



## REBECCASWAN

MELISA # 2, ASSUME NOTHING, 1999  
SILVER GELATIN PHOTOGRAPHIC PRINT, SELENIUM TONED  
61 X 50.8 CM

10 MARCH - 10 APRIL 2010



### MARK HUTCHINS GALLERY

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# CAPTURING THE GAZE

AN EXPLORATION  
OF THE SEXUAL,  
SOCIAL, AND  
PSYCHOLOGICAL  
CIRCUMSTANCES  
OF LOOKING



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We must offer ourselves to others. We discover who we are through the reactions we awaken in others. We look, they look and so we come to know who and what we are. We likewise give others this sense of self. We play the other side in this never-ending circuit of offering and looking. This circuit can be affirming. It can foster a consolidated sense of identity and confirm our place in the community. It can also do quite the opposite. We can be the object of a hostile gaze that fragments us or tells us that we do not belong. We too can look to affirm or look to deny and banish.

In the end, this externalized circuit has immense internal significance. We find significance in another's gaze through projection; we understand it as a look that we could give or have given others. As we know the power of the gaze, we hope for and dread it. The perception of the presence of another's gaze paradoxically also fosters a turning away from the externalized circuit of looking toward self-reflection that can range from pleasant self-affirmation to paranoid self-reproach.

Awareness of one's own gaze makes vision impossible until awareness is taken away from it. Self-reflection on the business of gazing causes it to stop. Joan Copjec writes (perhaps) hyperbolically, that "the moment [one's own] gaze is discerned, the image, the entire visual field, takes on a terrifying alterity. It loses its 'belongs-to-me' aspect and suddenly assumes the function of a

screen".<sup>1</sup> Perhaps, however, Copjec is not engaging in hyperbole: the employment of the gaze and being its object are occasions of key social importance for the consolidation or destruction of a sense of self.

An art exhibition is quite the best thing to capture the gaze. Citing Jacques Lacan, Copjec observes that "a painting or any other representation is a 'trap for the gaze'...." <sup>2</sup> We can understand this in two ways: the artworks on display capture the gaze of the subjects depicted and that of the spectators. And this is not all. Representations through their very status as representations, suggest there is more than meets the eye (a representation is of something not present, after all) and we find ourselves in possession of a "gaze" seemingly capable of seeing "outside the field of representation". <sup>3</sup> As we gaze, we imagine what is not shown and regard

what is visible in the representation as "trompe l'oeil and...constructed by something beyond [it]... [and so] something appears to be invisible". <sup>4</sup>

With seeming pitch-perfection Shigeyuki Kihara's prints stage the invasiveness of the colonial gaze that presents "natives" to satisfy the curiosity of Western eyes. Knowing her audience well, however, Kihara understands that the pitch-perfect nature of her stagings will create by means of their presence in the post-colonial world a critical space in which she may do her work.

A set of three prints, 'Fa'a Fafine: In the Manner of a Woman', when viewed together particularly show Kihara's confident assertion of agency. Born male in Samoa, she was designated Fa'a Fafine at a young age and from that time has lived life as a female. In these prints, Kihara stages the dusky

maiden or South Sea Islands Belle three times (the prints also recall the reclining female nude of the nineteenth century and even, perhaps, the Hellenistic Hermaphroditus). The pictures make a spectacle of the genital region. One time, Kihara wears a skirt, another time her penis is visible, and next it is obscured. This transgender display (within a genre which historically aspired to satisfy the heteronormative and acquisitive gaze) shows Kihara inscribing her power three times.

In the first place, she shows her power by invoking colonial tropes in a post-colonial setting. As noted above, this is an act of artistic sovereignty. Second, in violating the protocols of genre by revealing a penis, a more genuine representation of a real Samoan gender (Fa'a Fafine) is put forward and the colonial gaze stands corrected by Kihara. Indeed, it is fascinating the way in which

Kihara all but explodes the genre with genital and gender revelation. Lastly, the juxtaposition of the three prints perhaps raises the question about who the real Kihara is — is her ideal the picture with the penis or not? This possible question impresses me as a viewer's own and a function of an invasive gaze. Kihara has already triumphantly given her answer three times.

Rebecca Swan has been exploring sex and gender cross-culturally for a long time now and her prints embody this interest. Swan chooses models who embrace to varying degrees transgender presentation of the self and her prints often become an occasion to investigate (even quite explicitly) the boundary between the genders, as the print 'Androgynous', shows. Unlike Samoa, the world of the West does not have a designated transgender gender-role. This lack obviously makes for

fragmenting pressure on persons who know themselves to be transgender. One of the goals Swan has is to produce empowering portraits of transgender persons who are not beleaguered but are, instead, thriving. In 'Melisa #2', the subject looks into the eyes of the viewer in an assertion of ownership of their gaze. This powerful gaze is the property of a unified subjectivity. And wholeness — brought forth from what would generally be thought of as a problematic basis — is in evidence. Knowing that the individuals in Swan's prints are transgender, the non-transgender viewer may find him- or herself looking for something that "appear[s] to be invisible" and from there, as consciousness of the gaze turns the mind in on itself, perhaps to think about his or her own investments in normative gender presentation.

As we look at Hannah Edmunds' digital video art installation,

'B qualité', — a canny meditation on masculinity as hard to quantify and something that possesses more than a little of the performance about it — we may be put in mind of the common quality of Western men whereby they compartmentalize.

Peter Middleton asks:

*Is [modern masculinity] a discourse, a power structure, a psychic economy, a history, an ideology, an identity, a behaviour, a value system, an aesthetic event? Or is it all of these and also their mutual separation, the magnetic force of repulsion which keeps them apart? I believe modern masculinities are misrepresented when they are described solely in terms of sexuality, power or identity. Masculinity is a centrifugal dispersal of what are maintained as discrete fields of psychic and*

*social structure. In a formula: modern masculinities depend on the maintenance of discrete islands of subjectivity unconscious of one another.*<sup>5</sup>

The triadic arrangement of appropriated images of the actor Julien Boisselier presents facets of his identity as separated by a, as it were, divine hand that will keep them divorced from one another. We might therefore see this as something that he cannot control, which is so often the claim of men. Too, in the staging of his face, even once with tears, Edmunds raises questions of artifice and sincerity. As a B-actor, Boisselier provides a backdrop to the main action. One may presume that the films in which he was involved did not showcase his complexities and that his role was as a reliable and predictable masculine background player — and yet, he is an actor! Edmunds is interested in considering

where “the social performance of being a male and the acted performance of being an actor collide” and her installation suggests that the commerce between them is frequent.

Through flanking a realistic rendering of a lad with text seeming to provide biographical details, Ray Ching’s painting, ‘A True Story: A Young Man’, enacts with pristine effectivity the way in which the gaze creates knowledge about others through one’s own thought processes: the text, an utter fiction, was offered to Ching by a friend who only saw the portrait and had never met the model. In ‘At the Museum/ Cry of the Young Karearea’, the flying woman gives the viewer of the painting a dreamscape of flight and freedom from constraint. Annulment of gravity makes for a powerful metaphor. We arguably see in this painting a presentation of the idealized self (the Ideal-Ego) whose

powers are equal to all tasks and whose every desire will be met. The presentation of omnipotence is a perfect trap for the gaze and the something that “appears to be invisible” is nothing other than the judging faculty (the Ego-Ideal) who hopes with all his or her heart for the Ideal-Ego to be the truth. In fact, the viewer of this painting stands quite precisely in the place of the Ego-Ideal.

Memory is important to Terry Stringer. Through his bronze sculptures, Stringer endeavours to capture memory’s idealisations and distortions and its capacity to recover things perhaps long-forgotten. His *Metaphorical Head* works are typical in this regard. Three mildly differentiated head and shoulders sculptures of a youth are quartered on the face. Stringer has replaced the lower left and upper right quarters with a hand and pohutukawa leaves respectively.

This quartering creates sculptures with narrative potential. Well aware of this, Stringer remarks: “By making part of the head out of leaves I am saying the face is a flower. By cupping a hand around the chin I am plucking it.” Given Stringer’s interest in memory, the viewer may interpret the sculptures as memorials to a remembered or wished for encounter. As we inspect the busts, our gazing also perhaps embeds, in the present act of vision, memory’s variegated reclamations and revisionings of things past. The various quarters also thematize the way objects and persons come to have unlikely and yet understandable connections. Is the subject of the bust a young man from summer (hence the pohutukawa leaves)? Or is it that long-past summers are well represented by a remembered young manhood, and one that we would yet grasp? I suspect both and I have hardly exhausted the play of memory and desire here.

In various ways the artists in this exhibition provide spectacles for the gaze of their audience. These spectacles however are not merely objects to be registered in the visual field. The subjects depicted here (and such is the case in our lives all the time) are always already caught up in systems of meaning which we, as possessors of the gaze, use to make sense of our lives and the lives of others. This exhibition underscores the implication of the gaze in thoughts and expectations about gender, race, the self, sexuality, and the human condition.

<sup>1</sup> Joan Copjec. 1994. *Read My Desire: Lacan against the Historicists*. Cambridge: MIT Press, pg. 35.

<sup>2</sup> Joan Copjec. *ibid.*, pg. 34.

<sup>3</sup> Joan Copjec. *ibid.*, pg. 34.

<sup>4</sup> Joan Copjec. *ibid.*, pg. 34.

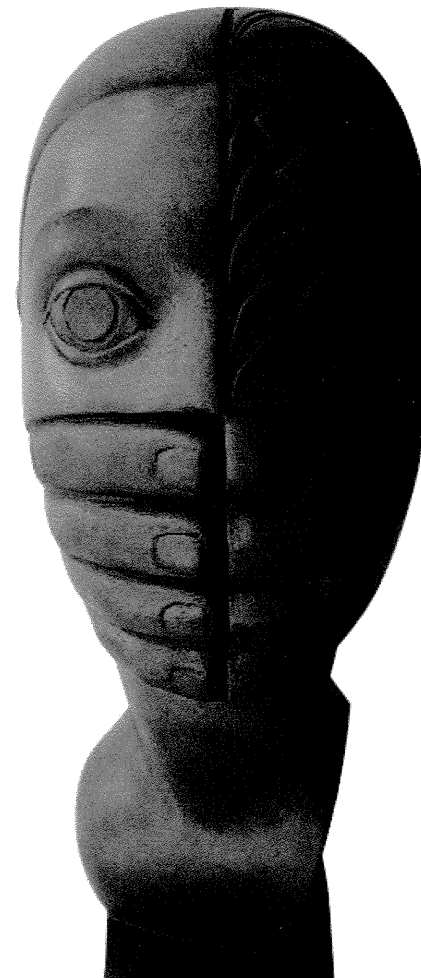
<sup>5</sup> Peter Middleton. 1992. *The Inward Gaze: Masculinity and Subjectivity in Modern Culture* New York: Routledge, pg. 152.

## **TERRYSTRINGER**

3 METAPHORICAL HEADS, 2009

BRONZE WITH PATINA

53 CM HIGH, EDITION OF TWO, AND ONE UNIQUE VERSION





## SHIGEYUKI KIHARA

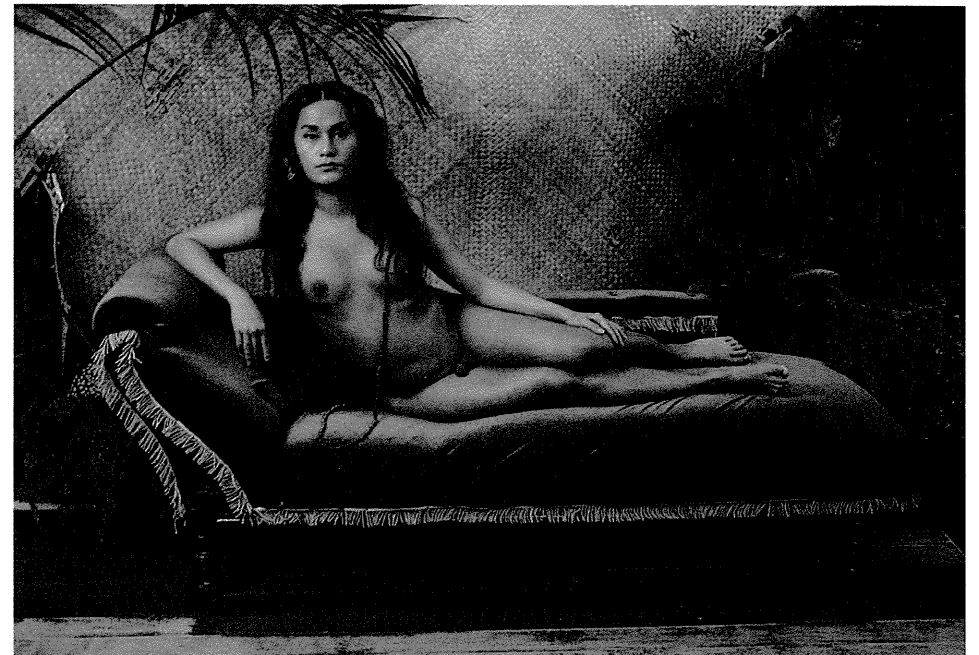
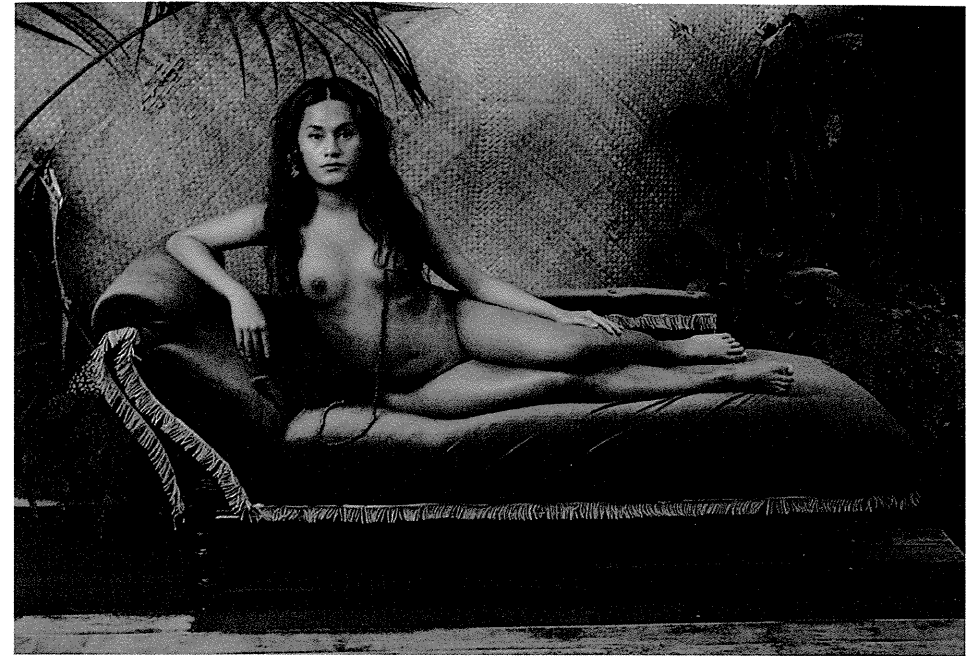
'FA'A FAFINE; IN A MANNER OF A WOMAN' SERIES 2005 / TRIPTYCH 1/3

'FA'A FAFINE; IN A MANNER OF A WOMAN' SERIES 2005 / TRIPTYCH 2/3

'FA'A FAFINE; IN A MANNER OF A WOMAN' SERIES 2005 / TRIPTYCH 3/3

PHOTOGRAPHY AND MIXED MEDIA, 3 X 60 X 80 CM

COURTESY OF ARTIST SHIGEYUKI KIHARA AND PHOTOGRAPHER SEAN COYLE



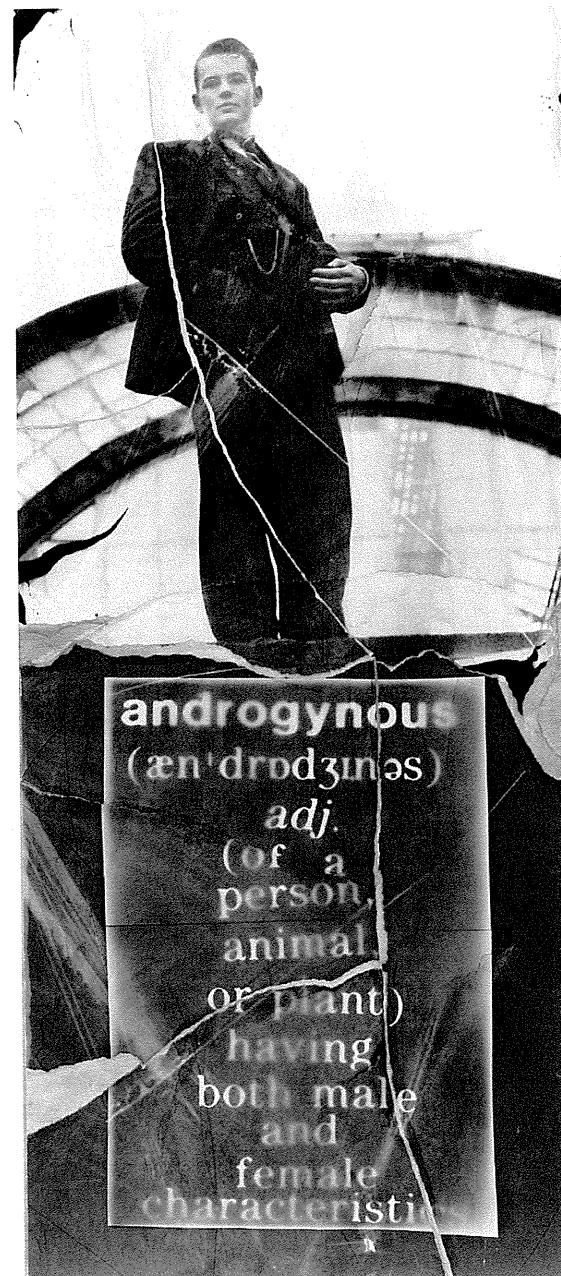


## REBECCASWAN

ANDROGYNOUS, 1995

SILVER GELATIN PRINT SEPIA TONED

120 X 54 CM



## HANNAHEDMUNDS

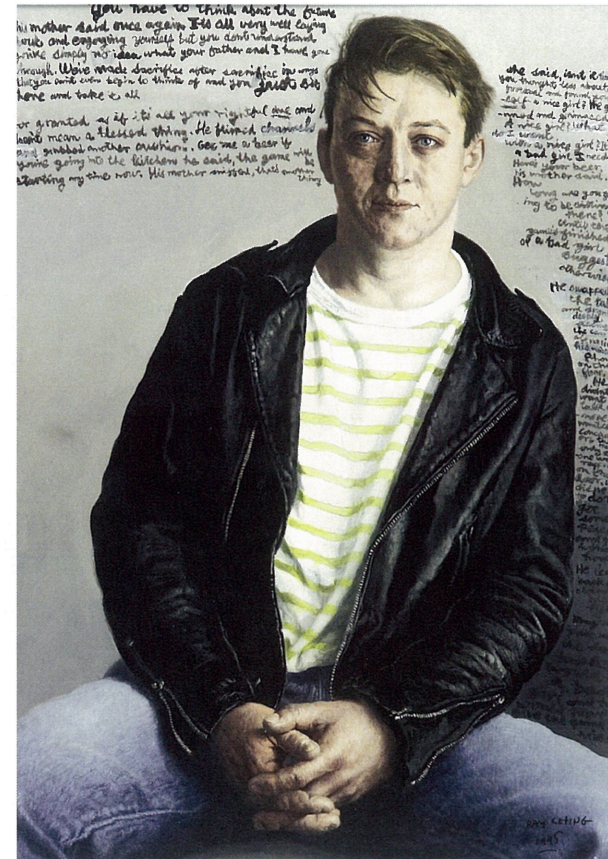
B QUALITÉ', SUPPORTING ACT SERIES, 2009  
DIGITAL VIDEO ART INSTALLATION CONSISTING OF THREE  
CO EXISTING VIGNETTES OF FRENCH ACTOR JULIEN BOISSELIER.



## RAYMOND CHING

A TRUE STORY: A YOUNG MAN, 1995  
OILS ON PANEL, 39.5 x 27.3 CM

COURTESY OF ARTIS GALLERY, AUCKLAND





# RAYMOND CHING

AT THE MUSEUM / CRY OF THE YOUNG KAREAREA, 2007  
OILS ON CANVAS LAID DOWN ON PANEL, 93 X 108 CM

COURTESY OF ARTIS GALLERY, AUCKLAND

