

NICHOLAS BUTLER AND BILLIE LYTHBERG
Situating the *Amu’i ‘i Mu’a/Ancient Futures*
Exhibition at Pah Homestead, Auckland, 2021

Abstract

This visual essay situates the Amu’i ‘i Mu’a/Ancient Futures exhibition at Pah Homestead in Auckland/Tāmaki Makaurau with photographs of works by Tongan artists Sopolemalama Filipe Tohi and Dagmar Vaikalafi Dyck, alongside loans from Canterbury Museum and Auckland Museum. Curator and collections manager Nicholas Butler presents an exhibition dedication and welcome in English and lea faka-Tonga to the homestead. Interpretative labels prepared by Billie Lythberg and Auckland War Memorial Museum for the loaned artifacts are included in this essay.

Keywords: *Amu’i ‘i Mu’a/Ancient Futures, exhibition, Tonga, Tongan diaspora, customary arts, contemporary art, Sopolemalama Filipe Tohi, Dagmar Vaikalafi Dyck, Pah Homestead, Oceanic art, collections*

Dedication (by Nicholas Butler)

The Arts House Trust was honored to present the exhibition *‘Amui ‘i Mu’a/Ancient Futures* at the Pah Homestead in Auckland/Tāmaki Makaurau. This was a special occasion, a major collaborative project between senior Tongan artists Sopolemalama Filipe Tohi and Dagmar Vaikalafi Dyck and academic specialists (in the fields of anthropology, art history, organization studies, history, and linguistics) from Aotearoa and their international colleagues.

A major part of the research considered Tongan art objects of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries housed in international and national museum collections, with visits made to collections in Europe, United Kingdom, United States, Australia, and Aotearoa. The historic Pah Homestead (1877) was the first venue for *‘Amui ‘i Mu’a* in Aotearoa. Architecturally, the Homestead belongs to an era in which ideas contributing to the development of the modern western museum were being extended into the far-reaches of the British Empire. It stands as an artifact of British colonial economic and cultural practice. Showing *‘Amui ‘i Mu’a* at this venue is fitting in as much as the building itself echoes the

Royal Palace of the Kingdom of Tonga, built some ten years earlier, and has been recast as a gallery local to the South Pacific.



Figure 1. Installation view of 'Amui 'i Mu'a/Ancient Futures, Pah Homestead, Auckland, 2021. Left to right: Filipe Tohi, *Puleika*, 2021, acrylic on canvas, 120 x 79.5 cm; Dagmar Dyck assisted by Alexis Neal, Milania Cairns, and Nilesh Selwaswala, *Worn to Obey*, 2020, handwoven and sewn relief-hand-printed paper, 80 x 140 cm; and Dagmar Dyck, *Reflection of an Existing Order*, 2021, acrylic and spray paint on collage, *feta'aki*, and wooden board, 160 x 100 cm. Photograph courtesy of Raymond Sagapolutele

Tohi and Dyck have long drawn from Tongan tradition, be it *lalava* lashing patterns, *kali* headrests, *ngatu* barkcloth motifs, or *kiekie* waist adornments. Out of necessity, their earliest reference points were often catalogs and publications, rather than the presence of the things themselves. Their tours abroad, with their academic colleagues, prompted new apprehensions and new vision. Back in their studios, they were compelled to produce new work and a reconsideration of linkages with earlier works that respond to photographs and facsimiles.

'Amui 'i Mu'a is a project that has been formed with the Tongan community in mind and for all of Aotearoa to experience. We wish to acknowledge the

'Amui 'i Mu'a team and supporting partners (particularly the Royal Society of New Zealand Marsden Fund and Creative New Zealand). A further thank-you is for Auckland War Memorial Museum Tāmaki Paenga Hira and Canterbury Museum Te Whare Taonga o Ngā Pākihi Whakatekateka o Waitaha for their loan of Tongan artifacts for this exhibition.



Figure 2. Installation view of 'Amui 'i Mu'a/Ancient Futures, Pah Homestead, Auckland, 2021. Left to right: Nimafā Collective (Vea Mafile'o, Emily Mafile'o, Luana Dyck, and Dagmar Dyck), *Sisi Fale*, 2021, moving image and sculpture installation, dimensions variable; Dagmar Dyck, *Relishing the Splendour*, 2021, limited-edition screen print on paper, 95 x 65 cm; and Dagmar Dyck, untitled working drawings, 1994, gouache and pencil on paper, 37.5 x 35 cm each. Photograph courtesy of Raymond Sagapolutele

Mālō ho mo lava mai

'Oku fiefia 'a e Arts House Trust ke fakahoko 'a e kātonga faka'ali'ali 'oku 'iloa ko e 'Amui 'i Mu'a: Ancient Futures. 'E fakahoko eni 'i he Pah Homestead 'i Tāmaki Makaurau ('Aokalani). Ko e taimi fakafiefia eni 'a e lava ke ngāue fakataha 'a Soplemalama Filipe Tohi mo Dagmar Vaikalafi Dyck ko e ongo 'aati Tonga mo e kau mataotao 'i Nu'usilá ni mo e opé he mala'e 'o e akó (*anthropology, art history, business studies, history, mo e linguistics*).

Na'e fakataumu'a 'a e konga lahi 'o e polokalama fak- atotoló, ki hono vakai'i 'o e ngaahi koloa fakamea'a Tonga mei he konga ki mui 'o e senituli 18 mo e konga ki mu'a 'o e senituli 19 kuo tauhi 'i he ngaahi misiume 'i 'Iulope, Pilitānia, 'Amelika, 'Aositelēlia mo Nu'u Silá ni. Na'e fuofua kamata ngāue 'a e timi 'Amui 'i Mu'a 'i he fale fakahisitōlia 'i Nu'u Silá ni 'oku 'iloa ko e *Pah Homestead (1877)*. Ko e fale *Homestead* na'e langa he taimi na'e fofoa'i ai 'a e fakakaukau ki hono fokotu'u 'a e ngaahi misiume 'oku nau kei tu'u he 'aho ní. 'Oku tu'u 'a e ngaahi misiumé ko e fakamanatu 'o e fakalalakaka faka'ekonōmika mo fakafonua 'o e Pule'anga Pilitāniá. 'Oku taau pe 'a e fakahoko 'a e kātonga faka'ali'ali 'Amui 'i Mu'a 'i he falé ni he na'e mei taimi tatau hono langá (ta'u 'e hongofulu ki mu'a) mo e Palasi Fakatu'i 'o Tongá 'a ia kuo hoko ko e taha 'o e ngaahi feitu'u 'iloa he Pasifikí.

Kuo ta'u lahi 'a e ngāue'aki 'e Tohi mo Dyck 'a e ngaahi founa mo e 'ilo mei he ngāue fakamea'a Tonga 'o e kuohilí 'o kau ai 'a e lalavá, kalí, kupesi 'o e ngatú pea mo e kiekie. Neongo na'e 'ikai ke na sio tonu he ngaahi koloá 'i he kamata 'ena ngāue, na'e tokoni lahi 'a e ngaahi 'ata mo e fakamatala fekau'aki mo e ngaahi koloa fakamea'a na'e 'osi pulusí. Kuo hoko 'enau fefolau'akí fakataha mo e kau mataotao he mala'e 'o e akó ke muimui'i ha ngaahi 'ilo fo'ou mo ma'u ai ha ngaahi vīsone ngāue. Na'e hoko eni ko ha fakalotolahi ke tānaki mai ha ngaahi founa fo'ou mo toe vakai'i 'a e ngaahi ngāue 'oku fenāpasi mo e ngaahi 'ata mo e fakamatala ki he ngaahi koloa kuo tauhi.

'Oku fakahoko 'a e polokalama ngāue 'Amui 'i Mu'a mo e taumu'a ke lave ai 'a e kāinga Tonga 'i Nu'u Sila ní. 'Oku mau hounga'ia 'i he ngaahi ngāue 'a e timi 'Amui 'i Mu'a pea tautefito ki he ngaahi tokoni 'a e *Royal Society of New Zealand Marsden Fund* mo e *Creative New Zealand*. 'Oku 'oatu 'a e fakamālō makehe ki he *Auckland War Memorial Museum Tāmaki Paenga Hira* mo e *Canterbury Museum Te Whare Taonga o Ngā Pākihi Whakatekateka o Waitaha* ki hono faka'atā 'o e ngaahi koloa fakamea'a Tongá ki he kātōanga faka'ali'alí.

Translation by Alioth Helu



Figure 3. Installation view of 'Amui 'i Mu'a/Ancient Futures, Pah Homestead, Auckland, 2021. Left: Dagmar Dyck assisted by Alexis Neal and Rona Osbourne, *Paper Strings*, 2015. Handwoven and sewn relief printed paper, 130 x 210 cm. Right: Dagmar Dyck, *M.A.P.S.*, 2020. Acrylic and spray paint on wooden board, 160 x 200 cm. Photograph courtesy of Raymond Sagapolutele



Figure 4. Installation view of 'Amui 'i Mu'a/Ancient Futures, Pah Homestead, Auckland, 2021. Fore-ground: Filipe Tohi, *Haufakalava*, 2001. Plywood (two parts), 40 x 43 x 130 cm and 53 x 50 x 50 cm. Photograph courtesy of Raymond Sagapolutele



Figure 5. Installation view of 'Amui 'i Mu'a/Ancient Futures, Pah Homestead, Auckland, 2021. Left to right: Filipe Tohi, *Fetu'u (stars)*, 2019, limited-edition screen print on paper, 82 x 61 cm; Filipe Tohi, *Māhina (moon)*, 2019, eight photographs on ceramic plate, each 42 x 42 cm; Filipe Tohi, *Fai-folau*, 1995, wood, steel, and paua shell, 175 x 57 x 26 cm; and Filipe Tohi, *Langi'olunga mo Langilalo*, 2005, plastic, 62 x 40 x 5 cm. Photograph courtesy of Raymond Sagapolutele



Figure 6. Installation view of 'Amui 'i Mu'a/Ancient Futures, Pah Homestead, Auckland, 2021. Left: Dagmar Dyck, *Markers of Community I & II*, 2020. Acrylic on *feta'aki* and canvas, each 102 x 78 cm. Museum loans as in other figures. Photograph courtesy of Raymond Sagapolutele

Barkcloth Loans from Canterbury Museum (by Billie Lythberg)

The Canterbury Museum loaned two Tongan barkcloths for the 'Amui 'i Mu'a/*Ancient Futures* exhibition at the Pah Homestead. Tongan barkcloths are traditionally made from the inner bark of the paper mulberry tree (*Broussonetia papyrifera*), known in Tongan as *hiapo*. The bark is beaten with a hardwood mallet on an anvil until its fibers spread to form supple sheets. Women usually beat bark alone, but fall into a rhythm with their audible, unseen neighbors. The ringing of their mallets and anvils creates a soundscape ubiquitous in Tonga; tapa beating ceases only on Sundays and during the observation of a period of mourning and is akin to the beating heart of the Tongan nation. Groups of women come together to paste their sheets of beaten bark into double-layered fibrous cloths. They decorate them with *kupesi* (motifs) commemorating important events, people, places, and things through naturalistic or figurative depictions and the important Tongan allusive technique called *heliaki* (to say or illustrate one thing but mean another).



Figure 7. Installation view of 'Amui 'i Mu'a/Ancient Futures, Pah Homestead, Auckland, 2021. Left to right: Filipe Tohi, *Haukulasi*, 2008–2009; nails and wool, 120 x 60 cm; Artists once known, *Ngatu Tapa'ingatu*: Gramophones and clocks, Tonga, c. 1922, barkcloth and natural inks, Reverend M. A. Rugby-Pratt Collection, Canterbury Museum E156.236; Filipe Tohi, *Pulefefine*, 2021, acrylic on canvas, 120 x 79.5 cm. Photograph courtesy of Raymond Sagapolutele

The chiefly variety of *ngatu tāhina*, called *tapa'ingatu*—in which the brown dye is used only on the raised designs of the *kupesi*, leaving the background of the *ngatu* unstained—does not appear to have been made since the 1960s. The *tapa'ingatu* in Figure 7 recalls and disseminates the appearance in Tonga of gramophones and clocks, which are clearly visible in its *kupesi*. Motifs such as these served initially to introduce new events or concepts, and thereafter to commemorate them. Through the incorporation of images into products of Tongan soil (beaten tree bark and plant-based dyes), formerly foreign concepts become Tongan. Some *kupesi* also offer Tongan versions of the names for new technologies, such as *kalamafoni* (gramophone), making them part of the Tongan language. This *ngatu* is sourced from the visit of Reverend M. A. Rugby Pratt to Tonga in 1922.



Figure 8. Installation view of 'Amui 'i Mu'a/Ancient Futures, Pah Homestead, Auckland, 2021. Artists once known, *Ngatu Tāhina: Figures and Trees*, Tonga, c. 1922. Barkcloth and natural inks. Reverend M. A. Rugby Pratt Collection, Canterbury Museum, E156.241. Photograph courtesy of Raymond Sagapolutele

The barkcloth in Figure 8 features anthropomorphized flying foxes and the *toa* (ironwood) tree branches in which they roost. Naturalistic motifs such as these did not become popular in Tonga until the late nineteenth century. This *ngatu* can be securely dated to the 1922 visit of Reverend Pratt. Flying foxes on Tongatapu, the main island of Tonga, descend from a pair presented in ancient times to the Tongan monarch by Sina, a Princess of Sāmoa. This important barkcloth celebrates these sacred flying foxes and, by association, the nobles of the villages in which the foxes roost; the Royal family of Tonga, to whom they belong; and the chiefly families of Sāmoa, from whom they were first received. This barkcloth is a section of a larger cloth. A similar piece in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York contains the same *kupesī*, differently arranged, demonstrating the extraordinary mobility of Tongan barkcloths as well as their international recognition as fine art.

Loans from The Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa and the Auckland War Memorial Museum Tāmaki Paenga Hira (by Billie Lythberg and Auckland War Memorial Museum)

The Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa and the Auckland War Memorial Museum Tāmaki Paenga Hira loaned five customary Tongan objects for the exhibition. *Kato alu* (woven ceremonial baskets) are made from the roots of the *alu* plant and *tu'aniu* (coconut midribs). The example in Figure 9 has a decorative motif woven in plaited coconut fiber. They have been made since the eighteenth century as significant items of exchange, and are often presented at weddings, funerals, and birthdays.



Figure 9. Left: *Kato alu* (basket), pre-1948. *Alu* (*epipremnum pinnatum*) roots and *tu'aniu* (*Cocos nucifera*, coconut leaf midribs), Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa and Auckland War Memorial Museum Tāmaki Paenga Hira, Oldman Collection, gift of the New Zealand Government, 1992 (1950.128/31539/ 534). Right: *Fue* (whisk), pre-1948. Wood and coconut fiber, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa and Auckland War Memorial Museum Tāmaki Paenga Hira, Oldman Collection, gift of the New Zealand Government, 1992, (1950.128/31530/539b). Photograph courtesy of Raymond Sagapolutele

Tongan *fue kafa* (Fig. 9) are among a repertoire of prestige items that are visual symbols of the social rank and status of their owners. Part of their efficacy

in demonstrating rank and status came through the way in which they were manipulated and performed, and relied upon the user's personal skill and bearing. *Fue kafa* had both mundane and sacred uses. In the hands of chiefs, they were oratory aids and their skillful deployment might prompt the remark, "Long has he used the *fue*"—indicating that he is an accomplished chief.



Figure 10. Installation view of 'Amui 'i Mu'a/Ancient Futures, Pah Homestead, Auckland, 2021. Far right: Filipe Tohi, *Sia Mataliki*, 2021. Acrylic on canvas, 120 x 79.5 cm. Other works as noted above. Photograph courtesy of Raymond Sagapolutele

The *fangufangu* Tongan nose flute (Fig. 11)—a chiefly instrument made from a bamboo cylinder sealed at both ends by intact nodes and often decorated with pyrographic motifs—is one of the oldest Tongan musical instruments. The name *fangufangu* is a reduplication of *fangu*, literally to sneeze, an act associated with vitality. The act of waking up someone from their sleep is called *fafangu*. There are records of chiefs being awakened by their guards and attendants with a tune from a *fangufangu*, so the act of awakening is also associated with this instrument. This definition was transferred to church bells used by missionaries to awaken their Tongan congregations, and later to all bells.

The Auckland War Memorial Museum describes the paddle club displayed in Figure 11 in this way: “The *pōvai moungalaulau* is carved from one block of *toa* (ironwood) and is deep brown in colour. The handle is cylindrical in shape and tapers out into an oval shape and furthermore into a paddle shape that is curved at the end and thin in depth. The entire surface of this *pōvai* is carved with geometric lines which are repeated throughout, the carvings are small and meticulous and would have taken hours of work to complete. *Pōvai* like this one were used by men and warriors in times of combat and warfare.”



Figure 11. Installation view of 'Amui 'i Mu'a/Ancient Futures, Pah Homestead, Auckland, 2021. Vitrine, top to bottom: *Fangufangu* (nose flute) with six holes and burned designs, pre-1948, bamboo, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa and Auckland War Memorial Museum Tāmaki Paenga Hira, Oldman Collection, gift of the New Zealand Government, 1992 (1950.128/31628/582b); *Pōvai moungalaulau* (paddle club), unknown date, *toa* (ironwood), Auckland War Memorial Museum Tāmaki Paenga Hira (1955.152.112/34226); *Pōvai apa'apai* (coconut stalk club), pre-1948, *toa* (ironwood), Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa and Auckland War Memorial Museum Tāmaki Paenga Hira, Oldman Collection, gift of the New Zealand Government, 1992 (1950.128/31863/512b). Photograph courtesy of Raymond Sagapolutele

The Auckland War Memorial Museum also provides this description of the *pōvai apa'apai* (coconut stalk club) in Figure 11: “*Pōvai* were used by men and warriors in times of warfare and combat. *Pōvai* is the general name for clubs in

Tonga, each *pōvai* has a specific name according to its make and purpose. This is a *pōvai apa'apai* or an *akau tā*, it is carved from one block of *toa* (ironwood), it is polished and dark brown in colour. In comparison to the other *pōvai* of its kind, this one is quite short. The entire *pōvai* has a diamond cross section, the handle is the smallest end, the club flares and tapers out from the handle in width and length ending in a flat top. The whole club is carved with geometric lines and patterns as well as human and animal figures. A significant chunk from the bottom edge of the handle is missing, possibly from use or damage to the club.”¹

Nicholas Butler is the curator and collections manager at the Arts House Trust in Hillsborough, Auckland Tāmaki Makaurau, Aotearoa New Zealand. He has a BFA in painting from Elam School of Fine Arts, a PGDip in museum studies, and an MA in art history from Auckland University. His master of arts thesis explored contemporary art and collective memory in Lebanon, with regard to the Lebanese Civil War (1975–1990) and the 2006 war. He has much working experience and knowledge in New Zealand contemporary art, with specific interests in photography and film.

Billie Lythberg is of Swedish, Scottish, and English descent. She is a senior lecturer in the Department of Management and International Business at Waipapa Taumata Rau | The University of Auckland, and an affiliated researcher of Vā Moana–Pacific Spaces at Te Wānanga Aronui o Tāmaki Makau Rau | Auckland University of Technology. She has worked with Māori and Moana colleagues on multiple projects for the Royal Society of New Zealand, including the Marsden Grant-funded 'Amui 'i Mu'a/Ancient Futures project. She publishes extensively, curates and critiques exhibitions, and develops documentaries for broadcast television.

Notes

¹ Information provided to exhibition by Auckland War Memorial Museum