

HEALOHA JOHNSTON

‘Āina in Contemporary Art of Hawai‘i

Abstract

In this article, Healoha Johnston considers how five contemporary artists describe the interconnectivity of the environment and aloha ‘āina through their work. Recent installations and exhibitions featuring artwork by Bernice Akamine, Maile Andrade, Sean Browne, Imaikalani Kalahela, and Abigail Romanchak engage issues of sustainability, articulate genealogical connections to ‘āina, and describe the possibilities for regenerative relationships to ‘āina through materials, form, and content. This essay considers the impact of the 1970s Hawaiian Renaissance as a cultural and political movement that re-centered the relationship between Kānaka and ‘āina, and catalyzed Hawai‘i’s contemporary art scene with a political dimension that visualized Kanaka ‘Ōiwi resurgence.

Keywords: Hawai‘i, contemporary art, environment, Hawaiian Renaissance, aloha ‘āina

This essay considers how five contemporary artists in Hawai‘i communicate different connections to ‘āina (land) through their work. Recent installations and exhibitions featuring artwork by Bernice Akamine, Maile Andrade, Sean Browne, Imaikalani Kalahela, and Abigail Romanchak engage issues of sustainability, articulate genealogical connections to ‘āina, and suggest possibilities for regenerative relationships to ‘āina through materials, form, and content. The lasting relevance of the 1970s Hawaiian Renaissance as a cultural and political movement that underscored the relationship between Kānaka ‘Ōiwi (Native Hawaiian people) and ‘āina, and catalyzed Hawai‘i’s contemporary art scene with a political dimension that visualized Kānaka ‘Ōiwi resurgence, is presented as an important forerunner of contemporary artistic production.

Hawai‘i’s socially engaged contemporary art owes its inception, in part, to the fertile ground laid by the Hawaiian Renaissance of the 1960s and 1970s when a renewed sense of cultural and political consciousness flourished in Hawai‘i. The Hawaiian Renaissance brought focus to ancient practices such as hula, oli (chant), mele (music), and ocean navigation by the stars, and enlivened their continuity in a contemporary context through the work of artists, practitioners, activists, and intellectuals.¹ This movement re-centered Hawaiian knowledge systems, and emphasized enduring connections between Hawaiian people and Hawai‘i’s complex land and ocean ecosystems. Although the spotlight was cast on Hawaiian culture, the momentum illuminated oppressive power structures that were pervasive across economic,

academic, and cultural sectors. This period of cultural resurgence served as a political precursor to the Hawaiian Sovereignty movements that had gained international attention by the early 1990s. It also coincided with global contemporary art practices of the 1960s through early 1990s such as conceptualism, minimalism, institutional critique, and identity politics.

In 1979, Dr. George S. Kanahale, a scholar and businessperson who has been referred to as the spiritual father of the Hawaiian Renaissance, delivered a speech as part of the Kamehameha Schools' Hawaiian Culture Lecture Series in which he masterfully synthesized aspects of the Hawaiian Renaissance by first situating it within an historical context before going on to predict long-term impacts of the cultural resurgence he likened to a “dormant volcano coming to life again.”² Kanahale named key contributors whose visionary and substantial, yet singular, influences anticipated the renaissance of the 1970s. Set against Hawai'i's political backdrop of the early twentieth century, however, Kānaka 'Ōiwi visionaries were unable to achieve on their own the social change that occurred after the mid-twentieth century through mass-mobilization of Kānaka 'Ōiwi communities.

The period between the 1893 illegal overthrow of the Hawaiian Kingdom monarchy and the twentieth-century Hawaiian Renaissance bears the imprint of an oligarchy whose political control over every aspect of life in Hawai'i was aimed at Americanizing the people of the islands by erasing the legacies of the Kānaka 'Ōiwi and Hawaiian Kingdom government from public memory. Land rights and the people's rights to enact the kānaka-āina (people-land) relationship through environmental stewardship and genealogical connection to the land were among the most visibly contentious aspects of the Hawaiian Renaissance because they contradicted the dispossessing logic of militourism.³ The arts were a galvanizing mechanism through which support for and awareness of āina rights and the reestablishment of the kānaka-āina relationship were cultivated.

Kanahale forecast, with incredible accuracy, what was on the horizon for the people of Hawai'i in the late twentieth century and beyond. Among the most profound aspects of his speech is his insistence of the importance of defining Hawaiian culture on Hawaiian terms, a process that would reassert holistic ecological approaches rooted in ancient Kānaka knowledge. He thought the culture, the land, the ocean, and the people of Hawai'i could not thrive in an aesthetic and political space that sought to only ever be, at most, derivative of another place. In his speech, Kanahale responded to an anonymous newspaper contributor whom he thought undermined the efficacy of the Hawaiian Renaissance:

Writing in the *Star Bulletin* (Feb. 20, 1979), he says the term [renaissance] implies the “tangible creation of works of art and literature” and that there is “scant evidence of such work in a Hawaiian Renaissance.” I don't know what he considers to be “scant evidence” in view of the prolific production of music, art and craft work, dances, and so on that Hawaiians have been responsible for during recent years. I would very much like to learn what he would consider to

be “renaissance quality” work. If he is using standards comparable to Michelangelo, Van der Meer, Leonardo da Vinci, Bacon, Erasmus, Machiavelli, the luminaries of the European Renaissance, I think he is kidding himself. It is more realistic and sensible to use the standards of the culture in which the renaissance is happening. I say let the Hawaiians themselves decide collectively what is “scant” or non-scant “evidence” of what is good or bad.⁴

Throughout his speech, Kanahele refused to assume Eurocentric points of reference to measure the potential of what was an intergenerational cultural revolution. Visual artists who were emerging in their practice during this time approached their work through a similar lens, whereby the de-centering of Euro-American paradigms and the reaffirmation of Hawaiian frameworks were considered valid methods through which to not only interpret the world, but to reactivate the kānaka-‘āina relationship in a direct sense. This shift occurred across media and took many different forms as artists situated themselves at the intersections of multiple art historical and material culture trajectories. This essay deliberates on pivotal examples by five contemporary artists who insisted on the continuity of the kānaka-‘āina relationship in the decades following the Hawaiian Renaissance, though many other artists were and are critical to the discussion.

Origins, Old Spiritualism, and New Nationalism

*The source
of
my origins
lie beneath my feet,
the breath
in my chest
originated
in Pō
the destiny
of my race
is
plunged into
my gut
and
infesting
my veins*

with a new nationalism,
 old spiritualism,
 and a need
 to make wrong
 right
 now.

—Imaikalani Kalahahele, “Manifesto” from *He Alo Ā He Alo*⁵

Imaikalani Kalahahele is an influential visual artist and poet whose career spans decades and a broad range of media including fiber, installation, illustration, and text. Regardless of format, Kalahahele’s artwork centers on sovereignty, political oppression, and liberation from dominant power structures. His “Manifesto” makes an association between Hawaiian national identity and the genealogical connection between person, land, and all living beings and elements of the world. Kalahahele ardently infers the spirit of aloha ‘āina (translated literally as love of land, love of country) and asserts the authority of Hawaiian sovereignty as traced through the Kumulipo in his reference to Pō.

Dr. Kamanamaikalani Beamer describes the concept of aloha ‘āina “as a movement for social, cultural, and ecological justice” that leans “toward the *union of culture and ecosystem*.”⁶ Embedded in this concept is the political dimension that oscillates between Beamer’s linked justice movements and the governance structure that oversees it. The concept of aloha ‘āina then weaves together ecological frameworks and issues of political sovereignty, and has been interpreted as such in a contemporary context by artists, scholars, and practitioners across disciplines. Although the words “aloha ‘āina” are not explicitly stated in Kalahahele’s “Manifesto,” the sentiment conveyed is consistent with earlier conceptions of balanced, interstitial relationships, and with what started as a nineteenth-century pro-Hawai‘i-independence political phrase that continues into the twenty-first century. Artists, including Kalahahele, explore the links between land and fisheries’ issues with governance structures, revealing in many cases the exploitive and destructive impact of systemic racism upon people, places, and bodies in Hawai‘i after the overthrow of the Hawaiian Kingdom monarchy in 1893 and absorption of Hawai‘i into the U.S. political structure in 1898.

According to Hawaiian cosmogony, humans share common ancestors with other living elements of the universe, a belief that links the Hawaiian Islands and the Hawaiian people to the same origin. The Kumulipo is the Hawaiian origin story that details the evolutionary relationship between the earth and living beings, including kānaka (people), recorded in the form of a chant composed of more than 2,000 lines which are retained, handed down, and expanded over many generations. In the foreword to the 1997 reprint of Queen Lili‘uokalani’s English-language translation of the Kumulipo, Dr. Pualani Kanaka‘ole Kanahahele describes the Kumulipo as a mele ko‘ihonua (genealogical chant) that “recognized the interrelationship of

all things is an everlasting continuum” and linked together the earth, the Hawaiian people, and the ali'i (royalty) by name.⁷ During the late nineteenth century, both King Kalākaua and his successor, Queen Lili'uokalani, shared the Kumulipo through printed publications. Dr. Brandy Nālani McDougall asserts that these textual efforts were political achievements intended to affirm the “continuing strength and survival of the Hawaiian people and nation” and reinforce Hawaiian sovereignty under Kānaka 'Ōiwi governance at a time when U.S. imperialism was an increasing threat to the lifeways and people of Hawai'i.⁸

The genealogical connection between humans and nature was sustained through social practices that value close observation paired with personal experience tied to a particular place. Enduring ancient thoughts suggest that for someone to truly understand a place, one must have knowledge about a site extending over many generations in conjunction with personal experience caring for it and eating from it. In effect, one merges one's self with the features of that locale. This type of connection enables a sensitive and highly attuned response to particular conditions and unique circumstances associated with Hawai'i.

From this perspective, a person comes to understand themselves through deep analysis of and responsibility to the 'āina that nourishes them physically and spiritually. While translated literally as “that which feeds” but often interpreted to mean “land,” the word 'āina in the context of “aloha 'āina” extends beyond notions of soil or landforms. It is important, then, to think about 'āina in a more comprehensive sense when associated with aloha 'āina. In Hawaiian philosophy, the symbiosis between humans and nature is mutually activating. When balance is maintained by proper stewardship and governance, healthy functions of the natural world flow and the elements respond favorably. In this way, the phrase “aloha 'āina” synthesizes the Hawaiian connection to the universe, not only the land but also the water, the sky, the order of the cosmos, and to all living beings. Dr. Noenoe Silva explains aloha 'āina as

a complex concept that includes recognizing that we are an integral part of the 'āina and the 'āina is an integral part of us. Part of that is a regenerated belief in our ancestors' cosmogonies, which include mo'olelo, mo'okū'auhau (genealogies), and mele ko'ihonua (genealogical chants) that tell us that the earth is Pāpāhānaumoku, the expanse of the sky is Wākea, and that among their children and descendants are the kalo, Hāloa, and his younger brother Hāloa, the first human being.⁹

Silva describes how Kānaka 'Ōiwi ancestors and kūpuna (elders) lived aloha 'āina concepts through an “ethic and orientation to the world,” defined by her as “mo'okū'auhau consciousness” —a term describing how Kānaka 'Ōiwi “drew on their ancestral knowledge and accepted and carried out the kuleana to record it so that Kānaka in their own time(s) as well as in the distant future would benefit from it.”¹⁰

In many ways, Imaikalani Kalahale's artwork anticipated what would be a discursive turn away from describing the cultural resurgence of the Hawaiian Renaissance as a demonstration of ethnic pride to situating it firmly within a renewed sense of sovereignty and nationalism rooted in aloha 'āina. In doing so, Kalahale connects injustices in Hawai'i's political past to present-day conditions associated with the expanse of the oceans and fisheries, the features of the land and places, and social and cultural well-being with his own participation in what Silva identifies as mo'okūauhau consciousness. Kalahale's textual references suggest an experience of disillusionment, frustration, and anger. Yet, with artistic lucidity, he articulates in a poem the process by which generations of Kānaka 'Ōiwi became both enraged by injustice and empowered by the knowledge of Hawai'i's political and philosophical past.

Methods of resistance initiated during and after the Hawaiian Renaissance intensified over the issue of Hawaiian sovereignty by the 1990s. Kānaka 'Ōiwi, along with non-Native allies, mobilized and took on a form of advocacy in which they asserted Hawaiian methodologies and deployed theories and tactics associated with critical race theory, feminism, and decolonialization in order to deconstruct systems of power in Hawai'i.¹¹ People inside and outside of academia were active in political movements, issues of land use, cultural practices, and exposing exploitative forms of institutionalized authority. Out of this emerging knowledge base came multiple interpretations of Hawai'i's sovereign experience, some of which developed in academia, while others gained traction through grassroots efforts.¹²

Aloha 'āina discourses affected colloquial descriptions of personhood in that many of us today self-identify as "Hawaiian" rather than "part Hawaiian." This is in contrast to the previous three generations for whom "part Hawaiian" and other blood quantum-like terminology was the vernacular.¹³ The shift is perceptibly attributed to an increased awareness of Hawaiian independence and aloha 'āina, culminating in a complex cultural and political matrix spurred by the Hawaiian Renaissance in the 1970s, radicalized by the sovereignty movements in the 1990s, and institutionalized by academia with the founding of the Center for Hawaiian Studies and its language departments, discursive evolutions in political science scholarship, and intellectual and artistic output from faculty and students across departments at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa over the last three decades. A "new nationalism"—in the form of twentieth-century aloha 'āina comingled with ancient knowledge systems as enacted in Kalahale's poetic "Manifesto"—set the conditions for bold artistic statements further perpetuating mo'okūauhau consciousness in contemporary art.

'Āina and the Everyday

In a 1993 interview with Bob Rees for a television series called *Island Issues*, sculptor Sean Browne described his work as part of an art historical trajectory rooted in the visual traditions

of Hawai'i. He explained how he was raised in a home filled with Hawaiian historical pieces collected by his parents, and how that visual record influences his work.¹⁴ The visual record to which Browne refers is simultaneously emblematic of Hawaiian experiences and inseparable from the land through their materiality and function, whether sacred or secular. Browne's interview concluded with his assessment that matters of sovereignty and land are inextricably linked, and one gets the sense from his words and composure that sovereignty and the island's ecosystems are an impetus to create—drivers of expression—as well as phenomenon to interpret.¹⁵

Kanahele once said that “one of the distinguishing characteristics of the [Hawaiian] Renaissance is a great interest in studying the past and the pursuit of knowledge in general” and explained that across disciplines and professions there is a “stampede back to the past.”¹⁶ Art was no exception. Making sense of the present in correlation with the past was a unifying undercurrent across the work of many Kānaka 'Ōiwi artists as they found their voice. John Dominis Holt describes this impulse as an “awakening among Hawaiians” to “know our history,” “find our roots,” and set our own terms aesthetically and politically.¹⁷ Ecological systems are frequent pathways to identifying and expanding aesthetic frameworks in Kānaka 'Ōiwi practices. “Land, body, and memory all inform one another,” Dr. Sydney Lehua laukea explains.¹⁸ She elaborates by situating the body within the natural ecosystem and suggests that “the body is the agent, the participant in the environment, and the container of memories.”¹⁹ laukea suggests that places are also vessels of memory for Kānaka 'Ōiwi. She describes how, historically, crucial information was transmitted through the environment and, therefore, places hold knowledge about who we are.²⁰ It is no wonder artists working during and after the Hawaiian Renaissance found access points to the past by understanding ecological connections between places, materials, and people, all of which are retained in Hawaiian material culture.

Sean Browne gained notoriety in the 1980s for his translation of Hawaiian iconography into large-scale sculptures carved and cast in metal, wood, and stone with sinuous lines. Forms that were small or human scale in life, such as fish hooks, adzes, and pōhaku ku'i 'ai (food pounders), took on new proportions as large public art commissions. Browne treated with equal care everyday functional objects, ancestral stories, Kānaka 'Ōiwi, and wahi pana (sacred places). He frequently borrowed and then abstracted the likenesses of familiar forms such as mauna (mountains), 'ahu'ula (feather capes), pōhaku ku'i poi (stone poi pounders), and mahi-ole (fiber and feather helmets) and then distilled essential visual components from these references into newly carved and reimagined shapes. When combined with Browne's own artistic interpretations and titles, classical Hawaiian images and aesthetics took on new meanings.

Because of their monumental scale, Browne's artwork commands attention whether in the public sphere or a gallery setting. Significantly, his renderings of Hawaiian ideals and



Figure 1. Sean K.L. Browne, *O Kalani*, 2019. Cast bronze and mahogany wood, 18.5 x 14 x 9 inches. Photograph courtesy of Honolulu Museum of Art

ecological connections, using dense materials such as stone and metal, give a sense of permanence and endurance to Hawaiian motifs, repositioning in a contemporary art context a visual vernacular which was previously relegated to ethnographic appraisals of the past. Browne's approach to understanding the past and creating a contemporary entry point from which others may see it means identifying his place within a continuum and adding his contribution to Hawai'i's memory through contemporary art.²¹

In a reversal of scale, Browne created in 2019 a bronze, maquette-size sculpture of the sacred mountain Maunakea titled *O Kalani* (fig. 1)—an indication, perhaps, of a larger monumental work to come. The sculpture hearkens to his childhood in Keaukaha, located at the coastal base of Maunakea where the mountain's running waters reach the Pacific. *O Kalani* was conceptualized at a time when the Protect Maunakea movement achieved national and international attention, and when the U.S. military's response to peaceful protests at the mountain's summit escalated. This sculpture was part of a larger museum exhibition that featured other works by Browne including sculptures depicting Joseph Nāwahī—a revered anti-annexationist, aloha 'āina, newspaper owner, and brilliant figure in government—and Samuel Kamakau, a preeminent authority on Hawaiian history.²² Together, Browne's sculptures articulate a triangulation between sacred places, ancient knowledge, and aloha 'āina in the persistent struggle to achieve justice for the 'āina in Hawai'i. Because the 'āina and the people are one and the same, ecological justice is intertwined with justice for Kānaka 'Ōiwi.

KALO: 'Āina as Process

The year 2021 marks the culminating phase of *KALO*, an art installation first assembled in 2015 by Bernice Akamine and featured in the 2019 Honolulu Biennial at Ali'iolani Hale. Akamine's installation consists of eighty-seven unique pieces reproducing the 1897 Kū'ē Petitions in the shape of kalo plants made out of ink, newsprint, and pōhaku (stone, figs. 2 and 3). The Kū'ē Petitions are documents—written in 1897 and signed by more than 21,000 men and women—protesting the annexation of Hawai'i to the United States. Members of Ka 'Ahahui Aloha 'Āina and the Hui Kalai'āina political organizations canvassed the islands, traveling district to district across the archipelago, gathering signatures in list formation. Delegates from the Hawaiian organizations traveled to Washington, D.C., to meet with members of the U.S. Senate and Congress with the goal of stopping annexation.²³ Akamine's *KALO* installation features the pages of the Kū'ē Petitions copied on newsprint paper and attached to pōhaku (stones). The combination of pōhaku and newsprint as art materials make direct reference to many aspects



Figure 2. Bernice Akamine, *KALO* (detail), 2015. Ink, newsprint, and pōhaku (stone); installation dimensions variable. Photograph by Stacy L. Kamehiro. Courtesy of the artist

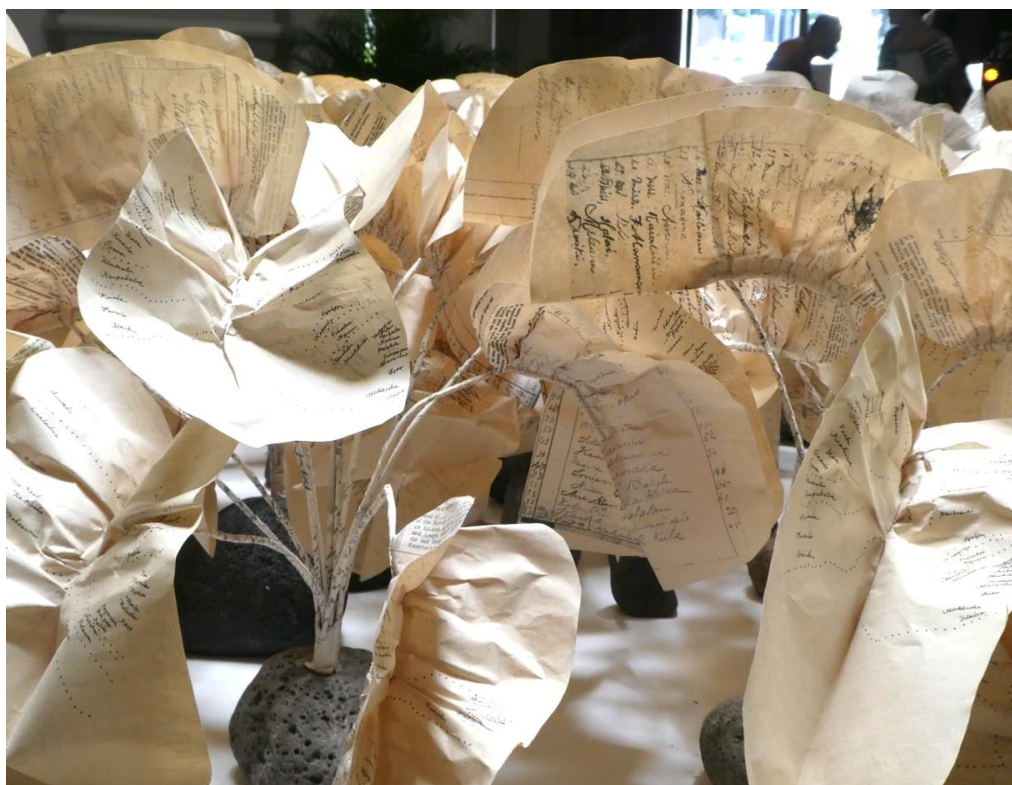


Figure 3. Bernice Akamine, *KALO* (detail), 2015. Ink, newsprint, and pōhaku (stone); installation dimensions variable. Photograph by Stacy L. Kamehiro. Courtesy of the artist

of the nineteenth-century aloha 'āina movement, one that through the Kū'ē Petitions persuaded enough U.S. senators to vote against annexation in 1898 and ensured Hawai'i's continued independence.

The pōhaku in Akamine's work are conceptually derived from the lyrics of the song "Kaulana Nā Pua" (also known by the titles "Mele 'Ai Pōhaku" and "Mele Aloha 'Āina") composed by Ellen Keko'aohiwaikalani Wright Prendergast in 1893. The song documents the dismissal of the Royal Hawaiian Band members for their refusal to betray Queen Lili'uokalani after the coup by signing an oath of allegiance to the Provisional Government. The song, written in 'Ōlelo Hawai'i (Hawaiian Language), protests annexation, asserts the rights of Queen Lili'uokalani, and declares that the people of Hawai'i are "satisfied with the stones, astonishing food of the land."²⁴

Akamine's decision to use newsprint as the surface upon which to reproduce the Kū'ē Petitions alludes to the prolific nineteenth-century Hawaiian-language newspapers and the aloha 'āina leaders who ran them while spearheading anti-annexation efforts. Hawaiian-language newspapers, and to a lesser extent English-language newspapers, played an important role in mobilizing Kānaka 'Ōiwi around the Kū'ē Petitions. Newspaper offices served as gathering places for Hui Kalai'āina and Ka 'Ahahui Hawai'i Aloha 'Āina, and were the primary communication outlets that kept Hawai'i's citizens informed of anti-annexation efforts archipelago-wide.²⁵

Akamine's use of the kalo plant as a sculptural form is a signifier of pono (right, balanced) government structure according to the Kumulipo and Hawaiian philosophy. The artist elicits figures in Hawai'i's origin story through this visual reference to affirm her support for the Hawaiian Kingdom monarchy. Among the vast descendants of the celestial deities Papa and Wākea (discussed earlier in reference to Imaikalani Kalahela's work) is Ho'ohökūkalani, who gives birth to a stillborn fetus named Hāloanaka. From the burial land of Hāloanaka sprouts the first kalo plant, the staple food of Hawai'i. Later, Ho'ohökūkalani gives birth to another child in human form, named Hāloa after his elder sibling. Born healthy and strong, Hāloa, the kalo plant's sibling, is the first ancestor of the Hawaiian people. This genealogy initiates the royal line of ali'i (chiefs, kings, and queens) who, over the course of Hawaiian history, govern the Hawaiian Islands and people and are tasked with maintaining balance and order between the human, spiritual, and earthly realms.²⁶

Reinforcing a parallel between people and place of origin, the pōhaku bases of each KALO sculpture were lent to the artist as a contribution to the installation, and Akamine is now returning the stones to the people who lent them. Gestures of cyclical reciprocity are both human and land-based, indicated by the sustained participation in artistic production that was conceptualized and facilitated by the artist, Akamine, with community members across the

pae 'āina (archipelago); and by the process of drawing upon earthly elements (pōhaku) as art medium and then returning those elements back to the 'āina from where they originated. Dr. Noelani Goodyear-Ka'ōpua reminds us:

Ea refers to political independence and is often translated as “sovereignty.” It also carries the meanings “life” and “breath,” among other things. A shared characteristic in each of these translations is that ea is an active state of being. Like breathing, ea cannot be achieved or possessed; it requires constant action day after day, generation after generation.²⁷

Akamine's artwork makes visible the continuation of Hawaiian sovereignty and honors those who struggle(d) to sustain it. The artist's process perpetuates ea in her activation of the kānaka-'āina dynamic turned art installation.

Ka 'Ōpua Ā Hina: 'Āina as Medium

In a 2018 solo exhibition at the Honolulu Museum of Art, mixed-media artist Maile Andrade transformed a gallery using wauke (mulberry bark) as her primary material. Titled *Ka 'Ōpua Ā Hina* (Figs. 4–6), Andrade's installation evokes symbolism related to the synchronicity and skill of a female deity to explore the vitality and intelligence of the natural world. Significantly, Andrade included the role of people in the activation of nature by tying together ideas of interstitial abundance, and underscoring both how vulnerable the earth is to human actions and, in turn, how vulnerable humans are to the earth's forces and systems. She made references to Hina—a female deity whose attributes are foundational to the Hawaiian concept of balance achieved through duality—and the human role as active agents, to Makali'i and abundance in the land, and to 'ōpihi as an indication of balanced ecological ocean health. The artist suggests that the kānaka-'āina relationship can play out in a cycle of healthy reliance, rather than destruction, seen in the inclusion of Makali'i by way of woven metal forms. More than a metaphor, Andrade situates humans within a matrix of the fertile, natural, and celestial worlds.

Andrade's studio practice is informed by her time spent researching and reactivating the kapa-making process. Kapa is a textile created out of pounded wauke, although other types of fiber were and are also used. In Hawai'i, kapa was methodically stretched, sometimes decorated, and often layered to function as garments, wraps, and blankets before the introduction of cotton fabrics to the Pacific. In the nineteenth century, kapa production waned as the Kānaka 'Ōiwi population drastically decreased. The catastrophic loss of human life due to the introduction of foreign disease severely diminished the work force, meaning there were



Figure 4. Maile Andrade, *Ka Ōpua Ā Hina*, 2018. Wauke, metal, and glass; installation dimensions variable. Photograph by Shuzo Uemoto. Courtesy of Honolulu Museum of Art

fewer survivors capable of passing on kapa-making expertise, and even fewer who were positioned to devote their energy to its continuation.

By the 1960s, kapa makers in Hawai'i had revitalized the practice through experimentation and the close study of pre-twentieth-century kapa examples housed in museum collections. Kapa-making, weaving, and the growing and gathering of requisite materials and dyes surfaced as important artistic pursuits—and as pro-Hawai'i political statements—during the Hawaiian Renaissance. In 1981, Andrade joined the contemporary artists and practitioners who had taken up the production of Hawaiian material culture using customary methods. Andrade channelled the material and methods of making kapa into an immersive installation as she reimagined the elemental manifestations of Hina for *Ka Ōpua Ā Hina*.

A divine kapa-maker, the goddess Hina created such fine kapa that the clouds in the sky were described as examples of her work. Andrade's other-worldly installation concentrates on the idea that, like Hina, we have the ability to affect change within our environment. Strips of wauke were suspended from the gallery's ceiling, creating an inverted, fibrous, forest-like ecosystem sprawling across 1,500 square feet (Fig. 4). Wall-mounted, glass 'ōpihi (limpet) shapes—translucent versions of the ocean delicacy—winding around the gallery perimeter suggested a waterline (Fig. 5). A series of partially-unraveled, metal woven baskets, repurposed from a previous sculptural iteration, were configured on the wall in the form of the



Figure 5. Maile Andrade, *Ka Ōpua Ā Hina*, 2018. Wauke, metal, and glass; installation dimensions variable. Photograph by Shuzo Uemoto. Courtesy of Honolulu Museum of Art



Figure 6. Maile Andrade, *Ka Ōpua Ā Hina*, 2018. Wauke, metal, and glass; installation dimensions variable. Photograph by Shuzo Uemoto. Courtesy of Honolulu Museum of Art

constellation Makali'i (Pleiades), a celestial symbol marking the start of Makahiki season when peace, abundance, and rejuvenation are celebrated (Fig. 6). Together, the wauke, the 'ōpihi, and Makali'i conjure generative and interconnected features of the universe.

Kā 'Ōpua Ā Hina featured wauke pounded by the artist to the mo'omo'o phase—the material had undergone preliminary rounds of soaking, felting, and drying, priming it for handling and keeping it flexible enough to enable it to continue into the later stages of kapa production post-exhibition. Resourceful and sustainable, Andrade's practice merges twenty-first-century contemporary art priorities with the radical possibilities of Hawaiian material culture. Kapa dating to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries from the Honolulu Museum of Art collection were on view in nearby adjacent galleries. Together with Andrade's installation, these textiles spanned a period of 300 years and indicated the continuity and evolutionary use of wauke as an art medium.

Kāhea: Visualizing the Unheard

Where Maile Andrade's installation radiated optimism and potential in the kānaka-āina relationship, Abigail Romanchak's installation *Kāhea* (Figs. 7-9) cautioned of the consequences paid for living at odds with nature. *Kāhea*, meaning “a call,” is Romanchak's visual lamentation on the quieting of the forests due to the endangerment and extinction of Hawai'i's native and endemic birds. It is also a call for people to turn their attention to surviving species. She explains: “In 1987, the last remaining male O'o bird on Kaua'i called to his mate. His song went unanswered, and now his call is gone too. The symphony of Hawai'i's birds is disappearing, and this mele of our land is dying. To date, seventy-two percent of Hawai'i's endemic land birds have gone extinct.”²⁸

To create *Kāhea*, Romanchak adapted three-dimensional spectrograms that document the pitch (measured in frequency), loudness, and duration of audio recordings into a series of prints. These wrapped around a gallery so people could “see the bird songs of the 'Akohekohe and Kiwikiu, two of Maui's most endangered bird species.”²⁹ As a Kanaka 'Ōiwi printmaker, Romanchak delves into environmental phenomena to unearth systems and forces that are so removed from most people's awareness that technological assistance is required to supplement observation skills in order to explain or understand the occurrence. She uses technological renderings to her advantage, translating data from scientific graphs, audio recordings, and banal reports into textured layers carved from blocks and printed onto thick stock paper as a way to generate visual awareness of the kānaka-āina relationship.

The act of manipulating data further detaches her final print from the original āina source. Yet, through this act the artist attempts to bring what could be considered legitimized



Figure 7. Abigail Romanchak, *Kāhea*, 2019. Collagraph print, 5 x 23 feet. Photograph by Tony Quarles. Courtesy of the artist

information closer to what might be detectable through the human senses for those whose abilities are attuned with the patterns of the universe. One-dimensional graph lines and sterile words are transformed into capacious reverberations and atmospheric shadows by the artist's hand (Fig. 8). In doing so, Romanchak questions that which is deemed quantifiable and begs the viewer to consider new ways of knowing and perceiving the elements around us. Like Browne, Kalahela, Akamine, and Andrade, Romanchak considers people to be an essential feature of an ecosystem. This inclusion is unmistakable in *Kāhea*, as the artist is calling the viewer to consider interconnectivity and consequences through the ghostly echoes marking each print.



Figure 8. Abigail Romanchak, *Kāhea* (detail), 2019. Collagraph print, 5 x 23 feet. Photograph by Tony Quarles. Courtesy of the artist



Figure 9. Abigail Romanchak, *Kāhea*, 2019 (detail). Collagraph print, 5 x 23 feet. Photograph by Tony Quarles. Courtesy of the artist

Conclusion

Bernice Akamine, Maile Andrade, Sean Browne, Imaikalani Kalahela, and Abigail Romanchak each approach the *kānaka*–*‘āina* relationship differently. A unifying commonality across their work is an engagement with social movements and the present moment in dialogue with *‘āina* philosophies that have been refined over the course of many generations. Their oeuvres suggest that roots in resistance and renaissance are vital to conversations of restorative justice, resource abundance, and sustainability, making their methodologies all the more relevant as the world reckons with what are sure to be the lasting impacts of a dual pandemic.

Acknowledgement and Thanks

My sincerest gratitude to the artists whose works are described here for their ongoing commitment to their practice, and for their collaboration in conversation over the years. I would also like to thank Cynthia Low, Director of Collections at the Honolulu Museum of Art, who supported many of the exhibition installations and artists named in this paper. Low is a great

thought partner in decolonial museum methodologies and has empowered artists, curators, and communities to be fearless in art.

Healoha Johnston lives in Kaiwiki, Hawai'i and is Curator of Asian Pacific American Women's Cultural History at the Smithsonian Institution where she is part of the American Women's History Initiative and the Asian Pacific American Center. Johnston's exhibitions and research projects explore connections between historic visual culture and contemporary art with a particular focus on the socio-political underpinnings that inform those relationships. Before joining the Smithsonian Asian Pacific American Center, Johnston served as Chief Curator and Curator of the Arts of Hawai'i, Oceania, Africa, and the Americas at the Honolulu Museum of Art.

Notes

¹ George S. Kanahale, "The Hawaiian Renaissance," May 1979, 1-10. The Kamehameha Schools Archives, Polynesian Voyaging Society Archives, Primary Sources Documents, Set 2-1978-1984.

² Kanahale, "The Hawaiian Renaissance," 1.

³ Teresia K. Teaiwa, "bikinis and other s/pacific n/oceans," *The Contemporary Pacific* 6, no. 1 (Spring 1994), 87-109, <https://doi.org/10.5749/minnesota/9780816665051.003.0002>. Teaiwa's definition of "militourism" is as follows: "a phenomenon by which a military or paramilitary force ensures the running of a tourist industry, and that same tourist industry masks the military force behind it." Teaiwa's term "militourism" developed into a theoretical framework for understanding militarization and the trappings of tourism in the Pacific, which I reference in this article. For additional information on this term and related framings, see also Teresia K. Teaiwa, ed., "Militarism and Gender in the Western Pacific," special section of *Asia Pacific Viewpoint* 52, no. 1 (2011), 1-55.

⁴ Kanahale, "The Hawaiian Renaissance" May 1979, 1.

⁵ Imaikalani Kalahela, *He Alo Ā He Alo (Face to Face): Hawaiian Voices on Sovereignty* (Honolulu: The Hawai'i Area Office of The American Friends Service Committee, 1993), 151.

⁶ Kamanamaikalani Beamer, "Tūtū's Aloha 'Āina Grace," in *The Value of Hawai'i 2: Ancestral Roots, Oceanic Visions*, ed. Aiko Yamashiro and Noelani Goodyear-Ka'ōpua (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2014), 13. Italics in original text.

⁷ Pualani Kanaka'ole Kanahale, "Foreword," in *The Kumulipo: An Hawaiian Creation Myth*, trans. Lili'uokalani (Kentfield, Calif: Pueo Press, 1997), n.p.

⁸ Brandy N. McDougall, "Mo'okū'auhau Versus Colonial Entitlement in English Translations of the Kumulipo," *American Quarterly* 67, no. 3 (2015), 755.

⁹ Noenoe K. Silva, *The Power of the Steel-Tipped Pen: Reconstructing Native Hawaiian Intellectual History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 4.

¹⁰ Silva, *The Power of the Steel-Tipped Pen*, 4-6.

¹¹ See key texts by Haunani-Kay Trask, *From a Native Daughter: Colonialism and Sovereignty in Hawai'i* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005); Lilikalā Kame'eleihiwa, *Native Land and*

Foreign Desires: Pehea Lā E Pono Ai? (Honolulu: Bishop Museum Press, 1995); and David Keanu Sai, *Ua Mau Ke Ea = Sovereignty Endures: An Overview of the Political and Legal History of the Hawaiian Islands* (Honolulu: Pū'ā Foundation, 2011).

¹² Noelani Goodyear-Ka'ōpua, Ikaika Hussey, and Erin Kahunawaika'ala Wright, eds., *A Nation Rising: Hawaiian Movements for Life, Land, and Sovereignty* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014); H. Johnston, "Visioning Nationhood," in *Hawai'i-Königliche Inseln im Pazifik*, ed. Ulrich Menter, Ines De Castro, and Stephanie Walda-Mandel (Stuttgart, Germany: Linden-Museum Stuttgart, 2017), 58.

¹³ On the question of "What is a Hawaiian?," see John Dominis Holt, *On Being Hawaiian*, 4th ed. (Honolulu: Ku Pa'a, 1995), 11; Mary Kawena Pukui, E.W. Haertig, and Catherine A. Lee, *Nānā i Ke Kumu (Look to the Source)*, vol. 2 (Honolulu: Hui Hānai, an Auxiliary of the Queen Lili'uokalani Children's Center, 1979), 312–314; and J. Kēhaulani Kauanui, *Hawaiian Blood: Colonialism and the Politics of Sovereignty and Indigeneity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), xi.

¹⁴ *Contemporary Hawaiian Art* (Honolulu, Hawaii: Wong Audiovisual Center, University of Hawaii at Manoa, 2012), film.

¹⁵ *Contemporary Hawaiian Art*.

¹⁶ Kanahēle, "The Hawaiian Renaissance," 2.

¹⁷ Holt, *On Being Hawaiian*, 8.

¹⁸ Syndey Lehua Iaukea, *The Queen and I: A Story of Dispossession and Reconnections in Hawai'i* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2012), 14.

¹⁹ Iaukea, *The Queen and I*, 14.

²⁰ Iaukea, *The Queen and I*, 14.

²¹ Holt, *On Being Hawaiian*, 17.

²² Browne's work was featured alongside pieces by Imaikalani Kalahēle in a two-person exhibition at the Honolulu Museum of Art titled *O Kalani*, running from September 3, 2020 to April 11, 2021.

²³ Noenoe Silva, "Kanaka Maoli Resistance to Annexation," in *Kū'ē Petitions: A Mau Loa Aku Nō*, ed. Nālani Minton (Honolulu: Kaiao Press with Friends of the Judiciary History Center, 2020), 19–49; Jonathan Kay Kamakawiwo'ole Osorio, "Ho'opi'i i ka Lāhui," in *Kū'ē Petitions: A Mau Loa Aku Nō*, ed. Nālani Minton (Honolulu: Kaiao Press with Friends of the Judiciary History Center, 2020), 7–12.

²⁴ "Kaulana Nā Pua (Famous are the Flowers)," Huapala: Hawaiian Music and Hula Archives, accessed October 29, 2020, https://www.huapala.org/Kau/Kaulana_Na_Pua.html.

²⁵ The *Elele* and *Ke Aloha Aina* were among the most influential.

²⁶ Kame'eleihiwa, *Native Land and Foreign Desires*, 22–25.

²⁷ Goodyear-Ka'ōpua, *A Nation Rising*, 3–4.

²⁸ "Abigail Romanchak," accessed September 15, 2020, www.abigailromanchak.com/prints.

²⁹ "Abigail Romanchak."