

Fa'ailoga: an exploration of tautua through art practice

A'aifou Kaufusi-Potemani

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the Sāmoan practice of *fa'aailoga*, which means to mark or to speak through practice-led methods of printmaking and installation. I centre the term *tautua* (service) and use it as a methodological framework where I apply the metaphorical sense of *tautua* in my creative process. My research seeks a personal interpretation of *tautua* that is expressed primarily in screen-printing and photographic techniques. Through *tautua*, I am interested in how *mafaufauga* (Indigenous thinking) transfers to how I respond to my surroundings, which is then applied into *fa'atino* (the action of creating). I use the method of *fa'alogo* (observation) as a form of *tautua* in photo-essays of significant places in my villages of Ōtara in Tāmaki Makaurau, Aotearoa and my father's village in Tokomololo, Tonga, as a way of sustaining community connection. The act of screen-printing over a long duration and installing long prints on calico in a gallery space presents an expressions of *tautua*; where a contemporary artform is connected to the labour of making Sāmoan *siapo* (Sāmoan bark cloth) and Tongan *ngatu* (Tongan bark cloth) and the endurance of receiving a *pe'a* (Sāmoan male tattoo).

Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, 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 submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A'aifou Kaufusi-Potemani', written in a cursive style.

A'aifou Kaufusi-Potemani

21 May 2025

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Figure 1. Tamā and Tinā. 2016. Photograph by the author.

² This is a Sāmoan saying meaning a job well done and giving thanks to the heavenly Father.

³ This translates to 'bro' or brother in Sāmoan.

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Preface: Fa'asinomaga

“*A leai se gagana, ua leai se aganu'u, a leai se aganu'u, ua po le nuu*”. If there is no language, there is no culture, if there is no culture, there is no people.

As a young kid of Pasifika descent, born and raised in Ōtara South Auckland, our values of *tautua* (service), *fa'aaloalo* (respect), and *alofa* (love) always had a significant impact on my upbringing. As I go on with my art practice, I am only where I am today because my village constantly supports and advises me. I live by and believe in the Sāmoan proverb above: if there is no language, there is no culture, and if there is no culture, there are no people. This phrase stems from a deep understanding that a person has no identity or sense of belonging without cultural values and beliefs. Keeping my cultural values alive has helped me push forward in my art practice when I lose track because when I think of my family, my cultural values appear in my mind.

My parents raised me until I was ten years old. My parents were religious, and I was immersed in the Tongan culture while growing up with my older and younger brothers. While living with my parents, I decided to go live with my Sāmoan grandparents (mum's side), my aunt, uncle, and cousins, to have them raise me. My grandparents were also very religious and valued culture; they would encourage us to attend every church event, like *aoga Sāmoa* (learning in the Sāmoan language) during weekdays, *fonotalo* (prayer meetings), which would commence early Saturday mornings and *aoga pese* (song/choir practice) in the afternoons. Sundays were full of church services—we attended the Congregational Christian Church of American Sāmoa (CCCAS) in Māngere. I never really understood why my grandparents encouraged me and my siblings to attend these activities, but as a kid, all I was taught was to listen and do, and that was it, nothing else! *Aoga Sāmoa* was where I picked up literacy and numeracy in Sāmoan. It was also through *aoga pese*. At home, no one was ever allowed to speak English. If we were watching TV and someone said a short phrase in English, the TV went off immediately. It was rigorous, but it disciplined us to learn and strengthen ourselves in our mother tongue. Through my practice, I love to honour the hard work of my parents, grandparents, and people in my village who nurtured me with my *fa'asāmoa* (Sāmoan way of life). Altogether, it is my *tautua* for all they have done, especially my late grandparents. They became a part of my artmaking and this master's research project.

I recently moved back to live with my parents, as I felt like I was missing a part of my identity: my Tongan side. Unlike my Sāmoan upbringing, I never spoke or learned Tongan language, although I understood words and phrases. In December 2024, I visited my dad's village in Tonga, and it was an eye-opener for me to not only experience the culture shock and our humble beginnings, but to force myself to speak Tongan even though it sounded plastic.

The significance of my upbringing and exposure to all the cultural aspects of *fa'asāmoa* is that I developed as an individual, and I learned a way of life. There is a saying in Sāmoan, “*E iloa le tama ma le teine Sāmoa i lana tu, savali, nofo, ma tautala*,” which translates to: “you know a Sāmoan by the way they present themselves”. This thesis centres on personal interpretation, which is shaped deeply by *fa'asāmoa*, not only in the cultural life but also in how I perceive myself. Since most of my childhood and teenage life was nurtured by *fa'asāmoa*, it has become a source of inspiration that prevails in shaping this research. As life experiences are incorporated in this research, my experiences of places and moments become transformed into printed life patterns.



Figure 2. A'aifou Potemani, *Green bananas from Ōtara supermarkets with l'a (fish) motif*, 2024, Screen-print on calico, 210mm x 297mm, AUT Lab, Auckland.

Fa'atomuaga/Introduction

To embark on this research, I returned to my roots and values of alofa, *manatu* (consideration), and tautua to my family. I think about their daily sacrifices; they are ultimately the pillar of my practice. The research begins by examining the question, "How can a printmaker explore ways of thinking and making with the influence of fa'asāmoa?". This question has been gradually shifted to consider the central role of fa'asāmoa through Fa'ailoga (marks of cultural identity) and Tautua as a methodology.

In chapter one, I will discuss my art practice based on the notion of Fa'ailoga through screen-printing and photography and the influences of fa'asāmoa in arts. Fa'asāmoa is widely practiced by Sāmoan people in their everyday lives, even though its meaning is different for New Zealand-born Sāmoans like me, to those living in Sāmoa. What remains constant is the values of alofa, fa'aaloalo, and tautua, which keeps constant connections with relatives back home. In chapter two, I will discuss tautua as a methodological framework for this research project, and I refer to the metaphorical sense of tautua, which involves acts of service and the idea of consideration, integrity, and reciprocity.

The act of tautua will be divided into three sections to describe how I approach artistic research through tautua. These involve *fa'alogo* (observation/listening), *mafaufauga* (thinking/thought) and *fa'atino* (creating/action). Fa'alogo in Sāmoan involves all our senses of listening, seeing, feeling, smell, and taste. I approach research by observing my close family's surroundings, the neighbourhood I reside in (Ōtara), and the things I interact with daily. There is a difference between listening and observing, but it is a thinking process that involves visuals and thought. I refer to mafaufauga to describe the critical thinking in my research approach, including deep thoughts on personal experiences of cultural arts such as *pe'a* (Sāmoan male tattoo)/*tatau* (Sāmoan tattooing) as a form of tautua. Fa'atino is defined as the action of creating; it is an approach to research through the processes/methods of making, which stems from how the body reacts to what it is thinking. In this case, I draw inspiration from how my ancestors traditionally made Sāmoan *siapo* (tapa/bark cloth) and created my modern-day siapo patterns on calico fabric. A journal article by Leali'ie'e Tufulasifa'atafatafa Taleni and Nicola Surtees "A Sāmoan pedagogy of the Heart: O 'auala e afua ma fa'atino mai le fatu," (2024) is also discussed in this chapter to emphasize the value of Sāmoan concepts for educational and research purposes.

Chapter three is a photo essay that visually illustrates my relationships with family, church, and community of Ōtara, and images from the transformative journey I took back to Tonga in December 2024. This is accompanied by captions to explain the significance of the images in the formation of patterns based on fa'alogo. In chapter four, I discuss how environments, places, or things become an iconography of *mamanu* (pattern), which is explored in this research through forms of printmaking into installation environments. The thesis concludes with a reflection on tautua in relation to Indigenous author Robin Wall Kimmerer's recent book *The Serviceberry: An Economy of Gifts and Abundance* (2024).

Chapter 1: Fa'aailoga: Art Practice in Context

This chapter investigates the social and creative artforms that have shaped my personal interpretation of fa'asāmoa cultural values, as expressed in my artworks. They include fa'aailoga and tautua as an expression of fa'asāmoa in the patterns in my art practice, and a discussion of the meaning and stories in the formation of patterns. I will also discuss the symbolism of contemporary artist Fatu Feu'u and Vaimaila Urale's patterns. The chapter then focuses on customary mamanu in pe'a (Sāmoan male tattoo) (Sāmoan male tattoo) and in Sāmoan siapo (Sāmoan bark cloth) and Tongan *ngatu* (Tongan bark cloth) and finally their conversion into contemporary patterns with my digital tools.

Historically, Pacific people have looked beyond the horizon, searching for a better life and better living. That search has shaped what we now call *the islands*—referring to our backgrounds, culture, language, history, *tupu'aga* (ancestry), and villages in the Vasa Pasifika (the Pacific). As anthropologist and writer Epeli Hau'ofa says in his influential essay *Our Sea of Islands*:

I have just used the term *ocean peoples* because our ancestors, who had lived in the Pacific for over two thousand years, viewed their world as “a sea of islands” rather than as “islands in the sea” [...] The world of our ancestors was a large sea full of places to explore, to make their homes in, to breed generations of seafarers like themselves. People raised in this environment were at home with the sea. They played in it as soon as they could walk steadily, they worked in it, they fought on it. They developed great skills for navigating their waters, and the spirit to traverse even the few large gaps that separated their island groups.⁴

Our ancestors were both storytellers and storymakers, and their stories live on and become apparent in the everyday things we do. The world they dwelled in was “unhindered by boundaries of the kind erected much later by imperial powers.”⁵ My ancestors in Tonga and Sāmoa sailed to trade and to marry and build relationships, and to increase their prosperity. Sometimes they travelled “to fight and dominate,” to cite Hau'ofa once more.⁶ The spirit of adventure lives on through many generations and it is evident with Pasifika peoples migrating from their homeland to Aotearoa New Zealand and growing in numbers for the past few decades, reaching its peak in the '60s and '70s. My family was of the mentality to find out more, including education, better opportunities, and not to settle for less.

Ōtara, South Auckland, has become my village that incorporates cultural values brought from the islands to the current destination. These values are woven into how we do things and the purpose behind the things we do. There is good and evil in life with challenges and obstacles shaping who we become. This balance is central to the heart of the Pasifika people and the community of Ōtara. In my practice, I see “practice” in two ways: as action and as a way of being. My practice is fluid and shifts constantly, where sometimes thought comes before action, and other times, action precedes thought. My ancestors are an inspiration, incorporating cultural values and language into practice to navigate new ways of thinking and making in a contemporary art space, and the importance of maintaining values and beliefs.

⁴ Epeli Hau'ofa, “Our Sea of Islands.” *The Contemporary Pacific* 6, no. 1 (1994): 148–61.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2370159>.

⁵ Hau'ofa, *Ibid.* 148.

⁶ Hau'ofa, *Ibid.* 154.

1.1 Fa'ailoga

The term fa'ailoga is seldom used in research by scholars, however it is intrinsic to my art practice as a printmaker, and in other artforms. Fa'ailoga appears in various aspects of fa'asāmoa through *siva* (performing arts/dance), *pese* (songs), *talatu'u*, *fa'atufugaga/faivaalofilima* (arts and craft), *lauga fa'asāmoa* (Sāmoan oratory), *tatau* (Sāmoan tattooing), and *siapo* (Sāmoan bark cloth). The root word for fa'ailoga derives from *fa'a* (in a matter of) and *iloga* (mark), a term used in my practice for expressing yourself through identity, cultural traditions, or beliefs. Fa'ailoga speaks to my art practice, which I acknowledge as mark-making and speaking patterns of stories through screen-printing and photography. Fa'ailoga is seen in notions of *fa'asinomaga* (ethnic identity, direction), *tautua*, *alofa*, and *fa'aaloalo*; it is what guides a Sāmoan in our journey in life.

Artist Fatu Feu'u is a prime example of how fa'ailoga, in the form of marks of identity and service, can be incorporated into art, inspired by fa'asāmoa and combining traditional and contemporary elements, creating a rich and fresh tapestry of Pacific art. In Shona Jennings' book *Fatu Feu'u: On Life and Art* (2012), Feu'u talks about his life growing up to become an artist, moving to New Zealand at twenty years old, figuring out life all on his own. Later in his life, Feu'u received his pe'a (Sāmoan male tattoo) in 1989 from a *tufuga tātatau* (tattooist) named Paulo Suluape, who encouraged him to accept it. Suluape saw the pe'a (Sāmoan male tattoo) as something any Sāmoan who must *tautua* to his people and community should go through. Feu'u states:

I saw the tattoo as a progression of doing art. It was easy for me to accept the tattoo, because it's part of a rite of passage as a young man... To go through those rituals of accepting responsibility to look after your family and to take on a title, and to take over the responsibility as a title holder...In a way, I had to go through that process of tattoo to accept my responsibility to do my art and serve my people...Also, my art was inspired by tattoo [...] ⁷

Receiving the pe'a (Sāmoan male tattoo) for Feu'u meant he could use it as a tool or guidance in creating his paintings and practice and as something he could be proud of expressing—being Sāmoan amidst the mainstream population in Aotearoa New Zealand. The majority of Fatu Feu'u's works are titled using Sāmoan phrases and words. This is evident in *Ao aulelei*, (2023), where *ao* (cloud/s) and *aulelei* (beautiful/wonderful) showcases symbols of an *l'a* (fish), cross, *'ali'ao* (trochus shell), frangipani, *gogo* (tern/bird), a tribal mask and other patterns are combined in a flag-like composition of cultural identity and religion. The primary-coloured broad stripes of lines with *l'a* and *gogo* bring forth representation of navigation and migration, tracing back to the Polynesians and their ways of navigating the Pacific Ocean. They were known as way-finders who used the stars, wind patterns, the swells in the ocean, and the movement of birds; if birds were near their *va'a* (double-hulled voyaging canoes), they were near land. There is a connection between the use of birds to identify land when out in the open sea for Polynesian navigators and the biblical story of Noah and the ark. In the Old Testament, Noah sent out a dove three times. At first, it returned because it did not have a place to rest its feet; the second time, it returned with an olive tree as an indication of land; and the last time he sent it out, it did not return. For Polynesians the patterns of migration of birds were indicators that land was near. The bird brings both Polynesian navigators and Noah a sense of joy and gladness.

⁷ Shona Jennings, *Fatu Feu'u: On Life and Art* (Auckland: Little Island Press, 2012), p. 41.

On the right side of *Ao aulelei*, Feu'u uses the tribal mask, a reference to his personal identity and personal story; this is evident in his signature beneath the tribal mask. The relationship between culture and religion is revealed in his symbolic patterns, where birds and the frangipani indicate that nature is the instrument that bonds the two together. In Sāmoan culture Christian values and beliefs that were brought to the island in the nineteenth century have been integrated into fa'asāmoa. In Fatu Feu'u's practice, fa'ailoga is more than just a mark; it is a message echoed by our ancestors through our practices and everyday lives.



Figure 3. Fatu Feu'u, *Ao aulelei*, 2023, mixed media on canvas, 172.5 x 200mm, Artis Gallery, Auckland.
<https://www.artisgallery.co.nz/artists/40-fatu-feuu/works/10061-fatu-feu-u-ao-aulelei-2023/>

Another artist who centres fa'asamoa values and draws on fa'aailoga is Vaimaila Urale, a Sāmoan-born artist residing in New Zealand. Her art practice revolves around storytelling through mark making. Urale is interested in oral and written words as crucial factors of communication. She draws inspiration from Sāmoan tradition art forms such as tatau (Sāmoan tattooing), siapo (Sāmoan bark cloth), Lapita pottery, and ASCII (American Standard Code for Information Interchange). With tatau (Sāmoan tattooing) and siapo, the use of ink transferred on skin or bark cloth are traditional forms of representation, whereas ASCII is for transferring messages to characters on computer keyboards. Urale expresses mark making as its own form of storytelling from lines, patterns, geometric shapes that are found in everyday objects. Using fa'asāmoa in the context of contemporary art draws upon her heritage and sustains her art practice. In her work *Aniva* (2019), I am interested in the pattern motifs that suggest the motif of the gogo. She interprets the pattern into her own bird motif. In addition, Urale is evidently inspired by Sāmoan *malu* (female tattoo).



Figure 4. Vaimaila Urale, *Aniva*, 2019, black card and sand, Ocula. <https://ocula.com/institutions/para-site-art-space/artworks/vaimaila-urale/aniva/>

Art is a fundamental form of cultural expression; as Fatu Feu’u says, “Part of our survival is doing our art. If we don’t then we are lost in another country without an identity.”⁸ Storytelling is a broad human impulse, and through a Polynesian lens it always was, and still is, an important element of sustaining the culture and language. Stories are told through siapo, siva, lauga fa’asāmoa, and many other expressions of fa’asāmoa. In my case, I take photographs that reflect everyday life, then become a screen-printed motif in an installation; a testament to the sustaining of an ever-changing culture through the making of art.

⁸ Nina Tonga, *Tautai Matagofie: The Wonderful Navigator*, 1999, p. 30.

1.2 Tautua as an expression of fa'asāmoa in my art practice

Art has become the medium through which I express my experiences and connections with family and friends. Those experiences are built and are explored through tautua, a significant value within fa'asāmoa, as Sāmoan people see it as an everyday tool that intensifies the spirit of cultural traditions. The etymology of tautua derives from the words *tau/taua* (fight/striving through pain and struggle) and *tua* (back/from the back), representing the backbone or foundation of something. Although there are several meanings to both words, in this research, tau and tua form a concept that embodies service, particularly to close family, friends, church, and the community.⁹ Tautua is practiced every day by Sāmoans, often without realizing it because it is an inherent concept for many of us who are raised by our elders. In the Sāmoan way, it is more than just a word—it is a lived experience shaped through alofa, manatu, *fa'atuatua* (faith), and *tofi* (inheritance) of Pasifika ancestors who paved the way for future generations. To speak about tautua is to acknowledge that it's a collection of voices, and a rich tapestry of cultural traditions.

These rich tapestries include another aspect of fa'asāmoa—mamanu, a Sāmoan word for pattern, which is integral to my practice. Patterns are interpreted in many ways, from the patterns of everyday life to the rhythms of making through time and duration. Mamanu is important to the cultural traditions of siapo and tatau. These designs and motifs are inspired by the natural environment of Sāmoa; therefore, connecting my work to these ancient practices reflects the continuity and cycles of life. Sāmoan author and researcher within Aotearoa, Sadat Muaiava talks about his journey of receiving the pe'a (Sāmoan male tattoo)/tatau and what it symbolizes within different spaces. He states:

What does my tatau mean to me? It means tautua which translates to service in English, tautua to my family, tautua to my parents, tautua to my church, tautua to my villages that I visit every year. Tautua to my people, and when I say people, I'm talking about my workplace. So, I see my work as a form of tautua, where I use the Pe'a (Sāmoan male tattoo) to symbolize that. But the tatau is also a form of identity marker. When I use it as an orator, it brings mana to the words that I speak because the tatau in a sense is an ancient language. It is obviously on my body, but when I am performing Sāmoan oratory it provides that connection to the past... I wanted to continue the genealogy of the tatau in our own family, so that connection of both family and village developing is a deep connection with fa'asāmoa.¹⁰

⁹ Melvin Taupulega Jnr Apulu, "Tautua Fa'atamāli'i (Servanthood with absolute integrity) Engaging with Sāmoan young people." (dissertation, Massey University, 2010), pp.15–17.

<https://mro.massey.ac.nz/server/api/core/bitstreams/02a644af-e472-4c28-96c8-f9a0f54fa550/content>

¹⁰ Te Papa Tongarewa, "My Tatau: Sadat Muaiava shares what his tatau (Sāmoan tattoo) mean to him", November 25, 2019, YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dhpdUB4JKo4>

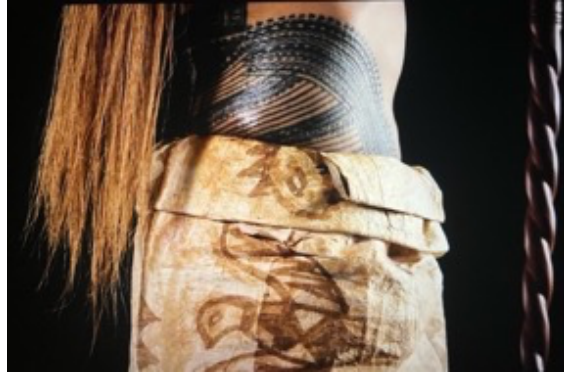


Figure 5. Sadat Muaiaava wearing a siapo and holding the to'oto'o (staff) and fue (flywhisk), Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, My Tatau: Sadat Muaiaava shares what his tatau (Sāmoan tattoo) means to him, 2019, still from video, YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dhpdUB4JKo4&t=47s>, 1:54

Sadat Muaiaava received his tatau at thirty-one years old and understood he had a responsibility and role to tautua to his family. When he performs lauga fa'asāmoa, the marks of his ancestors on his body brings mana to the words he speaks because tatau is described as an “ancient language” which binds his spiritual being to his past ancestors who have come before him. In figure 5, Muaiaava wears the cultural garment of siapo on his waist, holding the to'oto'o (staff) and fue (flywhisk) on his shoulder which are not always essential in lauga fa'asāmoa but when worn, bring a sense of pride and honour to past, present, and future Sāmoan people. Geometric patterns shown in his tatau flow throughout his body providing a deep connection and relationship between tatau and siapo. It is something that is ever lasting with its continuity from three-thousand years ago to the present time.

1.3 Siapo and Ngatu: customary and contemporary

In addition to tatau, the fundamental formal generator for making contemporary patterns in my practice is in siapo. Recently, I have also begun to look at Tongan ngatu, which I will discuss further on. First, siapo is an art form or cultural treasure of Sāmoa made from paper mulberry tree or *broussonetia papyrifera*, a native plant to Asian culture. Motifs and patterns on siapo tell our stories and histories, connecting Sāmoans to our ancestors and creating a deep sense of pride within the soul. The art form was brought over to Sāmoa by the Lapita people over three thousand years ago, in their geometrical lines shown in pottery, and it remains one of Sāmoa's oldest cultural art forms. The original use of siapo is said to be for clothing.¹¹

Today, siapo has various uses such as ceremonial gatherings presented as a gift at weddings for the newly-wed couple, birthdays, and funerals to wrap the body of the deceased. It is also hung on walls to decorate homes, and laid out on the ground in churches where the pulpit stands. It can also be sold to tourists. Siapo mamamu (hand-painted) and *siapo' elei* (block printed siapo) or *siapo tasina* (block printed) are the two main siapo practiced in Sāmoa.¹² Siapo *vala* (smaller size siapo) is another form.

¹¹ Michel Charleux, “TAPA From Bark to Cloth: An ancient art of Oceania from Southeast Asia to Eastern Polynesia” (Somogy éditions d'art, Paris, 2017), p. 249.

¹² Paul Tau'ili'ili, “The art of Sāmoan siapo,” accessed May 11, 2025, p. 3.

Below are images of the preparing of a siapo cloth ready for adding mamanu, contained in Mary J. Pritchard's book *Siapo: Bark Cloth Art of Samoa*.¹³ Initial steps in the process of creating a siapo includes the removal of the bark from its twig, rolled, and soaked before being rolled out to dry (see figures 6–9). I include these to compare aspects of siapo making processes to my own contemporary process of screen-printing, and as inspiration for the way I install my artworks, where the values of care and labour are reflected.



Figure 6. Removing the bark. Reproduced by permission from the author, *Siapo: bark cloth art of Samoa*, (University of Hawaii Print, 1986).



Figure 7. The bark is rolled and soaked. Reproduced by permission from the author, *Siapo: bark cloth art of Samoa*, (University of Hawaii Print, 1986).

¹³ The process of creating a siapo involves harvesting, stripping/scraping, and beating. For a good siapo, the paper mulberry tree is cut from its branch when it is ten to fourteen months old; following that process is scraping away excess bark and green growth and flattening the siapo using clam shells like pipi, pae, and 'asi, each with its purpose. The u'a is beaten using an i'e until it is separated before being laid out to dry.



82. On end, the roll is hit with the smooth side



83. . . . unrolled, pulled and twisted slightly



84. The sheets are stretched, to flatten and dry



85. Gently pulled away from the center line



86. Weighted at the sides, the sheets air-dry



87. Fast drying sometimes is done outside

Figure 8. Unrolling and drying. Reproduced by permission from the author, *Siapo: bark cloth art of Samoa*, (University of Hawaii, 1986).

The final stages of creating a siapo involve adding patterns and motifs which are free-hand-drawn mamanu using the *paogo* (dried fruit of a pandanus plant) as a paintbrush, shown in figure 9. Dyes like *o'a* (brown dye) as a base dye to mix with other dyes like *lama* (candlenut) and *ago* (yellow dye) or using the *upeti* (tablet) with motifs/designs (siapo 'elei/block printed siapo) covered in dye, rubbing the siapo onto it.



Figure 9. *Paogo*, "Mamanu process: Mamanu's paint brush," <http://www.siapo.com/mamanu-process.html>, 2025.



Figure 10. *Siapo mamanu* (tapa cloth), 1890s, Sāmoa, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa. <https://collections.tepapa.govt.nz/object/162815>

This siapo mamanu from the 1890s is an example of how natural elements of frangipani, shark teeth, and *manulua* (two birds) are used as motifs. The frangipani flower is a popular and fragrant plant in Sāmoa, *pua*, which also features in Aso Sā o Tamaiti (White Sunday), a church service mainly conducted by the youth and young children. Sāmoans use *pua* to create headbands or crowns for those who participate in White Sunday, and it is also used as fragrance in homes.



Figure 11. *White Sunday in Sāmoa*, Reproduced from Coconet TV (Facebook page), October 9, 2016.

Patterns that are used for siapo derive from natural elements of Sāmoa and in the rest of Polynesia; these patterns often depict animals, plants, trees and they have their own rhythm. As Frederic Koehler Sutter quotes Mary J. Pritchard:

There are 12 different notes in an octave, if you count all the half notes, 26 letters in the English alphabet: three primary colours plus black and white. From such limited resources, great music, literature, and art has been created. Siapo too has a small repertoire of stylized motifs taken from nature; patterns which suggest a net; the midrib of a coconut leaf, the trochus shell, pandanus, and breadfruit leaves, the sandpiper and starfish. When repeated, rearranged, reversed, inverted the result is an intricately balanced mosaic, a Sāmoan siapo.¹⁴

1.4 The labour of art-making

In Kalisolaite 'Uhila's master's thesis (2016), he describes how performance art is a part of his everyday life and a process of durational labour. He states: "simple actions now influence my practice as performance artist. As part of my performance, I use simple objects that relate to my daily life."¹⁵ This statement reflects the idea of the body being the canvas and objects as its paint brush. 'Uhila focuses on Polynesian masculinity; encapsulating male behaviour through contemplation, humility, and vulnerability. He believes that for many poly-males, everyday experiences are shaped through the drudgery of work.¹⁶ The use of objects of everyday life became part of practice and everything is in a sense performance art, because the body is in movement and in-tune with the mind. Linking it back to the unrolling of the calico, contemplation comes into play in my practice where every action in daily life relates to indigenous ways of creating and thinking. It may not be necessarily the same as the creation of siapo, but the thoughts are what bring that thinking into play.

In my own practice, I compare the labour-intensive steps in the process of creating a siapo including rolling and stretching it out, to my screen-printing processes. I unroll the calico onto the surface before designs and patterns are printed onto it. The significance in the art of siapo comes from the labour of the creation of the cloth itself as well as the patterns, whereas in my screen-printing, the calico has already been prepared beforehand and therefore design and printing become my creative focus. Yet, here is a connection between the act of rolling the bark and unrolling of calico where the word "act" is emphasized linking it to the performance of everyday labour.

¹⁴ F.K. Sutter, *The Sāmoans: A Global Family* (Honolulu, University of Hawaii Press, 1989), p. 210.

¹⁵ Kalisolaite 'Uhila, "Maumau-taimi: Wasting time; Being useless," (Master's Thesis, AUT, 2016), p. 31.

¹⁶ I note that Polynesian women also work hard.



Figure 12. A'aifou Potemani, *Untitled* in the process of printing, 2024, screen-printing ink on calico, 75 x 300cm, AUT Lab.

In addition to Sāmoan siapo, I also investigated Tongan ngatu. Ngatu is traditionally measured in lengths called *langanga* (45–60cm). These are called *tapa'i ngatu* (large scale ngatu) that range from just over a metre to over forty metres long. Longer ngatu show wealth and respect when presented at ceremonial gathering such as weddings, funerals, or birthdays. The process of making longer ngatu involves a community effort, mainly by women, and symbolizes unity and cooperation as a family or village. The physical length of a ngatu is more than just measurements; it is a rich tapestry of layers representing ancestral knowledge, cultural meaning, and relationships in the Tongan life.¹⁷

¹⁷ Charleux, *Op. Cit.* p. 249.



Figure 13. *Ngatu with kupesi designs*. Tapa Cloths from The Pacific and Artwork, 950mm x 320mm.
<https://www.tapapacifica.com/Tongan-ngatu-tapa-cloths.html>

In Tongan ngatu, often an inconsistency of *kupesi* (designs and motifs) is evident. In figure 13 some lines of the *kupesi* are slightly wider, longer, shorter, smaller, or bigger. Although it may or may not be the art-maker's intention, the ngatu becomes rich in its uniqueness when the shape of the moon changes, and the tree bends. It carries history, stories, genealogies, and family names that have deep significance. The inconsistency of misregistration in the prints reflects an understanding of lived experiences where humans are not always perfect, but uniqueness brings colour into the world. In comparison, the misregistered patterns and photographic origins in my screen prints carry community, family, and cultural identity beyond their appearance in the artwork.

In *Untitled* (2024), I reference Tongan ngatu with its length yet to be fully unrolled, an artform that holds deep cultural and social meaning in the culture. *Untitled* is three meters long and took two days to make. Many processes were repeated over and over in the making; from screen-printing a section at a time, drying the print, to cleaning the screen for the new section to be printed. This process involved a lot of time and dedication which made me reflect on the sacrifices my ancestors made, through labour and factory jobs. The unrolled section on the floor suggests a continuous connection with those who came before me.



Figure 14. A'aifou Potemani, *Untitled*, 2024, screen-print on calico, 75 x 300cm, AUT Studio.

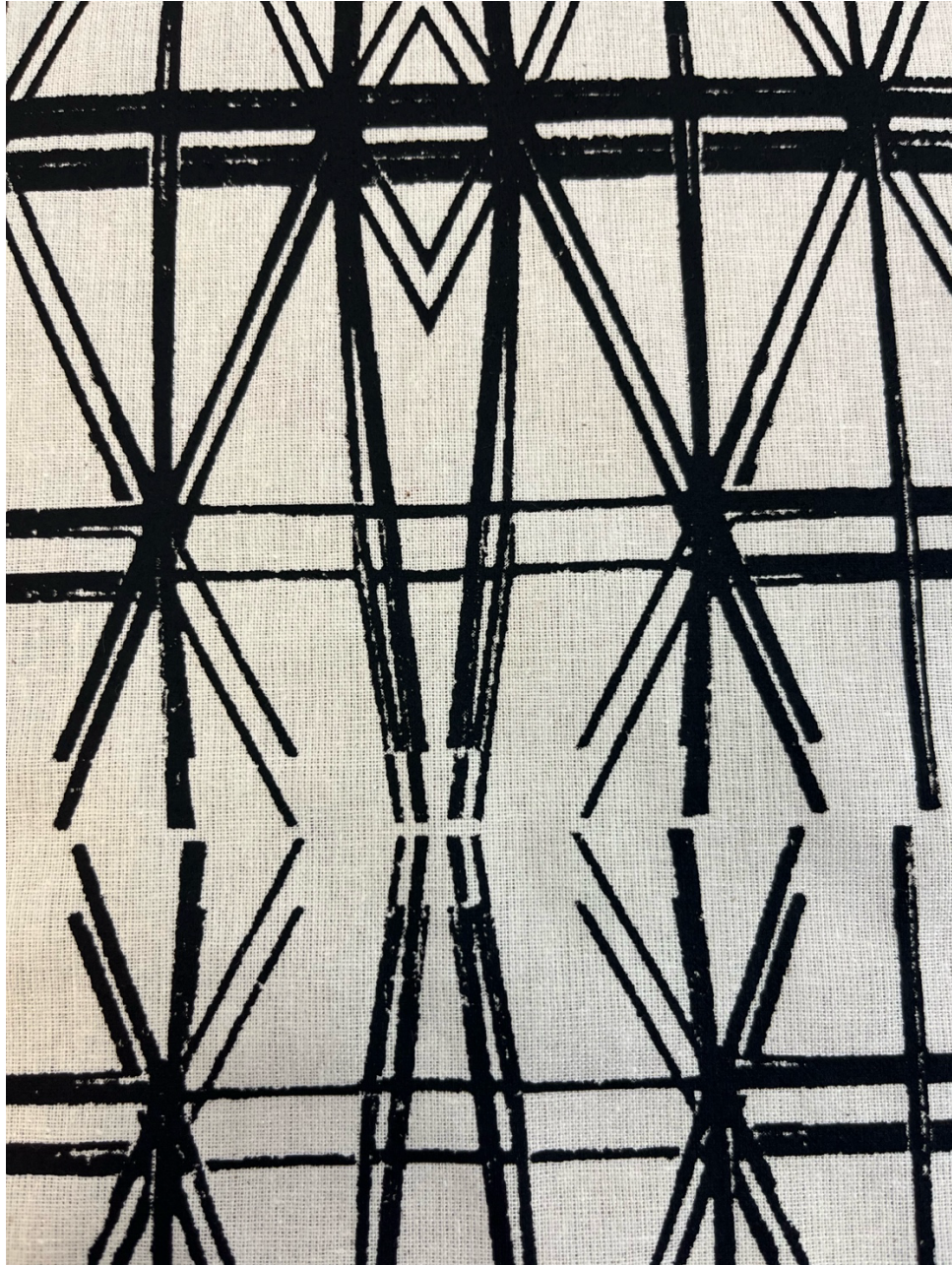


Figure 15. A'aifou Potemani, Close-up of *Untitled*, 2024, screen-print on calico, AUT Lab.

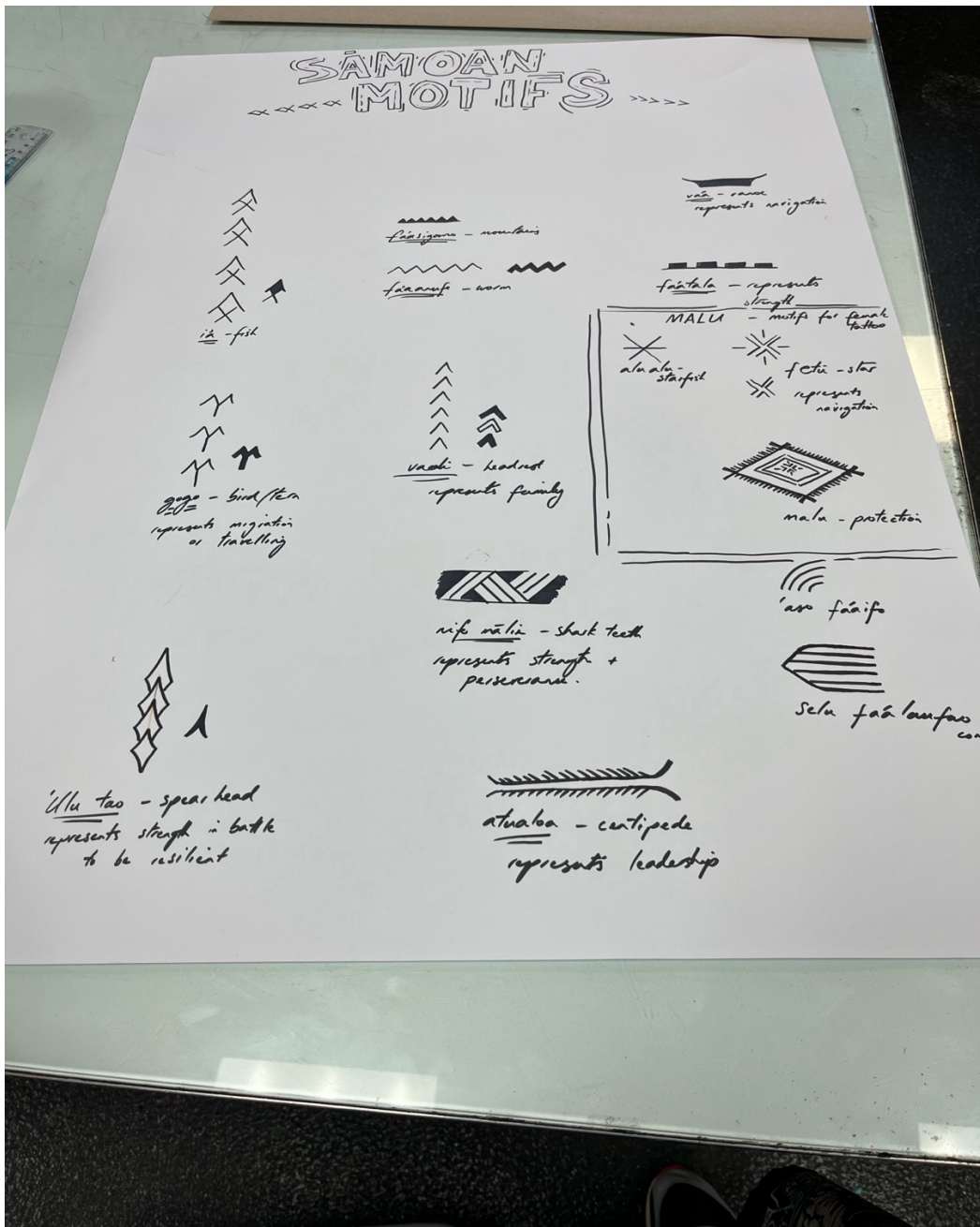


Figure 16. A'aifou Potemani, *Sāmoan motifs*, 2024. These were drawings of Sāmoan patterns/motifs from personal memory (in Sāmoan with English translations) that are likely to be found in siapo and tatau, AUT Lab.

1.5 From photograph to Photoshop to pattern

Pasifika designs have evolved through many lifetimes as new generations research and observe our contemporary world. In this research project, technology has been one of the primary tools where patterns are created in a contemporary way of making. Rather than using blocks or hand painting, Adobe Photoshop is a tool I use that is adopted to create patterns. Experimenting with different tools on Photoshop provides opportunities for inventing new patterns that tell stories of personal upbringing. I generate a contemporary form of siapo using calico material and screen-printing processes, rather than the way siapo is traditionally made; on bark cloth and hand painted or block printed. My pattern-making process begins with the action of picking up the camera and taking photographs of local surroundings that are intriguing to gaze upon. I find sources of patterns by capturing moments of time in certain environments in my neighbourhood in Ōtara or my father's village in Tonga.

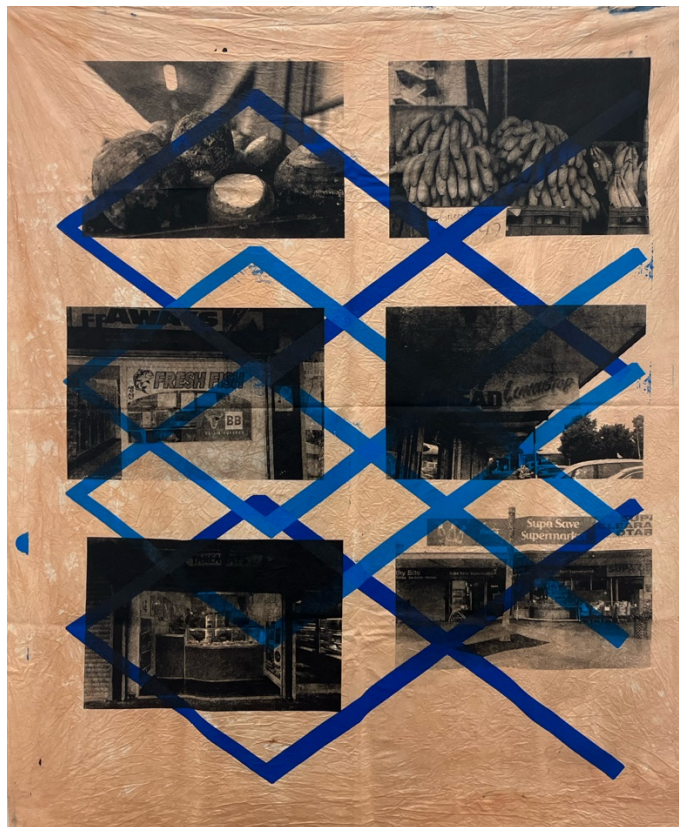


Figure 17. A'aifou Potemani, *Ōtara supermarket*, 2024, screen-print on calico, AUT Studio.

In *Ōtara supermarket* (2024) I explore the idea of a photographic image and an abstract motif merging to create a contemporary siapo. Combining the motif pattern of I'a and photographs of the local markets in the community of Ōtara, I mixed contemporary and traditional aspects of storytelling. The use of photographs archives important places in my community in Aotearoa and Tonga, to encapsulate moments of everyday life, to keep them for long term use, and to preserve these moments for future generations. I think this is something Polynesians have done for centuries to be able to keep stories, customs and traditions alive through the arts like siapo. I see

photographs as a way of storing the information that I see on an everyday basis in Ōtara and Tokomololo in Tongatapu to create future patterns.

Through experimenting with photoshop tools I extract a section from a photographic image and create a pattern from it. A photographic source material is cut/carved into an abstractive pattern using digital tools rather than hand drawn. It has enabled the abstracted patterns to be duplicated multiple times and merged into each other, creating an architectural-like imagery.

To return to *Ōtara supermarket (2024)*, the process of screen-printing the pattern and image onto the calico includes glitches and irregularity in the prints from brushes and blocks of ink. This is evident in figure 17; hand marks on the far left and top right of the print left after the printing process, which brings a relationship between the creator and creation.

Initially, I had the idea of layering photographs of my neighbourhood and patterns from my heritage. My first series of photographs portrays the market of Ōtara (a family ritual is visiting at the end of the week to buy groceries preparing for the church service) from which I generate a pattern. The strip lines of different tones of blue are a Sāmoan abstract motif, l'a, often seen in tatau. The use of blue in l'a is a reference to the Pacific Ocean that is vast and vibrant, with different shades of blue representing the diverse cultures of the Pacific, while black is in reference to siapo and tatau, creating a relationship between an abstract pattern that derives from seeing and a photograph that captures memories. From the pathway of representation through photographs and observation, to the abstraction of patterns, my practice follows the art of siapo, ngatu and tatau through its patterns and motifs.



Figure 18. A'aifou Potemani, Glass exterior of *The Fish*, 2024, Ōtara.

The photograph above comes from the architectural structural details of The Fish canopy in Ōtara bringing forth a *talanoa* (dialogue) through the pattern of The Fish in my artwork. This building is a

significant structure in my research (discussed further in chapter three). Its intricate geometric lines and repetition create a conversation around inter-generational continuity. The fish pattern represents young generations and the community of Ōtara moving forward into the future. Although my patterns are different in terms of their histories, origins, myths and legends, they follow a genealogical form of creativity.

To create a pattern, I extract aspects of my photographs taken of Ōtara or Tokomololo in Tonga. This is a long process. The dots seen in figure 19 are selected perfectly to capture the main lines, taking away the glass exteriors. The next process involves duplicating multiple layers of the design on the Photoshop panel shown in figure 20. The following images show the process in creating new patterns before transferring it into a screen for printing.



Figure 19. A'aifou Potemani, Extracting a shape from a photograph, 2024, screen capture.

In a section in her doctorate thesis *Moana Cosmopolitan Imaginaries: Toward an Emerging Theory of Moana Art* (2021), Lana Lopesi investigates how artists of the Moana who were raised in the era of digital technology and the internet see themselves through contemporary art. She states that making meaning emerges through their respective roles in society, their cultures, and influences through the arts becomes a way of being. Lopesi argues:

[...] a digital native generation of Moana artists have positioned themselves away from the narratives of displacement and nonbelonging featured in the Moana art of previous generations, imagining their subjectivity in globally routed, yet locally rooted, ways. Diasporic subjectivities are those which require constant reproduction and rearticulation. Most recently diasporic subjectivities can be understood through the acceptance of the cosmopolitan character of Moana life today, or Moana Cosmopolitanism, which empowers a complex sense of place.¹⁸

¹⁸ Lana Lopesi, *Moana Cosmopolitan Imaginaries: Toward an Emerging Theory of Moana Art* (PhD Thesis, AUT, 2021), p. 1.

The crushing waves of social media have influenced the way people perceive themselves and how they see the world. Although it has both a negative and positive impact, I have employed technology as a way of creating new designs through Apps like the Adobe suite to make meaning and to reconnecting people to our culture. Using Adobe Photoshop has created thoughts for me about how to differentiate my designs, created from pencil and paper, from the more advanced tools of graphic design apps as AI technology is introduced. Nevertheless, software has aided my research in terms of articulating, thinking and making in every aspect of my practice from Photograph to Adobe Photoshop, to screen-printing new designs. This cycle becomes a constant movement involving patterns of extraction, repetition, layering, rotation, and duplication which is evident in this process of creating pattern motifs. The making of siapo or ngatu is evolving through new technologies in my art-making, from exposing machines to softwares like Procreate and Adobe Photoshop, and in my experiences as a city-dweller, or “Moana cosmopolitan”.

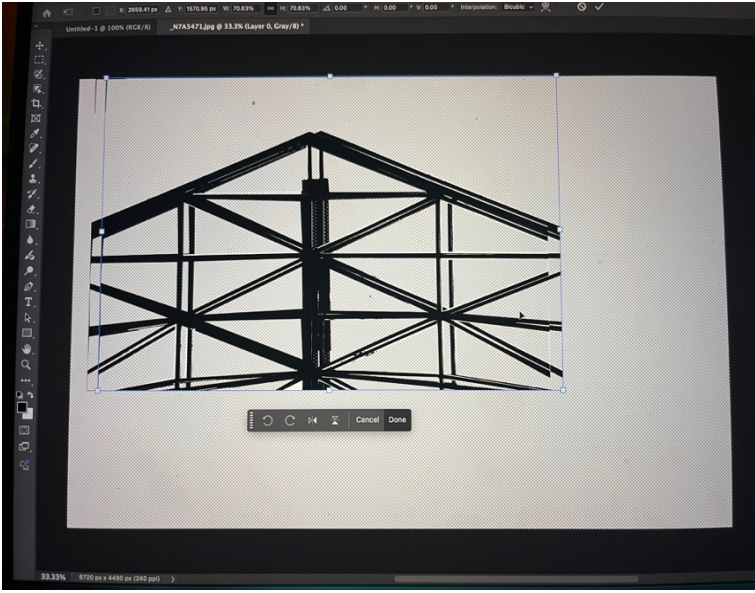


Figure 20. A'aifou Potemani, isolating a selection as separate layer/s, 2024, screen capture.

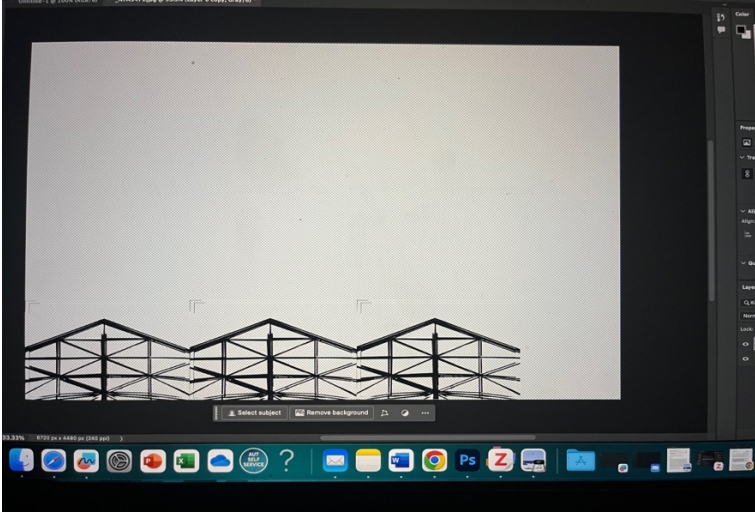


Figure 21. A'aifou Potemani, Multiplying motif, 2024, screen capture

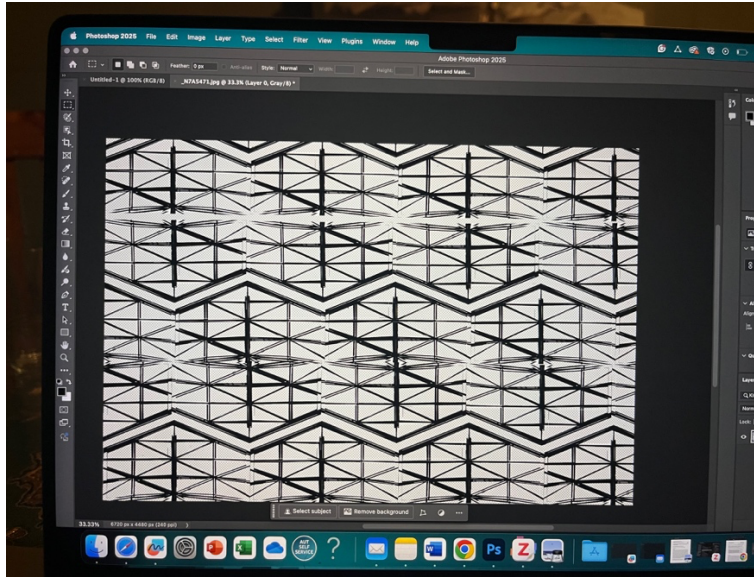


Figure 22. A'aifou Potemani, Digital pattern created, 2024, screen capture.

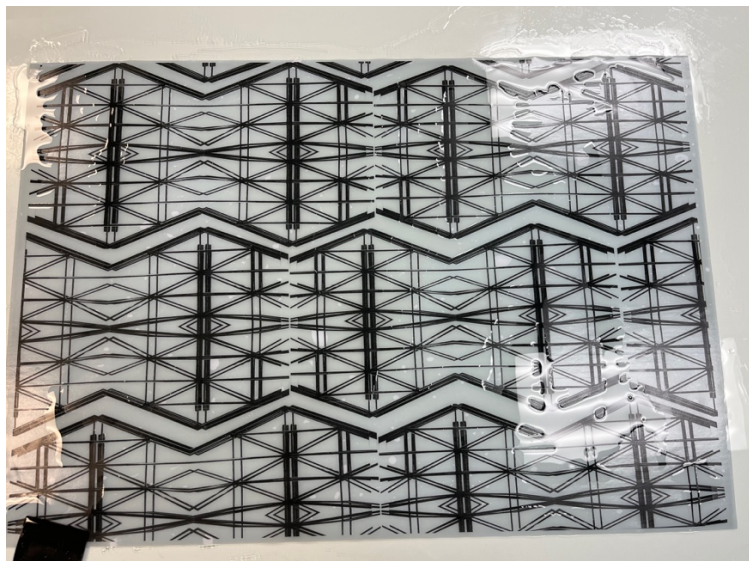


Figure 23. A'aifou Potemani, Pattern ready to expose onto screen, 2024, inkjet print on paper with oil layer, AUT Lab.

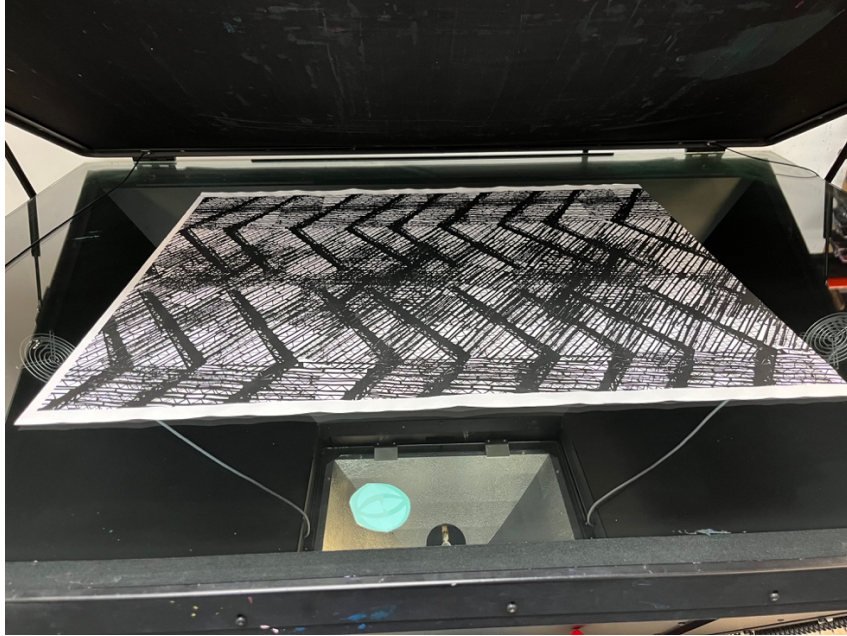


Figure 24. A'aifou Potemani, *Tail of Ōtara*, pattern on exposure machine, 2024, AUT Lab.



Figure 25. A'aifou Potemani, pattern exposed onto screen in negative, 2024, AUT Lab.

Chapter 2: *Tautua* as a Research Methodology

*O le ala i le pule o le tautua*¹⁹

There are multiple forms of *tautua* that cater to various kinds of service in the Sāmoan culture.²⁰ However, in this chapter, *tautua* is positioned as a research methodological tool as it speaks into my practice. *Tautua* is a way of serving and giving back to my community, and the village that raised me as a young kid. *Tautua* has been divided into four sections, the first is *fa’alogo*, which translates to listen and refers to observation. The second is *mafaufauga*, which is an idea or critical thinking and deep thinking on a particular topic. The third aspect I will discuss is *fa’atino*, which refers to actions and ways of doing things. Finally, I discuss *talanoa* as a form of dialogue with an artwork, in reference to artist John Vea. Although these are universal concepts in the *fa’asāmoa* world I live in, I will break down each section into its meaning in my art practice and how it connects back to *tautua*. In the article *A Sāmoan Pedagogy of the Heart: O ‘auala e a’oa’o ma fa’atino mai le fatu*, Leali’ie’e Tufulasifa’atafatafa Taleni and Nicola Surtees talk about how Sāmoan concepts have been applied in schools for educational purposes specifically for Pasifika students and how it can be used in research:

Conceptualized as the practice of teaching both from and with the heart, a pedagogy of the heart is a culturally based pedagogy and can be understood as a form of *tautua* or service. Underpinned by *tautua* and other key Pasifika values such as *alofa* (love) and *osiosiga* (reciprocity), we argue a pedagogy of the heart has the potential to lift Pasifika student engagement and achievement through utilizing these values as a catalyst for learning.²¹

Emphasizing these concepts is a way of teaching both from and within the heart that would benefit students in their learning journeys. *Tautua* is a fundamental concept in the scope of a Sāmoan community because it involves a whole way of being in life. Tufulasifa’atafatafa Taleni and Surtees state “For many Pacific peoples, love is inherent in all they do and how they behave. In the tone of voice, body language, how they greet, apologize, heal, affirm, console, farewell, and forgive”. It is something that is both taught in Sāmoan households and more so, already instilled in a Sāmoan since birth.²² Listening and *alofa* for me would involve story time, music, and consciousness. As a young kid my nana would always tell us myths and legends of Sāmoa, while listening to Sāmoan music, and thus, we grew up being conscious of being a Sāmoan.

¹⁹ A Sāmoan saying that translates to: the pathway to leadership/authority is service.

²⁰ Oranga Tamariki: Ministry for Children, “*Tautua matavela* (service with full commitment and honesty, *Tautua matalilo* (service done behind the scenes), *Tautua toto* (service with sacrifice), *Tautua aitaumalele* (service from a distance), *Tautua nofotuaanae* (service referring to someone who stands behind his/her matai/leader/agency ready to serve)”. *Tautua – Sāmoan Cultural Framework for Practice*, accessed 17 May 2025. <https://practice.orangatamariki.govt.nz/assets/practice/Vaaifetu/vaaifetu-Sāmoan-families.pdf>

²¹ Leali’ie’e Tufulasifa’atafatafa and Nicola Surtees, “A Sāmoan pedagogy of the Heart: O ‘auala a’oa’o e afua ma fa’atino mai le fatu,” *NZ Journal of Education Studies* 59, 31 - 47, (February 12, 2024): p 31, <https://link.springer.com.ezproxy.aut.ac.nz/article/10.1007/s40841-024-00308-8#citeas>

²² Leali’ie’e Tufulasifa’atafatafa and Nicola Surtees, *Ibid.* p. 39.

2.1 Fa’alogo

Most Sāmoan terms come into existence from observations, then interpretation develops a symbolic meaning. Fa’alogo has its root in the word *logo* meaning bell or alert, which have similar things in common and are interpreted in many ways. To apply this aspect to this research project, I begin with being alert and conscious of what I am doing and why I am doing it. In my process and method of photography (see chapter 3), fa’alogo is more than listening to what is being heard; it is also what the heart sees and feels. This alertness includes my photographic observations in Tonga and Ōtara. Being sensitive to the world around connects to how fa’alogo exists in my photographic work of documentation. In the article *The Art of Observation: The Two Types of Observations* (2013) the author highlights important aspects of observing. He states: “Just because you see does not mean you observe. The difference between seeing and observing is fundamental to many aspects of life. Observation is more than simple seeing something, but rather a mental process involving both visual and thought.”²³ There is a big difference between seeing and observing and the same could be said for hearing and listening, whether you are conscious or unconscious of what is happening in your neighbourhood.



Figure 26. A’aifou Potemani in Ōtara shopping centre, 2024, still from video.

²³ Farnam Street Media, “The Art of Observation: The Two Types of Observation”, Blog. April 1, 2013, <https://fs.blog/the-art-of-observation/>

2.2 Mafaufauga

In this research, my art practice involves mafaufauga or thought and reflection on traditional art forms of my Sāmoan/Tongan identity, and applying those ways of thinking into making in my art practice. In a tautua methodology, mafaufauga means being considerate and acting with integrity towards others, although in the fa'asāmoa, it can mean tautua in a hierarchical sense, to serve one's elders.

Mafaufauga is particularly important in studies that emphasize Indigenous methodologies, where researchers seek to incorporate the lived experiences and perspectives of local communities into their research and analysis. In a journal by the Moanarua collective of Pacific researchers called "Indigenizing research: Moanarua a philosophy for practice" (2024) a concern is raised about how Pasifika narratives and stories have often been gathered by non-Pacific researchers which leads to a misconception and misunderstanding of Indigenous culture.²⁴ As Indigenous people, it is only right that our stories are upheld for their true worth when incorporated into research practice. The Moanarua collective sought to emphasize the significance of "decolonizing" and re-Indigenizing research. Following on, I am urged to think about how stories of local communities should be seen and told.

In my opinion, Indigenous people have always held voice and visibility in our own knowledge systems that have been found in our DNA for thousands of years. It is this voice that we draw from now as we navigate forward, not bound by the racist borders of our nations, but by the vastness of our ocean. Mafaufauga represents a holistic way of thinking, which blends intellect with emotional, spiritual, and ancestral wisdom. In my way of practice, mafaufauga is seen as a way-finder because it takes time, thinking, the placement of patterns on each artwork, and interpreting the work after it has been made. The idea of time comes into play through contemplation and thinking about the placement of patterns, which leads to different interpretations of the work. Ultimately, without even consciously thinking about my cultural identity as being Sāmoan Tongan, the way I interpret each work leads me back to mafaufauga of tatau Sāmoa and siapo.

The question really is, what makes me think of tatau Sāmoa and siapo when making art? Cultural knowledge stems from seeing and listening; to see and listen is to be influenced or encouraged in ways where these come into the mind of thinking. My two older siblings (figure 27) both have tatau marks on their bodies and they became stuck in my mind; this is where my art practice sits, to see and think of those marks leads me into a deeper thought process and critical thinking about time, endurance of pain, courage, and ultimately the long history behind tatau.

²⁴ Dion Enari, Jacoba Matapo, Yvonne Ualesi, Albert Refiti et al. (Moanarua Pacific Research Group). "Indigenising research: Moanarua a philosophy for practice." *Educational Philosophy and Theory*. Vol. 56, Issue 11, pp. 1044–1053, 12 Mar 2024.



Figure 27. A'aifou Potemani, The Potemani brothers. 2023.

2.3 Fa'atino

Fa'atino translates to act or to do and it stems from the word *tino* (body), and refers to the act of the body and how it reacts to the way the mind thinks and what it is telling it to do. Fa'a simply means in a matter of, so when you put fa'a and tino together it produces fa'atino meaning to act in a way the mind receives messages from someone else and being conscious of that, until it is then transferred into action and the idea of doing. In my practice, fa'atino is a word that relates to tautua in many ways. For instance, this Sāmoan phrase: "la fa'atino le tautua!" translates as 'put service into action!' In other words, fa'atino or ways of doing, is what makes tautua what it is; correspondingly without fa'alogo there is no mafaufauga, without mafaufauga there is no fa'atino, and without fa'atino, there is no tautua. Much of what I have learnt is from observing and doing it repetitively until I know how to do it, which in fact is a pedagogy.

My screen-printing process, which takes place in the AUT (Auckland University of Technology) printmaking room, involves preparing screens that are the primary tool for creating large scale prints. In preparing a screen, removing emulsion from the screen using a water-blaster, is the first step in making sure that all the excess is removed from the screen ready to be used. This is followed by drying the screen and coating it with fresh emulsion.

At first, I tried to make the screen perfect every time through cleaning the screen and registration of the design onto the calico, but I often ended up with imperfections of the design outcome. When I was making *Fish in gogo*, 2024 (see figure 46), some of the marks come through clogged and with the design overlapping and misregistering. Some of the ink on my hands ended up on the print, and imperfect exposure of the screen affected the print lines. Often using smaller squeegees enabled me to be selective in areas of the print to avoid overlapping.



Figure 28. Screen-printing a motif onto calico, 2025, still from video, AUT Lab.

At the beginning of this project, I wasn't satisfied with the outcome of the prints but now I have come to value the imperfections and misregistration. The imperfections bring a sense of presence and relationship between the work and the creator through smudges of marks. They represent the passing of time where past and present are shown. It becomes a celebration of human limitations and acceptance of marks of the human hand as opposed to machine printing. The overlapping lines also create perceptual effects.

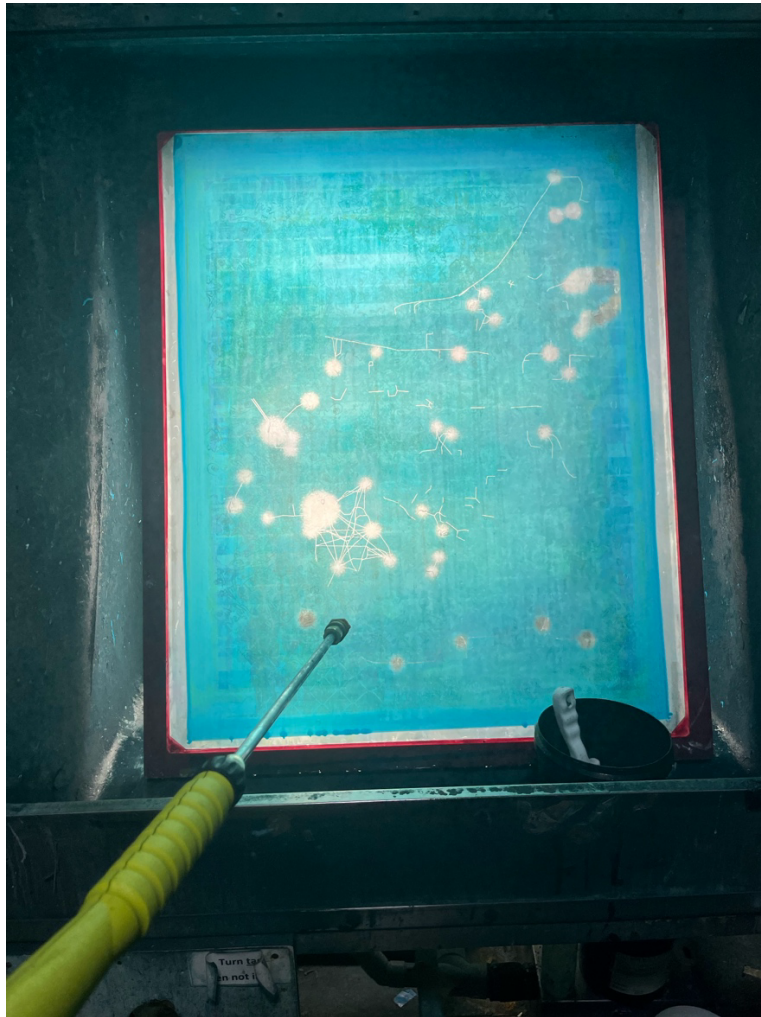


Figure 29. A'aifou Potemani, water-blasting screen. 2025, AUT Lab.

2.4 Screen-printing as form of talanoa

The purpose of this final section on methodology is to give an insight into ways of thinking and making through screen-printing as a form of talanoa. I will connect talanoa to tautua in my art practice. Talanoa is a term which derives from *tala* meaning story; it is a tool where people come together to share dialogue, converse, and discuss stories and perspectives on certain subjects. Talanoa is both a noun and a verb where one would talanoa to people in conversational exchange. Screen-printing as a talanoa occurs where screen-printing is positioned as an art form of transferring ink onto surface, serving as a creative medium for storytelling, cultural expression, and values. Talanoa is a common concept in research spaces as a methodological framework for practice and research. It has been incorporated in research in relation to talking about issues concerning different topics in many fields of practice, including a material approach. In “Re-Imagining the Dialogic Spaces of Talanoa through Sāmoan Onto-Epistemology” (2021), researchers Jacoba Matapo and Dione Enari state:

Talanoa within New Zealand Pacific research scholarship is problematized, raising particular tensions of the universal and humanistic ideologies that are entrenched within institutional ethics and research protocols. The dialogic relational space, which is embedded throughout talanoa methodology, is called into question, evoking alternative ways of knowing and being within the talanoa research assemblage (including material-world). [...] We call for shift in thinking material-ethics that opens talanoa to a materialist process ontology, where knowledge generation emerges through human and non-human encounters.²⁵

Matapo and Enari refer to Timote Vaoleti, a Tongan scholar who introduced talanoa as: “a phenomenological Pacific research framework” for practice to be able to articulate Pacific ways of thinking through cultural customs and traditions.²⁶ My practice of screen-printing in dialogue with my community and surroundings compares to an art form of talanoa, while talanoa in research is often understood to mean face-to-face conversations.

Tongan sculptor John Vea describes his artwork as a form of talanoa; his work *Murder site Memorial (installation)*, 2006, is an installation made in response to murders in South Auckland. After reading newspapers and listening to the radio, Vea responded to the incident through art to pay respects to those that had passed away, even though he did not know them personally. As he documented his artwork before reinstalling it, a group of youths bumped into him to see what he was doing and a talanoa took place over what had happened, giving him more knowledge.²⁷ The artwork becomes more than an object-based installation, rather the installation is used as a tool for verbalizing the story. It holds meaning and importance to a whole community and therefore it gains richness.

In summary, Talanoa can also be a non-verbal form of communication between an artwork and audience. It connects mafaufauga and tautua as they form a cycle of understanding and doing. Talanoa expresses values of alofa, fa’aaloalo, and manatu. These values are also expressed through tautua. As talanoa becomes the conversation, tautua is the action. The method of screen-

²⁵ Matapo, Jacoba, and Dion Enari. 2021. “Re-Imagining the Dialogic Spaces of Talanoa through Sāmoan Onto-Epistemology.” *Waikato Journal of Education* 26 (January): pp. 79–88.

²⁶ Phenomenology is the study of nature of being through its root word phenomena to describe how we manifest and perceive thinking through experiences.

²⁷ John Vea, *The Emic Avenue, Art Through Talanoa*. (Thesis, AUT, 2015), p. 7.

printing, fa'atino, allows me to transfer my lived experiences in their communities, cultural heritage, and messages into visual forms layered with symbolism, meaning, and emotion that invites viewers into a conversation. Taleni and Surtees suggest that the pedagogy of the heart could be implemented into practice and ways of teaching. They state:

While other Pasifika values have relevance to the pedagogy of the heart, including fa'aaloalo (respect), aloaia (integrity), fa'asinomaga (belonging), and fa'aleagaga (spirituality) we have chosen to focus on tautua, alofa, and osiosiga because these values both *come from the heart* and are *at the heart* of the pedagogy and therefore most tangibly illustrate the underlying essence of it. They are also central to its implementation, as described later in the article. However, importantly, Pasifika values are closely interconnected with one another.²⁸

In academic research, worldviews, perspectives, and knowledge systems are regarded as informing Sāmoan thinking and our understanding and interactions. Yet knowledge also links to alofa; both critical thinking and alofa intertwine with tautua.

²⁸ Leali'ie'e Tufulasifa'atafatafa and Nicola Surtees, "A Sāmoan pedagogy of the Heart: O 'auala a'oa'o e afua ma fa'atino mai le fatu," *NZ Journal of Education Studies* 59, 31–47, (February 12, 2024): p. 41, <https://link-springer-com.ezproxy.aut.ac.nz/article/10.1007/s40841-024-00308-8#citeas>

Chapter 3: Fa'asinomaga: A Photo-essay

The purpose of this chapter is to show visually how photography is a vital method for me to explore processes of thinking and making, through photographs of both Ōtara and Tonga, to enhance the use of fa'aailoga and tautua. Through documenting areas of Ōtara, and in my trip to Tonga in December 2024, I was able to connect with my community in Aotearoa and in my father's home village. Tautua was in action throughout the process of taking photographs that would show places and people in my communities in Aotearoa and in my father's homeland. This photo essay is used as a visual form of storytelling to evoke an emotion or feeling of my process for the reader within this thesis, that would come to form the basis of my final exhibition (see chapter four).

3.1 The Fish canopy



Figure 30. *Fish in Ōtara supermarket, 2024.*

3.2 Documenting the streets of Ōtara

Ōtara, or the longer form, Te Puke ō Tara, is a suburb located in South Auckland with majority of the population being Māori and Pacific Islanders, also known as “Home of the Brave”.²⁹ I recall a time during the research project when I was out in the Ōtara shopping centre taking photographs—immersing myself in that space meant I could both see and feel the presence of its people in that process. I felt that this place has significant meaning with both the present and more importantly the past of people that have come before me; it signified more to me than purely the everyday ritual of seeing. Many of the streets are significant to my family and the tautua of my upbringing; Ōtara has impacted the way tautua has been explored in this photographic method in a constant cycle of exchange. It was tautua from my family migrating from the islands for better opportunities and providing for extended families back home, to the Ōtara village who tautua to Polynesian families migrating from the islands and making it their new homes, to myself documenting Ōtara through photography as a form of tautua.

²⁹ Ōtara coined its codename “Home of the Brave” due to the challenges, difficult times, and resilient spirit of its people.



Figure 31. *Gwayz Shops*, 2024.

This is the local dairy near my grandparents' home known as "Gwayz Shops".³⁰ On the far left is a liquor store with a Chinese takeaway in between. This location is home to those who live near Gilbert Road, Eccles Pl (Place), and Franich Street. Home is described or known as a haven or safe space from the outside world where there is a sense of comfort and zero percent of worry. Growing up in Eccles Pl, it was my grandparents' convenient place to get everything they needed and therefore our family were daily visitors 24/7 to get essentials. It was a ritual every weekend; Saturday mornings were eggs and bread for breakfast and Sunday was the Chinese takeaway for the family feast after church service. We built a relationship with our local store owners because we visited their store multiple times both throughout the day and week, and in exchange given free sweets.

³⁰ "Gwayz" is a G from Gilbert Road and "wayz" meaning way/direction or road.



Figure 32. *Eccles*, 2024.

This sign stands on the corner of *Gwayz Shops* pointing in the direction of my grandparents' house.



Figure 33. *Tamā and Tinā’s brickhouse in the corner, 2024.*

My mother’s parents’ house in the corner was where my fa’asāmoa developed through tautua to my family, church, community. In that orange brickhouse a big family was raised in small house.



Figure 34. *Valder sign*, 2024.

Valder Ave is the street I was raised in before moving to my mother's parents' house.



Figure 35. Trailer on Valder Ave, 2024.



Figure 36. *Valderz Locoz*, 2024.

My playground as a kid growing up.

3.3 Documenting the village of Tokomololo, Tonga

Tokomololo, Tongatapu, is my father's place of birth, located in the Pacific Island of Tonga. The photographs below are a glimpse of my recent trip to Tokomololo in December 2024, capturing moments of my everyday experiences; from hanging around the street, to hanging clothes out for sale, to walking to the shops, and finally church services on Wednesday, Saturday, and Sunday. In this set of photographs, taken in Tokomololo, I spent a casual morning going out alone. Many questions and thoughts came to mind about what my father's childhood was like and how it was very different to mine. I started to see the similarities and differences in culture between Tokomololo and Ōtara in the details of the environment, objects, things, people. Everyday experiences become a ritual, such as shopping at the convenience store for essentials, or preparing feasts for church and Sunday services. As I immersed myself in that environment, I absorbed and thought about my own connections and relations in Tonga and Aotearoa. I realised the true testament of the strength of Pasifika peoples was to navigate to different islands and countries taking with them their values, cultural customs and traditions wherever they went.



Figure 37. *Hala Loto, Tokomololo, 2024.*

The road to my grandparents' house located near the main road to Nuku'alofa.



Figure 38. *'Api a Samiu mo Mele Potemani, 2024.*

My father was born and raised, in the house on the right, by his parents Samiuela and Mele Potemani. Clothes were hung outside for sale.



Figure 39. *Me'a lele maumau*, 2024.

A car broken down and abandoned for more than five years, next to the house my father was raised in.



Figure 40. *Siasi 'ahofitu, Tokomololo, 2024.*

The local Seventh-Day Adventist church in Tokomololo; a minute's walk from my grandparents' home.



Figure 41. *Falelotu I Tokomololo*, 2024.

Attending church service on Wednesday with close relatives and people from Tokomololo.



Figure 42. *Kautama mei Tokomololo*, 2024.

A bunch of boys hanging around the Tokomololo cemetery to clean the graves of their families and play touch-rugby on the small field next to the cemetery. As I was walking on Loto Road, one of the boys yelled out to see if I could take a photo of them.



Figure 43. *Falekoloa i Tokomoloto*, 2024.

3.4 Reflection on fa'ailoga through photography

The method of observation, fa'ailoga, of absorbing my culture through photography, has drawn inspiration from the communities of Ōtara and Tokomololo. It has been an important method in this project as a way of refreshing, retracing, and reimagining—as a way of sustaining the mind in my research, and to give the project fa'asinomaga, direction. Photography builds a bridge between creativity and contemplation because the simple actions of picking up a camera and taking a photograph of significant places/things becomes a way of thinking.

My method of using photography in this photo-essay has similarities to Sāmoan Tongan researcher Ruth (Lute) Faleolo's process of selecting eleven photographs shared with her by Pasifika knowledge holders for a photo-essay. While I take my own photographs, I also intend to create meaning both as a Pasifika person living in Aotearoa and to give an insight into an artist's way of thinking. In her research (2024), Faleolo talks about the important aspects involved in inter-generational Pasifika “meaning-making and sense-making” that is valid in the context of faith, family, community and education to Pasifika people living outside their homelands.³¹ I also intend to convey the meaning and value of family connection through visual imagery, creating pathways into patternmaking as a way of expression. The next chapter will return to how I interpret experiences as a way of creating meaning where photographs inspire patterns for screen-prints that are centred on experiences of place and things embracing cultural values to bring meaning.

³¹ Ruth (Lute), Sh'Kinah & Lydiah Faleolo, “Understanding Diaspora Pasifika (Sāmoan and Tongan) Intergenerational Sense-Making and Meaning-Making through Imageries.” *Art/Research International: A Transdisciplinary Journal*, 8, 2 (2024): pp. 362–414. <https://www.erudit.org/en/journals/ari/2024-v8-n2-ari09140/1109637ar.pdf>

Chapter 4: Mamanu used in Installation

In this chapter, I will discuss the use of mamanu in installation ideas and presentation in different spaces in my art practice. Installation, being three-dimensional, creates different perceptions such as seeing, listening, touching, tasting, and smell. It unlocks the potential for an audience to rethink ideas and reflect on what is being presented. Mamanu is an aspect of fa'asāmoa that is vital in the arts and crafts of Sāmoans and when it is discussed through ways of installation, it brings forth a tactile experience of pattern. This chapter will look also examine the installation techniques of two Indigenous artists based in Aotearoa: Arielle Walker and 'Uhila Nai.

4.1 Mamanu and photography converge

The three prints below are experiments with screen-prints of photographs with patterns directly laid over the image of sites in Ōtara and Tonga. In later works, the architecture becomes Mamanu using Adobe Photoshop, from extracting aspects of the photograph to the process of repeating, layering, and multiplying into an intricate pattern. Like *Ōtara supermarkets* (2024), the series which in *Fish in gogo* (2024), *Tamā and Tinā's house in Ulutao* (2024), and *Supermarket in 'aliao* (2024), patterns are derived from tatau created using Procreate. The designing of each pattern began as single motifs (drawn from personal memory) before being duplicated and rotated creating geometrical lines.



Figure 44. *Fish in gogo*, 2024.

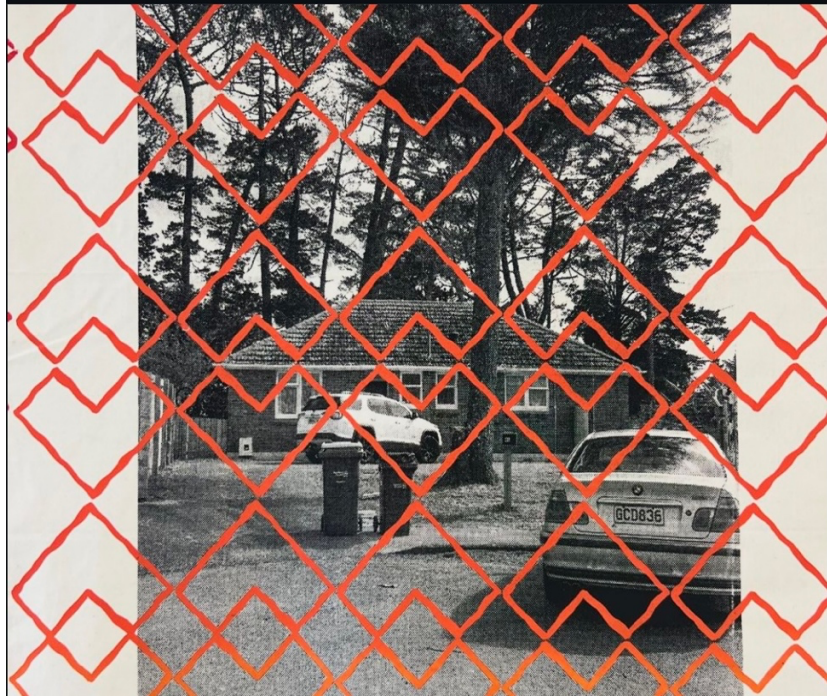


Figure 45. *Tamā and Tinā's house with ulutao (spearhead), 2024.*

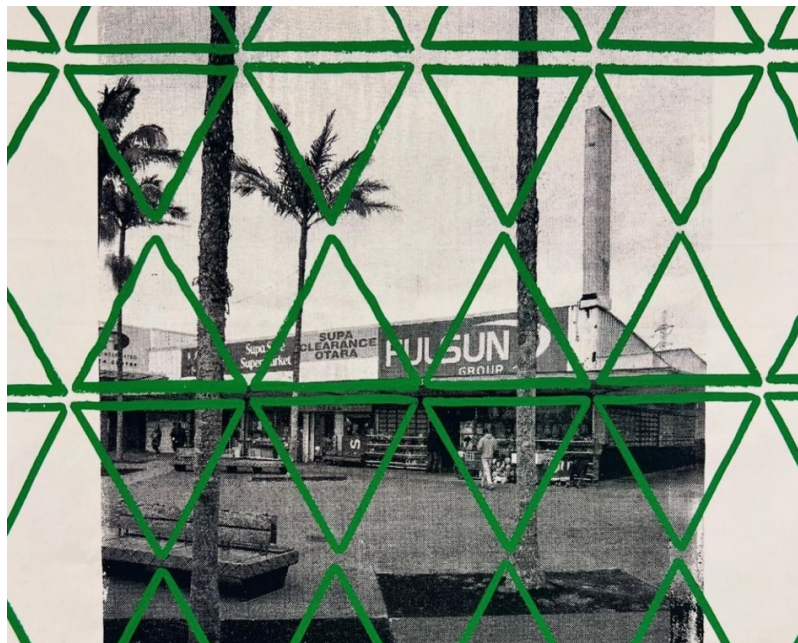


Figure 46. *Supermarket in 'aliao. 2024.*

4.2 Installing Mamanu

Before installing my artwork in a gallery space, I explored other artists' methods, I refer to Arielle Walker, a contemporary artist of Māori (Taranaki, Ngāruahine, Ngāpuhi) and Pākehā descent. Her practice is based on ways of belonging and reciprocity through connections to land, language, and practices of making—specifically crafts. Through her tipunā or ancestors' stories, immediate family narratives are passed down through generations, and ways of storytelling through interactive, spatial experiences. I am interested in Walker's installation techniques (see figure 47) for the work *Rongoā* (2020). In her exhibition *Mending the Kupenga*, her fifth iteration of the artwork was exhibited at Te Wai Ngutu Kākā (2024). Her work consisted of a large tapestry made of found silk and other vintage fabrics dyed with foraged plant dyes and handed-down materials. Through storytelling and visualising relationships to land and rivers, Walker installs the artwork from the ground to the ceiling. She considers the artwork to be a taonga that is special to her and her whanau; it raises ideas for me of continuity, endurance, and the endlessness of whakapapa.³²



Figure 47. Installation view at Te Wai Ngutu Kākā, Arielle Walker, *Rongoā*, 2020 – ongoing, currently 2000 x 3720mm. Arielle Walker, <https://www.ariellewalker.com/rongoaa>

³² I note that Arielle Walker's artwork *Rongoā* has been installed in many other exhibitions. The most recent is in the show *Pupuritia* at Objectspace, Auckland. Michael McCabe's installation design foregrounds the diverse ways textile art can be suspended. See <https://www.objectspace.org.nz/exhibitions/pupuritia-storytelling-and-contemporary-textiles/>

Also interested in installation of textiles, 'Uhila Nai is a Tongan artist, living in Aotearoa. She suspends her printed *pepa koka'anga* (textiles) in response to both a specific gallery space and a cultural form of kupesi. Her installed work *Hala Kafa* (2024), displayed in Te Pātaka Toi Adam Art Gallery, consisted of six textiles in ngatu form, made in response to *ngatu tahina*, a Tongan bark cloth well known for its vast ceremonial scale. Their size can extend to over twenty-four metres. These installations are displayed towering from the ceiling to the ground, displaying intricate kupesi throughout each work. Nai's practice derives from kupesi of her village Pelehake and the stories of her ancestors that they carry. She traces back these important *koloa* (treasures) to the time of her great-grandmother. I am interested in her installation (see figure 48) as a spatial formation that allows viewers to walk through her work and experience the kupesi up close. The works are suspended along a narrow walkway around the gallery's atrium.



Figure 48. 'Uhila Moe Langi Nai, *Hala Kafa*, 2024, ink on pepa koka'anga, six pieces of 900 x 4000mm, Te Pātaka Toi Adam Art Gallery, Wellington, Photo by Ted Whitaker. <https://www.adamartgallery.nz/exhibitions/archive/2024/vaiei-tupuna/image-gallery#b1a7ac54b712>



Figure 49. A'aifou Potemani, *Fa'ailoga lou Fa'asinomaga*, 2023, screen-print on calico, 150 x 450cm, Installation view at Te Wai Ngutu Kakā Gallery, Auckland.

In my BVA research (2023), I explored ways of installing prints that consist of patterns and photographs relating to my environment (see figure 49). The printing of large-scale works was intended to let the calico lengths flow from the ceiling to the ground to give an overwhelming feeling for the audience. At the same time, I hoped the audience would be drawn towards the patterns and photographs displayed. The inspiration for this work was realizing the pillars of my practice; my family, my community, Ōtara, and more importantly my culture. The print on the left includes a photograph of The Fish with the Sāmoan motif, gogo, depicting the navigation of my ancestors to Ōtara and making it their home. The second print includes a photograph of the first house my grandparents moved into when migrating from Sāmoa (Eccles Pl) with the *ulutao* (spearhead) motif. The last print consists of a photograph in the Ōtara supermarket with the 'ali'ao motif. At the beginning of my MVA research (2024) I was still working in series, but I was separating the image from the pattern (see figure 50).



Figure 50. A'aifou Potemani, *Untitled* (Art and Design Talk Week installation), 2024, 3 screen-prints on calico, 150 x 300cm, AUT, Auckland.

4.3 Sketch towards my MVA exhibition installation

In my final installation for my Masters project, I returned to screen-printing motifs on multiple rolls of calico which suggests the continuity of mamanu. The long lengths express a sense of the duration of making; a time extended to the printing process in repeated registration and misregistration of the screens, taking place over several days. I generated patterns extracted from the photographic image through the Adobe Photoshop process I have developed, rather than including the representational image itself. The diagram below (figure 51) is a rough drawing idea for installation in an exhibition inspired by my community, Ōtara. Once again, I return to the architectural structure of The Fish canopy, with the intention of giving a tactile experience to the viewer walking through that space, surrounded with mamanu. Drawing inspiration from The Fish, an idea came into mind to form an installation of works based on the skeleton of a fish. The bones of the fish become the pillars of Ōtara and Tokomotolo, our people, and infrastructure, where the mamanu represent my life experiences through ways of observing and thinking.

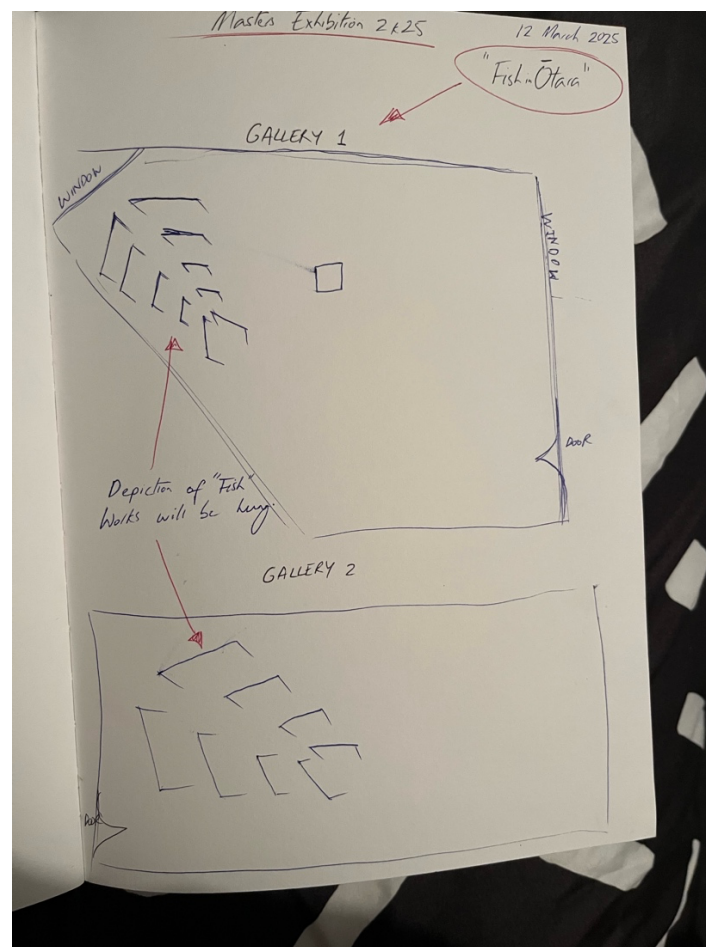


Figure 51. A'aifou Potemani, installation idea, 2025, pen on paper, Auckland.

In the final installation of textiles, primary colour has been reintroduced, interspersed with black print layers to play with visual perception for the audience. A predominantly yellow artwork, *Tails of Ōtara* (figure 52), is a play on words suggesting the fish tail and tales, or stories of my community. The black and yellow inks create optical effects and provide a direction for my final series of work.

Chapter 5: Nona/Conclusion

During this research project, I have learnt through the processes of photography and screen-printing that these mediums can become way-finders for patternmaking. Pacific knowledge through storytelling and service is captured through photographic images and used as a way of passing down knowledge. If anything, Pacific knowledge and culture has grown stronger through the generations and is still a way of being. Patternmaking is a strand of Pacific knowledge and way of thinking bound together with culture. Using photography, software and screen-printing as my tools, I continue the art of storytelling as a Pasifika person living in the diaspora. I carry the torch lit by my ancestors for the next generation. As Indigenous Canadian scholar Leanne Betasamosake Simpson states:

Stories are about responsibility and action in Indigenous cultures. They have kept us alive, grounded and inspired. They carry the resistance and strength of our ancestors. They hold our truths. And when we tell them on our own terms to an engaged audience, they carry a tremendous responsibility to transform.³³

5.1 Robin Wall Kimmerer's *The Serviceberry*

As a last reference to Indigenous thinking around tautua, I turn to *The Serviceberry: An Economy of Abundance* (2024) by Robin Wall Kimmerer, where the concepts of sharing, respect, reciprocity, and gratitude are mentioned. She emphasizes the importance of a serviceberry which Native American Indigenous people use as a tool for indicating seasonal changes/times for activities like gardening, harvesting, hunting, and fishing. The serviceberry, also known as juneberry, saskatoon, shadbush, Sarvis berry, and sugar plum, is a calendar plant that not only caters to people but benefits wildlife ecologies.

Kimmerer discusses “the ethic of reciprocity that lies at the heart of the gift economy” to think about how Indigenous knowledge and ecological systems emphasize how we exchange: she even scanned and offered her book for free online.³⁴ In the act of gifting something to someone, we build a strong relationship that benefits both parties. If we consume things that are gifted by mother nature, shouldn't we be taking care of the natural world in response to what we have been given? It raises a concern about how we should think about gratitude, respect, and sharing with others. She states, “How we think ripples out to how we behave,” a strong statement that reconnects to the concept of tautua; where the acts of giving or serving benefit both sides, not only through what is exchanged (whether it be money, food, or something you would enjoy) but also the relationship, the trust, and the security engendered by that relationship.³⁵

A good analogy to fa'asāmoa would be to buy a siapo for a family member online or from a store, so different from making a siapo and gifting it to them, which is a lengthy effort (see chapter one). The person receiving the gift feels not only gratitude and thankfulness, but it also gives them great responsibility to take good care of it. Similarly, for serviceberries to survive they rely on a

³³ Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, 2014, cited in Lisa Kahaleole Hall, *The past before us: Mo'okū'auhau and Mo'olelo* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press). 2019. p. 112.

³⁴ Robin Wall Kimmerer, *The Serviceberry: An Economy of Abundance*. (Penguin: London, 2024), p. 13.

³⁵ Kimmerer, *Ibid*.

community where there is a constant cycle of soil producing the plant and growing the fruit; the fruit catering to the birds, and the birds catering to people.

5.2 Evaluating Tautua as methodology and Tautua

The tautua methodology explored in this research project involved a personal interpretation of the word service. Through fa’alogo (observation), mafaufauga (reflecting), and fa’atino (action), I was able to rethink and imagine how tautua combines these methods; one is unable to proceed without the other as they complement each other. Fa’alogo is in sync with fa’atino as one observes, the act of doing proceeds and this act links to mafaufauga, analysing the observation of doing. I also have practiced talanoa (conversation) involving exchange with my community in the process of fa’ailoga (mark-making).

My act of tautua is shown in an installation of multiple screen-prints with patterns derived from photographs of significant places in Ōtara and Tokomololo, and what they mean to the community. As a son of Ōtara, the artwork is a tautua to the people of Ōtara as a gift. Reflecting on the length of the calico drops and the time spent creating them, I take into consideration the villagers who constantly work long hours overtime providing for their families. Their pain and struggle, and their experiences, become the different threads woven together a rich tapestry.

I return to a Sāmoan saying: *O le ala I le pule o le tautua*, the pathway to leadership is through service; my art practice is a homage to my urban village. Tautua is a way of life, it is an exchange between *tautua to pule* and *pule to tautua*, “to serve to lead” and “to lead to serve”. Tautua is an ongoing and endless concept that is visible in the fa’asāmoa. Although many of us now live in the Moana diaspora, the settings and technologies change, my patterns have evolved differently to traditional siapo or ngatu, but the Sāmoan values remain.

Finally, I end with the traditional Sāmoan adage: *E sui faiga ae tumau le fa’avae*, ways of doing may change but the foundations remain the same. Living in an environment where the academic space is dominated by the English language and mainstream culture, I incorporate the values that were and are taught to me by my elders to uplift my art practice whilst manoeuvring through different spaces.

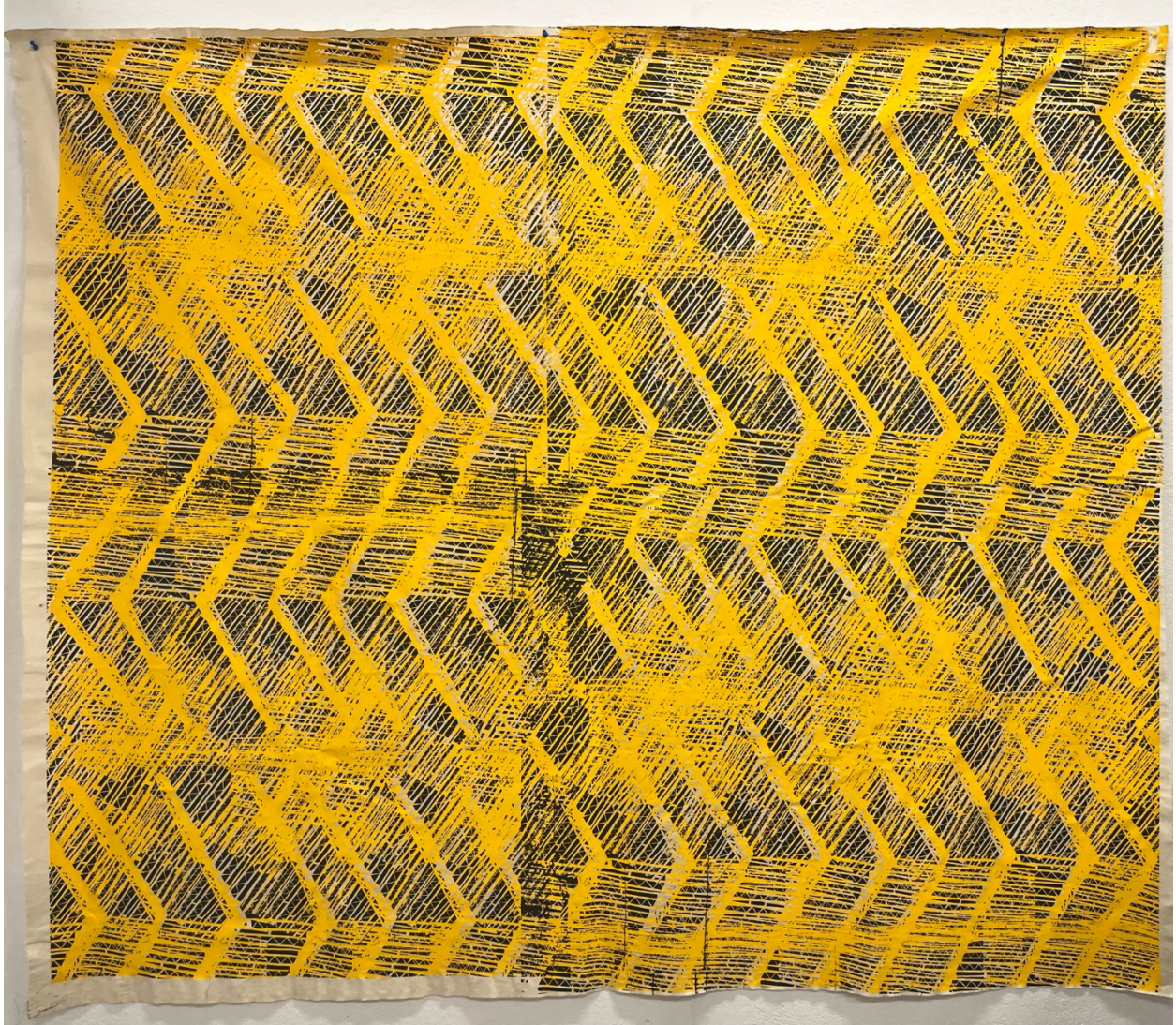


Figure 52. A'aifou Potemani, *Tails of Ōtara*, April 2025, screen-print on calico, Auckland.

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Appendix A:

Final MVA Thesis installation

My final installation series is titled *'Fa'ailoga Lou Fa'asinomaga,'* (2025), and installed at Te Wai Ngutu Kākā Gallery Two. The exhibition consists of four (500 x 5000mm) large-scale screen-prints of patterns created during the research project, with each pattern representing my communities of Ōtara and Tokomololo. Figure 53 shows that every print features black marks, referencing tatau and ngatu. In *Tails of Ōtara* (2025), the pattern draws from the tail of The Fish canopy in Ōtara, with yellow reflecting a bright community amidst troubles and tribulations. In *Falekoloa 'i Tokomololo* (2025), the pattern comes from a shop in the village of Tokomololo, Tonga, while blue symbolizes the Pacific Ocean and recalls my recent journey across the seas to Tonga. In *Body of Ōtara* (2025), the pattern represents the body of The Fish canopy of the market, with red referencing the store signage that dominates the Ōtara shopping centre. Finally, in *'Api a Samiu mo Mele Potemani* (2025), the pattern echoes the window frame of my grandparents' home in Tokomololo, with the green representing the natural surroundings. Altogether, *Fa'ailoga Lou Fa'asinomaga* marks and speaks to my identity as a Sāmoan Tongan living in Aotearoa as a creative. It is a snippet of my woven story with every intricate pattern representing each small community and village that has played a role in raising me. As part of each calico print is rolled up on a fabric roll and is yet to be rolled out, the idea of endlessness and continuity with the prints flowing to the ground suggests my woven story, yet to be unrolled.



Figure 53. *Fa'ailoga Lou Fa'asinomaga*, 2025, screen-- printed ink on calico, view from inside Te Wai Ngutu Kākā Gallery.

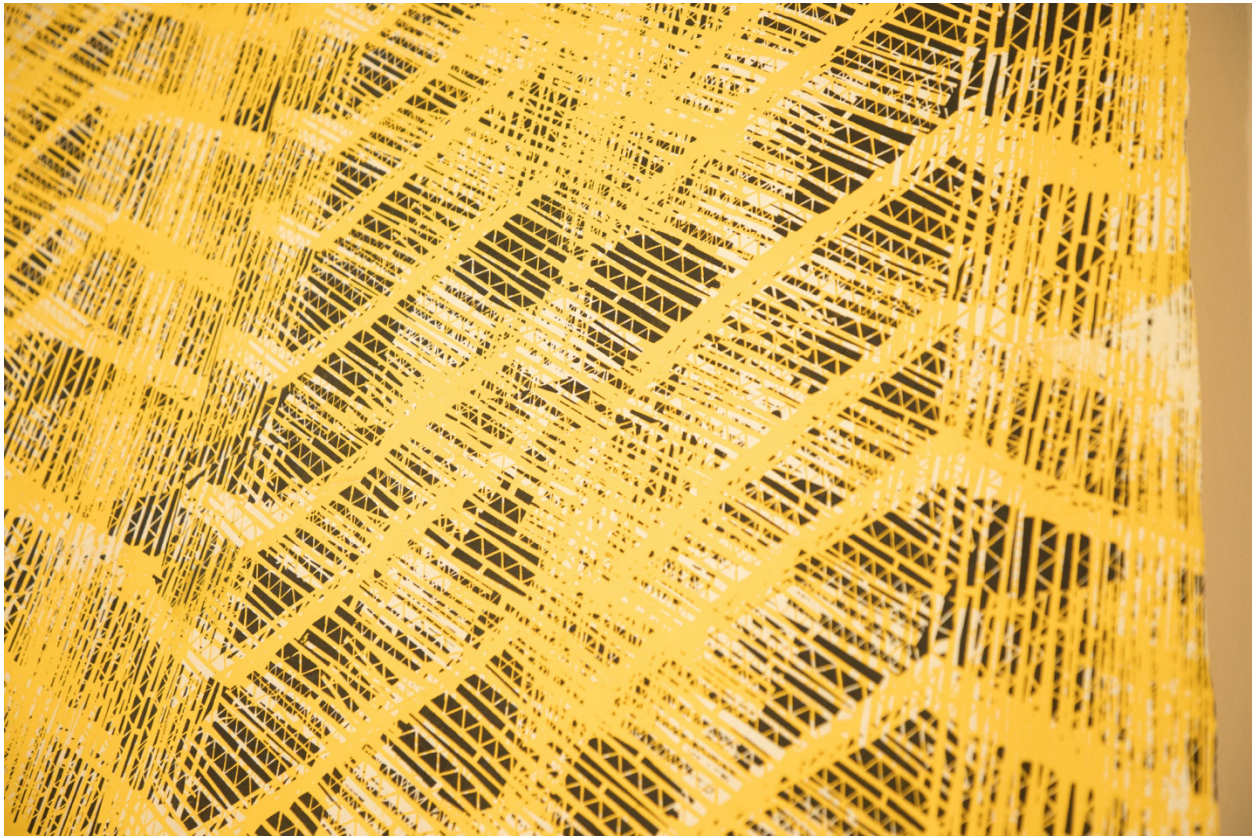


Figure 54. *Tails of Ōtara*, 2025, close -up view.

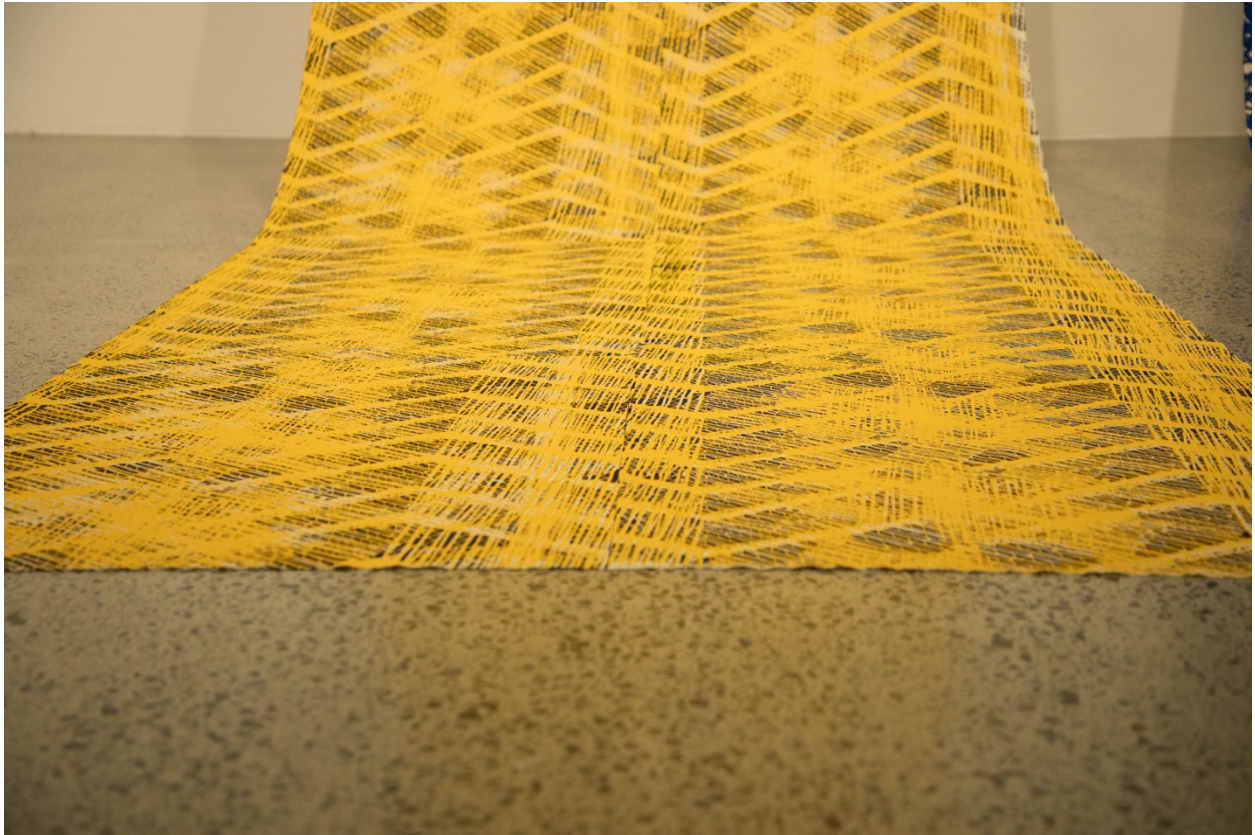


Figure 55. *Tails of Ōtara*, 2025, print laid on ground.

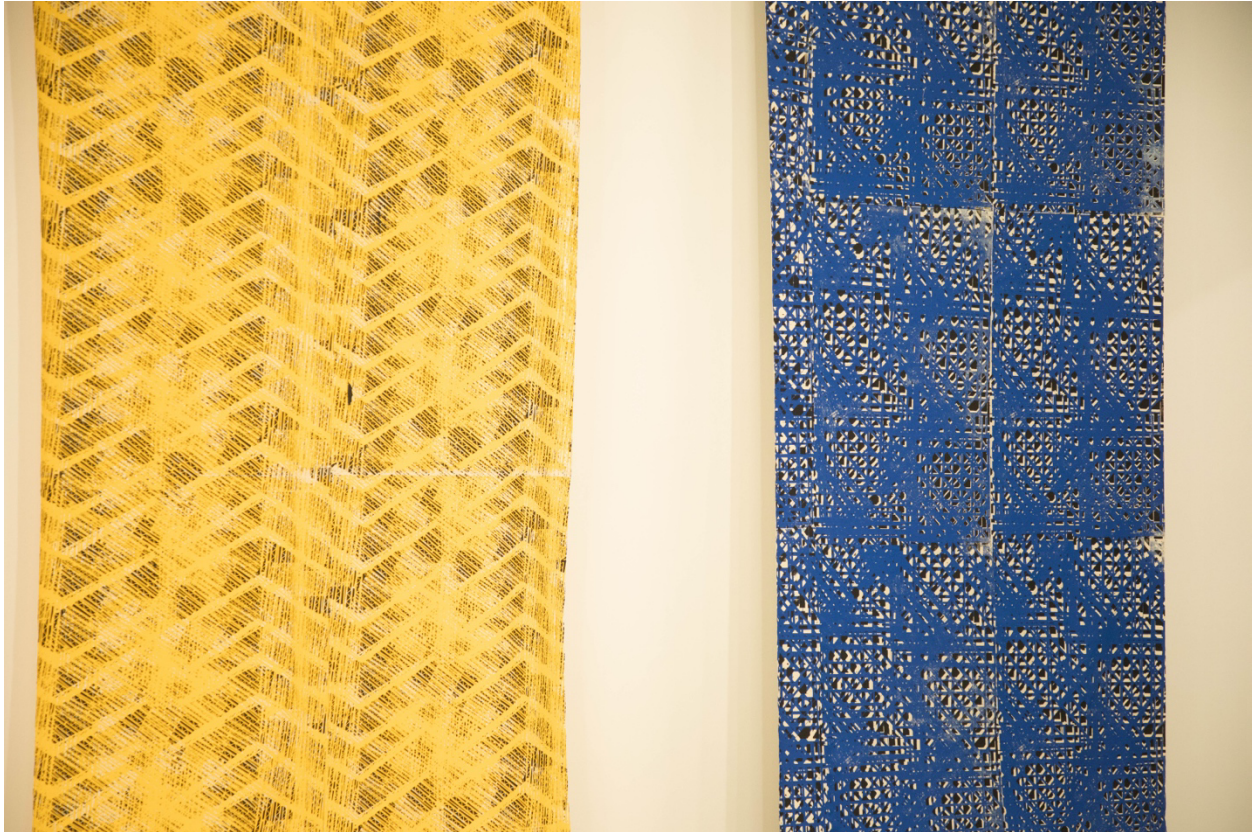


Figure 56. *Tails of Ōtara*, 2025 & *Falekoloa 'i Tokomololo*, 2025, prints installed next to each other from left to right.

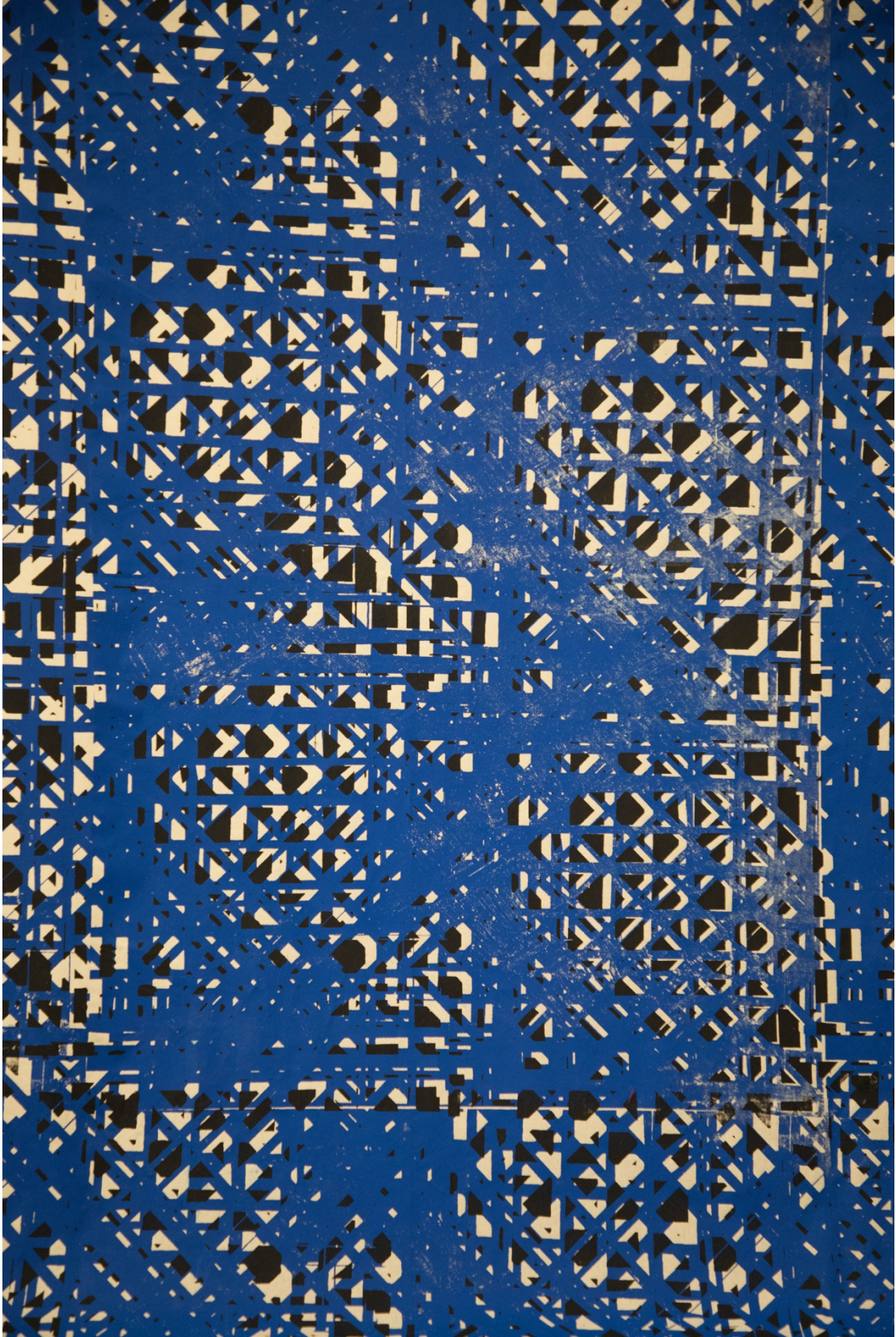


Figure 57. *Falekoloa 'i Tokomololo, 2025, close-up view.*



Figure 58. *Body of Ōtara*, 2025, print from top to bottom.



Figure 59. *Body of Ōtara*, 2025, view of dowel & carton tube used to roll up print.

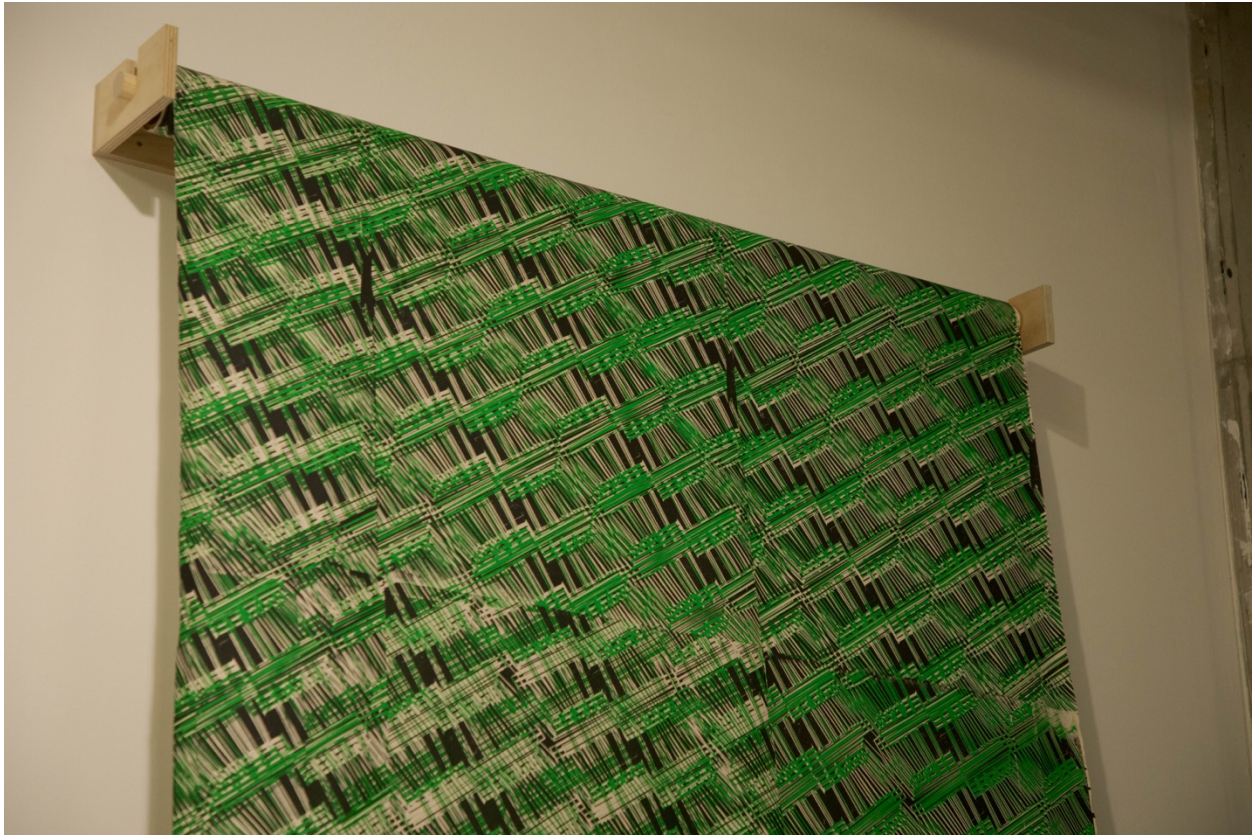


Figure 60. *ʻApi a Samiu mo Mele Potemani*, 2025, print installed using dowel & carton tube.

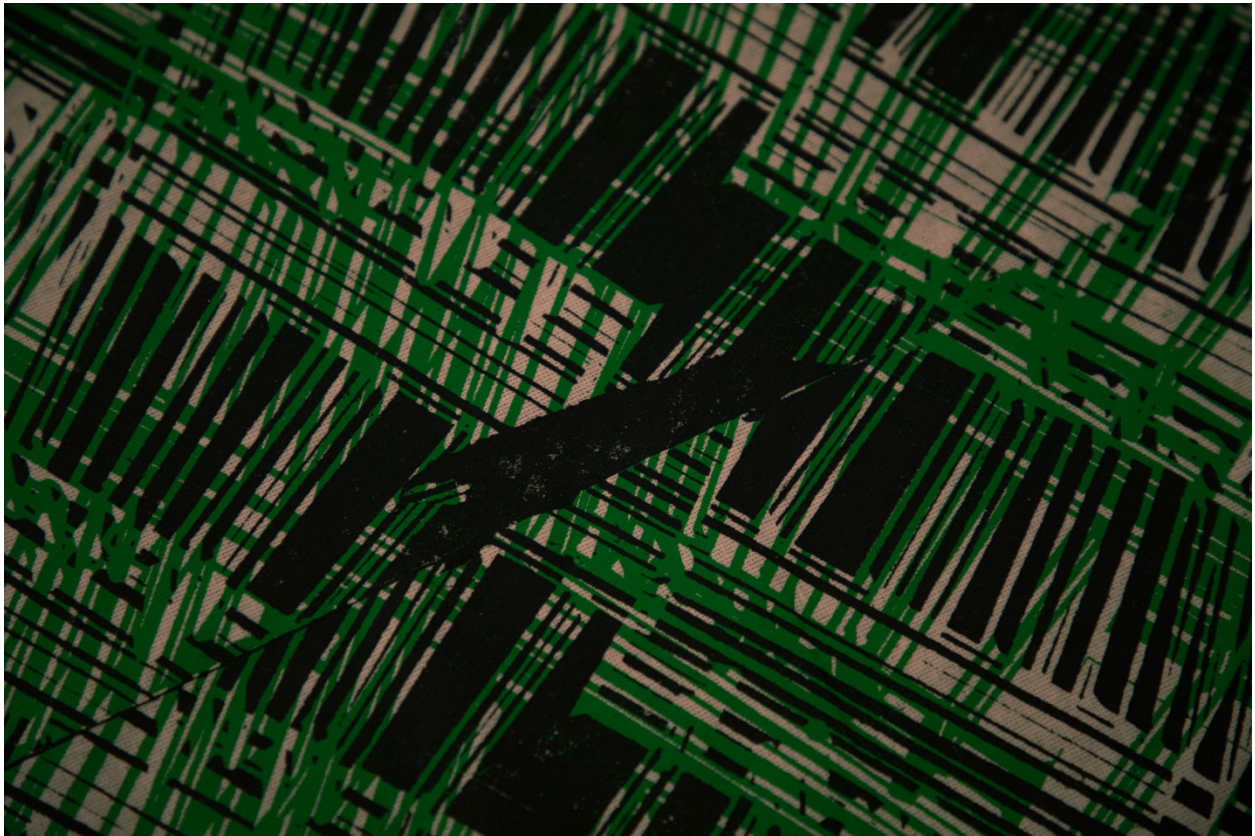


Figure 61. *'Api a Samiu mo Mele Potemani*, 2025, close-up view.



Figure 62. A'aifou Potemani, *Fa'ailoga Lou Fa'asinomaga*, 2025, screen-printed ink on calico, 500 x 5000mm, Installation view from outside Te Wai Ngutu Kākā Gallery Two, Auckland.