About the Artist: Jewel Castro

Southern California–based artist Jewel Castro received her art training at San Diego State University (BA 1995) and the University of California, San Diego (MFA 1998), where her academic and artistic excellence were recognized in the award of a prestigious two-year San Diego Fellowship. She has presented her work in individual and group exhibitions in California, Connecticut, New York, and Massachusetts, and curated two exhibitions, “Turning Tides: Gender in Oceania Art” (University of California, San Diego, 2006) and “Island Affinities: Contemporary Art of Oceania” (with Dr Peri Klemm, California State University, Northridge, 2007).

Castro began painting Samoan subjects in the 1990s, portraying members of her family and telling their stories. She conveys her tales of memory and travel through individual paintings, painted series, and installations. While her images represent personal reminiscences of family in Sāmoa, American Sāmoa, and California, her visual narratives resonate with diverse viewers sharing common experiences related to immigrating, living in diaspora, and negotiating cultural and national identities.

Her work is strongly figurative; she describes these figures as her saints. They are the vessels through which her stories are told: her grandfather and distant ancestors (represented as heavy, tapa-wrapped forms), who perpetually guide her to and from different Pacific shores; her grandmother and great-aunt, who sought to preserve fa'a Sāmoa in their California home; her uncle, who joined the US Marines to serve his country in Vietnam; and her mother and aunts, who delighted in American fashion and San Diego urban culture. Castro’s paintings and the environments she creates are full sensory experiences. She combines layered textures and images, color, light, sound, scent, and sculptural forms to guide viewers through the time and space of her stories and to render her memories, which are grounded in, and evoked through, bodily experience.

Stacy L Kamehiro
University of California, Santa Cruz
View of Red House/The Daughters of Salamasina, as first seen at the University of California, San Diego, 1998. Salamasina sculpture (standing) and Daughter Sculptures (seated) with view of Siva panels in background. This installation has grown since that exhibition. Size of total installation varies with venue, but typically ranges from 400 to 600 square feet.
Legend of the Leech (detail)
Acrylic on canvas, 1997, 96” x 72”
View of Talalelagi, Sāmoa (Story of the Skies, Sāmoa), as seen at the University of California, San Diego, 1997. Approximate size of installation: 600 square feet.
Tales of a Fisherman I
Acrylic on canvas, 2002, 60” x 48”
A Taupou on “A” Street
Acrylic on canvas, 2001, 60” x 48”
Auntie’s House,
from the collection of Dr Teri Sowell
Acrylic on canvas, 2001, 60" x 48"

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Daughters in the Logan
Acrylic on canvas, 2001, 60" x 48"

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View of Talalelagi, Sāmoa (Story of the Skies, Sāmoa), as seen at the University of California, San Diego, 1997. Approximate size of installation: 600 square feet.