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Cover Image: Artist unknown, *mormah* headdress (detail), pre-1956. Dried orchid stems, beetle carapaces, agave, rattan, trade cloth, cotton string, and cuscus fur; 43 x 4 cm. Simbu Province, Papua New Guinea. Courtesy of Linden-Museum Stuttgart

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PACIFIC ARTS
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Fijian Urban Youth Futures: Arts | Transmission | Resilience

Abstract

The online exhibition iSausauvou: Arts | Transmission | Resilience *(2022–ongoing) was organized in the framework of "Urban Pathways: Fiji. Youth. Arts. Culture.," a collaborative research project funded by the British Academy's Youth Futures program. Following an overview of the project and its core activities, this article focuses on the online exhibition, which showcases artworks created by young people who live in Fiji and its diaspora communities. Asked to reflect on urban youth culture, these young artists contemplate the social and cultural expectations that come with being youth in a multifaith, multilingual urban environment during the COVID-19 pandemic. By putting these youth artistic expressions within the framework of scholarship of "the future," this paper aims to move away from the tendency to associate youth with problems such as youth unemployment and lack of education, and instead focus on how youth imagine the future through art.*

Keywords: *Urban identity, Fiji, exhibition, youth art, future*

> *The connection we have to our countries of heritage is a part of our very souls. It enables us to see our identity as one of our greatest strengths. It grants us fearlessness, authenticity, self-acceptance, power, and a voice. It is the very best part of who and what we are, rooted in culture, language, history, tradition, [and] custom, but most importantly, ancestry. For our ancestors gave us more than trauma, they gave us a future.*[1]
>
> *—Salaima Raluvenitoga Kanasalusalu Tuisovivi*

Hope for the Future

Salaima Raluvenitoga Kanasalusalu Tuisovivi wrote the above words in the artist statement that accompanies her acrylic painting *Yalewa Kaukauwa* (meaning "strong woman") in the online exhibition *iSausauvou: Arts | Transmission | Resilience* (2022–ongoing). The exhibition, showcasing artworks created by young people that reflected urban youth culture, was organized in the framework of the

collaborative research project "Urban Pathways: Fiji. Youth. Arts. Culture.," which was funded by the British Academy's Youth Futures program.[2] Tuisovivi's statement refuses to reduce the past to trauma. Focusing on the future, it re-centers the historical narrative away from colonial interventions. She highlights continuity and resilience through one's heritage and identity as being powerful.

Figure 1. Salaima Raluvenitoga Kanasalusalu Tuisovivi, *Yalewa Kaukauwa,* 2022. Acrylic paint. Photograph by Salaima Raluvenitoga Kanasalusalu Tuisovivi. Courtesy of the artist

After an overview of the larger research project and its work placement program, I will analyze the online exhibition by drawing on anthropological scholarship regarding the concept of "the future."[3] Critical future studies emerged in anthropological scholarship in the 2000s, when the repercussions of a global financial crisis, a "war on terror," and climate change prompted academic reflection on uncertain futures. Faced with the difficulty of—even an inability to—anticipate the future, anthropologists became interested in the subject and moved away

from the tradition/modernity dichotomy that characterized anthropological thinking.[4] Closely linked with this study of the future was scholarly interest in temporality and nonlinear chronology.[5] As Tuisovivi reminds us in the quote above, time is cyclical rather than linear. Her reference to her ancestors in relation to her future echoes Ailton Krenak's work, which—drawing on the ever-shifting form of rivers as analogous to nonlinear temporality—proposes that the future is ancestral; it is rooted in ancestral knowledge.[6]

Temporality is also important in Indigenous futurism scholarship, which uses the tropes of science fiction to reimagine the future through the perspectives of local and marginalized voices. When Fijian author Gina Cole wanted to write science fiction but was confronted with the lack of Pasifika writers, characters, or stories, she coined the concept "Pasifikafuturism."[7] Cole put forward Pacific knowledge as the "science" in science fiction, demonstrating that ancestral knowledge informs the future.[8] What makes Pasifikafuturism unique is the centrality of the Pacific Ocean. Cole is inspired by ancestral practices of wayfinding. Drawing on the work of master navigator Hoturoa Barclay Kerr, she argues that wayfinding is an ancestral practice that demonstrates that "Pacific peoples and teachers have always been and continue to evolve as futurist thinkers."[9] Cole's concept is valuable in this paper on youth seeking guidance when considering the future.

Youth Futures

Between October 2020 and October 2022, the British Academy's Youth Futures program funded the collaborative research project "Urban Pathways: Fiji. Youth. Arts. Culture." Supported by the UK government's Global Challenges Research Fund, the Youth Futures program was set up in response to the high unemployment and underemployment rates of youth who live in developing countries. The program sought to sponsor projects that offered a youth-led perspective on the United Nations's 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. Projects needed to be genuinely interdisciplinary and based on collaborative work with young people that extended beyond the standard research model.[10] Through collaborations with urban Fijian youth, the Urban Pathways project aimed to bring youth communities into Fiji's cultural heritage institutions and help them consider these environments as potential employment opportunities. The project brought together scholars in arts, anthropology, education, museum studies, and marine science.[11]

Project partners were the Sainsbury Research Unit at the University of East Anglia (Norwich, United Kingdom); Fiji Museum (Suva, Fiji); The Pacific Community (SPC, Suva, Fiji); the School of Agriculture, Geography, Environment, Ocean and Natural Sciences at the University of South Pacific (Suva, Fiji); and VOU Dance Fiji (Nadi, Fiji).

The Urban Pathways project team worked with Fijian urban youth. The term "Fijian" was used to encompass all ethnicities in Fiji; what unified the group was not the tenacious binary of Indigenous/non-Indigenous but their status as young people who live in a hierarchical society. While urbanization only developed in Fiji in the 1950s, after the colonial government lifted limitations on the mobility of Indigenous Fijians from villages, currently half of the population lives in urban areas.[12] The urban environment in Fiji is a multifaith and multilingual environment where youth might be "less bound by cultural expectations" and have easier access to higher education.[13] However, urban centers also attract rural youth who might lack any relevant qualification to find employment, resulting in a high level of youth unemployment.[14]

Statistics indicate that urban youth is a considerable demographic in Fiji. The nation's population as of 2017 was just under 885,000, with more than half (55.9%) living in urban regions. Half the population at that time was younger than 27.5 years old, and 69% were under the age of 40.[15] Statistics appear similar today, with the population now approximately 936,000 and the median age now at 27.[16] Fiji's statistics correspond to those of other nations in the Pacific. In fact, there are growing concerns about the "youth bulge" in Pacific populations, a phenomenon that is believed to occur when the number of people between the ages of 15 and 24 exceed 20% of the total population. This ratio is often used in discussions that consider the youth population a problem to be managed.[17] As Helen Lee and Aidan Craney point out, the emphasis in Pacific-related development literature since the 1960s is on "youth problems," a term used to refer to complex concerns such as youth unemployment, street-frequenting and crime, lack of education, risky behavior, youth mental health issues, substance abuse and teenage pregnancies, which are often treated as stand-alone issues.[18] Some of the supposed underlying causes of youth problems are "poverty, education systems focused on white-collar employment skills, stagnating economies that do not provide enough employment opportunities, and rural/urban inequalities."[19] This specific focus on youth problems ignores the positive contributions young people make to society.[20]

While the UN's definition of youth is people ages 15 to 24, in Fiji the non-governmental definition of youth is people between the ages of 18 and 35;

governmentally, the age range shifts to 15 to 35 years old.[21] This broader age range reflects Fijian cultural and community values and speaks to stages of important life cycles experienced in Fiji, as well as iTaukei (Indigenous Fijian) hierarchical structures. A person can still be considered a youth if they are unmarried, living with parent or parents, married without children, or not yet in a position of authority. Consequently, as Aidan Craney writes in relation to urban youth in Fiji and the Solomon Islands, "although youth are numerically significant, the power they exercise and the extent to which their civic engagement is encouraged are extremely limited."[22]

Following an opportunity-oriented approach, rather than a problem-oriented one, the Urban Pathways project aimed to reach youth who do not consider the arts and cultural heritage sector to be a viable employment option by offering youth a paid work placement program. In Fiji, youth generally do not visit museums and cultural heritage institutions, apart from school trips. This has long been a global trend, as youth feel that museums do not cater to their interests.[23] However, museum-based youth programs that target skill development, professional learning, and cultural and social inclusion support youth engagement with museums and have been proven to have a positive impact on youth.[24]

The Urban Pathways project enabled paid placements for fifteen youth at three partner institutions—the Fiji Museum, the University of the South Pacific (USP), and VOU Dance Fiji—over a set number of days in a twelve-month timeframe between March 2021 and June 2022. The participants were an even mix of male-identifying and female-identifying people who represented diverse ethnic identities from urban areas in Viti Levu (Suva, Nadi, and Lautoka). At the Fiji Museum, six youth were completely integrated into the museum's work force and took up positions as technical interns in six museum departments: conservation, collections management and exhibitions, education, policy and legislation, library and archives, and digital media. They actively contributed to everyday work in their assigned departments, as well as the refurbishment of the museum. VOU Dance Fiji created five positions in arts and events management, focusing on areas of the sector that were undervalued and without representation in Fiji's cultural industry. The four youth based at the USP worked with the marine collections and conducted individual and group research projects that explored the cultural significance of natural heritage. Fully immersed in their organizations and treated as fully-fledged staff members, youth in the work placement program learned about career opportunities in the arts and cultural heritage sector. The program also taught the organizations how to value and champion youth engagement and

participation. The youth produced wide-reaching outputs; through their work placements, they hosted online open days, conducted research projects linked to their cultural heritage, undertook fieldwork trips, and created an exhibition.[25]

Overall, the youth work placement program went beyond merely work experience, as youth realized the potential of heritage as both a profession and as a tool to own their unique multicultural identity.[26] Interns at Fiji Museum, for instance, brought the collections out of the museum, both metaphorically and literally. Each of the Fiji Museum youth interns completed a fieldwork trip in which they focused on community outreach. Intern Inise Kuruwale accompanied Fiji Museum staff on a fieldwork trip to Nairukuruku to accompany a civa vonovono (composite whale tooth and pearl shell breastplate) for use by its traditional owners. In a blog post of her experience, she wrote, "Going up to Nairukuruku made me appreciate the uniqueness of our itaukei culture and tradition even more."[27]

The youth at USP conducted individual research projects on animal or plant species. Abraham Waqairoba selected the vermiculated rabbitfish (*Siganus vernmiculatus*), locally known as nuqa-ni-vei-dogo. This fish is not only an important food source, it has cultural significance in the Fijian lunar calendar (vula vakaviti). In his blog about the experience, Abraham wrote about how he mostly enjoyed the different ways of gathering information. Not only did he retrieve information from scientific journals and social media posts, he had discussions with family members, elders, friends, and people from his community. In his words, "It made me understand the value of traditional education to me as a person and as a Fijian."[28] Zelda Rafai has always had an interest and passion in learning about her Rotuman culture, which is why she chose to base her research project around three local birds of cultural significance based on discussions with elders, mentors, brothers, and sisters.[29] These examples demonstrate how youth appreciated the significance of intergenerational knowledge exchange, and temporal and geographical crossings by drawing on cultural heritage.

iSausauvou: Arts | Transmission | Resilience

The Urban Pathways project team had always intended to reach wider youth groups beyond those involved in the work placement program, but their goals were complicated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The team managed to organize three short online placements for youth of Fijian heritage living in the UK at the UK's Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (MAA), which holds

the largest Fijian collections outside of Fiji Museum, but most of the originally planned events to attract broader groups of urban youth in Fiji had to be canceled or moved online. Subsequently, an online exhibition competition was organized to showcase more youth voices. A way to celebrate arts, culture, and creativity in the time of COVID-19, the competition call invited young Fijian artists—ages 15–25 and living in Fiji and its diaspora communities—to send in submissions that illustrated the theme of "urban youth culture." Artists were allowed to submit a maximum of two works and were asked to include an artist statement of a maximum of 500 words with their submission.

Artist/Artist Collective Name	**Artwork Title**	**Medium**
Anthea Reddy	*Rewrite the stars*	Poem
Blackwater Triad	*Na Noqu Vosa*	Video Performance
Blackwater Triad	*Eyes*	Photograph (black and white)
Epi Vuruna	*My Ball*	Film (2:19)
Epi Vuruna	*Cula*	Film (17:46)
James Rabuatoka	*Expressionist*	Photograph (animated)
Jonathan Tudreu	*Passing Time**	Digital illustration
Keresi Vosa	*Everything will be Owl Right*	Painting
Salaima Raluvenitoga Kanasalusalu Tuisovivi	*Yalewa Kaukauwa*	Painting
Takenivula Rakei	*Rogoci Viti*	Video Performance
Takenivula Rakei	*Raici Au*	Photograph (color)
Teresa Regina Vaka'uta	*Dis Connection**	Digital illustration
Teresa Regina Vaka'uta	*Promises*	Digital illustration

Table 1: List of contributions to the online exhibition competition. Asterisks indicate the prize-winning entries.

Participation was open to anyone who met the criteria, and participants therefore self-selected by entering their work. It should be acknowledged that because pandemic-related restrictions required that the project team could only

accept entries online, entry was limited to youth who had access to the required technology. While this kind of access is less of an issue in urban areas, which this competition targeted, the online-submission requirement affected youth from disadvantaged backgrounds with limited or no access to technology. Nine artists submitted thirteen artworks using different types of media, from paintings and digital work to film and performance (see Table 1). There were two prizes of FJD $500 available for winning entries, which were chosen by an independent international jury.[30]

The exhibition's title*, iSausauvou*, is a polite Fijian honorific expression that refers to young people of high status, with the implication of them having future leadership roles. Usually the terms cauravou (young men) and goneyalewa (young women) are used to refer to youth, but the term iSausauvou was chosen by Fijian speakers on the project team to empower youth.[31] The subtitle, *Arts | Transmission | Resilience*, conveys the youth's tenacity as well as their desire to be surrounded by strong holistic education and governance systems. The artworks, with the artist's statements, are viewable online, with the choice to view the artworks as standalone images or to experience the virtual exhibition—the latter being an effort to provide a gallery space for the artworks.[32]

Within the limitations of an online system, the focus was on the artworks and the accompanying artist statements as expressions of youth identity. The aim of the exhibition was to amplify young voices, which often remain unheard in a society structured around age hierarchy; to show that youth have valid ideas that are worth listening to; and to engage youth through the arts.

The Artworks

The short film *Cula* (meaning "needle, injection") by Epi Vuruna tells the story of an anti-vax preacher, and his shock when he discovers that his son agreed to get the COVID vaccine. The artist's first drama, it was shot over five nights and in post-production for three months. The film expresses a pressing problem in Fiji, which Vuruna summarizes as "To jab or not to jab, that is the question."[33] In his accompanying artist statement, Vuruna explains that in Fiji, as elsewhere in the world, people were conflicted over whether to get the COVID vaccine: "As hundreds move in droves to vaccine stations to take their jab, hundreds more remain skeptical about the drug for their own reasons and choose to sit on the side-lines still wondering."[34] The film conveys how the preacher's son felt confident in his

decision, but that confidence disappeared quickly when his father reprimanded and punished him. The short film painfully shows the reality many Fijian youth were living at the time, when decisions were influenced by generational gaps or religious beliefs.

Figure 2. Teresa Regina Vaka'uta, *Promises*, 2022. Digital illustration. Courtesy of the artist

Other works in the exhibition reflect on general issues that youth face, which were only exacerbated by the pandemic. Teresa Regina Vaka'uta's *Promises* (Fig. 2) is a digital artwork that shows a young male standing in a flooded landscape with symbols of unfulfilled promises floating by while the sun is setting. In her words:

> Urban youth now more than ever are struggling with lack of employment and job security. From a young age we are fed an idea and promises of what a good future looks like, what a successful adult looks like, etc. . . . we are told if we go to school, study and work hard, if we stay healthy and do X, Y, Z, we're promised a better future. This piece is based on the Fiji flag, and these ideals being challenged by climate change, an economic crash, COVID, illness, etc.[35]

The flooded landscape is a clear allusion to the threat of climate change. Vaka'uta also refers to the country's coat of arms on the Fijian flag, reducing the lion, which tops the coat of arms, to a skeleton, and showing the banana bunch damaged, the coconut palm uprooted, and the doves of peace flying away.[36] The young male in the center of the artwork holds pieces of red thread referring to the use of red in both the British flag in the upper left corner of the Fiji flag and in the coat of arms. The emblems of two nations, now reduced to remnants, symbolize high hopes of opportunity that dissolved into empty promises.

Figure 3. Blackwater Triad, *Eyes*, 2022. Photograph. Courtesy of the artists

The black-and-white photograph *Eyes* by Blackwater Triad—a portrait of three women with white face paint that highlights their facial features (Fig. 3)—emphasizes that youth want to be seen. In their artist statement, the makers explain that this photograph was made once work resumed during the pandemic. They especially want to call attention to the eyes of the women in the photograph: "The eyes are like books that are being written continuously yet aren't told. You wish someone could listen to you through your eyes at times because they are the very windows to your souls."[37] While eyes might reveal a great deal about someone, this does not necessarily mean that people are seen. The artists refer to the fact that youth voices are not necessarily heard or valued, and, consequently, many youths do not feel seen.

In her poem *Rewrite the stars*, "a story narrated by the moon personified," Anthea Reddy reflects in free verse on "the predicament of two people from different religions yet the same gender being denied the one universal language which is love."[38] She expresses this in the poem's verses, including part of its ending:

> *Soul mates*
> *anticipating*
> *for their pathways to align,*
> *to be reborn in another time,*
> *in a foreign land*

Reddy reflects on social and cultural expectations that come with being youth in a multifaith and multilingual urban environment. The issues and stigmas surrounding same-sex relationships in Fiji are obviously not limited to youth or the urban environment, but in Fiji the urban environment brings more opportunities for multifaith and multiethnic social interaction.

Some youth problems begin on the playground, as the short film *My Ball* by Epi Vuruna shows. It focuses on young boys who try to take another boy's ball, an act that results in martial arts fighting accompanied by cartoon noises. While Vuruna explains in his artist statement that this was just a fun film he made because his cousins and their friends requested it, the playground is a social setting that can have a lasting impact on someone, particularly if they had a negative experience.[39] This work also expresses a longing for innocence, which is also present

in the work *Expressionist* by James Rabuatoka, a short video compilation of photographic portraits of a young child.

Teresa Regina Vaka'uta's second entry, a digital illustration entitled *Dis Connection*, explores (dis)connection that comes with technology (Fig. 4). The work shows two young people embracing, resting their heads on each other's shoulders while looking at their phones. In a video uploaded as a blog entry, Vaka'uta explains that the competition theme reminded her of social media, screen dependency, and economic/stability fears that developed during the COVID pandemic. She intentionally spelled her artwork's title as "Dis Connection" to refer to the act of detaching one thing from another, the feeling of isolation, and dis/"this" connection between us. She states that more and more youth are hungry for genuine connection and not just talking to a screen.[40]

Figure 4. Teresa Regina Vaka'uta, *Dis Connection*, 2022. Digital illustration. Courtesy of the artist

Figure 5. Blackwater Triad, *Na Noqu Vosa*, 2022. Video still. Screenshot taken by author. Courtesy of the artists

Communication was also at the center of the performance piece *Na Noqu Vosa* (My Language) by the collective Blackwater Triad (Fig. 5), which uses dance as a language to express the potential loss of spoken word. The artists state that they aimed "to highlight a challenge we believe some of the youths in Fiji face which is having knowledge of your mother tongue, the language spoken by our forefathers."[41] The artist collective addresses the fact that English is the most widely used language in Fiji, particularly in educational, government, and professional contexts. This can lead to a loss of one's mother tongue. They demonstrate that, for some youth, dance can be a form of expression that supports a reconnection with the mother language that they may have forgotten. The two artists' dance space is the side of a road next to a field of tall grasses; this positioning could be interpreted as the contrast between urban and rural environments. Cars pass while the dancers move to the spoken words "Na yacaqu—my name" (this is the only phrase that is also uttered in English), "Vakamacalataki iko"—explain yourself, or explain about yourself (to one person—iko); "Na noqu vosa" (my language).

Jonathan Tudreu's digital illustration *Passing Time* shows a turtle at the center with Indigenous Fijian wooden clubs and coconut trees, one flying the Fijian

flag, sprouting from its shell (Fig. 6). The turtle is depicted on a blue and green background with rows of patterns usually found on Fijian barkcloth. The turtle, as a long-living creature, Tudreu states, "represents time/strength/knowledge of culture and preservation while the things on its shell represent our traditional practices."[42] Tudreu's message is an appeal to preserve culture and traditions and to transfer this knowledge to subsequent generations.

Figure 6. Jonathan Tudreu, *Passing Time*, 2022. Digital illustration. Courtesy of the artist

The main theme of the performance piece *Rogoci Viti* (Listen to Fiji) by Takenivula Rakei is rebirth (Fig. 7). In her artist statement, Rakei describes how the inspiration for her artwork came to her during her internship at the Museum

of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Cambridge, through the Urban Pathways project. At the start of her video, Rakei uses historical photographs of meke (movement including song/dance) performances from the museum's Fiji photograph collection. Rakei then performs a meke she choreographed in a British garden wearing masi (barkcloth), a hibiscus flower salusalu (garland), a magimagi (coir) belt with pearl shell, a white cowrie shell neck ornament, and vau (hibiscus fiber) armbands and leglets. In her words:

> I felt that my understanding of my own culture was lacking in some areas and the internship represented that promise of a fresh start. To reconnect with my roots, building upon all that I knew so far, in a safe space, free from judgement. I chose the song "Rogoci Viti" because to me the internship was about listening to Fiji, to my history and culture and reconnecting with it.[43]

Figure 7. Takenivula Rakei, *Rogoci Viti*, 2022. Video still. Courtesy of the artist

The acrylic painting entitled *Yalewa Kaukauwa* by Salaima Raluvenitoga Kanasalusalu Tuisovivi, who also lives in the UK, was "inspired by the homeland that I continue to long for each and every day" (Fig. 1). While the work—which shows the back and partially concealed facial profile of a woman with a flower in her hair amidst vividly colored tropical foliage—might remind viewers of popular

representations of Pacific women, the title refers to a yalewa kaukawa, a powerful woman, and reflects, according to the artist, "what it means to be an Indigenous young woman who chooses to turn her back on colonialism, as she slowly navigates her way through life and strives to preserve the authenticity of her identity."[44]

Figure 8. Takenivula Rakei, *Raici Au*, 2019. Photograph. Courtesy of the artist

Culture, tradition, and their transmission are also themes of *Raici Au* (Look at Me), another work by Takenivula Rakei. She took the photograph of Emele Robanakadavu and Mary Patricia after the two, together with Ana Lavekau and Rakei, had performed a meke at Westminster Abbey, London, on February 22, 2019. The two women are in their performance attire: feathered headpieces, shell necklaces, barkcloth skirts wrapped with salusalu (garlands), and hibiscus fiber armlets. The event reminded Rakei of the fact that two Fijians had been chosen to attend the coronation of George VI at Westminster Abbey in May 1937, but that no meke had been performed there since. Performing her meke more than eighty years later at the same location was a momentous occasion that Rakei wanted to capture. She states that the photograph represents resilience. On the one hand, she wants to refer to the resilience of meke as an art form that has changed over time and has crossed boundaries, as Fijians took it with them to diaspora regions. On the other hand, Rakei suggests that the photograph expresses the resilience of the two young women depicted:

> The title of this photograph is *Raici Au* which means "look at me." Look at these two young Fijian women who even when surrounded by a culture that is not their own, they still had the courage to make that first step and say "yes" to performing a meke in Westminster Abbey to a large audience.[45]

Overall, the online exhibition features artistic expressions by young people from Fiji who raise awareness of issues that they are facing or that they feel will chart their future. In her painting of a white owl on a black patterned background, entitled *Everything will be Owl Right*, Keresi Vosa expresses hope for Fiji's urban youth's future.[46]

Urban Displacement: Longing for Belonging

In times of uncertainty, hope is a way to face the future. Hope has been defined as "a desire, longing or aspiration for something and the confidence that its fulfillment is possible."[47] Hope is about possibility, and even though not all possibilities are necessarily actualized, these in turn create new hope.[48] Referring to Ernst Bloch's philosophical writings on hope, anthropologist Hirokazu Miyazaki observes that a philosophy of hope is "open to the future" and "entails a commitment to

changing the world."[49] Writing about Suvavou people in Fiji, Miyazaki demonstrates that hope was a method of self-knowledge, "that is, knowledge about who they were."[50]

Youth is a transitory stage in life, a phase that is betwixt and between. It is this liminality that makes it an uncertain stage and one during which hope is important. Equally, it is that liminal status that implies that youth are not always heard. Indeed, while hope is commonly seen as an aspiration linked to possibility, when not linked to action it can also lead to an overwhelming feeling of being stuck.[51] The youth creations at the center of this paper need to be considered in this context.

As anthropologist Michaela Haug writes, "studying the aspirations that people have for the future and how they inform their actions in the present reveals a great heterogeneity," which "allows us to explore their entanglement within existing power relations and inequalities."[52] By organizing an exhibition competition, the Urban Pathways project team hoped that it would provide a space for dialogue around issues facing urban Fijian youth. As much as "youth" is not a homogenous category, these artworks resist any singular conclusion about what it means to be an urban Fijian youth today. Yet within this diversity, there is a unified strength connected by a love for cultural origins and how these origins are in dialogue with present-day challenges and desires.

What the youth generally highlighted in their artworks and artist statements was a need for transmission and connection in times of displacement. For some, displacement was caused by the pandemic (e.g., Vaka'uta's *Dis Connection*, Blackwater Triad's *Eyes*, Vuruna's *Cula*). Indeed, the pandemic was the closest we have all come to a futuristic dystopia or the apocalypse in science fiction. When COVID-19 spread across the world, quarantines, curfews, and lockdowns were put in place. People lost their jobs or were told to stay home, and people died. Social distancing became the norm and mask-wearing was introduced. While much of the world lost all sense of normality, the list of rules that were put in place aimed to generate a "new normal." No wonder that sociologist Daniel Briggs writes that reporting on the virus and the pandemic followed similar scenarios to dystopian future films.[53]

However, in science fiction, an apocalypse typically not only leaves devastation, but leaves survivors who endure and persist, who are guided by hope, and who eventually orchestrate a new future.[54] Rakei refers to a similar situation in her artist statement of *Rogoci Viti*. As mentioned, her video begins with

photographs from MAA's Fiji photograph collection, which Rakei accompanies with an audio track of lali (drum) beats:

> The lali beat [in the beginning of the video] describes a village which has burnt down. For me, that burnt village represented the understanding and confidence I had in my culture and identity before the internship. When you picture a burnt village, it conjures feelings of hopelessness. But on the other hand, however devastating a burnt village may be, there's also a sliver of hope in the promise of a fresh start over the horizon. A new beginning doesn't necessarily mean going back to square one and losing all the progress that you've made, but rather an opportunity to start again with the knowledge and lessons you have gained from the first try.[55]

Rakei imagines her future by drawing on her ancestral past and cultural identity as drivers for the future. This is a common characteristic of the artworks submitted to the *iSausauvou* exhibition, although the artists' reasons for that feeling of displacement differed.

Other artists expressed a sense of displacement by focusing on the fact that being a youth is to be in a transitional status. It is a stage in one's life when one feels old enough to make one's own decisions yet is not necessarily free to do so, and this ranges from decisions about vaccines (Vuruna's *Cula*) to choosing one's partner (Reddy). Some artists expressed disappointment in previous generations' choices and their impact on youth today, such as in Blackwater Triad's *Na Noqu Vosa*, which critiques the dominance of the English language in education institutions, and Vaka'uta's *Promises,* which reflects on the unfulfilled promises of the new nation.

Youth also reflected on the urban environment (Rakei's *Raici Au*, Tuisovivi's *Yalewa Kaukauwa*). In their performance piece *Na Noqu Vosa,* Blackwater Triad shows that the urban experience influences the knowledge of language. Accompanied by Fijian spoken language, the two performers emphasize the power of dance as a visual language. They state that, "In dance our forefathers were able to use chants to pass on the stories or legends of our people. It is through these mediums that most Fijian youths who are dancers feel a slight bit . . . closer towards their cultural roots."[56] The artworks in the *iSausauvou* exhibition expressed youth resilience by drawing on the transmission of culture as ways of dealing with challenging issues.

In his digital illustration *Passing Time*, Tudreu's message is an appeal to urban youth to preserve knowledge of culture and traditions in an urban environment: "We won't be on this earth for long, but the knowledge of our traditions and culture can be preserved and passed down from generation to generation."[57] In other words, to use Pacific Studies scholar Lana Lopesi's phrasing, while the urban environment can result in feelings of loss of language and cultural roots—which is reflected in the submitted artworks—the creations are equally "unapologetically urban."[58] In her description of the development of the Pacific arts scene in Aotearoa New Zealand in the last six decades, Lopesi describes how Pacific people were making their place in Aotearoa as expressed in urban-flavored art works: "The lingering question of Pacific identity could have been the cause of inner turmoil and self-implosion. But for the musicians, designers and partiers, it led to an explosion of infinite possibilities."[59]

When Adi Lewa Boginisoko completed a work placement at the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, she came across a music recording in the museum's collections that was made in her ancestral village. Her mother had learned to perform a Tongan-style lakalaka dance to this song, which she then taught Boginisoko during her placement. This was a deeply personal experience that bolstered Boginisoko's confidence, as conveyed in her blog post about the experience: "It has enabled me to connect with my culture on a deeper level."[60]

Part of the placement program for UK-based Fijian youth was a talanoa (open, inclusive, participatory dialogue) session with the Fiji-based youth participants. Together they discussed the impact of growing up in their respective social settings. About this experience, Boginisoko wrote: "I had assumed that [the interns in Fiji] had a stronger connection with their culture, whereas in reality we [the interns living in the UK] were a lot more similar than I had thought, in terms of trying to preserve our culture and traditions for the future generations in our continuous fast-moving world."[61] Because people in diaspora can no longer practice their traditions in their homeland, Pacific Studies scholar Albert L. Refiti writes that they "'coil' them into concepts, carry them in a 'tool box' of theory, then unpack, operate and perform with them when required," using them as tools to create a new home.[62] And this is exactly what the young artists featured in this paper are doing; their stories are not merely stories of displacement but stories of mobility, of resilience, creativity, family, and urban identities.

Conclusion: Youth Are the Future?

This paper aimed to move away from regarding youth—in Fiji and globally—as a problem to be managed by arguing that youth should be viewed as having great potential to make valuable contributions to their communities and their futures. In other words, while youth should certainly be considered as embodying the future, their consideration should not be limited to the future—they should be heard in the present, too.

While the artworks discussed in this paper reference youth problems and issues, they mostly center reconnection. Created at times when the artists were feeling disconnected either because of the COVID-19 pandemic, geographical distances, or other forms of detachment, the youths' future-oriented creations were neither fantasy nor speculative fiction. Rather, these creations were aspirational; they expressed a prevailing sense of hope. In trying or difficult times, hope can be a tool of empowerment. Scholarly writing on hope reminds us that uncertainty or disappointment can be engines of hope.[63] The status of youth, which is transitional and therefore uncertain and trying, is important in this regard. The Fijian youth who participated in this project reflected on this status and showed their resilience.

The artworks and the discussions in the collaborative research project at the basis of the exhibition demonstrate that youth connect to different temporalities in order to build a future. The youth involved were forward-looking, yet they sought guidance and direction through their artistic imaginaries of the future. Their future was an ancestral future, to use Krenak's words.[64] Youth drew on their past, on their ancestors, while dynamically moving forward, transforming along the way. While imagining the future involves contemplation of temporality, what the youth in this exhibition and project have shown is that it equally implies reflection about place. Diasporic youth outside of Fiji and urban youth in Fiji perceived the urban and diaspora environment in similar ways. Both felt that they are living away from their cultural homelands and are making efforts to maintain their cultural affiliations. Their reflections on displacement are expressions of possibility, hope, and resilience, which should be transmitted as much as being influenced by transmission of cultural knowledge.

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Notes

[1] Salaima Raluvenitoga Kanasalusalu Tuisovivi, *Yalewa Kaukauwa*, artist statement, accessed May 23, 2025, https://fijiyouthculture.wordpress.com/yalewa-kaukauwa/.

[2] The official project title was "(Re)Defining Culture: Engaging Urban Fijian Youth in Sustainable Employment Opportunities in the Cultural Heritage Sector," but the project team changed it to "Urban Pathways: Fiji. Youth. Arts. Culture." to make it more accessible. The project was supported by the British Academy's Youth Futures Program, under the UK Government's Global Challenges Research Fund, Grant YF\190078. Ethical approval was granted by the University of East Anglia's Faculty of Arts and Humanities Research Ethics Sub-Committee (reference: SREC 20-015).

[3] The focus on "the future" was also inspired by a call for papers on futurism by *Pacific Arts* journal.

[4] Rebecca Bryant and Daniel M. Knight, *The Anthropology of the Future* (Cambridge University Press, 2019), 6–9. See also, among others, Arjun Appadurai, *The Future as a Cultural Fact: Essays on the Global Condition* (Verso Books, 2013).

[5] Bryant and Knight, *Anthropology*, 14.
[6] Ailton Krenak, *Ancestral Future* (Polity Press, 2024).
[7] Gina Cole, "Wayfinding Pasifikafuturism: An Indigenous Science Fiction Vision of the Ocean in Space," in *The Routledge Handbook of CoFuturisms*, ed. T. J. Taylor et al. (Routledge, 2023), 55.
[8] Gina Cole, "'Pasifikafuturism': The New Genre of Science Fiction Invented by Author Gina Cole," *Stuff*, October 29, 2022, https://www.stuff.co.nz/lifestyle/130306614/pasifikafuturism-the-new-genre-of-science-fiction-invented-by-author-gina-cole.
[9] Cole, "Wayfinding Pasifikafuturism," 55.
[10] For more information on the Youth Futures program, see https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/programmes/youth-futures/.
[11] In the UK, the project team consisted of Karen Jacobs, principal investigator, and Katrina Igglesden, postdoctoral research associate, at the Sainsbury Research Unit, University of East Anglia. In Fiji, the project's co-investigator, Frances C. Koya Vaka'uta, is team leader of the Culture for Development in the Human Rights and Social Development Division at the Pacific Community. The team further comprised Sipiriano Nemani, director of the Fiji Museum; Sachiko Soro, director of VOU Dance Fiji Company; and Kelly Brown, curator of the Marine Collection at the University of South Pacific.
[12] "Fiji," Country Reports (website), accessed May 23, 2025, https://www.countryreports.org/country/Fiji/population.htm.
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[14] Patrick Vakaoti, *Street-Frequenting Young People in Fiji: Theory and Practice,* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 27.
[15] "Population Census 2017," Fiji Bureau of Statistics, accessed May 23, 2025, https://www.statsfiji.gov.fj/census-surveys/census-of-population-and-housing/#2017.
[16] See https://www.countryreports.org/country/Fiji/population.htm
[17] See Patrick Kaiku, "A Critique of the Youth Bulge Theory in Papua New Guinea and Melanesia," *Pacific Studies* 41, no. 3 (2018): 188–98; Aidan Craney, *Youth in Fiji and Solomon Islands: Livelihoods, Leadership and Civic Engagement* (ANU Press, 2022).
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[19] Richard Curtain and Patrick Vakaoti, *The State of Pacific Youth 2011: Opportunities and Obstacles* (UNICEF Pacific, Secretariat of the Pacific Community, 2011), 5.

[20] Secretariat of the Pacific Community, *Pacific Youth Development Framework 2014–2023: A Coordinated Approach to Youth-Centred Development in the Pacific* (Secretariat of the Pacific Community, 2015), 6.
[21] Government of Fiji, *Situational Analysis of Youths in Fiji 2011* (Ministry of Youth and Sports, 2012), 3.
[22] Craney, *Youth in Fiji*, 13. An edited volume on Pacific youth by Helen Lee demonstrates that understanding the impact of ignoring youth is essential when considering the future of Pacific countries. See Helen Lee, ed., *Pacific Youth: Local and Global Futures* (ANU Press, 2019).
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[27] Inise Kuruwale, "Nairukuruku Fieldwork – the story of a civa vonovono," blog post, accessed May 23, 2025, https://fijiyouthculture.wordpress.com/2022/02/09/nairukuruku-fieldwork-the-story-of-a-civa-vonovono/.
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[30] The committee members—Lambert Ho, Jerry Wong, Tarisi Vunidilo, Arunesh Kumar and Josaia Tokoni—judged each artwork on four main criteria: interpretation/relevance of theme, originality/creativity, quality of artistic composition—skill and technique, and overall impression (including artist statement).

Because pandemic-related restrictions had relaxed by the time the exhibition was launched online, the project team managed to organize an exhibition opening at Fiji Museum for the participating artists, project members, youth

ambassadors, and representatives of the arts and culture sector in Fiji. During the March 29, 2022 opening, the two winning artists, Jonathan Tudreu and Teresa Regina Vaka'uta, were awarded their prizes by the director of Fiji Arts Council. Members of the jury also decided to add personal accolades, and Vuruna, Rabuatoka, Vosa, and Tuisovivi were recommended for further mentoring in the arts.

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[32] To view the standalone artworks, see https://fijiyouthculture.wordpress.com/isausauvou/. To see the virtual exhibition, see https://www.artsteps.com/view/621dfe61884c75c4b6219442.

[33] Epi Vuruna, *Cula*, artist statement, accessed May 23, 2025, https://fijiyouthculture.wordpress.com/cula/.

[34] Vuruna, "Cula."

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[38] Anthea Reddy, *Rewrite the stars*, artist statement, accessed May 23, 2025, https://fijiyouthculture.wordpress.com/rewrite-the-stars/.

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[41] Blackwater Triad, *Na Noqu Vosa*, artist statement, accessed May 23, 2025, https://fijiyouthculture.wordpress.com/na-noqu-vosa/.

[42] Jonathan Tudreu, *Passing Time*, artist statement, accessed May 23, 2025, https://fijiyouthculture.wordpress.com/passing-time/.

[43] Takenivula Rakei, *Rogoci Viti*, artist statement, accessed May 23, 2025, https://fijiyouthculture.wordpress.com/rogoci-viti/.

[44] Salaima Raluvenitoga Kanasalusalu Tuisovivi, *Yalewa kaukawa*, artist statement, accessed May 23, 2025, https://fijiyouthculture.wordpress.com/yalewa-kaukauwa/.

[45] Takenivula Rakei, *Raici Au*, artist statement, accessed May 23, 2025, https://fijiyouthculture.wordpress.com/raici-au/.

[46] Keresi Vosa, *Everything will be Owl Right*, artist statement, accessed May 23, 2025, https://fijiyouthculture.wordpress.com/everything-will-be-owl-right/.

[47] Michaela Haug, "Framing the Future through the Lens of Hope," *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie (ZfE)/Journal of Social and Cultural Anthropology (JSCA),* 145, no. 1 (2020): 75.

[48] Bryant and Knight, *Anthropology*, 134.
[49] Hirokazu Miyazaki, *The Method of Hope: Anthropology, Philosophy, and Fijian Knowledge* (Stanford University Press, 2006), 14.
[50] Miyazaki, *Method of Hope,* 26.
[51] Haug, "Framing the Future," 75.
[52] Haug, "Framing the Future," 73.
[53] Daniel Briggs, "Hope, Dystopian Futures and COVID-19 as the 'Event' that Changed the World (Forever?)," *Journal of Contemporary Crime, Harm, and Ethics* 2, no. 1 (2022): 78, https://doi.org/10.19164/jcche.v2i1.1220.
[54] Briggs, "Hope, Dystopian Futures," 62.
[55] Rakei, *Rogoci Viti*.
[56] Blackwater Triad, *Na noqu vosa*.
[57] Tudreu, *Passing Time*.
[58] Lana Lopesi, "Urban Pacific," in *Pacific Arts Aotearoa: The Powerful and Dynamic Legacy of Pacific Arts in Aoteroa, as Told by the Artists Themselves*, ed. Lana Lopesi (Penguin Random House New Zealand, 2023), 230.
[59] Lopesi, "Urban Pacific," 230.
[60] Adi Lewa Boginisoko, "Connecting with Culture – thoughts from a UK-based youth," blog, accessed May 23, 2025, https://fijiyouthculture.wordpress.com/2021/11/15/connecting-with-culture-thoughts-from-a-uk-based-youth/.
[61] Boginisoko, "Connecting with Culture."
[62] Albert Refiti, "Building the House of Noa Noa and Lave Lave: A Possible Theory of Pacific Art," in *Home AKL: Artists of Pacific Heritage in Auckland*, ed. R. Brownson et al. (Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki, 2012), 12.
[63] Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope* (Blackwell, 1986); Rebecca Bryant and Daniel M. Knight, *The Anthropology of the Future* (Cambridge University Press, 2019); Solnit, "Hope in the Dark."
[64] Krenak, *Ancestral Future*.

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DIONNE FONOTĪ

Irony and Ephemerality: Siapo in the Exhibition *Atalilo: Motifs in Sāmoan Material Culture* (2024)

Abstract

Atalilo: Motifs in Sāmoan Material Culture *(2024–27) is the first exhibition staged in the newly established Ōfaga o Sa'li'iliga National University of Sāmoa Research Museum. The exhibition explores the myriad uses of motifs across six genres of Sāmoan material culture: tatau (tattooing), afa (sennit lashing), 'ele (pottery), ma'a (petroglyphs), la'au (wood carvings), and siapo (barkcloth). While displays of each genre had its own challenges in presentation, design, and curation, the most complex was the section on siapo. This article begins with an introduction to siapo's cultural and historical significance and its contemporary production and use. It then outlines emerging institutional and cultural ironies in attempting to display nineteenth-century siapo in contemporary Sāmoa—issues that prompt deeper questions about the urgent need to recognize and support both the living and ephemeral dimensions of Sāmoan heritage.*

Keywords*: siapo, barkcloth, museums, living heritage, ephemerality, continuity, measina, Sāmoa, exhibitions, National University of Sāmoa Centre for Sāmoan Studies, Übersee-Museum Bremen, cultural heritage, cultural preservation*

In 2019, the National University of Sāmoa's (NUS) Centre for Sāmoan Studies (CSS) and the Übersee-Museum Bremen (UMB) initiated discussions that led to a multi-year collaboration officially titled "Oceania Virtually." The project was originally conceived as part of the redesign of the UMB's permanent exhibition *Oceania*, which opened in March 2025.[1] Executed in a series of transnational activities, the project was designed to build capacity in Sāmoa by providing advanced on-the-job training on curation and exhibition design in a professional museum setting to an individual who lives and works in Sāmoa, as well as inform the ongoing exhibition revamp in Bremen. In 2021, the project established two new roles for individuals of Sāmoan heritage to work and learn alongside UMB staff for the duration of the project. One position was for a Co-Curator of the Oceanic collection and the other

for a Curatorial Assistant. In 2022, the CSS and the UMB co-hosted a six-part online workshop series in which knowledge holders and cultural practitioners in Sāmoa were guided through the UMB's storage spaces via virtual tours. In 2023 and 2024, teams from the UMB and CSS paid visits to each other's sites. Heading up the teams were the Director of CSS and the Director of UMB, with assistance from relevant staff as needed. The author is a lecturer at the CSS and served as the Project Manager and Co-curator of the exhibition. The project culminated in the co-curation and mounting of an exhibition entitled *Atalilo: Motifs in Sāmoan Material Culture*, which opened on August 31, 2024, in the newly established Ōfaga o Sa'ili'iliga NUS Research Museum, Sāmoa, and will run through December 31, 2027.

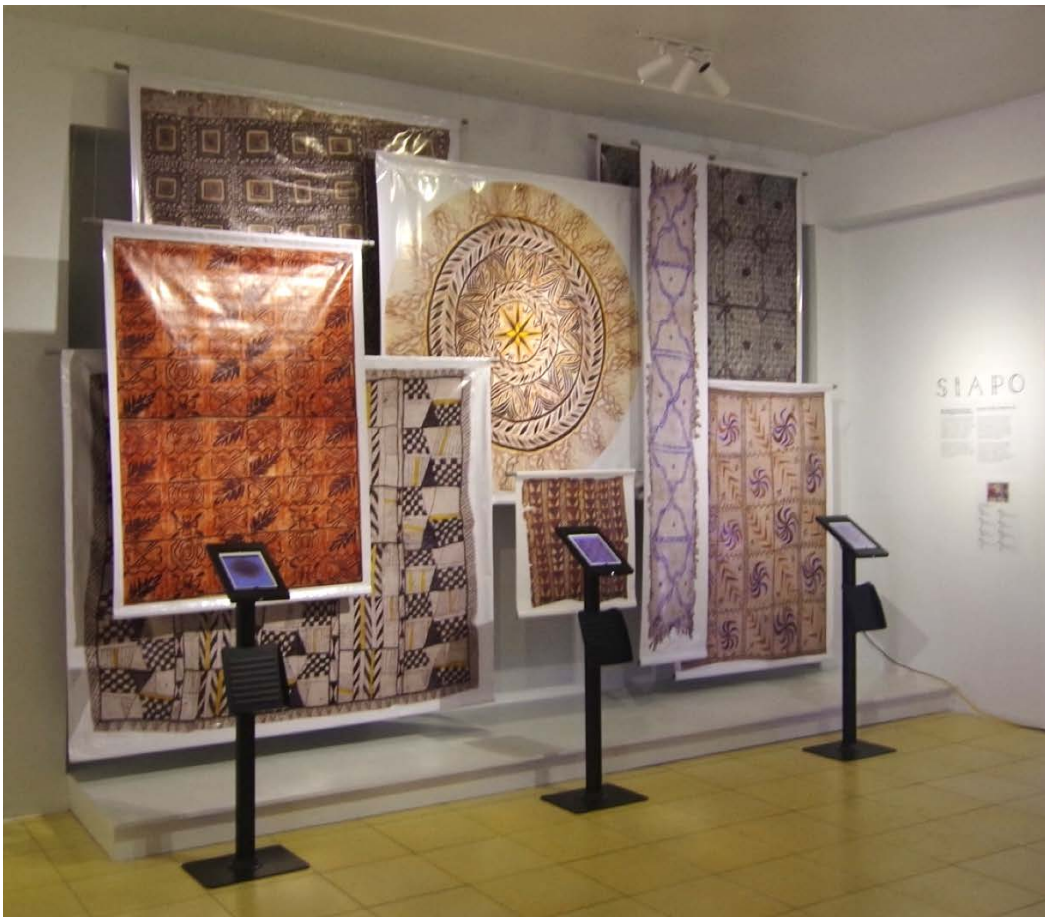

Figure 1. The siapo display in *Atalilo: Motifs in Sāmoan Material Culture*, September 2024. Ōfaga faga o Sa'ili'iliga, National University of Sāmoa Research Museum, Apia, Sāmoa. Photograph by Vaiwilmalua Maotua. Courtesy of Ōfaga o Sa'ili'iliga, National University of Sāmoa Research Museum

Atalilo is an exhibition exploring how motifs were, and are, used in the production of six genres of Sāmoan material culture: ʻele (Lapita pottery), maʻa (petroglyphs), laʻau (wood carvings), afa (sennit braiding and lashing), tatau (tattooing), and siapo (barkcloth).[2] These categories were selected partly to correlate with UMB objects that were available as loans, and partly due to limited resources available to mount an exhibition in Sāmoa as will be discussed. As a result, the exhibition is a mix of artifacts on loan from the UMB and object replicas and artistic renderings produced in Sāmoa.

Looking at the UMB's holdings, and considering the goals of the *Atalilo* exhibition, the curatorial team at CSS chose eight siapo from the UMB's Oceania collections for inclusion in the show (see Figs. 2–9). These siapo were photographed by the curatorial team at the UMB and the images sent to our team in Sāmoa, where they were edited by a graphic designer and printed as full-scale replicas on plastic banner sheeting. In *Atalilo*, the replicas were suspended from the ceiling using PVC rods and fishing wire in a gallery space approximately three meters wide (Fig. 1). While, initially, this process seemed relatively simple, and was ultimately successful, the curatorial process for and outcome of the siapo section were very different than what we had anticipated.

This article discusses some of the nuanced challenges faced by the CSS curatorial team in designing, developing, and mounting the siapo section of the *Atalilo* exhibition. We did not anticipate the hurdles we ultimately faced while mounting the siapo section of the exhibition. Specific issues included our inability to exhibit nineteenth-century siapo held in the UMB; challenges with photographing the UMB siapo, as well as with editing and printing photos of them; and how photo replicas—in place of actual siapo—would be received at the CSS when the exhibition opened.

Sāmoan Siapo

"Siapo" is the Sāmoan term used generally to refer to a multipurpose textile made by processing the inner bark of the paper mulberry tree (*Broussonetia paprifera*). Siapo-making is a time- and labor-intensive task that can take several weeks or months depending on the targeted size. Every single stage of the multistep process has historically been carried out exclusively by women.[3] Collectively, siapo was made by the aualuma (women's group) of individual villages. Geographer and

Sāmoan scholar Luamanuvae Professor Sa'iliomanu Lilomaiava-Doktor provides a succinct description of this important Sāmoan social institution:[4]

> The tama'ita'i or aualuma group contains the daughters of matai [chiefs] who reside locally and are no longer at school, unmarried, or widowed. They are the faioa "producers" (they manufacture traditional wealth like mats, fine-mats, and tapa cloth).[5]

Figure 2. Siapo, Sāmoa, nineteenth century. Paper mulberry bark and natural dyes, 1.7 x 1.7 m. Collected by Albert Anton Rosenkrantz in 1931. Übersee-Museum Bremen, D04821. Photograph by Volker Beinhorn. Courtesy of Ōfaga o Sa'ili'iliga, National University of Sāmoa Research Museum

Siapo was, and still is, women's work because siapo occupies a position at the pinnacle of Sāmoan material wealth. Māori ethnologist Te Rangi Hiroa notes a specific example of how siapo was produced by the elite, for the elite:

> Before contact with Europeans, and indeed for some time after, the use of siapo as an article of dress was confined to a few unmarried females of the highest rank, *O Tausala*, titled ladies; all others being prohibited from wearing it upon pain of heavy chastisement. The privileged few only wore it in the house.[6]

That ceremonial-adornment siapo was made and worn exclusively by women in pre-contact Sāmoa is an indication of siapo's elevated status—as an object of superior material wealth, ritual and ceremonial importance, and, until its decline, an integral part of everyday Sāmoan life.

The cloth, also called u'a, is decorated by dyeing or painting. Siapo are primarily distinguished by their differing styles of decoration: for example, siapo mamanu are painted free-hand while siapo tasiga have their patterns rubbed on using a stencil. Siapo mamanu were made by temporarily adhering the cloth to a board and then painting the patterns on at will. Afterwards, the finished piece was removed from the board and ready for use.[7] Siapo tasiga is made using an upeti, or stencil. Upeti fala (mat stencil), the older version, are made of natural materials foraged from local trees and plants that are adhered or sewn to a pandanus mat. After metal was introduced to Sāmoans, upeti fala were replaced by upeti la'au—stencils carved out of wood. Both types of stencils are used the same way; a plain barkcloth is laid across the upeti and red clay ('ele) is grated or shaved across the cloth, then rubbed in to reveal the relief pattern underneath.

Different color dyes are applied onto the cloth to enhance the patterns or painted over until the maker is satisfied with their design. Dyes were sourced from nature, in a range of primary and secondary colors.[8] Along with dyes, several naturally occurring adhesives and varnishes were required. Masoā (arrowroot), ulu (breadfruit), and tou were used to adhere multiple pieces of cloth together; sogā temporarily affixed siapo to wood backing for support while painting; and o'a was used as a varnish when complete.[9]

Until Western cotton was introduced and popularized in the mid-1800s, siapo was the primary choice of textile across the Sāmoan archipelago. Different sizes and thickness of siapo were used for many different purposes. They functioned as clothing, sleepwear, and as household items (such as curtains, bedding, etc.). They were used as ceremonial adornment, war regalia, and signifiers of rank. Siapo were included in wedding dowries, and were also used for exhuming

corpses, wrapping the dead, fishing, straining oils and foods, bartering, and ritual gift exchange.[10]

Figure 3. Siapo, Sāmoa, nineteenth century. Paper mulberry bark and natural dyes, 1.7 x 1.27 m. Collected by Albert Anton Rosenkrantz in 1931. Übersee-Museum Bremen, D04817. Photograph by Volker Beinhorn. Courtesy of Ōfaga o Sa'ili'iliga, National University of Sāmoa Research Museum

Sāmoans previously stored, and in many cases still store, their siapo with other family treasures and valuables. Sāmoa-based textile expert Fuimaono Rosa-lia Me describes three timeless methods of oiling, hanging, and storing siapo and mats under bedding:

> After decorating, apply oil or turmeric to the entire piece and let it dry thoroughly, then hang it up, or store it under a bed and ensure that no air can touch it. Every six months, take it out to reapply oil/turmeric, dry, air it out, and store it again.

> Hanging: [after] decorating traditional goods in ancient times (items such as fine mats, barkcloth, tuiga hair, war clubs, feather skirts, boars tooth necklaces, pandanus wreaths, nautilus shell headbands, shaggy white mats, various immersed mats and other valuable traditional goods are wrapped tightly with cloth and plain barkcloth, with siapo on the inside, use sleeping mats and sitting mats to make it thicker. Wrap it in rope or sennit to keep it well-protected, so that no air can get in), [they are] placed on or hung from the upper rafters of the family house.
>
> Similarly, when layering under bedding, the bottom is covered with sitting mats, sleeping mats, and other valuable textiles such as plain barkcloth, siapo, fine mats, white shaggy mats, and some other mats.[11]

Before the popularity of Western-style homes, siapo was stored in the upper rafters of the fale (house) occupied by the family, or folded and stacked under bedding, only to be taken out for use in special events where it was worn, traded, or displayed, and then stored again until the next occasion.[12]

Siapo is widely acknowledged and classified as measina, a treasure of collective Sāmoan culture. Siapo was, and still is, a significant element of Sāmoan material wealth, although it is no longer used for clothing as it once was. As with traditional forms of Indigenous clothing in other parts of the world, the use of siapo for clothing declined beginning in the early 1800s, heavily influenced by Christian missionaries.

Sāmoans began converting to Christianity in the 1820s, sporadically at first, and then more deliberately after 1830. By the early 1900s, siapo production was severely reduced, as it had been almost entirely replaced by "cambric, calico, linen, serge and silk—from the mills of Manchester and New England and the workshops of China."[13] Concurrently, siapo produced for home decor was increasing in popularity, mostly supported by growing tourism in the islands and to supply the market for curiosities.

Siapo found a place in overseas markets, a trend that some resourceful artisans capitalized on, but the outbreak of World War II halted siapo production almost completely across most of the archipelago.[14] After the war, siapo production resumed; Lowell D. Holmes, who lived on the island of Taʻu in the Manuʻa group reported in 1954 that "the manufacture of bark cloth (siapo) is carried on in nearly every household of Taʻu village."[15] By the 1970s, in American Sāmoa, the only women still regularly producing siapo were a modest cohort living in the

village of Leone. Pritchard, and other pioneers including Kolone Faiʻivae Leoso, re-invigorated siapo-making in those islands. By comparison, siapo-making continued more widely in Independent Sāmoa, but not by much.

Figure 4. Siapo, Sāmoa, nineteenth century. Paper mulberry bark and natural dyes, 73 x 75 cm. Collected by Albert Anton Rosenkrantz in 1931. Übersee-Museum Bremen, D04821. Photograph by Volker Beinhorn. Courtesy of Ōfaga o Saʻiliʻiliga, National University of Sāmoa Research Museum

Siapo Today

Today, specifically in Independent Sāmoa, siapo is produced by only a handful of makers; these either work independently from home and sell siapo to vendors at the local markets or makers who are also vendors. While aualuma (women's groups) still exist in villages across Sāmoa, albeit in a much-diluted role from that of the past, very few produce siapo.[16] There are two widely known women-led collectives who still make siapo within their villages: the Salū family in Vailoa Palauli and the fale lalaga (weaving house) in Salaʻilua, both on the island of Savaiʻi.[17] All of these makers practice independently but many are also affiliated with national organizations such as the Samoa Tourism Authority (STA) and Women in Business Development Incorporated (WIBDI).[18]

Figure 5. Siapo, Sāmoa, nineteenth century. Paper mulberry bark and natural dyes, 186 x 120 cm. Collected by O. Paul Liesau in 1935. Übersee-Museum Bremen, D05336. Photograph by Volker Beinhorn. Courtesy of Ōfaga o Sa'ili'iliga, National University of Sāmoa Research Museum

Today, siapo is still made for a variety of purposes, both ceremonial and everyday. Siapo made as decorative pieces that can be framed and hung on walls or to adorn tables are common. It is no longer used as bedding, which is now exclusively purchased from stores. Lace is the preferred material for curtains, and everyday clothing is decidedly Western or a hybrid of Sāmoan-influenced fashion.[19] In ceremonial rituals, siapo can still be seen adorning high-ranking individuals or decorating the spaces they occupy. Siapo is also commonly worn by high-ranking chiefs at ceremonial events, and tulafale (orators) are particularly well known for wearing a siapo belt (fusi) (see Fig. 8) during formal occasions. Because siapo is favored as home decor in the diaspora, and therefore has to travel long distances, export pieces are made in relatively small sizes compared to the larger pieces typical of the past; today, larger sizes are produced on-demand for cultural events. Siapo is also popular among designers who work in the local and overseas pageant world.[20]

The production of siapo has remained somewhat the same as in the past, with some notable exceptions in personnel and resourcing. Today, men are heavily involved in the process—a change that started when the first foreign settlers began arriving in Sāmoa—but women still direct and participate in all stages, especially the decorating of the barkcloth.[21] Only four or five of the natural dyes of the past are still in use, with some modern variations. On Savai'i, the Salū family uses three main colors for their work: brown as a base, black which is now made from hydrating charcoal powder, and red sourced from the bark of the togo (red mangrove). On American Sāmoa, artisans still use the primary colors of black, brown, red, and yellow, and also implement acrylics when needed.

Contemporarily, siapo has increased in visibility as an identity marker in the Sāmoan diaspora. Over the past decade, overseas Sāmoans, as well as other Pacific cultures such as Tongan, Fijian, Māori, Hawaiian, and Tuvaluan, have increasingly participated in cultural photography—staged photographs where the subject(s) are dressed in full ceremonial regalia. Many young entrepreneurial Sāmoans have created business ventures as "dressers" who specialize in pre-contact Sāmoan adornment. Dressers use nineteenth-century archival images as inspirations, creating a wide range of formal regalia out of siapo or fine mats. They generally source the siapo from other Sāmoans or their own families' collections, or they order it specially made from Tonga or Sāmoa. Increasingly, there are also contemporary artists who produce siapo as part of their multidisciplinary practice in the diaspora.

The status of siapo as a long-held object of Sāmoan material wealth has shifted significantly. While it still occupies a theoretically high place in cultural practices and rituals in both Sāmoas, it has disappeared entirely from everyday use. Across the archipelago it remains the adornment of the elite and one of the highest indicators of respect, and thus is seen primarily during special events involving those of high rank. Siapo has also become a part of modern-day pageantry of Sāmoa and a vehicle for artistic expression in culturally-inspired fashion (see siapo wedding dress and train by Paula Chan Cheuk in Francisco Mellén Blanco's exhibition review in this volume, fig. 14). In the diaspora, siapo has evolved into a proudly displayed marker of identity, distinguishing Sāmoans from other Polynesians and Pacific peoples; it is still a common feature in Sāmoan homes globally, as a decorative object or a treasure reserved for special occasions.

Siapo in the Übersee-Museum Bremen Collection

At the UMB, siapo are stored according to standards of museum conservation and preservation, which include flat storage with minimal folding in a stable, dark environment; controlled temperature and humidity levels; and measures to prevent insect and mold infestation.[22] Sāmoan siapo, generally, can be stored the same way barkcloth from other parts of the world are, although, according to a 1988 report on the tapa collection held at Bishop Museum, "because of the paste and surface decoration, Sāmoan barkcloth tends to be stiff and resistant to folding or rolling." Sāmoan barkcloth is also especially susceptible to insect infestation due to the heavy use of arrowroot starch as an adhesive between multiple layers, unlike Hawaiian kapa which uses breadfruit tree sap as an adhesive, or Fijian masi, which uses yam or taro.[23]

According to the UMB's accession records, the museum's oldest siapo was possibly produced in the eighteenth century, while the most recent examples were likely made in the nineteenth century. None of the museum's Sāmoan siapo are currently on public display, although in its storage spaces, several can be seen hanging in glass cabinets or stored flat in metal lockers.

The *Atalilo* Siapo

Because siapo, both of the past and contemporary, are heavily motif-oriented, they were a natural inclusion for the *Atalilo* exhibition. Initially, we hoped that a selection of siapo could be brought over from the UMB and displayed in Sāmoa. Most Sāmoans who live in Sāmoa have never visited a museum before, and we anticipated it would be a treat for them to see actual siapo from the nineteenth century. We wanted to juxtapose ancient and modern siapo, and specifically showcase examples that illustrated the greatest variety in motif use, size, and color. This logically drew us to the oldest siapo in the UMB collection because, by comparison, modern siapo are generally smaller and feature less variety in color and motif. Requesting loans of siapo that were made prior to 1900, before the artform started to decline, presented us with the following complexities.

Figure 6. Siapo, Sāmoa, pre-1932.[24] Paper mulberry bark and natural dyes, 1.6 x 1.17 m. Collected by Albert Anton Rosenkrantz in 1931. Übersee-Museum Bremen, D15865. Photograph by Volker Beinhorn. Courtesy of Ōfaga o Sa'ili'iliga, National University of Sāmoa Research Museum

Real Replicas

Very early in the exhibition's planning stages, curators at the UMB told us that none of the Sāmoan siapo in the collection could be sent to and displayed in Sāmoa due to their extreme fragility. The UMB's siapo are so brittle, we were told, that they would likely not survive the trip to Sāmoa, and even if they did, once they were reintroduced to the warm, humid climate, their inevitable decay would accelerate. This meant that the siapo examples we had most hoped to include in the exhibition for purposes of comparing old and new would not be available. The only option, if we wanted to showcase historic siapo, would be to use photo replicas.

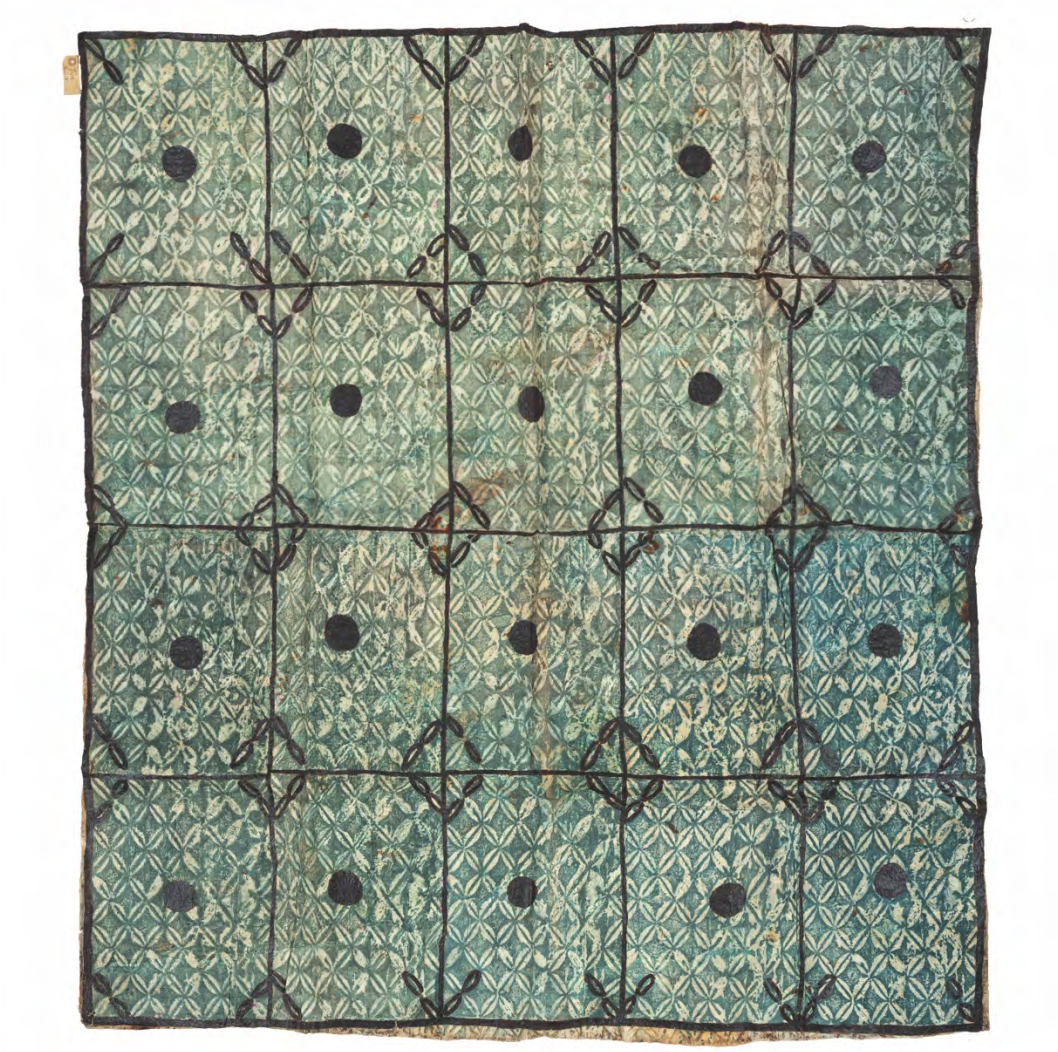

Figure 7. Siapo, Sāmoa, nineteenth century. Paper mulberry bark and natural dyes, 158 x 172 cm. Collected by Köper, Dock & Camp, year unknown. Übersee-Museum Bremen, D07896. Photograph by Volker Beinhorn. Courtesy of Ōfaga o Sa'ili'iliga, National University of Sāmoa Research Museum

Our disappointment in hearing this news was preceded by Indigenous indignation ("We are the National University of Sāmoa. Surely, we cannot be expected to show replicas of our own measina to our own people . . . ") mixed with impostor syndrome, as this was our team's first time curating an exhibition. "How on earth," we pondered, "do you show siapo without *showing* siapo?" Simmering beneath this dilemma, certainly, were sobering parallels to contemporary efforts by other Indigenous peoples to decolonize museums and other extractive Western institutions. Our planning had not factored in any institutional limitations, especially ones that concerned the stability of artifacts. And while none of us wanted

to contribute to advancing the deterioration of any Sāmoan measina, the irony of the situation was not lost on us. Presumably, museums do the job of protecting cultural artifacts when the average person, society, or government cannot, but now it was clear that museums also cannot keep siapo "alive" forever.

Without the option of "real" siapo to display, we were prompted to reconsider our exhibition plan. Being novices to the museum world, we considered what was possible for a display based on replicas. We contemplated commissioning a local siapo maker to produce modern copies of the UMB siapo, but quickly abandoned that idea when we accounted for time, budget, and the improbable success of such an endeavor. We also realized that this would not align with the spirit of our intended exhibition. Our objective with *Atalilo* was to celebrate motifs, highly flexible vehicles of cultural value and meaning that are the elemental building blocks of Sāmoan material culture.[25] The transmission of their message(s) falls squarely on masterful tufuga and the manipulation of motifs in their hands. We recognized that cultural change in Sāmoa has not only occurred but is expected and embraced. In the case of siapo—an artform that has evolved and declined but is still practiced today—the transformation is happening right before our eyes.

Our plan for a simple juxtaposition of old and new could obviously address the unique history of Sāmoan siapo, but we wanted to go deeper than that. We decided to lean into the realities of the situation. By highlighting the need to use replicas, we could initiate a timely celebration of a product of Sāmoan culture that has survived hundreds of years of pressure and neglect. We would not hide the fact that institutional conservation had led to the necessary exclusion of real siapo and the alternative use of siapo replicas; in fact, we would focus on it and center the section's narrative on a frank and open discussion exposing this stark reality. We wanted our audience to stumble viscerally into the space(s) left unoccupied, and in truth bastardized, by the convenient Western products that replaced siapo, which used to be part of almost every aspect of Sāmoan life. We wanted visitors to see the replicas; to feel for themselves what was lost, compromised, and replaced; and to appreciate the degree to which siapo has survived and thrived.

As we continued to negotiate with our German partners, we settled on a new plan—the UMB staff would take high-resolution images of the siapo which they would then send to our team to print and display as replicas. With this new strategy in mind, we set about choosing the *Atalilo* siapo.

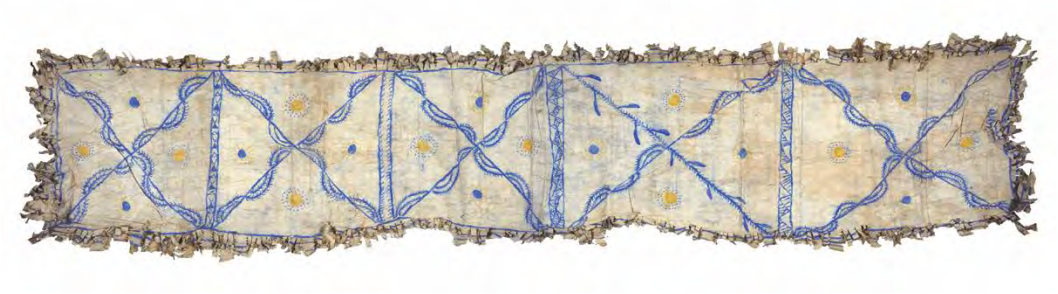

Figure 8. Siapo, Sāmoa, undated. Paper mulberry bark and natural dyes, 2.83 x 50 m. Übersee-Museum Bremen, D14133. Photograph by Volker Beinhorn. Courtesy of Ōfaga o Sa'ili'iliga, National University of Sāmoa Research Museum

Siapo Shelf Life

Of the UMB's 127 siapo, the oldest are six siapo that, according to the museum's accessioning records, were produced between 1800 and 1900—four of these are noted to "probably" have been made between 1800 and 1890 and only two have their sources ("Köper, Dock & Camp" and Hugo Schauinsland) documented.[26] Two more siapo have accession records that state they were created between 1850 and 1900.[27]

Most of the siapo in the Übersee collection were made after 1900. Just over half, sixty-seven, were collected by Otto Tetens between 1902 and 1906, but there is no clear indication of when any of these were actually made. While it can be assumed that all of Tetens' siapo were produced before 1906—the year he removed them from Sāmoa—the more difficult question is how long before 1906, and, most importantly, could they have been made before Western influence truly impacted the artform? If we wanted to showcase siapo free from colonial and settler influence, we needed examples of siapo that were produced, at the very least, before or around 1800—a full century before Tetens, or any other collector, came to Sāmoa.[28] However, we had no feasible way of confirming this, since the museum records were inconclusive and siapo are not known to have a long shelf life, nor have Sāmoans ever considered setting one. All of this was complicated by considering geographical and climatic conditions—how long could siapo be expected to have lasted *in Sāmoa* before they entered a climate-controlled museum in Germany?

We discussed this with our colleagues at the Centre for Sāmoan Studies and the results were interesting. Of the fourteen CSS staff members surveyed, none had ever made siapo themselves, although a few are related to current

siapo-makers. About half collectively owned siapo through their various family connections, and three acknowledged that they currently have siapo stored in their homes. When asked how long they thought siapo could reasonably be expected to keep before physically breaking down, their answers varied from "fifty years" to "infinity," but all responded that how long siapo lasted was absolutely contingent on how well it was cared for. "If people take good care of their siapo, it can last forever," one of my colleagues confidently insisted. This seems to be the opinion of experts like Mary Pritchard as well, who, in 1985, said, "I am not an anthropologist or someone that dissects with a microscope to look into the fiber or the material, but I have pieces that I feel that are way, way over one hundred, maybe two hundred years old, who knows."[29]

In the end, realizing we could not make much more than educated guesses on the age of the earliest siapo in the UMB's collection, we decided to showcase, instead, the most visually diverse examples. If siapo can last as long as owners enable them to, then, for our purposes, it did not matter when the pieces we included in the exhibition were made. Siapo has evolved so much that siapo from fifty years ago, in the era of pioneers like Mary Pritchard, are on the opposite end of the creative spectrum when compared with siapo made today. The evolution of siapo, we could now see, reflects the evolution of Sāmoan society and we would not shy away from that fact.

Ultimately, we chose eight pieces (Fig. 1), regardless of their age, based on their visible uniqueness in comparison to modern-day siapo produced in Independent Sāmoa. We also aimed for including a wide range of sizes, from long thin strips to circles to variously-scaled rectangles and squares. The oldest five siapo on view are noted in their accessions records as having been created between 1800 and 1931 and collected in the 1930s—four are credited as having been collected by Albert Anton Rosenkranz (Figs. 2–4, 6), and the fifth by O. Paul Liesau (Fig. 5). One is credited as having been collected by "Köper, Dock & Camp" (Fig. 7), although it has no collection date recorded. The remaining two on display (Figs. 8–9) have no dates recorded in their accession records, but satisfied our criteria of being visually and aesthetically unique.

Technical Cultural Difficulties

Photographing the UMB siapo was an unexpectedly complicated process, compounded mostly by the storage and handling restrictions faced by the

conservation team in Bremen. Every attempt was made to minimize overhandling the siapo; wrinkles and creases were left unsmoothed and folded-under edges and corners remained that way. Larger or awkwardly shaped pieces would not fit in the frame of the camera, so they could only be photographed in sections without unfolding or stretching them out for fear of damaging them. While this was an obvious necessity, it made things more difficult for our team in Sāmoa.

When we started receiving images of the siapo from the UMB team, we realized that the files were not always immediately ready for printing and display. This was not the fault of our collaborators, but rather, the byproduct of Indigenous Sāmoan design and methods. Because siapo are handmade, they are rarely perfect squares or rectangles with straight sides—even today. The edges of siapo are subject to the artist's will and natural shrinkage over time; they are scalloped, serrated, or frayed—some by design, some by accident. In many cases, siapo are borderless—painted all the way to their edges. As a result, we learned, photographing them for our purposes required the addition of extra physical space around them to achieve images that could then be cropped and/or rotated slightly during the editing stage so that each piece did not appear crooked. This addition of space around each siapo was difficult for our partners at the UMB, who had technical restrictions to contend with.

The condition and required handling of the UMB siapo had another side effect. Sāmoans have an intensely tactile approach to measina, including siapo, especially when they are still in active use. Before being traded or exchanged, fine mats and siapo are brought before the family and opened up one by one to be examined and judged for their quality and appropriateness. We pull, stretch, unravel, lift, and sometimes toss the mats and siapo, all in the name of a thorough collective appraisal. Size, composition, adornment, thickness, weight, beauty, and rarity are all gauged and measured through handling before a siapo or mat is either approved and put into rotation or deemed inappropriate and reserved for another occasion. Siapo in Sāmoan hands are stretched to their full length and have the dust snapped off and out of them—the absolute opposite of what museum conservators do (and in this case, did), and we could tell. The moment we downloaded and opened the files was bittersweet. While the intricate designs, rare colors, and genius of each piece radiated through without question, the siapo looked sterile, untouched, unused. They had unsmoothed wrinkles and creases, upturned corners and bent back edges and, even though they were photographed flat, still featured the soft undulations of extended periods of storage rather than the signature flatness preferred by and required for Sāmoan use. They would need

to be "revived" in order for us to progress, which meant going through several rounds of photography until we had images that we could actually work with here in Sāmoa. All the additional images would still need some form of editing.

We asked the UMB team to smooth out particularly conspicuous wrinkles, creases and edges, as much as they could, and, to their credit, they valiantly tried to meet our polite demands, re-photographing select pieces several more times. Only four of the siapo were small enough to be photographed whole, and even those images underwent very basic overall editing. The remaining four siapo would need to be photographed in sections. Editing these images was also a challenge because the graphic designer had to pinpoint the exact joints between multiple images in order to create a single one. We also decided to print the siapo with a four-inch-wide white border to further accentuate their two-dimensionality and highlight their imperfect borders and alignment.

Once all the photographs had been edited, they were sent to a local printer. More issues ensued. Initially, the printer did not realize the white border around each siapo was deliberate and necessary, so he removed them. In the subsequent round of printing, the printer selected the edge that he thought was the top—a longer end for all the rectangular pieces—and we ended up with prints that were all in landscape orientation, which was not the way we had laid them out to display. Inadvertently, this presented us with a new problem: trying to figure out the correct orientation of the siapo. Without being able to turn the pieces in our own hands, none of us in Sāmoa could tell which side of each siapo was the top. In the end, we oriented them according to the allocated display space, layering and puzzling them together in a way that we hoped would provide the viewers with the best opportunity to see each piece individually while forming a cohesive display.

Sensory Overload

The siapo installation was the first section in the exhibition gallery to be completed—it was finished almost three weeks before the exhibition was set to open. Once the siapo section was up, it was absolutely impossible to ignore. When any museum or university staff member walked into the gallery, the sight of the siapo literally stopped them in their tracks and everyone, without exception, was drawn to the display. As our curatorial team worked our way around the gallery, slowly installing the other five sections, we settled into a work pattern that orbited

around the siapo; the siapo became our new favorite gathering place, preferred break and lunch spot, and end-of-day debrief location. We spent countless hours sitting in front of the siapo—gazing at the replicas, identifying motifs, speculating on the source of the dyes, guessing each piece's purpose, speculating about the identities of the makers and wearers, and marveling at the ingenuity of ancestral Sāmoan siapo-making.

Figure 9. Siapo, Sāmoa, undated. Paper mulberry bark and natural dyes, 1.71 x 2 m. Übersee-Museum Bremen, D14117. Photograph by Volker Beinhorn. Courtesy of Ōfaga o Sa'ili'iliga, National University of Sāmoa Research Museum

When the exhibition opened later that month, the siapo were received with the same fervor and enthusiasm by the public. The fact that they were replicas became secondary to the experience of being in the presence of measina. The works clearly harkened to a time long since passed and to an artform in decline, but were unmistakably and proudly Sāmoan nonetheless. Adult guests reminisced about their beloved grandmothers and aunties and the power of the aualuma in its heyday, or recalled the steady thump of the tutua (wooden beater) on the iʻe (wooden anvil used for siapo production) echoing across the village. Student guests, who could not fathom a time when siapo was everyday wear, posted on Instagram and TikTok about the variety of naturally sourced colors and the realism of the motifs. In our narrated tour, we unpack the complicated story behind the making of the siapo display, explaining the necessary absence of "real" siapo and the logic behind the scaled reproductions. We make sure our audience understands the phases of Sāmoan history that the siapo in the *Atalilo* exhibition exist across, and we are painfully realistic about the challenges that Indigenous cultures like ours face in managing elements of our cultural heritage that have been collected to fill up foreign museums. For this experience, the response from our people is consistently, and overwhelmingly, one of gratitude.

The Ironic and the Ephemeral

Throughout this process, I found myself continuously thinking about the siapo in the UMB, fixated on the fact that they could likely never return "home." How is it possible for siapo to have been institutionally acclimated to such an extreme degree that their return to their homeland would destabilize them to the point of disintegration, a "death" of materiality, essentially? Should museums be held accountable for this? Or, to be fair, is this partly due to a gross overestimation that communities like ours have inadvertently imposed on museums, that once an object is safely ensconced in a climate-controlled museum, under the expert supervision of museum professionals, all threats to its longevity are neutralized? Siapo in Sāmoa is allowed to "die" all the time, and siapo-making and exchange, as a holistic social practice, has continued to exist and evolve despite the constant threat of decay and promises of unrequited salvage from museums. Museums are useful repositories of the past, but, as we saw in the making of this exhibition, when dealing with elements of heritage that have a life outside of museum walls, they are limited and cannot actually stop the natural degradation of artifacts.

Accession records are often incomplete, provenance remains unexamined, and environmental conditions can be inflexible and debilitating. The Übersee Museum Bremen has been instrumental in safeguarding siapo for, possibly, two hundred years, but, otherwise, they are not the agents of Sāmoan material continuity that I/we, perhaps mistakenly, thought them to be.

What I realized is needed to inform realistic heritage management in contemporary Sāmoa, speaking as well for myself, is a shift in perspective. Instead of seeing siapo held in museums as idyllic remnants of the past, or an adaptable element of living Sāmoan heritage, perhaps we need to focus on the ephemeral nature of siapo as a vehicle for continuity. Sāmoan culture is very much a living culture, and siapo is an example of living heritage that has steadily evolved for the past two hundred years. Living heritage, according to UNESCO, includes elements of cultural heritage that are continuously evolving and adapting as they are transmitted from makers, artists, and practitioners to their descendants, who still practice and use them today. Living heritage indicates the resilience of societies, and can help responsibly drive a nation's sustainable development strategies as current generations design their futures with cultural heritage management in mind. Museums are the antithesis of living heritage, as pointed out by Tatiana Poddubnykh:

> Living heritage cannot be protected if it is placed in the museum. Museum means death for it. Living heritage should be practiced, otherwise, it disappears. To stay "living" these practices, expressions, representations, skills, and cultural spaces associated with it, have to be recognized by the communities and individuals as part of their cultural heritage.[30]

In the case of Sāmoa—and siapo specifically—this is a possibility. Rather than reacting to a theoretical loss of opportunity to see "real" siapo, presenting siapo in the *Atalilo* exhibition helped our team, and particularly me, focus our attention on the ancient ingenuity behind siapo-making. In my opinion, CSS guests do not view the siapo as a dead or dormant artform, nor do they bemoan the institutional restrictions we faced. Instead, the siapo elicited commentary on the subjective symbology of motifs, the creative use of color, ancient connections to nature, and, most encouragingly, how to permanently embed these ideas in siapo-making today. Most rewarding of all was the affirmation that the continuity of siapo lies securely in Sāmoan hands.

If I have learned anything from this experience, it is that siapo will only continue to thrive if Sāmoans continue to make it. The key to the continuity of siapo, perhaps, is the complete embrace of its ephemerality—we have to grow it, process it, dye it, circulate it, store it, trade it, give it away, receive it, let it die a natural death, and, most importantly, do it all over again.

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Notes

[1] https://www.uebersee-museum.de/en/the-blue-continent-islands-in-the-pacific/

[2] The terms "siapo" and "tapa" are generally used interchangeably in Sāmoa, even now, but in this article, my preference is to use "siapo" because many siapo practitioners, including Mary Pritchard, claim that siapo is the Sāmoan term for bark-cloth and that "tapa" is adopted.

[3] German naturalist and ethnographer Augustin Kramer lists siapo-making under the category of "Women's Work," acknowledging women as "tufuga fai siapo" (master artisans/makers of siapo). Augustin Krämer, *The Samoa Islands: An Outline of a Monograph with Particular Consideration of German Samoa: Constitution, Pedigrees and Traditions,* Vol. 2 (University of Hawaii Press, 2000), 97.

[4] "Luamanuvae" is a chiefly title and precedes academic titles in Sāmoa.

[5] Sailiemanu Lilomaiava-Doktor, "Women Matai (chiefs): Navigating and Negotiating the Paradox of Boundaries and Responsibilities," *Pacific Studies* 43, no. 1 (2020): 61–82. Latu Latai extends the role of the aualuma to include a unique status called the feagaia, one half of a sacred brother-sister symbiosis—a role that enjoyed its own vaunted status in pre-Christian Sāmoan society. Latai states, "This power of women is seen collectively in the village setting in which all the sisters and daughters of the local men make up the social institution of aualuma, 'the front group.' This describes the aualuma's prestigious position within the village ranking, because it constitutes the feagaiga of the village. . . . In pre-Christian times, the institution of the aualuma, as the front group, stood for the honour and respect of the village. In times of war, the aualuma led in order to solicit the

favours of the gods. The feagaiga's venerated status, however, comes with serious responsibilities." Latu Latai, "Changing Covenants in Sāmoa? From Brothers and Sisters to Husbands and Wives?" *Oceania* 85, no. 1 (2015): 95.

[6] Te Rangi Hiroa (P. H. Buck), *Samoan Material Culture*, Bernice P. Bishop Museum Bulletin no. 75 (Bishop Museum, 1930), 282.

[7] Legendary siapo maker Mary Pritchard noted that leaving the cloth on the board permanently is a modern innovation and that, in her time, siapo mamanu were also heavily influenced by the stained glass windows that adorned Sāmoan churches. Hawaii Public Television, "Mary Pritchard Sāmoan Tapa 1985," 1985, video, posted by Phil Wilson, May 5, 2022, YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CpDy8QHh9go.

[8] I compiled the lists below from a number of sources: Hiroa, *Samoan Material Culture*, 297–304; Krämer, *Samoa Islands,* 351; John W. Hart, *Sāmoan Culture* (Atu's Sāmoan Print Shop, 1966), 2; and Siapo.com, accessed March 29, 2025, http://www.siapo.com/about-siapo.html. First is a list of primary dyes derived from a specific source, while the second list are secondary dyes made by mixing primary dyes:

> Primary Dyes: white/sina or tetea (namu or lime), black/uli or lama (candlenut), brown/oʻa (blood tree) or pani (pandanus tree), red/ʻele (clay), loa (lipstick tree) or togo (red mangrove), pink/aute (red hibiscus), yellow/ago or lega (turmeric root), purple/pauli comes from the soaʻa (plantain banana), green/lanulauʻava, blue/lanumoana
>
> Secondary Dyes: grey/tapumiti, yellow brown/ena or memea, bright red/ma, bluish red/melomelo, crimson, dark yellow/nonu (noni plant)

[9] Regarding breadfruit, specifically, the flesh of overripe breadfruit. The following plant species are being referred to: arrowroot (*Tacca leontopetaloides*), breadfruit (*Arto carpusaltillis*), tou (*Cordia aspera*), sogā (*Pipturu spropinquus*), oʻa (*Bischofia javanica*), and paogo (*Pandanus tectorius*).

[10] On the diverse uses of siapo: for clothing, see Hiroa, *Samoan Material Culture*, 312; Stair, "Jottings," 115. For household items, such as curtains and bedding, see Hiroa, *Samoan Material Culture*, 312–13; Krämer, *Samoa Islands*, 348; Stair, "Jottings," 109. For sleepwear, see Hiroa, *Samoan Material Culture*, 283, 313. For ceremonial adornment, see Krämer, *Samoa Islands*, 332, 334, 339. Regarding distinguishing rank, see Hiroa, *Samoan Material Culture*, 140, 141; Stair, "Jottings," 115. For wedding dowries, see Krämer, *Samoa Islands*, 152. For exhuming

corpses and wrapping the dead, see Krämer, *Samoa Islands*, 189; Stair, "Jottings," 182, 184. Related to fishing, see Krämer, *Samoa Islands*, 218, 224. For straining oils and foods, see Krämer, *Samoa Islands*, 318, 323. For war regalia, see Krämer, *Samoa Islands*, 297. For barter and ritual gift exchange, see Hiroa, *Samoan Material Culture*, 145, 283; Stair, "Jottings," 74.

[11] "A uma na teuga ia uʻu atoa le ʻie i suauʻu/lega ma ia mago lelei, faataʻui loa, pe teu i lalo o se moega aua nei sao iai se ʻea, ia taʻi ono masina ma laga e toe uʻu, faʻala, faʻasavili, ma toe teu.

Faata'ui: teuga o oloa faʻaleaganuʻu, i aso anamua. (o oloa e pei o ie samoa (ie toga), Siapo, laulu o se tuiga, nifoʻoti, titi fulumanu, ula nifo, ula lei, pale fuiono, ʻiesina, ʻietaʻele, ʻiefuipani ma nisi oloa taua faʻaleaganuʻu, e afifi malu lava i se ʻie ma lauuʻa, siapo e pito i totonu, avane ai fala ninii, ni papa laufala e pito i tua ia fa ʻamafiafia ai. Avane loa se maea poo se afa ua sai ai ia malu lelei, e le toe sao i tatonu se ʻea), ona faʻaeʻe loa lea i luga o se talitali, pe faʻatautau ifo i se maea mai le talitali o le faletalimalo.

E faʻapena foi pe a tatao i lalo a se moega ia pito i lalo ni falapapa, papa laufala falaniniʻi, o isi ʻie taua pei o lauuʻa, siapo ma ʻie samoa, (ie toga) ʻie sina, fala lauʻie o nisi fala." Fuimaono Paepaeolemuliaga Rosalia Me, *Faʻavagagaina Faiva Alofi Lima o Tamaʻitaʻi Samoa* (Women in Business Development Incorporated, 2008), 18. English translation by author.

[12] Stair, "Jottings," 112.

[13] Hiroa, *Samoan Material Culture,* 283; Margaret Jolly, "A Saturated History of Cloth and Christianity in Oceania," in *Divine Domesticities: Christian Paradoxes in Asia and the Pacific*, ed. Hyaeweol Choi and Margaret Jolly (ANU Press, 2014), 429.

[14] Noticing the foreign demand for Sāmoan products, Mary Pritchard started an export business in 1927, "shipping siapo, floor mats, table mats and hula skirts to dealers in Honolulu." She sourced products from one end of the archipelago to the other, from Manuʻa to Savaiʻi. Siapo became so popular outside of Sāmoa that in 1929 Pritchard made a special buying trip to Savaiʻi, where she purchased over 2,000 pieces from the villages of Safune, Sasina, Asau, Falelima, and Salaʻilua. Pritchard noted that on her 1929 trip, "at Falelima I saw for the first time a leaf upeti in use but never since have seen one in regular use in Sāmoa." "Mary Jewett Pritchard," Siapo.com, accessed March 29, 2025, http://www.siapo.com/mary-pritchard.html. On the impact of the war, see John Enright, "Contemporary Sāmoan Artists," *Pacific Arts* 15/16 (1997): 69.

[15] Lowell D. Holmes, "Taʻu: Stability and Change in a Sāmoan Village," *Journal of the Polynesian Society* 66, no. 3 (1957): 311.

[16] Since the decline of siapo making in the last century, generally speaking, two schools of siapo have emerged in contemporary Sāmoa. Siapo made in American Sāmoa is heavily rooted in the work of Mary Pritchard and other pioneers from

Leone, who popularized siapo mamanu and the freehand style of painting. Siapo made in Independent Sāmoa is driven by producers based on Savai'i, who exclusively produce siapo tasiga and use wooden stencils. Men are involved in both of these practices.

[17] Fale lalaga are an appendage to aualuma (women's group). If a village has a fale lalaga, it is considered part of the aualuma, although not all modern day aualuma have fale lalaga.

[18] STA maintains a designated space for siapo-makers at the centrally located Samoa Cultural Village in downtown Apia, and WIBDI supports sustainable development initiatives led by women and rural producers. Samoa Cultural Village was established as a space for Sāmoan artisans to showcase their skills and market their wares. Also featured are tattooists, carvers, healers, printmakers, weavers, performances, and cooking demonstrations. WIBDI also links local producers with international entities including The Body Shop and Ethique. See "About Samoa Tourism Authority," Samoa Tourism Authority, accessed March 29, 2025, https://www.samoa.travel/pagepreview/about-samoa-tourism-authority; and "Women in Business Development Inc," Women in Business Development Inc, accessed March 29, 2025, https://www.womeninbusiness.ws/women-in-business-home.html. In American Sāmoa, siapo is primarily produced by independent local artisans such as Nicholas King, Pua Tofaeono, and husband-and-wife duo Regina "Reggie" Meredith-Fitiao and Su'a Uilisone Fitiao. The Fitiaos own and operate Fa'asamoa Arts, a nonprofit arts studio and gallery "working to preserve the indigenous arts of American Sāmoa." The full name of the organization is Folauga o le Tatau ma Laga Aganu'u Fa'asamoa: Art Studio & Gallery of American Samoa, but it is widely known as Fa'asamoa Arts. "Fa'asamoa Arts: A Nonprofit Working to Preserve the Indigenous Arts of American Sāmoa," Fa'asamoa Arts, accessed March 29, 2025, https://www.faasamoaarts.com/.

[19] Siapo clothing has been replaced by a healthy local industry around handmade elei printmaking. "Elei" is the Sāmoan word for motifs but also applies to the practice of painting motifs. Motifs are applied to fabric that is then taken to local seamstresses to make everyday clothing, such as puletasi (matching top and wrap around skirt or lavalava worn by women), safari or "aloha" shirts for men, and other various clothing items.

[20] Annual events such as Miss Sāmoa or the fa'afafine equivalent, the Miss Sāmoa Fa'afafine Pageant, in Sāmoa and the Sāmoan diaspora, frequently include garments and costumes that feature siapo. Fa'afafine means men who exhibit the mannerisms typically associated with women.

[21] When nineteenth-century sailors and merchants introduced metal implements, they quickly replaced stone tools. Metal tools were easily adopted by master carvers who were responsible for building everything from large scale fale (houses) to

portable tanoa (‘ava bowls). This inadvertently led to a significant shift in production for siapo-makers, who previously made their stencils out of natural materials such as leaves, twigs, and fruits. Metal tools also allowed for the advent of the upeti la‘au (wooden stencil), an innovation that not only made for longer-lasting upeti, but ease for the siapo maker. Because carving is the exclusive domain of men, they are now irreversibly folded into the siapo-making process. Today, men assist in the growing and farming of u‘a, the carving of upeti, and other steps such as scraping and pounding out the cloth.

[22] Most museums storing siapo subscribe to the general conservation methods and criteria described in “Tapa: Situating Pacific Barkcloth in Time and Place,” Care Guidelines, University of Glasgow, accessed March 31, 2025, https://tapa.gla.ac.uk/care-guidelines/.

[23] Roger Rose et al., “The Bishop Museum Tapa Collection Conservation and Research into Special Problems,” *Bishop Museum Occasional Papers* 28 (1988): 16; Kapa Curious, “Natural Dyes, Paints, & Colors,” accessed March 29, 2025, https://www.kapacurious.com/dye; “Masi (Barkcloth) Workshop at the Fiji Museum,” International Network for the Conservation of Contemporary Art, accessed March 29, 2025, https://incca.org/masi-bark-cloth-workshop-fiji-museum.

[24] This siapo was inadvertently doubled in the photographic replica featured in the exhibition, as seen in Fig 1.

[25] The exhibition’s introductory wall text read as follows:

> Motifs are the elemental building blocks of Sāmoan material culture and can be infinitely configured to lend aesthetic beauty while also imbuing deep and nuanced significance. Each motif carries its own special meaning, and whether applied as text or decoration, enhances the material wealth of Sāmoan families and communities.
>
> In this celebration of motifs, we highlight their prominence in various genres of Sāmoan material culture, some well-known, and others less so. Through these genres, we are able to witness the mastery of specialists’ knowledge that are reflected in the creative pieces that unite these symbols, adding greater value to the treasured heirlooms and indigenous infrastructure that make Sāmoan culture unique.

[26] “D07896 Tapa Cloth/Siapo,” Übersee Museum-Bremen, accessed March 29, 2025, https://bremen.museum-digital.de/pdf/object/1775.pdf?lang=en; “D00356 Tapa Cloth/Siapo,” Übersee Museum-Bremen, accessed March 29, 2025, https://bremen.museum-digital.de/pdf/object/1802.pdf?lang=en. The

notations in the data sheet for each read "Created 1900–1890 (probably)." Schauinsland was a German zoologist who conducted research in the Pacific from April 1896 to May 1897. He visited Sāmoa, Hawai'i, New Zealand, Stephens Islands, and the Chatham Islands.

[27] These were donated by Franz Emil Hellwig, a German merchant who accumulated two large collections mostly of Melanesian artifacts between 1895 and 1910. Hellwig is not believed to have actually travelled to Sāmoa but he may have acquired the siapo through his close association to Emma Coe, a Sāmoan hotelier who he worked for in German New Guinea in 1900.

[28] The oldest documented siapo still in existence outside Sāmoa are held in the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History in Washington, DC. These were collected during the United States Exploring Expedition led by Commander Charles Wilkes. Wilkes visited Sāmoa between 1838 and 1842.

[29] Hawaii Public Television, "Mary Pritchard."

[30] Tatiana V. Poddubnykh, "Heritage as a Concept Through the Prism of Time," *Social Evolution & History* 14, no. 2 (2015): 116.

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CLARA BAL and KATHARINA NOWAK

Decolonial Knowledge Production and Reconnection through a *Mormah* Headdress from Simbu

Abstract

This article explores the relationship between knowledge, colonial entanglement, and material culture through the case study of a ceremonial headdress, a mormah*, from Simbu Province, Papua New Guinea, currently held in the Linden-Museum Stuttgart. The* mormah*, once used during highland rituals such as* buka ingu*, exemplifies how colonial collecting practices decontextualized culturally significant objects, transforming them from living ceremonial regalia into static museum artifacts. Drawing on postcolonial theory and Donna Haraway's concept of "situated knowledges," the authors adopt a collaborative, decolonial methodology that brings together archival museum research and oral history interviews conducted in the Kuman language with a key cultural informant: co-author Clara Bal's grandmother. This interdisciplinary and transnational research design highlights the epistemic authority of insider knowledge and the ethical imperative of trust-based engagement. By analyzing the symbolic, ecological, and ceremonial meanings of the* mormah*, the article foregrounds the object's role within Indigenous systems of memory and social reproduction. The authors argue for a reorientation of museum practice that goes beyond provenance as property tracing, toward provenance as a relational, ethical, and political project. Through this approach, the* mormah *becomes a site of cultural resilience and epistemic repair, offering new pathways for restitution, reinterpretation, and collaborative knowledge production between museums and societies of origin.*

Keywords: *Decolonial knowledge, collaborative research methods, Simbu, mormah headdress, Papua New Guinea Highlands, material culture, colonialism*

Introduction

Understanding the historical context of knowledge production is essential to examining its role in shaping colonial dynamics. The production of knowledge about the Simbu Province in the Highlands Region of Papua New Guinea (PNG) was integral to the facilitation of German and Australian colonial expansion in the

area during the twentieth century.[1] Beginning in the 1930s, scientific research and the generation of knowledge were deeply embedded in the power dynamics of colonialism in the region, especially through Christian missionary work and gold mining—both of which are ongoing.[2] Today, knowledge produced and researched by local scholars is of great importance as local scholars are able to quickly break down language barriers, recognize bias toward foreigners, and appreciate cultural differences through the development of trusting relationships.[3] Even in advanced research processes including data analysis and interpretation, different perspectives are essential for decolonial knowledge production. We use a theoretical framework based on Donna Haraway's concept of "situated knowledges" for understanding how knowledge production is not a neutral or objective process but is instead embedded within broader structures of power.[4] This conceptual framework is equally relevant to the study of colonial history. Which methods are most effective in re-establishing the web of relationships, practices, and meanings and reconnecting material culture that is stored in former colonial nations' museums with its societies of origin? This article discusses these considerations in concrete terms using a Simbu *mormah* headdress located in the collections of the Linden-Museum in Stuttgart, Germany. A *mormah* is a traditional headdress made using what is known as the kamb *mormah* beetle (Fig. 1). It is worn by people of all ages on ritual occasions such as the *buka ingu* as a symbol of status, tribal affiliation, and cultural identity.

Figure 1. Artist unknown, *mormah* headdress, before 1956. Dried orchid stems, beetle carapaces, agave, rattan, trade cloth, cotton string, and cuscus fur; 43 x 4 cm. Simbu Province, Papua New Guinea. Inventory #119652, Linden-Museum Stuttgart. Courtesy of Linden-Museum Stuttgart

While Western museums act as temporary custodians of the collections they are currently hosting, these collections contain vital and missing knowledge from the artifacts' place of origin. Activists and scholars from the Global South and societies of origin have been calling for closer cooperation with museums and

advocating for relationships based on trust.[5] Their aim is to discuss from a postcolonial perspective the interwoven connections between power relations and knowledge production, both of which may be understood through material culture.

The study of the *mormah* headdress intersects directly with questions of authority, cultural sovereignty, and the politics of representation. The headdress, removed from its Indigenous context and reinterpreted within colonial and institutional frameworks, illustrates how material culture can be mobilized to assert control over historical narratives. In the case of the *mormah*, this process of appropriation reflects the broader power asymmetries characteristic of colonial governance in the Pacific, in which, as Nicholas Thomas argues, the exchange and collection of material culture was deeply entangled with systems of Western domination, often subordinating or erasing Indigenous knowledge systems.[6] The removal of Pacific objects from their cultural contexts not only disrupted their ceremonial and social functions but also embedded them within Western classificatory frameworks that rendered Indigenous epistemologies marginal or invisible. By employing decolonial and participatory approaches to reinterpret the *mormah* headdress, the research offers a model for redistributing epistemic authority back to source societies. This political reorientation underscores the potential for material heritage to serve as a site of resistance and reclamation, linking cultural revitalization to broader movements for justice and self-determination.

Ethnographic objects like the *mormah* are embedded in historical trajectories of dispossession, negotiation, and reinterpretation. To engage critically with such material requires deconstructing the power relations that have governed their interpretation and imagining alternative futures for their cultural return. Although the politics of knowledge in postcolonial research has been widely examined, there remains a notable gap in case-specific studies that trace the epistemic trajectories of individual artifacts across time and space. This *mormah* headdress presents a particularly valuable case through which to explore the enduring afterlives of colonial knowledge production. Our research seeks to intervene in the current debates by focusing on how cultural knowledge embedded in material heritage can be recontextualized through collaborative, decolonial methodologies. By doing so, we aim to contribute to theoretical discussions on power and epistemology and to practical strategies for ethical engagement with museum collections.

Literature Review

Ethnographic studies of material culture in Simbu Province offer critical insights into how colonial and postcolonial processes shape knowledge production and power relations. Key scholarly works examine the entangled histories of object collection, Indigenous agency, and epistemic authority, foregrounding the role of museums and anthropological practice in constructing and contesting cultural knowledge. A foundational contribution to this discourse is Nicholas Thomas's *Entangled Objects: Exchange, Material Culture, and Colonialism in the Pacific*, which argues that the movement of artifacts across colonial boundaries is never one-directional. Thomas posits that material culture must be understood as "active in the formation of colonial relations."[7] In the context of Simbu, where ceremonial objects such as *mormah* circulated within complex exchange networks, their appropriation into Western museum collections exemplifies how colonial collecting practices both extracted cultural value and obscured Indigenous systems of meaning. The detachment of these objects from their ceremonial contexts reconfigures them as specimens of scientific interest, thereby consolidating Eurocentric forms of knowledge while silencing local epistemologies. The act of silencing signifies a suppression of knowledge, an act of ignoring and devaluing local epistemologies that are deemed irrelevant or unworthy of documentation.

Material culture has emerged as a critical lens through which to examine colonial encounters for Indigenous resistance and cultural negotiation.[8] Scholars including Chris Gosden, Dan Hicks, and Mary C. Beaudry advocate for the integration of postcolonial theory into material culture studies in order to better understand the layered meanings embodied in objects and built environments.[9] This approach emphasizes how material culture both shaped and was shaped by the power dynamics of the empire. Further enriching this discourse, scholars such as Gosden and Tania M. Li show how material culture was central to both imperial control and Indigenous agency.[10] Gosden and Chantal Knowles argue that museums used to define and fix colonized cultures but now challenge colonial narratives when the societies of origin recontextualize museum objects through postcolonial lenses.[11] Nicholas Thomas reframes colonialism as a set of colonial situations.[12] Feminist and Indigenous scholars including Linda Tuhiwai Smith and Clare Anderson push this analysis further, advocating for approaches that center lived experiences and cultural embodiment in order to understand materiality

under colonial rule.[13] Together, these perspectives call for a deeper, more ethical engagement with the physical legacy of empire.

Expanding on this call, Chris Ballard and Bronwen Douglas emphasize the co-productive nature of ethnographic knowledge, arguing that Pacific Islander contributions to colonial knowledge systems have historically been marginalized, yet were essential to the production of ethnographic data.[14] In regions like Simbu, Indigenous knowledge-holders acted as guides, interpreters, and informants, shaping how material culture was collected and understood. However, this co-production was rarely acknowledged in official documentation. The resulting asymmetry exemplifies what Smith has termed "the colonizing logic of research," in which Western scientific frameworks extract, classify, and archive cultural knowledge without reciprocal recognition or return.[15] These dynamics persist through institutional memory practices in Western ethnographic museums, which often retain colonial-era artifacts without engaging source communities in curatorial decisions or restitution debates.

Background and Methodology

Our collective research follows a decolonial and interdisciplinary methodology rooted in qualitative practices and collaborative knowledge production.[16] Katharina Nowak is a social- and cultural anthropologist whose work centers on the critical study of ethnographic collections from the Pacific, with a regional emphasis on Papua New Guinea. Her scholarly interest in the *malagan* societies of New Ireland Province, Papua New Guinea, underscores her broader commitment to understanding the shifting meanings of cultural objects across temporal, geographic, and epistemic boundaries. Her academic and curatorial work reflects a sustained engagement with questions of colonialism, material culture, and the practice of knowledge production within museums. Clara Bal is a political scientist specializing in national security and international relations in PNG. Having grown up in the Highlands of PNG and possessing intimate cultural knowledge of the region, Clara brings a distinctive insider perspective to issues concerning governance, community resilience, and Indigenous knowledge systems. Her academic trajectory, anchored in PNG Studies at Divine Word University and Community Development at Yeungnam University, reflects a deep commitment to research that is locally grounded and globally informed.

We (Clara and Katharina) first met in Germany in 2023 through the Erasmus+ exchange program.[17] In 2024, Katharina traveled to PNG for the second time to continue her research in New Ireland, work at the National Museum and Art Gallery in Port Moresby, and teach at the University of Papua New Guinea. During this time, we co-taught lectures that were focused on reflections about the intertwined colonial history of PNG and Germany and its impact on the present day. While preparing our lectures, we worked through photographs of the collections from Simbu in the Linden-Museum Stuttgart. The *mormah* headdress immediately caught our attention because of its use of colorful beetles. Despite her familiarity with highland traditions, Clara had never encountered a ceremonial object like it. Our visual curiosity led us to conceptualize a research project that connects museum-held material culture with living cultural memory. Similar to the concept of *punctum* in Roland Barthes's theory of photography,[18] we chose to use the *mormah* headdress as our object of focus because of the emotional intensity we experienced while engaging with it.

The next step in our methodological approach was to brainstorm research questions. We came up with the central question "How can historical knowledge embedded in a museum artifact be reconnected to its cultural origin through local oral histories and lived experience?" To find answers and explore the cultural significance of *mormah*, we planned a trip to Simbu Province to visit Clara's grandmother, Kunum. We felt it was important to interview her about her knowledge of the pre-colonial period and her experience in the postcolonial period, as well as to center her voice.[19] Using the framework of a polyphonic ethnography[20]—combining postcolonial theories with dissonant voices and perspectives from PNG in order to consciously counter the standardization of scientific theorizing—we developed a loosely structured series of questions to ask Clara's grandmother Kunum to guide our qualitative family research and gather data.[21] Clara conducted the interview, as Kunum speaks only Kuman, one of the many local languages of the Simbu Province. This ensured both linguistic accuracy and cultural sensitivity, while reinforcing the central principle of trust-based and community-grounded research. Clara subsequently translated and transcribed the interview, a process that not only preserved linguistic nuance but also allowed her to embed interpretive meaning that might otherwise be lost in standard translation.

Katharina conducted archival research at the Linden-Museum Stuttgart to reconstruct how the headdress came into the museum's collections, learn about its provenance, and discover any associated documentation.[22] After collecting

both the oral and archival data, we conducted a collaborative coding and thematic analysis of the interview.[23] Through this process, we identified the production, use, social functions, and underlying colonial systems of power attached to the headdress within the Simbu context. To guide our interpretation, we employed a theoretical framework grounded in both anthropological and political science literature.[24]

Figure 2. Artist unknown, *mormah* headdress (detail), pre-1956. Dried orchid stems, beetle carapaces, agave, rattan, trade cloth, cotton string, and cuscus fur; 43 x 4 cm. Simbu Province, Papua New Guinea. Courtesy of Linden-Museum Stuttgart

Unveiling the *Mormah*: Knowledge, Power, and the Colonial Legacies of a Simbu Headdress

The Linden-Museum's *mormah* (Fig. 1)[25] is a slender forehead band crafted from a complex assemblage of local and introduced substances. These include dried orchid stems, red commercial trade cloth (replacing earlier barkcloth), cotton string, cuscus (*Dactylopsila* sp.) fur, woven threads derived from the agave plant, and iridescent green scarab beetles (*Cetoniinae* sp.) known as *kamb mormah* in

the Kuman language. The beetles are securely bound between parallel braids of dried orchid fiber, the headdress's primary structure, using twisted cords of woven thread (Fig. 2).

In 1956, the Linden-Museum acquired this headdress as part of an object exchange with Stuttgart-based private collector Ernst Heinrich, who described it only as "composed of multiple components of meticulously woven straw. Two cords are attached lengthwise along the inside."[26] Heinrich attributed the object to the "Chimbu-Gebirge, Deutsch-Neuguinea," but museum archival records do not include information regarding the circumstances of its acquisition, insight into the object's ceremonial use, or its original ownership. From a museological standpoint, the *mormah* is a paradigmatic example of ethnographic material culture whose biography is marked by epistemic rupture. A thorough review of the museum's records revealed no evidence that the headdress has ever been exhibited; it appears to have remained in storage, absent from the museum's interpretive narratives. In this context, museum archival research uncovers and underscores not only archival silence but the systematic decontextualization characteristic of colonial collection practices.

The intricate entanglement between knowledge and power has long been a central concern within social and cultural anthropology. Postcolonial perspectives offer a lens through which to examine how scientific and ethnographic knowledge was historically mobilized to sustain colonial domination.[27] In the case of PNG, specifically the Simbu Province in the Highlands region, the entwinement of knowledge and colonial power is particularly stark. During the twentieth century, colonial administrations and Western anthropologists alike engaged in the systematic documentation of Indigenous life worlds, languages, and material cultures. These practices served the broader apparatus of colonial governance.[28] As Edward Said and Linda Tuhiwai Smith have observed, colonial regimes rendered colonized people legible through Eurocentric knowledge systems.[29] The *mormah* headdress exemplifies this dynamic. Removed from its ceremonial context and reclassified as an ethnographic object, it became part of an archive that privileged Western taxonomies while erasing Indigenous epistemologies. Reinterpreting the *mormah* through the voices of Simbu community members like Kunum Mond not only repositions Indigenous actors as epistemic authorities but also challenges the institutional frameworks that have historically excluded them. This shift from objectification to collaboration marks a methodological and ethical reorientation central to decolonial research.[30] Moreover, such efforts contribute to a broader project of epistemic justice that

seeks to rectify the historical asymmetries embedded in the archive of anthropological knowledge.[31]

Figure 3. Left to right: Katharina Nowak, Kunum Mond, and Clara Bal, September 2024, Gena, Kerowagi District, Simbu Province, Papua New Guinea. Photograph courtesy of the authors

Field Encounter in Gena Village

In order to interview Clara's grandmother, Kunum, we left Madang on September 11, 2024, embarking on a road trip that would take us across several provinces of PNG. We drove fourteen hours, eventually reaching Jiwaka Province, where we stayed overnight. The following morning, we drove to Clara's home village, Gena, located in the Kerowagi District, where Kunum currently resides. We had not been able to inform Kunum of our visit ahead of time, as there is no electricity in the village to charge her phone; residents rely on limited solar power instead.

When we arrived at Gena, Kunum was in her garden harvesting *kaukau* (sweet potatoes). She was visibly surprised and delighted to see us and came to embrace us warmly. She was especially excited to meet Katharina, as she is from Germany—a country with a close connection to the Lutheran mission, which is part of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of PNG.[32] We made our way down the hill to Kunum's front yard, where we sat together and exchanged gifts (Fig. 3). After the exchange, Clara showed her grandmother a picture of the *mormah* and explained our interest in learning more about it. Kunum's face lit up. She smiled and shared a heartfelt moment of cultural reconnection: "I was a young girl when we used to wear this during celebrations. Sometimes we even wore our traditional dress to the elections of the Kiaps in Kerowagi. They really admired me. That was how I met your grandfather!"

Passing and Missing Knowledge of *Kambu Mormah*

Clara explained to Kunum that we had several questions about the *mormah* headdress, and that our conversation might take some time. She gently encouraged Kunum to eat and drink the food we had brought first, and then, once she was ready, we could begin. Once Kunum had finished her meal, we proceeded with the interview, which was conducted in the Kuman language. Clara interpreted key points into English, so that Katharina could follow along and ask follow-up questions when necessary. When asked whether the youth of past generations and those of today still produce *mormah*, Kunum responded, "Youth today are no longer able to produce *mormah* for three main reasons. First, they are no longer members of the *yagl ingu* (men's house) or *ambu ingu* (women's house). Secondly, parents now send their children to school to receive formal education. Finally, during colonization, missionaries played a significant role in discouraging our traditional practices."

Kunum elaborated, saying, "In the days of our forefathers, and even when I was a young girl, there were specific houses built for boys and girls where they would receive cultural teachings."[33] In Tok Pisin, these were known as *Haus man* for boys and *Haus meri* for girls, and in the Kuman language, they are referred to as *yagl ingu* and *ambu ingu*, respectively. Kunum explained, "In the *yagl ingu*, fathers taught their sons crucial life skills such as hunting techniques and how to be responsible men. One of the important teachings passed down in this setting was the process of producing *mormah*." Kunum explained further: "In the *ambu ingu*, mothers taught girls how to plant and maintain gardens and how to support their husbands." She emphasized that today, these traditional institutions, *Haus man* and *Haus meri*, no longer exist in many villages. As a result, young boys are no longer being taught how to make *mormah,* and the skills are quickly fading.

Kunum continued, saying that "parents today are more focused on sending their children to school to receive formal knowledge so they can have a better future. Because of that, they don't take time to teach them our traditional knowledge and skills. Instead of showing them how to make their own traditional attire, they just buy it for them. That's why many of our young people don't know how to make *mormah* anymore." This intergenerational gap in the transmission of knowledge is deeply rooted in historical processes of cultural disruption and is not an isolated phenomenon.

The decline in *mormah*-making skills reflects broader patterns in which colonial and missionary interventions reshaped values and modes of learning in Simbu society. The *mormah* thus exemplifies the asymmetries of colonial-era knowledge production. Before 1958, during the final years of Australian administration in PNG, the object's extraction took place within a wider context of missionization, the expansion of road infrastructure, the development of cash-crop economies (notably coffee), and a shift in clan relations—all of which transformed the socio-material landscape of Simbu. That such transformations are absent from the museum's documentation reflects an enduring hierarchy of knowledge that privileges Western scientific taxonomies over Indigenous epistemologies. These processes of change in knowledge and the erasure of knowledge were made possible by the complicity between colonial administration and Christian missions.

Kunum said that missionaries in the 1930s to 1970s "told us that wearing our traditional clothes was sinful. They said if we wanted to be good Christians, we had to cover our bodies and wear *lap-lap* (a fabric worn by both men and women as a skirt, which they tie around their waist). They gave us salt to taste and

lap-lap to wear and told us to burn our traditional garments. Most of us listened to them and accepted these changes. We followed Christianity, and because of that, many people stopped teaching these traditions to their children and grandchildren." Kunum's reflections reveal how the interaction of colonial influence, missionization, formal education, and the loss of traditional institutions has deeply affected the transmission of cultural knowledge, especially practices like *mormah*-making.

Production, Techniques, and Materials Used in Making *Mormah*

Kunum explained that in Gena they usually collect the *kambu mormah* when the beetles come in large numbers to feed on the nectar of the flowers of two special trees deep in the forest. "In our language," she said, "we call these trees *ende yokind* and *ende mine*." She explained that sometimes you might find a few beetles in the jungle, but that most are gathered during the flowering season, when they appear in abundance. "We catch them carefully by hand to preserve their delicate wings, which are very important to us. . . . The *kambu mormah* are more than just beautiful beetles. Our ancestors chose them for their shiny green color—it really catches people's attention. They were used as adornments in traditional headdresses, a symbol of identity, pride, and aesthetic appreciation. Our elders knew that color could speak; it could draw the eye and show respect. So, when we wear *kambu mormah* . . . we're wearing something that represents who we are."

Kunum explained that "to make the *mormah*, the men collect several important materials . . . First, they go into the forest to gather the stems of the orchid nodes. These are split in half and left to dry in the sun. After they're dry, we split them again into thin strips." She continued, "We also use agave plants.[34] The stalks and leaves are cut, and then the leaves are sliced into strips. We scrape off the outer skin to get the fibers inside, and these are twisted into strong, thin strings. The *kambu mormah* are collected from the jungle and left to dry in the sun."

Supplementary literature, particularly the comprehensive volume *New Guinea Highlands: Art from the Jolika Collection* (2006), supports the identification of the *mormah* as part of a broader regional practice. Headbands embedded with beetle carapaces were used across the Western Highlands and Simbu Province, typically worn with elaborate wigs—such as the large *peng koem* or "judge's

wigs"—during male initiation and ceremonial performances. Initially, the objects were backed with red-dyed bark cloth; however, they were subsequently covered with lighter European commercial fabrics. This shift in material preferences may have been driven by the relative ease of trade during the colonial encounter.

"Once the men have all the materials," she added, "they weave the agave fibers into thicker cords. Then they take the dried *kambu mormah* and the thin strips of orchid stem, place them on a dried red pandanus leaf, and tie everything together using the cords. That's how proper *mormah* is made." Despite Kunum's detailed descriptions, one question remained: Are the scarab beetles whose carapaces embellish the Linden-Museum *mormah* still present in Simbu Province ecosystems? Preliminary ecological data and local testimonies suggest that such beetles have become increasingly rare, potentially due to habitat loss, pesticide use, and climate change.[35] This raises ethical and environmental dimensions around material sustainability, Indigenous biodiversity stewardship, and the invisibility of ecological knowledge in ethnographic museum collections.

The Use of the *Mormah*: Past and Present

Kunum told us, "We wear the *mormah* during special occasions, especially during *buka ingu*, which is one of our biggest ceremonies. In our language, *buka ingu* means 'pig house.' It's a time when everyone in the village comes together. We slaughter pigs and exchange them with other people in the village. For example, one man might give away ten pigs to someone in the village. Later, that person must return the favor by giving back even more pigs. That's how we show respect, and build relationships, and keep our traditions strong."

The continued use and creative development of the *mormah* in contemporary ceremonies such as *buka ingu* not only underscores its vibrant cultural relevance but also casts a critical light on museum practices that often removed such objects from their social and performative context. In Western ethnological museums, headdress objects such as *mormah* are usually presented as aesthetic artifacts or testimonies to "lost" cultures—a practice that fails to recognize the dynamic and vibrant significance of these objects.[36]

Kunum continued that "during *buka ingu*, the *mormah* is very important. It serves as a base to support and secure the decorative bird feathers worn above it on the head. The green from the *kambu mormah* beetles shines in the sunlight, it makes people notice you. Wearing it shows pride, strength, and status. When

people see the design of the *mormah* they know the tribe that you originate from, making it a symbol of identity. The *mormah* from Gena will be designed differently from that of Western Highlands or Jiwaka province."

Conclusion

A central principle of our methodology is the recognition that knowledge produced by local scholars, particularly those with personal or familial ties to the community in question, holds unique epistemic value. Clara's position as both co-researcher and cultural insider enabled us to have access to knowledge that would have remained inaccessible to outside researchers. This form of situated knowledge is essential for disrupting the extractive legacies of colonial ethnography. This kind of research also reflects the benefits of interdisciplinary and transnational cooperation. Clara's grandmother Kunum, a respected elder, shared insights that revealed the *mormah's* ceremonial and spiritual significance. Combining ethnological research methods, museum archival analysis, and political science theory enabled us to approach the Linden-Museum *mormah* from multiple vantage points, while also fostering a research relationship grounded in trust and mutual respect. In doing so, we aim to contribute to broader efforts that challenge hegemonic knowledge systems and advocate for more inclusive, ethically grounded approaches to material culture research.

The oral history interview we conducted expanded a museum object's fragmentary written archive. The *mormah* headdress, according to Kunum's recollection, was worn during high-level ceremonial exchanges that solidified political alliances, resolved disputes, and reinforced social hierarchies.[37] Such insight stands in stark contrast to the object's inert presence in a European storeroom, challenging museological representations of such artifacts as static or anonymous cultural specimens.

Framing the *mormah* within decolonial museum practice compels us to ask: What forms of knowledge are privileged or erased through the object's institutional framing? What kinds of memory—colonial and/or Indigenous—does the object embody? How might the *mormah* become not only an index of historical violence but a medium for epistemic repair? In its current circumstances, the object both illustrates and obscures colonial legacies. Yet, by engaging with descendants of its makers from its place of origin and meaning, we reanimate its social life and resituate it within a network of Indigenous agency, environmental

change, and museological accountability. The object's materiality further reflects its geographical and cultural origin. Simbu's mountainous terrain, limited arable land, and historically peripheral economic status within PNG's colonial administration shaped both the modes of production and the circulation of ceremonial items. Objects like the *mormah* were not commodities; they were embedded in gift economies. Their appropriation into European collections thus entailed not merely physical relocation but ontological transformation: from ceremonial regalia to scientific specimen.

This *mormah*'s trajectory reveals the entanglement of colonial knowledge production, climate precarity, and museum ethics. Our present collaborative research proposes that decolonial object-centered methodologies—especially those privileging oral testimony and Indigenous scholarship—are the most effective means of addressing the aforementioned issues. Museums must move beyond provenance as property tracing and toward provenance as a relational, ethical, and political project. The *mormah*, in this light, becomes both a witness to colonial disruption and a potential conduit for renewed cultural dialogue and restitution. Artifacts in Western museum collections, such as the *mormah,* are deeply rooted in colonial knowledge systems that document material culture while marginalizing Indigenous perspectives. This tendency has been criticized by Ciraj Rassool as part of a "postcolonial archive" that aims to stabilize Western power over definition.[38] Christina Kreps also argues that decolonial museum work must not stop at the presentation of objects, but must actively involve Indigenous actors as curators, commentators, and knowledge bearers.[39]

The *mormah* has changed in its materiality without losing its traditional meaning. Its contextualization in a museum must be reflective and seriously address questions of restitution, digital repatriation, and participatory research methods. *Mormah* are still in use today, although they are now often made with a combination of traditional and introduced materials including red *laplap*, thread, woven plastic laces, *cuscus* or possum fur, and bird feathers. Despite these changes in production, the *mormah's* function and cultural significance remain unchanged. The *mormah* should therefore not be understood as a static collection object, but as a living archive of cultural resilience and innovation.

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[17] Clara was part of the PNG delegation as a lecturer from the University of Papua New Guinea. Katharina, who was teaching at the University of Bremen and a PhD candidate at the University of Tübingen, was part of the receiving team in Germany.
[18] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (Hill and Wang, 1981), 25–27. Barthes distinguishes two modes of engaging with photographs: the *studium* and the *punctum*. The *studium* refers to the cultural, political, or thematic interest evoked by an image, shaped by shared codes, education, and social context. In contrast, the *punctum* is a subjective, affective detail that "pricks" or "wounds" the viewer, introducing emotional intensity beyond cultural conventions.
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[27] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (Pantheon, 1978); Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies.*

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[32] The Evangelical Lutheran Church of PNG emerged from the missionary work of the Neuendettelsauer (Lutheran Mission) and Rheinische Missionsgesellschaft (Rhenish Missionary Society) in the late nineteenth century.

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Sprouting Photographic Lotuses: On the Visual Return of Gregory Bateson's Photographs to Iatmul Villages

Abstract

This article discusses the recent visual return of photographs made in Iatmul villages (East Sepik Province, Papua New Guinea) between 1929 and 1933 by British anthropologist Gregory Bateson to those communities. It introduces the project and its methods, focusing on the specificities of returning culturally sensitive images to the region. It then discusses Bateson's photographic practices in relation to the broader history of anthropology and its uses of the camera, highlighting the ways in which photography can be seen as cutting its subjects from their original context. It also uses the metaphor of a lotus growing, comparing the return of photographs to Iatmul communities to a horticultural "striking" process and the researcher to a gardener placing a "cutting" in a fertile environment in which it can sprout and grow anew.

Keywords: *visual return, photography, Papua New Guinea, Iatmul, Gregory Bateson*

Introduction

Between April and September 2024, I visited six Iatmul villages (Kanganamun, Palimbei, Malingei, Yentschan, Kaminimbit, and Mindimbit) along the Sepik River, East Sepik Province, Papua New Guinea (PNG), following the path of British anthropologist Gregory Bateson. I brought with me printed copies of Bateson's photographic collection (462 images) and digital copies of his fifty field notebooks; the originals of both have been central to my doctoral research on his archives.[1] Bateson's photographs mostly depict ceremonial life, material culture, villagers (men, women, and children), and landscapes. The collection is the result of his first two trips to the Iatmul region: between 1929 and 1930, when he mainly resided in Mindimbit, and between 1932 and 1933, when he was based in Kanganamun. In this article, I focus on the processes through which I examined Bateson's photographs with my collaborators upon their "visual return" to these Iatmul villages during my fieldwork.

Figure 1. Collaborators looking at copies of Bateson's December 1932 photographs of a male initiation in Kaminimbit. Kaminimbit, East Sepik Province, Papua New Guinea, August 2024. I invited the men to circulate the images among themselves. They often looked at them silently for some time before discussing them together. On the stools in the foreground are customary gifts to the men's house–*buai* (betelnut) and money–that I had brought and presented. Photograph by the author and published with the consent of the collaborators in Kaminimbit

In the last thirty years, returning historical photographs to their related communities has become a relatively common practice in museum anthropology. Scholars in the field have emphasized the potential of (re)connecting communities with photographs as documents of and from the past.[2] By reproducing ethnographic photographs of Indigenous people held in Western archives and disseminating them among the descendant communities of those originally depicted, these images are freed "from their institutional and Western cultural expectations,"[3] allowing for them to be re-placed "into the network of relations from which they were cut."[4] By doing so, photographs act as springboards for new discussions, stories, and knowledges, which in turn activate "new or dormant relations."[5] As photography integrates local modes of telling, seeing, and being through its relational ontological nature,[6] visual return becomes a means to render existing and new relations both visible and salient through photographs.

While anthropologists Christian Coiffier and Eric Silverman previously returned part of Gregory Bateson's photographic collection to specific villages, my project is the first extensive return of Bateson's archives produced between 1929 and 1933 to the Iatmul region.[7] While Coiffier and Silverman showed Bateson's images to Iatmul descendants, their visual returns were not the primary focus of their research. The aim of my project was specifically focused on the return of both written and visual archives derived from Bateson's research in the Iatmul region.

In this article, I focus on the ways in which relations between photographic collections and communities are created through visual return. To highlight how relations are often assumed and prefigured, I bring Marilyn Strathern's perspective on ethnographic descriptions of relations to the context of visual return.[8] In this case, relations are not only considered as a prerequisite for any visual return but are simultaneously considered its result and what provides its meaning. Visual returns are often made to a specific community with the assumption that the community has retained dormant or active connections to the photographic collections.[9] In returning images, research not only tends to assume prefigured relations; it is also thought to create new connections between the past visual material and the contemporary community, thus validating such projects as meaningful.[10]

While discussions on the relations between archival/museum collections and descendant communities are central for a better custodianship of these collections, I argue that the return of Bateson's archives to Iatmul villages highlights that these relations are processual and constructed rather than readily given. Additionally, in her discussion of networks, Strathern warns of the temporality of these relations; they do not exist by themselves, but need maintaining by their

actors.[11] Photographs, as well as other museum collections, have been described as powerful agents because of their ability to "outlive us thus becoming bridges into the future where they have continuing effects."[12] While I agree with the discourse, I would like to challenge this ever-expanding agency of photography as a way of condensing and preserving relational networks. Using the example of my collaboration with Iatmul communities on Bateson's archives, I argue that photographs alone were not sufficient to (re)activate these relationships.

When discussing my preparatory methods for returning Bateson's photographs to the Iatmul region, I highlight local protocols around culturally sensitive knowledge. I then present the historical circumstances in which Bateson's photographs were made, focusing on the ways in which pictures were "cut" and removed from their original contexts. Finally, looking at two photos made by Bateson in 1933, I rethink visual returns through the botanical metaphor of the "striking" of a lotus, in which a new lotus and its rhizomes sprout from a cutting. I argue that the visual return of Bateson's photographic archives can be likened to a striking process, in which the researcher, like a gardener, places a "cutting" (a historical photograph) in an environment in which it can "grow" anew.

Methods and Practicalities of a Visual Return

As a medium, photography records the past in a specific way: it fixes a moment from the past onto the present.[13] Photographic images typically include details beyond what the photographer intended to capture. This "rawness" of photography, as described by Elizabeth Edwards, creates a characteristic open-endedness of meanings, which makes the medium unique and arguably the perfect candidate for a return project.[14] As opposed to written texts, bound by languages and literacy, photographs can be "read"—though subjectively—by all who can see them.[15] Looking at photographs in a context different from when they were taken, elements that remained overlooked can be reassessed and, therefore, have the potential to uncover new perspectives, meanings, futures, and connections. This perspective framed my initial approach when returning Bateson's collection to Iatmul communities.

Following similar projects of visual returns, and in order to re-engage Bateson's photographic collections with their contemporary descendant communities, I conducted preliminary research on Bateson's photographic collection and its related documentation at the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (MAA) in Cambridge, UK. This research, done between January and May 2023, was

necessary to identify and organize Bateson's photographs according to the villages where they were taken. Through close attention to and visual analysis of details in the photos, I was able to recreate photographic series from similar times and locations. This identification process was assisted by available documentation—both published and unpublished—related to the photographs. For example, I identified a series of images at the MAA taken during a *wagan mbuanggo* (wagan ceremony)[16] as the performance made in Yentschan village discussed and illustrated in Bateson's book *Naven*.[17] Another important reference tool for my identification of Bateson's photographs was a guide of the Middle Sepik collections at the MAA in Cambridge written by Alfred C. Haddon based on Bateson's comments. It enabled me to identify the man in photograph P.16633.BAT and the sculptor of a *samban* (hook) in the MAA collections as being the same individual: Asmankowi.[18] Other identifications of Bateson's pictures—made by anthropologist Andrew Moutu in 2003 after his field research in Kanganamun—were available in the museum's photo database.

Additionally, I compared the photographic collections at the MAA with Bateson's photos and written documents in the Margaret Mead Papers and South Pacific Ethnographic Archives (MMPSPEA) at the Library of Congress in Washington, DC. Most of the images in the MMPSPEA were the same as the ones in Cambridge, though the captions differed. There were two sets of photographic prints: a first set made in the 1930s and another set made between 1974 and 1976.[19] The second set was printed following Margaret Mead's selection by a team at the American Museum of Natural History in New York, its creation prompted by the deterioration and destruction of the original nitrate negatives.[20] In addition to Bateson's photographs, the MMPSPEA also holds his field notebooks for his two ethnographies in the Sepik (1929–30 and 1932–33). While Bateson rarely mentions his photographs directly in his field notes, the notes provide essential information regarding the context in which the photographic encounters took place. For example, Bateson's mention of the performance of a *wagan mbuanggo* in Yentschan enabled me to identify with certitude the date and location of the photographs mentioned earlier as having been taken in Yentschan in late May or early June 1932.[21]

In order to organize the visual return of Bateson's photographs to PNG, I made a preliminary trip to the villages of Kanganamun, Yentschan, Palimbei, Malingei, and Kaminimbit between August and September 2023. I selected these specific villages based on the locations I had identified in the photographs in the MAA's collection. During this trip, I visited the men's houses in all five villages, presented the customary gifts of *buai* (betelnut) to the community,[22] and asked for their

permission to conduct this research on Bateson's photographs and bring them to the village.[23] After they granted me permission, I decided to bring all 462 photographs known from his two visits to the region, regardless of their subject and whether or not their precise location had been identified. I sorted the photos based on their attributed location and returned them to each village accordingly.

Photos in which the location was unclear to me formed a separate set of images, which I showed to each village; my collaborators identified the locations of some of these photographs and, subsequently, I included them with photographs taken in that place. I printed the photographs, without any captions, on A4 paper and laminated them for durability. For practical and economic reasons, I grouped and printed copies of Bateson's photographs in pairs when they depicted the same object, person, or event. For these groupings, I also respected the local restriction protocols regarding culturally sensitive knowledge, especially with regards to images in a ceremonial context.

My preliminary trip was central to organizing the subsequent collaboration on Bateson's archives. During this trip, I met and stayed with Jack Kapi in Kanganamun; he and his family provided me with invaluable support in developing this project. Upon my return in 2024, I was adopted into Jack's family and given a name from his clan, Uliap. During my 2023 visit, I also met several men of Kanganamun who later became my main collaborators. They were men in their fifties and sixties who had varying perspectives on the village's past, especially on its relationship with spirits. Some were greatly involved in the local Seventh Day Adventist Church, while others were not attending church. Due to my adoption into the Uliap clan, I became intimately involved with the community of the Minjimbit men's house while also maintaining close relationships with the other two men's houses in Kanganamun.[24] The Minjimbit community was also central in helping to organize my stay and research in the other villages.

When preparing for the visual return of Bateson's photographs, I paid special attention to local protocols regarding culturally sensitive knowledge, especially due to the many photos' recording of men's initiations. Such initiations are culturally sensitive as they are processes and moments for transmitting secret knowledge and are restricted to those who are initiated. Thus, circulating images of such ceremonies had to respect local protocols of secrecy. Previous research conducted by Andrew Moutu has highlighted the secrecy and sensitivity of Bateson's collection. When documenting pictures of an initiation ceremony held at the MAA, Moutu noted:

> Some of the photographs about men's initiation as well as the ethnographic description provided by Bateson or myself are secret information known only by men who have access into the ritual. I therefore request that the researcher be sensitive and careful when asking Iatmul informants about the ritual—particularly women and uninitiated men.[25]

As they are records from and of the past, I treated *all* the photographs with attention and care, not just those representing men's initiation ceremonies. Following advice from my local collaborators—elders and initiated men—the showing of Bateson's photographs could only be done when the moment and the place were deemed appropriate. Both place and time determined the nature of the discussions possible when looking at images. In the Sepik region, talking about spirits and calling their names is a highly sensitive activity, as doing so may summon spirits to the village and cause potential harm to and/or retaliation against both the speaker and the audience.[26] As men's houses were traditionally the spaces where the past and spirits were discussed, they were considered safe spaces in which I could carry out research on former and contemporary ceremonial life as well as on Bateson's photography. Furthermore, such conversations had to take place during the daytime, as the spirits would wake up and become active at sunset.[27]

We also arranged for private showings of Bateson's pictures in residential houses throughout day and night, but what could be seen and discussed was often limited due to the presence of women and children. In each of the villages, the first collaborators to view Bateson's photographs were elders or initiated men.[28] Following these viewings in the men's house, and based on the elders' advice and approval, I selected images that could be shared with women and children. The strictest taboo was placed on the images showing men playing ceremonial flutes and the scarification of initiates.[29] Other ceremonial images were subject to debate; some men argued that they should not be shown to the noninitiated at all. Other men claimed that the noninitiated could look at the images because they did not have the related knowledge and therefore would not be able to make connections between the different elements depicted and understand what they showed.

Local protocols for the viewing, sharing, and reproduction of ceremonial images are often challenged and reassessed, especially because of tourism and the Internet. While tourism in the Sepik region represents important opportunities for economic and personal development, it is also a threat to cultural protocols.[30] Because tourists publish images of culturally sensitive images online, especially of the scarification process,[31] they directly affect the efficacy of *kastom*s (customary

ways).[32] As a response to tourism, Iatmul communities implemented different rules to negotiate the presence of tourists and their cameras in villages and men's houses.[33] However, even with these rules, the local communities have no control over the sharing of ceremonial images once tourists have left the village.

In contrast, my collaborators were not upset that Bateson published culturally sensitive images of men's initiations, including some of the most restricted moments, in his book *Naven*. For them, because of the time he spent in the region, his learning from local men, and his involvement in people's lives, Bateson had a different status that made this publication less problematic. In addition, my collaborators considered this book to be one of the main reasons for the popularity of the region globally, which, in turn, brought tourism.

Photographing as Cutting: The Historical Context of a Visual Collection

As has been written about extensively, the uniqueness of the photographic medium lies in its capacity to extract the referent from the world and turn it into a fixed image.[34] Conventionally, the camera is conceived as a fragment-making technology, where the shutter acts as a tool for separation, thus (re)producing people and images as disconnected.[35] As a result of this process, the photographic print operates as a stand-alone object, cut from the photographic event, its participants, and its contexts—a "cutting" of a moment in time and space by the camera.[36] Thus, the camera creates a disconnection between the object depicted and the depiction.

From this perspective, looking back at Bateson's photographs today brings new attention to the relational networks—global and local—in which a photograph is cut from its original context and referent. Here, I offer to place Bateson's photographic collections in their historical context, both in Bateson's personal and professional life and in the general history of anthropology and its uses of the camera.

In February 1929, frustrated by his ethnographic experiences with the Baining and Sulka groups in New Britain (PNG),[37] Bateson joined Jack A. T. Thurston, the captain of a schooner working for colonial plantations, during one of his (forced) recruitment trips along the Sepik River. Bateson stopped at Tambunum (a Iatmul village) and stayed for some days while Thurston continued his trip farther upstream. In Tambunum, Bateson began collecting genealogies "from force of habit" and became aware of "a curious kinship system—one of the most anomalous that [he] ha[d] ever heard of."[38] Returning from this trip, he decided to change

his area of research and focus on the Iatmul region. First established in Mindimbit, Bateson not only collected objects, but also stories and names, and he photographed the region. He described his time in the Sepik as "halting . . . ineffectual and haphazard."[39] At the end of this first fieldwork research in 1930, Bateson returned to Cambridge, UK, where he wrote his master's dissertation later published in the journal *Oceania*.[40] In 1932, Bateson went back to the Sepik River, but this time settled in Kanganamun. The reason for his choosing this village remains unclear, yet he mentioned his desire to compare and analyze the variations between the Eastern and Central Iatmul systems.[41]

Figure 2. Gregory Bateson, photographic portrait of Wolimbei, Mindimbit, East Sepik Province, Papua New Guinea, 1929. Black-and-white print, P.141806.CHB, Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge. This photograph was first published in the journal *Oceania* in 1932. I identified the subject as Wolimbei based on Bateson's description in his field notes and archives. My identification was endorsed by villagers in Mindimbit in August 2024, and the photograph is shown here with their consent. Courtesy of the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge

Bateson took photographs during both his trips in the Sepik region. Those from his first visit (1929–30) have a static aesthetic that is similar to earlier ethnographic images from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. They are stand-alone depictions of objects, individuals, and places, cut from the contexts in which they were rooted. Out of the entire photographic collection of 462 images, I could only identify twenty-five pictures as having been made in Mindimbit. Most of them are portraits of villagers posing for the camera or photographs of staged material culture. While Bateson observed a few ceremonies in Mindimbit, he only made portraits of men in full regalia, depicting them outside of any ceremonial actions. Two of these portraits were published in the journal *Oceania*. They each show a man holding his lime gourd and stick, posing for the camera (see Fig. 2). Each man's face is painted, their hair is adorned with feathers, and they are each wearing several body ornaments. Though these portraits were made at a ceremony, probably the inauguration of a *tegal* (junior men's house),[42] they cut their subjects from the context in which they took part and therefore tell the observer nothing about the actual ceremony.

Figure 3. Gregory Bateson, photograph taken during a *naven* ceremony, Palimbei, East Sepik Province, Papua New Guinea, 1933. Black-and-white print mounted, P.16764.BAT, Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge. Characteristic of Bateson's photographic practice during his second visit to the Sepik River, this photograph is one of about twenty photos (some blurry due to movement) that follows the ceremony's action. The series provides information about the ceremony itself as well as the context, including the audience's reactions. The photograph is reproduced with the consent of my collaborators in Palimbei. Courtesy of the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge

During his second visit to the Sepik region (1932–33), Bateson's engagement with his subjects and his use of a camera shifted. His photographic practice became more dynamic and began following the flow of events taking place rather than staying static. While he still made photographs of material culture and portraits, most of the images he took in Kanganamun were produced in series (Fig. 3). His taking multiple photographs at one event demonstrates his new concern for grasping phenomena and their contexts in their totality, as opposed to in a single snapshot. In doing so, Bateson intended to work against the fragment-making mechanism of the camera by producing photographs that provided additional context and knowledge of the subject depicted.

Bateson's new interest in recording this surplus of information through his photographic practice can be compared with Bronislaw Malinowski's practice nearly twenty years earlier. In Kiriwina in the Trobriands Islands (PNG), Malinowski often used a wider framing of his subjects as a means to visually transcribe the action he was observing *and* the context in which it was taking place.[43] Yet, the result of Bateson's engagement with the camera remained visually different from Malinowski's. Helped by the technological evolution of photographic processes, Bateson provided visual transcriptions of phenomena through series, which Malinowski could not do.[44] In Bateson's series, the spectator follows his eye and movements across space and time along the performance, witnessing the ceremony itself but also the surrounding environment. In his reportage of ceremonies, Bateson literally followed the movement of the performers and the action as well as paid attention to the audience—at times placing himself at the center of the action.[45]

Yet, during Bateson's two trips to the Sepik region, the camera never had a central role in his ethnography; the camera was a tool to capture what was available to him rather than photography being his primary research method. It was only when he returned to Cambridge in 1933 that he started reflecting on what photographs could tell about Iatmul culture.[46] From this perspective, Bateson's use of photography is similar to his approach to ethnographic writing; he used both as attempts to translate the intangible aspects of Iatmul culture into comprehensible data.[47] For example, by comparing portraits of men with portraits of women, he concluded that their differences in posing for the camera visualized the dichotomy of gender ethos. The masculine ethos was supposedly visible through the pride with which men were posing, as opposed to women's shyness, which was reflected by their modesty in front of the camera.[48] It was only later, during his research in Bali (1936–37) and Tambunum (1938), that photography became Bateson's central research method.[49]

Photography had been part and parcel of the Western anthropological project since the turn of the twentieth century, when the camera became one of the tools used to make unseen cultural aspects visible and comprehensible. Bateson's photographic and ethnographic practices were the result of anthropological methods he was taught during his time at Cambridge University. Alfred C. Haddon, Bateson's supervisor, was particularly concerned about the production of visual records through which culture was made visible.[50] Cultural meaning was thought to be located and captured in the appearance of things.[51] The anthropologist was understood as the one digging into local culture and life in order to bring cultural elements to the surface. These observations were to be made following specific methods and processes. From this perspective, photography calibrated the eye—"being taught what to see and how to see it"[52]—and enabled a so-called "objectivity" in the ethnographic enterprise. A trained eye was able to dig into the unseen and excavate the invisible rules and laws that regulate a social group, in this case the Iatmul.[53]

Picturing culture was therefore not simply an act of documenting, but needed to represent the invisible principles structuring the visible cultural phenomena.[54] Anthropologists hoped photography would produce a series of visual facts that would appear in print and be easily transportable and reproducible, thus validating the ethnographic endeavor.[55] As an indexical result of the actual object depicted, photography was evidence and witness of the past, now vanished. The evidential quality of a photograph became paramount in the "salvage ethnographic" project.[56] Particularly important in the Western imagination of Melanesia, the project of salvaging the cultural heritage of newly colonized people became the primary driving force in the ethnographic exploration of the area.[57] At the turn of the twentieth century, the Sepik region was the subject of multiple expeditions with the purpose of collecting objects from and photographing the different cultures established along the river.[58] In this context, Bateson was expected to study the social institutions that were holding this material culture together.[59] Photographing Iatmul culture was essential as a way to preserve and understand a population that was thought to be profoundly disrupted and on the verge of disappearance. Alongside ethnography, photography led to the cutting of objects and knowledge from their original contexts for their collection, classification, study, and publication.

Interlude: Thinking with the Lotus

The sight of a lotus flower and its leaves (*Nelumbo nucifera*) covering most of a lake's surface creates a dazzling image. A photograph taken by Bateson while traveling up the Sepik River in 1933 (Fig. 4) shows the full growth cycle of the lotus: on the right, a flower blooms, other buds appear in the background, and a seed head emerges at the center of the image. This photo offers a fixed moment that shows the different stages of leaves expanding, flowers blooming, and seeds being produced. During one of his visits to Chambri Lake to meet his colleagues Margaret Mead and Reo Fortune,[60] Bateson photographed five views of the lake covered in lotuses with the Chambri and Aibom mountains in the background.

Figure 4. Gregory Bateson, photograph of lotuses on the Chambri Lake, East Sepik Province, Papua New Guinea, 1933. Black-and-white print mounted, P.16750.BAT, Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge. Courtesy of the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge

The reader may wonder why I am interrupting my discussion of the visual return of Bateson's photographs to look at this image. Indeed, nothing in this image seems, at first glance, to be associated with specific cultural or historical discourses that would make it a meaningful image of the Sepik in the past. But while this image did not spark many conversations when I showed it to my Iatmul

collaborators, it stuck with me and has come to visualize a paramount discussion I had with men in Kanganamun in June 2024.

As mentioned earlier, I shared Bateson's photographs with Iatmul men in the men's houses to see whether the images sparked any comments, discussions, or stories. During my first weeks in Kanganamun, I spent afternoons in two men's houses, Wolimbi and Minjimbit, where I shared and discussed the same photographs. Most men only made a few comments. One exception was Vincent Yarme, a locally renowned sculptor and cultural specialist, who was particularly interested in trying to identify the different masks and objects in the photos and how they were made. The rest of the men did not have much to say. I was puzzled; the visual return that I hoped to be a moment of dialogue and sharing was resulting mostly in silence.

After a few weeks, in the hopes of generating interest and discussions, I read the notes I had taken from Bateson's field notes at the Library of Congress. Upon learning that Bateson wrote more than what was published in his monograph *Naven*, men became eager to know what was recorded in these field notes.[61] What was at first a visual return became a larger project involving my reading of Bateson's field notes to those gathered in the men's house. In the Wolimbi men's house, while discussing Bateson's field notes, I asked the men, "Why are you more interested in the field notes than in these images?" The men replied with a common Iatmul saying, "*Vandingawa Manbangasawa,"* that means "one root and many groups." The use of botanical metaphors to explain cultural phenomena, especially regarding kinship systems, is common in the region.[62] This saying usually refers to how human beings reproduce themselves like lotuses and that one person can have relatives across different villages. In the same way that a lotus on the one end of a lake can be related to another one at the other end by a series of rhizomes extending throughout the entire lake, a man can be related to another man in a different village because they share common ancestors. But during this discussion, in the context of Bateson's photos and his field notes, men used this saying to highlight how visual appearances provided limited access to knowledge. Whether understanding a photograph, a person, or a lotus, in the Iatmul context they followed a similar model: they had to be placed according to the relational networks that were constituting them.[63] This knowledge of the rhizomes—that is to say, the relational network—is what makes someone able to understand where something or someone comes from and how they are related to others in order to act accordingly.

As a Iatmul metaphor and the subject of one of Bateson's photographs, this image of the lotus has shaped my analysis of visual return. For photographs to

become meaningful for my Iatmul collaborators, they had to grow back connections to the local rhizomatic network of interconnections. Conversely, because Bateson's notebooks contained hundreds of Iatmul names and stories, my collaborators did not perceive the content of these notebooks as disconnected from the complex relational networks in which they belong. While photographs alone were not sufficient to sprout connections, connections between persons, places, ancestors, and spirits were made through names and stories. In the horticultural context, it is easier to grow new lotuses from rhizomes than from other parts of the plant because rhizomes as plant stems contain all the necessary nutrients for their vegetative reproduction, a process through which new sprouts grow from the nodes of rhizomes. In this perspective, field notes acted as rhizomes because they contained within themselves the necessary connections for their re-engagement in the dense entanglement of Iatmul relations. Even when the names recorded by Bateson were unfamiliar to my collaborators, they contained semantic sequences enabling Iatmul men to assign them to the right clan and thus connect them to other better-known names and stories.[64]

Sprouting Photographs: Visual Return as a Striking Process

With Bateson's photograph of a lotus and the Iatmul metaphor in mind, I propose that the cutting of scenes, people, and events out of photographs' contexts and fixing them onto negatives, can be seen as analogous to the cutting of a lotus from its rhizomes. When photographing the lotus, Bateson created an image of a lotus removed from the rhizomes from which it sprouted, and which connected it to other lotuses across the lake. This metaphor can be applied to the rest of his photographic collection. By taking photographs, Bateson removed the elements in his photos from their original context and relational network. Following the botanical metaphor, I argue that in the Iatmul context, a visual return can be compared to striking—a horticultural process through which a new plant is grown from a cutting. From this perspective, the researcher, like a gardener, places a "cutting" in the form of a photograph in a fertile environment and hopes it will sprout and grow new "rhizomes" in the form of connections between images and communities. The project of returning photographs to the villages where they were made is undertaken in the hope that these images will sprout new connections and reconnect with the context from which they were once removed.

The parallel between a visual return and a striking process can be demonstrated through the case study of the visual return of a particular photograph taken

by Bateson in January 1933 (Fig. 5). This image was part of a series of images he made during men's initiation ceremonies. It depicts a *wal mbuanggo* (crocodile performance), one of the first stages of the initiation ceremony in which the initiators are dancing in line and come to gather the initiates to bring them to the ritual enclosure. Men, fully ornamented, are walking toward the camera on the *wompunau* (ceremonial ground), bounded by two *tuvui* (mounds). At the back stands a men's house.

Figure 5. Gregory Bateson, photograph of a *wal mbuanggo* (crocodile performance) during an initiation ceremony in Maliguatgei, January, 1933. Black-and-white print mounted, P.16612.BAT, Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge. This photograph is reproduced here with the consent of the Minjimbit men's house community. It shows the first part of initiation ceremonies without revealing sensitive elements. Courtesy of the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge

I shared this image and the rest of the collection attributed to Kanganamun with my collaborators on multiple occasions in the men's houses. When I first showed them this image, they had no particular discussion other than short comments about the performance depicted and the ornaments used. As often happened when looking at Bateson's photographs, men began telling me stories that had no clear link with the images. Because in Kanganamun, my collaborators' grandparents were alive when Bateson visited the village, talking about Bateson had them remembering stories from their grandparents' generation. One of these

stories came to me from Jack Kapi, my adoptive father, who asked my *wau* (maternal uncles) Patrick Kamanjane and James Norubange to join us at his place to narrate it. Following the local desire to keep the story and related names hidden, I am providing only a summary of the story:

> During our grandfathers' time, a fight occurred between two men's houses in Kanganamun: Wolimbi and Minjimbit. A man from Wolimbi had learned that one of his wives had gotten pregnant by a man from Minjimbit. In great anger, he tried to kill him, but his spear was stopped by a second man from Minjimbit. Tension escalated and the conflict became generalized to the two men's houses. The community of Minjimbit eventually decided to leave Kanganamun. They created their own village, in one of the bushes of Gaikorobi, called Maliguatgei. Minjimbit stayed in this bush for some years before returning to Kanganamun.[65]

A few days after Jack, Patrick, and James shared their story with me, I was talking with Jack about a different photograph of the Wolimbi men's house in Kanganamun.[66] The structure of the building photographed by Bateson in 1932 was quite different from the one standing today in the village. I asked Jack about his perspective on these changes. This led Jack to start comparing it to Minjimbit, and to go through Bateson's images before stopping on the *wal mbuanggo* image (Fig. 5). He identified the men's house at the back as Minjimbit.

Later that day, I returned to the Minjimbit men's house, showed the same image to James and Patrick, and said, "Jack says it is Minjimbit. What do you think?" They spent some time looking at it and concluded, "Yes, it looks like Minjimbit." They started looking at the other images taken of this *wal mbuanggo* which had been said to be made in Kanganamun. I explained that, according to my understanding of his field notes, Bateson witnessed an initiation in Kanganamun in January 1933 and had written some descriptions of it in his notebook. Intrigued and curious, James and Patrick asked me to read some of these notes. Bateson had listed the names of five initiates, which I read aloud. Patrick stopped me; one of the names was that of his father, Suatkaman. Patrick returned to the picture and looked at it silently for a long moment. He said, "That's the initiation of my father." We marked a pause, moved by this realization.

After a moment, we continued our discussion of Bateson's notes and photographs. With more conviction, the men confirmed that it was Minjimbit. Remembering the story they had told me a few days prior, I asked "Is it the men's house from inland [Maliguatgei] or from here [Kanganamun]?" They went back to the

image, looked carefully at the arrangement of the *tuvui* (mounds), and concluded that this photograph of Minjimbit was not taken in Kanganamun but in Maliguatgei. The story of Maliguatgei was now directly linked to Bateson's ethnography; Bateson had clearly visited Kanganamun when Minjimbit and Wolimbi were in great conflict and Minjimbit had moved inland to Maliguatgei.

Figure. 6. Photograph of where the Minjimbit men's house used to stand, Maliguatgei, East Sepik Province, Papua New Guinea, September 2024. Photograph courtesy of the author

During my last week in Kanganamun in September 2024, I visited the bush where the village of Maliguatgei used to be. My collaborators from Minjimbit wanted me to visit and re-photograph the place where the men's house once stood, reaffirming and rearticulating the connections between past and present places, humans, non-humans, and ancestors.[67] Because the land does not belong to the men of Minjimbit anymore, our visit had to be organized with its current landowners: people from Gaikorobi. For the last decades, the community of Minjimbit had not visited the place. Arriving at the location, I was puzzled. It was difficult to identify landmarks because trees had grown everywhere (Fig. 6). What once was the *wompunau* (ceremonial ground) was now hard to identify; the *tuvui* that

delineated the *wompunau* had flattened out with time, and the only trace of what used to be the *wak* (ceremonial mound) was a *tepme iaman* (palm tree). Patrick said the "mother"—the original tree planted by their ancestors—must have died and a "child"—a new tree—had sprouted from it further down the *wompunau*. The place kept a visual connection to the past, but as for other connections, they sometimes grow in unexpected places and can be hard to recognize at first glance. It was just a tree hiding in the middle of others. This story was a great example of how this visual return was done *with* my collaborators. This detail in the landscape, which I was unable to see at first, had a powerful and meaningful story that we were able to reconnect with Bateson's ethnography and his archives.

I present this example to show that reconnecting visual archives with contemporary communities is a long process that involves more than just photographs. My work around Bateson's photographs had moved beyond merely identifying the elements his images depicted; through assembling historical photographs, archival written documents, and local knowledge, (re)connections were created. This collaboration became a unique moment—a meeting place for my collaborators and their knowledge of past events, material culture, environment, and social and personal histories, and my knowledge of Bateson's archives and his work in the village—that enabled us to reassess and recover stories from the past.

Here, I argue that the collaborative work done around the photograph of a *wal mbuanggo* can be compared to a striking process. Like a gardener, I (re)planted the photograph (the lotus) in its original context (the lake) from which it was once removed, hoping people would (re)connect with it. For a lotus cutting to sprout, it must grow new rhizomes that will provide water and nutrients to the plant. The lotus reconnects with other lotuses by spreading and growing rhizomes. The Iatmul saying about lotuses ("*Vandingawa Manbangasawa*," "one root and many groups") highlights a specific understanding of visuality and knowledge. For the photograph of the *wal mbuanggo* to become meaningful, it had to be (re)placed and understood together with the relational network from which it had been removed. In this case study, the image could be reconnected to the large and complex network of rhizomes because the image was re-entangled to both local history (the fight between Minjimbit and Wolimbi and the move of Minjimbit from Kanganamun to Maliguatgei) and personal stories (the initiation of Patrick's father).

The example of Bateson's *wal mbuanggo* photograph highlights the multiplicity of connections that can sprout from a single image when paying close attention to photographic details and letting discussions flow freely. Moreover, it shows how emotional, personal, collective, and sociopolitical connections are porous and entangled. Because of this porous and partible ontology of humans and non-

humans, the photograph of the *wal mbuanggo* in Minjimbit became the starting point from which multiple connections could be made. In thinking about connections as rhizomes, I emphasize the necessity of following discussions even when they seem to go in opposite directions or when they contradict earlier statements. Both connections and rhizomes can be described as uncontrollable. Rethinking connections as rhizomes implies imagining these connections beyond a specific order or process. Indeed, the rhizome has "no beginning nor end, but always a middle . . . from which it grows and overspills."[68] This botanical metaphor reflects the ways in which Iatmul men discussed Bateson's photographs—their discussions were never structured or stable but rather followed chains of thoughts which seemed conflicting or unrelated at times.

Additionally, this lotus metaphor offers an image of connections outside of the frame of truth-value and the objectivity of visual identification, emphasizing the fluidity and multiplicity of these identifications. The focus of my research was not necessarily on whether the identification proposed by my collaborators at one point was true or not. It was about letting men discuss the photographs and incorporate them within the local knowledge system. By bringing back images to the Iatmul villages, they were taken out of Western regimes of knowledge and visuality often centered around fixed discourses of photographs as documents or evidence. Indeed, in the Iatmul region, photographs were integrated into local knowledge systems in which there is no fixed or objective meaning. Knowledge is positioned and linked to different versions, public and secret ones, and can be regularly reassessed and debated.[69]

The successful "sprouting" of Bateson's photograph of a *wal mbuanggo* was possible because my collaborators and I were able to weave together information from Bateson's archives, his photographs, and local narratives. In doing so, photographs were reintegrated within a knowledge system based on debates and disputes over names, lands, and properties.[70] Ownership over the elements depicted in the photographs can only be secured when the story to which it refers is clear and well-formulated. Details are important because they are what confirm or disprove the veracity and mastery of the related knowledge. The identification of the men's house as Minjimbit took part in a bigger dispute between Minjimbit and Wolimbi. The men from Minjimbit perceived Bateson's ethnography as distorted. He was not aware of these conflicts, and he overlooked Minjimbit's role and position within Kanganamun because he was relying mainly on informants from Wolimbi, who had their own interests in promoting Wolimbi over the other two men's houses of Kanganamun. This centrality of Wolimbi was further reinforced in later ethnographies, especially when Wolimbi was included in Papua New Guinea's

national cultural heritage in 1967 and listed as part of PNG's National Art Gallery and Museum. By claiming that this men's house was Minjimbit, Jack, Patrick, and James were uncovering previously overlooked stories that had the potential to redress historical biases in the understanding of the village and redistribute power and agency to Minjimbit.

Finally, thinking about visual returns as the striking of a lotus brings new attention to the fact that connections are not given but produced. Merely returning photographs to the Iatmul villages would not have created meaningful connections. As I explored earlier, creating meaning is like growing rhizomes—it takes time, attention, and care. Growth, from a Sepik perspective, is not easy or simple work, but rather mobilizes multiple human and non-human agencies, embodied techniques, savoir-faire, and (secret and public) knowledge.[71] Growing a plant, gardeners are involved in a complex process engaging and reassessing multiple ties to places, people, past, present, and future, entangled within local discourses of aesthetic, efficacy, and ownership. Thus, both the growth of plants and the return of the image are entangled in different registers of knowledge. This is why, when talking about the *wal mbuanggo*, I was confronted with histories that had to remain secret. As I have shown earlier, the photograph was tied to the story of Maliguatgei. Nowadays, the story still holds great implications for several personal and collective lives. The descendants of the men involved in the fights between Wolimbi and Minjimbit are still living in the village. The reconnection between the photograph and this broader story had new ethical implications. I was specifically told to keep some elements of the story secret because they could be harmful to the descendants. If the story was known by most of the men, the details and ability to connect different elements of this event to the photograph and their contemporary utterances should not therefore be publicly known.

Conclusion

In this article, I used the botanical metaphors of photography as a cutting and of visual return as a striking process to call attention to several important specificities of a visual return project in the Iatmul context. While I discussed the successful experience of the striking of an image of a *wal mbuanggo*, many images made by Bateson were never deeply engaged with nor connected to entangled stories and contexts. In that sense, the striking metaphor acknowledges failure as part of visual return processes. Indeed, visual returns sometimes do not achieve their hope of generating (re)connections and photographs, like some cuttings, will remain

unsprouted. It does not mean that these photographs will never grow connections, but just that the conditions, at that time of the project, were not right to make them germinate.

When photographs do sprout, the growth of connections does not follow a specific order or process, but rather flow, with discussions going in unexpected or conflicting directions, much like the meandering of a growing rhizome. These botanical metaphors make apparent that integrating photographs into local systems of knowledge—in which the past is necessarily positioned, partial, and linked to public and private knowledge—moves the connection process beyond the Western framework of truth and veracity around photography.

The purpose of the lotus-growing metaphor was also to help frame visual returns as collaborative projects that take time, attention, and care. The return of photographs to the Iatmul villages, in itself, did not awaken connections between communities and collections; connections were the result of a long process involving the collaborative discussion of several sources of knowledge from both the past and the present.

Understanding historical photographs in the Iatmul region requires knowing how to navigate between the lotus (the photograph) at the surface and the rhizomatic network (stories, narratives, relationships) that connects them underneath. This distinction between lotuses at the surface and their rhizomes underneath illustrates the distinction between public appearances and hidden/secret knowledge. As such, growing new rhizomes (connections) from a lotus cutting (photograph) resurfaces hidden connections and meanings. In this process, researchers must ethically follow their collaborators' guidance and refrain from bringing up to the surface rhizomes that should remain hidden or buried.

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Notes

[1] Bateson's photographic archives are held at the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (MAA), Cambridge, UK, and his field notes are held at the Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

[2] Jocelyn Dudding, "Visual Repatriation and Photo-Elicitation: Recommendations on Principles and Practices for the Museum Worker," *Journal of Museum Ethnography* 17 (2005), http://www.jstor.org/stable/40793782. Photo-elicitation as a research method has developed since the 1950s; see John Collier Jr. and Malcolm Collier, *Visual Anthropology: Photography as a Research Method* (University of New Mexico Press, 1967).

[3] Joshua Bell, "Losing the Forest but not the Stories in the Trees: Contemporary Understandings of F. E. Williams's 1922 Photographs of the Purari Delta," *Journal of Pacific History* 41, no. 2 (2006): 192, https://doi.org/10.1080/00223340600826094.

[4] Joshua Bell, "Out of the Mouths of Crocodiles: Eliciting Histories in Photographs and String-Figures," *History and Anthropology* 21 (2010): 366, https://doi.org/10.1080/02757206.2010.521156.

[5] Bell, "Out of the Mouths," 359. For examples of visual returns, see Joshua A. Bell, "Looking to See: Reflections on Visual Repatriation in the Purari Delta, Gulf Province, Papua New Guinea," in *Museums and Source Communities: A Routledge Reader*, ed. L. Peers and A. Brown (Routledge, 2003), 111–22; Bell, "Out of the Mouths"; Anita Herle and Haidy Geismar, *Moving Images: John Layard, Fieldwork and Photography on Malakula since 1914* (University of Hawaii Press, 2010).

[6] Bell, "Looking to See"; Joshua Bell and Haidy Geismar, "Materialising Oceania: New Ethnographies of Things in Melanesia and Polynesia," *Australian Journal of Anthropology* 20, no. 1 (2009), https://doi.org/10.1111/j.17576547.2009.00001.x; Herle and Geismar, *Moving Images*.

[7] During his ethnographic research (1972–1988) conducted in Palimbei, Christian Coiffier showed villagers Bateson's photographs that were published in *Naven* (Cambridge University Press, 1936). Eric Silverman similarly visually returned photographs taken by Bateson in Tambunum in 1938 during his ongoing research in the village.

[8] See Marilyn Strathern, "Kinship as a Relation," *L'Homme* 210 (2014): 43–61, https://doi.org/10.4000/lhomme.23542; and Marilyn Strathern, *Relations: An Anthropological Account* (Duke University Press, 2020).

[9] This ties back to current discussions about the redefinition of "source communities," highlighting the complexities of notions of identity and community in cross-cultural contexts. See Laura Peers and Alison K. Brown, eds., *Museums and Source Communities: A Routledge Reader* (Routledge, 2003); and Laura Brown, "Museums and Source Communities: Reflections and Implications," in *Matters of Belonging: Ethnographic Museums in a Changing Europe*, ed. Wayne Modest et al. (Sidestone, 2019), 31–35.

[10] See, for example, Liam Buckley, "Photography and Photo-Elicitation after Colonialism," *Cultural Anthropology* 29, no. 4 (2014): 720–743, https://doi.org/10.14506/ca29.4.07.
[11] Marilyn Strathern, "Cutting the Network," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 2, no. 3 (1996): 523, https://doi.org/10.2307/3034901. See also Joshua Bell, "A Bundle of Relations: Collections, Collecting, and Communities," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 46 (2017): 241–259, https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-anthro-102313-030259.
[12] Bell, "Bundle of Relations," 252.
[13] See Geismar, *Moving Images*, 259; Roland Barthes, *La Chambre Claire: Note Sur la Photographie* (Gallimard, 1980); Elizabeth Edwards, *Raw Histories: Photographs, Anthropology and Museums* (Routledge, 2001).
[14] Edwards, *Raw Histories*, 5.
[15] In his presentation of the advantages of photo-elicitation methods, John Collier Jr. argued that photographs were a great medium to develop interviews in cross-cultural contexts because they could overcome linguistic barriers. See Collier and Collier, *Visual Anthropology*, 58. However, this ability to "read" photographs is culturally constructed and dependent on specific ways of thinking about images and representation.
[16] *Wagan* ceremonies are performed at important moments of village life, such as the inauguration of a new men's house. Historically, they were directly linked to the performance and presence of *wagan* spirits, a highly powerful and important category of spirits in Iatmul cosmologies. See Gregory Bateson, *Naven: A Survey of the Problems Suggested by a Composite Picture of the Culture of a New Guinea Tribe Drawn from Three Points of View* (Cambridge University Press, 1936), 136–7.
[17] Bateson, *Naven*, 168, Plate XVIII A and B, and Plate XXVIII A.
[18] The hook mentioned is part of Bateson's collection at the MAA (accession number 1935.62).
[19] Additionally, the photographic prints held in the MMPSPEA also contain sets of images related to different publications by Bateson, especially *Naven*.
[20] Letters between different employees at the American Museum of Natural History and Margaret Mead, folder 8, Box P 89, MMPSPEA, Library of Congress.
[21] Notebook G II, Folder 7, Box N107, MMPSPEA, Library of Congress.
[22] The offering of *buai* is necessary before engaging in any form of work with the community. It is a way to acknowledge the place and its people in the research (both humans and non-humans). *Buai* includes not only betelnut, but also Western goods such as cigarettes, salt, coffee, sugar, and newspapers.
[23] Discussions with my collaborators were done in Tok Pisin, the lingua franca of Papua New Guinea, with some English and Iatmul.
[24] This closer engagement with Minjimbit was justified locally by the involvement of previous researchers, especially Andrew Moutu, with the community of the

Wolimbi men's house. I was explicitly told by men from Minjimbit that it was their turn to have an anthropologist working with them.

[25] See Moutu's comment made in November 2003 on the database of the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology for the photographs depicting initiation ceremonies, https://collections.maa.cam.ac.uk/photographs/434162/.

[26] Every spirit is known by a series of names. Some are publicly known while others remain secret. Knowledge of the relevant and correct names is necessary to ensure a good communication with the spirits and the efficacy of ceremonies. On the importance of names, see Bateson, *Naven*; Andrew Moutu, *Names are Thicker than Blood: Kinship and Ownership amongst the Iatmul* (Oxford University Press, 2013); Jürg Wassmann, *The Song to the Flying Fox: The Public and Esoteric Knowledge of the Important Men of Kandingei About Totemic Songs, Names and Knotted Cords (Middle Sepik, Papua New Guinea)* (The National Research Institute, 1991); Christiane Falck, "'You Have to Call the Right Name'—Operation Joshua meets Cosmology and Catholicism at Lake Chambri in Papua New Guinea," *Australian Journal of Anthropology* 31, no. 2 (2020): 170–186, https://doi.org/10.1111/taja.12358.

[27] One afternoon in Kanganamun, we were discussing and debating stories linked to a specific *wagan* (a powerful type of spirit in the region). The interest for these stories led the conversation to carry on despite the sun going down. Suddenly, a mask suspended in the Wolimbi men's house dropped, signaling that the discussion needed to stop.

[28] In Mindimbit and Kaminimbit, men's initiations are not practiced anymore. Nevertheless, in both villages I was told by elder men that they had to be the first ones to see Bateson's photographs, and they provided advice on how to proceed with women and children.

[29] The flutes are kept hidden from women and played in pairs at different ceremonies, including men's initiations. See Raymond Ammann, "Middle Sepik Music and Musical Instruments in the Context of Melanesia," *Journal de la Société des Océanistes* 146 (2018): 179–188, https://doi.org/10.4000/jso.8411; Mervyn McLean, *Diffusion of Musical Instruments and Their Relations to Language Migrations in New Guinea* (Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies, 1994); Philippe Peltier, Markus Schindlbeck, and Christian Kaufmann, *Sepik, Arts de Papouasie Nouvelle-Guinée* (Skira 2015); and Gordon Spearritt, "The Pairing of Musicians and Instruments in Iatmul Society," *Yearbook for Traditional Music* 14 (1982): 106–125, https://doi.org/10.2307/768073.

[30] Tourism in the region first emerged along the Sepik River in the 1970s and has grown exponentially since the 1990s. Although tourism represents an important source of income, it brings new challenges, forcing villagers to reassess—and at times adapt—their customary practices, and to forge new sociopolitical stages for the promotion of new identities. For local perspectives on tourism, see Eric Silverman, "From Cannibal Tours to Cargo Cult: On the Aftermath of Tourism in the

Sepik River, Papua New Guinea," *Tourist Studies* 12, no. 2 (2012): 109–130, https://doi-org.uea.idm.oclc.org/10.1177/1468797612454511. For a focus on photography in the context of tourism, see Christian Coiffier, "Safari photo et chasse aux têtes en Nouvelle-Guinée," *Journal des Anthropologues* 80–81 (2000): 259–281, https://doi.org/10.4000/jda.3235.

[31] For example, during my first visit to Kanganamun in 2023, men were upset because a tourist who had visited the region had uploaded a photograph to Facebook showing the contemporary scarification process. My Iatmul collaborators perceived the Internet as an out-of-control space where they had no means to restrict the sharing of images.

[32] The Melanesian notion of *kastom* refers to ancestral and customary practices, rights, and knowledge systems. See, for example, David Akin, "Ancestral Vigilance and the Corrective Conscience: Custom as Culture in a Melanesian Society," *Anthropological Theory* 4, no. 3 (2004): 299–324, https://doi.org/10.1177/1463499604045566; Roger M. Keesing, "Creating the Past: Custom and Identity in the Contemporary Pacific," *The Contemporary Pacific: Journal of Islands Affairs* 1, nos. 1–2 (1989): 19–42, https://www.jstor.org/stable/23701891; Lamont Lindstrom and Geoffrey M. White, *Culture, Kastom, Tradition: Developing Cultural Policy in Melanesia* (Institute of Pacific Studies, The University of the South Pacific, 1994).

[33] For example, initiated men decided to charge visitors a fee in exchange for the permission to access and take photographs in the men's houses. Additional fees were charged for specific images, like photographs of the back of a scarified man. Similarly, tourists were required to pay to witness and photograph ceremonial performances. At initiation ceremonies, tourists could watch the scarification process but were only allowed to take pictures once it was finished.

[34] See, for example, Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (Penguin Books, 1977); Jean Baudrillard, *Le Crime parfait* (Galilée, 1995); Elizabeth Edwards, "Exchanging Photographs: Preliminary Thoughts on the Currency of Photography in Collecting Anthropology," *Journal des Anthropologues* 80–81 (2000): 23, https://doi.org/10.4000/jda.3138; Bruno Latour, "Visualisation and Cognition: Drawing Things Together," in *Knowledge and Society Studies in the Sociology of Culture Past and Present*, vol. 6, ed. Elizabeth Long and Henrika Kuklick (JAI Press, 1986), 7–13.

[35] Ariella A. Azoulay, *Potential Histories: Unlearning Imperialism* (Verso Books, 2019), 1–3.

[36] Sontag, *On Photography*, 22–23 and 156.

[37] David Lipset, *Gregory Bateson: the Legacy of a Scientist* (Prentice-Hall, 1980), 127–28; Andrew Lattas, "Re-analysing the Baining: The Mytho-Poetics of Race, Gender and Art," *Oceania* 90, no. 2 (2020): 98–150, https://doi.org/10.1002/ocea.5248.

[38] Draft letter from Gregory Bateson to James Mann Wordie in notebook Sepik III, Folder 3, Box N 105, MMPSPEA, Library of Congress.
[39] Lipset, *Gregory Bateson*, 132.
[40] Bateson, "Social Structures."
[41] Bateson, "Social Structures," 450. Locally, people recognize three different cultural groups linked to different histories of migrations and settlements. The eastern part of the region was studied by Bateson, Margaret Mead, Rhoda Métraux, Brigitta Hauser-Schaüblin, and Eric Silverman. The Central Iatmul group was the focus of much research undertaken since Bateson by Milan Stanek, Florence Weiss, Jürg Schmid, Christian Coiffier, and Andrew Moutu. The Western Iatmul group has been studied by Jürg Wassmann and more recently by Christiane Falck.
[42] This identification is possible through the comparison of this photograph with a group photograph of men in front of a building. In his field notes, Bateson mentioned ceremonies and performances linked to the opening of this new *tegal*, junior men's house.
[43] See Michael W. Young, *Malinowski's Kiriwina: Fieldwork Photography 1915–1918* (University of Chicago Press, 1998), 18–19.
[44] Malinowski mainly used a quarter-plate Model II Klimax camera with a Beck Mutar lens. For details, see Young, *Malinowski's Kiriwina*, 275–276. The camera model used by Bateson between 1929 and 1933 remains unknown, but the original negatives are 35mm films. In 1938, Bateson used a 35mm Leica camera. The technological improvement of photographic processes meant that the camera was more compact, portable, and could capture more images and faster. While the Klimax camera could only hold a maximum of ten dry plates, the 35mm film could record at least twenty shots. Dry plates were also more fragile than films.
[45] Following this description, Bateson's photographic practice appears similar to Layard's, as described in Herle and Geismar, *Moving Images*, 109.
[46] Bateson, *Naven*, 260.
[47] On the use of captions for the photographs published in *Naven*, see George E. Marcus, "A Timely Rereading of Naven: Gregory Bateson as Oracular Essayist," *Representations* 12 (1985): 66–82, https://doi.org/10.2307/3043778.
[48] Bateson, *Naven*, 151. Bateson's description of Iatmul womanhood was later challenged by Florence Weiss and Brigitta Hauser-Schäublin. See Brigitta Hauser-Schäublin, *Women in Kararau: Gendered Lives, Works, and Knowledge in a Middle Sepik Village, Papua New Guinea* (Göttingen University Press, 2019); Milan Stanek and Florence Weiss, "Aspects of the Naven Ritual: Conversations with an Iatmul Woman of Papua New Guinea," *Social Analysis* 50, no. 2 (2006): 45–76, https://doi.org/10.3167/015597706780810916.
[49] See Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead, *Balinese Character: A Photographic Study* (American Museum of Natural History, 1942).

[50] Gregory Delaplace, "More than Corpses, Less than Ghosts: A Visual Theory of Culture in Early Ethnographic Photography," *Visual Anthropology Review* 35, no. 1 (2019): 38–9, https://doi.org/10.1111/var.12177.
[51] Anna Grimshaw, The *Ethnographer's Eye: Ways of Seeing in Anthropology* (Cambridge University Press, 2001), 24.
[52] Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, *Objectivity* (Zone Books, 2008), 44.
[53] See Maurice Bloch "Truth and Sight: Generalizing without Universalizing," in *The Objects of Evidence: Anthropological Approaches to the Production of Knowledge*, ed. M. Engelke (Wiley-Blackwell, 2008), 21–30; and Grimshaw, *Ethnographer's Eye*.
[54] Delaplace, "More than Corpses."
[55] See Edwards, "Exchanging Photographs;" Latour, "Visualisation and Cognition;" Allan Sekula, "The Traffic in Photographs," *Art Journal* 41, No. 1 (1981): 15, https://doi.org/10.2307/776511.
[56] See Elizabeth Edwards and Christopher Morton, *Photography, Anthropology and History: Expanding the Frame* (Routledge, 2010).
[57] See Douglas Dalton, "Melanesian Can(n)ons: Paradoxes and Prospects in Melanesian Ethnography," in *Excluded Ancestors, Inventible Traditions: Essays Toward a More Inclusive History of Anthropology*, ed. R. Handler (University of Wisconsin Press, 2000).
[58] See, for example, the A. B. Lewis and the Joseph N. Field South Pacific Expedition between 1909 and 1913, and the Kaiserin Augusta River Expedition between 1912 and 1913.
[59] Alfred C. Haddon in Lipset, *Gregory Bateson*, 125.
[60] Bateson met Margaret Mead and Reo Fortune during his research in the Sepik Region in December 1932 at Ambunti. He helped the couple find a place to develop their third ethnographic research project after living with the Arapesh and the Mundugumor (Biwat). Together, they visited Kwoma villages before they decided to settle in Chambri villages in January 1933. During the last months of his research, Bateson often traveled to Chambri to visit them. On their relationships, see Margaret Mead, *Blackberry Winter: My Earlier Years* (Morrow, 1972) and Lise Dobrin and Ira Bashkow, "'The Truth in Anthropology Does Not Travel First Class': Reo Fortune's Fateful Encounter with Margaret Mead," *Histories of Anthropology Annual* 6, no. 1 (2010): 66–128, https://doi.org/10.1353/haa.2010.0009.
[61] A detailed discussion of the return of Bateson's field notes will not be included here. I discuss the return of these written archives in Enzo Hamel, "Listening to Archives: Iatmul voices and silences in Gregory Bateson's ethnographic archives," *Etnofoor* 37, no. 2 (2025), forthcoming.
[62] See Moutu, *Names are Thicker*, 140; Christian Coiffier, "'L'écorce et la moelle du rotin' Tshimbe Kuvu, Kwiya Kuvu: Conception iatmul de l'univers" (PhD diss., École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, 1994), 201,

https://theses.hal.science/tel-02146242v1; Eric K. Silverman, *Masculinity, Motherhood and Mockery: Psychoanalyzing Culture and the Iatmul Naven Rite in New Guinea* (University of Michigan Press, 2001).

[63] On Melanesian personhood, see Marilyn Strathern, *The Gender of the Gift: Problems with Women and Problems with Society in Melanesia* (University of California Press, 1988).

[64] See Wassmann, *Song to the Flying Fox*, 228.

[65] Summary of a story told on June 6, 2024 at Kanganamun.

[66] I will not discuss here the details of the history of the Wolimbi men's house. Wolimbi, as photographed by Bateson, was rebuilt from the 1940s. A detailed discussion of the men's houses in Kanganamun will be part of my PhD thesis.

[67] See Geismar, *Moving Images*, 266.

[68] Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 21.

[69] On the secret and situated nature of knowledge in the Iatmul region, see Moutu, *Names are Thicker*.

[70] See, for example, Bateson, *Naven*; Deborah Gewertz, "'On Whom Depends the Action of the Elements': Debating Among the Chambri People of Papua New Guinea," *Journal of Polynesian Society* 86, no. 3 (1977): 339–353, https://www.jstor.org/stable/20705271; Simon Harrison, *Stealing People's Names: History and Politics in a Sepik River Cosmology* (Cambridge University Press, 1990); Moutu, *Names are Thicker*.

[71] Ludovic Coupaye, *Growing Artefacts, Displaying Relationships: Yams, Art and Technology Amongst the Nyamikum Abelam of Papua New Guinea* (Berghahn, 2013). See also Tuomas Tammisto, *Hard Work: Producing Places, Relations and Value on a Papua New Guinea Resource Frontier* (Helsinki University Press, 2024) and Olivia Barnett-Naghshineh, *Economies of Care: Market Women in the Highlands of Papua New Guinea* (Bloomsbury Press, 2025).

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GISELA McDANIEL

Painting with the Subject-Collaborator

Abstract
This visual essay introduces the work of Gisela McDaniel, a diasporic, Indigenous CHamoru artist based in New York. Working primarily with women and femme people who identify as Indigenous, multiracial, immigrant, refugee/displaced, and/or of color, her work responds to historical/contemporary patterns of censorship as it relates to the exhibition of women's/femme bodies, voices, and narratives.

Keywords: *CHamoru, painting, portraiture, Pasifika, Guam, Guåhan, subject-collaborator*

I am a diasporic, Indigenous CHamoru artist based in New York. My practice lies in social research, portraiture, emotional aesthetics, and technology when fusing audio and visual representations of my subject-collaborators. I work primarily with women and femme people who identify as Indigenous, multiracial, immigrant, refugee/displaced, and/or of color, and my art responds to historical/contemporary patterns of censorship as it relates to the exhibition of women's/femme bodies, voices, and narratives.

By "censorship," I mean taken-for-granted and exploitative practices evident throughout art history, but especially in portraiture. As an Indigenous artist and a survivor of sexual violence, when viewing portraits of women/femmes I immediately note how their agency and identities (including, but not limited to, their names) have been customarily omitted. From my perspective, this essentially amounts to a form of censorship. As a student of art history, I have also noted that the nature of the relationship between the artist and the subject has also gone unremarked in the art historical canon, notably in ways that ignore differences in power between the artist and sitter. Given the frequent representation of sex workers in works of fine art, this tendency strikes me as problematic.

Finally, as an Indigenous Pasifika woman and fine artist, I am keenly aware of how my extended Pasifika Aunties (as young girls) and (is)lands were (and continue to be) indelibly distorted in fine art and popular culture by the reach of the colonial, white, Western, cisgender, heterosexual male gaze. My practices thus evolved as a means to intentionally disrupt the history and practice of these

conventions. My coining of the term "subject-collaborator" underscores this crucial paradigm shift.

I intentionally create environments for subjects to collaboratively share stories with varying levels of anonymity. Drawing upon my Indigenous Pasifika heritage and the cultural practice of talking story, I incorporate subject narratives into sculptural portraits that embed found and gifted objects, including jewels, flowers, and the sitter's significant belongings. For example, in *Tiningo' si Sirena* (2021, Fig. 2), which depicts my mother, shell necklaces and a beaded rosary hanging from a knitted cross near her feet refer to her maternal families' CHamoru-imbued practice of Catholicism. The inclusion of a t-shirt fragment commemorating the "60th Anniversary" of Guam Liberation specifically pays homage to the subject-collaborator's parents (my Nåna and Tåta) who were young children during the brutal Japanese occupation of Guåhan during World War II. It also conveys the enduring intergenerational trauma of war and displacement into the CHamoru diaspora, of which my family was a part.

I treat my subject-collaborators with respect, and ensure their ability to exercise control over how, where, and with what objects they choose to pose. When my works are exhibited, embedded audio is triggered via motion-sensor technology when a viewer is within a certain proximity. In *Put it down for her* (2023, Fig. 7), the audio plays a recording of the subject-collaborator, Cara Flores, speaking about healing for her grandmother, while in *Haga Haga'* (2020, Fig. 3) viewers also hear CHamoru Poet-Activist, Siobhon Rumurang speaking about life on Guåhan, militarization, and what spaces truly belong to her/our people.

By including voices and "consensual artifacts," my sculptural portraits invite—even compel—viewers to engage with complex stories exploring contemporary intersections of gender, race, colonialism, militarism, displacement, and the indomitable agency of women/femmes of color.

Based in New York, Gisela McDaniel received her BFA from the University of Michigan in 2019. Her recent solo and group shows include: ININA*, The Ogunquit Museum of Art, Maine, US (2025); Hawai'i Triennial 2025:* Aloha Nō*, O'ahu, Maui, and Hawai'i Island, US (2025);* Some Dogs Go to Dallas*, Green Family Art Foundation, Dallas (2024);* (Re)Work It! Women Artists on Women's Labor*, Mattatuck Museum, Waterbury, CT, US (2024);* The inescapable interweaving of all lives*, Kunsthalle Düsseldorf (2023);* Tender Loving Care*, Museum of Fine Arts Boston (2023);* Thinking of You, *FLAG Art Foundation, New York (2023);* Manhaga Fu'una, *Pilar Corrias, London (2022);* A Place for Me: Figurative Painting Now*, ICA Boston (2022);* The Regional*, Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art, Kansas City,*

US (2022); Sakkan Eku LA, *The Mistake Room, Los Angeles (2021);* How Do We Know the World?, *Baltimore Museum of Art (2021);* The Regional, *Contemporary Art Centre Cincinnati, US (2021);* Dual Vision*, Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit (2021);* Making WAY/FARING Well*, Pilar Corrias, London (2020);* Dhaka Art Summit*, Bangladesh (2020);* On the Road II, *Oolite Arts, Miami (2019);* Save Art Space*, Playground Detroit (2019);* Lush P(r)ose, *Playground Detroit (2019);* Virago, *Detroit Art Babes Collective (2019) and* Theotokos: New Visions of the Mother God, *The Schvitz, Detroit (2018).*

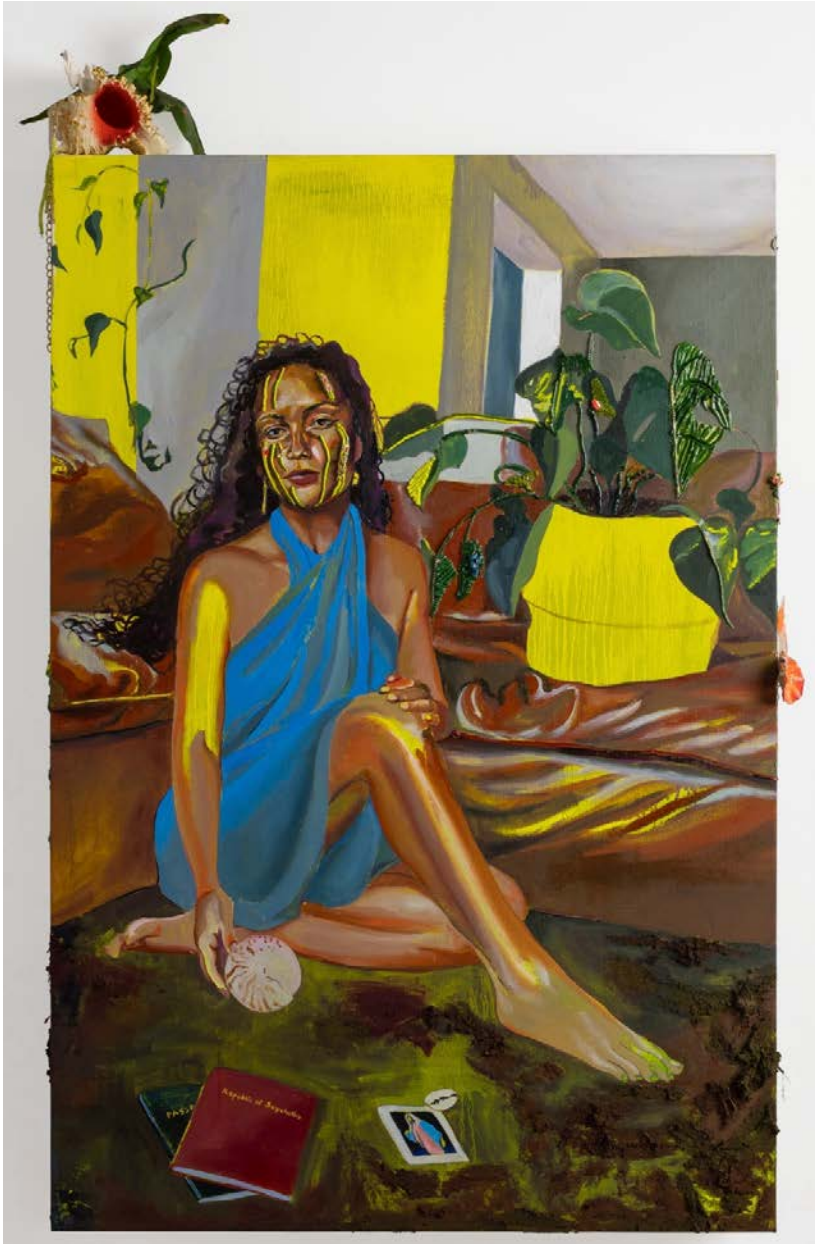

Figure 1. Gisela McDaniel, *Båli Mesgnon,* 2021. Oil on canvas, found object, shell, resin, and sound; 35 x 60 x 9 in. Courtesy of the artist and Pilar Corries, London

Figure 2. Gisela McDaniel, *Tiningo' si Sirena*, 2021. Oil on canvas, found object, jewelry from subject-collaborator, and sound; 45 x 60 x 5½ in. Courtesy of the artist and Pilar Corrias, London

Figure 3. Gisela McDaniel, *Haga Haga',* 2020*.* Oil on canvas, found object, resin, and sound; 42 1/8 x 53 3/4 x 5 1/2 in. Courtesy of the artist and Pilar Corrias, London

Figure 4. Gisela McDaniel, *Lovely Sky 1,* 2022. Gouache and acrylic on paper, 15 x 22 in. Courtesy of the artist and Pilar Corrias, London

Figure 5. Gisela McDaniel, *Måmes*, 2021. Oil on canvas, found object, shells from subject-collaborator, and sound; 45 x 51 x 5 1/2 in. Courtesy of the artist and Pilar Corrias, London

Figure 6. Gisela McDaniel, *Inefresi (Offering)*, 2024. Oil on canvas, 40 x 6 x 60 in. Courtesy of the artist and Pilar Corrias, London

Figure 7. Gisela McDaniel, *Put it down for her*, 2023. Oil on canvas, found objects, and sound; 65 x 54 x 5 1/2 in. Courtesy of the artist and Pilar Corrias, London

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J. KĒHAULANI KAUANUI

Aloha Nō and the Power of Healing in Contemporary Hawaiian Art: An Interview with Meleanna Aluli Meyer and Noelle M.K.Y. Kahanu

Abstract
In a three-part interview, J. Kēhaulani Kauanui engages multimedia artist, visual poet, and educator Meleanna Aluli Meyer, and scholar, curator, and writer Noelle M.K.Y. Kahanu. They discuss the Hawai'i Triennial 2025 (HT25): Aloha Nō*, the state's largest thematic exhibition of contemporary art in Hawai'i, the Pacific, and beyond. In the first segment, Kauanui engages Kahanu and Meyer regarding their connection through friendship, related kin ties, and the Hawaiian art scene. In the second segment, Meyer discusses her vision for and creation of her installation work* 'Umeke Lā'au: Culture Medicine *and how it relates to her longtime art practice. In the third segment, Kahanu discusses her trajectory as a curator and how that artistic labor is connected to her ongoing work in relation to the Hawaiian community.*

Keywords: *Hawaiian art, cultural politics, Hawai'i, curation, Kānaka Maoli, Hawai'i Triennial, Meleanna Aluli Meyer, Noelle M.K.Y. Kahanu*

On March 12, 2025, J. Kēhaulani Kauanui interviewed multimedia artist, visual poet, and educator Meleanna Aluli Meyer and scholar, curator, and writer Noelle M.K.Y. Kahanu (Fig. 1). Kauanui was in Honolulu to take in the offerings of the Hawai'i Triennial 2025 (HT25): *ALOHA NŌ*, the largest periodic exhibition of contemporary art in Hawai'i. The works were on view for seventy-eight days across collaborating exhibition sites on O'ahu, Maui, and Hawai'i Island. A few days prior to the interview, Kahanu, one of three curators of HT25, accompanied Kauanui to Honolulu Hale—the official seat of government for the City and County of Honolulu and the site of the chambers of the mayor and city council. Honolulu Hale served as the site for Meyer's installation *'Umeke Lā'au: Culture Medicine* (2025, Figs. 3–5). The piece is a large-scale, sculptural 'umeke (calabash) with accompanying audio enunciating the names of tens of thousands of Kānaka Maoli

(Native Hawaiians) who signed the Kūʻē Petitions in 1897 protesting a proposed treaty of annexation before the US Senate at the time.[1] Meyer worked with numerous collaborators on the design, construction, and engineering of the piece.

The interview was conducted in three parts. In the first segment, Kahanu and Meyer speak of their connection through friendship, kinship, and the Hawaiian art scene. The second segment features Meyer discussing her vision and creation of *ʻUmeke Lāʻau: Culture Medicine* and how it relates to her longtime art practice. In the third segment, Kahanu reflects on her trajectory as a curator and how that artistic labor is connected to her ongoing work in the Hawaiian community. The interview highlights the beautiful ways in which Kahanu and Meyer have served as lifelong advocates for and practitioners of Hawaiian culture and the arts.

Part 1: "As with Anything Meaningful in Hawaiʻi, It's Relational": A Conversation with Noelle M.K.Y. Kahanu and Meleanna Aluli Meyer

J. Kēhaulani Kauanui (JKK): I'd like to begin by asking you two to speak about your connection and collaborations prior to HT25.

Noelle M.K.Y. Kahanu (NMKYK): We have a very deep, lively, long, and extraordinary working relationship that goes back at least to 2004. At [that] time, I had started curating a series of exhibitions at the Bishop Museum.[2] I contacted Meleanna about doing a mural for a temporary exhibition. It became a community-based effort that involved painting forty separate boards to create one mural, [titled *Hoʻohuli: An Overturning, A Change*]. The community effort involved many students, from middle school to college. In fact, one of those students was Meleanna's nephew, Kanaka ʻŌiwi [Native Hawaiian] curator Drew Kahuʻāina Broderick, when he was just in middle school.

Meleanna Aluli Meyer (MAM): We worked over a series of weekends. Two fellow Native Hawaiian artists, Carl Pao and Solomon Enos, attended some of the work sessions, during which we collected images from each participant. I had done smaller mural projects with the State of Hawaiʻi and artist residencies, but never this kind of project in terms of scale. The collaborative mural became the focal piece of the exhibition space in the [Bishop Museum's] Long Gallery. That was in 2004. Four years later, we collaborated on another project.

Figure 1. Noelle M.K.Y. Kahanu and Meleanna Aluli Meyer, Honolulu, Hawai'i, March 12, 2025. Photograph courtesy of J. Kēhaulani Kauanui

NMKYK: I was one of a team of people working on the renovation of Bishop Museum's Hawaiian Hall, which eventually opened in 2009. There was a large empty space on the third floor above the staircase. It was the end of the [exhibition] narrative; we had just taken folks on a huge journey, and I wondered

what we were leaving them with. It finally occurred to me that the [2004] mural would be perfect and, miraculously, it had not yet been purchased by anyone.

Figure 2. Meleanna Aluli Meyer (project organizer and lead artist), *Hoʻohuli: An Overturning, A Change*, 2004. 10 x 16 ft., mural. Hawaiian Hall, Bishop Museum, Honolulu. Photograph courtesy of Noelle M.K.Y. Kahanu

MAM: And so, the forty boards [making up] *Hoʻohuli: An Overturning, A Change* were installed in Hawaiian Hall (Fig. 2). The color palette—reds, yellows, and blacks—adhered to an Indigenous or Maoli sensibility. Together, the boards told a story of deep cultural significance, with the ipu [gourds] and ʻahuʻula [feathered capes] in the background representing the aliʻi [chiefs], images of fire and

destruction, the pūʻolo [bundled offerings] on the paepae [platform], as well as Mānaiakalani [the demigod Maui's fishhook].

NMKYK: The mural was prophetic and uncanny, foreshadowing something we had yet to realize. Incorporated into the mural was the prophecy chant of Kapihe: "E iho ana o luna, e piʻi ana o lalo, e hui ana nā moku, e kū ana ka paia. That which is above shall come down, that which is below shall rise up, the islands shall unite and the walls shall stand firm."[3] Kapihe's words became the final statement of the permanent exhibition. We are stronger and more united, not in spite of our past, but because of it.

MAM: *Hoʻohuli* was my very first large community mural project. It was difficult because I didn't anticipate how long it would take or how many people would participate, including groups of students from various schools. There were about twenty-five of us at the beginning. The lead artists—Enos, Pao, as well as artists Al Lagunero and Harinani Orme, and I—created the master sketch. By the next weekend, there were sixteen participants left. The weekend after that, there were nine, and after that, there were four. I realized that we needed to finish the mural, so we committed to completing the work, pau pono [completely done]. This was our first mural endeavor, and it began our association as artists and led us to continue working together.

I say "yes" to things that I haven't done so everything is a new adventure. When Noelle asks me to participate in a project, I always enthusiastically agree because I can count on our friendship, her great ideas, and her sense of care. I trust that she would never throw me under any bus, and that's huge.

NMKYK: For me, it seemed like the Bishop Museum was closed to the community, like an ivory tower. It was the place that held kūpuna [ancestors] and their archives hostage. The institution required people to justify seeing materials that actually belonged to them. It was a place that reflected a history of animosity, resentment, hurt, and ʻeha [sorrow]. When I was finally in a position where I could throw open those doors, I invited people in to reanimate the collections. In Hawaiian Hall, we installed museum objects and artifacts in the exhibitions. In other cases, we featured contemporary work. Creating the permanent exhibitions were about building that sense of trust and comfort with community members. I'm most proud of the fact that when we held the opening for Hawaiian Hall in 2009, artist-

activist ʻĪmaikalani Kalahele came into the space and said, "For the first time, Hawaiian Hall feels Hawaiian."

MAM: Not only did Hawaiian Hall feel Hawaiian, but we also felt welcomed. As contemporary artists included in the exhibition, we were part of, and integral to, the moʻolelo—the story, the history—told in the exhibition. Noelle had insight about doing work that was contemporary in a context that was unfamiliar to us, and we felt great comfort as artists to be with kūpuna objects, study them, and have conversations with them. I remember making those pōhaku [stones], the poi pounding pieces [tools to mash cooked taro]. It was such a thrill to open that cabinet, but it was also intimidating to see a couple hundred stone poi pounders from as early as the seventeenth century. It left an indelible realization of, "Wow, this is not only a place for us, but a place that offers research to affirm who we are." Noelle did things there and invited us in as contemporary artists. It was cutting edge. I'll never forget it. Since then, I've had nothing but fun with all of this because I've felt like I belonged, which is unusual in that kind of anthropological space. We know those are dustbins of history, but no longer are they exclusively that.

JKK: What position did you hold at the time, Noelle?

NMKYK: I started at the Bishop Museum in 1999 under a Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act grant to identify unassociated funerary objects. After that work was completed, I ended up in collections as a project manager for a federal grant that allowed us to work with other museums like the Peabody Essex Museum; the Alaska Native Heritage Center; the Inuit Heritage Center in Barrow, Alaska; the New Bedford Whaling Museum; and the Mississippi Choctaw. I'm grateful I was able to do all this work with other Indigenous communities. We had a great synergy and created new programming based on these interactions.

However, I would say the key was when Bishop Museum allowed me to do exhibitions in the Long Gallery due to that earlier mural program. We then started on a journey to include more contemporary artwork in the early 2000s with the first Kū exhibit that paid homage to the temple image of Kū, deity of governance and warfare. Prior to this, Kū had been removed from permanent display for several years due to conservation reasons. This exhibition celebrated his return to Hawaiian Hall. In the Long Gallery, we planned a contemporary exhibition where

we invited artists to create work that considered Kū's dynamic nature. Those changing exhibitions took off from there, and we did two to three a year until I left in 2014. I was also in the museum's education department for a while; by the time I left, I was director of community affairs. In my fifteen years at the museum, I worked with at least a hundred Indigenous artists who, in some way, shape, or form, got to have their work featured in the Long Gallery. We also started Maoli Arts Month and took the concept out into the community during the month of May. For a couple of years, from 2006, we were in multiple galleries in downtown Chinatown, with five to six galleries all filled with Kanaka ʻŌiwi art, which was a thrill.

MAM: It was really a thrill to move out of the museum and into galleries—into a place where people could see Native Hawaiian art versus the Waikīkī garbage that gets peddled as Hawaiian art. That was exciting.

NMKYK: We started the Native Hawaiian Arts Market—our version of the Santa Fe Indian Market—in 2006. I just had so much fun, and it was a great run, but it did not last long after I left the museum. The PAʻI Foundation, established to preserve and perpetuate Native Hawaiian arts and cultural traditions, has carried it on in some fashion, but never to the extent we had at Bishop Museum.[4]

JKK: I appreciate you narrating your trajectory here and the specific interventions and contributions to open up more space. Shifting gears here, tell me about the lead up to HT25.

NMKYK: As with anything meaningful in Hawaiʻi, it's relational. I would add that one of my best friends is Moana Meyer, one of Meleanna's sisters, which makes our relationship not just one of artistic collegiality, but a familial one.

MAM: In other words, Noelle is like another sister. As an artist, I could always count not only on the friendship, but on whatever she was up to because she's kind of the dreamer-schemer, and I'm the one that says, "Sure, I'll do whatever you want me to do, because I want to play in the sandbox too."

NMKYK: Meleanna has also drawn me in along the way to moderate events, etc., which have given me the opportunity to bear witness to the magic that she has

been a part of. We could spend hours just talking about her murals and the way they have transformed our artistic landscape. I feel lucky to be in her orbit and that we get to bear witness to each other's magic.

MAM: And it is magic! It's all about creativity and figuring out how to interface with the community better to tell our stories. That's exciting for me, because that's how I get to tell stories, which ultimately lead up to the HT25.

NMKYK: Meleanna has traveled so much. She'd been to Paris and Palestine and had just come back from the Sharjah Biennial in the United Arab Emirates. As a member of the HT25 curatorial team, we thought about who in the arts community could contribute to our major theme, "Aloha Nō," in a transnational context. Our initial thinking was to approach Meleanna and see how she might address transnational solidarity, a theme that is evident in her muraling practice. But the great thing about the curatorial process of HT25 was the meeting between the artist and the three of us curators: Wassan Al-Khudhairi, Binna Choi, and I. We asked Meleanna, "What are you interested in? What are you doing?" And she went deep with ʻike Hawaiʻi [Hawaiian knowledge and vision]; a twenty-two-foot-plus sculpture was not on anybody's radar!

MAM: I declined at first, wondering what could even fit at Honolulu Hale, the proposed exhibition site. I thought it was too big a space to hang art or project film on the wall. But then, in a sit-down with the three curators, I shifted to a radical idea that Honolulu Hale had potential. Such a large space needed something very large to match it. I went in four or five times to study the space, and I looked at what other folks had done before. I thought, "I've got to go big with room to fool around and negotiate with," and planned for a new piece.

JKK: Could you say more about how you decided on a massive ʻumeke lāʻau—a calabash medicine bowl?

MAM: I happen to love large works, whether it's a [Claes] Oldenburg piece, [an Isamu] Noguchi, or [a Henry] Moore. I was very interested in sculpture when I was a kid, and I did a lot of little maquettes and little things. When I was twelve years old, my mom got me a kiln and said, "Don't burn down the house and just go out there and keep yourself busy." So, all people need to do is give me something to

do that I want to do. I've always wanted to do something like this sculpture in the deep recesses of my heart.

NMKYK: *ʻUmeke Lāʻau: Culture Medicine* is a brilliant and beautiful construction (Figs. 3–6). It also evokes kaona, metaphorical layers of meaning. When you look at the various HT25 exhibition spaces, you start to see the connecting points. For instance, the Capitol Modern exhibition includes an archive case displaying Rocky Kaʻiouliokahihikoloʻehu Jensen's carvings as well as a little pamphlet on *Artistic Alana*, the first exhibition of Hale Nauā III, Society of Maoli Arts, held in 1976. It was also the first time contemporary Native Hawaiians exhibited in Honolulu Hale. Fast forward fifty years later and there, in the same space, is the ʻumeke.

Figure 3. Meleanna Aluli Meyer, *ʻUmeke Lāʻau: Culture Medicine*, 2025. Mahogany veneer, stained plywood, oak, amplified audio, 22 x 8 ft. Installation at Honolulu Hale, Honolulu, as part of Hawaiʻi Triennial 2025: *Aloha Nō*. Photograph by Lila Lee. Courtesy of the artist and Hawaiʻi Contemporary

MAM: Here we have this epic ʻumeke holding space, which I think is the best representation of the persistence of ea [sovereignty] in an occupied land. You can

just sit there and watch the government operate all around it; the business of Honolulu is happening around this elephant in the room, which is this ʻumeke that is loving, light, and sturdy. In other words, we are not going anywhere.

NMKYK: The metaphors are not lost on any of us. It's extraordinary because it's a stealth piece—you don't expect it. I mean, the vast majority of people do not expect to see anything because they're not going there for art. They're going there for business, or doing something awful like paying a property tax, which is, I think, why the space works as a venue for HT25 and for the ʻumeke.

Figure 4. Meleanna Aluli Meyer, *ʻUmeke Lāʻau: Culture Medicine* (detail), 2025. Mahogany veneer, stained plywood, oak, amplified audio, 22 x 8 ft. Installation at Honolulu Hale, Honolulu, as part of Hawaiʻi Triennial 2025: *Aloha Nō*. Photograph by Lila Lee. Courtesy of the artist and Hawaiʻi Contemporary

MAM: What's exciting about this ʻumeke is that I wanted to have the voices of all our ancestors. Initially, I was going to [project] the Kūʻē petitions of 1897 protesting US annexation on all the walls, but then it would have been a distraction. So, I approached one of my theater director friends, Dr. Tammy

Haili‘ōpua Baker, who ended up reciting all the names of those who signed the petitions to create an audio loop. This part of the project ended up being the most complicated because it was difficult to decipher the handwritten names of the more than 38,000 signatures from the Kū‘ē petitions. The Apana ‘ohana [extended family] typed all those names of over 500 pages a few years ago so that we could more easily identify the names of our kūpuna. We wanted to invoke and invite our ancestors so that anyone who entered the ‘umeke could hear their names. And that way, the kūpuna were invited back into this space. The whole thing is more than magic; it’s divine.

Figure 5. Meleanna Aluli Meyer (left) and J. Kēhaulani Kauanui inside Meyer’s *‘Umeke Lā‘au: Culture Medicine*, 2025. Mahogany veneer, stained plywood, oak, amplified audio, 22 x 8 ft. Installation at Honolulu Hale, Honolulu, as part of Hawai‘i Triennial 2025: *Aloha Nō*. Photograph courtesy of Noelle M.K.Y. Kahanu

NMKYK: It was brilliant to situate the doorway on the backside. For the majority of the people who happen upon it, they don’t even know that you can go in it (Fig. 5). You first experience it as an ‘umeke, and don’t know until you come around it that one can actually enter it [see Faris, Fig. 10, this issue]. It’s situated due east, where it should be.

MAM: That is where the kaona [layered meaning] continues with the ʻahu, the altar form of the entrance. As it is situated there, it is a portal.

NMKYK: It's a conversation.

Figure 6. Meleanna Aluli Meyer, *ʻUmeke Lāʻau: Culture Medicine* (detail of pewa), 2025. Mahogany veneer, stained plywood, oak, amplified audio, 22 x 8 ft. Installation at Honolulu Hale, Honolulu, as part of Hawaiʻi Triennial 2025: *Aloha Nō*. Photograph by Lila Lee. Courtesy of the artist and Hawaiʻi Contemporary

JKK: Meleanna, could you speak to the theme of HT25*: Aloha Nō*, and how you took that space and reordered it with your work?

MAM: This work is the most concrete manifestation of *Aloha Nō*, in terms of the pewa [a wedge used for mending bowls] covering the outside and the inside (Fig. 6). The pewa, or patch, represents healing. How are we addressing the fractures

and the fissures in our communities, in our lives, in our families? How can artists function as pewa? How does artwork function as pewa?

NMKYK: The average person asks, "What is this?" and enters the space. Then, there's something that physically, spiritually, and mentally changes. I mean, how many times can you walk *into* art and have an immersive experience, and have it change you almost at a genetic level—like shifting on a molecular level?

MAM: And it happens not because of one artist. It happens because of the collective energy of all who have touched the piece, because there were many who did. In a piece like this, my teachers would ask me what the function of an ʻumeke is. It isn't just something to eat out of. We can share in its healing by utilizing it and being contained by it.

For example, Aunty Lynette Kahekili Kaopuiki Paglinawan—cultural practitioner, social worker, and healer known especially for her work in the Hawaiian art of hoʻoponopono [conflict resolution]—looked at it and went, "Oh, my God, this place! This is a Hawaiian place for healing and repair." She is a beloved teacher, so to have her acknowledge and express her satisfaction is what we aspire to, because we don't have many of these precious beings still with us. We don't have many of these elders left, so to have Master Carver Sam Kaʻai and Aunty Lynette able to be present and share their delight and affirmation has been a dream come true. That's all I really needed. And then it got better, because all we've done is share time with different children from different communities—Micronesian, Black, Hawaiian communities—I mean, everyone who wants to come is invited.

JKK: That's also very Hawaiian in that it's very inclusive. Could you say more about the function of the pewa?

MAM: They're fishtails. They're even called band-aids or butterfly patches. Pewa are critical for objects made of wood. It's a repair technique that is found not only in Hawaiʻi, but other places. Oftentimes, that new piece, the pewa, is made of a different, stronger material, so it would be another wood.

NMKYK: It is not meant to hide the flaw or to cover it up. It is almost a kind of beautification of that which was broken. Metaphorically, it means we have to be

stronger than the chaos around us. The artists are pointing out that there's cracks everywhere—we are being delusional if we think this current climate should be normal. This is the way in which I think the artists of HT25 have, through their practice, really spent time not only identifying what is so fundamentally problematic in our society, but also offering solutions, hope, and healing. As we were planning the triennial, co-curator Wassan Al-Kudhairi, reminded us to consider what the world would look like when we opened in February of 2025, with a new president. But I don't think we could have imagined this—the continuation of the war in Ukraine, genocide in Palestine, our economy in shambles. So, in that sense too, pewa is so important to think about.

I feel like the artists that came for the opening felt very nurtured, and maybe a Palestinian artist could not have had an exhibition in a state building anywhere else other than in Hawai'i at this moment in time. So, I think there's a way we were able to create a curatorial vision with the right artists at the right moment for what is necessary in this time, which makes this triennial exceptional.

MAM: I just felt like a Hawaiian artist. I felt comfort, relief, and permission to just go wherever I really wanted to go. I certainly didn't expect to go the direction I did, but I'm so happy I did. It's been the most exciting creative event for me because I'm finally able to have that time—since I'm not totally tied to a workday—to begin to really deepen my art practice.

JKK: Beautiful. Mahalo to you both.

Part 2: "We Are Containers for Spirit": Meleanna Aluli Meyer

JKK: How long have you been practicing art?

MAM: I've been an artist my whole life. Some energy made this—it isn't as if this comes from nowhere. It's not like I ever thought I was any great artist, that's for sure, but I was curious and loved to make things with my hands and loved everything about nature. So, it was a natural thing for somebody like me who really needed to find another way into education, you know, being dyslexic and not knowing it, being a slow reader, and being all these other things. We're called neurodivergent now. I think that's extraordinary, because we're missing at least half of our children because they have so many gifts and talents, but they're not

accepted nor properly recognized, supported, or channeled. So, we're missing what they really have to offer. That's why I'm an educator, and why I do what I do. Because I have to.

I recently took part in the first Maui Biennial in 2023 and in a Kanaka Hawai'i exhibition at the Maui Art Center the year before that. Also, I was invited to the Sharjah Biennial in 2022, and presented a film, *Mauna Kea: Sacred Mountain, Sacred Conduct*, in 2023, which was made as an offering—just like *'Umeke Lā'au: Culture Medicine*. The 'umeke is an offering to our community to help do the work that we did at Mauna Kea, to help do the work through and with the 'āina [land]. We need to do our healing. It's been extraordinary because the work then speaks for itself. It has its own mission, its own kuleana [responsibility and attendant prerogative] to do whatever it's going to do with people who encounter it or interact with it.

JKK: What was it like for you to shift from painting or filmmaking into wood working and design? Here I'm thinking about the sheer scale of the 'umeke project, and what went into your decision to create that and not something else.

MAM: 'Umeke hold all our valuable things for protocols: the waters, the salts, the 'ōlena [Hawaiian turmeric]. It also holds what we drink such as 'awa [also known as kava, *Piper methysticum*], our lei hulu [a lei made with feathers for the head or shoulders], or, most importantly, our poi [taro paste mixed with water] that families eat. So, it's just natural and so rich in metaphor. I've always had a fascination with 'umeke, and I have a little book that we wrote in the community twenty years ago called *'Umeke*, which says that "we are 'Umeke."[5] That was the message of Hale Makua, another beloved teacher who was also a healer. His mana'o [beliefs] and mo'olelo [tradition, stories] were that we are all beings—like bowls of light.

If you're going to be a bowl of light, you are also acknowledging energy and spirit and the dark moments that appear as rocks in your bowl when the light dims. All you have to do is turn your bowl over and get rid of the rocks, but your light will always be there. The metaphor, the kaona, of the 'umeke means we are containers for spirit. We are containers.

JKK: Could you say more about the reception of this particular work within the local and international art community, with your peers who see you do this kind of work, and the reception from the public when they see it in that space?

MAM: My goodness, I don't think anyone ever expected that sculpture. I was trained as a photographer with a design and printmaking background, but I didn't like design very much, and it didn't necessarily like me. I gravitated to printmaking with a beloved professor at Stanford and then I was with extraordinary photographers. Then I went into film because there's such a dearth of our stories being told in so many areas.

My first film, *Puamana* (1989), was about my Aunty Irmgard Farden Aluli.[6] Earlier, in 1987, I met the brilliant, wonderful, and famous Les Blank here in Hawai'i. He asked me, "Have you ever made a film before?" and I said, "No." But that didn't stop me, because when you're well-trained, you can. You can choose to call the things that you know will be important to you, and then spend the rest of your life unlearning the things that were not helpful. And I think that is the case for many of us who were Western trained because you spend a lot of time jettisoning things that don't serve you in community work.

None of these things are coincidental. They're very much purposeful and deliberate and meaningful, because, as Aunty Irmgard said, the work must have the function right. Beauty is in and of itself extraordinary and important, but for that mana [life force energy and power] or deeper 'ike Hawai'i, we must do the work, not only to be beautiful, but to serve a purpose. That's how you know things also grow their mana. It's like a canoe: If you've ever paddled in a beautiful canoe, there's nothing more extraordinary because it holds memory. It's organic. It's not a fiberglass piece. It's alive, it's fragile. It's a metaphor for us. It's just incredible.

JKK: Beautiful. Where will the 'umeke go next?

MAM: This 'umeke was invited to go out to Kapolei, the second city on the island of O'ahu, and will be there until October 2025. And my dear, beloved uncle, 'Anakala Sam Ka'ai, who lost the majority of all his life's work in the Maui fires, invited it to be shown in Lāhainā, Maui. I want to honor his wish and see if we can get *'Umeke Lā'au* reinstalled in situ, in that place of catastrophe and horror, because then it will really be able to do its work as I imagine it to do.

Someone else asked for it to go to Canada, to the Six Nations [a First Nations reserve in Southern Ontario], and it was also recently invited to Rapa Nui [Easter Island]. I first want the piece to do its work in Oceania, and then, if it's still intact after a few of these wild adventures, to travel to a place like Canada, because we all need healing and that is exactly what this culture medicine is meant to offer. It's not "like" medicine, but it *is* medicine. The piece itself is our culture. It is us. We can be our best selves, not only in terms of repair and aloha nō, but with conscious intention of mālama [care and balance]. So, the ʻumeke is just a demonstration and manifestation of that.

JKK: Would you speak to the audio aspect included with the sculpture?

MAM: The audio part is extraordinary, because I wanted to invite all our ancestors into the ʻumeke. As you know, our history is such that ninety-plus percent [of the Kanaka Maoli population in the islands at the time] signed a document against annexation called the Kūʻē Petition. My grandfather was seventeen years old when he signed that. So, it's personal—as art should be. This affects me, everything about those times plays a role in my own history. So that is why, for me, the arts exemplify some of my deepest fears, my deepest hopes—what art is supposed to do.

All of these thousands and thousands of names from the Kūʻē petitions were read into an audio track. The next part was to create a proper audio loop so that people will be able to acknowledge, "Oh, my kūpuna are here! They are here for me!" This is yet another way—orally, sensually, sensorially—to invoke that sixth sense that we all have: our intuition and instincts to heal. Because if people were to hear their ancestors' voices, there's a profound connection that can happen, and just to know that they are being invoked is enough for people to understand, "This is healing." This is an example of that in its best form, and another reason why the arts are critical.

It's affirming, and it again proves to me that belief, faith, hope, and aloha are the alchemy that creates not only beauty, but beyond that, the potential for healing in very significant ways. And my practice has really been for me and my children to get through some very, very difficult times in my life so that I can give my moʻopuna [grandchildren] the best of what I hope for them. That is what I dream about and hope for.

Part 3: "An Inclusive Archipelagic Approach": Noelle M.K.Y. Kahanu

JKK: I'd like to start by asking about your trajectory from the Honolulu Biennial to the Hawai'i Triennial, and your role as a curator within these mega-spaces, putting Hawai'i on the map in terms of contemporary art in many ways.

NMKYK: About ten years ago, in the fall of 2014, there was a prologue exhibition called *Chain of Fire.* As part of that, the Honolulu Biennial Foundation sponsored a series of panels. The topic was an inquiry as to how Honolulu might benefit from a biennial in the face of understandable skepticism, and I thought, "Oh, yeah, one more big event, and we're just the backdrop, serving tables." A big event like that may be a platform for other international and national artists, but we had to ask how local artists and the Hawai'i community would benefit. And so, *Chain of Fire* was meant to show how Hawaiian and other Pacific artists could stand on the same footing as other internationally recognized artists, a fledgling effort to test the waters. And then, two years later, we had the first Honolulu Biennial (in 2017).

The organizational structure started out as the Honolulu Biennial Foundation, a nonprofit formed to support the biennial. That organization transformed into Hawai'i Contemporary; it was the same board organized around the same intent, but they realized they needed to expand beyond Honolulu to have a more inclusive archipelagic approach, meaning all of Hawai'i. Therefore, Hawai'i Contemporary is the organization that supports what is now the Hawai'i Triennial. We are now in our fourth iteration, not including the prologue exhibition—2017, 2019, 2022, and now 2025. This is the first time I've been involved other than in an advisory role in 2019.

I think there are always conversations and skepticism around these kinds of art biennials/triennials, which are not unique to Hawai'i. These art events are monstrous and often exploit local labor; rarely is there collaboration or inclusion of the local artists or arts community. We had to pause and ask, "Do we really want to do this?" But I think the Hawai'i-based model works in the sense that for every year there was always somebody on the curatorial team that was based here. During the first year in 2017, it was Ngahiraka Mason, a Māori curator living in Hawai'i, while Fumiyo Nanjo from the Mori Art Museum in Tokyo served as the curatorial director. This model exemplified the importance of a local/Indigenous connection. Then, in 2019, Nina Tonga from Aotearoa/New Zealand was the lead curator, and Josh Tengan (who is from Hawai'i) was the assistant curator. In 2022, Broderick was the local/Kanaka Maoli associate curator alongside Dr. Miwako

Tezuka; Dr. Melissa Chiu was the curatorial director. In each of those circumstances, it was always hierarchical and the Hawai‘i person technically served under the artistic director.

HT25 is the first time that the curatorial team was nonhierarchical; all three lead curators worked by collaboration and consensus. We—Wassan Al-Khudhairi, Binna Choi, and I—had never worked together. Hawai‘i Contemporary invited people to apply [to be] a curator and we did not speak to each other in advance of what we’d individually submitted. I don’t know how many others made presentations or were being considered, but, when it came down to the three of us, given our different strengths and weaknesses, it was clear we had an opportunity to create something new as three women of color who would work by consensus to create something we were interested in and proud of doing.

I had never been involved in anything contemporary at this level. You know, I had fifteen years of experience in a cultural ethnographic museum, the Bishop Museum. I will be the first one to say that I was clearly out of my element but both Binna and Wassan had curated triennials and biennials before, and they compensated for my lack of experience. The other important thing is that Wassan ultimately moved to Hawai‘i. We could not have done it without her, especially at the end. At times, curating became a full-time job, even though it was presented as a part-time position.

I’m still a little on the fence as to whether we can create a model that’s not based on a certain level of exploitation, where the staff is working ten to twelve hours a day at the end. But again, it’s not unique. However, does that make it right? And is there a better alternative? How do we, for example, avoid one more boozy cocktail-party mixer/donor event? Instead, how do we get people to the lo‘i [taro patch]? How do we have the artists just do an ‘āina day [land restoration]? Even with the best of intentions, these things became logistically impossible. For me, that was a little heartbreaking. On the other hand, there were genuine connections that were made between artists and folks in our community that are meaningful.

We got closer to an alternative model through our decentralized approach, but it was not exactly what I was hoping for. Maybe that’s the thing—maybe with every version we can get a little bit closer to this alternative model. But, then again, you have a new executive director every time, and new curators too. So, is the Hawai‘i Triennial even capable of evolving? Or is it just reborn as a new, different version of itself? I don’t know. What I do know is this: there weren’t really any marquee artists in this, and some people, especially younger generations,

found that so refreshing. We included so many artists that I had never heard of before. Then we had another portion of the community that felt that we weren't international enough, who wanted the "marquee artists," but these are the curatorial choices. And given that the board chose this curatorial collective, they must have believed in a different model, right?

JKK: How did the three of you come to work together?

NMKYK: I think Hawai'i Contemporary individually made offers and then invited us to meet each other over Zoom. In the lead up to HT25, we had a lot of face-to-face opportunities. We got to know each other in person, which was so critical because we had never worked together before. We also traveled to meet artists, did 'āina [land]-based work, got our feet muddy in the lo'i together, and went swimming at Hāpuna Beach. It was important in facilitating meaningful conversations over shared meals.

JKK: Would you say more about the *'Ai Pōhaku* exhibition? I would imagine that played a huge role in you getting selected, especially since it was such an important and sizable contribution and intervention.

NMKYK: Yes and no. I was one of three curators for *'Ai Pōhaku: Stone Eaters,* a multi-sited exhibition held in venues across the University of Hawai'i [UH] system that opened in mid-2023, but the HT25 curatorial decision was made prior to that. Nonetheless, I learned so much and it was a seminal moment if we project into the future and look back on the key moments or exhibitions within the contemporary Native Hawaiian arts movement. It was a model based on taking the criticism to the very site of the crime. When you're applying for grants, the venues could be anywhere, but it was a major decision to have the exhibition within the UH system.

We required a letter of commitment from UH and we did get that, but I don't think the administration really knew what they were in for. I do think they understood that there would be a critique about the lack of Indigenous presence at a so-called "Hawaiian place of learning." Over twenty years had passed since the previous large-scale exhibition of contemporary Hawaiian art there, but I don't know if they fully appreciated the sharpness of the critique.

There was a Native American/Native Hawaiian Museum Services Grant program out of the Institute of Museum and Library Services that provided up to $100,000. Curators Josh Tengan, Broderick, and I sat around and conceived of this project, which would go on to receive funds from other sources as well. We got the grant, but due to the pandemic, it was pushed off for one year. In the end, there were almost forty artists in six venues. The sites included the Commons Gallery and the Art Gallery at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, the East West Center gallery (which is not UH, but is still connected to the campus), Windward Community College, Leeward Community College, and Kapi‘olani Community College.

JKK: So, that was a massive undertaking that must have amounted to gaining such vast experience.

NMKYK: If I am to be one-hundred-percent honest, it happened because of the young male energy of Drew and Josh. I am the “Auntie” after all. I just turned sixty this year! With all the physical labor and the catalog writing, in no way would I assert that there was equity in labor among the curatorial team for *‘Ai Pōhaku*. But what did I bring? I introduced older artists into the mix. There are ways in which we’re all contributing names for consideration, and these reflect our relationships within the community. Not just because maybe they’re willing to say yes because of who is asking, but because you’re genuinely interested in either what they’re addressing or how they’re doing it, or both, right? And then with Drew and Josh, both considered how artists relate to one another within the exhibition space. For example, in the main UH gallery, even though they were on opposite sides of the room, there was a visual through-line from the work of ‘Īmaikalani Kalahele to [that of] Cory Kamehanaokalā Holt Taum, which represented their mentor-mentee relationship. With Taum, his painting had a direct reference to the British explorer James Cook arriving in Hawai‘i during the time of the Makahiki, and the very next painting was Char Sinclair’s painting of an imu [underground earthen oven]. The kaona [hidden, multilayered, or metaphorical meaning] of that was very funny, if you knew what you were looking at. Co-curating is an interesting process, and it’s a reflection of people’s working relationships. And then there is knowing people’s strengths and the skill of offsetting each other’s weaknesses.

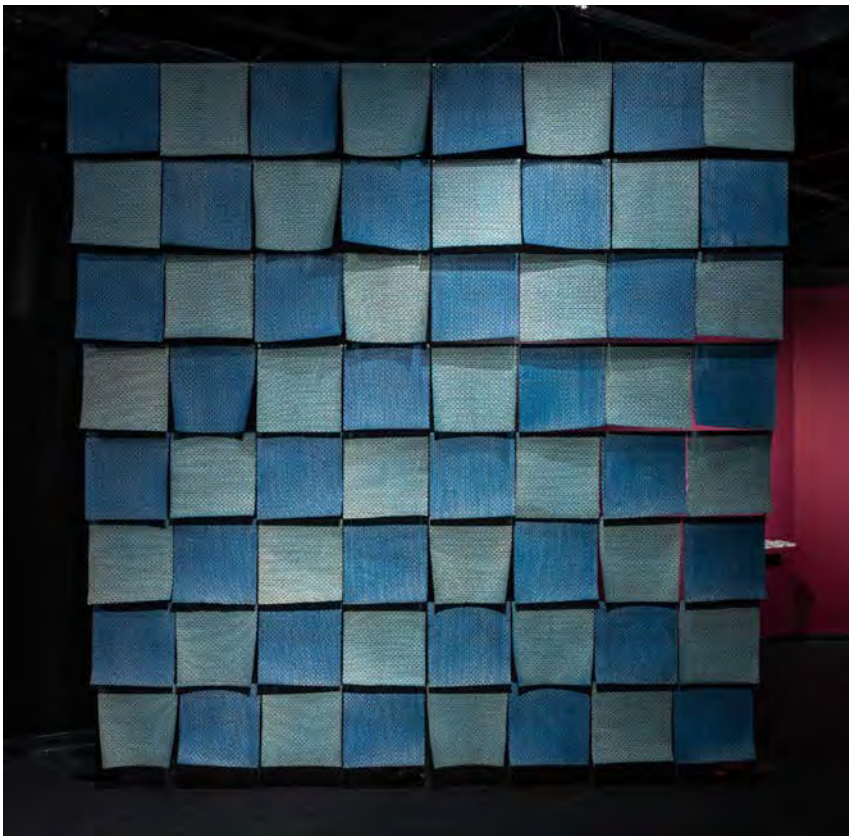

Figure 7. J.D. Nālamakūikapō Ahsing,*ʻĀinamoana*, 2025. Ohe kāpala on hau paper, metal structure. On view at Bishop Museum, Honolulu, as part of Hawaiʻi Triennial 2025: *Aloha Nō*. Photograph by Duarte Studios. Courtesy of the artist and Hawaiʻi Contemporary

JKK: Segueing back to HT25, what would you say is so unique about this particular iteration, beyond the working relationships that were nonhierarchical and consensus-based? You're bringing a Hawaiian perspective, with Kanaka and Pasifika artists, and that knowledge. I'm hoping you can speak to how that fits into the bigger picture.

NMKYK: Curatorially speaking, we really fought to have the title be in ʻŌlelo Hawaiʻi. [The title of the] Hawaiʻi Triennial 2022 [was] partly in Hawaiian: *Pacific Century: E hoʻomau no Moananuiākea*. So, at least there was a Hawaiian tagline. This was really what we wanted to do. With *Aloha Nō* for HT25, it was a matter of not being scared of appearing to exploit aloha [as a Hawaiian word for love, peace, and compassion, among many other meanings]. Adding the nō is what made the difference. Without the kahakō, a diacritical mark above a vowel to show that it is pronounced with a long sound, folks might have easily misunderstood our intention, implying that we had "no" aloha, as opposed to "nō," which does the

opposite and operates to intensify aloha. There was a circular conversation that we had with others and ourselves. In the end, I would say that we settled on it after going to Maui and hearing people talk about the need to share aloha, but also to defend it.

That, then is the *Aloha Nō*, right? The aloha no, and the aloha nō? And also, what does it mean to be loved too much? Where and how do we set our own limits? We're not the only ones that experience all of these challenges of colonial impositions and commercial exploitation. Once we settled on it, there was so much that *Aloha Nō* allowed us to explore. How did we understand Aloha Nō and its ability to translate across geography and cultural distance? Whether it's transnational solidarity or just understanding that the fate of Okinawa is the fate of Hawai'i is the fate of Puerto Rico, what does that look like in an exhibition? How do we select artists that are willing to engage with these themes and threads in a way that illuminates not only their circumstance, but the circumstances of others' rights? It's all connected.

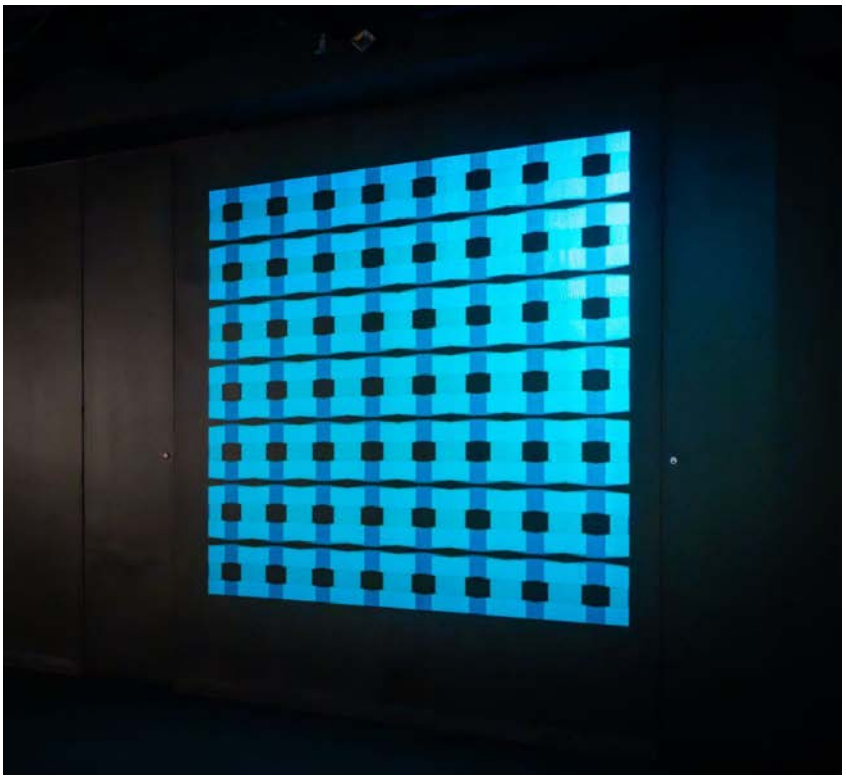

Figure 8. Sione Faletau, *Tau'a'alo*, 2023. Single-channel video, stereo sound. On view at Bishop Museum, Honolulu, as part of Hawai'i Triennial 2025: *Aloha Nō*. Photograph by Duarte Studios. Courtesy of the artist and Hawai'i Contemporary

Figure 9. John Pule, *Hao*, 2024. Acrylic on canvas, 2 x 2 m. On view at Bishop Museum, Honolulu, as part of Hawai'i Triennial 2025: *Aloha Nō*. Photograph by Duarte Studios. Courtesy of the artist and Hawai'i Contemporary

The one thing I learned from *'Ai Pōhaku* was the importance of developing a theme for each venue. For example, the *'Ai Pōhaku* gallery at Windward Community College (Gallery 'Iolani) was all women artists. If you went to Koa Gallery (at Kapi'olani Community College), it was all kāne [men]—except for one wahine [woman] carver, Puni Jackson—but clearly it was a male-centered exhibition. In that sense, I think it reinforced the way that we could be really deliberate about the venues and the themes and the artists. But some artists could go anywhere, they could go into multiple venues. They could address demilitarization at Leeward Community College, or they could go to the Bishop Museum and explore colonialism and collections. That's just a whole lot of conversation and feedback, "Oh, what about this person? What about that?" At the Honolulu Museum of Art, we explored women and healing. And then, you see the magic happens, like at Bishop Museum and how Jonathan Day Nālamakūikapō Ahsing's hanging of hau [hibiscus tree] paper (Fig. 7) is in direct conversation with

Sione Faletau's patterned kinetic video installation (Fig. 8). And then we put Nalamakū's hau paper next to John Pule's painting called *Hao* (Fig. 9). There are just all these ways in which the magic happens—some of which you plan for, and some of which just happens.

Thinking about agendas is a tricky thing—nobody really wants a curator who is going to come in like a bull in a China shop and just run rough-shod over everything. But at the same time, if I didn't think our community would benefit, then why would I do it? There's a way in which, at least for the curator on the ground—and maybe I can only speak for myself—you want to ensure that there is not just a platform for outside artists, but for our artists here. Creating meaningful opportunities for engagement—not just for Hawai'i-based artists but also Kanaka artists.

Meleanna Aluli Meyer would never have had this opportunity, as backbreaking as it was and as magnificent as it turned out to be, unprompted by a triennial. We wouldn't be here right now having this conversation. So, in terms of my role, I ask how to best advocate for the community and artists within it in a way that takes into consideration broader things.

Figure 10. Installation view of archival material and sculptures by Rocky Ka'iouliokahihikolo'Ehu Jensen. On view at Capitol Modern, Honolulu, as part of Hawai'i Triennial 2025: *Aloha Nō*. Photograph by Duarte Studios. Courtesy Hawai'i Contemporary

This is the first time that the triennial chose somebody posthumously. Most triennials or biennials won't because they're really interested in new work. But for whatever reason, we had never done it before, and I think there was a bit of a struggle as to how we could relate the work of renowned master carver Rocky KaʻiouliokahihikoloʻEhu Jensen to *Aloha Nō* (Fig. 10). I had to propose why it would work, and at some point, I thought, if I can't make the case, then why am I even doing this? At the heart of things, you know why you're doing it. He gave his life to laying the foundation for contemporary Native Hawaiian art, and I worry that this new generation doesn't even know who he is.

If we had not selected him, I don't even know what I would have done. That's how strongly I thought about it. He is the manifestation of what happens when, for fifty years, someone fights for the ability for Hawaiians to express themselves with their own contemporary visual aesthetic language. Oh, you can do a lauhala hat made of pandanus leaves, or make kapa cloth from the wauke [paper mulberry plant], or you can carve an image that replicates a museum's collection piece, but you're not allowed to change the form? You're not allowed to make a contemporary Hawaiian face with a wide nose, or a figure based on an akua hulu manu [feathered war god], but with silver teeth? The triennial becomes the opportunity to have that conversation. Rocky also could have gone almost anywhere: Bishop Museum, or Honolulu Hale, because that was the site of some of their first exhibitions, and there would have been a full circle, a return fifty years later to the site of their first exhibition. But at the same time, the lesson from *ʻAi Pōhaku* was to take the critique to the center of the scene of the crime, to the State Foundation on Culture and the Arts (SFCA, now called Capitol Modern). Even they have changed, and the SFCA has collected way more Kanaka art in the last five years than they have in the fifty years prior. It's both a testament to a fraught history, but also a commitment to turning the page on that. And so, it's not all bad.

These issues are related to the consequences of systemic racism, which *ʻAi Pōhaku* so well-articulated. Rocky did not participate in the show, but we borrowed something from SFCA. He was still alive when we mounted *ʻAi Pōhaku*, and every time I gave a tour, I sang his praises as the groundbreaking artist that he was and how he started the contemporary Native Hawaiian arts movement (Fig. 11). And I wish, if he had said yes, and he had flown to Oʻahu to see what was happening, it would have made a difference in the choice he made to take his own life. Or maybe not. I don't know, and I suppose one exhibit doesn't change fifty years of oppression, abuse, and heartbreak.

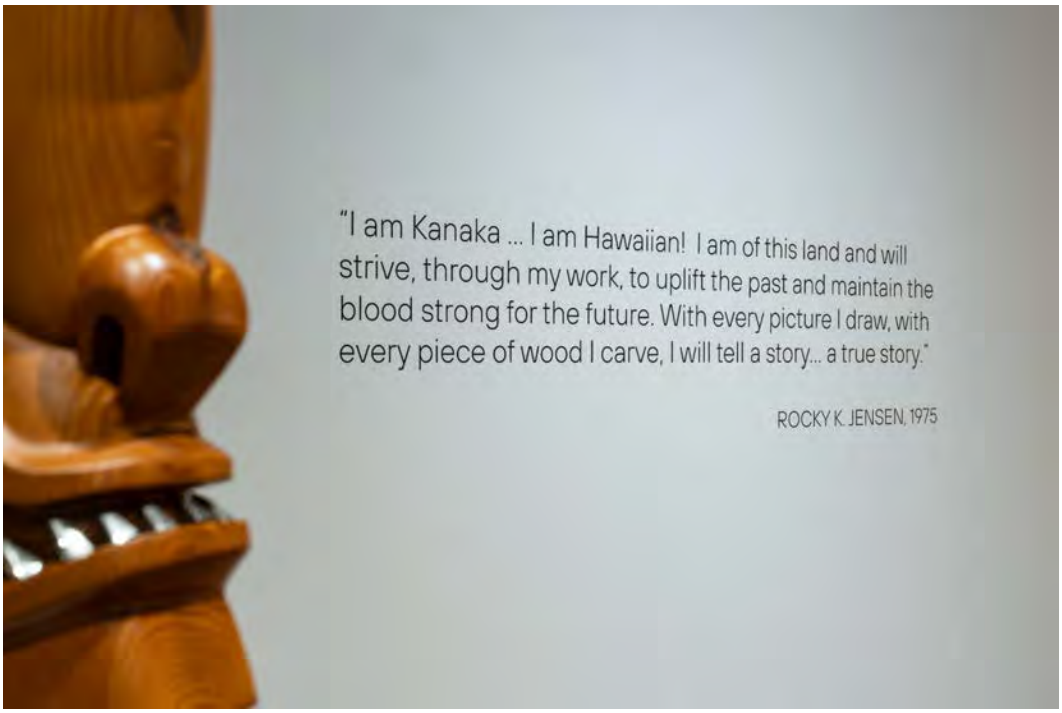

Figure 11. Quote by Rocky KaʻiouliokahihikoloʻEhu Jensen on the gallery wall at Capitol Modern, Honolulu, as part of Hawaiʻi Triennial 2025: *Aloha Nō*. Photograph by Duarte Studios. Courtesy of Hawaiʻi Contemporary

We're able to utilize HT25 as a platform to address systemic racism and its real-world consequences. We can look at artwork like that of Sonya Kelliher-Combs's really thoughtful piece about suicide and make those connections. That is the heart of the matter. That's what the triennial means to me. How are we addressing our own issues as a community, as a sovereign nation? How are we offering ourselves a language of hope and healing? But you don't get there until you're addressing the fracture—acknowledging that this is a problem.

To go back to the point that we're a great platform for national and international artists to come to Hawaiʻi, but if we're not even addressing this huge issue of the lack of appreciation and awareness and understanding of Hawaiian visual art, then is it worth it? We celebrate hula and Hawaiian music, but is there a celebration of Hawaiian visual art? There is none. We tried to do it with the Maoli Arts Month and the MAMo awards, but it ran its course.

Then there's the video about Rocky by David Kalama included in HT25. On the one hand, I could have worked with him and approached it like, "Okay, let's edit this out, or maybe that's too strong. Or let's not do that, or what about this?" But in the end, I just wanted Kalama to create a piece about one of his best friends,

to show who Rocky really was—the good, bad, the ugly, as well as the frustration and the brilliance. I wanted it really raw, seeing that his struggles were palpable and powerful.

JKK: Any closing thoughts on HT25? It's such an astounding achievement.

NMKYK: I like hearing what people are saying about the triennial, because you can only do your part, and then you put it out into the ether. Is it doing what we hoped it would do? It seems to me that people are really getting it, that there is an understanding of the thoughtfulness, and the deliberativeness of artists selected in conversation with each other, in relationship to the venue and the themes. There is no kind of randomness, like in a lot of these group exhibitions. How do they relate to one another, and why here and why now? So, I hope that when we look back on it, that this was a successful moment for the triennial, but also for the community and for the artists who have participated.

Noelle M.K.Y. Kahanu (Kanaka ʻOiwi/Native Hawaiian) is a fifteen-year veteran of the Bishop Museum in Honolulu, Hawaiʻi, where she developed scores of exhibitions and programs. She worked on the renovation of Hawaiian Hall (2009), Pacific Hall (2013), and the landmark E Kū Ana Ka Paia *exhibition (2010). She has a law degree from the University of Hawaiʻi and previously served as counsel to the US Senate Committee on Indian Affairs in Washington, DC, where she worked on issues affecting Native Hawaiian, Native American, and Native Alaskan communities. She is currently an associate specialist in public humanities and Native Hawaiian programs in the American Studies Department at the University of Hawaiʻi at Mānoa. Since 2023, she has been the acting director of the museum studies graduate certificate program. Her current research and practice explore the liberating and generative opportunities when museums "seed" rather than cede authority.*

J. Kēhaulani Kauanui is a budding art curator, seasoned radio producer, and established scholar-activist who situates her work in critical Indigenous studies, settler colonial studies, critical race studies, and anarchist studies. She is the Eric and Wendy Schmidt Professor of Indigenous Studies and Professor of Anthropology in the Effron Center for the Study of America at Princeton University. Kauanui is the author of two monographs: Hawaiian Blood *(2008) and* Paradoxes of Hawaiian Sovereignty: Land, Sex, and the Colonial Politics of State Nationalism *(2018). She also has an edited book titled* Speaking of Indigenous Politics: Conversations with

Activists, Scholars, and Tribal Leaders *(2018). She is one of the six co-founders of the Native American and Indigenous Studies Association (founded in 2008) and was the recipient of the Western History Association's 2022 American Indian/Indigenous History Lifetime Achievement Award.*

Meleanna Aluli Meyer (Kanaka ʻOiwi/Native Hawaiian) is an activist, educator, filmmaker, and visual artist based on the island of Oʻahu, Hawaiʻi. An award-winning artist and educator, she considers herself a translator of visual media and a visionary in the way she weaves culture, reconciliation, healing, and support of ʻike Hawaiʻi (Hawaiian knowledge) into her work on various platforms and media. She earned a BA in design/photography from Stanford University, and a masters in educational foundations from the College of Education at the University of Hawaiʻi at Mānoa. She is also a Borelli Prize winner and a former East-West Center Fellow, Asian Pacific American Women's Leadership Institute Fellow, and Salzburg Fellow. Meyer's deep dives into culture and the arts have been a lifelong and ongoing passion, not just of Hawaiian culture, but of cultures of the world that hold her interests.

Notes

[1] For a pathbreaking study on the petitions, see Noenoe K. Silva, *Aloha Betrayed: Native Hawaiian Resistance to U.S. Colonialism* (Duke University Press, 2004).
[2] Also known as the Hawaiʻi State Museum of Natural and Cultural History, the institution was founded in 1889 by Charles Reed Bishop (1822–1915), a businessman and philanthropist, in memory of his late wife, Princess Bernice Pauahi Bishop (1831–1884).
[3] Kapihe lived during the time of Kamehameha the Great and delivered the prophecy in the early nineteenth century. Today, it has become important in politically mobilizing Kānaka Maoli.
[4] Vicky Holt Takamine founded Pua Aliʻi ʻIlima (PAʻI) in 1977. See https://paifoundation.org/.
[5] Rebekah Luke and Meleanna Aluli Meyer, eds., *Umeke Writings: An Anthology* (Na Kamalei K E E P, 2008).
[6] Les Blank, Meleanna Meyer, and Chris Simon, dirs., *Puamana* (1991, Les Blank Films).

PACIFIC ARTS
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JOSHUA A. BELL

Book Review: *An English Girl in New Guinea: Kathleen Haddon's Journal and Photographs from New Guinea, September 16–November 18, 1914*

Abstract

Book review: Kathleen Haddon, author, and Virginia-Lee Webb and Jonathan Fogel, editors, An English Girl in New Guinea: Kathleen Haddon's Journal and Photographs from New Guinea, September 16–November 18, 1914*. San Francisco, California: J. M. Fogel Media, Inc. and Premier Arts Editions, 2023. ISBN 13: 9781733007856. 192 pages, color illustrations, maps, portraits. Hardcover $89.*

Keywords: *Kathleen Haddon, Papua New Guinea, photography, British anthropology, A. C. Haddon, fieldwork, string figures, University of Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology*

An English Girl in New Guinea: Kathleen Haddon's Journal and Photographs from New Guinea, September 16–November 18, 1914 invokes a series of spatial and temporal returns to a particular moment in the history of British anthropology,[1] and, more importantly, of the communities that Kathleen Haddon (later Mrs. O. H. T. Rishbeth, 1888–1961) and her father, Alfred Cort (A. C.) Haddon (1855–1940), visited in Papua New Guinea over two and half months in 1914. Co-edited by Virginia-Lee Webb, a former research curator of African and Oceanic art at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and now independent scholar, and Jonathan Fogel, *Tribal Art* magazine's editor in chief, the book is a production of Premier Arts Editions, "a boutique book publisher founded in 2023 to present rare images and previously unpublished accounts of the arts and cultures of traditional peoples around the world."[2] This volume is the first in a series entitled "Photographic Journeys," which promises to explore other notable unpublished photographic collections of communities in Papua New Guinea. The book will be of interest to a broad set of readers.

An English Girl in New Guinea is a visual and textual account of the Haddons' little-known but anthropologically significant trip through the southeastern coast of the island of New Guinea (known as the Territory of Papua), which was at the time under Australian colonial governance. The trip has been overshadowed by A. C. Haddon's earlier pioneering work in the Torres Strait (1888 and 1898).[3] Building upon C. G. Seligman's 1904 survey and his student Gunner Landtman's intensive work among the Kiwai (1910–12),[4] Haddon's 1914 journey informed a series of publications through which he synthesized his theories about the region's material culture and culture areas.[5]

As noted by Anita Herle in her essay in this volume, the Haddons' trip marked a critical juncture in the "Oceanic phase" of British anthropology (1898–1930). A. C. Haddon planned it to coincide with the 1914 convening of the British Association for the Advancement of Science in several Australian cities. This meeting brought together pillars of the discipline—Haddon, Seligman, W. H. R. Rivers, Baldwin Spencer, Henry Balfour, R. R. Marrett, and others—as well as its future architects, including A. R. Brown and Bronisław Malinowski.[6] Though Haddon was subsequently displaced through a later reframing of the discipline by Malinowski and others,[7] his 1914 trip's legacy for the regional understanding of Papua is complicated; while hinting at the region's dynamic nature, Haddon's work also laid the foundation for misunderstandings about the region's art and cultures. Recent scholarship has picked up his glimpses of cultural synergies and has helped clarify otherwise overlooked aspects of communities' dynamic materiality.[8]

Kathleen Haddon's hitherto unpublished journal of their trip, which constitutes the bulk of the volume in question, is preceded by a foreword and four short contextual essays. Interspersed throughout the text are 178 of Kathleen's approximately 300 photographs from the journey.[9] Equipped with a portable vest pocket Kodak (VPK) camera and a quarter-plate stand camera, twenty-six-year-old Kathleen served as the trip's official photographer. Alongside her remarkable photographic skills, Kathleen had a degree in zoology from Newnham College at Cambridge (though not officially conferred until 1948) and had worked as a demonstrator of zoology at the university for three years.

Although it was her first time in New Guinea, Kathleen was already a published author and possessed a keen interest in string figures (see Herle's and Rishbeth's chapters). Her relentless pursuit of string figures matched her father's push to document everything related to canoes and the art forms they encountered. Throughout the trip, Kathleen used string figures to break through the awkwardness of their cross-cultural colonial encounters and actively engage with

people. This provided her with opportunities to take close portraits, which are unusual for the time. In one image (Fig. 5.123) she sits among several Papuan constabularies in Port Moresby, and in another (Fig. 5.99) a young man, who had waded out into the water to meet the Haddons' launch while its engine was being fixed, shows Kathleen a string figure.

Kathleen's manuscript and photographs provide intimate glimpses of the Haddons' journey, the communities with whom they interacted, and the emergent infrastructures of colonialism. As Webb and Haraha note in their essays, her images, when juxtaposed with both earlier and later photographs by other European travelers to the region, provide an historical benchmark by which to understand regional continuity and change. While not the first foreign female photographer in Papua, Kathleen's images are one of the most significant extant bodies of systematic work made by a woman in this period.[10] In this regard, *An English Girl in New Guinea* is an important addition to a series of monographs detailing the image worlds created by outsiders to document Oceanic communities.[11]

The book's shorter essays help frame the intellectual project and contemporary significance of the 1914 trip, while also delving into Kathleen Haddon's biography and her photographic legacy. The foreword by Nicholas Thomas, director of University of Cambridge's Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (MAA), and the introduction by Anita Herle, former professor of museum anthropology and senior curator at the MAA, provide some intellectual history around the Haddons' expedition and the subsequent movement of Kathleen's photographs to the MAA. Sebastian Haraha, from Iuku village in Orokolo and former staff member at the Papua New Guinea National Museum and Art Gallery, provides a celebratory perspective on Kathleen's photography as one way to help presence the region's "missing history and [connect] this with the present" (19). In my 2000 trip with Haraha through the Papuan Gulf, communities found Kathleen's images very striking.[12]

The volume also republishes excerpts of a biography of Kathleen written by her son, Henry Rishbeth.[13] In addition to her accomplishments in zoology and documenting string figures, Kathleen traveled with her father to North America in 1909 and, following their trip to Papua, served as a nursing auxiliary. While a nurse, she met Oswald Rishbeth; they married in 1917 and had three children. Until she retired in 1953, Kathleen worked as a librarian in the Haddon Library at the MAA. While in that position, she wrote two books about string figures and participated in several television and radio shows. In *An English Girl in New*

Guinea, Kathleen Haddon rightfully emerges as an unacknowledged pioneer of documenting the Indigenous art form of string figures in Oceania.[14]

Webb's essay explores Kathleen Haddon's significance as a photographer, detailing how she obtained images (e.g., alternating between two cameras and taking both posed and covert images) and the difficult environmental conditions she had to work under (e.g., poor lighting and issues with water temperature while trying to develop her images). Drawing on her previous work, Webb places Kathleen into conversation with other visitors to the region who took photographs, namely Rev. William George Lawes (1881–1891), A. B. Lewis (1912), Ernest Sterne Usher (1914), and Frank Hurley (1923).[15] There is a larger project to be done here—one exploring the various gendered dimensions of these visual economies, how these images fed into the anthropological imagination and understanding of the region, and their contemporary significance for communities in Papua New Guinea.

The book shines through Kathleen's photographs, some of which have been reproduced as full pages. Others in smaller formats, presented alongside relevant portions of her manuscript, provide a useful approximation of what Kathleen may have envisaged when writing her narrative. Her account shows her father collecting information (see Figs. 5.15, 5.57), missionaries and government officials with whom they worked (see Figs. 5.19, 5.33, 5.55, 5.68, 5.115, 5.120), and the Papuan Constabulary and workers who assisted them (Figs. 5.56, 5.98, 5.106, 5.113, 5.114, 5.123). Most of the images are of Papuans they encountered, the environment, and the many material forms that defined these communities (architecture, art, canoes, etc.). The editors have done a good job giving the reader a wide breadth of images by which to judge Kathleen's work and her focus. I did find a few errors in locality attribution—for example, Figure 5.72 is attributed to Kairu. On close inspection, the image on the opposite page (Fig. 5.73) is of the shrine behind the first but is attributed to Kairu or Ukiaravi. Added to this, the carvings in this image are identified as *gope*, which is the term used by cultural groups found in the western Papuan Gulf. Among the Purari they are known as *koi*. While these are minor details, it would have been useful if the editors had consistently used the terminology of the cultural areas that the Haddons visited.

Kathleen's unpublished manuscript is written in a straightforward and unassuming style. I suspect that she modeled her writing on her father's popular 1901 account of the 1898 Torres Strait Expedition.[16] As with that book, Kathleen's manuscript provides another means by which to understand the sociality of colo-

nialism as it was emerging in Papua at the time. By 1914, rubber and coconut plantations had been established with varying success along the coast,[17] the recently pacified Papuan Gulf was becoming a source for labor, and the central Gulf was transforming as a result of the opening of the Vailala Oilfields in 1912.[18] Meanwhile, Anglicans, Catholics, the London Missionary Society (LMS), and the Australian colonial government were solidifying their network of stations along the coast.[19] The Haddons relied on these networks—using the LMS, government, and private-labor recruiting vessels to move about—yet these contexts are noticeably absent in the essays, and would have helped provide a more critical framing of the volume.

As with many travelogues, Kathleen's account can be alternatively self-reflective and damning by today's ethics. For example, at Wadodo on the Bamu River, she notes, "We bought a few articles, but they were reluctant to sell and we did not like to press them, for we ourselves would not relish the advent of strangers desirous of buying our most cherished possessions and heirlooms" (74). Later though, while accompanied by Patrol Officer Cardew along with several members of the Papuan Constabulary in the Purari Delta, the reluctance to part with cultural object fades. Kathleen notes that on their later stop in Ukiaravi they encountered "villages willing to sell specimens" and they "amassed quite a collection" (105). Kathleen also notes, while in Maipua, "The fact . . . that we were under the care of the mysterious and all-powerful 'Government' kept the natives from being too extortionate" (105). The Haddons collected 297 objects through exchanging trade goods and receiving gifts that are now at the MAA (e.g., accession no. 1916.143). The Haddons' collection, and indeed the photographs, point to the centrality of exchange in cross-cultural encounters, and document the transformation of local material culture for foreign consumption. A photograph of Bam and Waddy, two Papuan Constabulary who accompanied them, is, sadly, not included in the volume.[20] The absence of the discussion of these dynamics by the book's contributors is a missed opportunity.

The volume ends with a short appendix titled "Object Photo and Rubbings," detailing Kathleen Haddon's documentation of objects that were part of the Papuan Official Collection in Daru and Port Moresby, as well as images of the MAA collection taken by the museum's staff in Cambridge. These are juxtaposed with contemporary photographs of the objects now in various museums. This appendix builds on Webb's work for the 2007 exhibition *Coaxing the Spirits to Dance*,[21] and hints at the broader intellectual project of conducting documentary

surveys that interested A. C. Haddon and will appeal to scholars interested in object provenance.

My criticisms aside, this book is a welcome addition to the literature on and about Papua during a time of transition and on the region's visual economy now held in museums and archives around the world. It sheds light on a particular moment in the Oceanic phase of British anthropology and brings into view the remarkable images of an otherwise neglected photographer. Reviewing this book has involved a set of personal returns to my own work with these materials and is a reminder of photography's power to connect the "here–now" to multiple "there–then[s]."[22] To close this review, I want to share an encounter, which reiterates a point made by Haraha in his contribution, regarding the contemporary value of these images for communities in Papua New Guinea. In the village of Goari in 2000, while looking at photograph P.1637.ACH (reproduced in the volume as Fig. 5.56), which was captioned by the museum "Policeman, wife and baby, Kikori," people identified the man as Sivaga Nawara. Originally from the Kerewa village of Dubumba, Sivaga worked as an interpreter for the government's police detachment in Kikori. They also identified the woman as his wife, Gaigi, and their baby as their son, Maida Sivaga. Maida became a preacher for the LMS, worked in the Urama and Era River areas of the Papuan Gulf, and died in 1992. Later, while visiting Kikori, I met Maida's children and grandchildren and was able to give them a copy of the image.

My brief encounter speaks volumes to the re-inscription that needs to happen with museum collections by returning communities' visual heritage to them under their terms. This book is a reminder of the productive possibilities that ethnographic inscriptions possess through many forms of engagement, and of the ongoing importance of archival materials for communities in Oceania.[23] The volume's contributors and editors and the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology are to be commended for providing these materials with another means through which to circulate. I look forward to the other histories that will emerge through the wider engagement with Kathleen Haddon's photographs.

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Washington, D.C. Dr. Bell is the steward for the NMNH's Oceanic, African, and South American collections and for the National Anthropological Archive's holdings. His recent publications include "Object-Based Teaching and Learning in the University with Anthropological Museum Collections" (co-authored, 2025), "Unseen Connections: Exhibiting the Global Stories of Cellular Telephony at the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Natural History" (2024), and the co-edited volume Naturalist Histories: Making Nature, Knowledge, and People in Oceania (2024).

Notes

[1] Marilyn Strathern, *Property, Substance, and Effect: Anthropological Essays on Persons and Things* (Athlon Press, 1999), 5–11.
[2] "About," Premier Arts Editions, accessed August 30, 2025, https://premier-artseditions.com/about.
[3] See Anita Herle and Sandra Rouse, eds., *Cambridge and the Torres Strait: Centenary Essays on the 1898 Anthropological Expedition* (Cambridge University Press, 1998); Jude Philp, "Embryonic Science: The 1888 Torres Strait Photographic Collection of A. C. Haddon," in *Woven Histories, Dancing Lives: Torres Strait Islander Identity, Culture and History*, ed. Richard Davis (Aboriginal Studies Press, 2004), 90–106; and Jude Philp and Anita Herle, eds., *Recording Kastom: Alfred Haddon's Journals from the Torres Strait and New Guinea, 1888 and 1898* (Sydney University Press, 2020).
[4] See C. G. Seligman, *The Melanesians of British New Guinea* (Cambridge University Press, 1910); Gunnar Landtman, *The Kiwai Papuans of British New Guinea: A Nature-born Instance of Rousseau's Ideal Community* (Macmillan, 1927).
[5] See A. C. Haddon, "The Migrations of Cultures in British New Guinea," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 50 (1920): 234–80; A. C. Haddon, "Smoking Tobacco Pipes in New Guinea," *Philosophical Transaction of the Royal Society of London* 232, no. 586 (1946), 1–278; and A. C. Haddon and James Hornell, *Canoes of Oceania*, Bernice P. Bishop Museum Special Publication nos. 27–29 (Bishop Museum Press, 1975).
[6] See James Urry, "Making Sense of Diversity and Complexity: The Ethnological Context and Consequences of the Torres Strait Expedition and the Oceanic Phase in British Anthropology, 1890–1935," in *Cambridge and the Torres Strait: Centenary Essays on the 1898 Anthropological Expedition*, ed. Anita Herle and Sandra Rouse (Cambridge University Press, 1998), 201–34; and Michael W. Young, *Malinowski: Odyssey of an Anthropologist, 1884–1920* (Yale University Press, 2004), 289–307; 337–38). For a detailed discussion of this period, I recommend a volume (surprisingly not cited by Webb and Fogel) that details the parallel trip of Haddon's student John Layard. See Haidy Geismar and Anita Herle, *Moving Images: John*

Layard, Fieldwork and Photography on Malakula Since 1914 (University of Hawaii Press, 2011).

[7] Bronisław Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific: An Account of Native Enterprise and Adventure in the Archipelagoes of Melanesian New Guinea* (George Routledge & Sons, Ltd., 1922).

[8] See Mark Busse, "Wandering Hero Stories in the Southern Lowlands of New Guinea: Culture Areas, Comparison, and History," *Cultural Anthropology* 20, no. 4 (2005), 443–73; Nalisa Neuendorf, "Bridewealth a Pardon: New Relationships and Restoration of *Good* Daughters," *Oceania* 90, no. 3 (2020), 194–213; Ian J. McNiven, "Beyond Bridge and Barrier: Reconceptualising Torres Strait as a Co-constructed Border Zone in Ethnographic Object Distributions between Queensland and New Guinea," *Queensland Archaeological Research* 25 (2022), 25–46; Chris Urwin et al., "Swamp and Delta Societies of the Papuan Gulf, Papua New Guinea," in *Oxford Handbook of the Archaeology of Indigenous Australia and New Guinea*, ed. Ian J. McNiven and Bruno David (University of Oxford Press, 2021), 803–30; and Chris Urwin et al., "Rethinking Agency in Hiri Exchange Relationships on Papua New Guinea's South Coast: Oral Traditions and Archaeology," *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology* 69 (2023), https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaa.2022.101484.

[9] The original photographs and manuscript are in the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology at the University of Cambridge.

[10] Joshua A. Bell, "'For Scientific Purposes a Stand Camera is Essential': Salvaging Photographic Histories in Papua," in *Photography, Anthropology and History: Expanding the Frame*, ed. Christopher Morton and Elizabeth Edwards (Ashgate, 2009), 147. Other women photographers active during this period were Beatrice Grimshaw (1871–1953), a journalist and resident writer of Papua, and Alice Middleton Holmes (d. 1941), the wife of the LMS missionary Rev. J. H. Holmes (1866–1934). Though images made by these women do not survive in a coherent archival form, Grimshaw's photographs appear in her publications and Holmes's in her husband's work. See Beatrice Grimshaw, *The New New Guinea* (Hutchinson, 1911); Beatrice Grimshaw, *Isles of Adventure, From Java to New Caledonia but Principally Papua* (Houghton Mifflin, 1931); Max Quanchi, *Photographing Papua: Representation, Colonial Encounters and Imaging in the Public Domain* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007); and J. H. R. Holmes, *In Primitive New Guinea. An Account of a Quarter of a Century Spent Amongst the Primitive Ipi & Namau Groups of Tribes of the Gulf of Papua, With an Interesting Description of Living, Their Customs & Habits, Feasts & Festivals, Totems & Cults* (Seeley, Service & Co., 1924).

[11] See, for example, Michael W. Young, *Malinowski's Kiriwina: Fieldwork Photography, 1915–1918* (University of Chicago Press, 1998); Michael Young and Jennifer Clark, *An Anthropologist in Papua: The Photography of F. E. Williams, 1922–39* (Crawford House Publishing, 2001); Jane Lydon, *Eye Contact: Photographing Indigenous Australians* (Duke University Press, 2005); Quanchi, *Photographing Papua*; David Lawrence and Pirjo Varjola, *Gunnar Landtman in Papua: 1910 to 1912* (ANU Press, 2010); Geismar and Herle, *Moving Images*; and Lara

Lamb and Christopher Lee, *Repatriation, Exchange, and Colonial Legacies in the Gulf of Papua: Moving Pictures* (Springer International Publishing, 2023).

[12] See Joshua A. Bell, "Looking to See: Reflections on Visual Repatriation in the Purari Delta, Gulf Province, Papua New Guinea," in *Museums and Source Communities: A Routledge Reader*, ed. Laura Peers and Alison Brown (Routledge Press, 2003), 111–21.

[13] Henry Rishbeth, "Kathleen Haddon (1888–1961)," *Bulletin of the International String Figure Association* 6 (1999), 1–16.

[14] See also Robin Elizabeth McKenzie, "One Continuous Loop: Making and Meaning in the String Figures of Yirrkala," PhD diss., Australia National University, 2016.

[15] Virginia-Lee Webb, "In Situ: Photographs of Art in the Papuan Gulf," in *Coaxing the Spirits to Dance: Art and Society in the Papuan Gulf of New Guinea* (Hood Museum of Art, 2006).

[16] A. C. Haddon, *Head-hunters: Black, White, and Brown* (Methuen & Co., 1901).

[17] David Charles Lewis, *The Plantation Dream: Developing British New Guinea and Papua*, 1884–1942 (The Australian National University, 1996).

[18] J. P. Hennelly, *Papua Annual Reports for the Year 1910–11* (State of Victoria: Government Printer, 1911), 70–1.

[19] Diane Langmore, *Missionary Lives: Papua, 1874–1914*, Pacific Islands Monograph Series no. 6 (University of Hawaii Press, 1989) and J. H. P. Murray, *Papua or British New Guinea* (T. Fisher Unwin, 1912).

[20] See image CUMAA P.47833.ACH2 in the MAA Photographic Database (https://collections.maa.cam.ac.uk/photographs/).

[21] Webb, "In Situ."

[22] Roland Barthes, "The Rhetoric of the Image," in *Image, Music, Text,* trans. Stephen Heath (Hill and Wang, 1977), 44. I have been thinking with the photographs of Kathleen Haddon since 2000. Following archival work, I brought these photographs, along with others, to communities in the Purari Delta and surrounding areas of the Gulf between 2000 and 2002 as part of my dissertation research. In October 2000, I conducted a survey of the Papuan Gulf with Welsch, Haraha, and Rove that helped inform the exhibition *Coaxing the Spirits to Dance*, which was shown at Dartmouth College's Hood Museum of Art (2006) and the Metropolitan Museum of Art (2007). See *Coaxing the Spirits to Dance: Art and Society in the Papuan Gulf of New Guinea* (Hood Museum of Art, 2006). I received two Crowther-Beynon Grants from the MAA to support my research (2000 and 2001). Subsequently, I catalogued the photographs as part of a Getty-funded project at the MAA, and I was a Sylvan C. Coleman and Pamela Coleman Memorial Fund Art History Fellow supervised by Virigina-Lee Webb at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (2004). See Joshua A. Bell, "'A Gift of the First Importance': A Preliminary Report on the Cambridge University Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology's Papuan Gulf Photographic Collection," *Journal of Museum Ethnography* 17 (2005): 176–90; and Bell, "'For Scientific Purposes,'" 2009.

[23] For more on the productive possibilities of archival and museum collections, see Hulleah J. Tsinhanahjinne, "When Is a Photograph Worth a Thousand Words?" in *Photography's Other Histories*, ed. Christopher Pinney and Nicholas Peterson (Duke University Press, 2003): 40–52; Tina Campt, *Listening to Images* (Duke University Press, 2017); and Leah Lui-Chivizhe, *Masked Histories: Turtle Shell Masks and Torres Strait Islander People* (Melbourne University Publishing Limited, 2022).

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Exhibition Review: Hawai‘i Triennial 2025: *Aloha Nō*

Abstract
Exhibition review: Hawai‘i Triennial 2025: Aloha Nō*, curated by Wassan Al-Khudhairi, Binna Choi, and Noelle M.K.Y. Kahanu. The exhibition was presented at fourteen venues on O‘ahu, Maui, and Hawai‘i Island, February 15–May 4, 2025.*

Keywords: Aloha Nō, Hawai‘i, Oceania, contemporary art, Hawai‘i Triennial, Honolulu Biennial, Indigenous-led curation, ‘āina-based art, solidarity

Figure 1. Installation view at the HT25 HUB, Davies Pacific Center, Honolulu, 2025, showing (left) Brandy Nālani McDougall, *Aloha Ka‘apuni/ Revolutionary Aloha*, 2025; and looking toward Las Nietas de Nonó, *réplica de paisaje II*, 2024. Photograph by Tiffany Beam. Courtesy of Hawai'i Contemporary

Verses from *Aloha Ka‘apuni/Revolutionary Aloha* (2025), a series of poems by Kanaka Maoli poet Brandy Nālani McDougall, greeted me at multiple venues during the Hawai‘i Triennial 2025 (HT25).[1] I first encountered one part of the series, dedicated to Lē‘ahi (known in Hawai‘i’s militourist context as Diamond Head), on the fourteenth floor of the Davies Pacific Center, the “HUB” of HT25 (Fig. 1).[2] Printed in white vinyl, it was positioned on a green wall opposite a large bank of windows. Bridging the richness of Hawaiian mo‘olelo (storied traditions) and site-responsive contemporary art forms, each stanza was placed within an outline of Lē‘ahi. These faced what would have been a similar silhouette of the volcanic cone four miles away—if high-rise office buildings and hotels had not blocked the view.

The words celebrated the first wa‘a (canoe) to view the volcanic cone from the ocean, as well as the ali‘i (chiefs) who recognized it as an important place to fish ‘ahi (tuna). As I turned to look out the windows at a colonized and developed island, and turned again toward McDougall’s poem, I felt a small revolution with and in my body. This huaka‘i (journey) of the imagination—of bringing the past into the present and future—rotated my “view” of Lē‘ahi from tourist icon to ‘āina (land, water, that which feeds).

Figure 2. Brandy Nālani McDougall, “Lē‘ahi” from *Aloha Ka‘apuni*, 2025. Part of the Wahi Pana: Storied Places project. Installation view at Lē‘ahi Beach Park, Honolulu, 2025. Photograph by Lila Lee. Courtesy of the artist and Hawai'i Contemporary

McDougall’s poem spoke of Lē‘ahi as a wahi pana (storied place) from the distance of the Davies Pacific Center and continued at four other sites closer to the volcanic cone, creating a two-mile semi-circular path for me to feel the turns of land and history (Fig. 2).[3]

Embracing, revolving, rotating, traveling, and encircling. These movements speak to the kaona (layered meaning) of the word “ka‘apuni,” which is used to describe a range of different motions—from a pivoting hula step to the importance of relation and reciprocity in traveling “around the island” and across ka pae ‘āina (the Hawaiian archipelago). As McDougall explains, in using the term as the title of her piece, she was thinking about the importance of Hawaiian leaders historically reaching out to ‘āina ‘e (distant lands) to build international solidarity—especially when Queen Lili‘uokalani traveled the world to gain support for Hawai‘i’s independence in the face of US annexation.[4]

Figure 3. Left to right: Teresita Fernández, *Volcano (Cervix)*, 2025; Citra Sasmita, *Timur Merah Project XIV, Tribe of Fire 1–3,* 2024; Kanitha Tith, *Untitled III,* 2025. Installation view at the Honolulu Museum of Art, 2025. Photograph by Duarte Studios. Courtesy of Hawai'i Contemporary

McDougall's engagement with these interrelated "revolutionary" aspects of aloha was indicative of how the forty-nine international artists, from Oceania/Pacific, Asia, North America, South America/Caribbean, Europe, and Africa, in HT25 embraced the ethos of the triennial's theme: *Aloha Nō*. In many different ways, the artists moved audiences to think beyond "aloha" as a superficial expression of "love," and toward questions of how to craft relationships with care, how to build connection to each other as the foundation of local and international solidarity activist movements, and how this all depends on a deeper embrace of 'āina. I could feel the aesthetic resonance of this ethos in the recurring forms of circles, spirals, and currents across the fourteen sites and three islands of the exhibition (fig. 3).

Now in its fourth iteration, this year's Hawai'i Triennial was co-curated by Wassan Al-Khudhairi, Binna Choi, and Noelle M.K.Y. Kahanu. Kahanu, an established Kanaka Maoli curator and University of Hawai'i at Mānoa (UHM) faculty member based in Honolulu, brought the mana to create an international art exhibition in which an 'olelo Hawai'i title, *Aloha Nō,* would foreground a Native Hawaiian and Oceanic framework of revolutionary aloha.[5] Both Iraqi Wassan Al-Khudhairi and South Korean Binna Choi brought their own experiences—of working with biennials and networks of artists addressing the most pressing issues of our times—as expressions of their own deepening love for and connection to Hawai'i. Al-Khudhairi was most recently chief curator at the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis, where she mounted *Stories of Resistance*, and Choi was co-artistic director of the Singapore Biennale 2022 and former director of the Casco Art Institute: Working for the Commons, where she lead the Grand Domestic Revolution project. As the curators recounted to me on multiple occasions, HT25's title was born partly out of their shared commitment to a nonhierarchical structure of curating as a form of collective solidarity.

The curators' first revolutionary act was choosing *Aloha Nō* as their title. The addition of "Nō," with a kahakō, when placed after aloha, intensifies its meaning to "deep aloha" in 'ōlelo Hawai'i. The title also takes poetic license in playing with the homonyms of "Nō" in the English language, signifying both an act of refusing aloha's commodification and a "call to know aloha more deeply."[6] The curators hesitated before choosing such a known and exploited Hawaiian word, but, as Kahanu explains, they "thought about the role of contemporary art and the Hawai'i Triennial, [and] kept returning to the notion of aloha, as a means of conversing about healing, solidarity, and shared humanity. *Aloha Nō* allows us to process grief and emerge more whole, and ready to love anew."[7]

The curators shared their collective reclamation of the oft-used term with articles assembled in a reader (available for free at multiple venues and on the exhibition website as a downloadable PDF) that built an understanding of the word's Christianized and colonized history and its renewal in recent contexts.[8] Toward the end of the reader, Kanaka Maoli poets and activists No‘u Revilla and Jamaica Heoloimeleikalani Osorio offer that "aloha is deoccupied love." They say that "while the word is a common expression in Hawai‘i nei, particularly in greetings, it is important to remember that aloha is not tourist-oriented . . . Fundamental to our culture and identity, aloha is an ‘Ōiwi ethos of connectivity." It compels us to ask "What intimacies have we earned? What ways of knowing each other have we cultivated properly?"[9]

Aloha Nō is part of a movement in biennial- and triennial-making that prioritizes Indigenous knowledge and perspectives as relevant to the global contemporary art world—like *NIRIN* (meaning "edge" in Wiradjuri language), the 2020 Sydney Biennial led by Brook Andrew. The HT25 curatorial team assembled artists (a significant number of them women, femme-identifying, or queer as well as local, Indigenous, and Pasifika) who shared how earth, water, and community-care practices (including ceremonial and language regeneration), are, in fact, often earned intimacies. The exhibition's distribution across so many sites gave each artist space to express these intimacies, while also emphasizing a huaka‘i that connected the artists, and grounded them in their locations and their ‘āina. In the HT25 guidebook (like the HT22 one before it), each site is introduced in both English and ‘olelo Hawai‘i through its place names, the wahi pana (sacred places) in the surrounding area, and mo‘olelo of important moments in its history.

The curators made a clear effort to trace a growing network of artists working to recover ancestral knowledge and mo‘okūauhau (lineage) in relation to ‘āina-based care. At the Hō‘ikeākea Gallery, Quandamooka (Aboriginal Australian) artist Megan Cope's *Kinyingarra Guwinyanba (Off-Country), Kaulana ‘Ōlepe* (2025) featured handmade, locally-sourced oyster poles (Fig. 4). The installation was paired with a video showing how Cope and her community plant the poles in a circular formation to act as living reefs. The work is part of the long-term restoration of Quandamooka Sea Country. Though *Kinyingarra Guwinyanba* has traveled extensively in the last few years, it took on a new resonance at HT25, as the poles were mounted in a curving, protective, and honorific formation overlooking Pu‘uloa—once known for its abundant oyster beds and now the toxic military site widely known as Pearl Harbor (and one of the worst superfund sites in the United States).

Figure 4. Megan Cope, *Kinyingarra Guwinyanba (Off-Country), Kaulana ʻŌlepe*, 2025. Installation view outside Hōʻikeākea Gallery, Leeward Community College, Pearl City, overlooking Puʻuloa, 2025. Photograph by Duarte Studios. Courtesy of the artist and Hawai'i Contemporary

In the gallery, Cope's video was adjacent to Kanaka Maoli artist Tiare Ribeaux's documentary style video *Waters of Puʻuloa* (2024), which highlights Native Hawaiian efforts of restoration. At the Bishop Museum, Ribeaux shared a video installation related to Maui's waters: *Hoʻōla ka wai iā Maui—He Moemoeā (Water Returns Life to Maui—A Dream)* (2025). The artist, who traces her moʻokūauhau to Maui, structures the piece as a dreamy huakaʻi around the island's ruptured and contaminated watersheds in which moʻo (lizard-like water protector deities) return. The video features dancers dressed in long, flowing garments designed by Ribeaux that are activated by wind and water. Their reptilian, articulated motions caress stones, water, and the atmosphere. One performer was Nanea Lum, Kanaka Maoli painter and kapa-maker, and Ribeaux's longtime collaborator. Lum's own work, paintings about the revival of kapa making as ceremony, were included in HT25 at the HUB.

The HUB featured another performance-based video installation that resonated with Ribeaux's. *Finding Pathways to Temahahoi* (2024) by Indigenous Taiwanese artist Anchi Lin (Ciwas Tahos) is based on her ongoing efforts to reconnect with

her Atayal maternal ancestors and Temahahoi*,* a place in the mountains where women beekeepers are impregnated by the wind. To add to this evolving work, Anchi collaborated with four queer and femme-identifying performers based in Honolulu to develop a durational performance for the opening of HT25. On Anchi's unfurled map of Temahahoi, they recreated a space of communal sensual awakening, moving slowly over and around each other as they blew through handcrafted ceramic vessels to invoke the wind.

Across the way at the HUB, Puerto Rican collective Las Nietas de Nonó (Afrodiasporic siblings Mapenzi Chibale and Mulowayi Iyaye) contributed a new video, *réplica de paisaje II* (2024) (Fig. 1). Much like Anchi's work, it features their land and water-based choreographies—intimate gestural strategies of witnessing and recovering damaged rivers and militarized coasts. The emancipatory performances are initiated, as they state, in "opposition to fear" and borne out of a desire to "reimagine connection."[10]

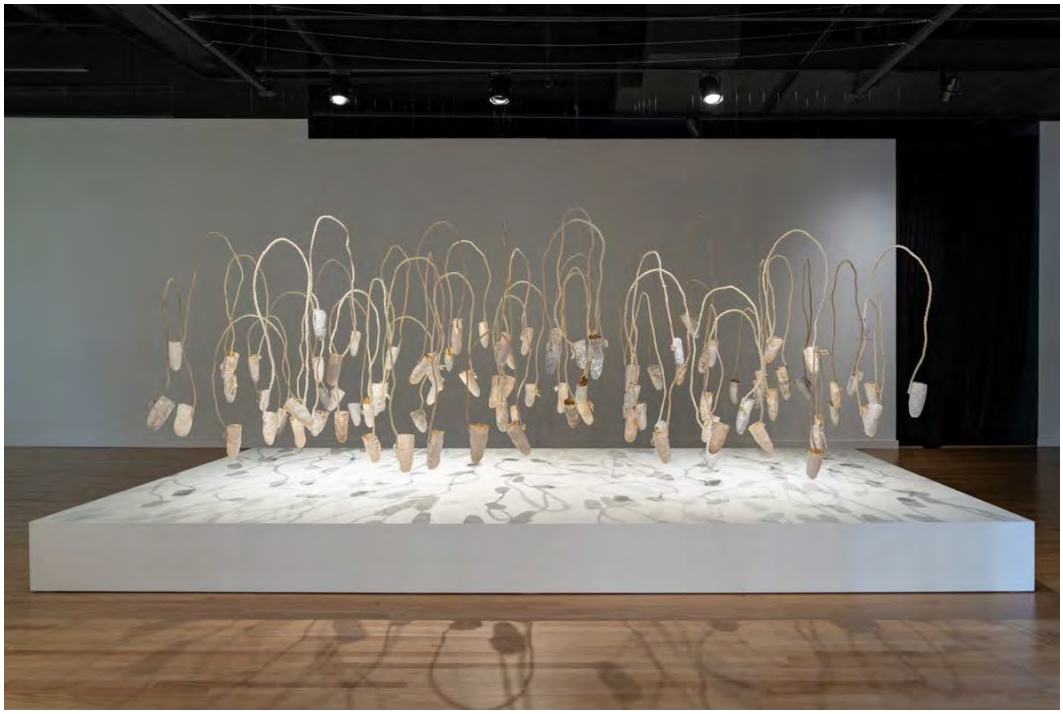

Figure 5. Sonya Kelliher-Combs, *White Idiot Strings*, 2025. Installation view at Capitol Modern, Honolulu, 2025. Photograph by Duarte Studios. Courtesy of the artist and Hawai'i Contemporary

At Capitol Modern, the state art museum, Sonya Kelliher-Combs, an Iñupiaq and Athabascan artist from Alaska, offered *White Idiot Strings* (2025), an installation of intricately stitched rawhide mittens that were suspended in the air (Fig. 5). Evoking absent bodies, the piece (and the shadows it casts) is Kelliher-Combs's reflection on the loss of her kin to boarding schools and high suicide rates, while it also celebrates the skills and creativity of her ancestors. In a nearby video space, *Guardians* (2024), by Denmark-based Korean artist Jane Jin Kaisen, featured children animating kkokdu (Korean wooden funerary figures) and circling a burial mound on South Korea's Jeju Island. *Guardians* is linked to the other two films by Kaison that were featured in HT25, but shown at different locations. All engage ritual and spiritual practices from her home island with incredibly careful and sensitive cinematography and immersive sonic rhythms. *Halmang* (2023), shown on Hawai‘i Island at the East Hawai‘i Cultural Center, features Jeju's esteemed haenyeo (sea divers), who collectively unfurl long rolls of sochang (white cotton cloths) in a spiral pattern across the black lava rocks that serve as a shrine to the wind goddess Yongdeung Halmang. The soundscape is composed of layers of on-site recordings that bring the wind alive, as with Ribeaux and Anchi's pieces.

Figure 6. Installation view of archival material and sculptures by Rocky Ka‘iouliokahihikolo‘Ehu Jensen at Capitol Modern, Honolulu, 2025. Photograph by Duarte Studios. Courtesy of the Jensen ‘Ohana and Hawai'i Contemporary

In multiple rooms at Capitol Modern, the resurrection and reinvention of contemporary Kanaka ‘Ōiwi ki‘i (images) are celebrated in the posthumous work of artist Rocky Ka‘iouliokahihikolo‘Ehu Jensen (1944–2023) (Fig. 6), as well as Carl F.K. Pao’s vibrantly colored paintings and Kahi Ching’s *‘Uhane Lā‘au* (2025) series (Fig. 7). Jensen’s presence acts as an important genealogical source for Pao and Ching. Kahanu took the lead in working with Jensen’s family, choosing works and ephemera that both honored him as a founder of contemporary Hawaiian art and expressed how embattled his position was in a white-dominated art context.

Figure 7. Kahi Ching, *‘Uhane Lā‘au*, 2025. Installation view with Sung Hwang Kim, *By Mary Jo Freshley*, 2025, in the background and Carl F.K. Pao, *KANU Kaho‘olawe: Replanting, Rebirth,* 2016, to the left. Capitol Modern, Honolulu, 2025. Photograph by Duarte Studios. Courtesy of the artists and Hawai‘i Contemporary

Ching’s five hardwood sculptures—organized in a circle and each with a unique rock, coral, or glass base—were standout pieces in the triennial. As an extension of his innovative approach to combining Japanese bonsai and Chinese penjing (miniature landscapes) with Kanaka ‘ike lā‘au (plant knowledge), each piece of wood, found by or given to the artist, tells the story of damaged and transforming landscapes. Ching sculpted each of them with immense care and sensitivity to the ‘uhane (spirit) of the

tree to bring out its intrinsic dancing energies. For Ching, each mark made into the wood is a deep meditation and collaboration with elemental and ancestral forces.

In addition to the strong genealogical tenor of many HT25 works, artists also foregrounded regional, trans-Indigenous, and international solidarity—especially around land and water sovereignty movements—as the core of their practice. *A‘gin* (2025) by Rose B. Simpson, a Tewa sculptor from Kha’p’o Owingeh (Santa Clara Pueblo, New Mexico), acted as a perfect embodiment of this. Placed at the entrance of the Honolulu Museum of Art (HoMA), two monumental figures stand side by side. As the artist recounts, the piece is a reminder to reflect on how “we carry ourselves,” to “be guests respectfully” in each other’s spaces.[11] At Capitol Modern, Sancia Miala Shiba Nash, a filmmaker and lauhala weaver who was born and raised on Maui, presented *Kuroshio* (2025), a two-channel video installation with a sitting environment of moena lauhala (traditional Hawaiian mats) the artist made with her friends in the Keanahala collective. The work offers a meditation on how her Japanese ancestral roots are interwoven with her commitment to ‘āina-based knowledge in Hawai‘i through the ocean’s currents.

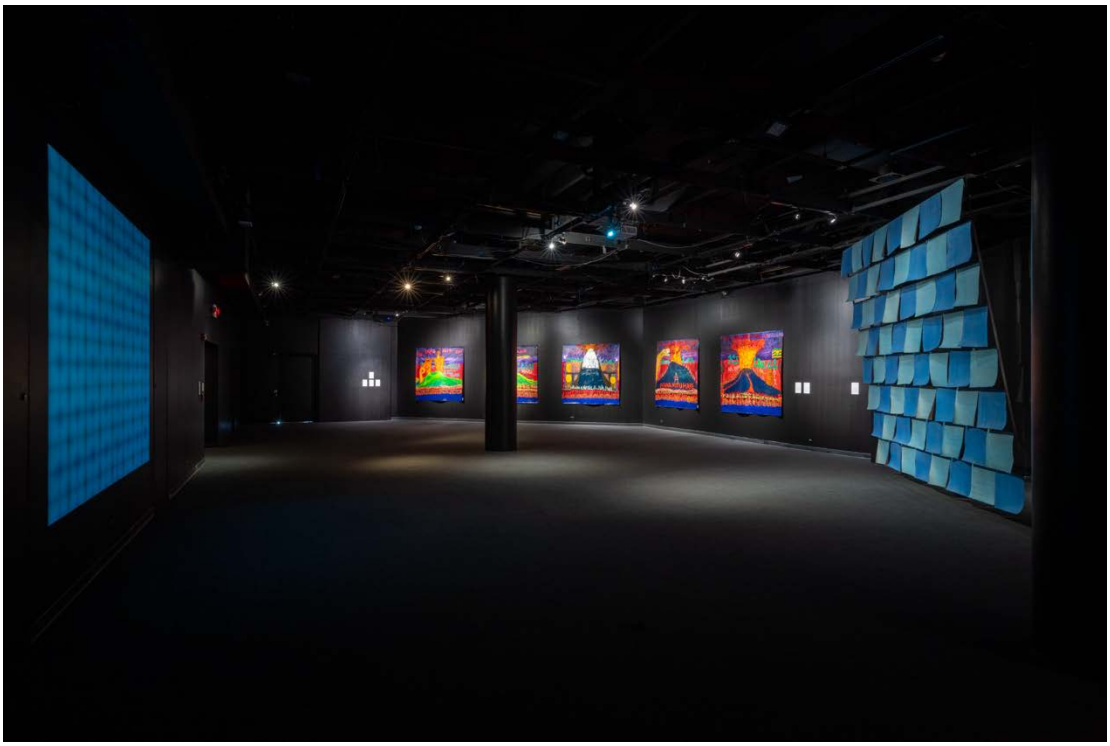

Figure 8. Left to right: Sione Faletau, *Tau'a'alo*, 2025; Emily Karaka, *Kohala, Hualālai, Mauna Kea, Mauna Loa,* and *Kīlauea*, 2025; Jonathan Day Nālamakūikapō Ahsing, *‘Āinamoana*, 2025. Installation view at the Bishop Museum, Honolulu, 2025. Photograph by Duarte Studios. Courtesy of Hawai'i Contemporary

The Bishop Museum’s HT25 artworks pulsated with Oceanic solidarities, also figured through ocean currents. A strobing kupesi design from Tongan artist Sione Faletau’s digital piece *Tau‘a‘alo* (2025) was set to the beat of a modified 1970s recording of canoe paddlers’ call-and-response song (Fig. 8). The work was mounted directly across from *‘Āinamoana* (2025), sixty-four sheets of handmade hau paper printed with designs that symbolize the “40,000” islands of Oceania, by Kanaka Maoli artist Jonathan Day Nālamakūikapō Ahsing. The marks were made with ‘alaea (ocherous dirt) and salt water from Piko o Wākea (the equator) obtained on a voyage to Tahiti with Hōkūle‘a.

These works by emerging artists were embraced by those of important elders. To the left were Māori painter Emily Karaka’s large-scale, unstretched canvases-as-packable-protest-banners that connect mauna (mountain) protection movements across Oceania. To the right, a single new work and poetic text by painter and writer John Pule celebrated the vibrant abundance of land and water of Niue. In another room, Salote Tawale, a Fijian-Anglo-Australian artist, displayed an arrangement of gifted necklaces hung on a subversively funny, deconstructed theater prop resembling an underwater cave with videos of Moana Nui. As Tawale imagines them, the ocean, cave, and necklaces all act as portals to connect friends across islands.

Back at the HUB, Taro Patch Creative’s “living room” offered a space of talanoa (dialog). The collective, founded by sisters Vea, Emily, and Elizabeth (Bubzie) Mafile‘o, is based in Tāmaki Makaurau, Aotearoa New Zealand, where they run a community space committed to storytelling as a practice of communal well-being. As a parallel approach in Honolulu, they featured stories from West O‘ahu (recorded in collaboration with Native Hawaiian filmmaker Pākē Salmon) that aim to foster connections amongst Tagata Moana (peoples across the Pacific).

Figure 9. Yazan Khalili, *Against Total Meaning*, 2025. Installation view at the HT25 HUB, Davies Pacific Center, Honolulu, 2025. Photograph by Duarte Studios. Courtesy of the artist and Hawai'i Contemporary

Another highly significant act of international solidarity-building was the inclusion of Palestinian voices at a time when they are being censored across the US and beyond. Yazan Khalili (born in Syria and raised in Palestine) is a photographer, writer, and activist leading projects such as Learning Palestine, a collective that disseminates knowledge about the ongoing struggle for justice and liberation. At the entrance to the HUB on the second floor, Khalili composed a run-on-sentence poem with no beginning or end, titled *Against Total Meaning* (2025), and printed it across a series of hats, shirts, and hoodies (Fig. 9). Part of it reads, "as we sit like a mountain that stands against the history of the prevailing powers that. . ." Echoing Karaka's work, land protection is a unifying force for Khalili. The artist brings recognition to the struggles against settler colonialism that Hawai'i and Palestine share. Each item printed with the poem's excerpts has been reproduced in multiples and is available for sale with the hope of distributing its message. Though purposefully ambivalent in its merchandizing strategy, *Against Total Meaning* is a powerful parallel to McDougall's widely distributed poetic works that similarly embraces language as activism.

Throughout the exhibition, intimate gestures of untwining and spiraling were used to acknowledge the damage done by colonization while also indicating processes of material, emotional, and social transformation toward decolonial futuring. These moments of release offered a sense of how artists are contemplating the potential of healing in a world of ongoing occupations and extractive violence. Berlin-based Palestinian artist Jumana Manna's quilted protest banners installed at Capitol Modern were tied down to cinder blocks using rope on pullies, with the exception of one that had been set free. Cambodian artist Kannitha Tith's steel coils are the manifestation of the artist's meditative hand-wrapping practice, in which she makes time to sit with the silences left in the wake of the Khmer Rouge. Canadian and French artist Kapwani Kawanga composed a vestibule with loose sisal fibers, stating that she wants the sisal, historically grown and bound into rope as part of African slave economies, to exist, at least for a moment, in an unmanufactured, liminal state: "I like . . . the promise that it can change into something else."[12]

In relation to her work *Blindspot* (2025), Filipino American artist Stephanie Syjuco said that she was "releasing" the Filipinos held captive in colonial ethnographic photography when she used Photoshop's "healing" tool to erase them from the surrounding landscape.[13] Melissa Chimera, a Lebanese Filipino artist born and raised on Maui, made the outdoor installation *Hulihonua, Transformed Landscapes* (2025). It encouraged native Hawaiian grasses and vines to use antlers from deer (an invasive

species) as a form of support, offering a way to think about how we prepare for hulihonua (the earth’s turning or revolutionary potential) even after environmental devastation.

Two artworks from Oceania also spoke deeply to the complex conditions of return and release. Samoan photographer Edith Amituanai’s new video *Vaimoe* (2024) at HoMA follows the story of her aunt, who returned to Sāmoa in 2023 after living in Hawai‘i, Alaska, and Nevada for more than forty years. It’s a story of homecoming that also addresses the complexity of living in diaspora. The return is never to the place as you left it, nor as the person you once were. And yet, the film captures how the “heart returns to Sāmoa.” It ends with Aunty Vaimoe, wearing a tuiga (ceremonial headdress) and ‘ie toga (mat skirt), dancing down the streets encircled by her family and community.

At the HUB, Māori artist Shannon Te Ao presented *Ia rā, ia rā (rere runga, rere raro) (“Every day [I fly high, I fly low]”)* (2021), a three-channel multimedia piece. The darkened space was saturated with a mournful pao (song), written and performed by Aotearoa composer Kurt Komene, that takes the form of the tīwakawaka, a small bird endemic to Aotearoa and associated with the transition between life and death. To this soundscape, Te Ao added large-scale projections of thirty-six black-and-white photos he took of two male collaborators as they developed a choreographic response to the music. In his talk during the opening days of HT25, Te Ao recalled the importance of setting up a ceremonial space for the photo session near his family’s burial site on the North Island. In the images, the men’s movements are blurred, yet still articulated in ways that address the necessity to remember and repurpose cultural knowledge through the body. The powerful atmosphere of *Ia rā, ia rā* embraced and amplified the many other revolutionary gestures of recovery and release I felt throughout HT25.

Perhaps the fullest embodiment of *Aloha Nō*, and complement to McDougall’s *Aloha Ka‘apuni*, was *‘Umeke Lā‘au (Culture Medicine)* (2025), at Honolulu Hale, the seat of the city and county government (Fig. 10). The monumental wooden ‘umeke (calabash)—twenty-two feet in diameter and eight feet high—was a dedicated space of reflection and healing created by Kanaka ‘Ōiwi multimedia artist and educator Meleanna Aluli Meyer. Within the structure, visitors heard the names of Native Hawaiians and Hawai‘i citizens who signed the Kū‘ē Petitions of 1897, opposing Hawai‘i’s annexation by the United States (among them was Meyer’s grandfather, Noa Webster Aluli, who signed as a seventeen-year-old.) The massive installation was born out of the artist’s collaborative efforts with community members; these included Honolulu-

based artists Kainoa Gruspe and Amber Khan, who led the fabrication of the piece; Leeward Community College and UHM art students and faculty; Hawaiian families who transcribed the handwritten names on the petitions; and UHM Hawaiian Theatre Program members (led by Tammy Haili‘ōpua Baker) who read aloud the document’s 38,000 names.

Figure 10. Meleanna Aluli Meyer, *‘Umeke Lā‘au (Culture Medicine)*, 2025. Installation view at Honolulu Hale, Honolulu, 2025. Photograph by Lila Lee. Courtesy of the artist and Hawai'i Contemporary

Over the course of the triennial, Meyer hosted conversations with groups seated in a circle within the ‘umeke, including my own classes. Many discussions focused on the importance of the pewa, a fishtail patch used to repair cracks or fissures that are ultimately celebrated for making an ‘umeke stronger and more beautiful. Displayed prominently on both the inside and outside of Meyer’s piece, the pewa are reminders of the ways that healing can only begin with a recognition that something is broken and worth saving. As I witnessed the commitment Meyer made to hosting

many different kinds of groups (something that doesn't always happen with relational-style pieces in the context of biennials and triennials), she practiced one of the most difficult aspects of revolutionary aloha: hoʻoponopono—sitting with each other to face hard truths in order to evolve together in new ways. Meyer has been invited to install her ʻumeke at multiple sites across Hawaiʻi, including Lahaina, as well as Canada and Rapa Nui.

Throughout HT25, it was evident that its curatorial team had worked hard to support the efforts of artists doing vital and long-term ceremonial and community-care work—and to display the chosen artworks so that they energized each other. This was a major strength of the exhibition, which made a stand in a revolutionary moment to foreground the real ways in which contemporary art is part of continuity and transformation for Indigenous and local cultures. Living and working in the contemporary art community in Honolulu as a settler ally, I had the privilege of meeting with, hosting, and working with many of these artists. I was able to attend discussions in which artists shared how their works were extensions of their love for their ʻāina and ancestors. My students also interviewed artists as part of an audio cast series in collaboration with the triennial. I say all this in full disclosure of my own intimacies with HT25, but also to highlight the ways that building intimacy with the works has helped me to journey alongside the artists, to see their work, even in the quietest moments, as part of larger movements of resistance against imperialism and fascism, as well as movements toward mutual care of earth, water, and each other. This is revolutionary aloha.

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Notes

[1] The venues included: Aupuni Space, Halehōʻikeʻike at the Bailey House, Bishop Museum, Capitol Modern, Foster Botanical Garden, Fort DeRussy, Fort Street Mall, Donkey Mill Art Center, East Hawaiʻi Cultural Center, Hōʻikeākea Gallery at Leeward Community, Honolulu Hale, Honolulu Museum of Art, Davies Pacific Center, and Lēʻahi.

[2] "Militourism" is a term coined by Teresia Teaiwa to describe the layered and ongoing relations between imperialism, military operations, and tourism in the Pacific. Teresia Teaiwa, "Reading Paul Gauguin's *Noa Noa* with Epeli Hau'ofa's *Kisses in the Nederends*: Militourism, Feminism, and the 'Polynesian' Body," in *Inside Out: Literature, Cultural Politics, and Identity in The New Pacific,* ed. Vilsoni Hereniko and Rob Wilson (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999): 249–63.

[3] The four Lē'ahi markers feature poems etched onto glass markers so that the land can be seen through the mo'olelo. They are sited outside in parks that will enable the piece to be viewed as public art long after HT25 is over. McDougall's Lē'ahi project, along with projects by Rocky Ka'iouliokahihikolo'Ehu Jensen and Carl Pao are collaborations between HT25 and the City and County of Honolulu Mayor's Office of Culture and the Arts (MOCA). They are three of thirteen artists/collectives working with MOCA on the Wahi Pana project. See www.wahipana.com for details.

[4] Brandy Nālani McDougall, "Aloha Ka'apuni, Revolutionary Aloha," Hawaii Contemporary Art Summit 2024, Honolulu Museum of Art, June 14, 2024, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JM-tnzyds5Y.

[5] In keeping with common practice, I use Kanaka Maoli, Native Hawaiian, and Kanaka 'Ōiwi interchangeably.

[6] *Aloha Nō* Curatorial Statement, Hawai'i Contemporary, accessed June, 2025, https://hawaiicontemporary.org/.

[7] Hawai'i Contemporary, "Meet #HawaiiTriennial2025 co-curator Noelle M.K.Y. Kahanu (Kanaka 'Ōiwi/Native Hawaiian) (@noellekahanu)," Instagram, March 11, 2025, https://www.instagram.com/p/DHC3xVEitcI/.

[8] Hawai'i Contemporary, *Aloha Nō: Art Summit Reader*, June 2024, https://static1.squarespace.com/static/59e143f712abd9a332920f01/t/666220b9b7a89e0dfd78a09c/1717707043166/ArtSummit_reader-web.pdf.

[9] No'u Revilla and Jamaica Heoloimeleikalani Osorio, "Aloha Is Deoccupied Love," in *Detours: A Decolonial Guide to Hawai'i*, ed. Hōkūlani Aikau and Vernadette Gonzalez (Duke University Press, 2019), 125, 129.

[10] Las Nietas de Nonó, "Aloha Aina: That Which Feeds Us," artists roundtable, Hawai'i Contemporary Art Summit, June 14, 2024.

[11] "HT25 at HoMA: Rose B. Simpson Pays Respect," Honolulu Museum of Art, February 24, 2025, https://honolulumuseum.org/pQDrdS5/ht25-at-homa--rose-b--simpson-pays-respect.

[12] Kapwani Kiwanga, "How I Became an Artist: Kapwani Kiwanga, as Told to Skye Sherwin," Art Basel, accessed June, 2025, https://www.artbasel.com/stories/how-i-became-an-artist-kapwani-kiwanga?lang=en.

[13] Stephanie Syjuco, Artist Talk, opening night of HT25, February 15, 2025.

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FRANCISCO MELLÉN BLANCO

Voices of the Pacific: Art, Tradition, and Innovation at CaixaForum Madrid

Abstract

This article reviews the exhibition Voices of the Pacific: Innovation and Tradition (CaixaForum Madrid, May 28–September 14, 2025), which featured more than 210 artifacts from the British Museum and other collections. The exhibition explored the artistic and cultural expressions of Oceanic island communities through seven thematic sections: innovation and tradition, innovators, weavers, dancers, warriors, carvers, and travelers. It gave special attention to emblematic objects such as Polynesian idols, Melanesian weaponry, Micronesian ceremonial gear, and an installation by Māori artist George Nuku.

Keywords: *Pacific Island cultures, CaixaForum Madrid, Oceanic art, British Museum, George Nuku, Indigenous representation, ethnographic exhibition, cultural heritage, museology*

Through its exhibition *Voices of the Pacific: Innovation and Tradition* (May 28–September 14, 2025), CaixaForum Madrid transported visitors to the islands of the Pacific. The exhibition showcased the cultural and artistic richness of the peoples inhabiting those archipelagoes, so distant from Spain. It featured 210 objects from the British Museum's collection—one of the most significant Pacific collections outside the region itself. Two additional pieces complemented the exhibition: a Hawaiian helmet (*mahiole*) loaned from the Museo de América in Madrid (Fig. 1) and a crocodile-head-shaped prow ornament from Papua New Guinea, loaned by the Museu Etnològic i de Cultures del Món in Barcelona.

The exhibition was curated by Dr. Julia Adams, curator of the Oceania Department at the British Museum, with support from Isabel Fuentes, director of CaixaForum Madrid, and artistic collaboration from Māori artist George Nuku, whose installation offered a striking interpretation of a plastic-polluted ocean.

Figure 1. A display case featuring two *mahiole* (helmets) and an *ʻahu ʻula* (feather cape), Hawaiian Islands (left), and a shark-tooth trident, Kiribati (right). Installation view from *Voices of the Pacific: Innovation and Tradition* at CaixaForum Madrid, May 28–September 14, 2025. Photograph courtesy of F. Mellén

A Journey Through Pacific Voices: A Cultural Dialogue

Objects from the British Museum's extensive Oceanic collection, representing around seventeen countries, was organized into seven thematic sections: Innovation and Tradition, Innovators, Weavers, Dancers, Warriors, Carvers, and Travelers. Each section highlighted the diverse talents and deep-rooted traditions of Oceanic islanders. The exhibition began with a large map of Oceania, spanning from New Guinea to Rapa Nui (Easter Island), and from Hawai'i to New Zealand; it excluded Australia in order to focus on island cultures shaped by their close relationship with the sea. These communities—expert navigators for more than 60,000 years—were in constant movement and were connected to one another hundreds of years before European contact. Their art forms are deeply interwoven with their natural environments and voyaging traditions.

Before reaching the map, visitors encountered a large display case housing several ancestral figures: a female idol (*ʻotua fefine*) from Tonga carved from whale ivory; a wooden figure from the Cook Islands; a *yipwon* from the middle Sepik region of Papua New Guinea (PNG); a wooden figure from Wuvulu Island, PNG; a painted figure from the Wosera region, PNG; a striking *moai kavakava* from Rapa Nui; a painted mask (*tapuanu*) from the Caroline Islands (Fig. 2); a human figure from Malakula Island, Vanuatu; a Māori central post (*pou tokomanawa*) from an ancestral house (*wharenui*) (Fig. 3); two ceremonial paddles or clubs from Baku Island influenced by the Solomon

Islands' spirit figure *kokorra*; and a spectacular basalt pestle shaped like a bird from PNG (Fig. 4).

Figure 2. *Tapanu* (painted mask), Caroline Islands. Wood, pigment. Installation view from *Voices of the Pacific: Innovation and Tradition* at CaixaForum Madrid, May 28–September 14, 2025. Photograph courtesy of F. Mellén

Figure 3 (left). *Pou tokomanawa* (central post for a *wharenui* [meeting house]), New Zealand. Wood. Figure 4 (right). Pestle, Aikora River, Papua New Guinea. Basalt. Installation views from *Voices of the Pacific: Innovation and Tradition* at CaixaForum Madrid, May 28–September 14, 2025. Photograph courtesy of F. Mellén

Figure 5. Model of a double-hulled canoe, Fiji. Wood, pandanus, sennit. Installation views from *Voices of the Pacific: Innovation and Tradition* at CaixaForum Madrid, May 28–September 14, 2025. Photograph courtesy of F. Mellén

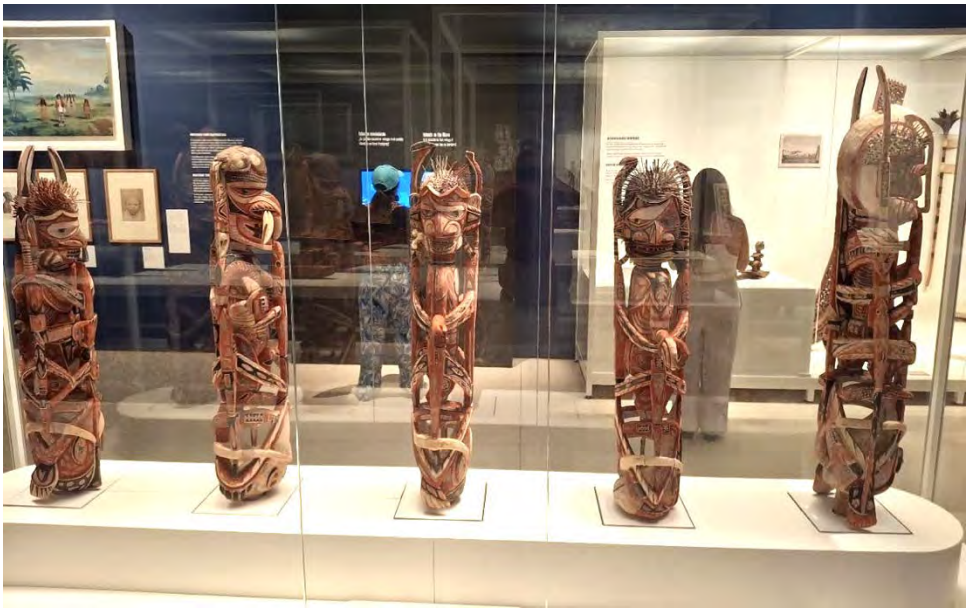


Figure 6. Five *malangan* figures, New Ireland, late nineteenth–twentieth century. Wood, pigment, shell, and plant fibers; maximum height 153.5 cm. The British Museum, London: Oc1884,0728.1, Oc1884,0728.2, Oc1884,0728.7, Oc1884,0728.9, Oc1884,0728.49. Installation view from *Voices of the Pacific: Innovation and Tradition,* CaixaForum Madrid, May 28–September 14, 2025. Photograph courtesy of F. Mellén

Elsewhere in the exhibition were several models of catamaran canoes from Fiji and Vanuatu featuring outrigger supports and triangular or crab-claw sails made from pandanus mats, replicating those used in ancient times (Fig. 5). A separate display showcased five vividly colored *malagan* figures from New Ireland, notable for their striking red and white tones (Fig. 6). Originally created to honor ancestors, these sculptures were typically later burned in elaborate ceremonial rites.

Nearby was a contemporary replica of a seventeenth-century figure of the Polynesian god A‘a from Rurutu (Austral Islands), crafted by art professor Hihirau Vaitoare (Sāmoan) of the Centre des Mètiers d’Art de la Polynésie française (Fig. 7). Alongside an *umete* (Tahitian bowl) made of black dolerite at the Museo Nacional de Antropología in Madrid (unfortunately not included in this exhibition), the original A‘a figure is among the most iconic art pieces of Polynesia. The original A‘a, in the collection of the British Museum, is on loan to the new Musée de Tahiti et des Îles in Pape‘ete until 2028.

Figure 7. Hihirau Vaitoare, replica of figure of the god A‘a from Rurutu, Austral Islands, 2020. Wood. Installation view from *Voices of the Pacific: Innovation and Tradition,* CaixaForum Madrid, May 28–September 14, 2025. Photo courtesy of F. Mellén

The original A‘a statue, taken to England in the early nineteenth century by missionaries from the London Missionary Society, is hollow with a detachable back panel sewn with coconut fiber. It lacks feet, has missing leg parts, and a damaged phallus. Its surface bears thirty small carved figures—sixteen with arms crossed over the chest, and fourteen with limbs outstretched. Vaitore composed a figure on the phallus, which is missing in the original.

Visitors interested in the original could watch a documentary about it near the replica. Another screening told the story of the legendary Polynesian canoe Hōkūle‘a, which made its first voyage from Hawai‘i to Tahiti in 1976, guided by Micronesian navigator Mau Piailug using traditional non-instrument navigation methods.

Continuing through the exhibition, a remarkable Marshall Islands navigation chart, crafted from palm ribs and two shells, was displayed. Such charts fall into three categories—*rebbelib*, *mattang*, and *meddo*—but, unfortunately, the museum did not provide the native name for this specific chart. A beautiful model war canoe (*tomako*) from the Solomon Islands—featuring the distinctive prow adorned with white cowries (*Ovula ovum*) and an image of the guardian spirit *Nguzu Nguzu*—was also on view (Fig. 8).

Figure 8. Model of a canoe, Solomon Islands, ca. 1900–1920. Wood and shell, 55 x 255 x 183.4 cm. The British Museum, London, Oc1921,1102.1. Installation view from *Voices of the Pacific: Innovation and Tradition,* CaixaForum Madrid, May 28–September 14, 2025. Photo courtesy of F. Mellén

Other display cases presented a variety of paddles and clubs (Fig. 9): a dance paddle from the Nomoi Islands (Federated States of Micronesia), a double-bladed paddle from the Caroline Islands, and a dance shield (*koka*) from

Bougainville. There were clubs such as the *gugu* from Fiji and others from the Solomon Islands. Notably absent were Solomon Islands *barava*—ornamental or currency items made from fossilized giant clam shells (*Tridacna gigas*)—and shell pendants such as *tarkola* and *tema*, which are important symbols of high social status. All are significant and representative artifacts of Solomon Islands culture, and their inclusion would have added greater breadth to the exhibition.

Figure 9. A display case showing various paddles and clubs, including: a dance paddle, Nomoi Islands, Federated States of Micronesia (wood, fiber, cotton, wool, feathers) (far left); a double-bladed paddle, Caroline Islands (wood, coir, lime, ochre) (top row, center right); and a *koka* (dance shield) from Bougainville (wood, chalk) (center row, far right). Installation view from *Voices of the Pacific: Innovation and Tradition,* CaixaForum Madrid, May 28–September 14, 2025. Photo courtesy of F. Mellén

Numerous wooden spears were also on display (Fig. 10), including a particularly fine example from the Cook Islands: the *momore'akatara*, a ceremonial spear made of heavy (*Casuarina equisetifolia*) wood. Hawaiian objects included a small feather cape (*'ahu'ula*) from The British Museum, of lesser quality than those at the Museo de América.

Figure 10. A display case showing various clubs and spears, including a *momore'akatara* (ceremonial spear), Cook Islands (wood [*Casuarina equisetifolia*]) (front, center). Installation view from *Voices of the Pacific: Innovation and Tradition,* CaixaForum Madrid, May 28–September 14, 2025. Photo courtesy of F. Mellén

Figure 11. Suit of armor, Kiribati, ca. 1800–1900. Coconut fiber, wood, human hair, and shark teeth. The British Museum, London, Oc1922.1009.1–3, Oc1972, Q.100.a, Oc.1108, and Oc1921,0221.81–82. Installation view from *Voices of the Pacific: Innovation and Tradition,* CaixaForum Madrid, May 28–September 14, 2025. Photo courtesy of F. Mellén

From Micronesia, and specifically Kiribati, was an extraordinary helmet (*te barantauti*) made from the skin of a porcupine fish; a trident weapon crafted from wood, shark teeth, fiber, and human hair; and, most striking of all, a full suit of armor, known as *bwai ni buoka* (Fig. 11). The armor was woven from coconut fiber, and included a breastplate (*te nana*) and helmet (*te bara-tekora*).

Unfortunately, some object labels failed to include the pieces' indigenous names For instance, the dance paddle (*rapa*) from Rapa Nui, the canoe (*hōe*) from Raivavae, the paddle (*cula-cula*) from Fiji, the nephrite ceremonial club (*gi okomo*) from New Caledonia, and the jamb mask (*apuoema*) from New Caledonia (Fig. 12) were all unnamed in their makers' native languages. This lack of information was particularly curious when one considers the online record of every Oceanic piece in the British Museum includes that piece's Indigenous name. In contrast, this is not the case for online records of Oceanic works held by the Museo de América. Such omissions can inadvertently reduce the richness of Pacific cultures to generic descriptions and underscores the importance of inclusive and culturally informed curatorial practice.

Figure 12. *Apuoema* (door jamb), New Caledonia. Wood. Installation view from *Voices of the Pacific: Innovation and Tradition,* CaixaForum Madrid, May 28–September 14, 2025. Photo courtesy of F. Mellén

From the Palau Islands, the exhibition included a large bird-shaped wooden bowl inlaid with mother-of-pearl birds (likely albatrosses) (Fig. 13), a ceremonial knife, and a small vessel decorated with warrior figures. Despite their labeling as Palauan, the mother-of-pearl inlays suggest Solomon Islands influence. Shields from various islands—some elaborately decorated, others modern and made from natural materials with vivid colors—shared exhibition space.

Figure 13. Bowl, Palau. Wood with snail shell inlay. Installation view from *Voices of the Pacific: Innovation and Tradition,* CaixaForum Madrid, May 28–September 14, 2025. Photo courtesy of F. Mellén

Ceramics were almost entirely absent, with only one item from Vanuatu on display: a wooden replica crafted in 2016 by artisan James Zepeta. This is understandable, as the Lapita culture, which originated in Southeast Asia and Taiwan, and then traveled east to Indonesia, Micronesia, and Melanesia, found suitable materials for pottery only on a few islands and largely disappeared upon reaching the Fiji–Sāmoa–Tonga triangle. By 1990, around eighty Lapita sites had been identified, ranging from Aitape and Aimbon (PNG) to Mulifanua in Sāmoa. In villages such as Wusi, Pepsia, and Olpot on Santo Island (Vanuatu), women still maintain pottery traditions.

Between Tradition and Innovation

The exhibition also featured contemporary textile works in the form of a wedding dress and train by Samoan-Chinese designer Paula Chan Cheuk, who specializes in wedding, bridesmaid, and pageant dresses made from barkcloth (Fig. 14). Innovation was evident not only in Chan Cheuk's elaborately crafted ensemble, but also in a range of other objects, such as a Hawaiian *pa'u* (skirt) fashioned from barkcloth printed with decorative motifs. This same impulse toward creative transformation could be observed in handbags made from recycled soda cans and stitched with plant fibers, produced by local artisans from Sāmoa, Micronesia, and elsewhere for the tourist market. Moreover, the reworking of pop culture imagery onto shields modeled after ancient forms (Fig. 15) illustrates the dynamic interplay between tradition, material experimentation, and contemporary visual culture.

Figure 14. Paula Chan Cheuk, barkcloth wedding dress and train, 2014. Paper mulberry bark, pandanus leaf, coconut fiber, mother of pearl, and *harakeke* (New Zealand flax). The British Museum, London, 2014, 2032.1.a-b. Installation view from *Voices of the Pacific: Innovation and Tradition,* CaixaForum Madrid, May 28–September 14, 2025. Photo courtesy of F. Mellén

Figure 15. Left to right: Wooden shields, including that from the Solomon Islands (bark, rattan, paint, mother of pearl; nineteenth century); New Britain (wood, pigment; early twentieth century); and two from the Wahgi people of Papua New Guinea (wood, metal, fiber, paint, plastic; twentieth century). Maximum dimensions 168 x 59 cm. The British Museum, London; Oc.8016, Oc1936,0720.282, Oc1990,09.6, Oc1990,09.2. Installation view from *Voices of the Pacific: Innovation and Tradition,* CaixaForum Madrid, May 28–September 14, 2025. Photograph courtesy of F. Mellén

The exhibition closed with *Bottle Ocean 2123*, a futuristic installation by the artist George Nuku (Fig. 16). The piece depicts marine creatures—turtles, sharks, rays, jellyfish—using only recycled plastic bottles. For Nuku, plastic is a spiritual material because of its capacity to suggest beauty. He argues that we must learn to engage with it from a philosophical and cultural perspective. His work is not merely a denunciation, but also an invitation to rethink our relationship with materials, with the earth, and with ourselves.

In summary, *Voices of the Pacific* was a valuable and visually compelling exhibition, though not without its shortcomings. Notably, unlike previous CaixaForum events, no exhibition catalogue has been published and no lectures were scheduled to deepen public understanding of Pacific Island cultures. Each object tells its own story, and many could inspire individual articles dedicated to their specific features and uses. The exhibition could be a valuable opportunity for CaixaForum to consider a future exhibition showcasing

outstanding Oceanic artifacts held in Spanish collections. Institutions such as the Museo de América, the National Museum of Anthropology, the Naval Museum, the Army Museum, Barcelona's Ethnological Museum, as well as notable private collections like those of Juan Carlos Rey Salgado and Jordi Clos, house remarkable pieces that could offer visitors a deeper appreciation of the region's cultural richness.

Figure 16. George Nuku, *Bottled Ocean 2123*, 2023. Plastic bottles and Perspex; dimensions variable. Installation view from *Voices of the Pacific: Innovation and Tradition,* CaixaForum Madrid, May 28–September 14, 2025. Photograph courtesy of F. Mellén

Francisco Mellén Blanco's work primarily encompasses the field of Pacific history, addressing not only Spanish expeditions but also anthropology and ethnology, with particular emphasis on ethnological objects from the Pacific Islands housed in Spanish museums. Now retired, he serves as a corresponding member of Academia Naval y Marítima the Naval and Maritime of Chile, an honorary member and former president of the Asociación Española de Estudios del Pacifico, and was curator in Australia and Vanuatu of Spanish Expeditions to the Pacific in the 16th–18th Centuries *(2006–07). He has received awards from Cultura Hispanica (1983) and the Australasian Hydrographic Society (2006). He has published several studies on Oceanic artifacts in Spanish museums, including the Museo de América, Museo del Ejército, Museo Naval, Museo Nacional de Antropología, and Museo Cerralbo.*

PACIFIC ARTS
Journal of the Pacific Arts Association

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Pacific Arts -- Call for Submissions

Pacific Arts, the journal of the Pacific Arts Association, has an **ONGOING OPEN CALL** for submissions on the arts of Oceania and its diasporas focusing on visual arts, material cultures, and heritage arts. The scope is temporally broad, highlighting both historical and current topics while engaging with a wide range of creative mediums, forms, and subject matter. *Pacific Arts* encourages interdisciplinary approaches to examining the political, social, economic, cultural, aesthetic, and environmental stakes in the production and study of Indigenous visual and material cultures in Oceania, past and present.

Please send full-length submissions and an abstract to pacificarts@ucsc.edu. Submissions should follow the *Pacific Arts* submission guidelines and style guide. *Pacific Arts* is a peer reviewed open access online journal published by the University of California/eScholarship and encourages broad participation and circulation.

Pacific Arts is also accepting reviews of books, media, and exhibitions that relate to visual and material cultures of Oceania. Authors, artists, museums, and publishers interested in having their work reviewed and anyone interested in writing a review should contact the editors at pacificarts@ucsc.edu.

PLEASE SUPPORT PAA & *PACIFIC ARTS*: There is no cost to contributors to publish with *Pacific Arts*. However, our editorial staff are volunteers and all of our publication costs rely entirely on your PAA membership and donations to UC Santa Cruz's Pacific Art & Visual Studies Fund. We encourage readers and contributors to join the Pacific Arts Association and/or donate to the Fund (donations, no matter how small, are very helpful and welcome).

PLEASE SUPPORT PACIFIC ARTS, ARTISTS, & THE PAA

~ Thank you for joining PAA or renewing your membership! ~

Founded in 1974 and established as an association in 1978, the Pacific Arts Association (PAA) is an international organization devoted to the study of all the arts of Oceania. PAA provides a forum for dialogue and awareness about Pacific art and culture—past, present, and future. By connecting individuals and institutions around the world, PAA encourages greater cooperation among those who are involved with the creation, study, and exhibition of Pacific art.

BENEFITS OF MEMBERSHIP:

- The peer-reviewed, open-access ***Pacific Arts* journal** features current research, creative work, reviews, and timely information about important events.
- The online **Pacific Currents speaker series** provides an internationally accessible venue for artists, scholars, and museum professionals to share current work.
- PAA's triennial **International Symposium** takes place in alternating venues across the globe and includes special tours, performances, exhibitions, and presentations of academic and artistic research on the arts of Oceania.
- Each of the **three PAA chapters** (Pacific, North America, and Europe) hold symposia or events. PAA-Europe holds a meeting in Europe annually.
  Members have the opportunity to meet and participate in a PAA-sponsored session at the **College Art Association annual conference**.

PAA's MISSION:

- Build awareness of the state of the arts in all parts of Oceania.
- Encourage international understanding among the nations involved in the arts of Oceania.
- Promote high standards of research, interpretation, and reporting on the arts of Oceania.
- Stimulate interest in teaching Oceanic art courses, especially at the tertiary educational level.
- Encourage greater cooperation among the institutions and individuals who are associated with the arts of Oceania.
- Encourage high standards of conservation and preservation of the material culture in and of Oceanic arts.

MEMBERSHIP: US$50 for professional individuals and institutions, US$35 for visual and performing artists, students, and retired persons. Individuals and institutions wishing to become members of PAA can visit the membership page of the PAA website www.pacificarts.org/membership.

PAA ONLINE SPEAKER SERIES

Pacific Currents Presents:

Nicolas Garnier
Director, Centre for Social Research, Divine Word University, PNG

Creating under Constraints: Bags from Beon, a Prison in Madang Province, Papua New Guinea

November 2025
(Date/time–TBD; schedule and Zoom registration link will be sent to PAA members)

In most PNG prisons, male inmates embroider rice bags. In Beon, prisoners have developed another but specific production of bags made with rigid nylon strings. This material, highly valued in Madang, offers a strategic medium because it is not (yet) a commercial production impacted by tourist trade nor the expectations of local politicians and institutions. Furthermore, this recent production offers an opportunity to understand the mechanisms that enable the development of new art forms.

Producing artworks in prison must consider the specific social context of their creation: isolation, restriction of movement, incapacity to regulate access to material, and often being the object of arbitrary sanction from prison administrators. Analysis of bag production offers an opportunity to study a key aspect of the prison economy and its multiple constraints. Based on over two years of research and interaction with three groups of prisoners at Beon Correctional Institution (the prison of Madang in PNG), Nicolas Garnier examines nylon bag production in a dialectic between what is allowed and forbidden; the way prisoners access materials from the outside world; and various forms of exchange that reveal unsuspected aspects of social relations in prison—among the prisoners, with guards, and with the outer world—as well as relations with family members whose frequency of visits constitute the most notorious variable of this economic system.

Nicolas Garnier (PhD, Habilitation) is a cultural anthropologist, artist, and director for the Centre of Social Research at Divine Word University (Madang, Papua New Guinea). He was previously the dean for Research and Postgraduate Studies at the University of Papua New Guinea; Acting Chair of the National Cultural Commission (Papua New Guinea); chief curator for the Pacific Collections at the Musée du quai Branly – Jacques Chirac in Paris. His anthropological expertise concerns Papua New Guinea, Pacific art, and rituals of manhood.

PAA-EUROPE NEWS

Announcing Dr. Karen Jacobs as the new Vice President of PAA-Europe!

Karen Jacobs is Professor of Art and Museum Anthropology at the Sainsbury Research Unit for the Arts of Africa, Oceania and the Americas, University of East Anglia. She has worked on various international research projects, focusing on the Kamoro region in West Papua, on Polynesian Visual Arts, the Arts of Fiji, Fijian youth, climate change and material heritage of British missions in Africa and the Pacific. Her research resulted in a range of exhibitions and publications. Exhibition projects include *Pacific Encounters: Art and Divinity in Polynesia 1760-1860* (Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, 2006; Paris Museé du quai Branly- Jacques Chirac, 2008), *Art and the Body* (Fiji Museum, 2014) and *Fiji: Art and Life in the Pacific* (Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, 2016-17) and she was curatorial consultant for *Darwin in Paradise Camp: Yuki Kihara* (2025). Book projects include *This is not a grass skirt* (2019), *Collecting Kamoro* (Jacobs 2012) and *Trophies, Relics and Curios? Missionary Heritage from Africa and the Pacific* (Jacobs, Knowles & Wingfield 2015).

Very special thanks to Dr. Wonu Veys for serving as the PAA-E Vice President for the past twelve years!

PAA XIVth INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM

Oceanic Blazing Forms: Memory, Place-Making, and Imagination

June 23 – June 27, 2026
Wereldmuseum Leiden

The 14th International Symposium of the *Pacific Arts* Association entitled Oceanic Blazing Forms: Memory, Place-making and Imagination will take place at the Wereldmuseum Leiden, the Netherlands from 23 to 27 June 2026. The symposium ties in with the exhibition Time for Papua, opening on 12 February 2026 and closing on 7 January 2027. For the first time in forty years, the Wereldmuseum is showcasing a selection of its western New Guinea collection as well as especially commissioned work. Visitors are invited to explore the richness, intricacy and making traditions of the art and material culture of this former Dutch colony. In addition, the public will discover concepts of time that relate to memory, place-making and imagination.

The symposium is further part of a series of gatherings aimed at rethinking global art histories through the expansive and intellectual space of the Wereldmuseum, which challenges the structures and assumptions of both art history and anthropology through new approaches to material culture. The title of these gatherings 'blazing forms', taken from Margaret Danner's poem The Convert, that initially applied to the blazing power of African art and material culture is here applied to Oceania to become Oceanic Blazing Forms: Memory, Place-making and Imagination. For more information on this series, visit materialculture.nl. For more information on the symposium, visit https://pacificarts.org/announcing-paa-xiv-international-symposium/.

CONFERENCE

History of Photography Panel

Pacific History Association Conference:
"Resilience in the Face of Adversity"
National University of Sāmoa, Apia
December 2–5, 2025

The 2025 Pacific History Association (PHA) conference will be held in Apia, at the National University of Sāmoa. It will be preceded by two workshops, one for post-grads (a "Master" class) and one for local history teachers.

At the 2023 PHA conference at Warrnambool, the History of Photography panel was, ***"Across the Seas: The History of Photography in the Pacific Islands,"*** and included papers from across the broad subfields of art, literature, anthropology, museum studies, fashion, travel, journalism, and media. The 2025 panel uses the same label and features empirical or theoretical examination of individual images, photographers, studios, albums, postcards, lantern slides, travel photography, official reports, expedition photography, domestic photography, illustrated books, photojournalism, and propaganda.

The first History of Photography panel at the PHA was at UH-Hilo in 1996, followed by panels at each subsequent PHA bi-annual conference. Papers from previous PHA photography panels have been published as special issues of *Pacific Studies* and the *Journal Pacific History*. Those from the Cambridge PHA 2018 appeared as a special double issue of the *Journal of New Zealand and Pacific Studies.*

The panel will consist of twenty-minute papers followed by ten minutes of questions, presented with accompanying song/dance/talk, and/or PowerPoint. The National University of Sāmoa campus has full projection facilities and internet access.

For information on the photography session please contact the co-chairs, **Heather Waldroup** (waldrouphl@appstate.edu) and **Max Quanchi** (Quanchi.amqfu@gmail.com).

Additional conference information can be found on the Pacific History Association website: https://nus.edu.ws/26pha/

CONFERENCE

ASAO Annual Meeting
February 4–8, 2026
Online
https://www.asao.org/

The **Association for Social Anthropology in Oceania (ASAO)** is an international scholarly society dedicated to the anthropology of the Pacific. ASAO welcomes anyone interested in the lives of Pacific people, including scholars working in Native/Indigenous Studies, Pacific Studies, Cultural Studies, and other disciplines.

For over fifty years, ASAO has served to connect scholars from across the globe and to further knowledge of the Pacific. Our annual meeting has played a role in the origin of several important pieces of Pacific scholarship, including Epeli Hauʻofa's essay "Our Sea of Islands" and Marshall Sahlins's "Historical Metaphors and Mythical Realities."

Our annual meetings are intimate, discussion-based, and cooperative, especially in support of developing topics for publication. ASAO has a book series and a special publication series. Many other publications have emerged from ASAO sessions, including but not limited to those listed in this cumulative bibliography.

ASAO also publishes a newsletter three times per year, with useful information such as annual officer reports, meeting session reports, and community updates.

ASAO supports the full participation of Pacific Islanders through the Pacific Islands Scholars Award (PISA) and encourages members to return information to the source communities from which it came through a program called the Grant to Return Indigenous Knowledge to Pacific Islands Communities (GRIKPIC).

FELLOWSHIP OPPORTUNITY

Mellon Curatorial Fellow on Oceania
Fowler Museum, University of California–Los Angeles

The Fowler Museum at UCLA seeks a Mellon Curatorial Fellow to participate in a research project devoted to the Museum's Oceanic art collections. The project, supported by a major grant from the Mellon Foundation, will focus on Oceanic objects from the Sir Henry Wellcome Collection that were donated to the Fowler between 1965–67. The Curatorial Fellow will work alongside key Fowler staff: the Director, Senior Curator of African Arts and Manager of Curatorial Affairs, Director of Collections Management and Registration, Head Conservator, and Collections Information Coordinator.

The project (**New Relational Ethics in the Museum: University Museums and Indigenous Arts from Formerly Colonized Regions**) has the goal of documenting and understanding the full complexity of a group of Oceanic objects formerly in the Wellcome Collection from the perspectives of their roles, meanings, materiality, and provenance. Essential to this process is the work of robust and complete cataloguing of each object, including past attributions, cultural affiliations, collection history, and materials analysis.

Over the course of thirty-three months the Mellon Fellow will be responsible for carrying out in-depth research on a selected group of Oceanic objects from the Wellcome Collection. These objects will be selected in consultation with other team members with a goal of providing the Fellow an opportunity to deepen an existing area of expertise or establish a new one. As part of this effort, the Fellow will coordinate and compile relevant sources on the objects' history – both as collected and as part of a larger cultural tradition, essentially creating a biography for each. This detail-oriented research will be augmented by research travel and community consultations. At the end of the project, we expect that the Fellow will have a deep background in understanding the role objects play in museum collections, the role they once played in the cultures that created them, and the role they continue to play in the ongoing conversations about cultural patrimony and source communities. The Mellon Curatorial Fellow reports to the Senior Curator of African Arts and Manager of Curatorial Affairs.

Deadline: November 16, 2025, 8:59 p.m. PT.
The full description can be found here: https://jobs.ucla.edu/jobs/8638

INTERNATIONAL WORKSHOP

The ARC discovery grant project "Unfreedom, Voices, Redress: Plantation Cultures of the Western Pacific," the Bonn Center for Dependency and Slavery Studies, and the Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum, Cologne invite paper proposals for the international workshop **"Plantation Lives, Gender, and Material Culture: Queen Emma's Networks and the (Post)Colonial Anglo-German Pacific"** to be held at the University of Bonn and the RJM, Cologne from June 17-19, 2026.

(continued on the next page)

During her lifetime, Emma Kolbe/Forsayth/Farrell (née Coe), known as 'Queen Emma of New Guinea', was one of the most powerful private individuals and economically successful entrepreneurs in the Pacific—a woman of color in a world dominated by men. Of Samoan and American descent, she and her sister Phebe Parkinson were intimately familiar with both Pacific Islander and American Christian lifestyles (Salesa, 2014). Owning more than 60,000 hectares of plantations in New Britain, New Ireland, Bougainville, and various smaller islands (a region later occupied by the German Empire), Emma Kolbe traded not only in copra, cotton and other natural produce but also people—for whose transport she also maintained ships. Around 1000 South Sea Islanders (as well as several Europeans) worked for her. Kolbe's main residence, Gunantambu in Kokopo, was considered the social hub of the Gazelle Peninsula, from where she controlled her large network including family members (siblings, children, and husbands), trading partners, and politicians. This network, which stretched from New Guinea to Sāmoa, the USA and Australia, also facilitated the sale of artefacts and natural history specimens, yet another means of financing the expansion of her businesses. At the end of the nineteenth century, many German and European ethnographical museums acquired artefacts collected and sold by Queen Emma's sister Phoebe and her husband, Richard Parkinson (Buschmann, 2023).

Using the figure of Queen Emma and her networks as a starting point, the workshop seeks to examine gendered lives on plantations as well as practices of coerced labor and forced migration. The material traces and histories of these in the Anglo-German Pacific, and in PNG in particular, at the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth century will be a key focus. Participants are invited to explore topics such as the formation of varying (and at times competing) notions of indigeneity, of self and other, gendered protocols, and regional, national, and transcolonial trade and personal affiliations. The workshop is also interested in questions pertaining to the legacies of these processes, how they are remembered today and the (textual, embodied, material, visual, sonic) archives available to study them. The workshop thus aims at fostering an interdisciplinary exchange among scholars who work on Pacific history, dependency studies, women's history, gender studies, life writing, missionary history, cultural anthropology, provenance research, and museum and heritage studies.

Proposal should include a 250-word abstract and a short bio. Please submit your proposal by email to the organizers Pia Wiegmink (wiegmink@uni-bonn.de) and Oliver Lueb (oliver.lueb@stadt-koeln.de) by **Nov. 24, 2025**. We will send acceptance notifications by early December. Funds to pay for speakers' travel and accommodation are available to a limited extent.

Find the full Call for Papers **here** (https://www.dependency.uni-bonn.de/images/pdf-files/call-for-papers/workshop_queen-emmas-networks.pdf)

International workshop web page: https://www.dependency.uni-bonn.de/en/outreach/news-bcdss/call-for-papers-3

NEW EXHIBITION

Reopening of the Arts of Oceania galleries at the Metropolitan Museum of Art

The Met's Arts of Oceania galleries returned in May 2025, in a reimagined Michael C. Rockefeller Wing. Following a multiyear renovation, the new galleries feature over 650 stellar works from the Museum's remarkable collection of Oceanic art, drawn from over 140 distinct cultures in a region of astonishing diversity that covers almost one-third of the earth's surface and continues to capture the global imagination.

The gallery includes monumental artworks from the large island of New Guinea and the coastal archipelagos that stretch beyond its shores to the north, central, and eastern Pacific, as well as the two neighboring regions of Australia and Island Southeast Asia, whose Indigenous communities all share a common ancestry. Exceptional artworks guide visitors through a wealth of stories relating to origins, initiation, and ancestral power and include some of the greatest achievements of Oceania's visual artists: elaborately carved ancestral figures from ceremonial houses and spectacular ritual regalia, such as towering slit drums, crocodile reliquaries, and dazzling turtle shell masks from the coastal regions.

THE MET

https://www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/arts-of-oceania

Image Credit: Installation view of the new Oceania Galleries, Michael C. Rockefeller Wing, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City. Photograph © The Met, https://www.metmuseum.org/departments/oceanic-art

EXHIBITION

Contemporary Painting in Papua New Guinea: Mathias Kauage and His Family

De Young Museum, San Francisco, March 30, 2024 – March 15, 2026

Mathias Kauage (ca. 1944–2003) is acclaimed for his boldly colorful paintings of a world radically changing around him in the late twentieth century. *Contemporary Painting in Papua New Guinea: Mathias Kauage and His Family* at the de Young Museum in San Francisco features four paintings from the permanent collection, including a new acquisition, on view for the first time. During his lifetime, Mathias experienced dramatic societal shifts — not only during the decades under colonial Australian administration but also after Papua New Guinea achieved independence in 1975. Both periods are a focus of his work. In the late 1970s, he led the contemporary arts movement in the newly independent country, which explored nationhood and technological advancement. Later works by Mathias, his wife Elizabeth (Elisabet), and their family also addressed social issues such as the onset of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. The circle of artists working in their style grew to encompass their children, including nephew and adopted son Apa Hugo. They, along with Elizabeth, continue their father's artistic legacy today as professional painters.

https://www.famsf.org/exhibitions/papua-new-guinea-mathias-kauage

Image Credit: Mathias Kauage (Mingu Village, Kundiawa-Gembogl District, Chimbu [Simbu] Province, now in the independent country of Papua New Guinea, ca. 1944–2003). *Kauage Flies to Scotland for Opening of New Museum of Contemporary Art*, 1999. Acrylic on canvas. Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, Museum purchase, Phyllis C. Wattis Fund for Major Accessions, INC2023.66. Photograph by Randy Dodson. Courtesy of the Estate of Mathias Kauage and Rebecca Hossack Gallery, London

EXHIBITION

The Stars We Do Not See: Australian Indigenous Art

National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C., October 18, 2025 – March 1, 2026

This eye-opening exhibition introduces North American audiences to the varied visual iconographies of Indigenous Australia, which is made up of more than 250 distinct Indigenous nations. Explore this rich and living history of creativity through over 200 works made by more than 130 artists. Drawn exclusively from the collection of Melbourne's National Gallery of Victoria, *The Stars We Do Not See* offers a rare opportunity to experience some of the most significant examples of modern and contemporary Australian Indigenous art. Charting watershed moments in Indigenous art from the late 19th century to the present, this exhibition reveals a rich history of creativity that predates the arrival of the British.

https://www.nga.gov/exhibitions/stars-we-do-not-see-australian-indigenous-art

Other venues
Denver Art Museum, Colorado, April 19–July 26, 2026
Portland Art Museum, Oregon, September 5, 2026–January 3, 2027
Peabody Essex Museum, Massachusetts, February 28–June 13, 2027
Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, July 31, 2027–January 9, 2028

Image Credit: Tiger Palpatja, *Wati Wanampi Tjukurpa*, 2010, synthetic polymer paint on canvas, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, © Tiger Palpatja/Copyright Agency, 2024

EXHIBITION

Islands Beyond Blue: Nikki Hastings Fall and Treasures from the Oceania Collection

Denver Art Museum

The arts of Oceania gallery at the Denver Art Museum (DAM) will reopen with the presentation of a new temporary exhibition, *Islands Beyond Blue: Niki Hastings-McFall and Treasures from the Oceania Collection.* This presentation showcases the work of celebrated contemporary artist Niki Hastings-McFall, who will create site-specific work in conversation with works from the DAM's Arts of Oceania collection.

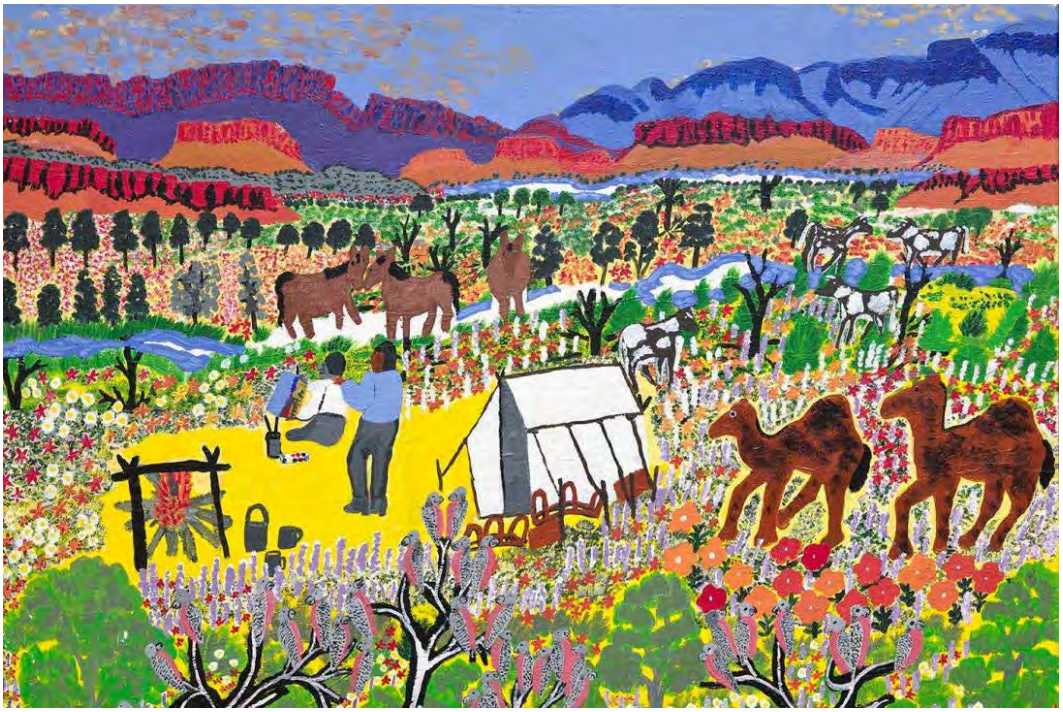
Hastings-McFall, who is of Sāmoan and Pākehā descent, has been credited with shepherding contemporary Pacific art onto an international stage. Known for her large-scale and immersive "lei bombing" installations, she will use hundreds of synthetic lei to create an installation. Her work will be presented in dialogue with approximately 25 *treasures*—Pacific Peoples prefer the term "treasures" over "objects"—from the DAM's collection that illustrate regional historic arts alongside new innovations.

This inaugural exhibition aims to dispel romantic notions of the Pacific Islands as a tourist's paradise through a nuanced exploration of the area's vibrant cultural landscape, challenging visitors to examine their perception of this vast and extremely diverse region. A full reinstallation of the arts of Oceania gallery, opening in 2024, will further highlight the museum's holdings of approximately 1,000 treasures that represent the vast artistic heritage of Oceania.

https://www.denverartmuseum.org/en/exhibitions/islands-beyond-blue

Image Credit: Nikki Hastings-McFall, *No Man Is an Island (With Atomic Rainbow)*, 2023, Mixed media. © Nikki Hastings-McFall. Installation photo © Denver Art Museum

EXHIBITION



‘Great and Small’: Kindred Creatures in Indigenous Australian Art

Queensland Art Gallery/Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane
June 21, 2025 – May 3, 2027

Animals have played a central part in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and spiritual beliefs for over 60,000 years. Native fauna form an integral part of relationships with Country, in community, and are a foundation of economies, identity, and sustainability. Over many millennia of co-existence, animals have been central to survival as a food source, for First Nations people they are also absorbed into lore and culture as images of totemic power and into the ancestral creation stories that link people, land, and animals. *‘Great and small’* is a celebration of these connections.

Curator: Sophia Nampitjimpa Sambono (Jingili people)
https://collection.qagoma.qld.gov.au/page/kindred-creatures-great-and-small
https://collection.qagoma.qld.gov.au/node/57744

Image credit: Irene Mbitjana Entata / Arrernte/Luritja people / Northern Territory Australia 1946–2014 / *Albert and Rex painting* 2003 / Synthetic polymer paint on linen / 90 x 120.5cm / Purchased 2003. Queensland Art Gallery Foundation / Collection: QAGOMA / © Irene Mbitjana Entata

EXHIBITION

Our Bodies are Memories of Our Bodies: Siapo ma Solo

The Pacific Island Ethnic Art Museum, Long Beach, CA, October 18, 2025–TBD

Siapo—indigenous Samoan barkcloth abstraction—and *solo*—poetry in the Samoan genre and worldview, here composed in English—by *Fa'afafine*, non-binary Samoan artist Dan Taulapapa McMullin. Printed on cloth with ink painting, these works embody the *fa'asamoa* understanding that the body itself is an archive, carrying ancestral and personal memory through the *mana* of social and environmental relationships. Taulapapa's *siapo* abstractions draw from sea geometries and mountain rhythms as indigenous heritage and moreover as an ever-shifting continuum, while the solo poems retain the cadence, imagery, and interwoven logic of *gagana Sāmoa*, each line a patterned surface of sound and sense. Complicating the Western partition between past and present, body and history, this exhibition invites entry into Pacific poetics where memory moves in cycles, returning like the tide to all the shores it has known and will know. Carried on cloth are imprints of ancestral siapos, cared for by Pasifika diaspora.

https://www.pieam.org/exhibits

EXHIBITION

Mere Porjav [I am remembering] – Shivanjani Lal

Umbrella Studio Contemporary Arts, Townsville City, Queensland
September 19 – November 2, 2025

The works in *Mere Porvaj [I Am Remembering]* speak to a history that has been forgotten, the labor of women, and the love of a land that continues to hold them. The pieces in this new body of work explore print making, textiles, objects, and a song that holds it all together. Offering a meditation on who gets to remember but also small moments of joy and prayer that allow a community to continue and persist.

Shivanjani Lal is a Fijian-Australian artist and curator whose work uses personal grief to account for ancestral loss. Recent works have used story-telling, objects, and video to account for lost Girmitiya (Indenture) stories from the Indian and Pacific oceans, centering women's perspectives. Truth-telling and monument-making has become a focal point of Lal's research, attempting to decipher what has been lost and future possibilities.

https://www.umbrella.org.au/mere-porvaj/

Image Credit: Shivanjani Lal, *Mere Porvaj [I Am Remembering]* (installation detail, in situ at Linden New Art), 2024. Photograph: Simon Strong, courtesy Shivanjani Lal and Linden New Art

EXHIBITION

Maree Clarke: Seeing the Invisible

Canberra Museum and Gallery, Canberra, August 2 – November 23, 2025

Maree Clarke—Yorta Yorta/Wamba Wamba/Mutti Mutti/Boonwurrung multi-disciplinary artist—presents a group of newly made, supersized scale Reed Necklaces. Their giant size pays tribute to the cultural strength that the original object holds, compelling us to notice its beauty and the power of its story, and to also acknowledge the scale of the loss felt by her people.

Clarke's research into the history of these objects has seen her travel extensively nationally and internationally to research and investigate holdings of cultural materials in institutional and private collections. With this background, Clarke was invited to visit Canberra and spend time on Country with the Ginninderry reed necklace that was made in 1862 by Aboriginal girls and gifted to Emma Minnie Palmer on the eve of her wedding. The necklace is now on display in the Canberra/Kamberri exhibition on loan from Catherine Palmer.

https://www.cmag.com.au/exhibitions/maree-clarke

Image Credit: Maree Clarke collecting reeds, ACT, 2025

EXHIBITION

Tiaki Ora ∞ Protecting Life: Anton Forde

Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, Norwich, England
August 3, 2025 – April 19, 2026

Anton Forde's (b.1973), Invercargill, Aotearoa (New Zealand) monumental installation of 81 over-life-size figures, *Papare Eighty.one* (2024) with Shiree Reihana, is shown in the UK for the first time in a new site-specific configuration and incorporating one of the earliest surviving wooden Māori figures in Europe, held in the Sainsbury Centre's collection.

Forde's work connects with the peaceful actions of the Māori community at Parihaka, New Zealand in November 1881, in the face of a British colonial invasion, and the many examples of similar world-wide powerful peaceful responses that have been inspired by Parihaka. It is a call for *kotahitanga*: unity, togetherness and solidarity. It shows that collective action can safeguard the future of our communities for generations to come, without need for killing – both physically and culturally.

https://sainsburycentre.ac.uk/whats-on/tiaki-ora-protecting-life-anton-forde/

Image Credit: Anton Forde, *Papare Eighty.one*, 2024, at Pātaka Art + Museum. Photo by Mark Tantrum

EXHIBITION

Wastelands

Auckland Art Gallery Toi O Tāmaki, Auckland, Aotearoa/New Zealand
June 7, 2025 – February 15, 2026

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki has announced the acquisition of *Wastelands* (2024) by contemporary artist **Brett Graham** (Ngāti Korokī Kahukura, Tainui). The sculpture, originally commissioned for the Venice Biennale, will go on display at the gallery in May 2025.

Wastelands is a reinterpretation of a pātaka (Māori storehouse), adorned with carvings of tuna (eels), referencing Māori food economies and the environmental impact of colonial land policies. It reflects the legacy of the 1858 Waste Lands Act, which severely impacted Māori land rights and the ecological significance of the Waikato River. It addresses themes of colonial history, ecological challenges, and the enduring relationship between Māori communities and the land.

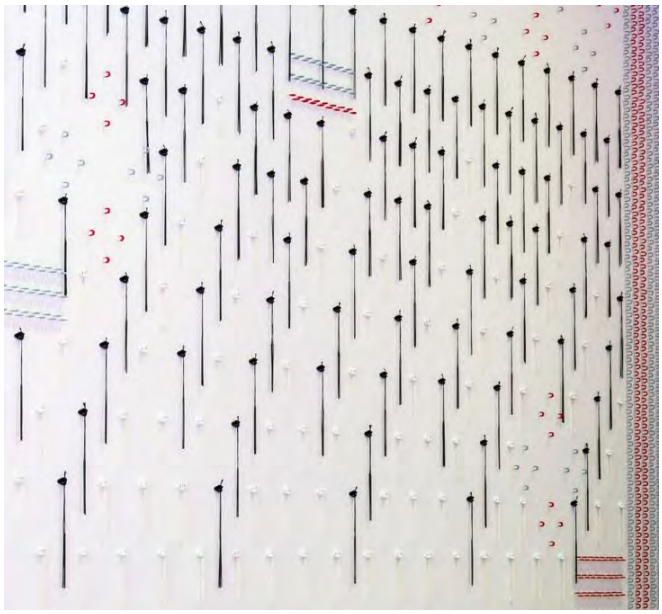
The sculpture challenges colonial narratives, while offering poignant reflections on cultural identity, environmental stewardship, and the impact of colonial-era policies on Māori land rights.

Image Credit: Brett Graham *Wastelands*, 2024. Installation: 60th International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia, Stranieri Ovunque – Foreigners Everywhere. Photo by Marco Zorzanello. Courtesy of La Biennale di Venezia

EXHIBITION

Mataaho Collective: Hautāmiro

Dunedin Public Art Gallery
Dunedin, Aotearoa/New Zealand
February 25, 2025 – February 15, 2026



Extending across twenty metres, the work creates meeting points between weaving traditions of kākahu Māori (Māori garments) and the introduction of wool by British and European migrants. Inspired by the dynamic visual language of hukahuka whakarākei (the adornments of customary kākahu), *Hautāmiro* acknowledges many things – Māori innovation, ancestral knowledge, and the many ties that bind people together.

Mataaho Collective (est. 2012) have been working in Ōtepoti Dunedin as part of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery Aotearoa Visiting Artist Programme, supported by Creative New Zealand Toi Aotearoa.

Hautāmiro will be accompanied all week by a live stream of **Te Matatini o Te Kāhui Maunga 2025**, the world's largest kapa haka competition, which is taking place this year in Ngāmotu New Plymouth. Watch on our large foyer screens as 55 kapa from across Aotearoa take to the atamira (stage), screening from Tuesday 25 February to Saturday 1 March, 2025.

https://dunedin.art.museum/news/hautamiro/

Image Credit: Mataaho Collective **Hautāmiro** 2025. Wool, harakeke, muka, plastic, metal fixings. Installation detail

EXHIBITION

Emily Kam Kngwarray

Tate Modern, London, UK, July 10, 2025 – January 11, 2026

Renowned Australian artist Emily Kam Kngwarray (c.1914–1996) created compelling, powerful works that reflect her extraordinary life as an Anmatyerr woman born in Alhalker in the Sandover region of the Northern Territory of Australia.

One of the world's most significant painters to emerge in the late 20th century, her lived experience and cultural connections to her Country was translated into vibrant batiks and later into monumental paintings on canvas. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, the concept of Country encompasses the lands, skies and waters to which they are deeply connected, over countless generations. Country is a shared place of spiritual, social, and geographical origins. Kngwarray's art embodies her detailed knowledge of the places where she lived throughout her life with layered motifs representing the plants, animals, and geological features that formed the desert ecosystems around her.

Discover rich textiles, paintings, film, and audio elements that embody the expansive scope of Kngwarray's Ancestral Country and culture.

https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/emily-kam-kngwarray

Image Credit: Emily Kam Kngwarray, *Ntang Dreaming* 1989 National Gallery of Australia. © Estate of Emily Kam Kngwarray / DACS 2024

EXHIBITION

Jasmine Togo-Brisby: Ungeographic

Pataka Art + Museum, Porirua, Aotearoa/New Zealand
July 25, 2025 – November 9, 2025

Jasmine Togo-Brisby has been pivotal in raising awareness of Australian South Sea Islanders, the Australian-born descendants of people brought to Australia as "indentured laborers" from over eighty Moana nations between 1847 and 1904. Her own great-great-grandparents were taken from Vanuatu to work as domestic servants. For over a decade, Jasmine has created large artworks that draw on icons and materials of the Pacific slave trade to create a specific visual language unique to South Sea Islanders' histories and experiences. Together, Jasmine's works can be read as a form of counter-mapping. Like a red thread strung across a corkboard, Jasmine's art practice crosses geographical and contextual divides to connect the places and spaces, fragments and traces where South Sea Islanders can be found.

This mid-career survey exhibition includes photography, video, and installations and is accompanied by a beautiful publication of the same name. Designed by Extended Whānau, it features texts by Jasmine Togo-Brisby, Simone Togo-Brisby, Anna Arabindan-Kesson, Ioana Gordon-Smith, Ruth McDougall, Imelda Miller, and Nina Tonga.

https://pataka.org.nz/whats-on/exhibitions/jasmine-togo-brisby-ungeographic/

Image credit: Jasmine Tot-Brisby, *Bitter Sweet*, 2016. Unrefined sugar, resin, individual dimensions: 14 x 19 x 14.5 cm, dimensions variable

EXHIBITION

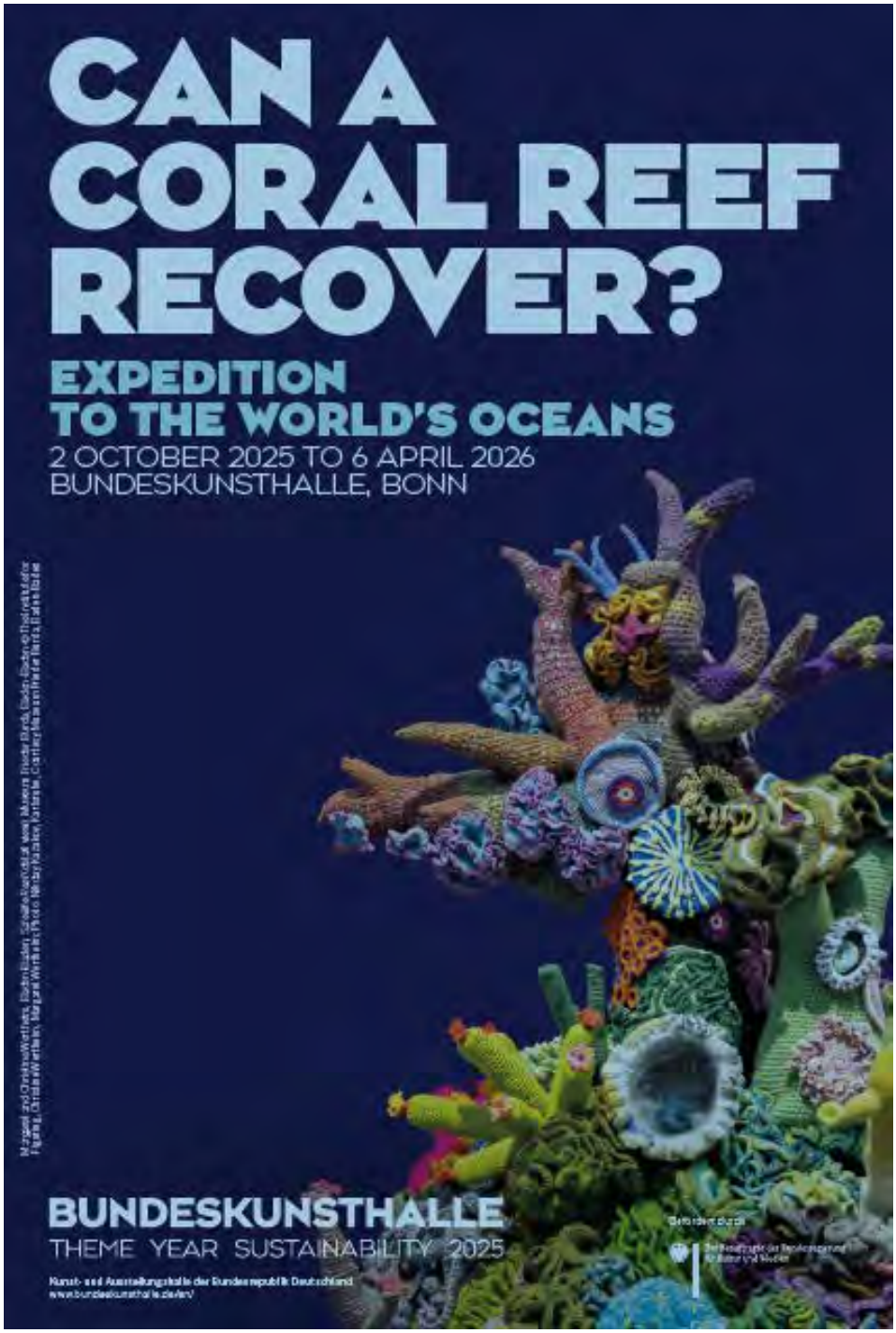


Image credit: Margaret and Christine Wertheim, Baden-Baden, *Satellite Reef* (detail shots), Museum Frieder Burda, Baden-Baden © The Institute for Figuring, Christine Wertheim, Margaret Wertheim; photo: Nikolay Kazakov, Karlsruhe, courtesy of Museum Frieder Burda, Baden-Baden

(additional exhibition information on the following page)

EXPEDITION TO THE WORD'S OCEANS

OCTOBER 2, 2025 TO APRIL 6, 2026

Bundeskunsthalle, Bonn

www.bundeskunsthalle.de

A captivating journey into the deep blue.

The oceans are the cradle of life and Earth's largest connected ecosystem. Covering 70% of the planet's surface, they produce over half of our atmospheric oxygen and host millions of species. Yet only 5% of their depths have been explored—making them more mysterious than the Moon.

This immersive exhibition invites you to discover the oceans as cultural, scientific, and imaginative spaces. It reveals the beauty and diversity of underwater habitats while addressing the threats they face from pollution, overfishing, and climate change. Since the dawn of globalization, the seas have been arenas of trade, migration, and exchange—and sources of longing, fear, and creativity.

THE DEEP SEA UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL
DIGITAL EXPEDITIONS INTO UNKNOWN WORLDS

Two spectacular installations bring the deep sea to life: A virtual descent takes you from the ocean's surface to the bottom of the Mariana Trench. In a retro-futuristic cabin inspired by Jules Verne's Nautilus, you'll encounter glowing jellyfish, transparent molluscs, and the legendary colossal squid. At the ocean floor, a VR lab lets you dive to the wreck of HMS Endurance, resting 3,000 meters deep in Antarctica—an unreachable place made virtually real.

Expedition to the World's Oceans makes the invisible visible and the unfathomable tangible. It shows that the deep sea is not out of reach—it's part of our world: fragile, vital, and full of wonder.

An exhibition of the Bundeskunsthalle in cooperation with GEOMAR Helmholtz-Centre for Ocean Research Kiel.

Art and Exhibition Hall of the Federal Republic of Germany
Helmut-Kohl-Allee 4, 53113 Bonn
T +49 228 9171–200
info@bundeskunsthalle.de
www.bundeskunsthalle.de
facebook.com/bundeskunsthalle
instagram.com/bundeskunsthalle
#ExpeditionWeltmeere, #Bundeskunsthalle

FILM SCREENING

NFSA Restores: *Tukana-Husat i asua*

(National Film and Sound Archive of Australia)
Arc Cinema, Canberra, Nov. 4, 2025, 6:00 PM

Tukana–Husat I asua (who's to blame) follows the story of a university dropout who returns to his village in Buka Passage, Bougainville. He drifts into rootlessness among bad companions, becoming progressively alienated from his parents and village life, with tragic consequences.

Considered Papua New Guinea's most significant feature film, *Tukana* is the result of a unique collaboration between Australian director Chris Owen, who was instrumental in the establishment of the National Film Institute in Goroka, Papua New Guinea, and Albert Toro, a celebrated writer, director, actor and MP, known as the father of PNG film.

Tukana has been digitally restored by the NFSA in partnership with Spectrum Films and gifted to the Institute to commemorate 50 years of Papua New Guinea's Independence. The restoration builds on a four-year co-design project with the Institute, assisting them to better preserve and access their films, with funding from the Australian Government's International Cultural Diplomacy and Arts Fund. This special screening will open with formal remarks celebrating the restoration of *Tukana*, and the ongoing partnership that made it possible.

Directors: Chris Owen & Albert Toro; Writer: Albert Toro; Producer: Chris Owen; Cinematographer: Chris Owen; Sound recordist: Les McLaren; Editor: Les McLaren; Distributor: Ronin Films; Cast: Albert Toro, Regina Talsa, Wenceslas Noruke, Timothy Hamanin, Emily Beani, Francisca Semosa

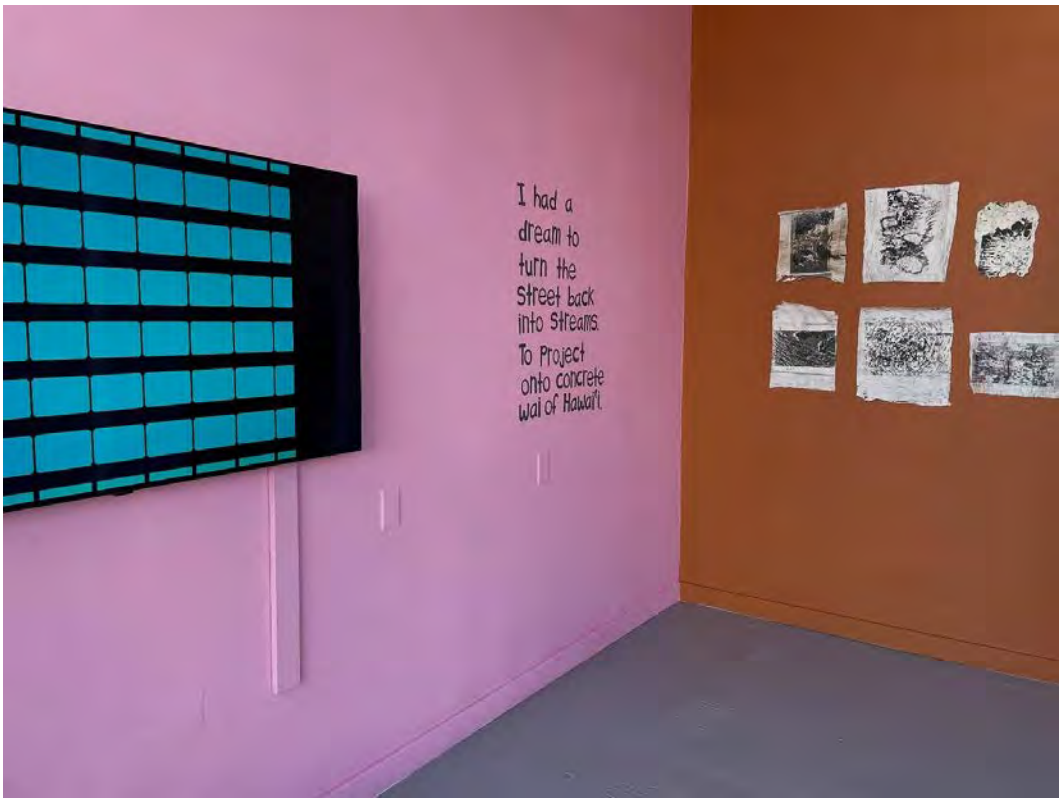
Additional information: https://tickets.nfsa.gov.au/events/nfsa-restores-tukana-husat-i-asua?mc_cid=a4ad98d1af&mc_eid=f9fd4461df

Image credit: Still from *Tukana-Husat I asua*, 1982. Directed by Albert Toro and Chris Owen

EXHIBITION

Sione Faletau—Tau‘a‘alo (2023)

Exhibition at Kadist Foundation, San Francisco, Oct. 9 – Nov. 9, 2025



Devon Bella presents a media exhibition in conjunction with ALOHA NŌ Hawai‘i Triennial (HT25) programming at Kadist Foundation featuring *Tau‘a‘alo* (2023) by HT25 Artist **Sione Faletau (Tonga)**. Visible both from the street and within the gallery, the installation extends the triennial’s themes into the San Francisco neighborhood, offering passersby and residents an immersive invitation to continue engaging with the narratives long after the screening.

Additional information:
https://kadist.org/program/aloha-no-hawaii-triennial-2025-film-night/

Image credit: Installation view of Sione Faletau, *Tau‘a‘alo*, 2023 (left) and Nanea Lum, *Waiwai o Nu‘uanu*, date unknown. Photograph from @devonbella.art on Instagram, https://www.instagram.com/p/DP8Psd0lZd6/?img_index=3

EXHIBITION

KULEANA

Gallery ʻIolani, University of Hawaiʻi–Windward Community College

Aug. 29 – Dec. 12, 2025

Co-curators April A. H. Drexel and Kapulani Landgraf paired artists and asked them to engage in conversations that would interrogate, contest, and demystify the impacts that surround our histories, politics, cultures, identities, and socio-economic situations. Artists responded individually or in pairs.

ARTISTS:

- Maile Andrade & John T. Koga
- Drew Kahuʻāina Broderick & Cory Kamehanaokalā Holt Taum
- Kimo Alexander Cashman & Edward Makahiapo Cashman Jr.
- Kaili Chun & Noelle M.K.Y. Kahanu
- Richard Hamasaki & Noʻu Revilla
- Stacy Hoshino & Keahiahi Sharon Long
- Healoha Johnston & Nina Tonga
- Rochelle Piʻilani Hussey Kaaloa & Lia O'Neill M.A. Keawe
- Linda Kāne & Malia Ann Crowningburg Kāne
- Karen K. Kosasa & Eiko Kosasa
- Kekeha Solis & Kekailoa Perry

https://gallery.windward.hawaii.edu/kuleana/

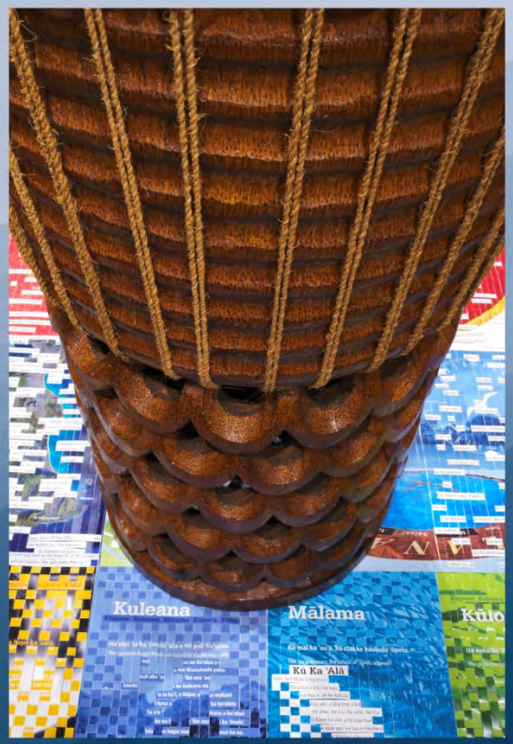
Gallery ʻIolani, 45-720 Keaʻahala Rd., Kaneohe, Hawaiʻi 96744

808-236-9155

(related events on the following pages)

KO‘AKĀ

Please join us for a series of five panel discussions held in conjunction with the exhibition - *KULEANA*
on view August 29 - December 12, 2025
at Gallery ‘Iolani
Windward Community College
Saturdays, 3:00-4:30 pm



Ku‘uwelolehuaikapōnō Kapulani Ka‘aona 2025

August 30, 2025 - Inspirations, Aspirations, Innovations
Panelists Maile Andrade, Drew Kahu‘āina Broderick, Kaili Chun and moderator April A.H. Drexel discuss their intentions, processes, and struggles from the point of conceptualization to producing significant visual texts.

September 27, 2025 - IN CASE of EMERGENCY
Panelists Linda Kāne, Kekailoa Perry, Cory Kamehanaokalā Holt Taum and moderator April A.H. Drexel engage in an unfiltered conversation surrounding urgent issues, controversial encounters, and impacts regarding survivance. They highlight the importance of caring for and protecting life-giving ecosystems to secure sacred spaces, attain food sovereignty, and sustain humanity.

October 11, 2025 - Perpetual Motion - churning, thrashing, roaring
Panelists Richard Hamasaki, Lisa Linn Kanae, Keahiahi Sharon Long, Nāwa‘a Napoleon and moderator April A.H. Drexel set forth key observations, syncopated patterns, and metaphorical touch points that boost meaningful perceptions to oli, mele and poema.

October 25, 2025 - festering wounds...battle fatigue...paralysis of toxic shaming
Panelists Noelle M.K.Y. Kahanu, Lia O’Neill M.A. Keawe, Karen K. Kosasa, Nina Tonga and moderator April A.H. Drexel offer critical strategies to rigorously challenge the fears and trauma of negative criticism by asserting respectful and genuine critiques wrapped in thoughtful analyses and assessments.

November 15, 2025 - Routes & Rootedness
Panelists Kimo Alexander Cashman, Rochelle Pi‘ilani Hussey Kaaloa, Kekeha Solis and m oderator April A.H. Drexel deeply reflect and examine accessibility, detours, and j unctures that resuscitate, energize, and liberate ancestral knowledge systems.

All programs are free and open to the general public.
We kindly ask that no video, sound recordings or photographs be taken during these panel discussions, out of respect for the speakers and the shared space. For information contact:
kapulani@hawaii.edu/808-236-9155/gallery.windward.hawaii.edu

Gallery ‘Iolani hours:
Monday through
Saturday, 1-5pm.

Gallery ‘Iolani
Windward Community College
45-720 Kea‘ahala Rd.
Kāne‘ohe, Hawai‘i 96744

KOʻAKĀ - Protecting Native Hawaiian Intellectual Property

Saturday, November 1, 2025, 3:00 - 4:30pm
Gallery ʻIolani, Windward Community College

@MuseScore @Leialoha Colucci @Aulani @REDValentino @IGsflorescortes @Honolulu Civil Beat @HI State Library

The Native Hawaiian Intellectual Property Working Group (NHIPWG) was convened in hopes of addressing the urgent need to protect Hawaiʻi's cultural expressions, language, and art forms. For generations, Native Hawaiian culture has been commodified—trademarked, copied, or used without consent—stripping it of meaning and benefit to the community. A roundtable featuring NHIPWG Vice Chair and Native Hawaiian Legal Corportation Executive Director Makalika Naholowaʻa, State Representative Darius Kila (Māʻili, Nānākuli, Honokai Hale, Koʻolina), attorney and cultural practitioner Uʻilani Tanigawa Lum, and moderated by artist Kapulani Landgraf will explore the impacts of cultural appropriation, limitations in the law, and strategies to ensure Native Hawaiians maintain authority over their cultural legacy.

Representative Darius Kila

Uʻilani Tanigawa Lum

Makalika Naholowaʻa

Please join us for a series of six panel discussions held in conjunction with the exhibition - *KULEANA* on view August 29 - December 12, 2025 at Gallery ʻIolani, Windward Community College. All programs are free and open to the general public. We kindly ask that no video, sound recordings or photographs be taken during these panel discussions out of respect for the speakers and the shared space.

Gallery ʻIolani hours: Monday - Saturday, 1-5pm. For information contact: kapulani@hawaii.edu/808-236-9155/gallery.windward.hawaii.edu

Gallery ʻIolani
Windward Community College
45-720 Keaʻahala Rd.
Kāneʻohe, Hawaiʻi 96744

EXHIBITION

ʻO Ka Wai Mai مي: From Lahaina to the Litani

January 13 – February 15, 2026 | University of Hawaiʻi at Mānoa Gallery

This exhibition explores the sacred and threatened nature of water in Hawaiʻi and the Levant. The title phrase, ʻo ka wai mai, can be translated in Hawaiian as "the water shall flow." The word mai carries a double meaning: in Arabic (مي) it means water, while in Hawaiian it signals the movement of water (wai) toward the speaker. This shared linguistic resonance anchors the exhibition's exploration of water as both precious and imperiled.

Water as Sacred, Alive, and Under Threat

Indigenous peoples of Hawaiʻi and the Middle East have long understood water as a living, sacred force—integral to survival, identity, and spirituality. From Hawaiʻi's aquaculture systems to the Levant's fertile valleys, wai or mai is central to both everyday life and cosmology. Examples abound: Lahaina's legendary breadfruit grove once bordered Mokuʻula-Mokuhinia, sacred waters guarded by the goddess Kihawahine. In Lebanon, the Litani River—the nation's lifeline—echoes ancient myth and medieval praise poetry. Across traditions, from the Kumulipo to the Quran, water rights are upheld as a collective trust: all may use water, provided they do not monopolize or waste it.

Today, these waters are under siege—from contamination, diversion, development, occupation, and war. The artists' works consider water's sacred role in sustaining lands, cultures, and self-determination in Hawaiʻi, Palestine, and Lebanon—at a moment when its loss threatens the very survival of these peoples and places.

About the Artists

Together, these women—all working mothers and studio artists—engage ancestry and environment, honoring Hawaiian and Arab lineages while challenging extractive systems that endanger both people and place.

- Painter Reem Bassous (Lebanon, b. 1978), who lived and taught in Hawaiʻi, draws on her personal history of war in deeply evocative paintings of memory, trauma, and survival.
- Multi-media artist and conservationist Melissa Chimera (Hawaiʻi, b. 1972) is of Lebanese and Filipino ancestry; her paintings, textiles, and installations confront themes of extinction, migration, and globalization.
- Hina Kneubuhl (Hawaiʻi, b. 1977) is a kapa maker, botanist, and translator whose work connects ancestral practice and contemporary issues through the living medium of wauke (paper mulberry).
- Abigail Romanchak (Hawaiʻi, b. 1976), a Maui-based printmaker, grounds her practice in Hawaiian identity and ecological science; her recent series visualizes drought through the life cycles of trees.

Exhibition Opening Reception and Artist Walkthrough: January 18, 2026, University of Hawaiʻi at Mānoa Gallery

Contact: Melissa Chimera, melissachimera@gmail.com

NEW PUBLICATION

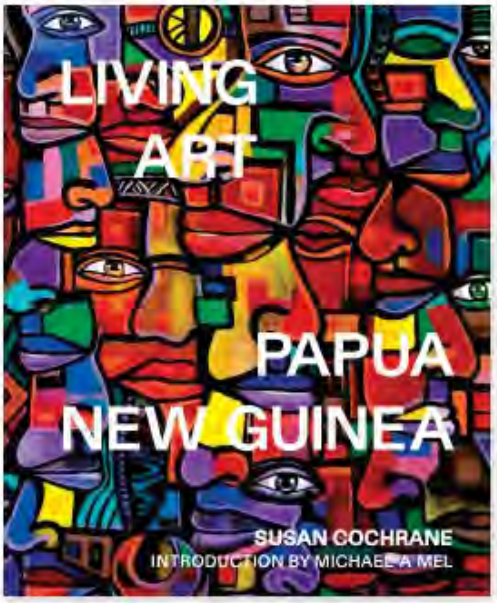
Upcoming Book Release | Melbourne Books | September 2025

LIVING ART PAPUA NEW GUINEA

Susan Cochrane

"... OUR ART IS A VIBRANT REPRESENTATION OF OUR HISTORY, DIVERSITY AND IDENTITY AND IT DESERVES RECOGNITION ON A GLOBAL STAGE..."

Honorable James Marape
Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea



Released in the month of Papua New Guinea's 50th Anniversary of Independence, this stunning book showcases the contemporary art and culture of Papua New Guinea and its people.

Lavishly illustrated and exceptionally researched and written, Dr Susan Cochrane's *Living Art: Papua New Guinea* brings alive the multiple contemporary realities of the country and its people.

This beautifully produced hardcover, full-colour art book represents more than 125 prominent artists with over 300 artworks and cultural performances. They are astonishing in their dramatic visual effect and virtuosity.

Culture, politics, history, and identity are interlinking themes through which the book presents ideas about artists, creative processes and aesthetics, revealing Papua New Guinea's diversity of cultures and environments. It locates innovative artists in their villages, in downtown Port Moresby, and on to the international stage.

About the Author

Dr Susan Cochrane is a researcher, curator and writer who works closely with communities and organisations in Papua New Guinea. Throughout her career, Dr Cochrane has been a staunch advocate for Pacific artists and writers, and she regularly collaborates with artists and writers from Indigenous Australian, Pacific Islander, and Papua New Guinean communities.

Preface by Honorable James Marape
Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea

Foreword by Steven Enomb Kilanda MBE
Executive Director, National Cultural Commission
Ministry of Arts, Culture and Tourism

Introduction by Professor (Assoc.) Michael A Mel
Director, Melanesian Institute for Arts and Communication (MIAC)
University of Papua New Guinea

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For all media and interview enquiries, including review copies, contact *publicity@melbournebooks.com.au* Tel: (+61 3) 9662 2051

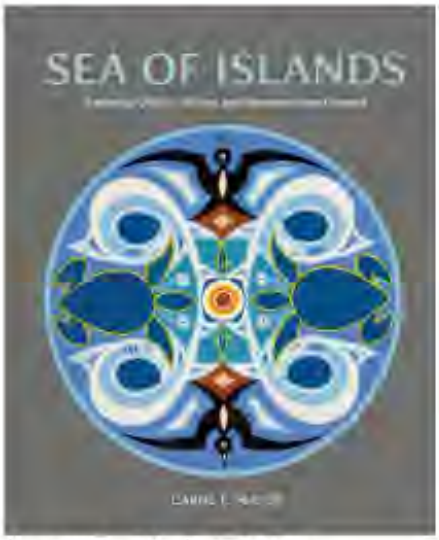
NEW PUBLICATION

Sea of Islands

Exploring Objects, Stories, and Memories from Oceania

BY CAROL E. MAYER

IN COLLABORATION WITH THE MUSEUM OF ANTHROPOLOGY AT UBC



Cover image: Four White Sharks, Ake Lianga, Solomon Islands/British Columbia, 2004

ON SALE JULY 17, 2025 (UK)

$55 CAD/$50 USD/ €44 EUR

Hardcover

240 pages

9" × 11"

ISBN 978-1-77327-155-2

150 colour photos, 3 maps, index

***Sea of Islands* brings together Indigenous knowledge holders, scholars, and artists from across the Pacific with researchers working with Pacific collections in Europe and North America—as well as members of diasporic Oceanic communities—to share the stories and journeys of the objects that comprise Canada's largest Oceanic collection.**

The Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia holds the largest and most diverse collection from this region in Canada.

From objects related to the complexities of daily life or to objects created for special events, they each have the potential to release narratives that describe/relay cultural import. All have travelled, sometimes circuitously,from their homelands—including Aotearoa, Australia, the Torres Strait Islands, Fiji, Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, Rapa Nui, the Marquesas Islands, and Vanuatu—to the west coast of Canada. *Sea of Islands* traces the journeys and stories of these holdings, as shared by Indigenous knowledge holders, scholars, and artists from across the Pacific. Presented alongside more than 250 photographs of individual objects contextualized by historic and contemporary images from Oceanic communities, Carol E. Mayer's text draws on her decades of research and outreach centred on the complex intersections between museum collections, contemporary art practices, and different knowledge systems.

The result is a lively and accessible exploration of how these objects—old and new—continue to articulate systems of meaning and engender new relationships.

(continued on the next page)

ABOUT MOA

The Museum of Anthropology (MOA) at the University of British Columbia (Canada) is built on the traditional, ancestral and unceded land of the of the Musqueam people.

MOA is committed to promoting awareness and understanding of culturally diverse ways of knowing the world through challenging and innovative programs and partnerships with Indigenous, local and global communities. The museum is known for its sizeable Northwest Coast collections, and holds the largest and most diverse collection from Oceania in Canada.

ABOUT CAROL E. MAYER

Carol E. Mayer is the Research Fellow—Pacific at the Museum of Anthropology at UBC. Internationally known for her work as a museum curator, she has published widely on museum-related topics, curated more than forty exhibitions, and received fellowships from the Smithsonian Institution and the Sainsbury Research Unit and numerous awards including from the International Council of Museums (ICOM) Canada. She has also received the Vanuatu Independence medal for her cultural contributions, and the Manu Daula Award from the Pacific Arts Association for her outstanding achievement and dedication in the arts of the Pacific.

ORDERING

***Sea of Islands* is available for purchase through online retailers, bookstores, and figure1publishing.com.**

For wholesale orders, Figure 1 titles are distributed internationally by Ingram Publisher Services (1-866-400-5351, IPS@INGRAMCONTENT.COM), by Raincoast Books in Canada (1-800-663-5714, ORDERS@RAINCOAST.COM) and by Publishers Group West in the USA (1-866-400-5351, IPS@INGRAMCONTENT.COM).

Corporate and bulk discounts are also available to qualifying organizations.

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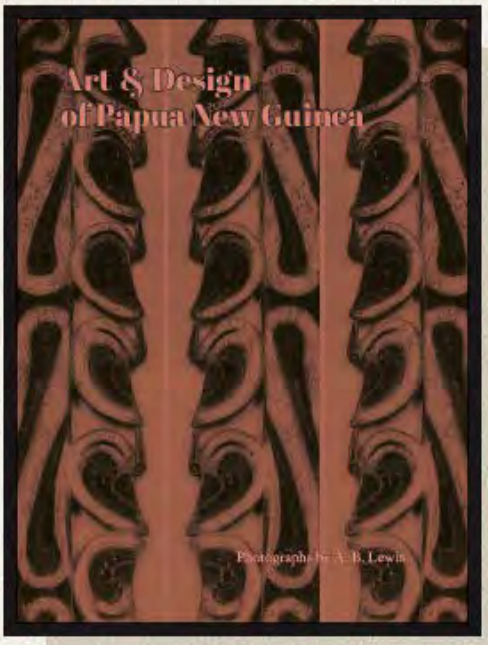
NEW PUBLICATION



CONRU EDITIONS

ANNOUNCES THE PUBLICATION OF TWO LIMITED EDITION BOOKS WHICH WILL BE AVAILABLE

SEPTEMBER 9, 2025

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NEW PUBLICATION

Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies

Access the Newsletter here: https://aiatsis.gov.au/sites/default/files/research_pub/Native%20Title%20Newsletter%202025%20Issue%201.pdf

The Indigenous Country and Governance Unit (**ICG**) delivers information services and activities to support the native title sector, particularly native title organizations, and undertakes research activities to inform law and policy reform.

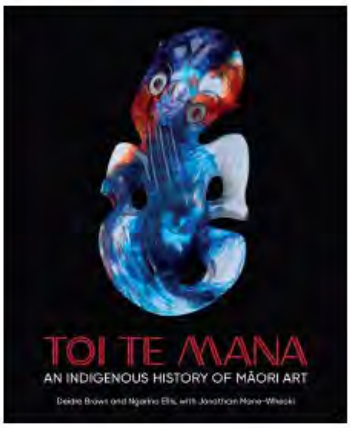
Over two editions per year, the Native Title Newsletter features updates on key developments in law and policy, contributions from the broader native title sector, and updates on the activities of the ICG.

Keep informed by subscribing to the Newsletter online or if you would like to make a contribution, please contact the ICG for further information.

Image credit: Quobba Blow Holes near Gwoonwardu (Carnarvon), Yinggarda Country, Western Australia

NEW PUBLICATION

CHICAGO
The University of Chicago Press



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Abakanowicz Arts and Culture Collection

Publicity contact:
Adrienne Meyers
Promotions Manager
University of Chicago Press
adriennem@uchicago.edu

TOI TE MANA

An Indigenous History of Māori Art

By Deidre Brown and Ngarino Ellis, with Jonathan Mane-Wheoki

A landmark account in words and pictures of Māori art, by Māori art historians—from Polynesian voyaging waka to contemporary Māori artists.

In six hundred pages and with over five hundred illustrations, this volume takes us on an extraordinary voyage through Māori art—from ancestral weavers to contemporary artists at the Venice Biennale, from whare whakairo to film, and from Te Puea Hērangi to Michael Parekōwhai.

The authors explore a wide field of art practices, including raranga (plaiting), whatu (weaving), moko (tattooing), whakairo (carving), rākai (jewellery), kākahu (textiles), whare (architecture), toi whenua (rock art), painting, photography, sculpture, ceramics, installation art, digital media, and film. The works discussed span a period from the arrival of Pacific voyagers eight hundred years ago to the contemporary artists working around the world today. With expansive chapters and breakout texts focusing on individual artists, movements, and events, *Toi Te Mana* is an essential book for anyone interested in te ao Māori.

Deidre Brown (Ngāpuhi, Ngāti Kahu) is a Māori art and architectural historian and professor of architecture at Waipapa Taumata Rau University of Auckland. Her books include *Māori Architecture, Introducing Māori Art*, and the multiauthored *Art in Oceania*. Brown is a fellow of the Royal Society of New Zealand Te Apārangi and Te Kāhui Whaihanga New Zealand Institute of Architects. **Ngarino Ellis** (Ngāpuhi, Ngāti Porou) is associate professor of art history at Waipapa Taumata Rau University of Auckland. She is the author of *A Whakapapa of Tradition* and coeditor of *Te Puna* (with Deidre Brown) and *Te Ata* (with Witi Ihimaera). **Jonathan Mane-Wheoki** CNZM (1943–2014; Ngāpuhi, Te Aupōuri, Ngāti Kurī) was an art historian specializing in Māori, New Zealand, and European art. He was the director of art and collection services at the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa and head of the Elam School of Fine Arts at the University of Auckland.

NEW PUBLICATION

X ARTISTS' BOOKS

Transformative Currents: Art & Action in the Pacific Ocean

Published by X Artists' Books + Oceanside Museum of Art as part of PST ART: Art & Science Collide
Editor: Cassandra Coblentz
Foreword: Maria Mingalone
Contributing Authors: Angela Mooney D'Arcy and Charles Sepulveda, Elizabeth DeLoughrey, Ziying Duan, Aaron Katzeman
Contributing Artists: Irwan Ahmett and Tita Salina, Ana Andrade, Martha Atienza and Jake Atienza / DAKOgamay in collaboration with GOODLand, Isabel Beavers, Ohan Breiding and Shoghig Halajian, Sean Connelly, Megan Cope, L. Frank and Jane Chang Mi, Maja Godlewska and Marek Ranis, Beatriz Jaramillo, Liz Larner, Charles Lim, Marcos Lutyens, Alex Monteith and Maree Sheehan, Enrique Ramírez, Tiare Ribeaux and Qianqian Ye, Genevieve Robertson, Paul Rosero Contreras, Fran Siegel, Angela Tiatia, Cecilia Vicuña
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Transformative Currents: Art and Action in the Pacific Ocean, edited by Cassandra Coblentz, brings together diverse writers, scientists, artists, activists, and thinkers to investigate social and environmental issues throughout the entirety of the Pacific Ocean, including Angela Mooney D'Arcy and Charles Sepulveda, Elizabeth DeLoughrey, Ziying Duan, and Aaron Katzeman.

The authors and contributors are leading figures in the field of Blue Humanities—an emergent discipline ranging from historical to visual to cultural and literary studies on oceans—and they bring a rich range of expertise to the project. At this crucial time in which the health of the Pacific Ocean is in an increasingly fragile and volatile state, it is now more important than ever to document and share these individuals' work as we strive to raise awareness and foster a greater consciousness of how artists are making vital contributions to improving the ecological conditions of our oceans and coastal environments.

The book and accompanying exhibition of the same name, curated by Coblentz with Katzeman and Duan for Getty's PST ART: Art & Science Collide, includes work by artists at many stages in their careers and from a variety of locations.

For more information please contact
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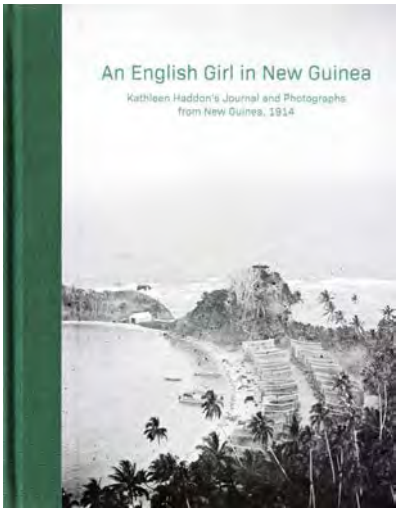
NEW PUBLICATION



An English Girl in New Guinea: Kathleen Haddon's Journal and Photographs from New Guinea, 1914

By Kathleen Haddon
Edited by Virginia-Lee Webb and Jonathan Fogel, with introductory essays by Nicholas Thomas, Anita Herle, Sebastian Haraha, Henry Rishbeth, and Virginia-Lee Webb.

In 1914, Alfred Cort Haddon embarked on an expedition to southern New Guinea, the third and final one he was to make to that region of the world. Intent upon furthering his studies on indigenous canoes as well as documenting the rapidly transitioning cultures there, he chose his twenty-six-year-old daughter, Kathleen Haddon to be the expedition photographer and research assistant, in addition to pursuing her own studies in invertebrate biology and string figures. They traveled for two months with no set itinerary, transported by missionary vessels, canoes, and government launches and staying in planters' houses, patrol stations, missions, and, most frequently, on the decks of the various vessels they sailed in. Along the way, they visited innumerable settlements, photographing the people and places they saw and taking detailed notes. Upon their return, Kathleen typed her notes into a narrative journal titled An English Girl in New Guinea, which lay dormant among her belongings until it was found by her children in 1999. Engaging, detailed, and insightful, her journal is presented in full here for the first time, with the entries paired with scores of her photographs, most never published. This is a unique and visually beautiful account of adventurous travel and cultural encounters impossible in today's world that will be of interest to contemporary Pacific communities, anthropology specialists, art historians, and enthusiasts of traditional cultures alike.

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ANNOUNCEMENT

UC San Diego Library Preserves the Sounds and Stories of Oceania with Recordings at Risk Grant

The UC San Diego Library received a $48,815 grant from the Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR) to digitize approximately 727 audiovisual recordings from eleven collections in the Tuzin Archive for Melanesian Anthropology, which will be added to the Library's Digital Collections.

Photo Credit: David Akin. Young men videotaping sango dance practice in `Ai`eda, 1996 (from https://today.ucsd.edu/story/uc-san-diego-library-preserves-the-sounds-and-stories-of-oceania-with-recordings-at-risk-grant)

This one-year grant focuses on digitizing content to preserve film, video, reel-to-reel, and cassette tape field recordings in order to safeguard against the deterioration of the physical materials and format obsolescence. It includes AV materials from:

- David Akin Audiorecordings, 1979-1997
- Christopher Ashton Audiorecordings, 1972 - 1975
- Paula Brown Glick Papers, 1933-1996
- David and Dorothy Counts Collection, 1966-2006
- Lamont Lindstrom Papers, 1978-2019
- Eunice Loeweke Collection, 1935-2011
- Philip Newman Papers, 1956-1994
- Lola Romanucci-Ross Papers, 1953-2000
- Harold Ross Papers, 1962-2010 (bulk 1966-1980)
- Ruth and Wallace Ruff Papers, 1945-2002
- James Stuart and Stevey Bruce Papers, 1957-1985

More information is available at: https://today.ucsd.edu/story/uc-san-diego-library-preserves-the-sounds-and-stories-of-oceania-with-recordings-at-risk-grant

ORGANIZATION

The Oceanic Art Society

The aim of the Oceanic Art Society is to further the understanding and appreciation of Oceanic art. The focus is on the traditional and contemporary art of the indigenous peoples of Melanesia, Micronesia, Polynesia, and Australasia. We hold regular presentations and seminars, and an annual Forum; we publish a quarterly Journal and send free newsletters to interested subscribers, worldwide.

For membership, event, and subscription information, visit:
https://www.oceanicartsociety.org.au/

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ORGANIZATION

EASTER ISLAND FOUNDATION
https://www.easterislandfoundation.org/

The Easter Island Foundation (EIF) is a public 501(c)3 organization registered in California. The organization is overseen by a volunteer Board of Directors who share an interest and concern about the culture and history of Rapa Nui and Oceania and include a variety of professions with expertise in anthropology, art, education, information technology, management, and fundraising. The EIF supports the preservation of the Rapa Nui heritage and culture through education. It was incorporated in 1989 to give back to the community that has inspired the world through its rich history, vibrant culture, and monumental archaeological treasures.

Our Mission:
The Easter Island Foundation supports the Rapa Nui people to preserve their vibrant Polynesian culture. We believe that education and opportunity strengthen the individual, family, economy, and community as a whole. Our vision is to empower the communities of Rapa Nui to make a difference in protecting their future and past. The EIF focuses on education to fulfill this mission.

Journal of Polynesian Archaeology and Research (JPAR)
JPAR is an open-access, peer-reviewed journal co-sponsored by the Easter Island Foundation (EIF) and the Society for Hawaiian Archaeology (SHA) and published by the University of Hawaii Press. This journal carries forward the legacy of the Rapa Nui Journal, the final issue of which was released in February 2023.

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