



SIAPO - TRADITIONAL BARK CLOTH



The Samoan art form of *siapo*, painted bark cloth, has been a tradition for centuries. The *siapo* designs are not merely decorative; they are infused with cultural meanings and often narrating stories, conveying proverbs, and depicting the natural world. The patterns and motifs are reflective of Samoan heritage, identity, and cosmology. Leading the *siapo* team at the 2024 Festival Arts of Pacific Arts & Culture (FestPAC) is Regina Meredith Fitiao, whose mastery and dedication to this art form are unparalleled. She is joined by Faitoto'a Nicholas King, Puataunofu Tofaeono, and Deliah Paopao, each bringing their unique perspectives and skills to the creation of these exquisite pieces.

At FestPAC, the *Siapo* team invited visitors to join as participant observers, giving them the opportunity to create their own tapa and immerse themselves in the experience of being a *siapo* maker.

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Regina Meredith Fitiao

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When Hawaii decided to call their theme “regenerating Oceania,” it meant something much bigger than just the title. *Regenerating* means, that we as stewards and as *Siapo*-makers have to be willing to focus and share as much as we know of that art form to pass and equip the younger generation when they reach a certain age. This will help them feel confident as representatives of our beautiful island of Amerika Samoa.

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Regina “Reggie” Meredith Fitiao is the daughter of Rev. Atualevao Heinrich A. King Kong Meredith & Elenoa R. Meredith of Leone Village, American Samoa. Her direct lineage to *siapo* comes from her great-grandmother, Lemeana’i Saiselu Tuimalealiifano Meredith. However, she learned the art of bark cloth making from her Auntie Mary Lealaitafea J. Pritchard, around the age of ten. After attending Leone High School and earning a government scholarship for college, Meredith returned home with a Master of Fine Arts degree to serve her people as an art educator. For over 35 years, she has dedicated herself to teaching young people on the island about various arts, with a special emphasis on indigenous art forms.

By working with *siapo* makers like Aunty Marylyn Pritchard Walker, Aunty Adeline Pritchard Jones, and *elei* master Aunty Tupu Tuiasosopo, Reggie grounded herself in the arts of *siapo* and *elei*. Today, she is a pillar of strength in *siapo* making, with a profound hope of sharing this ancestral knowledge of bark cloth with others on a large scale. She believes it is essential to perpetuate and regenerate a continuum of *siapo* makers in the future. She emphasizes that making *siapo* from start to finish is demanding; it requires time, commitment, and a willingness to let it reveal its purest form. Patience, focus, and attention to the *vao* (forest) are crucial, as it provides the essential materials needed for *siapo*.

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“ When I turned 60, I started reflecting on my life and realized my arts and craft keep me grounded and this soul gift has blessed me by my ancestors.

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Faitoto'a Nicholas King

Faitoto'a Nicholas King embarked on his journey as a *Siapo* artist at the age of 13, driven initially by a hunger for lunch. Sneaking into the 1978-79 Arts Council's Summer Samoan Arts and Crafts Program at the museum with friends to grab hotdogs and chocolate milk, he unexpectedly discovered a profound appreciation for the remarkable arts on display, sparking his passion for the craft.

Enrolling in the program, he immersed himself in the art of creating and designing *Siapo*, wood carving, mat weaving, and exploring Samoan legends and tales. Mrs. Mary Pritchard took King under her wing upon witnessing his initial *Siapo* creation. She mentored and nurtured him, helping him to become a *Siapo* demonstrator. He accompanied the 100-member Arts Council delegation on their first off-island trip to represent American Samoa at the International Year of the Child Festival in Santa Clara, California. Over the next five years, he traveled to diverse locations such as Tonga, Fiji, San Francisco, and Washington, D.C., as a *Siapo* demonstrator.

Aunty Mary motivated King to excel, imparting essential skills and knowledge needed for him to reach his full potential as a *Siapo* maker and artist. She once remarked that he possessed a divine gift and encouraged him to cultivate and share it with all who showed interest.

Mr. King celebrated his 60th birthday in May and remains dedicated to creating and designing *Siapo*. Embracing the role of an elder has prompted him to reflect on his achievements, shortcomings, and life experiences. Aunty Mary's wisdom continues to resonate with him profoundly.

This craft has brought Mr. King immense love and joy, connecting him deeply to the land, culture, ancestors, and spirits that surround us daily. *Siapo* is his sanctuary, offering solace amidst life's challenges and grounding him, fostering a connection with the spirits that encompass us. It provides the balance we all strive for, allowing us to love unconditionally until our final moments.

When invited to the 2024 FestPAC last year, he felt honored and immediately accepted the invitation. He devoted his time after work to prepare *Siapo* for the *Malaga*, increasing his efforts as the event approached, often working late into the night. The dedication paid off, and he has cherished every moment of it.

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I enjoy representing our island's spirit and sharing our culture with the Pacific community.

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Deliah Paopao

Deliah Samarra Vā'itaua Paopao is from Leone, American Samoa and Fitiuta, Manu'a. She discovered her love for art in the fifth grade and has been honing her drawing skills ever since.

While enrolled at the American Samoa Community College (ASCC), Ms. Paopao expanded her art interests under the guidance of Regina Meredith Fitiao and earned her Associate's degree in Visual Arts. She received a scholarship to continue her studies and will attend the University of Hawaii at Manoa this fall to further her love of art.

Ms. Paopao's selection as a delegate of American Samoa for FestPAC is a great achievement, driven by her commitment to representation. This opportunity to present her interests holds great personal and professional value for her. While she openly identifies as an introverted artist and has found it culturally shocking to meet new people and experience their traditions, this experience has been life changing for her.

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My motivation for coming to Hawaii for the Festival of Pacific Arts & Culture is to share our culture, especially the art of *siapo* making with other people and to also learn from our brother and sister island nations.

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Puataunofu Tofaeono

Ms. Puataunofu Tofaeono's love for art has always centered around drawing and painting. She was introduced to *Siapo* making during indigenous art lessons at the ASCC with Regina Meredith Fitiao. Over the years, Ms. Tofaeono has been fortunate to receive extensive guidance from Reggie and has immersed herself in the intricate process of *siapo* making.

Her journey has involved learning about the plants used, backcloth preparation, *u'a* beating, acquiring natural dyes, traditional *siapo* designs, the history of *siapo* artisans, exploration of various *siapo* styles, and more. She deeply appreciates our sacred ancestral art form, as it connects us to our past and heritage.

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AMERIKA SAMOA



2024 FESTIVAL OF PACIFIC ARTS & CULTURE - HAWAII

WEAVING/ADORNMENTS



Weaving is another cornerstone of Samoan cultural expression.

Traditionally, Samoan weavers use pandanus leaves (*lau'ie*) and other natural fibers to create mats, baskets, and other items. The process of weaving is labor-intensive and requires great skill and patience. The intricate patterns are not only aesthetically pleasing but also carry cultural and symbolic meanings.

At the 2024 FestPAC, the Samoan weaving team includes Niukini Luani, Zarahemla Mamea, Losalia Ah Chee, Tiena Tamahaga, and Fataoalii Papalii, whose involvement signifies the passing of traditional knowledge to the next generation. This group's presence highlights the communal and intergenerational nature of Samoan weaving practices.

WEAVING/ADORNMENTS



Tiena Tamahaga

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O le lalaga e sili atu nai lo o se faatufugaga, o nisi ua avea ma galuega tausi.

Weaving is more than a art, it is a way of life for some...

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Tiena Tamahaga, the eldest member of the American Samoa delegation from the village of Faga’alu, is a retiree who worked at the Territorial Administration on Aging (TAOA) office from 2014 to 2018. Her talent and experience have been widely shared through non-profit organizations such as TAMM (*Toe Afua Mai Samoa*) and *So'o Ula Aso lelei*.

A woman of many talents, Tiena takes joy in creating gifts for her loved ones through her passion for weaving. She brings light to the American Samoa village *fale* at the Hawaii Convention Center with her uplifting spirit.

Visitors are drawn to her positive attitude and the love and respect she shows as she shares her weaving stories. Tiena takes pride in representing the beauty of our island of American Samoa each day, cherishing this exciting journey in her heart.

WEAVING/ADORNMENTS

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Weaving is a beloved pastime of mine. When passion drives your actions, you'll never tire of pursuing your interests. FestPAC instills a sense of identity, especially when your cultural practices align with your passions, shaping your true identity. As a Samoan, I find joy in my craft.

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Losalia Ah Chee

Losalia Ah Chee, from the villages of Pago Pago, Taufusi, Palauli, Samoa has been employed with TAOA for two years. She recalls teaching herself the art of weaving Samoan handicraft as part of her daily routine.

Losalia views her weaving skills as a gift from God, cultivated through prayer and dedicated practice, allowing her to appreciate and honor the craftsmanship passed down by her ancestors. Engaging in something she loves as part of this delegation is a blessing she looks forward to share with her family back home.

She extends heartfelt appreciation to her coworkers, fellow weavers, and the entire American Samoa delegation. Their collaborative efforts have made for a seamless journey, showcased by the daily weaving and handicraft displays at the Hawaii Convention Center.

WEAVING/ADORNMENTS



Niukini Luani

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The most important thing I've learned as a weaver is blending different ideas, inspired by the diverse cultures around us.

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Niukini Luani, a proud resident of Masausi and a dedicated employee at the TAOA office, enjoys sharing her talent with others.

Motivated by her passion for weaving, Niukini collaborates with skilled artisans to exhibit their exquisite creations at TAOA, where she began her weaving journey. As she represents American Samoa through her craft, Niukini values the opportunity to learn new techniques from fellow weavers through networking.

WEAVING/ADORNMENTS

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I was excited to attend the Festival of Pacific Arts and Culture to share our rich culture, passed down through generations. I was inspired by my grandparents and I'd like to ensure its continuation to our next generation.

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Zarahemla Mamea-Faalii

Zarahemla Mamea-Faalii, a young member of the American Samoa Weavers team from the village of Alao, is renowned for her passion for weaving. She is the wife of Bishop Penaia Faalii of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and also a proud mother of three. Alongside her weaving endeavors, she crafts hats from coconut leaves.

After teaching at Matatula Elementary School for almost ten years, she was excited to join the Weavers team because of her passion for the craft. Her involvement often includes participating in events such as the Mosooi Festival as an instructor and hosting personal workshops at various venues, churches, and public gatherings.

WEAVING/ADORNMENTS



AMERIKA SAMOA



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ENU/AFA MAKING



Preserving tradition: A seasoned weaver passing down the craft to Leatiota Puipui by the shore, weaving together generations and family ties. The legacy endures as the next generation's skilled hands continue the tradition at lively cultural celebrations."

Weavers from Manu'atele are on a mission to revive the traditional fishing technique known as *Enu*. In the past, this method was essential for catching fish, and artisans like Leatiota Puipui and Lesi'i Salesa are dedicated to preserving this tradition. Puipui claims that weaving an *Enu* with love can make it last for 30 years.

This revival of traditional skills not only honors Samoan cultural roots but also highlights the timeless significance of traditional fishing techniques in the Pacific, perpetuating a legacy of heritage and sustainability.

ENU/AFA MAKING



Puipui Leatiota

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The art of *Enu* crafting is not often seen today. It has been passed down through generations in my family. I am lucky to have learned this skill from my father. It is my duty to ensure the preservation of this cultural tradition by sharing it to my daughter, who is currently accompanying me at FestPAC.

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Puipui Leatiota, a native of Olosega, Manu'a, is a third-generation *Enu* maker and 'Afa weaver in his family. He learned both the art of *Enu* making and 'Afa weaving from his father, who passed down this skill to him and the younger generations of their village. Puipui served as his father's apprentice, who was the sole *Enu* maker in Olosega.

In his youth, Leatiota was tasked with obtaining 'ie'ie, a type of bark or tree material used in the *Enu* making process, which grows on the mountainside. This was a daunting task for Leatiota when his father asked him to retrieve them. The 'ie'ie undergoes a meticulous beating process that typically takes 2 to 3 weeks to ensure it is prepared correctly.

After graduating from high school in 1984, Leatiota pursued higher education to better support his family in Manu'a. However, in 1987, when hurricane *Tusi* struck the Manu'a Islands, he was stranded in Manu'a due to the storm's impact on travel. Leatiota recalled the late Honorable Governor Lutali advising Manu'a residents on Tutuila to remain there and care for their families during the recovery phase.

Given the circumstances, Leatiota decided to forgo completing his education and focused on supporting his family. This period provided him with the opportunity to hone his *Enu* making skills passed down by his father. He hopes to pass this knowledge on to his family, especially the youth of his village. Mr. Leatiota was invited to teach a class on *Enu* making at the local National Park Service some years ago.

ENU/AFA MAKING

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la faataua le malamalama o
tupulaga i measina ua le toe vaaia.
Embrace the illumination of youth
regarding American Samoa's
treasured arts and culture.

”



Pea Salesa

Mr. Pea Salesa is currently apprenticed to Mr. Puipui Leatiota. Salesa considers himself fortunate to participate in FestPAC, hoping to gain further knowledge and insights from other island nations regarding their methods of fish trapping.

The emergence of modern materials like nylon rope and glue disrupted the traditional 'Afa or sinnet industry. However, the *Enu/Afa* masters are here to reintroduce us to the magic of 'Afa in our tech-driven world. In Manu'a, there's a saying: *Ua 'afa e Tasi Ta'ū*, symbolizing unity like a sturdy sinnet. It emphasizes making firm and unanimous decisions as one tightly knit community.

ENU/AFA MAKING



AMERIKA SAMOA



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HO'OU LU LĀHUI
Regenerating Oceania

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