

whangarei art museum

TE WHARETAONGA O WHANGAREI

Exhibition Education Resource Kit

PRESENTS THE EXHIBITION

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Heta: Power and Fragility



Museum, 2004, C-Type Print, 150x122cm. Collection of the Artist.

A photographic exhibition featuring the work of **Mark Cross**

Curated by the Whangarei Art Museum

1st Nov. – 28th Nov. 2004

Min. Gold Coin Entry per person – towards rebuilding of Niue Museum
and Cultural Centre

Mark Cross Artist's Talk:

Friday 19th November 2004 @ Whangarei Art Museum

1pm: Primary and Intermediate students.

2pm: Secondary students.

5.30pm: General Public - Fund Raising Event.

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RESOURCE KIT CONTENTS:

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INTRODUCTION TO *HETA: POWER AND FRAGILITY.*

Heta: Power and Fragility is an exhibition of photographs by New Zealand born artist Mark Cross.

Mark Cross' usual artistic medium is that of the paintbrush and oil paint but the events of January 5th 2004 on the Pacific Island of Niue, where Mark Cross lives with his Niuean wife Ahi, compelled the artist to set about photographing the aftermath of the tropical cyclone Heta.

The recording of the devastation and chaos that the cyclone and accompanying sea surge brought to bear on the small isolated nation has resulted in an exhibition of large photographs that are disturbingly still, colourful and bright. As Mark Cross states in the catalogue that accompanies the exhibition:

How can static images the day after, a sunny, breezy, tropical day, grasp any sense of the amalgam of energy and horror of the proceeding afternoon? I came to realise that this power and horror was fossilised in the remnants of the buildings and the hearts of people whose lives were so cruelly affected by the storm. So I set about photographing the aftermath...

In traditional photojournalism the image is a fragment of the whole whose reality cannot be experienced directly in it's entirety. The whole world is there but we cannot see it. In this sense my endeavour was to represent the sense of the force of nature of the day before...¹

These works could be journalistic images yet they are more than that. For Mark Cross Niue is the ancestral home of his wife and children and has been home to both himself and his family intermittently since meeting his Niuean wife Ahi in 1970 and moving the family there in 1978. Two of his children were born and

¹ Quote: Mark Cross (2004) *Heta: Power and Fragility* Catalogue Auckland: SOCA Exit.

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one died in the now totally destroyed hospital: Mark Cross' own history is embedded in the remains of the twisted architecture recorded in this graphic exhibition.

MARK CROSS- A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY:

Mark Cross was born in Auckland, New Zealand in 1955 and grew up in West Auckland. He trained as a precision engineer after leaving school, painting in his spare time.

He met his future wife Ahi in the mid 1970's and they travelled with their young family to her homeland of Niue in 1978. They stayed in Niue for four years during which time Cross painted and studied art history through the limited resources available to him. In the early 1980's he started devoting his whole time to painting, exhibiting regularly in Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch while returning intermittently to Niue.

After the death of their eldest daughter from cancer the Cross family returned to Niue in 1995 where Mark and Ahi are still based while also maintaining a home in West Auckland.²



Photograph of Mark Cross in his studio. By Glenn Jowitt

ARTIST'S PRACTICE:

Mark Cross is a contemporary realist painter and so, by definition, his work has a quality and purpose beyond depiction.³ As Mark Cross states in the book *Mark Cross: Have We Offended*:

But realism by it's very definition is most often problematically subjective and it is the vague space between subjectivity and objectivity that I have been endeavouring to invade for the last

² Reference: Cross, Mark (2002) *Mark Cross: Have We Offended* Monograph.

³ Reference: Brown, Warwick. (1995) *Hundred New Zealand Paintings* Auckland: Godwit Publishing Ltd. Chpt:17

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two decades and in so doing dissolve the distinctions between the two.⁴

Cross' painting meticulously reveals and details the minute in the landscape, giving every stone, ripple of sand or blade of grass equal weight. This creates a granular and textured like setting in which he places his figures theatrically to articulate the work. These figures caught in timeless and almost frozen stances, stop short of providing or communicating answers to questions the works pose for the viewer. For the artist "this symbolises the loss of spiritual communion among people in this new, selfish, secular world"⁵.



Gift, 1992, Oil on Board, 120x80cm.

⁴ Reference: Cross, Mark (2002) *Mark Cross: Have We Offended* Monograph. Pg. 2.

⁵ Reference: Brown, Warwick. (1995) *Hundred New Zealand Paintings* Auckland: Godwit Publishing Ltd. Chpt: 17

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A LITTLE ABOUT NIUE:

Niue is a small Island of 258sq.km. It consists of limestone and was formed from an emerged atoll that is often referred to by the locals as 'the rock'. It's former reef and lagoon have been uplifted to about 60m above sea level. The interior is a plateau with a jagged surface that slightly depresses towards the centre. The edge of this plateau slopes steeply on all sides to a lower terrace that abruptly ends in broken cliffs in most places. These cliffs are sculptured by continuous wave action and are honeycombed with caves, chasms and blowholes. A coral reef necklace intermittently encircles the island.⁶

The soil on the island is shallow and approx. 200-sq.m. is available for the agricultural production of taro, yam, breadfruit, tapioca, kumara, bananas, passionfruit and recently vanilla. Uncleared forest covers 20% of the island and contains Banyan, Tahitian Chestnut and Kafika trees. The remainder of the island is wooded with secondary growth forming thickets. These forests and thickets were denuded of vegetation during Cyclone Heta stripping fruit from the trees which left the bird life and Flying Foxes in need of human assistance to survive.⁷

Niue was territory of New Zealand from 1901 until 1974 when the people of Niue chose to be self-governed while retaining their New Zealand citizenship. The only landowners are Niuean people and the government as the sale of Niuean land is forbidden. Alofi is the capital and administrative centre of Niue and is situated on the island's west coast, which felt the full force of Heta. Public buildings, houses, Niue Hotel, the hospital and Museum and Cultural Centre were all destroyed. The New Zealand Government has recently come to their aid by establishing a \$20 million dollar aid programme in November 2004.

The climate in Niue is humid most of the year with prevailing east to south east trade winds from April to December and variable winds from January to March which is when the storms can occur as Niue is situated on the edge of the hurricane belt.

Cyclone Heta hit Niue on January 5th 2004 and was the strongest cyclone to make landfall in Niue's recorded history. The NIWA's national weather Centre in New Zealand has predicted that Niue, along with other islands east of the International time line, will experience an increased risk of cyclones over the next cyclone season.⁸

⁶ Reference: Dept. Land and Survey (1976) *Maps of the Pacific* .

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Reference www.niuenews.nu *Niue News*. 2nd Nov. 04.

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Untitled Photograph, 2004. (From the cover of *Heta – Disaster and Resilience* Produced by Mark and Ahi Cross).

WHAT IS A TROPICAL CYCLONE?

Tropical Cyclone is the name of a Hurricane force storm in the Indian Ocean or around Australia and New Zealand ie in the South Pacific Ocean. The same force storm in the North Pacific Ocean is called a Typhoon and in the Atlantic Ocean it is called a Hurricane. A Hurricane is defined as a storm with winds of 74mph or 118.5 km/h or more, up to a maximum speed of 200mph or 326.6km/h.⁹

Storms are the Earth's air conditioners. They inhale moist heated air that has built up in the tropics, releasing the heat into the atmosphere, and propel the heated air towards the polar regions, thus restoring global thermal balance.¹⁰

These storms rotate in a clockwise motion in the Southern Hemisphere and in an anti-clockwise motion in the Northern Hemisphere. The rotating movement is called cyclonic: a term coined by a British merchant sea captain stationed in Calcutta named Henry Piddington in 1840. The fact that storms move in rotation seems commonplace today but this observation was not made until 1743. The American Benjamin Franklin was the first to record this.¹¹ Because of the earth's rotation, air (and thus a storm or cyclone) tends to rotate around a depression (or low). The influence of the rotating earth on wind flow increases with distance from the equator; at the equator it is nil. In order to stay spinning and then keep

⁹ Reference: Robinson, Andrew. (2002) *Earth Shock* (Rev. Ed.) London: Thames and Hudson Ltd.
Pg.119

¹⁰ Ibid Pg.112

¹¹ Ibid Pg.119

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spinning, cyclones need help from the earth's rotation; the further away from the Equator they stay, the more help they get.¹²

They also need heat from the ocean. The ocean surface must be near enough to the Equator to be warm yet far enough away for the rotation to be induced. The threshold temperature for Cyclone formation to occur is 26°C; at this temperature winds blowing over the ocean collect heat from the ocean surface and as the moist air rises it forms clouds. As the Cyclone begins to form the air shoots skywards to a great height (up to 9150m above the ocean) shedding the rest of the water and energising the storm.¹³

The dependence of Cyclone formation on sea surface temperatures has led some scientists to predict more frequent and fierce Hurricanes, Typhoons and Tropical Cyclones as a result of global warming.¹⁴



Falina, 2004 Archival Inkjet Print, 69x56cm. Collection of the Artist.

¹² Ibid Pg.120

¹³ Ibid.Pg 124.

¹⁴ Ibid Pg.125

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TEACHERS INFORMATION:

Exhibition Cross-Curricular Links:

Visual Art / Nga Toi:

Communicating and Interpreting in the Visual arts:

- ♣ Students will describe ways in which objects and images can communicate stories and ideas. (Level 2 – 3)
- ♣ Students explore how different media (in this case photography as opposed to Mark Cross' preferred medium of paint)) influence the communication and interpretation of ideas in Cross' work. (Level 4—7))

Understanding the Visual Arts in context:

- ♣ Examine the significance of visual art for communities and explore the artist's meaning in a social context.

Social Sciences / Tikanga A Iwi :

Social Organisation:

- ♣ How people organise themselves in response to challenge and crises. (Level 4).

Culture and Heritage:

- ♣ Features of the culture and heritage of the people of Niue. (Level 1).
- ♣ How and why cultures adapt and change. (Level 6).

Place and environment:

- ♣ How and why people record descriptions of places and environments in different ways (eg. through pictures, sound and video recordings). (Level 2)

- ♣ The implications of changes to places, for people and for the environment. (Level 6).

- ♣ How people's descriptions of places and the environment reflect particular purposes and point's of view. (Level 6).

Time, Continuity and change:

- ♣ Ways in which time and change affect people. (Level 1).
- ♣ How past events changed aspects of the lives of communities. (Level 2).
- ♣ How and why the past is important to people. (Level 2).
- ♣ Causes and effects of events that have shaped the lives of a group of people. (Level 4)
- ♣ How events have short-term and long-term causes and consequences. (Level 7).

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TEACHERS INFORMATION Cont:

Ways To Prepare For A Visit To Heta: Power And Fragility:

- ♣ Discuss with students the geography, social history and location of Niue.
- ♣ Discuss what a Tropical cyclone is and how it is formed.
- ♣ Have the students recall their own feelings when a big storm has passed over their place.

Some possible post-visit work:

- ♣ Discuss with students the overall exhibition.
- ♣ Discuss how and if an exhibition of photographs in an art museum in Northland New Zealand can help the people of Niue's recovery and rebuilding after Cyclone Heta.
- ♣ Have students discuss how they could help their community after a natural disaster.

RESOURCES AVAILABLE WITH EXHIBITION:

Exhibition catalogue: *Mark Cross – Heta: Power and Fragility* \$2.25

Book: *Heta: Disaster and Resilience.* \$16.85

A picture book compiled and produced by Mark and Ahi Cross and published in conjunction with the Niue Government. Documenting the damage, the people, picking up the pieces, before and after, the art, the windfall and the rebuilding of Niue.

Book: *Mark Cross – Have We Offended.* \$24.95

A book published and written by Mark Cross exploring his painting practice. Copy available at the exhibiton. (Available for sale at The Piggery Bookshop, Walton St., Whangarei)

Handout: Exhibition Profile: Heta Power and Fragility. Free

UNPD Documentary: *Heta:* Available for viewing free at the exhibition.

Woven Baskets by Niuean weaver Falina Koutrifa. Made from fallen coconut palm fronds. Available in four Sizes: \$50.00, \$55.00, \$60.00, \$65.00

Exhibition Poster - Colour \$4.00

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EXHIBITION TASKSHEET FOR SECONDARY STUDENTS

1. Welcome to the Whangarei Art Museum. On entering the Museum take your time to observe the layout, atmosphere and presentation of the work in the exhibition *Heta: Power and Fragility*.
2. The artist, Mark Cross documents the aftermath of destruction left by Cyclone Heta; the largest and most powerful cyclone to hit Niue in recorded history. Niue lost 90% of the historical artefacts housed in the Niue Museum and Cultural Centre when Cyclone Heta Hit. Check out the artefacts on display, watch the DVD and read the text panels.
3. What do you think inspired Mark Cross to develop this body of work?

4. Why do you think the artist has used the medium of photography for this exhibition as opposed to his usual medium of painting?

5. What pictorial devices has Cross used in these works and why? Check out the artists viewpoint, his use of (or lack of) the horizon line in the compositions, and the format he has presented the large works in; ie an almost square, as opposed to a landscape, format?

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EXHIBITION TASKSHEET FOR Y4 TO Y8 STUDENTS

1. Welcome to the Whangarei Art Museum. Take your time to look around the exhibition then sit and listen to the DVD.
2. In the exhibition there are photographs of Niuean women weaving baskets like the ones on display. What did Cyclone Heta make available to the weavers?

3. Why do the birds and Flying Foxes on Niue need people to feed them?

4. What names are given to a storm the same strength as a Tropical Cyclone in other parts of the world?

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BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCE LIST

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Cross, Mark. (2004) *Heta: Power and Fragility* Auckland: SOCA Exit (Exhibition Catalogue).

Cross, Mark (2002) *Mark Cross: Have We Offended* Auckland : Cross Publishing.

Dept. Land and Survey (1976) *Maps of the Pacific* . Auckland: Dept. Land and Surveys.

Robinson, Andrew. (2002) *Earth Shock* (Rev. Ed.) London: Thames and Hudson Ltd.

www.niuenews.nu Niue News. 2nd Nov. 04.

RELEVANT SITES ON LINE:

www.niueisland.nu -The official website of the Niue people.

www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/ne.html. - Geographical information on Niue.

www.mcross.com - The official Mark Cross website.

www.markcross.nu - Another Mark Cross Website.

Visit our website to view this exhibition plus past exhibitions

We are on line at:

www.whangareiartmuseum.co.nz

View information for past exhibitions and find background information to compliment this exhibition education resource kit.

This Education Kit was compiled and written by Maree Saunders B.F.A.
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