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Gender Politics, Presence and Erasure: Tattoo in in Pursuit of Venus [infected] and Les Sauvages De La Mer Pacifique

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GENDER POLITICS, PRESENCE AND ERASURE: TATTOO IN *IN PURSUIT OF VENUS*
[INFECTED] AND *LES SAUVAGES DE LA MER PACIFIQUE*

by

Emily Cornish

A Thesis Submitted in
Partial Fulfillment of the
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ABSTRACT

GENDER POLITICS, PRESENCE AND ERASURE: *TATTOO IN IN PURSUIT OF VENUS [INFECTED]* AND *LES SAUVAGES DE LA MER PACIFIQUE*

by
Emily Cornish

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2016
Under the Supervision of Professor Matthew Rarey

This paper utilizes tattoo as a means for exploring the dialogue between contemporary Maori artist Lisa Reihana's *In Pursuit of Venus [infected]* and Joseph Dufour's nineteenth-century decorative wallpaper *Les Sauvages de la Mer Pacifique*. I argue that the tattooed body constitutes a re-insertion or re-infection within the pictorial program of *In Pursuit of Venus [infected]*. As such, tattoo becomes one focal point which allows us to work through four themes investigated by these two artworks: gender identity and ambiguity *vis a vis* practices that concern bodily adornment, the mutability of looking practices from one culture to another, encounters between different cultures and the concept of images as sites of encounter themselves, and the relationship between images, systems of knowledge and technology.

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LINK TO THE ARTIST'S WEBSITE

www.inpursuitofvenus.com/watch-video/

I highly recommend the reader view this clip before proceeding to the essay.

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Introduction: "...the oddest looking being for a wife *you've* ever seen."

When Dr. Edward Shortland, a colonial administrator in New Zealand during the nineteenth century, encountered the wife of Poukeni near Akaroa on the South Island, tattooing was still a prevalent part of Maori visual culture, despite increased efforts by missionaries to stem the practice.¹ By the nineteenth century Oceanic tattooing practices, for which Maori customs constitute but one of many traditions, had captured the attention of Europeans and affected cross-cultural encounters both on the ground in Oceania and by proxy back in Europe.

Shortland claimed "the old man (Poukeni) had the oddest looking being for a wife I had ever seen."² What Shortland found so strange about this individual had to do with their facial *tattoos*, or *moko* in *Te Reo* the Maori language, which he described as having characteristics of both male and female tattoo designs, saying "one half of her face was tattooed in every respect like that of a man, while the other had no more marks than her sex entitled her to..."³ Shortland further noted that one might assume this individual to be either male or female "according to the circumstances of the viewers position"; in other words depending on which side of their face was visible to the viewer.⁴ While tattoo might seem like a minor player within the larger framework of encounter and colonization, Shortland's comments should lead us to conclude otherwise.

¹ Edward Shortland, *The Southern Districts of New Zealand; a Journal, with Passing Notices of the Customs of the Aborigines*. (London, 1851), <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.b3118021>. A further note on Maori tattoo, these practices continue today and are undergoing a significant revival which I do not have time to discuss at length here. This statement in my thesis is not to imply that tattooing is no longer a prevalent part of Maori cultural practices but to acknowledge the fact that it was subject to a period of decline the coincided with the colonization of New Zealand from the middle part of the nineteenth century up until the middle of the twentieth century.

² Ibid.

³ Ngahuia Te Awekotuku and Linda Waimarie Nikora, *Mau Moko: The World of Maori Tattoo*, paperback edition (Auckland New Zealand: Penguin Book Group, 2011), 77; Shortland, *The Southern Districts of New Zealand; a Journal, with Passing Notices of the Customs of the Aborigines*.

⁴ Ngahuia Te Awekotuku and Linda Waimarie Nikora, *Mau Moko*; Shortland, *The Southern Districts of New Zealand; a Journal, with Passing Notices of the Customs of the Aborigines*. Emphasis in italics mine.

Shortland intended to draw attention to this individual's tattoos, however by bringing up the potential gendering of this person based on the visible field of the observer, Shortland actually draws attention to the viewer in this exchange, prompting questions like: what exactly are the viewer's circumstances and how do those circumstances inform the view? Would everyone who beheld Poukeni's wife have read into his or her gendering in the same ways that Shortland did, and if not, what is the effect of this conglomeration of perspectives on gender, identity, and matrices of representation that crystallize around tattoo?

Shortland's comments offer a useful point of departure to explore notions of position and positionality applicable to visual experience and works of art. This paper is concerned with two works of art in particular: contemporary Maori artist Lisa Reihana's cinematic installation *In Pursuit of Venus [infected]* (see the link at the start of the images section to watch a clip from the installation) and Joseph Dufour's nineteenth century decorative wallpaper *Les Sauvages de la Mer Pacifique* (figures 1-6). Though separated by several centuries, these works are connected on a number of levels, tattoo being one of them; while both *In Pursuit of Venus [infected]* and *Les Sauvages de la Mer Pacifique* approach and offer commentaries on this practice they do so in very different ways. The representation of tattoo within each of these artworks presents us with a microcosm for exploring larger issues related to position, positionality and visual experiences.

Position is a word that indicates the space one physically takes up, the space we bodily occupy.⁵ Yet position can also indicate social rankings, and the correct placement of both objects, and people inviting us into an area then that contends with concepts of power and socially defined arrangements.⁶ Positionality denotes specifically the relational quality of

⁵ "Position: Definition of Position in Oxford Dictionary (American English) (US)," accessed April 7, 2016, http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/us/definition/american_english/position.

⁶ Ibid.

positioning “with particular reference to issues of culture, ethnicity, or gender.”⁷ Shortland expresses a particular position in his comments on Poukeni’s wife, a position that implies his or any viewer’s physical placement in relation to this individual but also their cultural positioning and perspectives especially with regard to gender.

An example of this culturally conditioned position or perspective would be Shortland’s assumption of a gender binary in relation to Poukeni’s wife that may not have held true or even been at issue for Maori who also encountered this individual.⁸ The focus of this paper is on work that Oceanic tattoo and bodily inscription do within Reihana’s *In Pursuit of Venus [infected]* (interchangeably referred to as *iPOVi*) and *Les Sauvages de la Mer Pacifique*, (henceforth referred to as *Les Sauvages*).

There and here, then and now: Lisa Reihana and Nineteenth-Century Decorative Wallpapers

“Traveling in the company of those you love is home in motion”.⁹ This quote by Lisa Reihana offers a window onto some of the core Maori tenets that inform her artistic practice: community, a sense of history, time and place that looks to both the living and the dead.¹⁰ Reihana’s graduation from Auckland University’s Elam School of Fine Arts in 1987 coincided with ongoing tensions and debates over what it meant to be a Maori artist.¹¹ One facet of this struggle was the reconciliation of tradition (in terms of mediums, practices, perspectives, venues,

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Clive Aspin and Jessica Hutchings, “Reclaiming the Past to Inform the Future: Contemporary Views of Maori Sexuality,” *Culture, Health & Sexuality* 9, no. 4 (2007): 415–27, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20460942>.

⁹ Huhana Smith et al., “Lisa Reihana in Conversation with Megan Tamati-Quennell,” in *Taiāwhio. II, II*, (Wellington, N.Z.: Te Papa Press, 2007), 211.

¹⁰ Smith et al., “Lisa Reihana in Conversation with Megan Tamati-Quennell”; Nicholas Thomas, *Oceanic Art* (New York, N.Y: Thames & Hudson, 1995), 59–78; Ngahuia Te Awekotuku and Linda Waimarie Nikora, *Mau Moko*.

¹¹ Smith et al., “Lisa Reihana in Conversation with Megan Tamati-Quennell.”

markets etc.) with the contemporary and the global (also with regard to media, practices, perspectives, venues, markets and so on).

Reihana who's ancestry is Maori (*Ngapuhi*) and *pakeha* New Zealander, relates that she had to come terms with the fact that, however else she might perceive herself, the art community at large was going to understand and consider her a Maori artist.¹² Throughout the years Reihana has worked in many mediums. Often her artwork combines multiple mediums in a single work like her found objects, however video, sound, and the immersive localities of installation artwork are of particular note within her oeuvre.¹³ *In Pursuit of Venus [infected]* is her most recent work that brings to bear a longstanding engagement with technology and the language of film.¹⁴

Additionally within *iPOVi* we see Reihana returning to several themes that permeate many of her artworks, including gender politics and Maori or Oceanic visual aesthetics rendered in a contemporary way.¹⁵ This artwork like many of her others offers a commentary on these thematic concerns but this commentary is open-ended requiring the active participation of the audience.¹⁶ Tethering her artworks to specific conclusions or outcomes was never Reihana's goal, nor one that history has taught us an artist can ever fully control.¹⁷ In her own words, Reihana says "the point was to leave space for the audience to question, to examine their own theories and where they stood in relation to them."¹⁸ Given this information, position and positionality are categorically themes Reihana contends with in her work. By extension the

¹² *Ibid.*, 213. The term *pakeha* denotes someone who is a native of New Zealand but not Maori.

¹³ Smith et al., "Lisa Reihana in Conversation with Megan Tamati-Quennell."

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 211.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 212.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 213.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

audience of works like *iPOVi* contend with these issues whether or not they are cognizant of them.

In Pursuit of Venus [infected] is a thirty-two minute panoramic video that merges live action performances by contemporary actors and artists with a CGI adaptation of the landscape from *Les Sauvages*, in what is a striking re-imaging and re-imagining of the first encounters between Pacific people and European explorers. An array actions and interactions between a cast of characters which include figures from the voyages of Captain James Cook, such as Omai, Tupaia, Joseph Banks, Cook himself and many other unnamed Pacific Islanders and crewmembers unfolds in hyper-detail/realism in the installation.

In Pursuit of Venus [infected] is broadly concerned with visual perspectives (put in another way visual positionality), looking practices, and what happens when culturally different perspectives and practices meet in situations like the ones fostered by European exploration and colonization of the Pacific. Speaking in physiological terms, “pursuit” in the artwork’s title indicates “the action of the eye following a moving object” foregrounding the very act of looking within the installation. The abbreviation of *In Pursuit of Venus [infected]*, *iPOVi*, is a playful nod to the acronym for point of view.¹⁹ Further this acronym is one Reihana herself uses to refer to the installation.

At this point the reader may be wondering, “what in the world does any of this have to do with nineteenth-century decorative wallpapers like *Les Sauvages*?” *Les Sauvages* was also deeply concerned with questions of vision and visuality applicable to its own time. This wallpaper was designed by Jean-Gabriel Charvet and produced by Joseph Dufour in France

¹⁹ “Reihana’s Infected Pursuit of Venus – EyeContact,” accessed January 16, 2016, <http://eyecontactsite.com/2015/05/reihas-infected-pursuit-of-venus>; Clare McIntosh ed., *Lisa Reihana: In Pursuit of Venus* (Auckland Art Gallery To o Tamaki, 2015), 9.

between 1804-1805.²⁰ This wallpaper quickly acquired international popularity.²¹ *Les Sauvages* is a *papiers panoramiques*, or panoramaic wallpaper, having the distinction of being one of the first decorative wallpapers to utilize panoramic form in its design.²²

The term panorama denotes “a kind of pattern for organizing visual experience”.²³ The nineteenth century panorama was meant to create all-encompassing unobstructed views for the viewer to take part in. Panoramas from this time period were also meant to transport viewers to far-away lands like the Pacific Islands or to momentous events they were not physically present at. Stephan Ottermann’s groundbreaking study of the panorama thoroughly outlines the panorama’s association with travel, and newfound discoveries like the horizon.²⁴

Roger Benjamin in his essay *Colonial Panoramania* illustrates the larger political and social agendas embedded in panoramic images like *Les Sauvages*, stating “the Orientalist

²⁰ “Joseph Dufour & Cie, Jean-Gabriel Charvet *Les Sauvages de La Mer Pacifique* (The Native Peoples of the Pacific Ocean),” *Aucklandartgallery*, accessed October 25, 2015, <http://www.aucklandartgallery.com/the-collection/browse-artwork/11063/les-sauvages-de-la-mer-pacifique-the-native-peoples-of-the-pacific-ocean>; “Sauvage,” *Compact Oxford-Hacette French Dictionary* (Oxford, Uk: Oxford University Press, 2013). The title of Dufour’s panorama is often translated as people or native peoples of the pacific ocean (for an example visit the Auckland Art Gallery’s online entry about the panel depicting the wrestling match in Tongatapu, Tonga) even though the term sauvages in French means wild or primitive in both its adjective/verb form and a savage or unsociable in its noun form. I argue it is by design that the title of Dufour’s wallpaper is *Les Sauvages De La Mer Pacifique* rather than *Les Gens de La Mer Pacifique*.

²¹ Christin Mamiya, “Nineteenth-Century French Women, the Home and the Colonial Vision: *Les Sauvages de La Mer Pacifique* ‘Wallpaper,’” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, Domestic Frontiers: The Home and Colonization, 28, no. 1/2 (2007): 104, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40071949>; Vivienne Morrell, “Images of Pacific Peoples in 18th Century Books, Prints and Wallpaper,” *Vivienmorrell.wordpress.com*, July 9, 2015, <https://vivienmorrell.wordpress.com/2015/07/09/images-of-pacific-peoples-in-18th-century-books-prints-and-wallpaper/>; *In Pursuit of Venus*, 22.

²² Christin Mamiya, “Nineteenth-Century French Women,” 104; Vivienne Morrell, “Images of Pacific Peoples.”

²³ Henry M. Sayre, “Surveying the Vast Profound: The Panoramic Landscape in American Consciousness,” *The Massachusetts Review* 24, no. 4 (1983): 725,735-736, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25089492>; Stephan Ottermann translated by Deborah Lucas Schneider, *The Panorama: History of a Mass Medium* (New York: Zone Books, 1997), 7.

²⁴ Stephan Ottermann translated by Deborah Lucas Schneider, *The Panorama: History of a Mass Medium*.

painters madding painting as a means of cultural transfer their special province, exploring the potential of murals, panoramas, salonnets, *and in this case wallpaper to communicate between nations and colonies.*"²⁵ In this context *Les Sauvages* is more than just an inconsequential wall decoration, it becomes an agent in the colonial projects of European nations, meant to influence audiences' understandings of a given nation's colonial enterprise.²⁶

Colonization in Oceania enlisted images in the imperialist project of naming and claiming.²⁷ *Les Sauvages* takes part in a scheme aimed to manage the identities of both the colonizers and the colonized, becoming one channel through which very real bodies become subjected to the imperial gaze."²⁸ It is worth nothing that panoramic format through its creation of an unobstructed view, further effects and implicates this gaze because the power to name and claim is conferred on the viewer.²⁹

The escapist element implicit to the panorama and the manner in which these structures impact both vision and the positioning of the viewer are two major reasons panoramas are sometimes considered precursors to cinema. The cinematic language that both *In Pursuit of Venus [infected]* and *Les Sauvages* partake in is one formative connection between these artworks.³⁰

²⁵ Roger Benjamin, "Colonial Panoramania," in *Empires of Vision: A Reader* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 112. Emphasis in italics mine

²⁶ Christin Mamiya, "Nineteenth-Century French Women," 101.

²⁷ *In Pursuit of Venus*, 6,43.

²⁸ Walter Mignolo, "Crossing Gazes and the Silence of the 'Indians': Theodor De Bry and Guaman Poma de Ayala," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 41, no. 1 (Winter 2011): 175–76. Mignolog defines imperial in this context as "the colonial matrix of power, a complex structure of control and management, that emerged in the sixteenth century and in the Atlantic transactions and that encompasses economy, authority, gender and sexuality, knowledge and subjectivity."

²⁹ McIntosh ed., *In Pursuit of Venus*, 42.

³⁰ Panoramas are often cited as precursors to film.

iPOVi then offers a response to the nineteenth-century decorative wallpaper *Les Sauvages*. The tattooed body is acknowledged by the manufacturers of *Les Sauvages* but declared ridiculous or absurd, its visual suppression in the wallpaper explained thusly: “we have taken the liberty of suppressing these silly distinctive marks, in a picture which must offer only pleasant objects to the eyes of the public.”³¹ At the time of the wallpaper’s creation tattooing was a prolific practice in places like the Marquesas, Tahiti, Samoa and New Zealand among others.³²

iPOVi is modular, offering no fixed narrative for viewers to follow. Reihana works through this concern over looking and perspectives by reintroducing figures, images and practices that are otherwise absent or relegated to the background of *Les Sauvages*. Perpetually in motion whether through the movement of the video or the movement of the viewer, we shift through various scenes, simultaneously depicting the new with the old in terms of history, people, and performance.³³ This lack of linear historical narrative is indicative of Maori concepts of time and space.³⁴

The visual drama of *Les Sauvages* presents a utopian interpretation of the Pacific supposedly set on the island of Tahiti and is organized into twenty panels or drops, each depicting a different scene which successfully combines a modular effect with notions of the panoramic.³⁵ The term “Pacifique” in the title has been widely associated with Oceania yet the wallpaper as a whole claims to represent indigenous societies trans-Pacifically. *Les Sauvages*

³¹ trans. Rudd, Paul, “Les Sauvages de La Mer Pacifique: Tableau Pour Decoration En Papier Peint,” in *Les Sauvages de La Mer Pacifique: Manufactured by Joseph Dufour Et Cie 1804-05 After a Design by Jean-Gabriel Charvet*, 1804, 14.

³² Thomas, *Oceanic Art*, 89, 99–100.

³³ McIntosh ed., *In Pursuit of Venus*, 2.

³⁴ Deidre Brown et al., *Does Māori Art History Matter?*, 2014; McIntosh ed., *In Pursuit of Venus*, 2.

³⁵ trans. Rudd, Paul, “The Savages of the Pacific Sea”; David Freedberg, “The Power of Images: Response and Repression,” in *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1989), 104; Vivienne Morrell, “Images of Pacific Peoples.”

came with a written accompaniment or guide that offers an explanation of the wallpaper's visual drama and the sources of inspiration for the images. This document stresses the accuracy of *Les Sauvages*' pictorial program; extolling the wallpaper's ability to educate the public on the history and geography of the Pacific.³⁶

However, as many scholars have discussed, *Les Sauvages* may be better understood as a highly decorative, neo-classical enumeration of enlightenment ideals on the metaphysical state of man; resulting in an image that is an exotic no-mans land.³⁷ *Les Sauvages* does not include anyone with tattoos despite an obvious preoccupation with the physical appearance and dressing practices of the people it purports to represent.³⁸ This preoccupation is reiterated by the guide, which from the very beginning directs the viewer's attention to the variety of "costumes" depicted in the image.³⁹

The tattooed body therefore constitutes one of these re-insertions or re-infections within the pictorial program of *In Pursuit of Venus [infected]*. As such, tattoo becomes one focal point which allows us to work through four themes investigated by *In Pursuit of Venus [infected]*: gender identity *vis a vis* practices that concern bodily adornment, the mutability of looking practices from one culture to another, encounters between different cultures and the concept of images as sites of encounter themselves, and the relationship between images, systems of knowledge and technology.

Cook's Trousers: Ambiguous Encounters and Gender Politics

³⁶ trans. Rudd, Paul, "The Savages of the Pacific Sea."

³⁷ McIntosh ed., *In Pursuit of Venus*, 36.

³⁸ trans. Rudd, Paul, "The Savages of the Pacific Sea."

³⁹ Ibid.

The aforementioned Captain Cook presents us with a figure that can help unpack the dialogue between these two artworks and how tattoo is situated within both. Like tattoo, Cook constitutes another reintroduction within the visual drama of *In Pursuit of Venus [infected]*. Reihana represents Cook as both male and female (Figures 7-8) in the installation. When Cook first appeared in the Pacific the local people were unable to discern his gender, because his manner of dress (i.e. his trousers) successfully masked his biological sex.⁴⁰ In a vignette entitled *Gender?* (figure 9) Cook, along with some sailors, drink and party with a group of Pacific Islanders in a situation which quickly turns from comedic to tense and charged when several people try to pull Cook's pants down in order to solve the question of his gender identity.⁴¹

Among many indigenous societies in Oceania gender is often understood to be far more ambiguous and mutable in comparison to Western societies.⁴² This kind of ambiguity, a willingness to interrogate one's perspective on gender or the mechanisms that inform one's perspective with regard to gender, are present throughout Reihana's oeuvre.⁴³ Within *iPOVi* then the figure of Cook reflects the ambiguous nature of gender identities. This artwork underscores the fissures in conceptions of gender as biologically predetermined which encounter by its very nature brings to the surface. Societies as a result of encounter often attempt to smooth over, to inscribe or re-inscribe socially accepted gender identities.

Gender? deliberately highlights the misunderstandings that attend encounter and how such situations can quickly change tone and escalate to violence.⁴⁴ Further, this scene illustrates the ambiguities that exist within gender identities and such identities bodily assumption through

⁴⁰ *CIRCUIT CAST Episode 23: An Interview with Lisa Reihana*, accessed January 15, 2016, <http://www.circuit.org.nz/blog/circuit-cast-episode-23-an-interview-with-lisa-reihana>.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Thomas, *Oceanic Art*, 79–114.

⁴³ See artworks like *Dandy* from her *Digital Marae* series.

⁴⁴ McIntosh ed., *In Pursuit of Venus*, 10, 16.

modes of dress. Whether Cook is man or woman in this situation depends on your cultural perspective and customs of dressing the body; the jackets, stockings, trousers and other articles of clothing which are conspicuous signs of one's gender and social status in one context do not function as universal signifiers of Cook's identity. This scene, in combination with both a female and male actor who portray Cook within *iPOVi* explores the politics of gender and cross-cultural encounter.⁴⁵ Like Shortland's comments involving gender and tattoo, Cook highlights the interplay between one's physical appearance, manner of dress, and social/cultural identity.

Regarding *Les Sauvages*, viewers would have derived their conception of Oceanic tattooing practices largely from Cook and others like him who chronicled their journeys throughout the Pacific. However, Cook's voyages generated a different kind of interest in the Pacific Islands, surpassing that of previous ventures to that area of the world. Reihana refers to Cook and figures like him in historically and mythically evocative terms as "harbingers of colonization".⁴⁶ While explorers from many European nations including France made expeditions to Oceania, some of these even predating Cook's own, his voyages are often given a distinctive place as a source of inspiration for Chavret's design, becoming an almost ubiquitous reference in the scholarly discourse on *Les Sauvages*.⁴⁷ In the alternate name for *Les Sauvages*, the "*Captain Cook Wallper*" likewise points to this influence.

Accompanying Cook on his first voyage was an ethnographic collector by the name of Joseph Banks, the artist Sydney Parkinson, and in some sense the zeal for collecting which was

⁴⁵ *CIRCUIT CAST Episode 23*.

⁴⁶ McIntosh ed., *In Pursuit of Venus*, 16.

⁴⁷ See for instance Christin Mamiya, "Nineteenth-Century French Women"; Vivienne Morrell, "Images of Pacific Peoples"; McIntosh ed., *In Pursuit of Venus*.

at the core of the European cabinet of curiosities.⁴⁸ Cook's subsequent voyages to Oceania also included artists and illustrators. Dufour was known to have drawn heavily on the accounts of Cook, La Perouse and others. Additionally he researched contemporary illustrations of the Pacific, the wallpaper in turn making reference to the work of John Webber and William Hodges.⁴⁹ Parkinson's work, while also influential and evident in things like the comb in the hair of Kaoora seated with his back to the audience beneath the gris gris trees in panel 10 of *Les Sauvages* (figures 10-11), I argue was deliberately drawn on to a lesser degree by Chavret and Dufour.⁵⁰ This emphasis on Webber and Hodges over Parkinson can further be tied to the manner in which these artists depict or decline to depict tattoo, among other things, within their work.

Webber accompanied Cook on his third voyage, due partly to Cook's command to record in pictorial form the flora and fauna of the places he was to visit.⁵¹ Bernard Smith claims that Webber "sought out the minutiae of vegetation with *great zeal*" (Figure 12).⁵² This emphasis on landscape finds its echo in *Les Sauvages*, which depicts in hyper-detail plants like breadfruit and banana trees, the same vegetation that had taken center stage in some of Webbers works.⁵³ Hodges was present on the second expedition. Like Webber he also produced many landscapes, these painted *en plein air*.⁵⁴ Additionally Hodges was known for his oil paintings depicting

⁴⁸ Brownen Douglas, "'Cureous Figures': European Voyagers and Tatau/Tattoo in Polynesia, 1595-1800," in *Tattoo: Bodies, Art and Exchange in the Pacific and the West* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 34–39; *CIRCUIT CAST Episode 23*; *In Pursuit of Venus*, 37.

⁴⁹ McIntosh ed., *In Pursuit of Venus*, 6.

⁵⁰ trans. Rudd, Paul, "The Savages of the Pacific Sea."

⁵¹ Professor Bernard Smith, *European Vision and the South Pacific, Second Edition* (Yale University Press, 1989), 108–14.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 109.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 56–62.

indigenous islanders, especially Tahitians.⁵⁵ Smith singles out Hodge's images for having helped facilitate understandings of Oceania that combined an aura of antiquity with a semi-threatening exoticism.⁵⁶

The question then becomes: why did Cook's voyages exert such influence on *Les Sauvages*' visual presentation of Oceanic people? While some of Cook's overarching goals during his first expedition were to observe the Transit of Venus and map the coast of New Zealand, compiling a written and visual record of the inhabitants of these locals was also a large part of the expedition's purpose. The extended stay of Cook and company in Tahiti and their experiences in New Zealand in comparison with earlier explorers to the area allowed artists like Parkinson to "write and draw detailed impressions of the local people, not least of their *tatau*."⁵⁷

As previously mentioned, the media produced by these expeditions were numerous and extremely didactic. Joseph Banks believed pictures, i.e. visual media, were a more objective and precise means of recording information than writing.⁵⁸ Consequently this outgrowth of visual material can be argued to be one of the defining features of Cook's expeditions; one which Reihana herself regards as a point of fascination.⁵⁹

Furthermore Parkinson, one of the artists in Banks' employ, is often credited with creating the first visual catalogue of Maori tattoo, including dress, objects and ornaments to be seen by European audiences, though he would not live long enough to see the legacy his images

⁵⁵ Harriet Guest, "Curiously Marked: Tattooing and Gender Difference in Eighteenth-Century British Perceptions of the South Pacific," in *Written on the Body: The Tattoo in European and American History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 83–101.

⁵⁶ Smith, *European Vision and the South Pacific, Second Edition*, 64.

⁵⁷ Brownen Douglas, "'Cureous Figures'," 50; Nicholas Thomas, "Introduction," in *Tattoo: Bodies, Art and Exchange in the Pacific and the West* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 12. *Tatau* is Tahitian for tattoo.

⁵⁸ Brownen Douglas, "'Cureous Figures'," 36.

⁵⁹ McIntosh ed., *In Pursuit of Venus*, 14.

would have, as he died of dysentery in 1771 en route to England.⁶⁰ Parkinson appears several times (figure 13) in *In Pursuit of Venus [infected]*, usually shown with his artist's tools in the act of drawing or painting.

One of the most widely reproduced images from the Cook voyages is Parkinson's pen and wash drawing *Portrait of a New Zealand Man* (Figure 11).⁶¹ This drawing depicts the fully tattooed face of Otegoowgoow, a chiefly man from the Bay of Islands and made several appearances in printed form by the time of *Les Sauvages* manufacture.⁶² Reihana likens images like *Portrait of a New Zealand Man* to behind-the-scenes footage from a film today, which aptly demonstrates the popularity and fascination on the part of nineteenth century audiences with "genuine" images of the Pacific.⁶³

As an extension of the image, the guide for *Les Sauvages* claimed that viewers through their interaction with the wallpaper became like "the companions of the most enterprising voyagers..."⁶⁴ This assessment of the viewer's position in relation to the wallpaper replicates the behind-the-scenes sort of attitude inflected in the artworks produced during the expedition. This observation is even more salient given that tattoo takes center stage in *Portrait of a New Zealand Man*. Images like *Portrait of a New Zealand Man* removed the site of encounter between Europeans with Oceanic tattoo to Europe and it is here that images of the Pacific, *Les Sauvages* among them were produced.

⁶⁰ "The Head of a New Zealander by Sydney Parkinson | NZHistory, New Zealand History Online," accessed November 21, 2015, <http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/media/photo/head-new-zealander-sidney-parkinson>.

⁶¹ McIntosh ed., *In Pursuit of Venus*, 9,37.

⁶² "Portrait of a New Zealand Man," accessed November 23, 2015, <http://www.bl.uk/learning/images/ideas/large1672.html>; Ngahaia Te Awekotuku and Linda Waimarie Nikora, *Mau Moko*, 40.

⁶³ *CIRCUIT CAST Episode 23*.

⁶⁴ trans. Rudd, Paul, "The Savages of the Pacific Sea."

It is well established that Dufour and Chavret were not ignorant of Oceanic customs involving body modification, including tattoo. In open contradiction to the image, the guide for *Les Sauvages* acknowledges that many of the people the wallpaper claims the right to represent were tattooed, pierced or otherwise engaged in some form of body modification.⁶⁵ The inhabitants of Tonga are described as “spotted on all parts of the body in a thousand ways...”⁶⁶ In New Zealand “the faces of many of them are spotted with embellishments...”⁶⁷ While in the Marquesas the men were not only tattooed but engaged in “another ridiculous thing too which the women do not do—they stretch their ears to the extent of making them brush the shoulders and they make openings in them capable of receiving the five fingers of their hand.”⁶⁸

Tattoo despite its absence in the actual picture that is *Les Sauvages*, is presented to viewers as something distinct yet silly, noteworthy yet unpleasant; on those grounds it is excluded from the wallpaper. Visual references to the work of John Webber in particular support this reading as Webber was not only tasked with accurately recording his encounters within Oceania, but labored with an added emphasis on his images being entertaining.⁶⁹ Further, the quotes above display a similar disquiet as the one evident in Shortland’s comments about the wife of Pokenui. Tattoo seems problematic because it confronts the viewer with a kind of physicality that is unresolved and ambiguous, sparking questions and conceptions about gender and identity that cannot be neatly and quickly reconciled. It also suggests that the practice and resulting bodily images were suppressed to suit the tastes of European viewers.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Smith, *European Vision and the South Pacific, Second Edition*, 108.

Within Oceania itself the period following contact with Europeans was marked by “increased instability and dramatic change.”⁷⁰ In spite of this fact *Les Sauvages* presents a strangely idyllic vision of the Pacific at this time. This idealism is strange given that *Les Sauvages* integrated the panorama (another nineteenth-century visual construct) into its format and battle scenes typically dominate panoramic subject matter. Perhaps the wallpaper’s situation within the domestic sphere explains its lack of martial themes.⁷¹ However there is one instance within *Les Sauvages* that is suggestive of this artwork not fully being free of such concerns. Panels eight and nine depict the death of Captain Cook in Kealakeua Bay, Hawaii (figure 14).

A battle rages in the background of these panels indicated by the gun smoke emitted from the two tall ships, and the hectic arrangement of nine canoes and people both close to and on the shore. The figure we take to be Kaora in panel ten potentially looks out on this scene. Kaora was not well liked by Cook and his crews, the guide claims he was involved in the more violent exchanges that took place between them and the Maori, including citing an incidence of cannibalism, all of which suggests the link between this figure and Cook’s death in *Les Sauvages* may be deliberate.⁷²

A lone figure on the shore with a tricorn hat in the background of panels eight and nine is probably meant to represent Cook, yet this figure like all the others in this scene is faceless and not easily picked out unless you approach the wallpaper closely. Rather if your eye is drawn to this event in the wallpaper at all it is probably the two tall ships that attract the eye. This facet of the scene implies Cook is symbolically represented in the wallpaper to a certain degree by the two tall ships we take to be the HMS Resolution and HMS Discovery, in the background of these

⁷⁰ Thomas, *Oceanic Art*, 63.

⁷¹ McIntosh ed., *In Pursuit of Venus*, 42.

⁷² trans. Rudd, Paul, “The Savages of the Pacific Sea.”

panels. These ships also conveniently point to the naval accomplishments broadly related to European “discovery” of “new worlds” and the means by which everything from people, goods, pathogens, and ideas defied the boundaries of the societies they originated from in the course of these encounters.

I argue that this small section of *Les Sauvages* functions as an inverted image. Inverted images usually indicate a painting within a painting, or scene within a scene in which the main subject of the artwork in question is relegated to the background. While Cook’s death is perhaps not the main subject of *Les Sauvages*, it does indicate the moral and didactic aims of the wallpaper as a whole. Reihana herself notes this small portion of the wallpaper is significant constituting a rupture in this utopic vision of the Pacific.⁷³ It is this rupture that may tell us more than anything about *Les Sauvages* and its legacy.

In stark contrast, Cook’s death is foregrounded within *In Pursuit of Venus [infected]*. In fact, the actor Taofia Pelesasa only agreed to participate in the installation if he got to “kill” Captain Cook. The vignette *Grisly Gifts* (Figure 15) depicts the aftermath of Cook’s death, showing a chiefly Hawaiian man (easily picked out by his red feather headdress and cloak) kneeling in presentation of Cook’s hat and dismembered thigh to crewmembers from the *Resolution*.⁷⁴ Hawaiians and Europeans viewed this event in different ways once again pointing to a thematic interrogation of positionality in this artwork. Whether Cook’s death is seen as “a vicious murder or a likely outcome of his handling of a Hawaiian chief” becomes a matter of perspective.⁷⁵

⁷³ *CIRCUIT CAST Episode 23; In Pursuit of Venus*, 5–19.

⁷⁴ McIntosh ed., *In Pursuit of Venus*, 14.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 11.

While the crewmembers from the Discovery are inclined to react with disgust to the offering of one of Cook's body parts along with his hat, the other way of reading this presentation is in honorific terms.⁷⁶ The thigh was considered to be a prestigious body part, while Cook's hat was considered *tapu* because of "its relationship to his head."⁷⁷ Tapu denotes a state of being applicable to people, places, and objects that arises from "innumerable causes".⁷⁸ Additionally tapu can be understood as a kind of "impure-sacred".⁷⁹ People of importance in a variety of Oceanic societies tend to be categorized as tapu. Further this categorization would impact whether such people were tattooed or not.

The varied perspectives surrounding Cook's death showcase the fact that "encounter is a morally sticky space."⁸⁰ The process involved in acquiring a tattoo is quite literally a sticky space involving an effusion of bodily fluids. In discussing the Maori of New Zealand Nicholas Thomas posited that their visual practices and aesthetic modes functioned "as both a challenge to foreigners, allies and potential enemies who visited, often under tense and uneasy circumstances and as a source of affirmation for those who identified with the genealogy."⁸¹ The visual has bearing on the social and political, it is an active participant in these exchanges. In this quote Thomas is referring to Maori meetinghouses and ancestral carvings. It can be argued that tattoo would have been included in the response to this changing socio-political landscape and addressed its attendant concerns in kind. It is further worth noting that the tattooed visages of

⁷⁶ Ibid., 14. It is worth noting a similar kind of disgust did not seem to attend Bank's acquisition of tattooed heads known at Upoko Tuhi or Moko Mokei (depending on the aquisitional context) that had been shrunk and preserved through a steam drying process.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Herbert W. Williams, *A Dictionary of the Maori Language*, Seventh Edition (Wellington New Zealand: A. R. Shearer, Government Printer, 1971), 385.

⁷⁹ Adele Fletcher, "Sanctity, Power, and the 'Impure Sacred': Analyzing Maori Concepts of Tapu and Noa in Early Documentary Sources," *History of Religions* 47, no. 1 (2007): 51–74, doi:10.1086/522853.

⁸⁰ McIntosh ed., *In Pursuit of Venus*, 37.

⁸¹ Thomas, *Oceanic Art*, 63.

certain ancestor figures (*poupou*) are also present in these spaces (meeting houses). As such the reappearance of tattoo within *In Pursuit of Venus [infected]* marks its absence in *Les Sauvages* as a significant one.

In Pursuit of Venus [infected] challenges the historical narrative of exploration in Oceania implicit to *Les Sauvages* by presenting a more entangled history, one that reaches back to Reihana's own ancestors and beyond.⁸² Anne Salmond in her introduction to the exhibition catalogue for *iPOVi* notes that mapping the Transit of Venus, the basis for which Cook received his commission to travel throughout the Pacific was the very same star-path used by Reihana's ancestor Kupe to travel to New Zealand.⁸³ The term "pursuit" in this artwork's title is a multivalent reference that implies that we the viewers, like the people depicted in *iPOVi*'s performance, are chasing something, perhaps knowledge of history and ourselves.⁸⁴ "Pursuit" is further noteworthy because it would seem to take the place of other words like "discovery" which are common to artworks depicting first encounters between indigenous societies and European explorers (think Columbus or Cortes).

"Discovery" as Diana Taylor has pointed out, is an unoriginal, highly theatrical act employed in the exploratory ventures of figures like Cook and Columbus to assert colonial authority over land and bodies, creating positions of viewership and the viewed.⁸⁵

Reihana uses the very idea of "pursuit" to call attention to the "conscious performance" of discovery."⁸⁶ That is to say discovery is a kind of scripted performance, rehearsed within

⁸² McIntosh ed., *In Pursuit of Venus*, 3.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 1,5,9.

⁸⁴ "Pursuit: Definition of Pursuit in Oxford Dictionary (American English) (US)," accessed January 14, 2016, http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/us/definition/american_english/pursuit.

⁸⁵ Taylor Diana, "Scenarios of Discovery," in *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*, Second Printing edition (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2003), 53–58.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 54; McIntosh ed., *In Pursuit of Venus*, 9.

European urban centers before exploration and encounter ever take place.⁸⁷ Within the history of European exploration the colonization of new landmasses with the intention of exploiting available natural resources, of finding and maintaining control of new trade routes were not intended to be abandoned if as it turned out in nearly every case other people already inhabited these newly “discovered” domains.

Case and point would be the declaration of Australia as *terra nullius*, meaning a land that belongs to no one, in the course of colonization.⁸⁸ The interpretation of *terra nullius* with regard to Australia was also taken to mean “empty” as a means of further circumventing issues of ownership.⁸⁹ As Peter Kilroy states “The key point for them (Cook and his advisors) was whether property relations could be established between Indigenous people and the land via evident signs of occupation, architecture and/or agricultural cultivation. They could not or would not see such signs and so deemed the land amenable to possession.”⁹⁰ Essentially a precedent was set in Australia beginning with the voyages of Captain Cook in which allowed explorers and colonists to dispense with making treaties with the indigenous occupants, as had been the case in many other places like the Americas and New Zealand.⁹¹

This suggests that images of discovery like *Les Sauvages* are in and of themselves reenactments of the real thing, and as such the sense of accuracy in Dufour’s wallpaper is constructed rather than intrinsic to the work. The concept of reenactment, one that is cathartic

⁸⁷ Taylor Diana, “Scenarios of Discovery.”

⁸⁸ Peter Kilroy, “Discovery, Settlement or Invasion? The Power of Language in Australia’s Historical Narrative,” *The Conversation*, accessed April 8, 2016, <http://theconversation.com/discovery-settlement-or-invasion-the-power-of-language-in-australias-historical-narrative-57097>; “Terra Nullius | Definition of Terra Nullius by Merriam-Webster,” accessed April 8, 2016, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/terra%20nullius>.

⁸⁹ Kilroy, “Discovery, Settlement or Invasion?”

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

and effective is another connection between *Les Sauvages* and *In Pursuit of Venus [infected]*. Subtleties such as the interrelationship between text and history, and history and image etc. are the driving force of *In Pursuit of Venus [infected]*, rendering the links between words like “pursuit” and “discover” more than just coincidental.

Within *iPOVi* the viewer is no longer prefigured as a companion of European explorers or triumphant discoverer, as is the case with *Les Sauvages*. This thought is visually expressed in the artwork in a number of ways. One way being the placement of participants especially dancers at a three-quarter angle in relation to the camera, which gives the impression that these figures perform for an unseen audience rather than the viewer.⁹² This deliberate staging aids in circumventing what Reihana calls the “festival gaze” which arguably is an extension of the “imperial gaze”.⁹³ Another way is through the foregrounding of “scenes of encounter between European’s and Polynesians” in *iPOVi*.⁹⁴

One such scene depicts Joseph Banks discussing the cosmos with two Pacific Islanders. The three stand about a desk laden with maps and a telescope. These items and their gesturing toward the sky suggest the focus of their conversation, which may even center on the Transit of Venus. Beyond the possibilities contained in such a conversation, the telescope however small or commonplace is a significant object in this scene and indeed in other vignettes within *iPOVi*.

This object is relevant because it invited thoughts about voyaging to other worlds almost concurrently with the first European expeditions to the American continents.⁹⁵ Its potential connection to the Transit of Venus supports this reading as the transit is an astronomical

⁹² McIntosh ed., *In Pursuit of Venus*, 16.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ “About,” *Lisa Reihana*, accessed March 2, 2016, <http://www.inpursuitofvenus.com/about/>.

⁹⁵ Samuel Y. Edgerton, *The Mirror, the Window, and the Telescope: How Renaissance Linear Perspective Changed Our Vision of the Universe* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009), 168.

phenomena like an eclipse, one that helped humanity gauge the size of our solar system. At one time telescopes were also referred to as “perspective tubes”.⁹⁶

By the time Cook set sail for the Pacific the perspectival system the telescope belonged to was regarded in Europe as a unanimous mode of seeing.⁹⁷ The presence of practices like tattooing and objects such as a telescope in *In Pursuit of Venus [infected]* illustrate how pivotal changes can take place through objects and acts that on the surface seem inconspicuous but really speak to more poignant concerns. As an artwork *iPOVi* refutes the unanimity of visual experience.

Ngahua Te Awekotuku and Linda Waimarie Nikora, authors of *Mau Moko: the World of Maori Tattoo* state tattoo “takes place in the present but defies time itself...” In many ways *moko* is history written in another form; “it is a graphic accounting of memory and desire; it is an engraving on the Maori body, of history and commitment of loyalty and relationships.”⁹⁸ Historically and presently, Oceanic tattoo captured public attention, it is a practice with a continuous presence within Oceanic cultures but one that has also moved and changed with time.

The origins of this practice are traced back to the Lapita through the presence of incised pottery fragments, which depict highly stylized faces in their geometric patterns, and the chisels involved in the procedure at archeological sites in Oceania.⁹⁹ In the case of *moko*, its origins are not limited to what archaeology can tell us but exist in mythic memories.¹⁰⁰ Two stories

⁹⁶ Edgerton, *The Mirror, the Window, and the Telescope*.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ Ngahua Te Awekotuku and Linda Waimarie Nikora, *Mau Moko*, 8.

⁹⁹ Lissant Bolton, “Aesthetic Traces: The Settlement of Western Oceania,” in *Art in Oceania: A New History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012), 33–37; Ngahua Te Awekotuku and Linda Waimarie Nikora, *Mau Moko*, 14–15, 20.

¹⁰⁰ Ngahua Te Awekotuku and Linda Waimarie Nikora, *Mau Moko*, 12–14; Ngahua Te Awekotuku, “Mata Ora: Chiseling the Living Face--Dimensions of Maori Tattoo,” in *Sensible Objects: Colonialism, Museums and Material Culture* (Oxford, UK: Berg Publishers, 2006), 122.

dominate; that of Tamanui and Rukutia comes from the Te Waipounamu people from the South Island and that of Mataora and Niwareka is from the North Island of New Zealand.¹⁰¹ In both these tales Tamanui and Mataora, whose name means living face, travel to the underworld in order win back their wives. Tamanui wishes to become *purotu*, handsome, as Rukutia left him because of his ugliness, while Mataora goes to beg forgiveness of Niwareka and her family for physically mistreating her.¹⁰²

Both discover the tattooed visages of those that dwell in the underworld. In these stories *moko* is already a site with gendered significance. The pursuit of knowledge, of *ta moko* (this means to tap or strike and denotes the process of tattooing) is motivated by shame “inadequacy and a sense of ugliness”, ugliness both in terms of appearance and behavior.¹⁰³ These states are in part addressed and rectified through the acquisition of *moko*. The marking of both Tamanui’s and Mataora’s bodies becomes a signifier of both physical and spiritual trial, transition, and knowledge.¹⁰⁴ Further it is worth noting the name Mataora or “living face” indicates this person’s identity following not prior to his acquisition of *moko*.¹⁰⁵

These stories are part of the history and heritage *iPOVi* looks back to. As such tattoo is a subject that allows us to observe the manner in which gender, identity and even concepts of beauty are negotiated in a multiplicity of contexts of which the vignettes in *In Pursuit of Venus [infected]* are just two. *Star-Tattooing* (Figure 16) dramatizes a midshipman being tattooed by a Pacific Islander, possibly a *tufuga ta tatau* (Samoan tattoo artist), revealing that tattoos figured in

¹⁰¹ Ngahuia Te Awekotuku and Linda Waimarie Nikora, *Mau Moko*, 12–14; Ngahuia Te Awekotuku, “Mata Ora: Chiseling the Living Face,” 122.

¹⁰² Herbert W. Williams, *A Dictionary of the Maori Language*, 269; Ngahuia Te Awekotuku and Linda Waimarie Nikora, *Mau Moko*, 12–14; Ngahuia Te Awekotuku, “Mata Ora: Chiseling the Living Face,” 122.

¹⁰³ Ngahuia Te Awekotuku and Linda Waimarie Nikora, *Mau Moko*, 14.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ Ngahuia Te Awekotuku, “Mata Ora: Chiseling the Living Face,” 122.

the exchanges between European sailors and the indigenous populations of places like Tahiti, Samoa, the Marquesas and of course New Zealand. Tattoo acquired an aura of the curiosity among members of the Cook expeditions.¹⁰⁶ Curiosity or wonder became a central characteristic of European encounters with the material culture of non-western societies, not only indicating the objects or cultures which Europeans were interacting with for the first time but also as a form of “arousal” as in to arouse one’s curiosity.¹⁰⁷

As Thomas argues “tattooing overlapped contingently with collecting in that both represented ways of acquiring curiosities, and tattoos were curiosities par excellence but tattooing more fundamentally transcended collecting’s normal material limitations.”¹⁰⁸ Yet, sailors who were tattooed in order to gain a souvenir of their time in the Pacific often received more than they bargained for, as the act had the potential to embroil them in local politics.¹⁰⁹

Star-Tattooing targets the assumption that the sailors were tattooed with indigenous designs.¹¹⁰ *Star-Tattooing* along with a plethora of recent scholarship on the topic “shows indigenous people expanding their artistry to include western illustrative techniques and exposes the hierarchy within European crews, which existed as its own type of tribalism.”¹¹¹

While the title of this tableau vivant implies that the sailor is being tattooed with a star it is noteworthy that the image being tattooed on his body is not discernable to the viewer with

¹⁰⁶ Joanna White, “Marks of Transgression: The Tattooing of Europeans in the Pacific Islands,” in *Tattoo: Bodies, Art and Exchange in the Pacific and the West* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 74–75; Nicholas Thomas, “Introduction: Tattoo: Bodies, Art and Exchange,” 18–21; Harriet Guest, “Curiously Marked: Tattooing and Gender Difference in Eighteenth-Century British Perceptions of the South Pacific,” 85.

¹⁰⁷ Nicholas Thomas, “Objects of Knowledge: Oceanic Artifacts in European Engravings,” in *Empires of Vision: A Reader* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 152; Stephanie Leitch, *Mapping Ethnography in Early Modern Germany: New Worlds in Print Culture* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 1.

¹⁰⁸ Nicholas Thomas, “Introduction: Tattoo: Bodies, Art and Exchange,” 20.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 18–21.

¹¹⁰ McIntosh ed., *In Pursuit of Venus*, 7.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

anything that approaches the specificity of tattoo motifs that appear on the indigenous participants in the installation. I contend that this is purposefully done. To leave the markings being placed on this person's body ambiguous leaves the possible interpretations of these marks open, again highlighting the mutability of perspectives not only as they apply to visual experience, aesthetics and art but also to cultural encounters writ large.

Close Encounters of the Exotic Kind: Beauty, Normative Social Identities, and Tensions
Between Presence and Erasure in *Les Sauvages*

The use of the term “infected” in *iPOVi*'s title could imply that a trait such as beauty, which is caught up in the politics of a great many things, including art, gender, and race is to be infected by or privilege other perspectives; which in turn leads us to “Venus”. “Infection” also bespeaks literal infection, disease and the darker legacies of colonialism. Due to its almost idiomatic appearance in art history, “Venus” readily calls to mind concepts of idealized beauty, drawing us into a dialogue about surface textures and aesthetics; again suggesting that this artwork offers a critique on concepts of beauty, and the place of indigenous bodies in relation to such concepts throughout history but with an added emphasis on their place in art history.

Tattoo plays a role in the function of many social organizations in Oceanic societies, having links to beauty, politics, gender and sexuality, produced through a conglomerate of perspectives and interactions.¹¹² Bodies in Polynesian cultures were understood as being volatile in their corporeality, and as such threatening to both other people and oneself.¹¹³ Tattooing was one pathway that “redressed this problematic permeability” relating to the body.¹¹⁴ The process

¹¹² Alfred Gell, *Wrapping in Images: Tattooing in Polynesia* (Oxford University Press, 1996), 1.

¹¹³ Thomas, *Oceanic Art*, 107.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

of tattooing was a long and painful one involving penetrative violence, but in controlled circumstances with the aim being to seal the skin, the largest organ in the body and the one through which many experiences are borne, through the production of various motifs, often additional faces.¹¹⁵ In *Wrapping in Images: Tattooing in Polynesia* Alfred Gell frames Oceanic tattooing in terms of wrapping or clothing the body in images that “made possible a distinctive type of social being”.¹¹⁶ The second vignette involving tattoo within *In Pursuit of Venus [infected]* addresses this idea and other related concerns.

In this tableau a tattooist is shown moving a piece of paper around the body of a sailor trying to decide where on this person’s body the image belongs.¹¹⁷ Just as the brochure for *Les Sauvages* entreats viewers to pay attention to the “varieties of dress” seen in the wallpaper this scene in *iPOVi* invites viewers to consider the processes behind bodily adornment, to ruminate on what it means to put images on the body.¹¹⁸ It also demonstrates a consideration for the impact of works of art, the kind of impact that location has everything to do with. The visual impact of tattoos had the potential to “distract and disorient” the viewer while simultaneously empowering the recipient and those who related to the imagery through cultural or familial connections.¹¹⁹ Tattoos straddle the ground between bodily adornment and artistic illustration; as such the questions evoked by this vignette are also pointed at the very act of image making.

Like the examples of both Shortland and Cook, this scene illustrates the fact that dressing customs are not givens; that such practices are in a constant state of negotiation. As such tattooing and practices surrounding dressing or adorning the body, like Cook’s navel garb,

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 102–7; Lissant Bolton, “Aesthetic Traces,” 14–15, 20.

¹¹⁶ Gell, *Wrapping in Images*, 3; Thomas, *Oceanic Art*, 107. The italics are mine.

¹¹⁷ *CIRCUIT CAST Episode 23*.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ Thomas, *Oceanic Art*, 102.

involve the management of social signifiers.¹²⁰ Kaston Tange has suggested that decorating the home, like dressing the body, involved the careful management of social symbols as such this concern is embedded in *Les Sauvages* on multiple levels.¹²¹

I cannot overemphasize the conspicuous fixation that *Les Sauvages* and its guidebook display with the physical appearance and adornment of the people depicted.¹²² Grasping the degree of attention paid to clothing within *Les Sauvages* necessitates unpacking the technology involved in this wallpaper's creation. In *The Sartorial and the Skin* Charlotte Ickes indicates that printed media like *Les Sauvages* pay particular attention to what she calls "sartorial surface details", or details related to clothing and styles of dress within printed works.¹²³

Though in a much broader sense within the conventions of European portraiture one's manner of dress functioned as a means of signifying class, familial connections, even regional identities, taking on an almost heraldic kind of coding which the viewer engaged in.¹²⁴ Prints were also integral to the dissemination of images from the Cook voyages to a wider public, Parkinson's *Portrait of a New Zealand Man* among them.¹²⁵ As such the multiple reproductions of Otegoowgoow's visage in printed form are made even more compelling, because his image becomes engaged in this replication of faces already present in Oceanic tattooing but in different terms. This may constitute one of the many unexpected consequences attached to cross-cultural encounters and image production that *iPOVi* interrogates.

¹²⁰ Charlotte Ickes, "The Sartorial and the Skin: Portraits of Pocahontas and Allegories of English Empire," *American Art* 29, no. 1 (Spring 2015): 89–91, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/681656>.

¹²¹ Christin Mamiya, "Nineteenth-Century French Women," 88, 101. Mamiya argues that images like *Les Sauvages* were meant to stabilize the French nuclear family after the upheaval of the Revolution.

¹²² trans. Rudd, Paul, "The Savages of the Pacific Sea."

¹²³ Charlotte Ickes, "The Sartorial and the Skin," 89–91.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*; Harriet Guest, "Curiously Marked: Tattooing and Gender Difference in Eighteenth-Century British Perceptions of the South Pacific."

¹²⁵ Smith, *European Vision and the South Pacific, Second Edition*, 109. This image was reproduced countless times in printed form.

Les Sauvages utilized hand blocked printing techniques to produce a large-scale work of art.¹²⁶ Over 1000 woodblocks went into the wallpapers manufacture, with the addition of a hand painted sky, and stenciled details after printing was complete, truly making this *Les Sauvages* a multimedia artwork.¹²⁷ Woodblock engravings of this type would have required a separate block for each color visible in the image. This fact allows us to gauge the time invested in printing the colorful outfits present in the wallpaper. One result of this printing process is that clothing appears to be one of the most detailed, everything from textured pieces of jewelry that imitate shell work, to colorful feathers, and woven patterns in cloth can be discerned. These components of *Les Sauvages* provide the viewer with a sense of superficial diversity.¹²⁸

Yet again the guidebook supports this reading consistently describing items such as headdresses and cloth in vague terms, like “fine and bright” while simultaneously emphasizing the variety, beauty of the ornamentation and dressing habits of the people depicted.¹²⁹ Despite these facts Oceanic tattoo and other forms of adornment, that involve the painful penetration of the body which then leaves some kind of visible mark on the surface are not depicted in *Les Sauvages*. As previously discussed the brochure regards tattoo as distasteful and a problematic practice whose censorship in the wallpaper itself is explained in moral terms.

This anxiety surrounding bodily representation is further manifest in the figure of Mai, or Omai said to be depicted behind the group of wrestlers in panel sixteen of *Les Sauvages* (Figure 17).¹³⁰ Omai, a man from Raiatea, traveled to Europe in 1774 on the *Adventure*, the ship commanded by Tobias Furneaux during Cook’s second circumnavigation of the globe. Omai’s

¹²⁶ *CIRCUIT CAST Episode 23*.

¹²⁷ McIntosh ed., *In Pursuit of Venus*, 7.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 38.

¹²⁹ trans. Rudd, Paul, “The Savages of the Pacific Sea,”.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 15.

tattoos are documented both in text and images. Recent scholarship has problematized many depictions of Omai by European artists, however these paintings, drawings and prints do provide us with a good idea of Omai's actual likeness.¹³¹ While the guide for *Les Sauvages* asserts Omai's presence within the wallpaper, a comparison of the people in panel sixteen with other images of him does not reveal any one figure that specifically can be taken for Omai (however many of them mimic Omai's gesture in a painting by Joshua Reynolds (Figure 18), discussed in greater detail later in this section), suggesting that he is a kind absent presence within the image.

This is also in contrast to *In Pursuit of Venus [infected]* as Omai is one of the many recognizable figures who play out the drama of encounter in this artwork. *In Pursuit of Venus [infected]* also acknowledges Omai's interactions with Europeans as a pragmatic choice aimed at advancing his own social position within Raiatean society. Indeed when Omai returned to his homeland on Cook's third and final expedition he did so laden with gifts ranging from small objects to furniture.¹³² Cook pressed him not to give these gifts away and to keep them for his own material wealth and comfort; however Omai did the opposite and distributed them among his friends and relations.¹³³ While to some Omai offloading his newly acquired material wealth might appear imprudent, to others this would have been perceived as shrewd political move. *iPOVi* foregrounds this kind of slippage in perspectives, *Les Sauvages* does not.

Generally speaking, less time and effort seems to have been expended by the creator's of *Les Sauvages* on the expressions and poses of the people depicted.¹³⁴ Many figures appear with

¹³¹ Patricia Fara and Lisa Allardice, "Portrait of a Nation," *New Statesman* 132, no. 4658 (October 6, 2003): 38–39,

<https://ezproxy.lib.uwm.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,uid&db=a9h&AN=10967153&site=ehost-live&scope=site>; Harriet Guest, "Curiously Marked: Tattooing and Gender Difference in Eighteenth-Century British Perceptions of the South Pacific."

¹³² Fara and Allardice, "Portrait of a Nation."

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ McIntosh ed., *In Pursuit of Venus*, 38.

matching facial expressions and their heads titled to the left, while others strike statuesque poses gesturing in a manner reminiscent of Roman orators. It would be an oversimplification to propose this sort of nondescript presentation of individuals in *Les Sauvages* was an oversight or something the print process did not lend itself to depicting. Quite the contrary a cursory study of prints will reveal this medium as adept in the illustration of surface details in both small and large formats. Indeed the minute details evident in the clothing, and striations on peoples arms and legs possibly meant to suggest shading either due to light or variations in skin tone indicate *Les Sauvages* could have easily supported this kind of detailed rendering in its representation of specific figures like Omai or Cook.

Many of the men appear to be bearded, another detail which the creators of *Les Sauvages* went to the trouble of including, see for instance the group of Maori men in panel eleven of *Les Sauvages*. Again sources like Parkinson's *Portrait of a New Zealand Man* corroborates the fact that some Maori did have facial hair. However in *Les Sauvages* these beards seem to obscure the possibility that these figures also have *moko* unlike Parkinson's in which Otegowgow's *moko* dominates. The *koru*-like lines stenciled onto the comb of Kaora further imply that rendering something that would have approximated *moko* motifs was not outside the realm of possibility for *Les Sauvages*.

Joshua Reynolds' portrait *Omai*, places Omai's tattoos on display. Painted between 1775-1776 Omai appears swathed in cream cloth, with a turban about his head, taking the stance of a patrician figure. Guest has argued this image simultaneously embodies and masks the contradictory ideas related to colonization in Oceania.¹³⁵ These ideas became projected onto the bodies of Pacific islanders in images like *Omai* and *Les Sauvages*. Guest's assessment of

¹³⁵ Harriet Guest, "Curiously Marked: Tattooing and Gender Difference in Eighteenth-Century British Perceptions of the South Pacific," 83.

Reynolds' portrait is that despite Omai appearing in a pose Reynolds would use for any of his white sitters, that Omai in this image "lacks public command", that he is available to inscription, a curiosity more than a person who exists in a culturally or historically specific space.¹³⁶ This jettisoning of historical and cultural specificity is also characteristic of *Les Sauvages*. Guest interprets Omai's gesture as one of self-display, foregrounding his tattoos in the painting.¹³⁷ Many of the people in *Les Sauvages* also have their arms outstretched in a similar fashion suggesting these people are also engaged in acts of self-display.

Omai's appearance in Reynolds' portrait his gesture both in that painting and the subsequent mimicry of this gesture within *Les Sauvages* belongs to a set of visual conventions or types already established in the genre of portraiture by the time both of these artworks were produced.¹³⁸ Angela Rosenthal and Angés Lugo-Ortiz point out that the use of typing within artworks like *Les Sauvages* or *Omai* have connections to larger social concerns becoming part of "the disquieting equation between dark skin and subjection..."¹³⁹

Oceanic tattoos became caught up in notions of the curious and the exotic that become applied to Pacific bodies in images. In literature from the 1790's the decade prior to *Les Sauvages*' production tattoos are spoken of as being equivalent to clothing.¹⁴⁰ Guest argues that Omai's tattoos lack cultural specificity in Reynolds portrait but also undermine his status as a blank vessel awaiting outside inscription.¹⁴¹ The second portion of her argument seems to

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 86.

¹³⁸ Rosenthal Angela and Lugo-Ortiz Agnes, "Introduction: Envisioning Slave Portraiture," in *Slave Portraiture in the Atlantic World* (Cambridge University Press, 2013), 2–3.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 3.

¹⁴⁰ Harriet Guest, "Curiously Marked: Tattooing and Gender Difference in Eighteenth-Century British Perceptions of the South Pacific," 87.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 83–86.

undermine the first, suggesting that Oceanic tattoos fight the blankness which European artists and viewers tried to apply to them in images like *Omai*.

Even images like Parkinson's aforementioned *Portrait of a New Zealand Man* seems to fight this descent into a kind of cultural no man's land. While the image and its subsequent prints where produced by European artists, for European audiences, the complete erasure of Otegoowgoow the individual with a specific history seems to be prohibited in part through his recognizable *puhoro* tattoo which provides us with information about things like his *iwi*, or area of New Zealand he hails from.

Tattoo does so in these images despite the best efforts of their makers to mask or sterilize its culturally specific presence, so while tattoo has a history that is entangled with the exotic, it also has a history grounded in resistance.¹⁴² These circumstances should cause us to wonder why the presence of someone known to have been tattooed was evoked in *Les Sauvages*, but instead of depicting Omai or his tattoos we are left with the complete erasure of these culturally distinct marks that Reynolds' image and others like it fail to achieve. The answer to this lies in European conceptions of Oceanic tattooing and notions of properly civilized beings at this time.¹⁴³

In one of his later *Discourses*, Reynolds claimed that ornament was in and of itself a high art.¹⁴⁴ He goes on to say the knowledge of both ornament and "substantial beauties" are necessary to forming "good taste", as such he advocates a kind of culturally relative approach to the dressing habits of other cultures with notable exceptions being instances like tattooing where dress and ornament involved harming the body in some form.¹⁴⁵ The disavowal of tattooing and

¹⁴² Brownen Douglas, "'Cureous Figures'," 35.

¹⁴³ Harriet Guest, "Curiously Marked: Tattooing and Gender Difference in Eighteenth-Century British Perceptions of the South Pacific."

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 88.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

practices like it reveals a discomfort with the body's very physicality; a discomfort that *Les Sauvages* in both image and text reiterates. It also suggests that one way of dealing with the issues surrounding bodily inscription and image making, that Oceanic tattoos and tattooing confronted Europeans with during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, was to erase these marks completely.

This erasure is evident in another portrait of Omai by William Parry (Figure 19) in which Omai is dressed almost identically as in Reynolds' portrait except for two notable differences, his lack of tattoos and the gesturing figure this time of Joseph Banks. Banks' gesture is almost identical to Omai's in Reynolds' portrait, thus Omai's whole body becomes a curiosity and the very marks which inscribe his body with potentially differing views of things like gender and societally normative beings are gone completely. *Les Sauvages* seems to adopt a similar program. Thomas notes that by the time of *Les Sauvages*' completion the ambivalent nature that attended the experiences and narratives of figures like Cook and Banks had undergone a kind of public sterilization in Europe.¹⁴⁶ As such the effacement of tattoos in these images can be seen as part of this effort.

While many people are literally present within *Les Sauvages* their subjective identities seem to exist in a vacuum that is predicated or dominated by their relationship to the viewer, or in the case of Parry's painting Omai's identity exists only in relation to that of Joseph Banks.¹⁴⁷ As such we can argue these people become subject to a kind of symbolic erasure that takes place from the moment they were inscribed within these images "*their very presences* predicated on a

¹⁴⁶ McIntosh ed., *In Pursuit of Venus*, 34; Smith, *European Vision and the South Pacific, Second Edition*, 108–14. Smith suggests something similar in his discussion of John Webber's work

¹⁴⁷ Rosenthal Angela and Lugo-Ortiz Agnes, "Introduction: Envisioning Slave Portraiture."

relation that effected their symbolic absenting in the face of the dominant and nonchalantly subjugating white presence ” whether that presence is Joseph Banks or the viewer. ¹⁴⁸

Rosenthal and Lugo-Ortiz further note that images have a kind of “reclairant physicality.”¹⁴⁹ Just as the declaration of *terra nullius* in Australia did not render that land empty, *Les Sauvages* cannot obliterate Oceanic tattoo simply by erasing it, any more than Reynolds or Parry can obliterate Omai in their paintings. The preoccupation in the guidebook with tattoo and other forms of body modification attest to this fact, nor is it a stretch to suggest that though written descriptions only, viewers may have taken these and applied them to the people depicted in the wallpaper constituting a sufficient evocation of Oceanic tattoo to claim it does have a presence within this visual text. If erasure is never fully possible within visual texts, why then the move from symbolic erasure as is the case with *Omai* to physically absenting these marks in *Les Sauvages*?

Physically absenting both tattoos and the discernable individual as is the case with both Cook and Omai within *Les Sauvages* becomes a further act of marginalization, seeks to erase both the subjugation of these indigenous communities via colonization and the use of visual material like *Les Sauvages* as instruments that aided in bringing this about.¹⁵⁰ It is an effort to mask the ambivalence that attended these encounters, ambivalences which Omai’s tattooed hands in *Omai* highlight rather than obscure, and as such manifest a greater potential to undermine the colonial project. This ambivalence is also the reason that including the figure of Cook within the discussion of erasure does not undermine this argument. Cook’s role in the colonization of Oceania and his writings on the subject display a greater amount of ambivalence

¹⁴⁸ Smith et al., “Lisa Reihana in Conversation with Megan Tamati-Quennell,” 4. The italics are my own.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 5.

¹⁵⁰ Rosenthal Angela and Lugo-Ortiz Agnes, “Introduction: Envisioning Slave Portraiture,” 4.

compared to the textual and visual narratives which followed his (this would also hold true for Joseph Banks), hence the need for later narratives to clean up these accounts.

The preponderance of unmarked, un-tattooed bodies in *Les Sauvages* and the brochure's moralizing dismissal of such practices also reflect neoclassical aesthetic sensibilities that equate the unblemished body with beauty, perfection and civilization.¹⁵¹ The dancers in panel five and the wrestlers in panel sixteen of *Les Sauvages* are apt and often cited examples of neoclassicism within the wallpaper (Figures 1 and 6). Both the dancers and the wrestlers are clothed and perform in a manner redolent of Greco-Roman sculptures. The wrestlers in panel sixteen may be a rather overt reference to the *Uffizi Wrestlers*. The dancers in panel five may intentionally reference Botticelli's three graces, linking them not only to antiquity but Renaissance interpretations of antiquity. While several people sport feathered headdresses that seem to be a blend of Greco-Roman helmet and Hawaiian feathered headdress and quite clearly references the engraving after John Webber's work *A Man of the Sandwich Islands, with His Helmet* (Figure 20).

In Hawaii feathers like tattoo were connected to both political and religious life. Chiefly families typically would have controlled the manufacture and exchange of these objects whether through trade or warfare.¹⁵² When Cook traveled to Hawaii in 1779, he and his men were likely greeted by Kalani ʻōpu ʻu and other chiefly persons bedecked in feather garments. Such garments would have been visual displays of their rank.¹⁵³ The man making the offering of

¹⁵¹ Harriet Guest, "Curiously Marked: Tattooing and Gender Difference in Eighteenth-Century British Perceptions of the South Pacific," 92–93; Christin Mamiya, "Nineteenth-Century French Women"; McIntosh ed., *In Pursuit of Venus*, 6; "Neoclassicism in Oxford Art Online," accessed March 10, 2016, http://www.oxfordartonline.com.ezproxy.lib.uwm.edu/subscriber/article/opr/t118/e1862?q=neoclassicism&search=quick&pos=2&_start=1.

¹⁵² Brown Deidre, "Political Transformations: Art and Power 1700-1800," in *Art in Oceania: A New History* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2012), 251–64.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

Cook's thigh and hat in the vignette *Grisly Gifts* appears with a feather headdress that is also evocative of feather sculptures called *akua hulu manu* (Figure 21) meant to embody various deities. This figure is very clearly linked to Hawaiian social hierarchies and effectively makes this individual stand out in a manner that reflects knowledge surrounding feathered objects from Hawaii.

In contrast the men with feathered headwear in *Les Sauvages* do not seem distinct from the other figures in the wallpaper, nor does the guidebook accord them any such distinction in conformity with indigenous social structures, again suggesting the people presented in *Les Sauvages* are more figments of the imagination than historically and culturally sensitive depictions of Oceanic societies. The explorers themselves encouraged the interpretation of indigenaity throughout Oceania, as being indicative of a new and exotic kind of antiquity. Louis Antoine de Bougainville, a contemporary of Cook described Tahiti as "New Cythera".¹⁵⁴

Western art has a long history of equating one's outward appearance with the core of one's being; within this framework the unblemished body became associated with conceptions of purity and beauty, while people of color are often caricatured, their bodies becoming associated with notions of savagery and the demonic. Karl Van Mander III's *Aethiopica: Hydaspes and Persina Making Love* (Figure 22) aptly illustrates this dichotomy.

This painting depicts Hydaspes and Persina, the King and Queen of Ethiopia, dark skinned and opulently dressed in clothing, which in keeping with *Les Sauvages* bears no resemblance to the actual fashions that would have been adopted by these figures but rather reflects European fashion sensibilities. Hydaspes lays a hand on the bare breast of Persina, who gazes at a picture of a blonde porcelain-skinned Andromeda, rendered very much in the style of a

¹⁵⁴ McIntosh ed., *In Pursuit of Venus*, 9,35-36.

Renaissance Venus. This painting references a story written in the third century by Heliodors that relates how Persina's daughter Chariclea was born white as a result of Persina looking upon Andromeda's visage.¹⁵⁵

Van Mander's painting stands as a testament to the efficacy of images not only by invoking a story about that very subject but also because it demonstrates the manner through which images dialogue with history, becoming sites of encounter themselves. In this case an encounter involving a Greek tale from the third century becomes incorporated into seventeenth century, politics on race, gender, and beauty. In this scenario Andromeda is contrasted to Persina as the ideal woman, which the story seeks to confirm in the likeness of Persina's daughter Chariclea.

While Enlightenment concepts of mankind living in harmony both with their fellow man and with nature are evident in things like the striations visible both on the people and plants of *Les Sauvages*, there are cracks within this utopia. Cook's death discussed in the previous section is one of these. *Persina and Hydaspes* points to hierarchal understandings of race; while many scholars have rejected the idea that *Les Sauvages* corresponds to such inherent racism I believe this argument has been overstated and constitutes another one of these cracks in the utopia of *Les Sauvages*.¹⁵⁶

Photographs of *Les Sauvages* tend to obscure the variations in skin tone evident in the wallpaper. However a close examination of the wallpaper reveals several telling details that I think are indicative of a kind of a kind of inherent racism that was on the rise at this time and became heavily tied to the colonization of distant lands. The concurrent ending of the Haitian

¹⁵⁵ David Freedberg, "The Power of Images," 108.

¹⁵⁶ Vivienne Webb, Brian Kennedy, and Edmund Capon, *Les Sauvages de La Mer Pacifique: Manufactured by Joseph Dufour Et Cie 1804-05 After a Design by Jean-Gabriel Charvet* (Sydney : Canberra: Art Gallery of New South Wales, 2000), 5.

Revolution in 1804 with *Les Sauvages*' production dates, and the development of phrenology during the late eighteenth century further reinforce the argument that while the racist principles that permeated the later nineteenth century may not be fully developed within *Les Sauvages*, they certainly may be understood to be visually ascendant in this image.

In *Les Sauvages*, people with darker skin tones frequently appear seated in physically lower positions than those with lighter skin in the wallpaper. A woman and child are depicted below the standing nose flute player in panel 4 and another woman appears beneath the king in panel six. Adjacent to the woman and king in panel six is another person seated amidst the vegetation with their back to the viewer (Figures 23-24). People with darker skin tone also appear less ornately dressed. Many of these women are also topless, perhaps suggesting they are sexually available to the viewer, though this fact is in no way exclusive to figures with dark skin in *Les Sauvages* but is characteristic of its portrayal of Pacific femininity more broadly.

Their placement here among the plant life again may point to Enlightenment thinking regarding nature and mankind for this person is certainly close to nature, their physical proximity to nature is in fact closer than that of other people in the wallpaper but this could also reflect the tensions that underpin socially normative concepts of civility. The monarchical invocation in panel six is repeated in elsewhere in *Les Sauvages* and points directly to European social dichotomies that this panel reinforces.¹⁵⁷

Finally, if we return to the scene of Cook's death on the beach in panel eight the indigenous participants in the battle all have darker complexions in comparison to the other people present in the wallpaper. Clearly the way Europeans perceived and depicted Oceania in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century had an enduring impact on conceptions of

¹⁵⁷ Christin Mamiya, "Nineteenth-Century French Women."

Oceania; this is evident in Modern Art or even the tourist-driven tiki culture's representation of the Pacific.¹⁵⁸ The effect of images very much exceeds their physical parameters.

As a work from the beginning of the twenty-first century, *In Pursuit of Venus [infected]* is poised to effect the conception and representation of the Pacific in the future. In the exhibition catalogue for *iPOVi*, Reihana addresses the treatment of Pacific bodies in art head-on, saying “it is extremely difficult to not exoticise Pacific bodies, once they are within your field of view—they are powerful and life-affirming.”¹⁵⁹

Conclusion: Technology and Change

Image making in all its forms involves us in technology. *In Pursuit of Venus [infected]* is a technologically intense project. Reihana's use of green screen, sound, and multiple video channels scrutinizes conceptions of history, always with the potential through this exploration to be constitutive of history in its own right.¹⁶⁰ Many of the subjects and objects *iPOVi* dialogues with, are technologies in their own right including tattooing. The period visualized both in *In Pursuit of Venus [infected]* and *Les Sauvages* had an impact on tattooing within Oceania in a technological sense. Just as the previously discussed *Star-Tattooing* highlighted the integration of new visual motifs into the repertoire of indigenous artists, new materials such as metal needles were tested and taken into their practices.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁸ McIntosh ed., *In Pursuit of Venus*, 36; Mallon Sean, “Decolonization, Independence and Cultural Revival,” in *Art in Oceania: A New History* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2012), 348–83; Mallon Sean, “Tourist Art and Its Markets: 1945-89,” in *Art in Oceania: A New History* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, n.d.), 386–407.

¹⁵⁹ McIntosh ed., *In Pursuit of Venus*, 16.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁶¹ Ngahua Te Awekotuku and Linda Waimarie Nikora, *Mau Moko*.

Integration however is very different from the scenario in which pre-existing traditions within indigenous communities became wholly subsumed by Western ones. That which serves or is effective in one place and time may not be so always, as the resurgence of the chisel method of tattooing in places such as New Zealand, Hawaii and Samoa suggests. The audible “tap-tap” sounds that accompany the midshipman being tattooed in *Star-tattooing* may reference the chisel method of tattooing, further implicating the process as socially significant, as if part of the landscape itself.

In a similar vein of thought *iPOVi* utilizes contemporary cinematic elements to reenact the past. Looking back at the past, while moving forward through time conforms to Maori understandings of time and history.¹⁶² While performers within *iPOVi* use the “frame” as a place of resistance, *iPOVi* itself, its place within the rarified space that is the art museum purposes to infect this place, and the intertwined discourse of art history, with indigenous perspectives and methods.¹⁶³ These various and varied forms of media and the tools involved in their production constitute systems of knowledge with the ability to effect how people interpret both facts and relationships.¹⁶⁴ Technology is essential to the way a work of art is received or viewed by any given audience.¹⁶⁵

Technology and its effect on visual experiences not only functions as a theme within *In Pursuit of Venus [infected]* but is an integral part of Reihana’s artistic process, as her *Digital Marae* series and other artworks attest to. The use of sound in the installation highlights the fact that visual experiences are not limited to optical experiences within the aesthetic sensibilities of

¹⁶² Brown et al., *Does Māori Art History Matter?*; Thomas, *Oceanic Art*, 59–62.

¹⁶³ Brown et al., *Does Māori Art History Matter?*

¹⁶⁴ Nicholas Thomas, “Introduction: Tattoo: Bodies, Art and Exchange,” 8; Ngahuia Te Awekotuku and Linda Waimarie Nikora, *Mau Moko*, 8; Ngahuia Te Awekotuku, “Mata Ora: Chiseling the Living Face,” 125–26.

¹⁶⁵ McIntosh ed., *In Pursuit of Venus*, 8.

many cultures. Likewise tattoo is connected to this idea as the process engages many senses like sight, smell, and touch simultaneously. Reihana is constantly looking ahead at new technologies, and their potentiality in the context of art. *iPOVi* for instance is future-proofed for the day when digital technology can accommodate higher-resolution graphics. This circumstance indicates that like bodies, works of art and visual media are also not finished or fixed products.

Art as technological feat is another link between *In Pursuit of Venus [infected]* and *Les Sauvages*. In terms of printmaking the number of blocks that went into the wallpaper's manufacture is suggestive of Dufour harnessing the potential of these technologies. Even in the medium of print producing this work was a costly endeavor and one that perhaps predicated its success on the prior success of the media it mines from.

As previously mentioned, *Les Sauvages* dialogues with another popular visual format from the early-nineteenth century, the panorama. Panoramas from the nineteenth century were technological marvels in their own right, often cited as precursors to film, scholars like Ethan Robey and William Uricchio have even suggested they can be understood as an early foray into the realm of virtual reality.¹⁶⁶ Evidence suggests that panoramas were a widespread craze in Europe at time of *Les Sauvages*' production.¹⁶⁷ *Les Sauvages*' entanglement with the panorama may have started with monetary concerns but ended with the incorporation of complex aims that exceed this artwork alone.

Panoramas as a medium had one foot in the world of high art and the other in popular entertainment, much the same way *Les Sauvages* teeters between decoration and work of art, or

¹⁶⁶ Ethan Robey, "John Vanderlyn's View of Versailles: Spectacle, Landscape, and the Visual Demands of Panorama Painting," *Early Popular Visual Culture* 12, no. 1 (2014): 1–21; William Uricchio, "A 'Proper Point of View': The Panorama and Some of Its Early Media Iterations," *Early Popular Visual Culture* 9, no. 3 (August 2011): 225–38.

¹⁶⁷ Stephan Oettermann translated by Deborah Lucas Schneider, *The Panorama: History of a Mass Medium*.

In Pursuit of Venus [infected] tests the boundaries of filmmaking and new media art. One of the aims of a panorama was to create an all-encompassing view, with the viewer at the center of the image. Sean Cubitt claimed the panorama satisfied “a sense of metaphorical simultaneity” and was associated with an all-knowing, all-seeing conception of God and as such casts the viewer in that role.¹⁶⁸

While *Les Sauvages* is more modular than its public panoramic counterparts, the wallpaper’s guide again confirms the work’s connection with panoramas describing it as “an endless picture”, indicating a similar interest in visual media with a capacity to act upon both the viewer and the referent.¹⁶⁹ Further panoramas are also meant to render their viewers as “eyewitness” to the scenes or events before them.¹⁷⁰ Through consideration of the encyclopedic aspects of *Les Sauvages*, it becomes evident that this wallpaper is meant to display the sum of something: vision, knowledge, taste, beauty, the Pacific etc. the list goes on.

Yet *In Pursuit of Venus [infected]*’s 8 million pixels of information per frame thoroughly eclipses *Les Sauvages* and does so by taking to task the very conventions, histories, and perspectives that made an encyclopedia out of Dufour’s wallpaper in the first place. Again by placing people at a three-quarters angle in relation to the camera, Reihana works to subvert the exotic treatment of Pacific bodies in art. If we compare a set of dancers doing the hula in *iPOVi* to the three dancers in panel six of *Les Sauvages*, it becomes evident that the dancers in *Les*

¹⁶⁸ McIntosh ed., *In Pursuit of Venus*, 42–43.

¹⁶⁹ Stephan Oettermann translated by Deborah Lucas Schneider, *The Panorama: History of a Mass Medium*, 1.

¹⁷⁰ Stephan Oettermann translated by Deborah Lucas Schneider, *The Panorama: History of a Mass Medium*.

Sauvages are clearly situated within the wallpaper with the viewer's experience and pleasure in mind.¹⁷¹

By contrast the hula dancers in *iPOVi* do not dance for a specified audience, opening up the possibility that they dance for no one at all except themselves, and performing for oneself is different than performing at another's behest. A dancer who dances for themselves versus one who does specifically for the audience is directly related to *kanohi kit e kanohi*, meaning face to face or agreed upon representation, which is a part of Reihana's artistic methodology and guided the collaboration between her and the performers in *iPOVi*.¹⁷² Reihana states

"It was important to make this work ethically, and I'm well aware of the intellectual property issues. As well Maori, Pacific and other indigenous peoples have been colonized and in asking performers to participate against the French wallpaper backdrop, an enlightenment framework I seek their trust."¹⁷³ The result is a work of art that offers both performers and indigenous viewers a chance to step inside the exoticised "frame" that is *Les Sauvages* and change that space into one of resistance.¹⁷⁴ The cinematic techniques involved in making *iPOVi* cause the vignettes presented in the artwork to "roll in and out of the field of vision" in essence effacing the edges of the "frame" itself.¹⁷⁵

The larger stakes here broadly concern the art world and the disciplines of history, and art history. Those who have the privilege of inscribing "history" both visually and textually or those inscriptions that have been privileged face greater contestation in the global arena and with good reason. *In Pursuit of Venus [infected]* is a part of this challenge, raising awareness not just of

¹⁷¹ McIntosh ed., *In Pursuit of Venus*, 16; Smith, *European Vision and the South Pacific, Second Edition*, 108–14.

¹⁷² McIntosh ed., *In Pursuit of Venus*, 11.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 15.

things like discovery narratives but of the very mechanisms that assisted in the creation of such narratives in the first place.

Today in New Zealand tattooed visages is present not just in *poupou* or portraits (both painted and photographic) but many living generations, attesting to tattoo as a living tradition, not one that was destined to die out as a result of contact and colonization. While many indigenous artists are still underrepresented within academia, and museum/gallery spaces, globalization, the rapid exchange of information via the internet, new technologies and virtual platforms like Instagram or Vimeo are making room for people to access these technologies, and attain a greater measure of visibility that will no doubt effect both the academic and museum communities. In its own small way this thesis contributes to this shift.

Of greater significance is the fact that Lisa Reihana and *In Pursuit of Venus [infected]* will be representing New Zealand in the 57th Venice Biennale. While I can only speculate at this point the scale of *In Pursuit of Venus [infected]* will dominate any exhibition space it is shown in, thus if it is exhibited alongside other works of art at the Biennale it is likely to dwarf these almost entirely. The other alternative is that *iPOVi* may be given a standalone exhibition space at Biennale and this says something about this artwork that I would encourage readers to consider in more than just a logistical sense.

While not the first indigenous artist to represent their country at the Biennale Reihana's continued presence in mainstream museum and gallery spaces has the capacity to change the treatment and reception of indigenous artwork, artists and communities. Just as *In Pursuit of Venus [infected]* moves away from the erasure of *Les Sauvages*, challenges historical narratives of colonization that left little room for the indigenous narratives, questions normative gender identities, and uses technology to efface the "frame" Reihana and this work's presence at the 57th

Venice Biennale, an event which is very much a western construct, are harbingers of change within the ideologies and the literal spaces of the museums and galleries.

Undoubtedly these changes will face some form of a tightened grip on homogeneous notions of the past, and a push back aimed at protecting the status quo in academic and museum spheres. However *In Pursuit of Venus [infected]* and tattoo within this artwork attest to the fact that what has come under attack can be revived, what has been erased can be represented again and what has been seen cannot be unseen and that is the infection!¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁶ *Tagata Pasifika, Pursuit of Venus: Infected by Lisa Reihana, 2015,*
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GW7-zKBQksY&nohtml5=False>.

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