

Tohi Kumi Koloa – Ko e tohi fepōtalanoa‘aki ‘eni pea mo ‘eku fanga kui



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2025

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School of Art & Design**

*A thesis submitted to Auckland University of Technology
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)*

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 used artificial intelligence tools or generative artificial intelligence tools (unless it is clearly stated, and referenced, along with the purpose of use), 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.

Signed:

Date: 1 December 2025

Talamua‘aki – Abstract

Tohi Kumi Koloa – Ko e tohi fepōtalanoa‘aki ‘eni pea mo ‘eku fanga kui

This creative-led research project delves into the Tongan practices of ngatu (barkcloth) and kupesi (embroidered relief stencil) as a lived document of my ancestors. The work is grounded in the Tongan way of thinking, making, and doing, while adapting to the present day; a practice that exists within and across the past, Tonga, and the present, Aotearoa New Zealand, as seen in the movement between people, land, and materials.

Central to this research is a personal collection of kupesi inherited from my nena (grandmother), ‘Ana Va‘inga Nai, created by her and the hou‘eiki fafine (elder women) from their kautaha (association). As such, I ask: As a maker, how can I tauhi (take care of) all the tukufakaholo (knowledge, archival documents, bloodlines, tools and stories) my nena left with me?

This art practice is considered ‘lived research’, in which the methodology is a way of life, and the methods are how I carry myself when working across two different contexts, home in Tonga and in Aotearoa. The practice draws upon the methodological framework of Tui Kupesi, which comprises four distinct components. These are tokonaki pe tānaki (providing or collecting together), veteki (taking apart), tuiaki mo e ngāue fakataha (stitching back and collective making), and koloa (the gift/knowledge). The core methods of veteki (taking apart/unpacking) and liuaki (to go back and forth) foreground an analytical exploration of a collection of personal kupesi. Through existing documentation, the mark-making speaks to intergenerational knowledge, tukufakaholo, tupu‘anga (place of origin), mape (mapping), fonua (land), ngāue fakataha (working together), and the kāpasa (compass) as a tool for navigating practice.

This project unfolds the multiple voices of the hou‘eiki fafine through liuaki, by observing, listening, and participating in their collective labour – through koka‘anga (production of ngatu making), fepōtalanoa‘aki (in conversation), and ngāue faka‘aho (everyday life). Utilising traditional processes of ngatu and kupesi through printmaking, installation, sculpture, and scale, the project asks how traditional kupesi can be reinterpreted through a contemporary lens while honouring ancestral knowledge.



Tohi Kumi- metaphorically speaking, here is the pen ‘fā’ (dry pandanus fruit) that all my grannies had used to write their stories, therefore, is now has passed on to me to used it across this project, to research into the koloa that has been left behind by my Great-granny, ‘Uhila lahi (this is her fale Tonga).

Fakamālō – Acknowledgements

Pāloveape 1: 7

Ko e ‘apasiasia kia Sihova ko e ‘uluaki me‘a ia ‘i he ‘ilo:
Ko e poto mo e ako, ko e vale pē ‘oku ta‘etoka‘i ia.

‘Oku ou tomu‘a tuku ‘a e fakamālō ki he ‘Otua Mafimafi ko e ngaahi faingāmalie kuo ne fakakoloa ‘aki au ‘o fakafou mai ‘i he ki‘i fekumi ni, ‘isa, ‘a e tala mahu‘inga ‘o e Ngatu, ka ko e taha ‘etau koloa tu‘ufonua. ‘Oku ‘ikai puli ‘a e ngaahi faingata‘a na‘a ku fe‘ao mai mo ia lolotonga ‘a e fakahoko ‘a e ki‘i fekumi ni. ‘Oku ou fakafeta‘i he na‘a kau ai hoku fakaivia pea ke faka‘inasi ‘aki au ‘a e poto mo e ‘ilo fe‘unga pea lava ai ke ikuna ‘a e taumu‘a mo e kaveinga ako na‘e fai.

‘Oku ‘oatu ‘a e fakamālō loto hounga mo‘oni ki he‘eku kui ‘Ana Va‘inga (kuo ne mama‘o atu) ‘i he tauhi mo e fakahinohino au ki he mahu‘inga mo e ‘aonga ‘o e ngatu talu ‘eku kei ta‘u si‘i. Na‘e kamata mei heni ‘a ‘eku mahu‘inga‘ia mo manumanumelie‘ia ‘i he ngaahi tala fakafonua ‘o e ngatu mo e anga hono ngaohi. Ko e ngaahi naunau na‘u ku ma‘u ke fakahoko‘aki ‘a e fekumi, na‘e kamata ia mei he ako ‘i ‘api mo koe. ‘Oku ou kei ongona pe ‘a e ngaahi fanafaname‘a na‘a ke fai mai, pea ‘oku hoko ia ko e koloa mahu‘inga ki he ako mo e fekumi ‘oku fai. Ko e taha eni ‘a e ngāue na‘a ke maheni faka‘aho‘aki ‘i he‘eku tutupu hake, pea ‘oku hoko ia ko e taumu‘a ‘o e ki‘i fekumi ‘i he fonua muli ni. ‘Oku ‘oatu foki ‘a e fakamālō ki he toenga ‘o e fāmili, ‘i he ngaahi tokoni mo e poupou hono kotoa pe, hoko ia ko e fakanonga mo e fakalotolahi ki he fekumi na‘e fai.

‘Oku ‘oatu ‘a e fakamālō makehe ki he kainga hono kotoa pe mei he ‘Ī-‘o-Lupea ‘o tatau pe ‘akinautolu ‘oku nofo ‘i Tonga pea mo Nu‘usila, na‘e a‘u atu kiai ‘a e fakahemata ni. ‘Oku ou fakamālō atu ki he kau fefine ‘o falehanga mei he Vaomapa ‘i he ngaahi tokoni hono kotoa pe ‘o lava ai ke fakahoko ‘a e faka‘eke‘eke, faitā mo hono lekooti ho‘omou koka‘nga mo e ngāue hono kotoa pe felave‘i mo hono ngaohi ‘o e ngatu. ‘Ikai ngata ai, ka na‘a mou tokoni lahi ke fakakakato ‘a e koka ‘o e tokauanima ke fakakakato ‘a e fekumi na‘e fai. ‘Oku ou atu foki heni ‘a e fakamālō lahi ki he toenga ‘o e kāinga na‘a mou tokoni mai ki he tanaki ‘a e naunau ki he tui kupesi, ngaahi fakamatala pea pehē ki hono faitāa‘i ‘a e ngaahi fale faka-Tonga ‘i hotau ki‘i kolo. ‘Oku hounga ‘aupito kiate au, pea ‘oku honge ha lea ke fakamatala ‘a ho‘omou ngaahi tokoni pea mo hono talia ma‘upē ‘a e fakatangi ‘oku fai atu ‘i he taimi hono kotoa pe ‘oku ou lele atu ai.

‘Oku ou lave‘i, ko e ‘ikuna ‘o e ki‘i fekumi ‘oku makatu‘unga ia ‘i he ngaahi tokoni hono kotoa pe mo e poupou lelei ki he ako na‘e fai. Ko ho‘o mou ala nima mai na‘e hoko ia ko e fakalotolahi mo e ma‘u‘anga ivi ke hokohoko atu ‘a e fekumi na‘e fai. Ko ia ‘oku ou fakamālō lahi atu ai kiate kimoutolu. ‘Oku ou talamonu atu pea mo e fakatauange pe ‘e hokohoko atu ai pe ‘a ho‘omou poupou lelei ki he ngaahi ngāue mo e mahu‘inga ‘o e ngatu mo e koloa faka-Tonga ‘a hotau ki‘i kolo pea mo hotau ki‘i fonua.

‘Oatu heni ‘a e fakamālō:

To the curator at Window Gallery, Keaton Hamilton, thank you for your support and for believing in my project, allowing me to exhibit at Window, because *The 1620 Collection* was the first project that embodied the different elements that were later used as a guide in this project.

To the Artspace team, curator Tyson Campbell, co-curator Grayson Goffe, for giving me the opportunity to share my practice and to be a part of a group exhibition.

To the ST PAUL St Gallery (now Te Wai Ngutu Kākā Gallery), curator Cameron Ah Loo-Matamua (2022), thank you for allowing the practice to explore different installation methods and for supporting it by providing a platform to share the work with other audiences. Thank you for helping me understand conceptual aspects of the project and build confidence in voicing my opinion when it comes to how I want to install my practice.

To the Depot Artspace team, curator Nina Dyer, Amy Saunders and Diana Hu, for giving me the opportunity to participate in an exhibition about intergenerational knowledge being passed down by our female ancestors, and for supporting the practice, seeing it in a new space and environment.

To the Blue Oyster Art Project Space team, Hope, Erin, Thom, and Nico, for your assistance and for keeping me company during the exhibition.

To curator and writer Emil Scheffmann, for offering the project an opportunity, and supporting every aspect during its duration at Paper Anniversary, an exhibition that created an opportunity to meet curator Bonnie Luafutu-Tamati, and accompany the project down to Enjoy Contemporary Art Space.

To Enjoy Contemporary Art Space Director, Daniel Sanders, for your hospitality, hosting a group of artists, helping us to settle and providing us with spaces to stay—assisting us with our work.

To Benjamin Work, who curated a Tongan-based exhibition featuring senior and younger artists, including a connection with the Bergman Gallery team, and to Benny Chan, connecting us through our ancestral ties back to Taiwan, and keeping a connection to people in different spaces. Alongside this, allowing the project to participate in Tongan Language Week and work with the elders. You have been present in the practice across various spaces, connecting to our Tongan ancestors and history.

To the team from the Ripples of the Pacific International Artist Residency in Taiwan; Yuting Su, for reaching out and offering me my first international residency, assisting me throughout the residency, and helping me understand the language, taking me on tours, attending festivals, and handling all of the administrative tasks.

To Sione Faletau, you see and believe in the practice, and your consistent support has enabled the practice to grow, participate, and engage with our people, helping the project to be shared with the right audiences. You assisted the project at Papakura Art Gallery and Māngere Arts Centre, in the area where most of our people reside.

‘Oatu heni ‘a e fakamālō: to AUT University for the AUT Vice Chancellor’s Scholarship, giving me the opportunity to continue my studies, through practice-led research and time.

‘Oatu heni ‘a e fakamālō: to the AUT Office of Pacific Advancement for the Postgraduate Research Scholarship, thank you for accepting the project. I have been able to finish my study because of your support, giving me the opportunity to focus on wrapping everything up and not having to worry or extend my study.

‘Oatu heni ‘a e fakamālō: to Te Tumu Springboard Award, thank you for the support and trust that you’ve shown to the practice, and for giving the project a chance to travel, participate in an exhibition, and work with a mentor, Dr Andrea Low. Through this award, I was able to create a space for myself to depend on and extend my practice. Alongside this, access to the Tongan archives of crafts, research, and meeting with their librarian, which helped position the project.

‘Oatu heni ‘a e fakamālō: to the Vā Moana Research Cluster, Albert, Tina, Layne, Emily, and Arielle, for the opportunity of working as a curator, which allowed the practice to share its research, methods, and ideas, and how it could be presented through other artists’ points of view.

‘Oatu heni ‘a e fakamālō: to all the AUT technicians, the most incredible, hard-working, and creative people that I know, who work behind the scenes in transforming ideas from words—drawing into reality—Harriet, Matthew, Angus, Glenn, Greg, Struan, Lucas, Andrew, Cornelius, and ET. From working on testing and experimenting with different methods, ways of approaching the practice, and creating structure, to having conversations around how to help the project develop.

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‘Oatu heni ‘a e fakamālō: to all the women figures in this project, Vei and Moana, for your consistent support and for continuing to help me bring the practice of our ancestors to its best. In all aspects of the project, you are there, ready to support, helping to organise interviews, meeting people, and participating in conversations where I usually do not sit, due to hierarchy and social status. Yet you both set those boundaries to be less intimidating than they are.

‘Oatu heni ‘a e fakamālō: to my supervisors, Dr Nooroa Tapuni and Associate Professor Monique Redmond. We have been working together since the beginning of my studies here at AUT, from undergrad to my master’s, and through my PhD. We’ve been through it together, from learning and unfolding the practice layer by layer to now fully understanding it at its full capacity. I acknowledge you both, all your hard work, advice, support, and understanding of the practice from its original context. It requires a significant amount of effort, time, and space to learn about the practice from two different contexts. I really appreciate you both for staying up late with me, meeting with me, and helping me push through, especially over the last couple of months of this project. You both really took care of me, being genuine and honest with me, and while I am in the process of getting the words into print, you have both taken care of everything behind the scenes. We went through a lot, and I am deeply honoured, motivated, and glad that I had you both as my supervisors, whom I would definitely choose to work with in any lifetime.

‘Oatu heni ‘a e fakamālō: to my proofreader, Marie Shannon. I appreciate you allocating your time to review this document and fitting it into your schedule. As busy as you are, you have taken the time to sit and read through my words while proofreading other documents on your list. Thank you for giving this project an opportunity—your hard work, dedication, and time—which we sincerely appreciate.

‘Oatu heni ‘a e fakamālō: to my AUT PhD cohort, especially Arielle, Emily, and Sia, thank you for all the conversations we’ve had, words of encouragement and your support.

‘Oatu heni ‘a e fakamālō: to my friends who are also my family, John, Kalisola’ite, Vula, and Ansgar, Sean for standing by me, supporting me from afar and always being willing to help me in any aspect of the study. Providing me with research support, especially for my mental health. And your consistent checking in and helping me understand the practice from how we do it back home in Tonga.

‘Oatu heni ‘a e fakamālō: to my siblings, Ane, Amanda, Kaloni, Milika, Valu, ‘Analisa, Kafoatu, Liu Kovi, and Nena. Your support in all areas throughout this project has reminded me of my ‘why’ and who I am doing it for, and has helped me with the translation of Tongan words across the practice, proofreading, and pointing me to meet with people who are helpful for the project.

‘Oatu heni ‘a e fakamālō: to the church, the Auckland ICC and Taipei ICC—my brothers and sisters, thank you for your consistent prayers, words of encouragement, and guidance, which have helped me get through my lowest and toughest times. Thank you for understanding me, thank you for loving me, and thank you for your friendship. It helps me when I am overwhelmed, especially when things get tough, and I want to withdraw or leave the programme. Thank you for everything, and I love you all.

‘Oatu heni ‘a e fakamālō: to my friends who are my family back home in Taitung, Tama, Tina, Akong, Uncle Lu, Giegie (older sister) and brothers. Thank you so much for your hospitality, which made me feel at home, for taking me on a tour, for helping me gather materials, and for allowing me to connect with Taiwanese barkcloth makers. This experience provided me with a future project to return to. Thank you for hosting me. You’ve become a part of my practice, and you are my family, because I now have an akong (grandpa) and Tina (A-bus). You’ve filled in the space that I had left open, as my nena’s space. As a maker, I see my nena every time I step into the studio. Thank you for your knowledge and time, and for allowing me to be a part of your family.

‘Oatu heni ‘a e fakamālō: to my uncles, and cousins, and in-laws, Taufu, ‘Eveli, Vou, Viliami, and Pepa. Thank you for helping me gather materials and taking the time out of your day to come and assist me. Thank you, Etuate, for helping me find relevant books in your bookstore back home in Tonga.

‘Oatu heni ‘a e fakamālō: to my parents, thank you for trusting in me, thank you for all your help, and providing me with research that you take time out of your busy day to look into or to gather because you know how important it is to me. And for supporting me through every decision; even when I decided to take a break, you were still there to help me.

‘Oatu heni ‘a e fakamālō: to all my friends who have supported me throughout the duration of my PhD. You’ve made an impact that helped me get through it, thanks to your words of encouragement and consistent support.

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‘Oatu heni ‘a e fakamālō: to ‘Uhila si’i, thank you for not giving up, thank you for trusting in the Lord, thank you for trusting in your supervisors, thank you for trusting in everyone around you, so much support, from family, friends, and the faculty that you have been a part of for the duration of your study. It was a journey, it was tough, it wasn’t easy—as it was never easy to begin with—but it was for our ancestors and the future of our younger generations that kept you walking forward.

Ethics Approval

Approval for this research was granted by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC) on 16 December 2022 (application number 22/364).



Fola e ngatu 'i he'ene kei la'ā – is a phrase that my nena would always say, especially when it's sunny, because I know it is time to bring out all her ngatu. It unfolds the past for the present; 'me' to learn and observe from.

Kano Tohi – Contents

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Making process

Exhibition documentation.

Talateu – Introduction: Fola ‘a e ngatu ‘i he ‘ene kei la‘ā

This creative-led research project, *Tohi Kumi Koloa – Ko e tohi fepōtalanoa‘aki ‘eni pea mo ‘eku fanga kui*, comes from my personal experiences surrounding the practice of ngatu. I learned the craft from my nena, ‘Ana Va‘inga Nai (Image 1), in the village of Pelehake in Tonga. A core method used in the research is the concept of liuaki (to go back and forth). It has enabled me to gain an in-depth understanding of the practice of ngatu (barkcloth) making, alongside the fundamental component of kupesi (embroidered relief stencil), so that I may continue one of Tongan women’s koloa (textiles). Ngatu acts as a bridge that helps me to stay rooted in a practice I observed as a child, and which now inspires and influences every aspect of this research project. The methods, concepts, knowledge, and histories come from the place I call home, Pelehake.¹ (Image 2)

The research is considered ‘lived research’, drawn from the core of Pelehake, and a practice that the people of this village have nurtured. It moves on its own time, according to the Tongan ways of thinking and doing, which I refer to as ‘thinking in Tongan while writing in English’. For me, this encapsulates the idea of liuaki, situating my practice in the Tongan way of thinking through making, concepts, knowledge, and how we do things on an everyday-life basis, and sharing that through artmaking in the present–contemporary. It is a metaphor that exists across the project, involving a back-and-forth between the Tongan and English languages, the spaces between Tonga and Aotearoa New Zealand, and how it all draws from the past. This includes memories, stories, names, home, practising, materials, conversations, documentation, and, most importantly, experience, as the inspiration to create the artwork that is seen in the present time. That is, practising utilising processes such as screen-printed feta‘aki (undyed barkcloth) and pepa koka‘anga (vylene paper), laser-engraved stamps, printmaking, sculpture, and installation.

Tohi Kumi Koloa is a project that operates in two contexts: back home in Pelehake (Image 3) and at home in Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland. (Image 4) Metaphorically speaking, Pelehake positions itself as the past, while Tāmaki Makaurau is seen as the present. Pelehake centres the concept of working with the method of veteki (taking apart),² based on my curiosity of wanting to understand the individual characteristics of the kupesi forms, with the intention of knowing their meaning. Drawing from the collection of kupesi that belongs to Pelehake’s kautaha koka‘anga (Women’s Ngatu Makers Association), which was under the care of my nena as the chairwoman, I have been creating a series of screen-printed pepa koka‘anga that will become a new archive of its own. In framing the kupesi in ways that can be understood outside of the Tongan ways of thinking, veteki has helped categorise the kupesi into three categories: abstract geometric designs, figurative designs, and floral designs. The more I veteki the collection of kupesi, the

¹ Also referred to by the name Vaomapa or I-‘o-Lupea.

² C. Maxwell Churchward, “Veteki,” in *Tongan Dictionary: Tongan – English and English – Tongan*, The Government of Tonga, 1959. iOS and Android ed.

more it helped me to understand the practice of koka'anga (production of ngatu making) on a personal level, revealing aspects and details I wasn't aware of during my master's project (2019–20), when I first started researching kupesi. Through the method of veteki, I realised that koka'anga is not just about assembling layers or mark-making, but about understanding the levels of multiplicity regarding process and context. This led me to continue the practice of koka'anga in a different time, space, and materiality—with new meaning. I took all that I embodied while observing Nena to engage with the multiplicities of the koka'anga. Speaking of observation, Dr Manulani Aluli Meyer, a writer who works with Indigenous epistemology and is a worldwide keynote speaker, talks about the differences between observation and interpretation, as they are the two fundamental principles that have changed our practices,³ in the sense that 'our interpretation' is how our traditional practices have changed over generations. Considering this notion in the context of my art practice, based on my observations, I have now 'interpreted' the practice of koka'anga (the way that I understand it) and positioned it in contemporary artmaking.

Through multi-layered research, this project continually returns to Tonga as a means to contain the practice of tauhi vā (taking care of the relationship) that accompanies it. Every relationship I have been a part of is based on 'lived experience', as the methodology is a way of life. These methods involve me being the 'researcher', which has led me to develop the project methodology of Tui Kupesi—how we can understand the project from the Tongan perspective. Therefore, *Tohi Kumi Koloa* has gathered people for the opportunity to understand in depth how to make the project's artworks, utilising four methods derived from Tui Kupesi: tokonaki pe tākaki (providing or collecting), veteki (taking apart), tuiaki moe ngāue fakataha (stitching back and collective making), and koloa (the gift, the knowledge). These methods are not only driven by Tui Kupesi, but are also an expression of how I tauhi vā in all aspects of ngatu and kupesi.

³ Manulani Aluli Meyer, "An Introduction to Indigenous Epistemology," YouTube video, October 22, 2010, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lmJJi1iBdzc>



Image 1. Nena 'Ana Va'inga Nai.



Image 2. Mape 'o Pelehake, 2011. Pelehake Tax Allotment, 2022. ©Ministry of Land and Natural Recourses.



Image 3. Pelehake 'home' referred to as the past, 2025.



Image 4. Studio space, referred to as the present, AUT WM Building, Level 6, 2025.

To recognise the significance of this project, the practice examines the Tongan term ‘tauhi tukufakaholo’ (taking care of tradition). It is an important act of ‘doing’ for the practice in terms of understanding the functionality of how tauhi vā operates across the different generations of people, which allows the practice to engage with knowledge only accessible through the act of doing. My nena shared her knowledge with me by allowing me to participate as her ‘little tail’, simply because my great-grandmother’s name was bestowed upon me. (Image 5) Thus, I was seen to be with her everywhere she went. Whatever she needed, I was there for her and always the first person she asked. Through our relationship, I learned about our Tongan crafts by observing and listening to her maker’s needs. My nena was a well-respected elder with much knowledge about Tongan koloa. I expand on the concept of tukufakaholo in *Konga II: Tupu’anga – The family history of the project*.



Image 5. *Her little tail*, Nana, myself (in front of her) and the elders of Pelehake. ©Pelehake Community

The unique part of this research is learning about kupesi, which isn’t just a tool for making ngatu, but one that carries the stories and histories of my ancestors. From a personal perspective, I see ngatu as the object presented publicly, and therefore, it is how stories of the past are shared and passed on. Conversely, kupesi is seen as a tool. By understanding kupesi in this way, I wanted to document them through veteki and then write about what they represent through artmaking, drawing on the experience and knowledge of someone who has lived and been a part of their story. I use the term ‘insider’ to refer to people who have lived the everyday life of a Tongan koka’anga woman, as they hold a position of knowledge in accessing information. This is shown

in the documenting and writing through the processes of screen-printing and printing using the embroidered relief stencil of the kupesi.

This project wants to honour the labour, creativity, and persistence of our ancestors, and ‘we’ want to continue this rich practice left in their hands by their grandmothers, aunties, mothers, and the elders, and now in ours. Kupesi is a unique object made entirely from the material of fonua (land) to carry and embody the richness of Tongan history, allowing each village to write the stories they want to pass on for generations. Sometimes this is a story that only the maker and the villagers understand, which is why kupesi can be defined as heliaki (symbolic depiction of life and living in Tonga),⁴ because it is not always apparent or direct in how it presents itself, until it is explained or shared.

This research contributes to what has been ‘on the table’ (the papa koka‘anga),⁵ and to the new knowledge gained by creating a framework that responds to how ngatu and kupesi can be used outside of their primary context, aside from their materiality and functionality. There is a material and processual parallel between kupesi imprinted onto feta‘aki (what we call ngatu), and the printmaking screen used to screen-print the kupesi onto the pepa koka‘anga (what I call ngatu screen-print). New knowledge and methods of making ngatu reflect and respond to how I have observed it being made in Pelehake. One of the distinctive aspects of this project is how it unfolds the practice of ngatu through installation and scale within exhibition practice, utilising an approach that originates from a craft practice that has been around for a very long time. Furthermore, this PhD research is a contribution to the past: my ancestors, my family, the elders who were a part of the Pelehake koka‘anga group, alongside the present that is today’s generation, my siblings, today’s arts practitioners, and to anyone who feels connected to their ancestors through this project.

Research Questions

As a maker, how can I tauhi all the tukufakaholo my nena left with me?

What is the role of tauhi tukufakaholo in examining the origins of kupesi, and the use of processes and methods of making ngatu?

What do individual kupesi talk about when their meaning is unfolded or deciphered?

How do the different forms of kupesi operate across tukufakaholo?

How can traditional kupesi be reinterpreted through a contemporary lens, utilising processes of printmaking and installation?

⁴ Afuha‘amango and Ongo‘alupe Taumoepeau, “Heliaki: The Symbolic Depiction of Life and Living in Tonga,” in *Traditional Knowledge and Wisdom: Themes from the Pacific Islands*, ed. Samuel Lee (ICHCAP, 2014), 101, <https://library.sprep.org/sites/default/files/traditional-knowledge-wisdom-themes-pacific-islands.pdf>

⁵ Papa koka‘anga is a knee-high table used for assembling strips of feta‘aki (undyed barkcloth).

Positioning the Researcher

I was born in Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand, but was raised back home in Pelehake, Tonga. I grew up with a name that embodied more than just one person; it carried others' personalities, the way they presented themselves, and it reminded people of who they were. 'Uhila is my nena's mother, and I am the person to whom her name was given. I grew up in a space where I was surrounded by my nena's cousins, the elders of Pelehake, who would always refer to me as 'Uhila vaivai in the context of me carrying their grandma's name.

My journey toward undertaking this PhD has been deeply influenced by my connection to Nena, my grandmother, 'Ana Va'inga Nai, who was a skilled ngatu maker in Pelehake. (Image 6) Learning from her shaped my understanding of ngatu and kupesi, and the cultural significance embedded in these patterns. In 2013 I discovered Nena's collection of kupesi, which didn't really signal anything to me until 2019, when I began my Master of Visual Arts study. I developed an interest in making my own kupesi, as an object and archive that could carry the stories about my time living in Tonga with my nena. This desire led me to explore kupesi through this research project, specifically seeking to understand in depth what inspires kupesi, where its forms are derived from, which, in turn, developed into the creation of veteki kupesi.



Image 6. Nena 'Ana and Lavinia in the process of tohi ngatu, photograph by Tamasia Mafi, grandpa's nephew who was working for the Tongan Television at the time.

As a contemporary artist, I position myself within a continuum—past, present, future—drawing from ancestral knowledge while engaging with artistic practice in 2025. This informs my creative process, as I bridge traditional Tongan art forms with contemporary interpretations. It enables additional perspectives on how I might transition between two different contexts (Pelehake and Tāmaki Makaurau) and two practices (past–traditional and present–contemporary). Yet I have found a way and identified a parallel between the two. For artists who practise within contemporary artmaking contexts, it is common to borrow or take from the past as an inspiration in our artworks. To me, that makes them seem like a neighbour looking inwards: therefore, I don’t borrow or take, but instead I continue the practice through the act of fakafetongi (exchange).

The act of fakafetongi occurs as I liuaki between the past and present to build a deeper connection and understanding of how I can present traditional Tongan art forms in a space outside of their familiar context. Therefore, as a printmaker and ngatu maker, I draw on my lived knowledge to understand the complexity of being a contemporary artist. This means I look to the past for guidance on how to position my creative practice in the present and future.

To position myself as the researcher is not just about me as a person; it is about understanding the ‘we’ and ‘our’ of the project, as it is the multiple strands of collective identity that weave together the ‘I’. The back-and-forth of liuaki helps articulate the parallels between past–traditional and present–contemporary practices. I position myself across several spaces, which I expand on in *Konga I: Exhibition Projects* and *Konga II: Tupu’anga – The family history of the project*, where I metaphorically present myself with many names taken from family members of the past.

The Pattern of the Exegesis

The knowledge documented in this exegesis does not function in sections, as it might if following the order of literature review then methodological framework. The practice works under the expression of ‘always looking for something to do’. Therefore, the text is written in the order based on the title of this project: *Tohi Kumi Koloa*. Split into three parts, tohi is the letter, kumi is the research, and koloa is the textile, ‘the work’ that carries the stories. This conceptual structure has evolved over the duration of the PhD and through the delivery of the exhibition projects.

To navigate the multiplicity of a lived experience based on ngatu making, one encounters and experiences the concept of liuaki as the project travels across time. For this reason, I have set up the exegesis structure based on how it would position itself within the village of Pelehake, utilising kāpasa (compass) as a strategy to navigate the project. This means knowing when and what the right direction would be to take.

Tohi is a metaphorical letter, the lived knowledge given and gifted to me by my nena. Therefore, *Konga I: Exhibition Projects* and *Konga II: Tupu’anga – The family history of the project* unfold the shared knowledge in the letter, centring the concept of back-and-forth and revealing itself layer by layer.

Konga I: Exhibition Projects centres the research in the practice, which is driven by the different learnings and experiences, methods, and ideas generated through the exhibitions I have participated in during my PhD, ranging from solo to group exhibitions and a residency.

Konga II: Tupu'anga – The family history of the project explores the 'place of origin' of the research through the many forms of tukufakaholo handed down from generation to generation, as well as the cultural context and practices.

Kumi is an in-depth search of what is mentioned in the letter. It is laid out in the following chapters: *Konga III: Makers and Theorists in the Field* and *Konga IV: Founa Ngāue – Methodology*, which discusses the project's neighbours within the field and how the research operates in practice.

Konga III: Makers and Theorists in the Field looks to the neighbourhood of practitioners focusing on barkcloth, printmaking, sculpture, and installation. It outlines the ways in which different aspects of my practice intersect and align with various neighbours, including those who are reviving connections, Pasifika makers who practice ngatu from a contemporary perspective, and artists who draw on traditional methods. In support of this practice, the theorists and knowledge-holders help me articulate concepts, with the aim of examining the collective responsibility that ties us, makers and villagers, together.

Konga IV: Founa Ngāue – Methodology discusses the overarching framework and methods used in the practice, with kāpasa (compass) serving as a navigational tool and an open invitation to participate and learn. It outlines how I have deepened and broadened my knowledge of ngatu and kupesi through making and fepōtalanoa'aki with ngatu makers from Pelehake. During this project, I have understood the opportunity the elders gave us not only to know the practice of ngatu but also to document 'our' everyday work—lived experience—through the ways I have received knowledge by observing and listening.

Koloa lays out the material, tools, and processes used in the making of the work, which are shared across different spaces. This is covered in the last two chapters, *Konga V: Tohi Hohoko – The 'tool-box' of generations across the thread of time* and *Konga VI: Langanga (Scale) and Tauaki (Installation)*.

Konga V: Tohi Hohoko – The 'tool-box' of generations across the thread of time discusses materiality and the tools that are deeply interconnected through process and form the foundation of the making that becomes the koloa. It examines the concept of veteki to explore the project's key research question: What role does tauhi tukufakaholo (taking care of the tradition) play in examining the origins of kupesi? In doing so, it explores the stories individual kupesi might tell when their meaning is unfolded or deciphered in the context of different forms of kupesi operating across various lineages. It then examines the functionality of these tools, which are more than merely functional components within the practice—they carry knowledge, memory, and relationality between fonua, people, and place. And it explains the variety of materials, tools, and techniques that the practice uses.

Konga VI: Langanga (Scale) and Tauaki (Installation) explores the crossovers between langanga and tauaki in conceptual and formal contexts. The concepts of scale and installation have always been central to the making, and are derived from and understood through the perspective and practice of ngatu. Scale and installation, as intertwined components, serve as a reference point for understanding how the tools, processes, and literal scales operate in preparation for making the ngatu, including the collectives (the people of this project). In practice, scale operates in specific and referential ways, depending on the phase of making, whereas installation weaves between and across the practice, hand-in-hand with scale. In other words, installation as a mode of practising is always related to the scale of ngatu and how it presents itself.

Konga I – Exhibition Projects

In this chapter, I present in chronological order (2021–) the twelve exhibition projects that have been exhibited during the PhD timeframe, which come from the lived knowledge that has contributed to how the project has gathered across different generations and built over time. The artwork has been installed and presented in various contexts: gallery spaces, conference presentations, institutions, and in AUT studio spaces. Different environments have uplifted the practice as it travels between Tonga and Aotearoa, and outside of Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland for exhibitions, such as Pōneke Wellington and Ōtepoti Dunedin, and during a residency in Taitung, Taiwan, at the Pasikau Villages. This back-and-forth aspect has supported the notion of lived knowledge as an ongoing positioning within the overarching PhD enquiry through exhibition practice.

Project 1.

The Private Letter Becomes Public: The 1620 Collection

Window Gallery, General Library Foyer, University of Auckland⁶

14 July – 11 August 2021

The Private Letter Becomes Public: The 1620 Collection, focuses on a personal interpretation of our everyday surroundings in Tonga, which I translated into kupesi to produce feta'aki (undyed barkcloth) and pepa koka'anga (vylene paper, a synthetic interfacing fabric) prints. (Image 7) Working with the idea of recreating an image of our everyday, the work captures memories of my nena's studio, collections of clothes belonging to my uncle, the late Mote Kiai Aso, and family members, and a puha (box) that is a signifier of Nena's toolbox. The installation talks about intergenerational knowledge embedded in materials, processes, belonging, and everyday life conversations, using the method of tauaki-tautau (to hang or to dry) as a visual expression of 'at the end of a day's hard work'.



Image 7. 'Uhila Nai, Feta'aki and Pepa koka'anga stamp prints, 2019. Feta'aki (undyed barkcloth), pepa koka'anga (vylene paper), printmaking ink, plastic clothing pegs, Nena's front yard.

⁶ See <https://windowgallery.co.nz/exhibitions/the-private-letter-becomes-public-the-1620-collection>

The 1620 Collection is a collection of textiles gathered from various times and places that speaks to material, memory, family, past and present, and older and younger generations. The installation was inspired by a photo I took of our family's front yard back in Pelehake. The image depicts the shelter area in our front yard, which is used for occasions such as birthdays, family meetings/gatherings, for drying our clothes during rainy seasons, and preparing materials for ngatu (barkcloth) making. The site represents a location where knowledge accumulates across generations, sustaining the history of the hingoa fakafāмили (family names), tupu'anga (place of origin), and memories associated with Nena.

The 1620 Collection explores how my practice can respond to or position itself within a contemporary artmaking space while still reflecting its origins—the Tongan context. Therefore, the photograph on which this work is based encapsulates a concept of time and space, the relationship between people and land, and materials and processes. The window space, which is similar in proportions to a photo, became a three-dimensional image and a translation of the story depicted in the photograph.

The project was made at two locations: my childhood home and the AUT Print Lab facility. The works made back home in Pelehake were the feta'aki stamp prints, and the pepa koka'anga screen-printed works were made at AUT. In late 2019, I took some laser-engraved wooden stamps (Image 8) with me to Pelehake, with the purpose of using them in the ngatu-making process, which is, of course, not how kupesi is usually transferred onto the feta'aki.⁷ I had made the stamps in the Digital Fabrication Lab at AUT to experiment with different ways of making kupesi for printing onto the feta'aki and pepa koka'anga. I saw this visit as an opportunity to experiment at home in the traditional context, using contemporary printmaking technologies to create the feta'aki and pepa koka'anga prints.

The kupesi were produced in the lab through an analogue and digital process. The first set of kupesi, which was influenced by Western-style architecture in Pelehake, traces the rooftop of my nena's room from an aerial perspective. To create the wooden stamps, I used Adobe Illustrator to prepare the file, as I had chosen to use digital laser engraving to create the stamps. Separate to the laser-engraved stamps, for the screen-printed kupesi I used Illustrator as a tool for developing the new kupesi motifs, and to plan and structure how each one would be compositionally arranged on the fabric.

The 1620 Collection combines traditional and contemporary materials and processes, such as feta'aki and pepa koka'anga, screen-printing and stamping. Alongside these prints, I added clothes as sculptural elements, something I had never done in my practice before. As this exhibition was based on a photograph of our front yard in Pelehake, I wanted to adapt all elements to closely reflect what was shown in the picture. I borrowed my uncle Hale Nai's towel, which he had left here on his visit from Utah, a high school vest that was a gift from my childhood best friend, and a t-shirt, which was the last item I had belonging to my uncle, Aso. I also included

⁷ Kupesi is transferred to the feta'aki by placing the kupesi (embroidered stencil) beneath it and gently rubbing over it with 'umea (the brown dye made from clay).

a stack of the wooden stamps, the puha fakafāмили (family box), and kafa (coconut sennit cordage) to accompany these textiles. (Image 9)



Image 8. ‘Uhila Nai, Laser-engraved and laser cut stamps made from plywood and MDF, 2019. Kupesi inspired by found objects, Tongan oil ingredients, architect and envelope.

The puha fakafāмили is a replica of a box that belonged to my great-great-grandmother, Manu Tu‘ipulotu, who passed it down through five generations, and which is now under the care of my uncle’s wife, Pina Aso. I made this box from memory, based on the original box, which I had lived with for thirteen years. Its role in the context of this project is to serve as a signifier for how goods, artworks made in Pelehake, are transported back to Mount Albert (where I live in Tāmaki Makaurau).

The work was installed in Window Gallery utilising the main structure shown in the photograph—a universal way of sun-drying our clothes. The clothing line acted as a physical metaphor and installation structure for tauaki-tautau. The line is taken from the method of drying the tutu (inner bark of the mulberry tree) after it has gone through the process of ‘opo‘opo (the process of beating two layers of tutu together). The way tauaki-tautau is used in the ngatu process is metaphorically employed here to allow the work to speak for itself. The kafa,⁸ which is made by plaiting, talks about the different stories, materials, and labour that are embedded and woven together in this exhibition. (Image 10).

⁸ The kafa was fī (plaited) by my parents, Timote Nai and Lotomoua Nai, here in Mount Albert, Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland.

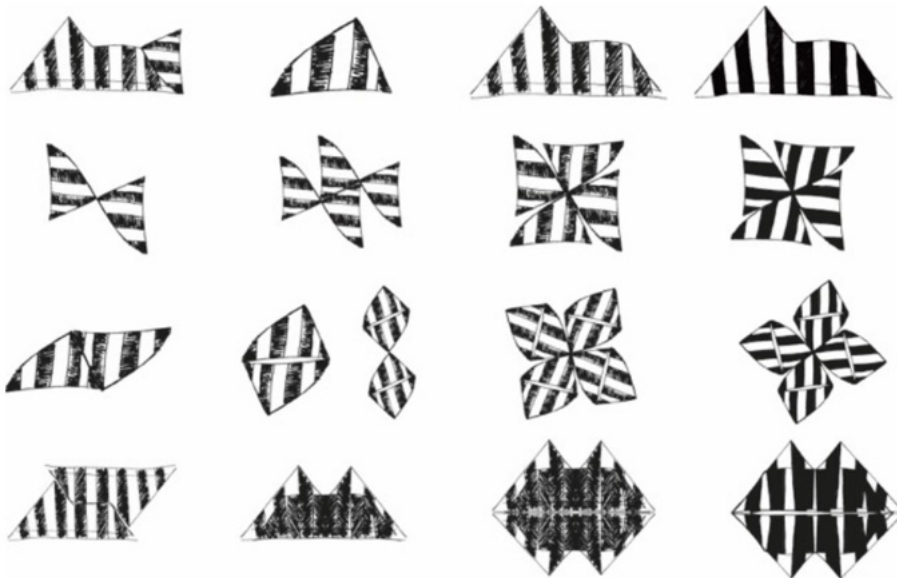
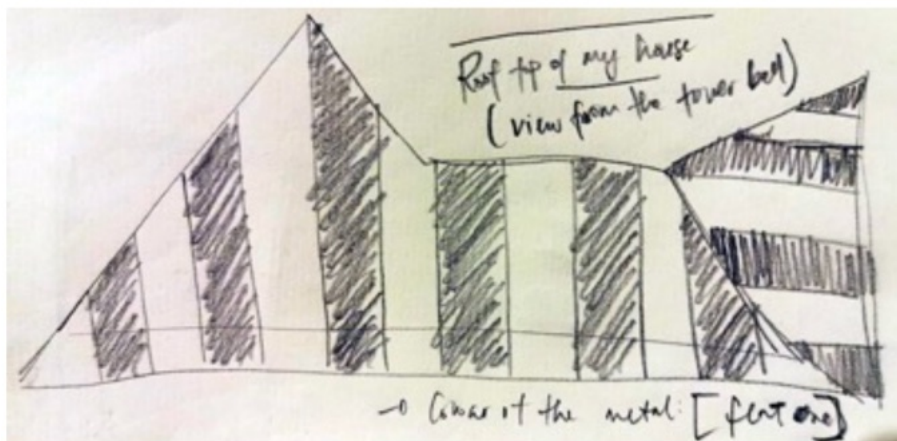


Image 9. 'Uhila Nai, *A New Version of her*, 2018 – 2019.
 Photograph, still life hand-drawing, digital drawing, and using
 Adobe Illustration to create the kupesi forms.



Image 10. 'Uhila Nai, *The 1620 Collection* installation view. 2021.
Window Gallery, Auckland University Library.

Project 2.

Tōkanga: Tala tukufakaholo ‘o e ngōue‘anga

Iteration 1, *Slow Boil*, Artspace Aotearoa, Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland (group exhibition)⁹
29 May – 7 August 2021 (*Tōkanga* install was 28 July 2021)



Image 11. ‘Uhila Nai, *Tōkanga: Tala Tukufakaholo ‘o e ngōue‘anga*, 2021.
Screen-printed pepa koka‘anga, charcoal, installation view, Aotearoa Artspace.
Photograph by Sam Hartnett

This series of work, *Tōkanga: Tala tukufakaholo ‘o e ngōue‘anga*, was commissioned as an extension of the *Slow Boil* exhibition at Artspace Aotearoa in 2021. (Image 11) Architect Karamia Muller (Waipapa Taumata Rau, University of Auckland) and software researcher Lachlan Kermode (Forensic Architecture) had previously worked together on *Violet Legalities* (2020), a research project presented at Te Pātaka Toi Adam Art Gallery. For Artspace, they facilitated *Slow Boil* “through co-design and co-curation with Grayson Goffe of Boil Up Crew. The project aimed to

⁹ See <https://artspace-aotearoa.nz/exhibitions/slow-boil>

explore the relationship between the mahi ngā-kai/kai rituals and tā wahi/notions of space, mana motuhake/sovereignty, and mapping.”¹⁰ My work *Tōkanga* responded to their curatorial proposition by highlighting traditional Tongan agricultural practices and the significance of plants, while underscoring the Tongan tradition that only men can inherit land.¹¹ I designed a total of sixteen kupesi, which were later combined to create kupesi that reflected the curatorial premise and four Māori concepts: manawanui (resilience), humarie (resourcefulness), hononga (connection), and tikanga (methods). I positioned these ideas in my work by responding to fonua (land), using the method of veteki (taking apart) to create new kupesi. These kupesi describe the people who go to the ‘uta (plantation) daily to provide for their families and grow plants for craft making, and their hard labour. These kupesi metaphorically respond to the anatomy of the talo (taro) plant. (Image 12)



Image 12. ‘Uhila Nai, *Tōkanga* installation view. Photograph by Sam Hartnett

The talo is a significant plant in Tonga and a common food across Asia and the Moana Pasifika. I selected the talo because of its multi-purpose use; food to eat and materials for cooking. Another aspect of the talo plant is that it brings people together through the method of making ‘umu, an underground oven, where it connects people through labour and feasting. The scale of the kato ‘umu (‘umu basket) demonstrates this; it is a method of cooking used for big gatherings such as

¹⁰ “29 May – 7 August 2021: Slow Boil,” Artspace Aotearoa, <https://artspace-aotearoa.nz/exhibitions/slow-boil>

¹¹ In the Tongan culture, men are set to be the ones who inherit land, while women, unfortunately, cannot.

funerals. Many hands need to come together to prepare the range of food from talo, lū, manioke, mei, and vai lesi,¹² to name a few.

In creating the kupesi, I first needed to understand each part of what it was that I was going to use to design my own. Talo was easy to veteki, because I am familiar with its functionality. I separated the talo by taking apart the leaves, stems, and root (corm) from each other. I then took a photo of the talo plant and traced each part separately to unpack it to its core, enabling me to design a kupesi that reflects the whole of the subject. The lū (taro leaves) and the mid-rib represent the older generations that lead to the paths ahead of us and keep us connected to them, which is what the vines represent: the pathway for the younger generations. The leaf symbolises the villages that keep everyone together and support one another as a community. The edges of the leaf represent the land-divider, the lines that connect the four corners of a piece of land. The stems, when cut in half, look like a spiral, which, to me, speaks of a compass. And with the root—the talo itself—I extracted lines to fashion patterns from its outside layers. Then I created different kupesi forms, such as triangles or diamonds, and lines that reference the tool used to make the ‘umu, known as kato ‘umu. (Image 13) Given the nature of the kupesi and its origins, I titled the work *Tōkanga*, to refer to the gender role and the place where men farm, plant, and harvest their crops. This reference is meant as an acknowledgment of the labour of men, who make a huge impact by contributing to the materials used in women’s craft. So, throughout this project, it is the men of tōkanga who help gather and provide every material from the land that goes toward the making of my kupesi and ngatu.

¹² Lū are the leaves of the taro, which you wrap with meat of choice in a small bundle, and you eat it with manioke (taro/cassava) or mei (breadfruit)—and to finish off, vai lesi (a Tongan dessert made from papaya and cooked with coconut milk).



Image 13. 'Uhila Nai, Tōkanga (ngōue 'anga), 2021. Designed using Adobe Illustration.
A breakdown of how I create or design kupesi that was used for Tōkanga.

Project 3.

Liuaki: Going back in a poetical sense

ST PAUL St Gallery, AUT University, Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland¹³

4 March – 25 April 2022



Image 14. ‘Uhila Nai, *Tokānga: Tala Tukufakaholo ‘o e ngōue‘anga*, 2022, screen-printed pepa koka‘anga, charcoal. ST PAUL St Gallery (now Te Wai Ngutu Kākā Gallery).

The work *Liuaki: Going back in a poetical sense* was exhibited at ST PAUL St Gallery 2 alongside *Tōkanga: Tala tukufakaholo ‘o e ngōue‘anga* (made initially for Artspace Aotearoa), which was installed as a new iteration in the Front Box (street-facing window space). (Image 14)

I named the installation *Liuaki* because its content was shaped by my memory and a photograph taken in Pelehake documenting ngatu drying on a line. *Liuaki* is often defined as to ‘come back, go back and come back’, referring to the concept of going back to, a returning or revisiting. In this exhibition, ‘liuaki’ refers to the idea of drawing from memories, and moving between memories of the past and the near present. Most of the memories I return to and use in this project are from my childhood: memories of materials and tools that I watched Nena make ngatu

¹³ See <https://ngutukaka.aut.ac.nz/exhibitions/past-exhibitions/2022/uhila-nai-liuaki>

with; a map of my village, Pelehake; the architectural structure of our family house; the ingredients we used to make Tongan oil; and a drawing of how we process hiapo (paper mulberry). The installation of this work was based on one of the methods of preparing hiapo, namely tauaki-tautau. The decision around this installation method was to mimic the hanging of a wet hiapo to dry, which becomes a feta'aki once it fully dries. I often draw on the process of tauaki-tautau as a referential method and way to install the work in a gallery space. (Image 15)

The Gallery 2 space was a perfect fit for the scale and height of the work, allowing me to suspend it as in tauaki-tautau. This gave the artworks space to breathe, just like the process of tauaki-tautau, where open space and sun allow the feta'aki to fully dry. Tauaki-tautau, in this context, sits as a metaphor that is conceptualised by how I install my work and how the work occupies the space.



Image 15. 'Uhila Nai, *Liuaki: going back in a poetical sense*, 2022. Screen-printed pepa koka'anga, feta'aki and calico, charcoal, installation view. ST PAUL St Gallery (now Te Wai Ngutu Kākā Gallery).

Project 4.

‘Ofo’ofa ‘a Kui

Fehokotaki, ST PAUL St Gallery, AUT University, Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland¹⁴

12 April – 12 May 2022

Curator: ‘Uhila Kanongata’a Nai

Artists: ‘Aloisia Ngata, ‘Ahota’e’iloa Toetu’u, Vula To’ofone, David Leone Vaea, Manuha’apai Vaeatangitau, and ‘Uhila Kanongata’a’¹⁵ Nai

The Vā Moana Pacific Spaces Research Cluster¹⁶ presented this curatorial exhibition project in partnership with ST PAUL St Gallery, Auckland University of Technology, and I was appointed as the curator. In this section, I will cover my curatorial concept for the exhibition, along with my presented work, *‘Ofo’ofa ‘a Kui: The love of a grandmother*.

The title of the exhibition *Fehokotaki* is taken from the Tongan phrase “fehokotaki ‘i ha vaha’a taimi ‘i ha feitu’u kehekehe,” which means to explore creative ways that Moana artists maintain connections (fehokotaki) to their ancestral homelands while working and living in different places (feitu’u kehekehe) and histories (vaha’a taimi).

The exhibition title uses the word ‘fehokotaki’ and its translation as the key concept. I invited these artists based on them all working in the related field of textiles, kupesi, sculpture, and installation. The artists were asked to create work in response to their experiences as diaspora Moana people, who hold to their traditions while adapting to temporal and mutable environments, such as in the digital vā (space–time). Through talanoa (conversation) with a larger list of artists, I chose these five multidisciplinary artists: ‘Aloisia Ngata, ‘Ahota’e’iloa Toetu’u, Vula To’ofone, David Leone Vaea, and Manuha’apai Vaeatangitau, because they work across different spaces yet still maintain a connection back home—wherever they call home.

As said, I presented work in *Fehokotaki* as well as holding a curatorial role. Drawing on my perspective and thoughts about the exhibition concept and its origins, I created sixteen A3 pieces that read as a single ngatu when assembled. My work, *‘Ofo’ofa ‘a Kui: The love of a grandmother*, talks about the conceptual significance of my relationship with kupesi and the relationship between my nena and me.

¹⁴ See <https://ngutukaka.aut.ac.nz/exhibitions/past-exhibitions/2022/fehokotaki>

¹⁵ As an artist, I take on different surnames, like this one, Kanongata’a, which is my nena’s maiden name, or Tu’ipulotu, my great-grandma’s surname. I wanted to include both women in my journey as an artist, because what I use in every aspect of my practice was taught by and gifted from my nena, the person I am named after.

¹⁶ The Vā Moana Research Cluster was formed by Leali’ifano Albert Refiti and Tina Engels-Schwarzpaul in 2012; the cluster engages Moananui thought to study notions of space and involves a far-reaching network of international scholars. It is based in Auckland University of Technology’s School of Art and Design. See <https://www.vamoana.org/about>

Using the method of frottage, the process of transferring the kupesi onto the feta'aki, which is known to me as 'the rubbing of a coin' (or as rubbings), allowed me to focus on one kupesi at a time, helping me to understand their individual stories and my thoughts behind their creation, transforming stories into forms and shapes. (Image 16)

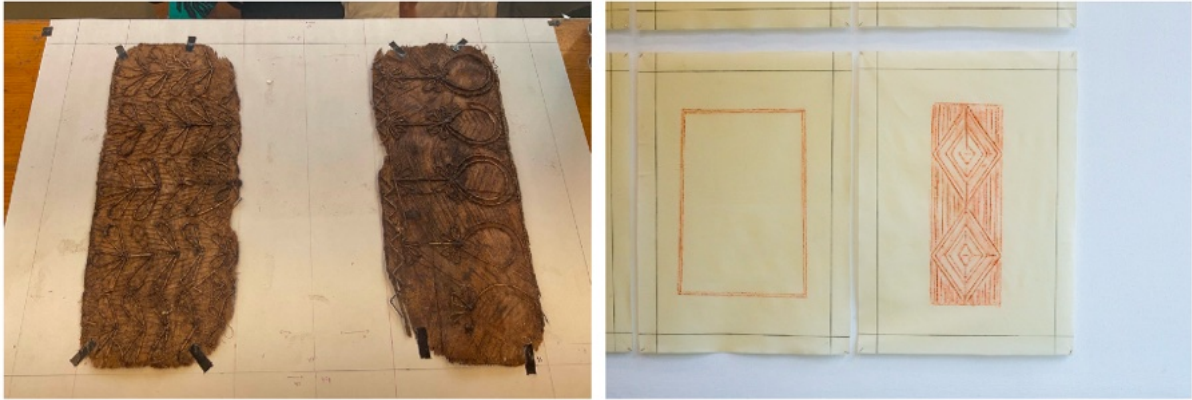


Image 16. 'Uhila Nai, the before and after of how kupesi are transferred through 'the rubbing of a coin' process, 2022. From Nena's kupesi collection and installation view, ST PAUL St Gallery (now Te Wai Ngutu Kākā).
Right image: Photograph by Emily Parr

My nena's love for our cultural craft practices and the gift that she passed on to me allows me to understand the kupesi beyond a surface understanding, their origin, and how they relate. As I work on individual kupesi, I am constantly reminded of the memories I share with my nena. Engaging with the process in this way also helps uphold our histories by sharing them with upcoming generations and new audiences through the artwork.

With 'Ofo'ofa 'a Kui, I decided to explore a different installation strategy by pinning the works in a grid on a wall instead of using suspension, as a response to the way ngatu follows a grid structure, which is designed to indicate where the kupesi will be placed and is the unit (langanga) for how we measure the length of our ngatu. I installed 'Ofo'ofa 'a Kui in a ngatu formation, showcasing the kupesi individually, in pairs, or in a set, which was dependent on the story I wanted them to tell. For example, from top to bottom, the top row speaks about the interior and exterior of a fale (house) in Pelehake. The second and third rows represent kakala (sweet-smelling flower) ornaments, which are different kinds of sisi (waist garments), one made of kakala, and the other made from pandanus leaves. Lastly, the bottom row contains stories that are based on the personal relationship I have with my family. (Image 17)



Image 17. 'Uhila Nai, 'Ofo 'ofa 'a Kui, 2022. Installation view, pepa koka'anga, rubbing process using black and brown charcoal, black T pins, 297 x 420 mm. ST PAUL St Gallery (now Te Wai Ngutu Kākā Gallery).
Photograph by Emily Parr

Project 5.

Lau'i fakatātā pea mo hono mahu'inga tukufakaholo

Matrilineal, DEPOT Artspace, Devonport, Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland (group exhibition)¹⁷

1 April – 4 May 2022

Matrilineal was a group show focused on gathering Te Moana-nui-a-Kiwa, the Great Ocean of Kiwa, or the Pacific Ocean, the centre where intergenerational knowledge sharing is vital to any art forms, continued or made by women. *Matrilineal* curator Nina Dyer invited artists whose practice was informed, inspired, or came from a place where their female ancestors taught them through inherited knowledge, methods, and ways of practising. More specifically, through weaving techniques and visual histories regarding the well-known practice of barkcloth, which in Tonga is known as nimamea'a koka'anga, the expression of feminine empowerment. The exhibition included artworks in various mediums, spanning contemporary and traditional practices, all of which embodied and upheld the stories of the women in their ancestral lines.

In responding to the exhibition concept, I created the series *Lau'i fakatātā pea mo hono mahu'inga tukufakaholo* (Image 18) by using one of the processes I learned from my grandmother and her colleagues when they got together for koka'anga—the transferring of kupesi onto the feta'aki, which, as mentioned, I call 'the rubbing of the coin'. Koka'anga provided a space for the elders to get together and exchange knowledge, learn from one another, have a good laugh, and sing.¹⁸ The group regularly got together on a set day of the week, either a Thursday or a Friday. I got to be in this space because of my nena; she was a woman of craft, mainly the craft of ngatu.

This artwork for *Matrilineal* was inspired by a booklet I made and gifted to a friend. The book contained Nena's and my kupesi designs, along with associated research listing the design, the stories, the dates, the materials they were made from, and their origins. In making this exhibition work, I produced the kupesi series based on what I'd recorded in the documentation booklet. The kupesi wall of documentation consisted of designs from my nena's collection, some from my own collection, and a couple I recognised as commonly used on ngatu across Tonga and overseas. The installation strategy was to simply pin the works to the wall in a single straight line, chosen to reflect what one langanga looks like on the table, before you move on to the next. I used this exhibition to experiment with a new installation format for the rubbings that reflected the grid structure and layout of a ngatu. While ngatu generally holds a similar visual language through its presentation, the 'reading' of it shifts depending on how much you know about ngatu and how you approach it.

¹⁷ See <https://depot.org.nz/event/matrilineal-exhibition/>

¹⁸ Koka'anga also provides children and adults with a learning space through observing and listening, which is the best approach for learning how ngatu are assembled.



Image 18. 'Uhila Nai, *Lau'i fakatātā pea mo hono mahu'inga tukufakaholo*, 2022, installation view, Depot Artspace. Photograph by Diana Hu

Project 6.

Fepōtalanoa'aki pea mo 'eku fanga kui: In conversation with my great-great-great-grannies

Iteration 1, Blue Oyster Art Project Space, Ōtepoti Dunedin¹⁹

6 August – 10 September 2023

Iteration 2, Papakura Art Gallery, Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland²⁰

12 August – 23 September 2023

Fepōtalanoa'aki pea mo 'eku fanga kui: In conversation with my great-great-great-grannies

presented a series of works that utilise the visual language of ancient Tonga and today's lea faka-Tonga (Tongan language) to explore the tala tukufakaholo (oral transmission of knowledge) about the hou'eiki fafine in my family and the continuation of their craft of nimamea'a koka'anga (the crafts of ngatu making).

The title, *Fepōtalanoa'aki pea mo 'eku fanga kui*, speaks metaphorically to the idea of kupesi as a way to be in conversation and connect with the hou'eiki fafine in my family, specifically those who are from our past generations and the village of Pelehake. (Image 19) The artwork draws on the intrinsic relationships that exist between people (the hou'eiki fafine) and materials and processes (traditional), and on how, in relationship, they share and continue the craft of hiapo. Furthermore, contemporary materials, such as the pepa koka'anga (vylene paper), have been adapted and integrated into practice for the same purposes. The role of materials, as mentioned previously regarding the transmission of knowledge, is central to writing cultural histories. This project focused heavily on these relationships through the fonua (land/people/environment), and how makers can embed stories about historical events around the making and actively share time collectively working with materials and processes, crafting that requires hours of making.

Fepōtalanoa'aki pea mo 'eku fanga kui explored the creative, conversational, and intergenerational space that is created by gathering together for koka'anga, the process of assembling pieces of feta'aki (undyed barkcloth) to create one large-scale ngatu that can be between a scale of five to one hundred metres in length, depending on the ngatu function and the desire of the lead maker.

¹⁹ See <https://blueoyster.org.nz/exhibitions/fepotalanoaaki-pea-mo-eku-fanga-kui-in-conversatio/>

²⁰ See <https://www.eventfinda.co.nz/2023/exhibition-opening-fepotalanoalaki-pea-mo-leku-fanga-kui/auckland/papakura>



Image 19. 'Uhila Nai, *Younger and Older generations in conversation with one another*, 2023. Screen-printed on pepa koka'anga, papa koka'anga (wood) with kupesi, kafa, wire, installation view, Blue Oyster Art Project Space.

This project echoed the relationship between the hou'eiki fafine and the to'utupu (youth) through the concept of fonua. Fonua is an approach that works from knowing how untreated natural materials are planted, in the context of where the hou'eiki fafine source their plants. I mention this because with 'i he nofo 'a kainga (Tongan ways of living), hou'eiki fafine (elder women) cannot inherit the land, only the hou'eiki tangata, the men. This is a key context for this work, because, in this show, I also exhibited the work, *Ko homau fonua ne tala'ofa mai 'aki: Our Heartland – Our Promise Land*, which is a series of maps of Pelehake drawn from the years 1926–2022, which I responded to as if each map was land that my female ancestors owned (on Nena's side of the family). Each map holds a different kupesi, which is positioned based on a story I had heard and encountered about these women. There were three sets of work in this project responding to fonua: the kupesi series in relation to materials, the series of maps across different timelines, and the kupesi as a result of the veteki method. Here, the combined use of mapping and memories speaks to the idea of repositioning. Mapping the stories based on memories of the women in my family is to speak to the relationship between the elders and the younger generations, which is represented through the kupesi and the screen-printed pepa koka'anga. (Image 20)



Image 20. 'Uhila Nai, *Ko homau fonua ne tala'ofa mai 'aki: Our Heartland – Our Promise Land*, 2023. Screen-printed on pepa koka'anga, wood, silver pins and wire. Installation view, Blue Oyster Art Project Space.

The two iterations of *Fepōtalanōa'aki pea mo 'eku fanga kui* were installed slightly differently in the two gallery spaces; the scale of Papakura Art Gallery allowed for a second table. The Gallery 1 space at Papakura is used for community workshops, artist talks, and related events during exhibitions. Therefore, instead of the community using the standard trestle tables, I decided to build a second 'makers' table for running workshops related to the exhibition, which mimicked the setting of the koka'anga as a learning space. This gave me the opportunity to share and teach the ngatu methods of transferring kupesi onto feta'aki or pepa koka'anga in workshops in a way that conceptually linked my artmaking with intergenerational knowledge as koloa. (Image 21)



Image 21. 'Uhila Nai, *Kupesi transferred workshop*, 2023. Kupesi, black and brown charcoal. Workshop view, Papakura Art Gallery.

Project 7.

Malu ‘a Fonua (7 am)

Paper Anniversary (Window Gallery), Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland²¹

18 May – 7 June 2023

The exhibition *Malu ‘a Fonua (7 am)* focused on a personal life-experience based on three months I spent in my childhood village of Pelehake, from January to March 2023. I had the chance to spend some time back home and investigate four concepts I’d been exploring in my PhD project. Driven by four conceptual arrangements of Tongan ways of practising—hiki fonua (migration), fakafetongi (exchange), lea fakafonua (language), and fononga pe folau (to set out or travelling)—*Malu ‘a Fonua (7 am)* attended to these movements through Tongan thoughts and expressed an ancient reading of time. The moment (roughly equating to 7 am) gestured to new beginnings and to the time my family departs for work every day in Tonga. Unfolding across divergent modes of art and language, *Malu ‘a Fonua (7 am)* aimed to speak to my journey of returning home to my childhood village.

This exhibition followed a different structure: the works changed every week on Sunday night for the duration of the show, mimicking the four arrangements. This changeover in the window space occurred on 28 May and 4, 11, and 18 June. I based the first work (a wooden stamp) on the concept of fakafetongi (exchange), examining the meaning and practice of migration, drawing on the exchange of familiar foods across borders between Tonga and Aotearoa. The recurring forms of *Colocasia esculenta* (taro) and *Dioscorea alata* (yam) leaves, and *Cocos nucifera* (coconut), describe this bounty of exchange and routine encounters with the Customs and Immigration Control authorities as I traced bureaucratic interactions throughout *Malu ‘a Fonua (7 am)*. (Image 22)

The second installation was based on the concept of hiki fonua and discussed my migration to Tonga for these three months, during which I documented the different architectural styles within the village where I grew up. I created a series of screen-prints focused on a Tongan fale, influenced and built with Western materials, making comparisons through its structure and material use, indicating how I employ Tongan traditional ways of doing things while using contemporary materials to bring it to life. (Image 23)

²¹ See <https://www.instagram.com/paperanniversary.aotearoa/>

Paper Anniversary was a gallery at 454 Karangahape Road that ran from 28 May 2022 to 18 June 2024.



Image 22. *Fakafetongi*, 2023. Pepa koka'anga, screen-printed on pepa koka'anga, kafa, safety pins, engraved wooden stamps, wooden dowel. Installation view, Paper Anniversary.



Image 23. 'Uhila Nai, *Hiki Fonua*, 2023. Pepa koka'anga, screen-printed ink, kafa and safety pins. Installation view, Paper Anniversary.

The third installation (vinyl-cut print) explored the concept of *lea fakafonua*, and the multiplicities of language formed through interactions between written and spoken English and Tongan. This work evoked *lea fakafonua* through the inclusion of funeral garments and physical testaments of loss, reflecting a duality of language within Tonga, as evidenced by the deceased's favoured biblical verses, which were presented alongside Tongan expressions of tribute. (Image 24)



Image 24. 'Uhila Nai, *Lea Faka-fonua*, 2023. Black calico, vinyl, kafa, safety pins and wooden dowel. Installation view, Paper Anniversary.

Following this attention to language, the fourth installation (screen-printed airline boarding passes) explored *fononga pe folau*, which is considered the act of travelling and represents the journey I undertook to speak to the elders. The graphic language of my boarding passes was processed through digital textile printing onto *feta'aki*, as a meditation on embedded time and the place I travel to, Pelehake. (Image 25)

Malu 'a Fonua (7 am) responded to traditional Tongan practices through installation, invoking a spatial expression grounded in Tongan thought. Central to the arrangement of the four consecutive installations was *tauaki-tautau* (to hang or to dry), the process of hanging to dry, which provided a conceptual structure for reimagining the gallery's hanging apparatus. As noted in my artist statement, the window vitrine of Paper Anniversary hosted this shifting epistemology, imagining a practice of Tongan thought behind the pane, between the public and the works.

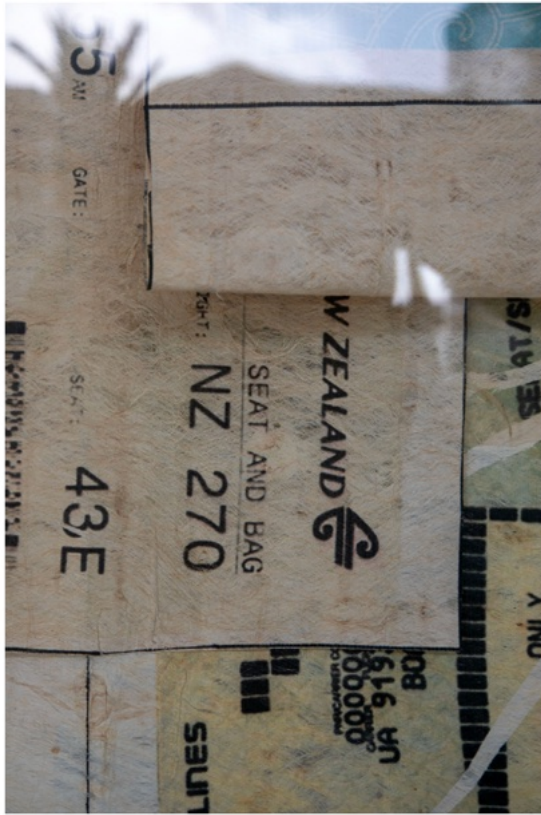


Image 25. 'Uhila Nai, *Fononga pe folau*, 2023. Digital printing, feta'aki, boarding pass printed in coloured, kafa and wooden dowel. Installation view, Paper Anniversary.

Project 8.

The Dead Is Alive – We Are Our History

Motherland/Homeland, ENJOY Contemporary Art Space, Pōneke Wellington²²

Curator: Bonni Luafutu-Tamati

Artists: Pilimilose Manu, 'Uhila Moe Langi Nai, Emily Parr, Monica Paterson, and Siliga David Setoga

8 July – 2 September 2023

In responding to the exhibition title of *Motherland/Homeland*, this work, *The Dead Is Alive – We Are Our History*, took the concept and separated it into three parts: mother, home, and land. Within these three words, I found ways to create works that, when viewed holistically, reflected the exhibition's conceptual emphasis.

For the work dedicated to 'mother', the *Nima poto* piece, I explored the idea of learning how to process hiapo by observing my grandmother, who was my mother figure while I was growing up. 'Nima poto' refers to someone skilled in handicrafts, or, in the definition I grew up with, someone who is good and quick at picking up skills when learning anything unfamiliar. It is an essential quality, because not just anyone can be called Nima poto; sometimes only a maker will notice those hands. I learned ngatu-making processes by observing my nena's hand movements and gestures. The movements showed me how to get from one point to another, without verbal explanation. I used my aunt's hand gestures to reference what I remembered of Nena's process of rolling out the hiapo. This is why I especially connect with *Nima poto*: it is an expression of those exact moments of seeing my nena and her friends engaged and involved in making. (Image 26)

With *They were always returning home*, the work that explored "home", I used the boarding passes that belonged to my nena and me for the imagery. Both passes showed we were returning home to Tonga, but on different occasions, years, and airlines. My nena's ticket indicated she was returning home from Auckland on 25 January 1996, and mine showed that I left Auckland for Tonga on 7 April 2014, returning home the day after Nena's passing to say my final goodbye. It is interesting to note that *They were always returning home* speaks about fonua, the idea of home, but the boarding pass itself can be seen as just a pass for getting from one destination to another. One returns to fonua (land), and the other returns to what is physically seen as fonua, which is my nena's 'api (home). We often do not pay attention to the details of what a boarding pass carries, beyond its initial use. I printed it as an image of the object because it references travel, migration, and people entering and exiting places. Its significance is somewhat private, though; it holds stories and allows my nena and me to return home. No matter where we are in the world, we always return home to that space, the place where it all started. "They are always returning home" is a saying we use when referring to our ancestors, the people

²² See <https://enjoy.org.nz/motherland-homeland>

who left before us and have returned to fonua. It is how we navigate through places and history. So the boarding pass allows us to navigate not just within and among the islands, but to all the outer islands, which are known as fonua muli (a foreign country). (Image 27)



Image 26. 'Uhila Nai, *Nima Poto*, 2023. Installation view, ENJOY. Photograph by Cheska Brown

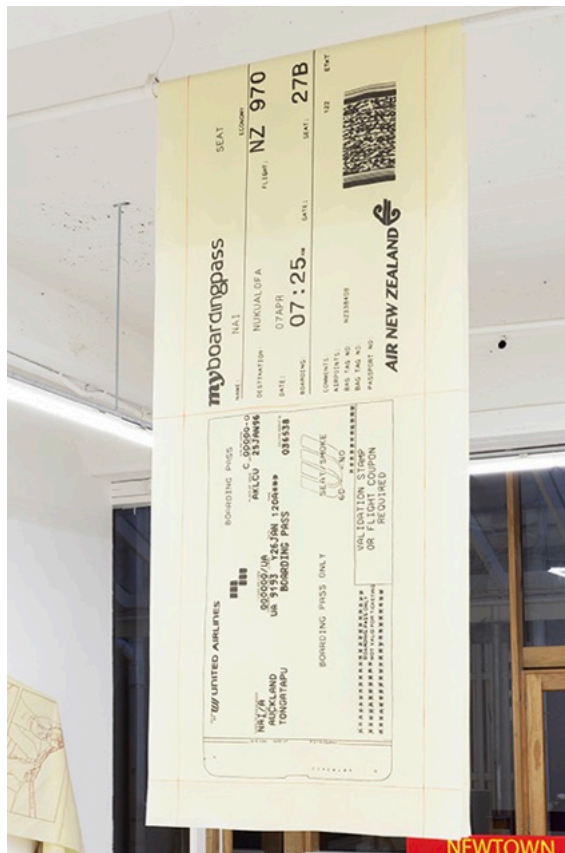


Image 27. 'Uhila Nai, *They were always returning home*, 2023. Installation view, ENJOY. Photograph by Cheska Brown

The work *'Api Tukuhaui* responds to the concept of land, which talks about the space where I grew up with my nena, at the house my grandpa built. I chose this particular section of our home not only because grandpa build it, but because it was influenced by the structure of our fale Tonga (Tongan traditional house) and the use of contemporary building materials. This part was Nena's room, where she stored all her many boxes filled with contemporary textiles such as tupenu (various lengths of printed fabric), monomono (quilts), and so on. And it was the space where she stacked all her koloa—her textiles such as ngatu, fala, and kie.²³ This land that held a living archive built over time became a learning space for making and exchange. I saw it as a space that catered for specific events, but also as somewhere the fonua has been, too, witnessing all the changes, from people entering and leaving to changes in architecture and the environment. (Image 28) As a living archive, this mother/home/land space became the primary area from which this practice came. The works of *The Dead Is Alive – We Are Our History* were

²³ Ngatu (barkcloth), fala (weaving mat), kie (another type of mat, but finer).

conceived of as one work in three parts, all intertwined in the context of the exhibition title, *Motherland/Homeland*.

The artworks were installed by the curator, Bonni Luafutu-Tamati; it was the first time I had not had a hand in how my work was situated in space. It was fascinating, because the install wasn't what I expected, nor my usual mode of presentation. Two different installation modes were used. *They were always returning home* was installed and suspended from the ceiling on a pipe. *'Api Tukahau* and *Nima poto* were installed as objects, with a couple of sticks used as supports to hold the draping screen-prints against the wall. It was a curious experience, because I wasn't able to read the works in context of their making; I didn't recognise my works. I couldn't comprehend their installation because, in my view, they no longer had a connection to each other. This experiencing of the work consolidated for me how my mode of installing work primarily references the tauaki-tautau process used in the making of hiapo, where it always returns to ngatu and my making apparatuses. Tauaki-tautau helps me position myself back home, no matter where the work is being exhibited. And it is a reminder of the labour that comes with any of the processes before koka'anga happens.



Image 28. 'Uhila Nai, *'Api Tukahau*, 2023.
Installation view, ENJOY. Photograph by Cheska Brown

Project 9.

Nima 'o e Ngaahi Fa'ē

Tukufakaholo: Tongan Contemporary, Bergman Gallery, Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland (group exhibition)²⁴

10 August – 2 September 2023

Nima 'o e Ngaahi Fa'ē (Image 29) is a series of works inspired by the hand gestures and movements of makers throughout the different stages of processing the hiapo. For this series, I collected different hand gestures from documentation of two distinct processes of fakapā tutu (pounding – beating the inner mulberry) and fohi tutu (stripping off the inner bark). To make the imagery, I traced the outline, intending to share the learning through a single frame, but I fortuitously and accidentally layered the traced images during scanning. The layered hand gestures showed the process in slow motion, evoking the idea of time. I then decided to screen-print the hand gestures onto the feta'aki (undyed barkcloth), because the process I had traced demonstrated how feta'aki is made. The hand gestures were printed onto six A3-sized feta'aki using brown ink as the chosen colour. *Nima 'o e Ngaahi Fa'ē* shares the way that knowledge has been passed down to me through the movement of hand gestures, which coincide with how the body responds to the way the materials need to be processed.

'Tukufakaholo' can be interpreted in different ways, depending on the context. Here, the term was used as a provocation for us, as Tongan artists, to respond to within the context of our own ways of practising. The exhibition text, written by academic and artist Dr John Veā, states:

in the Tongan dictionary tukufakaholo translated in a Pālangi context, is defined as inheritance or hereditary but in a Tongan world view the definition is much broader than that. Tukufakaholo could be translated as to pass knowledge/wisdom on, where to pass does not just mean us or the future, it has temporal meaning that relates to the past, the present and the future. In this we become conduits for ways of being and knowledge repositories through our art practice.²⁵

In addition, Rev Paula Onoafe Latu, in his 2017 PhD thesis "Ko e Tala-Tukufakaholo 'o Tonga: An Alter-Native Holistic Historiography of Tonga History from Their Own Traditional Oral Culture and Through Their Own People's Eyes," describes the term 'tukufakaholo' from H.M. Queen Sālote's perspective, "where she defines Tongan historiography in the *Tala-tukufakaholo* framework as the way these stories were orally passed down through the ages."²⁶ She states, "Ko e tala na'e 'ikai hano tohi, ka e kei tukufakaholo mei he ngutu ki he telinga, mei he matu'a ki he fanau. (Their chronicles/narratives were not documented on (paper) or (in) books but were passed down from

²⁴ See <https://bergmangallery.com/exhibitions/49-tukufakaholo-group-exhibition/overview/>

²⁵ John Veā, "tukufakaholo: Tongan Contemporary," in Benjamin Work, curator, *Tukufakaholo: Tongan Contemporary*, ed. Benny Chang (Bergman Gallery, 2023), 1.

²⁶ Paula Onoafe Latu, "Ko e Tala-Tukufakaholo 'o Tonga: An Alter-Native Holistic Historiography of Tonga History from Their Own Traditional Oral Culture and Through Their Own People's Eyes" (PhD thesis, University of Canterbury, Christchurch, 2017), 16. UC Research Repository. <https://ir.canterbury.ac.nz/items/79ecfcad-1740-406c-839b-9bb8744bffd>. <http://hdl.handle.net/10092/14672>

mouth(s) to ear(s), by fathers to their children.”²⁷ Similarly, in relation to this quote, knowledge that I had received, which is embedded in the making of *Nima ‘o e Ngaahi Fa’ē*, was through the tala tukufakaholo passed down via observation, not mouth to ear. My nena’s ways of sharing knowledge weren’t always verbal, because, as a child, it was hard to learn by listening, and she’d say I asked way too many questions. With *Nima ‘o e Ngaahi Fa’ē*, I intended to document the process of making to provide a way of reading the order, almost like an instruction. In a sense, I wanted the audience to experience the idea of listening to narratives passed from mouth to ear, but through seeing a physical document.



Image 29. Uhila Nai, *Nima ‘o e ngaahi fa’ē*, 2023. Feta‘aki, brown screen-printed ink and brown charcoal. Installation view, Bergman Gallery. Photograph by Raymond Sagapolutele

²⁷ Latu, *Ko e Tala-Tukufakaholo ‘o Tonga*, 16.

Project 10.

U NI NANG

Ripples of the Pacific International Artist Residency, Taiwan

Residency site: Abus Bunun Traditional Weaving Workshop, Taitung, Yangping Township

1 September – 12 October 2023

In 2023 I was invited to participate in the Ripples of the Pacific International Artist Residency in Taiwan, alongside artists from Malaysia and the Philippines. This one-month residency focuses on craft arts, with practitioners working in pottery, wood, soil, and woven fibre-based materials. I was placed at the Abus Bunun Traditional Workshop in Yanping Township, Taitung, owned by Takis Laving A-bus, a master weaver. (Image 30) This residency promotes the Bunun arts by teaching traditional handloom techniques, handcrafting with materials, using plant dyes, and growing ramie. (Image 31)



Image 30. Abus Bunun Traditional Workshop in Yanping Township, Taitung, Takis Laving A-bus and myself, 2023.



Image 31. Abus workshop: ramie fibre, air dry dyed ramie fibre, handloom shot, traditional Bunun costume.

I was invited to do the Abus residency because of the nature of my project, which involves gathering and sourcing materials set in soil, similar to how the Bunun costume workshop relates to materials. As a ngatu artist, I took the opportunity to extend my practice by exploring how it would sit in a different cultural context alongside Taiwanese Indigenous makers. I wanted to draw on the relationship between people and materials. While there, I questioned the role materials can methodologically play for a maker. I found some answers while exploring Taitung during my stay. I approached the residency with the mindset of sharing Tongan processes of how we create our kupesi. This idea of sharing and exchanging knowledge between makers from different backgrounds and unfamiliar practices was central to my experience at Abus.

During my residency, I encountered familiar plants/materials, practices, (Images 32–33) and languages that were used in ways similar to Tongan practices but were processed differently. For example, I learned that in Taiwan weavers use the stems of the peach plant leaves (Image 34) to weave with, while in Tonga we use lou‘akau (pandanus leaves). Interestingly, lou‘akau exists in Taitung, but is only found by the seaside. According to A-bus, they use lou‘akau, but they don’t really know the best way to process it, to make it easy to use for weaving mats, baskets, etc. With lou‘akau, they use the same methods we do in Tonga, as in, they boil it in hot water, then let it sun-dry, but they don’t cut the thorns on the edges off both sides or roll it into bundles. I found

it interesting listening to how A-bus described the process. It was a wonderful experience, like listening to the elders or my nena sharing their making process with me.



Image 32. Familiar plants/materials that also found in Tonga. They are used in the practice of ngatu making, like tuitui (candle nut), hiapo (mulberry) and fā (dry pandanus fruit) and tui kakala like the kaloni, ‘olive and sī.



Image 33. Practice of barkcloth from an indigenous Taiwanese perspective demonstrated by A-bus and Meilan Chiu, who was an intern at the time, 2023.



Image 34. Peach leaves outside Abus workshop.

Another similarity was their barkcloth practice. It was this knowledge area that inspired me to apply for the residency, as I wanted to observe their Taiwanese methods of hiapo making. The hiapo (mulberry plant) in Taiwan grows naturally without much tending required. In Tonga, we plant our hiapo and have to oversee its growth. We must cut off excess branches to encourage the plants to grow to a greater height. I observed the differences in how hiapo plants grow and are used in both cultures. A-bus and two makers from Dulan village, (Image 35) who ran their

barkcloth store at the Nanhai Art Gallery, showed me their barkcloth practices. They strip the outer bark from the inner bark, like we strip the outer green layer, but instead, they then soak it in water for a day or so, making it easier for the outer layer to come off. The soaking process helps soften the tutu (inner bark), making it easier to beat. In Taiwan, barkcloth is used to make clothes, hats, and decorations for bags and lampshades, all of which are small-scale objects. (Image 36) After witnessing the craft of barkcloth at the Nanhai Art Gallery, it became clear why the mulberry plants are grown the way they are. In harvesting their hiapo, they cut it into small pieces, depending on the type of clothes they are making, and then stitch them together to create larger pieces of clothing. This highlights the significance of scale in the process and makes me think about how scale is influential in all parts of the making process, depending on the purpose of the final piece. For instance, because barkcloth is used for clothing in Taiwan, the mulberry trees don't require their branches cut to promote growth. Apparently, some people do let branches grow to a diameter wider than 12cm, though, which is the standard of Tongan hiapo. We want the hiapo to grow taller, because we are making textiles that can be up to 100 metres in length. Tongan ngatu is seen as a larger-scale textile for use on occasions. In Tongan culture, it is presented as koloa (a treasure or a gift), and is used for a blanket, or for wrapping the dead, or as a form of mohe'anga (bed) where you stack lots of ngatu together.



Image 35. Asi Faki and Shen Taimu, Nanhai Art Gallery, barkcloth makers from the Amis people tribe, 2023.



Image 36. Nanhai Art Gallery, 2023. Clothes: vest, skirt, top etc. hats, lampshades, vest with embroidered pattern, varieties of bags, art works, bottle holder.

During the residency, I created three new kupesi. While collecting the materials, I faced issues sourcing them from the coconut tree. In Yangping Township, there weren't any young coconut trees that I could easily take from. I managed to get the coconut mid-rib, but the coconut fibre was hard to source. Therefore, I decided to use tutu as my base, since I had access to hiapo. I have never seen a kupesi using tutu as the base. With the help of A-bus and her friend Meilan Chiu, we could source a hiapo that stood 1 to 3 metres tall and was thick enough to use.

A-bus's daughter Langwuz, and her husband, whom I called Uncle Lu (Image 37), found out I was having trouble finding the coconut fibre I needed. So we went on a trip across the villages and the coastline, stopping by Fugang Village on the east side of the Coast National Scenic Area, Beinan Township, and Fushan Village. While visiting the Art Villages Museum, we came across a field of coconut trees. We stopped there, and with Uncle Lu's help I was able to collect a reasonable amount of coconut fibre for the base of my kupesi.

The artwork I created during the residency was shaped by my experience staying under the care of A-bus and her family. It felt familiar, like reliving an old memory through different people, places, and experiences. I designed a kupesi inspired by traditional Taiwanese culture and Tongan dance costumes. I chose to focus on costumes because A-bus's store was filled with Indigenous costumes and cultural patterns. While researching in the store for patterns similar to our Tongan ones, I couldn't find any direct matches, so that led me to explore our own cultural costumes for visual and symbolic similarities.



Image 37. Dengxian Bridge Recreation Area, Uncle Lu, Langwuz Xiaoyu, and myself.

I designed three kupesi; the first design was based on a Taiwanese female headband and a male necklace, along with Tongan kahoā kakala (floral necklace) and sisi kakala (floral waist garments). I chose to base my kupesi on cultural costumes because both traditions feature repeated patterns that vary in length depending on the wearer. I selected the most prominent pattern from

both costumes and used them as the foundation for the design. The second design was a plant motif taken from the Tongan kakala. The small beads from the Bunun female headband resemble the same shapes found in the Tongan kahoa kakala, while the third design included diamond shapes drawn from the Bunun tribes' male necklace. Combining these three motifs, I created a kupesi that speaks to the adornment worn around our waist and neck during cultural events and its position on the body. (Image 38).

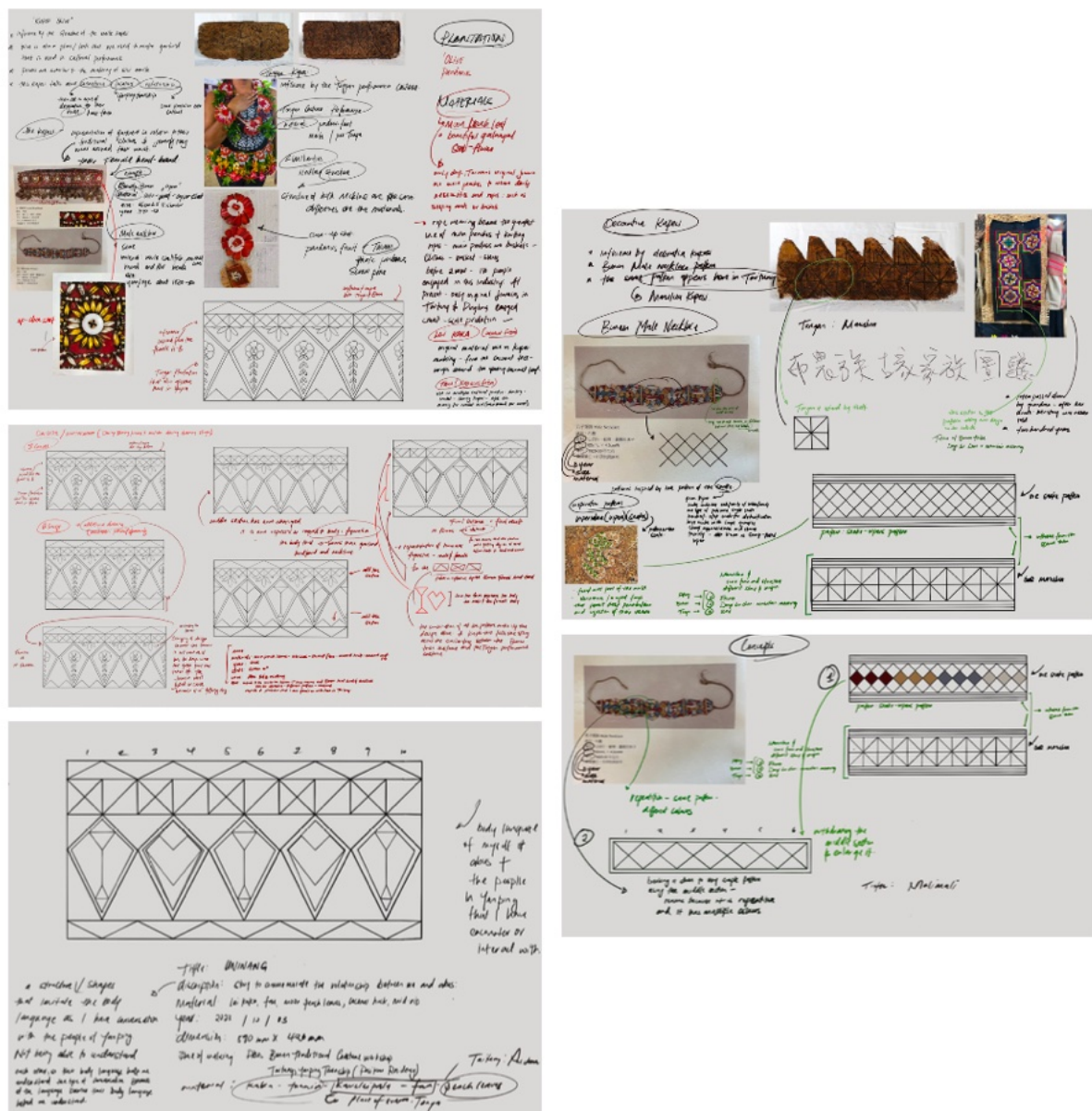


Image 38. 'Uhila Nai, drawing, planning and designing the *UNI NANG* kupesi, 2023. Digital drawing, Procreate Programme.

The kupesi stencil was made from a mixture of Tongan and Taiwanese materials. The first kupesi was a combination of tu'aniu (coconut midrib) twirled in kavele'ipulu (coconut husk), with a base of two layers of lau'i kaka (coconut fibre wrapped around a young coconut leaf) and peach leaves. It is unusual, but since that is the material they used for weaving, and lou'akau is what we use for weaving, I thought it would be conceptually interesting to try it out. I used tutu as my base to make the kupesi, since I didn't have access to lai kaka in Taiwan.

A required outcome of the residency was to produce an artwork. I presented two rubbings on a pepa koka'anga, titled *U NI NANG*, which means thank you in Bunun languages, as a way of thanking A-bus, her family, and everyone that was a part of my residency. (Image 39)

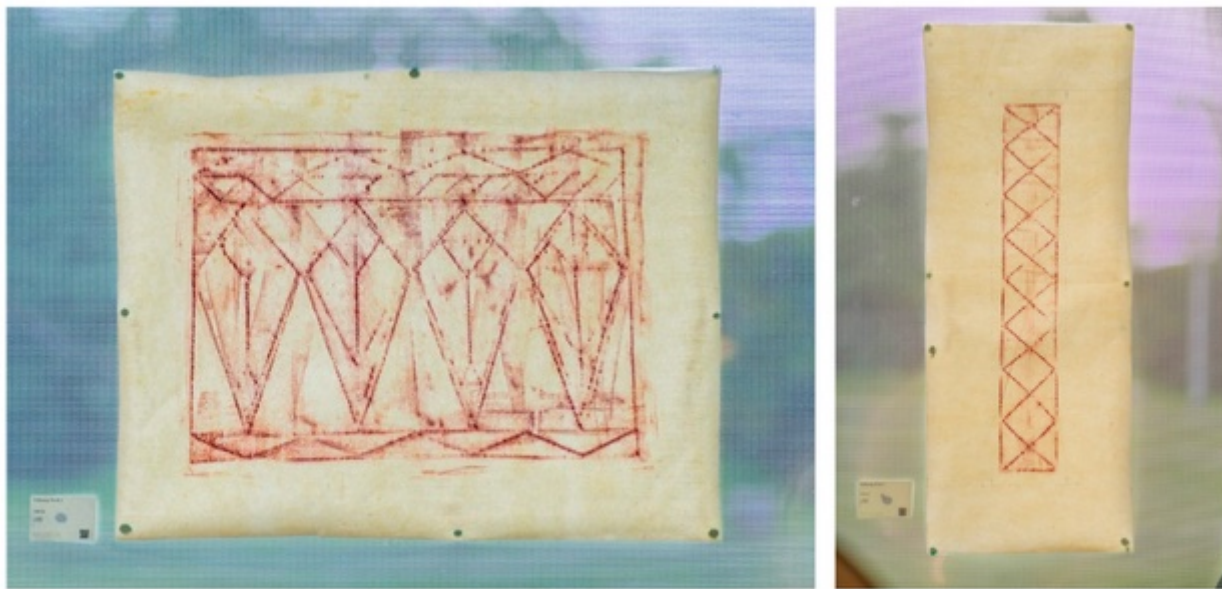


Image 39. 'Uhila Nai, *U NI NANG*, 2023. Pepa koka'anga and charcoal. Photograph by Yuting

Project 11.

Manatu-Melie: Honouring the Past

Māngere Arts Centre – Ngā Tohu o Uenuku, Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland (two-person exhibition)²⁸
23 March – 11 May 2024

The exhibition *Manatu-Melie: Honouring the Past* was an invitation from Dr Sione Faletau to participate in a Tongan show alongside artist Kato'one Koloamatangi, responding to the concept of manatu-melie, a term not commonly used in everyday conversation. It was interesting to see how manatu-melie was translated in this context, as it means honouring the past. I personally translate it as a form of memory, specifically memories of the past. In this exhibition, honouring the past carries the weight of what manatu-melie is within the context of Tongan knowledge systems. I accepted the invitation as an opportunity to celebrate the experiences and the lives of the people I stayed with during my time in Yangping Township, Taitung, Taiwan, for the Ripples of the Pacific International Artist Residency in September–October 2023.

In relation to manatu-melie, I created a four-part body of work that includes a series of pepa koka'anga screen-prints and photos documenting the residency in Taiwan. The first work, *Village life*, consists of 100 individual Fuji Instax film polaroids of familiar plants that also exist in Tonga, friends and family I met, materials and processes of barkcloth making, and other things that struck me as interesting, familiar, or that we have in Tonga. In essence, it is a collection of memories from my stay in Taiwan across Taitung and Taipei. These Instax prints document encounters I had with elders across the villages of different tribes, familiar plantations and tools used in barkcloth and weaving practices, and streets that reminded me of home in Tonga.

The second work, *Konga ngatu*, is a series of four 6000 × 900mm screen-printed textiles that respond to street signs encountered during walks in Yángíng Xiāng villages. (Image 40) These works reflect everyday life during my residency, as I experienced it travelling between the cities of Taitung, Taipei, and Hualien. The special moments that I shared with the elders, exchanging conversation and practices. The excitement of learning how similar the languages were between Bunun, Paiwan, and Buyuma, which I learned from the people I met—the Bunun language from A-bus and her family, and Paiwan and Buyuma from a Taiwanese singer, Kimbo, whom I referred to as my Taiwanese father, simply because of learning from each other's languages. Encountering Taiwanese barkcloth practice for the first time and visiting Dulan, where I got to see one of the tribes in Taiwan, known as the Amis people, who predominantly practice it.

²⁸ See Instagram account @mangereartscentre: <https://www.instagram.com/mangereartscentre/>



Image 40. 'Uhila Nai, *Konga ngatu*: street/welcome signs. Train tickets travelling between Taitung, Taipei and Hualien. Taiwanese languages spoken in the Bunun, Paiwan and Buyuma tribes. Mixture of barkcloth process used in Tonga and the Amis People. 2024. Screen-printed of pepa koka'anga, wire, silver pins and wood.

The third work, *U ni nang A-bus*, a 4000 × 1800mm pepa koka'anga screen-printed ngatu, is based on what I understood from an everyday conversation about materials, plantations, sightseeing, and exchanging practices of weaving and barkcloth, and food with my mentor, A-bus. Though we used Google Translate to communicate with each other, body language and shared moments helped us to bridge gaps in our understanding. (Image 41)

The fourth work is *Sisi Kakala 'o Tonga Hahake*, the exact dimensions of *U ni nang A-bus*, which is based on both Tongan and Taiwanese adornments – the Bunun female headband and male necklace, and the Tongan dance ornaments, kahoā and sisi kakala (floral necklace and waist garment). These two works, which I designed at the end of 2023, came about as a result of my residency work. (Image 42)

The installation process for this exhibition was one of my favourites. The Māngere Arts Centre exhibition space is large and cavernous with a high ceiling (perfect for my pepa koka'anga screen-printed ngatu). After spending time in the space and testing layouts, I developed a connection to the space and found a way for the works to sit comfortably within it. In designing the show, I spent a lot of time testing how I would showcase *Village life*, as it was my first time using photographs as a medium in my practice. The idea of including Polaroid images in this show was to share the memories from my residency. It was an interesting challenge to position photography alongside my screen-printed textiles, especially with their radical scale difference.



Image 41/42. ‘Uhila Nai, *U ni nang & Sisi Kakala ‘o Tonga Hahake*, 2024.
Screen-printed on pepa koka‘anga.

To resolve this, I decided to install the Fuji Instax film polaroids on a long wooden shelf with a crevice cut into it lengthwise for the photos to rest in, attached to the wall at mantelpiece height, facing toward the suspended pepa koka‘anga screen-prints. This created a visual dialogue between the documentation and larger works. (Image 43)

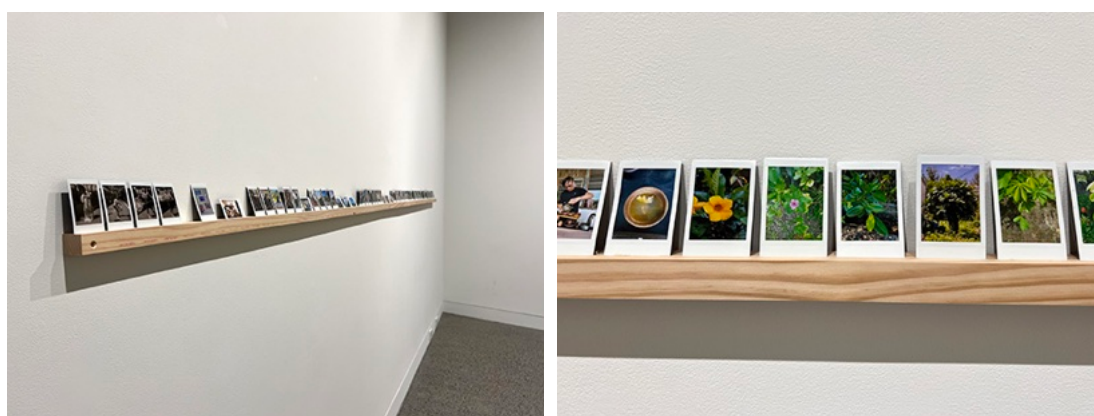


Image 43. ‘Uhila Nai, *Village Life*, 2024. Fuji Instax film.

For the suspended works, the *Konga ngatu* series, *U ni nang A-bus*, and *Sisi Kakala ‘o Tonga Hahake*, I used the method of tauaki-tautau. The *Konga ngatu* series of large, screen-printed

textiles was suspended from the ceiling and installed in a diagonally angled row, facing the entrance. The intention was that as visitors entered the space, they would encounter the first piece, which featured street signs. This set the scene for the exhibition, and as viewers moved closer to the second entrance, each piece and 'slice of everyday life' would gradually get revealed. This progression mirrored my experience in Taiwan, where each street sign welcomed me into a new space. (Image 44)

U ni nang A-bus and *Sisi Kakala 'o Tonga Hahake* were hung on the back wall facing toward the entrance. From that vantage point, visitors could take in the full view of the exhibition and experience my Taitung residency.



Image 44. 'Uhila Nai, Installation view of *'slice of everyday life'* back in Yangping Township, 2024.

Project 12.

Hala Kafa

Vaiei Tupuna, Te Pātaka Toi Adam Art Gallery, Pōneke Wellington (group exhibition)²⁹

5 October – 15 December 2024

The title of this series of pepa koka'anga screen-prints is *Hala Kafa*, a term borrowed from the language of ngatu. In Tongan, hala kafa refers to the middle section, or centre, of a ngatu. This series of ngatu was inspired by a 24-metre launima³⁰ installed in the Lower Chartwell Gallery at Te Pātaka Toi Adam Art Gallery. The ngatu was a gift to Victoria University from the late Tongan philosopher, historian, and educator Futa Helu (1934–2010), whom the University of the South Pacific awarded an honorary doctorate. In October 2023, on the same day of my return from the Taiwan residency to Tāmaki Makaurau, I caught a flight down to Pōneke for a site visit to have a conversation with the ngatu tāhina. Memories arose for me due to the interaction of the materiality, the kupesi, and how old the ngatu was. The material aspect especially, as it was made of two layers of feta'aki, and because it is so rare to see ngatungatu (double layers of undyed barkcloth). It was also a special experience to see a ngatu tāhina made by the hands of the elder generations.

Encountering a ngatu made without any contemporary materials or processes immediately reminded me of my nena and her koka'anga group. It was fascinating to encounter a ngatungatu, in contrast to the ngatu pepa, which is more common practice these days (layers of feta'aki on the top layer and vylene paper on the bottom). During my brief time spent with the ngatu tāhina, I noticed one of the designed kupesi: a kupesi manulua. Excitedly, I recognised it from the kupesi I inherited from Nena.

In the Tongan context, gifting koloa shows respect or kindness. Knowing how this ngatu came to be in the university collection, I became interested in the concept of gifting. It gave me the idea of creating a work that not only responds to the scale of the ngatu but also directly to the makers of the ngatu, albeit, in this instance, they are unknown.

Hala Kafa (Image 45) is a gift to all the hou'eiki fafine, our ancestors who have gone before us, the people who were here to continue the practice, and the elders involved in making this 24-metre ngatu tāhina. To acknowledge the labour of their work, I redesigned a series of kupesi using the kupesi they had chosen. I presented it through a different lens capturing how I view, understand, and design kupesi, versus how they would have done it during their time. I grew up with most of these traditional kupesi, so I am familiar with their stories through my nena. By making this work in response to the ngatu tāhina, I am looking into the past to create for the future, and yet the past is still involved and exists in the future.

²⁹ See <https://www.adamartgallery.nz/exhibitions/archive/2024/vaiei-tupuna>

³⁰ Ngatu are around 24 langanga upwards. The elders would often refer to them as launima, even though launima are 50 langanga.



Image 45. 'Uhila Nai, *Hala Kafa*, 2024. Screen-printed kupesi on pepa koka'anga, silver pins.
Photograph by Ted Whitaker

Konga II:

Tupu'anga – The family history of the project

In this chapter I will discuss the 'place of origin' of the knowledge for this research, *Tohi Kumi Koloa – Ko e tohi fepōtalanoa'aki 'eni pea mo 'eku fanga kui*, and the many forms of tukufakaholo (knowledge, archival documents, bloodlines, tools and stories) which were handed down from generation to generation³¹ through cultural contexts, and the practice. I do so by discussing the history of knowledge (the field), and where it is located within Pelehake to outline its position in the project, as 'new' knowledge coming into the academic knowledge system. This chapter, *Tupu'anga – The family history of the project*, outlines the people who weave in and out of the different aspects of the project—those who have contributed to how knowledge is handed down through Tongan ways of doing things. These people are also the makers who participate in koka'anga, and in helping to uncover information that is not written in books but is knowledge that can only be found through lived experience.

Tukufakaholo: How or where did the tukufakaholo of ngatu originate in my family

Pelehake is a small village on the east side of Tonga, known by various hingoa fakatenetene (nicknames): Vaomapa or Ī-o-Lupea.³² Pelehake is the central context for this project, as it is the home to seven generations of hou'eiki fafine (elder women) in my fāмили (family), and is the place that inspired this project, and where I grew up until age thirteen. Seven generations of women have lived in Pelehake; that is how far I can trace the line. We have Vika, my great-great-great-grandma; Manu Tu'ipulotu, my great-great-grandma; 'Uhila lahi, my great-grandma; and Nena, 'Ana Va'inga, my grandma. Also, there is Vaimoana, my aunt (one of my dad's older sisters), then 'Analisa (my sister,³³ who is my generation), and lastly 'Ofa, my niece. (Image 46)

What I have just described is a tala tukufakaholo (oral transmission of knowledge) of the hou'eiki fafine (elder women) I grew up with—a lineage of knowledge and tradition passed down through generations to me—that is a focal point of the project. This tukufakaholo comes with the research question that has shaped this enquiry: How can I, as a maker, how can I tauhi (taking care of) all the tukufakaholo my nena left with me? It includes knowledge of the processes used in ngatu making, a collection of kupesi, Tongan oil making, the practice of tui kakala (stringing a garlands), the relationship that I have with the elders in Pelehake, alongside everyday life lessons, and a home that became my own personal learning space and studio.

³¹ C. Maxwell Churchward, "Tukufakaholo," in *Tongan Dictionary: Tongan – English and English – Tongan*.

³² Hingoa fakatenetene refers to simply another name a village is known by, or can be what that village is known for. Often, various nicknames will be mentioned in conversation or speech without directly referring to the village's given name of Pelehake.

³³ Technically, 'Analisa is my cousin, but 'i he nofo 'a kāinga (amongst relatives) we do not have cousin as a word, therefore, we refer to our parents' siblings' children as our sisters or brothers.



Image 46. Generations of hou'eiki fafine: Nena, Moana, 'Analisa and 'Ofa. There are seven women who lived in Pelehake, including Vika, Manu and 'Uhila, but there are no photos of them.

I always happened to be around during those moments of tukufakaholo with Nena, whether that was for tohi ngatu (tracing/outlining/marketing the kupesi), gathering or preparing different kinds of plants for making Tongan oil, or going to 'uta (land for planting crops)³⁴ to visit her ngōue hiapo (mulberry farm), or to harvest the plants. Nena's everyday life was interesting to me; her routines always involved making and preparing what she needed ahead of time. There was always something new to learn, and the best way for me to embody that knowledge was to assist her, even though she could do it independently. She would patiently explain while she went about the task at hand, then would let me do it when she got tired, sitting quietly and watching me from the side.

Tukufakaholo can be metaphorically seen as a toolbox, filled with important tools that will last for generations. The toolbox comes with discipline and knowledge of our anga faka-Tonga (Tongan way of life), so that I might know how to approach this project as an insider with lived experience. The various tools in Nena's toolbox enable this project to continue the practice of kupesi and ngatu by extending an invitation to all generations of family residing in Tonga and those living overseas. A box that carries our anga faka-Tonga and shares it throughout any making spaces where the practice is invited.

In this project context, I will discuss tukufakaholo in relation to the ancestral bloodlines of ngatu makers in my family and extended family, which constitute the community of Pelehake. Meaning it will focus on the ancestral lines of ngatu maker from our late great-great-grandmother Melekapa Lahi, who is my grandpa's grandma. I want to discuss the tukufakaholo of ngatu makers in my family, as this is where the knowledge originates and has been passed on by

³⁴ Tōkanga, or in everyday language we call it 'uta. Where we plant all kinds of crops, including yams, bananas, taro, kumara, guavas, lopa, papayas, avocados, tomatoes, oranges, as well as plants we use for our Tongan craft practices, such as mulberry, pandanus, koka (reddish wood), etc. We also grow the plants for our Tongan medicine here. Our 'api 'uta is like a supermarket, except it's free.

makers to me, and consequently, to this research project—but first, I must speak about my nena. (Image 47)



Image 47. Family Portrait of the Mafi family (grandpa side of the family).

(Left-Right) Front row: Kaloni, Fanamaka, Vaimona
Second row: Tevita Siale, Melekapa, Lau'ese, Losimani, Tonga vaivai, 'Etuete.
Back row: Tali Mafi and Tu'ungafasi.

A Very Special Relationship with My Nena, 'Ana Va'inga Nai

Nena is 'Ana Va'inga Nai; she hails from the villages of Tatakamotonga (Image 48) and Pelehake, and her parents are Kanongata'a and 'Uhila Tu'ipulotu (also known by her nickname, 'Uhila lahi).³⁵ 'Uhila is originally from Nomuka, Ha'apai (Image 49), and later moved to Pelehake, and Kanongata'a is from Tatakamotonga. Their two children are 'Ana Va'inga and Tangifetaua. 'Ana married my grandpa, Sione Lautaimi, and had ten children (including my dad, Timote), as well as three adopted children, so they had a total of thirteen, including me. (Image 50) I always count myself as their youngest child, because Nena was more than just my grandma—she was also a

³⁵ The word 'lahi' is used when we refer to someone whom we are named after. We often use lahi (senior) or si'i (junior). For example, if I were referring to my great grandma, I would say 'Uhila lahi, and if anyone refers to me, it would be 'Uhila si'i.

mother to me. Grandpa passed away in 1988, and Nena in 2013.³⁶ I grew up watching Nena, the woman who inspired who I am and what I know today. Nena was a woman with many talents, respected among the elders and in any community, she was part of, and a woman who was never ‘last-minute’ when it came to preparing for any event or planning for contingency. She was always on the move, always had something to keep her busy, and let’s not forget one of her most important routines: her 5am or 6am prayer and attending morning service.



Image 48. Mape ‘o Tatakamotonga, village of my nena’s dad’s side of the family. Ministry of Land and Natural Resources.



Image 49. Mape ‘o Nomuka, village of my nena’s mum’s side of the family. Ministry of Land and Natural Resources.

³⁶ As Grandpa passed away too early, Nena had to step forward to care for her ten kids, meaning she embodied both roles of being a father and a mother. Later, her kids started moving overseas to Nu‘usila (New Zealand) and Amelika (USA), known as fonua lahi. Out of the thirteen kids, five stayed in Tonga, four immigrated to Nu‘usila, and the other three immigrated to ‘Amelika—and then there was me. My nena raised most of her fanga mokopuna (grandkids), and I was lucky to be one of those.

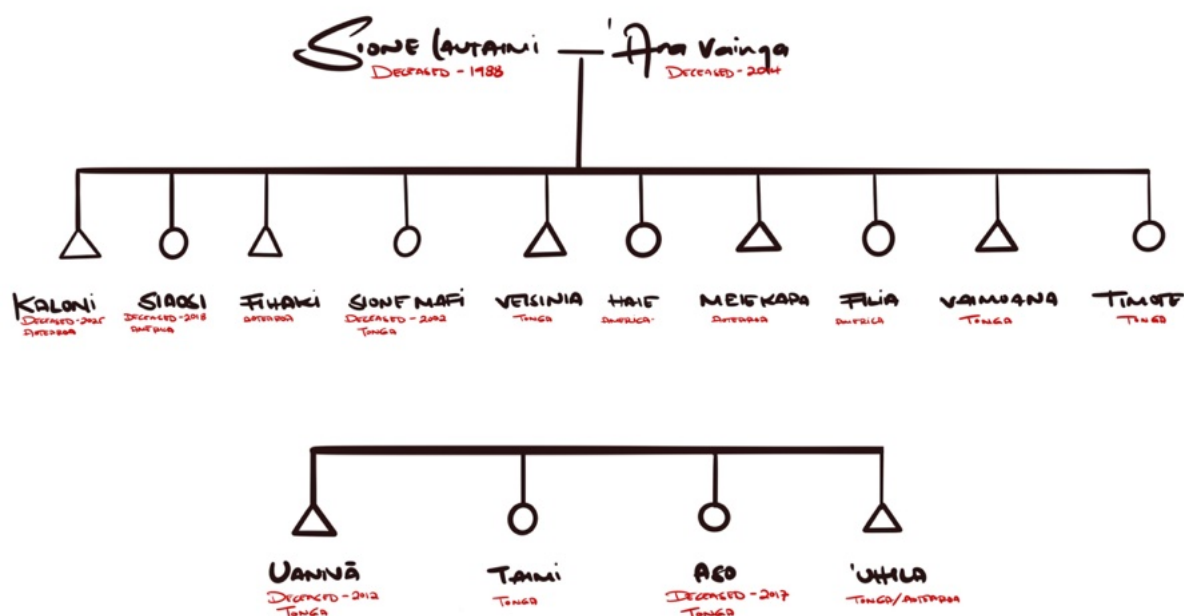


Image 50. Sione Lautaimi Nai and 'Ana Va'inga's family.

Practising koloa faka-Tonga

When I returned to Pelehake for another visit in February of 2025, I discovered that Nena had many other responsibilities. She was the chairwoman of their kautaha koka'anga (Women's Ngatu Makers Association),³⁷ taki Kalasi 'Aho mo e Misinale (groups within the church), and 'ilo 'i he koloa faka-Tonga (knowledge-holder in Tongan craft). Nena was particularly known for her knowledge of how koloa faka-Tonga (Tongan textile) is folded. Each koloa is folded in a specific way, depending on the katoanga (ceremonies).³⁸ Growing up, I learned how to fold koloa through doing, as my nena would direct me when preparing koloa (textile) for a funeral, wedding, or storage.

This work was for Saturdays, and only when the sun was out. My sisters and I would bring the ngatu out to the front yard, usually when it needed some sunlight or for an upcoming ceremony. We would unfold it for light, then refold it at the end of the day before sunset; it was refolded to fit

³⁷ Through a personal conversation with Lavinia Tu'aefe, who was a part of my nena's koka'anga, and is still participating in the making, alongside other practices that are happening in the village. This was when I discovered why my nena's storage room disappeared. I thought it was demolished during renovations to our house back in 2006. However, she told me, "The reason why we do not have any kupesi left is because it was burned alongside some of her tools when her storage was on fire."

³⁸ In a personal conversation with my dad, Timote, he explained that katoanga is kato (basket) and anga (cultural way of doing things), meaning that each basket carries its own responsibilities according to what is needed, and has its own ways of presenting itself.

for storage under the bed mattress, or it became the bed itself. Ngatu are stored under mattresses to keep them flat and smooth for when they are taken out and presented for any of our Tongan katoanga.

Tongan-born, Tāmaki Makaurau-based performance artist Kalisola‘ite ‘Uhila made the work *Mohe / Sleep for A Time of Waiting* at Te Wai Ngutu Kākā Gallery (2025). (Image 51) His performance work involved him sleeping in the gallery on a fala (mat) and ngatu during the day after night shift, using ngatu as his blanket. *Mohe* is directly tied to his night-shift job, a representation of the reality of managing work, rest, and his personal life.³⁹ This ‘routine’ occurred over the full seven weeks of the exhibition duration. In the Tongan culture, the fala and the ngatu are our beds, which we call mohe‘anga faka-Tonga (Tongan beds). The ngatu also serves as our blanket. The mohe‘anga that Kalisola‘ite slept on is an example of this practice, where the ngatu was refolded to match the size of a bed. In a previous conversation with Kalisola‘ite, he mentioned that the mohe‘anga faka-Tonga and his kafu were a gift from his mum, Fusipala ‘Uhila, specifically for the performance.⁴⁰



Image 51. Kalisola‘ite ‘Uhila, *Sleep/Mohe for A Time of Waiting*, installation view, Te Wai Ngutu Kākā Gallery, 2025.

During my Master of Visual Arts study (2019–20), I presented a performance piece titled *Fakamanatu ‘oe ‘aho 13 ‘o ‘Akosi 1924: Remembrance of the 13th of August 1924* for Visual Arts Talk Week.⁴¹ This work talked about the idea of packing, unpacking, and the unfolding of a ngatu

³⁹ Tia Sagapolutele, “Why Kalisola‘ite ‘Uhila Is Sleeping in Tapa Cloth at Britomart,” 2025, <https://britomart.org/kalisolaite-uhila/>

⁴⁰ Kalisola‘ite ‘Uhila, phone conversation with the author, October 26, 2025.

⁴¹ AUT Visual Arts Talk Week is a two-day critical forum organised by the Visual Arts department for BVA, MVA and PhD students. Students present their work in groups of four for discussion with a panel of two staff members and a guest critic.

between two different places, Tonga (Image 52) and Aotearoa (Image 53). The work was inspired by a very popular type of bag we call katolā (nylon canvas bag), which is used when we travel locally or internationally to carry things back and forth, because it's light and cheap. I made the artwork from the katolā by cutting it up into strips to use for the making of a contemporary ngatu, with the nylon canvas as the top layer and pepa koka'anga (vylene paper—a synthetic interfacing fabric) as the second layer. This red-white-blue bag was first made by a tailor, Lee Wah, in the 1960s in Hong Kong, using nylon canvas sourced from Taiwan, which was initially used as a shelter material.⁴² I became interested in using the bag, because I travelled with it when going back home or coming back home, when transporting my materials, such as tu'aniu (coconut mid-rib), fau (hibiscus fibre) or feta'aki (undyed barkcloth). I presented this artwork, using the process of unfolding the ngatu as a performance, by taking the contemporary ngatu out of the katolā, then unfolding it for fresh air, and then refolding it to the size of the katolā—as if I was packing it away to be taken home to Tonga with me.



Image 52. 'Uhila Nai, *Fakamanatu 'oe 'aho 13 'o 'Akosi 1924: Remembrance of the 13th of August 1924*, 2019. Unpacking, unfold, refold back home at Nena's front yard.

⁴² "Wah Ngai Canvas," Hong Kong Tourism Board, <https://www.discoverhongkong.com/eng/place-to-go/wah-ngai-canvas.html>



Image 53. 'Uhila Nai, *Fakamanatu 'oe 'aho 13 'o 'Akosi 1924: Remembrance of the 13th of August 1924*, 2019. Unpacking, unfold, refold at the AUT WM Level 1 foyer.
Photograph by Monique Redmond

Where did Nena's knowledge originate?

I used to wonder where Nena learned ngatu from, as there were no stories about her mum's family knowing how to make ngatu; they were always about Grandpa's side of the family. The is where Nena learned the art of making ngatu, which she learned after marrying her husband, Sione Lautaimi. Apparently, it was from her mother-in-law, Melekapa Lahi (three generations back). There was a well-known story among the elders that Melekapa Lahi had made a lauteau (100 metres in length) for the wedding of her daughter, 'Ana Vaimoana, which took place in Fua'amotu. (Image 54) In a personal conversation with my aunt, Veisia, on Thursday, 28 August, Ma'ufanga, 2025, she said she was told that for 'Ana Vaimoana's wedding, the koloa that was used for the celebration was made in one piece, 100 metres in length. It was said that multiple ngatu were folded all the way from Pelehake to Fua'amotu, which is the next village to us.⁴³ This story is the inspiration for the idea of wanting to make my own ngatu lauteau as part of my PhD final exhibition work. I see it as the foundation of how ngatu has been passed down generation to generation in my family.

⁴³ Through this conversation, I also came to realise this story explains how my cousin got her name, Mele Lauteau. It was based on the work that Mele Kapa had done, and she is named after her.

Like I learned from my nena, she too got to observe and learn a lot from her mother-in-law, which resulted in her becoming a knowledge-holder when it came to anything related to ngatu or koloa as a whole—not only within the family but also in our villages.⁴⁴ When speaking with people about ngatu, I use these stories that are told repeatedly, as a way to stay grounded and help me both understand and communicate the roots of my practice. The Aboriginal scholar Tyson Yunkaporta, founder of the Indigenous Knowledge System Lab at Deakin University in Melbourne, and author of *Sand Talk*, speaks about “building every chapter on oral culture exchange: a series of yarns with diverse people who make me feel uncomfortable. I yarn with those people because they extended my thinking more than those who simply know what I know.”⁴⁵ He uses the term ‘yarn’, stating that “yarns are like conversations but take a traditional form we have always used to create and transmit knowledge.”⁴⁶ Yunkaporta’s description of a yarn is similar in my practice to fepōtalanōa’aki, which are everyday conversations with a diverse range of people, such as the village matāpule (chief), elders in the making spaces, nobles, my parents, aunts and uncles, and so on. These people collectively help shape and extend my thinking, and later those understandings turn into a series of artworks.



Image 54. Mape ‘o Fua’amotu, where grandpa’s dad side of the family is from.
Grandpa’s land in Fua’amotu, where their wedding took place.
Left image: Photograph is from Ministry of Land and Natural Resources.

Nena’s materials and tools

As mentioned, I was one of the grandkids raised by our nena. For one reason, I was named after her mother, ‘Uhila lahi, and therefore she wanted to bring me here to Tonga. She originally came

⁴⁴ The first time I heard this story was during a conversation with my dad, Timote. We were talking about my nena and ngatu, and we ended up discussing who taught Nena the art of making ngatu.

⁴⁵ Tyson Yunkaporta, *Sand Talk: How Indigenous Thinking Can Save the World* (HarperCollins Publishers, 2020), 15.

⁴⁶ Yunkaporta, *Sand Talk*, 16.

to Aotearoa to babysit me while my parents were at work and my older brother was in school.⁴⁷ Nena was an outdoorswoman who always preferred to keep herself busy, surrounded by the warm weather. Being in Aotearoa wasn't ideal, as she preferred the warmth, which meant her returning to Tonga. Moving back to Tonga for Nena was never really a choice; her everyday life involved doing things that required her to be outside in Pelehake, like planting her hiapo (mulberry plant) and lou'akau (pandanus leaves). She requested that I should go back to Pelehake. This was agreed to on one condition, that I must return to Aotearoa before I started school, which turned from making amends with my parents to me staying until it was necessary for me to move back with my family at age thirteen.

During my thirteen years growing up with Nena, I learned a great deal about ngatu, its processes, materiality, tools, and plantations—because wherever she was, I was. (Image 55) By keeping me alongside her, Nena gave me access to a vast amount of knowledge that I didn't realise would be so invaluable until later in life (at art school). Our relationship is where this practice originated; lifelong knowledge gifted to me through observing elders making ngatu, weaving, tui kakala (stringing a garland), growing plantations, harvesting seasons, and so much more. Allowing me to be her helper in all situations was Nena's way of teaching. I would come to her with a million questions, and she accepted my curiosity by involving me in her work.

Nena had her own backyard garden where she would grow all kinds of plants, from food to Tongan oil plants, and ngatu materials such as maho'a/amanioke (*Tacca leontopetaloides* /tapioca), for easy access to her everyday making needs, which was one of my favourite spaces to be in because I got to be with her. The garden was close to her storage, where she kept all her tools, such as the kupesi (embroidered relief stencil), ike (mallet), 'umea (brown clay), special pots for making the black ink for tohi ngatu (tracing/outlining/markings the kupesi), and her tools for harvesting. (Image 56)

Nena growing her own materials and making her own tools reminds me of a personal conversation I had with one of her close friends, 'Eleni Manufekai. I had asked 'Eleni her thoughts about what she saw as important for us to'utupu 'o e 'aho ní (today's generation) to learn about the making of kupesi. She responded by saying it is essential to have or make your own tools, so you do not have to rely on or borrow tools from other makers, as it is a lot of work.⁴⁸ And it's true what 'Eleni said, because that is what my nena and her friends would do during the week, make their tools for their koka'anga. And it reminds me of what Nena said, "Nothing should stop you from making or slow you down," as someone who didn't want to rely on others for materials or tools. Witnessing my nena being the best ngatu knowledge-holder and maker she was, has been instrumental in how I make art and approach my making process.

⁴⁷ I had only one brother at the time; his name is Sione Ketisi Nai. I also have an older sister, Mele Seini (Dad's daughter, whom I attended primary school and college with), and younger sisters; Kafo'atu Nye, Liu Kovi Nye, and 'Ana Nai, whom we refer to as Nena (she is named after our nena).

⁴⁸ 'Eleni Manufekai, personal conversation with the author, 2019.



Image 55. The result of '*learning through observation*', how I understand its role within the making of ngatu, which is the everyday life of my nena. Left to right (top/bottom): tools, processes and planation/materiality.



Image 56. Nena's 'Āmoa, which later became her storage, after her old storage was taken out by a fire. It still stands and is used for storage of any kind, food, equipment and all sorts.

Tohi Kumi Koloa: The title that sets or positions the practice

The title of this project, *Tohi Kumi Koloa – Ko e tohi fepōtalanoa'aki 'eni pea mo 'eku fanga kui*, is derived from the tukufakaholo of hou'eiki fafine. The title can be split into three parts. Firstly, 'tohi' translates to writing, a book, or a letter to or from someone. Secondly, 'kumi': the direct translation is to search, find or look. Lastly, 'koloa' translates to textile. Within the context of my art practice, tohi is metaphorical; the letter represents the knowledge, skills, and information from my nena, 'gifted to me' to create the artworks of this project. This 'letter' has been written by different generations, and I was lucky to receive it while observing and listening to Nena. Conceptually, the letter acts as permission to kumi (search for or find) an in-depth understanding of what is written in the letter, which is to kumi anything in relation to ki he ngāue fakamea'a 'o e ngaohi 'o e ngatu pea mo hono kupesi (the crafts of making of ngatu and its kupesi). From here, I gather all the findings and turn them into the third part, koloa, a textile that carries the stories of the hou'eiki fafine and the kakai 'o Tonga (people of Tonga) across different times and spaces.

The title also speaks in multiple layers. One central aspect is time and space—time unpacks the relationship between people and the past, while space addresses materials and their connection to fonua (land). This relationship between people and the past is embedded in the practice of kupesi, as they have always been created as a tool that carries multiple events, representing and upholding most of our koloa faka-Tonga across different generations. These relationships

between materials and fonua are held within the village of Pelehake, because that is the place where I gather all the materials used in the making of my kupesi.

The second part of the title, 'ko e tohi fepōtalanōa'aki 'eni pea mo 'eku fanga kui', is the gift to the kāinga Tonga (the people of Tonga) and fonua (land). It refers to the artefacts, which in the koloa. All of the findings and research carried out across this project, including personal stories, migrations, cultural practices, and past lived experiences, are encompassed by the koloa. What I have just described is the essence or synopsis of how and where this project is situated. Pelehake is home⁴⁹ and the place from where I draw on the Tongan way of thinking and doing, and how we, as Tongans, navigate and practice as our way to continue the tala tukufakaholo of the crafts of ngatu and kupesi.

My installation *Liuaki: Going back in a poetical sense* (2022), exhibited at ST PAUL St Gallery, is an example of tupu'anga and how that sits within the context of tala tukufakaholo. As outlined in *Koanga I: Exhibition Projects*, the artwork comprises a series of screen-prints, containing multiple layers of different memories to illustrate a back-and-forth between the past and present experiences. For these works, I screen-printed line drawings of a series of hand movements based on the process of ngatu making, which were developed from photographs of the elder, 'Eleni Manufekai, making. In doing this, I was exploring what Manulani Meyer speaks about regarding ho'olohē (to listen) and ho'olono (to hear). She says, "to hear is one of the deepest practices, as we get to embody knowing, as we get to use our body as a tool, as a mediator to know what kind of knowledge that we like for our body to embody."⁵⁰ Therefore, the hand gestures of 'Eleni are the perfect example of the way I can share this incredible practice that I grew up observing, with the movement of the hand communicating the gestures I learned.

Back in 2019 (pre-PhD), I documented the fakapā tutu, the process of transforming the inner bark of the hiapo⁵¹ into feta'aki. Upon looking at a series of photos of fakapā tutu (pounding: beating the inner mulberry), I decided to trace only the hand gesture as a representation of the idea of learning while observing my nena's movements in the process of fakapā tutu. Therefore, I traced the various movements of the fakapā tutu process, then layered them in the order they would appear in real time—like a drawing mimicking an illustrated storyboard or stop-motion animation using only graphic outlines. The conceptual rationale for this way of making was that knowledge is tukufakaholo, and in the arts and crafts, is passed down through visual language: lines, shapes, and forms. Therefore, tracing the outlines, curves, circles, and so on, was the most appropriate method to share the knowledge I had embodied while observing Nena and the elders—and, of course, had fun with and enjoyed as a child, and now as an adult. (Image 57)

⁴⁹ When I am back home in Pelehake, that is where the ideas for the practice emerge from—based on conversations or encounters during the visit—which I then bring back to Aotearoa and transfer into the work being discussed in this research project.

⁵⁰ Manulani Aluli Meyer, "Ike 'Āina: Sustainability in the Context of Hawaiian Epistemology," Vimeo video, 65:00, October 23, 2009, <https://vimeo.com/7910477>

⁵¹ Hiapo is the name of the plant. Feta'aki is the tutu (inner bark) that, through the process of fakapā tutu, becomes the feta'aki. Ngatu is the name referred to when it is completed.



Image 57. 'Eleni Manufekai, *fakapā tutu process*, 2019.
 Demonstration of how processes and embodied knowledge has been passed on, observed in real time;
 Knowledge that is built over time layer by layer, traced, photocopied, then layered.

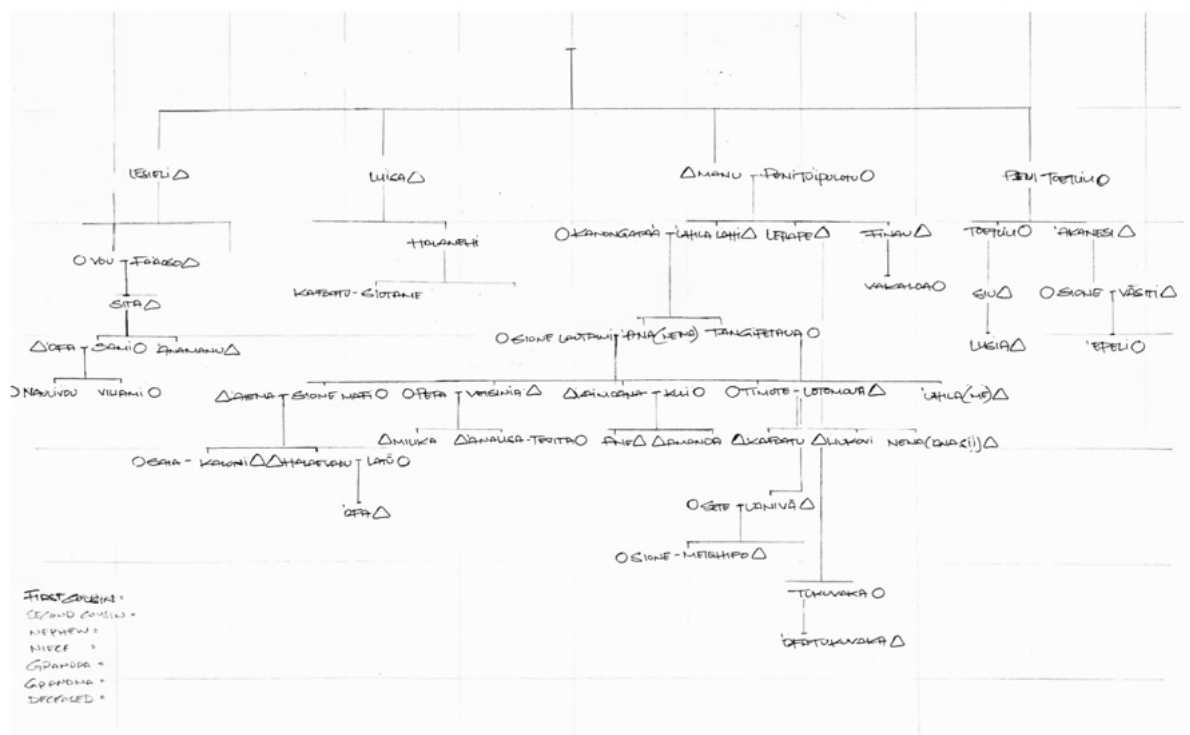


Image 58. Kāinga (distance relative) on Nena's side of the family.

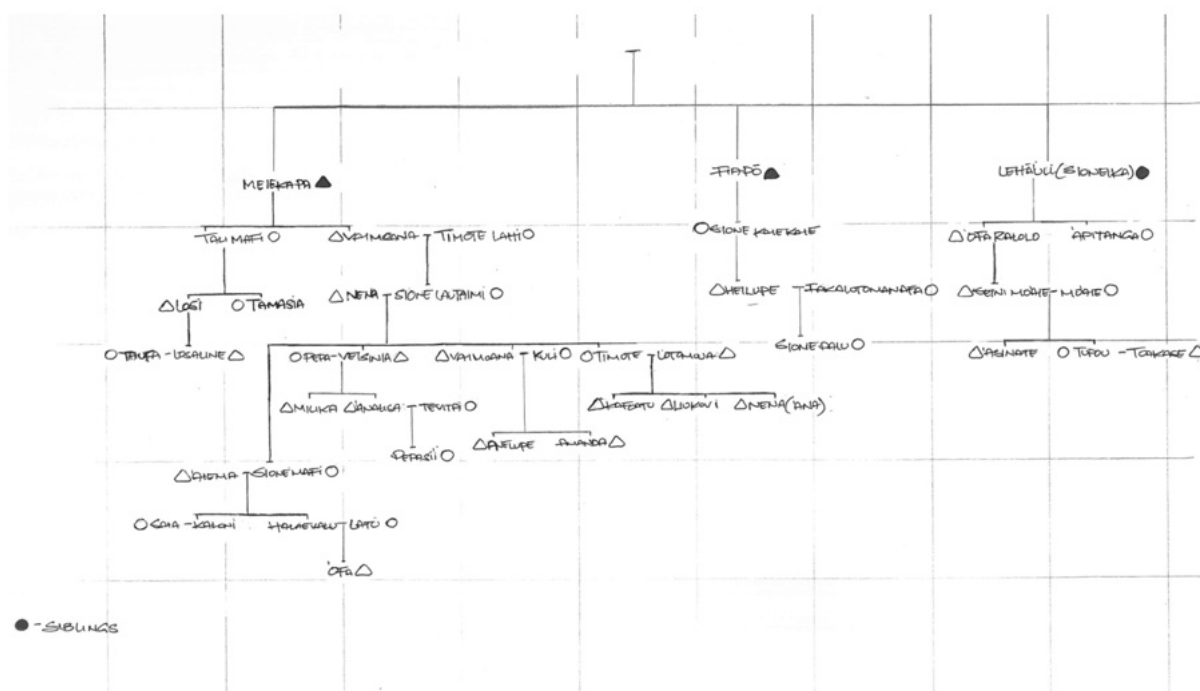


Image 59. Kāinga on Grandpa's side of the family.

Kāinga: The people of this project

Within this art project, ‘we’ and ‘our’ refer to the people, the participants, who weave across the practice, which is like the katoanga that my dad, Timote, talks about. The katoanga, the kato (basket) and anga (ways), bring with them what is needed for the project and the objects being made. These ngatu and kupesi knowledge-holders are relatives, family, and makers who were part of the same kautaha koka‘anga group as my nena, the Women’s Ngatu Makers Association from Pelehake, the village of my great-great-grandmother, Manu Tu‘ipulotu. I grew up amongst these women through my nena, and they are a part of this project because of her relationship with them, and with me as the next generation of ngatu makers.

The kautaha koka‘anga: Past and present ngatu makers

The hou‘eiki fafine who were part of Nena’s kautaha koka‘anga, but no longer participate in the making of ngatu—though they still contribute to the research project by way of conversation in the research activity—are ‘Anamanu Vea, ‘Eleni Manufekai, Sovalau Siale, Pelenaite Ta‘engalo ‘Ofa, and Seini Mo‘ale. They are no longer with us, but their contribution is honoured in this practice.

The makers who are part of the kautaha koka‘anga, and continue keeping it alive and active, are led and looked after by ‘Asinate Finau. The active members are Lavinia Tu‘aefe, ‘Ofa Veamalohi, Kafo‘atu Latū, ‘Anatovo, Tangini, and a new addition, Toakase Tu‘iono.

My family members who contribute to the project are the following: holding a matāpule (chief) title is ‘Apitanga, who goes by Lehā‘uli, his matāpule name; my dad, Timote Nai; my uncles, Filia Nai, who carries their dad’s matāpule name, Pautā, and Siosaia Manu-‘o-‘Uiha, who goes by Vakaola-‘o-Utumoteka; and my aunts, Vaimoana Le‘ota and Veisia Vaha‘i.

Key contributors to the project

The following is a list of key people who have contributed to the practice by sharing their own lived experience and knowledge, as well as the tools and methods they observed growing up. They, too, were surrounded by elders who upheld Tongan ways of living. Each of the contributors knows their role, ‘i he nofo ‘a kāinga (the way we live amongst one another); they know what to do, what they need to give and how to do it. This brings us to the idea of tauhi vā (taking care of the relationships) and how it operates across the practice, because the key contributors are the people helping the project understand how to continue what they have gifted through my research lens and interpretation.

My nena, the late ‘Ana Va‘inga is the foundation of this project, and has passed on the knowledge that inspired it. Her role in this practice was given to me long before she passed, without her knowing I would be the one to share it with everyone not familiar with what Pelehake upholds. This knowledge navigates the way that I position the practice and guides me through as I reconnect with the elders in Pelehake. (see Image 1)

Timote Pita Nai (my father) is from Pelehake, Fua'amotu, and Nomuka; he is the son of 'Ana Va'inga and Sione Lautaimi, and the youngest of ten kids (number ten of thirteen kids altogether). Timote is also known by the title Pautā, his father's chief title, which he uses when needed, especially at special events. My dad is known for his expertise and experience within the Tongan knowledge system and the practical side of things. Due to his experience across many fields, he contributes by sharing any relevant information, texts, readings, or ideas related to my practice. His contribution began when he wanted to learn about my art practice from a male perspective, and he was able to support and help me understand the knowledge, not just on a surface level, but with an in-depth understanding—how it relates to fonua, people, and crafts. He also plays the role of interviewer when in conversation with elders, especially matāpule. As a maker, I do not speak the language that a matāpule or elder uses in conversation. He helps the project understand the complex Tongan language and the relationships within it, and also supports me with the making of my work when I need help. (Image 60)

'Uhila Moe Langi Nai (writing about myself in the third person) is a knowledge-holder, artist, and maker, and the daughter of Timote from Pelehake and Lotomou'a from Foa, and was raised by her nena in Pelehake. Nai positions her practice in two contexts—Tonga and Aotearoa—and sees her role in this practice as producing the artworks that draw on the knowledge gained through observing and listening to her nena. Her role as a researcher is to learn and gain more in-depth knowledge about the practice of ngatu, and to share it with the younger generation, as a lived practice that weaves between the past and present in contributing to the future. (Image 61)



Image 60. Timote Pita Nai and Nena aka 'Ana, Pelehake, 2023.



Image 61. 'Uhila si'i, Deport Artspace, 2022. Photograph by Diana Hu

The late **Vakaloa-'o-'Utumoteka (Sosaia Manu-'o-'Uiha)** is the son of Finau Tu'ipulotu, from Pelehake and Nomuka.⁵² 'Vakaloa' is a chief title that was given by His Majesty, the late Fatafehi Tu'i Pelehake. Vakaloa was a matāpule (chief) who upheld many roles. He transcribed by hand many poems and songs written by the royals, alongside the history of Tonga, the ancient Tongan

⁵² Finau is 'Uhila lahi's younger sister, and he is my nena's cousin.

language, the royals' genealogies, and all the clans of Tonga. This is what he carried in his kato (basket)—all the work he did under the role of a matāpule. His contribution to the practice before his passing is based on what he shared with me personally, including a family book⁵³ in which he transcribed his perspective and understanding of the Tongan knowledge system. Knowledge that was from experience through his role of being a matāpule, which was later shared with me. (Image 62).

'Apitanga, who goes by his matāpule name Lehā'uli, is the son of the late Lehā'uli (Sione Ika Puna 'i Moana and Heheha Lehā'uli), from Pelehake. Lehā'uli was the Tu'i Pelehake's matāpule, and when people visited, he was the person who spoke on behalf of the Tu'i Pelehake. There is a term referring to the role of a matāpule, known as mu'a, which is the person who is close to or next to the King on any occasion. Therefore, the knowledge that Lehā'uli contributes to the practice is always considered sacred, because it is knowledge discussed in the house of the Tu'i Pelehake that only he knows about. For the practice to understand any knowledge or language from the past, Lehā'uli is the person who can help identify what it is, breaking down old Tongan language, metaphors, and any expressions that use it.⁵⁴ (Image 63)



Image 62. The late Saia Manu 'o 'Uiha Vakaloa.



Image 63. Lehā'uli, Aotearoa, Mount Albert, 2024.

'Eleni Manufekai, daughter of Naipuka and Tenisi Manufekai from Fiji and Tatakamotonga, was one of my nena's close friends and an elder in their koka'anga. Aside from Nena, she is one of the few other people I grew up watching who was involved in the practice of ngatu. As a knowledge-holder, she, too, is helping me identify a couple of kupesi from the collection that my nena had, which is the kupesi they made together during their koka'anga days. She has not only shared

⁵³ Vakaloa-'o-'Utumoteka, a personal collection of Tongan history transcribed in the form of a book for the next generation in his family.

⁵⁴ Timote Nai, video conversation with the author, October 20, 2025.

knowledge about ngatu, but has helped me personally regain many memories I had forgotten due to the shifting nature of my environment.⁵⁵ (Image 64)

‘Anamanu Vea is the daughter of Sione Nā‘uli Vou from Pelehake and Fa‘aoso from Lofanga, Ha‘apai⁵⁶ (both are deceased).⁵⁷ ‘Anamanu is a knowledge-holder and ngatu maker, and is one of the elders who was in the same koka‘anga group as my nena. With this project, she has contributed to the knowledge of ngatu (anything related to the making process) and identifying kupesi that only they would know. Her knowledge not only helps me gain a deep understanding of their way of practising, but also brings back old memories from my time with Nena and the elders, which helps me navigate the missing knowledge Nena mentioned to the ‘ears of a kid’. (Image 65)



Image 64. ‘Eleni Manufekai, Pelehake, 2019.



Image 65. ‘Anamanu Vea, Pelehake, 2025.

Veisia Vaha‘i is my aunt and the daughter of ‘Ana Va‘inga (Nena). She is from Pelehake, Tatakamotonga, and Nomuka, and is married to **Pepa Vaha‘i** from Vava‘u; they are now residing in Ma‘ufanga. Veisia is a housewife, and her everyday work involves knitting and weaving ta‘ovala (a unisex waist garment) and kiekie (a waist garment for women). Pepa works for the church of Ta‘ehaloto, Ma‘ufanga, as their secretary, and helps with planting, harvesting, and preparing Veisia’s own materials. She is a knowledge-holder for my research, contributing to organising and providing materials such as feta‘aki or lou‘akau, and also to completing our family genealogies. Veisia weaves across the practice, as she is the person I contact in Tonga if anything is needed from here in Tāmaki Makaurau. Pepa has helped gather materials for my project, especially during harvest seasons, and has facilitated meetings with knowledge-holders when my other aunt, Vaimoana, is busy. (Image 66)

⁵⁵ ‘Eleni Manufekai, personal conversation with the author, September 01, 2025

⁵⁶ Sami Veamalohi, Messenger conversation with the author, October 20, 2025.

⁵⁷ Sione Nā‘uli Vou is the son of Lesieli, and she is Manu’s older sister. Manu is my nena’s grandma, and therefore ‘Anamanu is Nena’s first cousin, but in the Tongan context she would be described as my nena’s sister.

‘Ana Vaimoana Le’ota (Moana) is my aunt, and the youngest daughter of ‘Ana Va’inga (Nena) and Sione Lautaimi, from Pelehake, Tatakamotonga, and Nomuka, and is married to **Viliani Le’ota** from Ha’ato’u, Ha’apai. She works at the Friendly Island Bookshop as their warehouse manager. Her husband lives in Waiuku, Tāmaki Makaurau, and works as a carpenter. Moana’s role within the practice is similar to that of her older sister, Veisia Vaha’i. Moana facilitates meetings with elders who carry important titles, such as nobles or orators, or with people I don’t personally know. She is involved facilitating and organising the kautaha koka’anga (Women’s Ngatu Makers Association), which will participate in the making of the traditional ngatu component, the tokauanima (25 metres in length), for the final PhD artwork. She is helping to collect and organise materials for its making. Her husband, my uncle, Viliani, will help me build the wooden structures for the final exhibition installation, such as the koka’anga table, and will also provide all the wood used across my practice. (Image 67)



Image 66. Veisia Vaha’i, Ma’ufanga, 2025.



Image 67. Nena aka ‘Ana and Vaimoana, Nuku’alofa, 2023.

Kautaha Koka’anga ‘o Pelehake – The makers of the tokauanima

The kautaha koka’anga (Women’s Ngatu Makers Association) of Pelehake includes first- and second-generation women. Some were part of my nena’s koka’anga group, whom I know from observing them work together as a child.

I want to mention some of the makers that have more recently passed away, such as the late **Seini Mo’ale**, daughter of the late ‘Ofa Fakalolo and the late Lehā’uli. ‘Asinate Finau, Seini’s daughter, used to join Nena’s koka’anga when she was free, and is now the person who leads by continuing the kautaha koka’anga that my Nena once led, and which is now under her care. Seini, as a knowledge-holder and ngatu maker, remains part of my project through the knowledge she has passed on to her daughter, ‘Asinate, who is helping organise the kautaha that will participate in the making of the tokauanima.

There is also the late **Pelenaite Ta'engalo 'Ofa**, who passed on 23 August this year (2025), from Ōtea, in Vava'u, who was married to Mavae from Pelehake. Their daughter is Pilimilose 'Ofa Pongi, and she is part of my nena's kautaha alongside her mother, Ta'engalo.

The ngatu makers

The ngatu makers who will be making the tokauanima (25-metre ngatu), along with me in Pelehake, Tonga, from December 2025 to February 2026, are:

'Asinate, who will lead the process; she is my dad's cousin, therefore my aunt;

Pilimilose, daughter of Ta'engalo (not related by blood);

Lavinia Tu'aefe, who married into Pelehake;

Penina from Pelehake, daughter of Loata (related on Grandpa's side);

Mele Kafo'atu Alatini Latū, wife of the late Siotame Latū from Pelehake, son of Halamehi, my nena's cousin on 'Uhila lahi's side;

'Ofa Veamalohi, wife of Sami Veamalohi from Pelehake, whom I would refer to as my kui (grandpa), family on Nena's side;

Lūsia Vatuvei from Pelehake, daughter of Siu, who is also my nena's cousin on 'Uhila lahi's side;

'Anatovo and Tangini, who are not related to my family;

Toakase Tu'iono, married to Tupou Tu'iono, son of Seini Mo'ale, 'Asinate's little brother;

Vaimoana Le'ota and Veisia Vaha'i, my two aunts.

The hands that harvest from fonua

Just as much as I need knowledge-holders to understand the Tongan knowledge system of ngatu and kupesi, I also need the collective of people who help gather materials, from harvesting to sighting and preparing. The notion of the gathering of the hands refers to the people who have participated during the harvest seasons, from harvest through to the processing phase of the materials.

The people involved in the 'fonua-related' activities are:

Sione Palu from Pelehake, son of Heilupe and Fakalotomanafa, my grandpa's cousin on his dad's side, therefore my uncle; (Image 68)

Viliami Veamalohi from Pelehake, son of Sami Veamalohi, grandkid of Sita, Nena's cousin on her mum's side; (Image 69)

'Epeli Kaufusi from Pelehake, son of Vasiti and Sione Kaufusi, 'Akanesi's grandkids, family on Nena's side; (Image 69)

Taufa Mahe from Talafo'ou, married to Losaline Mafe from Pelehake and daughter of Losi, Grandpa's cousin on his dad's side. (Image 70)



Image 68. Sione Palu, Houma, 2023.



Image 69. Viliami, 'Epeli and Taufu, Tokomea, 2025.

Fanga mokopuna – The grandchildren

Kaloni Mafi Nai Hoko and Tracy 'Aisea, daughters of the late Sione Mafi, my dad's older brother, and 'Alema Mafi; therefore, my cousins;

'Analisa Tutu'u, daughter of Veisia, my dad's older sister, therefore my cousin;

Ane Lupe and Amanda Le'ota, daughters of Vaimoana, my dad's older sister; therefore, my cousins.

Konga III: Makers and Theorists in the Field

This chapter addresses makers and theorists in the fields of barkcloth, printmaking, sculpture and installation. It primarily focuses on artists working with the revival of barkcloth traditions, such as Cora-Allan Lafaiki Twiss and Nikau Hindin, as well as Pacific artists whose practice connects to barkcloth through materiality and print processes. Of significance in this space are the practitioners who continue the practice of ngatu by collaborating with other barkcloth makers, such as Tui Emma Gillies and her mother, Sulieti Fieme'a Burrows; Ruha Fifita and Ebonie Fifita, working alongside Robin White; and Jasmine Tuiā. I will also look at the work of artists Benjamin Work and Kulimoe'anga Stone Maka, who collaborate with women ngatu makers as males working with a female collective (or domain), along with Doron Semu, who practices ngatu from a male perspective. Tongan artists who were born and raised in Tonga but later moved to Tāmaki Makaurau, whose practice draws on and reinterprets the past through contemporary approaches, include Filipe Sopolemalama Tohi and Kulimoe'anga Stone Maka. And then there are the artists situated in the present–contemporary, who draw on concepts from our Tongan cultural practices in their making; these are Kalisola'ite 'Uhila, Benjamin Work, Salome Tanuvasa, John Veā, and Sione Monū. Lastly, the makers working within the aspect of kupesi, with an emphasis on scale and installation, are Vaimaila Urale, Sione Faletau, and Lonnie Hutchison.

Theorists who contribute to the field of ngatu and kupesi include Tunakaimanu Fielakepa, known as the Dowager Lady Fielakepa, the foremost knowledge-holder in Tongan koloa. Alongside her are academics Phyllis Herda and Billie Lythberg, whose contributions to ngatu histories offer valuable perspectives. Dr Adrienne L. Kaeppler, research anthropologist and curator, provides guidance for my practice as I trace the knowledge of ngatu and kupesi to the past and use it to help me understand the developments in materiality, and adapting to new materials such as the pepa koka'anga and subtle changes in process as time passes by.

The Tonga sisters, Ane Tonga and Nina Tonga, have made significant contributions to the field of Pacific art and visual culture. Nina Tonga has an extensive history as a curator and writer focusing on the Indigenous perspective. Her writing spans academic research, exhibition reviews, media commentary, and blogs, and has addressed a range of areas including Indigenous photographic histories. Nina's latest research contribution is her involvement in the upcoming Tapa book set to be released in 2026, which she is co-editing with Sean Mallon and Rachel Yates. I was honoured to be invited to contribute to this book project by responding to one of the ngatu from Te Papa Tongarewa's collection (Image 70) with a written text, focusing on the process of frottage, a primary method for this research.

Ane Tonga is the first curator of Pacific Arts at Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki (since 2020) and has worked with many significant contemporary Pacific artists across various gallery spaces in Aotearoa. She aims to give Pasifika narratives an opportunity and a place within a gallery's collection, and in doing so, strives to increase access and engagement with Pacific art. In my

practice, one of the key outcomes I aim for is to create a space for Pasifika people to access and interact with our artworks stored in museums and galleries, thereby enhancing their knowledge and understanding of the objects' stories in context. As an artist herself (aside from being a curator), one of Ane's earliest memories of art was through her grandmother, who would ask Ane and her older sister, Nina, to bring out her collection of ngatu during the summer, and they would repair part of the kupesi by using different concoctions of materials.⁵⁸



Image 70. FE004065; Ngatu (Tapa cloth); Tongan, Te Papa Collection Report, 2025.
© Te Papa Collection Report.

I have chosen to focus on this group of artists, makers, and theorists because their practices span two worlds: the past–traditional and the present–contemporary. Although these worlds differ, the practices shared by this group reflect the richness of tauhi vā—the relational space between what came before us and what will continue to be passed on. As an artist working across the past–traditional and present–contemporary myself, I relate to their practices based on their making approaches and how they are positioned in the present–contemporary context. However, in the end, we are brought back together to one space: the past–tradition, where it all came from. I consider this group of artists as my neighbours in the village of ngatu practice.

⁵⁸ “Ane Tonga,” Waipapa Taumata Rau, University of Auckland, <https://www.auckland.ac.nz/en/alumni/our-alumni/40-under-40/a-z-list-of-profiles/ane-tonga.html>

Reviving Barkcloth Traditions

Multidisciplinary artist Cora-Allan Lafaiki Twiss (Ngāpuhi, Ngatumutumu, Alofi, Liku) describes hiapo as a time capsule, an interpretation of the land, the sea, and the people from their era.⁵⁹ Her art practice focuses on reviving the Niuean practice of hiapo,⁶⁰ drawing on decorative elements from botanical drawings and abstract marks. Cora-Allan is an important neighbour for this project, and her practice will be further discussed in *Konga V: Tohi Hohoko – The ‘tool-box’ of generations across the thread of time*.

In an RNZ interview with Kathryn Ryan in 2020, Cora-Allan spoke about her journey of learning Niuean hiapo, which began when her grandfather first mentioned hiapo, expressing that they (her grandparents) would like to be wrapped in hiapo when they died.⁶¹ In response, Cora-Allan said it could be done. This conversation inspired and piqued her interest in hiapo, though she also acknowledges the hardships of learning the tradition. Furthermore, it is through her experience of encountering the toughest processes of making that she comes to appreciate the making of hiapo. Hearing Cora-Allan express her joy while acknowledging the labour involved in traditional practices helped me come to terms with wanting to share the practice of ngatu and to recognise the labour of my nena. Experiencing the hardship and labour that comes with making ngatu gave me the motivation to continue the practice.

Years spent in the presence of my nena meant I witnessed the amount of labour involved in making ngatu. I resonated with Cora-Allan’s sentiment when she spoke about the fulfilment of making hiapo, saying, “for me I am able to make these items to gift into the community so that they can have their own memories with them.”⁶² In relation to my practice, I grew up surrounded by ngatu. Observing this process has made me want to dedicate this research project to every single person who has supported or participated in it from the beginning to the final PhD work, so that a piece of who they are will exist in my practice. This wish ties us back to the reviving of hiapo, as Cora-Allan has brought back a practice that had slowly disappeared, but is now revitalised through family, museums, collaboration with other makers, and exhibiting in galleries.

The Māori artist Nikau Hindin (Ngāi Tūpoto, Te Rarawa, Ngāpuhi) focuses on reviving and preserving the art form of aute, working with motifs from Māori culture and other designs from traditional architecture and textiles. Hindin is also embedded in her work, from star maps to kites, driven by a wellspring of Indigenous wisdom that has survived for millennia.⁶³ Aute is the Māori practice of barkcloth, and the presence of aute making in Aotearoa is minimal. In an article by Hindin, “Grafting Aotearoa: The Ancestry of te Aute,” she discusses the remaining examples of aute practice, which comprise fifteen ancient patu aute or pāoi (tapa beaters) found in swamps

⁵⁹ Cora-Allan Wickliffe, “Introduction,” in *Hiapo: A Collection of Patterns and Motifs* (Little Island Press, 2020).

⁶⁰ In Niuean, ‘hiapo’ is the practice of barkcloth; in Tongan, ‘hiapo’ is the name of the mulberry plant.

⁶¹ Kathryn Ryan, “Reviving the Lost Art of Niuean Hiapo,” interview with Cora-Allan Wickliffe, *RNZ*, September 30, 2020, <https://www.rnz.co.nz/national/programmes/ninetoon/audio/2018766235/reviving-the-lost-art-of-niuean-hiapo>

⁶² Ryan, “Reviving the Lost Art of Niuean Hiapo,” 11:30

⁶³ “Nikau Hindin,” 24th Biennale of Sydney, 2024, <https://www.biennaleofsydney.art/participants/nikau-hindin/>

around Tāmaki Makaurau, as well as the lasting presence of the word ‘aute’ in the language.⁶⁴ The practice was largely abandoned, as the aute plant could not thrive here in Aotearoa, but through Hindin’s exploration, she is reawakening the art form of aute to delve into the unknown space.⁶⁵ To understand how aute was made, Hindin looked to Hawaiian kapa (wauke) makers⁶⁶ to learn the processes and protocols for collecting and making as a way to come to an understanding of how aute may have been made. Hindin states,

I started learning about aute in 2013, and it has taken till now to become comfortable with the process, gather the resources required to make it, and also build relationships with knowledge holders. It is not just about making nice art objects; it is actually about understanding the right protocols and pathways to go about making.⁶⁷



Image 71. Nikau Hindin, Learning and making her own aute (barkcloth) in 2013. ©Nikau Hindin

In Hindin’s practice, materials and processes are important to her. Researching her practice, I found a post on the blog *Voices of Oceania*, in which Hindin was invited to talanoa on the synergy between place, person, and practice. She says, “Materials are most important to me in my practice. What am I using to create my work? Where does it come from? And how is it sourced? are all the questions I ask myself.”⁶⁸ These are also the kinds of questions I ask myself when it comes to materials, knowledge, and the processes I will use. The questions help me understand the tauhi vā between people and material, and material and fonua, in depth. Hindin touches on the same aspect, saying this line of enquiry is what “makes her realise the relationships that are

⁶⁴ Nikau Gabrielle Hindin, “Grafting Aotearoa: The Ancestry of te Aute,” *E-Tangata*, November 24, 2019, <https://e-tangata.co.nz/reflections/crafting-aotearoa-the-ancestry-of-te-aute/>

⁶⁵ Hindin, “Grafting Aotearoa.”

⁶⁶ “About Kapa: Traditional Hawaiian Barkcloth,” Lehuauakea, 2025, <https://lehuauakea.com/what-is-kapa>

⁶⁷ Mark Amery, “The Woman Reviving the Art of Māori Aute,” *The Spinoff*, July 27, 2019, <https://thespinoff.co.nz/art/27-07-2019/reviving-maori-aute-nikau-hindin-a-photo-essay>

⁶⁸ Emele Ugavule, “Nikau Hindin,” *Voices of Oceania* (blog), 2019, <https://talanoa.com.au/nikau-hindin/>

formed in the creative process. The stories that are told and the knowledge that is passed forward—all of this is woven (or beaten) into the fibres of my cloth.”⁶⁹ In her making, she uses earthly pigments, such as kōkōwai (red ochre pigment) and ngārahu (charcoal pigment), for marking the pattern onto the aute. (Image 72) Equally, in my practice, I collect natural materials from the fonua for the making of my kupesi. Knowing where my materials come from helps me understand the functionality of ngatu. (See Image 106 in Konga IV: Founa Ngāue)

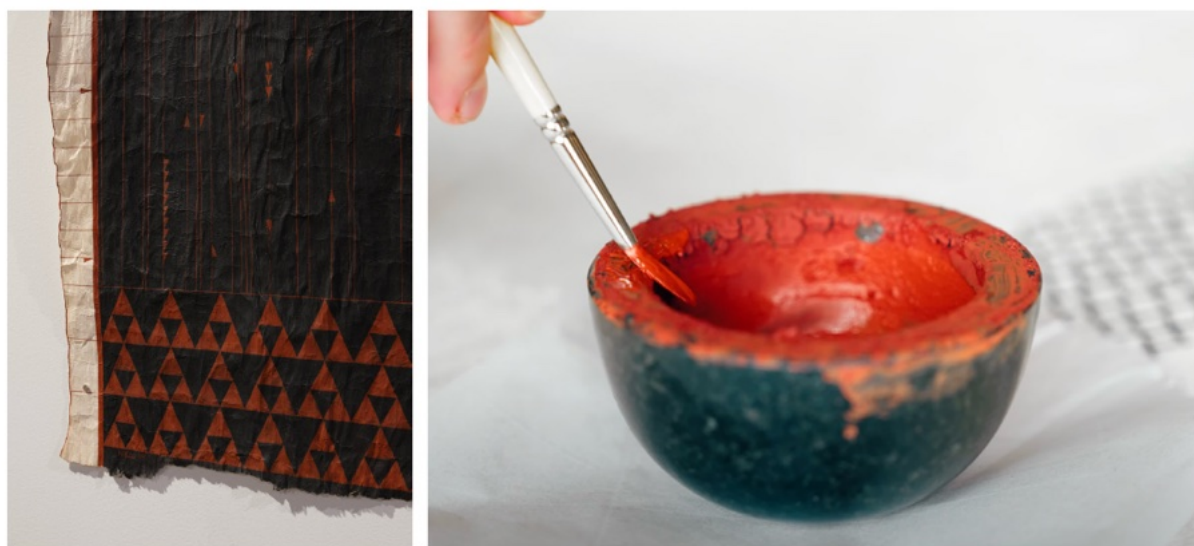


Image 72. Nikau Hindin, *Te Uranga (The rising and setting of the sun due East and due West. Autumnal Equinox, 20.30.2020)*, 2019. Kōkōwai (red ochre) ngārahu (shoot pigment), aute (paper mulberry). (left image) Artspace Aotearoa, photograph by Sam Hartnett. ©Nikau Hindin

Pacific Artists and Barkcloth Connections

Drawing inspiration from ngatu across the Pacific, we can look at painter, printmaker, poet, and writer John Pule from the village of Liku in Niue and his early collection from the 1990's, in which he explored the practice of hiapo (Niuean tapa cloth). He focuses on the structure of hiapo by unpacking its elements, such as the grid, forms, shapes, colors, and structure, and using them as a method in creating his paintings or prints. Pule compares the structure of hiapo to a map of a village because, when viewed from a bird's-eye perspective, the hiapo contains history and stories about the people and the land. Using the village of Liku as his primary reference, Pule drew on memories, streets, family homes, and rooms, as well as different kinds of images like Niuean cosmology and Christianity, positioning them on the canvas he created. In my practice, I follow the same methods by looking at the mape of Pelehake and reading it as a ngatu. Fonua carries history, materials, stories, and people across generations; therefore, every section of land is like a fragment of ngatu. I often use my memory to draw on knowledge from the village. It is the

⁶⁹ Ugavule, “Nikau Hindin.”

research ground for collecting materials, positioning kupesi back at their original site, and gathering site photos, practical details, and memories to create my kupesi.

Niuean printmaker Fatu Feu'u is considered an inspirational senior artist in the Pasifika art community and has supported Pasifika artists, including co-founding the Tautai Pacific Art Trust in the 1980s. Feu'u is known for his large prints and paintings that draw on Polynesian art forms, including the practice of Niuean siapo. Feu'u's practice relates to my practice, drawing on similar approaches from siapo/ngatu, yet they differ in how they are used in terms of concepts or context. For example, *'O Le Tautai Samoa*, written by the late Ron Brownson says, that Feu'u draws on different Samoan crafts such as the practice of siapo (barkcloth) and tatau (tattoo) by reconstructing or reworking its patterns and structure to design his own motifs. Drawing on kupesi and its functionality allows me to create and design my own kupesi. Speaking of the contexts in which we practice, Feu'u looks at traditional art that exists between Samoa and New Zealand. Whereas I liuaki between Tonga and New Zealand, practising in both contexts as a way of continuing the practice of ngatu that I grew up learning about. This aspect is also similar to Feu'u, who grew up around Siapo making, witnessing, and observing the elders in his village in the process of mark-making on the siapo.

The exhibition installation, *Kofu Kofu Koloa*, at Gus Fisher Gallery by Tongan-German artist Dagmar Vaikalafi Dyck drew on the practice of ngatu and everyday life to show how we maintain our koloa. I had the opportunity to encounter *Kofu Kofu Koloa* in person during my undergraduate studies in 2016. Dyck presented a series of koloa made with contemporary materials, such as fala (mats) and kiekie (waist garments) made from paper that had been handprinted with woodcuts, relief prints, and screen-prints as a replica of our Tongan traditional koloa, which were seen displayed on the mohe'anga and under the mattress in the bed installation. (Image 73) This approach, using found objects, aligns closely with how installation operates in my practice, particularly the context of introducing a found object and presenting it at its original scale.

Aside from the scale comparison, as printmakers, our practices both draw inspiration from ngatu, which can be viewed through the lens of adopting its structure/grid, scale, and kupesi. For example, in the work *Treasure Cloth*, 2016, (Image 74) Dyck references ngatu by using hand-pressed paper as her feta'aki and acrylics, Indian ink, dye, oil sticks, and pastels as her koka. Encountering this piece then, and making sculpture and installation myself within the PhD, I now realise how it was installed. It reminded me of the langanga on the ngatu: small strips of hand-pressed paper assembled to create the ngatu, reminiscent of how strips of feta'aki are glued together to create large-scale ngatu. However, there are differences in our approaches to materiality, particularly how I work with pepa koka'anga as a substitute for feta'aki and use printmaking ink and screen-printing as my method. Looking at my practice, I can see I practise in the same manner. We are recreating our own kupesi, reconstructing old kupesi, and designing new kupesi in honour of our ancestors koloa.



Image 73. Dagmar Dyck, *Aunty Ungatea's Bed*, Installation Bed stacked with family koloa and bedding, assisted by Lesieli Tukuniu and 'Ana Hemaloto, 2016. Gus Fisher Gallery. ©Dagmar Dyck



Image 74. Dagmar Dyck, *Treasure Cloth*, Printed hand-pressed paper with acrylics, Indian Ink, dye, oil sticks and pastels, 2016. Gus Fisher Gallery. ©Dagmar Dyck

Sāmoan artist Jasmine Tuiā is based in Te Atatū South, West Auckland. Her practice explores the Pacific body and Indigenous Sāmoan narratives through printmaking, photography, moving images, and siapo (barkcloth) making.⁷⁰ Tuiā works with the Sāmoan concept of 'tala lasi', "which describes the dynamic of storytelling in Sāmoa. 'Tala' means story, and 'lasi' means infinite", as

⁷⁰ The Sāmoan term for barkcloth.

in continuous and never-ending.⁷¹ Metaphorically speaking, it refers to stories with multiple layers and interpretations. Tuiā uses stitching as a method to attach her stories onto the siapo, as the means for her “to acknowledge those histories and the giants whose shoulders I stand on.”⁷² (Image 75) Stitching directly onto the siapo is new to me. Tuiā stitches her stories onto the siapo, while in my practice, I stitch my stories onto a kupesi base made from lau’i kaka and pāongo (pandanus). (Image 76) I use the term ‘tuiaki’ to explore the idea of stitching together layers of stories that, when taken apart, have different interpretations.



Image 75. Jasmine Tuia, *Folau Pea*, a series of siapo with stories stitched onto siapo, 2021. ©Jasmine Tuia



Image 76. ‘Uhila Nai, stitching my stories onto the base of my kupesi, 2023.

⁷¹ “Jasmine Tuiā’s Siapo Are a Study of Sacred Storytelling,” *Viva* 5, 2021, <https://www.nzherald.co.nz/viva/culture/jasmine-tuias-siapo-are-a-study-of-sacred-storytelling/EIRAVC5DJ7C2TC6QIIEBMWFLCY/>

⁷² “Jasmine Tuiā’s Siapo Are a Study of Sacred Storytelling.”

Artist and curator Ruha Fifita (Tongan, New Zealand) was born and raised in Tonga and works across various disciplines, including ngatu making, which she was introduced to by her grandmother. Working closely with her siblings and extended family, Fifita “focuses on collaboration, community engagement, and connection with Indigenous methods and materials.”⁷³ With this knowledge base, she was inspired to collaborate with Aotearoa artist Robin White, with whom she has been working on projects since 2010. Fifita combines and blends historical and contemporary iconography in her work. She also makes ngatu with her sister, Ebonie Fifita, who moved to Vava’u, Tonga, where her father is from, and who has also worked alongside White.⁷⁴

Robin White is a painter and printmaker whose interest in barkcloth practices developed during her seventeen-year stay in Kiribati.⁷⁵ In October 2025, I attended the Ngatu Conservation Art Collection Visit, an invitation and opportunity for anyone interested in learning about ngatu conservation through the University of Auckland’s art collections. The team from the Auckland of University art collection were undertaking an extensive restoration and conservation project of Robin White and Ebonie Fifita’s monumental *Siu ‘I Moana* triptych (Image 77), which is usually displayed in the University of Auckland Science Centre atrium.⁷⁶ The event was a chance for those interested (like myself) to meet and learn from Fifita and White about their process of conserving the ngatu and ngatu ta’uli, from an art collection context, and potentially participate in some of the processes of conserving ngatu. During this visit, White spoke about the joy of working collaboratively, as something she saw and encountered during her stay on the island of Kiribati. She made an interesting point that we, Pasifika people, work together as a group, which is due to the nature of our crafts; there are always more than two people working on a craft project together.⁷⁷ This reminded her about her time at the Elam School of Fine Arts, where she’d found more of a sense of working as an individual. These two ways of working are how this project operates: back home in Tonga, everyone works together, but here in my studio or the Print Lab, I work as an individual. (see Image 92)

⁷³ “Ebonie Fifita,” *Pacific Docs* (blog), November 5, 2009, <https://pacificdocs.wordpress.com/latest-features/photography/ebonie-fifita/>

⁷⁴ “Ebonie Fifita.”

⁷⁵ White’s artworks respond to her environment; for example, moving to Kiribati, adjusting to life in a space in the middle of the Pacific, and learning the language, which is reflected in an artwork series of cross-cultural observations and experiences, utilising the surroundings of her new environment as a subject in her paintings, such as houses, boats, people, and household chores. Katerina Teaiwa, “Kiribati: A Beginning’s Guide,” in *Robin White: Something Is Happening Here*, ed. Sarah Farrah, Jill Trevelyan, and Nina Tonga (Te Papa Press, 2022), 144.

⁷⁶ Margaret Kiely, Ngatu Conservation Art Collection Visit, conservation work on *Siu ‘I Moana Triptych*, Artstore, University of Auckland, City Campus, 2025.

⁷⁷ Robin White, Ngatu Conservation Art Collection Visit.



Image 77. Robin White and Ebonie Fifita, *Siu 'I Moana*, 2025. Auckland of University Science Centre atrium. Kupesi that was used in the making of the work.

Ngatu makers and mother–daughter duo Sulieti Fieme‘a Burrows (Tongan) and Tui Emma Gillies (Tongan, New Zealand) hold great significance in my practice. Their relationship reflects my own connection to working closely with my nena through lived experience and archives. They continue the practice of ngatu, creating kupesi, and teaching generations of people across different spaces, incorporating both traditional and contemporary stylistic choices to share knowledge with the next generation.

Working alongside each other, Burrows is known for her practice of making ngatu using older kupesi to preserve their memory,⁷⁸ and Gillies focuses on “preserving family lineages through the sacred ritual of tapa making.”⁷⁹ She learned by observing her grandma, ‘Ema Topeni, whose ngatu was apparently so colourful it inspired her, alongside her mother, to pursue the practice.⁸⁰ The mother–daughter duo practise together closely, which is evident in all of the collaborative exhibitions they’ve worked on together.⁸¹ Their practice is a combination of traditional and contemporary mediums, while respecting the roots of where it came from, which was inspired by Sulieti’s mother, Tui Emma’s grandma.

In August 2025, H.M. Queen Nanasipau‘u Tuku‘Aho of Tonga commissioned a workshop called the Ngatu Kupesi Tapa Workshop in Pea, Tongatapu, which was facilitated by this mother–daughter duo. The purpose of the workshop was to revive and promote Tongan ngatu practice, and to provide local women with an opportunity to learn from their knowledge, expertise, and experience. This involved sharing the practice through teaching a collective of nearly one hundred

⁷⁸ “Watch: Sulieti Fieme‘a Burrows at the ‘Ahu: Ngā Wairua o Hina Wānanga,” Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, <https://www.tepapa.govt.nz/discover-collections/read-watch-play/tapa-barkcloth-art-in-the-pacific/ahu-nga-wairua-o-hina-tapa-workshops-in-tahiti/watch-sulieti-fieme-a-burrows-at-the-ahu-nga-wairua-o-hina-wananga>

⁷⁹ Tui Emma Gillies, 2025, <https://tuiemmagillies.com/>

⁸⁰ “Watch: Tui Emma Gillies at the ‘Ahu: Ngā Wairua o Hina Wānanga,” Museum of New Zealand, Te Papa Tongarewa, <https://www.tepapa.govt.nz/discover-collections/read-watch-play/tapa-barkcloth-art-in-the-pacific/ahu-nga-wairua-o-hina-tapa-workshops-in-tahiti/watch-tui-gillies-at-the-ahu-nga-wairua-o-hina-wananga>

⁸¹ “Sulieti Fieme‘a Burrows,” Masterworks Gallery, <https://www.masterworksgallery.co.nz/collections/sulieti-fiemea-burrows>

women from across twenty villages in Tonga. (Image 78) A significant similarity between our practices and ethos is our desire to maintain the continuity of the ngatu tradition, and, in my practice, one of the ways I do this is through conducting workshops during exhibitions and teaching people, which I will discuss and expand on in Konga IV in the section *Koloa: The gift and the knowledge*.



Image 78. Tui Emma Gilles and Sulieti Burrows facilitating the workshop for one hundred Tongan women from 20 villages who participated in the ngatu workshop, held at the Hungalu 'o Pea Hall, Pea, Tongatapu, 2025. Top/Middle: ©Matangi Tonga/Tupou Vaipulu Jr
Bottom: ©Tui Emma Gillies

Doron Semu, of Māori and Pālagi descent, is a siapo maker based in Māngere, Tāmaki Makaurau. Semu's practice is based on the idea of using the traditional Sāmoan practice of siapo to bring together LGBTQ+ Pasifika youth, which is a way for him to connect with his Sāmoan heritage. Why am I talking about Semu's practice? I am speaking about it in the context of gender,

because it is interesting and rare to see a male figure (Image 79) participating in a practice known to be predominantly practised by females (Image 80). From a Tongan context, males do not participate in or create ngatu, but instead are present when discussing fonua (land), harvesting hiapo, or assisting with loading and transportation. The presence of a male figure appears when they are needed. For example, in my practice, I ask my uncles, cousins, or in-laws to help me with sourcing tu'aniu or kavele'ipulu, because, as a woman, I cannot climb a coconut tree, and it is traditionally a job for men. (see Images 103-105) Semu's practice involves creating a new space through workshops, which is a great way for LGBTQ+ Pasifika youth to write their stories through siapo making.



Image 79. Doron Semu, Māngere siapo workshop, 2022. Photograph by Armani Alofa ©Doron Semu



Image 80. Lavinia Tu'aefe mid shot during the fakapā tutu process, Pelehake, 2025.

Contemporary Artists Using Traditional Methods

Many Pacific artists draw on traditional processes, materials, and cultural concepts as the subject area for their artmaking—reinterpreting them through a contemporary lens. This approach aligns closely with my project, where I explore how Indigenous forms of making can be reimaged in present-day contexts.

Artist Kulimoe‘anga Stone Maka (Tongan), now based in Aotearoa, works with large-scale drawings, installation, and ngatu.⁸² His practice draws from traditional Tongan methods and materials, reworking the art form of ngatu tā‘uli through contemporary processes and conceptual frameworks, such as creating large-scale abstract works. Similarly, the works of artist Filipe Sopolemalama Tohi (Tongan) draw on the practice of lalava (lashing), a traditional Tongan technique used to bind large structures, such as the Tongan fale (house) and vaka (canoe). (Image 81) The binding techniques create kupesi designs that carry narratives and metaphors that tala-ē-fonua (telling of the land).⁸³ I will be discussing Tohi’s practice further in *Konga V: Tohi Hohoko – The ‘tool-box’ of generations across the thread of time*, in the section on *Veteki: identifying kupesi forms through fonua*, where I focus on how he unpacks kupesi in his work by recreating and transforming traditional arts into a modern representation of the lalava practice.



Image 81. Falelotu Fotu ‘a e ‘Eiki, Pelehake, 2025. Tongan practice of lalava (lashing), used in the interior of my childhood church.

⁸² “Kalisola‘ite ‘Uhila: Ouau Kohikohi / Ceremonial Markings, 21 January – 19 February 2022,” Michael Lett, <https://michaellett.com/exhibition/kalisolaite-uhila-2/>

⁸³ “Finalist: Vena Latu,” Te Kāhui Waihanga New Zealand Institute of Architects, 2022, <https://nzia.co.nz/awards/student-design-awards/2022-student-design-awards/finalist-vena-latu/#:~:text=Lalava%20is%20a%20form%20of,and%20revitalising%20this%20ancient%20practice>

Drawing and mark-making as a means of cultural reflection is evident in the work of performance artist Kalisola‘ite ‘Uhila. His work encompasses a diverse range of practices, from mark-making to live performance. An example of the two processes combined was seen in his solo performance work *Ouau Kohikohi / Ceremonial Markings*, exhibited at Michael Lett gallery in 2022. (Image 82) The performance involved ‘Uhila creating new carvings through a process of performative mark-making.⁸⁴ Moving from one to the next, ‘Uhila marked/carved intricate and repetitive incisions onto six painted pieces of timber, each representing an ancestor, family, mentored, or supporter. It was as an art student that he first experimented with print processes in this way, realising “that he did not need paper to make a print but could bring image and sound together. He started to use his body as a tool and his first performance was using an antique saw to make marks on wood.”⁸⁵ The process by which ‘Uhila’s marks are made in response to his body movements, is the equivalent to how I create marks using kupesi through frottage and screen-printing.



Image 82. Kalisola‘ite ‘Uhila, *Ouau Kohikohi / Ceremonial Markings*, Michael Lett, installation and performance view, 2022. Photograph by Sam Hartnett
©Kalisola‘ite ‘Uhila

Artist and researcher Sione Faletau (Tongan) is based in Ōtara, South Auckland. His multidisciplinary practice spans drawing, sculpture, installation, and kupesi, and is deeply rooted in Tongan and Moana cultural concepts. The concept of ongo—the integration of sounds and feeling—reflects Tongan culture and spiritual life, such as funerals, church services, katoanga

⁸⁴ “Kalisola‘ite ‘Uhila: *Ouau Kohikohi / Ceremonial Markings*.”

⁸⁵ “Kalisola‘ite ‘Uhila,” The Arts Foundation Te Tumu Toi, <https://www.thearts.co.nz/artists/kalisolaite-uhila>

(ceremonies), and celebrations.⁸⁶ Faletau “reimagines traditional kupesi by translating audio wave spectrums into visual forms,”⁸⁷ essentially weaving ancestral knowledge with contemporary digital techniques.⁸⁸ Likewise, Benjamin Work, an artist of Tongan and Orcadian/Shetlander heritage, is interested in the intersections of contemporary and traditional influences, using his art as a conduit to connect past, present, and future narratives.⁸⁹

Artist Salome Tanuvasa (Sāmoan, Tongan) works with drawing and installation, often referencing personal and familial histories. One of her projects, *Culture That Holds My Family* (Image 83), is a series of paintings that “were inspired by my mother’s Tapa,” which had been stored in a plastic bag in her wardrobe and was part of the family collection.⁹⁰ The works are semi-abstract, painted with lines and patterns using a warm colour palette reminiscent of tapa. The kupesi on the tapa specifically inspired the compositional elements. Tanuvasa says, “The hand-drawn lines, the clear painted shapes and the warm earthy colours captured me immediately and I felt the Tapa transform a domestic space into one for paying respect.”⁹¹ The tapas created space that held Tanuvasa and her family together through a family bereavement and sadness, and the paintings are made in honour of “these beautiful objects.”⁹²



Image 83. Salome Tanuvasa, *Culture that holds my family*, 2025, installation view. ©Salome Tanuvasa

⁸⁶ “Sione Faletau,” Artspace, <https://www.artspace.org.au/artists/sione-faletau>

⁸⁷ “Sione Faletau.”

⁸⁸ “Sione Faletau.”

⁸⁹ Benjamin Work, <https://www.benjaminwork.com/about>

⁹⁰ “Salome Tanuvasa: Culture that Holds my Family,” Tim Melville, 26 March – 12 April 2025, <https://www.timmelville.com/exhibition/salome-tanuvasa-culture-that-holds-my-family/>

⁹¹ “Salome Tanuvasa: Culture that Holds my Family.”

⁹² “Salome Tanuvasa: Culture that Holds my Family.”

John Veā is a Tongan artist who works with sculpture, video, and performance art. Veā's practice explores the concept of fonua and migration. The work *Ini Mini Mani Mou* (2025) (Image 84) is about the complexities Pacific migrants face living and working in Aotearoa. The sculpture consists of a vending machine that could be used to purchase and process visa applications. To acquire a visa, you enter coins into the machine or tap your card to get your request. Veā states, "they point to the challenge and barriers of the often-bureaucratic immigration processes that they must navigate in order to come to Aotearoa to live or work."⁹³ This is a political statement. In my work, I have explored migration through the idea of using my boarding pass as a screen-printed image onto pepa koka'anga. (Image 85) I share my journey as I liuaki between Tonga and Aotearoa, but in some ways, it speaks to the fact that most of my tickets are one-way. This means I can still travel, but there is always a chance of facing migration if I don't have both passports with me, Tongan and New Zealand, when travelling one-way. (Image 86)

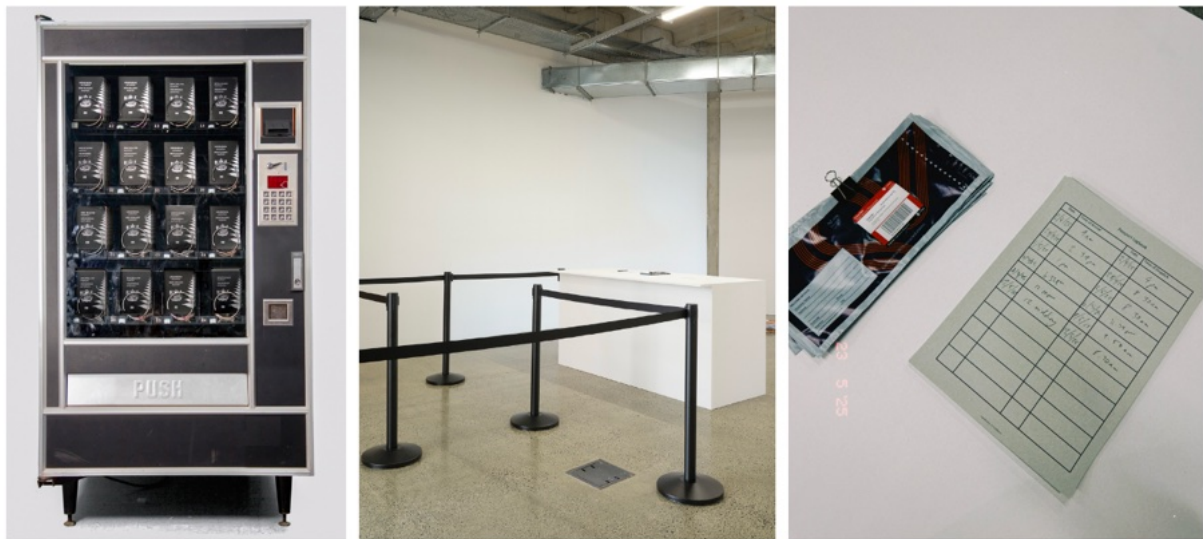


Image 84. John Veā, *Ini Mini Mani Mou*, Left image: *Baa, baa, black sheep, have you got any wool?* Middle/Right: *Time of Arrival / Time of Dispatch, for A Time is Waiting*, 2025, installation views, Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna O Waiwhetū (1) and Te Wai Ngutu Kākā Gallery (2-3). ©John Veā

⁹³ "John Veā: *Ini Mini Mani Mou*," Christchurch Art Gallery, Te Puna O Waiwhetū, March 8, 2025, <https://christchurchartgallery.org.nz/exhibitions/john-vea>



Image 85. ‘Uhila Nai, boarding pass work screen-printed on pepa koka’anga, installation view, Papakura Art Gallery, 2023.



Image 86. ‘Uhila Nai, New Zealand and Tongan passport.

An interdisciplinary artist of Tongan descent, Sione Tuivailala Monū works between Canberra, Australia, and Tāmaki Makaurau. One of the significant aspects of his practice is drawn from the Tongan practice of tui kakala—the art of flower design. Monū uses the methods and techniques of tui kakala, but with “plastic and synthetic materials that are used by Tongan communities in the diaspora to create their craft and adornment when the natural, fresh, colourful materials they have in the island weren’t available.”⁹⁴

Tāmaki Makaurau-based installation artist Vaimaila Urale (Sāmoan) has a diverse art practice that references Sāmoan symbols and utilises digital technologies with installation and scale. She also explores the idea of creating kupesi from things that exist within our everyday lives. Urale’s kupesi, which she calls *Typeface*, were created using only four keyboard buttons—“found on any American Standard Code for Information Interchange (ASCII) keyboard: / > < and \”—to generate tatau designs.⁹⁵ With every artwork, “Urale generates a unique series of symbols experimenting with colour, scale”, installation, and the exhibition context.⁹⁶ Through various media and approaches, “these ancient symbols make their way into everyday contexts, such as public walls,

⁹⁴ “Sione Monū,” Bergman Gallery, <https://bergmangallery.com/artists/61-sione-monu/overview/>

⁹⁵ Vaimaila Urale, “Typeface: Enjoy,” May 2018, <https://enjoy.org.nz/publishing/exhibition-essays/typeface-enjoy/tamara-tulitua>

⁹⁶ Urale, “Typeface: Enjoy.”

gallery spaces, performance venues, and skin.”⁹⁷ (Image 87) Urale’s practice of creating patterns out of just four keyboard strokes is similar to how I create kupesi out of everyday, ordinary forms and shapes, such as the pattern on the rooftop of Nena’s room, the anatomy of taro, or interior and exterior architectural structures. (see Image 9)

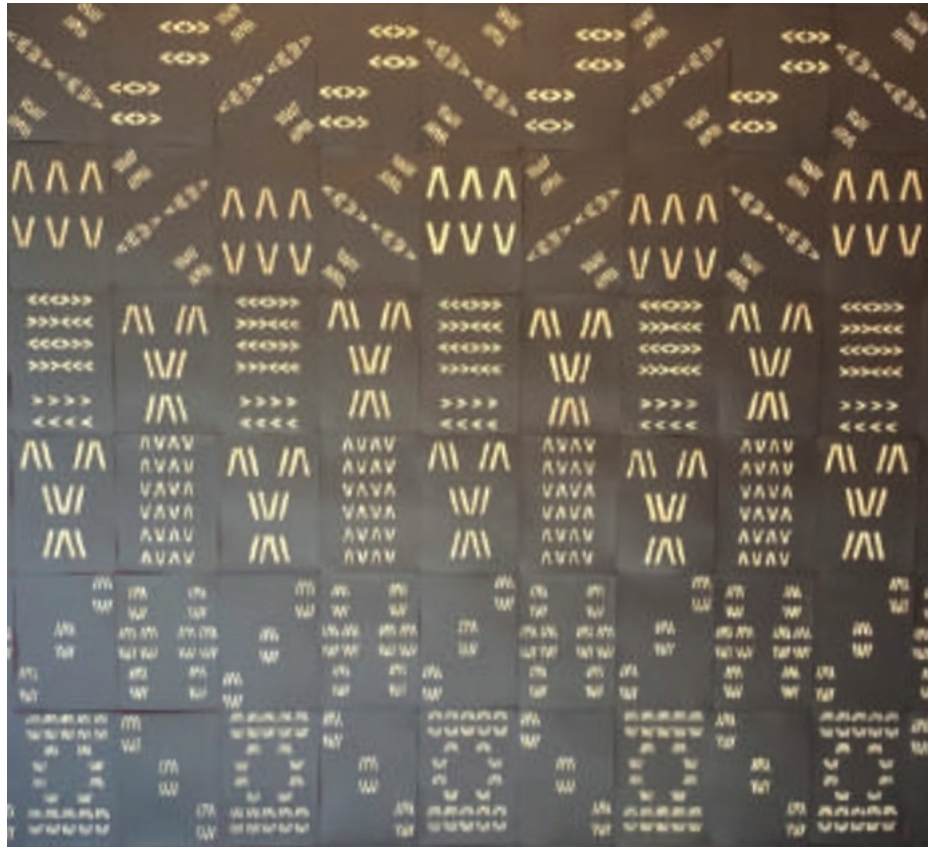


Image 87. Vaimaila Urale, *Aniva II*, 2019. Black card and sand. Artspace Aotearoa, Koloa vertical cards. ©Vaimaila Urale

Lonnie Hutchinson (Ngāti Kurī ki Ngāi Tahu, Sāmoan [Faleilili], Celtic) incorporates Māori and Sāmoan motifs and narratives into her multidisciplinary practice. Drawing on a multigenerational family history of migration and displacement, her methods range from hand-drawn, hand-stamped motifs to laser-cut stainless-steel designs and cutouts.⁹⁸ (Image 88) Similarly, I integrate analogue and digital practices in the making of my work. Early in my PhD, I had veteki (taken apart) my kupesi to create a physical model of where individual kupesi originated or were located within Pelehake. I laser-engraved the map of Pelehake onto a piece of clear acrylic, then laser-cut each kupesi in linear form onto black acrylic. The aim was to experiment with positioning the kupesi onto the map of the village, to help me better understand its forms and map the origins of kupesi. (Image 89)

⁹⁷ Urale, “Typeface: Enjoy.”

⁹⁸ Lonnie Hutchinson, <https://www.lonniehutchinson.net/about>

One of the key collectives of influence is Mataaho, a group of four wāhine Māori artists (Erena Arapere-Baker, Sarah Hudson, Terri Te Tau, and Bridget Rewiti) who have collaborated on creating large-scale installations since 2012 and who I look to when it comes to scale, for which they are well known. Their approach as a collective is interesting; as they say on their website, “Mataaho develops work with a single authorship and relishes in a ‘four-brain, eight-hand’ approach.”⁹⁹ This mindset is similar to how I would think about making ngatu with the Pelehake koka’anga group, which is a ‘ten-brain, twenty-hands’ approach. Making ngatu involves ten women makers sitting at the papa koka’anga, collaboratively working in unison.

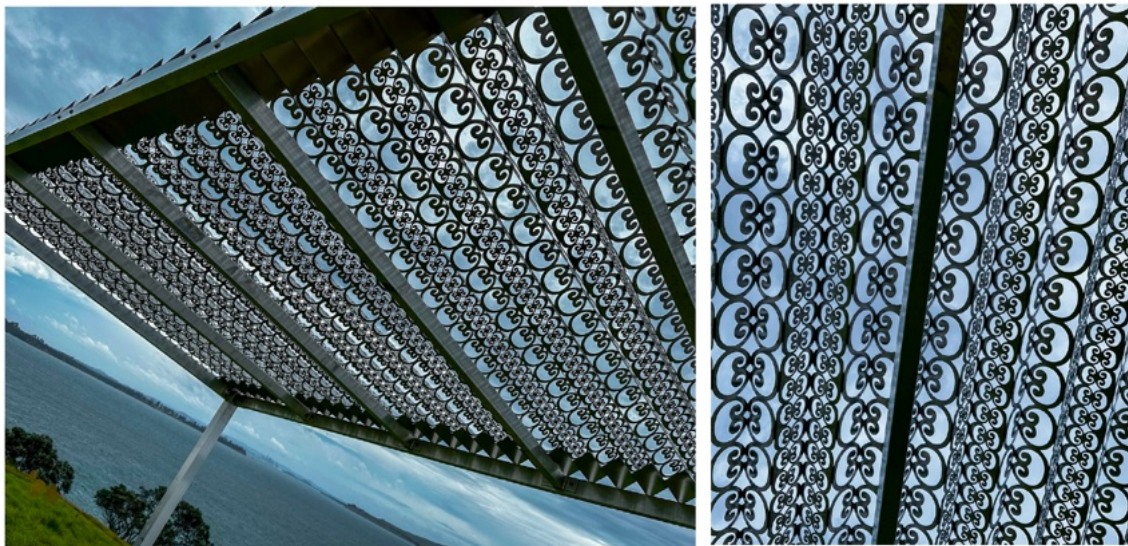


Image 88. Lonnie Hutchinson, *Moemoeā: A Model for Dreaming*, 2024. Laser cut aluminium.
Photograph by ‘Uhila Nai



Image 89. ‘Uhila Nai, *Mapping out kupesi forms back to fonua (land)*, 2022.
Laser cut and engraved acrylic.

⁹⁹ <https://www.mataahocollective.com/about>

Theorists and Knowledge-Holders

Tunakaimanu Fielakepa, the Dowager Lady Fielakepa from Kolomotu‘a, is an educationalist, textile artist, and cultural historian based in Tonga. She is known for her role in taking care of and sharing koloa produced by Tongan women. She served as the “technical advisor for the National Council of Women from 1996 to 2013, as President of the Tongan National Handicraft Association from 2009 to 2012, and continues to advise the Langa Fonua Handicrafts Centre, Langa Fonua ‘a Fāfine Tonga (Women’s Council of Tonga).”¹⁰⁰ (Image 90) The Centre was established in 1953 by Her Majesty Queen Salote III with the vision of ngāue loto taha pe (working in one accord) for the benefit of equipping women of Tonga with better ways to provide for their families and to preserve the skills of Tongan handicrafts.



Image 90. Langa Fonua ‘a Fāfine Tonga (Women’s Council of Tonga), 2025.

¹⁰⁰ Tunakaimanu Fielakepa, “Career”, Wikipedia, 28 November, 2025, 23:46, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tunakaimanu_Fielakepa

A key essay for this research is *Kupesi: A Creative Tradition of Tonga*, written by the Dowager Lady Fielakepa, in which she discusses the transmission of cultural knowledge. Speaking about how knowledge is accessed, she says, “Tongan children learn their culture through observing, listening and doing. It was the obligation of the parents, the family, the extended family, and the community at large to ensure that every child had the opportunity to experience the culture.”¹⁰¹ For me, that opportunity was through my nena’s everyday life and her desire to impart her gift, which is how I came to understand this practice and PhD project on a deeper level. An experience given to me as my opportunity to share how I received the practice of ngatu making from my nena.

In the lecture “‘Ike ‘Āina: Sustainability in the Context of Hawaiian Epistemology,” from the lecture series Puana Ka ‘Ike: Imparting Knowledge, academic Dr Manulani Aluli Meyer, an expert in Indigenous epistemology, discusses Indigenous sensibilities about sustainability and the fundamental ideas found in *ekolu mea nui* (three important things). They “are *mana‘o‘io* (knowing through experience), *mana‘olana* (knowing through deliberation) and *aloha* (liberation through action).”¹⁰² In her lecture, she breaks down what epistemology is from a Hawaiian perspective, explaining: *Mana‘o* means idea/thought and ‘*i‘o*’ means flesh or to know something because you have experience it—and together you have ‘*mana‘oi‘o*’, which in essence is knowing through experience. And ‘*mana‘o*’ in ‘*mana‘olana*’ is the ideas, knowledge, and thoughts that float beyond and around us. Lastly, ‘*aloha*’ is our intelligence.”¹⁰³

Meyer discusses the importance of relationships between people as being central to how we exchange and pass down knowledge. She explains, “It is about the quality of how you listen to the questions, which is the beauty of Indigenous ways of knowing.”¹⁰⁴ This knowing speaks about the various perspectives on how we receive knowledge, and through my practice I gain knowledge via our forms of *kupesi* and *ngatu*. It can also be seen in my relationship with the elders in Pelehake; there is a lot of practical *mana‘o*, which can only be communicated and contextualised through making. However, that *mana‘o*, the new ideas and thoughts, doesn’t ‘float around’ if you have not experienced it. As Meyer says, it is “knowledge that turns to knowing because we have really experienced it.”¹⁰⁵ I use the *mana‘o* that I grew up ‘knowing’ as a child to continue the practice of *ngatu* and to apply it in making all the artwork of this project (contemporary and traditional).

The importance of ‘quality’ that Meyer addresses is situated alongside the Tongan method, or methodology, of *Talanoa* (conversation), as it is known within academic circles. It was Tevita Masima Vaoleti, a Tongan academic and scholar, who proposed *Talanoa* as a Pacific-led research strategy and methodology. Vaoleti defines the term ‘*talanoa*’ as ‘*tala*’, which “means to command, tell, relate, and inform, while ‘*noa*’ can mean common, of no value, or without

¹⁰¹ Tunakaimanu Tonga Fielakepa, *Kupesi: A Creative Tradition of Tonga* (Vava‘u Press, 2018), 38.

¹⁰² Meyer, “‘Ike ‘Āina.” 14:10

¹⁰³ Meyer, “‘Ike ‘Āina.” 13:11

¹⁰⁴ Meyer, “‘Ike ‘Āina,”

¹⁰⁵ Meyer, “‘Ike ‘Āina,” 14:46

exertion.”¹⁰⁶ This definition aligns with Churchward’s definition of talanoa as a conversation, a talk, and an exchange of ideas, be it formal or informal.¹⁰⁷ In this project, the meaning of talanoa in practice is defined as or through a relationship—‘tala’ is the person who is talking or telling and ‘noa’ is the person who sits quietly and is paying attention.¹⁰⁸ Talanoa, when used in the academic context, is understood as both a method and a methodology, but it is more than that in this project. Within my practice, talanoa is carried through the project via the lens of sitting in silence, as a ‘kid’ listening to the elders’ stories. Therefore, ‘noa’ is critical to this project’s approach, as the knowledge used to produce the work comes from paying attention to the elders. As Meyer affirms, it is the quality of how I am listening to what is being said that is the beauty and where the richness of this practice comes from.

Tongan academic Hūfanga-He-Ako-Moe-Lotu Dr ‘Ōkusitino Māhina is a knowledge-holder who brings knowledge from the past to the present through concepts of time and space. In the video “Vā Moana: Space and Relationality in Pacific Thought and Identity,” he is interviewed by Albert Refiti, and he speaks about the concept of the vā, saying it is “not only a system that structures relationships, but also as an integral part of artistic endeavours in Moana societies, like rhythmic beating and marking of time.”¹⁰⁹ The concept of vā is the open space between you and whoever is in front, or from your left or right side. Here, Māhina suggests that the vā shouldn’t just be a relationship structure, but should also be “an integral part of artistic endeavours in Moana societies, like the rhythmic beating and marking of time.”¹¹⁰ In my practice, the vā exists within the doing, so it’s not just about what I have in relation to you or another. Vā is activated through the notion of fatongia (duties), where the vā is present through the act of fulfilling your duty, like the way you carry your kato (a basket filled with different responsibilities) as you enter cultural spaces, making or creating that space, which is in tauhi vā (taking care of the relationship).

The collective ‘Ilo Me’a Fo’ou (New Creation) was a group of Tongan women, now disbanded, who were based in Te Awa Kairangi ki Uta Upper Hutt, Aotearoa. There were fourteen members, and they were taught by Lata Foliaki Fisi. They created a launima, which was made at Na’a Sina’s home, and sold to Te Papa Tongarewa in 1996.¹¹¹ (Image 91) “It was the first of several synthetic ngatu purchased by the museum.”¹¹² Vylene pepa is a significant material in today’s ngatu production, especially in the contemporary context. For Tongan ngatu makers and artists who work with ngatu, using materials that are accessible to them is essential, considering how expensive the feta’aki is to source from Tonga. I use pepa koka’anga in my practice, just as Nena did. Living in Tāmaki Makaurau, I have to use materials available to me, such as vylene pepa, as a

¹⁰⁶ Timote M. Vaioleti, “Talanoa Research Methodology: A Developing Position on Pacific Research,” *Waikato Journal of Education Te Hautaka Mātauranga o Waikato* 12 (2006): 23. <https://doi.org/10.15663/wje.v12i1.296>

¹⁰⁷ Churchward, “Tukufakaholo,” in *Tongan Dictionary: Tongan – English and English – Tongan*.

¹⁰⁸ Timote Nai (the author’s father), personal conversation with the author, 2020.

¹⁰⁹ “Talanoa: Hūfanga-He-Ako-Moe-Lotu Dr ‘Ōkusitino Māhina,” Vā Moana Research Centre, March 16, 2022, <https://www.vamoana.org/news/talanoa-hufanga-he-ako-moe-lotu-dr-okusitino-mahina>

¹¹⁰ “Talanoa: Hūfanga-He-Ako-Moe-Lotu Dr ‘Ōkusitino Māhina.”

¹¹¹ “Ngatu Pepa (Vylene Tapa),” Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, <https://collections.tepapa.govt.nz/search/FE010743/results?wi=false&wdi=false&q=FE010743&page=1>

¹¹² Billie Lythberg, “Polyvocal Tongan Barkcloths: Contemporary Ngatu and Nomenclature at the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa,” *Tuhinga* 24 (2013): 97. <https://www.tepapa.govt.nz/assets/76067/1692674140-tuhinga-24-2013-pt5-p85-104-lythberg.pdf>

substitute for feta'aki, the same as the Tongan elders do. 'Ilo Me'a Fo'ou was the group that helped me learn about the history of how vylene paper came about, enabling me to understand its relationship to ngatu and why they decided to use this synthetic interfacing paper instead of a different material.



Image 91. FE010743; 'Ilo Me'a Fo'ou (New Creations), Ngatu Pepa (Vilene Tapa), 1996.
©Te Papa's Collection Report

Generations of People Bound Together by Collective Responsibility

Throughout the project, I refer to the generations of people as 'we' and 'our'; they are the people who have shared, carried, or passed on the knowledge of ngatu. It is a responsibility shared by parents, aunts and uncles, and their children and nieces and nephews, which extends to their grandchildren and beyond. One of the ways I care for the research and the practice is through the Tongan concept of tauhi vā (taking care of the relationship), which involves caring for the tradition through the people—specifically, the relational aspect of being present and in relationship with one another through exchange, crafting, and conversation. This project didn't come to fruition because I carried it on my own, but rather, because it is generational and people cared enough to contribute and be a part of it. Vā is the relationship I have with the past and present community of Pelehake—the makers, my family, everyone who participates—as they add value and knowledge to how the practice is situated in both contexts: back in Pelehake and here in Aotearoa. Tongan Professor of Anthropology Dr Tevita Ka'ili says:

The performance act of tauhi vā is about the creation and maintenance of symmetrical forms through the mutual performance of social duties (fatongia). This symmetrical arrangement of tā and vā gives rise to mālie, and beauty evokes powerful feelings of warmth, elation, and honor among the performers.¹¹³

¹¹³ Tevita O. Ka'ili, "Tauhi Vā: Creating Beauty Through the Art of Socio-Spatial Relations" (Grad. Diss., University of Washington, 2008), <https://anthropology.washington.edu/research/graduate/tauhi-va-creating-beauty-through-art-sociospatial-relations>

This quote speaks about the act of tauhi vā, which extends beyond maintaining a strong relationship with the people of this project, as seen in the act of tauhi, as they are involved in my practice through their fatongia (duties), as the makers and knowledge-holders of the village. It brings such a warm feeling knowing that, through my nena, my vā with the elders honours the villagers and the ngatu makers, past and present. Through this tauhi vā, I am tied back to fonua, which is directly manifested in the materials and processes that I use throughout the project, which in turn stem from my relationships with people.

To source materials from our fonua, such as lou'akau (pandanus leaves), hiapo (mulberry paper), koka (*Bischofia javanica* or bishop wood), and tu'aniu (coconut mid-rib), I harvest them from our family land. For the materials not accessible, such as niu kafa (another kind of coconut)¹¹⁴ and lau'i kaka (coconut fibre wrapped around a young coconut leaf), we harvest them from relatives' land or ask the people who plant them. When the vā is well respected, it makes it easier for me to understand my vā in the material and why I chose to use it in this project. This is because the material used by the generations before me continues to carry knowledge to this day. Learning and understanding its functionality helps me keep the vā in a respectful way, because it is the elders who keep us connected to the past and carry the knowledge towards the future.

Tongan Fijian writer and anthropologist 'Epeli Hau'ofa uses 'we' and 'our' in his writings, also when he is referring to the people of Oceania. For example, in the chapter "Our Place Within: Foundations for a Creative Oceania," he talks about the "important principles of our societies—in particular reciprocity, cooperation, openness to community, and transmission of knowledge and skills through observation and hands-on experience,"¹¹⁵ which is how I see the process of intergenerational knowledge occurring within my practice. Hau'ofa then explains, in the context of creative practice and 'we/our', that

in the modern world, art is considered an individual's affair. We, however, view art from the interest of a collective and encourage our artists to nurture each other. We do not spurn individualism; we choose to give priority to the collective.¹¹⁶

In my practice, I work individually in Tāmaki Makaurau, Aotearoa, at AUT, creating screen-printed ngatu works on a scale that could only be achieved with traditional ngatu in a collective setting. However, when explaining and sharing the practice, I do not talk as an individual. I always acknowledge there is more than just me; hence why I use 'we/our'. This is because I do not carry or acquire knowledge and understanding as an individual; rather, I gain it through observation and engagement in the collective 'doing' with people who practice and work together. The 'we/our' that Hau'ofa talks about can be witnessed across our

¹¹⁴ Whose fruit is very long and is mostly husk. This type of coconut is used for making kafa or as a thread for stitching kupesi, crochet and many other Tongan crafts

¹¹⁵ 'Epeli Hau'ofa, "Our Place Within: Foundation for Creative Oceania," in *We Are the Ocean: Selected Works* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2008), 85.

¹¹⁶ Hau'ofa, "Our Place Within," 85.

Oceania communities, in many art forms such as dance and music, these are a matter of communitywide participation. Everyone joins in, either performing or supporting. The idea is that everyone has a part to play.¹¹⁷

In this research project, the idea that “everyone has a part to play” is outlined in *Konga II: Tupu’anga: The family history of the project*, where I describe how each person brings different levels of expertise that are related but distinct. As said, this is apparent in the collectives of people who come together in support of the practice, but it is especially evident in the practice of koka’anga. I will be making my final PhD exhibition work, titled *Tohi Kumi Koloa – Fepōtalanōa’aki pea mo ‘eku fanga kui*, involving the elders from the community of Pelehake in making one of my ngatu as a village. This will be made in parallel to the screen-printed pepa koka’anga which in practice becomes ‘I’ instead of ‘we’. However, conceptually I am still operating as a ‘we’. For example, when I make my large-scale screen-printed works without a community of literal hands, my body knows what to do—they are not physically there, but they are, through me. Metaphorically, I play all the parts that everyone contributes to in Pelehake. (Image 92)

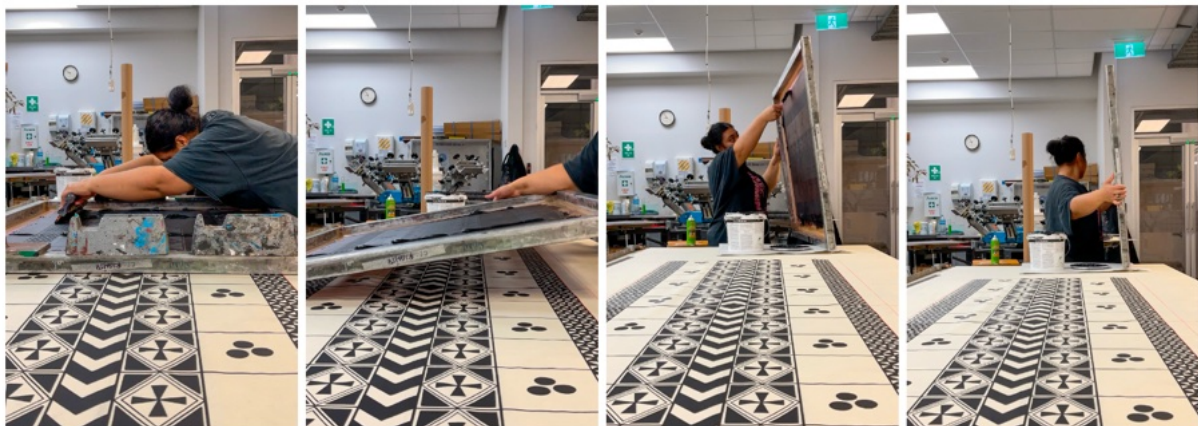


Image 92. ‘Uhila Nai, *The silent ‘we’*, 2024. At the AUT screen-printing facility, printing kupesi onto pepa koka’anga.

The notion that ‘we’ and ‘our’ are present in the practice through me is reinforced by academic Leali’ifano Albert Refiti (Sāmoan) in the article “The Forked Centre: Duality and Privacy in Polynesian Spaces and Architecture.” He discusses the idea “of ‘knowing/placing who you are’ — of identifying where one tu or ‘to take a place letting things pass,’ in relation to the fanua (landscape), and the tupu’aga (ancestors), āiga ma le nu’u (family/village/community) and respecting the vā (sacred in-between space) relationship with the natural environment.”¹¹⁸ He states:

¹¹⁷ Hau’ofa, “Our Place Within,” 85.

¹¹⁸ Leali’ifano Albert Refiti, “The Forked Centre: Duality and Privacy in Polynesian Spaces and Architecture,” *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples* 4, no. 1 (2008): 98.

your body does not necessarily belong to you as an individual. Because you are woven from the flesh of the dead, your body belongs to the ancestors, to your fanua, the place of birth, and to the community that shaped and cared for you.¹¹⁹

Therefore, when referring to my ancestors, my family, and the people who have left before me, I use the term ‘we’ because, in this way, the ‘I’ does not exist in this project, except when I am literally screen-printing.

In a personal conversation with Refiti centred on language, he suggested that this liuaki between the Tongan and English languages does not always match in definition. We discussed the term ‘archive’, and he said, “Archive is not a Tongan term, and therefore, your parents, grandparents and our crafts are the definition of what archives are.”¹²⁰ They are the ones that carried the knowledge, in that we never wrote our history. Our crafts are embedded within our everyday life practice, and our body both carries and passes it on through the method of oral tradition—and in this context, through practising.

In his book *Sand Talk: How Indigenous Thinking Can Save the World*, academic, arts critic, and researcher Tyson Yunkaporta (who belongs to the Apalech clan from Western Cape York) notes that “before European occupation we just called ourselves ‘People’ in our own languages, but because I’m not speaking for any single language group, I use many of the inadequate English terms when I need to refer to us collectively.”¹²¹ An example he uses is the word “‘dreaming’ (which is a mistranslation and misinterpretation) because a lot of the old people I respect, and who have passed knowledge on to me, use these words. It’s not my place to disrespect them by rejecting their vocabulary choices.”¹²² I understand this idea as similar to the decision I have made around the making of my work; as it is made collectively by my ancestors, who are part of me, I have no right to reject the way ‘we’ work collectively. I might be an artist who makes art sometimes as an individual, but in all cases, it’s my ancestors and I who are working together, which is why everything I do across the practice, whether making or planning, is always intentional.

¹¹⁹ Refiti, “The Forked Centre,” 99-99.

¹²⁰ Albert Refiti, conversation with the author, 2019.

¹²¹ Yunkaporta, *Sand Talk*, 22.

¹²² Yunkaporta, *Sand Talk*, 22.

Konga IV: Founga Ngāue – Methodology

This research is ‘lived research’, in which the project’s methodology is a way of life, and the methods involve me being the ‘researcher’ as a part of kautaha (association). A way of life based on nimamea’a koka’anga (the crafts of ngatu making) and its fundamental component, kupesi (embroidered relief stencil), the practice acknowledges the hou’eiki fafine of the past—the women who inspired this practice.

In this chapter I outline the Tui Kupesi research framework, which was developed in response to the multiplicity of lived experiences encountered throughout this project, across time and space. I also discuss how I have deepened and broadened my knowledge of ngatu and kupesi through practising and fepōtalanoa’aki (in-conversation) with ngatu makers from Pelehake. Over the course of this project, I have come to understand this special opportunity given by the elders, not only to learn the practice of ngatu but also to document ‘our’ everyday work—a lived experience—in the ways I have received knowledge, observing and listening.

Pelehake and Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland, dual contexts of practice

The methods employed in this project come from the process of making ngatu and kupesi, as well as from our everyday lives. Layers of different techniques, knowledge, and conversations are unpacked in a context that might allow the practice to become familiar with an unfamiliar space, known as ‘contemporary artmaking’. The research positions itself in two different contexts, Pelehake and here in Tāmaki Makaurau. Pelehake is where I fakafetongi (exchange) and fepōtalanoa’aki with the kautaha koka’anga (Women’s Ngatu Makers Association), exchange and discuss with family, elders, and makers. Tāmaki Makaurau, on the other hand, is where I am situated at AUT, undertaking a practice-led doctoral project. Here, I position myself in my studio, the AUT Print Lab and the 3D Digital Fabrication Lab, where I learn and adapt contemporary artmaking skills for my project’s purposes. Working in these facilities operates in parallel with making spaces in Pelehake.

Tui Kupesi Research Framework

The project’s methodological framework is derived from the art of Tui Kupesi, which serves as an overarching methodological tool and a culturally grounded framework. This provides an appropriate lens through which to understand the artwork conducted through this research project. This is a newly developed research methodology that I created specifically for this project to reflect the kupesi making and mode of practising in Tonga and Aotearoa. It is designed to shape the project into a lived document, one that can be carried forward by future generations.

Through this framework, I pay homage, offer respect, and acknowledge my nena and all the ancestral lines that have been left for me to trace.

To explore and understand the project through the Tui Kupesi research methodology, I use *kāpasa* (compass) as a guiding tool to navigate the trajectory of the thesis. It forms the foundation for the project's practical, conceptual, and theoretical dimensions, guiding it through stages that reflect traditional knowledge systems and creative practice. The Tongan term '*kāpasa*' refers to me'a ngāue fua faifolau (a navigation tool). In the project, I use *kāpasa* to help me navigate the complexities of the practice, with Pelehake as a guide. When I return home, it helps me navigate through different spaces, enabling me to move in and out smoothly, especially with a practice that weaves between two different practices.

The origins of the framework

The Tongan craft of *nimamea'a koka'anga* encompasses many layered processes that reflect the depth of this practice. A key component is the *kupesi*, which functions not only as a tool but also carries multiple meanings and roles within the craft.

The term '*tui*' can be translated in various ways depending on context, such as dressing, religious belief, or stitching. In the *Monolingual Tongan Dictionary*, *kupesi* is defined as *pule 'o e ngatu*,¹²³ meaning the centre or core of the *ngatu*. *Tui kupesi* and *kupesi tui* carry two distinct meanings, referring to different aspects of the same object. This distinction was clarified in a conversation with my father's older sisters, Aunt Vei and Aunt Moana. *Tui kupesi* refers to the process (method) of making the *kupesi*, while *kupesi tui* refers to the final product—the completed *kupesi*. The latter is the result of applying the method of *tui kupesi*.

Pule 'o e ngatu: Making the kupesi for the ngatu (stencil making)

The term '*tui kupesi*' comes from the practice of making *kupesi*. They are traditionally made from natural materials sourced from the coconut tree, using the *tu'aniu* (coconut leaf mid-rib) and *filohi'aki 'a e kavele'ipulu* (the coconut husk twisted around the coconut mid-rib). To *tui* (stitch), you use a single strand of *kavele'ipulu* (coconut husk), or *fau* (hibiscus fibre), with the base layers made out of *lau'i kaka* (coconut fibre wrapped around a young coconut leaf) and *pāongo* (pandanus leaf).

There are three recognised methods used by *hou'eiki fafine* to make the *kupesi*. In 2018 I encountered an essay written by Tunakaimanu Tonga Fielakepa,¹²⁴ "*Kupesi: A Creative Tradition of Tonga*,"¹²⁵ which, in the early stages of my PhD, was pivotal in helping to unpack the concept

¹²³ "*Ko e Tala 'Uhinga 'o e Lea Faka-Tonga: Monolingual Tongan Dictionary*", (Ministry of Education, Women's Affair and Culture, 2010), 214.

¹²⁴ Without the use of her title, Dowager Lady, because this is the name that was used in the essay.

¹²⁵ Tuna Kaimanu Tonga Fielakepa, "*Kupesi: A Creative Tradition of Tonga*," in *Traditional Knowledge and Wisdom: Themes from the Pacific Islands*, ed. Samuel Lee (ICHCAP, 2014), <https://library.sprep.org/sites/default/files/traditional-knowledge-wisdom-themes-pacific-islands.pdf>

of kupesi. I revisited the same text in 2022 while working as a gallery assistant during the exhibition *Koloa: Fafine, 'Aati, Mo e Tekinolosa / Women, Art, and Technology* at Artspace Aotearoa. In the exhibition catalogue, Fielakepa outlines three methods of kupesi making, each characterised by geometric figures and abstract designs:¹²⁶

Kupesi tongo: These designs are traditional and “woven from strips of tongo (mangrove stems) using string made from fau (hibiscus fibre) or pulu (coir). Examples include motifs such as Ve‘etuli and Tatau Tuisipa.”¹²⁷ These are rarely made today. (Image 93)

Kupesi tui: These designs are constructed “using coconut leaf midribs (tu‘aniu) on a background of pāongo lined with kaka (fibrous integument around young coconut leaves).”¹²⁸ Examples include Tokelau Feletoa and Kalou.” (Image 94)

“Kupesi fokotu‘u: These are temporary designs that are often set up the day before the koka‘anga. “Using the stalk of the coconut leaf, these designs are easier to prepare than kupesi tongo or kupesi tui.”¹²⁹ The kupesi fokotu‘u is also temporary, meaning you create the kupesi design by lashing it onto the papa koka‘anga, and then it is taken off at the end of the koka‘anga. Kupesi that are easy and quick to set up are Amoamokofe and Potuamanuka.” (Image 95)

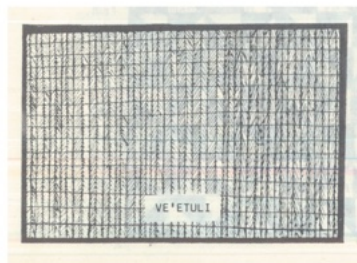


Image 93. Kupesi tongo

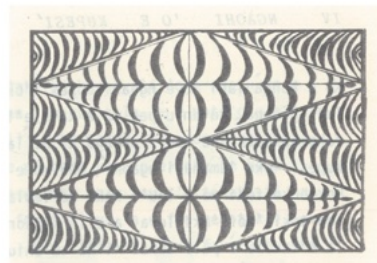


Image 94. Kupesi tui



Image 95. Kupesi fokotu‘u

¹²⁶ Tunakaimanu Fielakepa, the Dowager Lady Fielakepa, “Kupesi: A Creative Tradition of Tonga,” in Cosmin Costinaș and Vivian Zihel, curators, *Koloa Fafine, 'Aati, Mo e Tekinolosa / Women, Art, and Technology* (exhibition catalogue) (Artspace Aotearoa, 2022), 39.

¹²⁷ Fielakepa, “Kupesi: A Creative Tradition of Tonga,” 39.

¹²⁸ Fielakepa, 39.

¹²⁹ Fielakepa, 39.

At the start of the PhD, I began to unpack the collection of kupesi passed down from my nena. (Image 96) These three methods became a relevant way to articulate the methodological direction of the research. When I was first introduced to kupesi making in 2019 by my cousin's wife, Toakase Tu'iono,¹³⁰ I was unaware that multiple methods existed. From personal observation in Pelehake and in other villages, kupesi tui appears to be the most commonly used method. This is also evident in Aotearoa, where barkcloth makers continue to produce their own kupesi. Notable practitioners include Tui Emma Gillies and Sulieti Burrows, Ruha Fifita, Ebonie Fifita, and Benjamin Work. Examples can also be seen in collections held by Auckland War Memorial Museum, and were evident at the recent collaborative workshop held in September 2025 for a collective of eighty women from twenty villages in Pea, Tonga.¹³¹

Despite ongoing challenges in accessing materials, kupesi tui remains a preferred method. Its durability and cultural significance allow stories to be carried across generations. Unlike kupesi fokotu'u, which is temporary, or kupesi tongo, which is more difficult to prepare, kupesi tui supports both the remaking of old kupesi and creation of new designs, using what is on hand.

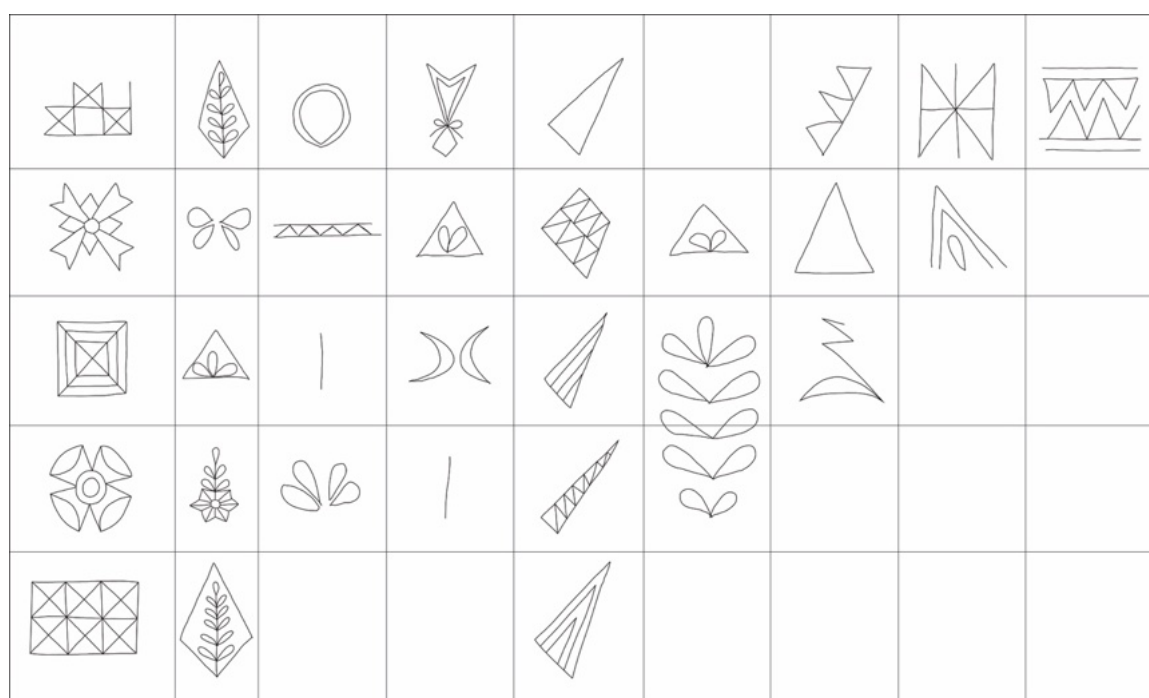


Image 96. Unpacking kupesi using Procreate as a tool, makes it easy to separate out the different forms that each kupesi possesses within each set.

¹³⁰ Toakase Tu'iono, as mentioned, is my cousin-in-law. In *Konga II – Tupu'anga: The family history of the project* I have outlined who she is and her relationship to the project.

¹³¹ Tupou Vaipulu Jr, "Ngatu Kupesi Tapa Workshop Adapts Tapa Printing for Marketplace," *Matangi Tonga Online*, August 26, 2025, <https://matangitonga.to/2025/08/25/ngatu-kupesi-tapa-workshop-adapts-tapa-painting-marketplace>

Mapping meaning

Through the process of unpacking the kupesi, I found myself in conversation with their forms. I was able to understand where their shapes derived from or what they were inspired by, and which categories of geometrical forms they belonged to—such as abstract, floral, monumental sites, past events, or well-known stories from royal history.

Over time, I have developed a comprehensive understanding of why kupesi is a fundamental component in the practice of koka'anga. These insights have positioned me as a knowledge-holder, someone who continues to carry and pass on stories of ngatu making shaped by the experiences I had growing up with Nena. They are a reminder of the practice's origins, grounded in the lived experiences of my nena, the people around her, and now me. Tui Kupesi functions as the overarching methodology that structures and maps the research. It speaks to the concept of stitching—metaphorically, it is the act of liuaki (to go back and forth), binding unspoken stories between past and present, and allowing them to be spoken when needed.

Fā kavei koula – The four pillars of the project

There are four core methodological stages that deepen my understanding of the practice of koka'anga, through visual arts approaches such as screen-printing, sculpture, and installation.

The project's methodological framework focuses on four methods derived from Tui Kupesi, which are:

Tokonaki pe tānaki – providing or collecting

Veteki – taking apart

Tuiaki mo e ngāue fakataha – stitching back and collective making

Koloa – the gift, the knowledge

The first stage, tokonaki pe tānaki, encompasses planning, conversation, organising, intergenerational collaboration, and creating space for sharing and gathering knowledge. It is akin to seasonal planting—preparing ahead of time before the making process begins. In this project, it is considered the material collection stage, carried out by planning and mapping out the structure of the artwork. The second stage, veteki, is a process of taking apart, unpacking, arranging, and categorising multiple layers of meaning, across time through kupesi (embroidered relief stencil), koloa (textile/knowledge), materials, fonua (land), and lea (language). It categorises and rearranges what is needed and what is not for the project, especially in preparation for the next phase. The third stage is tuiaki mo e ngāue fakataha, which focuses on the aspect of working together in creating the tool for the making of the work through the act of binding and stitching unwritten stories that are from lived experience or can only be seen or heard through the act of doing. Lastly, there is the stage of koloa, which focuses on gifting in two aspects. First, it is giving back to the community through the work that has been created. Second, knowledge is shared through different spaces, such as workshops, mentorships, or teaching.

Next, I will unpack the core methods that emerged from the practice's consistent moving about and looking for something to do. Based on that action, I was able to identify these four methods: tokonaki pe t̄anaki, veteki, tuiaki mo e ngāue fakataha, and koloa. I will explain the 'why' of these methods and how they shape the thinking and structure because of the act of liuaki.

Tokonaki pe t̄anaki: Planning and collecting

Tokonaki has multiple meanings, both literal and metaphorical. Literally, it refers to Saturday or crops; metaphorically, it means preparing in advance, such as food for Sundays.¹³² This method is derived from the Tongan expression 'tokonaki mei mu'a' or 'tokateu mei mu'a', which refers to preparing ahead of time before any inconvenience or disruption can take place.¹³³ This expression is rooted in doing, action ahead of time, and has become a core mode of working in this research.

T̄anaki simply means to gather or collect together.¹³⁴ T̄anaki emerged from the act of travelling back to Pelehake to collect indigenous materials not available in Aotearoa. Travelling between these two spaces is necessary to collect the materials, but it is also about planning, and collecting data through conversation, which helps to structure the works.

This stage in the process prompts key questions:

- What is the focus or purpose of the research?
- Why and how should it be pursued?
- Who is it for?
- Who contributes to the research and making?
- Where and with whom are conversations exchanged?
- What is the intended outcome, and who benefits?
- What materials are selected for use?

To address these questions, I used the methods of t̄alanga (informal conversations with elders), interviews, and mapping drawings (Image 97 - 100) to prepare for the journey home to Pelehake and the collection of data and materials.

During the tokonaki pe t̄anaki stage, I refer to the term 'liuaki', meaning to go back and forth. This concept applies to my movement between Tonga and Aotearoa, and between past and present. Returning to Tonga—which I see as the past—I gathered insights into intergenerational knowledge from ngatu makers (Image 101) who have been practising since I first attended koka'anga with my nena around 2002. This included village orators, key knowledge-holders, and family members in Pelehake (as listed in *Konga II: Tupu'anga – The family history of the project*). (see Images 60–69) While there, I also collected materials rooted in the soil, such as hiapo

¹³² As Sunday is a holy day, you are not meant to harvest any of your crops, and cannot buy meat or other ingredients, because shops are closed on Sundays.

¹³³ Personal conversation with Aunt Vei, Aunt Moana and my dad, Timote, referring to the ideas of before any inconvenience, like a blackout or hurricane, family funerals, things that are unexpected.

¹³⁴ Churchward, *Tongan Dictionary: Tongan – English and English – Tongan*.

(mulberry tree), pāongo, fau, and components from the coconut tree. Gathering these materials requires insight and skill in identifying high-quality sources and knowing where to locate them.

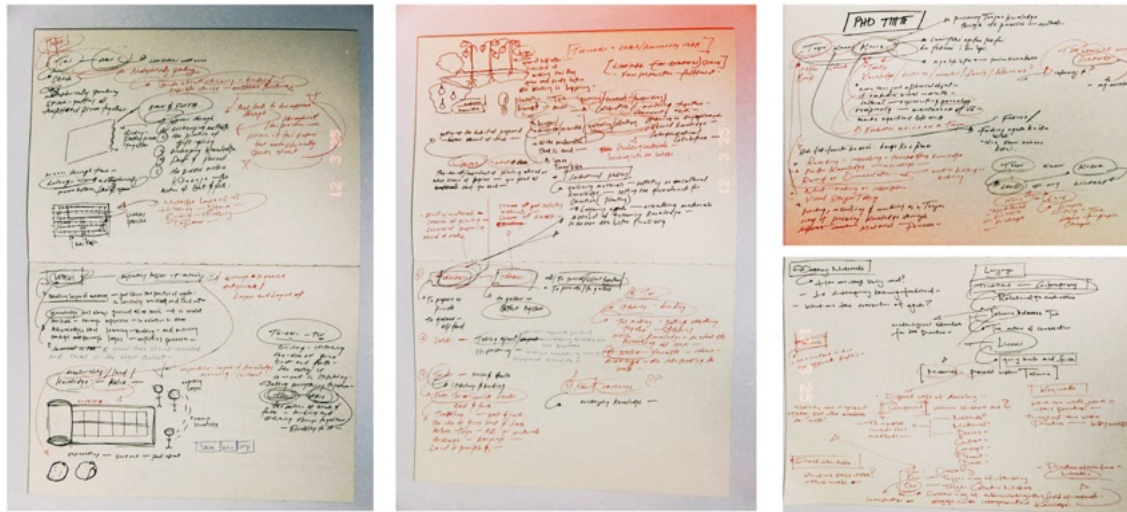


Image 97. Workbook Studio documentation, mapping/drawing before / after going to or coming back from Pelehake, preparation for an exhibition, drawing out ideas, mapping out context between 2021–2025.

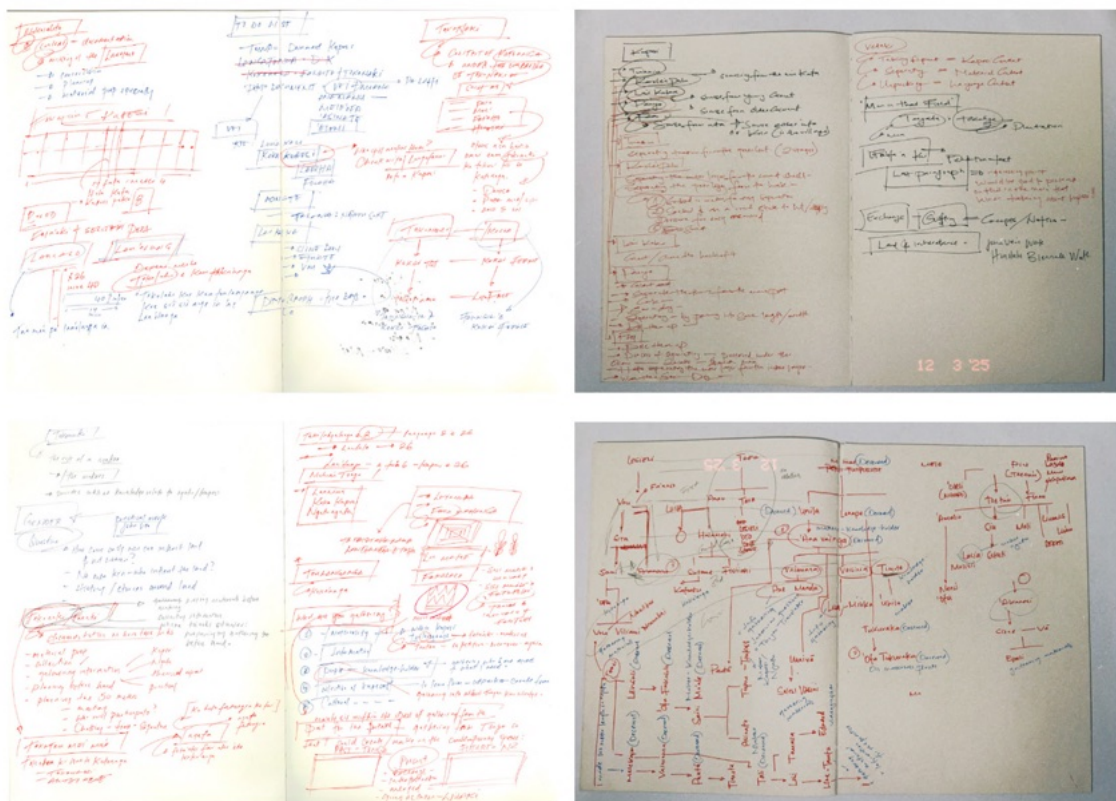


Image 98. Studio documentation, 2021–2025.



Image 101. The Pelehake Koka'anga women whom I always go to for learning in-depth about the process of koka'anga which helps me to know how to navigate the ngatu screen-print when I work in the AUT Print lab.

In Aotearoa—referred to as the present—I have gained new knowledge, methods, and tools through AUT's technical labs, including printmaking, specifically the method and tool of screen-printing, which I will be discussing further in *Konga IV: Founa Ngāue –Methodology*. Working across various labs, the 3D Lab, the Digital Fabrication Lab (laser cutting and 3D printing), and the Wet Lab (ceramics), I have adopted these methods, which I now carry with me and use when needed. These complement the materials and knowledge I gather in Tonga to support the next stage of the project.

To tānaki materials from soil (or from the fonua), I remain in contact with my uncle, Sione Palu, who helps in organising where to gather specific materials such as niu kafa (another kind of coconut). He also acts as a guide when I need to photograph key sites, such as my childhood church and Tongan fale. (Image 102) On my recent trip in October 2025, before the submission of this exegesis text, new participants joined me to collect lau'i kaka (Images 103–105) and tua'aniu (Image 103), as you need young adults who have the skills to climb up the coconut tree. They were my in-law, Taufa Mahe, Uncle Viliami Vou, and cousin 'Epeli Kaufusi. (see Image 69) Their role involved climbing coconut trees—ranging from two to three metres to six to nine metres tall—to cut down leaves and access the fibres that are wrapped around each coconut leaf. My job was to gather the fibres and coconut midribs. To create a full set of kupesi, we collected materials from approximately four to eight coconut trees and two to four coconut leaves. All materials were gathered from my grandfather's land in Tokomea.¹³⁵ (Image 106)

¹³⁵ Our family land in Pelehake, which is shared across the family.



Image 102. Couple of the Fale Tonga across Pelehake, inspired by the structure of a fale Tonga, made with contemporary material, alongside the church. Photographing these sites is what contributes to the making of kupesi which I will use in the making of the final work.

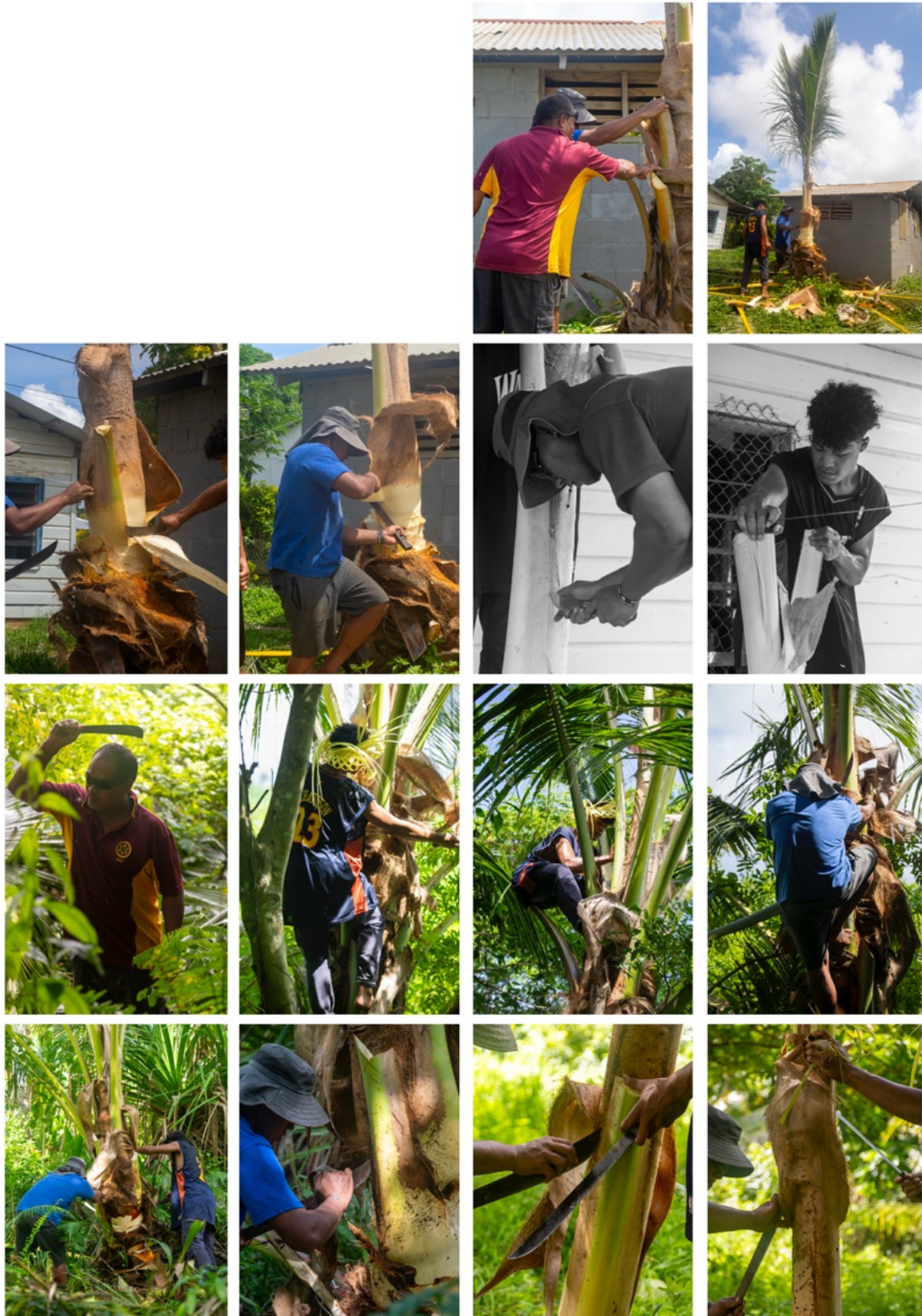


Image 103. Taufa, 'Epeli and Viliami in the process of collecting la'ui kaka, 2025. Tokomea (family land) and fale kalapu (Kava Lounge).



Image 104. 'Epeli and Viliami in the process of collecting lau'i kaka at our family land, Tokomea, 2025.



Image 105. ‘Epeli and Viliam collecting louniu from fale kalapu, 2025: Myself and Uncle Lu collecting louniu on the coastline of the Beinan Township – Fushan Village, 2023.



Image 106. Tokomea, an aerial shot and places where I gathered my materials set in soil. It is a family land shared between my dad's siblings and their cousins on grandpa's side of the family. 2025.

Veteki: Unpacking and arranging

The process of veteki appears in two forms in this project: one as a method that unstitches kupesi, and another that unpacks materials and research. Veteki, or the unstitching of kupesi, is a method of cultural and material analysis rooted in my personal experience and place-based knowledge.

Unstitching of the kupesi

I only use the kupesi from where I grew up in Pelehake; I do not borrow or use kupesi from other villages in Tonga or from the Internet. To unstitch kupesi so that I can understand their separate forms, I photograph each kupesi (Image 107), which I then use as a reference or a guide. To separate individual kupesi, I have created my own method using a digital drawing programme called Procreate, a software for drawing or animation. Procreate is one of my main tools, because within it, kupesi is treated as a guide to trace the outlines of individual forms. Through this veteki process, I ended up with a total of 30 individual forms of kupesi from a collection of nine different kupesi. (see Image 95)



Image 107. Photographs of the collection of kupesi left with me by Nena.

After tracing and separating the kupesi, I began to recognise some of the forms. The majority were plants that I grew up learning about from my nena during the practice of tui kakala (stringing garlands). The making of tui kakala always involved Nena asking me to collect different flowers from family and friends' houses. (Image 108) If her garden didn't have the type of kakala she was looking for, she would instruct me on what to get and whose house to visit. Her making process gave me access to knowledge about different plants and their material functionality in Tongan craft making.



Image 108. These are some of the kakala that my nena would ask me to collect, which she would later use to make a kahoa or a sisi. Kaloni, siale Tonga, pua Tonga, mohokoi and maile.

In her essay “Kakala Research Framework: A Garland in Celebration of a Decade of Rethinking Education,” Seu’ula Johansson Fua describes the practice of tui kakala:

Picture a group of older women sitting on a mat under a tree, sprawled around them are scented flowers, usually carefully wrapped with some piece of cloth, a variety of needles and strings of fau (stripped from bark of the fau tree). Buzzing around them would be children of different ages who would be venturing out to different gardens throughout the village collecting flowers and leaves for the women to carefully string together into a kakala, a garland.¹³⁶

Having personal experience similar to what Fua describes has helped me identify some of the kakala that inspired our kupesi. Recognising familiar parts of the kupesi and their names gave me insight for mapping out the kakala to where they belong and where they came from in Pelehake. (Images 109) Drawing on kupesi derived from kakala designs, I looked at two different sisi (waist garments) from my nena’s collection. Both were made using the same plant, and were named Sisi maile ‘o Fatafehi and Sisi maile ‘o ‘Uluvalu, in honour of Queen Sālote’s two sons.

¹³⁶ Seu’ula Johansson Fua, “Kakala Research Framework: A Garland in Celebration of a Decade of Rethinking Education” (University of South Pacific, Ha’ateiho, Tonga, 2009), 49, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/312532893_Kakala_Research_Framework_A_Garland_in_Celebration_of_a_Decade_of_Rethinking_Education

Sisi maile 'o Fatafehi was named after Prince Fatafehi Tu'i Pelehake (Sione Ngū Manumataongo), holder of one of the highest-ranking chief titles in Tonga and the youngest son of Queen Sālote Tupou III. He received the title Tu'i Pelehake from his mother in 1994, alongside the second-highest title in Tonga, Tu'i Faleua ('king of the second house'). Sisi maile 'o 'Uluvalu was named after Sione 'Uluvalu Ngū Takeivūlai Tuku'aho, son of Prince Fatafehi Tu'i Pelehake, who inherited the title Tu'i Pelehake after his father's death in 1999.

From memory and stories shared during this research, Sisi maile 'o 'Uluvalu was created to commemorate the tragic event in 2006—he and his wife died “in a car accident on Highway 101 in Menlo Park, California, near San Francisco.”¹³⁷ To remember his passing, this sisi maile was created and named after him, and it is from him that the name and story of Sisi maile 'o 'Uluvalu originated.

The sisi maile kupesi is made up of two different plants: maile (*Alyxia stellata*) and fā (dry pandanus fruit). Maile has a fragrant leaf and sweet-scented flowers, and is commonly used as a lei across the Pacific, including in Hawai'i and Tonga. Fā is the fruit of the pandanus tree, used for weaving. In kakala practice, there is a sisi maile made with just maile leaves. On top of the sisi maile is a kahoa made from fā, in which the outer layer of the fā is used to create flower shapes, which are woven together with the maile. (Image 110)

In conversation with my aunt, Veisia, she said, “sisi maile fungai 'aki e faka'otusia,” meaning they added the faka'otusia on top of the sisi maile. That is how they created the sisi maile faka'otusia—a combination of a kahoa kakala and a sisi.¹³⁸ (Image 110)

I learned about making the sisi maile and kahoa faka'otusia from watching my nena. Because of this experience, it was easier for me to relocate where the maile and fā are found in Pelehake. I located the maile at 'Amelia Kainga's¹³⁹ house, and the fā in my nena's backyard.

¹³⁷ Palo Alto Online Staff, “Tongan Royal Couple Killed in MP crash.” *Palo Alto Online*, July 7, 2006, <https://www.paloaltoonline.com/news/2006/07/07/tongan-royal-couple-killed-in-mp-crash/>

¹³⁸ Aunt Veisia Vaha'i, maker and family member, personal conversation with the author, 2025.

¹³⁹ 'Amelia Kainga is a relative on my grandpa's side, the daughter of 'Ana Puka.

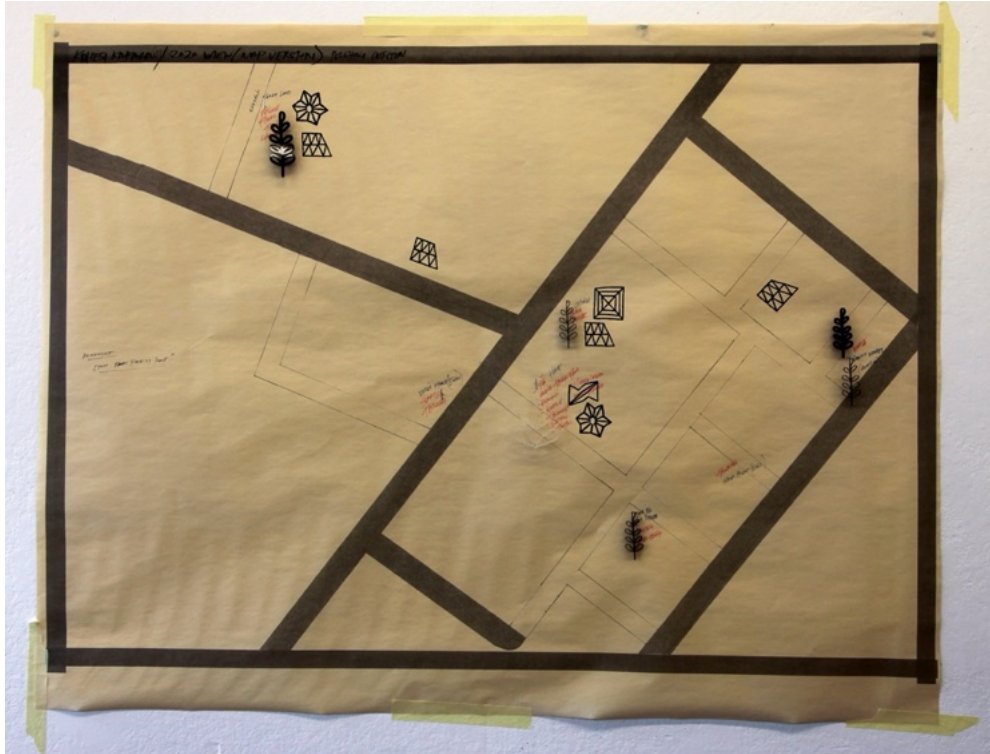


Image 109. Mapping out the malie and fā back to where I source them from within Pelehake. Locating maile back to ‘Amelia’s house, and fā back to my nena’s backyard.



Image 110. The order or a demonstration of how I veteki kupesi. Through veteki, I was able to make a link to where the kupesi was derived from, which was taken from our sisi and kahoa kakala practice. Drawing/mapping using Procreate programme.

Veteki – Taking apart a collection of things

In everyday Tongan life, the word ‘veteki’ is in common usage and expressed as fakamovete (to scatter/disperse) or holoki (to demolish, in architectural contexts). It can also describe taking apart a pile of coconuts or untangling things that are stuck together. Within this research project, veteki is the method used for taking apart or unpacking already existing things to understand their meaning and relationship to art practice.

Veteki is, therefore, expressed in three ways:

Kupesi – Taking apart the components that make up one kupesi, revealing multiple layers of historical stories.

Natural materials – Separating raw, natural materials used to make textiles and objects.

Lea (language) – Unpacking the Tongan language, its use, and how it shifts across time, space, and generations.

Veteki kupesi

Early on in my PhD, I came across an explanation of one of the royal family’s kupesi, which is well known as Sila ‘o Tonga—Tonga’s coat of arms. Created in 1862 by Prince Uelingatoni Ngu Tupou,¹⁴⁰ it is identical to the Royal arms. Tunakaimanu Tonga Fielakepa explained that each component represents the connection between the people and what constitutes Tonga as a nation.¹⁴¹

Until this project, I had never truly understood what the coat of arms was comprised of. Learning about it made me realise how many of our kupesi are known only by name, sometimes with a story attached, but not by the origins or meanings of their forms. Fielakepa’s explanation revealed how kupesi can hold deep layers of history and spiritual understanding. She described that ifi (Tahitian chestnut) leaves symbolise humility. They are designed around the crown to show that the King and the Crown humble themselves before God Almighty. The crown, placed at the top right, symbolises that Tonga is a Kingdom. On the bottom right are the three swords, representing the three dynasties: Tu’i Tonga, Tu’i Ha’atakalaua, and Tu’i Kanokupolu. On the bottom left sits the lupe—a dove carrying an olive branch—symbolising peace, unity, and Christianity. To the top left, the stars represent the three main island groups within the Kingdom of Tonga: Tongatapu, Ha’apai, and Vava’u. And at the centre lies the six-pointed star with a cross, symbolising the nation itself.¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰ “National Arms of Tonga,” Heraldry of the World, https://www.heraldry-wiki.com/wiki/National_Arms_of_Tonga

¹⁴¹ Tunakaimanu Tonga Fielakepa, personal conversation with the author, 2020.

¹⁴² Michel Charleux, ed., *Tapa: From Tree Bark to Cloth: An Ancient Art of Oceania, from Southeast Asia to Eastern Polynesia*, trans. Adam Rickards and Manuel Benguigui (Somogy Éditions d’Art, Paris, 2017); Tunakaimanu Tonga Fielakepa, *Tonga Island: Kupesi, a Creative Tradition of Tonga* (Association TAPA, 2017), 290–294.

The Dowager’s teaching helped me see the coat of arms not just as a royal emblem, but as a vessel of knowledge. Through it, I learned how design becomes a repository of histories, genealogies, and intergenerational wisdom. It reflects anga-fakatōkilalo (humility)—one of Tonga’s key values—fonua (land), and Christianity, together forming the foundation of Tongan identity and worldview. (Image 111)

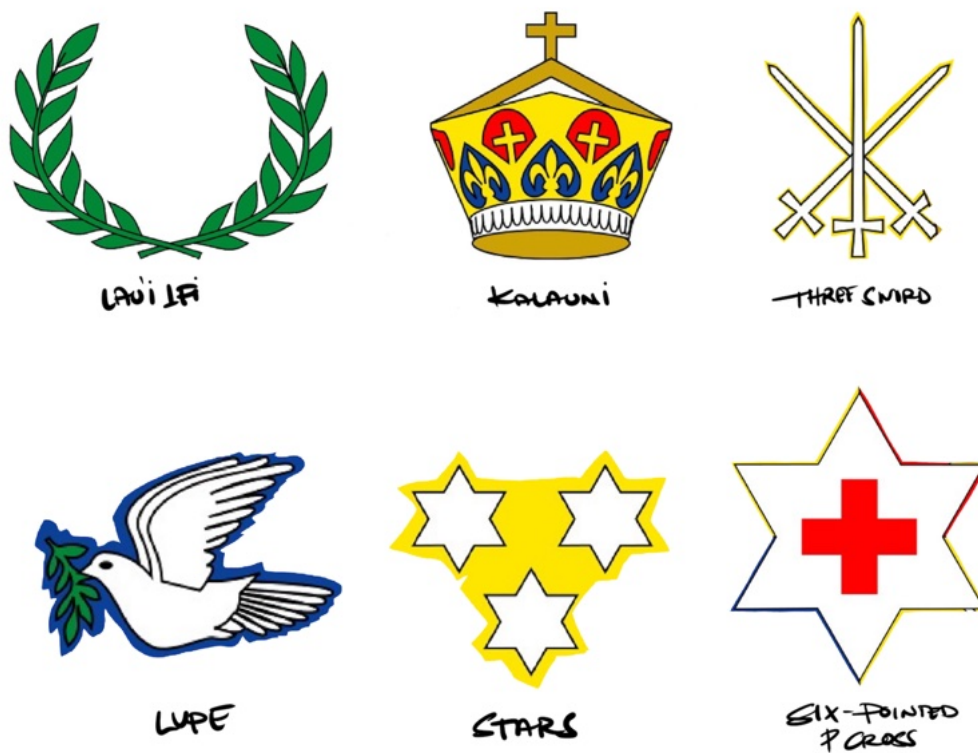


Image 111. Prince Uelingatoni Ngu Tupou, Sila ‘o Tonga – Tongan Coat of Arms, 1862.
Using the method of veteki to understand the way it was being designed.

Veteki natural materials

Growing up in village life, I observed the life of a maker—always active, always on the go. My nena was the provider, deeply involved in women’s making. She planted her own materials in her garden, so she was not reliant on anyone, while also serving the community. Her days began at 6am with prayer and Bible reading. She was organised, self-sufficient, and resourceful—qualities that have shaped my own approach to working with unprocessed materials.

Working with natural materials has allowed me to learn more about their roles and what they contribute to the assembling process. Kupesi is made from materials such as tu‘aniu, kavele‘ipulu, and lau‘i kaka, sourced from the coconut tree; pāongo and fau are sourced from the hibiscus and pandanus, respectively. When it comes to veteki, access to this list of natural

materials is weather dependent. What that means is that it takes fewer days to prepare the materials for making kupesi—let’s say between four and five days—when it is sunny. However, this timeframe is extended during the rainy season, which can be over a week or two, simply because the materials need to be fully dry to make the kupesi.

Ngaahi naunau: The materials

Tu’aniu (midrib):

Taken from the leaves (fronds) of the coconut tree, the tu’aniu is the midrib of each leaf. Using the tip of a knife, the midrib is separated from the green leaf. This process creates the structures (symbolic form) used in kupesi forms—carrying story, history, knowledge, and memory. (Image 112)



Image 112. Aunt Moana, Ha’alo tu’aniu, 2025.

Kavele’ipulu:

The process of kavele’ipulu can take more than two days and involves five stages. First, the coconut is husked, and the outer green layer is separated from the shell. The husk is then soaked overnight to soften the fibres, making them easier to pull apart. After soaking, the outer layer is hammered with a block of wood to loosen the tougher sections. Mature husks are thick and strong—extending up to 40 centimetres in length—and are known as niu kafa. These fibres are traditionally used for stitching, crocheting, and making kafa (coconut sennit cordage). Through veteki, each part of the coconut is separated so it can be used as a thread for stitching and wrapping around the midrib, giving texture and structure to kupesi. (Image 113)



Image 113. Niu kafa process. The process of husking the coconut and removing the outer green layer, soaked in water then leaving it out to dry.

Fau (hibiscus):

To prepare fau, the outer bark must be separated from the inner bark. Bundles of hibiscus branches are tied with hibiscus fibre and placed in shallow seawater, weighted with rocks to prevent floating. After about two weeks, the green layers separate easily. The inner bark is then washed twice—first in seawater, then in freshwater—before being sun dried. This material is used as a thread for stitching the base together and to stitch the tu‘aniu onto the base when creating the kupesi forms.

Pāongo:

Only mature leaves that are long and wide, and undamaged, are harvested. Using a knife, the spines along the leaf edges are trimmed away. This is for making the base, either as the second layer or the top layer, depending on how the kupesi maker wants the base of their kupesi. What I was taught, though, is that the pāongo is used as the second layer, simply because of its thickness and width, as it provides a good layer without the need for too many layers of lau‘i kaka. (Image 114)



Image 114. Pāongo (pandanus) process.

The process of veteki is not just about separating materials to reach what is practically useful. Veteki is an important methodological stage in this practice, because what it does is enable me to dive in and really understand the functionality of each material component and its connection to the craft it is chosen for. As a maker, veteki helps you understand in-depth material connections to the history, and veteki kupesi is important because it allows me to navigate its stories easily, seeing how people are tied to their past, cultural responsibilities, and the arts that are being embodied in different ways.

Veteki lea

The term 'lea' in Tongan means to speak, or language. Throughout the entire project, I constantly veteki the lea faka-Tonga for me to understand how to use the right word when translating into English, and particularly in an academic context. I started doing this because translating Tongan to English often seems to lose some of the meaning and richness that each word carries. Veteki lea is how I can communicate with the elders, because it helps me understand the different hierarchy of language they use, and for the practice to position itself in any context. It doesn't just exist in the way that I have conversations with people, but through the way that I write. The exegesis is written in a mode of respect to acknowledge how I am taking care of the traditions, honouring the knowledge-holders, and reflecting my insider's understanding and lived experience of the practice from a traditional perspective and its role within society. Across the practice, lea faka-Tonga weaves in and out like weaving a mat together, because it is the lea faka-Tonga that holds and connects the practice. (Image 115)

kavele'ipulu, fau, and the layers of a story told by many voices. The needle threads through these layers, binding what is important to be captured and shared through the kupesi forms and passed on to future generations. The forms created by tu'aniu are the stories, stitched together using a single kavele'ipulu or fau.

An example of collective tuiaki can be seen in the practice of the koka'anga women from the Fauniteni 'o e Mo'oni (fountain of truth) collective. In the article "Commoner Tongan Women Authenticate 'Ngatu Pepa' in Auckland" by Ping-Ann Addo, a collective of women from the Dominion Road Methodist Church in Mount Eden gathered between January and June 2002 to make kupesi using "materials sourced from the Tongan islands and the diaspora. The members cut plastic sacking to the size of island-Tongan kupesi tablets (about 14–18 inches) and reinforced the edges, sewing with coconut leaf midribs sent from Tonga."¹⁴³ To create the kupesi shapes "the women bent and angled the coconut midribs into desired shapes and sewed them into the sacking."¹⁴⁴ When women gather collectively, this kind of making experience is joyful and eventful, filled with singing, reminiscing, and sharing jokes to pass the long hours. This is the aspect that I find most memorable and meaningful, as it brings joy to the practice. (Image 114)

For my artwork *The Third Generation* (2019–20), my family joined me in making the materials for the papa koka'anga—Timote (father), Kafo'atu, Liu Kovi, and 'Ana (siblings), and Lotomou'a (mother). Their help reflected Addo's description: collective singing, sharing jokes, and stories about my parents' life in Tonga. They helped prepare tu'aniu by twirling it with kavele'ipulu. (Image 117) At the same time, I stitched everything together and plaited kafa (coconut sennit cordage) from pulu (coir), which was used as a tool on the papa koka'anga and for suspending my pepa koka'anga prints.

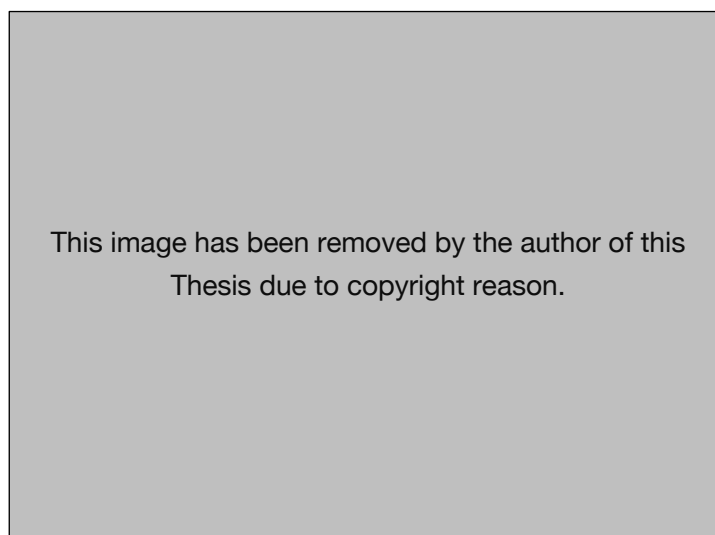


Image 116. Women of the Fauniteni 'o e Mo'oni group construct kupesi (pattern tablets) using plastic sacking and coconut leaf midribs. The pattern is a traditional one called "Fata 'o Tu'i Tonga" Auckland, New Zealand, 2002.

¹⁴³ Addo, "Commoner Tongan Women Authenticate 'Ngatu Pepa' in Auckland," 65.

¹⁴⁴ Addo, 65.



Image 117. Timote, Liu, Kafo and 'Ana, 2020. Family members in the process of twirling the tu'aniu with kavele'ipulu, which they will also participate in helping with the tu'aniu for the kupesi that will be used in the making of the tokauanima (25 metre-long ngatu).

Another example can be found in the collection of materials in the making of the *Malimali* and *U NI NANG* kupesi during the Abus residency in Taiwan. I used kaka collected during a site visit to Dulan, along the coastline. The top layer was kaka, and the bottom layer was lou'akau that I had brought with me from Aotearoa, along with the peach leaves given to me by A-bus, the master weaver who hosted me during my residency. After organising the stories I wanted to create out of tu'aniu, the stitching process began, binding all layers together to create the tool used for the final work. (see Image 77)

Koloa: The gift and the knowledge

Koloa has various definitions—treasure, textile, or knowledge—but in this research process it is defined as a gift. Koloa is a collection of different crafts made by women, as explained in the book *Ko e Talamalu 'o e Fonua: Ko e Kava, Koloa mo e Fatunga Lea 'a e Kakai Tonga*. It includes fala and papa (woven mats), ngatu (barkcloth), kato (baskets), lolo (Tongan oil), and kakala (sweet-scented flowers).¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁵ Ernest E. V. Collocott, James E. Moulton, and C. Maxwell Churchward, *Koe Talamalu 'o e Fonua: Ko e Kava, Koloa moe Fatunga Lea 'a e Kakai Tonga* (Friendly Island Bookshop), 2013, contents page.

Culturally, koloa is presented as a 'bundle', a gift during ceremonies such as funerals, weddings, and birthdays. In the Tui Kupesi research process, the koloa method asks: What do we do with the works made using the tools from the tuiaki stage? For me the answer lies in the process of gifting the koloa back to those who contributed and participated in the making of the different works that exist within the project. The gift is the outcome of all the research, making, and knowledge that emerged from the existing knowledge offered by participants. Therefore, in this project, the koloa—the gift—is returning home to Pelehake, where it originated. It is the exchange of koloa (knowledge) for koloa (outcome of the physical work).

Speaking of koloa as knowledge, from a Tongan perspective, knowledge in any form, such as stories shared through oral tradition, everyday talanoa (conversation) among the elders, or in any space where it is being shared or passed on, is considered as koloa. Koloa as translated as treasure, wealth, or something valued; therefore, knowledge is koloa because it is something that we both value and treasure for generations. It follows then that knowledge becomes koloa not to be kept away or within, but to be shared and gifted back to the people of the village, for the next generations and the future. It is this act of exchange that occurs between villagers during ceremonies.

Koloa: Knowledge for the 'noa'

The method of koloa is also activated in this project through workshops hosted during exhibitions. For example, most galleries would schedule workshops or outreach events as part of their education programme. In *Konga I: Exhibition Projects* I discuss two projects at Blue Oyster Art Project Space, Ōtepoti Dunedin (Image 118, and Papakura Art Gallery, Tāmaki Makaurau (Image 119), which included workshops as part of the exhibition. When it comes to sharing knowledge in a workshop setting, I focus on what happens behind the scenes of a koka'anga. At Blue Oyster, the table that displayed the kupesi was transformed into a koka'anga space. The workshop focused on sharing how kupesi are transferred onto the feta'aki or pepa koka'anga, as non-ngatu makers don't normally get to be a part of this process, and only witness the ngatu when it is completed and shared. I began by demonstrating how placing the kupesi onto the papa with tape allows for less movement, helping the kupesi to stay in place. Taping the kupesi onto the papa is important because, when you place the feta'aki or pepa koka'anga over the kupesi, there is potential for the kupesi to move or slide. It is best to transfer the kupesi by rubbing from left to right, creating a hold on the kupesi and preventing a double image. By sharing this simple knowledge used in the setting of koka'anga, participants gain a broader understanding of how ngatu is made.

There were ten participants including the gallery staff. It was a diverse group of people, including elders, middle aged, and youth, which reminded me of the demographic of the koka'anga group, the range of women that participate. In comparison, at Papakura Art Gallery I shared the same methods of making, but with a group of young artists who came along wanting to learn and experience koka'anga through the processes I use in my art practice. The diversity of both groups

brought memories of different fragments of my life and my participation in koka'anga, both as a child and now.



Image 118. 'Uhila Nai, Workshop at Blue Oyster, Dunedin, 2023.



Image 119. 'Uhila Nai, Workshop at Papakura Art Gallery, 2023.

Koloa, as knowledge, was again utilised when I was working with Connect the Dots Charitable Trust, established in Tāmaki Makaurau in 2014 by arts educators Andrea Gaskin and Selina Anderson. Their original focus was on various community groups, including girls entering secondary education, “women with migrant and refugee backgrounds, and older adults,” but when I came on board in 2021, their focus “had shifted to working in creative ageing and

supporting people living with dementia.”¹⁴⁶ I facilitated a workshop catering to Tongan elders with dementia and delivered it in Tongan. Taking on this opportunity, knowing that I had never worked with or come across Tongan people with dementia, was a full-circle moment. Particularly in the context of reminding and teaching these Tongan elders about something that might have been part of their daily routine or something they were engaged with in their cultural context. Facilitating this work wasn’t just about sharing kupesi knowledge, but speaking in Tongan—a moment to work with elders and give back what was given to me. The workshop focused on them creating their own kupesi based on the examples I shared, while trying to draw kupesi that they could remember. (Image 120)



Image 120. Workshop at BUPA David Lang, Mangere 30 June 21. Engaging in conversation while the elders’ recap their memories, what they remember about these kupesi.

In the context of mentorship, I work in the space of providing feedback and ideas, and helping students bring ideas that are sitting on the fence between Indigenous practices and contemporary practices. I have worked as a Hāpai Mentor for the AUT’s School of Art and Design, looking after Māori and Pasifika students who need support, whether that is providing a space for talanoa, giving students the space to connect and have conversation with students from different faculties, sharing ideas, or critique sessions where we can offer feedback on how to improve, applying Indigenous knowledge that helps students position their practice in a way that makes sense for them. (Image 121) I have also been a mentor on the Vuli Tara Project, hosted by Moana Fresh,¹⁴⁷ which involved mentoring students working in a similar area and context to my art practice. I mentored two students: one from Elam School of Fine Arts at Waipapa Tamata Rau, University of Auckland and another from the Fashion department here at AUT.¹⁴⁸ Their practice concentrated on the materiality and functionality of ngatu; I was able to support them by sharing the ways I work with ngatu, as well as offering readings that aligned with their research.

¹⁴⁶ Andrea Gaskin, *Connect the Dots staff handbook*, 2021, 5.

¹⁴⁷ Moana Fresh is a marketplace and community space celebrating Pacific and Māori artists, creatives, and authors indigenous to Te Moana-nui-ā-Kiwa. Founded by Ahilapalapa Rands (Maoli/Hawaiian, iTaukei/Fijian, Pākehā) and Vaimaila Urale (Sāmoan) in 2019. <https://www.moanafresh.com/about>

¹⁴⁸ The Elam student was Latamai Katoa and the AUT student was Helena Cocker-Valu.



Image 121. Hāpai students out on a gallery visit for our mentor John Vea's exhibition, alongside my cousin, Kalisola'ite 'Uhila, 2023.

Another form of sharing and teaching took place with my residency host, Takis Lavalng A-bus, during the Abus residency in Taitung, Taiwan. Over one month, we shared and exchanged the way we each practice, discussing materials and processes, during which I taught A-bus how to tui kupesi—she became the first student I've ever taught. To reciprocate this act of exchange by teaching A-bus tui kupesi was something new for me. I had never taught anyone how kupesi are made, which is something special to me. She learned how to twirl single kavele'ipulu (coconut husks) around the tu'aniu (coconut midrib), and then how the base is made for stitching the kupesi design onto. (Image 122) Teaching A-bus strongly reminded me of the way Nena taught me, her words and nuanced gestures, the observation and listening—this is the beauty of making craft in any form. As a master weaver, A-bus understood the functionality of some materials we used, but not always to their full potential. This highlighted how craft knowledge (koloa) within the Tongan community can be shared, but at the same time restricted to those who share the same practice or are making in the field.



Image 122. A-bus in the process of learning how to make kupesi. An exchange between an elder and the younger generations. Abus workshop, 2023.

Koloa, as knowledge, is evident in my practice in every aspect. From the community, including youth and elders, within creative spaces, as well as in academic contexts. For example, earlier in the year, I was asked to create course content for the Trace, Transfer, and Drawing Minor course in the Bachelor of Visual Arts programme. (Image 123) In this paper, I had the opportunity to share my creative practice with students through the course curriculum. It was interesting to create a structure based on my artmaking, but also to acknowledge that it is from a practice that weaves between the academic system and the non-academic, meaning it is Indigenous knowledge. I shared knowledge about screen-printing and relief prints, which are the primary printmaking methods I use in my practice. Through this process, I had the opportunity to register and witness how knowledge was practically received and applied by the students. Here, we can revisit the concept of talanoa, where ‘tala’ refers to the person who tells, which is me as the lecturer, and ‘noa’ refers to the students who sit and observe. This was shared knowledge that they then applied in their making, based on their part in the talanoa. (Image 124)

This pedagogical experience relates to the original idea of koloa and how it functions in Tongan communities. It’s a practice that can’t be too hidden, because to keep the knowledge alive we need to pass it on to the next generation or through katoanga (ceremonies), as we gift koloa such as ngatu, fala, kie, and monomono to the family hosting an event, and they do the same in return. This is how koloa, that is knowledge, is positioned in this project; it is now my job to share the gift that was passed down to me by my nena. This is what gives me the position to say that the letter I once held on to, in order to understand and create the artwork, can now be passed on to the next generation, as I am now like Nena, a maker and a knowledge-holder.



Image 123. Paint, Print and Drawing Minor: Trace and Transfer minor paper, 2025.



Image 124. Trace and Transfer installation view, *'tala'* and *'noa'* in action. 2025.

Konga V: Tohi Hohoko – The ‘tool-box’ of generations across the thread of time

This chapter discusses the project’s materials, tools, and processes, which are the fundamental components that closely connect and form the foundations of the practice. Materials include feta’aki (undyed barkcloth), pepa koka’anga (vylene paper), acrylic sheet and wood. Tools include kupesi, screen-printing, and the Kaitian laser cutter, and techniques such as rubbing (frottage), printmaking, digital drawing, and laser engraving. These are not merely functional elements used to transmit intergenerational knowledge, but are central to the writing of cultural histories. They carry knowledge, relationality between fonua, people, and place, and show us how they enact a living archive across generations.

I will be sharing Pelehake’s kupesi collection from the past, which I veteki (unstitched) into its individual forms (layers), so that I could learn the origins of their forms and shapes. (see Image 96) Through veteki, it was easy to identify them. Upon discovering these details, I then traced the kupesi to where they belong within Pelehake. With these new understandings of their meaning, I redesigned the old kupesi that I had veteki, alongside creating new kupesi that both represent the past and speak for the present.

Therefore, this chapter focuses on the following research questions: What is the role of tauhi tukufakaholo in examining the origins of kupesi and the use of processes and methods of making ngatu? And therefore, what do individual kupesi talk about when their meaning is unfolded or deciphered? And how can traditional kupesi be interpreted through a contemporary lens, utilising printmaking and installation?

The materials in this practice align with the processes I use, which involve both traditional and contemporary methods in parallel. Earlier in the project, I used the term ‘traditional’ when referring to the practice of ngatu from the perspective of my nena’s time, meaning naturally resourced materials and the old ways of making, which allowed the ngatu to last longer. I used the term ‘contemporary’ when referring to materials and processes made overseas, machine processed, or to describe what is available or accessible within my current space in Aotearoa. However, as the project has shifted between spaces over time (Tonga and Aotearoa), changes in the making process have occurred according to the type of materials I can access. Thus, I have gained a new understanding of how notions of traditional and contemporary are perceived or approached nowadays. In this project, the term ‘traditional’ is used when referring to knowledge, any or all processes, or tools used to create natural ngatu and kupesi. ‘Contemporary’ is used when referring to what belongs to or exists in the present time. This shift in thinking occurred when I encountered the term ‘indigenous’ in use in Taiwan to describe local practices during my 2023 residency in Taitung.¹⁴⁹ In Taiwan, this made me think about how ngatu makers back home in

¹⁴⁹ Pasikau locals, personal conversation with the author, Taitung Artist Residency, Taiwan, 2023.

Pelehake refer to the material used in ngatu as ‘natural’.¹⁵⁰ The reason for addressing this new finding is that I was trying to identify a term that refers to materials harvested from the land. In that context, ‘traditional’ wasn’t quite the proper term. As mentioned above, tradition encompasses the processes, knowledge, and tools passed down through generations, whereas materials are not. Therefore, ‘indigenous’ refers to materiality, as it is deeply connected to fonua or springs from it.

The Collection of Pelehake’s Kupesi

Through researching the origin of kupesi, one key finding was the discovery that ‘kupesi’ is not a Tongan term. In the chapter “From Lowlands to Islands: Dutch Loans in Polynesia,” by Paul Geraghty and Jan Tent, the authors describe the origin of kupesi. It is a Dutch word, ‘*kopertje*’,¹⁵¹ meaning a “smaller copper plate bearing a design,”¹⁵² which was likely coined when the Dutch set out to explore the South Pacific and trading began between them and Pacific peoples. This description aligns with the Dowager’s, that “kupesi is an art form inspired or taken from the practice of relief or stencil making.”¹⁵³ However, my practice builds on this definition, seeing kupesi as a vital document in and of itself that carries and holds the stories of my ancestors. I have concluded that kupesi is often regarded as a replica of the past. Dr ‘Okusitino Māhina said in a personal conversation with Billie Lythberg, “a person’s face may be described as their kupesi, a pattern in which others may be discerning the intersection of one’s parents.”¹⁵⁴ Metaphorically, this saying made me think about how kupesi is defined in the *Monolingual Tongan Dictionary* as ‘pule ‘o e ngatu’ —face/main subject on the ngatu.¹⁵⁵

As Māhina says, a person’s face can be understood as kupesi, which reflects not only one’s parents’ faces or features but also their ancestors’. The same applies to kupesi, as it is the representation of the past that ngatu makers replicate, duplicate, and pass down through the practice of ngatu. They are all stories with different features. This then leads us to the encounter of Pelehake’s kupesi, which was left behind after Nena’s death. Through observing this collection of kupesi over time, I have asked myself: Why do I want to understand and know the stories embedded within kupesi? I think it is simply because I wanted to know how kupesi was being made, as it was the only tool in making ngatu that I never learned from my nena.

¹⁵⁰ Pelehake ngatu makers, personal conversation with the author, Pelehake, Tonga.

¹⁵¹ Paul Geraghty and Jan Tent, “From Lowlands to Islands: Dutch Loans on Polynesia,” in *Borrowing: A Pacific Perspective*, ed. Paul Geraghty and Jan Tent (Pacific Linguistics, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Australian National University, 2004), 125, <https://files.core.ac.uk/download/160609382.pdf>

¹⁵² Geraghty and Tent, “From Lowlands to Islands,” 125.

¹⁵³ The Dowager Lady Fielakepa, knowledge-holder, personal conversation with the author, 2020.

¹⁵⁴ Billie Lythberg, “Mama ‘o a Folau (Far Away but Only Travelling): Contexts and Performativity in the Making, Use and Display of Contemporary Ngatu (PhD thesis, University of Auckland, 2013), 119.

¹⁵⁵ *Ko e Tala ‘Uhinga ‘o e Lea Faka-Tonga: Monolingual Tongan Dictionary*, 214.

The following are the sets that have helped me understand the functionality of kupesi and how they are made. Before we veteki into the individual components of the kupesi, we can look at Pelehake's kupesi, their names, stories, and their relations.

Sisi maile (Image 125) is one of our traditional Tongan dance costumes, made from maile (*Alyxia stellata*), and it is straightforward to make. I watched my nena regularly make this sisi, which became a personal favourite. The design is based on the literal shapes of the sisi and is a kupesi known across Pelehake, and the hou'eiki fafine often used it.

Sisi and kahoa maile faka'otusia (Image 126) are known to be chiefly kahoa kakala (floral necklace). This kupesi, inspired by the kakala (sweet-smelling flowers), took on a literal form of the flower to create this design, but with a two-dimensional perspective. Both the kahoa and sisi maile faka'otusia are composed of different kakala and when they are assembled, there are at least two layers of kakala: the base, the middle, and then the top layer. The base is made from kalosipani (frangipani) or lousi (broadleaf palm-lily), and the middle layer is made from fā (dry pandanus fruit). The top layer is made from siale (golden gardenia), huni (*Ixora coccinea*), or heilala (*Garcinia sessilis*).



Image 125. Unknown, *Kupesi Sisi maile*, date unknown, tu'aniu, lau'i kaka, kavelele'ipulu, filo and fau, 19 x 20 inches.



Image 126. Unknown, *Kupesi Sisi and kahoa maile faka'otusia*, date unknown, tu'aniu, lau'i kaka, kavelele'ipulu, filo and fau, 19 x 20 inches.

Sisi pelu (Image 127) is inspired by the way waist garments are made, specifically the bottom part, which is hibiscus fibre. There is a specific style used for folding this section of the sisi, and that is where its name originated.

Fata mahanga (Image 128) was designed in honour of the double wedding of Queen Sālote Tupou III's two sons, Prince Tu'i Pelehake and Crown Prince Tupouto'a Tungī, which was held in 1947.



Image 127. Unknown, *Kupesi Sisi Pelu*, date unknown, tu‘aniu, lau‘i kaka, kavele‘ipulu, filo and fau, 19 x 20 inches.



Image 128. Unknown, *Kupesi Fata Mahanga*, 2019. Tu‘aniu, lau‘i kaka, kavele‘ipulu, filo and fau, 19 x 20 inches.

Leimapa is derived from the plant known as mapa (*Diospyros major*), a member of the ebony family. The mapa plant grows in the village of Pelehake, which is how we got the name Vaomapa, meaning a field filled with mapa trees.¹⁵⁶

Kupesi that connects different lands together

Manulua is one of the kupesi that I have seen used in the Pacific (Sāmoa and Fiji) and Asia (Taiwan). (Image 129) It is a kupesi that was part of Nena’s collection, but it does not belong to the village of Pelehake. The manulua, well known among today’s generations, is often used for tattoos, logos, and more. The story behind the manulua kupesi refers to two birds flying over each other. In Lythberg’s PhD thesis, she explains the manulua in detail:

Manulua (Two birds: manu = bird, lua = two), sometimes known as ‘vane swastika’, is comprised of three or four triangles joined at their points. Sometimes mistaken for a frangipani flower and in a heliaki for chiefly status from both parental lines.¹⁵⁷

Dr Cresantia Frances Koya Vaka‘uta, a leading voice in Pacific education, Fijian national and of Sāmoan heritage, states in her paper *Cultural Symbols at Risk: Anthropological Evidence of the 15 Intended iTaukei Tapa Cloth (Masi) Motifs Pre-dating the Creation of the Air Pacific/Fiji Airways Logo* that the fourth design out of the fifteen is ‘kaso’, which is a shared motif across Sāmoan Siapo, Tongan ngatu and Fijian masi. It is referred to in Sāmoa and Tonga as manulua, while in Fiji, according to Koojiman (1997),¹⁵⁸ it is known as kamiki on Moce Island.¹⁵⁹ I came across the

¹⁵⁶ Personal conversation with Vaimona, my aunt, who stayed at our family house in Pelehake on August 27, 2025.

¹⁵⁷ Lythberg, “Mama‘o a Folau (Far Away but Only Travelling),” 101.

¹⁵⁸ Simon Koojiman, *Tapa on Moce Island (Fiji): A Functional Interpretation of a Tapa Desing* (Rijksmuseum voor volkenkunde, Leiden, Netherlands, 1997), https://www.researchgate.net/publication/41017963_Ceremonial_exchange_and_art_on_Moce_Island_Fiji_a_functional_interpretation_of_a_tapa_design/fulltext/00b4531a0cf245659d025d47/Ceremonial-exchange-and-art-on-Moce-Island-Fiji-a-functional-interpretation-of-a-tapa-design.pdf.

¹⁵⁹ Cresantia Frances Koya Vaka‘uta, *Cultural Symbols at Risk: Anthropological Evidence of the 15 Intended iTaukei Tapa Cloth (Masi) Motifs Pre-dating the Creation of the Air Pacific/Fiji Airways Logo* (University of the South Pacific, Faculty of Arts, Law and Education, 2013),

manulua during my artist residency in Taiwan in 2023, when I visited the pottery studio in Chulu Village in Beinan Township—they said it was just a flower that they didn’t know much about.¹⁶⁰

Going through this collection of kupesi reminds me of a conversation that I had with the Dowager Lady Fielakepa, in which she said, “kupesi talks about the notion of storytelling, every single kupesi was created from a story that our ancestors passed down to us.”¹⁶¹ That is what these kupesi do; they were made for the purpose of embodying stories that can be expressed through linear forms and shapes. It is also how I can take care of the past that has been given to me through kupesi as a tool, which is related to the way I make art. The role of taking care of the past is evident in the act of remaking, renewing old kupesi, where stories are retold in a koka’anga setting, educational contexts, daily conversation among the elders, or in spaces appropriate for sharing. Sometimes these stories and their meanings differ according to how they were passed down—how they were received and interpreted. Language, knowledge, understanding, and social status play significant roles in shaping the narratives.



Image 129. Unknown, *Kupesi Manulua*, date unknown, tu’aniu, lau’i kaka, kavelele’ipulu, filo and fau.

Feta’aki: The materials that embodied the past

The Pelehake kupesi have become an archive in themselves for the project, especially given that my nena, the person who embodied knowledge about every aspect of ngatu, passed away before I began my studies. Metaphorically, I think of feta’aki as the past, since it’s the material used as paper for the ngatu makers to write upon with kupesi, not only the history of Tonga, but the history of each village. Feta’aki is the material whose boundaries I have never wanted to cross, due to respecting its value, regarding how it was made and seeing my nena use it in its rightful

https://repository.usp.ac.fj/id/eprint/6765/1/FinalAnthropologicalevidenceof_the_15_intended_iTaukei_Tapa_Cloth.pdf

¹⁶⁰ Yuting, personal conversation with the author at 9 Birds Pottery during the Taitung Residency, Taiwan, 2023.

¹⁶¹ The Dowager Lady Tunakaimanu Fielakepa, knowledge-holder, personal conversation with the author, Kolomotu’a, Nuku’alofa, Tongatapu, 2020.

function. It wasn't until I fully understood its purpose as a material to be honoured that I started to use contemporary methods of mark-making and apply them to the feta'aki.

During one of my undergraduate presentations, in which I presented a contemporary ngatu made from a clear rubbish bag, I had another conversation with Albert Refiti. The artwork was a response to the bags used in our 'umu ('umu box) when travelling from home to Aotearoa. He commented that what we write our history and stories on is the supporting material that helps uphold our stories.¹⁶²

Feta'aki functions as a paper in the way it is being used across this project, like an archive of privilege, as it speaks to the idea of paper that holds traces of who could afford or access it. Accessing feta'aki in this project has been unpredictable because of its high price. My aunts, Vei and Moana, no longer practice making feta'aki, as they are getting older.



Image 130. 'Uhila Nai, Exploring using contemporary methods by stamping onto the feta'aki, 2019.

Feta'aki is used as a material in four different artworks in this project. In the exhibition *The Private Letter Becomes Public: The 1620 Collection*, I explored the concept of exchange between traditional and contemporary practices. I decided to use feta'aki by applying printmaking methods to its surface, specifically stamps, which I considered contemporary, as I had utilised

¹⁶² Albert Refiti, Contemporary Pacific class presentation, 2018.

laser-engraving technology to produce the stamps. (Image 130) The use of contemporary techniques and tools in applying feta'aki is evident in Jasmine Tuiā's practice. Tuiā's siapo practice involves using siapo su'i (embroidery or stitching) on siapo to share her stories and memories. For example, her work *Roo(u)tes*, (Image 131) inspired by a personal conversation with Leon Taupaki about siapo, focused on the thought of what siapo would look like if it were being embroidered over time.¹⁶³ We both utilise the same approach to share and extend our stories, yet we mark them onto the siapo and fetak'aki differently.



Image 131. Jasmine Tuiā, *Ava* (left) and *Roo(u)tes* (right) embroidery cotton on siapo, installation view, Jhana Millers Gallery. ©Jasmine Tuia

Feta'aki was also incorporated into the exhibitions *Liukai* (2022) (see Image 15) and *Nima 'o e ngaahi fa'ē* (2023). (see Image 29) Both projects employed a similar approach, utilising the figurative element of the hands of ancestors. This type of pictorialised image is not commonly seen in ngatu as a design motif. In my work, the multiplicity of the hands (the layered images) indicates that knowledge does not belong to one person but to a collective. Another of the feta'aki screen-printed pieces presented in *Liukai* responds to the idea of sharing materials that are used in the process of fakapā tutu (pounding: beating the inner mulberry), such as the ike (mallet) and the tutua (anvil), the way in which the making space is set up, and the materials and tools that are used in Tongan oil making. The use of figurative elements as subject matter is evident in Tui Emma Gillies' practice, as seen in the exhibition *Voyagers: The Niu World* (2021), curated by Gillies and her mother, Sulieti Fieme'a Burrows. As noted, figurative imagery is not something that is often marked onto ngatu, but Gillies employs this approach through using feta'aki as the substrate for her paintings. In an interview with Tautai Contemporary Pacific Arts Trust, Gillies talks about how she paints the things that she likes onto feta'aki, but notes, "just the thought of painting naked women onto ngatu is considered taboo, as it is sacred in the Tongan culture," and that she "quite enjoys painting women and men with a kind of lack of clothes

¹⁶³ "Exhibition Opening: Jasmine Tuiā: Roo(u)tes," *ArtNow.NZ*, accessed September 15, 2025, <https://artnow.nz/events/rooutes-jasmine-tuia>

because it's natural."¹⁶⁴ Gilles also painted a portrait series of different people and age groups wearing masks during the Covid-19 pandemic, using feta'aki as the substrate, with the intent of sharing their journeys as they came to terms with and accepted the reality of living behind a mask. (Image 132) In the exhibition *Voyagers: The New World*, Gilles painted faces of people, whereas in *Liuaiki*, I screen-printed images of hands making, both of which are unusual in terms of figurative representation on ngatu.

Artist Kulimoe'anga Maka, in an interview with *RNZ*, reflected on why he uses traditional Tongan materials in his practice.¹⁶⁵ He said that it was not until his fourth year of study (2004) that he realised he was using the same mediums, materials, and processes, and working with a similar style of artmaking as other contemporary artists did.¹⁶⁶ This led him to notice that in the art industry worldwide, one must come up with something of one's own or something different from other practitioners. Therefore, he questioned himself: What can I get from home, Tonga, that I could use in my practice instead of using what everyone else is using? Something that reflects creative practices from my culture. That is why Maka has continued to use traditional Tongan materials to this day.¹⁶⁷ Reflecting on Maka's words, this is how I approach my practice. Instead of following what has already been established in the art industry, where some artists use part process/part materials, I take from the everyday life of a ngatu maker—applying methods and processes that remain true to the concepts of ngatu. This is the case, especially in the context of presenting our ngatu within installation practice, when I pay attention by utilising existing methods and adapting them to navigate through contemporary spaces. For me, this is the idea of taking your kato (basket) that has already been filled, using it as the means to adapt to the new space, while adding to your kato what you have learned.

¹⁶⁴ Tautai Arts, "Meet the Curators, Voyagers: The Niu World," YouTube video, 2021, 2:05–2:19, <https://youtu.be/Ecqt22KE5iQ>

¹⁶⁵ "Kulimoe'anga 'Stone' Maka," *RNZ*, January 25, 2011, <https://www.rnz.co.nz/national/programmes/nights/audio/2454096/kulimoe'anga-'stone'-maka>

¹⁶⁶ "Kulimoe'anga 'Stone' Maka."

¹⁶⁷ "Kulimoe'anga 'Stone' Maka."



Image 132. Tui Emma Gillies, *Face of the Pandemic*, 2021. Acrylic on feta'aki. ©Tui Emma Gillies

Veteki: Identifying kupesi forms through fonua

To learn and understand the knowledge embodied in each kupesi, I took the kupesi from the Pelehake collection and veteki as an opportunity to learn about the components that make kupesi what they are. Kupesi is a tool that has been crafted over generations to carry the history and stories of the people of Tonga, based on various katoanga (ceremonies) of the past. Through veteki, I can understand a kupesi on its visual language, but sometimes with stories and ones that are hard to identify, I have had to ask the elders from my nena's kautaha koka'anga about each kupesi name, origin, stories, and who made them. This process of veteki raised the research question: Can the knowledge, history, and stories of my ancestors be understood when the individual kupesi form is unpacked or deciphered? The answer is yes—through the method of veteki, it can be understood because we are identifying what they are; however, it is for the noa (the listeners/audience) to interpret what they understand. And this is where the nuance of this research lies.

To 'know' and become familiar with a kupesi is shared during the process of making the kupesi, specifically the koka'anga or the tohi ngatu phase. In conversation with the Dowager back in 2019, she noted that each village has their own kupesi, and therefore, they do understand what kupesi uphold.¹⁶⁸ This also relates to a recent discussion I had with my dad, where we talked

¹⁶⁸ The Dowager Lady Tuna Fielakepa, knowledge-holder, personal conversation with the author, 2019.

about the word ‘katoanga’. He spoke about the same concept, katoanga, as derived from kato (basket) and anga (way of doing things), indicating that each basket comes with its own ways of doing things.¹⁶⁹ I veteki the kupesi as a way to search for a connection between its name and the story. So, how do I veteki a kupesi that has already been assembled? If there is no visible story, I then break down its name. A kupesi is a combination of different forms, yet it always carries one story.¹⁷⁰

In 2020 artist Cora-Allan Wickliffe (now Cora-Allan Lafaiki Twiss) assembled a collection of hiapo patterns that she had learned and designed, and published it in a book, *Hiapo: A Collection of Patterns and Motifs*. It is a compilation of patterns and motifs divided into categories of land, sea, weaving, and carving, (Image 133) as well as a section on discoveries she made in the process. This notion of reciprocity has been a continuous presence in Cora-Allan’s creative practice. Going through this hiapo book helped guide me in how I could position the kupesi I had veteki back to their origin. Cora-Allan assembled the content with her grandmother on her father’s side, who collected together the various motifs, such as lagakali (a flower with a strong scent). They also made notes about the different names and stated the use of the flower.¹⁷¹

I am interested in the synchronicities between Cora-Allan’s and my practices. We both view the craft of hiapo or ngatu with an interest in collecting knowledge and forms related to traditional practice. Similarly, we focus on the process of separating different forms/shapes or motifs/patterns, by drawing out individual shapes and giving each motif the space to be noticed and appreciated. (Image 134) I unfold the kupesi and provide it with space by tracing its origin and sources of inspiration (where they came from), (Image 135) which is comparable to Cora-Allan’s practice, in the sense that she researches by collecting different plants native to Niuean culture and uses them to create new patterns. As an artist concerned with the revival of hiapo, Cora-Allan understands that part of the work’s responsibility is about collecting ‘new’ experiences, materials, skills, and knowledge about the craft of hiapo that she also did not have access to growing up, but which has been lost to an extent. In contrast, I am researching Tongan crafts that exist in contemporary life, are accessible, and with which I am familiar.

¹⁶⁹ Timote Nai, the author’s father, personal conversation with the author, August 29, 2025.

¹⁷⁰ It was curiosity that led me to want to take kupesi apart, as during my master’s project I designed my own sets of kupesi based on personal relationships I had with my nena, memories about koka’anga, family names, histories, and architectural structures.

¹⁷¹ Cora-Allan Wickliffe, *Hiapo: A Collection of Patterns and Motifs* (Little Island Press, 2020). This book is a journey of hiapo collection, research, and study, filled with so much richness of knowledge, compiled shortly before her grandfather passed. Such an experience reminded me of the relationship that I had with my grandmother.

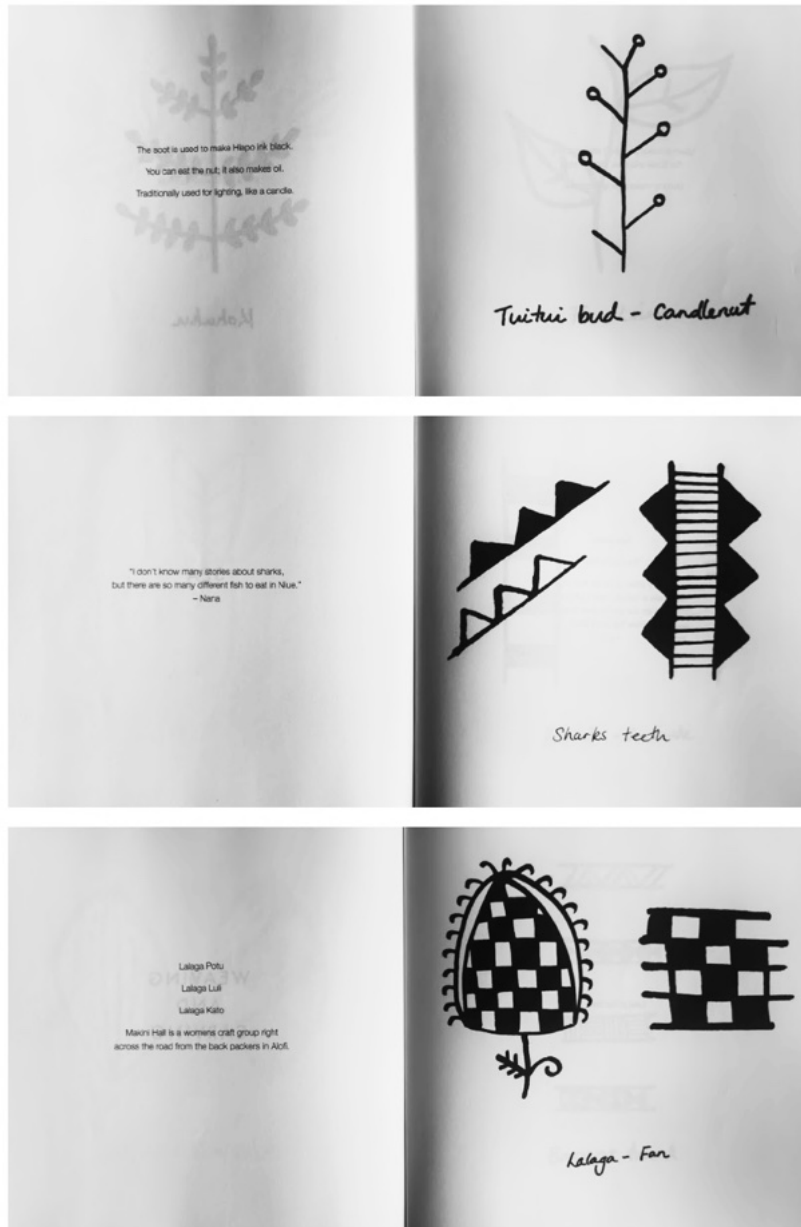


Image 133. Cora-Allan Wickliffe, land: tuitui, sea: sharks' teeth, weaving and carving: lalaga, 2020.



Image 134. Cora-Allan Wickliffe, McCahon House Residency drawing/research, 2020.



Image 135. 'Uhila Nai, tracing flowers, plants and parts of kahoā kakala that I found and picked up from the collection of kupesi that I had veteki, see Image 93. Digital drawing, Procreate programme.

The practice of Filipe Tohi offers a distinct approach to the practice of veteki, focusing on the reconstruction and reconfiguration of the craft of lalava (lashing). In Tohi's practice, I see his use of lalava in a three-dimensional way, framing the work through a contemporary lens. In the book *Filipe Tohi: Journey to the Present: Makahoko mei Lotokafa* (2015), Karen Stevenson notes that Tohi defines "lalava as the intersection of two strings that form a pattern as they spiral up and down. That without both strings (lines) there are no patterns, both must go together."¹⁷² This is the same with kupesi—the lines are connected, bound by the stitch of fau/kavele'ipulu. Without the string of fau and the strand of kavele'ipulu, or the lines that create the kupesi, it wouldn't be a complete kupesi. Working with lalava (lashing) as inspiration for his sculpture work, Tohi veteki lalava, by unwinding the kafa to understand its language, stepping away and seeing it from every aspect. Tohi notes:

I have identified a visual language based on what lalava and its patterns signify, including unity, duality and community. I translate and expand this language into a larger, three-dimensional sculpture that allows the viewers to enter and experience the nature of geometric patterns. By

¹⁷² Karen Stevenson, *Filipe Tohi: Journey to the Present: Makahoko mei Lotokafa* (University of the South Pacific Press, 2015), 61.

adjusting the scale of lines, I aim to intrigue viewers through the manipulation of space and patterns.¹⁷³

With my practice, taking apart the kupesi is a means of creating space for the younger generation to understand the geometric language that each individual kupesi embodies. I am taking it apart not just as separate forms, but also by expanding and changing the scale of each line, providing new ways to approach it through the lens of both the past–traditional and present–contemporary. One of Tohi’s sculptures, titled *Manulua* (2025) (Image 136), is installed on top of the western and eastern legs of the tanoa (kava bowl) at Auckland War Memorial Museum. The title *Manulua* means ‘two spiritual birds’ in Tongan, but if you look around Te Ao Mārama on the right, you’ll be able to see that the two birds become a flock as they multiply in the reflection of the windows.¹⁷⁴ The documentary about Tohi’s practice discusses *Manulua*, the way he veteki the manulua to recreate sculptural elements, including making a maquette to envision the sculpture.¹⁷⁵ That is an act of veteki, where the aspect of taking apart the manulua and changing its scale is applied, altering the direction in which the lines intersect—looking at the positive and negative spaces and finding ways to manipulate the way patterns operate from different viewpoints. I use a similar strategy to Tohi with making a small-scale version as a guide, to test out how we will veteki the kupesi or to build a larger sculpture. For example, early on, when I started veteki the kupesi, I would laser cut each kupesi so that I could physically see what the shapes looked like. So when I created new kupesi, I could understand the geometrical aspect, allowing me to redesign the kupesi and uphold the same stories, which involves adjusting its scale when transitioning from three-dimensional to digital in the context of drawing.

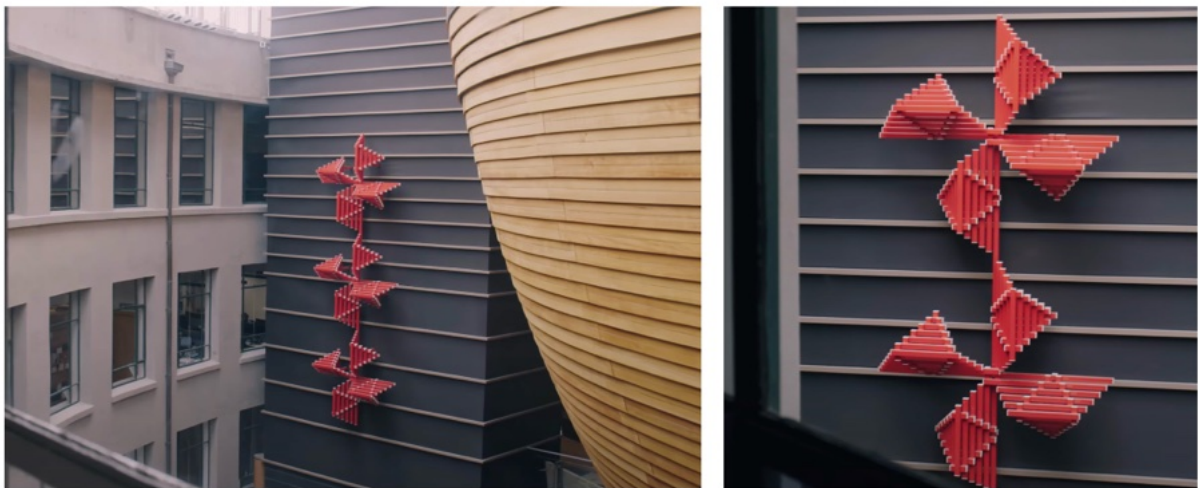


Image 136. Filipe Sopoalemalama Tohi, *Manulua*, 2023. Auckland Museum, Te Ao Mārama, South Atrium.
©Filipe Sopoalemalama Tohi

¹⁷³ Stevenson, *Filipe Tohi: Journey to the Present*, 5.

¹⁷⁴ “Manulua, by Sopoalemalama Filipe Tohi,” Auckland War Memorial Museum, <https://www.aucklandmuseum.com/your-museum/south-atrium/artworks#manulua>

¹⁷⁵ “Manulua by Sopoalemalama Filipe Tohi.”

Relocating ‘Mape’: The collection of mape

Mape (map/mapping) is not a Tongan term; it is a transliteration of the word ‘map’. In the Tongan context, we never used maps like the ones used today, as, across the Pacific, Polynesian navigators relied heavily on their senses, which served as their primary navigation tools. As is known, our navigation was guided by the stars, ocean swells, and bird observation—these tools were our maps. Metaphorically, ngatu can also be considered a mape, as it is a document that records the past, embodying history rooted in time and space. Throughout the project, I have been using mape as a strategy to understand the contexts from which the Pelehake collection of kupesi forms/shapes originated. I used the mape of Pelehake to gain a deeper understanding of the village, thereby creating an even stronger connection to the people, and most importantly, helping me understand where the kupesi are positioned.

A key part of this enquiry involves asking questions such as: What influences the kupesi shapes and forms? And what makes them unique? As stated, I have been examining their individual stories, materiality, functionality, and location. To make these discoveries, the mapping strategy was first employed to investigate and understand my village through this framework. The notion of a map and the process of mapping are utilised differently in this project; in this instance, the map examines the different geographical maps across different generations (era, epoch, and times) of the village of Pelehake.

Understanding that kupesi is a ‘tool’ used in the making of ngatu helped me appreciate how important it is to tauhi tukufakaholo the kupesi as a tool, because it enabled me to create a process of veteki, specific to my project. In choosing my village, and a collection that was made in and belongs to Pelehake, I am fortunate to know every street and corner. Thus, I started by tracing what is familiar to me and placing those kupesi in that lot of land or house. (Image 137) Through this approach, I was able to create my own kupesi, drawing from individual or existing kupesi.

Thinking about the relationship between mape and ngatu is interesting to me, particularly when I examine it from the following aspect: barkcloth comes from fonua, stories come from people, and the grid or structure on the ngatu comes from how land is divided and given to family.¹⁷⁶ This takes me to the saying I often use when discussing mapping: the idea of ‘moving in’ to understand the practice on a personal level, meaning seeing the art practice in its raw form. Speaking of ‘moving in’, the notion of zooming into Pelehake by revealing it layer by layer is akin to zooming in to a photo, allowing you to analyse what is visible. Therefore, to understand the connection between kupesi and people, as well as fonua, I moved frame by frame to examine the different layers that can only be understood by being in that space.

¹⁷⁶ Metaphorically, tohi ‘api and the grid on the ngatu can be read as an object that maps out the history of my culture, where its meaning is very context specific.



Image 137. 'Uhila Nai, mapping out familiar kupesi form and plants back to their land of origin.

Mape 'o Pelehake

The map of Pelehake has been a part of my research since 2018, the final year of my BVA undergraduate studies. (Image 138) At the time, I used Pelehake's land division (a hand-drawn aerial street map) to draw out a contextual map of my cultural and intellectual neighbourhood; that is, the field of practice. I chose to use the map of Pelehake because I saw it as an extension of the methods and process of ngatu making being explored. I took up the idea of positioning the contextual conceptual relations involved: the makers, artists, concepts, where materials were planted, and the technical and anecdotal knowledge from the villagers, as well as the different spaces/places where a lot of the collectives' making and gathering takes place. Drawing this mape and positioning my practice within the land division of Pelehake made it clear where I stood and where my practice originated at the time. (Image 139)

The map of Pelehake has become a critical methodological strategy, because it helps me navigate the practice through different relational lenses, including my family, who are my personal archives. They carry with them knowledge passed down from our ancestors and thus have become an archive themselves. The elders who are knowledge-holders, the makers, the younger generations, the orators, and, significantly, the voices of my ancestors who weave it all together.

At the beginning of my PhD, when I first veteki the kupesi, I used my ‘memory’ as a map to navigate Pelehake, to guide the positioning of the individual forms onto the mape dating back to the time of my great-great-grandmother, Manu. I went back this many generations, because the hand-drawn maps sit alongside the tohi ngatu, and it is through the action of drawing that I can communicate with my past. From January to March 2023, I conducted field research in Tonga, where I collected maps of Pelehake I had requested from the Ministry of Land and Resources. I was able to access a series of maps from different years, dating back to around 1968, which depict the villages of Pelehake, Fua’amotu, Tatakamotonga, and the islands of Ha’apai, where Lotofoa and Nomuka are located. All of these maps of villages and islands are from the areas where my ancestors are from, on both sides of my family.

Early in my PhD, I wanted to explore kupesi that belonged to each of these villages, and understand how to design a kupesi that carries their stories. However, because I was already familiar with Pelehake, it was more comfortable for me to unpack our collection of kupesi and map out their origins than to look outward to other villages, where I would feel more like an outsider than an insider. One sentence about responsibility/ownership/permission from personal perspective (grannies). Meaning, even though my ancestors are from those villages, entering those spaces with the intent of unpacking their kupesi seems odd and uncomfortable for me. Additionally, as for the people of these villages—Fua’amotu, Tatakamotonga, Nomuka, and Lotofoa—I consider myself an outsider to a certain extent as I didn’t grow up there. I had requested the maps of Pelehake for the respective years my nena and I were born (1924 and 1997), but there was no record for those years. Instead, they provided me with maps of Pelehake from 1968, 2006, 2011, 2020, 2022 and 2023. These Ministry of Land and Resources maps were used in multiple ways within the practice, but my intention was to place the kupesi I had veteki back to fonua by matching the date it was made to the years of the maps. However, since this was an impossibility, I decided to match the year of the maps according to the order of the hou’eiki fafine on my dad’s side of the family, from my great-great-great-grannies, which started from Vika and ended with ‘Ofa, a total of eight generations. (see Images 140-145)

In August 2022 I exhibited *Fepōtalanoa’aki pea mo ‘eku fanga kui: In conversation with my great-great-great-grannies* at Blue Oyster in Ōtepoti Dunedin. For this show, I installed a series of screen-printed maps in a row, arranged in a generational sequence. The individual pieces echoed the relationship I had to the person or what I knew based on stories about each hou’eiki fafine across eight generations. Every hou’eiki fafine and kupesi story was different; therefore, the kupesi I had drawn was positioned onto the maps as I would imagine our relationship would be. (see Project 6, Image 20)

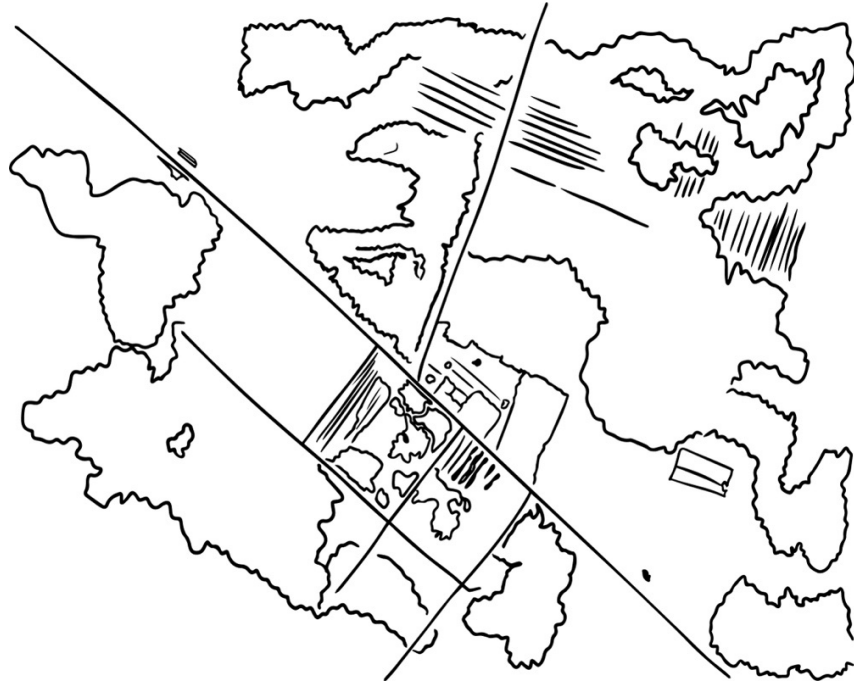


Image 140. 'Uhila Nai, *Great-great-great-grandma Vika lahi*, 2022. Digital drawing, Pelehake's mape 1968 drawing version. Unclear structure and stories, as the only thing I've heard about Vika lahi was her name.

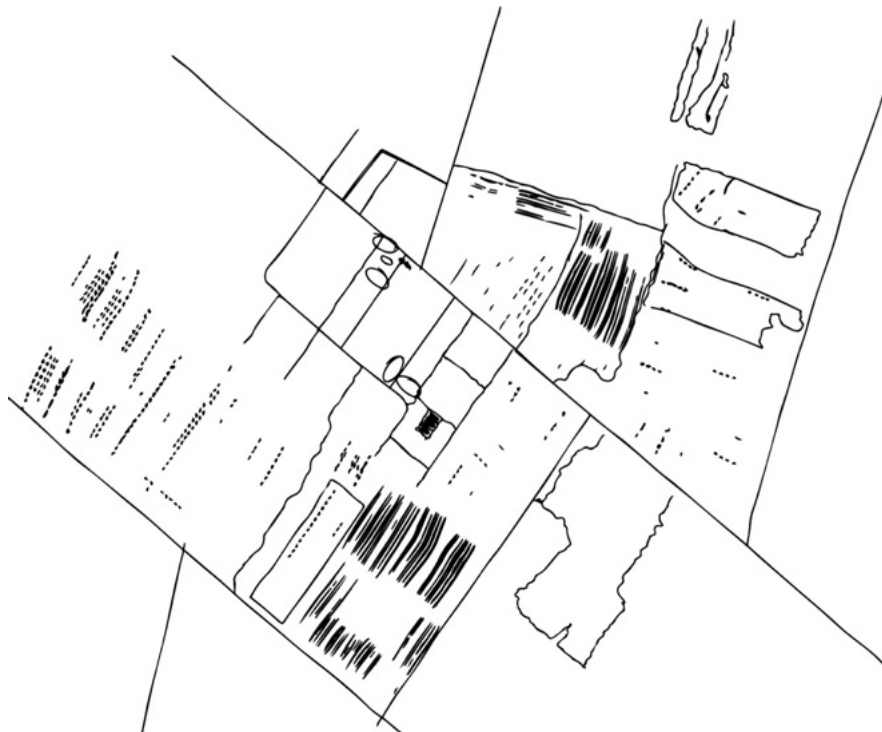


Image 141. 'Uhila Nai, *Great-great-grandma Manu Tu'ipulotu*, 2022. Digital drawing, Pelehake's mape 2006 drawing version. Manu's stories were very vivid, as she moves back and forth between Pelehake and Nomuka.

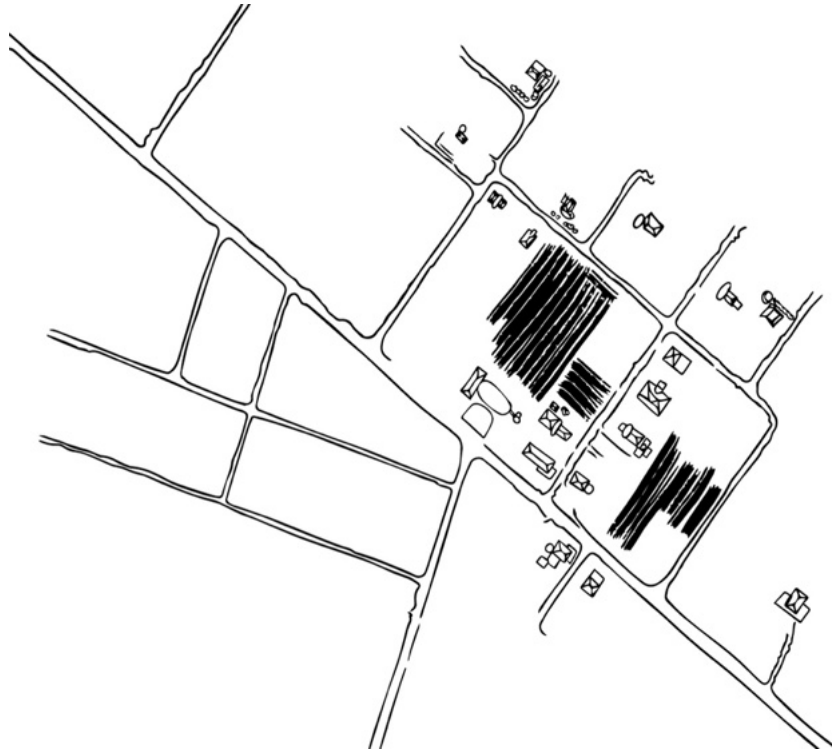


Image 142. 'Uhila Nai, Great grandma 'Uhila Lahi, 2022. Digital drawing, Pelehake's mape 2011 drawing version. 'Uhila lahi stories, reminds me of all fale Tonga around Pelehake, as her fale Tonga still exists today.

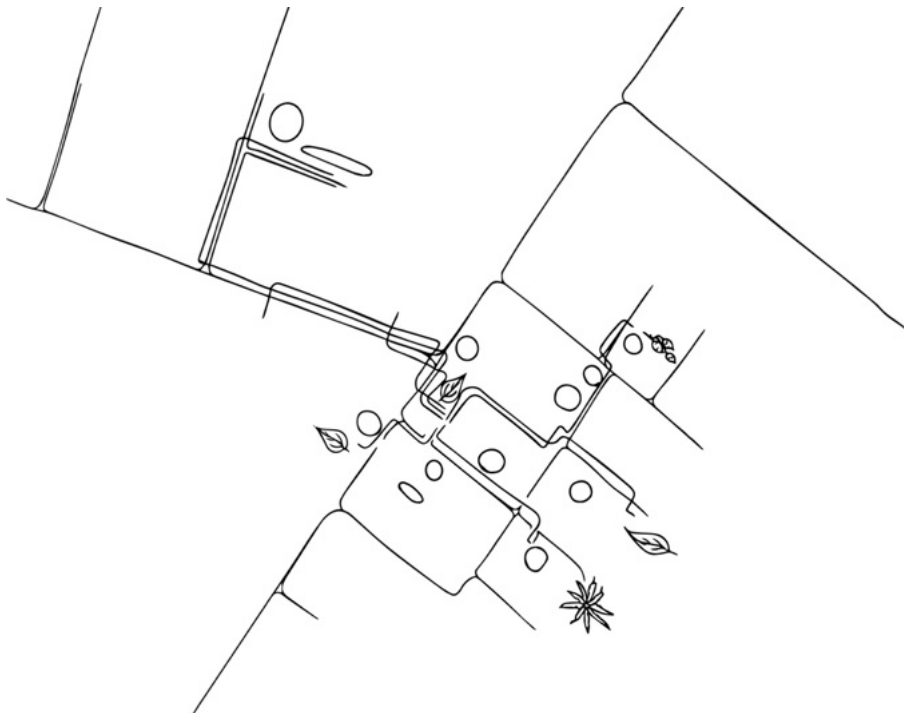


Image 143. 'Uhila Nai, Grandma 'Ana, 2022. Digital drawing, Pelehake's mape 2020 drawing version. My nena's story was based on my favourite memories: the process of making oil, strolling around the village collecting ingredients, then coming home to make it.

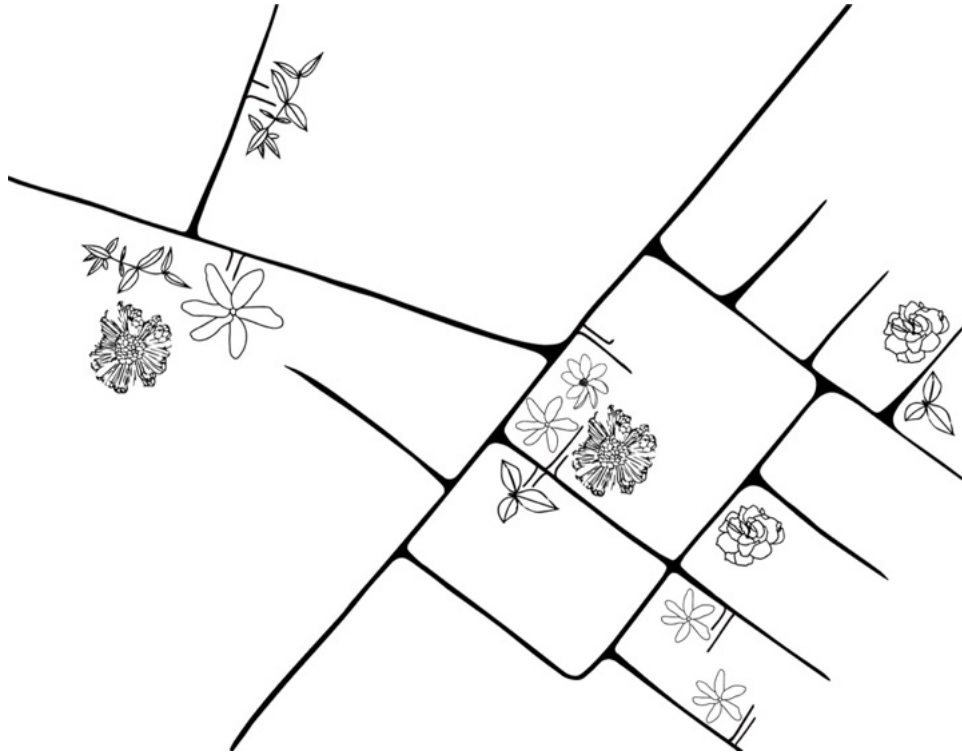


Image 144. 'Uhila Nai, Aunt Veisia, 2022. Digital drawing of Pelehake's mape from 2022.
Aunt Vei who would always joint my nena for tui kahoa or sisi.

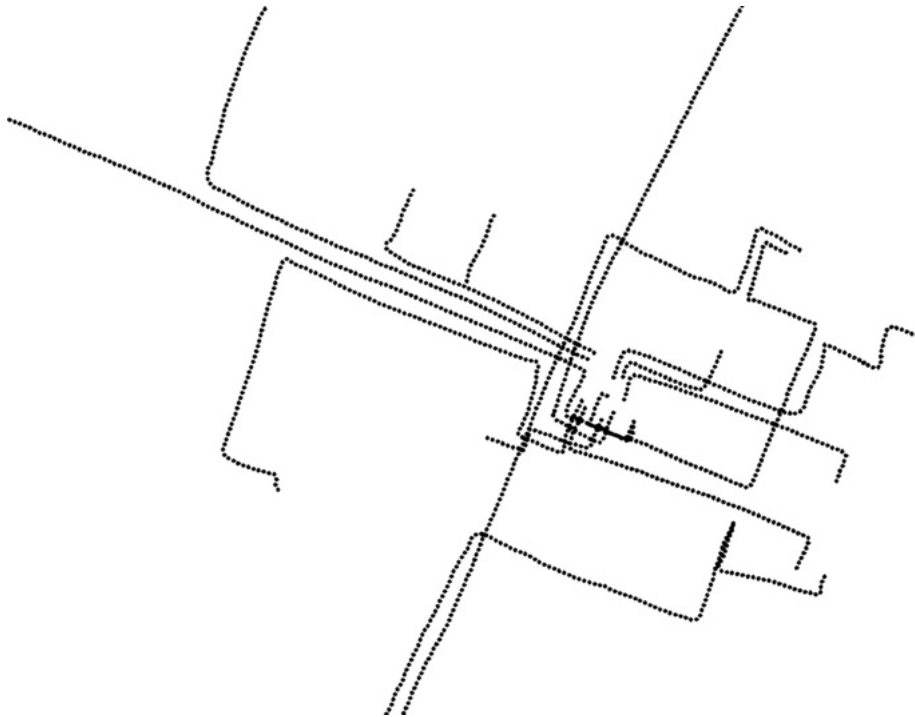


Image 145. 'Uhila Nai, Niece 'Ofa known papa, 2022. Digital drawing, Pelehake's mape 2023.
The stories haven't been established, as she was still a baby at the time.

Pepa koka'anga (vylene paper)

My nena regularly used pepa koka'anga to make her ngatu. Pepa koka'anga (vylene or vilene paper) is a synthetic interfacing fabric used in the production of ngatu as a replacement material for natural fibres or fabric. The older Nena got, the more she used pepa koka'anga as the second layer for her ngatu—the underside support. According to Nena, ngatu lasts longer when it's made with natural materials and is looked after by airing in the sun. Therefore, using mahoa'a Tonga/manioke (*Tacca leontopetaloides*/tapioca) helps prevent the ane (silverfish) from eating the ngatu, as the use of mahoa'a pālangi (all-purpose or plain flour) makes it more likely to be eaten away. It goes hand-in-hand, though, because it does depend on the person and how they take care of their ngatu.

The 'Ilo Me'a Fo'ou (New Creations) koka'anga¹⁷⁷ group first used the vylene paper as a substitute for feta'aki when it wasn't available to them when they moved to Te Awa Kairangi ki Uta Upper Hutt. To continue making ngatu, they searched for something equivalent and found vylene paper, which they decided to use because it could carry the actual weight of a ngatu. In the text “Polyvocal Tongan Barkcloths: Contemporary Ngatu and Nomenclature at the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa,” Billie Lythberg discusses the intention behind these elders' decision to create the ngatu pepa. 'Ilo Me'a Fo'ou created a ngatu tupenu vilene, and, based on an interview with the makers in 2010, Lythberg says:

This piece is fascinating—and was possibly unique at the time—because of the aims of the women who made it. In 1996, a group of 12 Tongan women got together and began talking about what they could use to re-create a koka'anga in Upper Hutt. They tested various synthetic fabrics and pigments, drawing on the experience of a young relative at Whitireia Polytechnic, who eventually supplied them with three custom-mixed commercial dyes.¹⁷⁸

There is a difference in the production of ngatu between Tonga and Aotearoa. The making of ngatu pepa (double vylene paper) is generally only practised within the communities in Aotearoa and in the United States. Therefore, ngatungatu and ngatu pepa (feta'aki on top, vylene on bottom) are made across Tonga. In conversation with Aunt Vei, who used to be a part of the Pelehake koka'anga, I asked about the practical term for ngatu pepa (double vylene), and she said it is just ngatu pepa, followed by “‘oku 'ikai ke koka pepa 'ata'atā Tonga ni, ko muli pe ia, pea ka mau koka, e feta'aki 'i 'olunga pea pepa lalo” (here in Tonga, we do not make ngatu out of double vylene, only overseas they do, and if we were going to koka, it will always be barkcloth over vylene). Even though the pepa koka'anga is not close to what feta'aki is, it has given us ngatu makers who could not access feta'aki a material to work with that is close enough to actual ngatu. Due to where we situate ourselves and where we choose to live overseas, Tongans can fulfil their fatongia by presenting ngatu pepa.

Based on what I observed, both ngatungatu and ngatu pepa were the materials I saw Pelehake's koka'anga group use. (Image 145) In a talanoa with ngatu maker Seini Mo'ale in 2023, she mentioned they used pepa koka'anga because it was easy to source and use, and cheaper per

¹⁷⁷ Te Papa Collection Report (unpublished), October 21, 2025.

¹⁷⁸ Billie Lythberg, “Polyvocal Tongan Barkcloths, 98.”

roll (it would make 4–5 fola'osi or tokauanoa).¹⁷⁹ 'Ilo Me'a Fo'ou had done the same with their ngatu, as they made fuatanga ngatu that is between 4 and 7 metres in length in their first year of being in the kautaha koka'anga. And then “two launima in the second year, which they made instead of making a lauteau 100 metres in length, as they wanted to keep one for themselves and the other for selling, ideally to Te Papa Tongarewa.”¹⁸⁰



Image 146. Pelehake koka'anga group in the process of koka'anga. This is a ngatu pepa, feta'aki on top and pepa koka'anga at the bottom, Pelehake, 2025.

Pepa koka'anga is an ideal material for the methods I use, such as screen-printing and laser-engraved stamps. With feta'aki and pepa koka'anga, they have different values yet serve the same functionality. I have become confident in using pepa koka'anga because I screen-print the same stories that are written on ngatungatu (double layers of undyed barkcloth), and which are being written onto a material that can also carry the depth and volume of Tongan history. The making of *Hala Kafa* (see Project 12) involved double vylene, with two layers that run both vertically and horizontally. I redesigned the kupesi to fit into the context of what a hala kafa is, which is the centrepiece of the ngatu. It was a gift to the makers of the original ngatu tāhina, for their labour that is not being recognised. I rewrote the story by screen-printing it onto the pepa

¹⁷⁹ The late Seini Mo'ale, in-person conversations with the author at fale kautaha, January–March 2023.

¹⁸⁰ Lythberg, “Polyvocal Tongan Barkcloths.”

koka'anga, from my perspective as a younger generation, and how I received this ngatu, viewed it, and understood it.

Drawing from the practice of ngatu, but utilising mark-making on new materials like calico, we can look to the work of architect and maker Vula To'ofone, specifically *Fuakava*,¹⁸¹ which was part of the *Fehokotaki* group exhibition I curated in 2022. *Fuakava* (to take an oath) (Image 147) was inspired by how ngatu is assembled, the layers, the collective of hands across different generations, and the stories they share. As To'ofone mentions in the exhibition text, the making of *Fuakava* occurred during kava sessions at the Four Shells Kava Lounge, located in Victoria Park Market in Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland. Produced over a month, the artwork was made in a context that referenced a koka'anga setting. The work itself drew on various collective groups of friends, lecturers from the University of Auckland School of Architecture, family, makers, artists, musicians, and visitors to the kava lounge, who “were invited to share their thoughts pertaining to an ‘Oceanic Worldview’.”¹⁸² The same framework applies to koka'anga, as hou'eiki fafine is shared across different age groups, especially among elders, who come together to share their stories with laughter and conclude with a kai at the end of the koka'anga.



Image 147. Vula To'ofone, *Fuakava*, 2021. Calico cotton fabric, black and red permanent marker alter 5 points, fala 12 (weaving mat 12 ft). ST PAUL St Gallery (now Te Wai Ngutu Kākā Gallery). ©Vula To'ofone

¹⁸¹ “Fehokotaki,” Ngutu Kākā, 2022, <https://ngutukaka.aut.ac.nz/exhibitions/past-exhibitions/2022/fehokotaki>

¹⁸² *Fehokotaki* roomsheet, ST PAUL St Gallery, 2022.

Redesigning: Digital creation

The redesign, restructuring, and creation of new kupesi occur after I understand their position within the structure of kupesi on the ngatu. That is, drawing from existing kupesi that are from a specific time period or taken from Pelehake's kupesi collection, and then creating a new collection of kupesi that becomes a tohi fananga (a written record of oral tales). Kupesi exists within this project as a tohi fananga through symbolic language—encompassing both three-dimensional (kupesi) and two-dimensional forms (prints or rubbings).

Screen-printing is the primary tool and process that I utilise in my project for making the 'contemporary' ngatu. Out of all the technical processes and tools I acquired during my undergraduate studies across the various workshop facilities, including the 3D fabrication lab, Digital Fabrication Lab, Wet Lab, and Printmaking Studio, screen-printing has stuck with me. Drawing on lived experience as a method of making throughout the project, screen-printing is a parallel tool to what kupesi represents. Kupesi and screen-printing both exist in the world of printmaking; therefore, they complement each other. For example, with screen-printing, I organise my drawings for exposure onto the screens,¹⁸³ which then become the equivalent of kupesi (embroidered stencils).

Screen-printing performs with the same language, but for kupesi, you create the base, then draw and stitch the kupesi you want. This process is outlined in *Konga IV: Founa Ngāue – Methodology* in the section *Pule 'o e ngatu: Making the kupesi for the ngatu (stencil making)*. Both approaches involve creating a tool to use in the making of the artwork. Screen-printing focuses on the idea of 'printing onto', while frottage focuses on 'transfer onto' the feta'aki or the pepa koka'anga. Following that, I go through the process of tohi ngatu, tracing and marking the kupesi with black ink onto the ngatu, which is similar to how screen-printing functions in the transfer of images.

Artist Sione Faletau creates digital kupesi by extracting waveforms from songs, audio recordings, and field recordings of the environment. The audio waveforms provide him with material that can be manipulated into kupesi. Faletau's artwork showcases kupesi using digital elements, proposing a new and innovative way of expressing kupesi in contemporary spaces. His digital kupesi has the potential to be added to the collection of Tongan traditional kupesi, just like Vaimaila Urale's keyboard tatau (tattoo), *Typeface*.

His video work shown in *ATĀVA: Tātatau'ata "Marking-symmetry-in-images"*, titled *Kupesi Ta – Tuki* (2022),¹⁸⁴ (Image 148) is a digital kupesi created from the actions and sounds of tuki kava (pounding *Piper methysticum*) by men and fakapā tutu (beating of the paper mulberry) by the elder women. The work is centred on the gendered space of Tongan men and women, and how both are characterised as separate entities, yet they are intertwined through fatongia (duties). By

¹⁸³ The screens are the tool you expose imagery onto, which is then used for printing your imagery onto any desired surface. The tool is the screen, and screen-printing is the name of the process.

¹⁸⁴ "ATĀVA: Tātatau'ata 'Marking-symmetry-in-images'," Ngutu Kākā, <https://ngutukaka.aut.ac.nz/exhibitions/past-exhibitions/AtAvA-tatatauata-marking-symmetry-in-images>

merging the two sounds, an off-beat is created that then forms the digital kupesi when the ta-tuki beat sounds. The off-beat carries their fatongia; the two practices serve one another by being present within the same space. I use digital tools to make kupesi, but not as a medium for presenting my work. I primarily use the Procreate programme for designing kupesi, as well as mind-mapping how I can structure my work onto the pepa koka'anga, and for installation aspects.

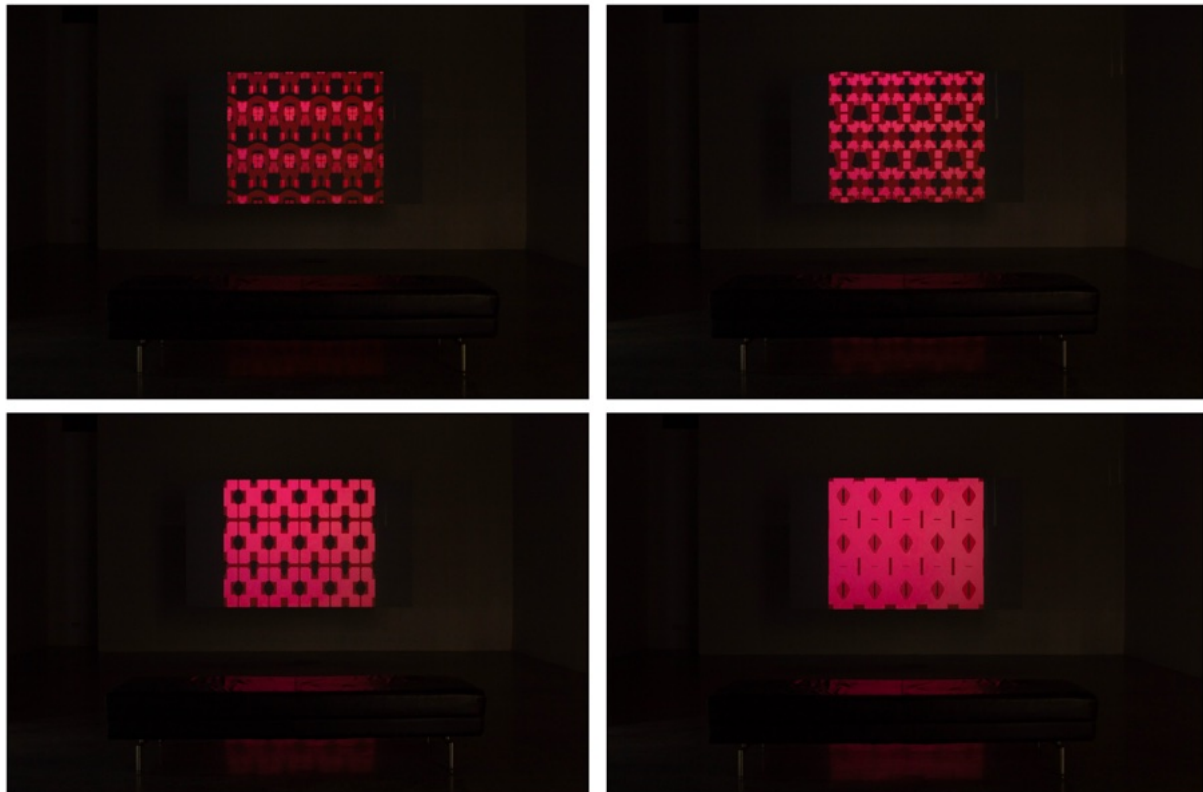


Image 148. Sione Faletau, *Kupesi Ta – Tuki*, 2022. Moving image duration of 4m 30s. ST PAUL St Gallery (now Te Wai Ngutu Kākā Gallery). ©Sione Faletau

A ngatu tā'uli might seem the easiest ngatu to make, simply because it's covered in black koka (ink made from candle nut). However, the reality is that making the black ink is hard, as it is a unique and sacred process that cannot be rushed or disrupted. (Image 149) As artist Stone Maka says, it might appear simple, but it is an abstract art form. I had never seen a ngatu tā'uli with colours until I came across his work, titled *Toga mo Bolata'ane (Tongan and Britain)* and *Kuini Haati 2 (Two Queen Heart)*, exhibited at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney. (Image 150) Maka explains that the design on the ngatu tā'uli is associated with a memory of “doves flying endlessly upwards [that] I remembered on a large ngatu on our wall when I was a child—were also modern: those designs originated after missionaries came from London.”¹⁸⁵ The kupesi he

¹⁸⁵ Tulia Thompson, “The Meeting of Two Queens,” *Bulletin* 205, August 27, 2021, <https://christchurchartgallery.org.nz/bulletin/205/the-meeting-of-two-queens>

used on *Toga mo Bolata'ane* referred to the sisi garlands of flowers that were made especially for Queen Sālote. I find it interesting that, even though the ngatu tā'uli is an abstract art form, seeing kupesi marks on it prompted me to consider the structure used in ngatu tāhina, particularly the grid and the formation of the kupesi. I structure my kupesi by following how kupesi is placed on the ngatu tāhina.



Image 149. Pelehake koka'anga group in the process of making the koka (black ink) which used for the ngatu tā'uli and tohi ngatu. It was for an interview with The Dowager, Tonga Broadcasting. © Benjamin Work.

This image has been removed by the author of this Thesis due to copyright reason.

Image 150. Kulimoe'anga Stone Maka, *Toga mo Bolata'ane (Tongan and Britain)* and *Kuini Haati 2 (Two Queen Heart)*, 2008 – 10. Oil, clay, dye of tapa cloth.

The Document: The present-future

With my relationship to the Pelehake elders, we share a very special bond due to their connection with my nena. Thus, I have kept in contact with them, getting to know the names of the kupesi and related stories. Usually, it was based on a one-off conversation, but I liuaki and updated them on what I have learned through the making in exchange for their knowledge. I have come to know about the stories kupesi were based on, who they were named after, and who the kupesi were for. This knowledge comes from different age groups, which means the knowledge passed on to me would be different from how they received or learned it. Most of them received it from their mothers and grandparents, who were makers, and others learned through observing and participating in the making process. It is the same relationship I have with the kupesi collection. I sit, listen, and observe, which allows me the right to create new kupesi designs that belong to my family and the village of Pelehake.

\\

'Uhila vaivai's collection¹⁸⁶

Based on my understanding of how kupesi were traditionally made, I created new motifs from my surroundings, including Taitung during my residency, my home, church, and fonua, as well as the

¹⁸⁶ 'Uhila vaivai was my nickname as a kid, given to me by my nena's cousin Lu'isa, because I am named after Uhila lahi. She refers to me as a grandma because of my name, Uhila.

past, which encompasses stories, people, and kupesi that have been used by the kautaha koka'anga of Pelehake.

Vai ko Toloa¹⁸⁷ symbolically represents the past and the future through the structure of our 'api (home), which was influenced by the building's Tongan and Western architecture. It is a kupesi that was designed to commemorate all the people who grew up in this house across generations, and to carry the stories, memories, and moments of our grandparents, especially my nena. The design is an aerial perspective outline taken from the rooftop structure of my nena's room, showing the exterior shape of both rooms, one of which was inspired by the structure of the fale Tonga, and the other by Western structures. (Image 151)

Manatu'ofa ki 'api¹⁸⁸ is a kupesi that was made to commemorate a special relationship between a kui pea mo hono mokopuna (a grandparents and her grandkids). It talks about all the memories I shared with Nena, including observing her tend to her personal garden and chicken farm, as well as making and processing materials for ngatu, Tongan oil, lalanga (weaving), and more. It is a kupesi that reflects on everything that has helped me, taught me, and given me access to the practices that we see throughout this project.



Image 151. 'Uhila Nai, *Vai ko Toloa*, 2020. Tu'aniu, lau'i kaka, paongo and fau.

Tōkanga (ngōue'anga) was inspired by the connection between people and land. The kupesi is composed of three parts; first, the leaf represents fonua, and its edges resemble the coastline of fonua. Metaphorically, the leaf is the person who brings people together. Then we have the mid-rib that represents the main road, known as Hala Tuku'aho, and signifies important knowledge-holders within the village, such as orators, grandparents, chiefs, and parents. The veins are small and therefore represent the inner streets around the villages, as they are lines, marks left behind by those who lived here in the village before us. (Image 152)

¹⁸⁷ Version one: Kupesi inspired by the Tongan and Western architecture of my grandparents', 'Ana and Pautā's, family house.

¹⁸⁸ Version two: Kupesi to commemorate a memory of my nena and me from the past.

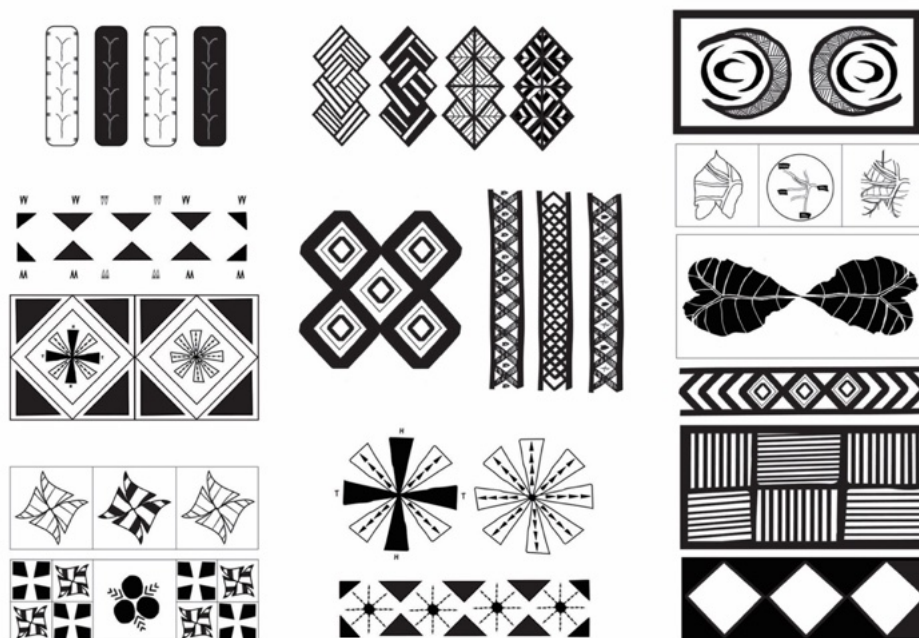


Image 152. 'Uhila Nai, *Tōkanga (ngōue 'anga) series of kupesi*, 2021.
Designed using Adobe Illustration.

U ni nang was created during my residency in Taitung, where I stayed with A-bus, a master weaver. We do not speak the same language; she speaks Bunun and Chinese, and I speak English and Tongan. Our conversation was limited, but we used Google Translate to communicate. Even though it was challenging, I managed to understand some of the conversation through her body language and demonstration. (Image 153)

Malimali means 'thank you' in Paiwan language and is also one of the six tribes of Taiwan. I used this word because in Tongan, it means 'smile'. This kupesi was inspired by the Taiwanese and Tongan cultural costumes—the Taiwanese costume from the Bunun tribe, their female headband and male necklace, and the Tongan dance costume, our necklace ornaments and waist garments. The kupesi malimali carries a different essence, as it responds to the malie (expression of bravo or well done) in Tongan and Bunun cultural dance performances, where you observe people exchanging smiles while embracing different dance moves. It is a kupesi created to commemorate all the Indigenous dance performances I watched while sightseeing, attending festivals, and most memorable of all, seeing the Bunun dance at their village day. (Image 154)

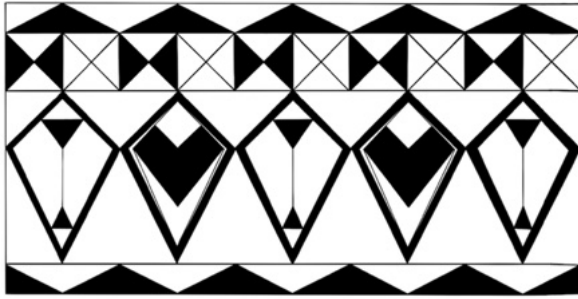


Image 153. 'Uhila Nai, *U ni nang*, 2023. Digital drawing, Procreate programme.



Image 154. 'Uhila Nai, *Malimali*, 2023. Digital drawing, Procreate programme.

'Uhila vaivai's collection, my collection of kupesi, is born out of the notion of lived experience. It helps me create kupesi by drawing on what is important around me, which is my relationship to the past—tradition through fonua, materiality, and people. And, in turn, allows me to continue to connect with and collect experiences, which are not just from the past but from my own lived experience in present—contemporary spaces.

Konga VI: Langanga (Scale) and Tauaki (Installation)

In this chapter I will explore the crossover of langanga and tauaki (Image 155) as formal conceptual strategies within the project. The concept of scale and installation has always been central to the making; it is derived from and understood through the perspective and practice of ngatu. Scale and installation, as intertwined components, serve as a reference point for understanding how the tools, processes, and literal scales (such as the collective of project-involved people) operate in preparation for and the making of ngatu (traditional and contemporary). Throughout this project, scale operates differently, depending on the phase of practice. Conversely, installation weaves its way through and across the practice, hand-in-hand with these scales. In other words, the way installation works draws on the scale of ngatu in all its parts: methods, materials, making, and presentation.



Image 155. ‘Api ‘o Ta‘engalo, tauaki ‘a e feta‘aki – the process of drying out the feta‘aki.

Papa Koka'anga as an Installation Component

The tools, such as the kupesi and the papa koka'anga (a knee-high table for assembling strips of feta'aki), have their own scales. The papa koka'anga is best described as a long, low rectangular worktable (usually knee height). As a working surface for ngatu, its structure and materiality have evolved. Initially, a fala koka'anga (koka'anga weaving mat) was used, followed by a long, half-round cylinder, and now a low table is the standard practice. (Image 156) The papa koka'anga is a tool used in making ngatu, but in this project it is also employed as an object and support structure for kupesi within the artwork installation. For example, the papa koka'anga that my nena and the kautaha koka'anga in Pelehake use is 14 feet long by 40 inches wide, which is a scale of 4 × 1 metres. The kupesi (embroidered stencil) comes in various sizes, depending on the type of kupesi that is to be transferred onto the feta'aki (undyed barkcloth). The kupesi proportions and measurements also relate to the scale of the table, as it is divided into sixteen sections in a two-by-eight configuration. (Image 157) That is, the women sit opposite one another, five down each side of the table, with one maker seated in front of each kupesi/section. There is a total of twelve makers involved, including two who sit at either end of the papa.¹⁸⁹



Image 156. Pelehake's papa koka'anga which has been used for over decades now. I grew up seeing the papa being used over time by different generations of hou'eiki faine in Pelehake.

¹⁸⁹ Back home in Pelehake, when referring to the papa koka'anga, the elders often use the term 'papa' as a shorthand.



Image 157. Kupesi placed onto the papa; the order and layout depend on whose ngatu the makers are making. This set up is what shows and outlines the grid/structure seen on ngatu.

Throughout the PhD project exhibitions, I have considered how the scale of the papa koka'anga fits within my making. I accurately and conceptually reference the maker's table measurements to create a support system for displaying or sharing kupesi with the viewer. I have also explored the possibility of creating a box to reference the idea of kupesi being stored after a koka'anga. For a previous work, *The Third Generation is What My Memory Captures* (2019–20), I made a copy of my nena's tool storage box (Image 158), which was displayed as a sculptural object in the installation and functioned to store overnight the kupesi that were on display on the papa during daylight hours. This action was to reference how the kupesi is taken home and stored until the next koka'anga. I was 'taking care' of the kupesi by getting it out and putting it away, morning and night, during the exhibition. However, the storage box doesn't allow for the kupesi to be seen as part of the artwork if they are being stored. While conceptually interesting, it is less important than them being displayed. Therefore, I have investigated how kupesi can be shared, utilising installation tropes and display systems that situate the setting of a koka'anga. Thus, a papa koka'anga was created following the exact scale measurements from the papa the Pelehake koka'anga use. My aim was to share the behind-the-scenes set-up as installation art.

For example, in August 2022 I presented a solo exhibition at Blue Oyster in Ōtepoti Dunedin, titled *Fepōtalanōa'aki pea mo 'eku fanga kui: In conversation with my great-great-great-grannies*. For the central installation, I created a papa koka'anga with dimensions of 4 × 1 metres, directly referencing the size of the Pelehake papa koka'anga. (Image 159) Creating this sculptural object reminds me of how my cousins and I would sit and draw at the back of the papa; this was our version of contributing to the making then, since we were too young to participate. I displayed ten kupesi of different sizes from my collection and Nena's on the table. It was through this exhibition that the papa koka'anga became an integral installation element of the broader practice; however, I only make a papa koka'anga when kupesi are to be displayed within a work.

In August 2023 I presented the second iteration of *Fepōtalano‘aki pea mo ‘eku fanga kui* out south at Papakura Art Gallery, Tāmaki Makaurau. In this instance I created two papa koka‘anga, as the scale of the gallery space afforded more possibilities for exploring spatial relations. In a diagonally alternating zigzag pattern, I presented sixteen kupesi, eight on each papa koka‘anga. Placed in this way, the tables seemed to converse with one another—like elders or my ancestors in dialogue.



Image 158. ‘Uhila Nai, A replica of my nena’s tool-box, 2020. Installation view, ST PAUL St Gallery.



Image 159. ‘Uhila Nai, Making/building the papa with the help of the gallery technician, Thom Kenny, 2023.

At the beginning of my PhD in 2021, I used the papa as a sculptural support system. As an initial work, I presented two small papa koka'anga for critique during Visual Arts Talk Week.¹⁹⁰ By creating two papa in different sizes, I wanted to reference my memory of seeing the elders make koka, with the background noises coming from kids playing and running around. The larger papa, created to represent the elders, was made to the height of the papa that my nena's kautaha koka'anga used. The second papa was made at a child's size to refer to my cousins and me. The items displayed on the papa responded to the proposed 'users' (elders/makers or children) of the table. For example, on the papa for the elders, I displayed kupesi that they would have used. On the smaller papa, I created a book of kupesi (documentation of the process), in response to the idea of documenting kupesi for the younger, future generations of Pelehake. (Image 160)



Image 160. 'Uhila Nai, *Our Past 'older generations' passing down knowledge to the present 'younger generations'*. Installation view, AUT WM Level 6, 605 studios for Talk Week, 2022.

The third iteration of the exhibition *Koloa: Fafine, 'Aati, mo e Tekinolosia/Women, Art, and Technology* exemplified the papa koka'anga's dual role as both display system and sculptural object. An exhibition presented in Tāmaki Makaurau, at Artspace Aotearoa in 2021, *Koloa* is one of the most influential exhibitions for this research project. It has always been a dream of mine to see Tongan koloa exhibited for our community and the public to see, as we don't often get to see

¹⁹⁰ Visual Arts Talk Week is a two-day critical forum organised by the Visual Arts department for BVA/MVA/PhD students. Students present their work in groups of four for discussion with a panel of two Art and Design staff and a guest critic.

our koloa presented in public galleries, apart from cultural events. Upon seeing the display tables used in the show for the kupesi, I was curious to learn about their design. In conversation with Luke Boyle (Artspace technician), he said that the table was inspired by his time working as a technician at ST PAUL St Gallery in 2020 (now known as Te Wai Ngutu Kākā Gallery). He had worked with the tech team on my master's exhibition, and my papa koka'anga had given him the idea for how the tables for the *Koloa* exhibition came to life. This encounter confirmed for me a conceptual understanding of the table and its dual functionality in my work as both a display mechanism and a sculptural object. Furthermore, it provided insight into how this papa koka'anga was positioned within *Koloa* from an exhibition design perspective. To address the work's display, four tables were created, each measuring 7.6 metres in length and twice as wide as my 1:1 scale pepa.¹⁹¹ A key difference for me here is that the designed table for *Koloa* is a presentation strategy, with its extended width and length, compared to a 'working' papa koka'anga, albeit it still retained the characteristic knee height. (Image 161)

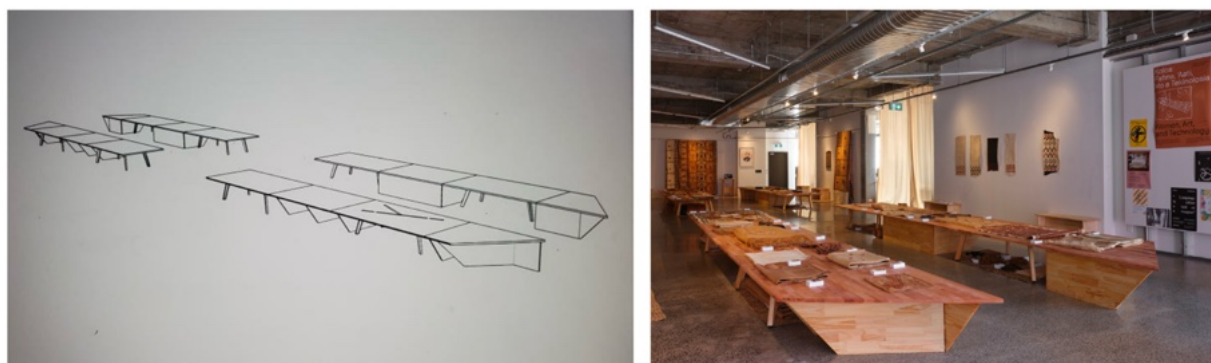


Image 161. Luke Boyle design and made the table for *Koloa*, 2021. Digital 3D programme, and installation view, Artspace Aotearoa. Photograph by Sam Hartnett ©Luke Boyle (left image)

The *Koloa* exhibition featured over seventy different collections of koloa, including ninety unique pieces of ngatu from the Dowager Lady Fielakepa's collection, as well as collections of barkcloth from contemporary female practitioners. It also included works by Tania Edwards, Nikau Hindin, and Vaimaila Urale. Of particular interest to my practice was Urale's work, in which she designed tatau (tattoos) using four Sāmoan symbols (from a computer keyboard): the greater than (>) and less than (<) symbols, as well as the backslash (\) and forward slash (/) symbols. She chose these symbols because the < and > signs translate into the fa'avae tuli. Tuli is a shorebird and one of Sāmoa's native birds, so it represents their footprints in the sand. It also has a second meaning, fa'avae ali, where ali is a traditional Sāmoan headrest. And the \ and / symbols translate to tusi lili'i, or small lines, which can be found on the coconut leaf.¹⁹² Urale calls this kupesi *Typeface* to acknowledge the origin of the design. (Image 162)

¹⁹¹ The dimensions of the table Luke made were 1180 × 7600 × 150mm. Luke Boyle, Artspace Aotearoa technician, Instagram conversation with the author, October 3, 2025.

¹⁹² Koroī Hawkins, "Computer Keyboard Characters to Create Polynesian Designs," interview with Vaimaila Urale, *RNZ*, June 26, 2018,



Image 162. Vaimaila Urale, *Aniva II*, 2019. Installation view, black card, sand. Aotearoa Artspace. Photograph by Sam Hartnett ©Vaimaila Urale

The structure and form of the *papa koka'anga* are simple, yet they hold and carry a lot of memory over time, as they are used to assemble layers upon layers of stories. For example, in the recently published *Sio FakaTonga 'a e Aati FakaTonga: Tongan Views of Tongan Arts* (2025), written by Kolokesa Uafā Māhina-Tuai, Tēvita O. Ka'ili, and 'Okusitino Māhina, in chapter five, "Tongan Fine Arts," the practice of *nimamea'a koka'anga* is discussed.¹⁹³ One of the *koka'anga* mentioned is Fauniteni. Vai 'o e Mo'ui collective, a *kautaha koka'anga* from Dominion Road Tongan Methodist Church, which happens to be my family church. It consists of thirteen members and was led by the late 'Evelingi Havea.¹⁹⁴ (Image 163) In 2015 they collaborated with artist Benjamin Work on *Ngatu Tupenu Tā'uli Black-Marked Bark-Cloth*. Benjamin's works with 'scale' in relation to *ngatu* making. According to Work, the *papa koka'anga* used to make *Ngatu Tupenu Tā'uli* (Image 164) was one that Fauniteni 'o e Mo'ui hadn't used in years. The *kupes* created by the elders was bigger than the *papa*,¹⁹⁵ which meant they had to add an extension so the *kupes* would fit.¹⁹⁶ He

<https://www.rnz.co.nz/international/programmes/datelinepacific/audio/2018650975/computer-keyboard-characters-to-create-polynesian-designs>

¹⁹³ Kolokesa Uafā Māhina-Tuai, "Tongan Fine Arts," in *Sio FakaTonga 'a e Aati FakaTonga: Tongan Views on Tongan Arts*, ed. Kolokesa Uafā Māhina-Tuai, Tēvita 'O. Ka'ili and 'Okusitino Māhina (Kula-Uli Publishing, 2025), 217–129.

¹⁹⁴ Fauniteni 'o e Mo'ui collective is a group of women who have been practising for a while (including when I was living back home in Tonga). They ceased production after the Covid-19 outbreak in 2020.

¹⁹⁵ The measurement would have been 14 feet long by 40 inches wide.

¹⁹⁶ Benjamin Work, Instagram conversation with author, October 3, 2025.

also mentioned that the papa was covered with chicken wire to create the textured effect of the kafa (coconut sennit cordage) on a papa koka'anga.¹⁹⁷ Although the texture created by the kafa and the chicken wire kupesi differs slightly, the chicken wire creates an effect that is close in texture, which adds the characteristic look of traditional ngatu. (Image 165) This makes me aware of how ngatu makers living in Aotearoa still find ways to make ngatu, even though they are far from home.



Image 163. Fauniteni Vai 'o e Mo'ui koka'anga group with Kolokesa Māhina-Tuai and Benjamin Work, 2015.
© Benjamin Work

¹⁹⁷ Most of the papa koka'anga that villagers in Tonga use for koka'anga would have kafa on the table, adding texture to the ngatu and setting measurements.



Image 164. Benjamin Work with Fauniteni Vai 'o e Mo'ui ngatu makers tohi ngatu together, 2015. Dominion Church Hall. © Benjamin Work

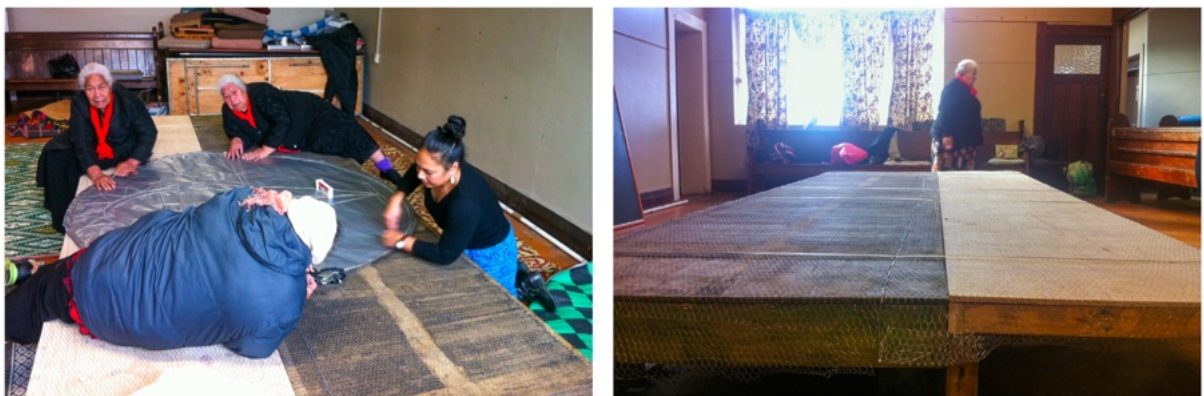


Image 165. Kolokesa Māhina-Tuai with Fauniteni Vai 'o e Mo'ui makers attaching the kupesi onto the kupesi. The papa koka'anga with the chicken wired attach with the addition to the papa, 2015. ©Benjamin Work

Langanga in its Literal Scale

As outlined above, the standard measurement of the papa koka'anga used in Pelehake is 14 feet long by 40 inches wide. Langanga is the unit of measurement used to determine the scale of the ngatu; therefore, one langanga is equivalent to the size of the papa koka'anga (ngatu makers' table).

For example, konga ngatu refers to any piece of ngatu that is between 1 and 4 langanga in length and is used for everyday purposes, such as blankets, wrapping babies, and creating dance costumes. The fola'osi is 4–7 langanga, and is presented at a specific time during a ceremony. For example, at a funeral there is a time when extended family, friends, or anyone who knew the deceased presents koloa to the family as a sign of respect—and to add to their collection of koloa to use during the funeral or for future use.¹⁹⁸ Fuatanga is 10 langanga and is a very common ngatu; it is one of the main ones I saw in my nena's collection of ngatu, alongside tokauanoa (20 langanga) and launima (50 meters in length). These ngatu are presented as gifts. For example, on a birthday, a launima or tokauanoa may be given to the faifekau (Rev. Minister), as a costume for the birthday person, or to the fahu (father's sister).

The largest ngatu is the lauteau, measuring 100 langanga; historically, the lauteau is typically used only for royal weddings, funerals, or coronations. For example, at the double wedding of the late Queen Sālote's two sons, Prince Tupouto'a-o-Tonga and Prince Fatafehi Tu'i Pelehake, a lauteau was part of the koloa that was presented during the wedding.¹⁹⁹ And, based on what I have seen, the lauteau was used as a carpet laid out like a red carpet, as seen in the royal wedding ceremony and the King's coronation. (Image 166) The significance of how scale plays out is a massive part of our Tongan ceremony; it highlights the different hierarchies between the people for whom each ceremony is designed—the ngatu scales mentioned above help identify which kind should be presented to whom. Even though there are other time–place factors when presenting the ngatu, the process and materials used in koka'anga remain the same. What changes is the choice of kupesi to be used or given as a gift. Some kupesi have been made from stories about the history of the royals, or are named after them, such as the kupesi kalou (Image 167), which is about the exile of H.M. Queen Sālote's son to Fiji.

¹⁹⁸ A collection of koloa, including a fala (weaving mat), ngatu, and kie (another type of mat, but finer), is folded together, with the monomono (quiltsa) on top when presented.

¹⁹⁹ August Hettig, "Betrothal of Two Tongan Princes," *Pacific Islands Monthly*, March 18, 1947, 20, <https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-316193141/view?sectionId=nla.obj-329870243&partId=nla.obj-316205308#page/n22/mode/1up>



Image 166. Photograph taken at the double wedding of the sons of Queen Salote of Tonga, Nuku'alofa, Tonga. between 10-12 June 1947, Film Negative. ©Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand.



Image 167. Toakase Tu'iono, Kupesi Kalou *GOD*, 30x40cm, 2020.

Through learning about how scale functions within our everyday life and Tongan ceremony, I find it interesting that they all serve a purpose, not just because the ngatu is made in a certain way. In my practice, scale has been implicit in the making throughout the entire project, either attached to the work's purpose or in response to the exhibition space. For example, I was invited to

participate in the *Back of House* exhibition by Sophie Thorn, Kaiwhakarākei Curator Collections at Te Pātaka Toi Adam Art Gallery, and commissioned to make a work that responded to a ngatu tāhina held in the collection of Victoria University, Pōneke Wellington. (Image 168) Seeing the ngatu, I felt a sense of home, a warm welcome from the ancestors, and a deep connection that inspired the creation of *Hala Kafa*, which was linked to one of the kupesi from Pelehake's collection. It was a launima, produced and presented in a way that was partly influenced by its spatial positioning in the gallery space. Te Pātaka Toi Adam Art Gallery has very tall, high, and narrow exhibition spaces, which were ideal for suspending long lengths of screen-printed ngatu. The ngatu tāhina launima was a gift from The University of the South Pacific to Ngā Puhipuhi o Te Herenga Waka Victoria University of Wellington Art Collection in 1999. I knew that I would respond not only to the kupesi, but to its 24-metre length. I felt excited by this idea, imagining how I might make an ngatu of this scale and installation using printmaking as the primary process. I knew that if I were to make a traditional full-size ngatu, I would need a collective of people, but screen-printing offers a different potential.

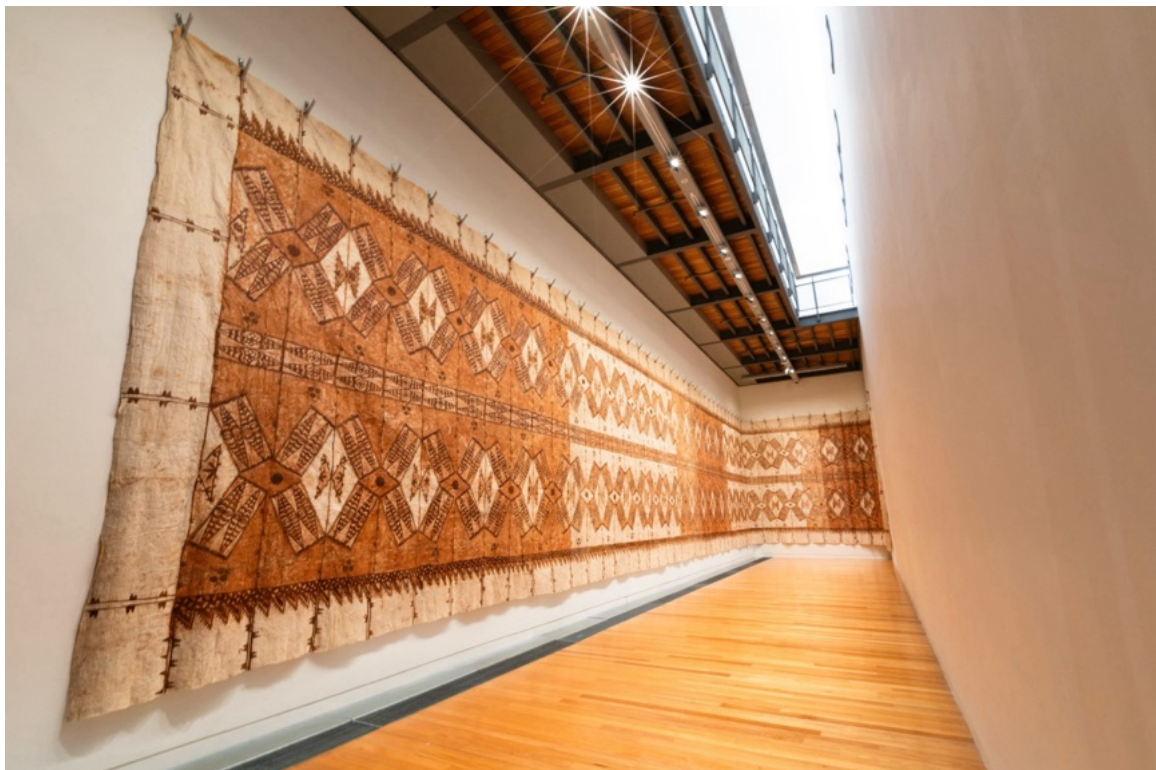


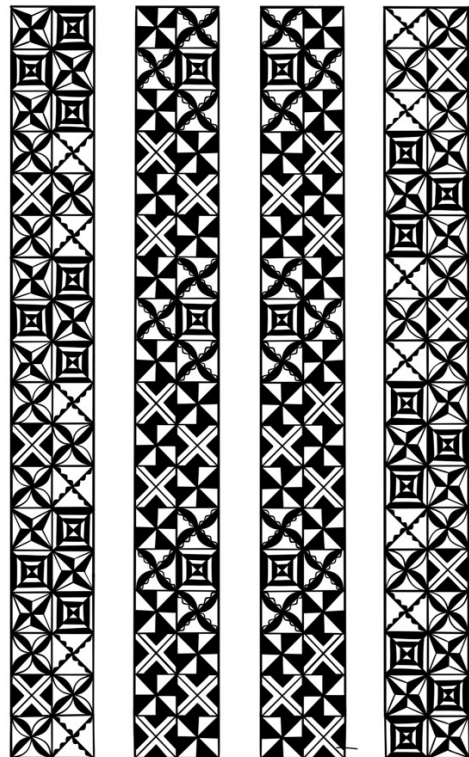
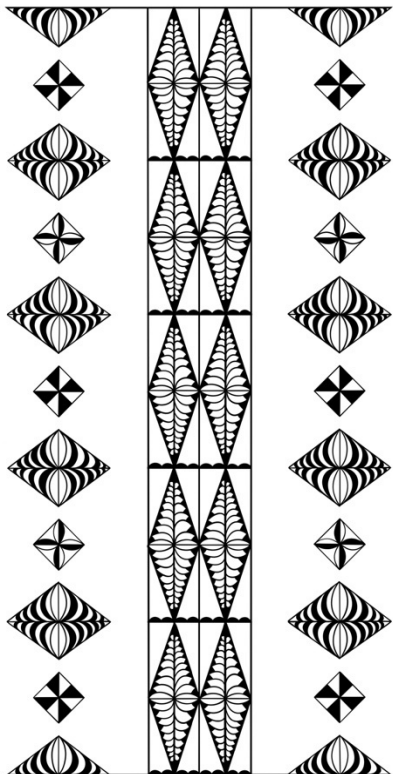
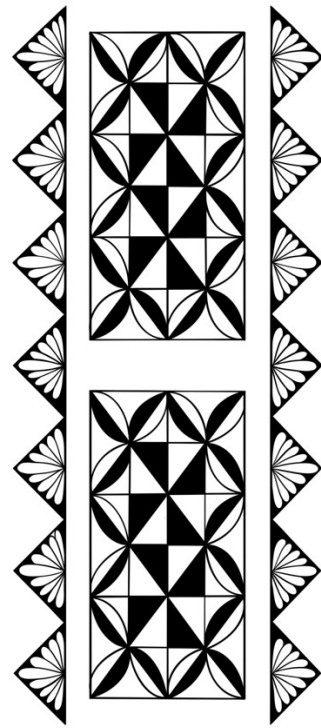
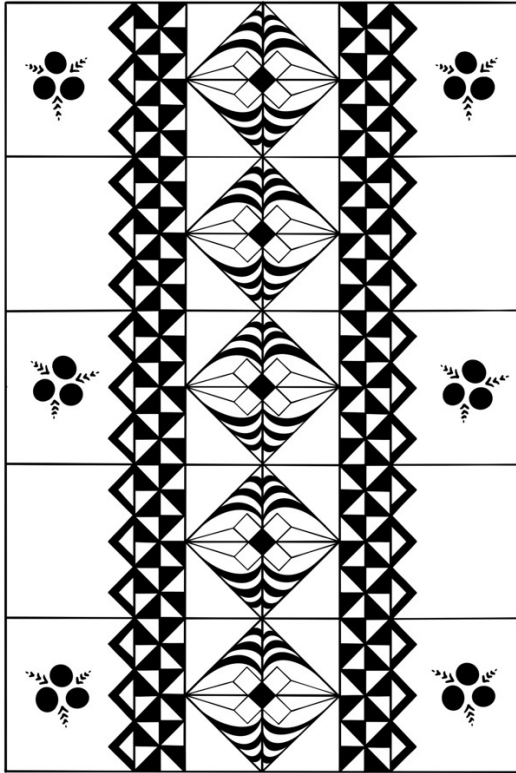
Image 168. Ngatu Tāhina, 24 meter in length, 2023. Installation view, Te Pātaka Toi Adam Art Gallery. Photograph taken by Ted Whitaker

I created *Hala Kafa* based on the middle section of a ngatu, which also inspired the title. I chose to respond directly to the kupesi on the ngatu tāhina by restructuring and redesigning a series of kupesi based on my personal understanding and interpretation of them. (Images 169-172) To replicate the scale, I created six pepa koka'anga ngatu prints, each 4 metres long (multiplied by

six equals 24 metres). (Image 173) An interesting challenge and opportunity was figuring out how I could create a launima as an individual artist versus with the koka'anga. I had the idea of creating a launima that is divided into parts, and through its display, enacts a whole. Observing artists and collectives working with larger-scale sizes prompted me to imagine my own ngatu using the process of screen-printing to produce the launima (50 metres in length).



Image 169. Had used the method of veteki to take apart the kupesi seen in the ngatu tāhina, which it has 8 kupesi in total. Drawing/veteki using Procreate Programme, 2023.



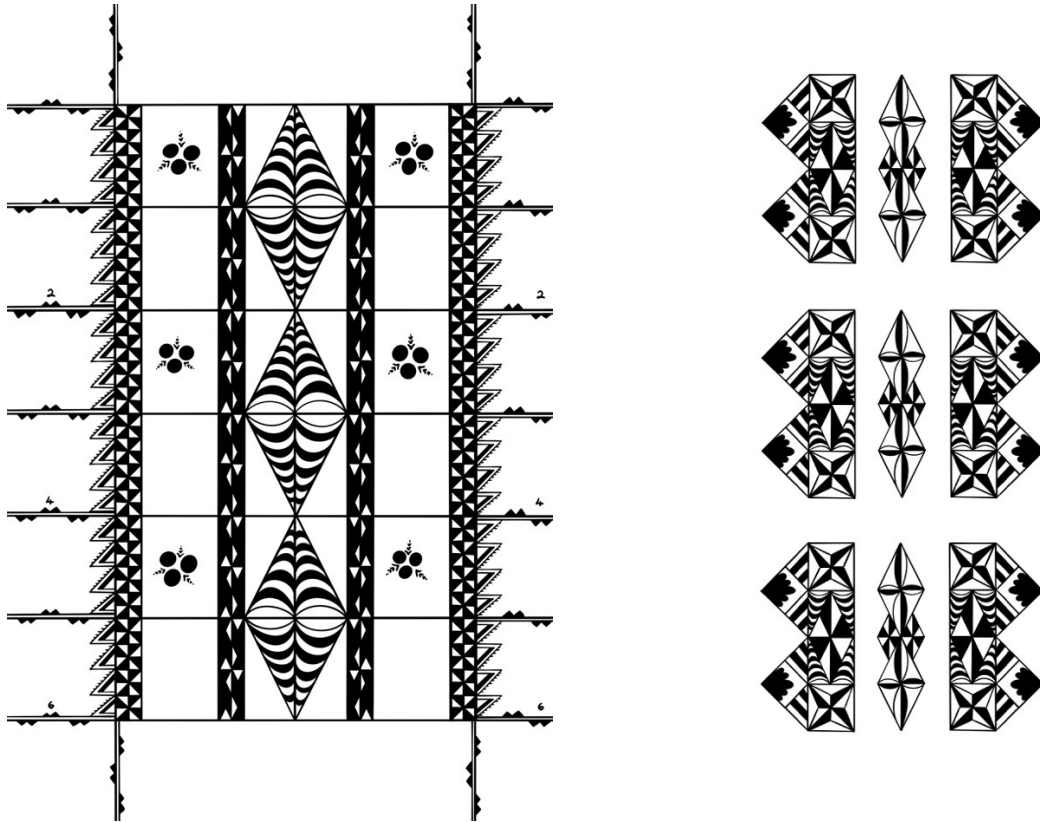
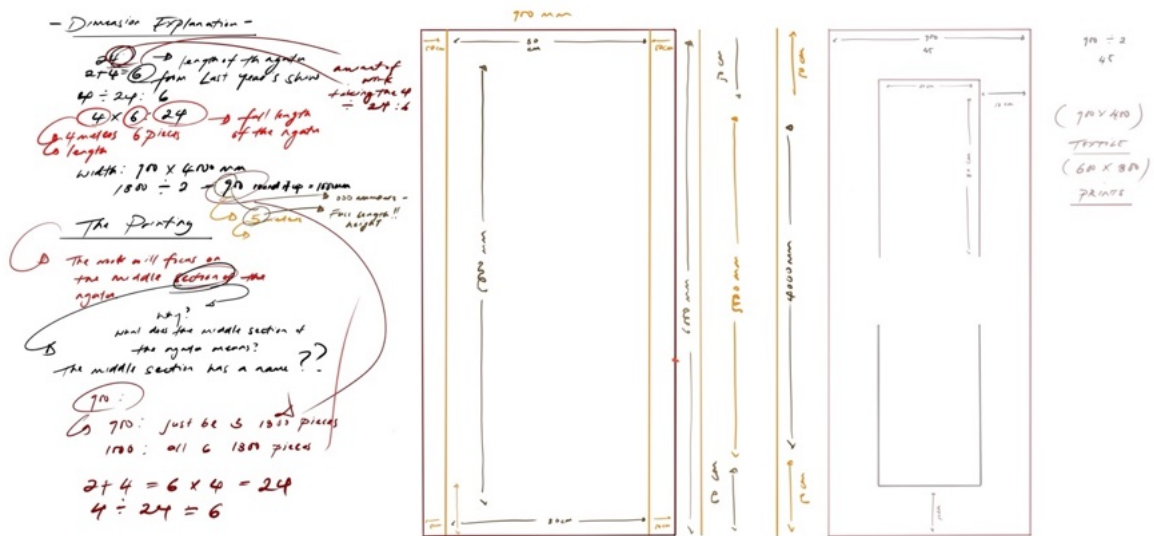


Image 172. 'Uhila Nai, *Hala Kafa*, 2023. Recreating and reconstructing a ngatu using the kupesi from the ngatu tāhina. Another form of veteki to understand the past in order for me to create work for the present.
Drawing/veteki using Procreate Programme.



The scale of 25–50 langanga is of interest to me. As outlined in *Konga II: Tupu'anga – The family history of the project*, there is a story that has been in my family for generations and is the source of my ambitions. My great-great-grandma, Melekapa, my grandpa's grandma, had koka²⁰⁰ a lauteau—100 metres—in length for the wedding of her daughter, Vaimoana. All of the koloa used for the wedding were lauteau. It was said that the lauteau were laid out end-to-end as a carpet that ran from Pelehake all the way to Fua'amotu, which is the village next to us, and is about seven minutes by car via Tuku'Aho Rd (4.4 kilometres in length).²⁰¹ (see Image 54) Making a ngatu in response to this story, after hearing it told repeatedly over my life, embodies the idea of a mother–daughter relationship. Although I haven't created a ngatu of this scale previously, *Vaiei Tupuna* introduced the concept of referencing ngatu through a 1:1 scale, albeit using a different process.

The Operations of Langanga

How the langanga of a ngatu is positioned is a constant consideration when I am making objects, prints, and installations. Langanga is always a particular scale reference in the production of artwork; my project draws on this system as a reference and measurement for my screen-printed pieces. The ngatu langanga is not the only aspect that dictates scale; it is also layered into other scales, such as the space of an installation or exhibition.

As noted, the scale of a ngatu can be any length by a fixed width of 14 feet (4 metres) and the papa koka'anga is made by a collective of people. I am interested in the relationship between traditional ngatu and my ngatu screen-prints, particularly in terms of working independently versus collaboratively with a group. In the studio, I approach my work with the mindset of figuring out how to make ngatu as an individual maker using the elders' methods. I have to adopt different mannerisms from koka'anga to produce pepa koka'anga ngatu prints on any scale. For example, some parallels can be seen in the worktable I use at the Print Lab, referred to as a 'fabric table' and designed especially for printing on fabric and creating large-scale prints. The table also features a measuring system that guides you when working with the same print repeat, allowing me to work at a pace and with a movement that mimics how the koka'anga operates. Again, this is reinforced by my moving from side to side of the screen-print table, just the way the elders take care of their own section according to where they sit.

For the making of *Nimapoto*, *'Api Tuku'hau*, and *Always Returning Home*, which were part of the *Motherland/Homeland* exhibition curated by Bonni Luafutu-Tamati, I conceptually worked with the scale of a konganga ngatu—4 metres in length, which equals one langanga. Each of the three artworks measured 900cm × 4m. These works were screen-printed with images of an airline ticket, the ngatu maker's hand gestures, and Nena's fale (reflected in the order of the work's title and relationship to the exhibition concept of *Motherland/Homeland*). (see Images 26–28) Although the scale referenced a konganga ngatu, which has an installation logic, the works were installed by

²⁰⁰ Koka is short for koka'anga and is used when referring to or discussing ngatu after it has been created.

²⁰¹ Veisia Vaha'i and Timote Nai, makers and knowledge-holders, personal conversations with the author, 2021–25.

the curator. I generally install or guide the installation of my work, so I was not familiar with this process—yet I allowed the work to experience it. This difference in installation brought to light a perspective on viewing the work not as a pepa koka'anga screen-printed ngatu, installed using the sculptural tropes I have developed for display, but simply as a series of works that spoke about generations, home, and migration. However, I still saw it as a konga ngatu because of its scale, process, and materiality, and because it was made within this project using the collective knowledge and methodological framework through which all of the artwork has been produced. *Motherland/Homeland* brought new experiences and perspectives to the practice, offering insight into how a gallery might approach the installation of my artwork. However, it is something I would never allow my work to undergo again, as I felt it removed the intentionality behind my installation process and the cultural context embedded in the display.

I see a collective of knowledge in action in the collaborative practice of artists Robin White and Ruha Fifita. It is their interest in working with barkcloth in collaboration with women makers from Fiji and Tonga that is relevant to this research. In the book *Robin White: Something Is Happening Here*, the chapter “An Act of Faith” includes a couple of ngatu that embody the scale of a konga ngatu.²⁰² The work *Living in a material world*, (Image 174) a collaboration between White, Fifita, and Fijian artist Tamari Cabeikanacea, was created in 2017 and measures over 3 × 2 metres in scale. The composition of this work presents as an image of an interior space versus a traditional ngatu pattern. It feels more like a digital print than a handmade craft object because of the neatness of the lines and the positioning of the subject matter. With ngatu, you can see how the lines or subject matter are drawn as they reflect the handmade mark and character of the elders. In my practice, when I screen-print a house or airline ticket, I aim for the work to be as neat as possible, but sometimes that can take away the essence and experience of tohi ngatu (tracing/outlining/markings the kupesi). (Image 175)

White and Fifita's collaboration, like many craft-oriented projects produced by collectives and communities, extends the practice of ngatu (painted barkcloth) into new territory, moving beyond traditional forms to discover new ways of making and styles.²⁰³ For their exhibition *Siu 'i Moana: Reaching Across the Ocean* at the NGV International in Naarm Melbourne in 2016, White and Fifita presented, a series of three monumental-scale barkcloths suspended on the wall. (Image 176) The name of the exhibition was taken from their work “*Siu 'i Moana* (2011), which speaks about the things that bind Aotearoa and the Pacific Islands.”²⁰⁴ In the book *Robin White: Something Is Happening Here*, in the chapter “Wakaoriori Masterton,” I came across the *Siu 'i Moana* series. The work *Tonga to New Zealand* is an example of the scale of a fola'osi.²⁰⁵ The work was designed as a triptych and intended to be viewed “from left to right” in narrative form.²⁰⁶ This format is reminiscent of a series of fola'osi I showed in *Liutaki: Going back in a poetical sense*

²⁰² Sarah Farrar, Jill Trevelyan, and Nina Tonga, eds., *Robin White: Something Is Happening Here* (Te Papa Press and Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, 2022), 202.

²⁰³ “*Siu 'i Moana: Reaching Across the Ocean*,” National Gallery of Victoria, accessed October 13, 2025, <https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/exhibition/siu-i-moana/>

²⁰⁴ “*Siu 'i Moana: Reaching Across the Ocean*.”

²⁰⁵ Farrar, Trevelyan, and Tonga, *Robin White: Something Is Happening Here*, 230.

²⁰⁶ Farrar, Trevelyan, and Tonga, *Robin White: Something Is Happening Here*, 238.

(2022), during the early stages of my PhD. I installed *Liuaki* in the form of two pepa koka'anga ngatu prints, suspended facing toward the clear glass window, reflecting the idea of airing out the ngatu in the sun. (see Image 15) The rest of the feta'aki and calico ngatu prints were suspended facing the entrance of the gallery, in response to the tauaki process, where wet feta'aki is left to dry. Facing them towards the entrance evoked for me a memory of the feeling of entering Nena's making space, where the feta'aki was the first thing you'd see.

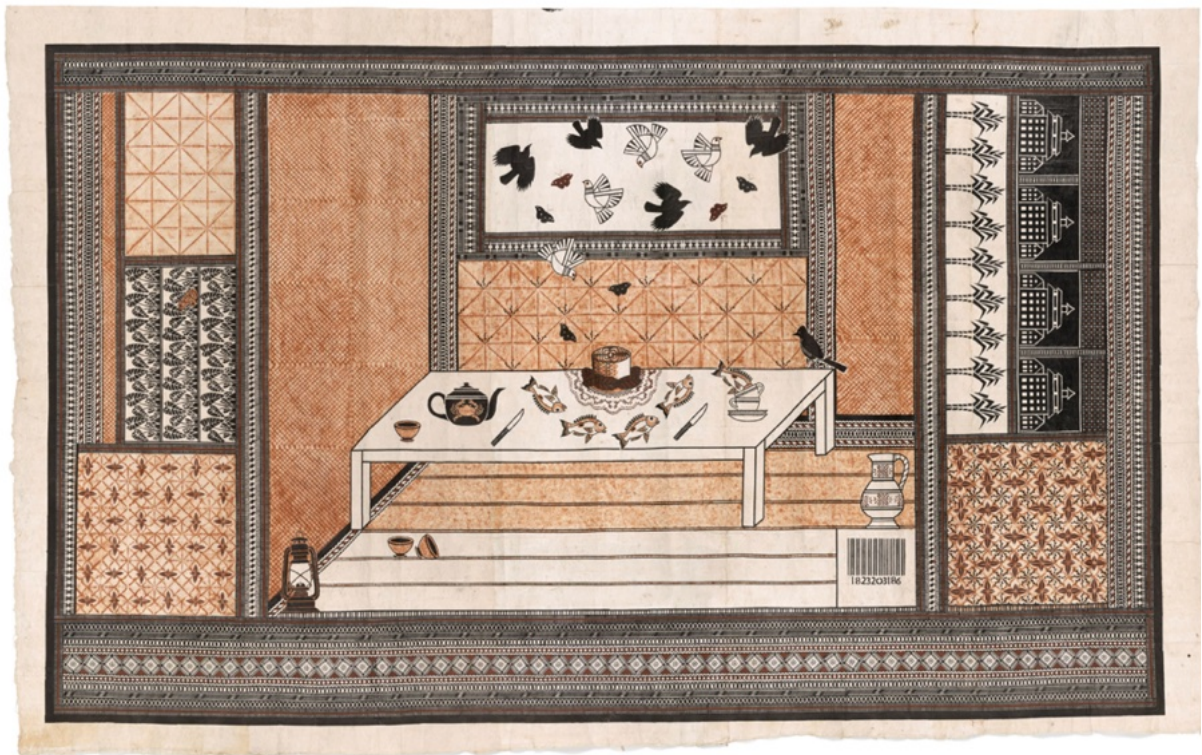


Image 174. Robin White, Tamari Cabeikanacea and Ruha Fifita, *Living in a material world*, 2017, barkcloth, earth pigments, nature dye. ©Robin White, Ruha Fifita and Tamari Cabeikanacea



Image 175. 'Uhila Nai, 'Api Tukahau, 2023. Installation view, clean screen-print the fale.



Image 176. Robin White and Ruha Fifita in collaboration with the women of Haveluloto, 2011.

Top – bottom: Siu 'I Moana 3: Rangitahua, Siu 'I Moana 2: Tonga to New Zealand, Siu 'I Moana 1: New Zealand to Tonga. Ngatu tā'uli, barkcloth, tuitui, 'umea and tongo, University of Auckland Art Collection.

©Robin White, Ruha Fifita and Tamari Cabeikanacea

Artist Lonnie Hutchinson is also working with a similar aspect. In an interview with Ngā Ringa Toi o Tahu, she discusses the installation of her paper cut-outs, which are hung in spaces where they float, rather than being traditionally mounted against the wall.²⁰⁷ Suspending work in space allows people to interact freely with it, walking through and looking. The suspended cutouts manipulate light and shadow, creating positive and negative spaces, depending on their positioning in the gallery space.²⁰⁸ (Image 177) Similarly, I draw on the idea of taukai by suspending my pepa koka'anga ngatu prints in open spaces, allowing them to breathe and showcasing all aspects, both front and back, rather than only presenting the face of the work to the audience.



Image 177. Lonnie. Hutchinson, *I Will Never Fade Away From You*, 2015, Corman Arts Centre, Canberra, installation view. ©Lonnie Hutchinson

Observing ngatu makers, I noticed their incorporation of ngatu scales in their artwork, such as the use of launima, fuatanga or tokauanoa. For instance, contemporary Tongan artist Visiesio Poasi Siasau, known as Sio, whose practice comes from the Tongan tufunga (Tongan craftsmen). During his master's degree at Te Wānanga o Aotearoa in 2013, Sio spent several months in his village of Haveluloto, Tonga, working alongside his mother and sister, where he created his first ngatu. In collaboration with his family, his work, titled *Onotu'ofe'uli – Onoto'ufekula*, reflects the scale of a tokauanoa. (Image 178) The work itself discusses the labour of love that was undertaken over more than two years, spanning two locations: here at Te Wānanga o Aotearoa and then back home in Tonga. As part of my master's research in 2019–20, I spent several months in Tonga, experiencing and testing how I might apply contemporary methods of printmaking and object-making to Indigenous materials and vice versa. This notion of working

²⁰⁷ Ngahi Tahu, "Lonnie Hutchinson: Ngā Ringa Tohi o Tahu," August 3, 2017, interview, YouTube, 8 min., 18 sec., <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YTzArq6TdLQ>.

²⁰⁸ Ngahi Tahu, "Lonnie Hutchinson."

between ‘here and there’ formed part of *The Private Letter Becomes Public* (2022). I was able to incorporate what I had made back home, a series of kupesi that were stamped onto feta‘aki and pepa koka‘anga, and present them as part of the Window Gallery installation. (see Project 1) Another example is the upcoming PhD exhibition work *One Year Making*, which involves a collaborative ngatu tokauanima between the elders from my village and me. It will be presented at Te Wai Ngutu Kākā in Gallery 2 and the Foyer atrium space, which is seven stories and approximately 28 metres in height.



Image 178. Visessio Poasi Siasau, Tongan Tapa Cloth: *Onotu ‘ofe ‘uli – Onoto ‘ufekula*, 2014. Tongan customary pigments and dye on bark cloth. Installation View ©Visessio Poasi Siasau

First Nation artist and curator of mixed cultural backgrounds Lisa Waup is an artist living in Naarm Melbourne, who practices across different media, “including weaving, printmaking, photography, sculpture, fashion, and digital art.”²⁰⁹ Her practice focuses on personal experience, family history, Country, and broader historical narratives. A shared aspect between our practices is the

²⁰⁹ Lisa Waup, “About,” <https://www.lisa-waup.com/about>

combination of printmaking, sculpture, and digital art, although we each approach these mediums in different ways. I bind together ancestral history and relationships, and Waup “weaves together threads of lost history” and explores and responds to “the passage of time, culminating in contemporary expressions that speak to her past, present, and future.”²¹⁰



Image 179. Left image: Lisa Waup, *holding County, the veil*, 2025, the veil, Buxton Contemporary, University of Melbourne, Narm (Melbourne), Photograph by Christian Capurro. Right image: Portrait of Lisa Waup, *holding County, the veil*, Buxton Contemporary, University of Melbourne, Narm (Melbourne), Photograph Christian Capurro. This work has been acquired by Museums and Collections at the University of Melbourne. ©Lisa Waup

It is a practice that sits close to this project in so many ways, but the aspect of her work that I want to talk about is installation. Across her practice, Waup utilises all kinds of spaces, whether that involves suspending elements in an open space, pinning them to the wall, or creating murals, prints, or installations. Waup merges all of these different methods in her practice. Her work *holding Country* (2023) (Image 179) was part of a group exhibition titled *Current* at Buxton Gallery in Naarm. The work was created in response to a flood she had experienced with her family. Screen-printing on hessian sandbags, Waup wanted to reimagine this experience by utilising these objects as vessels that embody “memory, tradition, and shared experience” through screen-printing onto the sandbags.²¹¹ The installation of this work, where the screen-printed sandbags hung loosely on metal rods with various fixtures,²¹² is structured in a formation that appears like multiple rows of clothing lines. This temporary arrangement reminds me of my work, *The 1620 Collection*, where I mimicked how the clothing lines back home in our front yard have

²¹⁰ Waup, “About.”

²¹¹ “Reimagine Sandbags with Lisa Waup,” Buxton Contemporary, August 2025, <https://buxtoncontemporary.com/exhibitions/reimagine-sandbags-with-lisa-waup/>

²¹² The fixtures listed on the gallery wall text included: “Assorted handles: hand spun nettle string, turmeric hand spun hemp string, 2 ply hand spun hemp string, braided jute, cotton rope, cotton thread, jute string, coconut string, sea grass, linen rope, hand dyed raffia, vintage light cord (c.1940 Bakelite, copper, rubber, cotton, reclaimed wire, barbed wire, coconut sinnet, antique rope, rubber, feathers (tawny frog mouth, emu, galan, cockatoo, parrot).”

been installed for multi-purposes, including drying the feta'aki—with numerous wires that run horizontally one after another. (see Image 10)

The Many Hands of the Collective

Working with scale is a formal and conceptual strategy that many contemporary art practitioners and collectives employ methodologically. Of course, these are not necessarily related to specific scales associated with practices like ngatu. However, we can look to our neighbours, such as Mataaho Collective, with whom we align closely in terms of working with large scales as part of our practice and sharing it through installation strategies. An example of this is their work *AKA*, a 14-metre-tall woven cylindrical installation created in 2019 for the exhibition *Ābadakone* at the National Gallery of Canada. (Image 180) This work is made out of a “New Zealand-produced blue-green marine rope [called Poly-Pacific Blue], used in both the fishing and farming industries”—a material choice “inspired by marine rope found in Honolulu.”²¹³ *AKA* is the definition of how I imagine my PhD final exhibition work, especially in relation to its height and installation aspect. Just by looking at *AKA*, I am reminded of how it was made, its structure, and the studio strategy employed to ensure its success. What I am referring to is that they were able to collectively work on the piece in a studio with a height of 12 metres in Te Papaioea Palmerston North.²¹⁴ This is akin to the AUT Print Lab space, where I use a 4 × 1 metre table to screen-print my pepa koka'anga ngatu prints to the scale of the decided drop. Mataaho's use of “traditional whatu (finger twining) techniques with modern materials” is at the conceptual core of their practice.²¹⁵ I, too, draw on the different processes and methods from the practice of ngatu and create work using contemporary visual devices and built display structures.

²¹³ “Aka, 2019,” Mataaho Collective, <https://www.mataahocollective.com/art-works/aka>

²¹⁴ “Aka, 2019.”

²¹⁵ “Aka, 2019.”

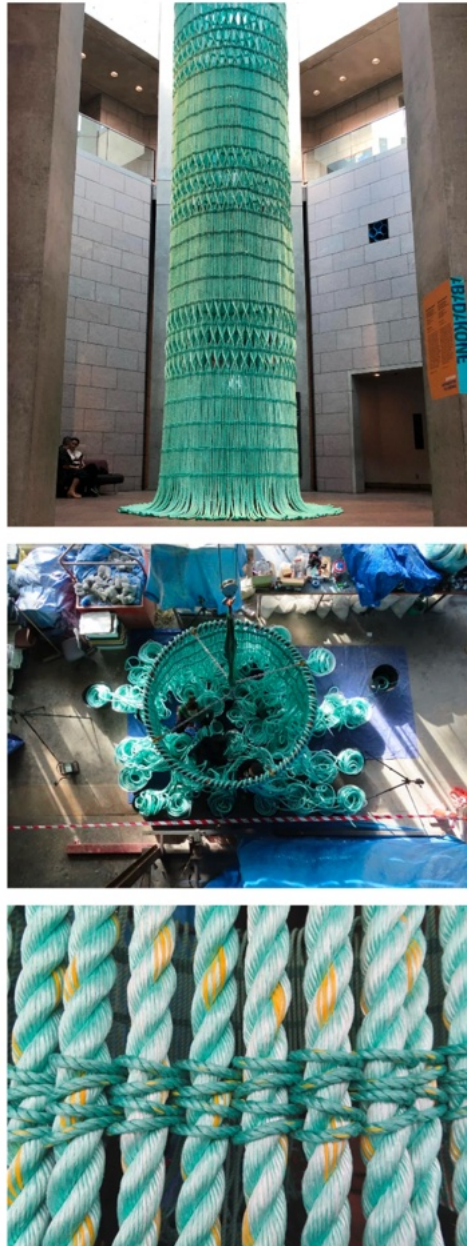


Image 180. Mataaho Collective, *Aka*, 2019. Installation view, 2.5m x 14m, copolymer fibre rope and steel.
©Mata Aho Collective

Kiko Moana (2017) (Image 181) is another significant work by Mataaho Collective, and its scale caught my attention. The work is made from blue tarpaulin, layered and sewn together, then cut and arranged into a repeating pattern.²¹⁶ It is reminiscent of the ngatu in its structure. This particular work draws on the idea of repurposing a material commonly used across the island in Tonga, specifically a bag that sells for two dollars, which I discussed in the section *Practising koloa faka-Tonga* in *Konga II*. As stated by the artists, *Kiko Moana* is a work layered with different narratives gathered from friends and whānau, as a way to help them to ground their work in

²¹⁶ “Kiko Moana, 2017,” Mataaho Collective, <https://www.mataahocollective.com/art-works/kiko-moana>

mātauranga Māori while exhibiting overseas.²¹⁷ I see a strong relationship to my practice and the process I follow when designing kupesi. I gather different layers of narrative from the fonua, people, materiality, the past and present, objects, and memories. I then rearrange these elements to determine their positioning and appearance when screen-printed onto the pepa koka'anga. (see Images 96 – 100)



Image 181. Mataaho Collective, *Kiko Moana*, 2017. Installation view, 5m x 11m, tarpaulin, cotton and eyelets.
©Mata Aho Collective

Another example is the story woven on the lands of the Kunibídjí, Burarra, and Gadigal peoples. In December 2024 the work *Mun-dirra*, one of Australia's largest woven sculptures, was exhibited at the NGV Triennial, having travelled from Maningrida in Central-West Arnhem Land to Naarm Melbourne.²¹⁸ The making of the work involved thirteen women and took them two years. *Mun-dirra* is a 100-metre-long woven fish fence, made from more than 35,000 threads and from 4,400

²¹⁷ "Kiko Moana, 2017."

²¹⁸ Anna Freeland and Richard Mockler, "Making Mun-dirra," *ABC News*, February 13, 2024, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-02-13/ngv-triennial-2023-mun-dirra-fish-fence-maningrida-arts-centre/103186786>

pandanus leaves.²¹⁹ (Image 182) Among the thirteen artists from the Maningrida Arts Centre were Doreen Jinggarabarra, from Jinawunya Country near Gupanga (the Blyth River), Freda Wayartja Ali, known as Freda 1, and her younger sister, Freda Ali, from Yilan Country. These three collaborated over two years to make the artwork; this length of time working on one piece is traditional within the Burarra culture.²²⁰

This image has been removed by the author of this Thesis due to copyright reason.

Image 182. *Mun-dirra (Maningrida fish fence)*, 2023. Installation view of Freda Ali, Freda Ali Wayartja, Maureen Ali, Cecille Baker, Michelle Baker, Bonnie Burarngarra, Gabriella Garrimara, Doreen Jinggarabarra, Lorna Jin-gubarrangunyja, Indra Prudence, Jennifer Prudence, Zoe Prudence, Anthea Stewart. NGV International, Melbourne. Photograph by Sean Fennessy

I work in a similar setting, collaborating with the elders, which is traditional to us Tongans. What draws me to this work, in particular, is that it is 100 metres long, which is at a scale I have been working with for my final PhD work, *One Year Making*. Their approach as weavers in making an object of this scale is to break it down into sections—ten sections, each 10 metres long by 2 metres wide.²²¹ This is equivalent to how I intend to approach the making of the second part of *One Year Making*, which is a pepa koka'anga screen-printed ngatu. Also, I am interested in the link between the title's translation and the installation. 'Mun-dirra' means 'fish fence' in the Burarra language, and the work was installed on the ground floor of the NGV, where each piece of the netting was hung as if it were floating in the ocean. Seeing this installation aspect, I

²¹⁹ Freeland and Mockler, "Making Mun-dirra."

²²⁰ Freeland and Mockler, "Making Mun-dirra."

²²¹ Freeland and Mockler, "Making Mun-dirra."

appreciated the artists' decision to float these objects, which, for me, was a response to the idea of drawing from a lived experience and the everyday life of the Burarra men. The "mun-dirra were traditionally made by Burarra men, using coastal sedge grass called gurdagarra, and were designed to fence in schools of fish in shallow sea or riverbeds."²²² Similarly, I suspend the screen-printed ngatu in space as they are, responding to the method of tauaki (to hang or to dry), which is part of the making process of feta'aki. (see Image 155) *Mun-dirra* is a work that I will use as a guide when I move on to the actual making of the *One Year Making*. The making of *Mun-dirra* was the weavers' way of "paying [their] respects to their elders, storytellers and artists—past and present."²²³ Therefore, their intention is the same as mine, which is a letter of paying my respect to my nena, the elders, and the ngatu makers—the past-present and the future.

Making Scales

Scale also operates in the context of collective making, as it addresses the people involved in producing the ngatu. Throughout this practice, people weave in and out of the project, moving between its different spaces, whether participating in the creation of a work, discussing ngatu and its history, or coming together to help gather materials for the project. When considering the practice of ngatu, it is essential to involve many people, as exemplified throughout the creation of every part, material and process. This level of contribution and participation is evident in the collective of people who have generously supported my project, such as my cousins, uncles, and in-laws, who came together to help cut down the coconut tree for the collection of tu'aniu (coconut midrib), lau'i kaka (coconut fibre wrapped around a young coconut leaf), and kavele'ipulu (coconut husk). The same can be said in the context of collecting and gathering information and knowledge from the elders through my documenting the making of ngatu. This is a different kind of collective experience to Mataaho, in that my project draws on my community closely in support of the production of the work: In *Konga II: Tupu'anga – The family history of the project*, in the section *Kāinga: The people of this project* I mention the key contributors to the project, the Kautaha Koka'anga 'o Pelehake—the makers of the tokauanima—and also people from *The hands that harvest from fonua* and *Fanga mokopuna – The grandchildren* sections. I think of these sub-groups as collectives of people.

In the process of preparing for the making of my final PhD work, titled *Tohi Kumi Koloa: Fepōtalanoa'aki 'eni pea mo 'eku fanga kui*, there are different collectives of people who are involved, particularly in the making of the 25-metre-long traditional ngatu. The collectives of people mentioned in *Konga II: Tupu'anga – The family history of the project* are the groups that will be helping with the production of the traditional ngatu.²²⁴ In a conversation about organising makers for the koka'anga, there are four people I speak with: Moana, Veisia, 'Asinate, and Amanda. For collecting material, there are six people: Sione, Taufu, Viliami, 'Eveli, Pēpa, and

²²² Freeland and Mockler, "Making Mun-dirra."

²²³ Freeland and Mockler, "Making Mun-dirra."

²²⁴ I will be screen-printing a contemporary ngatu in the Print Labs at AUT, which, of course, is informed and conceived of in parallel with the project knowledge gained in making the traditional ngatu.

Naulivou, and for the koka, which is the biggest collective of all with twelve people, the ngatu women makers are Nate, Pilimi, Penina, 'Ofa, 'Atu, Lūsia, Toakase, Lavinia, 'Ana, Tangini, Moana, and Vei.

For me to conceptualise and make sense of the making, I refer to the knowledge-holders, makers, and orators, like my nena and what she left for/with me, myself as a maker and a knowledge-holder, 'Eleni, the Dowager, Vakaloa, Timote, Lehā'uli, and Tamale. This 'collective' is an essential group of people and is pivotal in how they have helped me with the project concept and how the practice presents itself in the making context.

Pacific Communities of Practice and Collaboration

Lalaga: Le Hui Fono was an exhibition curated by Theresa Tongi and Ruha Fifita at the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery in Ngāmotu New Plymouth, November 2024–May 2025. The curatorial premise drew on their “ongoing commitment to deepen relationships of collaboration” amongst different collectives, focusing on “mutual support, and reciprocity between Pasifika artists and communities in Taranaki and across Te Moana-nui-a-Kiwa.”²²⁵ I was fortunate to have the opportunity to visit the exhibition, where I encountered collaborations between makers from Ngāmotu, Sāmoa, Fiji, and Tonga. The exhibition integrates the concept of lalaga (weaving) by bringing together different collectives of makers from various cultural practices, such as weavers, contemporary practitioners, ngatu, and fangufangu makers. (Image 183) In the video of the opening day of *Lalaga: Le Hui Fono*, Namulau'ulu Josh Robertson, from Taranaki Vaimoana Pasifika Charitable Trust says, “to lalaga is basically weaving together to undertake real meaningful engagement with each other, exchanging ideas and actually hear what's been asked and what's been shared.”²²⁶ This quote reflects my experience of the exhibition and being there in person—seeing different hands from across various generations come together to weave the stories of their ancestors. For me, the exhibition was more than just a show presenting Pacific artists' works made with a variety of mediums; it was an exhibition filled with knowledge, history, and stories that taught the youth of today what everyday life looks like for our people back home. Youth Ambassador Jorja Wilson says, “I've learned how important it is to keep our culture alive and to understand the different ways in which our ancestors have represented our culture.”²²⁷ For me, and in relation to this PhD project, my ambition is to share what was shared with me by my nena as a way of teaching, not just today's generation, but everyone across different generations.

On display was a ngatu launima suspended from the ceiling, facing downward, made between the 1960s and 1975, and now in Te Puke Ariki's collection in Ngāmotu. (Image 184) The installation and its scale, as well as the way the kupesi was structured on the ngatu, immediately caught my attention. The installation aspect reminded me of the inside of 'Uhila lahi's fale Tonga,

²²⁵ “Lalaga: Le Hui Fono,” Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, <https://govettbrewster.com/exhibitions/2024/lalaga-le-hui-fono>

²²⁶ “Lalaga Le Hui Fono – Opening Day,” Govett-Brewster Art Gallery (YouTube video), Namulau'ulu Josh Robertson, Taranaki Vaimoana Pasifika Charitable Trust, 3:55–4:07, <https://youtu.be/KJ9sYpaoCO4>

²²⁷ “Lalaga Le Hui Fono – Opening Day,” Jorja Wilson, Youth Ambassador, 5:46–5:57.

which still stands to this day. After she passed away, the house was used by Nena's kids, grandkids, relatives, and anyone who stopped by to visit. It was the place where my nena would often withdraw to when she was sick, or to hang out, sleep, and do her making, because it was the house that belonged to her mother. The ceiling was covered with ngatu pepa, because buying wood or cardboard was expensive; therefore, my cousin found a konga ngatu that was just big enough to cover the interior.



Image 183. Theresa Tongi and Ruha Fifita, *Lalaga: Le Hui Fono*, 2024. Installation view of weaving, ngatu and fangufangu, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery.

Seeing how the ngatu launima was installed at the Govett-Brewster gave me an idea for how I might position my ngatu prints here at Te Wai Ngutu Kākā Gallery for the PhD exhibition. What inspired me the most in spending time with this work was seeing the ngatu launima and noticing how the kupesi were transferred onto the ngatu as individual kupesi. (Image 185) It reminded me of the series of work that I had created for *Fepōtalanoa'aki pea mo 'eku fanga kui* in 2022, where I screen-printed kupesi as individuals (kupesi that have been through the process of veteki and separated into layers) rather than grouping them together as one kupesi (kupesi before it is veteki). (Image 186) I don't think I've encountered a ngatu like this ngatu launima; it was simple, yet still carried multiple layers of history and stories.



Image 184. Theresa Tongi and. Ruha Fifita, Ngatu Launima, 1960s-75, 2024. Installation view, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery.

Another notable installation in *Lalaga: Le Hui Fono* was *Mai te Whenua ki te Moana* (from the land to the sea, a journey of connection) (2024), by Kim Kahu, a Taranaki-based weaver whose practice spans over thirty-five years. Her creative focus is on providing learning experiences for others and discovering how the weaving materials, techniques, and forms of her ancestors can continue to serve the needs of her community and family today. *Mai te Whenua ki te Moana* talks about a meeting point between the lands and culture of Aotearoa and Te Moana-nui-a-Kiwa, highlighting the shoreline that positions itself as a threshold between spaces. The installation itself had different elements that set the ‘scene’, such as “sand and driftwood that was gathered from the takutai (shoreline) as a weight to hold down the women’s form that binds together kiekie, pīngao, and harakeke fibres from Aotearoa, alongside lau’ie (dried pandanus) fibres from Sāmoa.”²²⁸ Seeing this work in person had a huge impact, as it reminded me of walking into the lalanga space back home in Pelehake.

²²⁸ Tongi, Theresa, and Ruha Fifita, *Lalaga: Le Hui Fono* (exh. cat.), (Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, 2025), 8.



Image 185. Ngatu Launima, close-up view on the individual kupesi and how it is positioned on the ngatu. Installation view, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery.

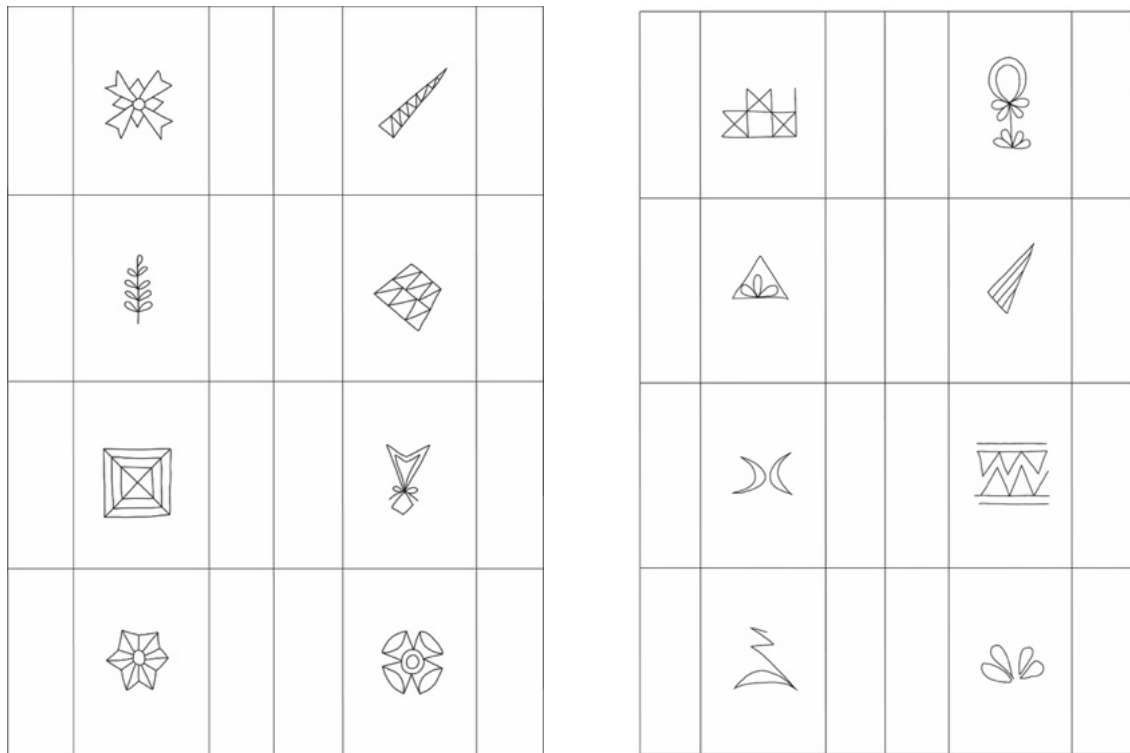


Image 186. 'Uhila Nai, *Fepōtalanoa 'aki pea mo 'eku fanga kui*, 2022. Drawing/mapping out kupesi to how it will be screen-printed onto the pepa koka'anga. Digital drawing on Procreate.

While at home in 2023, I visited a group of women who had gathered together to lalanga their own kie Tonga (another type of mat but finer) just across the road from home, which was the fale kalapu (space for drinking kava). (Images 187–188) A comparative approach within my practice is *The 1620 Collection* installation (2021), in which I recreated from a photograph the space Nena would use as her making space to fakapā tutu (pounding: beating the inner mulberry) and other

processes. The Window Gallery installation was essentially a collection of clothes belonging to family members, kupesi stamps, and rocks borrowed from the gallery site, in response to the exhibition space. The rocks served as supports, holding the metal rod that suspended the wire for the clothes to hang from. This strategy is common on the island, where bamboo or metal pipes are used to hold up the clothing lines. Reflecting on these different spaces reinforces how the making spaces create the dynamic for working together as a collective. It also demonstrates the scale of the craft of ngatu making, a reflection of daily life, which is why everything across the practice connects and can be read metaphorically as one family tree.



Image 187. Lalanga by a group of women in Pelehake, who get together every Tuesday, 2023.



Image 188. Fale Kalapu. A space of exchanging knowledge, passing of knowledge, which somewhat an equivalent to a koka'anga space, 2025.

Fakamā'opo'opo – Conclusion

Pelu e ngatu he kuo tō 'a e la'ā

Throughout the PhD timeline, I have visited different fonua to connect with my ancestors through conversations, practices, and language. Navigating through the mape of Pelehake enabled me to make artwork in a new space, which I refer to as the present–contemporary context. Between liuaki and the past-home, Pelehake, and the present-here, Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland, I weaved between different making studios. In September 2025 I went home for a month to work on my exegesis. It was a first, spending time writing, as previously going home has always been about collecting and making; therefore, being in that space shifted the way I talked about my practice.

For the process of writing, I set up my nena's room as my studio/writing space, which was like a full circle—being back home and learning once more from Nena in her space. (Image 189) It enabled my thoughts to liuaki easily between the Tongan and English languages. Being able to write parts of my exegesis in Pelehake was a great experience, knowing that I wrote it alongside my family and all my fanga kui (great-great-great-grannies). My family and ancestors have been my kāpasa throughout this project (and still are); they've helped me navigate my childhood experiences and learnings through the mape of my village, Pelehake. They have supported me to reach the end, the final artwork.



Image 189. 'HOME', 2025. Nena's front yard/room that continues to be my own personal studio. It is the space where I unfold and fold the practice every time I go home.

Tohi Kumi Koloa – Ko e tohi fepōtalanoa'aki 'eni pea mo 'eku fanga kui began with the intention of veteki (taking apart) a collection of kupesi that was left with me to hold. It was the idea of wanting to understand the definition, meaning, history, and stories embedded within this object called kupesi, which the elders have always referred to as a tool in the making of ngatu. The aim was to create a documentation filled with history that would become a guide for the younger generation

to understand the deeper meaning of the kupesi and their stories. As the project developed, it became clear to me that it was also about my responsibility, and so I asked: As a maker, how can I tauhi all the tukufakaholo my nena left with me? It wasn't just about understanding the more profound meaning by simply picking up the koloa (knowledge, tools, processes, and materials) and continuing to do what my nena would have done.

This practice has been unfolding every aspect of the research since the beginning of my PhD, and a significant portion of it stems from the act of doing, which existed in the everyday Tongan life of my nena. Approaching the practice from a Tongan perspective, I created work in my studio at AUT using methods drawn from the Pelehake context. Approaching the practice of ngatu through the applied methods of veteki (taking apart) has helped me, as a maker, to learn about the 'how' in tauhi (taking care of), leading me to ask about the role of tauhi tukufakaholo (taking care of tradition). The project is an active practice that has incorporated Tongan ways of thinking, which have helped shape a methodology that emerges from an ongoing practice that weaves together multiple generations. The function of tauhi tukufakaholo has been to position the practice within a space where my methodology and making have co-developed through conversation and observation as I liuaki between spaces. It has contributed a method that makes sense of the practice, through the different stages of mind-mapping (planning—research—drawing) as a way to understand the practice in context and explore concepts attached to materiality and process.

Returning to the original intent of the project to veteki kupesi, I questioned the role of tauhi tukufakaholo by examining the origins of the Pelehake collection through my relationality, the act of tauhi vā between myself and the ngatu makers back home. I gained a deeper understanding of the processes used in making ngatu, which led me to discover kupesi and its functionality. Through personal conversations, new terms and languages surrounding ngatu and kupesi emerged out of these interactions. The terms helped me gain new knowledge, as I would use these words when researching, having conversations, or asking questions. It allowed me to access the knowledge of the past, and to view or see it from Nena and the elders' perspective. Knowing and understanding old Tongan terms has enabled me to navigate the practice easily, while also knowing how to approach it with respect.

One of the key discoveries of the project is the development of a project methodology, which was informed by the findings of collecting and asking a lot of questions about kupesi. Introducing the Dowager Lady Fielakepa, who wrote about the breakdown of the three methods in making kupesi, assisted me in identifying a language or the means to navigate the space where I think in Tongan while responding in English. Metaphorically speaking, this is how the practice functions. In seeking to understand the origins of kupesi, I return to Tongan ways and respond by applying what I have discovered across different spaces when the practice is conceptually introduced to a new street—the understanding that kupesi is a tool. One of my key discoveries occurred when I introduced the method of rubbing or transferring kupesi onto the feta'aki. I called it the rubbing of a coin, as I didn't know its practical term. Later, I learned the technical term: frottage. This became part of the new language for kupesi—a term used to describe how kupesi is imprinted onto feta'aki during koka'anga or when it is used in the Print Lab setting.

Observing the action of transferring kupesi from the perspective of someone who sits at the edge of the papa koka'anga during the koka'anga, the method of screen-printing is parallel to that action, as it provides a way for the project to unpack the layers of kupesi in fine detail by moving closer. When I enter a plot of land within my village, I start by looking closely at the kupesi and distinguishing what their single forms and shapes represent. It is all related to the fonua, the people, their cultural practices, and their everyday life. Nothing stands on its own; therefore, everything is connected, and this is knowledge I came to through the method of mapping individual kupesi back to fonua. One of the key findings through this idea of mape is that everything that happens on the land connects us back to fonua.

Unfolding kupesi in this way has allowed me to design and create a new collection of kupesi that contributes to Pelehake's collection—continuing the practices of my nena and her friends—getting together and making kupesi. I will continue their tradition through the active making of kupesi, documenting the life, history, stories, and lived experiences from the viewpoint of someone who was a part of it. What emerged in this process is how kupesi have evolved, in relation to past and present forms. The project also explored how different forms of kupesi operate across tukufakaholo, across generations, according to how they were passed down and received. Nothing stays in the same form. I have realised kupesi will constantly change as time goes by. From stories to materials to forms, it is the act of tauhi, taking care and looking after the tradition, that helps the kupesi maintain its value and how it is gifted on.

This research, *Tohi Kumi Koloa*, has found a language that enables communication between traditional arts and contemporary art utilising printmaking and installation. To reinterpret traditional ngatu and kupesi through a present–contemporary lens, I employed methods embedded within the practice of ngatu and kupesi—meaning the process of how they are made, how they are being presented in a cultural setting, or simply the way they are being taken care of. As I work in contemporary spaces—whether in my studio, the 3D Lab, the Digital Fabrication Lab, or the Print Lab—I use these environments as a way to communicate and share the ideas that I want the artwork to embody. The series of works presented in *Konga I: Exhibition Projects* exemplifies how this project found its new language.

One Year Making – The PhD Exhibition

The final work of this project, *Tohi Kumi Koloa: Ko e Tohi Fepōtalano'aki 'eni pea mo 'eku fanga kui*, is underway and has been ongoing for the last year of the PhD. It has two parts: the first is a tokauanima ngatungatu (25 metres in length—double layers of undyed barkcloth), with traditional kupesi (embroidered relief stencil) made from natural materials. The making will be done back home in Pelehake, Tonga, by the kautaha koka'anga (Women's Ngatu Makers Association) alongside myself, from December 2025 to February 2026. The second is a tokauanima made from double layers of pepa koka'anga (vylene paper), screen-printed with kupesi. As the ngatungatu is being made in Pelehake, I will be making the screen-printed ngatu in the AUT Print Lab. Both works will be presented in Te Wai Ngutu Kākā Gallery at AUT University.

Koka e ngatungatu tokauanima

It has been an ongoing conversation, collecting and planning with Pelehake's koka'anga, through liuaki, and in conversation with my aunt, Moana. I liuaki back home to Pelehake to collect and to keep my vā (relationship) to my elders, which has resulted in them helping me with the making of a traditional tokauanima ngatungatu. Currently, we are in the process of collecting materials such as feta'aki (undyed barkcloth), mahoa'a Tonga (Tongan tabioca), and 'umea (brown clay), alongside kupesi that I will be designing and making. I will make the base for the kupesi and stitch the forms/shapes with my family. They will be helping with twirling the tu'aniu (coconut midrib) and with kavele'ipulu (coconut husk), as it is one of the processes that can take hours. Multiple hands are better than one pair of hands for stitching the forms/shapes onto the base piece made out of lau'i kaka (coconut fibre wrapped around a young coconut leaf) and pāongo (pandanus), using fau (hibiscus) as the thread.

Screen-printed pepa koka'anga tokauanima

The design and mapping of the pepa koka'anga tokauanima will be made in the AUT Print Lab. The ambition for this work stems from the discoveries that have shaped the project from the beginning. My goal has been to see how far I can take the practice of ngatu within a space that I have been studying in for the last decade. During the PhD, I broke the ground rules by extending my practice as outlined in *Konga I: Exhibition Projects*. From those experiences, the saying 'go big or go home' resonates with me as someone who works with scale and installation. I constantly challenge myself to consider how large in scale I can go; how far can I take the work? With this idea in mind, the making of two tokauanima is intended as an act of sharing one of my largest installations to date with the space that has taught me so much and as a way of wrapping up years of study.

Although this research project, *Tohi Kumi Koloa*, is nearing its 'end of the day', when I pelu (fold) my ngatu to be taken inside, the conversation will continue. I will return to do my job of bringing it outside to the sun for refreshment. As I step away from this document, I will continue to look after the craft—the koloa that was gifted to me through the letter of observation and listening.

Making in Pelehake and AUT

In December 2025, after submitting the exegesis, and over the summer, the project progressed, and I got to witness the practical side of the *fā kavei koula* – the four pillars of the project: *Tokonaki pe tānaki* (providing or collecting), *veteki* (taking apart), *tuiaki moe ngāue fakataha* (stitching back and collective making) and *koloa* (the gift, the knowledge).

I started working on the PhD exhibition by preparing the *kupesi* for the making of *Ngaahi Le’o ‘o ‘eku fanga kui*. I slowly *veteki* – taking apart, section by section, starting from *fau*, *paongo*, and then *lau’i kaka*. While this was happening, I *liuaki* (to go back and forth) between my studio space and the Print Lab at AUT, to *veteki* the *pepa koka’anga* by cutting it into sizes and binding the layers together.

Before the *tuiaki moe ngāue fakataha* – the stitching and collective making of the *kupesi*, with my parents and my younger sisters, I worked on designing the story I wanted the *kupesi* to embody and transfer onto the *feta’aki*. To determine the sizes of the *kupesi*, I used the 'long fabric table' at the Print Lab to calculate how many *kupesi* I needed to make before leaving for Tonga, which needed to be similar in scale to the *papa koka’anga*.

I spent time in the gallery working out the positioning of the Te Wai Ngutu Kākā Gallery 2 artworks. My focus then was on how to shift the work from textile to sculpture/installation, with the idea of creating a structure that replicated something from Pelehake. Therefore, I left for Tonga with the mindset of working out what that structure would be; I had two potential structures that aligned with the project: Nena's 'āmoa and Great-grannie, Uhila lahi's fale Tonga. I chose Uhila lahi's space because it has been used across five generations of my family, and was Nena's studio space.

In preparation for the making of *Ngaahi le’o ‘o ‘eku fanga kui*, the method of *tokonaki pe tānaki* – providing and collecting was used for the *koka* (Bishop wood) and *manioke Peru* (Peru cassava). The process of making the glue was a moment of collective making, as the men worked alongside my aunt Veisia. They were needed: my dad, Taufā and Lotoā were to help gather materials, as a lot of work was required given the scale of the *ngatu* I wanted to make. Although I observed Nena doing everything for herself, in my practice, the men in my family took on the key role of gathering and harvesting from the *fonua*.

Working with my family and the community reinforced for me Tongan protocols regarding hierarchy and respect for the elders. In Pelehake, I got to witness how the practice defines *talanoa*, because my family – the *kautaha koka’anga* became the TALA and I became the NOA, as I sat and listened/observed how the elders responded to the ideas I had brought with me.

During the *tohi ngatu* process, I witnessed the rawness of mark-making as the elders hand-drew the *kupesi*; seeing the imperfect lines added to the richness of the *ngatu*, in comparison to the screen-printing mark-making, which appears more graphic. The *ngatu* mark-making is transferred by hand onto its surfaces, recording the physical trace of the maker's movement. The black *koka* ink bled through the layers of *feta’aki* as they traced over the *kupesi*, bringing out what the authentic, traditional Tongan *ngatu* looks like.

Hearing the elders talk about the completed *ngatu* made me realise: This is the *koloa* that I talked about, the gift, the knowledge. Seeing a 360° moment from going to Tonga over time to learn and gain an understanding of *ngatu* and *kupesi*, to now, where the elders are looking at using natural

materials just like our ancestors did, as they are available to us without any expense but our time and labour.

On returning to Auckland, I had to work out how to install the ngatu and the fale. Based on its original scale, I wanted it to be functional, used, and not exist as an artefact to be left untouched, but rather to encourage the audience to interact with it. Within their original context, the objects have a purpose and functionality, therefore giving the audience a lived experience in real time, but in a different time and space. For me, positioning the fale from Pelehake into the gallery is about sharing the koloa – the gift, the knowledge. The fale itself holds a lot of knowledge, memories, and stories about generations of people, and, significantly, my grannies.

In considering the print-making aspect of the practice and given the scale of the fale, I reprinted the screen-printed pepa koka'anga. Making the fale at its original scale measurements along with the ngatu, I had to make sure that both works could speak to one another through material, knowledge, generations, layout, and their positioning in the gallery in relationship to the mape of Pelehake. The ngatu is tauaki (to hang) in the atrium, representing the older generation, and the fale in gallery two represents the younger generation.

Undertaking this project has been one of the greatest experiences, filled with laughter, tears, lows, and highs, and meeting people across time and space. In conjunction with all of this, encountering the depth and richness of ngatu and kupesi has allowed me to experience the rawness between people, land, and materials.



Image 190. Aunt Veisia and Lusie, '*A conversation that will always continue across generations*', 2025.
A conversation that leads into the making of the two tokuanima for my PhD exhibition.



Image 191. 'Uhila Nai, *Koloa* – metaphorically, I have now picked up my koloa, but I will always return 'home' to continue the conversation that I last had with my nena, Pelehake, 2025.

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Project Glossary

A – E – F – H – I – K – M – N – NG – O – P – S – T – U – V ‘.

Notes:

The Project Glossary is in Tongan alphabetical order because the glossary is in the Tongan language. Many of the letters in the English alphabet do not exist within the Tongan Alphabet.

Translations are predominantly based on my understanding of the Tongan language and our everyday use of words.

Where appropriate I used the Maxwell C. Churchward's *Tongan Dictionary: Tongan – English and English – Tongan* (The Government of Tonga, 1959. iOS and Android ed.)

A

ane – silverfish

anga – ways in which you do things, an attitude

anga fai – method or way of doing things

anga-fakatōkilalo – humility

anga faka-Tonga – Tongan ways of life

‘api – home

‘api kolo – town allotment

‘api tukupau – tax allotment

aloha (Hawaiian) – intelligent in which we meet life in the Hawaiian Epistemology context

E

F

fā – dry pandanus fruit

fā – four

fa‘ē – mother

fahu – father's sister

fakafetongi – exchange

fakamovete – to scatter/disperse

fakapā tutu – pounding – beating the inner mulberry

fala – mat

fala koka‘anga – koka‘anga weaving mat

fale – house
fale kautaha – Association house
fale Tonga – Tongan traditional house
fatongia – duties
fau – hibiscus fibre
fehokotaki – connections
fepōtalanoa‘aki – in conversation
feta‘aki – undyed barkcloth
fī – plaited
fohi tutu – stripping off the inner bark
folau – travelling
fononga – to set out
fonua – land
fonua muli – a foreign country
founga – way in which a thing is done

H

heliaki – symbolic depiction of life and living in Tonga
hiapo – mulberry tree
hiapo – Niuean term for barkcloth
hiki fonua – migration
hingoa fakafāмили – family names
holoki – to demolish, in an architectural context
hou‘eiki fafine – elder woman
hou‘eiki tangata –elder man

I

ifi – Tahitian chestnut
ike – mallet

K

kafa – coconut sennit cordage
kahoa kakala – floral necklace

kāinga – distance relative
 kakala – sweet-smelling flowers
 kāpasa – compass
 kapa – Hawaiian barkcloth
 kato – basket
 kātoanga – ceremonies
 katolā – nylon canvas bag
 kato ‘umu – ‘umu basket
 kautaha – association
 kautaha koka‘anga – Women’s Ngatu Makers Association
 kavele‘ipulu – coconut husk
 kie – another type of mat, but finer
 koka – *Bischofia javanica* or bishop wood (name of the tree)
 koka – black ink made from the koka and candlenut trees, used for tohi ngatu.
 koka – short for koka‘anga (term used amongst the elders)
 koka‘anga – production of ngatu making
 koloa – treasure, textile, value, wealth, knowledge,
 koloa – the gift, used in the context of methodology
 koloa – knowledge
 koloa – outcome of the physical work
 koloa faka-Tonga – Tongan textile
 konga – chapter
 konga ngatu – pieces of ngatu under 4–7 langanga
 kui – grandparents
 kupesi – pule ‘o e ngatu
 kupesi – embroidered relief prints

L

launima – 50 meters in length
 lalava – lashing
 langanga – measurement unit
 lau‘i kaka – coconut fibre wrapped around a young coconut leaf
 lea – language

lea fakafonua – language
lea faka-Tonga – Tongan language
lesi – papayah
liuaki – to go back and forth
lou‘akau – pandanus leaves
lū – taro leaves

M

maile – *Alyxia stellata*
mahoa‘a – all-purpose or plain flour
mahoa‘a Tonga – *Tacca leontopetaloides*
malimali – smile
Malimali – thank you in Taiwanese Paiwan language
manioke – tapioca/cassava
mana‘i‘io – knowledge that turns to knowing because we have experience it, explained in the Hawaiian Epistemology context
mana‘olana – ideas, knowledge or thoughts that float around/beyond us, explained in the Hawaiian Epistemology context
matāpule – chief
mei – breadfruit
mohe‘anga – bed
mokopuna – grandkids
monomono – quilts

N

nimamea‘a koka‘anga – the crafts of ngatu making
nimapoto – skillful with one’s hands
niu kafa – another kind of coconut

NG

ngatu – barkcloth
ngatu pepa – double vylene paper
ngatu pepa – vylene paper on feta‘aki
ngatungatu – double layers of undyed barkcloth

ngāue fakataha – working together

ngāue fakataha – collective making, Tui Kupesi methodology context

O

‘opo‘opo – the process of beating two layers of tutu together

P

papa – short for papa koka‘anga (a common term used amongst ngatu makers or those that are familiar with koka‘anga production)

papa koka‘anga – knee-high table specifically for ngatu making

pāongo – pandanus leaves

pepa koka‘anga – vylene (synthetic interfacing fabric) paper

puha – box

puha fakafāfili – family box

pule ‘o e ngatu – face of the ngatu

pulu – coir

S

siapo – Sāmoan term for barkcloth

sisi – waist garment

T

tala-ē-fonua – telling of the land

tala tukufakaholo – oral transmission of knowledge

talanoa – conversation

tālanga – informal conversation with the elders

talo – taro

tānaki – provide or to collect

ta‘ovala – a unisex waist garment

tapa – the white border on the ngatu

tauaki – to dry

tautau – to hang

tauaki-tautau – to hang or to dry used in the installation context

tauhi – take care of, look after

tauhi tukufakaholo – taking care of tradition
 tauhi vā – look after, take care of, maintain, carry out, one's duties
 tauhi vā – taking care of the relationship
 tohi – book, write
 tohi fananga – a written record of oral tales
 tohi ngatu – tracing/outlining/markings the kupesi
 tokānga – plantation
 tokonaki – Saturday - prepared ahead of time - collection of different crops
 tongo – mangrove stems
 to'utupu – youth
 tu'aniu – coconut leaf mid-rib
 tuiaki – stitching back
 tui kakala – stringing a garlands
 tukufakaholo – knowledge, archival documents, bloodlines, tools and stories
 tupenu – various lengths of printed fabric
 tupu'anga – place of origin
 tutu – inner bark of the mulberry tree
 tutua – anvil

U

'umea – brown clay
 'umu – underground oven
 Uninang – thank you in the Taiwanese Bunun language
 'uta – plantation

V

vā – space
 vai lesi – Tongan dessert made from papayah, cooked with coconut milk
 vaka – canoe
 veteki – taking apart
 veteki – taking apart a collection of things used in the context of materiality
 veteki – unstitch, used in the context of deciphered kupesi

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- Image 109. Mapping out the malie and fā back to where I source them from within Pelehake. Locating maile back to 'Amelia's house, and fā back to my nena's backyard.
- Image 110. The order or a demonstration of how I veteki kupesi. Through veteki, I was able to make a link to where the kupesi was derived from, which was taken from our sisi and kahoa kakala practice. Drawing/mapping using Procreate programme.
- Image 111. Prince Uelingatoni Ngu Tupou, Sila 'o Tonga – Tongan Coat of Arms, 1862. Using the method of veteki to understand the way it was being designed.
- Image 112. Aunt Moana, Ha'alo tu'aniu, 2025.
- Image 113. Niu kafa process. The process of husking the coconut and removing the outer green layer, soaked in water then leaving it out to dry.

- Image 114. Pāongo (pandanus) process.
- Image 115. List of Tongan terms which have been part of the process of veteki and helped me identify which Tongan term is needed to be used in specific contexts.
- Image 116. Women of the Fauniteni 'o e Mo'oni group construct kupesi (pattern tablets) using plastic sacking and coconut leaf midribs. The pattern is a traditional one called "Fata 'o Tu'i Tonga" Auckland, New Zealand, 2002.
- Image 117. Timote, Liu, Kafo and 'Ana, 2020. Family members in the process of twirling the tu'aniu with kavelele'ipulu, which they will also participate in helping with the tu'aniu for the kupesi that will be used in the making of the tokauanima (25 metre-long ngatu).
- Image 118. 'Uhila Nai, Workshop at Blue Oyster, Dunedin, 2023.
- Image 119. 'Uhila Nai, Workshop at Papakura Art Gallery, 2023.
- Image 120. Workshop at BUPA David Lang, Mangere 30 June 21. Engaging in conversation while the elders' recap their memories, what they remember about these kupesi.
- Image 121. Hāpai students out on a gallery visit for our mentor John Ve'a's exhibition, alongside my cousin, Kalisola'ite 'Uhila, 2023.
- Image 122. A-bus in the process of learning how to make kupesi. An exchange between an elder and the younger generations. Abus workshop, 2023.
- Image 123. Paint, Print and Drawing Minor: Trace and Transfer minor paper, 2025.
- Image 124. Trace and Transfer installation view, 'tala' and 'noa' in action. 2025.
- Image 125. Unknown, *Kupesi Sisi maile*, date unknown, tu'aniu, lau'i kaka, kavelele'ipulu, filo and fau, 19 x 20 inches.
- Image 126. Unknown, *Kupesi Sisi and kahoa maile faka'otusia*, date unknown, tu'aniu, lau'i kaka, kavelele'ipulu, filo and fau, 19 x 20 inches.
- Image 127. Unknown, *Kupesi Sisi Pelu*, date unknown, tu'aniu, lau'i kaka, kavelele'ipulu, filo and fau, 19 x 20 inches.
- Image 128. Unknown, *Kupesi Fata Mahanga*, 2019. Tu'aniu, lau'i kaka, kavelele'ipulu, filo and fau, 19 x 20 inches.
- Image 129. Unknown, *Kupesi Manulua*, date unknown, tu'aniu, lau'i kaka, kavelele'ipulu, filo and fau
- Image 130. 'Uhila Nai, Exploring using contemporary methods by stamping onto the feta'aki, 2019.
- Image 131. Jasmine Tuiā, *Ava* (left) and *Roo(u)tes* (right) embroidery cotton on siapo, installation view, Jhana Millers Gallery. ©Jasmine Tuia
- Image 132. Tui Emma Gillies, *Face of the Pandemic*, 2021. Acrylic on feta'aki. ©Tui Emma Gillies
- Image 133. Cora-Allan Wickliffe, land: tuitui, sea: sharks' teeth, weaving and carving: lalaga, 2020.
- Image 134. Cora-Allan Wickliffe, McCahon House Residency drawing/research, 2020.
- Image 135. 'Uhila Nai, tracing flowers, plants and parts of kahoa kakala that I found and picked up from the collection of kupesi that I had veteki, see Image 96. Digital drawing, Procreate programme.
- Image 136. Filipe Sopolemalama Tohi, *Manulua*, 2023. Auckland Museum, Te Ao Mārama, South Atrium. ©Filipe Sopolemalama Tohi
- Image 137. 'Uhila Nai, mapping out familiar kupesi form and plants back to their land of origin.
- Image 138. 'Uhila Nai, Pelehake's mape drawn from memory, 2018.

- Image 139. 'Uhila Nai, Pelehake map, an updated version of what I mapped out during my undergrad. As the practice evolved and developed, moved and changes in context, the mape changed, just like a ngatu.
- Image 140. 'Uhila Nai, *Great-great-great-grandma Vika lahi*, 2022. Digital drawing, Pelehake's mape 1968 drawing version. Unclear structure and stories, as the only thing I've heard about Vika lahi was her name.
- Image 141. 'Uhila Nai, Great-great-grandma Manu Tu'ipulotu, 2022. Digital drawing, Pelehake's mape 2006 drawing version. Manu's stories were very vivid, as she moves back and forth between Pelehake and Nomuka.
- Image 142. 'Uhila Nai, Great grandma 'Uhila Lahi, 2022. Digital drawing, Pelehake's mape 2011 drawing version. 'Uhila lahi stories, reminds me of all fale Tonga around Pelehake, as her fale Tonga still exists today.
- Image 143. 'Uhila Nai, Grandma 'Ana, 2022. Digital drawing, Pelehake's mape 2020 drawing version. My nena's story was based on my favourite memories: the process of making oil, strolling around the village collecting ingredients, then coming home to make it.
- Image 144. 'Uhila Nai, Aunt Veisia, 2022. Digital drawing of Pelehake's mape from 2022. Aunt Vei who would always joint my nena for tui kaho or sisi.
- Image 145. 'Uhila Nai, Niece 'Ofa known papa, 2022. Digital drawing, Pelehake's mape 2023. The stories haven't been established, as she was still a baby at the time.
- Image 146. Pelehake koka'anga group in the process of koka'anga. This is a ngatu pepa, feta'aki on top and pepa koka'anga at the bottom, Pelehake, 2025.
- Image 147. Vula To'ofone, Fuakava, 2021. Calico cotton fabric, black and red permanent marker alter 5 points, fala 12 (weaving mat 12 ft). ST PAUL St Gallery (now Te Wai Ngutu Kākā Gallery). ©Vula To'ofone
- Image 148. Sione Faletau, *Kupesi Ta – Tuki*, 2022. Moving image duration of 4m 30s. ST PAUL St Gallery (now Te Wai Ngutu Kākā Gallery). © Sione Faletau
- Image 149. Pelehake koka'anga group in the process of making the koka (black ink) which used for the ngatu tā'uli and tohi ngatu. It was for an interview with The Dowager, Tonga Broadcasting. ©Benjamin Work.
- Image 150. Kulimoe'anga Stone Maka, *Toga mo Bolata'ane (Tongan and Britain)* and *Kuini Haati 2 (Two Queen Heart)*, 2008 – 10. Oil, clay, dye of tapa cloth.
- Image 151. 'Uhila Nai, *Vai ko Toloa*, 2020. Tu'aniu, lau'i kaka, paongo and fau.
- Image 152. 'Uhila Nai, *Tōkanga (ngōue'anga) series of kupesi*, 2021. Designed using Adobe Illustration.
- Image 153. 'Uhila Nai, *U ni nang*, 2023. Digital drawing, Procreate programme.
- Image 154. 'Uhila Nai, *Malimali*, 2023. Digital drawing, Procreate programme.
- Image 155. 'Api 'o Ta'engalo, tauaki 'a e feta'aki – the process of drying out the feta'aki.
- Image 156. Pelehake's papa koka'anga which has been used for over decades now. I grew up seeing the papa being used over time by different generations of hou'eiki fafine in Pelehake.
- Image 157. Kupesi placed onto the papa; the order and layout depend on whose ngatu the makers are making. This set up is what shows and outlines the grid/structure seen on ngatu.
- Image 158. 'Uhila Nai, A replica of my nena's tool-box, 2020. Installation view, ST PAUL St Gallery.
- Image 159. 'Uhila Nai, Making/building the papa with the help of the gallery technician, Thom Kenny, 2023.

- Image 160. 'Uhila Nai, *Our Past 'older generations' passing down knowledge to the present 'younger generations'*. Installation view, AUT WM Level 6, 605 studios for Talk Week, 2022.
- Image 161. Luke Boyle design and made the table for *Koloa*, 2021. Digital 3D programme, and installation view, Artspace Aotearoa. Photograph by Sam Hartnett ©Luke Boyle (left image)
- Image 162. Vaimaila Urale, *Aniva II*, 2019. Installation view, black card, sand. Aotearoa Artspace. Photograph by Sam Hartnett ©Vaimaila Urale
- Image 163. Fauniteni Vai 'o e Mo'ui koka'anga group with Kolokesa Māhina-Tuai and Benjamin Work, 2015. ©Benjamin Work
- Image 164. Benjamin Work with Fauniteni Vai 'o e Mo'ui ngatu makers tohi ngatu together, 2015. Dominion Church Hall. ©Benjamin Work
- Image 165. Kolokesa Māhina-Tuai with Fauniteni Vai 'o e Mo'ui makers attaching the kupesi onto the kupesi. The papa koka'anga with the chicken wired attach with the addition to the papa, 2015. ©Benjamin Work
- Image 166. Photograph taken at the double wedding of the sons of Queen Salote of Tonga, Nuku'alofa, Tonga. between 10-12 June 1947, Film Negative. ©Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand.
- Image 167. Toakase Tu'iono, Kupesi Kalou GOD, 30x40cm, 2020.
- Image 168. Ngatu Tāhina, 24 meter in length, 2023. Installation view, Te Pātaka Toi Adam Art Gallery. Photograph taken by Ted Whitaker
- Image 169. Had used the method of veteki to take apart the kupesi seen in the ngatu tāhina, which it has 8 kupesi in total. Drawing/veteki using Procreate Programme, 2023.
- Image 172. 'Uhila Nai, *Hala Kafa*, 2023. Recreating and reconstructing a ngatu using the kupesi from the ngatu tāhina. Another form of veteki to understand the past in order for me to create work for the present. Drawing/veteki using Procreate Programme.
- Image 173. 'Uhila Nai, *Hala Kafa*, mapping out scale in Procreate Programme, 2024.
- Image 174. Robin White, Tamari Cabeikanacea and Ruha Fifita, *Living in a material world*, 2017, barkcloth, earth pigments, nature dye. ©Robin White, Ruha Fifita and Tamari Cabeikanacea
- Image 175. 'Uhila Nai, *'Api Tukuau*, 2023. Installation view, clean screen-print the fale.
- Image 176. Robin White and Ruha Fifita in collaboration with the women of Haveluloto, 2011. Top – bottom: Siu 'I Moana 3: Rangitahua, Siu 'I Moana 2: Tonga to New Zealand, Siu 'I Moana 1: New Zealand to Tonga. Ngatu tā'uli, barkcloth, tuitui, 'umea and tongo, University of Auckland Art Collection. ©Robin White, Ruha Fifita and Tamari Cabeikanacea
- Image 177. Lonnie. Hutchinson, *I Will Never Fade Away From You*, 2015, Corman Arts Centre, Canberra, installation view.
- Image 178. Visesio Poasi Siasau, Tongan Tapa Cloth: *Onotu'ofe 'uli – Onoto'ufekula*, 2014. Tongan customary pigments and dye on bark cloth. Installation View. ©Visesio Poasi Siasau
- Image 179. Image 179. Left image: Lisa Waup, *holding County*, 2025, the veil, Buxton Contemporary, University of Melbourne, Narm (Melbourne), Photograph by Christian Capurro. Right image: Portrait of Lisa Waup, *holding Country*, the veil, Buxton Contemporary, University of Melbourne, Narm (Melbourne), Photograph Christian Capurro. This work has been acquired by Museums and Collections at the University of Melbourne. ©Lisa Waup
- Image 180. Mataaho Collective, *Aka*, 2019. Installation view, 2.5m x 14m, copolymer fibre rope and steel. ©Mata Aho Collective

- Image 181. Mataaho Collective, *Kiko Moana*, 2017. Installation view, 5m x 11m, tarpaulin, cotton and eyelets. ©Mata Aho Collective
- Image 182. *Mun-dirra (Maningrida fish fence)*, 2023. Installation view of Freda Ali, Freda Ali Wayartja, Maureen Ali, Cecille Baker, Michelle Baker, Bonnie Buranngarra, Gabriella Garrimara, Doreen Jinggarrabarra, Lorna Jin-gubarrangunya, Indra Prudence, Jennifer Prudence, Zoe Prudence, Anthea Stewart. NGV International, Melbourne. Photograph by Sean Fennessy
- Image 183. Theresa Tongi and Ruha Fifita, *Lalaga: Le Hui Fono*, 2024. Installation view of weaving, ngatu and fangufangu, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery.
- Image 184. Theresa Tongi and. Ruha Fifita, Ngatu Launima, 1960s-75, 2024. Installation view, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery.
- Image 185. Ngatu Launima, close-up view on the individual kupesi and how it is positioned on the ngatu. Installation view, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery.
- Image 186. ‘Uhila Nai, *Fepōtalanoa ‘aki pea mo ‘eku fanga kui*, 2022. Drawing/mapping out kupesi to how it will be screen-printed onto the pepa koka‘anga. Digital drawing on Procreate.
- Image 187. Lalanga by a group of women in Pelehake, who get together every Tuesday, 2023.
- Image 188. Fale Kalapu, A space of exchanging knowledge, passing of knowledge, which somewhat an equivalent to a koka‘anga space, 2025.
- Image 189. ‘*HOME*’, 2025. Nena’s front yard/room that continues to be my own personal studio. It is the space where I unfold and fold the practice every time I go home.
- Image 190. Aunt Veisia and Lusia, ‘*A conversation that will always continue across generations*’, 2025. A conversation that leads into the making of the two tokauanima for my PhD exhibition.
- Image 191. ‘Uhila Nai, *Koloa* – metaphorically, I have now picked up my koloa, but I will always return ‘home’ to continue the conversation that I last had with my nena, Pelehake, 2025.

Publications

2021

The Private Letter becomes Public: The 1920. Window Gallery, Auckland University Library. (solo exhibition)

Slow Boil Exhibition, 'Uhila Nai; *Tōkanga tukufakaholo 'o e ngōue 'anga*, Boil Up Crew; Grayson Goffe, Slow Boil Crew; Chiara Ficarelli, Matthew Galloway, Lachlan Kermode, Bhaveeka Madagammana, Karamia Müller and Blaine Western. With works by Forensic Architecture, Jumana Manna, and Sky Hopinka. Curator, Artspace Aotearoa, Karangahape Road.

2022

Liuaiki & Tōkanga: Tala Tukufakaholo 'o e ngōue 'anga, ST Paul St Gallery Two and Window Gallery. (solo exhibition)

Fehokotaki, 'Ofo'ofa 'a Kui: *The love of a grandmother*, ST Paul St Gallery, Vā Moana Research Cluster, Curated by 'Uhila Nai, AUT, Auckland. (group exhibition)

ĀTĀVĀ – Tātatau'ata, ST Paul St Gallery, Vā Mona Research Cluster, Curated by 'Uhila Nai.

Matrilineal, *Lau'i fakatātā tupu'a mo hono 'uhinga tukufakaholo*, Deport Artspace, 2022. (group exhibition)

Interview with Deport Artspace, 'Uhila Nai Interview (Matrilineal Exhibition), Interviewed/Video by Diana Hu, 28 April 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PbDC-f9Bzs>

Fepōtalanoa 'aki pea mo 'eku fanga kui: In conversation with my great-great-great grannies, Blue Oyster Art Project Space, Dunedin, Auckland. (solo exhibition)

TU'ULO: Katoanga'i 'o e lea faka-Tonga – Ke Tu'ulua 'a e lea faka-Tonga 'o Aotearoa Visual Art Exhibition, Te Oro Music & Arts Centre, Curated by Benjamin Work. (group exhibition)

Extended version of: *Fepōtalanoa 'aki pea mo 'eku fanga kui: In conversation with my great-great-great-grannies*, Labour Party Event: Labour Leader's speech, Dew Drop Event Centre, (the Vodafone Event Centre), Manukau, Auckland.

Conversation with oneself, Blue Oyster Commission, Christmas Card, Blue Oyster Art Space. (Commissions by Blue Oyster).

Tongan Global Scholars, Talanoa 10: Kupesi Kulture: Re-imagining the art of commemoration, Speakers: Dr Sione Faletau, Terje Koloamatangi, and 'Uhila Nai, Doctoral Candidate. Facilitator; Dagmar Dyck.

2023

Malu 'a Fonua (7 am), Paper Anniversary, Karangahape Road, Auckland. (solo exhibition)

Enjoy Contemporary Art Space, Motherland – Homeland, Curated by Bonni Tamati, July – September, Wellington, Auckland. (group exhibition)

Nima 'o e ngaahi fa'ē, Bergman Gallery, Tukufakaholo, Curated Benjamin Work, Karangahape Road, Auckland. (group exhibition)

Papakura Art Gallery, Continuation of *Fepōtalanoa 'aki pea mo 'eku fanga kui: In conversation with my great-great-great-grannies*, Curated by Sione Faletau and 'Uhila Nai. (solo exhibition)

Art Ripple: Taitung Artist Residency, Taiwan, Taitung, Abus Bunun Traditional Costume Workshop, located in Yangping Township. September – October.

FIND Asia Design Fair, Taitung Crafts: Austronesian Ripples of Art. Singapore, 21 September.

2024

Hala Kafa, Sophie Thorn, 2024, Aro Toi/Art Collection in Focus: A Gift, A Celebration, An Invitation at Te Pātaka Art Toi Gallery, Wellington. (solo exhibition)

Manatu-Melie: Honouring The Past, Kato'one Koloamatangi and 'Uhila Nai, Māngere Art Centre, Auckland. (group exhibition)

Commission on a ngatu and designing a kupesi for Ali and William's wedding.

Interview with Radio Station 531PI, PMN Tonga, interviewed by John Nicholas Pulu, 2 April, <https://pmn.co.nz/read/arts/tongan-phd-student-stamping-her-mark-on-traditional-tapa-cloth-art>

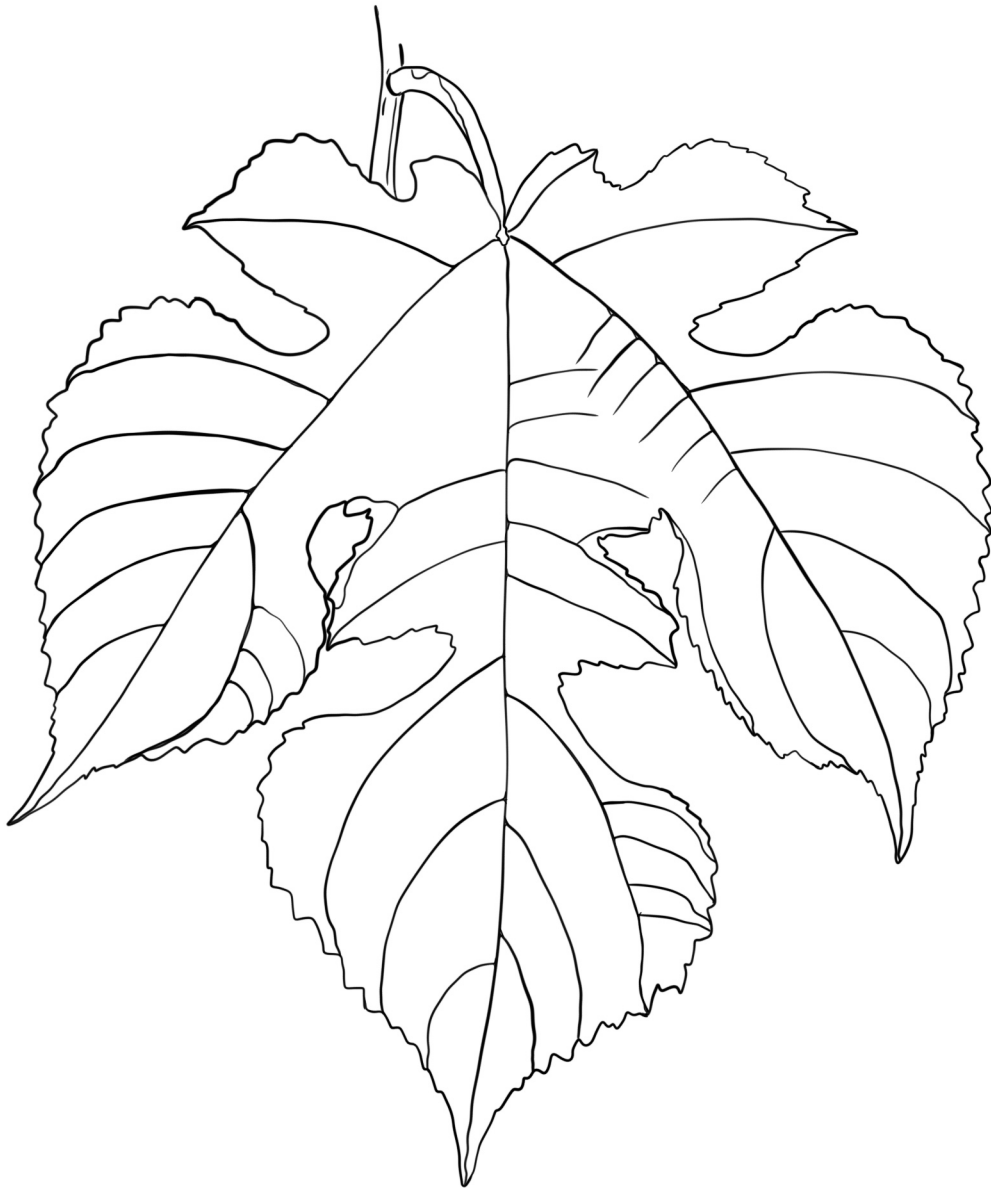
Interview with RNZ Culture101 Tapa panel, interviewed by Mark Amery alongside Nikau Hindin and Doron Semu, 22 November, <https://www.rnz.co.nz/life/culture/the-young-generation-beating-new-life-into-tapa-cloth>

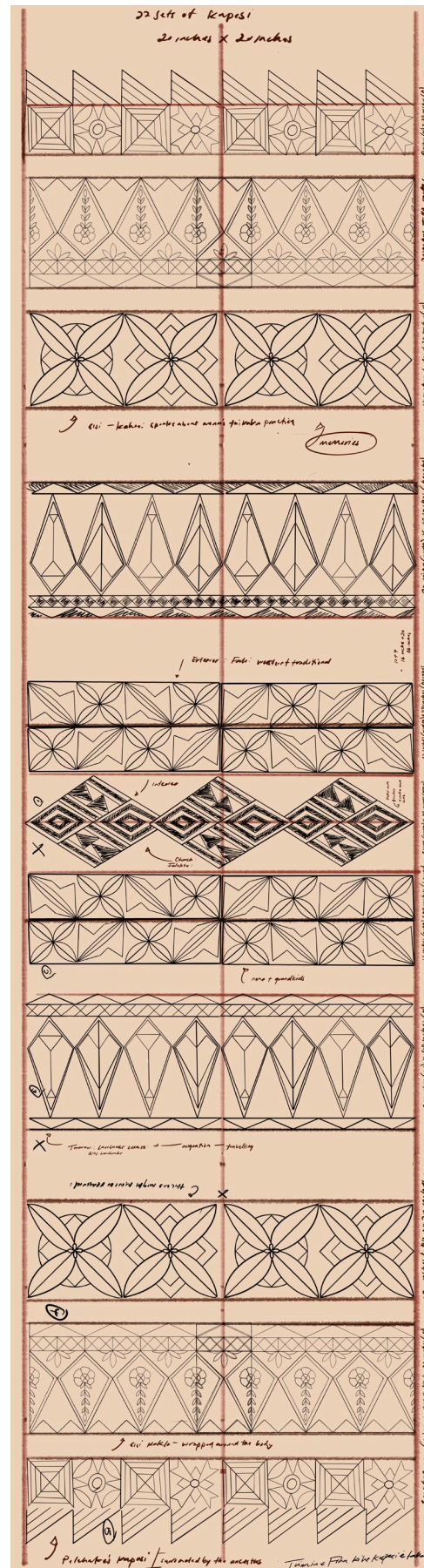
KAVAX: Tā Valivali in honour of celebrating Tongan Language Week, hosted by Four Shells Fale Talanoa, 4 October.

2025

Contributing writer to the book, *Tapa* (working title) to be published in 2026, edited by Sean Mallon and Nina Tonga.

MAKING PROCESS OF TOHI KUMI KOLOA

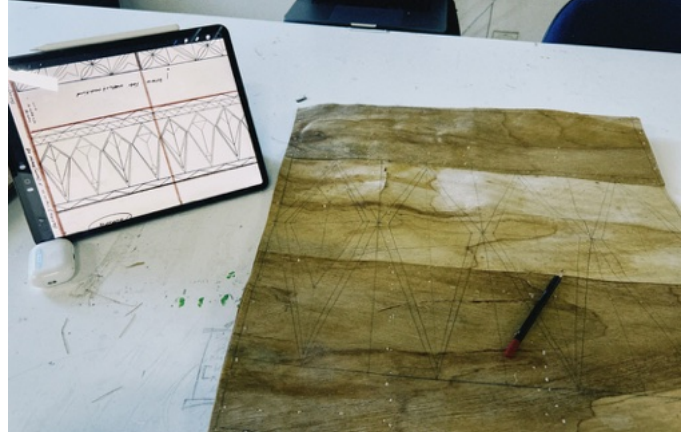




The process of tu'aniu (coconut midrib) being twirled with individual or multiple strands of kavele'ipulu (coconut husk).



Ta kupesi - the process of marking/drawing the kupesi onto the kupesi board before stitching the tu'aniu on.



Tui kupesi process - stitching the tu'aniu onto the lau'i kaka board by following the drawing that has been outlined.





FOLA KUPESI

The process of laying out the kupesi onto the papa koka'anga.

These are the first sets of kupesi I had tui back home in Auckland, which, somehow, when placed onto the papa, were too big. The measurement discrepancy was due to different units of measurement.

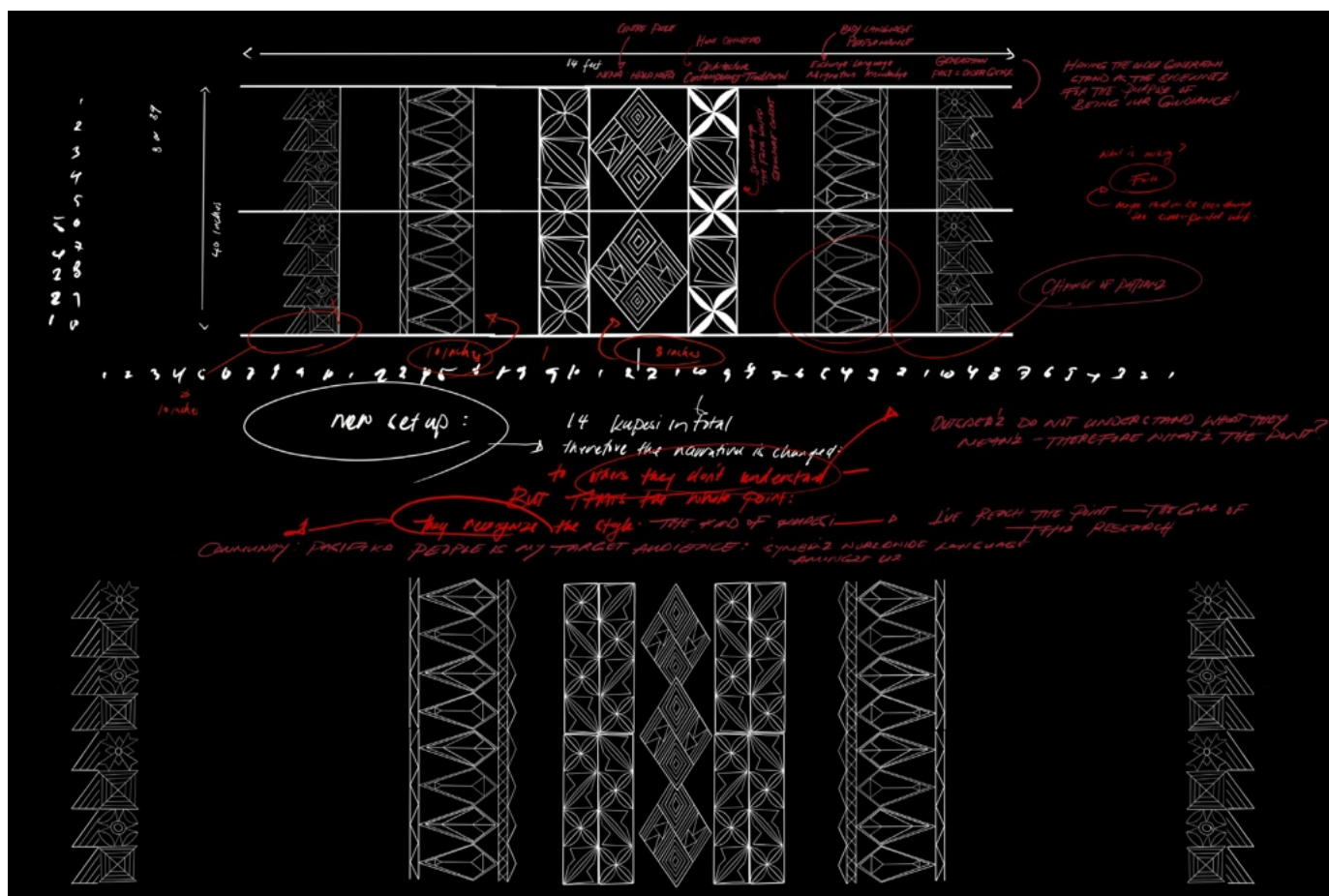
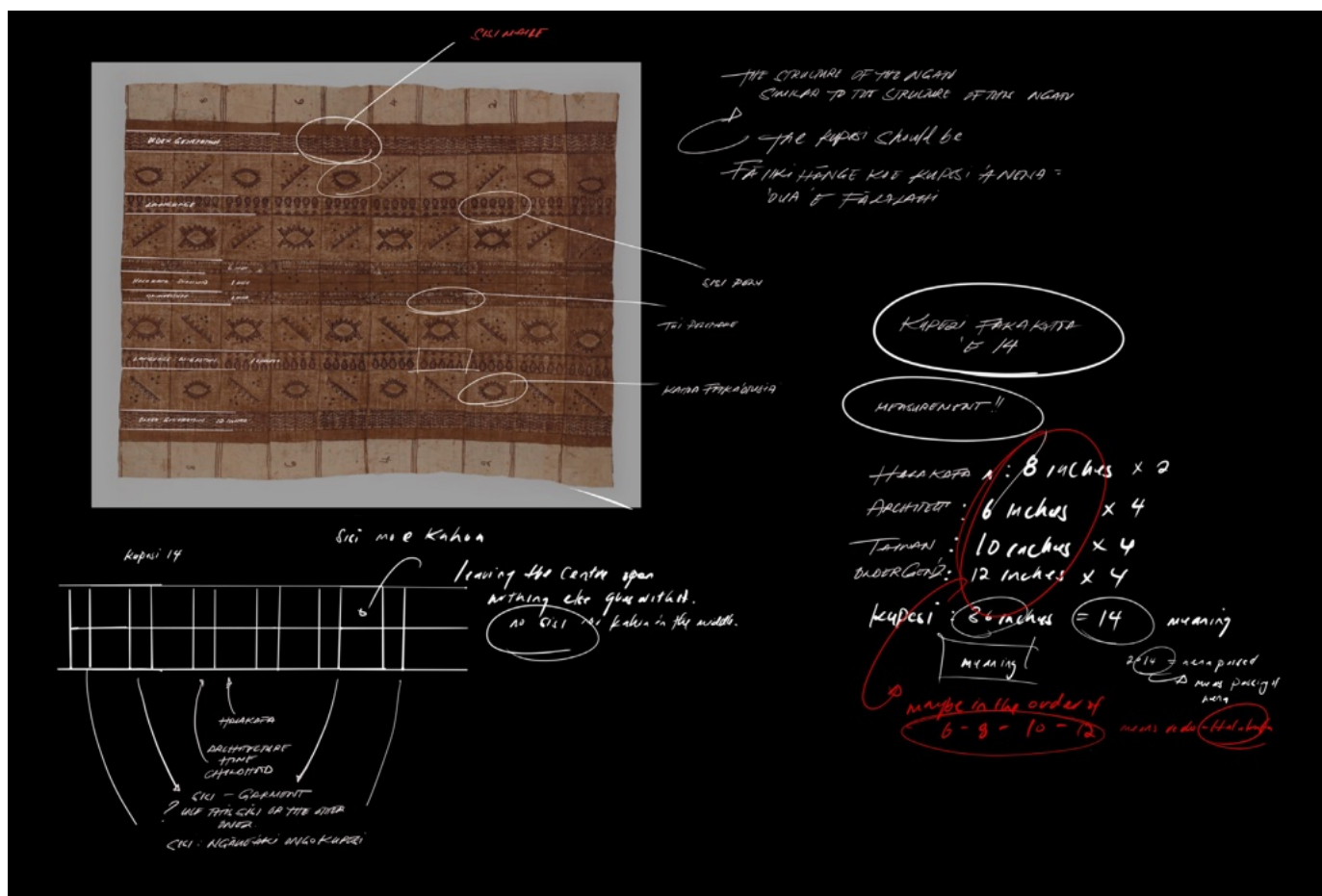
The process of setting up the papa koka'anga allowed me to work out simple sizes for making the new sets of kupesi, which I had taken from the original scales of my nena's kupesi. However, it also helped me with working out the layout for the new sets.

Every single kupesi made back home in Auckland became an example of how the new sets could be made, given their new size.



The following pages describe the new sets of kupesi and their layout.

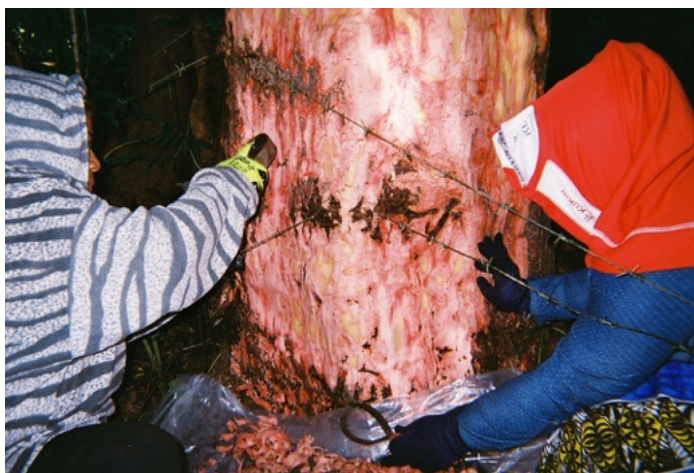
Reconstructing the structure of the kupesi to align with the size of the papa koka'anga, meaning the design and scales.



Tui Kupesi - The making of the new sets of kupesi.



Vau Koka process - the process of scraping the inner bark of the *Bischofia javanica* or Bishop wood tree, which is used as the ink for frottage, transferring the kupesi onto the feta 'aki, and the ink that is used for tohi ngatu (tracing/outlining/marketing the kupesi). We had Timote, Taufa, Moana, and Liu help with the vau koka process.



Tatau Koka - the process of straining the koka, which they had used a fresh onion bag as a substitute for the traditional fau tau koka, which is made from hibiscus fibre.





Here is what the koka looks like, which is used on two occasions:

1. Tohi ngatu: The koka is cooked until it turns black, that is, the black ink used for tracing/outlining and marking the kupesi.
2. Transferring the kupesi onto the feta'aki.

Haka Tou - the process of making the glue that is used to bind the strips of feta'aki together. Made from manioke, which is grated into fine pieces and slowly added to boiling water, stirred until it dissolves and becomes viscous.



Setting up the papa koka'anga and organising/arranging the kupesi in the order I wanted, to reflect the stories I intended to transfer onto the ngatu. The elders, Losaline and Tolofa, taped down the kupesi onto the table with pepa koka'anga and masking tape.



Feta'aki is being tauaki before it is being used.



The tou - glue-based is being served into an ice-cream container, which each member will have.



Setting up to start the koka'anga, which always begins with the women seated against the wall.



The process of applying glue to the feta'aki.



The act of rolling the ngatu towards the elders, so they can add on another langanga.



The process of transferring the kupesi onto the feta'aki using the koka.



The final process is getting it ready for transfer out to be tauaki, which is unfolding to its original scale.



Tauaki - The process of unfolding the ngatu back to its original scale, allowing it to fully dry. Usually, it is tauaki out in the field, but as it was raining, it was tauaki inside the Vaomapa Hall.





Paaki Ngatu: The process of applying a thin code of manioke that was cooked until it turns into a viscous liquid. Then you add a couple of drops of gasoline to help protect it from getting eaten by the silverfish. The process of paaki ngatu helps preserve the ngatu but also acts as a layer that stops the koka from bleeding through during the tohi ngatu process.



Tauaki - letting it dry outside Nena's front yard, where she always tauaki and paaki her ngatu.



Tohi Ngatu - the process of tracing/outlining/markig the kupesi on the ngatu.



The process of lining up the ngatu into its grid/structure.





Examples of tracing/marking the kupesi, following the kupesi that has been transferred during the koka'anga process.





ART OF ACCESS

Art of Access was established in 2022, focusing on Specialist Access Operations. Art of Access navigate through project that involves Rope Access and Rigging Projects.

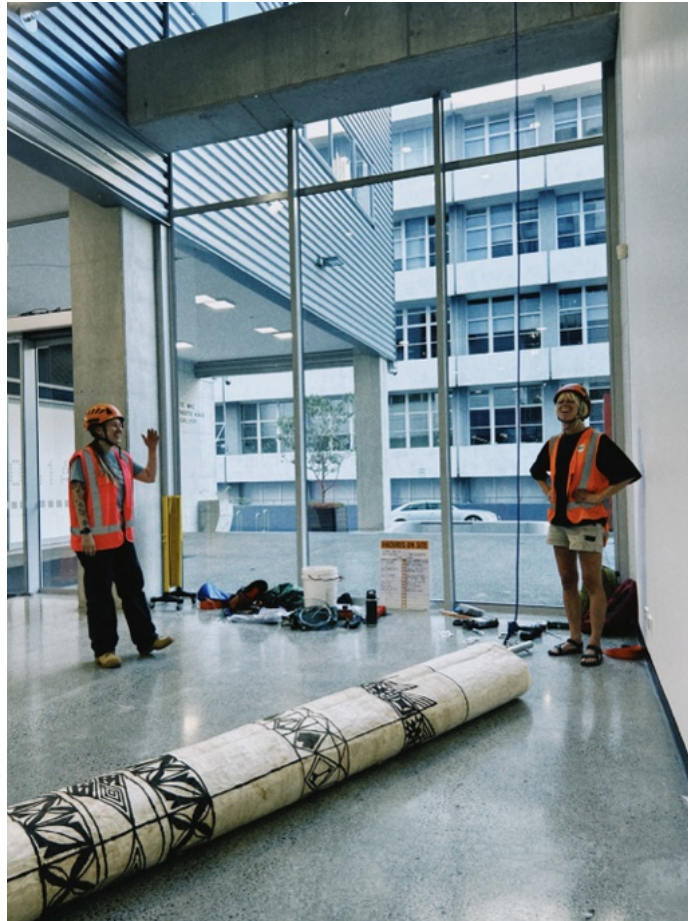
The scope of this project was for Art of Access to tauaki the ngatu via rope access from strucutal steel in the WM Atrium ceiling space.

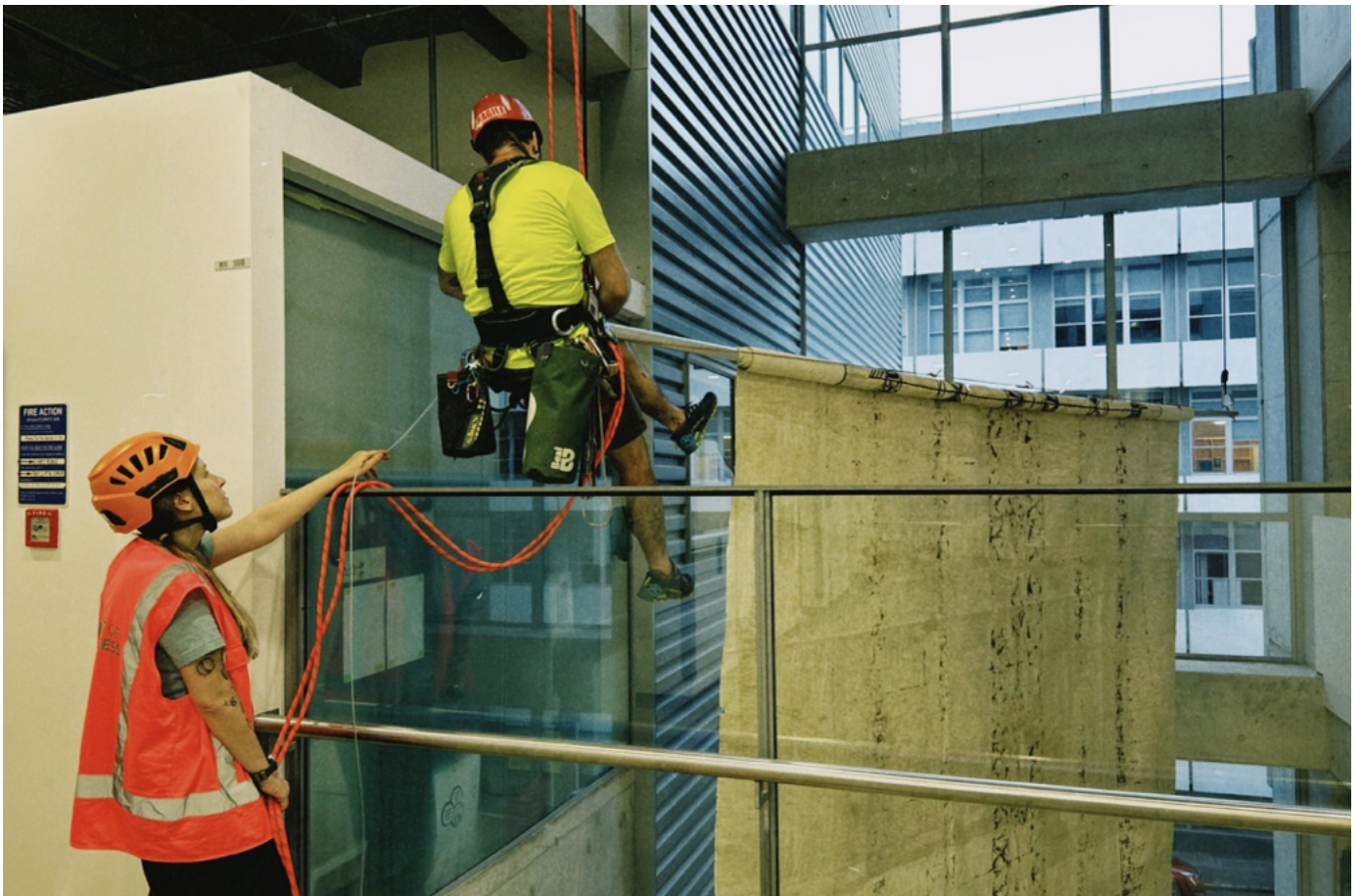
Locations: WM Builidng, 40 St Paul Street

Team Leader: Dan Pidgeon

Team Member: Hrvoje Hajdarovic

Assisstants: Olivia Ray Lorena Račić









These are the details that I want achieved:



→ Replacing what exactly of the house -
 collection of ingredients that would build up the house itself.

measure exact where these places are → does → before the opening

what is the angle of all the angles? → conversation with dad

Paper Patterns → planning out the house -

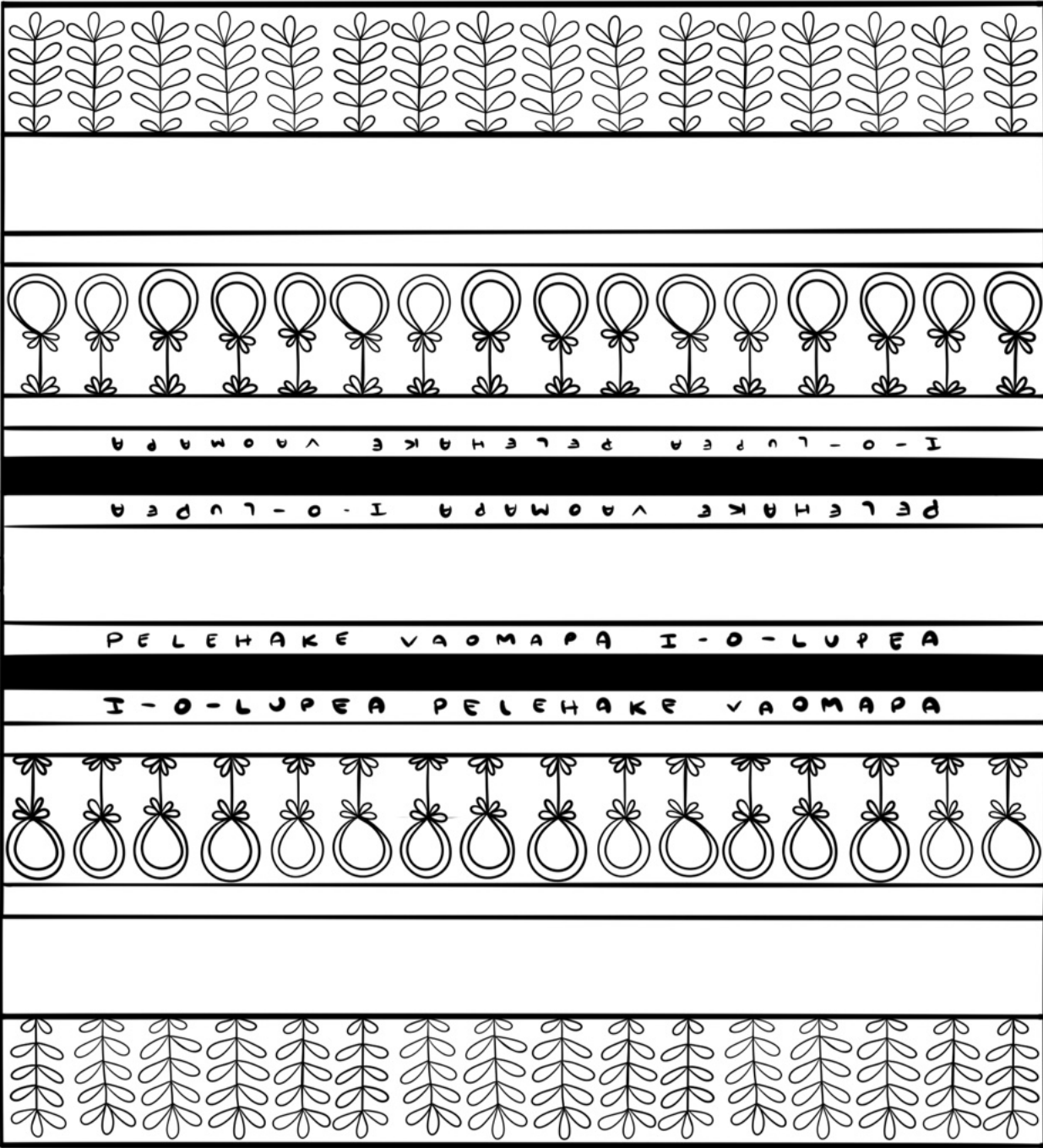
Don → call him and with drawing -

The making of Uhila Lahi's fale Tonga, from sourcing the papa to putting the pieces together.





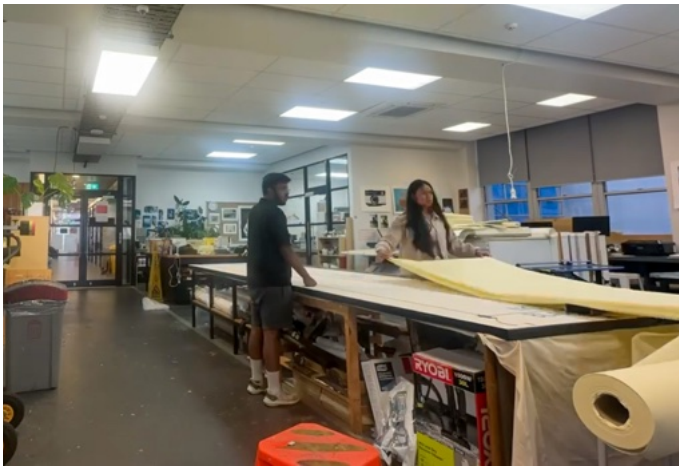
These are kupesi from my nena’s kupesi collection, which I had veteki and created the kupesi for the screen-printed pepa koka’anga. I had chosen this kupesi to represent the older generations, based on where I had it installed on the fale Tonga, where the screen-printed pepa koka’anga was used to aofi (cover) the roof.



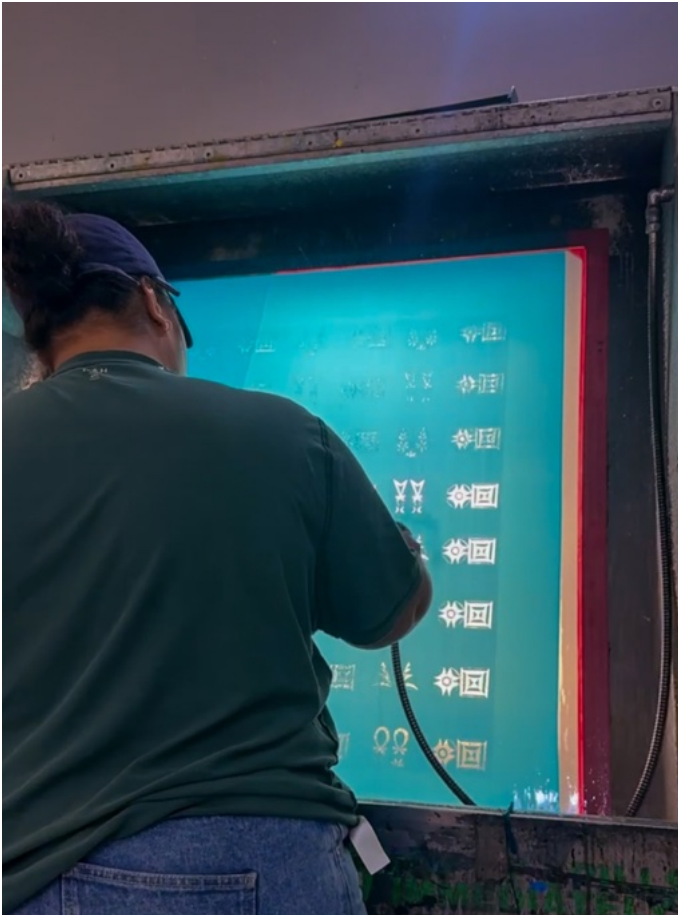
These are kupesi from my nena's kupesi collection, which I had veteki and created the kupesi for the screen-printed pepa koka'anga. I had chosen this kupesi to represent the older generations, based on where I had it installed on the fale Tonga, where the screen-printed pepa koka'anga was used to aofi (cover) the roof.



Veteki - unpacking the pepa koka'anga by cutting it to scale, using the 'textile table' as my screen-print measurements (as it is the same scale as a papa koka'anga).



Screens preparation and stencil making.



Screen-printing in action.



Aofi fale - wrapping the fale Tonga with pepa koka'anga and screen-printed pepa koka'anga.









Dad aka supervisor, Timote Pita Nai, who built the fale Tonga.



EXHIBITION DOCUMENTATION

The map is a hand-drawn conceptual plan of a community development project, divided into three horizontal zones: **Past** (top), **Present** (middle), and **Future** (bottom). The map shows a grid of streets and various community spaces.

Past Zone (Top):

- Tikiner - Family Land** (circled in red)
- Heritage, Past Markets** (circled in red)
- Travel Two World Road** (circled in red)
- Research (Urban) Street** (circled in red)
- Traditional Room of Living Space** (circled in red)
- Contemporary Art** (circled in red)
- Contemporary Space** (circled in red)
- Kaka'anga Group** (circled in red)
- Kaka'anga Space** (circled in red)

Present Zone (Middle):

- City Centre - Tanaka - Poler** (circled in blue)
- Market** (circled in blue)
- Bike Lane** (circled in blue)
- Travel Two World Road** (circled in blue)
- Research (Urban) Street** (circled in blue)
- Traditional Room of Living Space** (circled in blue)
- Contemporary Art** (circled in blue)
- Contemporary Space** (circled in blue)
- Kaka'anga Group** (circled in blue)
- Kaka'anga Space** (circled in blue)

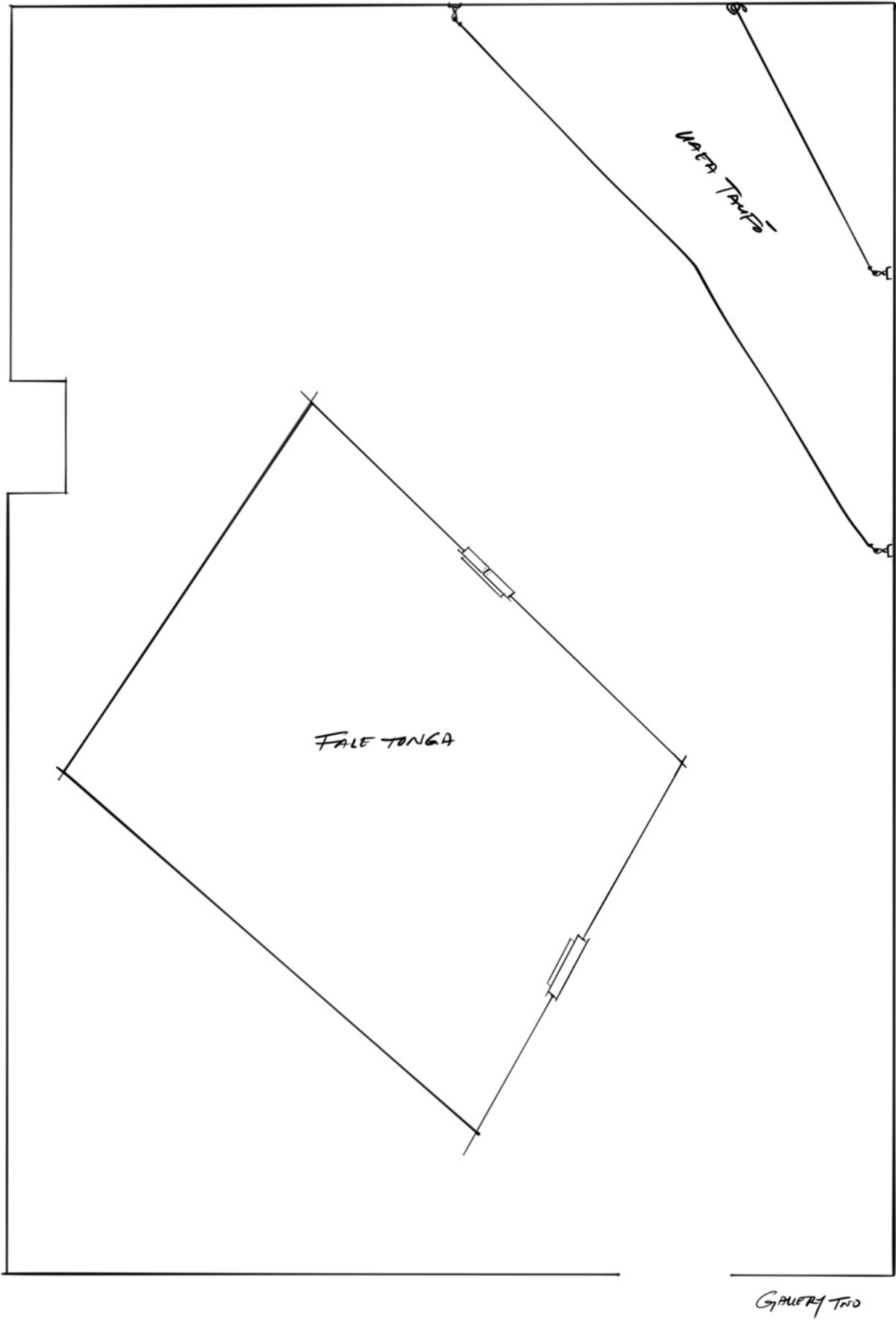
Future Zone (Bottom):

- Contemporary Art** (circled in green)
- Dance From Indigenous Culture** (circled in green)
- Kaka'anga Space** (circled in green)

Other Annotations:

- Road - Toward Market** (green arrow pointing right)
- Studio / Where** (green arrow pointing right)
- Travel Two World Road** (green arrow pointing right)
- Research (Urban) Street** (green arrow pointing right)
- Traditional Room of Living Space** (green arrow pointing right)
- Contemporary Art** (green arrow pointing right)
- Contemporary Space** (green arrow pointing right)
- Kaka'anga Group** (green arrow pointing right)
- Kaka'anga Space** (green arrow pointing right)

EXHIBITION FLOOR PLAN



ATRIUM

NGAAHI LE‘O ‘O ‘EKU FANGA KUI, 2026 **TOKAUANIMA 26 M (L) X 4 M (W)**

Suspended from a steel tube and wire in the Te Wai Ngutu Kākā Gallery foyer and atrium;
Installed by Ollie Ray, Dan Pidgeon, Hrvoje Hajdarović and Lorena Račić.
Feta‘aki (Undyed Barkcloth), Koka (Bischofia Javanica or Bishop Wood), Manioke Peru (Peru Cassava), Tongo (Mangrove Stems).

The kupesi is a personal collection that I designed and developed based on different histories, memories, events, places, and locations in Pelehake, alongside kupesi from my nena’s kupesi collection. They include:

Title: Kupesi Vai ko Tui Mate (Hala Kafa - centre piece)

Description: Vai ko Tui Mate kupesi is inspired/taken from Nena’s middle name in honour of our relationship and to commemorate the years of growing up with her and learning and observing, which led to gaining knowledge about ngatu.

Year of Design: 2019

Used: 2026

Dimension: 7-inch x 19 inches

Place of making: Pelehake

Title: Kupesi ‘Api ko Toloa (outer section)

Description: ‘Api ko Toloa was inspired/taken from Nena’s middle name and created in response to the interior and exterior of our childhood home.

Year of Design: 2019

Used: 2026

Dimension: 7-inch x 19-inches

Place of making: Pelehake

Title: Kupesi Sisi Kakala ‘o Tonga Hahake

Description: Sisi Kakala ‘o Tonga Hahake was created to commemorate stories about migrations, languages, exchange and the indigenous people from Taitung, Taiwan.

Year of Design: 2023

Remake: 2026

Used: 2026

Dimension: 9-inch x 19-inches

Place of making: Pelehake

Title: Kupesi Fata

Description: Kupesi Fata was taken as a sample from the kupesi Fata, which was one of the kupesi from Nena’s collection.

Year of Design: unknown

Remake: 2026

Used: 2026

Dimension: 9-inch x 19-inches

Place of making: Pelehake















la Nai | Tohi Ku

GALLERY TWO

FALE ‘O ‘EKU FANGA KUI MA‘AE FANGA MOKOPUNA, 2026.

The structure of the fale Tonga was built by my dad (Timote Nai) using old Limu (Rimu) timber from my family’s church on Dominion Road, and I screen-printed the pepa koka’anga (vylene paper) at the AUT Print Lab.

Fale ‘o ‘eku fanga kui is a replica of my great-great-grandma ‘Uhila lahi’s fale in Pelehake. I chose this structure because it was a space my family has always used a lot, and because my nena used it as her making space. Ngatu is often utilised as a divider or to cover the ceiling roof, serving as an equivalent to the wooden lining. Inside ‘Uhila lahi’s fale Tonga, there was a time when the interior was completely covered with ngatu pepa. This inspired the creation of the fale Tonga, which is both a sculptural element and a support structure for the screen-printed pepa koka’anga, metaphorically functioning as a fale that holds knowledge of the past and the present. The interior of the fale Tonga comprises my own personal collections of kupesi and a series of Pelehake mape from 1968–2022, representing seven female ancestors on my dad’s side of the family.

Entrance wall:

My personal kupesi collection

Left wall:

Mape 1 representing the story of Vika

Mape 2 representing the story of Manu Tu‘ipulotu

Taiwanese barkcloth processes

Tongan ngatu process #1

Mape 6 representing the story of ‘Ofa ‘Aisea

Nena’s boarding pass

Back wall:

My personal kupesi collection

Right wall:

Mape 3 representing the story of ‘Uhila lahi

Mape 4 representing the story of ‘Ana Va‘inga

Mape 5 representing the story of Vaimoana

The Taiwanese aboriginal languages of Puyuma and Paiwan

Tongan ngatu process #2

Nena’s and my boarding pass

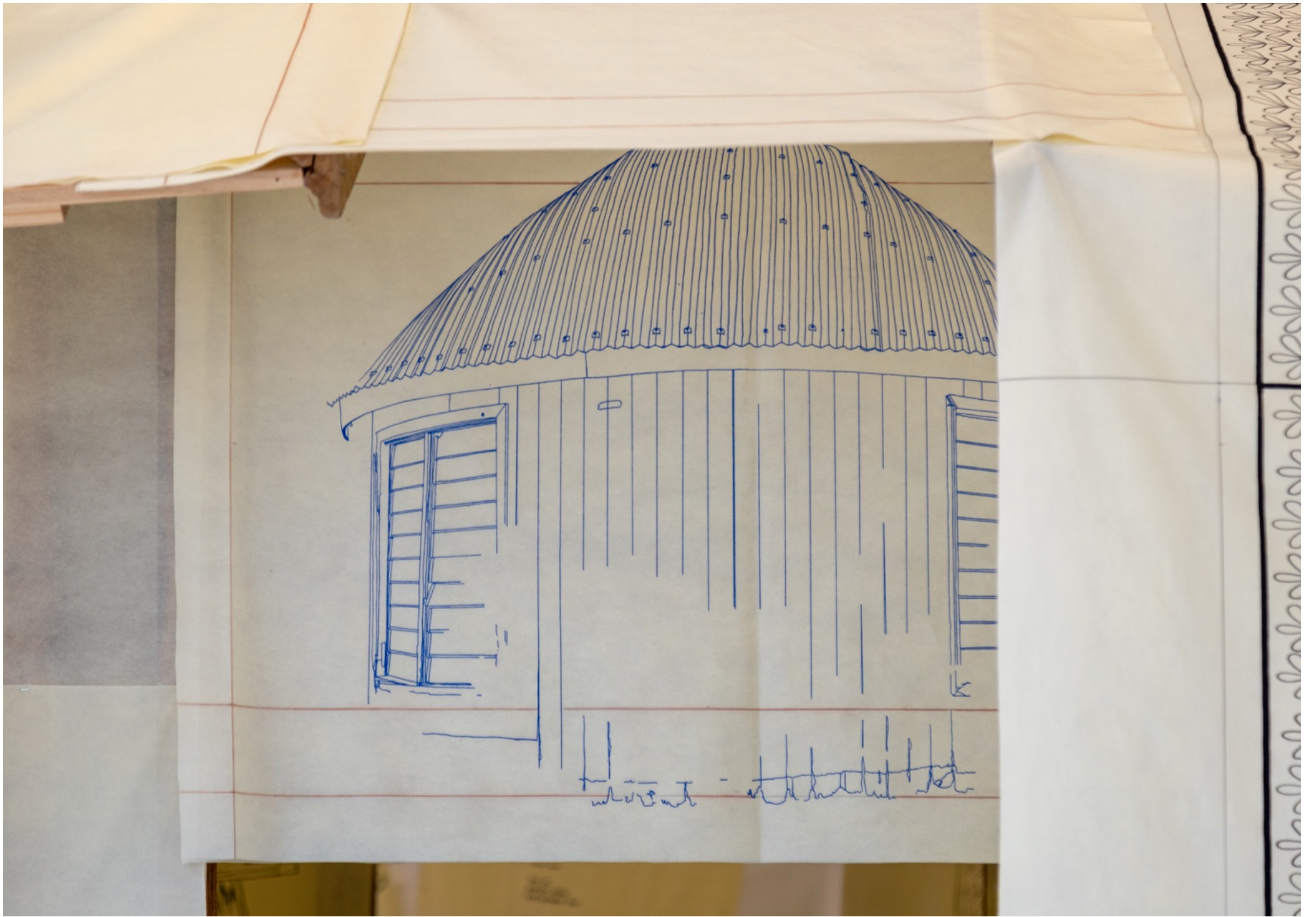
The exterior of the fale Tonga (clockwise from the left):

Left outer wall – Pelehake’s kupesi

Back outer wall – Taitung Residency kupesi

Right outer wall – Collection of kupesi being veteki

The window – Nena’s fale Tonga is an example of Tongan traditional architecture.





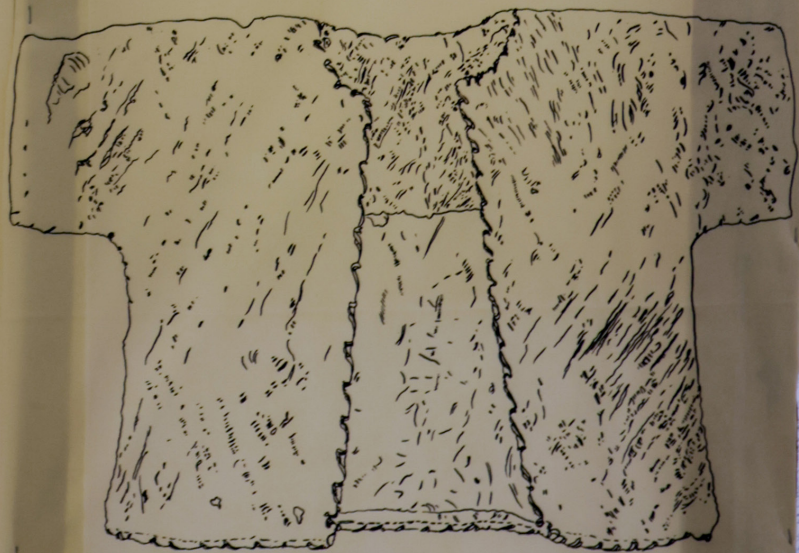
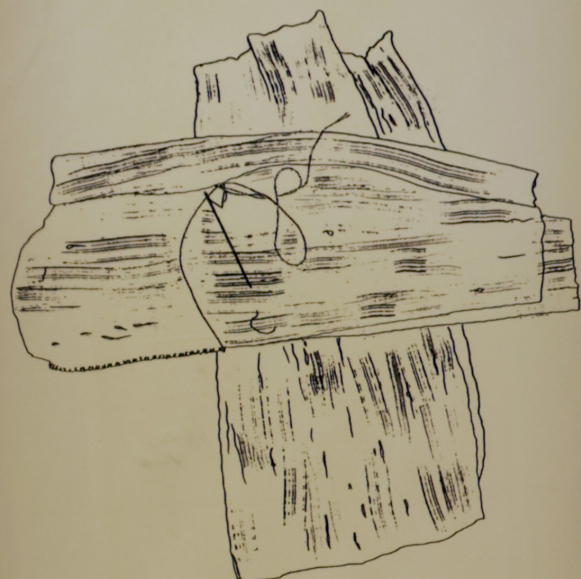
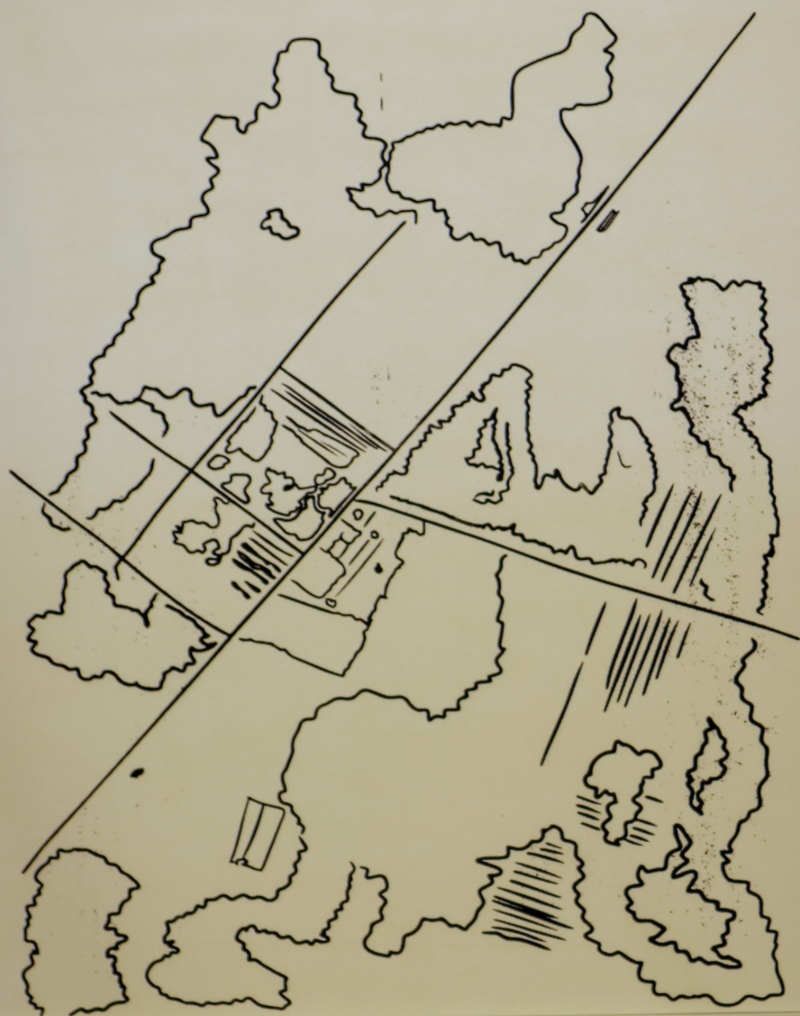


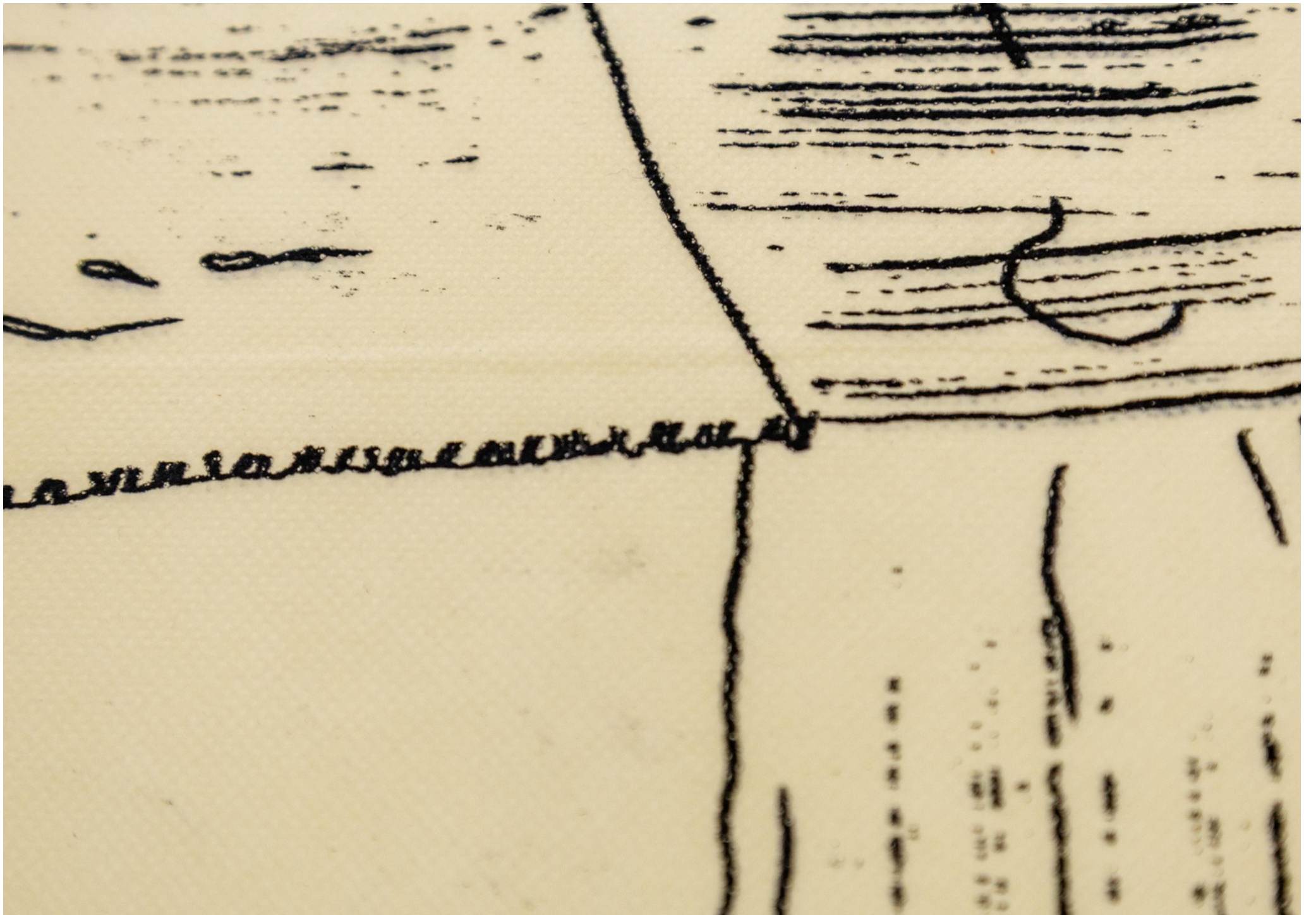


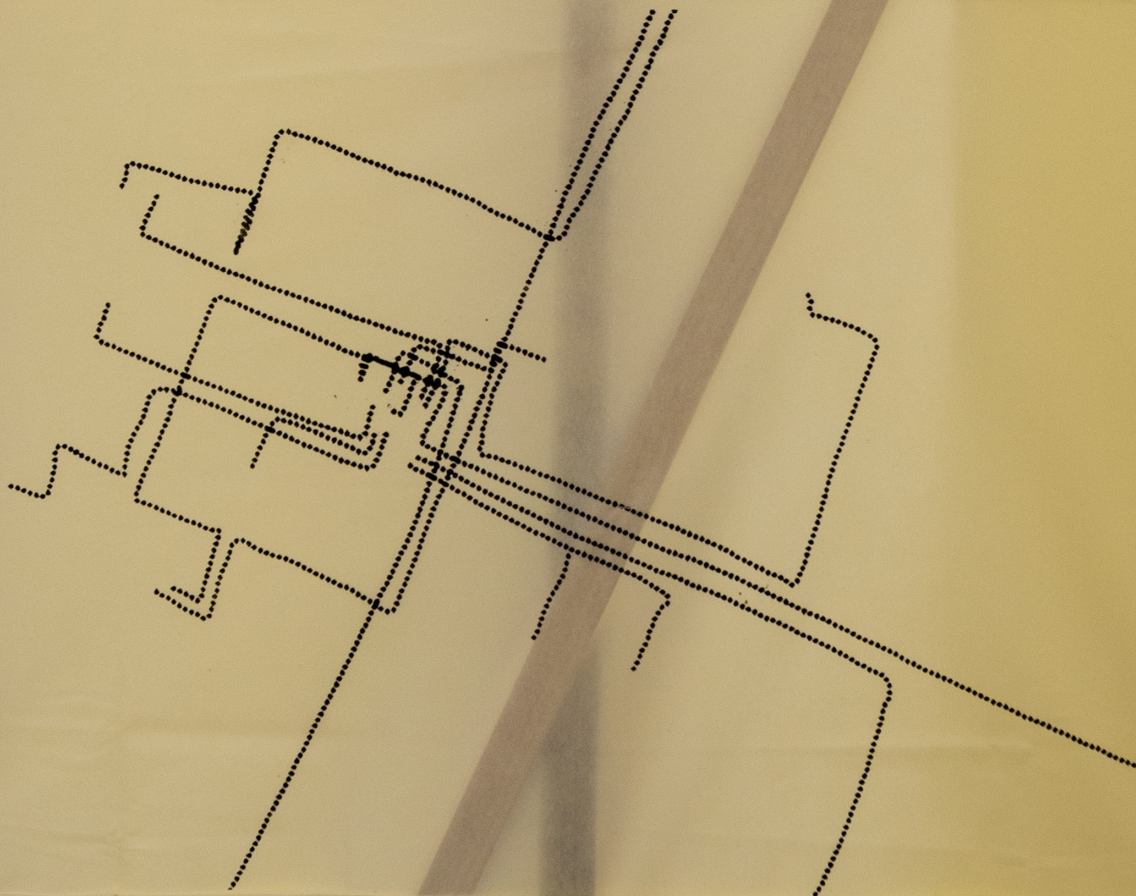
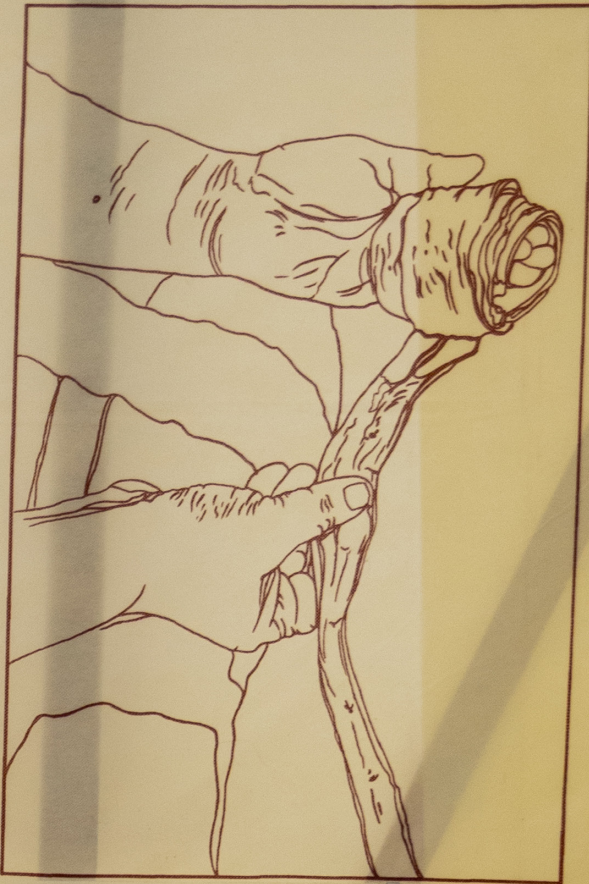
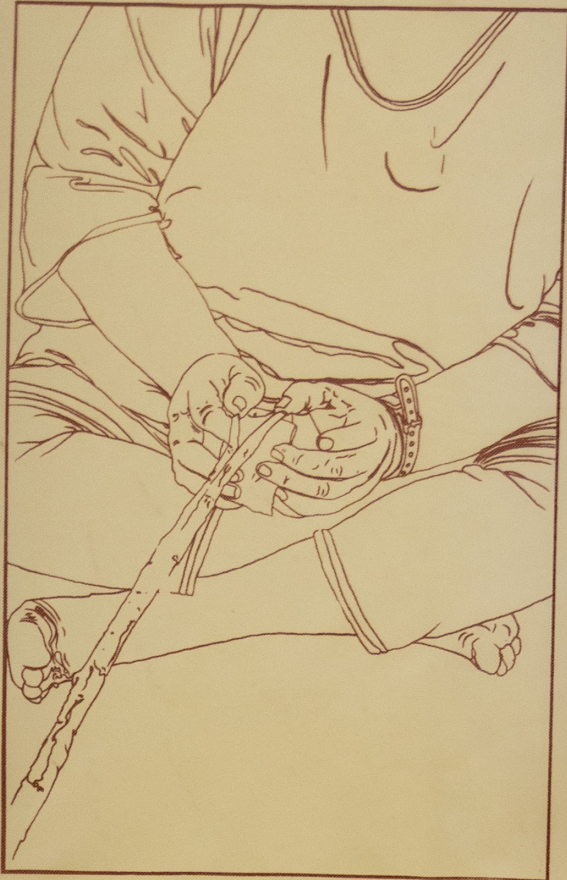












ISSUED BY **UNITED AIRLINES**

BOARDING PASS

NAME OF PASSENGER
NAI/A

FROM
AUCKLAND

TO
TONGATAPU

CARRIER CODE
000000/UA

FLIGHT
UA 9193

CLASS
Y

DATE
26 JAN

TIME
120A***

PLACE OF ISSUE
AKLCU

AIRLINE CODE
C 00000-0

DATE OF ISSUE
25 JAN 96

ISSUING AGENT ID
036538

BOARDING PASS ONLY

SEAT / SMOKE
6D / NO

BOARDING PASS ONLY
NOT VALID FOR TICKETING

VALIDATION STAMP
OR FLIGHT COUPON
REQUIRED

9 6 7 0 3 4 3 2

UT 7573 REV 9-91 PRINTED IN U.S.A.

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BOARDING PASS



NAME OF PASSENGER

NAI/A

FROM

AUCKLAND

TO

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CARRIER CODE

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DATE OF ISSUE

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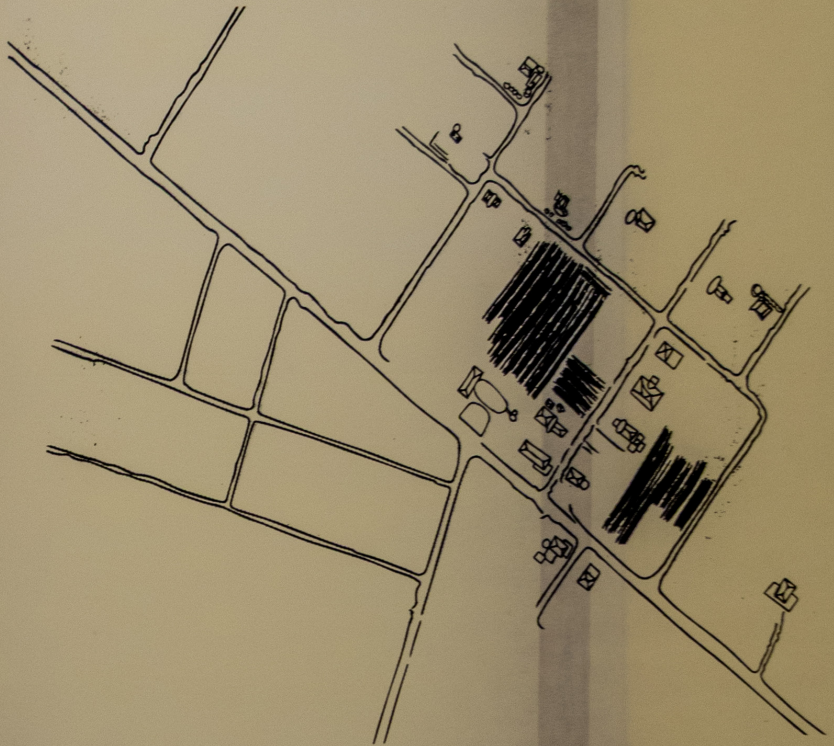
AUCKLAND

TO

TONGATAPU

加加. >
 加加主系 自左 [UHIA NAI]
 * Xuro. Pusumang
 (Ara).
 Ke ke Hake? ~ 18 岁 吗?
 Hinava yiu (第 1 卷)
 第 1 卷 (第 1 卷) "Puyuma"
 Jali rak soon "Paiwan"
 (第 1 卷 "第 1 卷")
 Aji Aji 第 1 卷
 Aji 火
 Tjokulu: 第 1 卷
 Talingna y.

Teru
 spat
 Lima



Father = ara
 Mother = Ina
 daughter = fapa yia

Puyuma
 Lou me direction to
 Sahar (K) Kandu yun

Hinava yiu
 eta - rusa Hapuru - spat - Lima

Puyuma
 Jali rak soon Anapui

Vu-lawn



boardingpass

NAI

SEAT

ECONOMY

NUKUALOFA

FLIGHT:

NZ 970

07 APR

07:25 AM

GATE:

SEAT:

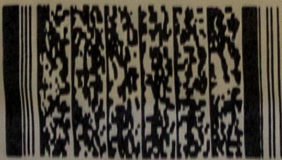
27B

122

ETKT

NZ338408

NEW ZEALAND



25_{AM}

GATE:

SEAT:

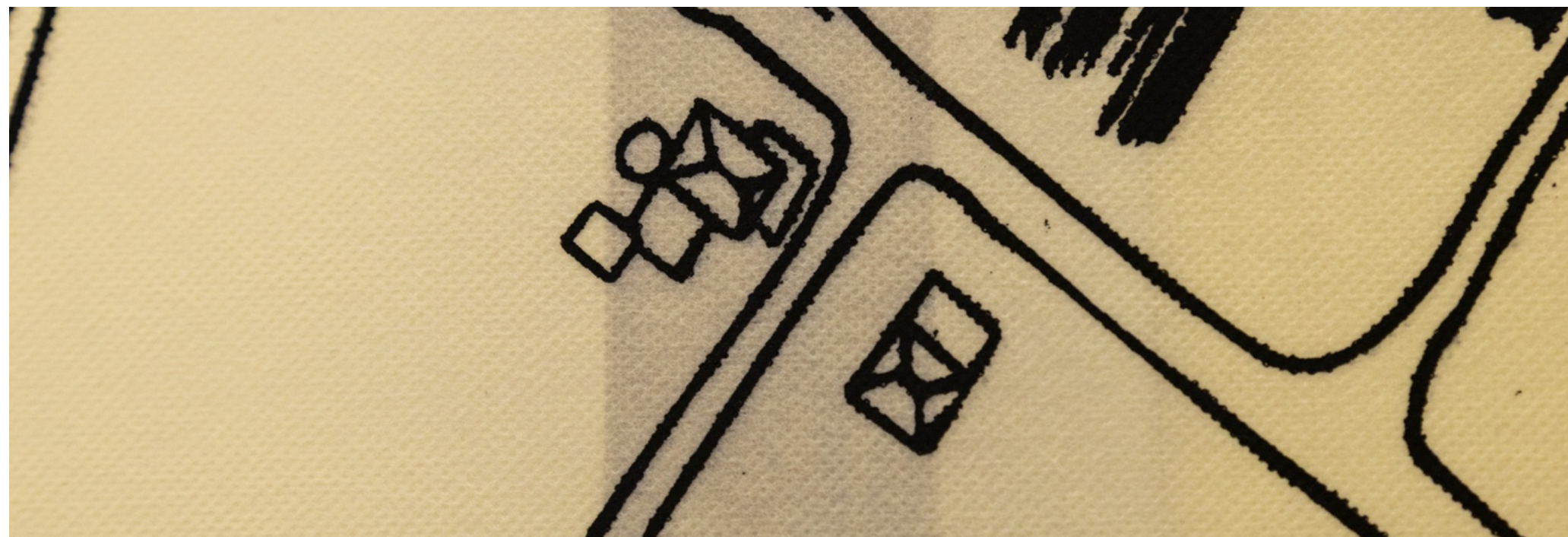
27B

122

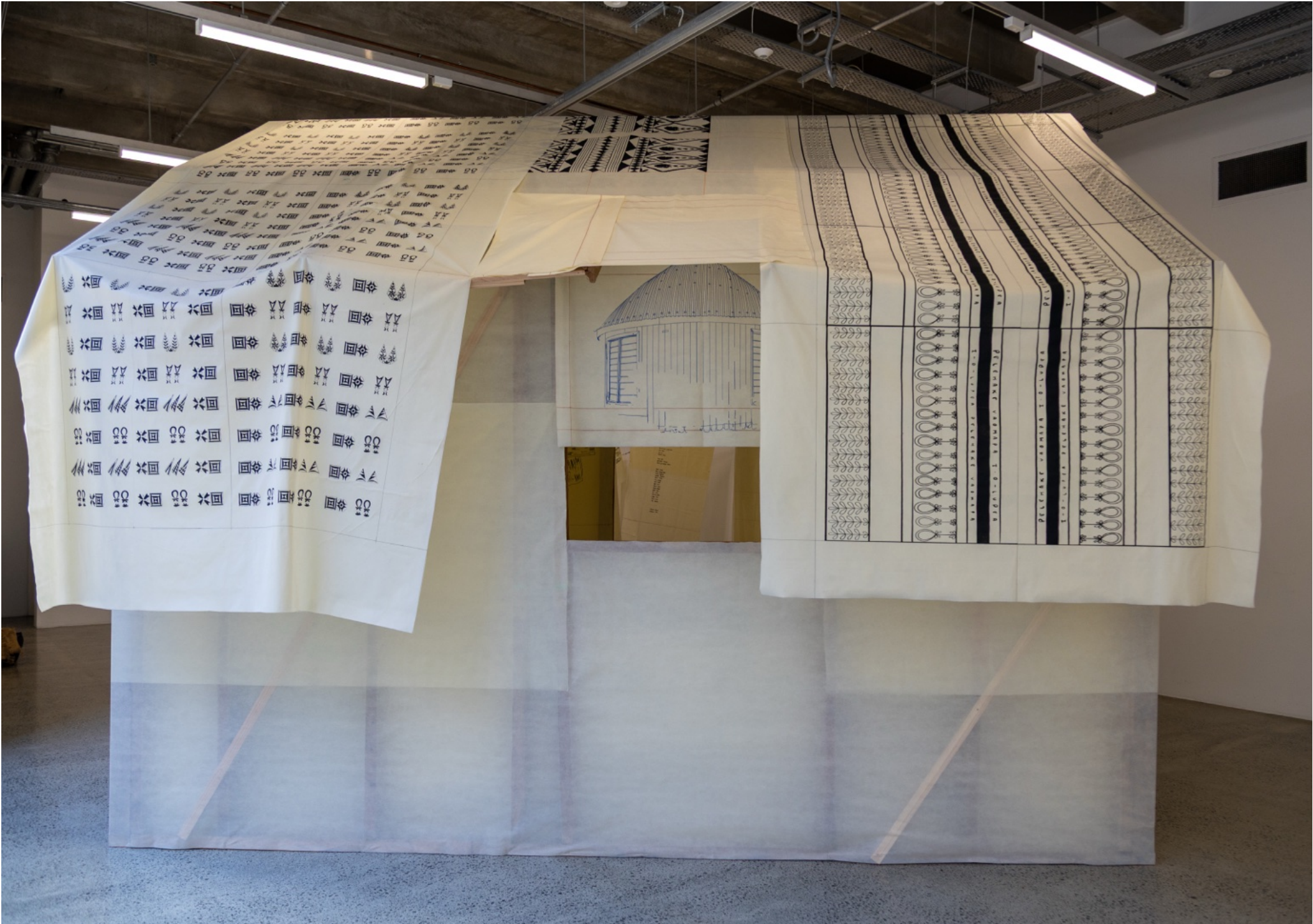
ETKT



LAND 







GALLERY TWO BACK WALL

TAUKAI, 2026.

Screen-printed pepa koka‘anga from 2022–2026

Uaea taufō (clothesline): screen-printed pepa koka‘anga (vylene paper), steel wire and fittings, paper clip, nails, safety pins, old Rimu

Suspended screen-printed pepa koka‘anga included:

Drawing of Nena’s room

Luva papa (wooden window) / Loka (lock)

Electricity box

The Taiwanese Aboriginal Indigenous language from the Bunun Tribe

Mape 2 representing the story of Manu.

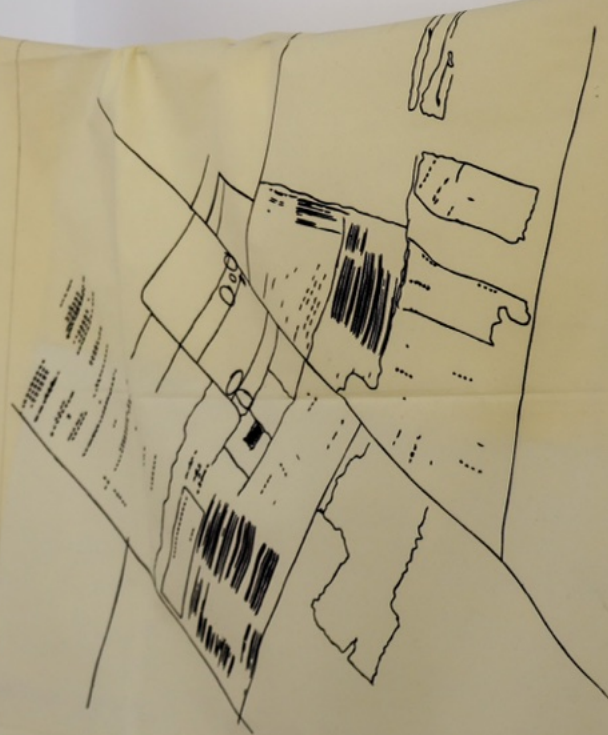
Bunun Tribal language

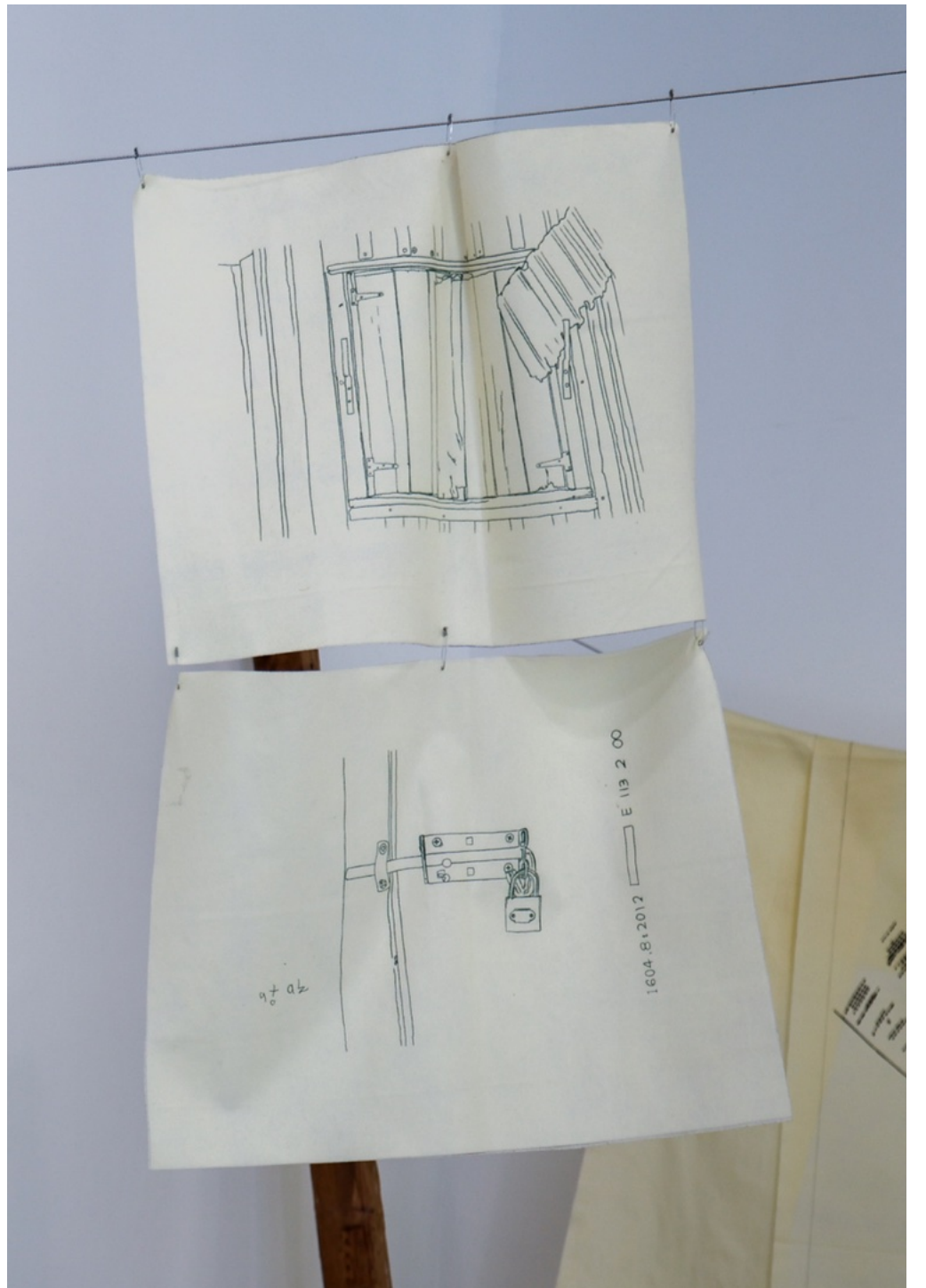
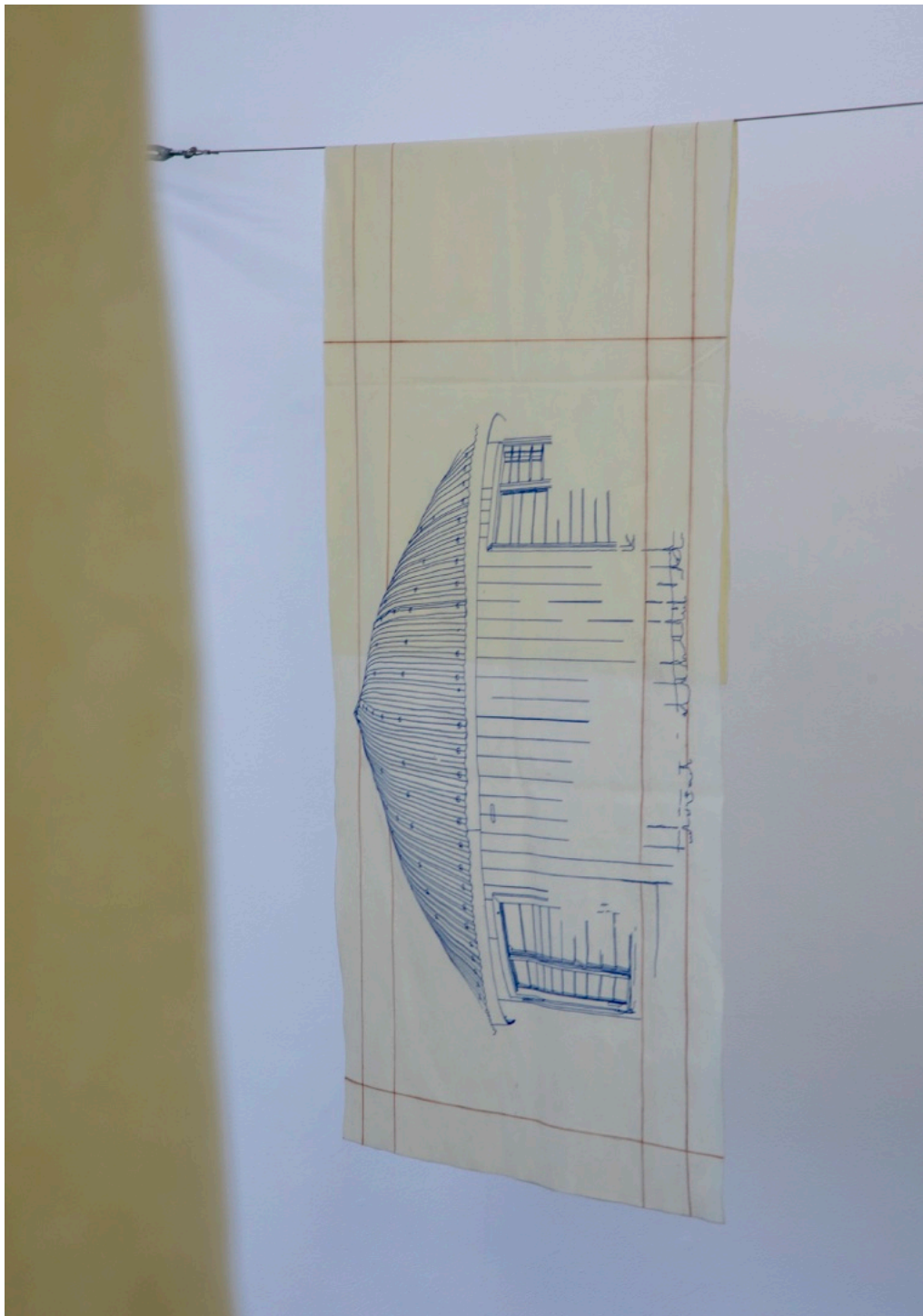
Thank you ukunag
Yes ung
No ai
Wood haki

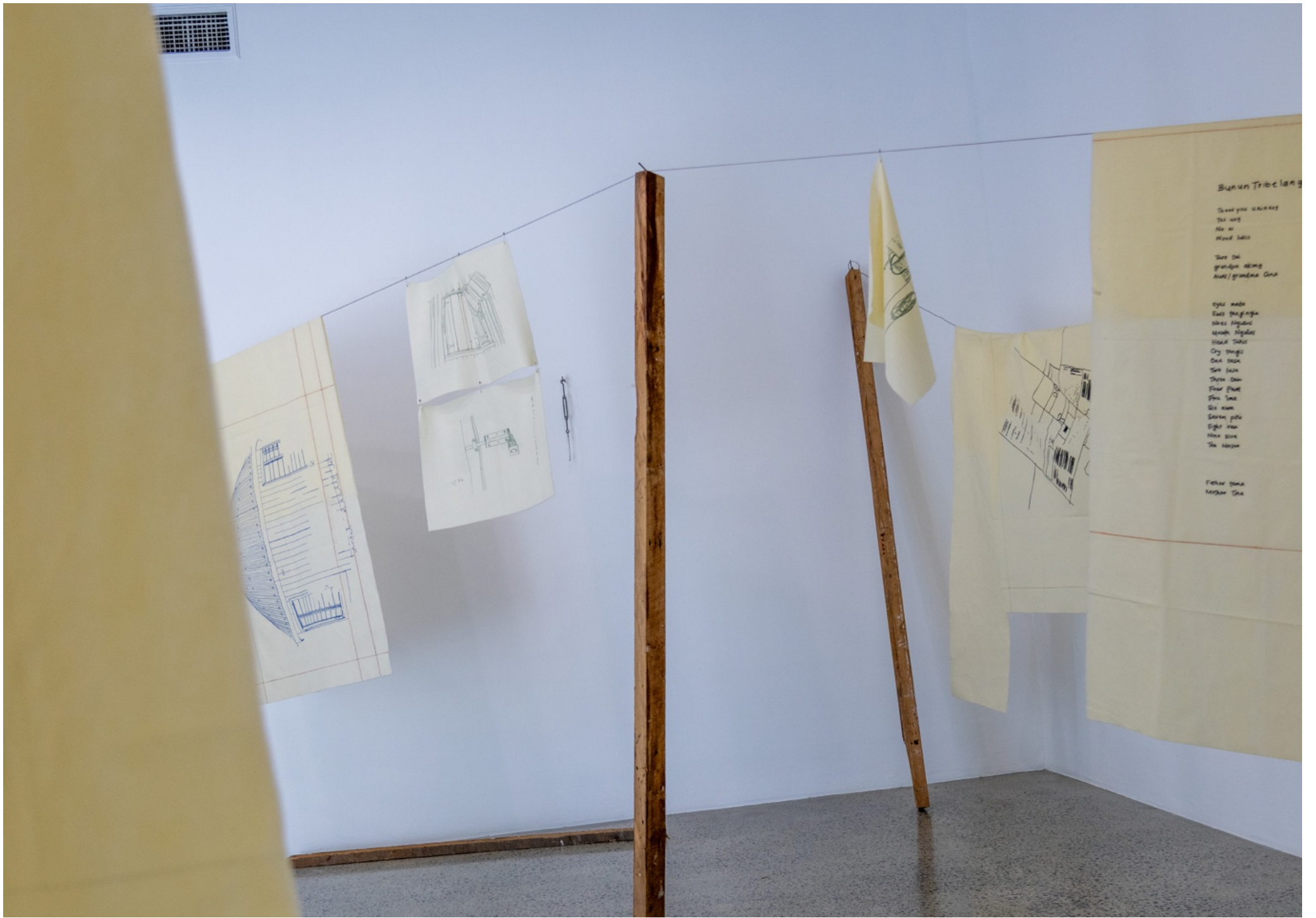
Turo tai
grandpa akong
Aunt/grandma Gna

Eyes mata
Ears tanginga
Nose Ngulus
Mouth Ngulus
Head Tahis
Ory tangis
One tain
Two lusa
Three lau
Four Paat
Five Tina
Six num
Seven pih
Eight van
Nine siva
Ten Masea

Father tama
Mother Tina









FAKAMĀLŌ - ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Although this research project, Tohi Kumi Koloa, is nearing its ‘end of the day’, when I pelu (fold) my ngatu to be taken inside, the conversation will continue. I will return to do my job of bringing it outside to the sun for refreshment. As I step away from this document, I will continue to look after the craft—the koloa that was gifted to me through the letter of observation and listening.

ATRIUM - TOKAUAONO

TUI KUPESI - Timote Nai - Liu Nye - Lotomoua Nai - ‘Ana Nye aka Nena - Vaimoana Le‘ota - Amanda Le‘ota - ‘Etuete Mafi - Taufu Mahe

VAU KOKA - Timote Nai, Taufu Mahe, Liu Nye, Vaimoana Le‘ota - Veiasinia Vaha‘i

MANIOKE - Timote Nai - Taufu Mahe - Lotoā ‘Aho - Veisia Vaha‘i

KOKA‘ANGA - Losaline Mahe, Vasiti Kaufusi - Toakase Tu‘iono - Lusie Vatuvei - Melelini ‘Aho - Veisia Vaha‘i - Vaimoana Le‘ota - Vikatolia Vea - Kalolaine Funganitao - Tolofi Va‘eno.

INSTALLATION CREW - ART OF ACCESS

Ollie Ray - Dan Pidgeon - Hrvoje Hajdarović - Lorena Račić

GALLERY 2 - ‘UHILA LAHI’S FALE TONGA

BUILDING THE STRUCTURE OF THE FALE: Timote Nai - Eddie Clemens - Ansgar Pale - Vula To‘ofuhe

WRAPPING THE FALE: Ansgar Pale - Vula To‘ofuhe - Hanslahval Lilo - Timote Nai

SCREEN-PRINTING: Ansgar Pale - Vula To‘ofuhe -

TOKONAKI PE TĀNAKI - Hanslahval Lilo - Aydney Garcia - Avishek Prasad

CAMERA CREW

Etuete Mafi (Tokomea Media) - Liu Nai

TECHNICIANS

Eddie Clemens, Angus Roberts

Malo lahi ‘Aupito - Malimali - Uninang (Thank you)
to all my family, friends, colleagues, supervisors, mentors who contributed to the making of
TOHI KUMI KOLOA