



SOFUKINNATIVE

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In 2011, as part of the Melbourne Fringe Festival, Indigenous-run arts space Blak Dot Gallery hosted a group exhibition which explored the reclaiming of Indigenous and discriminatory imagery by Aboriginal and Pacific Islander artists in *Re:Appropriate*. In 2012, Léuli Eshraghi and I, as guest curators, have brought together works from eight cutting-edge Aboriginal and Pacific Islander artists, and one accomplished Anglo-Australian performance artist, for the follow up show, **SO FUKIN NATIVE**.

The curatorial concept behind **SO FUKIN NATIVE** was consciously, ironically, deceptively *simple*. It centres on one word, six letters that together connote so many different impressions to different people, layered with meaning through broad historical forces and divergent subjective experiences: **NATIVE**. Representations of Aboriginal and Pacific Islander peoples, and ‘natives’ in general, continue to be highly exoticised, and alternately homogenised, in Western cinema, literature, media, art, and across colloquial sites. ‘Native’ representations range from fond, romantic idealisations to barely concealed condescension.

As young urban citizens of Australia, with ‘native’ lineages tracing to Sāmoa/Iran and Papua New Guinea respectively, Léuli and I bear witness to the array of conflicting responses that are elicited as individuals living life in a Western context, negotiating the complexities of personal identity not merely between and within cultures, but within subcultures, social circles (our

modern ‘tribes’), families, and our intimate relationships. We cultivate our connection with our complex ‘Native’ roots, whilst existing and consuming as individuals within an equally complex and dynamic cultural context – one that so frequently misunderstands or dismisses that very root system which *continues* to sustain us.

The impact of perceptions and representations of *native* peoples on how we see ourselves as communities in relation to a dominant culture, and how we construct our individual identities in the midst of that culture, can be profound, both consciously and subconsciously. In **SO FUKIN NATIVE**, we wanted to explore these tensions, connections, and contradictions. The esteemed artists we selected were asked to reflect upon sexuality, power, politics, language, and contemporary identity; to further unpack the layers of a loaded term that means different things to different people. Ironically, our deep respect for the complexity and diversity of our human experiences and perspectives as ‘Native’ peoples, necessitated that the brief be spacious and simple.

The result, however, is a sophisticated, profoundly rich, diverse yet *cohesive* selection of works, across a stunning array of visual mediums – an aesthetic challenge and battlefield where artists bear witness to pejorative speech, ironic hipster fashion, kitsch and derivative aesthetic treatment. In the spirit of its predecessor, **SO FUKIN NATIVE** continues multiple critical reclamations of

“224 years of subjugation have born witness to many changes in what is now known as Australia. These changes present many complexities that have been shaped and continue to be redefined by the subjugated.” – Ben McKeown

“Interculturality and its meanings are not exclusive; nor is it a one-sided license to categorise ‘other’. Its existence is embodied in everyone. It is complex and works through varying levels of conscious and subconscious recognition.” – Latai Taumoepeau

cultural trajectories. The title itself, both tongue-in-cheek and offensive, was witnessed and reclaimed from the context of a popular and predominantly White alternative culture forum.

With superb clarity and vision, through sculpture, film, photography and installations, the artists explore the hidden intricacies behind the word ‘Native’. We are honoured to present new video works by Torika Bolatagici, photography and installation by Maree Clarke, photography and painting by Ben McKeown, installation by emerging artist Candice Perese, and an international video collaboration between Chantal Fraser and Los Angeles-based artist Chuck Feesago. We are equally honoured to present existing photographic works by Greg Semu, and a challenging two channel video installation, which plays with symbols of identity politics in Australia, created by performance makers Latai Taumoepeau and Kathy Cogill – the result of a three-year collaboration.

We urge you to read the artists’ biographies and statements for further insight into these exceptional individuals and the works that Léuli and I had the *privilege* of curating. For the time, dedication, vision and energy they invested in creating these artworks, we express our heartfelt gratitude. We also express our sincere gratitude to Kimba Thompson and Jacob Tolo, of Blak Dot Gallery, and Taloi Havini, our advisor, for their astonishing support throughout this curatorial project. To you we are truly indebted. To Tauiilili Malifa and Pearson

Vetuna, our translators, our deep respect and appreciation for your assistance. And to our friends, families, and community members, who supported and encouraged us to the finish line, we thank you.

Finally, no public conversation on Indigeneity in contemporary Australia would be complete without the notion of “authenticity” being addressed. In political and media stoushes of the recent past, and in the context of ongoing ‘culture wars’, the rules of engagement themselves are being questioned. Indigeneity in this context carries a measure of weight – it confers the right to speak, to be heard, on critical issues facing Indigenous peoples. Thus, undermining or questioning the *authenticity* of an Indigenous person, in this context, has become in itself a weapon for those in whose interest it may be to subvert those whose embodiment of Indigeneity deviates from that which is politically and socially convenient. Or, perhaps, merely *familiar*.

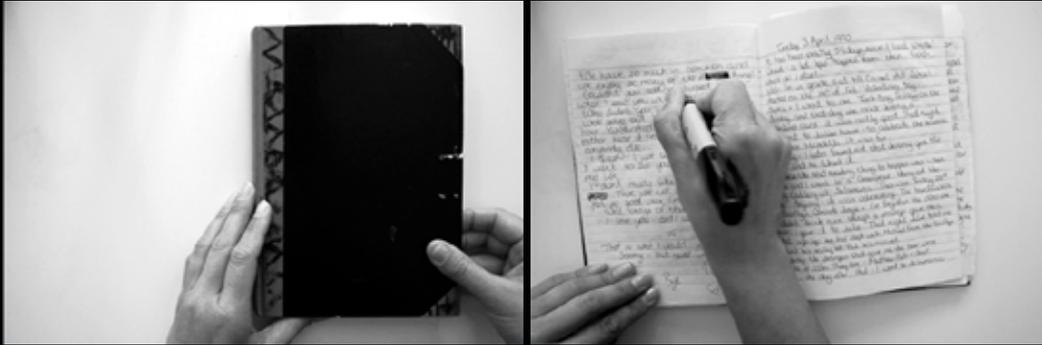
The presentation of Indigeneity in **SO FUKIN NATIVE**, I dare say, may deviate in this way – posing a challenge to those mired in outdated preconceptions. But it is by no means inauthentic.

Essentially, **SO FUKIN NATIVE** explores the question: what does it mean to be a ‘native’ in contemporary Australia?

With earnest curiosity and an open mind, we invite you to explore this with us.

Pauline Vetuna, Co-Curator

TORIKA BOLATAGICI



Torika Bolatagici: A Girl Like You

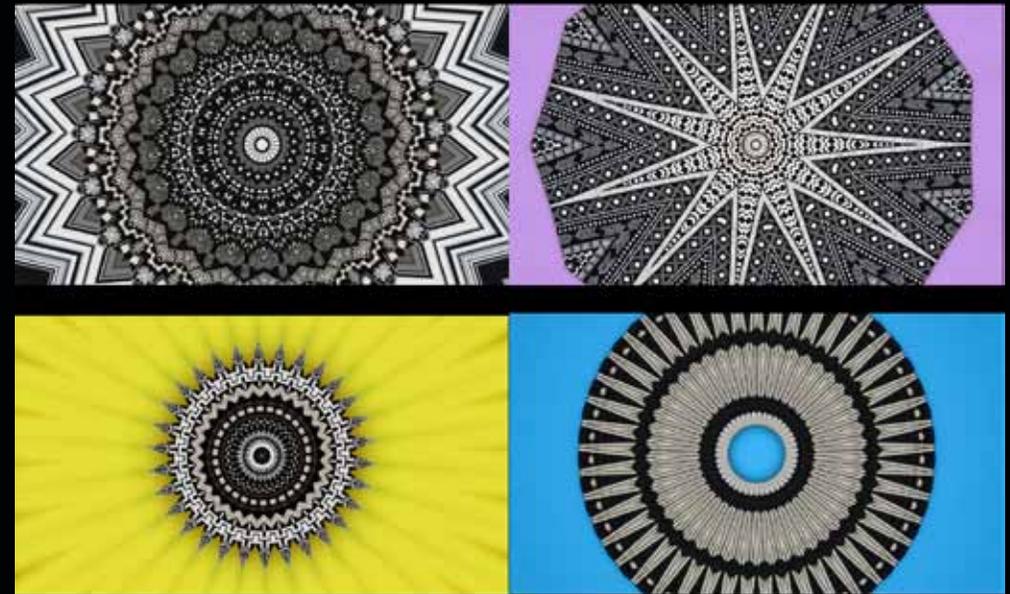
TORIKA BOLATAGICI's photographic and video work has been exhibited in the United States, Mexico, Aotearoa New Zealand and Australia. She has published and presented at local and international conferences about contemporary visual culture, gender, identity and the Pacific.

Torika is a full-time photography lecturer in the School of Communication and Creative Arts at Deakin University, Melbourne. She is currently undertaking a PhD at the College of Fine Arts, University of New South Wales.

Torika is on the Advisory Committee for *New Scholar* journal; a member of the *International Working Group on Militarism and Gender in the Pacific*; and a member of *Pacific Artists in Australia* (PAIA).

VIDEO: A GIRL LIKE YOU (2012)

A Girl Like You is a response to a work I made in 2003 titled "Memory + Moments" reflecting on unexpected and unsolicited comments from friends and strangers during my early years... "can I touch your hair?" "you're very well-spoken" "where do you get your colour?" "are you wearing a bustle?" In 2011 I re-discovered my teenage diaries from 1989-1995. The process of redaction is about coming to terms with my vulnerability through a process of revealing and exposing the internal monologue of a teenage girl, growing up in Hobart during the 80s.



Torika Bolatagici: NeoGeoNative

PROJECTION: NEOGEONATIVE (2012)

NeoGeoNative is about my uneasy relationship with the appropriation of Indigenous motifs in contemporary fashion to which I am both attracted and repelled. Cheap "tribal" leggings that I have purchased from places like Sportsgirl, Glassons and the Preston Market have been edited into a kind of hypnotic/ seductive kaleidoscope of colour and patterns - that reference the Melanesian, Polynesian and Native American designs that they appropriate - but at the same time are completely decontextualised, re-emerging as neon mandalas and other sacred geometry.

LATAI TAUMOEPEAU & KATHY COGILL

LATAI TAUMOEPEAU is a Punake, body-centred performance artist; her story is of her homelands, the Island Kingdom of Tonga and her birthplace; the Eora nation – Sydney, and everything far and in-between. Latai activates Indigenous philosophies and methodologies; she engages in the sociopolitical landscape of Australia with sensibilities in race, class and the female body politic; committed to bringing the voice of marginalised communities to the frangipani-less fore ground.

Latai has presented works at MCA, Carriageworks, Performance Space, Sydney Opera House, Campbelltown Arts Centre, Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre and the Australian Museum to name a few. She has also toured internationally to London, Germany, France, Japan, Switzerland, Hong Kong and Aotearoa New Zealand.

KATHY COGILL is a dancer, actor, and performance maker with a Diploma in Dance (VCA, 1984) and a Degree in Acting (NIDA, 2001). Most recently she has performed with Marregeku in *Burning Daylight* (2009), Urban Theatre Projects in *The Last Highway* (2008), Opera Australia's *BLISS* directed by Neil Armfield, UK's Pacitti Company's *FINALE*, Hans van den Broeck's *Settlement* and *NOMADS*, *Out of Water* with Narelle Benjamin, choreographed Karunesh for Sydney Festival Opening Night, and worked as movement director for *The Riot Act*.

Currently she teaches at Wollongong University, NIDA, UNSW open classes and for Life and Balance yoga centres in Glebe and Hunter Street.

VIDEO: SIDESHOW (2011)

SIDESHOW (Definition: A diversion or spectacle that is incidental to a larger set of circumstances or a bigger issue of concern)

Kathy Cogill and Latai Taumoepeau were brought together to create a collaborative work over a three year period that responded to the idea of the "intercultural" as part of Campbelltown Arts Centre's Intercultural Dance Project 2009 – 2011. Of the premise Taumoepeau comments, "Interculturality and its meanings are not exclusive; nor is it a one-sided license to categorise 'other'. It's existence is embodied in everyone. It is complex and works through varying levels of conscious and subconscious recognition." The resulting two-channel video installation features Cogill and Taumoepeau performing short skits in which the artists dress up, impose, mask and decorate their bodies to consider façades, their perception, deception and what lies beneath. Their performance stretches and redefines outward actions of difference, playing with symbols of identity politics in Australia, to explore the complexity at play in an individual's cultural identity.



Latai Taumoepeau (R)
& Kathy Cogill: Sideshow

CANDICE PERESE



CANDICE PERESE is an emerging artist from Auckland, New Zealand, currently based in Melbourne, Australia. She completed her Bachelor of Visual Arts at Auckland University of Technology, during which time she worked as an Artist's apprentice for Reuben Patterson (2005) and exhibited her work in 'Superabound' (2006), a group exhibition at St Paul Street Gallery, Auckland. A year later, she held her first solo show, 'Paint your heart out', at the Oldies Boutique and Gallery in Paris. This exhibition was then relocated to Panique, Paris, in 2008. From 2008 to 2009 Candice was also a member of the Parisian boutique gallery, TOAST. Other exhibitions she has featured in include a 20eme Open door event in Paris (featuring two artists) in 2009, a solo show at Chez Alphonse, Paris, in 2010, and a more recent group exhibition at Melbourne's Brunswick Street Gallery, in 2011.

INSTALLATION: TISSER (2012)

I have always been drawn to balance in form and balance in colour combinations. Paired with a slightly obsessive need to organise and arrange and match things I create the physical form of what I consider Balance and order. I am always playing with the idea of perfect randomness, the way we automatically and systematically arrange things evenly in an attempt to be completely spontaneous.



Candice Perese: Tisser (section)

CHANTAL FRASER & CHUCK FEESAGO

CHANTAL FRASER is a Brisbane-based multimedia artist with a BFA (Honours) from. Fraser's practice engages in pushing the boundaries of adornment through mediums such as installation, performance and digital media.

She has exhibited nationally at various institutions such as QUT Art Museum, University of Queensland Art Museum and Brisbane City Hall (now Museum of Brisbane). She has also exhibited internationally at La Cité internationale des Arts, Paris, Les Brassières in Belgium and Ngan Jila Tjibaou Cultural Centre, Kanaky New Caledonia. Most recently, Fraser was included in "ATA: An Exhibition of Contemporary Samoan Art" at Harris Gallery, La Verne California curated by her collaborator Chuck Feesago and Los Angeles artist Dan Taulapapa McMullin. This year Fraser will hold a solo exhibition at Arterreal Gallery, Sydney.

CHUCK FEESAGO is a performance and conceptual artist and curator based in Los Angeles, California. His evolution as a performance and conceptual artist supported Feesago's belief that the perception of the artist and the perception of the viewer were key elements to foster discourse.

Currently, through painting, sculpture and installation, Feesago's art practice focuses on the hybrid outcome when systems come together. It is the conflicts and similarities in the melding systems that he finds the conversations for his work. He looks to move beyond the cliché conversations that often deal with race, culture or politics. Feesago searches for the quiet moments when differences agree, conflicts harmonize and lies may tell a truth. He finds that details, which are often omitted from a conversation, reveal our beliefs to be out of sync with our actions. Ultimately, he discovers that both as individuals and as members of larger social structures, we have much more in common with each other than we normally allow ourselves to believe.

Feesago is also on faculty at the University of La Verne in La Verne, California where he teaches foundation courses, sculpture, installation and curatorial practices.

PROJECTION: OTHER OTHER (2012)

When is one not the 'Other'? This collaboration between Chantal Fraser and Chuck Feesago questions the possibility of Native as naïve and intends to create a new native by imitating hybridisation. The objective is to open discussion about the conflicts and harmonies of being inside and outside of a hybrid group at the same time.

The work is two separate projections, one of each artist's face. The projections merge halfway into each face thus creating a central layered image. Within the outer parts of each artist's face (left and right side of projection) each artist is performing actions such as blinking timed at regular human pace. The central layered projection sees both artists performing frequent blinking every second, separating the actions from either half of their faces – one regular and slow, the other fast and frequent. Both artists live at either side of the Pacific, one in Brisbane the other in Los Angeles, both belonging to the same diaspora but at the same time, not. The merged central layer of this work bridges already hybridised 'Others' to create the birth of a new 'Other' that permeates energy and life and 'Otherness'.





Ben McKeown: Joseph In The Lounge



*Ben McKeown:
Portrait of an Aboriginal Artist*

BEN MCKEOWN is an artist and sometimes curator. A descendant of the Wirangu language group of the Far West Coast of South Australia he has works represented in collections including: National Gallery of Australia, State Library of Victoria, and the United Nations Collection, Geneva among others.

From 2008 to 2009 McKeown was the Assistant Curator at Linden: Centre for Contemporary Arts, as part of their Indigenous Programs. In 2010 he curated *20 Years; Bold. Black. Brilliant* for Ilbijerri Theatre Company's 20-year retrospective celebrations at Bunjikkala, Melbourne Museum.

One of his artworks is currently on the loom at the Australian Tapestry Workshop, commissioned for the State Library of Victoria. He holds a Master of Visual Art from the Victorian College of the Arts, University of Melbourne.

PHOTOGRAPHY: JOSEPH IN THE LOUNGE (2012)

McKeown's practice is largely influenced by history, memory, and layering, with painting and photo media as his main disciplines he creates works that reflect a duality between historic references and contemporary visual language.

His works form part of a unique contemporary dialogue, that is evidence that art has the power to change conventional thinking.

'Joseph in the lounge' presents the viewer with a hybridised image. One that has both instant and painterly qualities, while a portrait of an Aboriginal artist, directs us to consider questions about image and ideas pertaining to identity. Catalogue images courtesy the artist and Gabrielle Pizzi Gallery.

PAINTING: PORTRAIT OF AN ABORIGINAL ARTIST (2012)

GREG SEMU



Greg Semu: Tuane Tangaroa

GREG SEMU is self-taught in the art of photography and film. Nomadic wanderer of the world since his early 20s in search of adventure, fame, fortune, love and ultimately the discovery of self. New York, Paris, London, Samoa, and most recently Sydney, Australia. His works sit in the collections of various museums around the world including France, Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand, Germany and Taiwan.

The themes that run strongly through Greg's work are cultural displacement, colonial impact on indigenous cultures (particularly of the Pacific Islands), and religious Christian iconography's mutation of tribal and so-called primitive icons. Mostly classified as an art photographer, Semu is comfortable with the commercial world. Photography is a visual language often used to manipulate certain masses of peoples, cultures and identities.

PHOTOGRAPHY: TUANE TANGAROA (2006)

*Tuane Tangaroa is a Ta Moko artist currently based in Amsterdam. This portrait was created in 2006 as a working study for the series *Battle of the Noble Savage* commissioned by the Musée du quai Branly, Paris. Inspired by two New Zealand painters, Charles Frederick Goldie and Gottfried Lindauer, who both documented Maori in the great tradition of fine art portraiture in the early and volatile years of colonial Aotearoa.*



Greg Semu: The Apostles 1, 2 + 3

PHOTOGRAPHY: THE APOSTLES 1, 2 + 3 (2011)

The last Cannibal Supper is a dialogue of cultural and religious displacement. A visual song to the contamination of indigenous and Christian iconography and history. Residue of a cannibalistic practice once embraced by our ancestors and now a disgraced memory replaced with the symbolic ritual of 'The covenant of Christ', a metaphorical act of cannibalism renewed every sabbath day. The artist thanks the Ngan Jila Tjibaou Cultural Centre (ADCK), Nouméa, Kanaky New Caledonia.

MAREE CLARKE

MAREE CLARKE is a practicing freelance artist and art curator with over 20 years' experience. Her work extends from photography to jewellery making, as well as possum skin-cloak work and public artworks. Maree's art philosophy rests in her experiences as a southeast Australian Aboriginal artist, where assertions of her culture are grounded within contemporary Aboriginal Australian society, including strengthening and continuing connections to community, family and Country through her art practice. Maree's ambition is to continue researching and passing on cultural knowledge. This includes furthering knowledge of the ethnographic collections of Ancestors' objects and items in collections around the world, and recreating those items that aren't in Australian collections.

INSTALLATION: NEVILLE AND VIRGINIA (NEV 'N' GIN) GO NATIVE (2012)

Nev 'n' Gin first attracted the public's gaze at the Mildura/Wentworth Arts Festival in the year 2000, where their self-representation of the 'noble savage' contested ideas of the objectification of Black people as fauna, as relics reduced to objects on the front and backyard lawns of bland suburban landscapes throughout the 1950s, 60s and 70s.

At the turn of the 21st century their status as garden ornaments had fallen out of favour, as Australian ideas of taste and fashion moved beyond the kitsch and gaudy to embrace the landscaped ideals reflected in TV programs such as Burke's Backyard and Better Homes and Gardens. Yet Neville and Virginia resented these attempts at 'tasteful' intrusion, seeing parallels with the earlier colonial invaders, which sought to sublimate the history of their continuing connections to land. Today, they venture south to continue their quest to subvert the idea of 'blackfellas', 'jackie jackies', 'gins' and 'Nevilles' as idyllic, passive, collectable curios, representative of a primitive, unchanging, homogenous 'other'.

In this exhibition, Nev 'n' Gin 'go native'. They once again resurrect their profiles as contemporary 'native' icons, disrupting notions of their status as 'exotic trophies'. Their position on a manicured garden lawn, behind a white picket fence, provides them with an opportunity to reclaim disparaging notions of the 'native', repositioning themselves as today's 'natives', as

contemporary, dynamic representations of Aboriginality. In this context they reassert their place as the original inhabitants and owners of the land, where to be 'native' is to reveal and celebrate diversity, as well as a history of adaptation and change, which contests ideas of southeast Aboriginality as inauthentic and unreal.

Neville strikes a handsome pose as he proudly claims his stake in the land where his Ancestors were whitewashed from history. Virginia affirms her ancestral connections, dressed in a fashionable reinterpretation of a 'traditional' possum-skin cloak. At once Nev 'n' Gin's position on the garden lawn reflects their endeavours to reject attempts that undermine their positions as 'natives', as they pursue their mission to reframe their 'native' culture and history within modern-day Australia.

PHOTOGRAPHY: RITUAL AND CEREMONY

These photographic works are part of the landmark Ritual and Ceremony series exhibited at Bunjilaka Aboriginal Cultural Centre, Melbourne Museum, in 2011. Clarke delves into and renews expressions of traditional ritual and ceremonial mourning practices. The works empower individuals and communities in accepting their sensibilities and experiences, rendering the traditional mourning practices of southeastern Aboriginal peoples visibly worn and embodied in a contemporary context.



Maree Clarke: Neville and Virginia



Maree Clarke: Ritual And Ceremony

1. Rueben 2. Carl 3. Dee 4. Malika

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS OF COUNTRY

SAMOAN, KUANUA AND ENGLISH

E mātou te fiafia e ofoina atu le fa'a'aloalo fa'atasi ma le fa'afetai i tagatanu'u o Bunjil ma Waa, e o'o lava l o lātou tua'ā ma mātua ua tu'ualemālō, le taimi nei ma le lumana'i.

Ose fa'amanuiaga le mafai ona mātou fa'aaogaina le lau'ele'ele ma ona vai e fa'atinoaina ai lo mātou fa'amoemoe, ole fa'atāuaina o tū ma aganu'u a atunu'u ile lau'ele'ele o Kulin, ma ole ā mātou manatuaina pea ma le fa'aaloalo.

ō lenei ua fa'atasia e ui ina 'ese'ese vāega ole vao e omai ai, ma e mātou te fia tu'uina atu galuega tu'u fa'atasi a tagata Aporisini ma tagata o le vā o motu e manino lelei ai auala ole so'ofa'atasi, e ui ina ala 'ese'ese vāega o lo'o nonofo ai, i o lātou nofoaga.

We acknowledge and offer our respects to the creators Bunjil and Waa, to the ancestors and Elders past, present and future of the Kulin Nation. We are blessed to continue our contemporary arts and cultural practices on the lands and waters of the Kulin Nation, and for this we are ever grateful.

We have come together from different parts of the forest, and tonight we present to you works by significant living Aboriginal and Pacific Islander artists that respond to the diverse ways of being of the land, being Indigenous.

- Léuli Eshraghi, Co-Curator

lau na ilam ra umana Tavui go ra pia da ki tana. Kaugu varirū i vana tadap kadia umana Patuana lualua ma gori.

I acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land on which we live. I pay my respects to their Elders, past and present.

- Pauline Vetuna, Co-Curator



COVER IMAGE

MODELS L-R: Taloi Havini, Djava Tologata-Thompson, Doug Mulitalo, Éliane Dahma, Léuli Eshraghi, Manu Potoi, Linda Tanoai, Pauline Vetuna, Arthur Bonjui. PHOTOGRAPHY: Kimba Thompson, Linda Tanoai. DESIGN: Jacob Tolo VENUE: Thankyou Michael Hole at Small Block Café

Neville and Virginia photograph by: Jorge de Araujo Photography. All rights reserved.

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