Camping paradise:

I AM WHAT I AM'

NATALIE KING

WHO AM I, WHAT AM I, AND WHAT ARE YOU?

Jim Vivieaere[2]

THE PACIFIC IS NO LONGER UNTOUCHED.

Charlize Leo, Miss Sāmoa Fa'afafine, 2017–18[3]

WE MUST FIND WAYS TO DECOLONIZE FROM INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURES THAT RETAIN A STRONGHOLD IN SĀMOA, THE MOANA, AND ITS DIVERSE GROUP OF PEOPLE, AND THAT KEEP ALL OF THEM FROM FULLY REALIZING THEIR FREEDOM AND SOVEREIGNTY.

Yuki Kihara[4]

WE SHALL SEE THAT ANOTHER SOLUTION IS POSSIBLE. IT IMPLIES RESTRUCTURING THE WORLD.

Frantz Fanon[5]

Yuki Kihara takes the tempo of our times in the midst of global turmoil and the groundswell of social justice, where disillusionment has transformed into solidarities and rage is reshaped into movements including Black Lives Matter, #MeToo, intersectionality, Indigenous sovereignty and climate change activism. In an array of artworks that are politically urgent and creatively astute, Kihara reflects on pertinent local and global issues from the perspective of Fa'afafine – 'in the manner of a woman'. 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. Kihara poses incisive questions: what does it mean to decolonise? How can communities speak back in order to counter dominant discourses and narratives? How can archives and research become performative, embodied and visible? What are the roles of hope and humour in inverting the script of trauma?

OPPOSITE
Two Fa'afafine (After Gauguin) (detail), 2020

In *Two Fa'afafine (After Gauguin)*, Rubenita Pau cradles a shallow bowl laden with rambutans, wearing a fuchsia pink 'ie lavalava, while Mandy Lynn Joyce holds a white flower and glances sideways as part of a taut composition of grace and dignity. In another photograph, Fa'afafine Tiara Tu'ulua sits on a timber rocking chair with her son Joshua across her lap and her daughter Blessing nearby clutching a teddy bear. Verdant foliage frames this compelling image (see page 87) set in the village of Amaile on Upolu Island, Sāmoa. A midwife, Tiara adopted her children, even though they were born prematurely and were perceived to be compromised in health terms, and so, potentially burdensome. Resplendent in a blue, patterned dress and garland of flowers, Tiara is a mother and motherly, caring and careful, as denoted in the title *Fa'afafine with children (After Gauguin)*. She is both poised and gazing at the camera directly with the gravitas and sanctity of assured motherhood. Yet, on the children's birth certificate, Tiara, the devoted mother, is described as the 'father'.

Affirmatively depicted from the distinctive perspective of Fa'afafine or third gender in Sāmoa, Kihara's performative photography upcycles select paintings by French Impressionist Paul Gauguin with fidelity to detail in a suite of incandescent images that challenge Gauguin in an insolent and daring reclamation. Kihara's audacious re-enactments deftly alter and reinstate a Polynesian inflection to each photograph highlighted within scenography of dazzling costumes, a vibrant palette and richly tropical landscapes. Kihara's photo portraits eloquently and provocatively investigate a range of critical issues, including the intertwinements of colonisation, intersectionality and climate catastrophe.

An ensemble exhibition, *Paradise Camp* unravels colonial histories linked with gender politics and environmental concerns. Conceived eight years ago, after an extensive gestation, *Paradise Camp* comprises a suite of twelve tableau photographs in saturated colour; and 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.

Casting storyboard, 2019

In her photographs, Kihara repurposes select paintings by Paul Gauguin, created during his time in the islands of Tahiti and the Marquesas between 1891 and 1903. Gauguin epitomises the notion of paradise in his paintings of Indigenous peoples of the islands, where stereotypes mask colonial violence and oppression. Kihara problematises Gauguin's outsized legacy in defining the Pacific, reclaiming and tampering with his Eurocentric and colonial bias. By amplifying Gauguin's distortions in an ingenious upcycling as decolonial tactic, Kihara reinstates Indigenous queer histories: 'Despite Gauguin's problematic gaze, his paintings of Māhū serve as a visual record of an early Indigenous queer his/her/theirstory in the Pacific.'[6]

By translocating Gauguin back to the Pacific, Kihara's re-enactments are based on strong personal relationships with her sitters, all of whom are part of the Fa'afafine community. They are photographed in rural villages, churches, plantations, rivers, beaches, heritage sites, streams and abandoned houses, with Kihara selecting landmarks in the Anoama'a East, Aleipata, Falealili and Lotofaga districts of Upolu Island, Sāmoa. As such, the project carries stories, histories, creativity and politics while overturning cultural and gender stereotypes. Kihara not only disrupts the dominant male gaze alluded to in Gauguin's original paintings but presents an alluring alternative. This enthralling, revisionist account of the Western art history canon proposes a counter vision. Derived from a staunchly Pasifika perspective, Kihara's *Paradise Camp* reflects on a relational society where the subjectivity of land and belonging is interconnected with water, tides and oceanscapes. Further, Kihara deftly blurs the binary divisions to do with notions of fact/fiction, paradise/apocalypse, man/woman, savage and civilised.

Kihara confers a holistic perspective and capacious world view of ancestors, heavens and beyond as articulated in Sāmoan poet and writer Albert Wendt's 'Towards a New Oceania':

> So vast, so fabulously varied a scatter of islands, nations, cultures, mythologies and myths, so dazzling a creature, Oceania deserves more than an attempt at mundane fact; only the imagination in free flight can hope - if not to contain her - to grasp some of her shape, plumage, and pain.[7]

In preparation for *Paradise Camp*, Kihara undertook an extensive phase of consultation with traditional landowners including Letiu Lee Palupe, high chief of the Aleipata district, to gain permission to shoot on location, as well as discussions with Alex Su'a, president of the Sāmoa Fa'afafine Association, to seek a cross-generational cast.

Paradise Camp has been a comprehensive undertaking involving a cast of Fa'afafine, including the artist herself, and a local crew of over sixty people, with broad community engagement between Sāmoa and New Zealand. Kihara's project seamlessly alludes to Pacific geopolitics based on self-determination rather than dependence or indebtedness, exploring traditional communal systems, gender politics and the impact of climate change.

STRIKE A POSE: GENDER PERFORMATIVITY[8]

WE ARE NOT DRAG QUEENS, OR FEMALE IMPERSONATORS TRYING TO IMPERSONATE SOMEBODY, NO. WE ARE WHO WE ARE.

Resitara Apa[9]

since the early 1980s. Kihara's astute knowledge of Polynesian queer history is combined with acting up and acting out:

> The process of working in collaboration with the Fa'afafine community was an empowering and liberating experience which showed our collective resilience in the aftermath of the recent measles epidemic.[10]

Tanya To'omalātai poses in *Two Fa'afafine going to church (After Gauguin)* with her niece Lesina Rodler dressed in their Sunday attire in front of a church. The duo occupies the foreground in a composition where Tanya is the lead protagonist in this double portrait that is imbued with respectful agency. By casting non-actors and Fa'afafine beauty queens to perform scenes, the photographs empower Kihara's friends and talented community in a distinctive visual repertoire and socially engaged process of mobilisation. Kihara's community contribute to her practice as active subjects, content and participants. Apart from one image, Kihara works outside a studio on location, like a mobile atelier, in order to select diverse landscape spaces as settings for her portraits and work in situ. Her expansive, situational practice engages with urgent social issues within the communal sphere, beyond the confines of the studio. By not being limited to one space, Kihara can listen to untold stories of her own community in Sāmoa, and redress the way identities are constructed, reconstructed and performed in front of the camera.

An interdisciplinary artist of Sāmoan and Japanese heritage, Kihara comes from a creative family: her father was a civil engineer and her mother a chef at Sāmoa's first Japanese restaurant, Lesina's Lounge. Initially trained in fashion, editorial and theatre, she attended primary school in Ōsaka and lived with her family in Jakarta before going to boarding school in Wellington. Studying fashion design at Wellington Polytechnic, Kihara sought fashion as a sculptural material yet resisted the industry and vocational focus of the course. Instead, she produced *Teuanoa'i: Adorn to Excess,* a series of T-shirts featuring reappropriated corporate logos that was displayed at the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa in 2001. Adroitly working across performance, photography, collage, curation and dance, Kihara's early training in fashion as a stylist was a precursor to her creative dexterity.

Moreover, the annual Fa'afafine beauty pageants have been a participatory source of inspiration for Kihara, who was herself a judge in 2017. Pioneered in the 1980s by the late Moefa'auō Tanya To'omalātai, the beauty pageants are entertaining events but also empowering occasions specifically designed to address injustice experienced by the community in terms of non-acceptance and violence. In 2013, the Fa'afafine community welcomed the replacement of the *Crimes Ordinance Act* of 1961: a law enforced during the New Zealand colonial administration of Sāmoa that criminalised the impersonation of a female by a male in Sāmoa. Historically the law was used to persecute Fa'afafine with fines or imprisonment, although it has not been actively enforced by police

Fa'afafine take on leading roles within scenes inspired by paintings, not as a deferential gesture but rather one of reclamation and subversion. Kihara is a Fa'afafine artist transposing a dead white male European artist: a defiant interpretation of these ossified paintings, turning them into contemporary versions with potency, beauty and grace while extending the boundaries of portraiture. For example, in *Spirit of the ancestors watching (After Gauguin)*, Cindy of Sāmoa, a renowned performer and singer, reclines seductively under a palm tree before a seascape as an odalisque - a traditional Western art trope - sensitive and naked before a rising tide. For Kihara, 'Cindy is someone I've always admired growing up because her self-expression gave me the licence to be myself.'[11]

FOLLOWING

Two Fa'afafine going to church (After Gauguin) (detail), 2020

Spirit of the ancestors watching (After Gauguin) (detail), 2020

IN-DRAG-ENOUS: 'KO WAI KOUTOU, AKE? WHO ARE YOU, REALLY?'[12]

In 2008, Kihara presented a solo exhibition at The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York where she saw, for the first time, Gauguin paintings. Significantly, Kihara's work was acquired by the museum. Prior to visitor entry at dawn, she gained access to the Gauguin wing, allowing her to commune with Gauguin's paintings while her own exhibition, *Living Photographs*, was being held in the Lila Acheson Wallace Wing in the Department of Modern and Contemporary Art, including her renowned *Fa'afafine: In the Manner of a Woman*. In this series, Kihara casts herself in re-enactments of 19th-century ethnographic photographs and dismantles Western binary norms of sexuality and gender. In a sepia-toned triptych, the artist is photographed as she reclines on a chaise as an odalisque, referencing a trope adopted by earlier anthropological photographers working in colonial Sāmoa such as Thomas Andrew and Alfred James Tattersall where, typically, sitters were posed partially clothed among props and backdrops of tropical foliage.[13] Kihara re-creates the studio tableaux with each image revealing her protagonist in different stages of undress as both male and female, thereby challenging gender stereotypes. As art historian Erika Wolf highlights:

> Just as ethnographic photography provided a limited and distorted stereotypical representation of non-Western peoples, the imposition of Western concepts of sexuality onto Pacific cultures functioned to impoverish and repress rich, multivalent traditions.[14]

Kihara denotes her theatrical mise-en-scenes as 'In-drag-enous',[15] fusing costuming, backdrops and highly staged scenarios while simultaneously referencing Sāmoan traditional community theatre:

> In old Sāmoa, 'faleaitu' (house of spirits) was theatre performed by men presenting political satire in skits in front of the chiefs. The men of 'faleaitu' were respected as entertainers and simultaneously served as social commentators to the wider community. It is the ancient practice of 'faleaitu' which led me to create my recent body of work entitled *Fa'afafine: In the Manner of a Woman* (2005), a series of photographic self-portraits where I disguise myself to portray a Sāmoan man, a woman and a married couple. These works pay homage to my ancestors and simultaneously subvert the dominant Western heterosexual 'normalcy' that continues to conflict with the existence of Fa'afafine people today.[16]

During a one-month sojourn in New York, Kihara returned repeatedly to view Gauguin's paintings, recognising aspects of herself, eventually igniting the concept of *Paradise Camp*, further inspired by an essay entitled 'He tangi mo Ha'apuani (A lament for Ha'apuani): Gauguin's models – a Māori perspective' by Māori scholar Dr Ngahuia te Awekotuku MNZM, presented at the Gauguin Symposium in 1992 at Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki.[17] In her paper, te Awekotuku discusses how Gauguin deliberately painted his models to appear androgynous and exotic as a reflection of his personal and sexual fascination with the 'Māhū' – the equivalent of Fa'afafine within the Indigenous culture of Tahiti as described in Gauguin's journal *Noa Noa*.[18] Te Awekotuku's foundational paper ardently critiques Gauguin's paintings from a Māori, deeply personal and non-binary perspective. She pauses, reflects and questions: 'Ko wai koutou, ake? Who are you, really?'

Te Awekotuku's revisionist account is the bedrock of Kihara's *Paradise Camp*, infusing the project with a Polynesian narrative while dismantling Gauguin's legacy and exploitation. Instead, te Awekotuku writes on Polynesian and Māori sexuality as non-binary:

> The male-female opposition was reconfigured and reinforced in the 19th century by missionaries, gentleman scholars and Christian Māori scribes as the accepted norm, though the natives persist in its subversion.[19]

Perhaps the most transformative photograph in *Paradise Camp* is an elaborate self-portrait where Kihara returns indoors to a studio in Auckland, casting herself as Gauguin in an ingenious reversal (see page 112). *Paul Gauguin with a hat (After Gauguin)* mutates Kihara via silicone prosthetics, costume and wig. Reperforming as Gauguin heightens the overarching disguise for Kihara: the ultimate decolonial gesture. As well, by re-enacting the physical alteration and role reversal of Impressionism, Kihara commands her own space within the traditions of art history, and by upending the conventions of portraiture itself, she provides an unnerving self-portrait of her own.

OPPOSITE
Ulugali'i Sāmoa: Sāmoan couple, 2004/2020

SCENOGRAPHY AND MISE-EN-SCENE

Kihara's faithless re-enactments are the same dimensions as Gauguin's original paintings with the titles reworked into Sāmoan. This mirroring in scale and composition transposes these images of colonial infliction back to the community in Sāmoa who proudly gaze affirmatively at the camera. Further, Kihara's elaborate production was composed entirely of Sāmoan cast and crew. Working with a film production methodology across photography, moving image and archival material, Kihara carefully selected locations, props, wardrobe, make-up and hair while undertaking community liaison through briefings and rehearsals. Heavily styled and stylised, *Paradise Camp*, with its heightened coloration and exaggerated re-enactments, melds fantasy and reality within a humorous, 'camp' repartee. Mimicry cleverly flips colonial antecedents while cross-pollinating new stories of resilience and triumph. Kihara reframes the myth of the Pacific, as exemplified by Gauguin, and in so doing, reinstates a potent storytelling tradition:

> I used to see Gauguin's work feature in tourism paraphernalia like coffee mugs, postcards, T-shirts, posters, and cruise ship advertisements outside of Sāmoa … I remember thinking how strange it was to be in front of his paintings, as if time and space had collapsed. Here we were as artists from two different parts of the world having a dialogue in two different moments in art history.[20]

Kihara situates the 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.[21]

Even though the beach and oceanscape are alluring metaphors, the undercurrent belies the tumultuous history as outlined by Tongan Fijian scholar Epeli Hau'ofa, who postulates on the vastness and co-prosperity of Oceania:

> Oceania is hospitable and generous, Oceania is humanity rising from the depths of brine and regions of fire deeper still, Oceania is us. We are the sea, we are the ocean, we must wake up to this ancient truth and together use it to overturn all hegemonic views that aim ultimately to confine us again, physically, and psychologically, in the tiny spaces that we have resisted accepting as our sole appointed places, and from which we have recently liberated ourselves.[22]

The ocean is a sacred space, connecting to neighbouring islands and ancestry.

The beach is a complex and contested place of arrival and departure, as well as a site impacted by climate change, but is also part of tourist propaganda. Layers of historical and custodial meaning are embedded in the beach and sea as a place of belonging, since 80 per cent of Sāmoa's population lives along the coastal strip. Previously, Kihara has mined this metaphor in the black-and-white photographic series *Where do we come from? What are we? Where are we going?* (2013) whereby she appears as the Biblical figure Salome, notoriously adapted by Oscar Wilde into a sinister tale of a woman scorned. In Kihara's version, she stands mournfully in Victorian costume poised on a beach and gazing wanly into the distance. Kihara's site-sensitive photograph (see page 130) is specific to her locality yet extends beyond geographies to the shared legacy of colonialism, diaspora and the retention of culture.

Explorers' journals describe that the beach was used for 'blackbirding' – islanders being transported elsewhere to work on primarily Western-owned enterprises – thus becoming a place where trickery, kidnapping and violence resulted.[23] Moreover, since the beginning of the 18th century, the effect of rising sea levels and increasing acidification of the surrounding ocean in Sāmoa has impacted this habitat as well as the devastation caused by the tsunami in September 2009. The artist is cognisant that the reality of the impact of climate problems dents any colonialist notion of 'paradise':

> The title of my exhibition is intended to 'camp' the notion of 'paradise' by using satire and subversion to question the notion of the Pacific often associated with unpolluted and vacant white sandy beaches that are constantly re-created by the tourism industry.[24]

By casting her photographs on location, in situ from villages to the seaside, Kihara reflects on the injuries of colonialism and patriarchal structures by presenting a different view of the world that is open, inclusive, accepting and humorous. Kihara returns us to American writer Susan Sontag's 1964 'Notes on "Camp"', whereby high and low art is collapsed and the vernacular celebrated in a dazzling parlance where the real, artificial and artifice are a heady mix of life as theatre:

> Camp responds particularly to the markedly attenuated and to the strongly exaggerated. The androgyne is certainly one of the great images of Camp sensibility … to perceive Camp in objects and persons is to understand Being-as-Playing-a-Role. It is the farthest extension, in sensibility, of the metaphor of life as theater.[25]

In Kihara's photograph *Genesis 9:16 (After Gauguin)* (see page 91), she assembles a group of Fa'atama (in the manner of a man) in rainbow-coloured outfits seated across a bench holding various props such as a woven fan and conch shell. Referencing Gauguin's *Ta Matete*, 1892 – the marketplace of social gathering in Papeete – the figures sit side by side in both images, possibly modelled on tomb frescoes. Yet Kihara expands the reference by assembling a garrulous gathering that riffs off Western rainbow pride – as well as the symbolism of the rainbow in Sāmoan culture as a bridge from the mortal to the divine world - while provocatively satirising the original. With urgency and humour, Kihara's subversive and melodramatic mise-en-scenes induce a queer, Indigenous lens on these camp scenarios.

QUEERING THE ARCHIVE

I MAKE ART TO MAKE SENSE OF MY THOUGHT PROCESSES.

Yuki Kihara[26]

A research fellow at the National Museum of World Cultures in the Netherlands, Kihara incorporates deep research, reading, archival study and the uncovering of overlooked histories into her practice. An essentially revisionist section in *Paradise Camp* is therefore devoted to archives and includes colonial portraits, a 3D render of Vailulu'u volcano (formally called Fa'afafine volcano), source material, posters, advertisements and explorers' journals. Kihara says: 'Working with archives often feels like I'm using time as a sculptural material to talk about what's happening now and what would happen in the future.'[27]

This exhibition within an exhibition amasses historical photos from her personal collection, early accounts of Fa'afafine in accumulated documents, images and narratives. Typically, archives are rigid and formulaic, yet Kihara assembles an alternative and exploratory archive that conflates pop culture, ethnography, aesthetic anthropology and historical imagery. Components include posters and newspaper clippings, including references to 'exotic' cruise advertising campaigns in the Pacific; the cover of the *Samoa Observer* which published an unblurred photo of the alleged suicide of Jeanine Tuivaiki, a twenty-year-old student and Fa'afafine; Kihara's extensive personal archive comprising missionary and explorer accounts published in books from the 19th century; colonial portraits; Pasifika safe sex posters by the NZ AIDS Foundation; footage and reverential photographs of Fa'afafine who were interviewed for the publication *Samoan Queer Lives*, which was co-edited with Eastern Sāmoan artist Dan Taulapapa McMullin.

In the exhibition and publication *Gauguin: A Spiritual Journey*, Kihara reflects on Gauguin's brief visit to Auckland in August 1895 where he made detailed sketches of Māori and Moana Pacific Treasures held at Auckland Art Gallery and Auckland Museum.[28] While Gauguin didn't visit Sāmoa, Kihara's in-depth research has led her to speculate on Gauguin's access to photographs of people and places in Sāmoa, particularly those of New Zealand photographer Thomas Andrew.

Kihara's archive augments and compounds her photographs with early accounts and representations of Fa'afafine displayed against a siapo-patterned backdrop inspired by her siapo teacher, the late Sylvia Hanipale. Siapo is the fine cloth made from the bark of the paper mulberry tree with a distinctive pattern and used in ceremonial occasions, especially weddings and funeral services. Kihara's siapo wallpaper binds the disparate archival components such as photographs (circa 1900) of Sāmoans exhibited in the Völkerschau (human zoos) in Europe and North America, and a group photo of New Zealand colonial officers who established the first legislative assembly of Sāmoa, which introduced laws incriminating homosexuality that remain in place. Kihara integrates archives and memories, posters and performances, thus allowing her to retrieve and retell her own story, while queering the archive from the multifarious position of being, in her own words, 'interracial, intercultural and intergendered'.[29]

ABOVE
Arjan Hoeflak and Mariano Vivanco, *Queens of the Pacific* poster, New Zealand AIDS Foundation, late 1990s

FOLLOWING
Three Fa'afafine (After Gauguin) (detail), 2020

PARADISE CAMP TV

SHE IS IN A VERY SAD PERIOD FROM LOSING HER CULTURE TO A DIFFERENT IDEOLOGY.

Charlize Leo, former Miss Fa'afafine Sāmoa[30]

DON'T YOU THINK THE GIRL IN THE PAINTING IS LIKE THAT BECAUSE OF INVASION?

Anastasia, host of episode one,
First Impressions: Paul Gauguin[31]

The soundscape for *Paradise Camp* is *First Impressions: Paul Gauguin*, a five-part episodic talk show featuring a group of Fa'afafine critiquing selected works by Paul Gauguin, who is both essentially unknown and irrelevant to them. With remarkable candour and acerbic humour, the five guests comment on the appearance of Gauguin's paintings with hilarity and insight. Hosted by Anastasia Fantasia Vancouver Stanley (aka Queen Hera) and commissioned by the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco and the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen, *First Impressions* draws us into the *Paradise Camp* universe.

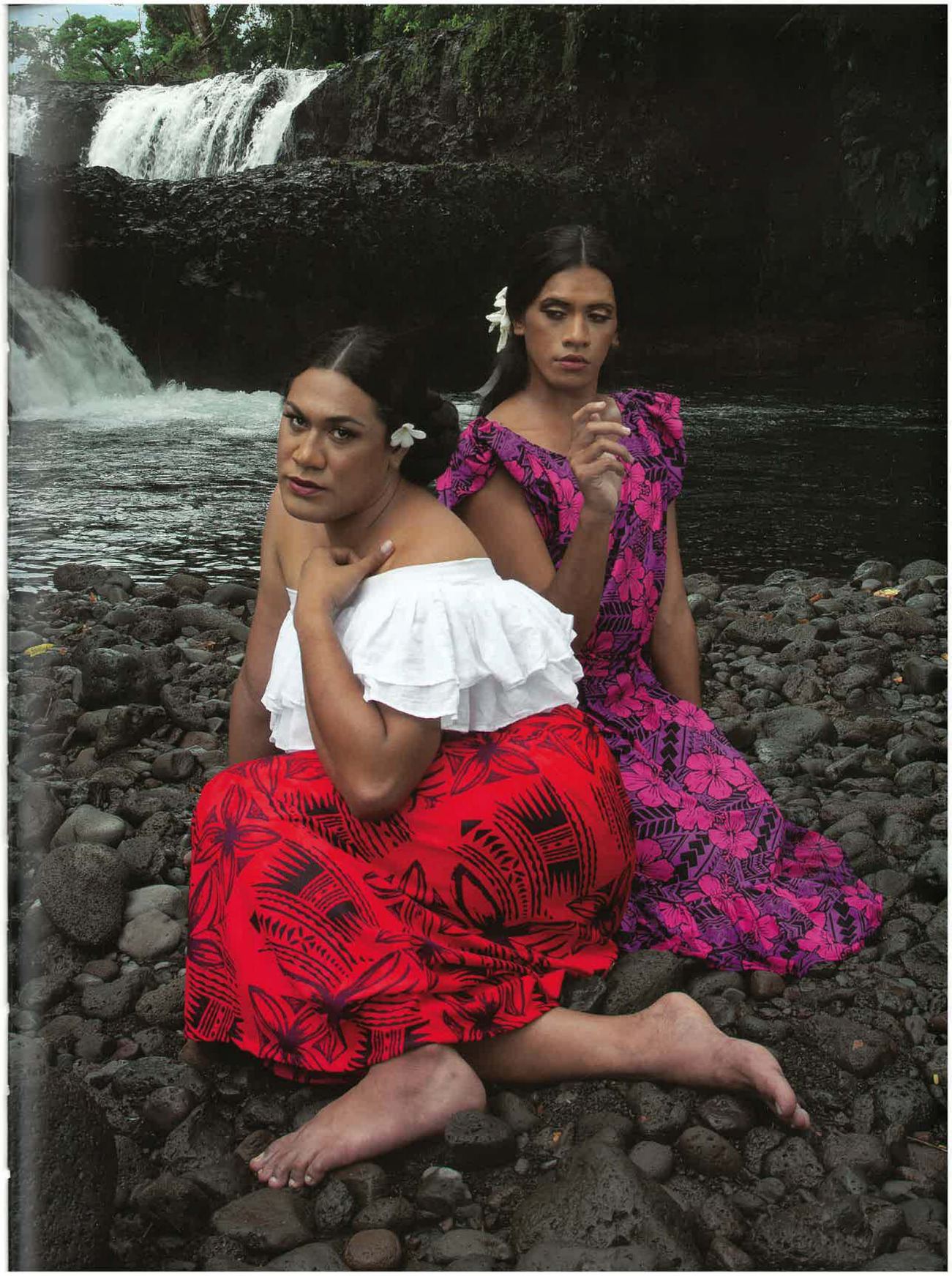
At once humorous and pointed, the assembled 'panel of beauties' includes former Miss Fa'afafine Sāmoa Charlize Leo, resplendent in a bejewelled crown, and Vanila Heather, the president of Fa'atama Sāmoa. John, the host's interim 'husband', brings out facsimile paintings such as *Vahine no te tiare* (*Woman with a Flower*) (1891) and places them on an easel for commentary. Anastasia asks: 'Would you do your hair like that, Charlize?' to which she responds: 'She is giving me that Polynesian vibe which is very attractive,' while Vanila remarks: 'She's no hoe, she has elegance!' Discussing hairdos, whether the sitters are sufficiently attractive, their attire and the monetary value of the paintings, the group laughs in unison. Collectively, they speculate on Gauguin's message: 'I feel it's to maintain culture and tradition, and the difficulties these people endured' (Vanila).

The title *First Impressions* is a double take on Gauguin's Impressionism from the perspective of a group of Fa'afafine. The episodes commence with a brief interlude in a colonial museum wing – The Marianne and Richard H Peterson Gallery – with grand portraits in gilt frames and baroque furnishings swiftly shifting to a group of Fa'afafine dancing in frame to the upbeat opening song. Like a segment from reality TV, the non-scripted banter hilariously demotes Gauguin while commenting on Eurocentricity and colonial exploitation with empathy towards the sitters.

In episode two, the panel discusses *Nafea faa ipoipo?* (*When Will You Marry?*) (1892) and their desire for marriage, love and looking for 'Mr Right'. The host asks: 'what the girl behind the girl at the front is doing?' and they hypothesise wildly as to whether it is a back massage, giving wishes for a happy marriage or 'fighting for the same guy'. Kihara further complicates the inquiry into same-sex union in her photograph where the title is altered into Sāmoan, with Celine Hunter and Tyra Fanks positioned demurely with a waterfall in the distance, oblivious to Gauguin's reputation:

> Despite Gauguin's popularity in the art world, no one in the Moana (Indigenous pan-Polynesian term for the 'Pacific') cares about who he is. However, his works produced in Tahiti and the Marquesas Islands have today become a blanket stereotype of the Indigenous people and the region, presented as noble savages living in idyllic paradise ripe for Western consumption.[32]

OPPOSITE
Nafea e te fa'aipoipo? When will you marry? (After Gauguin) (detail), 2020



COMMUNE WITH COMMUNITY

BEING A FA'AFAFINE ITSELF IS AN ACT OF REVOLUTION.

Alex Su'a, president of the Sāmoa Fa'afafine Association[33]

In her essay on being a community navigator, Pasifika practitioner Phylesha Brown-Acton reflects on Polynesian practices of dance, weaving, storytelling and navigation inherently tied to the Ocean:

> The Fone Fale model uses the floor of the fale [house] to depict the foundation of a fale Sāmoa. A representation of family connection by kin, relationships and genealogy which connects them to titles, land, sea and gods.[34]

The notion of orientation and belonging in the fale is also articulated in *Samoan Queer Lives*:

> ... the fale is free. The fale doesn't have wings, walls; it's a place for shelter. All the qualities of fale is what I feel about dance. It's open. It's for people to come look at and come watch. It's shared. I believe all the things that are happening to us, all the social things, is for us to come together as a community.[35]

A fale appears in the background of Kihara's photograph *Si'ou alofa Maria: Hail Mary (After Gauguin)*, which uses the former residence of Paramount Chief of Sāmoa Matā'afa Iosefo, who played a pivotal role in the 19th century, during the country's colonial era, when Germany, Great Britain and the United States were vying for control of the Sāmoan archipelago. Kihara first saw Gauguin's version of the painting *Ia orana Maria* (*Hail Mary*) (1891) at The Metropolitan Museum of Art in 2008, which she revisited by casting Fa'afafine activist Vaito'a Toelupe in the role of Mary and imbibing the image within the Sāmoan cultural context:

> Gauguin's painting *Ia orana Maria* alludes to the Christian influence in French Polynesia by rendering the biblical narrative of three kings visiting Mary after she had given birth to Jesus in a Tahitian setting. My version of *Si'ou alofa Maria: Hail Mary (After Gauguin)* (2020) repurposes and upcycles Gauguin's *Ia orana Maria* (*Hail Mary*) into a Sāmoan setting to highlight the connection between Sāmoa and Tahiti through the establishment of the Congregational Christian Church of Sāmoa also known locally as 'Iotu Tahiti ('Tahitian prayer')' to denote the arrival of the Christian faith in Sāmoa in 1830 first introduced by London missionary John Williams and his Tahitian Māohi missionaries that travelled from Tahiti.[36]

Paradise Camp reflects on the injuries of colonialism and patriarchal structures by presenting a renewed world view that is open, inclusive, accepting and humorous, replete with double entendres. Kihara's remediation of Western art history from Gauguin to Manet is manifested in the vast photograph *Fonofono o le nuanua: Patches of the rainbow (After Gauguin)*, emulating Gauguin's *Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?* (1897–98). Here, a group of Fa'afafine poses riverside in bright attire in a photograph spanning over 3 metres that is like a frieze in scale and complexity. Poetic, profound and resilient, this community portrait asserts new narratives, confounding what te Awekotuku calls the:

> ... pernicious and globalizing world order, the English-speaking imperium. Because they are about survival and resilience, about adapting beyond translation and the singularity of idiom, in what Maori call *te ao huri-huri*, the ever-turning world.[37]

In *Paradise Camp*, Kihara traverses scholarship, contemporary art, history, popular culture and politics within a practice that binds communities without mandating hierarchy. *Paradise Camp* is not confined to aesthetics but extends to participation, enlarging our understanding and raising questions rather than issuing agendas. By camping paradise, Kihara takes us back to Wendt's multifarious Oceania: 'whenever we think we have captured her she has already assumed new guises'.[38] Similarly, Kihara's creative wayfinding steers us towards a geo-poetics of place, eliciting our capacity to imagine relationships anew while forging radical forms of togetherness and solidarity.

OPPOSITE
The Wizard (After Gauguin) (detail), 2020

FOLLOWING
Si'ou alofa Maria: Hail Mary (After Gauguin) (detail), 2020

Repurposing Gauguin

ELIZABETH CHILDS

Yuki Kihara purposively deploys the art and life of Paul Gauguin as her platform, 'upcycling' the French artist who worked in Tahiti and the Marquesas Islands for over a decade between 1891 and 1903. Throughout her *Paradise Camp* series, Kihara unfolds a thoughtful Indigenous critique of Gauguin's use of the bodies, art and culture of Pacific Islanders to advance the avant-garde agenda he developed in fin-de-siècle Paris. Gauguin constructed a persona of himself as 'savage' and uncivilised for the purpose of asserting his own claims to invention and novelty within the evolving modernism of the French art of his time. By unravelling Gauguin's agenda, Kihara targets Gauguin's endeavours in Polynesia in the 1890s – not only in his work as an artist but also his actions as a member of French colonial society. In so doing, Kihara seeks to 'repurpose' Gauguin's images by extracting them from the currencies of canonical art history and by redirecting the viewer to the concerns of contemporary Pacific Islanders.

OPPOSITE
Paul Gauguin with a hat (After Gauguin), 2020

LEFT
Paul Gauguin, *Self-Portrait with a Hat*, 1893–94

Kihara coins the term 'visual sustainability' to describe her process of recycling signature images in a way that counters and neutralises their colonial power. Moreover, Kihara emphatically foregrounds the presence of the resilient Fa'afafine queer community of Sāmoa by affirming their longstanding role in Indigenous culture while inserting them in global conversations about queer identity. Both as an artist and as a socially engaged thinker, Kihara intervenes in contemporary visual culture on behalf of her Fa'afafine community, who have long been marginalised within and discriminated against in a modern Sāmoan society dominated by residual colonial, political, legal and religious structures.

Kihara staged the first eleven photographs of *Paradise Camp* in Sāmoa on beaches and riverbanks, in tropical gardens, and on verdant lawns of Upolu Island. But for the final photograph of the series, she relocated to an indoor photographic studio in New Zealand, assembling a large professional team who worked together for three days to assist in the creation of *Paul Gauguin with a hat (After Gauguin)*.[1] She underwent a four-hour make-up session to assume the guise of Gauguin, whose photographs and self-portrait remained on the mirrors in the studio, as professional make-up artists transformed Kihara's face into that of the (in)famous dead white artist, whose art and writings promoted Polynesia as an ideal colonial paradise.

Maui ti'eti'e talaga: Maui and the first fire of Sāmoa, 2004

Previously she had twice assumed the guise of a Sāmoan man in order to question and blur the gender binary of male/female that Sāmoan society inherited from its colonial history.[2] In her newer work in *Paradise Camp*, she achieves a cross-cultural as well as a cross-gender blurring of identities. The experience was both exhausting and instructive, Kihara recalls, because 'the more make-up I put [on], the more it revealed what I was thinking about in the context of colonially constructed boundaries of race, gender, sexuality and geography'.[3] The process gave Kihara creative agency and physical power over art history, as she could assume, inhabit, and then shed the guise and persona of the celebrated white artist. She donned a period suit, complete with silk cravat and modish vest and a Sāmoan straw hat, to further assume the roles of Frenchman, exoticist, colonist and artist.

Kihara credits the performativity of this project to the inspiration of the faleaitu (house of spirits) skits traditionally performed in Sāmoan culture for high chiefs.[4] Disgruntled by some aspects of village life, a group of men staged elaborate comedic skits in disguise to draw the attention of local leaders to the concerns of villagers. Those who performed in faleaitu were regarded as local activists who, in the space of the play, effectively defied authority with humour and disguise to better their own social conditions. Similarly, Kihara assumed the character of Gauguin to counter a social condition – the lingering impact in Sāmoa of the heteronormative colonial gaze, literally embodied by Gauguin's visage.

Why did Kihara choose to stage this particular self-portrait of Gauguin out of the dozens of possibilities? Gauguin painted the canvas (now at the Musée d'Orsay) not in Polynesia, but in Paris after his return in 1891, where he set up his studio at the Rue Vercingétorix as a French staging of his 'studio of the tropics'. In that space, he displayed souvenirs of his Pacific sojourn: he mounted traditional spears on the walls as emblems of male dominance and his 'savage' identity; he also had at least one bark cloth, a Tongan ngatu, which he spread over his writing table like a tablecloth. The Orsay canvas offers direct proof of the artist's voyage in two objects, one being a royal blue and yellow Tahitian pareu cloth of the sort he and many of his models alike might have worn as their daily costume. Above he displays his canvas of 1892, *Manaò tupapaú* (*Spirit of the Dead Watching*), perhaps his most famous depiction of his Tahitian teenage mistress Teha'amana. He wears a fashionable Buffalo Bill hat, a style du jour that invoked the cowboy adventurer made famous by William Cody's 'Wild West' shows staged in Paris in 1889. Details of his studio interior affirm Gauguin's multiple roles in the Parisian avant-garde as notorious traveller, adventurer, exoticist, painter and as heteronormative male colonist. Kihara resists and inverts these historic identities in her photograph.

Kihara's most significant departure from the Gauguin prototype is the spectacular background of the image: a photographic reproduction of Sāmoan bark cloth, siapo. Kihara selected a pattern made by the late Sylvia Hanipale, her own teacher in this traditional art form. This featured background signals Kihara's desire to 'Sāmoanise' Gauguin in *Paradise Camp*, restaging the inspiration such Indigenous art has long offered other renowned European artists who visited the Pacific, such as the Scottish writer Robert Louis Stevenson, who covered the walls of his Sāmoan home, still preserved today in Vailima, with dramatic examples of siapo.

By introducing the distinctively Sāmoan cultural tradition of siapo, Kihara eclipses both the Tahitian and French worlds where Gauguin actually worked. Through this choice, Kihara asserts her keen awareness that in some of his 'Tahitian' works, Gauguin referenced images of Sāmoan individuals. Papeete in the 1890s was a crossroads of colonial trade, and Gauguin encountered numerous photographs of Sāmoans and other Pacific Islanders in the curio shops on the quay of the colonial capital. Although Gauguin never visited Sāmoa, he freely mixed photographs taken in this and in other Pacific cultures (such as Rapa Nui, Fiji and the Marquesas) in his portable musée imaginaire of images pinned to the walls of his studios.[5]

To highlight this place of Sāmoa in European ideations, Kihara features several of the Sāmoan photographs that inspired Gauguin on her archive wall in *Paradise Camp*. In one collage, Kihara transposes the central passage of Gauguin's painting *Pape moe* (*Mysterious Water*) (1893) over a copy of the colonial photograph (perhaps taken by another European traveller, Stevenson's son-in-law Joseph Strong) that directly inspired the painting (see page 64). Kihara thus foregrounds Sāmoa's place in an enduring colonial imaginary of island paradise and spectacularised bodies of Pacific Islanders. The figure in the photograph, wearing a Sāmoan sarong, an 'ie lavalava, is notably androgynous and may be a Fa'afafine, a possibility that might well explain Gauguin's interest in this particular image during his first years in Polynesia.

While posing for her photograph of *Paul Gauguin with a hat (After Gauguin)*, Kihara reflected on the construction of artistic legacies. Gauguin's was of his moment: he strove to consolidate his position within the French avant-garde through his art, his writings and his dramatic persona as a self-styled 'savage' working in the distant reaches of French empire. By contrast, Kihara references Gauguin's now canonical imagery to repurpose it in *Paradise Camp*. Kihara's fresh perspective foregrounds Indigenous sexualities and identities over the gendered binaries long cultivated by colonial hierarchies and (particularly male) privilege. In so doing, her art speaks broadly to the possibility and strength of cultural resilience, and to visions of inclusivity and community that can inform and reshape our shared global future.

Production stills, 2020

Robert Louis Stevenson Museum in Apia, 2017