***“Kõmij mour ijin/Our life is here”***

**The Marshall Islands – A Cape Farewell Arts/Science Expedition March 2019**

Isolated in the midst of Earth’s largest ocean, the 29 coral atolls of the Marshall Islands have been called home by star-navigating, canoe-voyaging people for three thousand years. That home can now rightly be called the most existentially threatened place on the planet. The story of its people in the 20th Century, and their ongoing tenacity in the 21st, has much to teach the rest of the world.

In 1952, on remote Enewetak atoll, tool-bearing people from far away found a way to literally create their own star, brighter and hotter than the Sun itself, and in so doing permanently changed everything, everywhere. At that moment, human culture became the architect of its own sublime, finally and irrevocably equalling Divinity and the awesome power of the natural world. We know this fabricated star as the hydrogen bomb, a weapon that has the capability to annihilate existence itself. From 1946 to 1958, the Marshall Islands served as the site of 67 of the largest United States atmospheric nuclear detonations, and suffered the worst radiological disasters in U. S. history, the worst of which leaves Bikini Atoll uninhabitable to this day. Literal and metaphorical cancerous fallout continues to the present day for the Marshallese people, like no other on the planet.

Today, the Marshallese are also on the front lines of another human-created threat that is almost too big to comprehend: that of global climate change and rising sea levels, the legacy of two hundred years of the industrialized world burning fossil fuels for energy. Living on coral that lies on average barely six feet above sea level, all of the Marshall’s 70,000 people are now urgently threatened by the very oceans that have nurtured them for millennia. It is estimated that the nation will become uninhabitable by the end of the century, drowned by forces and actions it had no hand in creating.

Lastly, the Marshallese are a water people on a planet where most humans are terrestrial; they understand the inscrutable ocean in ways most of us do not. Like the possibility of nuclear annihilation and the fact of human-induced climate change, the scale and nature of the oceans is truly challenging to comprehend. The oceans cover 71% of the globe’s surface, harbour 80% of its species, are by far the largest carbon sink of human carbon emissions and generate the oxygen needed in every other breath we take – and yet fewer people have been to their depths than have walked on the surface of the moon. 58% of the oceans – half the surface of the planet -- remain outside any national jurisdiction and are totally ungoverned.

Directly confronted as nowhere else on Earth with such vast and overwhelming forces - what philosopher Timothy Morton calls “Hyperobjects,” entities the scale of which are almost impossible to comprehend -the people of the Marshall Islands are engaging with tenacity, resilience and innovation. In 2015 at the Cop21 Paris Climate Talks, Marshallese statesman Tony deBrum led the establishment of the “High Ambition Coalition,” an alliance of more than 100 developing and developed countries that became the “1.5 degree centigrade” bedrock of the Paris Climate Accord. Acclaimed Marshallese poet Kathy Jetnil-Kijiner has performed at the United Nations, Marshallese sailors and navigators are world-renowned, and Marshallese nuclear survivors continue vigorously to fight for compensation from the United States. In 2010 radioactive Bikini Atoll was made a UNESCO cultural heritage site, and in 2011 the Marshalls created the world’s largest shark sanctuary. Local and international scientists continue to measure the effects of radiation and the impacts of climate change, and there is growing support to establish a large-scale marine protection area in the North that includes uninhabitable Bikini and still-radioactive Enewetak atolls, to create a crucial biological and climate resilience area.

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American Michael Light and Brit David Buckland will lead Cape Farewell’s ninth expedition to the heart of the anthropocene, offering first-hand experience of climate change displacement and massive nuclear destruction. Sailing aboard the M/V Windward (10 berths) and an Okeanos Foundation traditional motu sailing catamaran (8 berths), a powerful team of 18 international and Marshallese artists, writers, scientists, and filmmakers will witness this crucial example of our human-altered world to create narratives in art, film, words and music that offer insight and resilient pathways forward.

The Cape Farewell ***Koj Mour Ijo*** Marshall Island expedition will take place in March 2019 for 18 days. Cyclically sailing nearly six hundred miles of Pacific Ocean, its voyagers will experience island culture and traditional maritime navigational skills, re-inhabit the irradiated nuclear testing atolls of Bikini and Enewetak, and glide through the world’s largest shark sanctuary, four times the size of California. Fifteen years of ocean expeditions have given Cape Farewell experiential knowledge of how a group of diverse and creative people can produce work both individually and collectively, creating a uniquely resonant cultural voice larger than any one of its separate makers.

Each day during the expedition a three-minute film will be created, edited and broadcast worldwide using social media and traditional news channels to amplify the work of expedition scientists and artists, with the aim of becoming a social media phenomenon.

Using material gathered during the expedition as well as creative work and science honed after, Cape Farewell will work with the Nevada Museum of Art to produce a major touring museum exhibition and catalogue, debuting in 2020/21. The exhibition and book will communicate to a global audience just how relevant the Marshallese story of seventy thousand isolated people and their violated coral atolls is to the larger planet.

In addition to the exhibition and book, a known actor participating on the expedition will later narrate a documentary film made from trip material, amplifying the message that a sustainable human existence is possible if we examine the past carefully, truly engage with present challenges, and consciously dream a different future.

Great work is being done by Western scientists, artists and conservationists. Great work is being done by the people of the Marshall Islands. The ***Koj Mour Ijo*** expedition aims to brings the two worlds together to tell a compelling story of a remote people to capture the public imagination worldwide. We voyage to learn, to re-inhabit, to re-invent, and to survive. To make a home here, on Earth.

NOTES

**ORIGINATORS/COORDINATORS:**

David Buckland, [Cape Farewell](http://www.capefarewell.com/) founder and [artist](http://www.bucklandart.com/)

[Michael Light](http://www.michaellight.net/), artist

**KEY ANNIVERSARY DATES:**

July 16, 2020 75th anniversary of dawning of nuclear age, Trinity Test, New Mexico

August 2020 75th anniversary of atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan

March 7, 2021 75th anniversary of Crossroads tests, Bikini Atoll

**[BIKINI MADE UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE SITE](http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1339) 2010**

**[MARSHALL ISLANDS SHARK SANCTUARY](http://www.pewtrusts.org/en/about/news-room/press-releases/2011/10/02/worldand39s-largest-shark-sanctuary-declared-in-central-pacific) DECLARED 2011**

**“**[**MICRONESIA CHALLENGE**](http://www.micronesiachallenge.org/)**” 30% Near Shore Waters Protected by 2020**

**WEATHER:**

**RMI Dry Season is December-April; Wet Season is May-November; north atolls less 50”/yr, south atolls more than 100”/year**

**LOCAL MARSHALLESE EXPERTISE:**

[Alson Kelen, Bikinian, director Canoes of the Marshall Islands](http://www.canoesmarshallislands.com/)

[Jack Niedenthal](http://www.microwavefilms.org/host.html), filmmaker and former trust liaison for Bikinian People

[Lani Kramer](https://pulitzercenter.org/reporting/marshall-islands-scuba-paradise-and-plutonium-nightmares-amid-rising-seas), current trust liaison for Bikinian People

**CONSERVATION/MARINE PROTECTION AREAS (MPA):**

Willy Kostka, [Micronesia Conservation Trust](http://www.ourmicronesia.org/)

**MUSEUM SUPPORT:**

Nevada Museum of Art; Center for Art + Environment, Reno

British Museum, London