

HUM

Still Alive

Nikau Hindin and Yuki Kihara at the 2022
Aichi Triennale

by Stuart Munro

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Nikau Hindin, Aichi Triennale, installation view, 2022. © Aichi Triennale Organizing Committee. Photo: ToLoLo studio.



Nikau Hindin, *Sky above, Earth below, I am tangata whenua.* / "Ko te rangi, ko te whenua, ko aute tangata whenua." –*EruPotakaDewes (NgatiPorou)*, 2022. Aichi Triennale, installation view, 2022. © Aichi Triennale Organizing Committee. Photo: ToLoLo studio.



Yuki Kihara, サーマアのうた (*Sāmoa no uta*) *A Song About Sāmoa – Fanua (Land)*, 2021. Aichi Triennale, installation view, 2022. © Aichi Triennale Organizing Committee. Photo: ToLoLo studio.



Oka Family Residence, Arimatsu venue, Japan. Photo: Nagoya City.



Takita Family Residence, Tokoname, Japan.

The writer Stuart Munro visits this year's Aichi Triennale, Still Alive, based around the Japanese city of Nagoya, to see works by Aotearoa artists Nikau Hindin (Ngāpuhi, Te Rarawa) and Yuki Kihara (of Sāmoan Japanese descent). He finds them installed in buildings of local historical significance, and unpacks their connections to family, survival and place.

Nagoya is the birthplace of Japanese conceptualist On Kawara, who lends the triennale its title. From the 1970s onwards, Kawara, who gained a reputation for being enigmatic, sent a sprawling list of friends, accomplices, acquaintances and colleagues one simple message by telex: "I am still alive." Kawara's message is profoundly relevant this year, and the Aichi Triennale 2022 featured works that reflect on the pandemic and on existence, perseverance, survival and longevity, in which the importance of place also played a pivotal role.

The Aichi Triennale presented exhibitions of 82 individual artists or groups from Japan and 31 other countries and regions, exhibited across Aichi prefecture in several locations. Besides the main venue, Aichi Arts Center in Nagoya city, three other sites, cities in their own right, acted as surrogate hosts to local and international artists. In each of these, the artworks were placed within the local landscape and in the physical space of old buildings, such as quiet suburban houses and a former dyeing factory in Arimatsu, or amongst the pottery furnaces of Tokoname.

Catching a breeze, away from the din of Nagoya city, a short train ride south took me from the focused intensity of the Aichi Arts Center to some of these more isolated venues, where the works of Aotearoa artists Yuki Kihara and Nikau Hindin were displayed. My first stop was the town of Arimatsu and the old mercantile residence of the Takeda family, which Gabriel Orozco and Prinz Gholam (Wolfgang Prinz and Michel Gholam) occupied in parallel fashion: in *Roto Shaku* (2022), Orozco placed measuring sticks in the residential tearoom while Prinz Gholam, in *There are eyes* (2022), placed face masks around the rest of the house, which watched people arrive, move about the works, and then leave.



Oka Family Residence, Arimatsu venue, Japan. Photo: Nagoya City.



Oka Family Residence, Arimatsu venue, Japan. Photo: Nagoya City.

Further along the street is the Oka Family Residence, which dates back to the Edo period and once belonged to a tie-dye wholesaler, who not only claimed to have one of the largest homes in the area but who staked that claim many years later by installing a telephone box at one end of the reception room. At the other end of the room stand five hand-embroidered and beaded kimonos. They are phase two of a project by Yuki Kihara, *サーモアのうた* (*Sāmoa no*

uta) *A song about Sāmoa – Fanua (Land)* (2020–21), a polyptych for a real and imagined view of modern-day Sāmoa, a country vulnerable to environmental change and the spectre of colonial rule by Aotearoa New Zealand, which only ended in 1962.

The five distinct kimono panels are made of tapa, the bark cloth handmade in the islands of the Pacific Ocean from the paper mulberry tree. The work at Aichi follows an earlier work not seen there, phase one, *Vasa (Ocean)* (2019), a cross-section of five panels that feature a skull at the bottom of the ocean, in memory of the earthquake and tsunami of 2009. Those images of the past connect to the present work, phase two, *Fanua (Land)* (2020–21), a flotsam and jetsam of chaos unfolding through five kimonos. The first two illustrate the aggressive farming of Sāmoa in more recent years, while the central kimono depicts the new Vaisigano Bridge in Sāmoa’s capital, Apia. The bridge, connecting Apia with the industrial area, was built to replace the existing 67-year-old bridge as part of a new development in the town centre. The road sign on the new structure proudly bears American and Japanese flags, acknowledgements of the international aid that helped pay for it. In Kihara’s work, a Sāmoan bull dominates the scene, blocking access to the bridge, the building of which was not without controversy, viewed by some as a cosmetic development.^[01]

The new bridge, the bull, the construction earthmovers, and the fruit bats swinging from trees all seem as helpless in the face of international aid relief, renovation and the ongoing effects of colonialism as they are in the face of a tsunami—rapidly approaching the beach and tourist hotel depicted in the next two kimono panels. Every environmental disaster Sāmoa faces, from flooding to tsunamis, dredges up the past to reinforce the constant presence of colonialism. Masami Tsujita, author of *The Sāmoan Aidscape*, describes how an influx of foreign aid is also changing the cultural landscape of Sāmoa.^[02] As Kihara argues in an interview, rather than lending help, mass tourism driven by foreign aid has had the opposite effect, triggering climate change and reinforcing cultural stereotypes.^[03]



Yuki Kihara, サーマアのうた (*Sāmoa no uta*) A *Song About Sāmoa – Fanua (Land)*, 2021. Aichi Triennale, installation view, 2022. © Aichi Triennale Organizing Committee. Photo: ToLoLo studio.



Yuki Kihara, サーマアのうた (*Sāmoa no uta*) A *Song About Sāmoa – Fanua (Land)*, 2021. Aichi Triennale, installation view, 2022. © Aichi Triennale Organizing Committee. Photo: ToLoLo studio.



Yuki Kihara, サーマアのうた (*Sāmoa no uta*) A *Song About Sāmoa – Fanua (Land)*, 2021. Aichi Triennale, installation view, 2022. © Aichi Triennale Organizing Committee. Photo: ToLoLo studio.



Yuki Kihara, サーマアのうた (*Sāmoa no uta*) A *Song About Sāmoa – Fanua (Land)*, 2021. Aichi Triennale, installation view, 2022. © Aichi Triennale Organizing Committee. Photo: ToLoLo studio.

The past is no straight line and much of what is depicted in phase two of *サーマアのうた (Sāmoa no uta) A Song about Sāmoa* plays with what has been gained and lost since national independence. At one end of the room, adjacent to the five kimono panels, hangs a kimono that once belonged to the mother of Kihara’s Japanese father. Kihara never met her grandparents but a photograph of Masako and Nobuo hangs beside the mustard-colored kimono against the dark timber wall. Remarkably, the kimono both embodies the absent grandmother and inspires the form given to the artwork.

The Oka residence, where Kihara’s work is installed, is the ideal host for the link between Sāmoa and Japan. The house vibrates as architectural elements of the building echo Kihara’s family history. The structure of the house dates back to the final years of Japan’s feudal Edo period during the 1800s. Timber walls inside undulate with a fire-proof finish, while the walls outside feature a smooth curvaceous lip of raised plaster that gives them strength. This lip also gives the *namako-kabe*^[04] wall its character, soft and defensive like the sea cucumber it’s named after, and similar in colour to the

antique kimono hanging inside. These life signs of the family of this old merchants' *machiya* (house) share the house, temporarily, with Kihara's textiles, handwoven by members of her Sāmoan family.

The house remains privately owned but for the most part is not lived in, yet where the building fabric ends and the fabric of Kihara's kimonos begins, elevated like upright dominos on *tatami*,¹⁰
⁵¹ there appears the shadow of encroaching development and the socioeconomic changes that befall local families. Kihara's work depicts Sāmoa enduring a constant state of forced change, some positive and some disastrous, while the *machiya* demonstrates how technology over time has changed the hand-dyeing process, leaving the building with the oddity of disused dyeing vats, paper-lined smoke stacks, and a small telephone booth at the heart of the Oka house.



Nikau Hindin, *Sky above, Earth below, I am tangata whenua.* / "Ko te rangi, ko te whenua, ko aute tangata whenua." –EruPotakaDewes (NgatiPorou), 2022. Aichi Triennale, installation view, 2022. © Aichi Triennale Organizing Committee. Photo: ToLoLo studio.



Nikau Hindin, *The vibration/intonation of the tone in the voice in relation to how sayings are delivered.* / Te Tōiri o te Hauoro, 2022. Aichi Triennale, installation view, 2022. © Aichi Triennale Organizing Committee. Photo: ToLoLo studio.



Takita Family Residence, Tokoname, Japan.



Nikau Hindin, Aichi Triennale, installation view, 2022. © Aichi Triennale Organizing Committee. Photo: ToLoLo studio.



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Navigating old routes and making sense of newer ones is a process shared with the other artist from Aotearoa New Zealand at Aichi, Nikau Hindin, who is of Māori descent. Her works are painted aute, a fabric also made from the bark of the mulberry tree, and depict star maps for navigating the night sky, with patterns of vertical and horizontal axes that reference time and location. Hindin's Māori ancestors travelled the seas using something similar, and her paintings revivify the aute tradition, but they also take on new meaning here in the setting of Tokoname, some 20 km south of Arimatsu on the coast overlooking Ise Bay.

In Tokoname, where the heat of the pottery furnaces is matched only by the furnace heat of summer, the Takita Family Residence stands on the edge of the Chita Peninsula, jutting into Ise Bay. Eiji Takita was the eighth head of his family, a shipping agent who had long been fascinated by history and culture and who wrote a book on the mysteries of the local Tokoname ware, titled *Tokoname-shiwa sakuin*.^[06] He settled in the Takita homestead with Harumi Hanayagi, Japan's very first film actress, known on the fashionable streets of 1920s Ginza, Tokyo, for dressing up in work clothes and wearing a wrist watch wrapped around her leg. As one of the first female screen actors in Japan, Hanayagi always plotted a course of her own, and after settling in Tokonome she handed that independent spirit to their children.^[07]

To the rear of the main residence, a smaller building houses Hindin's installation of delicate paintings, many of which lie across the floor on a low-slung plinth; one drapes across a wooden ikō stand, or kimono rack, and another hangs from the plaster wall of a tatami-floored room. Each painting is a way-post marking types of arrival and departure, noting passages through high- and low-pressure systems in *Ocean Path / Ara Moana* (2022), celebrating someone's passing by measuring them against the night sky in *Grandad Steve, 15.8.21 3:00am* (2022), or aligning earth with heaven in *Sky Above, Earth Below, I am tangata whenua / "Ko te rangi, ko te whenua, ko au te tangata whenua."* *Eru Potaka Dewes (Ngati Porou)* (2022), angled at 45 degrees from the tatami, plots lines between heaven and earth.

Based on maramataka, the Māori stellar-lunar calendar, the paintings track the time and movement of the stars as Hindin grows, harvests, and processes the aute for her work. While the Takita family has long since gone and the house is now a museum, the ancestral agricultural and navigational technologies in Hindin's paintings are re-rooted in the present where these paintings, like maps, are laid out for study.^[08]



Takita Family Residence, Tokoname, Japan.



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The canvas draped over the ikō stand within the room's alcove stands apart. *The vibration / intonation of the tone in the voice in relation to how sayings are delivered / Te Tōiri o te Hauora (2020)*, depicts an image of sound as it leaves the mouth. From where the Takita Residence is positioned, high atop Tokoname looking down across Ise Bay, that sound could be a voice calling out directions for travel. The painting shows a slab of earthen red anchored by a block of black, like the sea and the horizon. The work compares to Mark Rothko's *Seagram Murals*, a lifelong series of paintings made in shades of deep red, which read like the boundary of a window with the eye moving back and forth between inside and outside a room. That exchange is reflected in Hindin's painting, thunderous colour traced with a cartographer's eye across the aute surface, which draws a horizon of its own between its black sea and deep red sky.

The Takita Family Residence unites the art of navigation with the story of the family's own way-making, negotiating their way through patriarchy and its social customs. Encouraged to study law by her actress mother, Ayuchi Takita became a pioneer as the first female executive of an aviation company. In the main Takita house a Mujin-to rapeseed oil pressure lamp sits behind glass, while

an enormous television sits unplugged in one corner, serving as subtle clues to the family's wealth and success. These artefacts also describe modern Meiji-period Japan (1868–1912), as it became more and more reliant on technology. The designer of the Mujin-to lamp, Hisashige Tanaka, helped build the country's first steamboat in 1854 before being commissioned to build a city-wide telegraph system in Tokyo, and later devoting himself to astronomy and mathematics. In the context of the lamp, the television, the Takita shipping company, and Ayuchi's career within the male-dominated corporate culture of Japanese aviation, Hindin's geometric patterns plot their own measure of time and position, interlacing families with vastly different trajectories.

The sun beats down in early August and On Kawara's telex "I am still alive" hangs midair, reaffirming each work and every building they temporarily call home this summer. Yuki Kihara and Nikau Hindin retrace personal histories while outlining the history of others, and the more personal that history becomes, the more complex the works become. From the grief and black humour of a Sāmoan island shown in cross-section across the five kimono, each one made by an extended family and shown alongside the photograph of distant and unacquainted relatives, to the nautical language of sailing ships, the cartography of star maps and the colour of sound, both artists plot a course in the unfamiliar waters of each residence. Both exhibits convey ideas of longevity, perseverance and survival, as the hand-embroidered painting and staged choreography, especially Hindin's image of sound, expose the dial tone of a collective conversation wishing each other well.

Footnotes

01. "Vaisigano Bridge in Samoa Seven Years in the Making," *Pasifika Environews*, 13 August 2020, <https://pasifika.news/2020/08/vaisigano-bridge-in-samoa-seven-years-in-the-making/>

02. Masami Tsujita, "The Samoan Aidscape: Situated Knowledge and Multiple Realities of Japan's Foreign Aid to Sāmoa" (PhD thesis, University of Hawaii, 2016), <https://oatd.org/oatd/record?record=handle%3A10125%2F100800>

03. Milford Galleries, "Yuki Kihara / サ-モアのうた (Sāmoa no uta) A Song About Sāmoa – Fanua (Land) / Artist Interview," Vimeo, 25 March 2021, <https://vimeo.com/529048401> (00:03:00)

04. なまこ壁 *namako-kabe* is a style of Japanese decoration that literally translates as 'sea-cucumber wall'. *Namako-kabe* offer protection from fire and the elements and feature a raised lip of smooth, rounded plaster joining together a latticework of tiles. It is the smooth plaster lip that is

said to resemble the shape of sea-cucumber, a resilient marine animal that, when caught, is eaten raw.

05. Flooring made from rush-covered straw mats.

06. Eiji Takita, 『常滑史話素隠』 *Tokoname-shiwa sakuin / The Mysteries of Tokoname Earthenware* (1965).

07. Their daughter Ayuchi—a pioneer among career women in Japan—went on to join Japan Airlines, leading the JAL foundation, and advising the Japanese Ministry of Transport; in 1966 she played a part in managing the Beatles’ trip to Tokyo. “Before heading off to study law, 16-year-old Ayuchi Takita wrote a heartfelt note to her classmates at Aichi Prefectural Senior High School for Girls: ‘Are we the ones who have to follow our destiny? I don’t think it’s possible to say for sure. Destiny is something that is given to us, and something that is carved out for us.’” Editorial (no author), 「彼女が切り開いた道」 *Kanajo ga kirihiraita michi / The path she carved,* Chunichi Shimbun, 3 January 2022, <https://www.chunichi.co.jp/article/394217>

08. Te Kuru o te Marama Dewes, "Mapping the stars to reclaim time: Nikau Hindin and the art of aute", *The Spinoff*, June 2021. <https://thespinoff.co.nz/atea/21-06-2022/mapping-the-stars-to-reclaim-time-nikau-hindin-and-the-art-of-aute>

Biographies



Nikau Hindin (Te Rarawa, Ngāpuhi) is a contemporary artist and with a revivalist agenda to reawaken Māori aute. She completed her conjoint BA in Māori studies and Media studies and Honours in Fine Arts at the University of Auckland. In 2013, she did an exchange at the University of Hawai’i (UH) where she first learned about Māori aute. In 2014 she was part of the crew on Hōkūle’a from Auckland to Golden Bay. She is the recipient of the Māori Battalion VC scholarship and the Sir Hugh Kawharu award which enabled her access to study the Auckland War Memorial Museum collection. She returned to the UH, on a Graduate Assistant Scholarship, where she learned from Master knowledge holders. In October 2018, she completed a deep-sea voyage from Norfolk Island to Tāmaki Makaurau. Nikau completed her Masters of Creative Practice at Toihoukura Art School.

In 2021, Nikau showed at the Auckland Art Fair, Te Urū Contemporary Gallery, Millers O’Brien Gallery. She has been featured recently in three shows around Aotearoa New Zealand: *Native Voices* at Tairāwhiti Museum, *Te Rangi Haupapa: A Woven History* at Tauranga Art Gallery and *Tākiri: An Unfurling* at the New Zealand Maritime Museum.



Yuki Kihara is an interdisciplinary artist of Japanese and Sāmoan descent. Working across a range of media including performance, lens-based media and sculpture, Kihara's research-based approach has led to a comprehensive body of work and curatorial practice that examines gender roles, consumerism, (mis)representation, and the past, present and future societal issues from an Indigenous perspective. Kihara lives and works in Sāmoa, where she has been based over the past 11 years.

Kihara's works are in the permanent collections, among others, of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, British Museum, Queensland Art Gallery/Gallery of Modern Art, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Kaohsiung Museum of Fine Arts and Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen. Her works have been presented at the Asia Pacific Triennale (2002 and 2015), Auckland Triennale; (2009), Sakahan Quinquennial (2013), Daegu Photo Biennale (2014), Honolulu Biennale (2017) Bangkok Art Biennale (2018) and Aichi Triennale (2022). Kihara has been appointed by the Arts Council of New Zealand Toi Aotearoa to represent New Zealand at the 59th Venice Biennale in 2022. Kihara is a research fellow at Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen. Kihara is represented by Milford Galleries Dunedin and Queenstown.



Stuart Munro lives in Tokyo. His writing has appeared in *Art-agenda*, *Art Basel*, *ArtReview* and *ArtReview Asia*, *Mousse*, *The Wire* and numerous other publications. www.stuartmunro.net

