

## EXHIBITION OVERVIEW



**TATAU**  
MARKS OF POLYNESIA





THE WORK OF  
TRADITIONAL  
TATAU MASTERS  
ALONGSIDE THAT  
OF YOUNGER  
PRACTITIONERS  
AND ARTISTS



AN INDIGENOUS  
ART FORM WITH  
A HISTORY THAT  
DATES BACK  
2,000 YEARS



*\*Our Bodies, Our Voices, Our Marks* opening event at the Immigration Museum,  
images by Xavier Smerdon Photography, courtesy of Museums Victoria



# AN EXHIBITION ON SAMOAN TATTOO PRACTICE

## An Important Indigenous Tradition

Samoa's *tatau*, along with Japan's *irezumi*, is one of the world's most distinct living tattoo traditions. *Tatau* is an indigenous art form with a history that dates back 2,000 years. It has played a pivotal role in the preservation and propagation of Samoan culture, having survived multiple attempts at eradication. In Samoa, *tufuga tā tatau* (master tattoo artists) are granted high status in society, and acquiring *tatau* is considered a powerful affirmation of national identity, particularly for young men, for whom it is an important rite of passage.

## The Artists

Among the artists featured in *Tatau* are Su'a Sulu'ape Alaiva'a Petelo, Su'a Sulu'ape Peter, Su'a Sulu'ape Paul Jr., Su'a Sulu'ape Aisea Toetu'u, Sulu'ape Steve Looney, Tuigamala Andy Tauafiafi, Mike Fatutoa, and Sulu'ape Si'i Liufau. An important focus of the exhibition is the influential Sulu'ape family and their disciples; the legendary Petelo Sulu'ape and his deceased brother Paulo are credited with spurring the resurgence of Samoan tattoos worldwide. Additional photographs taken in New Zealand, Hawai'i, California, and Nevada demonstrate the spread of the art form outside of Samoa and some of its newer interpretations.

## The Organizers

*Tatau* is organized by the Japanese American National Museum (JANM) and curated by Takahiro "Ryudaibori" Kitamura, the master tattoo artist and author who previously curated the successful exhibition *Perseverance: Japanese Tattoo Tradition in a Modern World* for JANM in 2014. Kitamura is collaborating with John Agcaoili, photographer; Sulu'ape Steve Looney and Danielle Steffany-Looney of Pacific Soul Tattoo in Hawai'i; Sean Mallon, author and Senior Curator of Pacific Cultures at the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa; and Sulu'ape Si'i Liufau of A-Town Tattoo.





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## Exploring the World of Tatau

Through photographs taken in the studio and on location in Samoa, *Tatau* showcases the work of traditional *tatau* masters alongside that of younger practitioners and artists who are adopting *tatau*'s motifs and styles for new media and art forms. Viewers are able to appreciate the sheer beauty of Samoan tattoos while learning about what they signify in Samoan culture, and how they help Samoans and other Polynesians living abroad stay close to their identity and their heritage.



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## Exhibition Physical Description

### 175 PHOTOGRAPHS (Unframed sizes— add 6" for frame/mat)

- 87 photos (21" x 15")
- 70 photo (15" x 21")
- 7 photos (38" x 54")
- 2 photos (42" x 54")
- 2 photos (30" x 22")
- 2 photos (24" x 30")
- 1 photo (54" x 38")
- 1 photo (54" x 42")
- 1 photo (30" x 27.5")
- 1 photo (30" x 24")
- 1 photo (14" x 13")

### PAINTINGS/DIAGRAMS (Unframed sizes)

- 5 paintings
- 4 template boards (8" x 8")

### ARTIFACTS

- Taupou headdress
- To'oto'o (orator's staff, 66" long)
- Fue (orator's whisk, 40" long)
- Traditional tattoo tools (2 sets)

### VIDEOS

- 10-20 interview videos (DVD format) with the exhibition curator and artists, offering insights into the exhibition
- 1 documentary film (DVD format) shot during the production of the JANM exhibition by cinematographers John Agcaoili, Alexander Bauzon, and Jon Ugto. Directed by John Agcaoili. *The film takes viewers to Samoa, the birthplace of tatau. Focusing on the legendary Sulu'ape family, the film documents the tatau process, Samoan cultural ceremonies, and the rarely seen Sulu'ape family tomb. This footage is paired with candid interviews with the Samoan Head of State, the Samoan Prime Minister, and fautasi skipper Zita Martel. The cultural importance of tatau is further explored through interviews with artists and clients alike, providing an in-depth analysis of the contemporary Polynesian tattoo scene.*

### TEXT PANELS

- 2 primary, 10 secondary text panels

### AUDIO FILES

Featuring voices of the curator and artists — available for use as an audio tour.

### → EXHIBITION PUBLICATION

The companion book *Tatau: Marks of Polynesia*, (268 pages, 220 photos, softcover, 8 1/2" x 11") is published by the Japanese American National Museum. Written contributions by Sean Mallen and working tattoo artists. Foreword by former United States Congressman Eni F.H. Faleomavaega. Photography by John Agcaoili.

### → VENUE REQUIREMENTS

<b>Space Required</b>	2,000 - 4,000 sq ft
<b>Minimum Ceiling Height</b>	10 ft
<b>Production Time</b>	4 working days for installation, 3 working days for deinstallation
<b>Venue Preparations</b>	Painting and minor graphics as needed per agreed floor plan. Objects require cases. Hanging fixtures.
<b>Inbound Freight</b>	1 x 20 ft truck





JAPANESE AMERICAN NATIONAL MUSEUM

🖱️ [www.janm.org](http://www.janm.org)

The mission of the **Japanese American National Museum** is to promote understanding and appreciation of America's ethnic and cultural diversity by sharing the Japanese American experience.

The Japanese American National Museum is the first museum in the United States dedicated to sharing the experience of Americans of Japanese ancestry as an integral part of U.S. history. Through its comprehensive collection of Japanese American objects, images and documents, as well as multi-faceted exhibitions, educational programs, documentaries and publications, the National Museum shares the Japanese American story with a national and international audience.

*Tatau: Marks of Polynesia* is produced by the Japanese American National Museum and toured internationally by Flying Fish.

**Contact Us For Exhibit Hosting Information!** +1.651.207.8877 / [info@flyingfishexhibits.com](mailto:info@flyingfishexhibits.com)



**FLYING FISH**

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**Flying Fish** is a world-renowned producer of museum and science center exhibitions offering comprehensive services from design & fabrication to sales & marketing and global tour operations. Flying Fish works with some of the world's top museums to co-produce exhibitions from their collections and is entrusted to tour its clients' exhibitions globally. Flying Fish provides a wide variety of services to execute upon a successful touring exhibition program.

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