

Patterns and Motifs found in Samoan Art

Tatau

Pula tele - This is a large upside down triangle that represents extended family.

Pula tama - This is a smaller upside down triangle inside the Pula tele which represents immediate family.

Va'a (canoe) - This is a small black triangle, at the back of a man's tatau (Pe'a or Malofie) which represents a va'a (canoe).

Asofa'aifo and ivi'aso'aso- These are lines that come out from the va'a. They represent family and genealogy which is all about where you come from.

Siapo

There are 13 traditional patterns that you will find on Siapo. [You can practise drawing these here!](#)

1. **Fa'a 'au'upega**. This pattern represents a net for catching pigeons or turtles.
2. **Tusili'i**. These can be small lines (midline of the coconut leaf) or wavy lines (hand weaving of coconut fibres).
3. **Fa'a 'ali'ao**. This pattern represents a triangular shaped shell called a Trochus shell.
4. **Fa'a sigago**. This pattern represents a flower from the Pandanus plant.
5. **Fa'a lau paogo**. This pattern represents a leaf from the Pandanus plant.
6. **Fa'a lau ulu**. This pattern represents a leaf from the Breadfruit plant.
7. **Fa'a tuli** (Sand piper - type of bird), **Fa'a gogo** (Tern - type of bird), **Fa'a vae tuli** (footprints of a bird).
8. **Fa'a 'aveau**. This pattern represents a starfish.
9. **Fa'a tumoa** or **Fa'a moa fai**. This pattern represents an open or closed banana pod.
10. **Fa'a masina**. This pattern represents rolled Pandanus leaves.
11. **Fa'a 'anufe**. This pattern represents a worm.
12. **Fa'a atualoa**. This pattern represents a centipede.
13. **Logo logo**. The meaning of this symbol is unknown.

Usually the design is put onto Siapo using a form of printing (**Siapo 'Elei**). The design is first carved into a wooden plate and then transferred onto the siapo. Alternatively, siapo patterns can be painted onto the siapo by hand (**Siapo mamanu**).

[Here are some examples of Samoan Siapo.](#)

Bibliography:

[*The Truth about the Samoan Tattoo Tatau 2*](#)

[*Skin stories*](#)

[*Samoan art lesson for kids*](#)

[*About Siapo*](#)