

exhibition review / SĒMISI FETOKAI KULĪHA'APAI
MOAHEHENGIOVAVA'ULAHĪ POTAUAINĒ AND 'ŌKUSITINO MĀHINA

Oceanic Architectural Routes: The Photographic Archive of Mike Austin Curated by Albert Refiti

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Tāvāism, like Realism, mediates ontology (i.e., “reality as it is” / “ways of reality”) versus epistemology (i.e., “reality as we know-feel it” / “ways of society”), and argues that the fundamental issue is not “how we know-feel what we know-feel,” nor “where we know-feel what we know-feel,” nor “when we know-feel what we know-feel,” nor “why we know-feel what we know-feel” but, rather, “what we really know-feel.”

Tā (time) is verb (or action-led) and fakafuo (definer) of vā (space) which is, in turn, noun (or object-based) and fakauho (composer) of tā (time), on the abstract level, and fuo (form) is verb (or action-led) and fakatā (definer) of uho (content) which is, in turn, noun (or object-based) and fakavā (composer) of fuo (form), on the concrete level.

Everywhere in 'Iai (reality), tā-vā (temporality-spatiality), or tapafā¹ (four-sided dimensionality), as in nature, mind-heart, and society, is inseparable hoa/soa (pair, duality, or binary), and there is nothing above hoatatau/hoamālie (equal pair, duality, or binary) and/or hoakehekehe/hoatamaki (opposite pair, duality, or binary).

Everywhere in 'Iai (reality), tā-vā (temporality-spatiality), or tapafā (four-sided dimensionality), as in nature, mind-heart, and society, is fakafelavai (intersection or distinction), and there is nothing beyond fakahoko (connection or relation) and/or fakamāvae (separation or segmentation) as an indivisible hoa/soa (pair, duality, or binary).

Everywhere in 'Iai (reality), tā-vā (temporality-spatiality), or tapafā (four-sided dimensionality), as in nature, mind-heart, and society, is mata-ava² (eye-hole), and there is nothing over mata (eye) and/or ava (hole) as an indivisible hoa/soa (pair, duality, or binary), where me'a (matter) as tā-vā (time-space) as ivi (energy) is most dense and intense.

Tā-Vā (Time-Space) Philosophy of Reality



Fig. 1 Albert Refiti (2022). *Oceanic Architectural Routes: The Photographic Archive of Mike Austin*. [Curated exhibition; photograph by Sam Harnett]

This amazing exhibition *Oceanic Architectural Routes: The Photographic Archive of Mike Austin*, presented by Architectus and curated by Leali'ifano Associate Professor Albert Refiti, is indeed a cross-section of the voluminous work by Professor Mike Austin in the field, thereby actively yet critically informing both his research and teaching spanning over three decades. This consists of some 47 archival photographic 'ata (images) across six Moanan Oceanian groups of islands:³ Papua New Guinea (23); Solomon Islands (4); Sāmoa (4); Rapa Nui (Easter Island, 2); Tonga (3); and Fiji (6).

The brief review of these photographic images as a specific "text" is made in the general "context" of Tāvāism,⁴ where both "text" and "context" are entwined and intertwined by way of both process and outcome. While the proverbial saying,⁵ that "a picture is worth a thousand words" applies here, one has to both reflectively yet emotively unpack a plurality of overlays or layers of meanings in order to arrive at the knowledge beneath.⁶ Working within an imposed word limit, this review critiques only a select few amidst the richness of the photographic material.

The right-left, anticlockwise movement of the images within and across six designated Moana Oceania island groups points to the inevitability of change as a philosophical fact of reality (and both culture and history). That is, that change in architecture (and engineering),⁷ as in all things in reality, as in nature, mind-heart, and society, is by nature both "synchronic" and "diachronic,"

where it is both “rooted” and “routed” in terms of both assistance and resistance. Succumbed to the Western influences, there is evidence of both the metaphorical but historical deployment of the past, present, and future,⁸ where the past is put in the front as tūhulu (guidance) and the future behind, huluhulu (guided) by past experiences, with both mediated in the present.⁹ This is apparent in various photographs that show ancestors being addressed.

Both architecture and engineering, tufunga langafale (material art of house-building), are treated as separate artforms in the West as opposed to Moana Oceania where both are taken as inseparable forms of tufunga (material art).¹⁰ This is most evident in the case of Tongan tufunga langafale (material art of house-building), where both artforms coexist as a process and outcome. The fale¹¹ (house) is considered a fefine (woman)—as is fonua (variously known throughout Moana Oceania as vanua,¹² fanua, fenua, enua, hanua, honua, or whenua) as a fefine (woman), defined by tangata (person) and vā (place),¹³ as both respective fakatā/fakafuo (tempo-definer) and fakavā/fakauho (spatio-composer), thereby making or marking fā’ele (birth) as the first fonua through mo’ui (life) as the second fonua to mate (death) as the third fonua.¹⁴ Glimpses of these cultural references can be found in most if not all the architecture in the photographs—for example, in the haus tamberan (spirit house) in Middle Sepik, Papua New Guinea, and in the triangular korambo (ceremonial house) in East Sepik.

Besides the tufunga langafale (material art of house-building, i.e., architecture and engineering), there are other key tufunga (material arts) which lie in close

proximity, notably, tufunga lalava¹⁵ (material art of house-structure-lashing), tufunga tātongitongi/tā’akau¹⁶ (material art of sculpture), tufunga teuteu lotofale (material art of interior design), tufunga teuteu tu’afale (material art of exterior design) and many others. While both tufunga langafale (house-building, i.e., architecture and engineering) and tufunga lalava (material art of house-structure-lashing), the latter is not only both architectural and a form of engineering (i.e., as means of holding house parts in place),¹⁷ but also a form of tufunga teuteu lotofale (material art of interior design), as witnessed in the interior photograph of the bure (residence) of the Ratu paramount chief of Bau island, Fiji.

On one hand, there are regional variations, such as Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands, where the tufunga tātongitongi/tā’akau (material art of sculpture), in the form of tamapua (sculptural form of an ancestor or diety) and pūloa (masks),¹⁸ are utilised as both forms of tufunga teuteu lotofale (material art of interior design) and tufunga teuteu tu’afale (material art of exterior design), for example, in the image titled *Bure, Vanua Levu, 1973*. On the other, there are others’ expressions, e.g., Tonga and Sāmoa, which make use of the tufunga lalava (material art of house-structure-lashing) and nimamea’a lālānga (fine art of mat-weaving), by way of kupesi (elaborate

Fig. 2 Mike Austin (1988). *Bure* interior, Bau. [Photograph]



and complex geometric designs) and papa/fala (mats), in tufunga teuteu lotofale (material art of interior designs). An example is the image titled *Fale Interior Detail*, 1983. Besides, Tonga utilises a number of tufunga teuteu tu'afale, viz., tufunga tō'akaufaito'o (material art of medicinal-plant-planting); tō'akaukakala (material art of sweet-smelling-plant-planting); and tufunga tō'akaukai/fua (material art of food-plant-planting).¹⁹

By way of both "roots" and "routes," synchrony and diachrony, or assistance and resistance, we witness both the tā (temporal) and vā (spatial) variations in the arrangements of these artforms by way of fuo (form) and uho (content). These include varieties of the lanu kula/kulokula and 'uli/'uli'uli (black colours)²⁰ as Moanan Oceanian basic lanu (colours), with the former as lanu melo/melomelo or kena/kenekena (brownish colours) and lanu enga/engeenga (yellowish colours). This is more evident, for example, in the use of kafa kula/kulokula and kafa 'uli/'uli'uli (red and black kafa-sennit) in tufunga lalava (material art of house-structure-lashing), in the use of kili kula/kulokula and vaitohi 'uli/'uli'uli (red skin and black ink) in tufunga tātatau (material art of tattooing), in the use of kele kula/kulokula and vaitohi 'uli/'uli'uli (red earth/soil and black ink), in tufunga ngaohikulo (material art of pottery-making), and in the use of koka kula/kulokula and tongo'uli/'uli'uli (red koka-sap/dye and black tongo-sap/dye), in nimatea'a koka'anga (bark-cloth-making).

Generally, things are arranged in plural, temporal-spatial, collectivistic, holistic, and circular ways in Moana Oceania (in contrast to their general arrangement in singular, techno-teleological, individualistic, atomistic, and linear modes, in the West). Specifically, this is witnessed in the organisation of Moanan Oceanian

Fig. 3 Mike Austin (1973). Bure, Vanua Levu. [Photograph]



faiva (performance), tufunga (material), and nimamea'a (fine) arts—as in the case of tufunga langafale (material art of house-building or architecture and engineering). Both the tā (temporal) and vā (spatial) variations by means of fuo (form) and uho (content) revolve around the mata-ava (eye-hole) formations. From a tāvāist philosophical perspective, it is in the mata-ava (eye-hole) where ivi (energy) (as me'a [matter] as tā-vā [time-space]) is most matolutu'u (dense) and mālohitu'u (intense).

This is apparent in the architectural and engineering structures within and across the six selected Moanan Oceanian island groups. We experience variations in the 'ato (roofs), arranged in tāpotopoto/fuopotopoto (circular) and tāloloa/fuololoa (ovular) ways, with some as ngaofe-ki-lalo/loto (downward/inward) curvatures, for example, in Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands, such as the haus tambaran on the Sepik River, and others as ngaofe-ki-'olunga/tu'a (upward/outward) curvatures, as in Tonga and Sāmoa, seen in various images. Vertically, there seems to be an emphasis on the 'ato (roof) over the faliki (floor), as evident in Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Fiji, Tonga, and Sāmoa (as opposed to the West, generally focusing on the floor over the roof), all as different ways of dealing with both the architectural and engineering problems. Some classic examples are Tongan fale fakamanuka (ovular house) and faleafolau or fale-ala-folau (boat-hangers, ovular-angular house often referred to in Tonga as fale alafolau) and Sāmoan fale maota (circular house), again, as seen in various images.

Some key questions of both ontological and epistemological significance and relevance are raised for further reflection. They include, “what art is,” “what art is for,” and “what art is by means of,” with the former one as ontological in nature and the latter two as epistemological in character. Whereas the former one is concerned with faka'ofa'ofa (beauty) as a function of both tatau (symmetry) and potupotutatau (harmony), i.e., a matter of process or production, the latter two are linked to 'aonga (utility), i.e., a matter of outcome or consumption. The works of art are, inclusive of tufunga langafale (material art of house-building or architecture and engineering), often projected beyond themselves to some outside social purposes, by focusing on the questions, “what art is for,” i.e., art use, and “what art is by means of,” i.e., art history, leaving the question of “what art is,” i.e., art work, unaccounted for. Therein, 'aonga (utility) is made to precede faka'ofa'ofa (beauty), when the latter precedes the former, as a coexistence, in reality, as in nature, mind, and nature.

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NOTES

1. Or tafa'akifā (four-sided dimensionality), i.e., reality or temporality-spatiality has four dimensions, viz., fuo (form), loloto/ma'olunga (depth/height), loloa (length), and fālahi/maokupu (width/breadth), with the former one as tā (time) and the latter three as vā (space).

Tā (time) and vā (space), like fuo (form) and uho (content), are inseparable yet indispensable hoa/soa (pairs, dualities, or binaries), in reality or temporality-spatiality, as in nature, mind-heart, and society.

To privilege tā (time) or fuo (form) over vā (space) or uho (content) renders reality "ta'evā" ("spaceless") or "ta'euho" ("contentless"), and privilege vā (space) or uho (content) over tā (time) and vā (space) warrants reality or temporality-spatiality "ta'etā" ("timeless") or "ta'efuo" ("formless").

2. As in the mata-ava (eye-hole) of the matangi-avangi (eye-hole-of-the-wind), mata'i afi-ava'i afi (eye-hole-of-the-fire) or mata kula-ava kula (red eye-red hole) and mata 'uli-ava 'uli (black eye-black hole) in outer space.

3. See the late Professor Epeli Hau'ofa's, "Our Sea of Islands," where motu (island) can be defined as "lands connected and separated or intersected by sea, ocean, or water." In *A New Oceania: Rediscovering our Sea of Islands*, ed. E. Waddell,

V. Naidu, and E Hau'ofa (Suva: School of Social and Economic Development, University of the South Pacific, in association with Beake House, 1993), 2–6.

4. Tongan (and Moana Oceanian) Tāvāism parallels Australian or Sydney Realism, with both tā-vā (temporality-spatiality) and 'iai (reality) considered to be synonymous, both ontologically and epistemologically, as the common medium for existence of all things, in nature, mind-heart, and society.

5. In Tonga, proverbial sayings are called lea heliaki, defined as "metaphorically saying or speaking one thing but historically meaning another."

6. From a tāvāist philosophical view, knowledge (and skills) gained in education (as a transformation of the mind and heart from vale [ignorance] to 'ilo [knowledge] to poto [skills], in that logical order of precedence), are composed in fonua/'ulugaanga fakafonua (culture) and communicated in tala/lea (language), both as mere social vaka (vessels).

7. While architecture is chiefly concerned with the fakatā/fakafuo (temporal definition) of vā (space) and, in turn, the fakavā/fakauho (spatial composition) of tā (time), on the one hand, engineering is mainly concerned with the fakatau (mediation) of intersecting or connecting and separating (i.e., pushing-pulling) energies, forces, or tendencies, through sustained tatau (symmetry) and potupotutatau (harmony) to produce faka'ofa'ofa (beauty), on the other hand.

8. Organised in plural, temporal-spatial, collectivistic, holistic, and circular ways versus their organisation in singular, technoteleological, individualistic, atomistic, and linear modes, in the West.

9. Given the already-taken-place past has stood the test of tā-vā (time-space), it is placed in the mu'a (front) as tūhulu (guidance), and the yet-to-take-place future is situated in the mui (back), huluhulu (guided) by past knowledges, where both the illusive past and elusive future are constantly mediated in the ever-changing present, in the loto (centre).

10. Tongan arts were generally divided into three genres, namely, faiva (performance), tufunga (material), and nimamea'a (fine) arts. Moreover, in old Tongan, education and art, both as disciplinary practices and a form of social activity, were closely organised alongside each other.

11. The kava and tō (sugarcane) ceremony is defined at the interface of the vaka (boat) and fale (house), where the vaka (boat) is a fale fakafo'ohake (downside-up house) which is, in turn, a vaka fakafo'ohifo (upside-down boat).

12. The Tongan word "vanu" as in the term "vanua" means "unknown," as in both the fonua (land) and moana (ocean), or tahi (sea).

13. The former, i.e., tangata (person), is a tempo-definer of the latter, i.e., vā (place) which is, in turn, a spatio-composer of the former, i.e., tangata (person/man).

14. The first, second, and third fonua are respectively made up of the valevale (fetus) and manava/taungafanau (mother's placenta/womb), the kakai (people) and 'ātakai (environment), and the mate (dead) and fa'itoka/mala'e (burial place).

15. Which makes use of the intersecting or connecting and separating kafa kula (red-kafa-sinnet) and kafa 'uli (black-kafa-sinnet) which spits out an infinite number of kupesi (elaborate and complex geometric designs), in loto-ki-tu'a (inside-out), tu'a-ki-loto (outside-in) constant motion, in multi-dimensional, multi-directional ways. The root word is "kupe," meaning intersecting or connecting and separating koho-vā (lines-spaces), i.e., tā-vā (times-spaces), in grid-like, vortex-type, helix-driven (or mata-ava [eye-hole-led] formations—as in the ancient Māori hero warrior, navigator, and discoverer, Kupe, as the "Intersector or Connector and Separator" of winds and waves. On the other hand, the Tongan (and Moanan Oceanian) kupesi is the scientific DNA which is, in turn, the Tongan (and Moanan Oceanian) kupesi, with the former moving tu'a-ki-loto (outside-in), and the latter loto-ki-tu'a (inside-out).

16. Or tātikī, especially the sculpturing of 'ata (images).

17. See tufunga fo'uvaka (or fa'uvaka; material art of boat-building [and engineering]). The same holds true for kupenga (net or web) as in fishnet and spider's (or world wide) web.

18. The global pandemic COVID-19 enforced the wearing of "masks," newly translated into Tongan as "masiki," like the Tongan translations of "link" and "text" into "lingiki" and "tēkisi" respectively. Similarly, the aphoristic expression "world wide web" (www) can be translated as "kupengaope" or "kupeope," following note 17 above.

19. Like all the artforms, these forms of art point to the coexistence of both faka'ofa'ofa (beauty) and 'aonga (utility), as in the highly problematic distinction between "art" and "craft," in the West, yet when it comes to production, then faka'ofa'ofa (beauty) precedes 'aonga (utility), followed by consumption, in that logical order of precedence. That is, the more beautiful, the more useful and, conversely, the more useful, the more beautiful.

20. As the basic Moanan Oceanian lanu (colours), the lanu kula/kulokula and 'uli/'uli'uli (red and black colours) are, on the epistemological level, metaphorical extensions of tā and vā (time and space) and fuo and uho (form and content), on the ontological level.