

From the collection



The iconic upturned boat form of the Fale Pasifika is a landmark on campus. Designed by Ivan Mercep of Jasmx Architects at a cost of \$6 million in 2004, the Fale has won several architectural awards. Collaboration with architectural theorist Albert Refiti ensured that Pasifika artists were involved in its construction adding layers of cultural meaning.

Traditional Tongan lashings in brown and black coconut coir from Fiji by Filipe Tohi conceal steel plates and bolts at the main intersections of the roof structure on the interior. Outside the building, the work of Tongan artist, Tumoi Kaloni, forms a high archway entrance to the malae or greeting area, which is paved with a grid of tiles with applied arrows by Tania Euruatua Short to form a work entitled *Accidental and Deliberate Voyages in the South Pacific*. Described as a cartographically inspired pattern, this treatment of the malae's surface was intended to evoke the presence of the ocean connecting Pacific peoples.

The aerial view conjured by this careful schema is further enhanced by the presence of seven birds crafted in stainless steel plate that soar overhead on six-metre high poles: rare examples of objects made by the late artist and curator Jim Vivieaere. Entitled *Beacons*, these avian manifestations were initially intended to sway in the wind, and have mirrored surfaces which would render them invisible by day, then lit up at night using fibre optic cables. However, the budget of \$62,000 did not allow for special effects, and ultimately the artist reconciled himself to painting the bird shapes with

the plumage colours of *Fregata ariel*, or Lesser Frigatebird which is closely associated with the Pacific.

The flight silhouette of the frigate bird is singular, with the largest wingspan to bodyweight ratio of any seabird. Such long, thin wings, combined with a tapering forked or scissor-like tale and the bird's strong hooked bill make this bird a distinctive presence in Pacific skies. Vivieaere chose the bird for its cultural and spiritual dimensions as well as its ability to conjure notions of movement, migration and ocean. These "beacons" represent each of the seven major Pacific Island communities living in Aotearoa, and their placement on the malae is dictated by the geographical relationship that the islands of Samoa, Tonga, Fiji, Niue, Tokelau, Tuvalu and the Cook Islands have to each other in the Pacific Ocean.

Born in Waipawa to Rarotongan parents, Jim Vivieaere attended medical school in Dunedin before beginning study at the University of

Canterbury's School of Fine Arts in 1972. A visit to Noosa Heads connected him with a Tahitian family in 1981 and precipitated an exploration of his Polynesian heritage which developed into curatorial work around definitions of "Pacific Islandness". As a Mōet & Chandon artist-in-residence in Avizes, France in 1993 he formulated his groundbreaking exhibition *Bottled Ocean* which opened at City Gallery, Wellington in 1994. Radical both in its installation and its deployment of artists using new media, it has yet to be surpassed as an exploration of contemporary art by Pasifika artists in Aotearoa. His own multimedia work includes a video installation as part of Le Folauga at Auckland Museum in 2007 and makes reference to Belgian surrealist Rene Magritte's 1928-29 work, *The Treachery of Images* which was a painting of a pipe with the text "This is not a pipe". Vivieaere's work was called *This is not an ocean, this is a rented house/this is not a hand, this is a library/this is not the sky, this is a grandfather clock/this is not a child, this is a mirror poetically evoking issues of Polynesian identity*. It shows a young child diving into calm water and swimming away clumsily as the sound of the ocean builds tension in the background.

Over five hundred mourners gathered at the Fale Pasifika to farewell Jim Vivieaere on 12 June 2011, standing beneath his *Beacons* at the service's end. A tribute exhibition, *This is not a vitrine, this is an ocean* curated by Leafa Wilson opened on 1 August at Waikato Museum Te Whare Taonga o Waikato in Hamilton and will continue until December 2011.

Linda Tyler

Director, Centre for New Zealand Art Research and Discovery

Pictured: Jim Vivieaere (1947-2011) Beacons, 2004, stainless steel