part in this residency were able to give their creativity free rein in exploring the Pacific Ocean’s most magnificent and iconic marine mammal. Delving deep into their artistic and cultural heritage, they have created artworks which reflect, revitalise and pay tribute to the natural and cultural heritage of the Pacific Islands.

Christophe Chevillon
Director
Pew New Caledonia
In our endeavour to “Protect Pacific Whales – Ocean Voyagers”, our islands are commemorating 2017 as the Pacific Year of the Whale, as agreed to by members of the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP). Key objectives of this campaign are to:

• celebrate whales and their place in Pacific cultures;
• and reinforce the image of the Pacific islands as a region where whales are revered and protected.

The ocean and all she holds, defines us as Pacific people. It underpins our livelihoods and way of life and as such is a cross cutting theme for SPREP. Although most SPREP members have small populations and economies, they are Large Ocean Island States responsible for managing more than ten per cent of the planet’s oceans.

We must remember that whales are sentinels of the ocean, and the impacts of climate change and pollution on whales will also soon have impacts on people. By focussing our campaign on the health of whales, we also focus on the health of the oceans and Pacific communities “Tù, Des baleines et des hommes pour le protection des océans” is the embodiment of these aspirations and will carry our Pacific message to a wide audience, both across our region and around the world.

Our grateful thanks go to the Pew Charitable Trusts, the Tjibaou Cultural Centre, Fonds Pacifique, the governments of New Caledonia and New Zealand, Creative New Zealand, for their support and commitment to this project, and to all those who have contributed to its realisation.

Most of all, SPREP gratefully acknowledges the artists from New Caledonia, Tonga, Niue and Aotearoa/New Zealand, through whose vision and creativity, the Year of the Whale has attained a cultural dimension and expression that campaigns alone cannot achieve.
Our raison d’être and current role as a centre of contemporary art on our Pacific Island involves ensuring we have the means to see our world clearly and to provide artists with the means to dedicate their talents to addressing the critical issues of our time. We feel that, through this project, we are fully fulfilling our role by bringing together artists from all over Oceania, encouraging them to work together, to challenge and explore their ideas and skills, watching as techniques merge and each artist distils the best of their own art and culture. The project’s success is intimately bound up with the high quality of the artists who accepted the Tù challenge. Whether they are artists who have worked with us for over 20 years or new generation artists, whether they have often exhibited their work at the Tjibaou Cultural Centre or are exhibiting it for the first time, they have all thrown themselves into making this exhibition a landmark event in the region’s cultural landscape. Proof that we can still count on artists to light the way in a world where the darkness of obscurantism suffocates the struggle to uphold even the noblest of principles, such as the fight to protect and preserve our environment, a burning issue which the great and powerful are sometimes reluctant to acknowledge as needing urgent action. So we are delighted to present the fruits of this lofty and worthy aspiration to the New Caledonian public, and to voice our heartfelt wish that the whales may long dwell in our oceans and inspire the dreams of the men, women and children of our islands.

Guillaume Soulard
Cultural and artistic director
Agency for the Development of Kanak Culture
Tjibaou Cultural Centre
Background and implementation

Milestones in an Oceania and arts focused project

From the Kermadec Islands...

In 2015, the Tjibaou Cultural Centre hosted the exhibition entitled Kermadec: 9 artists in the South Pacific based on a proposal made by non-governmental organisation The Pew Charitable Trusts. This exhibition was first launched in New Zealand in 2011 by Pew's local team. The avowed aim was to raise public awareness, through art and works by contemporary artists, about ocean conservation and the creation of vast, fully protected marine parks. With the aim of providing the artists with a stimulus for creative inspiration, they set off aboard a Royal New Zealand Navy ship to experience life in the remote Kermadec Islands, on a crossing from New Zealand to Tonga.

...to the Natural Park of the Coral Sea

The popular success of the Kermadec exhibition at the Tjibaou Cultural Centre inspired the Pew New Caledonia team to devise a new creative artist residency project involving artists from the South Pacific and New Caledonia, designed, this time, to raise public awareness about issues bound up with the management of the Natural Park of the Coral Sea surrounding New Caledonia. Environmental issues are a constant concern for the ADCK-CCT so they were again happy to partner the new project and host the residencies and the exhibition at the Tjibaou Cultural Centre.

Whales, totemic creatures, link between the islands, link between the artists

Ocean conservation is an issue of immense significance, vital to the survival of the planet. “The Pacific Year of the Whale”, launched by the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) in 2016-2017, provided the perfect opportunity to adopt the whale as the emblem of this fight for the cause of ocean conservation, and also as a totemic creature with the power to inspire and “spit out” - as in the biblical story of Jonah - the creative energy of the project artists. Thus, from the affinities and exchanges between whales and artists was born a universal message reaching out to each and every one of us.

Immersion and encounters on Ouen Island to forge a creative cornerstone

In July and August, the whales leave Antarctica to breed and give birth to their young in the warm waters of New Caledonia’s lagoon. Ouen Island in the south of the Main Island is a strategic landmark on the route followed by the whales, where the local community has strong ties with these creatures who play a vital role in the yam farming cycle. When the whales slap the water with their flukes and send up plumes of spray through their blowholes, the local men know it’s time to ready the land to plant their precious tubers.
On 3 August 2016, as a first step in getting the first Tù project creative residency underway, the artists set off on a lagoon boat trip for a close encounter with the creatures at the heart of their work. On a misty and rainy morning, the artists ventured out for their first group experience of the creatures they sought to understand. Maori and Kanak incantations and songs were chanted and then the whales appeared and gathered round the boat. For a few hours, the artists were treated to a breathtaking spectacle of power, elegance and playfulness binding them with a deep and lasting tie to these living totems.

So what could be more natural than that they should head for Ouen Island to spend five days with the Ouara Tribe and immerse themselves in a natural and human world in close communication with the whales? This was when their work really began, orchestrated by encounters, exchanges, shared meals, recordings, dances, workshops with the children of the tribe and moving customary rituals, with everyone also taking part in the Whale Festival organised by the Ouen Island Management Committee. On the boat carrying the team back to Noumea on Sunday evening, the memories of Tù, the conch shell horn, and of Tù, the whales, echoed and lingered long, mingling the songs and dances of whales and men.

**August 2016:**

1st creative residency on Ouen Island and then at the Tjibaou Cultural Centre.

Drawing on their intense shared experience, the artists could begin their creative work in earnest. From living with the tribe to workshops at the Tjibaou Cultural Centre, each of the artists could unleash their creative energy.

**George Nuku**, who had started his residency earlier as part of his *Bottled Ocean 2116* exhibition, pushed ahead with his work using plexiglas and plastic bottles, part of which he had begun on Ouen Island;

**Ruha F Fifita**, returning from Ouen Island, with earth pigments and natural dyes, began designing her huge barkcloth;

**Christelle Montané**, after exchanging ideas with Ruha, decided to try working in barkcloth herself and to create for the exhibition a work inspired by Oceanian symbolism;
Sacha Terrat who had created sounds of every kind and songs for the Ouen Island children, began listening, reviewing and selecting the best sections of his musical creations, then turned to planning exhibition opening night events with Ruha.

Arnaud Elissalde and Ito Waïa began a shared review of the many photographs of whales they had taken during the week spent on Ouen Island. For his own photographic artwork, Arnaud had focussed specifically on the movements and gestures used by each of the other artists.

Nicolas Molé, deeply impressed by the great size of the whales and their “above/below” relationship to the water surface, began work on a project to reflect this. This was also the genesis of 2% (the fish in its bowl), symbolising the tiny percentage of the ocean currently set aside as Marine Protected Areas, the development of which is a key Pew commitment.

Kapoa Tiaou, who had encountered whales close up for the very first time during his time on Ouen Island, set to work with his chisels to carve a whale’s tail from a log, introducing the Ouara Tribe children to the secrets of his art.

Marie-Ange Kapetha, a member of the Ouara Tribe who uses natural fibres to craft stunning woven marine animals, and also leads the children in songs and dances, was very moved by the way the artists interacted with the tribe and, in return, told the team an eloquent personal story by the fireside one evening. She was warmly invited to join the team!

The forging of bonds between the project team and the artists, and between them and the whales and the people of Ouen Island played a crucial role throughout the entire creative process behind the exhibition.

November 2016:

2nd creative residency at the cultural centre

John Pule, the only artist unable to come to New Caledonia in August, settled in at the Tjibaou Cultural Centre in November.

Although the whales had departed, the lagoon remained as a tangible reminder of their presence. The Tù team set off again aboard a boat to spend a day at sea with John and to share with him memories of their encounters with the whales in August and to welcome him into their collective artistic adventure. The outing also gave Christelle Montané an opportunity to regale the group with Pacific tales and legends about whales.

It was during this residency that some of the artists began active work on their projects:

John Pule started composing two large canvases and also some poems.

Christelle Montané threw herself into the intricate and painstaking design of her barkcloth creation.

Kapoa and Seiuli Tiaou each brought their individual insight to transforming wood into an evocation of the spiritual essence of the whales.

Arnaud Elissalde focussed on his series of portraits of each artist and continued his photographic essay recording their gestures. Influenced by his selection of the photos shot in August, he conceived the idea of highlighting multiple facets of the ocean and the whales for the exhibition: a cube suggested itself.

In the period between the two residencies, Nicolas Molé made the decision to base his art on the yam cycle and to envisage, in the Tjibaou Cultural Centre garden, a whale-shaped mound of earth with a symbolic blowhole from which a yam stalk would grow to reach maturity in time for the opening of the exhibition in March 2017. Memories of the lagoon surface pierced by the bodies of the whales also gave him the idea of a blue surface in the exhibition room.

Ito Waïa whittled down his photographs to 5, which he had printed on large format canvas before executing graphic designs over the photos.

Sacha Terrat played the team the first extract from the Tù original soundtrack...
The opening night, a time for all to meet up and unveil their message to the public

The Tù opening night is designed as an artistic event involving not only the project artists but also the Ouen Island children who will come over with their teacher to the Tjibaou Cultural Centre.

It is often true of Oceanian artists that each has several strings to his or her bow and the creative talents of the project artists take more than one form and extend beyond the visual arts... poetry in the case of John Pule, music and song in the case of Sacha Terrat, Marie-Ange Kapetha and music, song and dance in the case of Ruha Fifita.

And so the performing arts will be a key feature of the opening night, giving symbolic expression to the commingling of humans and whales through the project and setting the stage for a second encounter between the public and the visual artworks.

Further mediation or educational encounters will take place throughout the six months that the exhibition will be on display at the Tjibaou Cultural Centre.

New journeys

We are willing to bet that, like the whales, the exhibition will journey far afield to spread its message beyond the Tjibaou Cultural Centre and the Natural Park of the Coral Sea to new horizons... Art on the move for ocean conservation.

The first stage in the journey should take place from September 2017 in the North Province, with the collaboration of the Pomémie Provincial Cultural Centre. But the Pacific Region will provide the main arena for the exhibition’s journey, with each island a potential haven for Tù. Ever onward...
Arnaud Elissalde is a self-taught photographer based in New Caledonia since 2012.
Whales first took centre stage in his work for a project undertaken in 2015 as part of the Géante exhibition held to mark the Whale Festival on Ouen Island, shown thereafter at the Art Café in Noumea. His photographic work was shown alongside paintings by Christelle Montané, who shares his passionate interest in whales.

Arnaud Elissalde initially used photography to capture and illustrate his travel adventures. It gradually became his ruling passion and finally his chosen career.

He draws his inspiration first and foremost from nature, he adores contemplating and celebrating the natural world.

He continues with his travels to the wild places of the South Pacific, such as the Vanuatu volcanoes, dedicated to capturing their haunting beauty.

Born in 1983, in Périgueux, Dordogne.
Lives and works in Noumea, New Caledonia.
For a photographer, capturing a fleeting moment through a camera lens is no trivial matter. It transforms his relationship with the world around him. When Arnaud Elissalde took his first shots of the humpback whales which migrate every year to New Caledonia’s lagoon, it was a truly transformative experience. Seeing this iconic species up close was enthralling and mesmerising. Photographing the whales was both a privilege and a real challenge in terms of the technical skill needed for the shots and what he wished them to convey.

The backlit cube provides a fitting showcase for this giant of the ocean, so vulnerable and so imperilled. The shots capture the behavioural patterns shown by the whales in New Caledonia’s waters and highlight their power and agility.

The square format allows the images to be composed so as to place the subject full centre, making it the focus of our concerns. The processing used for the photographs and the central halo of light created by backlighting emphasise the “highlighting” concept. The choice of colour shading, the same for all the images, with its slight bluish tint, evokes peace and universality.

The plexiglas cube gives depth to the image and places plastic at nature’s service. This three dimensional geometric representation has five sides, which could be seen as evoking our planet’s five oceans.
This series of photographs by Arnaud Elissalde shows people and their art. An introduction to the Tò, Whales and men to protect the oceans exhibition, it includes a portrait of each artist followed by a series of photos showing the various techniques used by each one of them. Each stroke of the brush, pen or chisel is charged with meaning, the bearer of a heartfelt message pleading for the oceans to be protected. This series is by way of being a response to the whales: “We have heard you.”

Portraits 2016
Photographs
60 x 80 cm
Prints on fine art paper laminated on alucobond
Ruha Fifita is a Tongan artist whose work involves both visual and performing arts. The natural materials and traditional methods she uses lend themselves quite naturally to capturing themes related to the connection of peoples and the environment. Her works on ngatu [barkcloth] reflect the natural and social environment in which she has been immersed, and allow her to explore how our collective care, consciousness and understanding of the world around is inseparable to our ability to progress, both spiritually and materially.

Born in 1990, in Neiafu, Tonga. Lives and works in Brisbane, Australia.
Ruha Fifita

Having lived on islands in the Pacific all her life, the power and sacredness of the ocean is something that is deeply engrained into Ruha Fifita’s view of the world. The young artist is originally from Vaimalo, a village in Vava’u (an outer island of Tonga), which sits at the mouth of a channel that for decades has witnessed the migration of whales as they seek safe refuge to give birth and nurse their young. Building on the conception of the process of ngatu-making as one that nurtures learning and expression through story-telling, Ruha Fifita highlights through her work the ancient connection that Oceanians had with the ocean and the whales: Stories, legends and songs that served to sustain a respectful and reverent attitude towards their environment.

Lototō 1*

2016

Ngatu
550 x 360 cm
Natural dyes and pigments on barkcloth

*Lototō is a core value enshrined in the constitutional and customary history of the Kingdom of Tonga, it represents the spirit of humility and generosity.
The artist explores ways of recasting these values to incorporate the evolving context in which the balance between man and their environment must continuously be redefined. By using old methods to develop new works, her work considers the imperative of those attitudes and principles that might guide humanity’s successful stewardship of the physical world. Among these is the need to manifest a level of humility that will enable us to learn from from our past, from the wisdom of our natural environment, and to desire the well-being and prosperity of all before our own.

Lototō 2*
2016

Ngatu
45 x 45 cm
Natural dyes and pigments on barkcloth

*Lototō is a core value enshrined in the constitutional and customary history of the Kingdom of Tonga, it represents the spirit of humility and generosity.

Ruha FIFITA

The artist explores ways of recasting these values to incorporate the evolving context in which the balance between man and their environment must continuously be redefined. By using old methods to develop new works, her work considers the imperative of those attitudes and principles that might guide humanity’s successful stewardship of the physical world. Among these is the need to manifest a level of humility that will enable us to learn from from our past, from the wisdom of our natural environment, and to desire the well-being and prosperity of all before our own.
Although nobody on Ouen Island claims to be a full-time artist, Marie-Ange Kapetha is most definitely a creative genius! Superbly skilled at weaving, she is passionate about preserving and celebrating the skills and wisdom of her tribe through weaving and also song, storytelling and dance. She holds workshops with the Ouen Island school children and younger kids to get them involved in welcoming tourists, with the Whale Festival in August as the key attraction.

Marie-Ange Kapetha exemplifies the commitment of Kanak women to cherishing and sharing their cultural legacy.

Born in 1963, in Noumea.
Lives and works in the Ouara Tribe on Ouen Island, New Caledonia.
Marie-Ange Kapetha’s proposal to weave a “life-size” whale for the project was just perfect. She had long drawn inspiration from local wildlife, especially the creatures sheltering in the waters around the island, and eagerly seized the opportunity offered by the exhibition to create a sort of “chef d’oeuvre”, a masterpiece of weaving which would pay fitting tribute to the whales. So she set out to accomplish her project of creating a whale calf around 6 metres long from Ouen Island coconut palm leaves, destined to swim in the imaginary waters of the Tjibaou Cultural Centre exhibition hall.

**Wuce awé ! Wuce aro ! Véâ mà gï và urè !**

2017

Woven artwork
590 x 370 cm
Coconut palm leaves woven onto a bamboo and metal frame

*from nàâ kwényï (Drubea-Kapumë), literally “Wake up! Wake up! Come, let’s go crush the clods of earth!”*
Nicolas Molé has earned a well-deserved reputation as a leading artist on the contemporary Kanak cultural scene. Born in France, with a French mother and a Kanak father from Lifou, he settled in New Caledonia in 2011. Moving fluently between drawing, animation, video and other experimental mediums, Molé constructs animated multi-media installations that respond to the natural and cultural environment of New Caledonia. His works are often performative in nature, requiring an audience to activate or transform them. They are also interventionist, adapting an existing building, site or place. Molé has worked extensively with performance companies to create environments for their works.

Born in 1975,
in Niort, Deux-Sèvres.
Lives and works in Mont-Dore, New Caledonia.
Nicolas MOLÉ

"One day in winter, the whale swims close to our shores. She slaps the sea with her side fins. On the island, the yams sleep in the earth. The sound of the whale’s fins slapping the waves awakens the yams, startled, they put forth their first shoots. It is time for the menfolk to plant them.”

Wela me koko*

2016

Plant sculpture
Variable dimensions
Yam planted in the ground, gaïac wood stake

* from Drehu (Lifou), literally “Whale and yam”
Nicolas MOLÉ

"Nowadays, almost everyone, everywhere, every day, comes into contact with plastics, especially packaging. Worldwide use of plastic increased twentyfold in the second half of the 20th century, and it is expected to double again in the next twenty years. About eight million metric tons a year of all plastics produced wind up floating in the sea, equivalent to the contents of a garbage truck being thrown into the sea every single minute. Plastics in the ocean will outweigh fish pound for pound in 2050".
Nicolas MOLÉ

Our oceans play a crucial part in maintaining life on earth. Covering nearly 75% of the planet, they shelter around a quarter of the known species in the world and many more, as yet undiscovered. These waters feed billions of people and a multitude of species.

Today, however, all the planet’s oceans are threatened by industrial plants, plastic waste, climate change, overfishing and illegal fishing. Marine reserves have been used for many years to protect the marine environment against overexploitation of its resources. Research shows that these reserves are more effective when they are large, highly protected, established and located in remote areas. They are essential for boosting the abundance and diversity of the species, as well as for preserving the general good health of the marine environment.

Scientists therefore recommend creating these reserves in 30% of the planet’s ocean areas. Less than 3% of our oceans are currently protected, in comparison to 17% of land areas. “2%” is the name Nicolas Molé has given to this fish in its bowl.

2%
2016

Living sculpture
Variable dimensions
Bowl, water and goldfish
Painter Christelle Montané settled in New Caledonia in 2006. She fell in love with the sea and sailing and joined the crew of a catamaran. In 2007, the whales entered her life and changed it forever.

Committed to protecting whales and responsible tourism, she spends every southern winter taking passengers out on her yacht to meet the humpback whales. For several years, she has focussed on paintings of her totemic creature with a series of watercolors on nautical charts.

Her creative energy is driven by her close bond with the natural world, which she renders with intricately finished detail. Her works sometimes hint at a human presence but figures are rarely depicted.

Christelle MONTANÉ

The theme chosen by Christelle Montané is the migration of the humpback whales. The nautical charts she uses as supports for her painting are charts of New Caledonia in its maritime domain, the waters around Southern New Caledonia and Ouen Island just off Prony Bay. The geographical areas highlighted in the charts follow the annual route taken, probably over thousands of years, by the whales as they cover distances of around 8,000 km to migrate from Antarctica to their breeding grounds.

Christelle Montané’s triptych is an evocation of the courtship ritual between a female whale who leads a dominant male and a rival on a watery dance. A breathtaking sight offered up to whale-watchers in the warm waters of Prony Bay during the three months of the southern winter. The three paintings are named after the reefs shown on the charts.

**Rendez-vous**

“Bellona”, “Kaé”, “Ioro”

2017

Triptych

120 x 84 cm

*Watercolor on nautical charts*
Christelle MONTANÉ

The humpback whales set off on an annual migration but the people of Oceania also once took to the sea and sailed towards new lands in a quest for welcoming shores where they could prosper and lead a better life. For the communities of the South Pacific, the giants of the seas are a powerful symbol of their cultural heritage, bearing witness to the close bond between whales and humans as they journey far and wide. This tapa (barkcloth) embodies a customary gesture offered by the artist in gratitude to the whole Oceanian continent and, in particular to the country which welcomed her 10 years ago: New Caledonia. Gathering the tales and legends which inspire her work is, for Christelle Montané, her way of paying tribute to her friends the whales and also to the 9 Pacific countries and cultures which celebrate these legendary creatures.
Maori artist George Nuku has an intuitive mastery of the ancestral sculptural art of his people, expressed in wood, stone or bone. However these days he’s just as likely to carve polystyrene, plastic or the transparent plastic known as Plexiglas.

His art is fired by a quest to transform plastic to reveal it as a work of art and even a precious cultural treasure, thus transforming our relationship with ecological crisis and alerting us to a future where our world could be a vast depository of man-made waste.

Whale Skull Cube
2017

Sculpture
350 x 350 x 350 cm
Pygmy blue whale skull, polystyrene

George NUKU

Whale Skull Cube represents both a development of ideas and a multi level dialogue of ideas and feelings around whales and ocean conservation.

The use of an actual whale skull inside the cube embodies and is the pure form of the whale animal in nature. The carved white polystyrene cube is seen to constitute the body form and the skeleton of the whale in a completely abstracted form. The fret worked nature of the carving allows the skull to be seen within the cube, while utilizing the interplay of form, light and shadow. The cube can also be seen as the element protecting the skull and enshrining the sacredness of the whale inside, the cube acts as both a reliquary and a sanctuary to contain, protect and perpetuate divinity. The significance of the use of the polystyrene material lies in its absolute syntheticity, poised against and yet in communion with the purity of the bone forming the skull of the whale.

The three-dimensional spatial composition of the cube symbolises the idea of a multi-dimensional boundary, in this it speaks of the importance regarding ocean sanctuaries - in width, in length, in breadth, in depth- for the whales and all marine life as a whole. The material composition of the cube also speaks of the petroleum origin of the polystyrene, its relationship to the underwater fossil fuel exploration currently endangering the life cycles of whales and marine life. The cracks engraved onto the carved polystyrene refer to the seismic testing currently conducted by fossil fuel exploration companies and their impact on whales and all marine life.

George Nuku sees this issue as a direct cause of whale fatalities in the Pacific.

This artwork, like many of the artist’s creations, is designed to be both aesthetically pleasing and to convey a challenging and disturbing message. A wake-up call to transform our relationship with the environment.
George Nuku uses plastics - plastic bottles, plexiglas and polystyrene - as a medium for his art. He sculpts, carves and assembles them to create strange new creatures inhabiting an ocean world also transformed by plastic. Like fragmented transparent denizens of the deep, his plexiglas whales resemble mutant creatures, morphing towards a new stage of evolution driven by plastics pollution of the oceans. George Nuku’s art confronts human beings with the consequences of their own acts, yet also incites them to take action and, like these strange new creatures, find ways to adapt to the inevitable transformations of the environment they inhabit.

Ruawharo #1 & 2
2016
Sculptures
Whale head 142 x 150 cm
Whale tails 90 x 150 cm
*Plastic bottles, plexiglas, fishing line and waxed thread ties*
John Pule, an Officer of the New Zealand Order of Merit, has been described by the Queensland Art Gallery as “one of the Pacific’s most significant artists”. He has completed three novels, is a published poet and turned to the visual arts at the age of 25. Now one of New Zealand’s most renowned artists, Pule continues to write novels and poems, increasingly incorporating his poems into his visual art. John Pule was two when his family left Niue to emigrate to New Zealand. His art highlights issues linked to migration and separation and explores the rich fabric of his Niuean cultural heritage. Since his first return trip to Niue in 1991, Pule’s lithographs, prints and paintings have reflected his fascination for the history, mythology and make-up of his country of origin, often in parallel with his personal experience of life and culture.

Weaving together elements from Polynesian mythology and personal narratives, John Pule’s work is inspired by the fragments of pattern and vignettes and the subtle colours of Niuean hiapo (barkcloth) and draws on Niuean genealogy and oral traditions. Pule fuses Niuean motifs with Polynesian and Western symbols, developing his own language of geometric and figurative signs and awakening echoes recalling the colonisation of the Pacific.

The central section of this painting depicts a coastal landscape, a place commonly used for communal meetings in the Pacific. We see an encounter between whales emerging from the ocean and figures carrying statues of Polynesian gods (atua). The gods appear to have come to the aid of these beached, distressed whales, welcoming and speaking to them. Nowadays, these ancient gods are mostly forgotten, few people still believe in them, know about them or have any interest in them. This painting brings them back to life and calls on the spirits and energy of these gods, living icons with the power to protect and answer the prayers of those who believe in them. Tanoa is prepared for discussion and decision making. Some of the Gods shown here represents Tahiti (double-headed figure) Rapanui, Tonga, and Hawaii.

This scene embodies a plea for us to protect and preserve our natural and cultural heritage.

**Gods, Whales, Tanoa and Lei**

*2016*

Diptych
200 x 200 cm
Enamel & oil paint, ink, polyurethane

* Tanoa, large wooden kava bowl found in western Polynesia and the Fiji Islands. Lei, a Hawaiian word for a garland of flowers worn on the head or around the neck

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This scene embodies a plea for us to protect and preserve our natural and cultural heritage.
Where the gods and whales meet in Gods, Whales, Tanoa and Lei, the creatures in this painting are lifted from that coastline and carried across a plateau by groups of people. They are taken to another part of the sea where they will be granted protection. The mountains offer an uneasiness about the enormity of the task ahead to do such things as offer medical assistance and shelter. It shows how far and how much energy is needed to climb to those highest of thoughts; how difficult it is to overcome obstacles. A photographer at the beginning of the procession documents the improbability of the situation. What could prove to be a miracle and help achieve the impossible are the dazzling array of anthropomorphic plants and creatures that accept acts of kindness to achieve success through knowing how to help and respect.
I kneel, cup my hands to drink the sea
2017
Handwritten and illustrated poem
75,5 x 56,5 cm
Ink, pastel, oil stick, graphite

John PULE
The full text of the poem introduces the catalogue.
In New Caledonia, Sacha Terrat is hailed as the local male counterpart of Icelandic singer Björk. He is an electronic music composer, programmer and vocalist. Deeply concerned about environmental issues affecting the lagoon of his native island, Sacha Terrat was enthusiastic about taking part in the Tù project and setting out to gather sounds to create a unique sonic canvas during the creative residencies of the project.

Sacha Terrat has created a single giant musical fresco which, in harmony with the journey of the whales, draws us into a circle where “we end where we began”.

His sonic canvas was created from in situ recordings made during residencies and work sessions for the Tù project. The complex tissue of sounds includes discussions, stories, sounds made by tools used by the artists as they worked, traditional and contemporary songs mingling with the song of the whales. Terrat’s musical tapestry transports members of the public on a melodic journey and speaks of the distances traveled beneath and above the sea towards a much-desired meeting.

**Journey**

2016

Music album

45 min

*Sampling & sound synthesis*

Sample
Kapoa Tiaou and his wife Béatrice (known as Seiuli), also his partner in sculpture, have founded a “tribe of artists” comprising eleven children who are all sculptors, apart from one who is a carpenter.

Kapoa began sculpting in 1988 at a training centre in Bourail and he has worked as a sculptor ever since, creating works of all kinds and all sizes, from very small to monumental. He mostly draws his inspiration from the ocean encircling his native island and the wildlife species the ocean shelters. His work has expanded in increasingly abstract directions. His experience has gradually led him towards a different artistic vision, freeing himself from his initial cultural ties and moving towards greater liberty of expression, with his close bond to his natural environment still central to his work. Some of his monumental sculptures are scattered throughout New Caledonia.

Born in 1959, in Ouvéa. Lives and works in Noumea, New Caledonia.
This work took shape from ideas and discussions between Kapoa Tiaou and others during the group residency on Ouen Island in August 2016. The concept behind the sculpture is bound up with the links between the coming of the whales to the coastal waters and the start of the yam farming cycle on Ouen Island. The stone covered clef symbol suggests the body of a whale surmounted by its tail fin. The leaves of the yam stem are seen emerging beneath the tail fin, on this side, the clef coated with an earth-mixed resin, let the harshness of the red soil appear. When the whales slap the surface with their fins in the waters offshore from Ouen Island, the menfolk start preparation for the yam planting. Every element comes together in this work. The whale’s body is a conch shell, its song is the sound of the conch horn calling for the yams to be planted.

The artist was also mindful of the biblical message of resurrection, of Jesus Christ speaking to the Pharisees, recalling the comparison between Jonah swallowed and spat out by a “great fish” and the earth which gives rebirth to life. Continuing the analogy, the artist has imagined that just as yams must be planted in the earth to bear new fruit, man can be reborn through contact with the whales (tafolaa), inspired with a new sense of protectiveness towards them and their environment.

It is a vision of Mother Earth, of a whale proffering the richness of life, and of man who must act as protector.

**Kapoa TIAOU**

**Tafolaa**

2016

Sculpture

280 x 173 cm

*from fagauvea (Ouvéa), literally “Whale”*
A native of Corsica, Béatrice (known as Seiuli) came to New Caledonia in 1988. In 1990, she married Kapoa Tiaou who taught her to sculpt. She then began to show her works at exhibitions in Corsica, Paris and New Caledonia. She was awarded the 1st Professional Prize at the Printemps des Arts event in Bastia, while continuing her university studies in Corte for a degree in visual/applied arts. She has also specialised in creating complex monumental works.

Since 2006, she has been writing folktales which she illustrates with her sculptures, and works on developing her art by teaching others. In 2016, she took part in two sculpture projects in Noumea involving young people seeking a career direction, and worked with them on a dozen monumental sculptures.

Born in 1967, in Bastia, Corsica.
Lives and works in Noumea, New Caledonia
This sculpture is a symbol of peace and reconciliation between humans and whales. Once hunted and threatened with extinction, the humpback whales are now no longer endangered because they are protected. This sculpture represents a mother entrusting her destiny and the future of her offspring to the mighty hand of man stretched out to her. A hand offering tenderness and protection which, not so long ago, was an instrument to wreak extinction on whales. Today, humans are fascinated by these majestic creatures and eager to safeguard their habitat. For many generations, some peoples and civilizations have accorded whales a key role in their lives, deeply entwined in their culture, rituals and customs. This is true of New Caledonia, where whales are seen as a powerful symbol, a precious jewel of the lagoon. “May our hands be like this loving and protective hand, hands of reconciliation.”
Self-taught and best known as a sculptor in wood, Ito Waïa has expanded his artistic range by working with a variety of forms and techniques (including sculptures, drawings & paintings). Since 2004, his work has been shown at various venues both in New Caledonia and further afield. Photography is currently his chosen medium and he gives regular shows of work inspired by nature. Born in Maré, he lives with the Azareu Tribe near Bourail, where he has a seat on the clan council. Ito Waïa has many strings to his bow: specialist facilitator for classes working on arts or cultural projects, member of the Mwe Ara Local Private Law Group, environmental and cultural advisor to the Deva Domain, he is actively involved in the work spearheaded by the Western Coastal Zone Management Committee. His environmental commitment finds natural expression in his art, which serves as a powerful means of raising awareness about protecting the natural environment.

Born in 1959,
in Maré, adopted by the Azareu Tribe.
Lives and works in Bourail,
New Caledonia.
Eau centre de l’océan
Danseront les baleines
Et sur la valse sacrée de la mère
Le devoir du respect de l’humanité
2016

Photographs
120 x 72 cm / 100 x 100 cm
Photographic print, paint and Indian ink

Ito WAÏA
“L’ART EST À L’INFINI DE LA CRÉATION
L’ŒUVRE DONNERA EAU. À DES FORMES DE PENSÉES
ET LE SONGE DE NOS RÊVES POUR MOT
LE VOYAGE DE NOS ÉMOTIONS

Le maître de l’univers créa les océans
Qui fit des baleines porteuses de message
A la gestion du temps et de l’igname.
(Bwé-Mora : Tête de lumière à l’humanité)
Pour que la belle bleue, reste le paradis de la vie.”

“ART IS INFINITY IN CREATION
THE WORK WILL GIVE FORTH WATER. TO FORMS OF THOUGHT
AND THE DREAM OF OUR DREAMS FOR A WORD
THE JOURNEY OF OUR EMOTIONS

The master of the universe created the oceans
Which made the whales bearers of a message
To govern time and the yam.
(Bwé-Mora: Head of light to mankind)
May the beauteous blue remain the paradise of life”. 
This international artist residency and exhibition was introduced by the non-governmental organisation The Pew Charitable Trusts as part of the "XXL marine reserve" project for the Natural Park of the Coral Sea in New Caledonia; and "the Pacific Year of the Whale" promoted by the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP); in partnership with the Agency for the Development of Kanak Culture – Tjibaou Cultural Centre.

It is supported by the Pacific Funds, Creative New Zealand, the governments of New Caledonia and New Zealand, Calédonie Charter, and the Musée Maritime de Nouvelle-Calédonie.