

### *Lisa Reihana: Emissaries*

Lisa Reihana's 64-minute, panoramic video installation *in Pursuit of Venus [infected]* reinterprets and brings to life through sound and movement, the French 19th-century decorative wallpaper *Les Sauvages de la Mer Pacifique*, which is in the museum's collection installed nearby. Using digital technology, Reihana orchestrates 80 vignettes where historical figures, such as the cartographer Captain James Cook, the botanist Joseph Banks, and the diplomats Omai and Tupaia, are cast in the artist's speculative narrative.

A 21<sup>st</sup> century technical feat, *iPOV [infected]* is a multi-channel video with 1,500 digital layers consisting of more than three trillion pixels. Reihana collaborated with cultural practitioners, respected elders, designers, teams of technicians, and artists across disciplines to create the garments, choreograph the performances, develop the soundscape, and produce this complex 10-year project into a seamless video projection. She empowered performers to script their own dialogue, whereby setting the stage for a multi-lingual piece with several Pacific languages orating the installation, and established a methodology based on extensive research, artistic experimentation, and inter-generational exchange.

Reihana's scenes are enacted by Indigenous people currently living in the areas Captain Cook visited while he attempted to measure the distance between the sun and Earth by tracking the transit of Venus during three Pacific expeditions spanning 1769-1779. Wallpaper manufacturer Joseph Dufour and designer Jean Gabriel Charvet sourced visual content for *Les Sauvages de la Mer Pacifique* (1804-05) from records and journals documenting those 18<sup>th</sup> century Pacific voyages, though their images were largely informed by French Neoclassical ideals of utopia.

Like Charvet and Dufour, Reihana takes creative license with the subject matter. She alters widely reproduced images, such as John Webber's *The Death of Cook*, and complicates idyllic notions of the exotic with scenes of comedy, customary practices, conflict, and moments of uncomfortable social tensions between characters. Look closely and notice Captain Cook is played by a male actor in select vignettes, and a female actor in others. In this, Reihana alludes to the ambiguity of Cook's gender and begs the viewer to question received histories that circulate misrepresentations. Paired with the telescopes set across the gallery, the artist underscores how different viewpoints shape entirely different systems of meaning. In Reihana's installation, Pacific people inhabit Charvet's landscape, and cross-cultural encounters unfold against the wallpaper backdrop in unexpected ways. Charged interactions between characters contradict the wallpaper's picturesque setting, disrupting historical narratives and challenging stereotypes that originated in the colonial myths of empire.