

About the Lecture
Shigeyuki Kihara: Undressing the Pacific
Wed., 30 Oct 2013, 5:00, Kresge Town Hall

Shigeyuki Kihara's illustrated lecture, *Undressing the Pacific*, centers on key works she has produced in the last decade or so. The title reflects the **centrality of dress** in Kihara's *oeuvre*. One series, *Teuanoa'i Adorn to Excess* (1999), is comprised of a series of 28 T-shirts that toys with corporate branding and the stereotyping of Pacific peoples. Her *Savage Nobility* photographic series (2002) incorporates the language of art direction, fashion styling and photography. The triptych *Fa'afafine: In the Manner of a Woman* (2005) showcases Pacific customs of body adornment and responds to colonial gender definitions and representations. One particular costume – the Victorian mourning dress – features prominently in Kihara's work. This garment, introduced to Sāmoa by missionaries in the 19th century, is worn by Kihara in her performance *Tauluga: The Last Dance* (2006-2011) and in her recent photographic series *Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where are We Going?* (2013).

As well as referencing the importance of dress in her art practice, “**undressing**” describes the way Kihara's works subvert historical cross-cultural representations of Pacific people and the framing of the landscape as a Pacific paradise. By interrogating late 19th and early 20th -century images of Samoan people and landscapes by European photographers, her works expose inequalities and complexities within the structures of power associated with sexuality, gender, race and colonialism in the Pacific.

Samoan Couple (2005), from her *Fa'afafine: In the Manner of a Woman* series, subverts the stereotype of Samoan women as “Pacific belle” and Samoan man as “noble savage” similar in style to late 19th-century ethnographic and tourist images by New Zealand photographers such as Thomas Andrew and Alfred Burton. The triptych from which this series takes its name explores the Samoan cultural phenomenon of the *fa'afafine* – a third gender community of Sāmoa – and **critiques the imposition of European concepts of gender and sexuality onto colonized peoples**.

Kihara's work also **interrogates historical representations of the landscape of Sāmoa**. As well as being a Dunedin-based studio photographer, Alfred Burton was the official photographer on board the Steam Ship Company's first commercial tourism venture to the Pacific Islands of Fiji, Sāmoa, and Tonga in the 1880s. At a time when New Zealand sought to expand its political influence and commercial interests in the Pacific region, Burton's 19th-century images of lone indigenous figures in a natural paradise ripe for consumption may be seen as being complicit with the project of colonialism.

The “**dusky maiden**” **stereotype** of the Pacific woman as seductive temptress continued throughout the 20th and 21st centuries and was key Charles McPhee's 1960s kitsch paintings of Pacific women on velvet. The sophisticated art direction of Kihara's self-portrait photographic series *Tales of Ancient Sāmoa* (2004) mimics McPhee's portraits in order to subvert the stereotype.

Early European visitors to Sāmoa misinterpreted cultural traditions including forms of **dance** as sexual provocation. Kihara undermines this perception and makes dance a key part of her practice. *Undressing the Pacific* features three dance performances presented as digital videos with Kihara cast as the sole protagonist. Her solo dance performance *Tauluga: The Last Dance* (2006-11) shows her performing the *tauluga*, a graceful ceremonial dance set to a chant sung by village elders to retell the cultural legacy of colonialism. The work conveys the sense of loss and struggle for power that characterizes Sāmoa's colonial past from an indigenous perspective. In *Siva in Motion* (2012) Kihara uses the choreographic movements of the *tauluga* dance to re-tell the experience of the tsunami that

impacted Sāmoa in September 2009. *Galu Afi: Waves of Fire* (2012), which won the Paramount Wallace Arts Trust Award, comprises a silent dance that reveals the wisdom of indigenous belief systems.

In the wake of Cyclone Evan and Sāmoa's commemoration of 50 years of independence from New Zealand colonial rule, Kihara traveled to Sāmoa in December 2012 to produce a new body of work, the aforementioned *Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where are We Going?* (2013), a series of black and white photographs. With its title lifted from a painting by Paul Gauguin (1897), this series unpacks **the myth of the Pacific as paradise**. While Gauguin's painting addresses his struggle with the meaning of existence, Kihara redirects this sentiment to examine issues currently shaping Sāmoa, including natural disasters and the global economic recession.

Her recent works also highlight **local architectural forms and monuments** that commemorate Sāmoa's history under German (1900-14) and New Zealand (1914-1962) colonial administration.

[Text adapted from the March 2013 press release of Kihara's mid-career exhibition, *Undressing the Pacific: A Mid-Career Survey*, at the Hocken Library, University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand.]

Additional event: Culture for Sale, Thursday, 31 Oct., 12:00-2:00, Sesnon Gallery, Porter 236
Kihara invites students and faculty to attend a workshop to discuss the intersections between art, performance, and politics. Refreshments will be served.

<p style="text-align: center;">About the Artist Shigeyuki Kihara, Independent Artist & Curator</p>
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www.shigeyukikihara.com

Artist's website, which includes partial portfolio and descriptions of recent exhibitions and events.

<http://vimeo.com/channels/shigeyuki>

Numerous video and performance pieces by Kihara can be viewed at this website.

A native of Samoa, Shigeyuki Kihara is an interdisciplinary artist and curator whose work crosses a range of media including photography, performance and video, Shigeyuki Kihara has built a comprehensive body of work and curatorial practice that examines gender roles, consumerism, (mis)representation, and the past, present and future societal issues from colonial and post-colonial perspectives of Oceania (the Pacific Islands).

Kihara's work has been presented at Asia- Pacific Triennial, Auckland Triennial, Videonale, and the upcoming Saka'hàn International Quinquennial of New Indigenous Art at the National Gallery of Canada (Ottawa) in May 2013. Her works have also been shown internationally at numerous venues, including: the de Young Fine Art Museum of San Francisco, Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, Gallery of Modern Art (Brisbane), National Gallery of Victoria International (Australia), Te Papa Tongarewa Museum of New Zealand, Zendai Museum of Modern Art (Shanghai), Kaohsiung Museum of Fine Arts (Taiwan), National Museum of Poznan (Warsaw), Centro Ricerca Arte Attuale (Italy), Haus der Kulturen der Welt (Berlin), Musée du quai Branly (Paris), Auckland Art Gallery (New Zealand), and Gus Fisher Gallery (New Zealand).

Her 2008-9 solo exhibition at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art entitled *Shigeyuki Kihara; Living Photographs* was the museum's first exhibition of contemporary Samoan art and resulted in the

acquisition of a number of works for its permanent collection. "Kihara has created exceptionally beautiful and inventive works that simultaneously merge colonial images, performance, and contemporary photography! Her 'living photographs,' as she calls them, are visually powerful commentaries about moments in the history of art, differing cultural traditions, and outsiders' perceptions of them" (Virginia-Lee Webb, Research Curator, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2008).

One of Kihara's signature work is the 2006 solo performance and video documentation entitled *Taualga: The Last Dance*. Her adaptation of the traditional Samoan dance form operates at one level as a social commentary on the rich multiplicity of Samoan histories and their appropriation by colonial voices for a colonial audience. Costumed in Victorian mourning dress formally introduced by the Christian missionaries, Kihara inhabits the character of a Samoan Salome, reclaiming her own cultural histories as well as mourning those who fought to do the same in Samoa's past. The public performance of *Taualga: The Last Dance* has previously been staged, amongst others, Musée du quai Branly, Paris and Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin. It was recently re-staged and performed at Te Papa Tongarewa Museum of New Zealand in the context of their new acquisitions exhibition *Collecting Contemporary* held in 2012, where the performance documentary video of *Taualga: The Last Dance* has been acquired for Te Papa's contemporary art collection.

In 2012, Kihara's practice has taken centre stage in New Zealand. Her silent performance video work entitled *Galu Afi: Wave of Fire* (an extension of *Taualga: The Last Dance*) was the first video work to ever receive the Wallace Arts Trust Paramount Award. Reinterpreting once more aspects of the "taualaga" a classical Samoan solo dance form, *Galu Afi* is a lamentation for those lost in the 2009 tsunami in Samoa, American Samoa and Tonga. Art writer and judge, Warwick Brown spoke for the judges, saying "the moment we saw [Galu Afi] we were mesmerised. It's such a beautifully classic piece of work" (*New Zealand Herald*, 2012).

Kihara is a recipient of 13 awards from Creative New Zealand Arts Council, including the Creative New Zealand Pacific Innovation and Excellence Award (2009). With the October 2012 announcement that she was awarded one of three New Generation Awards from the Arts Foundation of New Zealand, Kihara is firmly positioned as one of New Zealand's most interesting and innovative artists. "In the last ten years, Shigeyuki Kihara has built an impressive career as a contemporary artist and curator, built around performance, film and photography. Her work sits beyond traditional Western forms of classification and is informed at a deep level by the emotional scars left on her cultures" (Mark Amery, Arts Foundation of New Zealand, 2012).

Kihara's mid-career survey exhibition entitled *Undressing the Pacific* will feature highlights of works made from 2000 to 2013 curated by Natalie Poland held at the Hocken Library, University of Otago, New Zealand (20th April to 8th June 2013). An artist in residence program and a symposium (4th May) will be held in association with the survey exhibition organized by the Department of History and Art History, University of Otago.

Kihara has an upcoming solo museum exhibition held at the Utah Museum of Fine Arts opening in August 2013 (until December).

Examples of Kihara's work can be found in selected permanent collections internationally including: Te Papa Tongarewa Museum of New Zealand, Auckland Art Gallery (NZ), University of Auckland (NZ), Massey University (NZ), Waikato Museum of Art and History (NZ), Sherman Contemporary Art Foundation (AUS), Queensland Art Gallery (AUS), University of Cambridge Museum of Archeology and Anthropology (UK); Jean Marie Tjibaou Cultural Centre (New Caledonia) and the Metropolitan Museum of Art (USA). Kihara's work is also held in number of private collections internationally, including those of Giorgio Armani.

Selected international projects for 2013:

- *O fea lo matou tupuaga? A o le fea fo'i matou? O fea o le a matou aga'i iai? (Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?)*, solo exhibition at Mildford Galleries, New Zealand. 16th March - 11th April 2013
- *Shigeyuki Kihara: Undressing the Pacific* Mid-career Survey 2000 – 2013, Hocken Gallery, University of Otago, New Zealand. 19th April - 17th June 2013
- *Sakahān Quinquennial*, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. 17th May - 2nd September 2013
- *Pasifika Research Art Fellowship*, College of Creative Arts, Massey University April/May 2013
- *Lips Painted Red*, Trondheim Kunstmuseum, Norway. 22nd June - 15th September 2013
- *Culture for Sale*, solo exhibition at City Gallery Wellington, New Zealand. 29th June - 11th August 2013
- *'A different view: Artists address Pornography'*, Guss Fisher Gallery, New Zealand. 16th August - 12th October 2013.
- *Artist in Residence* at International Studio and Curatorial Program (ISCP), New York USA. July - December 2013
- *Where do we come from? What are we? Where are we going?*, Solo exhibition at Utah Museum of Fine Arts, USA. Sept - December 2013
- *Tapa: Art and Identities in Oceania*, Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum, Köln. 11th October 2013 - 27th April 2014
- *Where do we come from? What are we? Where are we going?*, Solo exhibition at Pataka Museum, New Zealand. February/March 2014

Selected readings:

- Bell, Helen Marjorie. 200. *Halcyon Days?: Photography and the Nostalgic Revisions of Ben Cauchi, Shigeyuki Kihara and Peter Madden*. Ph.D. dissertation, Art History, University of Auckland.
- Federico, Celeste. 2008. "Gender & Identity: Sāmoa's Narratives," *Aesthetica Magazine* (Dec. issue), 32-35.
- Message, Kylie. 2005. "Contemporary Identity, Culture and the Art of Redress: Tokyo Street Style and Shigeyuki Kihara in Aotearoa New Zealand," *New Zealand Journal of Media Studies* 9(1).
- Rosi, Pamela Sheffield. 2007. "About the Artist: Shigeyuki Kihara," *The Contemporary Pacific* 19(1): vii-vii.
- Tamaira, A. Marata. 2010. "From Full Dusk to Full Tusk: Reimagining the ' Dusky Maiden' through the Visual Arts," *The Contemporary Pacific* 22(1): 1-35.
- Vivieaere, Jim. 2003. "Melding Boundaries in a Liminal Space: The Art of Shigeyuki Kihara," *Object* 43: 30-3.
- Wolf, Erika. "Shigeyuki Kihara's *Fa'a fafine; In a Manner of a Woman*: The Photographic Theater of Cross-Cultural Encounter." http://www.academia.edu/1030331/Shigeyuki_Kiharas_Faa_fafine_In_a_Manner_of_a_Woman_The_Photographic_Theater_of_Cross-Cultural_Encounter
- "Dance of History and Light," *Art News New Zealand*, Summer 2012.