

## **Report for 2009 NZFGW Fellowship Recipient: Polly Stupples**

My doctoral thesis in Development Studies at Massey University examines the strategies for and implications of using international development assistance (aid) to support the work of artists in the world's poorest countries. Aid for 'cultural development' is a small but potentially very positive, aspect of development assistance. I examine the tension inherent between the demands for social expediency of any development programme, and the demands for independence and experimentation claimed by many artists who receive development assistance. My research focuses on one highly dynamic artists' initiative in Central America run by sculptor and Fulbright scholar Patricia Belli that has a focus on developing critical practice in the visual arts, including challenging the visual representation of women in the region.

I received the NZFGW Fellowship to assist with living costs as I complete my doctorate, and to present at two conferences in December 2008. I am particularly grateful to the committee for allowing me to split my fellowship 'year' in two, either side of the birth of my daughter in February this year.

I spent the first six months as a Fellow backtracking somewhat in order to move forward, that is reworking the framework and logical necessity of the thesis (and writing some front-end material in the process). While this seemed a little frustrating at first, it has in fact been really fruitful and I feel very positive about my ongoing writing. I also wrote and presented two conference papers in December 2008: one based around development policy for the arts for the development community at the biannual DevNet Conference (Victoria University), and the second tackling the political implications of my findings for the combined Commonwealth Social Anthropologists' Conference (Auckland University) in an interesting panel on the global circulation and appropriation of cultural expressions. I enjoyed the challenge of presenting my work to two quite different audiences: the more practice-based development community and the academically-focussed social anthropologists as I hope that my professional career can span these different environments.

I am now nearing the end of the break that I have taken for the birth of my daughter. She is an absolute delight and will, I am sure, keep me grounded and motivated as I return to thesis-completion in earnest.