

# Kalisolaite 'Uhila

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Kalisolaite 'Uhila  
Sun Gate: Ha'amonga a Maui  
March 2023  
Live-streamed performance  
Tonga





Kalisolaite 'Uhila  
Ouau kohikohi / Ceremonial Markings  
February 2022  
Live performance and installation  
Michael Lett, Auckland







Kalisolaite 'Unila  
Ouau kohikohi / Ceremonial Markings  
February 2022  
Live performance  
Michael Lett, Auckland





Kalisolaite 'Uhila  
Left-right, Left-right  
May 2021  
Live performance  
Michael Lett, Auckland





MYERS  
PARK

MYERS PARK  
THIS PARK  
WAS A GIFT TO  
THE CITY OF AUCKLAND  
BY  
THE HONOURABLE  
ARTHUR H. MYERS M.P.  
FOR THE  
GENERATION AND ENJOYMENT  
OF THE PEOPLE  
1913

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Kalisolaite 'Uhila  
Left-right, Left right!  
May, 2021  
Live Performance  
Michael Lett, Auckland













Kalisolaite 'Uhila  
*Makatuliki / Cornerstone*  
February, 2021  
Live performance  
Performance Arcade, Wellington





Kalisolaite 'Uhila  
Honolulu Biennial, 2019  
Photo by Ben Carpenter-Nwanyanwu



Michael Lett



Kalisolaite 'Uhila  
*First will be last and last, first*  
August 2018  
performance  
Michael Lett, Auckland





Kalisolaite 'Uhila  
*First will be last and last, first*  
August 2018  
performance  
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Kalisolaite 'Uhila  
*Pigs in the yard II*  
November 2016 – March 2017  
performance  
Te Tuhi, Auckland





Kalisolaite 'Uhila  
*Pigs in the yard II*  
November 2016 – March 2017  
performance  
Te Tuhi, Auckland





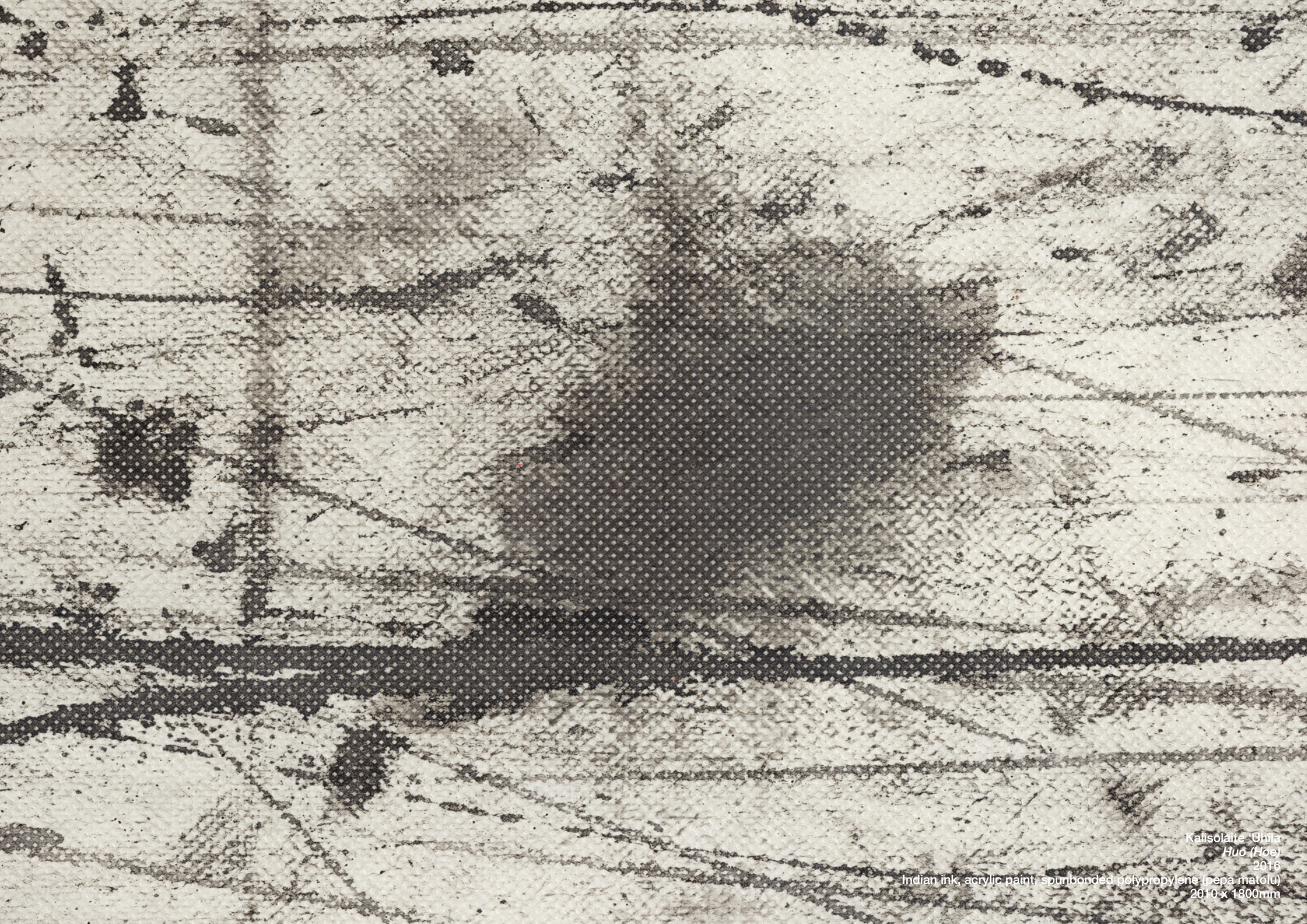
Kalisolaite 'Uhila  
*Pigs in the yard II*  
November 2016 – March 2017  
performance  
Te Tuhi, Auckland





Kalisolaite 'Uhila  
*Huo (Hoe)*  
2016  
Indian ink, acrylic paint, spunbonded polypropylene (pepa matolu)  
2010 x 1800mm





Kallisolaite Uhila

Huo (Hoe)

2016

Indian ink, acrylic paint, spunbonded polypropylene (pepa matolu)

2010 x 1800mm





Kalisolaite 'Uhila  
Ongo mei Moana  
2015  
performance  
Wellington Performance Arcade





Kalisolaite 'Uhila  
*Umu Tangata*  
2013  
performance  
Mangere Arts Centre, Auckland





Kalisolaite 'Uhila  
Mo'ui tukuhausia  
2012/14  
performance  
The Walter's Prize, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki





Michael Lett

Kalisolaite 'Uhila  
*Mo'ui tukuhausia*  
2012/14  
performance  
The Walter's Prize, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki







## Kalisolaite 'Uhila

Born 1981 in Tonga  
Lives and works in Auckland, New Zealand

### EDUCATION

2016  
Master of Performance & Media Arts (First Class Honours), Auckland University of Technology

2010  
Bachelor of Visual Arts, Auckland University of Technology

### AWARDS & RESIDENCIES

2022  
Karekare House Artist Residency

2021  
Arts Foundation Harriet Friedlander Award

2018  
Montalvo Arts Center Residency, California, USA  
Youkobo Art Space Residency, Tokyo, Japan

2017  
Dean's Award for Excellence in Postgraduate Study

2016  
Tuakana/Teina Postgraduate Scholarship, AUT School of Art and Design  
The Physics Room Residency, Christchurch NZ  
ZK/U & Ifa Galerie Residency, Berlin, Germany

2015  
Henry Wilson Pasifika Postgraduate Scholarship, AUT School of Art and Design

2014  
Walters Prize Finalist, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki

2013  
Iris Fisher Scholarship, Te Tuhi Centre for the Arts

2011  
Auckland Fringe Awards, Visual Arts

### SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

2023  
Sun Gate: Ha'amonga a Maui as part of the exhibition Huarere: Weather Eye, Weather Ear, Te Tuhi, Pakuranga, Auckland

2022  
Ouau kohikohi / Ceremonial Markings, Michael Lett, Auckland NZ (solo)

2021  
the body and its outside, Michael Lett, Auckland NZ (group)  
Performance Series, Michael Lett, Auckland NZ (solo)  
Auckland Art Fair, Auckland NZ (group)  
Prophetic Visions, curated by Dilohana Lekamge, Wellington, NZ (group)  
Makatuliki / Cornerstone, The Performance Arcade, Wellington, NZ

2019  
How to Live Together, St Paul St, Auckland, NZ (group)  
Honolulu Biennial 2019: To Make Wrong / Right / Now, Hawaii, USA (group)

2018  
First will be last and last, first, Michael Lett, Auckland (solo)

2017  
Politics of Sharing: On Collective Wisdom, Artspace NZ (group)  
The Pacific, Libby Leshold Gallery, Emily Carr University, Vancouver Canada (group)

2016  
Kohikohi, Fresh Gallery Otara, Auckland, NZ (solo)  
Pigs in the Yard II, Te Tuhi Arts Centre, Pakuranga, Auckland NZ (solo)  
Kelekele mo'ui (Giving Life), Physics Room, Christchurch (solo)  
Inhabiting Space, Adam Art Gallery, Victoria University Wellington, NZ (group)  
Wasting Time in Berlin, Politics of Sharing, Ifa Galerie, Berlin, Germany (group)  
Ongo mei Loto, The Performance Arcade, Wellington, NZ (group)  
Maumau-taimi', St Paul St, Auckland, NZ (Masters presentation)

2015  
Tangai 'one'one, Oceanic Performance Biennale, Rarotonga, Cook Islands (group)  
Ongo mei moana, The Performance Arcade, Wellington NZ (group)



2014

Mo'ui Tukuhausia, Walter's Prize (Finalist), Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, Auckland NZ (group)  
Fusi Fonua, Democracy Festival, Atenisi University, Nuku'alofa, Tonga (group)

2013

Simavao: Concrete Jungle Puehu: Cultural Dust, Suter Art Gallery, Nelson NZ (solo)  
Kaufata / Pallbearers, Silo Auckland, NZ (solo)

## SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

2023

'Kalisolaite 'Uhila performs Sun Gate: Ha'amonga a Maui on the Autumn Equinox,' Issue no. 197, *Art News*, 10 March 2023.  
Zara Stanhope, 'Watching, listening and acting: 'Huarere: Weather Eye, Weather Ear' at Te Tuhi,' *Art Monthly Australasia*  
Melody Nixon, 'Nga Huarere o te Moana Nui a Kiwa: Pacific Weathers,' [www.contemporaryhum.com](http://www.contemporaryhum.com)

2022

J. A. Kennedy, 'bag Bang BANG on Kalisolaite 'Uhila's Ouau kohikohi/ Ceremonial Markings,' *The Art Paper Magazine*, no.3, July, 2022.

2021

Victoria Wynne-Jones, 'Kalisolaite 'Uhila: Time well-wasted.' *The Art Paper* Issue no. 00  
Celia McAlpine, Kalisolaite 'Uhila's 'Kalanga /To Shout', *Eyecontact*  
Victoria Wynne-Jones, 'Walking the Wall and Crossing the Threshold: Angela Tiatia, Kalisolaite 'Uhila and Shigeyuki Kihara's Counter-Hegemonic Choreographies' in *Choreographing Intersubjectivity in Performance Art*. Cham: Palgrave McMillan, 2021.

2019

Moana Nepia, 'About the Artist: Kalisolaite 'Uhila' *The Contemporary Pacific*, 2019, Vol.31 (1), p.V-V.  
Caroline Sinavaiana Gabbard, 'Archipelagic Poetics in the Art of Kalisolaite 'Uhila and Yuki Kihara' *Journal of transnational American studies*, 2019, Vol.10 (1)  
Emma Willis, Helena Grehan, Peter Eckersall, 'It's just not right: Performing homelessness in Kalisolaite 'Uhila's Mo'ui tukuhausia, *The Routledge Companion to Theatre and Politics*, 2019, p.143-146  
Hi'ilei Julia Hobart, when we dance the ocean, does it hear us? *Journal of transnational American studies*, 2019, Vol.10 (1)

Kalisolaite 'Uhila, 'The first will be last and the last, first' *The Contemporary Pacific*, 2019, Vol.31 (1), p.262

Kalisolaite 'Uhila, Ongo mei Moana, *The Contemporary Pacific*, 2019, Vol.31 (1), p.139

Kalisolaite 'Uhila, 'Pigs in the Yard' *The Contemporary Pacific*, 2019, Vol.31 (1), p.160

Kalisolaite 'Uhila, 'Mo'ui tukuhausia' *The Contemporary Pacific*, 2019, Vol.31 (1), p.35

Kalisolaite 'Uhila, 'Umu Tangata' *The Contemporary Pacific*, 2019, Vol.31 (1), p.104

Kalisolaite 'Uhila, 'Fakama'a (III) (to make clean, to cleanse)' *The Contemporary Pacific*, 2019, Vol.31 (1), p.235

2016

Anthony Byrt, 'Luke Willis Thompson / Kalisolaite 'Uhila: The Walters Prize 2014' in *This Model World*. Auckland: Auckland University Press  
Elde aus dem Moore and Misal Adnan Yildiz, *Politics of sharing: on collective wisdom*. Stuttgart: Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen; Auckland: Artspace NZ.

2015

Gregory Minissale, 'Problem spaces in the Walters prize,' *Reading room* (Auckland, N.Z.), 2015 (7), p.126-147

2014

Nina Tonga 'Roaming All Levels,' Te Papa Tongarewa, *Off the Wall: Issue #6 - August*  
Bruce E. Phillips, 'Curator's response: Kalisolaite 'Uhila's Mo'ui Tukuhausia,' Auckland Art Gallery, 2014.  
Anna-Marie White, Conversation with Kate Brett Kelly-Chalmers, *Ocular*, 2014.  
Stephen Cleland, *The Walters Prize 2014*. Auckland: Auckland Art Gallery

2013

Ioana Gordon-Smith, Rangituhia Hollis, Jeremy Leatinu'u, Kalisolaite 'Uhila, *More than we know*, Auckland: Gus Fisher Gallery

2012

Bruce E Phillips and Kalisolaite 'Uhila, 'Discussing Mo'ui tukuhausia', in *What do you mean, we?* (exhibition catalogue) Te Tuhi Centre for the Arts, Auckland, 2012, p. 51.

2011

Leafa Wilson, 'The Pig and Its Friend Kalisolaite 'Uhila's Iconic Performance Work, 'White Fungus, 2011.

2009

Nooroa Tapuni and Charmaine 'Ilaiu, Don't pacify me: St Paul St Gallery, 26.06.09-10.07.09



# Revered Porcine Cuisine

AA JH

John Hurrell – 28 January, 2017

*I personally greatly enjoy eating pork and ham, especially around Christmas time, but I also enjoy observing the intelligence and personalities of pigs when I visit farms or agricultural shows, so I can't escape a certain amount of conflictual soul searching, which this exhibition pushes my nose in. As the Te Tuhi blurb accurately says, "the pigs in 'Uhila's work...(while) significant as sacred animals of Tongan lore (are)...also surrogates for the human body."*

► **TE TUHI CENTRE FOR THE ARTS**  
Pakuranga

**Kalisolaite 'Uhila**  
*Pigs in the Yard II*

12 November - 18 March 3017

**Kalisolaite 'Uhila** <2014/10/the-artist-as-haua> is well known for his performances that spotlight the plight of the **homeless** <2012/04/using-art-to-combat-prejudices>; the difficulties of having no money and living on the street. (Being a finalist in the second most recent **Walters Prize** <2014/08/art-as-social-critique> upped his national profile.) This suite of documentary projects differs in that it examines his interaction (as human representative) with domestic animals, in particular that commonly denigrated mammals, the pig.



In Tonga pigs are allowed to roam around comparatively free (not in batteries), being regarded as sacred, but they are slaughtered and eaten on certain ceremonial occasions. In this show we are presented with a pen-like structure that we can walk through, and see two sets of three spot-lit photographs recording two earlier performances. One set (a one day performance in Mangere Arts Centre, 2011) shows the artist and his audience restricted to being behind fences while the animals are free in a courtyard. A second (documentation of a one week performance in Performance Arcade, Aotea Square, 2011) has the artist lying in a straw-filled pen alongside a very relaxed piglet.

A third component features a large video monitor flat on the floor, showing the daily lives of a sow, boar and about eight piglets, filmed from above as they snuffle around for food, roll in the straw and dirt, and jostle for advantageous positions. Next to the screen are the fenced-off remains of a spit, and charcoal, from when one of the animals was cooked and eaten by the artist, family and guests during the exhibition's opening function.

This show is clearly not intended to provoke, yet it surely will upset some vegetarians and vegans, even though there are no disturbing images and no traces of grease or smell. It is a sensitive (unfrivolous) presentation, one not deviating from a certain matter-of-factness. It makes its point without being gruesome. **'Uhila** <2014/09/whom-is-the-walters-prize-addressing> has a great empathy for other people and other sentient beings or creatures - *that* seems to be a characteristic of his practice - but he is not sentimental.

I personally greatly enjoy eating pork and ham, especially around Christmas time, but I also enjoy observing the intelligence and personalities of pigs when I visit farms or agricultural shows, so I can't escape a certain amount of conflictual soul searching, which this exhibition pushes my nose in. As the Te Tuhi blurb accurately says, "the pigs in 'Uhila's work...(while) significant as sacred animals of Tongan lore (are)...also surrogates for the human body."

Attached to this (what I see as) paradoxical - even contradictory - empathy is also an implied secondary theme (also **explained** <<http://www.tetuhi.org.nz/whats-on/exhibitiondetails.php?id=179>>), that of space, bodily control and social structure. This metaphorical spatial and therefore sociological aspect is salient - and of great interest - but it is overshadowed (I think) by the dietary ethical issues. They dominate the emotional tone of the exhibition.

John Hurrell

John Hurrell, "Revered Porcine Cuisine", Eye Contact, January 2017



# How artist Kalisolaite ‘Uhila made a statement by vanishing into the streets

by Anthony Byrt / 10 April, 2017

Portrait by Pati Solomona Tyrell



Auckland artist Kalisolaite 'Uhila.

**One of New Zealand's most intriguing and gifted artists, Kalisolaite 'Uhila's work is a series of disappearing acts which include living as a homeless person for three months – and making Auckland's inequality starkly visible in the process.**

It's 10am on a sticky day and Kalisolaite 'Uhila has just finished work. We meet for coffee near the intersection of Ponsonby and Karangahape Roads, not long after his night shift at Lion Breweries' East Tāmaki factory. His job is to stand on the production line straightening up Stella bottles so the process doesn't stall. He grins, and tells me to think about that the next time I'm drinking one.

'Uhila is one of Auckland's most intriguing and gifted artists. He first entered the public consciousness with his 2014 Walters Prize live performance *Mo'ui tukuhausia* ("to be absolutely stranded, or to be left destitute and friendless"), in which he lived homeless for three months around central Auckland. The work was a redux of a shorter performance he made in 2012 at Pakuranga's Te Tuhi Centre for the Arts, well before the city's homelessness crisis became a daily conversation.

I ask him how his loved ones cope when he puts himself in such vulnerable scenarios. "My wife has been by my side since day one," he says. But things have been trickier with his wider family, who have often asked what he's doing and why he bothers. It took him seven years to finish his undergraduate degree. There were times when

his family suggested he give up and do a building apprenticeship with his older brother instead.

Things weren't much better for him within the art world. Before his Walters Prize breakthrough, he was depressed and convinced nobody understood his work; 'Uhila, whose parents are Tongan, grew up in Ponsonby, but had decided to move to Tonga with his wife and daughter. The plan was to never come back. His wife wanted to study theology there. His goal was to reconnect with the world around him – to try and get well again. "Before we left, the family challenged us, saying, 'Why are you going back to Tonga? Why are you going backwards?'" he says. "But you've got to go back to go forwards. The future is the past."

He was in Tonga when he got the call telling him he'd been nominated for New Zealand's richest contemporary art award, the \$50,000 Walters Prize. Every two years, a jury of experts select four works they consider to be major contributions to New Zealand art; in 2014, the jury thought *Mo'ui tukuhausia* was one of them. 'Uhila admits he didn't even know what the Walters Prize was – he handed the phone to his wife because he thought it was a prank call. Around the same time, he also received a scholarship from AUT to do his Masters degree. These affirmations drew the couple back to Auckland.



'Uhila in *Maumau-taimi*, 2016, where he sat in the window box of St Paul St Gallery for hours; the audience could watch or interact by sitting inside the window box with him. Credit: Raymond Sagapolutele]

Luke Willis Thompson (a good friend of 'Uhila's) eventually won the Walters Prize, but *Mo'ui tukuhausia* became the major talking point. 'Uhila's performance was both powerful and ephemeral: there was almost no evidence of him in the Auckland Art Gallery itself; instead, visitors had to imagine him living anonymously outside of the gallery for the duration of the show. The brilliant contradiction here was the way he simultaneously vanished into Auckland's streets while also making one of the most upsetting aspects of inequality starkly visible: the plight of young Pacific men caught between the cultural expectation to provide for their families, and the financial pressure of living in one of the world's most debilitatingly expensive cities.



'Uhila – who lives in Māngere, makes next to nothing from his art and works nights at Lion to support his family – is one of those men. But he's also keen to point out that his work stretches beyond socio-political commentary. When I ask him what really drives his thinking, he laughs. "Wasting time," he says.

He elaborates with a complex explanation of "maumau-taimi", a Tongan concept of time that he says is different to the Western, linear sense of how the hours pass. "It's like, we're sitting here and we see someone across the road, and he looks like he's wasting his time," he says. "But we don't even know who he is and we're making judgements. It's that perspective that I'm trying to address. It's not to cause tension, but it's the awareness of how we judge people sometimes. For me, I need to create that understanding: don't judge me, don't see me as useless or as this person wasting time.

"It's a philosophical way of thinking," he continues. "Doing the homeless piece, my own time kind of left. You've got high tide, low tide, daylight, nighttime, you've got traffic at eight o'clock and five o'clock. Five in the morning is when the cleaners come. People become a shadow of time; they're moving while I stay still. Everything repeats. Life and art aren't separate. They're connected."

Being nominated for the Walters Prize changed 'Uhila's family's perceptions about his career choice. So did getting a Masters degree and, he laughs, being interviewed on TV about *Mō'ui tukuhausia* – all signs that his art was becoming something, rather than being, ironically, a waste of his time. The fact that he travelled to Europe is also seen as a big deal. He went there for a short residency at ifa-Galerie in Berlin, an institution that promotes cultural exchange and dialogue. He describes the experience as a "culture shock" and "alienating", though I sense in both phrases an exhilaration rather than fear.



'Uhila talks to one of the audience members, Aldous Nissen, in the window box of St Paul St Gallery. Credit: Raymond Sagapolutele

In Berlin he made a series of videos in some of the city's most historical sites, including spots where the Wall once ran, which are now gathering points for drug users and the homeless. As we search the crowds, we realise 'Uhila is in there too, standing or sitting still as people move around him. One of these videos was recently shown in the Artspace exhibition *Politics of Sharing – On Collective Wisdom*. Shot at Tempelhof Airport – one of Berlin's most intact examples of Nazi architecture, recently turned into a shelter for thousands of refugees – we can just make out 'Uhila, sitting alone in a field of long grass.

"I like the idea of that book, *Where's Wally?*" he jokes. "I'm in that space, but where am I? I haven't got the red and white stripes, or a dog and a cane though." Underpinning the works are serious ideas about empathy, transition and democracy; as with his decision to live homeless, 'Uhila clearly identifies with the people many of us choose not to see.

This is the crucial point: 'Uhila's profound inventiveness is based on a conceptual shift for his audiences, forcing them to move from the idea of "looking at" to "being with". And that's still the case when he isn't literally present. Think, for example, of everything you project onto his absent body when you imagine him living on the streets – all your empathy, all your fears (both of and for him), all your prejudices.

'Uhila's actions often cast him as an outsider: as a wanderer, philosopher, poet, and sometimes prophet. He seems capable of being all these things at once. Not that he'd necessarily say this. He'd probably just call himself an artist.

I ask him where he thinks it's all headed. He pauses before he answers. "I like the fresh smell of coffee. The smell of existence. The present. I don't know what's going to happen tomorrow. At the moment, what I've got in mind is to just live life. Being honest in what you do is not telling someone else's story. That's what the work is about."



## Arts award boosts confidence for artist Kalisolaite 'Uhila

25 Oct, 2017 8:30pm



Kalisolaite 'Uhila says a Pasifika arts awards makes him more confident of the work he's doing. Photo: Raymond Sagapolutele

By: **Dionne Christian**

Arts & Books Editor, NZ Herald  
dionne.christian@nzme.co.nz

Tongan-born artist Kalisolaite 'Uhila acknowledges there have been times when he's wondered whether anyone truly notices and comprehends the experiential performance art he makes.

He's even been spat on and confronted by the police while undertaking sometimes lengthy performances designed to make us think about how we can connect to other people and issues around us.

After last night, 'Uhila says he'll wonder no more.

The 36-year-old, who once spent three months living on Auckland's streets for an art project about homelessness, won the contemporary Pacific Artist Award and \$7500 at the Creative New Zealand Arts Pasifika Awards. The annual awards recognise Pacific artists practising contemporary and heritage art forms.

'Uhila was told about the award this month before flying to the Emily Carr University of Art + Design in Vancouver, Canada for *The Pacific*. An inaugural exhibition, it brought together artists from around the Pacific to look at how their art can highlight historical issues and explore contemporary concerns.

He flew straight from Canada to Wellington to be at the CNZ ceremony, saying it is a privilege to be honoured in such a way. When 'Uhila first got the call, he thought CNZ had telephoned to talk about funding applications.

"Then I realised and I was speechless but, at the same time, privileged," he says. "Deep down inside me, I had tears of excitement. I've been working as a performance artist for some time and I thought nobody understood what I was doing or would get the meaning of my work."

That work has included sleeping rough around Auckland Art Gallery for three months and, before that, at Te Tuhi Gallery in Pakuranga; spending days with a piglet in a pen for *Pigs in the Yard* at the Mangere Arts Centre and in Aotea Square; conducting the tide at Wellington's Oriental Bay and, in 2012, donning a black balaclava and green fishing net before leaping from a swing bridge into the Waimapu Stream then dragging himself to shore and wandering to the Bay of Plenty Polytechnic.

"For me, it's about my experience and trying to find something, 'how can I connect to you? How can we connect?' I could be direct but I will try to find other ways to connect," 'Uhila says.

Sometimes the connections made haven't exactly been life-affirming. At Te Tuhi, a visitor spat loudly and fulsomely on 'Uhila's head thinking he was a homeless man hanging around the gallery.



"When he spat at me, I had ~~that~~ human mind - yes, I wanted to punch him - but he had done what he had done, he'd connected to me and he'd walked away," 'Uhila says.

"I could have responded but then I thought to myself, 'a punch won't go a long way but not responding to what he has done, not responding with violence, is more effective'. I bet when he got home, he probably thought, 'what did I do that for?'"

Despite winning awards for *Pigs in the Yard* and receiving a 2013 Iris Fisher Scholarship from Te Tuhi, 'Uhila moved his family back to Tonga because he felt he was not achieving the results he wanted to with his art.

He returned in 2014 after being selected for that year's Walters Prize, partly on the basis of the two weeks he spent living rough in and around Te Tuhi for the group show *What do you mean, we?*. For the Walters Prize work *Mo'ui Tukuhausia*, 'Uhila spent three months on Auckland city streets.

While Luke Willis Thompson won the 2014 Walters Prize, 'Uhila opted to remain in Auckland and take up a Pasifika post-graduate scholarship (art and design) to work toward his now completed master of performance and media arts at AUT.

He stills works nights at Lion Breweries to support himself and his family, who now include a 10-year-old daughter and an 18-month-old son.

"I'm standing up bottles, standing there for a whole eight hours just looking at bottles and any bottles that fall, you have to pick them up because if the bottles don't stand up, it stops production," says 'Uhila. "When the bottles are all standing, it's like humans; when we are all standing all in line then one of us falls, the other person can come and pick us up."