We See the Same Stars

Gabriela Salgado’s 'Southern Stars' in London presents artist Salome Tanuvasa

by Gabriela Salgado, Sabine Casparie

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Southern Stars Projects is a new gallery and project space in London, founded by Argentine-born, London-based curator Gabriela Salgado. Drawing on the shared affinities between artists from the southern hemisphere and her experience as former Artistic Director of Te Tuhi in Auckland, Salgado's project brings together artists from the Pacific, Latin America, Africa and Aotearoa New Zealand, including Arapeta Ashton, Joyce Campbell, Christina Pataialii, Peter Robinson, Shannon Te Ao and Salome Tanuvasa.

With Southern Stars' first physical exhibition, Golden Daughters of the Sun*, presented at non-profit art space Kunstraum and featuring the work of Salome Tanuvasa, Sabine Casparie sits down with Salgado in London to talk about this new platform, its inaugural exhibition and how Southern Stars offers a space for Indigenous voices and decolonial perspectives in the European art world.*

I visit Gabriela Salgado in Kunstraum, a Shoreditch gallery, on a rainy London afternoon in October. Her new art platform and gallery, Southern Stars, has just opened its inaugural exhibition, *Golden Daughters of The Sun*. It is a temporary exhibition; Kunstraum is a separate non-profit organisation "primarily supporting artists with origins in the African & Caribbean diasporas and People of Colour of the world"[01]. It is a fitting host

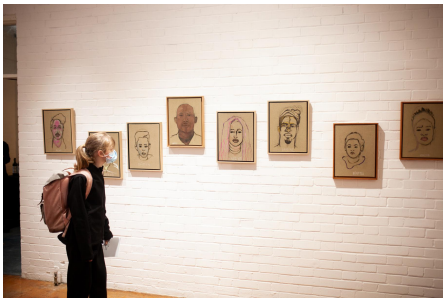
venue for Southern Stars' first exhibition, which specialises in artists from the southern hemisphere, spanning Aotearoa New Zealand and the Pacific, Latin America and Africa.

A burst of colour greets me when I walk in. *Golden Daughters of the Sun* is an exhibition of three female artists of different generations and countries: Delia Cancela (b. Argentina), Dalila Dalléas Bouzar (b. Algeria) and the youngest artist, Salome Tanuvasa (b. Aotearoa). All three artists share a focus on women's agency and empowerment, and an interest in collaborative and transdisciplinary practice. Delia Cancela's drawings are from her new series *Mujeres y Naturaleza (Woman and Nature)*: elegant and light drawings of female figures entwined with natural elements such as water, fire and sky, taking on the image of goddesses. Dalila Dalléas Bouzar presents recent paintings as well as documented performances, the two media closely connected in her practice. The exhibition includes documentation of some of her performances, which are often ritualistic and addressing the oppression of women. In many performances Dalléas Bouzar paints directly on her face and body and transfers such images to her paintings, where her warrior-like bodypaint bestows her an almost regal presence.

But it is the colourful work of New Zealand artist Salome Tanuvasa that first stands out when you enter the room. Two rectangular textile banners are suspended diagonally through the middle of the exhibition space, each facing a different way. Both works consist of two horizontal blocks in different colours, giving the suggestion of horizons. The top fields, in white and grey respectively, are reminiscent of the sky; the bottom fields, green and blue respectively, of water. On the surface of each banner are more brightly coloured shapes, stitched on so that they appear to float.



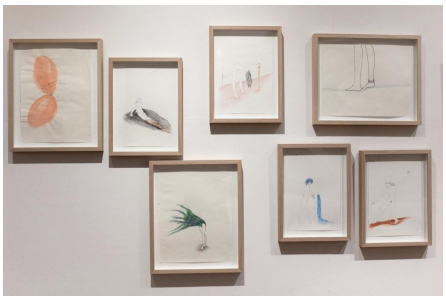
Southern Stars Founder and Director Gabriela Salgado at the opening of *Golden Daughters of the Sun*, Kunstraum, London, 8 – 31 Oct 2021. Image courtesy Southern Stars. Photo: Daniaal Khalid.



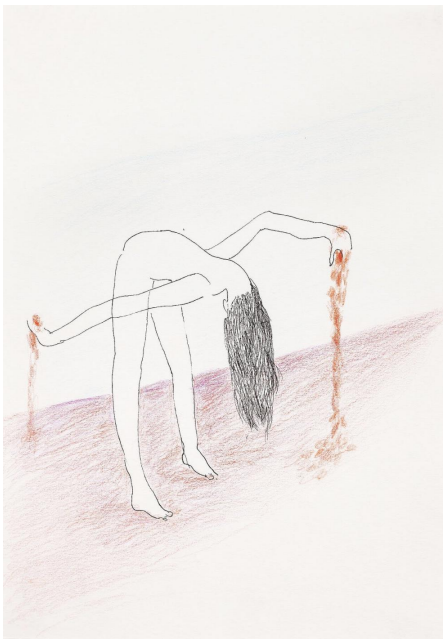
Golden Daughters of the Sun, installation view, Kunstraum, London, 8 – 31 Oct 2021. Image courtesy Southern Stars. Photo: Daniaal Khalid.



Exhibition poster for *Golden Daughters of the Sun*, Kunstraum, London, 8 – 31 Oct 2021. Image courtesy Southern Stars. Photo: Daniaal Khalid.



Delia Cancela, *Mujeres y naturaleza / Women and Nature*, 2021, mixed media on paper. *Golden Daughters of the Sun* installation view, Kunstraum, London, 8 – 31 October 2021. Image courtesy Southern Stars. Photo: Daniaal Khalid.



Delia Cancela, *Mujer y lava/ Woman and lava*, from the series *Mujeres y naturaleza / Women and Nature*, 2019. Pigment ink and watercolour pencils on paper. Image courtesy Southern Stars.



Delia Cancela, *Mujer - torso árbol / Woman - tree torso* from the series *Mujeres y naturaleza / Women and Nature*, 2021. Mixed media on paper. Image courtesy Southern Stars.



Dalila Dalléas Bouzar's works, *Golden Daughters of the Sun* installation view, Kunstraum, London, 8 – 31 October 2021. Image courtesy Southern Stars. Photo: Daniaal Khalid.

Salgado met Tanuvasa when she moved to Aotearoa New Zealand in 2017. A New Zealand-born artist of Samoan and Tongan descent, Tanuvasa is based in Auckland and she graduated from Elam School of Fine Arts, University of Auckland in 2014. Salgado commissioned these two works from Tanuvasa after seeing documentation of a recent exhibition of her work at the Gus Fisher Gallery, Auckland. Salgado was drawn to Tanuvasa's new, larger pieces, which reminded her of panoramas. For *Golden Daughters of the Sun*, Salgado gave Tanuvasa rough measurements for the work, and left the rest to her.

Salgado tells me that the two pieces are called *Equally Different I* and *II* (2021); the smaller stitched-on shapes are symbols alluding to the sun and the moon, to trees, and clouds. I start to see it now, too: *Equally Different I*, with its clear, white sky and active forms: upbeat and angular, in primary colours. *Equally Different II*, with its deep grey sky over a midnight blue ground, its forms more anthropomorphic, in pink and purple hues, giving the scene a dreamlike quality. "These banners are allegorical, but the tones are so well put together that they evoke the light of the sun and the moon" Salgado explains. "Tanuvasa has the eye of a painter." Salgado shows me a photograph of the banners against a backdrop of lush plants. "She often takes photographs of the textiles hanging on the washing lines in her garden like you would do with laundry. She really likes that dialogue between her textile works and the flora and fauna around it."

Salgado launched *Southern Stars* after working as a curator all over the world. After studying philosophy in Buenos Aires, she moved to

London to do a Masters in Curating Contemporary Art at The Royal College of Art, graduating in 1997. But her work as a curator also took her to many other places, such as Africa (in particular: Senegal, Mali, Cameroon, Mozambique, Nigeria, Tunisia and Algeria) and Southeast Asia (Cambodia and Vietnam). In 2017, Salgado moved to New Zealand for three years where she worked as Artistic Director of the public art gallery Te Tuhi in Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland.

“I discovered so many similarities with South America in those countries”, she explains. “There was a familiar discourse. It wasn’t necessarily about racial identity or ethnicity, but about being ‘in the South’ and having the experience of being colonised. It’s about that different perspective. Many - though definitely not all - countries in the South are connected by history, and those remnants of oppression stay in the economic system, but also in the philosophical and political discourse.” “Latin America was colonised already in 1500. So people learnt early on to administer the expectation of the west, whilst still being able to be ourselves”, Salgado tells me. “Polynesia and the South Pacific was the last part of the planet to be ‘discovered’.“



Salome Tanuvasa, *Equally Different I*, 2021, commissioned for the exhibition *Golden Daughters of the Sun*, London, October 2021. Image courtesy of the artist and Southern Stars.



Salome Tanuvasa, *Equally Different II,* 2021, commissioned for the exhibition *Golden Daughters of the Sun*, London, October 2021. Image courtesy of the artist and Southern Stars.

But it is a more poetic connection and spiritual side that inspired Salgado’s name for her new platform. “What people in the UK may not be aware of is that James Cook travelled to the Pacific accompanied by Joseph Banks, a naturalist and president of the Royal Society. He had a mission to follow the trajectory of Venus in

the sky." A political, colonising mission disguised as a poetic, scientific enterprise. "The idea for the name *Southern Stars* came to me in New Zealand, when I looked up, I saw the same sky of my childhood in Argentina. What makes us similar is the constellations."

Salgado tells me about the work *in Pursuit of Venus* [*infected*] (2015) by Aotearoa artist Lisa Reihana (Ngāpuhi, Ngāti Hine, Ngāi Tūe Auru), New Zealand's representative at the Venice Biennale in 2017. A panoramic video over 20-metre long, it shows British explorers and Pacific people meeting in a utopian Tahitian landscape. The hour-long video moves through 80 live-action vignettes projected onto a green, lush landscape with palm trees and small dwellings, against a backdrop of sea and mountains. Loudspeakers emit sounds of the sea, the wind and birdsong; there is the murmur of voices in several Pacific languages. Actors from PIPA, the Pacific Institute of Performing Art, are enacting a series of scenes informed by Māori and Pacific ceremonies, alongside brutal European practices such as the trading of goods in return for sexual favours. The panorama ends with the violent and dramatic climax of the death of Captain Cook in Hawai'i in 1779.

While Reihana uses as much fiction as historical research, her imaginative representation of history raises the question of what it must have been like when British explorer James Cook and his crew travelled to the Southern Seas in the late 18th century, on a mission funded by the British Crown. And yet for the subsequent two hundred years, we have been presented with a very different image. Reihana took the visuals of her landscape from a famous wallpaper from 1804, *Les Sauvages de la Mer Pacifique*, by Joseph Dufour. When Reihana encountered the wallpaper in the National Gallery of Australia in Canberra, she was struck by the representation of the Indigenous people of Polynesia: she couldn't see anything that she recognised. The people depicted in the wallpaper were light-skinned, clad in Grecian clothes and wearing the eccentric headwear that was fashionable in the ballrooms of Paris. Reihana decided to turn the imagery around, using the opportunity to talk across time.

This history of visual stereotyping of Indigenous cultures has happened for centuries to colonised countries everywhere, and it is

something Salgado is very well aware of. But *Southern Stars* is not just about giving visibility to artists from the Global South. Take the current exhibition, *Golden Daughters of the Sun*. “For instance, Algeria officially isn’t even in the southern hemisphere” Salgado says with a smile, “but it’s about that mentality of being South of the epicentre, the centre of power.”



Lisa Reihana, *in Pursuit of Venus* [*infected*] (detail), 2015, HD video, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, gift of the Patrons of Auckland Art Gallery.



Lisa Reihana, *in Pursuit of Venus* [*infected*] (detail), 2015, HD video, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, gift of the Patrons of Auckland Art Gallery.



Les Sauvages de la Mer Pacifique (detail), scenic wallpaper illustrated by Jean-Gabriel Charvet and manufactured by Joseph Dufour. (1804-1805). Courtesy of P. Plattier, Musées de Mâcon.



Les Sauvages de la Mer Pacifique (detail), scenic wallpaper illustrated by Jean-Gabriel Charvet and manufactured by Joseph Dufour. (1804-1805). Courtesy of P. Plattier, Musées de Mâcon.



Lisa Reihana, *in Pursuit of Venus* [*infected*], 2017. Installation view, NZ pavillion, The 57th International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia. May 2017. Photo: Contemporary HUM.

This counts for Tanuvasa too, whose landscape and domestic environment are her main inspirations. Tanuvasa uses abstract mark-making to convey the shapes and forms around her. In some works there is text. Another banner that is not part of the exhibition but included in the catalogue shows the word ‘Essence’ in light blue, stitched-on letters, with deep red elliptical forms dancing playfully and mysteriously around it.

Although Tanuvasa's main training was in painting, she found herself often confined to her home, trying to combine her artistic career with being a mother. So even though in many of her works, including *Equally Different I* and *II*, there is an allusion to landscape, it is mostly the flora and fauna in her direct environment that inspires Tanuvasa. This is because as a young mother and art teacher, Tanuvasa makes most of her works - which also include sculpture and large scale-paintings - at home. For Tanuvasa, the domestic context of her work is not just in the background; it is something to be celebrated.

"As a child, I grew up in a home where industrial sewing machines and fabrics were distributed around the house" she writes in the exhibition catalogue. "My mother is a seamstress who learned this skill upon migrating to Aotearoa New Zealand from the Pacific Islands of Tonga. While my siblings and I played outside, there were car parts and lawnmowers in the back yards as my father worked as a mechanic. My father gained these skills as he too migrated from Samoa to Aotearoa for a better life. All these experiences have formed me, and I use art to share my experiences."[02]

Collective art production and craft-based media didn't always fit with the individualised western view of art and authorship. For centuries, the labour and the collective elements of artistic production were smoothed out, unrooting the artwork from its context, its process and its sense of place. Yet for Tanuvasa, working with fabric connects her to her mother in a very holistic way. "Learning to work with fabric helps me understand the labour input by the body and mind when creating my pieces and significantly recognise what it was like for my mother to work with this material" she continues in the catalogue text.

But it appears that the world is catching up, with more and more female artists, collective art practices and the medium of craft gaining attention. The exhibition *Making, Knowing: Craft in Art, 1950-2019* presented from 2019 to 2022 at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York is a major example. And the exhibition *S onglines: Tracking the Seven Sisters* just opened in October 2021 at The Box, a new art space in Plymouth, comprising more than 300 artworks- paintings and objects – made by more than 100 Indigenous Australian artists, mostly women, and heavily features

performance in the form of song and dance. The exhibition originated at the National Museum of Australia in Canberra, which focuses on Indigenous histories and cultures, European settlement and people's interaction with the environment. It was viewed by more than 400,000 people, and will continue touring in Europe, taking in Paris and Berlin.



Golden Daughters of the Sun, installation view, Kunstraum, London, 8 – 31 Oct 2021. Image courtesy Southern Stars.



Salome Tanuvasa, *Equally Different I* (detail), 2021. Image courtesy of Southern Stars.



Salome Tanuvasa, *Equally Different II* (detail), 2021. Image courtesy of Southern Stars.



Salome Tanuvasa, *Equally Different II* (detail), 2021. Image courtesy of Southern Stars.



Salome Tanuvasa, *Essence*, 2021. Image courtesy of the artist and Tim Melville gallery.

Plymouth was also the port from which Cook set sail in 1768, so this exhibition has a way of showing Plymouth in a different light: not as the original site of expeditions that spread western ideas on other countries, a launching point of colonisation, but as a site welcoming art made by Indigenous artists, a reverse expedition. And it brings me back to Salgado's project. I ask her if she thinks artists from the southern hemisphere have a common aesthetic, but she immediately refutes the idea. "That would be impossible: these artists are all different and unique. But what unites them is that shared history of colonisation, and a certain sense of loss. For a long time, artists in colonised countries have wanted to please the European palate, yet at the same time they were trying to stay true to themselves. It is that tension, that challenge, that unites many artists from the South."

Does she feel that George Floyd's death and the *Black Lives Matter* protests last year are having a positive effect for Indigenous artists in general? Salgado is a little sceptical. "Indigenous communities in New Zealand are slowly starting to receive the attention and respect they deserve: there is the renaming of public organisations, Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern has recently made a public apology for the Dawn Raids of the early 1970s, many children are now taught te reo Māori in schools. But I worry about the art world. Indigenous artists are popular now but I hope that this is not just another trope, an ephemeral fashion."

Salgado is more interested in creating a platform for the discussion and exchange of ideas, emphasising connections instead of differences. According to the website, "*Southern Stars* aims to convey a core belief that not adding to life's betterment is unsustainable and unethical in the current climate and human emergencies. Upholding the idea of a healthy planet and thriving societies, we share values with artists and audiences to promote wellbeing, avoiding waste production and carbon emissions and implementing fairness and transparency." To this aim, Southern Stars will have a curated programme of talks, events and meetings. It will also offer consultancy services to public and private collections.

When I started to write this piece, I decided to look up the terms to describe the northern and southern hemispheres. I found *Boreal*

and *Austral*: the Latin words for northern and southern winds, respectively. There definitely is a fresh breeze traveling through the art world, and Gabriela Salgado's *Southern Stars* is one of many initiatives carried by these soft winds of change.

But maybe the time has come to abandon opposites altogether: North and South, Boreal and Austral, Day and Night. Looking at Salome Tanuvasa's *Equally Different I* and *II* again, I no longer believe that the banners are dividing the exhibition space. On the contrary: they hold it together. Day and night are not two poles on a spectrum; they are fluid entities, coexisting together, happening simultaneously depending on our coordinates on the planet. I believe that Salgado is hopeful, too. The catalogue of *Golden Daughters of the Sun* starts with a poem by Plotinus.

> *"The stars are like letters that inscribe themselves at every moment in the sky. Everything in the world is full of signs. All events are coordinated. All things depend on each other. Everything breathes together."*

Footnotes

01. www.kunstraum.org.uk/about-kunstraum/

02. Exhibition catalogue, *Golden Daughters of the Sun*, hosted by Kunstraum, 8 – 31 October 2021. Published by Southern Stars.

Biographies



Lisa Reihana (b. 1964) is a multi-disciplinary artist from Aotearoa New Zealand (of Ngāpuhi, Ngāti Hine and Ngāi Tū tribal descent) whose practice explores how identity and history are represented, and how these intersect with concepts of place and community. The subjects of Reihana's portraiture inhabit a world in which the boundaries of past, present, and future are mutable; their identities are likewise unfixed and transgress everyday expectations of cultural and social norms.

She graduated from Elam School of Fine Arts, Auckland University, with a Bachelor of Fine Arts in 1987, and recently completed her Master of Design through the Unitec Institute of Technology. Reihana has an extensive exhibition history in New Zealand and abroad and in 2014 she was awarded an Arts Laureate Award by the Arts Foundation of New Zealand. Her works are held in private and public collections including Te Papa Tongarewa; Auckland Art Gallery; Australia National Gallery; Staatliche Museum, Berlin; Susan O'Connor Foundation, Texas and Brooklyn Museum, New York.



Salome Tanuvasa is a visual artist born in Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland, Aotearoa, of Tongan and Sāmoan heritage. She holds a BFA (Honours) and an MFA from Elam School of Fine Arts, University of Auckland and currently lives and works in Auckland. Solo exhibitions include several presentations at Tim Melville Gallery, Auckland 2018-2021; Gaffa Gallery, Sydney AU, 2014; and Window, Ozlyn, Auckland, 2012. Tanusava's works are held in the collections of the Chartwell Collection, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki and James Wallace Arts Trust, New Zealand. In 2018 Salome won the Creative Award from the China Academy of Art, Huangzhou, China.



Gabriela Salgado is an Argentine-born curator based in London, UK. Salgado holds an MA in Curating Contemporary Art from the Royal College of Art and has curated a large number of exhibitions including La Otra Bienal in Bogotá, Colombia (2013) and the 2nd Biennale of Thessaloniki, Greece (2009). She has lectured in over 20 countries. She specialised in Latin American art as curator of the Collection of Latin American Art at Essex University, UECLAA (1999-2005) and was curator of Public Programmes at Tate Modern (2006 to 2011). Salgado has published essays on the work of contemporary artists including Carlos Cruz Diez, Julio Le Parc, Mad for Real, Studio Orta and Grzegorz Klaman and wrote the catalogue of the Pangaea exhibition at Saatchi Gallery.

Southern Stars is a new art platform and gallery specialising in artists from the southern hemisphere, spanning Aotearoa New Zealand and the Pacific, Latin America and Africa. The gallery offers consultancy services to public and private collections as well as a curated programme of exhibitions, talks and events to showcase outstanding works by artists working under the southern stars and in the diaspora. *Southern Stars* will soon launch its 2022 programme for pop-up exhibitions on its website (www.southernstars.art).



Sabine Casparie worked as a lawyer before making a career change into art, completing a Postgraduate Diploma in art history at the Courtauld Institute of Art, London, in 2011 and a Masters in Modern and Contemporary Art at Christie's Education, London in 2012. Since then she has led contemporary art tours and artist studio tours in and around London and taught contemporary art engagement classes on Zoom and in the gallery. Sabine was a regular contributor to Arts & Culture Texas between 2016-2019 and writes a quarterly blog on contemporary art, with a particular interest in neglected histories of art.
(www.sabinecasparie.com)

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