

# **THERE ONCE WAS AN ISLAND**

## **PUBLICITY AND MEDIA 2010-2011**

### **Print Media**

The Dominion Post Newspaper, July 2, 2011  
The New Zealand Herald Newspaper, June 25, 2011  
The Listener Magazine, June 25, 2011  
Remix Magazine, May 30, 2011  
Human Rights Arts and Film Festival Interview  
The Jakarta Post, February 25, 2011  
Robin Chapman News, February 17, 2011

De Volkskrant Newspaper, November 26, 2010  
Dins DAG krant Newspaper, November 23, 2010  
Maan DAG krant Magazine, November 22, 2010  
KiaOra Magazine, November 9, 2010  
ENI News, October 26, 2010  
Still In Motion, October 24, 2010  
Pacific Scoop, September 18, 2010  
The Press Newspaper, July 31, 2010  
New Zealand Herald Newspaper, July 17, 2010  
Otago Daily Times Newspaper, July 10, 2010  
Canvas Magazine, July 3, 2010  
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Real Groove Magazine, July 2010  
The Lumiere Reader Magazine, June 14, 2010  
OnFilm Magazine, June 2010  
Current Newspaper, May 17, 2010  
SuolQuest Newspaper, March 28, 2010  
Le Literal Newspaper, March 26, 2010

Quotes from Educators

### **Radio and Television Interviews**

Radio 531pi (New Zealand Radio Station), August 2011  
Spirit Lounge on Joy FM 94.9 (Australian Radio Station), May 2011  
POW Festival (youtube), 2011  
Citizen Reporter (podcast), December 2010

Hawaii Pacific News (youtube), October 2010  
Radio Wammo Show, Kiwi FM, September 2010  
Jameson Cinefest - Briar March receiving award for Best Doco (youtube), September 2010  
Public Address Radio, July 2010  
Saturday Morning with Kim Hill, Radio New Zealand, July 2010  
Breakfast, Channel 1 TVNZ, July 2010  
Euronews, June 2010  
Sunrise, TV3 New Zealand, March 2010  
Nightline, TV3 New Zealand, February 2010  
Pacific Beat, Radio Australia, January 2010  
Sunday Program, Channel 1 TVNZ, July 2009

## MOVIE REVIEWS



Graeme Tuckett



**There once was an island:** An urgent, human story, well told.



# THERE ONCE WAS AN ISLAND

(80 min) ★★★★★

Directed by Briar March.

**R**ETURNING, happily, from last year's Film Festival, Briar March's very good *There Once Was an Island* takes us to the Pacific island of Takuu, and a series of encounters with the articulate and impassioned people – especially the hugely likeable Teloo, Endar and Satty – who live in that apparently idyllic place. Apparently idyllic, maybe. But Takuu, like a great number of Pacific island and atoll communities, is only a metre or

two above sea level, and that level seems to be rising inexorably. Counterpointing the lives and choices of the indigenous people, Briar March introduces two scientists, an oceanographer and a geologist, who speak well about the likely causes of climate change, and its possible global impact. Low lying islands are the canaries in the coal mine of sea-level change. A rise of a metre might devastate tens of thousands of people, but a rise of much more than that could wreak havoc on a billion.

The great strengths of March's film are its patience, its accessibility, and its sheer likeability. There is no preaching to the choir in *There Once Was an Island*, just an urgent, human story, well told. Go and have a look.



## Movie Review: There Once Was An Island

By [Peter Calder](#)

7:00 AM Saturday Jun 25, 2011

Unsensational, intimate and quietly passionate, March's meticulously observed examination of the crisis facing the small atoll of Takuu is an object lesson in patient documentary film-making.

March's first documentary feature, the excellent *Allie Eagle and Me*, traced the pioneering feminist artist's journey from lesbian separatist to fundamentalist Christian.

For this film, she made two trips to the atoll, 250km northeast of the island of Bougainville in Papua New Guinea, charting the inexorable rise of the oceans swallowing the island and compiling a lucid, compelling and often visually ravishing portrait of Takuu life.



Takuu boys dancing in 'There Once Was An Island'. Photo / Supplied

The sea is a constant, menacing presence in the film but, March's camera finds the ineffable beauty in the environment too, sharpening the poignancy of the loss happening before her (and our) eyes.

More important she shows plainly what is at stake for the islanders as they debate what they should do. Ethnically and culturally Polynesian in a Melanesian country, they are far from comfortable with the plans to relocate them to the mainland – to a plantation, far from the sea and surrounded by a decade-long civil war. The proposal, which seems to be not much more than bureaucratic hot air in any case, takes no account of the cost in economic, never mind cultural, terms of uprooting a people from their ancestral home.

Rising oceans will displace hundreds of millions over the next half century and Takuu is the canary in climate change's coal mine. This sobering and important film is a warning to the world, if only it would listen.

**Director:** Briar March

**Running time:** 80 mins

**Rating:** Exempt. In English and Takuu with English subtitles

**Stars:** 4/5

**Verdict:** Sobering, handsome and passionate.

–TimeOut

By [Peter Calder](#)

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# NEW ZEALAND LISTENER

## *My Afternoons with Margueritte; There Once Was an Island; Russian Snark*

By [Helene Wong](#) | Published on June 25, 2011 | In [Film](#) | Issue 3711 | Tags: [Film review](#)

Jean Becker's *My Afternoons with Margueritte* is like a matching bookend for his *Conversations with My Gardener*: a chance meeting between two people of disparate backgrounds, followed by bonding, learning and healing. It's also just as soft-hearted, and bathed in warmth and the romanticism of French village life. So, yes, sentimental and thematically light, but also touching and anchored by engaging performances.

My Afternoons with Margueritte

Because, sentiment or not, Becker attracts top talent. *Conversations* had Daniel Auteuil; *Afternoons* has Gérard Depardieu. Like Auteuil's artist removed from his milieu, Depardieu's character, Germain, is also a little on the social margin, burdened by an eccentric mother and constant teasing about his less than sharp mind. But whereas the earlier film had the urbanite learning from the country cousin, here the social status of the roles is reversed. Germain's chance meeting is with Margueritte, a friendly and highly intelligent 95-year-old who infects him with her knowledge and love of literature. It's a slightly long bow, but the actors charm you into not minding.

Depardieu, a lumbering oaf in overalls, plays his soft and comic sides here without overreaching. Emphasising gentle rather than giant, he plays Germain good-naturedly tolerant of life's provocations, and capable of inspiring affection. Gisèle Casadesus, a veteran actress in seemingly constant demand (seen recently in *The Hedgehog* and *Sarah's Key*), is a wonderfully bright-eyed and spry Margueritte, her fragility just discernible beneath a dignified elegance. And she knows how to convey, fleetingly, a lovely sense of shrewd understanding.

So where, among all these warm fuzzies, is the drama? Part of it comes from Germain and his mother's back-story, revealed in flashes to layer in enough mystery to move the story forward. It's melodrama by comparison, and thematically isn't knitted in especially well or convincingly. The rest comes from the mild complications in Germain's and Margueritte's relationship.

But, really, drama isn't what this film is about. As in *Conversations*, it's more the rare satisfaction of watching two people open-heartedly delighting in each other's company, free from obligations and expectations, engaged in the simple act of responding to each other's humanity.

**MY AFTERNOONS WITH MARGUERITTE, directed by Jean Becker, session times [here](#) <sup>[1]</sup>.**

Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth* notwithstanding, the issue of climate change has never been conveyed more powerfully to laypersons than in Briar There Once Was an Island March's documentary *There Once Was an Island: Te Henua e Nnoho*. Where

Gore did show and tell, March does show, don't tell – and quietly sheets home the implications with greater force.

Not that there isn't *some* telling, which turns out to be her secret weapon. Satty, Endar and Teloo are Takuu, a Polynesian people on the atoll of Nukutoa, 250km from Bougainville. Each relates how the rising sea-level affects them and their families, revealing different sides of the debate as the island grapples with decisions about its future. Perceptive, articulate and personable, they transform climate change from being vague and “out there” to something immediate and highly personal.

March, who also operates camera, enhances our empathy even further with scenes, some graphic, of the effects of the rising water. But there's another subtext to her visuals: water might be a threat, but it's also beautiful and the lifeblood of the community. Therein lies the dilemma – do they stay or do they go? As March patiently and unobtrusively observes the pragmatism of the islanders, the efforts of visiting scientists to explain and help and the Papua New Guinea government's neglect, the dilemma – and film – are completely absorbing. Because this isn't about theories and fancy charts. It's real.

**THERE ONCE WAS AN ISLAND, directed by Briar March, session times [here](#) <sup>[2]</sup>.**

Humour, whimsy and visual beauty turn Stephen Sinclair's *Russian Snark* from a typical migrant tale into something near-poetic. As Russian artists Misha and Nadia struggle to find their feet in Auckland, Sinclair gently takes shots at artistic pretentiousness (Misha's making a black-and-white film of naked bodies in the landscape), exposes the painful choices migrants have to make and draws fine, natural performances from Stephen Papps and Elena Stejko as the couple, and especially Stephanie Tauevihi as their wise and compassionate neighbour.

**RUSSIAN SNARK, directed by Stephen Sinclair, session times [here](#) <sup>[3]</sup>.**

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Article printed from New Zealand Listener:

URL to article: **[/culture/film/my-afternoons-with-margueritte-there-once-was-an-island-russian-snark/](#)**

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[2] here: **<http://www.rialto.co.nz/vistait/village/Default.aspx?Control=Sessions&CinemaID=&MovieID=HO00004096>**

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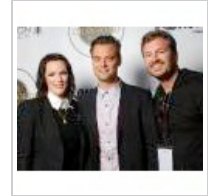
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Brindle

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## Check out 'There Once was an Island'

Monday, 30 May 2011 13:15

This June, the award winning festival gem *There Once was an Island*, will hit NZ cinemas, documenting the devastating effects of climate change on the Polynesian community of Takuu. This poignant documentary follows how the Takuu community experiences the effects of climate change first hand after a terrifying tidal flood rips through their already damaged home. In this verite-style film, three intrepid characters Telo, Endar and Satty, allow us into their lives and their culture and show us the human impact of an environmental crisis. Two scientists investigate the situation with our characters and consider the impact of climate change on communities without access to resources or support. Intimate observational scenes allow Telo, Endar and Satty to take us on their personal journeys as they consider whether to move to an uncertain future in Bougainville or to stay on Takuu and fight for a different, but equally uncertain, outcome.



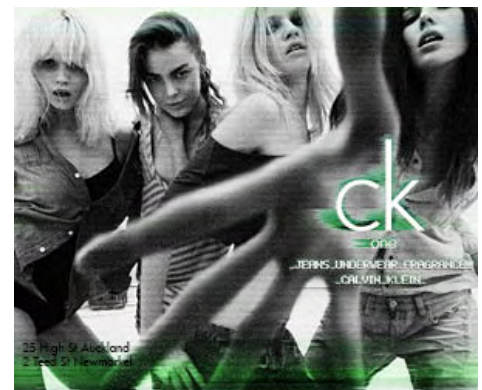
Director Briar March gives a human face to the direct impacts of climate change in the Pacific, challenging audiences everywhere to consider their own relationship to the earth and the other people on it.

Check out some of the beautiful imagery from the film below...

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Catch *There Once was an Island* from the 23 June 2011 at Rialto Cinemas Newmarket and Dunedin; Waiheke Cinema, Paramount in Wellington, Arthouse Cinema in New Plymouth and Gecko Theatre in Motueka.



fashion talent debut their final year collections at the AUT Rookie show coming up on November 11, 2011. A selection of final year Fashion Students ...

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# HUMAN RIGHTS ARTS AND FILM FESTIVAL



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## Director Briar March discusses her film 'There Once Was an Island'

By Samantha Ackroyd.

'There Once Was an Island' reveals the devastating effects that climate change is having the world over. In the film, director Briar March travels to a tiny South Western Pacific atoll called Takuu to capture, with great intimacy, the personal stories of local villagers Teloo, Endar and Satty. What follows is a deeply moving observation of how a small, tight-knit community comes to terms with the fact that the ocean is gradually swallowing their home.

**In the documentary you travel to the tiny Pacific islands Nukutoa and Takuu to document the devastating effects that climate change and rising sea levels are having on the community living there. How did you find out about this story?**

I read about Takuu in a magazine article – in which Richard Moyle an ethnomusicologist spoke about the islanders' unique music and culture. An island to me is like an allegory for the entire planet. I wanted to make a film about climate change but I wanted it to be a personal story, and this felt like the right premise.

**So how did the locals react to you being on their island documenting them?**

The Takuu people were remarkably generous and open to us. They had requested a filmmaker to come and document their situation, so most of the community was already behind the project. But no film is without its complications, and being from a completely different culture and language did mean that sometimes I got things wrong and made mistakes. Overall, however, we were very much embraced by the community.

**You mentioned that no film is without its challenges. What were some of the obstacles that you faced?**

It was a production nightmare. We had extreme difficulty getting our visas. There was no electricity on the island so we had to spend a lot of time charging our batteries through solar panels and taking extra care of our equipment within the atoll's salt corrosive environment. There was also the challenge of raising money as the majority of funding bodies we approached seemed to be very tired of environmental documentaries and turned us down. The film basically required sheer persistence, in fact almost to the point of insanity. I am so glad the final film is paying off for that work!

**Despite these challenges, what did you most enjoy about creating this documentary?**

I probably most enjoyed living on an atoll and being a part of the community. The community is small (only 500 people live on the island) and it felt like being part of a very large extended family. Feeling part of the community gave me an amazing sense of belonging, an experience we often miss out on if we live in urban cities. I also enjoyed eating fresh fish and coconuts everyday. I love making documentaries as I find that through learning about others I learn more about myself, and this is definitely the case having made this film.

**You said that many of the funding bodies you approached were tired of environmental documentaries given that there seems to have been a proliferation of these types of films in recent years, so what makes this film different from all the other films about climate change?**

I am sure it is not different from every other film on this issue, but it definitely stands out by the fact that it tells a human story, and allows the people in the film to speak about the issue from their own point of view. I also hope the film allows the audience to feel like they can take their own position within the story, rather than telling them what to think.



**For anyone who still isn't quite convinced, why do you think people should see this film?**

Unlike other documentaries on the issue of climate change this film explores the problem from a social and cultural perspective – and shows the ways in which climate change is not only an 'environmental' problem, but a 'social and geopolitical' one too. Instead of grounding the film in scientific research it tackles the issue from the perspective of individual experience and allows audiences to access this issue through a human face, rather than listing a bunch of scientific facts. It is not merely an activist film – but an insight into a unique community and a universal story about the way we all respond to fundamental change.

Since there are still debates and uncertainty in scientific circles surrounding the degree in which sea-level is rising I felt it was important to remain fairly reserved in the film about any claims as to how soon an island like Takuu might be submerged in water, or if this would ever be the case. What we do learn however – is how vulnerable atoll communities like Takuu are to environmental change, due to their lack of resources and infrastructure. This herein becomes one of the central questions in the film – how can the Takuu people, who are the least responsible for carbon emissions, adapt to such changes? Relocating to higher ground is only one of the options considered, remaining on the island and finding ways to adapt is another. But the question our characters ask is where would the money and infrastructure come from? Ultimately this is why I would urge Australian audiences to see this film, as a developed country in the Pacific – it's time for all of us to seriously consider these questions.



Published on The Jakarta Post (<http://www.thejakartapost.com>)

# A Disappearing Island

The Jakarta Post | Fri, 02/25/2011 8:35 PM |

*A new film documents the life-altering effects of climate change on Pacific Islanders.*

By Hana Miller



“As a New Zealand filmmaker I like to pay attention to what is happening to our island neighbors,” says Briar March, director of the recently released film *There Once Was an Island*.

The documentary explores life on a tiny and remote island in the Pacific, as the community there faces the decision of leaving the island to escape the impending natural disasters that threaten their homes.

“I was inspired by the way in which the story of an island had the potential to work as an allegory for the entire planet, and its small community, a microcosm for how society at large responds to

environmental change,” March explains.

March, who is currently pursuing her master’s degree in documentary film at Stanford University, spent several months on the island during the four years it took to make the film. In addition to the initial challenge of actually getting to the island, which is located on the remote atoll of Takuu in Papua New Guinea, March and her crew experienced firsthand what it was like to live – and film – in a place largely without electricity, telecommunications or, indeed, contact with the rest of the world.

On their second visit there, as if Nature knew the cameras were rolling, the crew experienced the effects of a flood, of a magnitude the island hadn’t experienced in more than 20 years.

Takuu, like many populated islands, is facing the dire consequences of rising sea levels. As the island’s shoreline shrinks, the community continues to build sea walls to try and keep the water at bay. However, as oceanographer John Hunter points out in the film, these seawalls interfere with the shore’s natural process of rebuilding itself by blocking the sand from being washed back up onto the island.

“The changes in the shape of an atoll island are caused by varying weather patterns, hence different wave regimes and overall higher or lower water levels, and partially by what the islanders do,” says Hunter. “I think that much of the change we observed on Takuu was due to human interference.”

Confronted with the risk of losing the rich cultural traditions so closely linked to their lives on the island if they choose to leave, and with the changes that they must initiate if they are to safely remain, the islanders are forced to assess their relationship with their environment in the most literal way.

“Sea-level rise will ultimately be a big problem for these people,” says Hunter, when asked how the circumstances in Takuu – an island no more than 500 m long, only 1 m above sea level and home to 400 people – might represent serious considerations for other islands and seaside towns. “They need to learn ways of coping with these inundation events and to refrain from stopping the process of island building by putting this sand back in the sea.”

In an archipelago such as Indonesia, with densely populated areas and the shore never too far away, this message carries an added weight.

“For relatively undeveloped islands like Takuu, this is not too difficult, given that their



infrastructure is mainly composed of huts,” he continues. “However, in places with more modern infrastructure ... the problem is greater.”

Asked about the challenges tackled and the lessons learned through the process of creating *There Once Was An Island*, a film that has already won several international awards, Briar March gives us the filmmaker’s perspective on what it was like to make a documentary with such far-reaching implications.

### **Why make this film?**

Overall I think that the central message of the film is summed up by Satty, one of the film’s characters. He eloquently explains, “When you lose something small in the world you lose a lot.”

Satty’s words make us realize how everything is connected – a small island out there in the Pacific Ocean might seem insignificant in the larger scheme of things, but if it were to disappear, it will directly impact the ocean’s fragile eco-system, and potentially destroy a rich and valuable culture. With this in mind, everything in this world is in some way connected – and it’s worthwhile making small differences in our own lives, as the little things are just as valuable and count as much as the big things – just as Satty has said of his island and people.

Ultimately I hope the film will encourage developed nations to not only consider the pending reality of environmental refugees but to think about adaptation – so that the less advantaged communities such as Takuu can still maintain a sense of their land and culture.

### **What is it about Nature and human nature?**

I think human nature is very predictable and in many ways universal. When there is a problem we don’t want to deal with, we like to sweep it under the carpet or we quickly go back to our old ways, the way we have always done things – not always the most sensible solution in the long run.

There are two instances that occurred while making the film that make me think of this. For example, after we witnessed a major flood on Takuu, which destroyed over half the houses on the island, the scientists we brought to the island advised the community to build their homes further inland, in order to prevent being flooded again. However, most people quickly rebuilt their houses in the very place they were before, as they wanted the convenience of being close to the water.

Similarly, the non-biodegradable rubbish on the island is usually chucked into the sea, only to be washed back onto the beach, causing a major safety hazard for swimmers, who are in danger of cutting their feet on broken glass and the edges of old tin cans. Throwing rubbish into the sea dates back hundreds of years, but when once the rubbish only consisted of food scraps, it now includes car batteries and coke bottles, which don't breakdown like banana skins!

Such scenarios reminded me of similar situations in my own country or elsewhere in the world. Adjusting to change doesn't come easy – but if we want to avoid getting our feet cut every time we go for a swim, or losing our house from flooding, this community, just like all of us, will need to start rethinking the way we have been doing things.

### **How did the islanders react?**

It has taken us a long time to get a copy of the film to the community. This is mainly because of the remoteness of the location, and the very few boat trips that are made to the island each year. We would have loved to go back to Takuu and show the film to the islanders ourselves, but because of a lack of funds and the difficulties of getting there, we gave a DVD to Richard Moyle – the ethnomusicologist who indirectly introduced me to the island of Takuu when I read an article about his studies on the island's customs and music – who traveled there a few weeks ago.

He told us that overall the community spoke with gratitude of the film, mentioning it was something important in their lives. This news makes me really happy, as I have always hoped that the film might eventually be used by the community as an archival resource and historical document.

There are very few photographic records of the island or its people other than what Richard and we have recorded. In this sense, making this film has had a significant cultural impact on the community, in comparison to most other films, where there is more access to media and cameras.

### **What does it feel like to be a documentary filmmaker?**

I love filmmaking for its potential to change people in positive ways. In this instance, through the scientists, filmmakers and participants' active engagement in the process of making the film, a transformation took place. Documentary has a unique way of creating a ritual out of an event. Through the apparatus of the camera, participants being filmed respond in a certain way. When confronted with the camera's lens there is a particular gravity to what is being said and a sense

of permanence.

We can't always say how a film is going to change the world. Sometimes it's a little change, like a seed planted inside the mind of the viewer. And sometimes it is a big change – consider the dramatic impact of a film such as *An Inconvenient Truth*. But whether it's big or small, it is a change, and I really feel all these changes count.

— JP

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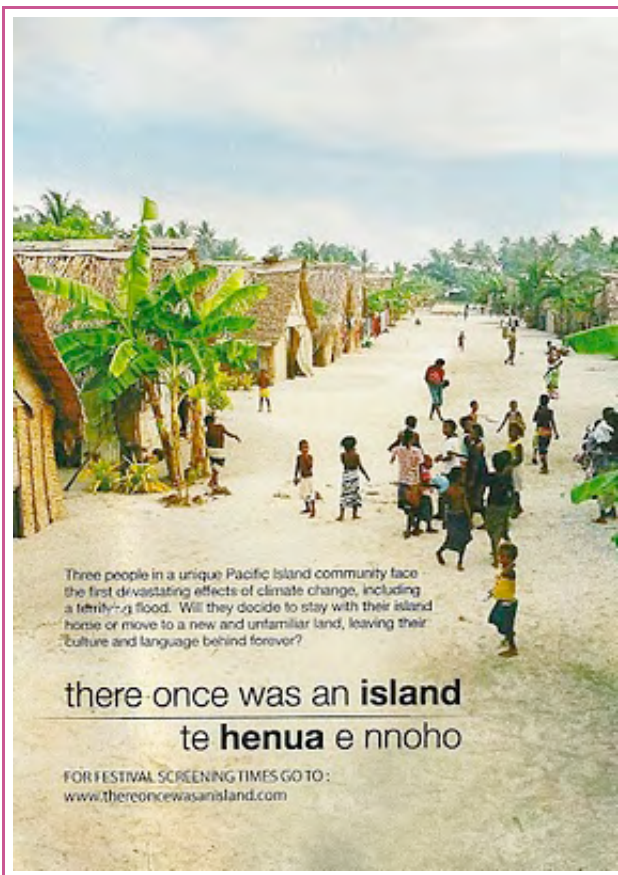
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# ❖ ROBIN CHAPMAN NEWS ❖

LOOKING HERE AND THERE FROM THE 21ST CENTURY

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 17, 2011

## The Disappearing Pacific Island



I wanted to alert you to look for a documentary I learned about at an event last night. The film is called, *There Once Was an Island*, and tells the story of a tiny atoll in the South Pacific that faces an uncertain future. I haven't yet seen it, but it looks fascinating.

The island's future is uncertain because it appears to be sinking into the sea--a problem of some urgency for its isolated

## AND IF YOU BELIEVE THIS ...

I read that Barbara Walters interviewed Bernie Madoff in prison and he said "he had never been happier." It reminds me of the last scene in *The Producers* where Bialystock and Bloom are in the slammer, selling shares in their new musical "Prisoner of Love." (*Prisoner of love. Blue sky above. You can't put my heart in jaaaaaaail.*)

## HALLOWEEN FRIGHT



I saw this guy in front of my neighbor's house today. I'm

population of five hundred people.

The young woman who produced the film--thirty-year-old Briar March--is a New Zealander working on her MFA at Stanford University. She read about the atoll in 2006 and, with great difficulty, worked to tell its story.

The difficulty came because the island--near-but-not-so-near to Bouganville, in the Solomon Islands--can be reached by ship only once every two or three months and has no electricity. She and her crew had to use solar panels to charge their equipment, remaining on the island for months at a time and living, along with the natives, in thatched huts without indoor plumbing.

March is from an arty family of Kiwis--(she described her parents as hippies!)--and she's already won a Fulbright Fellowship in addition to her scholarships to Stanford University, so she is clearly a talented young woman.



*Briar March, center, with her parents in New Zealand.*

I found her point of view interesting because she did not immediately attribute the island's problems to global warming. Instead, she did real research on what is happening there: ("It's

wondering if my scarecrow is replicating. (See scarecrow story at left ... )

## PUMPKIN HARVEST



A nice man at the "Y" asked me if I planned to make pumpkin bread from my pumpkin crop. "Pumpkin bread?" I asked with a concerned look. "You mean you think I should cut them up? I don't know ..."

## WIDEAWAKE ENGINEERS UPDATE

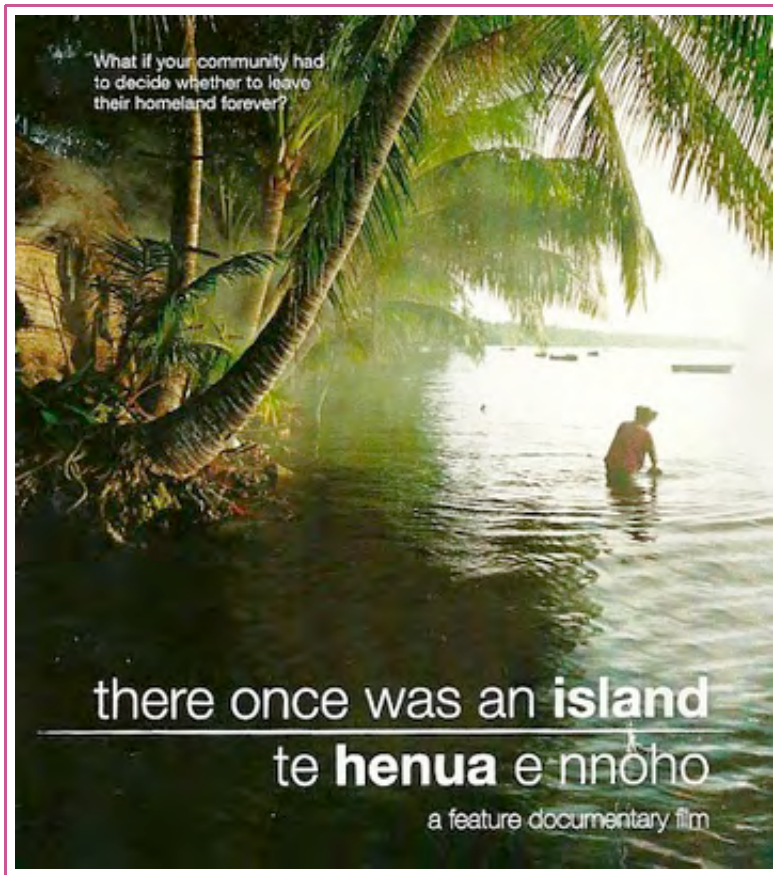


I managed to get a couple of new pieces up on the Wideawake Engineers site, after a slight pause. Click the pic and learn what Brazil



complicated," she said). She also worked to make a difference: bringing a scientist with her on one visit, so GPS mapping could be used to help the population make informed decisions about evacuating.

While she was there, there was a flood. I hate to call that a filmmaker's dream--because it clearly wasn't a good thing for the locals--but it is the kind of thing that clearly helped her tell the story.



As a television news reporter, it took me several years to realize that my job was like the job of a documentarian (though slightly more low brow): I was making little non-fiction movies every day. A good story was almost never difficult to tell. If a story *was* difficult to tell, it generally wasn't a good story.

Not a problem with this tale. Keep your eye out for this award-winning film.

and "the snake is smoking" have to do with World War II.

## BLOG ARCHIVE

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S'no Go for SF Snow

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Strangeness of Bahrain

Thinking About New Zealand  
And California's Own Qu...

The Origins of Presidents'  
Day

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The Disappearing Pacific  
Island

How the Pope Changed  
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Interesting Experiences With  
Color ...

Google's Wael Gonim in  
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***There Once Was An Island: Te Henua e Nnoho***, produced by Briar March and Lyn Collie. For more information click on: [THERE ONCE WAS AN ISLAND WEB SITE](#)



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- The Ghost on the Sculpture Committee

10/29/2011

"Imagine That" by artist Tom Williams. Lincoln Park, Los Altos, California. I got a call this week from someone looking...

- There's Nothing New Under the Sun

10/25/2011

Robin and Kimberly at our Echo Drive home with friend. Keeping the rain off the rhubarb and the locusts...

- Attack of the Killer Crows! Or: Four-and-Twenty Blackbirds May End Up in A Pie

10/23/2011

Many people in California don't even have lawns anymore: it is that water conservation thing and a good change...



POSTED BY ROBIN CHAPMAN AT 8:07 AM

LABELS: [BRIAR MARCH](#), [THERE ONCE WAS AN ISLAND](#)

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G'day Australia: Florida Feels Your Pain

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## NEWEST NIECE



She's so pretty. And she has the Chapman feet!

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## A NOTE ABOUT COMMENTS FOR READERS OF ROBIN CHAPMAN NEWS



# Koraaleilandje als symbool voor de wereld

Van onze verslaggever  
**Lennaert Roeljakkers**

**AMSTERDAM** Als een vloedgolf over hun eiland slaat en het zeewater door hun huizen spoelt, dringt het ook tot de koppigste bewoners van het koraaleilandje Takuu door: hun wereld staat onverbiddelijk op het punt te verdwijnen.

Slechts vierhonderd mensen wonen op het idyllische eilandje in de Stille Oceaan, dat maar één meter boven de zeespiegel uitsteekt. Maar voor de Nieuw-Zeelandse documentairemaakster Briar March (29) staat het lot van de bewoners van Takuu symbool voor de hele wereld. 'Vroeg of laat krijgen alle mensen met deze problemen te maken', zegt zij.

Om de nadagen van het moderne

Atlantis vast te leggen, reisde zij naar het afgelegen atol, dat onder Papoea Nieuw-Guinea valt. Aan het begin van de film *There Once Was an Island* van March wijzen de oudste bewoners van Takuu de plekken aan waar zij vroeger op het strand speelden en waar nu slechts golven klotsen. Her en der steekt een half verdronken palmboom uit het water, als teken van de toekomst die Takuu te wachten staat. Als gevolg van de opwarming van de aarde stijgt de zeespiegel steeds verder. Het is slechts een kwestie van tijd voordat de zee het eilandje zal verzwelgen.

Voor de bewoners zit er dan niets anders op dan te verhuizen naar Bougainville, een groot autonoom eiland van Papoea-Nieuw-Guinea, 250 kilometer ten zuiden van Takuu. Hun



vrees is dat hun Polynesische cultuur, die sterk verschilt van die van de Melanesische cultuur op Bougainville, ten onder zal gaan.

## Unieke cultuur

Twee keer ging March naar Takuu om de twijfels en hoop van de eilandbewoners vast te leggen. 'Ik heb bewust gekozen om me te richten op de mensen die dagelijks de gevolgen van

klimaatverandering ervaren en niet op de oorzaak daarvan', zegt ze. 'Het is met name de trots op hun cultuur die de bewoners van Takuu bij elkaar houdt, al is het leven op het eiland verre van eenvoudig. Ook gaan er amper boten naar het eiland.'

Voor March en haar ploeg was het uiterst lastig werken op Takuu, dat geen elektriciteit en geen wegen kent. Maar dat was voor March juist een extra prikkel. 'Takuu is zo uniek, dat ik het per se wilde doen. Ook al is het logistiek onpraktisch, kampten we met geldgebrek en verliep het werk bij ons eerste bezoek, van december 2006 tot februari 2007, bijzonder stroef.'

Na lang zoeken vond March in Nieuw-Zeeland nieuwe geldschietters, waardoor ze in december 2008 weer

naar het atol kon gaan. Dit keer nam ze een oceanograaf en een geoloog mee uit Australië, om te onderzoeken hoe lang het eiland nog zou kunnen bestaan.

'Zij ontdekten al snel dat de dijkes die de bewoners van Takuu sinds mensenheugenis bouwen, juist bijdroegen aan de bodemerosie', zegt March.


Voor verder onderzoek had ze geen geld. En de problemen aankaarten bij politici van Papoea-Nieuw-Guinea, haalde ook weinig uit. 'Ze zijn zeker bereid naar je te luisteren, staan open voor suggesties en beloven veel, maar vervolgens gebeurt er niets', aldus March.

Zaterdag nog te zien op het IDFA, om 12.15 uur.

DINS  
NR6 ■ 23 NOV '10

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DAGkrant 



## GEEN PANIEK!

De opwarming door CO<sub>2</sub>-uitstoot is niet het einde van de wereld, dus geen paniek! De Deense econoom Bjørn Lomborg (te zien in *Cool it*) stelt het publiek gerust tijdens het Green Screen debat in Escape.  
FOTO: FELIX KALKMAN





FOTO: FRIJK KALKMAN



Briar March en Laura Israel

Klimaatverandering. Soms lijken de problemen zo groot en onoplosbaar dat mensen er liever de ogen voor sluiten. Daarom richten Laura Israel (*Windfall*) en Briar March (*There Once Was An Island: Te Henua e Ninoho*) zich op concrete situaties, van gemeenschappen die met de gevolgen van klimaatverandering worden geconfronteerd. DOOR WENDY KOOFS

Haar voorzet om een kritische film over windenergie te maken kwam de Amerikaanse regisseur Laura Israel op een immens schelkhaanvande te staan van een 'grote' productie. 'Hij begon er als de ene gik tegen me te schreeuwen. 'Wij zijn soms een klein of een kerncentrale' is hij absoluut niet negatief zijn over windenergie.' Hij ging helemaal over de roos. 'Ze had hem verteld over de situatie in Meridith in de staat New York, een dorp waar ze een buitenshuis heeft. De bewoners werden belagert door bedrijven die - onder bedenklijke voorwaarden - windturbines van meer dan 120 meter hoog op hun grondgebied wilden zetten. Vaak op korte afstand van hun huizen en in tussentijd met alle bijbehorende risico's voor de gezondheid. 'Ik dacht: als hij al zo reageert, dan heb ik wellicht weinig zin. Dan moet ik het laten zien.' Het resultaat is *Windfall*. Veel bewoners in het dorp maakten dezelfde ontwikkeling door als Israël: aarzendheid waarna ze uiteindelijk over het

idee van windenergie. Tot ze beseften wat de nadelen zouden zijn. 'Mijn zorg was dat het gebied helemaal geïndustrialiseerd zou worden', vertelt Israël. 'Nu is het boerenland. Daarnaast kwam ik er al snel achter dat windenergie het aantal kern- of kolencentrales niet verminderd. Het is geen zachte energievorm, dat er moet altijd genoeg back-up zijn. Ze voert in haar film de bewustwording van de bewoners en hun conflict met de voorstanders van de turbines zelf. De mensen in Meridith zijn het soms zo meero, dat zelfs vaders en zoons niet meer met elkaar praten.'

#### ZEEPSPIEGEL

Ook de Nieuw-Zeelandse regisseur Briar March neemt in *There Once Was An Island: Te Henua e Ninoho* in op een specifieke gemeenschap om het lokale thema klimaatverandering

te behandelen. 'Wat Israël zich verdient in de voor en tegen van wat draagbare grote wind als een belangrijke mogelijke oplossing, want March heeft concreet het dilemma waarvoor we met zijn allen staan. Aan de hand van het eiland Nukunua in de Stille Oceaan, dat wordt bedreigd door de stijgende zeespiegel. 'De kleine eiland van onderhaal kilometer lang is een microkosmos. De manier waarop de eilandbewoners reageren op veranderingen in het milieu is een metafoor voor de reactie van de wereldbevolking als geheel.' Iedereen kent de verhalen over de mini-eilanden in de Stille Oceaan die dreigen te verdwijnen. 'Toen ik de bekende eilandengroep, maar Nukunua is een van de hardst getroffen eilanden doordat het maar één meter boven zeespiegel ligt en zo constant afgevoerd is. De bewoners hebben kleine bananenboerderijen om mee te leven, maar voor lange afstanden zijn die niet geschikt. Ze kunnen bij overstromingen nergens naar uitwijken.'

#### OPGESLOKT

Toen March vier jaar geleden met het project begon, was er volgens milieudeskundigen onvoldoende bewijs dat de eilanden zouden worden opgeslokt. 'Wél dat het scenario streep, maar niet dat de eilanden daardoor onbewoonbaar zouden worden. Pas toen de IPCC-rapporten (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, red.) uitkwamen, waren veel

MARCH ONTMOET ISRAEL

## 'IK MOCHT NIET NEGATIEF ZIJN OVER WINDENERGIE'



voorgeld dat het in de toekomst alleen maar zou verderechten, besloot ik dat de film daarom moest gaan. 'Welke beslissingen nemen mensen als ze weten dat het water hen in elf maanden tijd letterlijk aan de lippen staat? De mensen hebben het eiland, dat geen elektriciteit heeft en tot voor kort zelfvoorzienend was, voort onder verdere. Verreken is ontzettend inspirerend, want het eiland is de enige wereld die ze kennen. 'De gemeenschap was erg in de was, want de regering wilde het eiland ontruimen', vertelt March. 'Net als bij *Windfall*, want de dorpelingen zijn verdeeld: de één wilde weg, de ander was bang dat ze hun cultuur zouden kwijtblijven. Dat was er veel debat en discussie. Wat ze minen was betrouwbare informatie. Daarom vroegen ze wetenschappers en ingenieurs de situatie ter plekke te komen onderzoeken. Daarop konden ze vervolgens hun beslissing baseren.'



ken', beaamt Israël. 'Ik denk dat het publiek vaak ontzettend onderschat wordt. Er wordt ze steeds hapklare brokken aangeboden, en voor het geval het niet meteen duidelijk is, wordt alles nog eens herhaald. Ik heb liever een actieve kijker dan dat ik ze meteen alle antwoorden laat zien. Ik wil ze meten, niet om zelf op onderzoek uit te gaan. Er zijn in de wereld zo veel heugtigende dingen aan de hand op het moment. Het risico bestaat dat mensen apathisch worden en zich erover afsluiten. Door duidelijk mensen en hun emoties te blijven en het probleem door hun ogen te bekijken, kun je iets zien groeien in de grote problemen, van mens tot mens.'

#### VERDRUKING

Beide regisseurs geven niet hun film mensen in de verdrinking een stem. De bewoners van Meridith krijgen zelf prima in staat de windturbines uit hun dorp te weten. Andere gemeenschappen in Amerika gaan globale onder de wapengroeven dat ze met grote bodiepen hebben gekend. Hun land is niet meer waard en mensen worden rijk door de laagfrequente geluiden en het onbepaalde gevoel dat ze hun huizen. 'Bewoners zamen deze niet in de auto om bij de premie aanreiking te zijn. De QRA duurt twee uur, onder anderen zijn verlaet wilde dieren en andere wilde waarden.'

March interieurde gesprekken tussen de wetenschappers en de eilandbewoners. 'Door de ontroering werd bij allebei een verandering in gang gezet. De wetenschappers zagen de impact van de klimaatveranderingen op deze gemeenschap, de eilandbewoners gingen van de wetenschappers nieuwe inzichten, maar vooral ook het gevoel dat ze geïsoleerd werden door de buitenwereld. Omdat ze open serieus werden genomen, werden ze gemotiveerd hun situatie op een veel diepgaander manier te doorgronden. Iedereen zal zich moeten aanpassen, daarvoor zijn ze het reus. Israël: 'Het zal heel lang worden, maar mijn film maakt één ding duidelijk, we moeten het niet alleen aan het bedrijfsleven overlaten. Het antwoord ligt bij onszelf, we moeten allemaal aanpassingen doen in ons leven.'

*Windfall* - Laura Israel. Ma 22 15.30 Tuneski 1, 22 17.00 Markt 9. *There Once Was An Island: Te Henua e Ninoho* - Briar March. Do 23 10.00 Brinkse Grand Brinkse Zaki, 23 21.15 Tuneski 1.



After three years spent making a documentary about the remote Pacific island of Takuu and its precarious future, Briar March is now heading for Stanford University.

STORY SIMON FARRELL-GREEN

## profile » BRIAR MARCH

**TO GET TO** the island of Takuu, 250km east of Bougainville in Papua New Guinea, you have to get your timing right. There is a boat, the *Sankamap* (pidgin for "sun comes up"), which goes to the island four times a year: its schedule is erratic, although it always goes in December, when it brings the island's children back from boarding school in Bougainville, and leaves again in January, when it takes them back.

Documentary-maker Briar March has been there twice, filming for *There Once Was an Island* which has had positive early feedback from film festivals.

Takuu, a tiny atoll in the middle of the Pacific, has 400 inhabitants of Polynesian origin, with a unique language and customs largely untouched by the outside world.

But the island is in trouble. Rising sea levels caused by climate change, regular flooding and the resulting salination of the land are making life almost impossible for its inhabitants. In December last year, a series of floods washed away crops, homes and churches. Many have considered moving away, which will mean the loss of the singular culture.

March happened on the story through the research of University of Auckland ethno-musicologist Richard Moyle, who has been recording the island's music and language for a decade. "At the time," she says, "I wanted to make a film that had more of an international audience. I also wanted to make a story about climate change from the human perspective."

So, at the end of December 2006, she and a small crew spent two months living on the island with the villagers. A year later, March returned with a bigger team and a couple of scientists. She found Takuu has problems other than climate change — its isolation means the young are seeking opportunities elsewhere and there is a lack of government support. "I think probably what was most frustrating was that not much had changed," she says. Bougainville's government is new; it has only just emerged from decades of civil war with Papua New Guinea.

She finished the film in September, after three years of hard work. A few days later, she flew out to Palo Alto, near San Francisco, to start a Masters of Fine Art in documentary film-making at prestigious Stanford University. Only eight students a year are admitted into the two-year course and March is the first New Zealander to attend Stanford's art school. Last year, Werner Herzog was a guest lecturer on the course, which excites her no end. "A week with Werner Herzog, that'd be pretty amazing, eh?"

March is diminutive and quick, with a big laugh. She grew up at Bethell's Beach, a stunning, wild beach on Auckland's west coast, and went to the local schools. "That was probably what made me get into documentaries, without knowing it," she says. "Because I was exposed to so many different cultures, ways of life and socioeconomic groups."

After graduating from Elam, the University of Auckland's School of Fine Arts, March set herself up as a documentary film-maker. It was a way of exploring the same issues, but with a bigger audience. "There was something that didn't feel right for me with the art-gallery context because I felt the work wasn't always getting to everyone," she says.



Briar March visited Takuu twice during the making of her documentary. She and her team lived with the island's villagers.

"What I love about film is the way it reaches so many people. I think it's one of the most powerful art forms of our time."

Her first film, *Allie Eagle and Me*, was about a New Zealand artist who lives at Bethell's. She's a controversial figure who started out as a lesbian separatist and wound up a Pentecostal Christian. It was a demanding project on which March and Eagle often grappled for creative control. While she wouldn't repeat that experience again, she does like polarising subjects. "I find that really fascinating, when you have people who are controversial or contradictory in their nature."

Making documentaries is not an easy road in New Zealand: there are few outlets for serious-minded documentaries and funding is limited. The team on Takuu, which included her co-producer and business partner Lyn Colles, didn't pay themselves. March has worked as an assistant to the noted New Zealand documentary-maker Annie Goldson — "she's a real mentor for me" — and worked as a wedding photographer. "Hundreds of weddings. Every summer," she says slightly ruefully.

That's part of the reason for heading to Stanford, where, she hopes, she will make enough contacts and learn enough about the American film-making system that she is able to make a career back in New Zealand. "I can't rely on the industry changing overnight and making it perfect for me," she says. "So I had to find a way to make it right for myself."

Which is typical understatement from March, who has a habit of resolving difficult situations. The Takuu project cost more than \$100,000 and March and her team had to seek funding from American foundations because of the limited pool of funding in New Zealand, although they did get a small amount of funding from the Screen Innovation Production Fund for the first shoot. She and Colles, through their production company, sponsored a young woman from Takuu to come to New Zealand and work on the film and will donate a portion of the proceeds of the film to a trust for the islanders.

The cost of attending Stanford is around \$160,000, much of which has come from the Fulbright Foundation and the AMP Foundation. March had begun to wonder quite how she was going to pay for accommodation in Palo Alto when she was offered free board by a family who live near the university in return for childcare.

When I spoke to March in September, just before she left for Stanford, she was looking forward to the experience. "What I'm excited about is making films from an outsider's perspective," she says. "I like to find stories when I feel there's something there that needs to be told, an important thing that needs to be recognised."





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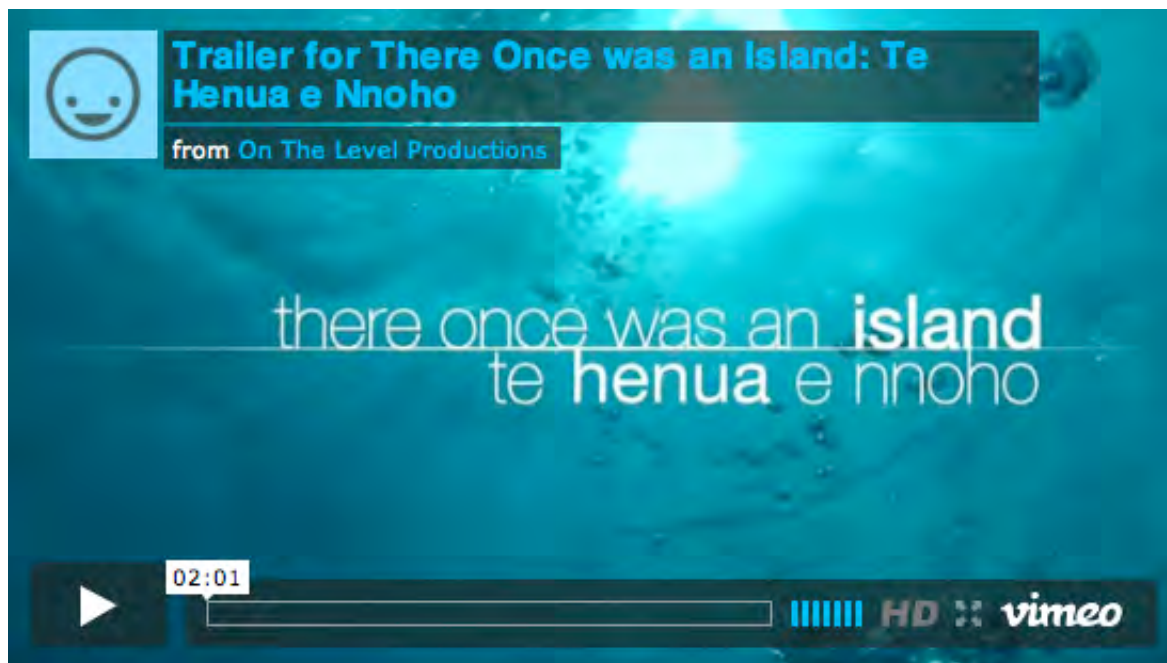
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## Film on Pacific climate change clinches Leipzig revolution prize

**Stephen Brown**

26 October 2010

**Leipzig, Germany (ENInews).** A film charting the dilemmas facing a community of 400 people on a Pacific atoll threatened by rising sea levels, due to climate change, has clinched a prize to commemorate East Germany's 1989 "peaceful revolution".



Trailer for [There Once Was an Island: Te Henua e Noho](#) from [On The Level Productions](#) on [Vimeo](#)

The New Zealand film, "There Once Was an Island: Te Henua e Noho", is the first production to receive the "Leipzig Ring" prize awarded by the Peaceful Revolution Foundation, during the 53rd International Leipzig Festival for Documentaries and Animation Films.

"The film took four years to make. A lot of that time I was struggling to find funding for it. Many people thought I was crazy," producer Briar March said after being presented with the award in a 23 October ceremony at Leipzig's Nikolaikirche (St Nicholas' Church).

The church was the scene of peace prayers that in 1989 preceded mass protests calling for democracy in communist-ruled East Germany.

"The people of Leipzig have shown the world that societies and systems can be changed non-violently through civil courage," said Rainer Vor, the chairperson of the Peaceful Revolution Foundation, founded in 2009 to promote the non-violent values of the protests.

Its film prize is for a documentary that portrays civic engagement for democracy and human rights or where the producer has demonstrated personal commitment or great personal courage in making the film.

"There Once was an Island" follows the Polynesian community of Takuu, a string of islets on a reef around a central lagoon in the south western Pacific. People live on the islet called Nukutoa.

Takuu is located about 250 kilometres northeast of Bougainville and part of the Autonomous Region of Bougainville which is in turn part of Papua New Guinea.

As a tidal flood rips through the atoll, the island community faces the choice of whether to move to an uncertain future in Bougainville or to stay on Takuu and fight for a different, but equally uncertain, outcome.

Explaining the difficulties she faced making the film, March recounted that there were only four boats a year to the island and they do not follow a regular timetable. The island has no mains electricity. "I want to thank the Takuu community," she said. "They are the ones who made this film possible."

The jury praised the way the film portrays the islanders' calm, composure and determination in responding to the threats facing the island. It said it helps those seeing the film in places such as Germany to see "that our lifestyle and the resulting climate change is a reason why the island faces such threats".

The award is a sculpture in the shape of the Leipzig inner city ring road where the pro-democracy demonstrators marched in 1989, and a cash prize of 5000 euros.

Ten films were shortlisted for the award, dealing with themes such as the Russian-Georgian conflict of 2008, civic rights activists of East Germany during the transition to democracy, an environmental cover-up in Kyrgyzstan, and Iran's political protests of 2009.

- Film Web site: [www.thereoncewasanisland.com](http://www.thereoncewasanisland.com)
- Peaceful Revolution Foundation Web site (in German): [www.stiftung-fr.de](http://www.stiftung-fr.de)
- *ENInews'* managing editor Stephen Brown is a member of the World Association for Christian Communication's Europe steering committee, one of the contributors to the prize.

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# Still in Motion

October 24, 2010

## Award Winners at DOK-Leipzig



First of all, apologies for all the different font sizes and styles going on for the last few posts. Typepad has a habit of occasionally re-jiggering their templates (with no notice), so I have to settle into finding a new look and size that I like. Helvetica never disappoints.

So I'm just back from Leipzig where I jammed my eyes and brain full of animation--it was lovely. It was, without a doubt, one of the most superbly organized events I've ever attended and downright relaxing. I don't experience that at too many fests. I did manage to see a few "live-action" docs, as well, and am pleased to see that the juries picked some really outstanding films from the program on which to bestow awards, with generous award winnings totalling 71,000 euros.

The winner of the inaugural Leipziger Ring Film Award, presented by the Peaceful Revolution Foundation, went to New Zealand filmmaker, Briar March, for her film

**There Once Was an Island: Te Henua e Nnoho**. The jury awarded March with a 5000 euro prize for her film which tells the story of the struggle for survival of the 400 residents that inhabit the small South Pacific island



of Nukuta, a place that is disappearing due to climate change. This prize will go a long way in helping the filmmaker with her primary goal: raising global awareness about this very specific environmental issue and highlighting the spirit of solidarity that needs to be created with the inhabitants of Nukuta to save their homeland from perishing. (Still from film pictured.)



Here is an overview of most of the award winners: the International Jury for Documentary Film gave the Golden Dove to Jerzey Sladkowski's **Vodka Factory** from Sweden (still from film, pictured); the Silver Dove went to **Miesten vuoro (Steam of Life)** by Joonas Berghäll and Mika Hotakainen (Finland, Sweden). The jury also gave honorable mentions to **Goodnight Nobody** by Jacqueline Zünd (Switzerland, Germany), and Samir Abdallah's **Gaza crève l'écran / Gaza on**



**Air** (Egypt, Palestine, France).

The German Jury for Documentary Film gave the top prize to Gereon Wetzel and Jörg Adolph for their **How to Make a Book with Steidl**. Chris Wright and Stefan Kolbe received an honorary mention for their beautiful and deeply moving film, **The Home / Kleinstheim**, about adolescents growing up together in a group home. (Still from **The Home**, pictured.)



The International Jury for the Young Talent Competition gave a prize to Brazilian filmmaker, Rodrigo Siqueira, for **Terra deu, terra come / The Earth Giveth, the Earth Taketh**. The prize of 10,000 euros will go towards initial funding for his next documentary. Prizes from this jury also went to Macarena Aguiló for **El edificio los chilenos / The Chilean Building** (honorable mention); Polish filmmaker, Marta Minorowicz, for **Kawalek lata / A Piece of Summer** (Golden Dove for mid-length); and, Anja Strelets for **Natascha** (honorary mention for mid-length).



The International Jury for Animated Film awarded the Golden Dove to François Alaux, Hervé de Crécy and Ludovic Houplain (France) for their brilliant film, **Logorama**. The Silver Dove went to Matray (France) for the delightful (and way too short!) **Babioles**. The best German animated film went to Felix Gönner for his wonderful film, **Apollo**, definitely one of my favorites out of the 75 animated films I saw at the fest. (Did I mention that I left Leipzig with an eye infection? Too many cartoons? Who knows.) Honorary mentions for animation went to Anita Killi (Norway) for **Sinna mann (Angry Man)** and Vessela Dantcheva (Germany, Bulgaria) for **Anna Blume**. The coveted audience award also went to an animated film. Called "the mephisto 97.6 Publikumspreis," the award went to Bastien Dubois' **Madagascar, carnet de voyage / Madagascar, A Journey Diary** (another brilliant and stunningly beautiful piece that was way too short--still from film, pictured).

Read about these films and other award winners on the festival's website [here](#). There are also podcasts available for downloading off the site including the master class with Sergey Dvortsevov, the Animadoc Podium, and the DOK Podium on Crowdfunding--all well worth a listen.

For my new screening series in Berlin called Kino Satellite, co-produced and co-curated with [Andrew](#)

Grant, we will be collaborating with the new head of the animation program at Leipzig, Annegret Richter, to bring our audience in Berlin some selections from the animated documentary and new German animation programs. Look for that soon.

Also, look for more of my extensive coverage on the animation program in the next issue of DOX. For those of you that don't subscribe (but you should), once the issue is published, I will re-print the article here on SIM.

Congrats to all the winners from Leipzig!

Posted at 12:41 PM in [Art](#), [Awards](#), [Festivals](#), [Film](#), [Markets](#) | [Permalink](#)

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## Boost Pacific climate change 'frontline' coverage and analysis, educator tells media

Posted By [Rua](#) On September 18, 2010 @ 3:50 pm In [Articles](#), [Asia-Pacific Journalism](#), [Fiji](#), [NZ](#), [Pacific Headlines](#) | [4 Comments](#)



[1]

David Robie speaking at the creativity and climate change conference in Suva, Fiji. Photo: Shailendra Singh/USP

*Pacific Scoop*

*Report – By Pacific Media Watch in Suva*

**News media** need to boost their coverage and analysis of Pacific environmental issues to meet the critical challenges facing the region, says a journalism educator.

Associate Professor David Robie, director of the Pacific Media Centre, told a creativity and climate change conference at the University of the South Pacific this week that most media were not doing enough about the issues.



## OCEANIC CONFERENCE ON CREATIVITY & CLIMATE CHANGE

SEPTEMBER 13-17, 2010

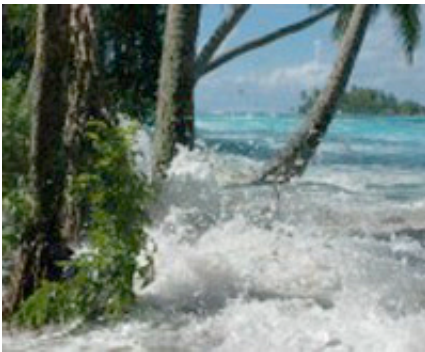
THE UNIVERSITY OF THE SOUTH PACIFIC  
LAUCALA CAMPUS, SUVA, FIJI

[2] With up to 75 million Asia-Pacific climate change refugees being predicted by 2050 by many science reports, news media needed to urgently “up their game” on environmental reporting.

Describing some of the environmental indicators confronting the region and the failure of Australia and New Zealand to adopt more radical carbon emission reduction targets and to give greater support to adaptation strategies in the Pacific, Dr Robie [told the conference](#) [3] developing nations in the Pacific were in the frontline of global climate change.

News media needed to adopt “frontline” news reporting and analysis strategies to challenge policy priorities.

The survival of countries such as Kiribati, Tuvalu and remote parts of the Cook Islands, French Polynesia, Papua New Guinea and Tonga were at stake.



[4]

A king tide strikes on Takuu Atoll, Papua New Guinea. Photo: Still from There Once Was an Island.

Climate change had the potential to have an impact on almost every development and poverty issue in the region.

### **Part of solution?**

“So where does the mainstream media fit in the middle of this complex scenario and the digital technologies revolution? Is the media part of the problem or part of the solution?” Dr Robie asked.

“For the most part, it is probably part of the problem. The relentless pursuit of ratings, short-term circulation spinoffs, the dumbing down of content and ruthless cutting back of staff are examples of this.



"And there are many instances of poor editorial judgment or downright sensationalist opportunism that accentuate this problem.

"These frequently overshadow the times when the news media does a credible job and puts in considerable effort over public social justice and environmental issues and other agenda-setting reports such as climate change."

Dr Robie talked of several innovative information initiatives on climate change and the effective use of social and independent media that challenges mainstream "sluggishness" on the issues.

He praised the experimental new media project headed by the University of Technology, Sydney, based on the website Reportage-Enviro [www.reportage-enviro.com](http://www.reportage-enviro.com) <sup>[5]</sup> which is linked to the Global Environmental Journalism Initiative (GEGI) – run cooperatively by several international journalism schools – and Pacific Scoop.



[6]

Young girls on Takuu Atoll. Photo:  
Still from *There Once Was an Island*.

### Climate refugee film

One of the highlights of the conference was the screening of the new film [\*There Once Was an Island : Te Henua e Nnoho\*](#) <sup>[7]</sup> directed by New Zealander Briar March, which tells the story of an isolated Polynesian community on Takuu Atoll in the Mortlocks in Papua New Guinea losing their culture and their homes as some prepare to relocate in Melanesian Bougainville more than 250 km to the south-west.

They are among the first of the climate change refugees in the Pacific and their on-screen story was greeted with emotion by the audience.

**More about [\*There Once Was an Island\*](#) <sup>[7]</sup>.**  
**[The USP creativity and climate change conference.](#)** <sup>[3]</sup>

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- [7] *There Once Was an Island : Te Henua e Nnoho*:  
<http://www.thereoncewasanisland.com/about/>

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# Insight into change



**Uncertain future:** Takuu boys feature in the documentary *There Once was an Island*, directed by film-maker Briar March, right.

Critically acclaimed documentary *There Once was an Island* will screen at the Christchurch leg of the New Zealand International Film Festival this weekend. New Zealand director Briar March, who is attending both Christchurch screenings, writes about her experience making the documentary.

I first heard about Takuu, an isolated, remote low-lying atoll in the southwestern Pacific after reading an article featuring Richard Moyle, an anthropologist who has worked on the island every other summer for the past 16-plus years.

The article described a Polynesian community largely untouched by the outside world, considering relocating to mainland Bougainville in Papua New Guinea, because of the impact of rising sea levels on their island.

What captivated me about the story was the way Takuu, a small island, had the potential to work as an allegory for the entire planet, and its small community, a microcosm for how society at large responds to environmental and cultural change.

Four years in the making, *There Once was an Island* has put our crew through a thrilling, sometimes terrifying, roller-coaster adventure.

Dealing with the bureaucracy in Papua New Guinea can be difficult – our visas arrived only a day before we were to board our plane, and catching the boat to the island is also very dicey.



On average, it makes only four trips a year to the island, and when we caught it, it had lost all three of its anchors and had 10-year-old expiry dates on the lifeboats.

During our shoot, we also experienced a disastrous flood that destroyed more than half the houses on the island. It took more than 10 days to get any news of when aid or supplies would come from the mainland.

After spending more than



three months filming, and learning about the community's culture and way of life, what stands out for me are the many rich experiences we gained and the wonderful people we met.

This is reflected in the film, which takes an observational and character-driven approach, following three characters – Teloo, Endar and Satty – who allow us into their lives and show us first hand what it is like to live on an island that is extremely isolated and vulnerable, in the midst of an environmental crisis.

We gain personal insights into their perspectives as they consider whether to move to an uncertain future in Bougainville or to stay on Takuu and fight for a different, but equally uncertain outcome.

Ultimately, our film gives a human face to the direct impacts of climate change in the Pacific, but also a very intimate portrait of a unique Polynesian culture.

I am very proud of the finished film and the positive responses we have been getting from audiences worldwide.

□ *There Once was an Island's* Christchurch premiere is today at 6pm at the Regent on Worcester. It will screen again on Monday, August 2, at noon.



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## Movie industry reeling them in

Success of Kiwi film-makers luring others to try. By Gill South

THE international success achieved by film-makers like Nikki Caro, Peter Jackson and Andrew Adamson have inspired many New Zealanders to pursue a career in film. As the current NZ International Film Festival in Auckland shows, New Zealand films are making an increasing contribution.

Film-makers should come from all walks of life – it is the life experience of the person behind the camera who really makes a story come alive. Rosemary Riddell directed the sold-out festival film *The Inseparable Moon* in her downtime from being a judge.

If you want to take a more orthodox route, the New Zealand Broadcasting School in Christchurch is one of the most prestigious film schools in the country. Auckland University of Technology and the University of Auckland also offer programmes. The Christchurch school accepts just 20 students every year for its Bachelor's programme in digital film and TV production. There is no barrier on age, says Richard Bell, head of the second-year programme. "We tend to get students who are very keen, will have been very involved in media studies at school and have work experience with a production company."

"Nothing can beat life experience," he adds. On the Christchurch course, students are taught all there is to know about film-making from directing, producing, to raising finance. "It's an immersion course," says Bell. The three-year degree is two years on campus and the final condensed year is an internship with a production company which often leads to the student's first job. Christchurch students have had their films in NZ film festivals, short film festivals and shown all round the world, says Bell.

Though not many go on to make feature films, the majority of students stay in the industry, going on to work in TV, for documentary companies, in commercial production and for web

companies, says Bell. Only a select few manage to make feature films as a full-time living.

"It's about letting them find their niche," says Bell, who sits on the executive committee of the Screen Directors Guild of New Zealand.

One of his brightest students, Eileen Gallagher, is finishing her internship at film and campaigns company Borderless Productions and has been offered a job there as production

a company on their own and with their films, to create positive social change. "We are using film as a tool or catalyst for creating change, something we could feel positive about," says Wong.

Their company is behind the award-winning documentary *A Grandmother's Tribe*, a film made to show the plight of grandmothers in Africa bringing up their grandchildren. "With *A Grandmother's Tribe* we came up with an idea of how can we use a film and campaign to inspire people to support grandmothers who have lost their children to HIV Aids," says Wong. The film won a humanitarian award at the Socoma Film Festival. Borderless is just about to submit their next film as a campaign project to the Sundance Film Festival. It will definitely go into the Vancouver Film Festival next year. *The Jade Bell Story* tells the tale of a young Canadian man who took a drug overdose and was left mute and blind but with a fully functioning brain. Bell is campaigning to inform children about the dangers of drug taking.

"His whole mission in life is to save kids," says Wong. The film will be distributed in schools.

As well as campaigning films, Borderless makes commercials and provides production services for companies such as AMP Financial Services, Oxfam, Buzzone and the Sir Peter Blake Trust. It did the campaign for World Environment Day, and the Oxfam Unwrapped commercial.

Wong says she and the team at Borderless love making something out of nothing, seeing an opportunity, the creation of an idea, then watching it go worldwide.

Yes, you have to be creative, but anyone can have an idea. It's having the technical skills of turning it into something, she says.

To be a successful film-maker, you also need perseverance and passion, says up and coming NZ film-maker Briar March, who is premiering her film, *There Once Was an Island*,



Dean Easterbrook



Qiujing Wong

**'We are using film as a tool or catalyst for creating change, something we could feel positive about.'**

QIUIJING WONG  
BORDERLESS PRODUCTIONS

assistant. Borderless was set up by Qiujing Wong and Dean Easterbrook. Wong, managing director of Borderless Productions, is a different kind of film-maker. She studied business and then went and worked at international advertising and marketing communications group Omnicom. There she met her partner, trained film-maker Dean Easterbrook.

Together they had a dream to set up



MAKING THE CUT: Briar March says you need passion and determination to build a career as a film-maker.

tomorrow. March, currently studying for her Masters in Fine Arts in documentary film at Stanford University, was inspired to do film during her fine arts undergraduate degree at the Elam School of Fine Arts.

Then March was mentored, in her final year, by seasoned documentary maker and University of Auckland Associate Professor Annie Goldson. She gravitated towards concerns around the environment, human rights and social issues.

In her last year of the BFA, she started making her first serious documentary, *Allie Eagle and Me*, which she finished six months after the course. She has spent four years on *There Once Was an Island*, a film about

the Papua New Guinea Government's plans to move the population of the island of Taki as a result of climate change.

March says realistically, "I don't think you can really rely on making documentaries and earning a living from it, you've got to think outside the square. How can I make this vocation sustainable?" Hence her decision to do an MFA so she can teach.

Learning how to navigate funding is a big challenge for any film-maker. For *There Once Was an Island*, March and her producer Lynn Collins got money from America. "I have been learning about the US funding film model, it's quite different from New Zealand."

The other thing is, because you are

in America, you get invited to festivals. I've been invited to Europe for one. I made it at Stanford and for *There Once Was an Island*. She went to Brussels for one, and the International Student Film Festival in Potsdam Film for another where she won an award for her film.

March has just flown in from the Los Angeles Film Festival which was, she says, hilarious. She went to the world premiere of *The Twilight Saga: Eclipse* and realised to get ahead in her industry, you've got to keep pushing. "It's hard to do all this networking."

March, who would like to make a feature film one day, has another year at Stanford and is hoping to get an internship in the States.

### MOVERS & SHAKERS

■ Greg Thompson has been appointed to the role of sales representative (industrial specialist) for Wedderburn Scales Ltd.

■ Bachcare Holiday Homes has appointed Natalia Garcia to the newly created role of marketing coordinator.

■ Three CFA Society of New Zealand's CFA Charterholders have been appointed to prominent positions in the finance industry in New Zealand and globally. Simon Botherway CFA was appointed chairman of the Financial Markets Authority Establishment Board. Pip Dunphy CFA has been named chairwoman of New Zealand Clearing and Depository Corp Ltd, a wholly-owned subsidiary of NZX Ltd. Louis Boulanger CFA, one of the founders and first President of the Society, has recently been elected GIPS council chair.

■ Microsoft New Zealand has appointed Steve Haddock as server and tools business group lead.

■ ADT Security has named Alex Kim as vice president of strategy for its Asia Pacific region.

■ MSN New Zealand has appointed Karen James account manager.

■ For inclusion in Movers & Shakers, email [careers@nzherald.co.nz](mailto:careers@nzherald.co.nz)

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### On the internet

News and features  
[nzherald.co.nz/career](http://nzherald.co.nz/career)



Briar March's ambitious new documentary, which will screen in this year's International Film Festival, should launch her as a film-maker to watch. She tells **Rebecca Barry**, of the *NZ Herald*, of the sacrifices she's made for her craft — and why not everyone wanted her to make her latest movie.



Out of time... The people of Takuu are running out of time as climate change claims their home.

## That sinking feeling

**M**OST FILM-MAKERS had given up trying to get to Takuu. The remote atoll, also known as the Mortlock Islands, is 250km northeast of Bougainville, Papua New Guinea. It has no airport; visitors must travel from Port Moresby on the service boat, which you could call unreliable if it actually had a schedule. Those who do manage to get there would have a hard time shooting anyway. There is no electricity in this endangered island paradise.

That wasn't about to stop Kiwi documentary-maker Briar March. Armed with solar panels, a generator and her film camera, the 29-year-old was determined to capture the unique plight of the Takuu people. Their place in the world — both geographically and culturally is in danger of being swallowed by climate change.

As March's poignant eco-documentary *There Once Was An Island: Te Henua E Noho* shows, waves routinely flood the locals' homes, and the protective sea walls the islanders erected some years ago to protect them have only short-changed the island's natural ability to build itself up. The once-abundant taro crops have become sodden with salt water. The fine white sands known fondly to those who grew up there have almost completely washed away.

The Takuu film is one of three of March's documentaries screening at the upcoming New Zealand International Film Festival. The others are *Michael and His Dragon*, and *Sick With It*, short films she made while studying for a masters' degree in documentary film at California's Stanford University. Her first feature film, *Allie Eagle and Me*, in which she followed the pioneering feminist artist as she made the transition from lesbian separatism to pentecostal Christianity, screened at the festival in 2004. Then, March was the youngest director with a feature film in the running. So it's no surprise she's back, says festival director Bill Gooden.

"It's a powerful little film. It gives a voice to several views, which gives it its intimacy and impact."

It works as a literal documentary of an innocent people's plight — the irony is not lost on the 400 Takuu locals that they are not the architects of their own demise. March's film charts the heart-breaking decision the community must make: whether to stay at the mercy of the tides or relocate to life unknown on the mainland. The film's scope is a rare combination of grand and intimate. Amid the swaying



Tropical issue... Briar March on location on Takuu.

PHOTOS: NZFI

palm trees apocalyptic themes are evident and family tragedies play out, Takuu acting as a microcosm for the entire planet.

"There are lots of films about climate change out there that are scientific, fact-based," says a hellishly jetlagged March, on the phone from Brussels a day after *There Once Was An Island* screened to United Nations delegates at the Millennium International Documentary

Film Festival.

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March first read about Takuu in an article by New Zealand ethnomusicologist Richard Moyle, who had spent years studying the isolated community and became the only New Zealander proficient in their native language. One of the few

Polynesian communities in which Christianity was not fully adopted, they instead held fast to their own customs, the very fibre of which is now threatened. Moyle had been approached many times to make a film about Takuu but until March came along, none had gone through with it.

Ambitious is an understatement for the challenge that lay waiting. Everyday living on Takuu is a full-time job. Fishing, cooking, cleaning and child-rearing can take up more than a few hours in an office.

"It was a logistical nightmare," says March, who began filming on Takuu in late 2006. For two months she shot what she thought would be the makings of the film. Two years later she returned, this time with a crew.

"I probably should have run screaming because it was such a tough project," says the film's producer, Lyn Collie, who also joined March on the second expedition.

Unlike *Allie Eagle and Me*, in which she narrates the story and appears on camera, March is mostly removed from the story. But she was responsible for bringing two scientists back to the island to assess the damage, thereby manipulating the reality of what she's documenting.

"Briar tends not to take a didactic approach from the beginning, but goes in thinking, 'how can I leave this out on screen?'," says Collie. "Because of that her films are not going to be like Al Gore, making a strong argument in service of the point I'm making. She tends to think, 'how are people experiencing this? What's really happening? What's the full complexity on the ground?'"

Some locals were cautious of March's motives. Hostility erupted when the skipper of the boat the crew chartered to get to the island went scuba diving;

some were worried they were out to over-fish.

"The biggest misunderstanding was that many people thought my film was going to make lots of money," says March, who struggled to fund a non-New Zealand story. "They were very concerned we were taking advantage of them. It's as though turning up there with a movie camera makes people think that, and they presume all films are like Hollywood blockbusters. I can understand why but of course my movie isn't going to make any money. I've never been paid for any work done on a film."

*There Once Was An Island* was incomplete when March was accepted to attend Stanford University's film school. Faced with the astronomical fees — she estimates the cost of the tuition and living costs throughout the two-year course at about \$200,000 — she knew she'd need a miraculous helping hand. Divine intervention came first with an AMP scholarship and then with a prestigious Fulbright Scholarship, while studying she earned three more scholarships, and for her first year an American family provided food and board.

"I see film-making for me as a lifetime vocation, but it's very unsustainable," says March. "It's not something I could do forever unless I have other forms of income and support. I thought I could go into teaching to complement my practice. And I didn't have a masters' so I thought it was a good idea to do that."

On top of the academic work each quarter students must produce an original short film, working with a range of styles and equipment, from black-and-white on 16mm to shooting on a hand-cranked Bolex camera. The hours were long, the work tough. In the final quarter of her first year she lost access to her subject three days

before she was due to start shooting.

The exposure it has given her to top-class films has been second only to the theory — the allegorical elements in *There Once Was An Island* were partly inspired by a class on eastern European film, and the way directors there used metaphor to get around socialist-state censorship.

"That has been such an inspirational class. That will really change the next films I make."

March has always been drawn to dark, life-and-death themes: environmental, social and cultural issues, human rights, stories told from an outsider's perspective. In *Michael and His Dragon*, she follows American war vet Michael Ergo who has succumbed to post-traumatic stress disorder having returned from Iraq. In an effort to lighten up she made *Sick With It*, which, in the spirit of David LaChapelle's *Rise*, tells the story of Oakland youths transcending gang violence through dance. It's uplifting until one of the subjects confesses that if he wasn't dancing he'd be killing people.

"I was like, 'oh damn, this is serious,'" March says laughing. "I couldn't help moving into that terrain."

Perhaps she'll have more luck with her next film, which follows high school students as they get ready for the prom.

March, who grew up in Berkeley, on Auckland's west coast, went to Elam art school with her sights set on becoming a painter like her father, Derek March (her mother, Liz March, is a photographer). She soon became frustrated that her paintings weren't making as much impact as she'd hoped. Film, on the other hand, had the potential to reach a wide audience.

"I love that you can move around the world with a DVD,

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Not even a long-term relationship was going to stop her living her dream. Putting her career first, she split from her partner, who, with a business of his own, wasn't willing to up and leave for the US.

"It was really hard... but I realised I had amazing opportunities ahead of me. I'd worked so hard for the Fulbright, and I could see that if I did this, make film-making a realistic vocation for me, something I needed to do was take extra steps to make that happen. If my partner couldn't be part of that, what could I do?"

A family is on the cards one day, she adds, although for now, she's dedicated to raising her cinematic offspring.

"When you make a film it really is like having a baby. You get the idea which is like you conceive. That germinates. Then you start the process of making it into a reality — you fundraise, you give birth to it, you start shooting. In editing, you experience all the growing pains. You have so many doubts, you're not sure where you're going, it's very daunting. Finally you send it out into the world."

### Catch it

The New Zealand International Film Festival runs from July 23 to August 5 in Dunedin. *There Once Was An Island* screens at Rialto on Sunday July 25 at 3.45pm. *Michael and His Dragon* screens at Rialto on Thursday August 5 at 6.15pm and on Saturday August 7 at 11.15am as part of Homegrown: Darky Stories. *Sick With It* screens at Rialto on Tuesday July 27 at 6pm and Wednesday July 28 at 1.45pm as part of Homegrown: Dance Films. See [www.nzifi.co.nz](http://www.nzifi.co.nz)



# GIRL ON FILM

Briar March's ambitious new documentary, set to screen in this year's International Film Festival, will launch her as a film-maker to watch. She tells **REBECCA BARRY** the sacrifices she's made for her craft — and why not everyone wanted her to make her latest movie



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**SLICE OF LIFE:** Briar March found life on Takuu is a full-time challenge, but there is time for dancing.





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Briar March

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**CINEMATIC CONCEPTION:** Briar March filming in Takuu. She says the process is like having a baby and seeing it grow.

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Not even a long-term relationship was going to stop her living her

dream. Putting her career first, she split from her partner, who, with a business of his own, wasn't willing to up and leave for the United States.

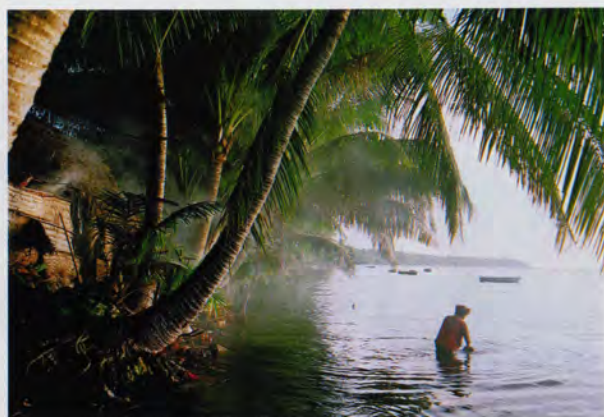
"It was really hard ... but I realised I had amazing opportunities ahead of me. I'd worked so hard for the Fulbright, and I could see that if I did this, film-making would become a realistic vocation for me. I needed to do extra steps to make that happen. If my partner couldn't be part of that, what could I do?"

A family is on the cards one day, she adds, although for now, she's dedicated to

raising her cinematic offspring.

"When you make a film it really is like having a baby. You get the idea which is like you conceive. That germinates. Then you start the process of making it into a reality — you fundraise, you give birth to it, you start shooting. In editing, you experience all the growing pains. You have so many doubts, you're not sure where you're going, it's very daunting. Finally you send it out into the world." ☺

*The New Zealand International Film Festival runs from July 8-25 in Auckland. Bookings at [www.nzff.co.nz](http://www.nzff.co.nz)*







The highest point on Takuu is less than a metre above the high-tide mark.  
Above: Documentary maker Briar March.

## An island on borrowed time

Documentary maker Briar March finds a unique Pacific community facing extinction.

**I**n a cruel twist of fate, a unique island community that would barely produce a little toe's worth of a carbon footprint is facing the drastic consequences of other countries' excesses.

Residents of Takuu, a low-lying Pacific atoll 250km off the east coast of Bougainville, were alarmed when homes, churches and the school library were swallowed by swollen seas in December 2008. Emergency supplies from the mainland took several weeks to arrive by boat, further exposing the community's vulnerability.

The king-tide floods were captured on film by emerging director Briar March, whose documentary *There Once Was an Island: Te Henua e Nnoho* illustrates the effects of climate change on Takuu.

The film follows the lives of three islanders as the community, which has existed on the island for hundreds of years, debates a dire dilemma: relocate to the mainland or risk being submerged by the sea.

March had read about the endeavours of University of Auckland associate professor of anthropology Richard Moyle, who's visited Takuu several times in the past 16 years (the chief's granddaughter was named after Moyle's wife).

Moyle had predicted the extinction of the traditional, egalitarian way of life for the island's 400-odd inhabitants due to rising sea levels. The highest point on Takuu is a mere metre above the high-tide mark and the freshwater table is already becoming contaminated by sea water, threatening the traditional taro crops.

March says she felt it was important to tell the stories of our Pacific neighbours "as they lacked the resources to do so themselves". Still, March and producer Lyn Collie had to forage for funding to shoot and edit the film over a four-year period.

Filming on a tropical island wasn't as idyllic as you'd imagine. Camera gear had to be powered by solar panels and a generator. The sleeping quarters were populated by rats and chickens. The mainland boat service was erratic. The ocean was the toilet.

Also, in the three months March spent on the island, there were three deaths.

"Everyone stops what they're doing and engages in a series of customary events, which can last weeks, months, even a year."

She says she didn't find it

The highest point on Takuu is a mere metre above the high-tide mark and the freshwater table is already becoming contaminated by sea water.

too hard to get by on the staple diet – coconut and fish.

During the first shoot in 2006, the community had asked for scientists to assess the atoll. March found two scientists willing to accompany her when she returned to the island for a second stint of filming – which was when the floods hit.

The crew also set up a charity fund for the islanders and sponsored one of them to live in New Zealand for two months to translate the hundreds of hours of footage.

The story of Takuu's fate has already screened overseas, winning awards at film festivals in Tahiti and Montana. March – a Fulbright recipient currently studying postgraduate film at California's Stanford University – is excited to return home for the New Zealand premiere.

"It'll be a day I'll never forget," she says. "Having worked on a film for this long, it becomes a part of you."

*There Once Was an Island* screens as part of the New Zealand International Film Festival, nationwide July 8 to November 17. Visit [www.nzff.co.nz](http://www.nzff.co.nz) for details. STACEY ANYAN





# THERE ONCE WAS AN ISLAND

New Zealand filmmaker Briar March is on the phone from California. The West Auckland native has recently been awarded a prestigious Fulbright Scholarship and is the first Kiwi to be accepted into the Masters Of Fine Arts Programme at Stanford University in the United States. But March is due to return to New Zealand this month to accompany the screening of her first feature length documentary, *There Once Was An Island*. The film addresses the issue of climate change and how it has affected the population of a tiny, isolated island off the coast of Papua New Guinea. The people of Takuu are faced with the very real possibility that their island will be swallowed up by the Pacific Ocean. March decided to film the story after reading an article written by ethnomusicologist Richard Moyle, who published his story in the Auckland University alumni magazine.

"I was just really taken by the story," says March. "I was wanting to make something about climate change and I thought what better than to find one that embodies so many of these ideas about how we deal with the environment when we're living in a small space. I guess I also feel that it's really important for New Zealand filmmakers to be looking at the Pacific and making stories about the Pacific."

two scientists, to help assess the island's fate. But as fate would have it, a once-in-a-lifetime storm hit the island while they were there, causing massive flooding and giving March an opportunity to shoot some truly spectacular footage.

"How often are you there on the one day of the 50-year flood? It's crazy to think about how many things could have happened that would have meant that we weren't there when the flood happened."

One thing that March learned from her experience is that the climate change issue is a complex beast, with many other issues weighing in.

"Our film is not an axe-grinder film. Really, my position on the whole thing to do with climate change in relation to this film is I think there are lots of factors as to why islands like Takuu and Tuvalu and many other low-lying islands in the Pacific are facing problems with coastal erosion and changes to their island. Not all of those things are to do with climate change. Overpopulation is a big issue; there is the way the sea walls are built around the islands. All these things are factors to do with coastal erosion."

Now studying at Stanford, March looks back at making *There*

## "IT WAS BEAUTIFUL.

THERE WAS SOMETHING ABOUT IT THAT WAS SO SPECIAL AND I DON'T THINK I'LL EVER HAVE AN EXPERIENCE LIKE THAT FOR THE REST OF MY LIFE."

But shooting a film about an isolated island in the middle of the Pacific Ocean has its pitfalls. Just getting there proved to be a mission, with only one boat, based in Bougainville, setting sail for Takuu sporadically.

"The boat was called The Sun Come Up and it only goes to the island four times a year. The only time that it's really certain that this boat trip is going to happen within any certain timeframe is in December because that's when the young people who live off the island during the year to study, come home to see their families. It was incredibly stressful for our producer Lyn Collie. We pretty much got these visas couriered to us the day we had to leave. We arrived in Bougainville and the boat was leaving in like half an hour. So the New Zealand Police had brought everything for us and basically just dropped us off onto this crazy boat. We were jetlagged and standing there going, 'Oh my gosh, we could have missed this boat!'"

Once they arrived, March and her cameraman Zane Holmes didn't know what to expect. "It wasn't like there were all these people there to welcome us. Life just happened and you just fitted in. You just suddenly were part of the family. So automatically, I was given a lap lap to wear, which is like a lava lava, and a fresh coconut to drink, and life just kind of went on. Zane and I were put in this really nice hut. We didn't realise this at first, but it was actually the family's main house and they had all moved out for us. The other really funny thing is that if a boy and a girl stay in one of these houses, that means that they're married. Zane and I were just working as colleagues together but in the eyes of the community, because we were staying in this house, it made us married."

After spending two months on Takuu, Holmes and March left, planning to return after they generated more funding. Two years later they returned with a much bigger crew, including

*Once Was An Island* as a life-altering experience. "It was beautiful. There was something about it that was so special and I don't think I'll ever have an experience like that for the rest of my life. You're in such a small community; there's only 500 people living there on a very small island, and you just become a part of this world."

Marty Duda

## MORE HOME GROWN DOCOS

In addition to Briar March's *There Once Was An Island*, there are at least two other New Zealand documentaries screening at this year's Film Festival that are worthy of your consideration. They are Robin Greenberg's *The Free China Junk* and Clive Neeson's *Last Paradise*.

Neeson describes his film as "a 45-year quest for adrenaline and paradise." Using previously unseen archival film footage, he reveals how New Zealand has become the adventure sports capital of the world.

Greenberg's film looks back even further. Her film tells the story of five fishermen who crossed the Pacific in 1955 in an old traditional Chinese junk. None of the young sailors had ever sailed a junk on the open sea. Along with archival footage, *The Free China Junk* features new interviews with the surviving men more than 50 years after their incredible journey.



## Breaking the Waves: *There Once Was An Island*

BY JACOB POWELL | JUNE 14, 2010

*Climate change reaches the shoreline of south-west Pacific atoll Takuu in Briar March's poignant eco-documentary.*

Like fabled Atlantis of old, an isolated Island in the South Pacific is being slowly consumed by the ever-rising tide. **There Once Was An Island: Te Henua e Nnoho**—the second feature from young New Zealand documentary filmmaker Briar March—gets right amongst the sun-drenched palms and ocean spray of Takuu (aka the Mortlock Islands) to discover what is to become of a land and people in crisis. Inspired in part by the work University of Auckland anthropologist Richard Moyle, the filmmakers document the intimate journey of a people struggling to maintain their place in our world—both culturally and geographically—as their home slowly disappears beneath the breaking waves. This illustrates a broader narrative about the global impacts of accelerated climate change; a story in which, ultimately, we all play a part.

Shooting was accomplished during two trips to the island: first in 2006, then again in 2008. Director March, along with producer Lyn Collie and team, decamped from New Zealand to the balmy if occasionally hazardous climes of Takuu in the South Pacific. 250 kilometres off the coast of Bougainville, Takuu's tiny population (approx. 400) are of Polynesian rather than Melanesian origin (the latter being the prevailing ethnic group in the region). Indeed, watching the film, I was surprised at how similar the islanders' language is to Te Reo Maori. Braving challenging filming conditions—as simple as lack of electricity to run equipment if batteries failed, through to encountering a storm which saw waves wash over whole sections of the small island—the filmmakers worked hard to pull together the various threads of the Takuu Islanders' story.

Beautifully filmed, March frames and constructs her shots with the eye of an artist. The colours, captured in high definition digital, are crisp and alive, creating real immediacy for the viewer and contrasting the aching sense of loss evoked in the unfolding story. In pure aesthetic terms I found the opening and closing shots of the open sea particularly memorable and poetic.

March's documentary style flits between personal interview and fly-on-the wall. She canvasses the various positions held by different factions in the tribe (as represented by particular interviewees, in community debate and family discussion) but rather than advocating for the relocation of the island's



inhabitants to (a non-coastal area of) Bougainville, it is clear the director favours a solution that would see the Islanders remain where their roots are for as long as they are able. Fair enough. The argument for the latter is certainly compelling, particularly when a couple of Australian scientists (an oceanographer and a geomorphologist!) are shipped in to assess the situation during the filmmakers' second stay.

*An Island's* micro-to-macro structure echoes Marc and Nick Francis's deconstruction of the global coffee trade through the lens of a specific Ethiopian grower cooperative in their 2006 documentary *Black Gold*. Likewise, *An Island* successfully connects the viewer to the plight of Takuu by highlighting our part (insignificant though it may seem) in its slow but steady submersion—reminiscent of the way in which Edward Burtynsky illustrates our indirect complicity in negatively impacting our physical environment as seen in Jennifer Baichwal's similarly themed *Manufactured Landscapes* (2006). On occasion the film's various story elements lose their sense of cohesion, which might, in part, be attributed to the unusual constraints the filmmakers had to contend with. So isolated is Takuu that its primary connection to the outside world is via charter boat from Bougainville which is too expensive to keep to a reliable schedule. Costly and difficult to get in and out of, no additional shooting was possible. Nevertheless, March manages to keep the logical flow of her picture clear and works well with the footage she has available.

*An Island* derives its significant emotional impact primarily from the vulnerability and artlessness of the Takuu islanders. The director wisely ensures they are kept to the fore. These people are confronted with the kind of tragedy few of us will ever have to face and of a magnitude that is difficult to fathom. To lose your entire land would be to lose your sense of place in the world. One scientist, in a poignant statement to the camera, outlines the cruel irony that these people, who, though paying the highest cost of global climate change, have made the least contribution to its advent. Despite the serious themes, it is to the credit of the filmmakers and the people of Takuu that March's documentary does not leave you feeling cynical and disillusioned, but rather with a strong sense of hope. Positive outcomes are still possible: both in terms of Takuu's situation and the broader arena of global climate change. *There Once Was An Island* lets us know that the ending isn't written and that we're holding the pen. A challenge is left at our feet; will we take it up? Will we play our part in making the necessary changes to benefit our neighbours and future generations to come?

*Dir. Briar March*

*New Zealand, 2010; 80 minutes*

*In English, Takuu and Tok Pisin, with English subtitles*

Screening: [Auckland](#), [Wellington](#), [Christchurch](#), [Dunedin](#). For New Zealand International Film Festival dates, programme details, and screenings in other regions, visit [nzff.co.nz](http://nzff.co.nz).

## RELATED ARTICLES

- [Making \*There Once Was An Island\*](#)
- [Clive Neeson on \*Last Paradise\*](#)

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## Against the tide

Director Briar March and producer Lyn Collie talk about making *There Once was an Island*, a doco screening at this year's New Zealand International Film Festival about a Pacific community that will soon lose their home to the rising sea.

**How did you first become aware of the plight of the community of Takau?**

**Briar March:** I read an article in 2005 published in the *Auckland Advertiser* Magazine featuring Richard Moyle, an ethnologist from Auckland University who had spent many years researching the music and customs of the Takau people. The article described a remote community, largely untouched by the outside world, that was considering relocating to Bougainville in Papua New Guinea due to the impact of rising sea levels on their island.

I was inspired by the way in which the story of an island had the potential to work as an allegory for the entire planet, and in small communities as a microcosm for the way in which society at large responds to environmental change.

I had been fishing around for stories to do with climate change for some time. I had seen many films on the science of the issue but I knew I wanted to make something that was more personal. I couldn't get the story out of my head, and so a week later I arranged to meet Richard.

There were many things that felt right for me. The location was in the Pacific (which was important to me personally, as I feel as New Zealand filmmakers we should be paying attention to what is happening to our island neighbours), and it involved people – an entire community, in fact. And we also had a way in through Richard. I wouldn't have

wanted to just stroll on up to a place like that with my camera, and need to get formal permission, and Richard helped us get that.

**What have been the greatest joys of making this film?**

**Lyn Collie:** Being part of something I'm really pleased with, getting to work with people who have amazing talent and amazing skill – those both in front of and behind the camera, learning so, so much about myself and other people and about the process of filmmaking, seeing people in front of the camera come together to make the project.

**BM:** Perhaps what was most inspiring about the process of making *There Once was an Island* was the experience of taking scientist John Hunter and Scott Smithers to the island, so that the important conversations about the islanders' future could really start to happen. In this way I felt like my role as a filmmaker worked as a type of enabler, or a mediator, one that set up situations and then recorded the outcome.

No scientist had ever come to Takau and conducted the research that John and Scott did. It was through the conversations we filmed that both the scientists and the local people were able to see eye to eye, and learn from each other in a non-hierarchical fashion. It was also through this process that we discovered the real need for more focus on adaptation. This is something I was not aware of when I started making

the film, but something I learned through my collaboration with the community and the scientists.

It's these sorts of encounters that happen through art. Documentary has a unique way of creating a ritual out of an event. Participants being filmed respond in a certain way when confronted with the camera's lenses – there is a particular gravity to what is being said, a sense of permanence. It is also why, in my optimistic opinion, film can have the power to make positive change – given the right context, the subjects' and the filmmaker's active engagement in the process of filming can have a transformative impact for all involved.

I guess this is what I hope to achieve as a filmmaker. I try to collaborate with my subjects, creating a dialogue between people and cultures. It is through this dialogue that we find the heart of what the film is about, and ultimately we learn something important from it.

Recently my Masters class at Stanford University had an opportunity to meet Frederick Wiseman. Among other things he told us that he did not think film had the power to change the world. I disagree, although we can't always say how a film is going to change the world. Sometimes it's a little change, like a seed planted in the mind of the viewer, and sometimes it's a big change – consider the dramatic impact of a film like *An Inconvenient Truth* (whether or not it is a good film or not, or accurate for that matter). Either way, big or

small, it is a change, and all these kinds of changes count and make a difference.

*There Once was an Island* is not the next hard-hitting, climate change documentary; it approaches the issue more quietly. But I know it has already been successful at raising awareness, not only through its success with audiences but, most importantly, through the direct encounter that happened between the filmmakers, community, and scientists.

By including the grey areas in our story, and considering both the social and political factors that impact the island, I hope this film will encourage developed nations to not only consider the pending reality of environmental refugees, but to think about adaptation as well, so less advantaged communities such as Takau can still maintain a sense of their land and culture.

**What's your view of the film that documentary makers (and journalists) must remain objectively distant from their subjects and 'not get involved'?**

**LC:** I see the idea of objectivity as impossible. People are always inside their own subjectivity and to pretend otherwise is just silly. Consequently I do think it's very, very important that a filmmaker or journalist understands their own position in relation to the subject being explored and to the people being worked with, and what those people's position is and what they're participating

You have to negotiate lots of politics, access, points of view, different interpretations of actions and events, and make sense of lots of stuff that's happening – often all at once. Ultimately a documentary is hopefully an elegant and sophisticated piece of creative analysis.

Being able to take stories you've been given or witnessed and make a film is a filmmaker's job. You can't be objective when doing it, but you have to know and be yourself, and accept that it's going to make you a bit crazy figuring everything out. You also have to own your position – editorial control should rest with the filmmaker, however collectively the process of filmmaking is managed. Telling what you have come to understand as honestly and as beautifully as you can to a bigger audience than most people get – that's the privilege and the purpose of being a filmmaker.

**How close is it to have finished the doco after four years of working on it?**

**LC:** Actually, it doesn't feel as if we'll be finished for another few years – there's still so much distribution work to do!

We're looking at various ways of getting the film out, including the traditional route with *Journeymen Pictures* and possibly as part of a collective in the US if we're accepted. We're also waiting to confirm a screening date with PBS, and still have DVD, Blu-ray and video-on-demand to organise, as well as festivals

we're still applying to and sending screeners to...

We've also had a number of invitations to participate in public lectures and debates since the film was initially screened [in January it had its world premiere at FIJO in Tahiti, where it won the Jury Grand Prix] and that's been a great chance to talk about the issues and the experience of the filmmaking process in person.

Not having been through this all before, I have to say it's amazing how much work begins after the film 'finishes'.

**While it seems hard to argue that rising sea levels as a result of climate change are at the very least contributing to the disaster facing Takau, other factors put forward include tectonic plate movement and natural erosion (possibly exacerbated by the islanders' efforts to build back the waves by building sea walls). Given there's a vigorous, well-funded campaign to debunk and deny any connection between human activity and climate change (and even the seriousness of the climate change phenomenon, never mind its causes) are you giving your film for what is probably the inevitable attack on you and the film from this group?**

**LC:** I'm psychologically prepared for climate change deniers to be confrontational but so far none really have, except sometimes online where the trailer is screening on someone else's website. Perhaps this

will all change at screenings in New Zealand?

*There Once was an Island* looks at a number of problems being faced on Takau in relation to climate change, in a non-didactic way. We take the position that climate change is contributing to what's happening but we don't grind on about it, and we also show that there are other factors at work in the situation being faced on Takau.

Our main focus is to explore what's real for the people from the island and the scientists who went there to investigate. We're not scientists ourselves and we didn't start the film as climate activists, so while people are welcome to ask us anything they want about what they see on screen or what we experienced while making the film, questions concerning tide gauge levels, or tectonic activity, or La Niña, or anything else specifically climate science-related are best answered by experts – and we're hoping that John Hunter and Scott Smithers will be available at some of our NZIFF screenings to do just that.

**So what's your pitch to potential audience members as to why they should come and see the film at NZIFF?**

**LC:** Come and see it because it's beautiful and true and it's a really good watch. Come and see it because we worked soooo hard on it and now we want to party – come and join us!

**BM:** I really can't wait to see how



**Island films:** (opposite page, top) director Briar March, screen consultant and historical advisor Jeffrey Hutton and Dan Lortie (holding baby) during the second shoot on Takau; (this page, clockwise from top left) Takau village; Briar March with two Takau women; washing in the ocean; Takau village in traditional dress.



it goes down with an NZ audience. I'm really excited. Everyone mark 18 July in your calendars, and I will see you at the national premiere at Auckland's Sky City Theatre!

For a much longer, more detailed version of this interview, including an account of the challenges encountered in making the doco and all the generous support the filmmakers received in order to bring it to fruition, see [www.onfilm.co.nz/](http://www.onfilm.co.nz/)

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there once was an island  
te henua e nnoho

COMING SOON TO PUBLIC TELEVISION



*There Once Was an Island: Te Henua e Nnoho* is a one-hour documentary on climate change and the devastating effect it has on islanders in the Pacific. Three characters take the audience on their personal journeys as they must make the heart-wrenching decision of whether to stay on their island home that is being destroyed by rising tides or move to a new and unfamiliar land. Can they leave their culture and language behind forever? This film gives a human face to the impact of climate change in the Pacific and challenges audiences everywhere to consider their own relationship to the earth and the other people on it.

 PACIFIC ISLANDERS IN COMMUNICATIONS

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# Sortir

## Une caméra qui donne à réfléchir

**ROCHEFORT** Le Festival du cinéma du Pacifique Sud, organisé par Cinéma des ailleurs, a pris ses quartiers jusqu'à lundi

Fenêtre ouverte sur la Polynésie, le Festival du cinéma des pays du Pacifique sud, qui se déroule jusqu'à lundi, fait de Rochefort la ville la plus septentrionale d'Océanie. Il faut dire que les liens de la cité de Colbert avec les Antipodes sont forts, surtout à travers les expéditions scientifiques du XVIII<sup>e</sup>, parties de l'Arsenal.

Voilà pourquoi, depuis quatre ans, l'association Cinéma des ailleurs regarde vers les 27 pays du Pacifique sud. Pas question pendant ce festival de tomber dans les clichés exotiques ou le catalogue touristique ! Ici, au contraire, le cinéma est prétexte à mieux connaître et comprendre ce continent insulaire, son histoire, ses peuples, ses coutumes. Voilà pourquoi chaque film projeté est suivi d'un débat. Pour peaufiner cet esprit de rencontre, les invités du festival, qu'ils soient réalisateurs, scientifiques, artistes ou musiciens, sont logés chez l'habitant.

Pour l'édition 2010, l'équipe réunie autour de Michel Degorce Dumas a choisi trois fils conducteurs. Certains films se pencheront sur « l'Océanie, une culture, un partage sur le Pacifique sud ». Mais on parlera aussi des femmes océaniques et des conséquences du réchauffement sur ce monde insulaire. Aucun des films ne sera mis en compétition, puisque l'esprit du festival est ailleurs : il veut tisser des liens.

**Ambassadeur du Pacifique**  
Et cette manifestation unique en



**Samedi, à 16 h 30, le documentaire « Te Henua et Noho » sera projeté pour la première fois en France. PHOTO DR**

France jette même des ponts avec d'autres festivals : celui du cinéma des Antipodes à Saint-Tropez ou celui du film océanien à Papeete. « L'idée est de faire émerger un réseau de diffusion de la culture du Pacifique en France », explique Michel Degorce Dumas, pas peu fier que le festival ait obtenu le label année de l'Outre-Mer 2011.

Chaque année, le programme du festival s'étoffe pour largement dépasser le cadre du cinéma et du documentaire. Ainsi, cette fois, un sculpteur kanak est en résidence à l'ancienne école de médecine navale. Il fait d'un tilleul, cassé par Xynthia, un totem, hommage aux victimes, mais plus encore le sceau du lien d'amitié entre Rochefort et le Pacifique. « Cet événement devrait poser d'autres relations entre la France et la Calédonie. C'est un geste politique

fort », explique l'une des organisatrices, Marie-Christine Babin.

### Un concert ce soir

Un autre artiste, le peintre calédonien Adilio Poacoudou, l'accompagnera aussi avec son exposition à la médiathèque municipale. De même que le groupe de kanéka Toulélouzé, qui donne un concert, ce soir, à 21 heures, à la Poudrière. Sans oublier un repas festif demain soir autour du traditionnel bougna. Si le cinéma est prétexte à mieux se connaître et réfléchir, c'est aussi une belle occasion de faire la fête en signe d'amitié entre les peuples.

**Kharinne Charov**

Festival au Palais des congrès, jusqu'à lundi. Tout est gratuit, sauf le repas. Le programme est sur [cinemadesailleurs17.weebly.com](http://cinemadesailleurs17.weebly.com). Tél. 06 69 52 82 83.

*"Sud-Ouest" du 22 Mai 2010*

› Animation

# Le Festival du cinéma des Pays du Pacifique Sud

*La 4ème édition du Festival du Cinéma des Pays du Pacifique Sud s'est clôturée le Lundi de Pentecôte à Rochefort.*

Michel Degorce-Dumas, le président du Cinéma des Ailleurs, compte 2100 entrées au total à l'une ou l'autre de ces manifestations : projection de 25 films ou documentaires suivies de débats animés par les nombreux réalisateurs présents, tables rondes sur les femmes océaniques et sur la montée de eaux menaçant certains archipels, interventions auprès de collégiens et de lycéens, exposition de portraits à la Médiathèque (jusqu'au 8 Juin), stands d'artisanat, concert kaneka à la Poudrière, repas festif autour d'un bougna calédonien dans les jardins de la marine...

De nombreux films en exclusivité, le film « Te Henua e Noho » de Briar March, récemment couronné au Festival International des Films Océaniques, des films présentés par des réalisateurs venus de Nouvelle Zélande, de Papouasie Nouvelle Guinée, de Nouvelle Calédonie pour les plus éloignés... mais aussi le documentaire émouvant de la rochelaise Dominique Amiel, ceux d'Anne Bernard, Corinne Tidjine... ont comblé les participants.



Inauguration du festival en présence de Bernard Grasset et Wallès Kotra.



Le sculpteur kanak devant son totem au Musée de l'Ecole de Médecine.

Les collégiens de Tonnay-Charente ont présenté au Palais des congrès une remarquable exposition sur la Nouvelle Calédonie, et les élèves

du collège Pierre Loti de Rochefort le film très applaudi, « Kamoudja », réalisé par leurs soins, sur la vision du Pacifique par les Rochefortais.

En partenariat avec le Musée de la Marine, le kanak Hiandjing Pagou-Banehote a sculpté un totem dans le tronc d'un arbre cassé par la tempête Xinthia dans le jardin de l'ancienne école de Médecine Navale, illustrant ainsi le lien entre le Festival, le Pacifique et Rochefort.

La remise officielle de l'œuvre au conservateur du Musée de la Marine a été faite dimanche soir, selon la cérémonie traditionnelle de la coutume. Michel Degorce-Dumas et son équipe songent déjà à 2011. « année de l'Outre-mer ».

Nul doute que ce festival convivial prendra une nouvelle dimension...

*"Le Littoral" du 26 mai 2010*



## Quotes from Educators

*"This emotionally charged documentary had audiences in tears... It will completely change your outlook on life."*

- Raindance Film Festival

*"There Once Was an Island powerfully depicts the islanders' struggle to come to grips with their changing world. I anticipate using this film for introductory classes in cultural anthropology, Pacific ethnography, and social and environmental change."*

- Richard Feinberg, Professor of Anthropology, Kent State University

*"It is one thing to sit in a classroom and be taught about climate change, but it's another thing to be completely enraptured by the true reality of climate change taking its course. This movie explores many different teaching possibilities and can be used across numerous contexts..."*

- Kapisha Patel, Social Sciences High School Teacher, One Tree Hill College, New Zealand

*"The sinking of an island can signify the end of the world to a village elder, a logistical problem to an engineer, or merely an afterthought to a government official. The film eloquently tries to reconcile these opposing perspectives by gradually convincing us of the weight of small things."*

- Sean Gilbert, Film Reviewer, London