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Cover Image: Gazellah Bruder, *Restitution to our Oceans–to our Pasifika II*, 2025. Acrylic on 300psm printmaking paper, 76 x 56 cm. Courtesy of the artist

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PACIFIC ARTS
Journal of the Pacific Arts Association

ALBA FERRÁNDIZ GAUDENS

Reactivation and Reconnection at the Chamorro Latte Ceremony at the Bishop Museum

Abstract

On June 15, 2024, during the 13th Festival of Pacific Arts and Culture (FestPAC), the Bishop Museum held a ceremony honoring the latte—ancient Chamorro megalithic stone house pillars—that the museum stewards. Unlawfully removed from the Mariana Islands in the 1920s, these latte, along with over 10,000 artifacts, had been recently relocated to the Bishop Museum's central courtyard by Hawaiian Chamorro diaspora members. The 2024 ceremony, attended by members of the Chamorro diaspora from the US and FestPAC delegates from Guåhan (Guam) and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, was the culmination of the reconditioning, relocation, and re-display of the ancestral latte, which took months of work. This paper, presented at the 2024 Pacific Arts Association-Europe conference in Berlin, focuses on the emotional connections that the latte ceremony elicited among three groups present: between Chamorros who attended, between Chamorros and the latte, and between Chamorros and their ancestors. Using interviews and photographs taken during the ceremony, the author emphasizes the importance of emotional responses in the processes of healing and of cultural revitalization in museum settings. More specifically, she argues that the latte were imbued with life again through chant, touch, and offerings, as the ceremony's Chamorro attendants connected with one another and reconnected with their saina (ancestors).

Keywords: *Chamorro, Mariana Islands, Festival of Pacific Arts and Culture, affect, museum collections, latte, repatriation*

On June 15, 2024, the final day of the 13th Festival of Pacific Arts and Culture (FestPAC),[1] the Bernice Pauahi Bishop Museum in Honolulu, Hawai'i, hosted members of the Chamorro diaspora in the United States,[2] members of the Micronesian diaspora in Honolulu, and FestPAC delegates from Guåhan (Guam) and the Northern Mariana Islands (NMI).[3] The occasion was to honor the latte—megalithic stone structures erected by ancient Chamorros in the Mariana Islands—currently stewarded by the Bishop Museum (see Fig. 3) in a special ceremony. The latte, some of which have been at the Bishop Museum for approximately 100 years, were removed from their ancestral homelands by amateur archaeologist Hans Hornbostel between the 1920s and the 1950s. The Latte Stone Ceremony that took place that day inaugurated the 2024 Celebrate Micronesia Festival, an annual event hosted by the Bishop Museum featuring Micronesian music, dance, art, food, and storytelling.[4] Aligned with both this festival and FestPAC, the Latte Stone Ceremony drew hundreds of Chamorros, many of whom would not otherwise have been in Honolulu.

Early that morning, people gathered in the museum's courtyard and surrounded the latte in a circle (see Fig. 4). Speeches—predominantly in Chamorro—were followed by chants and offerings for the saina (ancestors).[5] Overall, it was a deeply emotional ceremony in which members of the Chamorro community—those residing in the Marianas as well as those living abroad—had the opportunity to physically reconnect with the saina embodied in the latte and shed tears for their displacement.

This paper looks at the emotional and multisensorial engagements the Latte Stone Ceremony elicited between three groups: Chamorros and the latte, Chamorros themselves, and Chamorros and their saina. I argue that museums can be places for the reactivation of Indigenous cultural belongings and suggest that events like the Latte Stone Ceremony can facilitate healing, reconnection, and feelings of pride for Indigenous communities by transforming ancestral objects into living agents of relationships and creating a communal space of emotional and cultural affirmation. To examine how the 2024 Latte Stone Ceremony revitalized these relationships, I focus on four affective responses enacted during the ceremony: voice, offerings, touch, and emotions. I analyze my personal recollections of the ceremony, along with reflections of Chamorro participants recorded by Guam Museum curator and cultural practitioner Dr. Michael Lujan Bevacqua.[6]

Latte Stones: The Pillars of Chamorro Culture

To appreciate the events of the Bishop Museum's Latte Stone Ceremony, it is essential to understand the significance and function of latte. In their original conform, latte were made of haligi (megalithic stone pillars) topped with tasa (capstones), as seen in Figure 1. They date back to the Latte Period (ca. 900 BCE–1700 CE), a major prehistoric era in the Mariana Islands, and were used to support homes and other built structures.[7] A typical latte was between four and seven feet tall, although smaller and larger ones—measuring up to fifteen feet—exist across the archipelago. They are often found in rows arranged parallel to natural features such as the sea, cliffs, or rivers.[8] Latte likely served residential, communal, funerary, and ceremonial functions, as indicated by ancestral remains and artifacts—including pottery sherds, åcho atupat' (slingstones), higam (shell adzes), and lusong (stone mortars)—that have been discovered in their vicinity.[9]

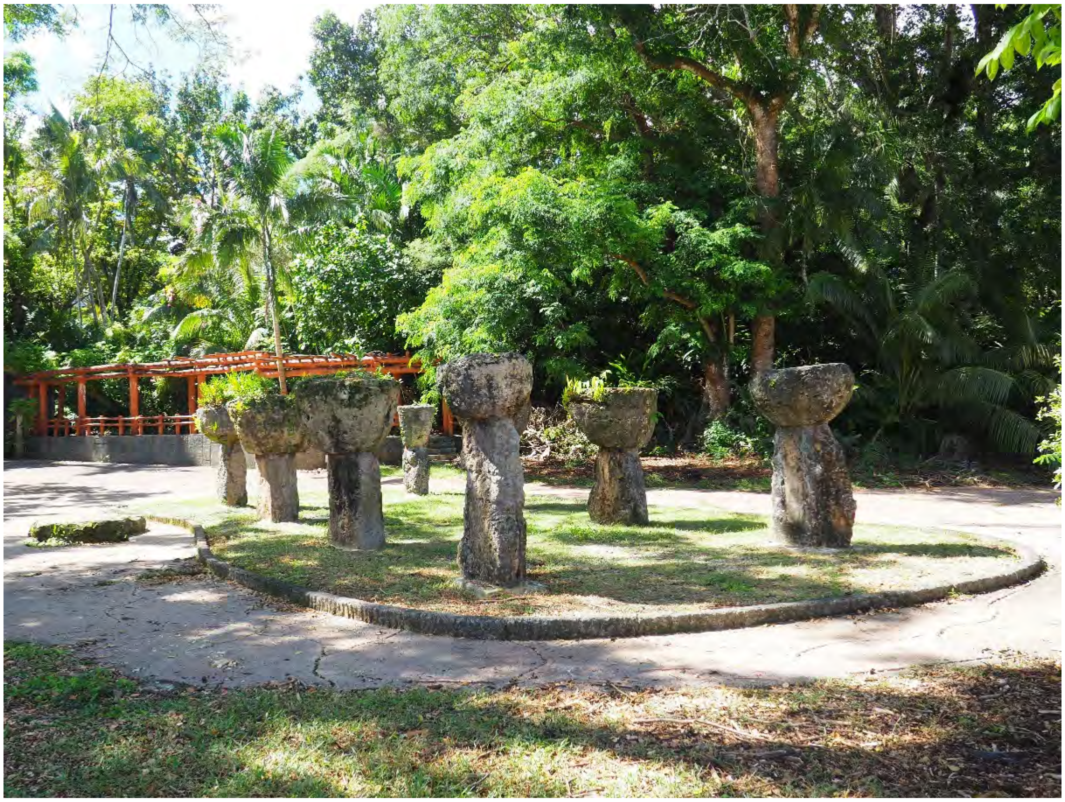

Figure 1. Latte at Senator Angel Leon Guerrero Santos Latte Stone Memorial Park in Hagåtña, Guåhan. These latte were likely erected during the latte period (ca. 900 BCE–1700 CE) and are about 2 feet tall. Photograph courtesy of the author

The construction and organization of structures made using latte was deeply connected to a broader set of cultural, social, and ritual practices, documented in early European voyage and missionary accounts.[10] The period of latte production came to an abrupt end around the same time as the conclusion of the Spanish–Chamorro Wars (ca. 1700 CE) and the establishment of Spanish colonial rule in the Marianas. During this period, the Spanish forcefully relocated Chamorros from the entire Marianas archipelago to the islands of Guåhan and Luta, in a process known as the Reducción. Many Chamorros lost their lives during the wars and from infectious diseases introduced by the Spanish. Following this period of tumult, the Indigenous inhabitants of the Mariana Islands experienced extensive religious, linguistic, and cultural assimilation, which fundamentally reshaped daily lives and identity.[11] As a result of generations of social disruption and population loss, knowledge about the ancient meanings of latte and the skills required for their construction were largely lost.[12]

Latte sites are considered sacred spaces where saina dwell. In a community-edited monograph about the latte, Chamorro storyteller Malia Ramirez points to how these pillars—upon which ancient dwellings were built—are sacred because they contain the spirits of those who once lived on these sites.[13] As previously noted, ancestral burial sites are frequently discovered in the vicinity of lattes, reinforcing the notion that the latte serve as physical representations of the saina. This belief has been perpetuated through Chamorro oral histories and passed down through generations, preserving cultural connections to the past. One such example is the following story:

> The remaining lone standing latte at Guma’ Taga’ [commonly known as House of Taga in the island of Tinian], for example, is said to house the spirit and bones of the daughter of Taga’ [a Chamorro maga’låhi or chief]. Legend states that as long as that latte is standing at Taga, the CHamoru culture lives on.[14]

According to Chamorro oral histories, Maga’låhi Taga was a giant Chamorro chief who, dissatisfied with his father’s ruling style, challenged him to a fight. He lost the fight and was exiled to the island of Luta (Rota), north of Guåhan. Legend says that during his time in Luta, he carved some of the largest latte known to humankind, which he later transported to Tinian. The stones were assembled to form Guma’ Taga, the House of Taga, the latte site with the tallest stones found in all of the Marianas.[15]

Latte have always held a significant place in the lives of Chamorro people. Chamorro oral histories reveal that, despite shifting attitudes toward the reverence of latte sites, they remain important cultural monuments, and that knowledge about them has continuously been transmitted intergenerationally.[16] In recent years, there has been a renewed appreciation for the latte as enduring symbols of Chamorro culture and resilience. Latte forms have been incorporated into the architecture of communal buildings and landmark signs (Fig. 2), and one appears on the flag of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. The Latte of Freedom is an eighty-foot, modern representation of a latte at the Governor’s Complex in Adelup. Latte forms are also included in popular culture, such as street art, commercial product packaging, souvenirs, and other memorabilia. Some people tattoo their bodies with images of lattes, emphasizing their strong significance for the Chamorro community as well as a deep bodily connection. Joe Quinata, director of the Guam Preservation Trust, and Dr. Kelly Marsh Taitano, head of the Guam Cultural Repository, remind us that, for some people, the latte are "a means for knowing the way forward by looking to, or at least remembering and honoring, the past." Quinata and Marsh Taitano also note that latte are considered the "pillars" of Chamorro culture—a common metaphor used to refer to their strong stone foundation: "After all, latte have survived over hundreds of years through dry seasons, wet seasons, typhoons, and super typhoons."[17]

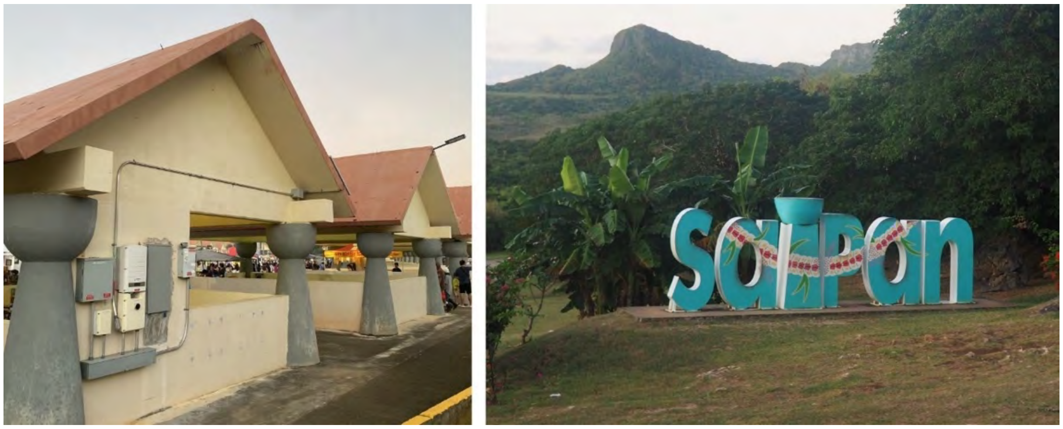

Figure 2. Two examples of how the latte form appears in contemporary settings across the Mariana Islands. Left: latte-inspired huts at Chamorro Village, the weekly night market in Guåhan. Right: a Saipan landmark sign where a latte form is used in place of the letter "i." Photographs courtesy of the author

The Role of Hans and Gertrude Hornbostel in Moving Latte to the Bishop Museum

The question of how a specific set of large, heavy latte arrived in Honolulu, Hawaiʻi, can be traced back to Hans Hornbostel and his wife, Gertrude Constenoble. Hornbostel was a US Marine who first arrived in Guåhan in the early 1900s. In 1922, he resigned from the Marine Corps, and the Bishop Museum hired him as an amateur archaeologist to systematically collect ancient artifacts and ancestral remains in the Mariana Islands, particularly in the Northern Mariana Islands (NMI).[18] It is believed that his collecting activities, which granted him access to the Japanese-occupied northern islands, were a cover for his role as a spy, monitoring

Japanese activities in the NMI for the US military.[19] His wife, also known as "Trudis Alemån" in Guåhan, was a Swiss woman who had settled on the island as a child when her parents moved there, and was a known figure in the community. Her fluency in the Chamorro language played a crucial role in her compiling one of the most extensive collections of Chamorro legends and oral histories of that period.[20]

Hornbostel conducted several archaeological excavations at latte and other burial sites in the islands of Guåhan, Tinian, Luta, and Saipan.[21] He gathered six latte—three tasa and three haligi—between the 1920s and the 1950s. The manner in which Hornbostel removed and transported the latte—some of them weighing over 5,000 pounds—to the Bishop Museum remains uncertain. He also collected over 10,000 ancient Chamorro artifacts—including slingstones, pottery samples, stone and shell tools, and body adornments—and unearthed and removed 300 ancestral remains.[22] All of these were sent to the Bishop Museum, where they stayed until the museum de-accessioned the ancestral remains and repatriated them to the Marianas in 2000.[23]

It is unlikely Hans Hornbostel gained permission from the Chamorro people to conduct his excavations and acquire artifacts and remains, as the disturbance of latte sites is considered deeply disrespectful in Chamorro culture.[24] Beyond this, there is documentation that he often used dubious collecting methods, including manipulating or persuading locals into sourcing the artifacts for him using gifts such as movie tickets for Chamorro children.[25] Additionally, it is likely he leveraged Gertrude's network in the Chamorro community to gather information on ancestral site locations. All in all, the Hornbostels' methods reflect a pattern of ethically questionable practices that disregarded Chamorro cultural values and the sacredness of latte sites.

Latte Stone Relocation Project

Hosting the Latte Stone Ceremony in June 2024 required months of collaboration between Bishop Museum staff, representatives of the Historic and Cultural Preservation Offices of the Mariana Islands, and members of the Chamorro diaspora in Hawaiʻi. For the past thirty years, the latte have not been displayed due to construction and maintenance done by the museum.[26] When displayed in the past, the latte were placed at the back of the museum, neglected and not easily accessible. Few visitors were aware of their presence, meaning that few people engaged with them.[27] Although several groups associated with the Chamorro community had been making requests for their return to the Mariana Islands since the

1990s, it was only following a recent effort—led by Guam Museum curator Dr. Michael Lujan Bevacqua and Guam Cultural Repository Lab manager Nicole Delisle Dueñas—that the latte were relocated to the central courtyard of the Bishop Museum. This followed a series of online public consultations, coordinated by Bevacqua, that brought together Chamorros living in the islands and those in the diaspora to explore their feelings about the relocation of the latte, as well as the possibility of their return home. Bevacqua and Santos invited several diasporic Chamorro museum professionals to contribute their perspectives.[28]

Overall, the goal of the Latte Relocation Project was twofold: it aimed to present the latte to the Chamorro and wider Pacific community during FestPAC, and have the ceremony initiate discussions about the latte's return to the Marianas. Cultural festivals are very important for Chamorros, particularly for those who live abroad,[29] and FestPAC is particularly significant, as it gathers thousands of people from all over the Pacific, including hundreds of delegates and some political representatives from both Guåhan and the Northern Marianas. The fact that the thirteenth FestPAC was held in Honolulu, Hawaiʻi, enabled the convergence of not only Hawaiʻi but also Chamorros from the Mariana Islands and other parts of the United States.

Elyssa Santos, a history graduate student at the University of Hawaiʻi at Mānoa and member of the Hafa Adai Club,[30] led the Latte Relocation Project and served as one of the organizers of the Latte Stone Ceremony, alongside Dr. Faye Untalan and Dr. Mary Therese Perez Hattori. In an interview conducted by Dr. Bevacqua, Santos recounts how she, accompanied by a group of volunteers—most of them Chamorro from Hawaiʻi—helped to clean and then move the latte during their spring break in March 2024. Santos mentions that during the cleaning process, volunteers experienced feelings of reconnection with the stones and the saina, particularly when their family members asked about the project and shared stories about previous interactions with other latte.[31] However, she also mentions that while cleaning the latte, the volunteers felt pain and loss for the stones' current state, which they shared with one another. Santos reflects on how the process of relocating the latte, marked by long days and the need for great care to avoid damaging the stones, was an experience filled with anxiety. Such feelings of distress, anxiety, and apprehension are common among Indigenous communities in museum contexts, as these spaces often symbolize loss, colonial violence, and pain.[32]

Not only were the people cleaning the latte feeling pain, but they said the latte themselves were experiencing similar feelings.[33] Sandra Dudley argues that artifacts relegated to storage are "actively inhibited in the prospect of selfarticulation, restricted to particular kinds of encounter and reduced to the function of a sign in a narrative that is not one's own."[34] She adds that this feeling, when experienced by museum objects, is a form of oppression. Santos's recollection of the latte cleaning process reflects this perspective: she recalls how artificial it felt to clean the latte at the Bishop Museum: "It's kind of an odd process. Back home they would be in the jungle, in their natural environments. The idea of cleaning them, of sterilizing them, is a bit bizarre and comical," she says.[35] She also references the removal of dirt as the removal of the ʻāina (land in Hawaiian), which has become embedded in the structure of the latte themselves by binding pieces of stone together during their time in Hawaiʻi.[36] In this way, the double process of removal—from their original lands first and then, through cleaning, from the ʻāina that once held them together—bears witness to the shared pain of exile felt by both the latte and those who clean them.

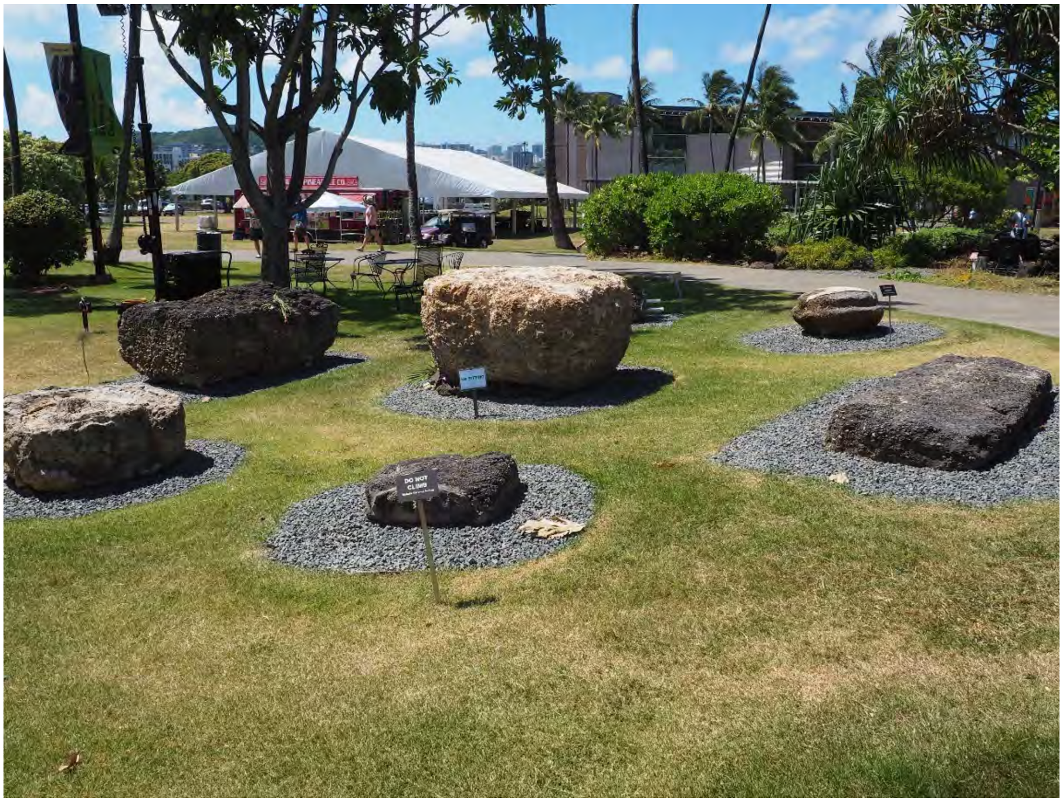

Figure 3. The latte after their relocation to the Gallery Lawns at the Bishop Museum, Honolulu, Hawaiʻi, June 12, 2024. Photograph courtesy of the author

In their new location on the Bishop Museum's Gallery Lawns, they have become more accessible to Chamorros and museum visitors alike. Seven latte components (capstones and pillars) were arranged to form a circle, with the largest tasa (from the island of Luta) in the middle (Fig. 3). Museum curators and members of the Chamorro community, however, view this as a temporary placement for the latte, with the hope that they will soon be repatriated to the Mariana Islands. Currently, discussions are taking place between cultural institutions in the Marianas, the governments of Guåhan and the NMI, and the Bishop Museum regarding the return of the latte and portions of the Hornbostel collection to the islands.[37] This process, which has been in development for several years, is complex. Because of Guåhan's and the NMI's political status as a territory and a commonwealth of the US, respectively, they do not fall under Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) legislation. This US federal law, first enacted in 1990, requires museums and federal agencies to inventory Indigenous ancestral remains, as well as funerary, sacred, and other cultural objects, and consult with affiliated tribes to return them when requested. However, the circumstances of the Mariana Islands necessitated negotiating an agreement between the Bishop Museum and Chamorro institutions outside the scope of NAGPRA, treating this case as an international repatriation. The whole process has thus demanded significant compromise and effort from both parties.

The efforts to repatriate the Hornbostel collection at the Bishop Museum are part of a broader conversation about the return of Chamorro ancestral remains and cultural artifacts to the Marianas from other parts of the world. In November 2023, the remains of an ancient Chamorro woman, and other ancestral remains dating from about 100 years ago, were returned to Guåhan from the University of California–Riverside (UCR).[38] The remains, which had been excavated in the 1980s by archaeologists from the University of Guam, had been stored at a UCR laboratory for forty years. In October 2024, UCR repatriated Chamorro and Carolinian ancestral remains from Saipan and Tinian back to the NMI.[39] A repatriation ceremony was held on November 16, 2024, in Riverside, where members of the Chamorro diaspora in California wished their ancestors a good journey back home.[40]

There have also been recent efforts to return ancestral remains collected during the German administration of the NMI (1899–1914). In August 2025, Guåhan dance group Inetnon Gefpå'go and NMI cultural practitioner Auntie Frances M. Sablan were invited by Chamorro scholars Andrew Gumataotao and Samantha Barnett to take part in a series of conversations and visits to some of Germany's museums. This project was a collaborative effort to engage with

Chamorro cultural heritage items held abroad through fostering dialogue around the interpretation, care, and potential repatriation of artifacts, human remains, and animal specimens in order to center the conversations around Chamorro perspectives and knowledge.[41] In this regard, the Latte Stone Ceremony is part of ongoing broader efforts to return Chamorro ancestors and cultural belongings back to the Marianas.

Voice and Movement

The Latte Stone Ceremony held on June 15, 2024, on the Gallery Lawns of the Bishop Museum began with an oli aloha, a Hawaiian welcoming chant, as a symbolic invitation to the Chamorro community to share in the space. The oli aloha also embodied other deep emotional connections: the continued collaboration between the institution and the Chamorro community toward repatriating Chamorro artifacts and caring for them until their eventual return, and the solidarity between Hawaiians and Chamorros, whose lands have experienced—and continue to experience—parallel forms of US colonial occupation.

After the oli aloha, Dr. Faye Untalan, Donald Mendiola, and Frances Sablan, important cultural advocates in the Mariana Islands, spoke in Chamorro, reaffirming that this gathering was mostly intended as a space for the community. They expressed their gratitude for people's presence in the ceremony, and their honoring the saina. Additionally, Donald Mendiola, who is a Chamorro suruhånu (healer) and respected manåmko (elder) from Saipan, performed a blessing. In Chamorro culture, blessings are often done by elders before meals or at the beginning of important religious and cultural events. In September 2025, for example, the NMI Indigenous Affairs Office organized the "I Man Mabisita I Mañainai-ta Siha" community visit to ancestral burial sites in Saipan, held as part of Cultural Heritage Month in the NMI. In each of the stops, Mendiola chanted for the saina:

> What I did when I was chanting was, I used the very deep Chamorro that was spoken by the taotaomo'na [ancestral spirits]; that's just calling them, letting them know, informing them that we are here to remember them through their life on earth. And we're expressing our appreciation for them, for all that they've done to teach us about the culture, our way of life, how to live peacefully and to continue on with the interdependence part of the very high value system that ancient Chamorros have, and [that we have] even now,

> because the highest value we place in our culture is inafa'maolek,[42] which includes respect.[43]

In a similar way, during the Latte Stone Ceremony, Mendiola's blessing assured the saina that they would be treated respectfully. Echoing Untalan's and Sablan's speeches, Mendiola's blessing shared feelings of unity and respect for those in the gathering.

The hosts of the event then invited everyone to sing a lålai (Chamorro chant): the Latte Stone Ceremony Chant, composed by Elyssa Santos and Brant Songsong, a Chamorro language professor at University of Hawaiʻi at Mānoa originally from Luta. Handouts with the lyrics were distributed to each attendee, enabling them to actively participate in the chanting. Sung in Chamorro, the chant was dedicated to the saina embodied in the latte. It spoke of the continued protection that has been granted to them since they were removed from their homeland. It also conveyed the mutual love and light rekindled through the reconnection between saina and descendants. Additionally, it expressed the lattes' pain of separation from their place and community of origin. And most importantly, it spoke of their eventual return home and the collaborative efforts undertaken to achieve this goal. All of these emotions were shared and expressed by those who chanted the following at the Latte Stone Ceremony:

Hagas ha' ham manmacho'cho',	We have always been working,
I gumogogue hamyo.	those who protect you.
Hihot yan chågo',	Near and far,
minasa'pet hugua na tåno'.	the work of two lands.
In na'gåsgas in fa'maolek	We cleaned, we fixed
in fa'gåsi (a)yuhi amko'.	we washed away the baggage.
Hagas mansahnge i hemhom	They were separated for a long time
på'go bula puti'on.	the darkness now has many stars.
Mañaina-ta guse'	Ancestors, go on,
ina i chalan-måmi.	light our path
I che'cho' inadahi	They care work,
guinaiya in faninåmte.	love will heal us.
Mamachom påpa' i atdao,	The Sun sets,
ti ta li'e' finatton puengi,	we don't see night come,
ya ti u mappot ini na cho'cho',	and this work is not difficult,
sa' manhihita ha' guini	because we're here together.

According to Master of Chamorro Chant Leonard Iriarte,[44] lålai date to ancient times and can be considered the most respected form of Chamorro artistic expression. Lålai has been embraced by the Chamorro as a contemporary tradition and is now an integral component of official cultural welcoming ceremonies and other cultural events in the Mariana Islands. Iriarte has spearheaded the revival of Chamorro chanting, begun in the 1990s, as part of wider ongoing efforts to revitalize the Chamorro language and culture.[45] Today, the I Fanlalai'an Oral History Project, also led by Iriarte, includes dozens of chanters who engage in the learning of fino'håya (the version of the Chamorro language without Spanish borrowings) and deepen their understanding of their heritage through historical lessons.[46] Some members of the Guåhan chanting delegation at FestPac have reflected on the content of the lålai they chanted during the festival, which were inspired by oral histories of Chamorro life in pre-colonial times. For example, in an interview for the *Guam Pacific Daily News*, Tamara Cruz asserted that "chant is a way to record history."[47] Lålai, in this way, serves as a means of preserving and transmitting knowledge and aids in the recollection of past events.[48]

Drawing from this tradition, the composers of the Latte Stone Ceremony Chant researched a specific form of lålai, the Kåntan Chamorrita,[49] examining its melodies, rhythms, and improvisational elements to embed these features into the chant. Santos, in turn, incorporated stylistic inflections rooted in the way she was taught to sing the Kåntan Chamorrita, and contributed her own words and ideas for the lyrics, while Brant Songsong provided the translation into the Chamorro language.[50]

I suggest that, in this vein, chanting for the latte served as a means of reconnecting the saina with their descendants, reminding Chamorro attendees where they came from by re-enlivening cultural traditions transmitted across generations. Although the latte have long been treated as "lifeless" museum artifacts, Indigenous affective practices such as lålai help restore both their agency and the relational ties disrupted by institutional preservation.

Once speeches and singing had concluded, ceremony attendees were invited to approach the latte and pay their respects in whatever manner they found most meaningful. As the community moved around the circle of stones, some people spoke to them. Their voices reverberated against the surfaces of the latte, breathing life back into them. Others were at a loss for words, but the absence of words can convey as much meaning as a lengthy speech.

As participants engaged with the latte, the performance delegates from Guåhan sang a selection of lålai dedicated to the latte and the saina, accompanied by dancing. As with many Pacific peoples, chanting and dancing are deeply interconnected in Chamorro culture; lålai are often accompanied by embodied movements, including "slapping, stomping and swaying in place."[51] This association between voice and embodied practice is also deeply tied to the presence of the saina.

Accordingly, during the Latte Stone Ceremony, Guåhan performers—led by Master of Chamorro Dance Eileen Meno—showcased traditional Chamorro lålai and dances. Some involved the performers moving their arms toward the sky (Fig. 4), which suggests a connection and reverence toward the saina, metaphorically residing far away from the land. Another variation featured powerful steps and defensive arm movements, embodying the strength, unity, and resilience of the Chamorro people across centuries of colonization. Speaking about the chants and dances they performed during FestPAC, Meno stated that "they are about moving forward and remembering who the Chamorro people were through the elders and honoring them."[52]

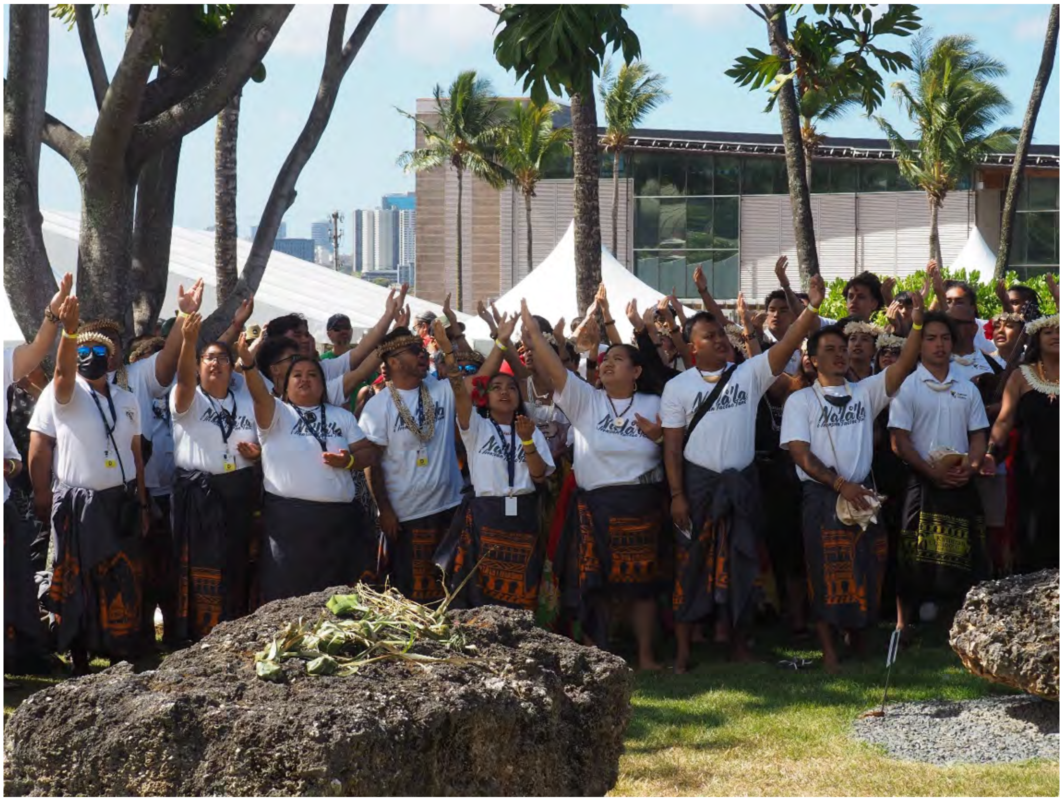

Figure 4. Delegates from Guåhan performing during the Latte Stone Ceremony, June 15, 2024, Bishop Museum, Honolulu, Hawaiʻi. Photograph courtesy of the author

Some of the performers from the Northern Mariana Islands delegation and the Kutturan CHamoru dance group from Long Beach, California, joined the Guåhan delegates from the opposite side of the circle, creating a soundscape that surrounded the latte. Reminiscing about this moment, Dr. Riley Taitingfong commented that she "felt something in the air through the chant."[53] In this way, the environment was affectively mapped through a strong, powerful sense of unity among the attendees at the ceremony, expressed through voice and movement.[54] This created an atmosphere of renewed engagement with the latte, where lålai and the emotional responses it evoked can be understood as a means of ancestral reconnection, or in the words of Marzia Varutti, as "affective encounters."[55]

Following Sarah Ahmed's argument that emotion is a collective experience shaped through contact with others, and that objects elicit rather than contain emotions, I argue that the latte acted as focal points for the emotions of those who took part in the ceremony.[56] These emotions in turn enacted an affective response, a desire for a better future, and the reactivation of the community. In Hawaiian culture, pule (prayers), and mele (song) are used during repatriation ceremonies to reconnect people with their ancestors and help them to ask for forgiveness, understanding, and guidance throughout the process of return.[57] Chamorros shared this feeling during the Latte Stone Ceremony, encapsulated well by Dr. Michael Lujan Bevacqua: "We sang that day, with the hope that someday soon, these parts of our ancestors' lives, the treasures of our people today, will find their way home to us again."[58]

Offerings

Offerings are used by Indigenous communities all over the world to pay their respect to the ancestors.[59] In the Federated States of Micronesia, for example, offerings in the form of material goods must be made to trees and other spiritual deities before any oceangoing voyage sets out.[60] During the first set of chants in the Latte Stone Ceremony, a group of children approached the stones to leave offerings of leaves, flowers, seashells, woven objects, coconut shells, coconut oil, and fruit. Following this, representatives from the islands and the diaspora advanced toward the latte to leave their own offerings. The opportunity to participate in the practice of offering was then extended to all attendees, and soon a procession of Chamorros was interacting with their long-lost saina.

Chamorros have a longstanding tradition of offering tributes to the taotaomo'na, who, according to Dr. Bevacqua, are "the people of before," the "ancestral spirits that inhabited the earth along with the living."[61] These spirits, which are different from the saina, are believed to protect and assist the island's inhabitants, and to cause harm if disrespected. Ancient Chamorros would often offer food, drink, and sometimes artifacts to ancestral skulls that they kept in baskets in the rafters of their homes.[62] In 1683, Jesuit missionary Francisco Garcia reported that before ancient Chamorros engaged in important activities such as warfare, travel, planting, harvesting, and fishing, they made offerings to these ancestral skulls.[63] This was a way to thank the taotaomo'na for their role in keeping one's family safe, prosperous, and strong.[64]

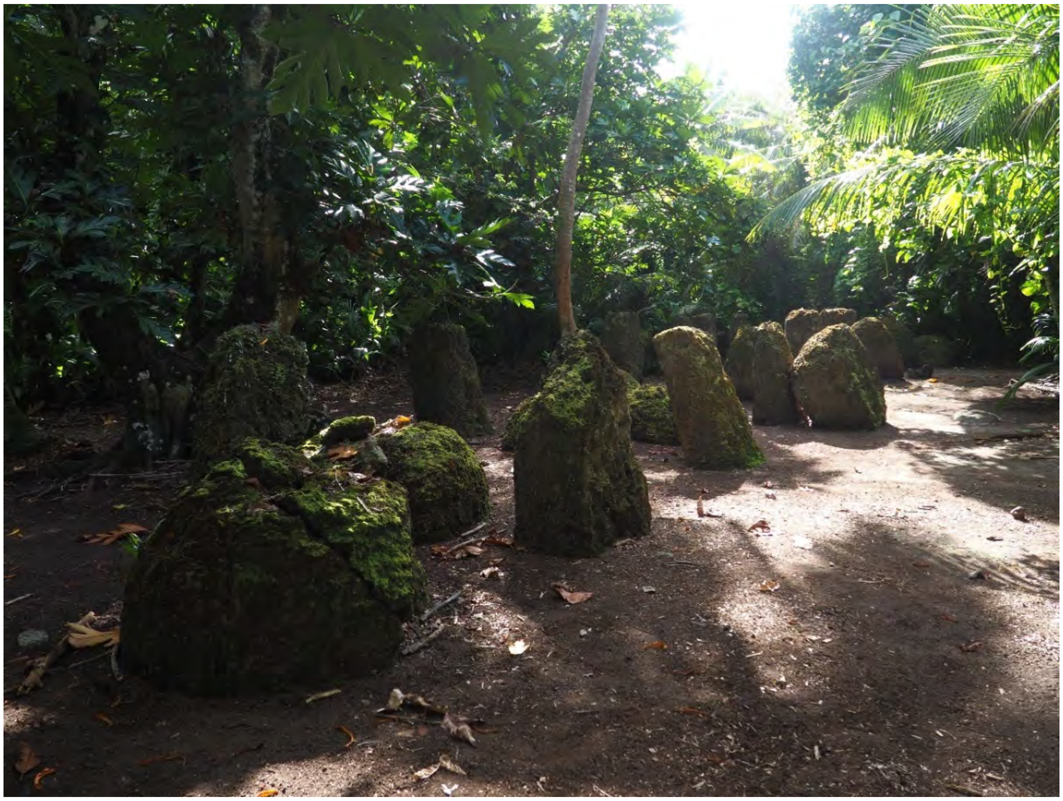

Figure 5. Latte at Mochong Village in the island of Luta (Rota), NMI. These latte date back to ca. 1000 BCE and are around 2 feet tall. Photograph courtesy of the author

Accounts such as this demonstrate deep cultural continuity through ceremonial practice in the Mariana Islands. Today, Chamorros often leave offerings on the latte, as can be seen in many latte sites all over the Mariana Islands. While conducting fieldwork in the Marianas in January 2024, I visited Mochong Village on the island of Luta (NMI), one of the best-preserved latte sites in the islands and a place of pilgrimage for many Chamorros (Fig. 5). It comprises fifty individual latte and, in contrast to other renowned latte sites, many of the stones are still standing. One of the first things I appreciated upon arriving was that most of the latte had some offerings on top of them (Fig. 6). Often, such offerings come in the form of ancient artifacts that people have found around the village, such as pieces of pottery, shell implements, and slingstones.[65] By being repurposed as offerings, objects found at latte sites in the islands—including some that once shaped the forms of tasa and haligi—are transformed into enduring tributes to their makers.

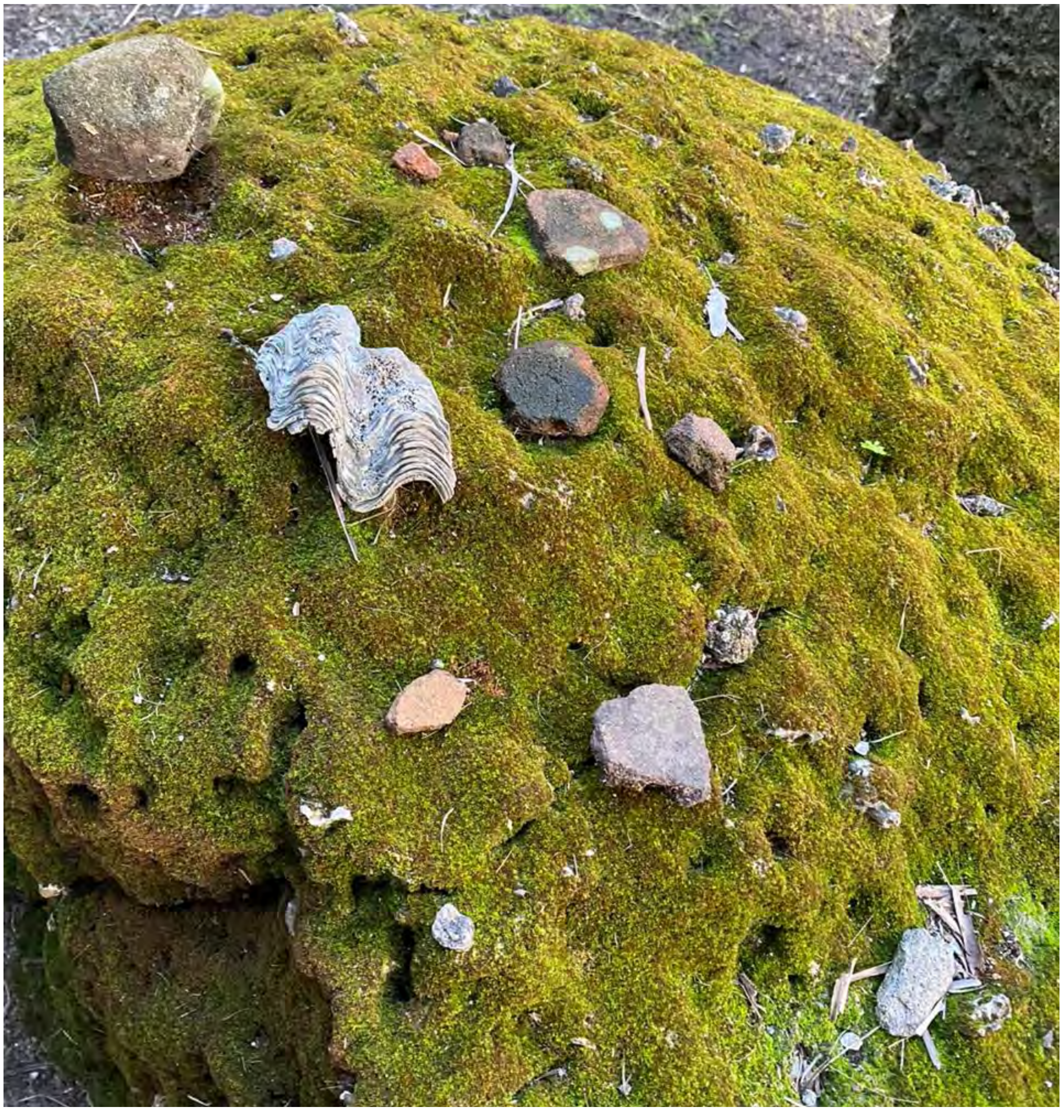

Figure 6. Offerings of ancient pottery and higam (adzes) left on one of the latte at Mochong Village on the island of Luta (Rota), NMI. Photograph courtesy of the author

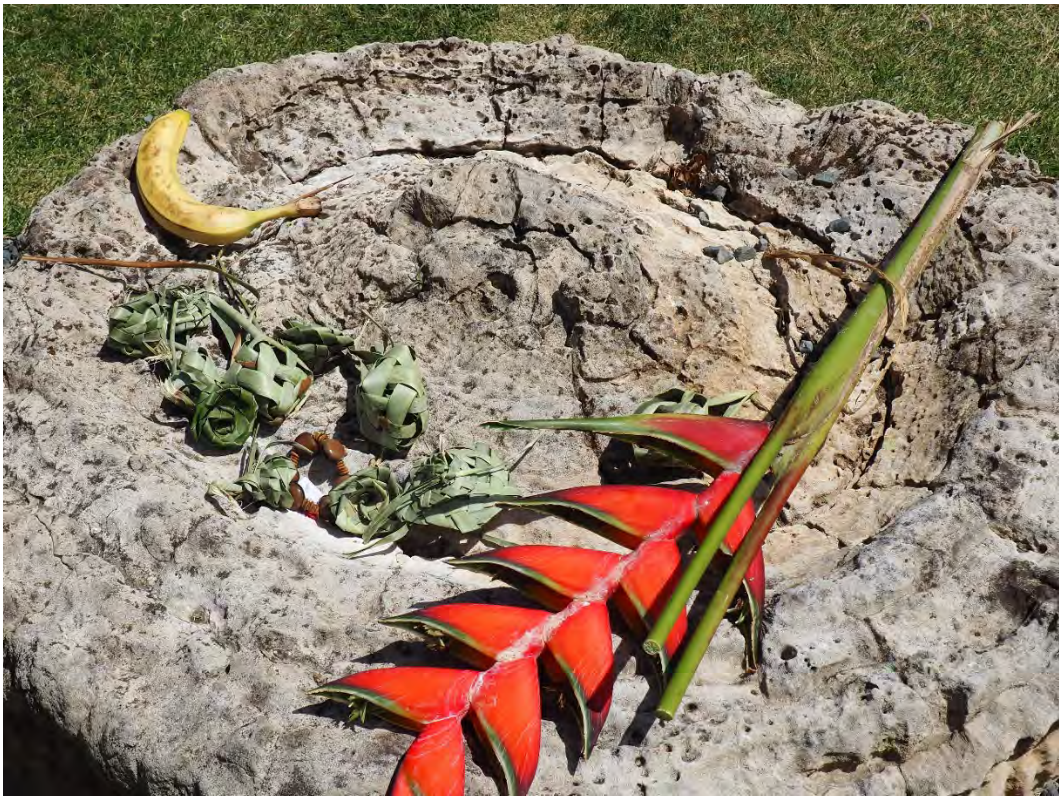

Figure 7. Offerings left on one of the latte at the Bishop Museum, Honolulu, Hawaiʻi, June 15, 2024. Photograph courtesy of the author

While some of the offerings presented to the latte at the ceremony in Honolulu included leaves, flowers, and fruits, many of them came in the form of woven objects made by community members (Fig. 7). Tinifok CHamoru (the art of weaving), as it is referred to in the Mariana Islands, plays a crucial role in shaping contemporary expressions of Chamorro culture. The practice of weaving, much like the practice of offering, is transmitted intergenerationally, and as such it embodies the cultural essence of the Chamorro community, as well as its ability to thrive despite many waves of colonization, both historically and in contemporary expressions.[66] While its everyday utility has recently given way to different, more experimental artistic expressions, weaving as a practice still holds a vital place in Chamorro material culture. Chamorro weaver James Bamba, in fact, says that "the inspiration [for weaving in his case] comes from them [the saina] and flows within our spirits, coursing through our thoughts, and executed through our voices, hands, and bodies."[67] In this way, woven objects such as kottot and guagua' (baskets) or katupat (rice pouches) embody both personal and community relationships.

Coconut oil produced in the Mariana Islands and transported especially for the ceremony was also a recurrent offering to the latte, and was poured over their surfaces. This symbolic act is similar to the practice of covering one's body in the same substance, which is often associated with Indigenous notions of health and beauty.[68] Additionally, to the Chamorros living in the diaspora, coconut oil, as a commodity that can be purchased and transported outside of the Marianas, represents an embodied, spiritual, and sacred bond to their homeland. It is a product that informs their identity-building as Chamorros and Pacific Islanders. Chamorro scholar Nathaniel Lennon Rigler Siguenza writes:

> Coconut oil is a product that reflects us. It's a product that has, for as long as Pacific peoples have existed, cared for us, and we in turn have cared for it. In the places where coconuts cannot grow, it is remembered through language and myth. We remember our ancestors—including our plant ancestors—as we carry them with us on our skin, in our scent, and quite literally, in our heart.[69]

The affective significance of niyok (coconut)—one of the most important native plants in the Marianas, one that holds a place as kin, a reliable source of food, and a material used in cultural production[70]—and its derived products are vehicles for ancestral reconnection. Considerable thought and effort were invested in creating and transporting offerings to the latte, acknowledging the latte as embodiments of the saina and therefore active participants in the ceremony. In this way, the latte gradually awakened through the sensory connections fostered by the ritual offerings the community made and gifted to them.

Touch

Another primary method of reconnecting with the saina during the ceremony involved direct physical contact with the stones. For a long time, touching objects held by museums has been forbidden, influenced by Western rational objectivity and the belief that museum artifacts are lifeless objects, a perspective that overlooks their cultural vitality, sacred significance, and how they activate relationships between people.[71] Moreover, the ritual characteristics of the museum reinforce this distance, as its quasi-sacred atmosphere encourages visitors to only engage with objects visually and reverently rather than physically.[72] Recently, however, scholars and museum practitioners have been advocating for the positive qualities of embodied sensory and cognitive engagements with objects in museum settings and increasingly encourage physical contact between people and objects.[73] Indigenous communities have long emphasized the necessity of physically engaging with their cultural objects to maintain their vitality or to reactivate their significance.[74] Touch, in particular, can act as a powerful tool that prompts an emotional response both in the individual engaging in the act and in the object being touched.

For the Chamorro people, touch serves as a means of establishing connection with the saina. It is common to hear stories of saina "touching" individuals as a way of welcoming them to the islands. This ancestral touch often manifests physically as fingerprint, fingernail, or teeth-like bruises on people's bodies.[75] In a similar way, touch, as it was used during the Latte Stone Ceremony, was a two-way emotional force that reconnected the Chamorro with the latte. Just as the saina touch people, the lifeforce of those who touched the latte during the ceremony was transferred to the stones. Metaphorically, the lifeforce of Chamorros touching the latte can be understood as a fluid-like essence that permeates their skin and into the stone's surface, symbolizing a deep, spiritual connection. As Chamorro poet Arielle Taitano Lowe said after the ceremony, "Our ancestors are still very much tied to these very precious, embodied, cultural latte."[76] In this way, when they were touched, the latte were imbued with new forms of life while, simultaneously, the participants themselves were "touched," not only by the saina who created the latte, but also by the generations who lived in their presence and cared for the spaces around them.[77]

In addition, the materiality of the stones as an index of the tåno' (land) may have inspired those at the ceremony to touch the latte. Just as ancient Chamorros relied on the land and sea in their daily lives, the use of stone to build the latte may have embodied a deep connection between spirit and nature.[78] Touching the latte in the present can thus be considered a way of fostering a renewed connection with the tåno'. In addition, the enduring quality of stone ties the latte to the passage of time, allowing them to function as markers of an ancient society whose presence symbolizes the resilience of the Chamorro people in the face of a long—and still ongoing—colonial history.[79]

During the ceremony, individuals from different generations interacted with the latte in different ways, reflecting different cultural attitudes toward the reverence for the saina embodied in the latte and presenting an interesting contrast. Older generations were often taught to avoid interacting with the latte, as touching them was believed to provoke the taotaomo'na (ancestral spirits).[80] Dr. Michael Lujan Bevacqua recounts how, throughout the ceremony, many elders sought reassurance from him regarding the appropriateness of touching the latte.[81] In contrast, younger generations found it easier to physically engage with the latte, experiencing fewer cultural prohibitions and a renewed sense of reconnection through physical contact (Fig. 8). The response of Chamorro youth to earlier cultural protocols should not be interpreted as a sign of disrespect; instead, it may be attributed to their growing involvement in disciplines such as archaeology, historic preservation, and museum studies, where direct engagement with the latte is often necessary.[82] This training positions them to become future leaders in preserving and transmitting the cultural significance of the latte, as well as safeguarding their broader ancestral and historical heritage.

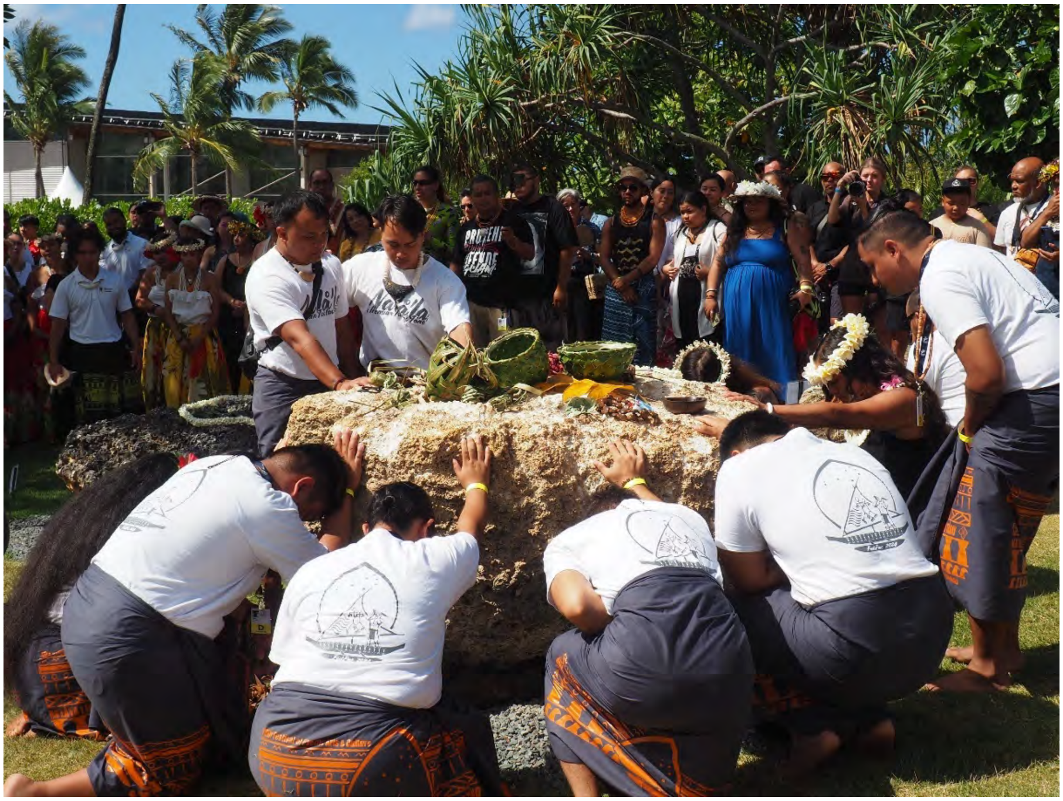

Figure 8. Members of the Chamorro community touch the latte during the Latte Stone Ceremony, Bishop Museum, Honolulu, Hawaiʻi, June 15, 2024. Photograph courtesy of the author

Despite generational differences in cultural protocols, both elders and young Chamorros physically interacted with the latte. These interactions reconnected I manåmko yan i manhoben (the elderly and the young) with the latte and also fostered an intergenerational reconnection as people of all ages jointly engaged in the touching of the stones. Concern for the well-being of the ancestral latte is shared across generations of Chamorros. In this sense, touch functioned as a bridge, uniting past and present cultural protocols and generations through shared cultural experience.

Feelings

When asked what they thought of the ceremony, most attendants responded that they found it deeply emotional. "Emotion" is defined by Sarah Ahmed as arising from the recognition of the "sensations" enacted through an "affect" that becomes "emotion" in cultural processes.[83] However, for a long time, emotion and practice have been treated as separate domains, largely because Western scientific traditions have linked "emotion" as an analytic category to an individualized emotional subjectivity.[84] To counter this classification, Catherine A. Lutz argues that emotions are culturally constructed, shaped by social practices, beliefs, and norms. She states that, while studies on emotion in the West typically portray them as arising from "an internal world of sensations and thoughts," they can also be understood in relation to the "environmental crucible"—in other words, the external conditions—in which they emerge.[85] Focusing on the experience of the Ifaluk people of Yap State, Federated States of Micronesia, Lutz argues that emotions and the feelings that arise from them are interconnected with Ifaluk cosmology, value systems, social interactions, historical changes, and everyday life occurrences.

Similarly, in the Mariana Islands, Chamorro cultural practices demonstrate how material objects and communal rituals can evoke complex emotional responses that are both historically grounded and socially shared. During the Latte Stone Ceremony, the shared knowledge of the unlawful removal and subsequent neglect of the stones evoked negative emotional responses, as often happens when Indigenous peoples encounter their cultural belongings in museum settings.[86] Hugs were exchanged and hands placed on shoulders, symbolizing a shared sense of support and solidarity in the face of profound sorrow. The atmosphere was charged with intense emotion, as people openly expressed their grief through tears and their frustration through anger and serious facial expressions. Some people were overwhelmed by their emotions; others needed time to process the deeply emotional experience.[87] Guåhan slinger Roman dela Cruz mentioned that it was "easy to get offended that the artifacts and latte stones are so far away from home."[88] This feeling was shared among many community members, as well as Chamorros living in the diaspora. However, dela Cruz claimed that it was even worse that the latte "had never been activated." The latte at the Bishop Museum, in this sense, act as evidence of the widespread desecration of funerary and culturally significant sites in the Marianas, and the ongoing cultural trauma and deactivation it perpetuates.

Despite the difficult feelings that the ceremony elicited, many of the attendants also emphasized feelings of hope and reconnection. Talking about the repatriation of ancestral human remains, Fforde et al. suggest that the experience is in itself "transformative and inherently powerful."[89] In a similar fashion, during the Latte Stone Ceremony, individuals experienced a profound sense of respect for their saina. NMI delegation member Erlinda Naputi described feeling at peace after reconnecting with the latte.[90]

Furthermore, the ceremony served as a powerful reminder of the historical and cultural continuity that links past and present generations, fostering a shared sense of community reconnection. Taitano Lowe, who lives in the diaspora, talked about how hopeful she felt after the ceremony: "Healing is happening in knowing that the latte are here in community and with the ancestors . . . that they're well taken-care of."[91] Sarah Untalan, a Chamorro woman who works as an administrative assistant at the Bishop Museum, also noted how happy she was that so many Chamorros had reunited for the event.[92] Tomas Perez of the Chamorro diaspora in Seattle shared similar feelings: "The biggest thing [I felt] is reconnection."[93] In this context, feelings of hope and anger were not opposing forces, but rather intertwined and coexisting.

Feelings of unity, respect, and longing for the return of the ancestral latte to their home were also common among the Chamorro attendants. Several attendees mentioned that the ultimate goal of the Relocation Project was to repatriate the ancestral latte in the near future. In *Placental Politics*, Christine Taitano DeLisle notes that there is a deep connection between Chamorros and the tåno' (land), where the land becomes a visceral, multisensory presence, communicating with Chamorros in ways that both literally and figuratively ground them in the soil and bind them to the land.[94] Latte sites, in this respect, serve as tangible manifestations of the deep connection that Chamorros have to their tåno'. In the words of Marsh Taitano and Liston, "Latte are a significant symbol and treasured birthright to contemporary CHamoru, signifying heritage, identity, and nationalism, and maintaining a community rooted in the land and culture."[95]

Latte sites are also intimately connected to the physical, spiritual, and cultural well-being of the land. Chamorro suruhana (healer) Mamma Chai says the following about her visits to latte sites: "There are times I feel a very deep, deep piniti (hurt) of our ancestors. I believe they hurt when they see such destruction and lack of respect for our land and our environment."[96] As expressed by Mamma Chai, the desacralization and removal of materials from latte sites—including the stones themselves—play a significant role in the harm inflicted upon the saina and taotaomo'na who inhabit these sacred spaces. While the Latte Stone Ceremony was a significant first step in the rekindling of mutual relationships between the latte and the Chamorro community, the return of the latte from the Bishop Museum back to the islands will entail their physical, emotional, and spiritual reconnection with the tåno', as well as with the taotao tåno' (people of the land). The agency of the latte expressed in these concepts will in turn contribute to the healing of the land, the preservation of the cultural landscape of the Mariana Islands, and the reconnection of Chamorros who reside in different, often extremely distanced, geographical areas.

Reactivation and Reconnection

The latte at the Bishop Museum were reactivated through a series of "affective encounters"—the kinds of encounters that take place in the museum in which *something* affects something or someone else.[97] As descendants engaged with the latte, their presence infused new life into these ancestral structures. In a way, there was an almost ontological transformation in the stones—from inanimate objects stored at the back of the museum to animated agents, reawakened through the relationships imbued in them by the descendants of those who carved them, as well as in the community which was reactivated through the presence of and contact with the latte. These transformations were fueled by touch, offerings, words, movements, and emotions shared during the ceremony. Thus, the Latte Stone Ceremony reveals how such affective responses can transform museum spaces from sites of violence and pain into spaces of healing and reconnection for Indigenous communities. Attending seriously to these emotional and sensory dimensions opens new possibilities for museums stewarding Indigenous cultural belongings—not as passive custodians, but as active participants in facilitating spaces for relationship building, care, and cultural affirmation.

Affective encounters were not limited to interactions between the latte and individuals; they also occurred among members of the community. The ceremony served as a significant moment to be proud of being Chamorro, offering an opportunity to embrace and affirm the Chamorro heritage and language within a communal space. For Chamorros participating in the Latte Stone Ceremony, the presence of the latte evoked a profound connection to the saina, or ancestors. It represented a deeply significant and sacred moment for all those involved. The Bishop Museum became a space where the Chamorro community had the opportunity to reconnect with their saina, as well as with each other. It became a relational space, where dynamic and deeply emotional engagements between people and cultural artifacts took place.

Furthermore, the latte brought Chamorros together, fostering a sense of reconnection among individuals regardless of their place of origin—whether from Guåhan, the Northern Mariana Islands, or the diaspora. The Latte Stone Ceremony, in this way, embodied the spirit of inafa'maolek, a complex and important cultural metaphor for the Chamorro that emphasizes the cultural values of community cooperation, solidarity, and respect.[98] The gathering of Chamorros for the ceremony holds particular significance because it transcends historical, political, cultural, and linguistic separations, often imposed by external colonial forces; the event not only fostered a shared sense of cultural reconnection but also reaffirmed the latte as a unifying symbol that bridges diverse Chamorro experiences and identities. This feeling is encapsulated by a phrase that was often repeated during the ceremony: “Un taotao, un Marianas—One people, one Marianas.”

Coda

This article was originally written shortly after the Latte Stone Ceremony took place in 2024, and exciting developments on the future of the latte housed at the Bishop Museum have taken place since. In August 2025, the Bishop Museum announced the ethical return of the latte, alongside the 10,000 artifacts collected by Hans Hornbostel, to the Mariana Islands. The announcement was made after the Bishop Museum’s Board of Directors unanimously voted to deaccession the pieces. This return is among the largest of its kind in terms of the number of items involved.

A small ceremony in Honolulu on August 9, 2025, marked the beginning of this process. Attendees included Lieutenant Governor of Guam Josh Tenorio, Department of CHamoru Affairs President Melvin Won Pat-Borja, and Nicole Delisle Dueñas of the Guam Cultural Repository. Representing the CNMI were Chief of Staff to the Governor Henry Hofschneider, Senator Celina Babauta, NMI Museum Director Leonard Leon, and staff from the CNMI State Historic Preservation Office. Representing Hawaiʻi were Governor Josh Green and First Lady Jaime Ushiroda, as well as key representatives of the Bishop Museum. Some members of the

Chamorro diaspora in Hawaiʻi also attended. In their speeches, these dignitaries emphasized the importance of this moment and framed it in terms of reconciliation, healing, and continued collaboration, friendship, and commitment between the Mariana Islands and Hawaiʻi. Following these remarks, attendees were invited to place offerings upon the latte, to wish them a good trip or say goodbye to them. Bishop Museum staff then started to crate and prepare the collection for transport.

Soon after the ceremony, the first set of objects traveled back to Guåhan. From September 6 to 12, 2025, the Guam Museum held the exhibition *Iyo-ta Gi Tano'-ta Ta'lo* (Ours in Our Land Again) to welcome the artifacts home and reconnect them with the community. On October 24th, the people of Guåhan held a rematriation ceremony in front of the Guam Museum to honor the return of several latte from Honolulu, which will remain on display in Skinner Plaza until a more permanent home is found. Over two hundred people gathered to chant, leave offerings, and touch the latte, welcoming both the stones and the spirits of the saina back to the island. This ceremony, much like the Latte Stone Ceremony, was a deeply emotional occasion, marked by feelings of healing and resilience. In parallel, one of the latte from the NMI—the one displayed in the center of the circle of latte in the central courtyard of the Bishop Museum—has also returned to Saipan. A public ceremony to welcome it home is scheduled to take place within the next few months. While some latte and artifacts have made their way back to the Marianas, roughly 6,000 more are still awaiting return.

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Notes

[1] Every four years, members of different Pacific communities gather in the world's largest celebration of Pacific Islanders and their culture: the Festival of Pacific Arts and Culture (FestPAC). Originally set to take place in 2020 and postponed due to the COVID-19 global pandemic, the thirteenth edition of the festival took place in Hawaiʻi, June 6–16, 2024. FestPAC 2024 also served as a celebration of the 50th anniversary of the first festival. This circumstance allowed its organisers to conceive the biggest event seen to date, with over 100 official delegatations, five main venues, nine additional venues for performances, and eight simultaneous thematic programs. Under the theme "Hoʻoulu Lāhui/Regenerating Oceania," the festival organizers wanted to "honor traditions that FestPAC has perpetuated for the last fifty years, with an eye toward the future." "Ho'oulu Lāhui/Regenerating Oceania: 13th Festival of Pacifc Arts & Culture," Gravitas Pacifica LLC, accessed January 30, 2026, https://www.festpachawaii.org/. This iteration of the festival also revolved around ohana (family) reunions after a long eight-year hiatus, enabling the reconnection of different Pacific communities.

[2] The Chamorro are the Indigenous peoples of the Mariana Islands. The term used to refer to them can be spelled several ways—the most common ones being "Chamorro," "CHamoru," and "Chamoru"—reflecting the complexity of Chamorro identity and culture. In this paper, I use "Chamorro" as inclusive terminology encompassing people from Guåhan, the Northern Mariana Islands, and the diaspora. While the majority of people residing in Guåhan (Guam) identify as "CHamoru"—seen as a "practical assertion" of an orthography that is "self-defined and self-adopted, and thus not imposed by any external authority"—inhabitants of the Northern Mariana Islands use the spelling "Chamorro." Gina E. Taitano, "Chamorro vs. CHamoru," Guampedia, last modified February 4, 2025, https://www.guampedia.com/chamorro-vs-chamoru/. The Chamorro diaspora in the United States is concentrated in San Diego, California; Tacoma, Washington; and Honolulu, Hawaiʻi. Faye F. Untalan, "CHamoru/Chamorro Migration to the US," Guampedia, last modified February 4, 2025, https://www.guampedia.com/chamorro-migration-to-the-u-s/.

[3] The Mariana Islands are a tropical archipelago located in the northwestern Pacific Ocean. The archipelago comprises fifteen islands, listed from south to north: Guåhan (Guam), Luta (Rota), Aguijan (Goat Island), Tinian, Saipan, No'os (Farallon de Medinilla), Anatåhan, Sarigan, Guguan, Alimågan (Alamagan), Pågan, Agrihan, Asuncion, Maug, and Uråcas (Farallon de Pajaros). While the islands form one archipelago and their people share a common identity, the Marianas are politically administered as two jurisdictions. The largest island in the archipelago, Guåhan, has been an unincorporated United States territory since 1898, while the remaining islands are part of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI). The political status of the Mariana Islands is complex and has long contributed to divisions between the Chamorros of Guåhan and those of the CNMI.

Owing to their strategic location near Asia and differing political arrangements, the islands hold significant importance in global geopolitics, particularly for the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD). For more details on the DOD's interest in the Mariana Islands see Sylvia C. Frain, *Fanohge Famalåo'an & Fan'tachu Fama'lauan: Women Rising Indigenous Resistance to Militarization in the Marianas* (PhD diss., University of Otago, 2017).

[4] The Celebrate Micronesia Festival is hosted annually by the Bishop Museum, in partnership with the Pacific Islands Development Program at East-West Center, the Center for Pacific Islands Studies at the University of Hawaiʻi at Mānoa, and leaders from Micronesian communities that live in the diaspora in Hawaiʻi. The event honors the "rich traditions and contemporary expressions of the Republic of Palau, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Guåhan (Guam), Yap, Chuuk, Pohnpei, Kosrae, Kiribati, and the Republic of the Marshall Islands," and brings examples of cultural practices such as music, dance, food, art, and storytelling, among others. "Celebrate Micronesia Festival 2025," Bishop Museum, accessed January 30, 2026, https://www.bishopmuseum.org/celebrate-micronesia-festival-2025/.

[5] Although the word "saina" may refer to one's parents as well as to all elders or to Chamorro ancestors, in this paper it will specifically be used to refer to the ancestors.

[6] "Gi Oriyan I Latte ni Gaige gi Museon Bishop giya Hawaiʻi," June 26, 2024, by Fanachu! Live (podcast), YouTube, 1 hour, 4 min., 35 sec., https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_udqhzuQVjE.

[7] For an archaeological account of the latte, see Mike T. Carson, "An Overview of *Latte* Period Archaeology," *Micronesica* 42, no. 1/2 (2012): 1–79; *Rediscovering Heritage through Artefacts, Sites, and Landscapes: Translating a 3500-year Record at Ritidian, Guam* (Archaeopress Publishing, 2017), and Mike T. Carson, "Ancient Life in the Mariana Islands: From the First Settlement through the Latte Period" in *I estoria-ta: Guam, the Marianas and CHamoru culture,* ed. Ministerio de Cultura y Deporte and Acción Cultural Española (Ministerio de Cultura y Deporte, 2021), 27–37.

[8] Lawrence J. Cunningham, *Ancient Chamorro Society* (Bess Press, 1992), 48.

[9] Carson, "An Overview of *Latte* Period Archaeology," 42-49; Carson, "Ancient Life in the Mariana Islands," 33-35.

[10] Early voyage and missionary accounts in the Mariana Islands are reproduced and translated in Cunningham, *Ancient Chamorro Society;* and Rodrigue Lévesque, *History of Micronesia: A Collection of Source Documents,* volumes 1–4 (Lévesque Publications, 1992).

[11] Many historians have written about the Spanish-Chamorro Wars, the Reducción, and the short- and-long-term impacts that these events had on the Chamorro population. See Francis X. Hezel, *The First Taint of Civilization: A History of the Caroline and Marshall Islands in Pe-Colonial Days, 1521–1885*, Pacific

Islands Monograph Series, No. 1 (University of Hawai‘i Press, 1983); and Robert F. Rogers, *Destiny's Landfall: A History of Guam* (University of Hawai‘i Press, 1995).

[12] Carson, "Ancient Life in the Mariana Islands," 35.

[13] Malia A. Ramirez, "Taotao Latte yu', Islas Marianas!: Descendant of the Latte People, Mariana Islands!," in *Latte in the Marianas: By the Community for the Community*, ed. Kelly Marsh Taitano and Jolie Liston (The Latte in the Marianas: Art, Icon and Archaeology Project, 2021), 11.

[14] Siñora Rufina F. Mendiola, "Narratives of Maga'låhi Taga'," in *Latte in the Marianas: By the Community for the Community*, ed. Kelly Marsh Taitano and Jolie Liston (The Latte in the Marianas: Art, Icon and Archaeology Project, 2021), 61.

[15] For a longer version of the story, see Don Farrell, "Taga," Guampedia, last modified June 20, 2024, https://www.guampedia.com/taga/.

[16] Evidence for the continuity of oral traditions associated with the latte—and their enduring sacred significance—appears, for example, in a report by a Spanish colonial governor. Felipe de la Corte, *Memoria Descriptiva e Histórica de las Islas Marianas: estudio analítico de todos sus elementos físicos, morales y políticos, y propuesta de su reforma...; escrita por el Teniente Coronel D. Felipe de la Corte y Ruano Calderón, del Cuerpo de Ingenieros del Ejército, Gobernador de dichas Islas* (Imprenta Nacional, 1875), 83.

[17] Joe Quinata and Kelly Marsh Taitano, "Hinanao-ta Mo'na: Our Journey Forward," in *Latte in the Marianas: By the Community for the Community*, ed. Kelly Marsh Taitano and Jolie Liston (The Latte in the Marianas: Art, Icon and Archaeology Project, 2021), 97.

[18] Christine Taitano DeLisle, "Civilizing the Guam Museum," *University of Michigan Working Papers in Museum Studies*, no. 4 (2010): 2.

[19] For more information on Hornbostel's spying activities in the Marianas, see DeLisle, "Civilizing the Guam Museum," 2; Michael Bevacqua, "Bevacqua: Hans Hornbostel," *Guam Pacific Daily News,* September 28, 2023, https://www.guampdn.com/opinion/bevacqua-hans-hornbostel/article_b9b9f990-5dc3-11ee-a0cc-3b7e54256ecf.html; and Michael Bevacqua, "OPINION Bevacqua: We sing, so they will find their way home," *Guam Pacific Daily News,* June 28, 2024, https://www.guampdn.com/opinion/opinion-bevacqua-we-sing-so-they-will-find-their-way-home/article_21dc78c0-344e-11ef-8123-87c53d7849d4.html.

[20] Judy Flores, "Gertrude Costenoble Hornbostel," Guampedia, last modified February 4, 2025, https://www.guampedia.com/gertrude-costenoble-hornbostel/. Some of the oral histories gathered by Gertrude Costenoble have been published in Appendix A of Laura M. Thompson, *Archaeology of the Mariana Islands* (Bernice P. Bishop Museum Bulletin 100, 1932), 59–70.

[21] DeLisle, "Civilizing the Guam Museum," 2.

[22] Bevacqua, "Bevacqua: Hans Hornbostel."

[23] DeLisle, "Civilizing the Guam Museum," 1.

[24] Bevacqua, "OPINION."

[25] Bevacqua, "Bevacqua: Hans Hornbostel."

[26] Cassie Ordonio, "Repatriation efforts underway for ancient Chamorro stone carvings at Bishop Museum," *Hawai ʻi Public Radio*, April 8, 2024, https://www.hawaiipublicradio.org/local-news/2024-04-08/repatriation-efforts-ancient-chamorro-stone-carvings-bishop-museum.

[27] Dr. Michael Lujan Bevacqua, in "Gi Oriyan I Latte," 03:30.

[28] Bevacqua, in "Gi Oriyan I Latte," 03:47.

[29] Chamorros who live in the diaspora tend to gather in annual cultural festivals organized by different US-based Chamorro organizations all over the United States. Examples include the Håfa Adai Festival and Che'lu Festival in San Diego, the Marianas Festival in Portland, the Chamorro Day Festival in Tacoma, and the Chamorro Cultural Festival in Oceanside, California. Festivals are extremely important for Chamorros in the diaspora who have never been to the Marianas, as they enable them to connect with their culture, language, and community.

[30] According to their Facebook page, the Hafa Adai Club of Hawaii is a group of "family and friends from Guam" based in Hawaiʻi. Hafa Adai Club of Hawaii, Facebook, accessed February 03, 2026, https://www.facebook.com/groups/2449077455114351.

[31] Elyssa Santos, in "Gi Oriyan I Latte," 15:00.

[32] See Sonya Atalay, "Braiding Strands of Wellness: How Repatriation Contributes to Healing through Embodied Practice and Storywork," *The Public Historian* 41, no. 1 (2019): 78–89, https://doi.org/10.1525/tph.2019.41.1.78; and Cressida Fforde et al., "Emotion and the Return of Ancestors: Repatriation as Affective Practice" in *The Oxford Handbook of Museum Archaeology*, ed. A. Stevenson (Oxford University Press, 2022), 65–84, https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198847526.013.43.

[33] Elyssa Santos, in "Gi Oriyan I Latte," 14:00.

[34] Sandra H. Dudley, *Displaced Things in Museums and Beyond: Loss, Liminality and Hopeful Encounters* (Routledge, 2021), 81.

[35] Elyssa Santos, in "Gi Oriyan I Latte," 16:15.

[36] Elyssa Santos, in "Gi Oriyan I Latte," 16:50.

[37] "Lieutenant Governor Tenorio Leads Effort to Return Latte Stones to Guam, Address CHamoru Artifacts at the Bishop Museum in Hawai'i," Ufisinan i Maga'Håga/Office of the Governor, August 30, 2024, https://governor.guam.gov/press_release/lieutenant-governor-tenorio-leads-effort-to-return-latte-stones-to-guam-address-chamoru-artifacts-at-the-bishop-museum-in-hawaii/.

[38] "Ancient Remains Returned to Guam after Four Decades in a California Lab," *Pacific Island Times*, November 9, 2023, https://www.pacificislandtimes.com/post/ancient-remains-returned-to-guam-after-four-decades-in-a-california-lab.

[39] "NMI Museum Leads Repatriation Project to Return Ancestral Remains," Kuam News, October 30, 2024, https://www.kuam.com/story/51714127/nmi-museum-leads-repatriation-project-to-return-ancestral-remains.

[40] Andrew Roberto, "NMI Museum to Bring Ancestral Chamorro Remains Back from California in November," *Marianas Variety*, October 30, 2024, https://www.mvariety.com/news/local/nmi-museum-to-bring-ancestral-chamorro-remains-back-from-california-in-november/article_3477f67e-95d0-11ef-8f9a-57bf857393a8.html.

[41] Walter Ulloa, "Cultural Group Visits CHamoru Artifacts at German Museums," *Marianas Variety*, October 20, 2025, https://www.mvariety.com/regional_world/regional-world-cultural-group-visits-chamoru-artifacts-at-german-museums-dwtorvhd/article_6c8c5dc3-1458-474c-baf8-3920744d2ecb.html/.

[42] Inafa'maolek is a complex and important cultural metaphor for Chamorros that embodies several interconnected meanings. The literal translation of the term is to "make (inafa') good (maolek)." Dr. Katherine Aguon argues that the concept espouses the six traditional values of Chamorro culture: 1) Respetu: respect afforded to the elderly, the ancestors and other significant members of the community and one's family; 2) Manginge: a reverence of respect given to the elderly by slightly touching one's nose to the back of the person's hand; 3) Mamahlao: shame, embarrassment; 4) Chenchule': to give things way; 5) Che'lu: relationships with siblings; and 6) Påtgon: the collective responsibility of raising children. Lilli Perez-Iyechad, "Inafa'maolek: Striving for Harmony," Guampedia, accessed January 31, 2026, https://www.guampedia.com/inafamaolek/.

[43] "Community members visit ancient burial sites in Saipan," September 14, 2025, by Marianas Press, YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qap0bNujNZs&t=221s.

[44] The title of "Master of CHamoru Culture," awarded by CAHA, the Guam Arts Council, is bestowed upon those master practitioners who preserve various aspects of Guåhan's Traditional and Folk Arts (like chanting, dancing, weaving, blacksmithing, carving, healing, among others). The award honors master practitioners for their artistry, craftsmanship, and dedication to preserving Guåhan's cultural traditions. See "Masters Program," Guam Council on the Arts & Humanities Agency, accessed January 31, 2026, https://guamcaha.org/programs#:~:text=Since%20the%20establishment%20of%20the,Award%20will%20be%20April%202019.

[45] For more information on the Chamorro revival of chant, see Judy Flores, "Chant," Guampedia, last modified February 22, 2025, https://www.guampedia.com/chant/; and Judy Flores, "Art and Identity in the Mariana Islands: Issues of Reconstructing an Ancient Past" (PhD diss., University of East Anglia, 1999).

[46] Tihu Lujan, "Ancestral Connections Through Language: Chanters preserve fino'håya," *Guam Pacific Daily News*, May 30, 2024,

https://www.guampdn.com/lifestyle/ancestral-connections-through-language-chanters-preserve-fino-h-ya/article_91bed166-1e22-11ef-bcb5-e3f2d1ba7245.html.

[47] Lujan, "Ancestral Connections Through Language."

[48] D. S. Farrer and James D. Sellman, "Chants of Re-Enchantment: Chamorro Spiritual Resistance to Colonial Domination," *Social Analysis* 58, no. 1 (2014): 127–48, https://doi:10.3167/sa.2014.580107.

[49] Kåntan Chamorrita is the contemporary name given to an ancient Chamorro art form, known for its call-and-response, impromptu verse-making practiced between several people. Judy Flores, "Kantan Chamorrita," Guampedia, accessed January 31, 2026, https://www.guampedia.com/kantan-chamorita-2/.

[50] Schyuler Lujan, "Latte Stone Ceremony Chant by Brant Songsong and Elyssa Santos," Lengguahi-ta: Digital Lessons and Learning Resources for the Chamorro Language, June 26, 2024, https://lengguahita.com/2024/06/26/latte-stone-ceremony-chant-by-brant-songsong-and-elyssa-santos/.

[51] Lujan, "Ancestral Connections Through Language."

[52] Jerick Sablan, "Letting the World Know about the CHamoru People through Dances," *Guam Pacific Daily News*, June 4, 2024, https://www.guampdn.com/lifestyle/letting-the-world-know-about-the-chamoru-people-through-dances/article_c608933c-2154-11ef-b6bd-a3228837461f.html.

[53] "Gi Oriyan I Latte," 35:00.

[54] Jonathan Flatley, *Affective Mapping: Melancholia and the Politics of Modernism* (Harvard University Press, 2008).

[55] Marzia Varutti, "Affective Encounters in Museums," in *Heritage Ecologies*, ed. Þóra Pétursdóttir and Torgeir Rinke Bangstad (Routledge, 2021), 129–44.

[56] Sarah Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 10–11.

[57] Fforde et al., "Emotion and Return of Ancestors."

[58] Bevacqua, "OPINION."

[59] Examples of this from around the world can be found in Bill Sillar, "Animating Relationships: Inca *Conopa* and Modern *Illa* as Mediating Objects," in *The Inbetweenness of Things: Materializing Mediation and Movement between Worlds*, ed. P. Basu (Bloomsbury, 2017), 131–48; Danelle Cooper et al., "It's Always a Part of You": The Connection Between Sacred Space and Indigenous/Aboriginal Health," *International Journal of Human Rights Education* 3, no. 1 (2019): 1–29; and Aurore Dumont, "Turning Indigenous Sacred Sites into Intangible Heritage: Authority Figures and Ritual Appropriation in Inner Mongolia," *China Perspectives* 3, no. 126 (2021): 19–28, https://doi.org/10.4000/chinaperspectives.12129.

[60] Hilary "Larry" Raigetal, "Revitalizing 'Traditional' Navigation Systems in the Contemporary Pacific," in *The Cambridge History of the Pacific Ocean Volume 1: The Pacific Ocean to 1800*, ed. R. Tucker Jones and M. K. Matsuda (Cambridge University Press, 2023), 345–68.

[61] Michael Bevacqua, "Taotaomo'na," Guampedia, last modified February 22, 2025, https://www.guampedia.com/taotaomona-taotaomona/.

[62] Accounts of ancient Chamorro storing ancestral skulls under the rafters of their dwellings are found in Cunningham, *Ancient Chamorro Society*, 53; Farrer and Selman, "Chants of Re-Enchantment," 132; Marjory Driver, *The Account of Fray Juan Pobre's Residence in the Marianas, 1602*, MARC Miscellaneous Series No. 8. (Micronesian Area Research Center, University of Guam, 1993); and Michael Bevacqua, "Taotaomo'na."

[63] An original account of this practice is found in Francisco Garcia, *The Life and Martyrdom of the Venerable Father Luis Diego de San Vitores, S.J.*, ed. J. A. McDonough, MARC Monograph Series 3 (Micronesian Area Research Center, University of Guam, 2004 [1683]), 13–19.

[64] Bevacqua, "Taotaomo'na."

[65] These ancestral objects are now protected from removal by various laws, like the Commonwealth Historic Preservation Act of 1982 (Public Law 3-39) in the NMI, and Chapter 76 of the Regulation of Real Property Uses (21 GCA Chapter 76) in Guåhan. US federal laws, including the Archaeological Resources Protection Act (ARPA) and the National Historic Preservation Act of 1996, further restrict excavation on public lands and require permits for artifact removal. Adding another layer to these legislative projects, the removal of artifacts from Chamorro ancestral sites is a profound act of disrespect toward the community and the saina.

[66] Jesi Lujan Bennett, "Guagua' (woven basket) and Chamoru Weaving (mamfok)," *Smarthistory*, March 26, 2025, https://smarthistory.org/chamoru-guagua-mamfok/.

[67] James C. Bamba, "I mañaina-hu chumachalåni yo': My Ancestors Guide Me," in *Latte in the Marianas: By the Community for the Community*, ed. Kelly Marsh Taitano and Jolie Liston (The Latte in the Marianas: Art, Icon and Archaeology Project, 2021), 81.

[68] Nathaniel Lennon Rigler Siguenza, "Coconut Oil Reflects: A Comparative Commodity Ethnography in Two Sites" (PhD diss., Te Herenga Waka — Victoria University of Wellington, 2022), 241–60.

[69] Siguenza, "Coconut Oil Reflects," 260.

[70] Siguenza, "Coconut Oil Reflects," 89–139.

[71] Fforde et al., "Emotion and Return of Ancestors," 65; and Elizabeth Pye, *The Power of Touch: Handling Objects in Museum and Heritage Contexts* (Left Coast Press, 2008), 16.

[72] Carol Duncan and Alan Wallach, "The Universal Survey Museum," *Art History* 3 (1980): 448–69; and Carol Duncan, "Art Museums and the Ritual of Citizenship" in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Display*, ed. Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine (Smithsonian Institution, 1991), 88–103.

[73] Scholars who have focused on the emotional aspect of touch include Pye, *The Power of Touch*; Dudley, *Displaced Things*; and Sandra H. Dudley, *Museum Materialities: Objects, Engagements, Interpretations* (Routledge, 2010).

[74] See Fanny Wonu Veys, "Awakening Sleeping Objects," in *Pasifika Styles: Artists Inside the Museum*, ed. Rosanna Raymond and Amiria Salmond (University of Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, 2008), 111–15; and Stephen Gilchrist and Henry Skerritt, "Awakening Objects and Indigenizing the Museum: Stephen Gilchrist in Conversation with Henry F. Skerritt," *Contemporaneity: Historical Presence in Visual Culture* 5, no. 1 (2016): 108–21, https://doi.org/10.5195/contemp.2016.183.

[75] Bevacqua, "Taotaomo'na."

[76] Arielle Taitano Lowe, in "Gi Oriyan I Latte," 25:40.

[77] Veys, "Awakening Sleeping Objects," 15.

[78] Fred Rodriguez, "Latte's Significance," Guampedia, last modified February 26, 2025, https://www.guampedia.com/lattes-significance/.

[79] Michael L. Bevacqua, "Latte: Contemporary Symbol of CHamoru Identity," in *Latte in the Marianas: By the Community for the Community*, ed. Kelly Marsh Taitano and Jolie Liston (The Latte in the Marianas: Art, Icon and Archaeology Project, 2021), 133.

[80] Bevacqua, "Taotaomo'na."

[81] Bevacqua, in "Gi Oriyan I Latte," 08:45.

[82] Joe Quinata and Kelly Marsh Taitano, "Hinanao-ta Mo'na: Our Journey Forward," 97.

[83] Sarah Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Introduction.

[84] Fforde et al., "Emotion and Return of Ancestors."

[85] Catherine A. Lutz, *Unnatural Emotions: Everyday Sentiments on a Micronesian Atoll & Their Challenge to Western Theory* (University of Chicago Press, 1988), 150.

[86] Cressida Fforde et al., "Emotion, affective practice, and the taking of Indigenous Ancestral Remains" in *The Oxford Handbook of Museum Archaeology*, ed. A. Stevenson (Oxford University Press, 2022), 45–64, https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198847526.013.43, 64.

[87] Bevacqua, in "Gi Oriyan I Latte," 19:45.

[88] Roman dela Cruz, in "Gi Oriyan I Latte," 53:30. A "slinger" is a person who practices slinging: throwing or hurling stones or other things using a tool known as a sling.

[89] Fforde et al., "Emotion, affective practice," 64.

[90] Erlinda Naputi, in "Gi Oriyan I Latte," 59:10.

[91] Arielle Taitano Lowe, in "Gi Oriyan I Latte," 25:30.

[92] Sarah Untalan, in "Gi Oriyan I Latte," 21:20.

[93] Tomas Perez, in "Gi Oriyan I Latte," 28:08.

[94] Christine Taitano DeLisle, *Placental Politics: Chamoru Women, White Womanhood, and Indigeneity Under U.S. Colonialism in Guam* (University of North Carolina Press, 2021), xiii.

[95] Marsh Taitano and Liston, "Introduction," in *Latte in the Marianas: By the Community for the Community*, ed. Kelly Marsh Taitano and Jolie Liston (The Latte in the Marianas: Art, Icon and Archaeology Project, 2021), 1.

[96] Marsh Taitano and Liston, "Taotao Tåno yan Tåsi, Taotao Latte: People of the Land and Sea, People of the Latte," ed. Kelly Marsh Taitano and Jolie Liston (The Latte in the Marianas: Art, Icon and Archaeology Project, 2021), 7.
[97] Varutti, "Affective Encounters in Museums," 62.
[98] Bevacqua, "Latte: Contemporary Symbol of CHamoru Identity," 133.

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California Is the Eastern Pacific: Toward a Collective Oceanic Realignment

Abstract
This article is a reprint of a curatorial essay written for the catalogue of Transformative Currents: Art and Action in the Pacific Ocean*, a multi-venue exhibition presented as part of* Art & Science Collide*, Getty's most recent PST ART initiative (2024–25).* Transformative Currents *featured work by twenty-one artists and collaborative teams from across the Pacific region at three venues in Southern California: Oceanside Museum of Art, Orange County Museum of Art (now UC Irvine Langson Orange County Museum of Art), and Crystal Cove Conservancy. The essay details how the show, while rooted in Southern California, attempted to suture the ways in which the Pacific has been divided by colonial and imperialist powers and, thus, is regularly presented in large-scale exhibitions. It argues that the work in* Transformative Currents *both disembarked from Southern California and seemingly always recalled it, the artists navigating the Pacific searching for points of solidarity, not places for subjugation.*

Keywords: *Getty PST ART, Pacific art, contemporary art, environmental art, exhibitions, curatorial practice*

Transformative Currents: Art and Action in the Pacific Ocean was a multi-venue exhibition presented in 2024–25 as part of *Art & Science Collide*, Getty's most recent PST ART initiative. Curated by Cassandra Coblentz, with assistant curators Ziying Duan and myself, *Transformative Currents* featured work by twenty-one artists and collaborative teams at three venues in Southern California: Oceanside Museum of Art, Orange County Museum of Art (now UC Irvine Langson Orange County Museum of Art), and Crystal Cove Conservancy.[i]

The work of these artists from across the Pacific—encompassing the coastal Americas, Oceania, Australia, and South/East Asia—examined oceanic concerns including deep-sea mining, military weapons testing, plastic pollution, nuclear waste, coral restoration, climate data collection, kelp ecosystems, sea-level rise, border infrastructures, factory fishing, sand dredging, coastal erosion, saltwater intrusion, Indigenous relationalities, and the challenges of international stewardship, among others. The catalogue, published by X Artists' Books and designed by Polymode Studio, features curatorial and contributed essays, individual project profiles for each participating artist, and documentation of the international "Sea Change" symposium held at Orange County Museum of Art in 2022.[ii] It beautifully archives the nearly five-year project. Conscious decisions around the catalogue's use of algae paper inserts and vegetable-based ink also contributed to the exhibition's participation in PST ART's Climate Impact Program.[iii]

The following is a reprint of my curatorial essay in the catalogue, which details how the show, while rooted in Southern California, attempts to suture the ways in which the Pacific has been divided by colonial and imperialist powers and, thus, is regularly presented in large-scale exhibitions. From the onset, *Transformative Currents* repeatedly challenged me to reconcile my research on contemporary art in Oceania with the project's place-specificity of Southern California. Inspired by the reverberations between Indigenous oceanic practices in Southern California and Oceania, this text is the result of that curatorial wayfinding process.

Introduction

In the hit song "Californication" from their 1999 album of the same name, the Red Hot Chili Peppers describe, somewhat resentfully, the state of California as the "edge of the world and all of Western civilization." An influential assertion from a stereotypically "Californian" band if there ever were one, this conventional geographical parlance reassures listeners that California is, indeed, something associated with a "West." Contrary to any perceived "western-ness," the seafaring practices of Indigenous peoples in Southern California have led Craig Torres and Cindi Alvitre, both Tongva and members of the Ti'at Society, to refer to Southern California's offshore islands, now called the Channel Islands, as the "furthest east of Polynesia" and the "most eastern point of [the] Pacific landscape," respectively.[1] Such a shift in orientation, marked by a compass placement centered in the Pacific Ocean rather than on the North American continent, would lead us to classify California not as the West Coast but as the Eastern Pacific, in turn encouraging a considerable realignment in perspective (Fig. 1).

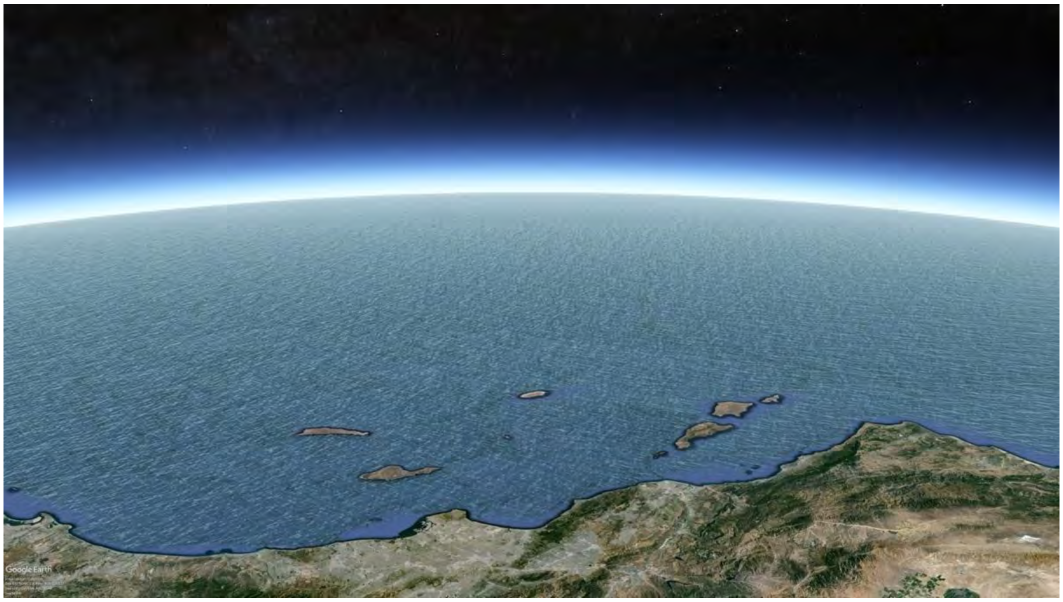

Figure 1. Google Earth view of the Pacific from Southern California's coastline.

These two understandings of California—the edge of Western civilization and Polynesia's easternmost limits—each suggest certain ideological inclinations toward the Pacific Ocean. The former recalls the Pacific as merely the successful termination point of Manifest Destiny, the "civilizing" project of the United States that realized its continental completion in the state-sanctioned genocide of California's Indigenous peoples.[2] Evoking death, destruction, and a newfound rampart, this militarized approach has lent itself to a fraught relationship with a fortified coastline that must not only be continually defended from outside enemies but can also function as a strategic base for further oceanic conquest. The latter, based on the scientific knowledge of Indigenous boatbuilding, brings to mind ecological ingenuity, pan-oceanic kinship, and cultural exchange.[3] Averse to a racist hierarchical worldview between "civilized" and "uncivilized," Torres's and Alvitre's sentiments foster respect for similarities and differences, mediated through a shared obligation to the oceanic environment.

As an exhibition anchored in Southern California with its sights set toward the greater Pacific, *Transformative Currents: Art and Action in the Pacific Ocean* strives to hold these two orientations in tension. The exhibition takes seriously the notion of Southern California as an oceanic entity, putting into conversation artists whose work either derives from socio-ecological concerns close to these shores or emerges from elsewhere in the Pacific but elicits particular relevance to local communities. Guided by aspirations to further recalibrate Southern California to the Pacific, the curatorial process for *Transformative Currents* has prompted many difficult questions requiring deep deliberation: what does reimagining an "oceanic gaze" from this vantage look like, beyond the generally romanticized impressionist seascapes of the plein air art "colonies" that arose in beachside communities during the early twentieth century? How might a critical oceanic examination effectively expose Southern California's historical and ongoing complicity in colonialism, imperialism, and militarism, while also offering potential routes through which more harmonious ways of engaging the ocean can be coordinated? Taking Torres's and Alvitre's pronouncements as its theoretical starting point, this essay will articulate the fruitful connections made visible by *Transformative Currents*' innovative inclusion of Southern California within existing scholarly and artistic discourses concerning the Pacific. Although not possible to comprehensively represent the entire Pacific in its rich diversity, I contend that the place-based projects included in the exhibition elicit parallel analyses, motioning toward a collective oceanic realignment.

Navigating Pacific Geo-Terminologies

The very capaciousness of the Pacific is precisely what makes arriving at terminology adequate for an oceanic spatial understanding so difficult. Focusing on a single ocean is itself already an arbitrary task of selective exclusivity, especially if one takes into consideration geological time. Hundreds of millions of years ago, before massive plate tectonic subduction and corresponding uplift shaped the distinctive coastline to what we recognize today, the area that is now Southern California was completely submerged, the evidence of which can be found in marine fossils still dotting the landscape.[4] Even if one limits their outlook to the more immediate past, present, and near future, the boundaries between individual oceans (and *within* oceans as well, such as the racialized identities imposed through the colonial partition of the Pacific into Polynesia, Micronesia, and Melanesia)[5] are largely human-produced cartographic demarcations influenced by geopolitical motivations. What is more, if one follows how complex coastal ecosystems interact with the ocean—from estuaries, wetlands, and the inland waterways that replenish them—the ocean/land distinction becomes increasingly blurred, constituting less of a binary division than a spectrum of entanglements. For Pacific Islanders, the ocean also inhabits bodily realms. "We sweat and cry salt water," Banaban, I-Kiribati, and Black diasporic scholar and poet Teresia Teaiwa once reflected, "so we know that the ocean is really in our blood."[6]

Akin to these dilemmas of generally defining oceanic space, others have also problematized how the Pacific has been framed, emphasizing how the terms privileged often correlate to underlying rationale.[7] Epeli Hauʻofa, a Tongan and Fijian anthropologist and founder of the Oceania Centre for Arts and Culture, repeatedly unsettled prominent continental perceptions of the Pacific. In his essay "Our Sea of Islands," Hauʻofa famously posits "there is a world of difference between viewing the Pacific as 'islands in a far sea' and as 'a sea of islands,'" stressing how cultures and peoples are not separated by the ocean but, rather, interconnected through mobilities facilitated by its expansive waters.[8] This critique is further contextualized in his later essay "The Ocean in Us," in which Hauʻofa dissects terms such as "South Seas" and "South Pacific," among other representations, as troublesome for the ways they reduce the region to peripheral status, a mere backdrop for paradisiacal leisure and military campaigns. Hauʻofa also challenges the label "Pacific Rim" by likening it to a doughnut in which decision-making power is reserved only for countries in the ring of continents (North and South America, Australia, and Asia) that border the ocean, while Oceania—his preferred unifying identity for the region—is relegated to a helpless void of nothingness, a hole in the metaphorical doughnut.

The meanings imbued through the charged terms outlined by Hauʻofa mirror the critique opening this essay between considering California as the West Coast or as the Eastern Pacific. Much like how each suggests an orientation to the ocean largely incompatible with the other, the dominant geo-terminologies of the Pacific reveal how it has long been imagined by colonial regimes, providing rhetorical cover for exploitative resource extraction, poisonous legacies of radioactive fallout, and environmental destruction.[9] "When viewed through island rather than continental eyes," Kanaka Maoli scholar and Hawaiian sovereignty activist Haunani-Kay Trask explains, "Pacific peoples live in the largest danger zone in the world."[10] While some of the more explicitly nefarious uses of language have receded as formal colonialism has slowly given way (in some places) to neocolonialism, exclusionary framing continues. Take, for instance, Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), the enterprise of capitalist trade liberalization founded in 1989, spearheaded by US imperialist interests, and including barely any Pacific Island member states (depending on how one classifies New Zealand and Papua New Guinea). As Pacific studies scholar and artist Katerina Teaiwa has noted, APEC's logo seems to visualize the Pacific as a space devoid of anything but water.[11] More specifically, the Pacific is rendered empty in the logo precisely due to APEC's wordmark—and its economic influence—spanning the entire ocean, paradoxically proving in this very representation the deceitful nature of the erasure inherent within “Pacific Rim” framings.[12]

Antithetical to terminologies that derive from competition and promote division, the names for the ocean in Indigenous Pacific cultures allude to cohesion and interconnection. In ʻōlelo Hawaiʻi (Hawaiian), *Moananuiākea* refers to the Pacific as the “vast/great ocean.” *Te Moana-nui-a-Kiwa*, the name for the Pacific in te reo Māori (the Māori language), locates the ocean as the home of the god Kiwa. To acknowledge the centrality of the ocean for Pasifika peoples without privileging any single understanding at the expense of others, Sāmoan, Persian, and Cantonese artist and curator Léuli Eshrāghi commonly uses the general translation of “Great Ocean.”[13] Rather than continually being subsumed into continental struggles for power, these terms imply an alternative worldview emanating *from* the Pacific, what Hauʻofa willed in his declaration that “Oceania is expanding.”[14] Hauʻofa offered an embracing vision of Oceania, one that already resonates with the seafaring Indigenous peoples of Southern California: “As far as I am concerned, anyone who has lived in our region and is committed to Oceania is an Oceanian. This view opens up the possibility of expanding Oceania progressively to cover larger areas and more peoples […].”[15]

Sometimes reinforcing and sometimes resisting these disparate framings, several recent exhibitions have addressed related themes in/about the Pacific. The rapidly growing number of contemporary art biennials/triennials in the cosmopolitan hubs of “Asia-Pacific” (itself another framing in danger of equating all of Oceania with Australia and further subordinating any representations of the Pacific to the more economically advantageous Asia) have engaged these questions with varying criticality, either by directing attention toward Oceania or by mapping links between Oceania and Australia, Asia, and, to a lesser extent, North America. These include the Asia Pacific Triennial hosted by the Queensland Art Gallery/Gallery of Modern Art (QAGOMA), begun in 1993; the Honolulu Biennial (now Hawaiʻi Triennial), established in 2017; TarraWarra Biennial 2023: *ua usiusi faʻavaʻasavili*; and recent editions of the Biennale of Sydney.[16] Other exhibitions have touched on affinities across the Indigenous Pacific, concerns of climate change in the ocean, or both, including *Paradise Now? Contemporary Art from the Pacific*, at Asia Society (2004); *ʻAe Kai: A Culture Lab on Convergence*, organized by the Smithsonian Asian Pacific American Center (2017); *The Oceanic*, at Nanyang Technological University (NTU) Centre for Contemporary Art Singapore (2017); *Transits and Returns*, at Vancouver Art Gallery (2019); *Inundation: Art and Climate Change in the Pacific*, at the University of Hawaiʻi at Mānoa Art Gallery (2020); *SALTWATER / Interconnectivity*, at Tautai Pacific Arts

Trust (2020); *Te Au: Liquid Constituencies*, at Govett-Brewster Art Gallery (2022); and the ongoing research initiatives and exhibitions organized through *Blue Assembly* at the University of Queensland Art Museum and by TBA21–Academy, among many others about ecology and/in oceans more generally.[17]

In California, the short-lived California-Pacific Triennial, held at the Orange County Museum of Art in 2013 and 2017, became the first major exhibition in the "Western" hemisphere to situate California alongside other places of the Pacific Rim, highlighting California's interrelation with Latin America and Asia. Dan Cameron's curatorial essay for the 2013 edition, though, spoke of the ocean only in superficial terms, as a surface for transpacific encounters between continents.[18] Even the decorative line drawing of the Pacific that spread across the front and back covers of the 2013 catalog did not include any islands from Micronesia or Polynesia, except for the northern tip of Te Ika-a-Māui, the North Island of Aotearoa New Zealand. True to what its name implied, neither California-Pacific Triennial went so far as to consider issues in or include artists from Oceania, in no small part because—when the ocean itself is not of immediate focus—the region can, as Hauʻofa warned, too easily "disappear into the black hole of a gigantic pan-Pacific doughnut."[19]

Southern California Connections

Transformative Currents is indebted to the breadth of these scholarly and curatorial efforts examining the Pacific. The exhibition contributes to these evolving conversations by centering Southern California in its study of the ocean and situating that locational grounding toward the Pacific in as expansive and inclusive terms as possible. Following Torres's provocation that associates Southern California with Polynesia, the work in *Transformative Currents* generates newfound connections for places like Southern California that are geographically located in the "Pacific Rim" but also find crucial similarities in Oceania. Put differently, cognizant of both the doughnut and the hole, but without unproductively diminishing their differences, *Transformative Currents* makes a concentrated effort to suture the two together. This method of recovery also informs *Transformative Currents*' use of *Pacific* in its subtitle. While sensitive to the colonial origins of the word to describe the body of water and its extrapolation onto Pasifika peoples as weak and passive, perhaps the use of *Pacific* in this context can work to reclaim its literal meaning of "peaceful" into an ethic of relationality, of treating the ocean and its billions of inhabitants—human and more-than-human alike—with peace. Despite its turbulent historical usage, and in the spirit of challenging existing notions of the ocean, it might be worth resuscitating the term to give it new life.[20]

To meaningfully make such generative associations without effacing culturally specific meanings and approaches, it was imperative to include artists whose work interrogates place-based issues—not to further divide the Pacific into increasingly smaller, separate pieces, but to raise questions in one location which might find their answers in another. As opposed to projects speaking to oceanic environments with little locational grounding, an approach likely to reproduce problematic assumptions in its sweeping generalization, it is precisely this place-specificity that allows productive dialogue to transpire across the Pacific. As such, there are a roughly equal number of projects in *Transformative Currents* rooted in issues in Southern California that speak to the Pacific as a whole as there are projects from elsewhere that speak to concerns in Southern California, including military bombing, nuclear waste, oil drilling, deep-sea mining, navigation technologies, fiber-optic cables, rising sea levels, and ocean conservation.

For example, L. Frank and Jane Chang Mi's
múyuki hísh pó' putíi'un
(she will dream many things)[21]
encourages us to consider the much-studied histories of military weapons testing in the Pacific through Southern California's offshore islands. Frank and Mi's installation links Indigenous dispossession of Minar, or San Nicolas, to the current US military occupation of the island, which was originally proposed as one possible testing site for the first atomic bomb and has since been repeatedly used as a bombing range, not unlike many other islands and atolls throughout the Pacific, including Kahoʻolawe and Bikini. Also focusing on Southern California coastal waters, Beatriz Jaramillo's *Connect 27,000 Dots* references the 2020 discovery of barrels dumped between the shores of Los Angeles and Pimu, or Santa Catalina Island. The discovery of the barrels has since resulted in corresponding detection of DDT pollution and low-level radioactive waste, alerting the public to the long history of the improper disposal of toxic pollution in nearby oceanic waters.[22] Ohan Breiding and Shoghig Halajian's *Souvenir* follows the migratory path of ocean debris caused by the 2011 Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami in Japan, which led to the major accident at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant. These three projects, installed in Oceanside just over twenty miles from the now-being-decommissioned San Onofre Nuclear Generating Station, embed Southern California within a larger understanding of "transnational nuclear imperialisms,"

among the many Pacific places dealing with legacies of nuclear radiation and nuclear reactors threatened by the tectonic activity of the Pacific plate.[23]

As one might expect in an exhibition on the ocean and climate change, the topic of sea-level rise is pervasive. Charles Lim, Irwan Ahmett and Tita Salina, and Angela Tiatia address aspects of sea-level rise in Singapore, Indonesia, and Tuvalu, respectively, while local effects are charted through Fran Siegel's multimedia drawing installation of four wetlands in Southern California between Los Angeles and the US-Mexico border.[24] On the other side of the border at Playas de Tijuana, Ana Andrade examines the delicacy of oceanic life, which is similarly contemplated in Isabel Beavers's multimedia installation on deep-sea mining, a related topic in Alex Monteith and Maree Sheehan's and Sean Connelly's projects, too. Connelly's *Gut Technics* traces the history of scientific data collection throughout the Pacific, creatively using the Argo float program—developed at Scripps Institute of Oceanography in La Jolla, California—as an emblematic case study. Tiare Ribeaux and Qianqian Ye's collaborative project *Kai-Hai* also makes visible transpacific infrastructures of communication. Named after the Asia-America Gateway submarine cable system, Ribeaux and Ye's *A.A.G.* goddexx figure is composed of the fiber-optic cables that stretch across the ocean floor and physically connect North America from San Luis Obispo, California, to Southeast Asia through Hawaiʻi and Guam.[25]

Continuing to traverse Southern California's coast, Marcos Lutyens's project about offshore drilling rigs near Santa Barbara gestures toward the origins of the contemporary environmental movement in the US, which was initiated in part in response to the 1969 Santa Barbara oil spill, leading to the inaugural Earth Day in 1970. Similar activist efforts continue today in community projects like those of Jake Atienza and Martha Atienza's work on Bantayan Island in the Philippines, where they have helped declare Adlaw sa Mga Mananagat, or Fisherfolks Day, and designate Mambacayao Daku, an islet of Bantayan, as a Marine Protected Area. As in Bantayan, however, the tension between desires for sustainable oceanic stewardship and commercial profit repeatedly comes to the fore in Southern California. This is especially the case for those seeking Indigenous sovereignty, as advocated by Charles Sepulveda and Angela Mooney D'Arcy in an essay (republished in the catalog) responding to a 2021 oil spill off the coast of Huntington Beach and further evident through the prolonged difficulties of establishing the Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary off California's central coast.[26] Sepulveda and D'Arcy share that the Tongva and Acjachemen word for ocean is *moomat*, commemorated in the first ti'at (sewn-plank canoe) built by the Tongva in over a century, which has helped restore Indigenous oceanic traditions in Southern California. *Moomat Ahiko*—"breath of the ocean," as the ti'at is named—reasserts the importance of language in shaping our perception of the Pacific.

These are but some of the ways the work in *Transformative Currents* both disembarks from Southern California and seemingly always recalls it, the artists navigating the Pacific searching for points of solidarity, not places for subjugation. For viewers local to Southern California, *Transformative Currents* is an appeal to likewise rethink our reciprocal relations with geographies of the Pacific more holistically, up and down the coasts of the Americas, across and throughout Oceania, and all the way to South/East Asia. For viewers from elsewhere in the Pacific, the exhibition is an invitation to generate conversations needed for new collectives of global action, in which an alignment from/toward Southern California as outlined here might provide useful guidance. For all who care for the ocean, *Transformative Currents* is an offering to the Pacific, in its expansive entirety.

Aaron Katzeman is assistant professor of art history at The Ohio State University. His research focuses on visual culture concerning the interdependent legacies of US settler colonialism and imperialism, specializing in the intersection of nationalism, class, and environmental politics. His current book project comparatively analyzes art and film produced alongside Indigenous, peasant, and anticolonial national liberation struggles since the 1960s. Katzeman's writing has appeared in Momus*,* Radical History Review*,* Third Text*, and* caa.reviews*, among others. His work has been supported by the Getty Research Institute, University of California Humanities Research Institute, and Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society.*

Notes

[i] The artists exhibiting at Oceanside Museum of Art were Irwan Ahmett and Tita Salina, Ana Andrade, Jake Atienza and Martha Atienza/DAKOgamay in collaboration with GOODLand, Isabel Beavers, Ohan Breiding and Shoghig Halajian, Sean Connelly, Megan Cope, L. Frank and Jane Chang Mi, Beatriz Jaramillo, 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, and Cecilia Vicuña. Liz Larner exhibited at Orange County Museum of Art, and Maja Godlewska and Marek Ranis exhibited at Crystal Cove Conservancy. For more information, see the exhibition

page on PST ART's website, https://pst.art/en/exhibitions/transformative-currents-art-and-action-in-the-pacific-ocean.

[ii] Cassandra Coblentz, ed., *Transformative Currents: Art and Action in the Pacific* (X Artists' Books and Oceanside Museum of Art, 2025). For a review of the exhibition catalogue, see Maggie Wander, this volume.

[iii] See "Getty's PST ART Releases Largest-Ever Dataset on Climate Impact of Exhibition-Making," *Getty*, November 18, 2025, https://www.getty.edu/news/pst-art-releases-largest-ever-dataset-on-climate-impact-of-exhibition-making/.

[1] Craig Torres and Cindi Alvitre quoted in "Rethinking the Coast with the Ti'at Society," *PBS SoCal*, November 3, 2019, https://www.pbssocal.org/shows/tending-nature/episodes/rethinking-the-coast-with-the-tiat-society.

[2] Benjamin Madley, *An American Genocide: The United States and the California Indian Catastrophe, 1846–1873* (Yale University Press, 2017).

[3] Thanks to Joe Riley for our conversations on this topic.

[4] See the Los Angeles County Natural History Museum's exhibition *L.A. Underwater: The Prehistoric Sea Beneath Us*, which opened in 2022.

[5] Lana Lopesi, *False Divides* (Bridget Williams Books, 2018); Maile Arvin, *Possessing Polynesians: The Science of Settler Colonial Whiteness in Hawaiʻi and Oceania* (Duke University Press, 2019).

[6] Teresia Teaiwa, quoted in Epeli Hauʻofa, "The Ocean in Us," *The Contemporary Pacific* 10, no. 2 (Fall 1998): 392.

[7] Greg Fry, *Framing the Islands: Power and Diplomatic Agency in Pacific Regionalism* (Australian National University Press, 2019).

[8] Epeli Hauʻofa, "Our Sea of Islands," *The Contemporary Pacific* 6, no. 1 (Spring 1994): 152.

[9] See Margaret Jolly, "Imagining Oceania: Indigenous and Foreign Representations of a Sea of Islands," *The Contemporary Pacific* 19, no. 2 (2007): 508–45; Elizabeth DeLoughrey, "Toward a Critical Ocean Studies for the Anthropocene," *English Language Notes* 57, no. 1 (April 2019): 21–36.

[10] Haunani-Kay Trask, "Politics in the Pacific Islands: Imperialism and Native Self-Determination," in *From a Native Daughter: Colonialism and Sovereignty in Hawaiʻi*, 2nd ed. (University of Hawaiʻi Press, 1999), 45.

[11] Katerina Martina Teaiwa, "Reframing Oceania: Lessons from Pacific Studies," in *Framing the Global: Entry Points for Research*, ed. Hilary E. Kahn (Indian University Press, 2014), 67–96.

[12] See also Rob Wilson, "Doing Cultural Studies inside APEC: Literature, Cultural Identity, and Global/Local Dynamics in the American Pacific," *Comparative Literature* 53, no. 4 (2001): 389–403.

[13] Léuli Eshrāghi, *Indigenous Aesthetics and Knowledges for Great Ocean Renaissances* (Common Room Editions, 2023).

[14] Hauʻofa, "Our Sea of Islands," 160.
[15] Hauʻofa, "The Ocean in Us," 402.
[16] For example, I wrote about the tense use of "Pacific Century" in Hawaiʻi Triennial 2022. See Aaron Katzeman, review of *Hawaiʻi Triennial 2022: Pacific Century - E Hoʻomau no Moananuiākea*, eds. Melissa Chiu, Miwako Tezuka, and Drew Kahuʻāina Broderick (University of Hawaiʻi Press, 2022), *caa.reviews*, August 19, 2022, http://www.caareviews.org/reviews/3989.
[17] See Melissa Chiu, ed., *Paradise Now? Contemporary Art from the Pacific* (Asia Society, 2004); Margo Machida, "*ʻAe* Kai Rising: Trans-Oceanic Communities of Cultural Imagination," *Pacific Arts* 22, no. 1 (2022): 58–78; Ute Meta Bauer, ed., *Climates. Habitats. Environments.* (MIT Press, 2022); Tarah Hogue, Sarah Biscarra Dilley, Freja Carmichael, Léuli Eshrāghi, and Lana Lopesi, eds., *Transits and Returns* (Vancouver Art Gallery, 2019); Jaimey Hamilton Faris, ed., *Inundation: Art and Climate Change in the Pacific* (University of Hawaiʻi Art Gallery, 2020); Giles Peterson and Katharine Losi Atafu-Mayo with Stacy L. Kamehiro and Maggie Wander, "SALTWATER / Interconnectivity," *Pacific Arts* 22, no. 1 (2022): 130–55; Léuli Eshrāghi and Peta Rake, eds., *The Clam's Kiss/Sogi a le faisua*, University of Queensland Art Museum, https://www.theclamskiss.com/; Stefanie Hessler, ed., *Tidalectics: Imagining an Oceanic Worldview through Art and Science* (MIT Press, 2018); Daniela Zyman, ed., *Oceans Rising: A Companion to "Territorial Agency: Oceans in Transformation"* (Sternberg Press, 2021); Stefanie Hessler, ed., *Prospecting Ocean* (MIT Press, 2019); Pandora Syperek and Sarah Wade, eds., *Oceans* (MIT Press, 2023).
[18] This is despite Cameron also referring to California as "lying on the eastern coast of the Pacific Ocean." Dan Cameron, "A Bigger Gulp: Trans-Pacific Routes in Twenty-First-Century Art," in *2013 California-Pacific Triennial* (Orange County Museum of Art, 2013), 14–25.
[19] Hauʻofa, "The Ocean in Us," 393.
[20] For a counterargument regarding the usage of *Pacific*, see Ioana Gordon-Smith, "Terms of Convenience," *un Magazine* 9, no. 2 (November 2015), https://unprojects.org.au/article/terms-of-convenience/.
[21] L. Frank: "Alone for so long, longing for so many years, she will dream many things. Of children's laughter, of mothers singing to their babies, or the music of the dances that keep the world turning." The title is in two lines to emphasize Native language over forced language and to represent the rupture of time and space caused by settler colonialism.
[22] Rosanna Xia, "It's not just toxic chemicals. Radioactive waste was also dumped off Los Angeles coast," *Los Angeles Times*, February 21, 2024, https://www.latimes.com/environment/story/2024-02-21/radioactive-waste-ocean-dumping-los-angeles-coast.
[23] Anaïs Maurer and Rebecca H. Hogue, "Introduction: Transnational Nuclear Imperialisms," *Journal of Transnational American Studies* 11, no. 2 (2020): 25–43.

[24] Rosanna Xia, *California Against the Sea: Visions for Our Vanishing Coastline* (Heyday Books, 2023).

[25] For more on such cables, see Nicole Starosielski, *The Undersea Network* (Duke University Press, 2015).

[26] To learn more, visit https://chumashsanctuary.org/.

PACIFIC ARTS
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DREW KAHUʻĀINA BRODERICK with MAILE MEYER,
MANULANI ALULI MEYER, and
MELEANNA ALULI MEYER

Native Art, Culture, Education, and Healing in Hawaiʻi: Family Stories of Connection[1]

Abstract

This personal essay takes shape around short descriptions and images of recent community arts and cultural events of Hawaiʻi. Reflections by the authors bring additional layers of meaning to the text. Through the interweaving of these different elements, the essay proposes family stories of Native art, culture, education, and healing in Hawaiʻi as antidotes to art-historical canons, especially those reinforced by settler colonial museums and Westernized higher education systems in the Hawaiian Islands.

Keywords: *Hawaiʻi, contemporary art, community engagement, grassroots organizing, Hawaiian sovereignty, intergenerational healing*

Hawaiʻi community art events led by Hawaiian women, queer folks, and their allies represent ongoing group processes committed to cultivating long-term structural and systemic change. Recent grassroots, do-it-yourself endeavors can be traced back to the late 1960s and early 1970s, a particularly transformative moment for the Hawaiian Islands characterized by an archipelago-wide cultural and political reawakening. Energized by the possibilities of ea (sovereignty, life, breath, freedom) "we"—all those working toward more abundant futures for Hawaiʻi beyond the tourism industry and United States military occupation—have been creating, educating, organizing, protesting, and protecting for over half a century.[2] As a Hawaiian artist, curator, and writer with an interest in local and global histories of art, I am acutely aware of how much work has been done by past generations of creative practitioners to ensure that future generations—both active across the islands and abroad—do not have to endure the same struggles or make the same sacrifices again.

This personal essay touches on some of these longstanding efforts, in particular those involving my family, friends, mentors, and frequent collaborators.

The four authors of this paper are related: Maile, my mother; and my aunties, Manulani and Meleanna. I recorded three informal discussions, one with each co-author, between March and April of 2024. These discussions provide a foundation for this co-written text, which takes shape around excerpts from edited transcripts of our conversations.

Our connections—daughters, sisters, mother and son, aunties and nephew—are vital aspects of our individual and collective processes. Beyond so-called "conflicts of interest," statements of relationality like this offer us an opportunity to acknowledge relations to their fullest potential. Where the four of us live, work, and care in Hawaiʻi nei, relationships are a lifeforce, not a liability. Educator and philosopher Manulani Aluli Meyer speaks of working with family and the need to change an entrenched and somewhat misguided perspective that views family collaboration as problematic:

> *NEPOTISM ROCKS!* Let's make a bumper sticker! I tell people all the time: "I want to hire my sister. She's three times better and twice as cheap." And they usually respond, "You can't do that, it's a conflict of interest." So, whenever I can, I try to help organizations and institutions change their conflict of interest disclosures to statements of relationality. We can't let the inauthentic voice be raised up as authentic. We need to challenge Westernized notions of integrity and insist on Hawaiian practices. I'd take a deep relationship over a community of strangers any day.[3]

In this essay, memories of the authors from childhood and adulthood are interspersed among a series of scenes describing different scales and configurations of arts organizing and activism in Hawaiʻi. Through a loose weaving of our family experiences and stories with brief accounts of arts and cultural events of the 2010s and early 2020s, a mesh of kinship, community, and place emerges. As Hawaiian and local creative communities of Hawaiʻi continue to navigate international art worlds, we would do well to share our family stories of art, culture, education, and healing, not just as antidotes to the "art-historical canon" but because they remind us where we come from, who we are, and what we might be, especially if we embody aloha ʻāina—love for lands, waters, and skies.

Accompanying the main text is a selection of captioned images documenting opening activations, exhibitions, installations, artworks, public programs, workshops, and cultural field service trips. These captioned images serve as a supplemental record and provide additional information that helps to visualize and contextualize the varied efforts being considered. At times the link between text and image is direct, and at other times less so.

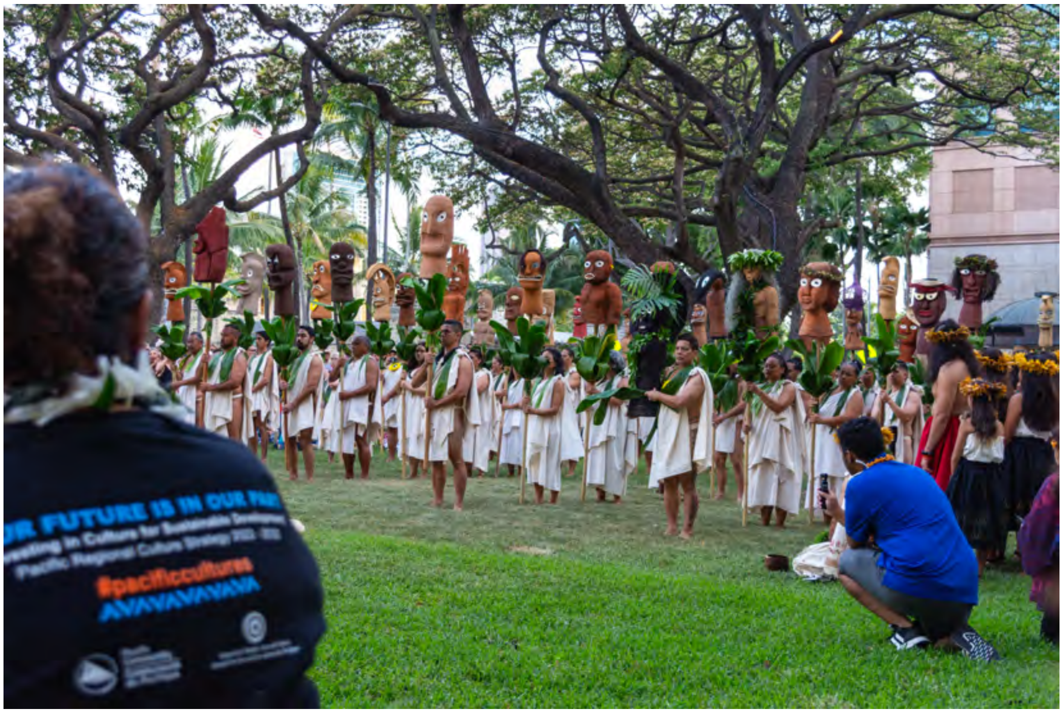

Figure 1. Participants in the opening ceremony of *Ke Ao Lama: Enlightened World,* prior to entering *Nā Akua Ākea, The Vast and Numerous Deities,* one of five interconnected exhibitions presented at the 13th Festival of Pacific Arts and Culture (FestPAC), Capitol Modern, Honolulu, Kona, Oʻahu, June 7, 2024. Photograph courtesy of DKB [Drew Kahuʻāina Broderick]

Hoʻoulu Lāhui: Regenerating Oceania, the 13th Festival of Pacific Arts and Culture (FestPAC), was convened on the island of Oʻahu, Hawaiʻi, June 6–16, 2024 (Figs. 1–2).[4] It has been over fifty years since the South Pacific Commission organized the inaugural festival in Suva, Fiji, and a century and a half since David Kalākaua, elected king of Ke Aupuni Hawaiʻi (Hawaiian Kingdom), shared his famed motto with the world: "E Hoʻoulu Lāhui," which translates as "to grow or nurture a nation or people" (specifically, of course, the Hawaiian nation and its people).[5] In 1874, after nearly 100 years of loss—including mass death due to introduced diseases, the forced removal of cultural practices by Protestant missionaries, and land dispossession for American businesses—the Hawaiian population had collapsed. From an estimated one million in the late eighteenth century, it fell to less than 50,000 by the late nineteenth century.[6] King Kalākaua, like the South Pacific Commission, understood that if "we"—Hawaiians and Indigenous peoples of the

Pacific, more broadly—are to survive and maintain some semblance of independence in the face of colonization and ongoing occupation, it is absolutely necessary to grow our national consciousness by invigorating our people and advancing our cultural practices. FestPAC—a transoceanic exchange that takes place every four years in a different Pacific Island nation—was created in response to this need for a collective consciousness. It brings together thousands of delegates and visitors from different countries and territories across Oceania for a memorable, if brief, celebration.

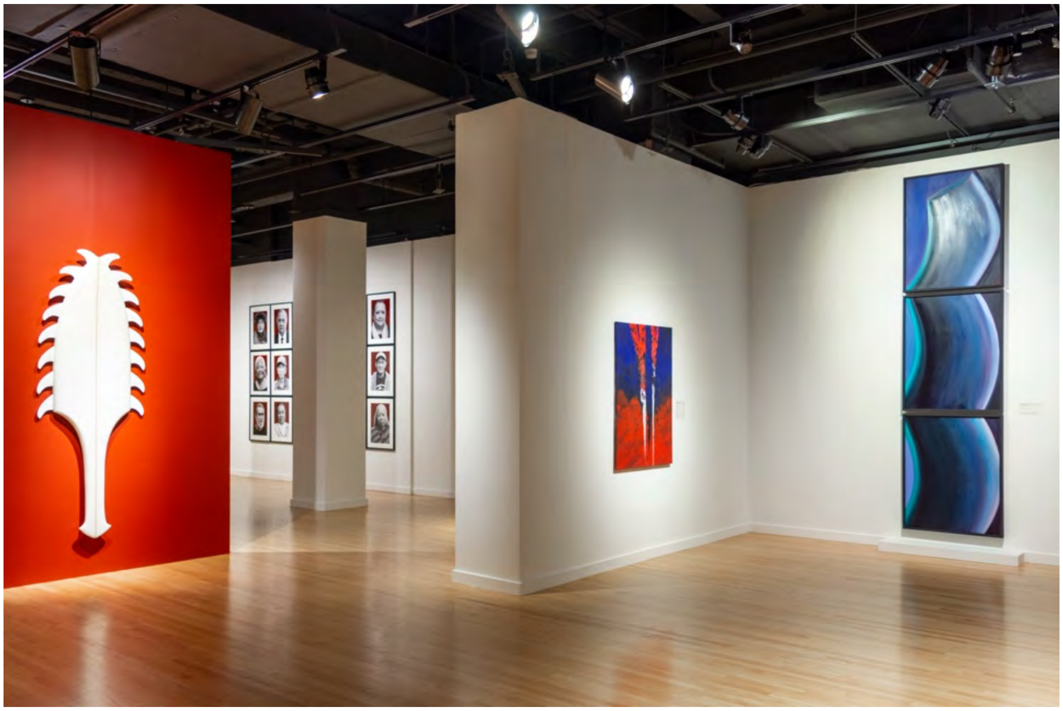

Figure 2. Installation view of *ʻAi ā manō*, 2024, curated by Drew Kahuʻāina Broderick, Kapulani Landgraf, and Kaili Chun, in *Ke Ao Lama, Enlightened World*, Capitol Modern, Hawaiʻi State Foundation on Culture and the Arts, Honolulu, Kona, Oʻahu. Artwork from left to right: Scott Fitzel, *Evolution—7'0 Lei O Mano*, 2016; Kapulani Landgraf, *Māmakakaua*, 2021; ʻĪmaikalani Kalāhele, *Divided*, 2018; and Sean Kekamakupaʻaikapono Kaʻonohiokalani Lee Loy Browne, *Kalamakū (Guiding Light)*, 2004. Art in Public Places Collection, Hawai'i State Foundation on Culture and the Arts. Photograph courtesy of DKB

It is mid-July 2024 now, and many are still reflecting on the significance of the 13th FestPAC. Drawing on our experiences at the festival, we know we must continue efforts to rekindle and repair our relationships with one another as part of a larger effort to perpetuate diverse and creative cultural practices. The event reminded us of the ways in which Indigenous internationalism and solidarity influence the health and wellbeing of Moananuiākea (the Pacific), and how the caring social bonds of our immediate families (both chosen and given) sustain generations and communities.

Artist and filmmaker Meleanna Aluli Meyer reflects on creativity born of community and healing:

> When I started on this journey as a creative, nearly fifty years ago, there was so little appreciation of and support for Hawaiians, let alone us Hawaiian contemporary artists. It was a sorrowful time. At a certain point, I just got tired of holding protest signs at marches and rallies. So instead, I began painting community murals to work through generational trauma and help envision abundant futures for Hawaiʻi. Understanding what it is to heal is a lifelong process and that's how I found my way to the creative work I'm doing today. Art, education, and cultural practice activated through community become tools for our own healing.[7]

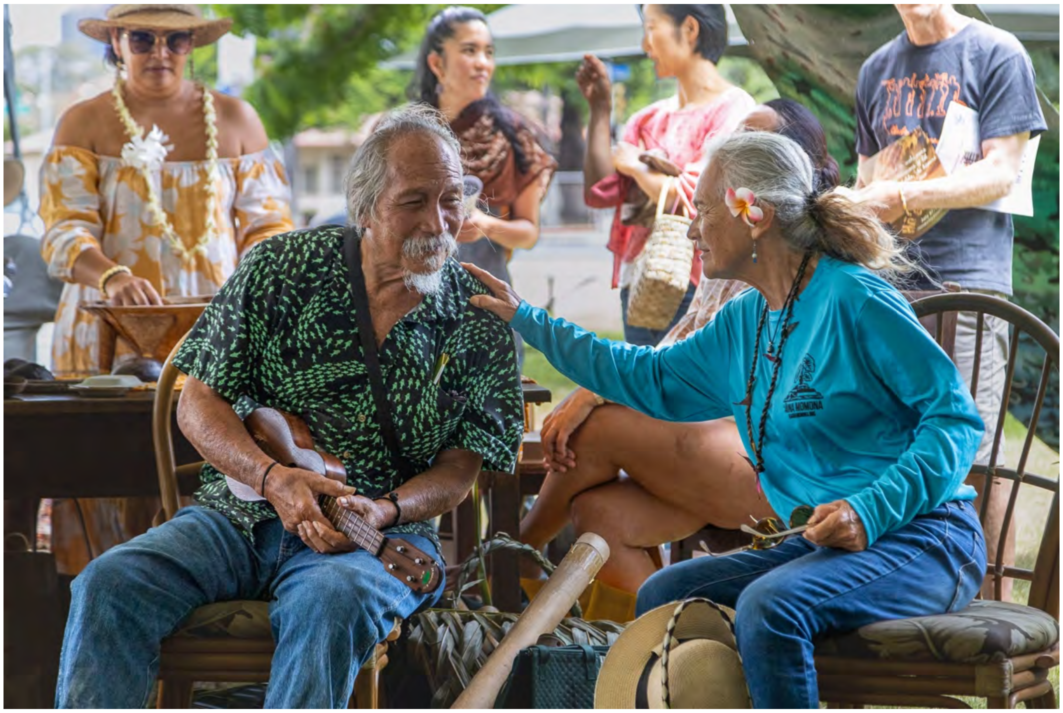

Figure 3. Left to right: Keliiolalo-Kimiko "Lalo" Ishiki-Kalāhele (back), Calvin Hoe, and Loretta Ritte pictured inside *Tūtū's Hale,* at *Hōʻeu Mana: Reawakening Ancestral Stories*, hosted by Hoʻoulu ʻĀina, organized by Puʻuhonua Society as part of Lā Hoʻihoʻi Ea 2024 at Thomas Square, Honolulu, Kona, Oʻahu. Photograph courtesy of Kaʻōhua Lucas

As I write this paper, my sister Emma, mother Maile, and aunties Meleanna and Manulani—along with an extended support network of members of the nonprofit arts and culture organization Puʻuhonua Society—are preparing to take part in activations commemorating Lā Hoʻihoʻi Ea (Sovereignty Restoration Day).[8] In 1843, King Kamehameha ʻEkolu, Kauikeaouli, established July 31 as a national holiday to mark the end of temporary occupation by rogue agents of the British Crown and the return of sovereign control by Admiral Richard Darton Thomas, who traveled to Hawaiʻi on behalf of Queen Victoria to correct the "unwarranted transgression against the Hawaiian Kingdom."[9] On that day, the British flag was ceremoniously lowered and the Hae Hawaiʻi (Hawaiian flag) triumphantly raised to symbolize the restoration of the Hawaiian Kingdom encapsulated by the motto "Ua mau ke ea o ka ʻāina i ka pono" ("The life of the land is perpetuated in righteousness").[10] Today, Lā Hoʻihoʻi Ea is annually observed at Thomas Square Park in Honolulu.

To celebrate Lā Hoʻihoʻi Ea in 2024, Puʻuhonua Society collaboratively organized *Hōʻeu Mana: Reawakening Ancestral Stories*, a two-day community art gathering focused on ea, a Hawaiian concept encompassing sovereignty, life, breath, and freedom. Through *Hōʻeu Mana*, photographers, sculptors, weavers, poets, musicians, dancers, farmers, chefs, filmmakers, activists, archivists, historians, and storytellers—both Hawaiian and non-Hawaiians—held ground at Thomas Square Park to practice their freedoms. In the astute words of Hawaiian patriot Dr. Kekuni Blaisdell, participants "recognize[d] what the British did and what the United States government has not done as of yet."[11]

Lā Hoʻihoʻi Ea is an event where families gather, and relationships are strengthened (Fig. 3). Community advocate and entrepreneur Maile Meyer attests to the importance of nurturing arts and culture through family and relationships:

> My mother, Emma Aluli Meyer, believed that children should be exposed to every possible kind of art form at a very early age. She did everything she could to foster an environment of unfettered access to creativity in all its expressions. Singing, dancing, life drawing, ceramics, cooking, weaving, lei making—you name it, we did it. This kind of upbringing liberated me and my siblings and a lot of the neighborhood kids from believing that there was only one way to do or be in the world. Even though she lost her mother at an early age and was raised by Catholic nuns, my mother was always an independent, creative thinker [who valued] community presence and participation.[12]

Carrying on the conscious work of previous generations, in the early 2010s I began organizing, curating, designing, advocating for, and writing about the contemporary art of Hawaiʻi. At the time, there were few engaged in this work who were in my position: a Hawaiian artist who was born and raised, as well as living and working, on Oʻahu. This multifaceted engagement was an important tactic to advance my own creative practice, as well as those of my family, friends, mentors, and our overlapping communities. By honing our skills, demonstrating our capacity, and affirming our presence, we could eventually force mainstream museums and educational institutions with exclusionary practices and environments—such as the Honolulu Museum of Art; Department of Art and Art History, University of Hawaiʻi at Mānoa; and Hawaiʻi State Foundation on Culture and the Arts—to acknowledge our significant contributions to the art ecosystem of Hawaiʻi. If *they* weren't going to support *us*, then *we* needed to support *ourselves*—or as my family often says, "If there is work to be done, don't wait for someone else to do it!"

Aunty Manu emphasizes the roles that unity, family, difference, and conflict play in diverse artistic endeavors:

> Unity differentiates, we are the same but different. If you are not mentored by difference, you are going to inevitably want to colonize it. I've learned to appreciate and honor our differences. We've got to go where the conflict is greatest because, as Paulo Freire says, "Conflict is the midwife of consciousness." And that's what family is to me—perceived conflict. Even in conflict, we must remain committed to recognizing the efficacy of and the need for the vibrational energy of loving and what loving can do for this planet. As artists heal and get to the next level, their ideas will inspire our evolution, not deconstruct it over and over again.[13]

These principles guide our creative work. Exhibitions, essays, publications, films, screenings, lectures, workshops, panel discussions, community gatherings—no matter what the collaboration, the teachings of my mother Maile, Aunty Manu, and Aunty Mele permeate it all. Through the actions of these Hawaiian leaders and others like them, I have come to know our family's stories of art, culture, education and healing. And through these intersecting stories, I am continuously arriving at a larger context for contemporary art and community in Hawaiʻi—a context that weaves together different places, peoples, practices, and perspectives, all grounded in lived experience and guided by the multigenerational and grassroots efforts of many. By knowing and sharing these stories, I uplift those who embody Hawaiian values of ea, aloha ʻāina, and ʻauamo kuleana; participate in larger networks of solidarity; and believe in the power of creativity to accelerate processes of positive change in communities and institutions.

During my early teens, I would hang out after school at Native Books, an independent bookstore, art gallery, and community venue dedicated to Hawaiʻi and the Pacific.[14] My mother established Native Books in 1990, after a stint as the marketing director at Bishop Museum Press during the late 1980s. She recalls the community-based origins of Native Books:

> [In the late 1980s,] my sister Manu invited me to the Native Hawaiian Leadership Development Conference she organized with David Kekaulike Sing of Nā Pua Noʻeau through the University of Hawaiʻi at Hilo. My second child, Emma, was an infant so I brought her along with me and a kupuna [community elder] offered to hold her. As I spoke to educators and took book orders, I watched Emma be loved and cared for, passed from person to person around the room until she returned to me. For the first couple of years, before we opened the bookstore in Pālama, we sold books only through community events. I'd set up tables at craft fairs, swap meets, farmers markets, concerts, and conferences, six to eight times a week. Back then, I was constantly asked why I sold books "since Hawaiians couldn't read"! That's when I started [informing] anyone who asked me that question that the Hawaiian Kingdom had one of the highest literacy rates in the world.[15]

A populist at heart, my mother established Native Books in the hopes of reclaiming agency and supporting knowledge exchange for and by the people—not to make a profit and certainly not, in social media jargon, for the "likes." In 1993, she co-founded ʻAi Pōhaku Press with her lifelong friend, book designer Barbara Pope (Fig. 4). A few years later in 1996, she opened Nā Mea Hawaiʻi, a resource center and retail environment focused on the circulation of cultural materials and products. True to form, throughout the 1990s, she would frequently distribute, for free or at cost, photocopies of the *Kūʻē Anti-Annexation Petitions* (1897) and *Indices of Awards made by the Board of Commissioners to Quiet Land Titles in the Hawaiian Islands* (1929). I didn't know it then, but Native Books, ʻAi Pōhaku Press, and Nā Mea Hawaiʻi's eccentric scenes—enlivened by Hawaiian artists, designers, poets, musicians, educators, and community activists such as Nakeʻu Awai, ʻĪmaikalani Kalāhele, and Calvin Hoe—would have a tremendous influence on me in the decades to follow.

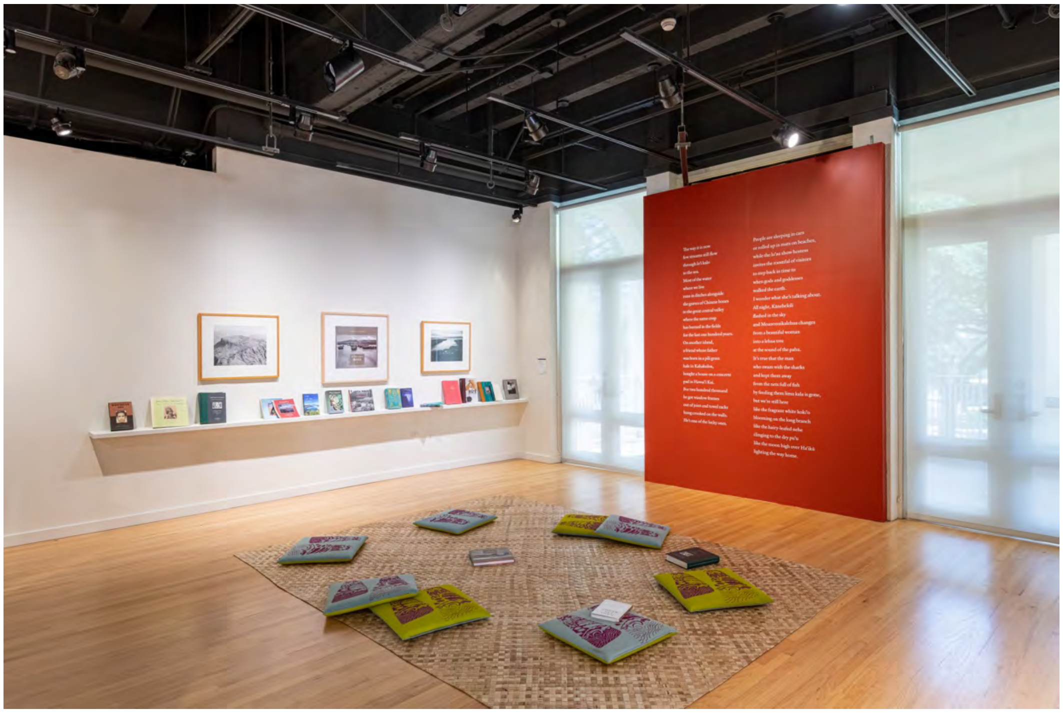

Figure 4. ʻAi Pōhaku Press (Maile Meyer and Barbara Pope) with KEANAHALA, *Reading Room*, 2022. In Hawaiʻi Triennial 2022: *Pacific Century – E Hoʻomau no Moananuiākea*, curated by Melissa Chiu, Miwako Tezuka, and Drew Kahuʻāina Broderick. Hawaiʻi State Art Museum (now Capitol Modern), Honolulu, Kona, Oʻahu. Courtesy of Hawaiʻi Contemporary. Photograph courtesy of Christopher Rohrer

At an event held at Native Books amid the excitement and exhaustion of the 13th FestPAC, artist and writer Dan Taulapapa McMullin of Sāmoa i Sasaʻe (Eastern Samoa), who now lives in the Mahhicannituck (Hudson River Valley, New York State), celebrated the second edition of their artist book *The Healer's Wound: A Queer Theirstory of Polynesia* (Fig. 5). During the event, I found myself thinking about a story Dan told a few years earlier at a poetry reading organized in parallel with the Hawaiʻi Triennial 2022: *Pacific Century—E Hoʻomau no Moananuiākea*. The story was about a young man who was playing an ipu (gourd) as part of a kani ka pila (impromptu jam session), with Uncle ʻĪmai and Uncle Cal, at a gathering Dan attended decades earlier when Native Books was still located in Pālama. As Dan recalled: "I still remember how he held that gourd. How he played it, how beautiful it was . . . How I wished I was that gourd and he was playing me."

Listening intently from the back of the room, with a big grin on my face, I was reminded of how influential puʻuhonua (places and people of refuge, peace, and safety) like Native Books can be for those who don't conform to the norms of a heteropatriarchal, settler colonial capitalist society. For thirty-five years, Native

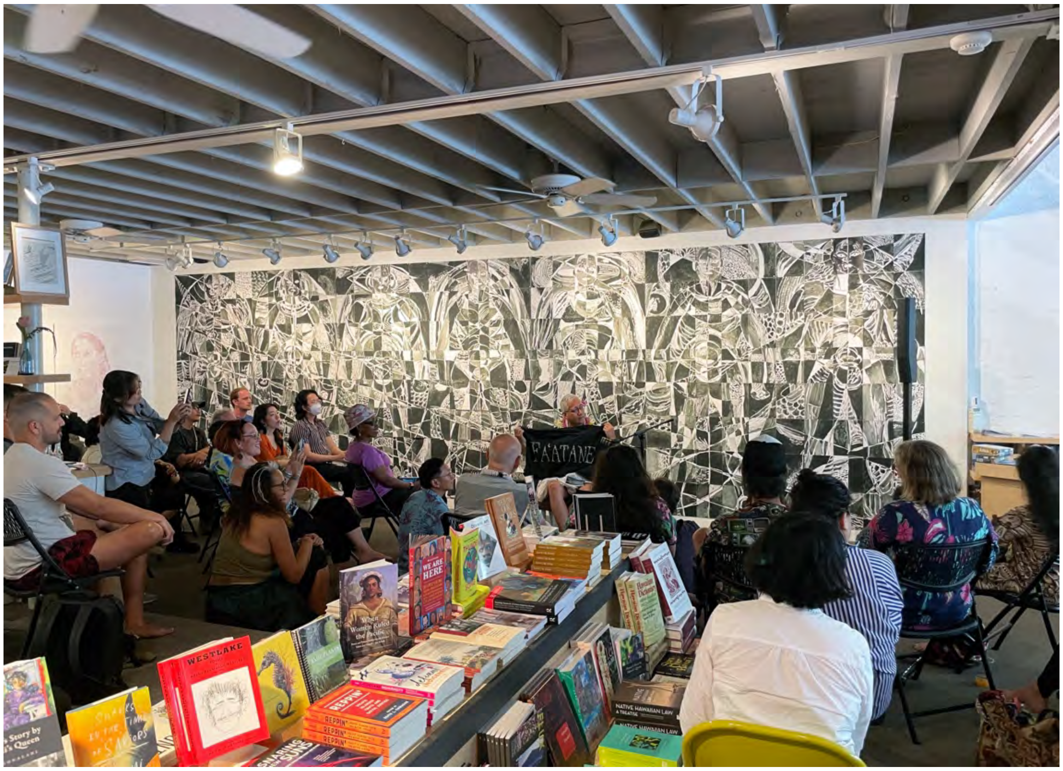

Figure 5. Dan Taulapapa McMullin (center) at a poetry reading and book launch for *The Healer's Wound: A Queer Theirstory of Polynesia* (second edition), Native Books, Nuʻuanu, Kona, Oʻahu, June 8, 2024. Artwork (background): Solomon Robert Nui Enos, *Papa Heʻe Nalu i ka Wā Akua, Surfing in the Time of the Gods*, 2022, in *Heʻe Nalu: The Art and Legacy of Hawaiian Surfing*, 2024, curated by Carolyn Melenani Kualiʻi and Ian Kualiʻi. Photograph courtesy of DKB

Books has offered space to gather, share, and perpetuate culture, not just for Hawaiians and Hawaiʻi locals but for anyone who is called to the venue from near and distant shores. According to my mother, spaces such as these are beacons of hope:

> After decades of community initiatives, we are now beginning to experience the full potential of what we've been planting together and sustaining through long-term relationships with one another. When I think of pilina—the importance of community and connection—I imagine a gathering in darkness, old Hawaiian-style with kukui torches. As lights are lit, filling the gaps of darkness, enough illumination brings awareness of those already waiting. With shared presence and purpose, many things are possible. The work never happens alone even when we think we are out there on our own. We do it for our descendants, for all those future ancestors, so that they will know less heaviness and more joy![16]

During summers in my-preteens, I would visit Aunty Manu on Moku o Keawe, the Big Island of Hawaiʻi. At the time, she was an associate professor in the Education Department at the University of Hawaiʻi at Hilo, living and working, occasionally off-grid, at the intersections of Indigenous epistemologies, cultural and environmental stewardship, food sovereignty, transformational education, and community healing. Aunty Manu often took me with her to visit muliwai, places where stream mouths embrace ocean tides, where fresh and saltwater mix—Pāpaʻikou, Onomea, Kahaliʻi, Awawaloa and so on, along the Hilo Palikū shoreline of the island of Hawaiʻi. Here, surrounded by elemental forces, she would sit, sometimes for hours upon hours, listening, observing, gathering, making. Moving in stillness, she would shape waterworn basalt into ʻulu maika (disks) and pōpō pōhaku (spheres). Back then, I was too young to appreciate the knowledge that was being transmitted—from place to person, and from aunty to nephew. It wasn't until my early twenties, when I was living abroad, that I would come to fully acknowledge these moments of water and stone.

Aunty Manu has reflected on the significance of process and presence:

> Repeating something enough so that you're not analyzing it, so that you get out of your thinking mind, is to experience it fully. When I shape pōpō pōhaku, spheres, one hand is consistent, steady, and moving in one direction while the other hand is chaotic, random, and moving without order. You need both—randomness and consistency—so there is a constant and a variable and you have to trust in the process. Sustained repetition combined with sustained creativity has led me to the inevitability of self-awareness, self-development, and self-knowledge.[17]

Over the years, Aunty Manu's steadiness has created numerous environments for individuals, groups, and communities to ʻauamo kuleana, to practice excellence and transform ourselves collectively in the process. As the current Konohiki (facilitator) for Kūlana o Kapolei, a Hawaiian Place of Learning at the University of Hawaiʻi, West Oʻahu, Aunty Manu continues to work toward more just and sustainable futures for Hawaiʻi, and through Hawaiʻi, for the world—"Ea Hawaiʻi, Ea Honua." Together with Indrajit Kumara Samarasingha Gunasekara, an Indigenous farmer from southern Sri Lanka, she leads NiU NOW!, a community cultural agroforestry movement that deconstructs capitalism and encourages a sharing economy. More specifically, NiU NOW! emerged to affirm the significance of niu (coconut) and uluniu (coconut groves) in ecological systems (Figs. 6–7). At the center of the movement is the re-establishment of a loving relationship with niu and the ancient practices surrounding this "tree of life." Founded in backyards, in the hearts of its practitioners, and through the cultural practices of their communities, NiU NOW! is not large-scale uluniu for economic gain, but rather uluniu for a healthy society and everyone's wellbeing.

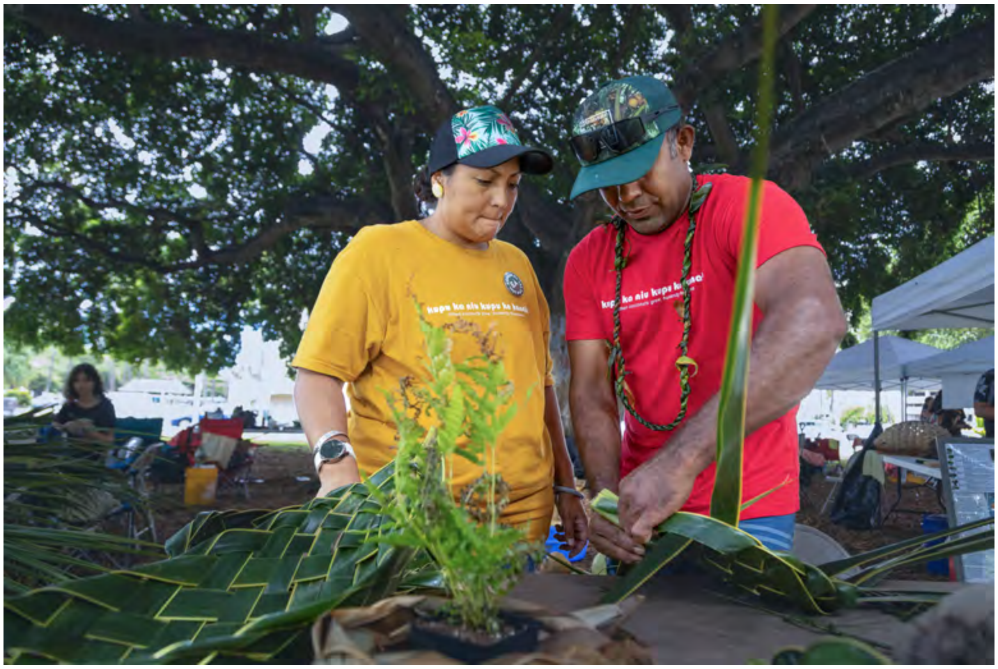

Figure 6. Jesika Hernandez (left) learning to weave launiu (coconut leaves) with Indrajit Gunasekara, as part of hands-on activities with NiUNOW!, *Hōʻeu Mana: Reawakening Ancestral Stories*, 2024, organized by Puʻuhonua Society as part of Lā Hoʻihoʻi Ea 2024 at Thomas Square, Honolulu, Kona, Oʻahu. Photograph courtesy of Kaʻōhua Lucas

Aunty Manu discusses the centrality of ʻāina (land, that which feeds) to ea (sovereignty, life, breath, freedom):

> You can summarize Hawaiian epistemology in one idea and that's aloha ʻāina—love of land. And we love the land because of ʻāina aloha, because we know that the land loves us. Our geography shapes our knowing. People who know what that means have spent time in place and have loving relationships with their surroundings. Hahai nō ka ua i ka ululāʻau. Plant a forest and the rains will come. Share purpose with others and transform the world. My purpose is to learn how to love better, to embody aloha in all its fullness. That's it. What is the purpose you want to share with others?[18]

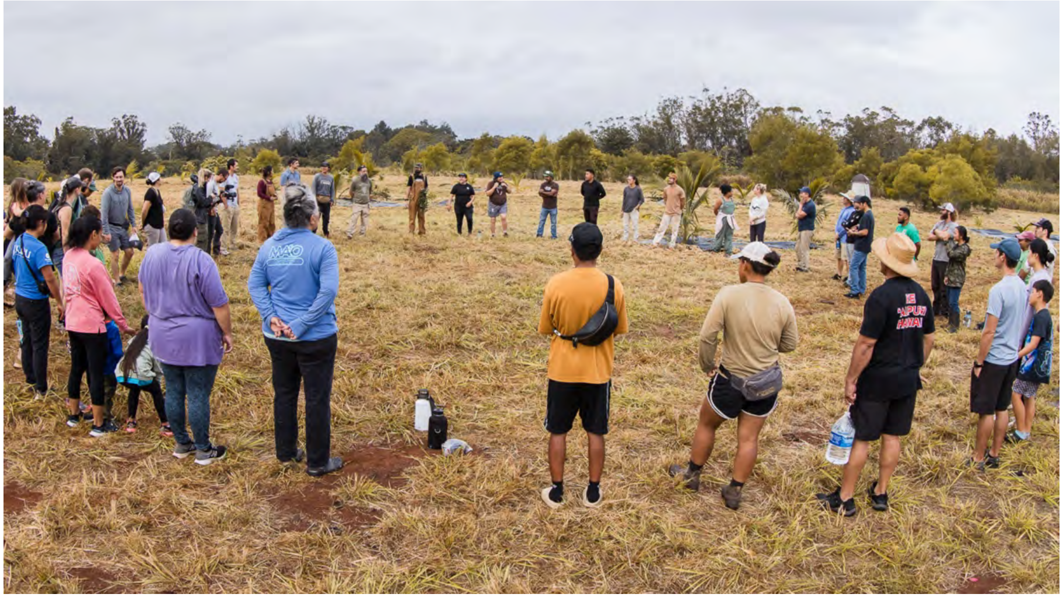

Figure 7. Uluniu (coconut grove) work with NiUNOW! community, Makahiki, 2023, Kūkaniloko, Wahiawā, O'ahu. Photograph courtesy of Ka'ōhua Lucas

As a teenager, I would assist Aunty Mele in art workshops and mural projects across O'ahu. At Ke Kula 'o Samuel M. Kamakau, a Hawaiian public charter school in Ko'olaupoko, Aunty Mele helped young people to establish relationships with art, informed by their cultural identities and experiences. There is no easy way to address personal pain and intergenerational trauma but expressing oneself creatively in a safe and supportive learning environment can be a powerful beginning to a lifelong journey of healing. Since 1992, Aunty Mele's "classrooms" have taken many forms—a steel-framed, blue tarp tent; a wooden park bench on the beach; a pothole-ridden parking lot; a correctional facility; a family's backyard; a public library; and the white walls of a state-funded museum. No matter where the learning happens, it is never about the art or the final product; rather, it is always about connecting with people and sharing a culturally rooted creative process along the way, as Aunty Mele explains:

> As a young, widowed mother of two boys, I was carried, like a high tide, to this place of going, "DAMN! There's just so much trauma, rage, and confusion in me." Finding out all the deplorable things that have happened to Hawaiians over the generations put me on a course of corrective action; as in, get myself educated so that I can make more informed decisions and then try to better understand the reasons for all of the dysfunction in the Hawaiian community—in the lives of my own family, our cousins, and their

> families. Desperation. Insanity. Addiction. Suicide. Families experience loss and difficulties at some point. But if we can practice forgiveness, patience, and kindness throughout it all, then we can do it within our communities and beyond. I work whenever a need presents itself, and I don't go where I'm not invited. Serving as a community arts educator has been my own lifelong education.[19]

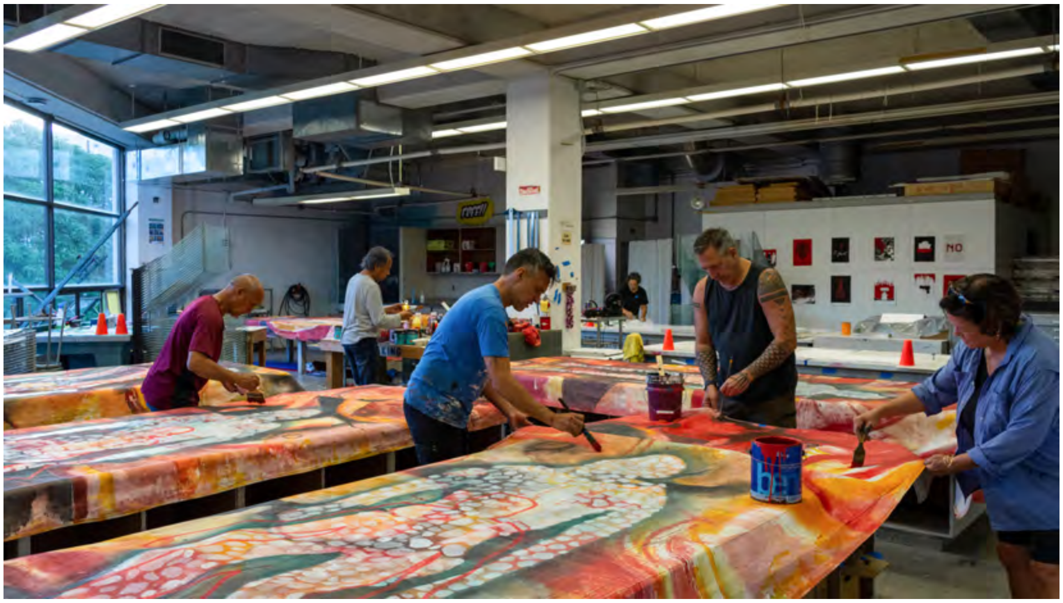

Figure 8. The painting of *Nā Akua Kiaʻi*, for the exhibition *ʻAi Pōhaku, Stone Eaters*, 2023. Participating artists (left to right): Kahi Ching, Al Kahekiliuila Lagunero, Solomon Robert Nui Enos, Harinani Orme, Carl F.K. Pao, and Meleanna Aluli Meyer. Screenprinting studio, Department of Art and Art History, University of Hawaiʻi at Mānoa, Kona, Oʻahu. Photograph courtesy of DKB

The first time I worked on a community mural with Aunty Mele was in 2004, when I was sixteen. At the invitation of Noelle M. K. Y. Kahanu, then director of community affairs at the Bernice Pauahi Bishop Museum, Aunty Mele was developing a large, forty-panel mural. Painted by school students and community members over a period of ten weeks, *Hoʻohuli Hou: An Overtuning, A Change* (2004) is a rumination on a wānana (prophecy) attributed to Kapihe, a kāula (seer), and adapted from *Hawaiian Antiquities (Moolelo Hawaii)* (1898) by Hawaiian historian Davida Malo.[20] The mural, currently on view in the museum's Hawaiian Hall, celebrates the prophecy "E iho ana ʻo luna. E piʻi ana ʻo lalo. E hui ana nā moku. E kū ana ka paia" ("That which is above shall be brought down. That which is below shall be lifted up. The islands shall be united. The walls shall stand upright").[21] Aunty Mele elaborates on the mural's powerfully enduring tenet:

> Our ancestors are extraordinary, and they want the best for us. I believe in them and feel their presence. I am an embodiment of their knowledge and strive to continue their good works. Everyone I vision and paint and heal with, we all channel ancestral memory in our own ways. Together we hold it, we feel it, we pray for it. Our work helps remind us of what we are supposed to be doing, of what we all should be caring about. It hasn't been easy, let me tell you, but it's certainly been worth the effort. At the end of the day, we only need to remember that Spirit is in all things and as many of my kumu, beloved teachers have said to me over the years, "It matters not *what* you practice, but *that* you practice." Simple, right!?[22]

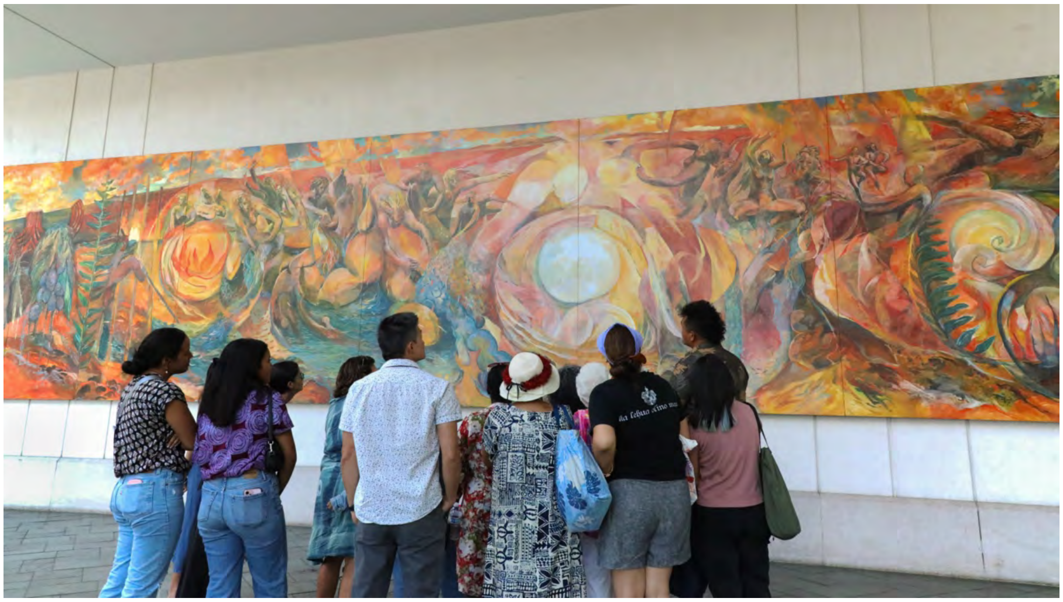

Figure 9. During the 13th Festival of Pacific Arts and Culture, 2024, Meleanna Aluli Meyer leads a discussion in front of *Hawai'i Loa Kū Like Kākou*. Mural by Meleanna Aluli Meyer, Al Kahekiliuila Lagunero, Harinani Orme, Kahi Ching, and Solomon Robert Nui Enos, 2011. Hawaiʻi Convention Center Lobby, Waikīkī, Kona, Oʻahu. Photograph courtesy of Allyson Ijima

Following *Hoʻohuli Hou*, Aunty Mele oversaw many more community murals and formed a hui (working group) with longtime friends and fellow Hawaiian painters Al Kahekiliuila Lagunero, Harinani Orme, Kahi Ching, Carl F.K. Pao, and Solomon Robert Nui Enos (Fig. 8). Among their collaborative projects, two works stand out: *ʻĀina Aloha* (2015) and *Hawai'i Loa Kū Like Kākou* (2011). *ʻĀina Aloha* is a two-sided painting addressing generational healing within Hawaiian communities. Since 2015, the mural has traveled to local and international conferences that focus on dealing with historical and cultural trauma, and in 2023, it was included in Sharjah Biennial 15: *Thinking Historically in the Present* in the United Arab Emirates. *Hawaiʼi Loa Kū Like Kākou* (Fig. 9) is a monumental eight-panel meditation on ʻauamo kuleana, a Hawaiian concept encapsulating the burden and privilege of responsibility in caring for Hawaiʻi and the planet. The mural—which shows another way of being in the world—was organized by Puʻuhonua Society in collaboration with the Office of Hawaiian Affairs and Hawaiʻi Tourism Authority. It was produced in advance of the 19th Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Economic Leaders' Meeting, held in Honolulu in November 2011. It was also a direct response to the State of Hawaii's commission of public art for the Hawaiʻi Convention Center in the late 1990s, which included no Hawaiian art. A testament to the ways in which community murals can raise awareness and bring about meaningful change, *Hawaiʻi Loa Kū Like Kākou* is now prominently displayed near the building's main entrance.

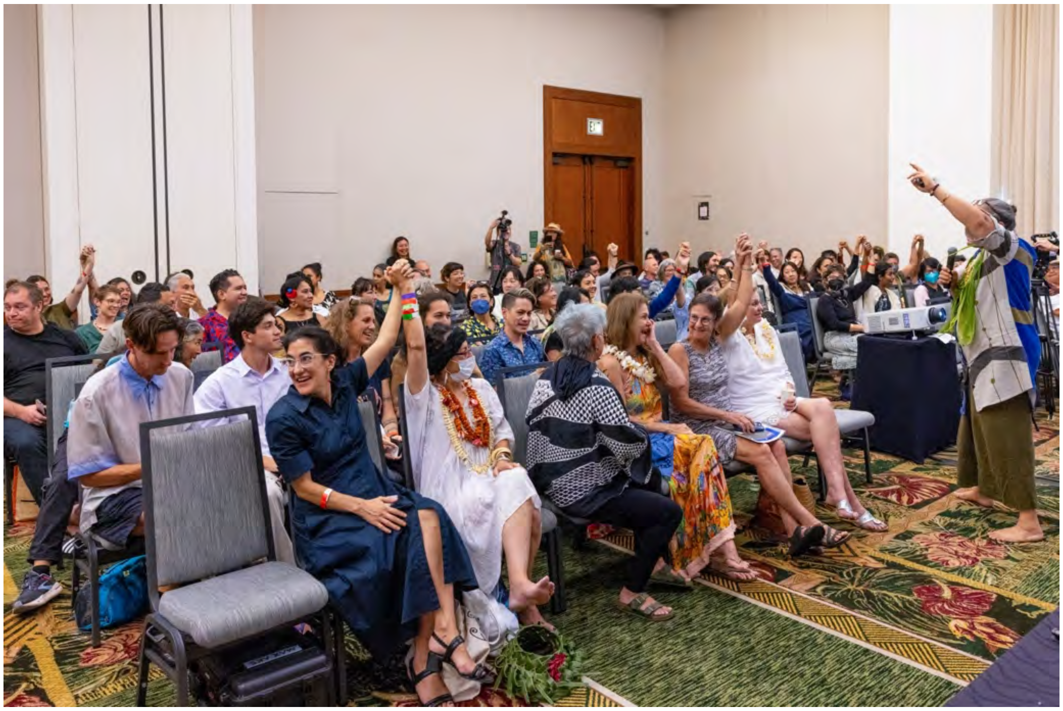

Figure 10. Audience activated by Manulani Aluli Meyer during keynote for *ALOHA NŌ: Hawaiʻi's Role in a Worldwide Awakening*, Art Summit 2024, Hawaiʼi Convention Center, June 13, 2024, Waikīkī, Kona, Oʻahu. Photograph by Bryan Berkowitz. Courtesy of Hawaiʼi Contemporary

On June 13, 2024, at the end of the 13th FestPAC, the Hawaiʻi Contemporary Art Summit 2024 opened at the Hawaiʻi Convention Center, two floors above the spectacular Festival Village. A thematic precursor to Hawaiʻi Triennial 2025: *ALOHA NŌ*, the free, multi-day, multi-site event brought together artists, curators, and thinkers from Hawaiʻi, the Pacific, and around the world to consider the triennial's theme through a series of talks, film screenings, artist presentations, and workshops.[23]

Amid the converging arts and cultural scenes of Moananuiākea, Aunty Manu delivered a keynote, "ALOHA NŌ: Hawaiʻi's Role in a Worldwide Awakening," inspired by the teachings of Aunty Pilahi Paki, Aunty Edith Kanakaʻole, Aunty Lynette Kahekili Paglinawan, and Aunty Pūlama Collier. During the session, she spoke movingly to notions of aloha as a practice that flows through truth-telling, healing, spirituality, and the Hawaiian sovereignty movement during this time of radical transformation (Fig. 10). Aunty Manu calls for aloha as method for living in a world where your worldview is valued:

> Aloha (love and loving) is the primal energetic force of our collective evolution; it is the genesis of world transformation. You know how I know that? Because others told me it was! I remember listening to kūpuna, community elders, to family, to friends telling me about Hawaiian intelligence and that, in the end, it just boils down to aloha. And then, suddenly, I felt intelligent. Like, wow! You know, I was made to feel so stupid in this other world but that wasn't the one I wanted to inhabit. That was in 1997, while I was pursuing a doctorate in Philosophy of Education at Harvard University because I wanted to study with Howard Gardner whose theory of multiple intelligences resonated with me at the time. That's also when I realized how sick US society really is.[24]

Later in the day, Aunty Mele participated in a roundtable discussion, "Pewa: Healing and Truth Speaking," with fellow triennial artists Megan Cope, Carl F.K. Pao, and Emily Mafileʻo of Taro Patch Creative, which was moderated by curator Mina Elison. The group engaged in conversation about loss and grief in a postcolonial and capitalist context, as well as healing and connectivity through artistic practices that mend cracks or divides in communities. Across the three days of Art Summit 2024, my mother Maile, then a board member of Hawaiʻi Contemporary, actively strengthened relationships between artists, audience members, and community partners, as she has done diligently since the organization's inception over a decade ago. On her uplifting approach to community, my mother stated:

> Everything we do, it’s all about lifting up the work of Native Hawaiian, Hawaiʻi, and Pacific creatives. If we can just meet people where they are at and help to support them so they can continue in the direction they want to go—that’s it right there, that’s enough. And so it’s always about nurturing relationships through community in all the ways we can. This is how we rise, through a different understanding of exchange.

Witnessing my mother, aunties, and their extended support networks of friends, mentors, and frequent collaborators over the course of my life has instilled in me a deep appreciation for all those who care, individually and collectively, for the people, practices, and places that sustain Hawaiʻi. My family has taught me that meaningful change happens when we work together and take action, each in our own way. Or as Aunty Manu often says when speaking about ʻauamo kuleana and the importance of carrying your responsibility, “Collective transformation through individual excellence.”

Drew Kahu’āina Broderick *(b. 1988) is an artist, curator, and educator from Mōkapu on the windward side of Oʻahu, in US-occupied Hawaiʻi. His work is guided by the multigenerational, on-the-ground efforts of Kanaka ʻŌiwi women and queer folk who have devoted their lives to art, culture, education, healing, and community in Hawaiʻi. Currently, Broderick co-leads (with filmmaker Sancia Miala Shiba Nash), the grassroots film initiative kekahi wahi (est. 2020), which documents transformations and shares intersectional stories across the Hawaiian archipelago through time-based media. Recent projects include:* ʻAi ā manō *(2024) with Kapulani Landgraf and Kaili Chun;* ʻAi Pōhaku, Stone Eaters *(2023) with Josh Tengan and Noelle M.K.Y. Kahanu; and Hawaiʻi Triennial 2022:* Pacific Century – E Hoʻomau no Moananuiākea *with Melissa Chiu and Miwako Tezuka.*

Maile Meyer *(b. 1957) is the third daughter of Emma Akana Aluli and Harry King Meyer. She is a formally trained photographer who grew up in Kailua, between Mōkapu and Kaʻōhao, on the windward side of Oʻahu. In 1990, she founded the independent bookstore Native Books with a focus on Hawaiian and Pacific literature. In 1993, with book designer Barbara Pope, she co-founded ʻAi Pōhaku Press, specializing in publications connected to the storied and sacred places of Hawaiʻi. In 1996, she established Nā Mea Hawaiʻi, a place for Hawaiian and locally made cultural products. In 2020, with entrepreneur Wei Fang, she launched Arts & Letters Nuʻuanu, a mixed-use bookshop, art gallery, and coworking and community events space. From 1996 to 2022, she served as the executive director of*

Puʻuhonua Society, a Honolulu-based Native Hawaiian women-led nonprofit arts and culture organization.

Dr. Manulani Meyer *(b. 1959) is the fifth daughter of Emma Akana Aluli and Harry Meyer. She is an internationally renowned speaker who grew up on the sands of Mōkapu and Kailua on the island of Oʻahu and along the rainy shoreline of Hilo Palikū on the island of Hawaiʻi. She is a writer and international evaluator of Indigenous doctoral dissertations, working in the field of Indigenous epistemology and its role in worldwide awakening. Her book* Hoʻoulu: Our Time of Becoming *(2001) is in its third printing, and* Hoʻopono: Mutual Emergence *was published in 2025. From 2004 to 2010, she served as an associate professor of education at University of Hawai'i at Hilo. From 2010 to 2015, she was the lead designer-teacher for He Waka Hiringa, an innovative master's degree in applied Indigenous knowledge at Te Wānanga o Aotearoa, the world's largest Māori university. She is currently the Konohiki (facilitator) for Kūlana o Kapolei, a Hawaiian Place of Learning at University of Hawaiʻi, West Oʻahu.*

Meleanna Meyer *(b. 1956) is the second daughter of Emma Akana Aluli and Harry Meyer. She is a community educator from the ahupuaʻa of Kailua, in the moku of Koʻolaupoko, Oʻahu. For over thirty years, she has worked in private, public, charter and Hawaiian-language immersion schools across the Hawaiian Islands. As an artist and filmmaker, she translates ʻike Hawaiʻi (Native Hawaiian wisdom) through kaona (metaphor) to engage audiences and viewers in art, film, and the written word. She sees her work as a springboard for deeper conversations for reconciliation and for healing. Recent projects include the public mural* Nā Akua Kiaʻi *(2023) with Al Kahekiliuila Lagunero, Harinani Orme, Kahi Ching, Carl F.K. Pao and Solomon Robert Nui Enos; and the documentary short film* Mauna Kea: Sacred Mountain, Sacred Conduct *(2020) with Tom Coffman and Lisa Altieri. She was a participating artist in the Hawaiʻi Triennial 2025:* ALOHA NŌ.

Notes

[1] This text was originally commissioned by the Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane, Australia. A previous version was published as: Drew Kahuʻāina Broderick, Maile Meyer, Dr. Manulani Aluli Meyer, and Meleanna Aluli Meyer, "Native art, culture, education and healing in Hawaiʻi: Family stories of Connection," *Asia Pacific Art Papers*, Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art, December 25, 2025, https://apap.qagoma.qld.gov.au/native-art-culture-education-and-healing-in-hawaii-family-stories-of-connection/.

[2] Established in 1973, Hale Nauā III, Society of Maoli Arts was one of the first organizations concerned with advancing Hawaiian contemporary art in Hawaiʻi. Led by Hawaiian artist and master carver Rocky KaʻiouliokahihikoloʻEhu Jensen, Hale

Nauā III channeled the teachings and lessons of individuals into the collective well-being of a community of artists, both Hawaiian and non-Hawaiian. In line with its aims, Hale Nauā III sourced its name from an older cultural organization in existence during the late nineteenth century, Hale Nauā II. Founded by King Kalākaua in 1886 and functioning until his death in 1891, Hale Nauā II worked to secure political leadership positions for Hawaiians while also promoting the revival and strengthening of Hawaiian culture in combination with the advancement of Western sciences, art, and literature. Although membership in King Kalākaua's Hale Nauā II was limited to those of Hawaiian descent, it was open to all genders in contrast to many Western fraternal organizations active in the Hawaiian Kingdom.

[3] Manulani Aluli Meyer, conversation with Drew Kahuʻāina Broderick, March 21, 2024.

[4] The 13th Festival of Pacific Arts and Culture Commission, appointed in 2018 by the Hawaiʻi State Legislature, included nine members: Kalani Kaʻanāʻanā, Māpuana de Silva, Senator Jarrett Keohokālole, Representative Richard Onishi, Jamie Lum, Makana McClellan, Stacy Ferreira, Shanty Asher, and Snowbird Bento. The festival was organized by Gravitas Pasifika, a boutique firm that harnesses the power of creative storytelling to advance Hawaiian, local Hawaiian, and Pasifika worldviews; it is led by Dr. Aaron J. Salā and Dr. C. Makanani Salā.

[5] "Ka Hooulu Lahui," *Ka Nuhou Hawaii*, April 21, 1874, p. 1. For additional context, see "Hawaiʻi, Host of the 13th Festival of Pacific Arts & Culture," Bishop Museum, https://blog.bishopmuseum.org/nupepa/hawai%CA%BBi-host-of-the-13th-festival-of-pacific-arts-culture.

[6] Nā Maka o ka ʻĀina (Joan Lander and Puhipau), *Act of War: Overthrow of the Hawaiian Nation*, 1993, 60 minutes; see Hawaiian Voice, https://www.hawaiianvoice.com/products-page/history-and-sovereignty/act-of-war-the-overthrow-of-the-hawaiian-nation-2/.

[7] Meleanna Aluli Meyer, conversation with Drew Kahuʻāina Broderick, April 30, 2024.

[8] Puʻuhonua Society is a Hawaiian and women-led non-profit organization based in Honolulu, which was founded in 1972 as the Young of Heart Workshop by Emma Akana Aluli Meyer, my maternal grandmother. In the words of my sister Emma and mother Maile:

> For the past four generations, the work of Puʻuhonua Society has been led by members of our family. For over 50 years, lineal descendants of Emma Yuklin Akamu and Noa Webster Aluli have focused on providing support to artists, writers, educators and community organizers who serve as translators, mediators, and amplifiers of social and environmental justice issues in Hawaiʻi. Ka poʻe i aloha i ka ʻāina, Puʻuhonua Society is of and for the people who love this land of Hawaiʻi nei. As an extension of our ʻohana and a reflection of our values, our collective work acknowledges our

> allegiances. Our pilina—our connectivity—joins us to communities in ways that are long-lasting and deep rooted. Through these relationships with creative thinkers, dreamers, and doers, Puʻuhonua Society serves as a refuge for Hawaiian ways of being.

As of 2024, Puʻuhonua Society's primary programs include: Aupuni Space, an artist-run gallery, venue, and studios; Hoʻākea Source, a Regional Regranting Program Partner of The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts; Hoʻomau Nā Maka o ka ʻĀina, a cataloguing and public programming partnership aimed at preserving and making accessible Nā Maka o ka ʻĀina's moving-image archive; KEANAHALA, an inclusive and collaborative weaving program that perpetuates the Hawaiian practice of ulana lauhala (pandanus weaving); KĪPUKA, a makers' space and educational environment offering a series of classes and workshops focused on the transmission of ancestral knowledge and material practices; and NiUNOW!, a cultural agroforestry movement affirming the importance of niu (coconut) and uluniu (coconut groves) to the health and wellbeing of Hawaiʻi and its peoples. For more information see: "History," Puʻuhonua Society, https://www.puuhonua-society.org/.

[9] For additional context, see Lā Hoʻi Hoʻi Ea, https://lahoihoiea.org.

[10] On July 31, 1843, King Kamehameha ʻEkolu, Kauikeaouli, addressed the people of the Hawaiian Kingdom at Kawaiahaʻo Church and offered these timeless words of wisdom.

[11] Uncle Kekuni, who helped to re-establish Lā Hoʻihoʻi Ea at Thomas Square Park in contemporary times, speaks to the group's intention in detail, addressing the need to reclaim and restore Hawaiian independence in Nā Maka o ka ʻĀina's feature film *Ka Lā Hoʻihoʻi Ea* (1986). Hawaiian artists, musicians, sovereignty leaders, community members, and activists—including ʻĪmaikalani Kalāhele, Peter Kealoha, Homer Hayes, Pua Kealoha, Haunani-Kay Trask, and Mililani Trask—have made appearances in the educational program.

[12] Maile Meyer, conversation with Drew Kahuʻāina Broderick, March 12, 2024.

[13] Manulani Aluli Meyer, conversation with Drew Kahuʻāina Broderick, March 21, 2024.

[14] At the time, Native Books was located up the hill from Niuhelewai Spring, on the corner of School and Aupuni Streets in Pālama, a short walk from the Kamehameha Schools Bus Terminal, past Maluhia Cemetery, Jean Charlot's vibrant *United Public Workers Mural* (1970–75), and Golden City Restaurant.

[15] Maile Meyer, conversation with Drew Kahuʻāina Broderick, March 12, 2024.

[16] Maile Meyer, conversation with Drew Kahuʻāina Broderick, March 12, 2024.

[17] Manulani Aluli Meyer, conversation with Drew Kahuʻāina Broderick, March 21, 2024.

[18] Manulani Aluli Meyer, conversation with Drew Kahuʻāina Broderick, March 21, 2024.

[19] Meleanna Aluli Meyer, conversation with Drew Kahuʻāina Broderick, April 30, 2024.

[20] Davida Malo, *Hawaiian Antiquities (Moolelo Hawaii)*, translated from the Hawaiian by Dr. N. B. Emerson, 1898 (Honolulu: Hawaiian Gazette Co., Ltd., 1903), 154.

[21] For further discussion of the mural, see J. Kehaulani Kauanui, "Aloha Nō and the Power of Healing in Contemporary Hawaiian Art: An Interview with Meleanna Aluli Meyer and Noelle M.K.Y. Kahanu," *Pacific Arts* 25, no. 2 (2025), 111–14, https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7g64k84j.

[22] Meleanna Aluli Meyer, conversation with Drew Kahuʻāina Broderick, April 30, 2024.

[23] Hawaiʻi Triennial 2025: *ALOHA NŌ*—curated by Wassan Al-Khudhairi, Binna Choi, and Noelle M.K.Y. Kahanu—was the first time that the curatorial team for the Hawaiʻi Triennial was composed entirely of women of color working collaboratively in a nonhierarchical arrangement. Hawaiʻi Contemporary Art Summit 2024 is the second iteration of the event. The inaugural Art Summit 2021 was conceived shortly before the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown of March 2020, by Melissa Chiu, Miwako Tezuka, and Drew Kahuʻāina Broderick, who were also the curatorial team for Hawaiʻi Triennial 2022: *Pacific Century – E Hoʻomau no Moananuiākea*. Presented in a hybrid format comprising in-person and online sessions, the summit was envisioned as a way of exchanging ideas, sharing practices, and remaining in relation, given the travel restrictions and health risks that defined daily life then. For more information see Hawaiʻi Contemporary, https://hawaiicontemporary.org/art-summit-2024.

[24] Manulani Aluli Meyer, conversation with Drew Kahuʻāina Broderick, March 21, 2024.

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GAZELLAH BRUDER
with an interview by Stacy L. Kamehiro

Restitution to Our Oceans–to our Pasifika I, II, III, and *IV*

Abstract
Gazellah Bruder is an artist based in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea. She presents four paintings she created while an artist-in-residence (August to October 2025) in the Leipzig International Art program at the Leipziger Baumwollspinnerei in Germany. In an artist statement, Bruder describes how her paintings are inspired by conversations surrounding complex subjects—colonization, de-colonization, identity, and restitution—and presents a critique of the devastating human impact on the earth's oceans and ocean life. Her work calls for restitution to the oceans. Then, in an interview with art historian Stacy L. Kamehiro, Bruder discusses the four paintings and her artistic process in detail.

Keywords: *Oceania, Papua New Guinea, contemporary art, colonization, de-colonization, identity, restitution, oceans, environmental degradation, climate change*

Figure 1. Gazellah Bruder, 2025.
Port Moresby, PNG. Photograph courtesy of the artist

Artist Statement

During my 2025 artist's residency through the Leipzig International Art program at the Leipziger Baumwollspinnerei in Germany, I produced a series of four paintings titled *Restitution to our Oceans–to our Pasifika, I, II, III,* and *IV*. These works were inspired by conversations surrounding very complex subjects: colonization, de-colonization, identity, and restitution.[1]

Many Indigenous societies have experienced cultural atrocities under colonization, including the removal of their cultural history and heritage. Restitution of precious artifacts to their original owners is an overwhelming process that requires the participation of institutions, governments, and civil society. Although I lack precise knowledge of the complexities of restitution procedures, I was completely astounded when confronted by the sheer magnitude of the subject of restitution and did not know how to process it. It took a lot of deep thought on how best to express my understanding. Human problems can seem impossible to fix and require a lot of work and time to resolve. Therefore, I felt it necessary to refocus and look at the issue of restitution from a different perspective.

I thought of my position as a Pacific Islander and where I come from: Papua New Guinea. I considered the ocean and people's impact on life in the ocean. The human species can be very destructive; as a collective, it has plundered nature. We have failed to use our earth sustainably. Nations have thrived on destructive practices that humans feel entitled to—practices that have contributed to climate change and global warming. The negative consequences of our greed are evident on our lands, and also in our waterways, our lakes, our rivers, and our oceans. We continue to colonize the oceans—over-fishing them, using destructive fishing methods, and polluting with our trash. With deep-sea mining, the worst is yet to come. Life on earth is at our mercy. Do we have time to fix the damage we have caused? The future looks bleak.

History has shown how much we have failed in our dealings with each other as human beings. Have we thought, even for a moment, about who fights and speaks for the tens of thousands of species we share this planet with? Who will speak for all life in the ocean? Who will make restitution to them, and how? Let us consider restitution to the oceans—all life on earth depends on this. It is my hope that my paintings will provoke and inspire us all in the fight to protect our oceans.

Interview with Gazellah Bruder by Stacy L. Kamehiro

Stacy L. Kamehiro (SLK): *Thank you for sharing your new and important work with* Pacific Arts*! Please tell us about your process in creating the* Restitution to Our Oceans–to our Pasifika *series.*

Gazellah Bruder (GB): My work always starts with my feelings about a story or a conversation I have in my mind. The paintings express deep, chaotic, and often troubling, overwhelming feelings. I start with a quick sketch to capture an image of these feelings and then—like carving out a rock to find the sculpture—through painting, I look for the story and reveal it.

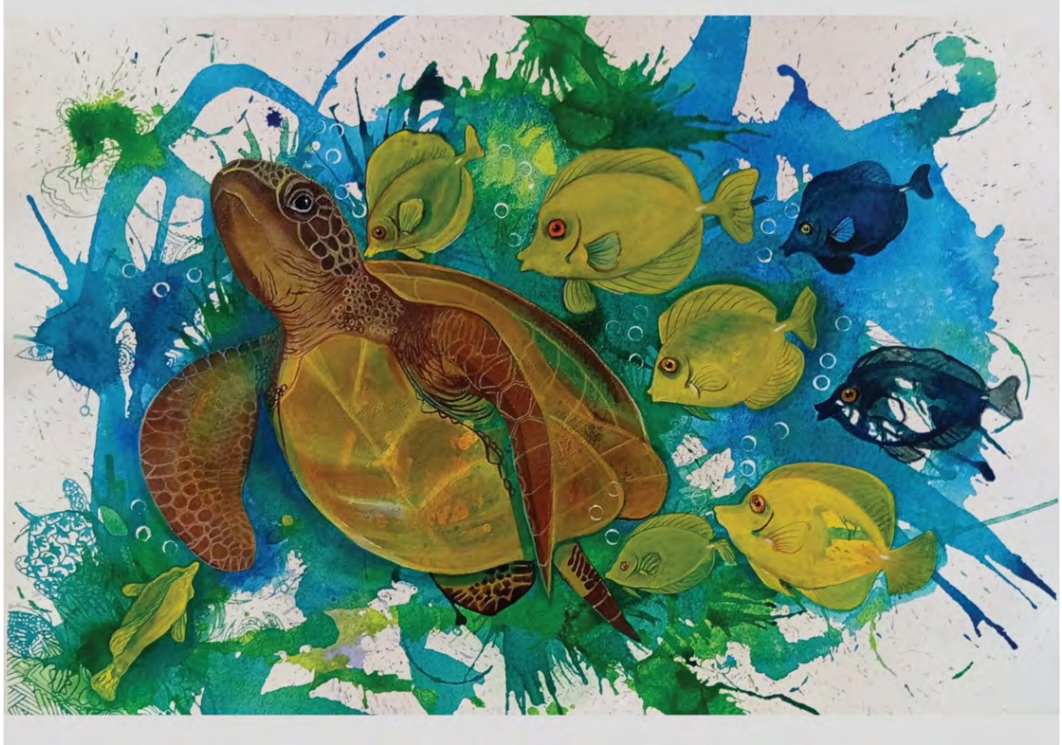

Figure 2. Gazellah Bruder, *Restitution to our Oceans–to our Pasifika I*, 2025. Acrylic on 300psm printmaking paper, 56 x 76 cm. Courtesy of the artist

SLK: *Your paintings feature specific animals, such as turtles, yellow tang fish (*Zebrasoma flavescens*), nautiluses, and manta rays. Is there a special significance of these forms of sea life for you?*

GB: I depict the turtle as a symbol of the people of whose land touches the warm water of the Pacific Ocean, especially those people who have historically been colonized or are still colonized. The turtle represents the survival of Indigenous cultures, societies, and practices—sea turtles travel far and wide, from the moment they hatch to when they return to their home beaches years later to nest and create a new generation.

Tang fish clean parasites off large sea creatures like turtles and whales. They are featured in one of the paintings (Fig. 1) as a representation of the countless colonizers who picked off the resources from their Pacific colonies to benefit their own coffers. They extracted resources at the expense of the original inhabitants who become subservient to the colonizers.

The nautilus shell and manta ray represent rare beauty and the mysteries of the deep that have yet to be discovered. All life on earth is precious, and yet the ocean is held ransom by human activity. It is our responsibility as human beings to intervene to save and protect our warming Pacific Ocean. We must protect our ocean to save all life on earth.

SLK: *Some of the animals appear as opaque, silhouetted forms. Is there a reason you paint some of the sea life (especially the turtles) in this way? Are they akin to "ghost" figures—especially because so many of the Pacific marine turtles are endangered species that are threatened with extinction?*[2] *Or might they be signaling future life—life that we hope is to come but is uncertain?*

GB: Yes, these represent all life: lived, living, and still yet to come.

SLK: *Please tell us about the arched patterns found in painting* II *(Fig. 3) and the arched and crosshatch patterns found on the rays' bodies in painting* IV *(Fig. 5).*

GB: There are many common motifs in traditional patterns across Indigenous visual cultures throughout Pasifika. The patterns I used in these paintings represent the ripple of time, cultural continuity, and the current of the ocean and its waves that connect many Pasifika people. The crosshatch pattern is found in the weave of our traditional houses, mats, and fishing nets. Despite globalization and global warming, our Indigenous cultures and lifestyles continue to thrive. We have co-existed with nature, but now this symbiotic and balanced existence is in danger of being altered forever.

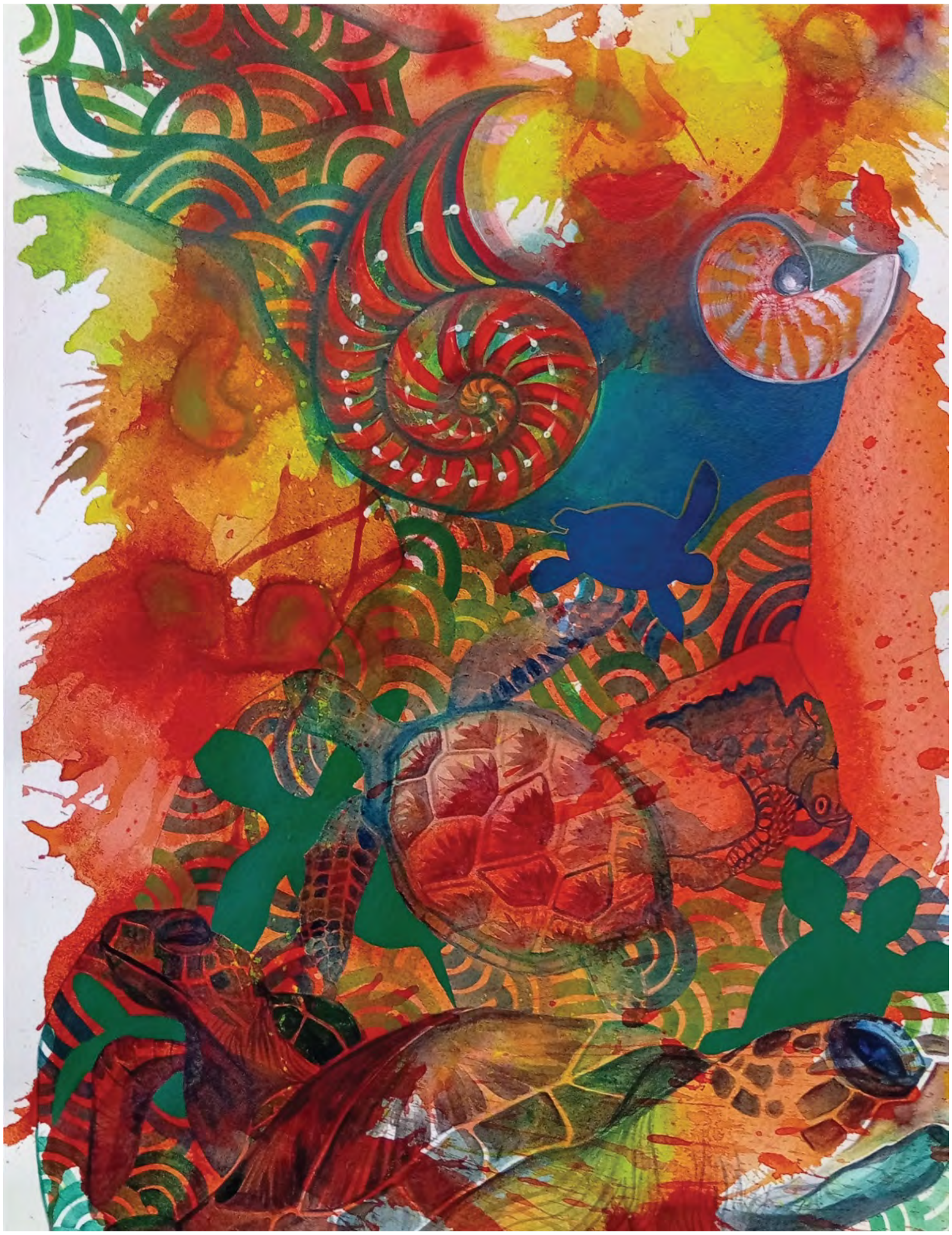

Figure 3. Gazellah Bruder, *Restitution to our Oceans–to our Pasifika II*, 2025. Acrylic on 300psm printmaking paper, 76 x 56 cm. Courtesy of the artist

SLK: *Would you comment on your color choices? Although the blue and greens in painting* II *(Fig. 3) correspond to the ocean environment, the bright purples, reds, and oranges seem to indicate something else, like danger*.

GB: The color choices are not accidental. The blues and greens are the beautiful calm cool waters of the ocean. The colors grow warmer: from purple and green hues to orange, representing heightening climate change and global warming, until they become a “red hot” warning—a call to action for humanity. We have long colonized the ocean; our activities on land are mirrored in their impact in the ocean. We must take responsibility for our actions and be accountable to our environment lest we lose sight of the bigger picture: of how all elements of the earth are connected, wreak more destruction upon our ecosystem, and, ultimately, suffer the consequences of our actions.

SLK: *The acrylic paint you used appears to have been very liquid, very fluid—it almost resembles watercolor. Were you going for a specific effect? Also, the way the paint that forms the environment for the sea life is applied suggests urgency. Are you intending to show chaos and violence in the ocean through your color choices and painting technique?*

GB: I enjoy working with acrylic paints because the colors are intense and remain vibrant when dry. Watercolor does not have the same bright finish and may fade over time. For practical reasons, I also used acrylic because I did not want the paints to run if the paper accidentally got wet after completion.

The style I used to portray this “conversation” about the ocean relates to my attempt to relinquish my control over wet paint and wash techniques. The ocean cannot be tamed—it can be violent, wild, passionate, unpredictable, and beyond our comprehension. I deliberately chose to make it look chaotic. I applied diluted paint onto wet sections of the paper and while the paint was drying, I blew air across wet puddles and moved the paper in various directions to spread the paint, using salt to add textured effects. A lot of the beautiful transitions in forms and colors were almost organic and unplanned. I then simply looked at the paper when it was dry to “find” my characters in each piece.

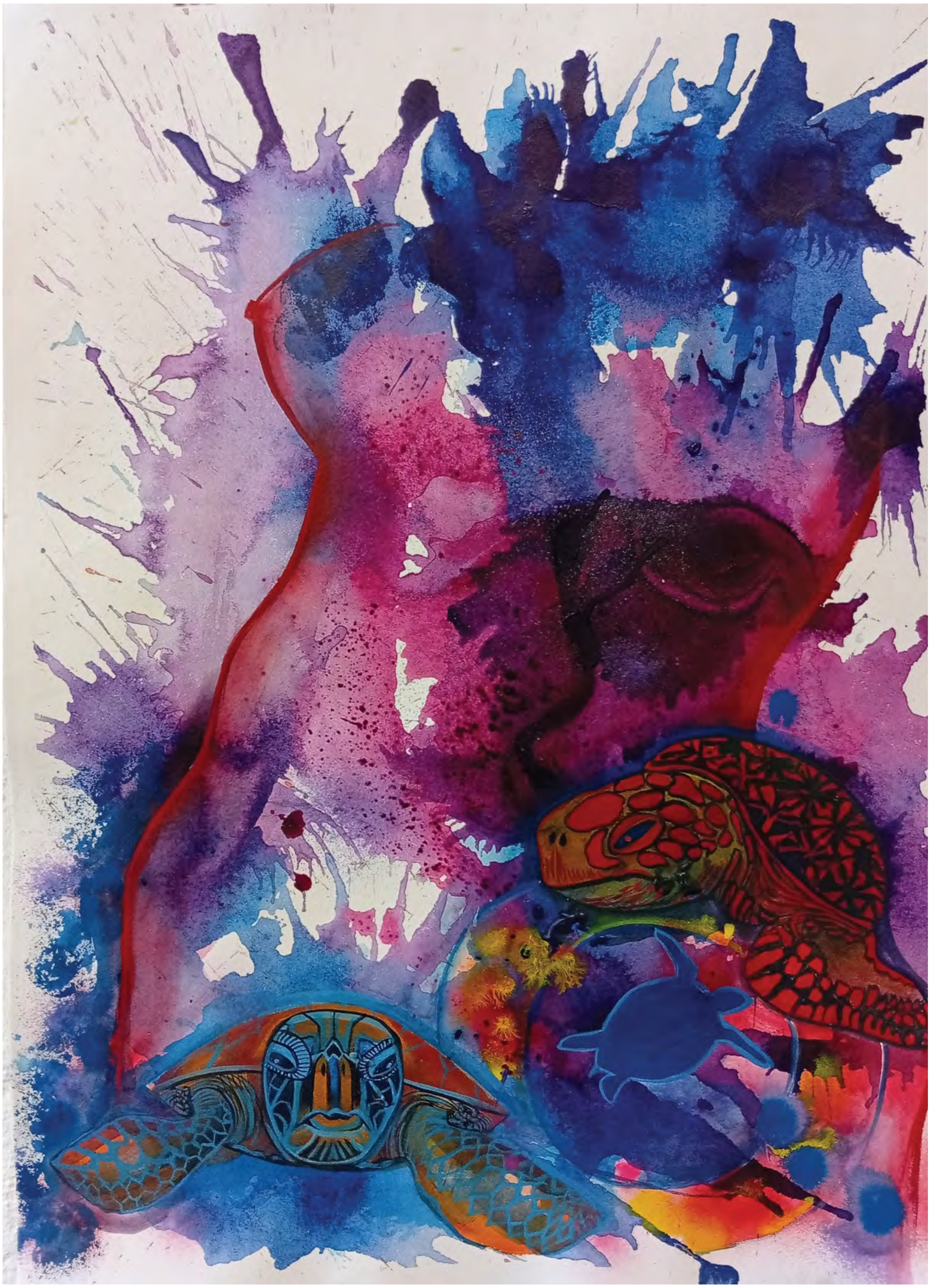

Figure 4. Gazellah Bruder, *Restitution to our Oceans–to our Pasifika III*, 2025. Acrylic on 300psm printmaking paper, 76 x 56 cm. Courtesy of the artist

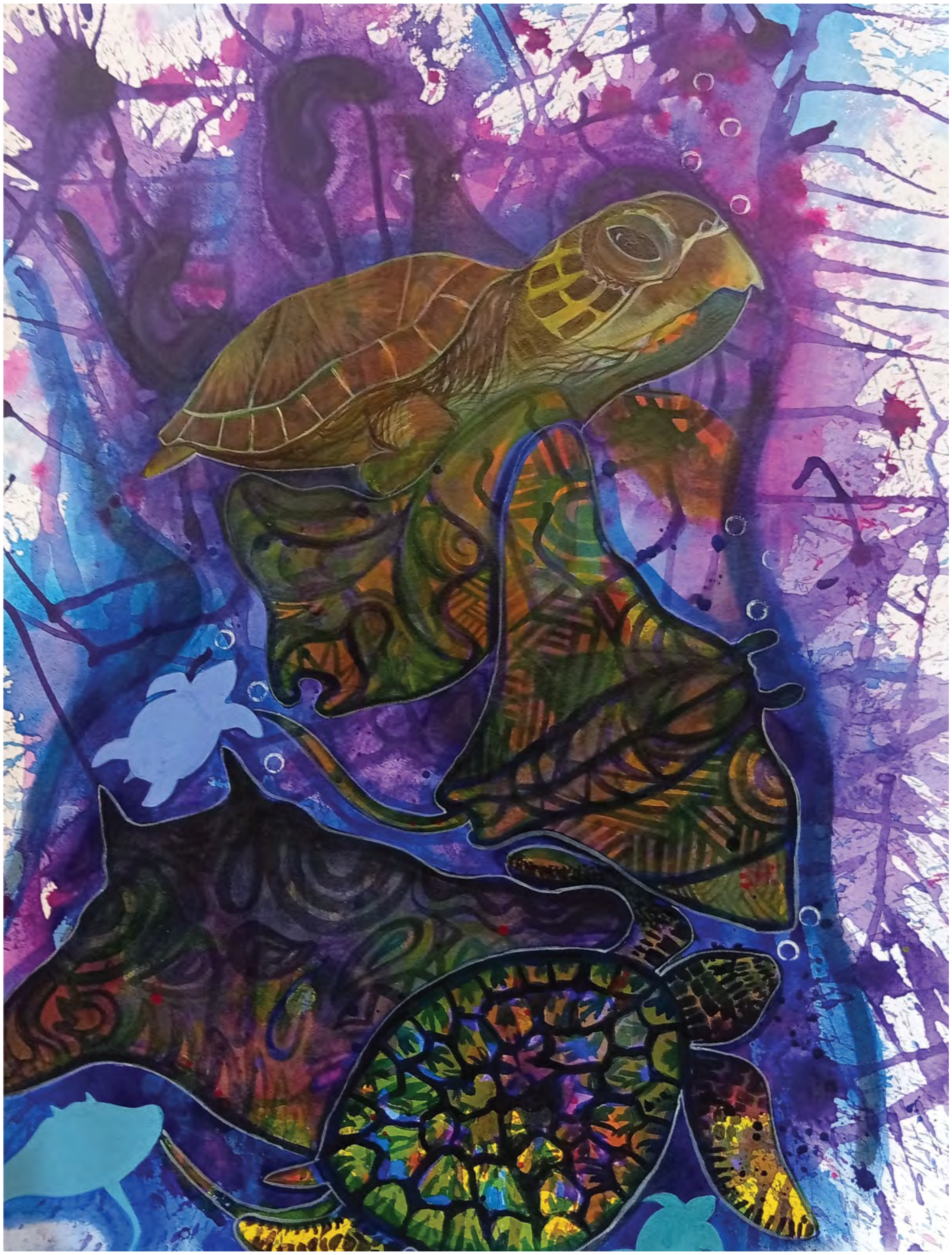

Figure 5. Gazellah Bruder, *Restitution to our Oceans–to our Pasifika IV*, 2025. Acrylic on 300psm printmaking paper, 76 x 56 cm. Courtesy of the artist

SLK: *The paintings seem to include gestural effects in the way the paint is splashed onto the paper. Your own body and actions (activism?) are very present. Was this something you were thinking about—perhaps responding to your own call to act to protect our oceans?*

GB: The idea of my being a "conservation artist" was really born unintentionally. Most of my work for the past twenty-seven years has focused on the female form, specifically the female torso, as the epitome of life.[3] I was inspired by the annual Hiri Moale Festival that celebrates Motuan culture, languages, and traditions in the Central Province of Papua New Guinea.[4] Part of the celebration features the Hiri Hanenamo, in which young women demonstrate their knowledge of Motuan culture and their commitment to preserving Indigenous heritage. The women wear grass skirts that sway with their movements to welcome the arrival of the Hiri Lagatoi—large sailing canoes famed for their ocean voyages in complex historic trade networks. In two of the paintings in the *Restitution to our Oceans–to our Pasifika* series, I subtly depict a female form (Figs. 4 and 5) to emphasize the presence of Mother Nature, the connection of humanity and the environment, and peoples' responsibility to protect the environment and therefore ourselves.

My feeling the need to act is also inspired by my father. I have always loved painting turtles and see in the turtle the spirit of my father.[5] He was wise, refined, and kind—virtues that I aspire to. I am not the most courageous person or a born leader, but I also am not a follower. I am a nonconformist who has always striven to use my art to create conversations. I am not an aggressive or confrontational human being and in the face of violence, I run for the hills—I always thought of myself as a coward. In terms of human rights, I have always hidden behind my work to express my thoughts. I never tagged nor saw myself as an activist. I suppose my work through the years created this persona of someone who actively participates in conversations that matter. Activism for me came slowly and subtly.

My experience during my three-month artist residency through the Leipzig International Art program was profound in such a way that I had no choice but to take a stand. I can no longer sit on the fence, playing it safe. I finally realize how complex and so much bigger than me these discussions on colonization, decolonization, and participatory restitution are. I couldn't visualize how to express and participate in this conversation without feeling like an imposter and ignorant. I thought deeply and it was emotionally traumatizing for me. It was then that the connections between the ocean, life in the ocean, my existence as a member of a former colony, and my personal experience became clearer. I wanted to address human colonization of the ocean and how we human beings have caused so much havoc to other species of life who cannot speak for themselves. It was in imaging this “voicelessness” that I was deeply moved to speak and become part of a growing voice for all life in the ocean. I don’t know if anyone will hear or care about my voice, but I do believe that we all play an important role in this “war.”

***Gazellah Bruder** is of mixed Mekeo and Tolai parentage of Central and East New Britain, respectively, and was born in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea. The complexities and expectations of being raised within the opposing structures of a patriarchal and matriarchal society significantly impacted her and her siblings. The cultural and social contrasts created a sense of alienation for her, inspiring her passion to find an identity and a place to belong. Art has been that safe place for her. She earned several degrees from the University of Papua New Guinea: a certificate in visual arts (1995), a diploma in fine arts in printmaking (1997), a BA in art and design with a minor in anthropology (2010), and a BA with honors in visual anthropology (2012), for which she wrote a thesis titled “Tolai Women and Tabu Shell Money Today.” She has worked in arts and media industries for twenty-seven years and has participated in over sixty-five major exhibitions. She held her first solo print exhibition in 2014 and is working toward her second solo exhibition in 2026.*

***Stacy L. Kamehiro** teaches in the Department of History of Art & Visual Culture at the University of California, Santa Cruz. Her research focuses on colonial Hawaiian visual and material culture. Her recent work attends to the politics of art organizations following the overthrow of the Hawaiian monarchy; the place of overseas travel in King Kalākaua’s efforts to maintain Hawai‘i’s independence; the roles of Hawaiian featherwork as cultural affirmation, political statement, and historical subject; and US empire and art history. Her current book project,* Objects of the Nation: Hawai‘i at the World’s Fairs, *examines collections and exhibitions of Hawaiian material culture and natural history in local and international contexts.*

Notes

[1] On other works by Gazellah Bruder that focus on the environment, see Marion Struck-Garbe, “Artists Concern: Visualising Environmental Destruction in Papua New Guinea,” *Pacific Arts* 20, no. 1 (2021): 88–104.

[2] There are numerous species of turtles in Oceania threatened with extinction, among them green turtles, hawksbills, loggerheads, leatherbacks, flatbacks, and olive ridleys. See “All Sea Turtles in the Pacific Threatened with Extinction, Report Reveals,” Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme, September 4, 2025, https://www.sprep.org/news/all-sea-turtles-in-the-pacific-threatened-

with-extinction-report-reveals. In her paintings, Bruder features one or all these turtle species, often merging features of the various turtles together. The turtle images represent Indigenous Pacific Island peoples and their survival. Gazellah Bruder, personal communication with Stacy L. Kamehiro, January 1, 2026.

[3] For discussion of two of Bruder's paintings that focus on the female form, see Stacy L. Kamehiro, "Gazellah Bruder, *Goddess I Am* and *Feeding the Gods of Melanesia*," in *Smarthistory*, March 31, 2025, https://smarthistory.org/gazellah-bruder-goddess-i-am-and-feeding-the-gods-of-melanesia/.

[4] For a discussion of the Hiri Moale in the context of Indigenous sovereignty, see Peter Phipps, "Performing Indigenous Sovereignties across the Pacific," in *Touring Pacific Cultures*, ed. Kalissa Alexeyeff and John Taylor (Australia National University, 2016), 258–62.

[5] For additional discussion on the significance of turtles for Bruder, see Struck-Garbe, "Artists Concern," 96.

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DERK HARM VAN GRONINGEN À STULING

Kilenge Nausang Singsing (West New Britain, 1977–1978): A Visual Essay

Abstract

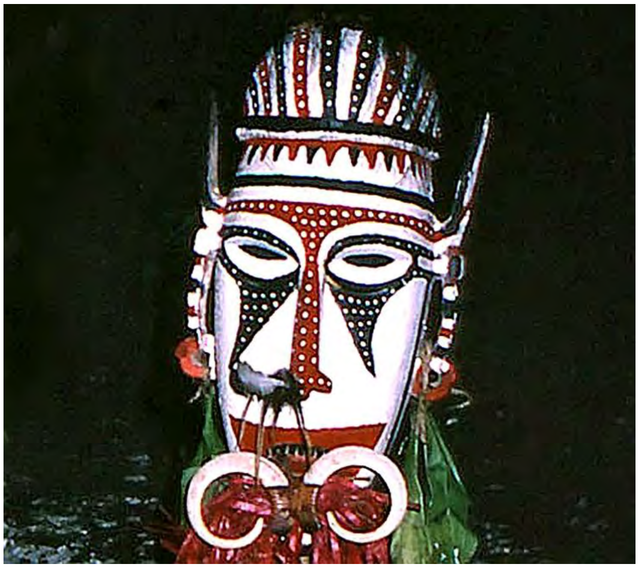
In this visual essay, the author documents the Kilenge Nausang masks he photographed in 1977 and 1978 during a Nausang singsing *in the Kilenge village cluster of Ulumainge, Waremo, and Saumoi in West New Britain. The Kilenge people describe the Nausang as a giant of extraordinary power, a being with an essentially malevolent character who serves a corrective function. The author also presents his photo-documentation of a Nausang mask depicted on the men's house* (naulum) *in Potne, New Britain, as well as the construction of the men's house.*

Keywords: *Kilenge, West New Britain, Nausang, masks, initiation, art, material culture, visual anthropology, architecture, Papua New Guinea*

In my 2023 publication *Kilenge: West New Britain, Papua New Guinea. A Pictorial Ethnography*, I narrate the different art forms I encountered and was privileged to photograph in 1977 and 1978 while conducting field research centered on the circular migration pattern of the Kilenge people on the northwest coast of the island of New Britain.[1] Being permitted to take photographs of their daily activities, my research focus became much broader, to include various Kilenge-oriented material art forms featuring designs related to a mythical personality called "Nausang."[2]

The Kilenge figure of Nausang is a giant of extraordinary power, a being with an essentially malevolent character who serves a corrective function.[3] The images I saw of Nausang's face in 1978 were depicted as a human face in the colors white, red, and black on wooden masks. I also found stylized, simplified Nausang-face figures on various objects like Siassi-origin bowls, dance clubs, and chisel sticks.[4] Women and noninitiated children were not allowed to see a Nausang mask, and if this ban was not complied with, repercussions could follow. In fact, before the establishment of colonial rule in western New Britain in 1890, the sight of a Nausang mask by women or uninitiated children could even lead to the killing of the perpetrator's entire family by villagers as a deterrent act.[5] Due to the efforts of the colonial government and missionaries, and conversion of the Kilenges to Christianity, such practices were no longer occurring during the period of my research.

This visual essay—consisting mostly of photographs that have not been previously published—documents the Kilenge Nausang masks I encountered during a Nausang *singsing* in the Kilenge village cluster of Ulumainge, Waremo, and Saumoi in 1978. A singsing is a periodically recurring festival lasting several days during which there is drumming, dancing, and singing that accompanies male children undergoing various phases of initiation. The Nausang masks I saw were the property of families or clans residing in these villages. While conducting my research, I also photographed the construction of a *naulum* (ceremonial men's house) in Potne village, also located on the northwest coast of New Britain, and a Nausang mask included in that structure. I describe some of the features of these masks and the contexts in which they were made.



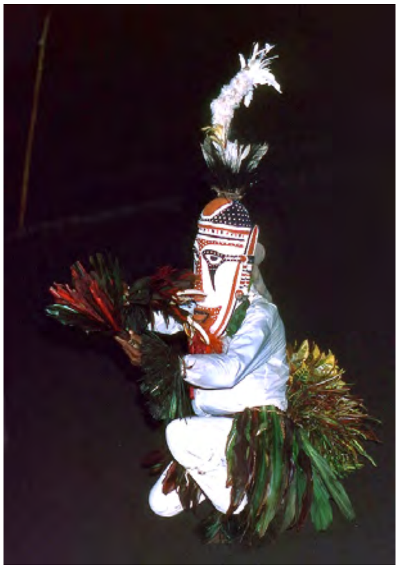
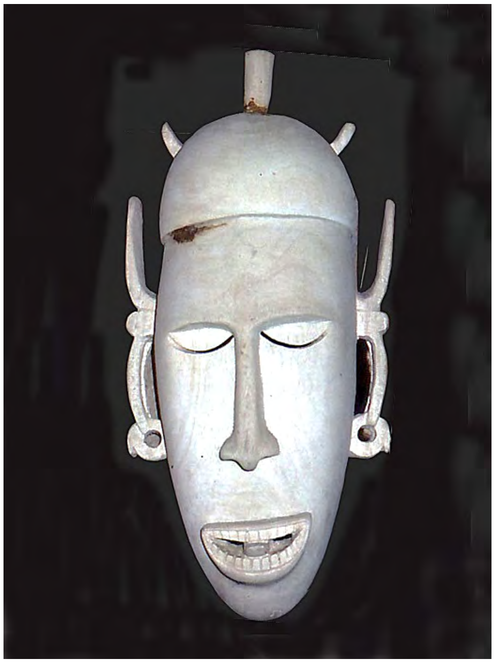


Figure 1 (left). Tavelemanugé Nausang mask decorated with white dots. Painted wood, approx. 60 x 30 cm. Waremo village, Kilenge, West New Britain, Papua New Guinea, March 1978. Photograph courtesy of the author

Figure 2 (right). Nausang dancer Talania Aigilo wearing the Aisivok mask. Waremo village, Kilenge, West New Britain, Papua New Guinea, March 1978. Photograph courtesy of the author

By the time of my visit, anthropologist and curator Adriaan Alexander Gerbrands (Leiden University), in collaboration with anthropologist Philip J. C. Dark (Southern Illinois University), had already conducted research in the Kilenge villages. Their research spanned several years, with Gerbrands conducting fieldwork in 1967, 1970, 1973, and 1978, while Dark's investigations occurred in 1964, from 1966 to 1967, and in 1970. Part of their research also included the documentation of the Nausang face in words and images, which I gratefully reference.



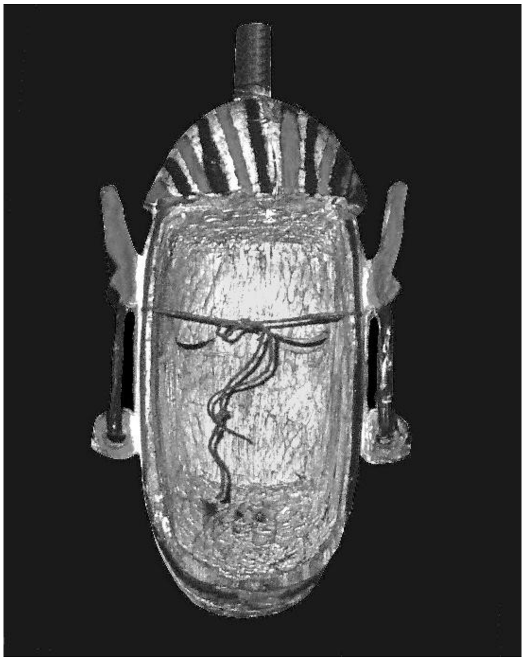
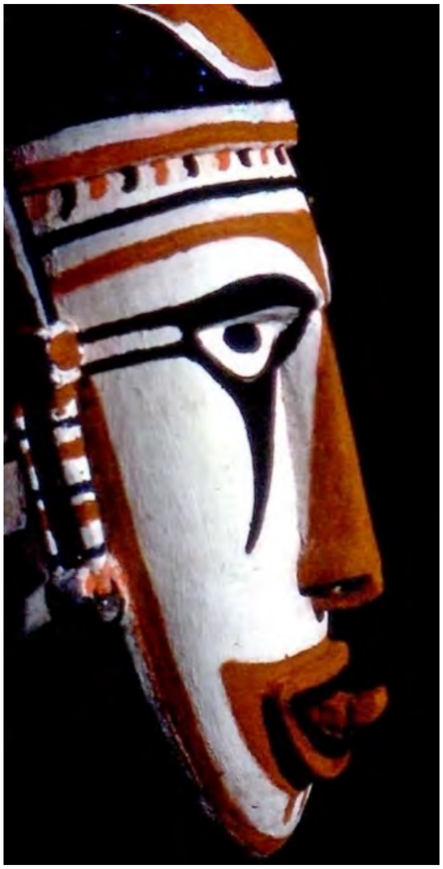


Figure 3 (left). Front of Ulumainge Nausang mask. Unpainted wood, approx. 60 x 30 cm, 1977. Kilenge, West New Britain, Papua New Guinea. Photograph courtesy of the author

Figure 4 (right). Rear view of Ulumainge Nausang mask. Painted wood, approx. 60 x 30 cm, 1978. Kilenge, West New Britain, Papua New Guinea. Photograph courtesy of the author

Kilenge Nausang Masks

The Kilenge Nausang masks (*tumbuans*) I saw in 1978 were beautifully carved in the form of a human face. They were hand-made by a local woodcarver (*namos*) who had been commissioned by a Kilenge family. Their shapes were more or less identical, measuring approximately 60 cm high—about twice the size of a human face (Fig. 1). Rather thin, wide-eyed, oval-shaped gaps are carved into the mask and serve the purpose of allowing the Nausang dancer to maintain his position during the performance. These gaps become invisible to spectators after the painting of the masks is completed in the naulum, as well as during the dance performance. Other mask characteristics include an open mouth with visible teeth (Figs. 1 and 3), a protruding tongue (Figs. 5 and 7),[6] and elongated ears with pierced earlobes through which clumps of leaves can be hung. The base color of a Nausang mask is white (*koki*; Fig. 3), with the characteristic features of the forehead, cheeks, nose, ears, chin, eyes, and mouth indicated in reddish brown and black (*kuruk*; Figs. 5–7). The protrusion on top of the high forehead is for attaching the headdress, consisting of black cassowary feathers as well as a bamboo stick adorned with white cockatoo feathers. During a singsing, a bullroarer called "Nausang's tongue" is swung about by the men and produced a menacing wail that announced Nausang's arrival.[7]



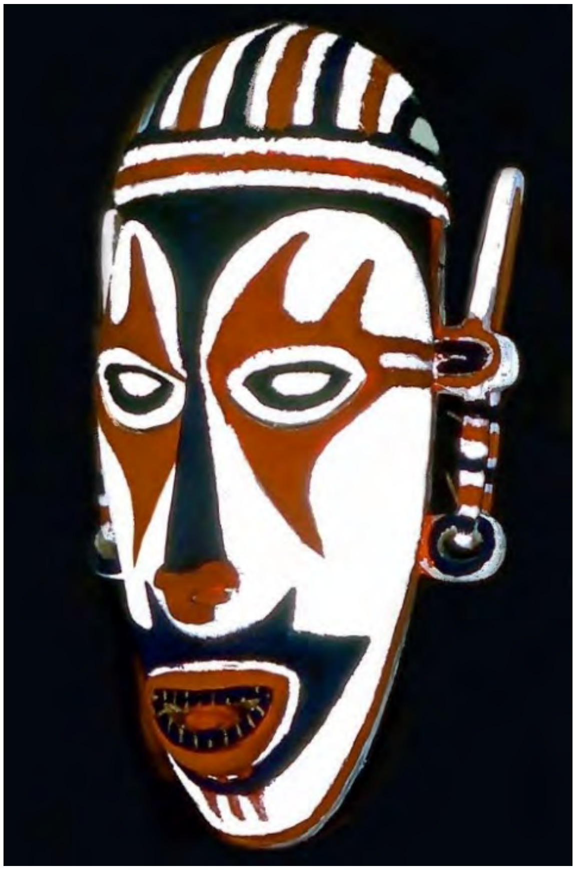


Figure 5 (left). Aisivok Nausang mask. Painted wood, approx. 60 x 30 cm. Waremo village, Kilenge, West New Britain, Papua New Guinea, March 1978. Photograph courtesy of the author
Figure 6 (right). Marimbu Nausang mask. Painted wood, approx. 60 x 30 cm. Waremo village, Kilenge, West New Britain, Papua New Guinea, March 1978. Photograph courtesy of the author

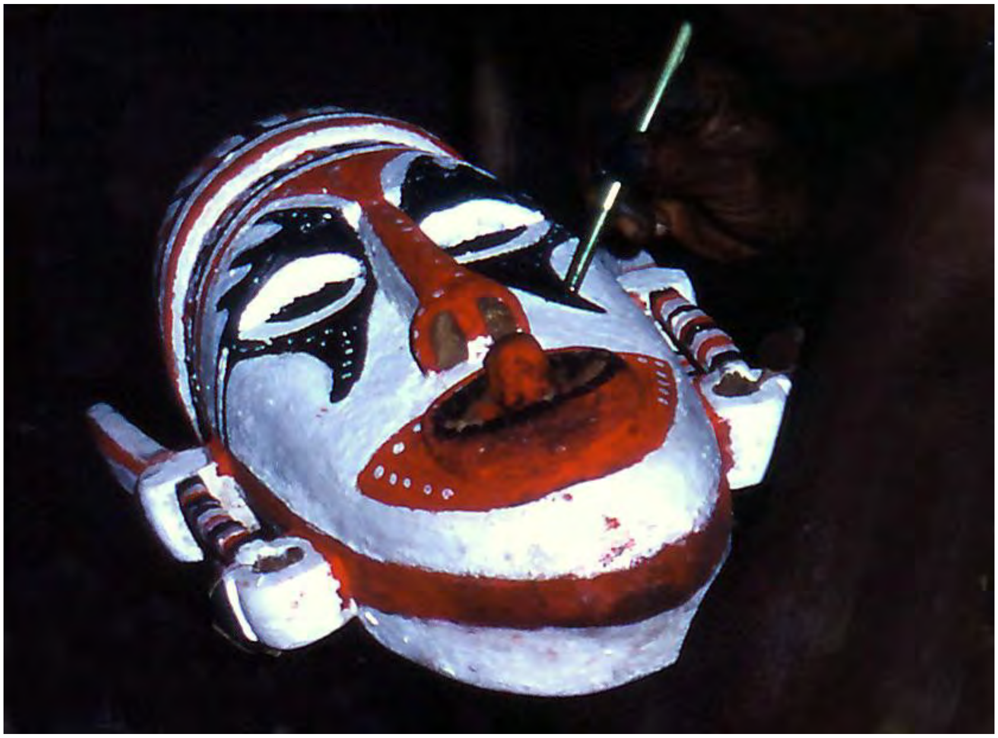


Figure 7. Kaiwakaainge Nausang mask. Painted wood, approx. 60 x 30 cm. Waremo village, Kilenge, West New Britain, Papua New Guinea, March 1978. Photograph courtesy of the author

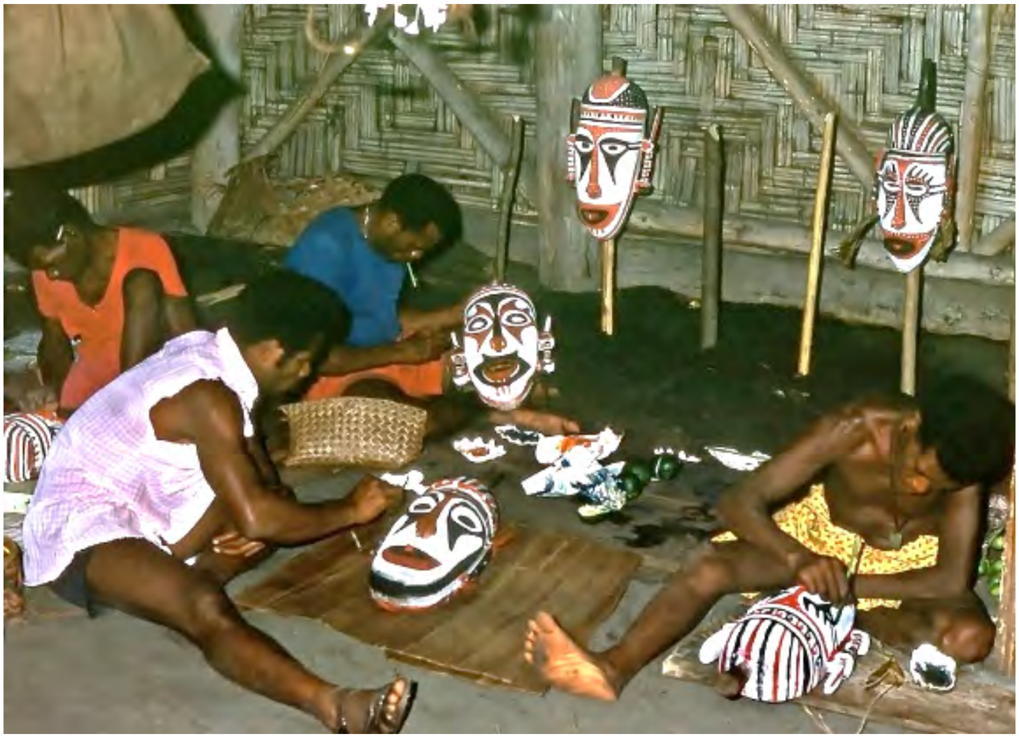


Figure 8. Kilenge men repainting Nausang masks in Ulumainge naulum (men's house), Kilenge, West New Britain, Papua New Guinea, March 1978. Photograph courtesy of the author

An important activity during the preparations for the Nausang singsing that took place in 1978 in Ulumainge village was the repainting and fitting of the Nausang masks (Fig. 8), which had been stored in dried banana leaves in the Ulumainge ceremonial men's house, together with feathers, pig's tusks, and leaves. As not every male painter was able to complete the repainting task in one go, the masks were placed on wooden posts along a wall in the men's house so that progress in the restoration process was clearly visible to the other painters (Fig. 9). Finally, all the masks had colorful leaves and a pair of round tusks from a mature pig attached to the mouth openings. Figure 10 shows Kilenge men affixing pig tusks and red fibers to the mouth of the Tavelemanugé Nausang mask with great care and precision.

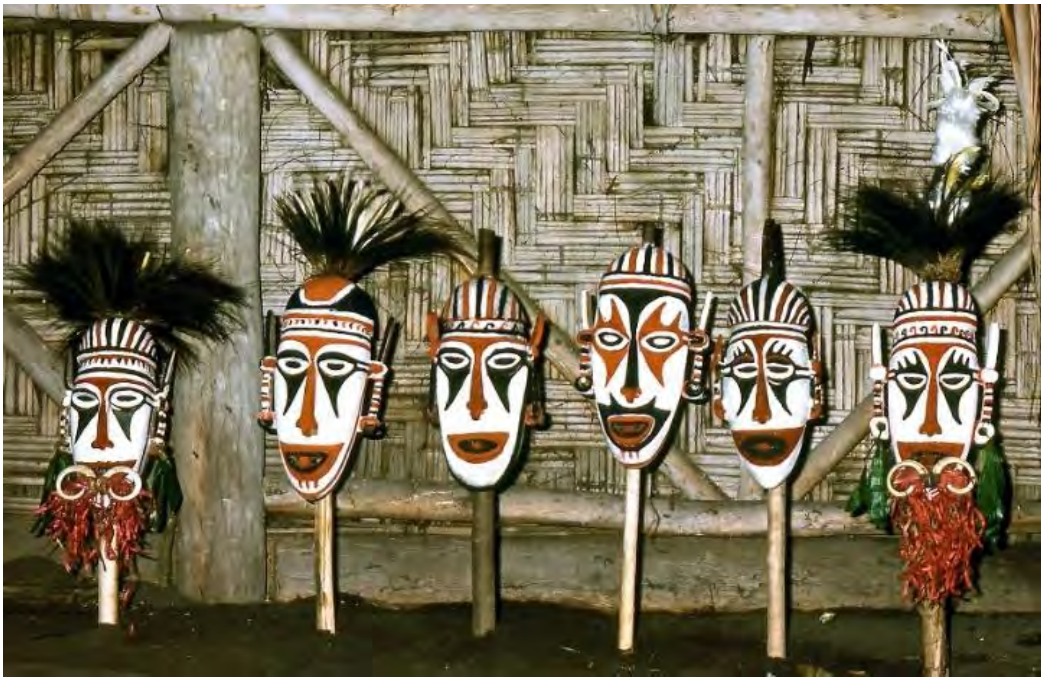


Figure 9. Nausang masks on wooden posts in the naulum (men's house) during the restoring process. From left to right: Tavelemanugé, Aisivok, Navantamé, Marimbu, Aulamainge, and Kaiwakaainge. Ulumainge village, Kilenge, West New Britain, Papua New Guinea, March 1978. Photograph courtesy of the author

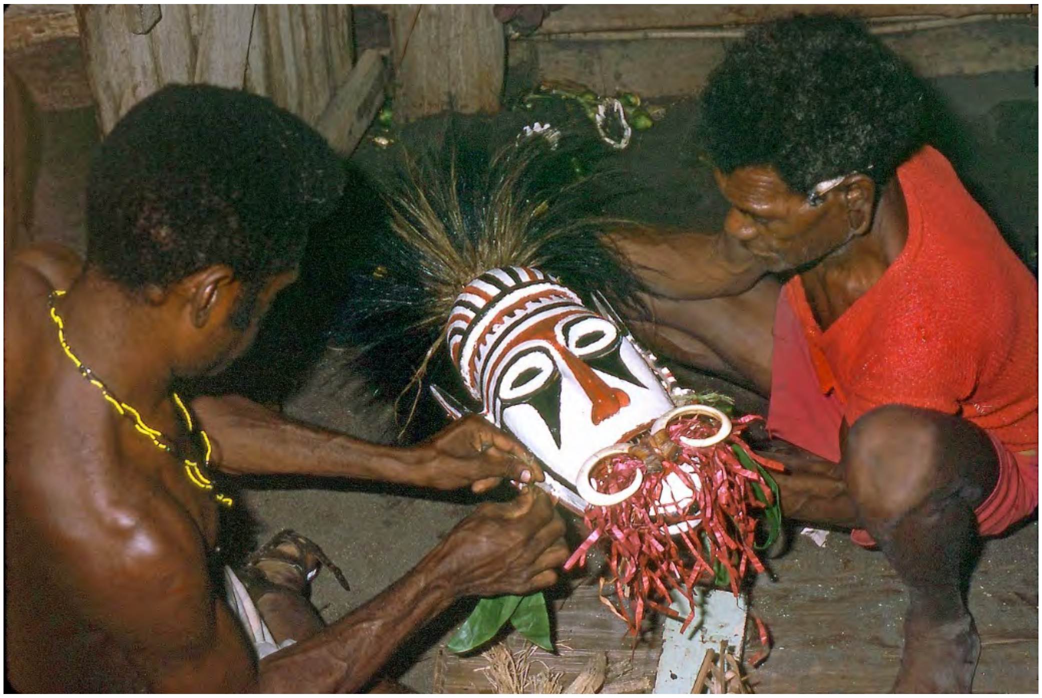


Figure 10. Kilenge men fitting ornaments on a Tavelemanugé Nausang mask in the Ulumainge naulum, Kilenge, West New Britain, Papua New Guinea, March 1978. Photograph courtesy of the author

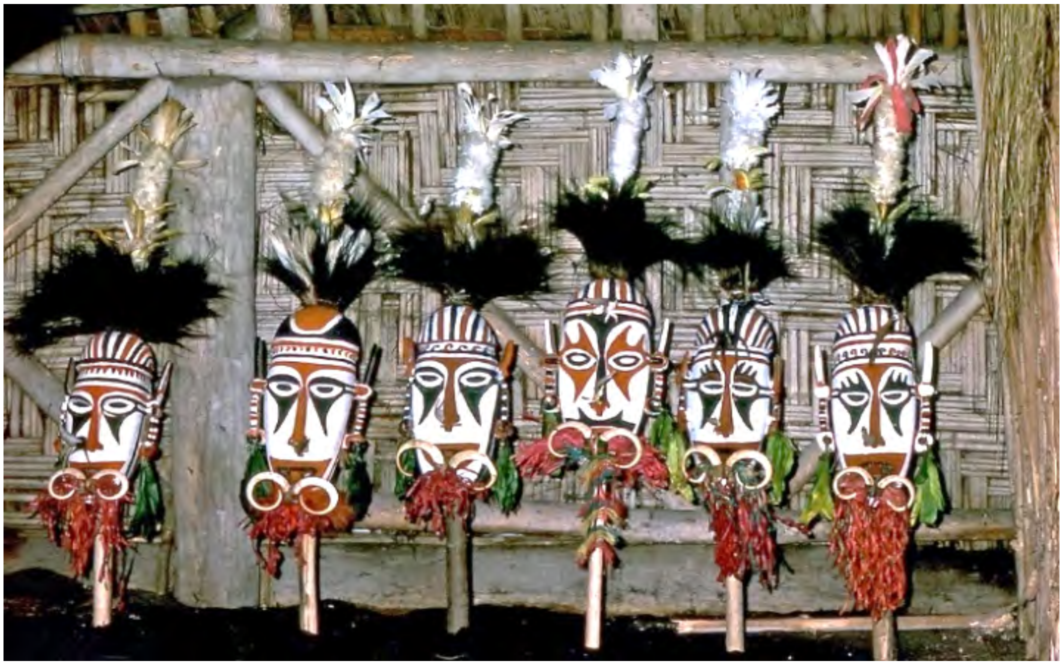


Figure 11. Nausang masks with adornments erected on poles in the Ulumainge naulum. From left to right: Tavelemanugé, Aisivok, Navantamé, Marimbu, Aulamainge, and Kaiwakaainge. Ulumainge village, Kilenge, New Britain, Papua New Guinea**,** March 1978. Photograph courtesy of the author

Figure 11 shows six Nausang masks, fitted with black and white feather headdresses and other adornments, erected on poles in the Ulumainge naulum. All six masks were meant to be worn while performing by Nausang dancer Talania Aigilo during the various 1978 Nausang singsing ceremonies. During the April 1978 singsing, Aigilo actually used a seventh mask known as Marimbuainge (see Fig. 12 and the far-left mask in Fig. 14) during his performances in front of the Waremo naulum. This mask had not been repainted in the Ulumlaut men's house. The significance of Marimbuainge is rooted in its correspondence with the number of clans (*Lains*) that were present in the Ulumainge village in 1978.[8]

Mask Names and Designs

Although the Nausang masks used in the 1978 Ulumainge Nausang singsing were given names, I have not been able to verify the possible meanings of the individual masks' names. In a 1994 publication, Gerbrands mentions names of Nausang masks—including Aisiwok, Esugal, Kaikai, Kanamuré, Moro, Sago, Sengkana, and Talawagi—that had formerly been used in one of the Kilenge villages. In his opinion, the names were more or less comparable to a family coat of arms.[9] While the 1978 Ulumainge/Waremo/Saumoi Nausang singsing bore the name "Angkuruainge," no Nausang mask bearing this name was made due to lack of resources. Like Kilenge family genealogies, a kind of Nausang family tree exists. In this lineage, the Angkuruainge Nausang was stated to be the "father" of three "sons"—Aulamainge, Kaiwakaainge, and Tangaiva—and Ulumainge men made masks for two of these Nausang in 1978 (Figs. 11–13).[10] The suffix "ainge" stands for "bikpela" ("big" in Pidgin). Following the Nausang family tree, this could mean that the owners of the "ainge" masks had a higher status. Potential meaning for the names ending in "tamé" and "manugé" was not as clear.

The names and designs of Nausang masks appear to correspond to a Nausang lineage and the clan with which the mask is associated. The resemblance between the face designs on the Marimbu, Marimbuainge, Aulamainge, Kaiwakaainge, Navantamé, and Tavelemanugé Nausang masks is clearly visible (Figs. 11 and 14). This similarity indicates that the owners of the masks belong to the same clan. As for the Aisivok Nausang mask (Fig. 13), the top of the head section is painted with a completely different design, lacking the stripes featured on the other masks, suggesting that the owner is from a different clan.[11]

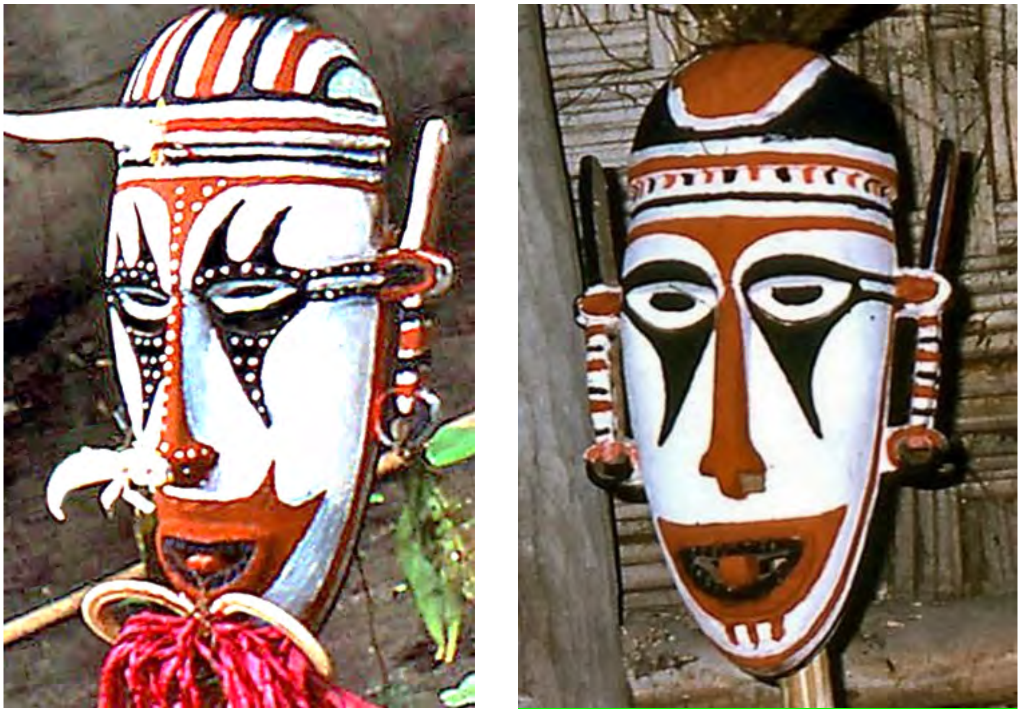


Figure 12 (left). Marimbuainge Nausang mask. Painted wood, approx. 60 x 30 cm. Ulumainge village, Kilenge, West New Britain, Papua New Guinea. 1978. Photograph courtesy of the author
Figure 13 (right). Kilenge, West New Britain, Papua New Guinea. Aisivok Nausang mask, Ulumainge village, 1978. Painted wood, approx. 60 x 30 cm. Photograph courtesy of the author

The geographical proximity of Ulumainge, Waremo, and Saumoi—the three villages that were the main villages within a comparatively diminutive cultural area—facilitates a more precise description and comparison of the mask designs in Figure 11. This is a shift from earlier studies, which focus either on a specific design on masks originating in communities located hundreds of kilometers apart or on isolated masks in museum collections. A few observations, for instance (see Fig. 11):

- It is evident that all six Nausang masks exhibit a similar horizontal line pattern above the eyes, and five masks are characterized by vertical red and black lines above these.
- Navantamé and Tavelemanugé Nausang masks are notable for the absence of triangles above the eyes.
- Marimbu (Figs. 6, 9, and 11) and Marimbuainge (Figs. 12 and 14) Nausang masks both display two tapered fin shapes located above their eyes.
- Aulamainge and Kaiwakaainge Nausang masks share three tapered fin shapes above their eyes.

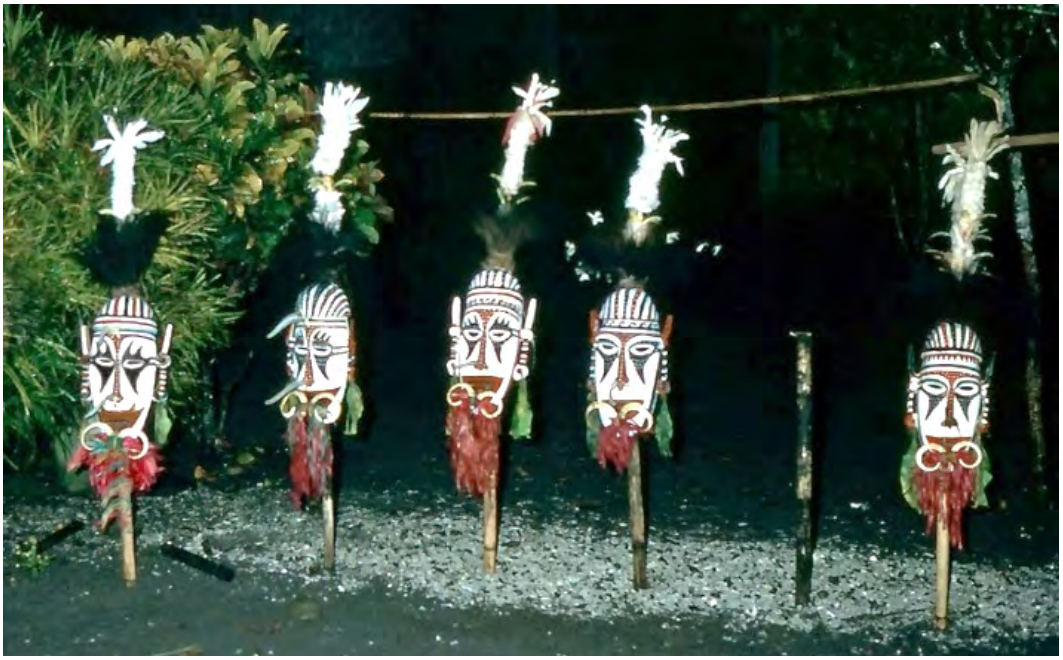


Figure 14. An arrangement of Nausang masks to be used by Talania Aigilo near the naulum. From left to right: Marimbuainge, Aulamainge, Kaiwakaainge, Navantamé, and Tavelemanugé. Waremo village, Kilenge, West New Britain, Papua New Guinea, March 1978. Photograph courtesy of the author

Arrangement of Masks at Ulumainge

The fact that the arrangement of the Nausang masks at the nighttime Nausang celebration in front of the Waremo naulum (Fig. 14) was in reverse order of their arrangement during their painting in the Ulumainge naulum (Fig. 11) had eluded me; I only noticed it when editing the ceremony photo for publication. This change of position and the genealogy of the names of the Nausang singsings—expressed through the variations in the masks' face designs—led me to believe that this Nausang art reflected a partition in the Kilenge social structure.

This hypothesis is also supported by Philip Dark's ascertainment that

> traditionally, most people living in a village would have belonged to one of the two named social grouping or patri-sibs or *namon-ainge*.[12] One of these is associated with the founding of the village and is considered the most important. Marriage would have been with a person of another sib. Each *namon-ainge* is associated with a particular bird, its founding ancestor.[13]

Dark's statement regarding the association of the Kilenge clans with a particular bird bears some resemblance to the statement of Jerry Navoge Kenda from Ongaia village. Kenda claimed that each Kilenge clan was linked to a specific Saumoi—a white-tailed eagle that resided in their clan territory—which led to separate Saumoi bird names for the different territories.[14] The mask designs did not indicate this specific knowledge, which was reserved for the clans involved.

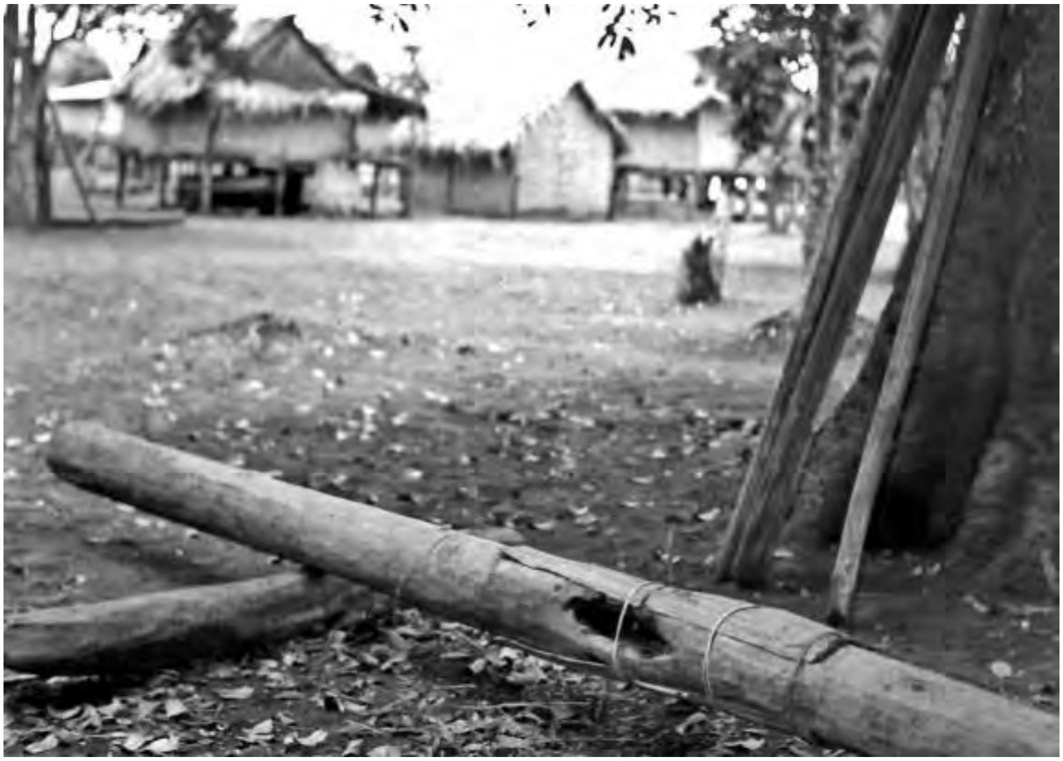


Figure 15. Tree trunk with a hole on the backside. The front is partly covered and ready for the reconstruction of the naulum in Potne village, Kilenge, New Britain, Papua New Guinea, c. 1977. Photograph courtesy of the author

A Kilenge Nausang Mask Depicted on the Central Naulum Pole in Potne

In the Kilenge sub-village of Potne, a painted Nausang mask was attached to the central pole of the men's house (naulum). During a walk through Potne, I wondered about the purpose of cut tree trunks that were lying under a tree. A large hole was visible on one side of the longest trunk (Fig. 15), while on the other side tied banana leaves seemed to protect something. I later discovered a Potne artist in a dark, remote place, painting a Nausang mask attached to a pole in the traditional white, red-brown, and black colors (Figs. 16–17). Upon completion of the painting, the trunk with the painted Nausang image was carefully covered with leaves, which would not be removed until the pole had become the center of the men’s house and the construction of the naulum had been completed (Figs. 18–21).

Why had the repainted Nausang mask on the central pole in Potne's naulum been covered with leaves during its storage and the rebuilding of the ceremonial men's house? The answer was that in Kilenge communities in 1978, women and uninitiated boys were not allowed to see or admire the Nausang face. This applied not only to the mask on the pole in the Potne men's house, but also to the Ulumainge Nausang “dance” masks.[15] The Nausang image on the central pole was uncovered upon completion of the naulum restructuring, though only inside the naulum, signaling the presence of the Nausang spirit. Figures 18–26 document some of the stages in building the Potne naulum.

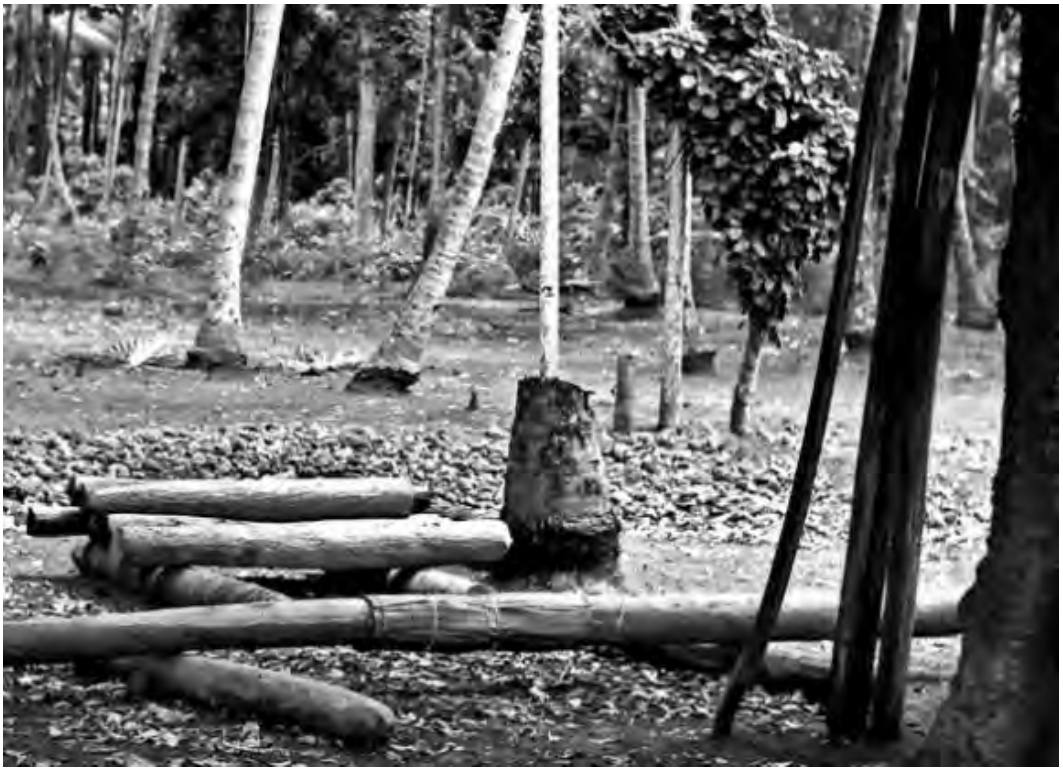


Figure 16. Poles lying ready for the reconstruction of the naulum in Potne village, Kilenge, New Britain, Papua New Guinea. c. 1977. Photograph courtesy of the author

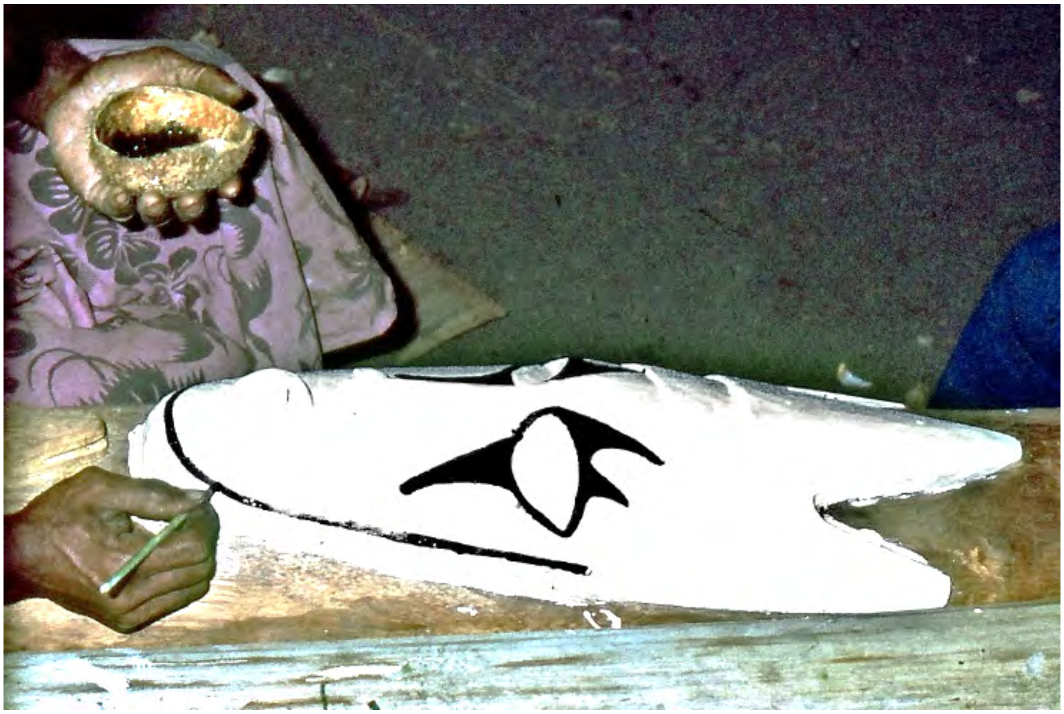


Figure 17. Black paint being put on the white surface of the Nausang mask. The paint is contained in a coconut shell. Potne village, Kilenge, New Britain, Papua New Guinea, c. 1977. Photograph courtesy of the author

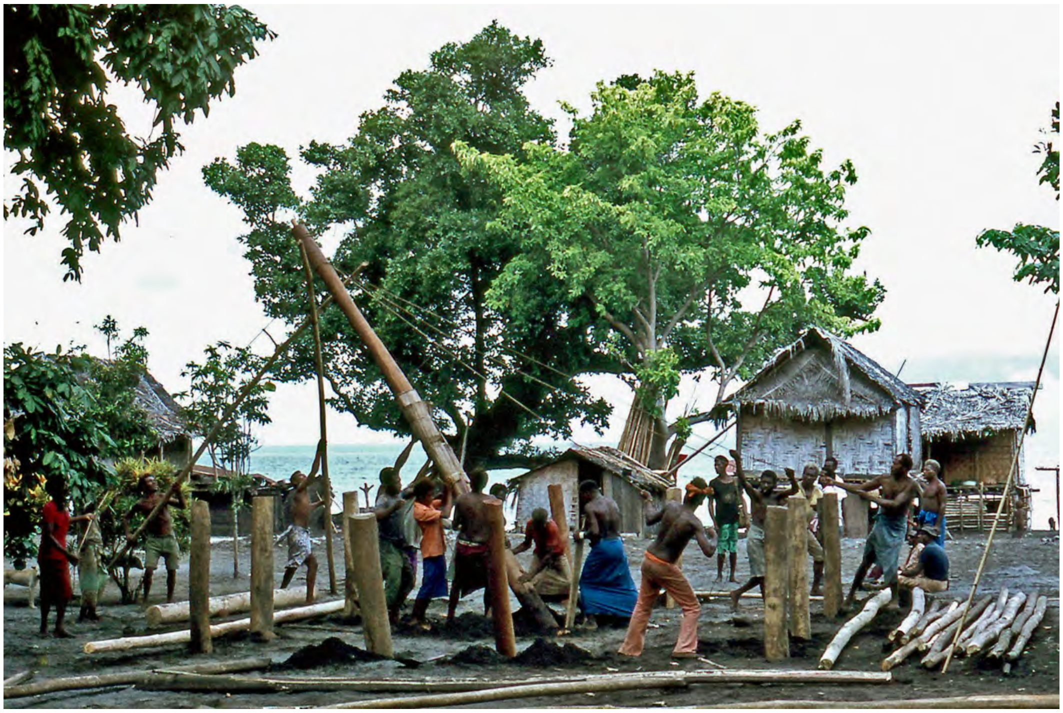


Figure 18. Erecting the central post of the naulum. Potne village, Kilenge, West New Britain, Papua New Guinea, c. 1977. Photograph courtesy of the author

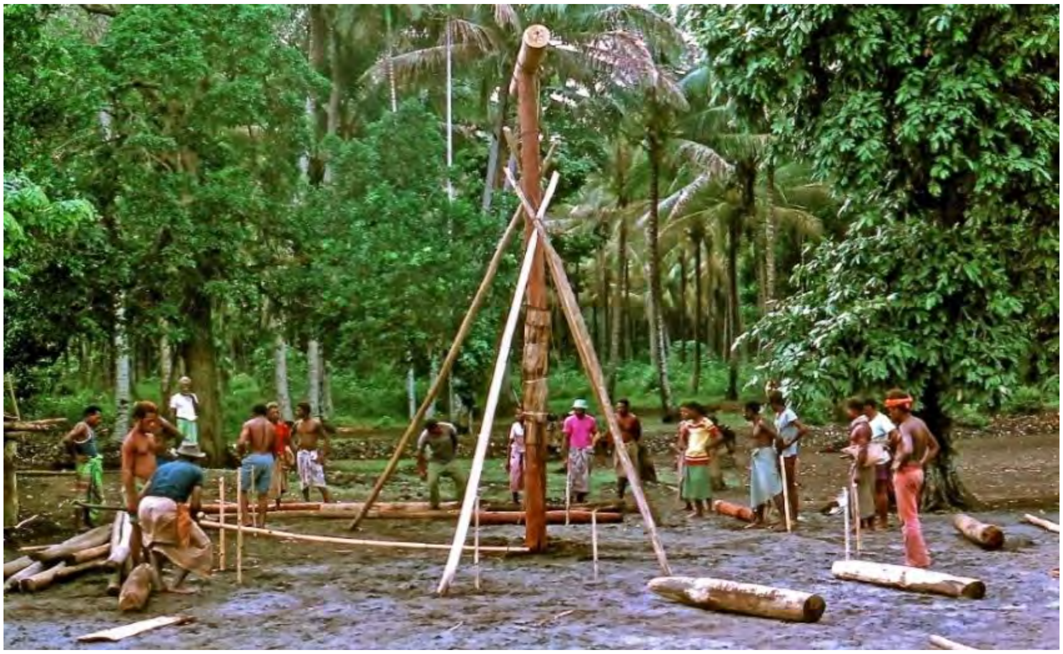


Figure 19. Central pole of naulum is erected. The Nausang face on it is covered with leaves in order that it not be seen by women or uninitiated children. Potne village, Kilenge, West New Britain, Papua New Guinea, c. 1977. Photograph courtesy of the author

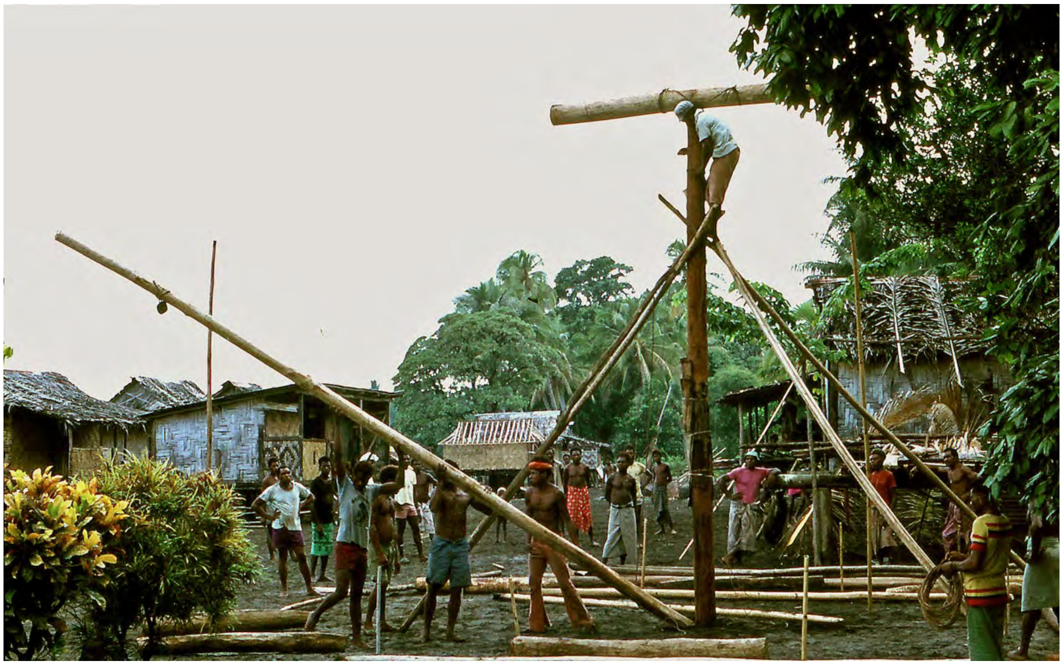


Figure 20. Construction of the naulum. Potne village, Kilenge, West New Britain, Papua New Guinea, c. 1977. Photograph courtesy of the author

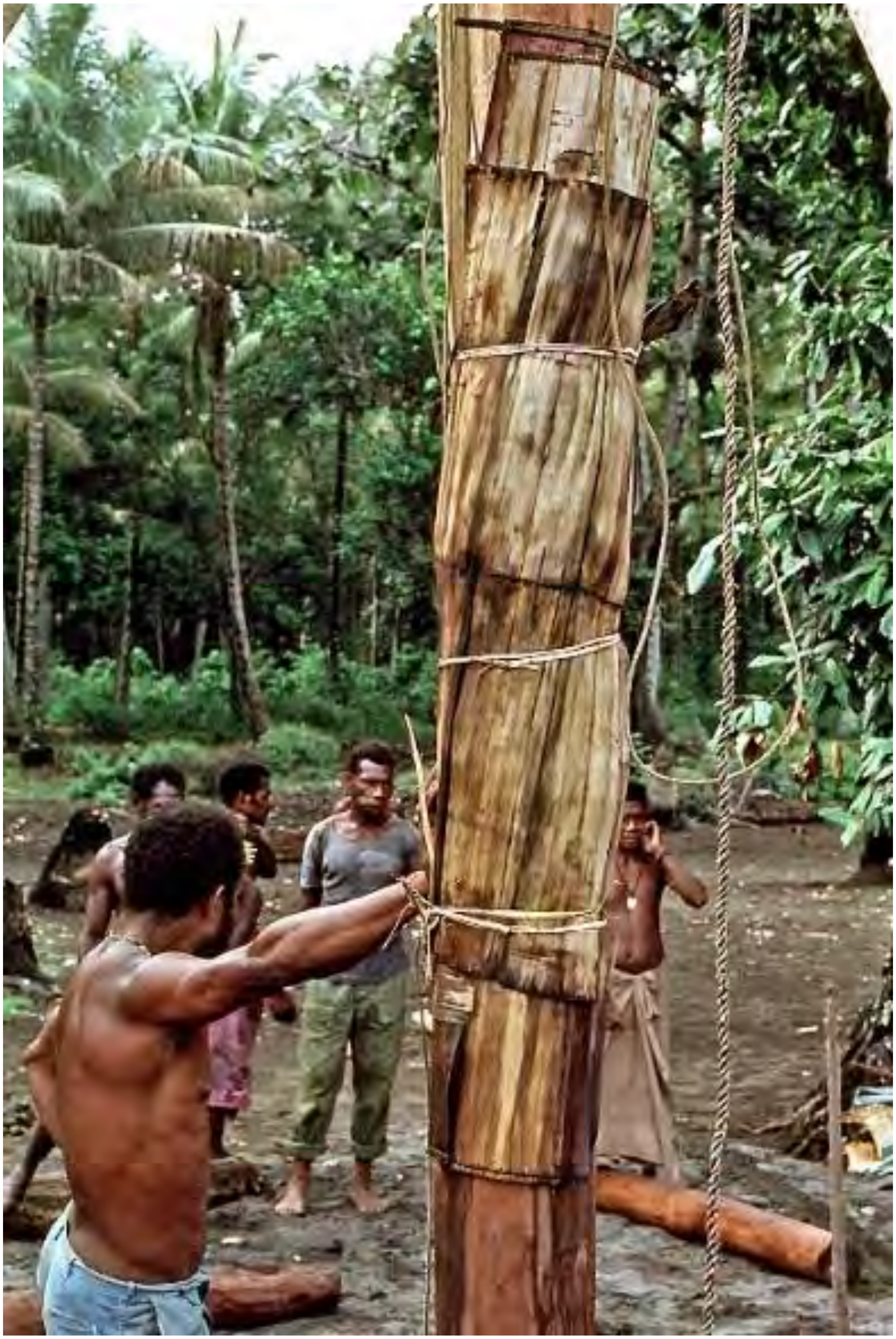


Figure 21. The central pole of the naulum is erected with the Nausang face still protected by leaves. Potne village, Kilenge, New Britain, Papua New Guinea, c. 1977. Photograph courtesy of the author

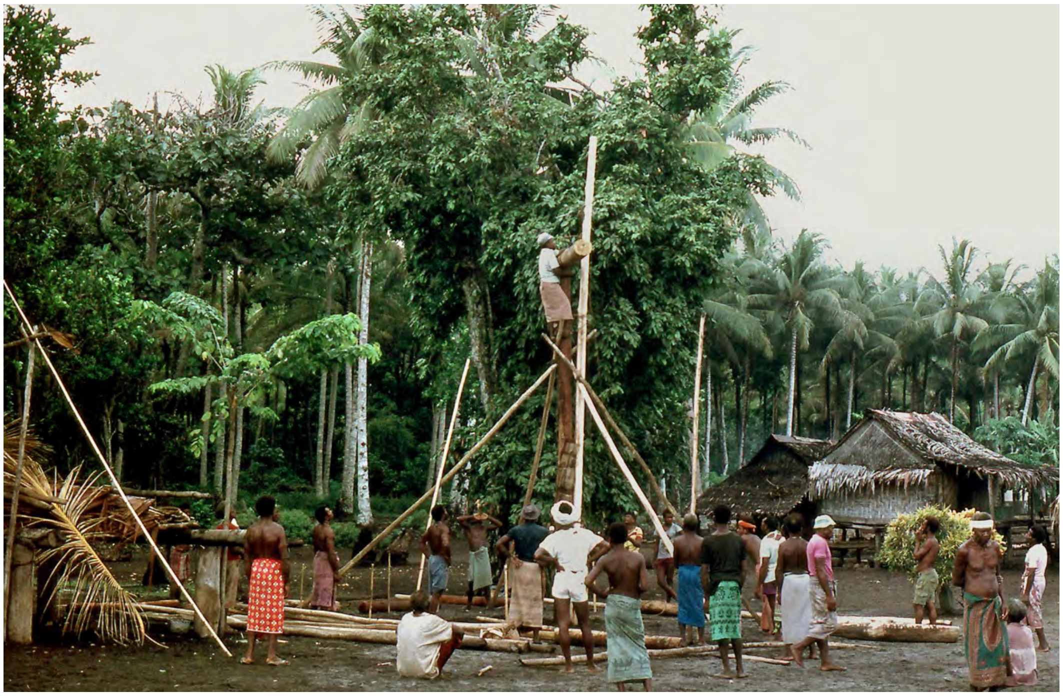


Figure 22. Construction of the naulum. Potne village, Kilenge, West New Britain, Papua New Guinea, c. 1977. Photograph courtesy of the author

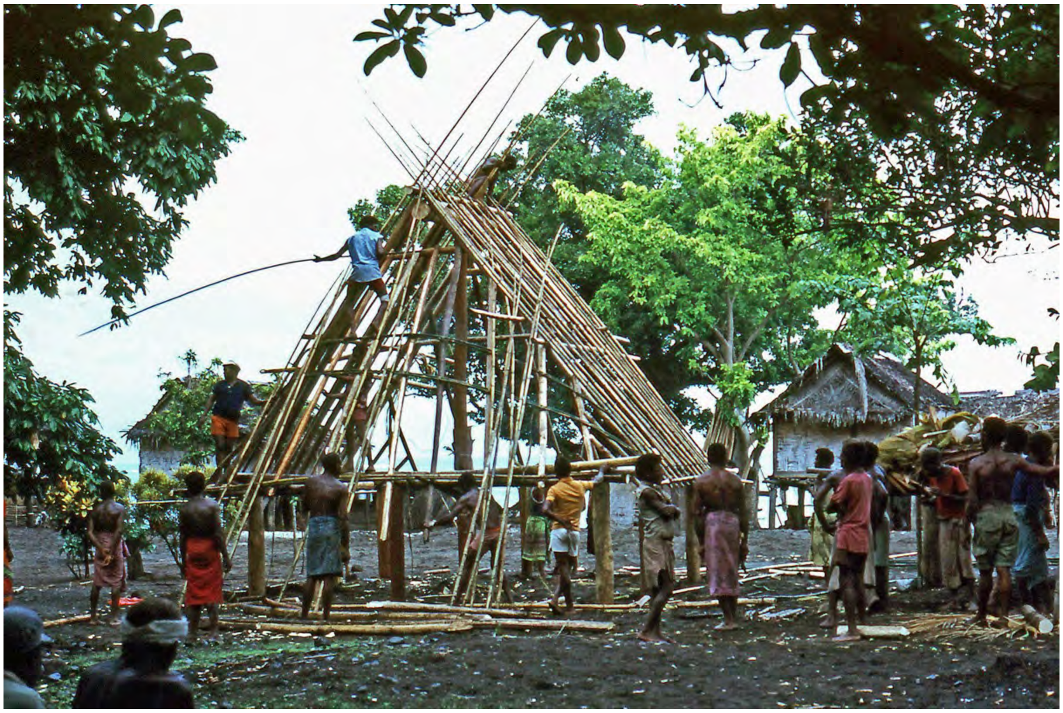


Figure 23. Construction of the naulum roof. Potne village, Kilenge, West New Britain, Papua New Guinea, c. 1977. Photograph courtesy of the author

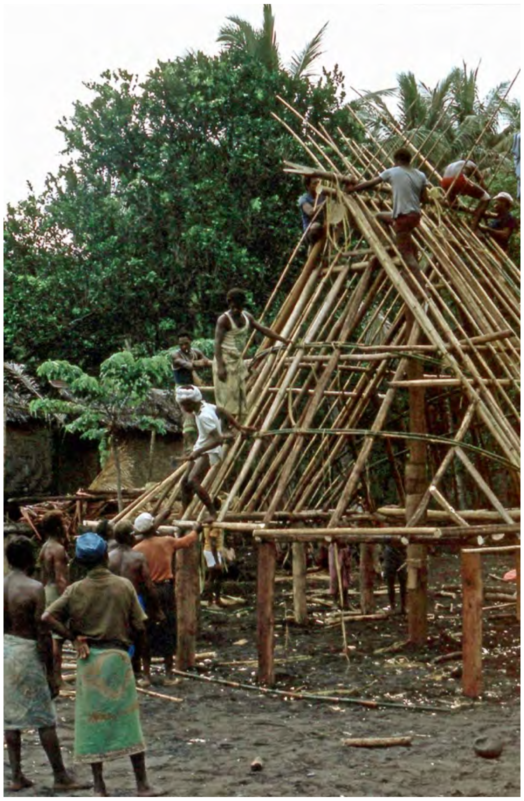


Fig. 24. Construction of the naulum roof. Potne village, Kilenge, West New Britain, Papua New Guinea, c. 1977. Photograph courtesy of the author

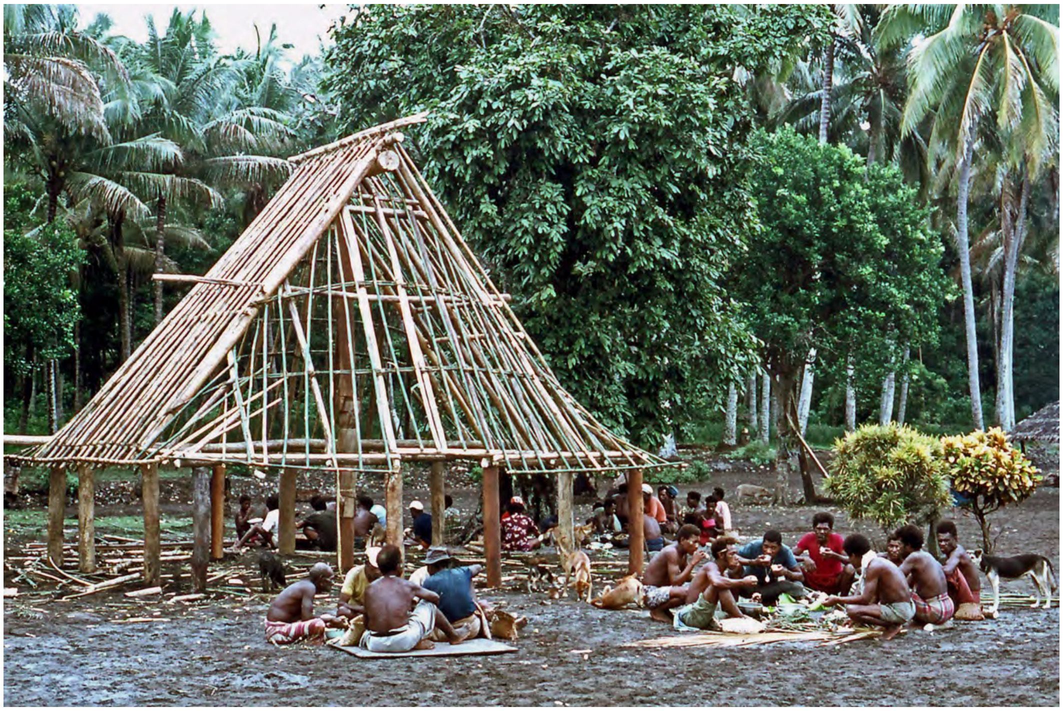


Figure 25. Having completed their work on the naulum for the day, the builders enjoy a meal sponsored by the local big man and prepared by Potne women. Potne village, Kilenge, West New Britain, Papua New Guinea, c. 1977. Photograph courtesy of the author

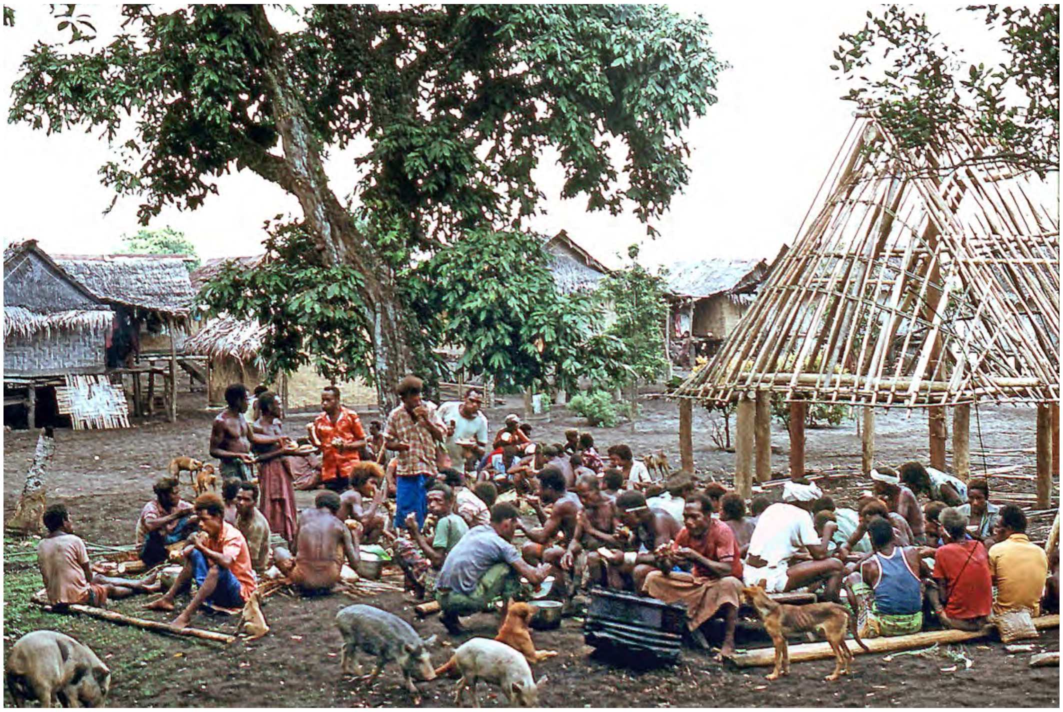


Figure 26. Having completed their work on the naulum for the day, the builders enjoy a meal sponsored by the local big man and prepared by Potne women. Potne village, Kilenge, West New Britain, Papua New Guinea, c. 1977. Photograph courtesy of the author

Derk Harm van Groningen à Stuling *was born in 1940 in Groningen, the Netherlands. From 1970–79, he studied cultural anthropology at Leiden University, devoting himself to visual field research on the daily life of a farming family in the Netherlands (1972) and the circular migration patterns of the Kilenge in New Britain, Papua New Guinea (1977–78). His publications include* Inventory for Profile of Villages. Oksapmin, Waulap, Aranimap, Tomianap and Divanap. Oksapmin Subdistrict, West Sepik Province, Lahara 1977–1978 *(Port Moresby, 1978); “Migration of the Kilenge: A Village Study,”* Yagl-Ambu: Papua New Guinea Journal of the Social Sciences and Humanities *(1980); and “Oksapmin Photographs,” in* Oksapmin: Development and Change *(1981). The 2005–6 exhibition* Singsing Iapun Talania *(Bildungswerk Cloppenburg, Germany) featured 250 of his photographs of daily life among the Kilenge. Additionally, van Groningen supervised various educational and agricultural projects in Tanzania (1980–86), served as project manager of a water supply project in Rwanda (1987–89), and was a coordination consultant for water supply and sanitation facilities in four provinces of Zimbabwe (1990–2000).*

Notes

[1] Derk H. van Groningen à Stuling, *Kilenge: West New Britain. Papua New Guinea. A Pictorial Ethnography* (Harrassowitz Verlag, 2023), https://www.jstor.org/stable/jj.423490.

[2] Van Groningen, *Kilenge,* 96–100 and 138–9. See also A. A. Gerbrands, "Die furchterregenden *Nausang* der Kilenge (Neubritannien)," in *Geschichte und mündliche Überlieferung in Ozeanien*, ed. Brigitta Hauser-Schaublin (Ethnologisches Seminar der Universität und Museum für Völkerkunde), 187–201.

[3] Gerbrands, "Die furchterregenden nausang," 192.

[4] Over time, the Kilenge Nausang masks became well known for their beauty among private collectors, and some made their way to ethnological museums including the Rautenstrauch-Joest-Museum-Cologne (from Huon Gulf); the Museum of Ethnography, Budapest (from Tami); the Wereldmuseum Leiden (from Kilenge); the Linden Museum-Stuttgart (from Western New Britain); and Southern Illinois University, Carbondale (from Kilenge).

[5] Other scientific publications dealing with the Nausang phenomenon include Philip J. C. Dark, "Die Kunst der Kilenge für Tanz und Zeremonien," in *Form, Farbe, Phantasie: Südseekunst aus Neubritannien,* ed. Ingrid Heermann (Arnold, 2001), 176–79; F. Geldof, "Het kunstcomplex van de Tam eilanden" (MA thesis, Ghent University, 2007); and Ingrid Heermann, "West-Neubritannien und die Witu-Inseln," in *Form, Farbe, Phantasie: Südseekunst aus Neubritannien,* ed. Ingrid Heermann (Stuttgart: Arnold 2001), 164–68.

[6] "Aankomst van Nausang wordt aangekondigd met het dreigende gebrul van zijn 'stem', voortgebracht door de mannen die in de grauwe ochtend een zogenaamd bromhout rond-zwaaiend. Dat bromhout, de 'tong' van Nausang, is een dun lancetvormig stuk hout." (Nausang's arrival is announced by the menacing roar of his "voice," produced by men waving a so-called "humming stick" around in the grey morning. This humming stick, or "tongue," is a thin, lancet-shaped piece of wood.) Adrian A. Gerbrands, "In naam van Nausang," internal publication, Cultural Anthropology Department, State University of Leiden, 1990, 2. Translation by the author.

[7] Adrian A. Gerbrands, "Report on Project: To aid filming of Kilenge Nausang mask ceremony, West New Britain," University of Leiden, June 21, 1972, 3.

[8] Van Groningen, *Kilenge,* 26, 170.

[9] Adrian A. Gerbrands clarifies this as follows: "Wesentlich wichtiger ist die Bemalung, die für jeder *nausang* unterschiedlich und zugleich typisch ist. Durch sie wird die Identität einer bestimmten *nausang* festgelegt [(ein gemaltes Kennzeichen)]." (The painting is much more important, as it is different for each *nausang* yet still typical. It defines the identity of a particular *nausang* [(a painted mark.)]). A. A. Gerbrands, "Die furchterregenden Nausang der Kilenge (Neubritannien)," *Basler Beiträge zur Ethnologie* 37 (1994): 190. Translation by the author.

[10] In daily life, however, people referred only to the Nausang singsing. See Van Groningen, *Kilenge*, 97.

[11] It is evident that Gerbrands previously referenced the name of this mask, which he designated as “Aisiwok,” exclusively from the older Nausang masks. It is noteworthy that Gerbrands mentions the name of an Aisiwok mask, while I have mentioned a mask in the Ulumainge naulum called “Aisivok.” Given the close proximity of *v* and *w* in the Dutch alphabet and the remarkable similarity of their phonetic qualities, I assume that the name “Aisivok” I use is due to a discrepancy in articulation, more specifically a transition from *w* to *v*, and that this is the same Nausang mask. This observation leads to the hypothesis that the design depicted on the mask may already be quite antiquated. Despite extensive research, a resolution to this issue has yet to be found.

[12] The generic term for a category that breaks down into the sub-classifications of patri-sib, referring to patrilineal clan descent, and matri-sib, referring to matrilineal clan descent.

[13] P. J. C. Dark, A. A. Gerbrands, and Mavis H. Dark, *The Context of Art in Culture: An Ethno-aesthetic Study of the Kilenge of Western New Britain: Report to the National Science Foundation on Field Work* (Department of Anthropology, Southern Illinois University, 1969), 26.

[14] However, due to the extension of the Kilenge clans, as well as the living and working together in the villages and gardens, this subdivision gradually had become mixed up.

[15] Before the establishment of colonial rule in western New Britain in 1890, the sight of a Nausang mask by women or uninitiated children could even lead to the deterrent act of killing an entire family of the perpetrators by the villagers. Due to the efforts of the colonial government, missionaries, and conversion of the Kilenges to Christianity, such practices no longer occurred during the period of my research.

During the Ulumainge, Waremo and Saumoi Nausang singsing in 1978, I did not observe any violation of this prescription by the villagers. When the Nausang spirit was present, women and uninitiated children had to leave. Consequently, they had to enjoy themselves outside the village or stay with families in neighboring villages where the Nausang singing was not celebrated. Nevertheless, unannounced visitors from other areas, such as users of the Cape Gloucester–Saggsag public road or a helicopter pilot who landed at a new airfield in the Kilenge area, had to pay a symbolic fine in the form of a pig.

PACIFIC ARTS
Journal of the Pacific Arts Association

ANAÏS DUONG-PEDICA

Kanak Cultural Presence, Pedagogy, and Reformulation: An Interview with Will Nerho aka WillStyle

Abstract

In this interview, Kanak musician and graffiti artist Will Nerho (WillStyle), from the Neaoua tribe in Waa Wi Luu (Houaïlou) in the A'jië-Arhö region of Kanaky/New Caledonia, discusses his creative practice and navigation of cultural politics. He calls attention to the rejection of Kanak cultural markers he has experienced in Nouméa, capital of the country, located in the South Province. He also discusses the place of local animals in his art, their connection to Kanak culture, and the ecological pedagogical practice that comes with painting animals. Nerho offers a critique of French colonial appropriation of Kanak art, objects, culture, and knowledge, and emphasizes the importance of reclamation and transmission of culture within Kanak society, notably through language. He explains the significance of the flèche faîtière *(carved wooden rooftop spires on Kanak houses) and reflects on his work reformulating and redesigning those* flèches faîtières *scattered throughout Europe that have lost their identity.*

Keywords: *graffiti, Kanaky, New Caledonia, Kanak art, cultural politics, flèche faîtière, Kanak culture*

In April 2025, Anaïs Duong-Pedica interviewed Kanak musician, visual artist, and graffiti artist Will Nerho (who goes by the artist name WillStyle) from the Neaoua tribe in Waa Wi Luu (Houaïlou), located in the A'jië-Arhö region of Kanaky/New Caledonia.[1] In the interview transcript that follows, Nerho speaks of his creative practice as a Kanak graffiti artist having to navigate the cultural politics of different places and spaces throughout the country. Specifically, he calls attention to the rejection of Kanak cultural markers in the South Province, and most specifically in the capital city Nouméa.[2] The rejection of Kanak cultural markers in this region is notable because ninety-one percent of the settler (non-Kanak) population and ninety-two percent of the white population of Kanaky/New Caledonia are located there. While the North and Island provinces are managed by pro-independence political parties, in the South, anti-independence parties dominate in the management of the province and the municipality of Nouméa.

Nerho also discusses the place of local animals in his art, their relation to Kanak culture, and the ecological pedagogical practice that comes with painting animals. In the final part of the interview, Nerho offers a critique of French colonial appropriation of Kanak art, objects, culture, and knowledge, and underscores the importance of reclamation and transmission of culture within Kanak society, notably through language. He explains the significance of *flèche faîtière* (carved wooden rooftop spires on Kanak houses)[3] within Kanak culture and reflects on his efforts to reformulate and redesign examples that are now scattered across Europe and have subsequently lost their Kanak identity.[4]

The interview highlights the ongoing struggle to make Kanak culture known in a context of French settler colonialism. It touches on the legacy of one of the most prominent leaders of the Kanak independence movement, Jean-Marie Tjibaou, his work around the recognition of Kanak culture, and its impact on Kanak artists like Nerho. To explain the necessity of Melanesia 2000, a festival organized in 1975 in Nouméa to celebrate Kanak culture and arts,[5] Tjibaou wrote that to "exist fully, Kanak culture, like the whole Kanak world, fundamentally needs this recognition by the world around it. It is vital. Denigration by indifference and the absence of cultural dialogue can lead only to suicide or revolt."[6] Despite being written more than five decades ago, his words are still relevant today and are echoed in Nerho's artistic and pedagogical practice.

Anaïs Duong-Pedica (ADP): *As a graffiti artist, you are often asked to paint murals of varying sizes for schools, municipal markets, and other public places. Can you talk about who asks for this kind of work and your creative process for these communal spaces?*

Will Nerho (WN): Most of the time, requests come from a municipality, province, school, or association. Municipalities usually ask me to work on communal walls and school walls. The most significant requests I have gotten have come from in-stitutions, such as the Koné prison (Fig. 1) or the Camp-Est prison in Nouméa, as part of their work towards the social reintegration of youth, to help them find job opportunities when they get out of prison.

In general, when an institution asks for something, they already have a project in mind—like at the prisons—so I only come in to teach them the technique of graffiti. Other times, when there isn't a pre-planned design, we work together to come up with a design. For example, for the town hall of Koné, for which I drew a kagu [*Rhynochetos jubatus*, a bird endemic to Kanaky/New Caledonia], they asked me to do something that would bring people together (Fig. 2). Because Koné's Le Bosquet neighborhood is multicultural, we drew a swordfish, which is a totem animal for Polynesians.

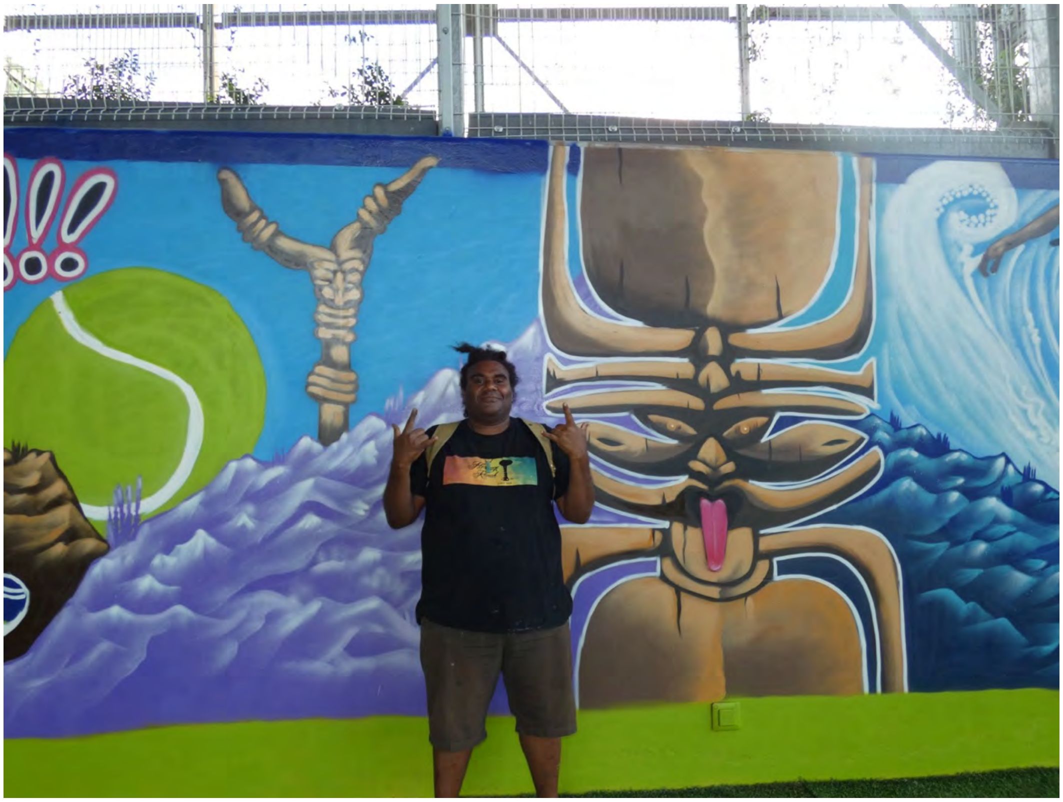


Figure 1. Will Nerho in front of a wall he painted at Koné Prison with the detainees, 2024. Photograph courtesy of Will Nerho

ADP: *A lot of your work is based in the North Province, but you have expressed to me that you would like to graff on walls in Nouméa, in the South Province*.

WN: Yes, it's easier in the North Province. I am in the collective known as ATM Couleurs du Pays—the brothers from the South, the North, and the Islands who graff. We applied to work in the South, but apparently, we were rejected by a South Province official because our work would "kanakize" the space. In Nouméa [South Province], there are graffs of butterflies, things that fly, weird things with weird colors, but there are no graffs of *flèche faîtière*[*,* the carved wooden rooftop spires on Kanak houses]. There are no artistic representations of *flèche faîtière* in Nouméa [at all]. There are people who graff them, but their graffs are quickly erased. The only thing the boys [ATM Couleurs du Pays] managed to negotiate was to paint a whale mural in Koutio [just north of Nouméa] on a little *case* [French term for a traditional Kanak dwelling] with a *flèche faîtière* in the background, but officials even complained about this, saying that only the whale was planned.

ADP: *It's interesting to think about how the walls speak when we consider the referendums for independence and the revolt in May 2024 (when Kanak people protested France's decision to open the provincial electoral roll to recent residents of the country—contributing to the disenfranchisement of the Indigenous Kanak—in and around Nouméa)*.

WN: Yes, the walls speak. But sometimes the messages are subliminal, and some-times they are racist, too. When you don't know the codes of graff, you cannot know, but in the graffiti world, there are codes, and when you see them, you know. The people who paint with these codes know. Examples include codes for the year the country was taken as a "possession" of France, the beginning of the Native code, and "blackbirding" in the Pacific.[7] Local institutions in the South Prov-ince never ask ATM Couleurs du Pays to paint anything—even though we have made requests many times, with well-written applications! Either the institutions don't have time, or the space we picked wasn't right, or nothing is right. But some-times the spaces we had picked are painted a year later by someone else. We feel like we've wasted enough of our time, so now we try to do what we want. In the North Province and in the Island Province, it's not the same. In the South Province, we do this [use Kanak cultural symbols in the city] to show our culture.

ADP: *I saw that you did some graffiti at the Tjibaou Cultural Center in Nouméa.[8] It seems that for the South Province, the Tjibaou Cultural Center is the one space that's designated for Kanak culture, and yet it's almost exclusively tourists who go there. It seems that Kanak culture must be contained within that space and it shouldn't leave that space.*

WN: That's it. We are being told: "Your Kanak space is over there, far away, hidden. You can go paint there." Spaces in the city center are good because all the cultural communities can see them, but the space that they *do* want us to use is not made for graffiti. There comes a moment when you realize how things really are. For instance, I have applied for projects in the South Province that were supposedly open to all. I called the province to ask for the application form, and they told me, "But you're from the North Province." That's how I found out that the project was not actually open to people of the North Province. I asked them, "Why do you say, 'Call for artists from the country' then?" They then proceeded to change [the project application requirements]; ten minutes later, the website said, "Call for artists from the South Province." They also know who I am, and they know I graff *flèches faîtières*, so they're thinking, "No, no. He's not going to 'kanakize' our walls." It's as if they don't want us to "taint" the walls.

One time, I graffed for a school in Nouméa attended by the daughter of an anti-independence politician. The school's principal told me to paint the totems of all the cultural communities present in the country. I started to paint, and I included a *flèche faîtière*. Everyone was okay with it, especially the parents. Some Wallisian and Javanese people were happy because I had included their totems. Two days later, the school principal called me to let me know that she had received a lot of complaints after putting pictures of the graffs on the school's website—she told me people said things like, "Kanak art is forbidden in schools." She told [the complaining parents] that this school was meant to bring communities together, so they complained about that.

It's not the parents who go to school but the children, and the children who had made the graffs with me were happy. Can you imagine what these parents tell their children? "You drew a Kanak spire, now you are grounded." Can you imagine how the children must feel? These parents will destroy their children culturally. That's how young people end up like their parents and there is conflict among this youth.

When I was in France, I painted a *flèche faîtière* in a high school in La Rochelle, and the people there were happy about it because they felt like I was leaving them a part of me. They gifted me a miniature of the La Rochelle tower. It's the experience of sharing something that's important. I do not understand why those people in Nouméa don't like the spire in the school graffs since there are other totems by its side. . .. It's as if they reject us, we who are from this land. They accept the other communities, but within the South Province, in Nouméa, we are rejected.

ADP: *Earlier you were explaining that when you graffed for the Koné town hall, they asked you to paint something that would bring cultural communities together* *and you also mentioned the whale project in Koutio. I wonder to what extent animals appear more innocent than a Kanak spire with regard to cultural politics. What animals do you graff and what do they represent for you?*

WN: I graff whales, geckos, sharks, turtles, kagus [bird], humphead wrasses [fish], sea kraits [semiaquatic snake], notous [imperial pigeon], and flying foxes because many local animals are endangered species. I want to remind people that they're not just beautiful; these species live with us. We have to care for them, let them live, and not capture them. I know some people who catch kagus and put them in cages, which isn't good. We have to be careful when we have cats or dogs at home for example.[9] The notou lays one egg every year, and the flying fox has only one pup per year, so we have to be careful. These animals are universal totems that belong to the Pacific. Around here, when whales swim through our waters, it is time to eat yams.[10] The entire country eats yams. At the same time, the whale travels throughout the world, and she is endangered. We have the same characteristics here for whales as someone who would tell you about the whale from Tahiti, Hawaiʻi, or Tonga. We are an island and we are surrounded by water, and all these species live with us. We have stories with the turtle, the kagu, and so on. When I'm asked to graff, public institutions are interested in the pedagogical aspect of the graff. They are interested in my work because part of my practice involves explaining the importance of preserving these animals as humans, as ourselves.

The people of the A'jië region say that the kagu was the first master dancer, that the kagu is the origin of all the dances of the Kanak people. It is the kagu who taught Kanak people to dance; they mimicked him to become choreographers. That is why he opens his wings, he jumps, he sings, he barks, and he yells "ka kou kou kou ka ke"—those are the yells we use in dance "hoo hoo hoo." The elders say that the kagu is a supreme being. It is human, but it is also a bird, so he is part of us. He shouldn't be considered a bird either because he is a man; this is the same for the gecko, the notou, and the flying fox. Those are people who take this form. In A'jië, to say "kagu," we say "awöö" and when we say "wea awöö," it means "this man we call kagu"—we refer to him as a man, not as a bird. This bird is not just an endemic bird; it is superior to us, even to me who draws him. He has a status. That is why when the chiefs go to war, they wear white feathers, kagu feathers; it means that they are dangerous, because they are in the kagu spirit, beyond the human spirit.

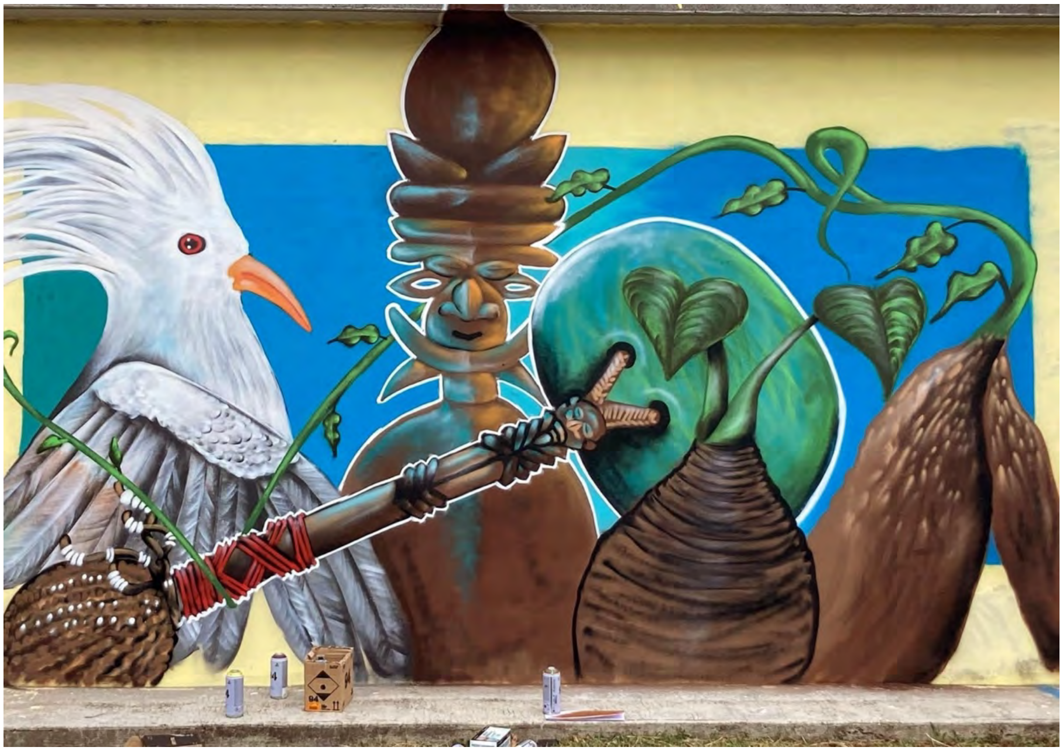


Figure 2. Will Nerho, graffiti in Le Bosquet neighborhood of Koné with elements of Kanak culture such as a kagu, yam, taro, *flèche faîtière*, and a jade-bladed *tamioc* (axe), 2022. Photograph courtesy of Will Nerho

ADP: *Within the pedagogical aspect of your practice, you also raise awareness around the need for Kanak people to reclaim their culture.*

WN: I see people taking Kanak art objects with them to France and selling them. Then, they come back, organize exhibitions, and teach us what the objects mean. After that, a Kanak person might say: “Oh yes, I saw this at the exhibition.” But sometimes I’m scratching my head, thinking, “Brother, are you serious? You waited for the exhibition to know what this is?” He then looks at me and tells me that unlike him, I was taught Kanak culture—but in fact, I wasn’t taught Kanak culture; I had to research all this. I had to ask my family. I was a little lucky because I grew up with my grandparents, so a lot of what I know I learned from them. For the rest, I researched it myself. I went to customary ceremonies to watch the protocols, to observe the gestures and everything.[11] I understand that some people are disappointed that they have not learned many things, but it’s never too late to learn and you must approach people and speak with them.

The colonizer always wants to remind us of who we were before they came. Once, I had a conflict with a guy on my Facebook page because I told him, "It's not you who will teach me my culture, brother," and he replied, "Yes, but I have read." But the books [about Kanak culture] have been written by outside people who have come here to learn. I have not needed to write a book to learn—I have learned on my own. This [process of colonizers claiming authority over our culture] leaves us or represents us as ignorant, so that colonizers can later come and teach us.

You don't need to know everything about your culture, what's important is for you to speak your language. Once you speak your language, you're already fifty percent in your culture. This is because, thanks to the words, you understand what we are talking about. You don't need to know what the *flèche faîtière* is used for, or everything else. Fifty percent of yourself is speaking. Once you speak, you are already above someone who will teach you something from a book. [An outsider might] tell you, "I've been here, [meaning New Caledonia generally, or a specific place]," and then you'll speak to him in your language, and he won't understand anything and that'll settle it. I know the same as you, but I speak my language, that's all. For me, there is always this sentence by Jean-Marie Tjibaou: "We have a culture, and we have to show it. If we don't show it, they think we don't exist."[12] So we must show them first what we know, [to show the self-proclaimed "experts" that they] cannot be a master of something that they are still learning.

ADP: *Can you talk about the symbolic place of the* flèche faîtière *in Kanak culture? What is your creative process when it comes to designing spires from your region, A'jië-Arhö, and from other Kanak countries? How do you find inspiration?*

WN: The *flèche faîtière* (Fig. 3) represents the ancestor of the clan. It is a pointed object that we put on top of the *case*. The face that is on it is the ancestor of the clan. It is the connection between the world of the living, the world of the dead, and the spiritual world. These are three different worlds: The *case* is the living, under the *case* is the dead, and above it is the spiritual. Consequently, that's what the *flèche faîtière* is: it's the big brother. It represents the face of the big brother. The spires have an identity that depends on where you live. In the A'jië-Arhö and Xârâcùù countries, the spires have two faces: one in front and one behind. In the A'jië-Arhö country, we say that the good looks ahead, and the bad looks behind. The latter is the one who protects you from those who want to stab you in the back. We also say that the face in the front looks at the sea, and the face at the back looks at the mountain.

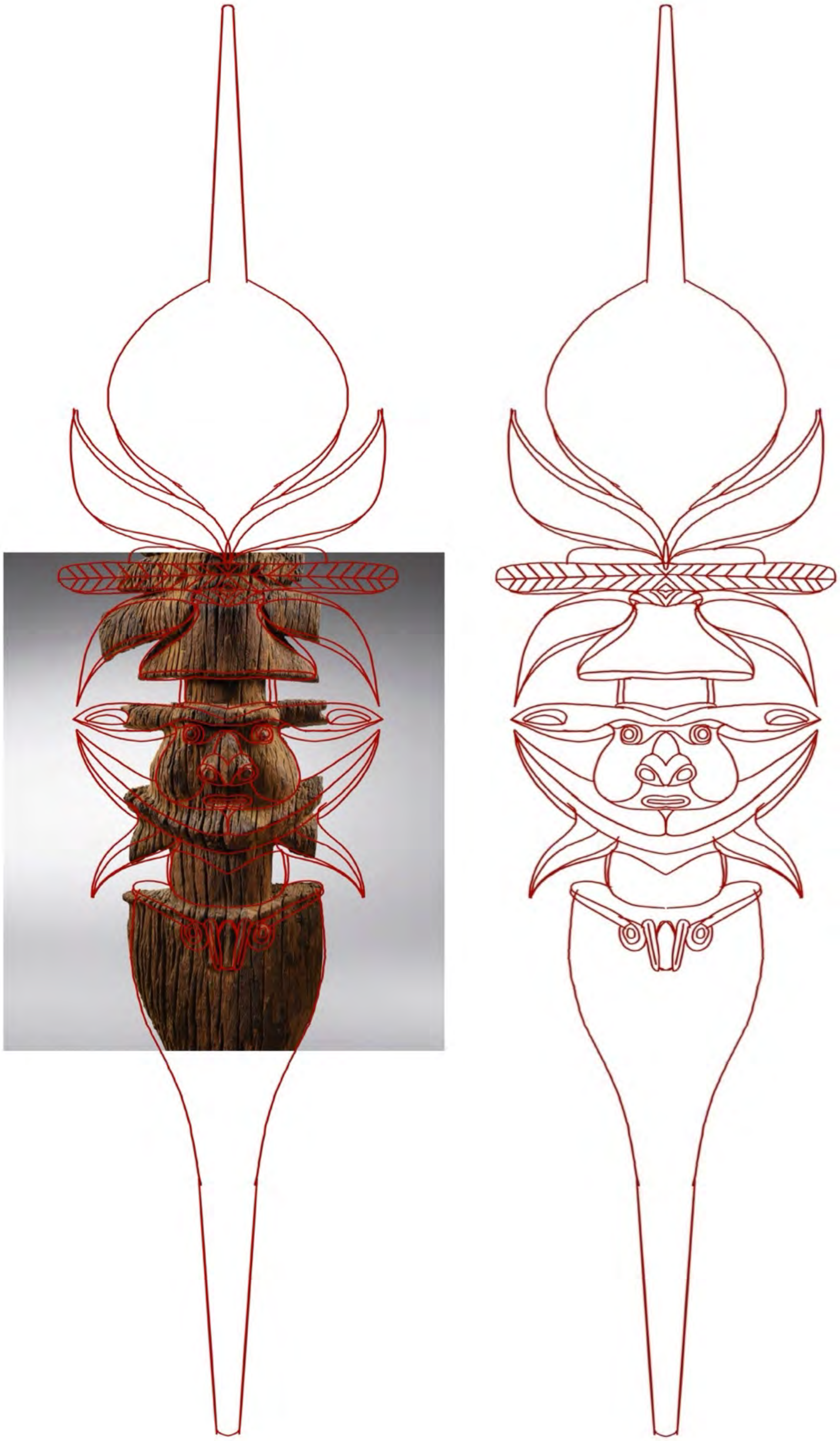


Figure 3. Will Nerho, example of the reformulation of a *flèche faîtière* from the A'jië-Arhö region, 2019. Courtesy of Will Nerho

How do I proceed? With all the knowledge I have of sculpture and of the *flèche faîtière* in the A'jië-Arhö country, I know almost all the geometries and the designs that go on it. This is because I have worked with elders and sculptors. My uncle is also a sculptor. When I was younger, I spoke with knowledge-holders to understand the spires from different Kanak regions. I then went around the entire country, because once you understand the design, you can understand the place and environment where the people are from. For example, those who live in the forest won't have the same spires as those who live by the sea because they don't have the same types of trees. Everyone has their own design.

In my work, I re-design the spires spread across the world that no longer have faces.[13] On Facebook, I've shared some photographs of spires that are abroad for which there is no identified place of origin. . . . The place of origin is stated only as "New Caledonia" [by the museum that holds the spire], so the specific region is missing. That means they no longer have an identity. That is when I come in, and I work on them [by designing the missing parts of the spire] (Fig. 3). Based on the bit that is left and its shape, I determine which Kanak country it belongs to. I give them an identity based on their shape, which always corresponds to a specific Kanak country. Sometimes, some have lost their shape entirely, and in those cases, I reinvent. Our task now in our culture is to reformulate, reinvent, and recreate our spires. This is because we say that this is what our elders did, what our parents did, what our grandparents did. It's our turn to reformulate with contemporary designs, but we keep in mind that the face must remain the same.

ADP: *Are there workshops that exist to do this specific restoration work on the* flèche faîtière?

WN: I worked on this with young people from the Camp-Est prison in Nouméa, but it is not the same as the work I am doing on my own with spires. You need to have a lot of knowledge to understand and make young people understand. They make their own *flèche faîtière* however they like it: "It's my thing; because I am imprisoned, I create this," you see? I understand that; you can create spires that are about your individual identity and that only belong to you, and not to a clan, a family, or a region—just to you.

I haven't yet done the work of reformulation in the sense that, for me, this work will start when the spires are being sculpted. . . . I started working with my brother-in-law, Jean-Phillipe Tjibaou, who has now left us, and Florenda Nirikani[14] to figure out how to reformulate. Jean-Phillipe had done a lot of reformulations of *flèches faîtières*, so we started working together. I started to reformulate masks. I had drawn many masks (see Fig. 4), because they are as important as . . . [and] have the same principle as the *flèche faîtière*. The mask is the face of the ancestor that is walking. The *flèche faîtière* don't move, but the masks walk.

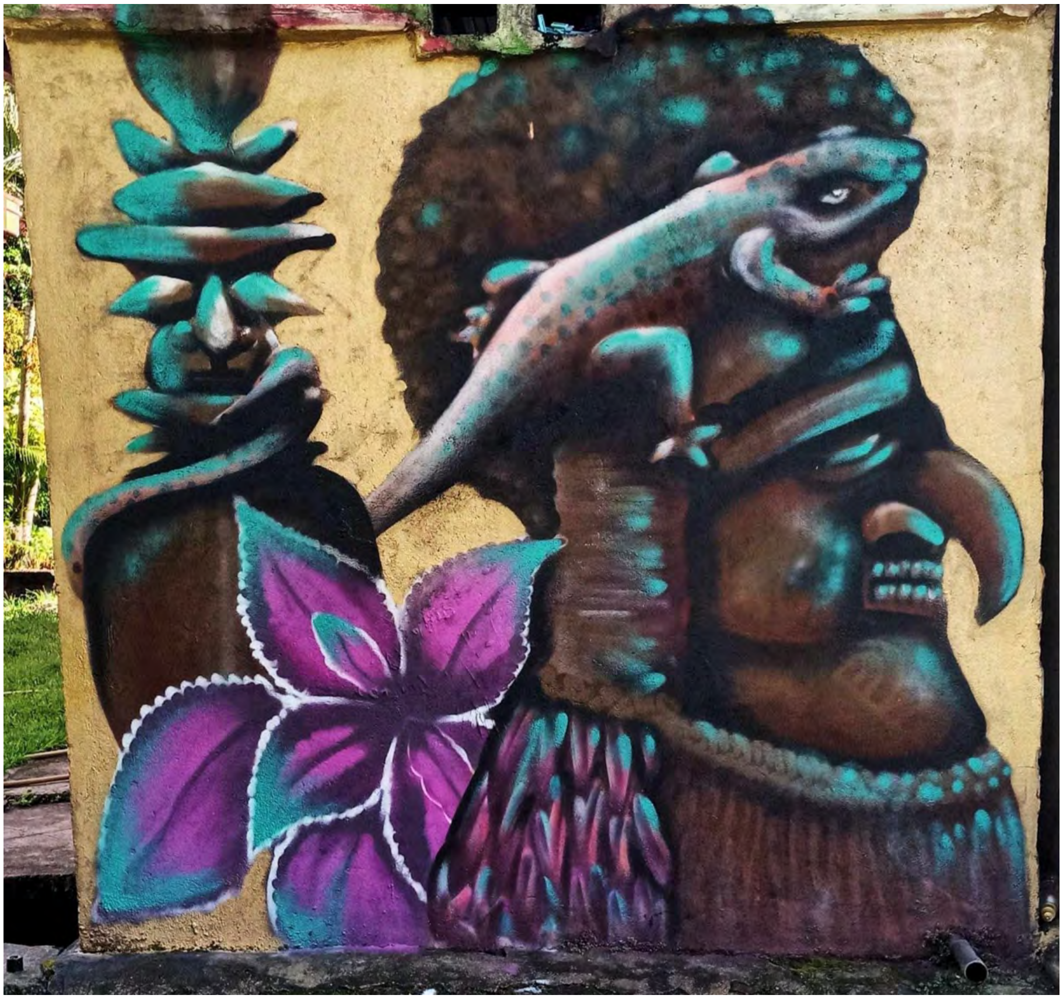


Figure 4. An exterior wall of Nerho's home with his gecko totem, a mask, and *flèche faitière*. Photograph courtesy of Will Nerho

I have had calls from schools that want to create spires and work on identity, and I have accepted them. I love to create things, to invent. . . . At the moment, I'm working with two sculptors to sculpt the spires I've been reformulating by creating 3D designs. They're into it. We will create a spire that doesn't exist.

We'll be able to touch it. We can give it a spirit afterwards. That's what reformulation is about. I took a picture of a spire lost in a museum in Europe, I re-designed it because it no longer had a face, and then we will sculpt it. We give it life, we give it a spirit again, to reconnect it to its land.

***Willfrid Nerho** is a visual artist, stencil artist, musician, graffiti artist, and graphic designer from Waa Wi Luu (Houaïlou). He finds his creativity in music. His name in the A'jië language, Bëvia Nô Nörö, was given to him by his grandfather and means "tie the word of the thunderstorm." Topics that affect him and constitute the basis of his artistic struggle include societal issues, Kanak culture, and the environment, along with issues related to youth and finding an aesthetic identity specific to his country. Nerho teaches and intervenes in schools and works as a facilitator at a youth house and in carceral environments. He also practices his art for private people and institutions and sometimes does collaborations with other artists. His creative process is always in movement and active. He has participated in many artistic and cultural festivals in the Pacific and internationally.*

***Anaïs Duong-Pedica** is a settler researcher and teacher from Kanaky/New Caledonia. Her doctoral research focuses on the politics of contemporary mixed-race discourses and settler colonialism in Kanaky/New Caledonia. She has also written about revolutionary Kanak feminism within the Kanak struggle for independence. Duong-Pedica contributes to the podcast "La Pause Décoloniale," broadcast on pro-independence Djiido radio in Kanaky/New Caledonia.*

Notes

[1] Kanaky/New Caledonia comprises eight different customary regions or Kanak countries: A'jië-Arhö, Drehu, Drubea-Kapumë, Hoot ma Whaap, Iaai, Nengone, Paicî-Cèmuhî, and Xârâcùù. The A'jië-Arhö region is located in the center of the *Grande Terre* (the main and largest island) and in the North province. For the interview, the two had a video call—Nerho from Waa Wi Luu and Duong-Pedica from Turku, Finland, where she is finishing her doctoral studies. The interview was conducted in French and translated by Anaïs Duong-Pedica in collaboration with Will Nerho.

[2] Following the Matignon-Oudinot Accords (1988) and since the early 1990s, Kanaky/New Caledonia has been divided into three provinces: the South, North, and Islands provinces. This provincialization was one of the solutions suggested to better share the political and institutional power between settlers and Kanaks. While most residents in the North and Island provinces are Kanak, the majority of settlers are concentrated in the South Province, where the capital is located. Nouméa

is also the home of many Kanak families who have been displaced by colonialism and/or came to the urban center to seek employment. In 2019, fifty-two percent of Kanak people live in the South Province, which represents thirty percent of the population of the South Province. See Institut de la Statistique et des Études Économiques Nouvelle-Calédonie, https://www.isee.nc/population/recensement/communautes.

[3] The terms "*flèche faîtière*" and "spire" are used interchangeably in the translation of the interview. The *flèche faîtière* is a wooden sculpture that is placed at the top of the central pole of a Kanak house. It represents the face of the clan's ancestor. Due to its emblematic and prestigious character within a chieftaincy, the spire has appeared in the center of the pro-independence Kanaky flag since 1984. The Kanak names for the *flèche faîtière* reference Houp wood (*Montrouziera cauliflora*). In Kanak society, the Houp tree symbolizes the body of the chief and the ancient character of his lineage. The sculpture of a *flèche faîtière* is divided into three parts: The central part is a face surrounded by motifs, below it is a base that ties it to the roof, and above the face is one or more needles ornamented with seashells. Three stacked circles represent the chest, face, and neck of the chief. See André Sirota, "Une flèche faîtière pour parler avec les autres," *Yakamédia*, accessed December 16, 2025, https://yakamedia.cemea.asso.fr/univers/comprendre/comp-culture/une-fleche-faitiere-pour-parler-avec-les-autres.

[4] In this translation, I use the word "reformulation" which alludes to Kanak leader Jean-Marie Tjibaou's concept of *reformulation permanente* in French and which Nerho draws on in his own work. This has been translated by Helen Fraser and John Trotter as a "permanent process of renewal" in English. In 1985, Tjibaou explained this process: "The return to tradition is a myth—I keep saying this over and over again; it is a myth. No people has ever done it. I see the search for identity, for a model, as being ahead of us, never in the past—it's *a permanent process of renewal*. I feel that what we're striving for at the moment is to bring as much as we can of our past and our culture into constructing the personal and social models we want to guide the building of our polity. Some might view it differently, but that is the way I see it myself. Our identity is ahead of us. At the end, after we are dead, people will take our picture and put it on the wall, and it will help them fashion their own identity. Otherwise, you never move out of your father's shadow, you've had it." See Jean-Marie Tjibaou, *Kanaky*, trans. Helen Fraser and John Trotter (Pandanus Books, 2005), 160.

[5] Melanesia 2000 drew fifty thousand spectators and was "the earliest explicitly Melanesian arts festival." See Anna Naupa, "The Melanesian Way in the 21st Century: Culture, Politics, and Festivals," *The Journal of Pacific History* 60, no. 2, (2025): 208. The festival was co-organized with the Kanak women's association Mouvement Féminin pour un Souriant Village Mélanésien, led at the time by Scholastique Pidjot. See Michel Degorce-Dumas, "Le point de vue de Jean-Marie Tjibaou président et organisateur du festival," *Journal de la Société des Océanistes* 100–101 (1995): 109–15; and Jean-Pierre Velot, "Tous vibraient de la même force,

de la même conviction: Témoignage de Marie-Claude TJIBAOU," *Journal de la Société des Océanistes* 100–101 (1995): 117–24.

[6] Tjibaou, *Kanaky*, 5.

[7] Auguste Febvrier-Despointes "took possession" of New Caledonia on behalf of France on September 24, 1853. While the date of annexation is a day of mourning for Kanak people, it has been celebrated by settlers throughout history. See Tjibaou, *Kanaky*, 68. Since the Nouméa Accord, this anniversary has become New Caledonia's "Day of Citizenship" or "Citizenship Celebration" (Journée de la Citoyenneté or Fête de la Citoyenneté) leading to conflicts around how the date should be memorialized. See Stéphanie Graff, "Visibilité du destin commun et invisibilité de l'histoire: discours, célébrations et construction de la citoyenneté en Nouvelle-Calédonie," *Anthrovision* 4, no. 1 (2016). The Native code or *Indigénat* was an imperial legal framework that "provided for a deviation of the Penal Code" by establishing a legal exception for "natives," legalized at the level of the state. In New Caledonia, the Native code applied from 1887 to 1946. See Isabelle Merle and Adian Muckle, *The Indigénat and France's Empire in New Caledonia: Origins, Practices and Legacies* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), 6.

"Blackbirding" refers to the nineteenth-century Pacific labor trade and kidnapping of coerced Melanesian workers to work in plantations in Australia, Fiji, and New Caledonia. The Australian-Pacific indentured labor trade that started in 1863 and was abolished at the beginning of the twentieth century, involved men, women and children who mainly came from the Solomons, Vanuatu, Papua New Guinea, Kanaky/New Caledonia, and Fiji to work in the sugar industry in Queensland. See Tracey Banivanua-Mar, *Violence and Colonial Dialogue: The Australian-Pacific Indentured Labor Trade* (University of Hawaiʻi Press, 2007), 1.

[8] The Tjibaou Cultural Center opened in Nouméa in 1998, nine years after the assassination of Jean-Marie Tjibaou. It is "dedicated to the life and aspirations for Kanak culture of Jean-Marie Tjibaou." See Berenice Murphy, "Centre Culture Tjibaou: A Museum and Art Centre Redefining New Caledonia's Future," *Humanities Research* 9, no. 1 (2002): 78. The cultural center is located on the Tina peninsula, close to the Tina golf course, away from the city center of Nouméa. Peter Brown has noted the inaccessibility of the center to those relying on public transportation and "its highly institutional character," which means that Kanaks do not identify strongly with it and that it is attended mostly by white people. See Peter Brown, "New Caledonia: A Pacific Island or an Island in the Pacific? The Eighth Pacific Art Festival," *International Journal of Francophone Studies* 4, no. 1 (2001): 34–35.

[9] The primary predators of kagus are free-roaming domestic dogs.

[10] The yam is central to Kanak culture, as time is structured around the cultivation of yam. Jean-Marie Tjibaou writes: "For Melanesians, the rhythm of the year is set by the cultivation of the yam, the principal nourishment, which is offered to chiefs, to the elders and to all guests of honour. It is the noble offering, the symbol of man, of the phallus, of honour. It is the yam which is offered on the altar where it

symbolises the *kaamo*, the country with the chiefs, the old men, the children and everything which makes the country live. The yam with the *thawé* (the string of traditional money) and the *mada* are the main items in the exchange of traditional wealth that is effected for a marriage or a bereavement. The yam is carried with as much delicacy as a child. It is cultivated with quite particular methods, an activity that keeps people of the tribe occupied for a good part of the year." See Tjibaou, *Kanaky,* 43.

[11] A customary gesture is part of the protocols enacted by "clans [which] meet on the occasion of an engagement request, a wedding, a birth, a death or a request for forgiveness. [These] customary exchanges are carried out according to precise protocols depending on the geographical area in which one is located." See Anthony Tutugoro, "A Kanak Way of Being to the World: The Appropriation of Customary Diplomatic Protocols in New Political Contexts," in *Oceanic Diplomacy: Reasserting Indigenous Pathways through the Contemporary Pacific*, ed. Salā George Carter et al. (Macmillan Brown Centre for Pacific Studies Press, 2025), 226. Jean-Marie Tjibaou explains that "custom is less an interpersonal relationship than a relationship between groups, communities. . . . Custom, for us, is the *gesture* which, at every moment, at every meeting, brings this relationship to mind. . . . For us, the generic term 'custom' really means the law, the way we live, all of the institutions which govern us" (emphasis mine). Etienne Cornut, "Kanak Custom – Legal Overview," in *Understanding New Caledonia*, ed. Caroline Gravelat, trans. Elaine Sutton (University Press of New Caledonia, 2021), 286.

[12] Nerho is referring to a speech that Jean-Marie Tjibaou gave at the Melanesia 2000 Festival in 1975, in which he said, "If we want to organize Melanesia 2000, it is so that the kids know that there is a culture in this country. It is so that our European friends who are here can know that we are men. We are men with a culture, and we must show this culture. If we don't show it, people think we don't exist."

[13] *Flèches faîtières* located abroad become unidentifiable when their place of origin is omitted from collection records and display signage and/or when their faces and shapes become less recognizable due to wood wear, damage during transportation, and conservation. According to Nerho, the place of origin of the *flèches faîtières* are sometimes missing because this information can be willfully omitted when an object has been stolen. This is because, in the case of an object being reclaimed in the future, the place of origin can lead to finding out who took or stole the object. Nerho also explains that, in some instances, those who took the objects prefer to hide all traces of their stay in specific clans or tribes.

[14] Jean-Philippe Tjibaou was a traditional sculptor from Hyehen (Hienghène) who was one of Jean-Marie Tjibaou's sons. He passed away in June 2022. His partner, Florenda Nirikani, is a political and cultural facilitator. For Jean-Philippe Tjibaou's explanation of the *flèche faîtière* in the Hoot ma Whaap region, see "Construire une flèche faîtière," Boutures de paroles, YouTube, May 5, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5MaPbqfid70.

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MĀRATA KETEKIRI TAMAIRA

Past, Present, Futures: Telling Indigenous Stories through an Urban Art Aesthetic

Abstract

Indigenous muralists across the Pacific have adopted urban art aesthetics as a strategic means of asserting ongoing presence, celebrating cultural traditions, and articulating visions of Indigenous futures. This research note examines two murals by Hawaiian artists Carl F.K. Pao, Cory Taum, and Solomon Enos that were included in the 2021 Bishop Museum exhibition POW! WOW! The First Decade: From Hawaiʻi to the World*. Through urban art's accessible visual language, these artists assert an enduring Indigenous will to self-define, ground their work in ancestral knowledge, and articulate temporal visions that span past, present, and multiple futures.*

Keywords: *Bishop Museum, Hawaiʻi, Indigenous muralism, Kanaka Maoli, POW! WOW!*

> *We must write . . . we must paint . . . we must create our own ways of understanding. We are re-writing, re-scripting, re-imagining history. It is simply our version of the truth and when we speak it we are changing our future because we are able to define our past and present.*
>
> *—Manulani Aluli Meyer*[1]

Urban street art has grown into a dynamic global phenomenon since its origins on the streets of Philadelphia and in the subway tunnels of New York City in the second half of the twentieth century. It emerged as a social justice response to the waves of destruction sweeping through poor minority neighborhoods as entire blocks were demolished to make way for highways and the sprawling suburbs of middle-class America. Out of harsh conditions including dislocation and dispossession, crews of malcontented inner-city youth took up magic markers and later aerosol cans to "write" messages of resistance on cities' concrete and metallic surfaces. By the 1980s, graffiti, tagging, and muralism had evolved into a distinctive collective visual aesthetic alongside other forms of urban performance such as hip-hop, rap, and breakdancing. Today, visual urban art is one of the most highly accessible and democratized genres of contemporary art expression in the world.

In addition to its popularity and prestige, urban art has become a tool of empowerment for Indigenous communities, particularly in the effort to speak truth to power in the context of ongoing colonialism. For example, for First Nations Secwepemc youth living on reservation lands in the Kamloops region of south-central British Columbia, urban art is a means through which they can leave their “visual tracks in the landscape”—asserting the ongoing presence of First Nations people in Canada and in defiance of a history that has been marred by systematic dispossession, displacement, and genocide.[2] In this case and many others, urban art is not simply an expression of “art for art’s sake.” As Cherokee poet Marilou Awiakta contends, Native artistic creations are an expression of “art for *Life’s* sake.”[3]

In Indigenous communities across the Pacific, urban art has provided a similar platform for Indigenous artists to tell their stories. Large-scale murals, in particular, have become prevalent across the Pacific region as artists and communities seek ways to assert their ongoing presence in their ancestral places of belonging, revive and celebrate their unique histories and cultural traditions, and articulate grievances in response to the colonization of their homelands. For example, Aboriginal artist Reko Rennie’s 2013 mural *Welcome to Redfern*—on a Victorian-era building in the Redfern neighborhood of Sydney, Australia—stands as a lasting tribute to local Aboriginal history and the continuing presence of Aboriginal communities in the area. The mural is rendered in black, yellow, and red—the colors that have come to represent the Aboriginal people of Australia—and pays tribute to Aboriginal leadership through portraits of key historical figures, such as Pemulwuy, an eighteenth-century clan warrior who led resistance efforts against white colonists. In 2015, Ngāi Tūhoe activist and artist Tame Iti teamed up with Pākehā street artist Owen Dippie in Aotearoa to produce the mural *Ma Mua a Muri, Ka Tika (The People of the Past Have Things to Say to the People of the Present)*. It features a larger-than-life image of Hokimoana Tawa, a respected kuia (elder woman) of the Tūhoe tribe. The mural is located in the small Bay of Plenty township of Taneātua—considered the gateway to Te Uruwera, the ancestral homeland of the Tūhoe people. This placement is an empowering counterpoint to the fact that the area was the site of the “Tūhoe Terror Raids” of 2007,[4] and enables the mural to function as a celebratory touchstone for tribal identity.

While the above mural projects attracted a great deal of media and public attention, most urban artistic interventions in the Pacific occur less conspicuously at the grassroots level. In Guam, for instance, as part of the "We Are Guam" campaign during the early 2000s, local CHamoru villages were encouraged to create murals to celebrate the distinctive stories and histories of their communities.[5] In Tahiti, over the last couple of decades murals have served in urban communities as a visual vehicle for conveying social and cultural messages, as well as to boost self-esteem among Tahitian youth who, due to the increasing urbanization of their home islands, risk becoming untethered from their cultural roots and sense of identity to ancestral place.[6]

Hawaiʻi has witnessed its own efflorescence of Indigenous muralism. Over the past decade, POW! WOW!—an international alliance of graffiti writers and street muralists founded in 2010 by Hawaiʻi-based artist Jasper Wong—has brought this movement to wider public awareness. John "Prime" Hina, Matt Ortiz, Kahiau Beamer, Keoni "Pufftronic" Paʻakaula, Kai Kaulukukui, and Haley Kailiehu are just a few of the artists within the growing cadre of Kanaka Maoli muralists in Hawaiʻi. These and other Native artists fuse Indigenous knowledge, motifs, and stories with contemporary global artistic styles, characterizing what writer Māhealani Dudoit describes as a uniquely Hawaiian aesthetic that "reaches towards the past . . . in order to translate our traditions into the language of today."[7] The murals by Native Hawaiian artists Carl F.K. Pao, Cory Taum, and Solomon Enos featured in the exhibition *POW! WOW! The First Decade: From Hawaiʻi to the World* (Bishop Museum, Oʻahu, 2021) deserve particular attention for the way they embody the contiguous connection between past, present, and, as we will see, futures.

Panta rhei (Life is flux). So wrote the ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus. The phrase is more popularly known as the oft-used adage "Change is the one true constant." This constitutes the central theme of Carl F.K. Pao's and Cory Taum's collaborative mural *Kaiwiʻula* (Fig. 1). In the mural, the artists recollect the eighteenth-century Battle of Kaiwiʻula (The Red Bone), which was fought between the chiefs of Oʻahu and Maui on the very land the Bishop Museum was built on. The artists' goal was not simply to recall an historical event that reshaped Island politics, but to explore how the same land that saw a bloody battle was transformed, during *POW! WOW!*, into a site of collaboration, idea exchange, and the cultivation of positive social consciousness through art. Pao and Taum use the Battle of Kaiwiʻula as a counterpoint to violence to highlight the kind of ethically motivated change they want to see in a world that is beleagured by injustice, war, environmental degradation, and—recently—a global pandemic. "Change can come about in countless ways," states Pao, "War is one of those ways, but so is art."[8]

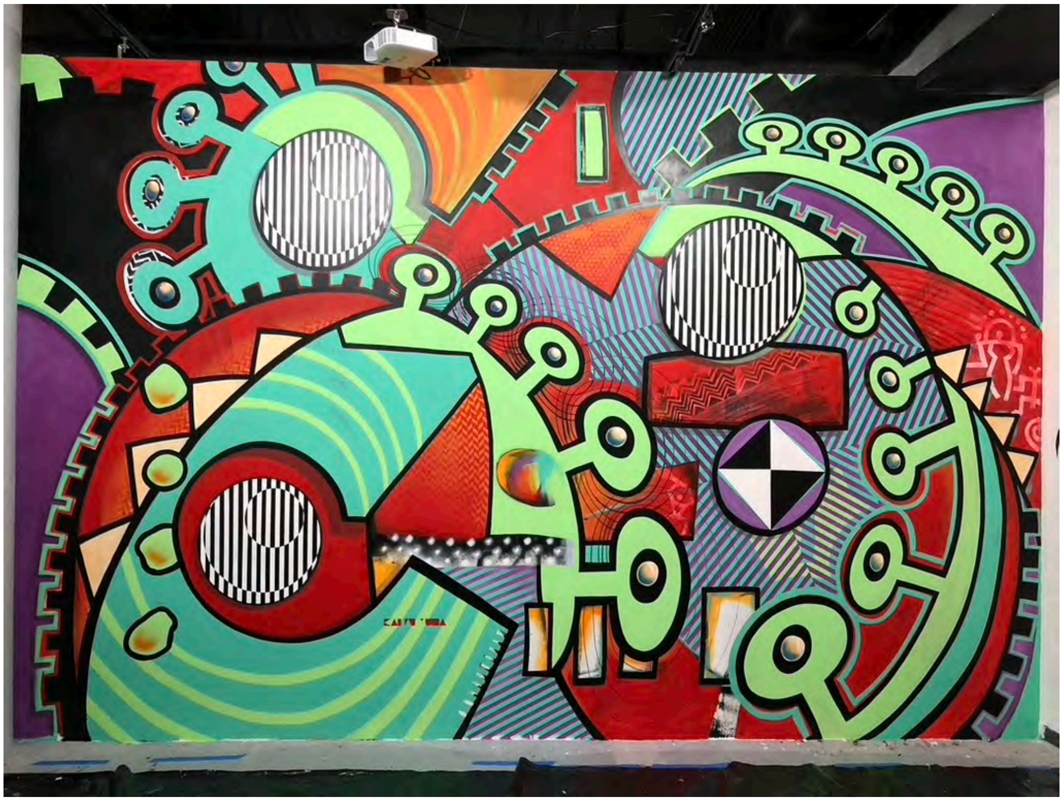

Figure 1. Carl F.K. Pao and Cory Taum, *Kaiwiʻula*, 2021. Installation view in *POW! WOW! The First Decade: From Hawaiʻi to the World*, Bishop Museum, Honolulu, 2021. Acrylic on drywall; 18 x 24 ft. Photograph by Carl F.K. Pao. Courtesy of the artists

Kaiwiʻula visually explodes with a bold palette of red, purple, green, orange, and aqua that is reminiscent of 1980s graphic art. While the work has clearly defined large circular and arching forms that serve as key compositional coordinates for the piece, some of the shapes between the larger elements have been treated in a more expressionistic manner. This can be seen in the incomplete sphere located just off center of the piece that is painted in a mixed palette of purple, aqua, red, yellow. As Pao states, this represents the piko (center) of the entire mural and functions as a portal to the past.[9] Three orbs with black and white vertical stripes—created using yellow masking tape (Fig. 2)—anchor the piece and represent the past, present, and future. Each orb is enveloped by the maka (mouth) forms that are prominent in Pao's visual vocabulary and which represent the open mouths of the Hawaiian kiʻi images that were used in ritual ceremonies to hold offerings to the god Kū. The mouths also connote sacredness and serve as a barrier of protection for the orbs.

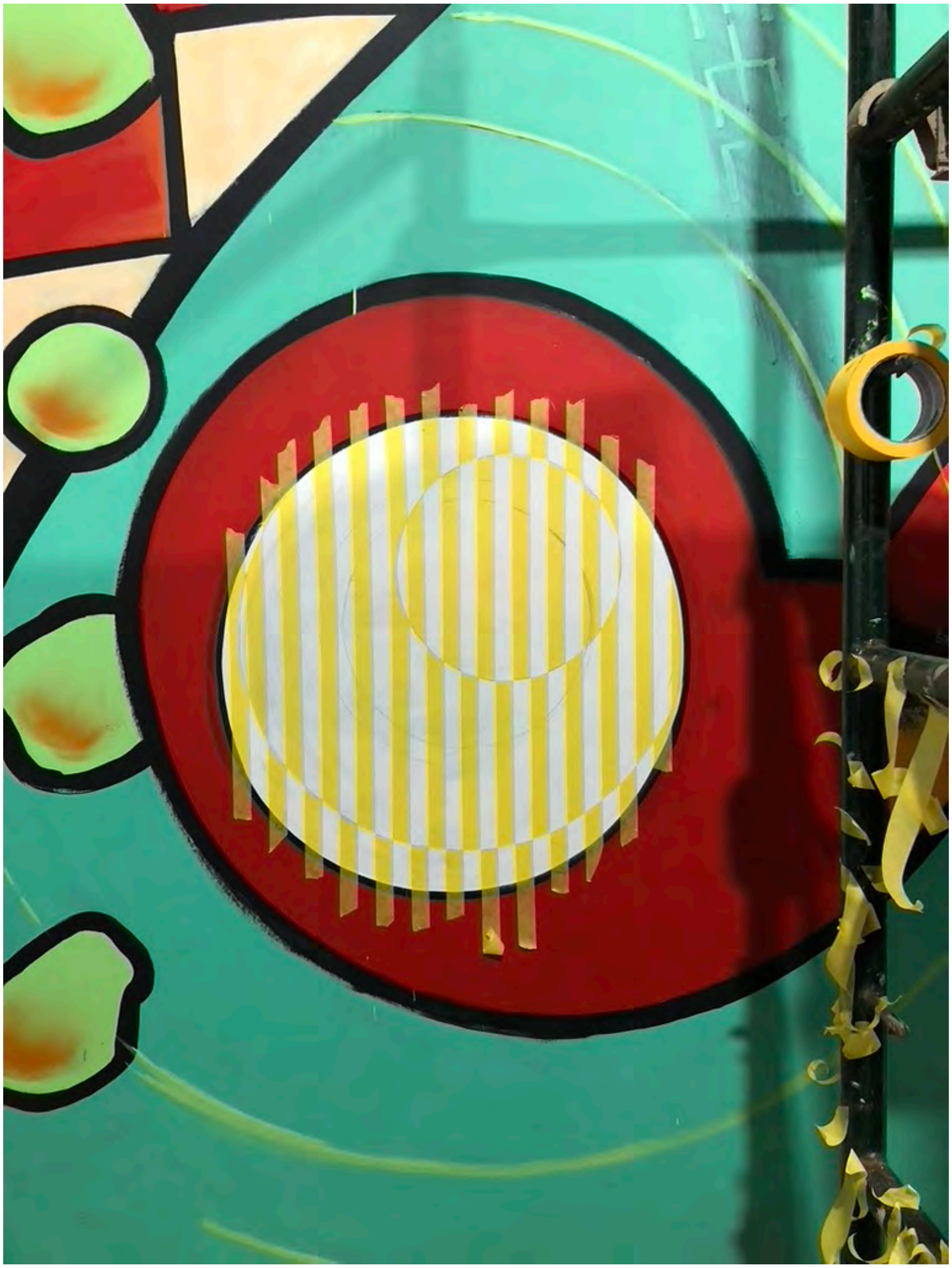

Figure 2. Detail of *Kaiwiʻula*, 2021, showing the artists' use of masking tape to create white vertical stripes on orbs that will be painted black. Photograph by Carl F.K. Pao. Courtesy of the artists

Kaiwiʻula is also informed by the natural world.[10] For example, the arched green elements each have five maka that recall the new shoots of a fern. The heʻe (octopus) motif—a series of black crenelated forms that weave in and out of the central space—represents the search for knowledge. Fields of alternating red-orange chevrons and of purple and aqua stripes resemble the kupukupu, a fern native to Hawaiʻi; like the shoots of the fern, they signify growth and thriving.

A series of four yellow triangles was inspired by shark-tooth tattoo designs that are associated with protection.[11] A makakua (literally "eyes of god") commands attention: black and white triangles create a quartered square within a purple circle. This symbol represents primordial ancestral power that governs all. Renderings of petroglyphs—representing the link between the past and the future—make notable appearances at the center and right-hand side of the piece. "The mural draws on the ancient petroglyph fields that are found throughout Hawaiʻi," states Pao, "but [*Kaiwiʻula*] also serves, in its own way, as a new kind of petroglyph field—albeit a two-dimensional one."[12] Here, the ancient and the new are imbricated realities activated within a singular space.

Finally, in the background of the piece are areas of red (ʻula), a color that signifies sacredness in Hawaiian culture. Its use in the mural represents the ancestral land on which the Bishop Museum stands, the blood that was spilled on it during the Battle of Kaiwiʻula, and the blood that ties the global collective—people yearning to see and initiate compassionate change in a world of flux—together. *Kaiwiʻula* simultaneously reaches into the past while being attentive to the concerns of the present. It is not a call to arms as with the battle so long ago, but to social action and awareness.

In his mural *From Islands to Islands, From Stars to Stars* (Fig. 3), Solomon Enos expands on his longtime project of mapping a sweeping history of futuristic Hawaiians, who over many millennia have advanced from journeying from island to island to exploring the stars and the wider multiverse as intergalactic voyagers. In his visual moʻolelo (stories/histories), the artist-storyteller seamlessly merges his Native Hawaiian cultural identity with his deep and abiding interest in science, sci-fi, and fantasy to create his own brand of Indigenous science-fiction visuality. His primary influences include Carl Sagan, Kurt Vonnegut, Robert E. Howard, Frank Herbert, Arthur C. Clark, Ursula K. Le Guin, and the inimitable J. R. R. Tolkien.[13]

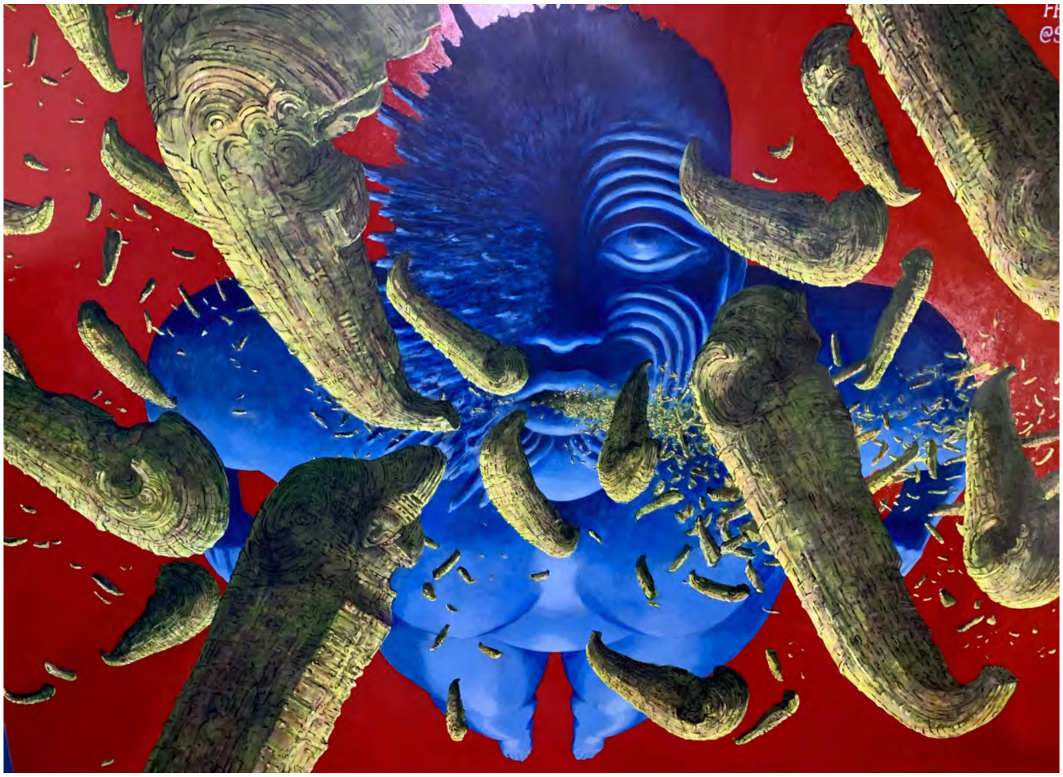

Figure 3. Solomon Enos, *From Islands to Islands, From Stars to Stars*, 2021. Latex house paint on drywall; 12 x 18 ft. Photograph courtesy of the artist

According to Enos, the central cobalt-blue figure in the mural represents one of many Mother Ships that are part of a larger fleet of sister vessels dispatched from the sentient planet Honua, a planet like Earth but where Indigenous cultures did not suffer the fate of colonization and instead thrived untouched.[14] A profusion of green pods containing plants, humans, and other life forms streams from the mouth of the Mother Ship and is released into a bright red extraterrestrial realm where they are destined to seed life into a new world.

From a technical standpoint, the mural is masterfully executed. Enos's use of a complementary color scheme—a simple palette of blue, green, and red—produces a striking visual effect that allows each element in the mural to inhabit its own space while being fully integrated into the whole. The artist also captures the illusion of depth and movement through his strategic placement and rendering of the individual components within the composition. The Mother Ship and the pods appear as animated beings soaring into the viewer's space. Through this ambitious feat of visual alchemy, the viewer shifts from being a passive spectator to an active participant in a celestial seeding event.

Through the visual motifs Enos uses and the themes they activate, he infuses his mural with a Hawaiian cultural sensibility. The release of new life from the Mother Ship's mouth, for instance, bears striking resemblance to the story of Haumea, a principal goddess in the Hawaiian pantheon who births her progeny from her brain and other parts of her body. Further, the theme of life springing forth in abundance from a single progenitor also ties in with the Hawaiian Kumulipo, an eighteenth-century cosmological and genealogical chant that recounts the creation of all living things in sixteen epic wā (epochs). In the Kumulipo, life is generated from the night: "Hanau ka pō/The night gave birth." This kind of parthenogenic delivery of life into the world, whether through sentient beings of the natural world or the gods, is common in creation stories throughout the Pacific.

The deep curvilinear lines on the right side of the Mother Ship's forehead, cheek, and chin are reminiscent of Hawaiian carving traditions of the past, specifically the beautifully sculptured Kū temple images, one of which is in the Bishop Museum's collection. Broadening our analysis to include the wider Pacific, we could also link the facial markings to Aotearoa and the rich tattooing traditions of the Māori.

The pod forms in the mural serve as conduits for the embryonic life force of plant and animal biota that, once seeded on the new world that they have been sent to populate, will give rise to a sustainable system that is in harmony with the multiverse. The crescent form of each seed pod visually echoes the Hawaiian niho palaoa (carved whale tooth), which signifies genealogical connections and chiefly rank. The pods also summon connections to other Pacific ancestral art forms, including the elegantly carved waka huia of Māori culture, used as receptacles for storing treasured heirlooms, as well as the magnificent elongated and arching prows of Tahitian ancestral war canoes. On this last point, the pods recall the familiar Pacific narrative of long-distance voyaging and migration, only these waʻa (canoes) are destined to reach the shores of islands that rise not from an Earth-born ocean but from the depths of an ever-expanding and infinite cosmic sea.

The visual stories that Pao, Taum, and Enos advance in *Kaiwiʻula* and *From Islands to Islands, From Stars to Stars* offer a frame of reference that privileges a Native worldview both grounded in tradition and open to change. Where Pao and Taum reach into the past and translate it into the visual language of the present, Enos reaches for the future, or—perhaps more accurately—many futures. Ultimately, the kind of work these and other Indigenous artists are forging can best be understood—as this paper's opening epigraph attests—as an enduring will to self-define and represent a "version of the truth" that, when articulated through the vehicle of an urban art aesthetic, brings Indigenous pasts, presents, and futures into clear view.

***Mārata Ketekiri Tamaira** is an independent Hawaiʻi-based Māori researcher and writer originally from Aotearoa New Zealand. She traces her genealogy to Ngāti Tūwharetoa of the central North Island, specifically the subtribes Ngāti Turumakina and Ngāti Tūrangitukua. She holds a PhD in gender, media, and cultural studies from the Australian National University and has published widely on contemporary Hawaiian and Pacific art. She has taught Pacific studies and Pacific visual culture at the University of Hawaiʻi at Mānoa and the University of California, Santa Cruz. Her first children's book,* Mother Tree, Daughter Seed: Lessons in Slow Growth, *was published by University of Hawaiʻi Press in October 2025. She lives on Hawaiʻi Island with her husband and daughter.*

Notes

[1] Manulani Aluli Meyer, "Hawaiian Art: A Doorway to Knowing," in *Nā Maka Hou: New Visions*, ed. Momi Cazimero (Honolulu Academy of Arts, 2013), 13.

[2] Marianne Ignace, "Tagging, Rapping, and the Voices of the Ancestors: Expressing Aboriginal Identity Between the Small City and the Rez," in *The Small Cities Book: On the Cultural Future of Small Cities*, ed. W. F. Garett-Petts (New Star Books, 2005), 310.

[3] Daniel Heath Justice, "Seeing (and Reading) Red: Indian Outlaws in the Ivory Tower," in *Indigenizing the Academy: Transforming Scholarship and Empowering Communities*, ed. Devon Abbott Mihesua and Angela Cavender Wilson (University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 109.

[4] In October 2007, police raided several Ngāi Tūhoe (Tūhoe tribe) communities across Aotearoa New Zealand on suspicion of illegal firearms possession and the operation of paramilitary training camps. A number of people were arrested, including Tame Iti. The raids were widely regarded as racially motivated, and in 2014 New Zealand Police Commissioner Mike Bush issued a formal apology to the Ngāi Tūhoe people. For more, see Natalie Mankelow, "Police Apologise to Tuhoe over Raids," Radio New Zealand, August 13, 2014, https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/251999/police-apologise-to-tuhoe-over-raids.

[5] See Peter Brunt et al., *Art in Oceania: A New History* (Yale University Press, 2012).

[6] Brunt et al., 452.

[7] D. Māhealani Dudoit, "Carving a Hawaiian Aesthetic," *ʻŌiwi: A Native Hawaiian Journal* 1, no. 1 (1998): 22.

[8] Carl F.K. Pao, conversation with the author, November 30, 2021.

[9] Carl F. K. Pao, conversation with the author, January 27, 2025.
[10] Carl F. K. Pao, conversation with the author, December 2, 2021.
[11] Carl F. K. Pao, conversation with the author, December 2, 2021.
[12] Carl F. K. Pao, conversation with the author, November 30, 2021.
[13] A. Marata Tamaira, "Frames and Counterframes: Envisioning Contemporary Kanaka Maoli Art in Hawaiʻi." PhD diss., Australian National University, 2015.
[14] Solomon Enos, conversation with the author, November 2, 2021.

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ANDRE PEREZ and J. KĒHAULANI KAUANUI

“Our Gallery is the Heiau”: A Discussion of the Revitalization of Hawaiian Wood Carving

Abstract

This dialogue between Andre Perez and J. Kēhaulani Kauanui explores the recent revitalization of Hawaiian wood carving through two recent projects Perez had a leadership role in. Perez is founder and project director of Hui Kālai Kiʻi o Kūpāʻaikeʻe, a carving apprenticeship program based in Waiawa, Oʻahu, Hawaiʻi. In 2025, he co-curated, with Hawaiian artist Kaili Chun, the exhibition Hoʻokāhi ka ʻIlau Like Ana—Wield the Paddles Together *at Gallery ʻIolani at Windward Community College. For the show, Perez and Chun selected canoe paddles made in the Pacific carving village that Perez organized for the 13th Festival of Pacific Arts and Culture (FestPAC) in 2024. In the FestPAC carving village, hosted by Bishop Museum, master carvers from various Pacific nations created large wooden canoe-steering paddles (hoe uli). In this discussion, Perez and Kauanui cover a range of issues related to the traditional Hawaiian practice of carving, including the cultural politics of Indigenous revitalization.*

Keywords: *Hawaiʻi, contemporary art, carving, kiʻi, tiki, art activism, voyaging culture, Pacific Islands, sculpture*

In March 2025, J. Kēhaulani Kauanui interviewed cultural practitioner and activist Andre Perez, sparked by Kauanui’s experience at the opening of *Hoʻokāhi ka ʻIlau Like Ana—Wield the Paddles Together* (January 18–March 7, 2025), an exhibition Perez co-curated at Gallery ʻIolani at Windward Community College with Hawaiian artist Kaili Chun. For the exhibition, Perez and Chun selected canoe paddles made in the Pacific carving village at the 13th Festival of Pacific Arts and Culture (FestPAC) during the summer of 2024. In the carving village, hosted by Bishop Museum, carvers from various Pacific nations created large wooden canoe-steering paddles (hoe uli). The Gallery ʻIolani exhibition featured work by carvers from Hawaiʻi, Aotearoa, American Sāmoa, Sāmoa, Tonga, Fiji, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, French Polynesia, Guam, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Rapa Nui, Solomon Islands, Taiwan, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu.

Kauanui spoke with Perez about how both the FestPAC project and the exhibition emerged from his work as founder and project director of Hui Kālai Kiʻi o Kūpāʻaikeʻe, a carving apprenticeship program inspired by his master's degree work in Hawaiian studies at the University of Hawaiʻi at Mānoa.

J. Kēhaulani Kauanui (JKK): *I'd like to start by asking how Hui Kālai Kiʻi o Kūpāʻaikeʻe, the carving revitalization project you founded, and the exhibition at Gallery ʻIolani fit within the broader field of your work?*

Andre Perez (AP): Even before I went to college, Hawaiian activist and scholar Kaleikoa Kaʻeo gave me a lot of books about liberation politics to read, so by the time I started my graduate program, I was becoming acutely aware of cultural appropriation and issues of race and power.

I focused my master's studies on Hawaiian carving traditions because I recognized that Hawaiian kiʻi (tiki) were greatly appropriated. For instance, the tiki movement of the 1960s yielded many tiki bars in California and many other parts of the United States. Tiki are ubiquitous even here in Hawaiʻi—at hotels, Sea Life Park (in Waimānalo, Oʻahu), the Kauaʻi Airport, and elsewhere. They are made of a variety of materials including fiberglass, and some are crudely carved. I wanted to help reclaim the knowledge of kiʻi-making, use, and function.

In the process of my graduate research, I met one of the most famous, accomplished, skilled, and respected Māori carvers of our time—Lyonel Grant—and in our first conversation about carving he offered to teach if I rounded up some students. I took him up on his offer because (and I use this analogy a lot) it was like Bruce Lee offering to teach you martial arts. I recognized that it was a huge opportunity, and I took it seriously.

Part of my theory around what is necessary in order for things to change, for ideas to take hold, is grounded in the ceremonial concept of hānaipū, meaning everyone is fed (it's not individualistic), which is a Hawaiian value. I don't want to just feed myself because that would be kind of egocentric and selfish—if I wanted to learn carving, and I just taught myself, there'd only be one more carver. As part of my theory of change, my [carving] practice aims to be inclusive—hānaipū—to feed everyone and create opportunities for more than just myself.

JKK: *What drew you to kiʻi?*

AP: Traditionally the kiʻi is an image of a Hawaiian ancestral god. If you pay attention, you will see poorly carved kiʻi in many places across the United States. It is based on popular (non-Indigenous) and commodified renditions of different Hawaiian gods. I wanted to address this appropriation, and I knew, from surveying the community, that carving was an at-risk practice. I figured we should do something about that. Elder Sam Kaʻai had been my mentor and teacher when I lived on Maui (I used to live down the road from him). He's been a big influence on my understanding of the importance of reclaiming carving knowledge while dispelling the fear of kiʻi in our communities. By reclaiming that knowledge and embracing it, we dispel that Christian colonial effect and enhance the relationship between kānaka (people), akua (deities), and ʻāina (land).

I've learned from kumu Kekuhi Kealiʻikanakaʻole[1] that kiʻi are representations of the elements, which help us understand the relationship between the forest and the water, the wind and the rain, and the ocean. We don't have many traditional Hawaiian carvers practicing, and back then, while I was in graduate school (2014–2018) there were no venues to go and learn. If you looked hard enough, you could find kapa (cloth typically made from the inner bast of wauke, paper mulberry) and places to learn how to weave hala (pandanus leaves), but it was very difficult to find kiʻi carving-learning opportunities. My impetus [to learn] was based on creating opportunity for my community to learn and reclaim this knowledge, and, of course, it helped to have a community of cultural practitioners and activists for more than twenty years. All of this contributed to my wanting to safeguard what I saw as a practice at risk of disappearing entirely.

I was also inspired by a quote, articulated by Romanian philosopher Emil M. Cioran: when a people's gods are destroyed, their civilization is destroyed. By this measure, colonialism can be understood as successful when colonizers achieve total dominance by eliminating Indigenous spiritual traditions.[2] This idea resonated with me; I want my work to be disruptive of colonialism and challenge the colonial imposition of Christianity. We have our own gods and our own understandings. Because of this, in the past I have tried to include kiʻi into activism. For instance, at Red Hill (a military fuel-storage unit on the island of Oʻahu), a group of us activists, educators, attorneys, culture keepers and youth who organized into a group called Kaʻohewai put the kiʻi Kaneikawaiola, the god of water and all forms of life, in front of the US Pacific Fleet command in response to the Navy's contamination of the aquifer there (Figs. 1–2).[3] I think it's important and meaningful to community to have a visual representation of the gods present. That way, we can have that spiritual, emotional support and courage through our ancestral connections.

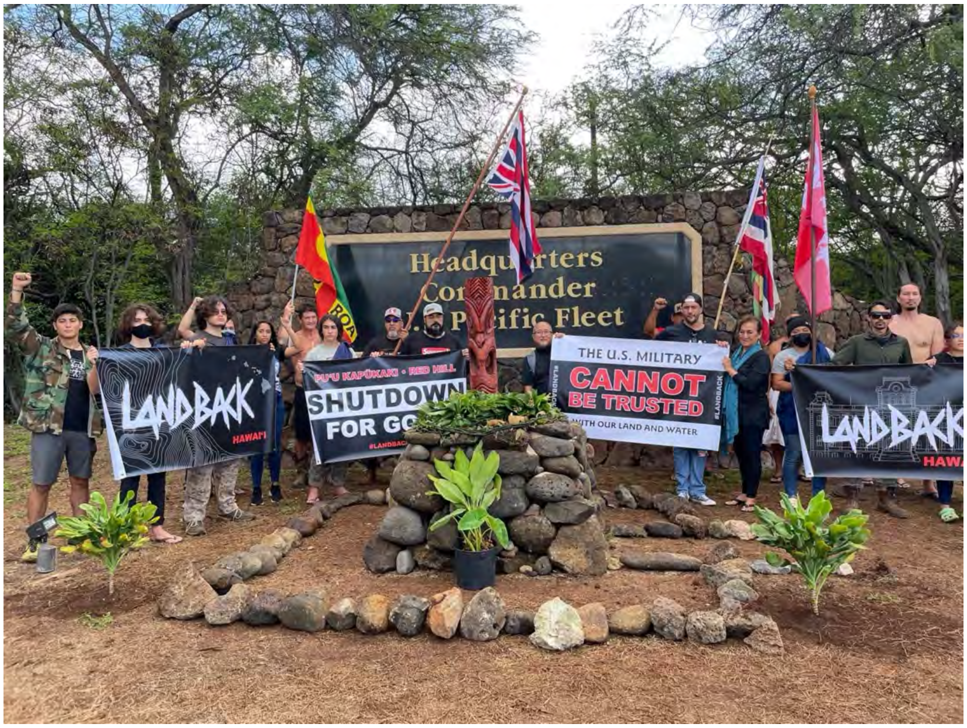
Headquarters
Commander
U.S. Pacific Fleet
LANDBACK
HAWAI'I
PU'U KAPŪKAKI • RED HILL
SHUTDOWN
FOR GO
THE U.S. MILITARY
CANNOT
BE TRUSTED
WITH OUR LAND AND WATER
LANDBACK
HAWA

Figure 1. The kiʻi Kaneikawaiola (center) is included in community activism and resistance against the United States Navy's contamination of an aquifer at the Red Hill Underground Fuel Storage Facility, Halawa, Oʻahu, December 2021. Photograph courtesy of Andre Perez

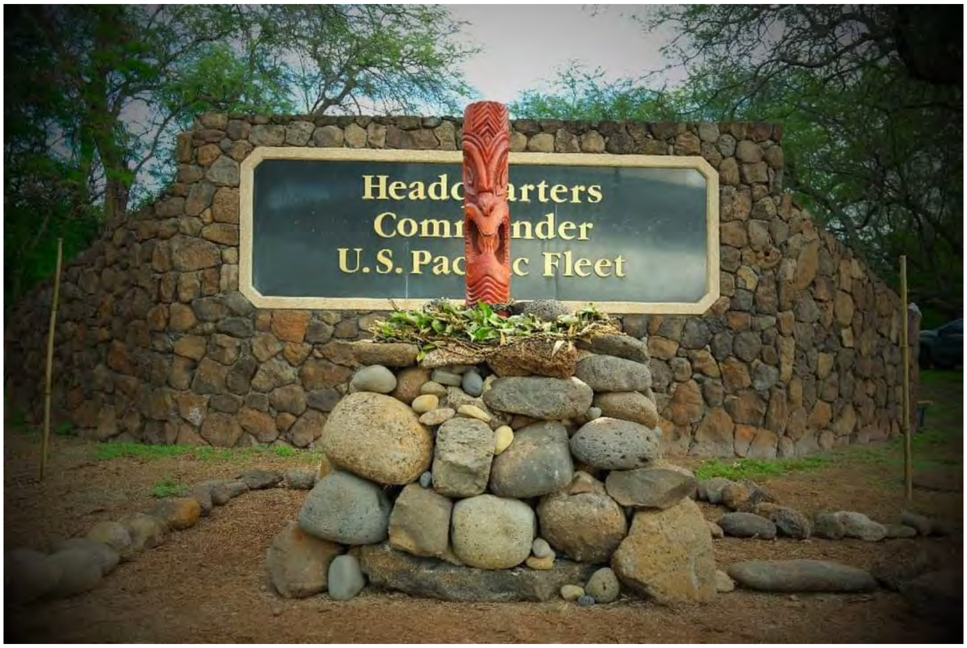
Headquarters
Commander
U.S. Pacific Fleet

Figure 2. A koʻa (shrine) dedicated to the Hawaiian god Kāne (god of fresh water, sunlight, and all forms of life) erected at the entrance to Pacific Fleet Command Headquarters, Halawa, Oʻahu, December 2021. This Hawaiian-constructed koʻa catalyzed community resistance and opposition to the US Navy's leaking Red Hill Underground Fuel Storage Facility at Halawa, Oʻahu. Photograph courtesy of Andre Perez

JKK: *That’s powerful. Tell me more about the formation of the carving apprenticeship Hui Kālai Kiʻi o Kūpaʻaikeʻē.*

AP: I organized a carving hui (group) to learn and, in doing so, help revitalize the practice and took a bunch of Hawaiian brothers along with me for the ride. We created Hui Kālai Kiʻi o Kūpaʻaikeʻē in 2016 on the north shore of Kauaʻi in Waipā. Kūpaʻaikeʻē is the god of carving canoes, but ultimately, he’s the god of the adze. I chose to include his name to really ground us in the practice by highlighting the tool. During our first gathering, we camped and held a workshop. In the evenings, I facilitated discussions about not letting this gathering just be a one-off but creating a hui with the goal of making it an ongoing practice. I’ve always taken a very careful approach—asserting that we want to contribute to revitalization but knowing that we’re not going to revitalize it all by ourselves. It’s going to take generations, but my hope is that our contribution will help to establish a good or strong starting point and a foundation for revitalization.

I have also worked toward that goal with my written research. At the University of Hawaiʻi at Mānoa, my master’s program included the option of producing a thesis. My research methodology was centered on ethnography as well as archival research, oral interviews, and eventually participatory action research (also known in Hawaiʻi as ma ka hana ka ʻike). When I formed the hui, we started having training workshops. One of the important things for me was that all the guys that I selected were outside the same old circle of Hawaiian artists who already had access to resources, venues and teachers. I wanted to get the grassroots brothers who didn’t have access, because they were a whole new demographic. I wanted to expand the circle and get new folks—particularly those who are marginalized—involved.

When I recruited our first round of participants, about three-quarters of our guys were unemployed from rural areas. A lot of our students didn’t have jobs or were struggling and would likely not be able to afford the required tools. My number one principle for the hui was that we are revitalizing and safeguarding a sacred practice, and I took issue with charging people money for that. Our community shouldn’t have to pay money to buy back and relearn a sacred practice. I stepped into the kuleana (responsibility) of finding the resources and funds so that our students don’t have to pay. It’s now my job to find funding for travel, for tools, for the training, for the teachers that we pay, for the venue, for the food—for everything. I didn’t want my community to have to pay money to relearn our sacred practices.

We’re really building out, toward a legitimate institution of learning. We’ve been carving under tents for nine years, and we’re now working with an architect to build a dedicated carving space at the farm here at Hanakēhau. We’re in the process of fundraising to build a real home—a place to keep all our tools and equipment and to do training.

Because we have an organized team and resources, we were asked to host the carving village for the 13th Festival of Pacific Arts and Culture (FestPAC). We have a good supply of tools and a tool trailer, etc., so we had the capacity.

JKK: *Would you share more about the process of establishing the carving village for FestPAC?*

AP: Back in 2020, Aunty Vicky Holt Takamine asked if I would help host the carving workshops and demonstrations at FestPAC, and I said, of course, I’d love to—that’s my kuleana as an organizer and a guy who has stepped into uplifting carving. The 2020 FestPAC was impacted by COVID-19 and delayed four years. In a way, that alleviated a budget problem; it gave the festival organizers extra time to organize and fundraise. I learned that if you're going to host the carvers, you must provide the wood, and the delay also gave me time to round up the wood.

My team and I wanted the FestPAC carving component to be completely different. We wanted to center the carvers *as practitioners,* to give them space and visibility, and to acknowledge them as the high-level artists that they are. Also, I wanted to organize the FestPAC carving component in a different way than how it had been done in the past. I wanted all the carvers to be together, not doing short two-hour demonstrations in their respective hale (houses): the Sāmoan hale, the Hawaiian hale, the Māori hale, the Tongan hale, for instance. I know carving—it takes time, it’s labor intensive, it’s a long process. I wanted the carvers to keep carving throughout the whole festival. I was successful in getting the festival organizers to support my vision of having all participating artists work continuously together for the full ten days at Bishop Museum. The festival organizers trusted me to do it the way I wanted. I asked Bishop Museum if we could host it there because they had security (it’s fenced off with a gate, which would provide greater security for our tools). We had access to the museum so we could look at older carvings from across the Pacific for inspiration. And there was an additional little hale, a little cottage, where we could accommodate kupuna (elders) like Sam Kaʻai, who I mentioned earlier. Bishop Museum was very gracious; I didn’t encounter a single barrier. They supported everything that the carvers needed. When we ran into logistical problems that the FestPAC organizers couldn't solve, museum staff stepped in to help solve them. I should note that at the time, the museum was under Hawaiian leadership, and it was noticeable; I had an easy time working with Bishop and we created a carving village. Out of the twenty-eight nations invited to FestPAC, eighteen came with carvers. And from those eighteen nations, we hosted about seventy carvers.

For me, the most important thing about FestPAC was the pilina (relationship-building). We can always carve, but when are we going to ever be around seventy other carvers? Because I wanted to take advantage of that opportunity, we created a space for carvers to sleep at the venue so we could have evening programming, which had never been done. Every evening during FestPAC, we had an agenda where we had presentations, videos, discussions, tool-sharing, and demonstrations of different kinds of tools. We considered the innovations of carving today and the tensions around authenticity, tradition, and innovation. And we carved for ten days. It was great.

JKK: *How did you decide on paddles as the center of the carving project for the festival?*

AP: The FestPAC organizers asked me to come up with a theme. It was a bit of a struggle to think of a common carving theme for twenty-eight nations and took me a few days to process. I had to ask, what do we have in common? Then the light went on: *We're all from Moananuiākea*. *We're all sea people, we're all canoe people, people of the ocean*. In my thought process, the paddles represent our collective agency and self-determination—that as people of the Pacific, sea-going people, we are navigating our collective futures together. That's what that paddle means, our self-determination in this crazy colonial world. We've still got the paddle in the water, and we're choosing our destinations—that's the symbolism behind the paddle. It is tied to the scholarship in Epeli Hauʻofa's pathbreaking essay "Our Sea of Islands." The ocean is not a barrier for us; the ocean is a bridge. The ocean is what connects us. The ocean is how we get to where we need to go.

I think it was the first time in FestPAC history that there was a collection of carved cultural material going on exhibit, so I wanted to give it context and meaning. I thought of the hoe uli, the large-scale steering paddle—the kind of paddle that you would use to steer Hōkūleʻa (a double-hulled voyaging canoe launched in 1975 by the Polynesian Voyaging Society as part of the Hawaiian renaissance movement). A hoe uli would be a carving theme that people would understand. Also, the large-scale steering paddle could be more decorative and enable more storytelling than a solely functional paddle (Fig. 3).

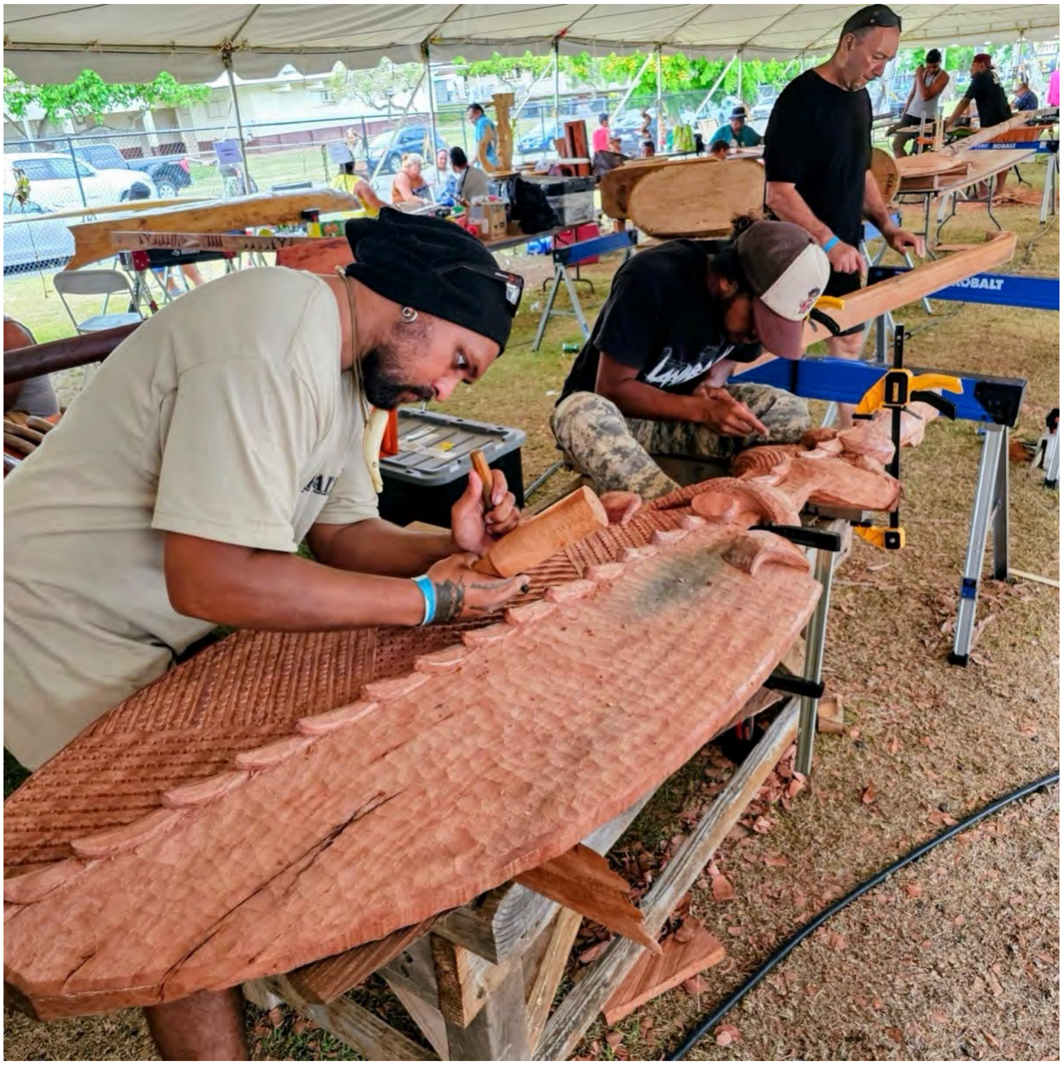

Figure 3. Members of Hui Kālai Kiʻi O Kūpāʻaikeʻe carving a hoe uli (canoe-steering paddle) at the Festival of Pacific Arts, Bishop Museum, Honolulu, Hawaiʻi, June 2024. Photo courtesy of Andre Perez

Because this was such a large-scale project, we had to provide large pieces of wood that were difficult to come by. In our group, we don't cut down trees for carving; we only use repurposed recycled trees. It's our principle. For me, it's tied to my history working in conservation on the island of Kahoʻolawe, where I helped to plant about 100,000 native plants and trees over the course of seven years. I'm not into chopping down native trees. Luckily, with the metro being built, I was able to negotiate with Honolulu Area Rail Transit for some large logs that they were already going to remove. These logs ended up being one-hundred-year-old kamani (*Calophyllum inophyllum*) that we milled into slabs for the blades of the paddles. And then, from another wood miller friend on the Big Island, I ordered 4 x 4 x 12-inch blanks of ʻōhiʻa (*Metrosideros polymorpha*) for the shafts of the paddles. When the carving teams arrived at Bishop Museum, each delegation got a slab that was four inches thick and about 24 x 40 inches, along with the 4 x 4 x 12-inch piece for the paddle shaft. We then created a diagram—a spec sheet that showed the dimensions of the paddle. The challenge was to join the shaft to the blade and carve it in your own cultural aesthetic. The carvers immediately understood the task and loved it. They hit the ground running: chainsaws, power tools, chisels, adzes—chips were flying! It was organized chaos.

JKK: *What sort of responses did you encounter regarding the festival village?*

AP: What mattered most was the feedback from the carvers themselves, some of whom have been going to festivals since the late 1970s and early 1980s. They said that at the end of the day it was the best FestPAC they had ever been to. One carver said it was the first time they felt centered as a practitioner in their own space and their own time; this was the first time they had gotten to carve for the entire duration of the festival. And, because the amount of wood we were able to provide was ample, some carvers made three or four carvings beyond the paddle. It was awesome.

JKK: *If I can circle back to your choice of having the artisans carve paddles, I think that idea was ingenious, especially because so many Pacific nations are Christianized. Paddles are secular, so they can serve as a unifying force across Oceania in a way that kiʻi carving can't.*

AP: Right, plus, there are some Pacific nations that don't carve kiʻi and others that don't carve kiʻi anymore. When I was talking with one of the carvers from Sāmoa, with whom I built a strong relationship, he said, "Oh, we don't have three-dimensional images. I wish we had images of these kinds of ancestral gods." What they do have in terms of visual forms is often labeled as "handicraft," such as the carving of utensils, bowls, and other functional items used for food, or the Tokotoko, the talking sticks. With the paddles, they had a lot of leeway in terms of creating cultural aesthetics, motifs, and patterns, along with the shape of the blade (Fig. 4).

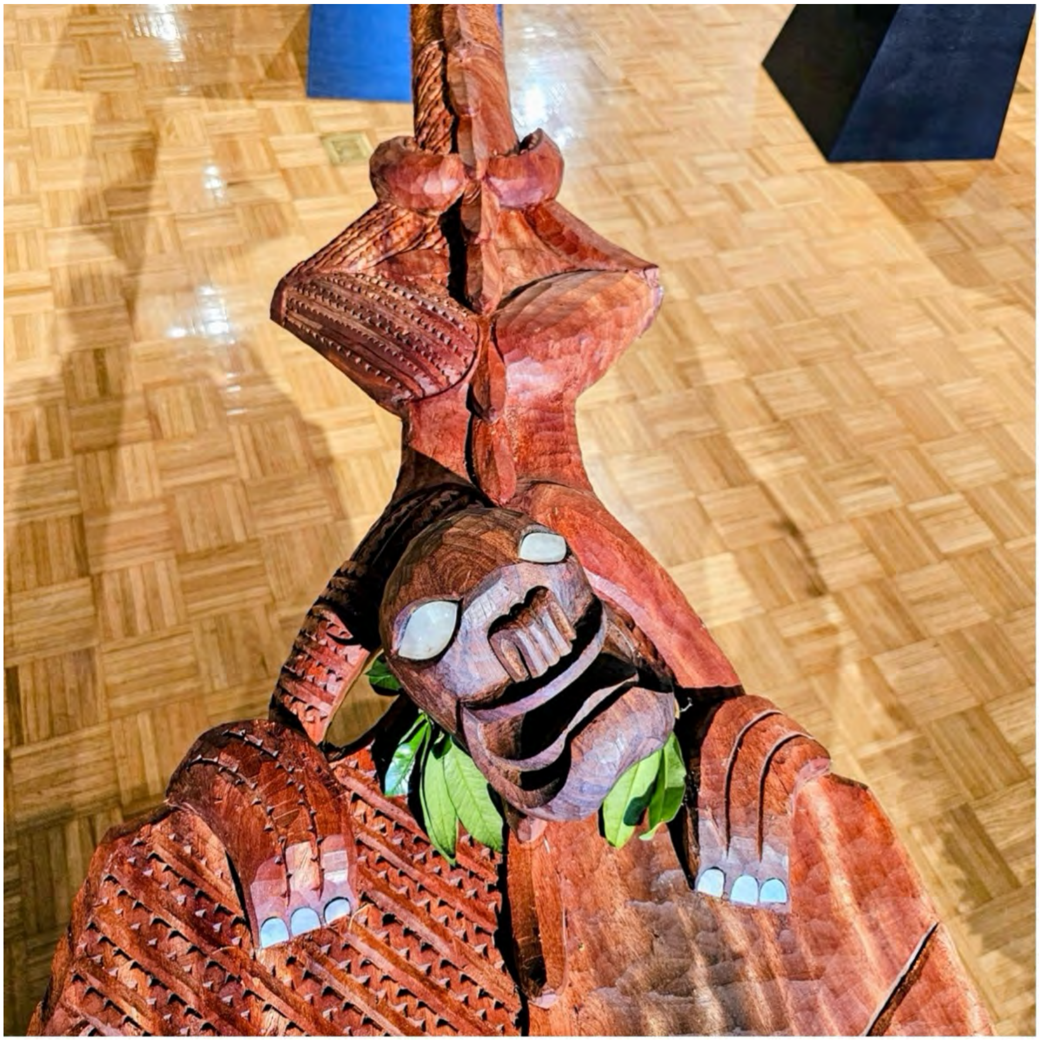

Figure 4. Hui Kālai Kiʻi O Kūpāʻaikeʻe, Hoe Uli (canoe-steering paddle) carved for the Festival of Pacific Arts, Honolulu, Hawaiʻi, 2024. Ohiʻa wood (shaft) and kamani wood (blade); 15 x 2 ft (at widest part of the blade). Installation view in *Hoʻokāhi ka ʻIlau Like Ana—Wield the Paddles Together*, ʻIolani Gallery, Windward Community College, Oʻahu, 2025. Photograph courtesy of Andre Perez

JKK: *It's powerful that you were able to marshal the carvings from the festival to the exhibition at Gallery ʻIolani at Windward Community College. The works are beautiful, and I think you and Kaili Chun did an excellent job curating the show. The pieces were effectively complemented with the photographs by Kapulani Landgraf of them in the carving village. How was the show received?*

AP: I think a lot of people appreciated it. The exhibition was great—I went five or six times and did some talks. My sense is that people were amazed. The community had never seen a carving collection like that before in Hawaiʻi. But honestly, art exhibits aren't that important to us. I started the hui for us to be a traditional carving hui of practitioners in service to community needs. Our gallery is the heiau (temple mount), and our exhibition is in the hands of the practitioners. And, of course, kiʻi don't belong in art galleries. They have no place in there. Although, we may do our own hui sharing kiʻi on our terms, in our space.

JKK: *What's next for the carvings?*

AP: Well, the paddles are big and heavy—they are fifteen- to sixteen-foot paddles that weigh anywhere from fifty to seventy pounds. I didn't want to be responsible for managing them since we have no place to put them, so we gave them to Kamehameha Schools Kapālama for their Kaʻiwakīloumoku building. It functions as a Moananuiākea (Great Oceania) gathering center, for when Pacific guests come to Hawaiʻi, and is a much better placement option than putting them in storage where no one will see them. Hundreds of Hawaiian students will be able to view the paddles and hopefully be inspired by them.

* J. Kēhaulani Kauanui wishes to thank the peer-reviewers and journal editors for their detailed feedback. Mahalo also to both Julia Noriega and Katie Meyer for assistance with transcription.

***Andre Perez** is a community organizer, activist, and cultural practitioner from Koloa, Kauaʻi, whose work focuses on Hawaiian sovereignty, self-determination, and land and water defense. From 1998 to 2005 he assisted with the implementation of Kahoʻolawe's environmental restoration plan, which incorporated Hawaiian cultural-healing approaches. In 2010, he co-founded Hanakēhau Learning Farm, and in 2016, he founded Hui Kālai Kiʻi o Kūpāʻaikeʻe, a Hawaiian carving practitioner apprenticeship for which he serves as project director. In 2017, he co-founded Hawaiʻi Unity and Liberation Institute (HULI). Additionally, Perez was an organizer and leader for Puʻuhonua o Puʻuhuluhulu, the occupation camp on Maunakea. He is co-founder of Koʻihonua, a not-for-profit organization dedicated to reclaiming and restoring Hawaiian lands, providing the means and resources for Hawaiians to engage in traditional practices by creating*

Hawaiian cultural space. In 2021, he was named a Changemaker Fellow by the NDN Collective, recognizing his work toward cultural preservation and social and environmental justice.

***J. Kēhaulani Kauanui** is a budding art curator, seasoned radio producer, and established activist-scholar who situates her work in the fields of 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 at the Effron Center for the Study of America, Princeton University. Kauanui is the author of two monographs:* Hawaiian Blood *(Duke University Press, 2008) and* Paradoxes of Hawaiian Sovereignty: Land, Sex, and the Colonial Politics of State Nationalism *(Duke University Press, 2018). She also edited* Speaking of Indigenous Politics: Conversations with Activists, Scholars, and Tribal Leaders *(University of Minnesota Press, 2018) and numerous guest-edited journals. She is one of the six co-founders of the Native American and Indigenous Studies Association (founded in 2008) and is the recipient of the 2022 American Indian/Indigenous History Lifetime Achievement Award by the Western History Association.*

Notes

[1] Kekuhi Kealiʻikanakaʻole was trained in the tradition of Hula ʻAihaʻa and Hula Pele and named for her grandmother—renowned dancer, chanter, teacher, and kumu hula Edith Kekuhi Kanakaʻole.

[2] Emile M. Cioran, *The New Gods*, trans. Richard Howard (University of Chicago Press, 2013), 7.

[3] The focus of our activist campaign was to shut down the Redhill fuel facility that was leaking and contaminating the Oʻahu aquifer making hundreds of people sick with carbon poisoning. The community eventually won, and the fuel facility was shut down.

PACIFIC ARTS
Journal of the Pacific Arts Association

MAGGIE WANDER

Book Review: *Transformative Currents: Art and Action in the Pacific Ocean,* edited by Cassandra Coblentz

Abstract

Book review: Cassandra Coblentz, editor, Transformative Currents: Art and Action in the Pacific Ocean*. X Artists' Books and Oceanside Museum of Art, 2024. ISBN: 9798990698581. 176 pages*, *illustrations (chiefly color), maps. Hardcover, US$45.*

Keywords: *Pacific Ocean, contemporary art, pollution, extraction, coastal environment, Blue Humanities, Indigenous artists, exhibition*

Transformative Currents: Art and Action in the Pacific Ocean was published to accompany the exhibition of the same name that showed at three venues in Southern California from August 17, 2024, to February 9, 2025.[1] The book includes short essays on each of the artists featured in the exhibition, longer thematic essays by the curatorial team and select scholars, and short excerpts from a symposium that took place at the Orange County Museum of Art in Costa Mesa, California in conjunction with the exhibition. The publication demonstrates the extensive research that went into the exhibition—an aspect of curatorial practice that is often less visible to audiences—and offers an excellent glimpse into the dialogues, partnerships, and research agendas that characterize many recent exhibitions that take an interdisciplinary approach to social justice, environmental issues, and contemporary art.

The acknowledgments and introductory essay by lead curator Cassandra Coblentz situate the project in this larger context, citing the exhibition and publication *Tidalectics: Imagining an Oceanic Worldview through Art and Science* (curated and edited by Stefanie Hessler) as one inspiration (11), along with the work of climate scientists, community organizers, and environmental studies scholars whom Coblentz met in the lead-up to the project. She specifically notes the influential work of Elizabeth M. DeLoughrey, Rachel Carson, and Kamau Brathwaite for their thinking on tides and currents as metaphors for the fluid connections across oceanic time and space (19). Riffing on these ideas, Coblentz identifies four "currents" to serve as an organizing framework for the exhibition: research methodologies, reciprocity and responsibility with the more-than-human, community collaboration to produce action, and "futuring" as a verb that brings past practices into the present and speculative future. These currents are briefly explored in special inserts throughout the book that capture moments from the symposium. Some of the longer essays exemplify them as well, however they become much more concrete in the latter half of the book when the specific artworks are discussed. One exception is the fourth current, futuring, which remains too abstract throughout the book—save for one artist's project (Marcos Lutyens's *Platform Theta*, 2024, which imagines future uses for decommissioned oil rigs).

Assistant curator Ziying Duan contributes an essay that outlines the first current, focusing on the art-research methodology that characterizes much of the work selected for the exhibition. As Duan demonstrates, the curatorial team was drawn to projects that work *with* communities, rather than make art *about* them. While Duan's essay mostly discusses artists who did not appear in the exhibition, an emphasis on collaborative research is apparent in the short essays about each artist at the end of the book. For instance, Irwan Ahmett & Tita Salina's installation grew out of their long-term collaboration with fishing communities in Jakarta (69); Jake and Martha Atienza (as the collective DAKOgamay) featured footage of youth groups in Bantayan Islands, Philippines, whom they support through their organization GOODLand (77); and Alex Monteith and Maree Sheehan collaborated with Te Kāhui o Taranaki Takutai Kaitiaki (coastal custodians from Taranaki Iwi in Aotearoa New Zealand) to make their video about aquatic life choked by polluted estuaries on the Taranaki coast (135).

Throughout the text and artworks, there is an emphasis on coastal communities—understandable given the project's focus on the ocean rather than inland freshwater issues that also plague the region. The project is unabashedly coming from a Southern California perspective, and I appreciated the publication's insistence that "the Pacific Ocean" *includes* places in California, South and Central America, and Alaska. Assistant curator Aaron Katzeman offers a refreshing and much-needed discussion of the way California should be considered the "Eastern Pacific" rather than the "edge of Western Civilization" (25).[2] His argument could be further reinforced with the fact that San Diego, Los Angeles, and the Bay Area are home to a large Pacific Islander diaspora, as well as the legacy of a now-legendary cohort of Pacific thinkers who emerged from UC Santa Cruz's History of Consciousness program.[3]

Julie Decker's excerpted remarks from the symposium, which discuss the ocean's central role for Tlingit communities in Alaska, further push a hemispheric approach to what is included in the cultural region called "the Pacific" (or "Oceania," "Moana," etc.) (128). Artworks in the exhibition that advocate for an expansive definition of "the Pacific" include Enrique Ramírez's project about the impact of large-scale salmon farming on the glacial coastline of Patagonia, Chile, as well as the projects by Ana Andrade and Fran Siegel that deal with coastal ecosystems across the US–Mexico border. These examples reinforce what Coblentz asserts in the introduction: the Pacific Ocean is "a shared space" that necessitates looking "beyond historically enforced cultural barriers" and "across cultures not often considered in relation to one another" (19).

This expansive and interconnected vision of the Pacific becomes clearer in the artist features, where similar ecological issues are addressed in different locations, demonstrating how extractive "currents" flow from one place to the next. A great example is the *Kai-Hai* project (2021–ongoing) by Tiare Ribeaux and Qianqian Ye, which consists of digital and 3D-printed models of various goddess/goddexx figures that give form to East Asian and Polynesian stories of environmental change. By connecting these "transpacific stories, oral histories, legends, and folkore," Katzeman explains in his exegesis, *Kai-Hai* "generate[s] new possibilities for oceanic cultural connection" (143).

By destabilizing the discursive, geopolitical barriers that imperial powers have violently imposed on the Pacific region—resulting in the perceived separation between Oceania and the Western coasts of North and South America—this volume participates in a justice-oriented approach to ecological issues. Histories of environmental racism lurk in the background of much of this book, coming to the fore in two invited essays. Angela Mooney D'Arcy and Charles Sepulveda's contribution is a reprint of their 2021 essay "The Oil Spill in California Lends Urgency to Demand for Indigenous Land Stewards," first printed in *Truthout*.[4] The opinion piece situates the 2021 oil spill by Amplify Energy off the coast of Orange County, California, within a longer history of environmental injustice against Acjachemen and Tongva peoples. Citing recent conservation projects announced by California Governor Gavin Newsom (such as the 30x30 Initiative and the Native Ancestral Lands Policy),[5] the authors demand that land rematriation must be part of *any* climate action plan (47).

The second invited essay, by environmental humanities scholar Elizabeth M. DeLoughrey, also implicates violent histories of extraction, pollution, and militarism in current ecological crises, but does so through a more theoretical exploration of an "oceanic imaginary": "an ontological becoming in which we shed our individualism and anthropocentrism and engage with our more-than-human relatives" (52). Centering the notion of embodiment, DeLoughrey discusses how

Pacific-based artists and writers remind us that the material, metaphorical, and multi-scalar embodiment through which this engagement with the nonhuman occurs goes both ways: "the ocean is not just contained in our human blood," as Teresia Teaiwa once said, or as the Tongan artist Lingikoni Vakaʻuta visualizes in their painting *Noʻo ʻAnga* (1999), but "human extractivism and pollution are rendering the ocean itself as anthropogenic" (53). In a "fluid exchange" with oceanic life, radiation and toxic waste is not only polluting the ocean—it is also polluting human and nonhuman bodies (58). DeLoughrey points out that artists such as Ralph Hotere and Brett Graham remind us that not all bodies are equal or visible in this notion of embodiment, however. DeLoughrey's analysis of Hotere's *Black Rainbow* (1986) and Graham's *Bravo Bikini* (1996) focuses on the way darkness and lightness are used as commentary on how US nuclear testing ruptured oceanic space and time, obscuring and "whiting out" the violence against Indigenous bodies and lands (including the nonhuman) (54–55). DeLoughrey brings this context into conversation with more recent threats including the dumping of DDT, a toxic water-insoluble insecticide, off California's southern coast and deep-sea mining in the Clarion-Cipperton Zone. Responding to such issues, artists such as Rebeca Méndez and Hefrani Barnes "creat[e] an undersea imaginary centered on stewardship, the sacred, and imagining the sea around and in us" (59).

DeLoughrey's essay elaborates the second "current" swirling through the exhibition—reciprocity with the more-than-human—but also demonstrates, like Duan's contribution, that critical artistic approaches to ecological violence in the Pacific Ocean expand beyond the works in this exhibition. For this reason, the volume will remain useful as these issues, art practices, and actions are increasingly urgent.

***Maggie Wander** is a settler American of European descent and assistant professor in art and art history at Santa Clara University. She received her PhD in visual studies from the University of California–Santa Cruz in 2024. Her research focuses on contemporary art in Oceania engaging with the intersections of colonialism and climate change. She was previously a senior research associate at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and has served as the co-executive editor of* Pacific Arts*, the journal of the Pacific Arts Association, since 2020.*

Notes

[1] Part of Getty's PST ART: *Art and Science Collide* initiative, *Transformative Currents* showed at three Southern California venues: Oceanside Museum of Art in Oceanside; Orange County Museum of Art, Costa Mesa; and Crystal Cove Conservancy, Newport Beach. See "Past Exhibition: *Transformative Currents: Art and Action in the Pacific Ocean*," *PST ART*, https://pst.art/en/exhibitions/transformative-currents-art-and-action-in-the-pacific-ocean. For more information about the exhibition see Aaron Katzeman, this volume.

[2] Katzeman's essay is reproduced in this volume (pp. 35–47).

[3] See Vicente M. Diaz and J. Kēhaulani Kauanui, "Native Pacific Cultural Studies on the Edge," *The Contemporary Pacific* 13, no. 2 (2001): 315–42; and James Clifford and Stacy L. Kamehiro, "From the Edge through the Vā: Introduction to 'Pacific Island Worlds: Oceanic Dis/Positions,'" *Pacific Arts*, 22, no. 1 (2022): 4–19.

[4] Charles Sepulveda and Angela Mooney D'Arcy, "The Oil Spill in California Lends Urgency to Demand for Indigenous Land Stewards," *Truthout*, October 17, 2021. https://truthout.org/articles/the-oil-spill-in-california-lends-urgency-to-demand-for-indigenous-land-stewards/.

[5] For more on the 30x30 California initiative, see https://www.californian-ature.ca.gov/. California's Native American Ancestral Lands Policy of September, 2020 can be found at https://www.gov.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/9.25.20-Native-Ancestral-Lands-Policy.pdf.

PACIFIC ARTS
Journal of the Pacific Arts Association

FANNY WONU VEYS

Book Review: *Toi Te Mana: An Indigenous History of Māori Art*, by Deirdre Brown and Ngarino Ellis with Jonathan Mane-Wheoki

Abstract

Book review: Deirdre Brown and Ngarino Ellis, with Jonathan Mane-Wheoki, Toi Te Mana: An Indigenous History of Māori Art*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2025. ISBN-13: 978-0-226-83962-2, ISBN-10: 0-226-83962-1, xii+604 pages, 584 color illustrations, notes, references, index. Cloth US$55.*

Keywords: *Māori art, Māori artists, Aotearoa New Zealand, Indigenous art history, whakapapa, taonga, carving, textiles, architecture, rock art, body adornment, drawing, ceramics, contemporary art, film, gender, museums, exhibitions, Christian missions, colonialism*

When I was asked to write a book review of *Toi Te Mana*, I awaited the arrival of the publication with great expectation. That anticipation proved fully justified, for the book rewards both the eye and the intellect. As an object, it is imposing: more than six centimeters thick, bound in deep red cloth with beautiful white embossed lettering. Its material presence alone signals ambition. Inside, over 500 full-color images have been reproduced with the utmost care, providing a lavish visual survey of Māori arts. Just flipping through the pages is a feast for the eyes.

Co-authored by Deirdre Brown and Ngarino Ellis, with the late Jonathan Mane-Wheoki having been integral to the project from its inception, *Toi Te Mana* sets out to offer the first Indigenous art history of Māori art. This ambition is not merely stated but enacted throughout the volume. The authors have placed Māori concepts, values, genealogies, and social worlds at the center of every discussion. In doing so, they decisively challenge entrenched art-historical frameworks that have long privileged Western categories such as form, style, periodization, and individual authorship. Rather than rejecting these categories outright, *Toi Te Mana* adds Māori intellectual traditions that emphasize community context, the land, spiritual relationships, and complementary gendered roles. Concepts such as *whakapapa* (genealogy and interconnectedness), *whenua* (land, origin, place), *tikanga* (custom and ethical practice), *mauri* (life force), *mana* (authority and power), *wairua* (spirit), *tapu* (sacredness), and *koha* (gift and reciprocity) shape the structure and interpretive framework of the book. Māori art is thus presented as a constellation of relationships between people, ancestors, land, cosmology, and historical circumstance. All those relationships show that art cannot be separated from social history; it is produced within it, shaped by it, and responsive to it.

The authors have divided the book into three parts, organized and titled around the Māori concept of the "three baskets of knowledge"—a cosmological and philosophical framework describing how Tāne, one of the main characters in the creation of the world, retrieved these treasures. *Te Kete Tuatea* (the basket of light) contains the multitude of Māori art that "is from and within the customary world" (5). *Te Kete Tuauri* (the basket of the unknown) includes "arts developed out of engagement with Pākehā [white settlers], and the consequential changing dynamics of Māori relationships with each other as *hapū* (subtribal), *iwi* (tribal) and pan-*iwi* organisations" (5). Finally, *Te Kete Aronui* (the basket of pursuit) contains the arts that humans seek. The knowledge-basket framework enables the authors to move fluidly across time, resisting rigid Western periodizations such as "pre-contact," "colonial," and "modern." Instead, Māori art is situated within a dynamic continuum of knowledge transmission, adaptation, resilience, and sovereignty. The reader learns that early twentieth-century art movements aimed at reforming social conditions for Māori ultimately led to the emergence of contemporary art forms and schools in the second half of the twentieth century. Throughout the volume, focused text boxes introducing key artists, *taonga* (treasured objects), and critical moments in the development of Māori art allow for depth without interrupting the overall flow.

Providing a summary of such a comprehensive book is hardly possible, but I do want to point out some of its key themes and the way it offers a different and Indigenous perspective on art forms in Aotearoa New Zealand. Part 1—*Te Kete Tuatea* (the first basket), foregrounds ancestral knowledge and its continuation into the present. Art forms such as carving, weaving, canoe-building, architecture, rock art, and body adornment are discussed in relation to *whakapapa* and *whenua*. Importantly, this section addresses the gendered biases that have long shaped Māori art scholarship, in which carving traditions—often associated with men—were elevated above practices such as weaving associated with women. This section also addresses how colonial influence deepened these inequities. As Ellis observes, "The introduction of heteropatriarchy by Europeans, especially by Christian missionaries, diminished these identities by reducing and minimizing their role, which in turn suppressed the use and acceptance of imagery of women and *takatāpui* (gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex, or part of the rainbow community) in art" (188). This critical intervention offers a necessary redress and reframes gender as integral to understanding Māori visual culture.

Connections to ancestral Pacific homelands recur throughout this section. While such links are well established in discussions of *waka* (canoe), the explicit attention given to the Pacific antecedents of Māori adornment is particularly welcome, as it expands the spatial and intellectual horizons of Māori art history.

The second "basket," *Te Kete Tuatea*, examines art that was produced in response to contact with Pākehā, beginning with museums and their collections. The authors situate these artistic developments within a broader social history marked by land dispossession, language loss, government policy, and later, the Māori renaissance. Art emerges as both a record of struggle and a site of opportunity, shaped by new technologies and materials while remaining grounded in Māori values. Museums are positioned not as neutral repositories but as witnesses to how customary practices adapted to new materials, markets, and social pressures of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This idea is emphasized through the discussion of women's stories in Māori art that were suppressed with the introduction of Christianity in the nineteenth century.

A particularly compelling chapter in Part 2 is "The art of utu," in which Deirdre Brown demonstrates how art mediates balance—between life and death, and peace and conflict—through reciprocal exchange. Here, art is inseparable from social organization, land management, and political negotiation.

Part 3—*Te Kete Aronui* addresses contemporary and experimental practices in painting, photography, installation, performance, and multimedia art. The discussed works engage with modernism, urbanization, Indigenous rights, environmental activism, gender critique, and historical redress. Temporal boundaries remain deliberately porous, demonstrating that the book does not follow a linear timeframe. The section opens with a discussion of twentieth-century Māori leaders including Te Puea Hērangi, Apirana Ngata, and Tahupōtiki Wiremu Rātana, whose reformist visions profoundly shaped artistic production and education. Under the influence of these leaders, newly founded art schools would ultimately take prominent positions where intergenerational teaching was fostered. This section also addresses the fraught relationship Māori communities have with museums worldwide holding their treasures, as well as how contemporary Māori art has moved and flourished beyond the borders of the islands of Aotearoa New Zealand.

One of the book's most compelling strengths is its insistence that art is inseparable from social life. Throughout, artworks are essential to telling complex stories—of kinship, labor, spirituality, politics, colonial violence, resistance, diaspora, and return. Simplified narratives that cast Māori art as static or ahistorical are not featured. Instead, Māori art is shown to be dynamic, intellectually rigorous, politically engaged, and deeply enmeshed in the lived experiences of Māori people. Contemporary art becomes a dialogue between past and present, and between cultural responsibility and personal expression.

Although Jonathan Mane-Wheoki passed away before the book's completion, his influence permeates the book. His lifelong dedication to Indigenous art histories, belief in the centrality of Māori intellectual frameworks, and commitment to gender inclusivity in art-historical narratives are integral to *Toi Te Māori*. His presence in the project is a reminder of the intergenerational nature of knowledge transmission—a theme that the book emphasizes throughout.

Ultimately, *Toi Te Mana* demonstrates what becomes possible when Indigenous epistemologies structure the telling of art (hi)stories. The book is not only a major contribution to Māori art history—it is also a theoretical intervention with wide-reaching implications for Indigenous studies, museum practice, anthropology, and visual culture.

My awaiting this volume with great curiosity and enthusiasm was entirely justified; what *Toi Te Māori* delivers is monumental. It is aesthetically sumptuous, intellectually rigorous, and methodologically innovative. By grounding its narrative in the three baskets of knowledge, it honors Māori ways of knowing while offering readers a coherent and generous guide through centuries of artistic practice. For scholars, artists, curators, students, and all those engaged with Indigenous arts or the rethinking of art history, this book is an essential reading. It is a landmark publication that will continue to shape the field for generations to come.

Fanny Wonu Veys *is curator of Oceania at the Wereldmuseum, a Dutch umbrella organization comprising locations in Amsterdam, Leiden, and Rotterdam. She is also a professor by special appointment of arts and material culture of Oceania at Leiden University. Her topics of interest include Pacific textiles, gender and material culture, missionary collections, and the contemporary significance of historical objects. Her fieldwork sites include Aotearoa New Zealand (since 2000), Tonga (since 2003), and Arnhem Land, Australia (since 2014). She is the main editor of the* Provenance *series, published by the Wereldmuseum, and was the president of the Pacific Arts Association for twelve years.*

PACIFIC ARTS
Journal of the Pacific Arts Association

ROBERTA COLOMBO DOUGOUD

Book Review: *Sea of Islands: Exploring Objects, Stories, and Memories from Oceania,* by Carol E. Mayer

Abstract

Book review: Carol E. Mayer, Sea of Islands: Exploring Objects, Stories, and Memories from Oceania. *Vancouver: Figure 1 Publishing and Museum of Anthropology at UBC, 2025. ISBN: 978-1-77327-155-2, 240 pages, color & b/w illustrations, map, acknowledgments, notes, selected bibliography, index. Hardcover US$50.*

Keywords: *museum collections, Indigenous collaborations, provenance research, object agency, decolonial museum practice*

Sea of Islands: Exploring Objects, Stories, and Memories from Oceania presents itself as a history of the Oceania collections held at the Museum of Anthropology (MOA) at the University of British Columbia (UBC)—some 3,500 objects. At first glance, it may appear to be a conventional institutional history, or a catalogue documenting the provenance and significance of a major museum's holdings, but it soon becomes clear that Mayer's project goes well beyond a standard provenance-based history of a collection. Written by Carol E. Mayer—a research fellow on the Pacific at the MOA, where she worked for thirty-five years—the book traces the trajectories of the museum's Pacific collections.

The volume follows a relatively classic organization, one that readers familiar with museum catalogues and regional surveys of Oceania will recognize. A foreword (by Ralph Regenvanu, Minister for Climate Change Adaptation, Energy, Environment, Meteorology, Geohazards, and Disaster Management of the Republic of Vanuatu) and a preface (by Susan Rowley, director of the MOA) are followed by a map of Oceania and an introduction to the volume, in which Mayer outlines her methodological positioning. An early chapter is devoted to Frank Burnett, whose donation of approximately 1,500 Pacific objects to the UBC in 1927 formed the nucleus of the MOA's Oceania collections. Two thematic chapters, devoted to navigation and barkcloth (tapa), follow before the book moves geographically through the Pacific—covering Vanuatu, Fiji, Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea, Australia, the Torres Strait Islands, Aotearoa (New Zealand), Sāmoa, Rapa Nui, and the Marquesas Islands—and concludes with an epilogue.

That Mayer is going beyond conventional collection-history orientation is first signaled by the book's covers. Rather than foregrounding colonial-era imagery, the front cover features *Four Great Whites* (2004) by Solomon Islands artist Ake Lianga. Drawing on a local legend of four great white sharks that guided and protected a founding community, the work evokes ancestral guardianship, movement, continuity, and ceremonial traditions linked to shell money and shark-calling practices. The back cover reproduces *Destiny* (2019) by Wukun Wanambi, a Yolngu painter from the Marrakulu and Dhurili clans of eastern Arnhem Land. A member of the Dhuwa moiety, Wanambi described the work as symbolizing mullet fish journeying between waters, echoing the search for ancestral connections. Together, these contemporary prints frame the volume as oriented toward living relationships, circulation, and continuity rather than static heritage.

In her introduction, Mayer explains that her initial intention was to produce a comprehensive account of the museum's entire Pacific collection, but she soon recognized that such an undertaking was both impractical and conceptually misaligned with her approach. Rather than striving for encyclopedic coverage, she instead chose to focus on the parts of the collection with the strongest relational histories—objects already activated through exhibitions, teaching, research, and long-term collaborations. This decision marks an important methodological shift away from a traditional framework: the book does not attempt to exhaustively document a collection but instead reflects on how collections become meaningful through use, encounter, and relationship. The result is not only the biographies of objects, but also Mayer's own intellectual and relational trajectory over more than three decades of curatorial practice.

The book is explicitly informed by Epeli Hauʻofa's influential concept of Oceania as a "sea of islands," which reframes the Pacific as a vast, interconnected world shaped by Indigenous voyaging, mobility, kinship, and exchange rather than as a constellation of isolated islands.[1] From this perspective, *Sea of Islands* reinterprets the MOA's Oceania collections through narratives co-created with Indigenous scholars, artists, knowledge-holders, and members of source communities and diasporas. Hauʻofa's vision provides not only a geographical metaphor but also an epistemological framework that privileges movement, relation, and continuity over boundedness and fragmentation.

Central to Mayer's methodology is the recontextualization of collections through collaboration. Rather than presenting objects through a single authoritative voice, she foregrounds polyphony. Mayer selected objects in consultation with source communities, and their descriptions are accompanied by commentaries from community members, as well as curators, artists, and scholars. This approach effectively reactivates objects whose social and cultural connections had been muted by museum storage and classification. Throughout the book, Mayer weaves historical collections with present-day concerns such as revival movements, environmental and political struggles, artistic innovation, and community-based knowledge. Objects are never treated as inert; instead, they emerge as agents that reactivate memory, generate relationships, and open new avenues of research and practice.

Mayer's long-standing relationships with Indigenous artists, curators, knowledge-holders, scholars, and Pacific diaspora communities in Canada shape many of the chapters. These sustained engagements allow the book to move beyond episodic consultation, and toward more deeply embedded forms of collaboration. In doing so, *Sea of Islands* challenges the idea of the museum as an isolated producer of knowledge, and repositions it as a site of encounter, negotiation, and shared responsibility.

This collaborative orientation is particularly evident in the book's thematic chapters. The chapter on navigation challenges long-standing European representations of the Pacific as empty, fragmented, or disconnected, and instead reframes Oceania as a densely networked seascape shaped by sophisticated voyaging knowledge. Canoe models in the MOA collection—often dismissed as souvenirs, curios, or pedagogical miniatures—are presented as teaching tools, historical records, and repositories of ancestral knowledge. Through dialogue with Pacific navigators and scholars, these models become catalysts for contemporary navigation revival movements and symbols of sustainability, resilience, and cultural continuity.

Similarly, the chapter on tapa treats barkcloth as both material object and cultural practice. Mayer traces its origins, regional diversity, and ceremonial significance, as well as the disruptions to these practices caused by colonization and Christianization, which led to its decline or suppression in many regions. In this context, museums emerge as unexpected reservoirs of endangered knowledge, enabling artists and communities to reconnect with techniques, motifs, and meanings that had been partially lost. Of particular interest are women-led revivals of tapa-making, which demonstrate how historical collections can support cultural renewal, identity formation, and artistic innovation.

Mayer also demonstrates how museums can act as intermediaries for dialogue and healing. In the chapter on Vanuatu, she discusses the 2009 Erromango reconciliation ceremony (*klinem fes*) between the descendants of missionary John

Williams and local families. The 1839 killing of Williams and a companion—an event that profoundly affected the evangelical world—had long weighed on the people of Erromango as an unresolved historical burden. Initiated through sustained museum relationships, the reconciliation process culminated in a ceremony at Dillon's Bay, offering a powerful moment of acknowledgment and renewal. This case exemplifies how museum collections and relationships can function as catalysts for future-oriented engagements grounded in memory and responsibility.

While going through the book, I found a few dates that would have benefited from fact-checking, updating, and/or proofreading. For example, the author states that migration into Pacific Oceania from Asia began before 25,000 BCE (19), while recent archaeological research suggests that human occupation dates back considerably further, to approximately 65,000–45,000 years ago.[2] The book also suggests that the settlement of Aotearoa happened around 1300 BCE, when the widely accepted date is approximately 1300 CE ("Common Era," rather than "before the Common Era").

I was also struck by how Mayer does not explicitly employ the terms "decolonize" or "decolonization," which are now widely used in ethnographic museums in response to sustained criticisms of these institutions. The absence of this vocabulary should not, however, be understood as a lack of critical engagement, as *Sea of Islands* addresses decolonization at the level of practice and methodology, positioning itself firmly within these debates and making a substantive contribution to ongoing discussions on the legitimacy of ethnographic collections and the reconfiguration of museum theory and practice.

Ultimately, *Sea of Islands* is less a museum-collection catalogue than a sustained and well-illustrated argument for a museum practice grounded in relationships rather than objects alone. Mayer makes clear that museums are not fundamentally about things, but about the connections that things enable. By foregrounding Indigenous voices and lived relationships, the book demonstrates how collections can bring together the past, present, and future. The voyage traced in *Sea of Islands* does not lead backward into a closed past, but forward—toward renewed relationships, shared responsibilities, and futures still in the making.

***Roberta Colombo Dougoud** has been the curator of the Oceania collection at the Museum of Ethnography in Geneva (MEG) since 1999. After studying sociology at the University of Urbino, Italy, she worked at the Institute of Social Anthropology at the University of Fribourg, Switzerland, where she earned her PhD with a* *dissertation titled "Le storyboards di Kambot: Arte del Sepik tra tradizione e modernità." She has conducted field research in Papua New Guinea, Morocco, and Italy. She has curated several exhibitions on Kanak and Indigenous Australian art, and she leads the MEG project "Connecting Collections and Source Communities." Since September 2024, she has also been a lecturer at the Laboratory of African Archaeology & Anthropology at the University of Geneva.*

Notes

[1] Epeli Hauʻofa, "Our Sea of Islands," in *A New Oceania: Rediscovering Our Sea of Islands*, ed. Eric Wadell, Vijay Naidu, and Epeli Hau'ofa (Suva: The University of the South Pacific, School of Social and Economic Development, 1993), 2–16.

[2] Patrick Roberts et al., "Fossils, Fish and Tropical Forests: Prehistoric Human Adaptations on the Island Frontiers of Oceania," *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences* 377, no. 1849 (2022), https://doi.org/10.1098/rstb.2020.0495.

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).

Pacific Arts
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Pacific Arts
Journal of the Pacific Arts Association
N.S. Vol. 25 No. 1
2025

Pacific Arts
Journal of the Pacific Arts Association
N.S. Vol. 25 No. 2

PAA
Pacific Arts Association

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 and events. PAA-Europe holds a meeting in Europe annually. Members have the opportunity to meet and participate in the PAA-North America sponsored session at the **College Art Association annual conference**.

PAA's MISSION:

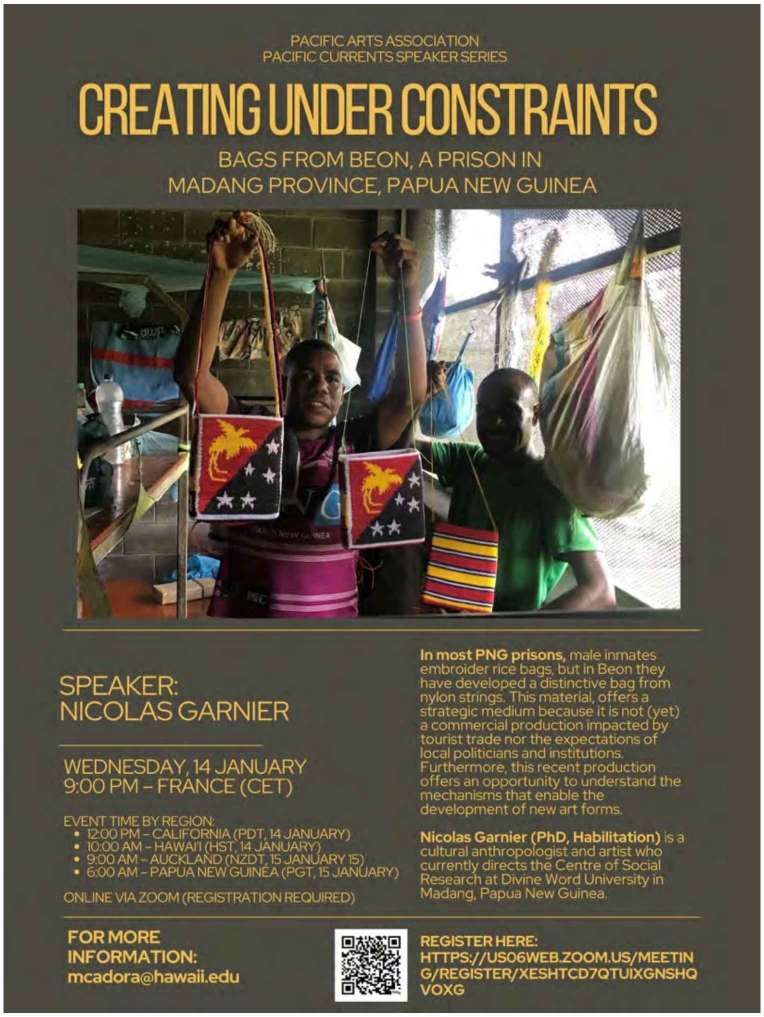
- Build awareness of the arts and material cultures in all parts of Oceania.
- Encourage international understanding among the nations involved in the arts of Oceania.
- Promote high standards of research, interpretation, and reporting on the arts of Oceania.
- Stimulate interest in teaching Oceanic 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 CURRENTS – ONLINE SPEAKER SERIES

In 2023, PAA launched its online speaker series, “Pacific Currents”—a venue in which scholars, creative practitioners, and heritage professionals share their research and join in conversation.

Most recently, Nicolas Garnier presented
Creating Under Constraints:
Bags from Beon, a Prison in Madang Province, Papua New Guinea



PACIFIC ARTS ASSOCIATION
PACIFIC CURRENTS SPEAKER SERIES

CREATING UNDER CONSTRAINTS

BAGS FROM BEON, A PRISON IN
MADANG PROVINCE, PAPUA NEW GUINEA

SPEAKER:
NICOLAS GARNIER

WEDNESDAY, 14 JANUARY
9:00 PM – FRANCE (CET)

EVENT TIME BY REGION:
- 12:00 PM – CALIFORNIA (PDT, 14 JANUARY)
- 10:00 AM – HAWAI'I (HST, 14 JANUARY)
- 9:00 AM – AUCKLAND (NZDT, 15 JANUARY 15)
- 6:00 AM – PAPUA NEW GUINEA (PGT, 15 JANUARY)

ONLINE VIA ZOOM (REGISTRATION REQUIRED)

In most PNG prisons, male inmates embroider rice bags, but in Beon they have developed a distinctive bag from nylon strings. This material, 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.

Nicolas Garnier (PhD, Habilitation) is a cultural anthropologist and artist who currently directs the Centre of Social Research at Divine Word University in Madang, Papua New Guinea.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:
mcadora@hawaii.edu

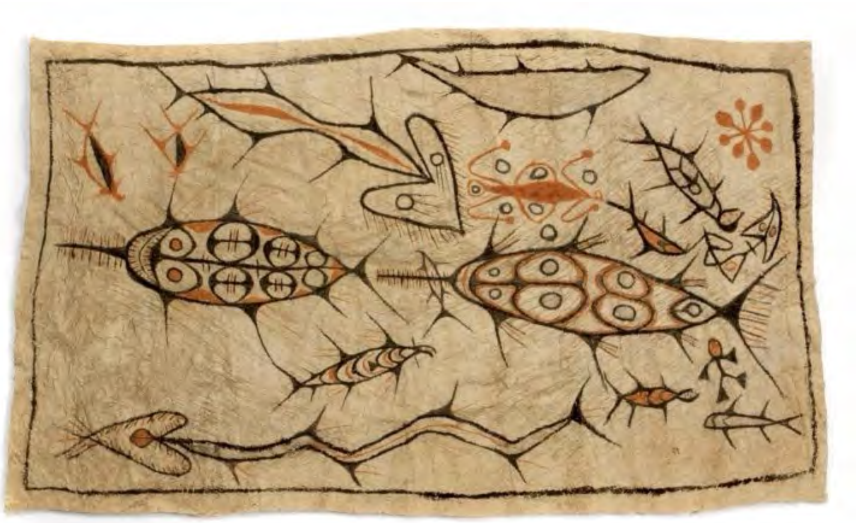
REGISTER HERE:
HTTPS://US06WEB.ZOOM.US/MEETING/REGISTER/XESHTCD7QTUIXGNSHQVOXG

PAA welcomes proposals for the series—those interested can email Karen Stevenson at ks-kf@xtra.co.nz

PAA XIVth INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM

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

June 23 – June 27, 2026, Wereldmuseum Leiden

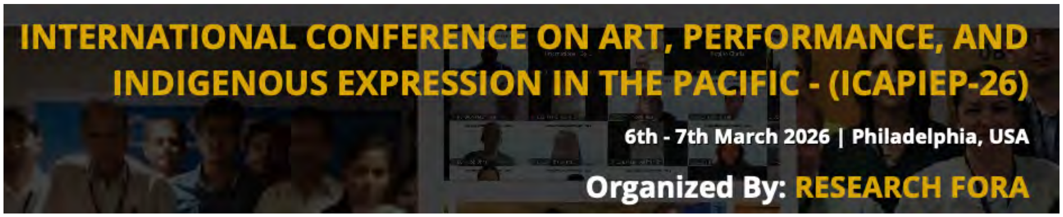


The 14th International Symposium of the *Pacific Arts* Association—“Oceanic Blazing Forms: Memory, Place-making and Imagination”—will take place at the Wereldmuseum Leiden, the Netherlands, June 23–27, 2026. The symposium ties in with the exhibition *Time for Papua*, which opens on February 12, 2026 and closes January 7, 2027. For the first time in forty years, the Wereldmuseum is showcasing a selection of its western New Guinea collection as well as specially 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 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

Conference attendance fees will be €250 standard/€190 concessions. Please visit the PAA website for additional information about the International Symposium: https://pacificarts.org/announcing-paa-xiv-international-symposium/

CONFERENCE



INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON ART, PERFORMANCE, AND INDIGENOUS EXPRESSION IN THE PACIFIC - (ICAPIEP-26)

6th - 7th March 2026 | Philadelphia, USA

Organized By: RESEARCH FORA

The International Conference on Art, Performance, and Indigenous Expression in the Pacific (ICAPIEP-26) conference, will take place on March 6–7, 2026, in Philadelphia, USA. The event will bring together leading experts, thought-provoking discussions, and a diverse group of attendees from around the world. With over 500 participants expected, the conference will provide ample opportunities for networking and professional growth.

The conference will feature a wide range of sessions, including keynote lectures, oral presentations, poster sessions, symposia, and workshops. Our panel of speakers includes academics, students, researchers, and industry professionals, making for a dynamic and engaging environment. Attendees will have the opportunity to actively participate in discussions, connect with others in their field, learn about the latest research and discoveries, and explore solutions to ongoing challenges.

In addition, the conference will bridge the gap between theoretical studies and practical applications, providing attendees with valuable insights and knowledge. Join us for the (ICAPIEP-26) and take the next step in your professional journey. Don't miss out on this opportunity to expand your knowledge, make meaningful connections, and explore new areas of the field.

For more information: https://www.researchfora.net/event/index.php?id=100276506

CONFERENCE

Asia Pacific Conference on Maritime & Underwater Cultural Heritage (APCONF-MUCH)

Bali, Indonesia

October 26 – 31, 2026

APCONF
2026
Bali, Indonesia
26-31 Oktober

The Asia Pacific Conference on Maritime & Underwater Cultural Heritage (APConf-Much)—formerly known as the Asia Pacific Conference on Underwater Cultural Heritage (APConf)—has been the leading regional conference dedicated to the study, preservation, and management of maritime and underwater cultural heritage in the Asia-Pacific region. The rebranding reflects our conscious effort to broaden the conference's focus by integrating a wider range of disciplines and perspectives to address the complexities of underwater and maritime cultural heritage.

Since its first conference in November 2011, APConf-Much has been functioning as a vital platform for scholars and professionals committed to advancing research, conservation, and sustainable management of underwater and maritime cultural heritage. For over 14 years, it has primarily brought together archaeologists, conservators, and historians to discuss and share knowledge about underwater archaeological sites, shipwrecks, and maritime practices.

The decision to expand the conference's scope acknowledges that maritime and underwater heritage extends beyond submerged sites to include coastal traditions, seafaring practices, and human-environment interactions. In response, APConf-Much now invites contributions from a broader array of disciplines, including anthropology, ecology, marine science, public policy, environmental studies, maritime legislation, marine engineering, and blue economy. By incorporating these diverse perspectives, the conference promotes transdisciplinary collaboration and fosters a more holistic approach to the preservation and management of underwater and maritime cultural heritage.

For more information: https://apconf-much.org/?page_id=10

CONFERENCE

Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Summit 2026, June 1–5, Gold Coast Convention & Exhibition Centre

AIATSIS 2026 SUMMIT
1 – 5 JUNE GOLD COAST
Our Truth.
Our Power. Our Future.

Photo by Jacinta Keefe Photography.

The AIATSIS Summit provides a unique forum for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders, leaders, and youth along with Academics, Native Title stakeholders, legal experts, GLAM (Galleries, Libraries, Archives and Museums) sector, and government representatives to come together and collaborate on the issues that matter most to First Nations peoples.

As one of the largest conferences of its kind, the Summit also provides opportunities to support and strengthen Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, knowledge, and governance and provides a forum to network and establish new relationships.

The Summit will incorporate GLAM and Research topics (June 1–3) and Indigenous Country and Governance topics (June 3–5). Dedicated programming will also be provided across the full five days for our youth and emerging leaders.

This year's theme—*Our Truth. Our Power. Our Future.*—pays tribute to, and acknowledges, the lived experience, strength, solidarity, and resilience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. By owning our truths and stepping into our power, we actively build a more just, inclusive, and hopeful future.

Registration and Information: https://aiatsis.gov.au/whats-new/events/aiatsis-summit-2026

WORKSHOP

Native Seas: Students and Relatives of Papa Mau Visit the Bay Area

The Berkeley Center for New Media, Berkeley

March 8 – 13, 2026

The Berkeley Center for New Media will be hosting our Native Seas Workshop Series, a week-long educational program curated by Sophia Perez, Indigenous Technologies coordinator and UC Berkeley PhD, and coordinated in collaboration with the Critical Pacific Islands Studies Collective (CPISC) and the Pacific Islander (PI) Initiative, that will bring several traditional navigators, including students and relatives of Papa Mau Piailug, from the Northern Mariana Islands to the Bay Area.

These distinguished navigation teachers will be traveling from across the Pacific, representing the only two remaining schools of traditional Pacific navigation and carrying forward ancient knowledge systems that have guided oceanic travel for centuries without modern instruments. As teachers, their work is foundational to keeping the ancient art of traditional navigation alive, and they will be visiting UC Berkeley to foster intellectual exchange and create visibility for Pacific Islander and Indigenous communities.

Pacific Studies scholar Dr. Damon Salesa observed that, prior to Western contact, not one of the over 1,000 Pacific Island languages contained a word for “the Pacific”— this was because, to Indigenous Pacific Islanders, "the Pacific" was not a place. Each island culture created and belonged to their own, distinct reaches of the Pacific, defined in part by their voyaging traditions and techniques. Salesa calls these lived oceanic regions “Native Seas,” which “blanketed the inhabited Pacific, like an intricate weave of maritime places, constantly being made and unmade, with Islanders holding all of it together with warp- and weft-like voyages.”

By embracing Salesa’s PI-centered Native Seas framework, this workshop series intends to explore and celebrate the perseverance of ancient seafaring knowledge in our modern era, where oceanic worlds are sustained not only through traditional voyaging, but also through new technologies spanning from airplanes to planetariums.

Planned public events include a keynote lecture on campus, a celestial navigation presentation at CalAcademy, a traditional boat-building workshop, and more.

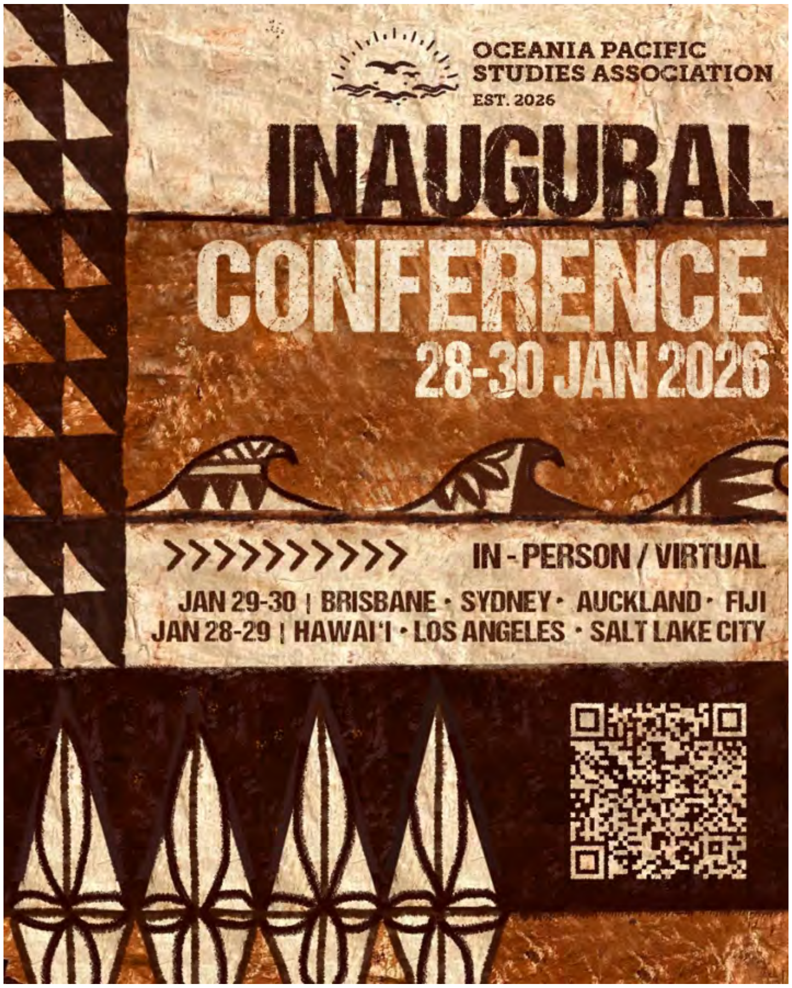
This event is free and open to the public. This event will be held in-person, on and off the UC Berkeley campus.

For more information: https://bcnm.berkeley.edu/events/13/art-tech-culture/6534/native-seas-students-and-relatives-of-papa-mau-visit-the-bay-area

RECENT CONFERENCE

Virtual Inaugural Conference of the Oceania Pacific Studies Association

January 28 – 30, 2026


OCEANIA PACIFIC STUDIES ASSOCIATION
EST. 2026
INAUGURAL
CONFERENCE
28-30 JAN 2026
IN-PERSON / VIRTUAL
JAN 29-30 | BRISBANE · SYDNEY · AUCKLAND · FIJI
JAN 28-29 | HAWAI'I · LOS ANGELES · SALT LAKE CITY

The Oceania Pacific Studies Association hosted its Inaugural Conference from January 28–30, 2026. The conference connected Pacific thinkers, practitioners, creators, organizers, activists, and community leaders across the region.

Participation was free. There were virtual and in-person hubs in Brisbane, Sydney, Tāmaki Makaurau/Auckland, Fiji, Hawaiʻi (Honolulu & Lāʻie), Los Angeles, and Salt Lake City. Sessions focused on critical issues that are currently impacting Moana Nui.

For more information: https://sites.google.com/hawaii.edu/opsa/home

RECENT CONFERENCE

Entangled Seascapes: More-Than-Human Histories Across Oceanic Worlds

The International Center of Medieval Art
January 22–23, 2026

This conference brought together scholars working on pre-modern and early modern oceanic worlds: from the Indian Ocean, South China Sea, and the Pacific to the Mediterranean and the Atlantic. Framed within the emerging field of blue humanities and building on posthumanist and decolonial perspectives, the conference explored the sea not as a passive space between empires or cultures, but as an active, more-than-human agent, one that shapes and is shaped by human and nonhuman actors. By focusing on more-than-human histories and material entanglements, orgranizers aimed to challenge dominant land-based narratives of civilization, encounters, and sovereignties.

The conference intended to be multidisciplinary, and welcomed contributions from historians, archaeologists, anthropologists, human geographers, and any scholars interested in seascapes, more-than-human thinking, and related theoretical approaches.

The keynote lecture was delivered by Professor Serpil Oppermann, Director of the Environmental Humanities Center at Cappadocia University, and author of *Blue Humanities: Storied Waterscapes in the Anthropocene* (Cambridge University Press, 2023).

Entangled Seascapes was intended not only as a forum for presenting original research, but also as a collaborative space for scholarly exchange and long-term network-building among researchers working on oceanic and more-than-human histories from across the worlds.

For more information: https://www.medievalart.org/calendar/call-for-papers-for-international-conference-entangled-seascapes-more-than-human-histories-across-oceanic-worlds-academia-belgica-rome-22-23-jan-2026

RECENT 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).

CALL FOR PAPERS

Addressing Ocean and Space Pollution Through the Arts: New Considerations on Indigenous Knowledges and Collaborative Practices

Conference: November 16–18, 2026

What is the role played by contemporary Indigenous artists and non-Indigenous artists engaging with Indigenous knowledges in making ocean and space pollution visible? How are Indigenous knowledges, know-how, histories, and memories mobilized to address current environmental crises? How do Indigenous artists and artists working with Indigenous communities talk about, classify, and use different types of waste?

Examining together ocean and space pollution is crucial not only to take into accounts the specifics of Indigenous epistemologies, ontologies, and concepts but also for the sustainable future of the planet.

This conference—co-organized by OSPAPIK, the Centre des métiers d'art de la Polynésie française (French Polynesian School of Art, Craft and Desigh; CMAPf), and the Université de la Polynésie française (UPF)—will explore innovative approaches to pollution, Indigenous knowledges, and the arts.

The committee is particularly interested in focusing on the materiality and the disintegration process of waste and on the relationship that people have with waste. Our aim is also to investigate how creative and artistic expressions allow the artists themselves, scientists, expedition project organizers, and audiences to better understand how marine ecosystems and (outer) space are impacted by pollution. Finally, with this conference we want to discuss comparatively affective, professional, sensorial, and historical relationships to marine, nuclear, and space debris and waste through an analysis of Indigenous artistic practices and non-Indigenous practices engaging with Indigenous knowledges. We are interested in papers focusing on Oceania and French Guiana. If you would like to give a paper on a different area, please contact us.

Papers due: September 8, 2026
Call for papers PDF : https://ospapik.eu/uploads/2025/12/cfp-ospapik-conference-2026-
For more information: https://ospapik.eu/en/conference/

Image Credit: Sylvana Opoya, a young Wayana woman describes her family tree to illustrator Benoît Bonnemaison-Fitte © Julien Cassierle & GdRA

CALL FOR PAPERS

The History of Mobility in the Atlantic and the Pacific: People, Goods, Ships, Ideas, and Routes Between the Continents and Islands

The Association of Latin American and Caribbean Historians

The Association of Latin American and Caribbean Historians (ADHILAC) celebrates its 15th International Meeting for the first time in the British city of Gibraltar in Southern Spain.

We invite all researchers to submit their papers by April 15, 2026, to secejecutivo@adhilac.org, subject to the conditions outlined in the Call for Papers. The conference will be held at the renowned Sunborne Hotel Gibraltar, a former cruise ship in the port of the British colony.

Sven Beckert (Harvard University) and Paul E. Lovejoy (York University) are confirmed as keynote speakers. The conference president is Sergio Guerra Vilaboy (Havana University). We look forward to receiving your applications.

Dr Jorge Elias Caro, President of the ADHILAC

Dr Christian Cwik, Executive Secretary of the ADHILAC

Papers due: April 15, 2026

Call for papers PDF: https://networks.h-net.org/system/files/attachments/callforpapersadhilac09-2026gibraltar.pdf

For more information: https://networks.h-net.org/group/announcements/20136056/history-mobility-atlantic-and-pacific-people-goods-ships-ideas-and

CALL FOR PAPERS

8th biennial conference of the Association of Critical Heritage Studies

Herenga Waka — Victoria University of Wellington, Aotearoa New Zealand
November 29 – December 2, 2026

ACHS 2026
TŪHONO
weaving relational heritage spaces
29 NOVEMBER - 2 DECEMBER 2026
Te Whanganui-a-Tara, Aotearoa | Wellington, New Zealand

Centering on the theme Tūhono—weaving relational heritage spaces, ACHS 2026 invites participants to explore how heritage creates connections among people, across time, and with place. The conference foregrounds Indigenous perspectives grounded in Māori worldviews, alongside the diverse cultural voices of Aotearoa and the broader Moana Oceania region.

You can find all key information here:

- Conference website: https://www.achs2026.nz/
- Call for Papers: https://www.achs2026.nz/call-for-papers

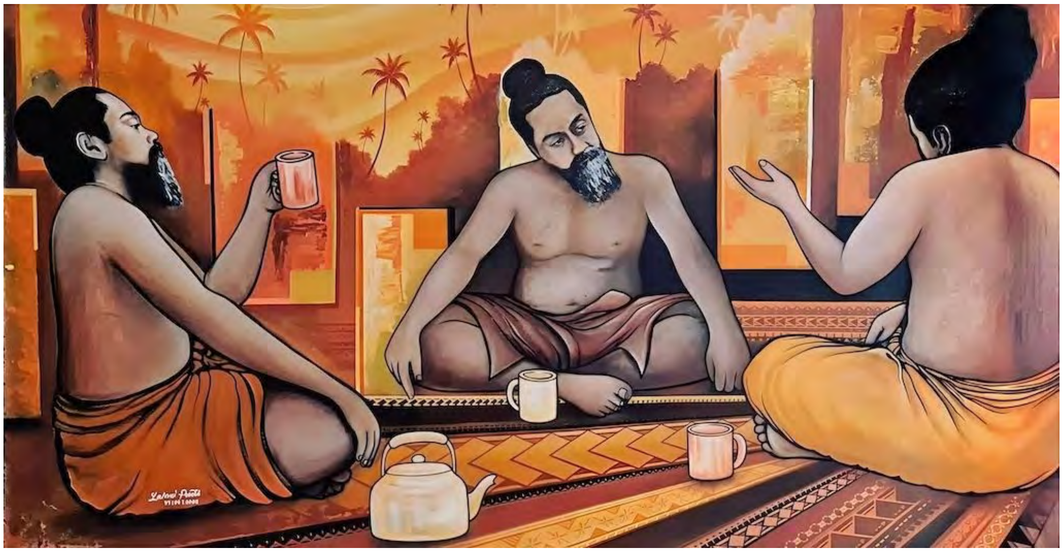
Please note: all presentations will be in-person.

Sign up to the mailing list on the website to receive future updates about the conference.
www.achs2026.nz

Timeline

- CFP opens: **November 10,** 2025
- CFP closes: **February 10,** 2026
- Notification of outcomes: **April** 30, 2026
- Registration opens: **May** 2026
- Conference: **November 29** – **December 2,** 2026

EVENT



Sāmoa Arts Fono

March 5–6 2026
Upolu Island, Sāmoa

The **Sāmoa Arts Fono**, organized by the Talanoa Arts Forum (TAF) will serve as a vital platform for fostering collaboration and tackling critical issues within the local and regional arts sector. Participants will include a diverse array of stakeholders, such as artists, musicians, writers, poets, choreographers, heritage artists, curators, producers, researchers, scholars, museum officers, art educators, business entrepreneurs, and policymakers to name a few. Speakers, among others, include artist and Reverend Pelenato Liufau (Sāmoa); arts manager Ammon Fepuleaʻi (American Sāmoa); regional arts policy analyst Frances Koya Vakauta (Fiji), and artist and curator Reuben Friend (Aotearoa). More speakers to be announced soon.

About Talanoa Arts Forum: Led by Sāmoa-based practicing artists Tauʻiliʻili Alpha Maiava and Yuki Kihara, Talanoa Arts Forum (TAF) is a Sāmoa-based curatorial agency setup to establish the infrastructure that supports cultural and artistic exchange between locals and the international community in Sāmoa. Talanoa Arts Forum is a multidisciplinary cultural platform working with private and public entities to activate spaces for cultural production and promotion across all creative disciplines, spanning heritage, visual arts, literature, film, fashion, dance, design, and music. Talanoa Arts Forum aims to enhance Moana Pacific's creative industries and knowledge economy, and leverage its soft power for an Indigenous-led advancement. For more information visit www.talanoaartsforum.ws

The Sāmoa Arts Fono is made possible by the Pacific Feminist Fund and the New Zealand High Commission, Apia.

Image credit: *'Men talk* | *Fa'asausauga a tamali'i'* (2023) by Lalovai Peseta. Courtesy of Lalovai Peseta and the Manamea Art Studio, Sāmoa.

RECENT EVENT

MET Expert Talks: Arts of Oceania

The Metropolitan Museum of Art Fifth Avenue, New York
February 24, 2026

Join Museum experts, including curators, conservators, scientists, and scholars, for a deep dive into a selection of exhibition objects in the galleries. Hear new insights and untold stories from Met insiders and take a closer look at the works of art. You'll also have the opportunity to ask questions.

Presented in celebration of the reopening of The Michael C. Rockefeller Wing, featuring the Museum's collections of the arts of Africa, the ancient Americas, and Oceania.

Events and programming related to the reopening of The Michael C. Rockefeller Wing are made possible by the Breyer Family Foundation, the Ford Foundation, Samuel and Gabrielle Lurie, the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, and the Thompson Family Foundation. Additional support is provided by Stephen M. Cutler and Wendy N. Zimmermann, Kyveli and George Economou, Ed and Dale Mathias, the Mex-Am Cultural Foundation Inc., and two anonymous donors.

For more information: https://engage.metmuseum.org/events/education/talks/public-programs/met-expert-talks/fy26/met-expert-talks-oceania/#TicketingApp

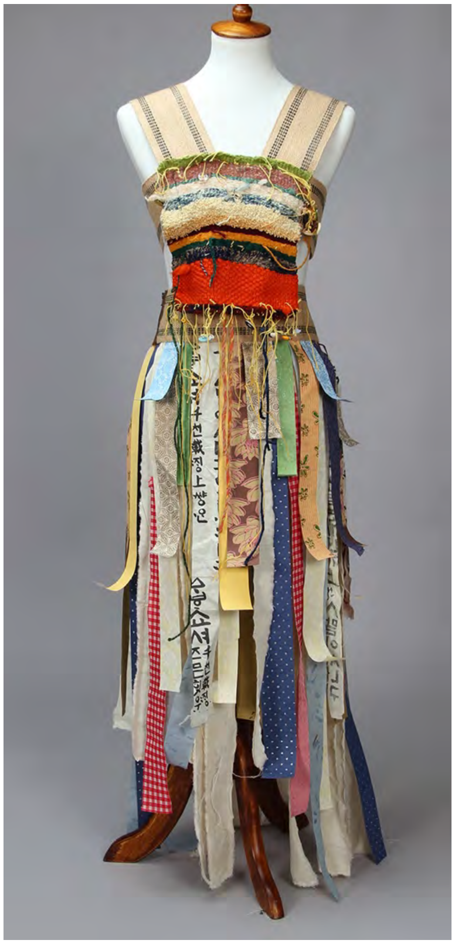
Image Credit: Photo by Bridgit Beyer © The Metropolitan Museum of Art

RECENT EVENT

2026 Hawaiʻi Scholastic Regional Student Art Awards

Capital Modern: the Hawaiʻi State Art Museum, Honolulu
Scholastics Opening and Awards Ceremony:
February 14, 2026

The Hawaiʻi State Foundation on Culture and the Arts was established by the Hawaiʻi State Legislature in 1965 as the official arts agency of the State of Hawaiʻi. The concept of setting aside 1% of construction appropriations to provide a funding base for the acquisition of works of art set a national standard in 1967 when Hawaiʻi became the first state to pass such legislation. The 1989 revision of the law created the Works of Art Special Fund, a non-lapsing account into which all funds set aside for artworks are deposited and from which expenditures for purposes consistent with Section 103-8.5, Hawaiʻi Revised Statutes, are made.



Objectives of the Art in Public Places Program are to enhance the environmental quality of public buildings and spaces throughout the state for the enjoyment and enrichment of the public; to cultivate the public's awareness of visual arts in all media, styles, and techniques; to contribute to the development and recognition of a professional artistic community; and to acquire, interpret, preserve, and display works of art expressive of the Hawaiʻi an Islands, the multicultural heritage of its people and creative interests of its people and creative interests of its artists.

Image Credit: Miley Cox, *Dress*, 2025, mixed media. Courtesy of Capitol Modern

EXHIBITION

Good As Gold, an exhibition of works by Telly Tuita

Tautai Gallery, Auckland, Aotearoa/New Zealand
February 27–May 2, 2026

Coining the term *Tongpop* to describe his rich yet complex relationship to his ancestral home of Tonga, alongside his lived experiences across Australia and Aotearoa, Telly Tuita's practice spans performative self-portraiture. Through sustained experimentation across photography, video, painting, sculpture, and installation, Tuita examines his own life story, navigating ideas of belonging, colonization, and cultural hybridity.

Tuita draws on the multifaceted nature of his experiences to champion the possibility of multiple, shifting versions of oneself. Employing familiar, and at times nostalgic, references and materials—including pop culture, religious iconography, motifs, colors, textures, and light—these works subvert fixed ideas of identity, making connections across time and space.

With the presentation of old and new works, *Good As Gold* frames Tuita's broader enquiry in to how worth is assigned, inherited, re-negotiated, and reimagined through language, memory, and lived experience.

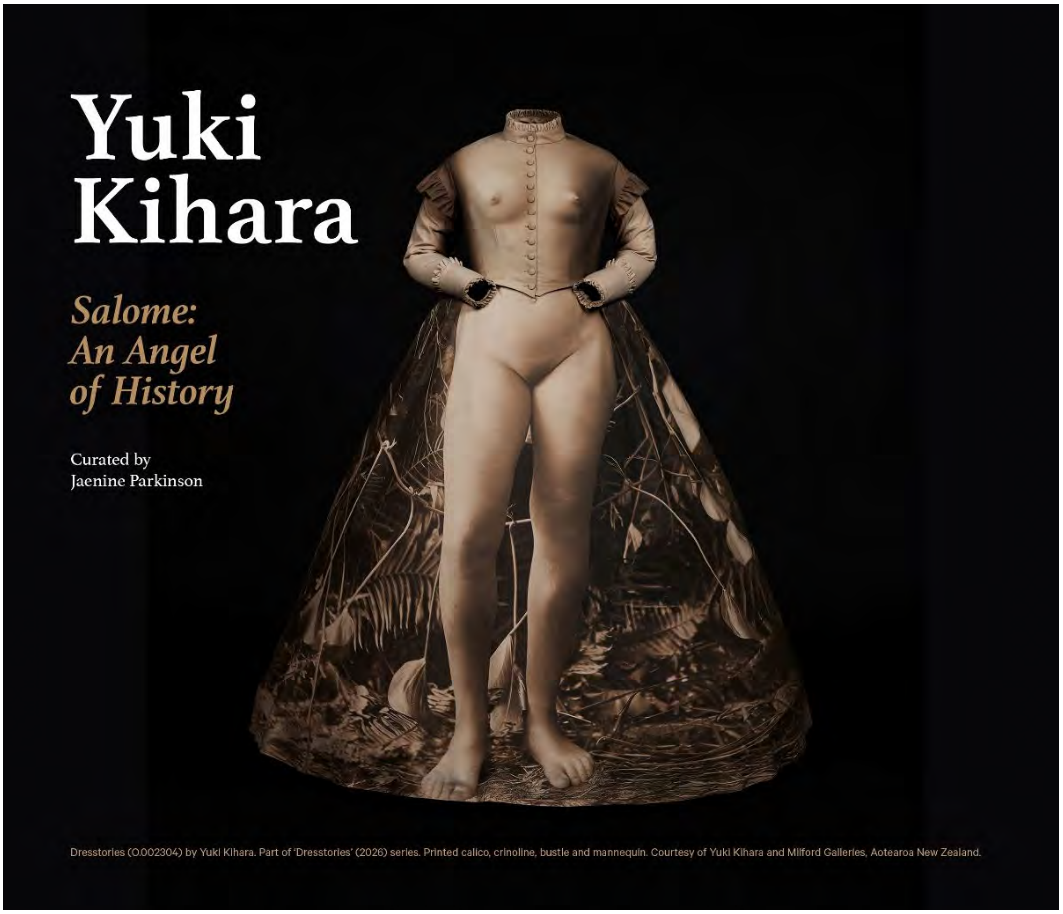
Exhibition opening event: Friday, February 27, 2026
For more information: https://www.tautai.org/exhibitions

Image credit: Donna Vo

EXHIBITION

New Zealand Portrait Gallery
Te Pūkenga Whakaata

February 19 – May 10, 2026



Dresstories (O.002304) by Yuki Kihara. Part of 'Dresstories' (2026) series. Printed calico, crinoline, bustle and mannequin. Courtesy of Yuki Kihara and Milford Galleries, Aotearoa New Zealand.

Salome: An Angel of History is a new exhibition that follows New Zealand artist Yuki Kihara's exploration of Pacific history through her alter-ego Salome. Inspired by the 1886 photograph "Samoan Half-Caste," Kihara uses photography, video, and sculpture to portray herself as a nineteenth-century Sāmoan woman.

A public artist talk featuring Yuki Kihara in conversation with curator Jaenine Parkinson will be held at the Gallery on Thursday, February 19, at 11:30 am. A conversation between April K. Henderson, Peter Brunt, and Yuki Kihara, facilitated by exhibition curator Jaenine Parkinson, will be held at the Gallery on Saturday February 21, at 11am.

https://www.nzportraitgallery.org.nz/

EXHIBITION

Wanbel: Connecting Papua New Guinea Heritage Across the World

Until September 16, 2026

WANBEL
PAPUA NEW GUINEA
1975-2025
CELEBRATE OUR HISTORY
INSPIRE OUR FUTURE

To commemorate Papua New Guinea's historic milestone 50th Anniversary of Independence on September 16, 2025, selected museums and cultural institutions were invited to come together for *WanBel: a PNG Collective Global Exhibition*.

The Mariwai Project, in partnership with the PNG Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture and its agencies—the National Museum and Art Gallery, Port Moresby and the PNG National Cultural Commission (NCC)—engage these collaborations as part of PNG's official 2025 national program: "Celebrate our History, Inspire our Future," running through to September 16, 2026.

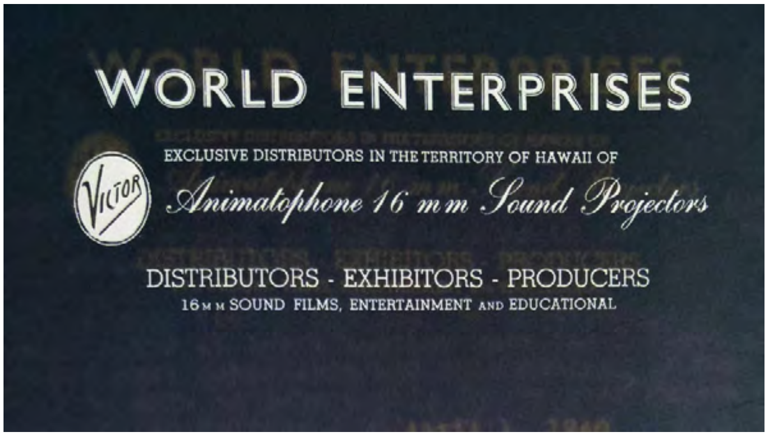
Over the anniversary year nearly fifty participating museums and cultural institutions are holding tailored exhibitions, educational events, and workshops in their own spaces and sharing their digital learning resources, focusing on their collections that contain many significant artworks from PNG. From historical colonial collections to contemporary art, these collections represent an enormous wealth of PNG cultural resources and documentation. The public will benefit from expanded access to rare objects, talks, creative labs, family days, and more, creating the largest and most inclusive global exhibition of PNG art ever assembled for millions of visitors worldwide. PNG's exceptional arts, traditions, and cultural artifacts reflect our diverse heritage. As we mark half a century of independence, we illuminate PNG's cultural legacy and honor the artists and the cultures from which they originate.

For more information: https://wanbelglobal.com/

EXHIBITION

WORLD ENTERPRISES, A FILM INSTALLATION BY ANTHONY BANUA-SIMON

Aupuni Space, Honolulu, Hawaiʻi, https://aupuni.space/
February 27 – March 28, 2026


WORLD ENTERPRISES
EXCLUSIVE DISTRIBUTORS IN THE TERRITORY OF HAWAII OF
VICTOR
Animatophone 16 mm Sound Projectors
DISTRIBUTORS - EXHIBITORS - PRODUCERS
16 MM SOUND FILMS, ENTERTAINMENT AND EDUCATIONAL

In 1940, the Kekaha Sugar Company (Kauaʻi, Hawaiʻi) began a six-month mail-order film subscription with World Enterprises, an Oʻahu-based distributor—screening films for sugar plantation workers. Varied in style, the films shared a common theme: American power taming lands and peoples of the "frontier" through extraction, an encroachment justified by declared ideals of progress. These narratives attempted to codify American absorption as inevitable—meanwhile Asian immigrant laborers were actively exploring socialist futures that incorporated Kānaka Maoli sovereignty and imagined an independent, multiracial nation.

WORLD ENTERPRISES is a collage of radical possibilities sourced entirely from the original 1940 film program. Recontextualized by Banua-Simon, the short compilation enters a dreamlike conversation with both the material realities of the moment of its creation and the present day. The brazen promotion of harmful chemicals developed by DuPont that featured in the program remains particularly relevant, given their ongoing impact on both the environment and the health of residents of Kauaʻi.

When this program was originally shown, Hawaiʻi workers were navigating a period of intense upheaval: an early strike victory in 1937 by the Filipino labor union Vibora Luviminda was followed by police violence during the 1938 Hilo Massacre, when unarmed strikers were fired upon. It wouldn't be until after WWII that the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) would consolidate a diverse and militant membership—laying the groundwork for what would become one of Hawaiʻi's most effective working-class housing initiatives of the twentieth century. In 1940, however, workers living in plantation camps continued to organize and strategize despite escalating harassment and red-baiting from the "Big Five" sugar barons.

Through sampled material, Banua-Simon draws moments of rupture and levity, culminating in an explicit "cut-up poem" provocation. The reconstructed work reflects on community amid political defeat while pointing toward a revolutionary movement just beneath the surface. The installation features an analog live score by composer Paul Cosme, led by the traditional percussive kulintang instrument originating in the Philippines, with Gustavo D'Amico on saxophone and Kev Calamayan on vibraphone.

EXHIBITION

Time for Papua

Wereldmuseum, Leiden

February 13, 2026 – January 7, 2027

Time for Papua brings different perspectives together: from refined wood carvings and korwar figures to prauw prows and recent film works. You see how creators make history tangible, how objects form relationships, and how a dynamic perception of time clashes with imposed boundaries and economic interests. We bring together context, dissenting voices, and current examples. This unfolds a story of resilience and imagination: deeply rooted in place and past, yet focused on a just, green future.

In addition, the objects reflect regional networks and the international influences that have shaped, but also threatened, Papuan worlds. The impact of Christianity and the destructive consequences of mining and plantation economies are visible in the collection.

Now that the Papuan region is facing ecological and humanitarian crises, the collection takes on even greater significance in the West, especially for the Papuans in New Guinea and the diaspora, such as in the Netherlands. The exhibition provides a platform for their stories and is a call to understand Papuan art in its full context, with respect for the Indigenous worlds and their future.

https://leiden.wereldmuseum.nl/en/whats-on/exhibitions/time-papua

Image Credit: Oceania collection, Wereldmuseum, Leiden. Installation photo © Wereldmuseum Leiden.

EXHIBITION

Hui No‘eau Visual Arts Center’s Solo Artist Exhibition

March 20 – May 15, 2026

Hui No‘eau Visual Art Center’s Solo Artist Exhibition provides Hawai‘i artists with the unique opportunity to exhibit a complete body of work. It challenges artists to envision and produce an innovative and cohesive show to be displayed in a professional gallery setting. Up to two artists may be selected to present concurrent Solo Exhibits in Hui No‘eau’s two adjoining gallery spaces. This exhibition has advanced careers, spurred community dialogue, and continues to define our local visual arts movement. The Hui’s serene location, bustling open studios, dynamic staff and faculty, and its reputation as a gathering place for Maui’s leading artistic minds combine to foster creative potential and inspiration. Selected artists are invited to engage the community in walk-throughs, hands-on workshops, and talks or lectures.

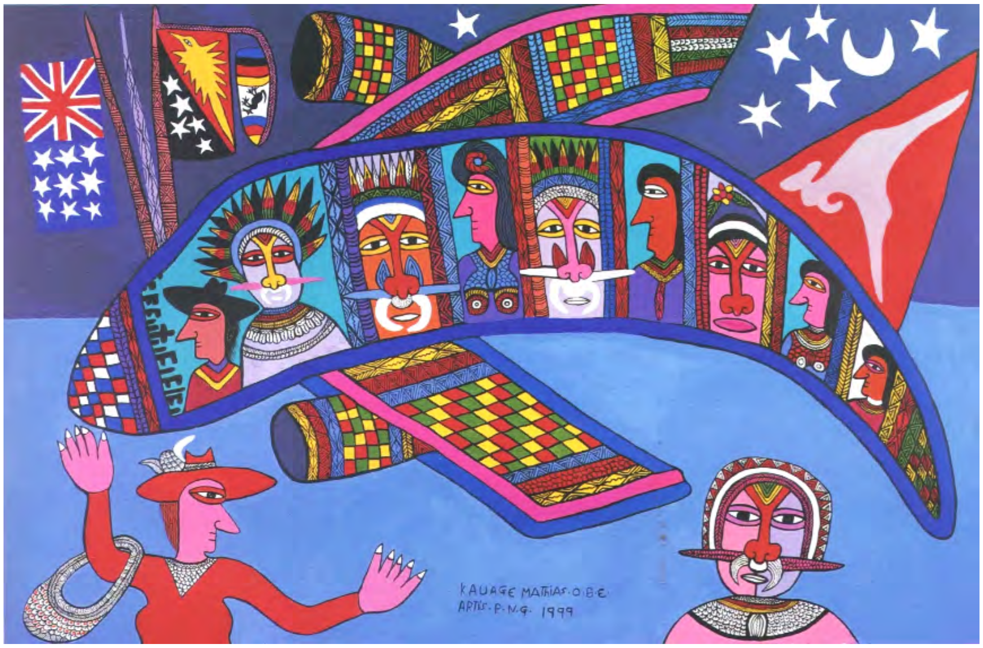
hui no'eau
VISUAL ARTS CENTER
MAUI, HAWAI'I

Applicants must be 18 years or older and reside full-time in the state of Hawai‘i. Artwork to be featured in the exhibition must be current—created within two years of the exhibition date (March 2024–March 2026) without supervision and not previously exhibited. Proposals are open to artists working in all media and can include more than one medium.

Artists are invited to exhibit a current body of work focusing on a specific theme or concept that should be clearly articulated in the proposal’s artist statement. The Exhibitions Committee (comprised of representatives from Maui’s art community), the Hui staff, and Board of Directors, will review applications and make artist selections. Proposals are evaluated based on the inventiveness and technical proficiency of the artwork, originality and clarity of proposed concept or theme, in addition to the artwork’s reflection of the artist’s statement. The committee may select two artists to each exhibit individually in the Hui’s two adjoining gallery spaces or one artist to exhibit in both galleries. The assignment of gallery spaces is determined by the Exhibitions Committee at the time of selection.

For more information on how to apply: https://www.huinoeau.com/exhibitions/2024/4/2026-solo-artist-exhibition-call-to-artists-6swx6

EXHIBITION



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

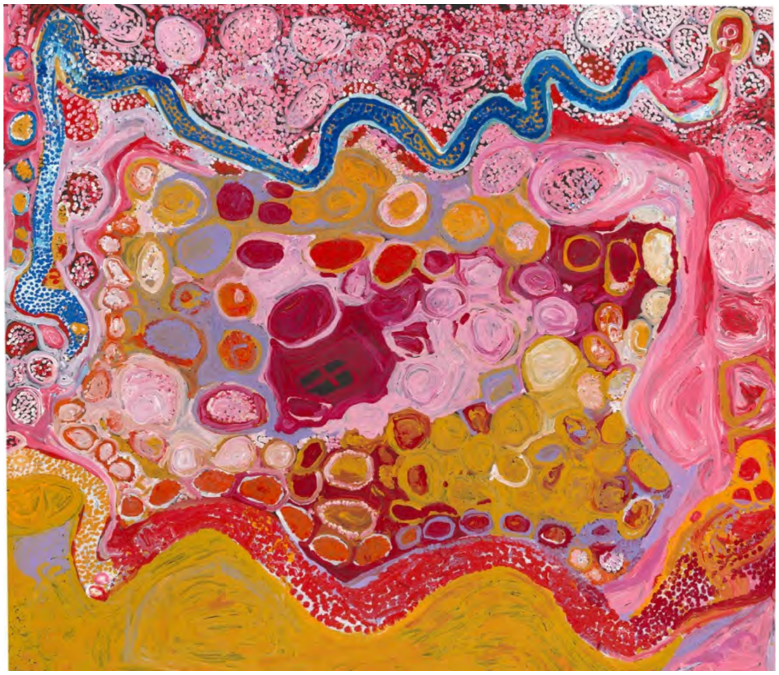
De Young Museum, San Francisco, March 30, 2024 – March 15, 2026

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 nineteenth 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

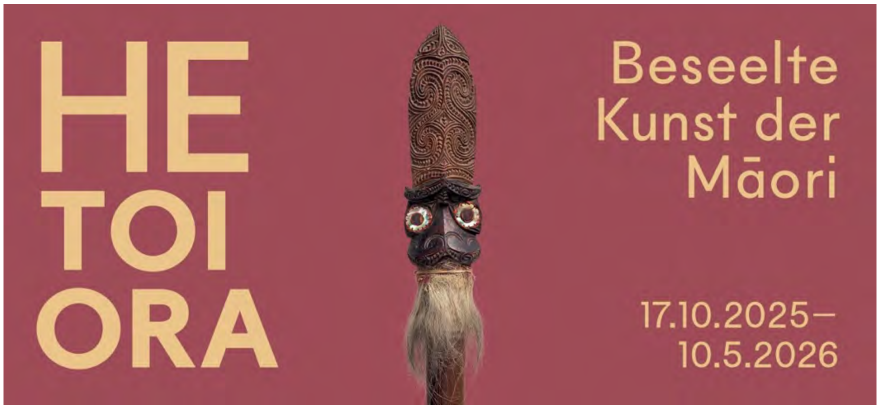
Image Credit: Tiger Palpatja, *Wati Wanampi Tjukurpa*, 2010, synthetic polymer paint on canvas, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, © Tiger Palpatja/Copyright Agency, 2024.

EXHIBITION

He Toi Ora – A Living History. Connecting Carved Māori Treasures in the Museum Fünf Kontinente

Museum Fünf Kontinente, München

October 17, 2025 – May 10 2026



In the Māori world view, all art forms carry within them an enduring relationship between the past and the present. Many carvings are thus perceived as living and connected to the ancestors. For this reason, the descendants of the original creators or owners should be able to renew this important connection. *He Toi Ora* means: a living art.

But from which *iwi* (tribal groups) in New Zealand do the museum objects now looked after in the Museum Fünf Kontinente originate? The research comes up against boundaries: almost all the pieces were acquired in London between 1825 and 1914, where their trail is lost. Often, the question of their origin can only be approached based on certain clues.

The search for these clues begins with historical photos and documents. They provide information about the previous owners from whom the museum acquired the objects and their motivation for collecting them. Another piece of the puzzle is provided by wood analyses, which offer information about the different tree species used for carving.

The carving motifs can also be part of provenance research, pointing towards specific stylistic regions. However, Māori knowledge is of vital importance when classifying and tracing the pieces.

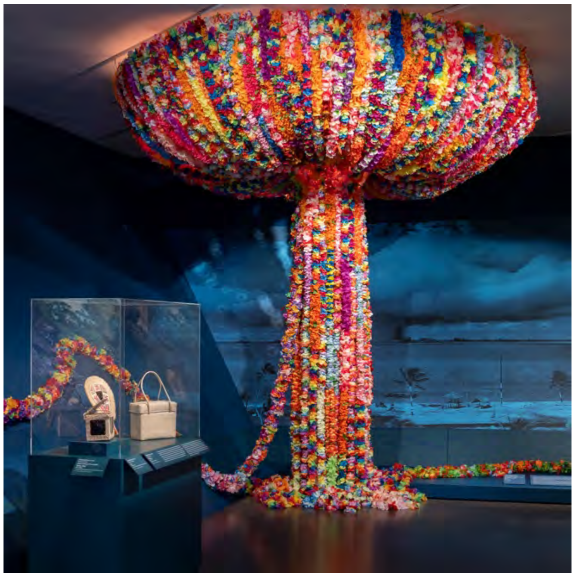
For more information: https://www.museum-fuenf-kontinente.de/ausstellungen/he-toi-ora-a-living-history/

Image Credit: Long Staff Club (Taiaha), length 140 cm, Inv.-Nr. 989 © Museum Fünf Kontinente, photo: Nicolai Kästner

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.

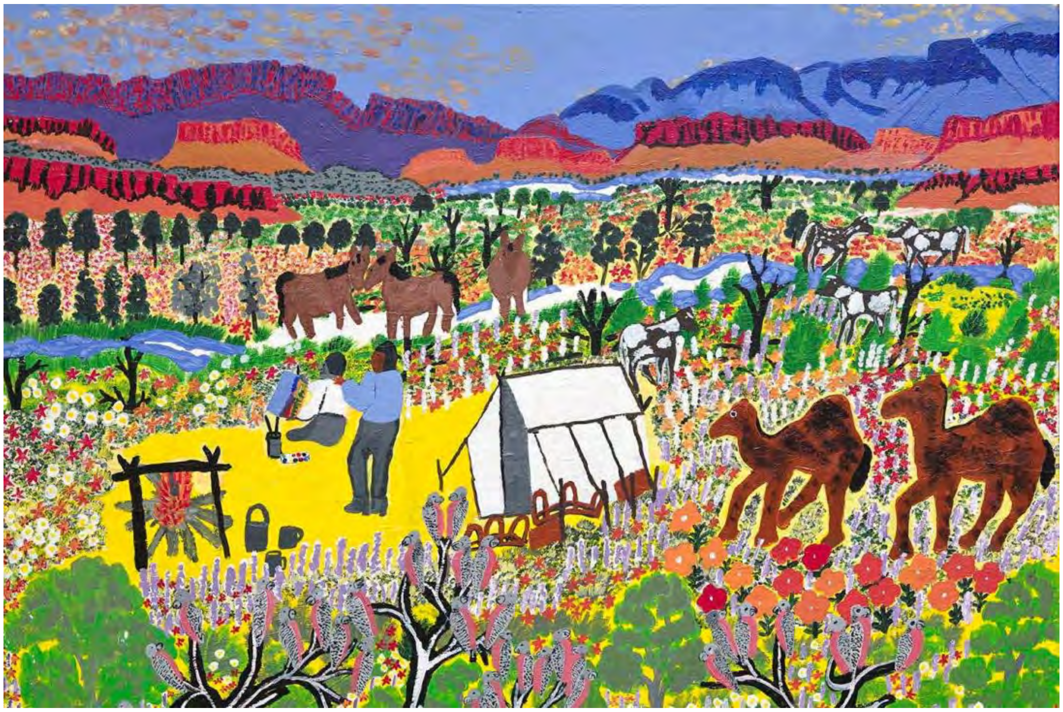
Hastings-McFall, who is of Samoan and Pākehā descent, has been credited with shepherding contemporary Pacific art onto an international stage. Known for her large-scale and immersive "lei bombing" installations, she will use hundreds of synthetic lei to create an installation. Her work will be presented in dialogue with approximately twenty-five *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, which opened in 2024, further highlights 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.

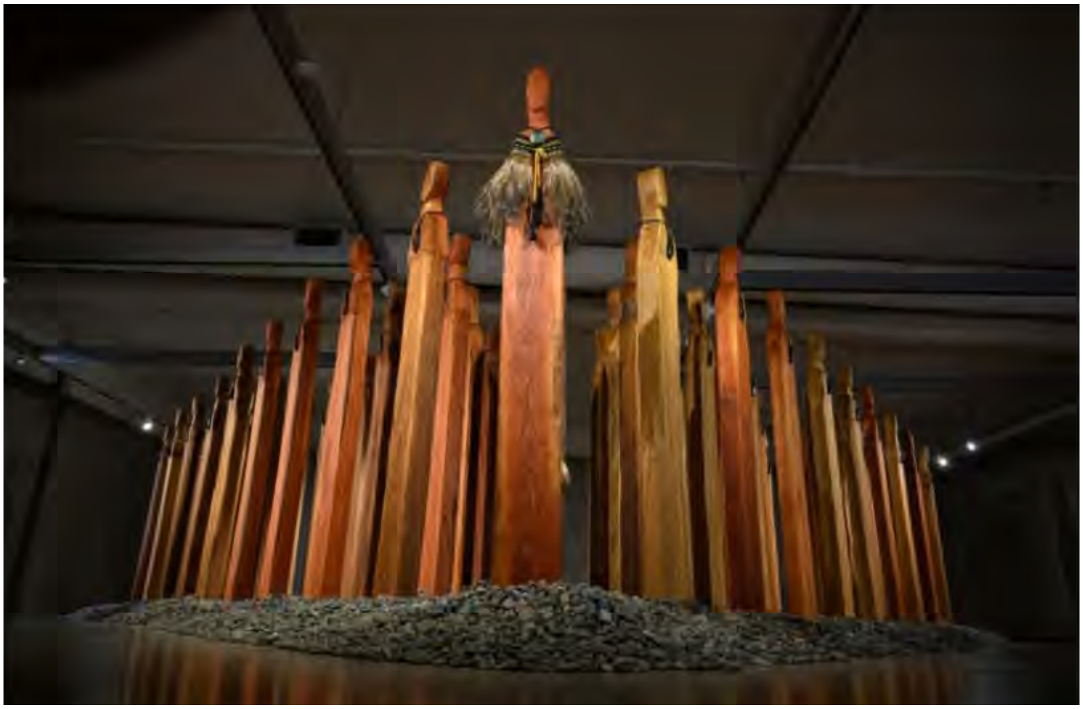
Curator: Sophia Nampitjimpa Sambono (Jingili people)
https://collection.qagoma.qld.gov.au/page/kindred-creatures-great-and-small
https://collection.qagoma.qld.gov.au/node/57744

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

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

Hawaiʻi: A Kingdom Crossing Oceans

January 15 – May 25, 2026
The British Museum, London

Hawaiʻi: A Kingdom Crossing Oceans is a dazzling celebration of the artistry and history of Hawaiʻi. The exhibition brings together remarkable objects – from feathered cloaks worn by chiefs and finely carved deities, to powerful shark-toothed weapons and bold contemporary works by Kānaka ʻŌiwi (Native Hawaiian) artists.

In 1824, the young King Liholiho and Queen Kamāmalu traveled across vast oceans on a journey that would mark a turning point in the history of their kingdom, Hawaiʻi. The exhibition commemorates over 200 years since this ill-fated royal visit and sheds light on Hawaiʻi's history and culture through an exploration of the complex and enduring relationship between the Hawaiian and British nations.

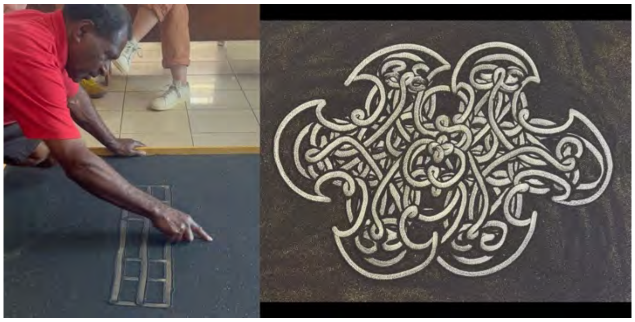
Building on years of collaboration with Native Hawaiian artists, practitioners, and scholars, the show centers on Indigenous knowledge, shining new light on exceptional objects and extraordinary stories. Shaped together with Hawaiian knowledge-bearers, the exhibition showcases seldom-seen international loans alongside the remarkable collections at the British Museum—one of the largest in the world outside of Hawaiʻi.

Image credit: ʻAhu ʻula (feathered cloak), Hawaiʻi, before 1892. The British Museum, Oc,+.5897

EXHIBITION

Sandroing: Tracing Kastom in Vanuatu
Museum of International Folk Art
Sante Fe, New Mexico
June 29, 2025 – April 26, 2026

More than an intricate and ephemeral artform, sand drawing in Vanuatu is a storytelling tradition, a means of communication, and an important method of knowledge preservation. Performed mostly in the northern islands of this South Pacific archipelago nation, sand drawing conveys folklore, histories, genealogies, rituals, and other forms of kastom (local, traditional knowledge). Narrators illustrate a story running a single finger through loose sand, ash, or fine dirt, often in continuous movements, forming complex geometric and symbolic patterns. Sand drawing is a UNESCO-designated Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity.



Sandroing: Tracing Kastom in Vanuatu will be on display in the Mark Naylor and Dale Gunn Gallery of Conscience, marking MOIFA's first exhibition focused on Oceania since 1960. This exhibition is a collaboration between The Museum of International Folk Art (MOIFA) and the Vanuatu Kaljoral Senta and National Museum (VKS). The project is an outgrowth of discussions regarding MOIFA's ni-Vanuatu collection, the history of the collection, and a potential repatriation of kastom objects to the VKS. Together, staff from both institutions engaged in collections research and the development of the exhibition's ideas, content, and design.

The exhibition will feature sand drawings to be created by Edgar Hinge, a sand drawing practitioner and cultural knowledge bearer who is originally from Pentecost Island. He is currently lives in Vanuatu's capital, Port Vila, where he works as a museum educator and guide at the Vanuatu Kaljoral Senta and National Museum.

For more information: https://www.internationalfolkart.org/exhibitions/exhibition-details?eventID=6452

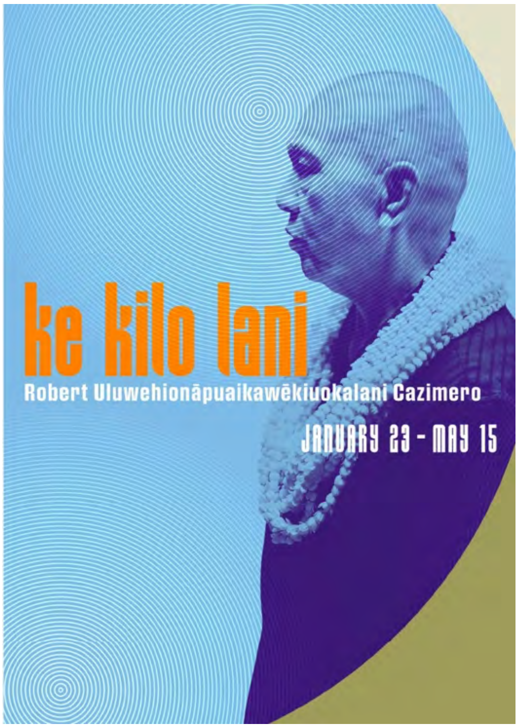
Image Credit: Sand drawing by Edgar Hinge at the Vanuatu Cultural Center and National Museum, Port Vila, Vanuatu. 2023. Photo by Felicia Katz-Harris.

EXHIBITION

‘Iolani Presents Ke Kilo Lani
Presented by Gallery ‘Iolani and the Wāhea Foundation
Kaneohe, Hawai‘i
January 23, 2026 – May 15, 2026

Ke ho'okipa nei makou ia oe i Ke Kilo Lani. Ho'omohala keia ho ike ike i kekahi mãwae lihi o ke ola honua aiwaiwa o Robert Uluwehionāpuaikawekiuokalani Cazimero i mea e pulama a hilipoli mau 'ia ai ka 'ike a me ka na'auao Hawaii o ka wã ma mua a me ke au o ka manawa e ne'e nei. E kau mai ka halia a e pahola mai i ka nolau ma o kou makaikai ana i ka lehiwa a lehia hol o keia huaka'i ana. Wahea Foundation / 2026

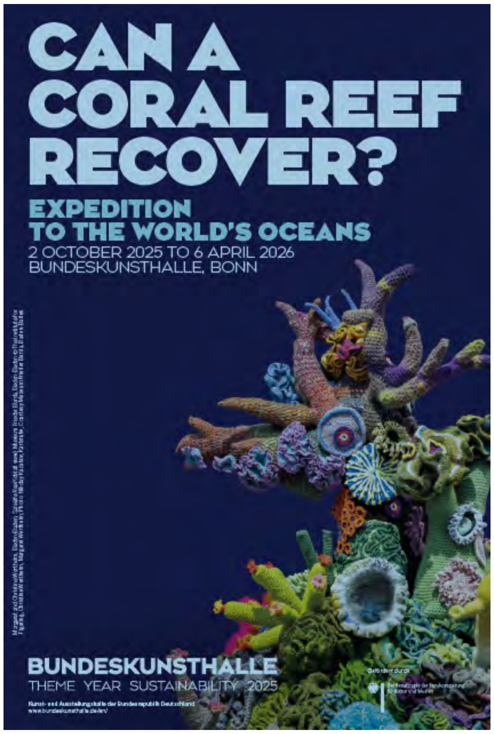
Welcome to Ke Kilo Lani. This exhibit opens a window into Robert Uluwehionäpuaikawēkiuokalani Cazimero's extraordinary life's journey to ensure the continuity of Hawaiian cultural heritage in both traditional and innovative teachings. Find inspiration through your own connection to the beauty and depth of his journey.



For more information: https://gallery.windward.hawaii.edu/ke-kilo-lani/

Image credit: https://www.instagram.com/p/DS--xcAEt0H/

EXHIBITION


CAN A CORAL REEF RECOVER?
EXPEDITION TO THE WORLD'S OCEANS
2 OCTOBER 2025 TO 6 APRIL 2026
BUNDESKUNSTHALLE, BONN
BUNDESKUNSTHALLE
THEME YEAR SUSTAINABILITY 2025

EXPEDITION TO THE WORD'S OCEANS
OCTOBER 2, 2025 – 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.

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

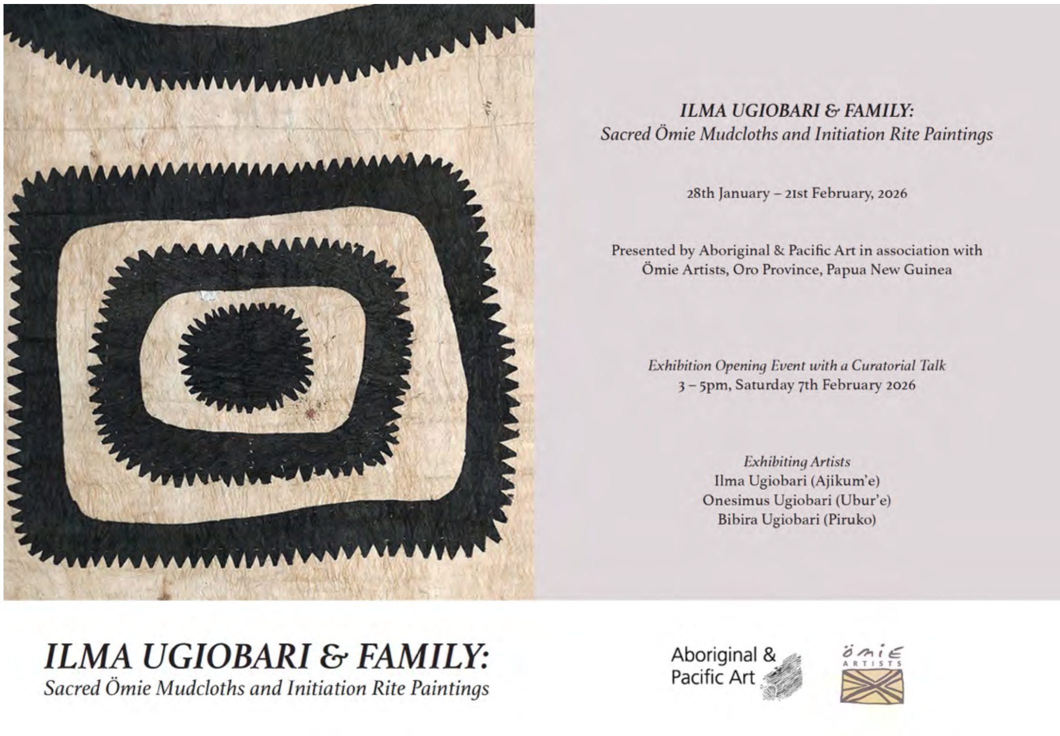
Art and Exhibition Hall of the Federal Republic of Germany
Helmut-Kohl-Allee 4, 53113 Bonn
T +49 228 9171–200
info@bundeskunsthalle.de
www.bundeskunsthalle.de
facebook.com/bundeskunsthalle
instagram.com/bundeskunsthalle
#ExpeditionWeltmeere, #Bundeskunsthalle

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

RECENT EXHIBITION

ÖMIE ARTISTS (Oro Province, Papua New Guinea) and ABORIGINAL & PACIFIC ART (Sydney, Australia) warmly invite you to a new exhibition:

Ilma Ugiobari & Family: Sacred Ömie Mudcloths and Initiation Rite Paintings
January 28–February 21, 2026
Aboriginal & Pacific Art Gallery



ILMA UGIOBARI & FAMILY:
Sacred Ömie Mudcloths and Initiation Rite Paintings

28th January – 21st February, 2026

Presented by Aboriginal & Pacific Art in association with
Ömie Artists, Oro Province, Papua New Guinea

Exhibition Opening Event with a Curatorial Talk
3 – 5pm, Saturday 7th February 2026

Exhibiting Artists
Ilma Ugiobari (Ajikum'e)
Onesimus Ugiobari (Ubur'e)
Bibira Ugiobari (Piruko)

ILMA UGIOBARI & FAMILY:
Sacred Ömie Mudcloths and Initiation Rite Paintings

Aboriginal & Pacific Art

ömie ARTISTS

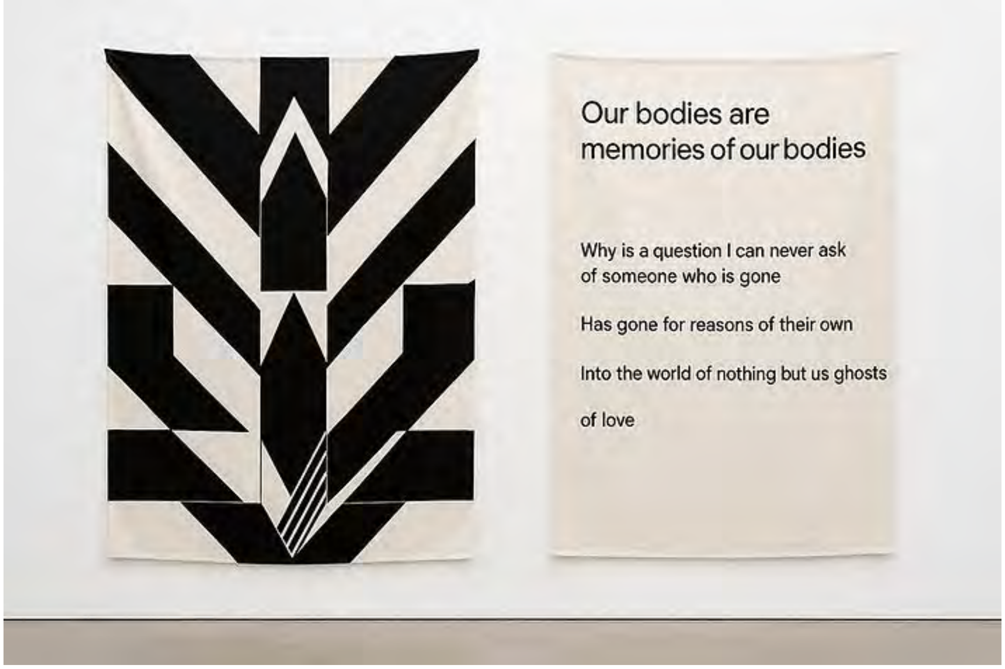
The exhibition can also be viewed ONLINE in the: Online Exhibition Catalogue or on the Gallery Website: Aboriginal & Pacific Art, https://www.aboriginalpacificart.com.au/exhibitions/current.

For further exhibition information and artwork enquiries, please email the gallery: info@aboriginalpacificart.com.au
1/24 Wellington Street
Waterloo NSW 2017
Australia

RECENT EXHIBITION

Dan Taulapapa McMullin
Our Bodies Are Memories of Our Bodies: Siapo ma Solo

Pacific Island Ethnic Art Museum, Long Beach
October 18, 2025 – February 22, 2026


Our bodies are
memories of our bodies
Why is a question I can never ask
of someone who is gone
Has gone for reasons of their own
Into the world of nothing but us ghosts
of love

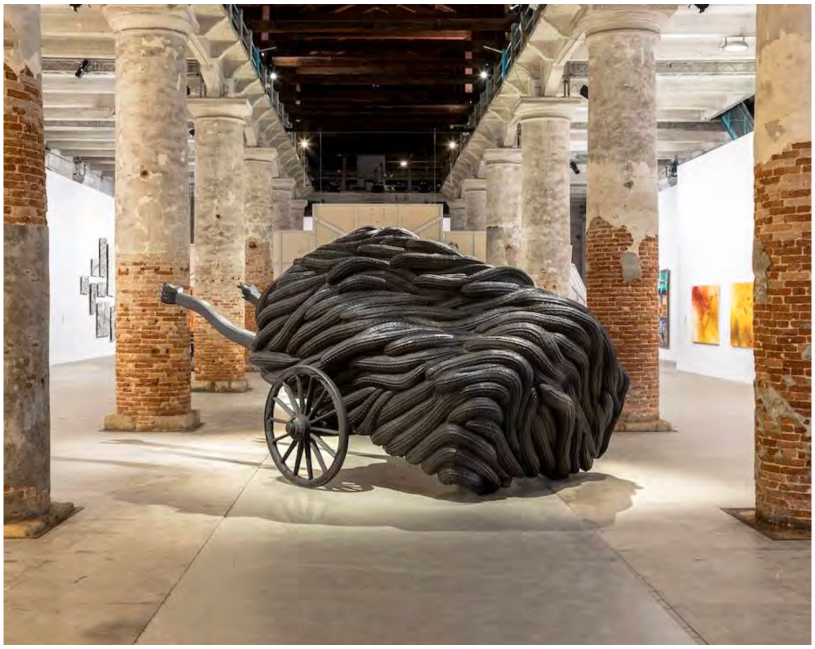
Siapo—Indigenous Samoan barkcloth abstraction—and solo—poetry in the Samoan genre and worldview, here composed in English—by Faʻafafine, non-binary Samoan artist Dan Taulapapa McMullin. Printed on cloth with ink painting, these works embody the faʻasamoa understanding that the body itself is an archive, 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. Limited edition art pairings from this exhibition are available for sale, with all proceeds supporting PIEAM.

For more information: https://www.pieam.org/exhibits

Image Credit: *Our Bodies Are Memories of Our Bodies*. Cloth and ink. Installation detail.

RECENT 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, went on display at the gallery in May 2025.

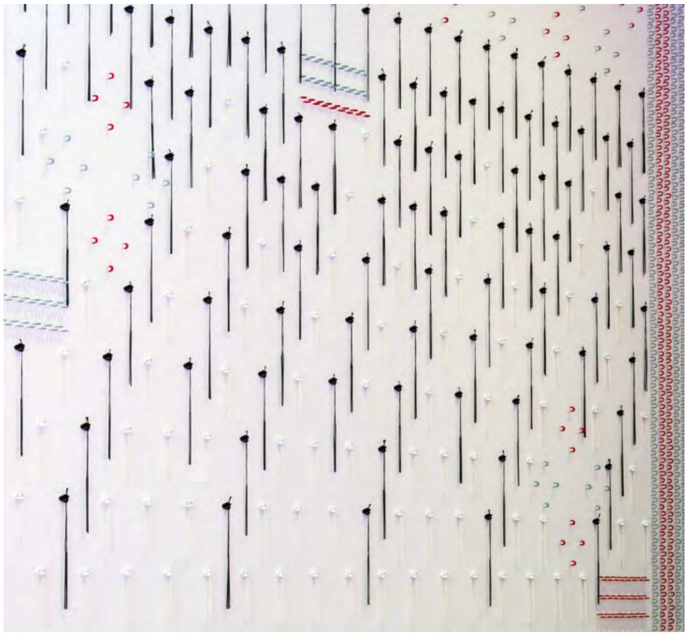
Wastelands is a reinterpretation of a pātaka (Māori storehouse), adorned with carvings of tuna (eels), referencing Māori food economies and the environmental impact of colonial land policies. It reflects the legacy of the 1858 Waste Lands Act, which severely impacted Māori land rights and the ecological 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: La Biennale di Venezia.

RECENT EXHIBITION

Mataaho Collective: Hautāmiro
Dunedin Public Art Gallery
Dunedin, Aotearoa/New Zealand
February 25, 2025 – February 15, 2026



Extending across twenty meters, 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.

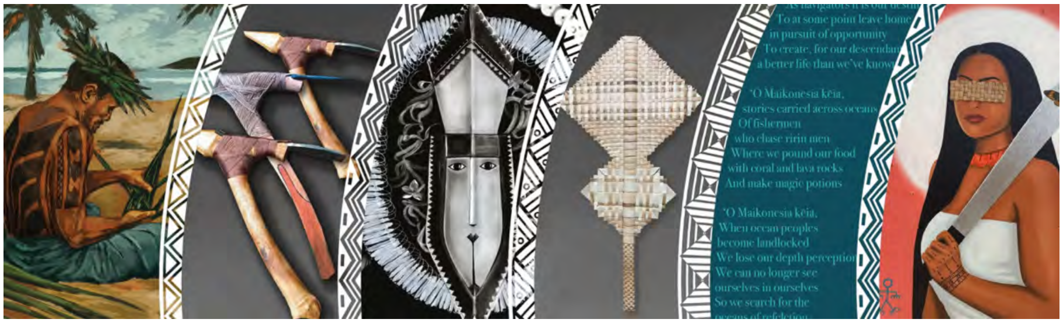
Mataaho Collective (est. 2012) has been working in Ōtepoti Dunedin as part of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery Aotearoa Visiting Artist Programme, supported by Creative New Zealand Toi Aotearoa.

For more information: https://dunedin.art.museum/news/hautamiro/

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

RECENT EXHIBITION

Ocean of Peace
Schaefer International Gallery,
Maui Arts & Cultural Center, Kahului, Hawai'i
December 6, 2025 – January 31, 2026


To at some point leave home
in pursuit of opportunity
To create, for our descendan
a better life than we've know
'O Maikonesia kēia,
stories carried across oceans
Of fishermen
who chase ririn men
Where we pound our food
with coral and lava rocks
And make magic potions
'O Maikonesia kēia,
When ocean peoples
become landlocked
We lose our depth perception
We can no longer see
ourselves in ourselves
So we search for the

The "Ocean of Peace" represents a framework that was endorsed by Pacific Island leaders in 2025, envisioning a future for the Pacific region as a space of harmony and cooperation drawn from traditional values and cultural customs. The exhibition features six contemporary artists of Micronesian heritage: **James Bamba** (Guåhan/Northern Mariana Islands), **Carol Ann Carl** (Pohnpei), **Gillian Dueñas** (Guåhan), **Kalany Omengkar** (Belau/Northern Mariana Islands), **Anthony Watson** (Belau), and **Lissette Yamase** (Chuuk). These artists integrate the beliefs and practices of their Micronesian cultures with lived experiences in the Hawaiian Islands to build connections across island chains, expressing ways we can collectively realize this future.

For more information: https://mauiarts.org/exhibit-details/ocean-of-peace

For information on current and upcoming exhibitions at the Schaefer Gallery: https://mauiarts.org/exhibits

Image Credit: https://mauiarts.org/exhibit-details/ocean-of-peace

RECENT EXHIBITION

2026 HIAA Invitational
Hawaii Island Art Alliance, Hilo, Hawaii
January 16, 2026 – February 12, 2026

HAWAII
ISLAND
A · R · T
ALLIANCE

Presented by Hawaiʻi Island Art Alliance (HIAA), this exhibit featured thirty-four outstanding Hawaiʻi Island artists. HIAA selected artists for their caliber of work and their unique point of view. to submit up to 5 works. The exhibition showcased the wide breadth of talent of both renowned and emerging artists that reside on Hawaiʻi Island.

Featured artists: Clayton Amemiya, Laurie Bauers, Henry Bianchini, Jane Bonus, Claudia Centorame-Hagan, Ken Charon, Rebecca Rosen Charon, Jelena Clay, Scott Fleming, Stephen Freedman, Reyn Grillo, Joe Hampton, Jan Hashi, Kaiili Kaulukukui, Codie King, Suzi Lacey, Maria Marcias, Kawehi Mahi-Roberts, Ethel Mann, Rodrigo Diego Mazano Pérez, Jillian Marohnic, Diana Miller, Elizabeth Miller, Hiroki Morinoue, Patrick OKiersey, Rachel Orr, Abbie Rabinowitz, Nainoa Rosehill, Joseph Ruesing, Robin Scanlon, Danielle Stanfill, Dominic Tidmarsh, Sunny Tracy, and William Wingert.

For more information: @WAILOACENTER, WAILOACENTER.COM
https://www.wailoacenter.com/exhibitions-1
https://www.wailoacenter.com/

RECENT EXHIBITION

ʻO Ka Wai Mai مي: From Lahaina to the Litani

January 13 – February 18, 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 a 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.

For more information: https://hawaii.edu/art/%CA%BBo-ka-wai-mai-%D9%85%D9%8A-from-lahaina-to-the-litani/

Contact: Melissa Chimera, melissachimera@gmail.com

RECENT EXHIBITION

Voices of the Pacific: Innovation and Tradition
Caixa Forum, Barcelona
November 7, 2025 – February 15, 2026

VOCES
DEL
PACÍFICO
INNOVACIÓN Y TRADICIÓN

From New Guinea to Hawaiʻi, and from Rapa Nui to New Zealand, Oceania is a network of islands and cultures united by the Pacific Ocean. This ocean has not only been their means of subsistence but has also inspired the development of their creativity.

The exhibition features over two hundred historical and contemporary pieces from the British Museum's collections dedicated to the peoples of the Pacific Islands. These include ceremonial paddles, basalt figurines of ancestors, garments made from mulberry bark, hats, models of war canoes, necklaces and nose ornaments, and mother-of-pearl fishhooks. It is a comprehensive display of the artistic genius of Oceanic peoples, structured into seven sections: innovation and tradition, innovators, weavers, dancers, warriors, carvers, and travelers.

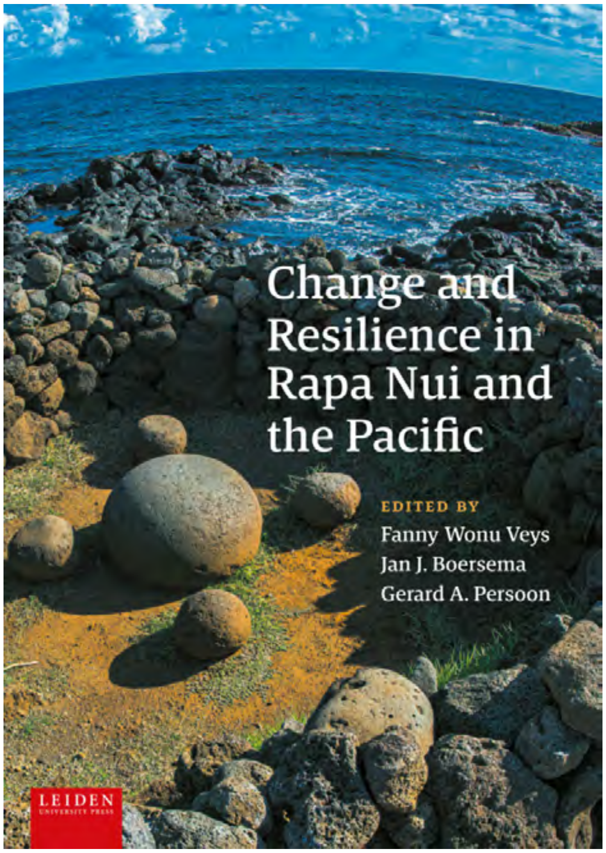
For more information:
https://caixaforum.org/es/barcelona/p/voces-del-pacifico_a173457069

Image Credit: Ango. Model of a tomoko (war canoe). Roviana, Solomon Islands, 1900-1920. Wood and shell. OC1921, 1102.1. © The Trustees of the British Museum

NEW PUBLICATION

Change and Resilience in Rapa Nui and the Pacific

Edited by Fanny Wonu Veys, Jan J. Boersema, & Gerard A. Persoon

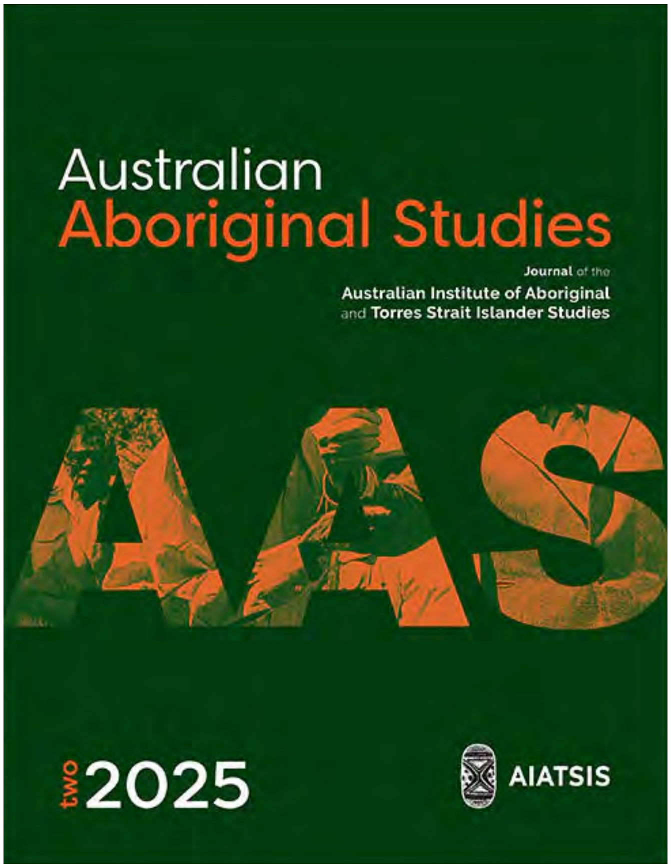


This edited volume reflects the latest research on Rapa Nui and the Pacific in the fields of archaeology, education, history, Indigenous studies, and museology. Archaeologists show the relationship between value judgments, archaeological data and mapping; economic, ideological, and socio-political interactions and stone quarrying; rock art, voyaging histories, and Rapa Nui astronomy. The book pays attention to European views including those of the explorer Jacob Roggeveen, the expedition leader Walter Knoche, nineteenth-century eyewitness accounts, the ethnologist Alfred Métraux, and Professor John Macmillan Brown. The representation of Rapa Nui in popular culture is discussed. Contributions show that Rapa Nui identity is expressed through ancestral medicine, finding ways to self-determination in relation to Chile, barkcloth traditions and body art, and architectural space and place. The violence of western education systems is unpacked in the context of Rapa Nui. Contributions also discuss how museum collections, be they photographs, stone and obsidian artifacts reveal new dimensions of Rapa Nui history. Concerns about the restitution of Rapa Nui objects and ancestral remains are explored. Authors discuss the still undeciphered Roŋoroŋo script from historical, scientific, and linguistic perspectives. They also reminisce on 1970s life on Rapa Nui and ethno-archaeological experiments. Two contributions take the reader outside of Rapa Nui to Palau and the Marquesas.

To purchase and for more information: https://lup.nl/publications/academic-research/change-and-resilience-in-rapa-nui-and-the-pacific/

NEW PUBLICATION

Journal of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies

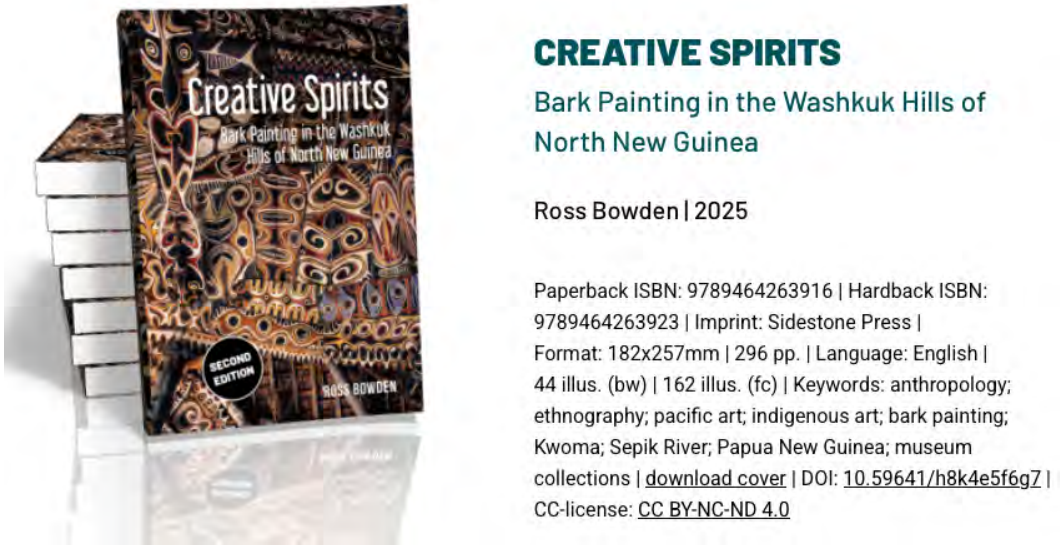

Australian
Aboriginal Studies
Journal of the
Australian Institute of Aboriginal
and Torres Strait Islander Studies
AAS
two 2025
AIATSIS

Access the journal here: https://shop.aiatsis.gov.au/products/australian-aboriginal-studies-aas-2025-issue-2
Most recent publication date: December 19, 2025

Australian Aboriginal Studies (AAS) is a peer-reviewed journal that combines academic rigour with research excellence. The journal advances qualitative academic scholarship of significance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in established and emerging fields of humanities and social sciences in contemporary and historic Australian contexts. The journal is published twice a year by AIATSIS.

Click here to view current and past publications or email asp@aiatsis.gov.au for any queries.

NEW PUBLICATION



CREATIVE SPIRITS

Bark Painting in the Washkuk Hills of North New Guinea

Ross Bowden | 2025

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The art of painting on bark was once widely found in many parts of the Pacific, including the Sepik River region of Papua New Guinea, the home of the Kwoma people who are the subject of this study. The styles of the paintings and the subjects of designs were as varied as the hundreds of languages spoken in this region.

Following European contact at the end of the nineteenth century, and the social change this brought, many New Guinea peoples discontinued producing their vibrant designs on bark. But in some areas the art form still flourishes. This book gives a detailed account of the art of painting on bark among the Kwoma, a people speaking a distinct language who display their barks on the ceilings of their ceremonial men's houses. The book includes accounts of the work of a number of individual artists all of whom are represented by paintings in one or more major art museums internationally.

This second edition has a new chapter illustrating thirty-three large-format Kwoma paintings on paper commissioned by the author during his fieldwork in the Sepik. All thirty-three works on paper, along with forty-two of the barks illustrated, now form part of the permanent collection of the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne (Australia). The book is a unique study of bark painting in a Papua New Guinea society and will have wide appeal to those interested in the art and ethnography of this region.

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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. It holds regular presentations and seminars, and an annual Forum. The OAS publishes a quarterly journal and sends free newsletters to interested subscribers, worldwide.

For membership, event, and subscription information,
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ORGANIZATION

EASTER ISLAND FOUNDATION

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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 Hawaiʻi 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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