Shigeyuki Kihara is a visual and performance artist based in Auckland, New Zealand. The recipient in 2003 of Creative New Zealand Art Council’s Emerging Pacific Island Artist Award, her cutting-edge work challenges cultural stereotypes and dominant norms of sexuality and gender. Crossing borders is integral to Kihara’s life. She grew up with a Japanese father and Samoan mother, and in adolescence began occupying the Samoan space (vā) of a Fa’afafine—a liminal gender category best translated as a male who identifies as a woman.

Kihara’s first acclaim came in 2000 when her exhibition Teuanoa’i: Adorn to Excess (twenty-six T-shirts satirizing corporate logos) created a sensation and was purchased by New Zealand’s National Museum Te Papa Tongarewa. Her next work re-appropriated ethnographic images of Polynesians with modern consumer items through the medium of paper collage (Black Sunday, 2002) and later focused on photographic self-portraits where she posed as Samoan Goddesses (Fale Aitu: House of Spirits, 2003) and deities from Samoan folklore (Vavau: Tales from Ancient Samoa, 2004). Emulating the genre of velvet paintings, these photographs express a double entendre as they are intended to honor traditional Samoan culture while subverting a Western gaze that exoticizes images of Pacific Islanders. Parody is integral to her performance work, as well. For example, as pictured opposite, she wears a corseted eighteenth-century gown while richly bejeweled and displaying the fingernails of a high fashion model. Her 2005 exhibition Fa’afafine: In the Manner of a Woman intended a similar critique with personal implications. Drawing on archival nineteenth-century South Seas postcards, Kihara poses as both a Samoan man and woman, and in three panels of a dusky Polynesian maiden reveals her dual sexuality to challenge the binary model of Western sexuality that labels third sex/gender categories deviant. Kihara exhibits and performs internationally. Her Fa’afafine works are carried by Sherman Galleries in Sydney, Australia.

PAMELA ROSI
Bridgewater State College
Taualuga: The last dance
Tasi ae afe; One but a million
Ink jet on canvas and mixed media, 2002,
60 cm x 90 cm
Show no evil
Ink jet on canvas and mixed media,
2002, 30 cm x 45 cm
Gossip sessions
Ink jet on canvas and mixed media, 2002,
60 cm x 80 cm
Distressed maiden
Ink jet on canvas and mixed media, 2002,
35 cm x 40 cm
Afa Tasi; Half of one
Ink jet on canvas and mixed media, 2002,
60 cm x 80 cm
Lalava Taupou
C-type photograph and mixed media, 2003,
100 cm x 80 cm
Collaboration with Filipe Tohi.
Tribute to Lesina
Ink jet on canvas and mixed media,
2002, 35 cm x 40 cm
Iesu Keriso: Jesus Christ
C-type photograph and mixed media,
100 cm x 80 cm