



SHIGEYUKI KIHARA with photographs from "Shigeyuki Kihara: Living Photographs" at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Photo by Curtis Hamilton for ArtAsiaPacific.

five  
artists for  
2008

### Shigeyuki Kihara's biography is central to her art. Born to a

Japanese father and a Samoan mother in 1976, Kihara has a Japanese man's name but she is *fa'a fafine*, a third gender indigenous to Samoan culture in which biological males are assigned female identity. Meaning literally "in the manner of a woman," *Fa'a fafine* was the title of Kihara's breakout exhibitions in 2005 at Artspace in Auckland, and Sherman Galleries, Sydney. There, Kihara exhibited her best-known works, sepia-tint photographs that recall the colonial-era portraiture of indigenous Pacific islanders. In Kihara's triptych *Fa'a fafine: In a Manner of a Woman* (2004-05), she reclines on a divan facing the viewer, wearing a grass skirt in one panel; appearing as a naked woman in another; and with her penis exposed in the third (SEE AAP 51).

This year, Kihara was included in group exhibitions "Le Foulaga" at the Kaohsiung Museum of Fine Arts, Taiwan, and "Dateline Return" (5/1-8/24) at the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth, New Zealand, and co-curated "Hand in Hand" at Plimsoll Gallery, University of Tasmania, Australia. Most notably, Kihara's gender-challenging photographs made a startling appearance in the traditionally reserved galleries of the Metropolitan Museum of Art (10/7-2/1/09) in New York. Works from her earlier series, "Fale Aitu: House of Spirits" (2003) and "Vavau: Tales from Ancient Samoa" (2004), find the artist depicting herself as Samoan goddesses and characters from ancient folklore. In *Tausaluga: The Last Dance*, a performance at the Met (10/19), Kihara performed the normally celebratory dance, *tausaluga*, in a somber spirit, dressed in a black Victorian dress and lit by a single spotlight.

Kihara grew up in Indonesia, Japan and Samoa before moving to New Zealand, where she studied fashion design at Massey University. Her cross-over career as an artist began in 1995 when the Te Papa Tongarewa Museum of New Zealand acquired her graffiti-laced dress and five years later purchased a series of custom-designed t-shirts remixing corporate slogans. In 2003, Kihara won the Creative New Zealand Emerging Pacific Artist Award and was an artist in residence at the contemporary art space Physics Room in Christchurch. Kihara's performative works bring Pacific island culture to the West, but Kihara also demands that viewers look at her—with her body and face as a synecdoche for Samoan culture at large—on her own terms. In 2009, Kihara will exhibit at the Tauranga Art Gallery and the Toi Rerehiko Moving Image Centre in Auckland.