396 MOONS: THE PATH HOME

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By

Benjamin Peter Kanui Pfister

Thesis Committee:

Yida Wang, Chairperson
Wendy Kawabata
Peter Chamberlain
We certify that we have read this thesis and that, in our opinion, it is satisfactory in scope and quality as a thesis for the degree of Master of Fine Arts in Art.

THESIS COMMITTEE

[Signatures]

Chairperson

Wendy Kawabata

[Signature]
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Concept of Home

My work is an exploration of the awkwardness and the beauty that results when two systems which seem to be 'out of phase' come together and reform each other. I am particularly interested in the intersection of the natural and cultural patterns that define identity and environment. Through the process of reflecting on the nature of these patterns, perspective shifts resulting in harmony where before there was dissonance. This experience of harmony is something I associate with the concept of home, and is something that I hope to communicate through my work.

In order to inquire into the meaning of home, one’s identity must be understood, and one’s position in the world must be clear. Perspective and context play an integral part in how we perceive the fabricated and natural elements in the world around us. Fabricated objects and systems are part of our culture - manifestations of ideas and thought structures such as language, city structures, roads, buildings, ethics, and politics. Natural objects and systems are those that follow laws of creation and movement not controlled by or conceived in human minds.

I understand home to be a place that engenders a sense of belonging, safety and security in the world. It can be a physical structure, a group or family, a
geographical location, a language, a culture, a mindset or a feeling. An individual’s sense of home can be made up of any or all of these things at a given time and continues to change as a result of shifting context and perspective. Amidst the unpredictability of life, security is often found in rhythms that are regular and predictable. These rhythms may be natural or human-made constructs. As we recognize new patterns in the apparent chaos of the world, the scope of our connection and understanding deepens, and the boundaries of what we consider home have the potential to expand.

Exhibition Overview

In the exhibition, 396 Moons: the Path Home, I create symbolic forms in order to translate natural patterns expanding so far into time and space that they are difficult to comprehend fully. This process of translation and creation brings me closer to movements in my environment that are not always seen, and to recognize harmony in seemingly dissonant patterns. The work offers a new perspective for individuals as they consider their position in such vast systems.

In addition to exploring universal movements through constructing forms, I also work with simple, smaller-scale interactions of natural and fabricated elements that are familiar and accessible. In these situations, I separate an element from its original function and put it in a new context. An essential part of discovering the essence of cultural constructions is their
recontextualization. Looking at something from a different perspective reveals another layer of understanding about it and the mindset that created it.

I explore rhythms that result from making, experiencing and observing patterns in an effort to better understand myself, my position in Hawai‘i and in the world. I examine what it means for me to be Hawaiian. I understand Hawaiian identity to be a mix of ancestral lineage, family stories and history, knowledge of Hawaiian culture, language, and relation to Hawaiian land. The work in this exhibition is a record of my attempt to locate myself in the natural and cultural patterns of Hawai‘i. Through my art, I pose questions about the implications of these intersecting patterns and how I fit in to this movement.

396 Moons: the Path Home (Plate 1) is made up of two installations: ‘The Path from Afar’ and ‘The Path up Close’. These spaces offer different experiences to the viewer. ‘The Path from Afar’ (Plate 2) is a space with handmade drawings, objects and sounds referencing natural patterns. Even though the works speak of universal movements and rhythms, the space feels intimate and connected. The patterns on the wall imply subtle movement, while the stool and the pahu (Hawaiian drum) offer stillness and grounding in the center of the space.

‘The Path up Close’ (Plate 16) is a video installation with four projections running simultaneously on four facing walls. The pair of related videos entitled, ‘Mānoa Rain and Wind’ (Plate 19) and ‘Kaimana Sand and Waves’ (Plate 20) face each other on opposing walls. These two works are still, quiet meditations on chance rhythms resulting from natural forces intersecting with fabricated
structures. Movement is subtle in both of these videos, and the viewer’s position is one of stillness.

The videos entitled, ‘A Walk over the Pali Highway’ (Plate 17) and ‘A Walk in Volcano, Hawai‘i’ (Plate 18) face each other on the other two walls. The viewer’s position in these videos is one of constant movement and occasional unease, contrasting the relative stillness of ‘Mānoa Rain and Wind’ and ‘Kaimana Sand and Waves.’ In this way, stillness frames movement and conversely movement frames stillness. The combination of stillness and movement in the framing reflects the reality we experience every day. In moments where we feel silent and still, the world never stops moving around us. And in moments where we feel incessant movement, we remain surrounded by the possibility of stillness.

This exhibition challenges viewers to locate themselves within the varying patterns of the installations. It offers moments where patterns that seem to be out-of-phase momentarily fall into recognizable harmony with each other. It is these moments that begin to offer a new perspective on what it means to belong, and what it means to find home.
CHAPTER 2
IDENTITY

Identity in Time

The Stool

In the center of installation sits the stool pointing to our current position in time - where we sit now, what supports us, and where we have come from. The vast difference in scale between the surrounding drawing and the stool hints at how small we are in the presence of the moving rhythms that surround us. The stool also contains patterns that extend within, suggesting that the surface where we sit in the present is supported by structures that extend far back in time.

In making this stool, I used found pieces of discarded branches and stumps, which I cut, sanded and oiled with kukui oil. The vertical pieces of wood are all rubbed with ash and oil resulting from the burning of the kukui nut. I chose kukui oil because its ability to give flame is a symbol of enlightenment and wisdom in – the flame that is passed on over time from generation to generation. Hundreds of smaller stools are interwoven in an irregular pattern (Plate 5) with each other. The legs vary in size, adjusting to the stools that support them below. These smaller elements of the stool would not stand straight, much less hold any weight, on their own. But together they create a whole that is able to support the weight of a sitting person.
The different kinds of wood used in the structure symbolize the diversity of individuals from the past and present who support where I am today, and contribute to my identity. The sliced wood (Plate 4) reveals the concentric growth rings that illustrate the complex history and experience of each piece in time. The kukui oil and ash touch all of the diverse pieces and represent the connection that is shared between individuals.

Many of the woven supports that make up the stool are not visible, but the support of each is essential to the integrity of the whole. Each little stool is supported by numerous stools extending below and symbolically back in time, and in turn supports countless stools above. The stool offers a visible, tactile representation of a pattern of support that extends through space and time – one that cannot be seen but can be sensed and felt. This pattern is a metaphoric representation of the system of support through generations of family and ancestors.

*The Drawing*

The drawing component of the installation (Plate 8) consists of ten 3’ x 14’ panels of white ink on black tar roofing paper, hung closely together in a semi-circle, mirroring the arc of the moon symbol itself. A field is created that allows the viewer to enter into the space of the drawing. The drawing consists of repeating symbols of the sun, moon and tides – representing the 396 lunar patterns that have coincided with my life from birth to the exhibition’s opening.
Measuring the time of our experience on Earth in contemporary society usually consists of counting how many years we have been alive. We are so accustomed to associating our age with a number, that it is easy to lose contact with the origin of the unit of measure. In order to regain contact with the time span of my life, I chose to measure it against a different standard – the number of lunar cycles that I have experienced since birth. I broke down the cycle further to represent every phase of every cycle. This meant measuring my life through examining the various 11,688 stages of the 396 lunar cycles (one moon phase for every day of my life).

Measuring my position in time through these symbols resulted in a subtle, yet clear rippling pattern (Plates 9 and 10) that passed through the drawing. The field appears to flow, turn, rush and gather, and creates a visual sense of movement. The natural rhythms of the moon and tides have continued through millions of years, whether we comprehend them or not. I attempted to translate this movement in my own constructed pattern to measure my position in time. The diagonal ripples emerged as an inherent outcome of this system of fabrication – a pattern embedded in a pattern.

Agnes Martin, a Canadian-American painter (1912 – 2004) dealt with that which can’t be seen – with what she called “the sublimity of reality, perfection, or transcendent reality” (Haskell 93). Martin’s work talks about the ideal, but she was always quick to point out that her work itself is far from ideal. In her search for essential qualities through her art, Martin explores reduced geometric lines
and forms. When working with the format of the grid, Martin was aware of how her patterns disrupt the order and power of the square. She wrote:

"My formats are square, but the grids never are absolutely square; they are rectangles, a little bit off the square, making a sort of contradiction, a dissonance, though I didn't set out to do it that way. When I cover the square surface with rectangles, it lightens the weight of the square, destroys its power" (Von Dieter Schwarz 29).

Unlike Martin, my geometric symbols directly reference forms and movements in the physical world through time. The idea of perfection within my system is the visual representation of the sun and the moon's shifting effect on the tides. Like Martin, I repeated my shapes by hand, and they reflect the awkward variation that is inherent in this kind of repetition. Just as her rectangles destroy the power of the square, my wavering ellipses destroy the rigid grid like structure of the pattern. It is these slight shifts and inconsistencies that allow new embedded patterns to emerge.

At the installation's edge (Plate 1) stands a full blank roll of tarpaper with just the beginning of yet another drawing. The roll completes the representation of the full 396 lunar cycles. This standing roll shows that the process is not finite, and will continue to expand.

Identity in Space

The videos, 'A Walk over the Pali Highway' and 'A Walk in Volcano, Hawai'i' are records of walks through two different sites in Hawai'i. In 'A Walk over the Pali Highway,' I experience an intervention of natural contact in a space deeply
marked by a fabricated structure: the Pali Highway. In ‘A Walk in Volcano, Hawai‘i,’ I participate in an intervention of construction in a space deeply rooted in natural rhythms. In these videos, the camera is used to communicate the unsettling and unique experience of actually walking through these two spaces.

‘A Walk over the Pali Highway’

In ‘A Walk over the Pali Highway’ (plate 17) I worked with the constructed path of the Pali Highway that connects the east and west sides of the island and is only conducive to driving. I wanted to slow down and regain the natural contact of walking barefoot on a path that has all but lost that contact.

I constructed a wooden car that acted as a moving tripod, filming the contact of my bare feet with the road as I walked the Pali Highway. The experience offers a different perspective of the Pali. The space on the side of the road is narrow and at times quite rough, with cars speeding by only a few feet away. Every step feels vulnerable to the passing traffic.

Walking the Pali Highway shifted the nature of my contact with a deeply engraved human construct in our community. My intention in this work is not necessarily to suggest the transformation of highways into walkways. It is to remind myself and those who see the video that when systems are moving too fast and contact is lost, it is still possible to slow down and regain that feeling of connection.
‘A Walk in Volcano, Hawai‘i’

‘A Walk in Volcano, Hawai‘i’ (Plate 18) was filmed on the Big Island of Hawai‘i during the first stages of construction of a home on my uncle’s land. When he first bought the property, we used machetes, chainsaws and our bare hands to clear the thick and thorny overgrowth that wove between the wild ginger and ohi‘a trees. We slowly moved into the space, creating our own paths, and envisioned what would be cleared and what might be left.

After many long workdays of clearing the land by hand and getting a feel for the layout of the property, it was shocking and exciting the first time my uncle called in a bulldozer to clear the building space. I remember how fascinating it was to wander through the forest that I was slowly growing familiar with, while hearing the occasional rumbling of the unseen bulldozer. It changed the experience to have had those first days of direct contact and work with the land before we moved in with the larger machine.

My interest in this walk was in the movement through a completely raw and natural space, with no established paths or structures fabricated by humans. The sound and occasional glimpse of the bulldozer are the only indications that the space is on the brink of inevitable change, creating a sense of unease and a moment of possibility.

‘A Walk over the Pali Highway’ is a reminder that long existing structures could change or be experienced in a different way. ‘A Walk in Volcano, Hawai‘i’ is a reminder of the beauty and the rawness of nature as we move forward to create
new structures. To see human constructions in opposition to natural forces will reinforce and perpetuate the separation and conflict between us and the world.

The German artist and teacher, Joseph Beuys said:

"... If all man can do is remain imprisoned in his stupidity, if he refuses to show a capacity for collaborating with nature, then nature will resort to violence to force him to change course. We have reached a point where we have to make a decision. Either we do or we don't" (De Domizio Durini 66).

'A Walk in Volcano, Hawai'i' exposes that critical point where we must make the decision. On the cusp of creation, how do we choose to move forward? Will the construction be a collaboration with nature or not? We may choose to separate 'nature' from what it is we are and what we make, but in reality, everything is natural, from the gas guzzling SUV to the high-rise apartment building. We are in collaboration with nature and damaging the natural world is damaging ourselves. An awareness of this might encourage us to be more considerate in our creations. These two videos are a look at the structures we have made, a consideration of those that we might make, and a reminder of the importance to maintain contact throughout the process.

Identity in Culture

The exploration of our position in physical space often parallels the search for belonging in cultural space. Working with the pahu in 'The Path From Afar' was an opportunity for me to reflect about my identity as a Hawaiian born away from the islands. Carving the drum was an exploration of a part of Hawaiian
tradition that was previously foreign to me. The process of working to recover knowledge of a culture that is both part of me and distant from me was at once uncomfortable and exhilarating.

A Tongan woman named Moana ‘Ulu’ave writes about her experiences returning to Tonga after being raised as an American. The following passage from her essay resonates strongly with me:

“My incompetence fuels a thought, ‘I am still Tongan.’ However, one generation removed from my ancestral island, I can no longer converse with members of my own family. What were my expectations coming to Tonga anyway? I expected to have this all-encompassing-soul-searin’-singin’-in-the-rain moment when I arrived that shouted from my spirit, ‘GIRL, YOU ARE TONGAN!’ Instead, I felt only shame. I was ashamed because I no longer spoke the language and I was not worthy to be in the presence of such humble people. Within that shame, a dichotomy of emotion occurred: I never felt the least Tongan and the most Tongan in my entire life. This paradox ran through my body. I could hear the call of the ancestors’ drums with each crashing wave but my American drum responded in sound waves as alien as a French horn” (‘Ulu’ave: Pacific Eye Magazine, 2007).

I imagine the last statement about the ancestors’ drums mixing with the American drum. My experience learning how to carve the pahu was a unique mixture of seemingly contrasting rhythms. I participated in prayers with the pahu kumu (teacher) in a language I did not fully understand. I used the chisels of my grandfather who was a European cabinetmaker. Amidst the moments of dissonance, I felt an overwhelming gratitude to be learning the tradition with such a loving group of people. Just like the movements and the forces of the
moon and the sun come together in seemingly irregular rhythms to shape our experience of the world, so does the mixture of cultures and experiences come together to shape my particular perspective.

While carving the pahu was a process of reconnection to tradition, I used it in a non-traditional way in this installation. I chose not to put skin on the drum, and to use it as a space to record and play back the sound of my voice and my breath. The same space that is intended to resonate the striking of a stretched skin is used as an open container for much more subtle vibrations from the body. The experience of hanging my head over the hole of the drum slowly singing and breathing into it felt like a delicate exchange. In the same essay, Moana ‘Ulu’ave writes:

“This identity conflict has become more prevalent as a result of globalization. I am the generation that must bridge this ‘two-ness’ into some sort of hybrid identity. Whether you’re a first generation American, Canadian, New Zealander or whatever, you like I must look in the mirror of understanding and ask, ‘Who am I?’” (‘Ulu’ave: Pacific Eye Magazine, 2007)

The process of carving the pahu and recording the sound in it felt like the bridging of “two-ness” into a hybrid creation. Through using this traditional object in a contemporary exploration of a different kind of rhythm, I felt I transformed an opaque symbol of culture into a living, transparent instrument.
CHAPTER 3
PERSPECTIVE

People use science, religions, gods, and stories to help explain the movements of the moon, sun and earth, and to make sense of the transitions of birth and death. Understanding these crucial movements contributes to a feeling of purpose and belonging in our lives. In day-to-day life, we see only limited segments of each of these cycles. When observed from our scale in time and space, these larger cycles of change and movement can be overwhelming to grasp.

Perspective on Time

By understanding the limits of our perspective on certain patterns, we may begin to perceive connections and movements that occur beyond what is visible. The accepted view of existence in the contemporary world often stems from science. That which cannot be proven in physical terms is said not to exist. It is common to frame life as a linear strand of time beginning with birth and ending with death. Presence is often associated with physicality. There are moments where I perceive continuity in my life that extends back to my ancestors and forward to future generations. There are moments where I feel real support from those who are not physically present. It is these moments that interest me – reminders that we are part of a cycle that is larger than we can see.
American video artist Bill Viola (1951 – present) often works with questions about life and death, of the purpose of our existence and our place in the world. He asks,

"Why isn't my mother here right now? Where did she go? Science tells me the reason why the body stops functioning physically, I still have those questions – the question is the spark, the provocation that exists to push you to discover, to learn" (Townsend 48).

In Viola's video installation, 'Heaven and Earth' (1992) he places two TV monitors face-to-face, one above the other. In the monitor facing up is a video of a baby (Viola's son) being born, and in the monitor facing down is a video of an old woman (Viola's mother) as she is dying. The footage in both videos has been slowed so that the viewer can read the subtle nuances of each moment. The monitors carry charged images, and are placed at such a close distance from each other that the space in between the monitors is activated. In a linear view of time, birth and death are moments at opposite and contrasting ends of our life. In ‘Heaven and Earth,’ Viola places these moments are happening at the same time, and at such proximity that they appear to be exchanging energy. In essence, he is bending the temporal span of life from something linear into the hint of a repeating cycle.

Viola uses representational video images of people in order to signify different stages of life. He shows an image of his mother in bed as a symbol for old age and death, an image of his child as a symbol for birth. His spatial arrangement of these images suggests a perspective on life and death. In 'The
Path from Afar, I use the structure of the stool as a metaphoric symbol of relationship and support through generations of living and dying.

The stool's structure is a metaphorical system of support through time. The stool's surface is a symbol of the present, of those who are alive, of that which visibly exists and touches us. Looking down at the stool from above (Plate 6), a myriad of overlapping surfaces weave together to make a horizontal plane. The pieces on this plane symbolize the network of support that is visible and present.

Looking at the stool from the side (Plate 5) offers a whole different perspective. What appeared to be a shallow plane of overlapping forms from the surface now opens up into a depth of interconnection between the various pieces. From this perspective, we see the system of support that extends beyond the visible surface. This structure symbolizes that which has come before. Those who have died and are no longer visible from the surface of the present, remain integral to the system of support as a whole.

We have a tendency to distance ourselves from the past and to concern ourselves only with the present. The stool is an acknowledgement that the past is not something that is finished and gone, but something that continues to affect us each moment of our lives. With a shift in perspective, we perceive a certain plane to be only the surface of a larger system; what we fear might be gone is still with us in a different form; what appears to be self-contained actually extends well beyond the limits of what we can see.
Perspective on Space

The Drawing

From our perspective on Earth, we are able to perceive natural rhythms such as the rising and setting of the sun and moon, the lunar cycle, and the changing tides. We measure these movements from a perspective of apparent stillness on the surface of the earth. We observe that the moon's phase changes, the sun rises and sets, and the tides rise and fall. These movements that we attribute to the sun, moon and tides are the results of our own perception. The drawing component of 'The Path from Afar' consists of symbols (Plate 10) that illustrate this system from a neutral perspective removed from Earth's particular point of view. From this position of stillness, the relationships between the sun (represented in the symbol by the circled dot), moon (the crescent shape), earth (the small circle) and tides (the ellipse) become clearer.

Every night, the shape of the lit moon in the sky appears to shift position and change shape. The phases that appear are the result of the earth's perspective on the changing relationship between the sun, moon and earth. At all times (excluding an eclipse) an entire half of the moon is bathed in sunlight and a half is hidden in darkness. The phases that appear to us on earth reflect the perspective of our position relative to the half-lit sphere slowly revolving around us.
We observe tides that rise and fall roughly twice a day. If it is possible to imagine the whole of the earth beyond the sliver that is visible to us, we may be able to conceive that there is a body of water that is suspended around the globe like a skin. The sun and moon's gravitational pull causes this mass of water to bulge in places. As the earth rotates once every day, a single position on a shoreline will experience all four sides of this hovering egg-shaped bulge, creating the effect of two high tides (the length of the egg), and two low tides (the width of the egg). It is, in fact the movement of the land through an irregularly shaped hovering body of water that creates the perception of the tides. Looking at this system from a distance reveals relationships that are difficult to imagine from our perspective. It exposes the fact that perceived movements that one might assume are independent from the observer's assumed stillness are actually the result of the shifting perspective of the observer.

Similarly, as we look at the moon move through the sky, we observe that it moves from east to west, just as the sun does. The moon actually is revolving around the earth in the opposite direction – from west to east. The speed of this revolution is relatively slow (one revolution every 29 or 30 days) when compared to the rotation of the earth. The movement of the earthbound observer is difficult to perceive because everything on the surface of the earth is rotating at the same speed. Even though the moon's revolution is in the same direction as our rotation, it appears from our perspective that it is moving in the opposite direction.
The implications of these studies reach beyond the technicalities of science. An awareness of the relative position of the observer to the observed makes clear that it is impossible to be a passive bystander, and that reality and movement are relative. In our efforts to make sense of our position in the world, it is often informative to turn the focus of the observation to ourselves – to look at how we look, to study and question the nature of our position.

The drawing views the lunar system from a distance and distills all of this information into a single, still symbol for each day. This shift in perspective is sometimes all it takes to perceive what can’t be seen - to transform what appears to be a series of seemingly isolated, random movements into a beautifully orchestrated and interrelated symphony extending far into time and space. Understanding our position – the relativity of our point of view – allows us to abandon our need to place ourselves at the center of the system while feeling the true nature of how we participate within it.

The Sound Component

As in the large drawing, the sound component in the pahu also draws its reference from the movements of the sun, moon and tides. The point of view, however, has shifted from the drawing’s more universal perspective to a particular place and time on the surface of Earth. The sounds illustrate the movement of the sun, moon and tides from the perspective of Hawai‘i during the time span of one month.
I assigned a tone of voice for the sun and a different harmonizing tone for the moon. The duration of each voice corresponded with the time the sun or the moon was visible in the sky. When the sun and the moon were visible in the sky at the same time, the two voices overlapped and sang together. The rhythm of breathing that relates to the intensity and the timing of the rising and falling tides weaves between the voices.

In the drawing, I condensed the representation of one day into a single, static symbol. From this removed point of view, the whole system is shown, and seems to stay relatively still during the length of a day. When perspective is shifted to the earth’s moving surface within the system, we perceive extreme change and movement during the length of a day. The sun and the moon appear to rise and set in the sky, and the tides appear to rise and fall twice a day.

The sound piece parallels the stool’s surface discussed earlier, while the drawing relates to the stool’s depth. The sound piece represents that slice of the cycle that is observable from the perspective of day-to-day life. The connections beneath these observable elements may not be comprehended immediately. The interweaving voices and sounds in the piece seem to start and stop randomly. One can only speculate as to how these sounds are tied together beneath the surface, just as one could only speculate as to how the elements of the surface of the stool are interconnected when looking at it from the top. In both cases, a shift in perspective offers an insight into the depth of connection that lies beneath and beyond the surface.
‘Kaimana Sand and Waves’ and ‘Mānoa Rain and Wind’

In ‘Kaimana Sand and Waves’ (Plate 19) and ‘Mānoa Rain and Wind’ (Plate 20), I explore physical movements of the earth from an even closer perspective than in the sound piece. I use video to document direct physical experiences with and explorations of the land of Hawai‘i. The directness of these first-hand interactions with the land contrasts with the technological method of video projection used in the gallery display. On a specific site in the Hawaiian land, fabricated objects are introduced to natural systems and the resulting movements and patterns are recorded on video.

Most people are familiar with the feeling of wind, rain, sand and water. They are familiar with the textures and qualities of fabricated objects like metal music strings and grates. The medium of video is one that eliminates the tactile presence of objects and creates a distance between them and the viewer through projection. I use the medium of video in these situations as a way of reframing patterns of familiar materials in order to allow the resulting image to evoke an open-ended reading in the mind of the viewer.

In ‘Kaimana Sand and Waves,’ I drag a metal grate through the sand and water for the length of Kaimana Beach. The video is framed from the perspective of looking straight down at the grate. The horizontals and the verticals of the grate correspond with the horizontal and vertical of the video frame. The camera
moves with the grate, so in the video the grid appears to be relatively still. By pointing the video straight down, it flattens and extends the space in two dimensions. The illusion of space is limited, which removes the sensation that we are standing in a position on the land and forces us to simply look straight at it. The sand and the water perforate the rigid grid, breathing through it and reaching into three-dimensional space.

My intention is to disorient the viewer -- so it is not immediately clear what is still, what is moving, and what is happening in the space. This might evoke questions about one's own position and perspective on the situation. It focuses all attention on the phenomena of the moving grate. The viewer zooms in to that space where these movements are coming together, and is able to spend time with the resulting patterns of forming and reforming of the elements involved.

In 'Mānoa Rain and Wind' (Plate 20) I placed a disassembled frame of piano strings on the grass in Mānoa Valley. I amplified the strings so they would pick up the sound of the slightest vibration caused by the rain and the wind. The point of view of this video is directly above the land and looking down through the pattern of piano wires. This perspective has the effect of disorienting the viewer and makes it difficult to identify what is being observed. The subtle blowing of the grass below the strings, the changing light and the periodic raindrops on the metal strings are the only visible movement of the video. The
stillness of the video shifts the main focus of the piece to the changing sound that results from the interaction.

Bill Viola, in discussing his video work, speaks of the effect of reducing an image to the point of it being unrecognizable, to “lose to find.” By showing a perspective of a phenomenon that is not immediately identifiable, it challenges the viewer to interpret what is seen in a variety of ways. Viola writes how it is possible to offer “the small voice of inherent possibility, the subtle prompting of something outside the limits of the imagination to which our eyes and ears are closed” (Townsend 20). The neutral perspective of the video engages and includes the viewer in the telling of the story rather than giving all of the information up front.

In ‘Kaimana Sand and Waves’ and ‘Manoa Rain and Wind,’ the metal grate and piano strings are reduced to linear patterns, deprived of their recognizable ‘objectivity’ through the framing of video. This seemingly limiting perspective may offer to the viewer more universal cultural readings of the symbol of the grid.

**Perspective on Culture**

*The Grid*

The interaction of the metal grate with Hawaiian land in ‘Kaimana Sand and Waves’ refers to the interaction of cultural mindsets prevalent in Hawai‘i. A grid implies a regular, rigid system of order. This characterizes the approach to
land measurement and ownership that European colonists imposed upon Hawai'i in the Great Mahele (or great division) of the 1940s. Pre-colonial Hawaiians had established a different measure for land use. Resources of the land were taken into consideration, and land was divided according to how much land was necessary to support a community. Land was not a commodity, but a source of life, nourishment and survival to be cared for and maintained. There was great confusion as Europeans tried to translate the Hawaiian system of land division and land use into their system of surveying, resulting in many Hawaiians eventually losing the rights to live and work on their homeland.

In the history of art, the grid is traditionally a symbol for the reality of the two-dimensional surface of the picture plane. Representational images on paintings, drawings or photographs create the illusion of three-dimensional space on the flat surface of the canvas, paper or screen. Our minds read the signs of shape, light and color and translate them in our minds to representation of space and form. Through the history of art, artists have spoken through the grid, struggled against its limitations, explored its laws and qualities, and acknowledged its reality. The grid has been covered, broken, challenged, reinforced, twisted and exposed.

The art critic, Rosalind Krauss, in her essay, “the Originality of the Avant Garde” writes about how the stillness of the grid is resistant to narrative, and promotes silence due to its imperviousness to language. She describes it as a schematized reduction that is arrived at as artists peel back layers of
representation in search for something pure and real (Harrison and Wood 1061). In 'Kaimana Sand and Waves' and 'Manoa Rain and Wind,' physical grids are shown, and they are allowed to interact naturally with their surroundings. The grid disrupts and is disrupted. There is an exchange between the natural patterns of the sand, waves, rain and wind and the fabricated pattern of the grid that results in a new unique rhythm of movement.

The pattern of grid-like structures may carry different cultural connotations. Nonetheless, the purpose of these videos was to remove these objects from their usual context through disorienting perspective, distilling them into symbols of fabricated, linear order. The combination of these structures with natural forces results in hybrid patterns of movement and sound. These are my efforts to reconcile that which is culturally constructed with that which is natural, to see and appreciate a new harmony, and to offer this experience to others.
CHAPTER 4
PATTERN

In the exhibition, 396 Moons: The Path Home, I experienced the difference between composing pre-determined patterns and facilitating compositions of patterns that were left up to chance. Order and freedom are often considered contrasting ways of functioning. In my working process, I found the two inseparable. I felt moments of complete openness and freedom in the creation of ordered patterns, and observed the emergence of structure in chance compositions.

Pre-determined Composition of Pattern

'The Path from Afar'

In the installation, 'The Path from Afar,' it was important to me to fit the entirety of the 396 lunar cycles that occurred from the day of my birth to the day of the show. I referenced scientific data (Plates 12 and 13) to account for the exact timing of the full moons during this stretch of time – even adjusting for leap years. I worked out the size and formatting of the pattern so that it would fit within the space and the rolls of tarpaper that I had available. The process of drawing the pattern (Plate 11) resembled composing a musical piece or building a structure. Like in a musical composition, the measure of spacing and timing in the drawing needed to stay constant and reliable to allow space for more subtle,
fluid movement to take place. The result of the process is a mix of order and freedom.

I chose to draw each pattern instead of print it because I wanted to experience the repetition in the making. It was exhilarating to move through the discipline of repetitive order and experience moments of openness and freedom. Only by adhering to the scientific data did I become more familiar with the subtleties of the movements and the changes from day to day. While the pattern appears to be regular and repeated, no two ovals are exactly the same, and the period of repetition is always shifting. There was enough subtlety and variety to the pattern that it was impossible to simply shut down my brain and mindlessly repeat the same thing over and over. Even after thousands of repetitive drawings, I would slip into rhythms of laying out regularly spaced dots, circles and shifting moons and ellipses that completely engrossed me.

Even if the viewer knows nothing of the allusion to the sun, moon and tides, the drawing holds the rhythm of the process of its making. The size and arrangement of the drawing immerse the viewer in an expansive field that seems to shift slowly in space and time. In the process of creating this drawing, I wanted to do more than show how the system worked. I wanted to slow myself down to feel the subtly changing rhythm, and to feel the expanse through repetition.
The Sound Component

The making of the sound component in the pahu required a layering of three recordings each lasting a total of about ten minutes. The process had similarities to the making of the drawing pattern, in that the composition was planned out beforehand to refer to a series of scientific data – in this case a tide chart for the month of October (Plates 14 and 15).

Like the drawing, the first step was to establish a foundation - in this case recording the timing and tone of the pattern of the sun. I then overlaid the voice of the moon as its rhythm of rising and setting is subtly off from that of the sun. I allowed the natural duration of the voice to represent the time the sun is in the sky, and the duration of silence for the inhaling to stand for the time of night. Over the span of the 29 ‘sun voices,’ the ‘moon voice’ gradually moves in and out of sync with the sun. The changes were so subtle over the ten minutes that it was essential to maintain focus on each breath and each hum. It was important that the two sounds harmonized with each other during the times they overlapped. Once the sounds of the sun and moon were established, I could listen to these, and record my breath in correspondence with the rising and falling tides read from the chart.

The process of creating the sound offered a different experience of openness from that of the drawings. Instead of creating a symbol of movement through repetition, I adjusted the rhythms of my own body to correspond with the patterns. As I tried to stay consistent with the subtleties of the pattern, I
became increasingly aware of the beginning, ending and intensity of each breath and each vocal tone and found myself totally absorbed in the process.

The Stool

The construction of the stool, like the moon drawing, was a process of repeating irregular elements to become aware of a larger pattern. I predetermined the width and height of the stool, but the building was far from mechanical.

Every slice of wood and every dowel went through processes of preparation before construction even started. Branches were gathered, cut, and left to dry for a few days before being sanded down. Each piece was sanded twice by hand to reveal the patterns of the growth rings, and then rubbed with kukui nut oil. Dried, raw kukui nuts were gathered and burned, and the oil and ash was mixed and rubbed on each wooden support dowel. Only after the pieces were prepared and oiled did the assembly process begin.

Every slice of wood was a different size and had varying strength – their characteristics determined their placement in the stool. Each supporting dowel had to be measured and cut for the particular position of each piece. While the construction consisted of a repetitive process of measuring, cutting, drilling and gluing, constant awareness was necessary to fit each irregular piece into its place. The process never felt monotonous, presenting challenges every step of the way.
Chance Composition of Pattern

In the pair of videos, 'Kaimana Sand and Waves' and 'Mānoa Rain and Wind,' I worked with chance compositions resulting from the interaction of fabricated linear metal shapes and natural forces. I set up the circumstances for each particular situation and determined the framing of the video camera. Outside of that, the resulting interaction was out of my control.

John Cage, an American composer and artist (1912 – 1992) performed in-depth experiments in chance composition of music and sound. He composed a piece for the piano where the muting and plucking of the strings were determined by repeated chance readings of the I Ching, or the Book of Changes. Cage writes about the composer's choice to relinquish control of sounds:

"...one may give up the desire to control sound, clear his mind of music, and set about discovering means to let sounds be themselves rather than vehicles for man-made theories or expressions of human sentiments" (Cage 10).

In 'Mānoa Rain and Wind' I allowed the weather of the valley to create the composition. The piano shifts from being an instrument of manipulation and control into being an instrument of sensing and reacting. A passing shower interacts with amplified strings, producing a tone for every drop. As the light in the video becomes grayer, the sound of the rain slowly emerges from the silence, and then fades away. In the moments of apparent silence, the strings pick up the subtle movement of a passing breeze – vibrating the strings and then leaving them in stillness and silence.
In 'Kaimana Sand and Waves,' the metal grate slowly moves over the surface of the sand, cutting into it and causing it to accumulate in mounds. Occasionally a wave comes in, flattening the piles of sand, hiding the grate and offering a moment of stillness and silence. Immediately the flat, still surface of sand begins to crack and open, reacting to the constantly moving grate. 'Kaimana Sand and Waves,' just like in 'Manoa Rain and Wind,' offers a natural rhythm of accumulation and decay — moments of where sound and form build up, and then fall again into silence and stillness.

The exhibition as a whole includes an experiment in chance composition of sound elements. The sound of all four videos and the sound from the pahu mix together throughout the space. The sound elements all loop at different lengths, so the composite sound of the space is always changing. While the viewer may selectively listen to the sound that corresponds to the direction of focus, all the sounds inevitably exist together at all times.

The idea of composing a pattern within a system of complete control, order and discipline is an illusion. Nothing exists in isolation: movement and stillness, sound and silence, order and freedom all exist in relation to each other. Through experimenting and observing patterns, these forces actually contain each other rather than lie in opposition. As Cage describes,

"[O]ne enters an anechoic chamber, as silent as technologically possible in 1951, to discover that one hears two sounds of one’s own unintentional making (nerve’s systematic operation, blood’s circulation)..." (Cage 13).
Even in our most desperate attempt to find moments of complete silence, stillness and order, we find ourselves embedded in a field of constantly overlapping movement and rhythm. Patterns that we see and hear are integrated with patterns around us that are not perceptible. 'The Path from Afar' and 'the Path up Close' refer to the same path. Allowing the sounds of the two installations to integrate reminds viewers that finding belonging in the ever-changing rhythms of their environment is a continuous process.
CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSION

My MFA work in Hawai’i has given me an opportunity to reflect on my cultural identity and my position in the world. Where do I belong on this earth? How do I fit in the expanse of time? Where do I belong in the Hawaiian culture? How do I relate to the Hawaiian land? How does a sense of belonging stem from something I know, something I am, or something I learn? What have I drawn from the lineage of my family? Where have they been, what have they done, what were their passions and their struggles? What strands of spirituality, philosophy or art history are now part of me?

There is no simple answer to any of these questions. I am looking for home in many ways. I have attempted to see where I belong in the expanse of the universe and in the flow of my family’s history through generations. I have attempted to place myself in the intersection between human-made structures and natural forces in Hawai’i and convey the new patterns that can emerge in that intersection. This helps me to reconcile and harmonize my relationship with the world, and to recognize the patterns that form my home.
APPENDIX

PLATES
Plate 2. THE PATH FROM AFAR
Installation: Ink Drawing on Tar Paper, Wood, Sound Recording
Plate 4. THE PATH FROM AFAR
Installation Detail – Stool
Plate 5. THE PATH FROM AFAR
Installation Detail – Stool
Plate 6. THE PATH FROM AFAR
Installation Detail – Stool
Plate 7. THE PATH FROM AFAR
Installation Detail - Pahu
Plate 9. THE PATH FROM AFAR
Installation Detail – Drawing
Plate 10. THE PATH FROM AFAR
Installation Detail – Drawing
Plate 11. THE PATH FROM AFAR
Drawing Process
Plate 12. Full Moon Data for Drawing

1991 Jun 27 02:59 Thu 2448434.625
1991 Jul 26 18:26 Fri 2448464.268
1991 Aug 25 09:09 Sun 2448493.881
1991 Sep 23 22:41 Mon 2448523.445
1991 Oct 23 11:09 Wed 2448552.965
1991 Nov 21 22:58 Thu 2448582.57
1991 Dec 21 10:25 Sat 2448611.934
1992 Jan 19 21:30 Sun 2448641.396
1992 Feb 18 08:06 Tue 2448670.838
1992 Mar 18 18:20 Wed 2448700.264
1992 Apr 17 04:44 Fri 2448729.697
1992 May 16 16:04 Sat 2448759.170
1992 Jun 15 04:51 Mon 2448788.702
1992 Jul 14 19:08 Tue 2448818.297
1992 Aug 13 10:29 Thu 2448847.937
1992 Sep 12 02:19 Sat 2448877.596

Plate 13. Full Moon Data for Drawing - Detail
Plate 14. Tidal Data for Sound Piece

Plate 15. Tidal Data for Sound Piece - Detail
Plate 16. THE PATH UP CLOSE
Video Installation
Plate 17. THE PATH UP CLOSE
A Walk over the Pali Highway – Video Still

Plate 18. THE PATH UP CLOSE
A Walk in Volcano, Hawai‘i – Video Still

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Plate 19. THE PATH UP CLOSE
Kaimana Sand and Waves – Video Still

Plate 20. THE PATH UP CLOSE
Manoa Rain and Wind – Video Still
BIBLIOGRAPHY


