Forever Fresh Talanoa Series 2.1

BE(COM)ING GLOBAL

by Ioana Gordon-Smith, Rosanna Raymond, Tanu Gago

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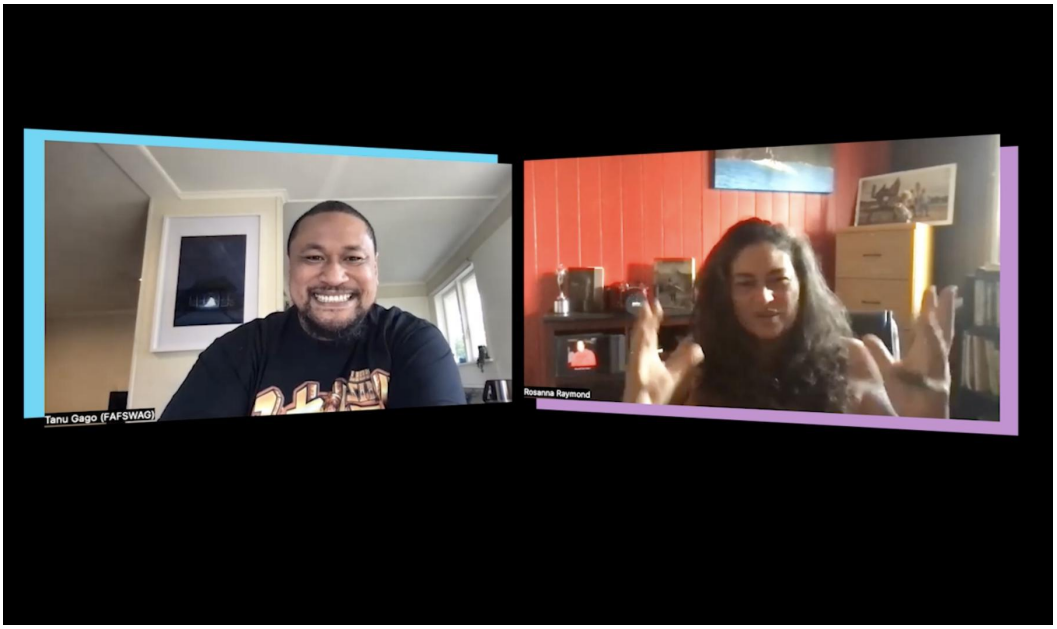

Episode One of our second Talanoa Series features Sistar S'pacific aka Rosanna Raymond and Tanu Gago reflecting on recent projects—Raymond with SaVĀge K'lub at Birmingham Museum in the UK and Gago with FAFSWAG at documenta 15 in Kassel. Recorded over Zoom, the pair discuss the difficulties of presenting internationally and of sustaining an art practice, being boxed in as 'other', and what it means to be Moana artists working in countries with cultural amnesia over their colonial pasts.

*Click here to watch this first episode of the Talanoa series on In*ter*is*land Collective's website, and continue reading below for Ioana Gordon-Smith's response to the video.*



Sistar S'pacific aka Rosanna Raymond. Photo: Salvador Brown.



Tanu Gago. Photo: Pati Tyrell.



Forever Fresh Talanoa Series 2.1 BE(COM)ING GLOBAL with Rosanna Raymond and Tanu Gago, 2022. Courtesy In*ter*is*land Collective.



Forever Fresh Talanoa Series 2, 2022. Courtesy In*ter*is*land Collective.



Forever Fresh Talanoa Series 2.1 BE(COM)ING GLOBAL with Rosanna Raymond and Tanu Gago, both artists based in Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand, 2022. Facilitated in collaboration with In*ter*is*land Collective.

Do You Have Time for My Ancestors?

Tanu Gago and Rosanna Raymond on long arcs and resisting reducibility

In the arts world, introductions function almost like an elevator pitch, but you're the product. Presenting your truncated CV, you describe who you are, where you're from, what you do, why you're here and, less overtly, why they should care, all in the span of a handshake. International art events bring curators, artists and collectors together from across borders, but for a short amount of time. Everyone competes for attention, and meetings between strangers are super economical.

Artists Tanu Gago and Rosanna Raymond introduce themselves at the start of this talanoa for the benefit of future viewers, and immediately acknowledge the awkward shortcomings of the 'bio' format. The talanoa between Tanu and Rosanna was prompted, in part, by their recent international presentations, with FAFSWAG presenting at documenta fifteen in Kassel, Germany, and SaVĀge K'lub opening their exhibition *Vā TAMATEA* at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery in the UK. Presentations of Moana art from Aotearoa in offshore exhibitions are often still stuck in the 'introduction' moment. As Rosanna notes, in comparison to other non-Western regions, such as Asia or Latin America, the Pacific is a relative baby in the international art scene. Consequently, the pressures of offering a pithy context are intense. Art historian Nora A. Taylor once noted that in 'global' art events, non-Western artists are often framed as ethnographic shorthand for the geographies they represent. But here, too, our geographical context of the great ocean often requires explanation itself, to resurface the specifics of island nations and the specifics of diaspora contexts. As Rosanna jokes, the constant work of explanation can be 'exhaustipating'.

Collectives, in particular, test exhibition didactics. Tanu observes that FAFSWAG's works often include numerous performers, collaborators and crew, and present a problem for text limits, while Rosanna reminds us that materials also have their own gafa, or lineages, that could warrant naming on a wall label. Practices and specific works are also translated into the international art language of biennales by exhibition curators, often favouring buzzwords that fit word limits. As Tanu asks, "Do you have room for our Ancestors?" The distinction between what does and doesn't make it into a wall text, a media interview, an intro is revealed to be an arbitrary boundary.

During the talanoa, Tanu speaks of "arriving at your audience". Given the brevity of didactic wall texts, the presence of artists can offer a way of correcting misinformation or offering a deeper insight into a work. But if the places you're travelling to are overtly racist, what is gained from being there? Is it about witnessing the sneers, the looks, in person, or dispelling the fantasy of the 'international'? Even then, can a travelling artist understand a place without spending a lot of time there? Ironically,

though, the Pacific has long histories with both the UK and Germany, localities that are ghosted by their respective colonisation of the Pacific. While most empires experience a cultural amnesia over their colonial pasts, artists enact what Rosanna describes as “a long-overdue reminder”.

Tanu and Rosanna, then, approach international presentations not as the career pinnacles they’re often perceived as, but instead as moments on long arcs of artistic practice. Rather than a ‘final destination’, documenta fifteen and Birmingham sit within longer concerns about the wellbeing of an arts collective, back-end housekeeping, and how sustainability, both mental and financial, is achieved.

Perhaps most obviously, this talanoa happens in the middle space of collegiality, between peers who already know each other. The recorded talanoa comes in 33 minutes over that 45-minute length we originally pitched. Ranging from polite versus overt racism, flop eras, the break-ups and the make-ups, artists’ fees and hypervisibility, the talanoa is a reminder of how generous a discussion can be when it’s unburdened of the work of explaining and containing everything, when you don’t have to introduce yourself, and when you can meet each other not at the beginning or the end, but in the middle of a relationship. Coming away from the talanoa, what I’m struck by are these long arcs that deny the fantasy of the international moment and instead integrate international presentations within various trajectories of entangled histories, of sustaining an art practice, of friendships that will persist well after the Zoom meeting or exhibition ends.

This is the first of three edited talanoa in our second series produced with In*ter*island Collective. Click here to view the first Forever Fresh Talanoa Series, released in 2021.

Biographies



Ioana Gordon-Smith is a Sāmoan/Pākehā arts writer and curator living in Aotearoa New Zealand. Across her work is a commitment to Moana arts practices and their histories. She has held roles at Artspace Aotearoa, Objectspace and Te Uru Waitākere Contemporary Gallery, and currently works as the Curator Māori Pacific at Pātaka Art + Museum. Ioana is the Assistant Curator of *Yuki Kihara: Paradise Camp*, the Aotearoa New Zealand Pavilion at the 59th Venice Biennale, and co-curator of the international Indigenous triennial, *Naadohbii: To Draw Water* in Winnipeg, Canada. She is also the co-founder and co-editor of *Marinade: Aotearoa Journal of Moana Art* and a trustee for Enjoy Contemporary Art Space, Te Whanganui-a-Tara Wellington. As well as writing for art journals, magazines and exhibition catalogues, Ioana has contributed to publications produced by Thames & Hudson, Routledge, ARP Books and Te Papa Press.



Sistar S'pacific aka Rosanna Raymond is notable producer of, and commentator on contemporary Pacific culture in Aotearoa and internationally. She is a long-standing member of the art collective the Pacific Sisters and a founding member of the SaVAge K'lub. Raymond specialises in working within museums and tertiary institutions, and has achieved international renown for her writing, poetry, performances, installations, body adornment, and spoken word. Raymond was awarded the CNZ Pacific Senior Artist for 2018 acknowledging her contribution to the arts, a former Chester Dale Fellow at the Met in NYC and holds a Master of Philosophy from Auckland University of Technology.



Tanu Gago (he/him) MNZM, is an interdisciplinary artist of Sāmoan heritage working at the intersections of, digital arts, live performance, film and Queer activism. Gago is an 'artist in development' with Piki Films, and one of the founding members of FAFSWAG; a Queer Indigenous arts collective based in Aotearoa and who are 2020's NZ Arts Foundation Arts Laureates.

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