



Following the tradition of oratory, the exhibition text and introduction to the artists' work is told by the artists Lolani Dalosa, Ma'alo Lafo and Axel Iva.



My name is Ma'alo Junior Lafo, born in Samoa. I come from the villages of Vaimea, Taufusi and Malaemalu, Falealili, but I was raised in Aotearoa. I come from the promised land otherwise known as Ōtara. Forklift driver by day, photographer by night. And I'm also working towards becoming a support worker. I do believe that my calling is to work amongst people. I just want to give back to my community. It feels like it's a more meaningful line of work than the work I'm doing right now.

And when did you start taking photographs?

So after our last meeting, I went and researched a little bit about like philosophies that surround photography. One of them was Roland Barthes's writing. He was talking about how photography deals with the nature of time. Although it can freeze time, it also reveals the unrelenting reality of time, meaning that today's present is like the past of the future kind of thing. I guess when people look at photographs, they can recall people, places, memories or moments and also emotions. And I guess when I was 17 years old, just realising that was what captivated me to take photos. But to me, it was more just like a keepsake thing, I wanted to—I didn't really have a goal to showcase anything. I told Edith Amituanai that the first time I met her, that I had no goals of showcasing or showing people. My work was more just to keep within my family. Only close friends and family knew that I did photos, outside of that no one really knew that I did photography.

Can you tell me a little bit about the title Sāmaria?

I wanted it to allude to something bigger than, bigger than myself kind of thing. And seeing that my parents are kind of inspiration to this whole work, I wanted to base the title off of them. I just pretty much combined their given names, and that's how I ended up with Sāmaria. So Sāmaria, first, it's just the given names of my parents, two parents: Lealasa, from the end of my father's name, and then the whole name of my mother, Maria.

And it also alludes to the Bible, as it's a prominent story in the Bible of the Good Samaritan. I think there are a group of people that are kind of outcasts in the time of Jesus, many because they followed a different thing, different to what believers at the time followed. But then there's a prominent story of the Good Samaritan in the Bible, despite being an outcast, they still showed compassion and love to the main character of the story.

I wanted that to relate back to the title, because my parents were also kind of similar in that way, because I guess they showed compassion even when they didn't have to, kind of thing. Not only to me but just to everyone else. It's not easy leaving your country and trying to navigate in a whole new country and just trying to navigate a whole new language as well. So that's where I drew the inspiration for the title as well. I just wanted to pay homage to all their sacrifices and everything they've done, not only for me, but for everyone in our family. They're the reason I'm allowed to have access to photography, and art in general.

Can you tell me about this whakataukī, “E afua mai mauga manuia o le tagata”, and its importance in relation to Sāmaria?

This translates to “It's from the mountaintops that we receive our blessings.” When we stand at the foot of mountains, we only see the streams of water which flow from the top. Yet, the mountains battle fierce winds, rain and storms which those at the foot of the mountain do not see.

This whakataukī points back to the title of my book, the mountains of my life, my dear parents. Those before us, whether our ancestors, elders, or in this case my parents, have sacrificed much to position us where we are right now. The search for opportunity and to further future generations comes at a cost and despite that, those before were willing to take that step. This idea influenced my decision on the title. Although it is my work on display, it was ultimately my parents who allowed me this opportunity through their sacrifices. I believe that our ancestors walked through storms so that we could run in the sun and Sāmaria is how I wish to honour that.



Who am I? I go by Axel Iva. I am of Samoan descent. I'm based out of the best place on earth in Māngere 275, and I'm a designer. My background is in graphic design but I like playing more on concepts—which is why I'm in this space now, because I don't have that freedom in a commercial design setting. I did a Masters in Technological Futures. Part of my thesis revolved around using nostalgia as a positive tool to accommodate grief. Half of the solution of our thesis was more tech-focused. But the other half of the solution was going into more tangible visuals that communicated with the key demographic that we were focused on at the time, or that I was focused on at the time, which was bereaved millennials. I knew the space that I wanted to get in—in order for me to be able to echo that voice, that the art space was the only place I could do that. So I applied for an artist residency, at Studio One - Toi Tū in Ponsonby, did that for nine months. And that's kind of how I just became part of it.

Can you tell me about your previous work A'E,I.O.U.?

It just naturally was the finish line of my studies at the time, I guess initially, I had this body of work that was running off the Samoan alphabet. When I was thinking of all the first teachings in being a Samoan that ever reminded me of having to learn the language first, this ubiquitous Samoan alphabet poster was everywhere. And so for me, I wanted to take that and index those letters to the customs, traditions and items that are found in the Samoan household and bring it into a contemporary context. All that work was quite refined, but, man, I know it's a bit—it's playful—but, in actuality, that stemmed from a moment of when I finished high school early, came home, and there was this random white-collar man holding a clipboard, and my old man was pointing him to our piano and our TV. I didn't understand what it was, and it wasn't until later that I realised that he was using our home assets to guarantee a loan. So for me, it was about the extent that our people would go through in order to service the village, even if that means sacrificing your household.

Why was it important to make a fale umu?

When my dad moved over here, this was the first thing he did. He was so concentrated on building a fale umu. For him, that was to connect as a portal to home. For me, this is my interpretation of building one, to connect a portal from me to him. Also, going in there was a massive sense of fragility. It wasn't the most council-permitted building, but just a janky umu. Somehow, it remained alive throughout it all. And so, I wanted to build something that was solid, but there was still a sense that it could collapse at any minute. I just enjoy making things that unify duality. I like the fact that you know—I don't know—this is my call and response to the hallucination versus the harsh reality of what it is.

Can you tell me about the title, VILT?

Va'aiga and LaloTai is a lexical blend of all four of my family names. It roughly translates to point of view under the sea. I see it as the hull of my father's demolished umukuka. A structure that I loathed, and saw as the wrecking ball to our property's curb appeal. VILT for me is the black box of unanswered calls, remote learning attempts, and quests that occasionally veered off-course. It is a family portrait. Lashed with nods to Samoan motifs, significant dates, and the rickety yet shatterproof construction of my father's umukuka.



My name is Joseph 'Lolani' Dalosa, I was born and raised in Aotearoa, prominently in Manurewa, Tāmaki Makaurau. I am of both Samoan and Filipino descent. I am a practising artist, co-founder of the collective Raroboy, and have been making works in various fields since 2017. Before pivoting, or rather, returning back to artmaking, I studied filmmaking from 2015 to 2017. I started exhibiting both collectively and individually from 2018, and in 2023, I did the Tautai Oceania Curatorial Internship, which helped broaden the scope in many ways for me. Making towards spaces over the years helped me refine my practice and work towards consolidating an artistic voice. Introspectively, I decided to explore ideas of the myriad forms of fear in my practice, which remains an undertone throughout my practice.

Can you tell me a little bit about what inspired you to make these works?

Hito Steyerl had a book called *Duty Free Art*, and she had this essay called “In Defense of the Poor Image”. So she kind of dissected the origins of images circulating online, the circulation of poor images. She went back to bootlegging, pirating. Yeah, I think it touches a lot on the ownership of images, and just how ubiquitous imagery is online. I guess that's how I would describe it in a nutshell, there are just a lot of things that I kind of took away from *Duty Free Art*, as Steyerl mentions this idea of a decoy. A stand-in as a proxy for the modern subject. I guess I think that was what mainly drove me to work with cutouts and standees as a medium because I like the idea of substitution.

What interests you about working with aluminium?

Previously I made a whole exhibition at Papakura Art Gallery heavily utilising aluminum sheets, *Someone's at the door*, 2023. I feel like that was a good, pinpoint origin of my interest in utilising aluminium sheets. The process was different to the current works. I was screen printing on them, sourced imagery from my own personal library of archival images of family photos, etc. And it was, yeah, I think that was a very handmade process-driven situation there. I was interested in aluminium as a sort of cold and apathetic material. Artists like Cady Noland kind of helped influence my interest as well. Yeah, everything was very two colours, grey and black.

Why do you make art?

I've asked myself that consistently, year by year. I've been making art, and I've been artistically interested since I was a kid. To be really honest, I started off drawing initially. I started making art because my twin was doing it, and it was just something that we shared together as an expression. I truly think it's a very innately humanistic way of communicating. There's just something innate about making art. In all forms. I think it's why I do it. It's sort of a way of life at this point. I think that's kind of the acceptance that I've made with why I make art. It's just like breathing, I guess.