beyond the paywalls of academic journals.

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Holo Moana: Generations of Voyaging offered visitors a narrative about the centuries-long legacy of Oceanic voyaging. The show, housed in the Joseph M Long Gallery at the Bernice Pauahi Bishop Museum, covered a lot of territory: embracing and disseminating indigenous knowledge, exploring the ways in which cultural exchange allows communities to gain a deeper understanding about themselves and the world, and examining the impact of technology on tradition and culture.

As a collaboration between the museum and the Polynesian Voyaging Society (pvS), the exhibition centered on the impact of the Hōkūle‘a (Star of Gladness), a canoe designed in the 1970s that utilized ancient Oceanic techniques and materials in its construction. Ben Finney, Tommy Holmes, Herb Kāne, Nainoa Thompson, and others came together at the pvS to recover Polynesian voyaging traditions, looking to Pius “Mau” Piailug, a Micronesian navigator from Satawal, to help piece together this lost past and design the Hōkūle‘a. The founding of the pvS and the first expedition of the Hōkūle‘a from Hawai‘i to Tahiti (and back) in 1976 led to several expeditions without the use of modern instruments throughout Oceania. The Hōkūle‘a embodied ongoing efforts to (re)situate way-finding knowledge within Hawaiian culture, history, and identity. In 2014, the Hōkūle‘a embarked on her first worldwide journey; the opening of Holo Moana celebrated the endeavor’s conclusion as well as the people met, events attended, and stories learned along the way.

Manu ihu, Manu hope (1976–2012) commanded one’s attention when entering the exhibition. Situated in the center of the gallery, the Hōkūle‘a’s curved bow (manu ihu) and stern (manu hope), with its moniker inscribed at the base, transformed the room into a still ocean. This stillness was broken by a digital projection display of contemporary navigators in action on its mast and sail. The piece literally and figuratively anchored the physicality of the Hōkūle‘a in the museum space. While Manu ihu, Manu hope offered only a semblance of the ship’s grandeur, smaller models, including Hōkūle‘a (undated), Canoe Model, Yap State (Micronesia, undated), and Wa‘a Mau (1976), summoned the viewer to explore the diversity of Oceanic canoe shapes and forms. The models aided the visitor in visualizing the vessels’ size and scale, communicating their layout and spatial interrelationships in three dimensions.

The sheer number of artifacts within the small gallery proved overwhelming at times, but the diversity of the objects illustrated the historical continuum between ancient Oceanic voyaging and the origination of the
Hōkūle‘a. The intricate bindings of coconut and olonā fibers rolled by Mau (Coconut Sennit/Olonā Cordage, Hawai‘i, circa 1970s) were encased below early twentieth-century drawings depicting Tahitian lashing techniques. While the inherent connection between voyaging and nature was clear, the combination of object and drawing subtly accentuated the skill of canoe makers. The drawings’ intricate diamond-shaped design highlighted the ways in which patterns resulted from applied scientific/mathematical methods, as well as the ways in which symmetrical harmonies rendered stability visible. The drawings and cordage, paired with a star compass made from coral and pandanus fiber created by a Mau student (undated), revealed the mechanisms by which navigators charted the seas and documented important markers, such as islands and reefs. The exhibition’s pragmatic approach was interrupted by two paintings in the gallery, both by Kāne. The first, Canoe Launching (1976, acrylic on canvas), depicted Pacific Islander men pushing and pulling a double-hulled canoe from the shore to the sea. The second, Tongiaki of Tonga (1972), a brilliantly blue oil on canvas, presented a scene of people managing a canoe in the open waters and pointing to the night sky for guidance. The objects, drawings, and paintings in the exhibition invited visitors to see the processes involved in wayfinding—to understand voyaging as part of a larger cultural enterprise requiring shared knowledge among people(s) and communities.

The exhibition reinforced Oceanic connectivity over time and space. Several objects relayed the ways in which gift exchange signified island networks, including a niho palaoa (hook pendant) given by King Kamehameha III to Princess Eugenie Ninito, granddaughter of Tahiti’s Queen Pomare IV, after her arrival in Hawai‘i in 1849, when she learned that her betrothed, Moses Kekūāiwa, older brother of Kamehameha IV and Kamehameha V, had died prematurely at age nineteen. Moreover, in strengthening the exhibition’s emphasis on cross-cultural encounters, the objects of gift exchange between Hōkūle‘a navigators and their international counterparts during the worldwide voyage occupied a prominent position in the gallery. A large wall adorned with makana (gifts) received during the expedition was contained in five large glass cases directly adjacent to Manu ihu, Manu hope. The gifts included two miniature moai (stone statues) as well as a lauhala mat, drawing, headdress, necklace, drum, and bark cloth. Visitors learned about each gift from film clips (taken during the Hōkūle‘a’s worldwide journey) displayed on a large television screen offset into the wall. Guests were also invited to operate a touch-screen device that provided more details about each gift. In its own case, on the side of the video wall, a note attached to a single fishhook replica of the gift bestowed by Pacific navigators to their international counterparts implored viewers to continue the journey in spreading the message of cultural and environmental conservation to their families, communities, and organizations. In these ways, the makana existed as both past and present, as they were both archived and actively exchanged.

The interactive components of the
exhibition relied heavily on technology. While technology hastened the decline of seafaring and the use of ancient tools such as the Ipu makani o La’amaomao (1883), a wind gourd that is said to have assisted in creating optimal sailing conditions, Holo Moana utilized technology to showcase the renewal of Oceanic navigation. In addition to touch screens, the gallery also contained a monitor and headset for visitors to listen to a navigator recalling his experiences, a wind simulator inviting people to “call the wind” and learn about native wind names, and a small “story dome” (projection theater) where Thompson narrated the ties of genealogy and friendship that led to the establishment of the PVS. In addition, the museum’s J Watumull Planetarium (separate from the gallery) staged Wayfinders: Waves, Winds, and Stars, a companion show where viewers were taught basic navigational techniques using the stars, sky, and ocean to make their way from Hawai‘i to Tahiti. The strategic use and placement of interactive technologies contributed to the exhibition’s narrative of voyaging as a collective endeavor grounded in effective communication and careful instruction.

One quickly learned that Holo Moana complemented the museum’s collection in the Hawaiian Hall Gallery and Pacific Hall. The former is organized on three floors that represent Nā Kānaka o Ke Kai (The People of the Sea), Wao Kanaka (The Realm of Man), and Wao Lani (The Heavenly Realm). A conspicuous double-hulled canoe suspended from the Hawaiian Hall’s ceiling allows visitors to contemplate the achievements of ancient Pacific Islanders and the ways in which the Hōkūle’a brings this illustrious past into the present. Moreover, the Pacific Hall’s emphasis on migration and settlement throughout Oceania gives contextual accounts of voyaging’s ties to ancestry, sustainability, and innovation. The breadth of the museum’s collection related to Oceanic voyaging traditions underpins the timely significance of Holo Moana—and long-distance voyaging more broadly—as an exhibition critically needed to “re-awaken, re-activate, and re-envision” wayfinding and bring attention to what Oceanic knowledge teaches us about Earth and its people.

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Anote’s Ark. Documentary film, DVD, 77 minutes, color, 2018. Written and directed by Matthieu Rytz. Produced and distributed by EyeSteelFilm, Montreal, Canada.

It makes for a pathetic and rather contemptible commentary on the immoral nature of global capitalism that among those fighting at the forefront of the Anthropocene are the leaders of states whose economies contributed nothing at all to its causes. For example, Sir Michael Somare, during his fourth term as the prime minister of Papua New Guinea (2002–2011), called for the establishment of a Coalition for Rainforest Nations in 2005 and gave speeches at the United Nations urging that developed countries take responsibility for greenhouse gases and help small island states adapt. In