

a brief English language summary of each song is provided on the first page of the liner notes.) Like his efforts in researching and finding ways to incorporate lost or buried traditional musical qualities into contemporary music, Tora's lyrics plead with people to dig deep to find ways to do so in contemporary society as well. As he expressed it, "The past is just like today, we have dark and light together, you know. You've just got to reach into the light and leave the dark. That's what I've done with the music" (*arTok*, 20 Sep 2000).

As before, I will always have a special place in my heart for Fijian music—and now a special part of that place is for a new subgenre inspired by the music of Sailasa Tora. Like his lyrical call to continually blend traditional and contemporary influences without the loss of beneficial attributes of both, this music should not be dismissed as either threatening or inferior to the more traditional and other prevailing contemporary sounds. In terms of enjoyment, it is a rewarding addition to any music collection, and can be appreciated privately while trying to write or simply relax. And, as truly "New Sounds Oceania," it is a complimentary addition to Sailasa Tora's pioneering work augmenting other current Fijian musical practice and inspiring both producers and consumers of music to continue to evaluate modifications to tradition.

BOB ALEXANDER

*East-West Center, Honolulu*

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*Gauguin's Zombie*, an installation by Debra Drexler at the Honolulu Academy of Arts, 5 September–27 October 2002, and at the Maui Arts and Cultural Center's Shaefer International Gallery, 3 May–15 June 2003.

The life of artist Paul Gauguin (1848–1903) retains a mythic quality, though its once-scandalous aspects now seem only draped with a certain late-nineteenth-century nostalgia. The early life of Gauguin, born in Paris, included years living in South America and working as a seaman. He settled in Paris as a stockbroker's agent, became a friend of several of the Impressionist painters and began to paint on his own, first exhibiting with the group in 1881. He left his family and struggled to make a living as a full-time artist, eventually settling in an artist's colony in Brittany in 1887. The changes in his style, from a more subdued palette to one enriched with color, from naturalism to symbolism, may be seen to parallel an increasingly intense search for an anchor of spirituality, which he sought first among the Breton folk, and later among the natives of Tahiti, the French colony he first visited in 1891 in his quest to be free of the bonds of civilization. He returned to Paris in 1893, enjoying the celebrity following the publication of his diary *Noa Noa*, but returned in 1895 to the South Seas where he lived out his life on increasingly remote islands, fretful at the relentless encroachment of European influence. Reading this life, set in an era of emergent modernity, from the perspective of the intervening century, we may appreciate its poignancy, but we are also inclined to see in Gauguin

an emblem of the very process of westernization against which he railed, including the deleterious effects of colonization and, in particular, the eroticization of native life.

Gauguin's own sense of self-transformation, expressed in *Noa Noa*, his illustrated memoir of life in a Tahitian paradise, was hopeful, transcendent: "Wholly destroyed, finished, dead, is from now on the old civilization within me. I was reborn; or rather another man, purer and stronger, came to life within me." Debra Drexler, associate professor of art at the University of Hawai'i, Mānoa, wants us to see it another way. Drexler's project *Gauguin's Zombie* is most definitely a darker, more satirical vision of the life-after-death of one of modernism's most celebrated artists.

Drexler has constructed a complicated narrative in which the corpse of Gauguin is brought back to unexpected life in a strange new existence—not only postmodern, but post-mortal as well—and embarks on a new journey that creates an uncanny and inverse echo of the journey that took him away from Europe to Tahiti. In Gauguin's escape to Polynesia, the artist considered that he could "end my days in peace and freedom, without thought of tomorrow and this eternal struggle against idiots." As Drexler's fantasy plays out, Gauguin's zombie makes a rather ignoble return to Paris and to a strange new phase of the painting life.

Drexler's complex installation includes seven large oil paintings (done in a neoprimitive style clearly meant to evoke and emulate that of Gauguin) supplemented by a number of corollary works—small oil

sketches, pages from a journal, woodcuts—that parallel Gauguin's historical output. One of the most elegant components is a carved wood frame Drexler has created for the gallery doorway, like Gauguin's own doorway for his Tahitian house/studio "Maison du Jouis" (House of Pleasure.) In Drexler's visual narrative, the figure of Gauguin's zombie is a recurrent presence, sallow skinned (very much like Gauguin's painting "Yellow Christ" of 1889) and accompanied by a dark-robed crone (from "The Spirit of the Dead Watching" of 1892).

Included too are documents that provide more of the back-story for the existence of Gauguin's zombie: from his strange revival at an ethnographic museum (he is still filled with libidinous desire, despite the fragile condition of his sexual apparatus) to his finding work as a painter-for-hire in the employ of artist-entrepreneur Vinnie Begone (a latter-day Vincent Van Gogh), cranking out paintings, now a hot commodity, in the style of none other than himself.

Much of the success of Drexler's installation comes from the detailed attention paid to the story that surrounds this story, examining the ways in which artists are mythologized and artworks appropriated and commodified. It is a multifaceted project replete with in-jokes, multilingual puns, and visual and textual references to Gauguin's own work that also scrutinizes insider knowledge and art-historical detection. Drexler has a fine-tuned sense of juxtaposition, joining gestures from Gauguin's work with notations from contemporary culture. In Drexler's "Lost in Paris," for example, she has transformed a row of young women from Gauguin's

“Ta Matete” (The Marketplace) of 1892 by dressing them in trendy clothing; they sit on a park bench, casually smoking, while in the distant background, the zombie and the crone walk through the trees (see figure 1).

Drexler is also very attentive to the fabrication of details that implicate various traditions of museum practice, beginning with museum memos from the fictitious “National Ethnographic Museum” documenting the preparation of the artist’s body for a blockbuster exhibition of “The Fathers of Modern Art,” from which point the story begins to unfold—or unravel. Another salient document is a flyer asking viewers to boycott the exhibi-

tion because of the irreverent display of human remains.

Continuing her conceptual deconstruction of museum ambience and protocol, Drexler has constructed another artifact of speculative authenticity: a small frond-covered hut, in which the artist-in-residence has ostensibly been at work on a self-portrait. In addition, a display case for the “Zombie Shop” features the requisite T-shirts, mousepads, and coffee mugs, emblazoned with reproductions of some of the paintings. (As a final ironic twist of appropriation, these products were also actually on sale in the real museum’s own shop.)

Gauguin’s own life ended not



FIGURE 1. Episode IV: Lost in Paris  
Oil on canvas by Debra Drexler, 2000. 72" x 95"  
Reproduced with permission of the Honolulu Academy of Arts.

romantically but in a state of literal corruption brought on by the venereal disease with which he suffered and with which he infected those with whom he was intimate. *Gauguin's Zombie*, for all its humor, is ultimately a kind of postcolonial morality tale, laying bare the tenuous immor-

ality of those canonized by art history, and revealing the persistence of cultural practices that continue to exploit and commodify.

MARCIA MORSE

*Honolulu Community College*

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