the Whitworth

PRESS RELEASE
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Yuki Kihara: Darwin in Paradise Camp

3 October 2025 – 1 March 2026



The Whitworth is proud to present a solo exhibition by interdisciplinary artist Yuki Kihara (b.1975).

Darwin in Paradise Camp will present Kihara's acclaimed installation *Paradise Camp*, originally presented at the Aotearoa New Zealand Pavilion at the 59th Venice Biennale in 2022, as part of its first UK tour, augmented by a striking video work, *Darwin Drag* (2025), created for its UK audiences.

For over twenty years, Japanese-Sāmoan artist Yuki Kihara has delved into art histories and archives to unpick the effects of colonialism on the peoples and ecology of the Pacific. Her visually compelling projects centre and empower the voices and experiences of the Fa'afafine and Fa'atama in Sāmoa, traditional yet marginalised third gender communities to which the artist belongs.

Paradise Camp, Kihara's most ambitious project to date, reconceives famous paintings of Tahiti and its people by French modernist artist Paul Gauguin (1848-1903). Through archival research, Kihara links Gauguin's paintings made during this time to colonial photographs taken in Sāmoa. Described by Kihara as an act of 'upcycling', she recreates Gauguin's compositions in a series of 12 resplendent tableau photographs, shot on location in Upolu Island, Sāmoa. Collaborating with Fa'afafine models and production crew, Kihara repurposes these cultural artefacts from what she regards as the 'landfill' of stereotypical Pacific Island imagery in order to speak to, and from, queer Indigenous worlds in a profound gesture of reclamation.

Kihara's stunning photographic series will be displayed on a panoramic oceanscape photograph, providing fresh perspectives on the presented works by Gauguin, including *Bathers at Tahiti* (1897) on loan from The Barber Institute of Fine Arts and rarely seen works on paper from the Whitworth's collection. On display nearby will be the *Vārchive,* telling the backstory of Kihara's research and a set

of video works that includes a five-part Fa'afafine talk show and an imagined *talanoa* (conversation) between Kihara and Gauguin.

Paradise Camp is an evolving project, introducing new components at each location. For its UK audiences, Kihara presents her new work *Darwin Drag* that engages with recent research into how famed evolutionary biologist Charles Darwin (1809-1882) shaped his findings to suggest that non-heteronormative species and same-sex attraction in animals was rare and unnatural, to conform with the conservative values of the Victorian period.

In *Darwin Drag,* Kihara combines Charles Darwin's evolutionary theories with queer aesthetics in the animal 'queendom'. It features Kihara prosthetically transformed into Charles Darwin, who confides in a renowned Sāmoan drag queen, BUCKWEAT, that he has been unhappy about keeping his secret about queer species in the closet for so long. It proceeds to introduce the fish species with 'Fa'afafine traits' found in the ocean surrounding the Sāmoan archipelago, including clownfish and parrotfish. Blending scholarly research with theatrical staging, the video is presented within a replica of a 'fale', a traditional, open structure Sāmoan house, alongside a collection of fish specimens.

The exhibition will weave together art historical paintings, wallpapers, specimens, contemporary photographs and videos, props, and archives to reveal interconnected histories and nurture an alternate Indigenous queer world based on self-determination, where community and care are central.

About Yuki Kihara
Yuki Kihara (b. 1975 Apia, Samoa) is a conceptual artist working and living in Sāmoa. Her interdisciplinary practice challenges dominant historical narratives and their socio-political persistence in contemporary culture. She incorporates Sāmoan aesthetics and cultural codes through performance, sculpture, film, photography, and curation. In 2022, Kihara represented the Aotearoa New Zealand Pavilion at the 59th Venice Biennale with *Paradise Camp,* accompanied by a dedicated publication. The exhibition has since toured to the Powerhouse Museum, Sydney (2023); the Saletoga Sands Resort, Upolu Island (2024) and the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, Norwich (2025).

Kihara gained prominence following her solo exhibition *Living Photographs* (2008) presented at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Subsequent solo exhibitions were presented at Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen; Gus Fisher Gallery | Te Whare Toi o Gus Fisher, Auckland; Wereldmuseum Leiden**;** and the Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco, among others. Kihara's works have been presented in numerous exhibitions, including the Gwangju Biennale (2023); Aotearoa New Zealand at the 59th Venice Biennale (2022); Aichi Triennale (2022); Bangkok Art Biennale (2018); Honolulu Biennale (2017); Asia Pacific Triennial (2015 and 2002) and Sakahàn Quinquennial (2013) to name a few. Her works are held in over 30 permanent collections including the Museum of Modern Art, New York; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; British Museum, London; Kaohsiung Museum of Fine Arts and Te Papa Tongarewa Museum of New Zealand, Wellington.

Kihara was a research fellow at the National Museums of World Cultures in The Netherlands from 2017 – 2022; and is currently an affiliate of Ecological Art Practices – a research cluster led by THE NEW INSTITUTE Centre for Environmental Humanities (NICHE) at the Ca 'Foscari University of Venice.

Kihara is also co-director of Talanoa Arts Forum, a curatorial agency facilitating international cultural and artistic exchange in Sāmoa.

EXHIBITION CREDITS

Darwin in Paradise Camp is a touring exhibition from the Sainsbury Centre, University of East Anglia. The exhibition has been adapted for the Whitworth by Yuki Kihara and Poppy Bowers, Senior Curator (Exhibitions), the Whitworth, The University of Manchester.

Darwin Drag (2025) is supported by the Sainsbury Centre; the Whitworth, The University of Manchester; the British Council and AHRC Impact Acceleration Account administered by UEA.

The artist's practice is supported by Creative New Zealand.

Image credit: Yuki Kihara, *Fonofono o le Nuanua: Patches of the Rainbow (after Gauguin),* 2020, C-print. Copyright: Courtesy of Yuki Kihara and Milford Galleries, Aotearoa New Zealand

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Listings Information

Yuki Kihara: Darwin in Paradise Camp
3 October 2025 – 1 March 2026
The Whitworth, Oxford Road, Manchester, M15 6ER
Open Tue-Sun 10-5pm (till 9pm on Thursday)
Free entry

Related Events

Exhibition Preview with online Artist Talk
Thursday 2 October 2025
6-8pm Exhibition Preview
7-8pm Artist Talk, streamed live from Sāmoa into the Grand Hall, the Whitworth

To launch the exhibition, Yuki Kihara will join us remotely from Sāmoa to introduce the latest iteration of her acclaimed project *Paradise Camp* and to discuss her new work *Darwin Drag* that features within this UK presentation of her work.

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About the Whitworth

The Whitworth is proudly part of The University of Manchester, operating as a convening space between the University and the people of the city. Founded in 1889 for "the perpetual gratification of the people of Manchester" it continues this mission today in new contexts. The gallery, its park and gardens are home to the collection of over 60,000 works of art, textiles, sculptures and wallpapers and provides a platform for artists from around the world. The Whitworth is driven by a vision to actively seek and manifest connections between art, creativity, and their role in developing a more resilient and caring society through its exhibitions and award-winning civic engagement programme.

Gallery opening times: Tuesday to Sunday 10am-5pm, Thursday late opening until 9pm
www.manchester.ac.uk/whitworth

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