

Student 1: Low Excellence

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Through the modernist practice of photography and the postmodern characteristics of merging high and low art forms, and the represented 'appropriation' of culture Shigeyuki Kihara appropriates and merges elements from both European and Samoan/Pacific cultures. An example of this is the Pacific setting of the works combined with the European dress featured in *After Cyclone Evan, Lelata*. Kihara stands, wearing a taffeta gown in front of the Fale Fono, the Samoan parliament, which does not appear to be damaged. However, if one compares the modern picture with the sepia-toned photograph of the same scene the differences between the same place before and after cyclone Evan are evident. The appropriation of both traditional and modern Samoan places of dwelling and the European dress produces "vivid contrast to the choice of backdrops" (Milford Galleries Dunedin 2013) in the works. This contrast between cultures is also present in a more poetic, spiritual way through the types of buildings depicted. In *After Cyclone Evan, Lelata*, a Samoan political/parliamentary building is depicted and in *Departure Faleolo, International Airport* Kihara stands wistfully gazing, perhaps 'mourning' the loss of her culture and the country's land; in a modern Samoan setting. Therefore this produces quite eerie meanings as the places where one would usually expect to see people, business and travelling friends, are empty. She wears a black Victorian mourning dress and both images are black and white (monochromatic). Because of the connotations the colour black has with death this could also relate to the death of culture. In relation to post-colonial theory these works could therefore be implying that the lives and usually busy, bright cultures of the Pacific Islanders were made empty by the marginalisation of their culture and establishment of foreign culture and people as the 'superior'. Furthermore the works, as they detail places Samoan culture and belonging (ie even though the European way of government and travel were brought to Samoa, traditional ways still existed as pre-established ways of Pacific life) after being wrought by the environmental destruction could be implying that the colonisation of Pacific people and their culture/heritage was like a natural disaster in how much damage it caused to people their land and identity.

The depiction of a place in travel in *Departure Faleolo International Airport* is also a significant feature of Kihara's work which highlights an issue of post-colonialism and the theory which is being currently addressed in society. In African-American culture, one of another ethnicity which has and perhaps still is heavily discriminated against by people who colonised their land, there is belief that one, after a lifetime of suffering (such as in slavery or discrimination) will travel to a higher place and better life. In spiritual songs a place called 'Jordan' is often mentioned as a sort of heaven created by the pre-existing religious culture of marginalised people, therefore the use of an airport, a modern place of travel, in Kihara's work *Departure, Faleolo International Airport* relates the religious beliefs of the Pacific peoples to the post-colonial condition and perhaps could convey that the communities who had new systems of belief and religion imposed on them were dreaming of a 'Jordan-like' place where they would find sanctuary, much as African-American enslaved people (93) believed in when they were oppressed as a people, race and culture. The deserted state of the airport and of the Samoan parliament in *After Cyclone Evan, Lelata* could also convey that the European imposition of culture destroyed the native, pre-existing culture in places like Samoa and that the people suffering through this establishment of new life needed to dream of a new life in a better place because of how cultural identity had been re-established and created. This idea of travel could even perhaps convey that the traditions and culture of

the Pacific had been destroyed in such a way that any place would be better than the new bi-cultural, developed society which European settlers had established.

Shigeyuki Kihara is an artist who “has built up a vocabulary of forms and techniques that allows her to move beyond core themes like racial and gender identity and colonisation to add a powerful poetic element” (Gifford 2012). Through using processes like photography and employing post-modern characteristics like appropriation and the merging of high European art forms and concepts and ‘low’ art photographic media Kihara discusses not only her own identity but also the lost cultural heritages and ideals of a collective, marginalised identity. She relates post-colonial theory to her own identity and gender, in turn critiquing stereotyped roles and views of women in art and of the imposition of other religions and ways of life onto ethnic minorities, therefore critiquing these same ideas in modern society and commenting on her role as a women artists in the art world.

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Post-colonial theory is a theory current and important to the people of New Zealand and their cultural identity today and forever. Artists such as Michael Parekowhai, Shane Cotton and Shigeyuki Kihara draw on their own identities and cultural lifestyles for inspiration to create new post-modern contemporary works that contribute to the intellectual discussion formed through post-colonialism, In order to understand our society and people of today these artists and others who contribute to this discussion and debates to educate us about our heritage issues of the past. In this way, through inspiration taken from modern and classic artist models and the context of European and Pacific societies in the period of colonisation, the effects of post-colonial theory in New Zealand history are shown. And in this New Zealand, bicultural artists play an important part as their works act as the mirror which reflects New Zealand modern society and the established bicultural nature of our heritage.

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