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‘Amui ‘i Mu‘a/Ancient Futures in Context

Abstract

This article introduces, in English and Tongan, the volume of Pacific Arts devoted to the project titled ‘Amui ‘i Mu‘a/Ancient Futures, which included a 2021 exhibition of the same name featuring artworks by Sopolemalama Filipe Tohi and Dagmar Vaikalafi Dyck. It also includes biographical sketches of Tohi and Dyck.

Keywords: *‘Amui ‘i Mu‘a/Ancient Futures, Tongan art, Pacific art, Sopolemalama Filipe Tohi, Dagmar Vaikalafi Dyck, Tongan diaspora, art, material culture, printmaking*

In the exhibition series *‘Amui ‘i Mu‘a/Ancient Futures*, senior Tongan artists Sopolemalama Filipe Tohi and Dagmar Vaikalafi Dyck bring renewed understandings of how the traditions of millennia of Tongan artists relate to their own praxes. Together, Tohi and Dyck convey late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Tongan art practices to new media and new audiences. In the exhibitions, the interlocation of past, present, and future Tongan arts is offered in glorious empathy to inspire feeling of *māfana*, unrestrained “warmth of heart” or emotion—a particularly Tongan feeling evoked powerfully by the direct experience of *nima mea‘a*, or Tongan arts.

The exhibitions, supported by Creative New Zealand, are the artistic culmination of a Marsden project funded by the Royal Society of New Zealand. Tohi and Dyck were the artist-scholars on *Ancient Futures: Late Eighteenth- and Early Nineteenth-Century Tongan Arts and Their Legacies*, working with us (art historian and anthropologist Billie Lythberg, historian and anthropologist Phyllis Herda, and linguist Melenaita Taumoeofolau—all based at the University of Auckland) as well as art historian Hilary L. Scothorn and international colleagues. Over five years, the team examined art objects of exchange and encounter between Europeans and Tongans in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, now held in museum collections worldwide. We looked for continuity within contemporary practices and innovation in the arts of Tongan ancestors and their descendants

and sought to reclaim and repatriate to Tonga and its diaspora the knowledge systems encoded in woven, layered, wrapped, and carved objects. The Ancient Futures team visited more than thirty collections in the United Kingdom, United States, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, France, Italy, Sweden, Japan, Australia, and Aotearoa.

Central to the aims and praxis of the project was bringing together our different knowledge bases and providing opportunities for the interpretation of ancient items in contemporary works as creative legacies for the future. Together in the storerooms, our senses were heightened. In some collections, Tohi and Dyck alone had the option not to wear gloves. For many of the artifacts they handled, theirs were the first Tongan hands to warm them in 250 years.

We learned from each other, often collapsing disciplinary boundaries and always adhering to the values on which the project was founded, including *faka'apa'apa*—respect for each other's observations and speculations as well as for the objects themselves. The synergy of working in the museum stores as a team proved, as we had hoped, both exciting and enlightening; the sum total of shared "table talk" was much more than our individual knowledge and expertise. The opinions and insights of artists and academics alike added to the often sparsely written details associated with each object by each institution, and their various intersections and divergences were both unpredictable and highly generative.

Sopolemalama Filipe Tohi was born in Ngele'ia on Tongatapu, Tonga's main island. He immigrated to Aotearoa in 1978. For *'Amui 'i Mu'a/Ancient Futures*, Tohi extended his lifelong examination of traditional Tongan *lalava* lashing patterns as well as the finely incised carving of late eighteenth-century Tongan clubs to uncover what he refers to as a "fiber system" of knowledge, with rules, orders, and schema. He has also analyzed eighteenth-century *kali* headrests, recovering the method of their construction as well as the relationships between their dimensions that encode sophisticated mathematical logic. Tohi's new works draw out the repeating motifs and ways of knowing that he has seen in these objects and reveal profound connections to navigation practices. The most literal of these, an installation of paintings of the moon, is based on his taking a photo of the moon every night throughout our travels as an enduring navigational aid—the same moon looked at by Tongan navigators and European explorers.

Dagmar Vaikalafi Dyck is a Tongan-German multimedia artist. She was born and raised in Auckland where she continues to live, practice art, and teach. Dyck's mother is German-Tongan from Vava'u and her father is German, Polish, and Dutch. In the 1980s, Dyck and her family lived for a year in Vava'u. Over the next

two decades, they spent most summer holidays in Vava'u, keeping connections with the village and family strong. Dyck attended the Elam School of Fine Arts at the University of Auckland and in 1995 was the first woman of Tongan ancestry to obtain a postgraduate diploma in fine art. She also holds a graduate diploma in teaching (2009) and recently completed her MA in professional studies, education.

Known for her dynamic prints and paintings that often draw from the *kupesi* (designs) on *ngatu* (barkcloth), Dyck has drawn new, significant inspiration from the garments worn by her ancestors. Dyck has continued her exploration of *ngatu* motifs and closely woven *kato alu* (ceremonial baskets) and *kato mosi kaka* (finely woven coconut fiber baskets), as well as elaborately feathered *sisi fale* (waist garments), *kiekie* (waist adornments), *fala* (mats), and *helu* (combs). Her works explicate these in woven, painted, and layered formats. With her skillfulness in printmaking, Dyck also created a series of limited-edition screen prints intricately layered with historical and contemporary references. Directly acknowledging the communal making of many Tongan women's arts, she led the creation of a multimedia installation with her sister, Luana Dyck, and photo-filmic artists and sisters Emily and Veia Mafile'o.

Another significant achievement was introducing Tohi to the complex and sophisticated screen-printing process and the possibilities this media presents for his practice. Dyck brought Tohi to the experts at Artrite Screenprinting in Auckland and worked together with its printmaking artisans to produce limited-edition prints that commemorate their participation in the Ancient Futures project. These contemporary works, made for the gallery context, were complemented by and exhibited in conversation with a selection of historical Tongan artifacts from both public and private collections.

Talateu: 'Amui 'i Mu'a/Ancient Futures in Context

Kuo fakahoko 'e he ongo taukei Tonga 'i he mala'e 'o e 'ātí mo e ngaahi ngāue fakamea'á, Soplemalama Filipe Tohi mo Dagmar Vaikalafi Dyck, 'a hono toe ngāue'aki 'a e ngaahi founga ngāue tukufakaholo lauita'u mei he kuohilí 'i he'ena ngaahi ngāué. Ko 'ena ngāue fakataha 'eni lolotonga 'a e polokalama ngāue 'oku 'iloa ko e 'Amui 'i Mu'a/Ancient Futures. Kuo ngāue fakataha 'a Tohi mo Dyck ke vahevahe atu 'a e ngaahi ngāue 'a e kāinga Tonga meí he konga ki mui 'o e senituli 18 ki he konga ki mu'a 'o e senituli 19 mo ha taha pē 'oku manako pe muimui'i 'a e ngaahi koloá ni. 'E kau mai ki he katoanga faka'ali'alí 'a e ngaahi ngāue faka'aati

mo fakamea'a Tonga mei he kuohilí mo e lolotongá ni ke hoko ko e fakalotolahi mo e fakamāfana ki he kau ngāue faka'aati mo e nima mea'a 'o e kaha'ú.

Kuo tokoni mai 'a e *Creative New Zealand* ki hono fakahoko 'a e polokalama ngāué pea fakapa'anga 'e he *Marsden project, Royal Society of New Zealand*. Ko Dyck mo Tohi ko e ongo taukei 'i he 'ēlia 'o e 'ātí mo e ngaahi ngāue fakamea'a pea 'okú na kau ki he timi ngāue fakatoto 'oku 'iloa ko e *Ancient Futures: Late 18th and Early 19th Century Tongan Arts and their Legacies (Ngaahi ngāue faka'aati mo e koloa fakamea'a Tonga mei he kongá ki mui 'o e senituli 18 mo e kongá ki mu'a 'o e senituli 19)*. Na'e kau ki he ngāue ko 'ení 'a Dr Phyllis Herda, Dr Melenaita Taumoefolau mo Dr Billie Lythberg mei he *University of Auckland* pea mo ha tokotaha mataotao ko Hilary L. Scothorn. 'I he ta'u 'e nima kuo hilí, na'e lava ke fai hono vakai'i tonu 'a e ngaahi koloa fakamea'a Tonga mei he ngaahi fakafetongi koloa 'a e Tongá mo e kau papālangí mei he kongá ki mui 'o e senituli 18 mo e kongá ki mu'a 'o e senituli 19. 'Okú tauhi 'a e ngaahi koloá ni 'i he misiume 'o e ngaahi fonua muli. Ko 'emau feingá ke fakatolonga 'a e ngaahi ngāue tukufakaholo ko 'ení ke tokoni 'i hono fofoa'i ha ngaahi founa fo'ou meiate kinautolu 'o e kuohilí. 'Okú fakahoko mo e ngāue ke fakafoki ki Tonga pea mo vahevahe 'a e ngaahi tukufakaholó ni mo e kāinga Tonga 'i he ngaahi fonua mulí. Na'e a'u tonu 'a e timi ngāue 'a e *Ancient Futures* ki ha ngaahi feitu'u kehekehe 'e 30 tupu 'i Pilitānia, 'Amelika, Siamane, 'Ositulia, Siusalani, Falanisē, 'Itali, Sueteni, Siapani, 'Aositelēlia mo Nu'u Silá ni, 'a ia 'oku tauhi ai 'a e ngaahi koloa fakamea'a.

Na'e fakataumu'a 'a e ngāué, ke fakatahataha'i 'a e ngaahi taukei mo e a'usia 'oku nau ma'ú, ke fakamā'opo'opo 'a e ngaahi ngāue 'o e kuohilí ko e sio ki he kaha'ú. Na'e ma'u faingamālie 'a Tohi mo Dyck ke na hoko ko e ongo fuofua Tonga ke sio mo ala ki he ngaahi ngāue 'o e 'aneafí 'a ia kuo tauhi mai eni 'i ha ta'u 'e 250. Kuo lava ai ke ma'u 'a e ngaahi hingoa, fakamatala, founa ngāue mo e teuteu fakasanisani 'o 'enau ngāué 'o lava ke mahino ai 'a e taumu'a 'a e tokotaha na'á ne ngaohí, tokotaha na'á ne foakí mo e tokotaha na'á ne tauhí.

'Okú tau fevahevahe'aki 'o ako ai 'a e ngaahi me'a lahi mo nofo taha ki he taumu'a 'o e polokalama ngaué. 'Okú kau heni 'a e faka'apa'apa'i 'a e ngaahi tñaki mai 'a e taha kotoa ki he ngāué. Kuo mahino 'a e ola lelei mo fakafiefia ange 'a e ngāue fakatahá 'i he ngāue fakatautahá. Na'e kau foki 'a e taukei 'a e kau 'ātí fakataha mo kinautolu 'i he mala'e 'o e akó ki hono fakamahino mo vahevahe mai 'a e ngaahi fakamatala na'e tō kehekehe ai 'a e ni'ihí fekau'aki mo e ngaahi koloa kuo tauhí.

Na'e fa'ēle'i 'a Sopolemalama Filipe Tohi 'i Ngele'ia, Tongatapu, Tonga. Na'á ne hiki mai ki Nu'u Silá ni 'i he 1978. 'I he'ene ngāue mo e 'Amui 'i Mu'a: *Ancient Futures*, kuo toe hokohoko atu ai 'ene vīšione ta'u lahi ki he ngāue faka'ātí

'o kau ai 'a e lalavá mo e tā tongitongi 'o e pōvai Tongá fakatatau ki he ngaahi ngāue 'o e konga ki mui 'o e senituli 18. Ko hono toe fakamo'ui eni 'a e *'fibre system'* pe tukufakaholo 'o e 'iló mo e founa ngāue na'e fakahoko'aki 'a e ngaahi ngāue fakamea'á. Na'á ne toe vakai'i mo ngāue ki he ngaahi kali mei he senituli 18 'o mahino 'a e anga mo e founa hono ngaohi pea mo e 'ilo fakafika fekau'aki mo e ngaahi fua 'o e lahi 'o e ngaahi kalí. Kuo kamata ngāue eni 'a Tohi ki he ngaahi tongi pe kupesi na'e ngāue'aki 'i he ngaahi ngāue fakamea'á 'o 'ilo'i ai 'a 'ene felāve'i mo e folau tahí. Na'e kau ki he ngāue'á 'a 'ene tā valivali 'o e māhiná fakata-tau ki he ngaahi 'ata na'á ne faitaa'i he pō kotoa lolotonga 'emau fefolau'akí hangē ha me'a faifolau na'e ngāue'aki 'e he kāinga Tonga 'o ono'ahó pe kau papālangi na'a nau kumi fonua fo'ou.

Ko Dagmar Vaikalafi Dyck ko ha tokotaha Tonga/ Siamane taukei 'i he ngāue faka'atí. Na'e fā'ēle'i pea tupu hake 'a Dyck'i 'Aokalani, Nu'u Sila. 'Okú ne kei nofo mo hoko atu 'ene ngāue'á mo faiako 'aati 'i 'Aokalaní ni. Ko e fine'eiki 'a Dyck, ko e Tonga/Siamane mei Vava'u pea ko 'ene tangata'eiki ko e Siamane mei Pōlani. 'I he 80 tupú, na'e nofo ai 'a Dyck mo hono fāmilí 'i Vava'u 'i ha ta'u 'e taha. Ko e ta'u eni 'e 20 mo 'ene folau ma'u pē 'o mālōlō ki Vava'u ke feohi ai mo e kāingá mo e ngaahi kolo kehé. Na'e ako 'a Dyck 'i he *Elam School of fine Arts* 'o e *University of Auckland* pea na'á ne hoko ko e fuofua fefine Tonga kuo ma'u 'a e mata'itohi ko e *postgraduate diploma of fine arts* 'i he 1995. 'Okú 'i ai foki hono mata'itohi *graduate diploma in teaching (2009)* pea ki muí ni 'a e mata'itohi *MA in professional studies, education*.

'Okú 'iloa 'a e ngaahi tā valivali 'a Dyck ki mui ní, na'e makatu'unga meí he ngaahi kupesi 'o e ngatú mo e vala hotau kāinga he kuo hilí. Kuó ne toe ngāue'aki foki 'a e ngaahi 'ilo mo e founa ngāue fakamea'a kehe 'o kau ai 'a e kato alú, kato mosikaká, sisi falé (teuteu'i'aki 'a e fulufulu'i manú), kiekié, falá mo e helú. Ko e ngaahi ngāue faka'aati eni kuo lālanga, tā valivali pea 'i ha ngaahi fōtunga kehe pē. Kuo lava ke paaki ai ha ngaahi 'ata 'o e ngāue'á ni 'o ngāue'aki 'a e ngaahi founa motu'a fakataha mo e ngaahi 'ilo fakaonopoó ni. Kuo ngāue fakataha 'a Dyck mo hono tokouá, Luana Dyck pea pehē foki ki he ongo tautehina ko Emily mo Veá Mafile'o, ko e ongo taukei 'i he ngāue faka'atí, ngāue'aki 'a e faitaa'á mo e filimí fakataha mo e ngaahi founa kehekehe 'o e mītiá (vitiō mo e 'ata). Kuo lava ke fa'u mo tauhi ha ngaahi lekooti ke fakamanatu'aki 'a e ngāue fakamea'a 'a e fefine Tongá.

Na'e kau foki 'a e ngaahi ngāue 'a Tohi 'i hono faitaa'i mo hiki vitioo'i 'o kau ai 'a 'ene ngaahi tā valivali fakaonopoó ni kuo paaki pea kuo tokoni ke tu'uaki 'aki 'ene ngāue'á ki he opé. Na'e fakafe'iloaki 'e Dyck'a Tohi ki he kau ngāue taukei 'o e fale paaki *Artrite Screen printing* pea kuo nau ngāue fakataha ki hono paaki

makehe 'o e ngaahi ngāue faka'ātí ke fakamanatu'aki 'ena kau ki he polokalama ngāue mo e *Ancient Futures*. 'Oku faka'ali'ali atu 'a e ngaahi ngāue ni fakataha mo e ngāue fakamea'a Tonga 'o e kuohilí.

Translation by Alioth Helu

Phyllis Herda's work crosses the traditional disciplines of anthropology, Pacific history, and women's/gender studies. She holds degrees from the University of Arizona (BA, anthropology), the University of Auckland (MA, first class, anthropology), and Australian National University (PhD, Pacific history). She has taught at Victoria University (Wellington) and the University of Auckland, from which she recently retired. She began working in Tonga in the early 1980s and continues to research, publish, and teach on topics including Tongan ethnography; European explorers in Polynesia; Polynesia art and material culture; Tongan oral tradition and history; gender, disease and colonialism; and traditional and contemporary Polynesian textiles.

Billie Lythberg is of Swedish, Scottish, and English descent. She is a senior lecturer in the Department of Management and International Business at Waipapa Taumata Rau|The University of Auckland, and an affiliated researcher of Vā Moana–Pacific Spaces at Te Wānanga Aronui o Tāmaki Makau Rau|Auckland University of Technology. She has worked on multiple projects for the Royal Society of New Zealand with Māori and Moana colleagues, including the Marsden Grant-funded project discussed in this volume. She publishes extensively in print and online, curates and critiques exhibitions, and develops documentaries for broadcast television.

Melenaite Taumoefolau was born to Tongan parents: the late Reverend Tēvita Tu'ipulotu Taumoefolau and Kakala. She attended primary and secondary schools in Tonga and attended the University of the South Pacific where she graduated with a BA in English and history and a concurrent certificate in education. She returned to Tonga and taught English at Tonga College and Tonga High School. She obtained an MA in English as a second/foreign language at the University of Wales. She became principal of Tonga College for a year before moving to New Zealand where she studied lexicography and linguistics at the University of Auckland, earning a PhD in linguistics and a masters of professional studies in translation (first class honors). Currently she is teaching and researching at the Centre for Pacific Studies, University of Auckland.