



# BOOK REVIEW

*Paradise Camp* by Yuki Kihara  
Edited by Natalie King. Creative New Zealand  
and Thames & Hudson, 2022.

Camp: *adj.* effeminate (man);  
*adj.* performance: theatrical

*Paradise Camp* by Yuki Kihara is the catalog of an exhibition presented by Aotearoa/New Zealand at the 2022 Venice Biennale, and much more. A dense artistic, scientific, and political volume, *Paradise Camp* by Yuki Kihara finds its coherence in its singular aesthetic, inspired by patterns painted on *tapa*—beaten bark cloth—as well as vintage tourist postcards. Is it a pastiche, or a documentary? A brilliant combination of both, really.

Sāmoan-Japanese artist Yuki Kihara represented Aotearoa in Venice in 2022 as a member of the Pasifika community, that is people from different Pacific nations living in Aotearoa. As such, *Paradise Camp* by Yuki Kihara speaks about shared histories of the Pacific beyond local differences, as stated by the Biennale Commissioner Caren Rangī. In addressing questions of identity, queer rights, climate change, and decolonization, Kihara and the rest of the volume contributors find ways to speak about the Pacific experience, playing on foreign generalizations and stereotypes—this time in their own terms.

In her exhibition “Paradise Camp,” Kihara re-enacts paintings made by French artist Paul Gauguin during his time in Tahiti and Henua Enana (the Marquesas Islands) in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. In staging members of the *Fa’afafine* (which translates into “in the manner of a woman”



from Sāmoan) and *Fa'atama* (“in the manner of man”) communities, and being herself *Fa'afafine*, Kihara manages to take control of Gauguin's narrative, rejecting his gaze on Indigenous bodies—not without irony. Kihara's photographs claim a certain level of artifice through exaggerated stances and saturated colors. The reader comes face-to-face with those staged figures, one of them always staring directly at the camera in a rather defiant manner. As such, the performers really force the viewer—or voyeur—to reflect on their own position, unlike Gauguin.

A work of art and scholarship at once, the catalogue *Paradise Camp* by Yuki Kihara includes photographs and information related to the exhibition as well as poetry, quotes, essays, and archival sources. Additionally, it includes text in Sāmoan and a glossary of Indigenous terms in Sāmoan, Māori, Tahitian, and other Pacific languages. More than a companion to the Biennale, this volume brings the exhibition catalog to a new standard.

**Louise Deglin**



Yuki Kihara, *Two Fa'afafine (After Gauguin)*, 2020  
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Courtesy of the artist and Thames and Hudson