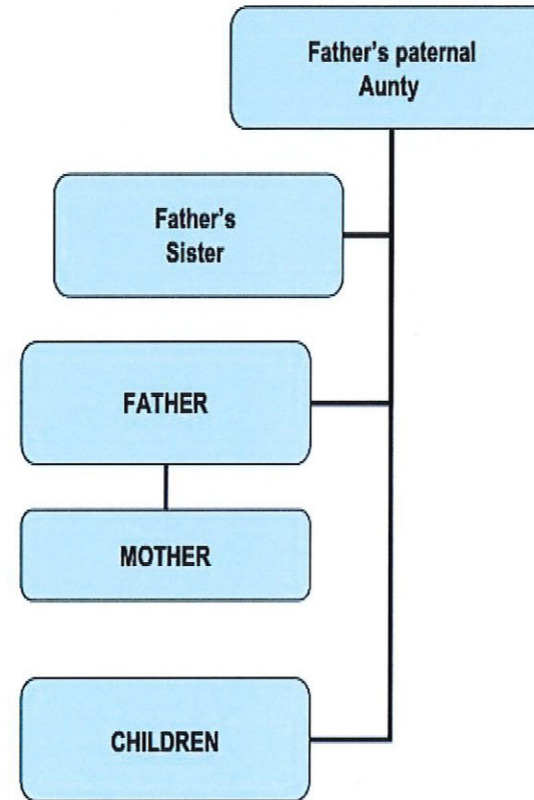


Page One: The Why/Proposal/Context

A lot of my inspiration was heavily influenced by my Tongan heritage and the customs and traditions that I have come to learn and understand. The Tongan culture is heavily influenced by a matriarchal 'fahu' system. Fahu is the dignified rank and is always the paternal aunty. This rank is evident as the Fahu will also be accorded the highest levels of respect at all formal and informal occasions from funerals to weddings and births. She acts as the family matriarch and oversees her siblings, nieces, and nephews.

In contrast, a man usually holds the power and is considered the head of his household. However, a man must care for his sister and her children. So in Tongan families, one's maternal uncle, or Fa'etangata, is considered lower in ranking because of his obligation to take care of the needs of his sister and her children.

The subject and focus of my theme are to explore the variations of hierarchy within the Tongan family and the traditions and rituals that take place within Tongan ceremonies. I had chosen this to display the different power dynamics within the Tongan family and how the Fahu hierarchy system operates and its gender dynamics. Furthermore, I've decided to give this work of series the title 'Matriarch' to pay homage to the Dusky Maiden and Tongan woman as the matriarch of the family structure



The hierarchy within the Tongan family structure.

The hierarchical positions and duties of gender roles differ. One's maternal uncle (*fa'etangata*) is considered to be lower in ranking in the extended family. In contrast, the highest-ranking member of the extended family is one's eldest paternal aunt (*mehikitanga*). She is considered to be the *fahu* (dignified leader) of the family, as exemplified in her role during special occasions for her brother's children. The ideology of sisters having a higher position than men often gives young women a strong sense of their identity as Tongan women. Attitudes of gender equality in Tonga continues through the symbolic honoring of women through the rank and the material honoring of men through a land inheritance.

I will be revolving around capturing the contents and potentially the gender dynamics between the Fahu and the Fa'e Tangata, challenging the western roles between males and females. I will also be exploring portrait photography and capturing the superiority of the Fahu and by using effective lighting, backdrop, and poses.

With these elements, I believe I will have a rich theme that explores many different avenues of what makes the Tongan hierarchy and matriarch such a special concept.



Princess Angelika exercising her role as Fahu at a funeral



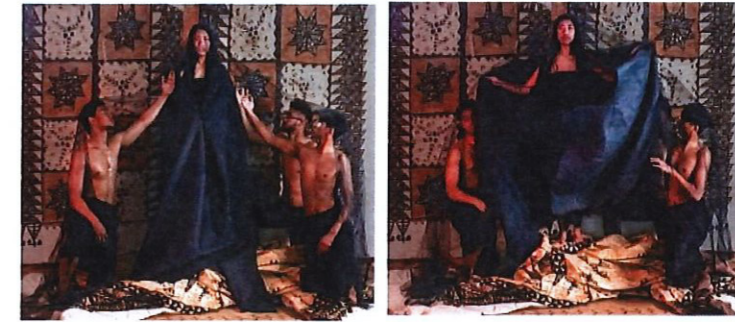
Hair cutting ceremony performed by the Fahu

Fa'e Tangata



Page Two: David LaChapelle

David LaChapelle is an American fine-art photographer whose work references art history and conveys social messages. LaChapelle's fine-art photography challenges the ideas of salvation, redemption, paradise & consumerism. The metaphysical themes have been a part of LaChapelle's oeuvre since the beginning of his career, where he would turn celebrities into modern deities time and time again, from Kanye West as Jesus to Lil' Kim as the Virgin Mary and Naomi Campbell as Venus. LaChapelle is also inspired by the breadth of art history, frequently evoking the compositions or poses of Renaissance paintings.



Although the works I was interested in utilised a bright and board colour scheme, I felt that it was more appropriate to use colours that were organic, homegrown, and true to the ngatu/tapa palette to be able to merge both art photography and storytelling in Tongan tapa/ngatu.

In the first image on the top left, most of my poses and formations were influenced by my artist model, LaChapelle. Moreover, I borrowed interest from his 'Good News for Modern Man' in his 'A New World' series of work. This reference was used to express how female figures are the backbone and play a significant role in Tongan culture. To highlight this twofold there is a halo of light that is focussed on the female model and I also used levels where the Fahu is sitting higher than the Fa'e Tangata to illustrate her importance. I cropped the image in an oval to pay homage to old vintage photos. I decided to make the colour for the area around the Fa'e Tangata monochrome to show how lower in ranking he is to her and uses different levels to emphasize this furthermore. In the 2 photographs on the right, the Fahu is wearing a cloak to symbolise that she is royal and divine. She also is covered with a veil - an idea that was influenced by LaChapelle, to symbolise her modesty, reverence, and chastity. Particularly in the second photograph, it shows the Fahu is opening her cloak. This is to emulate the dominance the female has over the men in Tongan culture. This is also to epitomise how although the men hold the authority and power in the family, they are still obligated to care for the needs of the women as they bestow the highest levels of respect in the Tongan matriarchal system.

In the bottom left series, I am referencing LaChapelle's 'Annunciation' from his 'A New Heaven, A New Earth' series of work. The figure on the bottom left appears more important as her side is coloured. This piece talks about gender equality and challenges the role between females and males in colonial society. The usage of the gold halo is to highlight the figure's head and to show her importance over the man. The patterns are also drawn from the tapa cloth tying this back to Tongan culture. The side of the male figure has been greyed out show mimic how his status is not up to par with the Tongan female. The poses and positioning of the series in the bottom right is inspired by renaissance paintings and is about the Tongan women who have acquired profound knowledge and proficiency in the hierarchy.

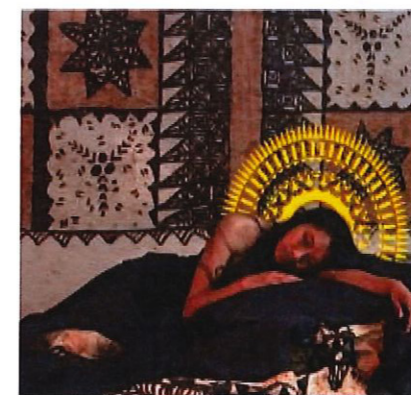


A New Heaven, A New Earth, 2019

I took influence from LaChapelle's more religious challenging artworks such as 'A New Heaven, A New Earth' and 'New World' as these works of series grasped me when researching for ideas that I felt could portray my theme and convey my ideas authentically as his signature blend of colourful and conceptual imagery enforces the idea of purity and the state of being holy, sacred and saintly. In the series, there is also a halo of light surrounding the subjects head depicting the savior and one who is sanctified. In some of LaChapelle's works, the subject wears a veil to symbolise the modesty, obedience, reverence, and chastity of his figures.



A New World, 2016



Page Three: Shigeyuki Kihara

Yuki Kihara is a multifaceted artist of Japanese and Samoan descent. Kihara has built a comprehensive body of work and curatorial practice that questions gender roles, consumerism, (mis)representation, and the past, present, and future societal issues from colonial and post-colonial perspectives.

Velvet Dreams brings together works from two early bodies of work by Shigeyuki Kihara, including *Faleaitu: House of Spirits* (2003) and *Vavau: Tales of Ancient Samoa* (2004). Both series saw Kihara examining Samoan legend and mythology from within, deconstructing the frameworks of cultural identity, spirituality, and narrative traditions. The title "Velvet Dreams" is drawn from a feature documentary directed by New Zealand filmmaker Sima Urale which pays homage to images of the 'dusky maiden' and explores the 'low art' of velvet painting.



Analysis:
Velvet dreams by Kihara interested me in her use of colour choices. This is something I wanted to explore in my works. I tested different coloured lighting and quickly realised that the different coloured lights changed the reading of the image and the figure. A red light made the figure appear more powerful and devious whereas a deep blue light made the figure appear more mysterious and calm. In the end, I chose to play with both red and blue lights as I felt that these two colours on the figures played off each other, showing both the strength and vulnerable sides to each of the figures.

Although the lighting was the main interest in the works, I felt that the posture/pose of the characters needed to match the light. To portray the themes in my board, I opted for the female to appear more staunch while the male figure was tasked to appear more feminine conveying a tenderness.

I was also interested in how the figures in her works appear to be emerging from darkness. Her compositional elements of a black background, dramatic lighting, and colour contrast all recall the aesthetics of velvet paintings. This is something that I also tried exploring as well.

Kihara's *Savage Nobility* series also interested me in its stylistic approach. Her photographs are based similar in style to the late nineteenth century ethnographic and tourist images by New Zealand photographers including Thomas Andrew and Alfred Burton. I wasn't so interested in the idea of the Noble Savage or the Dusky Maiden as this did not match my theme.

I was drawn to the compositions of this series. There was a sense of hierarchy that I took away from them. The positioning of the figures in the frame showed the importance of each of the figures and this was something that I wanted to be reflected in my photographs. I tried black and white and also colour but eventually settled for something quite muted that sat between the two. The reason for this was that I felt that in black and white it made the images too flat and in colour it took the focus away from the idea I was trying to convey. In my photographs I try to capture the importance of the Fahu, keeping everything quite central but always drawing the viewer's attention to the her presence playing with lines and thinking about how and which place the eyes would travel.

In my photographs particularly the bottom left. You can see that the Fahu is sitting on people. This is a metaphor for the rank the Fahu holds over her Brother's children. This is also a tradition that is still practiced in Tongan birthdays where the birthday person would sit on his/her fa'e tangata (mother's brother) to signify the ranks.



Velvet Dreams, 2004



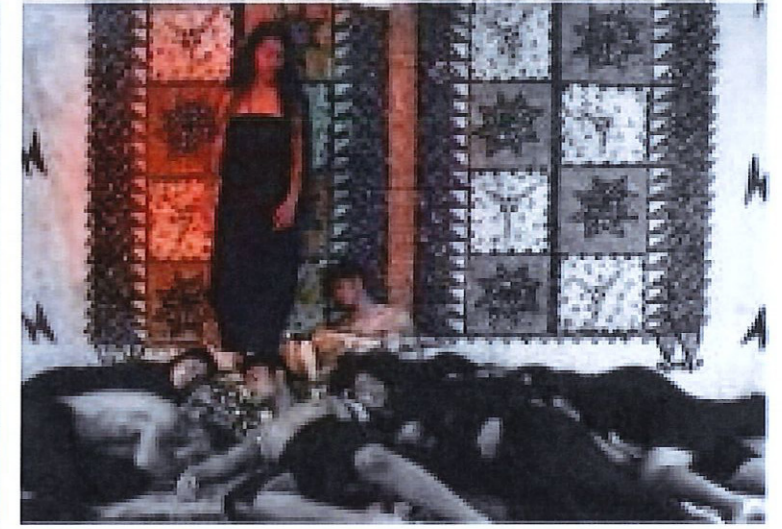
Savage Nobility, 2001



Page Four: Greg Semu

Greg Semu is a New Zealand born Samoan photographer whose work grapples with Western art history and leads us towards a Maori understanding of the events surrounding their ancestors' migratory voyage to New Zealand. Portraiture is the foundation of his art practice, augmented and scaled up to engage displaced and marginalised communities ethnic or aboriginal with arts-focused projects negotiating the horrific legacy suffered upon their ancestors and in the present. Using the visual medium of photography as the vehicle to aggressively questioning the force-fed archival narratives, deaths in custody, injustice, and incarceration law and enforcement. The seduction of suffering, the human condition, and trials and tribulations are stories secreted in the visual universe of Semu.

Greg Semu's *The Raft of the Tagata Pasifika* (2016) questions the fact or fiction of the painterly recorded history of colonisation by the re-imagining of two celebrated nineteenth-century European history paintings; Théodore Géricault's *The Raft of the Medusa* (1819) and Louis John Steele and Charles F. Goldie's *The Arrival of the Māoris in New Zealand* (1898) which was based directly on Géricault's work. Semu has photographically recreated the epic sea voyage consequently fusing and appropriating ideas from the two referenced paintings to cement art historically and for the first time an often shared Māori depiction of the true events surrounding their ancestors' arrival in New Zealand. While Goldie shows the Māoris in their tiny boat as emaciated and sorrowful, exemplifying colonial views of the idealised "dying race" in need of salvation, Semu presents us with Māori people that are strong and healthy of the body: brave travelers, rather than tragic.



The Raft of the Tagata Pasifika by Semu captivated me with his stylistic and dramatic compositions in this series and was something I wanted to reconfigure in my works. A sense of hierarchy was drawn from this composition. The positioning of the figures shows the contrast of importance between the matriarch and fa'e tangata. In the photograph, there are other figures below the female figure who are of lower status as they are the scion of the fa'e tangata.

In the photographs, I was focused on creating a narrative in the style of Semu where the female figure is portrayed as more significant and divine. I opted for the placement of the female figure to tower over the fa'e tangata and his extensions to convey her ranking and importance in the Tongan family hierarchy.

Although compositions and placement were the main ideas explored, the poses of the figures was also an important aspect that was needed to counterpart this. The pose of the female figure was influenced by the iconography of old Renaissance painting *The Birth of Venus* (1485-1486) by Sandro Botticelli, particularly in the left photograph. The figures at the bottom were tasked to appear as if the Fahu is their savior and a goddess who must be worshipped. *Madonna and Child* (13th - 14th Century) by Duccio di Buoninsegna is another iconographic old renaissance painting that influenced the posture of the female figure. This continues the narrative through to the right photograph where the female figures are portrayed to have drained and diminished the life source and energy of the figures below thus, illustrating the contrast of ranks and hierarchy. To emphasize this twofold a halo of light surrounds the female subject.

The Raft of the Tagata Pasifika
(2016)



Page Five: Other artists of interest



The idea of cropping portrait photographs into ovals/circles pays homage to old vintage Tongan portraits during the times when postcards were booming and the noble savage and dusky maiden came into existence and by using a Ngatu as a textured background depicts that a story is being told of my 2 models.



In my photograph, I drew inspiration from director Pierre Debusschere in his Pop Culture music video *Mine* (2013) by Beyoncé. The video references two works of art: Michelangelo's sculpture *Pietà*, and René Magritte's painting *The Lovers* (1928). During the first part of the video, Beyoncé is shown wearing a veil and a gown, sitting with a dancer covered in white paint resting their head on her lap, and with a mask on her hand, that she later put on, with the statue's peaceful expression. In the background there are contemporary dancers with veils, swinging them around in all directions to create a sculptural aspect. This same sculptural element is seen in some of my series of works. This was something I wanted to explore in my works as I was drawn to the contrast between the textures and subtlety in the opening scene in the video. In my photograph a central female figure (the Fahu) is present. On the central female figure, lap lays the Fa'e Tangata (the lowest rank in the Tongan family structure). In the photograph, other figures are facing the main figure in the middle to reinforce that the focal point of the image is on the main figure in the center. In a sense, one could argue that the surrounding figures are also seen as extensions of the fa'e tangata, those of the lower rank. Usually, in Tongan ceremonies, mats and tapa are gifted to the Fahu who usually sits in the center or an obvious part of the ceremony, so I have tried to emulate this same idea.

Robyn Kahukiwa



The idea of photoshopping a double exposure of the female figure into black illustrates the ancestors and the generations of Fahu that came before her. The coloured photos are to represent how the modern-day Fahu system operates. This is shown by artist Robyn Kahukiwa.



Bill Henson

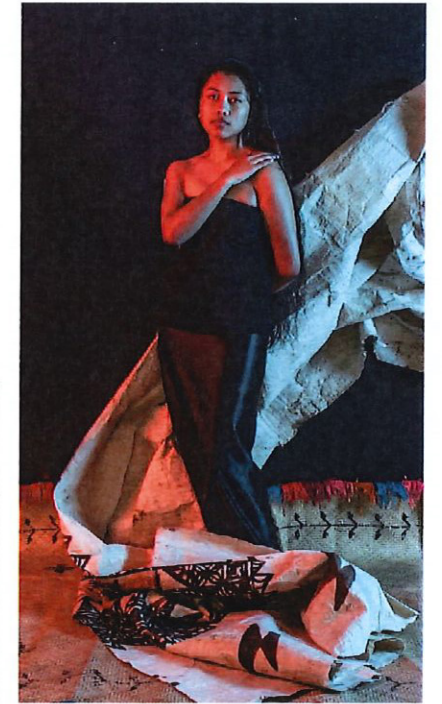


In Bill Henson's *Untitled* works I was interested in the dim lighting of his figures. This is something I trialed in my work and felt turned out quite successful as it captured the emotion and textures in the figure's postures and face. The dramatic lighting also is something that I later explored throughout my folio

Page Six: Trials and tests



The composition of this photograph was borrowed from the renaissance painting *Creation of Adam* (1508–1512) by Michelangelo. This composition of God and Adam nearly touching illustrates how God who is the creator of life is reaching out to Adam who is yet to receive it furthermore this gives the impression they are not the same level as would be two humans for instance. A sense of hierarchy was drawn from this and was an idea I wanted to be reflected in my works. In the image above I felt that the composition was successful as it depicts my theme of the Matriarch. To emphasize this twofold, only one side (the side of the Fahu) is coloured and with a halo ring surrounding her head whereas the Fa'e Tangata is monochrome. In the bottom, the left image was a test of the hands nearly touching as seen in *Creation of Adam* experimenting with textures of colours. Although this was successful I felt that it did not fit in my board as it didn't add to the aspect of storytelling or narrative

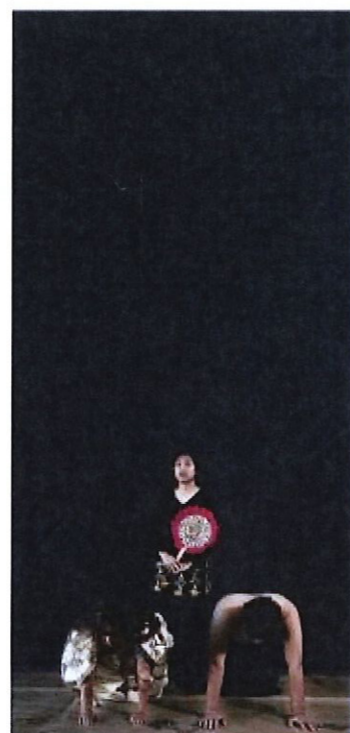


The composition of this photograph was borrowed by the renaissance painting *The Birth of Venus* (1485–1486) by Sandro Botticelli which talks about the divinity and purity of the central female figure. In my photograph, I wanted to solely focus on the female figure and use different colour textures also I wanted to use a ngatu to replace the shell in the original composition to give a sculptural effect so that the photograph doesn't fall flat and to relate this to the Tongan culture and I felt this was successful.

The Death of Marat (1793) by Jacques-Louis David was created to commemorate the personable hero. I decided to use this composition in my own works as the Fahu in Tongan culture is highly respected. I wanted to emulate similar postures in my photograph but the female figure is sleeping rather than appearing as dead. The drapery of cloth has been replaced by the veil and ngatu. In Louis' painting he commemorates the death of a hero whereas in my photograph it is to celebrate the Tongan female figure.



These photographs are displayed in a triptych. The idea of this relates to the holy trinity - the Father, the Son & the Holy Ghost which uses sanctity, holiness, and sacredness in his artwork. This was also borrowed from religious paintings to depict political ideas that question religious views. This artwork is theatrical and premeditated where he has precisely planned each element in his work. Although cropping the photograph into triptych was successful I felt that using a larger space above the female figure gave a more empowering statement hence why this was not utilised in my board.



The image to the left was my best attempt at trying to combine the ideas of the triptych and the *Death of Marat* with an overlay of the tapa cloth from the above-left image along with the lighting in the style of Kihara. I believe this failed because it became too busy and took away the aspect of storytelling and narrative. Although I did take away some ideas that I would later explore for the bottom part of my board. The idea of the overlay of the patterns to add texture.

Page Seven: Reflection/Analysis



At the beginning of the year, my initial board was to focus mainly on the Tongan family structure and the Tongan hierarchy by using compositions as metaphors to emulate this.

Throughout the year my idea changed numerous amount of times before I was content for what it is now. Instead of making the Tongan hierarchy my main conveying idea, I felt that the matriarch was a more interesting approach to explore in-depth as having a female figure who is higher in ranking challenges the western societal norms between male and female and questions gender equality. Furthermore, during this process, I decided that I wanted to take a more contemporaneous style approach with my photographs as my initial photographs and compositions felt too traditional and too literal towards the idea of Fahu.

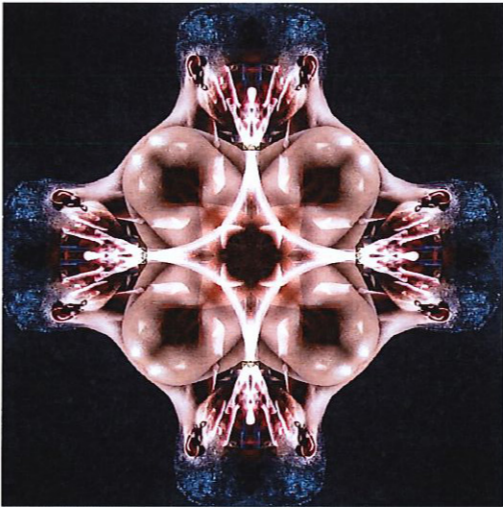
In my works, I wanted to explore and utilise different colour schemes so that my series didn't fall flat as previous tests and trials. In my initial board, I felt that monochrome or a dark and gloomy vignette was more appropriate to pay homage to the Dusky Maiden and Tongan woman as the matriarch of the family structure. In my second board, I wanted to merge both art photography and storytelling/narrative through ngatu and tapa. I felt that it was more appropriate to use colours that were more organic, homegrown, and true to the ngatu/tapa palette for this idea to be conveyed effectively. In most of the photographs on my second board, there is always a halo of colour or a side that is always coloured that follows the female figure which then fades to grey/black when surrounding the fa'e tangata and the surrounding figures. I felt that doing this emphasized the idea of the fahu being accorded the highest levels of respect and importance. In my final board, I wanted to explore further in-depth with the colour palette. I tested different coloured lighting and quickly realised that the different coloured lights changed the reading of the image and the figure. A red light made the figure appear more powerful and devious whereas a deep blue light made the figure appear more mysterious and calm. In the end, I chose to play with both red and blue lights as I felt that these two colours on the figures played off each other, showing both the strength and vulnerable sides to each of the figures.

Page Eight: Where to from here?

If I were to extend my board further I would explore the depths of the origins/legends of how the fahu came to be a custom and tradition in the Tongan culture. When Tongans were introduced to Christianity, the previous religions and cultural beliefs were forsaken and forgotten. The importance of the fahu system is derived from Hikule'o - her being the goddess of death/pulotu and creator of women and being the oldest sister of Tangaloa. Hence why fahu's are extremely important at the Tongan putu (funeral). Although Tonga's modern-day culture is heavily influenced by Christianity, pieces of the initial religion and pre-Christianity remain.

In my fourth board, I will be exploring the celestial portraits of Christian Thompson's *Equinox*. In this work of series, he plays a spirit figure that in each print is posed with Thompson's signature baroque regalia. As if the burden of prophecy has left them resigned to the sad fate of humanity, these spirit figures are too lost in melancholic thought to notice gallery spectators. This transcendental effect transforms the gallery into the pious space of the cathedral where we mortals seek atonement for our sins. I also will be drawing influence by Pati Solomona's *Fa'agogo* series of work, specifically his pacific spiritual portraits. I wanted to capture what the female figure would like as a celestial being and to pay homage to the original female goddess of death/pulotu. I was captivated by the compositions and their attire and is an aspect I want to reflect on in my board 4.

For board 5 I want to explore further than photography and capture moving images. For this to come to fruition I will draw inspiration from artist Lisa Reihana in her "In Pursuit of Venus" panoramic series. Reihana challenges 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. I will also be referencing Pati Tyrell Solomona's video works in his *Fa'agogo* exhibition. I was drawn to the mirroring of images and was an aspect I wanted to utilise to emphasize the idea of the celestial realm and out of this world. By utilising these ideas, I will create a panoramic moving image to recreate what the celestial female figure would appear in the underworld.



Mirroring of photographs that I will later explore in my series



Above is artist work

