

way, *Samoa Wedding* also retains a measure of cultural authenticity by featuring an all-Samoan ensemble of actors and actresses.

The Land Has Eyes and *Samoa Wedding* thus provide an interesting contrast to *No. 2*. While it may be argued that the absence of Fijians in the film denotes a kind of cultural inauthenticity, this should not necessarily be viewed as marring the film's integrity or value; there is a high degree of authenticity in terms of the narrative, which is written by a person of Fijian ancestry. Here, the line between inauthenticity and authenticity, representation and misrepresentation is blurred and not easily delineated.

Despite some drawbacks (specifically, actors who don't look Fijian, in a film about Fijians in Auckland), one of the great strengths of *No. 2* lies in its ability to capture the subtleties of the human experience. In one quiet scene, Nanna Maria lies alone on her bed, breathing in as much of life as she can through an oxygen mask. The knowledge of Nanna's mortality is made all the more poignant by the sounds of her family outside, laughing, fighting, living. And therein lies the denouement of the film—even as the breath of life is leaving Nanna Maria, it is being redirected into her family. One of the most exuberant moments in *No. 2* occurs during a fight scene between Tyson and Soul. As Nanna Maria watches the mayhem unravel around her—the two cousins pummeling each other with their fists; a tree in flames; and the main course of the feast, the pig, running loose—Nanna Maria exclaims jubilantly, "Look at all that life!" Indeed, such a statement perfectly sums up the two films reviewed here.

In expressing their own perspectives of the world, Pacific Island filmmakers are actively subverting many of the deeply ingrained stereotypes that have been projected on the silver screen and into the public imagination by Hollywood film studios. Divested of their cultural specificity, Pacific Islanders have historically been treated as exotic background foliage in films such as *South Pacific* (1958), *Blue Crush* (2002), and *50 First Dates* (2004), rather than featuring as central, fully formed characters. Viewed from this angle, *Samoa Wedding* and *No. 2* take their rightful place alongside a growing body of cinematic productions in which Pacific Islanders are primary contributors at all levels of the filmmaking process and appear in all their rich and glorious complexity at front and center stage.

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Pacific Encounters: Art and Divinity in Polynesia, 1760–1860. The Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, University of East Anglia, United Kingdom, 21 May–13 August 2006. Curated by Dr Steven Hooper, Director of the Sainsbury Research Unit for the Arts of Africa, Oceania and the Americas, University of East Anglia, on behalf of the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, in collaboration with the British Museum.

For people of Polynesian heritage, the Pacific remains the center of the universe. The great ocean that separates our islands—Moana-nui-a-kiwa—also connects and sustains us. We remain inextricably linked to our ancestors

and emotionally impacted by their achievements, whether or not we grew up immersed in a background of traditional culture. Accordingly, when we meet together on the other side of the globe, we are able to unite as members of an all-encompassing whanau (family group), celebrating our similarities rather than emphasizing our differences.

This was the sentiment in Norwich, England, at the launch of the exhibition "Pacific Encounters: Art and Divinity in Polynesia 1760–1860," the major event that marked the reopening of the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, at the University of East Anglia, following the completion of a lengthy, substantial building and refurbishing project. The various Polynesian peoples present contributed to a multicultural opening ceremony that merged their past, present, and future. As the preliminary rituals were brought to their climax, the haunting notes of the final Hawaiian *oli kahea*, chanted by Marques Marzan, rang out and hung in the air; the enveloping *wairua* (spiritual essence) was intense and the sense of expectancy strong. (An *oli kahea* is a chant to bring together and announce the people present and to request entry, acknowledging all the spirits, deities, and guardians of this world.)

The anticipation was not without foundation. Although certain customary Polynesian arts continue to be practiced, much of the traditional art history is less well known. Instead of being located in the Pacific, the most comprehensive collections of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Polynesian artifacts in the world are held in Britain. The "Pacific Encounters"

exhibition was part of a three-year research project called "Polynesian Visual Arts: Meanings and Histories in Pacific and European Cultural Contexts," sponsored by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (UK). As a British Museum Partnership UK project, it gained access to the enormous range of magnificent items brought back from the Pacific during the period of initial contact with European explorers, traders, and missionaries. Rare and valuable objects came from all three of Captain Cook's voyages as well as the voyages of Captains Bougainville, Bligh, Wallis, and Vancouver; also included are unique quasi-religious artifacts from the important collections of the London Missionary Society, in addition to materials from various international sources. More than 270 pieces were assembled for the first time, with the full intent of creating "the largest and most comprehensive exhibition ever mounted on Polynesia," as stated in the exhibition brochure.

The exhibits were drawn from the major Polynesian regions: from the Society Islands (Tahiti), Austral Islands, Cook Islands, Marquesas Islands, Hawai'i, Rapa Nui (Easter Island), Tonga, Fiji, Sāmoa, and Aotearoa/New Zealand. However, rather than being assembled according to region, they were grouped in relation to the five overarching themes of Sea, Marae or Temple, Land, Collecting, and Making Divine. To achieve this, the exhibition was mounted in the Sainsbury Centre's ground floor and lower ground floor temporary exhibition spaces, in addition to inaugurating the new exhibition gallery linking the two spaces. Contemporary

pictorial materials were incorporated to support the themes and extend appreciation and understanding of the artworks.

Created without the use of metal tools, from Pacific Island materials ranging from the most prestigious to the mundane, the treasures on display ranged from the exotic to the basic essentials of survival. They included awesome figures carved of wood and stone, intricate images created of feather and fiber (see for example figure 1), ornamental wooden bowls, textiles of decorated bark cloth or cloaks adorned with feathers, valuable items of ritual practice or ornamental regalia fashioned from bone, pearl and turtle shell, sperm whale ivory, and pounamu (nephrite), as well as small, practical items of everyday life.

To the academic researcher, some of these ancestral pieces were like familiar friends, seen outside of a customary museum context, and brought together into a surreal place of light where, collectively, they seemed somehow to mimic their extended Polynesian whanau of viewers. But for most visitors, the exhibited material was relatively unknown, having largely been hidden from view since entering institutional collections, and seldom if ever displayed in public. For the majority of viewers—whether specialist, interested amateur, or merely recreational—this richly rewarding exhibition provided a unique glimpse into a vanished world and lost lifestyles, giving a hint of different belief systems and values, a chance to marvel at Polynesian achievements, and wonder at their art traditions.

In this, the exhibition achieved one of its major objectives. Curator

Steven Hooper's stated aim was to present Polynesian material in a new light, accessible to a variety of audiences, and to broaden understanding and appreciation of the arts and cultures of Polynesia for the specialist and nonspecialist alike. Together with associated programs, indigenous artists in residence, and a special catalog published by the British Museum Press to coincide with the exhibition, additional aims were met. Hooper's fully illustrated 288-page catalog *Pacific Encounters: Art and Divinity in Polynesia 1760–1860* (also published by University of Hawai'i Press, 2006) includes maps and introductory essays designed to explain the role of the artifacts by setting them in appropriate cultural and historical contexts. It concludes by tracing the history of how such treasures came to be collected and ultimately be deposited in museums.

Notwithstanding the presence of these taonga (treasures), which were able to hold the spectator absorbed by their sheer beauty, the exhibition encountered some problems due to constraints of time and space. Initially, the crowds themselves restricted viewing accessibility. While the concept of displaying groups of artifacts within the five conceptual zones was essentially logical, the practicalities were not as straightforward; there was an unavoidable overlapping of themes where certain "collected" objects fitted into more than one category. For this viewer, the linking gallery was a somewhat disconcerting space, perhaps due to the sloping floor surface, or maybe because of the constant foot traffic at the time. Likewise, for some, there was a certain sense of incongruity in



FIGURE 1. Humanoid god image LMS 170, image number 00071985001 © The Trustees of the British Museum. Part of the “Pacific Encounters” exhibition, this fifty-seven-centimeter-high anthropomorphic figure is made of hanks of coconut fiber, thick cords of hair, palm spathe, bark cloth, and a variety of red, white, and black feathers. It came to the British Museum from the London Missionary Society Collection in 1890 and is tentatively attributed by an old label to Atiu, Cook Islands. Items that missionaries collected invariably held religious consequence; however, nothing is known of this figure’s real significance. Now, only the figure’s careful wrapping and construction materials, especially the red feathers, indicate something of the very special nature of this piece for its original owners.

descending to a lower level to view the “Making Divine” exhibition, with its inherent godly connections. In contrast to the upper levels, the enclosed space and lack of natural light created an ambience of a mythological underworld rather than an “otherworldly” setting for the treasures displayed there.

But the magnificence of the exhibit overcame all difficulties. It was not difficult to accept that “Pacific Encounters” was the most comprehensive exhibition of Polynesian art and material culture ever assembled. It achieved its intended goals, presenting the historical treasures of our Pacific Islands to a variety of audiences. After nearly three months, the exhibition was eventually closed with ceremony, bidding farewell to its taonga, appropriately acknowledging its mana tapu (special prestigious status) and its effect on all who had been involved.

However, for the viewers of Polynesian heritage who were fortunate enough to share these experiences, some poignant issues were raised. The 1970s was a decade of exhibitions marking the bicentenary of James Cook’s voyages in the Pacific. Within that period, through Adrienne Kaeppler’s 1978 exhibition, “Artificial

Curiosities,” at the Bernice Pauahi Bishop Museum in Honolulu, some Hawaiian artifacts were returned briefly to the Pacific from the European museums in which they are now housed. Early in 2006, people of Hawai‘i had an opportunity to view the Cook-Forster Collection of the University of Göttingen which was exhibited at the Honolulu Academy of Arts. Sadly, the rest of Polynesia could only view these treasures if they could afford to travel to Honolulu—or to Canberra, Australia, for that collection’s only appearance in the Southern Hemisphere (this despite the fact that Auckland, New Zealand, is widely acknowledged as the largest Polynesian city in the world). “Pacific Encounters: Art and Divinity in Polynesia 1760–1860,” a truly phenomenal exhibition of Polynesian art and material culture, was accessible for professional and proletarian alike—if either living in or able to visit the United Kingdom. Will there ever be such an opportunity for the average whanau of the Pacific to encounter the treasures of their ancestors?

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