

STILL FLOW

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By

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Acknowledgements:

This exhibition is presented in the honor and memory of the late **Professor John Mahoney**, without whose help I would not have been able to maintain the conceptual integrity of this work.

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Gallery Crew!!! Thank you all so much for all of your dedication and commitment to this exhibition.

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Table of Contents:

Acknowledgements	ii
Table of Contents	iii
List of Plates	iv
Preface	v
Introduction – Into the Flow	1
A Formal Description	2
Intention in the Exhibition Layout	7
Historical Beliefs Meet Present Intention	8
In the Know or Just Going with the Flow (Disseminated Discrepancies)	15
Permission Given – How to Begin?	18
Preparing the Vessel	20
Arise, Adrift, Adieu	23
Developing the Story – One Symbol at a Time	28
Closing Considerations	31
Appendix 1	35
Plates	37
Bibliography	48

List of Plates:

(All plates, with the exception of plate six and seven, were produced by Michael Hengler).

1.	Gallery Layout	3, 37
2.	Gallery Entrance	4, 38
3.	Left View of Boat and Projection	5, 39
4.	Right View of Boat and Projection	5, 40
5.	Lava Glaze Tests	20, 41
6.	Drift Boat	21, 41
7.	Polynesian Boat	21, 42
8.	Lava Boat	21, 42
9.	Whole Foam	22, 43
10.	Half Flaked	22, 43
11.	Half Invested	22, 44
12.	Half Filled and Loaded	23, 44
13.	Half Hoisted	23, 45
14.	Two Cinder Halves	23, 45
15.	Bryson's Cinder	24, 46
16.	Kalapana Pali	25, 46
17.	Kilauea Crater Silhouette	27, 47

Preface:

This paper will explore the symbolic, cultural, and technical aspects of my thesis exhibition *Still Flow*, which was exhibited at the University of Hawaii-Manoa's (UH-Manoa) Commons Gallery from March 8-15, 2013. This thesis exhibition and paper are the culmination of six years of creative inquiry into how to utilize the earth's volcanic process and product as an artistic means of expression. This process and research was formed and adjusted over the years in response to the technical and cultural complications that arose around it. This paper will therefore also delve into the relevant topics that altered and directed the outcome of this thesis project in order to understand why an artwork dealing with the abovementioned subject matter is of any consequence and is worth the creator's making and the critics' contemplation.

Introduction - Into the Flow:

The artwork *Still Flow* is a multimedia installation that utilizes a video projection, sculpture, and commercially processed materials. It functions as an allegory for human effort and the complexity of nature (human, cultural, social, economic, ecologic, and geologic) that arises and has arisen through time. The major symbols used in this allegory - a boat made of cooled lava, commoditized (culturally revered) land, machines (helicopters), molten lava rivers, and a voyage - create an art-space that exists as a forum in which inquisitive viewers will consider how these symbols relate to their own efforts to exist in nature.

The combination of the aforementioned symbols function as a corollary to the complexities of human existence and the eruptive volcanic continuum that shapes this earth: both rise from the earth, journey within and around this sphere, and return to it when that energy has been expended. Because of the remote location (the lava fields of the Big Island of Hawaii) and the material utilized (Hawaiian cinder), it is also a dialog about the native Hawaiian population and the non-natives who have moved to the islands. This interface between the Polynesian diaspora that originally settled on the islands of Hawaii, who self-identify as Hawaiians, and those who are not of the same genetic origin, has created conflicts of interest regarding topics of colonization, property rights, identity, exploitation, and ethical practices.

The objective of this exhibition is multivalent in nature. It was not meant to solve the previously mentioned problems, but instead intended to bring them into a social forum so that those who wished to engage in these topics had an outlet to express their opinions. It was also intended to present those uninformed about this subject matter a setting in which they might question the intention of the artwork and begin a path towards seeking the information that could help them to understand some of the complexities of living on the Hawaiian Islands. Lastly, this

was an artwork that responded to and was formed by my interaction with the people native to Hawaii, as well as the non-natives. This thesis exhibition began as a way to explore my fascination with the geothermal process that has formed and is still forming this sphere on which we walk. While searching for ways to create an artwork from the volcanism of Hawaii, my fascination was quickly encircled by the more contentious and perplexing cultural and economic perspectives that contribute to the underpinnings of this artwork's allegory. It is best to begin with a formal description of the thesis exhibition's video, sculpture, and commercial components to understand how this artwork functions on all of these levels.

A Formal Description:

The Commons Gallery at UH-Manoa was divided into two sections: the illuminated entrance and the darkened projection area. The first visible encounter with this exhibition was through the outside windows and into the triangular illuminated gallery entryway. The title of the artwork - *Still Flow* – was laminated to the window in black vinyl lettering. After entering this front section of the exhibition, the viewer encountered a pedestal on the left wall of the gallery that held the guestbook and exhibition postcards.

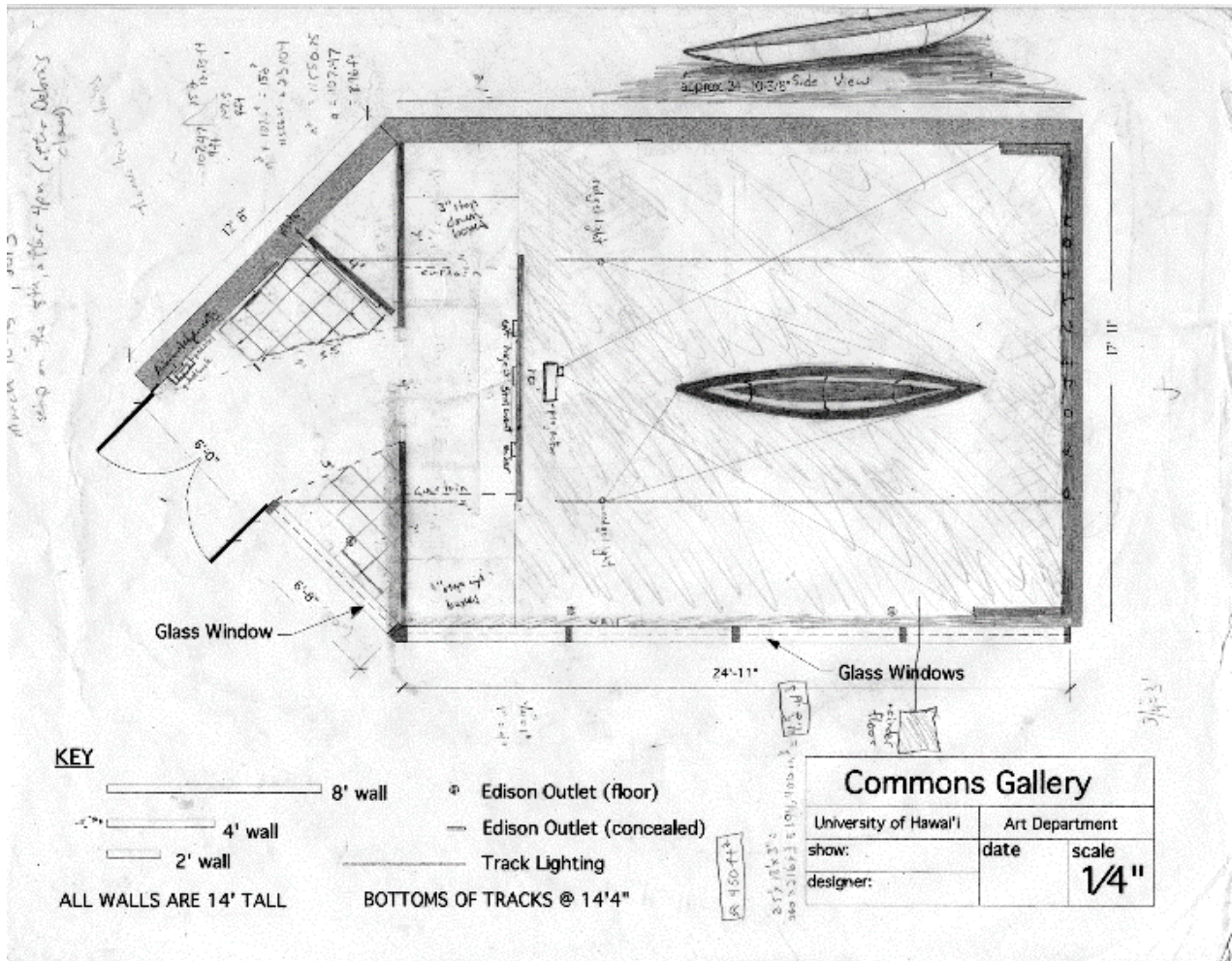


Plate 1 - Gallery Layout

To the right of the pedestal were stacked plastic bags, colored white with black text that denoted the producer of the bags: Niu Nursery. Also printed on the bags was the motto of the nursery: “Buy local – we care about Hawaii.” Inside of the bags was the quarried black cinder from the Big Island of Hawaii. The stacked bags ascended in height, from 8” – 4’, as the viewer moves into the gallery space. The stacked bags resembled sandbags used for levees or battlefield trenches.



Plate 2 – Gallery Entrance

A printed color photo of the artist’s silhouette was mounted to a wall, above the bags, furthest away from the gallery entrance. In the hand of the artist pictured in the photograph was the contour of the hull of a boat. Behind the silhouette of the artist was the red, orange and yellow smoke shrouded light illumination from Kilauea Crater. On the opposite side of the entrance was another stack of the same bags of cinder, equal in height, though smaller in square footage.

The space between these two formations of stacked bags formed a walkway towards the darkened gallery space. Towards the end of the walkway was a four foot opening that led into a hallway. At the center of this opening was a sheet of paper that described, in the artist’s words, the intent of the project. I located an “enter” and “exit” sign to the right and left of this description, respectively, to help direct the flow of traffic, and to insinuate that the visitor was invited to walk through the gallery. Black curtains were hung to the right and left of this signage to help block any light leakage into the darkened projection side of the gallery.

After the curtain was opened, the viewer had to take a step onto a 3” raised platform that demarcated the division between these two rooms and helped to contain the cinders that comprised the darkened gallery floor contained on its intended side. A left turn was required after stepping onto the platform, at which point, the darkened room was revealed to the viewer.

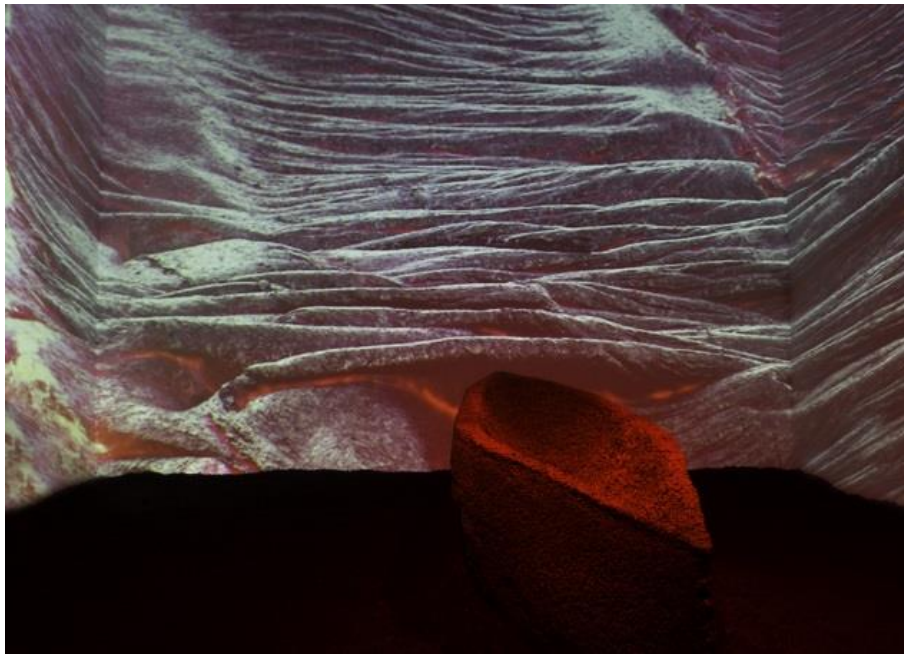


Plate 3 – Left View of Boat and Projection

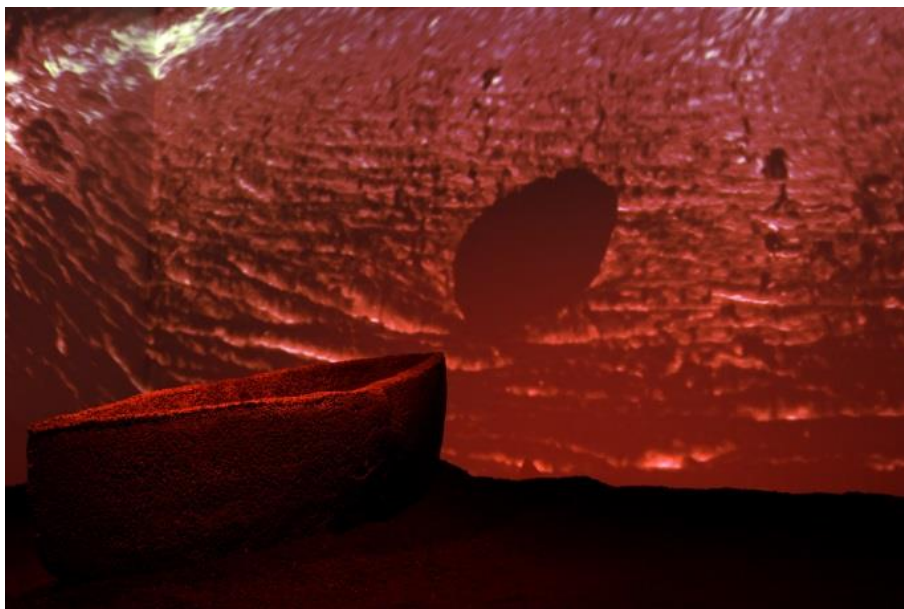


Plate 4 – Right View of Boat and Projection

The viewers entered the 18' x 21' dimly lit, red gel illuminated, cinder covered floor, to see a 10'3" long black cinder canoe. The bow is pitched upward in the direction of the 23' x 14' video projection.

The video footage was a five-and-a-half-minute loop that cycles through day, dusk, and night scenes of five different cinder boats floating on the lava-rivers of the Big Island of Hawaii. An audio component looped natural sounds of the lava fields crackling, wind blowing, helicopters flying, and feet crunching over the lava-scape. A second audio track, produced specifically for the video, looped an ambient, asynchronous score with an eerie and mysterious intent.

The boats in the video were the same form as the boat in the gallery, and are made of the same cinder material on the gallery floor and in the gallery entrance. Although the boats in the video appeared to be proportionate to the 10' boat in the gallery, their actual scale is only a foot in length. I made the boats at UH-Manoa prior to moving to the Big Island in order to return them to their location of origin. I returned the boats to the flows by hand. The footage captured the moments in which my effort to accomplish this feat finally meets the volcanic reality, and it combines these two energies (human and geologic) to begin the boat's journey back to the earth.

While this video played the viewer had the option to inspect the lava terrain, 10' boat, and projection. As the visitor progressed through the gallery space, they too become a part of the soundtrack as their shoes crunched over the cinder-scape. After the visitor completed their investigation of this space, they exited through the curtain on the opposite side from where they entered.

Intention in the Exhibition Layout:

As previously stated, the gallery layout was divided into two sections. The entrance area was designated as the area in which the visitor would be introduced to the larger conceptual framework of the artwork through explanatory wall text, signage, and photography. The area was also intended to present the cinder in its bagged commercialized form in order to associate the entrance space with the principals of commerce with which we are familiar: the exchanges of goods for currency. This commercialized world perpetuates a modality in which money is our measurement of success. Effort is rewarded by dollars paid. One's childhood excitement to pursue a passion becomes devoured by a financial reality that requires us to pay for the food on the table, the roof over our heads, and the cars that drive us to another day of work. The entrance area of the gallery was intended to be the antithesis to the darkened interior projection space of the installation.

The projection space was intended to confuse the world as we know it. In this space there was a 24 foot wide by 14 foot tall wall projection of cinder boats that float on rivers of lava. The installation on this side of the gallery was transformed into a lava field. In the center of this space was a 10 foot boat of the same bagged cinder seen in the entrance. The bagged cinder herein did not function as a commodity. The material was instead repurposed to express a sentiment that is both essential and essentially lost as we become socially conditioned through life: to imagine, create, play, and reconsider possibilities and our understanding of the world.

The boat in the center of the room, and the projected cinder boats on the gallery walls, offered the viewers a different perspective than that which is familiar: it was an economic regression of the cinder. The cinders instead became boats on which the viewer can ride their imagination into a realm in which the impossible becomes possible. The room represents

represented a world where (physical, financial, and rational) principles, as we knew them, do not apply. It is an alternate reality that encourages the viewer to reconsider the possibilities of their imagination, and what they might accomplish if they could allow themselves to relinquish the socioeconomic constructs that would have them bag and sell the cinder that comprises the boats, rather than build a metaphorical boat to float into a fabled reality. This darkened side of the gallery measured the cinder's worth, not by the price it can fetch, but by the utility it delivers to the viewer, helping them see an imagined existence that enables the impossible. The red glow in the room, the unfamiliar crunching ground beneath one's feet and the asynchronous ambient soundtrack was composed and added as an artistic score, all aimed to accentuate the surreality of the atmosphere and assist the viewer in considering the possibilities comprised in this alternative existence.

Historical Beliefs Meet Present Intention:

In order to work with lava as an artistic medium, I felt responsible first to gain knowledge about the islands of Hawaii, its people and culture, and their belief system pertaining to a *haole's* (someone of non-native Hawaiian descent) use of Hawaiian land. This sentiment of responsibility was a response to the anxious reactions I received from professors and colleagues after sharing my intent to work with Hawaiian cinder: I was told I should not proceed, or I was questioned as to whether I was culturally prohibited from proceeding. I therefore began this thesis project not by making, but by trying to ascertain a truth about who had the right to use what may be regarded as Hawaiian land, and where this conception (or misconception) came from that had so many people questioning my intentions.

Surprisingly, at no time in the past three years of research involved in this project have I found an exact decree that expresses the general idea that *haoles* shall not remove rocks from Hawaii. How can an idea that is so widespread not be declared in writing? Prior to the arrival of the colonial missionaries, in the late 1700s, Hawaiians communicated information in an oral tradition. It may be that this idea to prohibit the removal of Hawaiian stone is a request that has continued only in this oral tradition. Although this may be the rationale, the research I have conducted leads to multiple theories on the subject. Here is one from the Hawaiian scholar Haunai-Kay Trask:

“Modern Hawaii, like its colonial parent the United States, is a settler society; that is, Hawaii is a society in which the indigenous culture and people have been murdered, suppressed, or marginalized for the benefit of settlers who now dominate our islands. In settler societies, the issue of civil rights is primarily an issue about how to protect settlers against each other and against the state. Injustices done against Native people, such as genocide, land dispossession, language banning, family disintegration, and cultural exploitation, are not part of this intrasettler discussion and are therefore not within the parameters of civil rights.”¹

Trask’s statement highlights a dismal rationale that Hawaiians and their wishes are not worthy of being decreed and upheld on the islands in a formal and written manner, and are, in fact, purposefully not upheld. This rationale implies a resentment to the settlers of Hawaii and their lack of respect for its indigenous culture.

This resentment towards settlers provides a corollary for the hesitation I have experienced through the duration of this project. The wrongdoings Trask mentions can be projected onto

¹ Haunai-Kay Trask. *From a Native Daughter: Colonialism and Sovereignty in Hawaii* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 1999), 25.

myself and my non-Hawaiian heritage. My ancestors come from a European bloodline, and I am an American. These two regions are viewed as being responsible for the disruption of the traditional Hawaiian culture and their loss of control and land. This process began with Captain Cook's arrival to the Hawaiian Islands, in 1778. That year marks the beginning of the end of Hawaiian culture as it had existed prior to the non-Polynesians' arrival.

Noenoe Silva, author and authority on Hawaiian culture, points out that, although it has been widely believed and disseminated, the Hawaiians did not willingly concede their land and way of life to the colonial newcomers. Rather, she presents evidence of a 556 page petition opposing the eventual annexation of Hawaii in 1898. She recreates the process by which the European and American colonizers infiltrated the Hawaiian system of governance and hoodwinked their way into power, and, ultimately, control of Hawaii.²

Additionally, Jon Van Dyke, expert in the colonial appropriation of Hawaiian lands, provides detailed information specific to the actual political, legal, and financial transactions that transpired to slyly and stealthily remove the land of Hawaii, from the hands of the Hawaiians. He cites separate quotes from Alexander and Blackman, two government officials in the middle 1800s, in which they maintain that the (non-native) government has been working to secure the Hawaiian people with the most desirable lands, although Van Dyke starkly contrasts this with information from another official of the day. Levy, instead, provides numbers that show a disproportionate incongruence with the prior: more than five times more land was sold to a much smaller foreign population that constituted only forty percent of the total accounted land holders; the larger group of Hawaiians owned a smaller proportion of land.³ These actions have not been

² Noenoe K. Silva. *Aloha Betrayed: Native Hawaiian Resistance to American Colonialism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), 3, 41-44.

³ Jon M. Van Dyke. *Who Owns the Crown Lands of Hawaii?* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 2008), 57.

soon forgotten, nor excused. I understand this historical documentation, as it relates to my desire to use cinder as an artistic medium, to mean that the act of taking a singular rock from Hawaii today is a symbolic reminder that Hawaiian land has been wrongfully removed by the denizens of this land, from its rightful citizens, and that I am one of the denizens.

With a better understanding of the tension surrounding land ownership and property rights, I sought to further educate myself with respect to the spiritual considerations of the land. It is believed in Hawaiian culture that lava is quite literally bound to the materialization of land and life on earth. Most of the stone that comprises the Hawaiian Islands owes its origin to a volcanic process, therefore one could conclude that the stone (*pohaku*) and lava rock from Hawaii are equally viewed and valued by Hawaiians.

“Pohaku, then, were sacred to the Hawaiians. They were used to induce pregnancy, to bless births, to grow and prepare food, to create temples, to heal, to secure good fishing, to divine the future, to pass the time, to win during battle and for a host of other uses. The *mana* [spiritual power] contained within pohaku, as indicated by their many uses, was such that they became central to life in old Hawaii.”⁴

Stone was the fundamental and ubiquitous material in Hawaiian culture and it is therefore understandable why Hawaiians valued it culturally, spiritually, and functionally with such reverence.

The Hawaiian belief that specific stones possessed the *mana* of a god, goddess, or ancestor helps to further explain the possible depth of respect once (and possibly still) felt for *pohaku* by Hawaiians. The saying “He ola ka pohaku a he make ka pohaku (There is life in the

⁴ Scott Cunningham. *Hawaiian Magic & Spirituality* (Minnesota, MN: Llewellyn Publications, 2009), 107.

stone and death in the stone.”) was spoken by the older generations of Hawaiians to express that their livelihood, spirituality, and essence existed around and within stone.⁵ Today however, these ideas reveal a disconnect between the way many present-day-Hawaiians live and the historical belief system that defined them as a people.

Clearly Hawaiian stone is intrinsically linked to the history of the Hawaiian culture, but other material objects have since taken precedence over it - for example: a car, money, or a house. In this present day Hawaii, much of what one comes to possess is through an exchange of currency for goods, i.e., purchased, rather than homemade. Tools such as hammers, fishing sinkers, axes, etc., are manufactured, not carved; games are often played on a screen, rather than with rocks; medicine is purchased premade without need of being pounded and ground by a rock; districts once delineated by stones are now delineated by roads and maps. It may, therefore, be more that Hawaiians wish to maintain a sense of their pre-colonial identity and sense of ownership of the Hawaiian land by stating that Hawaiian rock should not be taken, rather than because the rock is still utilized and revered as it had been prior to 1778.

The fact that stone served the Hawaiians in so many capacities reveals their pragmatism towards it as an essential element in their lifestyle. The discrepancy today, though, is that there has been a shift in what it means to exist as a Hawaiian. Here are two current definitions of Hawaiian:

The Native Hawaiian Government Reorganization Act (NHGRA) defines Hawaiian in a political manner:

⁵ Ibid.

“... an individual who is (one) of the indigenous, native people of Hawai‘i and who is a direct lineal descendant of the aboriginal, indigenous, native people who resided in the islands that now comprise the State of Hawai‘i on or before January 1, 1893; and occupied and exercised sovereignty in the Hawaiian archipelago, including the area that now constitutes the State of Hawai‘i; or an individual who is (one) of the indigenous, native people of Hawai‘i and who was eligible in 1921 for the programs authorized by the Hawaiian Homes Commission Act or a direct lineal descendant of the individual”⁶

Kekoa McClellan, a representative of the Hawaiian Democratic Party, presents a definition that considers other criteria:

“Hawaiian is more than blood, more than lineage. It is a word we use to capture the essence of these islands, and it is a way of life. It is not merely enough to be born ‘kanaka ma‘oli.’ Understanding the culture and practicing our peoples’ beliefs is just as important as the blood that runs through our veins. A Hawaiian is connected to this land because we are part of it, our identity is not formed merely by the titles we carry or the people we marry, but by our stewardship over this place we call home. To be Hawaiian is a privilege and a responsibility. To be Hawaiian does not mean that one must be ‘olelo, but it does mean that one must appreciate, embrace, and support Hawaiian ideals in his or her everyday life.”⁷

McClellan and “Auntie” Leolani Pratt then provide these ideals as examples to which a Hawaiian adheres: *pono* (to be righteous and moral), *malama* (to take care of), *ha‘aha‘a* (to be humble) and *aloha* (love, affection, compassion and charity.)⁸

⁶ <http://www.soc.hawaii.edu/uhtoday/spring2007/j402/Sarah%27s%20stuff/sarah.html>

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

Although these definitions provide the characteristics, comportment, ancestry, and geographic locality one must possess in order to be considered Hawaiian, they do not encapsulate the evolution towards conformity that these defined Hawaiians have had to endure to exist in contemporary Hawaii. These shifts that came, at times, by the religious imposition of the colonial missionaries, and other times because of convenience and ease due to advancements in technology and production: buying one's food instead of growing and processing it; being born at a hospital rather than on a rock; seeing a reproductive endocrinologist instead of making offerings to fertility-stones, etc. At other times, though, this shift in the Hawaiian lifestyle may have transitioned through the greed that is innate to human nature - to want what we do not have. Evidence of this can be seen in the first encounters between Captain Cook and the Hawaiians in which they heisted fire arms, tools, and a boat (assembled with nails) from Captain Cook's ship.⁹

Defining what it is to be Hawaiian today, and what importance stone still has for Hawaiians, is further complicated because ninety percent of the native Hawaiian population has been decimated by disease and mistreatment, and inter-ethnic marriage and resultant offspring have complicated a purely ethnic definition of Hawaiian.¹⁰ Since the arrival of the colonial powers, the Hawaiian culture has struggled to maintain itself. What it means to be a Hawaiian today is as much a resistance of the transformation of the land as an adherence to cultural values that have diminished severely since colonial contact.

Considering the role that *pohaku* has had in the Hawaiian culture - from the land itself, to weapons, to sacred temples - it is not difficult to understand why there has been hesitation and tentativeness expressed about this project - *Still Flow* - in which a *haole* purchased Hawaiian *aina*

⁹ Gavan Daws. *Shoal of Time: A History of the Hawaiian Islands* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 1968), 17-19.

¹⁰ Ty P. Kawika Tengan. *Native Men Remade: Gender and Nation in Contemporary Hawaii* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 57-58.

and repurposed it to an artistic end. The inclination to take issue with this artwork (or with any *haole* who takes, purchases, or uses *pohaku*) is a way for this colonized culture to maintain a sense ownership of their culture, identity, and land. As stated by Professor Linda Tuhiwai Smith (author and specialist in colonized indigenous cultures at the University of Auckland) about indigenous colonized communities:

“To resist is to retrench in the margins, retrieve what we were and remake ourselves. The past, our stories local and global, the present, our communities, cultures, languages and social practices – all may be spaces of marginalization, but they have also become spaces of resistance and hope.”¹¹

In this quote is the idea that Hawaiians can reclaim their past and previous sense of identity by resisting the powers that have taken claim of their land and attempt to reinvigorate the strength of their culture that has been relegated to the past. Resistance to those who would take stone from Hawaii, is an attempt to reclaim the history of the Hawaiian culture that grew out of this land of stone.

In the Know or Just Going with the Flow (Disseminated Discrepancies):

In an effort to determine if my effort to use Hawaiian cinder as an artistic medium was truly problematic, I consulted three native Hawaiian cultural practitioners: Moana Lee (a practicing cultural anthropologist throughout the Hawaiian Islands), Pi'ilani Ka'awaloa (a teacher of Hawaiian Studies at Kamehameha Schools on the Big Island), and Auntie Mini Ka'awaloa (a 90 year old native of Kalapana, Big Island whose home was the only one spared

¹¹ Linda Tuhiwai-Smith. *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London, GBR and New York, NY: Zed Books Ltd., 1999), 4.

when the East Rift Zone began erupting in 1983). What they revealed to me is that the larger community opposition towards *haoles* using *pohaku* is not so readily generalized as has been socially disseminated en masse. According to these well informed few, there is neither a universal dictum that forbids one to take the island's rock, nor is it appropriate to consider all rock equally valued. The cinder used in this artwork, for example, was quarried from a cinder cone in Kapoho on the Big Island. Cinder, in Hawaiian lore, is considered to be Pele's vomit.¹² By comparison, the stones used to construct *heiaus* are spiritually revered and extremely valued, and it was because of their disappearance that opposition developed against tourists who were taking them.

All three of these Hawaiian practitioners encouraged approaching the idea of taking the stone by asking Pele for permission and listening for a response. If it appeared as though a blessing was granted, one must then, after procuring the stone, maintain efforts to care for it; this was described as keeping it as an item of veneration, not as trinket that is forgotten and disregarded. If it happened that the stone was to be sold or gifted, the initial possessor of the stone must insure that the recipient is also informed of the responsibilities of possession, and that they too care for the stone appropriately.

This Hawaiian cinder is quarried by Bryson's Cinder, a company owned by a Japanese business man on the Big Island. The cinder is processed and sold to Niu Nursery, a company owned by a Chinese business man on O'ahu who bags the cinder and sells it to City Mill. City Mill was started by a Chinese immigrant whose family has continued to maintain the company since his death. Although the cinder for this thesis project was purchased at City Mill, it should be pointed out that Niu Nursery distributes the cinder to other national hardware stores, such as

¹² Pi'ilani Ka'awaloa. personal interview, March, 26, 2012.

Home Depot and Lowe's, as well as gardening centers. The owner of Niu Nursery does not ship to the mainland regularly, although he will if it is requested by a client.

I spoke to these practitioners about my intentions to purchase cinder with the intention of utilizing it as a sculptural material that would be returned to its point of origin (the active lava flows of the Big Island). I told them that the video footage of the boats floating on the lava rivers would be projected and presented as a sculptural and video installation at UH-Manoa as a component of my thesis exhibition which would (if done successfully) earn me a Master's degree. Their reaction was that it was a nice gesture to return the cinder, but not necessary. They explained that the cinder is viewed as a gift from Pele to be used in accordance with how it is being commercially distributed: as a component of gardening soil, an aggregate, landscaping, or even as an artistic medium; its function is for utility.¹³ They each separately gave me their blessing to proceed with my project.

Despite these very important approvals, I still felt uneasy about my actions. I felt as though there was still an omnipotent council that I had not yet sourced from whom I could receive guidance. I continued to seek more sources. A native Hawaiian suggested conferring with Puakea Nogolmeyer, a Professor of Hawaiian Studies at UH-Manoa. Nogolmeyer told me that the sources I had already sought for guidance in this artistic effort were the appropriate authorities regarding this matter.¹⁴ He suggested that continuing to seek further approval was actually undermining the authority and respect of those previously consulted. He also stated the following: one should not think of the cinder as Hawaiian land, but, rather, as a volcano; that the cinder is not sacred by its own accord, but that a place or item is deemed sacred; and that it is

¹³ Auntie Mini Ka'awaloa. personal interview, July 23, 2012.

¹⁴ Professor Puakea Nogolmeyer. personal interview. December 5, 2012.

wise to proceed in matters like these with respect and an interest in learning. After this point, I continued to proceed with caution, although I felt satisfied from the affirmation Professor Nogolmeyer provided.

Permission Given – How to Begin?:

Prior to undertaking this project, making boats of cinder that would be returned to the active lava flows of Big Island, their place of origin, seemed like a simple idea. Reality struck when the first attempts at making boats of cinder were short of successful. The early prototypes of the cinder boats were created by melting the cinder in a heating chamber that exceeded 2300F. The cinder was a full liquid at this temperature and I initially attempted to work it as one traditionally works furnace glass: on the end of a metal pipe. However, the process was laborious and required temperatures considerably hotter than glass-blowing. Molten cinder is not vitreous and does not behave like glass - elastic and with a malleable body – rather, it moved like a porous molten rock – long to heat up and quick to cool down, without elasticity. The difference in the working properties of glass and rock are a result of glass having a melting range in which its viscosity decreases as its temperature increases, whereas rock has only a melting point in which it changes its state from solid to liquid. Even more problematic than cinder's working properties was that it would not cool down without fracturing into multiple pieces. These trials did not last long before I reassessed my approach.

The problem that needed to be solved was how to form the cinder so that it would not reaggregate into a uniform whole. If the cinder did not bind to itself, then it would not want to fracture from itself as it cooled. The Geology and Geophysics Department at UH-Manoa

proved to be a worthy ally in solving this problem. Professor John Mahoney provided the composition of a standard basalt rock from Kilauea:

SiO₂ (silicon dioxide) - 49.59
Al₂O₃ (aluminum oxide) - 13.70
TiO₂ (titanium dioxide) - 2.69
Fe₂O₃ (iron oxide) - 12.39
MnO (manganese oxide) - 0.17
MgO (magnesium oxide) - 7.22
CaO (calcium oxide) - 11.32
Na₂O (sodium oxide) - 2.24
K₂O (potassium oxide) - 0.52
P₂O₅ (diphosphorus pentoxide) - 0.27¹⁵

He suggested that adding a flux (either Li-metaborate or Li-tetraborate) to this composition would help facilitate a more cooperative cinder working experience. Although this may have worked to lower the melting temperature, I had already decided to pursue a different solution.

I worked together with Professor Brad Taylor in the Ceramics Program. Together we were able to utilize his computer program that can replicate a material's composition so that it can be used as a glaze. The resultant lava-glaze we formulated gave me the ability to re-approach sculpting the cinder. The idea during the formulation process was to maintain the conceptual integrity of the project by returning the cinder to the molten lava flows without introducing foreign materials. This eliminated the use of epoxies or other synthetic adhesives. By combining the lava composition from Professor Mahoney and the computer program from Professor Taylor I was able to produce a thermal adhesive that was of the same basic composition as the cinder itself.

¹⁵ John Mahoney. email correspondence. September 8, 2011.



Plate 5 – Lava Glaze Tests

I initially tested four lava glaze formulas that contained slightly different proportions of the previously listed components. One formula was clearly superior for this project (upper left). It melted at a lower temperature than the cinder and was a perfect match in hue and texture. The testing revealed that the chosen lava glaze recipe melted at 1600F. By comparison, the cinder itself melted around 1950F. By using this glaze formula, I was able to develop a new and successful approach to working with the cinder. The real success, though, was that I was able to create the glaze by using the same basic material composition as the cinder itself. Although the composition of the glaze had to be slightly altered by adding two fluxes (Boric Acid and Borax) to lower the melting temperature of the glaze, I was able to avoid using man-made adhesives of a synthetic nature. I felt that I had successfully accomplished what I had set out to do: create a way to mold the cinder while maintaining its compositional integrity.

Preparing the Vessel:

In consideration of what hull design would be best to float on a molten river of lava, it initially seemed most appropriate for me to replicate the Polynesian outrigger canoe. After further consideration, though, I did not feel comfortable appropriating this design because it did not resonate with me personally, culturally, or historically. I felt compelled to design a boat that

I knew from my experiences to be plausibly lava-worthy, which was really the most pressing consideration about the hull's design - what shape would make the most sense to navigate rivers of lava?

The McKenzie Drift (or River) Boat became the boat of choice from which this cinder canoe would be designed. It is a boat that owes its design origins to the dory of New England and, prior, Europe (first shown in an Albrecht Durer painting in 1497).¹⁶ The McKenzie was invented in the 1940s and was modified specifically to deftly maneuver the hostile rivers of Oregon. It has a flat bottom keel with a parabolic arc from bow to stern that is designed to be able to turn in place, in a circle, when the paddles are stroked in opposite directions at the same time. This attribute is very beneficial when one has to quickly adjust to conditions, obstructions, and currents. Although this boat design was the basis for the lava boat, my final form also adopted the sleeker, thinner lines of Polynesian canoes. I wanted to pay homage to the voyagers of Hawaii's past, without directly or fully replicating their form or cultural designs.

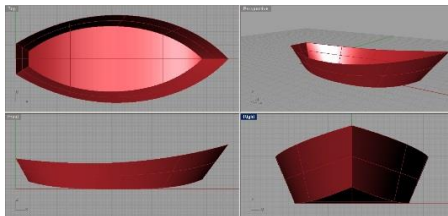


Plate 6 – Drift Boat



Plate 7 – Polynesian Boat

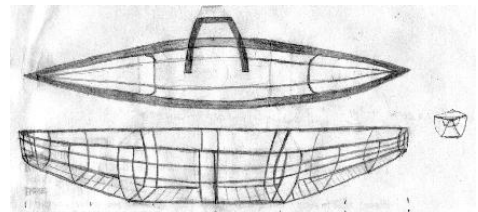


Plate 8 – Lava Boat

With the design resolved, the building began. The hulls of my cinder boats were first constructed in Styrofoam. Refractory molds were taken of the foam using an investment mix of plaster/silica, in a 1:1 ratio. The positive form of the boat was removed from the mold mix to reveal the negative form of the hull. The negative space of the mold was then filled with a premixed combination of the cinder and the lava glaze formula. This material combination was

¹⁶ John Gardner. *The Dory Book* (Camden, ME: International Marine Pub. Co., 1978), 15.

packed into the negative shape to obtain the outer lines of the hull. The interior of the boat was packed concavely so that the median line, running lengthwise in the boat, was lower than the sidewalls of the hull. The concavity provides the conceptual voyager a place to rest within the boat form.

Once the mold was prepared and packed, it was placed into an oven to begin an incremental increase in temperature that would firstly allow the moisture from the mold mix to burn off, and then would fuse the glaze formula into a vitreous state that would function to hold the cinder together after the oven cooled and the mold mix was removed. The process was repeated to produce six boats that would journey back into the Big Island lava flows, and one 10' version that would be displayed at the thesis exhibition.

The 10' version of the boat was essentially produced using the same process as the smaller boats, but the difficulty of making it increased exponentially. The positive Styrofoam form of the hull had to be cut in half, across the width of the boat, after it was built to accommodate the length of the oven into which it had to go. Each half of the boat required over 800 pounds of mold mix to invest the form. The investment had to be flipped upside down with the use of a mechanical crane so that (due to the procedural method of the casting) the form would be right-side-up when placed in the oven.



Plate 9 – Whole Foam



Plate 10 – Half Flashed



Plate 11 – Half Invested

In order to get the investment mold into the oven, a forklift was required. The cinder and glaze mix had to be mixed in a cement mixer, then poured and packed into the mold in the oven. Once the positive had been reconstructed with the cinder and glaze, inside of the investment mold, the oven was fired to temperature. After the firing, the investment was broken away from the now solidly formed cinder-boat. In order to remove each half of the boat, the forklift was required to hoist it up and out of the oven. After the two halves of the boat were assembled, the boat weighed approximately 1500 pounds.



Plate 12 – Half Filled and Loaded Plate 13 – Half Hoisted (Mark Sindelar) Plate 14 – Two Cinder Halves

Arise, Adrift, Adieu:

The decision was made to move to the Big Island in May, 2012, after a preliminary visit to the island in March, 2012. My initial visit was made to seek further help from the local Hawaiian population on some of the cultural considerations previously discussed, or to confirm firsthand the actual likelihood that the idea to return the boats to the flows was safe and viable, and finally to seek professional guidance on how to approach the flows, if it was determined that approaching them was realistic. The result of this trip was that I met two local professional photographers (Tom Kualii and Bruce Omori), who regularly capture images of the lava flows, both invited me to accompany them on a hike to the lava flows. They also introduced me to Pi'ilani Ka'awaloa, the first cultural practitioner on the island of Hawaii to reiterate what I had

already heard on O’ahu - that my effort to return the boats would not be problematic or offensive toward the Hawaiian culture.

In addition, the first visit to Hawaii was utilized to visit Bryson’s Cinder, the quarry from which the cinder was being mined, in the hope of ascertaining ownership, rights and permission given to quarry the cinder cones.



Plate 15 – Bryson’s Cinder

One of the quarries is in Kapoho, from where the black cinder comes, and the other in Leilani processes red cinder. The owner of the cinder cone quarries is Sanford Iwata, born in the Puna region of Hawaii, to parents who immigrated to Hawaii from Japan. He purchased his cousin’s ownership in the quarrying industry, although his cousin’s name still endures as the company’s namesake.

In May, 2012, I moved to Kalapana, Hawaii, with my collaborative teammate – Heidi Fisch. Kalapana is the closest town to the east rift zone (a volcanically active area of the Big Island that began erupting in 1983). The town that had been closer to the flows – Royal Gardens – was evacuated March 2nd, 2012, the day before the last house standing was covered by the lava flows. Although Kalapana had been covered twice by lava flows, it exists in Zone 2, whereas

Royal Gardens was in Zone 1.¹⁷ The zones are measured from 1-9, with the lowest number indicating the highest threat of danger. The difference between the towns' proximity to a volcanic threat is that Royal Gardens is above the magma chamber (the place where molten lava is held under the earth's surface), and Kalapana is near the vent out of which the lava flows (a vein off the main artery of the magma chamber), but not directly above it. This distance gives the townspeople a little more time to evacuate before the flows encroach on their homes, making it a slightly safer place to live.



Plate 16 – Kalapana Pali

Kalapana's short distance from the east rift zone revealed the *pali's* volcanic glow in the evening. During the day these hills emitted constant plumes of sulfur dioxide. This was our home-base, just miles from the active flows, and it was from here where we set out to return the boats.

¹⁷ <http://hvo.wr.usgs.gov/activity/kilaueastatus.php>

The preliminary hikes over the terrain were seductively welcoming with undulating masses, cooled from the previous flows. The variation of forms, from rolling ropes, to folded lava shirts, to pillowed puffs, to metallic iridized sparkle, all engaged the mind to press on in exploration, but the glowing hill cautioned against hasty approaches. After a month and a half of short reconnaissance cooled-lava-field trips, we began our first full hike up the *pali*, and attempted to reach the active flows on June 15th, 2012 (my 35th birthday)!

This arduous trek was unrelenting for seven hours. It consisted of an up and down hill hike on never-flat-terrain that would challenge even the most agile mountain goat. During this initial excursion we managed to launch the first two of six boats, however we quickly realized that revisions were needed for the future trips. We decided to begin the next hike towards dusk to arrive at the flows when it was dark, and to minimize exposure to the blazing sun. We needed to bring a better first aid kit that would consist of electrolyte tablets, aspirin, tape for rolled ankles, more water, etc. We also decided to hike across the coastal plain instead of up and down the *pali*. The ascent/descent of the *pali* battered our limbs mercilessly. Better skin protection was necessary for the duration of the hike spent under the sun, and, while at the lava site, to protect me from the infernal heat of the flows. We (me and my colleague) needed better camera work! I (from excitement) neither utilized my tripod, nor checked to verify that my camera was on the correct setting to record; I returned from the hike with no footage. My partner (from fear) produced imagery that resembled a tennis match – with every crackle, the camera would jerk towards the fading reverberation of sound. After this hike we practiced producing stable camera work with slow and smooth zooms, and made sure the equipment was set to record before approaching the active flows.

As difficult (and somewhat disappointing) as the first hike was, it was necessary to gain a better understanding of what would be required to make the next three hikes easier and more successful. The second hike, on July 15th, 2012, was on the coastal plain, at dusk, and it led to considerably improved results. However, there were still unforeseen challenges. Even though two more boats were returned to the molten lava flows, one went hard aground almost immediately after being set adrift and did not make a buoyant journey down the lava river. Also, I endured some radiant heat blisters to the face from attempting to return the boats into temperatures that exceeded 2000 degrees Fahrenheit.

Instead of returning immediately to the coastal plain with my last two boats, we decided to hike Kilauea Crater on July 29th, 2012. The hike to the crater was a fast two hours compared to the previous hikes. The terrain was well-marked with rock-stacks that delineated the most direct path to the crater. Although no boats were returned on this trip, the journey did result in the opportunity to photograph my silhouetted image in front of the glow of Kilauea Crater's lava lake - an image that I used in the exhibition.



Plate 17 – Kilauea Crater Silhouette

The trip out of the crater was neither as fast nor as flat, as it had been on the way in. The rock-stacks were easily engulfed by the darkness and the path was soon lost. There seemed to be no way out of this sulfur-filled 520 foot crater. It was not until the third hour of hiking in the wrong direction that it occurred to us to check the iPhone's GPS that guided us past the skeletal remains of some less fortunate animal, and up and out of this cylindrical volcanic vent.

On August 2nd, 2012, we attempted our last hike back on the coastal plain to return the final two lava boats. I decided to incorporate a third head-mounted-camera to capture the first-person views of the lava boats being placed in the lava flows. Both returns were successful and the applied information from the previous hikes resulted in a much calmer and effective trip. The sense of accomplishment for successfully returning the boats into such dangerous and unpredictable conditions was met with an equal sense of joy from knowing that we did not have to journey over that terrain again! Now, with the boats returned, and the footage obtained, the focus shifted to creating the most interesting and impactful storyline from it.

Developing the Story, One Symbol at a Time:

I initially considered presenting this thesis project as a documentary, but quickly chose otherwise. The act of the cinder being quarried, bagged, distributed to stores, purchased, formed into boats, returned to the Big Island, and launched back into the flows was not the aim of my artistic intention, nor did it seem to be the most powerful way of presenting the tightly woven intricacies of this project. Presenting it documentarily would have been a very literal presentation of the material and, seemingly, less open for the viewer to introspect what the underlying significance might mean. In this case, the objects and visual information literally represent themselves.

I chose, instead, to apply literary techniques to a visual dialog. My aim was to present this artwork so that the viewer could interpret it according to their own life experience. I created an allegorical narrative with this project by reducing the visual information into a limited presentation of symbols, each having their own connotations and significances. Each viewer's history and experience in relation to those symbols would conjure a very personal response based on their relationship to that symbolic information. As the artist, I controlled and limited the stimuli to direct the viewer's interpretive possibilities.

This allegorical narrative is about one's ability to effectively guide their life before death. In Ferdinand de Saussure's (a Swiss linguist and semiotician) interpretive construction, the allegory within the symbolic framework of this artwork is understood because the viewer is able to perceive a stimulus (signified) and identify it as a word (signifier) and then combine those two properties to extrapolate the meaning of that construct (sign).¹⁸ It is through this semiotic method, and within the framework of this artwork, that one can connect cultural, ecological, economic, geological, artistic and literary concepts with the symbols utilized.

For example, the combination of the word lava (signifier) and the flowing molten rock (signified), create an understanding of a larger, subterranean, magma chamber called a hot spot from which this molten lava erupts (sign). According to Roland Barthes (a Sorbonne educated French philosopher, linguist, and semiotician) however, the understanding of the sign is only a construct of the societal or cultural structure in which the sign is being understood.¹⁹ Therefore, a volcanologist may understand the combination of the word lava and the visual imagery of the flowing molten rock to mean the aforesaid geological interpretation, whereas a native of the

¹⁸ Paul Bouissac. *Saussure: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London, GBR: Continuum International Publishing, 2010), Chapter 6.

¹⁹ Paul Copley. *Routledge Critical Dictionary of Semiotics and Linguistics* (Florence, KY, USA: Routledge. 2000), 72.

Hawaiian Islands could instead understand that same information to mean a spiritual presence of their goddess - Madam Pele.

Considering these principles of semiotics, I understood that various groups and viewers would associate with what the visual and audio *signified* differently, according to their experiences. The result of everyone having a different background would therefore create a much wider interpretive set of *signs*. I viewed this to be an enriching consideration rather than a detriment to the artwork. The artwork relies on each viewer to bring their own knowledge-set to the exhibition, in that, without the viewer's different perspectives and backgrounds, the result of this exhibition would only allow one resultant interpretation.

My job, as the artist, is to utilize my understanding of how symbols generally function contextually, to be able to effectively manipulate and recontextualize them to serve my purpose. The result of this action is a semiotic shift in meaning of the symbols (*motivated signs*) into a new, constructed, artistic structure.²⁰ The use of these *signs* and semiotic shifts in this artwork attempted to reveal to the viewer the idea that we all have a limited time in our lives to achieve and accomplish something worthwhile. I wanted the viewer to leave the exhibition feeling revitalized and inspired, like there is still something new and undiscovered in this world that becomes more and more familiar to us as each day passes. I wanted people to believe that what is, is not the way things have to be – that effort, determination, and a willingness to fail are the qualities that enable us to redefine ourselves from within, and to then transfer that innovation into our physical reality in order to change the world around us.

All of the symbols I chose relate to effort, energy, time, change, determination, potential, and power. For example, the audio track that repeats the sound of the wind forcefully blowing,

²⁰ Philip Piero Thody. *Introducing Barthes: A Graphic Guide* (London, GBR: Icon Books. 2011), 36, 38.

is meant to remind the viewer that all of us on this earth are a part of a much larger system. We are all just organisms walking around on this sphere that is floating in space. Wind and weather result because the earth is spinning. The earth's spin of one full rotation is equal to one day in our life, a day that has passed and is now gone. The culmination of many days, come and gone, is our life's work. I interpret the sound of the wind to be a geologic tick of the clock. Really, the wind is just a reminder to keep a steady pace toward accomplishing our goals in life. To see in detail some possible meanings of the other objects I chose to present in this thesis exhibition, please see Appendix 1.

Closing Considerations:

The cinder for the floor of the gallery space was donated by the third-generation-Hawaiian-businessman whose company bags the material. Considering this man's cultural origin, and the duration of time he has lived on Oahu, I wonder how he self-identifies, and if this man of Chinese descent will ever be viewed as Hawaiian by the Hawaiians? What does it mean to be Hawaiian? The Hawaiians were at one point proto-Austronesian in genealogical descent.²¹ When did these travelers become distinctly Hawaiian? When does anyone who immigrated to the United States of America become an American? What is the basis for how we construct our understanding of identity?

If a *haole* practices and lives by a Hawaiian value system, more than a non-practicing Hawaiian, which of the two is more Hawaiian? The first, perhaps, is more Hawaiian in practice, and the later Hawaiian only in bloodline. Should either consider themselves Hawaiian? Why should it matter? These questions are important because two non-Hawaiians (the *haole* artist and

²¹ Bing Su, et al. "Polynesian origins: Insights from the Y chromosome." PNAS 97.15 (July 18, 2000): 8225-8228.

the *haole* proprietor) are making decisions about what happens to the land of Hawaii. Do either of us have the right to make decisions about what happens to Hawaiian land (especially myself, as an American, who is nationally linked to the country responsible for the annexation of Hawaii) when neither of us has a Hawaiian bloodline? Does a person's cultural identity effect the outcome of someone's actions, whether positive or negative?

Perhaps too much time is spent considering whose land Hawaii is, or was, rather than how we can work with the island's current cultural and ethnic demographics to make it as pleasant a place as possible. Maybe my consideration is too idealized and unrealistic, because, as history clearly shows, there has always been a constant struggle for power, and there probably always will be. For example, it is argued by Michael Brown, the scholar of indigenous cultures, that when elements such as this cinder are used by non-native parties, that its usage dilutes its importance within the native Hawaiian culture.²² On the other hand, Lawrence Lessig, the legal scholar and professor at Harvard Law School, has a different position on the matter, stating that an accurately informed non-native's engagement in native cultural traditions strengthens that culture by disseminating those beliefs.²³

The fact that the cinders were a donation could be viewed as an affirmation that this project was community supported. It could also be considered as yet another affront to the native Hawaiians because I am accepting these resources from the land, from a non-genetic Hawaiian, and possibly promoting his company in the process. Furthermore, my intent was to return the Hawaiian cinder (a metonym and metaphor for the land) to the lava flows, and yet, more of it was kept for the exhibition than recompensed. It could be said that, in spite of one's

²² Michael F. Brown. *Who Owns Native Culture?* (London, GBR and Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 5.

²³ Lawrence Lessig. *The Future of Ideas: The Fate of the Commons in a Connected World* (New York, NY: Random House, 2001), 21.

efforts to remove themselves from the societal rules by which we exist, we are inescapably a part of our consumer culture upon which we all depend to receive the goods that we either cannot produce, or that we do not resource for ourselves. Certainly it is prohibitive for everyone to build their own house, car, cloths, coffee mug, shoes, etc. Not all commodities are necessary evils.

If accepting the cinder as a gift removes me from the possible perception of being a *haole* who is attempting to undo actions that have happened as a result of the colonization of Hawaii, then that is fine, too. The aim of this thesis exhibition was not intended to suggest the hand of a metaphorical “savior” seeking to provide deliverance from the evils of consumerism, but rather, a helping hand that lifts the curtain for the audience to see and decide for themselves what their thoughts and opinions are on topics such as identity, art, imperialism in Hawaii, relocating the earth, etc. This exhibition was an opportunity to consider this fodder in an artistic forum that is brought forward as a visual and tactile presentation of information.

Having worked with this cinder (a material that was quarried, processed, and then reprocessed with an invented technology), for the artistic purpose of returning it to the place from which it had originally been taken, suggests that there is another force at work (that of the artist), other than the normal financially minded material ecology. The act of creating for enjoyment and exploration suggests that there are possibilities in life other than the commonly presented solutions, or a non-solutions. This modality does not place emphasis on financial gains as the impetus upon which one should base one’s life trajectory.

Creating a world in which rock boats float metonymic voyagers over a primordial landscape suggests a different time in geological history, a time before life as we now know it existed. It suggests an existence in which everything is in a constant state of fluctuation, though

always attempting to reach a state of equilibrium. The voyages of boats of cooled lava over molten lava rivers suggests new possibilities and new ways of thinking about intentionality and reality.

This lava boat journey may simply, in the end, just be about paddling into another reality in which the rules, as we know them, do not apply. The liquid lava journey intends to melt away our constructs of time and understanding. It may just be a voyage into a realm in which new possibilities are as malleable as one's mind will allow.

Appendix 1:

The following is a list of the various *signs* presented in this artwork, and some potential understandings I wished to illicit in the viewer:

- **Lava boats** (floating the lava rivers):
 - human effort/ intention (metaphor)
 - human connection to the earth and the geologic process (material ecology)
 - human life (metonym)
- **Lava boat** (on gallery floor):
 - the potential for one to navigate their existence
 - commercial material
 - the connection between what is and what we want our existence to become
- **Cinder floor:**
 - commercialized Hawaiian volcano
 - empowered transformation
 - community endorsement
 - bound to a commoditized culture
- **Lava river:**
 - span of time
 - the journey
- **Lava:**
 - human connection to the earth and the geologic process
 - the inevitable burying of the boats from future flow
 - the molten core of the earth
 - our coalescence from space dust
 - the birth of the earth
 - Pele manifested
- **Lava crackle** (audio):
 - geological forces
 - danger
- heat
- unpredictability
- vastness
- larger forces than our abilities
- **Footsteps:**
 - our current presence
 - our imprint we leave on our path
- **Helicopters:**
 - the human economic and industrial machine
 - accessibility
 - tourism
- **Bagged cinder:**
 - commoditized earth
 - industry
 - consumption/depletion
 - loss of control
 - loss of land
 - gardening supplies
 - Pele's vomit
 - Cinder cone
- **Wind:**
 - coriolis effect
 - weather
 - days passing
 - earth's enduring inertia
- **Photo:**
 - my effort in this span
 - the silhouette as a foreshadowing of our fate
- **Enter (signage):**
 - beginning of viewer's voyage
- **Exit (signage):**
 - end of the artistic existential voyage
 - beginning of practical application to existence

- **Type font:**
 - TRAJAN – monumental, permanent, victorious past
 - caslon – ligature, lowercase, humanitarian, communication
- **The video:**
 - style: allegorical, artistic, non-documentary, surreal, essentialist
 - the journey of the boat: beginning to end of an iteration in life
 - the blur of the geological continuum and human time
- **Cycle from one boat to the next:**
 - Stages of one's journey through life
- **Cycle from day to night:**
 - life's duration

Plates:

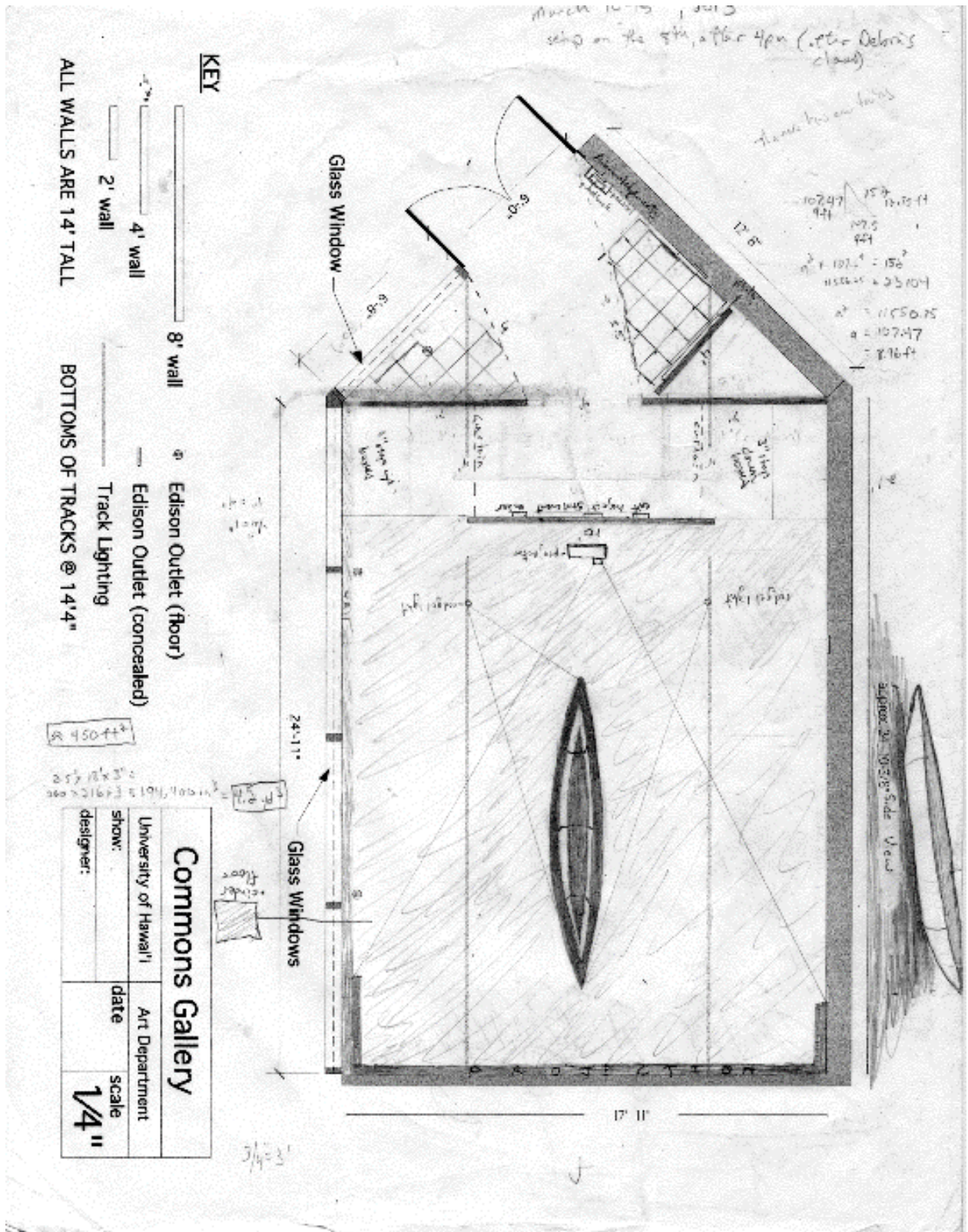


Plate 1 - Gallery Layout



Plate2 – Gallery Entrance

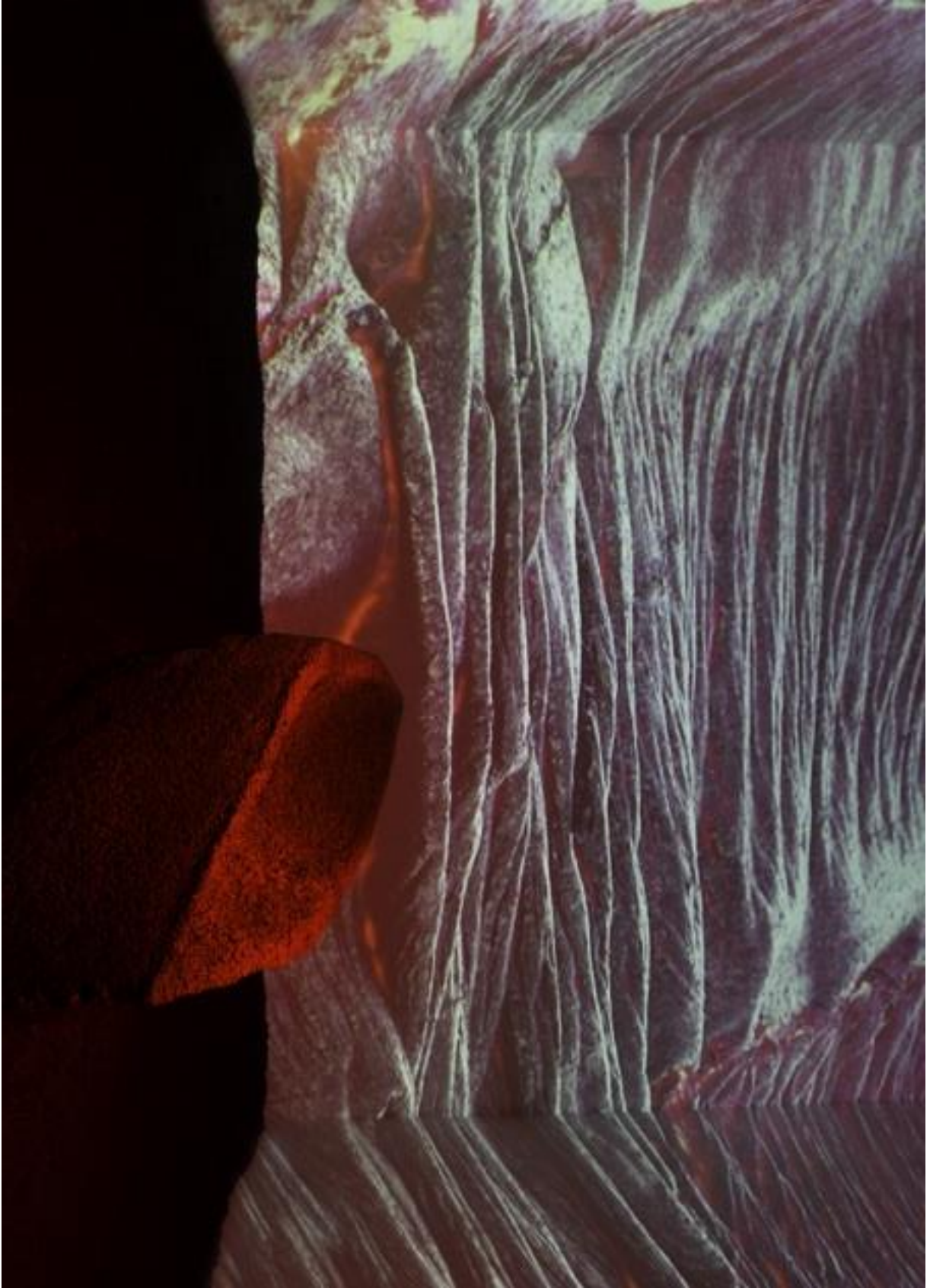


Plate 3 – Left View of Boat and Projection

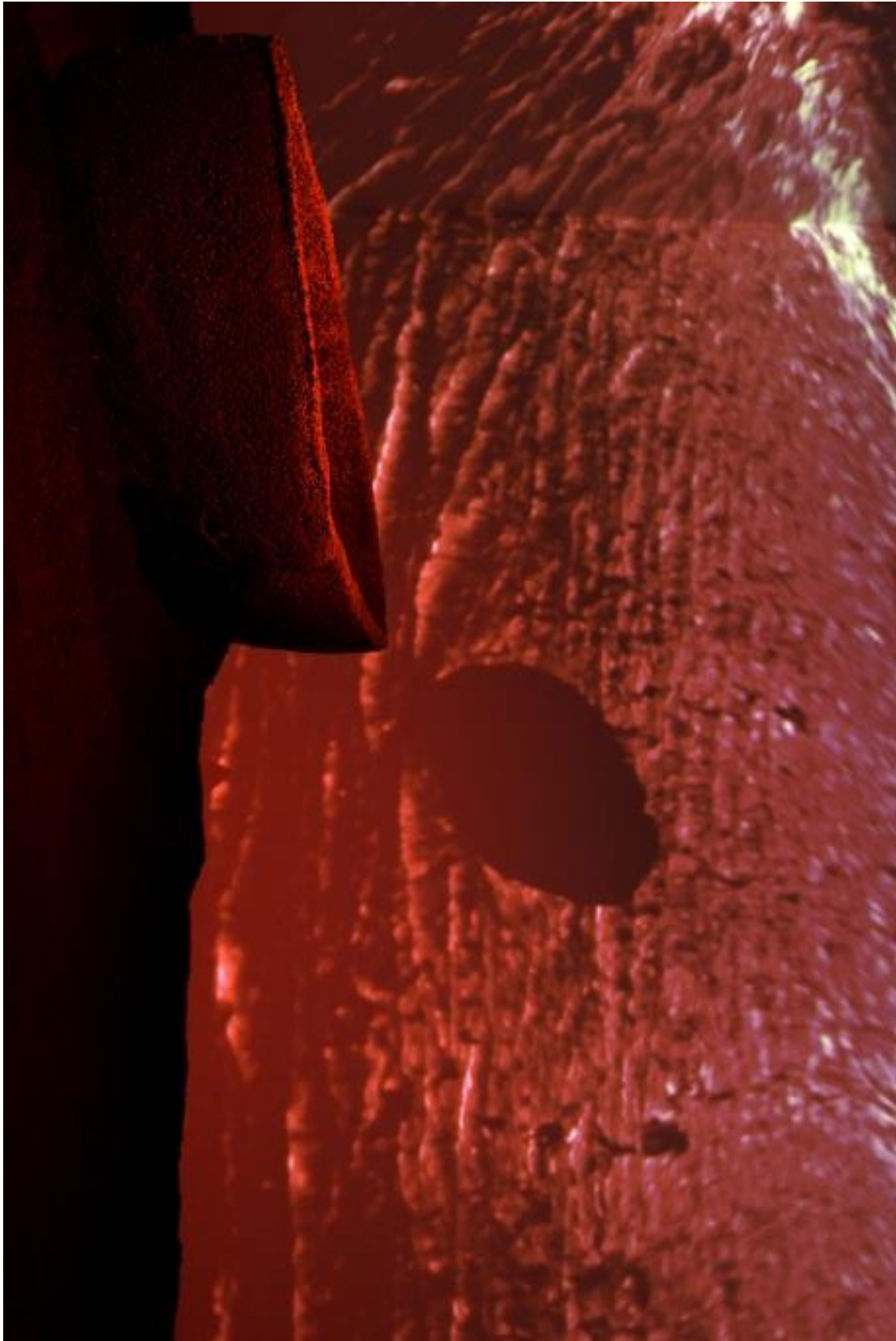


Plate 4 – Right View of Boat and Projection



Plate 5 – Lava Glaze Tests

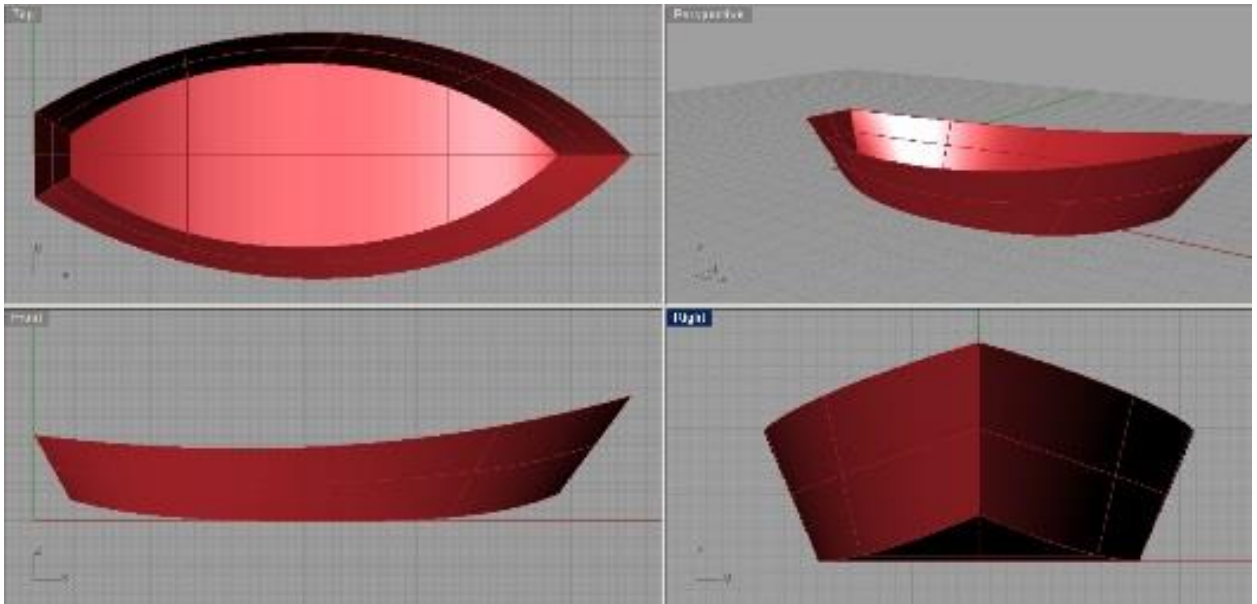


Plate 6 – Drift Boat



Plate 7 – Polynesian Boat

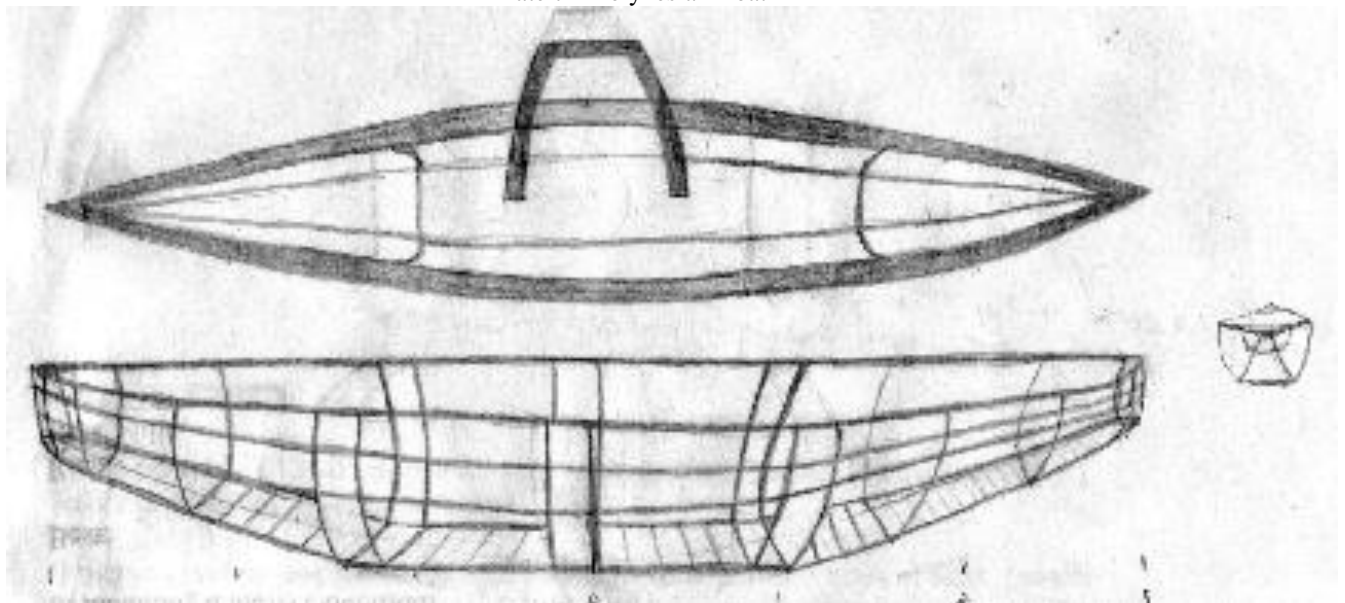


Plate 8 – Lava Boat



Plate 9 – Whole Foam

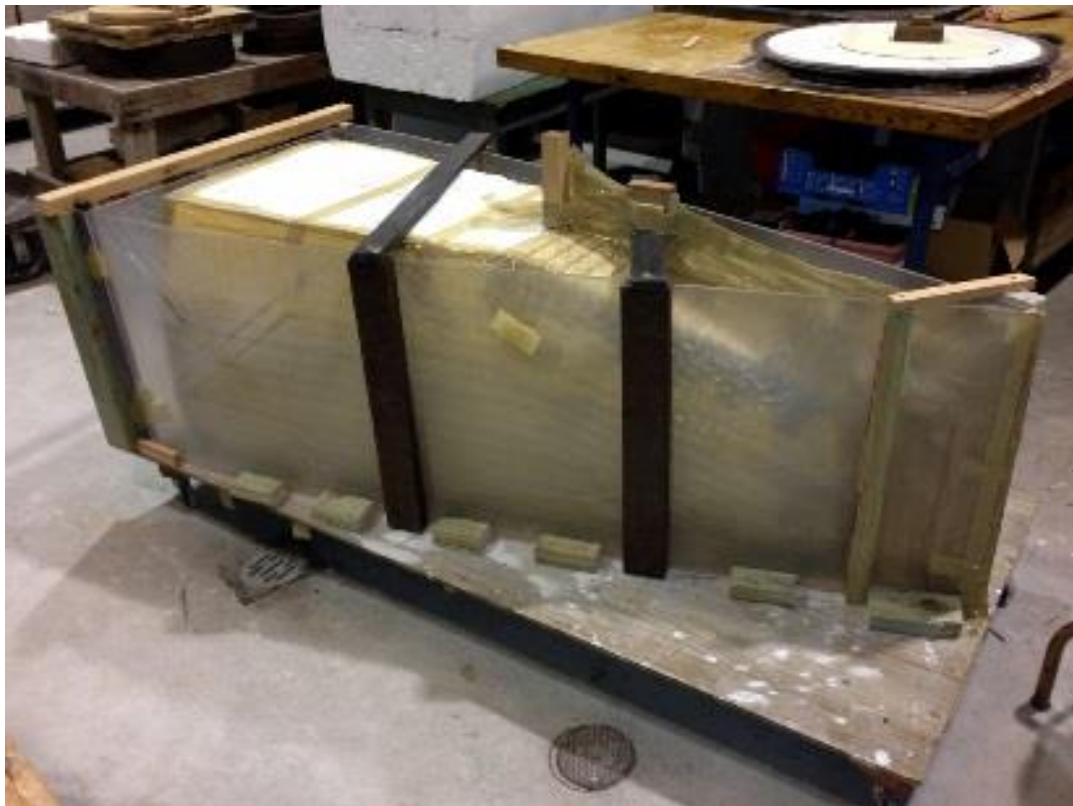


Plate 10 – Half Flashed



Plate 11 – Half Invested



Plate 12 – Half Filled and Loaded



Plate 13 – Half Hoisted (Mark Sindelar)



Plate 14 – Two Cinder Halves



Plate 15 – Bryson's Cinder



Plate 16 – Kalapana Pali



Plate 17 – Kilauea Crater Silhouette

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