



Tatau - Traditional Marks of Samoa

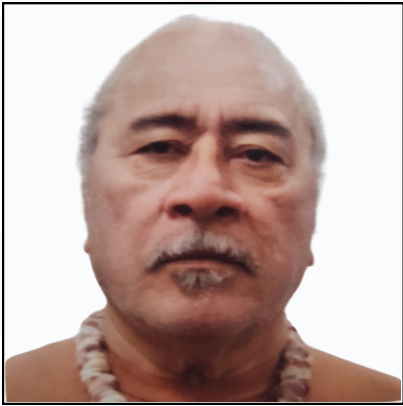


With a wealth of knowledge and experience in the heritage arts of *Tatau*, Mr. Su'a Uilisone Fitiao is a well-respected figure in the traditional Samoan tattoo community. The team from American Samoa, led by Su'a Uilisone, showcased the *Laei o Samoa*, a revered and sacred art form in the Pacific. This ancient practice is deeply rooted in Samoan culture, symbolizing important values such as strength, courage, and honor.

Joining Su'a Uilisone in this demonstration are his dedicated apprentices Mark Iulio and Isaiah Alesana, all of whom are passionate about preserving and promoting this traditional art form.



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Su'a Uilisone Fitiao

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We extend our gratitude to the Tapuaiga of our islands - Tutuila, Manu'a, and Aunu'u - for ensuring that our endeavors are well represented. Your thoughts and prayers are sincerely appreciated.

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Su'a Uilisone Fitiao was born in Siumu, Samoa but was raised in Matu'u, American Samoa after he and his parents moved there when he was just 8 years old. His father, the late Alesana Fitiao, used to take him on trips to Samoa where he was introduced to Su'a Suluape, a *Tatau* Master. Fitiao, who apprenticed under Su'a Lafaele Suluape in 1993 for ten years and had received an *Atoau* - a bag or satchel consisting of tatau tools. He returned to Tutuila and has been serving as a *Tufuga* in Tutuila and abroad ever since. Su'a Uilisone does both traditional and contemporary tattooing.

Su'a graduated from Fagaitua High School in the class of 1980, where he discovered his passion for Samoan artistry. During the late 1970s, he was mentored in the traditional art of Siapo making by the late Mary J. Pritchard, who greatly influenced his artistic journey.

Su'a Uilisone Fitiao embarked on his *Tatau* journey in 1993 when he traveled to Samoa to study under Su'a Lafaele Suluape to master the art of tattooing. Starting as an apprentice, he followed the guidance of his mentor until Su'a Lafaele Suluape bestowed upon him the *Atoau* in 2003. Upon returning home to American Samoa, he began his work on traditional Samoan tattoos for those who sought to have one.

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It was a great honor for him to be chosen to represent American Samoa at the festival. Participating in the event was a wonderful experience for him, allowing him to interact with diverse cultures from the South Pacific islands and meet skilled tattoo artists who shared their knowledge and patterns. Each design, though similar, held unique meanings and names, reflecting the rich cultural histories of their origins. The exchange of traditions and stories was truly remarkable and left him with an unforgettable experience.

Su'a Uilisone Fitiao worked on three Soga'imitis and two malus throughout the course of the Pacific Festival. The last of the Tataus were completed today. Receiving the Sogaimiti were: Isley Alesana, Zachery Falelua Alesana, and Wes Brewster. Receiving the Malu were: Salelupelele Leatigaga-Lualemana and her sister Holly Leatigaga.

Su'a Faalili Suluape is the son of his master, and together they received the Atoau from his father, Su'a Lafaele Suluape. It was a blessing for both of them, and he is incredibly proud. It's a unique experience for him to see Su'a Faalili representing Samoa while he represents American Samoa. This marks the first time that a family, starting from Su'a Lafaele Suluape, has both children representing their islands at the South Pacific art festival. Working side by side, tattooing together, they support and complement each other's work. Sometimes, as he is focused on his task, he hears his brother shout 'Faamalo!' across the shared workspace, adding to the camaraderie of their collaboration.

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Mark Iulio

Mark Iulio was born in Letogo, Samoa, and relocated to American Samoa in 2018. Under the guidance of Su'a Uilisone Fitiao for six years, he learned various aspects of *Tatau*, including crafting tools, understanding tattoo patterns, and the formations of *Malofie Samoa*.

Su'a Uilisone Fitiao intends to pass on his legacy to his son, Mark Iulio, as the successor to continue his work in Tutuila and potentially abroad if circumstances permit.

Isaiah Alesana is the Son of Su'a Uilisone Fitiao who currently resides in the State of Utah. He is also an apprentice learning *Toso*, which literally means pull. The *Tufuga* heavily relies on the essential role played by the *toso*, without which their work would be challenging to execute properly. It is crucial for the individual doing the *Taut* action to so that when the 'au hits the skin it gets a clean line.

Mr. Alesana is happy to be part of FestPAC and appreciates the opportunity to watch his father at work and learn more of the sacred form of art that we are very proud to call our own.



Isaiah Alesana

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