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Impacts on the Contemporary Visual Arts Community in Samoa

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Impacts on the Contemporary Visual Arts Community in Samoa

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S.I.T. Samoa, Fall 2013

Abstract

This study illuminates the world of contemporary visual art in Samoa. Research was primarily conducted using personal communications with members of the contemporary visual art community. A basic framework of the community was established by overviewing the present informal galleries, formal galleries, and art schools. This project explores the impacts felt on the contemporary visual art community; their subsequent challenges, and successes. These impacts include; a cash economy, conflict between traditional and contemporary styles, a need for higher education, Christianity, Samoan artists overseas, in-country and international support. Possible solutions and hopes for the future are also discussed.

Key words: Fine Arts, Art Education, Rgl Stu: Asia, Austr & Oceania

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Introduction

This study explores the field of contemporary visual arts in Samoa. As the country modernizes there is a clear shift away from traditional art production towards creation of modern artworks. This study hopes to illuminate the small art community that exists here and explore what impacts them, the challenges and successes. This study attempts to bring exposure to an often ignored contemporary Samoan visual art scene. It brings together a variety of personal communications and secondary research to establish a baseline of the visual arts community and analyze future prospects.

Methodology

As the project evolved it looked at what factors impact the arts community, what challenges they face, successes, and future prospects. This study mainly used personal communications with members of the art community. Interviews were set up and visits were made to Leulumoega Fou School of Fine Arts and The National University of Samoa. As with any study, there were challenges that limited the scope. Time constraints did not allow this study to be fully comprehensive of the contemporary visual art community. Rather, contacts were made as possible, and pieced together to begin construction of the contemporary visual art community's basic framework.

Finding the art

An integral piece of this study was to explore the contemporary art community to understand what exists in Samoa today. In interviews most individuals agreed that there is a larger space for art in Samoa than existed in the past. There are three established galleries, The Vanya Taule'alo Gallery, MADD Gallery, and EFKS Museum, while the G212 gallery is up and coming at the National University of Samoa. The artworks hanging at the international airport have finally been updated giving exposure to young up and coming artists. Buses driving around the island are sporting vibrant artworks, and hotels exhibit the work of local artists on their walls. In addition the next generation of artists are receiving more support than ever. A primary level visual art curriculum has been written. The secondary level visual arts curriculum has been in place for ten years now and its effects are being seen as motivated artists continue on to tertiary art education at the Leulumoega Fou School of Fine Arts and at the National University of Samoa.

Galleries

Vanya Taule'alo started The Vanya Taule'alo Gallery in February 2011 as a place to show work for young emerging artists. Exhibitions are changed regularly, showing both local artists and those from the Pacific region (Taule'alo, 13 November 2013). Momoe Von Reiche established the MADD Gallery (an acronym for motivational art, dance, and drama) in 1983. It all started with her children in mind and grew from there as more and more children started to join the sessions. The gallery functions as a space to teach children performance, arts, and literacy. Her children's and her works are also displayed

in the gallery. At the moment classes are held for early readers around the ages of 4-7 about once a week. They do painting, movement, dramatization and acting; teaching English is also an incorporated component for these youngsters. The gallery regularly invites other artists, local and overseas, to come perform or display their works (Von Reiche, 19 November 2013). The EFKS Museum located in Malua is funded and run by the Congregational Christian Church of Samoa. Groundbreaking started in 2009 and the museum's grand opening occurred May 12th 2011. The museum was opened with the intent to display the artwork of students from Leulumoega Fou School of Fine Arts. Since August 26th of 2013, the EFKS Museum is under the management of Tuigamala Opetaiia Liu. With a background in economics he is hoping to expand the EFKS Museum and make it a much more profitable business endeavor. He has created a corporate business plan to formalize and develop the museum structure. The museum gained exposure through contact with Jason's in New Zealand, Samoa Tourist Authority, and a reurrection of the museum. Plans are made to expand the museum to not only exhibit the artwork of Leulumoega Fou students but also include research on the church, Samoan culture and history. Construction is being done currently to finish the two additional wings, a café, and conference room (Liu, 20 November 2013).

The up and coming Samoan gallery G212 is located in Leua Latai's prep room at the National University of Samoa. She was frustrated having to continually ask for a space to show her students work so she finally decided to set up her own gallery. It's new this semester but she already has four shows planned for next year. These include a 12 year old young lady who's work will open the season, a solo student exhibition, and a group show of all her students at the end of the semester (Latai, 21 November 2013). Not only

do these three women run their own galleries, they are also practicing artists. In addition to the formal gallery setting there are other venues for displaying contemporary Samoan art. Hotels and restaurants around town such as Paddles, Sails, The Tanoa Hotel, and Aggie Greys display the works of local artists. Much of the bus art is produced by a Leulumoega Fou School of Fine Arts graduate. The Faleolo International Airport has housed the works of Leulumoega Fou School of Fine Arts students for about a decade. Just recently new works were finally brought in, through the initiative of Enid Westerlund, of Business Development for the airport. The airport has a two-year contract with Leulumoega Fou to display student works rotating on a 3-4 month basis (Westerlund, 12 November 2013).

Art Schools

Visual arts are taught at the primary, secondary, and tertiary levels in Samoa. The primary school curriculum includes visual arts as a subject, stating, “students will learn about appropriate techniques of traditional and modern performance associated with music making, dance and visual arts. They will develop critical awareness and enjoyment of the arts. Schools will ensure that students participate in a wide range of experiences in the performing and visual arts to provide for a balanced curriculum” (Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture, January 2006). The secondary school visual arts curriculum was prepared by the Visual Arts Subject Committee and written by Vanya Taule’alo in May 2004. Art Making, Communicating and Interpreting in the Arts, and Art In Culture and Society are the three components of the curriculum’s framework. These three sections aim to have the students proficient in physical art making skills,

communication of their works and analysis of others, and gain an understanding of artworks relationship to culture past and present (Curriculum Materials and Assessment Division, May 2004). Leua Latai believes there are signs the curriculum put in place about ten years ago is working effectively. As a professor at the National University of Samoa she sees students coming in to the art program “because they want to, they’re interested, and they have a background” while in the past they came in with no previous art experience and solely to receive one of their elective requirements.

As for tertiary education there are two distinct options. Leulumoega Fou School of Fine Arts and The National University of Samoa. The Leulumoega School of Fine Arts was established in 1987 as a vision of Ernesto Coter in close conjunction with Leua Latai. The original philosophy emphasizes the natural environment and Samoan culture, leading to production of student works that maintain the traditional aspects of Samoan culture and mythology with a twist through the young people’s interpretations (Latai, 21 November 2013). Today the Leulumoega Fou School of Fine Arts, an EFKS affiliated school, is headed by Pelenato Liufau the principal and a former graduate. Students can receive a certificate of fine arts after completion of two years and a diploma of fine arts after three years. The Samoa Qualifications Association controls the school curriculum as an approved Post School Education and Training Provider; therefore students are able to receive legitimate accreditations for their studies. However, Pelenato tries his best to maintain the tradition of hands on learning on which the school was founded. The school then transitioned into teaching in a uniform style, which he believes limited creativity. Now his goal is to give students the opportunity to imagine personal content and shape the curriculum for each individual. Art history ranging from prehistoric to contemporary,

drawing, painting, graphic design, mosaic and stain glass, sculpture woodwork, print media, and contextual studies in which the students work on writing, presentation, and critique are all offered subjects. English will become a subject next year and filmmaking will be introduced when they get a computer (Liufau, 21 November 2013).

The National University of Samoa's Faculty of Education houses the Expressive and Practical Arts department, under which is a specialization in visual arts. Leua Latai is the sole lecturer of this department, although she occasionally brings in Momoe Von Reiche, a fellow artist to teach a few of the courses. When teacher trainees come in they pick an elective, those that pick visual arts become Leua's students. These are not traditional art students; rather they are students of art education. However they take practical art classes as well as art education classes. Leua both teaches and designs the courses, with the exception of a few courses previously in place before her employment. Courses offered include Elements and Principles of Art, Learning About Our Environment, Introduction to Drawing and Painting, Introduction to Graphic Design, Art History: Ancient Civilizations to 21st Century, Teaching Visual Art at Primary School, Teaching Visual Art at Secondary Level, Modern Samoan Popular Art and Culture, Introduction to Construction: Materials, Techniques and Wearable Fashion, as well as Art History: Art in Oceania. A limited number of courses can be offered so Leua tries to make sure students are receiving a mix of theory background and practical skill. Student's final year culminates in an individual thesis and exhibition. Students graduate with a Bachelor of Education and a specialization in visual art allowing them to teach art. They are then posted to schools by the Ministry of Education Sports and Culture (MESC) and most continue to produce their own art. These two components formulate the

baseline of the existing contemporary visual art community. This community is greatly impacted by the unique culture and society of Samoa.

Impacts on the Art Community: Challenges, Successes, and Possible Solutions

There are several specific elements influencing the art community in Samoa. In a swiftly modernizing world artists face a lack of income, they must combat the dichotomy of traditional Samoan art style versus contemporary works. Young emerging artists encounter difficulty on an international scale due to a lack of customary academics taught in the tertiary art programs. In addition, the contemporary art community is not untouched by Samoa's heavily Christian society. The Samoan artists and art community overseas gives both inspiration and frustrations to local artists. Furthermore, international and in-country support is growing, expanding the vitality of this community.

A Cash Economy

Many of the challenges Samoan artists face are centered on struggles with money. Artists need to make a living for survival, which impacts the quality of their work as they may sacrifice self-expression for a more sellable piece. Other forms of employment are sought out, leaving less time for personal practice. Materials are costly and variety is narrow, greatly limiting artists. Individuals are often motivated to study art as a trade in hopes of finding work. Faosiliva, a student of Leulumoega Fou Fine Arts School, came to art school so he can work and get a job (Faosiliva, 12 November 2013). Those who attend NUS are studying contemporary art alongside art education, providing them with a more reliable option for employment.

Most artists cannot alone rely on selling their artworks to make ends meet. Artworks cannot be sold at the high price they would be valued at overseas. Vanya prices artworks as low as possible in an attempt to sell, but these low prices don't provide the appropriate income for the artist (Taule'alo, 13 November 2013). Paintings sold at the EFKS museum can be priced higher but subsequently a portion of the profit goes to the church, school, and finally the artist themselves. It's very difficult to survive on that type of money. Some business people are selling local artworks for higher prices overseas, increasing exposure, but unfortunately local artists are not receiving a large portion of the funds generated from their products (Toleafoa, 21 November 2013). Although fine visual art is still difficult to sell locally, there has been a clear improvement. Momoe Von Reiche has started selling more works locally, but previously was primarily selling overseas. She joked, "I'll never be a millionaire in Samoa!" but looked on the bright side stating, "at least there's an eye for this kind of art. They are starting to know there is a space here and to look at life differently, and look at art differently" (Von Reiche, 19 November 2013). The need for income can lead artists to create less original works, and instead create pieces that are more generic but can sell faster.

When artists have difficulty making ends meet they may start producing artwork that could be described as "touristy" or seen as less original. Artists continually struggle to find a balance between art for self-expression and the need to produce easily sellable art. Vanya expressed that a gallery with pictures of Frangipani and Hibiscus would be more successful, but emphasized that just because it may be easier does not mean she is going to give up (Taule'alo, 13 November 2013).

For the average Samoan artist it is almost impossible to make a living on art production alone. Instead most artists have to turn to other forms of employment to make ends meet, which in turn gives artists less time to create. One of Leua Latai's major challenges is finding time to dedicate to her practice while balancing her workload at NUS (Latai, 21 November 2013). Pelenato Liufau conveyed a similar dilemma and has difficulty identifying himself, as a teacher or an artist. The dominate amount of his time is spent at school or doing work for the school. He has less time to create work for solo exhibitions because he mainly makes artwork for the church; items such as stained glass, furniture, and crosses. Although he expressed some regret that he isn't able to focus a large amount of time on his own work, he is happy he can contribute to the church and his living expenses are paid for (Liufau, 21 November 2013).

The amount of in country art education has grown massively over the years, but the issue now is that these portions of education receive inadequate budgets. Leua Latai, a professor at NUS, turns to the community for additional support. She works with local companies and writes to those overseas for donations of materials. Her exhibition and sale of student works at the end of the semester brought in a bit of money for the department as well (Latai, 21 November 2013).

The lack of available materials in country and high prices of supplies are another challenge artists face. Luckily there are more supplies in country now than there ever were before; shops sell canvas and basic paints, although higher quality must still be purchased from overseas (Von Reiche, 19 November 2013). Without these high quality paints an artist's work cannot be sold at top price. A lack of materials is limiting to

students as well. With less money artists need to turn to innovation, by playing with recycled items and naturally available materials (Toleafoa, 21 November 2013).

Conflict between traditional and contemporary styles

In Samoa's ever-changing society a divide arises between traditional artworks and contemporary style. Many elder members of society are not understanding or supportive of the contemporary. Others would argue that a regurgitation of the same traditional styles over and over is hurting originality. However, artists are choosing to react to this challenge in a variety of ways. Some feel limited by the traditional Samoan culture and society, while others use it as a platform for further artistic exploration. Other artists ignore traditional styles entirely, but some still use traditional styles within contemporary art as an attempt to raise awareness for a disappearing Samoan culture. Somewhere in the middle exist many artists who blend traditional styles with a contemporary twist.

Artists who take advantage of the divide between traditional and contemporary chose to blend these two together. Pelenato Liufau gets his ideas from raising his children, family, and village life in Samoa. When in New Zealand he saw how people working hard for a better future often shifted away from how children are traditionally raised in Samoa. He created large pieces of public work showing these particular children to raise awareness for the issue. Other pieces of his depict village life, and its modernization. These pieces are displayed with a full matte style, inspired by tapa. The images are a bit faint and he used colors to make them appear older, signifying his roots and how they are starting to disappear. He wants to reinforce his culture with his work, but doesn't simply recreate traditional pieces of art. (Liufau, 21 November 2013). By mixing a new style

with messages of traditional culture Pelenato has found a great balance. Lealofi Toleafoa, an artist and teacher at Leulumoega, takes a similar approach. In the beginning of her art career she painted realistically but her style has evolved over the years. Now she likes to create something of her own, focusing on new and different styles. She gets many of her ideas from the legends of Samoa, but only uses this as a basis to begin her works. She describes painting as “being in another world. It’s like a dream” (Toleafoa, 21 November 2013). She imagines herself within the legend, lets herself feel the movements and uses those emotions to paint. She’s very proud of her country and therefore enjoys basing her images on its legends and natural environment.

Artists may be frustrated when dealing with members of society who are not understanding of contemporary Samoan art. While Leua was participating in a standard critique of her work she was faced with the question, “how come you’re not doing *siapo* and *tapa*?” Her response was clear and self-assured,

Well I’m a Samoan, I’m a modern contemporary Samoan woman and this is how I see the world. This is modern contemporary art. I don’t do *tapa*, I don’t do *siapo*. And I think that all you’re doing is trying to put me in a box and stereotype the work that I should be doing, but this is my work, and this is Samoan work (Latai, 21 November 2013).

Many Samoan’s don’t understand contemporary art, they only agree with the realistic, according to teacher Amosa Leaia. “They are not understanding of the changes in the world, but with more and more contemporary works showing up at the EFKS Museum people are gaining more exposure” (Leaia, 21 November 2013). Teachers like Amosa try to explain the works to visitors and a change is beginning to be seen.

Vanya Taule’alo finds there is a lack of freedom, making it difficult to address certain controversial topics such as sexuality, through artwork. “Artists here are looking to affirm

culture, while outsiders look at it in a more critical way” because they are further from the source they have more freedom to comment (Taule’alo, 13 November 2013).

Other artists don’t let the culture of Samoan limit them in anyway. Momoe Von Reiche has no trouble taking her artwork in whatever direction interests her. She admits there is a time and space for traditional patterns, but chooses not to use them in her own work. That is not to say that her artwork is not inspired by Samoa, pieces of hers on display at MADD Gallery are greatly inspired by the colors of Samoa. She’s been lucky to have a good environment and family that supports and understands the contemporary arts. A lot of artists face difficulty without support from their families, “even if they are contemporary artists there’s always a hold back because they have that traditional theme” (Von Rieche, 19 November 2013).

The conflict between traditional theme and a modernizing society, leads for difficulty when teaching contemporary art to a young generation and inspiring their individuality. Momoe Von Reiche states, “I think that parents want to encourage their children, but they still hold back...The way they bring children up in Samoa there’s so many dos and don’ts” She’s glad that many parents come to her studio and are motivated to have their children grown and experience the arts, but there is still an obstacle of strictness that needs to be overcome. When teaching older university students

They’re so scared to even put a pencil on the paper. I say ok, scribble. They cannot scribble. They’re even scared to make a mark on the paper, cause the mark might get dirty and they need rubber to rub it out and I say no rubbers! They can’t let go. So I have to go there with my hand say go with that! And the feeling of letting go and then away they go. I say don’t worry if it goes off the bloody line! But that’s how they are, they’ve grown up like that, if they do something wrong they’re so scared cause they might get slapped (Von Reiche, 19 November 2013).

In response to this challenge, Momoe, and other Samoan artists are focused on fostering individualism and providing support for the younger generation to create their own unique contemporary art. Momoe has created an atmosphere for her own children and the children she teaches “to be absorbent, to be aware of what’s around them, to be constantly looking at things, not to be closed up, and not to live inside that bubble. They have to open their eyes” (Von Reiche, 19 November 2013). Momoe has done a fantastic job of opening up her young students to the world around them and fostering creativity. When parents bring their quiet and shy children in she goes “right down to their level”. She’ll roll around on the floor, dress up, finger paint, and dance, to reach the children and make them feel comfortable with art and self-expression (Von Reiche, 21 November 2013).

At NUS, Leua Latai works hard to encourage her students. She has put together numerous projects in the past years that give students the chance to collaborate; students painted murals on campus with a New Zealand artist, and currently there’s a collaboration between The National University of Samoa, The University of the South Pacific, and Australia National University students running a seminar on Samoan arts and culture (Latai, 21 November 2013). Teacher Amosa also really tries to encourage his students to use their imagination and shy away from realistic art works. He feels there is no need for realistic works, as these are things you can just see in the world around you. By creating contemporary work his students can keep up with the world moving swiftly around them (Leaia, 21 November 2013). Not only do these art teachers foster creativity within their own students, they establish a reciprocal relationship. Lealofi emphasized

that she receives fresh ideas and is inspired to paint more when she's around her students.

Need for higher education

Another issue that arose frequently when discussing areas of possible improvement in the art community is the need for a greater emphasis on academic education for young emerging artists. It can be difficult for these artists to expand their career to a wider audience when they don't have the necessary skills to communicate on a global scale.

Many of the students starting out at Leulumoega Fou were those who did not excel academically; they come in with a little bit of talent but no knowledge of the arts. Teacher, Amosa Leaia does what he can to inspire them. He'll start small giving them a little exercise to draw their attention and build confidence. Once the student is happy they can move on from there (Leaia, 21 November 2013). Because they don't have much hope academically, Pelenato finds these types of students willing to commit themselves fully to the arts. They find a space to express themselves and it gives him great joy to help out these kids (Liufau, 21 November 2013).

Students who come into art classes at NUS often lack basic reading and writing skills. Von Reiche states, "You have to come down to the basics when working with these students. You have to talk in English and transcribe everything in Samoa. They wouldn't understand the terminology. Of course in our language we don't have words to translate (for the art terminology)" (Von Reiche, 19 November 2013). It can make lecturers jobs difficult, but luckily Leua Latai and Momoe Von Reiche have the patience and determination to make it work. Leulumoega Fou School of Fine Arts will be adding

English as a separate class next year in order to boost the students success after graduation (Liufau, 21 November 2013).

Christianity

Church and Christianity are integral parts of Samoan society, so it is no surprise it will have some impact on the visual arts community. The Leulumoega Fou School of Fine Arts and the EFKS Museum are both run by the EFKS church organization. There has been some subsequent criticism of how the church's control impacts the education of students. There is a clear difference between the very contemporary and even abstract paintings seen at the MADD gallery versus works containing more traditional patterns and themes seen at the EFKS Museum. Some local artists have assumed the church will have a large say in what these young artists create and question how much freedom is given.

On the other hand the church has positively impacted the visual arts community. Some may interpret the student's work as repetitive, while others see them as pieces that put a twist on the traditional aspects of Samoan culture and mythology (Latai, 21 November 2013). These organizations would not exist without support from the church. Church support has funded an entire art school and museum, giving young artists exposure to the public and a space to improve their practice. Many of these students were less successful academically and the art school provides them with a trade they can bring to the workforce. Churches themselves also provide another platform where artists can sell their work. Much of Pelenato Liufau's work recently has been focused on creating

artwork he can sell to the church, providing him with a source of income (Liufau, 21 November 2013).

Samoan artists overseas

There is no denying that a larger spread of opportunities exists for Samoan artists overseas. Higher education art institutions are well established and greater in number. The acceptance and visibility of contemporary visual arts is greater. Art supplies are easier to acquire. However the presence of a largely growing overseas Pacific art community has great impacts to locally practicing artists in Samoa.

The successes of Samoan artists overseas, such as Fatu Feu'u, have inspired young artists. They provide role models and a sense of hope for students and young artists. When they travel overseas and return to Samoa they bring back new and innovative ideas, helping to expand the art world here. However, their presence has also put pressure on them to achieve the same success. Paul Junior Sheck, a student at Leulumoega Fou, was pressured by his parents to be like Fatu. However, this young artist has insisted he pursue his own style (Sheck, 12 November 2013). It isn't hard to imagine that other young artists are facing similar pressures to live up to the achievements of successful Samoan artists who have established themselves overseas.

The overseas art community can also be stifling to artists who don't want to be boxed in as a "Pacific Artist". Momoe Von Reiche makes it clear that her work is not to be classified, "I'm an artist. I paint and create...I'm just an artist" (Von Reiche, 19 November 2013). Leua Latai has faced these pressures as well, but uses them a jumping off point instead of letting them bring her down. When she was studying in the states she

felt boxed in so she began research into Margaret Mead and other anthropologists and created works using the issues surrounding their anthropological studies (Latai, 21 November 2013).

For other Samoans they might feel that the “box” is really a misrepresentation of their own country. Local artists feel that overseas Samoan artists are often confused about their own identity and their work takes on a reflection of this inner conflict. “There’s a constant trying to go back to Samoan this, Samoan that (with artists operating overseas). But you should say I’m Samoan, this is Samoa, this is contemporary *avant garde* Samoan art, you don’t go back” (Latai, 21 November 2013).

Support for the art community

There is not an overwhelming amount of support for the contemporary visual art community in Samoa. Momoe Von Reiche reflects, “Members of the Samoan society aren’t so much at the level yet to really understand contemporary art. It’s just starting to move along” (Von Reiche, 19 November 2013). Specifically there is little publication locally and internationally, a small amount of government support, and not enough exposure for the community. These issues are currently being dealt with and addressed by members of the community.

There is little to no academic publication or recognition overseas of art being created here in Samoa. Vanya believes, if an artwork or exhibition got greater exposure it would be a lift to the community. Currently there is more visibility for performing arts on an international scale. The visibility of contemporary visual arts needs to be increased. This can be accomplished when there are more practicing visual artists in the country

(Taule'alo, 13 November 2013). Additionally the Samoa Arts Council hopes to increase exposure. The Samoa Arts Council was initiated in 2012 through The University of the South Pacific. Allan Alo is President, Vanya Taule'alo is the Vice President, and many other members are on board, including Leua Latai as the Director for Education and Training. Membership is voluntary, so it can be difficult to get down to business. This year they are just starting to review the ideas from last year's meetings. The two big projects in planning are a conference for the arts and an international arts festival to be based here in Samoa (Latai, 21 November 2013). Hopefully this Samoa Arts Council will be more successful than ones in the past. Momoe Von Reiche expresses her concerns, "With it being a government organization they have the right to ask for handouts from different organizations. They get a lot of money, but everyone wants something out of it. So I'm always wondering are they really going to set up things properly? I don't know" (Von Reiche, 19 November 2013). Regardless, the creation of the Samoa Arts Council is a milestone that inspires hope for the growth of contemporary Samoan art in the future.

In country there is some visibility for arts in the Samoa Observer. An Art, Music & Fashion section can be found on the online edition. When a show occurs at the Vanya Taule'alo gallery she places an announcement in the paper. In addition she's starting a weekly art page (Taule'alo, 13 November). The Museum of Samoa has also recently reached out to support the contemporary art community. Susana Liufau curated an exhibition of student works from the Leulumoega Fou School of Fine Arts, which opened at the Museum of Samoa September 2013. Students took turns for two weeks to give museum guests a tour of the exhibition (Apelu, 10 September 2013). Matafeo Falanaipupu, CEO of MESC, feels:

The exhibition is an indication that there are more noted tasks at the Museum. The Leulumoega Fou School of Fine Arts and the Museum of Samoa met as friends in the Solomon Islands (at the Festival of Pacific Arts), then continued dialogue in the past year about possible activities that both institutions could host or implement to promote the importance of Art, Culture, and their preservation in Samoa (Su'a, 4 September 2013).

The exhibition was the first of its kind for The Museum of Samoa and hopefully a relationship between visual arts and the museum will continue to flourish.

Artists have expressed frustrations that the government doesn't do much to support the contemporary arts. For example, one of Fatu Feu'u's paintings was gifted to the Prime Minister but never was hung up. When Vanya visited the Prime Minister to argue a spot for the painting his response was "we don't understand contemporary art".

Furthermore when a large exhibit was held for the 50th anniversary of Samoa no government official was in attendance, although several had been invited. To add injury to insult the Governor General of New Zealand flew in to be in attendance (Taule'alo, 13 November 2013).

Samoa's presence at international festivals such as the Pacific Art Festival is a great way to increase exposure and foster creativity. The festival was started in 1972 by the Conference of the South Pacific Commission. Its intention was to provide island communities to share their cultural traditions with one another and the globe. The festival meets every four years, rotating in location among the 27 participating Pacific Island countries. Most recently the 2012 festival was held in the Solomon Islands (Newton, 9 June 2010). Pelenato Liufau has been lucky to receive invitations to some of these festivals, most recently in the Solomon Islands. He gladly attended so he could expose himself to the Pacific and the world. In the past ten years the Pacific Arts Festival has expanded to provide contemporary visual arts with their own space. In addition The Next

Generation Pacific Artists Program, run by The Pacific Islands Society (PacSoc) has chosen Lalovai Peseta, a Samoan artist, as one of its newest members. Over the next five years this works of this group will be shared across the globe. PacSoc aims “to facilitate a deeper awareness and appreciation for the abundant artists talent in the Pacific Islands region by helping promote emerging artists, providing professional development opportunities, and putting on a roster of showcase events with its global partners” (Pacific Islands Society, 2 August 2013). The inclusion of a Samoan artist to this exclusive group proves recognition of Samoan artists overseas is beginning to grow.

Analysis and Conclusion

The contemporary art society in Samoa was almost non-existent a decade ago. Exploration of the current art education and galleries gives insight to factors impacting the community, both challenging and supportive in nature. In the larger picture the up and coming contemporary visual art community contributes in a few ways; to Samoan individuals, the art community, and the country as a whole. The modernizing society gives Samoa room for expansion and growth of the visual arts in the future.

Just like artists anywhere, Samoan artists use their practice as a form of self-expression. It enriches their lives personally, giving them an emotional release. For this reason, they are determined to continue their practice regardless of challenges they face from Samoan society. “We can’t give up what we love because this is our life. We love expressing” (Von Reiche, 19 November 2013). Artist Lealofi uses her art to communicate, waking up every morning wondering what she’s going to create today. She describes being an artist “like living in paradise” (Toleafoa, 21 November 2013).

In the education of a child self-expression can build self confidence. This is especially important for children in Samoa as they are raised in a society that is not always accepting of youngsters' opinions.

Through the arts there's no mistakes, and it's vital for me, for the students I work with. They're so bogged down with shut up shut up you're not old enough to say anything or have an opinion. This art is a form of therapy for our people...in the end you value them, you value their work, they feel valued...they become confident, there's a slight change in their demeanor (Latai, 21 November 2013)

Art can give children a platform to express what they're thinking. "The arts is a non-verbal form of expression that's really important for our young people" (Latai, 21 November 2013). It gives children a space to identify themselves as individuals. Schools in Samoa now teach visual arts as MESC has acknowledged that expression can greatly support the growth of a child, which in turn will nourish Samoa's future.

The Visual Arts offer students a means of fostering their creativity and self-expression as they learn to communicate and develop sensitivity to the world them. Through an exploration of the forms and languages of Visual Arts, students can express ideas, feelings, culture and their relationship with others and the natural and material environment (Curriculum Materials and Assessment, May 2004).

Fortunately, due to a greater amount of visual art education in Samoa than ever before, children have this opportunity for self-expression and therefore are swiftly building self-confidence. For all ages art can provide an informal means of therapy, helping individuals work through their hardships.

Today's technological day and age places new pressures on Samoa's traditional culture. The contemporary arts can help maintain the core of Samoan values and tradition. "Art is a written record of important history and tradition. Samoans are very

creative people; they use their own resources and nature around them. They are all artists, making canoes, *fales*, *tanoas*, etc” (Liufau, 21 November 2013).

However, the arts are not stationary, they are fluid and evolving along with Samoan society. “I think now with so much communication in the world people are just starting to look at new things...Reaching out, knowing there’s a change everywhere all at once” (Von Rieche, 19 November 2013). Samoan artists deal with and express these societal changes through the works they create. There’s much more exposure to the outside world, providing Samoan artists with ideas they’ve never before experienced. “With the internet now you don’t need to travel to MOMA in New York, or visit Munich, or Paris, in just two seconds you can have a look at all that” (Von Reiche, 19 November 2013). These are promising signs for the growth and success of the contemporary visual arts community.

Contemporary Samoan visual arts are a growing component of Samoan society. The established galleries and art schools have improved over the years and show promising signs their growth will continue. Local artists are shaped and molded by many factors of life and Samoan culture. When these influences are challenging, the local artists show great resilience and ability to work through difficulty. Their artworks support themselves as individuals, the greater art community, and enrich the culture of Samoa. Although the contemporary visual art field is still moderately small, the future holds great promise for this community.

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Glossary of terms

Siapo- The Samoan term for bark cloth, a traditional art form.

Tapu- The general term for bark cloth.

Fale- A Samoan house

Tanoa- A wooden bowl for holding kava (a drink made from the roots of the kava plant)