

Der Papālagi (The White Man)

Yuki Kihara

ST PAUL St Gallery Three
24 February – 31 March 2017

“Whenever Europeans feel or realise, now and again, the ‘discontents of civilisation’ (to use Siegmund Freud’s famous phrase), they seem to find relief in old, new or revived noble savage myths.”¹

Sāmoa has long been known as an enchanting paradise in literature and film alike. Scottish novelist Robert Louis Stevenson spent his final years in Sāmoa at his estate in Vaillima, and in 1894, was laid to rest on Mt Vaea. In the 1920s, American film maker Robert J Flaherty went to Safune on the island of Savai’i to create *Moana*, the first time the term ‘documentary’ had been applied in a cinematic context. Who can forget the beautiful shots of Matautu, Upolu as the backdrop for the 1953 American film *Return to Paradise* which generated 1.8 million dollars in box office revenue. And now, of course, we have Disney’s first Polynesian princess in the film *Moana*.

There is another lesser known piece of literature which also takes direct inspiration from Sāmoa: Erich Scheurmann’s *Der Papālagi*. The German national lived in Sāmoa from 1900 until 1914 while the islands were under German administration. Published in 1920, the book contains revelations about European culture as ostensibly made by Tuiavii, a Sāmoan chief who had been taken to Europe as a part of a *völkerschau*gruppe (a native performance group). However, it was later discovered that these speeches were not actually Tuiavii’s social commentary translated by Scheurmann, but Scheurmann’s thoughts and world-views published under this pseudonym².

Yuki Kihara’s solo exhibition *Der Papālagi (The White Man)* in ST PAUL St Gallery Three uses Scheurmann’s text as a spring board for a series of new work. In this work, Kihara films and photographs Barbara and Christian Durst, a German couple living in Sāmoa, standing dressed in indigenous Sāmoan regalia in a series of locations across the country’s capital Apia. What you get is a startling and at times humorous juxtaposition of two European actors dressed in customary regalia reserved for those of the highest ranks with the reactions of the Sāmoan community.

According to Scheurmann the book had two purposes: to protect the Sāmoan community against a destructive European influence, and to reveal how someone who is “still so close to nature”³ sees the European culture. Perhaps he hoped that Tuiavii’s openness and innocence would encourage German readers to return to nature

at a time when the Naturalism movement⁴ was taking form. Kihara’s work in *Der Papālagi (The White Man)* reveals Scheurmann’s romanticisation of Sāmoan life and culture as a personal desire of Scheurmann to be Sāmoan, dressing up the Dursts as a literalisation for Scheurmann’s own hopes of belonging.

This one-time German bestseller emphasises a 1920s desire for escapism, in the context of the political and economic frustration of the Weimar Republic. In writing for his German readership, Scheurmann negates the reality of the Other, the Other becoming nothing more than a fatalising subject crafted for European enjoyment. However, as Kihara points out through her work, Papālagi escapism is still very present in contemporary Sāmoa⁵. With a revitalised tourism industry, 2017 escapism even comes packaged with its own *völkerschau*gruppe. It is easy for us to look to the essentialism of the noble savage as something that lives in the past⁶, yet this fantasy is just as prominent in today as it was in 1920.

In this bold new series of work, Yuki Kihara breaks down both historic and contemporary forms of escapism confronting these exotic fantasies with the reality of life in Sāmoa. Through this strong statement, we are challenged to consider the politics of home, belonging and authenticity.

Lana Lopesi

Yuki Kihara received support from Creative New Zealand to make this work. *Der Papālagi (The White Man)* is courtesy of the artist and Milford Galleries Dunedin, New Zealand. This exhibition is presented in association with Auckland Arts Festival 2017.

1. Gunter Senft, “Weird Papalagi and a Fake Samoan Chief: A footnote to the noble savage myth,” *Rongorongo Studies: A forum for Polynesian philology* 9 (1999): 23-32-62-75.

2. Yuki Kihara, ‘Der Papālagi (The White Man) - artist statement’, Milford Galleries Dunedin, accessed 17 January, 2017. <https://www.milfordgalleries.co.nz/dunedin/submissions/10321-9b5290a9>

3. Erich Scheurmann, *Der Papalagi – Die Reden des Südseehauptlings Tuiavii aus Tiavea* (Buchenbach: Felsen-Verlag, 1920), 13.

4. Naturalism or Nacktkultur in German, is a cultural and political movement practicing social nudity in private and public. The movement gained prominence in the 1920s becoming known for its supposed health benefits while also becoming politicised for its ability to break down of class divides.

5. Sina Sevaetasi, “Here’s your chance to see ‘Der Papalagi (The White Man)’ Samoa Observer, accessed January 11, 2017, [http://www.samoaoobserver.ws/en/01_12_2016/local/14456/Here%E2%80%99s-your-chance--to-see-%E2%80%98Der-Papalagi--\(The-White-Man\)%E2%80%99.htm#disqus_thread](http://www.samoaoobserver.ws/en/01_12_2016/local/14456/Here%E2%80%99s-your-chance--to-see-%E2%80%98Der-Papalagi--(The-White-Man)%E2%80%99.htm#disqus_thread)

6. Senft, “Weird Papalagi and a Fake Samoan Chief: A footnote to the noble savage myth,” 23.

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“Whenever Europeans feel or realise, now and again, the ‘discontents of civilisation’ (to use Siegmund Freud’s famous phrase), they seem to find relief in old, new or revived noble savage myths.”¹

Nā ngā mātātuhi me ngā kiriata i mōhiotia ai he whenua taurikura a Hāmoa. I noho a Robert Louis Stevenson, kaituhi nō Kotirana i tōna kāinga noho i Vailima, Hāmoa i ōna tau whakamutunga, ā, nō te tau 1894 i tanumia ai ia i runga o maunga Vaea. I ngā tau o te 1920 i haere a Robert J Flaherty, kaihangā kiriata nō Amerika ki Safune, i te motu o Savai’i ki te waihanga mai i a *Moana*, ko te wā tuatahi tēnei i whakahāngaitia ai te kupu ‘pakipūmekā’ ki tētehi horopaki kiriata. Me pēwhea e wareware ai ngā whakaahua o Matautu, Upolu te whenua i whakaahuatia ai te kiriata Amerikana o *Return to Paradise* i te tau 1953 i eke ki te 1.8 miriona tāra te nui o tōna whiwhinga. Ināianei, kua puta mai ko te tapairu tuatahi nō Te Moana-nui-a-Kiwa o Disney i te kiriata o *Moana*.

Arā tētahi atu mātātuhi kāore e pērā rawa te nui o te mōhiotia i ahu mai i Hāmoa, arā ko *Der Papālagi* nā Erich Scheurmann. I noho tēnei Tiamana i Hāmoa mai i te tau 1900 ki te tau 1914 i te wā i a Tiamani te mana whakahaere o ngā motu. I whakaputaina te pukapuka i te tau 1920, ā, kei roto rā ētahi whakakitenga mō te ahurea Pākehā anō nei nā Tuiavii i kōrero, tētahi ariki i kawea ki Uropi i te taha o tētahi völkerschlaggruppe (he kapa haka). Heoi anō, nō muri mai ka kitea ehara i a Tuiavii ēnei kōrero i whakapākehātia mai e Scheurmann, engari nō Scheurmann anō ēnei whakaaro me ēnei tirohanga, he mea whakaputa nāna i raro i tērā ingoa Hāmoa².

Kua whakamahia ngā tuinga a Scheurmann e Yuki Kihara i tana whakaaturanga takitahi i *Der Papālagi (The White Man)* ka tū ki ST PAUL St Gallery Three hei tīmatanga mō tētahi whakaputanga mahi hou. I tēnei mahi āna kua whakaahua a Kihara i a Barbara rāua ko Christian Durst, tētahi tokorua Tiamana e noho ana i Hāmoa, e tū ana, e mau ana ngā kākahu taketake o Hāmoa i ētahi wāhi putaputa noa i Āpia. Ko te tukunga iho, e tino tauaro ana ngā āhuatanga e rua, arā ngā kaiwhakaari Pākehā tokorua me ngā kākahu taketake e rāhuitia ana mō te hunga rangatira, rere ana te wehi i te hapori Hāmoa.

Hei tā Scheurmann, e rua ngā take o te pukapuka. Tuatahi, he tiaki i te hapori Hāmoa kia kore ai e whakaawetia kinotia e te Pākehā, tuarua he whakaata i te tirohanga o tētahi “e tino pātata tonu ana ki te taiao”³ ki te āhua o te

ahurea Pākehā. Tērā pea, i tūmanako ia mā te wātea me te urutapu o Tuiavii ngā kaipānui Tiamani e akiaki ki te hoki ki te taiao i te wā e whakatūria ana te Taiaotanga⁴. Kua whakaaturia mai i ā Kihara mahi i a *Der Papālagi (The White Man)* te whakapōhewatanga o te ahurea me te oranga Hāmoa anō. He wawata nō Scheurmann kia tū hei Hāmoa, nā te whakakākahu i ngā Dursts i kitea ai ngā tūmanako o Scheurmann ki tōna anō tuakiri.

Ko tā tēnei kaituhi Tiamani, harore rangitahi he whakamiramira i te wawata o ngā tau 1920 kia puta ki waho atu i tōu nā ao, i roto i te horopaki ki ngā ākinga ā-tōrangapū, ā-ōhanga o Te Whenua o Weimar. I a ia e tuhi ana mā ana kaipānui Tiamana, i whakahē a Scheurmann i te ao o Tērā Atu, ka noho ko Tērā Atu hei kaupapa pōhewa noa iho, hei whakakpārekareka noa iho i te Pākehā. Heoi anō, hei tā ngā mahi a Kihara, e ora tonu ana i Hāmoa ināianei te whakaputa hei Papālagi⁵. I runga i te whakarauoratanga o te ahumahi tāpoi, kua kōpakina ki roto i te whakaputanga o 2017 tōna anō völkerschlaggruppe. He māmā noa iho te whakaaro atu ki te tūturutanga o te mohoa rangatira o mua⁶, engari kei te ora tonu i tēnei wā tēnei pōhewa nō te tau 1920.

I tēnei whakaputanga mahi hou ka turakina e Yuki Kihara ngā āhuatanga whakaputanga o mua, o nāianei hoki mā te tautuhi i ēnei pōhewatanga me te ao tūturu o Hāmoa. Ko tā tēnei kōrero nui he whakahoki i ō tātou whakaaro ki ngā tōrangapū o te kāinga, o te tūrangaewae me te motuhengatanga.

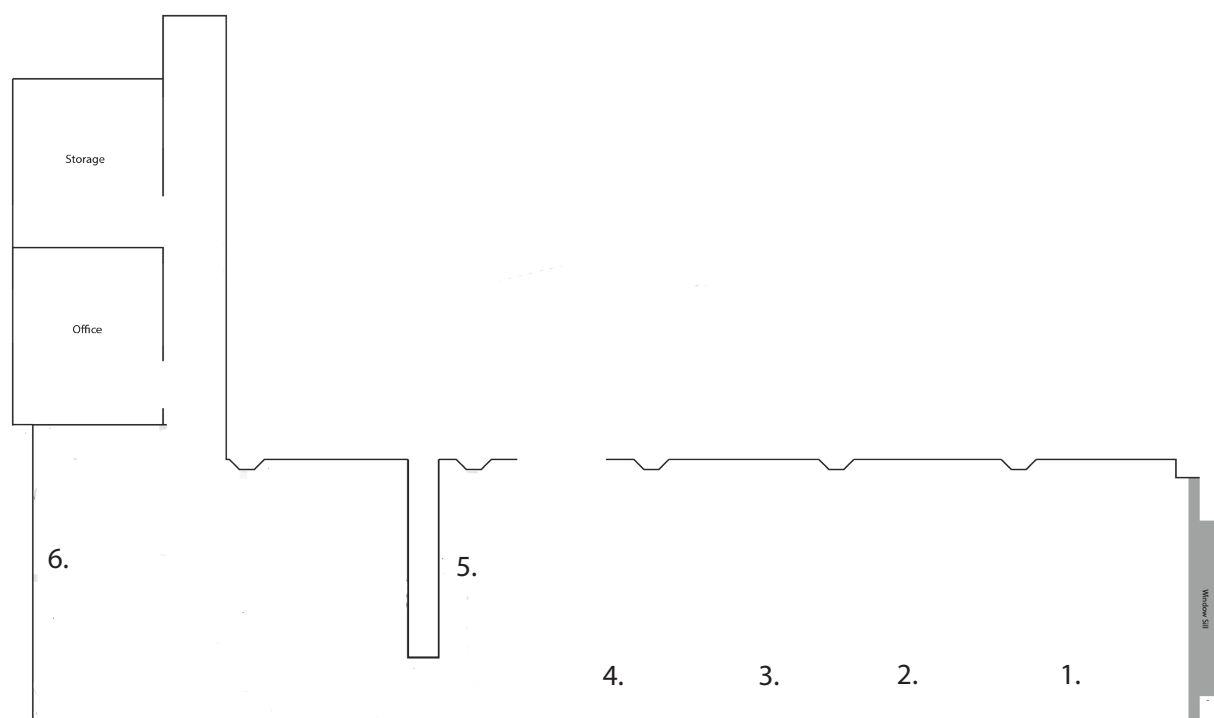
Te Reo translation by Hēmi Kelly



ST PAUL ST



Floorplan



LIST OF WORKS

1. *Der Papālagi at Convent Street*, 2016
c-print, 860 x 1060mm
2. *Der Papālagi at SNPF Plaza*, 2016
c-print, 860 x 1060mm
3. *Der Papālagi at Frankie Supermarket*, 2016
c-print, 860 x 1060mm
4. *Der Papālagi at Fugalei Market*, 2016
c-print, 860 x 1060mm
5. *Der Papālagi at Pinati Restaurant*, 2016
c-print, 860 x 1060mm
6. *Der Papālagi (The White Man)*, 2016
single channel digital video, full hd, sound,
11:30 minutes

All work is courtesy of the artist and Milford Galleries
Dunedin, New Zealand.

