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Exhibition Review: Hawai‘i Triennial 2022: *Pacific Century—E Ho‘omau no Moananuiākea*

Abstract

An exhibition review of the Hawai‘i Triennial 2022: Pacific Century—E Ho‘omau no Moananuiākea that was presented February 18 through May 8, 2022, in Honolulu, O‘ahu, Hawai‘i. Organized by Hawai‘i Contemporary, the triennial was on view at the Bernice Pauahi Bishop Museum, Foster Botanical Garden, Hawaii Theatre Center, Hawai‘i State Art Museum, Iolani Palace, Honolulu Museum of Art, and Royal Hawaiian Center. It was curated by Dr. Melissa Chiu in collaboration with associate curators Dr. Miwako Tezuka and Drew Kahu‘āina Broderick.

Keywords: *Hawai‘i Triennial 2022, Hawai‘i Contemporary, exhibitions, contemporary art, Oceania, Asia*

The Hawai‘i Triennial 2022 (HT22), formerly called the Honolulu Biennial, mounted its multivenue exhibition from February 18 through May 8, with this iteration centered thematically on the term “Pacific Century.” The triennial—curated by Dr. Melissa Chiu in collaboration with associate curators Dr. Miwako Tezuka and Drew Kahu‘āina Broderick—was planned during an unprecedented time: a COVID pandemic coinciding with and framed by social justice movements. Chu’s opening essay in the exhibition’s accompanying catalogue begins with the heading “Curating and Crisis”—an indication of the moment’s urgency and the potential for exhibitions to exist as responsive spaces.

In many ways, HT22 asked visitors to think on notions of time and place, not least through the bilingual title. The title’s English and Hawaiian language segments are not translations of each other; they suggest contrasting perspectives. “Pacific Century” harkens a start and end point to a geography’s dominant presence in the global sphere, but the ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i (Hawaiian language) portion of the title asserts the continuing and everlasting endurance of the Pacific. Artists and artist collectives working across various media and time periods were included under the premise of this dichotomy, presented at seven sites with dynamic, albeit uneven, curatorial approaches discernable at each location.

Stand-out yet unassuming artworks that were presented at multiple locations included Lawrence Seward's newspaper *Seaward Sun*, printed in an edition of 5,000 copies and installed at the Honolulu Museum of Art, Bishop Museum, Hawai'i State Art Museum, and Royal Hawaiian Center.¹ *Seaward Sun* is dated 2034 and offers present-day readers a glimpse into the future. It juxtaposes apocalyptic forecasting related to climate-change impacts and catastrophic effects of unchecked capitalism with a parody-articles describing Hawai'i as an ideal paradise of luxury living. In a spirit of collaboration consistent with HT22's focus on artist collectives, Seward invited writers—Lesa Griffith among them—to author articles for the newspaper. It presents, in exaggerated contrast, current scenarios that were described on a daily basis through media outlets in Hawai'i during 2021 when the piece was actually made. Also presented at multiple venues—'Iolani Palace and the Hawai'i State Art Museum (HiSAM)—was *When I think of Ea*, a poem and audio recording by Jamaica Heolimeleikalani Osorio.² Osorio's recitation of their poem echoed in the atrium of HiSAM's second floor. The poem considers *ea* and connects breath with music, sacrifice, skin, trust, love, and the *lāhui* as Osorio (re)members characteristics of their mother and father, the ocean and rocks, extended genealogies, and collective experiences tied to sovereignty.

Large-scale installations at Bishop Museum, such as the formidable portrait series *Te Pu o Te Wheke* by Pacific Sisters and the incredible *Enola's Head* by Gaku Tsutaja, and *With the toughest care, The most economical tenderness* by Justine Youssef at the Royal Hawaiian Center commanded attention in physical spaces while activating digital technology in an effective interplay for visitors (including myself) who were exhausted by virtual life and virtual exhibitions during COVID.³

HiSAM was, without question, the venue that featured the most carefully considered grouping of artists; its works were curated with attention to interconnectedness, interpretation, and narrative that the other sites simply did not have. HiSAM's installation read like an art-historical exhibition addressing the intersections between art, design, time-based media, literature, land struggle, and resistance in Hawai'i. It was the most distinct site in its departure from typical contemporary art-triennial methodologies. Opting instead for a historicized approach, the exhibition featured nearly survey-scale representations of artworks by Mark Hamasaki—a cofounder of the collective 'Elepaio Press and one of two artists in the collective Piliāmo'o—spanning several decades of his creative output as an individual artist (Fig. 1).⁴ Hamasaki is an underrecognized yet profoundly influential artist in Hawai'i. His work warrants the attention it received at HiSAM, and it was impactful to see the expanse of his work across multiple galleries. HiSAM's

focus on artist collectives enabled the inclusion of work by Kapulani Landgraf, one of Hawai'i's most internationally acclaimed artists whose photographic career centers on land issues.⁴ Landgraf, a featured artist in the 2019 Honolulu Biennial and Hamasaki's partner in Piliāmo'o, was included in HT22 by way of 'Ai Pōhaku Press, an artist collective whose publications document decades of activism.⁵ Any art exhibition addressing twentieth- and twenty-first-century land struggles and resistance in Hawai'i would be incomplete without her.



Figure 1. Gallery view of the exhibition *Pacific Century—E Ho'omau No Moananuiākea* showing issues of *Mana: A South Pacific Journal of Language and Literature* from the collection of Richard Hamasaki. Hawai'i State Art Museum, Honolulu, February 18–May 8, 2022. Photograph courtesy of Healoha Johnston



Figure 2. Gallery view of the exhibition *Pacific Century—E Ho'omau No Moananuiākea* showing “Pupule,” a concrete poem by Wayne Kaumuali'i Westlake. Hawai'i State Art Museum, Honolulu, February 18–May 8, 2022. Photograph courtesy of Healoha Johnston

Several artists who were not listed as officially invited HT22 artists were represented in the HiSAM exhibition through 'Elepaio Press, which has collaborated with innumerable local and Indigenous creatives across the visual and

literary arts over the course of its nearly fifty years in operation.⁶ Among these artists was Kanaka 'Ōiwi poet and philosopher Wayne Kaumualii Westlake (1947–1984). His writings exemplified the political consciousness of 1970s Hawai'i through his assertion of Hawaiian worldviews, consideration of identity, and, among other aspects of his writing, his embrace of pidgin and Hawaiian words. A prolific period in Westlake's writing career coalesced with the Hawaiian Renaissance from the mid-1970s through the 1980s. His publications were displayed in the gallery, and his concrete poems, including "Pupule," were reproduced in large-scale vinyl graphics on walls and gallery floors (Fig. 2),⁷ offering a visually brilliant and deeply sensitive interpretation of the poet's contribution to a pivotal political and cultural revolution in Hawai'i.

HiSAM's installation of HT22 succeeded in presenting a critical chapter of Hawai'i's art history—clearly an exhibition concept that at least one of the curators had given much thought to. Although it was inconsistent with the rest of HT22, and triennial formats in general, it was stellar, and was the standout installation of the triennial event. Overall, it was a testament to the need for such exhibitions, especially during a time when museums and cultural organizations are grappling with the structures and formats of their own existence and are reckoning with their relationships to land and people.

Healoha Johnston is an art historian living in Kaiwiki, Hawai'i. She is the director of cultural resources and curator for Hawai'i and Pacific Arts and culture at Bishop Museum. Johnston's exhibitions and research projects explore connections between historic visual culture and contemporary art, with a particular focus on the sociopolitical underpinnings that inform those relationships. She served as chief curator and curator of the arts of Hawai'i, Oceania, Africa, and the Americas at the Honolulu Museum of Art, and worked in contemporary art galleries, NOAA's Pacific National Monument program, and the Smithsonian Institution as part of the American Women's History Initiative and Asian Pacific American Center before joining Bishop Museum.

Notes

¹ "Lawrence Seward," *Hawai'i Triennial 2022*, Hawai'i Contemporary, <https://hawaiicontemporary.org/artist-lawrence-seward>, accessed April 26, 2023.

² "Jamaica Heolimeleikalani Osorio," *Hawai'i Triennial 2022*, Hawai'i Contemporary, <https://hawaiicontemporary.org/artist-jamaica-heolimeleikalani>, accessed May 2, 2023.

³ “Pacific Sisters,” *Hawai'i Triennial 2022*, Hawai'i Contemporary, <https://hawaiicontemporary.org/artist-pacific-sisters>, accessed May 2, 2023; “Gaku Tsutaja,” *Hawai'i Triennial 2022*, Hawai'i Contemporary, <https://hawaiicontemporary.org/artist-gaku-tsutaja>, accessed May 2, 2023; “Justine Youssef,” *Hawai'i Triennial 2022*, Hawai'i Contemporary, <https://hawaiicontemporary.org/artist-justine-youssef>, accessed May 2, 2023.

⁴ “Piliāmo'o,” *Hawai'i Triennial 2022*, Hawai'i Contemporary, <https://hawaiicontemporary.org/artist-piliamoo>, accessed May 2, 2023.

⁵ “‘Ai Pōhaku Press,” *Hawai'i Triennial 2022*, Hawai'i Contemporary, <https://hawaiicontemporary.org/artist-ai-pohaku-press>, accessed May 2, 2023.

⁶ “‘Elepaio Press,” *Hawai'i Triennial 2022*, Hawai'i Contemporary, <https://hawaiicontemporary.org/artist-elepaio-press>, accessed May 2, 2023.

⁷ The concrete poem “Pupule” can be found in the book *Westlake: Poems of Wayne Kaumualii Westlake*, ed. Mei-Li M. Siy and Richard Hamasaki (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009), 67.