

# From the collection



Edith Sagapolu (Amituanai) (b.1980) *The Amituanai Family Lotu, from Ioka, 2004 LED print 4/5*, The University of Auckland Art Collection.

It has been an exciting few years for emerging artist Edith Amituanai (nee Sagapolu), an Elam postgraduate student who had her first solo exhibition only a few years ago at Anna Miles Gallery in 2005.

Since then she has been curated into exhibitions at the Auckland War Memorial Museum, St Paul Street Gallery, the Auckland Art Gallery and the *Dateline* exhibition of New Zealand art currently touring Europe, as well as a solo show at Wellington's City Gallery in 2006.

And it is not just curators that have taken note. Last year she earned recognition from one of New Zealand's most celebrated photographers, receiving the inaugural Marti Friedlander Photographic Award. "I particularly like the way her photographic essays portray people and places that reveal new Zealanders and all their diversity," said Friedlander in the award announcement. And just last week it was announced that she has been shortlisted for the prestigious Walters Prize alongside such senior figures as Lisa Reihana, John

## Art

Reynolds and Peter Robinson.

Amituanai's work draws on documentary traditions with a particular interest in portraiture and domestic interiors. The subjects of her photographs are usually family or close friends, who provide ways for her to explore her upbringing as a New Zealand Samoan. *Dejeuner*, the exhibition for which she has received the Walters nomination, depicts Samoan New Zealander professional rugby players based in France, as well as the trophy-laden living rooms of their proud parents back home. The images explore the idea of a "third culture", acknowledging the layers of identity that develop from the migrations of successive generations of Pacific people and the provisionality of having a place called home.

The University of Auckland Art Collection took an early interest in Amituanai's work, purchasing in 2004 two works from what has loosely become known as her *Ioka* series. Taken before she married into the Amituanai family, these are depictions of what were then her boyfriend's family, particularly focusing on her now sister-in-law Ioka.

According to a statement issued by the 2008 Walters Prize jury, which included this writer, "Edith Amituanai's modest and generous photographs, part formal portrait, part casual snapshot, reflect her engagement with communal and personal rituals, family intimacies and the subtle way traditions mutate."

*The Amituanai Family Lotu* shows a private nightly ritual, still practised in Samoa, where they would get together for family time, to pray, read the *Bible* in Samoan and catch up with each other – *Lotu* literally translates as prayer. This is an intimate view in which the photographer's relationship to the subject is essential.

Andrew Clifford