Hello,

I am writing to you from Auckland, New Zealand. The group will be here for two weeks, using the printmaking studios of the Auckland University of Technology, and staying in University dormitories. Auckland is full of steep hills, as it is built on former volcanoes. It is known for its beautiful harbor, and sailing is very much a part of life here. It is New Zealand's largest city and its economic center, with a population of 1.3 million in a country of under 4 million in total. It is a major center for Pacific Islanders, as well as New Zealand Maori. It has a strong Polynesian feel, in addition to the European Kiwis, as well as a large Asian population.

On our first day here we had a great lecture on Maori art from a faculty member in the department of Maori studies. She described many facets of Maori culture and art, using both historical and contemporary examples—tattoo to the carved war canoes and meeting houses, to contemporary painters and sculptors. She then joined us in the museum to give further information using the actual works. Maori art is steeped in references to tribe and genealogy, and it involves intricate patterns in carved wood that refer to ritual. It can be quite new to the western eye, and it was nice to begin with a good overview. The Auckland Museum has the best collections of Maori and Pacific Island art in the world.

We then left Auckland for three days to go to the northern part of the country to visit a marae. A marae is a meeting house and the center of life for any Maori tribe. The tribe we stay with is the Te Rorora people of Waipoua forest. We now have a long relationship with this marae. I have watched their kids grow up in installments when I have visited every two years. I feel a part of this community, with deep friendships. The families of the marae mean a great deal to me, and our visit there is always a highlight of the trip for me. The marae is situated in a very special setting. Their land includes the largest remnant of native Kauri forest still in existence. The students read a book on the Kauri tree, which are immense trees that used to cover the northern part of the country. Nearly all of these trees were logged, and the land was dug up for deposits of tree gum. The Waipoua forest contains the largest remaining trees in a setting of dense rainforest. The people of the marae help to preserve and protect this forest. This effort includes running a major program to restore the forest by planting thousands of Kauri seedlings in land that borders the forest. During our visit a well known conservationist joined us to tell the students what makes this environment so unique. I want the students to see a link between cultural and environmental issues, and I could not think of a better way to do this than visiting this marae.

The marae is also situated on miles of pristine beach. The students went there to swim in the river and run on the large sand dunes. It is a spectacular setting, and I know they feel priveleged to be invited to a place like this.

But by far the greatest pleasure of the visit is our time with the people of the tribe. The students had several days to visit with both kids and adults, asking any questions they could think of. The two elders are well known artists, working in clay and silver, as well as in wood carving. We saw their work and heard about their lives as artists as well as their roles within the tribe. I know that our students found it to be a very moving experience to be there. I was proud of how they went about making the most of this opportunity.

We returned to Auckland to begin our course in printmaking. We work each day in the studio. Printmaking has a difficult introduction period as the students struggle to learn the process. My goal in Auckland is to get them comfortable with the medium, then give them some time to plan for our second period of studio time when we reach Melbourne.

Yesterday we took a day trip as a break from the studio period to go to the Coromandel Peninsula. We went to a very pretty beach/park called Cathedral Cove. It is named for the large sandstone natural arch that bisects the beach. The students had some time in the water and also
spent a good deal of time drawing. Some of them have found it hard to draw from the landscape, and I was happy to see them start to make progress by responding to the beautiful setting of Cathedral Cove. We followed this day by a free day in Auckland, giving them some time to explore the city.

We will be here for one more week. After that we will go to a volcanic park in the center of the island, then head south to Wellington and the South Island. I am enjoying this group. They are open to new things, flexible and enthusiastic. I try to fill their time here with experiences that would be hard to come by if they were not in this group. They seem pleased with these first few weeks of the trip.

Regards,

Fred Hagstrom
Well known local conservationist, Stephen King discussing Kauri regeneration projects.
Sketching at Cathedral Cove at the Coromandal Peninsula
Working on relief prints at the Auckland University of Technology print studio.