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# JOHN VEA

## Finish this week off and that's it! 2014

This is a remake of an earlier 2009 video. When Vea revisited the work, he ate below the poverty line during its creation (\$2.25 a day in 2014), monitoring changes to his strength while undertaking the physical performance. Over five screens, each one representing a week that he ate in this manner, Vea attempts to lift a large rock for as long as he can. His manipulation of a large, heavy object evokes the futility of such an act embodied in the ancient Greek fable of Sisyphus, who is condemned for eternity to push a large boulder up a hill, only to have it roll back down once he reaches the top. The struggle for Vea to keep hold of the rock becomes analogous to the precarious circumstances of living on a minimum wage and the effect poverty can have on the physical and mental wellbeing of those employed in manual labour. Through the framing of a gruelling task as performance, he makes visible the physical toll taken upon a labour force of Moana Nui a Kiwa bodies that is often unrecognised in mainstream New Zealand society.

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## Concrete is as Concrete Doesn't 2017

The impetus for this work emerged out of Vea's 2017 residency in Hawaii, where he employed talanoa (face-to-face conversation) to acknowledge his position as an outsider to Hawaiian culture. He translated the stories he encountered into a performance work that utilises concrete as a symbol of both physical labour and gentrification. It is shot on Maungarei (Mount Wellington), in Auckland. On a single screen split into six views, Vea and his collaborator, fellow artist Matawai Taulangau, stand on two rows of paving stones, passing pairs of stones between them from rear to front. They repeat this constantly, the pavers providing a buffer between them and the grassy slopes of their surrounding environment. The lifting, transferral and placing of the pavers become a meditation on the repetitive actions of the working-class labourer. The sound of the clinking stones gives a sense of their weight and lends a sparse rhythm to the unremitting nature of the two men's labour. It also alludes to the contemporary disconnect of the modern-day Moana Nui a Kiwa migrant from their land, or whenua, as well as from families and communities, that would otherwise contribute to an overall social wellbeing. Here, commonalities between Moana Nui a Kiwa peoples emerge, with talanoa providing a bridge between the experiences of migrants in Aotearoa and of those in post-colonial Hawaii.

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