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Léuli Eshrāghi on Curating the TarraWarra Biennial



In Conversation with [Rebecca Coates](#)
Melbourne, 12 April 2023

Léuli Eshrāghi (2019). Photo: Rhett Hammerton.

Léuli Eshrāghi has an expansive practice as a curator, writer, researcher, artist, and sometimes poet. Clearly in demand, 2022 saw them appointed as scientific adviser for the exhibition *Reclaim the Earth* at Palais de Tokyo, [Paris](#); participating in workshops and First Nations-led research projects in Australia and internationally; and exhibiting at [Tate Modern, London](#), as part of the exhibition *A Clearing in the Forest: Enmeshed*.



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This year, Eshrāghi is the curator of the 8th TarraWarra Biennial at the [TarraWarra Museum of Art](#), Wurundjeri Country ([Melbourne](#)) (1 April–16 July 2023). Since 2006, the event has served as an 'experimental curatorial platform' aiming to identify new trends in contemporary Australian art.

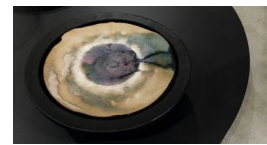
Eshrāghi takes this year's title from the Sāmoan proverb *ua usi'asi fa'ava'asavili* (the canoe obeys the wind). As they explain, the expression is demonstrative of 'Great Ocean celestial navigation practices' following centuries of European and Asian colonial occupations.

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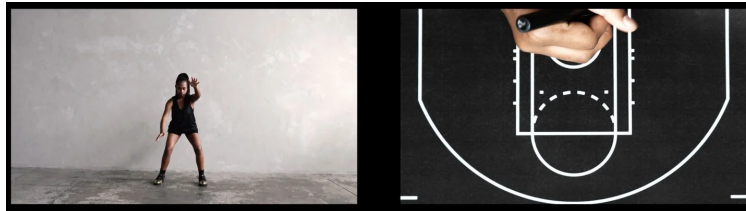
Hoda Afshar, *Speak the Wind* (2015–2021). Exhibition view: TarraWarra Biennial 2023, *ua ususi fa'ava'asavili*, Tarrawarra Museum of Art, Melbourne (1 April–16 July 2023). Courtesy the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane. Photo: Andrew Curtis.

Foregrounding First Nations artists and collectives, the Biennial showcases contemporary artists tied by ancestry or materiality to the many lands and waters constituting Australia, the Great Ocean and largest body of water on this planet (otherwise known as the Pacific Ocean), and the archipelagos and regions from West Asia and Iutruwita (Tasmania) to Borneo and Viti Levu (Fiji).



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Speaking with writer, curator, and lecturer Rebecca Coates prior to its opening, Eshrāghi discusses their curatorial project, the TarraWarra Biennial. They also discuss Sāmoan proverbs, and how First Nations kinship constellations can help us think differently about exhibition-making.



Torika Bolatagici (iTaukei Viti), *Value Form* (2023) (still). Two-channel HD video, sound, motion capture data. 7 min. Project supported by the Copyright Agency's Cultural Fund. Courtesy the artist.

rc **Where did you grow up and where do you call home?**

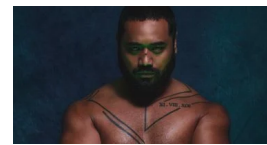
LE I grew up in Yuwi, Kabi Kabi, Bundjalung, and Yugambah First Nations territories as well as our ancestral lands in the Sāmoan archipelago before I left home at 17 years old to work in a school in northern Vanuatu. That experience broke and remade me, as have other important places in my life.

I have been on the move between residencies, exhibitions, talks, performances, and visiting kin since February 2022, so I don't have a set home. That said, Naarm [Melbourne] and Apia [Samoa] will always be home to a certain extent, and I feel most myself in Honolulu and Tiohtià:ke/Mooniyang [Montreal].



Regina Pilawuk Wilson (Ngan'gikurrungurr, Marrithyél), *Wupun (Sun Mat)* (2023); *Wupun (Sun Mat)* (2023). Exhibition view: TarraWarra Biennial 2023, *ua uslusi ja'ava' asavilli*, Tarrawarra Museum of Art, Melbourne (1 April–16 July 2023). Courtesy the artist and Durrrmu Arts, Peppimenarti. Photo: Andrew Curtis.

RC You describe yourself as a visual artist, writer, curator, and researcher, and hold a PhD in Curatorial Practice from Monash University, Naarm (2018) and a Graduate Certificate in Indigenous Arts Management from the University of Melbourne (2012).



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How do these research methodologies contribute to your curatorial practice and processes?

LE This rigorous academic training taught me attention to detail in terms of Indigenous cultural and intellectual property principles, macro-level scans of the art sectors' issues and opportunities, as well as anchoring curatorial research in expanded notions of time, space, relationality, and responsibility.

‘I think this platform brings specific responsibilities to the communities I have been mentored and nourished within, across and beyond Australia’s shores.’

I often return to discussions, analyses, reflections, and speculations from all these periods when approaching perceived and felt problems, such as the recurring erasure of majority world hystories [more than histories/herstories] and kin constellations from the epistemologies

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