

Narrative text:

The Honolulu Museum of Art will present *Lisa Reihana: Emissaries*, an exhibition featuring work by Aotearoa/New Zealand artist Lisa Reihana including *in Pursuit of Venus [infected]*, a 64-minute panoramic multi-channel video projection. Spanning over 70 feet, Reihana's installation creates an immersive cinematic experience, developed in response to the 1804 French wallpaper *Les sauvages de la mer Pacifique* (designed by Gabriel Charvet and printed by Joseph Dufour,). The wallpaper, a twenty-panel scenic depiction based on the Pacific voyages by British and French explorers James Cook, Louis-Antoine de Bougainville, and Jean-François de Galaup de la Pérouse, was created during a time of widespread fascination in Europe with exotic themes of the Pacific. Honolulu Museum of Art's collection includes a complete set of the original wallpaper, which will be shown with Reihana's video work and an installation of vintage telescopes.

The work brings to life—and reinterprets—the French 19th-century decorative wallpaper *Les Sauvages de la Mer Pacifique*, from the museum's collection. Both the wallpaper and Reihana's video are set against an idyllic Pacific landscape; however, Reihana uses digital technology to animate the figures in the narrative. While Charvet/Dufour's work models the Enlightenment concept of the “noble savage”, an idealized indigenous person, outsider, or “other” who has not been “corrupted” by civilization and therefore symbolizes humanity's innate historical goodness, Reihana's reading of the past is more nuanced. The artist foregrounds the complexities of cultural identity and colonization by including scenes of encounter between Europeans and Polynesians.

HoMA's installation will prompt visitors to enact voyeuristic tendencies by way of the physically engaging telescopes, while simultaneously underscoring the myopic view enabled by the limits of the lens.

Reihana has been working on this installation since 2011, when she completed an eight-minute precursor. Each time she shows this work, which comes to HoMA from the Venice Biennale, she offers new insights and presentation opportunities.

This final realization of *Emissaries* makes visible historical narratives absent from the original wallpaper, such as the brisk trade of iron and desirable goods for sexual favors. Differing ideas of ownership and reciprocity resulted in misunderstandings and violent outbursts. This latest version includes famous figures like the privileged and inquisitive botanist Joseph Banks, shown terrorizing villagers with a Tahitian Chief Mourner; and Tupaia, the Machiavellian Tahitian who was a gifted navigator, politician and artist, and Captain Cook's invaluable companion.

Leading these agents of change is Captain Cook—the famed explorer, cartographer and arguably the harbinger of colonization. As in the wallpaper, Cook's death is portrayed, albeit from a renewed perspective. Challenging historical and contemporary stereotypes, *in Pursuit of Venus [infected]* returns the gaze of imperialism with a speculative twist that disrupts notions of beauty, authenticity, history and myth.

Healoha's bio

Healoha Johnston is Interim Director of Curatorial Affairs and Curator of the Arts of Hawai'i, Africa, Oceania, and the Americas at the Honolulu Museum of Art. Ms. Johnston holds MA degrees in Art History and Pacific Island Studies, both from the University of Hawai'i. Her research interests include: exploring transdisciplinary approaches to contemporary art; and locating connections between historic visual culture and contemporary art, with a focus on the socio-political underpinnings that inform those connections. Ms. Johnston brings to the museum a diverse arts background. Her experience runs from serving as a gallery assistant, gallery director, and art advisor for contemporary art galleries, a writer for the NOAA Pacific National Monuments, and Oceanic art consultant for non-profits.

Katherine Love:

Remove K.Love's bio. She is not part of the support team on this project.
Jesi Bennet is, see her bio below:

Jesi Bennett:

Jesi Lujan Bennett is a Ph.D. student in American Studies and Museum Studies at the University of Hawai'i (UH) at Mānoa. She graduated from the University of California, San Diego (UCSD) with a BA in Ethnic Studies and a BA in Critical Gender Studies. Jesi then graduated with her MA from the Center for Pacific Islands Studies at UH Mānoa. Jesi's graduate work examines the outmigration of Chamorros from the Mariana Islands and the ways in which these diasporic communities articulate their Indigeneity in new geographic and cultural contexts.

Jesi is a Chamorro woman from San Diego, California with familial ties to Dededo and Barrigada, Guåhan (Guam). She is president of the Marianas Club at UHM and an active participant in Micronesian Connections and Oceania Rising. She is also an advisor for San Diego's Chamorro Hands in Education Links Unity (CHE'LU). Jesi is currently the Curatorial Assistant for the Arts of Hawai'i at the Honolulu Museum of Art.