

periods of exchange between Pacific Islanders and westerners remain hampered by the reality of the research materials available. Such is the overwhelming lopsidedness of the archives that we can never really know the full range of indigenous Pacific thought on tattooing at the time of European encounter: even native researchers today remain outsiders to the past, as others have famously remarked. Scholars must content themselves to look for “countersigns,” as Douglas terms them—moments of narrative ambiguity in the records we have inherited. Acknowledging this difficult predicament, this useful and beautifully illustrated volume explores, as best it can, some of those meaningful moments of meeting and exchange inking the skin of Pacific history.

APRIL K HENDERSON

Victoria University of Wellington

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Life in the Pacific of the 1700s: The Cook/Forster Collection of the George August University of Göttingen. Honolulu Academy of Arts, Luce Galleries, Honolulu, Hawai‘i, 23 February–14 May 2006, and National Museum of Australia, Canberra, Australia, 1 July–10 September 2006.

My responses here reflect my work as a Native Hawaiian customary practitioner of making kapa (bark-cloth, also called tapa elsewhere in the Pacific) and weaving, a contemporary artist, and an educator.

Seeing the exhibition *Life in the Pacific of the 1700s* was extremely important. The work was stunning. More specifically, the pieces from Hawai‘i revealed the excellence our

ancestors achieved in their customary practices. It was especially wonderful to see the variety of Hawaiian kapa and the complexity of the layering and designs.

Because of the existing literature, many people assume that the intricate designs on Hawaiian kapa developed only after contact with westerners. For those of us fortunate to have traveled to museums outside Hawai‘i to see precontact kapa pieces (often hidden away in storage drawers), we know this is a misconception. Hence, the exhibition was important because it dispelled the idea that precontact kapa was simpler than postcontact work.

The exhibition also allowed people to view everything in the Cook/Forster collection. Generally, in selecting the pieces to represent a historic period or a cultural practice, curators sometimes exclude items that customary practitioners want to see (ie, an undecorated piece of kapa). Hence, it was important that in this exhibition, all visitors, and not just research specialists, had access to all the works.

I would like to discuss a few of the problems the exhibition posed. I would have preferred seeing the works arranged by culture and not by function. Seeing all the material of a culture together gives you a sense of that culture. With that said, since the works were arranged by function, there should have been information explaining the repetition and variation of certain forms and their significance for different Pacific Island cultures. As an educator, I know visitors cannot be expected to understand all the connections visually.

Perhaps my most serious criticism is that the exhibition did little to link

precontact and contemporary customary practices. It would have been exciting to see large images of contemporary barkcloth makers from Tonga next to the display of the ngatu (tapa) pieces, or images of contemporary Māori martial arts practitioners near the Māori spears and clubs.

I would also like to comment on the ki'i akua hulu manu (feathered god image), which was displayed on a tall pedestal and rock platform. I found the altar-like setting perplexing and there was no explanation for it. It seemed overly dramatic, and I feel it encouraged people to leave ho'okupu (offerings), not understanding how this particular Kū (ancestral deity associated with politics or war) may have functioned as a private god for designated followers rather than a public god for all to worship.

Ultimately, the exhibition did not offer an indigenous point of view, except at the very beginning with the two quotations by Mary Kawena Pukui. This was not enough, and perhaps this is the reason I felt the exhibition was "cold." It did not adequately acknowledge and emphasize the relationship between the past and the present and why that connection is vital to indigenous people today. As a Hawaiian, I am linked genealogically to the pieces from Hawai'i lying behind the glass cases; they are my ancestors. The lack of interpretive materials in the galleries relegated the works to mere historic "objects." For example, if a text panel or label had pointed out the significance of the materials used and the skill level required to create an intricate kapa piece, it would have helped visitors to appreciate the long journey Hawaiians

have taken into modern times, and the skills and cultural knowledge that have been lost and recovered. It would help all of us to understand the excellence Hawaiians achieved and appreciate their uncompromising lifestyle.

In the end, I believe the museum did not feel a strong responsibility to educate. What it showed us was invaluable, but not enough. Hence, for many, the objects remained beautiful, but only historic "artifacts." In my view, this exhibition needed more research and extensive consultation with many customary practitioners across the Pacific.

IVY HALI'IMAILE ANDRADE
University of Hawai'i, Mānoa

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As a Tongan cultural practitioner and manager of a large Pacific collection, I found that the objects in the exhibition *Life in the Pacific of the 1700s* resonated as powerful links between the past and the present. The objects, collected during the second and third voyages of Captain James Cook (1728–1779), included impressive ceremonial and ritual items such as a heva (Tahitian mourning dress), kato alu (Tongan ceremonial baskets), and an akua hulu manu (Hawaiian feathered god image). They clearly revealed the amazing technical and creative skills achieved by Pacific peoples more than two centuries ago. For me, it was especially exciting to see what patterns, designs, and techniques were used in the eighteenth century but are no longer practiced today among Tongan weavers and tapa makers.

The exhibit design was appealing. The arrangement of the objects within

the cases and the light blue background enhanced their aesthetic qualities. However, I was troubled by the curatorial decision to reduce the text in the main galleries to object labels with minimal information on them. An indigenous view of material culture was therefore not available to visitors. These objects were not made to be viewed in glass cases and their meanings cannot be learned from simply looking at them. Seeing a kie fau (waist mat) or fala efu (fine ceremonial mat) displayed like an art object did little to convey its cultural significance for Tongans. It was like seeing a body without a soul.

I found the arrangement of objects by function interesting but undeveloped. While it established a foundation for cross-cultural understanding and a sense of close connections between ancient cultures in the Pacific, it did not explore this in any depth. It would have been equally important to acknowledge what was unique or different among the cultures or island communities in the Pacific. For example, many of the differences in the works of various island groups are due to differences in manufacturing techniques, but this was not explained in either the exhibition labels or the catalog essays.

If the exhibition had offered visitors indigenous views on function, it would have enhanced the displays. These objects were artistically crafted with specific uses in mind. The functional and cultural contexts were important in determining their forms and, ultimately, their cultural value. But these interrelationships were never explained. As one of the Tongan elders, Hakiti Mafi, said, a kava

bowl is not a sacred object unless it is used in a kava ceremony. In other words, it is only through its ritual use that its sacredness is recognized and its artistic form admired and valued.

Unless visitors purchased the catalogs or were already familiar with an object's historical and cultural contexts, it was probably difficult for them to get a sense of its specific cultural significance. According to Dr Stephen Little, director of the museum, "The limited amount of information in the labels allow[ed] the objects to speak for themselves" (personal interview). I would argue that it created confusion and frustration among some visitors. Even worse, the limited information in the labels was often incorrect and misleading. To give just two examples: a Tongan pandanus mat was mislabeled as made from plantain leaves, while another Tongan pandanus mat was mislabeled as made from flax. Incidentally, flax was not commonly used or cultivated in Tonga.

I believe such errors could be eliminated in the future by conducting more research—by consulting with more indigenous cultural experts and academic scholars to gather the most accurate information possible for the exhibition's labels and texts. Finally, if we want to present the material cultures of Pacific peoples in exhibitions more accurately, we need to consider different conceptual approaches and organizing strategies that will reflect indigenous points of view more successfully.

MAILE T DRAKE
Bishop Museum

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At the opening ceremony for *Life in the Pacific of the 1700s* at the Honolulu Academy of Arts (HAA), indigenous peoples filled the central courtyard as honored guests, performers, and visitors. On the surrounding courtyard walls, a companion exhibition, *Life in the Pacific: The 21st Century*, featured colorful photographs taken by primarily indigenous youth, who documented their connections to past traditions. The presence of indigenous participants at the ceremony and in the making of the photographic exhibition sharply contrasted with their absence in two other spaces. At a three-day HAA symposium on “Transformations of Cultural Traditions in Oceania,” inaugurated the following evening, only one indigenous person delivered a paper. In the main galleries, the views of indigenous peoples were conspicuously absent except in two introductory text panels in the entrance hallway. The caption labels—the sole texts in the main galleries—only listed each object’s name, materials used, place of origin, and inventory number (eg, “Sperm whale shoulder blade, Tonga, Inv. Oz 137”). Visitors unfamiliar with customary practices were left on their own to discern the function and significance of an object and the cultural activity in which it was used.

Art exhibitions typically minimize the amount of “extra-aesthetic” information they provide in galleries to encourage “unmediated” experiences with the objects. Before discussing the limitations of this practice, I would like to acknowledge some curatorial accomplishments. Aside from persuading German officials to loan out the entire Cook/Forster collection for the first time since it became part of

Göttingen University in the eighteenth century, the Honolulu Academy of Arts oversaw the construction of exhibit cases and the conservation treatment of objects in Germany, produced a three-volume catalog with extensive color plates and informative essays by indigenous and nonindigenous scholars, sent a Hawaiian kupuna (elder) to Germany to conduct appropriate protocol, organized two parallel exhibitions (the photographic project mentioned above and engravings by the artist John Webber), hosted a scholarly symposium, and offered free admission to the exhibition.

The Cook/Forster exhibition was an unmitigated success for many visitors, and their enthusiastic comments filled the guest book. Local reviewers were equally impressed. One reviewer explained that the “text-free strategy” limited the academy’s curatorial voice and allowed the objects to tell their own stories (Marie Carvalho, “Objects Tell Pacific Peoples’ Stories,” *Honolulu Advertiser*, 9 April 2006). As a nonindigenous museum studies educator, however, I believe the academy’s strategy undermined the potential for the objects to tell crucial stories about Pacific cultures. This is especially troubling in light of criticisms of art museums for fetishizing the appearances of non-Western objects over other qualities (see, eg, Hal Foster, “The ‘Primitive’ Unconscious of Modern Art,” in *Recodings* [Bay Press, 1985], 181–208). Even my own experiences confirmed the importance of these prior critiques.

Although I was disappointed the exhibition was not more dynamically installed, I found the modular cases and vitrines (glass cabinets) quite

beautiful—simply and elegantly designed, and warmly lighted. Even more appealing was the pale blue (almost turquoise) felt material lining the cases and complementing the earth tones of many of the objects. I was therefore surprised when an indigenous cultural practitioner described the color as “too passive.”

Initially, I was content to revel in my observations of the objects’ visual and material beauty since there was no interpretive text to redirect my attention. This was before I walked through the exhibition with knowledgeable colleagues or engaged them in extensive conversations, and before the arrival of the catalogs weeks later. Once armed with more insights, especially those of indigenous scholar-practitioners, I began reading against my own experiences. More importantly, I recognized I was doing precisely what they feared most—apprehending the works as art objects, appreciating them not within specific cultural contexts, but as decontextualized objects, as floating “aesthetic” signifiers. This is not to discount the importance of the exhibition, but to emphasize one consequence of its curatorial strategy.

In a provocative essay, Svetlana Alpers has discussed the “museum effect”—how objects on display are turned into works of art by isolating them from their worlds and subjecting them to “attentive looking.” Ironically, the latter can make it hard to see “cultural significance” versus “visual distinctions” (“Museums as a Way of Seeing,” in *Exhibiting Cultures*, edited by Ivan Karp and others, 1991, 26–27, 30). But why worry about this? Scholar-practitioner Momiala Kamahale explained

the urgency of the problem after viewing the HAA exhibition: Because Hawai‘i is colonized, the museum has an obligation to improve its strategies for educating the public about cultural practices from indigenous points of view as a commitment to decolonization. Obviously, this is a challenge not only for the Honolulu Academy of Arts, but also for many settler institutions in Hawai‘i, including my own.

KAREN K KOSASA

University of Hawai‘i, Mānoa

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Jolika Collection of New Guinea Art, de Young Museum, San Francisco, California. Opened October 2005.

Acclaim and excitement greeted the Jolika Collection of New Guinea Art of John and Marcia Friede when the de Young museum in San Francisco reopened in October 2005. But by July 2006, the enthusiasm had flickered and fulminated because of clashes over national cultural property exported without valid permits. There are no accusations of looting against John Friede himself; he had bought from dealers, traveling to Papua New Guinea only once, in 1981.

Despite the jangle of discordant voices, there may be an important accomplishment. A practical strategy is emerging, proposed by the National Museum of Papua New Guinea. The compromise would open access to the works within Papua New Guinea. The Jolika, and later the de Young when it receives this promised gift of over 3,000 objects, could share items with the National Museum. This is in