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Imagining Paradise

Embroidering Myth

Amy Sio-Atoa

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An exegesis presented in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Design

Massey University, Wellington, New Zealand

Amy Sio-Atoa | 2016

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.

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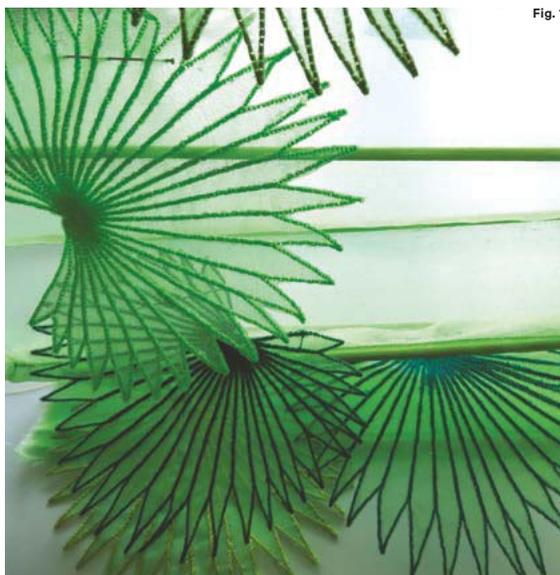


Fig. 1

Introduction

This textile design research project *Imagining Paradise* explores how textile design and paintings perpetuate notions of tropical 'paradise' from the perspective of European imagination.

I am an English immigrant to New Zealand and the daughter of an English father and a fourth generation Kiwi mother. I settled in Wellington where I married a Samoan man and trained as a textile designer specialising in digital textile print and then digital embroidery. I am also obsessed with colour.

The research has stemmed from a personal fascination with tropical nature and escapism provoked by growing up in England with its long bleak winters, grey skies, weak sunlight and bare deciduous trees. Raised by a Kiwi mother, my imagination fed on her longing for distant lands that I had never visited. It is as Paul Theroux, travel writer and cultural critic writes: 'The exotic is something we lack, something we crave, always the exotic is elsewhere' (as cited in Beukers, 2007, p.9).

When I started the journey of this project I fully believed the visual language of tropicality to be beautiful. I was holding on to an assumed loveliness, paradise as a utopian idealised condition. This research journey has led me to an understanding that my appreciation of the aesthetics of the tropics was operating under a persistent British colonial lens. Fig. 1 shows my early works.



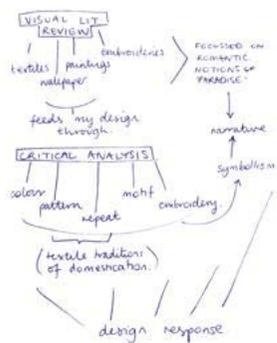


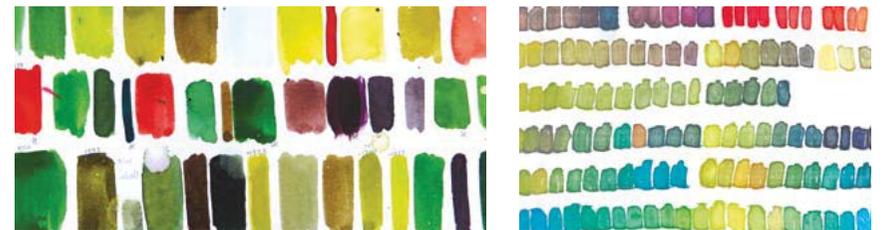
Fig. 2 (above)
Amy Sio-Atoa, 2015. tProcess strategy.

Fig. 3 (opposite)
Amy Sio-Atoa, 2015. Colour hunting.

Textile design has historically been a place where ideas and notions of paradise have been articulated. According to Beverley Gordon (2011), 'Beyond narrative content, textiles often express deep seated, profound glimpses of cultural world views and beliefs' (Gordon, 2011, p. 223). This practice-led research is informed by visual analysis of textile prints, wallpapers, paintings and embroideries that focus on idealised or romanticised notions of paradise. That visual analysis centres on colour, motif, pattern, repeat and how each of these components feed into symbolism and communicates a narrative. The diagram here demonstrates this process (Fig. 2).

My approach to colour hunting has been an intuitive process yet I also investigate historic colour palettes evocative of the tropics and analyse how the colour values operate together to evoke this notion (Fig. 3). I spent time in Wellington's Botanic Gardens collecting colour combinations, which communicated a sense of tropical nature, and then finding their corresponding Pantone colours and embroidery thread colours. The images exemplify the vibrant and varied colour palettes of paradise that exist in contemporary visual and material culture and affect a sense of the tropics (Fig. 4).

Drawing, collaging and embroidering strange unfamiliar plants and elements of nature alongside analysis of historic textile designs enabled me to synthesize research regarding the aesthetics of the tropics and the symbolism of elements such as the palm tree. The symbolism of each motif is carefully considered during motif development to ensure that they contribute to the critique of the myth narrated in each work.





Embroidery motifs and elements are stitched onto the surface of cloth to highlight, embellish and augment myths of paradise that are presented in the prints I design.

I have developed textile 'tapestries' or rather narrative embroideries, which critique European persistent historical perceptions of paradise.

In my approach to textile repeat pattern design, I liken colonialism to the domestication within historic textile design and control in pattern structure. I draw parallels between the ways in which colonialism disciplines and domesticates the land and its relationship to traditional textile design processes. Textile design often appropriates symbolism, orders motifs in a controlled way, manipulating imagery for the result of balanced repeat pattern design; my approach to pattern structure in each of the works communicates an additional layer of the narrative.

The visual elements mentioned here, colour, motif, embroidery, pattern and symbolism are commented upon more specifically in each chapter.

I conducted an initial broad survey of various means of representing historic notions of paradise in subjects as diverse as anthropology, colonial history, poetry, the history of James Cook's voyages, wallpaper design, Hawaiian shirts, Henri Rousseau's paintings, Gauguin's paintings. This survey and early work concluded that notions of paradise stem from a multi-faceted collection of ideas and cultural constructs. The history of textile design and art history is rife with cultural appropriation and amalgamation of ideas inspired by the nineteenth century World Exhibitions and the subsequent museums that displayed the loot of the empire. The multiple narratives of paradise, which

Fig. 4 (opposite)

Amy Sio-Atoa, 2015. Drawing colour palette and inspiration from purchased tropical print. Watercolour ink on paper.

emerged in my research, led me to recognise the perpetuation of paradise myths in popular culture from the nineteenth century through to the twenty first century.

Merriam Webster defines paradise as: 'a very beautiful, pleasant, or peaceful place that seems to be perfect.' (Merriam Webster Online, 2016). The notion of paradise operates in many different narratives, and layers of narratives embedded within culture. A cultural review by Richard Harris (1997) notes that common features include; a garden, an abundance of water, trees and foliage, an abundance of fruit, abundance of animals to hunt – when hunting is key to the culture, animals that are not carnivorous and do not pose a threat to humans, and interestingly four rivers coming together as a barrier to create an island to contain or protect it.

Richard Harris also comments that in contemporary culture:

The myth of paradise, although never wholly absent from the abiding central concerns of western culture, the idea at least since the Enlightenment and possibly since the Renaissance seems at one level to have been increasingly marginalized, relegated to an intellectual and imaginative periphery. Here in this limbo it continues to serve out a debased existence as a lazy metaphor for developers and travel agents (Harris, 1997, p. 147).

For the purpose of this project I was interested in critiquing the European lens – paradise as a utopian idealised place of escapism and an expectation of abundant nature anticipated by colonists. I am not a social historian and the purpose of this research is not to comment at length on the impact of

colonialism as a whole. Rather I have chosen to focus on the role that textiles and paintings have played in building and perpetuating myths of tropical paradise.

The chapter 'Arcadia' exemplifies this aim in its analysis of precedents. Whilst historical narratives, which I will introduce shortly, influence this project it is not entirely historically bound. In places my research maintains a certain poetic license, influenced by the images and fiction that I have appreciated. I am a designer and approach this study specifically in relation to digital textile print and digital embroidery design. The subject of colonialism in relation to paradise is a vast topic and for this design-led research I am exploring how design visualises, materialises and represents notions of paradise. Here I am exerting mastery in design informed by social and historical constructs rooted in colonialism.

Whether as sublime landscape, malignant wilderness or site for environmental conflicts and eco-tourism, tropical nature is to a great extent an American and European imaginative construct, conveyed in literature, travel writing, drawings, paintings, photographs, [and textile design]. (Stepan, 2001, p. 1).

These images are central to Nancy Leys Stepan's view that a critical examination of the 'tropicalization of nature' can remedy some of the most persistent misrepresentations of the region and its peoples. For many people, paradise is rooted almost exclusively in one's imagination. Nancy Leys Stepan, Professor of History at Columbia University, wrote the book *Picturing Tropical Nature* (2001) reflecting upon the development of the 'tropicalization of nature' which tropical imagery and its impact upon European perceptions of the

region writes: 'I visited tropical nature not in reality but in my imagination. From the perspectives of colder places, I found that I sometimes could not help but share in the very perceptions of tropical nature that I was simultaneously trying to take apart' (Stepan, 2001, p. 23).

From my experience of resettling in New Zealand I came to recognise the 'tropics' through a different lens, one removed from British cultural perspectives. I noticed a conflict between utopian ideals of paradise and the stories or visual language that I was dissecting. I recognised that places branded as 'paradise' are burdened with associations to colonial history and post-colonial debate. Examples can be found in the expectation of arcadian abundance of growth in the tropics, the displacement of native people by imperial European immigrants desiring to profit from the land, (Fowkes-Tobin, 2005), the replacement of traditional agricultural practices with European methods (Park, 2006), and the colonial stereotype of the exotic Pacific woman (O'Brien, 2006).

My research has led me to create three textile tapestries connected to imaging paradise. 'Paradise' exists globally across many cultures, and in contemporary culture is not a singular construct, but has many layers, hence the need to signal this multi-faceted concept with more than one design. Each tapestry bears out a narrative that responds to socio-cultural and socio-political conditions. In Jeremy MacClancy's (2002) book *Exotic No More: Anthropology on the Front Lines*, he describes an African hand carved wooden Tintin toy, which looks like a naive version of Hergé's Tintin, painted with a black face.

The toy questions, "So, you find me exotic do you? Well what, my friend, does that say about you?" (MacClancy, 2002, p. 419). I asked the same question while designing and producing these three tapestries.

This exegesis is structured around three textile works. Each tapestry is presented in a chapter that outlines the notion of paradise at play in the work, offers some historic context, and weaves in significant literature and references to existing design and art. Chapter One explores a work entitled *Living in a Fool's Paradise*, a work that unpacks the narrative around colonial nostalgic longing and reframes the symbolism of the palm tree to purge any romanticism. Chapter Two 'Arcadia' challenges imperial myths of bounty and abundance. The third and final chapter features a work called *Embellished Phantasmagoria* which re-vision the fecundity and sensuality of tropical plants and subverts the traditions of textile design. Whilst the primary aim of this research has been to critique paradise myths using textiles as a vehicle, I have made other 'technical revelations' during their development, which are elaborated upon when appropriate. This exegesis serves as a supplement to support the design works, to review relevant literature, and report upon the process that formed the work. See Fig. 5, 6, 7.

I will be unpacking, remembering, embellishing and augmenting myths of paradise in each of the following chapters as I outline the design process and critically reflect upon the final design work. At each point I draw links to the relevant literature and existing design works and practices.

I visited tropical nature not in reality but in my imagination. From the perspectives of colder places, I found that I sometimes could not help but share in the very perceptions of tropical nature that I was simultaneously trying to take apart.

NANCY LEYS STEPAN



My textile design interventions operate in the existing context of conversational textile print design, crafting prints and embroideries, which create narratives to critique myths. Print is the canvas and the embroidery embellishes, highlights and amplifies the issues.

Fig. 5 (left)

Amy Sio-Atoa, 2015, *Arcadia*

Fig. 6 (centre)

Amy Sio-Atoa, 2015, *Living in a Fool's Paradise*

Fig. 7 (right)

Amy Sio-Atoa, 2015, *Embellished Phantasmagoria*





Arcadia

Arcadia, easily translated as a utopian vision of nature, is helped by the word 'abundance' and an expectation of bountiful harvest from the land.

Joseph Banks was a botanical artist who accompanied James Cook on his first circumnavigation of the globe. Banks' classical education led him to a 'pastoral vision – Tahiti as the Garden of Eden', a site of unlimited bounty (Fowkes-Tobin, 2006, p. 33).

After three months of eating the Tahitians' breadfruit, pigs, coconuts, and other fruits and vegetables, the crew of Captain Cook's ship woke up one day to find that the usual supply of food the Tahitians brought them was not there. Banks remarks rather testily that the Dolphin's crew did not have this problem; he speculates that perhaps "seasons of this [bread] fruit alter" or that the Dolphin's crew frightened the natives into relinquishing whatever food they had. Adopting what he assumed was the Dolphin's strategy for extracting food from the Tahitians, Banks put together a search party and armed himself with his gun, which he knew frightened the Tahitians, and proceeded inland to coerce the locals into providing Cook's crew with more supplies (Fowkes-Tobin, 2006 p. 34).

Tahiti rose like a jewel from the Pacific, 'clothed to the summit with fruit trees' (Fowkes-Tobin, B.), a dense canopy of tropical verdure revealing a fecund and fragrant land with growth oozing from every surface "...in short the scene we saw was the truest picture of an arcadia of which we were going to be kings that the imagination can form."

JOSEPH BANKS
(as cited in Fowkes-Tobin, 2006).

Fig. 7a (opposite page) Amy Sio-Atoa, 2015. Arcadia and Cockatoo test sample.



Fig. 8 (above) & Fig. 9 (opposite)
 Jean Gabriel Charvet for Dufour, 1829.
Les Sauvages de la Mer Pacifique. Scenic
 Wallcovering.

Pastoral myths of an Arcadian paradise are apparent in *Les Sauvages de la Mer Pacifique*. The characters in Fig. 9 are eating straight from the banana tree, representing abundance with little work to yield a harvest. The imperial narrative claims to depict various islands of the South Pacific visited by James Cook, yet the characters appear to be informed by classical Greek sculpture in stature and dress.



I cannot speak about *Les Sauvages de la Mer Pacifique* without mentioning contemporary New Zealand artist Lisa Reihana and her animated wallpaper in *Pursuit of Venus [infected]*, which reclaims the history of the South Pacific through a subversive re-staging of the wallpaper. It reclaims cultural identities and critiques colonialism. As a European I cannot present the point of view of Pacific Island peoples, however, I can re-present the myths and critique the view of the colonialist and prevailing historic paradigms.



Discovering the Joseph Banks story led me to wonder how textiles and paintings have been used to perpetuate the myth of an abundant 'Arcadian' paradise and how this misunderstanding of agricultural domesticity could be influence the structure of pattern design. The *Arcadia* design was produced as a response to the narrative about Banks and the Tahitians. The design process was quite linear: first this story was identified followed by the analysis of historic examples of textiles and paintings that perpetuate the myth of arcadia. I analysed the visual language of contemporary precedents of subversive wallpapers, which set a pattern for how I would work with regard to pattern composition, colour, and symbolism within motifs. The other two textile designs had quite different design processes.

Fig. 10
A pattern structure diagram from *Line and Form*, Walter Crane (1900).

Fig. 11
William Morris. 1865. *Fruit and Pomegranate* wallpaper. Block printed on paper.

Domestication and pattern structure

Beth Fowkes-Tobin (2006), writes to the fact that whilst James Cook was raised by an agriculturalist and admired the agricultural labour and indigenous irrigation methods of the South Pacific peoples, Joseph Banks came from a wealthy family with a classical education and believed the Arcadian myths of abundance. Banks' view was informed by the colonial and imperial desire to rule the land.

Considering colonisation and domestication in terms of an ordering of the land, I have made a connection with 'gardening' imagery and cultivating motifs in textile design. Textile design traditions operate as a form of domestication, an act of taming nature and composing it in pattern and displaying it in the interior. William Morris and his Arts & Crafts contemporaries, who sought to mould and control imagery to create balance and harmony within pattern, drew motifs in such a way that pruned, shaped, and formed the foliage, framing it in a polished kind of domestication (Fig. 10, 11). British wallpaper designer Marthe Armitage reflects upon her drawing style in comparison to William Morris in the video *Back to the Drawing Board*. She speaks about the way in which she draws plants and gives them their shape, and then follows them in constructing her patterns, but she observes that William Morris 'makes the shapes follow him' in a more controlled manner. (Armitage, n.d).

These observations prompted me to buck the restrictions of traditional half-drop repeat grid structures and compose the textile print design in an undulating garland rather than a structured textile repeat pattern. Here I am

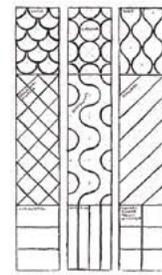


Fig. 10



Fig. 11



Fig. 12 (far left)
 Timorous Beasties. 2015.
Topical Tropical. Fabric. 1360
 mm wide, 1425 mm repeat.

Fig. 13 (left)
 Amy Sio-Atoa, 2015. Early stage
 sketch, developing the garland
 composition.

attempting to unleash the constrained aspects of repeat structure to realise the wild and more uncontrolled visual repeat as demonstrated in Timorous Beasties' work *Topical Tropical* (Fig. 12).

Analysis of the visual language in *Topical Tropical* by Timorous Beasties and Victoria Garcia's work yielded some helpful aesthetic tools for the development of *Arcadia*.

The vertical climbing composition of both *Topical Tropical* and Garcia's work have an abundant sense of growth; the plants reach upwards toward the sun. In Garcia's work the colour is carefully balanced to avoid obvious repetitions and, while the composition consists of only five drawn leaves, they have been repeated, stretched, flipped or rotated to create an illusion of variety. A sense of abundance is communicated by the variation in thickness of leaves, textures and colours. In these dense vertical drops, there is little negative space and yet the larger leaves give the eye a resting place, which prevents the design from becoming oppressive. The subtle plants in the background of each design make the ground less stark and intrusive.

Fig. 14
 Victoria Garcia (n.d). A collaboration with *Lost At E Minor* and *Microsoft Surface*. Digital illustration.
www.surrocodelia.com





Fig. 15
Henri Rousseau, 1910. *The Dream*. Oil on Canvas. 204.5 x 298.5cm. Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Mythmaking: The Arcadian dream

I investigated how textiles had been used to construct an aesthetic language and communicate an imaginary land. I found evidence that artists and designers of the 19th and 20th centuries inspired by the tropics drew threads together from secondary resources to build a myth as exemplified in Fig. 15. The mélange of plants and seasons displayed in *El Dorado* Fig. 16, the scenic wallpaper shown below can be attributed to the botanic exploration and progress in the acclimatization of exotic plants in Europe in the 19th century.



Fig. 16
Scenic - Panel, *El Dorado*, 1915–25; Designed by Eugène Ehrmann, Georges Zipélius and Joseph Fuchs; France; block-printed on continuous paper; H x W: 199 x 54 cm (78 3/8 x 21 1/4 in.), 1975-77-2.

Some visitors record [the] Pacific... from first hand experience, others imagined from their armchairs and easels in Europe...The greater resonance of particular versions of Pacific exoticism related more to the skill of the representers in embroidering existing tropes with layers that reflected the concerns and desires of their own time (O'Brien, 2006, p. 12).

In the 20th century, Rousseau's paintings present a naive medley of an imaginary world, which reveal his underlying attitudes of primitivism. (Adriani, 2001). In *The Dream* a mysterious dark figure that emerges from the 'jungle' playing a magical flute. An exposed nude lies totally unthreatened by the lions rendered powerless as though drawn from stuffed carcasses in the world exhibitions.

Rousseau's jungle collages set in the geographical nowhere and everywhere of the imagination were assembled from ... hot-house fantasies fed by the most diverse of sources...visits to the botanical and zoological gardens, the palm houses, orangeries and menageries of the city...The sudden development in French colonialism in the 1880s provided the excuse to present a brief overview of a world defined in colonial terms (Adriani, 2001, p. 156).

Time spent responding to Rousseau's *The Dream* in embroidered leaf motifs was beneficial as I recognised that a simplified drawing style when broken into block shapes and outlines, translates well in embroidery. (Fig.17) Once I was aware of the mythmaking apparent in historical painting and textiles, I noticed how the abundance myth in textiles prevalent in contemporary popular culture was being perpetuated. I discovered other examples ranging

Fig. 17 (opposite)

Amy Sio-Atoa, 2015. An embroidered test. A contemporary tourist taking a 'selfie', this represents the self-focussed approach of tourists, who are 'sold the dream of a secluded paradise', (Temkin, 2012). The subtle intruders or observers represent the threat, or disappointment of finding others.





Fig. 18
Mélanie Bénédicte's wallpaper design, *O Tigre*. An example of collage representing myth and a sense of fiction.

from contemporary wallpaper and interior products, contemporary fashion collections including high fashion examples like Aquilano Rimondi's Spring 2014 ready to wear collection to everyday textiles.

Re-presenting myth through design

Inspired by the amalgamation of secondary resources demonstrated in Rousseau's paintings, I became interested in collage as a method for re-presenting myths in my work. The naivety of drawing style and simplification of flora and fauna and dimensional flattening creates a collaged aesthetic that reveals the fictional narrative. In discussion with artist Kelly Thompson (March 2015), we recognised that textile designers have a tendency to simplify forms to evoke imagination of a leaf, flower, or 'jungle' without representing it as an empirical, detailed drawing. I felt that this analysis justified a blatant amalgamation of motifs in my process. I intended to use a collage of different techniques to embellish the fiction, exaggerate the imaginary and to highlight the implausibility of myths. Drawing in collage with a scalpel was a good way to start thinking about drawing with vectors for digital embroidery because there is a similar motion of hand control.

Bénédicte's wallpaper suggests a fictive landscape with its obvious cut outs and collage method combining different drawing styles (Fig.18). The illustrative style, a graphic decoupage, echoes the composition of scenic wall coverings to mock the 'authenticity' of botanic drawings, 'a wall can be come a limitless canvas for the imagination' (Brunet, 2012, p. 179).



Fig. 19 (spread)
Amy Sio-Atoa, 2015. These images show early developments for the collage works. Above is a photoshop file of all the motifs isolated and ready to collage.



Fig. 20 (far left)

Amy Sio-Atoa, 2015. Exploring the idea of making a drop that is withering and sickly at the bottom, rising up to a dense canopy at the top. When printed full scale some of the ink leaves were too pixelated, so I redrew these.



Fig. 21 (left)

Amy Sio-Atoa, 2015. Development of *Arcadia* where I gave everything crisp, sharp cut edges. This looked too clean, flat and child-like. It lost some of the depth and density, so I went on to reinstate some of the more textured hand painted motifs.

Fig. 22

Amy Sio-Atoa, 2015. These images demonstrate an exploration of placing the design in a repeat. I found that the dense repeat made the design look kitsch and overwhelming, but not particularly abundant. This experiment taught me that the *Arcadia* composition needed to be a figure in a field, a bounded motif that creates a sense of travelling to an island.





Subversive Wallpaper

I began to wonder how textiles could be used to critique persistent historic perspectives that have been used so frequently to perpetuate prevailing notions of paradise. Throughout the research the intent shifted to critique the constructed myth of Arcadian abundance and highlight imperialist attitudes by re-telling the Joseph Banks story in embroidery and print design.

In the phase I researched textile designers who seek to subvert traditions of wallpaper design.

Timorous Beasties produces textile screen-print wallpapers that demonstrate evidence of narratives with a political message. In *Iguana Superwide*, Timorous Beasties challenges the assumed authenticity of a lithographic style by strangling the iguana in a pineapple tendril and enlarging the scale to the point of becoming confronting (Fig. 23).

In *London Toile*, Timorous Beasties subverts the romantic nature of Toile de Joy, which traditionally present a romantic pastoral view of the countryside by revealing the underbelly of London in the depiction of homeless people on park benches and characters holding people at gunpoint (Fig. 24).

Another example is found in textile designer Munchausen's design of contemporary tropical prints, which upon closer inspection are laden with political commentary. The design presents oil slicks from freight ships and aerial fertilisation of land that causes birds to fall from the sky. I became aware that my design work could combine the strategy of Timorous Beasties, subverting traditional textile practices to reveal the hidden aspect of paradise narratives with the collage 'process' of Rousseau to acknowledge the fiction and the imaginary at play.



Fig. 23 (opposite)
Timorous Beasties. 2012. *Iguana Superwide*.
Wallcovering, paper. 1350 mm wide, 831 mm repeat.

Fig. 24 (above)
Timorous Beasties. 2005. *London Toile*.
Wallcovering, paper. 1350 mm wide, 831 mm repeat.



Fig. 25
Adrian Clifford. 2004. *Paradise Project*.
Wallpaper design for Wieden + Kennedy.



Fig. 26
Amy Sio-Atoa, 2015. Linen test print, exploring drawn pomegranates.

Motif and Symbolism in *Arcadia*

In '*Arcadia*', digitally manipulated ink paintings, cut collage and photographic imagery present the narrative. Influenced by *El Dorado* (1925), I decided to work with plants of my imagination, which extended beyond their scientific authenticity, name or geographic location. The digital collage is a Photoshop melange of photography, textured paper collage, fluid inky leaves with vector-based digital embroidery that collectively embellish the surface. The textured palms borrow from the child-like imagination in Eric Carle's *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* (1969) and the fantastical cut collage plants are influenced by *The Garden of Earthly Delights* by Hieronymus Bosch (c. 1490).

The colours of *Arcadia* were carefully balanced on screen, selecting a wide range of lively greens suggesting fresh growth, offset with thick dark green waxy palms, which give the eye a place to rest. The fine palms embroidered in lime overlaid with muted khaki's offer a sense of depth where the leaves intersect. The red pomegranates and tendrils work with the broad teal textured leaves, and are composed to lead the eye through like a garland, and the purple bromeliads also bring another welcome break from the sea of green.

Linen was selected for the digital printing of *Arcadia* because linen has been used as cloth frequently made into resort as a cool natural fibre for wealthy western travellers visiting the tropics. Additionally, the direct dye printing inks used by Think Positive Designer Prints sink deep into the fibre rather than softly sitting on the surface, a process where the bond of the colour allows it to be vibrant and the texture of the weave adds depth to the print.

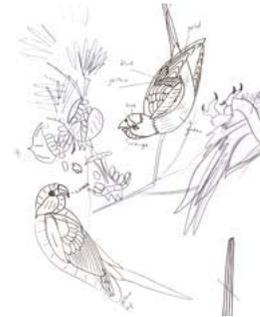


Fig. 27
Amy Sio-Atoa, 2015. Embroidery specification drawing, digitising the design and the first test sample.

Another feature of this work is the colourful Kuhl's lorikeets which were endemic to Tahiti in the 19th century and are now endangered due to the introduction of Black Rats (Forshaw & Knight, 2010). I have chosen embroidered lorikeets to represent the indigenous people amicably sharing a pomegranate and stitched on the surface of a narrative landscape to embellish and highlight the uncomfortable truth of the aggressive behaviour of Banks and other European explorers. The embroidered cockatoo depicts Banks with its raised hackles, aggressive posture and golden crest representing the greed of the imperial crown intruders. The embroidery was drawn from Walter Crane's *Cockatoo and Pomegranate* woodblock wallpaper, 1899.



Fig. 28 (left)
Walter Crane, 1899. Portion of *Cockatoo and Pomegranate* wallpaper; Colour woodblock print on paper. Produced by Jeffrey and Co., England, 1899.

Fig. 29 (above)
Amy Sio-Atoa, 2015. Embroidered sample, first iteration of digitising the Cockatoo. The bird was small and the feathers sparse, so I increased the stitch density for more coverage.

Australian artist Nicola Dickson writes that 'The quotation and re-presentation of historical images enables a form of contemporary re-reading or 'revisionism' of their meaning' (2010, p. 16). I have 'quoted' Walter Crane's bird as a critique of the exploitation of the tropical imagery within British textile design, but also because the posture of the cockatoo is so enlarged, aggressive and dominant, which I felt was appropriate for representing Joseph Banks' attitude as revealed in the story. The posture and shape of the cockatoo was adapted from Walter Crane's *Cockatoo and Pomegranate* woodblock wallpaper, 1899 (Fig. 28).

While the lively colour palette and depth in the layering of foliage is enticing, the collage aesthetic hints at a child-like imagination and the embroidered characters seed questions that jar with the apparent abundance and begin to unravel the myth. Despite their unrelated geographic origin, the photographic pomegranates were selected because of their symbolic association with fertility and fecundity in many cultures such as Ancient Greek, Ancient Persian and Chinese. Use of images of pomegranates is a subtle reference to the classical education of Banks and his misunderstanding of Tahitian domesticity. In Greek mythology, the tempting sweet juicy seeds/arils bursting from this ripe fruit were responsible for the condemnation of Persephone to the underworld, and the resulting seasons of lack, when her mother (goddess of the harvest) mourned and refused to bless the land with fertility (Graves, 1992, p. 95). Photographic imagery of the pomegranates was selected because they communicate the sense of juicy, ripe, bursting-at-the-seams abundance and contrast between drawn, stitched and photographic imagery hints at a collage of the imagination.



Fig. 30
Amy Sio-Atoa, 2015. Test print on Polyester. Photographic pomegranates with different Photoshop colour and hue saturation masks. The digital sublimation inks print polyester with a very high colour saturation.

Arcadia has been created in response to the Joseph Banks story, to augment the Arcadian myth and unveil the threatening behaviour of Cook's crew. This drop seeks to entice the viewer into the myth of abundance while leaving clues to the fiction in the visual language. Embroidery embellishes the surface, adding another layer to the narrative, to highlight new elements that I bring to critique the myth. This design is situated in the contemporary imagination, constructed through a digital collage amalgamating elements inspired from many sources, places and eras. It is not trying to present an accurate story, but re-presents the story, to unveil the myth of arcadia and augment the pervasive assumption of abundance.

In this chapter the story was selected before I began developing the design. In 'Colonial Nostalgia' the work developed differently: I pulled the threads of the story together as I designed the work. In 'Arcadia' the focus was upon evoking the imagination, in the next chapter I explore the visual language of botanic illustration as I explore 'Colonial Nostalgia'.

In developing *Arcadia* the idea of an excess of growth and overabundant surface has frequently arisen in my sampling, which is addressed in the final chapter, exploring fecundity, fathoming the fantastical and 'Phantasmagoria'.



Colonial Nostalgia

As I view *Living in a Fool's Paradise* across the room, I am drawn in by its undulating rhythms, vertically aligned tree trunks and almost geometric criss-crossing. I observe that the pattern structure, which I chose to employ presents sections of freshly planted young trees and denser areas of mature trees, ready for harvesting.

It reminds me of French novelist Alain Robbe Grillet's unromantic descriptions of a plantation engulfing a house in his book *Jealousy* (1957). Robbe Grillet's methodical, geometric descriptions are particularly of interest to me as I sense his frustration with the lack of order and his colonial desire to discipline and control the land:

On all sides of the garden, as far as the borders of the plantation, stretches the green mass of the banana trees. On the right and the left, their proximity is too great, combined with the veranda's relative lack of elevation, to permit an observer stationed there to distinguish the arrangement of the trees; while further down the valley, the quincunx can be made out at first glance. In certain very recently replanted sectors those where the reddish earth is just

Fig. 31 (opposite)
Amy Sio-Atoa, 2015. Photoshop plan for plantation design.

beginning to yield supremacy to foliage – it is easy enough to follow the regular perspective of the four intersecting lanes along which the young trunks are aligned (Robbe-Grillet, 1957, p. 5).

As my eyes explore higher and I approach the embroidery, I reminisce about the sensation of the light pouring through palm leaves in the botanic gardens and I find my imagination placing me under the canopy. I catch myself enjoying the sunshine dancing on the leave just as it reflects off the dense layers of stitching currently vibrating in the natural light of the room. This nostalgic moment causes me to consider the symbolism of the palm tree. It has been used often throughout visual and material culture and specifically textile design as a signal to trigger the illusion of tropical paradise in the collective imagination.

This design entitled *Living in a Fool's Paradise* developed in a different way to *Arcadia*. It was influenced by research into the nostalgia surrounding palm trees communicated through Hawaiian textile prints, botanic illustrations and the stark contrast with contemporary aerial photography of palm plantations. In a research-through-making methodology, the narrative of this work emerged through the act of analysing and reflecting upon the embroideries that were created in response to related readings and critical analysis of visual material.

This embroidered work intends to acknowledge and then break textile traditions that rely on a gridded pattern structure. The design recognises the relationship between a textile half-drop pattern, and the regular spacing of trees based on a European format of planting. Where the pattern falls out of beat it suggests contours in the land and variations in growth. There is a point

at which one embroidery frame is out of vertical alignment by a few degrees, but in the scheme of the scene it looks subtly like a change in terrain. The obvious diagonal pattern ascends into a densely planted section of overlaid embroidery, which appears to suggest distance and scale in a strange manner. There is a spatial, dimensional flattening, which often happens in scenic textile prints due to the simplification of imagery and motifs for screen print production.

I remember reading Patty O'Brien's historical study of Pacific colonialism. She states that 'clichés tied loosely to the fragmentary knowledge of the islands, their peoples and the history of Western colonization in the region often alone constitute the "Pacific" in popular culture' (2006).

Upon further analysis of Hawaiian imagery shown in my workbook, I came to the conclusion that whilst paradise may not actually exist, it operates in the realm of both melancholic memory – a longing for something unattainable and missing; and nostalgic memory, which paints an identity over places in an attempt to construct the illusions of paradise in the collective imagination (Olalquiaga, 1999) (Prasad, 2015). For example the Monstera leaf, which is abundantly used in Hawaiian prints, is not only an imported plant and not native to Hawaii, but it is also a noxious weed.

Such pondering inspired me to define 'Colonial Nostalgia' since it is such a key theme in this work. Independent scholar and cultural historian Celeste Olalquiaga, speaks of nostalgia that looks through rose-tinted glasses, 'a perfectly flawless version of itself,' without the grist, looking back with fondness and falsification (1999). This definition is enlarged by Prasad's assertion that 'colonial nostalgia is grounded in materiality and historicity



Fig. 32
Amy Sio-Atoa, 2014. Embroidered Monstera leaf on organza.



(seeking a re-enactment of historical forms)' (Prasad, 2015, p.3). I have observed the way that souvenirs and textile designs on Hawaiian shirts are used to construct a romantic notion of an imagined place, fabricating a reality. This visual language is clearly pitched at the tourist market, with a rose-tinted lens, there is never anything threatening or uncomfortable present. The purposeful manipulation and operation of nostalgia in the collective imagination inspired the narrative for this work.

The title for this design, *Living in a Fool's Paradise* is an idiom for living in an imaginary world where everything is perfect, refusing to acknowledge the existence of any trouble. I considered the historic impact of colonial nostalgia and its persistent presence in the contemporary tropical environment, which led me to wonder whether it would be possible to use embroidery to critique colonial nostalgia and purge its romanticism whilst acknowledging the ways in which land has been dominated and taken over. I began to consider elements that threaten the romantic nostalgia of a tourist's paradise, which I explored through some early experiments shown in Fig. 33-35.

Images of Hawaiian prints that demonstrate the perpetuation of nostalgia and the use of the palm tree. '...the palm tree became the ubiquitous sign of the tropics, images of it instantly signalling less a botanic species than an imaginative submersion in hot places' (Stepan, 2001, p. 49).

Hawaiiana is a medley of emblems juxtaposed to construct the illusion of tropical paradise. In order to critique that constructed identity, I wondered if I could examine the symbolism of one of these emblems and re-present it in a contemporary context to critique nostalgia. The palm tree is a key symbol, which is inseparable from the tropical visual language of 'paradise' and yet



Fig. 33 (opposite left)
Amy Sio-Atoa, 2015. Cockroaches embellish a purchased Hawaiian printed cotton voile.

Fig. 34 (opposite right)
Amy Sio-Atoa, 2015. A flamingo drawn from John J. Audubon's *American Flamingo*. My embroidery is being strangled by six-pack plastic rings.

Fig. 35 (above)
Amy Sio-Atoa, 2015. Interpreting embroidered palms.



Fig. 36
Amy Sio-Atoa, 2015.

in the contemporary world, the production of palm oil is a topic of grave socio-ecological concern. The palm emblem has been used so frequently throughout textile design history, exemplified above, as a signal to trigger the illusion of tropical paradise in the collective imagination.

Nancy Leys Stepan asserts that in the nineteenth century the popular visual tropicalization of plants was stimulated by the voyages of explorers and the development of natural history and botanic studies at the time. She also comments that the palm tree came to be valued as objects of nature and that '...the palm tree became the ubiquitous sign of the tropics, images of it instantly signalling less a botanic species than an imaginative submersion in hot places' (Stepan, 2001, p. 19).

Fig. 37 (opposite top)
Gilbert, D. 2009. Aerial photograph of plantations.

Fig. 38 (opposite bottom)
Kohler, F. 1897. Palm.



I connected with the association of palm trees to tropical places because as I researched Hawaiian prints I found that that palm trees were prevalent in almost all designs. Similarly, in a simple Google image search for 'paradise', every single image has an island with a palm tree in it; this demonstrates the extent of the contemporary imaginative symbolism of palm trees.

In this design, I have purposefully chosen not to juxtapose the palm tree with sunsets, beaches and other emblems of paradise. But instead, I have positioned the tree in an intensely domesticated, controlled and colonized scenario in an attempt to critique colonial nostalgia by presenting the embroidered palm plantation landscape reminiscent of colonial European farming patterns with a geometrical structure. This registers what Stepan writes: '...the productive farm of Europe, the outcome of centuries of human manipulation of the terrain...remained the ideal natural landscape for most Europeans't (Stepan, N. 2001, p. 54).

I drew a parallel between contemporary colonial impact upon the structure of land use and colonial taxonomy's intent to categorise and control from the style of botanic illustrations.

As I analysed this drawing I acknowledged its perceived scientific authenticity communicated through the drawing style (Fig 38). The way in which the palm is singled out on a parchment white background lends a sense of historicity (Prasad, 2015). It also suggests a European worldview that endorses collecting plant specimens and removing them from their original context. These aspects contributed to the decision to work on unbleached seeded cotton, similar to the affect of isolating the drawing on the book page apart from its environment and culture.



Fig. 39
Amy Sio-Atoa, 2015. Testing the scale of palms.

I began experimenting with manipulating one embroidered palm motif, reflected and scaled in a delicate almost monotone palette (Fig. 36). The purposeful subtlety of colour and the repetition within the surface makes me recall eco-political and socio-political concerns regarding the western approach to farming with monoculture farming and its impact on biodiversity and ecosystems. This issue was raised in reading cultural theorist Geoff Park's commentary regarding an importance to reinvigorate the native people's farming practices and their cultural approach to guardianship of the land, which has been changed through the process of colonisation to support modern 'development' (Park, G. 2006). This conceptual understanding led me to see in my early sampling that the seeded cotton 'ground' and the palest palms seem to be sucking the last of the nutrients from the soil.

The first technical revelation in this project came about in deciding the scale of the palms (Fig. 39). As the thickness of the embroidery thread could not change and decrease as the size of the palm motif reduces, there is a point at which the leaves of the palm become too dense and indistinguishable. The density of the stitching and sharp zigzagging causes regular thread breakages, which dramatically effects production time and quality. This issue also operates in the increase of scale, the palm leaves can look too sparse, and the consistency of the aesthetic of the palm motif is altered. This experiment set a size range of 15cm to 21cm high to work within.

Symbolism

Living in a Fool's Paradise intends to critique the symbolism of palm trees that are used in tourism marketing and manipulated in so many situations to provoke colonial nostalgia. Commercially, palm trees are planted across the globe for palm oil production, the sheer quantity of palm oil demanded by the western food and cosmetic corporations. The demand for palm oil is such that vast swathes of land are planted for palm oil monocrops, stripping the land of a bio diverse habitat (Hall, 2011). By placing the palm tree in the context of a plantation, which is not usually glorified, the embroidery shifts the prevalent imagination of the palm tree emblem and it dispels the nostalgic perspective. The crosses connect to 'paradise' because of the imagining of islands and mapping out places, 'X' marks the spot on treasure maps. Crosses also refer to the imperial intent to possess the land and subdue it (Lowenthal, 2007). The crosses also refer to the way in which farmers mark trees to be cut down, or where the ground is marked to determine where the trees get planted.



It was important for the weight of the embroidered line to be fine so that the layers and intersections of the palm fronds could build up in density and create a sense of an overgrown canopy, this was informed by my how my imagination interpreted Robbe Grillet's description at the beginning of this chapter. In places the fine lines overlap in six dense layers, creating an impenetrable barrier.

Where the variety of greens converge the light reflects off the threads and gives the illusion of movement. As the thickness of the thread could not change and decrease as the size of the palm motif reduces, there is a point at which the leaves of the palm become too dense and indistinguishable. The density of the stitching and sharp zigzagging causes regular thread breakages, which dramatically effects production time and quality.

The second technical revelation in this work related to stitch width and line weight. The machine produces single running stitch smoothly and the machine can handle stitching about six or seven layers on top of one another. (Fig 41).

Double running stitch is very much like a split stitch in hand embroidery; it stitches back through the last stitch. In doing this it creates a raised line, but also causes the thread to break more frequently as it stitches over itself and the stitch size appears to be very small. For embroidery of this scale the regular thread breakages would be have been a significant production problem, so I brought this control, just as a plantation owner would carefully select the species of their crop.

When I undertook embroidery-digitising training with Walker Sotech, I



Fig. 40 (opposite)
Amy Sio-Atoa, 2015. *Living in a Fool's Paradise*

Fig. 41 (above)
Amy Sio-Atoa, 2015. Double, single and triple running stitch (left to right).



Fig. 42 (left)
Reviewing embroidered completed canvas.



Fig. 43 (centre)
Finding gaps in the trees and colour composition.



Fig. 44 (right)
CAD colours.

learned that an important part of a digitiser's role is to design a file with as few thread trims as possible, and equally minimise the likelihood of breakages through selecting a stitch time according to the weight of fabric or design being produced.

In this palm motif design, I worked to use continuous line wherever possible to avoid the machine slowing down to a stop to cut threads. This caused fewer thread breakages and assisted with production.

During the production process I found that when I stepped back and looked at the embroidered textile *Living in a Fool's Paradise*, there were 'gaps' in the planting and imbalances in the placement of darker palms. This 'flaw' was as a result of struggling to see the overall effect when I was zoomed in so closely to the surface, scrutinising one framed section of the embroidery at a time. It is also due to the limited vivid CAD colours on the colour select panel (Fig. 44), which made it hard to envisage the colour balance and composition in



the end product, even though I had already planned out the colours on the Photoshop design (Fig. 45). I had to review the design and note positions to place single palms to fill the gaps as though replanting where sections of a plantation are unsuccessful.

In the process of producing a large scale embroidery it was necessary to print a paper copy of the design at actual size and trace the corners of the frames with tailor's tacks in order to have something to line up embroidery frames with when moving across the surface. It gives reference points to register with, which sometimes need to be approximate as the size of the fabric pulls in and reduces slightly when heavily stitched – even on a stable, sturdy canvas. I also found it really helpful to align the tree trunks with the straight grain and in turn the edge of the embroidery machine frame as I moved the fabric from one frame to the next.

As a European, I felt a sense of colonial guilt when I recognised that I was



Fig. 45 (left)
Photoshop map for aligning frames.

Fig. 46 (centre)
Selecting colours.

Fig. 47 (right)
Stitching frame by frame.

All images on this page taken by Amy Sio-Atoa.

entering into the romanticism of the tropics in my imagination and creative works. In response I came to feel that it was my duty to represent the myth and recognise the impact upon the land. Interestingly, I found that the repetitive process of producing this drop purged the romanticism that had been haunting me thus far. The hours spent digitising the embroidery for seventeen sections of the scene, the twenty-five hours of stitching out on the digital embroidery machine, the repetition of stitching a frame, moving the fabric and realigning – it all felt very mechanical. The experience felt like establishing a plantation.

When I reviewed the embroidered tapestry there were places where my 'crop' failed, or awkward negative spaces became apparent from misaligned frames. There is a level of perfectionism in my practice, so I became responsive and re-planted, re-embroidered extra trees in. So whilst the romanticism of the palm tree was dispelled for me, I still found my perfectionism leading me to place controls on the environment that I was creating.

Close focus on the detail caused me to struggle to see the bigger picture, just as colonial plantation owners would have a narrow lens. However, as an experienced digital embroidery designer and practitioner I knew that there would be a change in how the framing would affect the big picture. In a similar way, I have come to realise that my view of paradise has changed as I have broadly researched and reviewed the subject of textiles and paradise. I write about my change in perspective more fully in the conclusion.

As stated previously in the Introduction, my personal fascination with the tropical exotic led me to hold onto the perceived 'loveliness' that existed in my imagination of a paradise (Fig. 1). At the beginning of this project my

imagination was operating under a nostalgic colonial lens. I was unwilling to face the fact that places branded as paradise have been oppressed through the process of colonialism. I did not notice the perpetuation of colonial perspectives in textile design until I began examining textiles for this research.

While this chapter has had quite a pragmatic approach, the next chapter takes more poetic license, exploring the feeling of being in a humid, tropical climate. 'Phantasmagoria' also explores fecundity and the excessive fertility of tropical plants.

Guys Like Gauguin

I

thanks Bougainville
for desiring 'em young
so guys like Gauguin could dream
and dream
then take his syphilitic body
downstream to the tropics
to test his artistic hypothesis

about how the uncivilised
ripen like pawpaw
are best slightly raw
delectably firm
dangling like golden prepubescent buds
seeding nymphomania
for guys like Gauguin

II

thanks Balboa
for crossing the Isthmus
of Panama
in 1513
and pronouncing our ocean
the South Seas
hey thanks, Vasco
for making us
your underbelly
the occidental opposite of all
your nightmares
your waking dreams
inversion of all your laws
your darkest fantasies

thanks for seeing the earth as a body
the North, its head
full of rationality
reasoned seasons
of meaning

cultivated gardens
of consciousness
sown in masculine
orderly fashion
a high evolution
toward the light

thanks for making the South
an erogenous zone
corporeal and sexual
emotive and natural
waiting in the shadows
of dark feminine instinct
populated by the Africas
the Orient, the Americas
and now us

*

A Poem by
Selina Tusitala Marsh, n.d.

Phantasmagoria

The sensual descriptions of plants in Marsh's poem *Guys Like Gauguin* represent the way European representations of tropical nature are loaded with the overt sexuality of tropical plants as found in the line that describes thick, waxy, 'bizarre' forms with vibrant flora and seeds so enormous that they represent 'superabundant fertility but also fatal excess' (Stepan, 2001, p. 21). *Guys Like Gauguin* is also a critique of Paul Gauguin's sexualized representation of South Pacific women as noted in *Spirit of the Dead Watching* (1892), which represents a shift from the delicate Olympian nude to the figure of a thirteen year old girl in a vulnerable and exposed posture. In paintings of this time it was rare for women's buttocks to be on display. In these paintings, Gauguin reveals his dark imagination toward the tropics, which present fecundity and thick, humid atmosphere revealed through his intense use of saturated complementary colours and foreboding figures lurking in the background.

Leys Stepan also writes about imagining the tropics from a geographical distance: '[T]ropical nature began to acquire for me some of the fantastic or even the phantasmatic, character of the images of the tropics that I was examining... I visited tropical nature not in reality but in my imagination' (Stepan, 2001). Stepan's acknowledgement of the significant role that imagination plays in shaping ideas of paradise informed this design's focus on 'phantasmagoria', a term according to dictionary sources, defined as



Fig. 48 (left)
Marianne North. 1830. *Nephenthes Northiana*.

Fig. 49 (right)
n.a. *Alloxyylon flammeum* seed pod.



Fig. 50
Paul Gauguin. *Spirit of the Dead Watching*, 1892. Oil on canvas. Albright Knox Art Gallery.

'pertaining to or of the nature of a phantasm; unreal; illusory; spectral; phantasmal creatures of nightmare' (Stepan, 2001, p. 7).

This design does not seek to critique Gauguin, but draws upon the European representation of 'bizarre and deadly' plants (Stepan, 2001, p. 21). *Embellished Phantasmagoria* offers another imagining in contrast to the idyllic beach scenery that is pictured in many visualisation of paradise. This design maintains a certain poetic license, and reveals what is in the darkness. It presents the imagination of being in the heat of a torrid tropical landscape, and draws upon the notion of 'phantasmal creatures' climbing to dominate a fertile, juicy saturated environment.

The tale of *Embellished Phantasmagoria* begins in the recesses of my imagination as a collection of fragmented memories from my childhood. I remember the virile plants of *Jumanji* climbing out of the cupboard and threatening to engulf a household in an invasion of rapidly growing tropical plants. It captures the curious nature of anticipating a tranquil paradise and being confronted with the unfamiliar discomfort of a tropical nature so fecund and 'superabundant' (Stepan, 2001, p. 21) that it is untameable.

The sensual shapes and bursting seed heads in Marianne North and Martin Johnson Heade's botanic paintings exemplify a European fascination with the fecundity of the tropics. Here we find North and Heade illustrating abundance, environmental consumption, natural ecologies of fruiting and decay. The colours in Fig. 51 are rich and include variations of deep greens in the leaves with a waxy surface; the brighter limes and reds, a tropical, rich and fertile aesthetic. The ochre tinted khaki dying leaf lends an authenticity to the palette in that not everything is healthy and this prevents the colours



Fig. 51 (left)
Marianne North, (c. 1830) *Foliage, Flowers and Fruit of a swamp Shrub of Borneo*.

Fig. 52 (centre)
Marianne North, (c. 1830). *Foliage and Fruit of the Akee, Jamaica*.

Fig. 53 (right)
Martin Johnson Heade. (1871). *Cattleya Orchid and Three Hummingbirds*.

from looking plastic. This effected my decision to use colours, which look quite sickly in combination with each other, combining fluorescent lime with oranges and coral. I also decided to interpret the notion of fecundity through a bursting seed head full of maggots, and a flower with a tongue protruding from its petals. In Heade's painting *Cattleya Orchid and Three Brazillian Hummingbirds* (Fig. 53) the light touching on leaves in the lower half of the painting illuminates a sinister quality lurking on the surface; it produces a foreboding effect. The heavy grey skies and silhouette of hanging mosses suggest a moist, humid atmosphere that suggests an ominous storm passing or approaching.



In *Embellished Phantasmagoria*, I selected a deep charcoal petrol green (Pantone 5535C) for the pattern ground, which was inspired by the dark shadows in the Wellington Botanic Gardens. Extensive colour experimentations led to creating greens from different base colours including combinations of deep navy blue, golden yellow and scarlet make a muddy palette of greens. Those mixed using turquoise, lemon yellow and scarlet produce crisper fresh greens. Juxtaposing the muddy deep greens and the fresh limes has an almost foreboding, radioactive affect. The khaki greens begin to blend into the ground creating a tangled appearance, while the fluorescent greens springs forward. The embroidered motifs bring gems of colour to entice and seduce the viewer, while some of the cockroaches are subtly blended into the vines where they reflect light and glow in the darkness. It was important to draw the viewer in, so that as they look closer they find the maggots, the teeth and the stranger aspects of the motifs, which emulate the bizarre.

Within imagination of the tropics are sexual suggestions stimulated by the abundant fecundity of plant growth, the heat of the climate, the sheer gigantic size of flowers and fruit and the general sense of excess and fertility that thrives exponentially. Such imaginations are collectively held, and were commonly exaggerated in lithographs of botanic illustrators (Stepan, 2001, p. 21) as demonstrated by Marianne North's painting of the staghorn fern (Fig. 55).

The notion of tropical fecundity and phantasmagoria is of contemporary interest as demonstrated by Erdem's spring 2015 Fashion collection (Blanks, 2015). Inspired by Marianne North's painting collection at the Royal Botanic

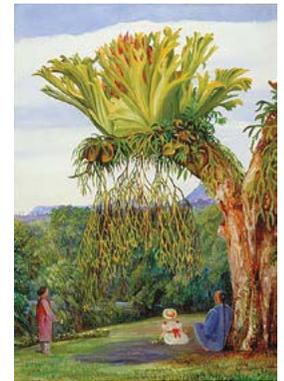


Fig. 54 (opposite)
Amy Sio-Atoa, 2014.

Fig. 55 (above)
Marianne North. 1830. *Staghorn Fern and the Young Rajah of Sarawak, Borneo, with Chinese Attendant*. Oil painting.



Gardens at Kew (Blanks, 2015), Erdem's fully embroidered collection juxtaposes Victorian architecture with a desire to 'tame' the tropics. The commentary written by fashion reviewer Tim Blanks uses the descriptive phrases such as 'steamy, dark, slightly sinister', 'riotous embroidery', 'encroachment of feathers and fronds', 'Victorian propriety', 'incipient chaos' and 'trapping something wild' to represent the Victorian European desire to tame tropical nature (Blanks, 2015).

The vegetation on textile designer Timorous Beastie's *Topical Tropical* armchair inspired me. The contorted warty red tendrils suggest entangling movement coming to entrap the sitter. The orchids have an avian beak-like tongue, which is reminiscent of Heade's orchids and echoing a threatening environment, (FIG. 53). In my opinion, this chair emulates the discomfort of the tropics via the sheer scale of the vegetation in relation to the body is intimidating. It begs one to wonder whether it is safe to sit or whether a giant weta will creep out from the chair's recesses to greet you.



The visual language expressed in the textile work *Embellished Phantasmagoria* stems from analysis of a wide range of imagery specific to fecundity and abundance. Its design concentrates on the notion that the threatening, overbearing excesses of tropical nature are exaggerated 'through a focus on the bizarre [and fantastical]' (Stepan, 2006, p. 49).

Embellished Phantasmagoria displays embellished fantastical plant embroideries that speak to the idea of phantasmic 'creatures of a nightmare' introduced by Leys Stepan. I imagine being in a humid tropical climate and expecting to find strange unfamiliar plant forms which provoke curiosity, but yet also bring a mild affect of the bizarre just as the images shown here

in Fig. 57 provoke a reaction of surprise. Colloquial plant names include 'Hooker's Lips', which are appropriately shaped and delectably shiny; 'Dracula Orchid', whose tooth-like reproductive parts appear to be poised ready to nibble; and the 'Angry-Faced Monkey Orchid', mouth open in an invasive scream.

The design arouses a curiosity in the benign creepiness and the grotesque aspects of the imagined tropics, and the hidden in the sexualisation of tropical nature in European fantasy. This embroidered length presents interpretations of digital photographs of these plants, which are intriguing in their uncanny similarity to human or mammalian features.



Fig. 56 (opposite)
Timorous Beasties, (2015). *Topical Tropical* Linen Upholstered Chair.

Fig. 57 (above)
Dracula's Orchid, Hookers Lips and Angry Monkey faced Orchid.

Pattern and Domestication

Having analysed the imagery and texts as described above, I began to critique the sanitised version of nature so often presented in textile print and embroidery; my designs began to confront it with notions and representations of the phantasmic. I manipulated hand-drawn vines into a 'serpentine' textile print repeat structure, a common domestic wallpaper pattern used most notably from the eighteenth and early nineteenth century when colonial exploration and botanical drawings were popular. In his book *Line and Form*, Walter Crane, a contemporary of William Morris and active participant in the Arts and Crafts movement declared that:

"If [the wallpaper designer] has succeeded in making an agreeable pattern which will repeat not too obviously over an indefinite space, to form a not obtrusive background, and which can be printed and sold to the ordinary citizen, he is supposed to have satisfied the conditions [of traditional textile design]" (Walter Crane, 1914, p. 252).

Embellished Phantasmagoria was inspired by the discomfort that untamed, dense, tangled foliage creates (Fig. 64). I chose to highlight the European tendency towards domestication and the colonial desire to subdue nature in a jarring and unexpected way by inserting sexualised plant motifs that depict cracked fruit spilling with maggots, lychees or rambutan which have been interpreted as hairy eyeballs, orchids with open mouths ready to bite and a sinuous tongue reaching out, an interpretation of the angry monkey orchid, screaming aggressively, and a plethora of cockroaches. While *Embellished Phantasmagoria* operates within the rules of balanced textile repeat design, it

also suggests a moving away from those rules in order to see paradise as the cultural construct it is and then examine social habits toward taming the land and verdant plant life.

In this design, the sexuality and fertility of the plants is boldly apparent unlike the work of Marsh where the modest layered petals of English roses cut from the 'cultivated gardens' veil their reproductive parts. The overt fecundity of plants critique the prevailing paradigm of interior textiles, which usually display domesticated and sanitised versions of 'nature'. I imagined that the sinister and seductive shapes fraught with phallic and yonic associations could affect a curiosity and a sense of discomfort if presented in a domestic interior textile.

Such a ploy was motivated by Gam'plus' Fratesis work ANT'IQUE (2004) which succeeds in subverting a familiar baroque-inspired wallpaper design comprising of millions of crawling ants that collectively create an overall pattern. At a distance one sees the traditional design style, but when one looks closer, the ants, which signify discomfort in a fecund environment, trigger a sickening reaction related to dirt, infestation and an unhomey fear of invasion of nature.

I sought to adopt and extend the viciousness and threat shown in the photographic imagery above in my own design. This intention was met with limited success. The digital embroidery process requires a certain simplification of motif into block shapes for satin stitch fills and line work for stitched lines. This simplification demonstrated in Fig. 65 lends a certain cartoon-esque aesthetic. Where I wanted to affect a sense of danger and threat, the motifs have lost some of the bizarreness and instead are



Fig. 58
Amy Sio-Atoa, 2015.



Fig. 59
Amy Sio-Atoa, 2015.



reminiscent of children's horror toys. However, in reference to the cartoon-esque quality of the Hawaiiana motifs discussed in chapter two, I think there is potential to bring this aesthetic technique closer to the darker side of the imagination. Where I haven't been able to affect a sense of threat in the embroidered motifs, I think this could be achieved by using more photographic imagery to affect a sense of horror, and use the embroidery as the structure, which ties digitally photographic motifs together.

I sought to test the controlling limits of traditions within commercial textile design practice, for example the prevalence of, agreeable and sanitised imagery, which is used in wallpaper design. I wanted to subvert the common practice of displaying harmonious florals within wallpaper as demonstrated by William Morris in Fig. 11, and create an interior textile, which dominates the space. This is in contrast to Crane's assertion to use 'agreeable pattern' (Crane, 1914) in wallpaper design as backdrop, which recedes in a space. I have interpreted the line of the vines shown in Fig. 64, which were delicately meandering through the traditional structure. I layered, offset and entangled them to create a dense, overbearing surface. The embroidery injects sexualised plant motifs into a common domestic wallpaper structure.

Embellished Phantasmagoria subverts the expectation of comfort and familiarity with oppressive tangled vines and a dark, sinister colour palette, just as the discovery of overwhelming humidity and incessant insects jar with European tourist expectations of a restful paradise. While this design presents a critique of interior wallpapers that contain, and control nature, it is not intended for a commercial interior, but rather intended as an exhibition artwork, which is capable of critiquing social, cultural and political ideas.

Fig. 60 (opposite) Amy Sio-Atoa, 2015.
This design was assisted by initially placing my motifs over the top, and using this analysis to consider direction of motif, balance of colour and their impact upon the pattern balance.



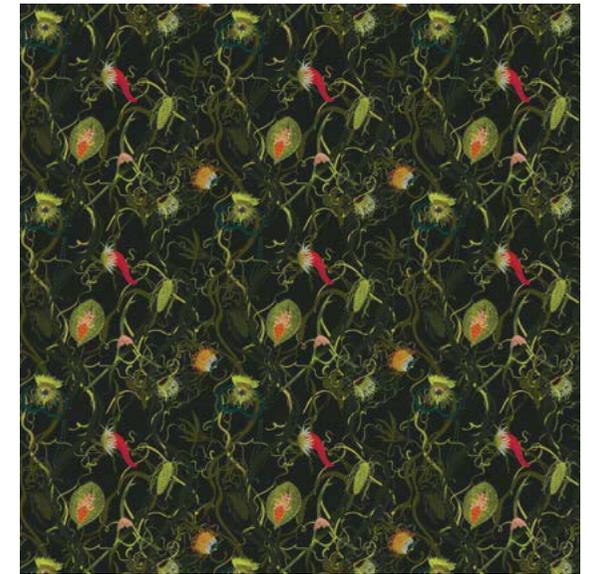
Fig. 61 (top left)
Mary Delaney, 1775, *Pancratium Maritimum*.
Botanical collage of cut and coloured paper.

Fig. 62 (top right)
Hilden Diaz, 2012, *Forms in Nature chandelier*
inspired by Ernst Haeckel's drawings.

Fig. 63 (bottom)
Timorous Beasities, *Topical Tropical*, 2015 close
up.

Fig. 64 (opposite)
Amy Sio-Atoa, 2015.

During the design process, the colours selected had a significant impact upon the effectiveness of the print design. I intentionally layered a toxic vibrant lime vine underneath khaki and deeper petrol green vines as the brightness of the lime lurches forward and the other colours recede, enhancing the tangled effect. As the first iteration of print design seemed too benign (Fig.58), I decided to create variations in the vine layers, one with thicker sinuous stems influenced by the lighting of Hilden Diaz, a second one inspired by Delaney and *Topical Tropical* by Timorous Beasities with undulating vine thicknesses that emulate a bulging boa constrictor; and another one with fine multi-directional tendrils which appear intent on entrapment (FIGS 61, 62, 63).





Embellished Phantasmagoria is a malignant night-time pattern of vines curling to lure you in and sending out tangled tendrils to entrap. It boasts unfamiliar and strange plant forms with moist and fecund sensibilities. The sexuality of the embroidered plant motifs, as with many plant forms in the tropics, is unapologetically bold. It is embellished with cockroaches that infest the vines, embroidered in a colour, which camouflages into the print. The threads reflect the light so that they glimmer in the darkness; the revelation that the surface is invested with cockroaches becomes visible on the second glance. This design provokes a curiosity in the benign creepiness and the grotesque aspects of the imagined tropics, and the hidden in the sexualisation of tropical nature in European fantasy.



Fig. 65 (opposite)
Amy Sio-Atoa, 2015.

Fig. 66
Amy Sio-Atoa, 2015.

Conclusion

This research project aimed to critique European perspectives of paradise through textile design. The process involved exploring existing visual and written literature and then embellishing and re-presenting the narratives in order to highlight inaccuracy in the myth or exacerbate nostalgia associated with paradise.

At the beginning of this design journey, I firmly believed in the beauty of tropical visual language and I was oblivious to the associated myths that were prevalent in European perspectives. In researching through making and reading, my lens changed and I now acknowledge the sinister underbelly or effect of these myths and attitudes. I have come to a fuller awareness of the effects of colonial perspectives informing the narratives embedded in textiles. In these creative works, I have not rejected paradise, but instead I have inhabited, re-presented, embellished, augmented and exacerbated myths of paradise through my textile designs. I have demonstrated that embroidery and print in textile design are appropriate devices for story telling. I have re-presented these myths in order to captivate people in their nostalgia and critique prevailing myths fostered by 19th century colonial paradigms of 'paradise'.

I have exerted mastery in digitally printed and digitally embroidered textiles in the development of three textile designs, each of which respond to and critique a myth using visual language of pattern, colour, motif, and

symbolism. Through my practice I have extended my skills to apply visual language through digital print. I now carefully consider drawing styles and the meaning and impact of colours that I employ. I have learned how to read and critically reflect upon the meaning and symbolism inherent in motifs and use these to communicate narratives. Through producing Embellished Phantasmagoria I have also become more fluent in developing complex all-over textile repeat patterns. Using the Photoshop pattern tools, I compose motifs and balance colour in careful consideration of the impact upon pattern rhythm.

As this exegesis relates, each of the three designs evolved in their own way. Arcadia was designed in response to a colonial story and design precedents. The print and each element of the embroidery developed in order to communicate part of the story and together print and embroidery work to critique the imperial myth of abundance. A cockatoo embellishes the surface and represents Joseph Banks who aggressively expects to be fed by the local lorikeets.

In Colonial Nostalgia, the design was more iterative and the narrative came about as I was making and reflecting upon the work. The literature that I was reading regarding symbolism of palm trees and nostalgia informed how I 'read' the design and this in turn contributed to the narrative of Living in a Fool's Paradise. The repetitive use of a single palm digitised motif presents a monocrop plantation and the layered criss-crossing of palms present a dense canopy.

The design process for Embellished Phantasmagoria was different again and took more poetic license than the others. As I look back upon all the

many samples that I have made, I see evidence of the journey' maturation including setbacks, failures and reorientations. From an early stage I was fascinated with provoking curiosity and creating strange and fantastical plant forms. As I reflected upon these explorations, the approach to Embellished Phantasmagoria aimed to re-present and evoke the phantasmic affect of a superabundant environment that threatens its inhabitants. Embellished Phantasmagoria is the least successful in achieving its aim, as the cartoon quality of the embroidered figures hardly affect fear of malignant nature. However, I feel that when placed next to the simplified clichés represented in tropical textile prints, it definitely contributes a new imagination of paradise as it reveals something lurking in the darkness. It evokes the expectation of discovering benign yet bizarre and intriguing plant forms when exploring a tropical climate. This is reminiscent of the first time I saw a Rambutan; I thought it was the strangest little creature and its texture felt like eating an eyeball.

Each design interprets traditional controls in textile pattern design, which I relate to colonial control of land and people. Arcadia rejects the linear grid and composes a dense set of collaged motifs in a manner reminiscent of indigenous planting methods, which promote biodiversity. Living in a Fool's Paradise uses a singular motif to construct a plantation and yet succeeds in not looking rigid and geometric through subtle changes in scale, reflections and colour balance. Embroidered Phantasmagoria works within the structure of a serpentine textile repeat grid, but offers subversive content through unsanitised insect and sexualised plant motifs. These motifs in combination with a densely entangled print produce an intrusive effect when placed in a domestic environment.

In order for these works to have an impact upon prevalent paradigms of paradise the work needs to be distributed and shared through an exhibition and digital platforms. Myths take time to unravel, and I feel that my work contributes to the discourse of critiquing myth and challenging traditions of textile design when contextualised alongside the works of Timorous Beasties and Munchausen. My next challenge as a design research is to take this work and future work like it to the public realm and wider audiences.

The scope of this research has been relatively broad and the process of the Masters Degree has been so intensive that there are many ideas, thoughts and narratives that have been discarded and filtered out for the sake of narrowing the field of interest. The workbooks and notebooks that track my journey are rich with seeds for potential future explorations. The development of this research has informed my practice as a designer. As someone interested in history and cultural identity, I have enjoyed uncovering narratives to communicate through my work. I foresee that I will continue as a practitioner who tells stories through my work, though the focus of these stories may change.

As a European, I have found it confronting at times in this project to recognise the impact of colonialism. My lens has shifted; I am now more aware of how textiles can be used to critique dominant cultural paradigms. I have observed that my political voice is subtle and as such, my work does not present a loud nor aggressive challenge to the issues it reveals. The critique is identifiable in the content, material and imagery of the textiles and allows others to draw their own conclusions. I believe that this has been a role textiles has played in history and as such it highlights the power such imagery and imagine have

to contribute to bigger issues of our contemporary world. Upon reflection, each of the designs entice people into a new site of paradise through imagery or colour palettes. Yet, for the astute viewer, these designs have layers of symbolism embedded in the print and embroidery which hint at the inauthenticity of the prevailing and dominate European imagination of paradise. The embroidering 'hand', or rather the digitising mouse-click, is the political voice developing a respect and regard for what is taking over the narratives of the tropics.

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Fig. 8 & 9. Gabriel Charvet, Jean. (1829). *Les Sauvages de la Mer Pacifiques* [Panels 1-20 block-printed scene wall paper printed by French manufacturer, Dufour]. Retrieved from <http://nga.gov.au/conservation/Paper/details/66148left.cfm>.
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Fig 12. McAuley, A & Simmon, P. (2015). *Topical Tropical*. [Screen printed linen, 1360 cm wide, 1425 cm repeat]. Glasgow, Scotland. Retrieved from <http://www.timorousbeasties.com/shop/fabric/1882/topical-tropical/>
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Fig. 15. Rousseau, H. (1910). *The Dream*. [Oil on Canvas, 204.5 x 298.5cm]. Museum of Modern Art, New York. Retrieved from: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Dream_%28Rousseau_painting%29
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Fig 16. Ehrmann, E. Zipélius, G. & Fuchs, J. (c. 1915–25) *El Dorado*. [Scenic wall panel, wood block-printed on continuous paper; H x W: 199 x 54 cm (78 3/8 x 21 1/4 in.)] Retrieved from: <https://collection.cooperhewitt.org/objects/18488853/>
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Fig. 18. Bénéfice, M. (n.d). *O Tigre*. [Wallpaper design]. Retrieved from: <http://melaniebenefice.com/book.php>
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Fig 24. McAuley, A & Simmon, P. Timorous Beasties. 2005. *London Toile*. [Wallcovering, paper]. Retrieved from: <http://www.timorousbeasties.com/shop/wallcoverings/85/london-toile/>

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Fig. 25. Clifford, A. (2004). *Paradise Project*. [Wallpaper design] Retrieved from: Blackley, L. (2006). *Wallpaper*. London : Laurence King, 2006. Used with permission from Adrian Clifford, of Rinzen, via email, 15.02.16.

Fig. 28. Crane, W. (1899). *Cockatoo and Pomegranate* [A portion of wood block printed wallpaper]. London, England: Victoria & Albert Museum Department of Prints and Drawings and Department of Paintings. Image is in the Public Domain.

Fig. 37. Gilbert, D. Rainforest Action Network. (2009) *Cargill's Problems with Palm Oil*. [Photograph of Mature palm oil plantation at Cargill's PTT Harapan Sawit Lestari, Borneo] Retrieved from: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/rainforestactionnetwork/5551348343> Image is available under Creative Commons for non commercial purposes.

Fig. 38. Kohler, E (1897) *African Palm*. Retrieved from: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elaeis_guineensis#/media/File:Elaeis_guineensis_-_Köhler-s-Medizinal-Pflanzen-056.jpg Image is in the Public Domain.

Fig. 48. North, M. *Nepenthes northiana*, (c.1830) Retrieved from: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marianne_North#/media/File:Nepenthes_northiana_by_Marianne_North.jpg Image is in the Public Domain.

Fig. 49. *Unknown*. (n.d.) Photograph of *Alloxylon flammeum*.

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Fig. 50 Gauguin, P. (1892). *Spirit of the Dead Watching*. [Oil on canvas, 72.4 × 92.4 cm]. Albright Knox Art Gallery. Image is in the Public Domain. Retrieved from: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Paul_Gauguin_-_Manao_tupapau_\(The_Spirit_of_the_Dead_Keep_Watch\).JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Paul_Gauguin_-_Manao_tupapau_(The_Spirit_of_the_Dead_Keep_Watch).JPG) Image is in the Public Domain.

Fig.51 North, M. (c. 1830) *Foliage, Flowers and Fruit of a swamp Shrub of Borneo*. [Oil on Canvas]. Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew. London. Retrieved from: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/arts/yourpaintings/artists/marianne-north/paintings/slideshow?page=4#/21> Image is in the Public Domain.

Fig. 52. North, M. (c. 1830). *Foliage and Fruit of the Akee, Jamaica*. [Oil on Canvas]. Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew. London. Retrieved from: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/arts/yourpaintings/artists/marianne-north/paintings/slideshow?page=4#/21> Image is in the Public Domain.

Fig. 53. Johnson Heade, M. (1871). *Cattleya Orchid and Three Hummingbirds*. [Oil on Panel, 34.8 × 45.6 cm] National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. Image is in the Public Domain.

Fig. 55. North, M. (c. 1830). *Stagshorn Fern and the Young Rajah of Sarawak, Borneo, with Chinese Attendant*. Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew. London. Retrieved from: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/arts/yourpaintings/artists/marianne->

north/paintings/slideshow?page=4#/21
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Fig 56. McAuley, A & Simmon, P. Timorous Beasties. (2015). *Topical Tropical*. [Screen printed linen upholstered on chair. Glasgow, Scotland. Retrieved from <http://www.timorousbeasties.com/shop/fabric/1882/topical-tropical/> Used with permission from Timorous Beasties, via email, 10.02.16.

Fig. 57. Dracula's Orchid, Hooker's Lips, Monkey faced Orchid. Retrieved from: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dracula_%28orchid%29
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Fig. 61 Delaney, M. (1775). *Pancratium Maritimum*. [Botanical collage of cut and coloured paper.] Retrieved from: http://tmagazine.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/09/29/now-showing-mary-delany-a-force-of-nature/?_r=0
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Fig. 63. Fig 12. McAuley, A & Simmon, P. (2015). *Topical Tropical*. Close up. [Screen printed linen, 1360 cm wide, 1425 cm repeat]. Glasgow, Scotland. Retrieved from <http://www.timorousbeasties.com/shop/fabric/1882/topical-tropical/>
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