

## ARTS

# In a New York minute...

American writer Thomas Wolfe wrote, 'One belongs to New York instantly, one belongs to it as much in five minutes, as in five years.'

New York is indeed the centre of the western universe (as far as it is concerned) and all are perfectly welcome, in fact the more the merrier.

A virtual human zoo, New York

is a gargantuan city of 8.2 million 'locals' crammed on to an island of 22.7 square miles. This state of affairs is further convoluted by 46 million tourists who visit this global capital city and spend USD28 billion while in town (2007 estimates).

New York's mantra could quite easily be 'Let meeeeeee entertain

you'. Imagine UK rock star Robbie Williams at full throttle. It is very much a celebrity city, a self-sustaining, hyped up, mega entity that runs at one speed, full speed, 24/7.

After the initial shock wears off, NYC turns on a surprisingly human side, people are very polite and if you can't follow the grid layout of the city, directions are

easy to find.

Consumerism, capitalism, voyeurism and narcissism are all city staples as is 'talk culture' – the uniquely American blight that has elevated verbal diarrhoea to an art form. But, hey this is America after all, and it just wouldn't be the same without it.

Nothing can really prepare the uninitiated but it is surprising how quickly you come to terms with the city that never sleeps.

Depending on how much time you have, there is an everlasting supply of experiences in NYC. Famous museums, Broadway shows, 5th Avenue, Soho, Greenwich Village, Harlem, Times Square, Yankee Stadium, Wall Street, Ground Zero, 1800 restaurants and bars... the list really is inexhaustible.

But, we were here for a different reason – to research modern contemporary art, its place (and potentially ours) in American art circles and return a part of the NYC experience to Avarua.

Meeting with the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the American Indian Community House, The Smithsonian and the Asia Society, we were pleased to hear the various opinions and avenues available to contemporary art practice from the Pacific.

Viewing the new Oceanic Gallery of the Metropolitan Museum, we discovered a rare Mitiaro staff god in exceptional condition displayed alongside a Rarotongan staff god.

Earlier this month, Cook Islands artist Mahiriki Tangaroa along with Beachcomber Gallery directors Ben Bergman and Luke Brown and NZ artist Andy Leleisi'uao visited New York City. This is their report on this venture to test the market for Cook Islands art.

In 2004, the Asia Society hosted 'Paradise Now?' an exhibition of New Zealand and Pacific contemporary art that included Peter Peryer, Michel Tuffery, Bill Hammond, John Ioane and John Pule. Both Tuffery and Pule have exhibited in Rarotonga.

Earlier this year the American Indian Community House hosted the NZ Maori festival of Matariki which was so well received, it will now become an annual event. NZ artist Lorene Taurerewa will also open there in October.

Options for reciprocal residencies were discussed and it became apparent that we were to achieve our aims of representing our art form and investigating further opportunities for growth and experience. The upcoming Pacific Arts Association Conference (PAA) in Rarotonga in 2010 was also discussed and it was clear that the overall expectation is high.

A significant American presence is expected at this conference.

Of note is the upcoming exhibition of photography by New Zealand artist Shigeyuki Kihara which will open at the Metropolitan Museum of Art on 7 October.



Artists Mahiriki Tangaroa and Andy Leleisi'uao (right) presenting Foreign Affairs & Immigration Minister the Hon Wilkie Rasmussen with the New York Art Report. 08082809

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Kihara serves as a regional trail-blazer and will further bring to the attention of the American public an avant garde art form that is emerging from the Pacific. Originally shown at the Sherman Gallery in Sydney, the somewhat controversial series of self portraits have elevated this artist to an international level.

To complement our meetings, we visited the famous art area of Chelsea whose warehouse district houses 300 galleries within four city blocks.

Speaking with a private gallerist, we gathered information on exhibition options and what the expectations were of New York galleries and the art buying public. Many galleries in Chelsea already

represent overseas artists including NZ Maori artist Rangi Kipa, but few are familiar with Pacific based contemporary art practice.

In between all this we got to know NYC and some of what she offers.

Dealing with cabbies that seemed to delight in an endless game of dodgems and 'chicken' with all traffic and sundry, witnessing the very best of modern art – Picasso's 'Les Femmes d'Alger' as well as overtly famous paintings by Paul Gauguin, Jackson Pollock, Robert Rauschenberg, Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein (to name but a few) and perhaps the most famous New York art sculpture of all, the lady of the harbour, La liberté éclairant le monde, or as it is more commonly know, The

Statue of Liberty.

One of Americas most recognised icons, the statue towers 93 metres above New York Harbour and is visited annually by approximately 5 million admirers. Gifted to the people of America by the Republic of France, the statue was erected on Liberty Island in 1886.

Meant to acknowledge the centenary of the signing of the US Declaration of Independence in 1776, the statue's late installation meant that its purpose and meaning evolved

and has now come to represent all that the American nation is.

New York is a city that truly gets into your blood. It is a city with impossibly high expectations and a people that are monstrously competitive but at the same time, surprisingly respectful.

Everything is available to you, usually at most hours, daunting at first but refreshing none the less.

As an art resource, New York is priceless, housing modern and ancient art treasures and famous

art institutions known the world over. Opportunity abounds and it is up to each and every one to take advantage of it.

'I go where the noise is' said Neil Diamond at Madison Square Garden on the second night of a three-night sellout show.

Yeah, so should we.

Our profound appreciation to Air New Zealand, the Cook Islands Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the New Zealand High Commission, Rarotonga and New York.



The very best of modern art – Les Femmes d'Alger, oil on canvas, Pablo Picasso, 243.9cm x 233.7cm, 1907. Collection of the Museum of Modern Art, New York City. 08082805



Beachcomber art directors Mahiriki Tangaroa and Ben Bergman (right) with Virginia-Lee Webb, research curator for the department of the arts of Africa, Oceania, and the Americas at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City. 08082804



# New Gallery Summer 2008

