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BERNIDA WEBB-BINDER

Exhibition Review: *Paradise Camp* at the Aotearoa/New Zealand Pavilion of the 59th Venice Biennale

Paradise Camp. Exhibition, curated by Natalie King with Ioana Gordon-Smith, assistant Pasifika curator. 59th Venice Biennale, Venice, Italy, April 23–November 27, 2022. Exhibition catalogue: Yuki Kihara, *Paradise Camp*, ed. Natalie King. Melbourne: Thames & Hudson, 2022. ISBN: 978-1760761424. 176 pp., 124 color illus. Hardcover \$50.00 (USD)

Abstract

Paradise Camp, an immersive exhibition of Yuki Kihara’s artworks first presented at the 59th Venice Biennale, was curated by Natalie King with Ioana Gordon-Smith, assistant Pasifika curator. Kihara is the first Pasifika, Asian, and fa’afafine (“in a manner of a woman,” third gender) artist to represent Aotearoa/New Zealand at the international art show. Inspired by an essay by Ngahuia Te Awakotuku, the exhibition features twelve new photographic works alongside a “Vārchive” of the artist’s research materials and a remix of a five-part “talk show” created in 2018. Through a camp aesthetic, Kihara presents a fa’afafine perspective that decolonizes paradise and gender, argues for community solidarity, and fosters intentional stewardship of the environment in response to climate change, among other topics. The Venice Biennale installation invokes the Sāmoan theory of vā and is accompanied by solidarity programming, an immersive website, and an extensive exhibition catalogue that signifies the tā-vā theory of reality, an Indigenous Moana framing.

Keywords: *Venice Biennale, fa’afafine, third gender, fa’atama, fourth gender, Aotearoa/New Zealand Pavilion, vā, tā-vā, camp aesthetic, climate change*

Paradise Camp, an immersive exhibition of work by interdisciplinary artist Yuki Kihara, garnered much-deserved praise from the art world when it debuted at the 59th Venice Biennale in 2022 (Fig. 1).¹ The *Burlington Magazine* acknowledged it as a “landmark presentation;” the *Art Newspaper* named it a “must-see pavilion,” along with five other country platforms at the Arsenale di Venezia venue; and *Art Monthly Australasia* referred to the exhibition as “FAA FA FABULOUS” in recogni-



Figure 1. Artist Yuki Kihara in the exhibition *Paradise Camp*, curated by Natalie King, Aotearoa New Zealand Pavilion, 59th International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia, April 23–November 27, 2022. Exhibition commissioned by the Arts Council of New Zealand Toi Aotearoa. Photograph by Luke Walker. Courtesy of Yuki Kihara and Milford Galleries, Aotearoa New Zealand

tion of Kihara’s trailblazing status as the first Pasifika, Asian, and *fa’afafine* (“in a manner of a woman,” third gender) artist to represent Aotearoa at the international showcase frequently described as “the Olympics of the art world.”² These accolades and others attest to the exhibition’s success while recognizing the artist’s activism, talent, and vision. The 59th Venice Biennale closed on Sunday, November 27, 2022, but the impact of Yuki Kihara’s *Paradise Camp* will reverberate through time and space.

Curated by Natalie King, with Ioana Gordon-Smith as assistant Pasifika curator, the exhibition is comprised of four distinct-yet-intertwined components: 1) a “Vārchive” of historical and contemporary records collected by the artist during her creative process;³ 2) eleven new collaborative photographic portraits featuring *fa’afafine* and *fa’atama* (“in a manner of a man,” fourth gender) communities in Sāmoa; 3) a new performative self-portrait of Yuki Kihara in drag as Paul Gauguin, the nineteenth-century Postimpressionist painter who traveled from France to Tahiti and the Marquesas in search of “paradise;” and 4) *First Impressions: Paul Gauguin*, a televisual interlude giving novel meaning to Gauguin’s Tahitian paintings. These paintings—now acknowledged as sexually predatory—of nude and semi-nude young women were incorrectly revered at the time (and long after) as avant-garde documentation of the sexual freedoms available outside of the French metropole. Effectively, Gauguin silenced his subjects, rendering them anonymous, their lived experiences lost through the process of eroticization and exoticization.

The New Zealand pavilion at the 59th Venice Biennale was one of more than twenty-five at the central Arsenale di Venezia location, a 110-acre complex built in the twelfth century as a shipyard and armory.⁴ The site’s 25,000-square-foot exhibition space was a series of connected warehouses which opened into each other; most of the spaces did not have separate entrances, so visitors traversed through one country’s offerings straight into the next. *Paradise Camp* was housed between the pavilions of Latvia and the Philippines in the historical Artigliere, and could also be entered directly from the courtyard. No matter which approach you chose, you immediately stepped into a space (*vā*) where you experienced time (*tā*) differently (Fig. 2). The exhibition’s immersive approach to its content—the decolonization of paradise and gender, increasing community action and agency, and employing humor as antidote to trauma—transcended the physical place.



Figure 2. Installation view of *Paradise Camp*, Aotearoa New Zealand Pavilion, 59th International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia, April 23–November 27, 2022. Commissioned by the Arts Council of New Zealand Toi Aotearoa. Photograph by Luke Walker. Courtesy of Yuki Kihara and Milford Galleries, Aotearoa New Zealand



Figure 3. Detail of Yuki Kihara's "Vārchive," *Paradise Camp*, Aotearoa New Zealand Pavilion, 59th International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia, April 23–November 27, 2022. Commissioned by the Arts Council of New Zealand Toi Aotearoa. Photograph by Luke Walker. Courtesy of Yuki Kihara and Milford Galleries, Aotearoa New Zealand

While there was no set path through the exhibition, the best sequential route to take was a clockwise exploration beginning with the “Vārchive” on your right as you entered from the courtyard (Fig. 3).⁵ Gordon-Smith describes the Vārchive as

a salon-hang of items that include newspaper clippings, personal photographs, archival images, a model of a Sāmoan volcano, a photographic “fa’afafine aquarium” of hermaphrodite fish, and a Sāmoan Fa’afafine Association Trophy, all set against a vast siapo-patterned wallpaper. “Vārchive” is a portmanteau of the Western “archive” and the Sāmoan “vā.”⁶

The pieces in the Vārchive were hung on the wall in small groupings, each set bordered by boldly colored frames. Archival objects in art exhibitions are often displayed in Plexiglas cases on pedestals, and the viewer must lean in to get a not-very-close view of the letter, photograph, or ephemera that is sealed away. In this case, each item could be viewed without the mediation of Plexiglas and this curatorial choice set the Vārchive apart from other exhibitions at the Biennale, as did its framing of the vā.

According to Albert Wendt,

Vā is the space between, the betweenness, not empty space, not space that separates but space that relates, that holds separate entities and things together in the Unity-that-is-All, the space that is context, giving meaning to things. The meanings change as the relationships/the contexts change.⁷

In this context, the Vārchive in *Paradise Camp* marks a multitude of spaces and times. The exhibition, including its catalogue, website, and community programming, is a “tā-Vārchive,” following the paradigm of the tā-vā theory of reality. Historical anthropologist ‘Okusitino Mahina and cultural anthropologists Tevita O. Ka’ili and Ping-Ann Addo write:

The Tā-Vā Theory of Reality argues that tā (time) and vā (space) are inseparable in reality and both dimensions must be examined together, and in relation to one another, in order to gain a deeper

understanding of natural, mental, and socio-cultural concepts and practices.⁸

In *Paradise Camp*, each photograph, clipping, or remembrance marks a different time in Kihara's life, *fa'afafine* and *fa'atama* history, Pacific history, or the history of us all. Kihara has gathered these sources over her lengthy career and, looking at them individually, one can glimpse moments of space and time. For example, the moment in which *Paradise Camp* was conceived is represented in three photographs on the right edge of the vārchive. In the largest one, Kihara stands in front of two iconic Gauguin paintings at The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (Fig. 4). In the photograph, Kihara's gaze is direct; the photo was taken over a decade ago, yet the viewer standing before it feels seen by the artist. In the exhibition catalogue, curator Natalie King relates that Kihara "returned repeatedly to view Gauguin's paintings" while her own exhibition, *Living Photographs*, was on view at The Met in 2008.⁹ If a center to this exhibition were to be pinpointed, this grouping of photographs would be a moment of genesis.



Figure 4. Artist Yuki Kihara at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 2008. Courtesy of Yuki Kihara and Milford Galleries, Aotearoa New Zealand

Paul Gauguin (1848–1903) was a French Postimpressionist painter who first travelled to Tahiti in 1891, returned to France for several years, and spent the remaining eight years of his life in Tahiti and the Marquesas. In response to the Impressionist painters who portrayed daily life in Paris and the suburbs by relying on visible brushstrokes to capture the changing quality of light, Gauguin sought inspiration far from the Parisian metropole in what he considered a paradise unspoiled by artifice and convention. Using bright colors, he placed classicized figures set against lush vegetation, resulting in iconic images of nude or nearly nude young girls, a subject that sold well back home. The girls were objectified and sexualized by Gauguin’s gaze (and subsequently by viewers). While we know the name of one model—Teha’amana, the first of several teens who would become his “wife”—her identity and agency and that of other models is erased by Gauguin’s gaze. These erotic and exotic images set the stage for Western notions of paradise in racialized, gendered, and sexualized frameworks that were instrumental in colonial expansion and subjugation. His work became popular posthumously and as the images circulated, they became synonymous with “paradise.”

Ironically, Gauguin sought an escape from the artifice of cosmopolitan and capitalist Paris yet ended up perpetrating a myth. His life is exaggerated in his published journal, *Noa Noa: Voyage de Tahiti*, in which the specifics of consent between the artist and the model (his teenage wife) are brushed aside.¹⁰ In her research, Kihara realized that Gauguin’s Tahitian paintings were a match for Thomas Andrew’s photographs of Sāmoan men and women taken when Andrew lived in Sāmoa. Kihara’s pivotal collage *Three Tahiti(Sāmo)ans (After Gauguin)* (Fig. 5) addresses this connection and is centrally placed in the Vārchive. Its title indicates the amalgamation of Indigenous Pacific identities. Kihara explains:

The collage features a seamless pairing between Gauguin’s *Three Tahitians* [1899] and Thomas Andrew’s *Back View of a Sāmoan with a Pe’a* (tattoo) [ca. 1890s]. This is one of many examples I found in my research where Gauguin used photographs of Sāmoa taken by Thomas Andrew as a foundational reference in developing some of his major paintings. I suspect Gauguin may have collected the photographs when he visited Auckland in August 1895, [when] he spent ten days en route to Tahiti for the second and final time.¹¹

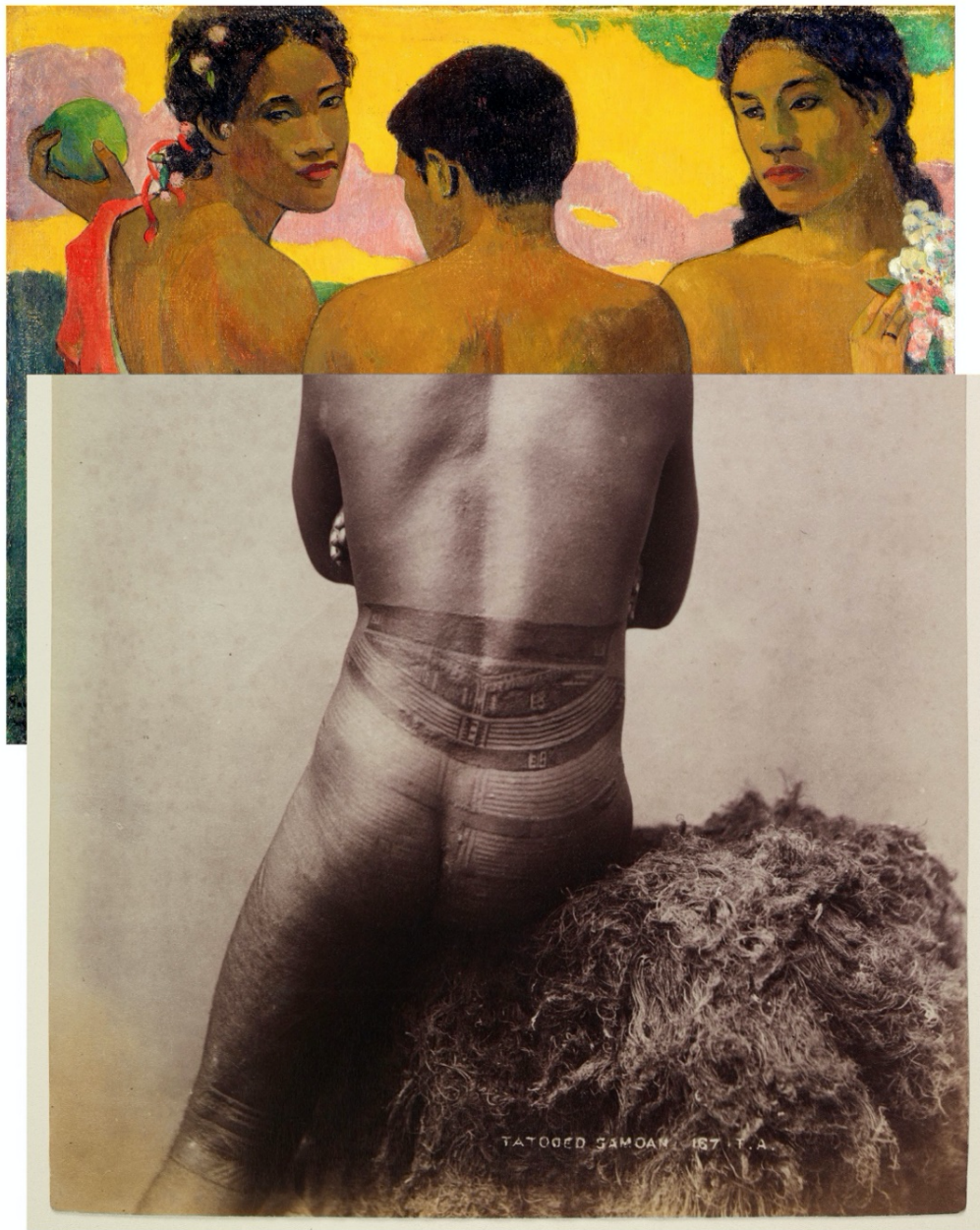


Figure 5. Yuki Kihara, *Three Tahiti(Sāmo)ans (After Gauguin)*, from the series *Coconuts That Grew From Concrete*, 2017, digital collage postcard, 150 x 105 mm. Courtesy of Yuki Kihara and Milford Galleries, Aotearoa New Zealand



Figure 6. Installation view of Yuki Kihara, *Fa'afafine Ancestors*, in the exhibition *Paradise Camp*, Aotearoa New Zealand Pavilion, 59th International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia, April 23–November 27, 2022. Commissioned by the Arts Council of New Zealand Toi Aotearoa. Photograph by Luke Walker. Courtesy of Yuki Kihara and Milford Galleries, Aotearoa New Zealand

On the wall behind the Vārchive was a wallpaper covered with patterns that are applied to *siapo* (Sāmoan barkcloth). *Siapo* is highly treasured, lending gravitas to its exchange and marking reciprocal relationships as special. The *siapo*-patterned wallpaper extended beyond the main groupings of the Vārchive to a quartet of portraits adorned with shell necklaces (Fig. 6). The four portraits honor late *fa'afafine* individuals and their contributions to Sāmoan society.¹² *Paradise Camp* has been heralded for its cheeky insouciance, but moments of sorrow are acknowledged as well. Susan Sontag writes, “Camp is playful, anti-serious,” yet at the same time, “camp taste is a kind of love, love for human nature. It relishes rather than judges.”¹³ While the exhibition’s title deconstructs Western notions of the exotic, at the heart of *Paradise Camp* is love and respect for *fa'afafine* and *fa'atama* ancestors, as well as an imperative to cherish communities, land, and the environment.



Figure 7. Installation view of *Paradise Camp*, Aotearoa New Zealand Pavilion, 59th International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia, April 23–November 27, 2022. Commissioned by the Arts Council of New Zealand Toi Aotearoa. Photograph by Luke Walker. Courtesy of Yuki Kihara and Milford Galleries, Aotearoa New Zealand

Eleven upcycled photographs feature in the second section with a set piece measuring over four and a half by eleven feet dominating the space. In filmmaking, a “set piece” is the scene (or sequence of scenes) that provides the big pay-off for the audience in terms of character or plot development. Set pieces are meticulously planned and lavishly produced visual moments that are so integral that without them the film is incomplete. In this respect, *Fonofono o le nuanua: Patches of the Rainbow (After Gauguin)* can be considered the first set piece within the exhibition, followed by the artist’s portrait of Kihara in drag as Paul Gauguin. The viewer was transported to the village of Saleapaga on Upolu Island, Sāmoa, via a floor-to-ceiling photograph of a beach that was devastated by earthquakes and a tsunami in 2009, and which is still struggling to recover (Fig. 7). From left to right, the oceanscape wallpaper depicted a sweep of beach leading into the surf. The expanse of ocean breaks when Nu’utele islet came into view in the middle, and then continued onto the adjacent wall at a right angle (Fig. 2). Ten individual

and group portraits on Hahnemühle fine-art paper mounted on aluminum were arranged in a rectangle in the first section. One image in this vista may seem familiar. In a notable photograph in the Vārchive (Fig. 4), one of the two paintings Kihara stands in front of is Gauguin’s iconic *Two Tahitian Women* (1899). Within the oceanscape section, Kihara prominently placed *Two Fa’afafine (After Gauguin)*, which was also featured on the cover of the exhibition catalogue.

Yet, to focus solely on Gauguin as catalyst in *Paradise Camp* is to give him too much credit by overlooking the Pacific Indigenous perspective on gender. In 1992, Ngahuia Te Awekotuku delivered a paper at Auckland Art Gallery’s Gauguin Symposium in which she considers the layered identities of the models from a Māori perspective.¹⁴ In “He tangi mo Ha’apuani (A lament for Ha’apuani): Gauguin’s models—a Māori perspective,” she writes,

*He whakaaro taka tapuhi; for years I have looked at those faces, and I have wondered about them. Who were they? And sometimes, I ask myself, what were they? He wahine, he tane ranei? He mahu, pea? Either gender? Or the one in between?*¹⁵

She describes her familiarity with his paintings across the years and her scrutiny of the models and their expressions, “recognizing their serene, beautiful, arrogant, and unforgettable faces.”¹⁶ Te Awekotuku poses a pivotal question to the models and to herself: “*Ko wai koutou, ake? Who are you, really?*”¹⁷

Kihara, inspired by this essay to upcycle Gauguin’s imagery,¹⁸ creates portraits that depict one or more *fa’afafine* or *fa’atama* with their family or friends in poses that do more than recreate or reenact the original depictions by Gauguin; the upcycled portraits take back the colonial gaze and recuperate the relationships between individuals, communities, and the environment as illustrated by their curatorial choice. Rather than hanging the photographs on a white wall or one painted with a complementary color, King and Kihara conceptually and visually situate the photographs within the landscape that was devastated in 2009. Many *fa’afafine* were first to respond to the natural disaster, yet the lack of gender-neutral bathrooms mirrors the power disparity to which they are subjected daily. Here, the individuals in these portraits are not just part of the imagery like Gauguin’s models; they are integral in the living energy of the “unity-that-is-all”—the land and the climate are just one component—in the *vā*.



Figure 8. Yuki Kihara, *Genesis 9:16 (After Gauguin)*, from the series *Paradise Camp*, 2020. Hahnemühle fine art paper mounted on aluminum, 73.2 x 91.5 cm. Commissioned by the Arts Council of New Zealand Toi Aotearoa for the 59th International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia, 2022. Courtesy of Yuki Kihara and Milford Galleries, Aotearoa New Zealand



Figure 9: Paul Gauguin, *Ta matete (We shall not be going to market today)*, 1892. Oil on canvas, 73.2 x 91.5 cm. Kunstmuseum Basel. Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons¹⁹

To the right of *Two Fa'afafine (After Gauguin)* was Kihara's *Genesis 9:16 (After Gauguin)* (Fig. 8), which foregrounds representation of *fa'atama*.²⁰ Wearing a spectrum of primary and secondary colors from head-to-toe with the hues of their shirts and *lavalava* matching their flip-flops, six *fa'afatama* pose on a bench. In *Ta Matete: We shall not be going to market today* (1892; Fig. 9), Gauguin presents Tahitian women in static poses, and while the hand gestures of the Sāmoan *fa'atama* in *Genesis 9:16* are similar, the effect is different. The vibrant color of the clothing in the verdant setting highlights the distinct expressions on each face, giving a glimpse of individual identities rather than the homogenized flat silhouettes of line and color depicted by Gauguin. The intent is unequivocal, according to Kihara:

Paradise Camp is a Fa'afafine project by and for Fa'afafine, compared to Fa'afafine identity that is often instrumentalized as a "cause" to expand cisgender dominance. *Paradise Camp* was created with the Fa'afafine and Fa'atama audience in mind and will tour Sāmoa after Biennale Arte 2022. The exhibition will be a space for continuous mediation where the Fa'afafine community can reflect on their past while offering a Fa'afafine world view for those outside our community.²¹

The rainbow effect of Figure 8 is reflected in the title reference to a Bible verse in which God cements his bond with the earth and its inhabitants after the Biblical flood. In the photograph, the rainbow colors reference the verse, acknowledge Western rainbow pride, and mark the bridge between the mortal and divine worlds. The placement of this radiant work is a visual foreshadowing of the oceanscape's centerpiece, *Fonofono o le nuanua: Patches of the Rainbow (After Gauguin)* (Fig. 10) in which Kihara and her collaborators provide some answers to Te Awekotuku's question, "Who are you, really?"

Fonofono o le nuanua is an embodied portrait of the intersectionality described by Kihara in her interview with King:

Paradise Camp is also a provocation against the stereotypical ways that we understand place, gender and sexuality and their intersectionality; it materializes queerness at odds with hetero-normative representation of Pacific people as a consequence of

colonialism while simultaneously raising questions about how we can decolonize ways of being in the world.²²

In *Fonofono o le nuanua*, artist and subject agency is reinforced through a collaborative effort mobilized in support of activism. Kihara's nuanced illustrations of lived experience are paramount, unlike the imbalanced power relationship between Gauguin and his models. Kihara's digital collage that superimposes Gauguin's painting with Andrew's photograph emphasizes the suggestive sexuality that Gauguin portrays and the fabulist nature of his life and artistic sources.



Figure 10. Yuki Kihara, *Fonofono o le nuanua: Patches of the Rainbow (After Gauguin)*. From the *Paradise Camp* series, 2020, Hahnemühle fine art paper mounted on aluminum, 139 x 375 cm. Commissioned by the Arts Council of New Zealand Toi Aotearoa for the 59th International Art Exhibition La Biennale di Venezia, 2022. Courtesy of Yuki Kihara and Milford Galleries, Aotearoa New Zealand

In Venice, the third component of the exhibition, *First Impressions: Paul Gauguin*, a single-channel video work, featured on what would be the fourth wall at a right angle to *Fonofono o le nuanua*. The exhibition shares space with the Albania Pavilion and, rather than build a wall, the artist and curator projected the work on a screen hanging above eye-level; the only focus of this “invisible wall” was the “floating” screen. The visitor could stand or sit on the bench in the center of the exhibition, and while you could “see” through the wall to the next exhibition and passersby, this reinforced the sense of multiple times and places converging in *Paradise Camp*.



Figure 11. Still from *First Impressions: Paul Gauguin*, dir. Yuki Kihara, 2018. Single-channel video, 13:00. Commissioned by the de Young Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco and the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen. Courtesy of Yuki Kihara and Milford Galleries, Aotearoa New Zealand

Here, *First Impressions* adds a layer of sound to the symphony of imagery—vārchival moments layered onto *siapo* and portraits placed on top of ocean and land—to create a multi-dimensional feel to the space. *First Impressions: Paul Gauguin* presents five thirteen-minute episodes of a TV talk show, each discussing a different Gauguin painting. Guided by host Anastasia Vancouver Stanley (aka Queen Hera), members of a five-person panel—Charlize Leo, Vanila Heather, Keli Tuatagaloa Laban, Dallas Siatina, and Saunoa Poia (aka Sandora)—voice their thoughts on Gauguin’s paintings upon seeing them for the first time (Fig. 11).

While *First Impressions* was commissioned in 2018, in this iteration it is presented as “Paradise Camp TV,” with the talk show episodes interspersed with other segments in a fifty-eight-minute loop that includes new footage of Kihara talking back to Gauguin—played by Kihara in makeup and prosthetics—as well as the trailer for Sāmoa’s 2019 Fa’afafine Beauty Pageant by the Sāmoa Fa’afafine Association. Rather than the soundtrack featured on the website, the exhibition space is filled with the laughter of the panelists and the hostess, the opening and closing notes of each episode, and the triumphant Game-of-Thrones-like music of the trailer. Also in the rotation is *Fa’afafine*, *Fa’atama* and *Climate Change*, a short

documentary film written and directed by Kihara, and New Zealand news footage from 2016 of the Sāmoan *Observer's* decision to run an explicit photo of the dead body of Jeanine Tuivaiki, a transgender student, accompanying an article misidentifying her gender.

Paradise Camp TV gives a sneak peek (Fig. 12) of the culminating work in the exhibition, Kihara's self-portrait *Paul Gauguin with a hat (After Gauguin)* (Fig. 13), which upcycles Gauguin's *Self-Portrait with a Hat* (1893).²³ This marks the trajectory of ideas embedded in the Vārchive photograph of Kihara in front of *Two Tahitian Women* (Fig. 4). In the self-portrait, the siapo pattern from the walls is echoed as the background that frames the head and shoulders of the artist. The hat sits at a diagonal, throwing shadows on the left side of the face. In a sidelong glance, the artist's eyes stare at the viewer outside the frame. The title, *Paul Gauguin with a hat (After Gauguin)*, doesn't immediately register as a self-portrait by Kihara in which she has recreated Gauguin in her own image. Once this becomes clear, one impact of *Paradise Camp* becomes evident. Gauguin has not only been upcycled by the first Pasifika, Asian, and fa'afafine to represent Aotearoa/New Zealand at the Venice Biennale, he and his colonial legacy have been supplanted through Kihara's fa'afafine perspective and intersectional methodology. Kihara's transformation into Gauguin, as King suggests, "seems like the penultimate decolonial gesture of masking, disguise and parallel acts of creation."²⁴ Kihara responds with honesty to this statement: "Making this work, I felt nervous, excited about mortality and the legacy one leaves behind."²⁵ As viewers, we, too, begin to wonder about our own legacies.

There is a sense of activation in *Paradise Camp*. The viewer is implicated in the message of this *tā-vā* and must consider how they will engage with gender inclusiveness, the effects of climate change, and ongoing decolonial strategies after leaving the exhibition. One of the key arguments made by Pamela Rosi about Kihara's body of work is that, by foregrounding her *fa'afafine* identity, Kihara

maintain[s] positive relationships to her Sāmoan community and her international circle of colleagues through the Moana-Sāmoan practice of *teu le vā*—meaning caring for or beautifying social spaces now threatened by global forces commoditizing the arts and cultures of Oceania.²⁶

In this instance, caring for the *vā* goes beyond the exhibition. In conjunction with *Paradise Camp*, Kihara hosted in-person and virtual discussion forums (“Talanoa: Swimming Against the Tide”) and established the Firsts Solidarity Network, an advocacy initiative for artists, who, like Kihara, are members of marginalized or underrepresented groups in their countries or are representing countries who are participating for the first time. The Firsts Solidarity Network connected artists and facilitated support across national boundaries and provided a map of the five pavilions (Fig. 14).



Figure 12. Production still for *Paul Gauguin with a Hat (After Gauguin)* by Yuki Kihara, from the *Paradise Camp* series, 2020. Commissioned by the Arts Council of New Zealand Toi Aotearoa for the 59th International Art Exhibition of *La Biennale di Venezia*, 2022. Photograph by Evotia Tamua. Courtesy of Yuki Kihara and Milford Galleries, Aotearoa New Zealand



Figure 13. Yuki Kihara, *Paul Gauguin with a hat (after Gauguin)*, from the *Paradise Camp* series, 2020. Hahnemühle fine art paper mounted on aluminum, 45 x 38 cm. Commissioned by the Arts Council of New Zealand Toi Aotearoa for the 59th International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia, 2022. Courtesy of Yuki Kihara and Milford Galleries, Aotearoa New Zealand

FIRSTS SOLIDARITY NETWORK

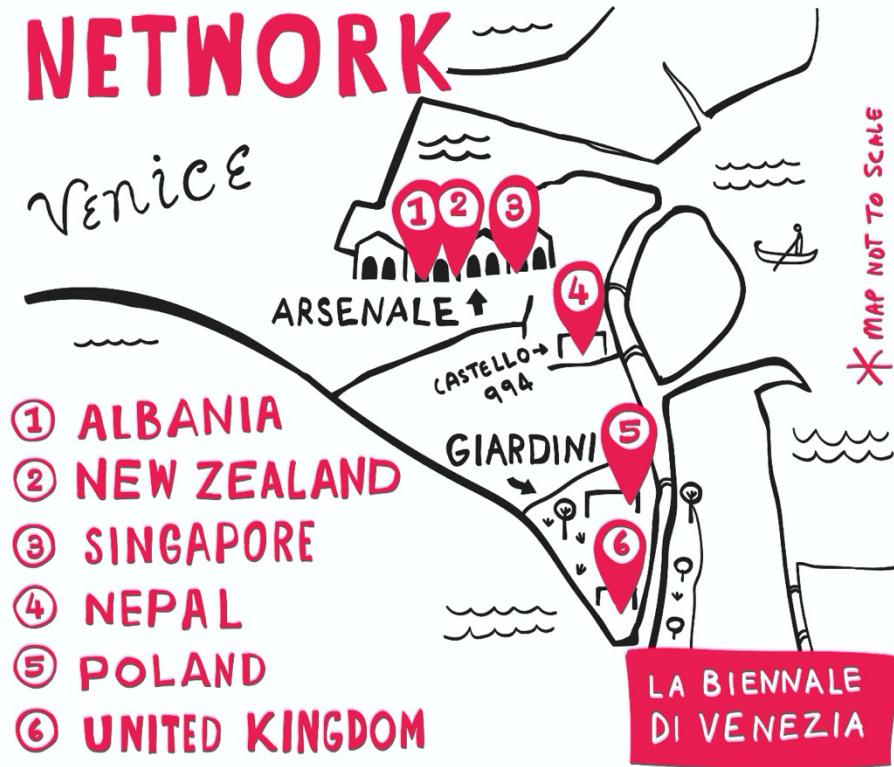


Figure 14. Map of Firsts Solidarity Network pavilions, spearheaded by artist Yuki Kihara during the 59th International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia, 2022. Courtesy of Yuki Kihara and Milford Galleries, Aotearoa New Zealand

Paradise Camp's themes are echoed in the exhibition's full-color catalogue, which opens with the poem "Fonofono o le nuanua (Patches of the Rainbow)," by Sāmoan poet Ruperake Petaia, reprinted in Sāmoan and English. The catalogue is a rich resource that outlines and explains the creative process of the exhibition, provides a scholarly documentation of Kihara's life and practice, and draws a nuanced view of Pacific history, art, and culture that privileges a *fa'afafine* perspective. In addition to Petaia's poem and Te Awekotuku's essay (with a new epilogue written for the catalogue), it includes poems by Dan

Taulapapa McMullin, who also provides an essay titled “Fa’afafine Theirstory,” and a wide-ranging interview between King and Kihara. Jacqueline Lo’s essay, “Interweaving Anew: The Japanese-Sāmoan Vā,” is one of the first to contextualize Kihara’s work within the framework of the Japanese concept of *ma* (間), “the fundamental time and space in which life needs to grow.”²⁷ Gordon-Smith contributes an extensive illustrated chronology of Kihara’s life that includes personal and historical landmarks. Other catalogue contributors are Coco Fusco, Elizabeth Childs, Chantal Spitz, Patrick Flores, Daniel Satele, and Fanny Wonu Veys.

The exhibition *Paradise Camp* illustrates Kihara’s artistic process. The inclusion of QR codes throughout the space, linked to a virtual exhibition, reenacts the Sāmoan *vā* by offering multiple times (during the exhibition and after) and spaces (in-person or online) to experience *Paradise Camp*. Additionally, it can be understood as a manifestation of the fourth dimension of the *tā-vā* theory of reality. I argue that to the exhibition’s immersive elements—the forums, the solidary network, the catalog and website with a virtual exhibition, and the invitation to the reader/viewer to commit to action—Kihara adds a fifth dimension, one in which *tā-vā* is global, embedded in the art world, the art market, and art history and criticism, which must be reckoned with going forward in discussions of Pacific art.

Paradise Camp is on view at the Powerhouse Museum—Ultimo in Sydney, Australia, through December 31, 2023.

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Bernida Webb-Binder is an assistant professor in the Department of Art & Visual Culture at Spelman College and is affiliated with the Atlanta University Center Art History + Curatorial Studies Collective. She theorizes Black Pacific art, visual, and material culture through an analysis of photographic portraiture, body adornment and performance, and narrative and identity. Dr. Webb-Binder received her PhD in the history of art and visual studies from Cornell University. Her research has been supported by Fulbright–New Zealand, the Ford Foundation, and the Getty Research Institute’s African American Art History Initiative.

Notes

¹ Viewers can explore the *Paradise Camp* exhibition as presented at the Venice Biennale at “Paradise Camp by Yuki Kihara,” <https://www.nzatvenice.com/>.

² Freddie Nelson, “Yuki Kihara: Paradise Camp,” *Burlington Contemporary*, May 25, 2022, <https://contemporary.burlington.org.uk/reviews/reviews/yuki-kihara-paradise-camp>; Jose da Silva, Gareth Harris, Hannah McGivern, and Tom Seymour, “Venice Biennale 2022: the must-see pavilions in the Arsenale,” *Art Newspaper*, April 20, 2022, <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2022/04/20/venice-biennale-2022-the-must-see-pavilions-in-the-arsenale?fbclid=IwAR0fygnA14-IgLDATPE3yBFaC4guQ5w5aoLzpxRw8p7y5zdWkxX5Jye0bEo>; Léuli Eshrāghi, “FA’AFABULOUS,” *Art Monthly Australasia*, no. 332 (Winter 2022): 74–79. <https://search-ebSCOhost-com.getty.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=asu&AN=156964509&site=ehost-live>; Tagata Pasifika, “Yuki Kihara: First Pacific Islander to represent NZ at the ‘Olympics of the art world,’” You Tube Video, 3:29, March 15, 2021, <https://youtu.be/oaZmcDvxG6M>.

³ “Vārchive” is a term used by Kihara to contextualize her archival research within the Sāmoan concept of *vā*.

⁴ This is the second site after the Giardini di Castello which has been in use since 1895. Twenty-nine countries maintain permanent pavilions at the Giardini. Many of these pavilions are designed by world-renowned architects and the buildings are styled to represent the country that maintains it.

⁵ Didactic labels—except for the introductory wall text to the left of the *vārchive*—were not included in the exhibition space. Instead, a Quick Response (QR) code at the entrance directed viewers to the official website at www.nzatvenice.com. The code provides a “shortcut” allowing you to point your phone’s camera at any of the artworks (including *vārchive* materials) to get a closer look, view descriptive videos starring Kihara, and, in the case of the twelve photographs, a digital slider that toggles between Gauguin’s painting and Kihara’s upcycled version. The website’s virtual explorer also includes a looping 4:37 minute soundtrack. This was best experienced with headphones, as the laughter and musical riffs of *First Impressions: Paul Gauguin* were a central focus of the space.

⁶ Ioana Gordon-Smith, “Yuki Kihara: Fa’afafine Nation,” *Art News New Zealand*, Winter 2022, accessed April 20, 2023, <https://www.artnews.co.nz/feature-winter-2022/>.

⁷ Albert Wendt, “Tatauing the Postcolonial Body,” *SPAN* 42–43 (April–October 1996), reprinted by New Zealand Electronic Poetry Centre/NZEPC, accessed April 24, 2023, <https://www.nzepc.auckland.ac.nz/authors/wendt/tatauing.asp>.

⁸ Tēvita O. Kai'iili, 'Ōkusitino Māhina, and Ping-Ann Addo, "Introduction: Tā-Vā (Time-Space): The Birth of an Indigenous Moana Theory," *Pacific Studies* 40, no. 1/2 (2017): 5.

⁹ Natalie King, "Camping Paradise: I am What I Am," in *Paradise Camp*, ed. Natalie King (Melbourne: Thames & Hudson, 2022), 25.

¹⁰ Paul Gauguin, *Noa Noa: Voyage de Tahiti*, ed. Julius Meier-Graefe (Berlin: R. Piper, 1926).

¹¹ Yuki Kihara, email to author, April 25, 2023.

¹² Pictured are (top row, left to right) Memea Eleitino Ma'aelopa and Tootoali'i Roger Stanley and (bottom row, left to right) Shevon Matai and Tuilagi Seiuli Ailani Allan Alo Va'ai.

¹³ Susan Sontag, "NOTES ON 'CAMP,'" in *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject: A Reader*, ed. Fabio Cleto (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), 62, 65, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctvxcrp56.8>.

¹⁴ Ngahuia Te Awekotuku, "He tangi mo Ha'apuani (A lament for Ha'apuani): Gauguin's models—a Māori perspective," (with epilogue) in *Paradise Camp*, ed. Natalie King (Melbourne: Thames & Hudson, 2022), 43–50.

¹⁵ Te Awekotuku, "He tangi mo Ha'apuani," 45.

¹⁶ Te Awekotuku, "He tangi mo Ha'apuani," 45.

¹⁷ Te Awekotuku, "He tangi mo Ha'apuani," 45.

¹⁸ Natalie King, "Yuki Kihara in Conversation with Natalie King," in *Paradise Camp*, ed. Natalie King (Melbourne: Thames & Hudson, 2022), 64.

¹⁹ Paul Gauguin, Ta matete (Le Marché), [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Paul_Gauguin,_1892,_Ta_matete_\(Le_Marché\),_oil_on_canvas,_73.2_x_91.5_cm,_Kunstmuseum_Basel.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Paul_Gauguin,_1892,_Ta_matete_(Le_Marché),_oil_on_canvas,_73.2_x_91.5_cm,_Kunstmuseum_Basel.jpg), accessed August 10, 2023.

²⁰ This verse in the Bible (King James Version) reads: "And the bow shall be in the clouds; and I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth.

²¹ King," Yuki Kihara in Conversation," 63.

²² Ibid.

²³ To view the transformation from Gauguin's original to Kihara's upcycled version, visit <https://www.nzatvenice.com/virtual-explore/artwork/paul-gauguin-with-a-hat> and scroll to the bottom of the webpage to the slider that toggles between the two versions.

²⁴ King, "Yuki Kihara in Conversation," 67.

²⁵ King, "Yuki Kihara in Conversation," 67.

²⁶ Pamela Rosi, "Concepts of Tā-Vā (Time-Space) in the Art Practice of Sāmoan Aotearoa Artist Shigeyuki Kihara," *Pacific Studies* 40, no. 1/2 (2017): 289.

²⁷ Jacqueline Lo, “Interweaving Anew: The Japanese-Sāmoan Vā,” in *Paradise Camp*, ed. Natalie King (Melbourne: Thames & Hudson, 2022), 141-147; Kiyoshi Matsumoto, “MA—The Japanese Concept of Space and Time,” accessed April 22, 2023, <https://medium.com/@kiyoshimatsumoto/ma-the-japanese-concept-of-space-and-time-3330c83ded4c>.