

ing the exhibition research, addresses some of these contemporary issues in an essay in the beautifully illustrated exhibit catalog. Haraha wrote his comments before the public challenge to the provenance of certain objects on display in the Jolika Collection of the de Young Museum in San Francisco (see review, *TCP* 19:345–351), and the arduous endorsement of contemporary collectors by official representatives of the Government of Papua New Guinea in April 2006, expressed in a letter from the Embassy of Papua New Guinea to the de Young Museum director and reported in the online edition of *Nature* (44 [6]: 722–723). Haraha emphasizes that the pieces in this collection were primarily gathered in museum-sponsored field trips or through enforcement of the National Cultural Property (Preservation) Act, which prevents export of older objects of cultural significance. He describes how the PNG National Museum is viewed locally as a contemporary Haus Tumbuna, or longhouse, storing ancestral knowledge in the form of artifacts within a new environment of knowledge preservation and production in object form.

The history of movement and collecting embodied in these objects and photographs is inevitably entangled in complex networks of colonialism, as Virginia Lee Webb notes in her catalog essay. The juxtaposition of these images and objects draws us both to wonder about how this kind of comparative exercise was enabled, and to challenge the timeless presentation of ritual artifacts as fine art, with the decontextualized emphasis on form and the naturalization of collecting contexts that this entails. However,

bringing these two very different kinds of objects together also joins two very different moments of these objects' lives in a more connected trajectory. As Webb comments, "The click of the camera's shutter mimics the human view, creating this souvenir of vision" (52). The photographs open a window into the ways in which these temporal connections do in fact tell us much about how we see these objects in terms of ideals about art and within the pragmatic and academic interests encapsulated in contemporary and past collection practices in Papua New Guinea.

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Power and Taboo: Sacred Objects from the Eastern Pacific. The British Museum, London, 28 September 2006–7 January 2007.

Pasifika Styles. Cambridge University Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, London, 5 May 2006–February 2008.

Pacific Encounters: Art and Divinity in Polynesia. University of East Anglia's Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, Norwich, 21 May–13 August 2006.

Last year saw the Pacific emerge into the public eye in the United Kingdom through a series of exhibitions and associated events that were spread across the southeast, creating a new Polynesian triangle of sorts between Cambridge, Norwich, and London. I was involved in many of the openings and celebrations in various guises, as

a curator, performer, artist, lecturer, and member of the large and thriving UK-based Polynesian community. Although the projects differed in their scale and time frames, they shared networks, artists, and ideas that will help advance and secure the position of Pacific art and artists in the international arena, expanding the old trade networks and perpetuating all things Polynesian in the twenty-first century.

May 2006 saw an intensive month of activity scheduled around the opening of "Pasifika Styles"—an exhibition and festival reconnecting contemporary artists with the historical collections housed in the Cambridge University Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology—and that of "Pacific Encounters: Art and Divinity in Polynesia" at the University of East Anglia's Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, which displayed an astounding array of historical taonga (treasures) drawn from collections worldwide. These two projects may have been centuries apart in terms of focus, but by working together in the planning of the opening dates of both exhibitions the organizers were able to maximize the involvement of several hundred visiting artists, academics, curators, and dignitaries visiting from Europe, North America, and the Pacific. Blessings, opening events, artist residencies, workshops, performances, and the Pacific Arts Association (Europe) conference all created opportunities for formal and informal discussion, with many conference delegates taking time to visit the Cuming Museum's "Mana: Ornament and Adornment from the Pacific" and the October Gallery's "Fijian Red Wave Collective: Contemporary paintings from Fiji, Solomon

Islands, Tonga and Samoa" exhibition in London.

Yet despite all this activity, the Pacific remained largely invisible to the public at large, thanks to a mystifying lack of interest in these happenings on the part of the mainstream national media, helping to push the Pacific farther into the back rooms of obscurity. So I hoped that the last of the year's Polynesian exhibitions to open would help readdress this issue of voice and representation in the United Kingdom.

"Power and Taboo" at the British Museum was in many ways a spin-off of the Norwich-based Pacific Encounters project, as it re-displayed many of the taonga from the British Museum that had been loaned to the Sainsbury Centre. But in another sense "Power and Taboo" was conceived out of a need to fill an empty gap in the museum's gallery number five, rather than a positive desire from the top levels of the institution to present its unparalleled Oceanic collections to the public. Even so, I was ready to relish this exhibition, especially as these taonga have no permanent gallery in the museum. When "Power and Taboo" was finished, so too were our five minutes of fame in the global arena that the British Museum claims to be.

My first glimpse of "Power and Taboo" was in the London Underground. I stood face-to-face with a mighty feathered god, nestled in among some modern-day gods—movie stars and the latest rock-star releases. Eyes bulging, mouth twisted, he looked angry, reflecting the mood of the passing commuters, a striking yet somewhat savage ambassador

for the exhibition. The next time I saw him was from a distance, looming above the masses milling around outside the British Museum. Ngāti Ranana, the London Māori Club, together with other members of the UK Polynesian community, were gathered by his side to partake in the blessing of the exhibition, the taonga bringing us together again, binding us through prayers and food (photo 1).

After the blessing I was ready to see the exhibition proper. The gallery is saturated in a deep-sea blue; darkly lit, large-scale Hodges watercolors firmly define the gaze of the day. This is an all-star gathering of Polynesian gods: Ta'aroa, A'a, and Tāne are all present, with the mighty Kū (escaping encasement with a few other lucky souls)

lording over all who pass. Woven feathered capes, body adornments of greenstone and whalebone, teeth, tapa cloth, tattooed warriors, an assortment of unnamed gods and useful receptacles—it seems not much has changed from the eighteenth-century presentations for the curious. Except for a less-is-more approach and more user-friendly language used in the labeling, the exhibition still focuses on the glass cases, though nowadays with less walnut trimming.

The section on “contemporary” Polynesian arts was as brief and abrupt in its introduction as the conditions that helped to form it. It appeared tacked onto the end, and it is perhaps significant that there was more space provided for the exhibition



PHOTO 1. Ngāti Ranana, Dr Kaori O'Connor, and the British Museum staff at the blessing of the “Power and Taboo” exhibition, September 2006. Photo by Kerry Brown.

gift shop, a bright and sparkly space largely filled with mass-produced trinkets and raffia bags masquerading as takeaway Polynesian art and craft. Thank goodness for Lyonel Grant's carved sculpture, a truly powerful modern ancestor, filling the small space—and for *E noho nei au*, an art work presented in word form adorning the walls, written as a waiata aroha or song by Che Wilson to help heal the pain of the taonga's separation from their present-day people. This waiata was sung many times for them in the British Museum and indeed in all the exhibitions that year.

For me, it was in the realm of the living that "Power and Taboo" managed to make some progress in offering something new to help make sense of the Pacific, past and present. Artist-in-residence George Nuku was cited as "undoubtedly the big hit of the season," according to Julie Adams, assistant curator of the exhibition, with approximately 12,000 visitors stopping to engage with him as he worked in the museum's Great Court. The exhibition was also accompanied by a substantial public program offering many opportunities for the public to interact with members of UK-based Polynesian communities, including gallery talks, film nights, and conferences, all contributing to the living dynamic.

The living dynamism of Polynesian cultures was indeed the common thread through all the exhibitions, transforming otherwise static displays, bringing forth *real* power and taboo. Without these living engagements (or in some cases, entanglements), the historical exhibitions would have been just more grand displays of the past, locked in glass cabinets, labeled for the masses, and carefully conserved out of existence. It is encouraging to see that, slowly but surely, relationships are being forged every time an exhibition presents itself. Museums are becoming spaces that produce creativity—changing the nature of the space itself, as our work spills out of the realm of the inanimate and reaches out directly to our communities and the public. In this way museums are helping to maintain present-day Polynesian arts and culture.

"Pasifika Styles" is closing in March 2008 with a further series of planned public events. For a taste of the exhibition, go to www.pasifikastyles.org.uk and, for those who missed "Pacific Encounters," they can see it in 2008 (16 June–14 September) at the Musée du Quai Branly in Paris.

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