

RESOLUTION VENTURE

◀ ST PAUL ST

EDDIE CLEMENS

17 NOV – 16 DEC 2022



TE WĀNANGA ARONUI
OTAMAKI MAKAU RAU

On January 20, 2019, the undersea fibre-optic cable that supplies the Kingdom of Tonga with internet and mobile phone access was severed, plunging the nation into an online blackout for over two weeks. The primary cause of this disaster, initially considered an act of sabotage, was believed to be the dragging anchor of the Turkish fuel tanker *Duzgit Venture*, which was suspiciously present in all of the locations where the cable was cut, at the times when connection was lost.

In *Resolution Venture*, Eddie Clemens draws a parallel between the *Duzgit Venture* and the HMS *Resolution*, the ship on which James Cook made his ill-fated third voyage to the Pacific. Both vessels represent invasive, unpredictable elements whose sudden arrival had disastrous consequences for Pacific peoples, but through inverse means. Whereas Cook's voyage was part of a multi-century colonial project to impose the religion, culture and economic supremacy of European nations onto the Pacific, arguably part of the first wave of globalisation, the *Duzgit Venture's* alleged actions isolated Tonga from the globalised communications networks that have replaced the navigational routes of Cook's day.

On entering the exhibition, visitors are confronted by *Fibre-optic Boot Scrubber*, a work modelled on the biosecurity appliances used when travelling to isolated biomes or islands. The fibre-optics in this work display news footage of the 2019 blackout event, although the nature of the device is such that only the general colour palette is distinguishable. This work points towards anxieties around contamination, and the desire to enforce a border or boundary. Ironically, the *Duzgit Venture's* dragging anchor may have been the cause of a strict boundary being imposed on Tonga in 2019; suddenly, the permeable membrane of digital access was replaced by the geographical reality of an isolated island nation.

Magnetically displayed on the gallery's window, *Untitled* presents a whole flotilla of ships on (rather than in) bottles, modelled on the humble cafe receipt spike. With characteristic humour, Clemens transmogrifies the spike into a mast and the magenta-inked receipt itself into a billowing sail, evincing a Joycean willingness to transpose the quotidian into the epic. Riding atop steam-collapsed milk bottles ready for the recycling bin, these ships of trade reference the sea routes that preceded the now-global supply chain, deliverer of daily staples such as coffee. Mirroring one another, they are both simulacra of themselves and mementos, curiosities or keepsakes of journeys real or imagined.

In the titular work, *Resolution Venture*, Clemens presents a two-player video game, in which a trackball and joystick control digital counterparts to the anchors of the *Duzgit Venture* and HMS *Resolution*, respectively.

These retro-styled controllers, with their satisfyingly clicky and tactile mechanical switches, bearings and buttons, are housed in hazard-striped 3D-printed tortoise shells that combine the tortoise motif from Clemens' exhibition *First Edition, Third Hand* (2019) with the yellow-and-black striped hand from his 2015 exhibition *Screen Used*, an official *Terminator 2* prop.

The game allows players to drag the anchors about, interacting with a shower of digital assets that rain from the top of the screen like debris tumbling from a passing container ship. These take the form of *Blade Runner*-esque neon signs in a panoply of shapes, including Tongan coins, unicorns, kanji, palm trees, dragons and the chunky pixelated dinosaur from the Chrome browser's offline game, which plays when the user attempts to navigate to a page when there is no internet connection. This creature serves here as an avatar for the predicament many Tongans encountered in January 2019, his vacant stare and flailing limbs a reflection of the helplessness of the user in the face of a totally mechanical failure to connect. Ultimately, if the players manage to hook the cable buried in the ocean floor, they can stretch it until it snaps, causing the various icons tumbling from offscreen to dissipate into a binary mist.

Resolution Venture is part of an ongoing project that sees Clemens triangulating a cyborg identity in the Pacific. The fulcrum around which this idea turns is Tu'i Malila, the 188-year-old blind tortoise said to have been gifted to the Tongan royal family by Cook on his third voyage, and which is referenced in Philip K. Dick's proto-cyberpunk novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* In Clemens' work, the inert shell of Tu'i Malila, reconstructed from photographs with a distinctive dent where it was kicked by a horse at some point in its century-spanning existence, becomes reactive, sensile and polyvalent. Assuming a new cybernetic identity, Tu'i Malila, in the work of the same name, extends from its carapace a quad of jointed, clawed robotic appendages based on Loc Line modular hoses. 3D printed in PLA plastic and then cast in bronze using a lost-PLA rather than lost-wax method, these works are a melding of ancient and cutting-edge methods of fabrication, a reflection of Tu'i Malila's status as an ancient being transported into a digital future.

Andrew Clark

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1. *Prototype Fibre-optic Boot Scrubber*

Medium: Custom-made 3d PETG printed broom heads, Custom-made fibre-optic bristles, Custom-made PCB LED array, Custom-made metal galvanised bracket, Balenafin 32gb, 5.1 USB to 3.5mm mic headphone Jack Stereo output, K8 Speaker and Power adaptors. Playing 'Tonga keeps close eye on Turkish tanker after it allegedly plunged country into communication blackout' 1News story, July 21, 2019, Duration 2:53 minutes, Hue Wheel, Duration 1 minute

2. *Tu'i Malila (First Edition, Third Hand)*

Medium: Bronze (Unique 3d PLA prints cast in bronze), Stainless steel alligator clips and fasteners, Custom printed micro-fibre cloths illustrating a 2 Seniti Tongan proof 1967 coin in a cardboard display sleeve

3. *Resolution Venture*

Medium: Sandbox/Endless Runner arcade game, 3d printed PLA carapaces, Joystick, Trackball, Unistrut cable tray, Unistrut channels, Hilti concrete bolts, Samsung LED TVs, Video wall splitter, HDMI cables, Computer

4. *Untitled*

Steamed Anchor Blue Top milk bottles, Custom-made receipt spikes, Screen printed aluminium, Rare earth magnets

Gallery Two:

