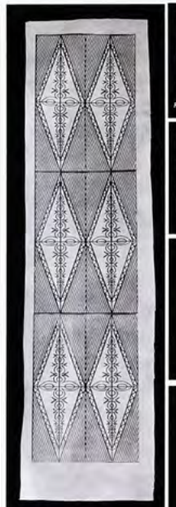
Mana Tohu Mātauranga o Aotearoa
New Zealand Qualifications Authority

Scholarship Visual Arts 2025

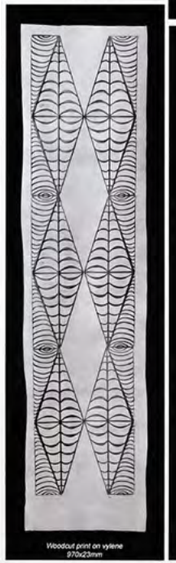
93309 Printmaking

TOP SCHOLAR

Etching print on Vylene. stills of women preparing tapa
1380x170mm



Woodcut print on vylene
1100x450mm



Woodcut print on vylene
970x23mm

Frottage rub on vylene
745x740mm

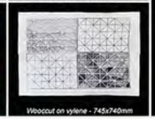
Frottage on vylene
745x740mm

Line print on vylene - 745x740mm

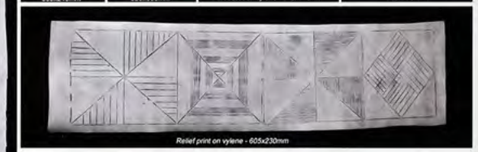
Woodcut print on vylene
745x740mm

Line on barkcloth
300x240mm

Woodcut on Tapa
520x665mm



Woodcut on vylene - 745x740mm



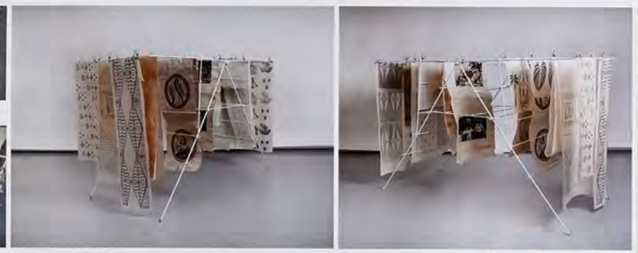
Relief print on vylene - 605x230mm

Woodcut print on vylene - 650x250mm

Woodcut print on barkcloth
1310x290mm

Image transfer on barkcloth
1100x450mm

Untitled. 2025
Dimension variable. vylene. barkcloth, ink, soft pastel
installation for Arts Evening



Untitled. 2025
30x30cm
Plaster

These two plaster plates were made by pressing my inked woodcut directly into wet plaster. As the plaster dried, it captured both the intricate texture of the woodcut and traces of the ink, leaving behind a subtle imprint and a ghostly residue of colour.

Details on the right

Untitled (Sand). 2025
1500x1000mm
Sand

The piece was made using sand sourced from Pha. I pressed tree-windows with a kupesi patterns from my village into the damp sand, leaving behind an imprint of the design.

The composition features three kupesi motifs: a central repeating triangle pattern running vertically, flanked on either side by diamond shapes, all bordered by a triangular shape.

Untitled (Sand Kupesi). 2025 - 400x1400mm. Sand and wood

Four horizontal prints produced by pressing a handmade kupesi board into a prepared bed of damp sand. The kupesi board was built from cardboard and skewers, arranged to form a mix of contemporary and traditional pattern units. The sand acted as the matrix, after each impression, its surface was levelled and re-pressed to refresh the relief. The process records raised and recessed lines with slight variation where the sand compacts, giving a soft, granular edge to the motifs.

Untitled (Kupesi)
Various Vylene prints
Various sizes 3000x1500mm

Print installation for Arts Evening. Frottage rubbing of pattern boards I created out of cardboard and skewers of traditional and contemporary patterns/images on to vylene fabric contemporary material used instead of Tapa cloth. Contemporary motifs include rugby shoe motif, rugby ball, aeroplane.

Prints draped over curtain string

Untitle (Kupesi). 2025
5000x1500mm
Frottage Vylene. Soft Pastel

A single length of vylene is suspended from the ceiling to floor, the lower edge resting and lightly curling on the gallery boards. The surface carries frottage rubbings taken from handmade kupesi boards constructed from cardboard and skewers. Using soft pastel, the rubbings form three vertical fields: a darker central band of repeating elongated diamond motifs, flanked by lighter grids of square panels.

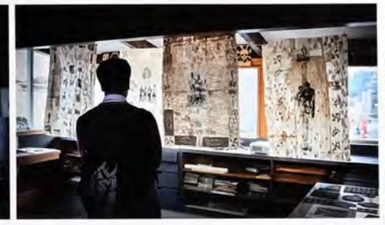
Each panel records a distinct pattern, combining customary Tongan kupesi with contemporary icons (triangle and cross units, pinwheel forms, fish, bird, oval, diagonal stripes, dotted clusters, and a boot outline). Variations in pressure and direction of rubbing produce tonal shifts and soft, broken edges where the vylene texture catches the pastel.

Installed at Corban Estate for the Matariki Exhibition

Untitled (Family and Friends). 2025
4 works, each 1500 × 1000 mm
Ngaiutapa (3), vylene (1). Line and block-printed kupesi patterns with homemade ink and image transfers

A set of four hanging panels, three made from real tapa cloth and one from vylene. Each panel is bordered and segmented with a mix of traditional and contemporary kupesi designs triangles, diamonds, coconut tress, roses, ike, linear bands and repeat units printed in dark tones with visible plate joins and pressure variation.

At the centre of each panel is a monochrome image transfer: group portraits of family members and my boyz. The transfers sit on the natural, slightly irregular ground of the tapa/vylene, with the fibres and surface creases showing through the prints. The four works are presented as a aligned series, for the creative arts evening.



Untitled 2025
Dimension variable; xylene, bamboo, ink, soft pastel
Installation by Ume Ekpenyi

Untitled, 2025
30x30cm
Plaster

These two plaster plates were made by pressing my inked woodcut directly into wet plaster. As the plaster dried, it captured both the intricate texture of the woodcut and traces of the ink, leaving behind a subtle imprint and a ghostly residue of colour.

Details on the right

Untitled (Sand) 2025
100x100mm
Sand

The piece was made using sand sourced from Ikirip, pressed three printcuts with shapes/patterns from my village into the damp sand, leaving behind an imprint of the design.

The composition features three copies motifs: a circle repeating triangle pattern running vertically, flanked on either side by diamond shapes, all bordered by a triangular shape.

Untitled (Sand Kupasi) 2025 - 600x1400mm. Sand and wood

Four monoprint prints produced by pressing a handmade kupas-board into a prepared bed of damp sand. The kupas-board was built from cardboard and sheaves, arranged in front a mix of contemporary and traditional pattern units. The sand acted as the matrix: after each impression, its surface was levelled and moistened to refresh the relief. The process records raised and recessed areas with slight variation where the sand compacts, giving a soft, grainy edge to the motifs.

Untitled (Kupasi) 2025
Mixed media prints
Various sizes 3000x1500mm

Print installation for Arts Evening. Footage rubbing of pattern boards / master cut of cardboard and sheaves of traditional and contemporary patterns/images on to xylene fabric (contemporary material used instead of Tapa cloth). Contemporary motifs include Ikpa Ikwo, rugby ball, pantaloons.

Prints draped over curtain string

Untitled (Kupasi) 2025
3000x1500mm
Footage Xylene, Soft Pastel

A single length of xylene is suspended from the ceiling to floor, the lower edge resting and lightly curving on the gallery boards. The surface carries footage rubbings taken from handmade kupasi boards constructed from cardboard and sheaves. Using soft pastel, the rubbings form three vertical fields: a darker central band of repeating elongated diamond motifs, flanked by lighter grids of square panels.

Each panel records a distinct pattern combining customary Tungan Kubwa with contemporary icons (triangle and snake units, pinwheel forms, fish, bird, dog), diagonal stripes, dotted clusters, and a block outline). Variations in pressure and direction of rubbing produce tonal shifts and soft, broken edges where the xylene texture catches the pastel.

Installed at [redacted] for the Materials Exhibition.

Untitled (Family and Friends) 2025
4 works, each 1500 × 1000 mm
Ngatu-tapa (3), xylene (1); Lino and block printed kupasi patterns with homemade ink and image transfers.

A set of four hanging panels: three made from real tapa cloth and one from xylene. Each panel is combined and segmented with a mix of traditional and contemporary Kupasi designs (triangles, diamonds, pinwheel trees, roses, ikw, linear bands and repeat units printed in dark tones with visible plate joins and pressure variation.

At the centre of each panel is a monochrome image transfer: group portraits of family members and my boys. The transfers sit on the natural, slightly irregular ground of the tapa/xylene, with the fibres and surface crinkles showing through the prints. The four works are presented as a aligned series, for the creative arts evening.

Etching print on Xylene - style of women preparing tapa
140cm x 170mm

Woodcut print on xylene
970x270mm

Woodcut print on backcloth
1,210x760mm

Image transfer on backcloth
110Cm x50mm

My Project

My name is [redacted]
I am Tongan
My villages are [redacted]
And this is my project

I moved to new zealand from Tonga in 2023 [redacted] and being away from my family and the familiar was hard but being in Art last year and this year helped me express that feeling in art and bring me closer to them. This is only my second year learning printmaking because Tonga does not teach art so when I was asked to think about what my idea was going to be it was easy. I kept thinking about family expsecially my nana and my mum so I decided my work should honour them and also show who I am now, living here in Aotearoa.

I know I wanted to work with ngatu so I needed to remember back to watching my nanas and mum make ngatu. The Ngatu is traditonal womens work, so I know I didn't want to copy it or act like I can speak for it. My goal was to work beside it with respect, learn from its system, and build a print style that feels true to me. That is why I chose two materials: tapa cloth and vylene. Tapa connects straight to Tonga and my culture. Vylene is modern and a bit see-through, and is used by Tongnas here who can not source the materials to make it. Using both together lets two worlds meet, without pretending they are the same thing.

I made kupesi plates out of cardboard and skewers and tested them with frottage and relief printing. At first I focused on technique how much pressure, getting registration right, drying times, and how ink behaves on different surface. Tapa needs slower and more careful pulls. Vylene required less ink as it bled through the material. I made mistakes but every mistake teached me something about the materials and how to control them next time.

When I got a bit better, I started mixing traditional Tongan patterns with images from my experience, plane, rugby boot, my boys and rugby field lines. I wasn't trying to be clever I just wanted to be honest about where I come from and where I am now. My life is between Tonga and New Zealand, so my patterns should show that too. I asked myself how can I carry kupesi knowledge forward without just copying it? I let the kupesi rhythm guide me, then I changed scale, spacing, and order to make a new print lanaguage.

Hanging the work helped me understand more. I installed vylene sheets like veils so people could walk between them. But this was more like how the fetaaki is hung to dry after being beaten and before turning it into ngatu. The semi-transparent layers made the patterns overlap and shift when people moved but the material moved with the people who walked around it because it hads a light quality. After these tests I took the best ideas back into the prints. I used ghost impressions, overlapping repeats, and borders that frame image transfers of my family members.

Across the year I learnt that care and editing are as important as new ideas. I worked to fix edges, keep borders clean, and make the inking consistent so the prints look strong and clear enough. I also showed less process photos and focused on bigger, finished works that prove how the idea develops from start to finish. My final panels try to bring together three parts: the kupesi structure, images of family, and a modern print style an installation.

This portfolio is not ngatu this is anIt is my way to show what I learned from it my research and from the women in my family. By using tapa and vylene, by mixing traditional and modern patterns, and by making prints that move between surface and space, I'm showing where my art stands and who helped me get here. Rugby brought me to new zealand, but printmaking gives me another way to carry responsibility. If these works show respect, patience, and intension without claiming what isn't minethen I reached my goal and honoured my nana, my mum, and the practice they continue.

Artist Influence

'Uhila Nai

'Uhila Moe Langi Nai is a Tongan artist who works with ngatu and kupesi. Her art looks at kupesi like a language that holds family history and place, not just pretty patterns. She focuses on designs from her village Pelehake and thinks about how elders pass this knowledge on. For her, kupesi is kind of heliaki (say one thing but mean another), so the shapes carry meanings too (The Arts Foundation Te Tumu Toi, 2024; AUT, 2023).

She made a work called Hala Kafa at Te Pātaka Toi Adam Art Gallery. It responds to a really long ngatu tāhina in the gallery collection (24 metres!), and she "re-visions" the old kupesi into a contemporary artwork. It shows how kupesi can move from museum object to living practice again, which I think is cool because it's respectful but also creative and new (Adam Art Gallery, 2024; Radio New Zealand, 2024).

So overall her work is about connecting: ancestors to now, village designs to new spaces, and women's knowledge to her own practice today. She doesn't just copy she studies the system and transforms it with printing, drawing and installation. That's why people say her work is about koloa tu'ufonua and how knowledge gets carried in families and designs (The Arts Foundation Te Tumu Toi, 2024).

Doron Semu

Semu draws on an older Sāmoan siapo style that uses freehand patterning rather than stencilling. His practice keeps the full siapo process visible—from stripping u'a (paper mulberry) bark to layering the beaten cloth—and he shares the making through workshops that centre young Pasifika communities in Tāmaki Makaurau. The result is siapo that feels both anchored in Samoan technique and responsive to present identities.

Talita Tolutau

Talita Tolutau looks at a Tongan way of speaking and storytelling called veitalatala and turns it into film and ngatu prints. The project holds memories of Tongan women who left their homeland and settled overseas (AUT CDR, 2021).

Talanoa is explained as a face to face way to share ideas. On the project page they quote Vaioleti to show what tala and noa mean. The research uses this Tongan view of talking and remembering to guide the artworks and the stories that are shared (AUT CDR, 2021).

The artworks mix photography animation sound and filmed footage. The aim is to make a new kind of documentary that goes further than a normal video interview and to bring Tongan ideas about narrative and representation into the gallery with large printed portraits on ngatu and moving image works (AUT CDR, 2021; AUT Open Repository, n.d.). I really like the work by Talita, this inspired me to add in images of y family and the boys into my own work through image transfer.

Quishile Charan

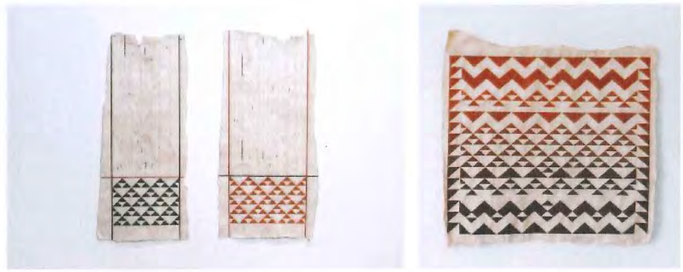
Quishile Charan is an Indo Fijian artist who works with fabric, natural dyes, printing and stitching. Her art is about healing and remembering. She looks at Girmit history and how it still affects Indo Fijian people today. She learns skills from the women in her family like dyeing and embroidery and uses plants to make colour, so the cloth feels like family knowledge being carried on, not just material (Enjoy, 2017; Objectspace, 2020).

For Charan, making textiles is also a way to push back on colonial stories. She wants to honour the women who resisted during and after indenture. The cloth becomes like a witness. She stitches memory, anger, love and care into it and builds counter histories for her ancestors so museums and others do not speak for them (Tautai, 2025; Objectspace, 2020).

Her recent show It takes the love of the living and the dead filled rooms with dyed and printed cloth, projection and stitched text. It felt like world building and community care. She treats making as a social practice where learning, cooking, gardening and talking are part of the artwork, not separate from it (Ngutu Kaka Gallery, 2024; Artspace Aotearoa, 2023; Asia New Zealand Foundation, 2018). Overall her work is about love, labour and responsibility. She turns so called domestic skills into a strong language and asks who keeps knowledge, who gets to heal, and how we make a home together now (Runway Journal, 2024).

Nikau Hindin

Hindin is reviving Māori aute from seed to sheet: growing and harvesting the plant, then making fine white barkcloth. Her imagery often looks to Māori astronomy and concepts of time and space; lately she's made manu aute kites as carriers of story. The practice positions aute as living whakapapa and navigational knowledge, not just material.



Cerisse Palalagi

Niuean hiapo (bark cloth) painting shares some stylistic features with other forms of tapa from the Pacific, but it's also distinctive for its diverse motifs, irregular patterns, and use of freehand painting. Hiapo painting provides the cultural foundation for Auckland painter Cerisse Palalagi, as it did for John Pule before her. Palalagi merges hiapo with a wide array of processes, including silkscreening, embroidery, and photography. She explains, 'The patterns I use are a reflection of my identity. I like the juxtaposition of cultural symbols and people combined in my portraits. They are usually of people in my family, including myself. This is my way of reviving the culture, and showing people that our culture and language is not dead.' Motunai, a Niuean word referring to 'people of the land', can also be translated as motu nei, meaning 'this land' in Māori. However, Palalagi's show is more than just a nod to her Niuean/Māori heritage. It also acknowledges the fact that, in our digital age, Pacific communities now look beyond their home shores, to seek a sense of belonging within a global community.

Ngatu

Ngatu is a important cultural cloth in Tonga. It's made from the bark of the paper mulberry tree (hiapo) and it's used for big life events like weddings, funerals, and special gift-giving. People call it cultural wealth because it shows respect and status, not just decoration (ICHCAP, n.d.). It's mainly a women's practice, with men helping a bit sometimes, and it travels across generations because the skills keep being taught and shared (ICHCAP, n.d.).

The whole process starts way back in the plantation. Hiapo trees are grown for about 2–3 years before harvesting, which already tells you it's slow and careful work (ICHCAP, n.d.). The first step is amusi (cutting/harvesting), then hae (letting the stems dry a couple days and stripping the bark), then fohi where the outer bark is scraped to reveal the white inner bark called tutu (ICHCAP, n.d.). After that the bark is beaten on a wooden anvil (tutua) with a wooden mallet (ike). Beating makes the sheets thinner and wider until they become feta'aki, which are the plain tapa sheets (ICHCAP, n.d.).

Next is making the big cloth. Women glue pieces of feta'aki together in a team called a koka'anga. Each woman contributes a measured length called a langanga; when you add all the langanga up you get a whole ngatu. Then they colour it with a brown-reddish dye from the koka tree to mark out the layout before drawing more details (ICHCAP, n.d.). There are special kupesi mats (stencils) woven from coconut materials and fixed onto the koka'anga table. Rubbing dye across the top prints the base patterns, and later artists finish details freehand (ICHCAP, n.d.).

Kupesi designs aren't random. Each has a story, place, and meaning like Tokelau Feletoa (linked to Vava'u), Palatavake (an ancient headdress), and Manulua (two birds circling). Even small motifs like fo'i hea can point to things such as the three main island groups. So ngatu is kind of a visual record of history, community and environment, not just pretty shapes (ICHCAP, n.d.).

After printing, the cloth is dried in the sun (tataki) and sometimes rubbed with a kerosene mix (fakangingila) to add shine and keep away bugs (ICHCAP, n.d.). Then you see how ngatu lives in the community: laid out for royal walkways, wrapped around the deceased, exchanged at weddings and birthdays, and shown with other koloa fakatonga (fine mats and more). Because of that role, ngatu is treasured and handled with a lot of care and respect (ICHCAP, n.d.).

There's also a social side that's huge. Koka'anga isn't just production; it builds trust and teamwork because everyone meets weekly, brings their prepared sheets (ngafa), and works together. That's how values like cooperation and responsibility are taught in practice, not only words (ICHCAP, n.d.). Fashion and handicrafts use ngatu and feta'aki too dresses, accessories, even shoes and photo frames showing it's versatile and still changing today (ICHCAP, n.d.).

So, the big idea: ngatu is cultural wealth because it holds history, ceremony, and community in one artform. It takes time, patience, and many hands from the tree, to beating, to kupesi printing, to sharing it at important moments. That's why people keep making it: it connects family, place, and identity all together (ICHCAP, n.d.).

This is a ngatu after the rubbing phase waiting for it to be painted with black ink

On the right is a 15 panel etching stitched into a single strip, built from stills of a video showing Tongan women harvesting hiapo, pounding, pasting, and finishing ngatu. I arranged the frames in sequence so you read the process vertically, panel by panel. Each image was etched, printed, trimmed, and hand-stitched to the next. The work sets up a clear contrast by recording the making of tapa onto a faux tapa surface, linking traditional technique with a non-traditional support.

On the right is an experiment printed on tapa my dad brought from Tonga and prepared by my nana. I used laser-cut woodblocks designed in Illustrator to depict the Tongan monarchy in the Tupou line which arw George Tupou I (Tāufa'āhau I), George Tupou II, Queen Sālote Tupou III, Tāufa'āhau Tupou IV, and Tupou VI. Each block was proofed, adjusted for line depth, and then printed directly onto the tapa.

Below are additional trials: a woodblock print of the Tokelau Feletoa on a cut section from an old ngatu, and a second print showing a coconut tree and the Kalou motif from my village. For all of these I made the ink myself by burning kauri gum to collect soot, then mixing the pigment with water and gum arabic. I rolled the ink onto the blocks and printed by hand, testing pressure and drying times to try and get an even print.

Close up of the process of making ngatu cloth. Etching

Kupesi Board

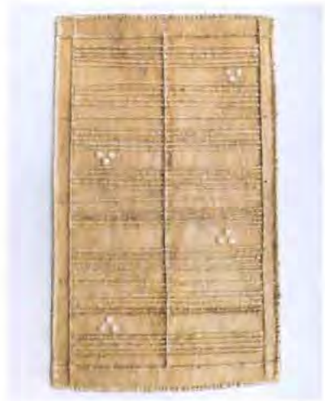
In Tongan ngatu making, kupesi are patterned rubbing boards that guide the first layer of design. You lay sheets of plain barkcloth (feta'aki) over the kupesi, then rub a brown dye across the surface so the raised lines underneath show up as the base pattern. It's kind of like doing a coin rubbing in art class, but bigger and organised into a full composition (Herle, 2002; Te Papa, n.d.).

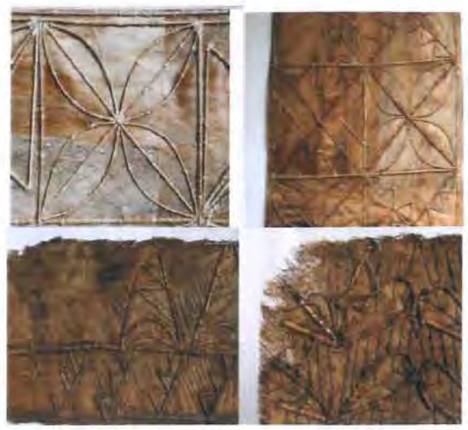
The boards themselves are made from sticks (often coconut midribs) or other materials arranged into geometric or figurative motifs. Each kupesi has a name and meaning, so you're not just printing shapes you're placing stories of place, family and history. During koka'anga (the group work session), the kupesi is fixed to the rubbing table, the feta'aki layers go on top, and makers rub the dye pad over the cloth, moving across measured sections called langanga so the repeat stays consistent (Herle, 2002; ICHCAP, n.d.).

Technically, the rubbing step sets up the underpattern (sometimes called the "shadow" or first state). Where the cloth passes over a raised rib of the kupesi, more pigment catches; where it doesn't, the cloth stays lighter. After this pass, artists usually retrace and deepen the design with darker dye and freehand details to finish the surface so rubbing and painting are paired stages, not separate worlds (Herle, 2002; Addo, 2017).

Museums explain the action pretty clearly: place feta'aki on the kupesi, rub koka-based pigment so the relief below prints through, then lift and shift to the next register. That's how large fields of repeating pattern come out clean and even (Te Papa, n.d.; Bowers Museum, 2018). The same logic applies when communities use vilene/vylene (a non-woven substitute) in diaspora settings the rubbing still transfers kupesi designs; only the substrate and how the dye sits can feel a bit different (Addo, 2017; Digital Pasifik, n.d.).

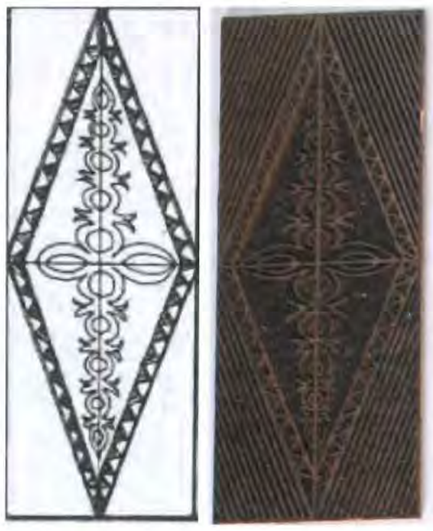
So, kupesi boards are basically the design memory of ngatu: they hold the structure (borders, grids, center fields), and the rubbing step activates that memory onto cloth. Then hand work (outlining, shading, darker dyes) finishes the piece. That balance between mechanical repeat (rubbing) and human hand (free painting) is what gives ngatu its rhythm and also its personality (Herle, 2002; ICHCAP, n.d.).





Kupesi Construciton

Living away from my family and country made it hard to source materials for an authentic kupesi board, so I built my own. I started with discarded cardboard boxes and skewers, then used digital tools to design patterns for laser cutting. In my research I learned many kupesi are tied to specific villages. I focused on my village, Pelehake, and found the Kalou pattern, which comes from the inside of a breadfruit. It was difficult to find online because Tongan knowledge is mostly passed on verbally. The skewers kept snapping when I tried to bend them into the Kalou's tight curves, so I shifted to laser cutting. After several trials and redrawing the kupesi in Illustrator, I produced a clean cut. The final pass took about twenty minutes because of the fine details



Above is my attempt to build kupesi boards from contemporary materials skewers and cardboard corona boxes from my teacher. I kept the style close to traditional board construction while testing new shapes and forms. After assembling each panel, I sealed it with shellac to harden the surface for rmore uses. One board includes the words "Ono Hiva Boys," which is just me and my crew of Tokos. I proofed the set with test prints and chose not to develop this direction further, but the trial helped me test durability, line weight, and registration under pressure

My Kupesi Boards

On the bottom left are laser-cut kupesi boards made from MDF. I build the designs as vector paths in Illustrator, set stroke widths to match the groove I want, then test laser power and speed on offcuts. I cut in several shallow passes to avoid scorching and clean the edges after. The plates are sealed with shellac or clear acrylic so paste or ink does not soak in, which makes them reliable for rubbing or pressing into damp sand and cloth. These patterns that were chosen were from the Tongan coat of arms. The three islands of Tonga are represented by three stars. The monarchy of the country is shown by a crown. The general idea of peace is shown by a white dove and and a olive branch and last three swords that showcase the three chiefly lines that have ruled the nation. Th

Some other images I tried were the firs chief king of Tonga wearing a traditional headdress called a palatavake and Queen Salote an iconic image where she rides a carriage in the rain for the crowing of Queen Elizabeth.

The lower right shows hand-carved wood blocks. I lay out the grid, knife-score the main lines, and carve 2–3 mm of relief with chisels and gouges, sanding and sealing the high points for durability. The images I chose here were also symbols from the coat of arms but a free hand version as most of the images on a tapa cloth are freehand so I wanted to capture that style.

At the top right are lino blocks the design is an attempt at drawing roses that signal my Grandmas rose garden in Tonga, these flowers represent her and her awards winning gardening. This is then carved with V and U gouges to a consistent depth. They ink evenly and proof quickly by hand burnishing or on a press. Other images I chose were the ike, a tool used to pound the hiapo bark into the layers of fetaaki before becoming ngatu, a coconut tree that sits in a cemetery in my village that bats are attracted to and a taro leaf because this is used in our national dish but also a reminder of how I am a taro patch kid growing up watching my parents, grandparents and other oldies tend to these taro patches are a source of food for their families.

The main differences are in precision, surface, speed, and durability. Laser boards deliver the highest accuracy and the fastest duplication, ideal for complex geometry and consistent repeats, but their edges can be brittle on thin card and the surface looks very uniform. Lino sits in the middle: it gives crisp edges and quick turnaround, good for small to medium plates, though very fine hairlines can crumble and large sheets can warp if thin. Wood is slowest to produce but the most robust the grain adds a physical tooth, tool marks carry through the print, and the plates tolerate heavier pressure on cloth. In short, laser excels at detail and replication, lino at clean shapes and efficient proofs, and wood at deep relief and long-lasting printing blocks.

Vilene/Vylene

In Tonga and in places like Aotearoa where a lot of Tongans live now, some women (and community groups) make ngatu pepa using vilene/vylene, a synthetic non-woven fabric, when hiapo bark is hard to get or they don't have space/time for full barkcloth processes. It is not trying to replace real ngatu, but it keeps the kupesi knowledge moving and lets people still make, teach and gift cloth in the community (Addo, 2017).

Museums in New Zealand collect these works, which shows they're recognised as part of a living practice. For example, Te Papa holds Ngatu Pepa (Vilene Tapa) made by Tongan women's groups like 'Ilo Me'a Fo'ou (Upper Hutt) and Kulupu Taliangi (Glen Innes). These pieces are built almost like tapa: layers of vilene are pasted together, then base patterns are rubbed from kupesi boards and finished by hand painting (Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, n.d.-a; n.d.-b).

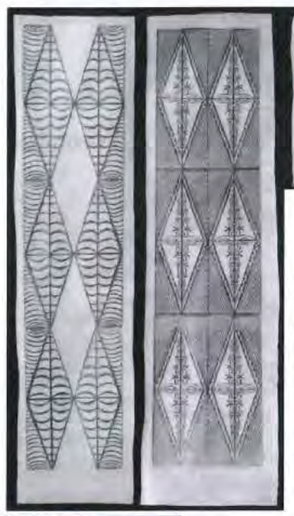
Addo (2017) explains that ngatu pepa actually began in the diaspora, where women adapted materials (like vilene and modern dyes) to keep making. This matters because it answers real problems cost, access to hiapo, and urban living while still carrying cultural meaning and social ties through koka'anga (collective making). Some people worry about "authenticity," but Addo shows how makers themselves authenticate these cloths through practice, naming, and how they are used in ceremonies and exchange (Addo, 2017).

You can see the look of ngatu pepa in Te Papa's object notes the surface is smoother and dyes/inks sit a bit different on vilene, but the logic is the same borders, central fields, repeating kupesi, and hand-detailed lines. One 2000 example is a large fuatanga (6600 × 4600 mm) made by Kulupu Taliangi; another from 1996 by 'Ilo Me'a Fo'ou shows similar construction and decoration. Both are documented with provenance, makers, and techniques, which also teaches students like me how the process works (Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, n.d.-a; n.d.-b; Lythberg, 2013).

Overall, vilene ngatu keeps the pattern language alive when the environment changes. It lets communities continue kupesi teaching, keep koloa circulating for life events, and practice koka'anga together, even far from Tonga. So for my own prints, learning about ngatu pepa helps me understand how materials can change but the cultural system still stays strong through repetition, collaboration, and how the cloth is used and cared for (Addo, 2017; Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, n.d.-a)








Left is woodblock prints using palangi ink of the patterns Tokelau feletoa and the kalou.

The above is a wood cut print printof symbols from the Tongan crest arrange to create a repeating pattern using palangi ink.

I found that the vylene picks up the ink well, although since its single layer the ink did transfer through the material because of how light it is. Although I quite liked this because you could view both sides of the vylene and see the pattern

Ngatu Pepa (Vilene Tapa)

OBJECT | PART OF PACIFIC CULTURES COLLECTION

Right is the Ngatu made by the 'Ilo Me'a Fo'ou Kokoanaga group using Vylene

I used vylene as a substitute for ngatu and made frottage rubbings from my kupesi boards. For this piece I used the cardboard kupesi I created that relate to my journey from Tonga, rugby boots, ika, vaka, and a plane, with tradtionall kupesi like the ikale tahi, lupe, palatavake, and manulua. The work is three metres long to mark my three years in New Zealand. Down the centre runs the Kalou from my village, set as a divider between the other kupesi and as the pathway through the composition and a reminder of where I come from and where I am going.

I made the rubbings with soft pastel because it is easy to source and gives a surface tone close to natural dye colours. The pastel picked up the relief cleanly on the vylene, letting the patterns register with clear edges across the full length of the sheet.

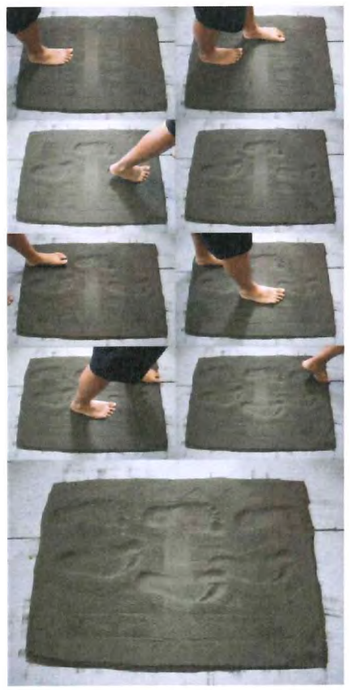
When I created this I felt a sense of accomplishment, I was proud of what I had made and was even more proud that this was selected as a finalists for the secondary art awards at the homestead galleries and exhibited at [redacted] estate.



Experimental Printmaking

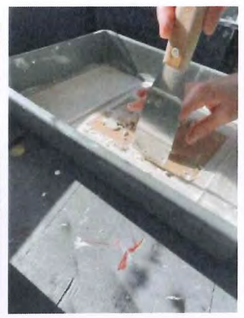
Last year I made lots of woodcuts for Level 2 printmaking and tried acetone image transfers. I passed, but the process felt boring and repetitive. This year I still wanted to use woodcut, but I also wanted to see how far I could push what printmaking could be. I started by asking Google, "What is printmaking?" and read that it's an artistic process where an image is transferred from a matrix to another surface like paper or fabric. My teacher also said it's basically moving a mark from one thing to another using a matrix.

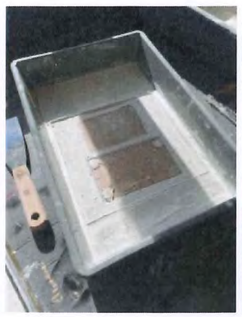
Instead of transferring onto tapa or vilene again, I looked for a different path. I remembered 2021 in Tonga when Hunga Tonga Hunga Ha'apai erupted and ash covered everything. I was about 14. My cousins and I spent days sweeping grey ash from the driveway and helping neighbours. When we walked on it our feet left clear prints, and we even pressed jandals, drew shapes, and wrote words in the ash before sweeping it away.



I wanted to capture that memory. So I printed the kalou kupesi into sand. I collected dark sand from Piha because the colour felt close to the ash I remembered, sprayed it with water to dampen it so the sand can hold and I pressed my kalou kupesi board into it. Then I walked over the surface to leave my footprints, echoing what I did back then. It still uses a matrix and transfer, but the "paper" is the sand itsself, and the print holds a temporary memory of home.

I decided not to use the footprint idea as part of the folio work because I feel it didn fit the aesthetic but I was satisfied I tried it and worked and now becomes a part of this scholarship writing.



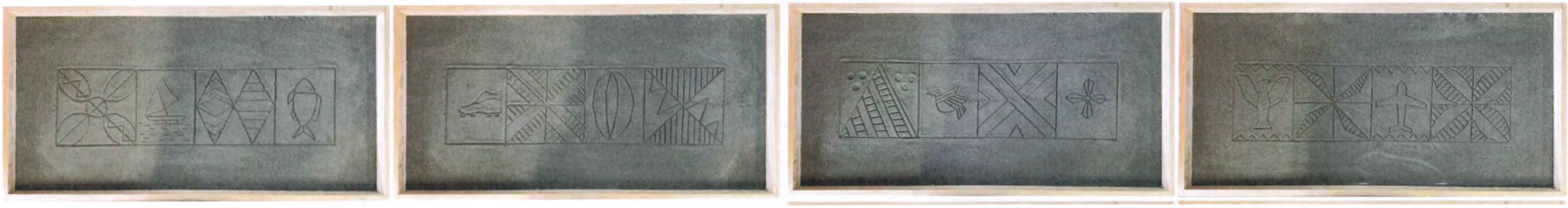


Above and left are experimental prints I made using laser cut kupesi designed in Illustrator. I tested two processes. First, I mixed plaster and poured it into a shallow container. While it was still wet, I inked a woodcut and set it face down on the plaster, leaving it to cure overnight. When I lifted the block, the ink had transferred and the relief left clear grooves in the set plaster. It reads as printmaking to me because it is still a transfer from a matrix to another surface, just with plaster instead of paper.

For the second test, I made a thin slip from sienna clay and poured it over an inked impression to see if it would take the image. This failed because the clay bonded to the texture and cracked when removed, although it did leave a good brown tone. I did not include this in my final submission. I like that these tests moved toward a more sculptural outcome, and I would explore them further with more time and another board

The images at the bottom show prints made by pressing my cardboard and skewer kupesi into black sand. I planned this as a crossover of sculpture and printmaking set up as a performance. In the video (these are stills), I worked in a loop: press the kupesi into the sand to form a clean relief, photograph the impression, shake the tray to level the surface, then print the next kupesi. The results act like embossing, there is no ink, just raised and recessed areas recorded by light and shadow.

A next step for this method would be to cast the impressions. Pouring plaster into the fresh sand relief could capture the form as a solid plate for later inking or rubbing. I did not run that test here due to time and space, but it would be my first trial if I add a fourth board.



Fakamalo




These four works make up my final series. They bring together my personal story and the people who anchor it: my paternal grandparents, my maternal grandparents, my parents, my siblings, and my close friends. From the beginning I set two simple rules to keep the project focused. First, every image would sit in the centre of the surface. Second, I would work with ngatu wherever possible. I wanted the structure to be clear and consistent, while leaving space to respond to each sheet as I printed.

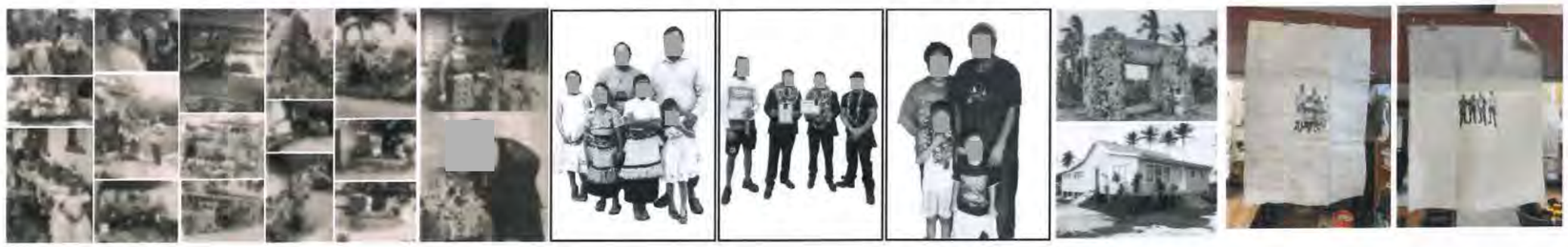
Getting the ngatu was straightforward. My dad travels often from Tonga to Aotearoa for work, and he brought four metres that my paternal grandma had beaten and prepared. I flattened the roll, measured it, and cut three sheets at 1500 × 1000 mm for the family pieces. For the fourth work, which features my tokos, I cut vylene to the same size. I chose this scale because ngatu is traditionally made in large lengths, not small sections, and I wanted to keep that sense of size and presence in my prints.

The most time consuming step was figuring out how to transfer photographs cleanly onto these different surfaces. I trialled several methods and logged the results. My first attempt was acetone transfer directly from a toner print. The image was too light and there wasn't enough pigment to hold detail in the fibres. Next, I tried a Mod Podge transfer. I brushed the medium over the printed image, placed it face down on the ngatu, left it to dry, then used water and fingertips to rub away the paper. This failed on tapa because the natural tapioca glue in the layered fetaaki rehydrated, which caused the surface to shift and the image to smear. I then tested an iron on transfer. On the tapa, the toner did not bond at all. On the vylene, the heat required for the transfer scorched the sheet because it is thin and sensitive to temperature. I also tried a control test by printing directly on vylene. The ink bled and marked the backing, and the result was not durable enough for installation.

What finally worked was using the non stick backing paper from Duraseal. I peeled off the adhesive film and kept the silicone coated backing, trimmed it to A4, and printed my image onto that surface. I brushed a thin, even layer of Mod Podge over the print, placed it face down on the ngatu, folded it to fit the press and ran through the press with clean newsprint to push out air pockets and ensure full contact. After pressing, I used a heat gun on low until it was dry. When I peeled the backing away, the image released cleanly onto the fibre. I repeated the process across all four works with consistent results.

With the transfers set, I checked the edges, sealed any weak areas, and added borders and pattern work chosen to suit each central image. I always printed outward from the portrait to avoid contact and smudging. The series holds together through a shared scale, centred compositions, and a transfer method refined through trial and error. After many false starts, the Duraseal-backing process delivered the consistent, sharp images the works needed.

I could spend a long time unpacking every choice, but the purpose is simple. These pieces are for my family and for me. They close this project in a way that feels true to how it began, careful making, steady testing, and gratitude for everyone who helped me print a path between here and home.





When I came to Aotearoa on a rugby scholarship I missed home hard. Art class gave me a place to put that feeling. Learning printmaking from the start let me slow down, listen, and build something with my hands that felt honest. I am thankful for that chance. I am thankful to my dad for carrying tapa from Tonga, to my nana for preparing it, and to my teachers and classmates who kept pushing me to test, fail, fix, and try again.

This folio is an attempt to show how I learned to work between two places. I made kupesi boards from cardboard and skewers, then from lino and wood, and finally with laser cuts when the pattern was too fine. I pressed patterns into black sand, poured plaster, tried clay slip, mixed my own soot ink, and printed on both tapa and vylene. A lot of things did not work the first time. The acetone transfer was too weak, the clay cracked, the iron-on burned, and direct printing bled. Each miss taught me how the materials behave. In the end, the Duraseal backing method gave me a clean, repeatable transfer, and that solution held the whole project together.

Printing my family at the centre of each work kept me focused. It made the technical choices serve a clear job hold a strong image, keep edges sharp, and protect the surface. These pieces are not ngatu, but they follow the same working values that make ngatu strong: rhythm, patience, teamwork, and care. I learned that process matters as much as outcome. If I respect the steps, the print respects me back.

I feel grateful to be in New Zealand where I can access tools like the laser cutter and still work with materials from home. That mix helped me connect to Tonga in a real way, not just by memory but through doing.

This portfolio is my thank you, to my family, my school, my friends, and the makers who shared knowledge with me. I will keep learning, keep testing, and keep finding honest ways to print the path between here and home.