

NEW ZEALAND

PARADISE CAMP

Commissioner
Caren Rangi ONZM

Curator
Natalie King OAM

Participant
Yuki Kihara

Project Director
Jude Chambers

Initiative Lead by
Creative New Zealand Arts Council
of New Zealand Toi Aotearoa

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Yuki Kihara's ensemble exhibition *Paradise Camp* reflects on pertinent local and global issues from the unique perspective of Fa'afafine – "in the manner of a woman" or third gender in Sāmoa. She creates an alternate, queer world that is both confronting and hypnotic in its humanity, while redrawing the afflictions of colonisation. In so doing, Kihara amplifies voices within her own community in Sāmoa thereby "returning the gaze" in a profound gesture of empowerment while camping the notion of paradise.

Kihara's luscious photographs in *Paradise Camp* were shot on location in Sāmoa, from rural villages to churches, plantations, and heritage sites with members of her community comprising the cast and crew.

Kihara's performative photography upcycles select paintings by French Impressionist Paul Gauguin with fidelity to detail in a suite of incandescent images that repurpose Gauguin's paintings, created during his time in the Islands of Tahiti and the Marquesas between 1891 and 1903. Kihara situates her photographs against a vast wallpaper of a landscape decimated by the 2009 tsunami. Despite its "picturesque" qualities, resembling tourist brochures with palm trees and sandy beaches, the backdrop includes Nu'utele Islet in the distance which was a former leper colony during the German and New Zealand period of colonisation.

Conceived eight years ago, after an extensive gestation, *Paradise Camp* comprises a suite of twelve tableau photographs in saturated colour; a five-part episodic "talk show" series whereby a group of Fa'afafine comment wittily on select Gauguin paintings in *First Impressions: Paul Gauguin* interspersed with footage from Fa'afafine pageants and Kihara's personal research archive of posters, rare books by 19th century explorers, colonial facsimile portraits, pamphlets, news items, and activist material. Together, these components meld portraiture, moving image, ephemera, and performance to narrate stories of invasion and prejudice. By addressing the intersectionality between decolonisation, identity politics, and climate crisis, Yuki Kihara's *Paradise Camp* takes the tempo of our times from a staunchly Pasifika perspective.

Natalie King



Yuki Kihara, *Two fa'afafine (After Gauguin)*, 2020. Hahnemühle fine art paper mounted on aluminum, 94 x 72.4 cm. Courtesy the Artist; Milford Galleries, Aotearoa/New Zealand