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Imagineing Paradise

Embroidering Myth

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Abstract

This practice-led textile research project explores notions of tropical paradise from the perspective of a European imagination. It critiques colonial myths of tropical paradise that have been perpetuated through visual art including textile design and wallpaper. The design practice is informed by a review of French scenic wallcoverings, tropical prints in popular culture and the paintings of Henri Rousseau and Paul Gauguin and a visual analysis of how colour, pattern repeat, motif, symbolism and embroidery work together to construct an idealised notion of the tropics.

The design responses liken colonialism to domestication and extends the same sense of control, domination, structure and regularity to historic textile design, effectively placing traditional processes and practices in textile pattern composition under review. In the creative works, paradise has not been rejected, but instead, it has been inhabited, explored, embellished and highlighted in order to captivate nostalgia and critique prevailing myths fostered by nineteenth century colonial paradigms of paradise.

The three design works employ digital embroidery and digital textile print to re-present three selected myths: Arcadia which explores the expectation of tropical abundance informed by a story from James Cook’s voyages, Living in a Fool’s Paradise reframes the palm tree emblem in a bid to purge colonial nostalgia and Embellished Phantasmagoria re-visions the fecundity of the tropical environment. Each work offers a critique of the inauthenticity of paradise perceived through a European lens.

Acknowledgements

With special thanks to:

Professor Julieanna Preston and Lilian Mutsaers for helping me clarify my path on this research journey and for invigorating discussions and sound guidance.

The Textile team for supporting me in the process; Hannah Clement for growing to fill my shoes in many ways; Stella Robertson for helping me believe I could do this; Prem from Walker Sotech for your technical advice; Madeira for thread sponsorship; Steve at Digital Decor for speedy printing and Leisa at Think Positive Designer Prints for understanding my picking colour requirements; and Tessa Baty for your friendship and beautiful graphic design work on this document.

Greta Menzies and Phoebe Smith for your challenging conversations, comradery and encouragement; David and Lynne Gough for always enabling my creativity and raising me to believe that I can do all things through Him who strengthens me; Ekeline Sio-Atoa for being my cheerleader and masterchef; and Bobby for your patience, faithful encouragement and hard graft with building our home.