

O LE MALAGA I LANU MA MUSIKA: MY JOURNEY THROUGH COLOUR AND MUSIC

Ana Teofilo



Figure 1. My adaptation of the Richter process using a painting roller:

I use the title "O le Malaga i Lanu ma Musika: My Journey Through Colour and Music" to express the way I form my paintings; this is my way of expressing colours through Samoan music in my studio practice. The key aspects of my paintings that inform my studio practice include my artist's models, tatau (tattoo), Samoan musika, siva Samoa and Samoan cultural customs. These are the influences that enable the various elements of my artworks to show through, such as the symbolic meanings of the patterns, the high and low intensity of bright colours and tones, and the texture of the glue dots used in many of my works. My paintings reflect the process of reminiscence experienced when going through old photographs when I was a child, as well as embodying themes relating to aiga (family), performing Samoan dance, attending church functions, significant events, and time and space.



Figure 2. *Pasifika Drums*, 2015, mixed media, 122.5 x 122cm.

The three most important elements of Samoan culture are faith, aiga and music. These are the three themes I always carry with me throughout my studio practice. The decorative patterns I create express my links to my land and genealogy. My work evokes the interweaving of connections between past and present through oral history, genealogy and storytelling, memories and artistic sentiment.

PAINTING PROCESS

The Western influences in my works show through dynamically gestural painting marks, and the depiction of compositional space through the play of colour shades. In terms of my painting process, I am influenced by techniques developed by German artist Gerhard Richter – in his abstractions rather than his photographs. He uses a squeegee to smear the paint across the wet surface of his work. In my earlier works I started off using the same technique as Richter; but I found it hard working with the thick paint residue scraped off during this process, so I began to use a roller: I dip the roller in water and then scrape paint off to creating a swirl effect, giving me the ability to choose an area of the painting over which I can exercise control.

SWIRL

The swirl is an important aspect of my work. It symbolises the movement and rhythm that I perceive in siva (dance) Samoa and music. In Samoa, one of the most admired and revered dance forms is the tualuga. A traditional Samoan dance which has been part of Pasifika culture for thousands of years, it is regarded as the most important dance in Samoa, unchanged since the beginning of Samoan history. And indeed, it has been part of Samoan culture for thousands of years. The siva is performed at any cultural celebration that affirms the relationship between family values, the Christian faith and the importance of fa'a Samoa (the Samoan way). The swirl symbolises the arm movements and hand gestures performed during traditional dance, which are used to illustrate the accompanying songs. The movements are fluid, elegant and effortless. Tualuga is thus one of the central influences on the swirls I use in my art.



Figure 3. *Tattoo the Men and not the Women*, 2015, mixed media. 122.5 x 122cm.

GLUE DOTS

The glue dots I use in my work represent many things for me. In my paintings, these dots often signify the general characteristics of contemporary Samoan dance, most often large group performances. In group dances, the performers are generally arranged in rows and columns, and the dots mimic the way in which the rows of dancers echo one another. The glue dots also signify the journey I have taken through my own storytelling, revolving around loved ones, the warmth and love I have received from family and friends and the influence they have had on me, especially in my walk with the Heavenly Father. The repetitive marks carved into my works are influenced by my father's Samoan tatau, but also by my own tatau that I wear as a reminder of where I come from to help me in whatever situation I encounter in my own personal journey. In Samoa, the strength provided by the family unit is the foundation of society.

LANU MA MUSIKA THEORY

Wassily Kandinsky, an influential Russian painter and art theorist, was fascinated by colour theory, but also by the relationship between music and colour. He believed that composing music was very much like creating a painting. Drawing on Kandinsky's colour and music colour theories, I was able to develop my own lanu ma musika (colour and music) theory that I experiment with in my own painting.

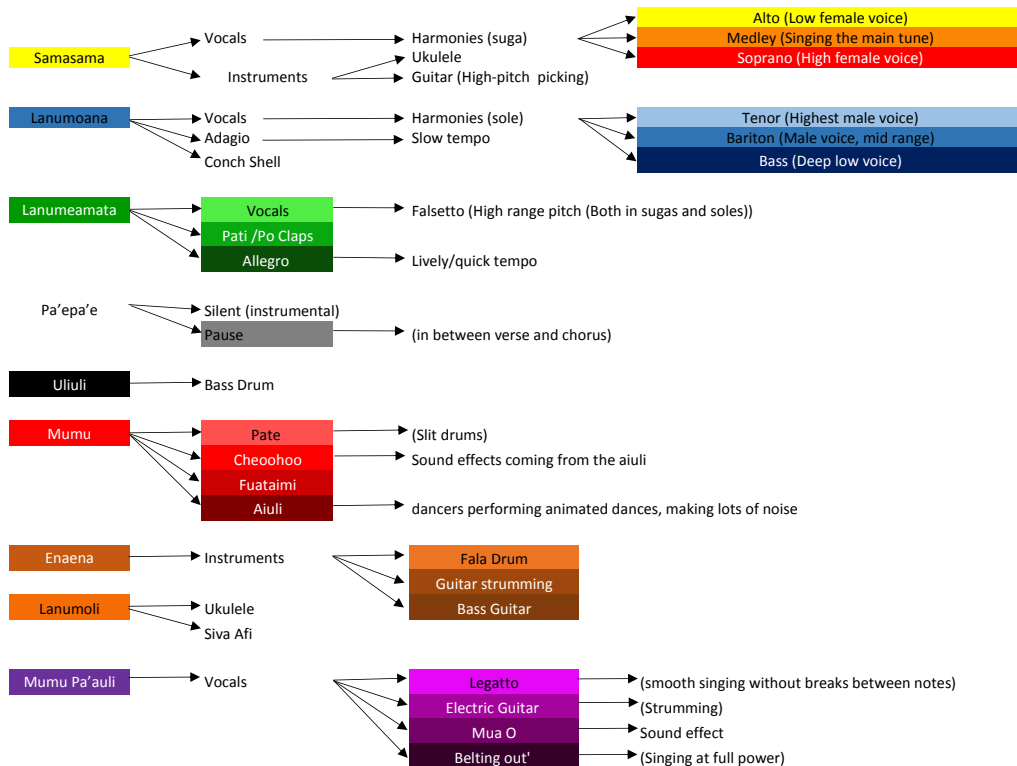


Figure 4. Lanu ma musika (colour and music) correspondence chart.

While Kandinsky's musical colour theory was inspired in turn by Alexander Scriabin's symphonic work *Prometheus: The Poem of Fire*, my approach is based on traditional and contemporary Samoan music. In Samoan music, the most important and essential ingredient has always been the voice; singers mourn, rejoice and indeed reflect every

emotion. The past, the present and sometimes even the (near) future are turned into song. The two songs I used to create my lanu musika were *Faliu le la* by soul and reggae singer Ben Vai and the traditional *Tausagi mai manu e*. To me, these two songs embody the essence of Samoan music.

Figure 4 illustrates the system of correspondences I have devised between colour and musical styles (lanu ma musika) in a Samoan cultural context. In the vocals section of the samasama (yellow) phase, I have placed harmonies for the sugas (girls or young women), whereas the harmonies for the sole (men) are assigned to the colour blue. For the girls assigned to samasama, the alto voices are in yellow, the medley section in orange and sopranos in red. The instruments for samasama are ukulele and guitar (high-pitch picking).

Next comes lanumoana (blue), where the harmonies for the male voices resolve into light blue for the tenors, mid blue for the baritones and deep blue for the deep, low bass voices. The slow tempo beats of the adagio are represented by the conch shell.

Lanumeamata (green) is subdivided into falsetto vocals (light green), mid green for pati/po, which are different kinds of hand clap, and dark green for allegro.

Pa'epa'e (white) represents the silence that falls when all the instruments stop playing, while lanu efu'efu (grey) suggests the pauses found between the verse and chorus. Uliuli is black for the bass drum.

Mumu is red, while piniki (pink) is used for the pate, a Polynesian percussion instrument. The various sizes of pate produce sounds of different pitch and volume, with the choice of striking the instrument in the middle or near its ends. Also in red is cheoohooo – a sound signifying joy and happiness, usually used when a group or a taupou (sacred maiden) is performing siva Samoa. In the mid-red section I have placed the fuatimi, the person who guides both the dancers and musicians in a group performance, conducting the choir as it accompanies the dancers with singing or movement. Dark red signifies the aiuli. For example, when a chief's daughter is dancing, she is surrounded by a group of animated dancers making a lot of noise, known as aiuli.

Enaena (brown) is associated with three instruments: the fala drum (light brown), a rolled up mat beaten with two sticks called the fala, and one of the oldest Samoan instruments; the guitar (mid brown); and the bass guitar (dark brown).

Lanumoli (orange) is represented by the ukulele and the siva afi or fire dance.

Mumu Pa'auli means purple. I use a purply hot pink to represent legato, smooth singing without breaks between notes. Purple proper is used for the electric guitar, while mid purple represents the phrase "mua o," traditionally voiced at the beginning or end of a performance. Dark purple is reserved for singing at full power – belting out the vocals.

CONCLUSION

I have explored my use of decorative mark-making using carving tools and the hot glue gun, and the use of Pasifika motifs as a signifier of events and a sign of respect. My Pacific-based concepts and ideas are the cultural driving force that defines me as an artist in a predominantly Western cultural context. They enable me to draw on past traditions to inspire new ideas and concepts. In brief, my art practice is a reflection of my life journey: my parents leaving their homeland in Samoa and my positioning myself as a New Zealand-born Pasifika artist.

O le Malaga i lanu ma musika: my journey through colour and music.

Fa'afetai lava

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