



Image courtesy of Artspace NZ

Faamele Etuale has recently completed a Bachelor in Creative Arts and an Advanced Diploma in Jewellery at Manukau Institute of Technology. As an artist, her passion stems from her formative nature as a painter, throughout her studies Faamele became fascinated with adornment. Contemporary Jewellery offered a medium to capture and archive memories through object. Her process is indicated by pivotal moments in life, adornment has created a structure for her to encase, reflect and release emotion.

The River Remains; ake tonu atu

Faamele Etuale

[9]

The Yellow Brick Road Home

Household items, bricks, felt lei, and old family photos
2018

"This work is not only a memory of happiness for myself, it was once was a space we all shared as a family - so many happy memories. It is also a place where all of our lives changed forever. Through this installation I honour my parents in a place we once were. It is also a reminder of where I once was, reflecting the crossroads that took place in that house that changed me forever."

- Faamele Etuale

Public Programme

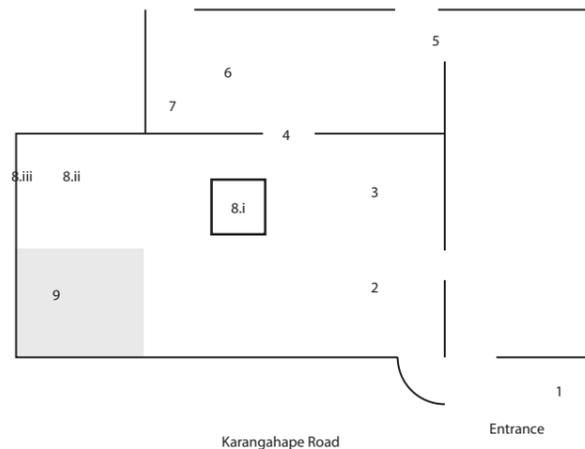
Saturday 16 September 2pm - 3pm
Group Artists Talk

Saturday 6 October from 1pm
Lunchtime Leis with Faamele Etuale

Thursday 11 October 6pm - 9pm
Artweek: Electric Night

The Yellow Brick Road Home is a space drawn from memory - the family lounge around which the artist's family's life revolved. Reconstructed through memory, love, courage, and loss this work is an act of adornment where the past is lovingly refigured, given physical presence and honoured.

The audience is encouraged to adorn themselves with a small felt lei as they move through the exhibition, and to then take one home to their own space.



During Faamele's studio residency I've had the honor to have had a number of long conversations about everything - from love, to courage, the object, memory, loss, and education. The following is a compilation of excerpts of Faamele talking to and around her work 'The Yellow Brick Road Home' (2018).

- Taarati Taiaroa

She was thirty six years old.

That was really young. And to know your fate at that age; I could not imagine what she was carrying. But I know that woman, she was so resilient. We've buried all three of our parents and our little sister - the baby of our family. So, you know, if that's not enough to break your spirit down, I don't know what will.... When my dad died, that was it for me, I was like 'nah I'm over it'.

My mum really liked to decorate things, like seriously! We had Elvis in the hallway, Bob Marley at the other end. She loved to collect things; ornaments, toys...she would leave them in plastic bags. I didn't understand that part. She liked to op-shop and go to garage sales. Saturday was her day for garage sales... She just loved making everything beautiful. She had a hard life, so now that she had this family she loved, any chance she gets she's decorating, cleaning....the house was immaculate....She was a real stay-at-home housewife, which I will never be able to qualify for! [laughter] Because that word 'BYO' exists which is buy-your-own or do-it-yourself [laughter]. She loved to adorn things... She really loved home and in that house... was the happiest time for her but also it was going to be the hardest time for her too. She transitioned from someone who had these five beautiful kids, she had a job, she had a good husband, everything was perfect and then everything just turned on its head when she got sick.

Thirty one, she got sick. She lived on an oxygen machine for five years. Round the clock care. Ems used to do her tablets. Early in the morning. That was her job. Lisa would sit with her if she wanted a cup of water, get what she wanted. I would do all the housework. Do everything else to get the kids to school. So we had to work as a team to ensure she was cared for. When she got really really sick, even walking or just sitting, she was exhausted. Breathing was exhausting. But, I never saw her suffer, I just saw her get through the day. She was so resilient... one hell of a tough woman.

Things started [to change - Taarati Taiaroa, ed]. No one took care of her plants. She used to have plants that used to grow on top of the ceiling. We were not concerned about all those material things anymore. We were just too busy worrying about her, her medication.

And you know when you're a young girl, your mum's the person you turn to... We had it cut off, we never got to engage with her in the next level of our lives. I was just abruptly finished. Deleted.

She got tired. She looked after all these things, but as her life was ending things just slowly got removed. She always used to look around and ask 'Oh, Mele why isn't that there? Why isn't that there?' and I'd used to tell her, 'Don't worry about it, don't worry about it mum, these things don't matter.' ...She was the life in the room... as things started going out of the room it was like her life was slowly depleting at the same time.

I think when you're truly happy in life and then something really not happy happens to you, that engagement of where the happiness was becomes sadness, you just can't remove it. It's set in stone in that room.



Image courtesy of the artist.



Image courtesy of the artist.

We can carry so many things.

Especially how we feel, memories...we carry all those things inside of us everyday. But for me doing my jewellery allows me to have this outlet where I take things that are inside of me and project them into objects that I can give to people that I love -to wear. People that I care - to wear, people that I honor. You can't go around holding a canvas, but you can go around carrying an object, a broach, a clip, an earring. You can forever, carry the memory of that person.

...It's that longevity that I'm interested in. ... I have this thing about the object and I think it's a lot to do with the room, because we have a porcelain cat, a porcelain cat that used to sit in our lounge that has been part of our whole experience. It doesn't talk but it's an object, it's been a part of our journey. And that's why for me an object speaks more than the image...I feel the object is paramount because you can lift it, you can feel it, you can touch it, you can take it. You can carry it with you.

And the thing that my son always says to me, and I always say it to him; 'Oh, mum I carry your heart in my heart'. And I always say it back to him 'Yes, I carry your heart in

my heart'. But, it always makes me wonder how would I make a jewellery piece that could embody that saying that we have.... Being able to make jewellery allows me to play and explore that.

I used to be quite lippy with my mum sometimes, I was a very naughty child, I wasn't perfect. So my form of punishment was cutting up plastic squares for her. She was very resourceful. She made lei for the house. She never gave them away, that's the weird part, she used to make them and put them around our photos.

For me, I feel like I need to give the lei away. It's like I have a lei in my hand, I'm parting with someone, it just doesn't feel right if I'm like 'Okay bye!' It feels right if I adorn that person and am like 'Thank you for coming, goodbye'. She would adorn people, but they were photos.

She could sit there for hours which meant that I had to sit there for hours looking at her and cutting squares up, which I didn't enjoy at all! Sometimes when I think back now, if only you knew then what you know now. I wish I had just rolled over to her, said to her, looked at her, how she was doing... her designs. Because she made things out of a square, made these beautiful designs, cut stuff out, it was ridiculous. And, she'd just patiently sit there making, making, making.

When I was making lei...I didn't have any plastic and then I thought about it and I got this idea of what if I had a piece of clothing of someone I loved. And it sounds really bad when you say 'cut it up!' 'cause when I said that to my sisters they went 'No!! You're not cutting up anything. That's so disrespectful cutting up Dad's jersey!' But I said 'I'm not going to waste a single bit of the jersey.' I made lei out of it and one of my sisters has it. His clothing that he used to wear on a daily basis was hanging in my space which he is not a part of anymore. The only physical remains of him are his clothes that he used to wear.

That's how Lunchtime Leis came about. I wanted to create a space where people like me who have lost people they love they can bring their favourite curtain, their favourite blanket or what ever it may be. I help them transform it through the basic learning of cutting a square and making a lei out of it. And I know people might think 'Oh yeah, well everyone makes leis!' But, it's not the lei itself but the process of the lei which for me is the most important part. You cut it up, you make sure they are all the same, then you sew it. Everything takes time.....

For me the most empowering thing is that person walks away and they can go teach other people. To me that is the greatest success of teaching someone anything. And I think that is just like us with our parents. Our parents, they teach, teach, teach us, all our lives and then when we are ready to go away, we fly away and we go do our own thing. But in their hearts they hope that we do everything that they taught us to do.

A lot of people are like, why don't you work in shell? Why don't you work in...? And I go 'because that's not where I am.' I feel like I don't have a right to it. And, it's just my way of respecting that material. I love to work in metal to modernise and preserve the objects that I create that are influenced by my cultural identity.

I still can't work out how she made her lei. It drives me crazy not knowing where she put the bloody needle. But, she did it from a square. That's the challenging part, she didn't use a different shape. She used a square and how I know is because I cut them up for her. You know I can see it, but it's just that.... When I hear people talking about garlands, lei and all of this and all of that, for me it's got nothing to do with my culture, it's more of a memory of someone that I loved so much... I'm trying to recreate that connection back to her. And, I will forever be trying to make out the square, how she made all those different designs.