

## Notes on the painting *Amuia*

(prepared by Fatu Feu'u and Director of The Diversion Gallery, Barbara Speedy)



This monumental painting by Fatu Feu'u, inspired by a major social issue, anchored the 2018 exhibition *Facing Change* at The Diversion Gallery, Picton – believed to be the largest painting ever shown in Marlborough. This painting will anchor an exhibition at Parliament in September 2018, about tackling issues of youth suicide and mental illness.

Entitled *Amuia* (a blessing) (mixed media on unstretched canvas, 2018, 2000x5200mm), it's one of the largest Feu'u has painted; because he is so fired up about the need for family and communities to nurture our young people better in the face of increasing youth suicide and depression. A tough subject to be sure, but he has created an incredibly uplifting colourful painting, a suggested pathway forward, encouraging a greater sense of spirituality in our young people, taking a lead from our ancestors and addressing the issues leading youth to such desperate measures.

Fatu Feu'u has 8 children, 8 grandchildren and one great-grandchild, and is very conscious of the need for ongoing guidance even after our young people leave home.

*Amuia* (a blessing) is the beginning (and largest) of a new series of paintings in which he is taking the ideas through in a looser more abstract manner, rather than this more formal composition with motifs he is best known for, from tradition and his own visual language.

The motifs:

- The vast capital letter 'I' stands for Ifoga, the tradition of rebuilding and/or reconciliation, with two sides coming together, hence the colours meeting and overlaid with significant icons.
- The kissing/talking fish here represent better communication between parents and communities and their young people – going beyond simply existing in the same household in a world of electronic absorption.
- The fish without tails represent young people who need a sense of where they came from to know where they are going to – otherwise they are rudderless looking to the future.
- The central goddess refers to the 'Long Nosed God' of Samoan spiritual tradition, here matriarchal, while masks and the flying 'gogo' figures refer to ancient gods, ancestors and guardians, amid symbols of old sailing traditions, pathways, and new life.
- Five handprints were made on the canvas by Feu'u's granddaughter Lola. The inscriptions and blessings from the Bible also refer to spiritual connection, (Feu'u is not personally particularly religious, but recognises the significance of Christian faith in contemporary Samoan culture). In this case they were appropriate to the concepts of family walking together, and the blessing of children.

## **Fatu Feu'u: thoughts on pathways forward to counter youth suicide**

# 1 is Communication between Parents and their Children - it must be a weekly event: a phone call, a letter, a conversation about positive directions for the children to follow. Use quotations from the Bible eg Book of Psalms chapter 1 verse 1-6 - it's about the need to avoid bad associations that spoil useful habits.

Also a written letter, or an email telling our kids that we still love, and cherish them. Ask them to spend time once a month if possible to talk on personal issues etc.

# 2 We all have Cultures to believe in, and take it as a strength to carry our lives through difficult times. For example, the Polynesians have been great navigators of the Pacific Oceans during the last 2000 years - use it as a reminder that we have a destination in our journey in life; that is, we must reach that destination of great-grandparents to pass down the knowledge to the next generations.

# 3 Memorise segments of poetry, songs, uplifting speeches that give us all the energy to live and share the knowledge with your fellow man. Some examples include Shakespeare's love poems, also Neruda, and Rupert Brooke; every day on the radio there are love songs to keep us focused on home comforts; and the great speech of Dr Martin Luther King *I have a dream*, talking about hope and salvation - he said "I went up the mountain and I saw the new Jerusalem"

# 4 Community sharing of the load, through Education and facilities to identify and promote help where it's needed for mental illness and young offenders. The law makers and politicians need to exercise wisdom in passing laws etc that clash with some cultural issues, Some of our laws are not fully understood by some of the minority in NZ. The law society in NZ must ensure that all ethnic groups are well informed on changes or the exercising of existing laws.

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