

MEDIA BRIEF: Thursday 14 June

TEN NEW ZEALAND DOCUMENTARIES ANNOUNCED FOR FILM FESTIVAL

The New Zealand International Film Festival today announced ten New Zealand documentaries that will premiere at the 2012 Festival.

The Last Dogs of Winter

Director: [Costa Botes](#)

New Zealand premiere screenings of NZIFF veteran Costa Botes' spectacular documentary. *The Last Dogs of Winter* has already been winning friends for its ornery conservationist hero and his more camera-friendly young Kiwi assistant at major film festivals around the world (Toronto, IDFA and more). It also serves, for those of us unable to make the journey ourselves, as an immersive visit to Churchill, Manitoba, Polar Bear Capital of the World.

<http://tinyurl.com/bonwhpa>

How Far is Heaven

Director: [Christopher Pryor](#), [Miriam Smith](#)

The film which Chris Pryor and Miriam Smith shot while they lived at Jerusalem on the Whanganui River is first and foremost a rapt pictorial response to its beautiful setting through four seasons. Its recurrent subject is whether three Pākehā nuns, kaitiaki of the church and convent founded in the 1880s by Suzanne Aubert, are serving any useful social purpose there in 2011. We meet the sisters working the land, discussing scripture, making jam and preserves, and talking easily about their doubts and outsider status.

<http://tinyurl.com/cn6f9wd>

Song of the Kauri

Director: [Mathurin Molgat](#)

Filmmaker Mathurin Molgat tells us that New Zealand lost 96% of its native kauri forests through felling and fire between 1820 and 1974. Land clearances account for much more of that statistic than any timber trade. Molgat's documentary is a labour of clear-eyed love, addressing the politics of exotic tree plantations in a land where the native species are uniquely beautiful and may possess a commercial potential that has never been explored. But does any government plan in the present for a harvest 60 years hence? Without demonising the perpetrators, Molgat explains the history of destruction, then finds inspiration in Luthier Laurie Williams, a man whose craft is dependent on chopping down more trees – judiciously and one at a time.

<http://tinyurl.com/dxf3hux>

Persuading the Baby to Float

Director: [Keith Hill](#)

The ongoing artistic collaboration between Norman Meehan, Bill Manhire and Hannah Griffin has produced two sublime CDs, with a third in the can for release later in 2012. This film captures them mid-process, as songs from *Making Baby Float* are rehearsed and then performed in front of an audience for the live recording. "When Hannah sings Bill's words accompanied by this group of musicians, something very true comes through... and I remember why I fell in love with music." — Norman Meehan

<http://tinyurl.com/covbfmr>

The Last Ocean

Director: [Peter Young](#)

The Last Ocean is a documentary directed by Peter Young, one of the country's leading nature cameramen and a key figure in the international movement to end fishing in the Ross Sea. His ravishing Antarctic footage lends emotive force to a detailed account of the conservationist case and the long political and diplomatic campaign to counteract the hungry fishing lobby.

<http://tinyurl.com/cwul9y5>

Tatarakihi: the Children of Parihaka

Director: [Paora Te Oti Takarangi Joseph](#)

In 1881 the children of Parihaka greeted the government invaders with white feathers of peace. Paora Joseph's film *Tatarakihi: the Children of Parihaka*, produced by Gaylene Preston, tells the story of a 'journey of memory' taken by a group of Parihaka children who travel to the South Island 130 years later to follow in the footsteps of their male ancestors who were transported south and imprisoned after the Taranaki land confiscations of the 1860s. The film is narrated by the children and combines footage of their hikoi (some of it shot by the children themselves) with vivid archival photography.

<http://tinyurl.com/bme5grf>

Maori Boy Genius

Director: [Pietra Brett Kelly](#)

Ngaa Rauira Pumanawawhiti, 16 years old at the time of filming, is a charismatic young man through whom a great many aspirations flow. Born under a double rainbow, he's carried a weight of expectation ever since – and with it a wealth of iwi pride and support. In her first documentary feature to address a New Zealand subject (but not her first to garner international attention), Auckland filmmaker Pietra Brett Kelly (*The Art Star and the Sudanese Twins*) accompanies him through a critical turning point in his education, a trip to Yale where he is enrolled in intensive political science seminars. In a world away from the wider whānau, he encounters more daunting challenges and choices than have been thrown in his path before.

<http://tinyurl.com/cad52zz>

Pictures of Susan

Director: [Dan Salmon](#)

Auckland 'outsider artist' Susan King stopped talking in 1955 when she was four years old and has said next to nothing since. Her grandmother recognised the little girl's talent for drawing and kept her supplied with coloured pencils and paper. For 20 years Susan described her world in thousands of drawings but then she stopped. Of late, Susan's *art brut* has been discovered by the dealer world. The family are desperate for her to enjoy the attention of the art world, but no gallery or institution will take on 10,000+ pictures, and the Kings refuse to sell or split the collection... Dan Salmon began filming them all in 2008 and his fascinating, thoughtful film performs its authorised role in their 'outing' with sensitivity and admiration.

<http://tinyurl.com/cymq5ln>

Tongan Ark

Director: [Paul Janman](#)

Paul Janman's lyrical documentary inducts us into the surprising world of Futa Helu and his 'Atenisi Institute, an unconventional Tongan institution that proudly stands apart from church and state, with a focus on the teachings of the ancient Greek philosophers whom its founder valued above all. The Institute has fallen on tough times of late; among the crumbling buildings students are sometimes outnumbered by the stray dogs and pigs that wander the campus. As Futa's health declines, the burden of preserving the school falls increasingly on his somewhat hesitant family and the school's eccentric faculty.

<http://tinyurl.com/d68szen>

Village by the Sea

Director: [Michael Heath](#)

In this gentle documentary Michael Heath follows up his earlier Edith Collier portrait (NZIFF07) to transport us to the Irish fishing village of Bunmahon where the New Zealand artist painted during the summers of 1914 and 1915. The beautifully shot landscapes – silver sea, misty green hills

and radiant lilac skies – are interspersed with Collier’s painted versions. Although Collier’s Bunmahon residency was a century ago, interviews with locals reveal a strong connection to this Antipodean painter. This melancholy-tinged story pays tribute to an under-acknowledged artist and the continued legacy of her work.

<http://tinyurl.com/d3sgqwo>

The Festival will begin in Auckland (19 July – August 5) and open simultaneously in Wellington and Dunedin a week later (27 July – August 12), then in Christchurch (9 - 26 August). Further regional dates are being advised on the website as they are confirmed.

Festival programmes will be available online and around town from June 26 in Auckland, and June 29 in Wellington. For Festival updates visit www.nzff.co.nz and register to receive e-newsletters.

<http://www.nzff.co.nz/wellington/announcing-our-new-zealand-documentary-programme>

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For further information about the NZ International Film Festival or to arrange an interview with Director Bill Gosden:

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