

## 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.