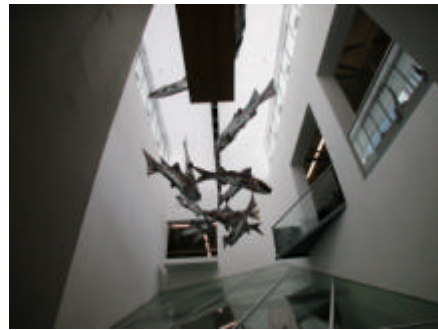


Mata Mata: an artist's project by Michel Tuffery

in collaboration with students from St Paul's College, Grey Lynn, Auckland

While ascending the escalator in the New Gallery visitors were met with a strange sight; giant iridescent fish floated overhead as if the white cube gallery interior has been transformed into a virtual aquarium. These creatures appeared to be swimming through the space towards the light entering from windows at the top of the building.



Mata Mata celebrated the ocean as a rich resource while highlighting the implications of environmental damage and loss of respect for this resource. The project's concept evolved from the artist's reading on initiatives to prevent poaching in the world's oceans, some of which involve underwater surveillance systems. An experienced recreational diver, Tuffery is acutely aware of the problems of over-fishing and poaching in the Pacific. He has stated that the issues he is recently concerned with include 'the pollution of the Pacific, the wiping out of fish stocks and global warming,' and increasing public consciousness about what we take from the sea and what we put into it. The theme of environmental exploitation has always informed his art practice. His widely known tin bulls made of recycled corned beef cans highlight the harmful effects of generations of introduced cattle on Samoa's fragile ecosystem and how imported foods contribute to dietary problems among Islanders.



In keeping with its title, **Mata Mata** – the Samoan word for 'watching' - has a futuristic, slightly sinister edge. Several of the fish's open mouths are fitted with miniature surveillance cameras which record the reactions of visitors. In a reversal of conventional roles the human predator becomes the prey, the stalkers are stalked, the watchers are watched. The camera footage is simultaneously broadcast on monitors visible from outside the building in a *Window-work* installation.

The Artist

Tuffery brings together contemporary and traditional concepts and currents in his work to create new forms of expression which transcend cultural boundaries and speak to the community about universal issues. The motif of shoaling fish can also be found throughout his earlier work, in



his woodcuts and in his dynamic multi-piece *vaka* assemblages based on the upeti blocks used for printing siapo or tapa cloth. While there is often an element of humour and irony in Tuffery's work, it's the environmental and cultural issues that are at its centre. He explores these serious issues by using familiar stereotypes and clichés of a sun-drenched paradise to expose the realities of island life – subsistence economies, environmental damage and the long-term impact of colonisation on indigenous culture.

Text by Kendrah Morgan Curator, New Zealand and International Art

Artists statement

'**Mata Mata** possesses two layers, firstly the sculpture / surveillance installation at Auckland Art Gallery opening November 2002. My approach was of a collaborative nature with St Paul's College in Grey Lynn, Auckland, I worked along side a number of John loane's arts students, exercising them through the conceptual and development processes using recycled materials. The outcome from this workshop was a series of hyper bred fish varying in scale of up to 2.5 metres in length, these artworks formed the body of work for the 'urban aquarium' installation.'

Mata Mata – *phusion* a performance by Michel Tuffery and students from St Paul's College – 8.30 Saturday 8 March 2003

'**Mata Mata - *phusion*** performance artwork evolved through the course of one week with a core group of St Paul's College students. My initiative was to further the students creative expression by building up and giving confidence to their own visual dialogue. Through improvised choreographed movements and sounds the students exposed themselves to the extremeness and ambience of live performance. By removing them from the familiarity of traditional performance where it can be quite constrained with **Mata Mata - *phusion*** we were pushing boundaries with no initial narrative and allowing the audience to create their own narrative.'

The collaboration with St Paul's College Students from St Paul's College were not only involved in working with the artist in the construction of the fish and the large heads used in **Mata Mata – *phusion***, they also developed and performed this incendiary spectacle. The performance, in the Gallery's forecourt and fountain, was part of the programme for Auckland's Pasifica Festival and also celebrated the end of the exhibition. Year 12 students not only had the opportunity to work with Michel Tuffery but also to use this experience to feed into their own work.



FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

These pages will be updated to further document the interaction between the artist and students as well as the work done subsequently with their teacher John loane.

USEFUL REFERENCES FOR STUDETS

ANOTHER INTRODUCED SPIECES? MICHEL TUFFERY AN ARTIST WITH A CONSCIENCE

Art & Industry Biennial, 20 Sept – 31Dec 2000. This essay in the exhibition catalogue by Karen Stevenson provides a useful background to the socio-political issues explored by this artist.

SPEAKING IN COLOUR: COVERSACTIONS WITH ARTISTS OF PACIFIC ISLAND HERITAGE

Sean Mallon and Pandora Fulimalo Pereira, Te Papa Press, Wellington 1997