

representational infelicities and binds of the colonial period. For how long will Pacific places remain haunted by the specters of colonial representational regimes, either as “detestable” images that should be opposed or, in a bitter irony of postcolonial sovereignty, as ready-made visual tools available to emergent local powers seeking to foster the potent appearances of political legitimacy and authority?

Marie Claude Teissier-Landgraf’s *Tahiti Beloved and Forbidden* is a thoroughly enthralling and ultimately wrenching coming-of-age novel. A close translation of her celebrated *Hutu Painu, Tahiti, racines et déchirements*, the novel follows the emotional and cultural adventures of Sophie, a young girl of mixed parentage who arrives in Tahiti in the aftermath of the Second World War. Fresh-eyed, independent, and kindhearted, Sophie witnesses and chronicles the postwar years before the installation of the French nuclear test establishments and the subsequent massive development, transformation, and reevaluation of many of Tahiti’s enduring institutions. Proceeding through charming, occasionally gripping encounters, Sophie’s struggle with the challenges of navigating social mores, class, and status, institutional and informal educations, and parental expectations draws the Tahiti of that period into an uncomfortable present—bringing to mind Faessel’s observations about the seductions of nostalgia. At the same time, Sophie’s fraught romance with Tahiti is not blind. Teissier-Landgraf’s achievement here is a marvel of anecdotes, vignettes, and rare sentiments that capture the wonder of youth as well as its perspicacity and

frankness. Like the recent translation of Chantal Spitz’s *Island of Shattered Dreams* (2007), Teissier-Landgraf’s artful narrative offers a point of entry into the ongoing conversations within the region discussed above. The novel does not intend for the reader to be comfortable. At its heart beats the uncertain and ambiguous rhythms of many of the insights of the Huffer/Saura and Fayayd/Regnault volumes. Indecision, *fêapiti*, and the terror of purgatory—the fear that one might never have the paradise of an island past undamaged by nor a future free from the specter of double belonging—are familiar to Teissier-Landgraf’s heroine. Anglophone readers interested in the region will find it well worth having on their shelves and in their thoughts.

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This IS Hawai‘i. The National Museum of the American Indian, 19 May–4 July 2011; and *Transformer*, 21 May–25 June 2011, Washington, DC.

For the past five years, Kanaka Maoli (aboriginal Hawaiian) and non-Kanaka Maoli audiences have converged in Washington DC to attend the Hawai‘i Festival, an event held every May over a period of two days at the Smithsonian’s National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI). This year’s gathering was noteworthy in that it included for the first time a collaborative exhibition of contemporary Kanaka Maoli art at the museum and at the smaller nonprofit gallery,

Transformer. Titled *This IS Hawai'i*, the goal of the multi-sited exhibition was to dismantle the prevailing notion of Hawai'i as a place of paradisiacal allure and exotic otherness—a perception that has been ardently cultivated through the visual and cinematic arts as well as through touristic marketing practices—by re-presenting Hawai'i from an aboriginal perspective.

Organized by Hawai'i-raised curator Isabella E Hughes, the exhibition featured works by four artists: Solomon Enos, Carl F K Pao, Puni Kukahiko, and Maika'i Tubbs. While Enos's and Pao's creations occupied the NMAI Sealaska Gallery, Kukahiko and Tubbs's site-specific joint installation was showcased several blocks away at Transformer. Kukahiko, functioning as the bridge artist, also created a freestanding sculptural piece—located in the NMAI Hawaiian Garden—that closed the gap between the two geographically separated exhibition sites.

The works presented in *This IS Hawai'i* comprised an eclectic range of themes and styles, with the artists using a divergent array of materials to articulate their points of view. Pao, for instance, used implements purchased from local hardware and secondhand stores to create his fictional museum, the Post-Historic Museum of the Possible Aboriginal Hawaiian, or PHMPAH. After reworking the bought objects, he incorporated them as part of the “museum's” ethnographic collection, complete with accession tags and tongue-in-cheek display labels explaining their possible functions. Commonplace tools like a garden rake, hoe, and tiller were transformed into instruments of ancient warfare,

the artist having carved the terminal ends of the handles into barbed tips. Similarly, feather dusters transcended their humble, quotidian status to become the resplendent kahili (feathered standards) of old, used by Kānaka Maoli nobility to denote their high social rank and lineage. Other faux artifacts in the Post-Historic Museum included a set of carved steak knives (ceremonial daggers for sacrifice); a cell phone masked in a tape stencil and then spray painted to create a stylized face (a device used to communicate with the gods); a carved Styrofoam cooler (a receptacle used to house an ancestral spirit or god); and a tattered piece of yellow legal-pad paper on which a recipe was written (in English), described on the exhibit label as either “a ‘cooks’ list for cooking or it might be ‘the’ list of ingredients for cooking ‘Cook.’” (Here, the artist was alluding to famous British navigator James Cook, who met his demise at the hands of Kānaka Maoli at Kealakekua Bay on Hawai'i Island in 1779.) My personal favorite was the large Weber barbecue—allegedly an ancient aboveground cooking appliance—that was given primacy of place in the center of the exhibition space (figure 1).

Pao extended the satirical drive of his museum-within-a-museum mise-en-scène by offering his own brand of theatricality. During an artist talk he gave to the public, Pao adopted the persona of the acting director of his fictional museum, drawing on the archetypal characteristics of a know-it-all anthropologist (to view the presentation, go to <http://blog.nmai.si.edu/main/2011/06/re-thinking-hawaii-a-virtual-tour-with>



FIGURE 1 s32-13: *Possible ceremonial vessel or “aboveground” cooking device*, by Carl F K Pao. 2011. Metal, rubber, and enamel. 35 × 23 × 18.5 inches. Photo by Marata Tamaira, and reproduced with permission of the artist.

-carl-fk-pao.html). As with the faux objects, Pao’s performance incited laughter from the crowd; but, like the everyday garden tools in the exhibit, there was a barb to his act. Using humor as a foil, Pao not only criticized the tendency of “experts” in the museum field to objectify Kānaka Maoli and their material culture, but he also used the fictional museum as a platform for challenging the ongoing political effort by some to pass

the Native Hawaiian Government Reorganization Bill (known as the Akaka Bill), which seeks US federal recognition for Kānaka Maoli. Thus, the artist “fights the ridiculous with the ridiculous” by creating a museum whose collection of everyday objects-cum-artifacts are used to provide evidence that aboriginal Hawaiians do, in fact, exist.

If Pao’s work focused on excavating the Kanaka Maoli past to prove their existence in the present, Solomon Enos’s *Polyfantastica* exhibit propelled Kānaka Maoli into an imaginary future. In this work, he fuses traditional mo’olelo (stories) and history with sci-fi fantasy to create a visual epic that spans a period of 40,000 years. *Polyfantastica*—which Enos and his wife originally developed as a graphic novel—is divided into four epochs that relate to a fictional, futuristic Kanaka Maoli civilization. The epochs—each covering 10,000 years—represent significant phases in the civilization’s development, including war, a collective awakening, voyaging to outer galaxies, and a final, triumphant reunion with “life across the multiverse.” The exhibit consisted of works in a variety of media, including watercolor and acrylic paintings, pencil-on-paper illustrations, and epoxy clay figurines (figure 2); there was also an interactive Web portal available for visitors to view images (available online at www.polyfantastica.com).

Inspired by the influential works of science luminary Carl Sagan, Enos’s multisensory vision of the future is populated by a vivid assortment of humanoid characters, some of which have moth-like heads and multiple eyes, while others display webbed



FIGURE 2 *Pana'ewa*, by Solomon Enos. 2009. Epoxy clay and acrylic. 9 x 5 inches. Photo by Marata Tamaira, and reproduced with permission of the artist.

hands and feet. In the piece titled *The 'Oro'ino*, a multi-tentacled leviathan with a being emerging from its stomach leads a phalanx of spear-carrying warriors decked out in exoskeleton armor.

The premise of Enos's exhibit is rooted in giving Kānaka Maoli agency by not only placing them firmly in the future as still living, still evolving people (thereby supplanting the "doomed race" theory of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries), but also dislodging Anglocentric assertions of scientific discovery. For Enos,

as master navigators of the future, it is Kānaka Maoli who "would lead the way in pan and intergalactic voyage, bypassing the idea that such possibilities could only come to fruition through western science." In the world he has created through *Polyfantastica*, Kānaka Maoli are the captains of their own destiny, "potential pitfalls and all" (Enos, pers comm, Aug 2011).

Puni Kukahiko and Maika'i Tubbs's joint installation project at Transformer was a visual commentary on the environmental fallout resulting from the introduction of invasive plant species to Hawai'i (figure 3). In *Coming Home to Our Most Indigenous Selves*, Kukahiko carved kalo (taro) leaves into discs of Albizia wood, an invasive tree that threatens to take over native 'ōhi'a (*Metrosideros polymorpha*) forests and that—in her capacity as a custodian in Kalihi Valley, O'ahu—she removes and repurposes. Using a different medium but complementing Kukahiko's organic work, Tubbs melted down white plastic forks, knives, spoons, and plates to create *A Life of Its Own*, a meandering sculpture fashioned in the likeness of the invasive Wood rose vine (*Merremia tuberosa*). The effect of the white plastic on the white gallery walls was intentional, emphasizing how both the vine and plastic have become so accepted as to be rendered invisible on the Hawai'i landscape. In her role as the bridge artist, Kukahiko carved a three-tiered sculpture—also part of the *Coming Home* series—of cascading kalo leaves using native kamani wood (*Calophyllum inophyllum*). The outdoor sculpture—which had been installed in the weeks leading up to the exhibi-



FIGURE 3 *Coming Home to Our Most Indigenous Selves* and *A Life of Its Own*, collaborative installation by Puni Kukahiko and Maika'i Tubbs. 2011. Albizia wood and recycled plastic. Photo courtesy of the Transformer gallery, Washington, DC, and reproduced with permission of the artists.

tion—was nestled in the NMAI Hawaiian Garden among native varieties of Hawaiian plants.

For the last four decades, contemporary Kanaka Maoli art has slowly been gathering momentum in Hawai'i but has yet to gain visibility both on the US continent and further abroad. Thus, *This IS Hawai'i* offered an important platform for the four featured artists to represent to a

wider audience twenty-first-century Kanaka Maoli perspectives. While they each drew on their ancestral roots to anchor their creations, the mo'olelo they conveyed were undeniably contemporary, speaking to issues relating to culture, identity, and environment. There are nevertheless some critiques that bear mentioning. Pao's exhibit, while laden with humorous caption labels (too many, one might argue), was devoid of text that would have aided the public in understanding the serious intent behind his work. Further, Kukahiko's kamani sculpture, though beautifully rendered, was too small for the space in which it was set; it provided a perfect accent to the outdoor garden but was dwarfed by the surrounding foliage. Finally, given the large pool of talented Kanaka Maoli artists in Hawai'i, the exhibition would have benefitted immensely from the inclusion of more than four practitioners. It may be too soon to judge, however. That a group exhibition of contemporary Kanaka Maoli art constitutes an historic first for the Smithsonian demonstrates that there is ample room for the addition of more voices in what will hopefully be an annual invitation for Kānaka Maoli to define what truly *is* Hawai'i.

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