

Pacific Arts

Journal of the Pacific Arts Association



N.S. Vol. 22 No. 1
2022

Pacific Arts

Pacific Island Worlds: Oceanic Dis/Positions, N.S. Vol. 22, no. 1
ISSN: 2769-108X (online), 1018-4252 (print), ©2022

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Pacific Arts is the journal of the Pacific Arts Association, an international organization devoted to the study of the arts of Oceania (Aboriginal Australia and the Pacific Islands). The journal was established in 1990 and is currently issued as an annual volume in a new series that began in 2006. In 2020, the journal moved to eScholarship, the open access scholarly publishing program of the University of California/California Digital Library. For information on upcoming calls and submission guidelines, please email us or visit our website.

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The journal receives support from the **Pacific Art & Visual Studies Fund**, established through the University of California Santa Cruz Foundation, which also supports Oceanic arts research and teaching. For more information or to make a contribution, please visit [this page](#).

Cover Image: Carl Franklin Ka'ailā'au Pao, *Ki'i Kupuna: 'O 'Ailā'au—Maka II*, 2021. Acrylic and shellac on canvas, 40 x 30 in., collection of the Hawai'i State Foundation on Culture and the Arts. Photograph courtesy of the artist

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e-ISSN: 2769-108X

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KAREN STEVENSON

Remembering Adrienne L. Kaeppler (1935–2022)



Figure 1. Ralph Regenvanu, Karen Stevenson, and Adrienne Kaeppler at the Pacific Arts Association XI International Symposium, Vancouver, Canada, 2013. Photograph courtesy of H. Scothorn

It is with heavy hearts that the Pacific Arts Association (PAA) acknowledges Adrienne L. Kaeppler’s passing on March 5, 2022, at the age of 86. Adrienne was a stalwart supporter of the PAA and one of its founding members. In 2003, she was awarded the association’s highest accolade, the *Manu Daula* (Frigate Bird) Award, which is given to an individual for outstanding achievement in, and dedication to, the arts of the Pacific.

Adrienne’s passion for the Pacific—its peoples, culture, and arts—was ignited while studying at the University of Hawai’i from 1959 to 1967. During this time, and her tenure at the Bernice Pauahi Bishop Museum in Honolulu, Adrienne began to develop a network of scholars and institutions that facilitated her research on Pacific collections around the globe. She found a “home” at the Smithsonian

Institution's National Museum of Natural History, where she worked for more than forty years, prior to her retirement at the end of 2021.



Figure 2. Adrienne Kaepler examining a nineteenth-century Sāmoan *siapo tasina* in a Smithsonian National Natural History Museum storage facility, Suitland, Maryland, 2003. Photograph courtesy of H. Scothorn

Throughout her distinguished career, Adrienne carried out research in many Pacific nations, in particular Tonga, Sāmoa, Hawai'i, and Rapa Nui, and focused on a wide range of art forms including visual arts, poetry, dance, and music. She published more than 300 peer-reviewed publications. Her scholarship was unsurpassed and her position within the communities of Pacific anthropology and arts unequalled.

Adrienne received many awards and accolades during her career. A highlight was her investiture as a Commander of the Royal Household Order by Tupou VI, King of Tonga and grandson of Queen Sālote, in June 2015.

For me, some of Adrienne's greatest attributes were her kindness and willingness to take young scholars under her wing. With this tutelage, not only did we acquire knowledge, we were able to expand the field to which she dedicated her life. Her legacy and our memories of her will live on forever.

JAMES CLIFFORD & STACY L. KAMEHIRO

From the Edge through the Vā: Introduction to “Pacific Island Worlds: Oceanic Dis/Positions”

Abstract

This special issue of Pacific Arts centers on the theme “Pacific Island Worlds: Trans-pacific Dis/Positions,” which was the topic of a two-day series of events held at the University of California, Santa Cruz (UCSC) in May 2018. This generative meeting explored Oceanic rootedness and mobility, grounded and expansive kinships, worlding, place-making, and colonial histories and their legacies. In important ways, it grew out of the “Native Pacific Cultural Studies on the Edge” symposium, also hosted by UCSC, nearly two decades earlier. “Pacific Island Worlds” was dedicated to the memory of Teresia Teaiwa, a graduate of UCSC’s History of Consciousness doctoral program (2001) who had passed away in 2017 and whose academic, activist, and creative work profoundly inspired Pacific studies scholars and artists around the world. Our introduction is a story of two conferences—moments, pauses, in an ongoing flow of historical, political, and intellectual activity.

Keywords: *Pacific studies, Indigenous studies, cultural studies, feminist studies, colonial studies, diaspora, identity, art, visual culture, material culture, indigeneity, activism*

This special issue of *Pacific Arts* centers on the theme “Pacific Island Worlds: Trans-pacific Dis/Positions,” which was the topic of a two-day series of events held at the University of California, Santa Cruz (UCSC) in May 2018. Largely supported by the University of California (UC) Humanities Research Institute and organized by Stacy Kamehiro and Kara Hisatake, with assistance from Michelle Erai, Maile Arvin, and UCSC graduate students in visual studies, literature, anthropology, and history, “Pacific Island Worlds” gathered together students and faculty from across the UC—as well as artists, students, and scholars working throughout the United States—to participate in workshops, artist talks, and a symposium.¹ This generative hui (meeting, joining) explored Oceanic rootedness and mobility, grounded and expansive kinships, worlding, place-making, and colonial histories and their legacies.

In important ways, the 2018 gathering grew out of the “Native Pacific Cultural Studies on the Edge” symposium, also hosted by UC Santa Cruz, nearly two decades earlier, and the powerful swells of inquiry and critique emerging at that time. “Pacific Island Worlds” was dedicated to the memory of Teresia Teaiwa, a 2001 graduate of UCSC’s History of Consciousness doctoral program who had passed away in 2017, and whose academic, activist, and creative work profoundly inspired Pacific Studies scholars and artists around the world. Born in Honolulu and raised in Fiji, Teresia taught at the University of the South Pacific in Suva before moving to Wellington. Deeply concerned with Fijian culture and politics after a series of military coups in that country, she strongly rejected all forms of ethnic absolutism. Her view of the world reflected a Pacific-centered internationalism. Her father is I-Kiribati (displaced to Fiji from the mine-devastated phosphate island of Banaba), and her mother African American. An understanding of the simultaneously rooted and mobile nature of Islander histories and attachments permeated her scholarship, teaching, and creative writing. “Native Pacific Cultural Studies on the Edge” crystallized this understanding.

Our introduction is a story of two conferences—moments, pauses, in an ongoing flow of historical, political, and intellectual activity. The anchoring dates, 2000 and 2018, are somewhat arbitrary markers for currents (and eddies) of change beginning in the 1980s and extending into an unfinished present.



Figure 1. View from the University of California, Santa Cruz “clifftop” (see p. 5 below). Photograph courtesy of James Clifford

2000

“Native Pacific Cultural Studies on the Edge” was organized by Vicente (Vince) M. Diaz and J. Kēhaulani Kauanui. It brought together established scholars, graduate students, activists, and artists from across the Pacific to explore possibilities for cultural studies in Oceania. Many threads link it with “Pacific Island Worlds”: an affirmation of inventive, cosmopolitan forms of “indigeneity,” a refusal to separate academic work from activism, and an openness to diverse aesthetic practices. Several individuals were active at both events: Jewel Block (formerly Jewel Castro), Michele Erai, James Clifford, and most pervasively, Teresia Teaiwa, tragically deceased and much missed.

A selection of papers from the first conference quickly appeared in a special issue of *The Contemporary Pacific* in 2001.² Diaz and Kauanui, both graduates of UCSC’s History of Consciousness doctoral program, defined the event’s focus on “native productions of indigeneity”: “We wanted to feature the edges of what is normally taken to be traditional native territory; in the face of diaspora and globalization, but without relinquishing the groundedness of indigenous identity, politics, theory, method, and aesthetics.”³ This awareness of deep local attachments, simultaneously engaged with contemporary structures and possibilities, was a hallmark of the complex concept, and practice, of “indigeneity” that was emerging in the conference discussions.

At that time, Teresia Teaiwa was a PhD student at UC Santa Cruz. She belonged to an extraordinary group of younger intellectuals (Oceanian, Native American, international) who were working with multiple, sometimes contradictory, perspectives: Indigenous, diasporic, feminist, poetic, activist, scholarly, postcolonial. Her dissertation, “Militarism, Tourism and the Native: Articulations in Oceania,” rescued “natives” from the stereotypes of pastoral exoticism, nationalist apologetics, and postmodern condescension.⁴ In her work, and that of her cohort, “Indigenous,” never meant “Nativist” in a national, exclusivist sense. At stake was a more open, relational figure, always both a dweller and a traveler. Throughout Teresia’s career as an artist, critical thinker, and educator, she challenged dichotomies, exploring the tensions, crossings, and dreams that make Oceania a dynamic old/new place.

Something that might be called “critical Indigenous studies” was taking shape at UC Santa Cruz—a development allied with, but distinct from, the ethnically-defined programs (“Hawaiian Studies,” “Native American Studies,” “Black Studies,” and “Chicano Studies”) that had formed in the 1970s and 1980s. By 2000, a diverse group had gathered at UCSC, attracted by a campus with a deep history

of interdisciplinarity and a willingness to support activist scholarship. The History of Consciousness Program harbored a vibrant cluster of Native Pacific and Island-savvy PhD students. Vince Diaz was the first to arrive, in 1986, after studying political science at the University of Hawai'i, Mānoa. A few years later, Teresia, with an MA in Pacific history from the same institution, followed. Then, after a Fulbright in Aotearoa, came Kēhaulani Kauanui. Over the next decade, others joined the mix: Noelani Goodyear Ka'ōpua, April Henderson, Michele Erai, Pamela Kido, Riet Delsing (in anthropology), and Heather Waldroup. Joanne Barker (Lenape/Delaware) was a close ally. A bit later, David Delgado Shorter and Kim Christen wrote dissertations based on their long-term alliances with Indigenous communities. The subsequent careers and many publications of these individuals are important and widely accessible.

The work being done at UC Santa Cruz was not unique; it was part of wider movements—feminist, queer, and postcolonial. The Pacific cluster overlapped with a group of largely South Asian students in the History of Consciousness Department devoted to the critical study of “colonial discourse.” An earlier conference, “Traveling Theories, Traveling Theorists,” had grappled with many of the issues of post-/neo-colonial location that would be explored a decade later in Indigenous/Pacific contexts.⁵ Another ally at UC Santa Cruz was an emerging research cluster (and annual film festival) for “Women of Color in Collaboration and Conflict.” Feminism, “racial formations,” “the politics of location,” and “intersectionality” were in the air.

During the 1980s and 1990s, Oceania was not well represented at UCSC. A “Center for South Pacific Studies” had recently folded.⁶ No faculty members in the humanities, social sciences, or arts were pursuing active research on Island Pacific issues. This did not deter Vince, Teresia, and those who followed. They brought with them local knowledge and ramifying networks. What they sought in graduate school was freedom to make connections, an open theoretical and interdisciplinary context that could support their work without forcing it into established academic molds. They found this in the History of Consciousness Department and its affiliated faculty.

James Clifford, Donna Haraway, Angela Davis, Barbara Epstein, Don Brenneis, Chris Connery, and others served as advisors and committee members, willing to listen and to offer critical guidance in areas outside their academic expertise. The Pacific Island cluster at UCSC was not a planned initiative. Faculty found themselves recruited, interpellated by social and intellectual projects they could not have anticipated. Students formed loose networks based on friendship,

political solidarity, and a commitment to critical thinking—a search for scholarship with a difference.

In her contribution to the 2000 conference, “L(o)osing the Edge,” Teresia traced the formation of academic links at a series of meetings around the Pacific during the 1980s. One result was a “motley group of Hawaiian, Chamorro, Fijian, Indo-Fijian, Samoan, Micronesian, and Filipino Pacific Islanders . . . [quoting Vince Diaz,] ‘in constant motion with the tides of change and growth . . . [who have] caught different waves, all of us, only to find ourselves beached, temporarily, out here in Santa Cruz.’”⁷ “*Out here* in Santa Cruz”: the US mainland was conceived, not as a center, but as a margin, a stopping place in a dynamic, interconnected Oceanic world. Epeli Hau‘ofa’s “sea of islands,” provided inspiration during these years.

“L(o)osing the Edge” was divided into two columns, creating a counterpoint on every page. In one column Teresia evoked the recent gatherings and networks that had come together in the 2000 conference. In the other she reflected on the conference theme, “edges”—places of power and perspective, both in the Pacific region and in intellectual work. Traveling natives/mobile theorists had to negotiate diverse locations, embodied perspectives. She traced her own movement from Hawai‘i to Santa Cruz and History of Consciousness, a place where nativeness could be conceived in relation to various “countercolonial discourses” and racial/ethnic formations. Her time in Santa Cruz offered “an intellectual luxury, away from the immediacy of nationalist struggles.” While there, she could “afford complex and theoretical formulations.”⁸ However, this intellectual stimulus and overview brought with it blindness. She evoked a Hawaiian proverb contrasting the distant view from a clifftop (*tapu*) with the intimate encounters down among particular ocean currents (*noa*). Teresia explained that leaving Santa Cruz after five years for Fiji and a position teaching at the University of the South Pacific positioned her at a different “edge,” a meeting place for diverse populations from all over the Pacific. There she learned, face-to-face, about “people and relationships,” different local histories and struggles. Something was lost and something gained in the move (which would not be her last). “For me, Fiji and Santa Cruz embody this complicated tension between the *tapu* and the *noa*, the clifftop and the face-to-face” (Fig. 1).⁹

Pacific Studies, as Teresia and April Henderson later developed it at Victoria University, Wellington, would mediate continually between these two locations: one of comparative, critical overview, the other of local affiliation and

activist engagement. And the same complex vision now characterizes the “Indigenous Pacifics” series at University of Hawai‘i Press, edited by April and Noelani Goodyear Ka‘ōpua. In their series introduction they write:

Recognizing that histories of exchange within and beyond Oceania shape the lived experiences of Pacific Islanders, *Indigenous Pacifics* seeks to create a space for generative and sustained conversations between the independent and the still-occupied Pacific Islands, between Natives and non-Natives, between academics, artists, activists and other cultural knowledge producers, between the Pacific and other regions.¹⁰

A recent book in the “Indigenous Pacifics” series by Emalani Case, *Everything Ancient Was Once New*, develops the resonant Hawaiian concept of Kahiki, at once an ancestral homeland and a pathway to life beyond island shores.¹¹ It explores the personal experience of a “traveling native” moving from Hawai‘i to Aotearoa, grappling with diasporic challenges and opportunities, while sustained by Kahiki, a mobile, form-shifting sanctuary.

Here, in the 2018 conference, and in many other places, we encounter echoes from the engaged theorists—Indigenous and “postcolonial”—who gathered in 2000 out on the Santa Cruz edge. Links to that moment can also be found in the first volume of Teresia’s selected works, *Sweat and Salt Water*, published by University of Hawai‘i Press in 2021.¹² Reading early essays such as “L(o)osing the Edge,” “bikinis and other s/pacific n/otions,” and “Yaqona/Yagoqu: Roots and Routes of a Displaced Native” reminds us how words like “indigenous” and “native” can evoke mobilities and interconnections, relational forms of identity and sovereignty. Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, who was part of the Santa Cruz conversation, has shown contemporary indigeneity to be a multi-scaled, non-guaranteed, globalizing “project.”¹³ Her account of this emergence describes what was coming together on the UC clifftop: networks made of specific contacts, travels, and affiliations.

At UC Santa Cruz in the 1990s and early 2000s, “nativeness” was fashioned through relations with other decolonizing and liberatory discourses. An important context, the research cluster for “Women of Color in Collaboration and Conflict,” opened links between Island Pacific and Native American experiences of colonization. With Joanne Barker, Teresia co-authored “Native Information,” an experimental essay published in the occasional journal *Inscriptions*.¹⁴ The essay reacted to a new visibility and normativity for Indians/Natives. It worked to make space

for something more: a critical, subversive edge to the Indigenous, and a sense of becoming. Refusing to be “native informants,” authentic insiders, the authors offered an open-ended scrapbook of Indigenous perspectives: “information” rewritten as “in-formation,” historical process.

2018

“Pacific Island Worlds” reflected on the impact of those early conversations sounding from the clifftop and extended them through complex strata of time and space. Writing about “Tā-Vā (Time-Space): The Birth of An Indigenous Moana Theory,” a conference session held at the Association for Social Anthropology of Oceania annual meeting in Santa Cruz in 2009, the session’s conveners—Tēvita O. Ka’ili (Maui-Tāvā-He-Ako), ‘Okusitino Māhina (Hūfanga), and Ping-Ann Addo (Kula-He-Fonua)—explain that “it is, in the Moana, symbolically thought that people walk forward into the past and, contemporaneously, walk backward into the future, both in the present, where the elusive, already-taken-place past and illusive, yet-to-take-place future are, and in the special process, constantly mediated in the ever-changing present.”¹⁵ Reflecting on the spatial component, A. Mārata Tamaira describes vā (the space between) as “a liminal zone marked not only by tension and transformation but also by confluences and connections”; it is uncomfortable, deeply personal, and also transformative.¹⁶ The students, scholars, artists, and activists who contributed to the 2018 gathering reckoned their consequential genealogies through the UCSC Native Pacific Cultural Studies group as they engaged questions of identities, mobilities, homes, belongings, and futures. They added to the productive waves of questioning, compassion, risk, action, and critique inspired by their forebears.

“Pacific Island Worlds” continued those earlier expansive conceptions of Oceania as a site of complex human interaction, as a heterogeneous space-time in which diverse communities are connected through kinship, colonial histories, and diasporas. Sustaining Epeli Hau’ofa’s “sea of islands” consciousness, this perspective aligned with a critical shift away from framing the Pacific Islands as isolated entities within an empty expanse of the Pacific Ocean. Instead, it recognized as a key conceptual and political intervention Hau’ofa’s vision of island (and Pacific edge) worlds that have been intimately connected within a vast relational network.¹⁷ Interactions between Indigenous communities, explorers, settlers, migrants, and colonial agents have produced a range of mobilities (either willful or compelled), yielding fraught processes of place-making, maintaining customary

homes, establishing new communities, and forming social, cultural, and political positions in the face of ongoing dis-positioning.



Figure 2. Some of the participants at the “Pacific Island Worlds: Transpacific Dis/Positions” symposium, May 5, 2018, University of California, Santa Cruz. Photograph by Joe Stockwell. Courtesy of Stacy Kamehiro

The heterogeneous, yet historically—and culturally—specific, character of transpacific movements enables and demands creative and theoretical approaches to understanding human experiences and agency in a far-reaching Oceania (dynamically and dialogically extending and centering the “edges”) in order to generate future imaginings that contribute not only to a mode of survival, but to an art of living.¹⁸ “Pacific Island Worlds” questioned the often indiscriminate applications of theories related to (post)colonialism, diaspora, creolization, borderlands, etc.—which are largely grounded in other histories and parts of the world—to Oceania. Through interdisciplinary collaboration and dialogue, participants asked: How can the Pacific generate theories, engage innovative methods, and emerge from epistemologies and historicities specific to its social and cultural experiences? What are the opportunities and challenges of dwelling in Oceanic thresholds that are both familiar and alienating, and how do these inform our approaches?

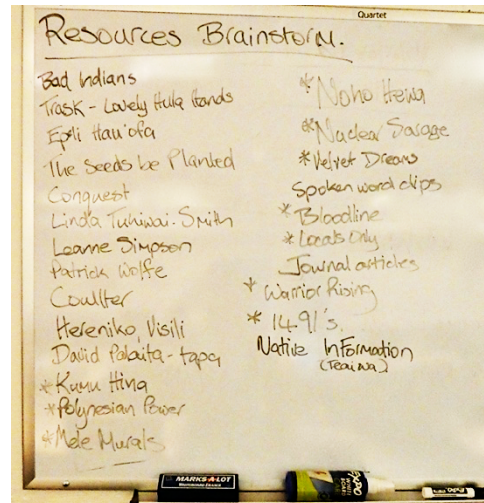
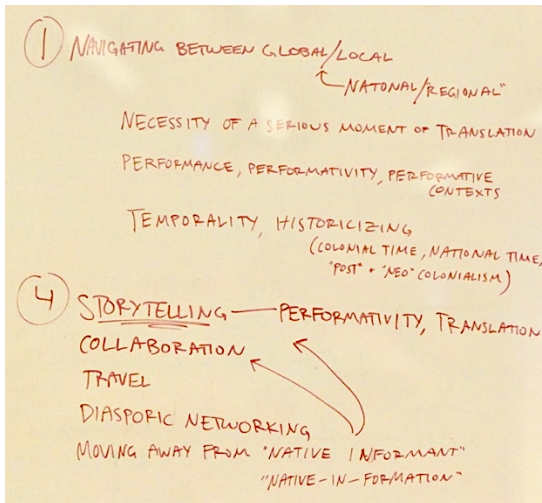
The 2018 hui included artists, undergraduates, graduate students, and faculty working in the fields of art, American studies, Asian American studies, community studies, economics, English, environmental studies, critical race and ethnic studies, feminist and gender studies, history, history of consciousness, literature, marine biology, museum studies, psychology, sociology, theater and performance studies, and visual studies (Fig. 2).¹⁹ The participants work at the mobile “edges” and through the *vā* of Oceania as they pursue their creative work, activism, education, and scholarship, living and creating the generative borderlands of what the 2000 conference and Teresia invoked as inventive, open, relational dwelling/travel. They inhabit a space-time akin to Emalani Case’s Kahiki—an ancestral homeland and a pathway forward-back, then-now.

Spatio-temporal metaphors of/for Oceanic identities have become more pervasive, enabling critical Indigenous studies to effectively articulate experiences of Indigenous movement and transition—positioning, dis-positioning, and repositioning through what artist Rosanna Raymond might characterize as “acti.VĀ.tions.”²⁰ In their creative, scholarly, and activist endeavors, “Pacific Island Worlds” contributors forge relational forms of identity and sovereignty and acknowledge networks made—and also interrupted and remade—through distinct sojourns and associations. They explore, what Halena Kapuni-Reynolds has argued for, an “embracing [of] the theoretical flexibility and diversity of *Vā*, as opposed to making concrete the meanings and work that one can do with space.”²¹ And they explore, in essential ways, being and becoming.

The first day of “Pacific Island Worlds” included a workshop in which participants discussed innovative and apt approaches for future Oceanic research and pedagogy (Fig. 3). Within diverse research interests, they grappled with bounded notions of “Indigenous,” “Migrant,” and “Settler;” how these are configured in the academy/from the clifftop; and how they are created and lived on the ground. They pursued a broader set of questions that complicated these categories through theoretical dis/positions as well as explorations of cross-cultural confrontations, alliances, and wayfinding in the formations of Oceanic places and identities. Additionally, they attended to the complex interactions taking place in everyday life that admit the imperfect impositions of empire and reveal intricate subject formations and human strategies (in art, education, language, literature, and community development) to create livable places in the shifting centers and edges of the Pacific. Participants considered how past scholarship about Oceania has often been subsumed in studies of Asian or US empires and thought about how to grapple with Asia-Pacific-America in productive ways to reconfigure the geographies of their research (Figs. 4–5).



Figure 3. Some of the participants at the “Pacific Island Worlds” workshop and artist talks, May 4, 2018, University of California, Santa Cruz. Photograph courtesy of Stacy Kamehiro



Figures 4–5. Two of the whiteboard notes generated by the “Pacific Island World” workshop discussions, May 4, 2018, University of California, Santa Cruz. Photographs courtesy of Kara Hisatake

They also reflected on Teresia’s writing about the classroom as a metaphorical canoe.²² Drawing on Joseph Lowman’s *Mastering the Techniques of Teaching*, she emphasized learning as a journey that entailed navigating into un-

familiar waters, a cooperative approach to learning, and shared responsibility between students and teachers.²³ Workshop collaborators pondered what “mastery” looks like in Oceanic studies. Three undergraduate members of UCSC’s student organization O.N.E. (Oceania Navigators Empowerment) delivered a compelling presentation on “Empowering Pacific Island Communities” in higher education that identified ongoing inequities in access and the lack of support faced by Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders in the US. They also described their academic and professional goals, campus and community projects, outreach and mentoring, and challenges and accomplishments.



Figure 6. Matai Kerupi Lesu'i (back row, center) with members of O.N.E. (Oceania Navigators Empowerment), a University of California, Santa Cruz student organization, at the kava ceremony for the “Pacific Island Worlds” symposium, May 5, 2018. Photograph courtesy Stacy Kamehiro

The symposium was held on the second day of “Pacific Island Worlds” and began with a kava ceremony officiated by Matai Kerupi Lesu'i (son of the Sa'o family), from Sāmoa and now living in Santa Cruz, who was assisted by members of O.N.E. (Fig. 6). Guests and hosts converged while Matai Lesu'i offered an acknowledgement of thanks and opened a space for those who had gathered with a willingness and readiness to think and share together. James Clifford's keynote address, “Teresia's Complexities,” reflected on her career as an artist, critical thinker, and educator who challenged simple histories and identities. Three panels followed, starting with “Pacific Poetics and Performances,” in which Diana Looser

examined the role of the performing arts in contributing to discourses of national pride and regional affiliations. She considered how *A Waka Odyssey*, a series of integrated performances staged for the 2018 New Zealand Festival, “foregrounds Aotearoa New Zealand as a critical site for examining complex relations between Indigenous, diasporic, and settler identities—entanglements that generate new theories based on local specificities but with broader resonances.”²⁴ Poet-artist Joe Balaz then presented his poetry and artwork in Hawaiian Islands Pidgin (HIP), punctuated with commentary from several literary journal editors on why they have included HIP in their publications, and revealed the expanding contribution of HIP to a growing world literature.

For the second panel, “Imag(in)ing history and Place,” sculptor and installation artist Kaili Chun described how she negotiates ideas of containment and exposure, agency, and restraint in her work, which is largely focused on Native Hawaiian colonial history. Her attention to process, materiality, and time seeks to transform physical spaces into unique environments in order to comment on contemporary issues and realize the culture as an ongoing formation. Ocean engineer and artist Jane Chang Mi discussed her work—including her exhibitions (*See Reverse Side.*) and *The Taste of Purity*—which considers the impact of US and French militarism and nuclear testing in the Pacific Ocean from 1946 to 1996. Through an examination of photographic archives of weapons testing and the production of her own photographs and videos, Chang Mi images non-linear stories of place that speak to earthly environments as collective heritage. Kiri Saliata presented “Citizens of Nowhere: Sāmoan Dis/locations in the United States,” exploring the ways American Sāmoans navigate an exceptional subjectivity as neither fully American nor Sāmoan.”²⁵ Her talk exposed competing narratives of history and belonging, and contended with colonial studies approaches that enact and reinforce Indigenous erasure.

“Pacific Diasporas and Travel,” the final panel, commenced with David Aiona Chang recounting *kanikau* (mourning songs) composed by Native Hawaiian diasporic laborers and settlers in North America in the 1860s and 1870s. He described how *kanikau* gave voice to their composers’ affective lives; how their spatialities formalized Native Hawaiian ties to their homeland; and how they indexed the ways Native Hawaiians were becoming intertwined with Indigenous North American places and social worlds. Focusing on cultural festivals, Jesi Lujan Bennett detailed strategies developed by diasporic Chamoru—who have settled in San Diego, California, facilitated by pervasive Chamoru service in the US military—to build new communities while maintaining connections to their homeland. Jewel Block spoke about her paintings and drawings, which are inspired by the physical

experiences of her family members in the US and in American Sāmoa—their travels, labors, celebrations, memories, material cultures, and building of homes and lives—and increasingly reflect on the impact that changing natural environments have on her family and, more generally, on Sāmoans and the Sāmoan diaspora.

Though closing the symposium, Rob Wilson’s presentation opened new questions about the ways creatives and researchers might engender different temporalities and spatialities within current conditions of global capitalism and planetary transformation. He argued that “‘Worlding Asia Pacific into Oceania’ would open up different ways of being with others and being in the world, opening life-forms to what have been called other ‘lived local temporalities’ and ways of dwelling or ‘being with’ above or below the nation-state, reified regionality, or the given world-system of a carbon-fueled, profit-driven capitalism.”²⁶

Several of the workshop and symposium participants—those working in art, visual studies, material culture, and performance studies—are contributors to this issue of *Pacific Arts* (Balaz, Bennett, Block, Kamehiro, Looser, and Axelle Tous-saint writing on Chun). They are joined by others who contemplate the critical interventionist reframing potential of art exhibitions to address colonial histories and Oceanic networks (Margo Machida; Giles Peterson, Katharine Losi Atafu-Mayo with Kamehiro and Maggie Wander; and Katerina Teaiwa and Yuki Kihara); reactivations of space and time through the re-awakening of archives (Christina Ayson Plank and Meleia Simon-Reynolds); reclaiming of nuclear and militarized environments (Claudia Ledderucci); the construction of transnational Oceanic spaces through festivals, performances, and education (Michelle Ladwig Williams); the liberatory possibilities of practicing culturally responsive architectural and urban histories (Kelema Moses); and the deep space-time of natural phenomena (A. Mārata Tamaira and Carl Franklin Ka’ailā’au Pao).

Gazing past/future, the contributors to this issue continue to weave the threads plied by those who led “Native Pacific Studies on the Edge,” fashioning Oceania as an old/new place. Rather than declaring what Oceanic “indigeneity” is, they consider how/where/when it is and respond to Henderson and Goodyear Ka’ōpua’s invitation to sustain multi-vocal and multi-sited conversations.

James Clifford (UCSC, History of Consciousness) is an Emeritus Professor at UCSC who is best known for his historical and literary critiques of anthropological representation, travel writing, and museum practices. He has published several books on these topics, including Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography (with George E. Marcus, 1986). Beginning with his first book, Person and Myth:

Maurice Leenhardt in the Melanesian World (1982), *the Island Pacific has been central to his thinking*. Returns: Becoming Indigenous in the Twenty-First Century was published in 2013. Jim is currently investigating the future possibilities and material limits of ethnological museums in the former First World. He continues to follow the changing politics of indigenism in diverse conjunctures today.

Stacy L. Kamehiro's (UCSC, History of Art and Visual Culture) research focuses on colonial Hawaiian visual and material culture. Her book, *The Arts of Kingship* (2009), offers a detailed account of public art and architecture during the reign of David Kalākaua (1874–1891). Her recent work attends to the politics of art organizations following the overthrow of the Hawaiian monarchy; the place of overseas travel in 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 Fairs* examines collections and exhibitions of Hawaiian material culture and natural history in local and international contexts.

Notes

¹ "Pacific Island Worlds: Transpacific Dis/Positions" received generous support from the University of California Humanities Research Institute and the following institutions and organizations at the University of California, Santa Cruz: Institute of the Arts and Science; Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion; Arts Division; Clare Wedding Student Enrichment Endowment; Cowell College; Porter College; History of Art and Visual Culture Department; and Asian American/Pacific Islander Resource Center.

² "Native Pacific Cultural Studies on the Edge," a special issue of *The Contemporary Pacific* 13, no. 2 (2001).

³ Vicente M. Diaz and J. Kēhaulani Kauanui, "Native Pacific Cultural Studies on the Edge," *The Contemporary Pacific* 13, no. 2 (2001): 315–6.

⁴ Teresia Teaiwa, "Militarism, Tourism and the Native: Articulations in Oceania," PhD diss., University of California, Santa Cruz, 2001.

⁵ James Clifford and Vivek Dhareshwar, eds., *Traveling Theories, Traveling Theorists* (Santa Cruz: University of California, Santa Cruz; Group for the Critical Study of Colonial Discourse; Center for Cultural Studies, 1989).

⁶ The Center for South Pacific Studies records and publications (1943–94) are housed at the University Archives, Special Collections, University of California, Santa Cruz.

⁷ Teresia K. Teaiwa, "L(o)osing the Edge," *The Contemporary Pacific*, 13, no. 2 (2001): 349.

⁸ Teaiwa, "L(o)osing the Edge," 351.

⁹ Teaiwa, "L(o)osing the Edge," 353.

¹⁰ “Indigenous Pacifics,” University of Hawai‘i Press, accessed February 28, 2022 <https://uhpress.hawaii.edu/bookseries/indigenous-pacifics/>.

¹¹ Emalani Case, *Everything Ancient Was Once New: Indigenous Persistence from Hawai‘i to Kahiki* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2021).

¹² Teresia Kieuea Teaiwa, *Sweat and Salt Water: Selected Essays*, compiled and edited by Katerina Teaiwa, April K. Henderson, and Terence Wesley-Smith (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2021).

¹³ Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, “Indigenous Voice,” in *Indigenous Experience Today*, ed. Marisol del la Cadena and Orin Starn (New York: Berg, 2007), 33–67.

¹⁴ joannemariebarker and Teresia Teaiwa, “Native InFormation,” in “Enunciating Our Terms: Women of Color in Collaboration and Conflict,” ed. Maria Ochoa and Teresia Teaiwa, *Inscriptions 7* (1994): 16–41.

¹⁵ Tēvita O. Ka‘ili (Maui-Tāvā-He-Ako), ‘Okusitino Māhina (Hūfanga), and Ping-Ann Addo (Kula-He-Fonua), “Introduction: Tā-Vā (Time-Space): The Birth of An Indigenous Moana Theory,” *Pacific Studies* 40, no. 1–2 (2017): 1. The authors note on page 2 that the tā-vā (time-space) theory of reality is based on Oceanic notions of “time” and “space,” variously known as tā and vā, or, kā and wā.

¹⁶ A. Mārata Tamaira, “Preface,” in *The Space Between: Negotiating Culture, Place, and Identity in the Pacific*, ed. A. Marata Tamaira, Occasional Paper 44 (Honolulu: Center for Pacific Islands Studies, School of Pacific and Asian Studies, University of Hawai‘i–Mānoa), 1.

¹⁷ Epeli Hau‘ofa, “A Sea of Islands,” in *A New Oceania*, ed. V. Naidu, et al. (Suva, Fiji: University of the South Pacific, 1993).

¹⁸ Cf. Wendy Knepper, “Colonization, Creolization, and Globalization,” *Small Axe* 10, no. 3 (2006): 85.

¹⁹ Participants at the two-day event included artists Joe Balaz, Jewel Block (formerly Jewel Castro), Jane Chang Mi, and Kaili Chun; faculty Juliann Anesi, Keith Camacho, David Aiona Chang, James Clifford, Elizabeth DeLoughery, Michelle Erai, Stacy Kamehiro, Diana Looser, Kiri Sailiata, Kēhaulani Vaughn, and Rob Wilson; graduate students Jesi Lujan Bennett, Marion Cadora, Emily Cornish, Danielle Crawford, Kara Hisatake, Josephine Ong, Angela L. Robinson, Demiliza Saramosing, Axelle Toussaint, and Maggie Wander; and undergraduate students Theresa Legae‘e Atanoa, Ray Decadiz, Geraldine De Leon, Fe‘Ofa‘Aki ‘Epenisa, Hattie Fletcher, Ilaisaana Lolohea Fuka, Barrie Greeley, Manamea Lafo, Tufumoena‘i Lesu‘i, Walter Manuofetoa, Alexandra Melendez, Connie Ngirchemat, Alexandria Laloifi Saelua, Alora Santos, and Maha J. Taitano. Matai Kerupi Lesu‘i officiated at the kava ceremony that opened the symposium on May 5, 2018.

²⁰ See Peterson et al, this issue. “Acti.VĀ.te” is a term and concept developed by artist Rosanna Raymond, who highlights the vā as a central practice within the word. “Acti.VĀ.te” uses the vā as a methodology to bring the past into the present through an embodied practice. “Acti.VĀ.tor” is the performative agent, or avatar, who uses the vā as an embodied practice. Rosanna Raymond, personal communication with Giles Peterson, September 10, 2021.

The concept of vā and related concepts were recently explored in a multimodal online conference, “Vā Moana: Space and Relationality in Pacific Thought and Identity,” hosted by the University of Hawai‘i–Mānoa and the Auckland University of Technology, November 24–25, 2021; see <https://www.vamoana.org/marsden-project>.

²¹ Halena Kapuni-Reynolds, email to Stacy Kamehiro, December 29, 2021. See also Halena Kapuni-Reynolds, “Place to Place, Space to Space: Huaka‘i Hele as Decolonial Praxis and the Tidalectic Repertoires of Place” (paper presented at the “Vā Moana: Space and Relationality in Pacific Thought and Identity” conference, Aotearoa New Zealand and Hawai‘i, November 24, 2021).

²² Teresia K. Teaiwa, “The Classroom as a Metaphorical Canoe: Cooperative Learning in Pacific Studies,” *WINHEC: International Journal of Indigenous Education Scholarship* no. 1 (2005): 38–48, <https://journals.uvic.ca/index.php/winhec/article/view/19254>.

²³ Teaiwa, “The Classroom as a Metaphorical Canoe”; Joseph Lowman, *Mastering the Techniques of Teaching* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1984).

²⁴ “Pacific Island Worlds: Transpacific Dis/Positions” symposium program, May 5, 2018 (University of California, Santa Cruz), 8.

²⁵ “Pacific Island Worlds” program, 11.

²⁶ “Pacific Island Worlds” program, 15.

DIANA LOOSER

A River Runs Through Us All: Asian and Pacific Linkages in Contemporary Performance from Aotearoa

Abstract

This essay seeks to broaden and diversify discussions of the transpacific itineraries that weave throughout Oceania by exploring artistic transactions among Māori, Pasifika, and Chinese peoples that are routed through Aotearoa New Zealand. I consider how New Zealand-based performance artists move beyond US-dominated categories and priorities to expose new relationships between islands and continents, and between Indigenous, diasporic, and immigrant identities and ways of being. I chart this terrain by examining three collaborative, intercultural performance works. The multilayered, photographic series Red Coats + Indians: The Games We Play (2019–20), created by New Zealand-born Sāmoan artist Greg Semu in collaboration with Indigenous Formosans in Taiwan, uses the iconic figure of Captain James Cook as an allegory for Chinese colonialism. Renee Liang’s opera The Bone Feeder (2017) and choreographer Moss Te Ururangi Patterson’s choral and dance ensemble piece Awa: When Two Rivers Collide (2017) trace geographical and spiritual connections between Aotearoa and China, but do so in ways that weave Aotearoa into wider Pacific circuits and crossings. The essay demonstrates the important role of the visual and performing arts in imagining mobilities, dis-positioning, place-making, and identities in Oceania, and in highlighting alternative Pacific and Asian linkages and modes of knowledge production.

Keywords: *transpacific, Oceania, intercultural performance, dance, opera, photography, China, Aotearoa New Zealand*

How can we broaden and diversify discussions of the transpacific itineraries that course throughout Oceania and their impact on Pacific Island worlds? This essay approaches the task by exploring artistic transactions among Māori, Chinese, and peoples from the wider Pacific that are routed through Aotearoa New Zealand. In a period when the United States’ foreign policy is focused anew across the Pacific Ocean, I consider how New Zealand’s own ongoing and developing engagements with Asia move us beyond US-dominated categories and priorities to uncover

alternative relationships between islands and continents, and among Indigenous, diasporic, and immigrant identities and ways of being.¹ In this article I chart features of this terrain by examining three collaborative, intercultural works, beginning with the performance-based photographic series *Red Coats + Indians: The Games We Play* (2019–20). Created by New Zealand-born Sāmoan artist Greg Semu, in collaboration with Indigenous Formosans in Taiwan, this multilayered project repositions Captain James Cook, the iconic figure of British exploration in the Pacific, as an allegory for Chinese colonialism. I then turn to two works that imagine geographical and spiritual tracings between Aotearoa and China, and, in so doing, weave Aotearoa into wider Pacific circuits and crossings. Chinese New Zealander Renee Liang’s opera *The Bone Feeder* (2017), performed in te reo Māori, English, and Cantonese, unfolds against the wider historical backdrop of repatriation of migrant Chinese remains across the Pacific, focusing on the disruption of this process and the “re-homing” of Chinese bones on Māori land. The choral and dance ensemble performance *Awa: When Two Rivers Collide* (2017), devised by Māori choreographer Moss Te Ururangi Patterson with Atamira Dance Company and the Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra in association with Auckland Arts Festival, explores repatriation from a different angle. Based on the memory of Patterson’s father, who died while working on a hydroelectric dam project in China, the dance depicts a contest between the ancestral guardians of the Tongariro and Yellow Rivers over the father’s spirit and his eventual return home.²

These examples emphasize the important role of contemporary visual and performing arts in helping to shape place-making and identities in Oceania. While the works attend to how Asian and European colonialisms produce (im)mobilities and displacements, and also establish new homes and communities, each one reaches beyond the colonial binary to explore intercultural affiliations and surprising juxtapositions that reveal and reconfigure existing alliances and trace new trajectories across the broader Pacific region. Whereas all of these pieces deal with death, loss, and remains, they are also invested in revival and resilience, and in cultural formations that contest hegemonic politics and institutions and generate future imaginings. In thinking through these Asian and Pacific exchanges, I take up a transpacific framework, encouraged by its promise as a way of tracing transnational interactions that speak to the concerns of our current moment, while also mindful, in Tina Chen’s words, of its “inherent asymmetries that must be explored in order to generate a more nuanced interpretive logic of transpacific possibility.”³ In this respect, this essay is inspired by the theme of a 2018 symposium presented by the Department of History of Art and Visual Culture at

the University of California, Santa Cruz—"Pacific Island Worlds: Transpacific Dis/Positions"—which gave rise to this special issue of *Pacific Arts*. The organizers' productive call to understand the transpacific through the lens of Tongan scholar Epele Hau'ofa's "vision of island worlds that have been intimately connected within a vast relational network" is relevant to the performances under consideration here, in terms of how they trace relations within, through, and among (rather than crossing over) communities of the Pacific Ocean world, offering a more decolonial view of the transpacific that privileges indigeneity and island ontologies.⁴ *Red Coats + Indians*, *The Bone Feeder*, and *Awa* do not merely describe intercultural encounters but actively bring different bodies, (im)materialities, cosmologies, and epistemologies together in the space-time of performance. Consequently, these collaborations do more than simply contribute to a more nuanced discourse on transnational Asian and Pacific creative praxis; they instantiate real-world solidarities and community networks that imagine new ways of living and relating in Oceania.

Transpacific Trajectories and Oceanic Imaginaries

Examining Chinese artistic intersections with Māori and other Pacific peoples in and through New Zealand encourages a more expansive and sophisticated view of transpacific relations. The interdisciplinary field of transpacific studies, as it has taken shape over the past decade, "both extends and exceeds the earlier categories of 'Asia Pacific' and 'Pacific Rim'" by providing tools to analyze more finely "the ways that different Asian, Pacific Island, and American cultures and communities mutually shape one another as they circulate throughout the region."⁵ China's meteoric ascent as a paramount economic and burgeoning military force in the Pacific region has stoked US concerns about security and the need to protect transnational capital interests in the northwestern Pacific in the era of "America's Pacific Century."⁶ It has also lent urgency to transpacific scholarship that (among other topics) critically assays various aspects of the US-China dyad and their neo-Cold War sensibilities.⁷ Vitaly important as this work is, it is also characteristic of a tendency in transpacific studies to reinforce a division between the flourishing "rim" of economic prosperity and the islands and oceans of the "basin," which remain largely elided or obscured. In turn, studies that have focused on the insular Pacific have often strategically distinguished Island cultures from their Asian neighbors, and indeed the whole "Pacific Islands"/"South Pacific" regional formation bears the legacy of colonial powers' post-war attempts to keep

island nations oriented toward a Western perspective and away from the threat of “Asiatic Communism.”⁸ Recently, transpacific studies has seen welcome advances in terms of thinking in more engaged ways about the dynamics between islands and continents, which include centering Indigenous subjectivities and favoring Oceanic and archipelagic approaches, exploring the potential of what Erin Suzuki terms “several alternative transpacifics.”⁹

As a Pākehā New Zealand scholar, I engage the transpacific from a different set of coordinates, situating Aotearoa as a crucial southern site and impetus for Asian and Pacific interactions. Here, I find it helpful to think about Christine Kim and Helen Hok-Sze Leung’s concept of the “minor transpacific,” which draws and expands upon Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih’s notion of “minor transnationalism” with its focus on “the creative interventions that networks of minoritized cultures produce within and across national boundaries.”¹⁰ The minor transpacific—as “at once a historical condition, a migratory network, a relation to power, and an analytic”—usefully “emphasizes the lateral relations among minor histories and minor locations in the Asia-Pacific region,” modulating our understanding of major political and economic entities.¹¹ These points of reference are necessary because, despite the considerable promise of transpacific studies to offer alternate and resistant views of the Pacific beyond trade agreements, treaties, and political alliances, there is much more work to be done, especially where transpacific discourse intersects with theater and performance studies, to push against what Rob Wilson describes as “the taken-for-granted view of an Asia/Pacific imaginary with Asian cultures and sites cast as transnational capital forces of globalization and set relentlessly against the interior Pacific—which is figured as a raw resource, fantasy site, vacancy, and/or source of subaltern and diasporic labor.”¹² Artistic and performance practice has great potential to show how the Chinese presence and role in the Pacific Islands, and its historical and ongoing relationships with Pacific communities, can be brought into illuminating, reciprocal conversation with discussions on the networks built by Indigenous Pacific peoples with each other and more broadly across Oceania. These existing Indigenous relational frameworks (as Hau’ofa’s work reminds us) are crucial components of transpacific connectivity. They also draw important attention to the greater recognition of indigeneity internationally which has catalyzed contemporary intercultural exchange across the Pacific, acknowledging both local belonging and affiliations with similarly positioned peoples worldwide. A more complex view of such regional interconnections and genealogies thus speaks soundly to Wilson’s question of how Oceania can become “the site of

alternative modes of Asian and Pacific, or Pacific and Asian, linkage and knowledge formation.”¹³



Figure 1. Detail from the Chinese *Kunyu Quantu* (*A Complete Map of the World*), by Ferdinand Verbiest (Nan Huairen) for the Qing dynasty Kangxi Emperor, 1674. Woodblock print, hand colored. In this view of the Pacific, the *Kunyu Quantu* advances beyond European maps that showed only the scant line of New Zealand’s west coast mapped by Dutch explorer Abel Tasman in 1642 to indicate the east coast of Australia and New Zealand as an insular entity. Reproduced with permission of Xiaowu Zhang and Cultural Relics Publishing

New Zealand exists as a salient node in this larger schema, both demographically and by way of a robust art and performance ecology that has enabled it to be the site or source of the performance works discussed in this essay.¹⁴ Both island and rimland, New Zealand has, as David Pearson notes, undergone a gradual transition from a relatively privileged position of being part of the British Empire “towards new vulnerabilities within a different world hierarchy of nation-states within which China and other Asian countries have become increasingly influential political and economic players.”¹⁵ New Zealand’s push for greater economic integration with Asian markets in the 1990s led to former Prime Minister Jim Bolger’s contentious 1993 declaration that New Zealand was an Asian country.¹⁶ Yet at the same time, New Zealand’s role as a major destination point for post-war Pacific Islander migration has reoriented the country’s domestic and foreign policy, its regional commitments, and its identity

as a Pacific nation. The cultures and communities engaged directly here—Chinese, Indigenous Formosan, Sāmoan, and Māori—share historical and ongoing links as Austronesian peoples, an early branch of Southern Mongoloid, descendants of whom entered the Pacific about 3,000 years ago. As they spread and diversified, one group became the Polynesian seafarers who eventually migrated to Aotearoa in c.1200 CE, and these connections form part of a living *whakapapa* (genealogy, layering of ancestry). In the modern era, there is little evidence that China and Aotearoa had knowledge of one another prior to the eighteenth century, although it is worth acknowledging a curious feature of the 1674 Chinese *Kunyu Quantu* (*A Complete Map of the World*) (Fig. 1), a landmark of Sino-Western cultural exchange and cartographic visual art created by Flemish Jesuit Ferdinand Verbiest (Nan Huai ren) for the Qing dynasty Kangxi Emperor.¹⁷ It is the world's first map to depict New Zealand (Xin Selandiya) as an island, predating by a century the map made following Cook's circumnavigation of New Zealand (1769–70), published in 1773.

British imperial ambitions in the Asia-Pacific region brought China and New Zealand into correlation during the 1790s, through the trade in fur and tea, and subsequently absorbed both Hong Kong and New Zealand into the British Empire in the early 1840s. The discovery of gold in California in 1848 saw thousands of Chinese men (primarily Cantonese from Guangdong province) flock to “Gold Mountain,” as well as to Australia's “New Gold Mountain” troves in the 1850s and to New Zealand in the 1860s. These newcomers from the Qing Empire gathered New Zealand into a new transpacific matrix, incorporating the young British colony into a “Chinese Commonwealth”; as Stevan Eldred-Grigg and Zeng Dazheng argue, “New Zealand now belonged not only to a booming new Europe but, thanks to gold, to a vast new China.”¹⁸ After the yield of the goldfields dwindled, those Chinese who stayed in New Zealand and prospered in different professions had to navigate an increasingly dominant Pākehā settler-colonial society, were characterized as a threat to the country's whiteness ideology, and were subjected to draconian restrictions on immigration and naturalization. By the turn of the twentieth century, Māori, too, were excluded from the developing national formation, and in their unique role as *tangata whenua* (Indigenous people) were engaged in complex dynamics of assimilation and resistance as they faced land confiscations stemming from breaches of the Treaty of Waitangi (1840) and various other diminutions of Native autonomy and expression. While these evolving circumstances throughout the twentieth century created certain conditions for Māori and Chinese to find commonality in adversity, these relationships were enriched and complicated from the 1950s by the influx of non-

Māori Pacific peoples, who carried out their own complex negotiations with these established communities alongside their differentiated struggles and marginalization vis-à-vis the Pākehā settler-state.¹⁹

New Zealand's major immigration review in 1986 opened the door to a significant new wave of Chinese and other Asian arrivals, the same year that Māori-Pākehā biculturalism became *de facto* cultural policy. Ensuing questions of how to balance the British, the Pacific, and the Asian in New Zealand's evolving self-conception tap into the unresolved issue of how immigrant communities might fit into a bicultural, treaty-based notion of the nation-state, which, Paul Spoonley contends, remains an obstacle for the development of a New Zealand-specific multiculturalism.²⁰ The contemporary relations among New Zealand's main ethnic groups are too intricate to adumbrate in this overview, but I focus here on the performing arts as an increasingly potent vehicle not only for examining these dynamics and embodying the possibilities of multicultural social practice, but also for speculating beyond the everyday—engaging alternate realities and cartographies to posit new imaginaries for Oceania.²¹ Since the 1970s, Māori theatrical performance has intervened in mainstream Pākehā cultural production and has become established as a key strand of New Zealand's creative scene and, arguably, its political discourse. Māori theater voices, in turn, provided inspiration for Pacific and Asian creative artists during the 1990s, who intervened in the bicultural framework, articulating their own perspectives on national politics, stereotypes, and discourses of identity and belonging, and founding a creative praxis that has flourished and diversified in the twenty-first century.

Red Coats + Indians, *The Bone Feeder*, and *Awa* highlight intercultural partnerships among these communities. In each case, their situated contexts voyage beyond the national, exploring networks and itineraries that speak to wider regional matrices. Their modes of artistic engagement are indicative of a recent turn in intercultural performance studies away from previous emphases on linear and hierarchical collaborations between Western auteurs and non-Western laborers, binary source-target models of analysis, and aesthetic encounters between discrete cultural systems. Instead, this new critical discourse and creative practice privileges mobile connections and transborder collaborations that are heterogeneous and non-hierarchical, and focuses attention on transversal minor-to-minor relations in ways that query dominant cultures and transgressively reimagine national and regional formations. Such work recognizes and respects diversity while building alliances with transformative capacity and which emphasize the processual elements of social becoming, attending both to the

micropolitics of the local and to macroscopic global phenomena.²² I consider how this sort of performance can be a force for what Anne Salmond has called *experiments across worlds*. Salmond points to the possibilities of exchanges across different realities that might allow “new forms of order to emerge,” and that might lead to new ways of living.²³ She imagines the potential of “drawing upon divergent strands from different philosophical legacies to confront current challenges and dilemmas, generating new kinds of insights and outcomes on the way.”²⁴ Artistic performance may rarely change the world, and so I hesitate to make those sorts of claims for particular projects. The fact is that such experiments are complicated and also expose the challenges and constraints of reaching across different realities. As I observe in what follows, performance also brings to light disconnections, ambivalences, and problems of representation that are not always easily reconciled. But I do remain open to the ways that intercultural performance praxis in Oceania might bolster the generative, world-making capacity of Salmond’s vision through its ability to excavate and validate repressed histories, galvanize alternative knowledge circuits, and advance new aesthetic and socio-political configurations—staging new dis/positions and contributing to an “art of living” across the region.

Dragging Up History: Greg Semu, *Red Coats + Indians* Series

Red Coats + Indians: The Games We Play (2019–20) (Fig. 2), created by New Zealand-born Sāmoan artist Greg Semu, is notable for the inventive, unusual, and challenging ways in which various transpacific narratives are overlaid and entwined, braiding together different regional perspectives on diaspora, indigeneity, and colonialism. Semu’s expansive and multilayered approach to bringing Pacific histories and viewpoints into conversation with Chinese and Taiwanese ones in this series evolved from his eight-week artist’s residency at the Taitung Indigenous Cultural and Creative Industries Park (TTICC) in Taiwan.²⁵ As Kim and Leung note in regard to the minor transpacific, a focus on Taiwan in this matrix “underscores the importance of Indigenous struggles throughout the transpacific region while highlighting how discourses of Indigeneity are mobilized throughout the Pacific and within various local sites.”²⁶ Semu explains, however, that the trans-Indigenous reciprocity he anticipated during his residency was compromised by the facilitators’ poor organization, lack of authentic contacts with Indigenous Taiwanese artists, and by the censoring of fellow artists’ work on the topic of Cross-Strait relations that he witnessed.²⁷ Fortunately, an Indigenous arts

lecturer at the National Dong Hwa University was able to connect Semu with arts students and performers drawn mainly from the local 'Amis community and to make sure Semu's project needs were met.²⁸ These experiences, however, prompted Semu to take a more covert, allegorical approach to his work; he embedded more oblique narratives within and alongside the apparent stories, and drew on drama, theater, and fantasy to encourage the participants to explore their feelings, anger, and imagination.²⁹ The collaboration resulted in a series of five life-sized photographic tableaux depicting battle scenes; three of these were presented in the project's premiere exhibition at TTICC in 2019 and are the focus of this discussion.



Figure 2. Greg Semu, photographic still from the series *Red Coats + Indians: The Games We Play*, 2019–20. Courtesy of the artist³⁰

Semu, currently based in Sydney, Australia, has received international acclaim for his community-arts projects undertaken in partnership with Indigenous, remote, and ethnic minority groups in Australasia and the Pacific. His elaborately staged, performative scenes are captured as large-scale photographic images that explore and critically interrogate experiences of colonialism, displacement, and intergenerational trauma; in his words, he is “flipping the script” in provocative ways that encourage dialogue and new ways of seeing.³¹ In works such as *The Last Cannibal Supper... Cause Tomorrow We Become Christians*

(2010), undertaken with Kanak collaborators in New Caledonia; *The Raft of the Tagata Pasifika (People of the Pacific)* (2014–16), created with Cook Islands actors in Rarotonga; and *Blood Red* (2016–17), completed in Coen, an Indigenous community in far north Queensland, Semu has experimented with various strategies of role-play, substitution, and role-reversal to unsettle colonial histories and to offer alternative images.³² These images can pursue more affirming possibilities but can also be visually confronting. Throughout his oeuvre, Semu's strategic visual repositionings embed reflexive commentary on art-historical conventions that entrench colonial hierarchies, yet he also places key emphasis on the role of theater and theatricality in stimulating fresh conversation. For him, the theatrical frame allows for critical distance, productively setting aside the scene for observation and contemplation to help provoke a shift in the conceptual—and, potentially, the lived—paradigms of his participants and viewers.³³

Although *Red Coats + Indians* presents fictionalized scenes, it cites and reworks key tropes that circulate throughout the Pacific region. Semu's surface narrative references the exploratory Pacific voyages and eventual death of Captain Cook, which, in a nod to the artist's New Zealand upbringing and Australian base, derive their topicality from the 250th anniversary of the navigator's "discoveries" being variously celebrated and lamented in 2019–20. Notably, the drama of this subject not only emerges through the elaborately choreographed engagements caught dynamically in the stills, but also in Semu's approach to the *theatricality* of colonial encounter: the formulaic, repeatable scenarios and their proliferating aftermaths, which altogether comprise, in Semu's words, "a fictitious narrative of operatic proportions, globally and historically."³⁴ As he describes it, "In this pantomime we reenact the tragic death of Captain Cook and reverse the cliched narrative" of settler-colonial dominance whereby the "savage Indians" rise up and save the day "by winning the game and protecting their lands, their culture and their sovereignty for the future of their people."³⁵ Whereas this stance places Semu's series within the recurrent waves of artistic and scholarly reassessment that inevitably accompany any public commemoration of Cook's entangled legacy, and posits a counter-scenario that might appear to have been tirelessly rehearsed, what is significant about Semu's angle is how he resituates the Cook narrative to speak to a framework of Chinese colonialism in Taiwan, particularly its impacts on the island's Indigenous peoples.

Although Cook's voyages and his demise in Hawai'i in 1779 have been principal elements of Euro-American settler-colonial fetishization, as well as of Pacific revisionist historiography, Cook's story does not resonate in Asia to nearly

the same extent. Semu's alternative transpacific trajectories, whereby European and Pacific histories become rooted in and routed through East Asian ones, provide a way for the 'Amis to stage an empowering narrative under the eyes of government censors while also opening the community to wider connections across the Pacific. The artwork pursues these objectives via a succession of visual and dramatic superimpositions that enable a multiplicity of trans-Indigenous, Asian-Pacific, and (de)colonial crossings and dis/positions to be adumbrated through a mixture of history and fantasy. At the same time, *Red Coats + Indians'* "inter-imperiality" embeds its own erasures and uneasy exchanges that raise questions about the ethics and limits of intercultural racial performativity; these dynamics are impacted by the complicated ways in which Cook's historio-mythology frequently elides local and regional histories, practices, and identities.³⁶

Semu's initial tableau, a charged face-off between the "Red Coats" and the "Indians" offers a rich example of the coded visual signifiers that index these interlocking narratives. Semu's use of "Indians" should be understood here in terms of the generic name given by Cook and his contemporaries to the Indigenous peoples of the Pacific and beyond, but is also intended as a critique of the racist game of "Cowboys and Indians" that entrenches colonial hierarchies and practices. On the left side of the image, 'Amis performers pose as a group of warriors—of different genders and armed with spears and longbows—arrayed in opposition to the serried ranks of colonizers (likewise played by 'Amis) bearing muskets and swords on the right. Within this accreted role-play, the red-uniformed actors suggest Cook's officers and British militia, but more covertly reference Taiwan's layered history of colonialism. Semu gestures to the Japanese occupation of Taiwan from 1895–1945, with its suppression of both Taiwanese-Chinese and First Nations military resistance, denial of Indigenous land rights, forced relocations, and undermining of traditional governance.³⁷ But most prominently—by way of the signal color of the People's Republic of China (PRC)—he indicates China's invasions and occupations of Taiwan: among them, the Qing dynasty's annexation and two-century rule over the island, its subsequent (re)appropriation by the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) in 1945, and the institution of an authoritarian form of military government. The imagery likewise references ongoing disputes over the political status of Taiwan and whether the Republic of China should remain a separate, self-governing entity or merge with the mainland to constitute "One China," wherein Aboriginal cultures are frequently appropriated to enhance Taiwan's distinctiveness.³⁸ Semu's decision to set this opening scene on the flat rooftop of an urban apartment block overlays

these histories onto contemporary, quotidian space and time, creating a trans-temporal arrangement that acknowledges how, for Indigenous Taiwanese, the war still continues.³⁹

Such visual encodings are replete throughout *Red Coats + Indians*. But what intrigues me most as a performance scholar is the deliberate lack of similitude, the not-quite-fits, the moments when these surrogations and substitutions expose their constructedness through slippage or excess. Here, I suggest that Semu undertakes a form of what Katrin Sieg calls “ethnic drag,” which involves “the performance of ‘race’ as masquerade.”⁴⁰ Although Sieg develops her analyses within the very different context of post-war West Germany, her ideas offer some useful ways of thinking about Semu’s choices. Going beyond gender drag to draw on postcolonial discourses of ambivalence and mimicry, as well as Brechtian concepts and techniques of defamiliarization or estrangement, Sieg explores the potential of ethnic drag to open critical space for seeing race differently; by *signifying* rather than *representing* race relations, ethnic drag addresses a range of social conflicts.⁴¹ By exposing the performative apparatus and, specifically, through the self-conscious disjunction of body, actor, and role, this approach undoes mimetic depictions, questioning seemingly stable and immutable identities and social structures and allowing room for other possibilities: “As a technique of estrangement, drag denounces that which dominant ideology presents as natural, normal, and inescapable, without always offering another truth.”⁴² In particular, I ask how Semu’s version of ethnic drag operates as a mode of historiographic intervention: how does “dragging up the past” become a way of doing, re-doing, or undoing history?⁴³ How does it enable the artwork to connect multiple histories, and to imagine alternative futures? Conversely, what situated histories and identities might it also threaten to submerge?

Semu’s core move is to have an Indigenous Taiwanese actor play a Chinese Captain Cook. Semu presents this composite character with a tousled, ill-fitting blond wig that purposely reveals the actor’s own black hair beneath, and a stylized historical costume of stark white breeches, long boots, and a waistcoat that leaves visible the actor’s bare arms. This messy misfit of actor and roles refuses mimesis and exposes the various layers that demand to be seen through the masquerade, disclosing “Chinese-ness” while hyper-troping an excessive whiteness. The portrayal parodies Cook’s white mask, decentering and denaturalizing white authority, while simultaneously, through this equivalence, emphasizing Chinese coloniality and subjecting it to a similar treatment. Accordingly, the portrayal disrupts the binary that associates imperialism with patriarchal masculinity

dominating feminized Indigenous bodies and lands. The emergence of the Indigenous as a destabilizing force from within the figure of the colonizer casts into relief the performative and contingent nature of hegemonic structures and histories; in Brechtian mode, history is posited as mutable, not inevitable, and open to new outcomes, thus advancing the potential for the masquerade to subvert, resist, and transform the social order.⁴⁴



Figure 3. Greg Semu, photographic still from the series *Red Coats + Indians: The Games We Play*, 2019–20. Courtesy of the artist

The two subsequent tableaux explode taut suspension and anticipation into violent, dynamic movement; the actors leap and arc in a clamorous, visceral battle caught sharply and startlingly in medias res (Fig. 3). These images shift us to the archetypal backdrop of the beach, the classic locus of Pacific cross-cultural encounter: the roiling clouds of a stormy sky, wind-blasted graveled shore, and concrete piles stacked against the steely sea moodily frame a furious scene of rebellion as the Red Coats, clustered in the middle of the melee, are eventually overcome by the Indians, the momentum of the warriors contrasting with the bloodied fallen. In their visual and choreographic composition, these scenes respond directly to eighteenth-century paintings of the fatal conflict between the British and Hawaiians that participated in an incipient mythmaking which figured Cook as a hero in a European tragedy. In particular, the melodramatic, chaotic crush of the opposing groups at the water's edge recalls such famous renderings as British-based German artist Johan Zoffany's *The Death of Captain James Cook*

(c. 1795), as well as *The Death of Cook* (1784) by British painter John Webber, official artist on Cook's third voyage. In both cases, Cook is presented as a tragic victim: in Zoffany's version, he lies helpless, supine; Webber goes further to reinforce an image of Cook as a peacemaker, his arm extended in a gesture of forbearance as he is stabbed unawares.

Although Semu's representation of Cook as an active, gun-wielding participant might appear to be an obvious intervention, figuring Cook so overtly as a mobile signifier of imperial violence and oppression within this iconic scene allows the series to engage even more broadly with what Sieg calls "proximate historical narratives," the complex ways in which stories of disenfranchised peoples touch and become contiguous in certain representations.⁴⁵ Cook is a particularly apt figure for this treatment because his wide-ranging voyages impacted so many Indigenous communities throughout and beyond the Pacific, and because of the ways that stories of his encounters and death have been reinterpreted and redeployed for so many different purposes. Semu is hardly alone among artists from Oceania in employing Cook as metonym and metaphor in order to recognize related histories and struggles across the region, nor in participating in the device of his demise so as to advance local resistance to colonial legacies. In this context, Semu's Asian Cook figure can be interpreted as part of a wider phenomenon of "dragging up" or "queering" Cook in various ways: the repertoire includes Aboriginal Australian Captain Cooks, Kanak (New Caledonian) Cooks, and Cooks presented with Polynesian features, adorned with Māori tattoos, and subjected to transformative Pacific afterlives.⁴⁶ Consequently, beyond European renderings, Semu's battle scenes also recall—perhaps inevitably if not intentionally—these attempts to reposition Cook from Oceanian perspectives, prompting further consideration of what is revealed and concealed by the seemingly endless end(s) of Cook.

The act of defeating a Chinese Captain Cook shows how recourse to Pacific histories and mythologies fuels the community empowerment impulse in Semu's artwork that envisages a different outcome for Indigenous Taiwanese: how about we win for once?⁴⁷ Simultaneously, however, the 'Amis actors might be understood to enact their own kind of drag in these tableaux, symbolically re-cast to invoke or imagine various other moments of Indigenous uprising, resistance, and struggles for self-determination. With Cook's killing, Taitung Beach "becomes" Hawai'i's Kealahou Bay, but it also splits prismatically to encompass other sites of violent encounter across the region and their legacies. Brutal as the scene appears, however, Semu does not advocate for physical retaliation but for a mindset that resists and reaches beyond the strictures of colonial thinking; the

fact that the guns are obviously wooden sticks or branches and that the longbows have no arrows underscores that the weapons Semu champions are those of the imagination.⁴⁸

Semu's project seeks to recognize affinities among Indigenous Taiwanese and peoples in the wider Pacific, and to encourage minor-to-minor solidarities that remember violent pasts but envisage more empowered futures. Yet, the work's broad-ranging equivalences, condensations, and distortions are not without their difficulties. The costuming of one of the 'Amis warriors in a Plains Native American feathered headdress, for example (Fig. 2, far left; Fig. 3, right), imagines forms of resistance against British colonialism in North America as well as the subsequent pioneer expansionism that fueled the United States' transpacific ambitions. It does so, however, at the risk of reinforcing, rather than ironizing or critiquing, reductive stereotypes.⁴⁹ This foregrounds Sieg's argument that the Brechtian paradigm of drag can, in certain situations, court "essentialist readings" by lending corporeal proof to clichéd images, thus undermining attempts to "construct a transformative notion of political community and ethnic interests."⁵⁰ Centrally, moreover, Semu's approach to restaging art-historical antecedents does not rethink the Hawaiian-British encounter nor the event of Cook's death in ways that surface Kanaka Maoli (Native Hawaiian) perspectives. Indeed, the refraction of the event into multiple scenarios, identities, and spaces creates a lacuna within which the original Indigenous actors and their stories disappear.⁵¹ Thus, a reading of the patent and latent stories in Semu's performance-based photographic capture should acknowledge how his Asian and Pacific crossings involve a set of strategic displacements in the face of censorship that open up new ways of imagining transpacific connections. At the same time, however, *Red Coats + Indians* raises questions about the limits of such aesthetic experiments across worlds and of the terms on which such affiliations are structured; it prompts us to ponder the implications of the representational politics of this kind of interculturalism, especially the issue of how to balance wide-ranging associations and local, specific claims to place.

Red Coats + Indians links Asian and Pacific scenarios in multiple ways, opening out from the perspective of a New Zealand-born Pacific artist and drawing on the trope of Cook as a figure central to New Zealand's colonial and national identity. In contrast, the performance works *The Bone Feeder* and *Awa* focus more directly on relationships between Aotearoa and mainland China. Produced in New Zealand, their intercultural collaborations explore, in complementary ways, how deep engagements with Chinese histories present new prospects for New Zealand and for its Māori and Chinese communities, both on and off the stage.

“My Family Flowers Here”: Renee Liang, *The Bone Feeder*

Above the wide, windswept shore of the Hokianga Harbor in New Zealand’s far north stands a red Chinese gate, a vibrant beacon amid the muted hues of dunes, beach scrub, and ocean reaching out to the broad horizon. This poignant memorial remembers the 499 Chinese gold miners whose bones were shipwrecked in 1902 en route to Hong Kong for reinterment in Guangdong in southern China. Those coffins that washed ashore were gathered by local Māori from Te Rarawa and Te Roroa *iwi* (tribal groups), who protected and took care of the remains until their families could come to honor them. This evocative history, with its turbulent circuits of loss, care, and renewal, becomes palpable as I sit in Auckland’s ASB Waterfront Theater for Renee Liang’s *The Bone Feeder*, an opera for twelve voices and a chamber ensemble (Figs. 4–6). One of the most prominent artistic pieces inspired by this story, the opera creates an immersive Gesamtkunstwerk through the libretto sung in English, Cantonese, and te reo Māori; Gareth Farr’s haunting soundscape of Western and Chinese classical instruments together with *taonga pūoro* (traditional Māori instrumentation) composed by James Webster; its cast of Māori, Asian, and Pākehā performers; and its compelling mise-en-scène. The wide stage heaped with golden sand conjures the beach at Mitimiti; the dappled light bathes the audience and performers in shades of sea and sky; and a long projection screen upstage features a succession of antique silver static and moving images: sometimes scenes from the natural landscape, sometimes symbolic patterns that speak to the story’s profound entwinements.⁵²

Renee Liang, MNZM, a second-generation Chinese Kiwi poet, playwright, fiction writer, pediatrician, and medical researcher, has had an important role in articulating and advancing the voices of the Chinese and broader Asian communities in Aotearoa. Over time, explains Liang, through conversations with descendants of the shipwrecked Chinese gold miners and her own artistic contributions, she has developed a sense of having become “one of the guardians of the story.”⁵³ Originally produced as a play over three versions in 2009, 2010, and 2011, the 2017 opera relates the quest of a young Chinese New Zealand man, Ben Kwan (Henry Choo), who travels from urban Auckland to the Hokianga to locate the bones of his great-great-grandfather, Choy Kwan (Jaewoo Kim), in the hope that by repatriating his remains to China and honoring them ceremonially, he might find a salve for his own cultural deracination. The opera—as it unfolds across time and space, past and present, living and dead, and in China, settler New Zealand, and Te Ao Māori—reveals how traumatic cosmic disruption leads eventually, through new intersections, to a positive change in New Zealand’s

social order. It also, vitally, foregrounds New Zealand's place in a wider transpacific matrix by recalling and imagining historical and contemporary relations with China that interleave Indigenous, colonial, migrant, and diasporic experiences and identities.



Figure 4. Scene from *The Bone Feeder*, written by Renee Liang, directed by Sara Brodie, and scored by Gareth Farr. Photograph by Candice Whitmore for GATE Photography

For almost a century from 1855, the Pacific was crisscrossed by a dense, intricate network of ships returning the bones of deceased, male Chinese emigrants to their homeland. Borne of an eminent desire in the nineteenth century to be buried in one's native village, where one's descendants could tend one's grave and make offerings in order to ensure future peace and prosperity, the practice of *jianyun* (the collecting and sending of bones) became a large-scale, embedded, and distinctive aspect of the Cantonese diaspora. It was enabled by transnational systems of institutions and associations, and formed the endpoint of a migration process that was always intended to be cyclical rather than linear.⁵⁴ Fellow Chinese carefully exhumed, cleaned, and packed their compatriots' bones for shipping, whereupon they were all routed via Hong Kong as a major transpacific entrepot: there, the bones received *jiao* (purification rites) before heading on to their final destinations in China.⁵⁵ As Elizabeth Sinn explains,

homecomings of this sort had particular socio-cultural, spiritual, and cosmic connotations: “Nothing was more abhorred and feared than dying in a strange land, deprived of attendance from one’s family and becoming a hungry, lonely ghost, unfed and unclothed, drifting in limbo.”⁵⁶ Whereas, traditionally, the practice of returning remains to one’s hometown for reburial was the privilege of the affluent and powerful, the newfound wealth on the goldfields of California (whence the first shipment took place) enabled en masse repatriation of ordinary laborers as well; according to Sinn, “what might initially have appeared an unlikely innovation and a luxury soon came to be perceived as a necessity.”⁵⁷ This enormous enterprise saw tens of thousands of coffins, bone boxes, and spirit boxes become a regular feature of transpacific traffic from the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand until the operation was halted by the establishment of the PRC in 1949.⁵⁸

Therefore, when the *SS Ventnor* (the mortuary vessel chartered by the Chinese New Zealand association Cheong Shing Tong) foundered off the Hokianga Heads on October 28, 1902, the event represented a disaster of cosmic proportions for the Chinese community in New Zealand, its members dismayed by the notion of their countrymen’s spirits condemned to wander forever as hungry ghosts in a foreign land. Significantly, however, the local Māori treated the exhumed bones as *taonga* (treasured objects) and reburied them in their own *wāhi tapu* (sacred/secret location), ensuring the protection of the miners’ *wairua* (souls). Māori *tangihanga* (death rituals) have certain affinities with Chinese Buddhist practices and beliefs. Stephen Deed acknowledges that although pre-colonial and pre-Christian burial customs varied among *iwi* and *hapū*, feeding a person’s spirit to sustain them on their final journey was not a wholly foreign concept for Māori, nor was the secondary disposition of exhumed remains (*hahunga*).⁵⁹ More directly, however, Māori funeral ceremonies, akin to Chinese ones, sought to maintain harmonious relations between humans and natural and supernatural worlds.⁶⁰ Although *urupā* (burial grounds) and *wāhi tapu* were physically inconspicuous, Deed observes, they were “integral components of the cultural and spiritual landscape of a society in which the intertwined themes of death, *tapu* [the sacred], *mana whenua* [power from the land] and *whakapapa* [genealogy, layering of ancestry] were paramount.”⁶¹ By incorporating the Chinese bones and spirits into a practice that bound the living with the ancestral dead and with the land, Māori enfolded them into an alternative cosmology with transformative potential, inextricably linked to Aotearoa New Zealand.⁶² The opera works as an artistic extension and reinforcement of these past ties and of the consequent rapprochements between Te Roroa, Te Rarawa, and Chinese Kiwi

communities in the present day that have grown out of this history.⁶³ As the show's director Sara Brodie suggests in the performance's program, "it seems the Chinese miners of New Zealand form their own iwi, now held by the tangata whenua [Indigenous people] and landscape in loving hands."⁶⁴

In its respectful and reciprocal interweaving of Māori, Chinese, and European influences, *The Bone Feeder's* interculturalisms rethink the rules of opera-making in New Zealand.⁶⁵ They moreover exemplify how minor-to-minor relations between Indigenous Māori and immigrant Chinese, both past and present, reconfigure the dominant bicultural dyad and its insistent engagement with Pākehā settler-colonialism while pointing to the productive potential of wider Oceanic and transpacific connections instantiated by these dis/positions. Importantly, the opera does not conclude with Ben Kwan repatriating his great-great-grandfather Choy Kwan's remains to China; instead, the story confirms the re-homing of Chinese bones in Māori land, with Papatūānuku (the land, mother earth) as a major character in the work's more-than-human scheme, thus redirecting the circuitry of *jianyun* to indicate new futures that emerge from these interlinked histories.⁶⁶ In addition to tracing transpacific geographies, then, *The Bone Feeder* emphasizes another meaning of the prefix "trans-" in transpacific: that of change or transformation. As a result of more than a century spent in the South Pacific, the deceased miners start to become something else; as Choy Kwan reflects, "Over time earth seeps into old bones / Roots come down and grow through the cracks."⁶⁷ A core part of this re-orientation for the older Kwan, however, is his discovery, via Ben, of a New Zealand family that descends not from his Chinese wife, Wei Wei (Xing Xing), but from his relationship with a Pākehā woman, Louisa (Chelsea Dolman): "My family flowers here— / A spring blossom / A spreading tree, a new dynasty."⁶⁸ In contrast to the Māori Ferryman (Te Oti Rakena), a liminal guardian figure who looks after the ghosts and guides Ben in his Stygian passage across Hokianga Harbor, and who readily occupies "[t]he space between the states, life/death, air and water," both Ben and Kwan lament their unanchored state in a duet where they describe themselves as adrift, floating from scene to scene.⁶⁹ The opera's reparative outcome thus emphasizes how both characters come to understand that they belong in New Zealand and that New Zealand belongs in some way with them, advancing a concept of Oceanic place-making that positions Aotearoa and China relationally and mutually.

The Bone Feeder's operatic form is more pared back and less expository than the play version—"a narrative poem" as Liang puts it, that compresses imagery and layers time-space through its scenography, choreography, and musical structure.⁷⁰ The opera's spatio-temporal fluidity allows for a reading of

transpacific relations that spans places and periods, drawing upon theater's heterotopic capacity to bring different sites and moments into simultaneity on the stage. Contrapuntal scenes—that imbricate Choy Kwan and the pregnant Wei Wei in the Pearl River Delta of the 1850s, Choy Kwan and Louisa in Dunedin of the 1890s, and the characters in the ongoing contemporary moment of the Hokianga—consistently weave together China and Aotearoa, gesturing to their ocean-crossing histories, exchanges, and (im)mobilities. This feature of the work, notably, flows into the representations of haunting and tropes of the ghostly that deeply infuse the work's logic. In addition to characters who actually are ghosts (Choy Kwan and his fellow miners), who are imbued with ghostly qualities (the Ferryman), or who, like Ben, are haunted by an unresolved history that speaks to "heredity itself as a form of ghosting," the opera abounds with memories of the dead evoked and brought back from the past.⁷¹ In a general respect, this resonates with theater scholars' ready acknowledgment of theater as a quintessentially "haunted" medium in its deployment of recycling and repetition, and in a different way, of acting as a process of conjuring and communing with the dead, and of actors "unconcealing and making visible what otherwise is invisible [. . .] unforgetting the presence of something absent."⁷² Yet, *The Bone Feeder's* performative interculturalisms also intervene more specifically into the theorization of the ghost in Western spectrality studies by foregrounding Māori understandings of *kehua* (ghosts) and spirits, along with Chinese ones, especially their theatrical representation. The notion that haunting disrupts Western linear temporality is here placed in relation to Māori and wider Pacific notions of time-space in which past, present, and future are inter-implicated rather than autonomous, and also in relation to dramatic manipulations of time and space in genres of Chinese theater where, through death, according to Xiaohuan Zhao, "the nature of what is possible is thus transcended so that past and present are overlapped and fused into a whole that advances both at the same time yet in different dimensions on the stage."⁷³

There is much to say about *The Bone Feeder's* "dramatic hauntologies," especially—per Mary Luckhurst and Emilie Morin—about how the opera's decolonial praxis uses ghosts and other spectral tropologies to reveal repressed and unresolved violences, destabilize dominant epistemologies and political hegemonies, and privilege competing histories and narratives that promote more fluid constructions of national identity.⁷⁴ But what interests me particularly here is the inventive way in which Liang diverges from conventional tales in which the plot turns on the ghost's quest for justice and its subsequent spiritual ascension through its agentic work on the living.⁷⁵ In Liang's work, the Chinese ghosts aren't

given this capacity; instead, crucially, the workings of the plot are activated by the agency of Māori women. Choy Kwan's ghostly self has no knowledge or ability to act beyond his immediate observation of time passing; like his ghostly compatriots, he is "fated to wander these foreign hills" without hope of deliverance, amid "the pine needles, the old dead tree, the freezing rain."⁷⁶ He has no power to summon Ben to Mitimiti, nor does he know anything of his descendant (Choy Kwan's comic miner friends make the connection before he does). In the more explanatory play version, we learn that the Ferryman's grandmother, Kere, found a jade cicada in Choy Kwan's skull when she was a young girl and, heeding the cicada's call, eventually had it sent to his descendants in New Zealand so that they would have a clue about where to find him.⁷⁷ As a result of Kere's actions, Ben and Kwan not only meet, but Kwan's posthumous encounter with his great-great-grandson gives him new knowledge that completely changes what he wants his spiritual destiny to be; he says to Ben, "this jade cicada led you here / not to bring me home / but to bring home to me, here."⁷⁸ Liang's transpacific reworking of ghost narratives highlights lateral affiliations that honor a Māori-Chinese relationship of remembrance and care, avowing Pākehā genealogies but accentuating connections between Indigenous and diasporic communities that open alternative pathways for finding a foothold in Aotearoa.

The Bone Feeder's modes of weaving belonging via being on and being with the land are also advanced materially and through the production's visual aesthetic. Here, I want to elaborate on the jade cicada, which, as both talisman and torment for Ben, inscribes transpacific trajectories, together with the device of *tāmoko* (Māori tattoo design) as an integral component of the scenography. The cicada has a longstanding role in Chinese culture as a symbol of rebirth and immortality, due to its unique life cycle whereby the nymph stays buried in the earth for years, nourishing itself on roots, before emerging into the sunlight, climbing high into the trees, and shedding its outer skin to reveal its full, adult form. The Chinese historical custom of placing jade amulets shaped like cicadas on the tongues of corpses analogized the hope that the spirit would likewise rise on "a path to eternal existence in a transcendent realm."⁷⁹ The performance acknowledges jade's congruence with Māori *pounamu* (greenstone), similarly a stone of great cultural and spiritual significance, invested with *mana* (spiritual power) and *tapu* (sacredness), and featured in burial practices. A powerful actant, the jade cicada harbors an effective power that compels behavior and scripts social action. In the production, it is refracted and diversified in the figure of the cicada dancer, performed by an instrumentalist who steps out from the orchestra

to animate the object's *mauri* (life force), and also through its visual imaging on the projection screen, with both devices adding resonance to the miners' long waiting in the earth for their family observances to release them on the spirit path.



Figure 5. Projected image designed by James Webster of a jade cicada covered in *tāmoko* designs. *The Bone Feeder*, written by Renee Liang, directed by Sara Brodie, and scored by Gareth Farr. Image created by Charley Draper, Sara Brodie, and James Webster. With permission of the artists and Auckland Arts Festival

The transformative potential signified by the cicada is lent further intercultural valence by the *tāmoko* patterns that emerge on the projection screen early in the performance when Ben first meets the Ferryman and that establish themselves as a more dominant aspect of the visual scheme as the opera unfolds (Fig. 5). Leading Māori arts practitioner James Webster (Tainui, Te Arawa, Pākehā) created these designs for the show. He explains that the Ferryman motif draws on designs connected to the Far North region and employs sinuous *puhoro* and *kirikiore* patterns to indicate speed, agility, and a fluid traversal of sky and ocean.⁸⁰ Elsewhere in the performance, other gradually entwining *tāmoko* patterns become symbolic of how the Chinese miners' histories become resignified: overwritten and co-written with and alongside Māoritanga. Scholar Ngahua Te Awekotuku (Te Arawa, Tūhoe, Waikato) has written eloquently about the various meanings and emotions expressed through the (act of) *moko*; among them, the suggestion that taking the *moko* in a ritual gesture of mourning and release may be an active form of memento mori that grieves and remembers but also lets go and heals.⁸¹ These core sentiments in the opera are augmented with more general operations and connotations of *tāmoko* with its binding of history, community, place, and *whakapapa* (layering of ancestry), and culminate in a series of captivating images of the cicada itself covered in *tāmoko* designs.

In our conversation about the cicada motifs, Webster revealed the rich and intricate ways in which the dense visual inscriptions elaborate the opera's narrative strands. The *koru* patterns repeatedly furled along the cicada's wings

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represent growth and prosperity and acknowledge the ancestral genealogies of the Chinese miners' families. They also suggest bonds between people and new branches of the miners' *whakapapa*. Twisting *pikorua* forms in the center of the image reinforce the binding of people together, while also evoking the DNA helix and its continuum of life, death, and evolution. The *mangopare* (hammerhead shark) motifs that trace the cicada's spine foreground the strength and determination of Chinese immigrants and their struggles in Aotearoa, and the *raperape* (spiral wave) forms on the cicada's head reference the creative consciousness, especially the enterprise demonstrated by the Chinese businessmen who organized the repatriation of bones.⁸² This profound, symbolic encapsulation and acknowledgment of these histories from a Māori perspective lend visual support for Choy Kwan's shift in expectation that he will be repatriated to China, emphasizing instead that his immortality in fact inheres in a new strain of family in Aotearoa with special links to Māori.



Figure 6. Scene from *The Bone Feeder*, written by Renee Liang, directed by Sara Brodie, and scored by Gareth Farr. Photograph courtesy of Candice Whitmore for GATE Photography

The opera's finale performs one last transformation through which the past is at once laid to rest and opened to new futures: the resolution of Ben's own quest cycle with his "death" and "rebirth." Ben's resolve to exhume and repatriate

Kwan's remains is now a disruption of the new order: the elemental and spiritual forces of Papatūānuku (the earth) rebel, and Ben is overwhelmed in a storm scene in which his descent and recovery set the stage for reconciliation across temporalities, geographies, and cosmologies. Significantly, during this rite of passage the jade cicada breaks—but does it break apart so much as break open? That is, it represents a productive rupture that opens to a new order of being and belonging for Ben and bespeaks his own maturation. The opera's closing moments feature Ben and the Ferryman performing the Bai San ceremony to feed and honor Kwan's ancestral spirit, and sharing a Māori *hongi* (pressing noses in greeting; Fig. 6). In the New Zealand context, *The Bone Feeder's* intercultural form and content exemplify how performance practices highlight and galvanize alternative knowledge circuits created through what Sean Metzger describes as “minor-to-minor transnational relationalities” that expose the “lateral configurations that link phenomena that have either been historically repressed [. . .] or that have only recently (re)emerged.”⁸³ With its complex interweaving of roots and routes, Liang's opera pursues experiments across worlds that give rise to other kinds of encounters, realities, forms of order, and ways of living, revealing how intended and accidental Oceanic dis/positionings of the past generate new modes of place-making that continue to evolve.

**Atamira Dance Company and Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra,
*Awa: When Two Rivers Collide***

The communal acknowledgment at the end of *The Bone Feeder* that “a river runs through us all” carries us into a consideration of the experimental dance work *Awa: When Two Rivers Collide* (2017), programmed at the same Auckland Arts Festival.⁸⁴ *Awa* (the title meaning “river”), like *The Bone Feeder*, deals with the loss of loved ones, the predicament of a spirit caught in a foreign land and unable to return home across the watery passages linking China and Aotearoa, and the animacy and agency of the elemental—but this time centers a Māori perspective. The production emerged from tours to Beijing and Guangdong that director and choreographer Moss Te Ururangi Patterson (Ngāti Tūwharetoa, Ngāti Pūkenga, Ngāti Rāhiri) undertook while working as artistic director of Atamira Dance Company, one of New Zealand's leading Indigenous dance ensembles, and through relationships nurtured with the pioneering Guangdong Modern Dance Company. A multi-award-winning dance artist, Patterson has garnered an international reputation for his distinctive choreographic work with Atamira and

his new company, TOHU, and for his intercultural collaborations and Indigenous knowledge exchanges developed through tours and residencies. An important aspect of this work involves large-scale collaborations with community groups, which emphasize creating a meaningful space for people to gather together. The objective of such pieces, often performed publicly only once, is to elevate the participants, empowering them for a moment in time, and building relationships of care.⁸⁵ Patterson and assistant choreographers Su Ka and Yu Fen Wang created a culturally and spiritually safe space for sharing and improvising gestural vocabularies of Māori *kapa haka* (performing arts/group dance) and Chinese tai chi martial arts to fashion an innovative form of modern dance theater with the core ensemble. Encompassing more than one hundred professional and community performers, *Awa* was also expressed through the Western orchestral arrangements of the Auckland Philharmonia, a Chinese pipa (lute) player (Min Gao), a Māori *taonga pūoro* (musical instrumentation) master (Riki Bennett), and two massed choirs: the Auckland Chinese Philharmonic Choir and the junior choir of Te Kura Kaupapa Māori o Te Kotuku, who performed renditions of Chinese choral songs and *waiata* (songs) from Ngāti Tūwharetoa *iwi*, respectively.

The devised work is based on Patterson's personal story. His father, an engineer from Tūrangi, a North Island town created from the Tongariro River hydroelectric power scheme, went to work in Jiyuan, China, at the Xiaolangdi Dam on the Yellow River (Huang He). When he passed away suddenly in China, he was returned home in a closed coffin, which made it difficult for the Māori family to carry out the protocols of *tangihanga* (death rituals) and to grieve properly. *Awa* thus explores the emotional impact on Patterson of his father's "physical form brought home but the spirit being left overseas," probing these unresolved feelings and seeking forms of closure and resolution.⁸⁶ In a wider sense, the piece's conciliatory work engages environmental concerns about the damming of rivers that are part of this transpacific relationship, tracing "a journey about the suffering arising when our own desires veil us from the importance of protecting our precious resources."⁸⁷

Over the past decade, control over freshwater has become the topic of passionate and contested clashes and legal debates in New Zealand, with diverging Māori and European views of ownership and caretakership of the environment that root in the nineteenth century accruing new, contemporary urgency in light of the privatization of power companies and the neoliberal quantification and commodification of natural resources.⁸⁸ *Awa* highlights the awareness of a river as a living being; indeed, as a legal person with its own rights, ancestral power, and life force—a status formally recognized by the New Zealand

government in 2014 in regard to another major North Island river, the Whanganui.⁸⁹ The two rivers featured in this performance—the Tongariro, which flows from the central plateau of the North Island and has an ancestral relation to the Ngāti Tūwharetoa *iwi*; and the Yellow River, acknowledged as the cradle of Chinese civilization and the spiritual home and sustenance of the Chinese nation—are here recognized as ancestors, living wholes, binding their people together and emphasizing how waterways, land, people, and *whakapapa* are inextricably interwoven (the people belong to the river, not the other way around). *Awa* is presented as a series of scenes depicting the journey of the *wairua* (spirit, soul) of Te Uru Rangi (portal to heaven)—the name Patterson’s father gave him as a child. The story begins with the lament at Te Uru Rangi’s *tangi* (funeral), where the spirit begins its journey through Te Rerenga Wairua, but it is pulled back and trapped in limbo between realms, unable to return home.⁹⁰ Eventually, the desire from his family in Aotearoa unleashes the Tongariro River’s *kaitiaki* (guardian in charge of the *mauri*, the life force, of the river)—a *taniwha* (ancestral water guardian) in the form of a serpent which travels the celestial pathways and grapples with Te Uru Rangi to bring him home. But Te Uru Rangi is also pulled and restrained by the Naga spirit (a snake-like water deity) of the Yellow River as retribution for the great blockage in that river caused by Te Uru Rangi while in physical form. The heart of the performance is about the Tongariro and Yellow Rivers trying to find resolution and restore balance.⁹¹

This approach prompts us to think about how relations between Aotearoa and China, as portrayed in *Awa*, engage human and non-human performativities in ways that go beyond representational strategies (i.e., *this* stands for *that* on the stage). In each of the case studies discussed in this essay, I have shown how performance’s capacity to bring together different bodies, objects, and immaterialities in time and space can contribute uniquely to the conjuring of linked transpacific and Oceanic imaginaries and, sometimes, their instantiation. *Awa* certainly employs narrative and representational techniques, reflecting Patterson’s interest in symbology. But an important aspect of the work is how it uses non-representational modes to activate and make co-present ancestral energies that relate to human (Te Uru Rangi/the father) and non-human entities (the rivers), helping us to imagine, through performance, the interdependence of human and non-human rights.⁹² Performance scholar Margaret Werry observes how, directly after the 2014 New Zealand parliamentary vote on the Whanganui River Bill, the *karanga* (ceremonial call of welcome), *karakia* (prayer), *waiata* (song), and *haka* (posture dance) performed from the parliamentary gallery by members of the river’s *iwi* operated to “presence non-human kin by naming them,

acknowledging and honoring them. At the same time, the bodies of the performers themselves presence the absent entities by virtue of their ancestry: they are, in an absolute sense, co-substantial.”⁹³

Nathan Matthews elucidates how Māori performance conducts and amplifies powerful effects, forces, and intensities that can traverse bodies through performance dynamics such as *ihi*, the awe-inspiring psychic power that elicits an emotional response from the audience; *wehi*, the reaction to the power of the performance that incites fear, awe, or respect; and *wana*, the condition created by the combination of *ihi* and *wehi*, the performance’s aura that envelops both performers and audience.⁹⁴ Werry subsequently argues that “sensitivity to these affects, then, is a way of registering the *appearance* of the non-human through the performance of the human.”⁹⁵ I suggest that these effects can also manifest in other kinds of contemporary, aesthetic performance such as *Awa*, in which traditional performance forms like *haka*, *karanga*, and *waiata* are incorporated alongside its other repertoires, in which performers serve as genealogical bodies that co-presence human and non-human ancestors, and in which stage architectures create vortices for spiritual energies. To make present the Tongariro and Yellow rivers in these ways enriches the piece’s complex working-out of relationships between human and non-human ancestors, people, and the environment against a backdrop of transnational modernity.

* * *

I sit in the high-ceilinged, Edwardian-era auditorium of the Auckland Town Hall amid a packed house of Māori, Pākehā, and Chinese adults and children waiting for the single performance of *Awa*.⁹⁶ The tiered stage arrangement flanked by two staircases creates an arena in which musicians can communicate intimately with dancers and singers. Making the most of its soaring height, the forestage features a huge, sculptural structure anchored top and bottom by two concentric steel circles (Fig. 7). Between these circles stretch suspension ropes, producing two containing formations—one inside the other, reaching upward to the sky and down to the earthen stage floor—that the dancers can move around and pass between. The *mise-en-scène* is thick with mist and bathed in a blue wash; soft lights playing through the mist evoke the illusion of sub-aqua shadows, depths, and ripples—the myriad movements and elemental actions taking place



Figure 7. *Awa: When Two Rivers Collide*, devised by Moss Te Ururangi Patterson/Atamira with the Auckland Philharmonia, Auckland Town Hall, 2017. Set design by Robin Rawstorne, with lighting and AV design by Jeremy Fern and Rowan Pierce. Photograph courtesy of Rawstorne Studio/Tohu Productions

below the surface of a body of water. As the show progresses, an upstage light directed at the audience in a glaring pin-spot brightens, generating a striking X pattern against the mist with two geometric banks of light against the darkness. Within this pattern, the crossed lines of the ropes appearing and disappearing through the azure space remind me of the woven *tukutuku* (woven latticework) panels within a *whareniui* (Māori meeting house and the focal point of a *marae*, or meeting ground). Indeed, Patterson tells me that the concept of the *whareniui*—as a vector or conduit for energy received from the ancestors that is channeled into the earth and then recycled up through the physical structure of the house—is core to this central set piece in *Awa*. Robin Rawstorne’s architectonic suspended rope set designs for Atamira are part of several other works by Patterson, and reflect Patterson’s interest in Indigenous architectures and their potential to serve as portals to connect us with what is above, below, and around us.⁹⁷ In this way, the entire performance can be understood as a vector and pathway for ancestral energies, bringing the spiritual realm into being within the space.



Figure 8. *Awa: When Two Rivers Collide*, devised by Moss Te Ururangi Patterson/Atamira with the Auckland Philharmonia, Auckland Town Hall, 2017. Set design by Robin Rawstorne, with lighting and AV design by Jeremy Fern and Rowan Pierce. Photograph courtesy of Rawstorne Studio/Tohu Productions

Awa begins gradually, seeding the initial journey of Te Uru Rangi while a *haka* performed at half strength sounds the lament (Fig. 8). The first part of the performance introduces and enhances the idea of the rivers' spiritual personifications, with the multiple currents and flows that comprise their living complexities enacted through fluid dancing. As the Chinese and Māori choirs start to sing, seven male dancers enter: three Chinese, three Māori, and one Pākehā crawl along the stage in serpentine fashion, then, stretching and reaching, rise together. The Māori chanting and the mournful sounds of the *taonga pūoro* are ethereal, otherworldly, while the orchestra's Bach fugues counterposed here give the impression of a river building from a trickle into a flow. Moving in lithe synchrony, the pulsating bodies gather energy, working as an organic whole. Sinuous and connected movement phrases are punctuated with tight, energetic explosions—eddies and confluences physicalizing the yin and yang of tai chi, the curves and flourishes of calligraphy, and the wave and whirlpool motifs of

kōwhaiwhai (scrolling ornamentation) are interwoven with balletic grace. Against an aural backdrop of strings, the ensemble dances with their foreheads connected, first in pairs and then in threes, synching and twisting. These elemental sequences, executed with meticulous coordination as the dancers pass through the undulating tenebrism and the X of light, offer up some mesmerizing moments: the repeated gesture of the dancers passing their hands over their shaven heads and down their backs, as if water was running down and over them; the dancers stepping lightly, their feet hardly connecting with the stage, as though traversing liquid rather than land; a Māori dancer produces a beautiful gesture with his hand moving like a fish darting swiftly through the stream.

The shift to a more narrative mode in the work is signaled by a duet featuring one Māori dancer (Luke Paull Hanna) and one Chinese dancer (Xiaochao Wen), who enact the fight between the guardians of the Tongariro and Yellow Rivers, with the spirit of Te Uru Rangi evoked in the struggle between them. Their dance is sensuous, intimate, but taut with a tortured intensity; their choreography grows ever more frenetic and urgent as their combat gathers energy. At this point, the Māori children's choir enters the space, marking a new phase of the piece. The leader of the group presents a bamboo staff to the Māori dancer, which gives him great power as he wields it. He can manipulate and control the serpentine entities that surround him: turn them on the end of the staff, align them like a catch of fish on a line and then slide them off, raise them up into a frenzy, and lay them supine, to a background of strong anapests from the orchestral string section. Patterson states that the bamboo staff here references the Māori *marae* protocol of *whaikōrero* (formal speeches) and the *rākau*, the speaking stick, that confers status to the person holding it.⁹⁸ It is this authority that enables the Tongariro *taniwha* to finally rescue Te Uru Rangi. Yet, significantly, in their final encounter, when the bamboo staff is a connecting rod filled with tension between the *taniwha*, the Yellow River guardian fights back and eventually ends up with the staff. For Patterson, this important moment signifies the restoration of balance necessary for the Yellow River, which has been subject to Te Uru Rangi's violations; the moment emphasizes the need to honor the Yellow River as a living entity with a right to well-being and to acknowledge its *mana* (spiritual power). *Awa's* final resolution unfolds in a powerful and moving sequence in which the staff is placed vertically center stage, illuminated by a focused shaft of light from above, and the performers—adults and children alike—reach out to grasp it along its length. In this moment, the staff functions as a *poutokomanawa*, the central column at the heart of the *wharenuī* that connects earth and sky and forms the metaphorical backbone of the primal ancestor. This communal, intergenerational expression of

whakapapa evokes a charged state in which ancestors and descendants become co-present. With the past assuaged, *Awa* looks hopefully to the future: we hear a Māori chant with a young boy leading the call as the piece ends.

Awa proceeds from a Māori “cosmo-onto-epistemology” and builds upon congruences and synergies between Māori and Chinese repertoires and communities.⁹⁹ Accordingly, the river that flows through space and time also serves as a metaphor for the confluence of distinct identities, personalities, and properties: as Salmond writes, a “hydrological account of identity” evokes the river in terms of how “distinct streams of people with their different histories swirl together to form a river that in turn flows out to sea.”¹⁰⁰ Beyond its stage aesthetic, *Awa* does important work through its outreach to and engagement with local Chinese in Auckland in addition to the professional artists brought over from China. Patterson speaks of how his intercultural performance projects directly address racism in New Zealand’s wider society, working directly with minority Indigenous and immigrant groups to stand united against prejudice and to work toward equity.¹⁰¹ By working locally and regionally, in Oceanic and in transpacific terms, and telling old stories in new ways, Patterson’s literal and conceptual journeys encourage participants and audiences to see differently and to set sail on new voyages of discovery with one another. As he affirms, “it’s about us being able to hop into another *waka* [canoe, seagoing craft] in our lives through the confidence we build in this process.”¹⁰²

* * *

Read together, *Red Coats + Indians*, *The Bone Feeder*, and *Awa* provide new perspectives on how transpacific connections and Oceanic imaginaries can be productively articulated. Centering Aotearoa New Zealand as a location of—and source for—Asian and Pacific interactions diverges from US-dominated concerns and coordinates to explore alternative transpacific paradigms and illuminate different questions about place-making and identities that can be asked of this diverse and expansive region. I have utilized the notion of the minor transpacific to highlight lateral connections among less prominent nodes such as New Zealand and Taiwan, and to address more distributed Chinese identities in the diaspora. This approach modulates understandings of China as a major political, economic, and military presence in the Pacific region, while also foregrounding Indigenous viewpoints and existing networks within Oceania. Although the stories told have a masculine focus—it would be good to see more work of this sort privileging women and nonbinary perspectives—their form and content range widely, from

historical encounters to contemporary transnational circulations that are producing Asia and Oceania in a new era of globalization. Set in littoral, marine, and riparian contexts, these photographic, operatic, and danced pieces engage multiple cross-currents, encouraging more fluid concepts of national and regional identity while still acknowledging intrinsic ties between seas, rivers, land, and people. As an embodied and spatio-temporal medium, performance has a profound capacity to traverse geographies and temporalities within its physical scene, and to evoke multiple registers of the human, more-than-human, spiritual, and cosmogenic. These dynamics also enable audiences and viewers to experience how the personal and local are enmeshed with the larger operations of capitalism, colonialism, public works schemes, and labor diasporas. This discussion has also shown that mediating between wide-ranging affinities and emplaced histories and identities can throw up thorny issues of identity and representation. But intercultural performance projects can also enhance Oceanic relationality in real-world situations by forging and reinforcing community connections that have the potential to help participants negotiate relationships between Indigenous, diasporic/migrant, and settler-colonial groups. Therefore, while the works deal with experiences of loss, death, and displacement, they are also invested in various modes of renewal, resistance, and productive reconciliation; as Lionnet and Shih maintain, “beyond the nostalgic and the melancholic, these solidarities point to ways of becoming more engaged with present and future promises of transformation through active participation in the production of local knowledges and global cultures.”¹⁰³ The performing arts in Oceania have much to offer in their experiments across worlds.

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Notes

¹ Yuan Shu and Donald E. Pease, “Introduction: Transnational American Studies and the Transpacific Imaginary,” in *American Studies as Transnational Practice*:

Turning Toward the Transpacific, eds. Yuan Shu and Donald E. Pease (Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College Press, 2015), 3.

² I am extremely grateful to Greg Semu, Renee Liang, and Moss Patterson for so generously taking the time to talk to me about their work and for their comments on draft versions of this essay. Thanks, also, to the two anonymous reviewers for *Pacific Arts* whose valuable feedback greatly improved the article.

³ Tina Chen, "(The) Transpacific Turns," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Literature*, January 30, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190201098.013.782>.

⁴ "Pacific Island Worlds: Transpacific Dis/Positions," symposium program (University of California Santa Cruz, May 5, 2018), 1.

⁵ Erin Suzuki, "Transpacific," in *The Routledge Companion to Asian American and Pacific Islander Literature*, ed. Rachel C. Lee (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), 352. See also Viet Thanh Nguyen and Janet Hoskins, "Introduction: Transpacific Studies: Critical Perspectives on an Emerging Field," in *Transpacific Studies: Framing an Emerging Field*, eds. Janet Hoskins and Viet Thanh Nguyen (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2014), 1–38.

⁶ Hillary Clinton, "America's Pacific Century," *Foreign Policy* 189 (Nov. 2011): 56–63.

⁷ See Lisa Yoneyama, "Toward a Decolonial Genealogy of the Transpacific," *American Quarterly* 69, no. 3 (Sept. 2017): 471–82.

⁸ Greg Fry, "The South Pacific 'Experiment': Reflections on the Origins of Regional Identity," *The Journal of Pacific History* 32, no. 2 (1997): 200.

⁹ Suzuki, "Transpacific," 352.

¹⁰ Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih, "Introduction: Thinking Through the Minor, Transnationally," in *Minor Transnationalism*, ed. Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 7.

¹¹ Christine Kim and Helen Hok-Sze Leung, "The Minor Transpacific: A Roundtable Discussion," *BC Studies*, no. 198 (Summer 2018): 13–14.

¹² Rob Wilson, "Toward an Eco-poetics of Oceania: Worlding the Asia-Pacific Region as Space-Time Ecumene," in *American Studies as Transnational Practice: Turning Toward the Transpacific*, eds. Yuan Shu and Donald E. Pease (Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College Press, 2015), 229.

¹³ Wilson, "Toward an Eco-poetics," 228.

¹⁴ Although I am discussing Indigenous and diasporic communities that are understood as ethnic minorities in Aotearoa New Zealand, it should be noted that in terms of Pacific Island cultural production, New Zealand is a *major* node. Consequently (to subject the musical metaphor to further torsion), one might think about the *relative minor* in the (trans)Pacific. There are several organizations and initiatives that encourage creative transpacific relations between Aotearoa, Pacific Island nations, and Asia. Key examples include Creative New Zealand artist residencies and the Asia New Zealand Foundation's residencies, and well as Indigenous initiatives in Taiwan such as the Pulima Arts Festival. Playmarket hosts creative development opportunities for playwrights and performance-makers, while

several local and national companies and arts festivals offer platforms both for the production of home-grown work and for collaborative enterprises with artists elsewhere in Asia and the Pacific Islands.

¹⁵ David Pearson, “The ‘Majority Factor’: Shaping Chinese and Māori Minorities,” in *The Dragon & the Taniwha: Māori & Chinese in New Zealand*, ed. Manying Ip (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2009), 46.

¹⁶ See Rochelle Bright, “Is New Zealand an Asian Country? The 1993–1997 Debate,” in *New Zealand and Asia: Perceptions, Identity and Engagement*, ed. Yongjin Zhang (Auckland: New Zealand Asia Institute, University of Auckland, 1999), 31–52.

¹⁷ There is considerable discussion of this map. For an overview, see, inter alia, Natasha Reichle, ed., *China at the Center: Ricci and Verbiest World Maps* (San Francisco: Asian Art Museum, 2016); Gang Song and Paola Demattè, “Mapping an Acentric World: Ferdinand Verbiest’s *Kunyu Quantu*,” in *China on Paper: European and Chinese Works from the Late Sixteenth to the Early Nineteenth Century*, eds. Marcia Reed and Paola Demattè (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2007), 71–87; and William Tai Yuen, *The Origins of China’s Awareness of New Zealand 1674–1911* (Auckland: New Zealand Asia Institute, University of Auckland, 2005).

¹⁸ Stevan Eldred-Grigg with Zeng Dazheng, *White Ghosts, Yellow Peril: China and New Zealand 1790–1950* (Dunedin: Otago University Press, 2014), 70.

¹⁹ For fuller discussions of this history, see Pearson, “The ‘Majority Factor,’” and Nigel Murphy, “‘Māoriland’ and ‘Yellow Peril’: Discourses of Māori and Chinese in the Formation of New Zealand’s National Identity 1890–1914,” in *The Dragon and the Taniwha: Māori and Chinese in New Zealand*, ed. Manying Yip (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2009), 56–88.

²⁰ Paul Spoonley, “‘I Made a Space For You’: Renegotiating National Identity and Citizenship in Contemporary Aotearoa New Zealand,” in *Asians and the New Multiculturalism in Aotearoa New Zealand*, ed. Gautam Ghosh and Jacqueline Leckie (Dunedin: Otago University Press, 2015), 40, 52.

²¹ Pākehā comprise 70% of New Zealand’s population, Māori 16.5%, Asian 15%, and non-Māori Pacific Islander 9%.

²² The discourse on the “new interculturalism” in theatre and performance studies is expansive, but for authoritative overviews of these approaches, see Ric Knowles, *Performing the Intercultural City* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press 2017); Rossella Ferrari, *Transnational Chinese Theatres: Intercultural Performance Networks in East Asia* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020); and Charlotte McIvor and Daphne P. Lei, eds., *The Methuen Drama Handbook of Performance and Interculturalism* (London: Methuen, 2020).

²³ Anne Salmond, *Tears of Rangī: Experiments Across Worlds* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2017), 3.

²⁴ Salmond, *Tears of Rangī*, 314.

²⁵ Both political entities use the name “China”: The People’s Republic of China (PRC), commonly known as China, and the Republic of China (ROC), commonly known as Taiwan. Over 95% of Taiwan’s population is of Han Chinese ethnicity.

Indigenous Taiwanese are also referred to as Formosan people, Taiwanese Austronesians, Yuanzhumin, or Gāoshān people, and comprise approximately 2.4% of Taiwan's population.

²⁶ Kim and Leung, "Minor Transpacific," 15.

²⁷ Greg Semu, personal communication, April 28, 2021.

²⁸ The 'Amis are the traditional land owners and main tribe of the Taitung district on the south-east coast of Taiwan. The 'Amis make up the largest group of sixteen officially recognized Taiwanese Indigenous Peoples. In contemporary Taiwan, the 'Amis also comprise the majority of urban Indigenous people and have developed many urban communities all around the island.

²⁹ Greg Semu, interview by the author, May 4, 2020.

³⁰ Greg Semu provides this acknowledgement: "We acknowledge and pay homage to the traditional landowners and custodians past, present, and emerging for where these images were created: The 'Amis Tribe, Taitung District, southeast coast Taiwan; Bulareyaung Dance Company; Taitung County Government; and National Taitung University" (Semu, personal communication, May 23, 2021).

³¹ Semu, interview.

³² Traditional owners of the Coen region are the Ayapathu, Kaanju, Lama Lama, Umpila, and Wik-Mungkan peoples.

³³ Semu, interview.

³⁴ I take the concept of the scenario from Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003). Greg Semu, "Artist Statement: *Red Coats + Indians*," <http://www.gregsemu.photography/red-coats-and-indians>.

³⁵ Semu, "Artist Statement."

³⁶ Rossella Ferrari, *Transnational Chinese Theatres: Intercultural Performance Networks in East Asia* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 12.

³⁷ Mark Munsterhjelm, "The First Nations of Taiwan: A Special Report on Taiwan's Indigenous Peoples," *Cultural Survival Quarterly Magazine*, June 2002, <https://www.culturalsurvival.org/publications/cultural-survival-quarterly/first-nations-taiwan-special-report-taiwans-indigenous>.

³⁸ This rivalry between Beijing and Taipei has also manifested in competition for diplomatic recognition by Pacific Island nations. See Jian Yang, *The Pacific Islands in China's Grand Strategy: Small States, Big Games* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

³⁹ Semu, interview.

⁴⁰ Katrin Sieg, *Ethnic Drag: Performing Race, Nation, Sexuality in West Germany* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 2.

⁴¹ Sieg, *Ethnic Drag*, 4, 255.

⁴² Sieg, *Ethnic Drag*, 2.

⁴³ See *Drag Histories, Herstories and Hairstories: Drag in a Changing Scene*, Vol. 2, ed. Mark Edward and Stephen Farrier (London: Methuen Drama, 2021), 1.

⁴⁴ Sieg, *Ethnic Drag*, 12.

⁴⁵ Sieg, *Ethnic Drag*, 14.

⁴⁶ See, inter alia, Aboriginal and South Sea Islander dancer Malcolm Cole's performance as Captain Cook for the inaugural Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander float in the Sydney Gay Mardi Gras Parade in 1988; Pierre Gope and Nicolas Kurtovich's play *Les Dieux sont Borgnes (The Gods are One-Eyed)* (New Caledonia, 2002); Sāmoan, Tahitian, and Rarotongan artist Michel Tuffery's painting *Cookie in the Cook Islands* (2008); Pākehā artist Lester Hall's digital pigment print *Kia Ora Cook*; and Robert Sullivan and John Psathas's oratorio *Orpheus in Rarohenga* (Aotearoa, 2002).

⁴⁷ Semu, interview.

⁴⁸ Semu, personal communication, May 13, 2021.

⁴⁹ Semu explains that this element of the performance was not one he intended in advance. The war bonnet was made and gifted to the group by the mother of one of the administrators; intrigued by the gesture, he included it in the tableau. Personal communication, May 13, 2021.

⁵⁰ Sieg makes these observations in regard to Native American representation, but in a different context. Her point about the potential problems with forms of ethnic drag, however, is relevant to note here. See *Ethnic Drag*, 222–23.

⁵¹ A fuller discussion of *Red Coats + Indians* might consider the final two images in the series, which were not exhibited at TTICC. They were shot separately from the group scenes and include Semu himself. The photo *The Death of Captain Cook and Other Colonial Catastrophes* depicts Semu as a blood-spattered character crying out to the heavens while supporting the body of the slain Cook; see <http://www.gregsemu.photography/the-death-of-captain-cook>. Here, Semu ventures beyond the binary of colonizer and colonized to indicate how such ideologies entrench divisions among Indigenous peoples themselves. The artist deliberately leaves it open to interpretation as to whether his character is the winner or the loser here, murderer or mourner, or both: the catastrophe is the divisiveness that forces people to choose sides, turning kin against kin (Greg Semu, personal communication, April 28, 2021). Once again, however, the politics of overlaying a specifically Sāmoan/Chinese encounter on to a historical Hawaiian/British one are complicated, and require a more extensive analysis than I have room to include here.

⁵² A video recording of the 2017 Auckland Arts Festival performance of *The Bone Feeder* can be viewed on YouTube:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YA6XvHTnkIE>.

⁵³ Renee Liang, interview by the author, February 18, 2020.

⁵⁴ Elizabeth Sinn, *Pacific Crossing: California Gold, Chinese Migration, and the Making of Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2013), 265–66.

⁵⁵ Sinn, *Pacific Crossing*, 281–82.

⁵⁶ Sinn, *Pacific Crossing*, 266.

⁵⁷ Sinn, *Pacific Crossing*, 268, 270.

⁵⁸ When a person was known to have died but their remains could not be found, their “spirit was summoned in a ritual and then deposited in a spirit box (*zhaohun*

xiang). The spirit box too would be sent back to China, and given the same care as physical remains." Sinn, *Pacific Crossing*, 275.

⁵⁹ Stephen Deed, *Unearthly Landscapes: New Zealand's Early Cemeteries, Churchyards, and Urupā* (Dunedin: Otago University Press, 2015), 30, 31, 214.

⁶⁰ Deed, *Unearthly Landscapes*, 34.

⁶¹ Deed, *Unearthly Landscapes*, 35.

⁶² Emma Cox, "Hungry Ghosts and Inalienable Remains: Performing Rights of Repatriation," in *Theatre and Human Rights after 1945: Things Unspeakable*, eds. Mary Luckhurst and Emilie Morin (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2015), 113.

⁶³ For an account, see Renee Liang, "Naming Our Ancestors Lost in the Hokianga," *Newsroom*, April 9, 2021, <https://www.newsroom.co.nz/naming-our-ancestors-lost-in-the-hokianga>.

⁶⁴ Sarah Brodie, performance program for *The Bone Feeder* (Auckland Arts Festival, March 23–26, 2017), n.p.

⁶⁵ Liang, interview. For an astute discussion of how Māori and Chinese customs and repertoires are brought together in this work, see Cynthia Hiu Ying Lam and Rand T. Hazou, "Decoloniality and Contemporary Asian Theatre in New Zealand," *Theatre Journal* 72, no. 3 (Sept. 2020): 325–43.

⁶⁶ This character is created after Choie Sew Hoy, a prominent Dunedin-based, Chinese businessman who chartered the *Ventnor* and arranged the shipment of coffins, but ended up on the vessel himself after his sudden death.

⁶⁷ Renee Liang, *The Bone Feeder Opera*, libretto 2.18 (2016), 15, *Auckland Arts Festival 8–26 March 2017* (website), <http://2017.aaf.co.nz/assets/2017-Documents/Show-Programmes/The-Bone-Feeder-Opera-libretto-2.18-FINAL.pdf>.

⁶⁸ Liang, *The Bone Feeder*, libretto, 15.

⁶⁹ Liang, *The Bone Feeder*, libretto, 2.

⁷⁰ Liang, interview.

⁷¹ Mary Luckhurst and Emilie Morin, "Introduction: Theatre and Spectrality," in *Theatre and Ghosts: Materiality, Performance and Modernity*, eds. Mary Luckhurst and Emilie Morin (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 14.

⁷² Marvin Carlson, *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as Memory Machine* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001); Alice Rayner, *Ghosts: Death's Double and the Phenomena of Theatre* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), xvi.

⁷³ Xiaohuan Zhao, "Ghosts and Spirits in Zaju and Noh," *Journal of Comparative Literature and Aesthetics* 38, no. 1–2 (2015): 16.

⁷⁴ Luckhurst and Morin, "Theatre and Spectrality," 1, 11, 15.

⁷⁵ Wang-NGai Siu with Peter Lovrick, *Chinese Opera: Images and Stories* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1997), 189 ff.

⁷⁶ Liang, *The Bone Feeder*, libretto, 2, 10.

⁷⁷ Renee Liang, *The Bone Feeder*, play script (Wellington: Playmarket, 2014), 6–7.

⁷⁸ Liang, *Bone Feeder*, libretto, 17.

⁷⁹ See, for example, National Museum of Asian Art, Smithsonian Institution, "The Cicada in China," April 29, 2016, <https://asia.si.edu/cicadas/>.

- ⁸⁰ James Webster, interview by the author, September 16, 2021.
- ⁸¹ Ngahuia Te Awekotuku, "Memento Mori, Memento Māori – Moko and Memory," Tangi Research Programme Working Paper (Hamilton: Māori and Psychology Research Unit, University of Waikato, 2009), 2, 6.
- ⁸² Webster, interview.
- ⁸³ Sean Metzger, "Editorial Comment: Minor Asias," *Theatre Journal* 72, no. 3 (Sept. 2020): xv.
- ⁸⁴ Liang, *The Bone Feeder*, libretto, 20.
- ⁸⁵ Moss Te Ururangi Patterson, interview by the author, April 19, 2021.
- ⁸⁶ Atamira Dance Company and Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra, in association with Auckland Arts Festival, *Awa: When Two Rivers Collide*, performance program (March 25, 2017), 5.
- ⁸⁷ Atamira Dance Company, 4.
- ⁸⁸ Salmond, *Tears of Rangi*, 295.
- ⁸⁹ Salmond, *Tears of Rangi*, 293–94.
- ⁹⁰ Te Rerenga Wairua is the leaping-off place of spirits at Cape Rēinga at the northernmost tip of Aotearoa. Many *iwi* believe that the spirits of the dead fly to Te Rerenga Wairua and from there take their underwater journey to Hawaiki for their final rest.
- ⁹¹ Atamira Dance Company, 5.
- ⁹² See Margaret Werry, "What's Left of Rights? Arendt and Political Ontology in the Anthropocene," *Performance Philosophy* 5, no. 1 (2019): 5.
- ⁹³ Werry, "What's Left of Rights?," 13.
- ⁹⁴ Nathan Matthews, "The Physicality of Māori Message Transmission," *Junctures* (Dec. 2004): 10. See also Rachael Ka'ai-Mahuta, Tania Ka'ai, and John Moorfield, eds., *Kia Rōnaki: The Māori Performing Arts* (Auckland: Pearson, 2013), xv–xvi.
- ⁹⁵ Werry, "What's Left of Rights?," 13, italics in original.
- ⁹⁶ My analysis is based on my viewing of the performance of *Awa: When Two Rivers Collide* by the Atamira Dance Company and Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra, for the Auckland Festival, at Auckland Town Hall, on March 25, 2017.
- ⁹⁷ For several examples of this design aesthetic, see <https://rawstornestudio.com/Atamira-Dance-Co>. Patterson, interview.
- ⁹⁸ Patterson, interview.
- ⁹⁹ Werry, "What's Left of Rights?," 13.
- ¹⁰⁰ Salmond, *Tears of Rangi*, 313.
- ¹⁰¹ Patterson, interview.
- ¹⁰² Atamira Dance Company, 8. Italics in original.
- ¹⁰³ Lionnet and Shih, "Introduction," 21.

MARGO MACHIDA

'Ae Kai Rising: Trans-Oceanic Communities of Cultural Imagination¹

Abstract

'Ae Kai: A Culture Lab on Convergence, a three-day pop-up exhibition and performance venue organized by the Smithsonian Asian Pacific American Center in Honolulu, Hawai'i (July 7–9, 2017), was a daring social and intercultural experiment. Bringing attention to Hawai'i as a locus of trans-oceanic circulation, contact, and contestation, the project convened more than fifty visual artists, filmmakers, poets, scholars, performers, musicians, artisans, and traditional cultural practitioners from across the Asia-Pacific region and the Americas. Beyond fostering person-to-person contact via curated spaces of conviviality involving the participants and visitors to the site, the Culture Lab was foundationally oriented to the transactional production and sharing of knowledge across diverse communities by encouraging collaboration and dialogue in informal, face-to-face exchanges. In considering what type of model for contemporary, socially-engaged curatorial and museum practice the Culture Lab was advancing by devising transitory, culture-centered spaces and identifying themes around which people could find common cause, this piece draws on my firsthand observation of 'Ae Kai and the insights of visual artists I interviewed about their projects. It equally raises the question of what kinds of communities and support systems are being called forth through public convenings in which artists/cultural producers and spectators alike can claim places as active, expressive stakeholders in coextensive civic discourse.

Keywords: *art, Hawai'i, trans-oceanic, relational, dialogic, communities of cultural imagination*

Directly off a twelve-hour flight from Connecticut, I had an immediate, visceral rush upon walking into 'Ae Kai: A Culture Lab on Convergence in Honolulu on its opening day. Housed on the lower level of the vast Ala Moana Shopping Center, the bare, disused, cavernous space of a former Foodland supermarket had been transformed by organizers from the Smithsonian Asian Pacific American Center (APAC) into a pop-up venue for a sprawling exhibition, performance, and cultural event running from July 7–9, 2017.² I was invited to the event by its organizers and

asked to write my firsthand impressions of *'Ae Kai* from my perspective as a cultural critic and scholar of contemporary Asian American art.³

Although I am originally from Hilo, Hawai'i, and have periodically traveled to O'ahu for my research on artists, I have not lived in the Islands for over forty years. Thus, my encounters with many of the works that specifically referenced present-day, local conditions and events made it apparent to me that close dialogues with the participating artists would be required for a stronger understanding of the issues and contexts that gave rise to their projects. Indeed, the experience of participating in my first Culture Lab—just months after attending the inaugural 2017 Honolulu Biennial (March 8–May 8)—made me acutely aware of how significantly the Islands' art and cultural scene had changed since the late 1960s when I moved to the East Coast. By drawing attention to Hawai'i as a locus of trans-Pacific circulation, contact, and contestation, the Honolulu Biennial and this Culture Lab both represent innovative moves by US-based curators to foreground cultural production in which islands, archipelagos, and oceanic passages are thought of both as metaphors for the human experience, and as real sites with pressing social, political, economic, and ecological concerns to be interrogated.

Over the ensuing three days, hundreds of visitors passed through the space, where they were immersed in a continuous stream of live performances, video screenings, and interactive installations. Suffused with a raffish, DIY spirit, this setting—with its improvised overhead lighting, jumble of displays intermixing art and visual and material culture, and the animate chatter of participants still scrambling to set up their areas—brought to mind New York's downtown artist co-ops and storefront community art galleries of the 1970s and 1980s. *'Ae Kai* also shared traits with a spectrum of public events, gatherings, and presentations similarly intended to be temporary, including art happenings, street fairs, block parties, and flash mobs.

Aspiring to promulgate a “culture of intersectionality,” *'Ae Kai's* experimental, open-ended format was oriented toward encouraging direct engagement, concurrent conversations, and free-ranging byplay between a markedly diverse range of participants and their audiences.⁴ In the course of grappling with the sheer density of offerings, standpoints, and issues being presented in the space, my attention ultimately centered on the nature of the Culture Lab itself, as an extended project that built on previous convenings in Washington, DC, and New York. Since my own research on contemporary Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and US Pacific Islander art is anchored in live interviews with artists about the ideas undergirding their work, I was intrigued by the project's emphasis on generating a dynamic space for sociality, and especially on its use of informal face-to-

face exchange as an integral part of forming communities and networks to collectively produce knowledge about the world.

The Culture Lab's approach in Honolulu—signaled by its invocation of *'ae kai* (the Hawaiian word for the shoreline where sea and land meet) as its earthly metaphor for local cultural convergence and dialogue—is reminiscent of what I term “communities of cultural imagination.” In my book *Unsettled Visions*, I posit that works of art and expressive culture enable us to recognize and articulate experiences that we hold in common and, thereby, contribute to constituting a larger communicative field between individual and collective imaginations that continually flows back and forth in mutually generative ways.⁵ This capacious conception of community can be readily extended to the notion of *'ae kai* as an imaginative schema through which individuals and groups can form empathic connections and as a tangible space of interconnectivity. Such formulations offer robust vehicles for groups to envision engaged, real-world responses to the everyday conditions they encounter, as they continually test and reconstitute their various standpoints and mutual attachments to one another despite potential tensions and contradictions. Throughout this visit, I found myself considering what type of model for contemporary, socially-engaged curatorial and museum practice the Culture Lab was advancing by devising transitory, culture-centered spaces and shared identifiers around which people may come together around common causes. Equally, it raised the question of what kinds of expressive communities and support systems are called forth through public convenings in which the visions and voices of artists/cultural producers and spectators alike can claim corresponding places as mutual stakeholders in active, civic discourse.

Despite receiving due recognition as a self-professed mix of artistic and social experimentation in which no single ideological, aesthetic, or didactic approach predominated, *'Ae Kai* also engendered critique, in part because of its decidedly ephemeral character.⁶ Some attendees questioned whether projects in a one-time, “pop-up” event could meaningfully address the gravity of complex and difficult issues being touched upon, among them the US military presence in the Pacific, climate change, Indigenous sovereignty, and food insecurity. Such considerations echo longstanding critiques of international residency and exhibition programs in which artists are “parachuted” into different locales to engage with local audiences for circumscribed periods. Likewise, the nature of the venue itself came under scrutiny for presenting the event in a former supermarket, thereby potentially lessening the social and political impact of *'Ae Kai* by associating the exhibited work with commercial products and everyday activities made to be readily

consumed. There were also tensions and contradictions characteristic of presenting an arts-related project to the general public under the auspices of a nationally visible government-funded entity—in this case, the Smithsonian—with requirements and constraints that had to be negotiated by organizers and participants alike. For instance, some performances involving partial nudity required strategic efforts to ensure the artistic and cultural integrity of the performers while addressing institutional issues about maintaining appropriate standards of dress.

Although such concerns point out the challenges of this venturesome and inherently complicated undertaking, ultimately the determination of APAC's trio of curators—Kālewa Correa, Lawrence-Minh Bui Davis, and Adriel Luis—to extend the Culture Lab's geographic and conceptual reach far beyond the East Coast by staging the third Culture Lab of the series in Hawai'i did, in fact, provide a fertile conduit for bringing Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders together. In order to begin to redress the continental bias found in past models of Asian American studies, and to acknowledge the extent of longstanding historic involvement of the United States in the Asia-Pacific region, a substantial number of individuals of Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, Asian, and mixed heritage were among the more than fifty visual artists, filmmakers, poets, scholars, performers, musicians, artisans, and traditional cultural practitioners participating in 'Ae Kai.⁷ Moreover, this Culture Lab involved the participation of people from other backgrounds who espouse links to Hawai'i, including a cohort from Cuba whose sense of personal connection proceeded from a passionate advocacy for surfing, a practice that has long been a central part of Polynesian culture. Through its selection of participants and orchestration of works, this iteration of the Culture Lab alluded to the extensive, overlapping spheres of circulation and cross-cultural encounter that today conjoin Hawai'i and its peoples to Oceania, Asia, New Zealand, Australia, North America, the Caribbean, and realms far beyond.

The deliberate use of a non-traditional yet well-known public venue like Foodland, instead of an institutional cultural space like a museum or art gallery, underscores the commitment of 'Ae Kai's organizers to bring this event directly to the attention of local communities. Foodland—a chain of family-run supermarkets co-founded in the 1940s by the Lau family and Maurice J. Sullivan that became a fixture for generations of Honolulu residents—provided an animate civic bridge via its historical ties to the sustenance of those communities.⁸ Concomitantly, due to its unrestricted location in a major shopping mall, the event also regularly attracted curious walk-in visitors. While much has been made of conceptual frames like “creative placemaking” as economic vehicles for urban revitalization, to my

mind 'Ae Kai's utilization of vernacular locational contingencies had more in common with precedents like the 1980 *Times Square Show* in New York City, in which empty storefronts along high-traffic streets were temporarily converted by artists to house and display transient projects.⁹

Guided by 'Ae Kai's overarching framework of convergence and interactivity, visitors circulated freely throughout the former supermarket, its raw space loosely divided into discrete zones that featured individual and collective endeavors, often taking the form of installations. Since no hierarchical distinctions were made between visual art, crafts, and vernacular culture, some participants foregrounded techniques for urban organic farming or the fabrication of traditional Hawaiian cultural forms including surfboards, *hōlua* (land sleds), and musical instruments. Because audience involvement was integral to many of these projects, a number of areas were configured as common spaces for communal engagement and transaction, some figuratively referencing the social and cultural realities of people's lives via places of commerce like clothing and grocery stores, outdoor food markets and stalls, and trading posts and commissaries. Some sections were likewise set up to host "barter" tables where the genial sharing of stories and information was the currency of exchange rather than money. Adjacent zones were arranged as informal classrooms, arts and crafts areas, miniature community gardens, and semi-private enclosures for retreat, meditation, or conversation. In other spots, signage invited visitors to sit at worktables to make their own drawings and prints or to write messages, which were subsequently used as components for nearby installations.

Spaces of Sociality and Dialogic Exchange

Ultimately, what stood out as the distinguishing feature of this event was the immediate, onsite presence of artists and cultural practitioners who made themselves available to visitors—interacting, socializing, and discussing the motivations behind their work. By design, then, the Culture Lab advanced a very different mode of engagement from that of the typical museum or art exhibition—for artists and audiences alike. Hospitable, non-didactic, and relatively unstructured encounters unfolded fluidly, ranging from casual conversations to more intensive engagements in which visitors asked detailed questions about the exhibitors' projects. As a situation explicitly constructed to foster sociality and dialogue, the Culture Lab bears affinities with concepts like "relational aesthetics," as well as with

artistic projects that seek ways to foster and share interaction with different publics, and bridge gaps between art and life.¹⁰ An often-cited example of this tendency toward affability and social immediacy in art is Rirkrit Tiravanija's 1990s creation of makeshift kitchens in art museums in which he cooked for visitors, thereby enabling the Thai artist's preparation and sharing of Thai food to act as a means to initiate informal conversation.

Having both witnessed and taken part in a number of open interactions during the event, I was struck by the artists' intellectual and emotional generosity in committing themselves to this endeavor. These often-extended exchanges, as one visiting arts-writer cogently noted, enabled 'Ae Kai's "audience to enter [into] the process of the artist . . . not just the result."¹¹ Through direct and congenial engagement with the audience, as one of the artists asserted, the very act of having Asian Pacific and Indigenous participants share "their stories in their own voice[s] subverts this whole idea of exoticization of the other and just makes people relatable."¹²

Beyond fostering person-to-person contact via curated spaces of conviviality, the Culture Lab was foundationally oriented to the transactional production and sharing of knowledge across diverse communities by encouraging collaboration and loose partnerships between artist-participants. Some of the symmetries between the experiences and histories of different peoples that surfaced through such dialogues suggest the potential for settings like 'Ae Kai to open new channels for creative investigation and cross-identification among members of diverse groups that might otherwise not be aligned.

Indeed, one memorable interview involved a three-way discussion between Charles Philippe Jean-Pierre, a Washington, DC-based Haitian American artist; David Keanu Sai, a Native Hawaiian activist scholar; and myself about their multi-media project entitled *The Commissary / Ua Mau Ke Ea* (Fig. 1).¹³ The two artists met at the 2016 Culture Lab in New York, and their joint project evolved through an ongoing dialogue in which Sai's 2013 book, *Ua Mau Ke Ea: Sovereignty Endures*, became the pivot point for Jean-Pierre's engagement with Hawai'i's history.¹⁴ For Jean-Pierre the term "commissary" provided a symbolic point of convergence, as both men associated the word with American military bases and prisons, institutions that disproportionately incarcerate and employ people of color—in particular African Americans and Native Hawaiians, along with other Pacific Islanders. To provide the visual counterpart and backdrop complementing Sai's provocative onsite lectures on events in Hawaiian history, including the overthrow of the monarchy in 1893, Jean-Pierre crafted a minimal installation meant to schematically represent a US military commissary, identified by prominent signage and

reinforced by distinctive American-flag-inspired bunting. Using metal shelves, clothes racks, a shopping cart, and a telephone cable spool serving as a table, the installation displayed popular local and imported foodstuffs and Hawai'i-themed merchandise to reference the continuing commodification of local Polynesian culture. To signal the foregrounding of an Indigenous perspective, among the wares being purveyed were tropical-flower-print aloha shirts imprinted with a stenciled English text—"MAKE HAWAII HAWAI'I AGAIN"—that contrasts the non-Indigenous and Hawaiian language spellings of this place name. Their rhetorical aim was to assert the Indigenous standpoint through the use of the 'okina, a diacritical mark indicating a glottal stop in the spoken Hawaiian language.



Figure 1. Charles Philippe Jean-Pierre in collaboration with David Keanu Sai, *The Commissary / Ua Mau Ke Ea*, 2017. Mixed-media installation. Photograph by Margo Machida. Courtesy of the artist

To entice visitors to enter their area, Jean-Pierre intentionally sought to create attractive displays of mass-market “cultural commodities” reminiscent of

those in contemporary gift shops or grocery stores. However, instead of actually selling such familiar merchandise, the installation was a performative environment ultimately designed to disseminate Sai's "knowledge and understanding of the history of the Hawaiian Kingdom."¹⁵ *The Commissary* follows the aspirations of the organizers of 'Ae Kai to engage the artists in a collaborative process that "not only allowed for but demanded [that they] be able to shape the kinds of spaces and the kinds of encounters" that took place.¹⁶ Similarly the visual components in a number of other projects were not intended to be standalone artworks so much as continuously evolving sites of interchange between the artists and visitors to this Culture Lab. Given the curatorial emphasis on fostering interpersonal exchange, I would argue that rather than evaluating the exhibited works on traditional factors like aesthetics, it is more salient and instructive to consider how well they functioned within the parameters put forward by 'Ae Kai.

Links to the Local



Figure 2. Carl Franklin Ka'a'ilā'au Pao, *He 'Āhole Ka I'a Hole Ke Aloha ('Āhole is the Fish, Love is Restless)*, 2017. Mixed media (woodblock print, ink, butcher paper), 96 x 120 in. Photograph by Kimberly Luis. Courtesy of the artist

By mounting this Culture Lab in Hawai'i, matters of indigeneity and pan-Pacific Indigenous affinities and connections necessarily took on a prominent role in the

proceedings. As such, the assembled projects contended with urgent regional and global issues, including climate change and rising sea levels, land use, toxic waste, environmental sustainability, food insecurity, Indigenous rights, militarization, sovereignty, and governance.

Although space does not permit a full account of the spectrum of presentations and issues in 'Ae Kai, I found it notable that in many projects the venue itself, as a former supermarket, prompted references to food that addressed broader issues impacting Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, and other local communities. For instance, Carl Franklin Ka'ailā'au Pao's installation, *'He 'Āhole Ka I'a Hole Ke Aloha ('Āhole is the Fish, Love is Restless)* (Fig. 2), referenced the municipal character of Foodland—which had primarily served a working-class clientele—by surveying members of the public about their economic status. Pao—concerned about growing economic disparities between the affluent Honolulu residents who now frequent the mall's increasingly upscale businesses and the swelling ranks of the city's poor and homeless—devised a participatory project in which woodblock printing techniques registered, compared, and visibly displayed visitors' social standings based on their differing income levels.¹⁷ He invited visitors to select from one of three colors of ink corresponding to their income level, then use an engraved stamp with an image of the *'āhole*, a local species of fish, to stamp a fish in that color on a large sheet of butcher paper affixed to an adjacent wall.¹⁸ The images this process created illustrated the stark polarities between wealth and poverty in present-day island society, signified by the contrasting arrays of black, aqua, and red fish. Yet, the project was also meant to summon a unifying spirit rooted in mutual connections to the Hawaiian Islands as one's home. The *'āhole* carries notable cultural significance in Hawai'i, as it was traditionally used in ceremonies to conjure the spirit of aloha and love.¹⁹ Each individual's act of hand-stamping an *'āhole* on the wall, therefore, became a symbolic contribution toward collectively "bringing aloha to that place."²⁰

Native Hawaiian artist Maile Andrade's mixed-media floor installation *'Āina Mea'ai (Food Land)* (Fig. 3) offered a trenchant commentary on local people's dependence on imported canned and processed goods—and the concomitant importance of growing their own food—via a three-dimensional rendering of the island of O'ahu. The island's landscape and population centers were assembled entirely from comestibles—including SPAM, canned sardines, and bottled water—that are currently omnipresent in Islanders' diets. (Fig. 4). The pork product SPAM, in particular, retains a deep resonance across the Pacific region,



Figure 3. Maile Andrade, 'Āina Mea'ai (Food Land), 2017. Mixed-media installation with canned goods and bottled water. Photograph by Margo Machida. Courtesy of the artist



Figure 4. Maile Andrade, 'Āina Mea'ai (Food Land) (detail), 2017. Mixed-media installation with canned goods and bottled water. Photograph by Margo Machida. Courtesy of the artist

as it was introduced and popularized by American troops during World War II. The artist's deployment of packaged foodstuffs purchased in bulk from Costco (and later donated to a local homeless encampment) provided a concrete manifestation of the impact of mass consumerism on the environment, including distress over "how we dispose of the waste that fills our island."²¹ Such themes, and attendant concerns for the profound damage to the planetary ecosystem brought about through humankind's actions, resonated throughout a number of projects in 'Ae Kai, some of which incorporated empty plastic bottles and other detritus gathered from area shorelines.



Figure 5. Craig Santos Perez and Brandy Nālani McDougall, *(de)fence*, 2017. Mixed-media installation with steel mesh fence (8 x 10 ft.). Photograph by Craig Santos Perez. Courtesy of the artists

Linkages formed through trans-Pacific warfare and colonialism inspired the installation *(de)fence* by Chamoru (Chamorro) poet Craig Santos Perez and Native Hawaiian poet Brandy Nālani McDougall. The work explored historic connections between the artists' respective island homelands, Guåhan (Guam) and Hawai'i, both of which came under US control during its late-nineteenth-century territorial expansion in the Pacific. The Cold War led to further expansion of the American military presence and the deeming of Hawai'i, Guam, Okinawa, and other Pacific islands as vital to America's national defense. As a result, fenced-off US military bases, supply and storage centers, training grounds, firing ranges, and test sites became ubiquitous postwar features in these island landscapes. To underscore lived experiences in these militarized environments, the central component of *(de)fence*—alluded to in its punning title—was a freestanding section of galva-



Figure 6. Craig Santos Perez and Brandy Nālani McDougall, *(de)fence* (detail-Hawai'i), 2017. Mixed-media installation with steel mesh fence. Photograph by Craig Santos Perez. Courtesy of the artists



Figure 7. Craig Santos Perez and Brandy Nālani McDougall, *(de)fence* (detail-Guam), 2017. Mixed media installation with steel mesh fence. Photograph by Margo Machida. Courtesy of the artists

nized chain-link fence (Fig. 5). Densely festooned with texts and archival images, detailing the islands' respective histories and printed on plastic sheets, the fence also included clusters of red ribbons and white fabric bearing handwritten messages of hope for peace, liberation, and demilitarization of the islands. Visitors were encouraged to add their own inscriptions on blank ribbons and strips of cloth that the artists provided (Figs. 6–7).



Figure 8. Shizu Saldamando, *Farewell to Honouliuli: Reflections on Manzanar, Rohwer, and the Japanese Incarceration in Hawai'i*, communal workshop in progress, 2017. Mixed-media installation. Photograph by Len Higa. Courtesy of the artist

In the mixed-media installation *Farewell to Honouliuli: Reflections on Manzanar, Rohwer and the Japanese Incarceration in Hawai'i*, Shizu Saldamando, a California-based artist of mixed Japanese and Mexican heritage, referenced Honouliuli, Hawai'i's largest Japanese internment camp, which operated from 1943 to 1946 (Fig. 8). Her piece encouraged visitors to participate in fashioning leis from paper flowers to pay homage to the Japanese Americans—including local residents and the artist's own West Coast relatives—who were incarcerated on O'ahu and on the US mainland during World War II. Notably, the leis were fabricated from shredded paper replicas of US-government documents authorizing

proscriptive policies toward ethno-racial and religious groups perceived as threatening to national interests—specifically, the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, Executive Order 9066 of 1942, and the more recent 2017 Executive Order 13769, colloquially known as the Muslim Travel Ban (Fig. 9). For Saldamando, cutting up these “politically loaded” documents and repurposing them to create leis, which are typically used on special occasions to welcome people to Hawai‘i, was both a “poetic action and a symbolic gesture of resistance.”²²



Figure 9. Shizu Saldamando, *Farewell to Honouliuli: Reflections on Manzanar, Rohwer, and the Japanese Incarceration in Hawai‘i* (detail), 2017. Mixed media installation. Photograph by Shizu Saldamando. Courtesy of the artist



Figure 10. Shizu Saldamando, *Farewell to Honolulu: Reflections on Manzanar, Rohwer, and the Japanese Incarceration in Hawai'i* (detail), 2017. Mixed-media installation. Photograph by Margo Machida. Courtesy of the artist

'Ae Kai took place during a period of escalating anti-Muslim xenophobia and public fear about Islamist terrorists entering the United States. When newly elected President Donald J. Trump signed Executive Order 13769 in January of 2017, he raised the possibility of establishing a national database of all immigrants from Muslim-majority countries, citing the constitutional precedent that had ordered the wartime internment of Japanese Americans. Condemnation swiftly ensued, with Japanese Americans demonstrating against Trump's action while also expressing support for Muslim Americans and other imperiled immigrants. Accordingly, Saldamando's installation includes her drawing of a young child holding a sign that reads "Japanese Americans against Muslim Registration" (Fig. 10). This stirring image, inspired by a photograph taken during a 2017 protest march, personifies an intersectional ethos of solidarity formed among minoritized groups and people of color through their struggles with discrimination, racism, institutionalized violence, and exclusion.²³



Figure 11. Robin Lasser and Adrienne Pao, *Dashboard Hula Girl Dress Tent*, mixed media installation at Foodland featuring Mareva Minerbi and Sequoia Carr Brown, 2017. Photograph courtesy of the artists

Adrienne Keahi Pao—a California-born photographer and artist of mixed Native Hawaiian and European ancestry who was raised in the Hawai‘i diaspora—simultaneously views herself as an outsider/observer and insider to Hawaiian culture. Negotiations of hybridity, Indigenous identification, and complex implications arising from Pao’s sense of “double consciousness” were given dramatic expression in *Dashboard Hula Girl Dress Tent* (Fig. 11). A collaborative installation and performance with artist Robin Lasser, the work was intended to contrast the hula dancer as a stereotypical Hawaiian female image with that of actual women in Hawai‘i. Playing off the swaying hula girl figurines that commonly appear on car dashboards and are sold as tourist souvenirs, the project was centered around a ten-foot-tall grass hula skirt resembling a thatched hut. The collaborators conceived this “dress tent” as both an iconic costume and a habitable dome-like structure. They enlisted a succession of local female dancers to inhabit and infuse this wearable sculptural object with their own interpretive performances, both at the festival site and on nearby Waikī Beach’s postcard-like, touristic setting (Fig. 12). To further underscore the contrast between received images and an intimate knowledge of Hawaiian culture, *Dashboard Hula Girl Dress Tent*’s hollow interior included text panels—recounting familial stories about the artist’s female ances-



Figure 12. Robin Lasser and Adrienne Pao, *Dashboard Hula Girl Dress Tent*, Waikīki Beach, Honolulu, Hawai'i, chromogenic print, 30 x 36 in., 2017. Photograph courtesy of the artists



Figure 13. Robin Lasser and Adrienne Pao, *Dashboard Hula Girl Dress Tent*, interior design fabricated by Christy Chow, 2017. Photograph courtesy of the artists

tral lineage of traditional hula practitioners—that were accessible to viewers who ventured into this tent-like enclosure (Fig. 13).²⁴

Co-relationality and Reciprocity

Driven by APAC'S staunch commitment to advancing issues of social justice, environmentalism, and human rights, the Culture Lab represents an adventuresome experiment in applying principles drawn from community organizing and outreach to the process of doing curatorial work.²⁵ In seeking to foster equity, interconnectivity, and reciprocity by developing and expanding lines of affinity across different groups, the Culture Lab series is providing vibrant public spaces for cultivating convergence, mixing, and co-relationality. In 'Ae Kai, this direction, by design, allowed for new channels of transmission and communication to organically take shape within a Pacific locale where multiple voices, narratives, and trajectories have historically intersected and converged.



Figure 14. Artists from 'Ae Kai participating in preservation work at the Ho'oulu 'Āina Nature Preserve, Kalihi Valley, O'ahu, Hawai'i, 2017. Left to right: Chad Shomura, Linh Huynh, Kayla Briët; upper right, Rosanna Raymond. Photograph by Nathan Kawanishi. Courtesy of Smithsonian Asian Pacific American Center

Kālewa Correa, one of the organizers, proceeding from a Native Hawaiian vantage point, movingly characterized 'Ae Kai's principal objective as sharing in "building the 'ohana (family), building communities of trust and communities of practice . . . knowing [that every participant's] job as family is to raise up each other."²⁶ Or, as Adriel Luis, another curatorial team member, pithily put it, "What we've made is not just an art show. . . . [H]ere we seed tribes."²⁷ This emphasis on "growing" relationships of mutuality and reciprocity proved deeply resonant for many Pacific Islanders taking part in 'Ae Kai and in the preliminary events arranged by APAC that preceded the exhibition. These included the pre-convening of the artists on April 21, 2017 to participate in preservation work at the Ho'oulu 'Āina ("to grow the land") Nature Preserve in Kalihi Valley, providing a tangible means to directly engage with Hawai'i by caring for a portion of its land (Fig. 14).²⁸ For Rosanna Raymond, a New Zealand artist of mixed Sāmoan heritage, the organizers' careful attention to establishing a "relationship-making space" prior to the event was analogous to Indigenous ways of being, as manifested in traditional values associated with hosting—*manaakitanga* in the Māori language—that place great worth on how well the person extending the invitation "brings people together, looks after them, and sustains them."²⁹

For this artist, the Culture Lab's affirmation of the importance of providing a reciprocal, inter-relational forum also resonates with Sāmoan conceptions of the *vā*, a term with variants among other Polynesian cultures. According to Raymond, in Sāmoa the *vā* is broadly perceived as the space in between all things, an expanse for negotiation that is "activated through the living, and the connections they make," as different standpoints, worldviews, and knowledges are brought together in purposeful engagement.³⁰ From this perspective, dialogic encounters also figuratively serve to constitute the ever-shifting scope of the 'ae kai, the shoreline, posited as a dynamic natural metaphor for emergent spaces of interchange and mutual transformation between people and cultures. I feel privileged to have had the opportunity to witness, share in, and derive sustenance from such a rich discourse-in-formation.

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the Americas (*Brill*) and a contributor to the retrospective catalog Carlos Villa: Worlds in Collision (University of California Press, 2022).

Notes

¹ This article was originally prepared in 2017 for the Smithsonian Asian Pacific American Center (APAC), and is being published in expanded form with their permission. All images are from 'Ae Kai: A Culture Lab on Convergence, organized by Smithsonian APAC, July 7–9, 2017, Honolulu, Hawai'i.

² For more information about 'Ae Kai: A Culture Lab on Convergence, see the Smithsonian Asian Pacific American Center website: <https://smithsonianapa.org/aekai/>.

³ As I was unable to witness an earlier gathering held solely for the invited artists and cultural practitioners, this commentary is based on attending activities that were open to the public.

⁴ Brandi Martin, dir., 'Ae Kai, A short documentary by 84 and Sunny (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Asian Pacific American Center, 2018).

⁵ Margo Machida, *Unsettled Visions: Contemporary Asian American Artists and the Social Imaginary* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2009), 276–82.

⁶ I thank an anonymous peer reviewer for sharing their observations regarding critical reactions to 'Ae Kai; these are paraphrased here.

⁷ Lawrence-Minh Bui Davis, interview by the author, August 3, 2017.

⁸ Jane Char Wai and Tin-Yuke Char, *Chinese Historic Sites and Pioneer Families of Rural Oahu* (Honolulu: Hawaiian Chinese History Center, 1988), 41–4. See also "Soo Shee Pang Lau" in Barbara Bennett Peterson, *Notable Women of Hawaii* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1984), 231–3.

⁹ Ann Markusen and Anne Gadwa, *Creative Placemaking* (Washington, DC: National Endowment for the Arts, 2010), 3–9. For a discussion of the 1980 *Times Square Show*, see John Reed, "Crossroads of the (Art)World," *The Paris Review*, October 10, 2012, <https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2012/10/10/crossroads-of-the-art-world/>.

¹⁰ Nicolas Bourriaud, "Relational Aesthetics," in *Participation*, ed. Claire Bishop (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), 160–71. See also Grant H. Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

¹¹ Sasha Dees, conversation with the author, Honolulu, Hawai'i, July 10, 2017.

¹² Shizu Saldamando, interview by the author, Honolulu, Hawai'i, July 8, 2017.

¹³ Charles Philippe Jean-Pierre and David Keanu Sai, interview by the author, Honolulu, Hawai'i, July 7, 2017.

¹⁴ David Keanu Sai, *Ua Mau Ke Ea Sovereignty Endures: An Overview of the Political and Legal History of the Hawaiian Islands* (Honolulu: Pū'ā Foundation, 2013).

¹⁵ Charles Philippe Jean-Pierre, interview by the author, Honolulu, Hawai'i, July 7, 2017.

¹⁶ Lawrence-Minh Bui Davis, interview by the author, August 31, 2021.

¹⁷ Carl Franklin Ka'ailā'au Pao, interview by the author, Honolulu, Hawai'i, July 16, 2017.

¹⁸ A wall chart posted in the installation denoted Pao's system of color-coding visitors by their annual income level and socioeconomic class, with black representing the "upper class" defined as "greater than or equal to \$154,000"; aqua corresponding to the middle- and blue-collar class, "between \$52,000 and \$153,000"; and red representing the "so-called lower class, less than or equal to \$51,000." Pao, interview.

¹⁹ For more about the significance of the 'āhole fish, see Mary Kawena Pukui and Samuel H. Elbert, *Hawaiian Dictionary: Hawaiian-English, English-Hawaiian* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1986), 8.

²⁰ Pao, interview.

²¹ Nina Wu, "CULTURE CONVERGENCE: A pop-up event features local artists, Cuban surfers and creatives from around the world," *Honolulu Star Advertiser*, July 7, 2017, T5.

²² Saldamando, interview.

²³ Shizu Saldamando, email to the author, September 2, 2021.

²⁴ For an in-depth discussion of Adrienne Pao's *Dashboard Hula Girl Dress Tent*, see A. Mārata Ketekiri Tamaira, "From a Native Daughter: Seeking Home and Ancestral Lines through a Dashboard Hula Girl," *Refract: An Open Access Visual Studies Journal*, 1 (2018), <http://dx.doi.org/10.5070/R71141463>.

²⁵ Smithsonian Asian Pacific American Center, "Culture Lab Manifesto," *Poetry Magazine*, July 5, 2017, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/articles/142894/culture-lab-manifesto>.

²⁶ Kālewa Correa, interview by the author, Honolulu, Hawai'i, July 9, 2017.

²⁷ Adriel Luis (@drztl), Instagram, July 13, 2017, <https://www.instagram.com/p/BWgCBXXlkXn/>.

²⁸ For more information about Ho'oulu 'Āina Nature Preserve, see <https://www.hoouluaina.com/>.

²⁹ Rosanna Raymond, interview by the author, New York City, August 12, 2017.

³⁰ Raymond, interview. For further discussion of the *vā* and concepts of relational space, see Vilsoni Hereniko, "Tualuga: Decolonising and Globalizing the Pacific," in *Transpacific Americas: Encounters and Engagements Between the Americas and the South Pacific*, eds. Eveline Dürr and Philipp Schorch (New York and London: Routledge, 2016), 167–74.

KATERINA TEAIWA & YUKI KIHARA

Project Banaba: A Dialogue on Exhibition Collaboration and Methods

Abstract

This is a discussion between artist and scholar Katerina Teaiwa and artist and curator Yuki Kihara about their collaborative exhibition Project Banaba—the origins of the project, the exhibition process, and its various iterations in Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand, and beyond between 2017 and 2022. First staged at Carriageworks in Sydney, the multimedia exhibition follows the historical path of colonial-era phosphate mining on Banaba; phosphate fertiliser production, distribution, and consumption; displaced Banaban life; and associated archives, images, stories, and media. Project Banaba engages the communities where it is shown—both in a historic and a contemporary sense—while reflecting on imperialism, the movement of Indigenous lands and peoples through mining, the complicated Indigenous kinships resulting from this history, and the cultural revitalization and resilience of Banabans and other Pacific Islanders.

Keywords: *Banaba, Kiribati, Rabi, Fiji, history, contemporary art, phosphate mining, fertiliser, agriculture, community outreach, exhibitions*



Figure 1. Entrance of *Project Banaba*, Carriageworks, Sydney, 2017. Photograph by Zan Wimberley. Courtesy of Carriageworks

Exhibition Background

Project Banaba is a multimedia travelling exhibition by scholar and artist Katerina Teaiwa and curated by Yuki Kihara (Fig. 1). The exhibition brings together research, seldom-seen historical archival materials, and new work that sheds light on a little-known era in the histories of Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand, Kiribati, and Fiji, and its ongoing impact on contemporary Pacific environments and communities.

From 1900 to 1980, a multinational phosphate enterprise that eventually became the British Phosphate Commissioners (BPC)—owned collectively by Australia, New Zealand, and Britain—mined Banaba, also known as Ocean Island, in what is now the Republic of Kiribati. The phosphate was manufactured into superphosphate fertiliser and applied to farms across Australia, New Zealand, and beyond. As a result of the extensive mining operations and Japanese occupation during World War II, the island of Banaba was rendered uninhabitable and the Banabans relocated to the island of Rabi in Fiji in 1945.¹ The underground water stores had long been polluted by the removal of twenty-two million tons of rock and topsoil, and in 2021 Banaba ran out of fresh water for the approximately three hundred Banabans and Gilbert Islanders who live on Rabi as its caretakers.



Figure 2. Installation view of “Body of the Land, Body of the People.” Voile printed with photographic portraits of ancestral Banabans and hessian sacks with calico and cotton appliqué and printed archival texts. Photograph by Zan Wimberley. Courtesy of Carriageworks

Project Banaba is a conceptually layered installation that interweaves rare textual, film, and photographic records from the National Archives of Australia and other sources with personal narratives, including stories of the political injustice endured by generations of Banaban communities. It reflects on how the rock of Banaba, *te aba*, was viewed and transformed by powerful imperial interests. It is divided into three sections: the first is “Body of the Land, Body of the People” (Fig. 2), which combines archival text and representations of the mined landscape on textiles meant to replicate sacks of fertiliser; information from the mining archives; and large-scale photographs of Banaban ancestors. The second section is “Mine Lands: For Teresia” (Fig. 3), a three-screen projection featuring early-twentieth-century footage of phosphate mining and life on Banaba juxtaposed with the mining’s aftermath one hundred years later. It is dedicated to the memory of Katerina Teaiwa’s older sister, the late scholar and poet Teresia Kieuea Teaiwa. The final section is “Teaiwa’s Kainga” (Fig. 4), which combines colourful family (*kainga*) snapshots of everyday life on Rabi Island in Fiji with black and white images of mining, environmental degradation, and fertiliser production and distribution.



Figure 3. Installation view of the exhibition section “Mine Lands: For Teresia.” Projections and soundscape of footage from the archives and Katerina Teaiwa’s fieldwork, chronicling phosphate mining and the displacement of Banabans. Photograph by Zan Wimberley. Courtesy of Carriageworks



Figure 4. Installation view of the exhibition section “Teaiwa’s Kainga.” Photo “reef” featuring a combination of black & white photographs of twentieth-century mining activities on Banaba and phosphate packing and transport in Victoria, Australia, with Katerina Teaiwa’s personal photographs of twenty-first-century daily life on Rabi Island. Photograph by Zan Wimberley. Courtesy of Carriageworks

The valuable rock found naturally on Banaba was first identified through a rock sample from nearby Nauru, which ended up in a Sydney office of the Pacific Islands Company. The industry that grew from both islands manufactured the rock into superphosphate fertiliser, which was used extensively by farms across Australia and New Zealand. For most of the twentieth century, phosphate was a matter of global and national food security, as it dramatically increases agricultural productivity and the resulting exports. The value of the mineral on Banaba also made the island a target for Japanese occupation during World War II. Many Banabans, and Pacific Islander, or “kanaka,” mining workers from the Gilbert Islands and Ellice Islands (now Tuvalu) were killed during this period.²

During her research for the exhibition, Katerina Teaiwa identified approximately 518 metres (1,699 feet) of government files associated with the BPC—some of which have only recently been declassified—in the National Archives of Australia. In her 2015 book *Consuming Ocean Island: Stories of People and Phosphate from Banaba*, Teaiwa describes the experience of encountering all this archival material as “one of diffraction and remix: every photograph generated a potential storyline that overlapped with the edges of another

storyline centered on a newspaper fragment, a letter, a face-to-face interview, a coral pinnacle, or a moment on a canoe.”³ *Project Banaba* gives form to the sense of remix that researching this history creates.

The following is a discussion between Katerina Teaiwa and Yuki Kihara about the origins of the project, the exhibition process, and its various iterations between 2017 and 2021.

About the Collaboration

Yuki: Katerina and I have been friends for over a decade now and we have mutual friends across the Pacific. In 2016, I was invited by Carriageworks in Sydney to present an exhibition and I knew I wanted to do something that had resonance with the Australian context. I remembered Katerina telling me a few years back about phosphate mining in Banaba. I had also seen the 2003 exhibition she had collaborated with Māori artist Brett Graham on, entitled *Kāinga tahi Kāinga rua* (presented at the Adam Art Gallery, Pōneke Wellington) in response to phosphate mining on Banaba.

I had also read her book *Consuming Ocean Island*. There were parts of the book that were poetic and also outraged me about the injustice endured by the Banaban people. I saw the phosphate mining history in Banaba as a forewarning of what could happen to those of us in Sāmoa, especially because at the time our country was in a heated debate around the privatization of customary land. I felt that the Banaban story told by Katerina was too important to be confined to academia; it needed to be highlighted within the contemporary art context—with its access to the general public—to help create awareness, especially because we’re living in a time when intersectional issues around Indigenous peoples, the environment, and sustainability are prominent in global media.

During our research and development for *Project Banaba*, Katerina had a number of great ideas regarding materials used during the mining production that could be recontextualized and represented as artworks. She also generously introduced me to her Banaban family, and we often talked about the lack of contemporary artists in the Banaban community. It was then I had an epiphany: if I wanted the outcome of the exhibition to empower the Banaban people, then Katerina had to be the artist and I would support her as the curator. I also felt that the Banaban story wasn’t mine to tell, that the exhibition would have more impact if it came from Katerina herself. Katerina didn’t take my suggestion that we swap

roles too well at first, but I reassured her that, given her experience as a former dancer and her thinking about materiality, she could think about the exhibition as choreographing an experience for the audience. That was when it clicked for her that she could take on the role of a “visual artist.”

Katerina: Working with Yuki has been an incredible journey. She is precise, organised, energetic, a brilliant planner, and has a strong sense of justice and resistance. I had loved her work for years before we decided to collaborate. It was really clear that she moved through the world, inhabited the world, in a critical and creative way—always seeing things from nuanced perspectives. Yuki’s practice crosses so many genres of art, and is driven by an ethics and politics that resonates with my own. She’s very much been a dear friend, generous mentor, and guide in this visual arts journey.

Moving from Academic Research to Practice-based Arts

Katerina: Prior to *Project Banaba*, I looked to established visual artists to interpret and represent the archival, photographic, and film material I had been collecting since the late 1990s, when I did my master’s in Pacific Islands studies at the University of Hawai’i at Mānoa, and during my PhD studies at the Australian National University in the early 2000s. My whole life I had been sketching and dancing, and while dance was well established as a passion of mine through my participation in the Oceania Dance Theatre with the late Seiuli Allan Alo Va’ai, the visual arts remained a more peripheral activity until the PhD.

I had imagined my research as an exhibition really early on in the process, but as I was not based in a school of practice-based arts, I struggled to realise the things I was visualising. My supervisors in the anthropology department were not able to guide me in anything other than writing or text. However, one of my mentors, the late Professor Greg Denig, used to challenge PhD students to “perform” their research projects. Experiencing this early on in the PhD research process was liberating. I paid attention to the photographic and film content I found in the archives, and decided to include the video footage I previously filmed while conducting fieldwork. I had about fifty hours of content after doing research on Rabi in Fiji, where most of my father’s family lives, and on Tarawa, Tabiteuea, and Banaba in Kiribati, where I also have many relatives. Australian filmmaker Gary Kildea, who worked in the old ethnographic film unit in the former Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, generously mentored and co-produced the

ethnographic film portions of my PhD thesis. But after I completed my PhD, they remained on the shelf while the text portion was turned into journal articles and book chapters. I eventually wrote a new book on Banaban history and phosphate, with one chapter that I described as a visual and textual “remix.” This became the basis for conceptualising the multimedia *Project Banaba*.

Taking Shape: audience and empowerment

Yuki: *Project Banaba* is co-curated by myself and the curator of the host institution that it is traveling to, in consultation with Katerina. I prefer to work this way because the host curator has more first-hand knowledge of how their institution operates, their budget constraints, and any logistical issues. The host institutions greatly benefit from presenting *Project Banaba* because it expands their audiences. The socially engaged nature of *Project Banaba* helps build solidarity and community, as it requires working closely with and alongside the local Banaban diaspora, Indigenous local authorities, Pacific communities, artists, and scholars. This becomes an allegory for repatriating the land that was taken away from Banabans in the twentieth century.

Katerina and I are careful in selecting venues that will be a good fit for *Project Banaba* because not all venues are suited to present installations. That said, we are currently looking at ways to mould *Project Banaba* based on the resources available to the host venue, especially where we feel that presenting this history can be impactful for the audience. *Project Banaba* also re-presents works made for or featured in its previous iterations, highlighting the exhibition’s multi-sited journey.

Katerina: The main issue for me with each gallery, location, or community where *Project Banaba* appears is that we link the exhibition to that site, make specific historical, material, archival, or contemporary connections. Yuki and I have already imagined how the exhibition travels along the same routes as the mined phosphate rock, which means it links Kiribati and Fiji to Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand, the United Kingdom, Japan, the US, parts of Europe, and every other place where Banaban phosphate rock, or manufactured fertiliser from Banaban phosphate, is applied to farm soil. That’s a lot of places over at least eight decades across the twentieth century, and probably into the twenty-first century as phosphate was regularly stockpiled.

Carriageworks, Sydney | 17 November – 17 December 2017



Figure 5. Artist Katerina Teaiwa at the entrance to *Project Banaba* at Carriageworks, Sydney, 2017. Photograph by Zan Wimberley. Courtesy of Carriageworks

Yuki: The relevance of presenting *Project Banaba* at Carriageworks in Redfern, Sydney (Figs. 1–9), is that the space occupies what was the Eveleigh Railway Workshops, and Banaban phosphate was transported across Australia through the railway system. The Carriageworks presentation of *Project Banaba* helped to set the tone for subsequent exhibitions in other venues. We initially thought of installing *Project Banaba* inside an actual carriage, but it became logistically complex to find an empty carriage for rent and to transport it to Carriageworks, so we opted for an installation inside the gallery space instead.

It was great to receive attention from the mainstream news and social media channels, including in the *Sydney Morning Herald*. And as part of the outcome of *Project Banaba*, Katerina has received numerous invitations to present her artworks internationally, independent of *Project Banaba*.

Katerina: Sydney was also the site of the original guano and phosphate mining office from which prospecting expeditions were sent into the Pacific Islands. New Zealand “phosphateer” Sir Albert Ellis discovered central Pacific phosphate when

he realized that a rock doorstep that had been previously thought to be petrified wood was, in fact, made of phosphate. The rock was from Nauru, a German territory at the time, so they searched for the closest island to it, guessing its geologic makeup would be similar, and found Banaba. Ellis was based in Sydney at the time, so Sydney is an origin point for the colonial and imperial forces and agricultural priorities that eventually shaped the lives and futures of Banabans and Nauruans.

Banaba is now an industrial wasteland filled with remnants of a dilapidated infrastructure: glass, steel, concrete, asbestos, and decayed mining equipment. Banaba is also quite “dark” in the sense that the history of mining and the devastation of the landscape weighs very heavy on the island, even when covered by vegetation. You can feel and see the impact of mining debris immediately when you disembark in Home Bay. Carriageworks is an industrial space, which was actually perfect for the show. After our initial gallery visit, I could envision the installation very clearly in its large, high-ceilinged space, and saw the potential of turning a large black box into a mined landscape. I decided to have phosphate pinnacles and superphosphate sacks floating in the space (Figs. 6–8). These were safeguarded by Banaban ancestors, whose images were printed on transparent voile—signaling their positionality in the afterlife—and hung nearby. Short quotes from the archives and their dates were printed beneath the Pivot fertiliser logo on the sacks, forming a historical timeline.⁴

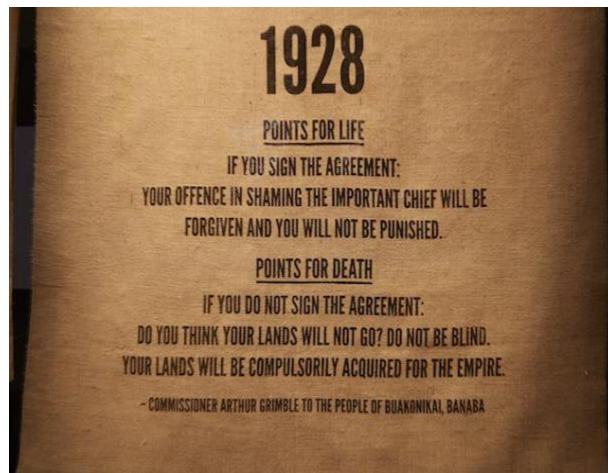


Figure 6 (left). Hessian sack with calico appliqué shaped as phosphate pinnacles. Photograph by Zan Wimberley. Courtesy of Carriageworks. Figure 7 (right). Detail of hessian sack printed with archival text. Photograph by Zan Wimberley. Courtesy of Carriageworks



Figure 8. Installation view of “Land from the Sea, Land from the Sky” with “Mine Lands: For Teresia” in the background. Photograph by Zan Wimberley. Courtesy of Carriageworks

My younger sister, Dr. Maria Teaiwa-Rutherford, surprised me by travelling all the way from New York, where she lives, for the opening of the show. This was very significant for me, as the whole exhibition references and is dedicated to our extended Teaiwa family, including our late sister, Dr. Teresia Teaiwa, who had passed away earlier in 2017 and whose early research and writing on Banaba very much inspired my own journey.

MTG Hawke’s Bay Tai Ahuriri, Napier, New Zealand | 4 April – 1 September 2019

Yuki: The relevance of presenting *Project Banaba* at MTG Hawke’s Bay Tai Ahuriri is that the Ravensdown phosphate factory is located near the museum.⁵ Hawke’s Bay in Aotearoa is known as the “fruit bowl of New Zealand” because of all the pears, peaches, plums, apples, and grapes grown from the soil formerly nourished by the Banaban phosphate, which was dispersed through years of aerial top-dressing. These fruits are also hand-picked today by seasonal workers from the Pacific.



Figure 9. Opening reception of *Project Banaba* at MTG Hawke's Bay Tai Ahuriri, 2019. Photograph courtesy of Yuki Kihara

Katerina: Aerial top dressing, the application of fertiliser via low-flying aircraft, was a critical motif for the MTG show, which was co-curated by Jess Mio. We created two new textiles and incorporated the design of a 1960 postage stamp that showed the phosphate fertiliser being applied to a field (Fig. 10). We also added quotes by Teresia on the walls of the gallery.



Figure 10. Aerial Top-Dressing Stamp, circa 1960. New Zealand Post Museum Collection, artwork by J.C. Boyd, produced by Harrison & Sons Ltd. Image courtesy of Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa



Figures 11 and 12. Artist Katerina Teaiwa overseeing the installation of *Project Banaba's* photo reef (left) and suspended textile works (right) at MTG Hawke's Bay Tai Ahuriri. Photographs courtesy of Yuki Kihara

Another new element added to Project Banaba at MTG was a Cook Islands dance skirt made by Caren Rangī ONZM. In her youth, Rangī performed in a Cook Islands dance group in Ahuriri Hawke's Bay. She made the skirt out of polyester phosphate sacks used to pack and ship phosphate from the Ravensdown Napier Works across Aotearoa New Zealand (Fig. 13). Cook Islanders have lived in Hawke's Bay, and worked at the phosphate plant there, for many years. We were able to learn from them and share so much about how Ravensdown had been processing and distributing Banaban and Nauruan phosphate for decades. This deepened our understanding of Rangī's piece and increased its resonance within this iteration of the exhibition.



Figure 13. Left to right: Artist Katerina Teaiwa, curator Yuki Kihara, Caren Rangī, and Caren's daughter, Kaiata Kaitao, standing with a Cook Islands dance skirt. Rangī made the skirt from polyester sacks from the Ravensdown Napier Works, a phosphate factory in Hawke's Bay. Photograph taken during the installation of *Project Banaba* at MTG Hawke's Bay Tai Ahuriri.

For the MTG exhibition catalogue, I had a really important conversation with a brilliant writer and environmentalist, Ngāti Porou Tina Ngata, a Māori rights activist and community organiser. We talked about imperial histories, contemporary cases of environmental extraction and dispossession, solidarity, and the complicated kinships that result from something like the transfer of Banaban land into Māori land.

The MTG showing attracted many viewers with direct connections to farming, mining, and Banaban histories. One Hawke’s Bay resident, Colin Wakefield, kindly reached out to me before the show and shared his own family history. His father, Major Ronald Wakefield, was the lead New Zealand officer who received the Japanese surrender after the occupation of Banaba/Ocean Island during World War II. This was a terrible period for Gilbertese and Ellice Islands (Tuvaluan) mining workers, who were left behind by the company, and for Banabans, who were eventually taken to war camps in Kosrae and Nauru after they ran out of food on the island. Many workers and Banabans were executed during the occupation. Colin’s family had kept personal papers, relevant media, and other information from the time, which helped fill in historical gaps of our knowledge of what happened in that period.

Such themes were further discussed at the floor talk for the show. Professor Alice Te Punga Somerville from the University of Waikato brought her undergraduate and postgraduate students along to this event. It was wonderful to have a Pacific Studies talanoa (dialogue) session under the textiles, surrounded by the other elements of the show, and to be able to reflect on the impacts of this multi-sited Pacific history (Figs. 14–15).



Figure 14 and 15. Jess Mio (left), co-curator of *Project Banaba* at MTG Hawke’s Bay Tai Ahuriri, introduces Katerina Teaiwa’s artist talk to students from Waikato University (right), 2019. Photographs courtesy of Yuki Kihara

After the show, one of Alice’s postgraduate students, Wanda Ieremia Allan, sent through a translation she had done of the journal of a Reverend Rusia, pastor for the Ellice Island community, who was interned with Banabans and workers during World War II. It was a harrowing and important account from a Pacific perspective that hadn’t made it into any history books.

Finally, this iteration of the show was particularly significant for me when three young Banabans, led by Itinterunga Rae Bainteiti, travelled from Auckland to join us for the opening night. Rae gave a speech and the young men sang (Fig. 16). Three generations of my family from Wellington and Auckland also came to the opening (Fig. 17). This was so important for me, as my parents have never been able to travel to see *Project Banaba*.



Figure 16. Rae Bainteiti, Rangaba Taoroba and Raieta Kaipati performing at the opening reception of *Project Banaba*, MTG Hawke’s Bay Tai Ahuriri, 2019. Photograph courtesy of Yuki Kihara



Figure 17. Three generations of artist Katerina Teaiwa’s family at the opening reception of *Project Banaba*, MTG Hawke’s Bay Tai Ahuriri, 2019. Photograph courtesy of Yuki Kihara

Te Uru Waitakere Contemporary Gallery, Auckland | 5 March – 29 May 2022

Yuki: So that I could focus on presenting my work at the Aotearoa New Zealand Pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2022, in 2019 Katerina and I discussed how I might hand over the curatorial duties for *Project Banaba* to another curator. I began considering a number of curators who could work with Katerina, and had conversations with curator Chloe Geoghegan about presenting *Project Banaba* at Te Uru Waitakere Contemporary Gallery in Waitakere region.

With the help and guidance of Katerina and Banaban leader Itinterunga Rae Bainteiti, on 8 August 2020 I made a short PowerPoint presentation introducing *Project Banaba* to the local Auckland community, during a church service hosted by the Banaban Christian Fellowship Support Hub at Ranui community hall in Waitakere (Figs. 18–19). Afterwards, I was surprised to see that people wanted to know more about the exhibition. There I also met Banaban elder Maggie Corrie-Kaipati—who already knew members of Katerina’s family—for the first time.



Figure 18 (left). Performance by the Banaban Christian Fellowship Hub at Ranui community hall in Waitakere. Photograph courtesy of Yuki Kihara

Figure 19 (right). Christina Buchanan (2nd from left), who was born on Banaba Island, discusses her family heirlooms from Banaba with members of the Banaban Christian Fellowship Hub. Photograph courtesy of Yuki Kihara

During our consultation with Maggie about *Project Banaba* at Te Uru, she identified a need for more resources for the Auckland Banaban community, in order to help strengthen their language and heritage arts. This inspired us to create the Te Kaneati Banaban Cultural Revitalization Workshops, which will be presented alongside *Project Banaba* at Te Uru. This was a perfect fit, given that the Banaban Christian Fellowship Support Hub and Te Uru were both based in

Waitakere. I knew that this opportunity would allow me to learn directly from the Banaban diaspora and to see whether I had it in me as a curator to make a difference in people's lives. This led to my decision to stay on as curator of *Project Banaba*. Being part of Te Kaneati also meant going above and beyond the call of duty as a curator because working with grass-roots Pacific communities means volunteering for many hours, which goes unnoticed by the institution of contemporary art curation. However, after having been part of many migrant community projects over the years and witnessing the true transformative power of art in peoples' lives, I knew Te Kaneati was going to be a special project for the Banaban community in Auckland. After numerous Zoom and face-to-face meetings, I am happy to have been part of the group effort alongside Rae, Lillan, and Chloe from Te Uru—as well as Katerina—in assisting Maggie to secure Creative New Zealand funding to stage the Te Kaneati workshop series. Maggie's engagement with *Project Banaba* also led to the inclusion, for the first time, of the performance of the Banaban Christian Fellowship Support Hub at the Fijian stage of the 2021 Pasifika Festival, with the support of Pacific Dance New Zealand.

Sefa Enari MNZM, director of Pacific Dance New Zealand, also gave us advice on how to structure the Te Kaneati workshops, which are divided into several parts, including costume making (weaving, knitting, sewing) (Fig. 20); music (Banaban language and meaning, singing and musical instruments); dance (choreography with song); and storytelling (ancestral, social, and political histories). The outcome of the workshops will be presented as an exhibition at Te Uru's Learning Center, in a separate gallery space alongside *Project Banaba*. The workshop activities will be recorded on video, as both a visual record of the events and to archive educational resource material for the Banaban community via accessible platforms such as YouTube.



Figure 20. Aroiti Tane, Te Kamari (a traditional, ceremonial Banaban neck piece worn by women), 2021. Photograph courtesy of Te Uru Waitakere Contemporary Gallery

Katerina: Unfortunately, the global pandemic and its associated travel restrictions have prevented me from being as involved as I'd like to be in the pre-exhibition workshops and activities that we have organised through Te Uru Waitakere Gallery and the Banaban Christian Fellowship Support Hub in Auckland. I was able to conduct one site visit and meet with Yuki, Maggie, Lillian, and the Te Uru team before New Zealand's borders closed in July 2021. The potential and impact of *Project Banaba* has now expanded even further to directly incorporate the Banaban Aotearoa diaspora.

The Future of *Project Banaba*

Yuki: *Project Banaba* is a site-specific exhibition that responds to the cities and countries in the Pacific Islands, Japan, the UK, New Zealand, and Australia that share a history related to phosphate mining in Banaba. It has a strong community outreach component that engages the Banaban diaspora, local Indigenous tribal authorities, the Pacific community, activists, artists, and scholars, among others. We have had people reach out to us and share their family heirlooms, rare memorabilia, films, and photo albums that cannot be found in research libraries and museums. Not everything about Banaba is held in institutions of learning—much is held in the memories of everyday people.

We hope to compile everything we have accomplished in *Project Banaba* into a book and/or a website that will be accessible to a wide and diverse general public. We can all learn from the strength and the resilience of Banaba and its people.

Katerina: I hope to bring *Project Banaba* to the Pacific Islands one day, especially to Kiribati and Fiji, where many Banabans live. Finding an appropriate space and arts support has been one of our challenges in that respect. Yuki and I share information and content from the show with many Pacific communities who are very active on social media so that knowledge of our work is accessible.

There are serious ongoing issues surrounding the ethics and colonial nature of phosphate mining today. Morocco runs the world's largest mine in the non-self-governing territory of Western Sahara, and has displaced many of the Indigenous Sahrawi people there. The history of phosphate mining is a history of the Anthropocene and a clear example of the kinds of mass agricultural, extractive, and industrial activities that have directly contributed to climate

change. We will continue to make these links with the exhibition going into the future.

Acknowledgements

Project Banaba has been supported by Australian National University's School of Art in the College of Arts and Social Sciences, and School of Culture, History and Language in the College of Asia and the Pacific. It has been funded and hosted by Carriageworks, Sydney; MTG Hawke's Bay Tai Ahuriri; Para Site Gallery, Hong Kong; and Te Uru Waitakere Gallery, Auckland.

Katerina Teaiwa was born and raised in Fiji and is of Banaban, I-Kiribati, and African American heritage. She is a professor of Pacific studies and the deputy director of higher degree research training in the School of Culture, History & Language at the Australian National University. She has a background in contemporary Pacific dance and was a founding member of the Oceania Dance Theatre at the University of the South Pacific, Laucala campus. She was president of the Australian Association for Pacific Studies from 2012 to 2017, and is currently its vice president. She is also chair of the Oceania Working Party of the Australian Dictionary of Biography, art editor for The Contemporary Pacific: A Journal of Island Affairs, and editorial board member of the Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute and The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology.

Yuki Kihara is an interdisciplinary artist of Japanese and Sāmoan descent whose work seeks to challenge dominant and singular historical narratives by exploring the intersectionality between identity politics, decolonization, and the environment through visual arts, dance, and curatorial practice. In 2019, the Arts Council of New Zealand Toi Aotearoa—the national arts development agency of the Government of New Zealand—appointed her to represent the Aotearoa New Zealand Pavilion at the 59th Venice Biennale in 2022. Kihara has been a curator of Project Banaba by Katerina Teaiwa since its inception in 2017 when it was commissioned by and presented at Carriageworks, Sydney. See <https://yukikihara.ws>

Notes

¹ Katerina Teaiwa, *Consuming Ocean Island: Stories of People and Phosphate from Banaba* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015).

² See Teaiwa, *Consuming Ocean Island* for more detail on this history.

³ Teaiwa, *Consuming Ocean Island*, 50.

⁴ The Pivot company manufactured and distributed phosphate made from Banaba and Nauru across Australia.

⁵ There is also a Ravensdown phosphate factory in Dunedin on Te Waipounamu.

JEWEL BLOCK and STACY L. KAMEHIRO

Home and Belonging: An Interview with Artist Jewel Block

Abstract

This is an interview between the artist Jewel Block and art historian Stacy L. Kamehiro, based on their conversations between May 2018 and November 2021. Block and Kamehiro discuss some of the conceptual frameworks and creative strategies developed by the artist to chronicle the experiences of her family relocating to Southern California from American Sāmoa, and address issues of memory, place-making, and Sāmoan-American identity processes.

Keywords: *Jewel Block, Sāmoan American art, Sāmoan art, diaspora, contemporary Oceanic art, materiality, memory, identity*

Stacy L. Kamehiro (SLK): *Thank you for sharing your work with Pacific Arts, and for this opportunity to learn more about your creative practice. In “Lessons, Challenges, and Adaptations: Reconstructing Self within Changing Pacific Environments,” your presentation at the 2018 Pacific Island Worlds symposium at the University of California–Santa Cruz, you emphasized the centrality to your paintings, drawings, and installations of your family’s experience of relocating from American Sāmoa to Honolulu, and then later establishing a life and a community in San Diego.¹ Can you describe these experiences and how they are present in your work?*

Jewel Block (JB): *Much of my work is rooted in being an afakasi (a Sāmoan person of mixed ethnicities and genealogies). My mother was Sāmoan and my father was Danish and Irish. I was raised by my Sāmoan family in San Diego, California, trying to find myself in the Pacific. I look to my family and ancestors who are the source of my “roots” and “routes,” as Jim Clifford would say.²*

My mother and other family members—including my grandfather, the late faife’au (minister) of the First Sāmoan Congregational Church in San Diego, Reverend Suitonu Galea’i of Fiti’uta, Manu’a, and my grandmother, Tinei, of ‘Āmanave, American Sāmoa—traveled to Honolulu in the 1940s. My family

moved to San Diego in 1957. My grandparents were very concerned about me assimilating into American culture and would take me aside to teach me things about Sāmoan culture. For instance, in my grandfather's office was a map of the Sāmoan Islands. It was very important to him that I knew where we were from; when I was little, every time I went to his office, he would grill me, asking "Where is the village of Fiti'uta?" "Where are we from?" He would remind me that Fiti'uta was the oldest Sāmoan village on the island of Ta'ū in the Manu'a archipelago. I would recite the information and point to the spot on the map. So, I think from a young age, I became sensitive to spaces that locate our family and connect to our past.

It was even more important to my grandmother, Tinei, that I learn how to be Sāmoan. She would always speak to me in the Sāmoan language. Tinei figures prominently in my art, and in all but one in the group of paintings and drawings featured in this issue of *Pacific Arts*. I didn't realize how strong her influence on me was until I started making art about her experiences and the things she taught me. Once I started, I couldn't stop making work about her or with her in it. She was a proud woman. Her presence was both commanding and delicately feminine. I often paint her to represent those dual qualities that I see present in Sāmoan women.

My *Fishing Lesson* series of ink-wash drawings focuses on the lessons and stories my grandmother conveyed to me about how to fish properly. One day, in her living room, I was talking about a place I had visited and this evoked a memory for her of this same place, where she used to fish when my mother was a child. The first painting in the series is called *Fishing Lesson No. 1, Patience* (Fig. 1) and corresponds to my grandmother explaining that one needed to wade out into the water and patiently stand still so that the fish would come near. She called the fish "somebodies" and would say, "Pretty soon, somebody's coming, and more somebodies are coming, getting close in because you aren't moving, so they aren't troubled." Finally, a fish would get close enough so you could pierce it with a fishing spear. Another painting in this series is called *Fishing Lesson No. 2, Reach* (Fig. 2) and responds to the physical aspect of her teaching me another way of fishing. My grandmother made me sit on the floor so that I could feel what it would be like to sit in the water and reach under rocks to find the fish hiding. *Fishing Lesson No. 6, Done* (Fig. 3) shows what you do with the fish once you catch them; you bite them in the head to kill them, and then bring them home.



Figure 1. Jewel Block, *Fishing Lesson No 1, Patience*, 2013. Acrylic ink on mulberry paper, approximately 24 x 30 inches. Courtesy of the artist



Figure 2. Jewel Block, *Fishing Lesson No 2, Reach*, 2013. Acrylic ink on mulberry paper, approximately 24 x 30 inches. Courtesy of the artist



Figure 3. Jewel Block, *Fishing Lesson No. 6, Done*, 2013. Acrylic ink on mulberry paper, approximately 24 x 30 inches. Courtesy of the artist

SLK: The church your grandfather established is in the Barrio Logan neighborhood of San Diego, next to the USS Midway Museum and directly across the bay from the North Island Naval Air Station and the Naval Amphibious Base in Coronado. References to the impact of the US military in Oceania are faintly, yet weightily, present in some of your work. Can you elaborate on this?

JB: My grandfather worked with the US Navy in American Sāmoa, facilitating negotiations of various things between the military and the local community, and later became a soldier in the Fita-Fita Guard.³ Because of this work, the US military gave him housing on the naval base in Honolulu, where he lived in a Quonset hut with his family. My grandparents had eleven children at that time (eventually, they had seventeen children), who were very much reared in a military environment. When the family moved to San Diego, my grandfather established the First Sāmoan Congregational Church. He and his parishioners erected the church from building materials acquired from the San Diego military base. The navy was dismantling buildings on the base and my grandfather asked if he could have the materials, which he was granted. He and his parishioners recycled the wood to build the church in Barrio Logan, which is still an active church. So, in my images of the church and my grandparents' home (e.g., Figs. 4–5), our long relationship with the military and its role in our trans-Pacific movements are there.

SLK: Your paintings reflect on the different responses among your family members to making a life in California. Can you describe some of those differences as they appear in your art practice?

JB: My mother really wanted to fully assimilate into American culture but others in my family did not. My *Assimilation* series of paintings (2001–2) addresses these different approaches to belonging and creating a home.⁴ For example, I have a painting of my uncle, who joined the US Marines to serve his country in Vietnam, and others of my mother and her sisters, who delighted in American fashion and Southern California urban cultural experiences.



Figure 4. Jewel Block, *The Pastor's Wife*, 2010. Acrylic on canvas, approximately 24 x 36 inches. Courtesy of the artist



Figure 5. Jewel Block, *Auntie's House*, from the *Assimilation* series, 2001. Acrylic on canvas, approximately 36 x 48 inches. Photograph by the artist. Courtesy of Teri Sowell

One of my favorite paintings, *Auntie's House* (Fig. 5), focuses on my grandfather's sister, Tu'imafua, who wanted to maintain her Sāmoan identity and culture. It depicts what was actually my grandparents' home (which Tu'imafua maintained), located on the church grounds in San Diego, and what the Barrio Logan neighborhood looked like. There are several children around her—she was unmarried and didn't have children of her own, so she took care of everyone's children for generations. The images above and inside the house represent my auntie's longings and perspective. When you walked into the house, it was like you left the US and walked into Sāmoa. Tu'imafua looks through the open front door—where you can see a sunny exterior scene with tropical plants—projecting memories of her home. Behind her, a window reveals a community gathering in Sāmoa. Above and behind the house is a fale (house) amidst a grove of coconut trees. This is how she pictured her Barrio Logan home and neighborhood; she refused to accept what she saw around her and created a Sāmoan space in San Diego.

***SLK:** Many of your paintings have a crinkled surface or texture that emphasizes the tactile quality of the two-dimensional surface and lends itself to making both the painting and the subject matter quite palpable. This stylistic feature seems to facilitate the people and activities depicted in the paintings to enter into the viewer's time and space. Your work makes me think about vā (space-time relationality) and the materiality of memory—how, in many parts of Oceania, cultural objects are not just things, but materially manifest social and historical relationships; processes of learning, preserving, and making cultural knowledge; memories of movement; and homes past and present. Can you share your thoughts about the relationship between materiality, memory, and your work?*

JB: As in the learning of oral histories through memorization, we (Sāmoans) learn how to make traditional art forms, like siapo (barkcloth) through memorization. My family members learned how to work the natural resources to create the siapo that dressed our weddings, were gifted to recognize dignitaries, and wrapped our dead. They learned how to properly apply designs and what they meant. And, I understand now that applying those designs permanently changed the surface of the cloth; it gave it memory, a way of remembering, and a link to our history. People would learn from a skilled master and develop a relationship with them; that relationship and the passing of knowledge through time and people becomes essential to the object that is made. Producing a material object is a method of

learning who we are. I like to refer to siapo made by earlier generations of women in my family (cf. Figs. 6–7); whenever I am working, they are in my view.

I purposefully emulate the wrinkles seen in siapo on my canvases as a way of physically and visually making memories of people, relationships, and identities—of creating and communicating tradition in Sāmoan-American art.⁵ In fact, my *Fishing Lesson* series is drawn on paper made from the paper mulberry tree, which is used to make siapo. I also think of my drawings and paintings like I do siapo—as objects. You can see grommets at the top of many of my paintings. At first, they were exhibited with a loop of rope through each grommet and with a black metal curtain rod fed through the loops so that they hung against walls like tapestries. Something didn't seem right about that, but I couldn't decide what it was. Then, one year, just by a fluke, I put a wooden rod through the loops and that changed everything. The rope that was tied around the wood and the way they hung reminded me of sails. Ever since, I think of my paintings as sails, which link to movement, travel, voyaging, and navigating memories.⁶



Figure 6. Detail of siapo (barkcloth) in the artist's collection, pre-1940, American Sāmoa. Courtesy of Jewel Block

SLK: And you have likened siapo to human bodies and tatau (tattoo).

JB: I think of our art forms, like siapo and the markings on it, as a visual language because of the way they are made. For example, in painting siapo, the liquid media is applied to a flat, porous surface of processed paper mulberry bark. It isn't like a canvas that has a sealed surface. Instead, the pigment is soaked into the bark, the *skin* of the tree, in thin, pooled layers. If you were to peel away the layers, you would see it "bleeding" through underneath. The pigment in the layers of bark is like the imprint of our tattoos into, not onto, our skin and our blood. The colors in siapo and the way they saturate the cloth are like tattooing the bark; it has permanence. Some of the colors—the reds and browns—are like the blood of our people, like the dried blood that would be left behind by those who came before.



Figure 7. Detail of siapo (barkcloth) in the artist's collection, pre-1940, American Sāmoa. Courtesy of Jewel Block

JB: The motifs in siapo form patterns that are repeated. The repetition of lines and shapes reminds me of the repetition in Sāmoan dance movements, the structure of our songs, and the call and response in our religious practices. The repetition creates a pattern. Even though you might not see obvious patterns in my work, the idea of pattern and repetition pervades it. I think of the repetition and patterns



Figure 8. Jewel Block, *Trio*, 2013–16. Acrylic and acrylic ink on canvas, approximately 60 x 84 inches. Courtesy of the artist

as an ongoing conversation between the past and the present. This is something I call holographic time and holographic space—it entails the idea of backing into the future while facing the past, or holding the hands of our ancestors while moving forward. The process for conceiving of and producing art, song, dance,

siapo, tattoo, architecture, or literature, forms a pattern of actions that connects us with our ancestors. Through this process the past meets and informs the present. I think of that connection as “the vā,” the meeting space between now and then.

My painting titled *Trio* (Fig. 8) is trying to think through these ideas. It includes my grandmother in the background and my deceased mother facing me in the foreground. The figures are somewhat transparent to show that patterns are within us and link us. The pattern extends behind my grandmother to indicate that these patterns go way behind her, both spatially (back to Sāmoa) and temporally (back in time).

SLK: There is a lot of play, or blurring, or combining of interior and exterior spaces in your work. Is this related to your thinking about being inside and outside of Sāmoan spaces? I think about your observations of the different ways your family members worked to fit “in” American spaces while others tried to keep America (or San Diego) “out,” to some extent, by creating Sāmoan places and homes in California, as you described earlier. Does the in/outside of your work speak to your efforts to produce a multi-spatial Sāmoan-American place, identity, and culture by navigating through memories, patterns, objects, and time?

JB: Some of my family’s homes in Sāmoa had no windows or doors because they were open structures; it was like being inside and outside at the same time. Once, while in Sāmoa with my grandfather, he had to be taken to the hospital. The structure of the ward he was in was open in this way too. I remember standing near his bed one evening, noticing how dark it was outside while watching a large lizard that was near him. Years later, while doing research for my art, I learned how woven mats were used as walls between posts in architectural structures. These walls would be lifted to open the structure to the outdoors. This flexibility between indoors and outdoors, and the idea that it was happening in the past and the present, has resonated with me. I began to see it not just as in/outside living, but also as a way for expressing how I saw my family members living both in the US and in the islands, whether through physically traveling back and forth or within their spirit.

The Pastor’s Wife (Fig. 4) depicts my grandmother and other ladies leaving the church dressed in their White Sunday attire.⁷ In place of the front wall of the church, which you see behind my grandmother, is a view of the island of Ta’ū where she is from, rather than the San Diego neighborhood of the church. The

ocean rolls in from the island, flowing beneath the parishioners' bare feet. I substituted woven mats for the actual carpeting on the church floor. Past homes and lifeways of Sāmoa are represented as outdoor spaces while homes and lifeways of San Diego are represented as interior spaces (e.g., the church, my grandparents' home). It is as though the natural and cultural environment of Sāmoa sustains us, reminds us of past homes, and carries us forward in our present homes. Like the tides, the water moves—ebbing and flowing; it's a continuous pattern, though the water in those tides is constantly changing.



Figure 9. Jewel Block, *Dusk*, 2015. Acrylic on canvas, approximately 36 x 50 inches. Courtesy of the artist

There is a similar dynamic in *Dusk* (Fig. 9). In part, the painting is a response to the common stereotype of Polynesian women as “dusky maidens” but more so,

I was imagining dusk happening. When dusk happens, the sea looks a particular kind of way. At first, it's rough and then it becomes smoother, but it's not quite calm yet. As the surf begins to smooth, I think of my women ancestors (with my grandmother in the lead) carrying it in and walking it to shore, which is painted as a continuous 'ie toga (fine mat).

***SLK:** It appears that these women facilitate the changing of time (dusk) and space (the sea and shore). The changing nature of the water meeting the shifting sands of the beach is presented as 'ie toga (fine mats, a treasured cultural valuable and a key form of family wealth). Because 'ie toga would not be used as floor mats, their presence in the painting doesn't seem to literally suggest an indoor floor covering but rather, perhaps, the homes that carefully protect and preserve these family valuables. The patterned mats create relationships between people and over time. Just as 'ie toga link families through exchanges at important occasions and through time, as they are passed from one generation to the next, the beach of fine mats in the painting extends into our unfinished, ongoing time and space. Unwoven strands of fibers emerge from the grommets at the base of the painting as though indicating that the future is yet to be formed, but, as underscored in the material substance of the fibers, this future depends on present and future people drawing on specific cultural knowledges and ancestral histories to continue weaving their patterns in new spaces and new times. Is that something you were thinking about in painting Dusk?*

JB: In addition to the idea of 'ie toga, there are also utilitarian woven mats called fala that include floor coverings. When my mom was a child, the floor of her family home mainly consisted of broken coral and shells. Mats were laid on top of this to protect their feet. Mats were used to cover the floor of important meeting spaces. The finest mats were brought out for this purpose when certain dignitaries visited or significant events were happening; their feet and bodies would touch the mats and not the everyday rawness of the floor. In my paintings, I typically locate fala on the ground and usually under the feet of people I want to honor. This is another way I'm making a connection between the past and present. So, for *Dusk*, I made the sand that the women's feet touch one endless fine mat.

***SLK:** The grommets at the top and bottom of Dusk, the wrinkled surface of the canvas, the hanging fibers, the upper and lower borders that are painted to*

resemble coconut tree logs, and even the way the waves seep over the lower border into the space of the viewer—these all underscore the “objectness” of the painting. Do these features connect with some of the ideas about materiality and memory you discussed earlier?

JB: Performing the task of making the art is a very physical and hard labor. It’s tough; it’s not easy to make *siapo*—it kills your back, shoulders, and neck. Producing and pounding the bark to make cloth requires a lot of hand, arm, and body strength. It’s hard work to make a fine mat, from preparing the fibers to intricately weaving them. It’s difficult to do a tattoo and to withstand the intense pain of receiving one. But enacting these are lessons. The physicality of making the art, and the final product itself, are ways of learning and remembering. Performance is a way of remembering. The performance of the task, of making the art, transforms meaning. The physicality and objectness of *Dusk* and other of my paintings are ways of expressing those connections.

Jewel Block (formerly Jewel Castro) is a Sāmoan American artist who was born in Chicago, raised in San Diego, and is currently based in Washington state. She received her BA in art, with distinction, from San Diego State University and her MFA in visual arts from the University of California–San Diego. Her work is strongly influenced by Oceanic art and cultural forms, especially those from Sāmoa, as well as the natural environment, sea vessels, and the trans-Pacific movements of her family. Block is a Lecturer in Culture, Arts, and Communication for the School of Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences at the University of Washington–Tacoma.

Stacy L. Kamehiro is a member of the History of Art and Visual Culture Department faculty at the University of California, Santa Cruz. Her research focuses on colonial-era Native Hawaiian visual and material culture. She has published on topics such as textiles, public art, architecture, arts organizations, collecting and exhibition practices, activist conservation, the arts of diplomacy, and connections between Oceanic visual studies and imperialism in American art history.

Notes

¹ Jewel Castro, “Lessons, Challenges, and Adaptations: Reconstructing Self within Changing Pacific Environments” (paper presented at Pacific Island Worlds: Transpacific Dis/Positions symposium, University of California, Santa Cruz, May 5, 2018).

² James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).

³ The Fita-Fita Guard, established in 1900, was originally called the Samoan Naval Militia. It served the US Navy until 1951, when it was disbanded. During World War II, the Fita-Fita Guard manned anti-aircraft batteries near the US Naval Station in Tutuila. See “World War II,” National Museum of the U.S. Navy, accessed Sept. 26, 2021, <https://www.history.navy.mil/content/history/museums/nmusn/explore/photography/diversity/asian-americans/world-war-ii/fita-fita-guard.html>.

⁴ Several of the paintings in this series are published in Stacy L. Kamehiro, “About the Artist: Jewel Castro,” *The Contemporary Pacific* 20, no. 2 (2008): vii–xv.

⁵ Jewel Castro, “Communicating Tradition in Samoan American Art: An Artist’s Reflection,” *Pacific Studies* 30, no. 1/2 (2007): 122–9.

⁶ Several of my paintings were displayed in this way in an exhibition called *Sail!*, curated by Heather Waldroup and held at the Catherine J. Smith Gallery at Appalachian State University, September 15–November 17, 2014. See “Sail! into CJS Gallery,” *Mountain Times*, August 14, 2014, https://www.wataugademocrat.com/mountaintimes/entertainment/art/sail-into-cjs-gallery/article_4e7d92f9-82d7-5e86-926b-867a216fe1e1.html.

⁷ White Sunday is a designated Sunday in October when children are celebrated and white is worn to church. It is a special day. For many years, Jewel’s mother would buy her grandmother a new white hat for the occasion.

JESI LUJAN BENNETT

“I Sengsong San Diego”: The Chamoru Cultural Festival and the Formation of a Chamoru Diasporic Community¹

Abstract

This essay addresses contemporary migrations of Chamorus tied to the history of US military presence in Micronesia and the ways Indigenous culture and identity are negotiated through the Chamorro Cultural Festival (CCF) that has been held annually in San Diego, California since 2009. The analysis explores how diasporic Chamorus maintain close transpacific connections to the Mariana Islands while also establishing Chamoru communities abroad through the CCF. The festival simultaneously enacts Chamoru identities based in both mobility and rootedness and is a large-scale expression of how Chamorus create and express collective identities.

Keywords: *Chamorro studies, Micronesian studies, Indigenous studies, festivals, diaspora, militarization, American colonization*

My grandfather, Jesus “Jesse” Estaquio Lujan, enlisted in the United States Navy in 1960. He and my grandmother, Guadalupe “Lou” Garrido Blas Lujan, were both raised in Guam, within the Mariana Islands, in the villages of Barrigada and Agana Heights, respectively (Fig 1).² Like many Chamorus growing up after World War II, the US military was the driving force that set them on their path to the United States.³ Together they rode the wave of active military duty life, briefly living with their three children in Hawai’i and Long Beach, and finally settling in San Diego, California, where they eventually retired. San Diego became a second home for me and my sister and cousins, as my grandparents had put down roots for the generations to come. The city was an important part of early migrations of Chamorus to the continental United States following World War II. Our family is part of a network of Chamoru families, many of whom also came to San Diego in the 1970s headed by young individuals who had enlisted in the US Navy. In 1978, the Federation of Guamanian Associations of America (FGAA) estimated that, “55,000 Chamorros were living in California, including 15,000 in San Diego

County, the established center of Chamorros abroad.”⁴ The FGAA’s figures highlight the reality of many Chamorus leaving for the continental US during the 1970s. The numbers reflect how the US military was the main driving force of mobility and indicate that there were more Chamorus in the US than within the Marianas Islands. In 2021, this trend of out-migration still holds true for Chamorus with approximately 69,098 in Guam and 12,902 in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI), while 147,798 Chamorus reside in the United States.⁵



Figure 1. Guadalupe Garrido Blas Lujan and Jesus Estaquio Lujan on their wedding day, Guam, 1962. Lujan Family Photo Collection. Courtesy of the author

This essay addresses contemporary migrations of Chamorus tied to the history of US military presence in Micronesia and the ways we negotiate and

express our Indigeneity through the Chamorro Cultural Festival (CCF), a celebration and commemoration of Chamoru identity and culture held annually in San Diego, California, since 2009. My analysis explores how diasporic Chamorus maintain close transpacific connections to the Mariana Islands while also establishing Chamoru communities abroad through the CCF. The festival simultaneously enacts Chamoru, identities based in both mobility and rootedness, and is a large-scale expression of how Chamorus negotiate and create collective identities.

The gathering of Chamorus at the CCF offers a unique way of understanding a diasporic community, as festivals enable culture and identity to be “maintained, change, mix, and hybridize with other cultural forms, and, ultimately, evolve.”⁶ These spaces allow a glimpse into how people create collective identities by utilizing symbols, reimagining traditions, and commemorating the past. Ultimately, “festivals, celebrations, and performance competitions are deeply ingrained in the histories of Pacific cultures, with some pre-European rituals surviving in various forms into the twenty-first century.”⁷ Oceanic peoples come together to reaffirm the strength of their communities through small-scale and large-scale festivals, such as the international Festival of Pacific Arts and Culture (established in 1972), New Zealand’s Pasifika Festival (established in Auckland in 1993), and San Diego’s Pacific Islander Festival (established in 1995). Those who attend and participate in these types of events forge identities that are “not comprised of a singular dispersal from homeland to adopted homeland. Rather, [they are] multilocal and multidirectional, and [are] understood within both historical and contemporary contexts of a continuous circulation and migration of people, trade, ideas, arts, and cultures that have crisscrossed the vast Pacific for millennia.”⁸

Similarly, the diasporic Chamorus living in California find cultural connections to their home islands and to other Micronesian communities in the state through community-building activities and events facilitated by local cultural organizations. The CCF was established in 2009 by fifteen officers and board members of Chamorro Hands in Education Links Unity (CHE'LU) and supports the process of building new Chamoru “villages” in new geographic spaces. The CCF provides opportunities for attendees to commemorate the common history of different Chamoru groups through relationship-building with other Chamorus. The name of the host organization itself, CHE'LU, reflects its work to keep Chamorus connected through cultural development while also celebrating new aspects of community identities that are created through



Figure 2. CHE'LU's Guma Chamorro (Chamorro House) at the CCF, Jacob Center for Neighborhood Innovation, 2013. Photograph courtesy of the author

ongoing movements and migrations of Islanders. The term che'lu means “sibling” in the Chamoru language. It is often used to denote close friendships and, at times, to show peace or a desire for friendship.⁹ Using this term for the organization's name reflects the deep relationships among Chamorus in the US and conveys an aspiration to bring Islanders together in meaningful ways. It demonstrates a need to move away from specific island-centered identities and to be inclusive of Chamoru identities more broadly. With a unified diaspora in mind, CHE'LU sets out to create the largest gathering of Chamorus outside of the Mariana Islands through the

CCF.

Starting in 2010, CHE'LU began scheduling the CCF in March to coincide with Chamorro Month in Guam, reflecting the strong connections between those in the diaspora and those in the home islands.¹⁰ Every year, thousands of Chamorus pour into San Diego, traveling from all over the continental US, the Marianas Islands, and even the Middle East (where many are stationed) to experience the CCF's offerings of foods, art, performances, workshops, culturally-based activities, and vendors of identity merchandise. In 2017, CHE'LU's former chair, David Atalig, served as the festival's master of ceremonies and offered the prize of a T-shirt for the person who had traveled the farthest to attend the festival, saying: “Some people say they came from Iraq because they're in San Diego on their leave. But they know they've made their leave during CCF . . . People fly in from the Bay Area or Vegas. People drive from

Vegas, Arizona, Texas . . . We have a large percentage [of attendees] coming from more than fifty miles away.”¹¹



Figure 3. The CCF main stage and amphitheater at California State University–San Marcos, 2019. Photograph courtesy of the author

The first CCF, held in 2009, attracted about 1,500 Chamoru attendees. From 2009 to 2013, the one-day event was held at the Jacobs Center for Neighborhood Innovation (Fig. 2), located about four miles east of the San Diego Bay and the North Island Naval Air Station. The swelling of support for the CCF and its growing attendance during the first few years of the festival required a larger venue and longer duration. From 2014 onward, the CCF was extended to three days and moved to the California State University–San Marcos campus (Fig. 3). In 2019, over 10,000 people attended the festival, the vast majority of them from throughout the Chamoru diaspora, including people traveling from the Mariana Islands.¹² The first two days are exclusively festival events, and the third day is a conference for traditional Chamoru dancing and chanting led by Uno Hit (“We Are One”)—an educational program of the Chamorro Optimist

Club of San Diego, which educates Chamoru youth in the diaspora about their histories, values, and language through cultural arts.¹³ Uno Hit participated in the CCF annually, sending its youth members as performers, and was eventually asked to help organize the related conference that brings together active Southern Californian Chamoru dance groups and dance teachers from the Mariana Islands.

At the CCF, the aim is to have Chamorus become active participants in their culture, not mere spectators observing performances. The annual festival program booklet is a testament to this goal of cultural connectivity and works to facilitate connections between those living in the diaspora and those living in the Mariana Islands. The program booklets begin with pages dedicated to the Governor, Lieutenant Governor, and congressional members from Guam and the CNMI, describing their enthusiasm for the CCF. In the 2015 program, Governor Eloy Inos of the CNMI began his message by stating, “As people of the Pacific, it is our belief that no matter where our brethren may reside, no matter how far away they may be from home, that we are forever connected by our language, our customs, and our culture.”¹⁴ This statement reinforced a sentiment of Chamorus being intrinsically connected to island homelands and one another regardless of their location. Similarly, in 2019, the Governor of Guam, Lourdes Leon Guerrero, stated that “no matter where in the world you are, be proud of where you came from. Your roots run as deep as the Marianas Trench! Although you are far from home, keep your Pacific paradise close to your heart.”¹⁵ Other government representatives echoed these thoughts about collective trans-Pacific connections and the perpetuation of Chamoru heritage in their program messages. It is noteworthy that in years past, government representatives from Guam and the CNMI made the long flight to San Diego to attend the CCF.

Beginning in 2016, Guam’s Visitors Bureau (GVB) and the Marianas Visitors Authority (MVA), which are sponsors of the CCF, included messages in the CCF program to congratulate CHE’LU on the festival and to welcome Chamorus back to the Mariana Islands. The GVB and MVA support the filming of the festival’s musical performances, interviews with cultural practitioners, and other events at the CCF and make them available online for worldwide viewing. They also distributed promotional giveaways at their festival booths to those who inquire about traveling back to Guam and the CNMI. The presence of the GVB and MVA at the festival helps to mitigate the feelings of separation on the part of Chamorus who see themselves severed from their homelands due to the islands’ political statuses with the US. The US held Guam as a non-self-governing

territory (NSGT) following World War II and made the Northern Mariana Islands a commonwealth in 1978. Thus, what was once a unified archipelago became divided.

In 2017, CHE'LU Chair, David Atalig, stated about the CCF:

Last year was historic because we had not only both governors attend, but both visitors' authorities represented. The islanders are starting to get together . . . and form a movement of wanting to . . . unify. . . With the military issues[,] . . . they're starting to form a unity on a different level. We're trying to do that also with Chamorus in San Diego.¹⁶

Atalig's words convey the potential for the festival to be a catalyst for closer connections among Chamorus in San Diego and also a tool to aid in the reunification of Chamorus in the home islands. The arbitrary political boundaries placed on the Mariana Islands by the US have had lasting consequences on how Chamorus relate to one another. This political rupture has often resulted in the fracturing of Chamoru relationships, depending on the specific island to which a family is tied. The CCF, as an annual experience, provides an enduring space for Chamorus in the diaspora to think through their relationship to home as well as their relationship to one another.



Figure 4. The cultural workshop areas at the CCF, 2019. Photograph courtesy of the author

Returning to the CCF program booklets, twenty of the thirty-eight pages of the 2015 CCF booklet were dedicated to promoting the cultural workshops taking place at the festival (Figs. 4–5). These workshops typically included lessons on how to kamyu (grind coconut); weave, build, and navigate canoes; carve ifit wood and shell jewelry; play the belebaotuyan (a Chamoru musical instrument); make amot (medicine); and maintain health and fitness. The majority of the programs offered Chamoru vocabulary and short educational lessons to make sure learning continues beyond the festival grounds. For example, the program announcement for the “Kutturán Leksion—Sakman Workshop” (Cultural Lesson— Canoe Workshop) highlights how the cultural practitioners for this activity will talk about the significance of wayfinding for Chamorus historically while also setting aside time to discuss how science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) are critical components of building a sakman (canoe) and to making the sakman a reality. The display of a sakman (also known as a flying proa), a traditional Chamoru outrigger sailing vessel, also reinforces Chamoru histories and cultural ties.



Figure 5. Weaving workshop with Chamoru weaver James Bamba, 2015. The GVB supported Bamba’s and other cultural practitioners’ participation at the CCF to help promote FestPac 2016. Photograph courtesy of the author

The sakman exhibit in particular pushes Chamoru visitors to recognize our ancestors as innovators and scientists of the ocean. During the 2015 CCF, the crew took turns leading workshops on and around the sakman (Fig. 6). An adjacent canopy tent displayed framed images of Spanish sketches of Chamoru canoes from the 1700s to demonstrate the canoes' range and used white boards to illustrate puntan layak (points of sail) techniques and explain Chamoru seafaring lexicon. There was also a display showing anchors, safety nets, images of booms, redesigned steering paddles, and sketches of new sails. This table of sailing equipment was placed next to a model sakman to show visitors how the crew made contemporary modifications to their canoe. Directly outside of the tent was a galaide (a small canoe without a sail used within the reef) for children to play on and to further entice visitors to enter the tent. The crew explained that these efforts to engage attendees was meant to show that they were "in serious training to be sailors as our ancestors once were. We are even venturing into the dark world of wayfinding, the art of navigation without instruments, a very tricky and difficult art requiring a lifetime to acquire."¹⁷ For the sakman crew, these canoe displays and workshops enabled communication and exchange across time through sharing knowledge from Chamorus of the past with Chamorus at the festival.



Figure 6. The GVB-sponsored area for FestPac 2016 at the 2015 CCF. CHE'LU's sakman canoe was a featured workshop because it was to sail from San Diego to Guam for FestPac. Photograph courtesy of the author

The CCF program also typically includes pages dedicated to ancient Chamoru stories, such as “The Legend of Alu and Pang” and “The Legend of Strength and Envy: Puntan Patgon,” written in a way that children can easily read and relate to.¹⁸ These stories are closely connected to Chamoru culture as they represent understandings of *inafa’maolek*—reciprocity, interdependence, and cooperation.¹⁹ The festival program not only acts as a way to navigate the many cultural activities that take place at the CCF. Together with performative means of identification and representation of Chamoru traditions that enable festival attendees to learn directly from cultural practitioners, they convey a deeper understanding of what it means to be Indigenous while living abroad.

For CCF attendees, learning is dynamic and engaging. Cultural practitioners articulate their contemporary Chamoru identity that is deeply fixed in a common genealogy and heritage. “Competence in traditional skills [is] still greatly admired within Native communities and [is] associated with cultural identity . . . [H]istorical artifacts function for many Native people as anchors for identity, material forms of information and values from the past which through study can be resurrect[ed] for use in the present.”²⁰ For Chamorus more specifically, the skills of the cultural masters and the work that they help others to create during the festival also play a major role in affirming Chamoru identity and underscore the importance of these activities for Chamorus in the US who are seeking ways to create relationships and strengthen ties with the Mariana Islands. Collaboration between CCF attendees and cultural practitioners is another avenue of reaffirming the desire to maintain transpacific connections to other Chamorus as well. These workshops help to strengthen different parts of Chamoru identity through access to cultural traditions and practices, watering the roots from the home islands while strengthening diasporic Chamoru communities.

New connections between San Diego and the Mariana Islands were facilitated through the 2015 CCF. In 2015, the Guam Council on the Arts and Humanities Agency sent four master cultural practitioners from Guam to lead workshops with CCF festival attendees and make their work available for purchase. This special appearance helped to promote the upcoming Festival of Pacific Arts (FestPac)—a major international festival that occurs quadrennially that was to be hosted by Guam in the summer of 2016. Chamorus at the CCF working with master craftspeople—such as master of body ornamentation Jill Benavente (Fig. 7) and master blacksmith Frank Lizama—became excited about Chamoru arts and feel enticed to go or return to Guam in 2016 for FestPac. The

CCF's program booklet dedicated two pages to describing what FestPac is about, and also provided information on how Chamorus in the diaspora could attend or be part of the artist delegation.



Figure 7. Master body ornamentation artist Jill Benavente standing by her jewelry and woven pieces on display for purchase, CCF, 2015. The Guam Council on the Arts and Humanities Agency flew Benavente to the CCF in order to raise interest in FestPac 2016 and lead workshops with festival attendees. Photograph courtesy of the author

Another form of identity formation at the CCF is through the purchasing of objects from Chamoru-owned businesses. Diasporic Chamorus—like myself—who might not have the ability to return to our home islands are able to engage in remembrance and perpetuate our culture despite our physical location through our purchases. At an identity-based festival like CCF, purchasing clothing, food, and cultural objects is not a superficial expression but rather a mode of identity formation and reaffirmation of cultural roots and traditions that are in a constant state of creation and change. Diasporic Chamoru experiences are grounded in Indigenous epistemologies, histories, languages, and cultural values, but are also subject to changes in their new geographic contexts. For Chamorus in California, material culture is a means of expressing their Indigeneity and signaling that they are in connection with islands beyond the continental US. The 2016 CCF had eighty-three vendors, many of whom travel on a Pacific Islander festival circuit through California and Arizona (Fig. 8). David Atalig notes the enthusiasm for Chamoru-related objects and clothing on the

part of sellers and buyers alike, saying that when you see someone wearing or using Chamoru merchandise “you know they’re Chamoru . . . It makes people connect. Today’s capitalism created brands that identify with a race or a group of people. So we try to use that to market. We try to get those companies to come. It helps build an identity, bringing people together.”²¹



Figure 8. Socks with “SPAM” and “Guam” designs in the retail vendor section of the 2019 CCF. Photograph courtesy of the author

There is a long-standing practice within San Diego, and in other diasporic spaces, of Chamoru and other Islander-owned brands emerging as a way for Pacific people to literally wear their ethnic and regional identities on their sleeves, as if to proclaim, “I too have a ‘culture.’ I am culturally marked. I am not plain vanilla or nondescript, like the *palagi* [Euro-American].”²² Even though this quote is speaking specifically to a Sāmoan context, Chamorus also use clothing to

denote a self-identity that shapes Oceania as a united and collaborative region. Clothing helps to construct an identity that not only works to be a representation of a Chamoru experience but also a material symbol of resistance. As much as a piece of apparel helps to signify that the person wearing it is a member of a specific Pacific ethnic group, it also denotes the person's positionality as an Indigenous Pacific person and is a way Islanders can maintain connections with the Marianas.²³

Chamoru purchases at the CCF of identity clothing can also be interpreted as taking a political and resistant stance to outsiders' understanding of the Pacific by making claims to land, space, and identity, and enabling a new conceptualization of what it means to be from the Marianas. Through ownership of aesthetically-pleasing, thought-provoking designs; regionally-specific motifs; and references to Chamoru language and proverbs, Chamoru consumers may represent themselves in ways that are empowering and project cultural-pride and belonging to place. Chamoru brand names available at the festival as well as online and in San Diego, including Crowns, Magas, and Låguas & Gåni enable visibility, validate the consumers' ethnic roots, and situate consumers as part of a larger Oceanic region.²⁴ It is also important to note that some of these clothing companies are based in the Mariana Islands and their products, therefore, also make the migration to the US through the festival circuit, helping diasporic Chamoru communities connect to the islands.

Conclusion

This study provides a brief analysis of the role cultural festivals play in shaping identities. The CCF mobilizes diasporic Chamoru communities; it opens a space for them to reflect on our cultural histories, ones that are woven into the fabric of our contemporary existence as living communities. While there are rich displays of culture and tradition, the CCF has yet to fully incorporate spaces for contestation and engagement with Chamoru colonial histories. The CCF is the largest gathering of Chamorus outside of our islands, and offers the potential to challenge hegemonic narratives of Chamoru history and facilitate healing and hope. My ongoing research aims to more deeply address the ways the Chamoru diasporic communities continue to stay rooted in their home islands while also grappling with the "difficult knowledge" of US militarization in the Mariana Islands, which enables transpacific mobility, through a variety of cultural

institutions.²⁵ My current work examines the complexities in identity processes that are conditioned by the role of the US military in providing economic and social opportunities for Islanders while also disenfranchising them and desecrating the Mariana Islands. It explores the ways festivals, museums, and other cultural institutions can assume the responsibility of engaging with violent historical truths and facilitate healing, hope, and better opportunities for attendees and participants. As Robert Underwood states, in the context of 1970s migrations, “the fact of Chamorro movement is sobering, for people are now Guam’s major export. Yet it is also heartening to realize that love for Guam and a genuine respect for Chamorro ways have managed to transcend vast distances, the attractions of California life, and even the American dream. It is not every Chamorro who does not return.”²⁶ This statement, from 1985, remains relevant today.

I am comforted in knowing that I am one of many Islanders abroad that bring “home” with them wherever they go. We are expanding the understanding of what the Mariana Islands are and finding new and innovative ways to stay grounded in our Chamoru roots. American colonialism has forced a process of severe disconnection from our culture and history, and has prompted an out-migration of our island communities in numbers that we have never experienced before. Yet, I see our stories from the diaspora as a means of mending these colonial ruptures and better understanding the various experiences of Chamoru throughout Oceania and beyond.

Jesi Lujan Bennett is of Chamoru descent with familial ties to Dededo and Bar-rigada, Guåhan (Guam). She is a faculty member in Pacific and Indigenous Studies at the University of Waikato. Bennett studied at the University of Hawai’i at Mānoa and earned a PhD in American Studies and Museum Studies. Her areas of interest include Chamoru visual culture with a particular focus in the relationship between colonialism, militarization, migration, and self-representation within the Mariana Islands and the Chamoru diaspora. Bennett’s research examines the out-migration of Chamorus and the way in which these diasporic communities articulate their Indigeneity in new geographic and cultural contexts in light of significant political and social change in Micronesia.

Notes

¹ In the Chamoru language, “I Sengsong San Diego” translates to “the village of San Diego.”

² In the Chamoru language, Guam is called Guåhan.

³ “Chamorro” is often used in general practice, when writing in English, and written according to the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands’ orthography. “Chamoru” is used when writing in the native language. In 2017, Guam’s Kumision I Fino’ Chamorro (Chamorro Language Commission) adopted “CHamoru” to emphasize that “CH” and “NG” are considered one letter and should be capitalized as such. I choose to use “Chamoru” to reference our Indigenous language and be inclusive of the Mariana Islands as a whole. The Mariana Islands are also referred to as Låguas yan Gåni. Låguas are the southern, populated islands and Gåni refers to the northern islands in the archipelago. Tiara R. Na’puti, “Speaking of Indigeneity: Navigating Genealogies Against Erasure and #RhetoricSoWhite,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 105, no. 4 (2019), 495–50.

⁴ Robert Underwood, “Excursions Into Inauthenticity: The Chamorros of Guam,” in *Mobility and Identity in the Island Pacific*, ed. Murray Chapman (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1985), 163.

⁵ See Guam State Data Center, *Guam Demographic Profile Summary* (Government of Guam: Bureau of Statistics and Plans, 2012), 24; United States Census Bureau, “Total Population: Decennial Census of Island Areas,” 2010, accessed October 25, 2021, <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2010/dec/2010-island-areas.html>; Guam State Data Center, *Profile of the Chamorros in the United States* (Government of Guam: Bureau of Statistics and Plans, 2012), 2.

⁶ See Jared Mackley-Crump, *The Pacific Festivals of Aotearoa New Zealand* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2015), 6; Tiara Na’puti and Sylvia Frain, “Decolonize Oceania! Free Guåhan!: Communicating Resistance at the 2016 Festival of the Pacific Arts,” *Amerasia Journal* 43, no. 3 (2017): 2–35; Katerina Teaiwa, “Reflections on the 11th Festival of Pacific Arts Honiara, Solomon Islands, 1–14 July 2012,” *The Journal of Pacific History* 49, no. 3 (2014): 347–53.

⁷ Mackley-Crump, *The Pacific Festivals of Aotearoa New Zealand*, 10.

⁸ Mackley-Crump, *The Pacific Festivals of Aotearoa New Zealand*, 19.

⁹ Eric Forbes, “Today’s Chamorro Word: Che’lo,” *Paleric* (blog), July 19, 2011, <https://paleric.blogspot.com/2011/07/todays-chamorro-word-chelo.html>.

¹⁰ The Northern Mariana Islands celebrate Chamoru Month in April.

¹¹ David Atalig, interview by Jesi Lujan Bennett, December 17, 2017.

¹² The 2020 Chamorro Cultural Festival was cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

¹³ In 2015, the Chamorro Optimist Club became one of the newest Chamoru-led organizations in San Diego. In 2021, the organization built a “House of Chamorros” as part of Balboa Park’s International cottages. They also run the

Uno Hit Program, whose dance focus was strengthened by collaborations with the Kutturán Chamoru Foundation in Long Beach. See “Uno Hit; we are one,” Uno Hit, accessed October 25, 2021, <https://unohit.org>.

¹⁴ Eloy Inos, “Inorabuena yan Mimorias!,” in *Mantieni Kuttura-ta- Hold on to Our Culture* (Chamorro Cultural Festival printed program, March 2015), 1.

¹⁵ Lourdes Leon Guerrero, “Celebrating the 10th Annual CHamoru Cultural Festival,” in *Ta-Selebra i Taotao Islas Marianas—Celebrating the People of the Mariana Islands* (Chamorro Cultural Festival printed program, March 2019), 3.

¹⁶ Atalig, interview.

¹⁷ Chamorro Cultural Festival, “Preparing for Her Journey,” in *Mantieni Kuttura-ta—Hold on to Our Culture* (Chamorro Cultural Festival printed program, March 2015), 31.

¹⁸ Chamorro Cultural Festival, “Legend of Alu and Pang” and “Legend of Strength and Envy: Puntan Patgon,” in *Mantieni Kuttura-ta—Hold on to Our Culture* (Chamorro Cultural Festival printed program, March 2015), 32, 37.

¹⁹ *Chamorro Heritage, A Sense of Place: Guidelines, Procedures and Recommendations for Authenticating Chamorro Heritage* (Guam: Department of Chamorro Affairs, 2003), 23.

²⁰ Laura Peers, *Playing Ourselves: Interpreting Native Histories at Historic Reconstructions* (Lanham: Altamira Press, 2007), 83.

²¹ Atalig, interview.

²² Jocelyn Linnekin, “Tradition Sells: Identity Merchandise in the Island Pacific,” in *Globalization and Culture Change in the Pacific Islands*, ed. Victoria S. Lockwood (New Jersey: Pearson, 2004), 335.

²³ Many merchandise brands also distance themselves from imaginary boundaries that colonizers have applied to Oceania (e.g., “Polynesia,” “Micronesia,” “Melanesia”). For example, the Chamoru-owned company All Nesian Division prints phrases including “Pride of the Pacific,” “Divided by Waters, United by Culture,” and “All Nesian” on their clothing and marketing materials. These products further the idea of the Pacific region as a fluid network of people, objects, and ideas.

²⁴ See Crowns Guam (website), accessed October 25, 2021, <https://crownsguam.com/>; 670 Rocksteady Shop (website), accessed October 25, 2021, <https://irocksteady.com/>; Låguas & Gåni (website), accessed October 25, 2021, <https://laguas-gani.myshopify.com/>.

²⁵ Roger Simon, “Afterword: The Turn to Pedagogy: A Needed Conversation on the Practice of Curating Difficult Knowledge,” *Curating Difficult Knowledge* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 194.

²⁶ Robert Underwood, “Excursions into Inauthenticity,” 184.

GILES PETERSON & KATHARINE LOSI ATAFU-MAYO
with STACY L. KAMEHIRO &
MAGGIE WANDER

SALTWATER / Interconnectivity

Abstract

This essay examines the recent group exhibition SALTWATER / Interconnectivity co-curated by Katharine Losi Atafu-Mayo and Giles Peterson at the Tautai Gallery in Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand (October 16, 2020 to January 30, 2021), including its public exhibition talks, forums, and performance activations. The exhibition was intended to embody the Moana worldview and explore questions of justice, equity, identity, and ecology through newly commissioned work by six multimedia Indigenous artists and designers from the Moana-Solwara (Oceania region): Katharine Losi Atafu-Mayo, Peter Elavera, Te Ara Minhinnick, Shawnee Tekki, Telly Tuita, and Gutinjara Yunipinju.

Keywords: *Moana, Solwara, Pasifika, contemporary art, Indigenous art, Oceania, saltwater, salt water, ecology*

We sweat and cry salt water, so we know that the ocean is really in our blood.
—Teresia Teaiwa

Ka mua, ka muri (Walking backwards into the future).
—Whakataukī (Maori Proverb)

“We sweat and cry salt water, so we know that the ocean is really in our blood,” said the late scholar, poet, and i-Kiribati activist Teresia Teaiwa. These evocative words became a reference point for Tautai Gallery’s recent exhibition *SALTWATER / Interconnectivity*. As co-curators, we aimed to transform the gallery into an embodiment of the Moana worldview and explore questions of justice, equity, identity, and ecology.¹ This essay describes some of the issues explored by the group exhibition—held in Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand from October 16, 2020 to January 30, 2021—including through its public exhibition talks, forums, and performance activations. The exhibition showed newly commissioned work by six multimedia Indigenous artists and designers of the Moana-Solwara (Oceania

region): Katharine Losi Atafu-Mayo, Peter Elavera, Te Ara Minhinnick, Shawnee Tekki, Telly Tuita, and Gutinjarra Yunipinju.

Several concepts guided the curation of the exhibition and its conscious engagement with local communities. **Salt water** is referred to as solwara in Tok Pisin and Melanesian Island language groups, as well as Moana, a pan-Polynesian term for the Pacific Ocean and its island peoples. Salt water is the key ingredient for the building blocks of life. It is also the essence of who we are as Solwara and Moana peoples of Oceania. This living and breathing heartbeat knows no bounds; it is an entity that acts as a highway that connects, separates, sustains, threatens, heals, and purifies as we continually navigate through it. We shaped the exhibition to reference these traits and reflect the critical relationships, worldviews, and shared histories of Indigenous Moana-Solwara peoples.² As change-agents, the exhibition's artists are a collective voice of the urban Moana-Solwara, weaving the past with the present to inform the future as they draw upon their own lived realities to investigate old and adapted systems of spirituality, social justice, equity, gender, sexuality, language, diaspora, and ancestral knowledge. *SALTWATER / Interconnectivity* was a moment to come together amid an ever-changing landscape. A space to talanoa (dialogue), celebrate, and critique our ways of life. A place to share our experiences within an ecosystem of relationships that informs who we are as saltwater people.



Figure 1. Community engagement at the opening of *SALTWATER / Interconnectivity*, October 15, 2020. Photograph by Isoa Kavakimotu. Courtesy of Tautai Gallery

“**Interconnectivity**” in the exhibition’s title refers to the connections that unite and connect Tangata o le Moana (Pacific Island peoples). **Tautua** is the Sāmoan word for service to community. **Tautai** is the Sāmoan word for navigator, one who leads and shows the way. We centred the exhibition on Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and wayfinding, as well as the navigation of ancestral,

intergenerational, and spiritual bloodlines and pathways. Tautai Gallery is a recently established (2020), Pasifika-driven space that builds on the Tautai Pacific Arts Trust's thirty-five-year legacy of championing contemporary Pacific creativity. The gallery is located on Te Karangahape Road, which sits above the ancient Te Wai Horotiu waterway, a freshwater stream of importance to Māori culture that flows from the Karangahape Road ridge, down the Queen Street Valley, and eventually to the Pacific Ocean. We referred to connections to ancient waterways of Moana peoples, the concept of katiakitanga (guardianship of waterways), and the role of waterways as a place of gathering and sustenance throughout the exhibition: in the scenography, curatorial texts presented in Te Reo Māori (Māori language) and English, and the artworks. References to the importance of the Moana as a source of life, sustenance, healing, awe, respect, and community survival were present throughout the exhibition space and in the works addressing climate change and ecological disaster.

Performance and Participation

As curators, we intended the exhibition and its related programming to visually, bodily, kinesthetically, emotionally, and spiritually engage Moana-Solwara communities in Aotearoa. Focusing on performance enabled us to do this, as Moana-Solwara cultures are strongly performative. We included spoken word poetry, dance, moving image, performative photography, time-based collaborations, participatory art, and digital storytelling. Performance and audience participation empower viewers who directly witness the talent, beauty, and bravery of their youth, artists, and teachers (and themselves) in the artwork and public programs.

Katharine Losi Atafu-Mayo's opening performance articulated these ideas about participation and empowerment in space and time. She collected salt water from the Pacific Ocean and ritually poured it into five kava bowls from different parts of Oceania that were set in a line on the floor of the gallery (Fig. 2). Atafu-Mayo's simple, powerful performance activated the bowls, their contents, and the cultures they represented. The space of the gallery was likewise transformed into a charged, ceremonial Pasifika space, in part through notebooks the artist had provided for audience members to draw and write in as they engaged with the piece (Fig. 3).³ In the performance, Atafu-Mayo wanted people to exchange with the Moana. Bringing the ocean water into the gallery transposed it from its usual context and allowed people to value it differently. In designing the work, she

thought about Indigenous worldviews and the ways her community celebrates, performs rituals, grieves, and forgives.⁴ She connected these ideas to her performance, stating:

Kava is a ritual that allows connection, authentic talanoa, and a space for vulnerability and transparency. Presenting saltwater, in the place of kava, in these bowls speaks to the spatial separation and diaspora that we find ourselves in, as well as our spiritual connection by a powerful multifaceted entity and God.⁵



Figure 2. Co-curator and artist Katharine Losi Atafu-Mayo with artist Telly Tuita at the opening performance activation featuring Atafu-Mayo's *Feso'ota'i atu (Connection)*. *SALTWATER / Interconnectivity*, Tautai Gallery, Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand, October 15, 2020. Photograph by Isoa Kavakimotu. Courtesy of Tautai Gallery

Other programming included three performances on the opening night of the exhibition on October 15, 2020, as part of Auckland Artweek.⁶ The first of these was a powerful spoken word poem and oratory by Aigagalefili Fepulea'i Tapua'i of 4TK (4 Tha Kulture), a South Auckland-based Indigenous environmentalist youth group committed to advocating against climate change through a lens of the perspectives and experiences of rangatahi (youth) (Fig. 4).

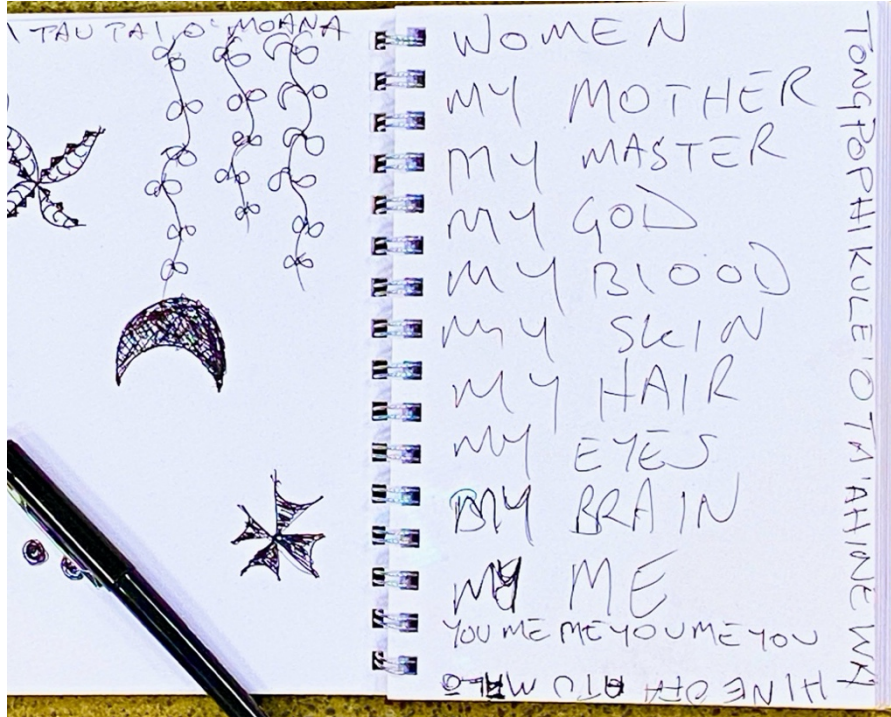


Figure 3. Katharine Losi Atafu-Mayo's notebook included in *Feso'ota'i atu (Connection)* for audiences to draw and write in as they engaged with the piece, 2020. *SALTWATER / Interconnectivity*, Tautai Gallery, Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand. Photograph by Giles Peterson. Courtesy of Tautai Gallery



Figure 4. Spoken word performance by Aigagalefili Fepulea'i-Tapua'i of 4TK (4 Tha Kulture) at the opening of *SALTWATER / Interconnectivity*, Tautai Gallery, Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand, October 15, 2020. Photograph by Isoah Kavakimotu. Courtesy of 4TK and Tautai Gallery



Figure 5. Sistar S'pacific (aka Rosanna Raymond), *Acti.VĀ.tion*, 2020. Performance at the opening of *SALTWATER / Interconnectivity*, Tautai Gallery, Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand, October 15, 2020. Photograph by Issoh Kavakimotu. Courtesy of the artist and Tautai Gallery

Rosanna Raymond—an innovator in the contemporary Pasifika art scene, long-standing member of the Pacific Sisters art collective, and founding member of the SaVAge K`lub—also contributed a performance piece. Her practice engages people, spaces, and objects to “acti.VĀ.te” dynamic relationships and to realise and reshape the *tā-vā* (time-space) duality.⁷ She uses performance, Pasifika ceremony, chant, storytelling, spoken word poetry, costume, and adornment as ways to transform the physical world into a sacred space and make sense of the world from an Indigenous Moana-Solwara worldview.

At the exhibition opening, Raymond appeared as Sistar S'pacific in a *kaitiaki* ceremonial role (Fig. 5). *Kaitiaki* is a New Zealand Māori term for the concept of guardianship for the sky, the sea, and the land. A *kaitiaki* is a guardian, and the process and practices of protecting and looking after the environment are referred to as *kaitiakitanga*. In a practice embedded within Moana world views, values, oratory, ritual chant, and movement, Raymond blessed and activated the community space and exhibition. She honoured the Indigenous custodians of the land; the spiritual power of our Moana-Solwara peoples; the great teachers and healers who have gone before, and their struggles and sacrifices that gave new generations a better way of life; and the bravery of the artists and their *mahi*

(work). Raymond’s performance celebrated the exhibition as a powerful expression of the Pacific family and the Pacific way, uniting our communities through the healing and transformative power of art. Sistar S’pacific heralded new beginnings and called on tautai—the navigators in us all—to come together, celebrate, exchange, and be ever-vigilant in supporting Pasifika peoples’ struggles for self-determination, equity, social justice, and freedom from oppression, systemic racism, and neocolonialism.

The exhibition opening event also featured contemporary dance by choreographer Ankaramy Fepuleai and four male dancers—who performed Fepuleai’s epic dance work LALO—direct from the *Pacific Dance Festival*. LALO, which means “below,” guided viewers through ifoga, the Sāmoan custom of seeking forgiveness. This involves delivering a formal apology to another person, while bowing down and humbling oneself. The offender appears covered in an ‘ie toga (fine mat) and the only way forgiveness is granted is if the victim lifts the ‘ie toga from the offender (Fig. 6).⁸



Figure 6. Performance by LALO (Ankaramy (Anks) Fepuleai, Jireh Lalotoa, Jay Lisimoni, Christian Segi, and Kardia Ah Kiau) at the opening of *SALTWATER / Interconnectivity*, Tautai Gallery, Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand, October 15, 2020. Photograph by Isoa Kavakimotu. Courtesy of LALO and Tautai Gallery

Resilience

It was important to us as curators to think about what we wanted to see in this uncertain time and in this ever-changing landscape. What does our community want to experience when they come into this gallery?⁹ We had several major themes related to resilience in mind for the exhibition: feminine energy; community; intergenerational storytelling; activation, social justice, and protest based on “Black and Brown Lives Matter”; and climate change and ecology. These are issues that affect not only the families and communities in our own neighbourhoods and across Aotearoa and the Moana-Solwara, but every person on the planet. Our communities face hostility towards Indigenous peoples of colour and incredible social hardship, especially among our most vulnerable, our elderly and our rangatahi (youth) who are often hardest hit by global crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, worldwide recessions and job losses, climate change, and more.

SALTWATER / Interconnectivity was a rallying cry and a celebration of the resilience of Pasifika people. The exhibition was a call to revel in dazzling beauty and artistry and honour the strength and resilience of Pasifika peoples through the creative talent of its young people as they weather storms of massive social change and survive colonisation and adversity.

Feso’ota’i atu, Katharine Losi Atafu-Mayo

Katharine Losi Atafu-Mayo (Sāmoa, Aotearoa, Scotland, England) is a devoted daughter, sister, and godmother whose social art practice is an evolving ecosystem of Moana healing methodologies, spirituality, and community engagement grounded in unconditional love. By confronting cultural norms, societal expectations, and systematic oppressions, Atafu-Mayo uses her lived experiences to create an alternative way of operating in our everyday lives.

Atafu-Mayo’s multimedia activation/moving image installation was titled *Feso’ota’i atu*, which means “connection” in the Sāmoan language. A video depicted Atafu-Mayo, who appeared as an unidentified Polynesian woman, collecting water from the Pacific Ocean. The water was stored in glass bottles to be used in the artist’s opening performance, as described above. The five kava bowls featured in the opening ceremony, lined in a row in the main gallery space, accompanied the video projection (Fig. 7). Atafu-Mayo borrowed these bowls from personal collections representing different parts of Oceania. Giles Peterson



Figure 7. Katharine Losi Atafu-Mayo, *Feso'ota'i atu*, 2020. Digital video projection (filmed by Benji Timu), sound, saltwater, Pasifika tanoa (kava bowls), wood, mother of pearl, coconut drinking cups, 250 x 100 cm, including projection. *SALTWATER / Interconnectivity*, Tautai Gallery, Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand. Photograph by Ralph Brown. Courtesy of the artist and Tautai Gallery

loaned two bowls: one from the Sepik region of Papua New Guinea that his father had brought to Aotearoa New Zealand—underscoring the intergenerational connections that ran throughout the exhibition—and another that was gifted to him in 2009 by Papua New Guinean artist Martin Morububuna. Atafu-Mayo and Rosanna Raymond contributed two Sāmoan ava bowls, and a colleague of Peterson's loaned a Fijian bowl. In advance of the installation, Atafu-Mayo oiled each bowl to protect them from the salt water that she and other participating artists ritually poured into them during the opening performance. The bowls were filled with salt water for the duration of the exhibition and remained lined up on the floor of the gallery, while a video was projected down onto the bowls from the ceiling. Like rays of sunlight, the footage of waves lapping against the shore immersed the bowls and viewers in a saltwater world.

Atafu-Mayo included the following original poem, “Po, po, po (night), Manava i totonu (breath in),” as part of her artist statement for the exhibition:

po, po, po
manava i totonu:

*may this space light the fire within you that has been extinguished,
may your peace that's been disrupted find harmony in all living things,
may your tino, mafaufau and agaga feel held,*

*I invite you to just be in this space of interconnectedness;
remember, navigate, reflect, meditate, thank,
manava i totonu:*

*exchange your love, your rage, your energy, your joy, your distaste, your
healing;
share what you must with the Moana.
They will be returned with what you pour into them.*

*we are connected, we are profound, we are resilient, we are powerful,
manava i totonu;
po, po, po.*

I Left My Heart in Tongpop, Telly Tuita

Telly Tuita's¹⁰ installation *I Left My Heart in Tongpop* consisted of paintings, sculptural assemblages, performative self-portraits, adornments, and found objects that transformed the exhibition space into a kaleidoscopic place of energy, vibrancy, beauty, living history, and arohanui (love) (Fig. 8). The piece consisted of about ten years of art production and testified to Tuita's experience of leaving Tonga as a child, growing up in Australia, and finally moving to Aotearoa New Zealand. Three self-portraits, interspersed throughout the installation, documented the artist's grown and coming to terms with his Tongan—and more broadly, his Oceanic—heritage. The first, *Romancing History* (2015) was an image of the artist kneeling in front of a black-and-white reproduction of a 1784 engraving titled *Poulaho, King of the Friendly Isles Drinking Kava* (Fig. 9).¹¹ Dressed in a tupenu (Tongan waist garment), Tuita appears to be at once a part of the group depicted in the engraving while also showing reverence for those who came before him. The other two, *Professional Brown Man* (2018) (Fig. 10) and *Tongpop 1–3* (2019) showed the artist in increasingly elaborate costumes and surrounded by numerous objects that evoke his relationship to Oceanic cultures, including woven mats and baskets, plastic lei, and Pasifika imagery on upcycled materials.



Figure 8. Telly Tuita, *I Left My Heart in Tongpop*, 2020. Multimedia installation. *SALTWATER / Interconnectivity*, Tautai Gallery, Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand. Photograph by Ralph Brown. Courtesy of the artist and Tautai Gallery



Figure 9. Telly Tuita, *Romancing History*, 2015. Digital print installed as part of *I Left My Heart in Tongpop*, 2020. *SALTWATER / Interconnectivity*, Tautai Gallery, Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand. Courtesy of the artist and Tautai Gallery



Figure 10. Telly Tuita, *A Professional Brown Man*, 2018. Digital print installed as part of *I Left My Heart in Tongpop*, 2020. SALTWATER / Interconnectivity, Tautai Gallery, Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand. Courtesy of the artist and Tautai Gallery

Tuita's photographs traced the evolution of his performance practice by showing how Tongan visual and material culture has become more and more central to his identity. The installation underscored the importance of art and culture in keeping the artist's connections with Tonga and Australia alive.¹² Tuita described the installation in this way:

How does one maintain connectivity when ties are broken? Through objects, through images, through stories, through my body. Like marks left from scars, like marks left on the earth we are always reminded of our interconnectivity to the past, present and future. The good and the bad.

I Left My Heart in Tongpop showcases ten years of a body of work that carries the spirit of Oceania. Not as a place but a Being/Spirit/God/Mother. Able to evolve and thrive in any time, any place.

Scouring second-hand shops and dollar stores, art history volumes, and visual histories, I collect items and iconography that connect with personal narratives and idealised views of places from the past. I ritualistically gather and process my bounty, layering and repurposing to create a cacophony of colour, shape, and motif which I have ascribed as TONGPOP—A hybrid aesthetic borne from broken ties and healed scars.¹³

Although Tongpop is a fictional place, Tuita notes that it has its roots in Tonga. He sees unique aspects of Oceanic cultures, histories, iconographies, materials, and art processes embodied in Moana-Solwara people who sustain a living and dynamic interconnectivity.

Healing

Atafu-Mayo's curatorial and artistic practice centres on Indigenous healing and well-being—a foundational theme for the exhibition—and is grounded in manaakitanga (respect, kindness, honesty), tautua (service), hospitality, and awahi (support). With this curatorial approach in mind, the exhibition's artworks metaphorically opened up the gallery space to foster healing through togetherness, warmth, resilience, survival, and joy. The exhibition was organised during the lockdown caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, which is still wreaking havoc on communities around the world at the time of this writing. Having a safe

and positive exhibition that united different-but-connected Indigenous Pacific ways of knowing and being was very important to her.

Healing is the restoration of that which has been wounded or broken. When connections break, we experience loss and hurt persists. The opportunity for young Indigenous artists to tell their stories and histories creates new spaces and opportunities for renewal and healing. Relationships, community, people, land, can all be recovered through healing.

SALTWATER / Interconnectivity's focus on Indigenous knowledges was linked to the strong emphasis in the exhibition on decolonising methodologies. The artists drew on Indigenous Moana-Solwara worldviews to create accessible, dynamic, and visually exciting artworks that spoke to the manawa (heart) of people. They sought to connect spiritually and emotionally with the diverse communities coming to engage with the healing energy of the artwork.

Gurruṭu`mi Mala (My Connections), *Gutiṅarra Yunupiṅu*

Gutiṅarra Yunupiṅu is a First Nations artist of the Gumatj clan, Yirritja moiety, and Buymarr homeland who lives and works in Yirrkala, Northern Territory, Australia, utilising film and digital media to capture the stories of his kin. Despite being deaf since birth, he has managed to overcome many barriers. Since 2015 he has worked at The Mulka Project, a Yolṅu cultural knowledge preservation project in Yirrkala. As a project officer and filmmaker, Yunupiṅu often travels to Yolṅu homelands where he regularly films cultural ceremonies and events.¹⁴ Viewers bear witness to the power of healing, family, and community across oceans from the perspective and triumphs of this young artist who is recording the living histories and culture of his elders and community, as well as forging the pathway forward for future generations of Indigenous youth.

In the powerful 4K film installation *Gurruṭu`mi Mala (My Connections)*, the artist situates himself in the world of gurruṭu (translated as “kinship system”) and articulates his connections to family, community, and beyond (Fig. 11). Chris Matthews (Quandamooka people of Minjerribah) describes gurruṭu as “a sophisticated system that defines interconnected relationships between *all the elements of the world*, such as those between people, animals, plants, insects, wind, fire, water, land and so on. In Gurruṭu, a connection is usually visualised as an invisible cord that connects two elements of the world.”¹⁵ Yunupiṅu describes his work in this way:

Gurruṯu`mi Mala demonstrates my connections to my family, my people, and my country through the Yolḷu kinship system of gurruṯu. Gurruṯu not only links me to my clan and my homeland, but to all clans and their homelands. Gurruṯu dictates my connections and relationships to all Yolḷu . . . past, present and future.

Here, I demonstrate my position in the world of gurruṯu through my first language barrkuṯu waṅa (language from a distance [Yolḷu sign language]). I am signing Yolḷu gurruṯu names to you, revealing how they connect and relate to me.¹⁶



Figure 11. Gutinjarra Yunupiṯu, *Gurruṯu`mi Mala (My Connections)*, 2019. Film installation. HD two-channel digital video, 4K. *SALTWATER / Interconnectivity*, Tautai Gallery, Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand. Photograph by Ralph Brown, Tautai Gallery, Auckland. Courtesy of the artist, Buku-Larrṅgay Mulka Centre, and Tautai Gallery

To view the piece, audience members walked into a long, rectangular room off to the side of the main gallery space. Both walls at each end of the room played a looped video that depicted the artist signing the names for his moiety, clan, and country. With the artist communicating in Yolḷu sign language on either side of the room, and surrounded by walls painted black to match the background in the videos, viewers were made to occupy the same space as Yunupiṯu. They entered

into the relationships that he shares, as a “saltwater person,” with the other artists and viewers.

Gurruṭu’mi Mala (My Connections) was also exhibited at the Art Gallery of South Australia as part of Tarnanthi 2019—an annual festival centred on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts. We found it of great interest due to the concept of gurruṭu underlying this art piece. Gutjarra received the 2019 Telstra NATSIAA Multimedia Award for *Gurruṭu mi’ Mala (My Connections)* and was a finalist for the Northern Territory Young Australian of the Year Awards.

Tōtō [Blood], *Te Ara Minhinnick*

*Mehemea ka pātai mai koe ki ahau;
“He aha Te Awa o Waikato ki a koe?”
Māku e kī atu, he rite tonu ki te toto o ōku tūpuna.*

*[If you ask me;
“What does the Waikato River mean to you?”
I will say that it is like the blood of my ancestors.]*
—Te Ara Minhinnick



Figure 12. Te Ara Minhinnick, *Tōtō*, 2020. Blocks of earth gathered near Waiuku. *SALTWATER / Interconnectivity*, Tautai Gallery, Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand. Photograph by Ralph Brown. Courtesy of the artist and Tautai Gallery

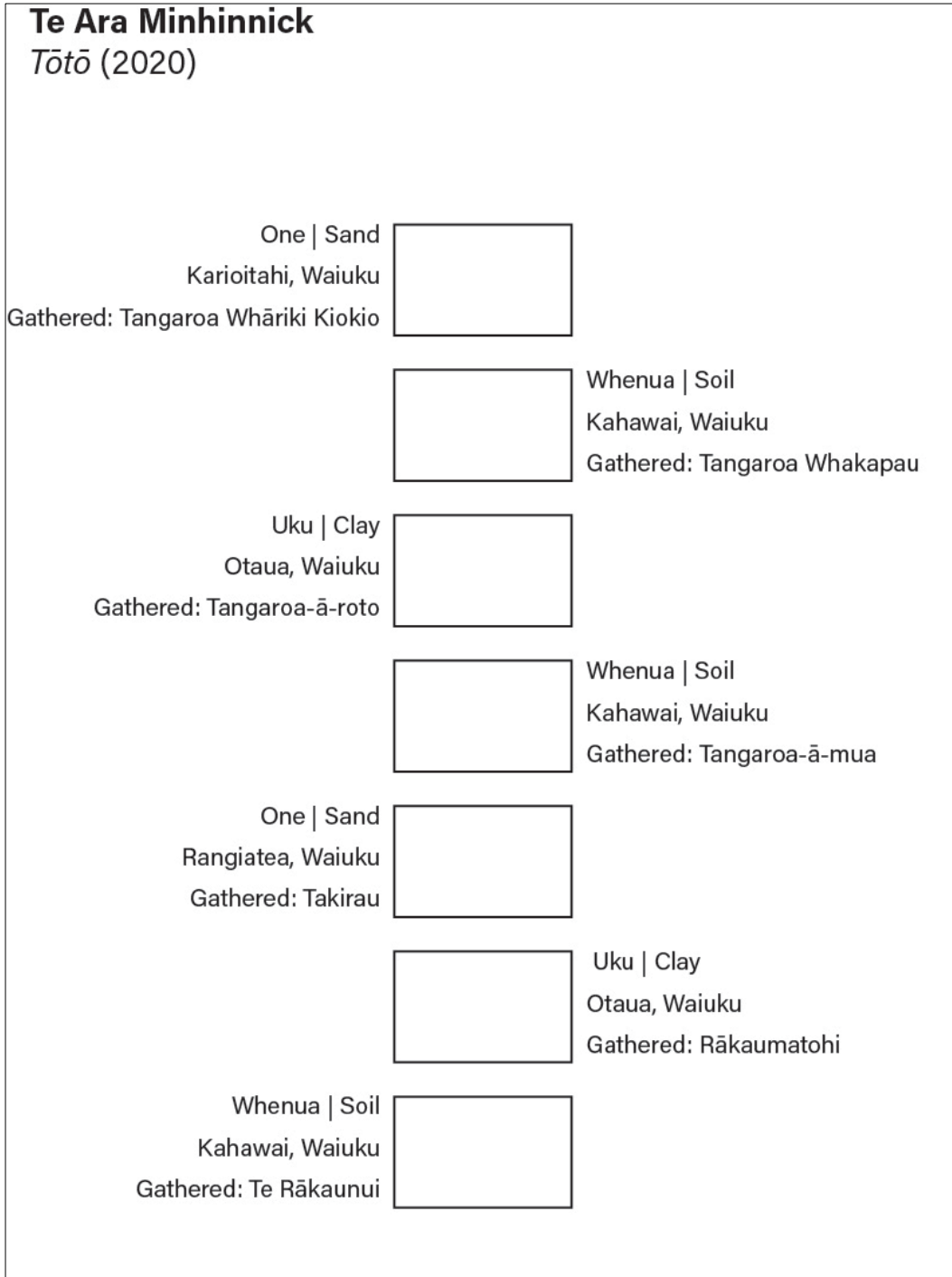


Figure 13. Te Ara Minhinnick, flyer that accompanied *Tōtō*, 2020. Text and layout by Te Ara Minhinnick. Design by Gloriana Meyers, Tautai Gallery. Courtesy of the artist and Tautai Gallery

The installation and time-based work of Māori artist Te Ara Minhinnick centres around the alliances of people, space, and place experienced in her ipukarea, her ancestral homeland, and waterways within Waiuku, where her iwi of Ngāti Te Ata (Aotearoa New Zealand) lives. She emphasises a responsibility to her homeland and iwi by employing methods of “wayfinding” through the contemporary realities of Mātauranga Māori (Māori knowledge). The title of Minhinnick’s work in *SALTWATER / Interconnectivity, Tōtō*, connects the Waiuku waterways with the blood of her ancestors and provides a means for the artist to learn her whakapapa (genealogy), history, and stories of her homeland. The piece consisted of seven stacks of whenua (earth) that she gathered from the shores of Waiuku, the same place her ancestors would have gathered food resources (Fig. 12). The specific time and lunar phase, according to the Māramataka (Māori lunar calendar), during which the earth in each stack was collected was recorded on a flyer that accompanied the work (Fig. 13).

Juxtaposing the concept of the constantly-moving-yet-stable natural cycle of the Māramataka with the solidity and permanence of the earthen blocks, the installation recalled the actions of the artist’s body and of her whānau (family) moving with seasonal rhythms and the push and pull of the tides. Much like Atafu-Mayo’s piece, this installation was a performative, embodied project because of the care and attention paid to the process of bringing the soil to the gallery, pouring water onto the soil in order to shape it into blocks, and letting the dirt dry, crack, and respond to the conditions of the gallery space. Exhibiting *Tōtō* at Tautai, itself located on a site connected with an ancient waterway, was particularly significant for the artist as a gesture of healing; the blocks of whenua created a sense of home, safety, and whakapapa within the gallery space and allowed her to sync with the temporal cycles connected to places and people.¹⁷

Connections

Te Moana Nui a Kiwa (the great ocean of Kiwa, the Pacific Ocean) as giver of life links all the artists in the exhibition. The theme “salt water,” however, is not just about the physical connections between Pasifika peoples and communities—it also embodies shared histories; colonial experiences; ecologies; worldviews and spiritualities; gods and ancestors; blood lines; and current cultural, social, political, and environmental challenges.

Unity Wall, Peter Elavera

Peter Elavera is a Papua New Guinean artist and currently a leader in urban street art in Port Moresby. His artwork incorporates social activism statements on injustice, inequality, and conservation of the natural environment. His interest in harnessing the potency of street art started in 2007. Currently, Peter and his team, known as the Kamilion Art Krew (KAKS), are working on an 800-metre-long seawall-mural project in Port Moresby on the theme “Radioactive Ocean,” which brings awareness to the conservation of ocean and marine life.

Unity Wall is a 769-metre-long mural that Elavera painted with KAKS. It surrounds the Sir Hubert Murray Stadium in Port Moresby, the capital of Papua New Guinea (PNG), where the country hoisted its flag of unity on September 16, 1975—the day of its independence from Australia. This was a significant political event that united about a thousand different Indigenous tribes and cultures. The mural celebrates the diversity of PNG Indigenous cultures and their interconnections through traditional trade and cultural exchange routes, such as Kula in the east and Hiri in the west. For the exhibition, Elavera presented a six-metre-long photograph of a section of the mural in situ that showed the stadium in the background (Fig. 14). The chosen section of the mural depicts four billboards that chart the colonial history, Indigenous bloodlines, customs, languages, and self-determination movements of PNG, especially those in the southern part of the nation.

A painting of the Union Jack, for instance, serves as the backdrop for an encounter between two figures painted in black and white: Commodore James Epstein, captain of the British Navy and Pacific Fleet, on the left, and a Papua treaty chief (most likely from Aroma Coast as indicated by his war shield), on the right. On one side of this encounter is the insignia for the Territory of Papua, annexed by Great Britain in 1883, and on the other side is a portrait of the reigning British monarch at the time, Queen Victoria. Reading left to right, the next segment of the mural depicts a circular portrait of Reverend James Chalmers of the London Missionary Society. Stretching out from either side of the portrait is a banner depicting body tattoo patterns of the Motu people, coastal trade voyagers who originally inhabited, and still inhabit, the PNG coast near Port Moresby. Other scenes in the mural that were not reproduced for the exhibition include historical figures such as Henry M. Chester, the First Magistrate of British Papua in 1883, and Sir Peter Scratchley, the First Administrator of British Papua from 1884 to 1885. Altogether, the mural provides a history of the travels and encounters that continue to shape PNG.



Figure 14. Peter Elavera and Kamilion Art Krew (KAKS), *Unity Wall*, 2019. Photograph of a portion of the painted mural, each section 6 x 2.5 m, 2020. *SALTWATER / Interconnectivity*, Tautai Gallery, Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand. Photograph courtesy of the artist and Tautai Gallery

In the photograph of the mural displayed in the gallery, Elavera also included more recent images of colonial occupation and the enduring Indigenous cultures of PNG. The third billboard (from the left in Fig. 14) depicts the Morning Star Flag of the Free West Papua movement. Elavera superimposed a raised fist, evoking the Polynesian Panthers and the legacy of the Pasifika freedom fighters, over the flag. He asserts that *Unity Wall* “calls for a united voice against tyranny and for political independence to the West Papuan determination for freedom. Free West Papua.”¹⁸ In an interview, Elavera connects anticolonial and decolonising movements with Moana-Solwara art and unity:

For me, personally, as an East Papuan, I see the West Papuan struggle for self-determination and human dignity as enshrined under the UN Convention on Human Rights Declaration [and] as the struggle against the old colonial regime under the new “political reform policy” propaganda. The struggle of our brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers, in West Papua is [the] Pacific’s fight against political oppressors and capitalism. The global rhetorical perception of the Pacific as a peaceful, friendly, and timid region has drawn wolves in sheep’s clothing. Government-controlled, mega-conglomerate enterprises [use] the age-old tactic of “divide and control” [to sustain] the pyramid of slavery, world dominance, and economic manipulation.

Genealogically, we—One Solwara Pacific Family—are all related and connected through our cultural heritage, languages, Indigenous arts, and values. In a nutshell, the Pacific region is one big family. We will not refrain, nor will we cease, from activism for

the freedom of our brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers in West Papua. We the Pacific must stand together in solidarity, undivided nor intimidated. As Pacific Islanders, whether we are Micronesian, Polynesian, or Melanesian, we must sustain unity in social, political, cultural, and economic consciousness and awareness of neocolonialism through global capitalism and global consumerism. Finally, Olgeta Wan Solwara [altogether one Pacific] family, please bear in mind that in the wake of neocolonialism under the pretext of political and economic reforms, the Pacific family now stands on the verge of being pushed over and being pushed under. The West Papuan struggle epitomises Pacific vulnerability. In light of all this, ultimately, West Papua's freedom will be the Pacific's freedom.¹⁹

Fake News, *Shawnee Tekii*

Cook Islands artist Shawnee Tekii uses art as a tool for social engagement and connecting communities. The digital age plays a large role in underpinning her practice, which is often influenced by mainstream media, digital apps, and interactive art. Her awareness of the ways social media and data configuration have influenced how we react, think, move, and perceive the world is keenly present in her art projects. Through the use of bold graphics that are often focused on urban Pacific imagery, she aims to communicate her political views on local and global issues directly to audiences of her generation. Her work encourages the use of mobile phones to either document or activate deeper conceptual content. She often draws inspiration from graphic design in advertising and branding, resulting in attention-grabbing works.

Fake News is a series of urban Pacific paintings that Tekii produced in response to news reports in mainstream media and social media that largely omitted Moana-Solwara peoples (Fig. 15). One painting featured a disembodied hand holding a smartphone horizontally, the way people often do when they are watching a video. On the screen, a hypnotic series of orange and yellow concentric circles appeared to recede into the background. The other painting depicted a bright pink television against an electric-green background with alternating pink and blue squares on the screen evoking televisual static. The bright colours intentionally recall the 1960s and '70s and the rise of Aotearoa's Polynesian Panthers, who led social change and Pasifika activism. They were inspired by the Black Panthers' revolutionary movement against police brutality and racial injustice, which continues today in the form of Black Lives Matter.



Figure 15. Shawnee Tekii, *Fake News*, 2020. Aerosol paint and acrylic on canvas. 170.8 x 122 cm each. *SALTWATER / Interconnectivity*, Tautai Gallery, Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand. Photograph by Ralph Brown. Courtesy of the artist and Tautai Gallery

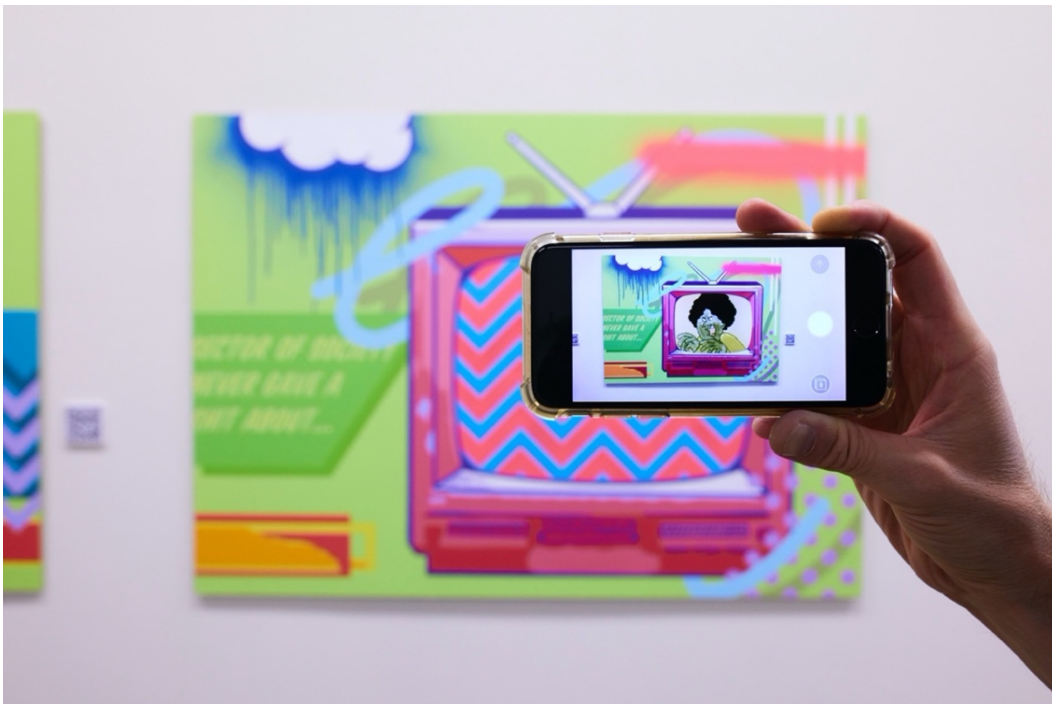


Figure 16. Gallery visitor using an app designed by Shawnee Tekii for *Fake News*, 2020. *SALTWATER / Interconnectivity*, Tautai Gallery, Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand. Photograph by Ralph Brown. Courtesy of the artist and Tautai Gallery

Drawing connections between the struggles against racism by Black and Brown communities speaks to the real power and community in shared oppression, which is something Tekii wanted to underscore in *Fake News*. Viewers

could interact with the paintings by using a mobile phone app that played documentary footage of the Polynesian Panthers and the Black Panthers, news broadcasts, and popular media from the 1970s (Fig. 16). The transformation, made possible by the phone screen, of the bright 'static' into false and racist news coverage mirrors the misleading nature of popular media. Tekii's work recentred Aotearoa in political, social, and economic news coverage by focusing on the ongoing fight for social justice and human rights. This work can connect and motivate us to continue fighting systems of oppression and to create a world of our own.

* * *

Through the concepts of resilience, healing, and connection, *SALTWATER / Interconnectivity* provided an important space where artists from across Oceania could come together and engage in the most pressing issues facing the region today. As Atafu-Mayo stated:

As Moana-Solwara/Saltwater people we are multifaceted, vast, dynamic, and . . . powerful. We stand on the shoulders of giants who have navigated oceans [. . . and . . .] paved pathways. . . This show [was] more than a response to global events and our ever-changing landscape. It [was] a representation of Moana leadership, creativity, and world views. Our understanding of interconnectedness to all living things is embodied throughout Te Moana-nui-a-kiwa. . . [T]hese truths . . . will help heal this capitalist and patriarchal place which houses systems of oppression against us Brown and Black folk. The more we creatively access [our Indigenous worldviews] and see ourselves . . . in spaces . . . *we have formed and maintain*, the more we are able to imagine and then rebuild a world in which we lead and live with empathy and love.²⁰

In many ways, Tautai Gallery and the exhibition operated much like the Moana-Solwara in its capacity to bridge space, time, and culture as well as connect people for centuries. In her closing address for the exhibition, Courtney Sina Meredith, Director of the Tautai Contemporary Pacific Arts Trust, stated, "*SALTWATER / Interconnectivity* foretells Tautai's ongoing commitment to artists from Te Moana Nui a Kiwa. Presenting an understanding of reality in the present—within urban, environmental, and sacred realms: the ever-flowing Moana connects us all, keeper of our salt spray stories."²¹

Giles Peterson was born in Papua New Guinea and is a lecturer at Whitecliffe College of Arts and Design (Auckland), where he teaches courses in New Zealand/Pacific art and design history, contemporary art, fashion theory, and arts management. He was a founding member of the Tautai Contemporary Pacific Arts Trust and has mentored three generations of Tautai artists. He is also an independent curator whose most recent exhibitions include Tiaho: Photography from Oceania (2010) and Garden of Memories: Extending Quilt Making Traditions from around the Pacific (2019).

Katharine Losi Atafu-Mayo (Sāmoa, Aotearoa, Scotland, England) is a devoted daughter, sister, and godmother with a beautiful vessel that houses her resilient soul, powerful heart, and unshakable spirit. She is a multidisciplinary artist, curator, creative and well-being director, and world builder. Her social art practice is an evolving ecosystem of Moana healing methodologies, spirituality, and community engagement grounded in unconditional love to create alternative ways of living in the everyday. Her artworks include installations, workshops, moving image, and poetry. She is best known for ceremonial rituals based on intuitive activation.

Notes

¹ The curators and the director of the Tautai Contemporary Pacific Arts Trust, Courtney Sina Meredith, are grateful to Creative New Zealand, Foundation North, Fetu Ta’i, and the Tautai Board of Trustees for their support of the exhibition. We are also very thankful for the outstanding work of the staff, volunteers, contractors, and suppliers who made the exhibition and programming possible.

² The terms Moana-Solwara, Moana, and Pasifika are used in this text interchangeably. With the incredible diversity of languages and cultures in the region, there are numerous terms that people use to identify their place, family, and heritage. By using terms that are more regional than local, we acknowledge the simultaneous diversity and unity that this exhibition celebrates.

³ Throughout the duration of the exhibition, Atafu-Mayo would activate the gallery space with karakia (prayers), talanoa (dialogue), and ceremony. Rituals, prayers, and thanks were also enacted at the exhibition’s closing in a private ceremony for the artists, curators, Tautai exhibition team, and our whānau (extended family) supporters Rosanna Raymond and Ema Lyon, who have been mentoring Atafu-Mayo.

⁴ Tautai Arts, “Artist Spotlight: Katharine Losi Atafu-Mayo,” video by No Six for SALTWATER / Interconnectivity, 2020, accessed September 9, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Emc4nunCcjo>.

⁵ Katharine Losi Atafu-Mayo, email exchange with Giles Peterson, January 29, 2022.

⁶ Tautai Arts, “Opening Night: *SALTWATER / Interconnectivity*,” video by No Six, 2020, accessed September 9, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rIUFGfEm3lo>.

⁷ “Acti.VĀ.te” is a term and concept developed by Rosanna Raymond who highlights the vā as a central practice within the word. “Acti.VĀ.te” uses the vā as a methodology to bring the past into the present through an embodied practice. “Acti.VĀ.tor” is the performative agent, or avatar, who uses the vā as an embodied practice. Rosanna Raymond, personal communication, September 10, 2021.

⁸ On the ifoga, see La’auli A. Filoiali’i and Lyle Knowles, “The Ifoga: The Samoan Practice of Seeking Forgiveness for Criminal Behaviour,” *Oceania* 53, no. 4 (1983): 384–8; and Cluny Macpherson and La’avasa Macpherson, “The *Ifoga*: The Exchange Value of Social Honour in Samoa,” *Journal of the Polynesian Society* 114 (2003): 109–33.

⁹ Tautai Arts, “Meet the Curators: Katharine Losi Atafu-Mayo and Giles Peterson,” video by No Six for *SALTWATER / Interconnectivity*, 2020, accessed September 9, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9GjUKhfHRPo>.

¹⁰ Artist Telly Tuita was born in Tonga in 1980, immigrated to Brisbane in 1989, and immigrated to Lyall Bay, Wellington, Aotearoa, in 2017. He has a BFA from Western Sydney University, a bachelor of art education from the University of New South Wales, and a master’s degree in special education from the University of Sydney. Tuita has been a high school art teacher, a special education teacher, and an assistant principal at Green Square School. In 2017, he returned to making art full-time. Tuita’s art practice encompasses painting, printmaking, sculpture, photomedia, and performance. He has contributed to exhibitions in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand, and his work is included in the collection of the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

¹¹ William Sharp, after John Webber, *Poulaho, King of the Friendly Isles Drinking Kava*, 1784. Engraving, 273 x 410 mm, British Museum, 1841,0313.74, https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1841-0313-74.

¹² Tautai Arts, “Artist Spotlight: Telly Tuita,” video by No Six for *SALTWATER / Interconnectivity*, 2020, accessed September 9, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iD9CcFlgh50>.

¹³ Telly Tuita, “Telly Tuita: I Left My Heart in Tongpop,” in *SALTWATER / Interconnectivity*, ed. Katharine Losi Atafu-Mayo and Giles Peterson (Auckland: Tautai, 2019), 11.

¹⁴ See Buku-Larrŋgay Mulka Art Centre, “About the Mulka Project,” accessed August 26, 2021, <https://yirrkala.com/about-the-mulka-project/>.

¹⁵ Chris Matthews, “Indigenous Perspectives in Maths: Understanding Gurruṯu,” *Teacher Magazine*, April 27, 2020, Australian Council for Educational Research, accessed August 26, 2021, https://www.teachermagazine.com/au_en/articles/indigenous-perspectives-in-maths-understanding-gurruu. Emphasis in original.

¹⁶ Gutinjara Yunupijū, “Gutinjara Yunupijū: Gurruṭu’mi Mala (My Connections),” in *SALTWATER / Interconnectivity*, ed. Katharine Losi Atafu-Mayo and Giles Peterson (Auckland: Tautai, 2019), 19.

¹⁷ Tautai Arts, “Artist Spotlight: Te Ara Minhinnick,” video by No Six for *SALTWATER / Interconnectivity*, 2020, accessed September 9, 2021 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c1sp97PhctY>.

¹⁸ Peter Elavera, “Peter Elavera: Unity Wall,” in *SALTWATER / Interconnectivity*, ed. Katharine Losi Atafu-Mayo and Giles Peterson (Auckland: Tautai, 2019), 25.

¹⁹ Tautai Arts, “Artist Spotlight: Peter Elavera,” video by No Six for *SALTWATER / Interconnectivity*, 2020, accessed August 26, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nY6cB9QFLXA>.

²⁰ Katharine Losi Atafu-Mayo (@KattyMayo), Instagram, October 21, 2020, accessed September 12, 2021, https://www.instagram.com/p/CGlcPaBH5uiHMcuw5euP_LtYcr1FfVDmvQx9OM0/.

²¹ Courtney Sina Meredith, “Acknowledgements,” in *SALTWATER / Interconnectivity*, ed. Katharine Losi Atafu-Mayo and Giles Peterson (Auckland: Tautai, 2019), 29.

MICHELLE LADWIG WILLIAMS

The ASB Polyfest: The Construction of Transnational Pacific Cultural Spaces in Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand

Abstract

This paper connects historical and ethnographic research to examine the construction of physical and ideological transnational Pacific spaces within Aotearoa New Zealand's longest-running Pacific festival and performance competition, the ASB Polyfest (The Auckland Secondary Schools Māori and Pacific Cultural Festival). The festival was established through the self-determination of Māori and Pacific peoples and progressive educational leadership in Auckland during the 1960s and 1970s. First staged in 1976 as a competition amongst four community-driven "Polynesian clubs," it has grown over four decades to involve approximately 10,000 individual participants and is a significant site for cultural transmission for transnational Pacific youth in Auckland. The origins of the festival are contextualised in the establishment of Māori and transnational Pacific communities in the southern suburbs of Auckland, who migrated for work opportunities during a period of rapid industrial growth and defied socio-economic and geographic marginalisation. A present-day ethnography of rehearsals for the ASB Polyfest music and dance competition examines the processes by which physical spaces are transformed into socio-temporal spaces where transnational Pacific communities of practice are developed and a place of Pacific belonging is established. Ethnographic vignettes describing key milestones in festival preparation, and the culmination of these preparations at the festival competition, highlight the progression of the formation of communities of practice. These examples support the central argument that ASB Polyfest school cultural groups are uniquely constructed socio-temporal Pacific spaces where transnational Pacific identities are explored and represented.

Keywords: *music, dance, transnationalism, cultural transmission, youth, arts education, performance, cultural festivals, identity, ASB Polyfest*

Scholars have found that cultural festivals in the Pacific are sites for the negotiation of ethnic, local, national, post-colonial, and global Pacific identities.¹ For transnational Pacific communities in Aotearoa New Zealand, Pacific festivals play a particular role as a locus of identity. Firstly, Pacific festivals act as "visible beacons of

belonging,” which establish Aotearoa as a place where transnational Pacific peoples belong, as well as belonging to Pacific homelands, whether as a home remembered or imagined.² Secondly, within New Zealand’s multicultural and urban locales where Pacific festivals are staged, preparations for these events play a crucial role in cultural transmission, especially through music and dance. The majority of Pacific peoples in Aotearoa are New Zealand-born, and markers of identity exist within particular realities. Pacific languages have shifted in various degrees to English, Pacific peoples are increasingly likely to identify with multiple Pacific and/or non-Pacific ethnicities, and Pacific youth find commonalities in multiple forms of expression, including popular music and other globally-influenced art forms.³

The importance of the ASB Polyfest (The Auckland Secondary Schools Māori and Pacific Cultural Festival), Aotearoa New Zealand’s longest continually running Pacific festival, as a primary venue for the teaching and learning of Pacific music and dance in Auckland cannot be overstated. Nearly 10,000 annual participants compete in school-based teams—called cultural groups, in Māori, Cook Islands, Niuean, Sāmoan, and Tongan categories—performing required programmes evaluated by expert judges. Rehearsals for the festival take place over six to eight weeks. Success at the festival relies upon the collective commitment of instructors, educational staff, families, and students, the latter having widely-varying degrees of culturally-specific knowledge before participating in the festival.

This paper contextualises the festival’s origins within the socio-political climate of the late 1960s to mid-1970s and outlines how the festival emerged through community self-determination and progressive educational leadership in the Auckland suburb of Otara. After a summary of the festival’s progression from its first staging in 1976 to its scope in 2021, I present findings from a field study of rehearsals from 2012–13 at Mangere College, one of the festival’s founding organisations. I examine how transnational Pacific “communities of practice” are constructed through the formation of cultural groups and weeks of festival preparation.⁴ I argue that teaching and learning practise incorporate culturally-specific ways of moving, speaking, and behaving to transform school rehearsal sites into unique socio-temporal Pacific spaces. I conclude with an ethnographic account of a day at the festival, examining how the festival’s events, sensory experiences, and social rituals represent the reification of teaching and learning within the ASB Polyfest community of practice as a whole.

Communities of Practice and Theorising Social Learning

In research on Pacific festivals, teaching and learning practises have received little attention despite the fact that it is during these hundreds of hours of social learning that identity-forming experiences are played out and a place of belonging is created, constructing socio-temporal space where the work of cultural construction takes place. A useful framework for examining groups of people pursuing teaching and learning, developed by sociologist Etienne Wenger, defines these social learning spaces as communities of practice “formed by people who engage in a process of collective learning in a shared domain of human endeavor.”⁵ They are places where theories and understandings of the world are developed, negotiated, and shared. Over time, a community creates a shared repertoire of resources for negotiating meaning, such as vocabulary, specific concepts, routines, symbols, actions, or stories. This shared repertoire not only reflects the history of engagement, but it is also applicable for future development of practice.

Given that learning happens through social participation in the world, Wenger posits that within these processes, individuals find and continually negotiate meaning. Through participation (the action of taking part in a community and constructing identities in relation to that community) and reification (the act of giving form to their experience and providing a point of focus for the negotiation of meaning), members of the community of practice shape and are shaped by their experiences.⁶

Identity is at the core of communities of practice. Fundamental to Wenger’s thesis is that learning is a universally-human experience that is reflective of the social nature of human beings; as individuals participate in and contribute to the practises of their communities, learning can be transformative for their identities.

Because learning transforms who we are and what we can do, it is an experience of identity. It is not just an accumulation of skills and information, but a process of becoming . . . We accumulate skills and information, not in the abstract as ends in themselves, but in the service of an identity. It is in that formation of an identity that learning can become a source of meaningfulness and personal and social energy.⁷

The following section outlines how the beginnings of the ASB Polyfest were situated in the formation of Māori and Pacific communities of practice, working towards the common goal of creating cultural space in migrant communities in the south of Auckland in the late 1960s.

The Origins of the ASB Polyfest

During the post-war boom in the world economy, New Zealand government policies that promoted industrialisation and full employment combined to create labour shortages.⁸ The government looked to the South Pacific, including New Zealand's territories of the Cook Islands, Niue, and Tokelau, as well as former territory Sāmoa, to supplement the workforce. Population pressure, rising economic demands, and lack of employment opportunities encouraged these island nations to promote emigration.⁹ The disruption of indigenous economic systems and declining demand for agricultural labour also led to Māori relocating to Auckland from rural areas.¹⁰

Personal histories of Pacific migration describe the desire for better work and educational opportunities as reasons for moving to New Zealand.¹¹ However, the realities of the labour economy meant that Pacific and Māori workers were concentrated into unskilled and semi-skilled jobs in secondary industries accompanied by low wages, less job security, fewer opportunities for advancement, and poorer conditions.¹² Many employers were open about their exclusionary attitudes toward Pacific workers, viewing them as a source of able-bodied and inexperienced but compliant labour, and regarding them as a "last resort" to fill labour shortages.¹³ When economic prosperity in New Zealand took a downturn in 1973, rising unemployment, urban decay, and crime became racialised, as these conditions were increasingly associated in politics and the media with growing Pacific communities.¹⁴

The early 1970s was a period of "explicit and populist racism" toward transnational Pacific people.¹⁵ Pākehā (New Zealander of European descent; non-Māori New Zealander) New Zealand was uneasy with increasing Māori political self-determination and the noticeable presence of Pacific communities. The National Party was, at the time, run on platforms of immigration reform and law and order, both of which identified Pacific people as "socially distinct and 'not part' of an imagined New Zealand" and suggested the country's decline in quality of life was, in part, their fault.¹⁶ The party capitalised on these fears during the 1975 election. Although the general laissez-faire policy toward migration during prosperous times meant the government had turned a blind eye to the practise of "overstaying" work permits in 1974, a review of immigration policy meant restrictions would be enforced and overstayers were at risk of prosecution and deportation.¹⁷

Though the majority of "overstayers" were from the United Kingdom, as were the majority of recent migrants in general, the term became synonymous with Pacific people.¹⁸ It was they, and Māori who resembled them, that were the target of the immigration division's campaign. This agenda was notoriously manifested in the Dawn Raids, raids of the homes of suspected overstayers carried out by police, under

orders from the immigration division, in the middle of the night between 1974 and 1976. Police sometimes targeted homes belonging to legal residents, who were arrested if not able to provide their passports, and their methods were often violent.¹⁹

Aupito Su'a William Sio was a student at Hillary College in Otago in the early 1970s, and serves as the New Zealand government's minister for Pacific peoples at the time of this writing. In a 2013 interview, he recalled his family's experience of being raided:

So, for our family, we were raided in the early days, '74, '75. But we were raided because we had family living with us, in the garage. About six boys on my father's side of the family were living there . . . [Police] came early in the morning, it was six o'clock, they knocked on the door, they had German shepherds barking. And immediately they knew people were in the garage. Some of my relatives ran into the bedroom, some hid in the bathroom, others hid underneath the girls' bedroom. . . . So, the ones they found they took, and the others just stayed hidden. And my mother and father were upset, because it was like what you see in the movies, the Gestapo—because they felt like they just had the freedom to come in and push people aside and look for the people they were looking for . . . because of whatever the rule changes at the time, everyone got picked up who looked like an overstayer. Māori were upset about it, being picked up, Cook Island[ers] and Niueans were upset, because they were New Zealand citizens. . . . I remember [the police] mucking me around, but because I spoke English better than most, in the end they just told me to get lost and go home.²⁰

The Dawn Raids established the fraught nature of relationships of Pacific people with other communities and the state, which was slow to change.²¹ The lingering stereotype of Pacific people as “overstayers” and their association with economic and social problems meant “[i]t took a long time for the myths about these new New Zealanders to be dispelled and for there to be an acceptance of their very positive contributions to the development of New Zealand's society, economy and cultural identity as a ‘Pacific’ nation.”²² It was not until August 2021, at the behest of the Polynesian Panthers—a social justice organisation formed during the Dawn Raids era—that the New Zealand government issued a formal apology for the actions of police and acknowledged the long-standing trauma that the Dawn Raids inflicted upon Pacific communities in New Zealand, as well as their legacy of racist stereotyping.²³

Preceding, and subsequently concurrent with, these politically and socially tumultuous events in Auckland, educational reform and Māori and Pacific self-determination were unfolding in Otago, a planned public-housing estate built on 1,200 acres

of farmland in South Auckland. Following its construction in the late 1950s, the population of Otara grew quickly, as Māori travelled mainly from Northland areas for job opportunities and to join family members already in the area. There was an even more rapid increase in Pacific residents, as the availability of manufacturing jobs, motorway construction in inner-city Auckland, and housing discrimination against Pacific people pushed more residents out to southern suburbs.²⁴ The number of Māori and Pacific residents totalled 33% compared to 17% in the rest of the newly incorporated Manukau City, then a separate local government entity to Auckland.²⁵ Otara quickly became associated with overcrowding, adult and youth crime, and single-parent homes. A 1967 magazine article described Otara, and other housing estates like it, as a “new kind of slum,” “truly bleak, isolated and barren of interest or involvement for the people who live in them,” and physically unattractive.²⁶

Many of the efforts to create a more liveable community in Otara were supported by the leadership of James Garfield Johnson, the inaugural principal of Otara College, Otara’s first secondary school. Johnson, who would later lend his sometimes-controversial progressive views as chair of the Committee on Health and Social Education, was influenced by the educational philosophies of John Dewey and the work of Māori scholar Ranginui Walker.²⁷ Johnson embraced philosophies of bicultural education in ways that few of his Pākehā contemporaries had, in what Bowler describes as a Freirean style of leadership.²⁸ Johnson called for bicultural education from early childhood, asserting that secondary school was too late. He argued that “Māori children need to know that the system is theirs, not just decorated with things Māori.”²⁹ The social problems associated with Otara motivated Johnson to rename the school Hillary College after Sir Edmund Hillary, citing the symbolism of Hillary’s and Tenzing Norgay’s pioneering summit of Mount Everest: “Two people of different races working together embodied the kind of spirit we wanted in the school.”³⁰ Guidance counsellor Jill Amos, in a 1998 interview, said, “we were the only school of its type in the country. Every other school had a Pākehā majority, and was contentedly monocultural.”³¹

To the extent of their abilities, Johnson and his colleagues recognised their responsibilities to respond to the needs of Otara’s multicultural communities. English teacher Bernard Gadd argued that

schools are placing heavy demands upon young Polynesians, expecting them to be culturally adaptable and flexible and able to fit neatly into a monocultural school . . . My thesis is that the endorsement of multicultural education means that while cultural common ground is important, each individual has the right, in addition, to cultural identity at variance with that of the majority.³²

Gadd asserted that, in addition to the teaching of Māori and Pacific languages, arts, crafts, and customs, “Polynesian heritages should have a natural place in every school course” and relevant topics of study should be integrated into humanities and sciences.³³ It was suggested that parents could enter the classroom as teacher aides or arts and craft tutors. Conscious of the need for relevant materials for its students, the school published a number of its own texts in-house, with many titles authored by Gadd.³⁴

Teacher Ian Mitchell, who was influenced by the philosophies of progressive New Zealand educator Sylvia Ashton-Warner, later implemented his ideas about bicultural and holistic education through the Whanau Unit at Hillary. The Whanau Unit was characterised by open timetabling, common areas, self-directed learning, and community outreach projects.³⁵ In 1973, in a display of self-determination and community solidarity that would challenge even the hardest of cynics, a group of students rushed into Mitchell’s classroom, frustrated with media coverage of the Department of Social Welfare’s report on juvenile crime in New Zealand, which pointed squarely at Māori and Pacific youth. The students decided to seek their own solution to Otarā’s lack of community services. With the guidance of their teachers, they approached government officials about the construction of a community centre—Te Puke O Tara—which they helped to design, raise funds for, and later manage.³⁶ After Ian Mitchell’s death in 1998, an editorial argued that many of Mitchell’s ideas in the 1970s were “revolutionary.”³⁷ Mitchell “understood some of the answers to meeting the needs of South Auckland children well before any of us had worked out any of the questions.”³⁸

In a conversation with former Hillary College student Boaz Raela, he recalled, “We had the strong leaders, we had amazing teachers, young and old . . . and then we had just this crop of young people at this period of time, just had a sense that they just wanted to achieve. They wanted to be somebody, wanted to be somewhere.”³⁹ It was in this environment that the school’s Polynesian Club was formed with the help of Ian Mitchell in 1967. From the start, “Poly Club” was a part of Hillary’s ethos of community inclusiveness; it involved students, parents, and local organisations.⁴⁰ Ian Mitchell acknowledged the significance of the Polynesian Club for his pupils:

I’m convinced you can’t learn certain things, pride and confidence, and, in fact, perhaps a deeper knowledge of the wellsprings of one’s own conscience, without activities like the Poly Club . . . I’m sure that kids that were starting to get restless and pretty hopeless, [were] invigorated by this.⁴¹

In an interview with former Hillary College student Ron Lau'ese, he recalled how social, school, and sporting worlds converged through the Polynesian Club.

Our Poly Club was very unique. Most of the guys in the Poly Club were in the 1st XV [rugby squad]. Wherever we went, the Poly Club went. When we went to play 1st XV, the Poly Club was there, and no school could match us when it came to the formal functions after the game, the singing, the dances we presented. . . . The Poly stuff was in school, it came into our social life, and it continued from there. So, we didn't have any fights! . . . And this is the thing we realise now, the impact that [Johnson and Mitchell] had. We had no idea.⁴²

In 1976, Māori student Michael Rollo, who taught *kapa haka* (Māori forms of stage performance) to the other students in the club, proposed that the school hold a cultural festival. Former student Aupito Su'a William Sio recalled that

Michael was a senior student, and he had the opportunity to travel to China, and when he came back, he reported to the full assembly. He talked about how China, all year round, celebrated different events. And he couldn't understand why in New Zealand, who had just as much cultural aspect to our way of life, that we shouldn't be doing the same on a day-to-day basis. So, he presented the school with this idea, and many of the students [agreed]. There were some teachers who came on board, particularly the Māori teachers, and some of the Pākehā ones.⁴³

The three additional schools that joined Hillary College to stage the first festival—Aorere College, Seddon College, and Mangere College—were each negotiating the needs of their communities and multicultural student bodies. Aorere College, in the South Auckland suburb of Papatoetoe, was one of several Auckland schools that pioneered a full community school model and embraced the concept of schooling being available to people of all ages. Adult learners equalled the number of youth and joined the school in both evening and day classes. The community was “engaged in a growing range of activities in the recreational, cultural, culture sharing, craft and design and personal development areas,” including a “Polynesian culture sharing group” whose meeting time overlapped with the young students' Polynesian Club.⁴⁴

Seddon College, which had recently relocated from midtown Auckland to the suburb of Western Springs in west-central Auckland, was going through a difficult transformation from a technical school to a neighbourhood school. Seddon was

attempting some of the same reforms as Hillary—no streaming, no corporal punishment, and even no uniforms—and to establish itself as a multilateral co-educational school with a multicultural emphasis. In particular, Seddon was seen as an “unsuccessful” school and was trying to change its reputation.⁴⁵

Mangere College was the most recently built school to join the festival—having opened only five years earlier in 1971—and asserted the importance of its role in Auckland as a multicultural school.⁴⁶ At the time, Mangere was a young state-housing suburb not far from Otara. Mangere had a strong Polynesian Club, numbering about sixty students, which had even earned praise from the governor-general.⁴⁷

The first festival was held in the school hall at Hillary College on October 20, 1976 (cf. Fig. 1). Although there were only four participating schools, the festival was popular, with a sizeable audience and an introduction by the mayor of Manukau City, Lloyd Elsmore. Mangere College took first place.⁴⁸ Boaz Raela recalled,

It was fantastic. It was a fantastic day. We, just as performers and as students in the group, we just enjoyed the fact that we had this opportunity to perform. And it was in a place where there were expectations to do your best. It was that sort of expectation. But also to enjoy.⁴⁹



Figure 1. Glenn Jowitt, *Performers from Hillary College, Otara, 1981*. Courtesy of Glenn Jowitt Trust

The festival that emerged from school Polynesian clubs in Auckland defied youth crime statistics, economic marginalisation, and institutionalised racism against Pacific peoples and the Māori that resembled them. In a letter to Garfield Johnson, Māori scholar and activist Ranginui Walker described Johnson's time at Hillary as "halcyon days when we believed anything was possible and we set out to make it happen."⁵⁰ In an interview, Boaz Raela echoed this sentiment: "It was the best six years of my life because it was the only place where I could be—I could be known, be successful, all those sorts of things. I loved it."

The Present-day Festival

After more than forty years, the ASB Polyfest presently takes place over four days at the Manukau Sports Bowl and Velodrome, with approximately 10,000 students from more than eighty schools participating and an equal number of audience members. Event management is outsourced to a professional company, and a large number of community volunteers provide additional support. Student groups choose a stage on which to compete: Māori, Cook Islands, Niuean, Sāmoan, or Tongan, as well as a Diversity Stage, which accommodates students performing from Asian, African, and other minority Pacific and non-Pacific populations. The naming sponsor, ASB, one of New Zealand's major banks, offers financial support along with universities and polytechnic colleges, who sponsor individual stages. The festival also includes Te Reo Māori and Pacific language competitions, entertainment from rising Māori and Pacific pop stars, food stalls serving both traditional Pacific fare and youth-friendly fast food, carnival games, and film crews recording footage for a Saturday morning television programme that is aired for six weeks after the festival. Because of the opportunities for good optics with Māori and Pacific communities, local and national politicians regularly make appearances.

A testimony to the festival's network of organisation and support is that it has been staged annually in late summer since 1976, with the exception of two significant events that posed major safety threats to the festival. When terrorist attacks at two mosques in Christchurch—the worst mass shooting in New Zealand's history—occurred on the third day of the 2019 festival, the remainder was cancelled out of concern for the safety of the students and public. In 2020, in the very early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Polyfest organising committee elected to cancel the festival in its entirety. New Zealand's largely successful response to the pandemic allowed schools in Auckland to remain open for most of the 2021 school year and for the festival to return in April of 2021, with new dates shifted a month later to accommodate

several short-term lockdowns and subsequent school closures in February and March 2021.⁵¹

Cultural Groups and the Construction of Pacific Spaces at Mangere College

Polyfest has consistently been a significant part of school and community life at Mangere College since 1976. One of the four schools that collaborated to stage the first festival, over the years Mangere has assumed competitor, host, and leadership roles. Vice Principal Mele Ah Sam has been the Sāmoan Stage Coordinator at Mangere College for over 25 years, and John Heyes, the school principal at the time of my fieldwork and a member of the New Zealand Order of Merit for services to education, was a member of the Polyfest Board of Trustees in 2011.⁵² Mr Heyes welcomed my interest in the school and arranged for me to conduct fieldwork at the start of the school year in 2012 for six weeks, and again in 2013 for same period. I positioned myself with students at the school primarily as a “supporter,” joining family and community members who came to rehearsals both to encourage the students and to demonstrate their commitment to the groups’ success through their physical presence. Although as a white American immigrant my differences were obvious, my sincere interest in the students’ learning and my participation in Pacific dance groups outside of the school helped me to transcend my outsider status. As a former classroom teacher, I aligned well with the teaching staff and could be sincerely empathetic to their needs and the minor disruptions my research project caused. I moved amongst supporter/teacher/colleague positionings throughout my study.

Mangere is a leafy suburb between Auckland Airport and coastal views of Manukau Harbour, situated about 15 minutes south via motorway of the Auckland city centre. Although they are a relatively small secondary school, with fewer than 700 pupils—giving them an underdog status compared to the far more populous grammar and Catholic schools that dominate the competition—Mangere College has regularly made a strong showing at Polyfest, bringing groups competing on each of the Māori, Cook Islands, Niue, Sāmoan, and Tongan stages, an Indian group to the Diversity Stage, and winning multiple first-place prizes in recent years. The majority of the pupils at the school are of Pacific heritage, followed by Māori students and a small number of Asian and African students, most from refugee families relocated to the neighbourhood.⁵³

The onus of organising and bringing a cultural group to the festival depends on the staff who assume the voluntary role of teacher-in-charge—one who recruits students to form a group, manages the rehearsal timetable, secures a physical space

to rehearse, liaises with parents, attends informational meetings for the festival organising committee, submits the entry paperwork required to compete, and delegates duties to other members of staff who will supervise rehearsals or perform other tasks as needed. If they have the expertise, teachers-in-charge will sometimes also assume the role of the group's instructor, or tutor, though this role is usually outsourced. I knew of tutors who had high profiles in the Pacific arts community and who worked for schools capable of paying for their services, but at Mangere College, family connections were typically called upon to find tutors in the school community willing to donate their time for a gratuity of cash or other gifts, dependent on fundraising efforts. Each cultural group also had student leaders, who were nominated by teachers-in-charge or tutors to take on extra responsibilities within the group and to assist them with teaching, disciplining, and motivating their peers. Student leaders were essential personnel for the success of cultural groups and were recognised with their own award category on most of the Polyfest stages. Teachers-in-charge or tutors chose some students as leaders because they had several years of experience in the group or were amongst the most skilled performers and could assist the tutors with helping newcomers.

Organising cultural groups is an undertaking that begins from nearly the very first day of school. The school year in New Zealand starts during the first week of February, and the scheduling of Polyfest in March harnesses the energy and momentum of the first term of school and avoids conflicts with school exams later in the year. Warm, fair weather can usually be counted on for outdoor practises—necessary with limited indoor space available for large groups of students—and the fresh air is welcomed after a day in classrooms. Once cultural group practises can begin—usually within the first two weeks of the school year—students commit to two to three hours of practise per weekday, and often on Saturdays, over a six- to eight-week period. Many students choose to join the group that corresponds with their cultural heritage or one reflecting a component of their multi-ethnic heritage, but there is no impediment to joining a different group, and some students do so due to interest in the performance genre or being in a group with established friends.

During my fieldwork period at Mangere College, I observed that the group tutors were methodical in sequencing their instruction. As students would accompany their dances with their own singing while performing at Polyfest, songs were taught first, so that harmonies, rhythms, pronunciations, and vocal styles could be established and the song lyrics memorised before adding choreography. Students used printed handouts, overhead projectors, and, in the case of outdoor rehearsals, poster boards to help them learn lyrics. When the students were ready to add movement, the choreography for individual items would be demonstrated—usually in four- to

eight-beat phrases—imitated, observed, and corrected, then drilled until students reached a sufficient level of competence to move on to the next phrase. If there were two tutors available, the boys and girls would be split up and taught their respective parts simultaneously. Those who lagged behind went to extra practises at lunchtimes, which the leaders organised, or were paired with more experienced students, who could take them through the movement sequences slowly during breaks in practise. When an entire performance item was learned and could be drilled with a minimum number of stops for correction, the transitions between items were practised. Smooth transitions—during which students change postures from sitting, standing, or kneeling in formation—are essential for a well-received performance. Tutors choreograph sixteen to thirty-two beats to move to the correct position for the next item. Items and transitions are gradually stitched together until the entire set can be performed in its entirety.

The practises I observed were mentally strenuous, and there were plenty of emotional peaks and valleys. The physical toll on students from practising was observable as well. Dancing and singing are physically taxing, as is the mental focus needed to commit words and movements to memory and replicate them correctly. Students were constantly in motion for two hours at a time, and formal breaks were infrequent, even for the toilet. One of my field notes after a particularly gruelling Cook Islands practise reads, “there was [figuratively] blood on the floor.” A student leader, Paulina, commented on the challenges of long practises:

Not only do you spend six hours at school, then you have two or three more hours of practise, and it can make you cranky, it makes you angry. Sometimes at practise you don't want to be there, but you have to because you made a commitment to the group.⁵⁴

There were instances in which tutors' frustrations boiled over, and students spent time sitting on the floor, with their legs crossed and heads bowed, being chastised during tirades about their apparent lack of focus or commitment. However, tutors and teachers-in-charge recognised that space to relax, play, eat, and laugh at each other's mistakes were essential for boosting morale and strengthening bonds between members. For example, Tuteru Samson, who tutored the Cook Islands group, was nothing short of masterful at sensing when his students needed to be sat down for a pep talk, a reprimanding, a huddle with the student leaders so they could hear from fellow students about their progress, or even a day off from practise when they had made significant headway.

After a long week of practising after school every day, students were rewarded on Saturday practises. Without bells, school business, and school uniforms to think

about, students arrived from home in their street clothes more rested than during the week. The day was always broken up with a shared meal after praying together and blessing the food—often provided and paid for by the tutors; their gifts of barbecued sausages, pizzas, or burgers from the shops at the Mangere Town Centre tacitly reminded the students that though they would frequently be “growled” (reprimanded), they would also be fed. Students would be given some leisure time with their fellow group members as well—sometimes the pool would be opened for the students to swim or a rugby ball would be tossed around. There was plenty of gossiping and joking. All this helped to balance the physical and mental labour of practising and creating the memories with friends for which the festival is known.

Cultural group practise was a place for family too, and coming to the school for support was welcomed. The tutors’ families sometimes attended to lend a hand with teaching. At Tongan group practises, there were parents and grandparents consistently present to sing the accompany for the *ma’ulu’ulu* (a seated action song) and many of the mothers’ and grandmothers’ hands were busy folding the endless number of ribbon rosettes that made up essential details of the students’ costumes. For other family members, support was simply through the act of turning up and being there. Around the gymnasium at Cook Islands practise, mothers, fathers, uncles, aunts, cousins, and siblings sat on the floor chatting, snacking, and minding the smaller children who played away from the practise area. I asked the grandmother of one of the students, with two young grandchildren playing nearby, why she liked coming to practise. She replied, “If it’s something to do with our culture, we like to be there.”



Figure 2. Mangere College Sāmoan group Saturday practise, 2012. Photograph courtesy of the author

Transforming Space

At Mangere College, there were no dedicated physical spaces for cultural group practise. Classrooms, the gymnasium, and outdoor spaces were adapted, the requirements being enough room to move and a minimum of hassle with locks and keys (negated by practising outdoors). Each cultural group claimed an area for their daily practises. The Tongan group gathered in the “hot spot,” a paved inner courtyard that was home to the school canteen; the Sāmoan group used the Sāmoan language classroom (Fig. 2) and the wooden deck and lawn that fronted it; the Niue group met on a grassy area between classroom blocks; and the Cook Islands group made use of the auditorium, and later the gymnasium when the volleyball season was over.

Appropriated rehearsal locations such as the gymnasium and sports fields—spaces in which cultural transmission cannot be taken for granted—were transformed at Mangere College by the intentional gathering of diasporic cultural groups.⁵⁵ The efforts for these transformations were seen at Mangere College in the teachers who added hours to their workdays chaperoning cultural practise, the tutors who re-arranged their work and family schedules, and students foregoing playing sport and hanging out with their friends, inviting physical exhaustion and perhaps repercussions for unfinished homework. Participation was not limited to the instruction-related roles of teacher and learner, and family presence and time for eating, socialising, and relaxing helped to construct a space of Pacific community and belonging.

The transformation of space through sound was a significant aspect of the construction of Pacific spaces at Mangere College. Sound itself territorialises, allowing music groups to make a claim of physical space present in the school during the Polyfest season by means of the high-pitched Cook Islands *tokere* (slit log drum) and rattle of Sāmoan “biscuit-tin” (metal box) drums; the bright, high-pitched, percussive strums of the Cook Islands *‘ukurere* (ukulele); the slaps and claps of the Sāmoan *fa’ataupati* (a standing body percussion dance performed by men); the masculine growls in the Niue *takalo* (war dance); and the vocal imitations of gunfire in the Tongan *taufakaniua* (battle dance).⁵⁶ The sounds of Pacific languages were also present in a number of ways, sometimes as the only language used for instruction, in the instruction of pronunciation of song texts, “counting off” when drilling, and in sung lyrics themselves. These culturally-specific sounds, iconic of other Pacific spaces in Auckland and Pacific homelands (whether real or imagined), when combined with environmental sounds—of buzzing cicadas, planes flying overhead to the nearby Auckland Airport, and the clattering, echoing cacophony of drumming in the hard-surfaced gymnasium—created a unique Mangere College Polyfest soundscape.⁵⁷ Over the college’s grounds after school and on Saturdays, sounds from the four groups competed

and overlapped, announcing individual Cook Islands, Niuean, Sāmoan, and Tongan spaces as well as creating an “aural signature” of the school’s diversity within its Pacific representation at Polyfest.⁵⁸

Rehearsal spaces are also transformed by the changes to the bodily hexis—“the ways of standing, speaking and walking, and therefore thinking and feeling”—which, in transnational communities of practise, takes on additional intention, responsibility, and imagination if these embodied habits are not easily acquired from their environment.⁵⁹ In dance, where choreography imitates activities of daily life, this presents particular challenges. In the Mangere College Sāmoan group, for example, students performing the *sasa* (a seated dance that includes logogenic movements of everyday activities) needed to portray activities typically done in Sāmoa, such as preparing *ava* (kava), climbing palm trees, weaving sennit, and casting fishing nets, as well as more abstract logogenic movements in Sāmoan dances accompanied by songs. Their tutor, Agnes Masoe, struggled to motivate the students to move with the appropriate weight and tension—with rigid torsos, fluid hands, and expressive eyes characteristic of the Sāmoan *ma’ulu’ulu*—and to communicate elements of the bodily habitus she acquired growing up in Sāmoa; in essence, to make their movements *more Sāmoan*. For students with more embodied knowledge (even if only because they were more experienced in their group’s dance forms and had a better ability to mimic their tutors) these changes were instantaneous as they entered the practise space, while for less experienced students, they happened over time as their bodies learned culturally-specific ways of moving and vocalising. As students acquired competence, the cohesiveness of the cultural group as a community of practice increased.

Between students’ daily incremental progress at cultural practise and their performances at the festival, an important milestone is the *fiafia* (Sāmoan; Tongan *fiefie*). A combination of dress rehearsal, fundraiser, and social event for families and other supporters, the *fiafia* events at Mangere College are a particular kind of Pacific space—what ethnomusicologist Thomas Turino calls a “heightened form” of diasporic cultural expression.⁶⁰ They represent the culmination of the many hours of participation and the reifications that have emerged from practise, as well as the tutors’ expertise and patience, students’ embodied knowledge, and their families’ commitment to the success of the group. In particular, the following ethnographic vignettes highlight costumes and fundraising, two significant and highly symbolic reifications of the practise of cultural groups.⁶¹

Vignette: The Tongan Group Fiefie

The Tongan fiefie was scheduled for the Saturday afternoon before the festival in the gymnasium. When I arrived, rows of chairs for the families and a speaker system were already set up. I had been asked to videotape the performance, so I set up my tripod and camcorder. Tongan pop music was playing at top volume, and some of the women, wearing festive, shiny kofu (blouses) and feath-er tekiteki (headpieces), got up to dance. The atmosphere was relaxed as family members trickled in and chatted with one another. Around the perimeter of the gym, and in the courtyard outside, mothers helped their children with their teunga (dance costumes). Both boys and girls wore white tupenu (wrap skirts), the girls' made of shiny white satin and the boys' from a cotton blend (Fig. 3). The girls paired their tupenu with kofu trimmed with blue ribbon and the boys with white collared sote (shirts). Blue and white are Mangere College's school colours and were chosen for the teunga at a parents' meeting.

Over the performers' tupenu, finely woven ta'ovala (mats of pandanus leaf fibres) were folded, wrapped around their waists, and tied with kafa (braided rope). Ta'ovala are valuable handmade items that are sometimes family heirlooms, and are essential for formal occasions. Over them were placed the fakaha'apai, wide fabric belts decorated with dozens of blue and white ribbon rosettes—which the mothers had meticulously folded during hours at cultural group practises—and trimmed with long, concertinaed ribbons. The students' feather tekiteki, vesa nima (wristbands), and vesa va'e (anklets) with the same ribbon rosettes emphasised the movements of their heads, hands, and feet respectively. The ensembles were completed by kahoa (garlands) of the ribbon rosettes. The girls were also wearing kahoa pule'oto (cowrie shell chokers) (Fig. 3).⁶²

Viliami, one of the more boisterous boys, who I have never seen still or quiet, leaned over deferentially as his mother, frowning with concentration, adjusted, tightened, and tucked. I saw her also looking after Tau, a Cook Islands student, as he folded and wrapped a borrowed ta'ovala. All around the gymnasium I saw the cheeky boys—the ones who always answered my questions with well-crafted jokes, goofed off at practises by doing one-armed pushups, and pretended to shoot each other with their taufakaniua (battle dance) props—silent and deferent as their mothers carefully and expertly fitted their ta'ovala and straightened their collars and tekiteki.

As their punake (director), Vaivai Kailahi, gathered the students outside the gym entrance so that they could process inside as a group, the students were quiet with anticipation, but the underlying sense of excitement was palpable. The external transformation of the students into their teunga had shifted something internal as well. Practise was over, and it was finally time to perform.



Figure 3. Student receiving help with her costume from her mother at the Mangere College Tongan group *fiefie*, 2012. Photograph courtesy of the author

The debut of costumes at the *fiefie* is a powerful reification for students and their families. For students, the receiving of their costumes represents their progress as performers in the cultural group. It is a reward for their commitment to their peers and an acknowledgement—after hours of the repetitive drilling, memorising, and perfecting of performance routines that must be completed in order to be worthy of performing at the festival—of their newly acquired competence. The careful fitting of the *teunga* in the socio-temporal space of the *fiefie* is a brief, but highly symbolic exchange between parents and their children—a sharing of embodied knowledge that marks the final transformation from cultural practise to performance.

The receiving of costumes is also a reification of the commitment of families and tutors over weeks of cultural practise. Like the Tongan group parents' hours of meticulous folding and knotting of ribbon to create the accessories for the *teunga*, and the sourcing of materials and sewing of *tupenu* and *kofu*, all groups directed significant time and energy toward costume design and production. Not only were points awarded for their costumes at the festival, but cultural group and school pride were at stake as well. Creating a full set of Cook Islands costumes is particularly onerous, as a minimum of two costume changes is expected, as well as distinct costumes

for a highlight of the performance set—a portrayal of a Cook Islands legend—and the boy and girl leaders. Many schools had three costume changes. The Samson family, who tutored the Cook Islands group, had erected a makeshift factory for costume making under a large marquee in their back garden. Tautape Samson’s specialty was as a costume designer, and friends and family worked tirelessly to make the elaborate head-to-toe outfits and accessories using fibres, shells, and feathers specially ordered from the Cook Islands and Sāmoa.

One of the most important aspects of membership in a Polyfest cultural group is working together as a team to raise funds, in part for the purpose of offsetting the potentially significant cost of costumes. Students each made a small financial contribution for their costumes, but fundraisers were needed to subsidise them. Cake stalls and barbecues are held throughout the Polyfest season, making the most of donated items from within family and community circles, but the ceremony of culturally-specific ways of presenting cash gifts is a defining characteristic of *fiefie/fiafia* as a constructed Pacific space. The vignette below describes this.

Vignette: The Sāmoan Group Fiafia

I arrived at the auditorium at 7:00 p.m. on the night of the Sāmoan fiafia. It was Wednesday, three days before the students were scheduled to compete at the festival. The raised stage area was too small for the group without it being cramped, so the floor space had been cleared of chairs, with the parents seated in the “stadium style” area at the rear. One of the Year 9 students, Christian, was stationed at the door to collect a “gold coin” offering (\$1–\$2), a common New Zealand fundraising custom. Lemoa Henry Fesulua’i, the teacher-in-charge, and Mrs Mele Ah Sam, the deputy principal and the Sāmoan Stage Coordinator, collected more substantial cash donations at a row of tables set up next to the entrance, logging each one in a notebook. Families trickled in and elders took their seats early, waiting patiently. There was a soft murmur in the room as the adults visited with each other and younger siblings played in the aisles. When it was time to begin, the students, in their formal wear—the girls in puletasi (form-fitting long dresses with short sleeves) and the boys in ‘ie faitanga (skirts falling below the knees) and white collared shirts for the boys—took their seats in neat rows on the floor; the costumes’ “reveal” would be later in the evening. Henry took the microphone and welcomed the families in Sāmoan and English—the latter was likely only for my benefit. After a prayer was invoked to bless the evening, he introduced the group as a whole, then passed the microphone on to student leader Mose, with instructions for each student to say their name and their family’s

ancestral village(s) in Sāmoa. Regardless of their fluency, which I know varies widely amongst the students, each student was able to do this confidently.

After each student spoke, it was time for the students to siva (dance) for donations. Individual female students were called up to dance, sometimes paired with a boy to dance with her as an aiuli (clown), their families' cue to come down to the floor with their cash gifts.⁶³ The other students sang, swayed, and clapped to accompany the dancers. Mothers tucked notes down the front of the girls' puletasi and into the boys' shirt pockets. Male relatives placed their donations in a hastily created donation box, made from a torn soda-can box, on the floor in front of the dancers. Other donations were more presentational—an uncle scattered \$20 notes in the air (a practise called lafo in Sāmoan), and a father walked down the stairs holding an ula (garland) of bills taped together, which he draped around his daughter's neck. After nine or ten students had performed, student leader Ailini was chosen. She looked stately and elegant in a champagne-coloured puletasi with a cowl neck, and she bowed to the audience before she began her siva. Her grandmother made her way down to the floor to join her. Watching the two generations dance together—smiling and occasionally locking eyes—was truly magical. The two generations of women performing together was one of the most memorable moments of the evening.

About twelve siva in total were performed, with Henry reading out the amount donated for each one—a practise done in some Sāmoan churches—to enthusiastic applause.⁶⁴ A portion was presented in envelopes to the group's tutors, Fa'apoi Tofa and Nese Masoe—this is their payment for tutoring. The students filed out of the auditorium to change into their costumes for their first official performance, but an equally important event for the evening had just successfully concluded.

Fundraising for festival costs at the school contributes to the construction of a particular kind of Pacific space. Families financially support cultural groups throughout the festival season, providing materials such as paper goods for selling food items and free services like sewing. However, raising funds at the *fiefie/fiafia* also provides family members the chance to actively participate in highly meaningful, culturally-specific displays of financial support, which are done similarly at other occasions in Pacific communities in New Zealand and are a component of complex community and social relations. For example, in Tongan communities in New Zealand, cash is viewed as a suitable gift for nearly all social transactions, particularly ones that mark life milestones.⁶⁵ Describing an example of a Tongan birthday celebration on Maui in Hawai'i, Tevita O. Ka'ili explains that to *fakapale* (place donations on the dancer's body) during the *tau'olunga* allows diasporic Tongans to express *mafana* (warmth), practise *tauhi vā* (the nurturing of sociospatial ties), and fulfil *fatongia* (community

obligations).⁶⁶ Giving cash gifts at events like the *fiefie* enables adults to model *fe'onga'iaki* (the values of mutual help, respect and empathy) to young people.⁶⁷ Cash gifts presented as part of dance performances are a reification of the families' commitment to the community of practise, and also legitimate Polyfest cultural groups as part of their greater cultural world.

Fiefie/fiafia at Mangere College intensify the Pacific spaces that are constructed by cultural groups over their weeks of rehearsal, and represent the development of a community of practise from its inception to its maturation. They are heightened "intentional gatherings" of students, teachers, tutors, and parents, transforming the school halls into "special landscape[s], marked by symbolism, practise, ritual and function."⁶⁸ The sounds territorialising the spaces are more ordered during *fiefie/fiafia* than at cultural practises, as they include formal speeches and well-rehearsed songs. Bodies wearing lovingly created costumes perform dance movements that have been perfected, and family support is embodied in dancing and the rituals of gift-giving. In the socio-temporal spaces of these intimate, celebratory occasions, the intentions, sounds, and bodies claim unique transnational Pacific identities.

Competition Day at the Festival

The formation of cultural groups and participation in weeks of rehearsals for Polyfest are all geared toward the goal of the festival performance. Although festival days lack the intimacy amongst students and their families experienced at *fiafia/fiefie* events, the physical and socio-temporal festival space is the only time of year when the entire ASB Polyfest community can gather in one place—where hours of practise, planning, fundraising, meetings, arguments, negotiations, and resolutions are reified into the festival events. In addition to the competition performances and the allocation of points and prizes by the judges, the four days of the festival—its structure, sensory experiences, and social interactions—are an integral aspect of the shared repertoire that give meaning to membership and engagement in a Polyfest cultural group.

ASB Polyfest is staged at the Manukau Sports Bowl and Velodrome, a sprawling complex of mainly grass fields where events including greyhound races and cycling races take place at other times of the year. The festival's audience is largely family members of performers; outsiders, like myself, are rare. Stage areas are located around the complex, with the largest area dedicated to the Māori stage. The Pacific stages are allocated space accordingly to the size of their audience, with larger areas for the Sāmoan and Tongan stages and smaller ones for the Cook Islands and

Niuean. The clubhouse behind the greyhound track serves as the hub for VIP guests—sponsors, dignitaries, and committee members—and provides much-needed shade.

Situated between stage areas are rows of vendors selling food, crafts, clothing, and souvenirs; portable toilets; and tents or booths for public services and community organisations such as the NZ Fire Service and Auckland Museum, who offer activities and free promotional merchandise. The food for sale contributes to the festival atmosphere. Māori *hangi* (meat and starchy vegetables cooked in an underground oven) and Pacific foods such as Sāmoan *sapasui* (chop suey), Tongan *‘otai* (a watermelon and coconut drink), and Cook Islands *poke* (steamed fruit pudding made with pumpkin or bananas)—usually sold by churches and youth groups to raise funds for their organisations—are sold alongside fast-food fare including chips, doughnuts, sausages, smoothies, and ice cream.

ASB, the naming sponsor, runs the carnival-like ASB Village, with games of chance and prizes bearing the ASB brand. Universities and colleges, naming sponsors of individual stages, have information stalls promoting their study programmes and support for Māori and Pacific students, reflecting the festival organisation’s emphasis on educational opportunity. Local radio stations provide entertainment by their programme hosts, live performances from rising Māori and Pacific musicians, and competitions for prizes. Stage emcees tell jokes, hold dance contests to give away t-shirts or other donated prizes, announce lost children, and keep the event running smoothly over the day of competition. One of the measures of a successful Polyfest stage manager is to keep the event running according to schedule, but achieving this in practise is usually difficult.

Students rise very early on their assigned competition day; the first slot on some stages is at 8:00 a.m. Students meet at their school and pack into buses that take them to the Velodrome in time to check in with the stage volunteers, unpack their costumes in the changing tent “backstage” (a set-up of tents and marquees to the side of the physical stage and minded by a volunteer who restricts access to schools at their assigned time), dress, add face paint and other finishing touches, say a unifying prayer to bless the performance, and take the stage under the judges’ watchful eyes, tempered with the exuberance of their friends and family in the audience (Fig. 4). Afterwards, the process goes in reverse; they decamp backstage, change back into their school uniform (if on a Friday) or street clothes (on Saturday), and are free to roam the festival.

A day spent as a spectator at the ASB Polyfest is marked by distinctive sensory experiences. The festival takes place in late summer, and the cool and damp mornings give way to the relentless Auckland sun, which is especially powerful due to New Zealand’s very thin ozone layer. A water truck and free sunscreen provide some relief.



Figure 4. Mangere College Tongan group members clowning for the cameras before their performance at ASB Polyfest, 2012. Photograph courtesy of the author

There is no seating, so parents, grandparents, and siblings stake out good viewing positions sitting on synthetic mats on the grass; older relatives unapologetically sit in

camping chairs that block the view of anyone sitting on the ground behind them. Shade is at a premium; most stages put up a marquee but request that only older patrons use it. Some watch performances peeking out from underneath umbrellas or *'ie lavalava* (sarongs) draped over their heads. Heat rises off the tarmac; the grass is inevitably sun-baked, dry and scratchy to the touch, and dotted with dusty patches from the thousands of feet carving paths between the stages, food vendors, and souvenir stalls. The occasional cloudbursts are torrential, scattering the crowds to find some kind of shelter until the rain passes.

When a student's competition performance is out of the way, or if they are there only to be a wildly enthusiastic supporter of their classmates, a day at the festival means freedom from the confines of school and the supervision of their teachers. Students move from stall to stall to look at souvenirs with their friends and cousins, meet students from other schools, flirt with potential love interests, indulge in festival foods, gather around Auckland radio station booths set up with live performers and anywhere else giving away prizes or gift bags, and shuffle through bottlenecked crowds to see their own schools perform. Perhaps the most distinctive sound at Polyfest is the exuberant screaming of classmates that begins once schools take the stage. No amount of pleading from the adult stage manager for quiet—so that judges can hear the opening song lyrics—can abate it.

The social experience of the festival is a reward for weeks of hard work and commitment to their cultural group, but also a key component of the shared repertoire of the ASB Polyfest community of practise. Within the festival space, young Pacific people experience kinship with other youth across school affiliations and ethnicities, and with real or imagined island homelands. For urban youth within Auckland's multicultural environment, the village-like atmosphere of the festival grounds is a socio-temporal place of belonging.

Prize presentations, held in the late afternoon on the final day of competition, are the ritual that mark the end of the festival. Those who are able to stay until the awards ceremony gather in front of the stage, and those who cannot eagerly check their phones for news of the "placings," with the hope that their school is amongst the winners. Awards categories differ slightly between stages, but generally include awards for individual routines, the highest aggregate scores, student leadership, and costumes. The final vignette describes this experience for the Mangere College Cook Islands group.

Vignette: The Cook Islands Stage Performance and Prizegiving

Moana Samson, the matriarch of the Samson family, has staked out an area in front of the stage for Mangere College parents and supporters with plastic mats, easily visible by the red t-shirts that were custom made for the students to wear at the festival. I hunkered down next to them as the emcee, Mr George George, filled the wait-time with recorded Cook Islands pop music and a few prize giveaways. The schedule was running slightly behind, making the anticipation even sharper. It had already been a long day. We had started the day at dawn, meeting at school to take a chartered bus together to the festival grounds, and then checking in the students in the early late summer's morning's chill and wet grass. It all felt like a blur. As the students dispersed to enjoy the festival, I lost track of them, but I knew they would make their way to the changing tent at their designated time. Tautape Samson would be fussing over the girls to fit their skirts and tītis (feather hip bands) and one of the mamas would be helping the boys fit their belts, elaborate headdresses, arm bands, and anklets. I could imagine the students in a circle, holding hands and with their heads bowed in prayer as we had done together in the final rehearsal on Friday afternoon. It had all come down to this.

The performance, in sum, was brilliant. The voices were bright, the group adjusted to the size of the stage well, they nailed the transitions. The lightweight-but-awkwardly-bulky Styrofoam statue of Tangaroa, god of the sea, was placed in perfect timing during the transition between the kapa rima (action song) and the legend (Fig. 5). The vocal harmonies in the kapa rima were right on the money—the tune had been borrowed from the song “We Are the World” and the surging key change was a hit with the audience. The students hammed it up with wild abandon during the legend, playing opposing tribes in battle. There was a nail-biting pause during the one of the key trouble spots—would Jackson, the student assigned the role of the rangatira (chief), remember every word of his speech and would the students be able to change into their full second costume for the ura pa’u (drum dance), the climax of the set? Jackson did remember his lines, and the costume changes went smoothly. Very importantly, only one or two costume accessories fell off during the entire performance—they did mean deducted points, but very few.



Figure 5. Mangere College Cook Islands group performing *kapa rima* at ASB Polyfest, 2013. Photograph courtesy of the author

By this point, I knew every note and every word of each song. My heart was in my throat and I felt like I had been holding my breath for the entire twenty-five-minute set. Relief flooded my body on the final drumbeat. The students' hard work had paid off a hundred-fold. There was only one more school left to perform and then the lengthy wait for the results. The students who had performed, flushed and happy and now decked out in their red t-shirts, picked their way through the crowd and filled up the rest of the mats. While we waited for the judges to tally up the scores, the emcees kept us all entertained with songs, jokes, and dance-offs to drumming—it was a much-needed time for the students to relax, have some belly laughs, and get up spontaneously and dance when the drumming moved them. Finally, the formal start to the prizegiving began. The trophies and wooden plaques were set out at a long table and, after a series of remarks by the major sponsors, the third-, second-, and first-place prizes for the individual items, leaders, and costumes were read out by radio host Bernard Tairea's smooth voice. Every prize announcement was met with exuberant cheering and sixteen beats from the drummers, so the leaders from the winning schools could dance across the stage—one even punctuated his entrance by doing a split! Mangere College accumulated quite a few prizes, including first place for the ute (traditional song), kapa rima, and ura pa'u, and for its drummers. But taking the overall first place had been the aim of Tuteru Samson, Mangere College's

Cook Islands team tutor, from the start—to “take the trophy home again” as he told us. Even though the students had performed brilliantly and we couldn’t really have asked more of them, coming second would be crushing.

After what seemed like an eternity, it was time to announce the overall winners.

“In third place . . . Tangaroa College.”

“In second place . . . Sir Edmund Hillary Collegiate.”

This was the moment when we all realised we had come in first. Elation washed over our faces as we grinned maniacally at each other. In an unfortunate anti-climax, Bernard Tairea delayed the formal announcement of the winner for the lowering of the Cook Islands flag and the singing of the national anthem.

“And the first place overall for the Cook Islands stage 2013 is . . . Mangere College . . .”

The end of the announcement was drowned out by screams as a sea of red shirts went airborne, fists punched the sky, bodies jumped up and down, whooping and cheering and hugging each other as the drummers played their final sixteen victory beats. As the band played a closing prayer and the crowd dispersed, the students embraced their friends and family, took photos, and relished the moment that for many of them will be the highlight of their school years. The following week there was a final gathering at school to celebrate the Polyfest season over shared food and a video-watching party, after which the students turned their focus to the sports season and other school activities and the group’s tutors returned to their normal lives. Mangere College’s cultural groups would re-form in a year’s time, beginning the process anew.

On festival days, tutors see who their students have become through what they have learned. Performers glean ideas from other schools’ performances. Old members initiate the new members in the rituals and protocols of their roles. Young children, who watch their older siblings from the audience, may set their intention to take the stage one day, and a parent may feel motivated to volunteer their time the following year. When the prizes have been given out and the festival finishes late Saturday afternoon, the ASB Polyfest community of practise continues its activities, with another year added to its history and its practises further developed.

Conclusions

The origins of the ASB Polyfest exemplify the self-determination of transnational Pacific peoples in Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand to transform physical and ideological spaces into sites for the continuation of cultural transmission. Countering social and economic marginalisation, Māori and Pacific communities created physical space—the Puke O Tara community centre—and cultural spaces through multicultural educational norms, including the Polynesian Club, with the support of progressive educational leadership at Hillary College. Similar efforts at Aorere College, Papatoetoe High School, and Seddon College led to a collaboration amongst schools and communities to stage the first festival in 1976.

As interest in and support for the ASB Polyfest has grown exponentially, it has become a significant site for cultural transmission for Pacific youth. Teaching and learning practises in gymnasiums, sports fields, school courtyards, and auditoriums “recode and alter spaces into particular Pacific places, territorialising and changing the places in which they occur.”⁶⁹ Collaborations between tutors, students, teachers, and families co-create Polyfest cultural group practises as socio-temporal spaces where ideals of cultural representation, participation, and expression are explored and negotiated.

The creation of cultural space at Mangere College through cultural group practises illustrates how transnational communities of practise can transform physical and social environments through the development of a shared repertoire of routines, rituals, language, and sound.⁷⁰ In my fieldwork, The observation of daily rehearsals revealed incremental changes: the establishment of norms and procedures, the embodiment of new knowledge, the spontaneous creation of inside jokes, the development of relationships, and the peaks and valleys of group morale. The *fiafia* events described here are reifications of the extensive preparation of communities of practise over weeks of rehearsal, and demonstrate the investment in cultural transmission by students, their tutors, teachers, and families. This is followed by the final culmination of practise at the competition day itself, during which the sport and racing facilities of the Manukau Velodrome are transformed by the gathering of the ASB Polyfest community in its entirety and the shared repertoire of the festival space—competitive performances, victories, disappointments, soundscapes, foodscapes, friendships, and play.

This paper is a brief representation of the forty-five-year period during which the ASB Polyfest has constructed unique cultures of music and dance transmission and performance within Auckland’s transnational Pacific communities. The festival continues to be transformative for Auckland students, and is an ideal representation

of how transnational Pacific communities in New Zealand are dynamic, responsive, and continuously developing communities of practice.

Michelle Ladwig Williams recently graduated from the University of Auckland with a PhD in anthropology (ethnomusicology). She also holds an MA in music education from the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa and a BM from Arizona State University. Her research interests include music and dance transmission, Oceanic music and dance, transnational Pacific identities, multi-ethnic Pacific peoples, and popular musics of the Pacific. She has worked extensively with Pacific music artists in Aotearoa as the education manager for the New Zealand Music Commission, Te Reo Reka o Aotearoa.

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Research Notes and Creative Work

This section of *Pacific Arts* features brief descriptions of original scholarship, extensions of previous research, works in progress (academic, creative, and/or curatorial), fresh perspectives on current scholarship and practice, announcements of new collection acquisitions, and creative work.

AXELLE TOUSSAINT

Kaili Chun: The Native Artist as Storyteller and Steward of the Land and the Water

Abstract

This Research Note proceeds from an interview with Native Hawaiian artist Kaili Chun following her presentation at the “Pacific Island Worlds: Oceanic Dis/Positions” symposium, which took place at the University of California, Santa Cruz, in 2018. The conversation delved into Chun’s interactive installation practice through a discussion of three of her artworks: Veritas (2012), Hulali i ka lā (2017), and Uwē ka lani, ola ka honua (2021). Each of these pieces celebrates the importance and value of water in Native ecologies, and proposes to view Native practices of stewardship of the land as pathways towards a more sustainable future. Ultimately, the conversation draws a portrait of the Native artist as a storyteller and steward of the land.

Keywords: *installation art, Indigenous art, water, stewardship, Native ecologies, storytelling, Hawai’i, Australia, Torres Strait Islands*

In March of the second year of the pandemic, while at home in the Indian Ocean, I met via Zoom with Native Hawaiian artist Kaili Chun (b. 1962), who was calling from the Hawaiian island of O’ahu. The setting of our communications—across oceans—turned out to be representative of our conversation, which revolved around waterways and transoceanic crossings of the digital, intellectual, and sensory types. In the rich and complex body of work that Kaili Chun has produced over the years, water—and water’s centrality to Indigenous lives—has been a recurring theme. The three artworks that are presented here are emblematic of Chun’s project to honor water as an important element of Native ecologies. Water is celebrated within these pieces as a connective vector between people and with the ancestors. Water also functions as a point of departure for a larger investigation of place and its genealogies.

I first met Chun at the “Pacific Island Worlds: Oceanic Dis/Positions” symposium that took place at the University of California, Santa Cruz, in the spring of 2018. At this event, which gathered Pacific Studies scholars and artists from



Figure 1. Kaili Chun, *Veritas* (detail), 2012. Fifty steel cells, each 96 x 8 x 8 in., Waimānalo Beach, O'ahu. Photograph by Kapulani Landgraf. Courtesy of the artist

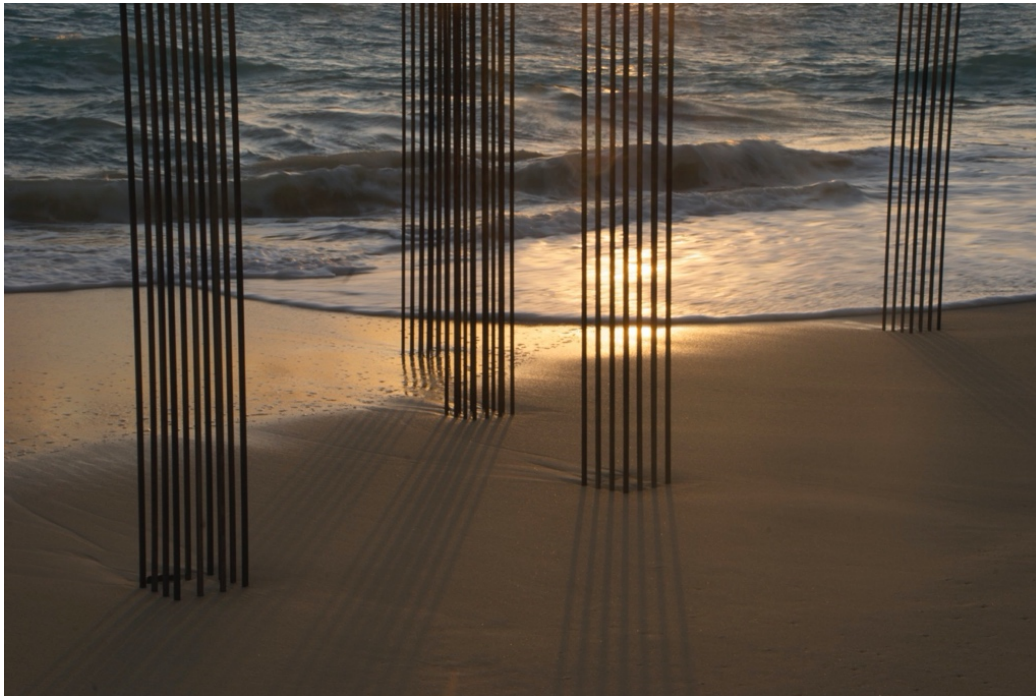


Figure 2. Kaili Chun, *Veritas* (detail), 2012. Steel cells, each 96 x 8 x 8 in., Waimānalo Beach, O'ahu. Photograph by Kapulani Landgraf. Courtesy of the artist

around the United States, Chun presented two interactive installations entitled *Veritas* (2012) and *Hulali i ka lā* (2017).

Chun's 2012 installation *Veritas* consisted of fifty steel cells, each made up of eight-foot-tall vertical rods placed temporarily on the shore of Waimānalo on the island of O'ahu (Figs. 1–3). The selection of this beach as the site of the installation was highly strategic and integral to the piece: art historian and critic Margo L. Machida observes that the liminality of the beach as the meeting point of land and sea and as a historic point of contact between people and cultures—along with its appeal to tourists and foreign homebuyers alike—makes it a “privileged site of protest and occupation” for Native Hawaiians.¹

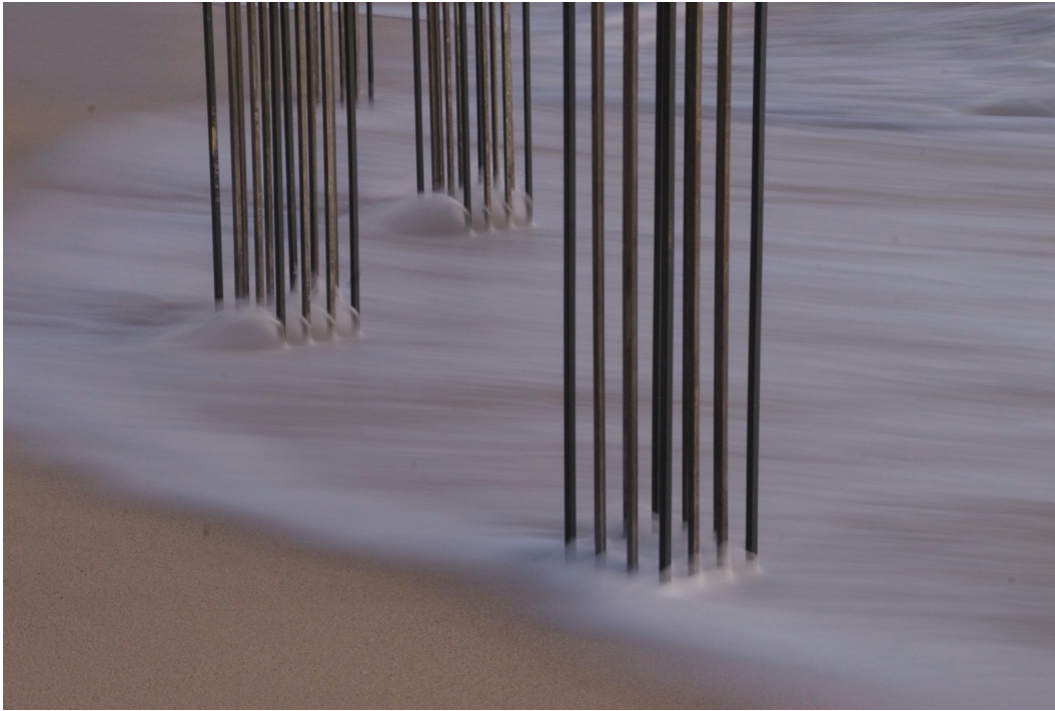


Figure 3: Kaili Chun, *Veritas* (detail), 2012. Steel cells, each 96 x 8 x 8 in., Waimānalo Beach, O'ahu. Photo by Kapulani Landgraf. Courtesy of the artist

The steel cells, Chun explains, were initially meant to represent the ruins of the Industrial Age brought about by settlers to the islands, and to allude to the settlers themselves as foreign bodies lodged into the Native land. However, the piece underwent an unexpected metamorphosis. In the early hours of the morning following the piece's installation, the steel structures started falling, one after the other—under the combined actions of the elements as the high tide softened the sand—and, perhaps, due also some metaphysical presence.

At this moment, Chun realized that the piece “was no longer about the Other. This was about us. This was about our people . . . this was no longer in my control . . . the ancestors [were] coming in and claiming” the space of the shore, which, for decades, has been occupied and owned by non-Natives.² This material and conceptual transmutation could be best perceived through sensory cues: the light of the full moon, the uncanny absence of wind on the typically windswept beach, the uncharacteristically glassy surface of the water, the quietness, and the sudden, intermittent thuds of the cells falling down onto the sand “like dead bodies” (Fig. 4).³ These sounds accentuated a conceptual transformation of the installation: from the cells representing the colonizing ways of the foreigner to their embodiment of our kūpuna (ancestors) becoming fallen warriors, lying prone upon the shore.

Machida calls the collapse of *Veritas*'s steel pillars a “metaphor for the Hawaiian people's capacity to move through and beyond the imposed structures of conditions and institutions that they did not create but are unable to avoid.”⁴ However, during the course of our conversation, Chun provided me with a different interpretation of the event. In her view, the cells, which were initially meant to represent colonizers, came to embody the ancestral connection that pervades the shore—they became beacons of, and to, the ancestors. This radical shift in the intended meaning of the work opens up questions about the agency of the art object: can it exceed the artist's agency? Chun might agree that it does, as for her the role of the Native artist is precisely to channel the ancestral forces that animate the landscape—to steward the land and tell its stories. Stewardship is achieved here through an aesthetic that is resolutely contemporary. While informed by traditional Hawaiian iconography, Chun's use of modern materials and techniques strives to re-articulate this heritage in an effort to connect Hawai'i's past with its futures.



Figure 4. Kaili Chun, *Veritas* (detail), 2012. Steel cells, each 96 x 8 x 8 in., Waimānalo Beach, O'ahu. Detail of "fallen warriors" with Makapu'u Lighthouse in the background. Photograph by Erin Yuasa. Courtesy of the artist



Figure 5. Kaili Chun, prototypes for components of *Hulali i ka lā*, 2017. Copper, of varying sizes. Photograph by Kaili Chun. Courtesy of the artist



Figure 6. Kaili Chun, *Hulali i ka lā*, final installation at the Prince Waikiki Hotel, Kālia, Honolulu, 2017. Copper. Photograph by Linny Morris. Courtesy of the artist

Chun’s 2017 participatory installation *Hulali i ka lā* responded to a similar impetus to reveal space as a palimpsest construct, a conglomerate of imbricated and storied layers—at once existing as time forward and time past. *Hulali i ka lā* took place at the Hawai’i Prince Hotel Waikīkī—constructed on the site of a former muliwai—in Kalia, O’ahu. A muliwai is an estuary, a place where fresh water meets salt water, a threshold between the land and the ocean. For this piece, Chun brought together the hotel’s employees and their relatives to participate in the creation of approximately 850 hand-hammered copper pieces shaped like hīnana, a fish that has the capacity to swim upstream because of its characteristically elongated belly fin (Fig. 5). The copper sculptures were suspended from the ceiling of the hotel lobby and arranged in an undulating pattern that reimagined the flow of the defunct freshwater stream on which the hotel is located (Figs. 6–7). Light bouncing off the hammered finishes of the copper forms replicated the optical effect of sunlight on moving water—the title of the installation, *Hulali i ka lā*, means “shimmering in the sun.” The site of the hotel was thus re-activated as a muliwai, a place of meeting and transformation.

Hulali i ka lā was commissioned by the hotel on the occasion of a renovation of its premises. Chun saw this transformation as an opportunity to share knowledge about Hawaiian culture and history with an audience of mainly non-Hawaiian participants, who would themselves become the “new storytellers of the place” (Figs. 8–9).⁵

A. Mārata Tamaira has underscored the tensions between Western and Indigenous ways of knowing and understanding the world, particularly with regard to the land, that *Hulali i ka lā* makes visible. “From a Western perspective,” she notes, “land is viewed as a commodity to be domesticated, organized, and ultimately dominated, while for Kānaka Maoli [Native Hawaiians] it is a cherished ancestor.”⁶ While unapologetically occupying space, Chun’s installations stop short of claiming ownership of the land. Rather, her work fosters the idea of a common ground, a shared land sustaining different forms of life that ought to be in synergy with one another. Through her work Chun asks, “How can we take care of our resources and our people?”

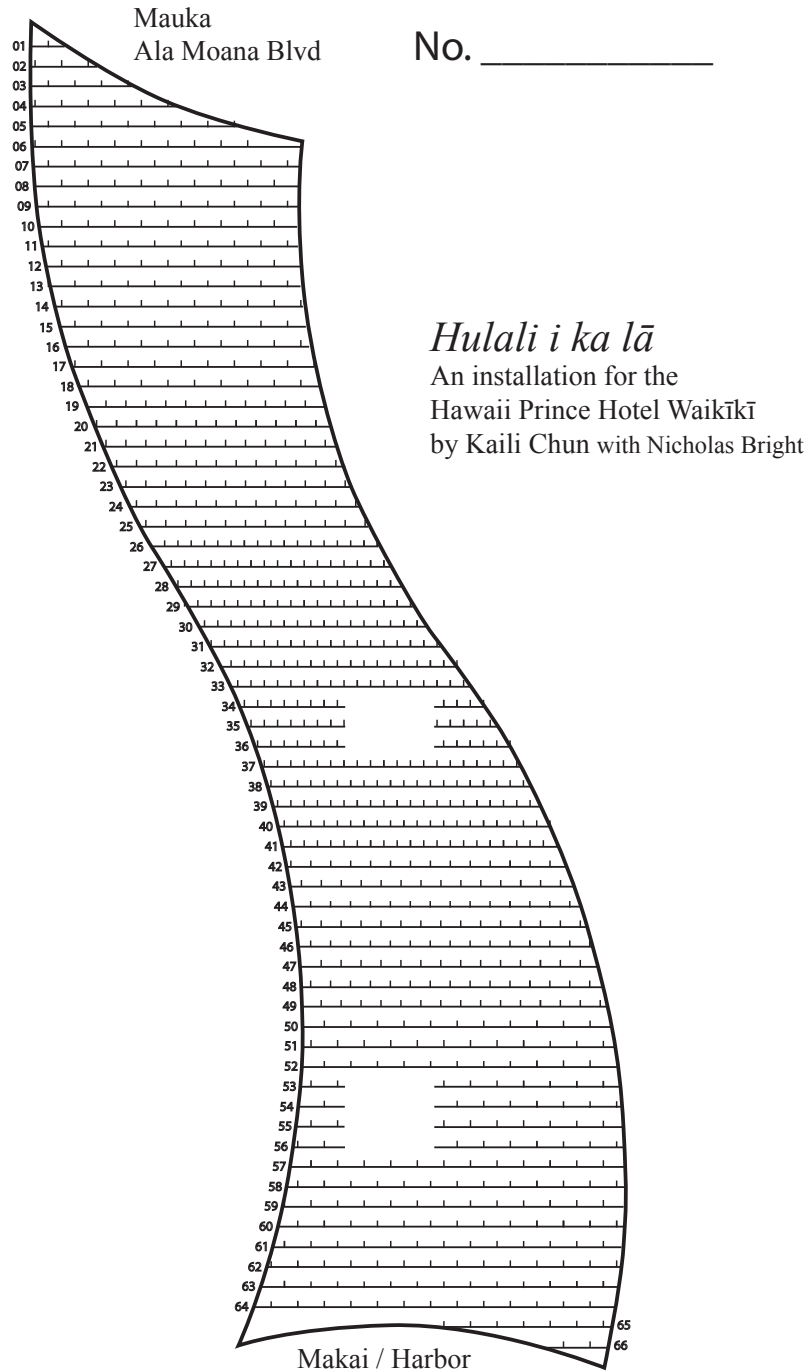


Figure 7. Kaili Chun, *Hulali i ka lā*, 2017. Installation plan, Prince Waikīkī Hotel, Kālia. Template of the “hammering cards” given to each of the 625 individuals who hammered a copper “fish” element for *Hulali i ka lā*. The copper pieces were uniquely numbered so that each person would know exactly where their hammered copper was to be located. The installation diagram was marked with these numbers and the corresponding locations were indicated on the installation’s on-site layout. Drawing courtesy of Nicolas Bright



Figures 8 and 9. Participants at one of twenty hammering sessions for Kaili Chun's installation *Hulali i ka lā*, held over a four-month period in 2017. Prince Waikīkī Hotel employees, their families, guests, and others associated with the hotel hammered copper elements to be used in the installation. Photographs by Nicholas Bright. Courtesy of the artist

Both *Veritas* and *Hulali i ka lā* allowed Chun to attend to the particularity of singular colonial narratives and genealogies. In her latest work—presented at the 10th Asia Pacific Triennial at the Queensland Art Gallery/Gallery of Modern Art in December 2021–April 2022—Chun put different points of colonial settlement and exploitation across the Pacific in relation to one another. *Uwē ka lani, ola ka honua* (Fig. 10) is a participatory and interactive installation that foregrounds the sacredness of water as a common element of both Native Hawaiian and Aboriginal Australian cultures. Visitors to the triennial are invited to make their way through a futuristic landscape made up of 400 steel cables stretched from floor to ceiling, each including a glass vial. The vials contain samples of water—either freshwater or saltwater—collected by various Aboriginal and Indigenous communities of Australia and the Torres Strait Islands (Fig. 11).



Figure 10. Kaili Chun, *Uwē ka lani, ola ka honua*, 2021. Four hundred steel cables with water-filled glass vials. Installation for the 10th Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art at the Queensland Art Gallery/Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane, Australia. Photograph by Natasha Harth. Courtesy of the artist

Alternatively, the participants were also invited to send soil or detritus, to materialize the absence or scarcity of water and to suggest, in its absence, a source that has dried up. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, contact between the artist and each participant-collector, or “steward” as Chun calls them, was established via a paper form through which each steward shared a water-related story about themselves. Each participant also sent along a local water sample. In the installation, each glass vial is etched with a unique number that enables visitors to access information about the individual who collected the sample, along with the name, stories, sounds, and genealogy of the corresponding body of water.

The title of the work, *Uwē ka lani, ola ka honua*, is a Hawaiian proverb that translates as “when the sky weeps, the earth lives.” It references the interconnectedness of all living beings and the convergences between Aboriginal and Native Hawaiian experiences. The steel cables holding the water vials are inclined to resemble rainfall, reinforcing the idea of water as a connection between the sky, the land, and the people (Fig. 12). The installation functions as an archive of a new genre. Moving away from the systematicity expected of a traditional archive, Chun’s water archive is organic in both its aesthetics and its

content, inspired by the cycles of human and non-human life, and laden with affect through the personal narratives that were encoded in the vials. The futuristic inflections of the piece remind us that this archive is oriented onward—it is about looking back at Indigenous practices of stewardship of land and water that have proven their valor and efficacy, in order to inspire a more balanced and restorative approach to our earth in the future.



Figure 11. Kaili Chun, *Uwē ka lani, ola ka honua* (detail), 2021. Four hundred steel cables with water-filled glass vials. Installation for the 10th Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art at the Queensland Art Gallery/Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane, Australia. Photograph by Natasha Harth. Courtesy of the artist



Figure 12. Kaili Chun, *Uwē ka lani, ola ka honua* (detail), 2021. Four hundred steel cables with water-filled glass vials. Installation for the 10th Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art at the Queensland Art Gallery/Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane, Australia. Photograph by Natasha Harth. Courtesy of the artist

With this new work, which will be on view through April 25, 2022, Chun extends the geographic range of her interest, engaging with the Indigenous peoples of Australia and Torres Strait Islands to foreground comparative, interdependent histories of different bodies of water across the Pacific. While mobilizing a transpacific lens, she remains attentive to the specificity of particular locales, demonstrating a renewed investment in restoring a sense of place eroded by a hundred years of colonialism.

Axelle Toussaint is a PhD candidate in visual studies at UC Santa Cruz. She holds an LLM from UC Hastings College of the Law and an MA in art and design history and theory from the New School. Her current research examines colonial and postcolonial experiences of trauma and fragmentation in the islands of the western Indian Ocean, and their mediation through visual culture, performance, and imagination.

Notes

¹ Margo L. Machida, "Pacific Itineraries: Islands and Oceanic Imaginaries in Contemporary Asian American Art," *Asian Diasporic Visual Cultures and the Americas* 3, no. 1–2 (March 14, 2017): 28, <https://doi.org/10.1163/23523085-00302002>. See also A. Mārata Tamaira, "Frames and Counterframes: Envisioning Contemporary Kanaka Maoli Art in Hawai'i," PhD diss., (Australian National University, 2015).

² Kaili Chun, interview by the author, March 6, 2021.

³ Kaili Chun, interview.

⁴ Machida, "Pacific Itineraries," 26.

⁵ Noe Tanigawa, "Kaili Chun: Local/Global," *Hawai'i Public Radio*, May 9, 2017, <https://www.hawaiipublicradio.org/arts-culture/2017-05-09/kaili-chun-local-global>.

⁶ A. Mārata Tamaira, "Frames and Counterframes," 109.

JOE BALAZ

Hawaiian Islands Pidgin Visual and Textual Poetry

Abstract

Joe Balaz—a writer, visual artist, and active advocate for Hawaiian Islands Pidgin (HIP)—discusses the reception of his HIP poems and art by literary magazines around the world, and presents examples of his published creative works.

Keywords: *Hawai'i, Pidgin, Hawaiian Islands Pidgin, Hawai'i Creole English, poetry, visual poetry, contemporary art, diaspora*

In 2015, the United States Census Bureau declared that Hawaiian Islands Pidgin, a Creole variant of English, was officially a language. This anticlimactic announcement was largely ignored by people who grew up in Hawai'i. It was a tiny blip of information that offered a bit of comedy; the proclamation by the federal government agency was like telling a large number of people that a language that they currently speak—the same language that their ancestors spoke—was now suddenly legitimate, copacetic, and acceptable. (By the way, in case you hadn't noticed, the sky is blue, when it is not painted cloudy and gray, and the sun rises in it every morning.)

Due to decades of stereotypes, misinformed labeling, and an unfortunate lack of necessary knowledge about what is an innovative, multicultural adaptation of the English language, a ridiculous and negative interpretation of Pidgin was imposed upon the greater society.

The former identification of Hawaiian Islands Pidgin as “Hawai'i Creole English” and its acronym (HCE) are archaic and obsolete to me—especially now that HIP is an “official language” (and I say this with a bit of sarcasm, knowing that it has always been official). Times have changed. In the future, I will continually express this point by not referring to those old identifiers anymore. I have used them in the past, even in the immediate past, to help shepherd along new, unfamiliar, but curious eyes and ears to fully realize what Hawaiian Islands Pidgin is.

HIP, the new and appropriate acronym that I am adding to the Pidgin lexicon, is a very positive lingo that has a rich past, and it will constantly evolve into a richer future. Its value to communicate effectively, and be incorporated into a dynamic literary and artistic movement, is evident in the Hawaiian Islands Pidgin literature and art that has already been produced. Imaginative people who speak it—and who understand its significance as a language that reflects the world that surrounds them—have succeeded in creating this literature and art. I have long recognized that Hawaiian Islands Pidgin is a very sophisticated language. Since its birth in the early nineteenth century, it has grown in complexity, enabling people from various ethnic and language backgrounds to create a singular language that all of them can understand.

I think of Pidgin as if it were a form of linguistic jazz. Similar to jazz, it is free flowing and growing, like a saxophone blowing random and rhythmic droplets of rain into your brain. Get hip to HIP, as you listen and hear what it is telling you.

I am an active advocate for Hawaiian Islands Pidgin. As a writer and artist, I have had the pleasure of being published by a number of progressive editors nationally and internationally. These editors and their inclusive platforms are providing new avenues for the appreciation of the growing expressive creativity from Hawai'i.

I reiterate: What I am bringing forth is actually what I have been working on for some time now, which is to expand Hawaiian Islands Pidgin literature and art as far as global reception will take it. You have to first move forward with something substantial to make your case. I, and others who create literary and art works in HIP, have clearly shown this over the years.

There is a transition point at which the uninformed truly realize and can become enlightened. That sea change is now. A cumulative breakthrough of what needed to be broken through and stated as obvious has already occurred. Hawaiian Islands Pidgin is a language. It always has been. It began in the earliest moments of its multicultural creation, so that people brought together quickly under different circumstances as immigrants were able to communicate effectively with each other, because it was vitally necessary to do so to survive in a new society.

A few years ago, in pondering some of the themes of the then-upcoming 2018 symposium “Pacific Island Worlds: Transpacific Dis/Positions—Crosscurrents in Indigenous, Diasporic and Colonial Histories of Oceania,” I came up with an idea of what I could present at the event. I asked the editors of some of the different literary and art magazines that I appeared in, why they published my writing and art in Pidgin. I inquired as to how those works, as examples of Hawaiian Islands Pidgin creativity, fit into their collective vision of the contemporary

literature and art that they were publishing. I was curious about their viewpoints and their decisions to offer poetry and art that was written in and created with a particularly local variant of the English language to an audience that had most likely never been exposed to Hawaiian Islands Pidgin before. In sharing the responses of these different editors, I essentially became an intermediary to my own work, and in doing so, I interspersed a few of my HIP poems and art images into a presentation. I have incorporated those relevant ideas from that 2018 presentation into the narrative that you are now reading. Here is a new poem to take you over a bridge and into that narrative:

WEN I STAY SPEAKING

I know of wat I speak
wen I stay speaking.

So as I profess
wat I going profess

wit intellect kine analysis
using good relatable stuff

we going see wat we going see.

I going bust out
wun manifesto

and we going presto
change-o da lingo.

By all kine means and scenes
and nuts and bolts too

I have nutting against
da eggheads.

On da contrary
we can coexist quite nicely

to open minds

to wun blue-collar
and grassroots perspective.

Some of da best universities
I've ever been to and attended

are located

in neighborhood bars
and living rooms.

So wen we mix

all da varied philosophies
and dissertations togettah

tings going be bettah
in da long run foa everybody.

Mark Young, the editor of *Otoliths*, an online and print literary and art magazine in Australia, had this to say about why he had published my work: "Because it's good poetry. Also, it has enough in common with standard English to be able to stand alone, to be understood with ease, with only an extremely minimal glossary required. *Otoliths* has an eclectic selection of contributions. Poetry written in Hawaiian Islands Pidgin fits in quite comfortably."¹

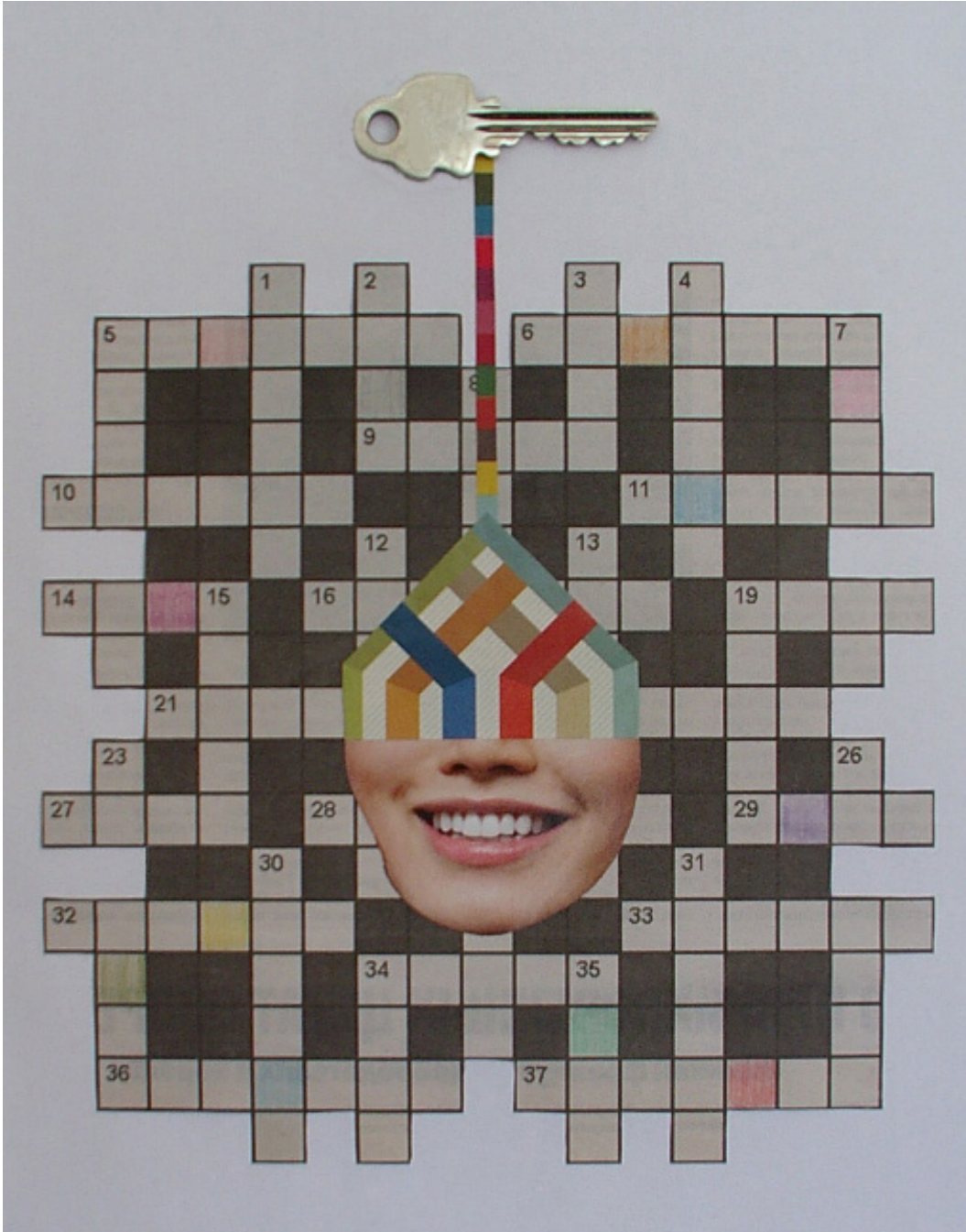


Figure 1. Joe Balaz, *Figuring Out Pidgin*, 2018.² Digital photomontage and mixed media. Courtesy of the artist

“Bite Da Eye” is one of the many Pidgin poems of mine that has been published in *Otoliths*.³ Before reading the poem, there are some terms that you should be aware of. “Haole” is a Hawaiian word that formerly described any foreign person but came to more commonly signify a white person. “Ono kine grinds”

means good food. The word “squid” has become a local slang term in Hawai‘i; when a person says that they are going fishing for squid, they actually mean octopus.

When old time fishermen in Hawai‘i speared an octopus, they would immediately cup the head of the sea animal, bite the eyes with their teeth, and then quickly flip the head inside out. Cupping, biting, and flipping the head inside out would be done in one swift action. This would immobilize the octopus, and you wouldn’t have tentacles grabbing you all over the place. When I used to skin dive, I speared many an octopus with a three-prong Hawaiian sling and it was always an effort getting the sea creatures off of the spear shaft because the animal would be grabbing and holding on tight with its suction cups. I never tried the bite and flip method. Octopus have very strong, parrot-like beaks. I didn’t like the idea of biting something that could bite me back. Those old-time fishermen knew what they were doing.

BITE DA EYE

Wen we wen buss out
wit all da local kine slang

da haoles at da adah tables

wen look at each of us
like we had two heads—

we might as well have been from Pluto.

Dey wuz listening
to two island expatriates

one from Ohio
and one from Michigan

talking wit da visitor from Hawai‘i.

Da Pidgin flew like wun strange bird
in dat small breakfast café in Ann Arbor.

Wen da waitress wen bring da pancakes
dat wuz as big as da plate dey wuz on

da island vernacular wen flap its wings.

“Ho, dose buggahs are huge!”

And wen she wen arrive
wit my order of hash browns, eggs, and ham,

I wen announce aftah I wen try ‘um,

“Ono kine grinds, brah,
and da ham not dat salty!”

We wuz talking story
in dat same familiar language

about da place
wheah we wen all grow up.

Anykine stuff

from spearfishing and bodysurfing
to da secrets of catching squid.

“Yeah, brah,

you bite da eye
and den you turn da squid head inside out.”

Wun haole lady
at wun nearby table heard dat

and she had wun look on her face
like she wuz tinkin,

“What the hell are these people
talking about?”

It shall remain wun mystery to her

cause we wen bite da eye
and we wen also bite da ears.

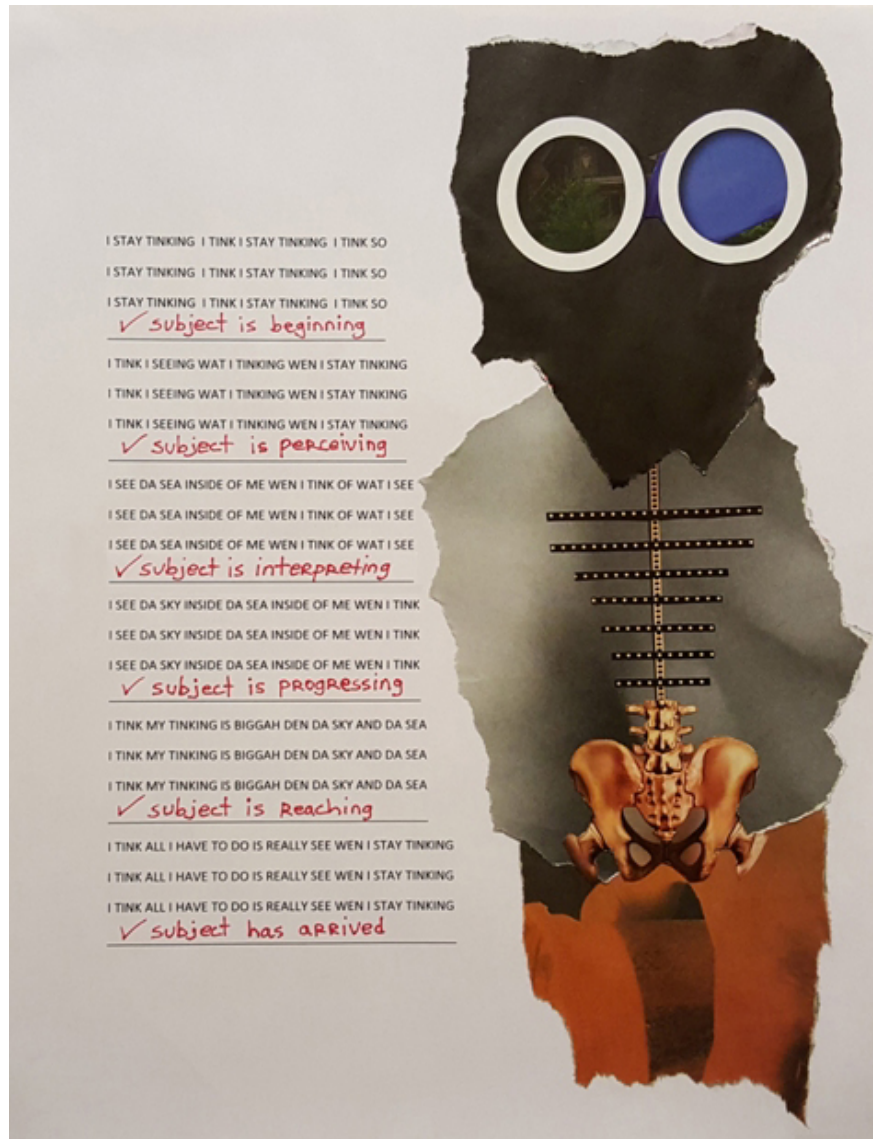


Figure 2. Joe Balaz, *Meditative Da Kine*, 2015.⁴ Digital photomontage and mixed media. Courtesy of the artist

Another editor who shared his insights is Jack Little, a person who has dual citizenship in the United Kingdom and Mexico. He edits *The Ofi Press Magazine*,

an online publication based in Mexico City. He had this to say about Hawaiian Islands Pidgin:

It's an interesting language, and having this dialect finally recognised as an official language is surely worthy of recognition. In my part of the north of England, we have a very particular dialect and I have always been interested in the use of local languages in the written form. I love that this poem celebrates such an important moment and that it is in a form of English that I had never come across before, and certainly never read.

A lot of the work that we publish [is] from writers with a dual cultural background who may be writing in English as a second language. This leads to some very interesting uses of words, phrases and expressions. I love how the English language is always evolving . . . and Joe's poems are making a valuable contribution to this.⁵

Here is one of the poems that *The Ofi Press Magazine* published:⁶

OFFICIALLY OFFICIAL

Now I can officially
take wun deep breath

and exhale into da air
dats all around me—

Thanks foa letting me know.

Day to day
da language referred to wuz understood

cause it wuz put into practice
and wuz around foa long time already.

Da new official announcement
dat wuz recently made on its behalf

is so blatantly obvious

it's just like Captain Cook
stumbling upon da islands.

Dat buggah nevah discover nutting
cause da first Hawaiians wuz already deah.

We know wat is wat
and we know wat we know.

So now dat Hawaiian Islands Pidgin
is recognized by da United States Census Bureau

it's not wun great revelation to me.

I no need any compiled data

to inform me dat lots of people in da islands
speak da language at home.

I am also one to believe
dat from ear to ear

da size of your mind is biggah
den da size of your brain

so if you going tell me
dat someting is now official

den maybe you should officially
use your intellect

and perceive as to how
it sounds so blasé to me.

But den again
it's progress

and maybe I shouldn't

jump on da guys

dat are becoming enlightened

especially wen deah are many people around
who no like Pidgin

and dey going let you know about it.

So excuse me
to all da good people

who have achieved wun new perspective.

As foa me dough

wen we now talking
about speaking da local lingo

it's like telling da sun

dat it's now official
dat it can go brighten up da day.

The next editor who offers his perspective is Michael Organ of *Tuck Magazine*, published in Canada:

We published Joe's poetry to add to the many voices around the world that are not necessarily heard as much as they should be. There is a growing trend to dilute and limit the varying voices into one safe box, effectively standardising and neutralising their identities.

It is important more than ever therefore to remind the world how rich it is in culture, ethnicity and race, with each individual voice an important working, living and breathing part for its progress.

We publish poetry from around the world and are keen again to give each a voice. The Hawaiian Pidgin is another essential

and important part of the diverse world we live in, with its beauty and individuality alongside all others.⁷



Figure 3. Joe Balaz, *Pake Burger*, 2015.⁸ Digital photomontage and mixed media. Courtesy of the artist

The following poem appeared in *Tuck Magazine*.⁹

UNBELIEVABLE

Like any adah wise guy
yapping off da top of his head

he works hard at knowing nutting.

Seeing his subject mattah on da internet
he takes it as gospel

wen it could easily be fake news
created by fake people in da fake world.

Fact checking is wun good ting
if you just stick to da facts

cause den you going know
wat is wat.

His girlfriend no help da situation

by sending him moa suspect info
on her cellphone

dat she wen find on Facebook.

Fish stories
and high school football glories

at da neighborhood bar or barbershop

now stay replaced
by soap opera politics and religion

spreading on da worldwide web
like unstoppable wildfire.

Da Russians wen do it

helped by da Nigerians
who wuz working wit da French

while dey wuz consulting
wit da Chinese.

Dats wat dis latest report
is saying anyway

and it's as reliable
as its unnamed sources.

Now he's reading
wun breaking story

dat da Pope had illicit sex
with wun Rohingya woman

while da holy man
wuz visiting Myanmar.

It's so outrageous
dat it has to be true

cause everybody
is covering up someting.

Da newly informed dude
viewing all of dis

is whipped into wun heightened frenzy
and he's exploding into anadah rant

cause wen you work hard
at knowing nutting

you going unknowingly prove
dat even belief is unbelievable.

Many other editors who have published my work have similar views about incorporating Hawaiian Islands Pidgin into their magazines. In these next few commentaries, you can see how they contrast with each other. Editor Caleb Puckett of *Futures Trading*, an online and print magazine based in Kansas, had this to say:

I see *Futures Trading* as a home for writers from around the world who share a commitment to creating innovative or forward-facing work. Given this view, I naturally welcome alterity in many forms. This embrasure extends to nonstandard and hybrid forms of language—including pidgin. The distinctive voice and phrasing—not to mention the wit—in Balaz’s writing provide a perspective and verve that I continue to find attractive after multiple readings.¹⁰

Editor Jonathan Penton of *Unlikely Stories Mark V*, which is based in New Orleans, Louisiana, said:

At *Unlikely Stories*, we seek to publish poetry that challenges and expands the readers’ worldviews. Various English-associated Paa-Twa have always been a part of that. Of course[,] we seek poetry that demonstrates insight and craftsmanship as well, and Joe Balaz’s poetry has both.

We frequently publish plain-language poetry, as we find that plain-language and elevated-language poetry can serve the same purpose: to expand the horizons of language, as well as the mindset of the reader. Plain-language poetry allows for unexpected and unfamiliar slang, which we find a wonderful component for intellectual growth. Joe Balaz’s plain-language pidgin poems fit very nicely into other poems of regionalisms and slang.¹¹

The last editor who shared his views is Alan Catlin, the editor and publisher of *Misfit Magazine*, which is based in Schenectady, New York. I had a very interesting interchange with him. When I initially sent my Pidgin poetry to his magazine, he didn’t know what to make of it. He recognized value in the work, but could not wrap his mind around publishing the poems. He couldn’t get my “method or poet’s aesthetic,” as he said.¹²

However, his inquisitive and longer response was so heartfelt and genuine, that I wrote back to him and suggested that he should try to Google my other work, and Hawaiian Islands Pidgin in general, with the notion that his research would answer some of the questions he was struggling with. He told me that when he could find the time, he would look into it.

Some months later, he wrote back to me, beginning his email with, "I bet you never thought you would hear from me again."¹³ Long story short, he had a new perspective, and he eventually published several of my Pidgin poems in *Misfit Magazine*.¹⁴ This is one of them:

NO INSULT MY ANTENNAS

No insult my antennas
wit dat hypothetical could have been

as if it wuz wun whole different story
dat you can simply create.

Da way you see it

if it looks like wun coconut
smells like wun coconut
and tastes like wun coconut

den it could have been wun lychee.

Dat sounds like editing
and ovahlap to me

and I can do da same ting
just like you.

It could have been
wun donkey jumping ovah da moon.

It could have been
3 chickens instead of 3 pigs.

It could have been
wun lethal kumquat

instead of wun poison apple too.

It could have been lottah tings
but it wuzn't.

It simply wuz wat it wuz
and dats da way it is.

If you like speculate
on how tings could have been

den go make some new fairy tales
or nursery rhymes

and let your theories
drift off into la-la land.

None of your changing scenarios
or reinterpretations

going get any reception from me.

I no moa time
foa your altering agenda—

I got wun appointment wit da real.

Alan Catlin later said about Hawaiian Islands Pidgin:

I was intrigued by the unique use of language in Joe's poetry. It is at once familiar and completely foreign. I did not know how to respond at first. I followed some of Joe's suggestions and read examples of his work that had previously been published in

various magazines. I also found a long essay about Hawaiian pidgin. This put his writing into a broader context and I was ready to reconsider his work.

I was also able to obtain a recording of Joe's poetry and was struck by the humor, the energy, and the striking originality of the work. The spoken versions are particularly vivid and give a broader understanding for an appreciation of the written work. Oral poetry has always fascinated me: how language is changed as it is spoken, how the spoken language is always richer and more in touch with the evolution of the language than the written language. I felt that experiencing Hawaiian island pidgin has enriched my understanding of both poetry, what it does, and can be, and language itself.

My magazine is called *Misfit*. I like to think and sincerely hope to be eclectic in my use of different approaches to poetry. I admit to a bias for narrative poetry but I am open to all forms of expression as long as they are thoughtful and respectful to others. Much of what I see can be classified as being traditional in approach to subject matter so it is particularly refreshing to find a writer who opens new areas (for me). There may not be anyone else who we have published who is even remotely similar to Joe's work so I guess you can say even *Misfit Magazine* has a subcategory for a true misfit and a different kind of poetry.¹⁵

All of these editors were very gracious with their comments. Their opinions on the craftsmanship of my work were flattering to me personally, but the more important thing is that it didn't matter to them that the poems were written in Pidgin. They were recognizing and appreciating the uniqueness of an artistic and literary genre to which they were being introduced. I'm thankful for these broad-minded editors who took it upon themselves to provide an avenue for poems written in Hawaiian Islands Pidgin to be shared nationally and internationally.

My poem, "Da History Of Pigeon" (and "Pidgin" in this case is spelled p-i-g-e-o-n), was inspired by the Colloquium on Pidgins and Creoles held at Honolulu's East-West Center in August of 1986. As one of the invited speakers, I wanted to present something new alongside some of my earlier works in Pidgin. I composed this poem about a week before the conference. In the audience was a person named Suzanne Romaine, who was from the United Kingdom. She got in touch with me later and asked me for permission to publish the poem in a book that she was working on. The book is called *Pidgin and Creole Languages*, and it was published in the U.K. in 1988.¹⁶ I find it interesting that this Pidgin English poem was first published where the English language originated.

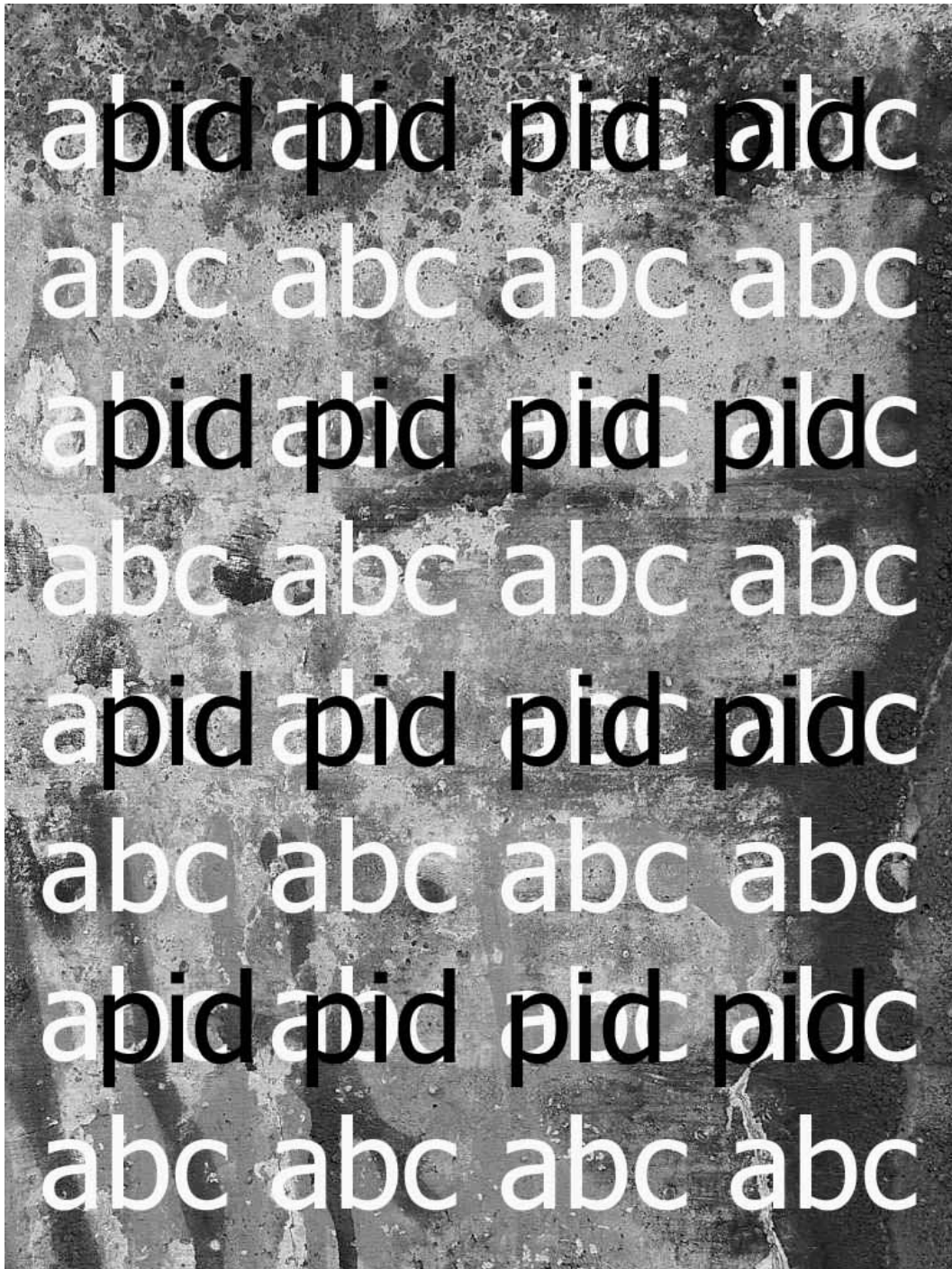


Figure 4. Joe Balaz, *Pidgin Concrete*, 2009.¹⁷ Digital photomontage. Courtesy of the artist

DA HISTORY OF PIGEON

Like different kine words
da world wuz full of different kine birds.

Yellow birds, blue birds, red birds, lovebirds,
and den came da pigeon.

Da history of da word pigeon is li'dis—

Wen da French speaking Normans
wen conquer England in da year 1066

dey wen bring along wit dem da word pigeon
foa da type of bird it wuz.

Da resident Anglo-Saxons used da word dove
or d-u-f-e, as dey used to spell 'um,
to mean da same bird.

It just so happened dat terms in Norman-French
wen blend wit Old English sentence structure
to form wat we now know as Middle English.

In da process da French word
became da one dat referred to da pigeon as food.

Today in England if you look foa dem
you can still find recipes foa pigeon pie.

Food foa taught, aah?
Even back den da word pigeon
wen blend wit pigeon foa get some moa pigeon.

So nowadays get pigeon by da zoo
get pigeon on da beach

get pigeon in town
get pigeon in coups

and no mattah wat anybody try do

dey kannot get rid of pigeon.

I guess wit such wun wide blue sky
everyting deserves to fly.

I appreciate the opportunity to share some Hawaiian Islands Pidgin writing and art, along with the insightful commentaries of some very innovative contemporary editors, with the readers of *Pacific Arts*. I encourage all writers and artists working in HIP to expand their visions and contribute their creative work regionally, nationally, and internationally. Their efforts will continue to take a once marginalized language, and its literature and art, into a broader global perspective and appreciation. I end with an image and poem that offer a Pidgin reflection on environmental change.¹⁸



Figure 5. Joe Balaz, *Solastalgia*, 2022. Digital photomontage and mixed media. Courtesy of the artist

SOLASTALGIA

Lots of people
experiencing solastalgia

dazed and diffused
and reeling to da new neologism.

Dats wat you expect to feel
wit da growing anxiety.

Climate change going rearrange
all da migratory ducks in wun row

dat not going be able
to find da mudflats anymoa.

Destination wetlands
dat used to be undah watah

going evaporate into sun baked cracks
wen everyting dry up.

At da same time out in da ocean
da dying coral stay coming all white

and dats really not alright

foa all da creatures
living on da reef.

Meanwhile
da polar bears up north

going be swimming
in moa open watah

just to find places foa hunt.

In da adah hemisphere
as da Amazon jungle disappears

and Pinocchio's nose
grows longah den his ears

all da authoritative denials
going go up in smoke

to help feed da coming hurricanes.

Existential distress
caused by wun altered environment

going be wun avalanche on da brain.

Who knows wat kine medication
dey going prescribe next

foa dis latest mental disorder?

In da least
color da pills green or blue

in pristine memory
of da trees, ocean, and sky.

Joe Balaz, born and raised in Wahiawa on the island of O'ahu, is of Hawaiian, Slovakian, and Irish ancestry. He writes in Hawaiian Islands Pidgin (HIP), a variant of English, and in American English. His writing, visual poetry, and artwork have been published in national and international journals and anthologies. Balaz is also the author of multiple books of poetry in Standard English and Pidgin, as well as the editor of Ho'omānoa: An Anthology of Contemporary Hawaiian Literature. His most recent book of poetry is Pidgin Eye (ala press, 2019). In July 2020, he received the Elliot Cades Award for Literature as an Established Writer, the most prestigious literary award given in Hawai'i. Balaz presently lives in Cleveland, Ohio. Throughout his career, he has passionately advocated for a wider and rightful acceptance of Hawaiian and Pidgin literature.

Notes

¹ Mark Young, email to author, February 20, 2018.

- ² *Figuring Out Pidgin* first appeared in *Otoliths Magazine* 49 (2018), <https://the-otolith.blogspot.com/2018/03/joe-balaz.html>.
- ³ “Bite Da Eye” first appeared in *Otoliths Magazine* 13 (April 2013), <https://the-otolith.blogspot.com/2013/04/joe-balaz.html>.
- ⁴ “Da kine” is a unique Pidgin word that can refer to a person, place, or thing. *Meditative Da Kine* first appeared in *Otoliths Magazine* 39 (2015), <https://the-otolith.blogspot.com/2015/10/joe-balaz.html>.
- ⁵ Jack Little, email to author, April 17, 2018.
- ⁶ “Officially Official” first appeared in *The Ofi Press Magazine* 57 (March 2018), 13-14, <https://en.calameo.com/read/004739059900b9643b43d>.
- ⁷ Michael Organ, email to author, March 21, 2018.
- ⁸ In the Hawaiian language and its use in Pidgin, “Pake” translates as “Chinese.” The Andrews Hawaiian dictionary provides this definition for “kaukau”: “[k]aukau is said to be a corruption of a Chinese word, and signifies to eat, to drink. It is used by foreigners in conversing with natives, and by natives conversing with foreigners.” Lorrin Andrews, *A Dictionary of the Hawaiian Language* (Waipahu, HI: Island Heritage Publishing, 2003 [1865]), 233. *PAKE BURGER* first appeared in *Otoliths Magazine* 39 (2015), <https://the-otolith.blogspot.com/2015/10/joe-balaz.html>.
- ⁹ “Unbelievable” first appeared in *Tuck Magazine*, May 2, 2018, <http://tuckmagazine.com/2018/05/02/poetry-1454/>.
- ¹⁰ Caleb Puckett, email to author, March 4, 2018.
- ¹¹ Jonathan Penton, email to author, February 27, 2018.
- ¹² Alan Catlin, email to author, April 13, 2017.
- ¹³ Alan Catlin, email to author, July 6, 2017.
- ¹⁴ “No Insult My Antennas” first appeared in *Misfit Magazine* 23 (Spring 2018), <http://misfitmagazine.net/archive/No-23/balaz.html>. Catlin published “No Insult My Antennas” after publishing other poems of mine a year earlier.
- ¹⁵ Alan Catlin, email to author, March 10, 2018.
- ¹⁶ Suzanne Romaine, *Pidgin and Creole Languages* (London: Longman, 1988), 110–3.
- ¹⁷ *Pidgin Concrete* first appeared in *Otoliths Magazine* 13 (2009), <https://the-otolith.blogspot.com/2009/03/joe-balaz-nonentity-compute-this-pidgin.html>.
- ¹⁸ *Solastalgia* first appeared in *Juked*, February 2020, <http://www.juked.com/archive/index.asp?mo=2&yr=2020&sb=d>.

A. MĀRATA TAMAIRA

About the Art: Carl Franklin Ka‘ailā‘au Pao’s *Ki‘i Kupuna: ‘O ‘Ailā‘au (Ancestral Images: Forest Eater) Series*

Abstract

*In his most recent series of paintings titled *Ki‘i Kupuna: ‘O ‘Ailā‘au (Ancestral Images: Forest Eater)*, Native Hawaiian artist Carl Franklin Ka‘ailā‘au Pao reflects on the volcano deity ‘Ailā‘au, who predates the more popularly known goddess Pele in the Hawaiian pantheon. Over the last century, ‘Ailā‘au’s story has largely fallen into obscurity. However, the eruption of Kīlauea volcano on Hawai‘i Island in 2018 heralded what many kūpuna (elders) and cultural practitioners believed to be the triumphant return of the god. Pao’s new, experimental works seek to place ‘Ailā‘au at the center of collective remembering once again—not as a challenger to the Pele narratives, but as a coequal in a more diverse, deeper, and complex storyline.*

Keywords: ‘Ahu‘ailā‘au, ‘Ailā‘au, kupuna (ancestor), Fissure 8, Hawai‘i

In his most recent series of experimental paintings titled *Ki‘i Kupuna: ‘O ‘Ailā‘au (Ancestral Portraits: Forest Eater)*, Carl Franklin Ka‘ailā‘au Pao reflects on the return of the volcano deity ‘Ailā‘au, who predates the more popularly known goddess Pele in the Hawaiian pantheon. Over the last century ‘Ailā‘au’s story has largely fallen into obscurity. He has been consigned to the margins of memory; forgotten by all but a few. But the 2018 eruptions of the great shield volcano Kīlauea on Hawai‘i Island heralded what many believed to be his reawakening—one characterized by the convergence of the twin forces of destruction and creation. During the eruption, Fissure 8, the massive vent that opened up on the East Rift Zone of Kīlauea and which produced the most intense volcanic activity, gave rise to a river of lava that incinerated thousands of acres of farmland and old growth native forest, destroyed homes, and razed entire residential neighborhoods. The images of the eruptions broadcast by media outlets around the world were surreal: fountains of lava gushed several storeys high in residential backyards and concrete pavements and roadways cracked open with fumaroles releasing toxic gases into the air. Cars abandoned on the side of the road were set ablaze as lava

engulfed them. And countless sites of cultural significance were lost forever, entombed under a thick crust of black basalt. Hundreds of people were forced to evacuate their homes, some never to return again. So much was lost. Yet out of all of this brutal upheaval, out of all of the churning, fiery chaos, something new was being birthed: land. The island was growing.

During the crisis, many kūpuna (elders) and cultural experts within the Hawaiian community attested to having had dreams and visions that identified the volcanic activity at Fissure 8 as being the work of the older god 'Ailā'au rather than the younger Pele. They said the eruptions felt more male, aggressive. Some believed that even the sulfurous gases that were being emitted smelled different. Scientific claims seemed to corroborate their speculations; geological surveys confirmed that the lava that flowed during the eruptions originated from older pockets of magma.¹ It was, many believed, the molten lifeblood of an old god. In May 2019, after intense public discussion, Fissure 8 was given a name that acknowledged the immortal force behind it: Ahu'ailā'au (Altar of 'Ailā'au).

Carl Franklin Ka'ailā'au Pao's most recent works—exploratory pieces that will be used to inform a larger series for a future exhibition—seek to place 'Ailā'au at the center of collective remembering once again; not as a challenger to the Pele narratives, but as a coequal in a more diverse, deeper, and complex storyline. Further, the works are personal and hold familial significance for Pao. He, himself, bears a variant of the deity's name, Ka'ailā'au (the addition of "ka" means "the"), which derives from his tūtū's (paternal grandmother's) lineage. It is a name that he has also passed down to his daughter. For Pao, 'Ailā'au is not simply a ravenous forest eater, as his name means when translated. Rather, he is—to Pao—a beloved tūtū kāne, a grandfather. Pao's paintings are, in fact, portraits of a deified family member as imagined by the artist. They are works that restore a once forgotten god to contemporary consciousness and, in so doing, reanimate the life affirming flow of ancestral connections.

A. Mārata Tamaira is an independent, Māori researcher and writer who hails from Aotearoa New Zealand. She has genealogical ties with the central North Island tribe of Ngāti Tūwharetoa and the subtribes of Ngāti Turamakina and Ngāti Turangitukua. She holds a PhD in gender, media, and cultural studies from the Australian National University and has written widely on contemporary Hawaiian and Pacific art. In 2016 she co-curated the exhibition Kanu Kaho'olawe: Replanting, Rebirth in conjunction with the University of Washington's Burke Museum of Natural History and Culture in Seattle. She lives on Hawai'i Island with her husband and daughter.

Notes

¹ Hawaiian Volcano Observatory, United States Geological Survey, “Volcano Watch—What We’ve Learned from Kīlauea’s 2018 Lower East Rift Zone Eruption,” April 25, 2019, <https://www.usgs.gov/news/volcano-watch-what-weve-learned-kilaueas-2018-lower-east-rift-zone-eruption>, accessed Jan. 18, 2022.



Figure 1. Carl Franklin Ka'ailā'au Pao, *Ki'i Kupuna: 'O 'Ailā'au-Maka*, 2020. Acrylic and shellac on canvas, 40 x 30 in., private collection. Photograph courtesy of the artist



Figure 2. Carl Franklin Ka'ailā'au Pao, *Kī'i Kupuna: 'O 'Ailā'au-Niho*, 2020. Acrylic and shellac on canvas, 40 x 30 in., private collection. Photograph courtesy of the artist



Figure 3. Carl Franklin Ka'ailā'au Pao, *Kī'i Kupuna: 'O 'Ailā'au-Makahā*, 2020. Acrylic and shellac on canvas, 40 x 30 in., private collection. Photograph courtesy of the artist



Figure 4. Carl Franklin Ka'ailā'au Pao, *Kī'i Kupuna: 'O 'Ailā'au-Maka II*, 2021. Acrylic and shellac on canvas, 40 x 30 in., collection of the Hawai'i State Foundation on Culture and the Arts. Photograph courtesy of the artist

KELEMA LEE MOSES

The Collection: Curated Architecture and Design in Kaka‘ako, Hawai‘i

Abstract

*This Research Note investigates *The Collection* (2016), a residential development in Kaka‘ako, Hawai‘i. *The Collection* is part of *Our Kaka‘ako*, an urban revitalization project on land administered by the Kamehameha Schools. *The Collection* initiates critical conversations about the fraught relationship between contemporary architecture, urban planning, and Kanaka Maoli (Native Hawaiian) futures in the settler state of Hawai‘i. While *The Collection* is steeped in neoliberal and capitalist discourses, its monumental presence also enables an interrogation of future possibilities of Honolulu as a just urban society—a place where everyone has a home and Kānaka Maoli can maintain and restore relationships informed by the ‘āina (land; that which feeds).*

Keywords: *contemporary architecture, urban planning, urban design, street art, Honolulu, Hawai‘i*

Our Kaka‘ako is an ongoing urban revitalization project located on twenty-nine acres of land wedged between downtown Honolulu and Ward Village on O‘ahu’s southeastern shore. The land that the project is on is administered by the Kamehameha Schools, the mission of which is to impart “smart, progressive, and culturally appropriate stewardship of lands endowed by Princess Bernice Pauahi Bishop.”¹ Supporters of Our Kaka‘ako maintain that this mission is met by garnering revenue from residential and commercial investment in the property. The money generated from diversified enterprises throughout Our Kaka‘ako is used to support the education of Hawaiian children.² Local shops abut corporate chains, and pedestrian walkways intersect with outdoor eateries and public seating in the district. Multiple constituencies, from families and professionals to locals and visitors, are drawn in by the community’s “live, work, play” ethos.³



Figure 1. Design Partners Incorporated and Pappageorge Haymes, The Collection, Tower, 2016. Our Kaka'ako, Honolulu, Hawai'i. Photograph courtesy of the author

My current research focuses on the liberatory possibilities of practicing and communicating culturally responsive architectural histories. In part, I am analyzing The Collection (2016), a residential project in Our Kaka'ako developed by Alexander & Baldwin (A&B) Properties, Inc. on the corner of Keawe Street and Ala Moana Boulevard (Fig. 1).⁴ The Collection is a mixed-use complex with commercial spaces, a six-story parking structure, and three residential spaces that are in stark visual contrast with one another. A forty-three-story central tower with 397 condominiums soars into the sky. Its façade is punctuated with equidistantly spaced balconies at every level, wrapping around the entirety of the structure. Low-e glass projects a crisp, silver-blue hue from a building that captures the sky's color and the city's ambient environment. The Lofts—fifty-four condo units in a four-story building—functions as a transition point between the tower and the townhomes; the white, gray, and burgundy mid-rise building features large windows

divided into variously arranged sections, adding visual dimension and artistry to the exterior. These windows give the impression of wide-open interior spaces and high ceilings, architectural features usually associated with lofts and former industrial centers (Fig. 2). The fourteen four-story townhomes offer ample square footage and access to private rooftop decks (Fig. 3). Deep burgundy panels outline their white façades, while tall vertical windows visually extend the height of the building and lush foliage lines the sidewalk and entryway of each home.



Figure 2. Design Partners Incorporated and Pappageorge Haymes, The Collection, The Lofts, 2016. Our Kaka'ako, Honolulu, Hawai'i. Photograph courtesy of Douglas Peebles Photography



Figure 3. Design Partners Incorporated and Pappageorge Haymes, The Collection, Townhomes, 2016. Our Kaka'ako, Honolulu, Hawai'i. Photograph courtesy of Douglas Peebles Photography



Figure 4. Philpotts Interiors, The Collection, lobby, 2016. Our Kaka'ako, Hawai'i. Photograph courtesy of Douglas Peebles Photography

The public face of The Collection is a two-story glass-enclosed lobby, which reflects an urban aesthetic of contemporary materiality. The color palette, furniture, and materials are intended to be in conversation with well-known wall murals located directly across Keawe Street at SALT. The Collection manifests an art experience, a stripped-down version of Kaka'ako's street aesthetic (Fig. 4). Philpotts Interiors, the Honolulu-based firm charged with coordinating the design approach, was explicit in its vision for The Collection:

Much of the design is tied to the history of the land, drawing inspiration from the fishponds and salt pans of a bygone era. In the lobby, porcelain tile reminiscent of basalt lines the floor while the reflection of marble finishes evoke the shimmering surface of the fishponds. Behind the concierge desk, an articulated wood wall with deep, earthy tones draws inspiration from the color of the earth found around the ponds, and from the shape of salt crystals. Large-scale pendant lights above the lobby seating area are shaped like fishing baskets and antique fishing baskets are used as decorative items.⁵

Philpotts Interiors's adoption of material metaphors—fishponds and pa'akai (salt)—to define its design premise is a common approach among architectural projects in the district. Yet, for individuals unfamiliar with these Hawaiian cultural

associations, abstracted and modified in their presentation, The Collection could be anywhere in the world. The structure's interior and exterior visualities are divorced from Indigenous knowledge about space and place that is storied, rooted, and routed in storytelling, memories, and movement.

Replicating Hawai'i's lands and its history in modern architecture is not a new practice. Western architects working in early twentieth-century Honolulu incorporated abstract figurations of Hawaiian motifs in their designs to position the islands within Euro-American imaginations about Asia and the Pacific. For example, the corporate headquarters of Hawai'i's major sugar conglomerate and the progenitor of A&B Properties, Inc. (developer of The Collection), is housed in the 1929 Alexander and Baldwin Building, an iconic structure in Honolulu's Central Business District (Fig. 5). Architect Charles Dickey designed the building as a synthesis of East and West, adding allusions to Peking's (Beijing's) Forbidden City onto the concrete and glass steel structure capped with a "Dickey-style" peaked roof. The gables and wide overhangs were inspired by Hawaiian hale (houses), edifices designed by Kānaka Maoli using wooden ridge posts and rafters to create elongated facades constructed of coconut bark, pili grass, and woven lashings. The Alexander and Baldwin Building came to define the Hawaiian Regional Style.⁶ As I have argued elsewhere, architects and patrons developed the Hawaiian Regional Style to make Honolulu—for better or worse—visually legible as a modern locale to people in the contiguous United States.⁷



Figure 5. Charles Dickey, Alexander and Baldwin Building, Honolulu, Hawai'i, 1929. Photograph courtesy of the author

Today, A&B Properties, Inc. is one of the largest landowners in Hawai’i.⁸ They have amassed over 89,000 acres of land and 5 million square feet of leasable space. The company positions itself as a “local company for local people.” At the time of completion in 2016, units within The Collection ranged in price from the mid–\$300,000s to the low \$600,000s.⁹ Today, the low-end prices have nearly doubled and the higher-end prices more than tripled. In contrast, the median household income in Hawai’i from 2016 to 2020 only rose from \$72,133 to \$80,729—an increase of less than 12%.¹⁰



Figure 6. The Polynesian Voyaging Society and 808 Urban, *Hōkūle’ā Mālama Honua*, 2018. Ground mural, The Flats at Pu’unui, Our Kaka’ako, Honolulu, Hawai’i. Photograph courtesy of the author

For many locals and tourists, Our Kaka’ako and the entire Kaka’ako district bounded by Ala Moana Boulevard and Piikoi, King, and Punchbowl Streets are synonymous with Hawai’i’s public art scene.¹¹ The streets and buildings are emblazoned with vibrant visualities. Public art commissioned by the City and County of Honolulu, pop-up art installations supported by local businesses and corporations, and ephemeral projects initiated by community members have made Kaka’ako into a constantly evolving, immersive, and interactive urban experience. *Hōkūle’ā Mālama Honua* (2018) is an iconic image in Our Kaka’ako. Creatives from The Polynesian Voyaging Society and 808 Urban collaborated with community members on this ground mural in front of The Flats at Pu’unui (2016), a yellow and green seven-story, mixed-use structure across from The Collection on the corner of Keawe and Pohukaina Streets (Fig. 6). The mural’s electric hues depict Polynesian voyaging canoes in the night sky amid vast land, sea, and plant life. The work is a testament to the legacy of wayfinding as a scientific and artistic endeavor, one

with contemporary implications about fostering community and reciprocal care for Hawaiian ecologies.¹² *Hōkūle'a Mālama Honua* is more than paint on concrete. It provides a space to contemplate the reciprocal care between human and non-human beings. Its location in a park-like setting with grass and outdoor seating near a water feature is a welcoming space to foster community activity within the dense urban enclave.



Figure 7. The Barn at SALT (foreground) and The Collection (tower in the background), 2016–18. Our Kaka'ako, Honolulu, Hawai'i. Photograph courtesy of the author



Figure 8. Kahiau Beamer, *Bernice Pauahi Bishop*, 2016. Mural, SALT courtyard adjacent to The Barn, Our Kaka'ako, Honolulu, Hawai'i. Photograph courtesy of the author



Figure 9a (top) and 9b (bottom). Kamea Hader, *Naupaka and Kauai*, 2016. Mural on the SALT parking structure adjacent to The Barn, Our Kaka'ako, Honolulu, Hawai'i. Photograph courtesy of the author

The cornerstone of Our Kaka'ako's master plan is, arguably, SALT—an 85,000-square-foot space for retail businesses, restaurants, and events. The Barn at SALT is the primary communal gathering space (Fig. 7). It is an open-air event venue made from a refurbished warehouse. It is framed with concrete blocks and

exposed orange scaffolding, allowing for uninterrupted floor space. The parking garage and retail structure adjacent to The Barn has iconic large-scale murals by Kahiau Beamer (*Bernice Pauahi Bishop*, 2017) and Kamea Hader (*Naupaka Murals*, 2017) (Figs. 8–9).¹³ Beamer and Hader's work at The Barn are explicit in showcasing Hawai'i's ali'i (chiefly leadership) and deities, ecologies, and creation narratives—a sharp contrast to The Collection's design aesthetic of abstract and modified figurations of Hawai'i. Both projects were created during *Pow! Wow!* in 2016.

Pow! Wow! has been the catalyst for the creative explosion in (Our) Kaka'ako. The non-profit organization hosts an annual event in the district that “brings over a hundred international and local artists together to create murals and other forms of art.”¹⁴ Artists and community members have gathered every February since 2010 to participate in workshops, listen to live music, and attend artist talks.



Figure 10. Detail of exhibition *Pow! Wow! The First Decade: From Hawai'i to the World*, Bishop Museum, Honolulu, Hawai'i, May 15–September 19, 2021. Photograph courtesy of the author

In 2021, the Bishop Museum in Honolulu mounted an exhibition marking the tenth anniversary of *Pow! Wow!*. Visitors entering the museum's Castle Memorial Building were immersed in a fictionalized Kaka'ako street scene. Signage indicated that the visitor was at the corner of Lana Lane and Queen Street/The

Alley. A tagged car was parked outside a Mini Mart (Fig. 10), and a tattoo parlor called Iron Gall and The Groove record store was across the “street” (Fig. 11). The Groove’s window was adorned with album covers of bands from several genres, from the Bee Gees and ABBA to The Supremes and Kool and the Gang—with an acknowledgement on a tag that “. . . we all related to music in some way or another.” A motorcycle was parked in a no-parking zone, and an empty bench below Iron Gall’s moniker beckoned the visitor to sit and watch passersby encounter a barrage of colors, scaffoldings, and construction materials within a reconstructed island urban center.

The gallery’s atmosphere compelled the visitor (me) to think critically about the centuries-long transformation of Kaka’ako’s cityscapes, streetscapes, and landscapes. Kānaka Maoli cultivated Kaka’ako’s rich wetlands, fishponds, and salt ponds as part of ahupua’a, wedge-shaped self-sustaining land units that traverse the mountains, extend down the valley ridges, and reach out to the sea. Kānaka Maoli expertly crafted an ecological ethic of land and system design. As architect Sean Connelly describes, “Poetically, ahupua’a is architecture—producing some of the most amazing living buildings imaginable . . .”¹⁵ The shift to industry and manufacturing during the twentieth century filled Kaka’ako with industrial warehouses, a visuality replicated at The Barn. Contemporary architecture with clean lines and modern materials throughout Kaka’ako embraces a global aesthetic, one that minimally asserts a cultural responsiveness and is divorced from a genealogical context that connects contemporary practice to ancestral design knowledge about hale and ahupua’a.

Architects including Connelly and James Miller (Kānaka Maoli) have proposed community organized design solutions. Connelly and his collaborators have written about land reparations and material innovation. Miller advocates for land-based ethical frameworks rooted in Indigenous knowledge systems including, but not limited to, mo’olelo (story, tale, history), mo’okū ‘auhau (genealogy), and huaka’i (a physical, spiritual, and intellectual journey).¹⁶ Thus, to my mind, the exhibition’s graffiti is a metaphorical marking out, or erasure, of the rapidly growing, sterile architecture developments in Kaka’ako. Graffiti metaphorically functions as a revelatory practice encouraging us to consider a reimagined Kaka’ako—one that utilizes Kānaka building methods and intellectual frameworks to sustainably address the housing shortage and societal needs of the island community.



Figure 11. Detail of exhibition *Pow! Wow! The First Decade: From Hawai'i to the World*, Bishop Museum, Honolulu, Hawai'i, May 15–September 19, 2021. Photograph courtesy of the author

Tina Grandinetti argues that Kaka'ako exemplifies a neoliberal agenda. The convergence of capital accumulation—from state and private enterprises—has resulted in a building boom in Kaka'ako that has, simultaneously, exacerbated housing inequalities.¹⁷ In addition to Kamehameha Schools, the Howard Hughes Corporation and the Office of Hawaiian Affairs (OHA) own property in Kaka'ako. Both

organizations have made clear their intentions to use the land to generate revenue. Howard Hughes's master plan for Ward Village—like Our Kaka'ako—incorporates reserved housing units; still, its luxury condominiums and national corporate chains have adversely altered the familial character of the community.¹⁸ Meanwhile, OHA's residential plans for its thirty acres of land in Kaka'ako Makai have been stalled for years because state law prohibits housing construction on the waterfront. Kaka'ako, ultimately, is a microcosm of the perils associated with urban development and gentrification. Non-resident acquisition of investment properties have spurred a housing crisis resulting in reduced availability and increased costs; the unhoused and the unsheltered have been "cleared" and displaced from the street; and sea level rise on the flat terrain makes the district and its architecture especially vulnerable to climatic change.

Kanaka Maoli artists confront many of these same issues on the streets of Kaka'ako and in the Bishop Museum exhibition. They make their own visual interventions, using site-specific surfaces to render the 'āina storied, and solidifying Hawaiian futurities within, around, and throughout the archipelago. Monumental works by Carl Pao, Cory Kamehanaokalā Holt Taum, and Solomon Robert Nui Enos construct journeys through the abstract and conceptual; they stitch together the time-space continuum in which Kanaka epistemologies are in conversation with legacies of self-determination, (settler) colonialism, and neoliberalism in Kaka'ako.

Enos's fantastical works reflect his commitment to island geologies and geographies. He makes explicit his desire to "restore Hawaiian cultural sites" through the cultivation of plants and foodstuffs on Hawaiian land.¹⁹ His oversize figures surrounded by large geometric shapes and earthly forms jump out past the wall to grab the viewer, shaking them from their malaise and inviting them to participate in planetary futures (Fig. 12). Taum's bold panel patterns seamlessly merge with Hawaiian ecologies and objects. Wai (water, streams) and wa'a (canoes), birds, and gourds harken to the (un)availability of the earth's natural resources. His works often reference the Hawaiian ahupua'a system of land organization, "encourag[ing] the viewer to question the current state of urbanization in Hawai'i."²⁰ Meanwhile, Pao challenges viewers to consider the seen and unseen. He compels people to acknowledge their positionality in relation to negotiations between kaona and wā, defined by Pao as "veiled layers of knowledge" and the "space between," respectively.²¹ Pao's collaboration with other artists (like Taum) and with art students from Hawai'i to Aotearoa engenders an openness to ideas and a diversity of interpretations that are—unapologetically—Indigenous (Fig. 13).



Figure 12. Solomon Robert Nui Enos, Mural, *Pow! Wow! The First Decade: From Hawai'i to the World*, Bishop Museum, Honolulu, Hawai'i, May 15–September 19, 2021. Photograph courtesy of the author

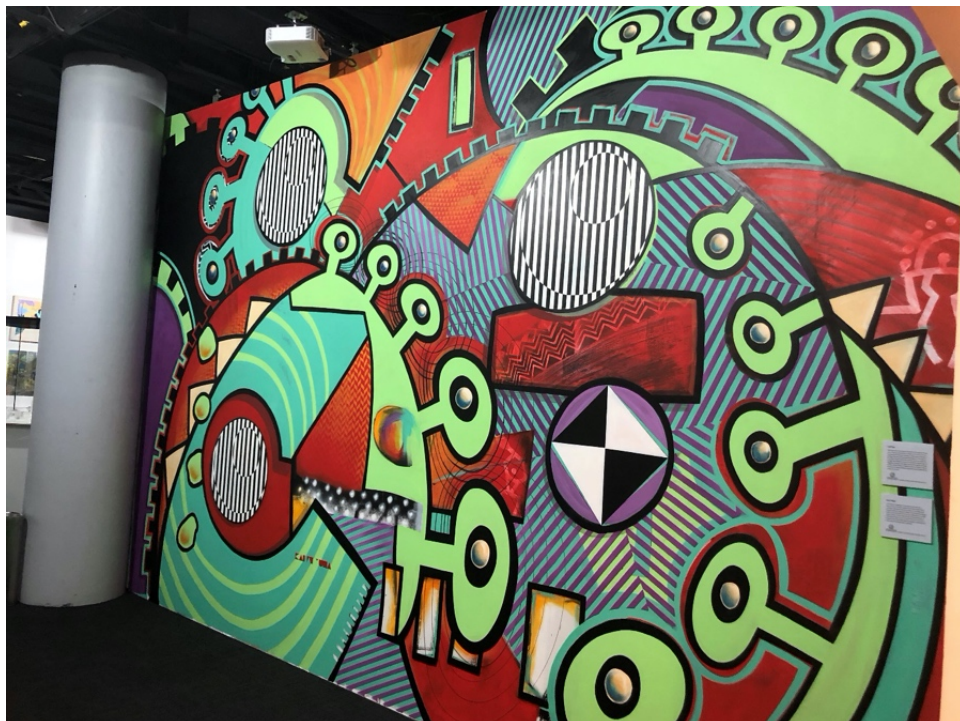


Figure 13. Carl Pao and Cory Taum, Mural, *Pow! Wow! The First Decade: From Hawai'i to the World*, Bishop Museum, Honolulu, Hawai'i, May 15–September 19, 2021. Photograph courtesy of the author

Kaka'ako is a curated urban destination both in the district and in the museum. For over a decade, Hawaiian artists have used Kaka'ako's streets and *Pow! Wow!* as venues to engage urbanism's impact on Kanaka Maoli lifeways and the local community. As part of this urban enterprise, The Collection in Our Kaka'ako allows for critical conversations about the fraught relationship between contemporary architecture, urban planning, and Kanaka Maoli futures in the settler state of Hawai'i. The Collection is steeped in neoliberal and capitalist discourses, but its monumental presence also allows artists, designers, and architects to propose plans for the future possibilities of Honolulu as a just urban society: a place where everyone has a home and Kānaka Maoli can maintain and restore relationships informed by the 'āina.

Kelema Lee Moses is an assistant professor of urban studies and planning at the University of California, San Diego. Her teaching and research combine historical perspectives with discussions about critical contemporary issues related to the built environment of the United States and the Pacific.

Notes

¹ "SALT at Our Kaka'ako," accessed February 20, 2022, <https://saltat-kakaako.com/about/neighborhood/>

² Our Kaka'ako has met with significant public resistance. The development has been mired with questions about the neighborhood's affordability and its ability to fulfill the Kamehameha Schools mission given the effects of gentrification. See Kaka'ako Ūnited, <https://kakaakounited.org>.

³ "Our Kaka'ako: Master Plan," accessed February 20, 2022, <https://ourka-kaako.com/master-plan/>

⁴ Two firms, Design Partners Incorporated (Honolulu) and Pappageorge Haymes (Chicago), planned The Collection's architecture.

⁵ "The Collection, Honolulu, O'ahu, HI," Philpotts Interiors, accessed February 20, 2022, <https://www.philpotts.net/portfolio/the-collection/>.

⁶ Kelema Lee Moses, "Kingdom, Territory, State: An Architectural Narrative of Honolulu, Hawai'i, 1882–1994" (PhD diss., The Pennsylvania State University, 2015), 61–2.

⁷ Moses, "Kingdom, Territory, State, 61–2. See also Kelema Lee Moses, "Almost, But Not Quite: Architecture and the Reconstruction of Space in the Territory of Hawaii," in *Colonial Frames/Nationalist Histories: Imperial Legacies, Architecture*

and Modernity, eds. Madhuri Desai and Mrinalini Rajagopalan (Surrey, England and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, July 2012), 161–84.

⁸ The Collection is the continuation of an almost century-long attempt by A&B Properties, Inc. to align the commercialization of the islands with housing and development (a contested term within architectural modernism). For example, The Kahului Development Co., Ltd, a predecessor to A&B Properties, envisioned the master planned town of “Dream City” for Maui during the mid-twentieth century. Wylan Marquez, “Hawai’i Plantation Village Design Concepts: Subdivisions to Villages in Hāwī, North Kohala” (PhD diss., University of Hawai’i, 2012), 47–9.

⁹ “A&B Properties, Inc. Completes Kaka ‘ako Land Purchase,” Alexander & Baldwin, News Release, October 6, 2014, <https://investors.alexanderbaldwin.com/2014-10-06-A-B-Properties-Inc-Completes-Kakaako-Land-Purchase>.

¹⁰ “Median household income in Hawaii from 1990 to 2020,” Statista (website), accessed October 5, 2021, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/205811/median-household-income-in-hawaii/>. See also, United States Census Bureau, “2019 Median Household Income in the United States,” accessed October 8, 2021, <https://www.census.gov/library/visualizations/interactive/2019-median-household-income.html>. Local groups, such as Kaka’ako Ūnited, have protested large-scale development in the district, including petitioning the Hawaii Community Development Authority (HCDA) to bar construction of The Collection. Kaka’ako Ūnited advocates for urban imperatives that serve the needs of the most vulnerable: affordable, low-cost housing; open space and parks; and protecting the “historic sense of place” with mauka (mountain) and makai (sea) views. See Kaka’ako Ūnited, <https://kakaakounited.org/vision>.

¹¹ Hawai’i’s art community extends far beyond the narrow parameters of this essay’s focus on Kaka’ako. Hawaiian and/or Hawai’i-based artists such as Joy Enomoto, Dr. Jamaica Heolimeleikalani Osorio, and Kamakakēhau, to name but a few, are committed to art practices that are deeply tied to the ‘āina (land; that which feeds) and lāhui (nation; peoplehood).

¹² “Our Kaka’ako: Hōkūle’a “Mālama Honua,” accessed February 25, 2022, <https://ourkakaako.com/blog/malama-honua/>. See also <https://www.808uban.org/pages/murals> and <https://www.hokulea.com/>.

¹³ For additional SALT murals see <https://saltatkakaako.com/art/>, accessed February 22, 2022.

¹⁴ POW! WOW! HAWAII 2020, accessed February 25, 2022, <http://www.powwow-worldwide.com/festival/pow-wow-hawaii-2020>.

¹⁵ Sean Connelly, “Our City as Ahupua’a: For Justice-Advancing Futures” in *The Value of Hawai’i 3*, eds. Noelani Goodyear-Ka’ōpua, Craig Howes, Jonathan Kay Kamakawiwo’ole Osorio, and Aiko Yamashiro (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press and the Center for Biographical Research, 2020), 235.

¹⁶ See Hawai’i Non-Linear, “Learning From Lē’ahi,” exhibition brochure, Koa Gallery, Kapi’olani Community College (September 23–December 21, 2021). See also, James Miller (and Kelema Lee Moses), “Troubling Housing: Process & Pedagogy in

Oceania,” design@large, public lecture, University of California, San Diego, February 23, 2022.

¹⁷ Tina Grandinetti, “Urban Aloha ‘Āina: Kaka’ako and a Decolonized Right to the City,” *Settler Colonial Studies* 9, no. 2 (2019): 227–46.

¹⁸ The HCDA Reserved Housing program allows buyers earning between 80–140% of the median household income to purchase homes below market rates.

¹⁹ Bishop Museum, Solomon Enos placard, *Pow! Wow! The First Decade: From Hawai‘i to the World*, May 15–September 19, 2021, Honolulu, Hawai‘i.

²⁰ Bishop Museum, Carl Pao and Cory Taum placard, *Pow! Wow! The First Decade: From Hawai‘i to the World*, May 15–September 19, 2021, Honolulu, Hawai‘i.

²¹ Melehina Groves, “Pao, Carl (on native art),” *Ka’iwakīloumoku: Pacific Indigenous Institute*, January 2007, <https://kaiwakiloumoku.ksbe.edu/article/kanaka-insights-pao-carl-on-native-art>.

**CHRISTINA AYSON PLANK AND
MELEIA SIMON-REYNOLDS**

Watsonville is in the Heart: Documenting Histories of Transpacific Filipino Migration in the Pajaro Valley

Abstract

Watsonville is in the Heart (WIITH) is a community-driven, public history initiative to preserve and uplift stories of Filipino transpacific migration and labor in the greater Pajaro Valley—an agricultural region located on central California’s coast. The WIITH team is creating a novel archive documenting the resilience of Filipinos who navigated the intersections of colonialism, migrant labor, and racism during the early twentieth century. The archive includes Filipino experiences documented through oral histories, photographs, personal records, and material culture objects. Significantly, WIITH’s archive reveals transpacific connections between the Philippines, Hawai’i, and the Pajaro Valley that have yet to be examined by scholars. The initiative’s value sits at the intersections of art, oral histories, and histories of Filipino migration. It will culminate in an exhibition at the Santa Cruz Museum of Art and History, Watsonville is in the Heart: Philippine Migrant Labor in the Pajaro Valley, that will bring the WIITH archive and the Bay Area artist community together. This essay provides an overview of WIITH’s archival development, methodology, and historiographical intervention thus far.

Keywords: *labor migration, oral history, photography, archives, Filipinos, exhibition*

Watsonville is in the Heart (WIITH) is a community-driven, public history initiative formed to preserve and uplift stories of Filipino transpacific migration and labor in the greater Pajaro Valley—a region located on central California’s coast. It works in partnership with The Tobera Project, an organization that celebrates Filipino history and culture in the city of Watsonville. Presently, the WIITH team is creating a novel archive documenting the struggles, vitality, and resilience of the manong (older brother) generation of Filipinos who settled in the Pajaro Valley in the early twentieth century. The archive includes Filipino experiences documented through oral histories, photographs, personal records, and material

culture objects. The initiative includes a culminating exhibition that will bring together the WIITH archive and the Bay Area artist community. The project's value sits at the intersection of art, oral history, and the study of Filipino transpacific migration and labor. Our focus on transpacific migration highlights the entangled colonial histories between the Philippines, Hawai'i, and California through the experiences of non-Indigenous migrants who traversed and settled in Pacific spaces.¹

Located approximately ninety miles south of San Francisco and adjacent to Monterey Bay, the Pajaro Valley—which includes the communities of Corralitos, Freedom, La Selva Beach, Pajaro, Royal Oaks, Pajaro Dunes, and Watsonville—is the fifth most agriculturally productive region in California. The beginning of the twentieth century saw an increase in Filipino labor migration to the United States transpacific empire, consisting of the continental territory acquired through westward expansion and overseas territories acquired after 1898—Hawai'i, the Philippines, and Guam as well as Puerto Rico and Cuba. Factors contributing to this influx included: poor conditions in the Philippines (poverty, high taxation, and lack of jobs); US immigration policies that allowed Filipinos to move within the transpacific empire as a result of their status as “nationals”; and recruitment by American agricultural businesses that sought to fill an increased demand for cheap labor. Migration from Hawai'i to the West Coast increased as Filipinos sought more opportunities after laboring in the sugar plantations.² Known as the “manong generation” of migrant workers, thousands of Filipino men and some women traveled to the central coast of California. Despite this, documentation of this history is limited. To date, only a handful of publicly available sources of information about this migration are known to exist, and these focus primarily on the anti-Filipino race riots that erupted in the 1930s and climaxed with the murder of a Filipino farmworker, Fermin Tobera. The race riots have been widely cited and referred to in Asian American history and creative writing, but original documentation has come from the narrowly focused news coverage of the events published in the regional daily newspaper *The Evening Pajaronian*.³ No historical or sociological study or archive focusing on the Filipino community of the Pajaro Valley—beyond the racial violence and anti-miscegenation policies of the early twentieth century—currently exists, despite the fact that Filipino families descended from the manong generation continue to live and work in the Pajaro Valley. These individuals offer invaluable perspectives on the history of Filipino migration and labor in the region.

WIITH's oral history interviews with Pajaro Valley Filipino community members are centered around specific historical topics including agricultural

labor, union organizing, and the 1930s Watsonville race riots. We also prioritize “life histories,” for which narrators discuss in detail their families’ migration journeys and growing up in the Pajaro Valley region. These interviews touch on themes such as identity, racism, belonging, community formation, and leisure activities. Some interviews also reference photographs from various families’ collections. Our oral history methodology draws on the work of scholars in Pacific, Indigenous, and photography studies working to (re)claim or decolonize colonial photography.⁴ Specifically, we conduct “photo-elicitation” interviews in which individual photographs as well as photograph albums are centered in order to jog narrators’ memories and spark reflection on specific historical moments. Photo-elicitation interviews are foundational for WIITH’s process of creating metadata for the digital archive, as well as for the development of exhibitions that feature photographs.



Figure 1. Agricultural workers picnicking in a field, ca. 1930s. The man in a white shirt on the left is Mamerto “Max” Sulay and the woman crouching above him is Betty Labor. Courtesy of Juanita Sulay Wilson

WIITH’s archive is also being built from local Filipino families’ collections—including lovingly crafted objects such as clothing, textiles, flags, woven baskets, and barber tools; photograph albums; unpublished memoirs; and scrapbooks—that have been passed down intergenerationally and augmented over the years.

They document both overt resistance and the less-obvious subversive tactics that Filipino communities utilized as they navigated transpacific US colonialism, racial hierarchies and violence, and back-breaking agricultural labor. For example, many photographs and material culture objects collected thus far highlight Pajaro Valley manongs' participation in well-known agricultural labor unions; fraternal lodges, including the Caballeros de Dimas-Alang; and the US military's First Filipino Infantry. These social groups confronted prevailing racist ideologies by celebrating their cultural pride. Other photographs and objects that represent leisure activities and community cultural celebrations illuminate everyday acts of place-making and opposition to colonial and racial regimes. For example, in Juanita Sulay Wilson's collection is a photograph of her father, Mamerto "Max" Sulay, an Ilokano (an ethnolinguistic group originating from the northwestern seaboard of the island of Luzon) agricultural worker and labor contractor, picnicking with other workers, families, and friends in a field in the 1930s (Fig. 1). This collection also has photographs of pageantry and fundraising events that directly supported the development and cultural vitality of the community. As such, they can be read as "hidden transcripts"—concealed acts of resistance that critique public transcripts of domination.⁵

Significantly, photographs in the WIITH archive also depict women's central contributions to community formation through migration histories, participation in social clubs, and cultural activities—all of which are understudied topics in Filipino American studies.⁶ For example, the Filipino Women's Club of Watsonville, founded by Rosario "Nena" Nieva Alminiana in 1951, organized cultural and social events to help integrate newly arrived Filipino migrants into the Watsonville Filipino community (Fig. 2). Because histories of Filipino migration, community formation, overt resistance, and everyday tactics in Pajaro Valley are often marginalized in mainstream narratives of American, Asian American, Pacific, and even Filipino American history, these family collections function as "alternative archives"—collections constructed outside of institutional or state archives that document and reveal hidden or alternative histories and challenge dominant narratives.⁷ Filipino families' photography and intergenerational archiving practices can also be understood as "alternative" because they undertook their own image-making and collecting in a way that undermined colonial and racialized representations appearing in popular media and legal-bureaucratic documentation.⁸



Second year of club

Figure 2. The second annual meeting of the officers and members of the Filipino Women's Club of Watsonville that took place at the Veteran's Hall in Watsonville, California, 1951. Courtesy of Eva Alminiana Monroe

Filipino studies scholars focusing on twentieth-century labor migration have yet to deeply interrogate the transpacific ties between communities in Hawai'i and California. WIITH's archive provides new insight into this history. For example, the Sulay family has documented Max Sulay's migration journey by steamship from Hawai'i to California. The family's oral histories also reveal that hula was (and continues to be) practiced as early as the 1950s by Filipina individuals in the Pajaro Valley who trace their family histories to labor migration from Hawai'i. According to Juanita Sulay, Max's eldest daughter, one of her first hula instructors was a Hawai'i-born Filipina, who migrated to Watsonville and informally taught other Filipinas once in California.

Transpacific families maintained cultural ties between California and the Philippines through the circulation of material culture objects, correspondence, and photographs. For example, the collection of Eva Alminiana Monroe—a descendent of Amando Ocampo Alminiana, who owned and operated a barber shop in Watsonville from 1934 to 1994—includes photographs of family members

taken in studios in Manila that were either carried or sent by mail to the Pajaro Valley. Other items included in the WIITH archive reveal the ways that the Pajaro Valley Filipino community engaged in place-making and coastal leisure activities. For example, WIITH uncovered a photograph of Rosario Alminiana fishing at Sunset State Beach in the Pajaro Valley (Fig. 3). As a result, WIITH contributes to shifts in Asian American and Filipino American studies scholarship toward Pacific-centered spatial frameworks that highlight the entangled transpacific histories of overseas empire and settler colonialism and emphasize the “oceanic-ness” of Filipino labor migration and diaspora.⁹



Figure 3. Rosario “Nena” Nieva Alminiana fishing on Sunset State Beach in the Pajaro Valley, California, ca. 1930s. Courtesy of Eva Alminiana Monroe

The WIITH research initiative will culminate in an art and history exhibition titled *Watsonville is in the Heart: Philippine Migrant Labor in the Pajaro Valley*, to be held at the Santa Cruz Museum of Art and History in April 2024.¹⁰ Objects from

the novel archive including family photographs and heirlooms, historical objects, and oral history interviews will be displayed with contemporary works of art in order to reclaim the history of Filipino migration and labor found in the city of Watsonville.

Narratives from individuals descended from the manongs and manangs will guide the exhibition in the form of oral history interviews highlighting the way objects elicit memories of home and belonging.¹¹ These will include community members discussing the origins and provenance of their family heirlooms, culled through our photo-elicitation, to reveal histories of dis-positionings.¹² By overlaying their voices in the exhibition space, we recognize the importance of having the community shape and share their stories.¹³ Their memories offer critical perspectives to the way historical events are remembered, shared, and represented.¹⁴ *Watsonville is in the Heart* will feature the perspectives of community members, scholars, and artists to offer multivocal understandings of the processes and impacts of US imperialism.



Figure 4. Johanna Poethig, *Placesetting (Manong Freddy)*, 2011. Plate with historic image. Courtesy of Johanna Poethig

In addition to the photographs, historical objects, and oral history interviews in the exhibition, contemporary art will also be displayed. We will invite two students from the University of California, Santa Cruz (UCSC) and a mid-career Bay Area artist to conduct research in the oral history archive and create new works of art inspired by their findings. These commissioned artworks will be displayed alongside other non-commissioned artwork related to Filipino labor history in Watsonville, including the installation *Placesetting* by Oakland-based contemporary artist Johanna Poethig. Reminiscent of some of the family heirlooms on display, Poethig's installation will include plates, teapots, and bowls that feature images of manongs who lived in the International Hotel—a low-income single-room-occupancy residential hotel in San Francisco's Manilatown that housed many Filipino agricultural workers, some of whom worked and lived in Watsonville—from the 1920s through the 1970s (Fig. 4).¹⁵ In the artist's words, *Placesetting* "combines the utilitarian objects of a table setting with the art, necessity, emotion and politics of creating home and community."¹⁶

Through their works, the contemporary artists in the exhibition will provoke questions related to identity, belonging, systemic racism, and place-making. In her discussion of the role of contemporary artists in the expanded field of the Pacific, art historian Stacy Kamehiro writes, "Art and visual culture have the capacity to impactfully intervene in dominant social and cultural understandings and can therefore play a critical role in the processes of transformation."¹⁷ We are inviting artists to the space to challenge visitors to bridge this history of systemic racism to contemporary anti-Asian hate crimes.¹⁸ We hope the exhibition will showcase the "hard truths" of history in an attempt to grapple with these present-day truths.¹⁹ The WIITH archive and exhibition intervenes in histories of labor resistance by uplifting the voices and everyday experiences of Filipino families in the Pajaro Valley.

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Meleia Simon-Reynolds is a PhD candidate in the History Department at the University of California, Santa Cruz. Her dissertation project examines transpacific Filipino migration, specifically the ways Filipinos engaged with photography to document migrant imaginaries and resist racialized, colonial hierarchies. Her work

with WIITH includes building an online archive and developing educational resources for K-12 teachers.

Notes

¹ Our project draws on scholarship from Asian American and Filipino American studies scholars who seek to analyze the shared histories of US imperialism in Hawai'i, Philippines, and California. With the migration of Filipino agricultural laborers to Hawai'i and California in the early twentieth century, many Filipinos settled in these spaces. Although these workers experienced racialized violence and discrimination because of US imperialism, their positionality as settlers in the Pacific also necessitates an understanding of the way Filipinos adopt, appropriate, consume, impact, and colonize Pacific culture and spaces. However, we acknowledge that the inclusion of Filipino studies in Pacific studies is an ongoing debate, see Amy K. Stillman, "Pacific-ing Asian Pacific American History," *Journal of Asian American Studies* 7, no. 3 (2004): 241–70; J. Kēhaulani Kauanui, "Asian American Studies and the 'Pacific Question,'" in *Asian American Studies after Critical Mass*, ed. Kent Ono (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2005); Dean Itsuji Saranillio, "Colonial Amnesia: Rethinking Filipino 'American' Settler Empowerment in the U.S. Colony of Hawai'i," in *Asian Settler Colonialism: From Local Governance to the Habits of Everyday Life in Hawai'i* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2008), 256–78, <https://nyuscholars.nyu.edu/en/publications/colonial-amnesia-rethinking-filipino-american-settler-empowerment>; and Vernadette Vicuña Gonzalez, *Securing Paradise: Tourism and Militarism in Hawai'i and the Philippines* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013).

² See Patricio Abinales and Donna Amoroso, *State and Society in the Philippines* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2005); Filomeno Aguilar Jr., *Clash of Spirits: The History of Power and Sugar Planter Hegemony on a Visayan Island* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1998); Rick Baldoz, *The Third Asiatic Invasion: Empire and Migration in Filipino America, 1898–1946* (New York: NYU Press, 2011).

³ For scholarship that mentions the 1930s anti-Filipino race riots, see Rick Baldoz, *The Third Asiatic Invasion: Empire and Migration in Filipino America, 1898–1946* (New York: NYU Press, 2011); and Dawn B. Mabalon, *Little Manila is in the Heart: The Making of Filipina/o American Community in Stockton* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013). Notably, the children's book *Journey for Justice: The Life of Larry Itliong* (Stockton: Bridge and Delta Publishing, 2018) by Dawn B. Mabalon and Gayle Romasanta also makes reference to the events of the 1930s.

⁴ Our project's "photo-elicitation" methodology is inspired by the work of scholars in Pacific, Indigenous, and photography studies including: Gaynor MacDonald, "Photos in in Wiradjuri Biscuit Tins: Negotiating Relatedness and Validating Colonial Histories," *Oceania* 73, no. 4 (2003): 225–42; Allison Brown and Laura

Peers, *Pictures Bring Us Messages/Sinaakssiiksi Aohtsimaahpihkookiyaawa: Photographs and Histories from the Kainai Nation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006); Bruce M. White, *We Are at Home: Pictures of the Ojibwe People* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2007); Jane Lydon, "Return: The Photographic Archive and Technologies of Indigenous Memory," *Photographies* 3, no. 2 (2010): 173–87, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17540763.2010.499610>; Tom Jones, Michael Schmudlach, Matthew Daniel Mason, Amy Lonetree, and George A. Greendeer, *People of the Big Voice: Photographs of Ho-Chunk Families by Charles Van Shaick, 1879–1942* (Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society, 2011); and Karen Hughes and Auntie Ellen Trevorow, "'It's that Reflection': Photography as Recuperative Practice, A Ngarrindjeri Perspective," in *Calling the Shots: Aboriginal Photographies*, ed. Jane Lydon (Canberra Australian Capital Territory: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2014), 175–206.

⁵ See James C. Scott, *Domination and The Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

⁶ For more information on community Filipino community formation, see Mabalon, *Little Manila is in the Heart*, and Dorothy B. Fujita-Rony, *American Workers, Colonial Power: Philippine Seattle and the Transpacific West, 1919–1941* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

⁷ Our understanding of "alternative archives" draws on Adria Imada's methodology in her study of transnational hula circuit performers. She constructed alternative archives that were outside of institutional collections built from oral histories, personal memorabilia, films, and live hula performances. Adria Imada, *Aloha America: Hula Circuits throughout the US Empire* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 22. Our conception of WIITH's alternative archive is also influenced by Allan Sekula's "shadow archive" which he theorizes as images that situate subjects in specific locations, provide multiple narratives simultaneously, and destabilize dominant representations of Indigenous peoples that are found in institutional or state archives. Allan Sekula, "The Body and the Archive," *October* 39 (1986): 10.

⁸ Our use of "alternative" to describe family archiving practices also draws on Imada, specifically her discussion of the self-representations and collecting practices of hula circuit performers. See Imada, *Aloha America*, 81.

⁹ Recently, scholarly calls for Pacific-centered research in Asian American and Filipino American studies have become more common. Some scholars argue that Pacific-centered spatial frameworks will de-center the US nation-state and narratives of exceptionalism, facilitate comparative colonialism research, highlight the ways that the histories of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders are entangled without obscuring the distinctions between each group, and interrogate Asian Americans' positionality as settlers. For more discussion, see Dorothy Fujita-Rony, "Water and Land: Asian Americans and the US West," *Pacific Historical Review* 76, no. 4 (2007): 563–74; and Yên Lê Espiritu, Lisa Lowe, and Lisa Yoneyama, "Transpacific Entanglements," in *Flashpoints for Asian American Studies*, ed. Cathy J. Schlund-Vials (New York: Fordham University Press, 2018),

175–89. Additionally, our project draws on Kale Bantigue Fajardo’s “Filipino crosscurrents” framework, which centers the Pacific as an important place to examine transnational phenomenon and emphasizes the “oceanic-ness” of Filipino history, culture, and diaspora which has often been overlooked. See Kale Bantigue Fajardo, *Filipino Crosscurrents: Oceanographies of Seafaring, Masculinities, and Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 21.

¹⁰ Due to the nature of our research project, the art and history exhibition is still in development, and will most likely change based on the information and objects we collect from the oral histories and family collections. In addition, logistics for the exhibition are still in development. This is, in part, due to changing COVID-19 regulations and necessary rescheduling.

¹¹ The practice of migrant communities recovering their histories through photographs has been a research and curatorial method used by other scholars in several recent projects. For example, the book *Unseen Samoa 1908–1915: The Karl Hanssen Photo Album* by Tony Brunt recovers the history of German immigration to Sāmoa; Hawai’i-based archivist Miki Bulos worked with the Lyman Museum in Hilo to recover photographs of Japanese immigrants in Hawai’i; and the Australia High Commission created a Facebook exhibition featuring the history of Tongans in Australia.

¹² In her book *Museum Pieces*, Ruth B. Phillips argues for the use of art historical methods of visual analysis on material culture objects as a way to read for the multiple places of displacement that are inscribed onto objects as they are brought along these routes. See Ruth B. Phillips, *Museum Pieces: Toward the Indigenization of Canadian Museums*, first edition (Montréal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2011).

¹³ Smith argues that a decolonizing method of working with community members involves having Native American people, culture, and theories drive the research project, including its topic and methodology. Many museum studies scholars have applied this method in their curatorial practices including scholars Michael Ames, Evan Maurer, and Ruth B. Phillips. They argue that exhibitions displaying cultural objects should be shaped by and for that particular community. For more information, see Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, second edition (London: Zed Books, 2012); Michael M. Ames, *Cannibal Tours and Glass Boxes: The Anthropology of Museums*, second revised edition (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1992); Evan M. Maurer, “Presenting the American Indian: From Europe to America,” in *The Changing Presentation of the American Indian: Museums and Native Culture* (Washington D.C.: National Museum of the American Indian, 2000), 15–28; and Phillips, *Museum Pieces*.

¹⁴ Cameron Vanderscoff underscores that while the oral history archive may contain historically inaccurate information, the ways individuals remember events can illuminate more about them and their relationship to these events. Cameron Vanderscoff, “Memory Work: Oral History as Toolkit for Creating a Living & Making an Impact” (PhD+ Workshop, online Zoom presentation), April 9, 2021.

¹⁵ For more information on the International Hotel, see Estella Habal, *San Francisco's International Hotel: Mobilizing the Filipino American Community in the Anti-Eviction Movement* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2007), and Karen Tei Yamashita, *I Hotel* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Coffee House Press, 2010).

¹⁶ Johanna Poethig, "Placesetting," *Johanna Poethig: visual, public, and performance artist* (website), accessed May 3, 2021, <https://johannapoethig.com/exhibitions-installations/placesetting/>.

¹⁷ Stacy L. Kamehiro, "Empire and US Art History from an Oceanic Visual Studies Perspective," *Bully Pulpit, Panorama: Journal of the Association of Historians of American Art* 6, no. 1 (Spring 2020), <https://doi.org/10.24926/24716839.10072>.

¹⁸ Weiyi Cai, Audra D.S. Burch, and Jugal K. Patel, "Swelling Anti-Asian Violence: Who Is Being Attacked Where," *New York Times*, April 3, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/04/03/us/anti-asian-attacks.html>.

¹⁹ Amy Lonetree uses the phrase "hard truths" to refer to the violent histories of settler colonialism in the US. Specifically, she analyzes the genocide of Native American cultures, history, and communities. We use the phrase to indicate the interweaving histories of many colonialisms that impact and stratify Indigenous, immigrant, settler, and refugee communities. For more information, see Amy Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums: Representing Native America in National and Tribal Museums* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012).

CLAUDIA LEDDERUCCI

Erasing the Empire through the Restitution of Military Land: Military Bases and Processes of Re-appropriation in French Polynesia

Abstract

Following several years of tense worldwide protests against nuclear testing, the French campaign in the Pacific ended in 1996. In the years that followed, military facilities in French Polynesia, at least those most strictly connected with nuclear activities, shut down. After the exploitation and detonation of the atolls Moruroa and Fangataufa (and symbolically of the Polynesian minds and bodies), land is finally being given back to French Polynesians. Military bases are closing and military personnel are returning to France. Some of these building complexes are now property of local towns. The questions raised in this article revolve around the symbolic power of military bases' dismantlement, which can be interpreted as the erasure of the French empire. What do such erasures of military facilities represent? Is it just an economic reorganization of the national defense or does it represent the will to materially erase colonial and nuclear history? Moreover, I argue that these ongoing processes can be analyzed as a form of re-appropriation of land by the Polynesian communities and a new form of sovereignty.

Keywords: militarization, restitution, nuclear testing, military bases, sovereignty, French Polynesia, Tāhiti

Tāhiti is unmade as it is made.
— Jean-François Baré¹

Introduction

Despite transitioning from being a French protectorate in 1842 to a colony in 1880 and then to an Overseas Territory following the Second World War, status changes in French Polynesia nominally gave Mā'ohi (the Indigenous people of French Polynesia) more rights while continuing the asymmetry of power between the French empire and these Polynesian islands.² From the 18th century, first explorers such as Bougainville and Cook viewed French Polynesia as a garden of Eden, an isolated and empty land. The Western imaginary built around the presumed remoteness

and isolation of the Pacific Islands had two major outcomes: on the one hand, the perception of these islands as pristine and beautiful (precisely because they are isolated and remote) made possible the metaphor of the garden of Eden. On the other hand, their remoteness and emptiness condemned them as expendable, precisely because they were considered far from the metropole, contributing to the creation of a nuclear hell.

This particular rhetoric of isolated islands goes hand in hand with that of finite spaces as perfect island laboratories, making possible the French nuclear project during the Cold War.³ For instance, Moruroa and Fangataufa, the two detonated atolls in the Tuamotu archipelago located south of Tāhiti, were uninhabited when they were “graciously” given to the French government for nuclear purposes, but this does not mean they were empty.⁴ In fact, they had a symbolic role in Mā’ohi life as fishing grounds and places for foraging. The French army gained access to other lands through leasing directly from private land owners, as is the case in Hao, or through land purchase, as in Tāhiti.

The wider aim of my research is to investigate the militarization process that took place in French Polynesia beginning in the 1960s and its impact on Mā’ohi practices of place-based sovereignty, specifically in relation to a spatial analysis of French military bases and structures associated with these. The sudden military infrastructural development by the French contributed to the upheaval of the economic and cultural life of local indigenous communities. Some of these bases were progressively shut down as nuclear testing came to an end in the 1990s, while other bases are still being restructured or dismantled, while restitution processes continue to this day. These processes are consequential and top-down: after the end of the nuclear era, the French army was reduced in numbers, the remaining soldiers reassigned among the Polynesian islands and moved primarily to Tāhiti. Many existing military sites were dismantled and the military infrastructures emptied. In a next phase, as will be explained later, some of the military-occupied lands were given back to the respective local municipalities.

This study looks at the deconstruction of French military sites in Tāhiti and the subsequent transformation of the land. While the lands have legally been returned to the towns, the actual restitution process has left the terrain visibly untouched, still bearing its original military fencing and with little to no public access (Fig. 1). Walking around Pīra’e and ‘Ārue, the sites of two military bases still present in Tāhiti today, one can see barbed wire and fences all along the military perimeter and signs informing people that the area is restricted to military personnel. Yet, what is striking is the easy accessibility to other sections of the bases: the gates are open, there are no armed soldiers defending the entrance and indeed,

there is a surprisingly active recruitment section in 'Ārue open to the public (Fig. 2). In addition to the lax security, there appear to be few soldiers in uniform inside the base and the open spaces are well maintained and can be viewed from the outside, with coconut palms, mango and papaya trees, and wild chickens singing in the fields. This is not the usual background for a military setting.



Figure 1. Restitution plan posted by the local municipality in 'Ārue, June 15, 2021. Photograph courtesy of the author



Figure 2. 'Ārue military base entrance, June 15, 2021. Photograph courtesy of the author

This material erasure of any military presence, although not complete, represents both a physical and symbolic reconfiguration of the relationship between France and French Polynesia. Nevertheless, this Pacific scene contrasts with the recent arrival of the French fighter jets that will be discussed below. The fighter jets stopped in French Polynesia before moving on to Hawai'i for a joint mission, a further example of the deep-seated colonial connections throughout the Pacific Islands.

While this research is specific to the importance of the military presence, I believe that sovereignty practices go beyond the restitution of the land and can be seen in everyday life through the enactment of cultural expression. Throughout this Research Note, I aim to connect military spaces and their symbolic and spatial role to contemporary and new forms of sovereignty, intended here not as a mere mode of survival, but instead as an art of living. Building on what Ann Laura Stoler defines as ruination, my research questions revolve around the less spectacular forms in which colonialisms leave their mark. More specifically, I investigate the enduring memory of what the land and the infrastructures built on it represent

and how communities are forging new forms of sovereignty.⁵ What is the historical and colonial heritage that these bases leave behind?

Building Sovereignty Practices in the Wake of Militarization

Before discussing these spatial dis-positions and re-appropriation processes and practices, it is useful to briefly summarize the establishment of the bases and to present the history of militarization and its impact on French Polynesia. Militarization, and defense more broadly, is a core mechanism used to allow nation-states to maintain their power and become hegemonic forces—that is, to exert their sovereignty.⁶ It was precisely in order to protect this sovereign power that French President Charles de Gaulle decided, at the end of the 1950s, to empower France with the nuclear bomb—it was an attempt to preserve the image of the once prevalent but rapidly vanishing French Empire.

The 1960s marked the arrival of so-called modernity in French Polynesia in the form of French soldiers and military infrastructures that were at the core of the French nuclear strategy. The process of militarization started with the construction of an airport in Fa'a'a. Officially inaugurated in 1961, it expanded Tāhiti's connections to the outside world and made possible the arrival of people—both soldiers and tourists—and different kinds of machinery. Pape'ete's port was enlarged in order to accommodate larger shipments of supplies for military construction projects and infrastructural development. Shortly after, the military base in 'Ārue was built, the Commissariat à l'Énergie Atomique (CEA) was brought to Māhina, and the headquarters of Centre d'Experimentation du Pacifique (CEP) was established in Pīra'e. This work was done in part by French soldiers and in part by the local population, although the French were largely white-collar workers while the local population made up the blue-collar workforce. The construction of the military infrastructure involved measures such as clearing coconut fields and dredging stretches of the lagoon, drastically changing the socio-environmental landscape. These alterations were accompanied by restricted access to the new military properties; Mā'ohi were now prohibited from utilizing their customary fishing and farming lands. Moreover, the influx of money had significant social and cultural effects, and prompted changes in the locals' appetites, aspirations, and desires. Indigenous landowners began selling their properties for small fortunes, while the middle class, due to an influx in jobs from the nuclear testing, began building family houses using concrete and other Western techniques.

Today, what 1960s military structures remain are faded versions of what they used to be, despite the fact that French President Emmanuel Macron recently

described French Polynesia as the core of the French Indo-Pacific military strategy.⁷ Nevertheless, the impact these bases and infrastructures have on the landscape and the lives of local communities is not debatable. For instance, in July 2021 three fighter jets, two refueling planes, and two other military planes landed on the airstrip in Fa'a'a, their deafening thunder reminding the islanders of the lasting military presence in Tāhiti. Beside their acoustic pollution, their visual impact did not pass unnoticed; when they were not training in the air, they were visibly parked at the military airport, next to the commercial one, with its airstrips adjacent to the water (Fig. 3).⁸



Figure 3. Fighter jet (left) and fuel tanker plane (right) at Fa'a'a International Airport, Tāhiti, June 24, 2021. Photograph courtesy of the author

Despite this strong contemporary assertion of the French presence in French Polynesia, I argue that the ongoing restitution of military land might represent a new opportunity for local communities to reclaim lands as a means of exerting new forms of sovereignties. Drawing on studies of non-self-governing territories, my understanding of sovereignty is wider than the classical Westphalian definition of the concept. In particular, I highlight the central importance of per-

ceiving sovereignty *beyond* the state.⁹ This is very important today, for it is a period of effervescence and of active (re)articulations of sovereignty as enacted through the everyday engagements with the built and natural island environments.¹⁰

Preliminary research

My preliminary research indicates that military bases and, more broadly, the militarization process are a particular material heritage left by nuclear testing and its related infrastructural development of the 1960s. This infrastructural development not only changed economic and social dynamics for the local population, but also altered geographical space, as is clearly visible with the installation of the CEP in French Polynesia.

After the end of the French nuclear program in the 1990s, adjustments were necessary to facilitate the transition from a nuclear to a normalized economy. Territories once occupied by the French army for military and nuclear purposes are now experiencing renewed attention and a process of restitution. In the case of the closure of nuclear military structures, the rehabilitation of the environment is needed. One way to regenerate the space is the partial or total reconversion of a site. Another way is the patrimonialization of a site—its preservation as a historical and symbolic monument. Usually, the rehabilitation process of a site goes through three phases—landscape requalification, reintegration of the structure into the city, and economic reconversion—often performed simultaneously.¹¹

In France, processes of restitution began in 2008 with a budgetary law that proposed cuts to the army and addressed military sites that were redundant; this resulted in reduced numbers of troops and the reassignment of forces. In French Polynesia, land areas that had been claimed by the French military were not legally returned to their towns until 2017. Such a delay is the paradoxical consequence of the special legislation sanctioned by Article 74 of the French Constitution, according to which French laws do not apply automatically to French Polynesia unless specified in the law itself. In other words, the ample sovereignty and administrative autonomy acquired by the territory after long negotiations with the metropole was, at least in this case, an obstacle and the cause of the impasse.

A further example of the impasse is demonstrated by the incomplete restitution in Fa'a'a, which hosts the commercial and military airports and the Résidence Bopp-Dupont, a military barrack that was partially restituted to the local

municipality. The Résidence Bopp-Dupont is a small structure that is not very visible; the fence, barbed wire, and “restricted area” signs that surround it are almost completely covered by vegetation. The name of the area itself does not indicate that it is a military residence. Along with its unassuming gate, which I only saw open a handful of times so that resident cars could pass through, the site blends in with the surrounding area, as demonstrated by one of the numerous local food stands selling roasted chicken at the entrance (Fig. 4). The juxtaposition of the elite community inside with the fried chicken stand on the corner is a clear example of the asymmetry of power embedded in daily life.



Figure 4. Food stand in front of the entrance to the Résidence Bopp-Dupont. Interestingly, the residence bears the name of the family who owned the land before it was sold to the French Army. Fa'a'a, August 8, 2021. Photograph courtesy of the author

This military site in Fa'a'a is a clear example of how complex the restitution process is. First, the parcel of land that is now owned by the local municipality is

completely enclosed within a surrounding military residence, with no public entrance. City hall officers and technicians need written permission from the military to enter the residence to access the returned land, even if just to assess the feasibility of a project. Second, and this is true for the majority of the restituted land, the space was not cleaned and remediated by the French before it was returned, meaning that the town of Fa'a'a has to pay for the cost of clean-up. The chemicals present in the majority of the restituted sites are mostly asbestos and lead; the costs of the clean-up vary from town to town and more than once the mayors of the towns involved asked the French state to pay, since it was the army who polluted the land. As of this writing, the town of Fa'a'a is ready to begin an aquaponic greenhouse project, but they must come to an agreement with the army to obtain the entry permission. The responsible person for the process told me that the town does not want to spend public money on a project that might not be beneficial for the community.¹² Beside these problems, products of a never-ending tug of war over sovereignty and autonomy between the Polynesian government and the French state, I argue that the project itself bears the potential for new forms of re-appropriation and new practices of local sovereignty. After an earlier proposal to build a community market was discarded, a new project to build an aquaponic greenhouse was approved. Its main goal is to achieve food sovereignty and to improve nutrition for the local population¹³. Although the project has been on hold for the last few years, during his visit to French Polynesia in July 2021, President Macron stated that the French government will pay for the clean-up costs, giving new hope to the mayors and communities.¹⁴

The city of Fa'a'a is itself a meaningful amalgam. Unlike the nearby capital city of Pape'ete, Fa'a'a is a densely populated town and it is known to be the headquarters of Tāvini Huirā'atira nō te Ao Mā'ohi (Mā'ohi Liberation Front), the local independentist party, whose president, Oscar Temaru, has been the mayor of Fa'a'a since the 1980s. Marches to commemorate the loss of sovereignty and protests against the upcoming visit of French president Emmanuel Macron utilizing customary and new forms of aesthetic representation took place in June and July 2021 on the streets of Fa'a'a. A march to the Tavararo memorial dedicated to the Fa'a'a residents who died in 1844 defending their land and independence against French soldiers took place on June 29, 2021. The demonstration was designed to



Figure 5. Oscar Temaru, mayor of Fa'a'a and President of the independentist party Tāvini Huira'atira, in front of the Tavararo Memorial, founded in 1985. Fa'a'a, June 29, 2021. Photograph courtesy of the author

commemorate the Polynesian loss of sovereignty and consisted of a funeral simulation to celebrate the death of the Mā'ohi sovereignty. At the same time, the protesters were emphasizing Polynesian cultural identity and heritage and expressing discontent with the French government through the use of Mā'ohi rhetoric (in its etymological sense, as art of the speech) and the presentation of woven and flower offerings to a symbolic tomb, meant to mourn the sovereign kingdom of Tāhiti before it was colonized (Fig. 5). As for Macron's July 2021 visit, Tāvini Huira'atira activists organized a protest on July 25, the day of the president arrival, during which they unveiled a Polynesian Statue of Liberty—adorned with a blue and white robe and their party's flag waving over her shoulder—in front of the airport (Fig. 6). One of my local interlocutors told me during the protest that this use of blue and white—the colors of the independentist party as well as of the Virgin Mother—represented the dual-relationship between the party and the church. The statue also has a double meaning, symbolically representing Mā'ohi's quest for freedom from the colonial yoke while reiterating the local relationship with the United Nations General Assembly in New York.¹⁵ The importance of the party's link to the UN is demonstrated throughout each Tāvini Huira'atira gathering, including the June 29 protest, when the UN flag was draped over the lectern (Fig. 5).



Figure 6. A Mā'ohi Statue of Liberty was unveiled in Tāhiti to greet French president Emmanuel Macron and his entourage. Fa'a'a, July 25, 2021. Photograph courtesy of the author

Conclusion

Considering the colonial history of French Polynesia, it is particularly important to analyze the concept of sovereignty and specifically question how it is interpreted by the populations affected by the restitution process of military bases. Uncanny practices of sovereignty can be seen through the re-appropriation of public spaces, like that of the roasted chicken stand in front of the military residence gate. Its fading military presence in the Pacific notwithstanding, France is still symbolically and materially very present in French Polynesia, developing a new form of soft power through the militarization of civilian tasks. An example of this is the expansion of the Régiment du Service Militaire Adapté, an educational military program tailor-made for the struggling young indigenous population.¹⁶ This form of power is not, of course, just related to French military and national power; it is also exerted through cultural and economic influences, often subtle and invisible, exercised by the French government on the local communities. Symbolically, the erasure of military bases in French Polynesia could be read as the material erasure of the French empire, but also as the symbolic erasure of colonial and nuclear memory. Yet, social memory cannot be erased and will re-emerge through social practices. This research originates from the assumption that colonization and the consequent militarization of French Polynesia brought structural violence. This is linked to nuclear testing but goes beyond that and includes the violence of the colonial situation more broadly, embodied by the Mā'ohi in their daily living spaces and in the ways they assert renewed claims to their lands and culture. The situation has shaped—and continues to shape—the natural and social environment of Tahitians while simultaneously translating into the emergence of new cultural practices and forms of expression, as we can see through these restitution projects.

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Notes

¹ “*Tahiti se défait à mesure que Tahiti se fait*” (author’s translation). Jean-François Baré, *Le Malentendu Pacifique* (Paris: Edition des Archives Contemporaines, 2002), 99.

² While the term “Polynesian” is very broad, and “Tahitian” is very narrow, Mā’ohi is a term used to highlight ancestral culture and heritage. For a discussion of the ethnonym, see Bruno Saura, “Dire l’autochtonie à Tahiti,” *Journal de la Société des Océanistes* 119, no. 2 (2004): 119–137, <https://doi.org/10.4000/jso.126>.

³ Elizabeth DeLoughrey, “The Myth of Isolates: Ecosystem Ecologies in the Nuclear Pacific,” *Cultural Geographies* 20, no. 2 (October 2012): 167–184, <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1474474012463664>.

⁴ “Graciously” is the term used in the law itself, meaning the two atolls were donated from the Territorial Assembly to the French government for defense purposes. (Assemblée Territoriale de la Polynésie française. *Délibération n° 64-27 AT du 6 février 1964 portant cession gracieuse, par le territoire, des atolls de Moruroa et Fangataufa (Tuamotu) à l’État français*).

⁵ Ann Laura Stoler, “Introduction: ‘The Rot Remains’: From Ruins to Ruination,” in *Imperial Debris: On Ruins and Ruination*, ed. Ann Laura Stoler (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 1–38.

⁶ Following Catherine Lutz’s definition, “militarization is simultaneously a discursive process, involving a shift in general societal beliefs and values in ways necessary to legitimate the use of force, the organization of large standing armies and their leaders, and the higher taxes or tribute used to pay for them. Militarization is intimately connected not only to the obvious – the increasing size of armies and the resurgence of militant nationalisms and militant fundamentalisms – but also to the less visible deformation of human potentials into the hierarchies of race, class, gender, and sexuality, and to the shaping of national histories in ways that glorify and legitimate military action.” Catherine Lutz, “Militarization,” in *A Companion to the Anthropology of Politics*, ed. David Nugent and Joan Vincent (Wiley Online Library 2007), 320, <https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470693681.ch20>.

⁷ Macron’s speech is available at <https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2021/07/28/discours-du-president-emmanuel-macron-depuis-papeete>.

⁸ It is interesting to note here that even the construction of the airport itself had a huge impact on the local land- and seascape. In fact, it was necessary to build an embankment in the lagoon and the airstrip was built on an islet in front of the coast, which was then linked to the land by a man made land-bridge.

⁹ Godfrey Baldacchino and Eve Hepburn, “A Different Appetite for Sovereignty? Independence Movements in Subnational Island Jurisdictions,” *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics* 50, no. 4 (November 2012): 555–568, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14662043.2012.729735>.

¹⁰ Alexander Mawyer and Jerry Jacka, “Sovereignty, Conservation and Island Ecological Futures,” *Environmental Conservation* 45, no. 3 (September 2018): 11–15, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S037689291800019X>.

¹¹ Michel Deshaies, “Introduction: Réhabilitation, Reconversion et Renouveau des Espaces Industriels et Urbains Déggradés,” *Revue Géographique de l’Est* 46, no. 3–4 (June 2006): 1–6, <https://doi.org/10.4000/rge.1384>.

¹² Interview with the Fa’a’ā technical services officer, July 21, 2021. All interviews were conducted in confidentiality, and the names of the interviewees are withheld by mutual agreement.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ The presidential speech is available online: <https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2021/07/28/discours-du-president-emmanuel-macron-depuis-papeete>

¹⁵ On May 17, 2013, Resolution 67/265 on the self-determination of French Polynesia was adopted by consensus by the UN General Assembly. With this resolution, the General Assembly “affirms the inalienable right of the people of French Polynesia to self-determination and independence.” <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N12/494/50/PDF/N1249450.pdf>.

¹⁶ The Régiment du Service Militaire Adapté, or RSMA, is a professional military device used to introduce the youth to the workforce. This program exists in all French overseas territories and dependencies. Each branch is tailored to its specific location and population. The RSMA branch in French Polynesia is designed to teach struggling youth a specific trade, such as lagoon navigation, and skills related to the tourism industry and accommodation.

KELLY JOSEPH

A Journey of Healing, Discovery, and Transformation: *Hohou Te Rongo*

Abstract

This is a review of Hohou Te Rongo: A Strategy towards Health & Wellbeing, an exhibition curated by Margaret Aull and Cerys Davidson that was on view at the Gallagher Academy of Performing Arts Gallery, Waikato University, Hamilton, New Zealand, July 2–September 3, 2021. It will be on view at the Waikato Museum from July 2022 through January 2023 and will be called Toi is Rongoā.

Keywords: Māori, art, toi, Indigenous, rongoā, health, healing, exhibitions



Figure 1. View of a portion of the exhibition *Hohou Te Rongo: A Strategy towards Health & Wellbeing*, Gallagher Academy of Performing Arts Gallery, Waikato University, Hamilton, New Zealand, July 2 –September 3, 2021. Photograph courtesy of the author

Stepping into the space of *Hohou Te Rongo: A Strategy towards Health & Wellbeing* is like surrendering to a warm, solid, and healing embrace.¹ It is very

much like the kind of hugs that the curator of the exhibition, Margaret Aull (Ngāti Tūwharetoa, Te Rarawa), is known to give. Aull, an advocate for Māori artists and an artist herself, has been delving into the rangahau of toi as rongoā—arts research as healing practice—for some time (see Glossary, below). She sees toi (art, knowledge) as a powerful tool that can bring balance back into Māori lives and this is the essence of the exhibition’s kaupapa:

Toi at the crux of it is the source. It means knowledge, and for me if you find that knowledge...we can utilize that as a tool to be able to keep ourselves in balance and if we’re good, our whānau are good and if our whānau are good, our communities are good...What this calls for is to find the balance—whatukura, māreikura—nothing operates on its own.²

Surrender and balance are embodied in *Hiwaiterangi* (Fig. 1), an electric-pink, crocheted goddess who greets visitors at the entrance of the exhibition. Her arms raised in supplication and her eyes skyward, she is Rudi (Ngāti Kohua, Ngāti Makirangi, Ngāti Paoa, Ngaruahine, Ngāti Tū, Te Arawa) and Lissy (Ngāti Hine, Ngāti Kahu) Robinson-Cole’s signature-neon revisioning of te ao Māori. *Hiwaiterangi* is the youngest of the stars in the Matariki cluster—a star to whom mortals send wishes and dreams; she is connected to our heart’s deepest desires. Beneath the Robinson-Cole version of this atua, a notebook invites visitors to offer up their wishes to her. It is here that people have written touching requests for wellbeing, among them “My wish is for my husband to find peacefulness and a place in the world where he is not stressed” and “My wish is for the world to start finding a more humane solution to the tragedy that is mental illness. To find better solutions and create more resources.” *Hiwaiterangi* encourages transformation, and these wishes reflect our longing for restorative, healing change.

Urutengangana (Fig. 2) and *Hine Turama*, two atua of light swathed in resplendent Kahu huruhuru and celestial feathers, stand like sentinels on either side of *Hiwaiterangi*. When viewed closely, the touch of Lissy and Rudi Robinson-Cole is evident. Faint smudges from fingertips and imperfect places where stitches have been drawn together are reminders that these mahi toi are not machine-made. Crochet can be a healing tool for those who do it (the repetitive movements of crocheting release serotonin in the body), and healing can also be found in the way that these warm, playful works elicit joyful wonder in the viewer. This is refreshing in our technologically-heavy lives and with the feeling of unease driven by COVID-19 and climate change. The Robinson-Coles guide



Figure 2. Lissy Robinson-Cole and Rudi Robinson-Cole, *Urutengangana*, 2021. Polystyrene and crocheted yarn. Photograph courtesy of the author

us with their bright light as they themselves are guided. As Rudi says, “Our mahi is totally faith-led, from our tupuna [ancestors], we have a whakaaro that we are but like prisms. And they shine their life into us and we shine that out through our mahi toi, through our bright colors. And you know that’s how we are in our practice.”



Figure 3. Eugene Kara, *Taku Manawa* (detail), 2003–2021. Tōtara wood. Photograph courtesy of the author

Eugene Kara (Ngāti Koroki Kahukura, Ngāti Pāhauwera, Ngāti Tipā/Waikato, Ngāti Kōata, Ngā Rauru, Te Ātihaunui-a-Pāpāurangi, Ngāti Tūwharetoa) is an exceptional multi-disciplinary artist and educator who is known for his public art projects focused on mana whenua (Māori who have historic and territorial rights over the land). This includes the striking pou (carved post) on the newly-renovated jetty on the Waikato awa that represents taonga tuku iho (treasures, heirlooms) from local hapū. Kara describes himself as a cultural navigator, and his mahi toi delves into advocacy, project management, and strategic planning within the community as a way “to let healing back into the land.” While his community work relates to the kaupapa of *Hohou Te Rongo*, his three pieces in the exhibition are a return to highly personal mahi with a more intimate scale. The artist believes that being a part of the kaupapa of *Hohou Te Rongo* is, in itself, a healing process, but

it came with its challenges: “To come back into this space in a gallery context where the work is all about you and not about mana whenua, not about the people, it’s quite a challenge because you’re putting, you know literally, my heart out there.”

Kara’s mahi toi *Taku Manawa* (Fig. 3) is a tōtara stump lovingly polished to a high shine and subtly carved into the shape of a heart. A chink that runs through the stump is filled with gold, making the repair visible. Like the Japanese art of kintsugi—a traditional process that highlights cracks and repairs to celebrate the life and history of an object—it evokes a kind of rebirth. Kara similarly celebrates and acknowledges the life of his brother who passed away after receiving a heart transplant. His brother’s baby was born around that time and was named Manawa (heart). Tōtara heartwood is one of the most durable timbers in the world, and a prized wood used by Māori for toi whakairo (the art of carving) and pou tokomanawa—the central ridgepole and heart of a whareniui. Kara’s mahi toi, then, is a powerful and lasting tribute to the loss of a loved one.



Figure 4. Eugene Kara, “*Find your shoes...*” 2008–2021, Tōtara wood. Photograph courtesy of the author

Another piece by Kara is “*Find your shoes...*” (Fig. 4), in which a single shoe is carved from tōtara and painted black and red. Its form is elongated, like

something a character in a children's storybook might wear. A tension exists because of the distorted form. Kara admits that with his mahi he seeks to confront the viewer through aesthetics and also through kaupapa. Subtle forms carved within the shoe are Kara's way of paying homage to those who wear traditional markings such as tā moko and kauae, acknowledging their pathway and their connection to tupuna:

In whakairo we activate our poupou by planting pāua in the eye so they can see. In the shoe here, there is no pāua in there, because sometimes during those moments you're guided by higher sources, so you don't need that pāua, and physical eye. So, if you were wearing those shoes, you're really tapping into your higher being.

Though these are older works, Kara himself knows the value in reworking and breathing new life into mahi toi, especially because the work may not have resonated with the right audience or the right kaupapa at the time they were created:

I think there's real value in honouring the ideas and the thoughts that we had twenty years ago and representing them in a different context to a new audience. And I think in that way of having reverence, we honour those ideas, that time, those people that were in that space when you were creating it.

Four oil paintings by Hiria Anderson (Rereahu, Ngāti Maniapoto, Ngāti Apakura) have a quiet, simmering power that honours the people and spaces of her life in Waipa/King Country. Anderson's ability to render chiaroscuro matches the sublime skills of the masters of the Dutch Golden Age. This is all the more striking because she applies it to everyday vignettes within her own community. Her paintings are political and healing in that they are never sentimental, but are an honest celebration and expression of the lived experience of Māori in the twenty-first century. *Ministers and the Dinosaur* (Fig. 5) shows a row of Anglican Church clergy members seated against a grid of windows. The composition is balanced, yet there is tension in the way two vinyl chairs in the foreground are truncated. This gives a dynamism to an otherwise peaceful scene and a sense that viewers are looking in, or even included, in this space. An unexpected element is a child wearing a vest with a dinosaur hood, whose presence is gently acknowledged with a faint smile by one of the ministers. A nuanced work that is playful in subject matter, this piece feels like a page from a visual diary to which we are

privity, and captures the daily connections between community members and whānau.



Figure 5. Hiria Anderson, *Ministers and the Dinosaur*, 2021. Oil on canvas. Photograph courtesy of the author



Figure 6. Hiria Anderson, *They Were a Lovely Couple*, 2021. Oil on canvas. Photograph courtesy of the author

They Were a Lovely Couple (Fig. 6) is an even quieter work depicting two orange vinyl chairs placed side by side. The chairs are flanked by outdoor views filled with trees and a curtain of falling rain outside. This is a liminal space, where the couple referred to in the title are absent, but two prosaic chairs become their poignant proxy. Potential narratives surface; we are left to wonder is this a quiet moment at a tangihanga or is it merely an everyday moment captured? Either way, Anderson has an ability to frame and make visible the details that most of us overlook in the modern rush. Through her lens, the ordinary is exalted but also remains truthful, and she continually shows that the present moment is completely worthy of our attention.



Figure 7. Regan Balzer, *Te Aki Kaa (I)*, 2021. Acrylic on canvas. Photograph courtesy of the author

Regan Balzer's (Te Arawa, Ngāti Ranginui, Raukawa, Maniapoto) mahi toi are a visual feast of colour, movement, and swirling layers of paint. Balzer began the two large canvases in the exhibition during her artist residency at Massey University, where their basic forms and structures emerged. Soon after, she attended the tangihanga (funeral) of taonga puoro legend Richard Nunns, and was inspired to finish the two paintings with that experience in mind. A palpable energy flows through both works. *Te Aki Kaa (I)* (Fig. 7) shows the kūwaha (front door) of a whareniui, along with its pare (lintel). Contrasting with these structured entry forms is the interior, where a pou tokomanawa and heke (rafters) are enveloped by organic forms—a kaleidoscopic multitude of heart-shaped kawakawa leaves that draw our gaze inward. The kawakawa plant is valued in rongoā for its purifying properties, and is used in the launching of canoes and in tohi ceremonies. The plant plays a significant part in tangihanga, as it is worn as a pare kawakawa (head-dress) to symbolise mourning and the loss of a loved one. Balzer depicts its leaves

like tears or confetti, as both a remembrance and a celebration of a life. She has captured the energy of spaces in which stories and waiata are shared, tears and laughter spring forth, and grief is allowed to flow freely so that healing can follow.



Figure 8. Regan Balzer, *Te Aki Kaa (II)*, 2021. Acrylic on canvas. Photograph courtesy of the author

Kawakawa features again in *Te Aki Kaa (II)* (Fig. 8). A swirling wave of curvilinear designs dissolves into a tumultuous cluster of leaves in shades of teal, yellow, and startling crimson. Merging with the foliage are the subtle features of a face, integrated with the natural forms. Like Balzer's other mahi, there is a portal-like quality and a reverence for the flow of things. Kawakawa has long been used as a medicine to remove paru and mamae (pain, injury). Balzer's mahi speaks about our tupuna's connection to nature, and how mātauranga Māori can guide

us to a healthier way forward. These works remind us how toi is a vital tool that allows us to tap into a force greater than ourselves. Balzer states,

Toi for me is as an integration of beliefs, of traditions, of our tu-puna...our stories and our narratives. And they all come in and they flow through. So, when we interact with our work, when others interact with our work, it's actually living, it has mauri.



Figure 9. Tāwhanga Nopera, *Bookworm*, 2017–2021. Interactive installation. Photograph courtesy of the author

Tāwhanga Nopera (Tainui, Te Arawa, Ngati Tuwharetoa, Ngapuhi) similarly explores the ideas that toi can be an invitation to connect to atua, tupuna, and our inner cosmos, but he takes them a step further by making us question what toi even is. Nopera is a Māori academic and artist of takatāpui identity, who currently works at Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato (the University of Waikato) as its health promotions coordinator. His PhD work and ongoing rangahau have been all-consuming. He says that after he got the call to join the kaupapa of *Hohou Te Rongo*, his initial feeling of dread at not having new work to show soon transformed into trust and confidence that what he was already doing could be incorporated. *Bookworm* (Fig. 9) is a stack of five publications from 2017 to 2021. A sign

nearby states, “This display is able to be touched and we encourage you to sit and read these publications.” The books on display are texts relating to his rangahau, Indigenous trauma, Māori sexuality, and Indigenous identity issues.³ What he presents is a beautiful blurring of the boundaries of toi, while addressing ways we can weave rangahau and mātauranga Māori into our lives organically. Ultimately this work starts a conversation about how life itself is, in fact, our most important mahi toi. Nopera explains,

I just started to really think through the data that I’m sitting with and I was like, hey actually this is gold. This is what’s at the heart of my practice, you know, it’s not just a desire to make beautiful things. It’s a desire to make a beautiful life and that’s what I want for myself and that’s what I want for the young people that I see come to this University. Not just the young people but all the people.

Bookworm draws together strands and models for healthier, conscious and intentional living, but like raranga (weaving) it can be complex:

It’s actually not about the strands, it’s about the space between—it’s about the tension. Because if you’re not figuring out what that tension really is, then it doesn’t matter what the media is, it’s not gonna bend and flex and resonate the way it should in a functioning world.

The making of this work was itself an act of letting go and yet, like much of Nopera’s work, there is also a wero (challenge) that is being laid down in front of us, that calls us to question ourselves and our presumptions about the world. It is in this juicy, confrontational, highly creative space that transformation has the potential to arise.

The installation *Toi is Rongoā* was created by three artists: Margaret Aull (Te Rarawa, Tūwharetoa, Fiji), Leilani Kake (Tainui, Ngāpuhi, Kuki Airani) and Elizabeth Gray (Ngāti Rehia, Ngāti Uepohatu Tama Ūpoko ki te awa o Wanganui, Ngāti Tūwharetoa). This collaboration is an extension of work the three created previously for *Whenua Ūkaipō Connectedness*, an art exhibition held in Wellington for the United Nations seventy-fifth anniversary (Te Whanganui-a-Tara, October–November 2020). One component of the installation is a digital video made by Kake and accompanied by toanga puoro played by Gray. The video (Fig. 10) is a mesmerising phantasmagoria of morphing imagery; rigid, geometric lines melt into

organic shapes as Māori motifs dissolve into unfamiliar abstractions and back again. Dualism and binaries are at play here: dark and light, negative and positive, whatukura and māreikura, te kauae runga (celestial) and te kauae raro (terrestrial), Rangi-nui and Papatūānuku, exterior and interior worlds—all echoing and folding into each other in the pulsing symbolism. Expanding and contracting, reaching back and forth, these seemingly contrary forces begin to feel complementary and interconnected. Harmony and balance abound in this toi mahi and reinforce Aull’s statement that “nothing operates on its own.”



Figure 10. Margaret Aull, Leilani Kake, and Elizabeth Gray, *Toi is Rongoā* (detail), 2020. Mixed media, video, and audio installation. Photograph courtesy of the author

An extension of this idea, and complementing the work’s intense and mutable imagery, is a soundscape that is calm and grounding. The taonga puoro offers a reo (language) of sound and vibration that draws together the installation’s imagery—and evokes nature, birds, the rustle of wind, and heartbeats. Gray is a skilled practitioner of taonga puoro and this mahi extends to her teaching techniques of pain relief using taonga tuku iho at Hapū Wānanga ki Tainui (Waikato District Health Board). She was inspired to create the six-minute track by the story of Hine Raukatauri, he atua o taonga puoro (the goddess of flute music), who descended from Rangi-nui down to this terrestrial realm. Taonga puoro is a rongoā

and by taking the time to listen, audiences are immersed in an energy where the divine meets the earthly.



Figure 11. Margaret Aull, Leilani Kake, and Elizabeth Gray, *Toi is Rongoā*, 2020. Mixed media, video, and audio installation. Photograph courtesy of the author

Another facet of *Toi is Rongoā* are the sculptural components made by Aull (Fig. 11). Yellow and black signs are warnings, perhaps harbingers, from Papatūānuku, indicating the imminent danger ahead for all of us, especially with regard to climate change. Three piles of earth lay on the floor and perched on top of one of them is a taumata atua, an effigy of Rongo carved from pumice (Fig. 12). Rongo is the atua of cultivated crops and peace, and is related to good health, wellbeing, and our senses. He is a fitting atua, then, for this multi-sensory mahi. Shells are embedded carefully on his body, shining like stars and evoking *Hiwaiterangi* at the entrance of the exhibition. So, we come full circle.



Figure 12. Margaret Aull, Leilani Kake, and Elizabeth Gray, *Toi is Rongoā* (detail of an effigy of Rongo), 2020. Mixed media, video, and audio installation. Photograph courtesy of the author

The artists in *Hohou Te Rongo* bring different expressions and interpretations to the kaupapa of toi as rongoā, but the mahi also interconnects as each practitioner answers Aull's call to action: "*Hohou Te Rongo* is about gathering in our mahi from wherever points of the compass we are sitting, and bringing it in together so that our community can see that there's an opportunity to find an answer for wellbeing." The underlying thread in *Hohou Te Rongo* is that we, the audience, are encouraged to connect to ourselves, to our communities, to the earth and beyond—to our tupuna, the atua, and the cosmos. Like the kete aronui—the basket of knowledge that contained aroha, peace, and the arts—*Hohou Te Rongo* is an important and rich offering. It achieves what all good toi does—it provokes, gives food for thought, opens our eyes, opens our hearts, nourishes, and provides pathways to transformation.

Glossary⁴

aroha: love, affection, compassion

atua: ancestor with continuing influence, god, deity

awa: river

hapū: subtribe

heke: rafters

hohou te rongo: to make peace

kahu huruhuru: feather cloak*

kauae: woman's chin tattoo

kaupapa: theme, initiative, subject

kawakawa: pepper tree with heart-shaped leaves

kete aronui: basket of knowledge of aroha, peace, and the arts and crafts which benefit the Earth and all living things

kūwaha: front door

mahi: work, practice, activity

mahi toi: art, craft

mamae: pain, injury, wound

mana whenua: the right of a Māori tribe to manage a particular area of land

māreikura: an order of female supernatural beings

Matariki: Pleiades, Messier 45 - an open cluster of many stars in Te Kāhui o Matariki

mātauranga: knowledge, wisdom, understanding, skill

mauri: life principle, life force

Papatūānuku: Earth, Earth mother, and wife of Rangi-nui
pare: lintel
pare kawakawa: headdress made from kawakawa
paru: dirt
pāua: abalone
pou: post or pillar, often carved
poupou: wall-pillars, post, pole
pou tokomanawa: centre pole supporting the ridge pole of a meeting house
rangahau: research
Rangi-nui: atua of the sky and husband of Papatūānuku, from whose union originate all living things
raranga: weaving, to weave
reo: language
rongoā: medicine
takatāpui: a traditional Māori term meaning “intimate companion of the same sex.” It has been reclaimed to embrace all Māori who identify with diverse sexes, genders, and sexualities*
tā moko: tattoo
tangihanga: funeral
taonga puoro: musical instrument
taonga tuku iho: heirloom, something handed down, cultural property
taumata atua: resting place of gods
te ao Māori: Māori world view*
te kauae raro: terrestrial
te kauae runga: celestial
tohi: dedication rite, baptism rite, child dedication ritual - a ritual ceremony over a child in flowing water while petitioning the *atua* to endow the child with the desired mental and physical qualities
toi: art, knowledge
toi whakairo: art of carving
tōtara: species of podocarp tree endemic to Aotearoa
tupuna: ancestor
waiata: song
wero: challenge
whakaaro: idea, thought, understanding
whakairo: to carve, carving
whānau: family
wharenuī: meeting house

whatukura: an order of male supernatural beings

Kelly Joseph (Ngāti Maniapoto) is a writer and artist living in Hamilton, New Zealand. Her writing has been published in anthologies such as Huia Short Stories, Black Marks on the White Page, and Pūrākau: Māori Myths Retold by Māori Writers. In 2009, Kelly was the Tau Mai e Kapiti Māori Writer in Residence, and in 2018 she received an Emerging Māori Writers Residency at the Michael King Writers Centre. Kelly has an MA in creative writing from Victoria University and an MFA from the Rhode Island School of Design, USA.

Notes

¹ An iteration of this exhibition will be shown at Waikato Museum in July 2022–January 2023 and will be called *Toi is Rongoā*.

² All quotes in this review are taken from the *Hohou Te Rongo* artists panel discussion held at The Gallagher Academy of Performing Arts Gallery, Waikato University, July 3, 2021.

³ These publications are Brendan Hokowhitu, Aileen Moreton-Robinson, Linda Tuhiwai-Smith, Chris Andersen, and Steve Larkin (eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Critical Indigenous Studies* (New York: Routledge, 2020); *The Aotearoa New Zealand People Living with HIV Stigma Index*, (Auckland, 2020), <https://www.stigmaindex.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/New-Zealand-Aotearoa-SI-Report-2020.pdf>; *Aotearoa New Zealand People Living with HIV Stigma Index*, Te Whāriki Takapou, February 6, 2021, <https://www.stigmaindex.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/New-Zealand-Aotearoa-SI-Maori-Report-2021.pdf>; Jaimie Veale, Jack Byrne, Kyle K.H. Tan, Sam Guy, Ashe Yee, Tāwhanga Mary-Legs Nopera, and Ryan Bentham, *Counting Ourselves: The Health and Wellbeing of Trans and Non-Binary People in Aotearoa New Zealand* (Hamilton, New Zealand: Transgender Health Research Lab, 2019), <https://researchcommons.waikato.ac.nz/handle/10289/12942>; and Leonie Pihama, Alison Green, Carl Mika, Matthew Roskrudge, Shirley Simmonds, Tāwhanga Nopera, Herearoha Skipper, and Rebekah Laurence, *Honour Project Aotearoa* (Hamilton: Te Kotahi Research Institute, University of Waikato, 2020), https://www.waikato.ac.nz/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/636420/Honour-Project-Aotearoa-Final-Report.pdf.

⁴ Unless noted with “*”, all definitions are taken from *Te Aka/The Māori Dictionary*, <https://maoridictionary.co.nz>.

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, heritage arts, and current creative work. 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 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 book reviews editor Joslyn Chu at jxchu@ucsc.edu.

Pacific Arts – Forthcoming Issue

Our next issue of *Pacific Arts* is “**Grounded In Place: Dialogues Between First Nations Artists—Australia, Taiwan, Aotearoa,**” guest edited by Sophie McIntyre, Fang Chun-wei, and Zara Stanhope. The collection of essays and creative work featured were presented at a three-day symposium held in October 2021 that explored several themes: History and Sovereignty, Land and Community, Site and Materials, and Place and Space. Contributors include: Patrick Flores, Vernon Ah Kee, Chang En-Man, Kaihaukai Art Collective, Judy Watson, Akac Orat, Areta Wilkinson on behalf of Ngāi Tahu Contemporary Visual Arts, Mandy Quadrio, Yuma Taru, Leah King-Smith, Civas Tahos, Ngahuia Harrison, and Megan Tamati-Quennell.



The Pacific Arts Association is an international organization devoted to the study of the arts of Oceania. The Pacific Arts Association (PAA), founded in 1974 and established as an association in 1978, 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. 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.

The peer-reviewed **Pacific Arts journal** features current research and reviews. The **PAA Newsletter** provides timely information about important events to members. 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. Members have the opportunity to meet and participate in a PAA-sponsored session at the **College Art Association** annual meeting. PAA-Europe holds a meeting in Europe annually.

PAA's **goals** are:

- To make members more aware of the state of all the arts in all parts of Oceania.
- To encourage international understanding among the nations involved in the arts of Oceania.
- To promote high standards of research, interpretation, and reporting on the arts of Oceania.
- To stimulate more interest in the teaching of courses on Oceanic art especially but not only at the tertiary educational level.
- To encourage greater cooperation among the institutions and individuals who are associated with the arts of Oceania.
- To 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.

CONFERENCE

PACIFIC ARTS ASSOCIATION–EUROPE
2022 CONFERENCE AT THE MUSÉE DU QUAI BRANLY—
JACQUES CHIRAC, PARIS:
GENDERED OBJECTS IN OCEANIA
13–15 SEPTEMBER 2022

The annual PAA-E meeting entitled *Gendered objects in Oceania* will be held at the Musée du quai Branly – Jacques Chirac from 13 until 15 September 2022 to coincide with the exhibition *Power & Prestige: The Art of Clubs in Oceania* (7 June – 25 September 2022).

As the exhibition demonstrates, clubs are sculptures, exchange valuables, markers of authority and status, embodiments of divinity and accessories of performance. However, clubs are first and foremost weapons that through their association with warfare may be seen as expressions of masculinity. The gender identity linked to clubs forms the inspiration of the meeting as we hope to explore whether and how objects are being gendered in Oceania.

Call for papers: While the papers can cover a wide range of topics, preference will be given to papers dealing with the following issues: material culture as expression of gender identities, gendered collecting, gendered objects and art practices, & access to collections along gender lines.

There are two types of presentations:

- (a) 30 minute papers (20-25 mins talk, 5-10 mins discussion)
- (b) 10 minutes reports

Abstract submissions (100-200 words) for reports or papers should be sent to [Stéphanie Leclerc-Caffarel](#) by 1 May 2022. Acceptance will be confirmed by 1 June 2022, allowing time for presenters to make their travel arrangements.

Registration, tentative programme and accommodation:

Details for the meeting and information about accommodation will be announced in due course. It is anticipated that the programme will include an excursion to the *Musée d'histoire naturelle* in Lille.

The meeting follows on the *Parcours des mondes*, which will be held from 6 until 11 September 2022.

NEW PUBLICATION

Navigating CHamoru Poetry: Indigeneity, Aesthetics, and Decolonization
by Craig Santos Perez



Navigating CHamoru Poetry focuses on Indigenous CHamoru (Chamorro) poetry from the Pacific Island of Guåhan (Guam). Poet and scholar Craig Santos Perez brings critical attention to a diverse and intergenerational collection of CHamoru poetry and scholarship. Throughout this book, Perez develops an Indigenous literary methodology called "wayreading" to navigate the complex relationship between CHamoru poetry, cultural identity, decolonial politics, diasporic migrations, and native aesthetics. Perez argues that contemporary CHamoru poetry articulates new and innovative forms of indigeneity rooted in CHamoru customary arts and values, while also routed through the profound and traumatic histories of missionization, colonialism, militarism, and ecological imperialism.

This book shows that CHamoru poetry has been an inspiring and empowering act of protest, resistance, and testimony in the decolonization, demilitarization, and environmental justice movements of Guåhan. Perez roots his intersectional cultural and literary analyses within the fields of CHamoru studies, Pacific Islands studies, Native American studies, and decolonial studies, using his research to assert that new CHamoru literature has been--and continues to be--a crucial vessel for expressing the continuities and resilience of CHamoru identities. This book is a vital contribution that introduces local, national, and international readers and scholars to contemporary CHamoru poetry and poetics.

University of Arizona Press, Jan. 25, 2022

<https://uapress.arizona.edu/book/navigating-chamoru-poetry>

NEW PUBLICATION



Textiles of Indonesia: The Thomas Murray Collection

With contributions from Lorraine V. Aragon, Joanna Barrkman, Christopher Buckley, Kristal Hale, Valerie Hector, Janet Alison Hoskins, Itie van Hout, Etsuko Iwanaga, Fiona Kerlogue, Eric Kjellgren, Brigitte Khan Majlis, Robyn Maxwell, Thomas Murray and Sandra Sardjono

Drawn from one of the world's leading textile collections, this magnificently presented array of traditional weavings from the Indonesian archipelago provides a unique window into the region's cultures, rites, and history.

Gathered over the course of four decades, the Thomas Murray collection of Indonesian textiles is one of the most important in the world. The objects comprise ritual clothing and ceremonial cloths that tell us much about the traditions of pre-Islamic Indonesian cultures, as well as the influences of regional trade with China, India, the Arab world, and Europe. As with the earlier volume, *Textiles of Japan* (Prestel, 2018), the book focuses on some of the finest cloths to come out of the archipelago, presenting each object with impeccable photographs. Geographically arranged, this volume pays particular attention to textiles from the Batak and the Lampung region of Sumatra, the Dayak of Borneo, and the Toraja of Sulawesi, as well as rare textiles from Sumba, Timor and other islands. Readers will learn about the intricate traditions of dyeing, weaving, and beading techniques that have been practiced for centuries. Original texts by international experts offer historical context, unspool the mysteries behind ancient iconography, and provide new insights into dating and provenance. At once opulent and scholarly, this book arrives at a moment of growing interest in Southeast Asian culture and carries the imprimatur of one of the art world's leading collectors.

Published by Prestel, 526 pages, 450 colour illustrations, hardcover

[Ordering information:](#)

https://shop.hali.com/product/View/productCode/THOMASMURRAY/?mc_cid=9428ba6d19&mc_eid=88ec697107

EXHIBITION

THE 10TH ASIA PACIFIC TRIENNIAL OF CONTEMPORARY ART (APT10)

4 DEC 2021 – 25 APR 2022

Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art's (QAGOMA)



For this landmark tenth edition, QAGOMA's Asia Pacific Triennial looks to the future of art and the world we inhabit together. It's rich with stories of how to navigate through time and space, reimagine histories and explore connections to culture and place.

The 10th Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art (APT10) includes 69 projects with new and recent work by emerging and established artists and collectives, together comprising more than [150 individuals from 30 countries](#). It includes works of art that are by turn highly personal, deeply political, and full of joy.

Including major new and recently commissioned works, APT involves a great depth of research by the Gallery's in-house curators working collaboratively with a network of artists across wide and diverse geographies from Australia and the Asia Pacific region.

QAG and GOMA features a great wealth of materials and techniques, from large-scale installations and immersive multimedia artworks to sculpture, textiles, paintings, photography and video. APT10 includes three curated [cinema programs](#), interactive artist projects for [children and families](#), plus [Up Late](#) and a [closing weekend Festival](#).

Information: <https://www.qagoma.qld.gov.au/whats-on/exhibitions/apt10>

EXHIBITION

HAWAI‘I TRIENNIAL 2022 (HT 22)



Hawai‘i Triennial 2022 (HT22) presented by Hawai‘i Contemporary will open on February 18, 2022. Preceded by two biennials in 2017 and 2019, the 11-week, city-wide art exhibition entitled “Pacific Century – E Ho‘omau no Moananuiākea” marks its third iteration with a new format and major expansion as the biggest contemporary art event in Hawai‘i.

HT22 is a citywide art exhibition of contemporary art installed across seven venues in Honolulu: Bishop Museum, Foster Botanical Garden, Hawaii Theatre Center, Hawai‘i State Art Museum, Iolani Palace, Honolulu Museum of Art, and Royal Hawaiian Center. For more information and updates on Hawai‘i Triennial 2022 (HT22), visit [HawaiiContemporary.org](https://www.hawaiicontemporary.org).

CURATORS: Melissa Chiu, Miwako Tezuka, and Drew Broderick

ARTISTS: Chitra Ganesh, Michael Joo with Alchemyverse (Yixuan Shao and Bicheng Liang), Karrabing Film Collective, Izumi Kato, Pacific Sisters, Ahilaplapa Rands, Lawrence Seward, Gaku Tsutaja, Ai Weiwei, Leeroy New, TOQA, Ming Wong, ‘Ai Pōhaku Press, Richard Bell, ‘Elepaio Press, Nā Maka o Ka ‘Āina, Jamaica Heolimeleikalani Osorio, Piliāmo‘o (Mark Hamasaki and Kapulani Landgraf), Tropic Editions, Jennifer Steinkamp, Theaster Gates, Ed Greevy and Haunani-Kay Trask, Masanori Handa, Ai Iwane, Yuree Kensaku, Sung Hwan Kim + David Michael DiGregorio, Liu Xiaodong, Dan Taulapapa McMullin, 目[MÉ], Shinro Ohtake, Mika Tajima, Xu Bing, Chikako Yamashiro, Herman Pi‘ikea Clark, Tsuyoshi Hisakado, Miao Ying, Beatriz Santiago Muñoz, Double A Projects, Sun Xun, Momoyo Torimitsu, Justine Youssef, Zheng Bo

LECTURE SERIES

The Hawai'i Triennial: History, Place, Identity

For Spring 2022, the Pacific Basin Institute Lecture Series invites artists, curators, scholars, and activists to present bodies of work featured in the international exhibition, *The Pacific Century—E Ho'omau no Moananuiākea*, the 2022 Hawai'i Triennial, which foregrounds the Hawaiian archipelago's location at the confluence of Asia-Pacific and Oceania. Touching on the exhibition's intersecting themes of *History*, *Place*, and *Identity*, our guests will consider the question: how can local cultural rights and sovereignty struggles be articulated in a global exhibition platform?

Pacific Basin Institute Presents

**THE HAWAI'I TRIENNIAL:
HISTORY, PLACE, IDENTITY**

JOSH TENGAN & DREW KAHU'ĀINA BRODERICK
E Ho'omau no Moananuiākea
https://pomonacollege.zoom.us/join/wn_wf0qp6HhSWSaL-EWYqfQLg
03.02.2022 @ 4:15 PM PST / 2:15 PM HST



DAN TAULAPAPA MCMULLIN
**The Healer's Wound:
A Queer Theirstory of Polynesia**
https://pomonacollege.zoom.us/join/wn_D_WmgLaHTC6Ht_5VemdZ3g
03.09.2022 @ 4:15 PM PST / 2:15 PM HST

JOAN LANDER
Nā Maka o ka 'Āina
https://pomonacollege.zoom.us/join/wn_ng_SpUN6RdykbA4knLyfjg
03.28.2022 @ 4:15 PM PDT / 1:15 PM HST

BERNICE AKAMINE
'A'ohe hana nui ke alu 'ia
No task is too big when done together by all.
https://pomonacollege.zoom.us/join/wn_KhYmihisSSCG0kxCP4XbPQ
04.11.2022 @ 4:15 PM PDT / 1:15 PM HST

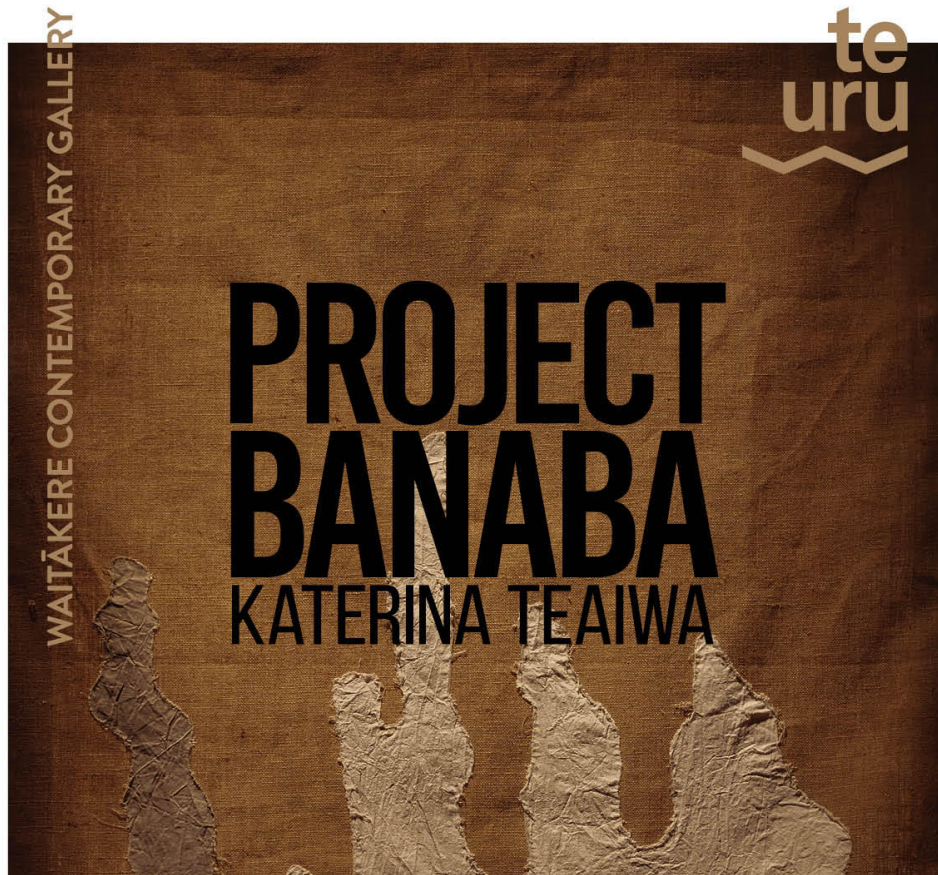
RICHARD BELL & ZOË DE LUCA
A Conversation
https://pomonacollege.zoom.us/join/wn_FeU_DAHDT2y_Rzop4YubzQ
04.27.2022 @ 4:15 PM PDT / 1:15 PM HST

All lectures will be via Zoom, for more info contact pbi@pomona.edu

Please visit this [link](#) for more information.

EXHIBITION



THE UNTOLD NEW ZEALAND MINING
HISTORY IN BANABA OCEAN ISLAND

Project Banaba is co-curated by Yuki Kihara and presented alongside *Te Kaneati*, a cultural revitalisation program by the Auckland Banaban community, funded by Creative NZ

5 March – 29 May 2022

teuru.org.nz



Exhibition information [here](#).

EXHIBITION

TE URU WAITAKERE CONTEMPORARY GALLERY (NZ)

is delighted to announce a double feature in our Autumn program with *Project Banaba*, a solo exhibition by Katerina Teaiwa, accompanied by the presentation of *Te Kaneati*, an exhibition that honors Aotearoa's Banaban diaspora, opening Saturday, 5 March 2022.

TE KANEATI

Te Kaneati is a presentation of Banaban arts, culture and heritage by Tāmaki Makaurau's Banaban community, presented alongside the exhibition *Project Banaba* by artist Katerina Teaiwa (Tabiang and Tabwewa) highlighting the resilience of the diaspora.

It follows a series of community-led, master-class workshops facilitated by Banaban elders with young Banaban community members that took place throughout 2021 and early 2022. The workshops were developed to strengthen Banaban cultural identity, language and creative arts, and to foster intergenerational relationships through sharing ancient knowledge and fostering connection to the homeland and its history.

Contemporary works made during these sessions will be exhibited at Te Uru, alongside *bai aika kakawaki* (treasures) from master-makers, co-curated by the Banaban Christian Fellowship Hub and Yuki Kihara. Together, these offer an account of Banaba's unique cultural heritage, and of what it means to be Banaban in Tāmaki Makaurau today.

Te Kaneati is supported by Creative New Zealand.

Image: *Auckland Banaban children with a diagram of the four Banaban villages*. Courtesy of Lilian Corrie

5 March – 29 May 2022

[Exhibition information here](https://www.teuru.org.nz/index.cfm/whats-on/calendar/te-kaneati/): <https://www.teuru.org.nz/index.cfm/whats-on/calendar/te-kaneati/>

EXHIBITION

Inspired by Country: Bark Paintings from Northern Australia The Gerd and Helga Plewig Collection

Museum Fünf Kontinente, München, 18 March–18 September 2022



In 1969, after completing his medical studies in the USA, Gerd Plewig went on a journey to Australia and bought a bark painting showing a kangaroo. This became the foundation for a collection of historical bark paintings from northern Australia, mainly Arnhem Land, which today is considered the best outside of Australia. For the Aboriginal people, however, these paintings are deep and spiritual maps of their Country, which also form the basis for their land right claims.

Arnhem Land lies in the most north-easterly part of the Northern Territory. Its culture, over 60,000 years old, is famous for its rock and bark paintings. The rock paintings show aspects of the creation stories of Arnhem Land and, according to the Aboriginal people, they were created by the original ancestors themselves, who still live on in the paintings. The bark paintings are painted with natural earth pigments on eucalyptus bark and are based partly on the iconography of the rock paintings and partly on ceremonial body painting. They show ancestors and mythical beings, sometimes in the form of animals, alongside star constellations, natural phenomena and religious ceremonies. They are an expression of *Mardayin*, the sacred law which the ancestors introduced and which is still to be found today in songs, dances, paintings, ritual objects and ceremonies.

The earliest bark paintings in the Plewig collection were created in the 1920s and 1930s, however, most of them are from the period from 1950 to the mid-1970s. At that time the artists of Arnhem Land were trying to convey the importance of Aboriginal culture to the world through their paintings. As ritual leaders of their clans they used their art to demonstrate their close connection to Country and to fight for their land rights.

The Plewig collection consists of 170 bark paintings from Arnhem Land and the Kimberley region which were donated to the Museum Fünf Kontinente in 2018 via the Collective Foundation in support of the Bavarian State Museums. The exhibition shows a representative range of paintings, including works by such renowned artists as Yirrwala, Dick Nuleingulei Murrumurru, Mawalan Marika or Mungurrawuy Yunupingu.

Exhibition information [here: https://www.museum-fuenf-kontinente.de/ausstellungen/inspired-by-country/](https://www.museum-fuenf-kontinente.de/ausstellungen/inspired-by-country/)

Exhibition catalogue: Michaela Appel (ed.), *Inspired by Country. Bark Paintings from Northern Australia. The Gerd and Helga Plewig Collection*, Hirmer Verlag, Museum Fünf Kontinente, 2022. Additional information [here: https://www.hirmerverlag.de/us/titel-1-1/inspired_by_country-2294/](https://www.hirmerverlag.de/us/titel-1-1/inspired_by_country-2294/)

POSITION ANNOUNCEMENT

Australian based volunteer Treasurer for the Oceanic Art Society

<https://www.oceanicartsociety.org.au>



Become involved in the dynamic boutique Oceanic Art Society. This is an opportunity to learn, contribute to and communicate with fellow national and international members, cultures and artists, all involved in the appreciation and understanding of oceanic art. Be an enthusiastic member of a small but passionate Committee who have an extensive network connection in the world of Oceanic art.

Skills & Job Description:

Basic MYOB skills preferred (alternatively they can be taught by outgoing Treasurer).

Reconciling monthly statements income and expenditures to MYOB:

1. Westpac
2. PayPal
3. Stripe

Monthly transfer of funds from PayPal to Westpac.

Funds management of events. This would include: x 4 Lectures/year, an annual International 2-day forum, an annual Sydney Oceanic Art Fair + Lecture.

- Budgets
- Tracking ticketing income from lectures and forums
- Depositing cash takings. Cash entries from annual SOAF (Sydney Oceanic Art Fair), lecture and raffle cash income.
- Managing the *Eftpos machine. Sending receipts. *Rarely used any longer for membership, used primarily during the SOAF.
- Managing the Eftpos machine for membership payments (no longer often used for membership).

Other:

- Invoicing journal advertisers (6–8) bi-annually. This involves working with our wonderful Journal Editor, Margaret Cassidy.
- Quarterly statistical returns of donations to Register of Cultural Organisations (ROCO). An online, preformed report.

Finance reporting (balances and P/L) at each OAS Committee meeting. An annual financial report (balance sheet /P/L) from MYOB at AGM.

The Treasurer is an office bearer in the OAS Executive Committee contributing to all aspects of decision-making and management of the organisation.

All inquiries are welcome: rita.uechtritz@bigpond.com

POSITION ANNOUNCEMENT

**Assistant Professor of Environmental Literatures and Ecocritical
Inquiry and/or Decolonial and Indigenous Studies,
University of Guelph, Canada**



The School of English & Theatre Studies at the University of Guelph invites applications for a tenure-track position at the Assistant Professor level in English, with Specialization in Environmental Literatures and Ecocritical Inquiry and/or Decolonial and Indigenous Studies. Often these two areas of research have overlapping mandates and methodologies, but this search is open to scholars who consider themselves specialists in one or the other field regardless of period or location. The appointment will commence on July 1, 2022.

The objective is to hire someone whose research and teaching speaks to the urgent political dilemmas facing present and future generations. That work can be situated in conventionally defined historical periods and literatures, or it can be staged in relation to wider definitions of tradition, community, environment, sociability, and mediation. Applicants should consider this as an opportunity to further the discipline-wide movement towards decolonization, the historical understanding of climate justice, and the interconnectedness of social and environmental justice. The preferred candidate will have a specialization demonstrated by publications in any of the following areas: environmental and climate literatures, eco-criticism, Indigenous cultural expression, decolonial writing. Applicants are encouraged to envision both how our current course offerings might be inflected to suit these needs and how our curriculum might be re-structured in the coming years.

Deadline: March 11, 2022 or until a suitable candidate is found.

Full position description [here](#):

<https://www.uoguelph.ca/facultyjobs/postings/ad22-12.shtml>

CALL FOR APPLICATIONS

**The Summer Institute on Global Indigeneities (SIGI)
A Graduate Student Program
June 27-July 1, 2022, University of Washington, Seattle**

Hosted on the traditional homelands and waters of the Duwamish, Suquamish, Muckleshoot, Tulalip, and other Coast Salish peoples, the Summer Institute on Global Indigeneities invites applications for our 2022 program in American Indian, Indigenous and Native Studies. Supported by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, SIGI is a collaboration of scholars at the Universities of British Columbia (Vancouver), Victoria, California (LA), Hawai'i (Mānoa), Minnesota (Twin Cities), Oregon, Utah, and Washington (Seattle). This summer institute offers a week of workshops, lectures, and collaborative learning activities for PhD students from member universities of the SIGI consortium. SIGI activities focus on the intellectual and institutional challenges of *articulating Indigenous studies* and will provide a set of epistemological, methodological, and professional strategies for the successful completion and dissemination of creative research projects in Indigenous studies that may not always be legible to conventional academic disciplines. Through these activities and related conversations, we foresee the elaboration of a sustainable and on-going network of collaborations that can support scholars of Indigenous Studies and usefully disrupt conventional and colonial forms of knowledge production and graduate training.

Teaching Team: Hokulani Aikau (UVic), Chadwick Allen (UW), Vicente Diaz (UMN), and José Antonio Lucero (UW)

Costs: Room and board for all SIGI graduate fellows will be funded by the UW and provided by UW Conference Services. UW students may opt not to reside in UW dorm housing. There are no additional fees for SIGI. SIGI consortium members will support travel costs for participating students and faculty.

Dates and Location: June 27-July 1, 2022 University of Washington, Seattle

Eligibility: Graduate students from SIGI consortium members in any academic discipline, at any stage of their PhD program are welcome to apply.

Application Process and Deadline: Please submit the following materials to sigi@uw.edu by **April 1, 2022**. Applicants should bundle CV and research statement **in one PDF document** with the applicant's last name in file name (for example: Aikau-SIGI.pdf).

- **Curriculum Vitae**
- **Research Statement. In no more than 1000 words**, introduce your dissertation project for an academic reader who may be unfamiliar with your topic, region of study, and disciplinary approach. In your essay, provide the central research question, problem, or puzzle. Describe how you intend to conduct (or have already conducted) your dissertation research. Finally, explain how you expect your dissertation project to engage and contribute to the existing literature.
- **One letter of recommendation**, sent separately to sigi@uw.edu.

Questions? Contact Professor Tony Lucero, jal26@uw.edu