



sunameke productions

tep tok

THE AUCKLAND CONVERSATION

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1 synopsis

Tep Tok (Tap Talk) around the importance of tattoo revival and the continuance of marking skin for the next generation.

This short documentary captures a series of Auckland conversations with Tapaeru Ariki Lulu French, Tyla Vaeau, Ema Tavola, Milly Korua Grant, Graham Tipene, Ahukata Keefe, Salevasa Gray, Georgie Williams and Moko Smith.

Directors message

Myself as a Papua New Guinea Australian skin marker and film maker, this short documentary is a sharing of the conversations had in and around Auckland centred on the practice of marking skin from the city my family choose to live in. Voices of Ta Moko practitioners to curators, healers, performers and youth speak to their insights and hope for the revival and continuance of the many Indigenous skin marking practices present in Auckland.

Tep Tok : The Auckland Conversation is a precursor to the full length documentary Tep Tok : Our Lines Connect Us releasing in December 2020. Travelling, filming and editing Tep Tok : Reading Between Our Lines from 2012 to 2015 was a defining period of time that transformed myself from a dancer and visual artist to then picking up the tools and learning to mark skin.

The Tep Tok documentaries are not the typical traditional or cinematic documentary but a complex and layered puzzle piecing of many voices from the stories shared with myself and my family. These documentaries are an avenue to author the stories of the people I mark and meet through the work of Melanesian Marks.

-Julia Mage'au Gray



Key Cast and Crew

Director: Julia Mage'au Gray | Filmed and Edited: Julia Mageau Gray & Keama Aniheta |
Sound: Excerpts from The Calling by David Bridie

Interviews with: Tapaeru Ariki Lulu French, Tyla Vaeau, Ema Tavola, Milly Korua Grant,
Graham Tipene, Ahukata Keefe, Salevasa Gray, Georgie Williams and Moko Smith.

Images:

1. Tapaeru Ariki Lulu French
2. Graham Tipene and son, Ahukata Keefe.

Relevant Questions

What does Tep Tok mean?

Tep Tok is in tok pisin language and it means Tap Talk / Tattoo Talk. Since the first documentary the term Tep Tok has often been mistaken as the word to describe the act of tattooing in Papua New Guinea. With over 800 living languages in Papua New Guinea words that describe tattooing are many such as; Poapoa from Mekeo, Harahara from Kairuku, Revareva from Motu, Aloalo from Hula, just to mention a few.

Why do we prefer to say Skin Marking over the word Tattooing?

Tattoo is a derivative from the word Tatau. Tatau is used in the languages of Samoa, Tahiti and Tonga to describe the act of making marks on skin. Rejecting the word Tattoo is a small resistance from my personal perspective of not using the colonisers language that is derived from a word they do not say correctly. Just a small resistance on my part but one that has changed the way we talk about this cultural practice we are breathing new life in to.

Why is sharing our skin marking stories important?

As Artistic Director of Sunameke Productions since 1997, myself and the three other women; Katrina Sonter, Samantha Sonter and Yolanda Gray, who make up the founding members of Sunameke, have used many diverse methods of story telling through the work we create. Sunameke formed In Adelaide, South Australia with the main purpose of expressing our identity through performance and educating Australian audiences about our Oceanic region and our place in it as Papua New Guinean Australians. Sharing our stories authored with our voices gives us clarity and the strength to own our identity.