

# ROBIN WHITE

[born 1946 Ngāti Awa, New Zealand]

Top to bottom, left to right:

**Michael is sleeping on the bed** 1983

**The name of this girl is Florence** 1983

**I am doing the washing in the bathroom** 1983

**The canoe is in the bareaka** 1983

**The maneaba** 1983

from: **Beginner's Guide to Gilbertese** 1983

Woodblock prints on paper

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, purchased 1983

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My [language] teacher was a young Gilbertese [I-Kiribati] girl called Florence. I would draw something and ask Florence what it was and then I would write the Gilbertese name next to my drawing.

– Robin White, 1987

Robin White's first artworks in Kiribati were drawings of her surroundings – her new home, her neighbourhood, and her young friend Florence Masipei.

With help from Florence, White annotated the objects in each of her images in *te taetae ni Kiribati* (Kiribati language). She said, 'As I worked I was exploring a new language, culture and environment.'

Eventually, White developed her drawings into a series of woodblock prints, which she titled *Beginner's Guide to Gilbertese* and completed in 1983. These are the first woodblock prints White ever made. Wood was easy to source locally, unlike oil paint and canvas.

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Ko tētahi kōhine nō Kiripati taku kaiako [reo], ko Florence tōna ingoa. Ka tā au i tētahi mea, ka pātai atu au ki a Florence mō tana kupu mō taua mea, kātahi ka tuhi au i te kupu nō te reo Kiripati ki te taha o taku pikitia.

– Robin White, 1987

Ko ngā mahinga toi tuatahi a Robin White ki Kiripati, ko ngā tānga o tōna anō rohe – ko tōna anō whare, ko te takiwā o tōna kāinga me tōna hoa (he rangatahi), ko Florence Masipei tōna ingoa.

Nā Florence ia i āwhina ki te tapatapa i ngā mea kei roto i ia whakaahua ki *te taetae ni Kiribati* (ki te reo Kiripati). Hei tāna, 'I a au e mahi haere ana, ka tūhuratia he reo hou, he iwi hou, he whenua hou.'

Nāwai rā, ka hua mai ngā mātātuhi poro rākau i āna tānga, ā, ka tapaina te raupapa toi ki te ingoa o *Beginner's Guide to Gilbertese*. Koinei ngā mātātuhi poro rākau tuatahi i hangaia e White. He māmā te kimi rākau ki ngā motu rā, hāunga anō te peita hinu me te kōnawehi.

# ROBIN WHITE

[born 1946 Ngāti Awa, New Zealand]

Left to right:

## **Falling Star over Betio** 1985

Screenprint on paper

On loan from Tauranga Art Gallery, purchased with Venetta Jessica Miles Trust funds, 2013

## **Remembering Childhood Nightmares** 1986

Woodblock print on paper

On loan from Tauranga Art Gallery, purchased with Sheila Morgan Charitable Trust funds, 2009

## **Self Portrait with Conrad and Shells** 1985

Lithograph print on paper

On loan from Tauranga Art Gallery, purchased with Sheila Morgan Charitable Trust funds, 2009

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In these three prints, Robin White envisions moments from her life against a background of war and violence in the Pacific.

*Fallen Star over Betio*, 1985 memorialises a devastating battle in World War II (1939–45) that took place on Tarawa atoll, where White and her family lived.

*Remembering Childhood Nightmares*, 1986 shows White as an adult still haunted by images of nuclear war she saw as a child.

In *Self Portrait with Conrad and Shells*, 1985, seashells and bullet shells frame the candid image of White and her sleeping son.

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Kei ēnei mātātuhi e toru, kua whakatū a Robin White i ngā pikitia o tōna anō ao ki mua i ngā pikitia o ngā pakanga me ngā tūkinotanga ki Te Moana-nui-a-Kiwa.

He tohu whakamahara te pikitia o *Fallen Star over Betio* mō te whawhai kino i tū ki te motu iti o Tarawa i te wā o te Pakanga Tuarua o te Ao (1939–45) – koia anō te wāhi i tū ai te kāinga o te whānau o White.

Kei *Remembering Childhood Nightmares* nō te tau 1986, kua pakeke a White, heoi, e hokihoki tonu ana ōna mahara ki te riri karihi nō tōna tamarikitanga.

Kei te pikitia o *Self Portrait with Conrad and Shells* nō te tau 1985, e tāparetia ana te whakaahua mārire o White rāua ko tāna tama e moe ana e ngā anga moana me ngā anga matā.

# ROBIN WHITE

[born 1946 Ngāti Awa, New Zealand]

Left to right:

**Postcard from Pleasant Island I:  
Come, come, Eroduabin 1989**

**Postcard from Pleasant Island II:  
Come, come, Dagaburoro 1989**

**Postcard from Pleasant Island III:  
Blood come/Te Aba 1989**

**Postcard from Pleasant Island IV:  
Come, come, Holy Spirit 1989**

from: *Postcards from Pleasant Island* 1989

Linocut prints on paper

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, purchased 1989

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This is landscape as metaphor, along with a reminder about our western preoccupation with facts and figures, production and profit. God help us!  
– Robin White, 1989

Skeletal and haunting, the pinnacles depicted in these linocuts are stark reminders of the effects of phosphate mining on the island of Nauru.

Robin White's Pacific travels often included stopovers in Nauru. In 1988 she spent a month there researching the environmental devastation caused by a century of mining. Throughout the 20th century, Australia and New Zealand relied on the supply of phosphate from Nauru for its use as an agricultural fertiliser.

In the third print, *te taetae ni Kiribati* (Kiribati language) describes the landscape as '*te aba n rii*' – the land of bones.

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E tū ana tēnei whakaahua taiao hei kupu whakarite, otirā, he whakamahara hoki – kua warea kē tātou o te Uru ki ngā tatauranga, ki te whakaputa rawa me te moni. Mā te Atua tātou e āwhina!  
– Robin White, 1989

Ānō he kōiwi, he mea wehi ngā toka pākeho kei ēnei mātātuhi kahupeka, he tohu whakamahara o te mahi keri pākawa tūtaewhetū ki te motu o Nauru.

I āna toronga o Te Moana-nui-a-Kiwa, he nui ngā wā ka tau atu a White ki Nauru. I te tau 1988, ka noho ia ki reira mō te marama kotahi e rangahau ana i ngā pānga kino o te mahi keri ki te taiao i te kotahi rau tau o mua. I te roanga o te rautau 20, ka whakamahi te whenua o Ahitereiria me Aotearoa i te pākawa tūtaewhetū nō te motu o Nauru hei whakahaumako mō ngā momo mahinga whenua.

Kei te mātātuhi tuatoru, kua whakaahuahia te whenua ki te reo Kiripati, ki ngā kupu '*te aba n rii*', arā, ko te whenua kōiwi.

# ROBIN WHITE

[born 1946 Ngāti Awa, New Zealand]

Left to right:

**On the beach at Bikenibeu** 1992

**This far and no further** 1992

**Getting past the dogs** 1992

**Under Te Uri** 1992

from: **Nei Tiein Goes for a Walk** 1992

Hand-coloured woodblock prints on paper

Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetū, Christchurch Art Gallery

Trust Collection

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These images trace events in the life of Nei Tiein, Robin White's young neighbour on Tarawa, who experienced developmental challenges from birth.

In describing this series of works, White says:

I observed Nei Tiein in her brave attempts to come to terms with this confusing world.

I began drawing those events, from memory . . . in the process the image of Nei Tiein merged with other ideas and eventually she became associated, in my mind, with the experience of anyone who has ever stepped outside the security of all that is recognisable, normal and safe.

In a personal context she became a metaphor for my own sense of confusion when encountering, for the first time, a culture and environment profoundly different from what I had previously experienced.

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Kei te whai ēnei whakaahua i ētahi o ngā mahi a Nei Tiein, he rangatahi e noho pātata ana ki a Robin White i Tarawa, ā, he tamaiti whaiora hoki.

Ko ngā whakamārama a White ēnei e pā ana ki tēnei raupapa toi:

I kite au i te māia o Nei Tiein ki te whai māramatanga i roto i tēnei ao hurihuri.

Ka tīmata au ki te tā pikitia o aua wā, mai i ōku maharatanga . . . i a au e mahi ana, ka whakahanumitia te whakaahua a Nei Tiein me ētahi atu whakaaro, nāwai ā, ki ōku whakaaro, he tohu ia mō ngā wheako o te hunga e puta atu ana i te āhurutanga o te ao e mōhio ana rātou, o tētahi ao e taunga ana ki a rātou, he ao haumaru.

Mōku ake, he mea whakataurite ia nāku ki ōku ake māharahara i taku tūtakinga tuatahi ki tētahi ahurea, ki tētahi taiao tino rerekē i tōku ao o mua.

# ROBIN WHITE

[born 1946 Ngāti Awa, New Zealand]

## Aio ngaira I – This is us 2021

## Aio ngaira I – This is us 2021

Gouache and watercolour on paper

On loan from private collection

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My friends in Kiribati had a very, very clear idea of where they had come from, and who they were, and where they were going.

– Robin White, 2021

‘Aio ngaira’ means ‘this is us’ in *te taetae ni Kiribati* (Kiribati language). Here, Robin White depicts everyday life in Bikenibeu, the Kiribati village where she lived for 17 years. She began preparatory drawings in 1997, but did not complete these two artworks until 2021, working from sketches and memory.

White says, ‘I was thinking of the questions posed by Gauguin’s painting, *Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?* [1897] . . . I wanted to revisit those questions from a Kiribati perspective, from the heart of the Pacific.’

In responding to these questions, White was influenced by conversations with Kiribati friends and their shared concerns about the impact of climate change. A limited, blue palette gives a sense of melancholy and distance.

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E tino mōhio rawa atu ana ōku hoa nō Kiripati ki tō rātou takenga mai, ā, ko wai rātou, e ahu ana rātou ki hea.

– Robin White, 2021

Ko ‘ko mātou tēnei’ te whakamārama o ngā kupu ‘aio ngaira’ i *te taetae ni Kiribati* (te reo Kiripati). Kei konei, kei te whakaatu atu a Robin White i ngā mahi noa o ia rā ki Bikenibeu, arā, ki te papakāinga i nōhia e ia i Kiripati mō te 17 tau. I tīmata ia i ngā taurira tuatahi o ēnei mahinga toi i te tau 1997, heoi, nō te tau 2021 rā anō, ka tutuki i a ia ēnei mahinga toi e rua – he mea tā mai i āna huahua me ōna mahara.

Hei tā White, ‘I te whakaaro au ki ngā pātai i whakaarahia ake e te mahi peita a Gauguin, e *Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?* [1897] . . . Ko taku hiahia, kia whakautua anōtia aua pātai mai i te tirohanga o te motu o Kiripati, mai i te manawa o Te Moana-nui-a-Kiwa.

Ka whakaaweā ngā whakautu a White ki ēnei pātai e āna whakawhitinga kōrero ki ōna hoa nō Kiripati me ō rātou āwangawanga mō te pānga o ngā huringa nui o te huarere ki runga i a rātou. Nā te ruarua o ngā momo kahurangi kei tana pae whakaranu, kei te rangona te wairua mokemoke o te noho ki tawhiti.

# ROBIN WHITE

[born 1946 Ngāti Awa, New Zealand]

# AURI OLSSON

[DOB Unknown New Zealand, Australia]

## Tui Tui 2005

Enamel spray, Flexo-print ink on wool bale  
Collection of the John Perry Estate

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Reflecting on colonial settlement and the history of sheep farming in the Wairarapa area led Robin White to create a series of works on wool bales. The Tararua Range appears across the top of the second panel, with four magpies looking back to the left. The Māori text written in block letters and graffiti across both panels is a well-known tauparapara (incantation) used at the beginning of whaikōrero (a formal speech).

White notes:

In May 1844, the first flock of sheep were driven into the Wairarapa thus opening a new chapter in the history of the valley. Local iwi and Pākehā settlers have since shared an uncertain territory, that space between, where language falters and stumbles and a persistent voice proclaims, 'Whakarongo ake ai ki te tangi a te manu' – 'listen to the calling of the bird'.

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Ko āna whakaatatanga mō te taenga mai o te Pākehā me te hītori e pā ana ki te mahi hipi ki te rohe o Wairarapa te pūtakenga mai o te waihangananga o tēnei raupapa toi a Robin White mō ngā pēre wūru. Kei te taha whakarunga o te papatoi tuarua te pae maunga o Tararua, kei te taha mauī, e tiro whakamuri ana ngā makipai e whā. He tauparapara rongonui ngā kupu Māori kua tuhia ki ngā reta nunui me te toi karawhiti kei runga i ngā papa e rua. Ka whakahuahuatia i te tīmatanga o ngā whaikōrero.

Hei tā White:

I te marama o Mei i te tau 1844, ka āia te kāhui hipi tuatahi ki Te Wairarapa, nā, ko te whakatuwheratanga tērā o tētahi wāhanga hou ki roto i ngā kōrero hītori o te whārua rā. Mai anō i taua wā, kua noho tahi te iwi kāinga me te iwi Pākehā ki runga i tētahi whenua pāhekeheke – he momo ātea, e rangona ai te reo tapepe, te reo nanunanu, ā, e whakapāho tonu ana i ngā kōrero, 'Whakarongo ake ai ki te tangi a te manu'.

# ROBIN WHITE

[born 1946 Ngāti Awa, New Zealand]

# KEIKO IIMURA

[born 1943 Japan, New Zealand]

## Summer Grass 2001

Oil on wallpaper panels

Collection of Aratoi Wairarapa Museum of Art & History

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*Summer Grass*, 2001, responds to a tragic incident involving Japanese prisoners of war interned outside the Wairarapa town of Paetūmōkai Featherston after being captured in the Pacific in World War II. A misunderstanding led to a fatal clash between the prisoners and guards on 25 February 1943, resulting in the deaths of 48 Japanese and one New Zealander.

The painting, made on wallpaper found in White's Whakaoriori Masterton home, depicts the location of the former camp, now a memorial garden, in mid-summer. Its title is taken from a haiku by 17th-century Japanese poet Matsuo Bashō which appears on a plaque at the site:

Behold the summer grass  
All that remains  
Of the dreams of warriors  
– Matsuo Bashō, 'Summer Grasses', 1689

The work is inscribed with a passage from Isaiah 40:31, selected for its significance to one of the surviving prisoners, Michiharu Shinya, and written in Japanese characters by fellow Masterton resident, Keiko Iimura. Captured mid-flight, the falcon in the painting recalls the eagles mentioned in the verse.

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He whakautu a *Summer Grass* ki tētahi aituā i pā ki ētahi mauhere nō Nipono ki waho atu o te tāone o Paetūmōkai ki Wairarapa. I hopukina rātou ki Te Moana-nui-a-Kiwa i te Pakanga Tuarua o te Ao. Nō te aranga ake o tētahi pōraruru i waenga i ngā mauhere me ngā tūtei i te 25 o Pēpuere i te tau 1943, ka tū tētahi kakari kino, ka mate atu e 48 o ngā mauhere nō Nipono, ā, kotahi te tangata nō Aotearoa.

He mea tā tēnei mahi peita ki runga i ētahi pepa pakitara i kitea ki te kāinga o White i Whakaoriori, ā, kei te whakaahuatia atu te puni mauhere o mua i te wā o te raumati. He māra whakamahara tērā ināianei. Kua hua mai te taitara i tētahi o ngā haiku a Matsuo Bashō, he ringa toikupu o Nipono nō te rautau 17. Kua tāia ngā kupu ki tētahi kōhatu ki reira:

Behold the summer grass  
All that remains  
Of the dreams of warriors  
– Matsuo Bashō, 'Summer Grasses', 1689

Kei reira anō tētahi wāhi o ngā kōrero a Ihaia 40:31. I tīkina ake aua kupu i te mea he kōrero whakahirahira tērā ki tētahi o ngā morehu, arā, ki a Michiharu Shinya. I tāia ēnei kupu ki te reo ā-tuhi o Nipono e Keiko Iimura, e noho ana rāua tahi ki Whakaoriori. Kei te pikitia tētahi kārearea e rere ana i te rangi, he hokinga mahara ki ngā ēkara i roto i te wāhi kōrero rā.

# ROBIN WHITE

[born 1946 Ngāti Awa, New Zealand]

# TAEKO OGAWA

[born 1951 Japan]

## August 6 2019

Earth pigments, natural dyes, acrylic and ink on paper  
On loan from the Ballin collection

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In 2018 White travelled to Japan to view the *Hiroshima Panels* by Iri and Toshi Maruki, which she had first seen as a 12-year-old with her parents at Auckland City Art Gallery in 1958. The *Hiroshima Panels*, 1950–82, are an artistic response to the devastating impact of the atomic bombing of the Japanese city of Hiroshima on 6 August 1945 which killed 140,000 people and badly injured many others.

White describes the *Hiroshima Panels* as ‘telling a horrific story, but with such beauty – those people in the pictures have so much dignity. I admired the artists . . . for their courage and their incredible sense of purpose’.

On the trip, White met Taeko Ogawa who, in addition to her work as an artist, had spent decades supporting *hibakusha*, survivors of the bombings, by teaching literacy and helping them to tell their stories. The two artists developed a rapport and agreed to collaborate on future works, including this one, in which Ogawa’s spirited calligraphy fills White’s empty interior scenes with the words of the *hibakusha*.

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I te tau 2018, ka haere a White ki Nipono ki te kite i te mahinga toi o *Hiroshima Panels* nā Iri rāua ko Toshi Maruki. Tekau mā rua ōna tau i te wā i kitea tuatahitia e ia tēnei mahinga toi ki Auckland City Art Gallery i te taha o ōna mātua i te tau 1958. He urupare ā-toi a *Hiroshima Panels* nō te tau 1950–82 ki te pānga kino o te pahū kariri i tukuna ki runga i te tāone nui o Hirohima i Nipono i te 6 o Ākuhata i te tau 1945. Kotahi rau e whā tekau mano te nui o ngā tāngata i mate, ā, he nui anō te hunga i pāngia e ngā wharanga kino.

Hei tā White, e whakapuaki ana ngā mahi a te tokorua rā ‘i tētahi kōrero whakarihariha mā te ringa ātaahua rirerire – he mana nui ō ngā tāngata i roto i ngā pikitia. Kei te mīharo au ki ngā ringatoi . . . i tō rāua māia, i tō rāua ngākau titikaha ki tō rāua kaupapa’.

I taua haerenga anō, ka tūtaki a White ki a Taeko Ogawa, he ringatoi, waihoki he kaihapai kua roa e tautoko ana i ngā *hibakusha*, arā, i ngā morehu o taua pahū nui. Ka whakaako ia i te reo ā-tuhi me te reo pānui, ka āwhina hoki i a rātou ki te whakaputa i ā rātou ake kōrero. Ka whakahoahoa ngā ringatoi e rua nei, ka whakaae hoki ki te mahi ngātahi ki te whakaputa i ētahi mahi toi, otirā, koinei tētahi. Kei te rangona te wairua hihiri o ngā tuhituhi a Ogawa e whakakī ana i ngā wāhi o roto o ngā tānga a White ki ngā kupu a ngā *hibakusha*.



# ROBIN WHITE

[born 1946 Ngāti Awa, New Zealand]

## Along the Way of Sorrows 1993

Photo-etchings

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, purchased 1993

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In 1992 Robin White travelled to Israel to visit the Bahá'í World Centre in Haifa. She also visited Jerusalem, where she took these photographs. The haunting images document scenes along the Via Dolorosa ('The Way of Sorrows'), the path that Christ is believed to have taken to his crucifixion.

White was profoundly affected by the trip and the political and spiritual tensions that continue to exist in Israel. As art historian Jill Trevelyan notes, 'the stark, meditative photo-etchings show fragments of doors, walls and windows, often bolted shut and covered in graffiti – a symbol of the barriers to faith and understanding'.

The work also recalls the work of Australian photographer Euphemia 'Effie' Baker (1880–1968), who photographed, at great personal risk, sites of significance to Bahá'í in Persia that were threatened with destruction in the 1930s.

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I te tau 1992, ka haere a Robin White ki Iharaira ki te kite i te Bahá'í World Centre ki Haifa. Ka tau atu hoki ia ki Hiruhārama, otirā, nō taua toronga ēnei whakaahua. He wairua pōuri ō ēnei whakaahua e mau ana i āna kitenga ki Via Dolorosa (ko 'The Way of Sorrows'), ko te ara tērā i whāia e te Karaiti i te wā o tōna rīpekatanga.

Ka mau i a White ngā āhuetanga i kitea e ia i taua haerenga ki tōna whatumanawa, waihoki, ko ngā tautohetohe o te ao tōrangapū, i waengnui anō i ngā whakaponono e haere tonu ana ki reira. Hei tā tētahi o ngā tumu kōrero o te ao toi, hei tā Jill Trevelyan, 'e tū tahanga ana ēnei huahua whakaahua, e tū mārire ana, e whakaatu ana i ngā wāhi moroiti o ngā kūaha, o ngā pakitara, o ngā matapihi – kua rakaina te nuinga, kua uhia ki te toi karawhiti. He tohu mō ngā ārai ki te whakaponono me te māramatanga'.

He hokinga mahara anō tēnei mahinga toi ki ngā mahi a te kaiwhakaahua nō Ahitereiria, a Euphemia 'Effie' Baker (1880–1968). Nāna ngā wāhi whakahirahira o te Hāhi Bahá'í ki Persia i whakaahua, ahakoa ngā karawhiu nui kei runga i a ia me te whenua i ngā tau 1930.

## ROBIN WHITE

[born 1946 Ngāti Awa, New Zealand]

## RUHA FIFITA

[born 1990 Tonga, Australia]

## EBONIE FIFITA

[born 1984 Tonga, New Zealand]

### Moana Loloto – The Crimson Sea 2014

from: **Ko e Hala Hangatonu: The Straight Path**, 2013–16

*Hiapo* (paper mulberry), *umea* (red earth pigment),

*tongo* (liquid pigment made from mangrove) and *tuitui* (black candlenut soot)

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, gift of the Patrons of the Auckland Art

Gallery and the artists through the Auckland Art Gallery Foundation, 2018

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*Moana Loloto – The Crimson Sea*, 2014, draws on the tradition of *ngatu tā'uli*, a special form of Tongan barkcloth darkened with layers of *umea* (red earth) and *tuitui* (black candlenut soot) pigment, usually reserved for use by Tongan nobility in important or solemn occasions such as a funeral.

Writing about her experience of standing in front of a *ngatu tā'uli*, Ruha Fifita notes,

Its darkness is deep. It reaches back past the layers of *feta'aki* [tapa cloth], past the clean white gallery wall, past the bounds of my memory. Framed on four sides of soft skin-toned tapa, [it is] just one small piece of an infinitely greater whole. A vast lineage of painstakingly crafted and lovingly created works of art – testimonies to our own weakness and poverty against the greatness of creation; a pattern, a rhythm and a purpose to life that transcends our comprehension.

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E whai ana a *Moana Loloto – The Crimson Sea* i te tauira o te mahi tuku iho o *ngatu tā'uli*, he momo tapa motuhake nō Tonga, e pania ana ki te *umea* (te kura) me te kano *tuitui* (he pungarehu pango). I te nuinga o te wā, ka whakamahia ēnei mea e te kāhui ariki o Tonga ki ngā huihuinga ōkawa, pērā i te tangihanga.

Anei ngā tuhinga a Ruha Fifita e pā ana ki tana tū ki mua i tētahi *ngatu tā'uli*,

Ko te pō uriuri tēnei. He hōhonu kē. E toro atu ana ki ngā rā o mua, ki tua atu o ngā paparanga o te *feta'aki* [te tapa], ki tua o te pakitara pūmā o te wharetoi, ki tua atu o te pae o mahara. Kua tāparetia ngā taha e whā ki te tapa, me he kiri pākākā te tae. He wāhi iti noa tēnei o te katoa. Ko te whakapaparanga o ngā whakapaunga werawera, o ngā mahinga toi i takea mai i te puna aroha – e taunaki ana i tō tātou ngoikore, i tō tātou rawakore i te taha o tēnei ao whakahirahira; he tauira, he manawataki, ko te aonga ake o tētahi māramatanga e kore e mau i a tātou.

## ROBIN WHITE

[born 1946 Ngāti Awa, New Zealand]

## EBONIE FIFITA

[born 1984 Tonga, New Zealand]

### Looking for ikons of place 2021

Barkcloth, earth pigments

On loan from the Ballin collection

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In her practice White continually reuses images and symbols, connecting the past to the present, and Aotearoa to the Pacific.

This 2021 work, made in collaboration with Ebonie Fifita, features a number of now-familiar objects from earlier works in this gallery space, including the black hat that belonged to the late Peter McLeavey (1936–2015), White's art dealer in Wellington. The white wooden staircase and chaise longue are from his Cuba Street gallery, where White has exhibited for over 50 years.

McLeavey described White's early works of buildings and landscapes in Aotearoa – such as *Mangaweka*, 1973, reproduced at the top of this artwork – as 'ikons of place'. Made from tapa, decorated barkcloth produced throughout the Pacific, White repositions Aotearoa into a wider Pacific context.

New Zealand is a Pacific island . . . In the European tradition the ocean was a barrier, but in the Pacific, it was a pathway to the rest of the world.

– Robin White, 2020

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He rite tonu te whakamahinga o ētahi āhua me ētahi tohu i roto i te mahi toi a White. Kei te tūhono ia i ngā rā o mua ki nāianei, waihoki i a Aotearoa ki Te Moana-nui-a-Kiwa.

Nō te tau 2021 tēnei mahinga toi, he mea waihanga i te taha o Ebonie Fifita. Tērā pea, kua taunga kē koutou ki te kite i ētahi o ngā taputapu nō roto i ngā mahinga toi o mua, e whakaatu mai ana ki tēnei whare toi; nō te kaihoko toi o White ki Pōneke, nō Peter McLeavey (1936–2015), te pōtae pango. Nō tōna whare toi ki Cuba St (neke atu i te 50 tau ngā mahi a White e whakaatuhia ana ki reira) te arapiki rākau mā me te nōhanga roa.

Hei tā McLeavey, he 'tūtohu whenua' ngā mahinga peita me ngā mātātuhi a White nō ngā tau 1970. Ko te nuinga, he whare me te whenua o Aotearoa – ko *Mangaweka* tētahi nō te tau 1973 – kei te taha whakarunga o tēnei pikitia tētahi tāruatanga. He mea waihanga ki te tapa, he momo kiri rākau e kitea ana huri noa i Te Moana-nui-a-Kiwa. Kei te whakaū a White i te noho o Aotearoa hei rohe o Te Moana-nui-a-Kiwa.

He motu a Aotearoa nō Te Moana-nui-a-Kiwa . . . Hei tā te Pākehā, e āraia ana ngā motu e te moana, engari hei tā ngā iwi o Te Moana-nui-a-Kiwa, he ara kē te wai ki te ao whānui.

– Robin White, 2020

## ROBIN WHITE

[born 1946 Ngāti Awa, New Zealand]

## EBONIE FIFITA

[born 1984 Tonga, New Zealand]

### Soon, the tide will turn 2021

Barkcloth, earth pigments, soot, plant-based liquid medium  
Courtesy of the Art Gallery of New South Wales, purchased with funds provided by the Friends of New Zealand Art Fund and the Don Mitchell Bequest Fund 2021

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I'm imagining what might be the conversation in the next world between Matisse and Peter McLeavey and Robert Louis Stevenson. What would they say to each other about their relationship to the Pacific?

– Robin White, 2021

In this *ngatu* (Tongan barkcloth), the artists use objects to personify three people: French artist Henri Matisse (1869–1954), New Zealand art dealer Peter McLeavey (1936–2015), and Scottish writer Robert Louis Stevenson (1850–1894).

The French colonial hat belongs to Matisse, who visited Tahiti in 1930. The fireplace, mirror and barkcloth wall pattern is from Villa Vailima, Stevenson's home in Sāmoa. The chaise longue was in McLeavey's Wellington gallery.

When White began making her Kiribati works in the 1980s, many New Zealanders saw the Pacific as a foreign place. McLeavey told her, 'soon the tide will turn'.

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E pohewa ana au he aha ia nei ngā korero i waenganui i a Matisse rātou ko Peter McLeavey, ko Robert Louis Stevenson ki tērā taha o te ārai. Ka pēhea ā rātou kōrero mō ō rātou pānga ki Te Moana-nui-a-Kiwa

– Robin White, 2021

I roto i tēnei *ngatu* (kiri tapa o Tonga), ka whakamahi ngā ringatoi i ngā taonga hei tauira mō ngā tokotoru nei: arā, mō Henri Matisse (1869–1954), te ringatoi o Wīwī, mō Peter McLeavey (1936–2015), te kaihoko toi o Aotearoa, me Robert Louis Stevenson (1850–1894), te kaituhi o Kotirana.

Nō Matisse te pōtae tawhito o Wīwī, ā, i te tau 1930 ka tae atu ia ki Tahiti. Nō Villa Vailima te takuahi, e mau ana i te tauira o te whakaata me te tapa, nō te kāinga o Stephenson ki Hāmoa. I ahu mai te nōhanga roa i te wharetoi o McLeavey ki Te Whanganui-a-Tara.

Nō te tīmatanga o ngā mahi a White mō Kiripati i te ngahuru tau o te tau 1980, he wāhi rerekē Te Moana-nui-a-Kiwa ki te tokomaha o Aotearoa. Ko tā McLeavey ki a ia, 'ākuanei ka huri te tai'.

## ROBIN WHITE

[born 1946 Ngāti Awa, New Zealand]

## EBONIE FIFITA

[born 1984 Tonga, New Zealand]

### All this time I have searched for the same thing 2020

Barkcloth, earth pigments, natural dye

Courtesy of the artists and Two Rooms Gallery, Auckland

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The object is an actor. A good actor can have a part in ten different plays; an object can play a role in ten different pictures.

– Henri Matisse, 1951

Ebonie Fifita and Robin White reflected on the work of French artist Henri Matisse when making this *ngatu* (Tongan barkcloth) and the two works to your left, *The perfect silence of the hour*, 2020 and *Soon, the tide will turn*, 2021. Like Matisse, the artists reuse 'actors': Palm corned beef is depicted here and referenced in *The perfect silence of the hour*, 2020. The many *kupesi* (patterns) appear in other works in this gallery.

In depicting a New Zealand product that is imported to the Pacific, White acknowledges the spirit of reciprocity and hospitality with which it has become associated in the region.

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He kaiwhakaari te taonga. Ka taea e te kaiwhakaari pai te tū ki ngā momo whakaari, tekau te nui; ka taea e te taonga te tū ki ngā whakaahua tekau hoki.

– Henri Matisse, 1951

I whakaaroaro a Ebonie Fifita rāua ko Robin White ki te mahi a te ringatoi o Wīwī, a Henri Matisse i te hanganga mai o tēnei *ngatu* (kiri tapa o Tonga), me ngā mahinga e rua kei tō taha mauī, arā, ko *The perfect silence of the hour*, nō te tau 2020 me *Soon, the tide will turn*, nō te tau 2021. Pērā i a Matisse, ka whakamahi anō ngā ringatoi i 'ngā kaiwhakaari'. Kei konei te mīti kau o Palm, ā, kei te kitea anō ki *The perfect silence of the hour*, nō te tau 2020. Kei ētahi atu mahinga o tēnei whare toi ngā momo *kupesi* (ngā tauira o Tonga).

He tohu o te manaakitanga a Te Moana-nui-a-Kiwa te whakaahuatanga a White o tētahi rawa hokohoko nō Aotearoa.

## ROBIN WHITE

[born 1946 Ngāti Awa, New Zealand]

## TAMARI CABEIKANACEA

[born 1967 Fiji]

## RUHA FIFITA

[born 1990 Tonga, Australia]

### Living in a material world 2017

from: **Something is happening here** 2017

Barkcloth, earth pigments, natural dye

Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, purchased 2018

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Things are not as they should be: a crab is in a teapot, a fish is in a teacup. New Angel tinned mackerel sits on the table like a cake, while a Fijian bulbul bird watches from the corner.

*Living in a material world*, 2017, presents a world in disarray, expressing the artists' concerns about social, spiritual, and environmental issues.

Robin White, Tamari Cabeikanacea, and Ruha Fifita use imagery from around the Pacific and beyond: *kupesi* (Tongan patterns) from earlier works, details from *masi* (Fijian barkcloth) in the Fiji Museum, and historical European paintings – Hieronymous Bosch's *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, 1490–1510, and Duccio di Buoninsegna's *The Last Supper*, 1308–11.

Reflecting on what they wanted the work to communicate, the artists turned to a recent Bahá'í message about the distribution of wealth and resources: 'Humanity's collective life suffers when any one group thinks of its own well-being in isolation from that of its neighbours . . . [and] the natural environment.'

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He tino rerekē ēnei āhuetanga: te pāpaka kei roto i te ipu tī me te ika kei roto i te kaputī. E noho ana te tīni tawatawa nā New Angel ki runga i te tēpu, ānō nei he keke, ā, e mātaki ana te manu bulbul o Whītī i te kokonga.

I roto i *Living in a material world*, nō te tau 2017, kei te tino raruraru te ao nei, ā, ka whakapuaki te ringatoi i ōna āwangawanga e pā ana ki ngā take pāpori, ki ngā take wairua me ngā take taiao hoki.

Ka whakamahi a Robin White rātou ko Tamari Cabeikanacea, ko Ruha Fifita i ngā atanga mai i Te Moana-nui-a-Kiwa, nō tua atu hoki: he *kupesi* (nō Tonga) mai i ngā mahinga o mua, he *masi* (kiri tapa o Whītī) nō te Fiji Museum, me ētahi peita tawhito o Ūropi, arā, ko *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, 1490–1510, nā Hieronymous Bosch me *The Last Supper*, 1308–11 nā Duccio di Buoninsegna.

Ka tahuri ngā ringatoi ki tētahi o ngā kōrero hou a te Hāhi Bahá'í e pā ana ki te noho o ngā rawa me ngā rauemi ki te whakaahua atu i te kaupapa o tā rātou mahi: 'Ka raruraru te oranga o te katoa ki te whakaaro tētahi rōpū mō tō rātou oranga anake, ānō nei e tū motuhake ana rātou i ō rātou hoa nohotata . . . me te taiao māori.'

# ROBIN WHITE

[born 1946 Ngāti Awa, New Zealand]

Left to right:

**The fisherman considers his options** 1995

**The fisherman is taken from the well** 1995

**The fisherman is brought down from the tree** 1995

**The fisherman shows us his wound** 1995

from: **The Fisherman Loses His Way** 1995

Woodblock prints on paper

Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, purchased 1997 with New Zealand Lottery Grants Board funds

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This series connects events from Robin White's life in Bikenibeu with larger narratives.

Instead of going to work, the fisherman, undermined by alcohol, struggles with confusion and despair. His gestures echo images of Christ – in the final print, he points to his wound.

White conceived this series and *Sainimele Goes Fishing*, 1995 (on the opposite wall in this gallery) at the same time. The stories of the fisherman and Sainimele intersect to convey a meditation on life's choices. Sainimele appears in the background in this series as the fisherman's friends and family attempt to help him, noticing what is going on, but not distracted from her purpose.

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E tūhono ana tēnei raupapa toi i ngā āhuetanga o te noho o Robin White ki Bikenibeu ki ngā kaupapa whānui.

Kāore te kaihi ika i te haere ki te mahi, ā, kua haurangi kē, kua taka atu ki te pōraruru me te pōuri. E kitea ana ngā āhua o te Karaiti i roto i āna mahi ā-tinana – i te mātātuhi whakamutunga, kei te tohu atu ia ki tana haehaenga.

I puta mai te whakaaro mō tēnei raupapa toi me tērā o *Sainimele Goes Fishing* nō te tau 1995, (kei te pakitara, kei tērā taha o te wharetoi) i te wā kotahi. Kei te pūtahitanga o ngā kōrero mō te kaihi ika rāua ko Sainimele tētahi māramatanga mō ngā kōwhiringa o te ao o te tangata. Kei tēnei raupapa toi, kei muri rā anō a Sainimele, ā, kei te ngana ngā hoa me te whānau o te kaihi ika ki te āwhina i a ia. Kei te kite a Sainimele i a rātou, engari ehara i te mea kua whakapōraruruhia tāna mahi.

# ROBIN WHITE

[born 1946 Ngāti Awa, New Zealand]

Left to right:

## **Tera ae kam karaoia? What are you doing?**

1995

## **Antai ae e mate? Who is dead?** 1995

## **Kam aki iri? Aren't you coming?** 1995

## **Ti bon rabakau n akawa. We are very good at fishing** 1995

from: **Sainimele Goes Fishing** 1995

Woodblock prints on paper

Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, purchased 2003

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Here I pay tribute, as best I can, to the strength and courage and utter determination of the many I-Kiribati women I know.

– Robin White, 1994

After 10 years in Kiribati, Robin White began to make artworks inspired by village life in Bikenibeu. This set of prints is about her friend Sainimele, whom she had watched grow into a confident young woman.

White says, 'Sainimele represented a very positive element in the village . . . She and a group of her friends [were] at the forefront of change, breaking out of the traditional mould, crossing boundaries and challenging others to follow.'

Sainimele challenged traditional roles by going fishing, but White saw her quest in more universal terms. For White, "Fishing" is also a way of representing the search for knowledge and the gifts that are discovered from that journey into the unknown.'

In this series, Sainimele passes through the same events depicted in *The Fisherman Loses His Way*, 1995 (on the opposite wall in this gallery) yet sees them from another perspective.

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Kei konei, kei te mihi atu au, i runga i te ngākau whakaiti, ki te kaha me te māia, ki te ngākau titikaha o ngā wāhine e mōhio ana au nō I-Kiripati.

– Robin White, 1994

Nō te paunga o te 10 tau ki Kiripati, kātahi ka pupū ake te hiahia ki roto i a Robin White ki te waihanga mahi toi mō te āhua o tana noho ki Bikenibeu. Ko te kaupapa o tēnei huinga mātātuhi, ko tōna hoa, ko Sainimele tōna ingoa. I kite a White i tana tipunga ake hei kōhine māia.

Hei tā White, 'Hei kanohi a Sainimele mō tētahi tira hou nō roto i te papakāinga . . . Ko rātou ko ōna hoa ngā kaikōkiri o ētahi huringa nui, e puta atu ana rātou i ngā here o te ao tawhito, e takahi ana i ngā taiepa, e whakahau ana i ētahi atu ki te whai i a rātou.'

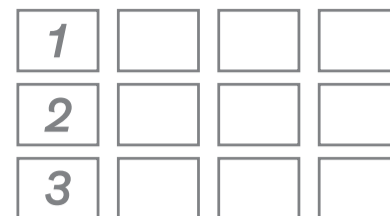
He tohe te mahi hī ika a Sainimele e pā ana ki ngā tūranga mahi o te ao tawhito, heoi, i kite a White i te hōhonutanga o āna toronga. Ki a White, 'He kupu whakarite te "hī ika" mō tana whai i te mātauranga me ngā taonga e hua mai ana i te toronga atu ki tētahi ao tauhou.'

Kei tēnei raupapa toi, e hipa atu ana a Sainimele i ngā āhutatanga i kitea ki *The Fisherman Loses His Way* nō te tau 1995 (kei te pakitara, kei tērā taha o tēnei wharetoi) – heoi, he tirohanga anō tōna.



# ROBIN WHITE

[born 1946 Ngāti Awa, New Zealand]



## Te Itoiningaina Catholic Women's Training Centre Kiribati

Top to bottom, left to right:

**Fresh Bread 1** 1998

**Fresh Bread 2** 1998

**Fresh Bread 3** 1998

**Safety Matches 1** 1998

**Safety Matches 2** 1998

**Safety Matches 3** 1998

**Red Label 1** 1998

**Red Label 2** 1998

**Red Label 3** 1998

**New Angel 1** 1998

**New Angel 2** 1998

**New Angel 3** 1998

from: **New Angel** 1998

Woven pandanus, natural and commercial dyes  
Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, purchased 2000

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I liked the sense of risk and adventure, where you can never tell what the outcome will be.  
– Robin White, 2013

In 1996, a fire devastated Robin White's home and studio in Bikenibeu, Kiribati.

White had to find a new way of working. She admired the Kiribati weaving tradition and established a relationship with expert weavers from Te Itoiningaina Catholic Women's Training Centre, collaborating with them to produce *New Angel*.

These mats combine different artistic traditions. They are made from pandanus, a material that is sacred to I-Kiribati, and feature customary Kiribati weaving patterns. The images reference the packaging of popular imported products such as New Angel tinned mackerel and Instant Sunshine powdered milk.

White says, 'The mats reference identity and belief systems that are subject to processes of change.' These works were her first 'where the medium was inseparable from the message'.

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I pai ki a au te wairua mōrearea me te mahi mātātoa, kīhai koe e mōhio ki te otinga.  
– Robin White, 2013

I te tau 1996, i wera te whare me te wāhi mahi o Robin White ki Bikenibeu i Kiripati.

Ko tana rapunga tērā i tētahi huarahi mahi anō. Ka ngākaunui ia ki te tikanga raranga a Kiripati, ka whakawhanaunga atu ki ngā tohunga raranga mai i Te Itoiningaina Catholic Women's Training Centre, ā, ka mahi ngātahi rātou ki te waihanga i te mahi toi o *New Angel*.

E mau ana ēnei whāriki i ngā tikanga raranga rerekē. He mea raranga ki te rauhara, he rawa tapu ki I-Kiripati, ā, kei te whakaaturia ngā taurira raranga tawhito nō Kiripati. E whakaatu ana ngā whakaahua i ngā pouaka o ngā rawa hoko nō whenua kē, pērā i tētahi tini o te tawatawa nā New Angel me te paura miraka o Instant Sunshine.

Hei tā White, 'Kei te whakaatu atu ngā whāriki i ngā tikanga a te iwi me te whakapono, otirā, kei te pāngia hoki ērā āhuatanga e te ao hurihuri.' Koinei āna mahi toi tuatahi i hangaia i runga i te whakaaro 'e kore e taea te whakawehewehe i te rawa toi mai i te kōrero'.

# ROBIN WHITE

[born 1946 Ngāti Awa, New Zealand]

## Florence and Summer in Auckland 1971

Oil on canvas

On loan from a private collection

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Robin White was close to her mother Florence, a 'hard-working resourceful person . . . [who] willingly dons her uniform, her white apron'. Florence appears in a number of White's early works.

Here, she poses slightly awkwardly in front of her home below Maungawhau Mount Eden, Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland.

White treats every element in the picture as a flat plane, stacking one behind another: the figure of her mother, the houses and shrubbery, the sun-baked terraces of Mount Eden, and the distant clouds.

Your hair a white net, pale  
Sky, as blue as your blouse  
Bleached skin, bruised and peeling  
With time. Slowly fading  
Like a cheap cotton print.  
You've tried to keep it nice:  
Washed and powdered, hiding  
Behind a white apron  
That you cut and sewed up,  
Hemmed, trimmed with a blue braid.  
You made it, all on your own.  
– Robin White, 'Florence'

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He nui te aroha kei waenganui i a White rāua ko tōna māmā, he 'pukumahi, he ringarehe . . . tere tonu tōna whakamau i ōna kākahu mahi, arā, i tōna pini mā'. He tini ngā whakaahua o Florence i waenga i ngā mahinga toi tuatahi a White.

Kei konei, kei te tū tahangoi ia ki mua i tōna whare kei raro iho o Maungawhau, kei Tāmaki Makaurau.

Ko te mahi a White i konei, he whakatūtū haere i ngā mea katoa kei roto i te pikitia, arā, kei muri tētahi i tētahi, kei runga i tētahi pātū papatahi – ko te āhua o tōna māmā, ko ngā whare me ngā rākau, waihoki ko ngā tuapapa pakapaka o Maungawhau me ngā kapua kei tawhiti rā anō.

Your hair a white net, pale  
Sky, as blue as your blouse  
Bleached skin, bruised and peeling  
With time. Slowly fading  
Like a cheap cotton print.  
You've tried to keep it nice:  
Washed and powdered, hiding  
Behind a white apron  
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– Robin White, 'Florence'