

Mariana Isara

Poem Notes

Rutu draws its inspiration from Rita Angus's painting of the same name. The text is primarily sourced from school children's responses to the painting when it was exhibited in Rita Angus: Life & Vision, at Te Papa. Interspersed with the children's comments are Angus's own words, and quotes from various sources. These quotes are intermingled in an attempt to question Rita Angus's idealised notion of a polynesian/pakeha identity and to engage with the painting's pacifist theme.

Poet Notes

Mariana Isara is a poet of Samoan and European descent.

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Rutu (1951)

Rutu looks like a girl
cowboy.

*

When I look at this picture
it reminds me of Rita
Angus and how she didn't
like war. She wanted peace and looked
like an angel.

*

'I am a conscientious objector to war...

A cowgirl is a woman with guts

...as an artist, it is my work to
create life and not to destroy.'

*

Paradise.
The cool beach, the elegant palms...

*

This image is of a woman wearing fake
tan, because she's trying to be like a PI
goddess. The circle behind her head looks
like the sun because she likes using fake
tan when she goes to the beach.

She also likes fishing and sniffing
flowers.

*

some may also regard it as a master
piece.

*

I love this painting because Rutu means
Ruth which is my name and she
seems very royal
just like me.

*

*Historically associated with white
privilege... 'afakasi
girls were treated like princesses*

*

your people shall be my people

Ruth, 1. 16

*

If I was this painting
I would be a Polynesian goddess. I like
my skin it is all brown
from the sunshine because
it is hot in the tropical
weather. The flower I
am holding is special
and pure because it is
a white lotus flower, which
represents peace. I
am at the beach and there
is no wind, the trees are
painted like they are still.

*

When I look at this painting
 it makes me feel
fresh.

*

*...many of us... (Rita included)
visualised an ideal state in New
Zealand where the two races would
inevitably intermingle - and
we would all end up somehow half
Pakeha and half Polynesian.*

*

I liked it because of the mixing of beautiful colours.

*

*Being 'afakasi, in fact
was described as an ambiguous
experience, associated with both positive
and negative consequences...*

*

Rita painted herself as a Pacific goddess,
 with dark skin even though she was
a kiwi.

Maybe she has blonde hair cos
□ she wanted to look young and
pretty.

*

The subject stares steadily into the distance,
perhaps remembering a past war, and feeling
regret.

*

*Rutu, or Ruth, a biblical name meaning com-
passion.*

‘I have taken stronger monastic, pacifist
vows...’

*

*My blood has been spilt for
Samoa. I am proud
to give it. Do not dream of avenging
it, as it was spilt in peace. If I die, peace
must be maintained at any price.*

Tupua Tamasese Lealofi III

*

I could tell from the sea it
was a calm day. I could tell
from her position she was
sad or lonely.

*

‘I work to represent love
of humanity and faith in man
kind in a world, which is
to me, richly variable and infinitely
beautiful’.

*□

I like rutu because she is
holding a lotus flower and
wearing fish around her neck. this

is a picture of rita her
self but with dark skin and blonde hair
so people with white skin and dark
skin can be together in peace.