

Dear Stronach Family,

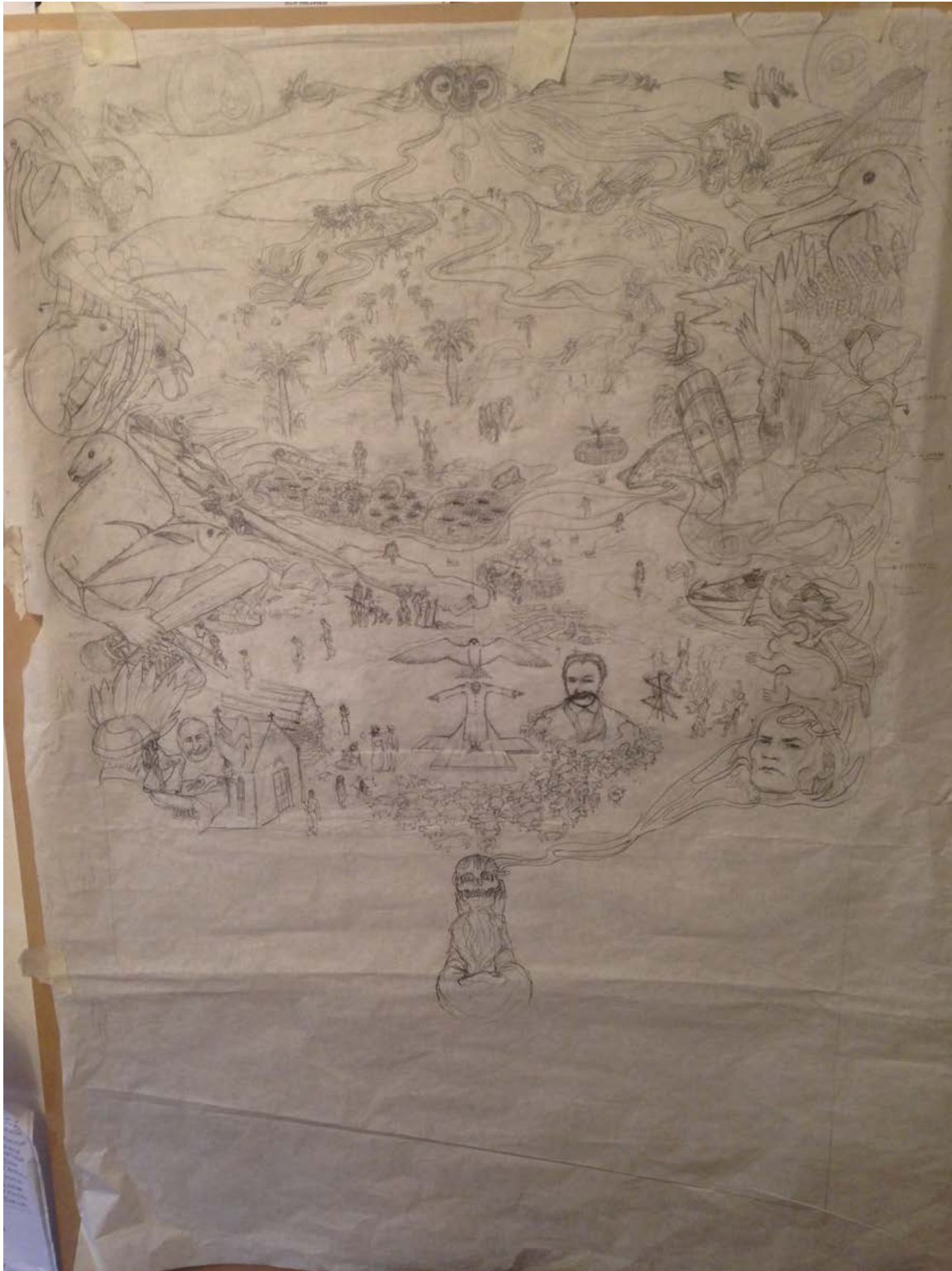
My project is nearing its end and the moment of sharing the collaborative work I have done in different venues with the community is almost here. This letter will be shorter than usual, as I am currently with a heavy workload, preparing the last aspects of the feature film before traveling to Easter Island this month and showing the video.

I spent all of May in Santiago working, mostly, with the illustrator, Antonia Lara, and also with two Rapanui people—a translator and a narrator. I have also been in touch with several Rapanui who live in Santiago as well as, remotely, with several Rapanui in Easter Island, all of whom have expressed interest in the project and followed and advised the progress of the film. As a result of this advice, as well as of deeper reflection on my part about the enormous amount of material I collected, I finally decided to give a fictional structure to the feature film I am making. The Rapanui narrator with whom I am working made this fictional structure possible. Indeed, the collaborative work I did in Easter Island was not research: the oral historians with whom I worked were not looking to answer a question, to delve into a subject and reveal historical truths about it. Rather, the experiment we were making was one of the imagination: reflecting over and imagining both the tangible and intangible ruins of their past, the oral historians I worked with were providing an alternative way of reading this history. The documentary film genre, I found, is not adequate to this mode of engagement with a community.

Therefore, in consultation with several Rapanui friends, I started reading and asking about certain aspects of the recent history of Rapa Nui on which to base a fictional story that would combine the material I gathered in a revealing way. Finally, I came upon the theme of manuscripts, which involve several documents written secretly by Rapanui people who had recently learned occidental ways of writing (Rapanui culture itself was the only Polynesian culture to develop the art of writing, but this practice had been abandoned by the 20th century). These documents contained valuable cultural information (legends, place-names, fishing and planting techniques, etc.) and were passed as valuable and treasured information down kin groups and were therefore unknown to outsiders until the 1950s and are still today veiled in mystery. The story that frames the film is based on this historical fact. The protagonist of the film is a fictional but plausible modern Rapanui character who re-encounters a manuscript which he inherited from his grandfather and which contains a drawing. The film shows the character's process of understanding the drawing as one involving a certain idea about the Rapanui's colonial history. This idea is the loss of *mana* [ancestral power] and the message of the drawing is for the character to continue drawing the history of Rapanui since his grandfather died.



The image above is a photo of the upper half of the illustration made by Antonia Lara. At the point of the photo, Antonia had already made the illustration and scanned it to the computer and was in the process of painting the illustration. After conceptualizing the fictional structure for the screenplay of the short film, the next step of my work was to choose a selection of moments from the three videos I had already edited and to make these moments make sense within the fictional structure. Concurrently with this, Antonia, with my knowledge of Easter Island's recent history and after we reviewed most of the material I collected, designed an illustration that could summarize this history. Here is a photo of the initial sketch made by Antonia of the illustration, including part of the lower half of the illustration.



After finishing the long processes of completing the illustration and fine-tuning the screenplay, we proceeded to incorporate the illustration into the screenplay. This required the use of simple special effects, for which we collaborated with another

visual artist. Here are photos of the studio that we used to complete our work. The first photo shows my workstation, where I edited the videos, made the screenplay, and produced the film. Beside my workstation is Antonia's, where she added the illustration via special effects to the film. The second photo shows the referents that Antonia used to complete the illustration.



May Letter Home
Umaña Tupuna

Pablo Seward

The day I left Easter Island to travel to the United States to visit graduate schools, a massive social movement started, whereby Rapanui people belonging to a radical political organization (most of whom happened to be participants in my project) closed the roads leading to the major tourist sites in Rapa Nui. Their intention was to force the Chilean government—with economic and political interests vested in the tourism industry in Santiago—to approve a bill proposed by the representatives of the Rapanui people to apply migration control regulations for Chilean residents in Easter Island. A secondary goal was to force the Chilean government to return the administration of what today is known as the Rapa Nui National Park, currently run by the Chilean National Forest Corporation, to the representatives of the Rapanui society. Finally, after an intense month of negotiating with the Chilean government, the government met the Rapanui's second goal, but not their first. The implications of being able to administer the majority of their heritage again, including all of the most valuable and attractive tourist sites, cannot be underestimated. This current event coincidentally fits perfectly with the reflections about history—a history of loss and dispossession—that Rapanui oral historians shared with me. Therefore, my hope is that the showing of the film to the general public in Rapa Nui will be very relevant given the present situation in Easter Island and may incite discussions about themes that today are more politically relevant than ever.

We are currently finishing the last details of the film before I travel to Easter Island this month. The next stage of the project will involve presenting the film at several venues in Easter Island, including via workshops delivered at the local high school.

Thank you, as always, for your unconditional support!

Pablo