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# An Evolution of Teaching Art in Sāmoa: A Personal Journey—The History, Insights, Challenges, and Successes of Teaching Visual Art at the Tertiary Level

## Abstract

*This article traces the history and evolution of art education in independent Sāmoa from the perspective of personal experience, while also considering numerical data. It discusses art as a discipline taught in Sāmoan secondary schools and focuses on the development of the creative arts at the tertiary level. The essay reflects on the history and challenges of teaching visual art in Sāmoa, including successes and setbacks. Also considered are the struggles for students pursuing visual art as a career interest in Sāmoa. Examples of works of art created at the Leulumoega Fou School of Fine Arts are included, as are pieces by current National University of Sāmoa art students.*

**Keywords:** Sāmoa, art, education

This article reviews the history and evolution of art education in Sāmoa from personal experience. It discusses art as a discipline taught in Sāmoan secondary schools and emphasizes the creative arts at the tertiary level. It reflects on the history, insights, and challenges of teaching visual art in Sāmoa from an individual perspective as both a student and teacher.

## Early Years and Influences

I lived my early years in Papua New Guinea, where my Sāmoan parents were missionaries. I was home-schooled by my mother through the Australian International Correspondence School. She had trained as a teacher at the Western Sāmoa Teachers Training College (WSTC) in Malifa in the early 1950s and conducted lessons for my brother and me until our family returned to Sāmoa in 1973. I entered public school for the first time when my parents enrolled me at Apia Primary School at Standard 3. Being in class with other Sāmoan children was quite a culture shock for me because it contrasted with my sheltered life growing up in the highlands of Papua New Guinea.

I was introduced to art at the age of eleven through the influence of my older brother, who was talented in drawing and painting. As the younger sibling, I admired his ability to capture the natural environment and thus wanted to emulate his work. The Sāmoan female figure and the flora and fauna around our home were images that I enjoyed drawing while growing up. I drew stick figures of the Sāmoan *taupou* (daughters of a high chief), and I was especially interested in the *tuiga*, the ceremonial headdresses worn by the *taupou*. Performing the *taualuga* (a ceremonial dance) was a cultural activity I participated in as the daughter of a church minister, and I loved the intricate patterns of the traditional costumes I wore to perform at our church functions and events.

### Encounters with an Italian Maestro, Ernesto Coter

As a school project when I was ten years old, we were asked to come up with a topic of personal interest to present to our fellow students. At the time, my uncle, the late Reverend Oka Fauolo, was the Secretary of the Congregational Christian Church of Sāmoa (CCCS). He and his wife, my aunt So'oletaua, hosted many church guests from all over the world. One of my uncle's guests then was the Italian artist Ernesto Coter, who later went on to successfully develop and teach the art curriculum at Leulumoega Fou College. With encouragement from both my parents, I wrote up interview questions for Mr. Coter and his wife, Maria, and headed off to Leulumoega Fou, where they lived on campus. I distinctly remember being nervous as I walked up the hill and knocked on their old glass door. A short man in his late thirties greeted me. He had a beard and a warm friendly face, and he smiled as I explained why I had come. He became excitedly animated and he invited me into his home, tickled with the idea that a ten-year-old wanted to interview him as an artist. I received an A++ for my project. At the time, art was not a subject taught at primary schools or high schools in Sāmoa, even though it had been part of the curriculum at the WSTC since the early 1950s.

I met Coter again in 1982 upon my return to Sāmoa from New Zealand, where I had been attending Christchurch Girls High School. I had enjoyed taking art in Form 5, and had done well on the New Zealand School Certificate. However, because I was homesick, I wanted to continue studying in Sāmoa and refused to return to New Zealand to complete my senior year. Unfortunately, none of the secondary schools in Sāmoa offered art as a subject except for Leulumoega Fou College under the successful direction of Coter. I wanted to pursue visual art as a university entrance-exam subject and met with Reverend Lale Ieremia, the principal of the college. He reintroduced me to Coter, who took me in as his first student studying visual art for the 1982 New Zealand university entrance exam.

After successfully completing Form 6, I was accepted into the WSTC in 1983. Maria Coter had briefly taught the art program for secondary teachers, but I unfortunately had

missed out on that opportunity. In 1986, after graduating, I taught for a year at Papauta Girls College under the leadership of the late principal Salamasina Malietoa. Arts and handicrafts were taught at Papauta, with an afternoon curriculum of making traditional baskets, mats, and the *siapo* and *elei* (printed fabrics). There I met Coter again; he was teaching evening classes in drawing and painting for those interested in pursuing art as a hobby and was experimenting with Sāmoan clay pottery. Whilst I was assisting with his clay projects and learning ceramics from him, Coter persuaded me to join him in developing the Leulumoega Fou School of Fine Arts. I requested to be transferred there and taught English and art history from 1987 to 1994. Our faculty consisted of Ernesto Coter, Emani Epati, Alapati Avealalo, Lealofi Siaopo, and me. Our first students were Penehuro Papalii, Panapa Lafoai, Misikopa Misikopa, Tafa Iuta, Lulu Tiatia, Mose Tia, Atoa Setu, Fa'amatala Fa'amatala, Risati Ete, Donna Kamu, and Pauline Kohlhase, among others.

### **Leulumoega Fou School of Fine Arts, 1986–2021**

A school of fine arts for those interested in pursuing a career as an artist was first proposed by Coter and began under the CCCS. The school also served as an alternative education venue for young people who were unable to complete their secondary school education. With the success rate of its students passing the New Zealand school certificate and university entrance exam in fine arts, as well as the growing interest of students in arts disciplines, the Leulumoega Fou School of Fine Arts (LFSFA) was established as a separate entity in 1986. The school offered specialized courses in fine arts, delivering a certificate and diploma developed by Coter and the Education Committee of the CCCS.

After thirty years, in 2016 the CCCS changed the name of Leulumoega Fou School of Fine Arts to the Congregational Christian Church of Sāmoa School of Fine Arts and Museum (CCCSFAM). The school currently operates under the governance and management of the Church. Its vision is to “provide equitable education for all...[and] to produce and maintain quality recognition and relevant Fine Arts education and Museum service...”<sup>1</sup>

The LFSFA was modelled on the creative energy, scholarship, and mentorship of the Italian Renaissance *bottega* workshops and studios of fifteenth-century Florence. Within these Italian co-working spaces there were master artists who were committed to teaching new artists, whereby “talents were nurtured, new techniques were at work, and new artistic forms came to light with artists competing among themselves but working together.”<sup>2</sup> The Renaissance artists valued knowledge as a fundamental part of the creative process.<sup>3</sup> This creative energy, scholarship, and mentorship were key elements on which LFSFA is modelled. During the Renaissance, teaching took place in the studios and knowledge was passed on and shared amongst talented artists, whether painters, sculptors, carvers, cartoonists, illustrators,

architects, or anatomists. “All of them gave form and life to Renaissance communities, generating aesthetic and expressive as well as social and economic values. The result was the entrepreneurship that conceived revolutionary ways of working, of designing and delivering products and services, and even of seeing the world.”<sup>4</sup> The art studios of Florence were

communities of creativity and innovation where dreams, passions, and projects could intertwine. The apprentices, workers, artisans, engineers, budding artists, and guest artists were interdependent yet independent, and their disparate efforts loosely coordinated by a renowned artist at the centre—the “Master.” But while he might help spot new talents, broker connections, and mentor younger artists, the Master did not define others’ work.<sup>5</sup>



Figure 1 (left). Emerging young Sāmoan artists with teacher Ernesto Cotter at the launching of the *Rebirth of the Past* exhibition: (left to right) Lulu Tiatia, Penehuro Papalii, Cotter, the author, and Lealofi Siaopo, 1994. Courtesy of the author

Figure 2 (right). Handmade pottery made by the author using imported and local clay, 1994. Courtesy of the author

This sense of shared endeavour is at the heart of LFSFA and its successor school. An exhibition that epitomized this idea was the school’s first graduation exhibition, *Rebirth of the Past*, curated by Ernesto and Maria Cotter in 1994. With this show, a new group of young Sāmoan artists was catapulted into the public eye under the mentorship of Cotter. Artists such as Lulu Tiatia, Mose Tiata, Leua Latai, Penehuro Papalii, Lealofi Siaopo, and others, were able to create works that expressed a revisitation and rebirth of the past as had never been seen in Sāmoa. The exhibition included sculptures, ceramics, posters, paintings, and carvings, all expressing Sāmoan thought and ethos. The show reflected the natural environment, Sāmoan culture, legends, and traditional life, emphasizing the natural beauty of Sāmoa whilst promoting the importance of climate change and Sāmoan-ness. A recent painting by LFSFA graduate Lealofi Siaopo (Fig. 3) takes the Sāmoan legend of Sina and the Tuifiti as its subject.

Inspired by Sāmoan mythology and legends taught at the school, Siaopo's painting also emphasises the importance of myths in Sāmoan culture and customs.



Figure 3. Lealofi Siaopo, *Sina and the Tuifiti*. Acrylic on canvas, 8" X 6", 2020. Photograph courtesy of the artist

In addition to the importance of both Renaissance ideals and Sāmoan traditions, culture, and heritage, Coter's vision and philosophy for LFSFA encompassed Greek aesthetics and notions of beauty. Curricular emphasis was also placed on the preservation and promotion of Sāmoa's natural environment. The school's first graduation and art exhibition in 1994 set the standards of the school locally, regionally, and internationally, and has never been surpassed. It reflected the importance of experienced and appropriate mentorship guided by talent, skill, ingenuity, intelligence, and knowledge.

### **Congregational Christian Church of Sāmoa School of Fine Arts & Museum, 2016–21**

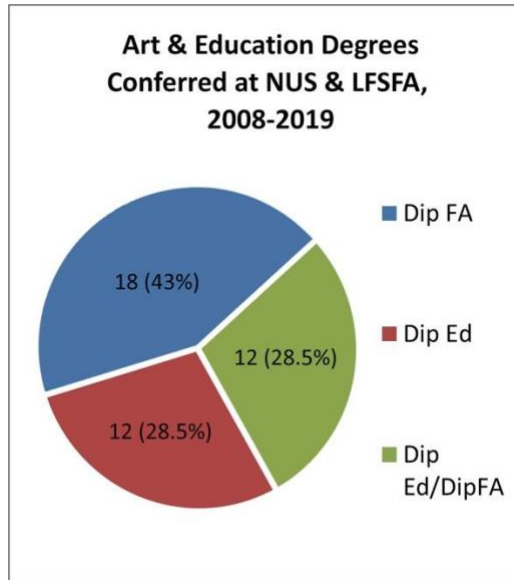
Despite the success of the CCCSSFAM, there is still a great need for qualified, experienced staff in maintaining the quality and development of the school. The departure of Ernesto Coter from LFSFA in 1998 left a huge void that was difficult to fill. From 1999 to the present, graduates of LFSFA and CCCSSFAM have run the school through their committed efforts to sustain its teachings and vision. The CCCS continues to fund and support the school and efforts are being made to replicate its successes of the early 1990s. Although there is

commitment, circumstances have resulted in an inability to provide suitable career pathways for the students. For instance, as discussed in the school's Quality Management System report, when interviewed, current students revealed that their aspirations for future career opportunities lay in the *elei*-printing business. Some expressed their dreams to continue further studies overseas and at the National University of Sāmoa (NUS).<sup>6</sup>

Eighty percent of CCCSSFAM graduates work in local commercial printing businesses, teach at the local secondary schools, have their own business, or have moved overseas to pursue art careers.<sup>7</sup> Today, thirty-three years after its founding, the school still needs financial resources, as well as skilled and experienced staff. The CCCS has to recognise the current requirements and demands placed on young people by Sāmoa's creative industries in order to support its clients. Creating and producing "art for art's sake" is not sufficient in today's fast-changing world. With Sāmoa's youth unemployment rate over eighteen percent and rising,<sup>8</sup> there is need for the CCCSSFAM to upgrade its programs by providing classes that teach computing skills and IT knowledge to support more sustainable career pathways for its students.

In 2018, the Sāmoa Qualifications Authority (SQA) reviewed the CCCSSFAM and its programs as part of the accreditation process.<sup>9</sup> In its report, the review panel indicated concerns about the school's delivery of its curriculum program. Noted were the neglect of the school's historical collection by faculty; the need for professional development among the staff; inadequate physical learning resources such as a library, online resources, and a computer lab; and inconsistencies in financial resources. In spite of the problems noted across the layout of its program, the SQA review panel commended the school's enrolment policy, which unlocks pathways both for those who are unsuccessful in mainstream subjects and those of mature age wishing to pursue a career in the fine arts.<sup>10</sup> Most noteworthy is the continued support of the CCCSSFAM and the CCCS's commitment to the recommendations provided by the SQA in the vigorous monitoring of the school and its program.

Between 2008 and 2019, sixteen percent of the graduates of NUS and LFSFA obtained a diploma in fine arts, eighteen percent graduated with a diploma in education specializing in visual arts from NUS, and fifteen percent of graduates successfully gained a diploma in fine arts and education (Graph 1). Since 2008, graduates of the former LFSFA have moved on to successful careers teaching art as a subject in Sāmoan secondary schools, as well as at private and overseas institutions; a recent survey of secondary art teachers teaching on the islands of Upolu and Savai'i indicated that the majority of art teachers in the field were trained at either CCCSSFAM or NUS. Other graduates work as curriculum developers at the Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture, and some teach at the tertiary level at NUS. Still others have opened up their own art studios and galleries in Sāmoa such as Beautiful Expressions of



Graph 1. Art and Education degrees conferred at the National University of Sāmoa (NUS) and the Leulumoega Fou School of Fine Arts (LFSFA), 2008–2019. Graph created by the author

Nature (B.E.N.), run by Penehuro Papalii, and the Manamea Art Gallery, owned by Lalovai Peseta. A few graduates run their own *elei*-printing businesses and others have moved overseas to pursue further education or careers in the arts. One LFSFA graduate was the first Sāmoan to have graduated from the prestigious School of the Art Institute of Chicago in the United States.

According to the Ministry of Education Sports and Culture’s (MESCC) School Operations Department 2019 report, a survey conducted in 2019 determined that twenty-three of the twenty-seven government secondary schools in Sāmoa offer visual art as a subject (Table 1).<sup>11</sup> The remaining four do not offer art due to a shortage of trained art teachers. In addition, there are eight private schools and thirteen church-run secondary schools in Sāmoa offering art, bringing the total of secondary schools that offer art in Sāmoa to forty-four.

Secondary Schools by Type	Upolu	Savai'i	Total
Government Colleges	18	5	23
CCCSS Colleges	5	2	7
Catholic Colleges	4	2	6
Other/ Private Colleges	6	2	8
Total	33	11	44

Table 1. Secondary education institutions in Sāmoa offering art instruction, 2019

At these secondary schools (private, church, and government), a total of forty-three art instructors are currently teaching at the secondary level. Twelve were trained at the CCCSSFAM and have pursued further training at the National University of Sāmoa, graduating with a second diploma and a bachelor of education-secondary degree majoring in visual art. Thirty-four art teachers were trained from other institutions and the National University of Sāmoa.

When I first joined the Faculty of Education at NUS in 2008, the highest qualification attained with visual art as a subject was a diploma in education for secondary teaching. In 2010, a bachelor of education at the secondary level was offered, thus students pursuing a goal of teaching could enrol in a major specializing in visual art. In the academic year 2016–17, eight secondary teachers majoring in visual art graduated with a bachelor's degree in secondary education from NUS.

### **Development of a Visual Arts Curriculum for the Secondary and Primary Levels**

In the early 2000s, the secondary school curriculum for visual arts for teaching visual art at the secondary level was developed by the Sāmoa Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture. The curriculum was developed by Maria Coter, Momoe Malietoa Von Reiche, Dr. Vanya Taulealo, myself, and others. It allowed visual art to be taught from Years 9 through 13, with the discipline now part of the School Certificate (SC) and Secondary School Leaving Certificate (SSLC) national examinations. In 2004, visual art was implemented in all government schools as an examinable subject for the SC and SSLC national examinations. Naturally, trained secondary teachers were needed to implement the curriculum. Those who were interested in teaching visual art at secondary schools enrolled in the bachelor of education-secondary program, majoring in visual art and another specialized subject of interest. In 2009–10, the diploma in education was phased out and replaced by the bachelor of education in secondary teaching. In 2015, a restructuring of the education programs at NUS led to more changes. The visual art major and other disciplines including music, performing arts, physical health and education, food textiles, and technology were put on hold.

Currently, NUS offers only a minor in visual art for those interested in pursuing a career in the arts and teaching at the lower secondary level (Years 9–11). The Expressive and Practical Arts Department at NUS was dismantled and merged under the Teacher Education Department. The visual art courses offered are designed to train teachers for primary and the lower secondary level grades (Years 9–11). The two remaining departments under the Faculty of Education are the Education and Teacher Education Departments. The bachelor of education degree in secondary teaching no longer exists, and all the expressive arts disciplines

are offered only as minors. In the academic year 2020–21, a proposal was put through to revive the visual arts major to be offered under the Faculty of Art programs.

Vigorous discussions—with strong opposition to the reoffering and existence of the art major—are ongoing, despite the curriculum being taught and implemented as an examinable subject in secondary schools for the SSC and SSLC national exams. With the bachelor of education in secondary teaching being phased out, students interested in pursuing a career in the arts and teaching in secondary schools have to pursue a bachelor of arts degree. The visual art courses currently sit under the Faculty of Education whilst there is still ongoing conversation on their relevance. Recently, there has been a drive to reinstate offering a bachelor of education degree in secondary teaching in visual art under the Faculty of Education. There is much debate on the existence of the arts at NUS due to resource constraints, ignorance, relevance, and poor attitudes towards its significance in education. Sadly, the university fails to see either the lucrateness of the arts or the arts as a worthwhile career pathway for our young people, even with the youth unemployment rate in Sāmoa at over eighteen percent and rising.<sup>12</sup>

### **Teaching Art at the Tertiary Level, 2008–21: Challenges and Success Stories**

It has been fourteen years since I came to NUS to teach visual art and education to primary- and secondary-teacher trainees. The success of the visual art courses taught at NUS is reflected in the interest and commitment of the students pursuing a career in the arts and the faculty and staff involved. Most students enrolled in the visual arts courses comment on having been inspired and motivated by their own primary and secondary art teachers, highlighting the importance of mentoring by those teaching in the field. The flow of students into NUS's visual arts program has been attributed to the NUS art teachers who have a reputation for being passionate and inspiring. Another contributing factor is the continuing upgrade of qualifications offered for secondary art teachers at the tertiary level, despite the challenges in acknowledging the importance of arts education as a viable career pathway.

Most remarkable, however, are the efforts of graduates from LFSFA who are seeking higher degrees in the arts and teaching certifications in pursuit of their art careers. Within the last fourteen years, many secondary art teachers in Sāmoa have upgraded from a diploma to a degree qualification. Between 2015 and 2018, thirteen students successfully completed a degree in secondary level education with a major in visual art and are now teaching in the field.<sup>13</sup> In 2021, it is predicted that fourteen students will graduate with a minor and hopefully a major in visual arts by 2022–23. In 2019, the MESC School Operations Division recorded 1,459 students enrolled in visual arts for Years 12 and 13 across all secondary schools in Sāmoa.<sup>14</sup>

These numbers anticipate an influx of students coming into the visual art programme at the National University of Sāmoa.

### Collaborations and Partnerships, 2008–21

Much of the success of the visual art courses offered at NUS over the years has been due to staff involvement in teaching and learning, and, in particular, the keen interest that students bring to the art program. In order to implement the visual art courses, art instructors, together with the support of students, must put a great deal of effort into acquiring the necessary supplies and equipment, as the departmental budget does not cover all needs. This includes applying for grants and funding. In 2016, the student organization Art Agency NUS received the Civil Society Organization Public Joint Forum Grant for Innovative Learning and Capacity Building, in recognition of its work on educational and professional arts development in vulnerable communities and advocating for the voice of the voiceless through innovative and well-managed projects. The grant was funded by the Australian government and the European Union through the Civil Society Support Programme. It funded the Art Agency Visual Literacy Project, which supports graphic design, illustration, and print media. The students' project involved the production and illustration of children's books in the Sāmoan language, with a focus on local author Fiapopo Taulogo (Figs. 4–5).<sup>15</sup>



Figure 4 (left). NUS students Jeremia Tu'upo and Leala Mose working on the Art Agency Visual Literacy Project, 2016. Courtesy of the author

Figure 5 (right). Children's books with illustrations by National University of Sāmoa art students, 2016. Courtesy of the author



Figure 6. Students from the Australian National University, the National University of Sāmoa, and the University of the South Pacific rehearsing a performance at the Sinalei Resort, Sāmoa, 2013. Courtesy of the author

Collaborations and partnerships with international, regional, and local institutions have been key to sustaining the visual art courses at NUS over the last fourteen years, as these organizations recognize the importance and value of a tertiary arts education. Partnerships with other universities have been established, such as with Professor Christine Yeh at the School of Education at the University of San Francisco, and continued friendships with staff and students at Indiana University Southeast through Professor Anne Allen. Professor Carol Mutch at the University of Auckland has supported student work through publications such as the poetry book *Talanoa Fogafala*, which was edited by Professor Mutch and myself. The book consists of original poems written by Auckland University and NUS staff and was published in 2019 with illustrations by NUS visual art students. Other partnerships include conducting research with Dr. Lex Mc Donald at Victoria University, focused on the Moving On Art Therapy Program for children affected by the 2009 Sāmoa tsunami. Professor Katerina Teaiwa (Australian National University) and the late Seiuli Allan Alo (University of the South Pacific and president of the Sāmoa Arts Council) brought together young people from Australia, Sāmoa, and the Pacific to engage in cultural community projects that enriched student experiences (Figs. 6–7). Partnerships with the New Zealand, British, American, and



Figure 7. Australian National University students performing the arrival of missionaries to Sāmoa. Sinalei Resort, Sāmoa, 2013. Courtesy of the author



Figure 8. National University of Sāmoa art students, *Banners of the Sāmoan Creation Story*. Commonwealth Youth Games Opening Ceremony, Sāmoa, 2016. Courtesy of the author

Australian embassies have provided financial resources in support of student art exhibitions, publications, and students' promotion and marketing their own art work. The revenues from the students' art sales are divided between the students and NUS, which has assisted in funding resources for the visual art courses from time to time.

Invitations from the United Nations, World Health Organization, Food and Agriculture Organization, United Nations Development Program, and Small Island Developing States—as

well as the 2018 Pacific Arts Association conference and the 2016 Commonwealth Youth Games, both held in Sāmoa—have provided fine arts students with opportunities to participate with other young people in initiatives supporting and enriching their experiences as students and artists. In 2010, the Aleipata school district’s Moving on Art Therapy program was invited to exhibit drawings and paintings and share their research findings at the New Zealand Parliament Building in Wellington. The public response from the local and international communities, through the provision of art materials and resources to NUS’s visual art program, was overwhelmingly supportive. In 2016, NUS art students designed banners and participated in the opening ceremony of the Commonwealth Youth Games (Fig. 8).



Figure 9. Hailey Rasmussen, *Tidal Wave*. Acrylic on canvas, 12” x 24”, 2021. National University of Samoa. Photograph by the author. Courtesy of the artist



Figure 10. Talalei Solomona, *Eleéle Fou (Reclaimed Area)*. Acrylic on plywood, 8” x 4”, 2021. National University of Sāmoa. Photograph by the author. Courtesy of the artist

In 2018, an international juried exhibition involving art faculty and students from NUS and Indiana University Southeast (IUS) in the United States was co-facilitated at the Niuleá Exhibition Space at NUS and Ronald Barr Art Gallery at IUS. The exhibition provided students with experience exhibiting their artworks both locally and internationally. In 2021, the British High Commissioner to Sāmoa collaborated with NUS in a regional photography competition and exhibition highlighting the impacts and effects of climate change. Visual art students were invited to create paintings that illustrated their take on climate change (Figs. 9–11) and to be involved in curating the exhibition. The exhibition provided an avenue for students to extend their arts experiences beyond the classroom and engage in community initiatives that were beneficial for all (Figs. 12–13).



Figure 11. Sofara Sofara, *Effects of Climate Change in Apia*. Acrylic on canvas, 4" X 6", 2020. National University of Sāmoa. Photograph by the author. Courtesy of the artist

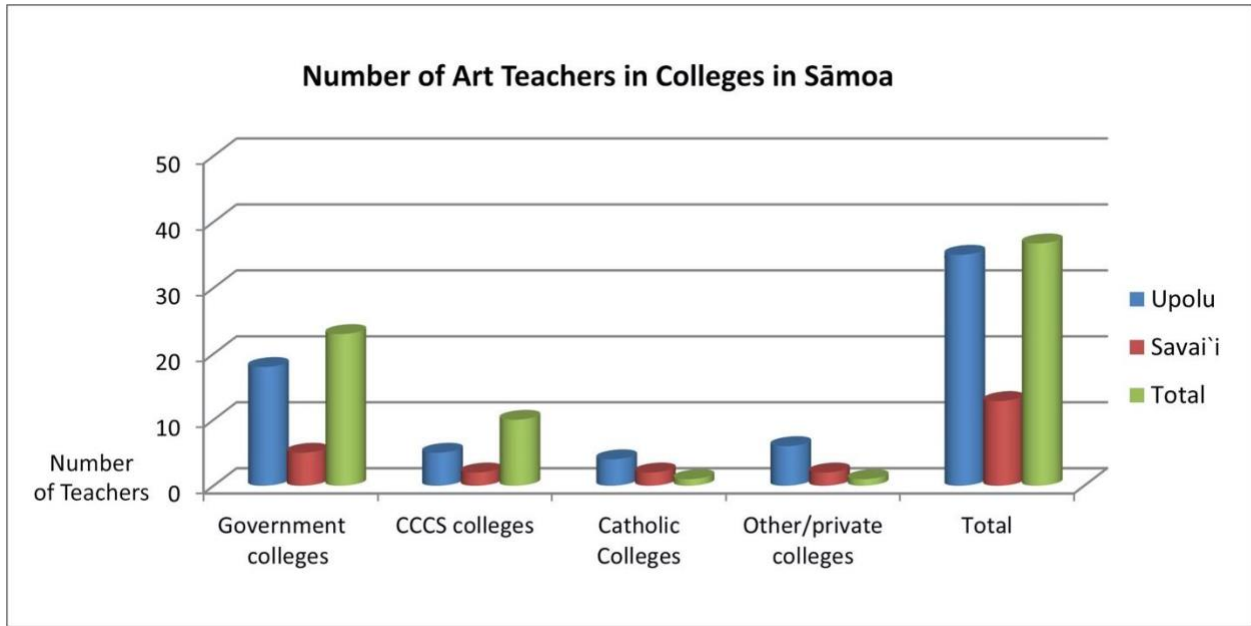


Figure 12. The author (second from left) with His Excellency David Ward, British High Commissioner to Sāmoa (third from left), and National University of Sāmoa art students (left to right) Gert-Jan Jakobus, Sofara Sofara, Ierenimo Pio, and Faitogafiti Mika. UK Climate Change Photography Competition and Art Exhibition, Tatte Building, Apia, Sāmoa, 2021. Courtesy of author



Figure 13. View of UK Climate Change Photography Competition and Art Exhibition, curated by National University of Sāmoa art students Gert-Jan Jakobus, Sofara Sofara, Ierenimo Pio, Faitogafiti Mika, Maumalo Natia, Miracle Poutoa and Leua Latai. Tatte Building, Apia, Sāmoa, 2021. Courtesy of the author

Partnerships with local, regional, and international institutions have been both successful and very popular with Sāmoan students wishing to engage with young people from overseas universities and organizations. Friendships made through these programs continue among our students and alumnae. Art students have also successfully continued their studies abroad, pursuing careers in visual art, graphic design, illustration, and education in Indonesia, New Zealand, China, and Australia. Furthermore, in the last ten years, NUS’s visual art program has trained more than twenty secondary visual-art teachers with a first degree in education with specialization in art. Data collected from a survey conducted in 2019 and the Operations Division of the MESC reported that twenty-three secondary art teachers were brought into the government secondary schools in Sāmoa (Graph 2).



Graph 2. Number of art teachers in Sāmoa, 2019. Graph created by the author

## Reflection

From the perspective of having been both an art student and instructor in the past fifty years, I have experienced and witnessed a robust development of the arts in Sāmoa. My country has come a long way; there is now a teaching curriculum for expressive arts and visual arts for the primary and secondary levels offered at the National University of Sāmoa. I, myself, am currently pursuing a PhD in creative practice at the Centre for Sāmoan Studies at NUS. In addition to other schools of fine art, such as the CCCSSFAM, we have the MADD (Motivational Art, Dance, and Drama) Gallery, owned and run by Momoe Malietoa Von Reiche; the Beau Rasmussen Carving Studio; the Vanya Taulealo Art Gallery; and the previously mentioned Beautiful Expressions of Nature and Manamea Art Gallery. Sāmoa has three art and culture museums and the Sāmoan government will be opening its new Sāmoa Culture Centre in 2021. In performing arts, we have S.P.A.C.E, a dance studio created by the late Seiuli Allan Alo. These art spaces have created economic prospects for those interested in the arts. These studios and galleries contribute to the economic development of Sāmoa and create an enriching environment that provides opportunities for our young people, especially those interested in pursuing careers in the field of art.

This expansion in the arts has generated more opportunities for NUS to develop areas such as museum studies, archival and art management courses, and programs that cater to Sāmoa's growing creative industries. Despite all these developments, the growth of the visual arts still remains relatively stagnant and the sustainability of the arts over the years has been held back due to lack of recognizing visual art's potential, true value, and significance to the

economic growth and development of Sāmoa. There is much focus on the development of subjects including math and science to the detriment of the arts, despite NUS's vision to prioritise and safeguard Sāmoan cultural heritage of which the arts are an imperative part.

In some way or another, out of interest and commitment, I have been involved in the development of the arts in Sāmoa over the last fifty years. On a human level, it has been a discipline in which I have found consolation—the arts allow me to be myself and independently express my views, as well as share others' experiences, skills, knowledge, and development. For others, art provides solace, the freedom to express their creativity, and a voice to react to the ever-changing social, cultural, and political environments. Keith Haring, an American pop artist, once said, “Art should be something that liberates one, provokes the imagination and encourages people to go further.”<sup>16</sup> My journey as an artist, student, and instructor has taken me to places I never dreamed I would reach. I owe much to the generous people I have met along the way. My voyage has not ended and I look forward with great anticipation to the next phase of my artistic journey.

*Leua Latai was born in Papua New Guinea to Sāmoan missionary parents. She graduated from Western Sāmoa Secondary Teacher Training College and taught at Papauta Girls College, as well as Leulumoega Fou College and the Leulumoega Fou School of Fine Arts, acting as curator and coordinator from 2006 to 2008. She married a Peace Corps volunteer and emigrated to the United States, earning a BA (University of Wisconsin) and MFA in art (School of the Art Institute of Chicago). She is currently a senior lecturer in visual art and education at the National University of Sāmoa and pursuing her doctorate in Sāmoan studies at the Centre for Sāmoan Studies.*

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Sāmoa Qualifications Authority Programme, *SQA Accreditation Report: Congregational Christian Church of Sāmoa, Congregational Christian Church of Sāmoa School of Fine Arts, and Museum Certificate III in Fine Arts* (Apia: Sāmoa Government Printing, 2018), 4.

<sup>2</sup> Piero Formica, “The Innovative Working Spaces of 15th Century-Italy,” *Harvard Business Review*, April 27, 2016, <https://hbr.org/2016/04/the-innovative-coworking-spaces-of-15th-century-italy>.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Sāmoa Qualifications Authority Programme, *SQA Accreditation Report*, 13–14.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Aaron O’Neill, “Youth Unemployment Rate in Samoa,” *Statista: Economy & Politic*, July 15, 2021, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/808904/unemployment-rate-in-samoa/>.

<sup>9</sup> Sāmoa Qualifications Authority Programme, *SQA Accreditation Report*, 13–14.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 13–24.

<sup>11</sup> Ministry of Education Sports and Culture, personal communication, email, Sept. 14, 2020.

<sup>12</sup> O’Neill, “Youth Unemployment Rate in Samoa.”

<sup>13</sup> Data gathered from author’s student assessment records of graduates.

<sup>14</sup> Ministry of Education Sports and Culture, personal communication, email, Sept. 14, 2020.

<sup>15</sup> The Art Agency Visual Literacy Project provided art education students with illustration and graphic design skills to create children’s books in order to promote literacy and numeracy skills. It also enabled secondary art teachers who were in training to create children’s books in both the Sāmoan and English languages. Grant funding provided for computer hardware and software to support the book projects.

<sup>16</sup> Victoria Kennedy, “The 10 Best Keith Haring Quotes,” *Canvas: A Blog by Saatchi Art*, May 4, 2017, <https://canvas.saatchiart.com/art/art-news/the-10-best-keith-haring-quotes>.