Against
Samoa House Library, Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland, 2019–ongoing.

Samoa House Library (SHL) is an independent art library and alternative education platform based on Karangahape Road in Tāmaki Makaurau. Established in 2018 following the closure of specialist arts libraries at the University of Auckland, SHL emerged from a moment of loss in institutional arts education and research infrastructure.

While formed in response to that closure, SHL has evolved into a sustained model for arts learning outside formal institutional settings. It operates as a third space—neither home, workplace, nor university—where creative practice, critical discourse, and collectivity are enabled through the everyday use of the library, its collection, and its shared spaces.

Learning at SHL is self-directed, relational, and embedded in practice over time. Learning takes place through reading, research, conversation, making, publishing, volunteering, residencies, and the ongoing exchange between artists, writers, researchers, and visitors who return to and shape the space.

Grounded in manaakitanga, Samoa House Library is as much a place to borrow a book as it is to have a chat, use the WiFi, work at a desk, host an event, or share a warm cuppa. People arrive for one thing and become part of an ongoing network of exchange. SHL supports the wellbeing of practice and people, focusing on the long-term conditions that allow creative work to continue. Rather than emphasising fixed outcomes, it prioritises ongoing engagement, access to resources, and the relationships that form around shared use of space.

SHL demonstrates how arts education can be understood as an ongoing social practice shaped by infrastructure, care, and participation. It sits beside formal institutions while operating beyond their structures and values, and against the assumption that learning must be institutional, accredited, optimised, or outcome-driven. This spirit is captured in the whakataukī: ‘Nāku te rourou, nāu te rourou, ka ora ai te iwi.’ With my food basket and your food basket the people will thrive forever.