



John Pule (b. 1962), *Nofoa koe ka fano a au (You stay I go)*, 1997.

Oil on canvas, 2103 x 1775mm.

The University of Auckland Art Collection

Journeys have been a constant theme in the work of John Pule, who arrived in New Zealand at the age of two from the village of Liku, Niue, and has gone on to exhibit extensively around the world. A self-taught artist, Pule draws his influence as much from poetry as art history and a variety of Pacific traditions, partly due to his parallel practice as an accomplished writer with three published novels and much poetry to his name. Painting grew out of his practice as a writer and language continues to play an important role in his art, which is often interwoven with his own autobiographical texts.

During the 1990s, Pule experimented with his own version of 19th century hiapo (bark cloth paintings), a shift that coincided with the artist making his first return visit to his homeland in 1991. Although writer Peter Simpson (associate professor in the English Department) is quick to point out that virtually no hiapo, a post-contact phenomenon, resides in Niue, this hybrid semi-traditional form provided a framework in which Pule created a distinctive language of his own, reviving the smoky hanging cloths with unstretched canvases, populating the dynamic grids with his own personal iconography of new and old; places, names and images.

Like psychic maps, his works explore the

interconnectedness of all things; religious scenes freely intermingle with traditional motifs and contemporary technology, combining, in one recent exhibition, ambulances, aeroplanes and crucifixions entwined with vines and mythic creatures. Pule is the storyteller and through the narratives of his own history and relationships, he threads fantastic fictions. Curator Ron Brownson has written that his “pictographs are like a potent sequence of film stills which can project the shapes of memory, dreams and intuition”.

With the turn of the millennium, Pule adopted a distinctively new style of vividly coloured clouds and vines, interconnecting floating scenes of bustling, surrealist activity. A large suite of these works can also be found on campus: in 2003 Pule was commissioned by The University of Auckland to design a set of ten windows for the new buildings of Pacific Studies, contributing to the skin of the building with images that act like an outer cloak, tattoo or protection. Artworks commissioned from other artists for the Fale Pasifika are also integrated into the building as the entry paving or gateway or in the construction of the Fale itself, providing links to the past and present in these living buildings.