PACIFIC ARTS
Journal of the Pacific Arts Association

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Curating Pacific Art in the United States: A Roundtable Discussion

Abstract
On February 16, 2024, the North American chapter of the Pacific Arts Association hosted a panel at the 112th College Art Association (CAA) Annual Conference in Chicago. Chaired by Sylvia Cockburn (Andrew W. Mellon Postdoctoral Curatorial Fellow) and Maggie Wander (senior research associate) from the Metropolitan Museum of Art, this roundtable invited Halena Kapuni-Reynolds, associate curator of Native Hawaiian history and culture at the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI), and Ingrid Ahlgren, curator for Oceanic collections at the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology at Harvard University, to share updates on their current projects and discuss critical issues in Oceanic art curation. The discussion centered on community engagement and critical methodologies grounded in Pacific epistemologies, the ethical and sociopolitical issues around museum collection and display, how to engage with different audiences (especially in the settler colonial context of North America), and how to collaborate across institutions.

Keywords: *Pacific Arts Association, Pacific Arts Association–North America, Oceanic art, Pacific art, curation, museum, museology, collections, community engagement, anthropology, art history, Harvard Peabody Museum, Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian, Metropolitan Museum of Art*

On February 16, 2024, the Pacific Arts Association—North America hosted a panel at the 112th College Art Association (CAA) Annual Conference in Chicago.[1] Chaired by Sylvia Cockburn (Andrew W. Mellon Postdoctoral Curatorial Fellow) and Maggie Wander (senior research associate) from the Metropolitan Museum of Art, where the permanent Oceania galleries are under redevelopment, this roundtable discussion invited Halena Kapuni-Reynolds, associate curator of Native Hawaiian history and culture at the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI), and Ingrid Ahlgren, curator for Oceanic collections at

the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology at Harvard University, to discuss critical issues in Oceanic art curation and their current projects. The four panelists reflected on community engagement and critical methodologies grounded in Pacific epistemologies, the ethical and sociopolitical issues around museum collection and display, approaches to engaging with different audiences (especially in the settler colonial context of North America), and collaborating across institutions. The following is an adaptation of that conversation for *Pacific Arts*.

Sylvia Cockburn (SC): ***To start us off, can you share what your work entails and what projects you are currently working on?***

Halena Kapuni-Reynolds (HKR): When you pose that question, the first thing that comes to mind is "What *aren't* I working on?" As curators, we're constantly pulled into multiple projects within and beyond our institutions. I have been learning over the past year how to manage these responsibilities and expectations as I continue learning about the role of the Smithsonian in diffusing knowledge regarding Native Hawaiian history and culture to the broader public. Overall, my position can be broken down into four areas: research and publishing, preparing exhibits and public programs, supporting individuals and external organizations through public service, and working with NMAI leadership to determine future collecting priorities around Hawaiian material culture and contemporary art.

Although there are numerous projects in which I am currently involved, there are two in particular that I would like to discuss today. These are not "new" projects that I have started but are outstanding commitments that the NMAI is working to fulfill. The first is the return of Kānepō—an accretionary lava ball that was brought to Washington, DC, in 2004 from the island of Hawai'i to serve as one of the Cardinal Direction Markers located on the grounds of NMAI. These stones are colloquially referred to by some as the "Grandfather Rocks." They were selected by Native communities and brought to the museum to represent our hemispheric scope, while recognizing the pivotal role that cardinal directions play in numerous Indigenous communities. The Northern Cardinal Marker is from Acasta Lake in Canada's Northwest Territories and was selected in conversation with Tłı̨chǫ community members in Behchokǫ̀. The Eastern Cardinal Marker is from Sugarloaf Mountain in Maryland; representatives from the Maryland Commission on Indian affairs and the Virginia Council on Indians assisted in its selection. The Southern Cardinal Marker is from Tierra del Fuego and was selected

by Yagán community members. Given Hawai‘i’s special inclusion within NMAI’s founding legislation, Kānepō was selected to serve as the museum’s Western Cardinal Marker. Kānepō is from the district of Ka‘ū on the island of Hawai‘i, and was chosen by the Kūpuna (Elders) consultation group of Hawai‘i Volcanoes National Park. Unlike the other three Cardinal Direction Markers, which were gifted to the museum, Kānepō was loaned to NMAI for twenty years, with the promise of their eventual return to Hawai‘i.[2] Over the last two decades, many Kanaka ‘Ōiwi (Native Hawaiians) who live in or travel to DC have made special trips to NMAI specifically to greet Kānepō with pule (prayers), oli (chants), and ho‘okupu (offerings), making them the most visited of the Cardinal Direction Markers (Fig. 1). The year 2024 marks the end of the long-term loan agreement. We are honoring Kānepō at this year’s Smithsonian Folklife Festival (June 26–July 1), which celebrates the 20th anniversary of the opening of NMAI’s Washington, DC, location. The stone will be return to Hawai‘i soon after.[3]

Figure 1. Halena Kapuni-Reynolds and Kānepō, the Western Cardinal Marker of the National Museum of the American Indian, following an ‘aha kīho‘iho‘i (return ceremony) that was designed and led by Kekuhi Keali‘ikanaka‘ole and Hālau ‘Ōhi‘a, July 1, 2024. Braided ‘aha (coconut sennit) was wrapped around Kānepō and cut to symbolically end their obligation to NMAI as a Cardinal Marker. Ho‘okupu (offerings) of lei adorn Kānepō in celebration of their return to Hawai‘i. Photograph courtesy of Halena Kapuni-Reynolds

While Kānepō isn’t necessarily a work of art, the activities surrounding Kānepō’s return reflect ongoing shifts in curatorial practice to work more closely

with individuals and communities regarding the return of ancestors and belongings to their source and descendant communities. I would add that the cultural protocols that are being planned to facilitate Kānepō's return will highlight the vitality and ongoing innovative practice of Hawaiian performing and ceremonial arts. In the meantime, I am working to ensure that all NMAI staff members who need to be involved in this project are receiving up-to-date information as we confirm our plans. I am also working with the Kūpuna consultation group and their designated representatives to determine how best to proceed with bringing Kānepō back to Hawai'i in a pono (just, right) way, and whether or not a new stone will be sent to replace Kānepō. A significant factor in moving this project forward is that I work remotely from Hilo, Hawai'i, which gives me the ability to meet face to face with the Kūpuna consultation group at their monthly meeting, as well as other stakeholders involved in this project.

The second major project I am working on is a traveling show on Hawaiian sovereignty based on the NMAI's exhibit *E Mau Ke Ea: The Sovereign Hawaiian Nation* (January 17, 2016–January 2, 2017). I inherited this project when I was hired, and it has been delayed for some time due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Given that the original exhibition is [more than] seven years old, I am updating the texts and images before it travels in Hawai'i and the continental US. It is a slow process to familiarize myself with the exhibition's history, and to revise the show to reflect recent scholarship on Hawaiian history and politics. By doing this work, my hope is that the final product can become a resource and catalyst for community conversations and programs regarding Hawai'i's unique history.

Ingrid Ahlgren (IA): I completely agree that [our jobs] can feel like being pulled in a million different directions. When I first started at the Peabody Museum in 2018, I thought that in my position as curator I would be doing collections research on a regular basis. But it became clear early on that there were greater responsibilities. Prior to my arrival, there had not been a curator for the Oceanic collection since Douglas Oliver, who left in the early 1960s. So, while this is one of the largest historic Oceanic collections in the United States (going as far back as the 1780s), it is not widely known outside of academia and the museum world. Many Pasifika communities are unaware of its existence—even Harvard students. Select individual cultural heritage items have been extensively researched and documented, however a holistic understanding of the collections was lacking and community engagement was primarily opportunistic and ad hoc. So, for my first task at the Peabody, I spent more than six months walking the aisles in storage, greeting the collections, and becoming familiar with them. This way, I had a

collections-based starting point for designing and prioritizing projects, rather than individual research interests. As a non-Indigenous person who was born and raised in Oceania (Marshall Islands), I think this approach as a starting point has served me well. As we all know, the role of curation has shifted in many museums, particularly at anthropology museums like the Peabody, where collection, research, and exhibition practices have been built upon fraught, problematic histories. My time at the Peabody has coincided with some major institutional changes, and I've been proud to be a part of shifting practices. With a focus on what we are calling "ethical stewardship," a lot of "normal" museum work has changed or even stopped.[4] And through the museum's growing pains, my own curatorial duties have shifted, from research, publishing, and physical exhibitions to outreach and engagement.

And so, how do we connect the collections to communities when awareness of the collection's existence is limited and without a large local diaspora to draw upon? After many conversations with other museums in Oceania, I proposed and piloted several ideas aimed at increasing awareness and raising Pasifika voices. I'll highlight just a couple. One is the creation of the Harvard Oceanic Collections Engagement Fellowship (or HOCEF), which was inspired by conversations with Moana Palelei HoChing, a Sāmoan Harvard employee and former student. After spending more than four years at Harvard, she did not know there were Sāmoan collections on campus. This disappointing but not uncommon feedback became a kind of call to action. Together, we developed a pilot program to fund Pacific Islanders to engage with the collections in any way they wanted, whether a historic research project or an artistic, ephemeral endeavor. It was important to us that the program wasn't based on a final product that had to benefit the museum but was really about asking "how do these collections speak to you today?" As a pilot program, and due to Moana's own familial ties, we decided very explicitly to offer the fellowship first to the Pasifika communities in Utah, which has a large diaspora but limited access to historic collections like those at Harvard. Partnering with a local Pasifika advisory board and the University of Utah's School for Cultural and Social Transformation, two groups were awarded the fellowships (Fig. 2).

One multigenerational group used the collections to inform the re-creation of a nineteenth-century Sāmoan 'ula lei (whale ivory necklace) using historic materials, tools, and techniques. The other cross-cultural group was inspired by the dozens of headrests from across the region, using them as a stepping off point to create a multimedia project exploring the concept of rest in Oceanic communities today. It was really interesting work and we learned a lot in the

process. I'm pleased to share that it is going to become a regular fellowship, hopefully every two to three years.[5]

Figure 2. Two recipient groups of the inaugural Harvard Oceanic Collections Engagement Fellowship, awarded 2021–2022 by the Peabody Museum. At left, Laneta Fitisemanu wears an 'ula lei at a community event in Salt Lake City, recreated as part of the group's project entitled "Restoring Samoan Galuēga Taulima: Bringing the 'Ula Lei Back to Life." At right, fellowship awardees view and discuss headrests from across the region for the project entitled "Asösö: Resting Collectively and Rising Collectively." Photographs courtesy of Ingrid Ahlgren

One of the other things I've been working on most recently underscores how collections and communities guide my curatorial practice—in this case, those from the Philippines. A year ago, a museum studies student named Katte Geneta was writing about the cultural erasure of the Philippine peoples in museums, which led us to look more closely at the Peabody Museum's historic practices of collecting and documenting in association with the Philippine-American War (1899–1902). Around the same time, I was asked to contribute to the *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs* on the topic of "forgotten conflicts" and "civil society." The invitation provided me and Katte the impetus to highlight how, as an institution, we [Harvard Peabody] continue to perpetuate cultural erasure through the war-time acquisition and biased cataloging of Filipino cultural heritage. We wrote about a brass betel nut box that is likely a war trophy (Fig. 3), and called out the inaccurate, racialized, and offensive terminology for dozens of diverse communities and traditions still employed in the museum's database. Of course, it is one thing to write an academic paper and criticize the museum, and another to enact change. This past year, I curated an online exhibition featuring Filipino and Filipino-American voices.[6] Thirteen individuals—academics, makers, activists, community leaders, and artists—were invited to choose anything from

the collections and respond to them in whichever way they wanted. So, if I think about what my work entails right now, there is a theme: providing platforms for Indigenous voices and critically responding to institutional histories.

Figure 3. A brass betel nut box from Mindanao, Philippines, acquired by an American army officer in 1905 upon the death of Dato Mustapha. Gift of W. Cameron Forbes, 1912. Courtesy of the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University, 12-61-70/84487

Maggie Wander (MW): ***This question intersects with what you were just talking about, but what are the challenges you foresee for the curation of these collections in the United States? Perhaps you can discuss these in terms of funding, restitution, community engagement, or engaging audience interest in (and awareness of) the region.***

HKR: In Hawai'i, I continue to collaborate with organizations and programs aimed at providing training and resources to Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander museum professionals interested in pursuing careers in museums, libraries, archives, and related institutions. One of the challenges that we face is the need to broaden US funding programs earmarked for Native Hawaiians, American Indians, and Alaska Natives to include other Pacific Islanders, namely those from

US territories (American Sāmoa, Guam, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands) and Freely Associated States (Federated States of Micronesia, Marshall Islands, and Palau). Today, there are a lot of opportunities for Native American, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian heritage professionals in North America.

Native Hawaiians are oftentimes included in Native American fellowships given our special inclusion in federal legislation like the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA). However, the result of this inclusion oftentimes excludes other Pacific Islanders who would otherwise benefit from receiving the same opportunities or protections. This leads to the question, "Where are these other Pacific Islanders living in US-affiliated territories and states supposed to go to get their training?" Oftentimes, they must travel to Australia or New Zealand, but how can we be better at creating inclusive opportunities to train more Pacific Islanders in this work? In a time where the Native Hawaiian and larger Pacific diasporas on the continental US are anticipated to continue growing, we need to start thinking about how we can better serve not only those who will return to their home islands, but those who will become the future stewards of Pacific collections in North America.

The other challenge that I would like to discuss is the issue of access, scholarship, and awareness of Pacific art exhibitions and programs that take place in grassroots settings and smaller, regional institutions. Like Ingrid, I have a background in anthropology, but I've been preparing myself recently to begin venturing more into the realms of contemporary art and art history specifically in relation to ʻŌiwi (Native Hawaiian) art. I like to think that my anthropology training, as well as my background in Hawaiian studies, has prepared me to develop my own methods of looking and thinking critically about ʻŌiwi art. In order to further develop this skill set, I have been writing reviews of shows and events taking place in Hawaiʻi's institutions.

Many of my reviews are of projects taking place on Hawaiʻi Island, with the exception of a few reviews for exhibitions in Honolulu, Oʻahu. I do this intentionally because when most people think of museology in Hawaiʻi, they think of institutions like the Honolulu Museum of Art and the Bernice Pauahi Bishop Museum. But elsewhere in the islands, we have smaller institutions doing incredibly innovative, grassroots work, bringing community into their spaces to cultivate cross-cultural dialogue.[7] One of the institutions that I've reviewed and have supported over the years is the Donkey Mill Art Center in the town of Hōlualoa, South Kona. Through the efforts of its curator, Mina Elison, it has brought in Pacific artists through their exhibits and programs, and they are

working to create a community space where Pacific Islanders and non-Pacific Islanders are coming together to learn from each other, while having a representational space for Pacific art in a rural community. These smaller institutions are the places that I find really exciting and fascinating; they teach me about the need for more access in rural contexts, as well as the need for more opportunities for artists to exhibit within these locations.

IA: I'm glad that you brought that up because the way I am going to answer is so specific to Harvard, but I appreciate you broadening it out. I think a core issue, of course, is funding to link communities and collections, whether in person or through alternative curation projects, commissioned works, and fairly compensating expertise and consultation on an ongoing basis (rather than being project-based). Aside from the perennial need for funding, the other major challenges for curating Oceanic collections outside of the region right now include audience awareness and interest, the scale of the collections, and the relational responsibilities implicated as a result. The East Coast is remarkably devoid of knowledge regarding the Pacific Islands and the extensive history of interaction with and exploitation by the United States, particularly amongst recent generations. Here in Massachusetts, that history is particularly salient as its coastline was the launching pad for thousands of voyages to the region since the 1770s, whether in association with the China trade, Christian missionaries, whaling, or anthropological study. Without this knowledge, it can be difficult to garner interest and attention in the region. At Harvard, I've developed a course called "New England and the South Seas: Studying Exploration and Exploitation through Museum Collections," which casts light on that past. I often like to argue that if it wasn't for its interaction with Pacific Islands and Islanders, and the exploitation of those people and resources, the United States wouldn't have been able to develop as an economically independent country. So, I think the lack of awareness is a huge issue.

There are so many other challenges, but it has recently become clear to me that the scope of my responsibilities for these large and diverse cultural heritage holdings is immense. The sheer number of people, things, and relationships that are represented can be intimidating. They each deserve care, attention, and dialogue. When I was an anthropologist before I became a curator, I had several important relationships with people that I would foster regularly. And now, as a curator for these collections, I feel like I have a responsibility to forge relationships with the *entire* Pacific community, and that's really intimidating. How do I maintain those relationships in a meaningful and fruitful way? Or, do I

choose a few places and peoples and collections to prioritize? I mean, it's really daunting at times, and so it's just hard being a one-woman show. That is perhaps more of a personal challenge, but I think it will resonate with other museum and gallery settings where there is simply not enough representation.

SC: ***You have both already addressed this in different ways but perhaps you could further reflect on how you approach community engagement in your work, from your respective positions geographically but also the scope of the collections you are caring for?***

HKR: I'm somebody who enters the curatorial space with a background in organizing in Hawaiian community and higher education. I haven't worked in many fine-art spaces, and because of that, I tend to learn from and listen to grassroots Hawaiian artists and makers about their experiences in perpetuating their art forms while pushing back on canonical thinking in art history. I am still in the process of learning more about contemporary Native Hawaiian art and Native Hawaiian artists, but recently in Hawai'i, we've been seeing more and more exhibitions that are working to transform the ways our institutions collaborate with our artists. As an example, Drew Kahu'āina Broderick, Josh Tengan, and Noelle M.K.Y. Kahanu co-curated *'Ai Pōhaku, Stone Eaters,* a multi-site exhibition on contemporary Native Hawaiian art that took place across six University of Hawai'i galleries on O'ahu.[8] In conjunction with the exhibition, I collaborated with a few of my colleagues to circulate a petition demanding the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa to create a tenure-track position in Hawaiian visual art. We were successful in this effort, and as we speak, they are in the process of hiring someone.

When I think of community engagement, I remember my younger, graduate-student days, when I first learned that the word "curation" is rooted in the Latin word "curare"—to care. For me, care—not just for collections but for people—is central to my community engagement practice. The project with Kānepō is a great example of how I am trying to move carefully as I work to bring this stone back to Hawai'i. I was not there twenty years ago when Kānepō first came to NMAI, but I have been doing my best to reconnect with those who were involved, to learn about their experiences with this project, and to inform them of what is happening. Throughout this process, there have been a lot of negotiations between the NMAI and Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park to determine what needs to happen in Washington, DC, and Hawai'i to facilitate this return, who needs to

be there, and how best to proceed. Although the process can be cumbersome at times, I think the final outcome will be something worthwhile.

Lastly, I think of good community engagement work as a process of translation. In *Pacific Arts*, I published an event review for the launch of the Edith Kanakaʻole US quarter that came out last year. The event was held at the University of Hawaiʻi at Hilo, and involved an array of performances, pop-up exhibitions, staged areas, and a mural that higlighted the vibrancy of Native Hawaiian performing arts.[9] A lot of that academic work also tries to develop a vocabulary around Hawaiian aesthetics that can be, hopefully, useful for students in the future. I always think about how, when I was in undergrad, we would have to constantly read the anthropological sources—which provide information and are a great start, but they also never necessarily gave me the language to write about what my aunties were doing and translate it in a way that would make sense to other people. So, *translation* is something that I see my engagements focusing on.

IA: Translation is interesting. That's what I kept thinking as you spoke: you're negotiating between these different parties. For me, I think my community engagement work is about forging relationships. So, some of my outreach is not about having a research project in mind. It's just about going out to Sāmoa [for example] and saying hi, giving lots of presentations, meeting with lots of different community members and sectors, and saying "these collections are here, this is your cultural heritage," and giving the opportunity to let people have their say in their future. But, honestly, it's just about relationships. Anthropologists, in particular, have a reputation for working in a product-oriented way, often traveling to work with communities, extracting knowledge, maybe giving back in some ways, and returning to their home institutions to carry on. Alternatively, I try to be proactive in increasing knowledge of and access to collections through relationships and then let the collections and the conversations that emerge become the guiding inspiration.

Whenever I'm in DC or New York, I always stop by the embassies and leave print-outs of works in the museum's collections along with my business card. In fact, this Sāmoa visit came about because about five years ago, I stopped in and met with the Sāmoan ambassador at the time. I called two or three years later to say "I'm thinking about this." So, I'm making sure people know. And then I also let the collections speak. I think the Philippines collections were an example of that. I had no expertise there, but they were calling out; there were a lot of signs that were saying, "You can't ignore these collections." And I think that happens in

collections, sometimes they just speak out and need to be dealt with. I think that's one way [to do community engagement]: to just be receptive to those moments.

SC: We can also share a little bit about the way that we are approaching community engagement at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The Met has a precedent of engaging with Pacific communities, particularly through a project like the *Te Māori* exhibition in 1984—which is just celebrating its 40th anniversary this year. This was the first real case where the Met engaged with Māori community members as co-curators, who really led the development of the exhibition and engaged in customary protocol in the opening. This exhibition toured around the US and then went back to tour Aotearoa New Zealand.

But, today, in terms of what we're doing (for the redevelopment of the Oceania galleries in the Michael C. Rockefeller Wing), one of the challenges that we face is that the Pacific is very far from New York. Compared to working with collections in communities in Australia, which is where I'm from, we don't have diaspora communities on our doorstep who become our audience and our guides in how we are developing the content for this exhibition. So, a lot of what we do is online. Also, much of the way we are presenting our community engagement content [in the galleries] is through our digital formats. Over the last two years, we've been having conversations with artists, knowledge holders, and creative practitioners from across the region to record their stories about works in the collection, which we are editing down into short-format audio guides and other written and audio outputs on our website. And these are creating new relationships with the Met, new ways of thinking about the collection.

MW: As Sylvia mentioned, we don't have an Indigenous community on our doorstep. We work alongside our colleagues who oversee the ancient Americas collection, for instance, and they're really engaged with the Latinx community and ambassadors to Guatemala, Honduras, and many other countries. Without as robust of a network, we're having to be very creative with the kinds of communities we reach out to, or are *trying* to reach out to. An example is the Asmat region in the southwest of New Guinea; it's very remote, but we are in touch with a photojournalist named Joshua Irwandi who is able to travel to the region and we are going to include some of his work in an audio-visual feature that will be on the gallery wall. So, while we have to ask what it means that we're just using Joshua's work rather than going out ourselves, we can still connect Asmat artists, the Met's collection, and audiences in New York. It's not perfect, but it's our way of engaging with the Asmat community via Joshua's more established

networks, which he has been building for over a decade. And then we're hoping it sets the stage for further connections into the future.

IA: Cost is just a massive issue for the Pacific. Even within the region, for instance going from Hawai'i to Majuro in the Marshall Islands is a $2,000 ticket, and that's tiny compared to $6,000 to then get to Sāmoa or other Pacific Islands. When you present numbers to the museum leadership, their eyes get pretty big.

SC: And you can also have an "engagement" budget around an exhibition or a fixed-term research project, but what we are all trying to do is build long-term reciprocal relationships with community. How do you factor five, ten, twenty years of relationships into your planning and, particularly, your budgets, if it's requiring people to visit in both directions over many, many years?

HKR: I wish I had budgets. For both of the projects I mentioned earlier, I don't have budgets for community engagement or programming. With Kānepō, we have the budget for shipping, but nobody accounted for the people we need to bring. Luckily, I was able to find funding internally to do that. But the challenges of being tasked with the work without having the adequate resources to do it are not unique to the Smithsonian.

We've been talking a little about digital technologies as an opportunity, and I think we're going to see that grow even more as these technologies become more refined and more accessible to people. With my work at the NMAI, I've been trying to work more closely with our social media department (i.e., the one person who manages our social media) and hopefully getting the museum to understand that it is a powerful platform for us to tell the stories of our collections—but also to invest in that resource, because one manager for our social media is not enough. Especially if we want to contact a broader community and to make content that community wants to engage with. February is Hawaiian language month back home in Hawai'i, and so one of the small projects that I've been helping with is writing a few posts highlighting objects in our collections in Hawaiian language. I also made a short video introducing myself and showing where I live. Those were just small opportunities to hopefully get a few more people in Hawai'i to follow our pages, to know that the NMAI has a Native Hawaiian history and culture curator, but also to show that we're trying to do this work on different platforms.

MW: ***We are having this discussion at a conference dedicated to art history, but given the historical occlusion of Pacific visual and material culture in the field of art history, we often draw on anthropological sources and methodologies in our work with Pacific collections. How, then, do you see your work in conversation with art history?***

HKR: I really see myself as somebody trying to learn about Hawaiian art history while figuring out ways to create vocabulary to describe said art with the background that I have. I have worked in an interdisciplinary space for a long time: anthropology, Hawaiian studies, geography, museum studies. I'm quite used to doing work that tries to bridge those different conversations and fields. Now that I'm at the NMAI, I'm really trying to develop more relationships with contemporary Hawaiian artists and trying to learn more about their process, how to talk about it, and also to highlight certain symbols or metaphors or motifs they're working with and how it relates back to earlier histories and themes that reflect specific Hawaiian viewpoints on art and art making. At the same time, I am also trying to figure out ways to describe Hawaiian art that doesn't necessarily have a space yet in academic discourse, but which is performing some kind of visual labor.

IA: This is a difficult question to answer in some ways. As an anthropologist, there is a specific language and approach that is employed, which can be dismissive of other disciplines at times. But I've learned a lot just in the past few days being here [at the College Art Association conference], so I'm grateful for what I've seen and witnessed. Harvard has several museums across disciplines (including three art museums), and I am fascinated by the decision-making process of how something arrives in one facility and not another, and—as a result—how it gets interpreted and presented to the public.

I have been reflecting on recent labeling trends and the recognition of individual versus collective authorship. Labels often say "maker unknown," or "maker once known," ascribing that there is an artist or there is an individual behind each of these pieces. Historically, there has been a tendency in anthropology museums to have "type" and "duplicate" "specimens" that represent peoples and times, often ignoring individual artistic choices and trends. And even though there's been a huge turn in anthropology and museology for many decades now, I think some aspects of the art historical approach offer one way of thinking through that in a different way. We anthropologists do not commonly talk about the individual influence of one known artist on an entire

aesthetic movement of historic creations. Meanwhile, in Western art traditions, movements and schools like Cubism and Impressionism credit these aesthetic changes and choices to specific individuals. Considering the importance of apprenticeship in many parts of Pacific traditions, why don't we talk about schools of art, and the idea of an artist creating something and then having a school of artists around them? I think that's what art history can offer, giving back the creative agency of individuals that anthropology doesn't always give.

SC: I think one of the reasons that we posed that question was from our own positioning at an *art* museum—and the history of the Oceanic collections at the Metropolitan Museum of Art was that they were originally from the collection of Nelson Rockefeller and the Museum of Primitive Art, and were transferred to the Met in 1969. Our wing opened in 1982, but the premise of that gift was based on Nelson Rockefeller's desire to elevate the arts of Africa, Oceania, and the Americas to a fine-art level, equivalent with a Euro-American canon. There's obviously been problematic elements in the way that it's been done, because you turn something into an aesthetic fine-art object and you diminish its cultural context. We're grappling with that now, and are bringing in an anthropological method in the way that we are approaching art historical curatorship at the Met. So, we were interested in exploring some of these crossovers and interdisciplinary boundaries that we are all navigating in different ways.

HKR: I'm glad you mentioned the *Te Māori* exhibition because I think it's a great example of how, in Pacific art history, Aotearoa is far more "advanced" than other Pacific Islands because they have the resources and *Te Māori* was such an important exhibit for them—not just for international recognition but also internally within Aotearoa New Zealand's museum culture to inspire a generation of folks to do this work. It speaks a lot to the international work that we have to do as well; to look outside of the canons within the US and to look elsewhere to see how folks have been intervening in the field. And when we talk about museums in the Pacific, Aotearoa was always the shining beacon for where we would love to be.

I also want to mention Sarah Kuaiwa [who isn't here but who was originally invited to participate in this panel] because Sarah is a kapa [Hawaiian barkcloth] historian and curator of Hawai'i and Pacific cultural resources at the Bishop Museum in Honolulu. In her research on kapa, she is helping to re-write that canon of work to incorporate Hawaiian primary voices. In Hawai'i, we actually have quite a substantial archive of Hawaiian language source materials that hasn't necessarily

been utilized heavily in most fields.[10] A lot of her research, especially in the nineteenth century, is trying to fill that gap on Hawaiian kapa production. Oftentimes, the assumption is that it stopped a little bit after contact, or only certain forms existed. In reality, there are many different types of objects that incorporated kapa over that period. I see her as an important person—trying to have a voice at the table, but also writing back to a very anthropologically-driven approach to Hawaiian bark cloth.

SC and MW: ***Thank you both so much for sharing your work and your thoughts with us!***

Dr. Ingrid Ahlgren is the curator of Oceania at the Peabody Museum of Archaeology & Ethnology at Harvard University. Her interests include the intersections of Pacific identity, environment, sacred beliefs, and material culture. She has written articles on the history of collections, climate change, cultural erasure in museums, and has a book in development about the traditions of taboo in the Marshall Islands. Ingrid was born and raised in the Marshall Islands, where she returned as an adult to work for the country's Historic Preservation Office and Alele National Museum. She also worked on funded grants to record and digitize the country's songs and chants, as well as a review for revising the country's historic preservation laws. After receiving her doctorate in anthropology at The Australian National University, Ingrid received a fellowship to conduct research at the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Natural History, investigating the large collection of Marshallese woven mats and bringing a group of weavers to the museum to study them together. She also led an assessment of the impact of the museum's Recovering Voices Community Research Program, which enables Indigenous communities to conduct museum-based research to save, document, and enliven their languages, cultures, and knowledge systems. Most recently at Harvard, Ingrid started the first fellowship of its kind at the Peabody Museum—the Harvard Oceanic Collections Engagement Fellowship—which provides funding for Pacific Islanders to visit the collections in person.

Dr. Sylvia Cockburn is a curator and art historian specializing in contemporary Pacific art, community engagement, and collaborative practice in museums. In 2020, she completed her PhD at the University of East Anglia, where her research focused on collaborations between contemporary Pacific artists and ethnographic museums in Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand, and the United Kingdom. She has previously held curatorial roles working with Pacific collections at Queensland Museum and Museums Victoria. Most recently, she has worked as curator of art

at the Australian War Memorial. She is currently the Andrew W. Mellon Postdoctoral Curatorial Fellow at The Met, where she is working on the redevelopment of the Oceania galleries in the Michael C. Rockefeller Wing.

Dr. Halena Kapuni-Reynolds is the associate curator of Native Hawaiian history and culture at the National Museum of the American Indian. He works remotely from Hawai'i on projects related to content development, exhibitions, acquisitions, education, public service, and collaborations between Smithsonian units and various external partners. He received his PhD from the Department of American Studies at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa and his scholarly interests center around Native Hawaiian art and music, place-based research, and Hawaiian museology. Most recently, he co-authored, with Noelle M.K.Y. Kahanu, a chapter titled "Native Hawaiians and the Bernice Pauahi Bishop Museum: Historical Reckoning, Truth-telling, and Healing" in the 2024 volume U.S. Museum Histories and the Politics of Interpretation: Never Neutral*. In addition to his professional and scholarly work, he recently joined the board of the Hawai'i Council for the Humanities. There he is supporting the development of the NEH-funded Pacific Islands Humanities Network, which aims to cultivate further conversation and collaboration between humanities organizations in Hawai'i, American Sāmoa, Guam, and the Northern Mariana Islands.*

Dr. Maggie Wander is assistant professor of art history at Santa Clara University. She researches the visual and material cultures of Oceania (the Pacific Islands, Aotearoa New Zealand, Australia, Papua New Guinea) with a particular focus on contemporary art, Indigenous sovereignty, environmental justice, and critical heritage. From 2022 to 2024, she was senior research associate for Oceanic arts at the Metropolitan Museum of Art where she worked on the reinstallation of the permanent Oceania collection in the Michael C. Rockefeller Wing. Maggie received her PhD in visual studies from the University of California Santa Cruz in 2024 and is the co-executive editor of Pacific Arts*, the journal of the Pacific Arts Association. Her writing has appeared in publications including the* Journal of New Zealand and Pacific Studies, The Contemporary Pacific, *and* Media Fields Journal*. Her research has been supported by the Luce Foundation/American Council of Learned Societies, the Social Science Research Council, and UC Santa Cruz.*

Notes

[1] The Pacific Arts Association is made up of three chapters: North America, Europe, and the Pacific.

[2] For more information on the Cardinal Directions Markers, see James Pepper Henry and Kristine Brumley, "Cardinal Direction Markers: Bringing The Four

Directions To NMAI," in *The Land Has Memory: Indigenous Knowledge, Native Landscapes, and the National Museum of the American Indian,* ed. Duane Blue Spruce and Tanya Thrasher (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press in association with the National Museum of the American Indian, 2008), 33–47.

[3] Smithsonian Folklife Festival, accessed April 22, 2024, https://festival.si.edu/.

[4] "Ethical Stewardship," Peabody Museum of Archaeology & Ethnology, Harvard University, accessed April 29, 2024, https://peabody.harvard.edu/ethical-stewardship.

[5] "The Harvard Oceanic Collections Engagement Fellowship (HOCEF)," Peabody Museum of Archaeology & Ethnology, Harvard University, accessed April 29, 2024, https://peabody.harvard.edu/harvard-oceanic-collections-engagement-fellowship-hocef.

[6] "Balikbayan | Homecoming: Filipino Perspectives on the Philippine Collections," Peabody Museum of Archaeology & Ethnology, Harvard University, May 30, 2024, https://peabody.harvard.edu/balikbayan_homecoming.

[7] Halena Kapuni-Reynolds, "Exhibition Review: Nā Māla: Layered Landscapes of Kona Coffee Heritage, curated by Mina Elison," *Pacific Arts* 20, no. 1 (2020): 153–58; Halena Kapuni-Reynolds, "Exhibition Review: *Project Banaba* Bernice Pauahi Bishop Museum," *Pacific Arts* 24, no. 1 (2024): 118–26.

[8] The exhibition was shown in the following venues: The Art Gallery, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa (January 22–March 26, 2023); Koa Gallery, Kapi'olani Community College (February 19–August 13, 2023); Commons Gallery, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa (March 5–April 2, 2023); Gallery 'Iolani, Windard Community College (March 31–May 5, 2023); Hō'ikeākea, Leeward Community College (April 29–August 25, 2023); and East-West Center Gallery (April 30–August 13, 2023). For more information on the exhibition, see Drew Kahu'āina Broderick and Josh Tengan, "'*Ai Pōhaku, Stone Eaters:* Affirmation, Defiance, and Kānaka 'Ōiwi Visual Culture Today," *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art* 23, no. 2, 146–65.

[9] Halena Kapuni-Reynolds, "Event Review: E Hō Mai Ka 'Ike: Celebrating the Launch of the Edith Kanaka'ole Quarter, Hilo, Hawai'i, May 5–6, 2023," *Pacific Arts* 23, no. 1 (2023): 155–64.

[10] Sarah Kuaiwa, "Transformations in Homespun: Power and Creativity in Early Nineteenth-century Hawaiian Cloth Manufacturing," *Critical Studies in Fashion & Beauty* 12 (2021): 49–66.