



FOUNDATION

art and climate change in the pacific

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INUNDATION

art and climate change in the pacific

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FORWARD AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

INUNDATION: ART AND CLIMATE CHANGE IN THE PACIFIC began as a conversation with Mary Babcock. We both had a strong sense that Hawai'i needed to host these amazing internationally-recognized artists and to learn from their approaches to climate justice issues. The artists bring not only environmental knowledge about the climate crisis in very different and disparate places across the Pacific, but they also bring their mixed emotions, historical knowledge and present experiences. Their positions offer very different perspectives than those of cosmopolitan Americans. To see the climate change situation through the eyes of these artists is to see climate change beyond the "green economy" of recycling, electric cars, solar panels and smart city retrofitting. Their experiences of the history of global climate processes that have affected islands—processes of colonization, extraction and development in the Pacific—now offer the most important lessons we need to learn. These lessons will help us all make the right choices, finding solutions that will honor the environment and honor each other across transnational boundaries, connected by one ocean. At the invitation of these artists, we can engage in our complex emotional responses to climate change—not just fear, overwhelm, futility, and anger, but also active and strategic hope and connection.

My deepest gratitude goes to the artists included in this exhibition. First and foremost, Mary Babcock, who has worked with me to organize events and to host visiting artists. My deep thanks as well to Kaili Chun, DAKOgamay, James Jack, Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner, Joy Enomoto, Charles Lim, Eve Mosher, and Angela Tiatia, as well as to Christina Gerhardt and Adele Balderston, who organized the HighWaterLine: Honolulu community walks and talks for this exhibition.

I couldn't have done this exhibition without the support and enthusiasm of my ART 395 students who took on the challenge of writing the catalog entries about the climate justice contexts of each artist's work. It was so gratifying to me to see a generation committed to understanding the complexity of climate change, doing the emotional work of overcoming their own inundating feelings, understanding what was truly at stake and making a contribution. Thanks to Kristen Glenn, Madison Hobbs, Lea Hutchinson, Sarah Igarashi, Blyth Kozuki, Katharine Masters, Mikayla Moses, Harry Russon, Azusa Takahashi, and Napua Wang.

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I'd like to dedicate this exhibition to my mom and to the ocean. The waves of my emotion in making this exhibition are nestled in the unfurling of lineage, in lessons of life and death, and in the currents of the ocean that shift me back and forth, but always carry me.

"From its own fetal curves, green fiddleheads produce ancient spiral formations. The fiddleheads teach me to unfurl my own lineage and experience patterns—examine them, be with them, and listen to their messages. The fiddleheads are gifted time-travelers. If I don't learn the lesson now, the pattern will show up in my life like an unwelcome visitor. By meditating with the spiral in mind, I can focus my attention on re-encountering the old wounds differently and imagine a new possibility. The fiddleheads teach me the vitality of a perspective shift. The fiddleheads teach me to respect the slowest micro-movements and own my way forward."

—MARIE VARGHESE



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JAMES JACK

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SEA BIRTH THREE, 2020

4K digital video

15:33 minutes

Special thanks to Masayuki Tamae, Leona Nishinaga, Hideaki Gushiken, Takeshi Ishihara, Osamu Makishi, Yukino Inamine, Soma Takahashi, Piko Ishihara, Monica Kim, Keith Teo, Nathasha Lee, Yuto Mori, Noa Jack and the Georgette Chen Foundation.

SPIRITS OF ŌURA, 2020

Handmade walnut ink on paper

53 in. x 174.4 in.

Special thanks to Kristen Ho Hui Yan & Hideaki Gushiken

HOME FOR PĪDAMA, 2020

Aged driftwood

29.5 in. x 13 in. x 8 in.

Special thanks to Wakagenoitari Village

James Jack is an artist based in Singapore who makes works sensitive to ecological and social networks of the sea. He has made socially engaged works for the Echigo-Tsumari Triennial (2009), Busan Biennale Sea Art Festival (2013), Art Base Momoshima (2014) and has a permanent community work at the Setouchi Triennial (2010-). His works have been exhibited at Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Art, TMT Art Projects (Fukuoka), TAMA Galley (New York), Satoshi Koyama Gallery (Tokyo) the Institute of Contemporary Art and the Centre for Contemporary Art Singapore. He is an Assistant Professor of Art Practice at Yale-NUS College.

With [SEA BIRTH](#), a trilogy of video installations about Okinawa, artist James Jack focuses on the resilient sea spirits alive within social and ecological habitats who help communities face multiple environmental threats. In [SEA BIRTH three](#), the final part of the trilogy, the walnut painting sets the scene in Henoko-Ōura Bay and the video provides context for the political contestations over the bay as a new U.S. Marine Corps base is built.

The video begins with a question by youthful village leader Hideaki Gushiken: "How can we create a society that doesn't spawn bases?" This is expanded upon in experiences recounted by elder Makishi Osamu, photographer, activist, and boat captain, who works to save Okinawa's blue and Acropora corals. The video weaves together these voices with other narratives: a dream recounted by artist Leona Nishinaga who calls upon ancestral songs for the *pīdama* (fire spirits) who are being threatened by land reclamation project currently underway at the base, a child's re-enactment of the birth of a loggerhead sea turtle at Sedake Beach on the side of the bay opposite of the base, and information about the environmental threats to the endangered Okinawan dugong, a relative of the sea manatee. These stories are all presented here based on intimate dialogue between the artist and each participant over the past eighteen months.

The various threads of narrative culminate in an understanding of what is at stake in the construction of the base, both environmentally and culturally. Despite human chains formed by protesters every day to block entry, construction of the new base continues. Stone, earth and sand are being transported from quarries inside and outside of Okinawa equivalent to 3.5 million 10-ton truck loads ([VELAZQUEZ](#)). The damage done to the coral reef through this land reclamation process impacts the entire ecosystem, from the seaweeds and small fish still harvested by the local community, to the threatened loggerhead sea turtle and the endangered dugong. Both animals have become symbols of environmental protests against the construction of the base. The Henoko-Ōura Bay base is currently in early stages of construction for the relocation of Marine Corps Air Station Futenma. Seabed drilling for surveys in preparation for the main landfill operation began in August 2014. The actual construction started in April 2017, and landfill began in December 2018. The reclamation of land for the immense project signals large concerns beyond the destruction of coral habitats important to the shoreline fisheries. Environmentalists and protestors are also concerned about heavy aircraft noise pollution ([MATSUI](#)), outflow of oils, and red dirt running into ocean waters from training sites. The history of toxic substances such as agent orange found in soils of returned lands that were previously sites of bases also informs the protests ([OKINAWA PREFECTURAL GOVERNMENT](#)).

The island chain was once the autonomous kingdom of Ryūkyū for many centuries and was first incorporated into the Japanese state in 1879. Okinawa became a fierce battleground during World War II in 1945, which resulted in the deaths of up to 100,000 Japanese soldiers and 40,000-100,000 civilians ([RINEHART](#)). After the war, Okinawa was placed under U.S. rule, but reverted back to Japan in 1972. Since then, the U.S. military presence in Okinawa allows it to fulfill its obligation under the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security, which was signed in 1960 at Washington D.C., not only to defend Japan but to also maintain security in the Asia-Pacific region, where security threats include potential flashpoints of the Korean Peninsula and the Taiwan Strait, as well as the more recent assertiveness by the Chinese People's Liberation Army Navy, and the intensification of the territorial dispute between Japan and China over islands in the East China Sea (Rinehart). Today, the islands host around 26,000 U.S. military personnel spread among 32 bases and 48 training sites which compose 70% of the bases in Japan despite the fact that Okinawa represents less than 1% of the land mass of the island nation ([LUMMIS](#)).

RIGHT AND BELOW

James Jack, *Spirits of Ōura*, 2020.
Image courtesy of the artist.

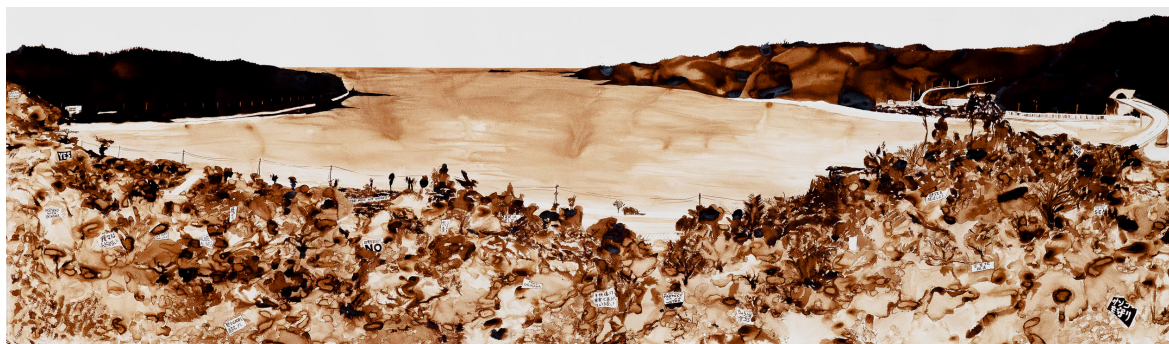


Inhabitants of Nago City located near Henoko-Ōura Bay, have a long relationship with the U.S. military dating back to 1959, when Camp Schwab was established. The community agreed to lend the land to the military after the U.S. government threatened the alternative of taking residential lands (KUMAMOTO). A similar history is part of the current Futenma Air Station, which was constructed in the urban area of Ginowan City on residential lands forcibly taken by U.S. forces in 1945. Studies show that about 91 percent of the Ginowan City was stolen from the residents (AKAHATA). Among the many proposals made by SACO to alleviate the burdens of the base-hosting communities, was the return of the Futenma base land. Early design plans for a combined navy-air base in Henoko date back to 1966 (MCCORMACK/NORIMATSU), however legal permits and strong resistance have prevented its development. U.S. and Japanese officials firmly rejected any plans of returning the land or reducing servicemen until a replacement facility on Okinawa was operational, which had led to the Henoko-Ōura Bay development (RINEHART). This planned complex essentially extends Camp Schwab to include the new Marine Corps air station built on what was recently shallow coral reef.

Though the U.S. military bases are heavily protested by most Okinawans (recently shown in the February 2019 referendum in which 73% voted against Henoko), they also symbolize the economic incentives to maintaining large scale military and capital development projects. Employment opportunities, rental and lease fees, and subsidiary aid all entice an ongoing relationship (KUMAMOTO). Signs appearing in the painting *SPIRITS OF ŌURA* are taken from recent demonstrations against the bases in favor of self-determination by Okinawans including messages such as: "Stand by Okinawa," "Anger," "Rise up Ryukyu," "Protect Democracy!", and others. These signs have been painted together with the panoramic image for which the perspective was selected by local resident Hideaki Gushiken for the artist.

"Reef checks" have been occurring regularly since the 1990s initiated by a Hong Kong oceanographer and local activists including diver Masayuki Tamae featured in *Sea Birth* one (TAMAE). The checks consist of measuring, photographing and documenting the condition of coral reefs, including those of Ōura. As recently as October 2019, Henoko-Ōura Bay was recognized as Japan's first "hope spot" by Mission Blue, an environmental protective organization led by legendary oceanographer Dr. Sylvia Earle. The reason for this recognition was for its rich biodiverse ecosystem with more than 5,000 species living in its reefs including 262 endangered species (MISSION BLUE). Many researchers have been appealing for this area's coral reefs, seagrass beds, mangrove forests, tidal flats, and wetlands that sustain biodiverse life (ABE). Blue coral (*Heliopora coerulea*) is one of the endangered species found abundantly in the Henoko-Ōura coastal waters, which marks the species' northernmost habitat on Earth (MISSION BLUE).

It is an important location where coral eggs rise to the surface of the ocean, joining with sperm to spawn new coral under the full moon, as documented by photographer Makishi Osamu. Studies show that the temperature over Japan is rising faster than the global average, and this will cause a direct impact on coral spawning and feeding grounds (JAPAN METEOROLOGICAL AGENCY). Another threat is the rapid sea level rise, which sinks the coral reefs deeper underwater. Insufficient sunlight and the overpopulation of introduced species that thrive in this environment are crowding out the endemic species (CHIRI).



RIGHT AND BELOW

James Jack, *Sea Birth three*, 2020.
Image courtesy of the artist.



One of the major focuses of Mission Blue has been to protect the loggerhead sea turtles and dugongs. Both are listed as “critically endangered” by the Japanese Ministry of the Environment. If the new base is constructed in Henoko-Ōura Bay, it will destroy these animals’ unique natural habitat, and also several marine plants in the large seabed. In *Sea Birth three*, Makishi Osamu talks about how the bay under construction is the spawning place for loggerhead sea turtles. The sea turtles come back to find their own birthplace every year to lay eggs based on smell but are unable to return now because the bay is physically blocked off, and the beach no longer exists due to landfill. Loss of a species’ natural habitat means direct decline in its numbers, and the surrounding environment will begin to change as well. For instance, the decline in the number of loggerhead sea turtles has meant increases in the highly venomous habu-jellyfish (*Chironex yamaguchii*) who now have no natural predators.

In 1997, it was estimated that there were less than 50 Okinawa dugongs left in the world, and the Okinawa Defense Bureau confirmed in 2009 that in fact there were only three remaining in the shores of Okinawa ([IKEDA](#)). Since the death of one of the three remaining dugongs found in the Okinawan seas has been reported on March 18th of 2019, The Nature Conservation Society of Japan (NASC-J) has submitted a written opinion to the Japanese government demanding to stop the landfill construction in Henoko-Ōura Bay for search and protection of the remaining two ([KAMEYAMA](#)). Among the three dugongs, one has not been seen since 2015, the second since 2018. There are almost no other possible seagrass beds sufficient enough as a natural habitat for dugongs around the islands of Okinawa ([KAMEYAMA](#)). American and Japanese conservation groups have filed a lawsuit in U.S. District Court in San Francisco to halt this construction back in 2014 when the preliminary construction began ([GALVIN AND MARTIN](#)). A scuba-diving guide who was one of the plaintiffs in the 2014 lawsuit said in an interview,

“Today, leaving their feeding trails in the construction site, I believe, our dugongs are warning us that this sea will no longer provide us with such abundance if the base is constructed; the U.S. government must realize that the Okinawan dugong is a treasure for us and for the world.” ([GALVIN AND WAGNER](#)).

Dugongs have been revered by native Okinawans as messengers for the gods of Nirai Kanai, the land believed to be the origin of all life by the people of Ryūkyū ([IKEDA](#)). According to Okinawan folklore, spirits of Nirai Kanai would come to the Ryūkyū archipelago (as it was known prior to Japanese conquest) riding on the backs of dugongs and bringing assurance of an abundant harvest from both land and sea ([OI](#)). Dugongs were also celebrated as “sirens” that brought friendly warnings of tsunamis. Folklore in Okinawa from oral traditions including the Omoro are full of stories of strength and resilience of people in connection with the land and the sea.

The soundtrack for *SEA BIRTH three* was composed by activist Takeshi Ishihara who resides in Takae, north of Henoko where the fight against the increased construction of landing pads for Ospreys and forest practice battle grounds is active. It complements the driftwood relic, which reminds viewers of the interconnectivity between land and sea.

Recent studies have predicted that climate threats associated with changing rainfall, sea level rise, and the intensity of tropical storms would become more severe in the North Pacific regions with the projected warming climate (WIDLANSKY ET AL.). The rapid decrease in the coral reef system will make the islands of Okinawa more prone to tidal waves and tsunamis. The driftwood relic, HOME FOR PĪDAMA, was found on the shore near Ōura. It is a home to which fire deities can return. This object embodying the strength of Okinawan folklore will be incorporated into the construction of a future residence in the Futami village based on the traditional practice of utilizing insect eaten driftwood in home construction during the Ryūkyū Kingdom before the islands were conquered by Japan. As in part one and two of the SEA BIRTH series, Jack uses relics both to reference the past and as a mode of imagining the future. This home, for both spirits and humans, symbolizes the ongoing resilience of communities in Okinawa protecting their resources amidst storms long into the future.

Through the SEA BIRTH trilogy, Jack draws upon maritime history of Okinawa, where the islands' folklore adds crucial perspectives often missing in current reporting of issues. In selecting particular episodes from Okinawa's rich maritime history, Jack revisits his own maritime ancestors' stories in the highlands of Scotland in an effort to find deep connections between the personal and the political. According to Jack, "Art allows us to address these spirits directly, not to describe or interpret them but to channel them into creative forms of expression" (JACK). As an American artist based in Asia, Jack is working to forge a future where centers of power return to the islanders who love the sea.

TRANSCRIPTIONS OF THE SIGNS IN SPIRITS OF ŌURA:

Return tous Futenma
 YES
 #STAND WITH OKINAWA
 我々はあきらめない (We Will Not Give Up)
 STOP ILLEGAL WORK
 CLOSE ALL BASES
 島ぐるみの会議 No Henoko Base / save sea (All Island Meeting)
 起りは限界を超えた (Our Anger Has Gone Beyond Limits)
 MAKE MUSIC NOT OSPREYS
 辺野古新基地NO (New Henoko Base NO)
 九条の会・うるま市貝志川 (Save Article 9 / Gushikawa, Uruma City)
 県民は屈しない (Citizens Will Not Give Up)
 FREE OKINAWA
 子供達の未来に基地はいらない (No Need for Bases in Our Children's Future)
 WE ARE HERE TO PROTECT WATER
 ちゅら海守ろう (Let's Protect Beautiful Sea)
 [Sign Intentionally Left Blank]
 建設を阻止しよう (Let's Block the Construction)
 全基地撤去 (Remove All Bases)
 NO WAR
 二見楚久トンネル (Futamisuku Tunnel)
 LISTEN TO THE SEA
 サンゴを守り (Protect the Corals)
 未来へ (To the Future)
 WE ARE THE OCEAN
 ワカゲノイタリ村 (Wakage no Itari Village)
 沖縄の未来は沖縄が決める (Okinawa Chooses Okinawa's Future)

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