

## ON CURATING: “TĪAHO” – A CONVERSATION WITH CURATOR GILES PETERSON

Jacque Phipps and Giles Peterson

*My images are a reflection of my current environment and help 'narrate' my journey through the two worlds I inhabit, often using music as a foundation.*

This paper presents a narrative interview with independent curator Giles Peterson about his 2010 project, “Tīaho,” a group photographic and moving image exhibition from Oceania – the first of its kind to show in Mexico City – with reflection and contextualisation from Jacque Phipps. The show presented 28 artists with New Zealand Maori, Pakeha, Aboriginal and Islander backgrounds from Fiji, Samoa, Niue, Tonga, the Cook Islands, Tahiti, Papua New Guinea and Australia. The “Tīaho” exhibition featured key works by Torika Bolatagici, Edith Amituanai, Ruth Choulai, Reweti Arepere, Becky Nunes, Kay George, Melanie FerDon, Leilani Kake, Terry Klavenes, Kieran Keat, Leilani Kake, Tracey Tawhiao, Vinesh Kumaran, Anita Jacobsen, Rosanna Raymond, Niki Hastings-McFall, Nooroa Tapuni, Greg Semu, Marlon Rivers, Siliga Setoga, Evotia Tamua, Tracey Moffatt, Janet Lilo, Shigeyuki Kihara, Lonnie Hutchinson, Angela Tiatia, Lisa Taouma and Michel Tuffery.<sup>1</sup>

*It was like a visual configuration of a waka or vaka – a cloud formation – of people, sea, sky – the Pacific Ocean – the largest ocean in the world, an ocean that also connects the peoples of Mexico.*

Giles Peterson

Along with conceptual, political and geographical boundaries, the boundaries of academic thinking and writing are being pushed here also. This piece of writing is presented as a layered metaphor of exhibition. Commentary, conversation and contextualisation appear alongside, presenting, woven through and framing the works and Peterson’s crafted responses



Figure 1. Marlon Rivers, *Othersreq Bitch!* (2010), digital print. Courtesy of the artist.



Figure 2. “Tīaho: Photography and Moving Image from Oceania,” El Centro Cultural Multidisciplinario, “El Casetón,” Iztapalapa, Ciudad de Mexico, April 2010.

and stories. Curator as artist and writer as curator: Together we offer a variety of discourses both critical and descriptive that relate to some key curatorial ideas such as: postcolonial representation and the notion of 'represent' (to make a statement through presence, words and actions); independent curating; collaboration, networking, opportunity and access; community activation; curating the polyphonic or third space<sup>2</sup> and the altermodern<sup>3</sup> – all pertinent to the literal and metaphorical border crossings and relationships discussed.<sup>4</sup> As contemporary curator and interview enthusiast Hans Ulrich Obrist summarised in his forward to Caroline Thea's *On Curating* (2009), "the twenty-first century curator is a catalyst – a bridge between the local and the global ... This is a metaphor for how one crosses the border of the self."<sup>5</sup>

Much has been made over the last century, through the Western academic and artistic heritage, of the importance of materials, methods and language to message and meaning, and vice versa. The writer and curator believe this direct access to the "little narratives"<sup>6</sup> offers a subjective phenomenological encounter with the exhibition and the ideas, in keeping with the values and intentions of the exhibition and the works incorporated within it. This qualitative and naturalistic research paradigm is focused on discovery, insight, and understanding from the perspective of the curator; sometimes reflective and always experiential. The narratives, particularly, also value indigenous oral traditions, and arguably the study of narrative is the study of the ways humans experience the world.<sup>7</sup> The narrative (direct and reflective) and commentary provide different bridges and points of access and invite readers to wander and linger.

Building upon the well-established positions of John Dewey<sup>8</sup> and Michael Polanyi,<sup>9</sup> valuing experience, knowledge development and discourse are all recognised, especially in the field of art, as broader than verbal. Gee describes discourse as a tool of inquiry: "People build identities and activities not just through language but by using other stuff together with other stuff that isn't language."<sup>10</sup> The conceiving of, organising and putting on, the exhibition and the reflections upon these constitute knowledge-building research. Lingering, whether it be over images, activities or words, has been described as inviting "discoveries, emergent issues, and ideas," and as mobilising "ways of seeing, and being."<sup>11</sup> Utilising reflective conversation (the interview) and the narrative also reveals the relational characteristics of these collaborative and community-based events (the exhibitions and this article). Moments of chance, opportunity and the unexpected appear; much like in art-making.

Ideas can sometimes become detached and reconnect in precarious contexts, 'becoming' misrepresented and misread. These 'misses' are arguably new shapes and new knowledge. Knowledge is becoming<sup>12</sup> – 'it' is in a state of perpetual emergence and rhizome-like in nature – without beginning, end or centre.

In his article on art research methodologies in *Scope* last year (2011), George Petelin argues that "if the product is not entirely pre-planned, it can potentially generate new knowledge that is intrinsically artistic,"<sup>13</sup> and he champions sampling from a variety of methods to offer different points of access and experiences. These ideas sit happily with curating as both art-making and curating wrangle, broker, posit, and mediate.

Art and its presentation are also inherently interdisciplinary and arguably reflect and thus offer unique opportunities for the artist, the curator, the writer and the viewer to challenge definitions and explore and engage with life's complexities.<sup>14</sup>



Figure 3. Edith Amituanai, *The House of Tiatia* (2007), type c print. From the Dejeuner Series. Courtesy of the artist.

*I photograph my surroundings and people I know as if they are unfamiliar, although what I want to show is an intimate and particular view.*

**JP:** How do you describe your curating style or approach?

**GP:** For the last 20 years I have worked as a lecturer and curator. Nearly all my curatorial work has been aimed at young people, and my projects are known for increasing the visibility of young people and young Pacific artists and their work.<sup>15</sup> The community house model of curating has been pivotal to my work. I began curating at a small community gallery called Uxbridge in Howick in Manukau City East. The communities out there are very diverse, but also divided. Art and exhibitions became a way to bridge that, to raise issues of significance to the local community and beyond, and bring different communities together. All of these exhibitions were accompanied by public education programmes – and schools both local and from out of the area always came. I remember Pat Bonnette, one of the artists exhibiting in “Pacific Dragons – The Art of Protest and Promise” (Uxbridge Gallery 1996), who was a local art teacher doing classes with children, brought her tiny tots to do drawings of their favourite works, and we showed their work as part of the exhibition. It was very kool.

Musicians like Emma Paki and others came and performed in a music festival we organised as part of that show. Lonnie Hutchinson and other artists did art workshops as part of the public programme, and there were artist and curator talks around the politics and themes of the show. I remember Diane Prince, who was one of the exhibitors, giving a talk with me about why the Treaty is important.

**JP:** How did “Tiaho” going international fit with this community approach?

**GP:** The exhibition showed in three community spaces and broke fresh ground in bringing Pacific art to new communities. The first was The Instituto Latino de Mexico, a high school in Coyoacan, Mexico City, where I documented and ran workshops with the students on social curating, and had them assist in the installation of “Tiaho.” The second venue, Centro Cultural Multidisciplinario, “El Casetón,” Mexico City, is a community art space where the exhibition showed in conjunction with a photography exhibition by queer Mexican artists and alongside a Latino-Caribbean-wide Indigenous music and reggae festival. The third “Tiaho” venue was the Palacio Municipal of Ciudad Nezahualcōyotl, a town hall in one of the poorest and [most] crime-ridden gang areas in Mexico State. By mounting the exhibition within places located at the far boundary of the Pacific, “Tiaho” brought an entirely new audience and communities to the work.

**JP:** In your presentation to the AAANZ (Art Association of Australia and New Zealand) Conference: Tradition and Transformation, in December 2010 at the University of Adelaide and the Art Gallery of South Australia, you initially characterised your show as “guerilla curating.” What is guerilla curating?



Figure 4. Centro Cultural Multidisciplinario, “El Casetón,” Iztapalapa, District Federal, Mexico City, April 2010.

**GP:** Curators are on the move – from info-mediator to guerilla curator. Paco Barragan, artist/curator in the Saatchi Gallery’s online magazine, says: “We are experiencing a clear paradigm shift in curatorial practice and its context.”<sup>29</sup> He quotes Mathew Collings, the art critic: “Now there is a definitive new type of curator, attractively hustlerish and modern, akin to DJs and fashion people – someone in a definite scene, one you’d like to be in yourself.”<sup>30</sup> And Ernesto Pujol from Art Journal, the magazine of art schools in the United States: “This is the age of the curator; everybody wants to be a curator.”<sup>31</sup>

**JP:** So they’re all referring to curators who are up with the latest trends, who are outside the bigger, slower public institutions?

**GP:** Yes, a guerilla curator is an independent curator who uses guerilla tactics in their practice. A curator who rejects conventional exhibition methods. A curator who sets and conceives exhibitions in unconventional places: offices, shops and shopping windows, factories, townhouses, and abandoned or temporarily unoccupied spaces, flats.

The concept is a relatively new phenomenon. There are some art fair curators and dealer gallerists who use guerilla tactics, but the majority of practitioners are young independent curators or artist-curators. It comes of course from guerrilla street art practices and also, like guerilla art, it references guerrilla warfare and the more recent guerrilla terrorism – with moving targets that appear and then disappear in an instant.

**JP:** The term 'guerilla' grew out of revolution against real and perceived tyranny. Guerilla curators are political and fighting against the power of the traditional public and commercial gallery systems. But in fact you have concerns about the use of the term 'guerilla' to describe what you do generally and, specifically, what you did with "Tiaho" in Mexico. It seems to me that while your practice may share some guerilla characteristics, it is far from deliberately warlike in its values and intent. It is more about community action, education and empowerment. All of these of course can be challenging, confrontational and subversive, depending upon the communities involved and the socio-political issues facing them. Once again, the boundaries of definitions are being challenged here. How might the curating of "Tiaho" be considered political?

**GP:** It was quite guerrilla in the sense of being under the wire. The "Tiaho" exhibition was done quite quickly. We are talking a couple of months for the organisation of the exhibition in Mexico City. Of course it's one thing to say you're going to curate an exhibition. It's another thing to make it a reality. And I suggested, when I had this brainwave in the middle of the night, "Oh, we could do it at the school!" I would really love to do an exhibition project aimed at teenagers, because most of my curating is targeted towards young people, as is my teaching, and it kind of goes hand in hand.

All the kids in Mexico at the high school got it straight away. It was a multi-layered exhibition talking about multiple perspectives and experiences – the survival and resurgence of Urban Pacific experience in art, music, body art, language, film, photography ... and politics. People are politics. This exhibition of photography was political. Just taking the exhibition to Mexico was political.

**JP:** So how did "Tiaho" come about, and why Mexico?

**GP:** Well, in 2009 I visited Mexico and stayed with a friend of mine, Dr Othon Lugo Cruz, who is a senior teacher at the Instituto Latino de Mexico (a high school) in the colonia: San Pablo Tepetlapa in the suburb of Coyoacán, in the



Figure 5. Students from the Instituto Latino de Mexico, Coyoacán, District Federal, Mexico City, April 2010.



Figure 6. Evotia Tamua, *St Josephs Catholic Schoolgirls*, Grey Lynn, Auckland, New Zealand (2001), colour print. Courtesy of the artist.

*Grey Lynn – a documentary project of the Grey Lynn shops, focusing on the people that travel through the area during the day and night.*

southern part of Mexico City. During this time I was staying in his house in nearby Iztapalapa – in the eastern side of the District Federal of Mexico City. I spent at least eight weeks with Dr Cruz and his family, and also with some friends of ours including Fernando Hernandez, who is a social worker and artist who works on social programmes in health, sport and education for the PRD party, which is the sitting left-wing political party in the borough of Iztapalapa, and also with other friends as well who were artists and educators.

The idea for curating an exhibition came from Othon and Fernando. After I had experienced the hospitality of their families, friends, and neighbours in their houses, Othon said: "Giles, it would be a really good idea when you next come to Mexico if you curate an exhibition" – and that was how it started back then in 2009. In 2010 I had the opportunity to travel to Davis, California, to the University of California. Taking advantage of being in America, I took a two-week break in Mexico City.

"Tiaho" was an exhibition of photography and moving image and I carried it in a two-metre architectural tube, plus some works that were framed photographs and a lei necklace sculpture made of photographs – by the artist Niki Hastings-McFall – and some other photographic works in small tubes in my suitcase.

The thing about the artists I work with is they don't just work in photography, they also might be working in performance, video, sculpture and installation; some do drawing and paintings, as well – so they have multidisciplinary practices, but I also knew they also had work in photography or video that they had never shown. So even in my approach or choice of artists whose work I wanted to show, it was quite unusual in the sense that not everyone was known as a photographer or video artist.

"Tiaho" was the first exhibition of contemporary photography and moving image from Oceania to show in Mexico City. And not only that, it was the first time the exhibiting artists had shown in Mexico, and that was quite a thrill.



Figure 7. Terry Koloamatangi Klavenes, *Untitled 2, South Auckland* (2009), digital photograph on archival paper.  
Courtesy of the artist.

*I'm interested in the relationship the viewer has with the photograph; how their reading of the image and the emotional response the photograph evokes can be based on their own personal story, their life experiences, values and beliefs.*



All of the artists that I approached knew that it was going to be under the wire – that I was going to basically be showing it in a high school, and that I would be taking it rolled up in a tube, that I couldn't afford to insure it, and that was the risk if they wanted to participate. No one said no, and everybody was quite excited. So that was how that happened.

So that's why the title was there. And the title is important.

**JP:** Tīaho: shine your light – el foco, iluminar. Photography: writing in light; video: to see.

**GP:** Until I have the title for a project, it doesn't have an entity. It's like a baby – you're creating this living, breathing thing. Artists that were former students; artists who I have long working relationships with – I also approached artists that I had never worked with before. My whole point about that is I'm quite democratic about the selection of artists for an exhibition – I'm not really hung up with celebrity or all of that, nor interested in vanity art projects and exhibitions. It's more that I've got something in mind, I'm looking for a certain feeling – it's a multiple feeling; and in a way I'm crafting a visual experience, or several experiences, through a group exhibition which could have anyone from, say, like Tracey Moffatt to a young student in the final year of a degree. I actually think that's quite exciting, mixing things up. And it's all about the project for me, and what we are trying to achieve.

I say 'we' because all the work I do is collaborative. I could not have done it without the artists, nor without Othon, or Fernando or some of their friends, and I could not have done it without Whitecliffe, or without some faculty including Melanie FerDon, who actually designed the digital catalogue of the exhibition for me. There was no money to print or publish a catalogue in the sense of a book, so what I did was organise a digital catalogue, which had images, a bilingual essay and titles. A digital catalogue could be burnt; it could be given out and distributed for free. It was easy for the young audiences in Mexico, as well – they are all into digital.

The second thing about the project was that it was only going to be one exhibition showing. Up until about five weeks before I left New Zealand, it was only going to be shown at the school. But in the meantime, my friends were really really excited ...

On the Monday morning we got up at 4am, left at 5am and got to the high school at 7am (two hours through the Mexico City traffic). This school is located in the southern part of Mexico City; there are about 1500 students at the college, two streams a day, so long hours for the teachers. We got there at 7am and unloaded the car. Othon and the school had organised an empty classroom in advance to be made available for the exhibition, and he and his students had also placed temporary walls in the middle of the classroom for the exhibition as well. (I had sent a plan in my proposal for a suggested layout.) Of course, it all changed when I got in the space and unpacked the work. Some of Othon's students in his form class had made a sign in glitter and coloured pencil saying "Tīaho: Photography from Oceania Exhibition." That was on the wall.

There was me, Fernando, Othon and ten of his students from his form class who were there to help install the work. We unrolled the tube and I had a discussion with the students and directed the placing of the work (e.g., told them to place Janet Lilo's 150 photographs from *top 16* all around the bottom of the gallery wall). The whole idea was to have the students learn what it's like to install and organise an exhibition. (This was followed up afterwards with the classes I talked to that day and a workshop I did with them on social curating and using digital photography and social media work as exhibition.) As well as installing the exhibition, they had to document it as well, so several of the students photographed the installation and made videos of the exhibition on their cell phones as part of the project, also photographing each other and their friends in front of their favourite works. The whole installing process was very rapid – one and a half hours basically before the bell rang and the first class started.

Once the exhibition was up, the principal came around and welcomed me to the school and said how excited the school was to host the exhibition and how much he loved the artwork. He had travelled to Sydney and many parts

of the world and thought it was a marvellous thing to bring such an exhibition to his school. (Later at the end of the exhibition he gave me a letter of thanks and said Please come back and do more projects and I was welcome to visit the school anytime I liked.)

**JP:** Tīaho's doors are open – how did all of these diverse artists and their work speak to you – what were you hoping the Mexican visitors would see?

**GP:** *Afio Mai* means welcome in Samoan and the symbol of a lei is a sign of welcome – that is why Niki Hasting-McFall's work was the first work you encountered in the space. A lei is given to someone as a sign of respect and welcome. Niki's work consisted of a lei made of photographs from a collection of slides taken by her grandfather. The lei was hung over a framed photo of a beach in West Auckland. The image was taken when Niki was a small girl, and she is in the photo – it was a piece of New Zealand, a highly personal work; an honouring and connection to family, memory, good times and to place.

Marlon River's photos and video works, Terry Klavenes's photos, Vinesh Kumaran, Kay George and Anita Jacobsen's photos, and Janet Lilo's photographic installation were all of young people – young urban Polynesians. Melanie FerDon (who is Mexican–American and lives in New Zealand) presents a candid photograph portrait of her son, Damien. Evtotia Tamua, Greg Semu and Siliga Setoga's photographic work and Lonnie Hutchinson's video work explore intergenerational connection – the importance of honouring elders and of young people in Pacific families and communities. Edith Amituanai's photographic series explores the temporary migration of her relatives living and working abroad. Edith produced portraits of young Samoan sportsmen out on the rugby field, and documented their homes back in Auckland. The works are about families, relationships, migration, lived experience and place.

Michel Tuffery's video performance works – *Povi* (Samoan for bull) – are about the building of communities, about issues facing all communities, such as environmental devastation, about the survival and resilience of Pacific communities in a globalised hostile world. For me his ten-year documentation of his performance and sculptural projects is also a visible attestation of the social role of the artist in our communities and of Michel's unique contribution and trailblazing work with Pacific communities and youth around the world. I think this is a very important point to make. Artists are agents of change and 'represent' leadership and vision, and without artists and the work they create communities will die, and what will be left for the next generation – a world that doesn't care about its own? All of the artists in the "Tīaho" project feel passionate about communities, – they are part of their communities, and workers in their communities, using art as a vehicle or platform to make important issues facing their communities manifest.



Figures 8 and 9. Students from the Instituto Latino de Mexico, Coyoacán, District Federal, Mexico City, pose in front of their favourite pieces (April 2010).

Shigeyuki Kihara's performance video,<sup>32</sup> Angela Tiatia's video work, Rosanna Raymond and Tracey Tawhiao's performative photographic and video work, Nooroa Tapuni's video, and Reweti Arapere's hip-hop animations of rangatahi (youth) investigate postcolonial histories and representations from personal, community and indigenous urban Pacific viewpoints. Tracey Moffatt's video work challenges racist stereotypes of women of colour in Hollywood films; Torika Bolatagici's photography explores issues around the representation of Fijian masculinity; Lisa Taouma's short film examines the origins, history and practice of Samoan tattooing (specifically focusing on the importance of the Samoan female customary practice of the Malu). The film explores the contemporary significance of the tattoo practice to Samoan communities today, and includes testimonies and interviews with several women about the significance of the Malu in their lives.

Becky Nunes' photographic portraits are from her collaborative book project *Mau Moko*<sup>33</sup> and are individual photographs of Ta Moko (Maori tattoo) practitioners and leaders who have been responsible for the continuing revival of this ancient Maori customary art; Kieran Keats' photography explores other cultural expressions of contemporary tattoo. The video work of Leilani Kake posits the family unit, herself as a parent and young people as a treasure and as central to community life. Ruth Choulai's photos in "Tiaho" are also photographs of community – images of her own people – in an urban environment, maintaining the lifeblood of customary values, languages, traditions and practices as they go through great social change. They are not "National Geographic" or colonising in gaze. They are photos of people from PNG – from the country where I was born.

**JP:** The criticisms most often made of exhibitions that are ethnically based – particularly those of indigenous peoples or of cultures marginalised by the First World, Western mainstream – is that these shows (and the works



Figure 10. Ruth Choulai, *Goroka Show, Eastern Highlands Province, Papua New Guinea, September 2009* (2009), digital print on archival paper. Courtesy of the artist.

*The Goroka Show has a 30-year history and is an annual event that draws domestic and international visitors to Goroka.*

within them) fall into postcolonial traps.<sup>34</sup> The shows present or broker identities. Back in the early 1990s in the seminal text *Thinking About Exhibitions* Mari Carmen Ramirez – then curator of Latin American art and a lecturer at the University of Texas – suggested that there was no escaping the [Western, First World] market and institution-



dominated lexicon. "Curators are the sanctioned intermediaries of ... institutional and professional networks ... To pretend that any type of alternative field of action exists ... is a fallacy."<sup>35</sup> Regionally defined exhibitions often present distinct cultures as an amalgam; stereotype and exoticise or portray individuals and groups as 'others.' The "cultural broker" argued Ramirez, is contradictory: at once tearing down hierarchies and democratising space, but also reinforcing reductive identity constructs.<sup>36</sup> How does "Tiaho" navigate this often-difficult territory?

**GP:** All my life I have felt like an outsider; never quite belonging, never quite fitting in. It has been explained to me as quite normal for a postcolonial person – in my case born in the Pacific islands – a settler/ hybrid. This contested zone means that creative people often do quite brave, border-crossing work.

When I stood on the shore at Ela beach in Port Moresby in September 2009 on the day before Papua New Guinea's Independence Day – a country I had been away from for 30 years, on a beach I went to as a child and could remember from childhood, in the town I was born – and saw the Lagatoi (large double hulled canoes) coming in across the water from the different Motu Koitabu villages towards the beach, it was like coming home. That is what is represented in that photograph to me taken by Ruth Choulai – my friend who enabled me to go home – the image of a young Papuan woman in her hiri customary grass skirt, her headdress, her Motuan tattoos – on a sunny day on Ela beach photographed before the hiri vessels came in – with her family, mother, father, and brothers dressed in urban clothes. Quite possibly that was what was running through my head when I installed the configuration that day – Ruth's photos are at the heart of that installation for me.

**JP:** So again we're back to the value of the subjective voice and eye. This hybrid self gives you a useful curatorial position – you have both insight and perspective. You are both insider and outsider – the bridge, the border-crosser.

**GP:** [An insider?] Yes, most of my curatorial and teaching values come from my own experiences and relationships with people, my own experiences of life. I was wanting to take an exhibition from New Zealand and the Pacific and show something of my life, the artists I work with, the issues their work raises, my community – which is a community of artists, a family and community that keeps extending and growing, but still strong at the core. As I get older and progress further in my life – teaching, creative practice, curating, etc. – I wanted to take and show an exhibition to young people in a different community, to curate an exhibition that said something about life, joy, pain, family, community, struggles, survival, resilience, achievement, beauty, art and life.

I remember the artist Emily Karaka once writing, "Art in a word, you gave me life – ake, ake, ake (forever)."



Figure 11. Mexican audiences viewing the Tiaho exhibition, El Centro Multidisciplinario, "El Casetón," Iztapalapa, Mexico City, April 2010.

**JP:** I believe the other principle or value that prevents your brokering from imperial or colonising tendencies is the respect you hold for the artists and their work and the power of that work. We have spoken a lot recently about the meaning of 'represent' – a term from the local vernacular that refers to a person's right to present themselves and their ideas. As Costa Rican curator Virginia Perez-Ratton says, you both seek to "undo the stereotype ... as one of the exotic," and "to integrate our artists into a larger circuit, taking the ... artist outside of the comfort zone and to promote exchange with foreign artists."<sup>37</sup> Rachel Bailey Jones, in her doctoral dissertation posits a belief in "the use of contemporary art that exists in multiple cultural spaces at once, that crosses boundaries and borders [that] offers the possibility to confront our biased views of those who are foreign to us."<sup>38</sup>

**GP:** Yes, exchange is important, exchange of ideas, experiences, perspectives of life – it is through interacting and sharing with others, working together, being open to new experiences, that we learn and grow. It was very exciting to be interacting and sharing with people from different but interconnected communities in this project: getting to meet and work with the young students at the high school, the teachers and faculty there who do such an amazing job. Through my friends and the “Tiaho” and the “Foto Arte Urban Cine” exhibition at El Casetón cultural centre, I got a chance to experience life in another Mexican community, meet and make friends with the Mexico City artists from the shared exhibition, hang out with some of the musicians and bands involved in the Olin Kan Indigenous music festival, make friends with the young team who work at the cultural centre – many of whom were artists, living locally and so inspiring in the work they do. It was awesome to see the way the young director interacted with his community, with the young people who come in to use the centre.

I loved the way the El Casetón team ran their community and youth projects and cultural activities – really open. The different outreach programmes they run for their communities – the multidisciplinary focus and community development aspects of their work. Whilst “Tiaho” showed at El Casetón, there were free movie screenings on Friday afternoons, and I know that the Centre do this continually – a free gym, free dance and hip-hop classes, free music festivals and concerts, youth theatre and other activities and after-school programmes. You could see that the centre was a really buzzing place and that it was a hub of the local community. The different age groups of the people using the centre was also interesting; art and culture weren’t separated from daily life. This view is common to many Pacific cultures. Another interesting thing was the diversity of cultural backgrounds. Every two days, a group that meets regularly to perform Aztec dancing and ceremonies (not for tourists, but for each other) came into the space. Whilst I was minding the exhibitions, a week-long programme of free consultations with natural healers and health professionals – which anyone in the community could access – was running as part of the Indigenous Music Festival, the “Tiaho” and “Urban Cine” exhibitions – all of this taking place in the open plan exhibition space. These are just some of the things I experienced at El Casetón, as well as having conversations with people that came in to see the exhibitions, use the facilities’ free phone, or take an exercise class.

I was struck by how different, but also similar it all was to what I experienced at the Uxbridge Arts Centre – which is a multi-purpose community art centre – when I started out curating all those years ago. Just really demonstrating how important art, cultural experience and expression is to human beings. At the Palacio Municipal of Ciudad Nezahualcóyotl, I got to meet and have conversations and exchanges with different groups of people – from another community, another city, another state: young people, older people, students, cultural workers, Mexican street artists, families – people from all walks of life. It was a very affirming experience and I am so grateful to everyone involved. Many people in the communities where “Tiaho” showed work six days a week, and often in more than one job to survive, so time is precious. My friends were the teachers, not me. The generosity shown to me in Mexico really broadened my mind; it made me think about what is important – friends, family, community, love, art, passion, integrity, openness, the art of life.

JP: I find it interesting as we sit here that the Auckland City Art Gallery is currently showing “Home AKL” – “Pasifika artists living here.” It seems this show is Auckland’s major public gallery taking up the challenge. As Anthony Byrt wrote in *The Listener* recently; “This show is a chance to redress some of the mainstream art world’s imbalances, but there may also be a bigger prize at stake: the opportunity to understand what it really means to make art in the South Pacific, in an international art world without borders.”<sup>39</sup>

It didn’t all end for “Tiaho” in Mexico or in 2010, did it? The light ‘shines on’ as ideas, opportunities and relationships continue to be revealed and emerge?

**GP:** Yes – after I returned home to New Zealand in May 2010, about three weeks later I held an artists’ and friends’ get-together, where I gave a Power Point presentation of the project; we watched Mexican music videos and had some lovely food and just hung out. It was really important for me to do this and thank everyone. I held the evening on a Friday night at Whitecliffe where I teach. It was so good seeing everyone – artists and their families, friends



Figure 12. Mexico City audiences viewing the exhibitions at El Centro Multidisciplinario, "El Casetón," Iztapalapa, Mexico City, April 2010.

from the Tautai Pacific Trust who I have also curated projects for, and even some of my students came, as well as art writer colleagues, a curator whose work has also inspired me, friends and friends of friends. It was a horrible rainy, windy and cold Auckland evening, so I wasn't expecting a huge crowd, but we had a good turnout and it was just awesome. I suppose I went on a bit in my talk, but I was just so inspired, excited and passionate. I was really touched that some of my students came and brought their friends and partners. Even artists who weren't involved in the project as exhibitors came – that touched me also. I'm a very lucky person to be able to do what I do.

Lucy Lippard said: "If we are not moved, if we stand still the status quo is our reward."<sup>40</sup> I went back to Mexico in December 2011 to stay with and see my friends in Mexico. Next year I am hoping to do another project with the high school students in Mexico City – but this time help them to facilitate and curate their own exhibition of photography and video work, about themselves, their interests and passions, the way they view life. This project is only in its initial stages of development. I'm also keen to hook them up with other young people at a school in New Zealand – a joint exhibition that they curate about themselves and what excites them.

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