The ‘Ie Tōga Pepa Replica: A Material Exploration into Samoan Weaving Design and Techniques

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Abstract

This autoethnographic research project explores the extent to which the weaving techniques of the finely woven 'Ie Tōga (fine mat), the highly valued treasure of Samoa, could be replicated through substituting the traditional pandanus leaf for paper. This is examined through a series of material tests that explore the techniques of fine mat weaving under the conditions of paper to produce a quality that is similar to the traditional 'Ie Tōga. The weaving design and techniques drawn on in this project are learned by analysing my family heirloom, our 'Ie Tōga (fine mat), video and photographic imagery collected from books and online sources. This method of analysis, to observe, learn, test, and adapt using these contextual resources, was prompted by the Covid-19 virus. The closing of borders between New Zealand and Samoa through the duration of this project resulted in 'using things at hand' as a way of learning and making. This project shares the hidden voices of the women's role behind the weaving, survival and sacrifice to protect what we have today as one of the most precious items in ceremony and gift exchanges, important in fa'asamoa (Samoan way).

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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 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."

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Sharon Semi Tugia
17th May 2020

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Introduction

Stored in a closet covered in a black rubbish bag, folded and hanging on a hanger along with my church clothes, is our family Samoan Measina(treasure), the 'Ie Tōga. In our living room, mum carefully takes out our fine mat, handing it to my sister and I to unfold in front of her and my father. Unravelling the mat, one hand holding the top corner and the other controlling the bottom half decorated with red feathers followed by a fringe of pandanus - Samoa's Measina.

As a New Zealand born of Samoan descent, my cultural values have influenced how I practice as a spatial designer. Growing up in a Samoan household, my parents raised my sister and I the way they were raised back home in Samoa. Guiding and teaching us with the essential cultural values of Tautua (Service), Usita'i (Discipline), Fa'aaloalo (Respect) and Alofa (Love). Embedded into a large population of Polynesians in the Southside of Auckland and being raised in a Samoan Methodist church, I always felt as if I was raised in Samoa. When in reality, I was in the Southside of Manurewa, New Zealand. However, though raised in New Zealand, I was still able to learn about my Samoan heritage within home and church.

The 'Ie Tōga is a sacred artefact highly ranked and treasured in Samoan Culture. In awe and admiration of our beautiful woven 'Ie Tōga, I have lost count of how many fine mats I have come across. All are uniquely decorated with different coloured feathers and woven in various sizes. From home to family and church gatherings, I grew up surrounded by our beautiful Samoan Measina of the 'Ie Tōga (Fine Mat). They are the most treasured mats and have high cultural importance in Samoan culture for the quality of the material and the survival of the fine mat tradition itself. It is never used as a floor mat as it carries the value of Fa'asamoa (Samoan way) histories of families and communities behind them.

The value of an ‘Ie Tōga is determined by the quality and softness of the material used to weave (Meleisea, Malama,1987). They are woven by women and is an important part of their role, identity and skill within their community (Peggy, Fairbairn-Dunlop, 1998).

'Ie Tōgas are stored in the attic, garage, under my mattress, and every other bed in the house. Any Samoan home you walk into would have their fine mats stored away securely so that rats or insects don't get to the natural fibres and munch a hole in it. While they are in an everyday context, I only ever see the 'Ie Tōga out when we have a family gathering for a wedding, funeral and cultural ceremonies. The weave's fine material and intricacy make it a highly valuable form of currency and a significantly ranked treasure in Samoan culture.

In 2020 I planned to travel to Samoa with my family, sit with my Aunty, and learn the weaving process. She weaves fine mats in the village of Fagali’i in the Fale lalaga(weaving house) with other weaves from the town. However, Covid- 19 and the border closing between Samoan and New Zealand meant I could not follow through with this learning process and develop alternative strategies for learning to weave. These days, my family struggles to find an 'Ie Tōga' because the common ones available are coarser mats. For Samoan weavers, it is a time-consuming process to produce a fine mat. While these are still available, they are not as refined as my family's Ie Tōga, given to us by my Grandmother. Drawn to the delicate weave of my family's 'Ie Tōga, I seek to learn weaving techniques and processes to understand what Samoan women go through when making a fine mat. This process will also inform how I may replicate these techniques using paper to make a pepa ‘Ie Tōga.

Figure 1: Semi Tugia, Sharon. Truck with bundles of ‘Ie Togas. August, 2017.

This autoethnographic project documents this journey of discovery I have made 'using things at hand' as a way of learning and making. This exegesis is structured in three parts. Chapter one provides contextual information for the project. It retells the origin story of the ‘Ie Toga, the meaningful processes associated with the fine mat and relevant art based case studies to the project. Chapter two discusses methods used for analysis based on the Samoan cultural values I grew up with. In this research practice, it has inspired me to learn the art of 'Ie Tōga as a way of revitalising our measina(treasure). This chapter also discusses one artist who has inspired me to observe more within my methods, learn, learn, and adapt. Chapter three outlines the project analysis of my research project. I start by discussing how a collaborative installation involving lalaga(weaving) and lalava

(lashing) inspired research into the art form of Samoa's sacred measina, the 'Ie Tōga. My initial material exploration is split into four key aspects of the 'Ie Tōga process, where I explore what could be replicated using paper.

The fine mat survived because of its quality value by women who gifted the treasures they weaved to generations of women in their family.

Chapter One: Contextual Review

This chapter begins by retelling the origin story of the ‘Ie Toga to outline the cultural values embedded into the fine mat. It discusses the meaningful processes associated with the fine mat and how they are displayed for gift exchanges. This knowledge provides further insights into the material production and the cultural value of 'Ie Tōga. I then discuss works from New Zealand based creative practitioners to unpack their way of telling a story, use of the material in art production. This chapter will end with a brief overview of information drawn from anthropologist research that is relevant to weave patterns.

Origin Of the ‘Ie Tōga

There are many stories about the origin of the 'Ie Tōga. I have selected the story told to me by a Samoan teacher in high school as it illustrates fundamental cultural values embedded into the artform:

> *A woman named Futa in Samoa wove the first fine mat. She would take this mat everywhere she went. Her skill in weaving, foreseeing and guiding the intricate weave of very fine strands of Lau'ie (Long Leaved Pandanus) made the fine mat silky and a pure masterpiece. The first-ever 'Ie Tōga (fine mat) Fale of Futa (Futa's Mat) was treasured and passed down from generation to generation of females in the family, then into the hands of a woman named Tauolosi'i. During the Tongan empire's dominion over Samoa, they enslaved many women. They took them to Tonga, Tauolosi’i’s being one of them. The Tuitoga’s brother Lautivunia and Tauolosi'i fell in love on the boat trip to Tonga until the King announced Tauolosi'i to be his wife. The Tuitoga found out on his wedding day his brother died because he could not live to watch the love of his life marry his brother. This led to anger clouding his judgment and commanded soldiers to have Tauolosi'i and the people of Samoa to be burned at stake. Tauolosi'i cried and begged for mercy and forgiveness until she covered herself with her fine mat, which caught the King's eye. The fine mat attracted his attention because he had a collection of mats’, but none as beautiful as Tauolosi’i’s mat. He demanded soldiers to bring out all his mats to compare with Tauolosi’i’s. If hers was more extraordinary, he would let her and the people of Samoa return home.*

Figure 2: Semi Tugia, Sharon. Photoshopped image telling the story of the Origin of 'Ie Tōga, 2021.

The fine mat is believed to be called two names, *Tasi ae Afe* (One but worth a thousand), because thousands of the King's mats were brought out, and not one could match the beauty of Samoa's mat. The second name *Pulou O Le Ola* (the cover of life), shielded Tauolosi'i from death. It is where Samoa got the name 'Ie Tōga, it was taken to Tonga and brought back to Samoa. The mat is valued because of its beauty – the skill and time taken to make a refined mat and as a shield for humility, protection, and forgiveness within Fa'asamoa (Samoan way).

Figure 3.1: Feagaimaali'I, Joyetter. "Afega ifoga accepted after double shooting". Samoa Observer, January 08, 2021.

Ifoga Process – Plea for mercy and forgiveness

The 'Ie Tōga is involved in many cultural ceremonies and events. It originated the process of Ifoga as told in the origin story when Tauolosi'I shielded herself with her 'Ie Toga in front of Tuitoga. *Figure 3.1* illustrates this process in recent events. The offender covers themselves with the fine mat to plea for mercy and forgiveness. Tauolosi'i used the fine mat as protection to cover herself from being burned; hence the name 'Pulou O Le Ola' (Cover of Life). To this day, the Ifoga Process of covering oneself with a fine mat is used to plead for forgiveness and mercy in Samoa and New Zealand. During the process of Ifoga, as shown in *Figure 3.1 and Figure 3.2*, the village and family of the offender is always behind them, lending support in hopes that their ifoga would be accepted. I find the fine mat covering the two men in *Figure 3.2* creates a powerful spatial connection between the two under the mat and the onlookers supporting them. The flexibility and shape of the 'Ie Tōga as a cover are interesting and have been further explored in my research practice.

Figure 3.2: Feagaimaali'I, Joyetter. "Afega ifoga accepted after double shooting". Samoa Observer, January 08, 2021.

'Ie Tōga Display and gift exchange

The 'Ie Tōga are sacred and symbolise the identity of the large family group attached to the mat. The 'Ie Tōga is part of the fa'aaloaloaga process (Figure 4.1) - the presentation of gifts. Writers have referred to the 'Ie Tōga as 'feminine Property', women themselves, that are some sort of object for exchange (Schoeffel, 1999).

Figure 4.1: Semi Tugia, Sharon. Gift Exchange: Rev Elifasa Vaituutuu Funeral Preparations. August 20, 2017.

When we received our family 'Ie Tōga, my family told me it was to be worn by my sister or me in an Ava ceremony or handed over to the family of the man we marry. This affirms Schoeffel framing of the 'Ie Tōga' being a female valuable and that the 'Ie Tōga' has lost meaning over time within its social and economic system (Schoeffel, 1999).

Figure 4.2: Semi Tugia, Sharon. Gift Exchange: Rev Elifasa Vaituutuu Funeral Preparations. August 20, 2017.

Presenting the 'Ie Tōga

There is a part in the Samoan gift exchange where girls would listen out for this phrase *"O lau Tofa lea" - Here is your gift*. This would cue the girls to present the 'Ie Tōga (The Coconet TV, 2020). As shown in *Figure 4.1*, two girls wait for their cue from the Orator or chief speaking to present the gift. The 'Ie Tōga is woven in many sizes. If it is small, you can use one hand to hold the mat from the top, revealing the weave. If it is slightly bigger than body size, both hands are used for better control. If the mat is larger and longer, there would be at least two girls holding the mat for display and people behind the mat in support (Figure 5.1). This process allows the viewers to judge the quality of the mat to determine which pile it will be placed in (Figure 5.3). When unfolding the mat, one stands on the right side of the fine mat. The top corner is held with the left hand, and the right hand has the edge where the visible line of the centrefold is. This way, the person receiving the gift and other witnesses in the event see the beautiful 'Ie Tōga.

Figure 5.1: Semi Tugia, Sharon. Gift Exchange: Rev Elifasa Vaituutuu Funeral Preparations. August 20, 2017.

Figure 5.2: Semi Tugia, Sharon. Gift Exchange: Rev Elifasa Vaituutuu Funeral Preparations. August 20, 2017.

Sorting of the 'Ie Tōga

When sorting the fine mats in family or church gatherings, the tupulaga's (youth) (Figure 5.3 and Figure 5.4) display the mats to the chiefs, priests, men and women in the space. This process is to approve whose name is put on which 'Ie Tōga bundle. When it comes to the gift exchange, we must see that the name and the person the Orator calls out is right. I enjoy the process, but there is pressure because the key to getting through and getting it right is to listen. Usually, when It comes to the gift exchanges or anything to do with the fine mats, I find myself hiding outside the church hall or in the kitchen corner, hoping to go unnoticed. Unfortunately for me, everyone hears my mum call out "RONA!" (short for Sarona – Samoan for Sharon). I then find myself sitting with the girls waiting for the gift exchange process.

Sometimes when unfolding the 'Ie Tōga' I would get called out for not listening. I grew up hearing "Fa'aoga kaliga'' in church and at home. Translated into english it means "use your ears". This was followed by "Fa'aoga maka", "use your eyes", followed by "Fa'aoga faiai", "use your brain". Us tupulaga just listen, respecting the adults teaching us our Samoan customs.

Figure 5.3: Semi Tugia, Sharon. Sorting of the 'Ie Toga: Rev Elifasa Vaituutuu Funeral Preparations. August 20, 2017.

Figure *5.4: Semi Tugia, Sharon. Sorting of the 'Ie Toga: Rev Elifasa Vaituutuu Funeral Preparations. August 20, 2017.*

Tautua, Usita'i, Fa'aaloalo and Alofa are the cultural values portrayed when my church family gathered together to help the Vaitu'utu'u family. The parents and the youth worked together. Whether in the kitchen crew, cleaning crew, prepping for the gift exchange, and everyone else behind the scenes helped out of respect, gratitude, and love in the fa'asamoa way. For this, I appreciate my culture and respect the fa'asamoa as it is what unites us together.

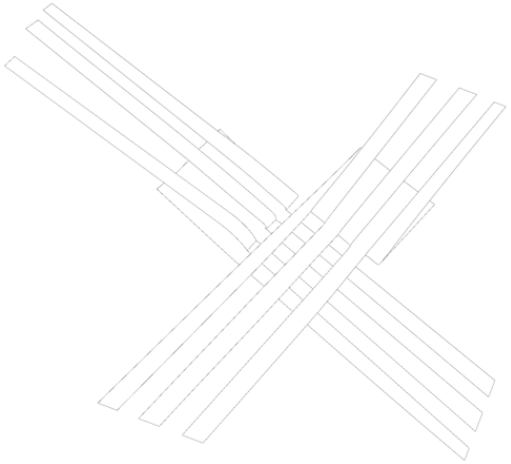
Figure 5.5: Semi Tugia, Sharon. Sorting of the 'Ie Toga: Rev Elifasa Vaituutuu Funeral Preparations. August 20, 2017.

The 'Ie Toga brings formality and dignity to an occasion and honours the status of the event and those involved (Mallon, p.81). The exchange of gifts forms a spatial relationship that connects the gift-givers and the receivers. Le Lau Ta'amu Tafea (Figure 6.), the 'Ie Toga gifted to New Zealand from Samoa, was presented by the

former Head of state, Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Efi. In 1962 Bernard Fergusson, the Governor- General of New Zealand, received the ‘Ie Tōga as a gift for New Zealand while in Samoa. Ta’amu represents the close ties as it is the significance of the gift exchange process which created the relationship between New Zealand, the United Kingdom and Samoa (Mayron, Sapeer, 2020). In a way, the fine mat is a powerful gift as it always brings people together - as the ‘Ie Tōga gifted to New Zealand united the three countries and is now stored in the Te Papa Museum.

Taking in the importance of the cultural gift exchanges of the ‘Ie Tōga, the fine mat creates a relationship between New Zealand and the Pacific region where it is now with Te Papa Museum to tell the stories related to the Measina(Treasure) gifted to New Zealand.

Figure 6: “Ie Toga (fine mat)”. Le Lau Ta’amu Tafea, gifted to Bernard Fergusson, 1962. Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa



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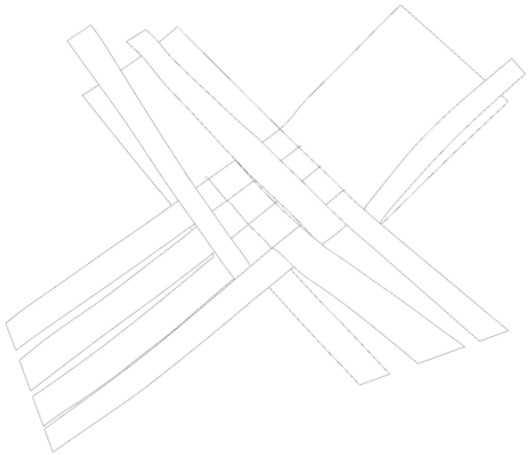


Figure 7.2: Semi Tugia, Sharon. Detailed Line Drawing of Weaving, 2021.

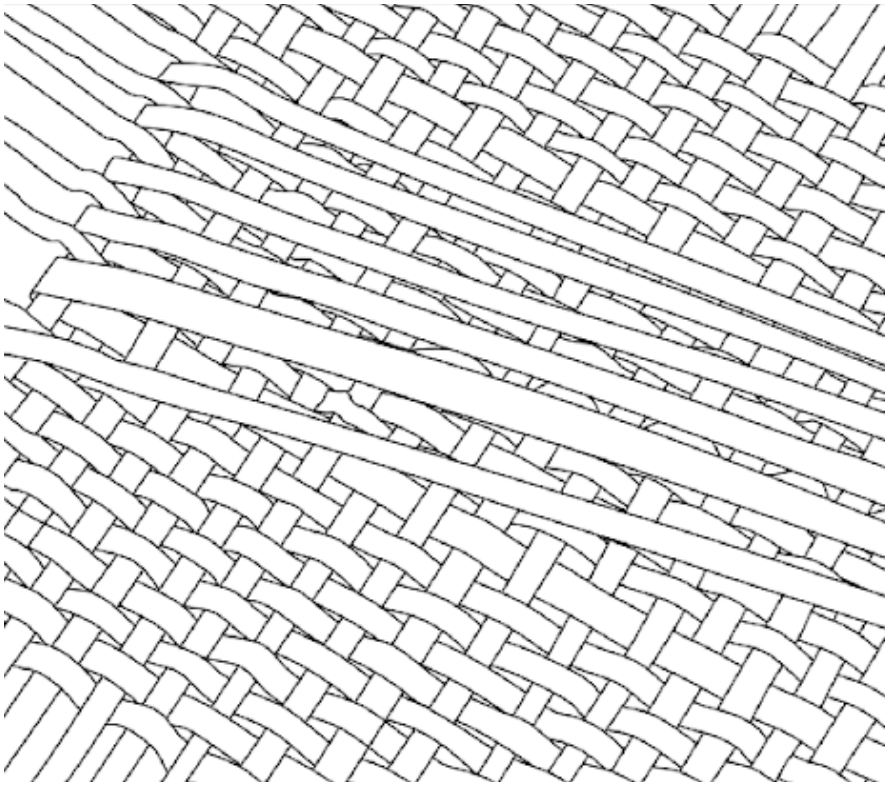


Figure 7.3: Semi Tugia, Sharon. Close up Detail Line Drawing 2mm(Tosi 2) Weaving, 2021.

***Traditional practice - Weaving an* 'Ie Tōga**

To replicate the art form of 'Ie Tōga using paper, I came across a scholar from New Zealand, Sir Peter Buck (Te Rangihiroa), a doctor, anthropologist, and politician. Te Rangi Hīroa researched Pacific material culture. In Western Samoa, he documented the material culture (Sorrenson, 2002). Te Rangihiroa studied cultural material and noted that three species of pandanus (laufala, laupaongo, lau'ie) were planted for weaving material mats (Buck, Peter Henry, 1996). In the book *Samoan Culture* (Buck, 1930), the weaving techniques and methods involve two sets of plaiting and weaving elements. I will be taking on the weaving techniques and practices described in his drawings and incorporating them into the project.

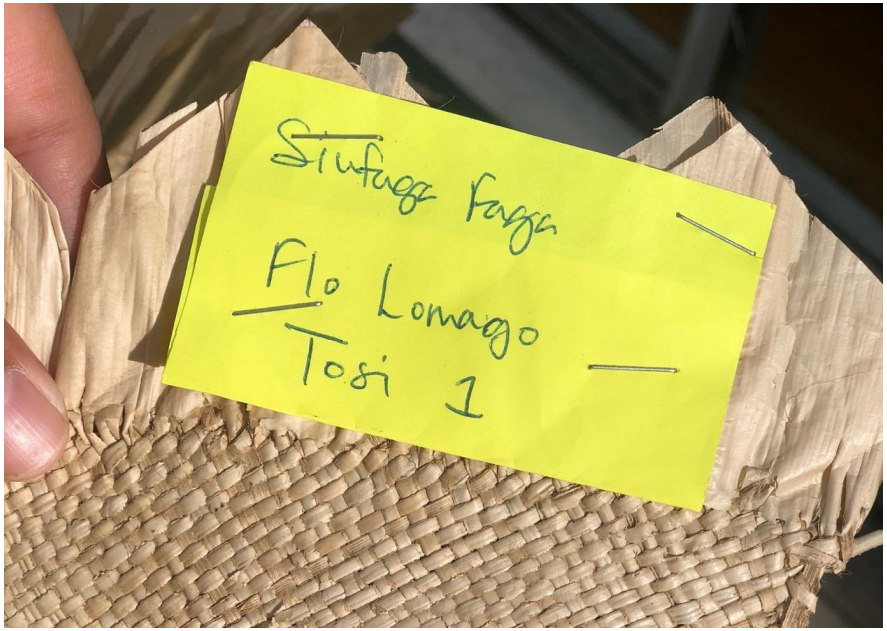
Material Preparation

Before weaving, the Pandanus leaves must be prepared before use. This is a meticulous, lengthy and time-consuming process where patience is needed. In a YouTube video from UNESCO (2014), Samoan weavers would cut the prickly edges of the pandanus then place them out in the sun before rolling them up together like a roll of tape. The women started a fire to boil water and then soaked the sun-dried pandanus to soften the leaves. They were then taken out and placed into a bucket of water. The Pandanus leaf peels like a double-sided tape and splits evenly, revealing the straight-line texture (Figure 8.1). The top side up of the pandanus leaf is stripped and used for weaving. The backside is removed and kept to plait the leaves when ready to soak into the sea.

Figure 8.1: UNESCO. "'Ie Toga, fine mat and its cultural value", Separating Top and backside of Pandanus leaf. YouTube, December 12, 2019.

Figure 8.2: UNESCO. "'Ie Toga, fine mat and its cultural value", Tosi Step, Stripping Step. YouTube, December 12, 2019

The weavers use kitchen knives to cut the leaves into strips strip sizes (Figure 8.2). This is measured by tosi tasi, tosi lua and tosi tolu which translate to 1mm, 2mm, and 3mm widths (Lemalu, Malu, 2014). Attached to my family fine mat, a piece of paper records the measurement 'Tosi 1' (Figure 8.3). The fine mat is woven with pandanus strips at the width of 1 mm. The note also records the person who wove the mat and the village. Within my project, I have manually cut lines into strips of paper at the widths used. However, this was time-consuming, so I resorted to trial using a laser cutter (Figure 8.4). More of this is documented in the subsequent sections of the exegesis.



8.3: Semi Tugia, Sharon. Close-up shot of my family Measina, 2021.

Using two pandanuses bands side-by-side, each already cut into thinner strips, care is taken to ensure the right side is facing up. The first strip is folded diagonally inwards from the right side, and the second pandanus strips behind it are folded oppositely (Figure 7.2). Making sure the two pandanus strips run diagonally opposite, the under over weaving technique can be started. Strips are added in two's until the top flap border of the 'Ie Toga. Then the work is continued down from here. I found that the Samoan women use items around them in the making of the mat. They use rocks to hold and stretch out the mat and a beetle's wing to cut the strips thinly. Once the mat is fully complete they rub coconut oil into it to make it silky sheen and so the mat lasts longer.

Figure 8.4: Semi Tugia, Sharon. Experiment: Laser Cutting Paper Strips, 2021.

Figure 8.5: UNESCO. "'Ie Toga, finemat and its cultural value", Two pieces to start weaving the 'Ie Toga. YouTube, December 12, 2019.

Figure 9.1: Semi Tugia, Sharon. Family 'Ie Toga' we received on August 2016.

The 'Ie Tōga is the main mat used for cultural obligations (The Coconet Tv, 2014). After my Grandfather's funeral was over, I overheard my Grandma's conversation with a neighbour. She said she had to go back to her village to help complete the 'Ie Tōga weaving requested a few weeks back for a funeral of a family member that passed away. I wondered how these women could weave a mat within a few weeks ready for a funeral? Connecting the dots, I realised that this is why there are coarser fine mats because they are faster to weave than years taken to weave the finest quality 'Ie Tōga.

I have taken these techniques discovered to help complete my replication of the 'Ie Tōga using paper. Paper sheets are already chemically and mechanically produced. I have attempted the process of softening applied to the pandanus. I

have chosen to explore this material because I have access to it every day, and it is at hand. For cutting paper strips, I have experimented with scissors and craft knives to follow how the pandanus strip is split into sections at the width of 2mm. From Te Rangihiroa's Material research in Samoan weaving and the UNESCO YouTube video ' Ie Samoa, fine mat and its cultural value' (2019), I have been able to test the weave pattern for a pepa 'Ie Tōga.

Contemporary Practice – drawing on heritage

While my practice draws on the heritage art form of 'Ie Toga, I use materials and processes at hand in Aotearoa. This method of practice is similar to many Pacific artists who live in New Zealand. A group of women in Otahuhu, South Auckland, met every week for sixteen years from 1993, formed the Falepipi He Mafola Niuean Handcraft group (Romy,2009).

Figure 10: Udanga, Romy. "Women's group has a heart for art"Falepipi He Mafola Niuean Handcraft group Dec 03, 2009.

Philia, a Heritage Art educator, felt lonely living in Aotearoa, so she decided to create a women's group through a cultural programme to adjust to the new environment. Though not in Niue, she found a way to continue the craft of her cultural tradition while maintaining important social connections. She held workshops to encourage youth to learn about their culture, sharing her knowledge.

My research into exploring materials to replicate the art form of 'Ie Tōga was a way of connecting and sharing my Samoan heritage. I could not travel to Samoa to learn to weave through traditional means due to CoVid19 travel restrictions. I found alternative methods to access knowledge held in the community in Samoa. I learned by observing and analysing photos and videos from social media platforms as well as analysing the family's fine mat.

Fatu Feu'u

Figure 11: Feu'u, Fatu. "Ia Mana". Artis Gallery, June 20.

Fatu Feu'u a Samoa artist who emigrated to New Zealand in 1966 uses the Polynesian artforms siapo (tapa cloth), tatau (tattoo), weaving, carving and ceremonial mask making (Auckland Public Art, 2020). Feu'u's compositional structures blend contemporary art mediums and traditional elements as a way of keeping his Samoan culture alive in New Zealand. Though Feu'u is a painter, he explores various materials and other mediums such as stone, lithographs, wood and glass to continue sharing his culture. Feu'u's exhibition *Reconciliation* (2019) held in the Artis Gallery was inspired by the Samoan Ifoga ceremony. The exhibition was a collection of his take on exploring the Samoan Ifoga process, a meaningful way to ask for forgiveness which involves our sacred artifact the 'Ie Tōga. His Reconciliation exhibition was based around his use of the letter *'I'* as an icon part of his paintings. Feu'u's *Ia Mana* painting (Figure 11.) painted from top to bottom sentences starting with 'Ia Mana" translated in English – We honour (Feu'u, 2020). Intrigued by his use of the letter 'I' as the icon taken from the Ifoga process to share the story of Prime Minister Helen Clark's apology to the people of Samoa on behalf of New Zealand – the reconciliation between Samoa and New Zealand. Feu'u's take on the Ifoga process is very powerful as it means a lot to my Samoan heritage and for him to tell this story through his artworks is his service, respect and love to his Samoan heritage. This resonates in a way as to how I want share the story of origin of the mat, the survival and most importantly the hidden voices of the Samoan 'Ie Tōga weavers who continue to pass on the knowledge of 'Ie Tōga weaving.

Lonnie Hutchinson – paper cut-outs

Contemporary Artist Lonnie Hutchinson (Ngāi Tahu/Kai Tahu, Samoa) addresses female experiences from an indigenous and feminist perspective portrayed through her sculptural cut-outs made from black builders' paper (Figure 12.3) and reflected through her practice as a multimedia and installation artist (The Central Art Gallery, 2020).

Inspired by feminist narratives and female subjectivity (Gus Fisher Gallery, 2015) Hutchinson's approach to portraying stories using black building paper is unique. Hutchinson's *Window Dressing* (10 July - 11 August 2018) represents her Samoan and Maori (Ngai Tahu) heritage, demonstrating the use of builder's paper and Hutchinson attention exhibition displayed. Hutchinson folds and hand cuts patterns in black builders' paper. The intricate cut out designs reflect Hutchinson cultural heritage and are often pinned to a white wall that displays the beautiful intricate pattern, allowing light to pass through the cuts. This display enables shadows to occur, which act as a trace of the form. I find it interesting that Hutchinson's key ingredients are light and shadow compared to the contrast of her chosen material, black building paper pinned to a white wall.

Figure 12.1: Hansen, Jeremy. "Toi Tū Toi Ora: Lonnie Hutchinson". Britomart, December, 2020

Figure 12.2: Hansen, Jeremy. "Toi Tū Toi Ora: Lonnie Hutchinson". Britomart, December, 2020

One of Hutchinson's recent works was part of the Toi Tū Toi Ora Exhibition (2020) and was based around the creation story. As shown in (Figure 12.1) Hutchinson's two panels represent three Maori cosmological gods Papatuanuku (earth mother) Takaroa (the progenitor) and Rakinui Aroha ki te Ora (Lover of Life). The artworks consist of two sets of three panels made out of metal and have different patterns cut out.

Figure 12.3: Hutchinson, Lonnie. "Milk and honey", 2012. Chartwell collection, commissioned by Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki.

The *Black Bird* exhibition (2015) features paper cut art forms to share the story of women's hidden voices. Hutchinson focused on moving freely between the past, present and future, producing paper cut works linked to memories about spaces in-between (Tyler, Linda 2015). Her Samoan and Maori heritage again the designs, the resulting paper cuts play with light and shadow to navigate space and time. This form of the display through the gallery space attracts visitors through space.

Hutchinson's Blackbirding made me think about what I want to share with my peers and the public. I want to highlight and share the hidden voices of the women's role behind the weaving, survival, and the sacrifice to protect what we have today as one of the most precious measina in ceremony and gift exchanges, important in Fa'asamoa (Samoan way). Hutchinson's use of black builder's paper to tell a story is similar to the use of paper as the primary material in this research project. The insights gained by analysing the display strategies will inform the final exhibition.

Matthew McIntyre-Wilson (Taranaki, Nga Mahanga and Titahi)
Inspired by traditional Māori artefacts, New Zealand jeweller Matthew McIntyre-Wilson (Taranaki, Nga Mahanga and Titahi) weaves accessories using copper and silver. Mentored by master weaver Rangi Kiu (Warren Feeney, 2016), McIntyre draws on traditional Maori motifs and techniques to create geometric forms made with materials like stripped electrical wires, copper, silver and gold.

Figure 13: McIntyre, Matthew Wilson. "Kete". Materials: copper & fine silver, width 5cm, height 5cm. Fingers Contemporary Jewellery, 2020.

McIntyre's practice in Raranga whakairo (Maori plaiting patterns) consists of using copper and silver as his materials for weaving. His choice of material appears to mimic very fine strips of dyed harakeke(flax). McIntyre combines his skills as a jeweller and traditional Maori weaver to utilise raw metal materials in his studio to create refined woven objects. In a way, like McIntyre's practice, I am combining the traditional weaving techniques with the contemporary through the material choice of paper, which differs from the traditional.

Chapter Two: Methodology + Methods

> *Surrounded from a young age by bundles of fine mats at home as well as church. Now having just one hanging in my closet, there are no longer any bundles in my closet and none under my mattress. My curiosity has grown after touching so many 'Ie Tōgas compared to my family fine mat. How is it that it can be so fine? Can I learn to weave such a beautiful measina of Samoa? I will observe, learn, test and adapt in New Zealand using material at hand, not letting the Covid-19 virus stop myself from wanting to practice the art form 'Ie Tōga.*

The Samoan cultural values of Tautua (Service), Usita'i (Discipline), Fa'aaloalo (Respect) and Alofa (Love) taught to me by my parents from a young age frames the way in which I view the world as well as the shaping me as a designer. To serve and love my family, friends and church. I would like to think I am a respectful and well-disciplined young Samoan woman. Choosing to focus on the 'Ie Tōga is my service – the saying "O le ala I le pule o le Tautua" translates in English to "The pathway to authority is through service" (Meleisea, Malama, 1987). My parents reflect these values because they are always helping others and just always giving out of love. These values mean so much to me as it has taught me life lessons to respect, be disciplined and love as it all leads to my service to family, friends and church.

Therefore, my approach to learning the art of 'Ie Tōga is out of Fa'aaloalo (Respect), Tautua (Service) and Alofa (Love) to my family and culture. This guides me through maintaining Usita'i (Discipline), through the challenges of gathering information without physical access to traditional resources and teachers, like my Aunty. And through the intensive labour of fine mat weaving.

Observe, learn, test, and adapt

Learning to weave a fine mat in Samoa during this project would have been a great experience. However, Covid-19 and border closures meant alternative ways to access knowledge were made. A key strategy that has allowed knowledge acquisition to occur was observing, learning, testing, and adapting. Respecting the sacredness of the ‘Ie Toga through my replication as I learn the traditional weaving through observing my family heirloom fine mat, photos and videos from social media.

Sopolemalama Filipe Tohi

Tongan Artist Sopolemalama Filipe Tohi drew on observation to initially learn the art of Lalava (sennit lashing) in the 1970s. Tohi sought to revive the art form of lalava through practice and sharing of this knowledge with other Pacific island cultures (Foley, 2016). Tohi reintroduces the art form of lalava to his homeland Tonga, to Samoa and other Pacific islands. His Service (Tautua) is sharing his knowledge of lashing out of Love (Alofa). I see resemblances within my practice to learn how to weave the ‘Ie Tōga, though I am using material at hand.

This is my way of giving back, my service to Samoa, to make up for the risk of losing this cultural heritage so that we continue to pass down the skill from generation to generation. Lashing is an important form in Samoa. I am grateful that Tohi was invited by Samoan chief Tupua Tamasese Tupuola Tufuga Efi, Head of state now, to lash the fale maota (mansion) at Nofoalii as well as sharing his knowledge and skills to Samoan people. I realised his name Sopolemalama has a beautiful Samoan translation, “Sharing the knowledge” (Foley,2016) and later found he has bestowed a Chief Title as Samoa’s way of Fa’aaloalo(Respect) and Lotofa’afetai (gratitude).

Tohi's observational research led him to the ceiling Tupou I raised, the Sia’atoutai Theological Chapel (Figure 14.1). In his homeland Tonga, Tohi spent time in the chapel to observe and study the patterns lashed to raise the roof with his eyes (Hamilton, 2014). Tohi was able to lash with the original material using coconut husk from sennit rope, then lashing to create a pattern to connect joints of building structures. Tohi focuses on connecting to his heritage and reviving a necessary art form. Tohi returned to his homeland of Tonga in determination to learn and master his cultural art form as it was at risk of becoming extinct. Continuing on with the art form of lalava, Tohi has explored ways in sharing his knowledge of lalava by using different materials. Moving on from to creating painted wood structures (Figure 14.2),

The lack of availability of the very fine 'Ie Tōga has led me to believe this cultural heritage is at risk of being lost. Like Tohi, I was seeking to return to Samoa to observe and learn the traditional process from expert 'Ie Tōga weavers. However, I have not let the inability to travel home stop my responsibility to learn this art form to revive the practice. Inspired by the works and the way Tohi crafts I have found that creating is the best way in passing on knowledge. I have selected to adapt what I do to learn how to weave an 'Ie Tōga with paper as the primary material at hand, is my way to revive the cultural art form.

Figure 14.1: Unknown, Julia. "Tonga – Sia'atoutai Theological College". Global Relations, May 17, 2019.

Figure 14.2: Hobbs, Bob. "Filipe Tohi with two of the works he created during his residency at the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Art ". May, 2006.

Chapter Three: Analysis of Practice

In this chapter I lay out my reflective analysis of my creative practice beginning with past knowledge of knowing how to weave and how I found interest in Samoa's Measina – the 'Ie Tōga. To then take this on to exploring techniques to weave my 'Ie Tōga pepa. I start by sharing a collaborative installation *Banig – Fala* (2020) and discuss how it has inspired me to look into the 'Ie Tōga art form. My initial material exploration is divided into four key aspects of the 'Ie Tōga process: The softness of the material, the thinness of the pandanus strip, the decoration, and the sealant using coconut oil. Using these four key aspects, I explore what elements could be replicated using paper.

Speaking Surfaces Exhibition: Banig - Fala Installation

In August- October 2020 I worked on a collaborative installation *Banig – Fala* (2020) installed in the St Paul Street Gallery II as part of the *Speaking Surfaces* exhibition (Figure 15.1 and 15.2). The work in the show was an undergraduate project realised at room scale after the course had finished. The collaborative team consisted of three women, one Filipino and two Samoans, hence the multi-lingual title. Mat translates as Banig in Tagalog and is a woven sleeping mat in the Philippines. Fala is the Samoan translation for mat. We discovered our cultures had similar techniques to weaving sleeping. This then became our focal point.

The Banig – Fala was woven using pine veneer sheets measured at 2400 x 1200mm. These were laser cut to the strip width of 40mm at different lengths. The intent was that the room-scale mat would create a space for people to interact by weaving the mat and social engagement. The bounded edges were inspired by Tohi and the element of lalava, which binds intersections and represents. The aspects of Lalava and Lalaga have similarities of connectivity as they overlap in the making. I find it fascinating that Lalava (Lashing) represents the men's role. I imagine they would be on the roofs binding the intersecting timber for the fale Samoa. Whereas the women would lalaga (weave) our measina of the fine mat, sleeping mats, floor mats, church bags, and church hats on the floor. Nowadays, from my experience, anyone can learn the elements of lalava and lalaga. Still, you would have to love and have patience for the art as I have come to appreciate it myself.

Figure 15.1: Banig – Fala: Weaving workshop, St Paul St Gallery 2, 2020.

Figure 15.2: Banig – Fala: Weaving workshop, St Paul St Gallery 2, 2020.

Initial material experimentation

The aspects of the 'Ie Tōga process I wanted to explore through paper were the softness of the material, the thinness of the pandanus strip, the decoration and sealant using coconut oil. Coconut oil is used to protect the 'Ie Tōga.

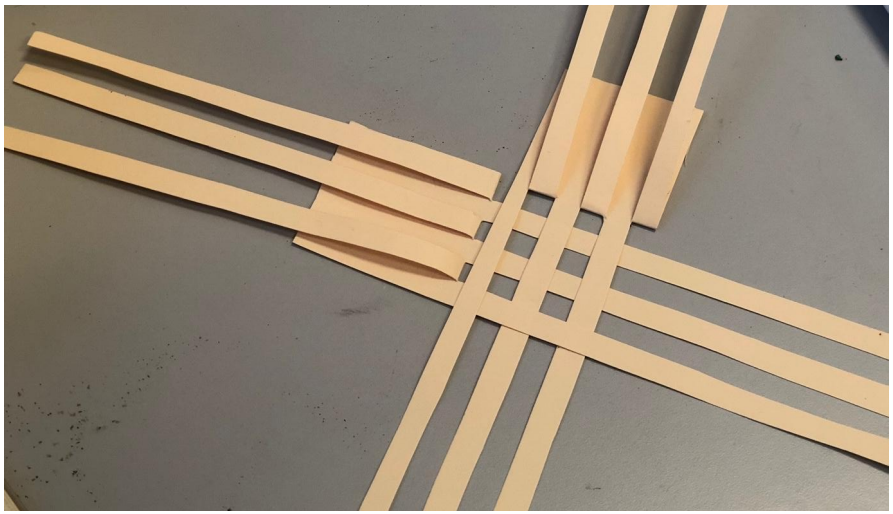


Figure 16: Utilising Paper in Studio to test a weaving technique before laser cutting strips to 2mm, 2021.

Materials and tools used for the project drew on the standard model making materials used by spatial designers. I utilised materials within my studio space. This consisted of scraps of tracing and rendering paper and timber as I was deprived of trees similar to the pandanus leaves (Figure 16). After many weaving experiments exploring different materials, I chose paper because it is inexpensive and easily resourced. Paper is extracted from wood fibres compressed and chemically processed to produce a paper sheet material.

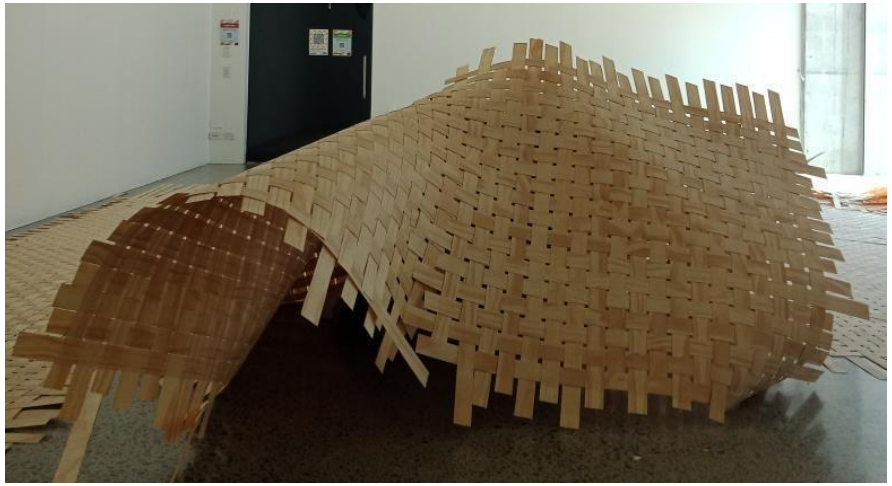


Figure 17.1: Semi Tugia, Sharon. Banig – Fala Deinstallation: First test to form a structure similar to the fine mat when used in the Ifoga process, 2020.

Figure 17.2: Semi Tugia, Sharon. Banig – Fala Deinstallation: Test to forming a structure similar to the fine mat when used in the Ifoga process, 2020.

From the *Banig – Fala* (2020) project, I realised that the mat was woven quickly due to the thickness of the strip, which was 45mm (Figure 15.1). I made a short series of test samples using different paper types and widths to quickly test the viability of making a paper 'Ie Tōga. I used a craft knife and ruler to cut paper strips at multiple thicknesses. The thicker strip was easy to cut and faster to weave, covering an enormous expanse. I was able to produce more in less time. The thinner width of 2mm was challenging to cut. I used off-cuts of plywood and pine timber to hold and stretch the strips out, while I used a craft knife to cut each line into each strip. Even when cutting with a craft knife and ruler, the line strayed. The weave was intricate and time-consuming. I ascertained that it was possible to create a paper 'Ie Tōga but that the cut and weaving at a fine-scale would be challenging to achieve. With very little patience and the inaccurate outcome, I ditched the step of ruling lines and winged it by eye. This became time-consuming, so I elected to use the laser cutter in the 3D lab facilities. This speeds up this process achieving quality strips for refined weaving.

Figure 18.1: Semi Tugia, Sharon. Banig – Fala Deinstallation: Test to forming a pod structure similar to the fine mat when used in the Ifoga process, 2020.

Figure 18.2: Semi Tugia, Sharon. Banig – Fala Deinstallation: Test to forming a pod structure similar to the fine mat when used in the Ifoga process, 2020.

Oil Experiment on paper weaving

In the studio, I ate a piece of bread when weaving and placed it on a sheet of paper as if it was a plate. I finished my bread and realised the paper was discoloured due to the bread oil stains. I chose to pin up this oil sample on the studio wall to see the colour difference and how long the oil stains lasted. I used baby oil to paint a small section of my weaving. This is similar to the process of applying coconut oil to a finished ʻIe Tōga to give it a silky shine. The oil from the bread took three days to soak into the paper. The stained woven paper samples became transparent over two days. A week later, there was no trace of oil or discolouration.

Weaving pattern – slow realisation

The weave used in the Banig – Fala (2020) installation was the over-under-over technique. My initial test in weaving drew on this technique. While making, I realised I was weaving the strips horizontally when they should be woven diagonally. From the top right corner using two strips.

I took time to analyse the weaving pattern. The edges were exposed and I had to find a way to close off the sides, so the weave does not fall apart. Using the plain weave, both sides would display the same pattern inverted. The process of figuring out how to achieve this finish was time-consuming, and I kept thinking about how much patience and focus the fine mat weavers have to weave for a year or longer. In the making process, I lost my patience and got frustrated when I lost track of the weaving. Telling myself to take a thirty-minute break goes on for weeks to months to the point where I would stop weaving altogether.

Figure 19.1: Observational Research in Test Space – Family Measina, 2020.

The shift

Before leaving home one day, I called mum to ask if I could take our family ‘Ie Tōga to Studio and she said of course, but I had to make sure to bring it back home the same way it left. Using the test space I lined up plinths to have the fine mat unfolded to observe it more. I sat there wheeling around looking at the fringe of the ‘Ie Tōga to observe how the edges are locked (Figure 19.2). I sat for two hours thinking about how I started my making without observing the fine mat. I was frustrated that I rushed straight into the making without knowing how to begin weaving a fine mat. Returning back from my break, the top corner of the fine mat caught my eye when I walked through the door. I realised I only observed the bottom half and I was thinking – How do I weave this section? When I should have analysed from the top left corner of the ‘Ie Tōga. I spent a few minutes staring at the top corner of the fine mat compared to the two hours I spent analysing the bottom half of the fine mat. It dawned on me there was no time to feel more frustrated, I grab some random paper, cut two thick strips at 40mm, cutting thinner strips leaving a 50mm flap as the top border of the ‘Ie Tōga.

Figure 19.2: Observational Research on fine mat to find a way to lock the edges– Family Measina, 2020.

Quickly setting up a file to laser cut, I grabbed the paper to laser cut so I didn’t lose what I had observed. After laser cutting, I wove strips onto the sheet of paper I have used as the body of my paper fine mat exploration. At this moment, I found the process of weaving soothing and therapeutic. It forced me to focus on what I was really doing and the task at hand – discovering the ‘Ie Tōga methods, reconnecting and activating my cultural heritage.

Developed process

My way of observing my family's ‘Ie Tōga help to refine the process of weaving a paper ‘Ie Tōga. I set up a timber panel and used my measuring tape for weight to hold and stretch out the woven parts:

- I used the laser cutter to cut 2mm strips on an A4 size sheet of paper. This achieved the intricate weave and softness of texture similar to the Ie Toga.
- The basic technique of over-under–over to achieve the weave.
- Weaving should be done diagonally.

Woven Images

I was exploring scrap papers from printed magazines. I noticed that I was weaving two images together to create one picture(Figure 20.2). I never paid attention to it, as I was just experimenting with strip sizes of papers. The woven Images led me to the idea of screen printing on the woven paper mat as a representation of the eyes of the mat. In this case, I thought about my family images. I was going through family archive images I had taken at my grandfather's funeral. It was the last time I was In Samoa in August 2016. As I observed our fine family mat, I finally paid attention to the feather decoration. It is the eye of the artefact witnessing the events it is presented in capturing memories.

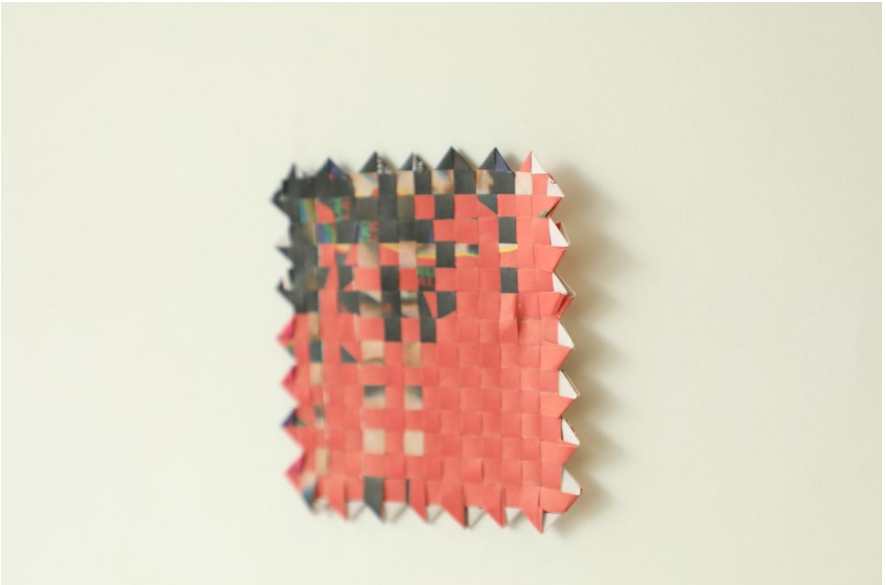


Figure 20.1: Semi Tugia, Sharon. Weaving utilising magazine papers and investigating how to lock the edges, 2021.

Figure 20.2: Semi Tugia, Sharon. Magazine paper – Combining two images by weaving them together , 2021.

Figure 21: First attempt to weave 2mm after being laser cut, 2021.

When a person is receiving an ‘Ie Toga in a gift exchange, they would not know how old the fine mat is, where it has been besides from the family who gifted it to them. The fine mat is never tracked and only the fine mat itself knows where it has been as it witnesses the happy and sad times within the event and in a way, collects memories.

Figure 22: Tested Screen printing as a Decoration representing the 'Eye' of the fine mat, 2021.

Display - 'Ie Tōga

I was apprehensive about displaying the paper 'Ie Toga in an exhibition space as it felt like showing off. However, I drew again on my cultural values to help guide me through. A Samoan Proverb that comes from Fa'alelegapepe is: Ua sola le pepe i nai le vae, ua sola le pepe i nai le vae (The butterflies have escaped from the feet and the hands) is compared to the Fale lalaga(Weaving house) because once the fine mats are completed, they bring it out to the village and flaps in the wind like butterflies for family and friends to witness their hard work and long hours spent weaving (Ilalio Zec, Akenese, YouTube, 2016).

I never thought of it this way, but it makes sense as the hard work of the women in the village is now out flapping in the wind like butterflies is completed- set free. Thinking of the Fa'alelegapepe has changed my thinking of displaying the 'Ie Toga pepa replica in an exhibition space showcasing my work to the public. The exhibition allowed me to share my Samoan heritage art form of 'Ie Tōga and how I have attempted to replicate the process using paper.

Pepa ʻIe Tōga

Figure 23.1: Semi Tugia, Sharon. Pepa ʻIe Tōga: Pinned to white background, 2021.

Mc-Clellan mentioned in the beginning of his essay that the ʻIe Tōga is sacred as it symbolises family and holds everlasting authenticity passed down through generations (Mc-Clellan, 2007). Looking into different methods of how I can display the pepa ʻIe Tōga within the exhibition space the traditional way, as I mentioned, where two girls open up a fine mat to present to the viewers. I want the viewers to focus on the mat so having the pepa ʻIe Tōga hung in front of the gallery window and levelled with the viewer can touch and see at eye level. I thought about having two wooden stakes with a rod pointed through the two top corners of the fine mat, but this is only for oversized fine mats bigger than me. By utilising the materials within my studio space to weave a mat, I found a pile of papers with different thicknesses in sizes of A4 and A3. I also browsed the studio, looking for alternatives instead of leaving my studio to look for rocks on campus. I walked around picking up objects left behind by past master students, such as their plaster models, but I did not want the plaster to leave stains on the paper as I will focus on that part after. The heaviest object I could find in my studio space was my cup, pine timber off-cuts, and my measuring tape to keep the strips in place as I completed the weaving in place.

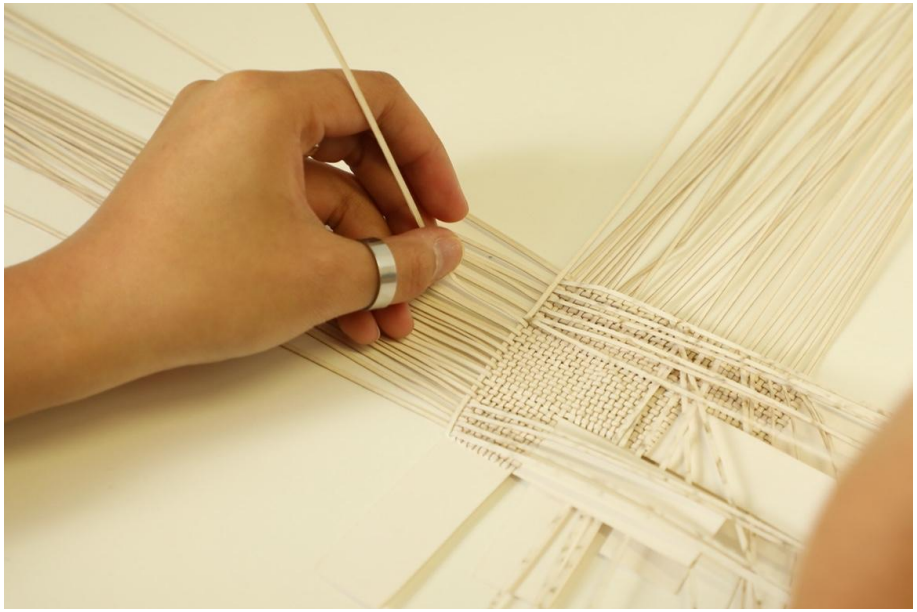


Figure 23.2: Semi Tugia, Sharon. Pepa ʻIe Tōga – Weaving the top border, 2021.

Figure 23.3: Semi Tugia, Sharon. Pepa 'Ie Tōga – Bottom to be continued, 2021.

Figure 23.4: Semi Tugia, Sharon. Pepa 'Ie Tōga, 2021.

Figure 23.5: Semi Tugia, Sharon. Pepa 'Ie Tōga, 2021.

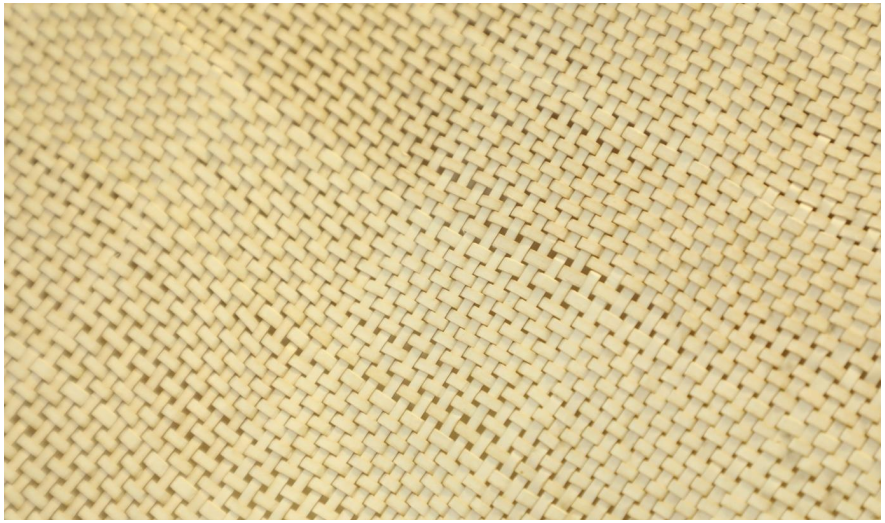


Figure 23.6: Semi Tugia, Sharon. Pepa 'Ie Tōga – Detailed close up, 2021.

Conclusion

This research project sought to replicate the ‘Ie Tōga. Focusing on one of Samoa’s heritage artefacts and not knowing what I would discover from the beginning to the end of the project was unnerving. However, the more I dug deep into our Samoa measina, the more I became curious. This research has made me appreciate the ‘Ie Tōga, the Samoan weavers and their hard labour to keep this heritage art form from generation to generation.

The origin and survival story came as a surprise to me but made sense of how it came to be where it is today. On discovering the scarcity of fine mats, I realised they were becoming extinct. The ease and speed of producing the coarser fine mats urgently for weddings, funerals and cultural ceremonies replace the time-consuming value of ‘Ie Tōga. This fortified the path I was on to reconnect as a maker to this tradition.

Originally the plan for this research was to take a trip to Samoa in 2020 to learn the artform from aunties in a fale lalaga. However, Covid-19 had other plans, which caused the border to close between Samoa and New Zealand. Meaning I could not follow through with this learning process and had to develop alternative strategies for learning to weave.

My cultural values and my passion for model making have shaped the way I think as a Spatial designer. If something fails, I assess and find another way. In this case, Covid-19 changed my original research to learn in hopes of helping traditionally revitalise the ‘Ie Tōga. I accomplished finding another way through my exploration to observe, learn, test and adapt. Observing my family's fine mat and videos from YouTube to learn from, successfully testing by combining traditional weaving techniques and previous weaving experience to then adapting in using paper as my primary weaving material to replicate the ‘Ie Tōga.

I have found a deep appreciation for the values that my parents have passed down. I have a new understanding of my Samoan heritage. I share the hidden voices of the Samoan weavers, who stay true to the original fine mat.

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Appendix

Figure 24: Semi Tugia, Sharon. Detailed close up of Family ‘Ie Tōga next to my Pepa ‘Ie Tōga, 2021.

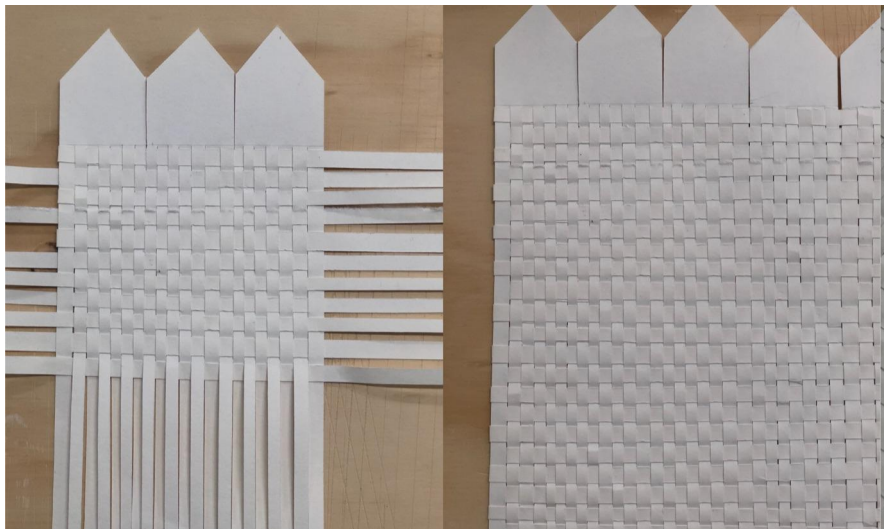

Figure 25: Semi Tugia, Sharon. First paper weaving experiment before the final Pepa ‘Ie Tōga, 2021.

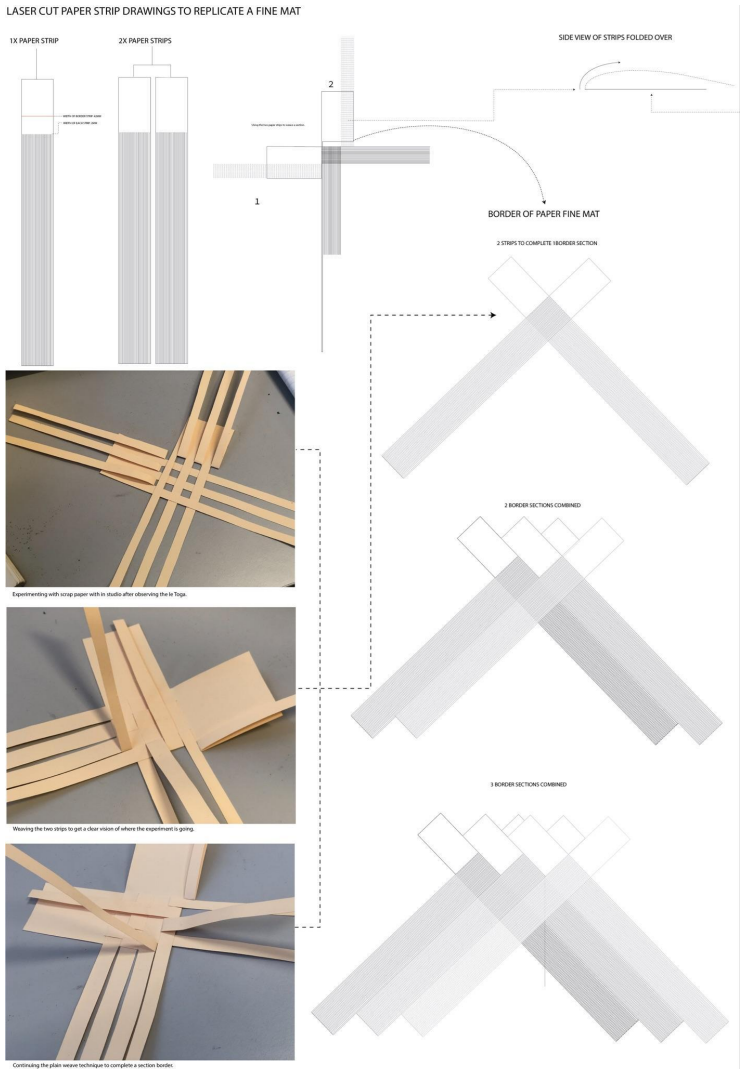

Figure 26: Semi Tugia, Sharon. Experiment hand cutting strips to test weaving to finalise the final laser cut file. Instructional weaving drawings, 2021.

Weaving the Pepa ‘Ie Tōga with Friends

Figure 27: Semi Tugia, Sharon. Weaving the Pepa ‘Ie Tōga together with Julia, 2021.

Gallery Install

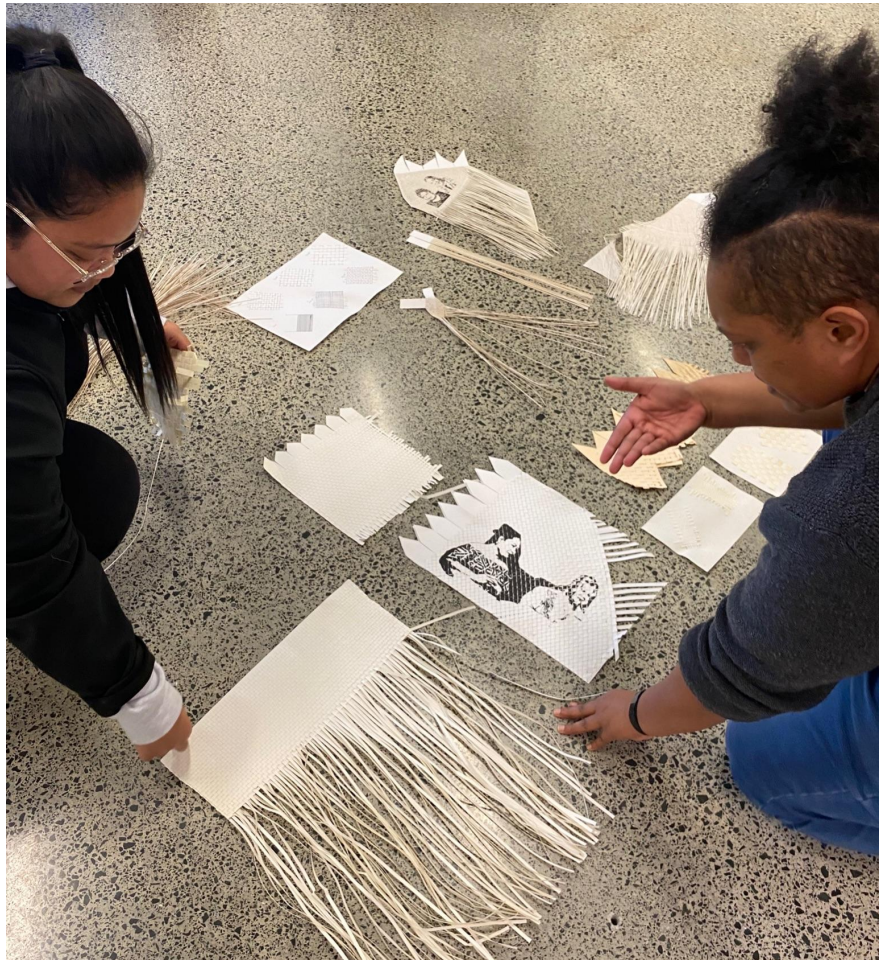

Figure 28: Semi Tugia, Sharon. Set up weaving samples for Install of Pepa 'Ie Tōga with Dr Nooroa, 2021.

Figure 29: Semi Tugia, Sharon. Set up Install of Pepa 'Ie Tōga for Exhibition with Dr Nooroa, 2021.

Figure 30: Semi Tugia, Sharon. Gallery Install of Pepa ‘Ie Tōga for Exhibition, 2021.

Exhibition

Figure 31: Semi Tugia, Sharon. Close up Pepa ‘Ie Tōga for Exhibition, 2021.

Figure 32: Semi Tugia, Sharon. Close up of strands, Pepa ‘Ie Tōga for Exhibition, 2021.

Figure 33: Semi Tugia, Sharon. Trace of Strands. Pepa 'Ie Tōga for Exhibition, 2021.

Figure 34: Semi Tugia, Sharon. Light through the Pepa ‘Ie Tōga, St Paul St Gallery, 2021.

Figure 35: Semi Tugia, Sharon. Pepa ‘Ie Tōga, St Paul St Gallery Exhibition, 2021.

Figure 36: Semi Tugia, Sharon. My Aiga Ft. Pepa ʻIe Tōga, St Paul St Gallery Exhibition, 2021.