

Fatu Feu'u

Taula'aitu, 1996 Lithograph and woodcut 604 x 745 mm



Personal style:

Fatu Feu'u (b.1946, Samoa) is from the village of Poutasi in the district of Falealili in Western Samoa. He emigrated to NZ in 1966. Feu'u bases much of his work on Samoan symbols and mythical stories. In Samoan oratory, or *tala lasi Samoa*, all historic event or occurrence is interpreted by each village very differently. Feu'u contemplates binary systems throughout his work, manifesting traditional Samoan ideals of balance, sacred versus secular, inactive versus active, dignified versus aggressive and so forth. Feu'u is seen as both chief and orator, which he has created and developed for himself within a NZ artistic context - both as artist and educator. Feu'u takes his role very seriously as an elder statesman of the Pacific Arts, using his power and talent to explore and advance the Pacific Arts. Terry Stringer was a huge influence on Feu'u by expressing that being in the Pacific meant doing things the "Pacific way" and not compromising his cultural values due to European influences.

How has the artist used formal art principles?

The image is **symmetrical**. It is **balanced** by the use of grids. There is **contrast** – warm tones of red, yellow and white against flat black and red backgrounds. There are **fine curvilinear lines**. The image is **flat** with little receding **space** or **depth**. It uses **symbols** to tell a story. Use the Art terminology help sheet/link in slides.

What compositional conventions does the artist use?

Symmetry and grids suggest balance. The undisturbed framing at each side with sun and moon suggests that Samoan cosmology continues.

What do you see in the artwork?

Just write down what you see. Not what you think it is about or what it could mean – just what you see.

How do the art elements and principles help the meaning and impact of the artwork?

In *Taula'aitu* (which means anchors of the spirits/ women healers/ the priests of Old Samoa) the image is symmetrical. It is balanced through using a grid which includes framing with the sun and moon at the top on each side of the print. Parts of the composition are arranged by using the grid to separate ideas or create a focal point, and as a framing device to create small stories in grids within the whole. There is strong tonal contrast with e.g. a strong black background behind finely drawn white plant life suggesting medicinal plants used by healers - and warm earthy tones for traditional Samoan cosmological elements. They are similar to the colours and style used in traditional tapa cloth drawings. White and yellow lines are used over black and red backgrounds which allows objects and line to stand out clearly from each other. A flat picture plane is used, and elements are arranged on the surface of the composition with little attempt to create an illusion of receding space. Fine, thin lines are used to describe objects creating a graphic quality in the work and suggesting life and growth within constrains (cross hatching). There is a narrative element and images of symbols, structures and stories are interwoven in this work plus he uses symbols from his Samoan heritage along with those invented by himself e.g. his trademark four petalled flowers and seed pods.

What are the techniques and processes used?

Feu'u has used lithography an old and highly technical printing technique using stone and woodcut (a very ancient technique). This requires many different layers of colour. It is a technique that allows for many reproductions and the wide sharing of images and information.

Symbolism and meaning?

Feu'u's work is inspired by Polynesian art forms such as *siapo* (tapa cloth), *tatau* (tattoo), weaving, carving and ceremonial mask making. Feu'u has taken many images from traditional *siapo/tapa* and Samoan cosmology to suggest island life in the present and past– he has overlaid fine white drawings and yellow crosshatching within grids to depict the effects of growth and constraint upon that life and environment. These binary systems can be seen throughout his work – expressing traditional Samoan ideals of balance, sacred versus secular, inactive versus active, dignified versus aggressive and so forth.

Paddy O'Rourke

Production Value? Feu'u is a chief and elder statesman and considered one of the Pacific's most significant artists. His work is keenly sought after. His prints have short runs which increases their value. His work is in all major Art galleries and museums in NZ and overseas.

Sources: <https://www.art-newzealand.com/Issue111/fatu.htm>

<https://thediversiongallery.co.nz/artist/feuu/>

https://www.prints.co.nz/page/fine-art/CTGY/Artists_Feu%27u_Fatu