

Presseinformation

Museum am Rothenbaum

Rothenbaumchaussee 64 | 20148 Hamburg
Germany | markk-hamburg.de

In the Shadow of Venus: Lisa Reihana & Pacific taonga

Press call: Tuesday 18 February 2020 | 11 a.m.

Opening: Tuesday 18 February 2020 | 7 p.m.

Exhibition: 19 February – 28 June 2020



Lisa Reihana, detail in *Pursuit of Venus [infected]*, 2015–17, Ultra HD video, colour, 7.1 sound, 64 min. Image courtesy of the artist, Art projects NZ, and New Zealand at Venice. With support of Creative New Zealand and NZ at Venice Patrons and Partners.

Lisa Reihana is among the most relevant contemporary artists from the Pacific. Her work *in Pursuit of Venus [infected]* constitutes the heart of the exhibition *In the Shadow of Venus: Lisa Reihana & Pacific taonga*. Here, the Museum am Rothenbaum puts artistic production from Oceania into the spotlight. Reihana's digital panorama will be on view for the first time in Germany. It is brought into dialogue with exceptional historical artworks from the museum's collection. Her work critically engages with the first encounters between Europeans and Pacific Islander societies which lead to their colonisation and also resulted in the transfer of cultural goods to Europe.

Borrowing motifs from a French wallpaper that was popular at the beginning of the 19th century, Reihana's counter-narrative from a Pacific perspective evokes and shatters romantic ideas of a "Pacific paradise" and of its inhabitants as "noble savages". The wallpaper, inspired by drawings and travelogues which circulated at the end of the 18th century in the wake of James Cook's expeditions, adorned the salons of the European elite at the time. Reihana engages and exposes her European viewers for whom this romantically-tinted, aestheticized representation of the Pacific continues to strongly resonate.

Reihana's large-format work was amongst the highlights of the 2017 Venice Biennale. The work binds the viewer within a timeless infinity loop of encounters in which questions of self-presentation, representation, power, history and cultural

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misunderstanding can be felt. These motifs allow for associative cross-connections to the objects from the MARKK collection. Unique and immaculate in their formal language, alluring in their aesthetics, these objects too are inscribed with levels of meaning in which relationships resonate: the engagement of the artists with material and design, inspiration and the social context of the process of creation and, finally, the seizure and appropriation of objects by Europeans.

The emergence of the museum's Oceania collection was closely tied to the city's trade networks. Its first pieces can be traced back to the Hamburg company Joh. Ces. Godeffroy & Son's own Museum Godeffroy. After the turn of the 20th century, Hamburg merchants financed Germany's biggest colonial research expedition to the Pacific Islands. It was supported by the Hamburger Wissenschaftliche Stiftung (Hamburg Scientific Foundation) and initiated by Georg Thilenius, director of the museum at the time. The profile of the collection was marked by its colonial context. Territories in which large numbers of culturally important goods were removed under German colonial administration were often left with holes in the totality of their cultural heritages.

The choice of objects captures the double entendre of the title, In the Shadow of Venus. On the one hand, it relates to the exoticized images of the Pacific which persist until this day in which women, stylised as "Pacific Venus", became blank canvases for the sexual desires of European audiences. On the other hand, the title refers to Cook's observation of the Transit of Venus in 1769 and, accordingly, the ambitions of European travelling researchers to measure space and time and to classify the world. The ambivalence of these two aspects — shifting between scientific ambition and romanticised distortion — is reflected in the exhibited works.

The exhibition hugely benefitted from the expert knowledge of Dr. Emelichter Kihleng who researched the MARKK Oceania collection in the context of a MARKK in Motion Curatorial Research Fellowship, funded by the Initiative for Ethnographic Collections of the Kulturstiftung des Bundes. She curated the exhibition in collaboration with Dr. Jeanette Kokott, head of the Oceania department, and selected works from the collection which, by association, matched the content of Reihana's panorama.

The exhibition is funded by the Hubertus Wald Foundation, the Board for Culture and Media Hamburg and the Government of New Zealand.