

The Dusky Maiden and The Noble savage: Conversations about archetype and fetish
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Fa'a Fafine; In the Manner of a Woman: Shigeyuki Kihara

This writing will explore the use of archetype and iconography within the Western colonisation process of the Pacific region. The traditions that have fed this topic are world views that used and continue to use notions of absolutes such as authenticity and truth. This has created a sense of dualism where the ambiguity within situations becomes shadow by-products to these concepts, creating division and segregation, both within and without the individual. The colonised subject becomes an object as opposed to a subject. This objectification leads to what I would call a fetishisation of culture or culture fetish. My experiences socially have been informed by my own ancestry, in part Tongan, Scottish and Spanish, and have come from negotiating these conflicted cultural spaces. I will be using works from Pacific artists that I feel express and convey these conflicts.

Traditionally archetypes and iconography are used as aural and visual mnemonic triggers for learning the myths and stories of cultures. Not only do they illustrate stories from the past but they help to form a world view. They are also used to create stereotypes about cultures and peoples which ultimately help the coloniser objectify them. This objectification becomes a culture fetish and has been a powerful tool to subjugate and undermine the colonised people. As a response to this through reframing the stereotypes some Pacific artists and other 'minority' groups are beginning to reclaim their identities.

Two common archetypes are the Dusky Maiden and the Noble Savage. These particular archetypes have fuelled many contemporary stereotypes and though this thinking may not have been ill-intentioned the outcome was excessively patronising, objectifying and misplaced. The Dusky Maiden and the Noble Savage are Victorian fetishistic stereotypes created in part by colonial desire and its concomitant guilt.

Christian Victorian English morality and pre-colonial Pacific people's morality were in conflict over perceptions of sexuality and gender. European missionaries, settlers, intellectuals, poets and writers, aided by a sense of inherent superiority, all illustrated and expressed in various ways these stereotypes. With the advent of photography the ethnographic photograph of the Dusky Maiden and Noble Savage was distributed world-wide. As a proactive move many Pacific artists have used these stereotypes extensively as a way of reclaiming identity.

The stereotypes highlight issues of cultural transference from coloniser to colonised and the objectification and fetishisation of Pacific cultures and how this has been reflected through photography. This conversation has been explored by Pacific artists such as Chris Charteris, Sofia Tekela-Smith and Niki Hastings-McFall, epitomised in their exhibition invitation *1 Noble savage 2 Dusky Maiden* and Shigeyuki Kihara in works such as *Tauuluga: the Last Dance* and *Fa'a Fafine: In the Manner of a Woman*.

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“there is a critique of the cliché, of the ways in which the islands and their people are represented. Posing in such a way as to recreate the ethnographic photograph, Chris Charteris, Niki Hastings McFall and Sophia Tekela-Smith became 1 Noble Savage and 2 Dusky Maidens the critique of this cliché balanced their respect for a cultural heritage with their reinterpretation of the Western stereotype.”ⁱ

The Charteris, Tekela-Smith and Hastings-McFall exhibition invitation recreates ethnographic photographs from the initial colonisation period, but the artists have put themselves in the positions of the Dusky Maidens and the Noble Savage. Humorously critiquing and reclaiming identity from the colonial Pacific fetish of the European gaze to Pacific people.



In *Fa'a Fafine In a Manner of a Woman*, Shigeyuki Kihara reframes the Dusky Maiden concept and pushes these boundaries even further. Kihara places his/her self in the place of the Dusky Maiden unravelling a multi-layered conversation about the time and space between cultures by referring to both gender *and* sexuality. This stand point is inherently conflicted but in so being Kihara also begins to reclaim an important part of his/her personal identity as Samoan and by exhibiting this also reclaims an important part of Samoan identity in a public forum. S/he reclaims a perception of gender that has been hidden publically through colonisation. Fa'a Fafine is a third gender and within a pacific context a valid gender as opposed to a perversion or abnormality as in western culture. Through this triptych Kihara explores both the colonial gaze and the Samoan gaze.

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“Kihara’s photograph is clearly staged in a studio but uses background props to create an illusion of being set in the natural world... In his influential writings on photography the theorist Roland Barthes coined the term ‘punctum’ to describe an, at first inconsequential detail that pricks at you as it does not seem right.”ⁱⁱⁱ

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Simulation and illusion are two strong ingredients punctuating these images. The dusky maiden is an illusory concept, an erotic object created in the space between the coloniser and the colonised. This is the first punctuation, in the second punctuation, the setting is simulated. The trees and other paraphernalia are bought into a studio setting from outside, creating a theatrical atmosphere. And thirdly but not least is Kihara's slow strip from appearing female to being of both sexes or Fa'a Fafine. According to Kihara it was not unusual for sailors and colonials to have had a male mate instead of a female, though this was never publically acknowledged probably due to the fact that homosexuality was illegal.

These images illustrate the disparities between cultures. They focus on the internalised anxiety that colonial Europeans historically projected onto Pacific people around gender and sexuality. We are talking about a culture that imprisoned people for homosexuality and then in more 'enlightened' times locked people up and gave them electric shocks as a way to cure them of their 'abhorrent' nature. Some of these differences are inherent in the notions such as Drag (Queen or King), as opposed to the notion of Fa'a Fafine. Within a drag context gender is parodied and traditionally theatrical, seen as a perversion from the normal, whereas Fa'a Fafine is a third gender and valid as a gender.

The crux of this cultural dissonance would, according to Kihara, come from an emphasis placed on a concept of space or *Va* (Pacific). *Ta Va*^{iv} or time-space in Pacific cultures often conflict with Western notions around these concepts.

According to Kihara, Fa'a Fafine exist in the *Va*, or the space between genders. Kihara's work explores and challenges the effects of the binary gender code of Western Culture and how it effects and has influenced traditional Samoan culture.

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ⁱ Stevenson, Karen, *The Frangipani Is Dead; contemporary pacific art in New Zealand 1985-2000;Chapter 4 Icons as Metaphor: Innovating Pacific Art*, Huia Publishers Page 126

ⁱⁱ Kihara, Shigeyuki, *Fa`a Fafine In the Manner of A Woman:2004-2005*, photography

ⁱⁱⁱ Wolf, Erika, Shigeyuki Kihara`s *Fa`a Fafine; In the The Manner of a Woman: the Photographic Theatre of Cross-Cultural Encounter* University of Otago, Pages 23-33

http://otago.academia.edu/ErikaWolf/Papers/1076542/Shigeyuki_Kiharas_Faa_fafine_In_a_Manner_of_a_Woman_The_Photographic_Theater_of_Cross-Cultural_Encounter

^{iv} Māhina,`Okusitino , *Atamai, Fakakaukau and Vale: Mind thinking and Mental Illness in Tonga Pacific Health Pacific Health Dialog Number 2, Health Transitions in the Pacific2002*, pages 303-308

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