**TBI Q&A: Niki Hastings-McFall**

15 January 2015



 Niki Hastings-McFall tells us about Fale Ula, a new site-specific installation that will

 transform Aotea Square as part of the Auckland Arts Festival in March. Using synthetic lei,

 Hastings-McFall 'polynises' the green space of Aotea Square into a vibrant, living artwork

 based on the Samoan fale, creating a site of contemplation, relaxation, gathering and

 sharing.

 The work from her Polynisation series also incorporates its first ever audience-responsive

 sound element, created in collaboration with Hubbub Studio breaking new ground for

 this renowned local artist.

 "Encountering elusive bird song within the site invites contemplation of the absence of

   many birds from central  Auckland and our relationship with both the natural world and

 the urban environment."

**During what hours of the day do you feel most inspired?**
24/7! I’m always working, even when I’m not. The subconscious processes much unremarked visual and conceptual information, connects the dots, problem solves and has the ability to form practical solutions that the conscious mind often can’t. Inspiration can be everywhere, anywhere, anytime.

**How would a good friend describe your aesthetic or style?**
You’d have to ask them that, as I’m not sure. I can say that my great friend of 30 plus years - Denise Layne - always provides a fresh take on my work. My partner Jason Hall gives brutally honest feedback and I trust him completely to spare no mercy. These constructive, honest critiques are pure gold.

**What aspect of your creative practice gives you the biggest thrill?**
The most exhilarating aspect of my practice is researching and hands-on making. It feels like it’s merely the tip of the iceberg in terms of workload, as a large proportion of my time is spent on admin, emails, accounts, writing, etc etc (yawn). However that only makes the precious part even more precious.

**How does your environment affect your work?**
Nature abhors a vacuum. I can’t imagine NOT being influenced by my environment.

**Do you like to look at the big picture or focus on the details?**
I try to keep perspective and look at the big picture, but having trained initially as a jeweller I often get involved in the minutae. (The “Mine’s smaller than yours” Jewellers mantra). I enjoy the pedantic nit picky-ness a bit too much sometimes. More balance could be good! I find if I have the luxury of time to live with a work for a while I gain perspective and can then refine/ remake/ shelve or biff.

**What's your number one business tip for surviving (and thriving) in the creative industries?**
Do not procrastinate!

**Which of your projects to date has given you the most satisfaction?**
Any of the *Polynisation* series installation works. When you’re doing strange things to a tree (or anything else for that matter), with 1000’s of lei, the conversations with passers-by are intriguing. By its site specific and ephemeral nature any installation work is always a challenge and I’m always nervous as hell. However it provides a great freedom and often a stunned mullet feeling of wonder at the alchemic result.

**Who or what has inspired you recently?**
Die Antwoord, Corvidae, legends, myths, fables, history, cryptic crosswords, NZ Bird Rescue and working with birds in general. Op shops, walking the dog, my friends/the ghosts who walk with me, other people’s kids, my gardens. The Light show at AAG, anything bent, warped, funny peculiar or funny haha.

**Tell us a bit about your creative background.**
Began with scribble patterns and pasta pictures at Kindy in Titirangi, studied Renaissance art in 7th form, AGGS, completed B. Visual Arts at MIT about 18 years ago, met my Samoan family in my first year at MIT aged early 30’s, snuck into Auckland Uni art history lectures. My involvement in many exhibitions has allowed me to meet fantastic artists, travel a fair bit and view inspiring original artworks.

**Tell us about your work at Auckland Arts Festival?**
*Fale Ula* is the latest site-specific installation work from the *Polynisation*series and incorporates its first ever audience-responsive sound element, created in collaboration with Hubbub Studios.

Wrapping about 20 trees with synthetic lei a metaphorical fale space is created, utilising the trees as the pou (supports) and the sky as the roof.

Encountering elusive bird song within the site invites contemplation of the absence of many birds from central  Auckland and our relationship with both the natural world and the urban environment.
PLANT A TREE, A BIRD WILL COME.

**What are some of your other upcoming projects?**
Coincided to time with and in conjunction with the Auckland Arts Festival.

***Heavens Above*** - Q Theatre Rear Window Work
Suspended, spinning and shimmering, Heavens Above  uses a star motif commonly found in Samoan siapo design.  As celestial sky borne entities, stars and birds often contain a  parallel symbolism and fulfil similar functions within Polynesian oral culture. Along with many other natural elements  they were commonly used by one of the greatest ocean going peoples to navigate the largest single oceanic spaces on the earths surface for centuries. Drawing on this parallel symbolism Hastings Mcfall connects the 2 spaces  by referencing these metaphoric and practical commonalities.
Where: Q Theatre, rear window wall.

Collaborative moving image/ digitised interactive project with Jenna Gavin and Matt Martin on the Dal 12 monitor screen, Aotea Centre.

***Flock*** - Solo exhibition Whitespace Gallery

Work from Chartwell at AAG group exhibition

**If you could go back and choose a completely different career path to the one you've chosen, what would it be?**
Avian Vet - but I’d have to get a brain transplant first.

**What place is always with you, wherever you go?**
Titirangi.

**What's the best way to listen to music, and why?**
Loud. On a good quality sound system. Why ever not???

**You are given a piece of string, a stick and some fabric. What do you make?**
A voodoo doll.

**What's the best stress relief advice you've ever been given?**
‘Let it go Pig.... Let it go’.

**What’s great about today?**
Every day’s a great day above ground... I mean that.

**What’s your big idea for 2015?**
Make more work. Make better work. Instigate more collaborative projects. Commence avian specific field work with tangata whenua in Mahia Figure out how to fund a decent chunk of time dedicated to research and actual making.

**About Niki**

Niki is of Samoan decent, but was born and raised in Titirangi. She draws heavily on her Pacific heritage when creating her work.

Her works are held in both public and private collections both nationally and abroad, including the Chartwell Trust, British Museum, GOMA, Museum of Volkekund (Germany), Tjibaou Centre (Noumea), Te Papa, The University of Auckland and Victoria University of Wellington