



# Returning Home / Interference

6 Aug - 6 Sep 2018

Jermaine Dean / Pati Solomona Tyrell  
Angela Tiatia

# Tā tā

Leafa Wilson  
August 2018

Onomatopoeic and poetic Samoan vernacular language is an appropriate way to introduce you to Angela Tiatia's work **Interference** because the phrase **tā tā** is not so much a word as it is description of the physical movement of being here and then there like a flitting moth. It's used in the Samoan language when referring in a derogatory way to interfering, sticking one's nose in where it wasn't invited. Samoan Australian Tiatia was brought up speaking Samoan and within the cultural construct of **fa'aSamoa** (the Samoan way), which was ideologically doubled with a strict Mormon culture.

**Aua e te tā tā i ga mea**, translates roughly as, **don't involve yourself with that**.

In the context of Tiatia's work though, **tā tā** alludes to the external interference that comes from the incoming data of pop culture, Western art history icons, nurture as opposed to nature, science and religion. It is a work that shows us a glimpse into the mind of the artist.

**Interference** was commissioned by Runway Experimental Art Journal to respond to the choreographic dance work, **A Caltex Spectrum** by Amrita Hepi. It is performed by Jahra Rager Wasasala, Tyrone Robinson and Sela Vai and their prop—a motorbike. The performers are backgrounded by a beautiful colour spectrum of cerise and apricot pinks. These same dancers are the performers you see in Tiatia's responsive work, **Interference**.

As Tiatia says in her working notes, an aspect of the work seeks "transcendence through movement, grace, spirituality..."—but transcendence from what? The brown body, the subject and the object seem to be contestable from with-out but also from with-in. The internal subtext seems to reveal another kind of pushing back, a bit of a kick-off at the experiences Tiatia encountered as a younger, dutifully compliant less-aware girl. The effects of a masculinised, Christianised Samoan worldview that is pervasive

and often dominates the thinking of the 'churched' populations in Samoan society, are conservative and at times, judgemental of the expression of any form of sensuality.

This on top of general society's expectations of normativity pommels the psyche of the 'other' from with-in. This 'otherness' Tiatia refers to in this work is almost certainly due in part to being not really part of the cultural mainstream in the artworld. Being 'other' also from within a Pacific Christianised mainstream causes this cognitive dissonance also due to not quite fitting the Pacific 'goodie-good' mould, this commensurately causes this interference in the Pacific bi-racial body's ability to just 'be'. Tiatia isn't so much concerned with letting the viewer know this as much as she is often working this out in a visual way.

This video work, for a few brief moments enables the brown body (the three dancers are people of colour) to elude the impact of race, ethnicity, status, scrutiny, tonality and contrast. even if it is for less than a minute. Tiatia's work is like a visual recording of this attempt to point out that throughout history, a type of emotional and physical labour is experienced by the brown body in almost every realm of society including art spaces within the hegemonic colonial gaze: this work exposes the artist's absolute fatigue and need to be seen just as an artist, not just a brown dusky maiden.

Tiatia negativises the substrate of the field, making the dancers more like a moving part of a tonal field. The inverted coloured dancers twitch and jerk. They are being 'fuzzied' with colour and distortion like white noise when the reception is bad on the in-between channels of the radio/television. The brown-bodied dancers' racial origins are not obvious. The succession of images that follow the dancers follow a similar aesthetic of not being locatable: the virus cells under the microscope point out Tiatia's

## ī (here)

allusion to a kind of analysis and classification of culture, ethnicity, class, social mobility (or stasis?). That constantly navigating cultural norms from every perspective even goes as absurdly deep as DNA and cellular level for her and others who are not fully white nor fully 'coloured'. It's as though Tiatia is creating her own form of therapy; a visual respite amidst the unceasing tug of war that comes with being bi-racial resulting in a kind of battle fatigue.

Interspersing images of people like Beyonce whose fame through music and Hollywood has enabled her an ascension to God-like status to transcend race and class supports the main sequence of the dancers. Like Beyonce, even fake old BINA48, in that they are not seen as black or brown bodies, they are humans who have at last, through the labour and labels of fame and genius, got the lucky prize of just being considered 'human' and can just **be**. Their giftedness has liberated them from being classified.

The sequence of various sets of sharp teeth are followed by a series of outreaching fingers and hands. Teeth and mouths are wanting and ready to devour while the hands are open and expectant and ready to touch, snatch and possess. The soundscape in these sequences surges with an urgency and the video begins to countdown through a series of timed beeps like that of a microwave oven or dishwasher might alarm to draw attention to the end of the cycle. The final image in the sequence is the Venus of Willendorf. She is made of stone: a signifier of transcendence—solid, eternal and disinterested. Like this Venus, Tiatia attempts to transcend all race and class just like Beyonce, and the Lion Man. No amount of any **tā tā**/interference will stop her rising above it all through the making of art.

## ā (there)



Angela Tiatia  
**Interference**  
moving image  
2018

## ī (here)

## ā (there)



Pati Solomona  
Tyrell  
**Bloodclot**  
2016  
Jermaine Dean  
**Femlick**  
2017



Pati Solomona  
Tyrell  
**Masculine**  
**Me Tender**  
2014  
Jermaine Dean  
**I MALIE I TAI**  
**I MALIE I UTA**  
**I MALIE I LALO**  
2015  
Pati Solomona  
Tyrell  
**Nikolai**  
2018

# Crafting presence

Emā Tavola  
August 2018

In **Returning Home**, Pati Solomona Tyrell and Jermaine Dean, the official photographers of the FAF SWAG collective, present insights into their individual practices as inextricably connected to the collective gains of the FAF SWAG movement and its undeniable impact on the cultural landscape of Auckland. In the stillness of studio portraits, lit with vivid greens, pink and deep purple tones, to the intoxicating energy of the FAF SWAG vogue balls, Pati and Jermaine document a cultural phenomenon that centralises, empowers and mobilises brown bodies and minds.

The momentum of FAF SWAG, both as a collective and within the individual practices of the collective's members, has been extraordinary in recent years. Strategic relationships with festivals, institutions, musicians, funders, sponsors and media partners have enabled the development of an award-winning interactive website and documentary series, numerous exhibitions, public art projects, performances and talks throughout New Zealand and increasingly Australia. The collective is about to produce another iconic **Aitu** themed vogue ball event in Auckland and from September onwards, FAF SWAG are embarking on a new global chapter with events and residencies in Paris, Berlin, Hong Kong and Switzerland over the next 12 months.

Pati's first solo exhibition, **Fāgogo** at ST PAUL St Gallery last year attracted the attention of the Walters Prize jury and at the age of 26, Pati is the youngest finalist in the running for this year's award by more than a decade. In the context of a dominant-culture-dominated art world that privileges individualism over collective practice, Pati's work has successfully infiltrated, embedding bold visual advocacy for FAF SWAG's unapologetic social development agenda within a beautiful nod to the continuum of New Zealand artists who explore indigenous Moana-Oceania connectedness and spirituality.

Whilst some New Zealand artists have built strong gallery-based reputations for visualising indigenous deities and ancestors in performative and digital form, Pati's work, and by extension the output of the FAF SWAG collective, has manifest the performance and visualisation of ancestral enquiry as affirming and powerful community collaborations and electrifying public events. It is this social function, the service and centring of the FAF SWAG community, that fortifies the artwork; it is so much more than what can be defined in terms of photography and art historical framing.

FAF SWAG events are transformative cultural happenings. Their vogue balls, initiated in South Auckland in 2013 and now delivered in the Auckland CBD, are safe spaces for queer, brown young people to express their authentic selves. The community is celebrated, and honoured; brown bodies are given centre stage and uncompromising visibility. FAF SWAG vogue balls have come to represent the power of mutual investment, a model for genuine social inclusion.

It is this level of care and authentic service that sits in the space between both Pati and Jermaine and those they photograph. Within the body positivity movement, self portraiture is a mode of healing. It is, in the words of Melbourne-based artist Frances Cannon, 'an act of forgiveness, reclamation and rebellion'. As both photographer and subject of much of their work, both Pati and Jermaine embody and create space for this performance of presence. Understanding the politics of the lens informs the gaze and unburdens it from the baggage of colonisation and harmful societal standards of beauty and conformity.

For Pati's recent series of studio portraits, he put out an open call across social media. Many of his subjects were not used to being photographed but his lens, his demeanour and the safe space he creates generated a body of work

that has extended the signature socio-political impact of FAF SWAG to a new community of mothers, artists, designers and aspiring models. His subjects are taken away momentarily from their every day time and space and captured in a moment of pure potential. In the most poignant portraits, Pati creates a vision of absolute presence, not overly of his own framing, but offered to him by his subjects. They are connected in that moment to their past and their future.

This series driven in part by entrepreneurial hustle, is testament to Pati's ability to apply his aesthetic, approach and positionality to just about anyone. In these bold, uncompromising portraits, Pati decolonises a hundred year old gaze, capturing Pacific people as visions of potential, godly beauty, deserving of attention and a revision of what we know about Pacific Islander experience.

FAF SWAG co-founder, Tanu Gago, has long impressed the importance of crafting visibility for queer, brown cultural narratives which have been historically neglected. Both Pati and Jermaine embed an explicit understanding of the politics of writing oneself and one's community into history. It is not enough to preach to the converted; their work is constantly claiming new territory, shifting perceptions and dropping jaws online, in galleries, on phones, and in real life.

Returning home is a vital process. There is a magnetic force field that centres the spirit and soothes a weary heart. The community building ethos that FAF SWAG embodies combines the knowledge of complex family dynamics and unconditional love that both co-founders—Tanu Gago and Pati Solomona Tyrell—have experienced in their lives. This is a significant moment: bringing FAF SWAG—the movement, the artists and the community—home to Hamilton is a ceremony of connectedness.





Pati Solomona Tyrell  
**Ghost**  
2018

Pati Solomona Tyrell  
**Supreme, Coven**  
2016

Pati Solomona Tyrell  
**Duchess, Coven**  
2016

Pati Solomona Tyrell  
**Princess, Coven**  
2016

Pati Solomona Tyrell  
**Fang, Coven**  
2016

## Jermaine Dean Tāmaki Makaurau

Jermaine Dean is a contemporary lens-based digital artist. His work explores gender identity, body politics, colour and surreal fantasy through pixilation, distortion and digital manipulation. Jermaine is a founding member and principle photographer of FAF SWAG artist collective and the Auckland Vogue scene. He has exhibited work in places like Fresh Gallery Otara, ArtSpace, CoCA in Christchurch and Auckland Pride Festival and has collaborated with many indigenous artists within NZ and abroad.

## Pati Solomona Tyrell Tāmaki Makaurau

Pati Solomona Tyrell is an interdisciplinary visual artist with a strong focus on lens-based media and performance. His work explores urban Pacific queer identity and presents counter-narratives by focusing on self-portraiture and images of the community he is part of. Pati is a finalist for the prestigious Walters prize in 2018 and has extensively shown work throughout New Zealand and internationally. Pati is also a co-founder and principle photographer of FAF SWAG artist collective and the Auckland Vogue scene.

## Angela Tiatia Sydney

Angela Tiatia is a Samoan-born, Sydney-based multimedia artist. Angela's work explores contemporary culture, drawing attention to its relationship to representation, gender, neo-colonialism and the commodification of the body and place. Angela has taken part in many publications and exhibitions all over the world. Her work has been exhibited in Köln, Singapore, Los Angeles, San Francisco, New York, Mexico City, Honolulu, Sydney, Melbourne, Auckland and Wellington and she was recently awarded the prestigious Ravenswood Australian women's art prize.