CONTEMPORARY HAWAIIAN ARTISTS:
A DISCUSSION ON IDENTITY, CREATIVITY, AND EXHIBITIONS

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DEDICATION

To my wife Sonia, whose wisdom guides and centers our 'ohana.

Mahalo me ke aloha.

To our children Laniākea, Moana, and Gaël.

May this dissertation light your calling with passion.

You are the architects and builders of your future.

Your multi-lingual cultural gifts empower your promise.

Inhale the elegant sweetness of life.

Trust in the truth-beating core of your heart

Laniākea, use your special magic and transformative powers

to create a just, peaceful, and beautiful world.

Moana, trust in your extraordinary intuition, gifted intellect and
intrepid leadership to open new vistas of hopes and possibilities.

Gaël, dream the impossible, be bold and sure,

then imagine and construct your better world.
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ABSTRACT

This dissertation presents information obtained from interviews of five contemporary Native Hawaiian visual artists. The focus of the interviews was on their views of identity, creativity, and exhibition. The following are the five artists:

- Dalani Kauihou Tanahy, a kapa artist;
- Noelle Kahanu, a maker of traditional and contemporary kāhili and a project coordinator at the Bishop Museum;
- Kaili Chun, a conceptual artist and carver of traditional Hawaiian implements;
- Imaikalani Kalahele, a poet, muralist, illustrator, and kupuna; and
- Solomon Enos, a commercial and fine art illustrator, painter, and community activist.

Among these Hawaiian artists, there is a general understanding that to be Hawaiian is to be genealogical Hawaiian. It is extremely important to these Hawaiian artists that they understand Hawaiian culture and use this knowledge in their artwork. These artists believe that participating in exhibitions is essential and an important way to share what they have discovered with their community.

The dissertation includes images of the works of these artists and provides a comprehensive definition of what is unique and distinctive in contemporary Native Hawaiian visual art in the 21st century.
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INTRODUCTION

Art is not about color or shape or form. It is ultimately not even about the thing that gets put down on paper, or made into an object, or carved into a stone. Art is the life that made that thing of paper or clay or stone. (Dudoit, 1998, p. 26).

Dudoit’s insight on art encapsulates what this study aimed to discover about contemporary Native Hawaiian artists and their art.

The foundation of this research started with my own inquiry as a Native Hawaiian visual artist. In particular, I have been critically interested in issues of identity, creativity and exhibition. As an extension of these interests, my research examined the lives and the art of five distinguished contemporary Native Hawaiian artists: Dalani Kauihou Tanahy, Noelle Kahanu, Kaili Chun, Imaikalani Kalahele, and Solomon Enos.

In my interviews with these artists, I asked them to share stories about their lives as related to identity, creativity, and exhibition. Through the insights shared, my goal was to open a window of knowledge that looks carefully at contemporary Hawaiian visual art within the social context in which it is produced.
**Native Hawaiian Artists and Identity**

I believe there is an inalienable relationship between a Native Hawaiian artist’s identity and the creative artistic process. In my own experiences as a Native Hawaiian artist, I cannot separate my understanding of myself as a Hawaiian artist from my creative process—a substantial part of my process and work is about who I am. To understand the process of each artist’s creativity I must first understand how each artist considers his or her sense of identity.

Identity is the essential element that guides creative lives. Identity authenticates all that artists do when creating art. Identity acts as a lens that filters artists’ thoughts and feelings, which are then revealed in their art.

What do Hawaiian artists mean when they identify themselves as “Hawaiian” and “artist”? What do they mean by the word “identity”? How does their notion of identity influence their art? How do they identify and describe themselves as artists? In my interviews, I asked five artists about their identity as Hawaiian artists and how these thoughts related to and affected making choices in their art practices.

As part of my interest in the cultural component of artists’ identity, I wanted to find out how their affinity with their genealogy and their family history and stories influence their identity and their art. I also asked them what kinds of literature they read and with whom they speak about issues important to their ideas and their sense of identity.
Native Hawaiian Artists and the Creative Process

An important part of creativity concerns an artist’s aesthetic sensibility—his or her “taste.” Therefore, I wanted to examine the nature of each artist’s creative process. I wanted to find out how each artist considers not only the creative process, but also what makes his or her art unique and distinctive. I wanted to find examples of work that best manifest each artist’s notions, theories, or ideas.

This second section is about the extent to which each artist’s cultural, social, and personal history influences his or her art. I wanted to find out how each artist’s social and economic challenges dictate what he or she is able to create and produce. What types of resources did each artist consider essential for developing and cultivating ideas? I was interested in the kind of materials each artist used and the conceptual or practical reasons for using them. The role that personal protocol played with each artist’s creative process was also of interest. I wanted to know how an artist’s formation in education—either Western or Hawaiian—influenced the making of art and about the schools and teachers that were most influential in each artist’s career. I wanted to learn how each artist used imagination to turn thoughts into creative projects and works of art. In short, I wanted to find out how each of the five Native Hawaiian artists considered the creative process as a unique and distinctive process.

Native Hawaiian Artists and Exhibition Experiences

When a Native Hawaiian artist decides to present his or her work in an exhibition at a museum, gallery, or public space, there are basic questions that should be taken into consideration. Each artist faces numerous challenges when negotiating these spaces. The
essential question to the third part of my research asks, “What are the experiences of a Native Hawaiian artist when exhibiting works in public spaces?”

Considering the art museum as a public place, where the community comes to engage with art and artists, I was interested in learning how each artist defined the community in which he or she lived and worked. I wanted to examine the challenges each artist faced when communicating with his or her community? I wanted each to speak about engagements with those who view his or her works? If a Native Hawaiian artist chooses to exhibit with other Native Hawaiian artists, what are the essential considerations? In what way is exhibiting in a group show with other Hawaiians different from exhibiting with non-Hawaiians?

Museums and art exhibitions often include curators, show designers, board members, executive administrators, museum educators, docents, and critics. These elements play an important role in how a Native Hawaiian artist is perceived and presented to an audience. I wanted to know about the experiences of each artist when engaging with these authorities. Does the artist worry that his or her artwork will be considered correctly when the ultimate presentation is in the hands of others?

In addition, art collectors play an important commercial role in sustaining an artist’s practice. I wanted to know what each artist thinks about the role of collectors. I also wanted to find out who is collecting each artist’s works and for what reasons.

**Aligning the Notions of Identity, Creative Process, and Exhibition Experiences**

I believe these three points of artistic consideration are essential to building a vibrant and meaningful art profession. I asked these questions:
What does it mean to be a contemporary Native Hawaiian artist?

What are the essential elements that enable the creative process of a contemporary Native Hawaiian artist to thrive?

How does a contemporary Native Hawaiian artist interact with and present his or her works to others in his or her community?

I sought answers about activities that impart profound meaning and great value to the life of a contemporary Native Hawaiian artist. I find this process of understanding the nature of an artistic practice useful to my own professional art practice. This understanding helps with developing my growth as a contemporary Native Hawaiian artist.

The three main areas of inquiry in this research are at the heart of a personal search that initially took seed as I began my journey as an artist. These areas arose out of my own questions about my identity and why I define myself as a Native Hawaiian artist. They concern the doubts and fears about my creative ideas. The challenges of trying to find venues to exhibit, to speak about my work with others, and to market and sell my works are daunting. As I pursued this research, I wanted to find out if other Native Hawaiian artists have similar experiences.

I drew upon my own experiences as a practicing contemporary Hawaiian artist to help guide my interviews of fellow Native Hawaiian artists. As a Native Hawaiian artist, I have an affinity with each artist, and this affinity has enabled me to conduct frank conversations with each. Further, my awareness as a Native Hawaiian researcher has helped me to frame my thoughts and protocol in constructing each question and in conducting each interview.
In addition, my consciousness as a Native Hawaiian researcher has helped me interpret the data and present the findings. I put great importance on the accuracy of the transcription of the interview of each artist because I wanted the written documentation to authenticate each artist’s voice and mana'o (thoughts).

**The Five Native Hawaiian Artists**

Five contemporary Hawaiian artists consented to being interviewed. These are the artists and the kind of art each is best known for.

- Dalani Kauihou Tanahy, a kapa artist;
- Noelle Kahanu, a maker of traditional and contemporary kāhili and a project coordinator at the Bishop Museum;
- Kaili Chun, a conceptual artist and carver of traditional Hawaiian implements;
- Imaikalani Kalahele, a poet, muralist, illustrator, and kupuna; and
- Solomon Enos, a commercial and fine art illustrator, painter, and community activist.

These artists were chosen for this study because their lives and works influence many of their fellow Native Hawaiian artists and others in the community interested in Native Hawaiian art. They were also chosen because of their connection to traditional practices of Hawaiian kūpuna (those who possess particular skills) culture.
Hawaiian Perspectives on Contemporary Native Hawaiian Art

Dudoit’s (1998) article, *Carving a Hawaiian Aesthetic*, spoke to the question of what constitutes Hawaiian art. This includes questions about Hawaiian identity, the creative process, and exhibition experiences. As a starting point, Dudoit offered insight into what she considers art of pre-contact Hawaiians.

Hawaiians and non-Hawaiians have agonized over the absence of a Hawaiian equivalent to the word *art* [emphasis added]. Some simply conclude that because there is no concept in ancient Hawai‘i of an object judged on its formal and aesthetic qualities alone, there is therefore no such thing as art (Dudoit, 1998, p. 23).

She noted that in efforts to define Hawaiian art and the Hawaiian artist some researchers fail in their attempts by marginalizing Hawaiian perspectives on what constitutes aesthetic qualities. Dudoit argued that to ancient Hawaiian sensibilities, an object’s worth, and thus its meaning or value, “always functioned in conjunction with a practical, spiritual, or symbolic capacity, whether secular or sacred” (Dudoit, 1998, p. 23).

Many contemporary Hawaiians and non-Hawaiians consider that a Native Hawaiian artist is an individual defined by hana no‘eau or his or her truly unique and skilled work. Dudoit wrote that these creative works are appreciated for their practical, applicable, and utilitarian function, as well as aesthetic choices and taste.

Imaikalani Kalahele shared his mana‘o with Dudoit about what he thinks Hawaiian art is and is not. He spoke about the aesthetic elements and principles and the significance of meaning and purpose. He described it as the ono.
The ono [the good taste], (which) all of a sudden became something that we wanted to define, (and) not the ono of da haole. When we talk about “art,” what dat “art” as Maoli [Native Hawaiian] people? What is our taste? What feel good to us? (Dudoit, 1998, p. 22).

He explained his concept of the image as in the word ki‘i.

What dat mean, ki‘i, image? Ki‘i is take pictcha, ki‘i is pound rock, ki‘i is also being in da right place when da shadow hit da right spot, and you go...(and) image is...song. Image is...poetry. Image is whatevah stimulates something inside of you, whether you see it, hear it, feel it, smell it, taste it. These are all images. And den maoli [emphasis added] images? These are our [emphasis added] images (Dudoit, 1998, p. 22).

Kalahele compared Native Hawaiian images to European images. He said that many Western images, aside from their concepts, are mainly concerned with color, shape, form, and balance or the elements of formalistic visual design. In contrast, Native Hawaiian images are about smell, taste, and sound. “Fo’ me art is ‘ono’. Art is not doctrine. If I wuz to take dis term ‘art’ and move it into something Hawaiian—we no mo’ one word named ‘art’—I would have to put it into a place like ono” (Dudoit, 1998, p. 23). Kalahele claims that his art aligns with something more primal than something rational and intellectual. He put it this way.

If no mo ihi [inner substance], you might as well sell Coke, Bic pens. Because nice image, look sharp, heavy li’ dat, but if da ting no say not’ing, it’s like saying, ‘Plop, plop! Fizz, fizz!’ So fo’ me art gotta
make da ‘ono’. Cause if not, it’s all bourgeois stuff (Dudoit, 1998, p. 23).

The Contemporary Native Hawaiian Visual Art Movement

Efforts by Hawaiian artists and community leaders who started grass-root art projects throughout Hawai‘i have added more native artists to this growing ‘ohana (family). This family of Native Hawaiian artists represents mixture of ages and genders. It embraces a rich diversity consisting of lived experiences and personal stories. These artists form a corpus of varied genealogical backgrounds, birthplaces, and settings. They also come from varied educational and ethnic backgrounds.

Within the past few years, Native Hawaiian visual artists have formed two organizations—Maoli Art Month (MAMo) and Maoli Art in Real Time. These organizations are noteworthy because of their tenacity for overcoming organizational, logistical, and financial challenges. These groups nurture the development of Native Hawaiian artists by offering them opportunities to mature their artistic sensibilities. The groups have developed stable venues that showcase contemporary Hawaiian visual art monthly, annually, or at event-specific showings. These organizations seek exhibition spaces where Native Hawaiians are able to present their works in formal settings. The opportunity to engage with those who view the art is central to these exhibitions.

Since 2006, MAMo has been publishing a full-color artist guide with an artist directory. Each guide includes a colored poster that features the works of two artists, a kupuna, and a young emerging artist. The publication coincides with a month-long art exhibit at various galleries in Hawai‘i, an award exhibition at Bishop Museum, a MAMo
Wearable Art Show and auction, and a Native Hawaiian Arts Market and Keiki Arts Festival at different island communities.

Maoli Art in Real Time sets-up three-day exhibitions at the Hawai‘i Convention Center when important gatherings are convened. The mission of Maoli Art in Real Time is to maximize public exposure of contemporary Native Hawaiian art to visitors who may be unfamiliar with Hawaiian art and Hawaiian artists. Featured at each exhibition are 30 to 60 Native Hawaiian artists. Exhibitions often include public forums where guests and artists are able to meet and where artists are able to sell their works. These venues also provide excellent opportunities for Hawaiian artists to meet as a group and to share resources and ideas.

Conversations at these gatherings often examine the concept of a contemporary Native Hawaiian visual artist. One belief that has emerged focuses on the koko (blood) lineage. That is, genealogical links to the original Indigenous people of these islands are a necessity.

This view of Hawaiian identity has presented a complicated and often contentious notion for some people who, through a colonial process have lost their legal status for claiming to be a “genealogical” Hawaiian

In addition, to the five artists interviewed for this research, I looked at other Native Hawaiian artists, kūpuna, and scholars to supply information about identity, the creative process, and exhibition experiences. In addition, journal articles, books, and lectures by reputable sources added breadth to my research.

For this study, the commentaries of the five Native Hawaiian visual artists will provide a unique perspective on life and lives, on concepts and thoughts, on paper and
clay, on stone and wood, of iwi (bones) and lā’au (plants); on color and dyes and shapes and marks and forms of shadows and spirit and mana that contains and sustains the visual mo‘olelo.

**Research Questions**

The main data-collection process began with three simple questions about what contemporary Native Hawaiian artists think about their identity, creative process, and exhibitions. These initial questions were open-ended, designed to begin a discussion. Follow-up questions were built on responses to previous questions. The overall goal was to build a series of questions that led to a deeply rich story, or mo‘olelo, that captured the creative life of each artist. The following were the open-ended questions asked during each interview. As a contemporary Native Hawaiian artist, how would you describe your identity? As contemporary Native Hawaiian artist, how would you describe your creative process? As a contemporary Native Hawaiian artist, what are your experiences when exhibiting your artwork in museums, galleries, and public spaces?

**Synopsis of the Chapters**

Chapter One, the literature review, focuses on the three areas of research: perspectives of contemporary Native Hawaiian artists about their identity, thoughts about the creative process, and views about exhibition experiences. The literature begins with a story about how kahiko (ancient) and present-day Hawaiians consider their identity and the importance they give to the concept of mo'okū'auhau (genealogy). Also explored are legal definitions and requirements of blood quantum that determine who is
considered Hawaiian. A reference to Māori regarding their issues of identity, self-determination, and development helps illustrate how another Polynesian group is dealing with similar challenges. This section concludes with voices from other Hawaiian artists about their thoughts and perspectives on Hawaiian identity.

The second part of Chapter One, considers what is unique and distinctive about a contemporary Native Hawaiian artist and his or her creative process. David Malo’s (1903) description of sacred protocol when constructing a wa'a (canoe) serves to establish a link in beliefs and concepts between kahiko canoe builders and contemporary Native Hawaiian artists. This section about creativity shares Momi Cazimero’s (2001) perspective on art and identity as intractable and linked. Included is her discussion about amalgamation that is part of her thoughts that are found in the introduction pages of the exhibition catalog published by the Honolulu Academy of Arts titled, Nā Maka Hou (2001).

Also in this section is a perspective from Manulani Aluli Meyer (2004) that compares Hawaiian aesthetics with John Dewey’s notions on aesthetics. A discussion by Robert Jahnke (2003), a contemporary Māori artist and cultural scholar, enlightens our notions about Indigenous artists and their engagement with new materials. Jahnke asserts that when artists utilize these materials, they are also claiming their kuleana (their rights and responsibilities).

A review of ideas realized by Smith (1998), exposes the notion of the politics of the creative process and demonstrates how acts for reclaiming imagination and creativity are useful tools for decolonizing Indigenous people. This section about the creative process also presents the political dilemma challenging Hawaiian artists. This problem
especially concerns the protection and legalization of native gathering rights which
impact and influence the ability of artists to replenish their supplies of raw material
necessary to making Native Hawaiian art.

The last part of Chapter One explores what contemporary Hawaiian artists think
about and consider when exhibiting their works of art in public galleries or museum
spaces. The section looks at examples of art exhibitions produced by contemporary
Hawaiian artists. A discussion about the notion of visibility from a museum studies
perspective looks at the writing of Tony Bennett (1995), a museum scholar. Bennett
discusses how information is understood and knowledge transmitted to an audience
within exposition spaces. This section considers the use of interpretive text as a means
for communicating information to the viewing public.

Chapter One concludes with the words of Hawaiian artists who produced the
Hoʻokuʻe Exhibition in 1997 at the East West Center Gallery. Their manaʻo on what is
unique and distinctive about Hawaiian art and artists are captured in a series of public
forums recorded on videotape.

Chapter Two is about methodology and research methods that support this study.
The chapter explains why a case-study approach, which utilize interview for collecting
data is best suited. The chapter also addresses this study’s instrumentation, process of
data collection, and procedures for treatment of data. Presented are the research
questions along with profiles of each artist interviewed.

Chapters Three through Seven introduces provide each artist and his or her
importance to this research. Explained are the setting and special considerations for each
interview. A significant part of these chapters is composed from transcription of each
interview, along with my commentary concerning salient information. Each chapter concludes with a summary and commentary on how each artist addressed each interview question. Chapter three is about Dalani Kauihou Tanahy who is a kapa maker, artist and teacher. Chapter four is about Noelle Kahanu who is a project manager at Bishop Museum and kāhili maker. Chapter five is about Kaili Chun who is a conceptual artist and traditional wood and stone carver. These three artists represent the wāhine or female artists. The following two artists represent the kāne or male artists. Chapter six is about Imaikalani Kalahele who is a poet, musician, visual artist, and kupuna. The last artist to be interviewed was Solomon Enos who is an entrepreneurial fine and commercial artist, community leader, activist and teacher. Chapter seven is about his artistic life story.

The Conclusion Chapter examines salient themes in the responses of each artist. The data are analyzed according to the foci of the research—the perspectives of the Hawaiian artists about identity, their thoughts about the creative process, and their views about exhibition experiences.
Identity

Identity and mo‘olelo kahiko.

_Eia ua lani a Hāloa I pili ai ka hanu I ke kapu_

Here is a chief descended from Hāloa, whose kapu makes one hold his breath in dread. A compliment to a chief. To be able to trace descent from Hāloa, an ancient chief, was to be of very high rank from remote antiquity (Pukui, 1983).

Who are Hawaiians? According to Hawaiian literature, their origins are found in ʻōlelo noʻeau (proverb), oli (chant), mele (song), and moʻolelo (story). These oral works speak about genealogy, heredity, and lineage.

There are several stories about the origin of the Hawaiian people. One story told in old Hawai‘i was about Hāloa. Hāloa descended from kalo, the food source that provided the basic staple for carbohydrate in the Hawaiian diet. In this story, passed down through generations by genealogical chants, kalo proceeded mankind. The ancestors believed that Hāloa was the elder brother of man.

Hāloa came to be when Wākea, the sky-father (also thought of as Kane the procreator of nature and man), mated with Papa, the earth-mother. Their first child, who was stillborn, was named Hāloanaka. The first kalo plant sprouted from the spot where Hāloanaka was buried. Wākea mated with his second child, a daughter named
Ho’ohokukalani, and from that union, Hāloa, the first human, a male, was born (Abbott, 1992; Handy, 1991 revised edition; Malo, 1903).

In matters of lineage, the ali‘i considered Hāloa their ancestor—the eldest. Being the first born, the eldest child had the most mana (supernatural power) and the right to direct or instruct younger brothers and sisters. These children had a reciprocal responsibility to listen and to obey (Abbott, 1992; Handy, 1991 revised edition; Malo, 1903).

This story about who Hawaiians are has been told since ancient times and continues to be an integral part of how Hawaiians of today identify themselves. The story serves as a cultural indicator that shows the connection between Hawaiian identity and cultural heritage that is expressed through ‘ōlelo mākuahine (mother tongue) and its grounding in the ‘āina (land).

**Identity and the Hawaiian Homes Commission Act of 1920.**

The conflicts and tensions embedded in contemporary realities about Hawaiian identity did not happen suddenly. These evolved from an inheritance of a continuing and yet-to-be-resolved colonial history that has affected Hawaiian identity and permeated all aspects of Indigenous reality. Smith (1999), a Maori scholar, asserted that the Indigenous experience is framed by imperialism. The reality of imperialism for Hawaiians has complicated an already complex Indigenous view of how Hawaiians are to be considered.

When the ali‘i created the Kingdom of Hawai‘i in the nineteenth century and began to adopt precepts and principles of Western ways, under the pervasive influence of American and European advisers, the ali‘i enacted laws that gave legal framework to
governance of their society. In this context, the scope of Native Hawaiian identity was reframed to reflect the views of the colonizer and, in particular, took on a different and new importance regarding ideas of ownership. An abiding citizenry was essential to sustaining a good, virtuous, and prosperous community (Kauanui, 2000).

The overthrow of the Kingdom and an eventual absorption of Hawai‘i into an expanding imperial United States of America saw a new legal definition of Hawaiian identity. In the early 1900s, the legal description of Hawaiian identity was crafted to fit the requirements of the Department of Hawaiian Home Lands. This new territorial agency was set up under the U.S. government Hawaiian Homes Commission Act of 1920. In the Act, the term “native Hawaiian” was defined to mean any descendant of not less than one-half of the blood of the races inhabiting the Hawaiian Islands previous to 1778 (Title 2, Hawaiian Homes Commission, Section 201, (a) (7) (Kauanui, 2000). For ownership of land, the U.S. Congress dictated that the Hawaiian delegation that went to petition the American government for land needed to negotiate with owners of the Hawai‘i sugar plantations about who could qualify for land stakes and which land could be designated homestead land for Hawaiians.

Plantation owners insisted on a 50% blood quantum. According to Kauanui (2000), owners speculated that descendents of those who identified themselves as native Hawaiians would eventually, through intermarriage with other races, dilute their blood quantum below the 50% requirement and, therefore, no longer qualify for land. Owners also expected that persons who could identify themselves as native Hawaiian would disappear through decrease in the population. Homestead lands would revert to plantations or be put to other use.
Hawaiians living in the twenty-first century are still affected by the identity requirement for 50% blood quantum. Many of the entitlement programs created to help Hawaiians gain economic benefits are for only those who can meet the 50% blood quantum requirement. The requirement is arbitrary. Who is more Hawaiian, the individual with less than 50% Hawaiian ancestry or the person with 50% or more native blood? For this study, this question raised in defining the legal identity of contemporary Hawaiian artists is directly linked to colonial policies formed out of the colonizer’s political agendas. The answer to the question about who is Hawaiian is still under debate.

Identity and a Māori perspective.

Attempts to construct a Hawaiian identity were also mirrored in social and political control of other Indigenous people of the Pacific. Although there were regional differences in local situations, the pervasive process of colonizing the Pacific shared common goals of domination and strategies by colonizers wishing to control the natives.

In Aoteroa New Zealand, for example, Māori had to deal with Pakeha notions of colonized Māori-ness. Mason Durie (1998) described the course of action.

[Pakeha anthropologists, missionaries,] and even a Governor created their own versions of Māori identity, using terms that reflected Eurocentric views of the world rather than Māori perceptions of tribe and the Māori world. The new constructions of a Māori identity were accompanied by the promotion of a range of stories, ‘legends’, and

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1 The word “Pakeha” refers to non-Maori people living in Aoteroa. In general use of this term refers to Europeans, mostly English colonizers who settled on Maori lands in the nineteenth century. The word also refers to their descendents and to newcomers.
traditions, based on various tribal accounts but amalgamated to form new pan-Māori versions which frequently also drew heavily on both European tradition and the Old Testament. It was part of a colonizing process, which not only led to alienation of land and other resources but also brought Māori history and culture into a regimented framework so that it could readily be understood and controlled by the colonizers. In the process, new myths were created and a new type of Māori identity was forged. (pp. 53-54)

The new construction of a Māori identity or of any colonized people caught in this “cultural (re) construction process strips from the equation of identity the sensibility of how natives vision themselves (Rosaldo, 1989). The original Indigenous identity becomes a new-hybrid-form that served the colonist agenda.

The Māori, however, questioned this redefinition. Durie (1998) explained how Māori saw it:

Māori, however, were not entirely convinced that they were the different ones; they were perplexed enough trying to understand the peculiarities of Western ways and did not think it necessary to try to decipher their own “normal” culture.

Durie (1998) described this “reversal of power” as more than just a matter of perspective. An assertive colonized native who rejects or questions the validity of an imposed identity shifts the power back to natives, making it possible for them to continue on the road toward self-identity and decolonization.
Identity and the Hawai‘i tourist industry.

In a similar fashion, Hawaiian identity was recast into a Western version that made easier colonial understanding and control. For example, the recast can be seen, in how Hawai‘i is presented as a tourist attraction today. The Hawaiian Visitor and Convention Bureau reach globally to advertise Hawai‘i as the “Islands of Aloha.” The portrayal of Hawaiians as friendly people is central to the image of Hawai‘i as the world’s most desired destination in leisure and business travel. Moreover, although the Bureau might not officially be endorsing a blatant image of Hawaiians as sexually promiscuous, the Bureau’s website features young healthy Hawaiian-looking men and women in bathing suits with surfboards on the beach.

These images by themselves are not offensive in content, and their context clearly projects the Bureau’s desire to portray Hawaiians as a healthy people (Hawai‘i Tourism Authority. 2007). The problem is that these images do not portray the daunting reality facing many Hawaiians who, as the original Indigenous ethnic group of these islands, have suffered greatly from poor health. Lack of a nutritionally healthy diet has led to alarming rates of cardiovascular diseases and diabetes (U. S. Senate, Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations, 2000).

While idealized images of healthy natives are used as headliners in the website of the 1999 Hawaiian Visitor and Convention Bureau, more insidious versions of Hawaiian images are hawked and sold in tourist curiosity shops. Images of wāhine and kāne flood the cramped shelves of tourist-oriented vendors in concentrated tourist areas in Waikiki and elsewhere. In its worst forms, these images promote vulgar notions of sexual promiscuity and scantily clad Native Hawaiians assuming provocative poses. These
images are repeated endlessly on candles, lamp stands and shades, in calendars and greeting cards, and on magnets for refrigerator doors.

How do these types of images of sexual promiscuity hurt Hawaiians? Haunani Kay Trask named it a “prostitution of Hawaiian women.” In 1999, she called for a halt to more tourists in Hawai‘i, telling them not to come and urging those who are here to go home. Trask believed that the visitor industry had not benefited Hawaiians but instead used them for financial gains all the while exhausting these islands’ most precious resources: land and water (Trask, 1999).

**Identity and the State of Hawai‘i (Office of Hawaiian Affairs) perspective.**

Several legal references define “Native Hawaiian”. One such definition is found in the November 23, 1993 Senate Joint Resolution 19, popularly known as the “Apology Resolution.” Section 2 of the Act contains this definition: “As used in this Joint Resolution, the term ‘Native Hawaiian’ means any individual who is a descendent of the aboriginal people who, prior to 1778, occupied and exercised sovereignty in the area that now constitutes the State of Hawai‘i.”

Other definitions are in The Native Hawaiian Data Book, published by the Office of Hawaiian Affairs (OHA), a State of Hawai‘i agency. Who is a ‘Native Hawaiian’?” One definition was used by the U.S. Bureau of the Census: “Hawaiians” were persons who simply identified themselves as Hawaiian. In contrast, the State of Hawai‘i Health Surveillance Program considered the racial background of parents in deciding if a person of mixed race was Hawaiian.
The 1990 Census conducted by the U.S. Bureau of the Census reported 138,742 ‘Hawaiians’ in the State of Hawai‘i. The Census Bureau uses single category self-identification to determine race. During the same year the Health Survey conducted by the Hawai‘i State, Department of Health, Health Surveillance Program estimated the ‘Hawaiian’ population in the State of Hawai‘i to number 205,079. There was more than a 66,000 difference. The Health Surveillance Program examines the ethnic background of the parents of each individual and bases its racial designation on the racial composition of his/her parents. Consequently, a determination can be made for those of mixed race (Office of Hawaiian Affairs, 1998).

To be more precise, the OHA along with other Hawai‘i State agencies utilize the words “Native Hawaiian” (with the upper case “N”) to refer to persons of Hawaiian ancestry regardless of blood quantum; “native Hawaiian” (with the lower case “n”) refers to those with 50% and more Hawaiian blood (Kauanui, 2000). As noted before, The Department of Hawaiian Home Lands, set-up under the Hawaiian Homes Commission Act of 1920, first used this latter designation.

**Identity and the colonization of Hawai‘i.**

These various definitions of Hawaiian identity emerged from a history of political, social, and economical struggles between Indigenous Hawaiians and Western colonial forces. Underlying this dissertation is the belief that American and Western colonial policies have altered Hawaiian identity and have likewise influenced how contemporary
Hawaiian artists practice their art and the manner with which they exhibit their works in public venues. Smith (1999) illuminated this point:

Imperialism frames the indigenous experience. It is part of our story, our version of modernity. … Imperialism still hurts, still destroys and is reforming itself constantly. “The talk” about the colonial past is embedded in our political discourses, our humor, poetry, music, storytelling, (visual arts), and other common sense ways of passing on both a narrative of history and an attitude about history.

Hawaiians have endured their share of all of this, to a point that has brought them to a crisis of identity. The word “Hawaiian” has gone through a fraught colonial process where the authenticity of the word changed in matters of language, cultural practices, and identification. The visual arts have not been spared either. What do contemporary Hawaiian artists have to say about this process of colonialism and how has it affected their notions of identity and their own self-imaging? How has colonialism affected their creative process? Answers to these important questions are the concerns of this dissertation.

The logical viewpoint and its effect on Hawaiian identity.

As Indigenous identities have evolved over a long colonial period their alterations have been shaped by certain assumptions made by colonizers about Indigenous people and their cultural practices. The Western culture of order assumed that Indigenous societies were ignorant, illiterate people (Smith, 1999). Their epistemologies and languages were primitive. The colonizer negated the fact that Indigenous cultures had
their own systems of order, systems that were steeped in spirituality and guided by love and respect for their ancestors. Indigenous peoples’ sense of order was informed by profound historical events where culturally ingrained uses of metaphoric and poetic verse were often preferred for communicating and expressing thoughts and feelings about the world.

Systems of knowledge continue to be in conflict with dominant Euro-American epistemologies where the hegemony of the dominant paradigm makes claims of being the logical, sensible, and, thus, legitimate way to live in the world (Ladson-Billings, 2000).

The reality in contemporary Hawai‘i is that the influence of American cultural norms colors and imposes what is seen and taken for granted as the rational, prudent, and justifiable way to live in the world. Hawaiian identity is affectively changed by its assimilation into this American culture. Hawaiians no longer are able to see the world in just Hawaiian terms but must see the world as mitigated through the influences of multiple cultural viewpoints.

**Identity and a changing Hawaiian epistemology.**

The changes that American colonialism brought to Hawaiian identity have altered the way Hawaiians identify themselves. When Hawaiians ask the question, “Who are we?” they are seeking, in part, to understand how they see the world differently from other people. This understanding, in turn, influences how they act.

As contemporary Hawaiian artists live and work in this complex social and political environment, their notions of identity have been heavily influenced and shaped by Western culture. The full scope of the ethnic and cultural identity of contemporary
Hawaiian artists in general is not so easily defined. Although parts of their identity can be described, an essentialist view of the Hawaiian character is at great risk of oversimplifying what it means to be Hawaiian. For example, even if we could even measure the percentages of blood quantum that qualifies some Hawaiians to benefit from government or nonprofit institutional programs, left out are those who are born of no Hawaiian genealogical family line but who feel culturally Hawaiian because they are either hanai by a Hawaiian family and or have embraced and learned Hawaiian language and practice Hawaiian cultural practices.

Among some Hawaiian artists, there is a general understanding that to be a Hawaiian artist you have to first be of the koko (blood). These testimonies come from videotaped forums conducted in 1987 by Alu Like titled, Kanaka Maoli: Hawaiian Artists. Another source is the 1997 Ho‘okū‘e Exhibition of Native Hawaiian artists. The following quotations are from my transcription of the video recordings (Ho‘okū‘e, 1997). Imaikalani Kalahale said, “A native is one of the koko.” Bob Freitas suggested that “A Hawaiian is a Hawaiian regardless of blood quantum.” Lucia Jensen said, “My koko tells me I come from the ‘āina from here.” Ipō Nihipali said, “Hawaiian art is an art form done by Native Hawaiians.” Alapai Hanapi added, “It is important to make the link, the connection, the perpetuation. Our kūpuna (ancestors) our ‘aumakūa (guardian spirits) rest right here. They are with us.” In this way Hanapi connects his koko with his genealogy.

At the Ho‘okū‘e (1997) public forums, April Drexel was adamant about who can be called Hawaiian and how colonization affects our identity:

If you are not of the blood don’t call yourself Hawaiian. We are native people here but we are like the second exile here in our home land.
This is a really disturbing thing from a Hawaiian perspective. Ho‘okū‘e means to resist in any form you can... whether loud and clamorous or soft and passive. We have been used as the doormat for too long. Our people are not anyone’s doormat even though we are the host culture here and people tend to forget that.

These comments by Native Hawaiian artists reveal that many think their ethnic identity as a person is based on genealogy and bloodlines. There is a strong suggestion that their work as an artist is greatly influenced by their connection to the land and their ancestors.

The Ho‘okū‘e discussion shows that questions about race and identity are a real concern for Hawaiian artists who are working toward defining themselves as distinctive and unique from other artists. Issues about Hawaiian identity and what contemporary Hawaiian artists have to say about their identity is a good place to begin a serious discussion about how artistic creative processes are influenced by notions of self-identity.

**The Creative Process**

In ancient times, creating and building a Hawaiian wa‘a (canoe) was an affair of religion. Here is how Malo described the process:

In the morning, they baked the pig in an oven dug close to the root of the koa tree. After eating the pua‘a (pig) and inspecting the tree, the kahuna kalai waʻa (priest) called upon the Akua (Gods) both male and female to listen now to the ax used to fell the koa. When the tree began to crack to its fall, they lowered their voices and allowed no one to make a
disturbance. Then the kahuna mounted the koa with his ax in hand facing the stump with his ‘ökole and looking at the top. “Smite with the ax and hollow the canoe! Give me my malo!” And his wife handed him a white kapa malo and having girded himself he turned about and faced the head of the tree. He stood and called out in a loud voice “Strike with the ax and hollow it! Grant us a canoe!” He struck a blow with his ax and repeated the same words again and again until he had reached the point where the head of the tree was to be severed and wreathed it with i’e i’e. Then the kahuna kalai wa’a called for silence and said prayers before cutting off the koa’s head. This done, the kahuna declared the ceremony performed, the kapu (restrictions) removed and then people celebrated (Malo, 1903b, pp. 126-28).

The creative spirit that existed in old Hawai’i was blessed with a belief that spirits inhabited all living and inorganic entities. Prayers were said to the Gods asking permission to use these natural gifts and offerings were given with aloha as a sign of respect.

If this was the creative spirit of people of old Hawai’i, do these beliefs still hold true for contemporary Hawaiian artists when they make their art? If so, in what ways have beliefs changed to reflect contemporary conditions and realities?

In the 2001 Nā Maka Hou (2001) exhibition catalog, Momi Cazimero stated how art and identity are related; it is through art as a window that one’s identity is revealed (p. 11). The intimate relationship between identity and culture is reflected in art. She stated that artists are like seers gifted with a second sight that can reveal hidden messages. They
encapsulate the essence of an idea by transforming it into concrete forms. They work in ways that understand and express the human condition of people. Hawaiian artists find their unique voices in a “heightened cultural awareness and pride of heritage” that preserves cultural beliefs that honor traditions.

How Hawaiian artists and cultural practitioners form art and aesthetics is the subject of Manulani Aluli Meyer’s essay, “John Dewey and Hawaiian Aesthetics,” from her book Ho'olu: Our Time of Becoming (2004). In response to Dewey’s notions of art (in Art as Experience), Meyer reviewed unique and distinctive connections between Hawaiian artistic practice and Hawaiian culture. In her view, Hawaiian artists are cultural practitioners whose “very lives are extensions of land and history” (p. 31). These extensions of culture are evident in dance, carving, weaving, surface design and pattern, oration, chant, and the making of utilitarian goods. She noted that as artists process their creative expressions, they consider their ancestors as “resources for material and guidance,” often “seen as specific elements in nature.” The art and spirit of Hawaiian artists are imbued with a distinctive and unique creative process where their sense of aesthetics emerges, in part, from dreams and pōhaku and ho'oponopono. Hawaiian artists are “conscious of (his/her) integration with (their) environment and history” (p. 32).

Aluli Meyer extended Dewey’s notion that art “becomes the material in which (one) can form [emphasis added] (his/her) purpose;” Aluli Meyer asserted that “art serves as the material or means in which (one) can heighten (his/her) purpose” (p. 32). She added that, from a Hawaiian practitioner’s perspective, there exists an unspoken understanding of avocation to quality in both life and in art. She said Hawaiian artists form their art through an amalgamation of emotional focus, peace, and tension that
allows for reflection and a desire for finding balance and union where the creative
expression is the realization of harmony, history, and place.

Aluli Meyer concluded that these concepts are at risk because contemporary
Hawaiians struggle with the problems of modernity. Consequently, she passionately
beseeched Hawai‘i teachers for a sensual awakening that could empower their students
with finding their spiritual epiphanies and engaging in passionate dialogue as a way to
form “the cultural foundation that recognize our senses as pivotal to how we learn and
how we create meaning” (Aluli-Meyer, 2004, p. 34).

Earlier in this chapter, I wrote of how Hawaiians of old considered their creative
process, particularly regarding material for creating a canoe. In contemporary Hawai‘i,
most artists have access to a huge array of material. Some materials are traditional plants
that have been gathered by Hawaiians for centuries. Others are Western manufactured
materials.

An issue that sometimes arises in discussing the identity of Hawaiian art is
whether Hawaiian artists should use or appropriate Western materials and icons
(Ho‘okū‘e, 1997). Western critics have wondered when it was appropriate for Native
Hawaiian artists to use non-Hawaiian icons and material and when was it appropriate for
non-Hawaiians to use Hawaiian icons and material. This question continues to be
debated. Māori artist and scholar, Bob Jahnke (2003) shed light on how Māori artists and,
perhaps, how contemporary Hawaiian artists should consider material in their art. He
claimed that many contemporary Indigenous artists use an arsenal of materials that are
either traditional or contemporary. In an emphatic statement, he asserted a stake or claim
to the materials that the colonizer has brought and that artists should use them in the manner or fashion that best helps to express their ideas.

This perspective should be applied to Hawaiian use of non-Hawaiian material and ideas. Sometimes art material is difficult to acquire. For some contemporary Hawaiians artists engaged in using traditional materials, gathering and accessibility are a problem. Traditional gathering rights and adequate easement to areas where these materials exist has become extremely restricted by laws that support individual or corporate ownership rights over traditional gathering rights (Kamahele, 2000; Trask, 1999).

Linda Smith (1999) offered a political perspective that suggests using the creative resources of Indigenous artists as a weapon to heal past wounds of colonial practices. In her book, Decolonizing methodologies: Research and Indigenous peoples, chapters six and seven, Smith set rational arguments for implementing a series of twenty-five Indigenous projects. These projects serve to help us find our self-determination through processes of healing and transformation of our physical, spiritual, psychological, social, political, and economical collective selves. These projects set a course that concentrates and mobilizes our resources in order to cleanse and decolonize our culture in local, national, regional, and global arenas. One of the projects is called “Creating.” In her description, Smith spoke of the notion of being able to create and be creative. The project of creating is not just about expressing artistic interest, but rather about exercising our creative spirit that we have been doing for thousands of years.

Imagination enables people to rise above their own circumstances, to dream new visions and to hold on to old ones. It fosters inventions and discoveries, facilitates simple improvements to people’s lives and
uplifts our spirits. Creating is not the exclusive domain of the rich (or) the technologically superior, but (of) the (imagination). Creating is about channeling collective creativity in order to produce solutions to indigenous problems (Smith, 1999, p. 158).

As Smith considered imagination as the precursor to creating, she saw them both working in tandem as a medium that connects the past with the future through the present. She saw this process as a collective activity that suggests collectivity as in a sharing community of artists and others. These imaginative and creative collective activities have utilitarian value that serves to further the well being of the community by focusing on solving community problems through creative solutions.

**The creative process: Two Hawaiian artists.**

Kimo Cashman and Herb Kawainui Kāne represent a small segment of Hawaiian artists practicing today. Although these artists were not asked to participate in this research, their stories provide rich information on essential questions about identity, the creative process, and exhibition experiences. These artists and others discussed later in this chapter centered their creative inspiration on their kinship relationship with their kūpuna (ancestors). They professed a profound aloha for the ‘āina (land) and respect for their Akua and ‘aumakūa (gods and guardian spirits). These are their stories:

Kimo Cashman is an example of a contemporary Native Hawaiian artist who emphatically claims his identity. He connected life and art in his salient “identity” essay, “Looking in the Hole with my Three-Prong Cocked” (Cashman, 2004). Cashman keenly answered his question ‘Who am I?’ by boldly proclaiming that “Kimo IZ HEA!”
(Cashman, 2004, p. 18). He is an artist, educator, father, son, husband, friend, cousin, grandchild, and fisherman influenced by everything but guided by his kūpuna. One of Cashman’s important goals was to make an ‘upena (fishnet), just like his grandfather’s. His ‘upena was full of the mana (spiritual energy) of himself and his grandfather. He worked in a skillful and purposeful way with respect for his grandfather’s hi’a (shuttle) and kā or haha (mesh gauge) that has his grandfather’s carved initials.

Cashman used fifteen-pound monofilament fishing line to create traditional shapes, patterns, and structures for his ‘upena. He used his ‘upena to teach about Hawaiian ways of thinking, of values, and of doing things. His pumana were symbolic of keiki in the ‘ohana. Whether in the ocean, hanging at his cousin’s house, or in a museum, Cashman’s ike hana no’eau was Hawaiian art and it is through viewing his ‘upena that, “art (as) a window through which one’s identity is revealed” (Nā Maka Hou, 2011, p. 11) exposes Cashman’s complex and multivalent identity.

The store-bought fifteen-pound monofilament fishing line is recontextualized within contemporary Hawaiian culture as material, now a contemporary Native Hawaiian material, useful for making fishnets (Cashman, 2004). In the case of Kimo Cashman, it was not so much a matter of his discounting the effect of colonization on him, but rather a claiming and using what he wants for the needs of sustaining life. Cashman’s essay contains what all great art does; it synthesizes imagination and the creative process into the fabric of a meaningful and fruitful life.

An artist different from Cashman is Herb Kawainui Kāne—artist, historian, and founding member of the Polynesian Voyaging Society. Kāne said, “As an artist, in order to paint people of another time, one must develop an empathy with them…without
empathy, it’s not possible to really approach the essence of the historic period” (Harden, 1999, p. 207).

Kâne considered himself different from other artists who, he said, try to express their personality in their art. Kâne was “trying to divine the original world of the Hawaiians….I want to express the personality of the subject. It’s more like method acting, allowing oneself to be completely subjugated by the role and let the role take over the personality of the actor” (Harden, 1999, p. 207).

Kâne said he does not feel in accord with what he considers the mainstream of art offered in universities.

I am in opposition…as it is taught in the universities, which is that art should be a highly personal thing, highly distinctive to the personality and expressive of the inner self. If the artist is concerned about his personality being expressed, there is no way he is ever going to be able to express the essence of the subject (Harden, 1999, p. 211).

Kâne offered an interesting notion that links the voyaging canoe to the physical features of Hawaiians; that the canoe shaped not only the culture but also shaped its people (Harden, 1999, p. 210). Kâne theorizes that some Polynesians are big with more muscle mass and fat than other tropical people because of the selection process for choosing the canoe crew. The chief needed to choose men with powerful muscles, stamina, and extra fat to sustain them through times of hunger and to protect them from exposure to wind and ocean spray. Women were chosen who seemed able to bear children of that same physical type. Harden wrote that in a 1991 documentary called *Children of the Long Canoes*, Kâne said, “the canoes could have had a shaping influence
on those who shaped them, making us truly the children of the long canoes” (Harden, 1999, p. 208).

Kāne believed ancient Hawaiian culture, as with other primal cultures, differs in premises, logic, and attitudes from Euro-American cultures. The Polynesians did not share the Western concept of “a supernatural sphere separate and apart from and hierarchically above the natural sphere, (that) man had a role halfway in between, below the gods and angels, but above the beasts” (Harden, 1999, p. 210). Polynesians based their belief on all spirits and ancestors being a part of nature. The major spirits, the progenitors of all and everything in the universe, were related to them by ancestry.

Polynesians saw themselves as the living edge of a much greater multitude of ancestors who, as ancestral spirits, linked the living to a continuum going back to the first humans, to the major spirits and thence to the ultimate male and female spirits that created the universe. The living and the spirits shared a universe in which there was no supernatural because all was natural” (Harden, 1999, p. 211).

Kāne not only linked genealogy to Hawaiian identity but also was explicit that Euro-American cultural traditions are different in their concepts of the gods. Interesting are his comments on the connections of physical characteristics of Polynesians to their environment and voyaging. As contemporary Native Hawaiians realize their conditions, how does living under a banner of American colonization affect their physical form? Many Native Hawaiians are believers in the Christian faith. How does this belief affect and change their ideas about their pre-Christian ancestors?
The creative process: Other Hawaiian artists.

The following quotations are from the Ho‘okū‘ē Exhibition in 1997. The quotations are from my transcriptions of videotaped recordings of artists speaking at three public forums held during the exhibition on May 7, 21, and 28. Additional information is taken from Contemporary Hawaiian Art: Ho‘okū‘ē: Resistance (Cashman, 1997). Some of the artists included in this discussion are Bob Freitas, Herman Pi‘ikea Clark, Duncan Ka'ohuoka'ala Seto, Alapai Hanapi, April Hokulani Drexel, Meala Bishop, and Ipō Nihipali.

Bob Freitas is an artist who works in wood and stone, often combining the two materials into a completed work.

For me as an artist I have basically gone through studying in Europe, studying in Paris, and been through New York and been through L.A. I’ve been through the hubs of the modern art movement throughout the world....What I slowly realized and what other Hawaiians slowly realized that we have something really special right here where we are at; and that Hawaiian artists are starting to identify themselves as contemporary Hawaiian artists. Our arts reflect the multifaceted nature of our culture. A lot of my work is the juxtaposition of a variety of materials and of forms, finishes, and surfaces (Ho‘okū‘ē, 1997).

Herman Pi‘ikea Clark, an artist and educator, said he believed in shaping an educational process through arts education reflective of Native Hawaiian perspectives. These perspectives would enable Hawaiians to learn about their unique history and identity. As an artist and educator, Clark argued for “the development of a visual arts
curriculum that is grounded in the cultural perspective of Kanaka Maoli [Native Hawaiian]” (Clark, 2004, p. 23). His position was a reaction to what he considered a detrimental Western-oriented visual art curriculum centered on a culturally biased Fine Art Content Standards. Clark contended that a Kanaka Maoli culture-based curriculum engaged in Indigenous systems of constructing knowledge would counteract a pervasive Western ideology that perceives and represents the world through an introduced colonial lens. He advocated for an arts policy that acknowledged Indigenous visual culture in its social context to balance learning content that is situated in a predominant Euro-American heritage (Clark, 2004).

Duncan Ka'ohuoka'ala Seto is a traditional lau hala weaver. He had this to say about the creative process that connects his art medium with his community:

I kind of compare the Hawaiian people to weaving. When I weave I think about how you take a leaf, a raw leaf from the tree, and you prepare it and you weave it together into a mat and you bring everybody together, many different colors of hala. But when you weave it together and you make nice patterns from it the final product is a beautiful thing and it’s tight. Keep it tight. You start strong at the core and you weave out and you bring the people together. It’s the same thing. It was like starting from one time period, the present, where I am today and working back to the past. It’s like sitting next to a river. You can only start from where you are and if you want to go back you have to follow the river upstream to find your source, which is what I am been trying to do with my art. I have studied the history,
the legends, the chants, and most of my artwork deals with symbolisms. We use (modern) technology. We use acrylic paints, more permanent. We use airbrush. We use the white man’s tools. We use it to our means. I try to get across to my spiritual essence and put it on to a canvas or even like little things like hair combs because if we don’t do it someone else will do it and it won’t be Hawaiian. It will be Pakeha (Hoʻokūʻē, 1997).

Alapai Hanapi thinks of himself as a people’s artist. He is a sculptor and a political cultural activist living on the island of Moloka'i where he has fought for Hawaiian land and sea rights. Hanapi says, “The purpose of my art is to better the conditions of my people. I am involved with my people, farmers, fisherman and all my people around.” Alapai Hanapi said his inspirations come from the 'āina. He normally works in kahiko (old or ancient) style but also in a contemporary style that for him contextualizes what is current and happening now. He said it is important for him to link and connect his Hawaiian culture so that is can perpetuate itself and states, “Our kūpuna, our 'aumakua rest right here. They are with us” (Hoʻokūʻē, 1997).

April Hokulani Drexel spoke about her kūpuna and their importance to her artistic process. She received her Master of Fine Art from the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa (UHM) and is currently assistant professor of Hawaiian Studies at Kamakahukalani at UHM. From 2002-2007, she was the director of Kia‘i ‘Āina (guardian of the land) project at the university.

Our kūpuna have given us so much and never stop. The land is us. It is our mother. If the Hawaiians of old had acrylic paint they would use
them. We doing the same things our kūpuna did. We are caring for our land, [and] about our gods. In one sense, I am a dreamer and in another I see reality. I bringing them together is my aim as a Native Hawaiian artist to show integration how entwined we are. I see myself as Hawaiian. I see myself as being displaced in a Western society. But, it will all work out for the better. That is our greatest hope. We will always look to the past for where all our knowledge comes from (Hoʻokūʻē, 1997).

Meala Bishop, a painter, oral history specialist and kalo planter said her inspiration comes from listening to the rhythms of the ʻāina and Native Hawaiian working.

We should be building from the Maoli [Native Hawaiian] epic. From the heavy pounding of poi, the steady rhythm of kapa beaters, the careful plaiting of lau hala and net weavers, the continuous repetition of chanters, the dependable receding and returning tides, the countless stars and their patterns, to the delightful pleasures of mea ai from where the loʻi shows its abundance of wealth, we can be impressed upon by the natural world, as abstract as it might be, and with the hope that Akua is pleased (Nā Maka Hou, 2001, p. 94).

Meala Bishop’s perception of the natural world is shown in repetitive geometric marks that pattern her canvases, creating what she calls her ‘dream speak’ that tells the stories of her people and her Gods.
Ipō Niihipali is a multimedia artist who spoke about when she goes to the mountain and sea to bath in the spirits of her ancestors. She travels to the realm of the spirits and reaches back into her ancestral traditions for inspiration.

When I go to mauka I always feel freshness, a real clean feeling going to mauka and bathing in the wai seeing your spirit being able to talk to your ancestors and touch the ‘āina. I feel my ‘aumakūa. I can relate to my ‘aumakūa there in mauka and there in makai. And this is what I try to capture in my paintings whether it be from the beginning of Pele’s creation with the lava flowing with her energy, her spirit, her strength, and the creating of our islands of Hawai’iki. We see the fetus in the moon that implies the new birth of land, the ‘āina, that create our unique culture as Polynesians as Hawaiians. When I create these special place, of the ‘āina my spirit actually travels to these distant areas, these remote areas, and I feel my soul. My spirit is in different dimensions. And I feel very comfortable in these areas because it is like creating my own world of reality that will always be there, that I will never leave. I resort back to my traditions and my old life style ways and my grandparents, my tutu lady and my tutu man who are deceased, but they taught me how to be real inside where I come from and where I am and not to feel shame. I brought up to feel shame, forced to live in this Western way. I need to find a release in my work by being in touch with myself, to who I really am, and what I have to do. Whether it be teaching, creating for myself, to inspire others, especially for the young, that’s my goal, to
help inspire the up and coming generation. I am a grass roots artist and I am proud of it. Never went to college, but I feel strong in my media because I’ve developed a skill for years now and I like to create the mana that is in our ‘āina (Ho‘okū‘ē, 1997).

All of these Hawaiian artists offered different emphases but overlapping thoughts on how Hawaiian identity is linked and resides at the heart of their creative process. Their kinship relationship with their kūpuna (ancestors) enabled these artists to know their identity; and it is from this understanding that they draw their creative inspiration and ideas. A reoccurring theme is their great aloha for the ‘āina (land) and their respect for Akua, ‘aumakūa (gods and guardian spirits), and the mo‘olelo (stories). How these artists conceived and understood their identity as Hawaiian and drew their sources for inspiration reinforces this study’s presumption that the perspectives of Hawaiian artists’ about their identity and their thoughts influence the creative process.

**Exhibition Experiences**

**Exhibition experiences: Perspectives of Hawaiian artists.**

In the recent past when Hawaiian artists gathered to present their art as a group in a formal gallery or museum setting, they were careful not to give up their rights to manage the curatorial and design portions of the exhibit. Differences exist between Western and Hawaiian aesthetic reasoning and concepts about presentation. The art museum is a public place where the community comes to look at art and, when possible, engage with artists. My research sought to answer the questions, “How does a contemporary Native Hawaiian artist interact with and present his or her works to others in his or her community?” “How do these issues affect how contemporary Hawaiians
exhibit their art in these spaces?” “What are some of the challenges they face when negotiating these spaces?” “How does each artist define the community in which they live and work?” “What are some of the challenges they face when communicating with this community?” “What are the protocols for exhibiting in these kinds of spaces, and how do these rules apply to what contemporary Hawaiian artists feel are acceptable?” “Is there a Western standard? If so, what is that standard?”

Two excellent examples of how contemporary Hawaiian artists considered and responded to issues about exhibiting their works of art were in the 1997 Hoʻokūʻē exhibition shown at the East-West Center Gallery in Honolulu and in the Mai Na Kūpuna Mai: Hoʻi I Ka Puʻolo exhibition shown at the Art Gallery at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa and at the East-West Center Gallery in fall of 2000. I was involved as an artist-participant and planner in the Mai Na Kūpuna Mai: Hoʻi I Ka Puʻolo exhibition. I also attended the Hoʻokūʻē exhibition and the community forums. For this research, I transcribed from videotape recordings what artists said at the community forums.

In both of these exhibitions, the artists were earnest about what would be shown and protocols about how the gallery space would be considered in terms of Hawaiian sensibility. What would be included or not included took on a critical importance in designing and presenting the exhibits. These artists began a discussion on how to place the works in juxtaposition with each other to create cultural meaning that made sense to their way of conceiving a Hawaiian perspective.

Their concerns included how to design and conduct programs involving public forums where discussions of the issues inherent in the themes of each exhibition and specific works of art would be heard. The artists were sensitive to how they would be
received and perceived, particularly by local art critics. Local critics welded persuasive power and access to the community-at-large through their writings. Throughout this process, the artists grew to understand how to create successful art exhibitions that dealt with difficult information in ways that bridged the gap of misunderstanding and mistrust between them and their critics.

It was important to these Hawaiian artists that their voices and their message were clearly expressed in the exhibition announcements, press releases, interpretive labels, and exhibition titles, as well as in other printed materials made available. Hawaiians and non-Hawaiians worked together to create these exhibitions. They succeeded, in part, because of the respect they afforded each other and because of the talent and skills that each brought to the project.

For these Hawaiian artists, group showings at public exhibition venues provided opportunities to explore their issues about identity. Collaborative efforts helped to enrich and expand the sense of community and to heighten awareness of their identity. I can attest that as the Mai Na Kūpuna Mai: Hoʻi I Ka Puʻolo exhibition began to take shape, finding an answer to the question “Who are we as Hawaiians?” became easier. What emerged was a multifaceted notion of Hawaiian artistic identity.

Participating Hawaiian artists learned to organize, produce, and curate exhibitions. They learned to document their works and exhibitions in written, photographic, filmed, and audio forms. These materials preserved a body of work for future indigenous research. The artists also learned to compose and produce exhibition announcements, press releases, brochures, books, and interpretive and exhibition labels to promote and clarify what they were presenting in visual form. They learned to organize
and offer community outreach programs that educated Hawaiian and non-Hawaiian audiences about what mattered to them. They learned how to commercialize and protect their works through trademarks, copyrights, and patents. And most importantly, they learned how to partner with other Hawaiians and non-Hawaiians in projects that benefit their communities through increasing understanding.

**Exhibition experiences: Museum studies perspective.**

Since the public face of contemporary Hawaiian art was occurring within the museum setting, a closer examination of museums is fitting. These are some of the questions relevant to such examinations: How did museums and public gallery spaces originate? What do contemporary Hawaiian artists have to say about these spaces? What does the field of museum studies have to say? What role can museums play in advancing contemporary Hawaiian art and artists? And, in general, how can Hawaiians utilize the resources of public institutions like museums to strengthen and sustain their culture?

The modern concept of public gallery and museum exhibition spaces has a rather recent history. Scholars suggest that the concept of public galleries and museum spaces started during the mid to late nineteenth century in Europe. The Musee du Louvre in Paris is usually cited as an example of the first modern museum. Originally, the Louvre had served as the royal residence housing a substantial collection of royal art and cultural objects. Leaders of the French Revolution saw the museum as a useful way to unite the citizenry of the new nation to witness the glories and riches of France. It served as a means to educate and civilize a previously mostly peasant and working class population.
in ways that could teach them the etiquette of proper manners and civil obedience (Bennett, 1995).

In the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, the concept of museums and public galleries underwent a transformation (Mastering civic engagement, 2002). In the past, museums functioned as research centers for scholars interested in the collections. They also served as places where wealthy families or private collectors could donate or will their collections. Both purposes bequeathed an air of exclusivity that served to set up class differences based on social and economic status. In this sense, although one goal of a modern public museum was to foster a more civilized community, a part of the population became excluded, barred from entering because they could not meet minimum social standards set by upper class gentry.

Eventually, the focus and mission of museums changed to meet the needs and concerns of the general public. This change was accomplished, in part, through initiatives for more community based programs. The new “call to arms” was for museums to become community centers of learning that reach out into the community in respectful ways (Weil, 2002). The movement progressed by initiating and forming equitable partnerships between the museum and other nonprofit enterprises, governmental agencies, and other ad hoc or grass-roots neighborhood groups.

Scholars in Museum Studies began studying how learning actually occurs in the setting of a museum. They wanted to know how visitors to museums learn and find meaning in what they are experiencing. This kind of study is important for contemporary Hawaiian artists. If Hawaiians want their works of art to be understood by a general
public not familiar with Hawaiian culture or contemporary Hawaiian art, understanding how learning occurs in a public art space is important.

To understand how learning occurs in exhibition spaces, museum scholars refer to “visitor studies,” which consider how external realities affect visitor understanding of what is on display. Visitor studies seek to understand how meaning is constructed from what is being viewed. Visitor studies show that museums have affected the production and consumption of art, helped build nation states, educated the public, and, ironically at times, narrowed or widened the gap between social classes (Bennett, 1995). Gaining insights into the phenomena of visitor studies enables us to frame ideas about art and its meaning.

Bennett (1995) suggested that visibility is theoretically framed through phenomenology, in that, it examines the ways external realities appear to humans. He argued that humans constantly seek to find meaning and a sense of purpose to their perceptions of these external realities. He explained how meaning is constructed when framed within precepts of Post-structuralist theory, whereby, sign systems are always dynamic and open to change, thereby making it possible to construct different meanings. An artist’s effectiveness in telling his or her story depends on how adept he or she is in presenting ideas and how capable viewers are in grasping these interpretations. In short, truly understanding or getting what is visible is dependent on a person’s visual literacy capacities and understanding the cultural contexts in which work is created.

As a helpful way of understanding the phenomena of visibility, Bennett (1995) referred to Krzysztof Pomian’s analysis of the phenomenological structure of collections. Pomian is a philosopher and historian who studied how private and museum collections
were formed and for what purpose. The placement of objects imparts a transformation of
knowledge and power.

All collections, Pomian argues, are involved in organizing an
exchange between the fields of the visible and the invisible, which
they establish. What can be seen on display is viewed as valuable and
meaningful because of the access it offers to a realm of significance,
which cannot itself be seen. The visible is significant not for its own
sake but because it affords a glimpse of something beyond itself: the
order of nature, say, in the case of eighteenth-century natural history

According to Bennett, Pomian used the term “semaphores” to describe collected
objects that are valued or prized for their capacity to produce meaning and knowledge.
When placed on display in a purposeful order, the objects become a part of a
communication system that carries and conveys meaning and knowledge. Bennett went
on to say that, “this invisible order of significance is both an effect of the arrangement of
objects within the sphere of the visible while also supplying the grid of intelligibility
governing the field of the visible” (p. 247 note 14). How an object is presented, its
exhibition labels and supporting literature, how it is positioned and placed, and how it is
lighted when on display are important because all of these influence viewers’ abilities to
organize the exhibition in their own mind. These elements enable the viewer to pause,
rest, see, and understand what is on display.

What visitors to a museum bring with them—their experiences, their social,
cultural and educational level, and their assumptions—influence their initial
understanding of the objects on display. Interpretive text, if written in a language foreign to the viewer and loaded with unfamiliar terminology, greatly reduces a visitor’s ability to comprehend. Bennett (1995) summarized other interactions of visibility and viewers:

Collections only function in this manner for those who possess the appropriate socially-coded ways of seeing and, in some cases, power to see which allow the objects on display to be not just seen but seen through to establish some communion with the invisible to which they beckon. Collections can therefore also be differentiated from one another in terms of who has access to the possibility of, and capacity for, the kinds of double-leveled vision that are called for if the contract they establish between the visible and the invisible is to be entered into (p. 35).

The Hawaiian terms kaona (a coded hidden meaning) and ‘ike (to see, feel, perceive) are often used to explain meaning within culturally significant associations among works of art in contemporary Native Hawaiian exhibitions. The 1997 Ho‘okū‘ē exhibition at the East-West Center Gallery in Honolulu and the Mai Na Kūpuna Mai: Ho‘i I Ka Pu‘olo exhibition in the fall of 2000 are excellent examples of contemporary Hawaiian exhibitions imbued with an understanding of culturally established relationships between the visible and the invisible; what is unseen but understood by those with the cultural knowledge and ability to understand the unspoken. The important role of educating viewers through interpretative text and at public forums helps to bridge understanding of what is not obvious.
Bennett’s (1995) notion of visibility supports the argument that museums can be daunting place for learning if the ability of the visitor to read socially coded messages carried in the visible signs of what is present is inadequate. Bennett correlates knowledge and power with an ability to read the coded messages inherent in works of art.

Michael Patton (2002), a qualitative researcher in education, offered a post-structural insight into how knowledge and power and language join to create powerful notions and beliefs about cultures:

As views of reality are socially constructed and culturally embedded, those views dominant at any time and place will serve the interests and perspectives of those who exercise the most power in a particular culture. By exercising control over language and therefore control over the very categories of reality that are opened to consciousness, those in power are served (p.100).

Bennett (1995) suggested that, if we accept this idea and are able to read the visual semaphores that codify meaning, only then are we capable of engaging in meaningful communication. Patton reminded us that language is very capable of being manipulated.

Panoho’s (2003) article about Māori artist Shona Rapira-Davis relates to notions of visibility and viewers:

It is completely possible that this searching and listening process is one with which many viewers would perhaps not bother. The artist is completely accepting of this type of response. She means no offence when she says, “they (i.e. Pakeha) can’t come with us.” However, I
think that this reality is also one that she bravely attempts to counter. An understanding of her Māori kaupapa in much of her work involves both a talking in and a disclosure of intention to those to whom she wishes to entrust information. Such work may well cause frustration to those who feel dialogue with the viewer has been openly established and that they have been welcomed to enter and negotiate this space...the artist’s work while offering transparency at a formal level is not open to those incapable or unwilling to accommodate the differing Māori concerns and value systems which clarify it (p. 32).

As difficult as it seems to communicate what the artist is presenting and what a viewer experiences, there are ways that museums try to bridge this gap. Tom Klobe (2003) pointed out that an effective use of text material and visual language of the exhibition space (governed by an astute understanding of principles and elements of visual art) is an excellent way to communicate ideas. This concept is especially true in examples of interpretive exhibitions that need to tell a story or offer different contrasting points of views. Klobe observes that interpretative text labels should be kept short, to the point, and interesting. Viewers will not read long-winded text. To get his point across, Klobe often referred to how Serrell (1996), museum exhibition consultant with expertise in conceptual planning, label writing and evaluation services defines a good label.

Interpretative labels tell stories; they are narratives, not lists of facts. Any label that serves to explain, guide, question, inform, or provoke in a way that invites participation by the reader is interpretative. Why should I care and how will knowing this improve my life? In essence
these labels should anticipate and address viewer’s unspoken concerns (p. 9).

Another approach to interpretation puts the text into first-person voice. In contemporary art exhibits, this method allows participating artists another way to communicate what they are trying to say. An example of this method of exhibition labeling was used in the *Ho‘okahi Kapa: Layers of Life* (2006) Bishop Museum Long Vestibule Gallery, 2006. The works were organized by the Keomailani Hanapi Foundation and facilitated by Noelle Kahanu, a project manager with the museum. The artists featured in the exhibit wrote exhibition labels in first person voices about their creative lives as kapa artists and what their works meant to them. Their text helped explain to visitors how the *Ho‘okahi Kapa* exhibition of these 21st century kapa artists was in many ways about cultural recovery as much as it was about a “unity and wholeness among its creators…[that] reflect the vision and movement of a community” (*Ho‘okahi Kapa: Layers of Life*, 2006). This message of unity was important and needed to be communicated to the general visitor. This was the first time that contemporary Hawaiian kapa makers had come together as a community to share their findings and ideas with each other while presenting their current works to the general public.

The setting of the *Ho‘okahi Kapa* exhibition also played an important role. The exhibition carried a contextual meaning beyond the printed text. Contemporary kapa works were placed among kapa kahiko (old or ancient) that had been selected from the museum’s collection. Such placement afforded a visual conversation among the works. As viewers went through the show they could compare similarities and differences among pieces. The gallery space was transformed into an educational space where
The following are examples of how artists used interpretive text in the gallery. Three kapa-making artists are discussed here: Marie A. McDonald, Roen Hufford, and Momi Subiono.

Marie A. McDonald (2006) is an artist renowned for her creations and the making of Hawaiian lei. She wrote about what moves her.

Motivated by curiosity and the urge to “see beyond the bend in the road, on the other side of the mountain or the next valley,” obsessed with the retrieval of a lost art form and challenged by the elusiveness of the process of creating the finest bark cloth in the world, I embarked on a long journey to uncover the secrets of kapa making. The research, the years of sharing with others, the trails and errors began. Sources of information were limited and none described the manufacturing processes of the cloth or the making of dyes in detail. Assuming that these were artistic secrets possessed and passed on by each kapa maker, I proceeded to discover such secrets for myself. My work presented here is the result of that discovery.

This is a good example of how a Hawaiian artist looks to the cultural heritage of her ancestors to try to understand who she is as a person and as an artist. Through her

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 Lei as a Hawaiian cultural expression conceptualize and communicate Hawaiian notions of beauty and notions of ho'okuupu (to sprout) that is by sharing something of its value and worth as it grows.
research of this lost art form, McDonald recovers, reconnects, locates and identifies her Hawaiian-ness.

When I viewed her pieces in the gallery, I thought that the striking curvilinear work entitled Kanaloa captured the force, the power, and the movement of the ocean. I wondered how her expertise in flower-lei making informed her work with kapa. What was obvious was her use of bold fields of contrasting color and patterns that curved and intersected in undulating movements. These visual elements folded under and over in patterns that created a sense of balance and the force of ocean and wind currents.

McDonald (2006) is neither shy nor intimidated in acknowledging her contemporary circumstance and claiming her rights as a contemporary Hawaiian artist:

My work is also the sum total of my upbringing, my formal Western art education, my innate sense of Hawaiian design, my experiments, and above all, my inherent right to self expression. At this juncture, much of my work is not meant to be used as sleeping covers or wearing apparel as was done in times gone by. Instead, I create pieces that are viewed much like the paintings and textile hangings of western man. The time in which I live dictates such use. Nonetheless, I look forward to the day when I will be able to replicate wearable pa'ū, kīhei, malo, and the kapa moe of my ancestors.

These interpretive texts helped transform the Long Vestibule Gallery into a teaching gallery. They enabled visitors who might be unfamiliar with Hawaiian kapa and the creative processes of each kapa maker to learn and understand what contemporary
kapa means to these Hawaiian artists. McDonald’s attitude about kapa, art, and contemporary life is not unlike the other artists featured in the exhibition.

Each kapa artist spoke about her work and love for experimentation and discovery and the joy of sharing with others what she had found. McDonald’s daughter, Roen Hufford of Waimea, Hawai‘i said, “I experimented with colors made from flowers and leaves from my farm. At first, they were vibrant and clear but have gone fugitive and are muted quite different than when I began to decorate the kapa” (Hufford, 2006). Her works render unexpected results. She continues with a quiet resolve searching for the lost and forgotten knowledge that made pre-contact kapa eloquent because of its unique and distinctive quality of luminosity.

Each artist sought to learn from the kūpuna of old as they researched by studying and looking at the Bishop Museum’s kapa collection. Momi Subiono (2006) said it simply in her personal statement:

I was inspired to learn to beat kapa by fragments of my great grandmother’s kapa moe [to sleep]. My mother found it after my grandmother passed away. My mother remembered her using it. Although I didn’t meet my great grandmother in person, the blanket she left behind has helped me to learn how true Hawaiian kapa was made. This inspiration stems back to four generations. It is of great importance to me to use what I learn to teach Nā Pua o Hawai‘i [the children of Hawai‘i] the art of their ancestors.

In their pursuits to uncover the lost knowledge of Hawaiian kapa, each of these wāhine kapa makers sought to clarify her ethnic identity as Hawaiian and as an artist.
Personal stories captured in each exhibition label were written in the voice of each artist. These exhibition labels provided an authenticity. They served as teaching labels where visitors were able to enter into the creative lives and intimate thoughts of living Hawaiian kapa artists. Through their words and telling their stories, these kapa makers increased and heightened each visitor’s visual literacy capacity and understanding of the material’s cultural context.

**Exhibition experiences: Zones of conflict.**

An exhibition space is not always a neutral zone where things rest in peace. It is often a place of conflict for opposing ideologies and beliefs. When an exhibition takes on controversial themes, like Hawaiian resistance to colonialism, the gallery space becomes the battleground. Such a battle was fought at the East-West Center Gallery in 1997. The *Ho‘okū‘ē* exhibition, featuring contemporary Hawaiian artists focused on the idea of resistance. *Ho‘okū‘ē* means to oppose. These Hawaiian artists were upset and disappointed despite all the recent gains that had been made in advancing Hawaiian issues. They wanted to heighten public awareness of what they considered wrong about a system that placed Hawaiians at the bottom of most socio-economic indicators. The message was a call to oppose what they saw as an oppressive and disrespectful power system. Throughout the process of the exhibition, from the planning stages to the publicly held forums, these artists worked together as a community and learned how to put forth the complexity of their ideas in an art exhibit.

The artists transformed the gallery space at the East-West Center in several ways. The juxtaposition of works of art used Hawaiian cultural sensitivities in conjunction with
a Western formalistic approach. Juxtaposition is not exclusive to a contemporary Hawaiian approach; it is a way to place works of art, to elicit other meanings that go beyond what is inherent in singular works of art. As a community, the Hawaiian artists designed the exhibition aware of kaona—the hidden meanings or concealed references of each work and the kaona of relationships between the works. Although I was not a participating artist, at the forums when speaking with individual artists and during formal sessions when each artist presented his or her work, the reoccurring notion of kaona and placement of individual works of art was mentioned. They wondered how, during the night when no one was there, the spirit of kūpuna that had inspired each work of art, considered their placement and position within the gallery space. This is a very Hawaiian idea because it speaks to a deep Hawaiian belief that the spirits of ancestors are always present.

The gallery spaces were also transformed into a place for discussion and argument. The evenings were turned over to planned thematic events that featured artists from the exhibit discussing with each other and the audience in a structured but open forum. Issues discussed centered on art and education, cultural appropriation, cultural awareness and evaluative criteria, and alternative education and curriculum (Hoʻokūʻē, 1997).

The following are the views expressed by three of the artists—Imaikalani Kalahele, Meleanna Aluli Meyer, and April Hokulani Drexel—about the exhibition.

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3 Formalism in gallery design requires using the elements and principles of visual design as one of the main criteria when placing works of art in an exhibition space.
For Imaikalani Kalahele a sculptor, painter, illustrator and poet, the *Hoʻokūʻē* exhibition was about social, political, and cultural awareness; and it was about changing attitudes. He said this about whom and why we are Hawaiian:

We have to be aware we are Hawaiian. Regarding issues of criteria it is about the why. The why is because we are Maoli [Native Hawaiian]! We are from this place. What makes it Hawaiian is simple. It is koko no matter how much you have. The criteria Hawaiian. When someone outside your community critiques, it takes on a whole different definition. We critique ourselves. We look at our na'au. No Haole critic can feel the mana of our work they can only intellectualize it. When we critique our work we feel first from our na'au then from our experiences, then from our eye. My critique is that these works are all not separate. The critique from outside from the Haole they eliminate this. Everything is from the head ("*Hoʻokūʻē*, Art and education: Cultural awareness and evaluative criteria," 1997, May 28).

While Kalahele lampooned non-Hawaiian approaches to understanding Native Hawaiian art, other Hawaiian artists placed a great importance on the idea of place and cultural learning. Meleanna Aluli Meyer, a painter and art educator, insisted that our critique should be culture-based and not from a discipline-based perspective that is taught and prevalent in Western art education. Aluli Meyer said that the ‘āina (our land) grounded our arts, aesthetics, and critique.

On a bitter note and in response to critical art reviews about the *Hoʻokūʻē* exhibition, April Hokulani Drexel had this to say:
Regarding evaluative criteria on the various art reporters for local papers (i.e. Honolulu Advertiser, Star-Bulletin, and Honolulu Weekly) they really need to know what it means to be Hawaiian and to think in Hawaiian terms. They need to listen and not to be so *dang* sly and cynical in their remarks. They need to realize that sometimes they are racist. I found Joan Rose’s (Honolulu Advertiser, date not available in archives) article to be quite insulting, very racist. They need to understand the research from a Hawaiian perspective. They have a lack of Hawaiian cultural awareness.

Drexel’s response to the art critic’s inability to “get it” to see the *Ho‘okū‘ē* exhibition from a Native Hawaiian perspective signaled cultural disparities where widening differences exist between Native Hawaiian artists and Euro-American educated writers. Her comments revealed frustration and belief that non-Hawaiians needed to educate themselves about Hawaiian culture before they formed their critical perspectives about contemporary Hawaiian art exhibitions.

Statements by each of these artists reflected hostility toward Western art criticism of Native Hawaiian art. Kalahele talked about *feeling* the work and not just intellectualizing it; Meyer called for a new rubric when considering Hawaiian art apart from Western notions of understanding; and Drexel’s comments embodied the most anger about how they just did not get it. As Hawaiian artists continued to exercise more control and management over their exhibitions they have become more skilled at conceiving and designing these exhibitions. They have empowered themselves by
transforming as individuals and as a collective voice; voices that have begun to critique the critic.

More and more, it is evident that contemporary Hawaiian artists consider public galleries and museum spaces valuable resources for exhibiting their works. They are learning when and how to negotiate these spaces and are challenged with transforming them into Native Hawaiian spaces. Their approach to the work of transformation is similar to how their ancestral kūpuna cleared and prepared the ʻāina for planting and productive use. First they asked for permission to use the resource, then they pule (said prayers) to bless and make ready the space so their kūpuna would feel welcomed and could reside there. Acting like kāhuna o hana noʻeau (or experts in the field of Hawaiian art), these contemporary Native Hawaiian artists conceived, planned, and designed each exhibit with careful attention to selecting appropriate works and placing them in pono (or in perfect order) where the spirit embodied in each work felt comfortable.

As indicated in their statements, these Hawaiian artists understood that the art gallery and museum are public spaces, where members of the community could come to look at art and when possible engage with the artists in discussions about their works. The Hoʻokāʻe and Mai Na Kūpuna Mai: Hoʻi I Ka Puʻolo exhibition experiences illustrated how an exhibition space can be transformed into a community center where controversial works of art are presented and discussed. The Hoʻokahi Kapa exhibition, at the Bishop Museum offered experiences where Native Hawaiian contemporary kapa makers could reach out to visitors with their voices and stories through the dynamic use of first person narratives. In all of these examples, contemporary Native Hawaiian visual artists and traditional practitioners illustrated what effects ‘best practice,’ conceived from
Hawaiian and non-Hawaiian perspectives and ideas, can accomplish; and where issues about Hawaiian identity, artistic process, and exhibition intersect in sometimes contentious but dynamic ways.
CHAPTER TWO: METHODOLOGY

Sources of My Ideas about Identity, Creativity, and Exhibitions

My learning experiences, family life, and heritage provide the foundation for my philosophical and artistic beliefs about identity, creativity, and exhibitions. The direction and structure of this inquiry are guided by these influences. They provide a philosophical viewpoint and filter for a qualitative investigation that examines the creative lives of five exceptional contemporary Hawaiian visual artists:

- Dalani Kauihou Tanahy, a kapa artist;
- Noelle Kahanu, a maker of traditional and contemporary kāhili and a project coordinator at the Bishop Museum;
- Kaili Chun, a conceptual artist and carver of traditional Hawaiian implements;
- Imaikalani Kalaehele, a poet, muralist, illustrator, and kupuna; and
- Solomon Enos, a commercial and fine art illustrator, painter, and community activist.

In my interviews with these artists, I wanted to identify what we share and how our perspectives may differ in respect to three topics: identity, creative process, and exhibition experiences. I wanted to know their thinking about their lives and art and all the compelling conceptual notions and aesthetic choices that span our shared culturally diverse landscape.

As I developed as an artist and a person, I began to ask questions about my identity as a Hawaiian. How culturally Hawaiian was I? Could I truly claim to be
Hawaiian legally, culturally, and socially? What was my family’s story and how did it play a role with shaping my identity?

These questions took on importance when I considered how to leave a meaningful heritage about Hawaiian art and culture to my children that would positively influence them and their identity as Hawaiian. My children, like my wife, are fully immersed in French, Iberian-Spanish, and American cultures. They can speak and read fluently in the three languages. How could I balance the cultural and language equation so that the Hawaiian language (in which I am neither fluent nor versed), and the Hawaiian culture (of which I have a some knowledge) would become part of their lives? Identifying myself as Hawaiian has consequences. An opportunity for my children to receive a Hawaiian legacy is an important consequence and one of my life goals.

These explorations of my identity led to questions about how my artistic process was influenced by my identity. How does my multiethnic background affect how I make art? Could I borrow from my Hawaiian culture ideas, techniques, and material to make art? How do Hawaiian values, beliefs, protocol, and customary practices enlighten my work? Could mo'olelo (Hawaiian myths and stories) inspire my works? How did 'āina (land) and my one hānau (birthplace) influence my creative process? If I use these cultural ideas to make art, how is my art different from other art because of my Hawaiian identity?

I was also interested in questions about exhibiting my art. When my artistic practice continued to build and expand, opportunities to exhibit works in museums and gallery spaces grew more numerous. I began to explore the entire nature and culture of the exhibition structure. What were the rules that governed it? What were the essential
considerations, visual elements, and principles that guided the process when putting together an exhibition? How important was exhibiting? In addition, should I exhibit with only other Native Hawaiian artists or be open to other kinds of venues and for what reasons? How was exhibiting with Hawaiian artists only different from exhibiting with non-Hawaiian artists? What were the roles of curators, art critics, and collectors? How could I effectively communicate to the viewer what my art was about?

My growth and maturity as a Hawaiian artist gave me an artistic foundation and provided insights that enabled me to ask salient questions about the identity, creative process and exhibition experiences of these five Hawaiian artists. I wanted to learn how the ideas and philosophical framework and underpinnings of the five artists were different from or similar to mine.

**My identity.**

Understanding *my story*, my family’s story, my artistic and studio practice, my experiences with exhibitions, and educational formation in art, and my experiences as a teacher of art are important in order to understand who I am as an artist. In a large part, my ideas about my identity come from family life experiences during the early 1950s through the mid-1970s. I grew up in Honolulu in the a close-knit, middle class, ethnically mixed Honolulu neighborhood in Mo’ili’ili. The ethnic background of my parents, Clarence and Leilani, was a mixture of Chinese, Hawaiian, and Caucasian. They had eleven children. I remember my mother adamantly telling us, as if our futures depended on it, that our birth certificates needed to verify that we were Hawaiian.
Hawaiian was the first language of both of my grandmothers. Their mothers were Hawaiian born during the time of the Kingdom of Hawai‘i. Popo (grandmother) Chun and Grandma Lee also spoke Cantonese Chinese and English. Culturally, my father’s parents embraced their Chinese heritage mixing it with local ways. My father’s father Akun (grandfather) Chun or Kam Lock Chun was born and raised in Honolulu and was pure Chinese. He could speak Cantonese, but when he did speak to us children, which was not frequent, he spoke in English.

My father’s mother, Popo Chun or Margaret Kam Lan Alama, was from the Honolimalo'o area in East Moloka‘i, a child of a lo‘i kalo farmer. Her mother Lucy Kalāhui was adopted by her mother Kalāhuinui of Kohala. My mother’s mother Grandma Lee, or Alice Keakealani Kuhns, was born above Waipio Valley at Kukuihaele and was raised in Waimea, on Hawai‘i Island. She became more accustomed to American culture when later she lived for several years in Spokane and Grand Coulee, Washington State. Her mother who gave me my name Kau‘i was Hannah Kahililaulani Campbell. My mother’s father, Grandpa Lee or Lee Kwai, was born in Toy San Village and raised in Lee Village in Canton, China. He passed away in 1944 before I was born, so I do not have a memory of him other than the stories about his life that were told to us.

In my youth, I was conscious of our Hawaiian ancestry but there was a strong pull towards our American and Chinese sides. We celebrated Chinese New Year Eve in a grand manner when Popo Chun and the family of my father’s older brother, the Francis Chuns, prepared from scratch every imaginable Chinese delicacy. On that evening, the entire extended Chun family would gather at their home to feast. These family experiences had a lasting impression on my sense of identity.
Looking back at my childhood, I realize we practiced many things that were culturally Hawaiian and that had a lasting affect on my sense of identity. I was told by my mother Leilani that when my great-grandmother Kahililaulani saw me as a newborn, she gave me my first inoa (or name) Kau'i referring to ka for the article the and u'i meaning youthful, handsome, or beautiful. I was told my first name Kau'i was later changed to Clarence, because it was not acceptable to have a Hawaiian first name in Hawai'i’s public schools during the territorial period. A child’s name needed to be an English Christian name. In fact all of my ten brothers and sisters had English first names and Hawaiian middle names.

My family and friends know and call me by my first given name Kau'i, but I am known as Clarence, my legal first name, on all documents and in most institutional situations. In my thoughts about my identity, the shuffling of my names has always confused and frustrated me.

My early family life also played an essential part in building my sense of being Hawaiian. The influence came from special occasions when we gathered to eat Hawaiian food, attend wedding, anniversary and birthday lū‘au, sing Hawaiian songs with my father, brothers, and sisters. We sang from the Charles E. King, *King’s Songs of Hawai‘i*, music book. We played our ukulele at the park or under our mango tree at home. Picking plumeria and making flower lei for family and friends leaving at the airport or for the May Day festivities was routine.

I remember harvesting coconut from neighborhood trees, then cracking open and grating them to make haupia (coconut pudding). We had our own banana patch in the backyard. We prepared homemade laulau, lomi salmon, kalua pork, uala (sweet potato),
poki, and raw crab. Our father and uncles took us to the ocean with fishing poles and throw-net, or sometimes at night with torch and spears, we walked on the shallow reef looking for he'e (octopus). We regularly went to the mountains to pick wild liliko‘i and guava, bringing them home to make juice.

When we hiked along stream beds we looked for 'ōhi'a'ai (mountain apple) to refresh ourselves. All the family gathered to fish during yearly swarms of 'owama (juvenile goat fish) or to pick limu wawae'iole, 'ele'ele, and kohu, or look for opihī on the black rocks next to the ocean. Every year, Dad piled all his children, and what ever neighborhood children he could fit in his Chevy stationwagon, to go to the annual Kamehameha Day parade. Even though we did not learn to speak Hawaiian, we were Hawaiian by our birthright and the activities we did as a family.

Although these childhood memories and experiences inform my ideas about my identity as a Hawaiian, my identity was also heavily influenced by an American education and by parents wanting their children to think and act as good American citizens. My father emphasized that our family’s goals were to be loyal Americans and church-going Catholics. My mother didn’t care about our being Catholic, but she went along. She wanted all her children to attend Kamehameha School, where she had graduated in 1937. Later she finished her education in the Teacher College at the University of Hawai‘i. That she had graduated from the university heavily influenced all of her children to pursue higher education.

My father, a Saint Louis High School graduate preferred for us to go to our Sacred Hearts parish school, Maryknoll. He did a lot of volunteer work for the parish and we served as altar boys and sang in the church choir. My father and uncle were identical
twins. Clarence and Lawrence were middle children of diligently hardworking parents who all through their lives struggled to gain access to material wealth. When the Great Depression engulfed Hawai‘i, their mother decided to give the twins to the Honolulu Roman Catholic Diocese entrusting them to feed, house, clothe and educate the boys—in return they would become Catholic priests.

My father was actually quite brilliant, a straight-A student in mathematics and science, and fluent in Latin. He became a self-educated man, determined to succeed after having to turn down a full college scholarship to the University of Washington because of his parents’ poor economic situation. He took correspondence courses, becoming an expert in electronics and radio communication.

He served as battalion chief with the Honolulu Fire Department in charge of their radio communication network. He was loaned out to the Honolulu Police Department to update their communication systems and then for the State of Hawai‘i as its adjunct communications coordinator. When our parents kept having more children he worked at night after his day job and on weekends during the early days of television broadcasting in Hawai‘i, directing live TV programs at a local Honolulu station. As children, we were the audience and acted in commercials. We got to meet all the local entertainers, TV hosts, and stars. For years, he directed the local productions that included Cherry Blossum Time in Japanese, Filipino Fiesta in Tagalog, Lucky Luck Hour with Hawaiian music, and the Kini Popo Late Night show.

These family experiences and parental supervision gave me my direction and identity as a child. This is how I learned about the world and how to deal with it. As I passed from childhood to early adulthood, all of these things helped shape how I came to
know and see myself. Our role models for the American dream were our parents, uncles, and aunties, most of them university trained and economically and socially successful. We looked up to them and, in that *ideal* world, our identity was formed.

At that time, we knew nothing about Hawaiian history from a Native Hawaiian perspective of what had happened to the Kingdom of Hawai‘i and the subsequent colonization of Hawaiians. My parents’ vision was for us to succeed and take advantage of the economic prosperity that had come to Hawai‘i after World War II.

For me, the big change began in the 1960s when I was faced with the prospect of being drafted and participating in the Vietnam War. I was a prime candidate because I had spent four years at Maryknoll High School, a military academy, learning how to be a good airman in the Hawai‘i Civil Air Patrol. We were military trained, brainwashed, prepared, and ready to join the armed forces. I knew how to shoot a rifle, march in step, salute, and turn on a dime in unison with my squadron. For 4 years, 5 days a week, I wore an Air Force uniform to school. My hair was constantly cut to one inch on the top and bald on the sides. Many of my classmates were sons or daughters of military officers stationed in Hawai‘i. This is how I was expected to act and identified myself while in high school. I was an out-of-step foot soldier in training unprepared for the coming of the American Cultural Revolution in the 1960s.

After high school, my sense of identity drastically changed. I was awakened. I asked myself who I was. Was I an American or was I something else? Did I honestly believe in the American dream and did I want to fight for this country? I knew I was afraid and vulnerable to being swallowed and caught up in the great social changes that gripped and swept across all levels of America. The Cultural Revolution had begun and I
was neither prepared nor educated for it! I opted out of the draft, escaping to the fringes of the war, by volunteering for the Hawai'i Air National Guard for six more long years in an Air Force uniform. It was ironic because during that period, while attending classes at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, I identified, marched, and sympathized with members of the antiwar movement. At the same time my squadron of the Hawai'i Air National Guard was training in riot control formations for possible trouble on campus. My life and identity was split in half.

Trying to find that elusive American dream proved daunting. I spent the next 20 years on the American mainland, living in Portland, Oregon; Phoenix, Arizona; and Los Angeles, California. I worked with private companies and developed into a respectable commercial foodservice facilities designer. I was the token Hawaiian-Asian, but I didn’t see my brown skin. I had succumbed to the pseudo-dream of an American way of comfort and life. I was assimilated and identified myself as an American.

An event that changed my feelings about being Hawaiian occurred on January 19, 1993. I had moved back to Honolulu after being away for so long, and it was the 100th Anniversary of the overthrow of the Hawaiian monarchy. At age 74, my widowed mother of 19 years, Leilani, whom we thought was ambivalent to politics, insisted on participating in the events. Her health was fragile because she was recovering from open-heart surgery, but she persisted, pressing us to take her to 'Iolani Palace. I was moved to see her with all the other white-haired kūpuna in their wide-brimmed hats under the hot sun, singing along to the songs they remembered from their youth. She stood there and marched with the crowds, listening to speakers all afternoon.
Never had I seen my mother do this, for she was a very private person who had always discreetly and purposefully avoided crowds and public protest. She stood there stoically, a proud Hawaiian wahine, still teaching her children lessons about life. As I watched my mother that day, I knew it was time to begin shedding my American skin to return to my Hawaiian roots. These life experiences helped frame my research questions about Hawaiian identity.

My creative processes.

When I am in my studio creating art, it seems as if time passes quickly. I am absorbed in the space of the moment. An internal sound of quiet engulfs me as my eyes shutter, squint, and open their lids, forcing or limiting light to pass through the apertures, while my wit creates and erases images within my mind. This is the eternal process of making and then destroying, of imagining and then editing. Preliminary concepts that have been mulling in my thoughts are like storms on secluded horizons. These inspirations grow to become mature and developed ideas eventually finding their way into my studio. They are clarified as they age and transform in that subconscious distance—apart from the burden of life’s mundane daily routine. They materialize uninvited, when daydreaming and sleeping or during moments while driving, or cutting vegetables, or folding clothes. They appear like an irritant, breaking my train of thought during conversations with others.

In my studio, during time set aside for contemplation, my thoughts project idea after idea against the large canvas stapled on my studio wall, if I am lying on the floor, I am able to envision ideas entering from different directions and angles. I have learned
from experience that big ideas need a lot of space to breathe so that my eyes can pause to see what is there. I understand the laws of seeing horizontally because of how my eyes are set along that peripheral plane. My hypnotized mind races and jumps, preoccupied with that which is in front of me, while I wrestle with abstract ideas transforming and constructing them into physical forms that can carry meaning and purpose.

I find that predicting this work is hard because of the uncertainties and miscues of this organic creative process where feeling and tasting and sensing carry more weight than rationality and quantification; mistakes become new directions. My process is not to illustrate an idea or thing. It is not to measure the arc of the brow or distances. It is to embody the spirit of earthly forms or noble ideas where the art becomes those sacred things. And, then, sometimes I lose that thought and become distracted worrying about unfinished work that sits or hangs in my studio, or about the next project I need to develop for an approaching public showing. Or my family needs my attention.

I have learned to work on large untreated and unstretched pieces of canvas—treating them like skin, as a living membrane that could be marked, scratched, and washed. I work on both sides of the canvas, looking for faint markings and imaginary structures. Mostly here in this sanctified studio space and during this time is where the intensity of my mind and physical and spiritual self join. Here is where I channel into the raw canvas the mana (spiritual energy) of my kūpuna (ancestors) and the ‘āina that surrounds. Sometimes when I feel lost and can no longer see the work, when my mind’s eye becomes numbed depression sinks in because I think I might have overworked the skin. In desperation, I bury the work in the earth hoping my kūpuna
(whose iwi or bones I believe infuse the lepo or soil of the 'āina with their mana) can rescue the work by speaking to it and working on it.

As time passes, as the canvas skin is baking in its imu (underground oven), I feel relieved, having relinquished my authority and power over to the work to my ancestors. This is why I often do not sign finished works of art. I feel these pieces are the works of my kūpuna. During my process in the studio, I literally draw on the canvas, using masking tape that allows constant reworking. The flexibility of the masking tape matches the fluidity of my ideas. The tape allows me freedom to broaden and refine my thoughts. I work with liquid and solid pigments, man-made materials, sand from my favorite beaches, and lepo 'ula (red earth) taken from my ancestral homeland on Moloka'i. I mix these into the fluid goo of acrylic medium and the heavy paste of white gesso. To thin, I add water. Then I paint and paint. I edit and edit. I look deeply for hours in silence. I talk to the art and close my eyes to rest. Then I wake-up to see again. Then I paint and paint and begin the whole process again. This is life in the studio. Figure 2.1 shows an example of my art created in this process.
My brushes, like my arms and hands, feel worn and hardened from use. I rejuvenate them by washing them after a long night or session of painting. To scratch open the painted skin of the canvas, my favorite things are pliers and scrappers, matt knives, and double hooked screwdrivers. Opening the painted skin of the canvas reveals a kind of double vision—a multiple layering of imagery. I look for signs—the bits of meaning that surface from my serendipitous wandering while painting.
As I clean my studio and then myself, preparing to go to rest, these thoughts become part of that storm cloud off on secluded horizons. They grow into mature and developed thoughts to again eventually find their way into my studio. A pair of faded orange hued swimming shorts, smeared and stiffened with paint, hides my nakedness and measures the change of my girth as time passes over the years. This is my creative process while in my studio. These experiences helped frame my research questions about creativity as I prepared to interview each artist.

**My experiences with exhibition.**

During the period of study for my Master of Fine Arts and Doctorate at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, I took several courses in gallery design and museum studies. This formation included courses from the Art Department in museum interpretation, exhibit design, and gallery management. I registered for the Graduate Museum Certificate Program with the American Studies Department and took courses about the theory, history, and practice of museums and about museums and collections. These formal courses constituted my foundational understanding about art exhibition from an academic perspective. My knowledge and understanding about exhibition was further enriched by the experiences I gained as an artist participant in numerous types of art exhibitions. These exhibitions occurred in three forms: solo, competitive, and group invitational.

Solo exhibitions have by and far the most intense and rewarding learning curve because the artist is often responsible for conceiving, designing, and installing the show. Solo exhibitions offer the most freedom for expressing feelings and ideas with less
encumbrance from others. Some exhibits feature one artist, usually as a retrospective collection commemorating an art career, or an event that celebrates an artist’s recent achievements. Museum curators, gallery curators, art agents, and collectors often sponsor these types of solo exhibits. The following list shows the exhibits that I completed:

- *Dios de Hawai*, Las Rosas Community Center Gallery, Madrid, Spain in 2005;
- *Heal: A Tribute to Manamana*, Queen Emma Gallery, Honolulu, Hawai‘i in 2001;
- *Kihi ka Mana*, *Drawing Mana*, Native Books Kapālama, Honolulu, Hawai‘i in 2001; and

The largest and most ambitious exhibition of these four was the *Dios de Hawai* in Madrid. This exhibition centered on human relationships to the four major kāne Akua (male gods) and the goddess Haumea. All of the works were completed as large-scale paintings produced on unstretched canvas and installed in a 2000-square-foot open gallery showroom. The male gods were grouped in one section as Kane (the progenitor) and his brother Kanaloa (of the ocean). In another section was Lono in the form of the chief of Makahiki (New Year) opposite his antithesis Kū in the form of Kūkailimoku (the snatcher or carver of ‘āina or land). The latter two sections formed a balance within the cyclical Hawaiian lunar calendar. The period of Lono starts and ends at the variable rise of the star Makali‘i or Pleiades in late fall and ends with the setting in early spring. In the other period, between these two movable dates, Kū reigns supreme (see Figure 2.2).
Haumea was presented as a 18-foot painting in an elevated section at the center back wall of the gallery, visible from the main entrance and other parts of the gallery (see Figure 2.3).

Across the gallery, facing Haumea was an homage to Mo'okū'au hau or Hawaiian genealogy captured in a 28-foot canvas that used rythmic repetative symbols as a form of visual oli or chant. Layed over the extra-wide six-step centered staircase leading up to Haumea’s elevated position was a long black canvas stained with a series of faded oval images symbolic of those lost and meant as a lament to iwi kūpuna (bones of ancestors) burials that have been desecrated. Placed over the black canvas were pōhaku (stones) dug from the ancestral village of my wife’s paternal Spanish grandmother. These were used to connect the place of Hawai‘i with the place of Spain where metaphorically each pōhaku embodied the spiritual energy or mana of my wife’s ancestors.

Figure 2.2 Kūkailimoku—by Kau‘i Chun

Acrylic, gesso, pigment on canvas 12 x 7 feet. Photographed by Kau‘i Chun.
Figure 2.3 *Haumea*—by Kau‘i Chun

Acrylic and gesso on canvas—18 x 9 feet.

Photographed by Kau‘i Chun.

To conceive, plan, and execute this work, I drew from knowledge I had gained from courses in exhibition design and museum and Hawaiian studies at the university. This experience taught me how to overcome long-distance logistics, international regulations when moving art across national boarders, and communicating with non-English speaking viewers whose knowledge about Hawai‘i was little or exotic at best, and non-existent-at-worst. A small catalogue was published with financial and logistic support of the Institut Francais of Madrid, the Spanish regional Las Rosas cultural office of
Madrid, and the director of cultural affairs with the American Embassy. I met with a local art critic who wrote an article about the exhibit for the Madrid art periodical and conducted gallery tours upon request. The interpretative text labels were written in English, and my wife Sonia translated them into Spanish. All of this was made possible because of Sonia’s family, who lived in Madrid and supported my work. Her mother Martina, who taught French language and culture at the Institut Francais, was instrumental in opening doors and introducing me to pertinent governmental authorities, art dealers, and gallery owners in Madrid.

This experience taught me that concepts and practices that govern exhibition are complex. An exhibitor must address the following tasks: negotiating how to use the gallery space to its ultimate advantage; following the rules governing institutional entities and their public space; working with directors and their staff; reaching into the local community to elicit support and interest; and ultimately communicating with clarity with the viewing public. Each step and component for installing a successful show presents unexpected challenges, differences of opinion, and limitations within available resources. How an exhibitor addresses and answers these challenges ultimately affects the degree of success or disappointment of an exhibit.

Another form of exhibition is the competitive art exhibit, which is a juried show where a person or a panel of experts choose the art that will be included. Selections are based on jurist opinions about the quality of the concept, design, and execution. It is also based on the relevance of the art to the theme of the show. Artists are often asked to submit photos of a body of recent works. If selected, artists are required to send in the actual work of art for a final judgment.
There are no guaranties of selection because you are usually being assessed on the physical appearance of the work from a jurist’s aesthetic sense, temperament, and, particularly in matters of contemporary Hawaiian art, their level of cultural understanding and knowledge. Artists usually do not participate in the design and installation of the exhibit but are asked to share their concerns if there are particular or unusual considerations in placing their work of art.

I was invited to participate in the following competitive exhibitions:

- **24th Annual Commitment to Excellence Art Exhibition**, Japanese Chamber of Commerce, Linekona, Honolulu Academy of Art in 2002;
- “9—11, Response and Remembrance”, Koa Gallery, Kapiʻolani Community College, Honolulu, Hawai‘i in 2003;
- **22nd Annual Commitment to Excellence Art Exhibition**, Japanese Chamber of Commerce—Centennial Anniversary, AMFAC Building, Honolulu, Hawai‘i in 2000;
- *College Art 2000*, Windward Mall, Kaneʻohe, Hawai‘i;
- **21st Annual Commitment to Excellence Art Exhibition**, Japanese Chamber of Commerce, AMFAC Building, Honolulu, Hawai‘i in 1999; and

My choice of shows, and one of the most rewarding experiences, is to participate in invitational group exhibitions. In these exhibitions, artists are invited to participate in a particular art event or decide as a group to exhibit their works together. Group invitations
frequently center on themes; works of art celebrate or commemorate special events or address important issues that concern those artists.

Strategically, as the contemporary Hawaiian art movement grows, bonds between Native Hawaiian artists are strengthened when they decide to work together on exhibits. Strengthening of bonds is accomplished in several ways:

- when venues are provided for emerging and established kūpuna artists to exhibit together, reinforcing connections between generations;
- when artists are invited to create art that responds to ancestral works in collections;
- promoting contemporary Hawaiian art onto a global stage, as when Maoli Art in Real Time puts on a special exhibiton for visiting conventioneers at the Hawai'i Convention Center.

Bringing contemporary Native Hawaiian visual artists together to exhibit and market their works as individuals and as a group is the mission of MAMo or Maoli Art Month. The PIKO and HOEA exhibit at Hamilton Library of the University of Hawai‘i celebrated the works of 73 contemporary Native Hawaiian artists who had gathered for 10 days June 2007 in Waimea on Hawai‘i Island. The Native Hawaiian artists had met with 115 Indigenous visual artists from First Nation Peoples, Native American Tribes, Māori, Aborigine, Torres Strait Islanders, Papau New Guinean and Pacific Islanders to engage in cultural exchange and art making.

These are invitational group exhibits in which I have participated:

- PIKO and HOEA Artists’ Works, Hamilton Library, University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, Honolulu, Hawai‘i in 2011;
- Maoli Art in Real Time, Hawai‘i Convention Centre, Honolulu, Hawai‘i in 2010 and 2011;
- Maoli Art Month, MAMo, Honolulu, Hawai‘i in 2006, 2009, 2010 and 2012;
- Hale Kuai Aupuni Part Art Show, Native Books/Na Mea Hawai‘i, Honolulu, Hawai‘i in 2009;
- Bridging Journeys, Louis Pohl Gallery, Honolulu, Hawai‘i in 2007;
- Shelter, ARTS at Marks Garage, Honolulu, Hawai‘i in 2007;
- Lono O Makahiki, Bishop Museum, Honolulu, Hawai‘i in 2004-05;
- Hale Ku Ai, Waikiki, Hawai‘i in 2004;
- *Mai Na Kūpuna Mai, Hoi I ka Puolo Exhibition*, University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa Art Gallery in 1999;
- *Scholarship Awards Exhibition*, University of Hawai‘i Commons Gallery in 1999;
- *Fiber Arts Exhibition*, University of Hawai‘i Commons Gallery in 1999;
- *Intersections Program, Exhibition of Hawaiian Artists*, University of Hawai‘i Commons Gallery in 1999;
• *Annual MFA Exhibitions*, University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa Art Gallery in 1999, 2000 and 2001;

• *Annual BFA Exhibition*, University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa Art Gallery in 1998;

• Special music and visual arts event, University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, Music Department, Orvis Auditorium in 1998;

• Special event, Native Hawaiian Chamber of Commerce Annual O‘o Awards Banquet, Ala Moana Hotel, Honolulu, Hawai‘i, group showing of Native Hawaiian artists in 1998;

• *Plein Air Exhibition*, Windward Mall, Kane‘ohe, Hawai‘i in 1997; and

• *Plein Air Exhibition*, Atelier Gallery, Honolulu, Hawai‘i in 1996.

My educational formation in exhibition design and museum studies, along with these art events, represent the cumulative total of my art exhibition experiences from which I draw my ideas for this research about exhibition.

**My art education: Effects on my identity, creative process, and exhibition experiences.**

Since my studies in studio art at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa from 1997 through 2001, where I received a BFA and MFA, my interest in art has grown. I am fascinated with all types of art, but there was a period as an art student when I progressively became more interested in what other contemporary Hawaiian artists were doing. My studies at the university helped to ground my understanding of the theories, histories, and different practices of art. My education opened a vision framed through
liberal studies that included the sciences, cultural studies, and humanities. My studies
gave me a broad and deep perception through an academic lens of Hawaiian language,
history, and customary cultural practices. My creative process and growth as an artist was
dependent on synthesizing these learning experiences to assure I was on firm ground
about what I thought, argued, and wanted to express in my works of art. These learning
experiences slowly effected a changing perception and feeling about how I viewed
myself, how I choose to make art, and how I preferred to exhibit.

During the summer of 1998, I traveled to Europe as a student doing an
individualized study-abroad course when I visited Madrid, Paris, and London and their
great museums. I wanted to see the art that I had only looked at through the limitations of
photos in books and projected images on walls during art history lectures. I was searching
for my identity as an artist, and I thought I could find it through what I saw.

Visiting the museums of Europe made me aware of how sovereign governments
built their patrimony by coalescing around their national treasures. At the Tate Museum
in London, I saw British artists Turner, Constable, and Freud but came across very few
French or Spanish painters. In Paris, at the Musée d’Orsay, a converted rail station with
its grand 18th century wrought iron architecture and high vaulted ceilings, all of the
important French artists and their major works from the middle 19th century until the
early 20th century were exhibited. I sensed that one of the missions of this museum was
to promote French national identity by showcasing these exquisite works of art. In
Madrid, at the Museo Prado and Reina Sofia, I looked at the most extensive collections of
Velázquez, Goya, and Picasso and began to realize firsthand how countries manufacture,
display, and promote their national identity through exhibition in their public museums.
Visiting and exploring art institutions, art districts, and commercial galleries of these important cities of art changed my attitude about my American and Hawaiian identities, my understanding about how other artists made art, and how cultures exhibited their heritage. What I saw and found were many great pieces of art exhibited in national museums, along with works that were not as great but still had merit, and an alarming amount of what I thought were works that were about ideas that were still undeveloped.

These three tiers of quality, from my eye, were not unlike what was happening in Hawai‘i. This revelation helped to equalize any false notions that I held about Western European art when comparing it with local and Native Hawaiian art. The experience shifted my preconceived notions about Western art and convinced me that contemporary Native Hawaiian art was culturally essential and historically important for Hawaiians, if they were to build a Hawaiian Nation.

I learned from this experience how other artists in these cities saw and identified themselves, how they made art, and how they worked and reached into their communities to share what they had made. I visited abandoned buildings in Paris where young squatters were creating art in makeshift communes. Their creative process included making art from discarded materials and building parts. They lit small fires from trash with bits of found wood to provide light in the gutted buildings. The fires provided warmth, heat for cooking food, and sometimes fueled a small kiln.

As economically poor as the artists were, I witnessed how they integrated their creative process as an inseparable part of their lives. I saw street artists making art as transit vendors, and selling it directly to interested pedestrians strolling by. This was their gallery and how they exhibited their works. I entered every type of commercial art
gallery in the main art districts of each city and was amazed by what was exhibited and thought to be worthy and of value as a commodity item.

And, I saw graffiti everywhere I went in that great outdoor exhibition arena called public space. I make a distinction between graffiti that is scrawled with quick tags of initials or acronyms, blighting other more mature large-scale graffiti art, and visually developed works whose contents critically reflect the human conditions of those living in these societies. I was overwhelmed. Graffiti was tagged on buildings either abandoned or in use, on metro stations and cars, on sidewalks, apartments, and parkways. Anywhere there was opportunity and a surface to paint, there was graffiti—and you did not have to speak the local language to understand it. There was an angst and edge to it all.

At every chance, I tried to engage in a conversation with people and artists about themselves, their ethnic and cultural backgrounds, what they did, and what was important to them. One particular encounter that affected how I felt to be an American happened in Paris at the Parc George Brassens close to Rue Leriche, where I was living with a friend of my future wife’s family. I was in the park one afternoon, sketching in my journal, when I met a group of young adult teenaged French-Algerians who were hanging out. We were curious about each other and, although I did not speak French and Arabic, and they did not speak English, we began to converse in made-up gestures and hand movements. They clearly hated Americans but accepted me for being Hawaiian, of which they knew nothing. They were a little disappointed when I said no thanks to sharing a hit from their pakalolo (cannabis), but then they asked if they could draw in my sketchbook. They wanted to leave me a gift, a memory of our meeting. They were graffitists who lived
partly at home but preferred the freedom of the streets. They repeatedly drew my name Kau'i in graffiti style.

On this trip, I had never encountered or felt prejudice from French or Spanish people because of my skin color or identity as a Hawaiian. Everyone was friendly, helpful and open to conversation. I was shocked because it was American tourists visiting Paris, Madrid, or London who would not say hello, purposely avoiding eye contact or friendly acknowledgments. This happened repeatedly and made me feel strange to be around the tourists. I began to question my identity as an American and started to see how some Americans acted when traveling abroad, away from the safety of familiar references.

After Paris, a perception of prejudice helped cut short my visit to London. I was staying at a family-type hostel owned by the Society of Friends or Quakers. I thought this hostel would be great and that I could make some new friends and finally express my views in English. We took our meals buffet style, and we sat at long tables. I got up early the first morning, eager to visit the Tate Museum. I went down to the dining hall to eat breakfast and meet other visitors. I was the first there and took a table.

As the room filled to its capacity, I noticed that no one had come to sit at my empty ten-foot table, to share a meal with me. I thought this was rather strange but brushed it aside. Then it happened the next morning. I looked around and realized that I was the only person of color in the entire room. This shocked me and hurt me, in part because English was my first language and for a large part provided the cultural references and foundation of my American life. These incidents may have been anecdotal and subjective on my account, but for me they were real and affected my core feelings.
and beliefs about identity, about being American, and wanting to learn more about being Hawaiian.

**My work as an art teacher: Effects on my identity, creative process, and exhibition experiences.**

From July 2007 through June 2009 I spent three memorable years working in an intense and purposeful learning environment teaching art to students at Hālau Lōkahi Public Charter School. The school serves predominately Native Hawaiian children living in the Kalihi area of Honolulu. As part of its public charter and educational goals, curriculum lessons at Hālau Lōkahi were framed around Hawaiian values and customary contemporary cultural practices. A customary practice of morning, afternoon, and assembly protocol was to oli (chant) and pule (pray) Hawaiian greetings, refrains, and offerings that reinforced our school’s and our students’ affinity with being Native Hawaiian.

The art curriculum focused on issues of identity, creativity, and sharing what was made. Lessons in mo'okū'auhau (genealogical succession) were an important part of training so students could understand who they were and where they came from (see Figures 2.4 and 2.5). We considered this piece of knowledge to be essential, providing a core-element for all students’ foundation as they grew and matured into strong healthy young adult Hawaiians. The protocol went to the heart of issues about identity.
Figure 2.4 *Moʻokūʻauhau*—Genealogy, Hālau Lōkahi wāhine students
*MAMo* exhibition—Arts at Mark’s Garage 2009
*Healing Touch* panels on window—Kauʻi Chun
Photographed by Kauʻi Chun.
Our art projects included exploring and uncovering each student’s unique voice as a creative person. These lessons ranged from transforming their poetic verses and narratives into visual art, portraits of themselves, and also writing first-person interpretive text labels so viewers could understand more deeply what the art meant to its creator.
Figures 2.6, 2.7, 2.8 Kau‘i Chun with Hālau Lōkahī student

Transforming her lament poem into a visual work of art

Water-based printmaker ink on kapa cloth.

Photographed by Kau‘i Chun and his student.

We constructed temporary exhibition spaces for students to display their two-dimensional works on makeshift vertical walls. Six-foot portable tables, which normally
functioned as student classroom tables, became our gallery walls when we folded one set of legs and set them up vertically. They leaned at a slight tilt. We then set them around the large commons classroom area and had students from other grade levels view the art works, which were accompanied with interpretive text labels written by each student artist.

Working in this environment at Hālau Lōkahi served as an informal lab where I could, when appropriate, address through an arts curriculum my concerns about identity, creativity, and exhibition. I got to see firsthand how young impressionable and predominately Hawaiian students understood who they were and to see them develop as Hawaiians immersed in their culture.

When the opportunity arose, I used art as a therapeutic method to elicit healing effects, where a student could vent anger and frustrations within the safety of creating expressive and or narrative art (see Figures 2.6, 2.7, 2.8). After these sessions, students were asked to write interpretive labels and titles that explained, in their own words, what their art meant to them and what they wanted others to understand; these labels where heartfelt and direct.

I was impressed at how fluent our students were in communicating their thoughts and feeling in Pidgin English. Watching them made me think that these borrowed bits and forms of different languages are what engage and occupy our contemporary Hawaiian visual artists. Our Hawaiian artists are adroit in their practice as they explore different ways to visually express their ideas. They are constantly using and inventing new forms of visual vocabulary of a Creole-type language that is peppered with nuance and metaphoric symbolism. Contemporary Hawaiian artists use these inventions to
navigate through their multicultural realities and to communicate with their own multiethnic communities.

Working with these children taught me how students evolve and mature their ideas through a serious process of critical and thoughtful creative thinking. This process eventually transformed those preliminary thoughts into elegant, beautiful, and deeply meaningfully works of art. With these children, age made no difference when discovering their own real and authentic voices. I learned about the profoundness of the act of sharing as these students proudly shared with their peers, teachers, and family their discoveries and works of creative expression.

The work I did at Hālau Lōkahi Public Charter School helped center and validate the conceptual concerns of my research. My work brought a renewed and fresh perspective to notions about our identity as the Indigenous people of these islands. Working with these students showed me how they created unique ways to communicate their creative ideas. And as students eagerly shared their creative works with friends, teachers and family, this experience taught me what it meant to reach into one’s community to exhibit his or her work.

**Indigenous and Case Study Research**

The case study approach for gathering data in my research consisted of interviewing five contemporary Native Hawaiian visual artists. As a sample of five, these artists represent a broader range of artists that define contemporary Hawaiian art. Their inclusion in this study takes into consideration a mixture of different personal histories, including voices from varied age levels and genders. Together, the artists present
exemplary and diverse notions about what it means to identify oneself as a Hawaiian artist.

Each of these artists represents distinct artistic styles and aesthetic sensibilities with preferences of tools and materials. In addition, each artist brings a range of experience in the exhibition of works of art in public spaces. They represent the diversity that make-up this contemporary visual arts movement in early twenty-first century Hawai'i.

One of the important goals of this research is to find out what is common or uncommon, and what is particular in each case, as it relates to the three research areas: Hawaiian artists perspectives about identity, their thoughts about the creative process, and perspectives on exhibitions. When taken in its entirety as a collection of findings, this study offers an insightful understanding about contemporary Hawaiian art and the lives of selected Hawaiian artists. A compilation of these artists’ stories enables us to appreciate their voices and their dedication to the contemporary visual arts movement of Native Hawaiians. Three wāhine (women) artists participated in this study: Dalani Kauihou Tanahy, Noelle Kahanu, and Kaili Chun and; two kāne (men) participated Imaikalani Kalahele and Solomon Enos. In each of these artist’s stories there is a wealth of information that provides insight about the three topics of this study.

**Framing the questions from a Hawaiian philosophical perspective.**

The following three open-ended questions guided this investigation and formed the core conceptual structure of this research:
• What do contemporary Hawaiian artists have to say about their identity?
• What is the nature of their creative process?
• What do they think about and consider when exhibiting their works in public gallery or museum spaces?

These core questions are modeled from what Smith (1999, pp. 172-172) suggests should be considered as important when developing questions relevant when conducting research on Indigenous peoples. The following are questions that should be asked.

• Who defines the research problem?
• For whom is this study worthy and relevant? Who says so?
• What knowledge will the community gain from this study?
• What knowledge will the researcher gain from this study?
• What are some likely positive outcomes from this study?
• What are some possible negative outcomes?
• How can the negative outcomes be eliminated?
• To whom is the research accountable?
• What processes are in place to support the research, the researched and the researcher?

My study asks similar questions about my role as a Hawaiian researcher researching Hawaiian artists. How the research and its conceptual framework would be designed, implemented, and what approaches would I use are important questions I need to address. Based on Smith’s questions I pose these questions to help inform the interview questions.
• Where is this research located and who will own and control it?
• Who does this research inform?
• What larger and specific interests will this research serve?
• Does this research help our Hawaiian community in positive ways?
• How are my research questions designed and framed in regard to the intended purpose and scope of the study?
• How is the research applied and carried out?
• Am I able to place my heart, mind, and spirit in pono with those I plan to interview?
• Can I present the research in ways that respect and further our culture and people?
• How shall my findings be disseminated?
• As an insider, researching the interior and sensitive world of contemporary Native Hawaiian visual artists, will I be able to fulfill their expectations with an accurate record of their responses to my questions?
• How will I carry the kuleana (right and responsibility) placed with me as my research evolves and is published?

These supporting considerations about purpose and effect framed from a Hawaiian perspective pave a pathway for considering in-depth questioning about identity, creativity, and exhibition.

• What do Native Hawaiian artists consider to be really important?
• What is deeply meaningful and purposeful about their lives and work?
- What is the essence of their lived experiences?
- How do they structure their lives around what is important and significant about their art and their lives?
- Who are we as artists?
- What are the essential and meaningful elements that enable our creative process to thrive?
- How do we interact with and present ourselves and expose our works to others in the community?

**Open-ended questions.**

The interview process focuses on the artist’s responses to a series of open-ended questions that address this study’s three major areas of interest: identity, creativity, and exhibition. The open-ended questions are intended to encourage and stimulate spontaneity in response and dialogue; to shift and move the research into unexpected directions and areas. Patton (2002) suggests this approach should yield long, more detailed and variable content. This is an important method useful for discovering other perspectives that can filter and reframe original assumptions, which inform judgment about this research. My concern as a researcher is to find a balance between following a conceptual and prescriptive script to guide each interview, while allowing for a wider range of ideas, perspectives, and directions as each artist shares his or her mana’o (thoughts).
First person voice of artists.

This study presents the interview responses in the voices of the artists. This form of first-person voice as a means of rich description is above all preferred when presenting an Indigenous perspective. Smith (1999, pp. 150-151) referred to the struggle against the colonizer by Indigenous communities to exercise what is considered their fundamental right to representation. My thoughts are that, in an ideal setting, Hawaiian artists are better able to express their native spirit, experiences, and worldview in their own voices rather than through the interpretations of others. Their voices capture real dilemmas confronting their daily life and artistic practice. Their voices authenticate the complexities of being contemporary Native Hawaiian artists. However, because this is a research-based study, balance with rigorous objectivity, subjective interpretation and the personal voices of artist are presented. This examination of identity, the creative process and notions on exhibitions, includes the voices of Hawaiian artists about Native Hawaiian art and provides a uniquely contemporary Native Hawaiian perspective.

Establishing trust.

One of my goals is to form a bond of trust and honesty with each individual Hawaiian artist interviewed. This trust is essential for producing an accurate report and interpretation of the findings, while constructing and assuring validity of the findings. This interview process is guided by the advice of Patton (2002, p. 21) regarding, what needs to be considered essential when gathering information in this manner, about the job of an interviewer and with the characteristics of a question that is asked. My task as a researcher is to facilitate and provide a conceptual framework for these artists, so
they can represent accurately and thoroughly their points of view about their art and practice.

Metaphorically, if I built a wooden frame and stretched canvas over it; and, then gave it to each artist to mark or paint their thoughts and ideas about their lived or learned experiences I should expect to be surprised. Even though, I created and controlled the raw material, size, and shape of the canvas, I should be prepared for each artist to do what they may. They might burn it or take it apart and reassemble the frame in another way or shape! They might turn it into a three-dimensional piece or a weaving or hammer and pound on it! If this happens, I still need to find ways of gathering honest and viable data that focus on the conceptual structure of my research; identity, creativity, and experiences with exhibiting works of art.

During each interview, my goal is to achieve an ambiance of candid, frank, fair and honest exchange. If I want to garner data that is truthful and honest, I need to be sincere with each interviewee regarding my assumptions, reasons for doing this research, and intentions regarding using this information. It is essential that trust be established because without this trust the information that they choose to share is in question and the validity of information that I gathered would be suspect. Speaking face to face in the familiar and safe environment of an artist’s studio, home, or favorite place lends each interview to be a more open, flexible, and less inhibited experience. Conversing directly with each artist and using open-ended questions that allow them to explain and express their ideas and thoughts is the most effective way of eliciting difficult information and personal thoughts and experiences that could be potentially dangerous or embarrassing. This task is always challenging and comes with kuleana (rights and responsibilities). I am
constantly aware and alert to any intended or unintended abuse or possible misinterpretation or appropriation of this information. To insure this, part of the process for preparing the transcriptions of each interview is to have each artist read and sign their approval of my written comments about their interview and what is recorded. The artists had the final say to what is published.

My sense of inquiry by observation is heightened with the awareness of my kuleana. Acute observation provides additional information to the collection of data. Field notes are part of the protocol of observation for each interview that enables me to recall and record my impressions of the sights, sounds, smells, and feelings I experienced during each interview. It adds richness and embellishes telling the stories these artists share.

The interview questions.

Native Hawaiian artists and identity.

When a Hawaiian artist says that he or she is a Hawaiian artist what do they mean? How do they define this term identity? How do notions of identity influence their art? How do they identify and describe themselves as an artist? In the first area of inquiry, I ask each artist what they think about their identity as a Hawaiian artist and how does it relate and affect choices they make in their art practice. In part, I was interested in the cultural component of each artist’s identity. How does their affinity with their genealogy influence their identity and art? How do their personal family history and stories influence their notions of who they are and their art? What do they read or discuss with others?
I looked to find out what these artists have to say about Hawaiian, local, Asian, American and other Indigenous cultures and what influences these cultures have on the formation of their identity and their art. What do they think about American colonization on Hawaiians and how has this colonial history affected their ideas about their identity as a person and as an artist? What do these artists think about the influences of American and local cultures on Native Hawaiians and how have these influences shaped their views of the world? I am interested in finding the personal histories of each artist that capture and tell the story about their formation as a person and as an artist.

_Native Hawaiian artists and the creative process._

What does it mean to be absorbed in the act of creating art? The series of questions in this section focuses on trying to find what each artist had to consider when creating art. The main question in this section is, “What is the nature of each artist’s creative process?” I wanted to discover more about their creative inspiration, then how ideas are born and developed, and for what reasons? How do they describe their aesthetic sense? I also wanted to find out how these artists, not only consider their creative process, but what they think makes their art unique and distinctive. What are some of the examples of work that best manifest their notions, theories, or ideas? What are they communicating in their works of art and, how does an individual work relate to a larger picture in the schema of their life and artistic purpose?

In this section, I asked questions about how their cultural, social, and personal history influences their art. In what ways do their social economic challenges dictate what they are able to create and produce? What types of resources do they consider essential
for developing and cultivating their ideas? What kinds of materials do they use and what are their conceptual or practical reasons for using them? What role does personal protocol play within their creative process?

I wanted to know how their formation in education, either Western or Hawaiian, influences their art making. How did they learn how to do art? What schools and teachers were most influential in their career? In this second part of the interview about Hawaiian artists and their creative process, I wanted to learn how contemporary Native Hawaiian artists use their imagination and turn it into creative projects and works of art? I wanted to learn the whole story about creative processes of these five contemporary Native Hawaiian artists and their formation as artists.

Native Hawaiian artists and exhibition experiences.

In response to the current revival in contemporary Hawaiian art, the third part of the interview process asked questions about what contemporary Hawaiian artists think about when considering exhibiting their art works in public spaces and galleries or museums. What are some of the challenges they faced when negotiating these spaces? What is essential and important to them when exhibiting in public spaces? In what ways is exhibiting in a group show with Hawaiians different from exhibiting with non-Hawaiians? Considering the art museum as a public place, where the community comes to engage with art and artists, I am also interested in knowing how each artist defines the community in which he or she lives and works. What are some of the challenges they face when communicating with this community? How do they feel about their experiences with museums in general, with curators, show designers, board members,
executive administrators, museum educators, and docents? What are their experiences with art critics? Do they worry if their message is being heard, and how do they go about making sure their message is heard? What do they think about when considering whether or not the general public will understand their art?

The artist participants.

These five Native Hawaiian artist participants were chosen for this study because I believe they represent a broad and insightful picture that best describes the realities and life conditions of contemporary Native Hawaiian artists. Each artist offers diverse notions about self-identity accompanied by distinctive life stories. They are of different ages and gender; they form a nucleus of artistic sensibilities regarding creative ideas and purpose; and have different preferences in choices of media and aesthetics.

Their experiences with exhibiting works of art in public spaces are extensive. For these reasons, these five artists and their stories about their creative life form the core of this research. The three wāhine artists who agreed to participate in the interview portion of the research are Dalani Kauihou Tanahy, Noelle Kahanu, and Kaili Chun. The two kāne artists are Imaikalani Kalahele and Solomon Enos.

Dalani Kauihou Tanahy.

Dalani Kauihou Tanahy lives and works in a mostly Hawaiian community on the island of O'ahu in Wai'anae. She is a kapa maker, wife, mother, and cultural practitioner at Ka'ala Farms where she teaches how to grow wauke and make kapa. Tanahy is an extremely bright and talented woman with an insatiable curiosity for learning. Not having
an opportunity to attend a formal Western university program, she feeds her insatiable
curiosity about things through the rigors of self-learning.

Kauihou Tanahy is valuable for this research because of her life passion of
Teaching herself and others about the ancient art of kapa making. She comes to this study
unencumbered by a formal Western arts education while offering what she learned from
other kapa makers. Her perspective on identity is important to the research because she
was primarily raised outside Hawai‘i. Her creative process is steeped in the old Hawaiian
ways of growing and collecting the organic materials, while at the same time informed by
Western scientific concepts of how to cultivate and process these materials. Her
experiences in exhibitions, although minimal, nevertheless add another perspective to an
expanding contemporary Hawaiian arts movement. The value Dalani Kauihou Tanahy
brings to the goals of this research is embodied in her passionate search for knowledge
about kapa and art.

**Noelle Kahanu.**

Noelle Kahanu works at the Bishop Museum and is responsible for managing
projects that involve contemporary Hawaiian artists. Her work includes organizing
cultural and art exhibitions in the Long Gallery (vestibule) at the Bishop Museum. Her art
practice is that of a contemporary kāhili feather worker. Kahanu is one of the founding
members of Maoli Art Month and continues to play a lead role in facilitating its events.
Kahanu received a law degree from the Richardson Law School at the University of
Hawai‘i at Mānoa. When she worked for Senator Daniel K. Inouye, as an aide, she was
involved with the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) legislation.

Kahanu brings to this research the valuable voice of a serious student and researcher of Hawaiian culture, her important contribution to exhibiting Hawaiian art, as well as being a leader in the Hawaiian arts movement. Kahanu’s value to this study comes from her sharing personal and professional insights garnered from years of work in community development projects and institutions.

**Kaili Chun.**

Kaili Chun refers to herself as a conceptual artist that primarily works in a genre called installation art. She has been honored with numerous awards including the 2006 recipient of the Cox Award. Her art education formation is interesting in that while she was finishing her Masters of Fine Art at UHM she was also apprenticing with Mr. Wright Bowman, Sr., a master Hawaiian woodcarver. Previous to this, she received a degree in architecture from Princeton University. Her inclusion enlightens this study because of her compelling wahine voice.

Major themes found in Chun’s works include a focus on the differences and tensions that are built or inherent between American/Western and Hawaiian cultures. She is on the cusp of rising to an art recognition level that goes beyond the local level found in Hawai‘i in terms of critical review and inclusion in international exhibitions. In addition, she brings a particular kind of knowledge and extensive reading that accompanied her through a stalwart Western academic formation. Chun’s participation in this study expands the notion of what it means to be a wahine Hawaiian artist in the
twenty-first century because of the rich experiences that have influenced her life’s journey.

**Imaikalani Kalahele.**

Imaikalani Kalahele is a prolific visual artist, poet, and community activist. His medium of choice includes pen and ink drawings, painting and multi-media-three-dimensional installation work. Kalahele is one of the important leaders of the contemporary Hawaiian arts movement since its recent inception in the early 1970s. He often plays a crucial role in organizing Hawaiian art and poetry events and speaks frequently at public forums regarding Hawaiian issues and art. Kalahele is one of six Hawaiian master artists honored in 2006 at the Bishop Museum Long Vestibule Gallery during the Maoli Art Month celebrations. Kalahele’s participation in this research is important because of his wisdom that is tempered with maturity and age and a lifetime of learning through experiences and extensive readings with interested Hawaiians and non-Hawaiians about Native Hawaiian art and culture. He readily shares his knowledge and opinions. Kalahele represents the Hawaiian arts movement in his important role as kupuna to many of us involved in its development.

**Solomon Enos.**

Solomon Enos is a mid-career Native Hawaiian artist who is commercially successful. Enos is well respected within the growing community of contemporary Hawaiian visual artists, their supporters, and patrons. His value to the goals of this
research is in his refreshing and authentic perspectives about uncovering ancient Hawaiian knowledge and perceptions and his efforts with preserving this wellspring. He blurs the boundaries between traditional notions of making art and his role as a caregiver for restoring and revitalizing ahupua'a (principle land division) cultivation sites.

Enos’s insatiable appetite to grow sustainable gardens for food production and healthy consumption enlightens his unique personal perspective about what it means to be a Hawaiian artist. Solomon Enos brings to this research his experiences in commercial and fine art ventures alongside his life commitment to community service and educating our youth.

These five Native Hawaiian artists represent a small but significant part of the contemporary Native Hawaiian visual arts movement in early 21st century Hawai'i. Because of the limitation of this study, there remains many more artists worthy of inclusion on this list. The number of Hawaiian artists continues to grow. These artists are like precious threads in a rich tapestry where personal histories, genealogies, places of birth, stories, and multiple perspectives reside.

**Instrumentation.**

The technological instrumentation used to record the interviews involved a tape recorder with a uni-directional microphone, a digital tape recorder and a videotape recorder. The cassette tape recorder used is a Radio Shack model number CTR-122. It has an external jack and microphone. The microphone is unidirectional and is fitted in a stand.
The secondary audio recording device is an Olympus digital voice recorder model number WS-200S. This recorder device allows downloading the data onto a laptop computer MP3 audio program for playback that aids in transcribing the interviews into written form.

The other recording device used for the interviews is a Sony video camera recorder that records on Hi8 videotape. The camera recorder is placed on a tri-pod and plugs into an electrical outlet. The videotapes from this device are downloaded onto a DVD format to serve as a back-up record.

Data collection.

My goal was to conduct the interviews in a safe, peaceful, and quiet space conducive for eliciting honest dialogue and rich conversations. Appropriate places can be an artist’s studio, workspace, or home. To elicit fresh responses and to prevent pre-scripted answers, artists were not given the interview questions in advance; they received the questions in written form during the interview.

Data sources.

The data sources for this research were the responses of the individual artists as they offered their mana'o (thought) to the interview questions. This data were collected onto the recording devices mentioned in the instrumentation section. Another data source comes from my handwritten notes. These notes recorded my impression of the setting and ambiance of each interview.
**Treatment of the data.**

The recorded interviews were transcribed, excluding minor grammatical and gestural information. These transcriptions generally are a literal account that captures what occurred during the interview sessions. One of the goals of the interviews was to place the research in the *voices* of the artists who participated in the interviews. As Smith (2001, pp. 150-151) suggests, from an Indigenous perspective, self-representation as a means of description is preferred. It is important to maintain precision of word and thoughts in order to keep the work in the first person voice. This treatment helps the researcher to tease out valid and authentic salient themes and threads found in each interview.

After the transcription of the interview and written commentary was completed, each artist was provided the text for editorial approval. Consent forms provided for signatures were collected and archived as part of the record. The final written form of each interview reflects each artist’s final proof and grammatical corrections.

My process of analysis of the data collected is to contrast and compare and to pair salient responses from each artist to the research questions. What are the particular responses that stand out in terms of content and temperament? I was looking for any disparities, similarities, and uniqueness of thought and experiences that indicated significant thematic threads and new, revealing perspectives. I presented interviews and commentary aligning them in the same sequential order as they appear during the interview sessions about identity, creative process and exhibition experiences.
CHAPTER THREE: DALANI KAUIHOU TANAHY—THE ORIGINAL

Introduction

The scope of my research was enriched with the inclusion of Dalani Kauihou Tanahy because of her unique role as a teacher, a self-learner, and a practitioner of the traditional process of growing wauke (mulberry) plants. In addition, she is known for her collecting and processing of dying materials for marking kapa cloth, for her fabrication of tools for making kapa, and for her utilizing and balancing western scientific and Hawaiian approaches. Her inclusion also pertains to the question of what differences distinguish contemporary art from traditional practice. Is the difference art or craft? My interview of her challenges these simple lines of demarcation.

I first met Kauihou Tanahy in July of 2000, while I was finishing my Master of Fine Arts degree from the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa. My mother-in-law, Martina Roblin Neveu, and I were in a papermaking class in the program when Martina expressed an interest in making Hawaiian kapa. Professor Patricia Hickman, the department chair, told us about Kauihou Tanahy, who worked at the Cultural Learning Center at Kaʻala Farm in Waiʻanae.

According to Eric Enos, cofounder and director of Kaʻala Farm, the Cultural Learning Center is a collective vision of young kāne and wāhine, guided by their community elders, who wanted to bring their Hawaiian cultural heritage back to life. Kauihou Tanahy is part of this vision, where her work involves growing her own wauke plants and teaching the art of making kapa. Kauihou Tanahy’s wauke plants, or as she
affectionately calls them, her keiki babies, are nestled alongside the lo'i kalo (taro patch). The wai (fresh water) that flows through the lo'i and that waters the wauke comes from a tap from the headwaters of Wai‘anae Valley.

On a sunny weekday morning, my wife Sonia, her mother Martina, and I took a drive to the Wai‘anae coastline on West O‘ahu to meet Kauihou Tanahy. We headed up the valley through dry country roads bordered by thickets of kiawe trees, inevitably losing our sense of direction. We were looking for a particular fork in the road that would take us up to the cattle gate we were told would mark the entry. Our cell phones had become useless out-of-range contraptions; so we could not call Kauihou Tanahy for directions.

After backtracking twice, I eventually found that elusive dirt road. Then I carefully inched my Corolla around worn pits that pockmarked the way. My back wheels began to lose traction on loose gravel as we climbed up the hill. In the distance, we saw the top of a thatched roof and knew that Kauihou Tanahy would be there waiting beyond the rise. She greeted us warmly with hugs then welcomed us to join her under a tree where she had laid out an assortment of materials and kapa-making tools.

Kauihou Tanahy grew her own wauke (paper mulberry) plants, the main source of natural fibers used in making Hawaiian kapa. She also cultivated and gathered source materials for making dyes and carving tools for beating and marking her kapa. (see Figures 3.1, 3.2, and 3.3) Through years of experimentation, she had become one of a handful of expert contemporary kapa makers who had helped revive the lost art of ancient Hawaiian kapa. Her works now rival ancestral works in the quality of their subtle characteristics. This accomplishment did not come all by accident; it was the result of
hard work and tenacious research on her part. Kauihou Tanahy is important to this research, as she possesses an insatiable appetite for the pursuit of learning spurned by self-motivation and interest. She is on a constant hunt as she digs through any information that could help with her understanding of making Hawaiian kapa.

Figure 3.1 Close-up of watermark design of Dalani Kauihou Tanahy’s kapa. Reproduced with permission from Dalani Kauihou Tanahy.

Found at [www.kapahawaii.com/dalani-tanahy.html](http://www.kapahawaii.com/dalani-tanahy.html)
Kauihou Tanahy is generous with sharing her findings about kapa with anyone who cares to learn and listen. Kauihou Tanahy told me during her interview that her findings had come to her from trial and error as she worked on each new piece of kapa. In the 19th century, the ancient practice had been recorded and written down by William Brigham as he traversed across ahupua'a (ancient land division) to different moku.
(island). Working like an anthropologist he had sought information from the remaining few natives who had still retained the old knowledge of making Hawaiian kapa. Brigham was an American geologist, botanist, ethnologist and the first director of the Bernice P. Bishop Museum in Honolulu. Kauhou Tanahy told me before the interview and reiterated it in the interview that she was able to find, in her words, “an ungodly amount of source information on Hawaiian customary practices about kapa making,” from Brigham’s text.

I last saw Kauhou Tanahy in May 2010, where she graciously agreed to exhibit with me as part of the yearly MAMo (or Maoli Art Month) celebration in an art show I organized for Sandy Pohl at Sandy’s Louis Pohl Gallery in downtown Honolulu. Since then, Kauhou Tanahy has continued with her work at Ka'ala Farm and has attained commercial success. She frequently shows in galleries around town and is a regular at the Bishop Museum Gift Shop and at Viewpoints Gallery on Maui.

**Identity**

To introduce the question about contemporary Hawaiian artists and what they have to say about their identity, I started this interview by explaining how I thought colonization had affected everything we did today. I wanted to know what she thought about American colonization on Hawaiians. How did American colonization affect her ideas about her ethnic identity, cultural identity, and social identity as a Hawaiian person and artist? Kauhou Tanahy said she was primarily raised in San Diego, but her mother was from Maui. She added these thoughts about her parents:
My mother’s generation was affected more from American colonization than us. Her generation lived through traumatic times. When she graduated from school, my mom went to the mainland and never moved back home. They came from parents who spoke Hawaiian but who wouldn’t let the kids speak Hawaiian in the house. They made sure that they went to school and assimilated really well into American culture. There had already been foreigners in Hawai‘i for over two hundred years; I think it was ingrained in her generation born the 1920s and 1930s. With Statehood there was a need to become a part of the American fabric.

This family history must have influenced Kauihou Tanahy’s thinking about herself as a Hawaiian. I wanted her to share any family stories that were important to how she considered herself. How was she raised? I knew she grew up in San Diego, but what was it like? She responded by saying this:

Growing up in San Diego, there was a lot of Hawaiians. We were in Hawaiian club things. And we would come back to Hawai‘i every year and be with family and cousins. A lot of my family was more hapa-Hawaiian; a gentrified type that tended to be a little more haole than Hawaiian. They didn’t embrace Hawaiian ritual things; a Hawaiian religion thing? There wasn’t any of that.

Kauihou Tanahy said that her family’s multicultural and ethnic background was grounded primarily with mainstream American cultural values. Her reflection about her extended family indicates that this diaspora that took her Hawaiian family away from the
islands had a tremendous influence on their family’s values and daily life. Kauihou Tanahy’s earlier experiences as a child, in adolescence and as a young adult were influenced by an assimilation of American culture by her family. She had this to offer on how she considered what it meant to be Hawaiian in San Diego:

I suppose it was like being raised with any other kind of people. There wasn’t anything that stood out making me feel more Hawaiian, per se. The exceptions would be for the more ingrained things and traits that Hawaiian people were known for. Being very generous people, being very humble people, and being people who always wanted to feed you and hardworking people. These were kind of the things that impressed me.

Interesting to note here is that her impressions about Hawaiian people carry, in part, a stereotypical sense of a generous and humble people, perhaps not far different from what our tourist industry might promote as gentle and friendly folks.

She continued to speak about her experiences growing up in San Diego:

Growing up in San Diego, I was a little bit darker. I had this funny name so people knew I was Hawaiian. But I never felt targeted even though I lived in a predominately white neighborhood. There were maybe four or five people of color, of which I was one, and not even one of a lot of color.

If this were true, then how did Kauihou Tanahy come to realize her Hawaiian-ness? How could she find her pono, or balance, between a dominant American culture
with her less dominant Hawaiian culture? What were the family stories that could reveal hidden connections to her Hawaiian heritage? Kauihou Tanahy remembered this:

So, I think my mother and her generation were probably affected more than I was. She never talked about growing up with a father who pounded kalo all the time; who grew lo'i [kalo]! She never spoke about any of these things; you know I remember daddy and how he used to pound poi. It wasn’t until many years later, when I was teaching a class to children about stone making and pounding kalo, that my mother, who was here visiting said, “I remember my dad doing this.” This was the first time in forty years that I ever heard her say this! Maybe it was because we never pounded kalo in San Diego, and that she hadn’t been in that situation before, since childhood. But, just for her to suddenly say, “I remember this” still astounds me. “Mom, you never told us any of this stuff!”

This revelation by her mother is significant to Kauihou Tanahy’s grounding and identity with her Hawaiian culture and practice. The story about her mother goes to the heart of my question about personal family histories and stories and their influences on Hawaiian artists on their identity and art making. That her dad was pounding kalo and that Kauihou Tanahy is now pounding wauke to make kapa is a significant and unique link that cuts through years of lost family heritage—perhaps an unconscious genealogical link. This story about pounding kalo returns her back to the ‘āina or land of her Hawaiian family roots. She said she had a stronger connection to Hawai‘i than her other siblings:
I grew up visiting Hawai‘i all the time; being with people I loved and coming to love my Hawaiian culture. I always said that I would come back. Of my three other sisters and brothers, I was the only one who came back to Hawai‘i to live.

Perhaps, this force that pulled her back to Hawai‘i precedes what Kauihou Tanahy will later allude to, in that it is “kapa that chooses you.” This idea about being chosen opens up questions about identity and genealogical links with a person’s ancestral lineage and about his or her artistic practice and cultural expressions.

Kauihou Tanahy’s choice of medium for expressing her Hawaiian culture is wrapped around her work as a kapa maker and teacher of this traditional art form. It is integrated with her sense of who she is and her identity. Probing back to her ideas about American colonization and its affect on her as a kapa maker, I asked her if she had any conflict with being American and Hawaiian. How did she perceive any conflicts between her Hawaiian culture and her American culture in general disparities of social and economic levels—between cultural assumptions and cultural values? She answered with candor:

I guess because I never personally felt…because I was never exposed to those kinds of conflicts…like I said, maybe my mom had those conflicts…but I never did, I never felt I was any more or less for being part-Hawaiian and part-White. Whether I was in San Diego being Hawaiian or here being Haole, or wherever I was I never felt any kind of conflict. There are as many Hawaiians, who don’t know beans about their own culture, as there are foreigners! Today, our people
have multiple ethnicities and cultures. I don’t embrace the thought that my Hawaiian side is better than my English, Danish, or Portuguese parts.

To address your other question about colonization, I choose not to live in the cultural conflicts, but rather seek a balance and harmony between being Hawaiian and everything else.

In this passage, Kauihou Tanahy declared her independence from the cultural wars that permeate much of today’s discussion about the effects of Western colonization. At first, I was taken aback by her comment, but I realized that internal conflicts are part of the process when a colonized culture is assimilated into a dominant culture. Many Hawaiians are just trying to survive economically—or as Kaili Chun says in her interview, “in the meanwhile you are just trying to put bread on the table or poi in the bowl.” This point about survival by adapting to finding solutions within our present condition was repeated often by the other four artists.

Considering that kapa making was an integral part of Kauihou Tanahy’s identity, I turned our discussion to the effects of colonization on natural resources to grow wauke and make kapa. In our discussion, she had indicated that it was necessary to have resources, land, water, and a healthy environment to grow wauke. I interjected that it would be difficult or nearly impossible to grow; pound, and process kapa if one lived in a condominium or an apartment building. What did she have to say about institutions like the military taking over a valley like Makua, or Hawai‘i’s “visitor industrial complex” where valuable lands and water resources are set aside for golf courses? Did she have any conflicts with these things?
When things are really beyond my control, I don’t really worry about them, but the organization Ka'ala Farms I work with does get into these things. They are involved in Lualualei trying to get property back from the military. They are involved with Makua Valley and what’s happening there and getting the military out. They are involved with the water issues up in Mākaha Valley, and they are involved with water issues in Wai'anae:

You know Wai’anae wasn’t always this big brown mountain. Five rivers used to run from Ka'ala, which is the highest place on O'ahu where all the water from that valley up above is tapped off and now nothing runs down! We have hiked to the back of the valley and seen where that pipe is stuck to the side of the mountain and where they the Honolulu Board of Water Supply don’t let any of it run back into the river. This has made Wai’anae Valley a dry place.

There once was lo‘i from the valley to Pōka'i Bay. All of Pōka'i Bay used to be that kind of marshy land and hence the name Wai’anae, which was the waters where the ‘anae fish or baby mullet all grew. Before sugar came in and tapped off all the water, Wai’anae was very rich in food; and rich in culture. When sugar plantations left and were replaced by people, there it went again! The water was tapped off.

At this point in our discussion, Kauihou Tanahy interjected an important thought about how she preferred to fight the battle of recovering potential cultivation lands:
There are conflicts with these kinds of things. The question becomes, how can you work with the military? How are you going to work with communities? And, how are you going to work with the Board of Water Supply? When we first built Ka'ala Farms, the Board of Water Supply said, “Hey, you are illegally taking water.” We had taken water through a little pipe that was running through a stream of this one little drip, that they had let loose, that wasn’t being sent to somebody’s toilet. This is where we stuck a pipe in, and they were calling us on it!

Twenty years later the Board of Water Supply is our best friend. And, we do these things with them. We talk to them, that they need to let some water run. Some water has to run into the valley. Some has to go into the lo‘i. Some have to feed the kalo and the wauke. A lot of what we do is to open up some of these kīpuka [opening in a forest or an oasis] areas.

In the natural flow of Kauihou Tanahy’s interview, she reached beyond her earlier comments about choosing not to live in the cultural conflicts. But, then she made an argument about working with those other powers, as she seeks to find balance and harmony between being Hawaiian and everything else. As Native Hawaiians grapple with the complexities of being Hawaiian and of mixed ethnicities in a predominant American landscape, to choose to work with rather than to totally oppose Americanism is a compromise of choice between adapting and self-regulating one’s own level of integration in lieu of wholesale assimilation into a dominant culture.
Creativity

The notion that Kauihou Tanahy’s Hawaiian heritage connects her to kapa making and that it influences her art has been established. This is the cultural and creative component of her identity as an artist. Teaching traditional art forms bridges her identity or sense of who she is with her creative artistic practice. Thus, the amalgamation of her identity, teaching practice, and creative process begins a discussion about the essence of her lived experiences and how she structures her artistic life around her Hawaiian identity and work as a teacher.

In this section, I wanted to explore what she thought about her creative process. Where did it begin and how did it evolve? Where did her inspirations come from? How did she develop her ideas? What were her intentions? Does she practice particular protocols when working with traditional materials? Who were her mentors or kūpuna? What did she think was beautiful, and what made her art unique and distinctive?

First, I wanted to know how she considered kapa making. She offered these thoughts about why she learned to make kapa:

When I first learned kapa making, I learned it with a purpose to teach it. This decision has greatly affected and influenced my decisions today. We first taught it in Wai‘anae. Our little hook to all those Hawaiian and Polynesian kids was to get them to understand that all their ancestors did this; and we are here to help you remember what your people always did.

An important goal of this dissertation was to find specific examples that established the value Hawaiians placed on passing to the next generation our cultural
knowledge. Notably, Kauihou Tanahy first set out to become a teacher of this ancient practice and not just a kapa maker. I asked her to speak about her protocol in the creative process. Did she say prayers or did she speak to her plants? What types of protocol did she consider culturally Hawaiian? Kauihou Tanahy shared this about her protocol when working with students:

I normally do not use a particular protocol when I make kapa. When teaching the art of kapa making, I speak to my students about respecting the simple things. I ask the students to realize when we make the dyes that all 30 of them needed to use this finite resource. When teaching kapa making, an important part of my job is instilling a real sense of what is pono. I take this very seriously.

Part of the kapa-making process is to manipulate and expand the fibers into another form. To do this, Kauihou Tanahy explained, she would find a flat-stone and use it as a kua pōhaku (an anvil). She then laid a prepared piece of wauke (the inner-bark of paper mulberry plant that had been fermented) over the anvil and gently tapped it parallel to the fibers, which more than doubled its original size. She spoke about teaching her students how to gather pōhaku at the beach or river:

When working with kids on how to gather pōhaku to use for kua pōhaku I will do a form of protocol. When we go to gather pōhaku close to Makua I always ask the rocks, “Who wants to come home with me?” I am not going to take a rock that does not want to leave the beach. In my lessons, I try to ingrain in my students the importance of respect. In all of these years, I have never had a kid drop a rock on their
toe or foot or have an accident. I reminded the children that we had asked these rocks if they wanted to come to this school and that these kids would be using you and pounding on you! If a rock fell out of somebody’s hand, it is your fault not the rock. Now they take care of these pōhaku by picking them up and carrying them very carefully.

While working, I do not hear a lot of loud banging when they are working on these rocks because they have a renewed sense of respect for them. I take time to teach them during each step of the process the why it is important and the how to respect their material. With all of these lessons, I am able to offer my students a whole new concept of what is a pōhaku.

Continuing with the idea that teaching kapa is part of her creative process, Kauihou Tanahy shared an interesting story about pounding kapa with adult women and general beliefs about customary practice and protocol. Although Kauihou Tanahy did not have a problem teaching men the art of kapa, she said that traditionally this was women’s work. She offered these reasons why women made kapa:

At that time, women did kapa. Why was that? Because you are right here and who needs to be right by you, your kids! So when you are this pōhaku in this place and have all of your kids, these little satellites all around and you know all the women in your family are all taking care of them, also then it makes sense. That made sense.

But, in this day and age we don’t have those options. For example, when I used to teach the group who did the repatriations,
they believed if you had your ma’i [menstruation] then you probably shouldn’t be pounding kapa. I did not believe this because, in the first place, we didn’t have enough women pounding kapa. If you’ve got 6000 women pounding kapa and 40 of them got their ma’i, okay, fine, then take a break because we got the others. But when you got 10 women and half of them are bleeding, I’m sorry! And secondly, traditionally if you had your ma’i you were in the hale pe’a and you are right there.

Today we have things to prevent you from bleeding all over your work. So, I did not embrace that particular thought because this is a modern time and we deal with these things differently. There were a lot of issues with that whole creativity thing that just got out of control. I think today we really don’t need to embrace the idea that women need to be separated and where blood is unclean. So, I didn’t have a big thing; get your ma’i; you’re not going to bleed on anything, okay, it’s alright; come pound because I need your body! I need your hands!

Kauihou Tanahy breaks from tradition trumping it with a practical sense of her contemporary purpose, use of modern resources, and her goal for completing a particular task. Adaptation and adjusting to present conditions take precedence over keeping with strict protocols governing traditions. I believe that, as Native Hawaiian artists work within a context of their present conditions, bending of strict rules and adapting to new ideas, mediums, and purposes will continue—opening an important discussion about changing traditions that are more reactive to 21st century realities.
I wanted to know how she came to learn and work with kapa. Kauihou Tanahy drew her memory back to when she was a child growing up in San Diego and how just doing art had set her creative seed that would later take her to discovering and dedicating her artistic life to kapa:

I was always an artist working with many different kinds of mediums. When we were kids, my parents encouraged that in us. They wouldn’t buy us retarded toys. They would buy us clay. They were always buying us those kinds of things, where you are making something, stringing something to knit, those whirly ones with the paint Spiro-graph, so we were always artistically involved in something like sewing. My sister and I could knit and crochet and do all of these things when we were very young. My mom would take us to the beach and we would make sandcastles and sand candles. She would take us to her friends and we would do tie-dye or batik. So, we were exposed to a lot of things.

Many contemporary Native Hawaiian artists working with traditional material begin by learning on their own. They do not have a kumu (teacher) and, therefore, learn through the process of making. Often what seem to be mistakes are learning lessons and potential breakthroughs for new ways of doing things. Kauihou Tanahy had a similar experience when she first started:

When learning this art form, I did not have a kumu who could guide me. I had kumu who taught me little pieces of the puzzle, but most of it was left for me to figure out. I did not have people saying
“no not like that,” “not like that,” “try again.” I asked myself is this right? Is this what I am looking for? What is my point? What I am trying to achieve? It took a long time, but it was a good way to learn.

When I was in Hawai'i and saw the picture of Puanani Van Dorpe pounding kapa I thought, you know, kapa is pretty cool. I had been given a Tongan piece when I was married. This woman said, “I never had any daughter, but if I had daughter, I would give her this” and, she gave me a huge Tongan kapa. I have always loved that piece and pinned it up everywhere we went.

So, when I had first seen that picture of Pua, I went you know, I bet you there are not a lot of people doing this. From the time I had thought I wanted to learn kapa it was probably another ten years, before I actually started doing it.

Kauihou Tanahy established her connection to Pua Van Dorpe, who had undertaken the retrieval of the kahiko or ancient ways of making Hawaiian kapa. Van Dorpe’s knowledge had grown out of extensive research looking at important kapa collections and exhaustive experimentations with making kapa and documentation of what she found. She learned to cultivate wauke, the plant most often used as kapa material, along with the other plants used for the dyes. She learned how Hawaiians of old made their stamps, anvil, and beaters. Van Dorpe is considered a Living Treasure of Hawai'i. So in this passage, we see Kauihou Tanahy seeking knowledge from a kūpuna source.
Besides learning from living masters and looking at the vast collections available to her at the Bishop Museum, Kauihou Tanahy poured herself into reading every book she could about other cultures that used the bark of trees to make cloth. Research and the knowledge—whether gained, through experimentation, reading literature, or asking other experts—is part of an artist’s creative process. This process establishes foundations from where to build and edit ideas. It is essential for the maturation of concepts and thoughts that will later become embodied in works of art. Kauihou Tanahy’s research led her to these discoveries:

In our recent memories, the resources of knowledge about Hawaiian kapa were scant and few. There were very few people left who knew it, or if they knew it they weren’t telling. Yes, perhaps in the near distant past, the few surviving people who knew about kapa were not telling or teaching it because of the introduction of non-Hawaiian ideas. They were trying to deal with the realities of their own world and with a new culture.

Much of our current knowledge about kapa is drawn from speculation. The best book I have learned from was written by William Brigham, who went around as an anthropologist. He observed, then copied things down.

Kauihou Tanahy shows the importance of good source material, and in this case Brigham, who was the first director of the Bishop Museum had done extensive research on Hawaiian botany, geology and material culture:
When you research about kapa, you find that people in Mexico did it. People in Africa did this. People in the whole subtropical belt around the world all made kapa. They all made clothe from the bark of trees and had very similar tools and methods. We know that our tools were different, from other parts of the Pacific and world. This widespread making and use of kapa enlightened me, and became ingrained in my teaching and me. Because of this, kapa ceased to be strictly a Hawaiian thing for me. Kapa is here in Hawai‘i because of the migration by people who lived in the South Pacific. So, for me I have never had a conflict about kapa being not a strictly Hawaiian thing. Now, when the break [referring to the isolation from other cultures] came, Hawaiians began to create new ways of making and forming kapa. This led to their distinctive and unique qualities and characteristics where as today we can see the differences.

My research sought to establish what was distinctive and unique about contemporary Native Hawaiian art in terms of concepts, process, and purpose. What sets contemporary Native Hawaiian art apart from other art works? In the case of traditional Hawaiian kapa found in ethnological museum collections, it is generally acknowledged by kapa makers and scholars to be finely made and of great variety in its felting, embossment of watermarks, and surface designs. These traditional differences help to ground and frame my research, as I sought to find specific examples of contemporary Native Hawaiian art that are unique and different.
A key passage in my interview with Kauihou Tanahy was when she spoke about her commitment of purpose to kapa and Hawaiian culture. She said this about her teaching kapa:

I see it as part of our work at renewing, reviving, and reteaching these cultural practices, so to survive a culture that is being diluted and diluted with every passing generation. As a teacher, I have endeavored to pass on knowledge about the traditional methods regarding design, patterns, and other parts of the process. I do this to show that this was the way of our ancestors, our indigenous Hawaiian way. If you look at traditional kapa works in collections and compared them with what I made yesterday, you will know where my direction and inspiration came from.

Her words carried passion and a clear vision of purpose, as to what and how she considered her work. Having a purpose, a reason for making something, is part of the creative process of all artists. Having a purpose is intimately linked in a symbiotic relationship to the concept or the idea of a work—both floating within a hair’s breath of another. This common theme a call-to-arms for renewing, reviving, and reteaching will occur often throughout the other four interviews. Kauihou Tanahy shared her thoughts and angst about the current condition of Hawaiian culture and how it could disappear, if not for other traditional practitioners, who are doing similar work to hers but in other mediums:

Unless you are inspired to learn something like Uncle Solomon Sol Apio, who does ie’ie [weaving with ie’ie vine], our culture will
disappear. Very few people do ie’ie. Another example is the feather makers. Did you see the Ali‘i feather capes? Oh my gosh! How many people do you think there are now who would take the time to tie those little bundles of feathers, very few? The works of our ancestors reflect a different sense of time and purpose.

[In old Hawai‘i], if you were making a cape for an Ali‘i, it becomes your crowning achievement for your entire life, period! Why, because it will take a lifetime to make those kinds of things. If you are making the same thing [a feather cape] today because you intend to sell it, that is a different thing. If you are making it now, so to keep the tradition alive and teach to it, that’s a different reason. So, people who get involved with these things a lot of times do it for other reasons than for the money. It’s got to be because of something intrinsic. In the past, many people have died without having passed on their knowledge. That is what happened the first time.

Kauihou Tanahy’s assessment about time and purpose was extremely revealing. She touched on a thought that precontact Hawaiians were probably creating for a different purpose or utility than contemporary Hawaiian artists. This notion presented a potential dilemma for Hawaiian artists intent on carrying on the traditional arts and mo‘olelo (stories) of Hawaiian culture. Kauihou Tanahy clarified her thoughts about differences between our ancestors and contemporary Hawaiians regarding their sense of utility, creative ideas, goals, purposes and processes:
For people back then, it was their work of necessity. Everything they did had to do with their survival. That included building shelter, growing food, and clothing themselves from the elements. Survival included making weapons for hunting and protection. They made spears and other wooden weapons, where shark’s teeth were added to make them more lethal.

Clothing was very simple. They didn’t do much sewing, and they had to use whatever resources they had. When those first people came from the south islands, they brought things that they were already using. The wauke plant, from where the material for making kapa comes from, was one of the twelve plants they brought on their canoes.

Perhaps, due to the isolation of the people, Hawaiian kapa developed into something unique. They began to create new ways of processing wauke and printing kapa. Why did they decide to ferment it and let it turn into pulp; a process not practiced in the other parts of the Pacific? We do not know or understand how this happened. Did someone discover it by accident, or was it done on purpose where the kapa was left in water too long; and, they went *oops!* Then thought they might be able to save it. This process then became commonplace in Hawai‘i when making kapa. But, we also found that Hawaiians made kapa cloth a number of different ways depending on its usages.

When we look at the works preserved in museums these were Ali‘i pieces. They were the finest works that were saved. Kapa that the
makaʻāinana [commoner] wore were simple, perhaps they only hadewatermarks with no printing. The finest kapa was made for the Aliʻi.
The commoners never had feather capes. These were all Aliʻi things.

Most of what Kauihou Tanahy offered here was her own thoughts about howthings might have happened. I believe she spoke from authority because she works withkapa at all of its stages of development—learning as she goes what probably challengedHawaiians of old and how they might have resolved the issues of processing kapa. Her“literature search” discovered these things:

The literature talks about native plants that were used for tools,but we do not know what some of those plants were because they were never given an English name. We have a list in Hawaiian of unknown plants. We needed to figure out what were the traditional woods used for making tools; in addition to finding new woods to make the tools of today. Big pieces of kauila and uhiuhi are not available as they are rare and endangered plants, so you can’t just cut them down. So the dilemma today is to find suitable substitutes for making our tools. We have a lot of eucalyptus that was planted, when they began to raise beef stock cattle in our islands. The cattle eventually ate, trampled, and changed the environment to a disastrous level where our native plants could not sustain themselves. These plants were then replaced and supplemented with non-Native and invasive species. For today’s reality, we can utilize these non-Native species for doing our work and making tools.
As we transition into the next part about exhibition, we have learned that Kauihou Tanahy’s unique character and creative process is entwined with her sense of her identity as a person and a woman, and with her making and teaching about traditional Hawaiian kapa. Although Kauihou Tanahy primarily is an artist who follows a self-discovered prescription to making kapa, she remains open to new ideas and innovations. This latter part of her creative process blurs the clear-lines between creating and exhibiting work of art. In the next section, about exhibition, is a discussion of a particular exhibited work of her art that facilitates our understanding of her creative process.

**Exhibition**

Exhibiting works of contemporary Hawaiian art is essential. I spoke about this earlier in the methodology section about my travels across Europe where I visited national museums in Madrid, Paris, and London—and how important it is for us to exhibit in order to build a strong Hawaiian nation. The Bishop Museum, with the guidance of Noelle Kahanu, has provided a venue for exhibiting contemporary Native Hawaiian art.

At an exhibition about contemporary Hawaiian kapa at the Bishop Museum (see Figure 3.4), Kauihou Tanahy presented a unique piece where she took a live plant, stripped it, and displayed it with its roots. I asked her to speak about this work in terms of her creative process. What was her idea? And, how did she consider aesthetics of the work? Was she trying to use it as an educational tool of just an aesthetic piece?
Kauihou Tanahy spoke about her experience with working and exhibiting at the Bishop Museum:

Noelle [Kahanu] told me that the docents liked my piece the best, because it was the easiest way to explain the process of making kapa from wauke. This was exactly what I was trying to do. Based on my experience with the zillion of times that I have tried to teach and explain to people how it works, you know from their look they cannot fully visualize the process. When they see a tree and its bark they wonder how you could make cloth out of that. It is so fun to teach, when you show them how it works, and they say wow! You cut the bark
with a knife, and peel it, then you beat it with a club, and it spreads; and, they say wow! They couldn’t see it in their head, on how it was done.

When I created this piece, my intention was to use it as an education work. I wanted to introduce the Hawaiian legend about Maikoha, who told his daughters to bury him when after [sic] he died, next to a stream that a tree [wauke] would grow giving you material to make cloth. In this piece, I needed to conceive ways of presenting different parts of the cloth of a wauke tree, and the kapa making process.

So, here is this tree. Here are the leaves. Here are the roots. Here’s how it starts when it is wrapped around the tree. Here’s this big piece of bark that can come off; and everything is right there. So, when you say, this is the bark of the tree, you are seeing the tree. You are seeing the bark. And so, there is no mistake at this point of what the heck I am talking about.

Again, we see the continuation of Kauihou Tanahy’s original intent with teaching—of passing on her knowledge to others. She blurs the line between what is a work of art and what is a teaching prop useful for creating a lesson plan or a wider curriculum. Her affinity with teaching and making kapa and art become essential parts of her identity. As with any process, the cycle is continuous. I wanted to know if she had a chance to do it again would she make it the same way or would you change it?
Essentially most of the work is stable except for the leaves. I dried them in silica, and then let them dry out. I noticed that in the end they looked even drier, so I began looking at other ways to preserve leaves. One way was to soak them in a glycerin and water mixture, which makes them more pliant. But with this piece, I looked at it a couple of days ago and saw that it was really wilting. When I made this work, I had to wire each leaf and then wrap them because I had taken all of them off and dried them. The top part of the branch was cut. The way that tree is, is the way it was trained.

The wauke plant has a lot of leaves and if you let them grow it will branch. There would be all of these branches that sprout out. I learned from experience that in order to cultivate trees for good use, if I let my plants grow to an ideal 12 feet tall, and then pinched the top off, that it would branch off. If you cut down this 12-foot plant at this point, you will get only 6 feet of usable wauke, because the other half is still immature. By allowing the tree to branch off it, gives the plant time for the top half of the wauke to mature. You need to let the other two branches reach another 6 more feet before you can cut the tree down. This discovery allowed me to have long continuous 12 foot pieces of usable inner bark.

I remember watching this particular tree [see Figure 3.5] over a period of time. It was the tree that I would eventually use for the kapa show at the Bishop Museum. I became worried one day when a storm
blew off all of its leaves. Somehow it survived and began to grow again. Then one day, I told the tree that it was its day. So, I pulled it out of the ground with its roots intact and then started the process of making the artwork for the show.

Figure 3.5 Finding the perfect wauke plant.
Reproduced with the permission of Dalani Kauihou Tanahy
www.kapahawaii.com/dalani-tanahy.html

Because I had never done this before, I decided to start the piece months before the show. I knew I needed time to figure how to do it. The wood of wauke is like cane. It is very light, and bugs love to
bore into this stuff, so I was being extra careful about treating the material.

When the work was done, I delivered it to the museum and they stored it in their office. The day it went into the exhibit space, that very night I got a call from Noelle [Kahanu] who told me that oh, I think one bug came with your piece. I said, why? She said, because there were dust droppings coming from the wood. I told them no way and that it must have crawled in from that window; because you know where the piece was, it was right by the open front window. The windows are wide open because there is no air-conditioning in there, so I was sure something had crawled right in and had bored into the plant. And, I was absolutely certain it did not come from my place and said to them that this was their problem to solve.

Kauihou Tanahy was saying this with animation, but also with a light hearted sense; I am adding this note so not to let the words carry the wrong spirit of the conversation. She said:

I think they were going to try to treat it with an insecticide! For the future, I know I need to come up with a way to preserve these trees because I want to do an exhibition later with 10 or more trees and paint each kapa a different color and do something crazy. I might also soak it in an insecticide to keep the bugs down. I also thought about using a piece of solid wood but then thought oh, no that is beside the point and besides I want to use the real tree.
Part of my inquiry about exhibition is to find out what Hawaiians consider in the gallery or museum spaces when exhibiting. How do they conceive that space? What are the challenges they face when negotiating these spaces? How do they deal with the administration, curators, and staff of museums and galleries? I asked Kauihou Tanahy to speak about her experiences with specific exhibitions. She offered this story:

For me, in the beginning it was to teach. During my career as a kapa maker, I wasn’t working as an artist trying to pursue venues to show. Things kind of occurred serendipitously, where people would say, “oh you are a kapa maker.” I remember the first pieces I had in an exhibit at The Mission House Museum. It was when they did their quilting exhibit. They had Hawaiian quilts, from old ones to contemporary quilts. You know in the early beginnings, Hawaiian quilts became known and referred to by its makers as kapa. When there wasn’t kapa cloth made anymore and they learned the quilting process from the missionaries. This is what they called their kapa—quilts—they called them kapa. So, for the genesis of those kapa they wanted to show real kapa.

I brought into the exhibit a kapa cloth that I had made previously. When I went in a couple of times to do demonstrations [see Figure 3.6] during the exhibition, I brought my kapa making tools and other things to work with. I did this so people could see how this was made. That was a great teaching opportunity to be able to show people how it was done.
Negotiating the Mission House Museum space did not pose a problem for Kauihou Tanahy. She seemed to work without difficulty within the parameters set by the museum for the show. Again, Kauihou Tanahy returned to teaching using the space and time of the exhibit to further her work as a kumu (teacher) of kapa.

In these two examples of Kauihou Tanahy’s exhibition work at the Bishop Museum and the Mission Houses Museum we see a pattern reoccurring that centers on using these spaces as educational platforms. This use of exhibition space is not unlike what the Hawaiian artists with the 1997 Ho‘oku‘e exhibition at the East-West center Gallery in Honolulu and the Mai Na Kūpuna Mai: Ho‘i I Ka Pu‘olo had done. The exhibition that was shown at two venues, the Art Gallery at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa and the East-West Center Gallery in fall of 2000.

Figure 3.6 Kauihou Tanahy demonstrates how to pound kapa.

Reproduced with the permission of Dalani Kauihou Tanahy,

www.kapahawaii.com/dalani-tanahy.html
They used these spaces to educate audiences about their intent of the exhibit, what it meant to them as Hawaiians, and that they were sharing what they knew about their culture—these are clear signs of how contemporary Native Hawaiian artists use the exhibition space to their own purpose and means.

Another important area that I have included with this section on exhibition is how Hawaiians negotiate the commercial promotion of their work. As the list of commercial venues available to Hawaiian artists has grown, I wanted to know how these artists consider the selling and collection of their works. Kauihou Tanahy gave her insights to where and how she would like to see her works displayed and collected:

When I remember this exhibit, and see pieces I have framed, or have put up for sale, something tugs on me inside. It makes me happy to know that after I have made something to wear like a pa'u or malo that people really care [see Figure 3.7].

I would rather one person have my kapa pāʻū where they could wear it, to having a thousand people see my kapa in a frame hanging from a wall. This is just me. That’s my own personal thing you know.
Figure 3.7 Festival of Pacific Arts Fashion Show.

Reproduced with the permission of Dalani Kauihou Tanahy,

www.kapahawaii.com/dalani-tanahy.html

As we will see later, this notion of utility and sense of purpose as more valuable, apart from exhibiting works in a museum or gallery, is brought up in Solomon Enos’s interview (Chapter Seven), where he describes art in a gallery as “kind of dead.” Both artists recognize the necessity of placing their works in commercial spaces and public museums in order to market what they do, but their ideal purpose of art goes beyond stretching and framing and hanging something on a wall. Kauihou Tanahy continued speaking about her commercial ventures:

What’s my real market? I mean do I really want to feel trapped? I was thinking I could always make baby blankets or malo;
I’m sorry brah, it’s a $600.00 malo! Okay, unless you want to grow the tree for me, that’s what you’re going to pay! But, then I started thinking again that if I was going to make malo to sell to people, it should be worth something because it is a genuine kapa malo.

I thought I would tell them, “I know you want to wear this for your next Merry Monarch so you really want this!” But then again, I begin to doubt myself and think could I really charge $500.00 for something like that? Or, I could tell them to come here and learn to do it yourself. I would be just as happy to teach the bradda how to do that.

Self-promotion is always a difficult and uncomfortable task and for many contemporary Native Hawaiian artists, including me. This part of our professional career sometimes brings a shudder. It goes against what many of us learned as children, to be humble to have ha‘a‘a‘a. I have discovered a way around this is to redirect the focus and to speak about individual pieces of art—the mo‘olelo (story), or perhaps the place that inspired the work. That is why having an interpretive text that is precise and to the point is essential because when the rare occasion presents itself, we need to be ready to share what we have discovered and learned from our process of making art. The promotion and eventual sale of our works will result from this.

Visiting Kauihou Tanahy’s commercial website, www.kapahawaii.com/dalani-tanahy.html is one way for viewing her work. Besides news about kapa events, the website presents information about Kauihou Tanahy’s background, what inspires her art, and her artist statement that clarifies her ideas and purpose.
Summary

Kauihou Tanahy’s interview was the first interview of my series of five; it came early on in the data collection phase. In reflection, I think if given a chance to start from the beginning, I would have left out from the beginning of the interview the reference about the effects of American colonization on Hawaiians. The effect of colonization on Hawaiians is an emotional issue charged with memories of historical, personal, and family experiences; some glorious, others disastrous that need an introduction and transition. In hindsight, I would have begun the interview before the subject of American colonization on Hawaiians with an icebreaker, a piece of humor or an anecdotic story to ease any tension. The subject about colonization should emerge naturally in context with stories artists share when speaking about their home life, life experiences, and art making.

When I asked Kauihou Tanahy about her thoughts on possible conflicts as a contemporary kapa artist and the effects of Americanization she responded with these words.

I guess because I never personally felt...because I was never exposed to those kinds of conflicts...like I said, maybe my mom had those conflicts...but I never did, I never felt I was any more or less for being part-Hawaiian and part-White.

She later said, “To address your other question about colonization, I choose not to live in the cultural conflicts, but rather seek a balance and harmony between being Hawaiian and everything else.”

I presented Kauihou Tanahy a hypothetical problem based on previous conversations we had prior to this interview. In these other conversations we had
discussed that in order to grow wauke and make kapa, it was necessary to have resources, land, water, and a healthy environment. It would be difficult or nearly impossible to grow; pound, and process kapa, if one lived in a condominium or an apartment building. I asked Kauihou Tanahy what she thought about institutions like the military taking over a valley like Makua or how tourism has placed great demands on land and natural resources for hotels and golf courses.

Kauihou Tanahy’s initial reply was filled with a sense of conflict between her personal point of view and her professional situation. She often uses both words and hand gestures when expressing her point. As she took control of the next few minutes of the conversation, her words became more poignant and body movements more animated.

When things are really beyond my control, I don’t really worry about them. But the organization I work with does get into these things.

She spoke about how Ka‘ala Farms was involved in Lualualei with trying to get property back from the military; with Makua Valley getting the military out; with the Board of Water Supply about water issues in Makaha Valley and Wai‘anae.

She concluded with, for me, an amazing and reviewing statement, “The question becomes, how you can work with the military? How are you going to work with communities? And, how are you going to work with the Board of Water Supply?”

I now understood her thoughts about how she chose not to live in the cultural conflicts, but rather to seek a balance and harmony between being Hawaiian and everything else. Kauihou Tanahy had synthesized her identity as a Hawaiian with her practice as a kapa maker and teacher. She found a practical solution that allowed her to
learn and to work with the ancient knowledge of kapa and to bring forth this knowledge into a contemporary practice. Her practice as a kapa maker is a place where she has found her pono or balance.

This amalgamation and conscious choice, to live life this way, frees her to spend her time doing what she loves most; exploring, creating, and sharing what she has found and made—and, with opening new horizons in which to dream. She identifies, lives her life, and does her art, much like many contemporary Native Hawaiian artists. Their reality being ensconced within multiple folds of overlapping cultures—their perception of cultural conflict is real in their multilayered world; many find their solution to living and working as artists, in pono or balance between the cultural and social political economic polemics of their contemporary situation.

In Dalani Kauihou Tanahy’s interview I focused on the conceptual structure this research sought to find out—her issues of identity; her practice as a contemporary Hawaiian artist; and, her involvement with exhibition and education outreach.

I can conclude from the information gathered from her interview that Kauihou Tanahy possesses a unique and distinct persona as a contemporary Hawaiian artist. She has a mature kupuna voice steeped with Hawaiian knowledge about kapa. She listens to the wisdom of her ancestors, her kūpuna, and those who possess ancient knowledge about kapa. Her spirit and mind are moved and kindled by the wonders of self-motivated learning and discovery; her life is a physical kinetic energy of artistic expression of an artist who makes one-of-a-kind works of art. In a world that places so much value on consumption, and where copies of originals have become the norm, her works are rare. Kauihou Tanahy is an original.
CHAPTER FOUR: NOELLE KAHANU—THE WORKER

Introduction

Noelle Kahanu’s curatorial work with exhibitions at the Bernice Pauahi Bishop Museum and her community work with organizing and facilitating the annual Maoli Art Month events places her in a leadership role with the contemporary Hawaiian arts movement.

I knew Kahanu while I was taking courses to satisfy a graduate certificate in Museum Studies in the American Studies Department at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa. She was invited to our class to share her mana‘o and experiences about her work with the education department at the Bishop Museum. Our association deepened when she invited me to create a new and original work of art, to be included in celebrating the season of Lono at the Long Vestibule Gallery of the museum. Our friendship continues to this day, particularly during planning meetings for the annual Maoli Art Month.

Noelle Kahanu offers a unique and positive difference from the other Hawaiian artists in this study because of her work experience at the Bishop Museum. She describes her job as an education project manager who coordinates exhibitions between the museum for the Long Gallery and Native Hawaiian artists and organizations. She also works as a liaison between the museum and the greater Hawaiian community.

Our interview took place on Saturday, May 6, 2006, in one of the Bishop Museum meeting rooms. We sat in front of a large Herb Kāne mural of a double hull and sail
Hawaiian voyaging canoe. At the time, I thought how fortunate we were to be within the embrace of this contemporary Native Hawaiian master artist’s work. Joining us was our two-year old son Laniākea who sat in his stroller and my wife Sonia who assisted in filming the interview. I remember feeling a sense of wellness surrounded by the mana of Kāne’s painting, the good spirit of my child and wife, and of Kahanu’s aloha as she greeted us into her workspace.

Identity

To open the question about what Kahanu had to say about her identity, I asked her to describe how she identified herself in ethnicity and culture. I asked how her name, age, and gender shaped her identity as a Hawaiian person and artist. Her responses were forthright, personal, and frank. She said, “I am half Japanese, hence the Yayoi, I am also Hawaiian, Chinese, and Caucasian.” Her full name is Noelle Mailei Kalahea Yayoi Kahanu. As with many contemporary Native Hawaiian artists, Kahanu’s ethnic identity is a mixture of several cultures. Her family and personal history were ethnically rich and unique. Her personal history seemed at times contradictory full of unexpected opportunities resulting from the serendipitous path of her journey. She spoke of her family background:

My parents divorced when I was at a fairly young age. Consequently, I was raised by my mother who was pure Japanese but had a very strong affinity to Hawaiian culture. Her name is Diane Hina Matsuo. My father is Hawaiian who lives on O'ahu. His name is George Hawae Kahanu, Jr., and this side of her Hawaiian family came
from Maui and Kohala on Hawai‘i Island. I identified myself primarily with my Japanese and Hawaiian culture more than the other parts. My Chinese culture and Caucasian side did not have a strong influence on me. That is what has shaped me growing up.

I wanted to know more about her Japanese heritage and how it influenced her sense of identity. I asked her to speak about how her Japanese culture influenced her and what it taught her. What holidays did she celebrate? What language was spoken at home?

Certainly, it was English that we spoke. My mother had been a student of Puakea Nogelmeier and had since then tried to be bilingual in both Hawaiian and English. My daughter [Hattie Keonaona Niolopa Hapai] is seven now and went to Punana Leo School where Hawaiian language is spoken. There is a major effort on our part to be more cognitive and make real efforts to know our Hawaiian culture and to be more fluent in our Hawaiian language. To me, the issues of being Japanese are really about values, a sense of loyalty, and of family. It is not necessarily about speaking Japanese language. Our family was really close; it was not the full-on mochi pounding. But during this past New Year’s Eve, we went over to my auntie’s house to make mochi.

When I asked about her memories of her early life, she remembered when her mother, a journalism student at the University of Hawai‘i, would bring her to class and have her sit in the hallways while she attended class.

I had a very unorthodox childhood, in part, because she [mom] was a hippie in the 1960s and 70s. My mother was an active supporter
of native Hawaiian issues concerning the island of Kahoolawe and was involved in various student sit-ins at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa that stemmed from her political consciousness of various social issues.

When I asked about other early influences, Kahanu said that many of their friends, when she was a young child, were Hawaiian activists. Their friends were Abe Ahmad, who is now known as Puhipau a Big Island filmmaker, and Kamaka Von Oelhoffen, who has passed on. They all played an important role in shaping Kahanu’s understanding and awareness of life when growing up.

I was curious to know what she felt were some of the things harmonious or discordant between her Hawaiian and Japanese culture. Although she did not directly answer my inquiry, her response offered more information about her early formative years. She offered this sense of a young life living on the extremes:

You know, I would say that it manifests mostly in my mother. She was the youngest of three children. But, she was so out there. Your expectation was to have this reserved child. She was a flaming liberal dancing in the streets, which was probably really appalling for her family. She had become this and in part had lived in extremes. I think, for her, her conflicts were the expectations of her having to be reserved and having a 9 to 5 job, which was something she never really did all her life.

We lived in town until I graduated from high school, and I think she stayed there so I could finish. I think we probably moved at
least 12 times before I had finished high school—living in a communal setting with six other roommates in a large house in Mānoa. Soon after I had finished, she and my stepfather Jim moved to Wai'anae where they lived for twenty years and had horses.

He was my stepfather for 17 years and we were really close. Jim came from Tacoma Park, Maryland and was very independent. I learned how to fix cars and shoot pool; all things any good son would want to learn from a father. He passed away in 1994. Where did I go to high school? I went to Hawai'i School for Girls at Diamond Head.

Kahanu shared with me the ironies of her life, in particular, while attending the Hawai'i School for Girls or La Pietra. This is a private college preparatory school for grades six through twelve. The campus includes the historical family home of Walter F. Dillingham, built in 1919 at Papa'ena'ena. The school is located in an exclusive neighborhood that hugs the western slope of Lē'ahi (or Diamond Head). Its view-plain looks out across a wide expansive Kapi'olani Park; at a distance are Waikīkī beach and the Waikīkī skyline.

In its marketing literature, La Pietra presents itself as having a focused curriculum that prepares students for leadership. At La Pietra, students are the leaders. These students learn to become leaders through opportunities in student government and peer leadership training. Student skills are reinforced with shared values of respect, manners, responsibility, perseverance, cooperation, independence, and teamwork.

Looking at Kahanu’s life and her eclectic professional career, I wondered how her response to experiences during these formative years at La Pietra helped shape her life...
choices. In her poem, *So there it is: The Question*, she offers a poignant insight about her experiences, crises of identity, and a double life.

So there it is
THE QUESTION
The Answer to which will tell you
If I was one snob, one slut
one nerd, one geek
one lez
The question I don’t want to answer
The question that sets me apart
A violation of protocol
What kine local you, no like answer

THE QUESTION?
The kine that went to that school on Diamond Head
I say delicately, apologetically
Oh, you mean that girls’ school?
Yeah, the pink one
Oh
Oh
I know what that oh means
It means you thinking I was one snob, slut,
Geek, AND lez
What kine local girl even goes to a school like that?
The kine girl that begged her mom not to send her there
The kine girl that cried cuz she wanted to go Stevenson
The kine girl whose mom said, you are not Going to Kam school—your dad went there and he only read one book! *Black Beauty*.
The kine girl who loved *Black Beauty*
The kine girl who caught the bus with the only two other local girls in school
The kine girl who walked up the hill, while her classmates rode past in their BMWs
The kine girl who had academic scholarship
The kine girl who got called into the principal’s office because her mom was late in the payments.
The kine girl who got dropped off in an orange Datsun with holes in the muffler—the kine
car that announced your arrival to the whole school, especially when you was late

The kine girl who, when she finally got one car, drove up in her faux-wood panel orange and brown Vega

The kine girl who found solace in basketball

The kine girl who applied for mainland schools even though she knew all along she was goin’ UH cause never had money

The kine girl that hung out at Crane park, you know, by Alex Drive-Inn

Went school with haoles by day, and locals by night

The kine that watched the local boys fish for cats, body slam them against cars, put fire crackers in bufos and watch them explode

The kine that when contribute her dollar when they was trying for pool their money for buy one six pack Bud, but not when they was trying for buy paint

The kine girl that went with Jon, one Hawaiian-Chinese Kaimuki School dropout

And so what about it?

That Question

That Stupid Question

It doesn’t tell you I almost when skitso

Living a double life

Going one expensive haole school

And buying groceries with food stamps

Pink stucco Italian mansion

(Dillingham’s old house, you know)

And one Nahuku Place duplex, with rats and peeling paint

The neighbors selling acid, and having sex so fricken loud you could hear every oof

Rolls Royces, and orange Vegas

Gastritis in 10th grade

My social studies teacher saw me 10 years after high school,

And told me I looked better, and younger, then I ever did back then

So, you don’t know nothing about me

Never have, never will
Asking a stupid question like that
So what if I violate protocol?
That’s what happens when you live life
Suspended
Besides, that was almost twenty fucken
years ago
So what if I was whatever you was thinking
I was?
(Kahanu, 2003). Reprinted with permission from Noelle Kahanu.

At this early age, Kahanu’s formation of her identity, her understanding of class distinctions, discrimination, and sense of social justice would become her foundation for later when she would study at the University of Hawai‘i William S. Richardson School of Law. After finishing law school, she dedicated her early professional career to community advocacy and policymaking. Kahanu spoke about her reasons for going to law school:

In the beginning, I had gone to law school because I wanted to change the Hawaiian culture in the community for the better. I had worked one summer for the Public Defender’s Office and for the Legal Aid Society in Hawai‘i on elder law. My interest also lay in Advocates for Public Interest Law and I interned for a year. For me, there was always this involvement with public interest and public policy.

I asked her to speak about her notions on colonization and how colonization influenced her view of the world and in turn affected her choices she made as a person. This question about colonization returns to my general assumption that the effect of colonization on Hawaiians was pervasive and difficult to escape. What do Native Hawaiian artists think about American colonization on Hawaiians, and how does colonization affect their ideas about their identity as a person and as an artist and, in
Kahanu’s case, her work as a community advocator, with which she identifies so strongly?

When I went to DC, it was about how public policy could change things for the public good. My experiences were about changing laws and policies that impact on a national level. How could we change Native American housing legislation to the betterment of Hawaiians?

I was in my early 30s when I went to Washington DC and spent 5 years working in the US Senate for Senator Daniel Inouye. I worked for the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs where we had jurisdiction over the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA). We had hearings on it (and) we traveled to American Indian communities to solicit testimonies on amendments to NAGPRA the act. I worked on it from a Hawaiian perspective as well.

Kahanu spoke about what happened after her experiences working for Senator Inouye ended, then returning back to Hawai‘i:

Coming from my work in Washington and then coming back to Hawai‘i where my law school training had prepared me for working on cases that dealt with individual dispute resolution or conflict between family members and or neighbors, I just couldn’t transition back to that kind of work. I didn’t want to go into law. I wanted to stay in the
public policy realm. I did that for about a year working at the Office for Hawaiian Affairs and at the Native Hawaiian Education Council.

I think you need to live out of the construct in order to see more clearly what is happening. But with that said, you are still in the box of a colonial system. I learned a lot. But, I learned about things that I wished I did not know—that most of our laws are made by drunken interns [laughter].

Ultimately, you can go through all this higher education, but, after all is said and done, it comes down to your cultural foundation and not necessarily how well you remember in the books what you have read. It comes from opening yourself up to knowledge that comes from dreams and comes from having your feet in the mud, by hiking alone in the forest and mountains, and by just simply having knowledge come to you. I think this is part of one’s decolonizing process. It is important to understand that equally valid information can come from what we might consider nontraditional sources but, in effect, are the most traditional sources.

At least for me, I went through this scurrilous route of going through a traditional Western education and then later was able to get back to the important source of knowledge that brought meaning to my life. I realize everyday that there are practitioners who I encounter that know vastly more than I do. And so, I recognize my need to learn more and be more open. I need to be careful about not having
expectations of feelings of superiority and knowledge because of my
Western knowledge.

Clearly Kahanu had come to a crossroads in her life where she embraced choices
that distanced her from values within the construct of Western perceptions and its
precepts—a form of knowledge aligned more with objective reasoning. As she
desensitized herself away from colonial underpinnings, Kahanu returned to a very
Hawaiian and ancient way of living life—a channeling of energy opened to ancestral
wisdom and knowledge filled with spiritual awareness; a knowledge that brought
meaning to her life. Now, unburdened and unrestrained she readied herself, armed with
her Western training having lived in the heartbeat of American political power, to fight
and advocate for Native Hawaiian rights.

I next asked her to explain her work at the Bishop Museum, anticipating that the
fight had moved into this arena. I asked Kahanu to share some insight about her work and
position at the museum, about how she identified herself at the museum, why she chose
to identify herself as a project coordinator rather than as a curator?

My work is a result of being a Hawaiian and working in a
Hawaiian institution that in the past has caused great harm to the
Hawaiian community. Part of my role at the museum is to facilitate
and improve that relationship between the Hawaiian community and
the museum and to make the museum a more welcoming and
hospitable place, by, number one, giving them a venue to showcase
what Hawaiians do. It is a celebration of their ability with maintaining
and continuing the Hawaiian culture in the future.
We are considered project managers or coordinators for shows at the museum. The term curator is not used, perhaps because it usually comes from an art-museum context. At the Bishop, we have put together an exhibit on Mars, on extreme science, or on bugs of Hawai‘i. When you do that, it is not in an art context of an art exhibit. Because of this, they have not adopted the culture of curatorship. Even now, as we have gone in a direction that is more art-based, I still consider my work from that of a coordinator.

Kahanu explained how she worked as a team member when conceiving shows at the gallery and the process they go through when creating exhibits:

The exhibitions in the Long Vestibule Gallery are not my vision alone, but rather they are based on a theme that we as a group have established. Within these established processes of creating a show we begin with contacting artists and asking them to submit ideas for pieces that they might create for the show along our established theme or, in some cases, an artist may already have something that they feel is right on point.

In other words, I do not serve as a curator where I am assessing the artistic quality of what is out there or making judgments. I see my job as more with establishing relationships with artists and different art organizations in the community, and then in trusting them with their vision and their foresight. I want to provide a venue that will showcase what they, the artists, do best.
This description of her job is extremely revealing, as it points toward a different direction. Her purpose is to heal old wounds and place an important part of exhibition not in the sole control of institutions, but rather with community stakeholders. Kahanu is now truly using her knowledge, talent, and position that are related to the conceptual underpinnings of Smith’s (1999, pp.172-173) questions to what is important and relevant within a cross-cultural context. Who will define the work at the museum? For whom are these exhibitions worthy and relevant? What knowledge will the Hawaiian community gain from this? To whom is the project manager accountable? And, my question: Where is this exhibition located, and who will own and control it?

Exhibition

In the space of a few paragraphs, we have leapfrogged from issues of identity to notions about exhibition. It is an appropriate jump because of the relationship of Kahanu’s sense of her identity as a Hawaiian and her work at the museum where she is able to carry out her advocacy for her Hawaiian community. Her work nurtures her sense of her identity, and her identity as a Hawaiian gives foundation to her work. Kahanu’s work at the Bishop Museum has played a major role with expanding the list of events and venues open to Native Hawaiian artists to exhibit. I asked Kahanu to elaborate about her work and how it happened that she was able to carve a space at the Bishop Museum to exhibit contemporary Hawaiian artwork. What were some of the challenges she faced?

We were able to do this in the Long Vestibule Gallery by opening it to living Hawaiian artists and cultural practitioners what we were not able to do in Hawaiian Hall because Hawaiian Hall was about
dead art not living Hawaiian artists. To be able to bridge that gap between old and contemporary is a way to open the eyes of our visitors and at the same time celebrates our existing Hawaiian community whether they are artists or cultural practitioners.

This is exactly what our visitors want to know. They don’t want to learn about a culture that is dead and gone. They want to learn about some part of that past, but also they want to know how it is carried on. Who is doing it today? They want to know that the culture is thriving and alive.

Kahanu used her position as a project manager to solve two museum problems. By carving out venues that showcased contemporary Native Hawaiian arts and cultural practices, she walked a tightrope between a previously insensitive institution and a suspicious Hawaiian community. And through her museum practice, she enabled visitors to deepen their knowledge of contemporary Hawaiian culture and its arts by bridging the ancient practice with an infusion of robust real-time Maoli cultural practices. I continued my questioning by asking her to tell me more about her responsibilities at the Bishop Museum.

It is involved. I started at the museum in the collections department as a cultural inventory specialist under a Native American Graves and Repatriation Act [NAGPRA] to identify associated funereal objects. Then a position opened up in the education department as a project manager where we got to work with museums called the Peabody Essex in Massachusetts and the Alaskan Native
Heritage Center in Anchorage. And because the Peabody Essex has the second largest collection of Hawaiian treasures outside of Hawai‘i, and then working with the Alaska natives in Alaska, it seemed a good fit.

That partnership has since expanded to include where now we are working with the Inupiat in Barrow, Alaska, with the whalers in New Bedford, Massachusetts, and Choctaw in Mississippi. It is kind of weird that I have come from with working on Native American legislation and now in a museum context am working on grants and programs that really involve natives throughout the United States, or at least in three states and now four including Hawai‘i.

Kahanu offered this reflection about how everything she had done to this point in her life had given her a special currency to pursue her advocacy at the museum:

I think I am unusual for where I am. Although, I am currently in education; my background of working in collections and in knowing how to identify and research items in our cultural collections and our archives has helped me at my current position. This background in collections helps me to do what I do now, which is, in part; to oversee the Long Vestibule gallery where we do three and four exhibits a year.

Kahanu spoke about her encounter with Karen Kosasa. Kosasa is the director of the Museum Studies Graduate Certificate Program at the American Studies Department of the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa. Kosasa has been influential with working with Native Hawaiian artists and museum practitioners.
But, I think the work at Bishop Museum, as when I was telling Karen Kosasa, the other day, that I felt really blessed and lucky, that I am thankful everyday for this opportunity to be surrounded by our treasures, and treasures that are our Ali’i treasures, that is in many ways our last connection to them. I am in awe that my work allows me to treasure that what they treasured, to bring to life what we have by telling the stories of our Ali’i. This work is so far removed from law school. Karen said that she thinks that my training has helped me to do what I do, in terms of, she used the term “fearless.” I don’t know if I would use that term about me. But just having have gone out there and come back in and knowing how to advocate, knowing how to work with the Hawaiian community.

We get a glimpse of the working environment and the people who work at the Bishop Museum when in this next passage Kahanu spoke about her role and function concerning other areas:

In terms of the meaning of consultation, you could take it out of a NAGPRA context, and that term still has meaning in every facet in how a museum functions. All of those things help me in what I do. But what I do is...well I am not sure [laughter], but it turns out that I have ended up being the Hawaiian they will ask when we are looking at policies in the museum.

For example, in the restoration effort it is I and one other individual that is Hawaiian and is on that team. So you know, I am
certainly a low person on the totem pole. I am middle management and am not a V.P.; but when it comes to consultation on certain issues, they will invite my judgments or thoughts. Whether they will listen to them is a whole other thing, but I think you have to. For that matter, any Hawaiian in this institution has to have the courage and lay it on the table and to say what needs to be said, and that to me comes not from a place that wants to criticize this museum because I love this place. I want, if given the choice, the museum will take the right path, but just think that sometimes they don’t know that there is that choice or that there is even a conflict.

I ask does the museum even know that there is a problem? I think part of the problem is that they don’t know there is a problem; and they are not consulting nor listening to the people out there who are trying to tell them that to the outside community that there is a problem. When it is finally presented to them as a problem, the majority of the time they will make the right choice. To me it is an issue of informing the museum in a way so they can make the right choice.

I was curious to know how these differences between the outside community and the museum had started. I asked Kahanu about the history of the museum and told her about my assumptions. I had thought that Bernice Pauahi Bishop’s American husband through her Ali’i trust had founded the museum. With that, I assumed historically that the museum had been more Western than culturally Hawaiian. Asking questions about the
institutional culture of the museum gives an insight to how the museum operates. Their operational procedures directly influence how and for what purpose contemporary Native Hawaiian art will be exhibited. Kahanu enlightened me about my presumptions:

When Bernice Pauahi Bishop died, she was the great-grand daughter of Kamehameha I, so one of the last lineal descendants, her corpus, the land and money from her trust went to form Kamehameha Schools. The personal effects, her belongings went to Charles Reed Bishop, as did the belongings of Queen Emma and of Princess Ruth. Each that had preceded Pauahi in death had given her all their personal effects. Those personal effects formed the corpus of Bishop Museum as an institution. Charles Reed Bishop’s money formed the Bishop Museum’s trust. So, it is not an Ali‘i trust per se. Regarding the financial underpinnings, the amount he left the museum was minuscule in comparison to what Kamehameha Schools and others had received.

We shared the same trustees. So earlier on, the KS [Kamehameha Schools] trustees were also the CRB’s [Charles Reed Bishop] trustees; but it was like this neglected stepchild. There was hardly any money in it and it languished until they created two separate boards. Bishop Museum is wealthy in terms of our treasures but not financially by any means.

When you look at the issue of Western and Hawaiian culture, what happened was that [Charles Reed] Bishop brought with him a notion of the importance of natural history and the Pacific. When he
created the museum, he wanted it to be both about Hawaiian culture and about Natural History and Science. So in many ways, the museum reflects their marriage, of coexisting between Western and Hawaiian culture. Our legacy is a reflection of their marriage and love for one another. Now, has it always been a seamless match between culture and science? No, it has not, but we have to deal with that, to contend with that. This is our history and who we are.

If the legacy was one born out of love and respect, I wanted to know how Kahanu, as a person who facilitates and manages exhibits dealing with contemporary Hawaiian artists and the museum’s collection, considered the exhibitions she managed. How did she organize and put them together? How did she treat the history and the treasures of the museum?

The first exhibit was easy. It was in 2003 when we had brought out Ku. He had been resting for several years. He had been out on exhibit since we received him back in, I want to say, in 1895. He had been in Boston. Originally, he had come from Hawai‘i Island, then he went to Boston for a time, and then he came back as part of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. Ku had been on exhibit for approximately a century, and then they rested him. This was his debut, and so, we built an exhibit around his return. In conceiving the show, these are the questions we needed to ask. In looking at him and his role today, “How does Ku manifest himself? How is he relevant in today’s time?”
We invited artists that I knew that were friends or family friends. Why was this? Because, I think if you are going to invite an artist, especially a Hawaiian artist to exhibit at Bishop Museum, we have to be very clear of what our intentions are, whether they are good or they are bad. For this first exhibit, for this one, it was to be about relationships based on existing relationships.

I asked Kahanu to speak in more detail about this first exhibit in the Long Vestibule Gallery. This was an important event because it was a learning experience on what to do, how to resolve problems both expected and unexpected—it would become a principal reference and archetype for future exhibitions of this kind. How did it evolve as an exhibition? What were their challenges and what was learned?

It just so happened that when we were writing the labels about the different aspects of Ku—one part of the exhibit was to be about his different kino lau or body parts. Another panel was to be about Ku of the deep sea. And, one was on Ku as war. Then there was the relationship of Ku and Hina and that balance.

It turned out that one of the artists we had selected, Bob Freitas, had completed a piece about the balance of Ku and Hina. And, then Maile Andrade had done a work that was all about the different forms of Ku and his names, those names that we know of him that come to mind today. It was really weird that everything that they had done was about a different aspect of Ku and that they did not overlap
and that each had coincided with something we were already talking about in the exhibit.

I learned from that first exhibit to have faith in the process and that things will happen, as they should. It was, I think, a really wonderful exhibit and was the beginning of many good things to come.

Now what happens, once you have opened with Ku? Hawaiians basically had two seasons, and so, it was logical that the next exhibit had to be about Lono and that transition period. Then the problem was, okay, if we commit the gallery space to recognition of the seasonal changes and the deity that rules during that season, we knew that we could not simply regurgitate the same panels. Something has to evolve and change. We have moved to a point where we now celebrate a particular aspect of that deity.

Kahanu next spoke about the kapa exhibit, an exhibition that was first proposed by the Keomailani Hanapi Foundation. They wanted to feature works from contemporary kapa makers. Fortuitously, one of my case study interviewees, Dalani Kauihou Tanahy was a featured artist in this exhibition. Kahanu spoke about the use of kapa as it related to dressing the ki’i images and other challenges that arose from this exhibit that would help guide future exhibits.

One of the main points in the kapa exhibit dealt with placing of malo, or the dressing, on our ki’i images. In the gallery, all of the male images would form the center or the kua [backbone] of the space. So,
in other words, the theme might change and that it is no longer exactly about that deity and yet it continues to be a celebration of that deity.

Kahanu added that they also needed to emphasize the importance of seasonal changes and the deity that rules during that particular period. This became an essential element for each sequential show that followed. With this, and starting from the first exhibit about Ku, the Long Vestibule Gallery at the Bishop Museum would follow a cyclical pattern based on Hawaiian worldviews about seasonal changes, customary cultural practices and Akua (Gods).

Another repeating conceptual element was the integration of images from the collection and responses from contemporary Hawaiian artists in the forms of new works. I asked her about the essential design element of this exhibit. “You said the backbone of the space. For me this raises more questions because it is very different from a Western approach to designing exhibitions. You are looking at this space from a Hawaiian perspective. Could you elaborate about this point?”

Kahanu responded by giving credit to another co-worker whose vision and conceptual capacity brings a master’s stroke to exhibits at the Bishop Museum:

That idea is totally from Kunane Wooton. He is a Hawaiian from Kaua‘i and is an exhibits preparator here at the museum. He is a wonderful artist, a carver, and a jewelry maker. He brings that Hawaiian aesthetic. He designed the space. He and I will sit down and I will tell him that I am thinking of a particular theme. Or as with the kapa exhibit it was the Keomailani Hanapi Foundation that came to us wanting to do an exhibit about kapa. So, either it is a theme that I think
of or it’s a theme that we arrive at through working with existing organizations.

Then Kunane will take time to think about it and come back to me with a floor plan and we will talk it through. That was his idea [in the kapa exhibit] to have an alignment of Ki’i down the center. Even though most people think of kapa as primarily a female endeavor, there were male images, there was a malo, there was a kane, and there was a Ku image. There was an image of the deity Maui holding two kapa kites. All of these male images became aligned in the center of the space. And that was Kunane’s concept. I think it is imperative in designing exhibits that are Hawaiian based that you need to design the space with a cultural foundation in mind.

Kahanu’s collaboration with Kunane Wooton supported her description of a facilitator or coordinator of projects. It helped to clarify her point earlier in this article of why she chose not to use the term *curator* when describing her work at the Bishop. What was worth noting was the respect and aloha and generous praise she gave when describing Wooton’s ideas and work—many Hawaiians that I interact with often prefer to work in a similar manner. It is characteristic and part of a general sense of what it is to be Hawaiian. It is an important part of our cultural identification.

An essential part of any successful exhibition centers on titles, show text, and descriptive labels. These descriptions enable visitors to gain a clearer understanding of what they are viewing. The question is: What do Hawaiians think about when considering whether or not the general public will understand their art and, in the Bishop Museum’s
case, the exhibition? I asked Kahanu to speak about exhibition titles and interpretive labels. What was essential for her and what were some of her concerns? I wanted to know how didactic she thought a label needed to be. Using the kapa exhibit as an example had she felt a need to explain or describe the concept of a backbone of the space?

I think it would be really wonderful that when you went in to a gallery there could be a label from the exhibit designer that explains conceptually the design and conceptual approach to that space. You know we don’t do that, but it has come up before in our meetings. I would like to be able, when appropriate, to integrate this information into the text writing. I don’t think people really understand all of the concepts that go into why things are placed here or there.

For an instance, when we did *Nā Akua Wahine: Celebrating the Female Gods of Hawai‘i Nei*, we knew that Pele and Mo‘o (supernatural lizard-like beings) don’t get along. If we had a panel about the Mo‘o, it could not face Pele. There are things that you need to consider in terms of the interrelationships between the Akua and its placement of where it is.

Another example is in the Ho‘ohuli exhibit where Kunane [Wooton] essentially had formed a piko [center] and in that piko in the middle of that circle was Lono. Kunane’s mana‘o [thought] was that our Akua are our foundation and that our Gods are in the center of our piko and our persona. Now do you need a label to say that or is it something that you just experience on a visceral or emotional level.
When we speak about kaona, there are things that are obvious and then there are things that might be less obvious and they remain so. I think it is up to the interpreters who are giving the daily tour, it is up to us as a museum to decide how much of that kaona we reveal in terms of why and the choices that are made.

Kahanu’s responses to my inquiry about exhibition labels prompted me to ask additional questions about the interpreters who take museum visitors through exhibits. I said to her that the interpreters played an essential role in the exhibitions because they were presenting things to visitors that were not perhaps so obvious. I asked her if she could explain her role in training the interpreters. How do you go about creating what it is that you are going to say?

For the Long Vestibule Gallery we had a daily tour, and so I would write the script. We did not have docents leading the tour—we had educational staff every day, including myself, and we tried to make it interactive.

So, I replied, “Why was this done?”

Part of the reason was to make it more consistent in its message. I thought it was a really important space for interpretation. We wanted to be careful with what was said, how it was said, to make it a highlight and to make it interactive. For the Ho’ohuli Exhibit, we had them [the visitors] learn the prophecy chant. Then we talked about the different meanings and how it could be interpreted today. In our docent tours, we do not have that level of interactivity. We also had a
grant for the show that helped fund it, and for helping to maintain a healthy level of visitor numbers.

I asked Kahanu if she worried about how the works would be understood once the works were put into this public space. I wanted to know what kinds of things they did to achieve a level of public understanding that was acceptable to them. “You said you used educators to conduct particular tours?”

For our daily tours in the Long Vestibule Gallery, our people are working off a script that I had prepared. The script incorporates the overall theme of the show interwoven with the works of the artists. I think it is really important to name the artists and incorporate what they are saying into the gallery theme. We ask each artist to offer a label or paragraph where they can speak about why they do what they do. We want them to say in their own words something about the works that they have created.

It is not about producing a three-word label. That type of label drives me bananas. I hate labels that tell you nothing other than what it is made of, when it was made, and the title. I want and love having a paragraph where the artist speaks about what is their creative motivation. This plays an important role for getting the message out and making sure that our visitors receive some sense of what is happening in that space.

Another area of interest I had with exhibition is of art critics who might write about the exhibits. Critics play an important role in any exhibit because they provide an
outsider viewpoint and, hypothetically, a socially and culturally appropriate interpretation of the work. Their published writing is important because it has the potential and capacity to create a larger discussion about the relevance of an exhibition. I asked Kahanu to share with me any stories good or bad about critics.

Marcia Morse had written a really great review of the first Ku exhibit, and we have had some very good reviews, most of them coming from OHA [Office of Hawaiian Affairs]. I would not venture to say that those review perspectives could be considered a really critical art critique per se. It has been disappointing that I don’t think art critics view what happens at Bishop Museum as being worthy of their consideration. I believe this is because we are viewed as a cultural history museum and, for that reason; they have not covered our exhibits. We may have what I think are totally art exhibits or at a minimum a seamlessly integrated art and cultural exhibit. Yet, we will be ignored when it comes to the art coverage in Honolulu.

In effect, this exists because that is the approach the museum would take. They would clearly say we are not an art institution. To be able to try and bring down those divides has been both an internal issue and an external one in terms of people comprehending that we are changing as well.

A good example is the Peabody Essex Museum that was a maritime history museum, the oldest museum in the United States. By sheer force of will through a major renovation and expansion, they
have transformed themselves into an art, architecture, and cultural museum. This is part of it that the museum has to be willing to view itself in a broader context and with engaging the community in that same vision.

We just recently hired a new PR person who comes from the Art Academy, and I think that in the next few years we will see a real change in terms of the museum’s profile in the art community.

I told Kahanu that I was familiar with a few museums—The Peabody, The Bishop, and The New American Indian Museum in DC—that had taken steps to include contemporary Native artists and to create new works in response to traditional works in their collections. I asked her if she could ever envision where Bishop Museum would place contemporary Hawaiian works on display?

Our current exhibition with MAMo [Maoli Art Month] is basically composed of contemporary works. We did Naʻau or Newa that included both traditional cultural practitioners and contemporary artists. There are those who would say this is a faulty construct, that what was traditional now was considered contemporary when it was created.

The other issue is this notion of art verses craft. It is complicated when you add to the mix that Hawaiians didn’t have a word for art aligned along Western sensibilities. For Hawaiians of old, everything had a function and a purpose. We now view these traditional
works within a Western aesthetic perspective. But these pieces always had that form, that aka, that essence to it.

Other Hawaiian scholars such as Māhealani Dudoit (1998) have addressed similar thoughts about how and where to locate Hawaiian visual art or cultural expressions within the lexicon of Western art. Dudoit discussed how that, for Hawaiians of old or precontact period, the awareness of an object’s worth, and thus its meaning or value, “always functioned in conjunction with a practical, spiritual, or symbolic capacity, whether secular or sacred” (p. 23). Kahanu added her thoughts about contemporary and traditional Hawaiian art:

I think it is important to continue an inclusion of both; and not to say, okay, this is only going to be contemporary art and we are not going to look at more traditional forms. It is ultimately about artistic and creative expressions. Whether I express my art in terms of more traditional kāhili or one made out of garbage bags, I don’t want to limit artists in what they do. I would not want to put a construct around what people would want to create.

Creativity

This part of the chapter begins a delicate transition where identity, creativity, and exhibition collide—it is less of a blurring of lines but rather a focus on the interdependent association in each element. I deviate from Kahanu’s thought about exhibition to her ideas about creativity only to return later, as will become apparent as our discussion shifted from creativity to exhibition to identity. I began this section by asking her about
kāhili (see Figure 4.1). “One of your most recent works was making kāhili. How do you go about developing your ideas? What type of resources do you consider essential for developing and cultivating your ideas? What are the types of materials you use and for what reasons do you use them? And lastly, would you please describe your sense of aesthetic?”

![Kāhili by Noelle Kahanu](image)

Figure 4.1 Kāhili by Noelle Kahanu

*Na`au or Newa* exhibition *MAMo*, Art at Mark’s Garage.

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Kahanu’s response was prophetic in that it went directly to the core of what it means to be Native Hawaiian: “I think that in order to be contemporary you really need to have a cultural foundation.” Kahanu, as well as all of the artists interviewed, turn to their Native Hawaiian culture for their main source and foundation:

Once you know how to make kāhili, then it is okay to move in this other realm of exploring different mediums. This idea of using
new materials is not something new. I used PVC tubing for the kumu. Imaikalani [Kalahele] and Natalie Jensen used clear Plexiglas and rods. For me, the issue of having feather work on the PVC was exploring this notion that we may look Hawaiian, we may look this way on the outside, but if we do not have that foundation, then who are we?

The feathers came and went, but for a kāhili the name came from the kumu, which is the source, the pō. That was the foundation. And now today it is all about the feathers. Nobody cares about the kumu. Now it could be a dowel. Today it is about the flash, the color, it’s the feather. It wasn’t this in traditional times. In the traditional times it was the kumu, the handle, that was important—not necessarily the feathers.

I made one with feather shaped garbage bags and wrapped them with cordage that was attached to an extension. It was made in a way that traditional kāhili would have been constructed, but again made with non-traditional materials. The reason I did this was to question what we value today. Is it about commercialism? What we can consume? That we can go to a grocery store fit it into a bag and take away? They were actually Safeway grocery bags. Again, these are not new ideas, but for me it was the idea of questioning what we value.

So much of what we do, about the art that people do is about our identity. Even in the exhibits at the Bishop, we are moving beyond
identity. The notion of identity is a given, but what are we trying to say?

What is revealing is her statement about the exhibits going beyond issues of identity. This is significant because many contemporary Native Hawaiian exhibitions have focused on issues of what is Hawaiian; and what is not. Examples include the 1997 Hoʻokuʻe exhibition at the East-West Center Gallery in Honolulu and the Mai Na Kūpuna Mai: Hoi I Ka Puolo exhibition shown jointly in the Art Gallery at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa and the East-West Center Gallery in fall of 2000. There is a lively discussion whether to include non-Hawaiians in Maoli Art Month exhibitions and the Maoli Art in Real Time mini exhibits at the Hawaiʻi Convention Center.

I continued probing about how Kahanu considered the purpose of her art, asking the following question about her aesthetics: “Where do you align with concerns of art, aesthetics and notions of beauty?” She responded to my query:

I would say with the latter. In this particular kāhili, it is social commentary. But it also comments about a traditional practice that has mutated and has taken on another form. What does that say if you do the same process with different materials? What does that mean? What does that say? The label for the piece asked questions about what we value and hold dear to us today. What do we consider important in our lives? I think the feather issue was less about beauty and more about what we consider valuable.
A Return to Exhibition

Part of the discussion about our creative process centers on the material we use. I asked Kahanu about her thoughts about old Hawaiian practices on uses of materials. What importance, value, and meaning might they have placed on the use of particular materials? She replied with an example of an exhibition that they had just completed;

We just did a whole Ola Na Mo'oleo, a storytelling presentation, in an exhibit about Nahi'ena'ena’s [1815-1836] pa'u and the fact that it is the largest known single feather work in the entire world. It was made from over a million almost entirely yellow feathers. It is extraordinary. What does that say about her as an individual? When it was first made [in about 1824], it was 20 feet long and 30 inches wide. One of the things we asked in the presentation was what did this mean to have a pāʻū of a nī'aupi'o? To put this in light of its significance, for most Aliʻi, even the highest-ranking female aliʻi, their skirts were usually made from kapa cloth. But this particular piece was made entirely out of feathers.

And, to get you to a level of understanding, her mother Keōpūolani had passed on, and even though she [Nahi'ena'ena] was a child still, she was probably the highest-ranking female in all of Hawaiʻi. And, this pa’u exalted her. Where does a pa’u wrap around? The skirt would wrap around her loin area or where her children, the next generation of chiefs, would come. It was through a sacred union with her brother in a moe pio relationship. So, it is all of that! Can we
ever entirely understand what something is really about? That is the whole beauty of this story.

There is a museum practice aligned with the Peabody Essex Museum approach, as many places do, where you highlight the beauty of something and are silent as to its context. This is under the theory that your Western aesthetic will move you to a place where then you may want to learn more.

For Peabody that was the concept of their ArtSpace program where you could go to their web site to learn more about this thing you just saw. In these types of expositions, the approach is not to clutter the space with big bulky labels. For me, this totally misses the point entirely. You do not achieve an aesthetic understanding unless you understand its context, its story. It is completely opposite to what I think we are about.

Again, I found a significant difference between how Kahanu conceived exhibitions at the Bishop and the practices at other cultural museums. She understood that Hawaiians of old placed a high-degree of importance on the materials they used. Similarly, Malo (1903) on pages 126-28 supported this concept of material when he described the sacred carving of a wa’a (canoe) where the kino lau (spiritual embodiment of a god) was present in the koa tree.

Kahanu’s concepts moved the discussion into a broader conversation about how to think of the entire exhibition as a work of art. An integral part of this issue was her consideration of exhibition text and labels and how they played a significant role in
telling the mo'olelo, or story. To help tell the story about Nāhi'ena'ena’s pā'u, Kahanu, made a special kāhili for the exhibit (see Figure 4.2). She explained her interpretation:

In the Nahi'ena'ena show, it took a twenty to twenty-five minute presentation to get people to a point where they would cry; because of the story that this pa'u tells and of how it was cut in half then sewn together and became a funeral pall. Our view of it today is not meant to be what it was meant to be seen. Where does interpretation and historical fact meet? They do not always meet. In my view, it is cut because she dies. It can never be wrapped around anyone of her rank. Her death ends this rank. It is the last sibling marriage ever again, and so the nī'api'o rank dies with her, and to have the ability to have a new generation that comes from that union.

Figure 4.2 Noelle Kahanu’s kāhili honoring Nāhi'ena'ena. Photographed by Kau'i Chun.

Reproduced with permission from Noelle Kahanun.
That is why I think after Kamehameha III, it is all down hill. There is no lineal continuation, and he is the last divine king who has traditional Hawaiian relationships, that has male lovers, and a sister as his wife; and does things in a way that was his right as an Ali'i. From that point forward, with Kamehameha IV and those that follow, they are already colonized.

This exhibit allowed us to be able to speak about one treasure and give it due justice. And by doing so, we brought back the names, particularly those of the Maui Ali'i in ways that carry them back to our consciousness. Today it is all about Kamehameha, but you know the children are sacred not because of him but because of Keōpūolani and all that linage in that line.

It was an honor. I usually don’t deliver story-telling programs, and for me it was a real honor where I conducted programs two or three times a week just about Nāhi'ena'ena. It was an honor and a real emotional experience. That for me is what the museum is all about—not just for educating the visitor but telling our Hawaiian community who our Ali'i were, what they left for us and why.

This notion of servicing the Hawaiian community is important. We are reminded that Smith (1999) on pages 172-173 argues for indigenous researchers, working with indigenous communities, to question their purpose of research and for whom it will
serve—in the case of the Bishop Museum a re-examination of their overall mission.

Kahanu spoke about the labels for the exhibit:

For this show, I had written a kind of a standard label. But, we were able to build an entire storytelling program around Nāhi‘ena‘ena’s pā‘ū. After the storytelling ended, we revealed the pā‘ū when we then turned the lights back on.

But my question was if a person did not have the chance of going on a tour with one of the education specialists, could they have been able to get this story?

To a degree, we had docent tours that went through twice a day, and there was a label about it. We are always looking for ways to improve the quality of our visitors’ experience. Some of these include the use of audio tours, and public broadcast announcements or videos where we can expound and tell these stories that a label simply cannot tell with regards to deeper meanings within an exhibit.

Your question about labels brings to mind other problems. It touches on concerns of communicating interpretation and historical fact. This is a whole other realm where finding a balance between interpretation and historical fact is an issue. The museum has tons of documentation and oral histories of which could be argued what is real or true. But should this preclude us from not telling these stories in ways that bring them back to our consciousness?

Kahanu shifted the notion of one absolute truth by arguing what was real or true. Her strategic move was not to prohibit a discussion or presentation but to find a balance
between interpretation and historical fact, and to move the decolonization agenda of Hawaiian culture—lifting an inspired social and cultural consciousness along these stories.

I was struck by the conscious effort to include an artist statement and his or her words with the exhibits. I noted this specifically in the kapa exhibit. This exhibit was very different from two other kapa exhibits that had been recently shown at the Honolulu Academy of Arts—The Kapa Moe and The Cook Foster exhibitions. I asked Kahanu to comment on this.

Every exhibit that I have ever done is in first person voice. This means it is not a third person ambiguous voice of an omnipotent person deciding what to say. I try to keep that to a minimum.

This is an important issue to my research because it aligns with my efforts of putting forth the voice of each artist, so that they can tell their story in their own words.

Kahanu continued with her thought offering an example that was dear to her heart and own family:

For example, we did an exhibit about these Hawaiian boys who were sent to various islands in the South Pacific during the 1930s and 40s. Almost the entire exhibit was in their own words, whether it was through contemporary interviews or logbooks. We had made a real conscious effort that they were allowed to tell their own story. Maybe, there were one or two paragraphs that would set the stage but then you let the story move and progress in their own words.
The title of the 2002 show was, *Hui Panalā’au: Hawaiian Colonists, American Citizens*. The show was later made into the 2010 documentary film, *Under a Jarvis Moon*. The film told the story of the United States government’s attempt to colonize remote deserted islands in the Pacific Ocean prior to World War II. During a span of seven years from 1935 and 1942, over 130 young men, mostly Hawaiian, had spent time on these islands (Noelle Kahanu discovers her history, February 12, 2010).

One of these Hawaiian men was Kahanu’s grandfather, George Kahanu. An archivist at the Bishop Museum had found a logbook date from 1936 written by her grandfather when he was stationed on Jarvis Island. Later when she met her grandfather to discuss his mission, Kahanu said, “He came out with this old manila envelope. And there were these yellow old pictures, real small of him on the island, and then also when they went to go on board the ship.”

Here was an example, from this exhibition, of how Kahanu was able to tell the story in a first person voice. Her grandfather along with another young man had composed the song titled, “Under a Jarvis Moon.” The following comment is an excerpt from George Kahanu’s logbook entry date June 25, 1936.

When dinner was over, all the boys gathered in the sleeping quarters and began singing various numbers of songs. One of the boys suggested we try and compose a song for our island. The moon, not yet in its fullest, gave us an idea (Muneno, 2010, October).

George Kahanu appears in the picture below, along with Noelle Kahanu and some others.
Figure 4.3 Left to right—Abraham Piianaia, Noelle Kahanu holding Arthur Harris’ arm, James Carroll. George Kahanu is behind Kahanu.  

Reproduced with permission from Noelle Kahanu.

The show opened with a film of the moon overhead, passing through a darkened sky. An elderly man is singing in a lonesome yearning voice:

Each lonely night as I sit in my shack, it brings memories of you. I am waiting for my ship to come in; to take me back to you…Jarvis moon makes me long for you (Under a Jarvis Moon, 2010).

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My mother Leilani Lee Chun was a high school classmate of Arthur Harris and George Kahanu at Kamehameha Schools.
Noelle Kahanu continued to explain her process of composing working labels for other exhibits at the Bishop Museum.

Obviously there would be labels to explain things in a more thematic show like the Ku exhibit, where we were celebrating and looking at his different aspects. In those instances, I would compose the labels approaching the writing in this way.

For me, it is about combining research within a poetic framework. There is a fundamental difference between labels of this manner and an anthropological label full of source citations. I believe in combining solid research and poetry. There needs to be a way to combine a poetic sensibility that is culturally sensitive and historically informative.

The idea of finding pono, or balance, between rational thought and creative inspiration through poetry touched a personal cord. It reminded me of my work at Hālau Lōkahi Public Charter School, where I taught art. My goal as a teacher was to create a learning environment where students could take their ideas and evolve and mature them through a serious process of critical, rational, and thoughtful creative thinking.

I wanted Kahanu to elaborate about her work on projects and framing things in a poetic fashion. Did she approach these exhibits as an art project or as an installation project? Was this a creative project for her?

I would say yes to the latter, but do I treat it as an art project?

No. For instance, where my role intersects with coordinating the various parts of an exhibit as in writing labels, I bring to my role as a
writer my own history and experiences. I have been a poet for twenty years or more, and hence I bring this quality to the writing.

Interesting to note about Kahanu’s response was that, when related to exhibition design at the Bishop Museum, she made a distinction between the notion of an art project and a creative project. This distinction was revealing for me because, for me as an artist, art and creativity are synonymous and parallel. I learned from Kahanu that the term “creative,” in a history and cultural museum context, could be disassociated from the term “art,” as in an “art practice.”

She spoke earlier that label writing touches on concerns of communicating interpretation and historical fact. Kahanu acknowledged her subjectivity and personal partiality of interpretation. Interpretive text was framed through her lens of experience.

It is important you write in a way that doesn’t make people afraid or feel undereducated. If you look at some labels closely, at times you find a kind of pretentious tenor. There are different camps about how a label should be written. Some say that a label should be written so that a fourth grader can read it. For me it is about being informative and poetic at the same time. I want people to have empathy with what they are experiencing and to be moved.

A Return to Creativity

I wanted to turn our discussion back to Kahanu’s creative process as a kāhili maker. “You mentioned about putting the kāhili together in a traditional way. Could you share with us, how and where you learned to make kāhili? And, how do you continue to
learn to make art?” Again, referencing her work at the museum as if was an extension of her creative sphere Kahanu spoke about how she learned this art form and what it meant to her.

At the museum, we are blessed because we often have people who come to study and offer lessons and classes in what they do. For instance, Kahai Topolinsky is teaching a class on kāhili making. I have had a chance to spend time with him. I have also attended workshops with Natalie Jensen. A good friend of mine, Audrey Wagner, makes kāhili. There are two things that happen, one is the process in making kāhili and the other concern is its aesthetics of the shape, the color choices, the feather choices, and the size. No matter how you try, every one will come out differently.

What I love most about kāhili making is it is tied to a process of gift giving and it is unique to that purpose. For example, I made one for my friend’s wife. A different time I made one on a very special occasion for another woman, and then there was one for a person who was leaving our partnership.

It is part of a broader protocol of gift giving, celebration and exchange. Each is unique and made for a purpose and is created for who it is being presented. That is what attracts me most and why I love making kāhili.

I chimed in, “So, you are creating each one individually for a specific reason and person. Could you expand a bit further on this?”
Each one has a name that is unique to that individual and for that purpose. The colors and type of feather are chosen for a purpose. When you are making it, you are thinking about that person and what they mean to you and what they represent for you. If you are not in the right frame of mind, you should not be working on it. All of your energy goes into what you are creating. You always have to be pure of heart, of intention and mind when you are working on it. It is a gift made for a particular person for an explicit reason to be presented on a specific occasion. During the naming, I try to weave together an oli [chant] that becomes part of the presentation.

This response answered my question about her creative process. When she begins to make a work, there is a personal protocol or ritual. Her description expressed the uniqueness and distinction of Kahanu’s practice and its signature traits. There was oli, which is poetic verse; there was the creative process of making as she thought about that person, the naming, and the symbolism of the material that went into making the kāhili. This explanation helped me to understand her as an artist.

I asked Kahanu if there were any other kinds of art she did that touched on these things. Where did she want to go from here with her art?

I would like to expand in other areas, but for now this is what I do and I continue to write poetry that for me is an artistic endeavor. All of these creative activities take time and are of purpose and intention.
At this juncture of the interview, I returned to my questions about identity. As Kahanu spoke, our discussion would shift back and forth about her ideas on identity, creativity and exhibition. Here is her response to my first question about identity (‘Does gender and age play a role to you as a person and as an artist?):

One of the things I did not mention is that I have been engaged in Lua training. Pa Kui a Lua is a Hawaiian martial arts group that I belong to. Our kumu is Richard Paglinawan. He says there is balance between Ku and Hina energy in every individual. For someone, it might be 70% Ku and 30% Hina. And, that male and females have both present. A male can have Hina energy and a woman can have Ku energy. Hearing that and going through the training process allowed me to feel much more comfortable about that balance for myself.

It drives me mad that I cannot do hula. It is just not in my makeup. But, when I do Haka, I just love the energy and place where it comes from. Being able to better understand and accept those male and female aspects has taught me to be fearless in what I want to do.

A Return to Identity and Exhibition

I asked her if age made a difference with how she identified herself now and, if so, what did it mean to her.

I just turned 42. Today, I feel more centered and focused and comfortable in what I say and what I think needs to be said. I think that just comes with time. As a Hawaiian working at Bishop Museum, you
need to know what to say, when to say it, and why. People will always want to grumble with you, they will always be dismissive or say that is just her and she has a problem. It is really critical to have a reason for what you are saying.

For an example, we wanted to put a malo on Kū. For the first time in the history of the museum, we wanted to put clothing on Kū. In order to prepare for this, I needed to have tabbed references to all of the Akua who had malo from the Cox and Davenport resource. I needed to have all the citations that showed the important ceremonial aspect of the Akua coming out and taking their positions within particular seasons.

I needed to be clear from an interpretive standpoint that we would not be reanimating Ku. We would be celebrating and honoring him as he would appear on the heiau. We were not creating the ahu and animating him, because that comes with a whole lot of other issues and responsibilities. It is almost like going into battle you have to have your ducks in order. It is not enough to say I feel it is the right thing to do.

I asked her, “Who do you have to answer to at the museum?” Her reply showed that Kahanu needed to be sure about what she wanted to do and prepared with information, research, and strong arguments backing her position:

I have to answer to the board, to Aunty Pat Bacon, our cultural advisor, and to the director. In a way, it is like going into battle. You need to be able to justify what you want to do. The energy that exists
in an institution tends to want to remain the same. The energy in an institution is not about change.

At the Winter Institute of Black Studies Conference, a question was about issues of interpretation. It was brought up that the audience and community are ready for change, but it is the institution that is not ready for change. I feel part of my job is to encourage the museum and to push it along for change.

I had a question about Kahanu’s advocacy at the museum when it comes to putting forth ideas or concepts for an exhibition. I asked her, “What are your experiences with working with the board of directors and executives at the museum?”

I would say that, in matters of exhibition and community relationships, the people who are at the VP or board level are not the ones who initially feel the heat. The community or organizations I am working with are mad at me, not the board. If we were to pull an exhibit off the schedule or change it like in the kapa exhibit, they, the board are not the ones who have to answer directly [to the community].

A good example of this was when I went to the Keomailani Hanapi Foundation to make a change in the schedule of the kapa exhibit. They were furious. This is not about just my reputation at stake, but also the museum’s reputation, that could affect our relationship within the community, to be acting in this manner and to be making these decisions because there are consequences. In terms of
reflection about the relationships that I have and am trying to forge, it is difficult when the board doesn’t have these relationships and only sees these things as fiscal responsibilities and decisions. I spend a lot of time trying to explain what is at stake.

Another example is this notion of wanting to see the art pieces before they are accepted and entered into the gallery space. We have never done that! I have never done that! We give them [the artists] a theme and I trust the artist to come with something that illuminates what the premise of the show is about. Trust is such a key element. It is ridiculous to say I need to see two weeks before the deadline a digital image of what you are planning to put in the museum.

For example, I knew that Carl Pao was creating a three-foot ule [penis] to commemorate Ku, and I went to the director and said, “By the way, I am pretty sure this is what he was doing. Do you have an issue with it?” He said, “No.” I am not trying to pull one over our museum, but they need to trust in our relationship with each artist and in what the artist is creating and in what we will be proud of. But again, we are changing and these are different times.

I asked her, “Do you find, when working with Hawaiians verses non-Hawaiians, that there is a difference where considerations need to be rethought or put a different way?”

I would say it really doesn’t relate because there is a conscious decision and effort to working with Hawaiian artists. It has been
problematic because we have had non-Hawaiian artists creating Hawaiian theme work and asking to be part of the exhibit, but we try to prioritize Hawaiian artists.

It is worth noting that Kahanu has claimed this space to be Hawaiian. And through her authority and position at Bishop Museum, she had made a strategic decision to give more preference to Hawaiian artists. I asked, “How do you feel about private and public collections and having to put your work into galleries for profit or the commercialization of your work?”

If we want to see our Hawaiian artists to be able to sustain themselves, then we need to look at new economic models. We need to create and develop sustainable alternative gallery and commercial spaces. Unfortunately, in the typical gallery model, a substantial portion of a sale does not go to the artist. An alternative example is Moku Ola in Hawai‘i Kai that is Hawaiian operated. They still have to do it on a percentage model, but I believe it is a percentage more favorable to Hawaiians. At the same time, people still need to pay their bills, and we need to show that our Hawaiian artists are viable in any gallery.

Getting back to galleries, clients, private and public collections and marketing, and selling and exhibiting works of art, I wanted Kahanu to discuss her work with Maoli Art Month (MAMo). This activity closely involves her with Hawaiian artists, with promoting them, and giving them settings and opportunities through the MAMo venue. I asked, “Could you explain in more detail your thoughts and engagement with MAMo?”
For over 80 years, the Santa Fe Indian Market has created a place for now over six-hundred American Indian artists to sell their works. In similar fashion, The Heard Museum in Arizona has been doing this for over 40 years. The Bishop Museum looked at these two examples as models. We are now going into our second annual Native Hawaiian arts market. Due to the overwhelming responses of last year, what was a two-day market ended up turning into Maoli Arts Month. It has become a month-long series of activities that we try to schedule for the month of May.

This year, we anticipate by the end of it there will have been over sixty participating Hawaiian artists who would have generated well over ten-thousand or more in sales. It was a real eye opener in the sense we had more galleries than we could accommodate. We did not have enough artists to meet the need. We had assumed that galleries had shut their doors on Hawaiian artists.

A lot of issues came up. A particular lesson I took away from this was one when we were working with a Hawaiian organization that was having a conflict with the museum. In fact, during the time we were planning and preparing for MAMo, they were picketing the museum. I totally love and appreciate our ability; maybe it is part of that colonization thing that we know we need to compartmentalize with who we are and with what we believe in.
The fact that the museum could work hand in hand with an organization for the Maoli Arts Month, and at the same time this organization could be totally at odds with our director and then the very next day be picketing the museum and not have that detrimentally affect our relationship, says a lot about what it is we need to do in terms of establishing relationships.

Again, we see the delicate balance of polemics, where the battle lines of cultural differences and ideologies are in constant tension. But I will suggest it is not as clear as this because Hawaiians live in multiethnic cultural and social realities; taking from both Hawaiian and non-Hawaiian systems when considering their worldviews. Kahanu continued discussing her work at the museum.

This was a real source of pride to be able to say that we could have a positive and powerful relationship with a person like Vicky Takamine even though she was picketing.

My point is that despite everyone’s differences, when it comes to things that matter most to our community, we can be of one mind. When it comes to celebrating Native Hawaiian visual arts that we are totally in that space, and we are as a community really moving in a wonderful direction, and it is about time. It is long overdue.

The effect of what Kahanu does at the Bishop Museum when putting on the annual Maoli Art Month exhibit goes beyond the simple showcasing works of art of our modern masters. The exhibition is a strategically planned event that furthers our decolonization process by placing contemporary Native Hawaiian art on stage in a world-
renowned ethnographical museum. I asked Kahanu what she considered a highlight of MAMo.

One of the proudest things I think we have done at the museum is to create this annual exhibit now around celebrating our Native Hawaiian visual artists, our master artists. This is our second year, and we have six new awardees. The letters went out, and so I will be waiting to see if they are going to graciously accept. Last year, that exhibit was at the tail end of the month. This year, it is the first thing that we do. We open with a May 3rd Maoli, or MAMo, awardees event and exhibit here at the Bishop Museum. This event acknowledges these artists as our sources and as our foundations. This is how we start the month. And, then the next day will be First Friday. We have seven galleries exhibiting exclusively Native Hawaiian works.

The governing board of directors of a museum holds power over what ultimately happens in the institution. I wanted to know what kinds of support or resistance Kahanu had gotten from the board regarding the MAMo project and with other things that affected the museum.

Oh, none at all regards to MAMo! They are thrilled to have the event. This is a place where dialogue should take place. We cannot say that we only want positive dialogue here or don’t come on campus. I wouldn’t say there are no issues. You know we have Hālau Lōkahi Charter School here where they start the day and end their day with protocol. The museum can be hesitant in the notion of someone
seemingly biting the hand that feeds them. At the same time I think we have to accept positive and negative criticism and self-expression.

With this final comment, my discussion with Noelle Kahanu about her thoughts on issues of identity, creativity and exhibition came to an end. I thanked her and said, “Well it sounds like a dynamic environment, and I can understand and appreciate why you love working here beyond taking care of our kūpuna and the gift that we have. Noelle, mahalo and I want to thank you very much for this interview.”

Summary

As she shared her stories about her work at the Bishop Museum, Noelle Kahanu’s voice took me into the heart, soul, and working mind of the museum, specifically in regard to the area of museum exhibition and education. Her experience coordinating exhibitions at the museum clarified how contemporary Native Hawaiian artists engage with showing their works at a premier institutional venue. This extensive experience with exhibition design offered a firsthand account of how exhibitions were conceived, planned, and executed at the Bishop Museum.

In the context of Hawaiian art and cultural exhibitions at Bishop Museum, her approach to writing interpretive text labels that incorporate artist statements about their work, often using the first person voice, reinforced a purposeful Indigenous strategy that articulates a decolonization agenda. This decision indicated a strong linkage between self-identity and imaging with exhibition practices. Like other Indigenous people in the world, Native Hawaiians have fought for their fundamental right to represent themselves.
Access to self-representation is a crucial component to establishing a positive and authentic self-identity.

My initial ideas that supported this dissertation presumed that the effects of colonization have altered Hawaiian identity and voice. I wanted to know how these ideas about colonization challenged and changed the ways in which contemporary Hawaiians practiced their art, how they exhibited their works in public; and how they imagined and imaged themselves. Kahanu’s approach to writing exhibition text was imbued with the voices of Native Hawaiian artists that describe the works on display. She challenged ideas that shape certain assumptions and precepts of the Western premise of cultural order of dominant Euro-American claims of what is logical, sensible and legitimate to ways of framing a world view as suggested by Ladson-Billings (2000).

Smith (1999) made a point of this idea of framing a world view, in her introductory section of *Decolonizing Methodologies*, where she wrote about how the collective memory of imperialism affected the representation of indigenous peoples, on how knowledge about them was collected, classified, and then represented back to viewers through the lens of Western premises. This was exactly what Kahanu aimed to discredit. Kahanu spoke about not producing a simplified three-word ethnographic or scientific word label that just provided a date when it was made, found or bequeathed along with a title. She spoke about, “having a paragraph where the artist speaks about what is their creative motivation.” For Kahanu, this approach gave visitors a better sense of what was on display in the exhibition space.

I can personally attest to how Kahanu works with Hawaiian artists. In one of the annual events celebrating Lono O Makahiki, I was invited to
exhibit my interpretation of Lono. My work showed Lono in his various kino lau (embodiments). Kahanu proofed and edited my artist statement for grammatical corrections but left intact the content. She treated this label with respect, as an artistic creative expression, as she had done with my Lono painting. By placing her trust with me and in my work, my personal view about Makahiki would be heard as I had envisioned. Kahanu explained the parameters she sets up when inviting an artist to participate in a show and how she regards the artist statements.

We give them [the artists] a theme and I trust the artist to come with something that illuminates what the premise of the show is about. Trust is such a key element. Every exhibit that I have ever done is in first person voice. This means it is not a third person ambiguous voice of an omnipotent person deciding what to say. I try to keep that to a minimum.

Kahanu uses in her label and exhibition text writing practice what Serrell defines (1996) and Klobe, in a personal conversation with me (Klobe, 2003), purported constitutes good labels and text:

A good label and text tells stories; they narrate rather than just list facts. They are portals to understanding; they guide, inform and provoke participation. They lead viewers to delve deeper and to ask profound questions about what is being presented (Serrell, 1996, p.1).

Kahanu’s narration text for the exhibit about Nāhi'ena'ena’s pā'ū feather work was a good example of this. To bring the viewer to tears in order to make the point was a
bold move. It illustrated how vital good text writing is for telling the story—but we know Hawaiians have always been good at *talk story*.

![Figure 4.4 Noelle Kahanu’s kāhili.](image)

Reproduced with permission from Noelle Kahanu.

Photographed by Kau'i Chun.

The story about Kahanu’s creative and artistic spirit was unique. Gift giving was at its heart. It was a creative process steeped with purpose of mind and heartfelt aloha for
whom she was making kāhili (see Figure 4.4). She said it best in her words. “What I love most about kāhili making is it is tied to a process of gift-giving, and it is unique to that purpose.”

Creating kāhili is a demanding creative process that requires spiritual strength, mental exactitude, and physically precise energy. Kahanu needs to conceive what she wants to create beforehand, and then during the creative process infuse it with great strength and force. While she is making the kāhili, she is focused and thinking about that person, about their shared experiences, and what it means and represents to her. She has to be pure of heart, of mind and spirit for any deviation will certainly reveal itself in the kāhili, whether in its physical aesthetic attributes or in its spiritual energy.

For these reasons, her materials, the type of feathers, and choice of colors are meticulously selected with a sense of purpose and attention to detail. This was not an exercise of illustration! Mana resided here! Her kāhili was a place full of spiritual energy, where shared memories and histories resided, where oli and a person’s name were infused with kaona, and where one’s heritage was celebrated. It was as if she was creating a newborn child; and, in her act of gifting, the child was hanai to another. It was set free from her bonds to become the kuleana of another person to take its rightful place in a community of others.

In concept and perspective, these ideas are steeped in Hawaiian ways of thinking. They are similar to how Hawaiians considered and blessed a new hale (home) or a new wa'a (canoe). And like in the blessing of a hale and a wa'a, she consecrated and bestowed the newly created kāhili with a name and an oli of significance, a celebration of that person and that occasion.
It was not surprising Kahanu preferred to make kāhili. She believed that in order to be contemporary, you really needed to have a cultural foundation. Because of this, she chose to articulate her creativeness in a very ancient form of Hawaiian cultural expression. Adding to this mix of reasons was her natural characteristic as a person who loved to incubate and give birth to new ideas and possibilities. At Bishop Museum, she works in proximity to the Ali'i treasures and the room that houses their kāhili. Her spirits are nourished and strengthened by this association. Her temperament and generous heart were the other reasons why she was able to do this because without these gifts, making kāhili would be difficult.

The interview of Noelle Mailei Kalahea Yayoi Kahanu provided an insightful look at what it means to be a contemporary Native Hawaiian artist and museum professional concerned with preserving and exhibiting Hawaiian art. Kahanu defines her identity from a rich multiethnic heritage. She uses her professional position along with her deep understanding about Western and Hawaiian ways to further her service for the betterment of her community. She is able to create kāhili because of her commitment to learning from kūpuna about how also to weave ‘ie ‘ie, how to do lua, and how to balance her Ku and Hina energy. She has learned to go into battle and justify what she wants to do at Bishop Museum and other public arenas, because of her openness to knowledge and spiritual energy that come from dreaming and from walking in the mud of the forest and mountains. For Noelle Kahanu her life does not seem to be a labor of work, but rather a life about the love of the work that she does.
CHAPTER FIVE: KAILI CHUN—THE CONCEPTUALIST

Introduction

Kaili Chun’s formation as a person and as an artist reveals a rich story about diversity within the Hawaiian art community. She calls herself a conceptual artist. As an artist, her practice spans the continuum of both Western and traditional Hawaiian learning and artistic systems, which includes conceptual and creative processes, aesthetics, making, criticism, and sharing.

On the following page, I share one of her earlier paintings (Figure 5.1), Na Pali I. For me, the subtle but strong symbolism and movements captured in the hollowed shelter of this ocean cave, with its watery floor and the sun-mist filtering down, could be understood as a self-portrait filled with what Hawaiians would describe as Hina, or female mana (spiritual energy). It is like her studio, her sacred sanctuary, where she works alone in deep concentration.

Kaili Chun refers to herself as a conceptual artist whose museum and premier gallery works center on a genre called installation and three-dimensional art. (Na Pali I is one of her infrequent departures from that genre.) She has been honored with numerous awards, including the following: the Catharine E. B. Cox Award for Excellence in the Visual Arts (2006); the Individual Artist Visual Arts Fellowship in Conceptual Art awarded by Hawai‘i State Foundation on Culture and the Arts (2000); Folk Arts Apprenticeship Awards (1999-2001); and the Alfred Preis Memorial Award for Visual Arts (1998).
She graduated from Kamehameha Schools in 1980, received her BA (Architecture) from Princeton University in 1986, and earned her MFA from the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa in 1999. From 1996-2003, she apprenticed under the tutelage of Master Hawaiian carver Wright Elemakule Bowman, Sr.

Figure 5.1 *Na Pali I*, painting by Kaili Chun.
Photographed by Kau‘i Chun.
Reproduced with permission from Kaili Chun.

I included Chun in this research because her educational path and formation as an artist added a rare and important element to the project. While working for her MFA from a traditional Western academic institution, she chose to learn carving from Bowman, an
esteemed Hawaiian kupuna. She brought to my project a discussion regarding values and differences, and the consequences of personal choices. What was an artisan? What was an artist? What was craft? And, what was art? 

Her artwork focuses on tensions built around the differences between Hawaiian and American/Western cultures. Her growing awareness and concerns as a Hawaiian artist were exquisitely captured in her conceptual installation entitled, *Nau ka wae* (the choice belongs to you) at the Henry R. Luce Gallery, Honolulu Academy of Arts in 2006.

I am grateful for Chun’s participation in this study because the multiple influences in her life journey add another layer of complexity to an already complicated question about what constitutes contemporary Hawaiian art. She is a rising artistic star of national and international importance. Few artists attain this achievement.

Our interview took place at Chun’s home in Nu’uanu valley. We sat in her studio surrounded by her work area and overlooking her back yard that sloped away slightly toward Nu'uanu Stream. It was Tuesday midmorning, December 19, 2006.

**Identity**

I first explained to Chun that, as I began the conceptual structure for this research, I decided I would center on contemporary Hawaiian artists and their issues of identity, their creative processes, and their experiences with exhibiting or putting their work into public spaces. I considered how our identity is in so many ways directly linked to our creative process. This was my assumption, so I would ask Chun to argue this point and offer her opinion.
With that as a point to consider, I asked her how she saw herself as a person and as an artist, with particular concerns surrounding her ethnicity, culture, social place, gender, age, and anything else she would like to add. She began with explaining who she was:

First of all, there is the obvious. I am a woman in my early forties, born and raised in Hawai‘i. I think our family surroundings and environment have a lot to do with who you are, what you become, how you think. Those factors play into the creation and molding of someone’s identity. I definitely associate myself with being Hawaiian, but of course, I am made up of many different ethnicities. These include Chinese and haole that is primarily German, Scottish, and English.

I think, because I was born and raised here and not China, I identify more with being Hawaiian than I do with being Chinese, although I do recognize that [Chinese] as being a significant part of my identity. It is interesting how people also associate one with their identity. People normally don’t associate me as being haole, but they would say I am Hawaiian/Chinese.

I am extremely grateful to the Kamehameha Schools for providing me with a world-class education that enabled me to understand and participate in the American system in which we live, while simultaneously ensconcing me in a Hawaiian environment that nurtured my Hawaiian values and developed my Hawaiian identity.
My education and my family had a great impact on my identity as well as the social context of living in 21st century Hawai'i. I don’t speak the language, and this is a reflection of the colonial impact and the subsequent commoditization of our culture, and the influx of non-Hawaiian people. I think all of these factors taken together have an impact on someone’s identity.

Because our relationships with other people affect how we see ourselves and how we identify ourselves I wanted to know how close friends and family affected her thoughts about identity. I asked her to speak briefly about how these people impacted her.

First and foremost on my list would be my parents, my mom and dad for sure. They have been so supportive throughout my whole life. My grandparents, the Mossmans, primarily raised me when I was a young baby. My mother and father, along with grandmother and grandfather Mossman, all lived together for the longest time.

My mom and dad finished college and we came back and all lived with grandma and grandpa. I think that tight unit was really important. I was very close to my grandfather, and we did everything together as a young child. Of course, when mom and dad moved up to campus [Kamehameha Schools Kapālama] my grandmother and great-grandmother came with them.

I think having this type of family really had an impact, and it still does. I consult with them on a lot of things, including my work. Of course they have different ideas about the projects.
My mother Bina has strong opinions. She is a great influence on my life. This has led me to look at that relationship; and perhaps engage it in future work. We have ideas and opinions about everything, whether it is art or politics. The way in which we engage is also interesting. So, definitely mom and dad…and thank god for dad too because he balances out everything. He is pretty solid. He has a good way and spirit about him. So does my mom. And, they love me. They love me. And, I love them. So, that’s what’s beautiful.

And, of course my grandparents, but not taking anything away from my nana and grandpa Lawrence, but I was just closer to the Mossmans. You know Grandpa Lawrence helped me out with a job, and I am very grateful to them also.

I wanted to know about people outside of her immediate family—who they were and their influence and relationship. This is what she said:

I would say that Toshiko Takaezu has been very helpful, where she introduced me to a lot of different people, not just from here, but outside. It was really great to have her as a teacher at Princeton. I met some of my best friends at Princeton who I am still in contact with. Kate, who lives in San Francisco, is an artist. I find it very important to keep it touch and to talk with her about ideas and ways to communicate those ideas in different forms. Susan Batton, who I met while I was at Princeton, she has been very helpful and I find her friendship very important, and we also discuss things.
I have my friends here as well, so I have a mix of friends both Hawaiian and non-Hawaiian that I try to engage with in discussion about ideas and thoughts and ways to communicate them.

Important to note is that Chun, as do most Hawaiian artists, considers the importance of having both Hawaiian and non-Hawaiian friends and influences. This collection of family, friends, and experiences becomes ingrained and part of their sense of who they are as a person and as an artist. It is with the community that they will ultimately share what they have made.

And, of course Mr. Bowman was very important. I am very grateful and thankful to him for those things he put in place for me so that I could continue this work, and I could take it into a different context; not just continue what he did but to take it into another direction, which is what I am trying to do now. His sources are now my sources, so there are people who he put me into contact with.

A recontextualized traditional form like this wasn’t part of his deal, his thinking. It would be interesting to hear stories about what he saw and what’s happening today, where we are today, and to hear about the differences between Hawai‘i then and Hawai‘i now. If you can imagine there were no cars on these islands at all during his lifetime. His father had the fifth car on the island of Hawai‘i. So today we drive in traffic and we are used to it and think okay this is just regular traffic at two o’clock in the afternoon or eight o’clock in the morning. So those kinds of things, when we would have conversations,
made me think about this new time and new place that we live in and how it has changed. It will never stop changing.

I then asked Chun if she found conflicts with trying to be herself and practice being a Hawaiian. I encouraged her to speak to issues of conflict between American values verses Hawaiian values and, if there were conflicts, how did she handle them.

Certainly, I think there are conflicts with those two very different systems. Sometimes you have to engage with one or the other. Sometimes you have to be in both at the same time. And, sometimes that is difficult.

This theme of straddling the fence or walking in two different shoes sounded familiar to me and was often acknowledged to be the case by Hawaiians I knew. When I was teaching at Hālau Lōkahi Public Charter School, this point often came up around lively discussions as kumu (teachers) engaged with students. Chun continued with her thought about how Hawaiians are identified:

I think it is interesting to be Hawaiian in this day and age because you have people who try to regulate how much are you. Can you speak the language? If you can’t, then how much Hawaiian are you? And, then there are some Hawaiians who completely reject that side of their identity and don’t find any value in it. There are those, perhaps because of a lack of knowledge or interest to find out, for example, your genealogy; and one might consider another inferior because of that. So, you are dealing with the Hawaiian side where there is a regeneration of interest in the culture, language, and all those
facets that make the culture. Sometimes those that are deeply in it can be condescending to those that are out further.

Then you have those non-Hawaiians who are within the Hawaiian culture who see those Hawaiians who are outside on the perimeter and they might ask, “How come you don’t know these things?” So, you get it both ways. You get it from inside and from outside like how come you don’t know this stuff and why don’t you find out…and in the meanwhile you are just trying to put bread on the table or poi in the bowl.

Chun’s astute understanding of our problems of choice goes back to basic human needs addressing hunger. It is as if she were saying we need to take care of this, and then we can talk about those other things. Part of the outside that Chun refers to is with those who believe Hawaiians are better off today because of American colonization.

Looking at Thurston Twigg-Smith, he thinks that colonization was the best thing that ever happened to Hawaiians, especially under missionary guidance. Look at all the statistics we are all familiar with. We have the highest incarceration rate. Our test scores are the lowest. Our health scores are the lowest, etc. I would argue that perhaps it wasn’t the best thing.

I sometimes look at myself and don’t even realize how colonized I am. Am I thinking in Hawaiian? Or, am I thinking in English? Am I dreaming in Hawaiian or am I dreaming in English? Most of the time it is in English, although there is somewhere inside
that I can’t really articulate well, but there is something that feels very Hawaiian.

I think being an educated person not only deals with our intellect but also includes our intuition, instinct, and spirit. When you have these things intersect in a cogitative relationship, then the process of learning is more open and rich. All of these four aspects are as important as the intellect. When you have those things within you, you make different choices.

The four essential cogitative elements that Chun synthesizes as important when making choices are our intellect, intuition, instinct and spirit. Acts of making choices that are conscious and personal are revealed throughout the interviews of the other four artists. Making choices is basic and instinctive for artist—without it we could neither hone our skills nor evolve our aesthetic sensibility and cognition of our artistic concepts.

She continued to explain her challenges as a carver of traditional implements. Her identity is shaped by these experiences and her accumulation of knowledge is constantly evolving:

So, it is difficult. I find helping a particular hālau with a certain thing or theme…I don’t know a lot about implements or weapons. I can make them, but with the research part I haven’t done research like Umi Kai has done or these other experts who are completely involved in it. I think sometimes this makes it difficult because you get questioned, but that is not necessarily a bad thing…so, why did you
design it this way or that way. It is interesting for me because I am learning constantly both within and without.

Chun said that strong family ties and parenting, her age and gender, and her education formed her sense of identity. She pointed out the difficulties many Hawaiians face today with “getting it from inside and outside…how come you don’t know this stuff and why don’t you find out” and the condescending attitude that crushes our spirit. As intelligent and well-read as Chun is, she recognized areas in Hawaiian culture where she lacked expertise—vowing continued search for knowledge and with that a constant evolution of her identity.

Creativity

At this point, our discussion transitioned into the next area of my interest: creativity. Chun often refers to herself as a conceptual artist. Within the context of contemporary Western art, conceptual art is an art where the idea or concept carries more importance than the actual object and its aesthetic design. Often it involves installation art, in which Chun is well versed.

I began with a question about her use of the crucifix and other Christian references. I told Chun that I thought much of her work dealt with Hawaiian values and social issues. I wanted to know how she balanced the conflicts between theories, histories, and practices of Christianity with those of Hawaiian culture, knowledge, and practice. Where did she find common ground and where did she find conflicts?

Okay, I’m not really interested in looking at the balance but rather I am interested in looking at the tension or the intersection
between the two. I am fascinated by the differences and similarities between the two. Inherently both systems contain pretty much the same values. If you study all of the world’s religions, they all contain similar values and lessons. For example, don’t hurt or kill your neighbor, be nice, be kind, be selfless, and help people, etc.

Those similarities and intersections are there, but it is the choices we make whether or not to engage with each other respectfully. This is problematic. This brings tension, and the choices we make can bring tension into a situation. I ask myself questions about what are the motivations that drive us to choose to engage a certain way, either disrespectfully or respectfully. What is it that really drives that force? It is there. I have sometimes made wrong choices and I ask myself, “Why did I do that or why did I speak to someone like I did? Why do people treat each other as they do?”

These passages reveal Chun’s art interest that centers on two major themes. The first is about conflicting social issues within cultural practices. The second concerns the human choices that are made and their inevitable consequences, either purposeful or unintended.

**A Return to Identity**

My next question returned to the issue of identity because of what Chun said regarding making choices. I wanted to further our discussion about the issues of colonization and the affects it had on her as a person and as an artist. My specific
question was what choices had she made, particularly regarding her sense of identity and her art practice, that stemmed out of this history and understanding that she was in this colonial state. What she shared about Wright Elemakule Bowman, Sr. is important for several reasons. He was her kumu and kupuna, both her teacher and elder—he had a tremendous affect on her identification as Hawaiian and on her creative process.

The first choice I made was to engage with Mr. Bowman, Sr.; it was a first experience for me to be educated as a Hawaiian from a Hawaiian. This was not about having to go pay money to take a class, to sit there and memorize, or choose not to go to class. My experience with Mr. Bowman was quite different from traditional Western educational practice. Here we are in his house and now my house. The whole experience was a gift and a real privilege.

It didn’t mean that I paid him money so I could come here. No, I have to sweep the shop. I have to cut the grass, take the rubbish out, and drive him to pick-up supplies, or to the doctor. I had to take him out at night to whatever event he was being honored at. And, talk or have a beer with him during pau hana time and eat lunch, or eat lunch then take a nap and then work.

We would talk about things like what do you think about this wood. Or, what do you think about that and how should this look? How should we design this? And, if we feel like it, do it…if we don’t, don’t. I think it was really important for me to become more aware of these things.
Mr. Bowman was working in wood, which is a very Hawaiian thing. We made a lot of things out of wood, whether they be umeke, canoes, paddles, or ki‘i…or, whatever out of wood because we didn’t work in clay here. The material itself contributed to my exposure to things Hawaiian that I had never been exposed to before. It was also interesting to engage this as an art practice. Mr. Bowman didn’t really consider his work as an art practice, but as an apprenticeship that he lived for over fifty years.

I was able to learn a lot about traditional forms with Mr. Bowman, so, paddles, canoes, o‘o [tilling sticks], all things I was not familiar with. This also included the material. This included the woods themselves like koa, ohia, milo, kamani, and wiliwili all those different kinds of Hawaiian woods and their differences. I was able to learn about the different functions and kino lau that’s involved with them, the different embodiments of Akua in each wood. That opened up a new area for me and in turn led me to reevaluate the impacts of colonization and my own colonial tendencies and ways of thinking.

Several things affected the way Chun saw herself as a Hawaiian when she worked with Bowman. As her artistic practice grew, moving into new directions that included making customary implements—she became adept with carving in traditional ways. Chun would later incorporate these skills into her conceptual/installation work. Learning these skills of traditional carving changed the way she saw how colonized she was.

Bowman passed his cultural knowledge and wisdom on to Chun his student. This passing
of knowledge, was it so different from what many contemporary Hawaiian artists did when sharing what they had found through their works of art when exhibiting? Passing on cultural information from kūpuna to student is a customary Hawaiian practice—a good example is seen in the numerous hula hālau that exist. To further our discussion, I asked Chun to share a few stories about how she and Bowman went about working together.

It is interesting. When I first got here, I wanted to be able to know how to do these things and to repeat them after Mr. Bowman died. I had my sketchbook and had written all of the steps down to make an oʻo. There are a lot of steps even though it looks pretty simple, but it is really complex. I needed to learn how to use each machine; of course, this is not the traditional way to make these things. But, you know I am really glad I have these machines; I love them. One can be critical about these aspects, with using these machines to create what I do. But, these things have helped me to understand and approach it differently.

It is like, “No, donʻt write it down in your book because we are moving too fast. Youʻre slowing me down by taking your notes.” I was writing down every single step so that I could someday come back, look at my book, and be able to replicate it. After a while, it was slowing him down, so I just had to put it aside. Then I just began to watch and observe. He would let me do things and I would work with
him every step of the way; a truly Hawaiian method of learning and teaching.

She redirected her energy from documenting in writing to just focusing with her eye and mind to learn from her kupuna his lesson. There is something wonderful and inspirational with learning and trusting in this manner. It is like both student and teacher catching the same wave on the same board and riding it successfully into shore. Chun continued with her story about Bowman:

After awhile sometimes if he was sick and I had to make a few o'ō [traditional digging stick] okay, I have to do it now. Instead of going into the book, it was just going into here. [Chun points her finger to her head]. I would visualize what this thing would look like and what the steps were. I envisioned it in my mind first so I wouldn’t have to look at my notes. That is when I realized I had learned not to make these things, but to be able to think.

Significant is how Chun transformed herself from just making an object to just thinking—this change impacted her creative process and her sense of being Hawaiian.

I have never made kāla'au [dancing stick] before, so at night before I would go to sleep I would try to figure out how to do it. I think that is what Mr. Bowman did for me; and, Toshiko as well, but more so, because of my closer relationship with Mr. Bowman. Through these exercises he gave me, I learned to practice thinking. That was the greatest part of my education. I think for me that is really what made, and makes, the difference.
That Chun learned to practice thinking from Bowman and cherished this as an important part of her education serves her well as a conceptual artist—conceptual art is about the idea and ideas that come from thinking.

Bowman’s life and what he passed on to Chun is a testament—reaffirmed by her continuance of his legacy she now lives and works in the house and studio that he built—and where we were now conducting this interview. This is exactly what it came down to—the choices that we make and how we engage this environment and engage with people.

**A Return to Creativity**

I wanted to use the point of what Chun refers to, “And, the choices that we make…are important and carry consequences” to segue back to the second part of my inquiry about her creative process. After listening to her thoughts, I considered that the way I had originally stated my research question on creative process could have been stated differently. Perhaps the first question about the creative process should have been less about how an artist develops ideas or what thought was absolutely essential to cultivating ideas and practice, but rather what Chun had spoken about regarding her Hawaiian sensibilities to concepts. I asked Chun what she was trying to say as a contemporary Hawaiian artist as she expressed her ideas in multiple and different forms. Would she summarize the essence of what she was trying to say and do?

I think it changes from piece to piece. Thinking about one facet about existence, I might try to form the piece to that specific idea, whether it is associating America with Ka 'ai a kaia upe, the female
robber who became known for treacherous actions, and equating her with America. So, if I look at our relationship with America, or if I am looking at individual choices, the piece will manifest itself in whatever form it takes from those ideas. But, I don’t have one single thing to say and then try to repeat that in different forms.

I think I take little bits of the larger experience with life and living as an individual within a community, within a society. Yes, I think my foundation is based in an understanding of Hawaiian perspectives, but I think this can cross over to many cultures.

Again, we find an example of how a contemporary Hawaiian artist considers her multiethnic and cultural mix. Chun continued with her thought:

I think everyone experiences that in some sort of way. Yes, we do have different experiences but there are similarities within those differences; and it is in those intersections that I am interested. It can either be wonderful or be very terrible; and it is because of the choices that we make, that is really, really interesting.

What is important to me is how we engage in issues that are specific to this place and how we take our individual Hawaiian experience, translate it, and take it outside of this place. I think it is important we do this, and we need to engage the rest of the world. It can’t just be right here. If you are talking about wanting to make a political statement, then there is only so much you can say here. We
need to understand that power sometimes has to come from outside of the place; some people here become deaf to what has happened.

For example, what do tourists who come to Hawai‘i do? They try to dance some hula, have a luau, and that is it, go to Waikiki and play in the water. But, I think it is very important we speak about these things in relation to other situations so there is a connection and intersection. Only then will people start to engage in ways of thinking that might make them think about making different choices.

I asked her about aesthetics: “In your artwork you touched on the issue of tension rather than balance, or pono. One of my questions is about your sense of aesthetics. If I were to define aesthetics in a Western context it often has to do with notions about beauty.” She replied, “I don’t know about that!” I said, “Okay, could you speak about your sense of your aesthetics in your creative process? How do you use tension in your artwork to bring out what it is you are trying to say?”

I don’t think I have been that successful in bringing out that tension. I am working on that part. I think that would be really interesting to try to depict somehow; but that is difficult to do in a very beautiful way. And, of course I would like for it to be beautiful, whatever beauty is. You know the piece you saw at the Honolulu Academy of Arts, by Won Ju Lim, the projection piece? To me that was really beautiful, but to many others it was difficult. The term for aesthetics covers a very, very wide spectrum. I thought it was an extremely beautiful piece.
When thinking about how to ask Chun this specific question about beauty, I had in mind a particular work of art that she had done. When I first saw it, I could not take my eyes away. I went back several times to see it—its concept, form and placement continues to bring me a great deal of pleasure both to my aesthetic sensibility and what I believe great art does. I said to Chun that I could suggest a piece that I’ve seen of hers that brought the issue of tension and notion of beauty together. I suggested the work at the Center for Hawaiian Studies that she dedicated to her father (see Figure 5.2). She remembered, “Oh! Right, right!” I continued to explain my interpretation of her work: For me each point of the spears issues tension; when I look at it, it is like a baseball game where you have this negative and positive space. Where you have this tension that is created, but it is so elegant in its beauty and its simplicity. Could you speak about this work? This is how she replied:

Okay, well I would like my work to be considered somewhat beautiful and elegant, sure. I think subtlety helps with that. Something that looks really simple can embody and embrace so much more than something that looks really complicated.

With that particular piece, I think there were eight or nine ihe [spears]. It was done with respect and acknowledgement of the abilities of our ancestors who could create these beautiful and functional weapons; they were recontextualized on the wall knowing that they would never ever be used to stick someone; that for me was a metaphor of what was going on with my father. Having that symbolic piece there is about both defense and offense. I wanted to recognize
that he went through a lot. For me, he acted like a noble warrior and
the selection of the ihe was important.

![Figure 5.2 Ua eha Ka Ili I ka Maka O Ka Ihe by Kaili Chun](image)

Kamakakūokalani Center for Hawaiian Studies.

Photographed by Kauʻi Chun.

Reproduced with permission from Kau'i Chun.

The nature of the weapon itself can bring tension. If you have a
gun in the house, it can bring tension to everything, but it can be a
sense of protection as well. With something that can do a lot of
damage, we have the choice to make on how we are going to use that.
And, I think that is really interesting. So, do we use this to kill
somebody or do we use this to protect ourselves.

I also asked Chun about protocol. Because Hawaiians of old followed many
protocols addressing Akua (the gods) and the kino lau (spiritual embodiment of a god) in
the material, asking for permission to use it, I wanted to know what role did personal
protocol play with Chun’s creative process. “Earlier we spoke about Mr. Bowman, and you touched upon some of the things that might be classified as protocol in a sense. Could you speak about your creative process and kinds of protocol you do? It could be as mundane as sweeping the floor before you begin or something like prayer.” She replied:

    Basically I have to get my house in order before I start anything. Everything needs to be clean and everything needs to be put away. That’s my protocol. I do ask for guidance.

    It is very simple. Throughout the day I check in with everything around here and the people who are involved in my life. I think that it is as simple as that, nothing too complicated. I feel the routine I go through is a Hawaiian approach to the creative process.

    Our conversation continued about her creative process. Because Chun is a conceptual artist, I wanted to know how she went about developing her ideas. She replied, “That’s the hard part. I guess it depends on the things you are engaging in life that is important to you at that time.”

    Going back to the use of material, I said, “With regards to materials and your choices of using materials, you spoke about Mr. Bowman and your lessons learned with using traditional woods.” I asked her to speak about her use of material in a sense of metaphor and symbolism. Chun shared her thoughts about material by referring to a collaborative project she had done with another graduate student while completing her Masters of Fine Arts at the University of Hawai’i at Mānoa:

        I think Mr. Bowman was able to open up the wood to me and the element of my work that incorporates wood. But, I think early on I
thought to engage with different kinds of materials to communicate my ideas and thoughts about issues.

The piece I did with Nicole Seu [see Figures 5.3, 5.4], with the bottles, dealt with ideas of identity in relationship to each other, one Hawaiian and one non-Hawaiian who doesn’t feel haole; because haole has become being more associated with being White rather than being non-Hawaiian. So, who is she? She didn’t feel White but with talking to me...when people go away from here to college, people say, “oh, you’re from Hawai‘i...oh, you’re Hawaiian. No, no, no, no...” Sometimes when people go away they just give up and say, “oh, yeh, yeh, yeh...yeh, I’m Hawaiian,” when they really are not; especially knowing there are native indigenous people here. That is why Nicole and I did this project together because that was where she was at that; there was no difference between local and Hawaiian. For me there is a major difference. I showed this by using bottles and Xerox copies in ways that non-Hawaiians image us—image Hawaiians.
O ke aka ka ‘oukou o ka i o ka makou. (Yours the shadow; ours the flesh).

Installation by Kaili Chun and Nicole Seu.

University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa Art Gallery. Found at Kailichun.com

Reproduced with permission by Kaili Chun.

I equate us with the earth or the stones or the water or the sand or the lava or the trees, etc. We can’t talk about native indigenous manifestation of life if we are not talking about those things equally. I
think that is where geographic maps or geological maps or anthropological studies or even artist’s renderings of us are someone else’s image of who we are. I think all people struggle to understand who they are.

Exhibition

An exhibition space is not always a neutral zone where things rest in harmony. It is often a place of discord for conflicting ideologies and beliefs. When an exhibition takes on controversial themes, like Hawaiian resistance to colonialism, for many contemporary Native Hawaiian artists, the gallery space becomes the battleground. A survey of Kaili Chun’s work confirms her relish for taking part in these conflicts as she battles with opposing cultural values and logical worldviews. Chun’s work can be difficult to understand if a viewer lacks particular knowledge about Hawaiian culture and history. Her full-scale installation works are filled with symbolic meaning and require well-composed interpretative text that helps to tell the story. Her works, when residing within the exhibition space, intersect the element of conflict with kaona. The Hawaiian terms kaona (a coded hidden meaning) and ‘ike (to see, feel, perceive) are often used to explain meanings and culturally significant associations among works of art in Native Hawaiian exhibitions.

I asked Chun to address my questions about her experiences with museums, galleries, and exhibitions. “When you exhibit, how do you consider your work in spaces? My assumptions are that when you enter a space, you are working in nontraditional Hawaiian spaces. What experiences have you had with museums, their curators, and
critics? Do you ever worry if your message is being heard, and how do you go about making sure that it is heard?” Her reply was positive:

With the Contemporary [Museum] and the Honolulu Academy of Arts…Golden! I have had fantastic experiences with them. John Koga at the Contemporary was so helpful with picking up the work, taking it there, discussing ideas about the space, and installing it. I know the space that I am going to go into, especially with those two shows in particular. So, I’ve had great experiences with the Contemporary Museum. The Honolulu Academy of Arts was just outstanding. They were really good. In this last show, the Nau Ka Wai, if I had that kind of experience every time, it would be so beautiful [See Figures 5.5, 5.6, 5.7].

I asked, “How about art critics and writers?” She said, “They have been good to me! [Good hearty laughter]. I haven’t had many complaints, and I think they have understood my work.” I asked, “At the Honolulu Advertiser before Marcia Morse there was Joan Rose. How was your relationship with her?” Chun replied, “Well, she kind of liked me, so I think that she was trying to understand the Hawaiian situation as well. And so, my write-ups were pretty good.”

I told her about a write-up that I remembered. In her article, Rose posed a question about when was it appropriate to use the American flag and in general when was it appropriate for Hawaiian artists to use non-Hawaiian items in their artwork.
Figure 5.5 *O'o* sticks or traditional Hawaiian digging sticks by Kaili Chun Honolulu Museum of Art⁵, *Artists of Hawai‘i 2012* exhibition.

Found at Kailichun.com

Reproduced with permission from Kaili Chun.

I asked, “Was she being critical about your use of the American flag, and how you had burned references about deceit then laid in on the ground with a pole stuck to the 50th star?” She replied:

I don’t think she was being critical. I think she brought it up perhaps for others who were commenting on that. And, I don’t think it was brought up in a real critical way, that she just acknowledged that that was a concern about that particular piece.

⁵ The Honolulu Academy of Arts founded in 1922 changed its name to the Honolulu Museum of Art in March 2012.
I asked her, “Do you ever worry how your work will be understood once it’s in public?” And, “What kinds of things do you do to assure that the public gets your message?” She replied:

Sometimes I worry and sometimes I don’t. When I feel my piece is pretty complete and I feel it says what it needs to say, then I feel great about it. I welcome multiple interpretations about my work, and I value different perspectives. For me, a piece becomes more meaningful because people have different ideas about it.
Figure 5.6 *Nau ka wae* installation by Kaili Chun

Honolulu Academy of Arts

Reproduced with permission from Kaili Chun. Found at Kailichun.com
Artist perspectives on interpretation are interesting because so often an unknowing viewer who might lack the cultural understanding or language of the maker misses the artist’s original intent or message. I find Chun’s position on this rather refreshing. Chun continued with her thoughts about her artistic process.

But, there are some pieces I put out there that I am not so confident about and not so engaged with; and sometimes they are transition pieces between one strong one, and then I’m trying to find my way to another one. I just have to acknowledge the function of that piece and not worry about people getting it or not getting it. Sometimes it’s better that way. And…I, I, it’s nice when they can kind of understand what I am saying, but I think it is even better if they
interpret it their own way and come out from the piece with something different. That is what I think is important.

Turning to another issue, I asked her, “In what way is exhibition in a group show with Hawaiians different from when exhibiting with non-Hawaiians? What kinds of considerations do you think about?”

Our work historically was fantastic. We have the finest kapa. We have the finest weaving. We have the finest ki'i and canoe building. Our aesthetics is very different from other Polynesian aesthetics. We don’t have a whole lot of carving like the wa'a, the canoes, the paddles like the Māori, or the Marquesans or the Tahitians. Ours is very refined. It is very, very sophisticated in its simplicity. I think to a certain degree…we are in a flux here. There is good Hawaiian art and there is really bad Hawaiian art. We have to recognize that.

Our standards have to come up for contemporary Hawaiian art. Not everything is good. You can look at it from a Western approach and look at it formally, but you can also look at it from a Hawaiian perspective and I don’t think they are so far off. That’s my own personal opinion.

I wanted to know how she felt about the Māori trademark idea. What did she think about Māori hālau type schools of art where issues of quality could be addressed in learning through practice? What did she think about a place or a school where ideas could be worked through in a safe learning environment before they were put into public viewing?
This is an interesting idea, and I think we have this in place in regards to [hula] hālau. Each school deals with issues of quality according to their standards, values, and practices. It differs from hālau to hālau. Within their system, they can look at what is being done and make judgments about their work. In our visual arts community, we don’t have that yet. Some of this is happening through lua and its engagement with weapons. So, there is dance, battle, and traditional types of engagements rather than...us who are looking at contemporary issues...I don’t know; maybe it’s not so different; maybe it is just looking at different forms that we use. Hula has transcended with awana styles with new types of hula pushing the limits.

Then I probed into the other auxiliary areas of my research on exhibition space and marketing. I wanted to know her thoughts about what were essential and important to her when exhibiting in public spaces. How did she come to terms with commercial marketing, selling, exhibiting her works of art? What experiences did she have dealing with gallery owners and their clients? How did she feel about being included in public and private collections?

I would like to be welcomed and successful. I have no problem with selling my work at all because I need to make a living doing this. What is interesting is that most of my work is multi component. Okay, like the stones [from the Academy show], someone can’t really incorporate that into their home as a complete installation. Even a
corporation couldn’t put it into their building. It would be cool if some collector bought it, and at least somebody could see it someday. I find this very problematic for my work.

I also find it interesting that the Hawaiian community; because I trained under Mr. Bowman, don’t see a lot of my contemporary work, which I consider my work. They look at the paddles, o‘o [refer to Figure 5.5], canoes and stuff like that and that is all they think I do. I find it interesting that the Hawaiian community considers that if you are Hawaiian you are an artisan and if you are non-Hawaiian you are an artist. I think there are different kinds of values in the use of these terms.

I remember when I couldn’t say that I was an artist. I didn’t feel that I had produced work strong enough to say that I am an artist. The life and endeavor of an artist can be daunting. If you are an artisan people will pay you according to what you produce. They are not paying you for your ideas. If you are an artist they pay you for your ideas. That is a different value. They might pay you one-hundred thousand dollars for your idea and they will pay a hundred for your kāla'au, for your o'o trying to get the best deal possible. It is a different way to think about yourself and a different way for us to think about ourselves. This is very interesting. If you paint or if you draw, then you are an artist, but if you work in natural materials, like wood you are an artisan.
My final question in the interview was about future possibilities for exhibiting Native Hawaiian artwork. I asked Chun if she had any ideas or thoughts about a possible contemporary Hawaiian visual arts museum that exhibited collected material and also new exhibitions. I did not expect her reply; I thought she would relish this idea of having an exclusive contemporary Native Hawaiian museum. Instead she reaffirmed her belief for bringing together many voices so all could share in the knowledge of each other—in a grand discussion!

I think it would be outstanding to have a space dedicated to contemporary Hawaiian art. I also think that to be valued it would be very important in the larger society to include other works from other peoples. This should include other Indigenous people and beyond. For example, if you included contemporary American work, you could develop relationships between artists. The net working starts to happen between people and starts an expansion of ideas outside of this place.

Summary

Identity.

Chun described herself as a woman in her early forties born and raised in Hawai‘i. Her thoughts about identity and what a person becomes and thinks reflected the importance of family influences, surroundings and environment. She spoke about her positive feelings about being Hawaiian and acknowledged her many different ethnicities.

Chun said that her education at Kamehameha Schools had played a guiding role on how she considered herself. Her dad is Dr. Michael Chun, recently retired and past
President and Headmaster of Kamehameha School Kapālama Campus. She spoke about her appreciation for how this school provided her a world-class education that enabled her to understand and participate in the American system and taught and nurtured her about the values of Hawaiian culture.

Chun went on to say that she was not a Hawaiian speaker and thought this reflected the impact of colonization and the subsequent commoditization of Hawaiian culture. Even though she felt a strong kinship with being Hawaiian, Chun had doubts about who she was as a Hawaiian. She lamented: “I sometimes look at myself and don’t even realize how colonized I am. Am I thinking in Hawaiian? Or, am I thinking in English? Am I dreaming in Hawaiian or am I dreaming in English?”

Chun’s understanding of her identity as a Hawaiian shaped the manner in which she worked as an artist. When she spoke about studying under Wright Bowman, Sr. she referred to the subject of thinking—she said the most valuable thing she learned from Bowman was how to think from a Hawaiian perspective. She said, “The first choice I made was to engage with Mr. Bowman, Sr.; it was a first experience for me to be educated as a Hawaiian from a Hawaiian.”

Creativity.

Chun believed that her process of thinking creatively was intertwined with her intellect, intuition, instinct, and spirit. It was this amalgamation of her heart, mind, and soul that enabled Chun to create art—that gave her the inspirational ideas.

Reminiscing about her past as an apprentice to Bowman, Chun spoke about their routine in the studio/woodshop. “I sweep the shop…cut the grass, take the rubbish out,
and drive him to pick-up supplies, or to the doctor. We talked or had a beer during pau hana time and ate lunch, or ate lunch then took a nap and then worked.”

She recalled, “I was able to learn about the different functions and kino lau [spiritual form] that’s involved with each type of wood, or the different embodiments of Akua [God] in each wood.” When learning these different attributes about each wood, she became more aware of a material’s metaphysical power as well as its physical quality.

Learning traditional carving of Hawaiian tools and implements became part of Chun’s foundation supporting her identity as a contemporary Hawaiian and her artistic practice. She talked about how a working piece would eventually manifest itself into a form that carried the meaning of her ideas and what this revelation meant to her as a Hawaiian. She thought about how she took, “little bits of the larger experience with life and living as an individual within a community, within a society.” Chun understood that these life experiences were based on her understanding of Hawaiian perspectives and were part of her creative process that became her artistic foundation.

Her art was to be engaged with the tensions between the differences of Hawaiian and Western cultures—to show where these different societies met, overlapped and were in conflict. What was important for Chun was how she engaged in issues that were specific to Hawai‘i and how she took her experiences as a Hawaiian, translated them, and was able to take them beyond Hawai‘i, or in her words, “outside of this place.”

She thought it was imperative to engage with the rest of the world about the problems facing Hawaiians. “It can’t just be right here.” If an artist wanted to make a political statement, Chun understood that Hawai‘i’s local art arena was limited. She said,
“There is only so much you can say here.” She understood that at times the power to make a difference came from outside of Hawai‘i.

**Exhibition.**

If Chun’s political views about Hawaiians living within an American dominated social structure informed her art, I wanted to know how the social conditions of Hawaiians affected her creative process and her choices of how and where to exhibit. Did she see the opportunity to exhibit as an essential part and an extension of her conceptual ideas that informed her art? Was the showing of her ideas in an exhibition as important to her as the process of making the art in her studio?

Chun was extremely grateful that she had the opportunity to exhibit her work at Hawai‘i’s premier venue for art exhibition the Honolulu Academy of Art. Her installation, *Nau ka wae (the choice belongs to you)* (reference Figures 5.6, 5.7, 5.8) was an example of the importance that Chun placed on what she wants to say in her art work and where she chooses to strategically exhibit work. *Nau ke wai* was about pushing us to think of the choices we make and their human consequences. It was about affirming the ways in which individual choices, made each day, could be both a force with consequences that empower and shape our lives. It was specifically about local events and personal choices of historical figures that helped to shape Hawaiian history. By choosing to place her installation work at the Honolulu Academy of Art, the premier art museum in Hawai‘i, Chun was able to place her art within easy access to the local community and with visitors from around the world that came to the museum.
In this summary, I have strung lei, not of flowers, but of material taken from Chun’s interview that I believed were salient responses to my questions about issues of identity, creative process and exhibition. What I found was an engaging artist who had a great respect for her identity as a Hawaiian. Chun’s path is unique because of her formation as a person and as an artist who draws from both her Western culture and traditional Hawaiian ways of understanding the world. Her contribution to contemporary Native Hawaiian art is invaluable in that she exemplifies how heritage and identity are deeply rooted in an artistic life—a life that reaches beyond the sanctuary of her studio as she relishes sharing what she has made and discovered in the arena of exhibition.
CHAPTER SIX: IMAIKALANI KALAHELE—THE ROPE MAKER: A WEAVER OF STORIES

Figure 6.1 Pa (detail of mural) by Imaikalani Kalahele.

Kamakakūokalani Center for Hawaiian Studies, University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa.

Reproduced with permission from Imaikalani Kalahele.

Photographed by Kau'i Chun.

Introduction

Imaikalani Kalahele has been one of the leaders of the contemporary Hawaiian art movement since its inception in the early 1970s. He has played crucial roles with organizing Hawaiian art and poetry events and has spoken out at public forums regarding Hawaiian issues. Kalahele was one of six Hawaiian master artists honored at Maoli Art Month in March 2006 at the Bishop Museum’s Long Vestibule Gallery. Noelle Kahanu
organized this event. Kalahele takes the concept of weaving and uses that idea while working as a sculptor or painter. Hawaiian historical events and ancient mo‘olelo (stories) are uniquely woven into his works of art. The murals Pa and E Laka E are narratives that capture Kalahele’s enjoyment of telling a good story (refer to Figures 6.1, 6.2, and 6.3).

Figure 6.2 Pa (detail of mural) by Imaikalani Kalahele.

Kamakakūokalani Center for Hawaiian Studies, University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa.

Dedicated to Uncle Sam Lono (Man in yellow cape)

Reproduced with permission from Imaikalani Kalahele.

Photographed by Kau'i Chun.

Kalahele shared with me that the man in the foreground with the yellow cape (refer to Figure 6.2) is Uncle Sam Lono and the woman in the foreground dressed in red
(refer to Figure 6.3) is Auntie Emma DeFries. According to Kalahele during his youth these two people were instrumental for inspiring and guiding his ideas about what it meant to be Hawaiian. He told me that all the current schools and movements of Hawaiian thought today had come from these two kūpuna who lead the way during the early 1960s.

This poem by Kalahele is part of the dedication plaque for the Pa mural at Kamakakūokalani Center for Hawaiian Studies, University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa. Uncle Sam Lono was a kahuna la‘au lapa‘au (a traditional Hawaiian medicine priest) who believed he was a direct descendant of the Hawaiian god Lono.

_I ka Makahiki: Lono the man, Lono the chief, Lono the God._
_I ka Makahiki: Lono of the dark clouds, of the rain, of the forest._
_I ka Makahiki: Lono the jealous husband, Lono the murderer, Lono the madman._
_I ka Makahiki: Lono of the Harvest, of the warless months, of the games._
_I ka Makahiki: The grounds are ready, kai moana awaits, and Lono speaks._

_Pa!
_I ka Makahiki
_I ka Makahiki
_I ka Makahiki
_I ka Makahiki_

Makahiki is the period of the Hawaiian lunar year dedicated to the god Lono. It coincides with the rising and setting of the star Makali‘i or Pleiades.
Figure 6.3 *E Laka E* (detail of mural) by Imaikalani Kalahele.

Kamakahoukalani Center for Hawaiian Studies, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa.

Dedicated to Auntie Emma DeFries (Woman dressed in red).

Reproduced with permission from Imaikalani Kalahele.

Photographed by Kau'i Chun.

Kalahele dedicated this poem to Auntie Emma DeFries and it is part of the dedication plaque for the *E Laka E* mural at Kamakahoukalani Center for Hawaiian Studies, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. Auntie Emma DeFries was a kahuna la‘au lapa‘au (a traditional Hawaiian medicine priestess) renowned for her skill in hula (dance). The poem is addressing Laka who is the goddess of hula.
Famous are you Laka. Laka the storyteller, the documenter, the historian.
E Laka e! Laka of the forest, the tree cutter, the chipmaker.
E Laka e! E kū mau mau. Laka our sister. Laka our brother.
Laka dancer through time.
E Laka E!
E Laka E!
E Laka E!

I approached my interview with Imaikalani Kalahele with personal apprehension and caution. The reasons for my trepidation were based on reflections of our first encounter from the distant past in 1997-98. At that time, I was a returning non-traditional student trying to finish an art degree that I had abandoned twenty years before. I had spent those in-between years as a very typical ‘middle-class’ American living on the continent chasing a career as a consultant and contractor designing and building commercial foodservice facilities. Kalahele, as we will see from this interview, spent his time primarily creating art and fighting for Hawaiian issues. At that time, our ideological differences about social political beliefs and understandings along with our family and personal histories were poles apart. Fortunately, these differences have been replaced with mutual respect and friendship.

Over time, several things helped to change things, but the turnaround came about gradually. Through those years, we worked collaboratively putting together a number of art exhibits in downtown Honolulu galleries. These exhibits took place as part of the Maoli Art Month (MAMo), an annual celebration.

We had also shared ten days and nights of blissful art making during the PIKO conference in June 2007 at Waimea, Hawai‘i. Over one hundred and fifty indigenous artists were invited. They came from Hawai‘i and around the Pacific Rim, including Samoan from Samoa, Māori from Aoteroa, Aborigine from Australia, and artists from
Torres Strait Islands, and Papua New Guinea. The PIKO gathering included indigenous artists representing First Nation Peoples of Canada and American Tribal natives from the Pacific Northwest, Arizona, New Mexico, California and New York. Besides working on his art, Kalahele played a crucial role as the awa master in the awa ceremony.\(^6\)

Kalahele eventually invited me to show a few paintings at his annual all-Hawaiian art show at The Queen Liliuokalani Children Center (QLCC), held each year on the second day of September. To date (2010), this is the thirtieth year that Kalahele has put together an art show celebrating the Queen’s birthday. Our relationship strengthened further as I taught art to his granddaughter, a middle school student at Hālau Lokahi Public Charter School (HL).

During the spring semester of 2010, I helped with arrangements to have several of our students at HL participate in a mural project Kalahele was doing for the Kalihi Community Health Center. He was one of three artists commissioned to do murals for community health centers located in Kalihi, Wai‘anae, and Moloka‘i. His mural celebrated the history, people, landscape and fauna of the ahupua‘a of Kalihi.

Beginning in November 2010 we exhibited together with thirty other Hawaiian artists at the Hawai‘i Convention Center with an ongoing exhibition of contemporary Hawaiian art called Maoli Art in Real Time or MAiRT. These special events are coordinated by Maile Meyer of Na Mea, who negotiated with the Center to put on art exhibitions featuring contemporary Hawaiian artists for visiting conventioneers. Through these formative years of building a new relationship founded on respecting and valuing

\(^6\) Awa is often used as a ceremonial drink during special occasions. The drink is made from the root of (*Piper methysticum*), a member of the pepper family and is found throughout the Pacific region.
our differences and similarities of ideas, we became respectful friends with a genuine liking for each other’s art.

I first met Kalahele while completing my Bachelors of Fine Arts degree at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa (UHM). He was invited as a visiting scholar whose position had been funded by a Ford Foundation grant. He came to the university at the request of a group of Native Hawaiian art students lead by Herman Pi‘ikea Clark. They had become disenchanted with the Western-biased ideology permeating the predominately white American faculty. They were frustrated by the department’s policies on employment practices that, since its inception, had mostly left out Hawaiians from the faculty in both tenure and nontenure positions. They were likewise frustrated about a curriculum and degree structure that excluded and marginalized Hawaiian perspectives in art history and artistic practice.

These Native Hawaiian students were fighting for the creation of a Hawaiian based multidiscipline fine arts program within the University’s Art Department. Their proposal to the Art Department included Bachelors (BFA) and Masters (MFA) degrees. Part of their strategy was to bring to the UHM campus a noted Hawaiian artist who was a community leader and activist and who had the status of a kupuna within the Hawaiian arts and activist community.

Kalahele’s job was to spend a year at the UHM Art Department giving lectures and conducting group discussions with students and faculty both inside the department and with other affiliated disciplines. His intention and mission was to shake-up the status quo and comfort zones of the institution, administration, faculty, and students. His
presence would help facilitate critical discussion and help move forward an agenda for systemic changes.

At that time, mentally, I was not prepared to meet head on with the likes of Imaikalani Kalahele. It was in one of Kalahele’s in-class group discussions that I first clashed with his ideas and what I thought he represented: bigotry and ignorance. Here was this big, barefooted man, who spoke in a deep reverberating baritone voice, had long graying hair and beard, and wore rimless reading glasses. He wore baggy khaki Bermuda shorts and worn, but clean, faded tee shirts. His favorite words were “fuck!” and “hello?” I was shocked! When I got together enough courage to challenge him about something he had said, I saw him raise one eyebrow. I could read his mind, “Oh, one wise guy.”

Over the years things changed. I have changed. In preparing the transcription and viewing the videotape of our interview, I realized that Kalahele has remained forthright and stoic in his beliefs and practice. He continues to offer critical and thoughtful perspectives about life and, in his case, a life lived in the bare feet of a contemporary Hawaiian man. When he speaks, people listen. His prophetic perspectives are one of the reasons why he is considered a kupuna in our Native Hawaiian arts community. A good example of his reflective and wise counsel happened on a recent visit to his home to review my first draft of the chapter about Kalahele. He circled the words “kill haole day” and noted, “don’t think you got it right!!...Talk to me about this.” I had written: “I remember thinking that there was ‘no way’ I could learn anything useful from this guy. My way of thinking was not ready for Kalahele’s recollection of working with young Hawaiian students about poetry based on “kill haole day.”
He started by saying that this was a very provocative statement that gets blown out of proportion in the media. But, at that class discussion (over twelve years ago), he did not say that. He was referring to KATH or “kill all the haole” from your brain. It came out of a discussion with kūpuna, working with the Office of Hawaiian Affairs, and disenfranchised Hawaiian youth, asking the question, “What is a Hawaiian?” It was about decolonizing the mind.

His other gifts lay in copious amounts of prophetic writings in prose and poetry and a profusion of sculpture, book illustrations, and large-scale public murals and two-dimensional works too numerous to list. Whenever there is a conference, meeting or call for community service concerning Hawaiian arts issues, Kalahele is present.

These were the reasons why I am truly humbled that he accepted my invitation to become part of my research. My research was enriched by his participation because of his critical thoughts and beliefs about how and why contemporary Native Hawaiian visual artists construct their identities. His understanding about how Hawaiian artists think and eventually materialize their ideas into acts of creative expression that become works of art is clear. Kalahele’s experience with exhibiting in group shows has given him a wealth of knowledge about why and how contemporary Native Hawaiian artists need to exhibit their works of art in public.

Earlier, I stated that I began my interview with Kalahele with trepidation. While viewing and completing the transcription of our videotaped interview I realized that I had acted very differently when compared with my interviews with the other artists. I found myself modifying my approach to the interview; not so in the consistency of my
questions but rather in my style of speech, tonality of voice and frequent use of Pidgin English.

I do not consider myself a native speaker of local-style Pidgin English; looking back at the video I felt uncomfortable realizing how haole-fied my accent was. For my interview with Kalahele I felt a need to speak Pidgin English. I acted instinctively with an intuitive awareness of switching between pidgin and standardized American English because Kalahele spoke that way; he flowed with ease going back and forth. He used either language with pleasure and to his advantage when making his points.

His poem about an old man making rope captured what was evident about Imaikalani Kalahele’s life as his mana'o (thoughts) unfolded during our interview. He was the old man making rope; one by one, strand by strand, becoming part of the collective memory of our people, still growing, proud and good.

Make Rope

Imaikalani Kalahele

Get this old man
he live by my house
he just make rope
every day
you see him making rope
if
he not playing his ukulele
or
picking up his mo'opuna
he making
rope

and nobody wen ask him
why?
how come?
he always making
rope
morning time...making rope
day time...making rope
night time...making rope
all the time...making rope

must get enuf rope
for make Hōkūle'a already

  most time
  he no talk
  too much
  to nobody
  he just sit there
  making rope

one day
we was partying by
  his house
  you know
  playing music
talking stink
about the other
guys them

  I was just
coming out of the bushes
  in back the house
and
  there he was
under the mango tree
  making rope
  and he saw me

  all shame
I look at him and said
  Aloha Papa
  he just look up
  one eye
  and said
  Howzit! What? Party?
  Alright!

  I had to ask
  E kala mai, Papa
  I can ask you one question?
How come
every day you make rope
at the bus stop
you making rope
outside McDonald’s drinking coffee
you making rope.
How come?

He wen
look up again
you know
only the eyes move kine
putting on more
strand of coconut fiber
on to the kaula
he make one
fast twist
and said
The Kaula of our people
is 2,000 years old
boy
some time…good
some time…bad
some time…strong
some time…sad
but most time
us guys
just like this rope

one by one
strand by strand
we become
the memory of our people
and
we still growing
so
be proud
do good
and
make rope
boy
make rope.

(Kalahele, 2002, p. 29); used with permission by Kalahele.
As in our interview, his prophetic words in this poem spoke to the contemporary condition of Hawaiians who continue to make art today. The underlining message Kalahele promotes encourages Hawaiian artists to continue to make rope and conceive creative ideas that can be transformed into works of art. He is saying that these works of art are the material evidence of contemporary Hawaiian culture. These works of art are building the kaula (cordage) of our culture.

**Description of the interview setting.**

I am offering this description of the interview setting to provide the reader an insight into the working and living environment of Kalahele and his family. I believe this information is important because Kalahele’s life as an artist and his artwork are influenced by this home and work environment. Kalahele lives and does his art work in a large ranch style home just off the H-1 freeway going Ewa at the Houghtailing street exit along Halona Street.

His house made of tongue-and-groove wood slat was painted light brown and protected by a roof of asphalt shingles. A gigantic monkey pod tree cast its gentle shade over the house, offering protection from the elements above. The home sat discreetly tucked away; there was a chain-link fence fronted by a ten-foot-tall mock orange hedge, thick and green, that shielded the bedroom windows. The house was just to the left of the entrance of the main parking area and was part of the Queen Lili‘uokalani Children Center (QLCC) in Honolulu, Palama district. The Ali‘i trust of Queen Lili‘uokalani, the last reigning monarch of the Kingdom of Hawai‘i endowed the Center. Its sole purpose was to support orphan children with preference to Hawaiians. To the west, his home and
studio was a stone’s throw from the access road fronting the freeway. On the other side, the north side, one could see up high on the heights the sprawling Kapālama campus of The Kamehameha Schools with its buildings rising above the urban landscape of Kalihi district below. That school was the sole beneficiary of an Ali’i trust endowed by the estate of Princess Bernice Pauahi Bishop. It is one of the wealthiest private schools in the world comprising elementary, middle and high school campuses on the islands of O’ahu, Maui, and Hawaiʻi. In addition, it offers scholarships for preschool Hawaiian children and post-Baccalaureate college students. Its primary purpose is to educate Hawaiian children.

Another Hawaiian institution, the Bishop Museum, lies west of Kalahele’s home less than half a mile away. It houses the personal effects of Princess Pauahi Bishop and other Ali’i whose possessions were handed down to her. The museum with its newly renovated Hawaiian Hall houses the single largest collection of Hawaiian treasures in the entire world. Kalahele’s residence and studio sat within a short distance from all of these major Hawaiian institutions. He and his art are in the piko (center) of Hawaiian thought and operate within the cross hairs of conflicting social-political forces that shape the reality of contemporary Hawaiian life.

Across from his home was an extensive complex of buildings constructed of concrete masonry, glazed glass paned windows, and tiled roofs. The buildings have expansive overhanging eaves made from sheets of patina copper. A low laying perimeter berme of pōhaku (rock), reminiscent of heiau (Hawaiian temple), surrounds the buildings imparting a sense of hallowed ground, of a protected space. Landscaped sections of St. Augustine grass studded with large pōhaku and accented with lau hala (pandanus), niu (coconut), lawai (fern) and ti leaf envelop you as you walk along the wide pathways.
Figure 6.4 Statue of Queen Lili‘uokalani.

Queen Lili‘uokalani Children Center, Honolulu, Hawai‘i.

Photographed by Kau‘i Chun.

Just past the stand-alone reception building was a patio courtyard (see figure 6.4). Small polished pebbles sat at the feet of large pōhaku; they shared the space with mondo grass, fern, ti leaf and palm circling around a Koi fishpond with islands of floating water lily. Nestled amongst all of this tropical beauty standing proudly on her pedestal was the bronze statue of the Queen dressed in garlands of crown flower and maile lei. It looked to be a scaled down version of the life size statue that can be found between the Hawai‘i State Capital building and ‘Iolani Palace. Down from there was a hallway lined with photographs of current and past trustees of this esteemed Ali‘i trust. A beautiful photograph of the Queen, elegant but simply dressed had its own special space along the wall. She sits comfortable in her posture of majestic dignity; her kind benevolent eyes
knowingly gazing, retired from the painful journey and years of struggle to regain her lost kingdom and protecting her people.

Turn the corner and you will find the executive boardroom paneled in rich koa wood and its built-in wood and glass display cabinets. In the middle of the room sat a twenty-five by eight foot koa table surrounded by koa chairs. The smell of oiled wood engulfs your senses.

Close by was Kalahele’s office. It was tucked away in a large hallway closet just before you reach the restrooms. On the outer door was posted a poster celebrating MAMO. His regular daytime job was janitor. Inside his office you can find all kinds of things from paintings, books, paper and supplies. As you walk down the hallways you immediately notice that the walls are full of art. Kalahele has diligently collected works over many years from contemporary Hawaiian artists like Eric Enos, Bob Freitas, Carl Pao and Kawena. His eclectic collection also included traditional works of kapa cloth and canoe paddles.

Kalahele was more than the janitor who cleaned and took care of these beautiful facilities with its landscaped grounds. On the day I went back to QLCC to gather additional information for my research the several aunty receptionists were eager to share with me an artist rendering that Kalahele had prepared. It was an illustration of a proposed memorial for a recently deceased kupuna. Her monument in the form of a four-foot tall ahu (altar) constructed of pōhaku with a bronze plaque would be built in one of the courtyards. There would also be a tree planted in her memory.

On the day of the interview, I arrived with my super 8 video recorder and back-up audio tape recorder. It was mid-morning Monday, August 13 2007. I went up the few
wooden steps to his front-screened door and knocked. I needed to be careful where I stepped because on the small front porch there laid a dozen or more pairs of rubber slippers of various sizes and colors. This took me by surprise but I quickly remembered that Kalahele and his wife Eunice had a large extended family. A young child greeted me and I said, “I am here to meet Imaikalani.” He turned around and called out “dad.” Then he said, “he stay outback.” I went around to the side yard and there was Kalahele. He greeted me warmly and said, “shoots, we go in the garage. That’s where my studio stay.”

We entered into a space full of artworks, some finished and some in progress. They shared the space with an assortment of things, an electric guitar, ipu gourds, a mixture of organized used bottles and cans, a collection of art materials and a potpourri of supplies and stuff. Some were placed on a makeshift table and on the floor, while even more hung from the walls. Others found a home wherever there was room. During our interview, what had appeared to me chaotic in his studio, it became clear and evident that Kalahele knew where everything was. This was his studio and its organization reflected his unique process of thinking, creating and making.

We cleared out a space and then I found something to sit on and got ready to work. Kalahele sat on a stool in front of one of his large triptych vertical ink paintings on canvas; a work in progress. And, I sat opposite him sandwiched between a table and a casual pathway.

Identity

I had decided to open the interview by not asking him to respond immediately to my research questions. In fact I did not ask him those questions until well into the
eighteenth minute. I wanted an *ice-breaker*; and because he sat in front of this painting (see Figure 6.5), I felt that asking him to speak about the painting was a great way to begin. To let Kalahele just talk was fortuitous. At the end of that opening part of our interview, I realized Kalahele’s mana'o had begun to address my three main research questions.

He spoke about Hawaiian issues of identity; and his description of his painting revealed his conceptual thinking and creative process. Kalahele spoke about the importance of Papa (Earth Mother) in Hawaiian genealogy. “The *she* in the painting or woman is Papa, because all of the genealogy goes back to Papa. We all go back to Papa… we come from Papa…we come from Po…we come up through our deities.”

He linked Hawaiian identity through Hawaiians conceptions of genealogy and bloodlines reaffirming my belief that our affinity with genealogy influences our identity and art.

One of the reasons they have their pedigree is because they breed. This is how we kept our bloodlines. They [the three Ali‘i in his painting] were bred to breed. They were the high of the high. They kept the lines. It was off these lines that we were supposed to be able to trace from where we came from. All of a sudden they were gone! What happened? When we look at Nāhi’ena‘ena, Kamāmalu and Liholiho, we see a group of royalty that went from the kapu to Christianity.

If you look at all three of them, they were all half siblings, they all died young. They all died childless. Liholiho and Kamāmalu
[brother and sister] were married. This was an interesting period if we use the Ali‘i thing, if we use the Kumulipo and look at things from this route that these siblings Liholiho and Kamāmalu were married. This is how the line was kept clean, and in our old system that was important.

To my surprise it was evident that Kalahele had begun to answer my question about Hawaiian identity before it had been posed. And that he was able to do this by speaking about one singular work of art supported my belief that works of art are essential to Hawaiian cultural heritage.

The idea that the intrinsic meaning of a work of art as intended by the artist supports my belief that individual works of art, at the highest level of cognitive experience, become cultural reservoirs of ʻike kūhohonu (deep knowledge). Kalahele’s words taken from the text transcription of our interview lends support to this idea:

I think art needs to say something. It needs to have substance. It needs to say something about the society that it comes from. If it is then it is wallpaper. I am not interested in doing wallpaper.
Figure 6.5, fourth panel of *Pehea Ka Manaʻo? Me Hea Ka ʻŌlelo?*  
by Imaikalani Kalahele, painting/drawing.  
Reproduced with permission from Imaikalani Kalahele.  
Photographed by Kauʻi Chun.
Kalahele’s painting about Nāhiʻenaʻena, Liholiho and Kamāmalu is a poignant example of this. In figure 6.5, part of the triptych painting where we began our interview, Kalahele said that the ʻāina and lā'au represent where Hawaiians came from, and the urban sprawl about the kiʻi heads are where they now live in. This fourth panel from the three aliʻi series of Nāhiʻenaʻena, Liholiho and Kamāmalu was sewn as part of a quilt onto the backside of an upside down Hawaiian flag (see Figure 6.6) for the Bishop Museum exhibition titled *Ili Iho: The Surface Within*, 2008 – 2009.

![Figure 6.6 Pehea Ka Mana ʻo? Me Hea Ka ʻOlelo?](image)

by Imaikalani Kalahele, mixed medium quilt. Reproduced with permission from Imaikalani Kalahele. Photographed by Kauʻi Chun.
This series of paintings goes directly to the question about Hawaiian identity. That Kalahele is able to explain pre-Christian beliefs about heredity and the importance of bloodlines confirms my premise that contemporary Native Hawaiian artists use their art for a purpose—to capture mo’olelo and to enlighten our understanding of who we are.

He continued to speak about the great change that happened and the consequences that followed:

This was also a time when different influences from outside came, the whalers, different kinds of economy, and different kinds of seductions. These children were brought up in this real flux time and then to be cut short… they all died in their twenties. They all died childless. Liholiho and Kamāmalu died in England. Nāhi'ena'ena died from illness in her twenties. When we look at our people and their beliefs in procreation, all of a sudden the fruit bearing trees didn’t bear any fruit. That was also the time of the breaking of the kapu. I don’t know if that was the reason why these guys never have any kids. They, the Ali‘i, broke the kapu and there was a new government coming.

It wasn’t exactly a new kind of government, but it was a new understanding of how we govern ourselves. It wasn’t a matter of making choices between communism and capitalism. It was that we really didn’t know anything else, and we had a really complicated form of governance. All of a sudden was a whole different wind. Came out of nowhere and we had no idea how to deal with it. That the turning point where things really start going wrong.
In this piece [Kalahele points to the work] [image is not available], it deals with Kamāmalu and Liholiho coming home. Kamāmalu is symbolized by the kāhili and Liholiho is symbolized by the umēke. The *she* in the painting or woman is Papa because all of the genealogy goes back to Papa. We all go back to Papa. This is Papa bringing home and in a really sad sense Papa bringing home the change. I don’t believe anybody murdered them. I don’t believe there was a plot. I believe it was a matter of that we were very clean people that ended in a very dirty place; where they succumbed to its illness. I also believe that when Kaahumanu started that trip of breaking the kapu, she also started a chain of events! Because, pau [the end, finished] is pau! Pau is pau! Dis pau! This also means that a lot of this other stuff is pau also.

So, in this piece, if you go through it, it has two different winds that blow through. The bottom wind has to do with our origins. We come from Papa. We come from Po. And, we come up through our deities; and we have developed this, we have created all of this [Kalahele points to the lower right side of the painting]. Then all of a sudden we run into these new things that start to change things.

The inside wind is very contemporary because I think when we look at some of the problems of our people we can look at causes and reactions and where you are at the end of the equation. I don’t think this is a blame thing. The actions that started here [Kalahele points to the
lower right side and gestures with his hand to the upper portions of the painting] eventually ended up with this wonderful skyline.

The mo’olelo, or stories, help us to form a part of our identity as Native Hawaiian. When Kalahele shares his interpretation about our ancestral history or about his observations of current conditions, he is adding to our identity story as Native Hawaiian. He is able to weave stories of the old with our contemporary times that speak to the conditions we live under.

Part of that condition Kalahele refers to addresses my question about the effects of American colonization, its politics and laws with issues of identity as they relate to blood quantum. At this point in our conversation, Kalahele returned to the present, lamenting how Hawaiians are so divided that we are fighting among ourselves for our own share of what the government allocates. Is this an effect of American colonization? Do contemporary Hawaiians identify themselves as wards of the State? Kalahele continued with his thoughts:

There is no room for less than 50% …all the money got to go to homesteaders, Hello!…Jonah Kūhiō said 1/32\textsuperscript{nd} man! When he went to Congress with the Hawaiian’s Home Act, it was 1/32\textsuperscript{nd}. Contrary to some homesteaders, the definition of what is Maoli [Native Hawaiian] is if you get, you get…none of this bullshit about how much you get. You get, you get, you don’t, you not…and that is all there is to it. I guess he had foreseen when we have people questioning who we are as a people, let alone blood quantum.
Kalahele then railed against non-Hawaiians who want to be considered Hawaiian:

Who are you? I am a Hawaiian because I am a citizen of this place Hawai‘i! Therefore, I have the right to that name! Hello! Regardless if you were born in Missouri or over here, you are a citizen of a place, but that does not give you the right of an ethnicity! I’m sorry man! Your ancestry is not that, kalamai, and what is the problem with your ancestry that you so willingly throw it away to be somebody else?

We are a small group of people in the most isolated place on this planet. The most isolated place! Federal money flowing into Hawai‘i is how colonial systems work.

Throughout Kalahele’s passionate description about the multiple meanings encapsulated in his painting, it became clear that he intended to show the unhealed wounds of what happened to the Hawaiian people. He wanted to share, or perhaps to educate the viewer, about the human, social, and economic condition of Hawaiians of the past and Hawaiians of the present. He clearly spoke to his experiences and made astute observations of Hawaiians who lived where he had grown up, downtown Honolulu.

I’m from downtown man; to give the directions was mauka [toward mountain], makai [toward ocean], and Ewa [West], to Waikiki [East]. Find it! Find it! Find the ocean! Find the mountain! If you didn’t know King Street runs this way and Bishop runs that way bradda, you would have no direction. And so, it comes down through our problems.
Town is my place. My time town is sleazy. It is better now, but it has to do with what happened to our people. If you look at who are the guys downtown. Most of the guys downtown is Hawaiians, you know? Who was the mahus [transvestites] on the streets…Hawaiians? Who are the dealers, mostly Hawaiians? Who are the guys sleeping on the streets, mostly Hawaiians? Who are the families sleeping on the beach bathing their kid in the storm in cold water, mostly Hawaiians?

Kalahele’s poem titled *Ode to Fort Street* is his poignant commentary about the changes that have occurred to Hawaiians in his old neighborhood.

*Ode to Fort Street*

when pigs walked
from the harbor
to the ice house

Kalakaua played
at Alekoki
and Hawaiians
ruled their
homelands

now

where pigs walk
marble and McDonald’s
obscure the harbor

Kalakaua stands
frozen in bronze
and the missionary
sons are still
inventing history

pigs, pigs, pigs
once they walked  
on cloven hooves  
up dirt paths  

now  
they walk  
on sidewalks  
and  
wear Italian shoes  

(Kalahele, 2002, p. 56).

Reproduced with permission from Imaikalani Kalahele.

Kalahele’s poem clarified the changes and absurdities of a downtown Honolulu environment from the time of old Hawai‘i to contemporary Hawai‘i. It reinforced what he said about Hawaiians living in downtown Honolulu and opens an interesting question about how our physical, political, and social environment influences our notions about our identity.

Turning from his poem about his town Honolulu, Kalahele went back to the three paintings about our Hawaiian ali‘i and the profound implication of their lives and acts on Hawaiians today:

This is Nāhi'ena'ena. She was part of the triad that was part of the high, you know. She went from being carried to the public on the shoulders, to people then, to kneeling to pray.

Kneeling to pray to whom I asked?

Not us, we don’t kneel to pray to our Gods. Again, it is that period of time that we shared. These women were bred to breed. This is not a negative thing. They were bred to breed. They were the high of
the high. They kept the lines. It was off these lines that we were supposed to be able to trace from where we came from. All of a sudden they were gone! What happened? Not to be crass, but if you look at dairy farmers....If one time, all of a sudden, if one whole generation of their breeding just went sterile everybody would go on a trip! Wow! What’s happening?

So, what did happen to us? I don’t know. I don’t know? I don’t think change in diet had anything to do with fertility. I just think there was so much happening among the responsibilities, the spiritual responsibilities of our people that perhaps something shutdown, and just said nah!

Figure 6.7 Detail of the upper right corner of the fourth panel of *Pehea Ka Mana‘o? Me Hea Ka ‘Ōlelo?* Pen and ink drawing with color wash by Imaikalani Kalahele. Reproduced with permission from Imaikalani Kalahele. Photographed by Kau‘i Chun.
Kalahele said, “this Madonna and child [refer to Figure 6.7] living in a tent represent the living conditions today of many Hawaiians.”

Kalahele had provided provocative responses to my question, explaining his interpretation of the history and condition influencing Hawaiian identity. His social commentary led to an open-ended conversation that made it possible to steer the interview in different directions. I went back to my research outline and reviewed with Kalahele my general areas of concern and the broader questions of each:

Getting back to the research questions, I have three areas I am looking at. The first has to do with identity of you as a Hawaiian artist that we’ve touched upon. The second has to do with your creative process. And, the third is about your experiences with exhibitions. How do you consider and what do you think about when putting your works into public spaces?

I spoke about my reasons for asking the first and second questions. These reasons where based on a simple assumption that how people considered their identity was essential to understanding who they were—and, that their sense of identity was directly related to their creative process as artists. I asked Kalahele, “How did his idea of identity influence his creative process?”

This is real interesting because if you had asked me this question two years ago it might have been a little different; only because up until two years ago I had no contact with my father’s family at all. I had no idea that they even knew that I was alive. I think basically it is the same but now it has expanded a little broader.
He explained that his father’s family was Caucasian-American and that he had cousins, uncles, and aunts. He linked his identity and who he was with his creative process:

Identity, for me to do art is to tell somebody what you think. I really don’t believe in decorative art. Art is a philosophy and comes from the understanding of the person doing it. However you were raised until the time you do what you are doing; I think all of that impacts what you are doing. For me as Maoli [Native Hawaiian], I always understood as a Maoli where I stood in the social circle. I have always understood my economic circle. And, I think early on I understood why. Maybe I didn’t have all of the facts together, but I kind of understood why. All of that has really shaped my work.

Creativity

Art, telling, thinking, doing, and identity are words Kalahele uses when capturing the interrelationship of each. Within this, he addressed my three major research questions and concerns. Kalahele then moved our discussion to his use of moʻolelo (story) in his artwork:

I like to tell stories, I think that is a method that we’ve used from the first time somebody went say, and ‘Eh, bradda you know what?’ I think it is important that we tell stories. And, when you tell stories, unless you have a degree and you tell stories from all over the world, you basically tell your [Kalahele emphasized the word your to
make his point clear that the narrative was about that storyteller’s story.

I told him that all of his pieces had stories to them, and he replied, “Well, it could.” If you survey the vast body of works both those that tend on the narrative part of the spectrum and with the abstract symbolic pieces on the other side, I have never known Kalahele not to have a story behind one of his pieces. Kalahele moved the conversation about creative process to notions of interpretation.

Sometimes I like stories that other people have better. Actually, an organization went pay me 80 bucks to set up one booth at the Kamehameha Parade celebrations and do some demonstrations like that. So, at that time I had done these four Pele pieces. They were on stretch canvas and with ink and stuff. But, they were four very different kinds of things about Pele. One was Kamupua’a and Pele playing kilo, very seductive! There were these huge panels about 11 feet. I had them all propped up looking nice, and I had my watercolor stuff on the bottom. I had them set up and then we sat out back and drank beer.

What happened was there was this one wahine, she came up with the first group of people and she started looking at it and next thing there was a crowd gathering around her. I said, ‘What’s up man?’ She had the most wonderful stories about these pieces. You need to understand that none of these pieces were named. There was no indication unless you recognized some of the things in the piece
about Pele. There was nothing, but she had these wonderful stories. She was talking about that piece and this piece.

For real, we got to the point where like she would do this every hour. She would stand around and another group would come by and we, us guys, would stand behind her and would say, ‘What? Wow! Unreal!’ I think sometimes this is what we do and so sometimes I don’t name my pieces. Sometimes I think when other people look at the work they think they get their own story and that is good too.

I asked Kalahele if he did not mind if a viewer made up his or her own story or did not get the story that he originally intended. He said there were exceptions. And, our conversation quickly shifted to notions of exhibition and art critic.

Exhibition

No. Okay, I going tell you this one story. We did a show at the old Windward Community College gallery. You know that room was once a place for aqua therapy where they would put the mental patients in these isolation tubs. That was the room. It was kind of heavy because the curator at that time said she would go at nights and she would hear these voices. We went down and thought maybe to feed them awa and food so you know, pay respect.

During the show, Joan Rose she came to review it. I had a piece and it was called Uku. It was a wicker, stone, and wood piece. It was a natural stone with a natural hole, and I had woven this wicker
piece that went through the stone and went up around came back and feed into itself. And, the piece was titled *Uku*.

She got down and came through the show and I think Pi’ikea [Clark] was there and I was there. When we met and were talking about things she was getting into this thing about explanations. Some other guys were real good about explaining things and some didn’t…me! Finally, she said to me, “look at your piece, Uku. If I was to look at this and wonder a flea, this has nothing to do with a flea. I cannot see any relationship with a flea.”

I said, “What e’vas?” She said, “Well, how are we to know?” I said, “Maybe you should ask somebody.” “Well, okay, I’m asking you, what is *Uku*?” I said, “*Uku* means revenge. There is a penis in the vagina going through the pöhaku. It is our revenge. It is our ho‘opai.” She said, “I could have looked at this and interpreted this as a flea.” I said, “Yeh.” She said, “and, I would be right.” No, I said, “You would not be right.”

And, that’s the problem, you can have your right to think what you want, okay, but being right has to do with something else. I am the only one that is right. So, ask somebody. That was my point. That is why I don’t do these long explanations unless talking like this because nobody asks nobody. Yeh, you can assume all you want but are you going to be right? You can assume whatever you like, crossing the
street…splat, dead right. And, I think that is part of the identity problem that we have, that nobody ask. Nobody asks us.

**A Return to Identity**

I said to Kalahele, “Why don’t they ask?” His answer reinforced a illustration of how many Hawaiians often see themselves in the eyes of non-Hawaiians—that is on the bottom of the social economic rung in our society—low lifers. Within our conversation about art critics and exhibition, we quickly returned to issues of Hawaiian identity.

Eh…where do you want me to start? Do I start with ego, ignorance, fear, neglect, ignorance, ignorance? People fear us. I think that fear is more a psychological hype. If you go Waimānalo and you say Hawaiian everybody go who? If, you go Hawai’i Kai and you say Hawaiian everybody go whoa! And, they start looking around and looking for their stuff. The fact is it doesn’t matter anymore because if you look at all these streakas ripping off they not all Hawaiians. But, say Hawaiian and you start looking for your cooler and you start looking for your da’kin, why? It’s an in-breed perception. It comes from all of those places. And, I believe it comes from guilt. Sometimes when you are guilty about something and you don’t really know what it is, you avoid. How do you not deal with that, well you avoid it, you just don’t look over there.
A Return to Exhibition

In a flash, Kalahele opened our discussion to issues of exhibition, about the role of commercial sales and the purpose of art:

I want to say something more about exhibits. For me, sales are not important. I understand that about trademarks from a business level. But for the last year and a half, every time we have gotten together to talk about art we have only spoke about the mercantile end.

I am sorry, maybe I am a dying romantic, but I do believe the purpose of art is not to fucking put it up on sale. But, that is not to say you don’t do that. But, that is not the purpose of art. If it is, then it is wallpaper. I am not interested in doing wallpaper. Again, I think art needs to say something. It needs to have substance. It needs to say something about the society and time that it comes from.

A Return to Identity

Kalahele summed up his understanding of the purpose of art, and in particular, his reason for making art. Importantly, he put it in a contemporary context as a reflection of substance of a specific time and place. I asked him if art was culturally bounded—a line that linked cultural identity and creative practice?

Yes, it is culturally based, but the culture that is happening at the time. We got to watch out as Hawaiians when we say culture, because people going start talking to us in Hawaiian, and if we no talk Hawaiian then we not Hawaiian.
Kaili Chun had made a similar inference in her interview in chapter five where she said people ask, “Can you speak the language? If you can’t, then how much Hawaiian are you?” A note of interest is that, to my knowledge, none of the artists in my research are fluent speakers of ‘ōlelo makuahine (our mother tongue)—although each one is highly regarded for their artistic practice and cultural involvement with their community. Cultural identity is essential to the discussion—Kalahele continued with his thoughts about what is, and the importance of, culture, making a point of how other cultures envision their arts and culture.

We do understand what culture is, right? It is the behavior of a people at a particular time. I think one of the problems we have…oh shit, I’m going to talk about this…the only thing that I envy about the Europeans and the Orientals are their understanding of what art is; that their art is theirs, period! It belongs to them! We are not there as a people. I think part of it is because of American society that is really, what, 500 hundred years old or less. What kind of culture could you build in 500 years? Give me a break! I think because the American culture is based on this really transient sense of what is cultural they are not capable of understanding.

What is American culture? American culture is the richest kids in America talking like the ghetto niggas. Hello? That’s American culture. That is American culture! Them guys in the ghettos are driving Mercedes. That’s American culture. Americans don’t want to
deal with it; they want to say there is no such thing as [inaudible word] bullshit that is American culture!

The culture is melting, and you guys have no control over it because there are no control systems. All cultures have a control system built into them because they come from generations of living with each other and trying to make things work. I think we are coming off of that. What we are doing is that once we found our sense of Maoli [Native Hawaiian], then we started to grow again as a people.

Kalahele made this reference about finding our sense of Native Hawaiian identity—this reiterated his earlier comments in this chapter (p. 250) about purging the haole from our colonized minds—KATH to “kill all the haole from your brain.”

**A Return to Creativity**

Kalahele shifted our conversation to another art form that is popular with Hawaiian youth. From his perspective about poetry he had this to say about rap.

I don’t like rap, I don’t like rap! I don’t like poetry slams, I hate them and I refuse to go to them. But I want to tell you something. Rap and poetry slams have done more for Hawaiian kids, for just regular kids, who never think about writing their feelings about anything! They all coming up man [he snaps his fingers]. Maybe my sense of liberation was a little old. So, I got to band together with this new sense of liberation because again culture grows. As long as it
grows for you in the way it needs to grow for you, maika‘i [good, fine, all right].

Reframing my questions about creative process and colonization, I asked Kalahele to speak about how the effects of Americanism affected him as an artist.

Greatly, first of all, one of the biggest first effects is that I use their material. [Laughter] And I like them! If you look at the subject matter of what I consider to be my more important works, it has to do with that reaction, reacting to that. You know I have been accused of being a total reactionary about griping about the same shit...well you guys keep forgetting about the same story. So, I got to keep telling the same story! Okay, now how you think the green braddas went last till today, they kept telling the story.

Good thing we still have the *Kumulipo*, because luckily somebody kept telling that story. How many stories we went lost? *How many stories have we lost* [emphasis was added to reflect the sound of his voice in the interview tape—it was a lamenting voice]? I think about that now because you think about the intellectual devastation that was done to our people within that short period of time. And, when it happens in one short period of time, it means usually a clean wipe. One big white eraser went *chukachukachuka*.

This is one of the salient points of this research; that the telling and retelling of our mo'olelo is of importance and central to the reason why artists like Kalahele make art.
A Return to Exhibition

In this next part of our conversation, Kalahele returned to speak about exhibitions.

I believe exhibitions are important because they are like poetry readings. They are like recitals. They are a way to demonstrate what your culture in a particular discipline is doing. Without these exhibitions, like the Queen’s show [Queen Lili‘uokalani Children’s Center], this is our 27th year. It is the only all-Hawaiian annual exhibit…period!

This annual all-Hawaiian art show is an exhibition that Kalahele alone has organized. This annual art exhibit celebrates the birthday of Queen Lili‘uokalani and is a testimony to Kalahele’s perseverance and total commitment to promoting Hawaiian art.

That is what I think art is and about exhibitions….I think exhibitions are important because…because, I am not into sales. What other purpose is it for me to do these things? I am not one of these guys who say, oh, I going keep’um. I going keep’um all. The reason I going keep’um all is because nobody like’um [big laughter]! I no can give them away!

We have had all Hawaiian exhibits; modest small little shows to keep the notion alive that there is an annual thing. And, that this is something we need to do outside of the mercantile approach. I am not saying that things cannot be for sale, but I am saying that sales cannot be the purpose for the exhibits. If we don’t, then what are we? I would
like to see different kinds of exhibits, in galleries…no! Galleries suck!

If the art is for the people, then that is where it needs to be.

Kalahele then made a reference to MAMo (Maoli Art Month), the annual event that usually takes place in the month of May to celebrate contemporary Hawaiian artists and their art:

About MAMo, we have to get MAMo out of Honolulu. I’m not saying don’t do Honolulu, because I’m a Honolulu boy. I love doing these shows in town. That’s where I grew up. But, no, this stuff got to go Waimānalo, got to go Wai‘anae…for the people. We need to go to the largest Hawaiian populations. Not because we like, just give it to them—because this is our people and none this should be exclusive.

None of this says, you guys no can come, but if you scared in one Hawaiian district then you…you really have a problem. It might be real, or it might not be real, but that is your problem. In order for us to build the kinds of things, like how Europeans and Asians feel about their art…then our people have got to embrace it. They have to understand that this is ours. They have to understand that when they see a Hawaiian they have to recognize that this is a Hawaiian painting. They have to look at a piece of sculpture and say, “Oh! That’s the kine eh?” And in order for that to happen, it’s got to happen but it is got to be there in a way that works for them.

Nānākuli should be filled with art! Especially Nānākuli high school, that prison! Man! You talk about one freaking trip man! Build
everybody into one round little internal module. Hello! That’s how you build prisons! Ah, but the one thing that is good there is a central courtyard. Each one of these buildings has a central courtyard. We should fill these places with art. They should know that things are happening all of the time and be in a place where they can come to it. That is I think how we build this mana’o that belongs to our people.

I posed a hypothetical question about exhibition to Kalahele asking, “If you were to put an exhibit into a Hawaiian space, as opposed to a non-Hawaiian space, how would you approach it differently? How would you do it?”

I don’t think I would approach it differently. I think that it would depend on the space. Now, if you are talking about physically hanging the show, it would just depend on the space. I think that whole thing if it is not in the gallery, and then it is craft. And, that is so how people understand it from the outside.

I don’t know. I really don’t know, but I can name off places that would be good…schools would be good, community centers would be good…like rap centers. Rap Center, brah! I don’t know if you know Rap Center, Rap Center Wai‘anae. Wai‘anae Rap Center was this place where people started, young braddas. We use to try to pull kids off the streets. There were two different kinds of programs…a lot of lo‘i programs like that eventually came out of groups that came out of programs and places like Rap Center. Me, Bob [Freitas], and Alapai Hanapi…maybe it was only us three, I’m not sure.
Rap Center was an old bust-up house that the guys got real cheap. And, the internal walls...you know the old kind paneling, the kind cardboard looking paneling, use to kind of look like paper wood? When it rained from the next valley, the whole thing went swell up. Well, that was all that we had for walls so we couldn’t hang anything on walls...anything! You put a nail in it and the weight of the nail would fall it out. So, we just propped up things and paintings on chairs.

You know the kids that came through went, “oh, yea, yea...you know ahhh...ya crude...” but you know at the end we had some few kids come outside talk to us about “wow yea, I draw like that...wow you know cause I neva see dis kind.”

Ah, for me that is the kind of mentality I like to go into communities and things. Where get, get. Where can, can. I don’t need walls, well sometimes I like walls, and we’ve done it before because I don’t need all of these other kinds of conveniences and traps. They are not for sale and they don’t have to be in all of these kinds of things.

It is grassroots. Rap Center reaches into the community where Hawaiians live. If we could imagine a hundred Rap Centers touching the lives of Hawaiians young and old, what a different world we would be living in.

Without fanfare or much resource, community artists like Kalahele connect with our at-risk youth. This is a salient point that addresses my
question about exhibition experiences and artists’ efforts to pass on knowledge as they reach into their community.

I moved the conversation to how Kalahele saw the purpose and function of art to a native community and how different was art’s placement in a commercial gallery. He introduced a brilliant idea to infuse contemporary Hawaiian art into our Hawaiian community:

Yes, yes, of course, because if the purpose and function is what I believe art, not to negate sales and not to beat sales up, it’s just that we need to take art to another place. I had this idea before but never get too far.

My idea was: what if we could fund one project where we could take one artist a month and do a pretty first-class poster—let’s face it; all the Wyland’s are posters anyway—and try sell one again ha, ha, ha! Every month we would send it to each Hawaiian home, to do with what they want, tack it up in your garage, frame it nice, use it for wrap one present, whatever, but just every month they would receive a relatively good quality. No have to be the kind, one four-thousand-dollar print.

Just get art into the homes, so that they understand that this belongs to them and hopefully build the interest and to build the support systems that I think we lack. You know in the past, we were all top heavy, we were all top heavy; we could only get the educators.
We could only get the business guys. We could only do this shit, and I think what we forgot was our base.

We need the people to believe in us...so far nobody believes in our work. Why? Our own people don’t believe in our work. Maybe because they don’t know, but if that’s the reason it can be cured. Yes, well you know that getting one list out is not a problem. Just somebody latching on to that kind of idea for that purpose. It should be something substantial, not one small 8 x 10 the kind. It should be nice.

It should be something nice.

In the natural flow of conversation, I offered that this could simply be an issue about distribution and with the right grant resources it could become a reality. From there, our discussion moved in the direction of possible future projects for contemporary Hawaiian art that would include finding ways for educating our people and about a possible future Hawaiian museum center for art.

A Return to Identity

Kalahele opened our conversation about why he thought this lack of awareness existed—returning to issues about the challenges of constructing a contemporary Hawaiian artistic and cultural identity:

Part of our problem is that we don’t have our own institutions. I believe we need our own institutions from K to PhD. We need our own institutions because in order to develop Maoli [Native Hawaiian] thought. We need a space in which we develop Maoli thought. I am
glad and I am happy by what seems to be a move at the [Center for] Hawaiian Studies [at UHM]. They are starting to pull all these loose ends.

What? Language is one loose end? Eh! No! Language one big monkey. We need to pull it all into a space so that we have a place to develop Maoli thought. That is the key because as a people who have to deal with other people we should all have all of our gifts available. What are the gifts we have? It is intelligence! It is art! It is philosophy! How you going to do that when you don’t have a place?

We stopped doing about a hundred something years ago. We have not had a real Maoli institute of learning. Let’s not ya, ya about Kamehameha [schools], because it really wasn’t the Hawaiians fault that it ended up the way it is. Punahou was a school with one-third of the money of Kamehameha; and they were sending out CEOs. We were sending out mothers and public servants! Why was that? It was because of the mentality of training of our people. Punahou trained their people to be leaders. We trained ours to be servants! That wasn’t Hawaiian!

It is really interesting they went bust all these Hawaiians the first time you went get all these Hawaiian trustees. They busted them all. Kicked them all out of their jobs. Did they convict anybody of anything? So, how is it you get accused of something, go to trial, lose your job, you are not proven guilty and you don’t get your job back?
Only Hawaiians. I call it the Walter Ritte theory, the Walter Ritte justice, cause they did it to him. That kind of stuff only happens to Hawaiians in Hawai‘i. It no happen to nobody else. And, nobody raises a race card...you know.

You know what we need? We need about five Conklins, yeh, we need five Conklins. You don’t know Conklin? The haole guy who thinks that all us guys no need be Hawaiian. Why, because there no such thing as Hawaiians! You know the fat guy with the beard who is very anti-Hawaiian. His whole sense of history is the Twigg-Smith sense of history, it is American endowment, it’s this DE – M OC – CRACY.

I think it is all part of a national movement. And, it’s not just against us! It’s against the Chicanos! It’s against the Blacks! It’s against anybody that...oh, you guys need special help. It is amazing they are doing exactly what they did to the Blacks in the sixties; you racist!

I asked Kalahele if Hawaiians were not caught in a system of reverse racism and noted that our situation was totally different from the Blacks—that our histories were different. My assertion was that a peoples’ history played a critical part in constructing their ethnic identity and social position in the order of other groups. How many times have you heard somebody say, I am a Hawaiian-American or an American-Hawaiian? Never, but you hear all the time I am an African-American.
Of course! The only similarity is we are being oppressed by the same group of people. We are being oppressed by a colonial system, they’re not. Yeh, but the trip is and I have got into this with Blacks. The trip is you not home. And, I am not making or being hard but you’re not home. The difference being we are. And, that’s the difference. I’m sorry for whatever how and for whatever reason you guys ended up in America. I’m sorry but it had nothing to do with us. The trouble is your equal right is very different from mine. I have a native right! The Black movement was all to be on par with the White citizenry. That was the trip, me [the Blacks] and you [White Americans] going to be the same guy!

It’s different for us. Read Marcus Garvey. Garvey is right on! The biggest problem they [Black Americans] had was that they were away from home. The other bigger problem was that they did not know where the hell home was…and I feel for them, I do…I really feel for them. But I sorry brah, we came very close to the same thing you guys did…now it didn’t happen that way for us, but there is a difference.

I said to Kalahele that we had been speaking about Hawaiian culture, American culture and a lot about contemporary culture. I wanted to go back to my question about his identity. What have been the influences on his work in terms of people, events, and other artists? He answered my inquiry about identity by returning to thoughts about his artistic practice.
A Return to Creativity

I weave but I am not a weaver. I’m a sculptor. My mom was a weaver. One of the reasons I don’t touch hala. I play with this kind of stuff. I do these one-leaf kinds of stuff. I don’t do hala at all. The reason is that, that was my job as a kid. My job was to help mom clean hala. When all my friend guys going surf Saturday, that was the day I went finish these two wheels [of hala] before I can go any place.

I did spend a lot of time with some traditional people who wove. My mom used to work at Ulumalu that was in Ala Moana. Kawai’s uncle, Uncle Paul…you ever met Uncle Paul? I have wonderful pictures about Uncle Paul. Uncle Paul went work with my mom. So, I had a lot of traditional stuff that I was around. Most of my job was just work and you got to do all of this before you can go. But, it also gave me a feel for stuff like weaving.

The kā’ai, the two kā’ai, my sculptures, these things [Kalahele pointed to them in his garage]. These things were all a product of being able to sit down and to understand that weaving wasn’t just a utilitarian thing. Weaving for us was a sculptural media. Our Kūkailimoku’s, all of these feathered things; these were all woven images that were sculptural.

And, for me that is where I draw my old and my new. I like to work with native materials. I just like the feel. I usually don’t do anything too traditional, but sort of traditional-ish. It is because I like
the feel. I like to work with things…I like work with hair with things like that, that we used to use. It is a different kind of feeling.

This salient point addressed my questions about creative process. It is an insight to understand how Kalahele thinks when making art—that he draws this notion of weaving sculpture from his ancestral heritage is significant. It reinforces our cultural references that enable us to look back at our heritage for inspiration and guidance when making our contemporary works.

I knew from his three-dimensional works that he used his own hair in many of the pieces. I asked Kalahele to tell me about his hair and to describe his creative process.

I have three brushes with only my hair. Whenever I clean my brush, I make a length of rope. I eventually use these in my sculptures. I do that with just my hair.

Others have given me their hair, but I don’t know what to do with it. And, this is only because as much as the contemporary *geek* I am there are some things that I do pay attention to and some of that is stuff like hair. Again, it’s just to keep it clean. It’s just so that there is no other mana involved. You like play with mine, play with mine brah! I deal with that not a problem. But, I don’t want to get other people involved. Even my children and my wife I don’t use any of their hair. Although, I have them, “Oh daddy, why not put them inside the”…besides the guys with only get oriental the kind hair hard for work with the thing no grab just long silky kind but mine real easy you go like that and whoop you get one nice piece rope! [Laughter] But,
basically it is to keep it clean. I will deal with anything. I just don’t want to pass it on to anyone else.

Every artist that I know has developed his or her own unique creative process. I asked Kalahele where his ideas come from and how did he begin a new work. His response was direct;

I have a description. The way I do it I don’t plan shit! My process I don’t plan shit. This is my favorite thing in the world one blank canvas. Ah! When you listen to these guys who go “oh, the most anxiety I have is that first stroke.” Fuck, you make ‘um! Because, for me my process is do.

Kalahele’s strong character and audacity was revealed with this salient point concerning his process—as just “do…make ‘um.” Rich narrative stories emerged from that accidental but purposeful beginning. Kalahele called on his knowledge of Hawaiian stories and his trust in a seemingly blind creative process that built upon itself. His work was instinctive—following his nose he sniffed for the ono smell of something that tasted good. In the journal article by Dudoit (1998) about Hawaiian art, Kalahele described Hawaiian art as, “Fo' me art is ono. Art is not doctrine…I would have to put it into a place like ono” (p. 23). He declared that his art was something more primal than something based on reason and academics.

It can turn into something like this, [Kalahele pointed to his painting of Liholiho, Kamāmalu and Nāhiʻenaʻena]. Where I pull out a series like this. But, my first instinct is to do just make one line. And, then whatever! You know?
I like the inter-reaction between materials and my thought. If I’m doing something and it becomes something else then, okay, that cool too, which is another reason I like markers on canvas. That’s because you can start to create these wonderful things. You just go like that and go like that, when all of a sudden, you see something in the corner where you can develop and create something.

I think that interaction between the medium is an important thing for me. Sometimes it’s my favorite part. I don’t plan things, but I do when I doing projects.

Kalahele pointed to another piece he is working on and used it to tell yet another story about energy, currents, mountains, and water.

This one started out when a friend of mine had asked me about that period in time. And, so we talked about these three people and about just that segment in time. If those conjunctions between time…well, that’s why this piece will eventually be when I finish it [Kalahele turned to his left and gestured toward another artwork in progress], this piece is Mu'u Wai. It is where the two waters of the mountain and the ocean run and mix. That is a wonderful metaphor, especially for us now because we are constantly within that current of the two waters, of the two things churning.
A Return to Exhibition

Part of my question about Hawaiian artists and their experiences with reaching into their communities through exhibition dealt with commercial sales and collections. I asked Kalahele to share his thoughts about this. What was his relationship with himself and with those who collected his work?

Because of the kinds of stuff I do, I am pretty sure most of the people who collect my work for whatever it is, like it or understand it, have a relationship with what I do and the kinds of things I do. Anyone who takes that much interest in what I am doing should be interested in what I am saying. Because again, “I don’t do wallpaper.”

And, again, thank you, I’m a janitor and I need the work! I got to retire! Shit man if somebody can buy something real big, real quick I can retire now! [Laughter]

Summary

Imaikalani Kalahele is an important historical figure. Including him in my research added rich content because of his philosophical and social political perceptions; his efforts as a founding leader of the contemporary Hawaiian art movement; and his multidisciplinary creative works that embrace poetry, the visual arts, and music performance. Kalahele was invaluable to the goals of this research because of his thoughtful insights regarding contemporary Native Hawaiian art. He is a wellspring of knowledge that swells from his innate wisdom; a na'auao seasoned, enriched, and matured through years of lived experiences and community involvement. He represents
the contemporary Hawaiian arts movement in his important role as kupuna, as one of the
movement’s most prolific visual artists, poet, and community activist. He is extremely
adept with materializing his ideas into poetic verse, visual art, and music that he readily
shares when asked.

He explained his thoughts about Native Hawaiian identity clearly emphasizing
that to be Hawaiian you have to have the koko (blood). He knew as a young Native
Hawaiian child growing up in downtown Honolulu, what his social and economic circle
was and why it was; and for Kalahele, all of this personal history played an essential part
that gave meaning and form to his artwork. With this background, he related his art
practice to his family history and his sense of identity.

His creative process is just to do it! Make a mark without a plan! And, then when
the first mark is made ideas will flow and the work will develop as it should. He thinks
like a weaver—but in his words, “I weave but I am not a weaver. I’m a sculptor.”
He said that his kā‘ai (casket work; in precontact Hawai‘i a sennit casket containing the
bone of ancestors) sculptural works are things that he could do because he understood the
ancient Hawaiian thought process and concepts of weaving. He claimed that, “weaving
for us was a sculptural media.”

I believe that through conceptualizing and employing the process of weaving,
Kalahele was able to find answers to what he sought regarding his creative process.
When I survey his works in various media, it was obvious to me that he was thinking like
a weaver, even though he called himself a sculptor. His works are less a practice of
chipping away at something—of subtraction, but rather of overlapped layering of
meaning and materials. His sculptural works are assemblages of careful additions. He
uses a piece of hairy rope here, a pōhaku (stone) there, and dimmed lights to draw out the drama of his works.

In his flat works, he weaves his layers, either loose or in tightened formation, as he wishes. When we look closely at the structural element of composition in his two-dimensional paintings, the membranes demarcating each section and theme are adjoined like transparent butt joints—flowing energy courses across surfaces connecting story to story with story. We feel the sensuous swelling of fine handling, a caressed patina emoting in its crust. His ink pen marks and strikes the canvas, a favorite technique found in most of his large paintings—they stitch like interlaced woven olana fibers—backbone of the kā'ai (sennit casket containing the bone of ancestors); backbone of his painting. He mixes his kahiko (of old) and his contemporary materials. Entwined with his Hawaiian mo'olelo as his muse, he forms new creations to express his feelings, thoughts and observation. He weaves to tell his stories.

Kalahele’s production of art is great because he works all the time. And, because of this he has run out of physical space to store everything. When I last saw Kalahele, he told me that was why he recycled his work, using parts of an old piece to make new pieces. He, like the old man making rope—no waste—no haste—steady pace

    some time…good

    some time…bad

    some time…strong

    some time…sad

    one by one

    strand by strand
What is the meaning of art? Kalahele said that art was to tell somebody what you thought. Art was a philosophy and came from the understanding of the person doing it. Kalahele did not believe in doing decorative art. He said that you basically tell your story and that art needed to say something. It needed to have substance. It needed to say something about the society that it came from. If it did not say something important then it was wallpaper. In words of his own, “I am not interested in doing wallpaper.” And, when describing himself he said he was “a dying romantic … a contemporary geek”—but what a weaver! A magnificent weaver of stories—just making rope.
CHAPTER SEVEN: SOLOMON ENOS—KAMAPUA'A

Figure 7.1 Kamapua’a by Solomon Enos

Acrylic paint on stretched canvas

Found in www.solomonenos.com

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Introduction

Solomon Enos is an artist who focuses in the areas of commercial art, online website and gallery. His works include designing compact disc cover jackets, book illustrations, comic strips, and fine art paintings and wall murals. He brings to my research the notions of entrepreneurialism and a commitment to making art full-time.

Enos is a midcareer native Hawaiian artist, who has found commercial success. Within the small but growing community of contemporary Hawaiian visual artists and supporters, he is well respected. His value to my research is found in his refreshing and authentic perspectives about efforts to uncover ancient Native Hawaiian knowledge. He brings a wealth of experience from his commercial art ventures and participation in art exhibitions. He is committed to serving his community with a particular focus on youth education.

When Enos speaks about these passions that are his life’s work, he enjoys describing them with allegorical text and imagery. “It is hard for me to have a conversation without bringing out metaphors. I see patterns and relationships that surround us.”

His artistic spirit embodies the strength of Kamapua’a (see Figure 7.1). Enos plows deep inside Native Hawaiian moʻolelo (stories) seeking to recover and reinterpret ancient accounts. One legend is about Kamapua’a the pig demigod, considered a symbol for fertility, his tusk digs deep in the ʻāina (earth) hunting for spiritual meaʻai (food). Enos shared with me that several wāhine claimed they got pregnant after seeing his painting.
I interviewed Enos on three occasions. The first two times were on March 4 and 13, 2008, we met deep in Kalihi Valley on the one-hundred-acre site of Kōkua Kālihi Valley (KKV) where he had worked and lived. Our most recent interview was on May 5, 2010 at Nu'uanu Valley Park, mauka of and next to Queen Emma’s Summer Palace, close to where he currently resides with his wife and young children. These two distinct sites share in common a peaceful, but powerful tranquil energy found especially in Hawaiian valleys flushed with the goodness of natural spirit and histories steeped in Hawaiian mo'olelo. Not by accident has Enos chosen to live in these settings. Nature imbued with its cultural histories draws him like a magnet. It is his muse in return.

In our first interview he told me that part of his life process, and thus his artistic practice, was to grow and eat foods that Hawaiians of old grew and ate. Enos described this food that he grew and ate as sacred kalo. His symbolic notion that we literally become what we eat was based on his interpretation of Western science’s theory of cell replacement. This story offers a unique insight into Enos’s thoughts about his identity and how it is formed.

From the first interview and until our last, Enos modified and expanded his ideas about identity. He was interested in knowing more about his own mo'okū'aunau (genealogy). Enos now finds conceptual balance about issues of identity with his notions of eating sacred kalo, the importance of koko (blood) and mo'okū'aunau. This exploration into his mo'okū'aunau aids his visionary efforts on the survival of Hawaiian culture by adding to his growing collection of new materials on family histories and stories previously unknown to him.
Identity

I began by asking Enos how he identified himself as a person and as a Hawaiian artist. He responded with a clear answer:

If you can control your identity, then I think you can control your destiny. If you can see it and draw a picture, you can be it. We as artists need to articulate this to our people. It is important to understand that my art is a way for me to understand who I am.

As I have evolved drastically overtime, I now realize that I am a translator that looks at the significance of the wonder that I see everywhere and with everyone. It is hard for me to have a conversation without bringing out metaphors. I see patterns and relationships that surround us. For instance, I see connections with our respiratory system, our circulatory system and our nervous system…and systems of the ʻāina and how humans organize their systems.

In this response, Enos blurred the fringes of where life and art overlap in order to better understand who he was. The blurring set the tone and direction for the rest of our interview, in that, his answers to my specific questions could and would often lead us to other ideas. There was a sense of freedom in traveling and engaging in conversations between his internal notions about himself and his observations of his world. Delving into his past, I was curious to know more about those who influenced his identity in his youth. I asked him, “What was your early life like and how did it inform your identity as a person?”
My identity as a Native Hawaiian was something that was formed very early. This is because of the exposure I was gifted with growing up with, what back then was considered a pretty radical family. Now what was radical has become the norm. I see this as a sign of progress. People would consider their ideas of going up into the mountain and gorilla style building lo‘i as dangerous.

I asked, “Could you share with me a few stories about growing up? What was your situation? I’m sure you came from a family where…you are like kalo…you are from this kalo family. Could you please talk about this? Who are your parents?”

This would be my father, Eric Enos and my mother Rochelle Enos. Both of them reside in Wai‘anae, Makaha side still. At one point in my life, I thought that every kid had to go to community board meetings! [laughter]. I thought that was common for every kid to do. It was only over time that I realized that my parents were really active.

I was born in 1976. It was a very interesting time in Hawai‘i, when there was a return to Hawaiian culture in a really big way; it was the Renaissance. I think I was truly gifted with amazing opportunities; to be in the proximity of so many radical things happening was awesome. It took awhile for it to sink in though; you know.

As a child, I want to stay home on Saturday mornings and watch cartoons; kind of hard to go pull weeds in the lo‘i. It had to come with time. Other than my father saying to “come up, you got to
learn how to work; don’t be kapulu [sloppy], be consistent”…those kind of core values.

Other than that, my father and my mother never said, you got to learn Hawaiian; or you got to learn Hawaiian history. They never pushed any of that. But, they wanted me to learn the value of working hard, and to understand the importance of kalo to our Hawaiian culture. Kalo production was core for my father.

If you feeding yourself and you are connected with the ‘āina, that practice is essential to a good beginning and with building a solid foundation. After that, they believed you could learn your hula, you could learn your chants, you could go back and relearn your history and your culture; but you got to first eat.

In the following response, Enos explained his understanding of the relationship between knowledge, wisdom, and our na‘au [intestines, guts; mind, heart, affection], and the eating of kalo. For him this is a significant thought that guides his personal practice as a contemporary Hawaiian and artist. It is ingrained in him as a principle part of his identity.

When we speak about our pili na‘au, we are referring to a primary place where the source of our knowledge and wisdom resides. It is said that the extended length of our gut is about 2,000 yards long. That is a lot of pathway, so everything you eat is part of that digestive process and it is pili [to be close] with our cognitive digestive process. That is something that I think my parents were trying to articulate the
significance of kalo and its foundation for the rest of Hawaiian culture. My father was very supportive of me to realize this.

What happened in my father’s life is he eventually put down art as a full-time thing, as a mainstream thing, and he went into community and culture work. I think he thought that was the frontline for that time. What I feel gifted with is the opportunity to pick-up and to continue where he was. Now he is getting back into the arts and for him it is about kapa.

I asked, “Were there other influences other than your two parents? Did you have brothers and sisters?”

I have an older brother Kamuela and my two younger brothers Nohea and Kanoe, who are twins. Because they harassed me so much I basically went inside the house. I didn’t want to play with them [laughter]. I just kind of wanted to do inside stuff because they were into sports and outside stuff. “Ah, heck with you guys. I know you guys are troublemakers and I didn’t want to deal with that” [laughter].

No, but seriously I think my brother Kamuela was a very big influence on me. He was somebody who kind of came full circle. He was into a lot of interesting literature; heavy into things like fantasy and science fictions, and things like that. He got me thinking about storytelling and how we articulate ourselves and how we share our message.
These early leanings about fantasy and science fiction will influence Enos’s later works about a futuristic comic strip titled *Polyfantastica*.

My grandfather on my Dad’s side, Joe Enos, who passed away about four years ago, was so proud and loved to see me doing art. He was always saying, “Oh, I wish I could draw. I wish I could learn to draw. I am so happy to see you draw. It was so well done.” I had done an abstract piece when I was about seven or eight and he hung it up on his wall and he said, “This is fantastic! Great job! I love seeing you do art.” That was critical for me. That was really important.

I asked Enos if there were any other people outside the family who were influential in developing his identity as a person.

Yes, and I am thinking in terms of my foundation because throughout my life there have been teachers. There have been people who I didn’t know who were teachers who were teaching me something.

In sixth grade when I was about eleven, I had done a book project. This was actually my first contracted book project. It was a project done through the Department of Education. They were doing a series of textbooks. These were being designed for fourth and fifth graders and were a textbook that reflected cultural, Hawaiian or local-Hawaiian perspectives. The hope was to create literature that wasn’t Tim and Bob in Chicago playing in the snow.
It was about a local family in Wai'anae, who had a fish farm, and all of these things that helped to keep them close to where we were. And, I was working with aunty Pua Burgess when she was the director of Ka'ala Farms. She was hired to help finish the writing, and to gather and bring images together for the project. I worked with her for a time and it was an amazing experience. Her mind was always perpetually fresh and bright with ideas.

There was an image where I had to draw a boy who is daydreaming. He was not carrying the groceries correctly and they spilled. The eggs fell down and the mother was so pissed off she picked-up an egg and threw it at him. Aunty Pua said, “Okay, put on your old shirt and let’s go outside” and, said, “Okay, here” and she threw eggs at me a couple of times and then okay one more time. And, then she said, “Let’s go inside and try draw.”

Those kinds of experiences were fantastic and taught me to really engage my whole body as a medium, as a way to express and immerse myself. It taught me that in life any experience good or bad can be converted into something creative or it can be creatively converted into something. That was one example of an opportunity for me to learn from someone [outside of art directly].

These responses showed how Enos’s early family and friends of the family influenced him by forming a positive core to his sense of values, purposeful meaning, and choices in life. It was particularly revealing about his commitment to community service.
and helping others through education and research to further their knowledge about Hawaiian ways. His family and their encouragement helped to construct his conception of his identity. He then spoke about how opportunities and the lessons he learned from these experiences influenced his perspective on life and commitment to community service.

I feel I have been given a similar opportunity [as what my father did]. And, sometimes I realize here in Kalihi Valley at our community center there is so much work to do with all of the different schools relating to land-based education. Ah, but I am slowly trying to figure how I can keep connected to my artwork because that is really important.

A lot of work has been put into the community making those important connections with the ‘āina. These relationships are extremely important for me as an artist. It enables me to become a translator of things of significance and I work at expressing these things through a broad range of mediums. The use of our ‘āina is one of these mediums. But it is fairly challenging and is something I don’t think I will truly get my head around in this lifetime. Understanding the ‘āina is fairly complicated. It is not a simple matter.

Ancestral knowledge is critical because it guides us about how to relate to the lepo [soil]; and how we relate to all of the la'au [plants]. I try to go into their mind-set as I build my accumulate knowledge of
what they knew. I try to enter into how I look at the world around us with very old eyes.

Again, we can see how easily and freely Enos moved between his formation as a person and his notions of creative process. In this passage, the soil of the land became another medium to use and an opportunity for expressing his creative ideas. Enos continuously returns to the wellspring of ancestral knowledge—translating and transforming the ‘āina, then using it for his muse and inspiration in his art.

By understanding values and applying them, we believe that the ‘āina is alive. But this belief is affected by our Western beliefs that skew how our ancestors might have viewed their world. I can visualize the ‘āina as a grandmother, but for our ancestors they didn’t even have to try to believe that because for them it was as natural as the lepo [soil] was like the flesh. It is really important if I could just get close to that awareness and find it through my art.

When I asked him if the identity of his Hawaiian ancestors were radically different from his own sense of identity as a contemporary Hawaiian. Enos took a thoughtful long pause before responding.

There are so many layers. I am actually thinking that in many ways I am trying to reinterpret what those meanings were. For example, in contemporary Hawai‘i we have hīmeni [hymn] with European introduced guitars, which is really beautiful.

In his argument supporting his idea about translating ancestral knowledge into contemporary new forms, Enos found this example taken from Hawaiian music. And, in
the following passages he connected the whole idea of eating *sacred kalo* with his issues of identity as a Hawaiian.

We still have our ‘ai. We are still connected with our different foods. We have our kalo and luau and so we are still eating like our ancestors, but just not as much. If I was eating sacred kalo and sacred ea all of the time, my skin would be different. My hair would be different. My whole entire sense of place would be completely transformed because of eating those plants. If I eat them everyday, part of that goes back into them [see Figure 7.2]. But, now 80% of what I am made of is from imported foods; recently imported by Matson.

![Figure 7.2 Maʻilikukahi by Solomon Enos](https://www.solomonenos.com)

Figure 7.2 *Maʻilikukahi* by Solomon Enos

Acrylic paint on stretched canvas

Reproduced with permission from Solomon Enos. Found in [www.solomonenos.com](http://www.solomonenos.com)
In his painting, *Ma‘ilikukahi*, Enos illustrates what it could have been like in ancient times when Hawaiians grew and ate kalo (a food staple cultivated since ancient times). Enos offered his belief about human cell replacement.

Western science says we replace our weight eight times in an average lifetime. There are parts of our brains and our teeth that don’t get replaced. But otherwise almost all of our cells get replaced. So this is where it becomes interesting in terms of identity and koko [blood].

If someone from outside Hawai‘i came here twenty or thirty years ago and lived in a lo‘i but wasn’t Hawaiian and they lived, farmed, and ate kalo from the ‘āina for decades, then they are really eating the dust of our ancestors and replacing their cells with the dust of the ‘āina. Then compare that to a Hawaiian who only eats from McDonalds. Who is more Hawaiian? I don’t know. So that is something I am always thinking about where identity is in relationship to where you live.

I said, “Well that becomes paradoxical.”

Yeh, so if I am actually eating mostly imported food; so then, I am probably more of a Wisconsinite or something else. That layer of mindfulness is something I try to approach the world with as an artist. A lot of times there are things that happen all around us that we don’t see. And, sometimes it is the artist who points it out; and we go, oh!

In answering my question about other people who influenced his life and his sense of identity, Enos opened the door to move into my second major research question, about how an artist progresses through their creative and artistic practice of making art.
Creativity

I moved to the topic of creativity by asking Enos how his identity influenced his artistic process. “How do you go about developing your ideas? Where do you get your ideas from?”

First I have to separate. There are projects where the source of inspiration or the wai is myself. Sometimes it is artwork that I do for myself. Sometimes it’s something I hope will take on a form as [there is a missing phrase here that is inaudible] so I can eat. It is a careful balance.

Whenever I do a project…for example I did a two-foot image by three-foot oil painting of Kamapua'a. I am always kanalua [doubtful] about taking something into the visual form and taking it into an interpretation form. I don’t want to say that this is the Kamapua'a. I don’t want to do that.

However, there are a lot of people who don’t know who and what is Kamapua'a. Why he is significant and what is his role that he has to play? I have to walk this line. My hope is to show an image of Kamapua'a that could lead viewers to discover their own image of who is Kamapua'a.

There still needs to be room for interpretation. For artists, that is our challenge where we don’t want to put too fine a point on anything but at the same time we want to articulate something.
This idea of interpretation, not to be the authoritative singular voice of Hawaiian mo'olelo, but rather, to offer another perspective, rings familiar. Kalahele and Kahanu in their interviews spoke about a similar perspective that allows viewers a degree of freedom to find their own personal interpretation and meaning.

To anchor his research when preparing to do a work of art, Enos often consults with others. This is part of his creative process.

Part of this process that is important is to build a group of people that I could go talk story with and share these images with. Because I was working on the Hi‘iaka project, I had a particular person I could share images with. His name was Puakea Nogelmeier, and he has a really wonderful mana‘o and was so fantastic. But, my hope is to be able to work with a council of people when I am cultivating images.

I cannot discount that Enos’s idea of bringing a council of experts together to discuss his art works, was not influenced, in part, from his experiences working in community service; where many visions were shared and valued. Enos’s idea was rooted in traditional practices found in many indigenous groups, and certainly, in Native Hawaiian culture; where a council of elders and experts were called together to discuss and make decisions that affected their communities.

Continuing our discussion about creative process I asked Enos to share what other creative ideas he had developed from his research about Hawaiian culture. Enos spoke about a Hawaiian concept called kupua or to change shapes then offered these thoughts about transformation as part of his creative process:
It is an amazing thing to be able to go from the oral to the literal to the visual. The content remains consistent, but its form changes. This is the idea of shape changing or kupua [a supernatural being, possessing several forms]. This means we can change forms, from a man to a shark and back, as a way to survive. It is not only about content, but how it is being articulated. What is its new shape? For example, Kamapua’a is being chased by Pele; he runs down to the ocean. Now, Kamapua’a as a mumu’u is still Kamapua’a, but he changes shape to survive.

For the same reasons, we need to be able to change from one media to another media. With this strategy, the information can survive; can continue to be heard in this age of massive information. It is important to me that our stories do not get drowned out.

The concept of shape-changing information requires that we become expert at understanding new media and the realm of the Internet as relevant forms of medium. In doing so, we need to re-flush-out our stories; taking them into another realm including the visual. This touches on the notion of adaptation, which for me is very important.

This is what we Maoli [Native Hawaiians] are good at. We are good at shape changing; and we are good at adapting.

This is an excellent example of how Enos’s creative process works. He is able to take a Hawaiian concept about kupua found in mo'olelo, in this case about Kamapua’a
the pig god, and reinvents it by giving that concept a new form and purpose. From this
platform, Enos intends to launch a host of new electronic media ideas, web programs, and
published books. Enos continued our discussion about shape changing and its
implications to new media as an adapted form for storytelling.

I love the fact that we have our different hui connected to wa’a, hui connected to hula; we have our hui connected to la’aulapa’au and with our carving traditions. If we considered all these aspects of our culture as being like actors; then the stage is the mo’olelo. This is the important role of storytelling.

This is a salient thought that explains the important role of artists as caretakers responsible for the cultural stories on this mo’olelo stage. Enos’s description suggests a circular and interdependent sense of actors and stage; of cultural components and our mo’olelo.

As an artist, I am looking at new media, as a way to continue the continuum. I am also interested in the time of our history, when our oral traditions began to be written down; recaptured into another form; shape changing. Our nineteenth century ancestors encapsulated these stories into writing, with hope that these stories could survive, and so, that their significance could be shared with future generations of people.

They did this by adopting the printing press and then through innovation used it to serve their purposes. They excelled in that
contemporary medium of their time. This is a good example of continuum.

With that in mind, how would our ancestors look at filmmaking? How would our ancestors consider multi-massively-online-player media involving role-playing games? For me, it is a natural continuation of our culture’s story to take the literal and transcend it into the visual realm.

There is the difference between interactive storytelling and traditional storytelling where you say to go here, to there, and here, then there. In interactive media, you are free to choose where to visit. Because of this new freedom of choices, our young people are getting into the new media of interactive games; where they are able to meet all kinds of people from around the world.

This is certainly a new form of storytelling. In these games, a story is created and defined in terms of directions; how to get from here to there. It entails giving the players a road map, where they could take multiple paths; and where they are encouraged through suggestions of where to go. During the process of their journey, players collect things; and, they build things as they travel to different parts of the world. This becomes a new way to travel and to learn about other people and to learn about their stories.

But, presently, there are not a lot of new ideas or content in these interactive games. It is still about dragons and knights that are
regurgitated in either Euro-centric or Japanese based imagery. We stand on a precipice of this new media, where stories from other parts of our humanity are not being told; and, much less in filmmaking. Although, in terms of presentation this could be the new cutting edge form, I think it is important to keep the new content pili with our values. So, we have a lot to do.

Although Enos is well known for his paintings and murals, he does not rest on these more traditional forms of art. Employing the concept of adaptation, Enos pushes the envelope of what it means to be a contemporary Native Hawaiian artist in early 21st century Hawai‘i. I asked him if he had any other idea about adaptation as part of his process when creating works of art. He spoke about a call for healing:

Yes, but before I go there, I would like to speak a little about the effects of globalization. Our Hawaiian culture is like kalo. It is meant to be huki [to pull]. It is meant to be cut. But, with the impact of globalization, our culture got ripped up! And, it was really cut! So, where do we put the blame? How can we get our revenge? I think that sometimes we spend too much time pointing the finger as to who did the cutting.

My question is who is doing the replanting? Here, take this. Here is some huli [the shoot or kalo top used for replanting] or parts of our culture that were not destroyed. The healing needs to happen.

This salient idea of cultural healing through planting of new seeds and Enos’s emphatic call for healing echo the words of Kauihou Tanahy, where she called for
cooperative work with powers that controlled the resources she needed for her work with wauke and kapa. Again, both artists are influenced by Eric Enos. It is evident with both Kauihou Tanahy and Enos that bringing pono (balance) to their creative lives included healing and listening to the voice of the ‘āina—caring for its needs much like our ancestors had cared for it during their time.

In Enos’s next statement he brings together the three areas of my research. Firstly, his identity as a Hawaiian provided him with a new idea. Secondly, he used metaphor in his creative process to illustrate his idea. And thirdly, this idea calls for working in our communities to promote Hawaiian values and concepts.

There is a lot of work that needs to be done with replanting our values and ideas. And, this means we literally need to reforest the ‘āina by creating new and traditional forms of literature and books. And, this is why we need our writers, artists, and producers.

Playing off his idea, I asked Enos if he saw adaptation as an essential ingredient for survival. This subject returned our conversation to issues of Hawaiian identity—it touched on the effects of colonization and how our native people have had to culturally adapt within a new, more powerful social order to survive.

Creative thinkers like Enos explore all avenues of thought. They draw on old knowledge for guidance and old practices for ways of studying the world around them. From those things of our past, they adopt ideas, and then reinvent them to answer their needs. In the next few passages Enos again merges his sense of Hawaiian identity, creative thought process and reaching into his community.
Yes, in Hawai‘i we have geographical areas we call Wao Akua [distant mountain regions believed inhabited only by spirits], along with many other areas that are relatively protected. In a real sense, these habitats on land are laboratories, where endemic and other introduced indigenous plants and animals have survived through evolutionary adaptation. Likewise, our oceans are also amazing laboratories of diversity that show evidence of adaptation of species. Our plants and animals have evolved into unique species found nowhere else on earth.

Likewise, we can also argue that there are very unique ideas and concepts that can only be found here.

This is where Enos derived his idea of adaptation by looking around at his environment and studying ancient knowledge. He then applied it to his creative process as if our cultural huli (the cut top of kalo used for replanting) was never cut and abandoned—but instead replanted into other creative forms.

What we are doing here is a continuation of what our ancestors did, when they celebrated and put into action and practice those characteristics, values, and beliefs unique to Hawaiian culture. In its natural evolution, our ‘āina has been adapting for millions of years. The first people who arrived followed that same process of adaptation.

They became pili [to be close] to their new environment, learned how to care for it and take what they needed to survive and thrive. They learned to be patient as the constant experimentation of
this evolution unfolded and evolved ever so slowly over many generations and years.

When you look at many of our native species, they are not gaudy big neon show-off plants. If someone didn’t point them out and show them to you, you could miss them. A good example is the beautiful naio [Myoporum sandwicense] here in our courtyard. If you look at the pua [flower] they are really tiny. When you look very close, there is this amazing little tee-shaped stamen-like part. You have to look especially close to see the intricacy of design of these pua; and you go “wow!” I have a series of close-ups of native pua that I thought are really amazing because the designs are fantastic [see Figure 7.3]. This collection is comprised of studies executed in drawing and painting.

The phenomenon of our ecology reminds me of how subtle our culture is and how hard it is to hear it with all the noise going on in the world. It is hard for us to be heard over the noise and glitter of Hollywood. But, I think there is still a valid way to be heard by speaking softly when working with the significances of our environment’s diverse bio-culture.

To delve deeper into his notions of creative process, I asked Enos what was on his list of essential things he needed in order to develop his ideas and make his art. What was his whole process from start to finish?
I have work that is generated from me, where I begin it and then, take it to talk story with other people. And, then there is work that gets contracted out. For example, the latest contracted work was with Kamehameha Schools, to do a series of murals at the Royal Hawaiian Shopping Center [in Waikiki] for their renovation. In these types of projects clients have very specific kinds of information that they want incorporated into the work.
In these situations I might say, “if a picture says a thousand words, then I might need a written description a thousand words long” to tell you exactly what you need. That is a great process.

It is something I learned when working with aunty Pua Burgess. Ideas need to be clarified, in order for an artist to understand in detail what is wanted from the writer or person who conceptualizes. This happens through a process of exchange, interaction and conversations between the writer and artist.

Our visual expressions and language is so important because of its communicative effect on a viewer. You could show someone a picture and [Enos gestures with his hand signaling BAM!], and you can instantly make a bridge. I compare this to giving a person a four page pamphlet or something [laughter].

When I begin a contracted work, I will sit down with the client and present a selection of ideas. During these sessions I try to ask as many questions possible. Often people don’t realize that when they say to draw somebody dancing the hula with a red malo, there needs to be more information. For instance, I might ask, “Are there any other adornments? Is there kakau? Are there prints on the kapa? What are they standing on? Where and what is the light source? And, what time of day is it?”

I have to ask all of these questions. And even then, I might not have thought it totally through; and so the client might have to make a
few adjustments. I have learned that with contract work to ask a lot of questions. What is it you want me to translate? Because in essence this is what I do. I translate.

If the idea comes from me, if it is internal, I begin researching for more information. Most of my internal ideas begin with a gut or nauo feeling and is related to my environment. Therefore, I need to have access to the ‘āina and to areas just to go holo holo [to go for a walk, stroll]. If I am doing a study on lāʻau, I need access to native plants like koa or ‘ōhia.

I pointed to our surroundings as we sat on Enos’s porch encircled by the lushness of Kalihi Valley, and he shook his head with a serene smile and gentle nod.

“We’ve been here two years and before that I was in Makaha, Waiʻanae. Everything is right up the road, or in back, and is very easy access for me."

I said, “When you talk about your earthwork projects it’s just like seamless to the rest of your more traditional art.” I continued, “The ‘āina as your inspiration is so tight with you; it is as if your concepts and forms are inseparable of each other.”

Yeh, but you know for me, it is about how our ancestors related to their ‘āina. I have been building some gardens below on the other side. I have been making a design with the loʻi style garden and its raised bed where some of them are circular. Working with the water by watching how it flows helps me to find my level. Working with water as a media is amazing. This kind of segues in, dovetails and all
grows together into the idea of using perma-culture with traditional style of planting methods and creating an aesthetics around it.

These ideas came about when working with the elementary students, who come here to plant and garden. These are the Hālau Lokahi students who come up. My hope is that they begin to think about working in the land and making it more accessible for them. This is as an extension of the sense of art and aesthetics. Gardens don’t necessarily need to look one-way and can be a really creative component to their learning.

And I said, “So art becomes part of their life.”

Yes, absolutely, it becomes something that is not separate, but is pili [connected to] with eating and with a sense of well-being.

If we look at some of the reasons why I do art, it has to do with the close relationship of our organization Kōkua Kalihi Valley with the health clinic Kōkua Kalihi Valley Health Center. Our land and activities here are vital to the Health Center because it is part of their preventative medicine program. This is fantastic and runs pili with the cultural beliefs we are practicing. In these projects, we work with different communities of Micronesians, Samoans, Tongans, and other Pacific Islanders. And, all of these cultures run so parallel with our own Hawaiian cultural beliefs. The diversity of cultures we are working with is really awesome.
Enos paused for a moment and said, “I’m sorry; I got off from the original question. We were talking about mala [gardens, cultivated field] and earthworks.” I thought to myself how I enjoyed his meander of thought because it added so much to the rich texture of our interview—our interview took shape as a process of flowing creative ideas familiar to artists when working in their studios. For Enos, his studio was all of this—the land, sun, moon, stars, air, rain, mist, clouds, springs, ocean, plants, and animals, the people who lived there, and the gods and spirits who guided.

My hope is that we can create garden areas that could be used for la'aualapa'au [medicinal plants]; and create areas that could articulate the mo'olelo of this place. I see establishing art installations along the lines of earthworks. In this way, our visitors can immerse themselves into the ʻāina, rather than trying to understand it by reading a sign.

I asked Enos, “Have you ever used any of the material here in the production of your own artwork?”

No, not yet, I am hoping to connect this in the area of carving, with different groups in our community. We have tremendous resources in materials. Look here, this is kamani [Calophyllum inophyllum]. There are six kamani trees right over here. And, we probably have a dozen more on this property. There are easily over a hundred and fifty koa [Acacia koa] trees at different states of health. When combined with our reforestation and management plans these are amazing resources. We could take it to the next step with creating a workshop area, where different Pacific Islander carvers come together, to share
their methods and techniques with each other. This would be an amazing continuation of what this 'āina wants in meeting the needs of this community.

I wanted to move our discussion to Enos’s other more traditional types of work. Because he is so well known for his paintings and drawings, I wanted to know what his studio looked like and his choice of medium. I said to him, “I know you as a painter and someone who draws. Do you do photography?”

No, not so much photography; I would say my medium these days are pretty close to pen or pencil on paper, oil, acrylic and gouache painting. I work on my kitchen counter [laughter]. My studio is really my kitchen just over there in my house. It is a little cramped.

I’ve been sticking with acrylics mostly, because they are safer around my child and they are accessible. It is a terrible habit, but I often am working and eating dinner at the same time. It is okay, if I get a little paint mixed. But, no it is not a good habit.

I had to laugh because this was just what Enos would do—eat paint so that he could be biologically a painter; remembering back to his early reference about eating kalo to be more Hawaiian. What a creative thought even though it was unintentional.

I moved our conversation to notions about his aesthetic sense. I wanted to know how he conceived it and what was important to him. What was the purpose of aesthetics in his works?

I am really excited about the idea of the continuation of a Hawaiian aesthetic. The idea is that, as images from various cultures
evolve overtime, I am curious with drawing parallels. Here is an example. I am interested in taking petroglyph designs and images, then overlapping them [see Figure 7.4]. I am also interested in taking these shapes and integrating them in a three-dimensional pattern. The word I have been throwing around is petro-glysum. When you have two images crossing over one another, you discover new shapes. I am thinking about the natural continuation of where these original petroglyphs were going in this idea of overlapping and overlaying.

Doing this kind of work is acknowledging that our ancestors are still alive. And, that they live within us and are working through us. If we are aware of what they were doing and then pickup from where they left off, this is pono [good and correct]. For instance, if we look at their pattern of the count two, four, six, and eight and anticipate where they were going, we should try to continue that pattern and let it live. An evolution of an aesthetic is like a pattern.

The idea of making or creating the patching design, when repairing a wa'a [canoe] or a papaku'i 'ai [wood board for pounding poi] is interesting to me. The art is the patching. If you look at the state of our people, there has been a lot of rot that has set in. Maybe, the healing we are bringing will be hard. The hurt has happened, but maybe, the healing will make it more beautiful.
Figure 7.4 Overlapping Petroglyph Forms by Solomon Enos

Acrylic panting on wood

Photographed by Kau‘i Chun

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I found his statement, “An evolution of an aesthetic is like a pattern” intriguing because Enos steps back to see a bigger picture. He condenses the expansion of our history, present and future into one encompassing moena a woven mat or perhaps a ‘upena a fishing net. The idea is Hawaiians are connected in the present with their past and future. Enos continued to explain how his creative process worked for him.

This is how I begin…how I can look at the world through ancient eyes. With that said, the shape of the moon hasn’t changed much since our ancestors came to these islands. Those are shapes that
are constant. I look into the sky and think my ancestors looked at that sky and saw the same moon. I look and begin with observing the curves and shape of each moon as it moves through the sky and throughout the year. I begin with that because this is a constant.

I look at the shape of the valleys, but I know much of the vegetation is radically different from old times. Our old forests have been decimated and lost.

Reading the surface and shapes of the mountains [see Figure 7.5] is interesting and curious to me. I can almost imagine that each shape is like a letter from an alphabet that has a million letters. If we knew how to read it, one mountainside could be a nonlinear textbook that could tell the history of the land from millions of years.

This revelation is significant because it brings us into his thinking process when creating art. This idea is clearly apparent in many of Enos’s landscape paintings. We see more than mountains. Enos is capturing the spirits and the energy that reside in the land.

This ties into the sophistication of our native people because they must have looked at the sky everyday and watched the stars rise where the peaks of the mountains become a super complex compass. We can map everything relative to the formation of the land. Observation was a medium for their understanding of the ‘āina and the natural world. When I think about observation I think about my aesthetics and on how I gather information from around me. I try to go as deep and far as I can to gather and perceive what is around me.
Enos opened up an interesting question regarding his belief system and aesthetics. When he produced particular kinds of works did he believe the spirit, the mana of his ancestor’s were actually embodied in that work of art? Or, was he thinking that it was a reflection or illustration of what he observed and digested? I asked Enos, “Do you consider your art a sacred or holy container that might be a place where your ancestor resides or is it an illustration or notion of your belief of who they were?”

Ah…[Long pause]…I like to think that today and yesterday and the day before is like a page in a book.
The sun we see rising was the same sun my ancestors saw a thousand years ago. I believe my work is a continuation of a pattern that started with my ancestors. I am continuing a pattern that had been started.

When I pick up poi kapala and take designs from these stamps that had been started thousands of years ago and make stamps or marks that best fit my narrative in a particular work of art I feel I am continuing a tradition.

This also relates to how we teach to build lo'i. It is a combination of restoring ancient lo'i, learning from those lo'i and building new ones. In both these ways it opens up possibilities and opportunities for me to continue an ancient beat or discussion for however our culture has been evolving.

I continued my inquiry and asked, “Five hundred years ago, Hawaiians were beating and marking kapa, making tattoo. Do you see any disconnect with your usages of contemporary materials like acrylic paint from what they did?”

The medium can evolve but the spirit or ano can be the same. To bring my answer closer to what you are asking, I think and hope to reach a level of resonation that our ancestors were able to perpetuate. My intention is to understand our past and to perpetuate this understanding.

I don’t know if I am meeting those same resonations. I would hope what I am doing is to bring a closer understanding to an ancient
perspective and understanding. I want to bring those views of understanding back because I think they are very important.

That ano (reverence, sacredness; feeling of awe) can live on in our contemporary works of art is an important revelation. I sensed after interviewing these five Hawaiian artists and others that I have spoken with on numerous occasions that most contemporary Native Hawaiian artists believe this ano to be so. Enos then spoke about the problems he faced when trying to gather information and seek knowledge about what he would eventually include in his work.

To inform my understanding I depend a lot on research. For example, the Hi’iaka book was an attempt to translate something from what was oral and written literature to a visual language. The problem is right there, that we may lose something in the translation, but we have to try. I would hope my work will become a vessel for understanding.

I believe that what I do is a form or a wa’a [vessel or canoe] that could hold and be filled with this ancient understanding. I hope this wa’a could travel out to the world and stay afloat in this media information age. If this happens then we might be able to survive and take it to another place of being.

As we had moved from issues about exhibition to thoughts about Enos’s creative process, he returned to speaking about how he saw the purpose and problems with exhibitions. I said, “My understanding is that not everything our ancestors made were necessarily conceived and used as holy vessels. They certainly had mana, but they were
not necessarily places where Akua resided. Have you ever thought about creating a work where Akua could reside?”

I think when we create gardens and lo'i and when we out-plant and do reforestation of the ‘āina; for example, when we opened up the area at mulu'u wai I had gone back in the evenings and saw pueo gather in areas we had just cleared. I think that when you open up an area choked up with invasive species, were people have come throwing all of their ʻōpala [trash or garbage] and a place witness to profound grief, suffering and deep-deep sadness, that when you open these areas and convert all of its mana into something positive…bring in the hands …bring in the aka'aka the laughter, children’s voices…

I couldn’t say if some new energy has moved into this place…I am not anyone who could make that judgment, but boy it really feels good. It really feels that the sum of all of our work goes beyond the parts of what we just finished. I like to think that that is my artwork. It is a land work.

“So,” I said, “the land is like your canvas. You spoke about doing earthworks. Is this an area where Akua might decide to reside?”

Absolutely! Absolutely! I look for opportunities to sculpt the land and bring in plants and insects. Seeing the ecosystem as a palette is in line with how our ancestors had viewed their world. They didn’t need to hang a picture of a sunset in their hale [home]. They just needed to look at the sunset. This is so much more sophisticated than
putting time and energy into a painting. The world surrounding you, in, of it itself is profoundly beautiful.

Perhaps I should have spoken about my thoughts on this in the beginning because that is how our ancestors would have looked at their world. Art and life are never separated. Work and family are never separated. Hana and ‘ohana is the same thing.

Understanding this notion of art/life and hana/’ohana as being inseparable is important. Enos provides a distinct characteristic of his art and life as one—as the same. He spoke about how he saw his place in society, his community, as a practicing artist.

In order to find new ways of expressing this information I need to draw it out and put them into canvases. I cannot bring this land down to a gallery but I can bring people up here into Kalihi Valley. I feel very well about that as a way to present one form of my art work.

Here is another thought. In line with the idea of art as an extension of life and living, I want to do art to undo art. I want to undo the need for an artist to do art for us. Everyone needs to be his or her own artist.

Enos offers us a strategic purpose for his reason for doing art. His intent connects with his community activism that serves as the vehicle for carrying out his mission to make everyone aware of his or her own artistic voice.

For example, I would hope a medical doctor might work in ways that could undo the need for people to have a doctor. And, that a lawyer could be there to undo the need for a lawyer…in theory. This is
in lieu of a society that has created a need for always having a doctor or lawyer. Unfortunately, in our day bad health and bad law or breaking laws are big businesses. They are economies into themselves.

As a creative person, I believe my job is to disseminate wonder to everyone. Every person needs to experience, in terms of art, a need to take in information, digest it and put it out. I think our media often encourages us to just take in information and then store it up. They do not give us opportunities to get it back out again in ways that articulate our thoughts and feelings. Tell a child to sit and watch a movie then ask them to write about what they experienced, saw and thought. Sometimes it is hard if they are not used to digesting and then outputting.

When our media ask us to pack it all in you end up with cognitive constipation. When people cannot adequately express themselves it sometimes comes out as violence and in un-positive ways.

I wanted to shift our discussion back to issues of aesthetics in terms of choices of material and techniques. I wanted to know where he went to school to learn his art and what artists and teachers influenced his art process and production. I suggested to Enos that when I survey his works of posters, books, and paintings, they appeared to be studies of value between lights and darks that favored middle tones rather than a study of color. And, that I had not seen any works with extreme contrast between light and darks. I told him that as we sat here on the patio at his home in Kalihi Valley surround by all this rich
landscape that it reminded me of his paintings—a meshing of medium tones both in the staging of his backgrounds and the characters. I asked Enos to speak a little about these aesthetic choices.

I will give you a bit of information about my art training. My dad only told me a few things in my work in terms of improvements and they were always very general. There was a time about 15 when I used dark lines around my images to define things. I would come with things really black. They looked like stain-glass. My dad said to try and not use black. “Black cuts yourself off. It limits you. Try to use light, bring the white of the paper come through.”

That radically changed my work. I completely dropped using black. I try not to use black unless it is for graphic work. I find burnt umber and thalo blue perfect. For me, mix them together for a good black, a nice good dark. Therefore, I have been using a lot of the white of the canvas.

A bit more about my schooling, in 1996 and 97 I took a class at Linekona at the Honolulu Academy of Arts. It was an intuitive painting class taught by Timothy Ojile. And, wow! Close your eyes! Use your non-dominant hand and a big piece of paper. You don’t even know what paint you are reaching for. While you are painting he is walking around the room telling us, for example, you are traveling through your esophagus going down into different parts of your body. I want you guys to draw the insides of your body.
I remember we were getting really heavy tapping into our intuition. With our eyes closed, you could hear somebody go tat, tah, tah, tah! Or go eh! Eh! Eh! People were really making noise as they voyaged through the landscape of themselves. It was scary and exciting. This reminded me that there was a whole universe inside of me.

That was an awesome class. I needed to think about how I could build on that. Coloring outside of the line was mandatory. Breaking the norms was fantastic. That really influenced my art. In 2003 and 2004, I took a couple beginning art classes at Kapi'olani Community College. I took Art 101 and drawing and painting with Russell Sunabe, and I had Sean Brown in sculpture class. I did these classes just to do it. I found I could do whatever I was doing four times faster. This eliminated some of my frustrations.

His next revelation about his creative process synthesizes all of his conscious and unconscious energy into his work. He throws himself into the act where his physical strengths, mental and spiritual capacities become one with his painting.

I found you can articulate a message if you compact and bring it to its essence. In order to sustain a process, I have to fool myself into thinking that what I am drawing is actually real. I try to fall into the piece, to fall into the piece and forget I am sitting there drawing on a piece of paper. I am actually tasting what I am drawing. I am hearing
things and smelling things. I don’t know if it is my nose but some sort of internal element where my dreams come into play integrating into my state of being.

He becomes one with his work using all of his senses to transmit the energy of what surrounds him—drawing on his memory of walking through the ‘āina and digging into it like Kamapua‘a.

Enos’s description of his creative process is similar to what Kalahele spoke to Dudoit (1998) regarding ono and tasting Hawaiian art.

The ono [the good taste] all of a sudden became something that we wanted to define, not the ono of da haole. When we talk about “art,” what dat “art” as Maoli [Native Hawaiian] people? What is our taste? What feel good to us? If no mo ihi [inner substance] (p. 22).

His process continues to expand into other areas that lead to newer ideas for expressing himself. He makes distraction a part of his thinking and working—using it to his advantage that places his creative mind into a semi-state of consciousness.

A part of my process is that I am an avid audio book person. I also listen to a lot of public radio. When I am working for long periods of time, I have a story, a narrative going on in my head. It is wonderful because it tends to distract me; whereas parts of my mind are a bit too critical about things. This gives me a brake and my mind has something to chew on for a while.

This distraction puts my rational logical mind into a state where my creative, free flowing, less critical mind is able to play.
There is a part of my mind that loves to have fun with lines and color where I get excited and let things just drip. Art gives that part of my mind a license to go and do things. This helps to develop my visual palette and visual stage.

Obvious through our discussion was that, for Enos, there is an intimate and symbiotic rapport between his creative and his conceptual processes.

Jumping back to how our ancestors viewed their world, when they shared mo'olelo or their stories when sitting around the fire every night they built their mind’s eye. This was something amazing. Relatively with today where there is information coming in but you don’t get it out. When information comes in through a big screen the smaller our mind’s eye becomes.

The smaller the mind’s eye, the harder it is to understand other people’s suffering. Maybe it is harder to be empathetic if you cannot visualize and when you cannot put yourself into somebody else’s shoes. So I think the healthier your imagination the healthier is your ability to feel. It hurts sometimes because the more feeling of a person you become the more you are able to feel hurt.

His notion about the relationship of imagination, feelings, and empathy is unique. I have not heard this idea from other artists. This must come from his heart and work in the community where he often participates or leads when asked to in service. The empathetic bond he has established with people is transformed into his conceptions and creative process.
Going beyond his notions of empathy, I wanted to know if he had in place a protocol or ritual while he worked to create art. What was important to him?

I have internalized protocol so deeply that it is involuntary. For me, my process is a continuum. If I am working on a project, then go to sleep, then go work on another project, there is no brake; it is all one big project. It is all one big effort that I break up over my lifetime.

If you look at protocol in this manner, it is unconscious, like my internal breathing and pumping of blood; involuntary. I don’t have to stop to think about every breath I take. I have never had to give pule or oli before I began a project.

I make a distinction between my personal process, and that of, when bringing groups of people into a special place. When you score pottery you need to score both ends of the piece. Before painting, you need to prepare the canvas; in that, it is just as important to prepare the visitor to a place.

If I am leading a class in carving and to check that everyone is in tune we will begin with pule or a moment of silence. The role of protocol often functions to bring a heightened level of awareness and mindfulness about a place or an activity. In this, I want everyone to be in tune to the rhythm of a place; so that they can get the most out of their experience. And so, as a group, we will conduct ourselves in a certain way before entrance into that place.
Protocol for me is information gathering. Protocol for me is when I am working outside. Planting is a form of protocol. It opens me up, so I am ready to go when I get to my art. Then, I can sit down and to start to draw anytime.

Enos’s protocol had something to do with a spiritual belief—a spiritual process. He internalized so much that it was just there—it was in a present state of being. His spirit moved here to there and it was always there. The protocol of just physically working a work of art, preparing his studio that was in his kitchen, and taking care of family and the land was all part of his protocol. Enos’s protocol was to clear the air, making things practical and possible. Some artists say that they always sweep their floors before beginning. Here is Enos’s view:

For me it is about physical activities, physical activities, outside and being surrounded by perpetual inspiration. It is inherent in my daily function.

I inquired, “What are your thoughts about what makes your art unique and distinctive from other artists?”

My role and main focus is working as a native artist, living in a modern world, articulating and sharing information, and wisdom as it is connected to my research about us as the indigenous people of this place, as the first people of these islands, as the Maoli [Native Hawaiian] of this ‘āina. I have been truly blessed for the opportunities that have come my way. And, this has taken the form of bringing the stories of our past and its gifts of wisdom forward and applying them
to our future. The reframing of these stories alone has imparted a tone of uniqueness into my works of art.

I think it is very important to realize this; that is, in our globalized world and economy there is a new sense of awareness about other people, their stories, perspectives and cultural practices. And, we have learned that it is because of conflict with more dominant forces, that we native people need to change how we define ourselves.

With new technologies we can bypass, to a certain degree, governmental hegemonies and corporate controls. We can, within the game of this paradigmatic reality, go independent. We can create and tell our stories independently without outside filters. This is how we start to decolonize ourselves; by telling our stories, in our voice, at our command. To realize this is to position our art and mo'olelo on a worldly stage, to bask in the floodlights of uniqueness and distinction.

I asked, “Could you give me a specific example of an idea or your work that exemplifies uniqueness and distinctness?”

I sometimes hear people say, “I am not gifted with art and that I can’t draw.” Everybody can draw because it is a learned technique. You just have to make the effort. But, it is what you choose to draw that makes it special. It is not about how you draw. It is about what you choose to bring into this world that is important. This is all part of what makes a work of art unique and distinctive.
As Enos spoke, his mind is always creating ideas and new thoughts. I wanted to know what his new ideas were at this time.

An image about a concept keeps on coming to me. You start with a petroglyph design. In one direction it starts transforming into circuitry boards. In the other direction it begins altering its shape into leaves of plants. Then, the leaf material falls away leaving a skeletal structure. In its next stage the petroglyph turns into an accessible map with roads that glide into streams.

I like this image because it speaks to where we are now, and how we can evolve in the future. The petroglyph takes our understanding and aesthetic forward by evolving it—merging and harmonizing it with the new global reality.

Part of Enos’s creative process is his intent. Why does he do what he does? Who will it serve? Who will own it? Who will control it? Why is it important that we identify indigenous thought and knowledge?

In this, our contemporary time, we cannot let it become lost in this information age, going the way side, as so much of our oral history was forgotten in previous ages. We need to protect and add new information to our cultural heritage. Cultures who have been misunderstood and are threatened can survive if they are able to transform their information and their wisdom into contemporary forms and means of communication.
My role, as well as those of other native artists is to share and protect what we love; this aloha is special. It is unique and is distinctive, inherent from its purpose and character.

This is a salient thought that describes one of the differences, the idea of aloha, as being Hawaiian. It speaks to the sentiment of many contemporary Hawaiian artists that I have encountered during my research. I said to Enos, “I would like to pick another artist that you know, your own father. What makes you unique and distinct from him, or what do you share in common with your dad?”

Sure, when I think of my father’s work, there is one image that comes to my mind. It is a painting my father did that is in my grandmother’s house. I think of how strange it is but, it is of a man who is leaning up against the top of a valley. He is like this. [Enos illustrates this by leaning his back against the banister]. All of his na‘au is open. His chest is opening up and all of his guts are spilling out. They are becoming the landscape, the lo’i. It is about the relationship between, where do we end, and where does the land begin. There is something hidden about the world around us. And, although you cannot see it, we can feel it. We can hear its beat. We need to trust it, because we know it is there.

This notion of our na‘au or guts is extremely powerful. As I sit here, we cannot see our guts or our hearts, but, it is in us, right here. That image will always influence me and it is one of the pieces I always go back to. This is the kind of visual poetry and metaphor that I aspire
toward. It is a rich aesthetic imbued with kaona, with layers and layers of concealed meaning. This goes back to my earlier statement that what matters in terms of unique and special is your choice of what you draw and have to say.

Part of my research seeks to find out what artists consider the best works that exemplify and manifest their ideas, theories and notions. I asked Enos to share his.

There are two areas I want to move into. They are both similar, but tend to move in different directions. The first is to continue to work on stories like Hi'iaka in visual and book form. I would like to leave this world having completed a body of books that I had a part in producing that could fill bookshelves.

I want to take and replant all of the seeds of information and wisdom found in the archives of the museum, so they once again blossom into trees of knowledge; to become kūmu for us, that guide our understanding of this world.

And, along with the books, I vision myself as an art director, or as an artist working with students where we could cultivate these stories into new media forms. I think a whole industry could be built on telling our stories. This effort supports and shores up our culture, it reinforces our identity, and it gives us connection to our destiny with our ao. We would be able to visualize our future. It is a win, win situation all the way around…and besides it is sustainable. This might
lead to creating micro economies where people could retrofit and work in their homes.

This area connects to my second field of interest, which is related to creative storytelling. It is taken and is inspired by all of our ancestral stories. These stories belong to us, in part, because the sun that rose in Hi’iaka during ancient times is the same sun here. We are Hi’iaka. The kalo we are eating is the same kalo that they ate. These stories are part of our internal organs and are not separated from us.

I am really excited about this idea of continuation; where we are picking up on the same beat that our ancestors created to; and where we could add to a new layer of understanding. We need to survive these traditional stories; and we can do this by updating them into new forms of media.

I asked, “How?”

When we take an old story and create new ones that are more fanciful, it is like rejoining and fixing a limb. If you want to fix something you need to have a parallel example; a bracing example. I liken this to a splint that helps to fix and heal something; to make it stronger and enduring. They are also like grafts; in a sense they help us to reconnect to our past, with a renewed set of understanding about our present and future.

I enjoy creating stories that are more fanciful than the original; that even crosses into the realm of science fiction. When I take these
liberties, I do so because I am trying to reach as broad an audience as possible.

A tree survives because its seeds can take root in many different types of soil. These stories are like trees. If I am able to plant them and bring meaning and relevance to new audiences, our stories will survive. If I can tell stories that are closer to main-stream contemporary stories, but still have an essence that allude to stories of our old, I am satisfied.

It is also important to clarify the distinction between these recreated stories that are more fanciful and science fiction in character with that of the original stories, which are truer to our sense of how we Hawaiians perceive the world with our culture and our history.

All of the artists interviewed for this research spoke about change and the effects change had on Native Hawaiians. Their opinions about social and political changes offer perspectives that are framed from creative artistic minds. All too often, it is the ideas of non-artists who make policy that changes our conditions. I asked Enos, “How do you see the world changing?”

I think and hope that the people of this earth are open to understanding these parallel or dual systems of knowledge; and big enough to allow us to live our contemporary reality that is both dual and duplex. We can be both modern and ancient people at the same time. We do not have to sacrifice one for the other. In fact, if we are to survive we need to harmonize these parallel differences.
We need to weave in new materials into our haku. Even though it is not the material from here we still need to make it tight. We still need to do a good job.

It is worth noting that both Kalahele and Enos refer to the weave. As Kalahele spoke in his interview about the cultural significance of weaving sculpture, Enos speaks about weaving a new and stronger life.

As we were getting to the end of this particular segment I thanked Enos for sharing his ideas and thoughts. While changing the tape in my recorder Enos said a remarkable and revealing thing about his process of thinking when painting.

You know I try to stay focused, but like to look at things from many angles. I think and talk the same way I paint. I take my image and might put a little bit of blue in the sky, and then go over here, and put blue in the ocean, and then to another part of the work, and say “Oh, blue would look great over here.” And, then I will take my green and put some green over here, and there is some…where I will work the whole surface at the same time, where I will jump all over the place, but in the end result you have an image, where there are relationships. Not all of it is really obvious.

I had not asked him a question; he just spoke from his heart and mind and offered this addition. In the course of our interview I believe this was one of the most unique and revealing remarks by Enos of his thinking and artistic process. And, it came from his casual observation and reflection of what was happening at the moment. For me this was such a profound revelation that I understood not only his thinking and creative process
but realized then why our interview was on this purposeful but meandering journey. His conceptual process influenced the flow and direction of the interview—and, “Not all of it is really obvious.” He then spoke about how other things helped him to free his mind and to think.

I am a real avid listener to public radio and avid listener to storybook audio-book listener. I am always having this other thing going in my mind and it helps me to freeze up another part of my mind that focuses on line and color.

That being said I wanted to know when he knew that a work was at a finished state. “How do you know when it is finished?”

That is actually one of the hardest things to decide as an artist, as to when is the thing pau. It depends. If it has to do with contract work, I will wait for the client to say, if it fits their impression of what they were asking for. I don’t know if I can say specifically whether the painting is pau, other than, I can go over every inch of it, every hundredth inch of the painting.

And then say, “If I just take this one square inch is this complete? Does this feel balanced? With this next inch, does this feel balanced, even though it is only just one shade of blue with a little cloud in the corner or something?” What I do is I organize my entire image into a grid, and then evaluate each square with questions like: “How does this feel? Does this feel balanced? Can this be an almost stand alone piece of artwork?” If I can do that and say each square
inch of the piece feels good, then I am able to move on from the piece. If I could name any definitive process that I use it would be this.

**Exhibition**

Of all the contemporary Native Hawaiian artists living and working in Hawai‘i today, Enos is one of the most visible. His artistic bibliography is extensive and constantly growing. Exhibits and commissioned works include the following: The Biennial of Hawai‘i Artists X at Spalding House—Honolulu Museum of Art; Aulani a Disney Resort and Spa; murals at The Sheraton Waikiki; and a collaborative mural commissioned by the Hawai‘i State Office of Hawaiian Affairs at The Hawai‘i Convention Center. I asked Enos what he considered when exhibiting his works in public spaces.

Simply, it ties into my need, to the importance, of disseminating our cultural information; our message. You need to prepare the viewer by providing a story that supports your work. You would not walk into a gallery in New York without prior information. In order to approach it intelligently you would want to do a bit of research and find some context about it. If we provide only an image without a story it doesn’t help the viewer to understand what we are trying to articulate. So, a story behind the artwork or context as to what it represents is important.

This is a strategy that many contemporary Hawaiian artists use in order to articulate their messages clearly. For viewers who are not familiar with the cultural
context of the works, an interpretive label or accompanying narrative can guide them with their understanding. As Noelle Kahanu with the Bishop Museum suggested, accompanying text should not take away from the viewing pleasure but rather enhance the pleasure through understanding (see Chapter Four). I then asked, “Do you see public exhibition spaces as a place for education?”

For education, yes, absolutely; I see these spaces as opportunities for education. When I meet someone and have the chance to discuss what I do, I talk about my responsibility to education and as a caretaker of the land. So, as an artist I look at every opportunity to share as a chance to pass on knowledge. This is vital!

I asked Enos to speak about other ways his ideas informed and supported his sense of aesthetics. As he spoke about this, Enos turned our discussion from the creative process and aesthetics to the area of exhibition and working with his community.

There are a lot of concepts that I have been trying to articulate. Perhaps, this is why I now identify myself, not so much as an artist, but rather, as a conceptualist. In fact, the finished piece of artwork is not as interesting to me as are the sketches, the ideas or concepts. It is the ideas and going through those ideas, or the process of generating these ideas, that for me are much more interesting.

A finished piece of artwork in a gallery could almost be like being in a morgue [laughter]. You miss out on the process and development of its life cycle.
This comment gives a significant insight into how Enos views the purpose and function of art. For Enos the creative process is more important than the hanging of work in a gallery. He prefers to be engaged with the transformation of ideas during the creative act.

Okay, it could be beautiful and there is a story, but you missed out of the whole life process. Or, it is like hanging out with elderly people, but never having had a chance of seeing their life. You can hear some of it. If you were to walk with them step-by-step through all of their life, it would be much more enriching.

This is why I think teaching and sharing a process is as (sic) more important than the finished product. I would rather do a hundred sketches than to do one finished piece.

Again, we find a salient thought about the creative process having more value to Enos’s life than the body of finished works. But with this said, Enos uses his art in public spaces, as many contemporary Native Hawaiian artists do—to teach and share in order to affect positive change in their communities.

For Enos it is nearly impossible to separate this notion of community outreach from putting his works into the public sphere. With these thoughts, Enos touched on exhibition, galleries, museums, and large-scale public works.

As our discussion took different turns, Enos spoke about future projects for putting his creative works out in the public—but not in a gallery or museum. His creative mind is always churning for new possibilities.
I would be really interested in doing radio plays telling either traditional stories or extrapolations based on traditional stories, with the whole audio suite of sound effects and different voices; and Podcasting it. Now we would have a real way of articulating our stories where we don’t have to pay a radio company to distribute it. We can do it independently. This again is an opportunity to optimizing our relationship with the new technology as a natural continuation of what our ancestors did.

Enos is always pushing the limit reaching to find new ways for expressing his creative concepts. Enos spoke earlier about preferring to consider himself a conceptual artist. This is significant because as he went through the process of reflecting about himself as a Hawaiian and an artist he realized that for him what was important were his ideas. He spoke as an entrepreneur artist but not solely in the sense of making profit. Enos proposed launching a new contemporary Hawaiian industry.

A part of me as a visual artist wants to break into these new kinds of media, but I want to do it by cultivating an industry around it. How do we create a Bollywood of the Pacific? Here is an industry where you could retrofit buildings, or create studios in your own home.

This encourages micro-economies, and, it gets Hawaiians learning their own language, because if you have to do the lua master instead of the kung fu master. There is a whole series, of a whole genre waiting to be tapped into. It is an industry that has a minimal impact to
the environment. It is an industry that could help to reinforce our sense of who we are as a people, our sense of identity.

To bring a lot of what I have said full circle, if you can control your identity then I think you can control your destiny. If you can see it and draw a picture you can be it. We as artists need to articulate this to our people.

This idea of being able to be a visionary is important because Enos understands the power of being able to think, see, and control destiny. He clearly believes in the power and importance of the artist. His big ideas open doors for bigger projects and collaboration with others.

I would like to produce film in order to expand the bigger picture, where I can hold larger concepts. There is something that I learned working up here, where we have thirty to fifty kids at a time doing a series of plantings. It takes a lot of organizing, interfacing and educating. And, it all has to happen, done with patience I would love to apply what I have learned working with these students to working with a host of other artists, writers and creative thinkers in order to bring these things together; as a way to really shore up our core beliefs and take our stories into the visual realm.

In his next comment about Hawaiian mo‘olelo (story), Enos reveals his cultural sensibility when conceiving new material. Enos is sensitive to retelling the stories, so that the original Hawaiian concepts about the relationship of deities and their mana (spiritual energy) is not changed in the translation.
For example, one of the things we had to leave out of the Hi'iaka book [see Figure 7.6] was the visual representation of mo'o [supernatural lizard-like beings]. This is because we could not mix Pele’s clan with the mo'o. In the future, I can vision collaborating on a new project about just mo'o, where traditional practitioners, writers, and artists could create, articulate and express into the visual realm this very important archetype of our culture.

I have seen some amazing images, for instance aunty Ipō’s mo'o with the ko'a [coral] and the ‘io [hawk] at the Center for Hawaiian Studies. It was beautiful. I really love how it all came together. Those kinds of representations are very subtle. There is a significance that is inherent within that type of subtlety. I am not quite sure on how to show that yet.

Another visual image I have is about transformation. How would a filmmaker approach Kamapua'a transforming [See Figure 7.1] from a man into a pua'a? How would you approach that? One thing coming to mind is that you could show a man walking behind lā'au [plants], as he walks past the lā'au it blooms. Then on the other side is a pua'a [pig]. This uses visual poetry.

For me the art is not the individual image but the relationship of a series of images. This is how we talk and articulate about process and transformation; and the significance of what we are doing; the movie motif. It is about how we connect to who we are.
In the span of a few minutes, Enos presented two wonderful concepts that could be turned into feature films—about mo‘o and Kamapua‘a’s transformation or shape changing. That he sees the link between individual images not only references his desire to make film, it is also a reminder that Enos paints and draws conceptually within the realm of narrative storytelling—these are like storyboards for a movie.

Figure 7.6 The Bookcover Illustration of Hi’iakapōliopele by Solomon Enos

Found at oha.org

Reproduced with permission from Solomon Enos
Summary

Enos’s interview did not have a clean shape of a left to right, and up and down journey. It was free flowing, often times taking unwieldy, oblique turns. Enos spoke about “peeling back the layers of Hawaiian culture” to find ancient knowledge. In a similar way I wanted him to talk openly and freely, to peel back his layers, to unbridle any feelings of restraint in pursuit of uncovering and delving into his cognitive process; in particular his creative notions.

Creativity.

He spoke candidly about his creative process. He said that he paints like he thinks. He looks at things from many angles. During the process of thinking and painting, things seem to jump around. It might seem chaotic but, underlining it there is an order of relationships that may not be obvious at first.

Exhibition.

His idea about exhibition was honest, blunt and surprising but understandable. For Enos, the creative process and development of a life cycle held more value than hanging a work of art in a gallery. He would rather engage with the discovery that comes with drawing the preliminary sketches rather than putting the finishing touches on a work of art.

Creativity and Identity.

Enos’s notions on identity and his creative process are like intimate companions whose clear lines of differences are blurred. Perhaps this is because both are nourished by the same source—ancient Hawaiian knowledge. Enos is like Kamapua’a, the great shape changer who digs with each thrust with his crescent moon tusk, honed ivory, hard and
white it sparkles through the crusted caked mud as he ploughs, and with smelling nose flared, his flower snorts in heavy ha. He uses those short curved o'o sticks to find, to seek, and then at last, to eat the sacred kalo.

And, like the mythical Kamapua'a who plows the soil, Enos digs in the forest searching for the mo'olelo of that place. He peels back layer after layer after layer; and filters everything that he has discovered through what he calls the ancient eyes of his ancestors. He seeks this knowledge to become a translator able to reinterpret the wisdom of his ancestors. He believes this knowledge can guide him through critical periods.

Enos believes that if he plants and eats sacred kalo everyday his skin and hair would transform into being Hawaiian. And, that eventually he would be returned back to the land of his ancestors. Enos considers the ‘āina or land as his grandmother—something sacred that needs to be protected and nourished. For him the lepo (soil) is the flesh of the ‘āina.

As his babies sleep in the bosom of their mama, in the tranquility of moonlight, Enos works stealthily across his kitchen table—a new drawing! A painting! Ideas, ideas, and more ideas plant their seeds in his fertile na'au (gut) till the innocent eyes see the elegant truth. He believes, “It is important to understand that my art is a way for me to understand who I am.”

Enos thinks that, “If you can see it and draw a picture you can be it! If you can control your identity then I think you can control your destiny.” For him, an artist’s responsibility is to find this vision and relationship between identity and destiny. And, with this knowledge to “articulate this to our people.” This facilitation of identity and destiny is a key component that fuels Enos’s commitment to his community. Part of his
community service is to build a group of people that could form a council where artists could go to talk and share the images they had drawn. My understanding is that for Enos the notion of exhibition goes beyond showing artwork in a gallery. For him the important part of an exhibition is to advance his ideas about identity, art, and creativity in ways that could improve his community.

Born from seeds set early by his parents and by a father who put aside his art career, then dedicated his life to revitalize the Hawaiian culture through community service and who incubated the beginnings of Ka‘ala Farms and guided it through its successes—Enos’s life, identity and art as a Hawaiian is centered on community involvement.

His identity as a Native Hawaiian was something that was formed very early from a family that was considered a bit radical because of their community activism. His father is Eric Enos and mother Rochelle Enos. He said that as a child his parents wanted him to learn the value of working hard and to understand the importance of kalo to our Hawaiian culture.

Enos explained his thoughts about the importance of kalo. He said that, “Our Hawaiian culture is as like kalo.” Kalo is meant to be huki or pulled and cut during harvest. But, through the course of American colonization and with the impact of globalization Hawaiian culture “got ripped up!” Enos believes we need to stop pointing fingers of blame but rather to reverse the revenge by planting more kalo—by replanting our culture. “The healing needs to happen! We literally need to reforest the ‘āina by creating new and traditional forms of literature and books.”
CHAPTER EIGHT: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This research centered on the identity, creativity, and exhibition experiences of five contemporary Native Hawaiian artists. In interviews, the artists presented their stories and mana’o, spoken in their own voices. All the artists shared thoughtful comments about the connections between their ethnic and artistic identities, their creative processes, and their perspectives on exhibition experiences.

I analyzed information in the interviews by comparing and contrasting the responses of the five artists to my questions. I was looking for statements that described the artistic life of these contemporary Native Hawaiian visual artists. I looked for particular responses that stood-out for artistic content and artist temperament. I looked for differences, similarities, and uniqueness of thought and experiences that indicated significant thematic strands and revealing perspectives. In the following pages, I present the findings as they pertain to identity, creative process, and exhibition experiences.

Hawaiian Artists and Their Perspective on Identity

I first wanted to know how contemporary Native Hawaiian artists described their identity. My goal was to find specific examples that established relationships between their identities as Native Hawaiians and their artistic practices. It was important to include examples of each artist’s work in his or her chapter to illustrate the relationship between art making and self-identity. I believe each artist imbues his or her work with unique and distinctive markings that reveals his or her identity. These works become
places where connections of genealogy and cultural heritage connect with an artist’s identity.

First, I wanted to establish a definition for the term “Native Hawaiian Artist.” When an artist identifies him or herself as a Hawaiian artist, what does this mean? Assuming that Hawaiian culture is important to these five Native Hawaiian artists, I sought to find the cultural component of each artist’s identity—his or her affinity with genealogy and personal family histories and stories that influenced his or her identity and art practice.

In the interviews, I searched for what the artists had to say about Hawaiian, local, Asian, American and other Indigenous cultures. I also searched for the influences these cultures had on the formation of the artists’ identities, art processes, and worldviews. I wanted to know what Hawaiian artists thought about American colonization and how colonization affected their identities and art practices.

For each of these five artists, I found that his or her moʻokūʻahau (genealogy) along with an awareness of his or her Hawaiian culture were extremely vital for his or her sense of identity. Every artist related strongly to his or her moʻokūʻahau. Each artist believed that his or her connection to Hawaiian lineage assured that he or she was Hawaiian. In addition, all the artists found it imperative to immerse themselves in the study of Hawaiian culture. Their immersion enabled them to rely on cultural references that supported their identities as Native Hawaiian artists and provided ideas that inspired their art. The following are salient examples of what the interviewees said about their identity as Native Hawaiians.

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7 Of, relating to, or characteristic of Hawai‘i and the multiethnic cultural influences particular to its local custom.
**Dalani Kaiuhou Tanahy about identity.**

Dalani Kaiuhou Tanahy provided a portrait of growing up in the San Diego area of Southern California. Kaiuhou Tanahy shared that she never felt unwelcomed or targeted as different. Even though she lived in a predominately white neighborhood, she was aware of her darker skin and that she had a Hawaiian name. During the summer months or at other times during the year, Kaiuhou Tanahy often came back to Hawai‘i to be with her family and cousins. Visits back to the islands brought her in closer contact with her Hawaiian heritage giving her important cultural references. Understandings gained from these summer visits played an essential role in building Kaiuhou Tanahy’s cultural foundations that she could later depend on when refining her skills as a Hawaiian kapa maker and constructing her identity as Hawaiian in more distinct ways.

It is noteworthy that Kaiuhou Tanahy’s growth and understanding of Hawaiian culture greatly expanded when she finally returned to Hawai‘i to live. She possesses the drive of a curious life-long learner. Her self-directed research broadened and deepened her knowledge about Hawaiian culture and this experience brought her closer to embracing her Hawaiian identity. Kaiuhou Tanahy, as she educated herself about Hawaiian culture, was able to deepen and broaden her personal views about what it means to be Hawaiian.

Kaiuhou Tanahy grew up in San Diego influenced by the beliefs of Mormonism and American social customs. Her Hawaiian culture and family roots, her church and the influences of American culture continue to play an important role with how Kaiuhou Tanahy considers identity.
Regarding her American up-bringing, Kauihou Tanahy referred to her San Diego family to be a gentrified type that was more haole (white or foreigner) than Hawaiian in practice.

I suppose it was like being raised with any other kind of people. There wasn’t anything that stood out making me feel more Hawaiian, per se.

The exceptions would be for the more ingrained things and traits that Hawaiian people were known for.

For Kauihou Tanahy, Hawaiians were known for being very generous, humble and hardworking people who always wanted to feed you. These were traits that made an impression on her sense of identity as a Hawaiian at an early age, making her feel proud to be a little different from others. Since that time, her ideas about what it means to be Hawaiian changed. Through her experiences learning about Hawaiian culture, working at Ka‘ala Farms as a kapa practitioner and teacher, and living on the Wai‘anae coast on the west side of O‘ahu, Kauihou Tanahy has reconsidered her ideas about what it means to be Hawaiian.

In our discussion, Kauihou Tanahy strongly suggested that she never felt the effects of American colonization on her identity as a Native Hawaiian. However, she said that her parents’ generation had been more affected by colonization. Additionally, the institution Ka‘ala Farms, where she worked, had taken a position to fight for Native Hawaiian land rights and access to natural resources.

The cultural influences of growing up Hawaiian and American and the moral guidance Kauihou Tanahy embraces from her Mormon faith enables her to focus and forge-on with her self-directed research about Hawaiian kapa. In doing so, Kauihou
Tanahy has emerged as one of Hawai‘i’s most knowledgeable and able contemporary kapa makers. Her identity as a Hawaiian is wrapped in the wauke plant material that she beats into kapa cloth. It is her work and her mo‘okū‘ahau that identifies who she is today.

Noelle Kahanu about identity.

Noelle Kahanu, the kāhili maker, said that both her Hawaiian and Japanese cultures were important to her perception of identity. She keenly regarded and held with esteem the concepts and practices of both cultures. For Kahanu, her Japanese heritage was centered on a great sense of understanding and embracing values, loyalty, and family. Being Japanese was not dependent on only being able to speak Japanese; it was also dependent on celebrating Japanese cultural events with her family: Kahanu stated, “[My] family was really close; it was not the full on mochi pounding. But, during this past New Year’s Eve we went over to my auntie’s house to make mochi.” Most likely, it was these positive family exchanges and experiences that grounded Kahanu’s memories of her Japanese culture and helped her to balance the two sides of her cultural heritages—Japanese and Hawaiian.

Kahanu’s professional life as a project coordinator at the Bishop Museum is mainly involved with Hawaiian cultural heritage. Her close proximity to the collections while coordinating new projects affected the way Kahanu considered her identity as a Hawaiian. Kahanu’s identity was broadened and deepened because of the effects of her professional work. It was these work experiences that intimately connected Kahanu with her profound interest in customary practices and traditions of Hawaiian culture and arts. An excellent example of Kahanu’s work was her kāhili (see Figure 4.2) in an exhibit that
honored Nāhiʻenaʻena the last reigning nīʻaupiʻo (first born) princess. In this kāhili, Kahanu created a moving work of art that helped to tell the story of this princess and her sacred pāʻū that wrapped around her loin.

Working with Hawaiian individuals and groups in the community places her in a unique and important role as an advocate for Hawaiian rights. She is a serious voice that fights for social justice affecting Hawaiian culture and its heritage. Kahanu’s advocacy work is an integral part of defining herself as Hawaiian.

Both her work and her family played an important part in providing Kahanu with a sense of being Hawaiian. Kahanu’s discovery of a logbook dated from 1936 written by her Hawaiian grandfather George Kahanu (see Figure 4.3) when he was stationed on Jarvis Island, reinforced her personal identity through her moʻokūʻauhau, or genealogy as a Hawaiian. Her lineage as Hawaiian became stronger as she was able to learn about her family heritage.

In forming her identity as Hawaiian, Kahanu was sure that she needed to define herself as Hawaiian beyond merely having a koko, or blood lineage: Kahanu said, “I think that in order to be contemporary you really need to have a cultural foundation.” Her process of making contemporary and traditional kāhili plunged her into the spiritual realm of ancient Hawaiian ways of conceiving and making objects of simple but complex beauty (see Figures 4.1, 4.2, 4.4).

Kahanu placed a real value on cultural understanding and grounding, which she considered essential to framing her identity, work, and art practice. It seems that her walks in the mud of the streams and mountains along ancient paths once traveled by
Hawaiians of old have permeated her conscious and unconscious sense of identity as a contemporary Hawaiian artist.

**Kaili Chun about identity.**

Kaili Chun believed family and environmental influences played an important role in shaping her identity. She was born and raised in Hawai‘i. Chun shared, “I think our family surroundings and environment have a lot to do with who you are, what you become, how you think.” She believed that these factors played into the creation and molding of her identity. Her haole side was primarily German, Scottish, and English. Although she was acutely aware of her many different ethnicities, she definitely associated herself with being Hawaiian. Chun’s ability and commitment to furthering a contemporary Hawaiian perspective within her artwork became evident during her interview. In this way, Chun’s art and her identity were bonded.

In the matter of art and identity, Cazimero (2001) stated, “through art as a window one’s identity is revealed” (p. 11). The intimate relationship of Chun’s identity and culture is reflected in her painting *Na Pali I* (see Figure 5.1). For me, the refined imagery and energy encapsulated in the safe haven of this sea grotto with its undulating flow of seawater captures Chun’s spirit and mana (supernatural energy). During my interview with Chun, we pondered over whether this painting is a reflection of her self. All of her works—her traditional carvings (see Figure 5.5), ceramic works, and her three-dimensional type installations (see Figures 5.3, 5.6, 5.7, 5.8)—are reflections of her manaʻo, or thoughts, that strongly identify her as a Hawaiian artist.
Imaikalani Kalahele about identity.

Imaikalani Kalahele presented poignant and sometimes contentious issues. He was passionate about claiming who could be considered Hawaiian. This is most evident when he said, “you get, you get, you don’t, you not…and that is all there is to it!” He linked Hawaiian identity through Hawaiian conceptions of genealogy. Kalahele often uses his artwork to shock his audience into understanding that his identity as a Hawaiian should not be taken lightly. It is important that his art speaks to issues about Hawaiian identity.

Kalahele used his painting concerning Papa (see Figure 6.5) to portray his beliefs about what it is to be Hawaiian.

The she in the painting or woman is Papa because all of the genealogy goes back to Papa. We all go back to Papa…we come from Papa…we come from Po…we come up through our deities. One of the reasons they have their pedigree is because they breed. This is how we kept our bloodlines. They [the three Ali‘i in his painting] were bred to breed. They were the high of the high. They kept the lines. It was off these lines that we were supposed to be able to trace from where we came from. All of a sudden, they were gone! What happened?

His bluntness underscored his disgust with the social political definitions and policies of who and what is a Hawaiian. He judiciously referred to Prince Jonah Kūhiō’s insistence for one thirty-second blood quantum and to the continuing struggles of Hawaiians today with less than fifty percent koko, or blood.
Kalahele did not agree with Hawaiian homesteaders, who he believed took most of the limited resources allocated by the governments of the United States and the State of Hawai‘i. In addition, he railed against those without koko who pretended to be Native Hawaiian: “I’m sorry man! Your ancestry is not that, kalamai, and what is the problem with your ancestry that you so willingly throw it away to be somebody else?”

Of all the artists I interviewed, Kalahele’s response about Hawaiian identity provided the most provocative messages. For him, it is not enough just to be able to speak Hawaiian and practice Hawaiian traditions. It is also necessary to be able to trace your lineage to your Hawaiian origin.

I think Kalahele is able to believe and say these rather blunt and seemingly harsh statements because, by character and temperament, he is a political activist willing to verbalize things that others are not comfortable saying.

**Solomon Enos about identity.**

Solomon Enos embraced an interesting thought about how food consumption affects his identity as a Hawaiian. He connected eating sacred kalo with his identity and his art practice. He believed that if he ate what his Hawaiian ancestors had eaten at every meal, he would be a totally different person, and a new way of viewing the world would open for him. For Enos, the ramifications and consequences of eating kalo were significant. He would be able to see with ancient eyes what and how his forefathers had seen. Thus, he could be better prepared to unearth, recover, and retell the ancient mo’olelo that he intended to preserve. Enos’s notion about eating directly affected his
ability to see and to conceive new works that identified and represented him as a Hawaiian.

Enos asserted that in terms of identity and koko (blood), if someone from outside Hawai‘i who was not Hawaiian had come here twenty years ago, and had lived, farmed, and ate kalo from the ‘āina, they would be eating the dust of Hawaiian ancestors and replacing their cells with the dust of the ‘āina. Enos compared this experience with the experience of an outsider to a Hawaiian who ate only fast foods.

Enos asked, “Who is more Hawaiian? I don’t know.” This idea was something that permeated his thoughts about his identity and relationship to where he lived. It is interesting that he based his idea on Western notions of cell replacement, even though identifying strongly with his Hawaiian ethnicity and heritage. Eating is a basic human function necessary for sustaining life. Foods have powerful cultural connections that link individuals culturally to identity. For Hawaiians the cultural significance of kalo is linked to genealogy. From the buried fetus named Haloanaka, the still-born child of Wakea (sky father) and his beautiful daughter Ho‘ohokukalani sprang kalo—thus Hawaiian identity has its root in kalo. For Enos, the genealogical relevance of kalo was a core element that affected how he perceived his identity as Hawaiian. In turn, Enos’s art process and making was philosophically influenced by Hawaiian conceptions about kalo.

A synthesis about identity.

Each artist’s mana‘o aligned with my own beliefs about how to define “Native Hawaiian.” I can say that a Native Hawaiian person has genealogical bloodlines to Hawaiian ancestry and cultural heritage to Hawaiian culture. To be Hawaiian, you must
have the koko, or blood,—but this alone is not enough; family heritage, stories, and histories also play a role in shaping a person’s Hawaiian identity. To be a contemporary Native Hawaiian artist in a position to play a positive role in your Hawaiian community means that you need to be culturally knowledgeable and have genealogical koko (blood) connections.

Additionally, it is essential that Native Hawaiian artists understand the effects of Americanism on their identity as a distinctive group of people. Although Kauihou Tanahy said she had not been affected by American colonization during her up-bring in San Diego, she spoke about how her employer, Ka‘ala Farms, addressed this issue. This knowledge enables Hawaiian artists to center their understanding of the consequences of colonization and to find balance with the values and beliefs of both cultures that often are at odds with one another. To be an ethnically mixed contemporary Native Hawaiian artist means you must be able to function within and between multiple cultures.

Education plays a major role with developing identity. Identity for a contemporary Native Hawaiian is enriched by access to and success in Western, Asian or indigenous educational situations. A contemporary Hawaiian needs to be open to learning from many different sources. This ability to learn and use critical knowledge from these resources enables Hawaiians to adapt to contemporary life. Their survival as a distinct group is dependent on adapting to new ways.

Bloodlines, family heritage, cultural knowledge, customary practices, education, and adaptability are the main features that help define the term “contemporary Native Hawaiian.” This definition will certainly undergo change—but for Native Hawaiians it
will always be linked to ancestral lineage. And for contemporary Native Hawaiian visual artists, their identities will always be linked to and revealed in their artwork.

**Hawaiian Artists and Their Creative Processes**

In the second section of my research, I sought to find an encompassing description of the creative processes practiced by Native Hawaiian artists. The data from the interviews show a rich diversity of interests, conceptual ideas, processes, aesthetic senses, and use of materials. I explored where the artists found their creative inspirations and how their ideas emerged and developed.

**Resources and materials.**

Without cultural resources contemporary Native Hawaiian artists would have difficulty developing meaningful works of art. And without access to materials Native Hawaiian artists would be hard-pressed to create works that could transform their abstract ideas into forms that display their creative thoughts.

The interviews revealed that the act of using theories, materials, visual languages, discoveries, and practices from Western, Asian, or other cultures was not a problem for these five artists. They were using what was rightfully theirs: what Jahnke (2003) suggested was the reclaiming by a colonized people of their kuleana (right and responsibility). They were mixing and taking from all of their cultural heritages, Western, Asian, or Hawaiian.

These artists engaged eagerly and often in cross-cultural borrowing or multicultural mixing. They were continuously utilizing and creating innovative structures
and visual vocabularies of Creole-type visual languages to navigate through their multicultural realities. Kalahele laughed about using contemporary materials, saying that, “I like this stuff!”

**Wähine preferences about resources and their creative process.**

When I analyzed the data along gender lines of wähine and kāne concerning their art production, an interesting dichotomy appeared. The wähine artists—Kauihou Tanahy the kapa artist, Noelle Kahanu the kāhili maker and Kaili Chun the conceptual and installation artist—often expressed their artistic mana’o (thoughts) utilizing geometric abstract shapes by frequently placing them in repetitive patterns. As the patterns repeated they formed wave-like groups suggestive of moving energy. These patterns took inspiration from natural energies and elements. This was not unlike how Hawaiians created repetitive patterns that symbolized elements found in the landscape such as ocean waves and mountains. These wähine artists were connected to their cultural heritage and Hawaiian identity through an aesthetic sensibility that responded to how Hawaiians of old might have considered pono or correct forms of visual expressions.

Although Kauihou Tanahy, Kahanu, and Chun generally used traditional materials that possessed and conveyed profound conceptual meanings, they did not have problems using contemporary materials when their artwork required a conceptual or practical use of these products. Kahanu used discarded plastic grocery bags for her kāhili to address her thoughts about consumerism and waste (see Figure 4.1). Chun used everything from a discarded refrigerator (see Figure 8.4) to her grandfather Mossman’s favorite pickling juice (see Figure 5.3), which temporarily preserved, while at the same
time dissolved photocopies of Western drawings of Hawaiians. Kauihou Tanahy used silica to dry her wauke leaves in her artwork *Kapa lā‘au* (see Figure 3.4) and had contemplated soaking them in a mixture of glycerin and water to make them more supple.

![Image](image.jpg)

Figure 8.4 *Pua‘a* by Kaili Chun.

Icebox with wooden pig.

Reproduced with permission by Kaili Chun.

*Dalani Kauihou Tanahy.*

Kauihou Tanahy’s creative process stood apart from the other four contemporary artists because she grew her own wauke plants for making kapa. She also harvested other natural materials and plants and then processed them for her dyes. Furthermore, she made some of her own tools and implements for processing the kapa. All of these steps center Kauihou Tanahy’s creative process and her artworks within traditional practices of kapa making. Like a bridge across time, Kauihou Tanahy connected the past customary practices with her present investigations about kapa making. Kauihou Tanahy’s alignment of her creative process and focus on kapa making from a traditional Hawaiian
perspective deepened her identity as Hawaiian. This reinforces the notion that making art is a human activity intimately connected to culture.

Noelle Kahanu.

Kahanu offered this insight about her creative process in being a Hawaiian practitioner: “I think that in order to be contemporary, you really need to have a cultural foundation.” Kahanu chose to align her Western academic training with immersing and opening herself to the knowledge that came from having her feet in the mud of the ‘āina, hiking in the forest and mountains, and letting her dreams speak to her. She learned how to weave and make kapa and kāhili, do lua, and practice chanting. For her works, Kahanu used both traditional and contemporary materials and valued the importance of how a particular material could convey symbolic meaning.

Her choice was to work at reinforcing and strengthening her identity as Hawaiian by using a creative process that extended beyond her studio. Her work as a project facilitator at Bishop Museum is in part an extension of her creative process. Kahanu utilizes her creative sensibilities to conceive and design museum exhibitions. As Kahanu deepens her understanding of Hawaiian culture and applies this knowledge to her creative process and work she reinforces her identity as a Hawaiian.

Kaili Chun.

A central part of Chun’s creative process was aligning her intellect, intuition, instinct, and spirit with her experiences of building an understanding of Hawaiian culture and perspectives. This combination gave her a creative process that was open and rich.
Chun spoke about how her foundation as a person was based on her understanding of Hawaiian perspectives and their relationship with other cultures. She showed her openness to learning about other bodies of knowledge distinct from Native Hawaiian perspectives.

Openness enables Chun to understand perspectives that are different from her own views. Her intentions to make intelligent choices in her creative work and life addressed issues about being Hawaiian. As a contemporary Native Hawaiian artist, Chun’s creative process focused on the tensions between cultures: “I am fascinated by the differences and similarities between the two [Western and Hawaiian].” Her motive was to engage with an audience outside of Hawai‘i to illustrate her own Hawaiian experiences and how she understood and translated the political problems facing her people. To do this work, Chun gave great importance to symbolic concepts that traditional and contemporary materials could convey. In addition, she created visual forms that were symbolic of her concepts. Examples showing her use of specific materials and symbols to carry her concepts are found in Figures 5.2, 5.3, 5.6, 5.7, 5.8, and 8.4.

**Kāne preferences about resources and their creative process.**

Kalahele and Enos often worked in mediums that ranged from pen and ink (see Figure 7.5) to a combination of paint and contemporary Western materials worked on paper, card stock, stretched and unstretched canvas, and wood panels for their two-dimensional flat works. They used Exacto knives to cut and score their card stock or wood panels. This was a natural progression for both artists because during their
formative years they took art classes from the Honolulu Academy of Arts Linekona program and were taught by non-Hawaiian Western-trained art teachers.

Although figurative forms played important roles in Kalahele’s and Enos’s artworks, Kalahele frequently introduced geometric shapes and patterns that helped convey and enhance his narrative stories. (See Figures 6.1, 6.2, 6.3, and 6.5) These geometric symbols carry meaning and work in conjunction with his realistic figures. Sometimes Kalahele’s figures were placed in contrast to a backdrop; while at other times, this arrangement was less defined when figures and images merged.

Kalahele used the open spaces in his works to carry what he referred to as the energy and wind as illustrated in his Ali‘i painting (see Figures 6.5, 6.7). A parallel can be drawn between Kalahele’s concept of creating open spaces between objects that align with kuana’ike Hawai‘i (Hawaiian perspective) about filling the open space with the power of ha (breath).

In his recent body of work, Enos took Hawaiian petroglyph images and overlapped them in translucent colors to invent new shapes and forms as a new way of telling a story (see Figure 7.4).

Kalahele and Enos also utilized techniques of contemporary painting and drawing. Western concepts, materials and techniques are often utilized when Kalahele and Enos develop their drawings and paintings about mo‘olelo. Do these references to Western concepts make these kāne artworks less Hawaiian and more Western? When is it appropriate for Hawaiian artists to use Western concepts, materials, and techniques to do their works? Jahnke (2003) states access to these resources is an indigenous right that allows Kalahele and Enos a means to achieve their ultimate goal. The evidence gathered
from Kalahele’s and Enos’s interviews indicated their goals as artists are to adapt, to tell, and continue telling the stories about Hawaiians in new forms and ways. Kalahele and Enos are reclaiming these stories, what Smith (1999) considers part of a decolonization process that Indigenous peoples need to do in order to rebalance the equation of power with more dominant social and economic cultures.

Enos emphasized that adapting creative ideas was a way to survive. Part of his creative process entailed uncovering ancient moʻolelo, then changing its physical form as in kaupe, and bringing it into a contemporary context. Enos’s creative approach to reclaiming and retelling stories deepens his cultural connections and enriches his sense of his Hawaiian identity. Enos’s artistic cultural identity supports Cazimero’s (2001) perspective that art is a window to understanding one’s identity.

Likewise, on several occasions, Kalahele spoke about how our stories were lost due to the effects of colonization, and that his art needed to say something meaningful and have substance. It needed to say something about the society and time that it came from. For Kalahele, his art process was not just about a sensuous expression as in the taste and smell of something ono (Dudoit, 1998, p. 22), but demanded a higher sense of presenting ʻike Hawaiʻi or Hawaiian knowledge and ways of considering the world. He was not interested in doing wallpaper. His painting of the three Aliʻi—Nāhiʻenaʻena, Kamāmalu and Liholiho—beautifully illustrated this point. And when I pressed him to explain his creative process, he said he liked to tell stories. Kalahele spoke with sarcasm about our lost stories.

Good thing we still have the *Kumulipo* because luckily somebody kept telling that story...you think about the intellectual
devastation that was done...within that short period of time...it means usually a clean wipe. One big white eraser went chukachukachuka. His growing collection of narrative works embodied this notion of adapting to “keep on telling our stories.”

**Cultural knowledge, identity, and creative process.**

Another significant indicator was the perception of these five artists about their art as a way for them to understand themselves, thus reinforcing the relationship between identity and the creative process. Art was a way to express what they thought and felt about life and being Hawaiian. Enos said it definitively, “It is important to understand that my art is a way for me to understand who I am.” Kalahele said, “I think art needs to say something. It needs to have substance. It needs to say something about the society that it comes from.” Kalahele’s art was about what he wanted to say, and what he said through his art was intrinsically dependent on who Kalahele chose to be.

Another finding about creative process that ties in with exhibitions and collections was how a finished Native Hawaiian work of art should be considered and valued as part of our cultural patrimony. I believe an individual work of art by any one of these five contemporary Native Hawaiian artists is a cultural reservoir of ‘ike kuhohonu (deep knowledge) and, thus, should be collected and preserved for future generations.

It was clear that cultural knowledge was an important component of these artists’ identities. The research provided examples of how Hawaiian and other ethnic cultures influenced the artists’ conceptions of their identities; and how these identities moved, informed, and affected these artists’ creative processes.
The interviews revealed the kinds of resources these artists considered essential for cultivating ideas and practicing their art. As the artists described their process of working, a description of their aesthetic sense slowly emerged. The interviews provided examples of what made these artists and their works uniquely and distinctively Native Hawaiian. The examples included Kalahele making rope with his hair, Kauihou Tanahy pounding kapa, Enos eating sacred kalo, Kahanu letting her dreams speak to her as she walked barefoot in the mud through forest and mountains, and Chun learning from her kupuna how to carve wood the Hawaiian way.

These examples offered a glimpse into the nature of each artist’s creative processes and the ways the artists experienced their world. Chun spoke about epic conflicts. Kalahele told mo’olelo. Kauihou Tanahy used water dripping out of a lonely pipe and thought she could grow her wauke from it. Kahanu saw Nāhi‘ena‘ena and wept. And, Enos looked to the past and created his future. Each artist learned by doing and invented new techniques by rendering and transforming raw material into works of art that told his or her stories—their Hawaiian stories.

I was amazed how the artists went about developing their ideas. Kalahele said, “My process is I don’t plan shit!” Enos revealed this view about his thinking and creative process saying that he painted the same way he processed his thoughts. He liked to examine things from different perspectives. Enos suggested that what appears to be chaotic with the way he processes information is his unique way of organizing and finding relationships.

Kahanu prepared her materials and conceived her kāhili before making the work. Then she prepared herself spiritually and emotionally by bringing into pono her entire
self as she made her kāhili. In the art of installation, Chun brought together all of her ideas about tension between Hawaiian culture and others. Kauihou Tanahy, in her dedication, just kept on pounding kapa until she couldn’t pound anymore, and then she kept on pounding again until she found what she was looking for—and that took a very long time.

**Perspectives of Native Hawaiian artists about the function of exhibitions.**

Dalani Kauihou Tanahy said exhibitions were places where she could continue to educate others about the ancient art of kapa making. She said, “I see it as part of our work at renewing, reviving, and reteaching these cultural practices, so to revive a culture that is being diluted and diluted with every passing generation.”

Noelle Kahanu relished the work she completed as an exhibition specialist at the Bishop Museum where she created exhibition spaces specifically for contemporary Native Hawaiian artists to engage with ancestral works in the collection. She saw exhibitions as a place to communicate new interpretations of historical records and facts.

Kahanu’s expertise as an exhibition specialist through her work at the Bishop Museum provided a glimpse at exhibitions developed in an institutional venue. These shows included the first exhibit about Ku at the Long Vestibule Gallery. They were followed by: Nā Akua Wahine: Celebrating the Female Gods of Hawai‘i Nei, and the Ho‘okahi Kapa: Layers of Life exhibits that represented Hawaiian views about seasonal changes.
Kaili Chun often used exhibition spaces as her battlefield, a place of passionate argument between opposing cultural values and logics.

Imaikalani Kalahele offered a practical reason for exhibiting, saying, “I believe exhibitions are important because they are like poetry readings. They are like recitals. They are a way to demonstrate what your culture in a particular discipline is doing.”

Kalahele spoke about Rap House, a dilapidated structure in Waiʻanae where he and other artists invited youths in the area to exhibit alongside them and to discuss art. He spoke about his idea of making good quality posters of Hawaiian art and sending them to every Hawaiian family. His goal was to educate the general Hawaiian population about what being Hawaiian is. He said we needed to move the work at MAMo, like the Naʻau or Newa exhibition at Art at Mark’s Garage, out of the city and into neighborhoods where Hawaiians live.

Solomon Enos agreed that exhibitions, “[Tied] into my need, to the importance of disseminating our cultural information...[and] I see these spaces as opportunities for education.” But he also suggested that the exhibition space was dead when he shared, “a finished piece of artwork in a gallery could almost be like being in a morgue. You miss out on the process and its life cycle,” while emphasizing the importance of an artist’s creative process.

Enos spoke about using the Internet to adapt Hawaiian stories into a form of interactive website gallery. These ideas illustrated the kinds of creative thinking, aside from their regular exhibitions in individual or group events, that the Native Hawaiian artists considered when engaging with their communities.
For these five Native Hawaiians the function of exhibition spaces as a place for educating viewers about their Hawaiian culture was a very important part of why they choose to exhibit.

**Success with exhibiting and the necessity of sales.**

Chun found success exhibiting in a variety of prestigious venues, including The Contemporary Museum in Honolulu (Biennial of Hawai‘i Artists), The Honolulu Academy of Arts (Nā Maka Hou, and Nau ka wae), The University of Hawai‘i Art Gallery (The 7th International Shoebox Sculpture Exhibition), and the Museum of Art and Design in New York City (Changing Hands 2). She said she had no problem with selling her work in that she needed to make a living. However, because her works were multi-component installations, they were difficult to sell because of their sheer physical size and shape. She found it interesting that because she trained under Mr. Bowman, the Hawaiian community did not see a lot of her contemporary work that she considered her art. They viewed her as an artisan making paddles, o‘o sticks, and kāla‘au. They were willing to pay her for a product she made, but not for her ideas as an artist.

Kalahele said that the main purpose of art was not about sales; it was to say something of importance. But he understood the value and necessity of sales, and admitted that he would like someone to buy a lot of his work so he could retire.

Enos and Kauihou Tanahy both continued to sell commercially through various outlets, including their Internet websites. Kahanu said, “If we want to see our Hawaiian artists to be able to sustain themselves, then we need to look at new economic models.
We need to create and develop sustainable alternative gallery and commercial spaces.”

These revelations offered a glimpse of reality about the economic situation of most Hawaiian artists; a reality not far removed from that of other practicing artists. Chun’s statement captured this reality sincerely, “And in the meanwhile you are just trying to put bread on the table or poi in the bowl.”

**Experiences with art critics.**

Regarding my questions about what kinds of experiences they had with art critics, Kalahele and Chun had opposite thoughts about one particular critic, Joan Rose, even though they were referring to different events. Kalahele spoke about how Rose was frustrated by his work titled *Uku*; she did not understand what it meant. Kalahele said, “that is part of the identity problem that we have, that nobody asks. Nobody asks us.” Chun, when asked about art critics said, “They have been good to me! I haven’t had many complaints, and I think they have understood my work.” About Joan Rose, she said, “Well, she kind of liked me, so I think that she was trying to understand the Hawaiian situation as well. And so, my write ups were pretty good.”

The disparities in the experiences of these two artists cannot be explained by this investigation. The important thing to consider is the limitations of this small but important sampling of only five Native Hawaiian artists. Perhaps future research could consider this issue about Hawaiian artists and art critics.
Regarding viewer’s interpretations.

Although, Kalahele and Chun welcomed diverse interpretations of their works, they had clear ideas about their intentions and their intended meaning. Interpretive text and catalog text in exhibitions were the primary mechanisms used for conveying the meaning of a work of art. Other forms for informing and educating visitors are artist forums and discussion sessions. The evidence found in this research pointed to the serious approach and efforts that the Bishop Museum placed when designing their exhibitions. Within their design criteria was the consideration of how the designed space could also conceptualize meaning as an important element for conveying the thematic threads of the show.

Evidence of this view was found when Noelle Kahanu spoke about how Kunane Wooton, their design specialist, presented an idea that would align all of the male images to form a center or kua (backbone) in the space. When I asked Kahanu if the general public would know this when viewing the show, she said probably not because it was difficult to explain the conceptual layout of any exhibition in a written statement, and limited wall space cannot be filled with excessive text. The other consideration was that all visitors came with their own personal histories that, depending on their level of sophistication, either enabled them or did not enable them, to interpret the space.

Defining the community.

My questions and their responses to how these artists defined the communities in which they lived and worked revealed the passion and commitment they had for their community. Noelle Kahanu spoke about being a liaison, a Hawaiian voice where part of
her role was to facilitate and improve the relationship between the Hawaiian community and to make the museum a more welcoming and hospitable place. She said that in the past, the museum had been a hostile place for many Hawaiians. In ways to heal and overcome that history, she saw her job as establishing relationships with artists and different art organizations in the community.

Imaikalani Kalahele’s community work with cultural organizations and youth groups, whether in formal settings or in ad hoc gatherings, exemplified what many Native Hawaiian artists typically do. Kalahele was often available when asked to help and participate in community events.

Dalani Kauihou Tanahy and Solomon Enos, with their common influence from Eric Enos of Ka‘ala Farms, placed their cultural awareness and part of their creative process directly within community service. Kauihou Tanahy was constantly preparing for another educational event about kapa. Enos hoped in the future to return to his Wai‘anae roots and to work with area schools, students and people in the community to form a strong sustainable enterprise.

Figure 8.5 The New Old Wisdom mural at the Hawai‘i Convention Center.

Found in www.solomenenos.com

Reproduced with permission by Solomon Enos.
Figure 8.6 Detail of the *New Old Wisdom* at the Hawai‘i Convention Center.

Found in [www.solomenenos.com](http://www.solomenenos.com)

Reproduced with permission by Solomon Enos.
The Future of Contemporary Native Hawaiian Visual Art

What does the future look like and what will contemporary Native Hawaiian visual artists think about their identities, creative processes, and exhibiting their works?

During October 2011, an event occurred that predicted what this future might hold. In six days, five contemporary Native Hawaiian kumu (teacher) artists, team-led by...
Meleanna Meyer along with Solomon Enos, Kahi Ching, Harinani Orme, and Al Lagunero, along with six alaka‘i (leaders) and seventeen haumana (students), completed a ten-foot tall by sixty-four foot wide mural at the Hawai‘i Convention Center in Honolulu. These five kumu artists are well known and very active in the community of contemporary Native Hawaiian visual artists.

The Office of Hawaiian Affairs sponsored this mural titled, New Old Wisdom (see Figures 8.5, 8.6, 8.7). I believe that this mural synthesizes the findings of my research. It is an excellent example of the effectiveness of contemporary Native Hawaiian visual art in the early 21st century. Through their collaborative work, these artists found ways to represent their Hawaiian identities, their creative processes, and their thoughts about exhibition. They accomplished this synthesis by finding answers to issue that their mural aimed to address regarding social and economic differences between Hawaiian and non-Hawaiian perspectives.

The main purpose for this mural was to provide a Hawaiian visual perspective and address some of the issues under discussion at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) convention in Honolulu in 2011. Meyer provided this synopsis of the four major goals of the project. Their first goal focused on the term Hawai‘i Kakou that

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8 Meleanna Meyer is a successful practicing artist, filmmaker, and designer of curriculum that focuses on issues of culture. An honors graduate of Stanford University, she received a B.A. along with the prestigious Borelli Art Prize. She studied architecture and the arts in Italy. While receiving her masters in Education from UH Manoa, she was a recipient of an East-West Center Fellowship.

9 The Office of Hawaiian Affairs (OHA) is a semi-autonomous entity of the state of Hawai‘i charged with the administration of 1.8 million acres (7,300 km²) of royal land held in trust for the benefit of native Hawaiians.

10 Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) is a forum for 21 Pacific Rim countries that seeks to promote free trade and economic cooperation throughout the Asia-Pacific region.
addressed the notion of collaboration—this mural was truly a collaborative effort accomplished by the cooperation of kumu, alakaʻi, and haumea. The artist group was multigenerational and included both kāne and wāhine. It was collaborative because it connected with other community resources and agencies.

The second goal centered on Pōhai Kealoha, or the relationship between Hawaiians and the spiritual mana (supernatural forces) of Akua (the Gods). These forces could be either seen or unseen—but they were always felt. When I spoke to Meyer about the mural, I told her, “There was no way they could have completed this work in six days without having channeled the energy of Akua.” She agreed. I believe that this work New Old Wisdom is a place where the mana of Akua resides—it is not merely an illustration of the idea of mana but rather a sanctuary for the spiritual embodiment of Akua.

When I viewed the work, I felt the energy leaping off the surface of the mural as it penetrated through my body. This spiritual concept spoke to the foundational importance that many contemporary Native Hawaiian artists place with connecting and infusing their artworks with the mana of Akua and their kūpuna ancestors.

The third goal addressed the issues of Hoʻola Ka Honua or about what was important to Hawaiians in relationship to the earth. And, the fourth goal was about balancing the needs of what was pono, or good, for all humans and living things. Meyer called this fourth goal Auamo Kuleana. The mural put into context the wisdom of ancient Hawaiians and the way they had taken care of the ʻāina (land) to preserve it and perpetuate its existence for the betterment of all things. It presented to the APEC visitors an answer that went beyond solving an economic problem. Furthermore, it showed how contemporary Native Hawaiians tapped into the wisdom of their ancestors as they
adapted this traditional knowledge and transferred it into a contemporary Native Hawaiian perspective.

**Concluding Thoughts about the Importance of Contemporary Native Hawaiian Artists**

In the introduction, I referred to Dudoit’s insight about the definition of Native Hawaiian art: “Art is not about color or shape or form. It is ultimately not even about the thing that gets put down on paper or made into an object, or carved into a stone. Art is the life that made that thing of paper or clay or stone.”

The creative lives and art works of these five vitally important contemporary Native Hawaiian visual artists offer a depiction of what is unique and distinctive about contemporary Native Hawaiian visual art in the early 21st century. In these interviews, the artists shared their stories about their identities, creative lives, and work in their communities through exhibiting their art works. They demonstrated a mutual respect for Native Hawaiian cultural values and beliefs and their works reflected their ideas about contemporary Native Hawaiian visual art.

Their collective lives and works have become repository vessels, like a wa’a or canoe where significant Native Hawaiian thought resides. Without their art, Kauihou Tanahy, Kahanu, Chun, Kalahele, and Enos would have lived very different lives—and without their art and their voices, how profoundly different our own lives would be.
REFERENCES


