

# Digital Launima

## Veā Mafile’o

ST PAUL St Gallery Two



TE WĀNANGA ARONUI  
O TĀMAKI MAKAU RAU

15 June – 6 July 2018

Mining an archive of personal footage that spans almost fifteen years, Veā Mafile’o renders a digital ngatu launima (decorated barkcloth) that both conflates and acts as an index of time. Ngatu launima is one of a variety of Tongan textiles that commemorate historical events and genealogical histories.<sup>1</sup> Much like ngatu launima, there is a sense of scale and generosity in Mafile’o’s work. The three-screen projection is a cascade of visual imagery and sound drawn from her return trips to the Kingdom of Tonga from as early as 2003.

Unique juxtapositions oscillate between past and present as well as personal and collective histories. Mafile’o draws on a diverse range of imagery; from the 2016 Tupou College Toloa Sesquicentenary juxtaposed with a koka’anga (female collective of barkcloth-makers) creating a launima in the village of Lapaha. Within these public celebrations are more personal narratives that reflect Mafile’o’s experiences. In one part of the work scenes of the Tongan landscape are layered over with a recording of Mafile’o’s late Aunt Ana sending best wishes to family in Aotearoa.

Mafile’o’s excessive mise-en-scène slices through life in Tonga, from the ceremonial to the everyday. Some of the most rewarding snapshots of village life include scenes from the local village shop. One sequence depicts a young woman looking out beyond the small island shopfront and she begins to sing Whitney Houston’s 1992 rendition of *I will always love you*. Her compelling performance, where one might begin to consider how identities can be created and performed, is broken by a customer who walks into the frame and starts to demand her groceries.

15 o Pipiri – 6 o Hōngongoi 2018

E whakarewa nei a Veā Mafile’o i tētahi ngatu launima ā-hiko, mā te toro atu ki ngā kapohanga maha kua kapohia e ia i roto i ngā tau tekau mā rima nei. Ko tā te ngatu launima nei he tuitui i te taukaea o te wā, he ārahi hoki i tōna tuituinga tonutanga. He momo papanga kotahi te ngatu launima o ngā papanga maha o Tonga, e whakakōrero nei i ōna hītori me ōna whakapapa.<sup>1</sup> Kāore i tino tawhiti te whānuitanga me te hōhonutanga o ngā mahi a Mafile’o i ō te ngatu launima. Ka kitea i runga i ngā papa e toru ētahi whakairinga whakaata, hopunga reo hoki i kapohia i ana haerenga maha ki Tonga, mai anō i te tau 2003.

Ka āta tuituia te nanahi ki te nāiane, me ētahi hītori takitahi, takitini anō hoki. Ka toro a Mafile’o ki ana kapohanga maha; kei tētahi taha ko te hui whakanui i te huringa o te kura tuarua o Tupou, i Toloa, ki tōna tau 150, i te tau 2016, kei tērā atu ko tētahi koka’anga (he kāhui wāhine, he kāhui raranga i ngā papanga) e hanga ana i tētahi launima i roto o Lapaha. Kei roto i ēnei whakaaturanga o ēnei huihuinga, ko ētahi kōrero atu anō, e whakaatu ana i ō Mafile’o wheako. I roto i tētahi wāhanga o te mahi, ko ētahi kapohanga o te whenua o Tonga, kua whakapirihia ki ētahi kapohanga o te reo o te kōkā o Mafile’o, arā, o Ana, e tuku ana i ana mihi aroha ki tana whānau i Aotearoa.

Inā kē te huhua o ngā pūkenga rāweke kiriata ka whakamahia e Mafile’o hei whakaatu i ngā mahi tapu me ngā mahi o ia rā i tea o o Tonga. Ko ētahi o ngā tino kapohanga o tērā momo ao i kapohia i tō rātou toa hokohoko. Kei tētahi wāhanga o ērā kapohanga ko tētahi wahine āhua taiohi nei, e titiro whakawaho ana ki tētahi motu i mua i te toa, e waiata ana i tā Whitney Houston

The work ends with the sound of the 1973 tune *When will I see you again* by The Three Degrees, which plays as Mafile'o's nephew Emil (then aged 7) and sister Elizabeth (aged 13) are depicted sitting alongside their elder relatives posing formally for the camera. Her family stands at the doorway of their home and they begin to wave goodbye, not to camera, but to those behind it.

This re-presentation of documentation becomes a screen memory, of sorts, that intimately farewells multiple journeys, and people who have passed, as easily as it evokes a sense of longing. Mafile'o works innovatively with concepts of time, in a way that looks forward and backwards simultaneously so that the future is as open as the past and both can be rewritten in tandem.

— Ane Tonga

**Vea Mafile'o** (b. 1981) is an artist of Tongan, Māori and Scottish descent who works primarily in moving image and installation. She completed a Bachelor of Visual Arts and a Graduate Diploma of Fine Arts from the University of Auckland, and has exhibited extensively since 1998. Selected exhibitions include *This Time of Useful Consciousness—Political Ecology Now*, The Dowse Art Museum, 2017; *Imaginary Dateline, Venice*, 2015; and *Tonga 'I Onopooni: Tonga Contemporary*, Pātaka, 2014. Mafile'o continues to work as a filmmaker and is co-founder of the company Malosi Pictures. She is currently developing her first feature film, which is due to be released later this year.

1 Ngatu launima (decorated barkcloth) is revered for its size. Launima indicates the length of fifty individual pieces sized between 45-60 centimetres.

waiata, i te *I will always love you*, nō te tau 1992. Hei reira, kua mārama te kite atu i ngā ararau hei whakapuaki i tō tuakiritanga. Nāwai rā, ka aukatihia atu te reo tioriori e te reo hāmama o tētahi wahine tohetohe mō ngā kai i hokona e ia.

Ka mutu ngā mahi ki tētahi kapohanga o ngā irāmutu a Mafile'o, o Emil (E 7 ana tau i tērā wā) rāua ko tana tuahine, ko Elizabeth (13 tau) e noho ana ki ō rāua pakeke, e whakatika ana ki te tango whakaahua. Ka mutu, ka rāngona te waiata nā The Three Degrees, *When will I see you again*, i puta i te tau 1973, i taua wā tonu. Ka tū tana whānau ki te whatitoka o tō rātou whare, kātahi ka tīmata ki te hurei mai, kua ki te kāmera, engari ia ki ngā tāngata kei muri.

He rau maharatanga tēnei whakaaturanga o ngā kapohanga maha, i kitea ai te wairua poroporoāki ki ngā takahanga wae, ki ngā tāngata i tūtakina hoki i ērā takahanga wae rā, i rāngona tahitia ai hoki te pūkōnohinohi o te ngākau. Ngāngahu ana te kite i te auaha o tā Mafile'o rāwekeweke i tēnei mea te wā i ana mahi, me te aha e ngātahi ana te rere o te nanahi me te āpōpō, he mea whakaū, whakamahere hoki rāua, e mau ai tō āpōpō, tahi me tō nanahi mana ā haere ake nei.

— Trans. Parekura Pewhairangi

1 E mōhiotia ana te ngatu launima mō tōna kaitā. Kei roto i te kupu Launima te tohu o te kaitā, ā, e rima tekau katoa ngā papanga iti kua whakakotahitia. Kei te takiwā o te 45 – 60 henemita te roa o ia papanga.

## Kupu

### **Kapohanga**

(noun) footage, documentation

### **Whakaaturanga**

(noun) exhibition, demonstration, production, display, presentation, performance, show

### **Whakaahua**

(noun) photograph, illustration, portrait, picture, image, shot (photograph), photocopy

### **Nanahi**

(location) yesterday, past

### **Nāianeī**

(location) today, present

### **Āpōpō**

(location) tomorrow, future