

Kelcy Taratoa

b.1972

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It is no accident that *Episode 17* appears to have been cut and pasted from various entertainment environments, such as computer games and comics. Elements from these 'fantasy' media have been inserted into the everyday 'reality' of the street to create what seems, at first glance, a strange twilight zone between fantasy and reality. In fact, this montage reflects the visual environment that many young urban dwellers inhabit: *from computer screen-to-comic book-to-street-to-Xbox-to-car-to-street*. It is their reality.

The young man depicted appears to be almost literally at a crossroads, caught between several possible options. Has he just left the sprawling city with the large, menacing form looming in the blood red sky behind him? Is he contemplating going there for the first time or is he returning? Will he follow the direction of his gaze and take the bypass?

Taratoa's painting is one of a large number of 'episodes' which formed an exhibition entitled *Who Am I? Episodes*. The title refers to the way television series, cartoons and comic books are sequentially numbered, suggesting that events taking place in an episode were preceded by, and will be followed by, other events. *Episode 17* also invokes the western painting genre of the self-portrait, where the artist often presents himself amidst signs and symbols that tell the viewer something. Going back to early childhood, Taratoa's episodes assemble elements from his environment – architecture, streetscapes, vehicles, toys, superheroes – that tell the viewer about his identity. We assume this because Taratoa places himself in each of these images, although it is not certain what his attitude is toward these things. He appears to be a neutral observer. (However, when a number of episodes are viewed, the lovingly collected superheroes, BMX bikes and cars suggest a 'fanboy' at heart.)

It is also unclear what the artist thinks about the almost complete absence of Māoritanga in these environments. Taratoa's own face is the only sign of Māori-ness. However it is also worth noting that none of the environments is domestic. Perhaps there is another world – the interior, home environment that the artist is withholding.

Taratoa's approach to image-making – combining digital cut and paste with earlier graphic techniques, such as stencils and screen printing – seems perfectly suited to an ambitious project which asks: how do we construct our own identities and how does this construction fit with the world around us?

Robyn Pickens

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