

## From the art collection

As a child, Julian Hooper spent nine months living on Fakaofu, the main atoll of the three that make up the tiny country of Tokelau. His parents, anthropologist Antony Hooper, and linguist Robin Hooper, took Julian and his brother Matthew with them while they worked on a study of Tokelauan health for Ian Prior, Director of Epidemiology at Wellington Hospital.

This watercolour, completed almost 20 years later, shows how indelibly the visual memory of the Tokelauan experience was imprinted. Working quickly in watercolour to build up an image which is both a record of a specifically male activity and an evocation of unrelenting sun, azure sea, tension and dynamic movement, Hooper has blurred the outlines of his figures by saturating the paper with water before laying on his pigments.

The atolls of Atafu, Nukunonu and Fakaofu are separated from each other by sixty to ninety kilometres of open sea, and fishing is an important but often dangerous activity for Tokelauan men. Julian and his brother were taken out with their Tokelauan friend Uili in outrigger canoes to catch pála or wahoo (*Acanthocybium solandri*). This predatory ocean fish belongs to the same family as the tuna and skipjack, but is longer in the body and more ferocious in defence of its freedom. One of the fastest fish in the ocean, it can swim at speeds up to 80 kilometres an hour. It was reputed to be the favourite quarry of legendary author and big game fisherman, Ernest Hemingway when he lived in Havana.

Unlike Hemingway with his diesel outboard motor and heavy duty fishing rods and reels, Tokelauans catch the pála by using a traditional Tokelauan fishing technique called taki ulu. This involves trolling (taki) a bait (ulu) on a light line off the canoe as it is paddled through the water,



tempting the pála to rise to the surface and follow. A test of the skill of the fisherman is whether he can manage to then seed the waves with free bait to lure a fish into his wide noose made from fishing twine. As soon as the fast-swimming fish puts its nose in, the fisherman's reflexes have to be quick, pulling the loop tight, hopefully catching the fish by its tail. As Julian Hooper remembers, "Great precision and split-second timing are required. No one talks."

In conjunction with the launch of Marti Friedlander's memoir, *Self-Portrait*, published by Auckland University Press, a digital exhibition of 212 photographs of her six-week visit with the

Hoopers on Tokelau in 1971 is on show at Gus Fisher Gallery. These photographs have been digitized by the University Library and form part of the online Anthropology Archive.

Linda Tyler

*Julian Hooper, Fishing for Pála, 1990, watercolour on paper, 500 x 640mm.*