

DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI AWARDS

TAUMATA

Each year, the University recognises a group of alumni for their career achievements and contributions to the community. Meet the 2023 recipients.

FATU FEU'U ONZM

PGDIPFA 1998 (CREATIVE ARTS
AND INDUSTRIES)

While Fatu Feu'u was being interviewed by Jack Tame at the Taumata ceremony on 1 April, behind him on a video was one of his striking artworks, which depicts the horror of the 2009 earthquake and tsunami in his homeland Samoa. When he talked about that time, the image appeared to come to life through the anguish in Fatu's voice, as he recounted the destruction of the village in which he grew up, Poutasi.

"Poutasi is one of the most beautiful places ... but the whole village was wiped out in 2009. A day after, I went back and there was no village. Huge boulders and fishing boats littered the road. The hospital was cut in half. The only buildings left were two churches."

Then he received the shocking news that nine of his family had died.

"I stayed to help rebuild the village. It's one of the strongest villages in Samoa in terms of the culture and, of course, its importance to me."

Fatu is an internationally recognised sculptor, printmaker, painter and ceramic artist who has created and exhibited Pacific art for more than four decades. In 2022, he received the Icon Award from the Arts Foundation Te Tumu Toi for his outstanding contribution to art and his role as a leader within the Pacific arts community.

His mother brought him to New Zealand from Samoa in 1966. "Earlier, she'd said, 'What are you going to do, you're no good on the plantation and you're no good at fishing?'"

"I told her I wanted to study art. Mum had no money to send me to art school, but she said, 'We have a very strong culture, go do your art and you can make yourself a future.'"

Fatu is indebted to have had support from Kiwi artists including Tony Fomison, Colin McCahon and

Pat Hanly. In turn, he now supports developing artists through the Tautai Contemporary Pacific Arts Trust in New Zealand and the Fatu Feu'u Arts Centre in Poutasi.

University of Auckland history lecturer Felicity Barnes and husband Michael Whitehead have also set up the Fatu Feu'u award to honour his role in Pacific arts. The award, \$15,000 each year, will go to an excellent Pacific student in fine arts, drama, dance, film, screen production, music or creative writing – someone with the potential to have an impact on the creative capital of Aotearoa New Zealand.

Fatu says he's been meaning to retire but could also see himself as a successful negotiator. "The Western world, with all its power of negotiation, isn't using it properly. I'm talking about Ukraine, and the almighty power of Americans.

"They should be dealing with it, to improve those negotiations to try and get rid of this war."

Watch the interview:

auckland.ac.nz/taumata-fatu-video ▶



Artist Fatu Feu'u and his artwork depicting the 2009 tsunami's impact on his home village Poutasi in Samoa. Taumata event photos: Richard Ng

