

Poem: Making the Mark

Tessa Miller

Introduction

The following poem was written at a cultural art festival where I was to present a paper on tapa making. While at the festival, however, I felt that presenting a paper would be an act of redundancy. In comparison to the tapa making from many Pacific Island countries that was happening live, under tents just outside the building, the 'experts' presentations of papers and powerpoints on the subject felt unnecessary. The tapa makers from Fiji were Koto and Vetacini Matemosi, daughters of the late Makereta Matemosi. Makereta, the designer of the Fiji Airways logo, was at the centre of the tapa motif copyright application controversy brought by the airline. In providing Fiji Airways with the logo and 15 accompanying motifs, Makereta had drawn on the traditional designs of her husband's province. The divide between artist and corporation meant she had, unknowingly, handed over motifs to an airline looking to copyright cultural knowledge that, in truth, belong to the people.

Instead of presenting a paper on the technicalities of tapa making, her story inspired me to write this poem.

Part 1

Ode to Makereta Masi mark maker

An angel with a golden heart
Set down her guard to embark
Upon a quest to hail the mark
Of land and sea, bird and shark

SINUOUS OBJECTS

And from the earth she gathered dust
By the father she laid her trust
To do great deeds her duties must
And of no glory did she lust

Drawing from far and wide
Sailing in on the ocean's tide
No identity was denied
As the strokes combined, side by side

A mighty flag to take hold
Of people united standing bold
To show the world, us treasures untold
Then suddenly, a knife sliced through her!

And a different story began to unfold ...

Part 2

The wrong copyright

What is this rogue so dark and devouring?
 That laps at our shores ever needy and hungering
 Stamping and branding, industrialising!
 Our peaceful co-existence; threatening, compromising

Dare we slip into this annex never ending
 What then of us-selves and the Earth we are tending?
 For feeding and clothing and sheltering and sharing
 Lest not us forget her, for we are her kin!
 Lest not us forget her in this protecting and officiating

(Of)

These marks.

These marks that translate us transcend us and blend us
 These marks are not hers, not mine, not theirs!

These marks ARE us

These marks are us ...

Translating and blending, transcending, never ending!

Living and breathing

Stressing expressing

Fenua! Vanua! Fonua, Tonua!

Sina and Hina and Hila and More!

So

So

So much more (are we)

We don't fit in a box

And don't ask me why!

Ask yourself

Figure 31. Tessa Miller, *The Wrong Copyright*, earth pigments on barkcloth and laminated paper, 2015

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