

Modes of Adaptation: Identifying Matriarchal Influences in  
Art Making and Translating Knowledge Through Spatial  
Apparatuses.

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## Glossary

Aiga – is the Samoan word for family.

Alaga’upu – is the Samoan term for proverb.

Elei – is the Samoan name for fabric. It is also a term use in the process of textile printing.

Fa’asamoa – is the Samoan way of living.

Gafa – is the Samoan word for genealogy.

I’ofi – is a utensil made from the midrib of a coconut leaf that is bent in half and used for moving hot rocks and firewood.

Lalaga – is the Samoan term for weaving.

Launiu – is the Samoan name for coconut leaf.

Ma’ama’a – refers to an area of land covered with small rocks. This is where the process of drying pandanus leaves takes place.

Olomu’u – is a traditional long dress sewn from patterned printed fabric. Commonly worn by older women.

Suafa – is the respectful Samoan term for ‘name’.

Talanoaga – is the Samoan term for discussion or conversation.

Tolua – is a Samoan native bird also known as the grey duck. These birds commonly inhabit the streams and rivers in Samoa.

Ula – is the Samoan word for necklace.

Umukuka – is the Samoan name for a cooking house located at the back or on the side of the main house.

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## Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award of another degree or diploma or a university or institution of higher learning.

Signed

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This thesis is dedicated to my Grandma Nina, whom instilled in me a passion for crafting and thus, art making. You are my inspiration and although we are parted by the vast distance of the Pacific Ocean, you will always be the home I belong to. Like the alaga'upu *'e lele le toloa ae ma'au lava i le vai'*, - the toloa bird takes flight but will always return to the water. Although I have migrated to New Zealand, I find myself returning to the waters of Samoa through my memories of you.

# ABSTRACT

## *Modes of Adaptation: Identifying Matriarchal Influences in Art Making and Translating Knowledge through Spatial Apparatuses.*

This research practice focuses on articulating the role of craft making as a mode of adaptation that is driven by a set of generational knowledge passed down from my ancestors. The instrumental translation of knowledge through sculptural and installation artworks values matriarchal influences, particularly my maternal grandmother's craft making. These artworks unpack traditional Samoan methods such as lalaga<sup>1</sup> and ula<sup>2</sup> making, through alternative use of materials or methods that reference the labour of performing these processes. I am interested in questioning the different ways that craft can depict lineage, as well explore geographical migration – this being my own move from Samoa to New Zealand. Various potential understandings of the concept of space are explored to include the idea of memory space as the threshold that holds ethereal moments of family history. An analysis of space is investigated through methods such as crocheting, welding and video animation, that specifically denote the role of a diagram in creating, illustrating and evoking a travelled sense of space.

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<sup>1</sup> "Lalaga" is the Samoan term for weaving.

<sup>2</sup> "Ula" is the Samoan word for a floral necklace. This crafted artefact is a conventionally made with real flowers, for special occasions where it will be used to fa'aula (place on a person as a necklace) to honour a person.

# INTRODUCTION

This exegesis compiles and discusses various understandings of crafting spaces as a concept and a methodological approach for producing artwork. These discussions will focus on significations of matriarchal influences while evaluating ways that translations of generational knowing and genealogy are upheld through a craft-based practice. A series of sculptural and installation works will be discussed with regards to how a material can evocatively hold and transmit thought patterns, as well as memories of place, such as my grandmother Nina's house in Samoa. I primarily use tactile materials like wool, fabric and metal to create forms that are retrieved from my experiences and observations of Samoan crafting. My making evaluates social practices that are cultivated within a domestic family environment. I will also explore the notion of adaptation within the context of living in New Zealand as a Samoan-born artist. In this research, I will explore ways in which my understandings of cultural context are represented through craft making and diagrammatic approaches to making.

Chapter One will situate this research within the context of familial knowledge and understandings embedded in the practice of art making. The compilation of discussion within this exegesis will explore the conceptual framework of a crafting space in Chapter Two, as a platform allocated for the act of generational knowledge being passed down from ancestors to the next generation. This dialogue will highlight the instrumental role of the matriarchs in my family, particularly my maternal grandmother, Nina in maintaining family customs for making crafts. Furthermore, Chapter Three will examine the body as an active agent in the conceptual performance of documenting intuition and thought. It will introduce sensual experiences as a mode of adaptation, by which the senses' interaction with materials such as wool, metal and fabric are internalised and embodied in the form of an artwork. The methodological approach of diagramming or drawing as a tool that creates and discusses space will shape the fourth chapter of my writing. In Chapter Four, I will analyse the nature of the diagram in relation to durational making and durational becoming. And, the action of drawing as a literal translation of intuitive thinking that emphasises the body's affectual interaction with materials. In addition to these discussions, I will be referring to a range of artist practices, artworks and relevant research in order to reflect on the project's key concepts of matriarchal influences and translation of

generational knowledge. Through these linked dialogues, I will examine the notion of space as a by-product of my art making.

# 1 LOCATING FAMILIAL CONTEXT IN ART MAKING

I, Sosefina Andy, was born and raised in Samoa for 11 years prior to my family migrating to New Zealand on the 30<sup>th</sup> of December 2006. Our move to New Zealand brought with it the not-unexpected but ongoing adjustments necessary to make in an unfamiliar place, where my Samoan lifestyle interchanged with the new regime of living in Aotearoa. The biggest difference was having neighbours that were not my relatives, whereas in Samoa it was normal for extended families to live together beside one another in a village. This village life with family is where I first and foremost came to understand the idea of a community as well as collective making. I grew up spending time at different relatives' homes that were situated beside one another. My parents' house was located behind my grandmother, Nina's house, and my Aunt Malia, Grandma's younger sister, lived next door to her (fig. 1). Each house represents for me, time spent, and values learnt from my family. Therefore, the implications of the transitional move between geographical places are paramount for understanding the conceptual and methodological approaches explored throughout my practice. The artworks I make refer to another space and time that belongs to a distant land which I am physically detached from. My learning of Samoan customs and family traditions is emblematic of inbuilt knowledge: these are used as reference points within this practice, where the stimulation of ideas to produce sculptural and installation works are established.



Figure 1. Grandma Nina's house (right) and my Aunt Malia's house (left). Photographed by Akenese Tulouna. Samoa, 2015.



Figure 2. Aunt Liga's house viewed from Grandma Nina's front door. Photographed by Akenese Tulouna. Samoa, 2015.

Furthermore, my artworks privilege the role that my female ancestors play, particularly my maternal grandmother Nina, in nurturing a space for crafting. My matriarchal connection to Grandma Nina is a vital part of my interest in craft making. The process for creating the work titled *Dialogue with Ancient Craft* (fig. 3), involved the creation of a space for collaborative making in which I crocheted a bind of plastic rope while referring to my grandmother's weaving of pandanus leaves through my imagination. The act of wearing Grandma Nina's brown olomu'u<sup>3</sup> to make this work suggests a channelling of her craft making. Her olomu'u still retains her unique scent mixed with Samoan coconut oil, thus aiding my recollection of watching her lalaga.



Figure 3. Sosefina Andy. *Making Dialogue with Ancient Craft*, 2017.

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<sup>3</sup> "Olomu'u" is a long dress sewn from patterned printed fabric.



My methods for making are an attempt to retain an understanding and learning of Grandma Nina's way of working with customary methods like weaving, sewing and hand stitching. My practice as an art-maker integrates these traditional processes into an alternative framework that operates within the space of present time. To understand the idea of labour invested in Grandma Nina's work, I emulate her action through time-based repetitive methods, like crocheting, ula-making or textile printing – the outcome being the creation of forms that uphold connections to her and our ancestors. Craft making, therefore, is an aspect of my genealogy that creates a focus and articulates the important role of my female ancestors both historically and today. Craft also suggests a wider understanding of values presented by a crafting space that serves the collective community through interaction and exchange.

“Gafa” is the Samoan term for genealogy that is said to be the understanding and translation of “so’otaga ma tala’aga o aiga.”<sup>4</sup> Gafa is passed down verbally by the elders of the family, and my understanding of it is defined by the names of ancestors that are mentioned during talanoaga.<sup>5</sup> The protocols for learning gafa are pertinent in preserving family history, thus it is spoken rather than written. This also indicates that it is a fluid expression of history, which acknowledges both distant and close connections among family. Fluid, in the sense that it encapsulates the action of voicing a name aloud within a space of constant flux, whereby history is recalled and woven into conversations held within present time. The oral structure of my family tree speaks the term gafa before each relative’s suafa.<sup>6</sup> For example, the expression “fa’ae’e le gafa o Sosefina,” translates “was born the name Sosefina” – this introduces the idea of name carrying the understanding of the name-holder’s connection to their family. The act of naming a person indicates a bestowing of genealogy in which the name is a vessel that carries ethereal understanding of kinship. It speaks of family connections before and after that person, and moreover the idea of a name upholding these connections perpetually has weighted values attached to it. These values are formed through the person’s relationship with their family and the exchange that takes place through conversation, making together and customary routines of fa’asamoa.<sup>7</sup> Grandma Nina’s name for me illustrates intergenerational knowledge and

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<sup>4</sup> “So’otaga ma tala’aga o aiga” means the lineage and hereditary history of family connections. This understanding of gafa was explained by my father during a conversation with me.

<sup>5</sup> “Talanoaga” is the Samoan word for discussion or conversation.

<sup>6</sup> “Suafa” is the respectful Samoan term for ‘name’.

<sup>7</sup> “Fa’asamoa” means a Samoan way of living.

its transferral through generational links. By simply mentioning her name, I remember observing her process of boiling pandanus leaves in a pot of water, then individually laying them out on ma'ama'a<sup>8</sup> to dry before using them for her lalaga.

*O le vivigi o moa, ua malama a'e ai le taeao. Ua o'u fa'alogo fo'i i le paō o i'ofi i le tafuga o le afi i atigi popo. Ua pupuna le ulu, le umu kuka ua asu. A mamae loa laufala, si'i ese ma sasa'a. Ona talatala ta'itasi lea ma fola i luga o ma'ama'a e fa'alālā. O aso, ma vaiaso, ma masina ua pasi, ona sauni loa lea e auau laufala ma ta'ai ta'itasi. So'oso'o ma toe ta'ai, o le fa'amasina lea o ta'aiga fala. A ma'ea, toe tu'u lea mo nai aso, ma vaiaso. Ona amata lea o lau lalaga i laufala ia.*

*The rooster crows at the first break of light, followed by the sound of the i'ofi adding coconut shells to the fire from a pile in the corner of the umukuka.<sup>10</sup> Balancing on two metal rods is a large-size pot boiling pandanus leaves. The leaves that have been cut from various trees growing at the back of Grandma's house have been bound in a moon-like shape and placed in the boiling water. Once the dark green layer of the pandanus leaves has been stripped and separated, the water is poured out. The binds are then unravelled and laid out individually on ma'ama'a to dry. After weeks and months, the pandanus leaves are ready to be sorted for weaving.*

The above excerpt is an “illustration memory”<sup>11</sup> of watching Grandma Nina and her children (my aunts and uncles) prepare pandanus leaves for weaving. This process was recalled in a conversation I had with my mother and uncle in the confines of our family lounge in New Zealand. They were both reminiscing about their assigned roles in preparing pandanus leaves, while sharing their memories of my grandmother's weaving activities. Conversation with family members is a vital form of cultural research; the passing down of cultural knowledge, and especially the sourcing of information about cultural ideas and processes that are of interest to my art practice. The way these conversations take form varies from in-person exchanges to talking on social media platforms like Facebook. The latter is my method for maintaining contact with Grandma Nina who currently lives in

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<sup>8</sup> “Ma'ama'a” is a Samoan word for an area covered with small rocks.

<sup>9</sup> “I'ofa” is a utensil made from the midrib of a coconut leaf that is bent in half and used for moving hot rocks and firewood.

<sup>10</sup> “Umukuka” is the Samoan name for a cooking house located at the back or on the side of the main house.

<sup>11</sup> “Illustration memory” is a methodological approach in my practice that I employ when documenting intuitive thinking, while focusing on the memory of a thing or person as presented through the crafting of a work. Its descriptive nature suggests a series of frames that are like moments within time, in which I understand the structure of memory recollection.

Samoa. My contact with her has to go through family members, as she speaks Samoan. They translate my questions from English to Samoan before reciting them to my grandmother, and in return they take down handwritten replies and send me copies of these translations in both Samoan and English. This method of exchange both acknowledges and represents my primary collective, this being my aiga,<sup>12</sup> while also enacting how generational knowledges are re-performed through the process of making artworks.

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<sup>12</sup> "Aiga" is the Samoan word for family.

## 2 CRAFTING SPACE

This chapter, Crafting Space, situates my position as a researcher and a craft maker through referential discussion that focuses on the exchange of knowledge between generations, as well as memories of growing up with Grandma Nina. It articulates the influential role of matriarchs within the context of a Samoan family, particularly their skills and artistry, as represented in my art making. Craft making is a conceptual framework that investigates how my artworks can embody translation of knowledge, while emphasising the significance of my relationship with my grandmother. Through techniques such as crocheting, ula making and textile printing, I am literally crafting a space between me, my grandmother and my female ancestors. I acknowledge this space as a between-ness belonging to geographical space and distance, as well as a cognitive understanding of connections to my grandmother and predecessors. Crafting space is a context of art making that designates a space for craft, as well as recognising how the artworks created, can act as an assigned space in which viewers may experience and exchange their understandings of the artwork.

### 2.1 GENERATIONAL KNOWLEDGE

Generational knowledge is identified by this practice as a compilation of knowledge that is kept within a family and is maintained by its members. The knowledge and understanding gained through my observations of Samoan fine mats being woven, and the family collectively making ula, is equally understood through heirlooms. As a child, I often assisted in my grandmother's craft making, and through this I customarily learnt her system of working in relation to the idea of fa'asamoa. The repetitive action of her lalaga routine enabled a kind of familiarisation with the process as it worked concurrently with ecological factors such as times of the day, or the abundance of pandanus trees during seasonal changes - at which time my family would begin the long process of sorting the pandanus leaves for weaving.

Vitolia Mo'a in the book *Whispers and Vanities* says, "le aso ma le taeao is a cyclical and interrelated concept of time" that "depicts existential consciousness in relation to human

beings.”<sup>13</sup> Mo’a translated the Samoan phrase *le aso ma le taeao* as “the day and the hour”<sup>14</sup> in which fa’asamoa or the way of Samoan living is understood as a systematic recurrence of activities performed by the body. I understand this statement regarding the habitual making of lalaga as it highlights a series of actions, like the sorting of the pandanus leaves during seasonal harvests, which is necessary for executing the process correctly. This as a concept introduces time as an arrangement of repeated stages carried out by the body, while also alluding to environmental changes as factors that situate these stages chronologically. The active body, which realises these natural changes through being familiar with lalaga, responds by re-producing the process to fit its new ecological system thus suggesting a mode of adaptation.

The notion of adaption is also illustrated through alternative ways of transmitting knowledge of Samoan cultural craft and reproducing the labour of these processes using unconventional materials. For instance, my learning of sewing ula with family was articulated by my ongoing work *Le Ula o le Alofa* (fig. 4&5) which translates as “The Ula of Love”. This work utilised a basic Samoan technique for making ula, which was a process taught to me by Grandma Nina. Conventionally, they are made from fresh flowers and leaves, but the form of my ula work was produced from hand-cut rectangular strips of clothing, collected from family members that were then threaded together using a needle. The ula currently compiles 21 items of clothing, extending its current length to approximately eight metres long. The title of this work being *Le Ula o le Alofa* signifies the unbreakable bond and love between family as well as genealogical constructs that link me to my aiga. Its making recalls Grandma Nina’s teachings of needlework, how to thread a needle, double knot it and most importantly overlap fabric pieces onto the needle. Thus far, the ula includes clothes that belonged to my mother, father, my two brothers and my older sister, and I aim to extend its form in length by incorporating clothing from my extended family of aunts, uncles and cousins. When making this work, my interaction with each garment is clearly linked to the person it belongs to. Seeing and feeling the texture of cotton, knitted wool, or polyester triggers my recollection of the family members who have wore them, and these memories are invoked by the sensual experiences herein. This

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<sup>13</sup> Mo’a, Vitolia, “Le Aso ma le Taeao – The Day and the Hour: Life and Demise for ‘Whispers and Vanities’?” in *Whispers and Vanities; Samoan Indigenous Knowledge and Religion*, ed. Tamasailau Suaalii-Sauni et al., (Wellington: Huia Publishers, 2014), 45, 51.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 45.

aspect gives the work a totemic value that is amplified by its association with not just the person but the space and time when the garments were worn.



Figure 4. Sosefina Andy. *Le Ula o le Alofa*, 2018. Detail of the ula.



Figure 5. Sosefina Andy. *Le Ula o le Alofa*, 2018. Full view. Compilation of my family's clothes.

In my work *Le Ula o le Alofa*, fabric is viewed as a carrier of meaning, and personalised through its attachment to a particular person. This association is made affective directly through my body's contact with the fabric, while the movement of it in space refers once again to its being previously worn. I am interested in this concept of materials carrying meaning and representations of people, particularly in relation to space and time. This for me suggests materials, such as fabric, an entry point to memories situated in a particular time and space. The body's contact with material analyses how meanings and personal attachments are formed or reformed.



This notion of a material as a signification of a person's connection to a place can be understood in the work *Mabu Mubu Mmu* (fig. 6) created by South African-born artist Dineo Seshee Bopape, who is now based in the Ukraine. Bopape's installation work uses soil as the main conveyor of ideas such as cultural space and the fertility of this soil in nurturing a variety of living things like the human body. The black soil that the artist sourced from her home in the Ukraine was compressed and moulded around the gallery space, navigating the viewer's movement within the installation while encompassing them in the aromatic experience of the soil. The soil held traces of bodily activities such as imprints of hands and sprouting of seeds (fig. 7) which offered a metaphorical reading of the soil as a fosterer of life. These imprints, which were static, spoke of a contact between the soil and the body that now only exists in past time, while the sprouting of seeds remained an active agent introducing the notion of durational becoming.



Figure 6. Dineo Seshee Bopape. *Mabu Mubu Mmu*, 2017. Mixed media installation.



Figure 7. Dineo Seshee Bopape. *Mabu Mubu Mmu*, 2017. Detail: bodily interaction and sprouting on black soil.

The idea of durational becoming that is presented in Bopape's work, is articulated in my work titled *O le lolomiga o le tā So'otaga*,<sup>15</sup> as it also engages in methods of durational making. This work constitutes two objects, a metal structure holding a piece of fabric and

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<sup>15</sup> "O le lolomiga o le tā So'otaga" translates as the printed impression of our lineage or connection. The 'our' that this work title refers to is my relationship with my grandmother and connections to my female ancestors.

a screen, that are positioned in close proximity to one another within an open space (fig. 8). The light blue fabric was repetitively block printed with images of a chair, and draped over a welded metal structure that also mimicked the form of this chair (fig. 9), and adjacently, a TV screened an animated drawing of the same chair.<sup>16</sup> This drawing, significantly, outlines the form of Grandma Nina's chair, which was given to her by the Samoan hospital in Moto'otua for rehabilitation purposes. Its structural design supports blood circulation while she's sitting and makes it easier for her to stand up. This chair is where Grandma Nina sits to do most of her hand-stitching works, thus for me it symbolises her craft making; the time and labour invested in mending an old t-shirt or producing new stitches for couch covers. And so, *O le lolomiga o le tã So'otaga* remembers the slow stitching of her needle into the fabric through both the animated drawing that actively outlines the space of her making and the printed elei<sup>17</sup> that alludes to the idea of durational making. The durational action is of my hand pressing the block stamp onto the blue elei, and lifting it off to reveal the outline of the chair, and covering the entire surface of a 2 by 1.2-metre piece of fabric. The slow reveal of the print mimics the slow pulling of Grandma Nina's hand guiding the threaded needle through her fabric. The action of textile printing also introduces the idea of parallel spaces, where the present space of printing the work is interplayed with the memories of my grandmother stitching her printed elei. The neighbouring screen reiterates this, as the animation gently traces out a simulation of my hand previously drawing this same image with a pen on paper.

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<sup>16</sup> *O le lolomiga o le tã So'otaga*, 2018. Animated drawing of Grandma Nina's chair. <https://vimeo.com/292021485>

<sup>17</sup> "Elei" is the Samoan word for fabric. It is also an expression use in the process of textile printing.





Figure 8. Sosefina Andy. *O le lolomiga o le tā So'otaga*, 2018. Full view: mixed-media installation.



Figure 9. Sosefina Andy. *O le lolomiga o le tā So'otaga*, 2018. Detail: block-print fabric work.

## 2.2 MATRIARCHAL INFLUENCES: THE FEMALE VOICE

My art practice uses fabric as a platform in which my ancestral life is kept alive within my New Zealand context and that of living away from Samoa. My grandmother's craft making speaks of history and a set of knowledges that have been performed by different generations of our family before and after her. The processes of weaving and sewing have constantly been individualised through the passing down of knowledge from one generation to another. The way in which I engage with needle work references my grandmother's knowledge and skill base, and as I have gained more confidence and

sensitivity to specific cultural nuances over time, are then embedded in the life force or essence of my artworks.

This notion of connectivity generated by the exchange of tacit knowing and craft making is presented in the exhibition *To Uphold your Name*,<sup>18</sup> by artists Quishile Charan and Salome Tanuvasa, held at Māngere Arts Centre - Ngā Tohu o Uenuku in August 2018. This two-person show focused on telling stories of Pacific women while shining a light on female resilience by means of textile making approaches. It acknowledges matriarchal influences in each of the artists in relation to their art making, while deliberately forming connections with the local Pasifika communities through a series of workshops that engaged in block printing, poetry writing, magazine making and Cook Island dance classes. Charan's work connects her to her Aaji (father's mother) who introduced Quishile to an expanded interest in traditional Fijian and Indian methods of fabric dyeing, textile printing and embroidery. The artist says it was 'inevitable' that she would only work with these methods and materials, as they are pertinent for understanding her cultural customs and way of living. Charan grew up in Fiji learning craft skills from her Aaji, and through this intimate relationship her textile works act as a series of platforms that illustrates the history of indentured labour in Fiji. They also re-visualise ways of narrating female experiences, giving power back to the voices of women.

The idea of connectivity can also be seen through the intermingling of text on fabric in the works of artist Salome Tanuvasa, which were situated in parallel to Quishile Charan's textile works in *To Uphold your Name* (fig. 10). Tanuvasa employed a diaristic approach to creating her works *Drawing reflections of Journey* (fig.11), by cutting out and stitching letters and shapes onto fabric. Thus, she introduces dialogue, which is also present in the elongated stream of responses by the public that are written on the light-yellow space beneath the fabric works. This new method of making in Tanuvasa's art practice embodies her mother's knowledge as well as her labour when working as a seamstress. The artist collectively produced these works with her mother, therefore engaging a passing down of skills, and at the same time becoming aware of bodily stresses that are caused by stitching large-scale works. Tanuvasa acknowledges her mother and family by stitching their names

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<sup>18</sup> Quishile Charan and Salome Tanuvasa, "To Uphold your Name," accessed August 20, 2018. <https://www.upholdyourname.com>

onto one of the fabric works. The inclusion of her parents' and siblings' names signified a layer of intimacy that articulated the richness of the domestic environment as an integral part of Tanuvasa's making. In addition, her works associate dialogue with the idea of 'upholding' culture and family traditions.



Figure 10. Salome Tanuvasa. Drawing Reflections of Journey. 2018. Installation: textile



Figure 11. Quishile Charan & Salome Tanuvasa. *To Uphold your Name*, 2018. Installation: textile and mixed media.

When I experienced the show *To Uphold your Name*, I was immediately reminded of the time I have spent crafting with Grandma Nina. My work *It's an extension of Her* (fig.

12) recognises 'her' as my grandmother, therefore the form of the work is symbolic of our relational connection. The shape and form of this crochet work evolved through passing time, as the stitching of wool approximated measurements, while tracing out my experiential understanding of my grandmother's chair that currently exists in her home in Samoa. This applied method of durational making continues to enlarge the scale of this work through a series of loops. This artwork comprises a welded metal frame holding the crocheted translation of the chair. The use of rebar construction metal in the production of works within my practice signifies its integral role for building houses in Samoa. These rebar metals are used to reinforce the architectural frame of a house before the cement or bricks are added to its construction. It is important that the foundational structure of a home is stable enough to withstand the severest tropical cyclones that commonly affect Samoa. The metal structure in the work *It's an extension of Her* supports the outline of a space of memory that is activated through the nature of crochet. The stability of the frame braces the crochet work within it while stretching its flexible form outwards in a pulling tension, revealing the drawing of Grandma Nina's chair.



Figure 12. Sosefina Andy. *It's an extension of Her*, 2018.  
Installation: crochet and welded metal frame. View towards  
the rear of the building.

## 2.3 THE ROLE OF CROCHETING

Crocheting was not a technique passed down or taught to me by my grandmother. It is a result of adapting to a new living environment, after migrating to New Zealand. I learnt how to crochet by watching YouTube tutorials for beginners. It was a technique that I picked up due to a desire for hand crafting. The feeling of missing the touch and alteration of textural materials such as laufala or launiu<sup>19</sup> initiated my working with processes and materials that are accessible to me, such as crochet and wool. Crocheting started as a pastime and hobby that slowly became a vital part of my visual thinking. To me crocheting is a spontaneous way of freestyling the form of a work, while documenting the memory of an object or a space. It is like a therapeutic tool that activates day-dreaming and a state of zoning out; by picking up a crochet needle and looping the wool around my hands, my mind eventually wanders.

Gaston Bachelard, in *The Poetics of Space*, stated that “daydream undoubtedly feeds on all kinds of sights, but through a sort of natural inclination it contemplates grandeur.”<sup>20</sup> This for me indicates the idea of desiring familiarity as a stimulus for day-dreaming. I am naturally drawn to crocheting due to memories of observing and collectively making with my grandmother. My pulling of wool to tighten a crochet work refers to Grandma Nina’s motion of pressing the laufala tightly beneath her finger while weaving, in order to avoid gaps in the lalaga. This presents day-dreaming as a consequence of my disposition when crafting a work. The empathic experience of working with crochet propels memory retrieval to the forefront of consciousness. In crocheting a work, I am physically and emotionally invested in patterns of making due to the ability of the process to not only initiate but also bridge a psychological journeying, for me, back to living in Samoa. In other words, I realise the action of crocheting enables my memories of Samoa to be poured into my present time and space, and this is immensely potent to my understanding the notion of memory retrieval/recollection.

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<sup>19</sup> “Launiu” is the Samoan name for coconut leaf.

<sup>20</sup> Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space: The classic look at how we experience intimate places*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), 183.



Ani O'Neill produced her work *There's no place like home* (fig. 13&14) in 1998, during her residency at the Rita Angus Cottage in Wellington. I first encountered this installation work in person as part of the 2018 Moana Oceania exhibition on show at the Auckland Art Gallery. The form of this work comprises 280 crochet circles, each with a 10.8-centimetre diameter, individually pinned in seven equal rows of colours. The assemblage of these crochet works covered the long wall of the gallery space, providing a painterly reading of the work. My perceptual experience of O'Neill's artwork coincided with her time spent making in the cottage previously owned by the painter Rita Angus. My interest in O'Neill's artwork is due to a conceptual understanding of space as a condition for making work. For O'Neill it was the cottage belonging to Rita Angus that influenced her synergy of rendering rainbow colours through an expansive installation of crochet forms. In addition, the act of making multiples for *There's no place like home* indicates a constant learning of a technique that familiarises the body with the making.

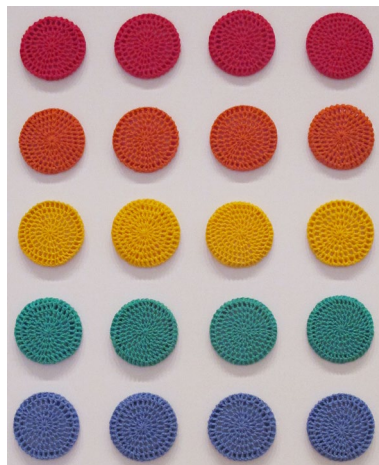


Figure 13. Ani O'Neill. *There's no place like home*, 1998. Detail: coloured crochet circles, 10.8cm diameter. Photographed by Sosefina Andy.

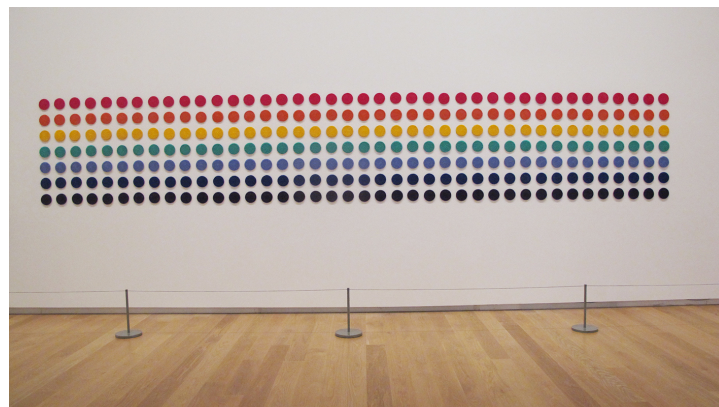


Figure 14. Ani O'Neill. *There's no place like home*, 1998. Full view. Installation work: coloured crochet circles. Photographed by Sosefina Andy.

My work titled *Peggy Squares; the month of July* (fig. 15&16) utilised a knitting method to produce an assemblage of peggy squares.<sup>21</sup> The title of this work speaks to a designated timeframe, which established a space for knitting one peggy square per day for the duration of the month of July. The form of each square had a plaited line that crossed diagonally through the work. This is due to a pattern-making method that begins with casting<sup>22</sup> 53 loops onto a knitting needle, reverse knitting 25 loops onto your second needle then jointly knitting three loops together, before continuing to knit the last 25 loops. By repeating this method, the number of loops decreases with each row of knitting, and the diagonal line emerges as the knitted work takes on the form of a square. The differing factors within this work are the various thicknesses of wool I used to carry out the same process. Some was 8-ply, which meant the work held its shape tightly, while the 12-ply wool revealed the loose interlocking of loops. My intention for applying the same making technique to the different thicknesses of wool focused on articulating the notion of a process altered by material, thus so is the crafted outcome. Nonetheless, using the same thickness of wool to repeat this pattern-making method also resulted in iterations that are not identical to the previous ones. This dissimilarity of form, for me, reveals the distinctive values amplified by my individually crafting the squares within the scheduled timeframe, each to their own uniqueness.

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<sup>21</sup> A “peggy square” is small knitted square, and multiples of it are stitched together to make a woollen blanket.

<sup>22</sup> “Casting”, a starting point, is a knitting term for the first row of the knit work that is threaded onto the needle.



Figure 15. Sosefina Andy. *Peggy Squares; the month of July, 2017*. Detail. Knitted squares.



Figure 16. Sosefina Andy. *Peggy Squares; the month of July, 2017*. Full view. Installation: knitted wool.



### 3 DOCUMENTING MEMORY AND INTUITION

This chapter, Documenting Memory and Intuition, discusses ways in which the idea of transitory experience is produced in an artwork. I am interested in how the body and mind work together when internalising sensual experiences. This chapter also highlights new modes of producing tools used for textile printing while analysing unconventional ways of employing techniques such as crocheting and welding.

#### 3.1 INTUITION: THINKING THROUGH FEELING/SEEING

Tacit knowledge is associated with muscle memory or how the body remembers action and its experience of working with material and processes. The making of the work *O le Lolomiga o le tā So'otaga* recalled for me my knowledge of hand printing elei during the time I lived in Samoa. This artwork initiated a comparable discussion between the past where I learnt elei printing and the immediate present of producing this work. The artwork recognises the body's labour of pressing and extending the pattern across the surface of the fabric. The making of this work also introduced digital technology as another way for creating the tool I used for printing on textile. The stencil was made through the digital program Illustrator, then laser cut onto medium-density fibreboard (mdf), and from this I created a block-print stamp of Grandma Nina's chair (fig. 17). The shift from traditionally using wood carvings for printing to creating these patterns digitally is a form of adaptation where the contemporary method of laser cutting is modified to fit traditional modes of accurately carving the outline of a pattern or design. The technique of continuously printing the same motif of Grandma Nina's chair embedded the fabric with a distinct manifestation of my body's interaction with the block print. The repetitive use of my grandmother's chair in various iterations of artworks within this practice symbolically represents her and her space of making.

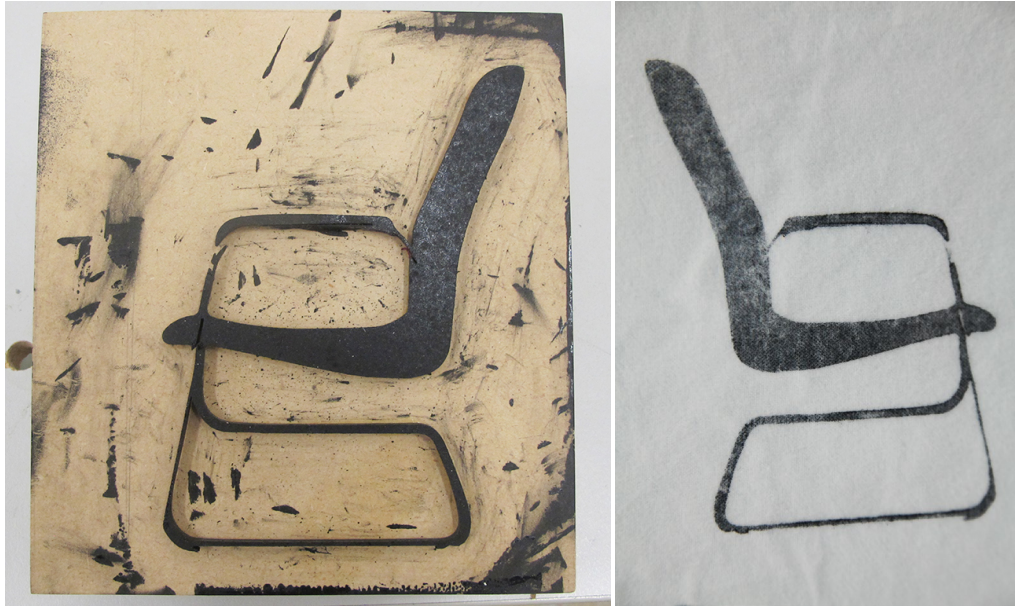


Figure 17. Sosefina Andy. *O le lolomiga o le tā So'otaga*, 2018. Block-print stamp and printed outcome.

The acknowledgement of a women's role through the employment of particular patterns and motifs is a driving force in the making of the work titled *Kaokao* (fig.18) by Mata Aho Collective. This work referenced a tukutuku pattern that symbolises strength and resilience to create a large-scale installation work using industrial materials. Similarly, I am intrigued by the idea of a motif forming a pattern that extends visual dialogue associated with female craft. The making of my work *O le Lolomiga o le tā So'otaga* (2018) multiplied the stencilled drawing of my grandmother's chair, thus creating a single pattern that converged my way of making with the idea of my grandmother's crafting space.

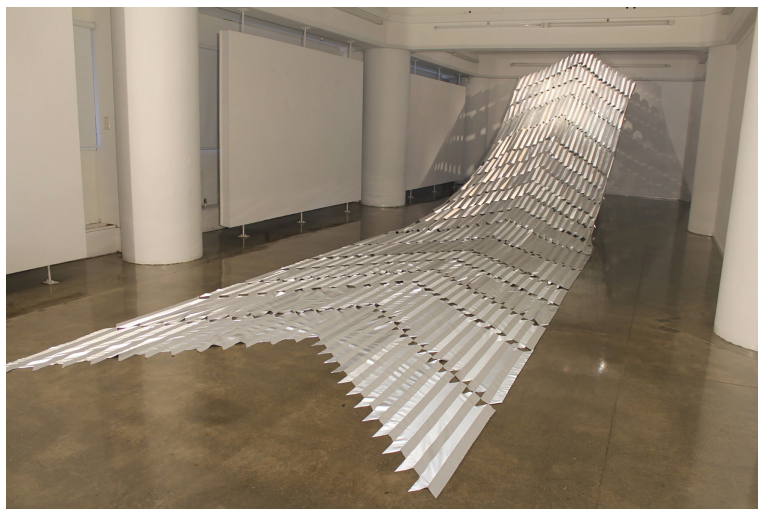


Figure 18. Mata Aho Collective. *Kaokao*, 2014. Tukutuku pattern. Installation: industrial material.

### 3.2 CRAFTED MEMORY: AN EPHEMERAL TRANSLATION

Crafting, in my practice, enables a distinct focus on the conceptual exchange between the mind and the body through an interaction with an object or material. It alludes to the cross-sectional experience of each of the senses that are set in motion by an active agent. The sense of touch takes focus when I am crocheting, as it is my hands that are primarily in direct contact with the wool. Contact between the hand and the woollen material activates neurons on the surface of my hand. These microscopic analyses of the thing I am touching send messages in the form of nerve impulses to the brain, which internalises them before actualising these finite understandings of a felt experience. My artwork *It's an extension of Her* (fig. 19) utilises crochet to create an image that references an object from my grandmother's house – her chair. The active movement of my hands working with needle and wool signified a/my sense of touch as the first receiver of this interactive and affective information.



Figure 19. Sosefina Andy. *It's an extension of Her*, 2018. Full view.  
Installation: crochet and welded metal frame. View towards the front of the building.

Like the sensual experience of touch or feeling enabling the making of a work, perspective viewing or the act of seeing in relation to imagination is also another way of creating artworks in reference to memory. The work *Fractions of a whole* (fig 20&21), discusses imagination as the threshold in which I understand the form of my grandmother's chair. This threshold is a space for retrieving and translating information into physical forms. *Fractions of a whole* is composed of three welded metal forms that are an explicit translation of three cognitive viewing at different times, of the same memory of my grandmother's chair. The idea of viewing, and returning to view again, the form of an object resulted in the varying outcome of these metal drawings. The dimensional turns in each welded iteration speak of different points of perspective that are embedded in my memory of experiencing the original chair.



Figure 20. Sosefina Andy. *Fractions of a whole*, 2018. Installation: welded metal drawings.



Figure 21. Sosefina Andy. *Fractions of a whole*, 2018. Full view.

## 4 THE DIAGRAM: FORMAL LANGUAGING

This chapter will focus on the role of the diagram in my art making. It will discuss how a diagrammatic approach documents intuition as linked to memory and ephemeral experiences, while also articulating the notion of a diagram as a formula for creating and articulating spaces. These spaces range from ethereal understandings of my grandmother Nina's house in Samoa to a space articulated in the diagrammatic process of line drawing as well as the present space for making a work. A term for understanding how I work with diagrams and drawings is the analysis of the body as a tool that retrieves and approximates measurements according to experiences of my grandmother's house. These embodiments derive from my chain of memories that are activated through being exposed to perhaps less familiar environments living in New Zealand. Thus, positioning the idea of unfamiliarity as a responsive mechanism of adaptation through craft making.

Diagramming for me is a default method for retaining ethereal moments of family history and generational knowledges like *lalaga* and sewing.

### 4.1 DRAWING A SPACE OF MEMORY

I utilise diagrams as an approach to give form to my thinking process. They articulate the idea of drawings as a spatial apparatus in which retention of memory awaits interaction with material to convey its structure. As a methodological concept, this refers to the visible body of a line being etched onto paper (or drawing platform), and in response this platform archives the image as the outcome of the hand's movement. In my work *Untitled: On my way home* (fig. 22), I am drawing in an attempt to document a chain of thought that counterparts my memories of Grandma Nina's chair. The diagram as shown in Figure 22 was created during a flight home from Wellington earlier this year, hence the title of the work '*On my way home*'. This diagrammatic artwork suggests a making space that is mobilised by an active agent, myself and the duration of the flight. Duration is an aspect represented by the continuous drawing of a line, based on the linear and freestyled nature of crocheting. I drew this diagram with the intention that it would be reproduced into a crochet work. This derives from my understanding of crocheting as a tool for spontaneous making or freestyling the form of an artwork embedded in memory recollection. Nevertheless, the work *Untitled: On my way home* suggests multiple layers of durational



space, one being the plane flying through atmospheric space while the other a continuous drawing of the diagram on paper by my hand holding a red pen. Thus illustrating how a space might be constituted by a series of lines.



Figure 22. Sosefina Andy. *Untitled: On my way home*, 2018. Durational drawing.

My diagrams are often intuitive and spontaneous. They do not intend to be exact but they attempt to present something that is close to the actual. My artwork *When two points meet* (fig. 23), was a perspective drawing of my grandmother's chair using light-blue and grey threads. The manner of drawing this work was intended to not be exact, as the two points of perspective did not align with the drawing of the chair. Therefore, the image of the chair appeared to extend off the wall rather than confined by linear perspective. The inaccurate quality of this work allowed it to be boundless from one translation, one viewpoint and present a perceptual space in which a viewer could formulate an open-ended response according to their own perceptual reading when encountering this work. The idea of my drawings being imprecise is deliberate. It metaphorically speaks of the manner in which my mind reminisces, as the method of drawing diagrams enables a psychological moving across liminal space in which evocative memories are in a constant state of becoming physical forms.

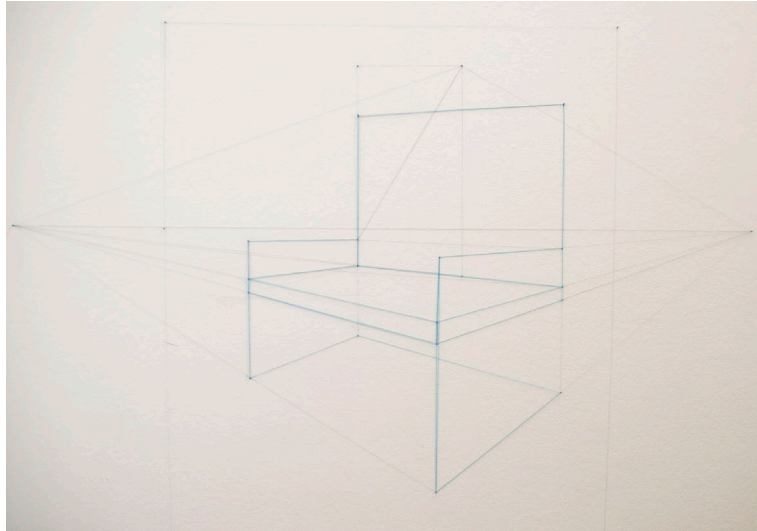


Figure 23. Sosefina Andy. *When two points meet*, 2018. Two-point perspective drawing. Blue and grey thread.

My diagrams are informed by the works of artists such as Salome Tanuvasa. Tanuvasa's practice utilises mark making to bridge conversations across geographical spaces and time. She lives in New Zealand and produces works that centralises her Tongan lineage here. The complexities of her mark making, specifically in her work, *Do you want to give it a name?* (fig.24) give context to the distance and longing that I feel when viewing Tanuvasa's work. Her line drawings are illustrations of gestures formed by her knowledge of and interest in wave patterns that metaphorically connect her between here and her homeland of Tonga. Tanuvasa's work presents the idea of waves hitting the shoreline, creating ripples that motion back and forth, and for me this translates as a metaphorical understanding of migration. The artist's line drawings also highlight a distance between the two motu or lands, and how the individual self is linked to each place.



Figure 24. Salome Tanuvasa. *Do you want to give it a name?*, 2018. Installation: pen/marker drawings on found paper.

Similar to Tanuvasa's work, the artworks I make attempt to fill the distance between myself and Grandma Nina as well as my family's history of craft making. The crochet work fills the space through texture and colour, and the tactile quality of wool used exudes warmth and domesticity which is also amplified by its cream colour. This pale shade of yellow strongly references my memories of Grandma Nina's window sills that are this colour. My consideration around colour is vital to ensuring that memories retrieved are close to authentic forms, thus I purposely matched the colour of wool with the colour of the window sills as seen in photographic images of my grandmother's house (fig. 25&26). The crochet work outlines a space for physically storing a recollection of memory. It adds volume to an imagined experience through its multiple loops. The constitution of loops to form lines of crochet is crafted in parallel to my line drawing. The line drawing for me captures thought and immediacy. It holds still the feelings that are active in the moment I am making a work. These lines, like Tanuvasa's line drawings in her work *Do you want to give it a name?*, generate a conversation about connections formed in spatial time; this being the present time in which I make work in response to past memories of making with Grandma Nina. Due to the convention of crocheting as a continual line of movement, my line drawings are continuous and unbroken. They suggest for me the idea of actively working with memory. It is in fact a continuous conversation that I get to revisit every time I crochet the same work. The process is unbroken, like the bond I have to my home country of Samoa that nurtured my initial understanding of crafting knowledge and family traditions.





Figure 25. Grandma Nina's home, Vaiusu, Samoa. 2014.



Figure 26. Inside Grandma Nina's house; lounge room. Photographed by Akenese Tulouna. 2015.

## 5 CONCLUSION

To conclude, this research articulates the substantial role of generational knowledge and matriarchal influences in a craft-driven practice, while underlining my craft making relationship with my maternal grandmother Nina. This exegesis also discussed the idea of memory as the threshold in which ethereal knowing is actualised through the textured material form of an artwork. The artworks made during this thesis, unravelled modes of making in relation to my memories of growing up in Samoa, surrounded by craft and family living in close proximity to one another. By crocheting with wool, or drawing using a pen or thread, or welding metal together, my haptic experience with material enables imagination and memory recollection. My continuous working with the idea of memory signified a cognitive experience of returning home to a place of familiarity, my Grandmother's house in the village of Vaiusu, Samoa. The psychological journey of 'returning home' can be annotated by the Samoan proverb:

E lele le toloa, ae ma'au lava i le vai,  
*The toloa bird takes flight but will always return to the water.*

The alaga'upu<sup>23</sup> above tells of the toloa<sup>24</sup> taking flight, covering an expanse of land and in due time returning to the water, to the place of its natural habitat. This proverb is often said by an elder of my family in the context of a child leaving home, highlighting the commencement of a new journey while emphasising the importance of remembering where we come from. The habitual returning of the toloa to the water represents my memories of collectively making with family and Grandma Nina. The 'water' signifies the intimate space of my grandmother's house, and experiences within it that are also articulated through the various forms of my artworks. Moreover, this proverb communicates the idea of imagination as the act of moving between time zones as spaces for art making – from the present, in which the work is made in response to the past, and as a space that holds genealogical links and family traditions of crafting.

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<sup>23</sup> "Alaga'upu" is the Samoan term for proverb.

<sup>24</sup> "Toloo" is the name of a Samoan native bird, also known as the grey duck. These birds commonly inhabit the streams and rivers in Samoa.

## 6 VISUAL DOCUMENTATION - CHRONOLOGICAL

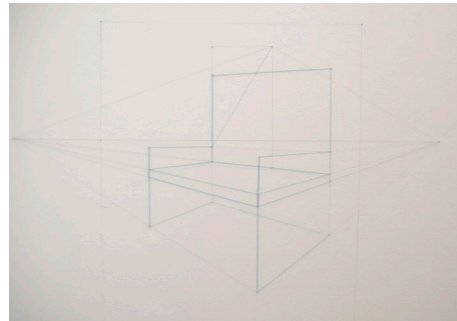
*Untitled: On my way home, 2018.*

Durational drawing of intuitive thinking in relation to memory retrieval. Red pen on paper.



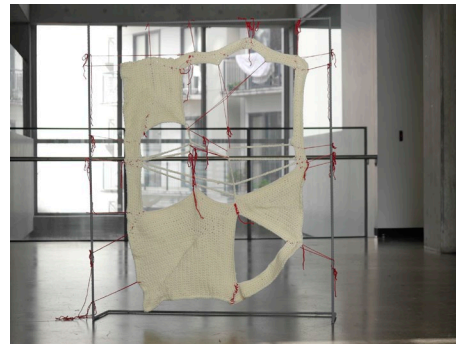
*When two points meet, 2018.*

Perspective drawing of Grandma Nina's chair. Blue and grey threads.

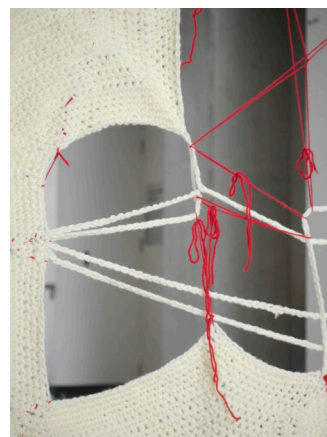


*It's an extension of Her, 2018.*

Crochet and welded metal frame.  
Documenting memory.

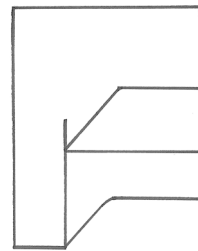
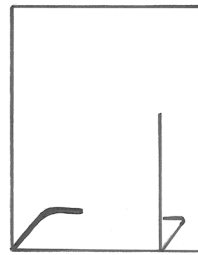
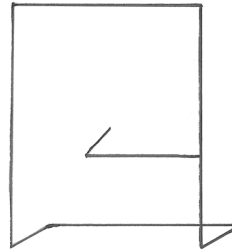


Detail image: Red wool holding the form of the crochet work.



*Fractions of a whole,*  
2018.

Pencil drawings of the welded  
forms on paper. Different  
iterations based on memory  
perspective.



Installation view of the  
work in an open space.





*O le lolomiga o le tū*  
*So'otaga, 2018.*

Installation work. Textile  
block-printing, animation of  
chair drawing.

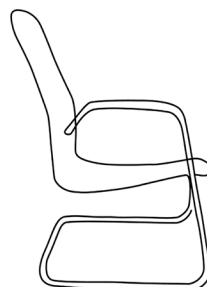
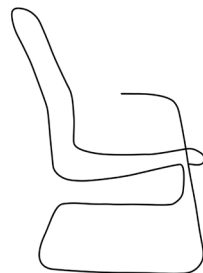
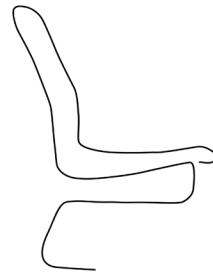
**Link to video animation:**

A drawing of Grandma  
Nina's chair.

[https://vimeo.com/29202148](https://vimeo.com/292021485)  
[5](#)



Still images from video  
animation of Grandma  
Nina's chair.



*Le Ula o le Alofa,*  
2018.

Ongoing work that utilises the Samoan process of making Ula. Collection of my family's clothing.



Experimenting with large-scale block printing. Matte grey spray-painted drawing on satin fabric (2018).



Image of Grandma Nina's chair used for textile printing.



*Peggy Squares; the  
month of July, 2017.*

Knitting peggy squares for  
the duration of one  
month.





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## APPENDIX: *RETURNING HOME: A RETENTION OF MEMORY*

*Returning home: a retention of memory*, (2018) is an installation artwork infused with familial knowledge represented in various forms of crafting and diagramming. The entire oeuvre of my installation composes of three artworks titled *Returning Home: a retention of memory* (2018), *Le Ula o le Alofa* (ongoing), and *Tracing lineage* (2018). Accompanying the installation is a printout on sky-blue paper containing the titles, and descriptions of the artworks installed in the gallery space.

***Le Ula o le Alofa.***

The necklace of love  
Ongoing

A durational work that is crafted from clothes worn by my aiga. The ula grows with each added garment, heightening its taua, value or importance through the memories of each family member who has worn them.

***Returning home: a retention of memory.***

E manatua pea e le loto le nu'u sa fanau ai  
The heart still remembers the village it was born in  
2018

A sculptural work that utilises crochet and welding as two distinct methods for drawing and documenting memory, as well as my imagined mappings of Grandma Nina's home in Samoa.

***Tracing lineage.***

5-min loop

An animation that continually draws in linear form Grandma Nina's piliki, the dividing shelves from her lounge that hold memories of aiga. The steady and continuous rhythm of the drawing corresponds with the nature of double crocheting in a series of loops.

The image above illustrates titles and descriptions of the three artworks included in my installation.

*Returning Home: a  
retention of memory, 2018.*

Crocheted and welded forms of drawings that architectural references the dividing wall, and places in Grandma Nina's house. This work was created to actual scale in order to amplify bodily experiences in relations to space.

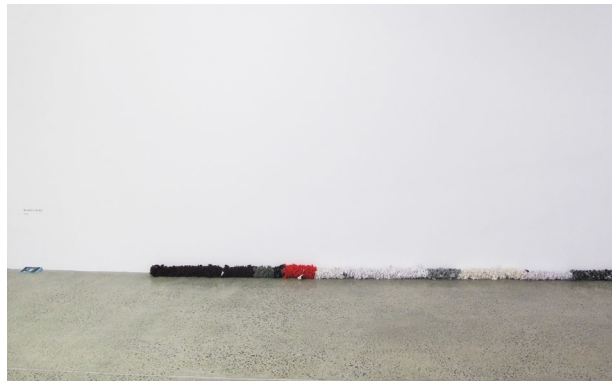


An extended crochet drawing on the floor, maps out approximated measurements of the dinner table and the long bench in Grandma Nina's dining room.



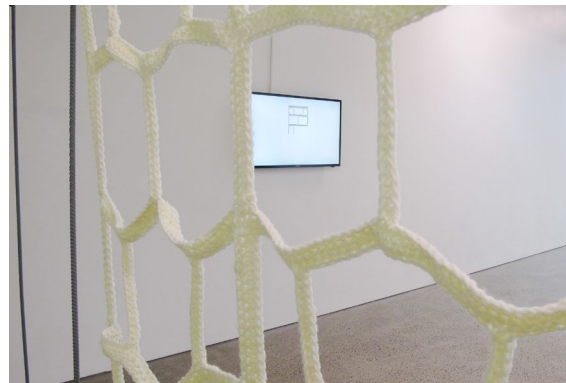
*Le Ula o le Alofa*, ongoing.

An ongoing work that utilises a Samoan ula making technique to thread together pieces of clothing worn by my aiga. The ula consists of 21 clothes, thus extending its current length at approximately 8 metres long.



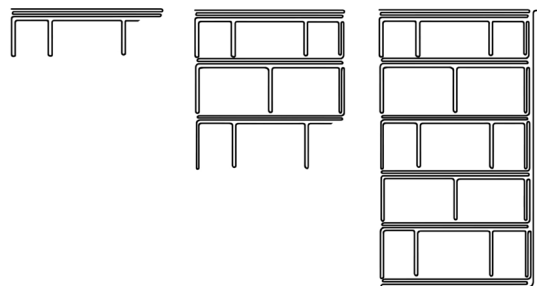
*Tracing Lineage*, 2018  
5-min loop.

A video animation seen through the crochet work that shows a continuous line drawing of the dividing wall in Grandma Nina's house.



**Link to video animation:**  
<https://vimeo.com/299979801>

Still images of the video animation that depicts an unbroken line drawing which corresponds to the nature of crocheting in a series of loops.





An A6 size block-stamp of a lino-cut drawing created from the image of Grandma Nina's front door.



The block-stamp was used to repetitively produce 65 copies of a printout containing the titles and descriptions of the three artworks that make-up my installation work.

