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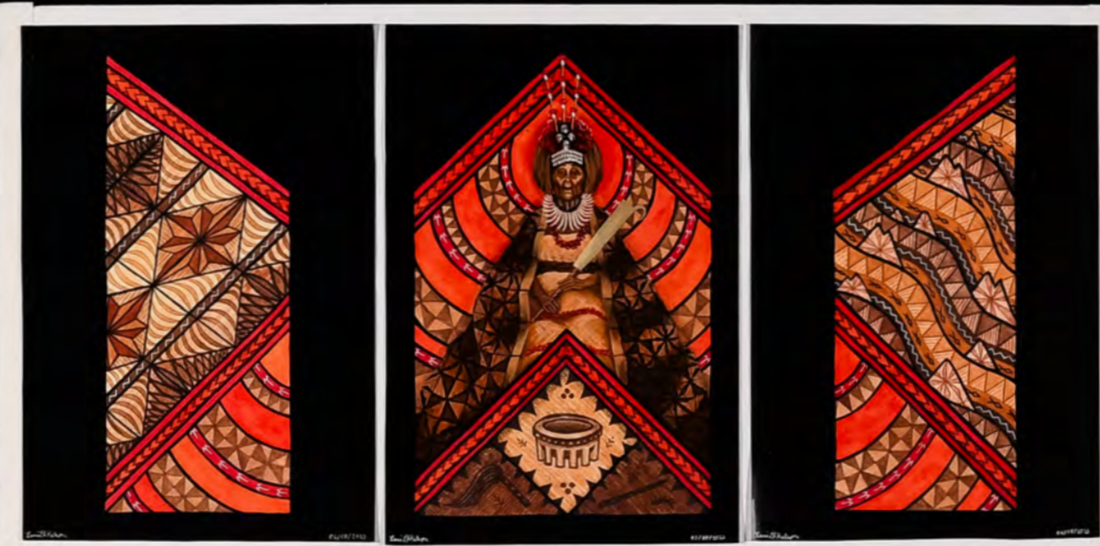
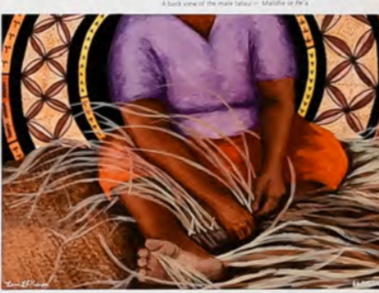
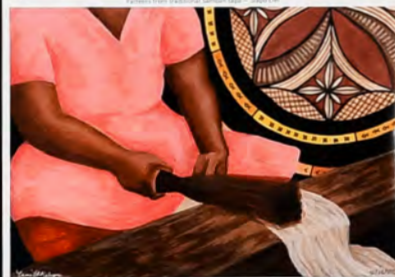
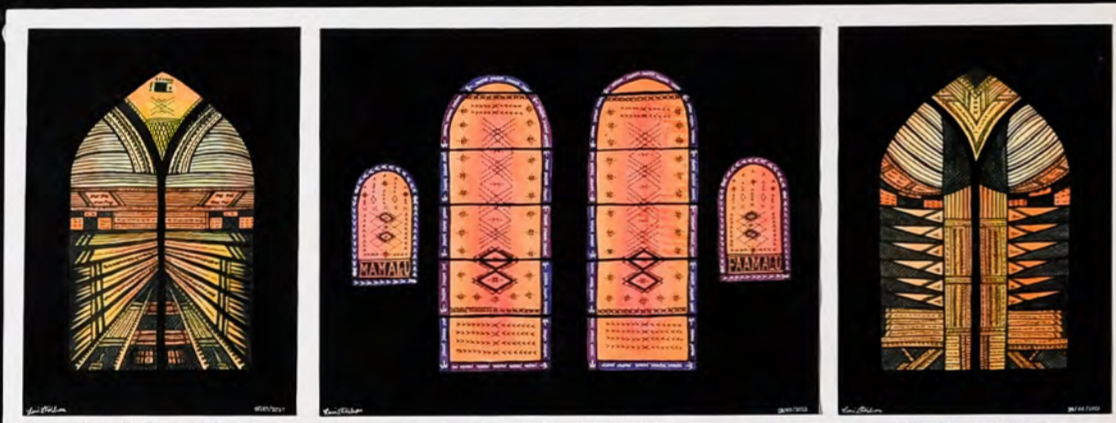


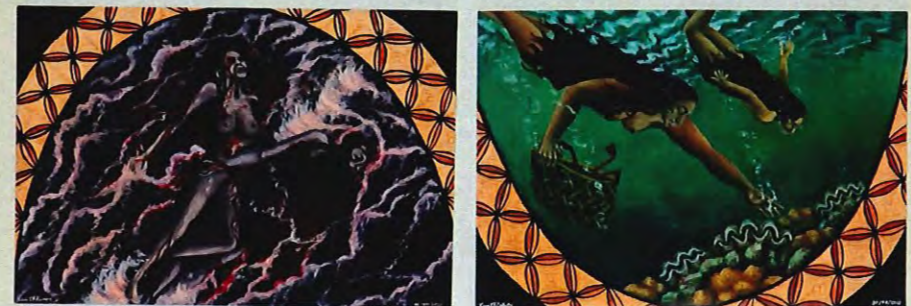
Mana Tohu Mātauranga o Aotearoa
New Zealand Qualifications Authority

Scholarship Visual Arts 2023

93306 Painting

OUTSTANDING SCHOLARSHIP EXEMPLAR





Proposal

The idea behind this year's portfolio is best summarised as 'Fa'asamoa, Fa'asinomaga' (Samoan way of life, Samoan identity), I want to depict the beauty and complexity of Samoan culture, traditions, and environment as well as how I navigate being a Samoan in the diaspora.

Through this portfolio I have returned to the ideas and imagery I have used in previous works, returning to my identity as a queer, NZ-born Samoan. I began this process with thinking of the portfolio as a visual diary using stained glass as the medium, but over time, I developed these ideas as looking into fa'asamoa (the Samoan way) and how I connect and interact with it. The stained glass and other biblical/christian mediums I used became a commentary on the influence of the church and colonial forces in Samoa.

Some themes I explore in this portfolio are the true value of fa'asamoa. By using stained glass firstly to portray Samoan art, like tatau (tattooing), lalaga (weaving), siapo (tapa), fale (architecture), and siva (dance). Then through tala fa'asolopito (history) by portraying samoan histories of creation and pre-colonial origin stories. I put aganu'u Samoa in a context and form palagi people can recognise and understand, making sense of a possibly foreign artform and showing the sacredness of it to Samoans. This results in one gaining an appreciation for what from a colonial lens, may be viewed as inferior forms of art.

I also explore the experiences of younger, culturally disconnected Samoans. By portraying the impacts of emigration from Samoa to New Zealand, I portray the juxtaposition of being New Zealand-born. The economic benefits I receive in this country that aren't afforded to those in Samoa, while missing out on being a part of and learning about fa'asamoa, because of the actions of my grandparents aiming to give us a better life. I convey the feelings of inadequacy and disconnection, being culturally assimilated, being disconnected from the church, and being queer.

Techniques and Imagery:

I used a specific colour palette to emphasise these themes, the colours are reminiscent of dyes used in tapa and are organic colours that can be sourced from nature.

The imagery incorporates a lot of traditional patterns of plants and animals further emphasising the connection between Samoan art and culture to nature and the environment.

I also used curved lines as a connection to halos featured in biblical artwork but also the dome shaped roofs of fale tele (meeting houses) which were modelled to be like the sky therefore giving a very heavenly and biblical sense to the images.



Contemporary topics



1960s immigration



Falafine



Main Artist Models

Faraimo Paulo

Is a current Tokelauan painter, carver, and designer who is "on a mission to record his peoples' history and culture." Emigration and climate change are factors affecting the Pacific and the themes of his Tokelauan art translate well to Fa'asamoa.



Edgar Miller

Was an American designer, painter, woodcarver, and renowned stained-glass designer of the 20th century. His bold designs are very reminiscent of medieval art both in colours, techniques and subject matter. The 40s and 50s resulted in mid-century elements being evident in his design.



Robin White DNZM

Is a current Māori artist who began by painting local New Zealand scenes but started exploring printmaking, and Pacific art like tapa and weaving. Her tapa art takes Pacific patterns and techniques to depict palagi scenes. Her prints uses Gilbertese words to depict life in the islands.



Fatu Feu'u ONZM

Is a current, highly respected Samoan painter. He uses traditional imagery to tell Samoan histories and emphasise the importance of fa'asamoa. He refers to his works as va'aomanu (vessels of knowledge.) He noted the differences in how art was viewed in Samoa and New Zealand, "beautifully made... canoes and houses" being art in Samoa and in NZ art was "something extra special not to be touched."



Broader Context

Many Pacific artists have explored these ideas and themes in both art and society. The true value of Fa'asamoa is something that Fatu Feu'u has contributed to greatly. Fa'asamoa is referenced as the unifying theme of his art and he takes his inspiration from traditional Samoan artforms and history while turning it into something distinctly his style. I have gone through a similar process in my own artworks. This is a technique well summarised in an old Samoan proverb,

“E sui faiga, ae tumau fa'avae”

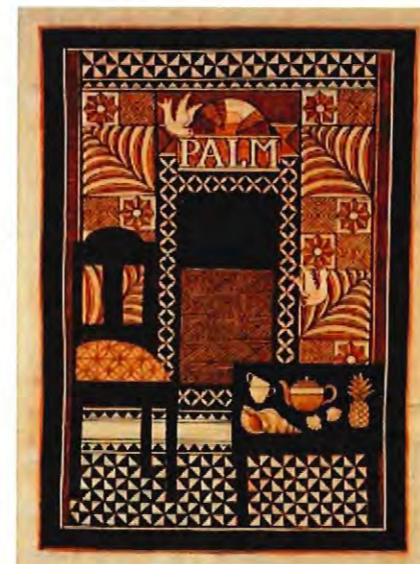
The form changes, but the underlying principles remain.



The dark history of the Pacific isn't something I have focused on in this portfolio but have done in past works. It was an intentional decision I made to reframe our history and culture without such a strong palagi focus but I have to acknowledge that these themes are connected to my chosen idea. Two artists who have highlighted the negative aspects are Pusi Urale and Jasmine Togo-Brisby.

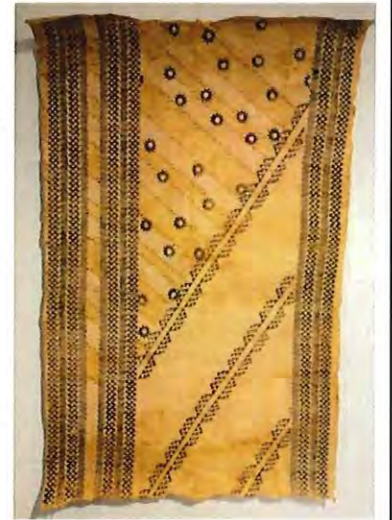


Urale looks into the enduring fetishising and exploitation of Pacific women by Palagi men, the “dusky maiden” stereotype. Most notably, she does this in her series “Blond Maidens” looking at “returning Gauguin’s gaze.” Jasmine Togo-Brisby bases her art around the Pacific slave trade looking at the horrific practice and impacts on South Sea Island people. She uses various forms of sculpture, installation, and photography to “create another space for our ancestors to live in.” The work ‘Bitter Sweet’ took sugar and resin forming them into skulls representing the South Sea Island people enslaved on sugar cane plantations. This is a technique I have used which is using European art and symbolism to reframe our history and culture. Robin White is another artist who has used this technique, she uses pacific artforms to depict Palagi scenes. Her recent works made in collaboration with Pacific artists uses tapa and traditional pigments and patterns to create very European still lifes.



Dalani Tanahy

Is a current Hawaiian artist a part of the revitalisation of kapa making. She specialises in the techniques surrounding the art, tool making, harvesting products from nature, as well as the making of barkcloth and designs of beating and markings. This statement is her purpose, “He Kumu Wai ‘Ole” (the water without a source). She notes her responsibility to pass on the knowledge she has reclaimed.



Pusi Urale

Is a current Samoan painter who came to art later in life. At 83 years old she paints scenes from her childhood in Samoa. She paints with vibrant colours and uses pointilism and abstract imagery to create very playful images. She also paints the female form looking into the history of exploitation of Pacific women by palagi men like Gauguin.



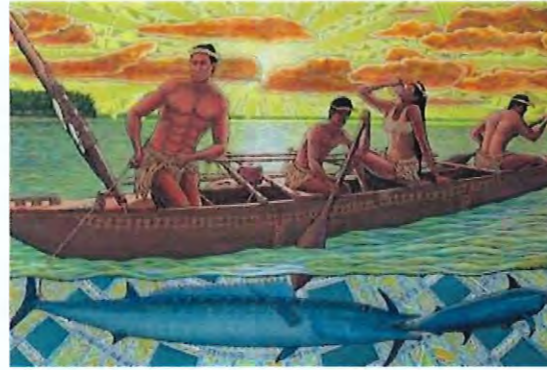
Jasmine Togo-Brisby

Is a current South Sea Islander artist, her art depicts themes around the Pacific Slave Trade as her great-grandparents were taken from Vanuatu and enslaved in Australia. She says, “I’m trying to create another space for our ancestors to exist within.” and uses many different mediums and techniques to do so such as tin type photography, sculpture, and installations.



Broader Context (cont)

Another idea previously explored by other artists is the perspectives of Pacific people in the diaspora, and New Zealand-born Samoans. There are 500,000 Samoans living in the diaspora compared to 200,000 in Samoa. Diasporic Samoans have varied experiences with points of view. People who grew up in the islands like Faraimo Paulo, Teuane Tibbo, and Pusi Urale have used art to document their experiences. Paulo takes experiences and scenes from Tokelau making them accessible for New Zealanders. His recording of Tokelauan culture aims to preserve it from climate change and migration. Tibbo used similar techniques in her art, she painted later in life after immigrating to New Zealand capturing scenes from her childhood in Samoa. Urale like Tibbo took to painting later in life depicting scenes of growing up in Samoa.



Art acts as a learning process. Robin White incorporates language and words to learn about indigenous Pacific culture such as her time in Kiribati. This shows the importance of language as well as art in gaining knowledge.



Dalani Tanahy uses the art of kapa-making to rediscover parts of Hawaiian culture lost due to colonisation. Tanahy shows how the product isn't that is to be admired in art but the entire process is art. The harvesting of natural materials, beating of the bark into cloth, making of the instruments, and finally the designs that go on the kapa.

“He kumu wai ‘ole”
The water without a source.

This Hawaiian proverb summarises well the re-learning of culture in the diaspora and the themes of disconnection I look at in the portfolio. Dalani Tanahy uses this proverb explaining that, “I am reminded that although we did not learn kapa making from our source... our grandmothers and kupuna, as kupuna ourselves, our grandchildren and our many students, will learn this art from us.



New Zealand-born Samoans also have a significant perspective in art. Yuki Kihara, Greg Semu and Michel Tuffery also explore issues and topics of younger generations. Kihara is fa'afafine and using photography explores gender and sexuality. Semu and Tuffery look into the impacts of Christianity and colonisation. Tuffery's sculpture 'Pisupo Lua Afe' is a cow made from corned beef tins and is a commentary on global trade's impact on Samoan society and health. Tuffery is an artist who references their Pacific identity in their work while using European mediums. “We're this third generation”, says Tuffery, “we were born here, in New Zealand. If you go to a new place, you create a new culture, and that's what we're doing. I don't think it's a trend at all, it's coming to grips”.



Symbolism

I have used shades of brown and earth tones on sections of the paintings to symbolise the siapo while the brighter colours and more graphic designs symbolise the tatau symbols.

In the Tagaloalagi triptych, the scenes on either side depict the important stories of the creation of the earth and the people and take much symbolism from siapo. The islands were created by Tagaloa as his stepping stones in the ocean so there are many symbols of the ocean and sea creatures in it. The other painting shows the creation of people from maggots forming from rotting vines so the symbols I used are of Samoan plants which are intersected with symbols of worms. Another example of the use of siapo is the 'Sāmoa – Sacred Center' artwork which shows the connections of Sāmoa to the rest of the Pacific. Tapa is a very widespread practice being made in many different Pacific cultures and is the perfect way to show the similarities between cultures.

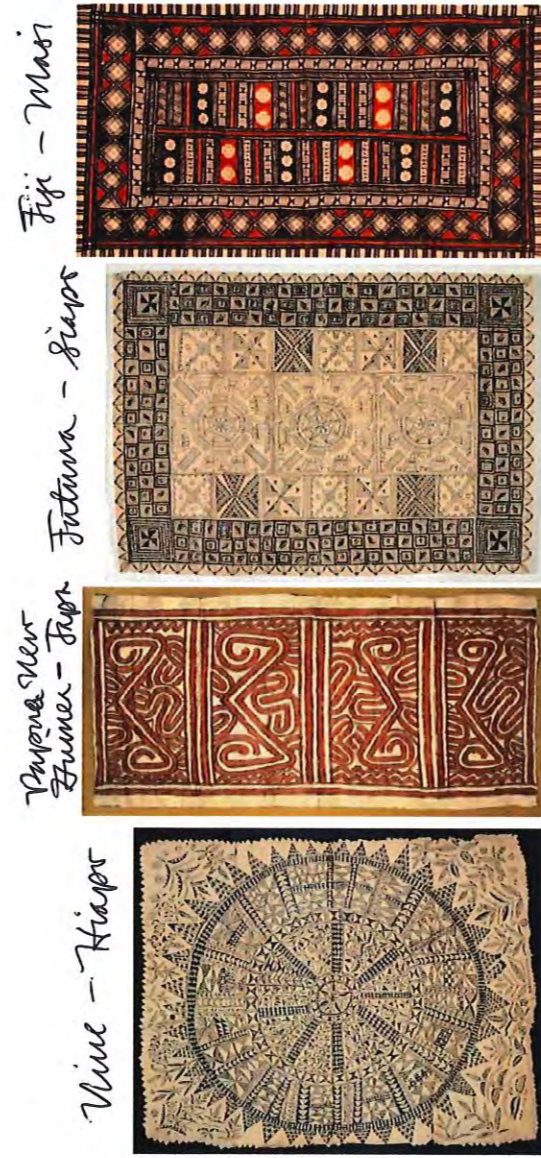
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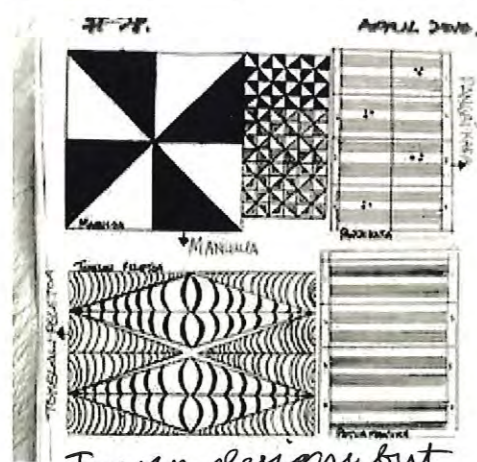
atualoa *anufe* *Fe* *Fogo*

The symbols of tatau are even more connected to the environment and convey more complex meanings such as, service, family, and protection. The artwork about my Grandparents' immigration is shaped like the back portion of the malofie, the top section (va'a or boat) is the piece that is tattooed first and in that portion is the boat they immigrated on. The tatau fans out from the boat they came on, to their experiences in New Zealand meeting and marrying, before the final portion where their children are born and growing up. The order in which the pe'a is done is symbolic of my Grandparents' journey to NZ beginning with the MV Matua and ending with the establishment of better lives for themselves, their children and grandchildren. I've also depicted the process of my Mum's tatau, receiving her tatau from Tufuga Tyla Vaeau and the importance of it being a female artist, as well the symbolism of the tualima.

Other forms of Tapa



	Net This design symbolizes the nets used in catching pigeons and turtles.
	Trochus Shell The shell is triangular in shape and can be used in many different formations such as a diamond for example.
	Pandanus Leaf Daga is Samoan for a particular type of pandanus tree, however, is also used to describe the pandanus tree in general.
	Sand Piper, Terns, Footprints of Sandpiper The bird forms take on many designs. These symbols offer the most opportunity for creativity.
	Starfish This symbol has sometimes been mistaken as the sun.



Tongan designs but still used in Samoa



Womb-like symbol = Mumi
Frigate bird = Vae
Vai = canoe
'ave tin = the water
Waka tui = tui
mala tui = mala
arohiti



Fetu = Mumi's surrounded
Mala either side = Grand's maternal and paternal lineage

Symbolism (cont)

Christian art was a big influence in my portfolio, the use of stained glass windows is to show the sacredness and importance of what they depict. The series of windows showing our malu and pe'a is to show the importance of our tatau as an artform while the Tagaloalagi triptych is to show sacredness of our own gods and ancestors.



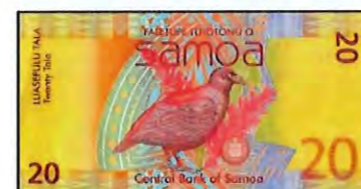
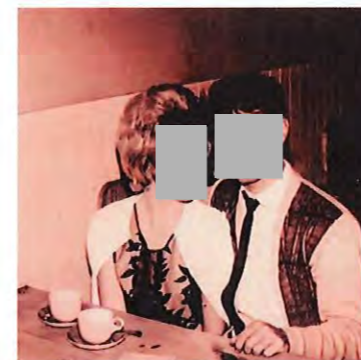
There were many other items featured in the portfolio that conveyed meaning. There are traditional pieces of clothing, weapons and adornments that reinforce many aspects of leadership. In the painting of Nafanua and Salamasina, two of the most powerful women in Samoan history, there are many symbols of the power they wielded. Salamasina has a fue (flywhisk) resting on her shoulder and a to'oto'o in her hand, these things are carried by tulafale (orator chiefs) and they are positioned as if she is delivering a lauga (speech). Nafanua carried other symbols of power, she carries two weapons she created, the Ta Fesilafa'i which she predominantly used in combat and the Ulimasao, (meaning driving safely) which was used to end warfare and bring peace. The contrast of their symbols of power reinforce the different times they lived in. Nafanua in a time of war and Salamasina in a time of peace.

Other symbols are used in the painting of Tagaloalagi, he is dressed as an ali'i (high chief) wearing an 'ie toga (fine mat), an ula nifo (Whale teeth necklace), an ula fala (pandanus fruit necklace), a

tuiga (ceremonial headress), and he carries a nifo oti (cane knife). These pieces are traditionally reserved for chiefs and their offspring. The tuiga is made from many precious materials including the hair of ancestors which along with the head is viewed as the most sacred part of the body. The nifo oti is a distinctly Samoan weapon that has been carried by many chiefs in Victorian portraits emphasizing their autonomy. Their most common use in modern times is in dancing the tauluga (ceremonial dance).



Other items and symbols I painted were far more contemporary and closely associated with my family. Especially in the third board I used many family photos in creating my paintings. On the piece about my Grandparents' immigration to New Zealand I put together photos of my grandparents to make each scene and used the photos of my parents and their siblings.



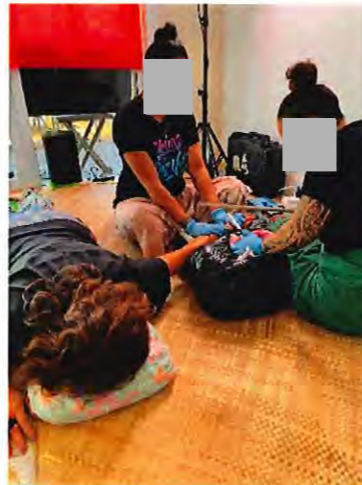
In the painting of my Grandmother and myself weaving, I'm wearing a t-shirt from our 2007 family reunion which was made for my Grandad. I wasn't able to attend the reunion and both my Grandfathers passed away before I knew them and I wasn't able to meet my Nana so the combination of all these missed opportunities is fitting for this painting. The painting of myself dancing a siva samoa is filled with a lot of symbolism. The dance was a monumental moment for myself as it was the first siva I have learned and performed. It was choreographed and performed by Mary Jane McKibbin Schwenke as her talent for Miss Samoa 1997 which she won. The dance, 'Ufi le manu ua gase', was about the preservation of Samoa's national bird, the manumea, which is still critically endangered. The costume I'm wearing was designed as a manumea and worn by Mary Jane when she performed the dance while the money that's floating around the figure is the \$20 tala note which features the Manumea on it.

Tatau

Tatau is the most important artform I have conveyed in my portfolio, it is an ancient artform believed to be 3,000 years old and it shows your commitment to Samoa, your community and Samoan values. The symbolism are representations of Samoa while the ink and instruments used come directly from the Samoan environment. This is also a prominent aspect of my portfolio because my Mum received her tualima while I was painting and it marked an important milestone in my journey learning about aganu'u Samoa.

The process of receiving the Pe'a is long taking weeks to months and the highly tapu event requires the recipient to follow strict protocols such as sleeping on mats and abstaining from alcohol and sex. A sog'a'imiti must receive permission from their family who it will reflect on badly if he doesn't complete the tatau. They will also support the sog'a'imiti throughout the process. During the process there is the Tufuga tā tatau (master tattooist), one or two Koso (stretchers or apprentices, helpers who prepare the skin and implements) and the Soga'imiti (Recipient of the Malofie). Traditionally receiving the tatau is also done with a Soa (Partner, usually a male or female sibling/cousin). The process finishes with the lifting of the tapu on the sog'a'imiti and presentation of gifts such as fine mats to the artist.

Mum had wanted a tatau for many years but had been more seriously discussing getting her tualima for the past five years. Originally she wanted to receive it from the man who did her brother's sleeve but he had moved on so she found [redacted] learned the art of tatau from renowned [redacted] and is recognised as the only female tufuga tā tatau. It was a unique occasion, as everyone involved in this process was a woman, [redacted] as the Tufuga, [redacted] as the Koso, and my Mum [redacted] as the recipient.



Tatau is a direct influence for paintings no. 1,2,3,9,10,18, and 21. An inspiration has been this painting by Faraimo Paulo. The style and techniques, the combination of painting realistically in the foreground and stylistically in the background have influenced not just my paintings related to tatau but my entire board. I've depicted tatau in other ways also, the patterns used are in every artwork and the sections of both malu and pe'a have been used in my compositions to enhance the meaning of the artworks.

Malu, Tualima

The Malu is the female tatau on the thighs and hands but unlike the pe'a, the malu is much finer and stylistically varied. The word 'malu' comes from 'fa'amalu' (to protect) and 'mamalu' (sacred) exemplifying what the malu does for the recipient but also the responsibilities of the recipient to her village and her family. Traditionally it was only the village taupou (daughter of the high chief) who received the malu but this changed over time as more women started receiving it regardless of rank. Malu was seen as a way inexperienced tufuga could practice and it was a more low-key event. The malu unlike the pe'a was more decorative than a rite of passage. When the taupou performed the tauluga (important ceremonial dance at the completion of a fale) her thighs were exposed so a malu ensured the pale skin was decorated. It is only in recent times the malu has been treated with the respect given to Malofie, being elevated from a purely beauty symbol and acknowledged as an important Samoan practice in the mid-1900s.



Malofie/Pe'a

The Malofie or Pe'a as it's colloquially known is the male tatau that covers two thirds of the body from the waist to the knees. Compared to the malu, the pe'a is far heavier stylistically with set parts that are tattooed in the same order. Unlike the malu which was traditionally reserved for noble women, the malofie is a coming-of-age for most young men and is highly ritualised and painful. To not complete it once the process has been started is seen as a great shame. The first Europeans to arrive in Samoa in 1722 mistook the malofie for "a sort of artistically made silk cloth," but once finding out the markings were in the skin, missionaries and other European influences set out stopping the "barbaric" practice through banishment and fines. The practice has survived, continuing to thrive and evolve. Tatau had a resurgence following the 60s where it has thrived in Samoan communities.

Siapo and Lalaga

Siapo

Tapa, known as siapo in Samoa, is one of the most widely dispersed artforms throughout the Pacific. The process in making it has remained largely the same with the patterns varying widely between cultures. Tapa means the uncoloured bark cloth made from the u'a (Paper Mulberry Tree), the trees are cut and the white inner bark is removed, soaked, and scraped before being beaten with an l'e (Mallet) on a tutua (wooden anvil). Multiple pieces of u'a are beaten together widening in width before being laid out to dry and being painted.



In the older times, siapo had many uses primarily as clothing but also as partitions in open houses, burial shrouds, bed covers or mosquito nets, and it was gifted in ceremonies. This more traditional form is called Siapo Elei and is different from the later style Siapo Mamanu because the patterns were transferred onto the tapa using an upeti (design tablet). They were later overpainted to emphasise certain designs. Siapo Mamanu gained popularity in American Samoa in the 1920s. The main differences to siapo elei are that the patterns are painted freehand rather than with an upeti and a wider range of dyes are used. Siapo mamanu is reminiscent of Victorian wallpaper and has been popular amongst tourists.



I have taken many of the patterns from siapo mamanu but the primary inspiration has been siapo elei being more traditional. The artworks no. 5, 7, 11, and 12 focus on siapo while the patterns from siapo are present throughout my

entire board.

Lalaga

Lalaga is another Samoan artform but unlike siapo, which has few practitioners, weaving is widespread and practiced by many Samoan women. While weaving creates many practical items such as fala (floor mats), ili (fans), hats, 'ato (baskets), etc, the 'ie Samoa or 'ie toga (fine mat) are the most valuable woven item being used as currency. They are woven from a long-leaved pandanus called lau'ie while coarser mats are woven with another variety called laufala. The pandanus is cut, soaked, dried, and bleached in the sun before being bound ready for use. 'ie Samoa are decorated with a fringe of red feathers called sega, traditionally they came from Collared Lory birds but are usually dyed chicken feathers now. 'ie Samoa are presented at important occasions and sometimes worn. Because of the time and effort involved in making them, once completed, there are public celebrations and the mats are displayed. There has been a push in recent times for quality over quantity in 'ie Samoa. They were very large and impressive mats but the weave was coarse where true 'ie Samoa are supposed to be woven very finely.



Artworks no. 4, 6, and 19 all focus on lalaga while mats are present in the rest of my portfolio. Since lalaga involved groups of women weaving, I used this theme to show connections to ancestors and the passing down of measina Samoa (Treasures). The literal value of 'ie Samoa becomes a metaphor for the value of aganu'u Samoa.

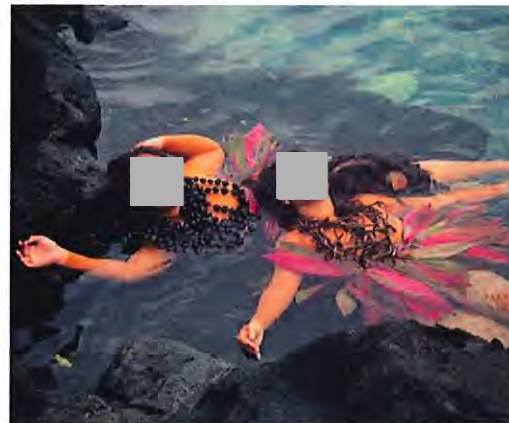
Tala Fa'asolopito, Samoan Histories

The second board of my portfolio focuses on pre-colonial Samoan history, while the third board looks at the Samoan diaspora which focuses on my Grandparents' arrival to this country in the 1960s. All of the figures both pre and post-colonial are direct ancestors.

Traditional Histories

Tagaloalagi is considered the first and supreme god in Samoan mythology and is credited with creation of the land and the people. Tagaloa dwelt in space where he created the heavens, sea, and earth. He first created Manu'atele as a place to stand before dividing the rock into more stepping stepping stones in the ocean. On these islands he created forests of trees which grew almost reaching the heavens, he sent down his creeper vine Fue to weigh the trees down slowing their growth. But Fue became luxuriant slowing the tree growth too much so Tagaloalagi sent down Tuli and Gaio. Tuli beat Fue down resulting in the formation of maggots which Gaio used to create people. A man and woman was placed on each island with their combined names naming the islands. The Samoan Islands are Sa and Vai'i, U and Polu, Tutu and Ila, as well as other Pacific islands like To and Ga, and Fi and Ti.

Tagaloalagi and Gaio, the creation of humans from maggots



Taema and Tilafaiga are very important figures in Samoan history as they are credited with bringing the practice of tatau from Fiti. They were born as nameless conjoined twins and raised on the island of Ta'u and they were split by a ship mast which resulted in one twin naming herself Tilafaiga while Taema named herself after a pale human excrement that floated by them. They swam from Fiti (some controversy whether this is Fiji or Fitiuta, a village in Manu'a) where they had learned the art of tattooing and had been told a chant instructing them that women are the ones to be tattooed and not the men. As they approached Falealupo in Savai'i they spotted large faisua (clams) at the bottom of the ocean which they dove for and upon resurfacing became confused changing the words of their chant resulting in men being tattooed, not women. Taema became a tufuga ta tatau which it is said a demigod from Puluotu (the underworld). Saveasi'uleo, abducted Tilafaiga resulting in the birth of Nafanua, one of the most important figures in Samoan history.

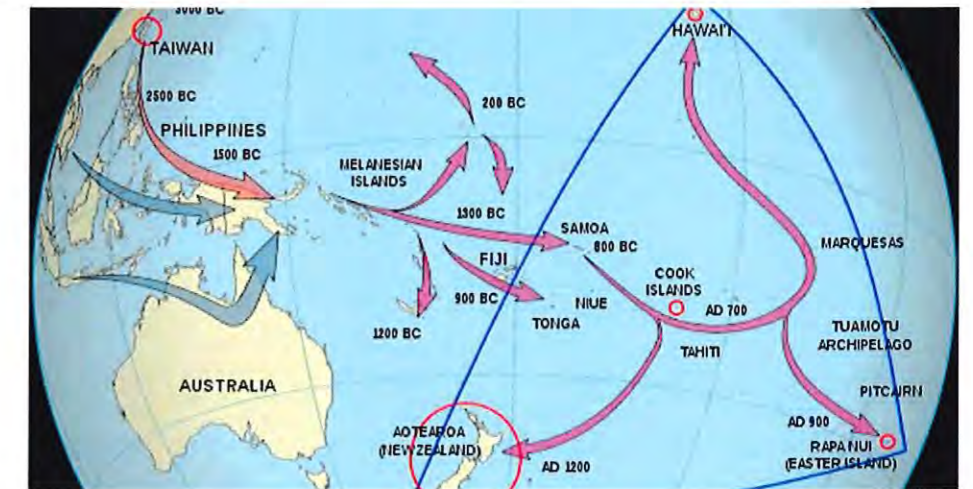


Nafanua fought against Lilomai'ava in the east to keep her people from being enslaved. She created multiple weapons which are still used to this day and she led her people to victory through war becoming the Toa Tama'ita'i (Goddess of War). The opposing side believed she was a man until a gust of wind blew her top upwards revealing her breasts. Humiliated they accepted defeat and Nafanua brought together Samoa's Papā titles (paramount chief titles) which was maintained by her descendant, Salamasina. Queen Salamasina is credited as being the first Tupu Tafa'ifa (holder of the four Papā titles) but the title was first held by Nafanua. Salamasina was still descended from very noble lineage in both Samoan and Tongan societies

and her reign is remembered as being peaceful and prosperous. The impact of these women on Samoan history is why I chose to paint them. They were involved in many changes to Samoan society and I have great pride like many other Samoans in being able to trace my ancestry to them.

Post-Colonial Histories

While the predominant idea from many Samoans and traditional Samoan teachings is that we came first and the other islands dispersed from us. However, other Pacific histories and European theories and teachings reinforce that our people arrived in Samoa around 3,000 years ago and originated around Taiwan, South-East Asia, and Papua New Guinea. The word Sāmoa when broken down means "sacred center" emphasising Samoa's importance as the center of Pacific migration.



A long time after the original waves of migration settling the Pacific islands, came the era of colonialism and colonisation of European powers. This eventually resulted in a later period of migration from Samoa in the 1940s – 1960s. It was during this period that my three Samoan grandparents immigrated to New Zealand.

What's Next?

This portfolio is a collection of the knowledge I have gained of fa'asamoa and it has been an amazing opportunity to grow and learn more about and engage with Aganu'u Samoa. If I continued to develop my themes in new projects I feel that I could go down multiple paths.

Looking more in depth into Samoan practices would be a deeper, more nuanced look at much of the subject matter I've already covered, such as looking into Samoa's fa'amatai system of leadership and the stories behind many families and chief titles including those I descend from. I could look into other cultural practices such as ifoga (process of atonement through ritual humiliation), saofa'i (chief title ceremony), 'ava ceremony a series of different Siva Samoa (Sasa, siva afi, tauluga, 'aiuli, fa'ataupati, mauuluu, siva tau, laumei and tautasi). There are also other aspects of our histories with other pre-colonial stories, such as looking into lapita pottery, star mounds and other archeological artefacts and how they connect to present day Samoa.



Another aspect could be looking into the effects of outside forces on Samoa. This could be a more controversial option as it tackles many contemporary and divisive issues facing Samoan society. Such as: the impacts of colonialism by Germany, America, Britain and New Zealand; the impacts of Christianity and the arrival of missionaries on our people and society; the impacts of imported foods on our diet and health. Another possibility is looking into the corruption of our systems of government and power and the effects of these forces on queer people in Samoa. Or another option is looking at the disasters that have affected Samoa: the 1918 Influenza Pandemic; the 1929 Black Saturday and the Mau Movement; the 2009 Tsunami; and the 2019 Measles Outbreak.



A continuation beyond my third board is looking more to diasporic topics and issues. This theme looks more into the journey of the first generation New Zealanders and the struggles they faced in coming here: their aspirations; actions; and sacrifices. Also the impacts of their actions on their children and grandchildren especially around the loss of language and culture, the impacts of cultural assimilation and the journey many now have to take to reclaim our Aganu'u and Gagana.



Outstanding Scholarship

Subject: Visual Arts – Painting

Standard: 93306

Total Score: 22

Marker commentary

The premise of this Outstanding Scholarship Painting submission was to depict fa'asamoa, fa'asinomaga (Samoan way of life, Samoan identity) and share the "beauty and complexity" of everyday practices and traditions through the candidate's diaspora lens. As a personal project about identity (they identify as a queer, New Zealand-born Samoan), the candidate is deeply invested and engaged in the proposition, which they negotiate through solid, in-depth research and integration of their thinking into technically expert paintings. From the outset, the folio works interweave complex pictorial strategies that provide navigation for the storytelling and signifiers utilised.

The artwork is beautifully rendered and powerful in its visualisation. Intentionality is a vital factor in the conception of the paintings and analysis of motif and compositional structure. The candidate utilises symbolism to situate their culture as the subject matter and vehicle; architectural references such as the shape of the fale tele enacting the sky (heavenly / biblical association) or the use of tatau to communicate the story of their grandparents' immigration to Aotearoa from Samoa. All visual aspects are considered equally: line, tone, pattern, figurative, perspective, paint stroke, and colour palette.

Artistic reference is excellent; the range of practices from senior artists to younger generation practitioners serves to provide a community of voices and an apt neighbourhood of contextual references. The candidate investigates Christian art, historical representations of sacred subject matter, traditional processes of tatau, lalaga, siapo, fale, and siva, and images of ancestors and family to create imagery that speaks to Samoan culture. For the candidate, this approach to traditional art forms and histories addresses the influence of colonial forces in Samoa and their own "feelings of inadequacy and disconnection, being culturally assimilated, being disconnected from the church, and being queer".

The workbook documents a thoughtful, well-researched, and critically focused journey. At every step, they are self-reflexive about previous steps taken and consider how learnings can be utilised to make the following passage of work. They combine the personal with collective and inherited knowledge; the workbook intelligently frames the candidate's line of questioning. Throughout the enquiry, they discuss the selection, relevance, cultural significance, and meaning of symbols in both their own artwork and historical contexts. The methodology is thorough and holds close to the candidate's intent to make work exploring their familial history through symbology and pattern.

The folio layout is structured incredibly well. There is a symmetry and rhythm to the linear and patterned compositions reinforced by the movements between the individual artworks of the stained-glass works and the images of Samoan people / family (ancestors and themselves) performing and making. This is an important aspect in the communication of fa'asamoa and fa'asinomaga and the cultural value placed on performance and crafting, intergenerational knowledge and making by hand. The folio paintings skilfully communicate a celebratory honouring of Samoan culture and the candidate's story.