

# Michel Tuffery

New Zealander, b. 1966

## Povi Christkeke

1999, mixed media: flattened corn beef tins, Christmas tree lights, wood  
176x311x110 cm

Purchased 1999

Reproduced courtesy of Michel Tuffery



### About the work

Many of Michel Tuffery's works are inspired by his love for the Pacific Islands and concern at the sometimes negative impact of Western influences. 'Christkeke' in the title translates roughly as 'in Christ's name' and makes reference to the arrival of the Christian missionaries in the islands and their impact on traditional attitudes and patterns of behaviour.

The imported corned beef - a staple for many Pacific Island families - is often incorporated into rituals of feasting, gift-giving and communal hospitality and Tuffery has invested the bull with a wry socio-political message. The sculpture is a comment on the impact of advertising and the mass consumption of corned beef on the health and lifestyle of the Samoan people. This food, introduced by Europeans, quickly became part of the staple diet, causing a decline in fishing, cultivation and indigenous cooking skills.

Serious as the issues are, there is throughout a whimsical sense of humour. *Povi Christkeke* is constructed from flattened and riveted corned beef tins, in a colourful and seemingly celebratory sculpture. Tuffery made this work for an art performance event presented in 1999, but in fact he had made two of these corned beef bull sculptures for a ritual

performance entitled 'Pisupo Lua Afe' at the 1997 Christchurch Arts Festival.

The bulls, mounted on coaster wheels, were accompanied by Samoan drumming and dancing and pushed through the city streets. Fireworks and Christmas tree lights placed inside the bulls were lit and a cacophony of sound, fire and colour indicated the start of a dramatic mechanical 'bullfight'. Tuffery says of these performance works that he wants to "get away from the usual thing of putting a picture or a sculpture in a gallery for display". Instead he involves the wider Polynesian community. "It is a much bigger deal for us (Pacific Islanders) because you carry with it the whole community's name, the fa'a Samoa (the Samoan way of life) and the sense of ownership which belongs to the whole community." ('The Artist as Dabbler', *The Press*, 13 August, 1997, p. 13.)

The use of the multiple parts, and in particular the use of the tins, is a connection to Pop Art's incorporation of objects common to everyday life, such as Andy Warhol's *Campbell's Soup Cans* and *Brillo Boxes*, but the bull cleverly raises questions about the common assumptions made of contemporary Pacific Island life.

# Michel Tuffery

New Zealander, b. 1966

## About the artist

Born in Wellington in 1966, Michel Tuffery is of Samoan, Tahitian and Palagi (European) descent. He graduated from Otago Polytechnic School of Art with Honours in 1988 and in 1991 attended the University of Hawaii, Manoa School of Fine Arts, USA.

Tuffery has been the recipient of numerous awards and grants, including the Rita Angus Fellowship in 1996. He was Artist in Residence at the MacMillan Brown Centre for Pacific Studies, University of Canterbury, in 1997. He has also taught printing, drawing and Pacific Island design skills throughout New Zealand, as well as the Cook Islands, Western Samoa, American Samoa, Tokelau Islands, Solomon Islands and French Polynesia. Tuffery has exhibited widely in New Zealand and internationally. He lives and works in Wellington.

Tuffery's sculptural practice developed in the late 1980s when he began to study woodcarving and tattoo designs. At this time he also began to research the serious socio-political implications of drift net fishing and agricultural practices in the Pacific Islands. Large mechanised sculptures of crabs, fish and the bull, made from found objects such as cans, were made during his residency at the MacMillan Brown Centre in 1997.

Tuffery also creates work on paper, such as screen prints and lithographs. His use of motifs and symbols found in Samoan art forms, such as the lizard, tattoo and weaving patterns found in mats, combined with Palagi imagery, create a cross-cultural interaction with art and life. He has said, "In the Pacific Islands 'tufuga' [master] refers to everything from architecture to tattooist, so I want to dabble in everything." (Ibid.)

## Other works by the artist in the Collection

*Turtle, Crab, Crayfish, Shellfish, Clam, Sea Eggs*

1990, print  
Purchased 1990

## Further reading

*Beretara: Contemporary Pacific Art*, Susan Cochrane, 2001.

*Speaking in Colour: Conversations with Artists of Pacific Island Heritage*, Sean Mallon and Fulimalo Pereira, Te Papa Press, 1997.

'Everything is Connected: the art of Michel Tuffery', Tim Walker, *Art New Zealand* No. 70, 1994, pp. 64-67.

