Performing Salome in the Pacific. Three works by Yuki Kihara

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The Japanese-Sāmoan interdisciplinary artist, researcher, and curator Yuki Kihara who is a dual citizen of Aotearoa New Zealand and Sāmoa, was the first non-Indigenous Pacific Islander to represent Aotearoa New Zealand at the 59th International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia (2022).[1] Born in 1975 in Sāmoa to a Japanese father and Sāmoan mother, Kihara is a member of the minority community of Fa'afafine, a term meaning "in the manner of a woman" and identifying people who are assigned male at birth and who express their gender in a feminine way. The term Fa'atama means "in the manner of a man" and refers to people who are assigned female at birth and express their gender in a masculine way. Fa'afafine also describes those identifying with a third gender or a non-binary identity, and therefore neither Fafine, the term used to describe cisgender women, nor Tane, are terms to describe cisgender men. Today the term Fa'afafine encompasses (but not entirely coincides with) the LGBTIQ+ community (Alexeyeff and Kihara 2018; Taulapapa and Kihara 2018; Schmidt, online, n.d.).

After studying in Sāmoa, Japan, and Aotearoa New Zealand, today Kihara lives in Sāmoa, and positions her work at the intersections of gender, indigeneity, history, diaspora, decolonisation, and the environment. Her work seeks to challenge dominant and singular historical narratives and inquire about Sāmoan culture and history through a research-based approach. In Venice, Kihara presented *Paradise Camp* curated by Natalie King. The exhibition included a dozen tableau photographs and a five-part episodic talk show series. In the series, a group of Fa'afafine discusses a selection of Paul Gauguin's paintings created during his stays in Tahiti and Marquesas Islands between the end of 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, which portray an idealised version of these islands as a paradise (King 2022). *Paradise Camp* also featured footage of Fa'afafine pageants, posters, books, performances, and other documents to unravel colonial and violent

[1] For more information on Yuki Kihara see: http://www.shigeyukikihara.com, (last accessed 5 May 2024).

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histories about the Pacific behind its stereotyped colonial representation. The research process leading up to the exhibition has also proved evidence that Fa'afafine were central to the Sāmoan social fabric from the beginning and that the existence of queer identities was perceived as problematic and, therefore, morally, and legally pursued only after the settlement of the colonisers.

The Biennale event marked the culmination of a long process that brought Kihara closer to a queer past deeply rooted in Pacific history. Inspired by the idea that archives must be continually re-experienced through processes of embodiment, she begins all her art projects with extensive archival research. Searching for objects, images, and photographs from the colonial past, she explores their performative potential. Ethnographic photography had a decisive cross-cultural function in disseminating anthropological knowledge in the 19th and early 20th centuries through the instruments of mass communication of the time. It contributed massively to creating a visual memory of peoples and cultures at risk of disappearing and radically transformed by colonisation and modernisation. Today, these photographs serve as a valuable source for artists like Kihara, who use them as tools to investigate how this past has been represented. Specifically, Kihara transforms these images from being prisoners of time into devices that re-trace the portrayed subjects, aiming to culturally and historically legitimise an entire community of people, who aspire to exist in continuity with their past and projected into a possible future. Through her dance performances, and photographic and video works, she invites visitors to critically rethink culturally constructed binary categories such as male and female, European (Western) and Oceanic, and material and immaterial culture.

This essay discusses a dance performance and two video works by Kihara, in which the artist appears as Salome, her recurring and evolving alter-ego in several works since 2002 when the Te Papa Tongarewa Museum commissioned a performance, *Taualuga: The Last Dance*, first presented the same year at the 4th Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art in Brisbane. This time, Kihara retraced Sāmoa's colonial past from an Indigenous and environmental perspective by reenacting the traditional dance of *taualuga* This dance, literally translating to the "last dance," but also known as the "dance of life," is a solo performance accompanied by choral music and percussion, usually offered a final touch to a ritualised public social occasion (*fiafia*). The term *taualuga* also refers to the top part of the roof of traditional Sāmoan houses (*fale*), and, on a symbolic level, in both cases, it means the gracious and beautiful conclusion of an important task or the grand finale of an enter-

tainment or celebration such as weddings or festivities. Traditionally, this dance—featured by graceful sequence of movements and postures, as much as hand and facial gestures—was performed in full festive regalia. In the Pacific, dance is considered the expression of social roles and statuses, but also of the joy for life. *Taualuga* is transmitted body to body from generation to generation serving as a means to archive social and political history and revisit the memories of ancestors. Kihara hopes that through this enduring symbol of Sāmoan culture she “can trigger important discussions about the state of our world today” (Teaiwa 2011). In *Taualuga: The Last Dance* Kihara uses *taualuga* movement patterns and choreographic sequences, which have been shaped as a form of storytelling to reference local history and echo global and contemporary environmental issues. Whitney Tassie writes that in this performance, Kihara shows a series of dichotomies: “subjecthood and spectacle, celebration and lamentation, assimilation and rejection, memories and hopes” (Tassie 2013).

Where is Salome in the Pacific?

Salome dances in grief to pay tribute to the people of Sāmoa for their resilience.[2] Kihara performed *Taualuga: The Last Dance* for four years at various festivals, galleries and museums and later she developed this piece in different versions with the same title[3] in which she revisits *taualuga* set to a chant sung by village elders. *Siva in Motion* (Dance in Motion)[4] and *Galu Afi* (Waves of Fire)[5] are the titles of two silent videos: the first was commissioned by the Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki in Aotearoa New Zealand in 2012, and the second won the Paramount Award of the 21st Wallace Art

[2] The character of Salome appears in several other works by Yuki Kihara in which she visits various sites in Upolu Island in Sāmoa that were impacted by natural disasters caused by earthquakes and climate change. See the photographic series entitled *Where do we come from? What are we? Where are we going?* (2013), https://www.milfordgalleries.co.nz/dunedin/exhibitions/328-Yuki-Kihara-Where-do-we-come-from-What-are-we-Where-are-we-going (last accessed 5 May 2024).

[3] *Taualuga: The Last Dance* (2002), recorded in 2006, https://vimeo.com/channels/shigeyuki/13811424 (last accessed 5 May 2024).

[4] *Siva in Motion* (2012, 8’,14”), HD digital video, colour, silent. Concept leader, performer, director: Yuki Kihara, DOP and camera: Rebecca Swan; creative producer & editor: Kirsty MacDonald, hair and wardrobe assistance: Lindah Lepou and Louina Fifita-Fa’apo. *Making Siva in Motion*, director, camera, animations, editor: Kirsty MacDonald, with the participation of Dr. Erika Wolf, Department of History & Art History, University of Otago. See https://vimeo.com/channels/shigeyuki/50271507 (last accessed 5 May 2024).

[5] *Galu Afi* (2012, 4’, 59”), HD digital video, colour, silent, same credits of *Siva in Motion*.

Awards. These videos are an extension of the video version of *Taualuga: The Last Dance* and were filmed during a single session. Both videos make explicit reference to the choreographic structure of the *taualuga* dance and to Eadweard Muybridge and Étienne-Jules Marey, who invented the most innovative photographic techniques from the Victorian era, to retell the stories of the tsunami ("wave of fire" in Sāmoan language) that in 2009 partially destroyed Sāmoa, American Sāmoa, and Tonga killing almost 200 people.

These three works are part of a broader artistic strategy that Kihara is developing to decolonise a culture and give a voice to neglected or marginalised visual and embodied memories by grand historical narratives (Tassie 2013). To shed new light on the historical strategies implicated in the narration, preservation, and transmission of the past and cultural heritage, Kihara presents herself in the guise of Salome, a character that she projects into the identity of an anonymous Sāmoan woman portrayed in a photograph titled *Sāmoan Half-Caste* that she found in the Te Papa Tongarewa Museum of New Zealand collections during her preliminary archival research work. The photo was taken by the New Zealand photographer Thomas Andrew and later included in the album *Views in the Pacific Islands* (1886). In the photo, the woman sits before the camera looking steadily at the photographer, wearing a dark and tightly Victorian morning dress that restricts her physical movements and gestures. On one hand, she adheres to the dress code introduced by the colonial administration to Sāmoa in the early 19th century. On the other hand, she demonstrates a remarkable self-awareness, evading both the colonising male gaze and the structure of representation that would have pre-destined her to appear as a vulnerable and eroticised female, following the most stereotyped representations of exotic womanhood in this historical context. The Victorian dress signifies the denial of modernity as much as the problematic representation of otherness. As Kihara stresses, a detail that is often forgotten makes the role of this dress even more relevant for her project: the boning of the crinolines and corsets of British (and European) fashion standards at that time came from the whales hunted from the Pacific.[6] In other words, she says, "The Pacific is actually in London … it is not something that is far away".[7] In this sense, Mandy Treagus affirms

[6] Yuki Kihara on *Siva in Motion*, https://www.royalacademy.org.uk/article/oceania-video-yuki-kihara-siva-in-motion. (last accessed 20/3/2024).
[7] Ibid.

that "Kihara's Salome has both Pacific and European identities and histories" (Treagus, 2017, 92). She unveils the paradisiac dimension in which the Pacific has been represented in colonial photographic imagery and, more recently, in advertising campaigns for mass tourism, bringing the focus to the complexities of the colonial structure of power and overcharging this exposure with issues concerning sexuality, gender, and race.

Genealogy of a character

The *Sāmoan Half-Caste* portrait is the principal visual source for the creation of Kihara's Salome, a character of a story narrated in the New Testament. Salome was the daughter of Herodias and stepdaughter of King Herod, the ruler appointed by Rome in Galilee, Palestine. She asked for the head of John the Baptist in exchange for her seven veils dance. This story gained popularity in Christian art from an early period and resurfaced powerfully in Western imagery in the late 19th and early 20th century, thanks to the works by painters such as Gustave Moreau and Aubrey Bearsely, writers like Stéphane Mallarmé and Oscar Wilde, and composer Richard Strauss. During the 19th century, the myth of Salome catalysed the misogynist representations of femininity as vicious and vengeful when not murderous and generally of a castrating sisterhood. In this fantasy, both the moralising attitude of the Church and the coeval medical perspective in the neurological, psychological, and criminological sciences reemerged.

Wilde's play *Salome* was first staged in 1896 at the Théâtre de l'Oeuvre in Paris and directed by Aurélien Lugné-Poë, who also performed the role of Herod. Initially inspired by the acting style of Sarah Bernhardt, the theatre star of the time who was meant to interpret it, the title role was performed by the dancer Lina Munte. Wilde emphasised the role of Salome as a passive object of the aesthetic gaze while paradoxically imagining the heroine's capacity for bodily action, erotic transgression, and shocking violence. In other words, Wilde's Salome contributed to orienting theatre practice to modernity. Mallarmé portrayed Salome as an algid and unfaithful woman, whose body conveys the idea of mortal immobility rather than movement. Strauss linked her identity to the *Dance of the Seven Veils*, never mentioned in Biblical literature, and 'Salomania' soon became a vast phenomenon throughout Europe and the United States, no longer entirely reducible to Symbolist and Decadent literary and cultural contexts (Jones 2013; Girdwood 2022; Bentley 2002; Caddy 2005, 37).

Salome has been reinvented via theatre, the visual arts, and cinema, acquiring the status of the emblem of the female dancer with a hypnotic

power over a violent and immoral model of masculinity but ready to embody irrational instincts that were deemed essentially feminine. This phenomenon intertwined with the Western fascination with "the Orient" that also spread through the bodies of female modern dancers and choreographers, who were able to draw spectators into a kinaesthetic experience. In those shows, created by Ruth St. Denis with Ted Shawn, Maud Allan, Martha Graham, and many others, quotations and imagery from "other" cultures converged, both when they were performed in elitist cultural contexts, vaudeville, and music hall theatres. The 'School for Salomes', opened in 1907 as part of the New York Theatre, to train future young dancers for this kind of popular entertaining show is a telling example (Bizot 1992).

For an audience well-versed in the history of Western theatre and concert dance and, more specifically the rise of modern dance in the first decade of the 20th century, encountering Kihara's three works and her reenactments of Salome is inevitably filtered through the imagery produced by ethnographic photography. This confrontation is further shaped by the construction, representation, and reception of female identity in the Western world, as well as by the prevailing theatre codes, dance techniques, and choreographic styles of the period. As Olga Taxidou brilliantly remarks: "The battle between the word and the body is primarily fought through and on the body of the modernist performer." (Taxidou 2007, 5) Modern dance not only infiltrated modernist performance and literary cultures but also became a favoured subject for silent film pioneers. Salome emerged as the character around whom to experiment with a creative subjectivity aspiring to full legitimate social emancipation, and performative authorship. Megan Girwood (2023, 23) insightfully notes that, through her dance, Salome has expressed a rejection of the manipulative dimension of masculine political power and challenged the male gaze, destabilising the patriarchal integrity of Western society.

Kihara's artwork also contributes to the recent critique of the long-standing canonical approach to dance as limited geographically to Western high culture. New dance studies now consider modernism as a transnational spread of influences, reconceptualising it as a "transtemporal and translocal discursive construct of intertextual connections." (Klimczyk 2022, 301; see alsoManning 2019)

Many artists engaged in choreographic explorations in the early 20th century embraced the character of Salome precisely because she inherently embodies the core of modern dance. This essence entails the need to break

free from technical apparatuses and expressive codes of the academic tradition perceived as restrictive and outdated, to embrace forms of Dionysian ecstasy and a more "natural" dynamic. Often shrouded (and thus protected) by Orientalist aesthetic references, modern dancers also staged female seduction, for which Salome represented a quintessential example.

At first glance, Salome's *Dance of the Seven Veils* may seem to be performed by a libidinous female character fully subservient to male visual and political authority. However, her dance compels Herod to succumb to the irrational and grants her the head of the man she desires. In contrast to the 19th-century ballerinas, modern female dancers of the 20th century were no longer the sole object of the desiring male gaze, but they posed a threat to the Victorian and modern eras' moral values. Girwood (2023, 23) also emphasises to what extent, with their presence and quality of movement, dancers brought to the surface of modernity—perceived as rational—the "primitive" and uncontrolled energies that the new choreographic aesthetics favoured over technical virtuosity. Loïe Fuller, Maud Allan, Ida Rubinstein, Tamara Karsavina, Theda Bara, Martha Graham, Gertrude Hoffmann, and many others all performed and embodied modern Salomes, prioritising the body as a site of creative if not glamorous empowerment. In some cases, they gained fame in Europe despite originating from other cultural contexts or dealing with complex gender, national, or religious identities. Consequently, Salome's theme and implicit queerness became part of a broader iconography of movement, aligning with the instability of the modern subject. Although Salome's *Dance of the Seven Veils* has been stigmatised as a staged striptease, it actually offered one of the most powerful 'visual paradigms' of choreographic modernism (Brandstetter 2015, 13). In this context, the veil in different choreographic solutions, marks the moving and porous membrane between the naked and "natural" female body and the spectator's gaze. In this unstable and dynamic space, the modern female dancer could create a new set of movements and gestures, asserting and displaying the mastery of her own body.

Among the many modern dancers who performed as Salome, Loïe Fuller and Maud Allan, particularly shared an explicit feminist interest and explored the potential of a new female and creative individualism through their performances. They also adopted the fin-de-siècle stage actress Sarah Bernhardt as a model to oppose the early 20th century diffused anxiety about the female body, and to foster an increasing identitarian awareness.

Fuller debuted her first Salome in 1895 in a small theatre in Paris,

and again in 1907, in a new version entitled *La Tragédie de Salomé*, at the Théâtre des Arts. This made her dancing body a crossroads of technology, performativity, and gender identity.cFuller's style of movement and the stage effects she created for her own performances are the outcome of a wide-ranging research in which her fascination with technology, her reflection on representational models, and her growing awareness of how to convey non-normative dimensions of identity by the standards of the time converge (Townsend 2008). The sophisticated and intricate lighting apparatus in which she performed emphasised the reception of her famous 'serpentine' movements. This new movement aesthetic also resonated with Eastern dances and, more specifically, the Indian *nautch* dancers, as well as the key modern spatial pattern of the spiral that was suggested by her highly technological use of textiles. By enhancing the impression of a dynamic energy radiating from the core of the body, Fuller transformed herself into a metaphor for modernism itself. By obscuring her body from the spectator's gaze beneath layers of multi-metric fabric, she shielded it from the erotic dimension to which the ballerina was historically relegated. As Girwood (2023, 48) observes, she therefore orchestrated her dance precisely in the same invisibility in which the imaginary of the time located (and relegated) queer female sexuality. Simultaneously, her second interpretation of Salome has also been historicised as an example of a proto-camp and "incandescent" gender identity, deliberately and intensely ambiguous and thus decidedly modern (Sontag 1964, 2018; Cooper Albright 2007, 115-143; Veroli 2009, 220-222). Fuller also represents a woman and dancer born in a cultural context, the United States of the 19th century, where she performed in the entertainment theatre of the music hall without ever denying it, even once she landed in Europe, where she managed to integrate her practice into intellectual and artistic environments that understood her innovative scope, making her dance became iconic and even popular.

In 1908, self-taught Canadian dancer Maud Allan, a former pupil of Fuller, successfully performed her own seductive interpretation of the *Dance of the Seven Veils* at London's Palace Theatre as part of her *Vision of Salome*. Her gestures and postures were deemed obscene and soon negatively connoted as a symptom of her "sexual deviance", which was officially declared during a legal trial in which she was involved indirectly also because associated with the famous character. While claiming to reverberate classical ideals of beauty and grace with her dance, Allan, barefoot and adorned with a net and strings of pearls, more explicitly than other dancers, embraced the eroticising Orientalism traditionally associated with Salome's visual imagery in

19th-century art. She did so, however, from a different position—simultaneously that of the performer and the choreographer of her piece (Walkowitz 2003; Koritz 1994).

Fuller and Allan radically transformed the perception of the female (dancing) body. A potent creative force, they catalysed the attention of women's claims to social independence and fuelled the aesthetic debates with issues concerning the status and visibility of women's bodies in the arts. By making the profound connection between kinaesthetic experience and gender politics visible, they also confer aesthetic and social legitimacy to the profession of dancing (Koritz 1995,148). Moreover, they fully integrated into a queer and feminist choreographic lineage due to the quality of their spiral and serpentine movement which elicited a recurring twisting of the gaze, problematising the spectator's vision and aesthetic engagement. In other words, it was the quality of their movements that expressed a queer and feminist attitude and vision. Fuller and Allan, although in different ways, embodied what Hillel Schwartz has defined as the new kinaesthetic of the "torque" (Schwartz 1992, 73), characterised by fluid and curvilinear gestures spiralling outward from the centre through controlled rhythmic impulses. Embodied in their renditions of the *Dance of the Seven Veils*, Salome has long inhabited European stages and beyond, thanks in particular to Allan's extensive tours.

That same year, 1908, the choreographer Michel Fokine staged another famous and controversial interpretation of Wilde's Salome in St. Petersburg, casting Ida Rubinstein in the title's role, with costumes by painter Léon Bakst, and music by Alexander Glazunov. Rubinstein, who was Jewish but converted to Orthodoxy, compensated for her lack of technical mastery with her legendary androgyne beauty and mesmerising stage presence. She refrained from speaking any words from Wilde's text —it was distributed among the audience before the performance— because the Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church had banned it. Consequently, Rubinstein could only interpret the dramatic content of the text and emphasise the mimic language. The performance consisted of a series of essentially static poses and gestures quoting the ancient Greek sculptural-iconic expressive trend of the time. However, her highly sensual and near-nude version, yet not obscene, of the *Dance of the Seven Veils*—accentuated by a long diaphanous tunic decorated with leaves—captivated the audience, contributing to the transformation of dance movement aesthetics and making her Salome the emblem of how the dancing body could overcome censorship (Garelick 2007). Her bisex-

uality, which did not conceal and superimposed on subsequent repertoire choices such as her legendary interpretation of Saint Sebastian, increased the retrospective curiosity for Salome with which she became acquainted with the major exponents of the renewal of choreographic language and the ballet genre in the 20th century.

Negotiating with the past as history and as memory

Through the series of performances and videos reenacting *taualuga*, Kihara inspires us to consider the role of anthropology within dance studies. She delves into the intricate relationship between history and memory, exploring their dynamics through processes of re-appropriation, and re-signification of the past. These works also prompt reflection on the interplay between dance, individual experiences, and collective memories. They underscore the active and vital role of mnemonic processes and transmission strategies in engaging with the past as both history and memory. Her dance performances and video works resonate with the numerous Salomes of the early 20th century, who were pivotal in crafting memorable choreographic explorations and identity representations. As Kihara aptly remarks "I wanted people to be seduced by the dance while being conceptually challenged by it" (Kihara quoted in Were 2012).

In *Taualuga: The Last Dance*, Kihara/Salome stands motionless in her dark robe and her hair pulled back in a bun, framed by a wide plaster arch in a museum room. A dim light that catches her from one side down casts a ghostly shadow of her body behind her throughout the performance. Following the precise gestural score of the *taualuga*, Kihara/Salome bends down and begins to move her hands, wrists, palms, and fingers, producing a rhythmic twisting of the torso to the right and to the left. She stands up and her arms amplify the gestures of her hands, which move symmetrically in relation to the torso but in the upper part of the surrounding space. Small bends of the legs alternate with light hops on the spot repeated in the two lateral directions until she ends her dance where she started it. The recorded music and chant break the silence surrounding the histories and memories of colonialism, and the dialogue between her real body and its shadow amplifies what Ananja Jahanara Kabir (2021, 52) defines as "the dialectic between spectrality and the material sumptuousness".

Siva in Motion and *Galu Afi* were shot consecutively, the former with the camera positioned on the vertical axes and focussing on Kihara's looking straight at the audience, and the latter shot horizontally, emphasising her hands and highlighting dance as a form of social commentary. Here,

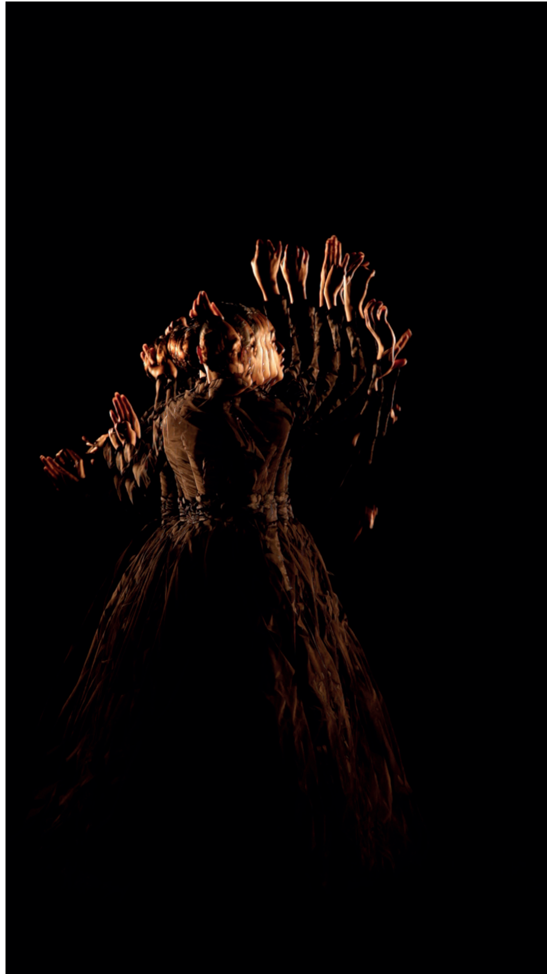
Kihara's face is out of the frame. The hand movements are the most evident trace of the *taualuga*, while at the same time evoking the destructive violence of the tsunami waves for the same duration of its devastating impact in 2009. The absence of sound shifts the attention to the visual dimension and the rhythmic and temporal articulation of the performer's gestural sculpture of movement. This approach explicitly references Eadweard Muybridge and Étienne-Jules Marey'a photographic techniques, which fracture time to analyse the dynamic motion of humans and animals.

In their photographic studies of locomotion Muybridge and Marey approached movement analysis differently. Muybridge prioritised narrative over scientific accuracy, capturing movement at different moments and often rearranging the sequence of images to create a continuous flow and to simulate chronological and logical continuity. In contrast, Marey, a trained physician who later specialised in physiology, utilised chronophotography (picture of time) to provide measurable evidence of human and animal locomotion. He employed multiple exposures on a single photographic plate to reveal a mechanical and optical truth, a perspective unattainable to the naked eye. Marey's work is regarded as emblematic of modern times because they introduced a level of naturalism previously unexplored, influencing painters and artists of Victorian times, and paving the way for new aesthetic dimensions in avant-garde movements (Braun 1992; Braun 2010).

These groundbreaking experiments in movement analysis and technological innovations significantly reshaped the contemporary experience and understanding of time and movement, which were also central concerns in dance. New methods of notation, traditionally considered useful *aide mémoire* for dance masters and a means to legitimise and archive this ephemeral art form, were also used to make the moving body a controllable (or censurable) material. At the beginning of the 20th century, these sophisticated tools allowed for the detailed analysis of dynamic motion, transforming dance into a subject for analytical study and documentation. In recent times, this approach to dance documentation and transmission merged into a vast field of study still enriching the theoretical debate about how to destabilise traditional narratives of dance history based mainly on written and institutionalised forms of documentation by emphasising the importance of memorial traces and broadening the geographical and temporal scope of its existence revaluing memorial traces of its existence (Franco and Nordera 2010).

Siva in Motion begins with Kihara/Salome shrouded in darkness, moving her arms rhythmically before slowly turning to face the camera. The hands begin to twirl ever more frantically back and forth and from bottom to

top. The acceleration doubles and triples her figure, evoking an image of a blazing fire, before the movement slows down and the fire gives way to the dancer's integrity. The gestures of the hands and arms become clearer, and Kihara/Salome turns again rhythmically to the right and left, gradually emphasising the twist of the torso, until she turns her back to the camera, repeating the same sequence of movements and returning to the front.



Yuki Kihara, *Galu Afi: Waves of Fire*, 2012, video still. Collection of the Arts House Trust. Courtesy of Yuki Kihara and Milford Galleries, Aotearoa New Zealand.

In *Galu Afi*, Kihara/Salome stands in front of the camera, but the frame only captures her torso, hands, and half of her face. Kihara/Salome never turns and her hands start twirling, at times seeming to touch the screen. By focusing solely on her hands and avoiding direct eye contact, viewers are encouraged to move beyond mere identification. Salome's body becomes a mere surface displaying historical and cultural discourses about gender and ethnic identities. The choreographic movements of the *taualuga* are sequentially repeated with rotations, bending, and hand movements, and the rhythm of the images fluctuates between deceleration and acceleration, creating an intensified effect reminiscent of a flame horizontally stretched before the viewer's gaze.

Yuki Kihara, *Siva in Motion*, 2012, video still. Commissioned by Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki. Courtesy of Yuki Kihara and Milford Galleries, Aotearoa New Zealand.

Siva in Motion and *Galu Afi*, both performed without an audience, echo the rational and analytical approaches to dance movement, but also the crisis of representation caused by the abandoning of the idea of the unity of the body as bearer of identity. They reenact as well the ambivalent reaction of (dancing) bodies against the experience of living in modern times and the conditions of modernity itself when dancing bodies became the privileged sites of the construction of modern subjectivity, and movement the privileged tool to convey emotion.

The darkness in the videos, with Kihara/Salome seemingly floating, intensifies the effect created by her body enveloped in a black and modest Victorian dress. This image underscores to what extent she exists under patriarchal control over her body and identity, while also subverting the

stereotype of the exotic Pacific woman. Daniel Satele (2022, 132) observes that "the spectacle of the Indigenous body in the Victorian dress encapsulates the complexity of the intercultural encounters that occurred in the wake of the European contact with the Pacific"). Much like Fuller, Kihara/ Salome conceals her body under layers of fabric, performing her ethnic and gender identity to escape both the Western and male gaze pressure. Additionally, in *Siva in Motion* and *Galu Afi*, both her dress and her physical presence evoke a sense of mourning over the destruction caused by the tsunami, reigniting grief over the loss of the independence and the identity of Sāmoans and other Pacific peoples due to colonisation and its associated model of patriarchal social organisation. Framed by the camera, Salome appears isolated and lonely, like a dancer caught in the tension between the denied movements and the constraining dress. She strives to preserve her people's traditions while recalling the colonial past, where cultural hybridity remains insufficiently explored. She stands as a witness for all, in Europe and the Pacific, confronting what it means to navigate ongoing modernisation amid a severe environmental crisis, while negotiating embodied gendered imaginaries and practising daily resilience (Seja 2015). Like Salome, who wielded dance as a tool for political manipulation, Kihara's Salome acts in the Pacific to further the current decolonising process.

In Sāmoan culture, for a performer to turn his/her back on the public is considered offensive, and here Kihara/Salome begins by turning her back and returns to the initial position to emphasise the idea of a temporal infinity around a highly provocative gesture. As the artist affirms 'While the world imposed the idea of paradise on Sāmoa, it is Sāmoa that is going through hell' (Kihara quoted in Seja 2015, np). Kihara emphasises the central metaphors of looking and veiling in the various reiterations of this myth by reversing or re-semantising them.

The colonial photography at the origin that spurred the re-invention of this character/alter ego represents a fluid dimension to compare narratives and imaginaries from the past and the present and, thereby exploring overlapping temporalities. Temporally, Kihara's Salome, moving at a decelerated pace and with post-production interventions that layer her gestures, stands as a figure capable of positioning herself beyond the traditional historical organisation as linear and chronological. Spatially, she is deeply rooted in Sāmoa, from where she witnesses destruction and environmental crisis amplifying an emergency on global scale, while also looking back at local history to highlight the wisdom of Indigenous belief systems as a

resilience reference point. Addressing both the temporal accumulation in our perceived present, and the spatial overlap of local and global, Kihara's Salome embodies our collective mourning for past and potential losses, yet she persists, making sense of it all.

Re-enacting the past in "potential museums"

Like various artistic strategies defined as reenactment that make past works (be it a choreographic or dance piece, a performance, or an exhibition) meaningful in/for the present, Kihara's performances and video works create a new environment for a traditional Sāmoan dance and for a Western character (Agnew, Lamb, and Toman 2019; Franko 2018; Baldacci and Franco 2022).

As an anti-positivist approach to (art) history, reenactment undermines the notion of chronological and linear succession of historical times, presenting them instead as complex and multi-layered, to be explored through alternative forms of temporal encounters between past, present, and future. Profoundly influenced by gender, post and de-colonial, environmental, and memory issues, this approach to the past has gained a central role in redefining knowledge and historical discourses. It also scrutinises canons and genealogies by challenging institutional forms of heritage preservation and transmission. Finally, reenactment prompts viewers to question the identities transformed, disguised, and betrayed by colonialism.

Colonialism also had a profound impact on the formation and development of museums, influencing the collection, interpretation, and display of cultural artefacts and narratives. The process of decolonising museums is therefore multifaceted and complex, and requires a commitment to ongoing reflection, education, and collaboration to challenge historical narratives, rethink curatorial practices, engage with Indigenous communities, and address ethical considerations related to ownership and representation. It requires a new sensibility to contrast the lack of Indigenous voices and perspectives in curatorial decisions that can perpetuate colonial stereotypes, misinterpretations and misrepresentations of Indigenous cultures. It also involves reeducating and engaging visitors to challenge and rethink their preconceptions, expectations, and understandings of museum collections and narratives.

Kihara's artworks, primarily commissioned by art galleries, are frequently presented inside museums or international exhibitions such as

La Biennale, which altogether are facing a profound rethinking of their mission and role in our societies. The inclusion of performative and choreographic artworks and participatory practices within museums contributes to reimagining the museological apparatus and decolonising curatorial strategies, investing in the collection and transmission of heritage. The live presence of performances and choreographic works that displace and reorganise bodies along with visitors' physical and emotional responses, has become crucial. This focus also extends to time-based media and digital art that interrogates marginalised memories and underrepresented collective identities through performance.

Kihara's works respond to these contemporary needs by revisiting history, transmitting embodied memories, and introducing counter-historical discourses. Moreover, her reenactments aim to counteract the musealisation of colonialism, shifting the focus from mere display to a process of making visible through remediation (Grechi 2023, 116; Lee 2022).

The generative force derived from ethnographic photography examined through the critical lens of our present, seeks to understand the past while anticipating the future. This approach situates Kihara at the heart of today's museological discourses and practices, grappling with the intricate task of collecting and presenting the multiple overlapping temporalities involved in challenging traditional and often Eurocentric understandings of time and history. This perspective challenges the linear and teleological organisation of time (past, present, and future) and therefore of history, emphasising instead the simultaneous coexistence and interaction of different temporalities. Multiple temporalities allow for a richer understanding of collective memory, where past events continue to resonate and influence the present as they uncover and highlight alternative histories and narratives.

Creating a museum space welcoming alternative and marginalised voices and experiences means reevaluating our relationship with history and the pastness of the historical (political) past, as much as opening to a rather inclusive, dynamic, and interconnected understanding of history that acknowledges the complexity and diversity of human experiences and perspectives.

Kihara engages with history via the Sāmoan concept of vā (or the collapsing time in space) to comprehend both the country's present and the potential future it invites. In this regard, she affirms: "Sāmoans walk forward into the past while walking back into the future, where the present is a continuous and simultaneous journey into the ancestral realm of the future". (Kihara quoted in Seja, 2015). Furthermore, Kihara describes

her practice as a *Vārchive* (a compound word for *vā*, meaning space, and archive) and Liang-Kai Yu and Eliza Steinbock refer to it as a "potential museum" (Yu and Steinbock, 2023).

In this conceptual space, the artist creates the possibility to spatialise and temporalise historical pasts, community (more than collective) memory, and embodied (more than material) knowledge. In this kind of museum visitors learn how artworks and artefacts, memory and people, can coexist and be mutually present rather than represented. This is the space where dance practices and their historical traces could also find their place, and Salome her home.

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