

OWARINAKI MICHU: KA HUAKA‘I PALENA ‘OLE

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ABSTRACT

The thesis installation entitled “*Owarinaki Michi: Ka Huaka ‘i Palena ‘Ole*” was presented at the Haigo and Irene Shen Architecture Gallery at the University of Hawai’i School of Architecture from April 1-12, 2013. “*Owarinaki Michi: Ka Huaka ‘i Palena ‘Ole*” depicts my journey to connect with both my native and adopted cultures. Through this process, I have come to realize how precious the beauty of nature is by cleansing negative emotion from my mind in order to absorb *mana*, a source of life, into my body. The English equivalent of these Japanese and Hawaiian phrases is “The Never-Ending Journey.” In this exhibition, my purpose was to depict a connection between both the Japanese and Hawaiian cultures, each of which respects the bond between nature and humanity. Japanese people express this through the spirit of Shintoism, whereas Hawaiians express it through the spirit of *mana*.

In the exhibition, the salt spiral represents a journey to discover my Japanese roots through the lens of the Hawaiian culture. The path is ritually drawn by hand-sprinkling salt three times into mound-shaped piles. This process metaphorically purifies the body, emotions and spirit while preserving knowledge from experiences. The structure of the roots refers to my own experiences and knowledge acquired through the course of my life, while the luminosity of the glass refers to spiritual power and strength that can be obtained from nature. Tying individual roots together symbolizes the establishment of self-awareness; the experiences and knowledge of the past joining together to create a complex tapestry continuing into the future. The journey of awareness will never end if there is hope that drives a person forward. My intent was to present a path through one such journey.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	1
CHAPTER 1: PERSONAL BACKGROUND.....	4
CHAPTER 2: JAPANESE AND HAWAIIAN ASPECTS OF SPIRITUALITY.....	5
CHAPTER 3: SPIRITUAL RITUALS.....	12
CHAPTER 4: DESCRIPTION OF INDIVIDUAL WORKS.....	15
SPIRAL/SALT/KUPUKUPU FERN.....	16
SPIRAL.....	16
THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SALT.....	16
MOUND-SHAPED SALT SPIRAL.....	19
THE KUPUKUPU FERN.....	20
ROOTS/GLASS.....	21
THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ROOTS.....	21
SYMBOL OF HOPE.....	23
CHAPTER 5: RETURN TO NATURE.....	24
CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION.....	25
PLATES.....	26
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	41

LIST OF PLATES

PLATE I.....	26
PLATE II.....	27
PLATE III.....	28
PLATE IV.....	29
PLATE V.....	30
PLATE VI.....	31
PLATE VII.....	32
PLATE VIII.....	33
PLATE IX.....	34
PLATE X.....	35
PLATE XI.....	36
PLATE XII.....	37
PLATE XIII.....	38
PLATE XIV.....	39
PLATE XV.....	40

CHAPTER 1: PERSONAL BACKGROUND

I am originally from Tokyo, Japan and moved to Hawai'i in 2008 to pursue a study of the arts and hula. Hula is a very important cultural activity for Hawaiians. It is not only a dance, but a narration of the past – a philosophical statement of the Hawaiian people and how they perceive their *'āina* (land) and *'ohana* (family). For twelve years, I have been fascinated by hula and am now carrying on the *kuleana* (responsibility) as a *ho'opa'a*. A *ho'opa'a* is an expert chanter and by participating in hula, I protect my adopted tradition, knowledge, and history and will be able to pass it on to the next generation of Hawaiian cultural practitioners. Studying hula taught me not only the happiness provided by dance and songs, but also how to live and appreciate everything around me.

My Japanese identity was the most significant aspect of the culture that I became aware of after I moved to Hawai'i. However, I began to learn more about Hawaiian cultural practices than Japanese cultural practices. It was not easy to learn Hawaiian art and hula, because my roots are not from this island; I am a foreigner. Everything I am fascinated to learn about, for instance hula, *kapa*-making and *kalo* planting, are native Hawaiian customs. At the same time I realize, as a person of Japanese origin, how precious my own cultural background is. In my journey through life, I have come to call these experiences “the awareness.”

CHAPTER 2: JAPANESE AND HAWAIIAN ASPECTS OF SPIRITUALITY

In its essence, the Shinto religion is strictly indigenous to the soil of Japan. First of all, it is a system of ancestor worship¹. Shinto consists of two different Chinese characters. “Shin” is written as 神 (*kami* or god) and “to” is written as 道 which means way. Thus, the word “Shinto” means “the way of the gods.” In the belief of Japanese Shinto, god is not a single deity and there are many *kami* or gods in nature. People lived together with the many *kami*. For instance, Japanese farmers prayed to the *kami* for rain in order to have enough water for their crops, especially rice, and they thanked their *kami* by providing food or drinks.

...direct appreciation of nature and sincere acceptance of the blessing of *kami* is favored, rather than the development of complicated doctrine and abstract philosophy. Leading a pure and sincere life under the blessing of many *kami* is at the heart of Shinto ideals.²

The belief of Japanese Shinto used to be a core of Japanese spirit but it faded in the past history of Japan. According to Stuart D.B. Picken,

Shinto was a dying cult as the Japanese government put an end to a lot of Shinto practices. But after World War II, Shinto has started a comeback. The number of shrines, which had shrunk from about 176,000 to between 70,000 and 80,000, has increased again to about 110,000. In other words, many of the shrines which had been

¹ Shinjiro Kitasawa, “Shintoism and the Japanese Nation,” *The Sewanee Review* 23 (1915): 479–483.

² H.B. Earhart, *Religions of Japan: Many Traditions Within One Sacred Way* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984) 17.

destroyed were replaced by the local communities after the Pacific War.³

One reason this movement occurred was due to a loss of natural resources depleted during the war:

...the principal duty of human being to care for and preserve their environment- to live within nature rather than attempting to dominate or destroy it... Japan suffered a tremendous loss of trees in the World War II... the importance of the forest... was understood by Showa Emperor.⁴

Shinto is the indigenous religion of Japan. It teaches the spiritual way that my ancestors believed and how they lived in the past. For me, learning the Shinto ritual is learning about my Japanese cultural heritage.

There is a connection between the Japanese perspective of *kami* and the Hawaiian perspective of *mana*. D.C. Holtom was an early-twentieth-century scholar who was the first Western scholar to write comprehensively about Shinto.⁵ He mentioned that the “Japanese term *kami* belongs to the *mana* type of religious classification, that *kami* is in fact the Japanese expression for *mana*.⁶”

The word *mana* is defined below from a quote in the book “*NĀNĀ I KE KUMU*” (Look to the Source) written by Mary Kawena Pukui, a Hawaiian scholar:

³ Stuart D. B. Picken, *Japanese Religion and the 21st Century: Problems and Prospects* (Tokyo: Japan Foundation, 1987).

⁴ Motohisa Yamakage, Paul Leeuw, and Aidan Rankin. *The Essence of Shinto: Japan's Spiritual Heart* (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 2006) 14.

⁵ Picken, *Sourcebook in Shinto* 240.

⁶ Daniel C. Holtom, “The Meaning of *Kami*. Chapter III. *Kami* Considered as *Mana*,” *Monumenta Nipponica* 4 (1941): 351–394.

Mana is a power.. origination in the supernatural, and thus always imbued with a mythic quality... we are connected with *mana*, the concept of “power” bestowed directly or indirectly from a supernatural source... *mana* has been defined as the existence of and the very aura of power.⁷

The meaning of *mana* is thought to be important not only in Hawai‘i but also throughout Polynesia. *Mana* is the power of spirit that made me become aware of the connection between nature and mankind. All of the physical and spiritual experiences that I am connected with are the power of my adopted cultural heritage.

Both terms, *kami* and *mana*, are related with the power of gods. In “Polynesian Ethnology,” Bradd Shore, states “The Polynesian concept of *mana*, though often used with reference to chiefs, is always tied to the power of the gods.”⁸

In the article “Hula and the Hawaiian View of the Natural World,” Samuel M. Ohukaniohia Gon III, Ph.D., mentions *mana* and the philosophy of the connection between man and nature as:

...a world in which things both animate and inanimate were considered to have consciousness and spiritual presence, or *mana*. It was a world in which one’s spirit might cycle through other living things after human death, or where being with great *mana* might at will, take on the form of other plants and animals around them. In such a world view one could talk directly to the winds and

⁷ Mary K Pukui, E. W. Haertig, and Catherine A. Lee, *Nānā I Ke Kumu: Look to the Source* (Honolulu: Hui Hanai, 1972) 149-150.

⁸ Alan Howard and Robert Borofsky. *Developments in Polynesian Ethnology* (Honolulu: U Hawaii P, 1989) 139.

rains and expect response, or swim with sharks, and being among beloved relatives, know you were completely safe in the ocean.⁹

In the article, “The Meaning of *Kami*,” Daniel Holtom, a Japanese folk religion and anthropological researcher mentioned that:

Kami signifies... the deities of heaven and earth that appear in the ancient records and also the spirits of the shrines where they are worshipped... It also includes such objects as birds... trees, plants, seas, mountains and so forth... the thunder is always called “sounding *kami*”... rocks, stumps of tree and leaves of plants spoke audibly. They were all *kami*. There are numerous places in which sea and mountains are called *kami*... they were exceedingly awe-inspiring¹⁰

This idea of the spirit of *kami* and *mana* is the foundation of the connection between nature and humankind which is the major concept of my thesis exhibition. The philosophy regarding the appreciation of natural objects might have been important in the ancient times before modern technology became widespread. However, as time goes by, the significance of the philosophy is being forgotten. I was once one of those people – someone who did not appreciate the importance of nature.

In our troubled modern era, materialism is the dominant force, and so talk of the invisible world, the realm of the spirit, is not always

⁹ Samuel M. Ohukaniohia Gon III, “Hula and the Hawaiian View of the Natural World,” 1 Apr. 2013. Internet: <http://www.mgf-hawaii.org/HTML/Hula/hula.htm>

¹⁰ Ian Reader, Esben Andreasen, and Finn Stefánsson. *Japanese Religions: Past and Present* (Honolulu: U Hawaii P, 1993) 77-78.

well received. Shinto, however, would not be complete without this aspect of mystery.¹¹

The essence of nature surrounds humankind. Even though the essence is not always visible with our naked eyes, we can feel it through our body. However, the spirit sometimes becomes visible when they borrow the outer shell from another element of nature. The outer shell could be something like rain or wind or even a rainbow. Once you notice the preciousness of nature, your perspective of the world will change and you will have a new appreciation for the natural world.

Japanese video and photographic artist, Mariko Mori, had a similar situation when realizing the importance of her cultural roots. She dealt with who she was in society and addressed individualism through her art projects. Living in a foreign land, she realized, like myself, the importance of where she'd come from. She mentioned that when she went back home, she noticed two perspectives of cultures that Japan had. One is the traditional culture and the other is the youth or pop culture. Mori explained why she started to have interest in Japanese culture:

When I was in London, I wanted to forget the fact that I was Japanese and wanted to express myself as an individual and singular entity. But since I moved to New York, there are so many ethnic groups and different cultures here that many people were curious about where I came from. I was reminded of my Japanese-

¹¹ Yamakage 12.

ness and felt that I could not escape from it. And I was raised in that environment.¹²

Mariko Mori shifted the focus of her artwork as fantasy-styled meditation relating to Buddhism or Shintoism. Zen Buddhism teaches humans how to open their mind and Shintoism teaches humans how nature and humans are interconnected. Some people think that humans are the center of the universe, but Shintoists and Hawaiians believe that we are part of nature and we share life by harmonizing and balancing with each other. Mori is aiming to integrate art, science and religion and she creates her own world as a spiritual space that she belongs to. Her artwork consists of many essences: the past and the future, dreams, tradition and culture, religion and nature. She not only deals with the history that connects us to our Japanese origins, but she also incorporated traditions and trends. She stated:

My interest is not just in looking back to traditional ideas or culture. I try to take in not only the present... I try to develop my own future vision and utopian ideas - my own interpretations of tradition.... To bring something stable from the past and make it stable for the future.¹³

There is another statement from her about the relationship between herself and her projects that parallels my own work in my thesis exhibition:

I intend to make my work a kind of offering... I have this urge, which might even be described as desire, to create. I would like to

¹² Kunié Sugiura and Mariko Mori, Interview. *Journal of Contemporary Art*. 1 Apr. 2013. Internet: <http://www.jca-online.com/mori.html>

¹³ Carol Eliel and Mariko Mori. *Mariko Mori: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, May 21-August 10, 1998*. (Los Angeles: LACMA, 1998).

think that I am not just trying to fulfill my desire. As long as I live, I am part of a bigger being, and I am being allowed to be a part of it because I offer. There always was a force that pushed me to create. I must create the world in order to breathe in the world; I do not exist unless I create.¹⁴

The perspective behind this quote connects to the idea of the relationship between nature and humankind according to the belief of Shintoism. Mori shows her respect for nature through her art. She creates art to connect herself and the natural world. Her strong spirituality is present in her work. For me, art becomes a means to convey a spiritual essence to the viewers because art carries the spirit of the artist's intentions.

¹⁴ Kay Itoi. "Tea with Mariko," *Artnet*, 1 Apr. 2013. Internet: <http://www.artnet.com/Magazine/features/itoy/itoy11-20-01.asp>

CHAPTER 3: SPIRITUAL RITUALS

On the day and hour of the opening exhibition (April 1, 2013 at 4:00 pm), I conducted a blessing ceremony (Plate I). I started with a Hawaiian cleansing *oli* (chant) followed by a Japanese Shinto ritual and lastly dedicated the hula performance to my exhibition. As a Shinto ritual, I dedicated a branch, called a *sakaki*, to connect to the spirit of *kami* before I entered the gallery (Plate II). *Sakaki* is a small evergreen tree with shiny leaves that is indigenous to Japan and the branches are used for ritual purposes.¹⁵ The *sakaki* is a very important Shinto symbol meaning “life existing forever, which is a fundamental Shinto conception.”¹⁶

The *sakaki* was then offered on the pedestal outside of the gallery.

Evergreen *sakaki*... is a form of worshipping through which the worshipper seeks to be united with the *kami*... When one offers to the *sakaki* branch to the *kami*, the stem is made to point towards the *kami* in the shrine. This indicates the worshipper’s desire to the *kami* mind.¹⁷

During the ceremony, I wore two leis. One was *maile* and the other was *sakaki*. According to the tradition of hula, I wore the *maile* lei for the hula ceremony and I wore the *sakaki* lei to honor and respect my Japanese heritage. Wearing these two symbols connects me to both traditions spiritually (Plate II). The *sakaki* branches were shared by the Izumo Taishakyo Mission of Hawai’i and are used for rituals at the shrine (Plate III).

¹⁵ Yamakage 66.

¹⁶ J.W.T. Mason, *The Spirit of Shinto Mythology* (Tokyo: Fuzambo Co., 1939) 116.

¹⁷ Floyd H. Ross, *Shinto, the Way of Japan* (Boston: Beacon P, 1965) 69.

The opening ceremony is dedicated based on the spirituality of *kami* and *mana*. The definition of spirituality is a connection, or tether, between the self and something greater than the self. It develops an individual inner life and sentience and connects the self with nature or universe. “Spirituality” is intangible or invisible and it is related to the communication between the soul and the mind. The word “ritual” is often linked with spirituality and is considered a part of religion tied to ritual ceremonies and ritual traditions. My definition of ritual is simply a physical manifestation designed to illustrate spirituality. Ritual is connected to an action that can be a tool or process to connect a person to something that is greater than their self; to their god, their beliefs, or enlightenment.

The importance that makes a ritual action spiritual depends on whether there is an intention behind the action or not. Spiritual rituals are individual, simple, or creative actions which are consciously conducted by people and it is necessary or beneficial for them. It raises their inner power, heightens awareness of intentions, or heals their body and mind. The Shinto ritual that I dedicated during the opening ceremony was a significant awareness of ritual to connect myself to the Shinto religion. The dedication of *sakaki* branch to the spirit of *kami* was simply an action that I used to perform mechanically as a part of the New Year’s ceremony at the shrine until I understood the meaning of the action itself. I was able to become aware of the connection between nature and humanity through the spirituality of Shintoism.

The *oli*, or chant and hula are considered spiritual rituals for individuals who practice hula. This also expresses the respect and appreciation for the land and people of Hawai’i who shared their cultural practice with me.

An artist who deals with the adopted spiritual ritual is Wolfgang Laib, a German conceptual artist. He was fascinated by Indian culture and its intent and expressed it through his artwork:

...to share some of the formal and ceremonial qualities of non-Western art and ritual, particularly that of Southern India, which he considers his spiritual home... Ultimately the experience of southern India inspired Laib to adopt the ceremonial as a continuing mode in both his life and his work, which were to become inseparable.¹⁸

I incorporated this spiritual ritual as the beginning of my thesis exhibition to express the strong bond between my artistic and hula practices according to the two ceremonial rituals.

¹⁸ Klaus Ottmann, et al. *Wolfgang Laib: A Retrospective* (New York: AFA, 2000) 11.

CHAPTER 4: DESCRIPTION OF INDIVIDUAL WORKS

The installation in the architecture gallery was composed of three individual but interconnected elements that are related conceptually. The installation was created utilizing different materials that were necessary to illustrate a relationship between nature and humans. Each component has a metaphorical element that is reflective of my own past and experiences.

The first element was a large interlocked spiral on the floor of the gallery created with mounds of salt (Plate IV). The salt mounds are references to the salt water oceans that surround Japan and Hawai'i. The second component was a fern in a small mound of soil, representing the element of earth (Plate V). The final element was a collection of hundreds of delicate glass roots and an abstracted glass sculpture. The glass roots were suspended from the ceiling, signifying the strands of knowledge and experience (Plate VI&VII). The abstract glass sculpture represented fire (the glass pieces were created using heat) in addition to being a symbol for hope (Plate VIII). It was located at the end of the gallery behind the glass roots. I experience new events, encounter curious things, meet people and learn something precious every day. Experiences and knowledge nurture the body and mind. However, we often encounter something unexpected that makes us feel uncomfortable or stressed. These negative feelings block the positive energy that surrounds us, even making us mentally unwell. To avoid this situation, we need to cleanse ourselves and our mind.

SPIRAL/SALT/KUPUKUPU FERN

SPIRAL

Spirals are represented all over in our physical world: as the shape of galaxies, in shells and even in plants. The symbol of the spiral is a nearly universal form and similar symbolism appears in many ancient cultures.

The spiral symbolizes the process of growth and evolution. It is a process of coming to the same point again and again, but at a different level, so that everything is seen in a new light. The result is a new perspective on issues, people, and places.¹⁹

In the gallery, I created an interlocked spiral with a diameter of seventeen feet (Plate IV). The spiral shape symbolizes growth and a desire toward progress. The flow of the pattern in the gallery signifies the concept of the never-ending journey in the pursuit of hope.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SALT

Salt is used as a symbolic element of purification in the Shinto religion, as well as for medicinal purposes in Japan. In Hawai'i, salt is also used for preservation, as well as for purification. Most of the salt that is produced in the United States is rock salt from evaporite deposits. Japan and Hawai'i are both islands that utilize the salt water in the Pacific Ocean. People from these islands have historically garnered salt from the ocean for centuries. There are slightly different processes when it comes to the creation of sea salt. According to Scott Cunningham, who has strong background in the research of

¹⁹Angeles Arrien, *Signs of Life: The Five Universal Shapes and How to Use Them* (New York: Tarcher/Putnam, 1998) 47.

religion, “The ancient Hawaiians also evaporated salt on the coast of each island.”²⁰ This is different from Japan, where the salt-making technique consists of two processes.

First, a heavy saline solution is extracted from the sea water in the “salt concentration process”, and then this salt concentrate is boiled down to form salt crystals in the “boiling down process” ... salt performs as an important function, not only in our diet but also as the “life blood” of a variety of sectors that support our lives.²¹

As can be seen, salt is a precious gift from the ocean and it is a significant resource for the human body. A Japanese contemporary artist called Motoi Yamamoto, who often deals with salt in his art, mentioned that “salt is not only a necessary element to sustain human life, it is also a symbol of purification.”²²

The two types of Japanese and Hawaiian salts were mixed and installed on the floor of the gallery to create the interlocking spiral. The first mixture is salt from the Pacific Ocean and the Sea of Japan, the Seto Inland Sea (Plate IX). The second mixture of salt is from the Pacific Ocean and the ‘*alaea* red sea salt (Plate X & XI). ‘*Alaea* is a water-soluble colloidal ochreous earth²³ and used by Hawaiians to cleanse, purify and bless tools, canoes, homes and temples.²⁴ I chose to use these two types of salt to symbolize the mixture of the two cultures within me. The mixture of the Japanese salt symbolizes my Japanese nationality; mixing it with the Hawaiian ‘*alaea* salt symbolized my adopted culture as a hula practitioner. This mound-shaped salt had strong meanings

²⁰ Scott Cunningham, *Hawaiian Magic & Spirituality* (St. Paul: Llewellyn, 2000) 98.

²¹ *Tobacco & Salt Museum* (2007) 67.

²² Mark Sloan and Brad Thomas, *Force of Nature: Site Installations by Ten Japanese Artists* (Charleston: Halsey Institute of Contemporary Art, 2007) 107.

²³ Pukui *Hawaiian Dictionary*.

²⁴ http://www.slowfoodusa.org/index.php/programs/ark_product_detail/traditional_sea_salt_from_hawaii_alaea/

that stem from the creation process. Each shape is hand-sprinkled in mounds composed of three layers. The process of sprinkling three times relates to the action of cleansing for the three elements; the spiritual division of the human body and the timeline of the human life (Plate XII, XIII & XIV). This action reflects the routine of life and this routine continues as long as we have the motivation to seek hope in our life.

According to Carl Jung, who was a Swiss psychotherapist and psychiatrist, the human body is spiritually divided in three parts; the body, emotions and soul. The timeline of human life is also divided into three parts: the past, the present, and the future. Jung mentioned that the,

...body experiences have nothing to do with emotion... We can separate purely mental experience from spiritual experience. And we have all had experiences in which all of these parts seem to be participating equally in a harmonious whole... Jung encountered physical, emotional, and spiritual problems; all are part of our common lot as human beings, and none should be excluded from any psychology that purports to deal with the whole man.²⁵

The cone shape of the mound is a sacred symbol of Japanese Shintoism. In front of the Kamigamo Shrine, located in northern Kyoto, Japan, there are two cone-shaped sand mounds where *kami* reside. It is a similar concept among Hawaiians who believe that *mana* lives in elements of nature. In both the Japanese and Hawaiian belief system, people respect and appreciate the elements of nature.

²⁵ Robin Robertson, *C.G. Jung and the Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious* (New York: Lang, 1987) 125.

I chose to use salt as a way for me to purify my body, emotions, and spirit in the process of creating the spirals. Therefore, the act of sprinkling salt three times signifies three things: First, it signifies the purification of negative energy from inside the body. Secondly, it signifies emotion and soul as past, present and future. Lastly, it signifies the preservation of positive energy.

MOUND-SHAPED SALT SPIRAL

The line of the spiral is created through 365 individual mounds; 364 mound-shaped piles of salt and one mound-shaped pile of soil embedded with a few *kupukupu* ferns and is in the center of the spiral. Creating 365 mound-shaped piles in the entire gallery signifies the cycle of life. The counter-clockwise spiral consists of 182 salt mounds made mostly of Japanese salt and is directed toward the center. The clockwise spiral consists of another 182 salt mounds containing Hawaiian *'alaea* red salt and untwining the spiral to the future. The color of the mound-shaped salt is slightly different depending on the ratio of white and red salt. The percentage of the mixture of Japanese salt and Hawaiian salt represents my life as a Japanese artist and Hawaiian hula practitioner.

American performance artist and sculptor Janine Antoni was an inspiration for the process of making art in terms of spirituality. Spirituality for Antoni is an expression of enlightenment between the body and mind. She deals with daily rituals that have repetitive patterns and are a form of meditation. She uses her own body and performs repetitive actions related to our daily habits: eating, licking, bathing, sleeping, drawing, weaving and twisting. She mentioned her interest toward daily rituals in the passage below:

I'm interested in everyday body rituals and converting the most basic sort of activities (eating, bathing, mopping) into sculptural processes. Even in doing this, I imitate fine art rituals such as chiseling (with my teeth), painting (with my hair and eyelashes), modeling and molding, (with my own body). In terms of materials, I use what is appropriate to the activity.²⁶

Antoni believes the process of making art is just as important as the result. While she is performing, there is a strong passion, desire, or grief emanating from her body and she raises her inner power by performing these actions and increases her level of spiritual enlightenment. The work itself has an absence of the artist and makes viewers think about what and why it occurred instead of having been merely observes, staring at the art pieces. This thought connects to my process of creating a big spiral pathway. The 365 mounds and the process of sprinkling salt to create the mounds was a spiritual ritual for me and I wanted the viewers who walked into the spiral path to feel the spiritual atmosphere flowing through their bodies and minds.

THE KUPUKUPU FERN

In the center of the spiral, there was a mound of soil containing the *kupukupu* fern which symbolized growth and life (Plate V). The *kupukupu* fern, *Nephrolepis cordifolia*, is in the sword fern family (Nephrolepidaceae).²⁷ In the fields of lava on the Big Island, the *kupukupu* fern is seen sprouting from the cracks in cooled lava. *Kupu* literally means

²⁶ Ayerza, Lacanian Inc, 2000.

²⁷ Kent Sadanaga and Kent D. Kobayashi, *Kupukupu Fern* (U Hawai'i at Mānoa, 2008).

sprout or growth²⁸. In the article “*Mana and Tapu*”, Shore mentioned a connection between the concept of *mana* and *tupu*. *Tupu* and *kupu* are the same word.

The connection between procreative power, the gods, and chiefs is suggested by the importance of term *tupu* throughout Polynesia. The term means ‘to grow’ or ‘to unfold’... Maori term *tupu* as ‘to unfold one’s nature’... The concept of an internal unfolding of something’s own nature, while *mana* connotes ‘something participated, an active fellowship’ that affects vitality.²⁹

This hardy fern is indigenous to Hawai’i and is one of the first plants to appear on lava fields.³⁰ Before it opens its leaves, the shape of the new frond is spiraled and then untwines. If you carefully examine the *kupukupu* fern, there are baby ferns with a spiral head that will untwine its leaves to begin life. This center point of the spiral is a hinge of life to connect the past and the present. It signifies the moments of awareness to change the direction of life. I selected the *kupukupu* fern as the center point of the spiral to bridge the interlocked spiral.

ROOTS/GLASS

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ROOTS

The roots symbolically represent experiences and knowledge from the journey of life that nurtured my body and mind. In my search for knowledge and a deeper understanding of my identity from the time I initiated my studies in Hawai’i, I used all

²⁸ Pukui *Hawaiian Dictionary*.

²⁹ Howard 140.

³⁰ Sadanaga

my senses to capture it. In my exhibition, the roots symbolize the gain of new experiences similar to how a root system absorbs nutrients (Plate XV). There are two different types of root systems in plants: taproots and lateral roots. Taproots are larger main root which grows directly downwards. Lateral roots are composed of thinner, clumps of roots which growing sideways. Root hairs absorb water and nutrients from the soil. The root structure becomes larger and denser as plants grow. Each root symbolizes all of what I have seen, learned, felt, and experienced from the past to the present.

My body is represented by the shape of the taproot, while my consciousness and intentions are represented by the shape of the lateral roots. It is as if I inhale the essence of *mana* through the wisdom in my life. That spiritual power becomes a source of energy in my life and drives me forward. Learning a foreign cultural practice allowed me to grow and reconnect with my Japanese roots.

Each root is very thin and fragile. Hundreds of glass roots are made via flame-worked glass. Rods of clear Pyrex glass were then connected through the power of fire. This fragility signifies the preciousness of cultural heritage, while the luminosity of glass refers to the power and spirit obtained from nature.

The hanging installation of the roots represents a place of new beginnings (Plate VI). There are many pieces of root-shaped glass suspended from the ceiling to create a structure. Tying individual roots together symbolized the process of building new experiences and widening my horizons through those experiences. Making hundreds of glass roots, and tying them together with fine thread was also like a meditation ritual to me. The clear glass infers purity and it emanates *mana*, and the spirit of *kami*, which are obtained from nature.

SYMBOL OF HOPE

Behind the curtain of glass roots, there was a solid, illuminated glass sculpture that sits on a curved coconut trunk (Plate VIII). The base is a coconut trunk which is carved into a hollow shape to allow room for a lighting device inside. The tip of the sculpture glows from the light, signifying a beacon of hope for the future. This sculpture is installed behind the glass roots and viewers can peek at it through the layers of the roots, yet they cannot go through the structure to where the sculpture is. This is because hope will never be determined and grasped until we reach a certain point. But, we can imagine the goal and continue to move towards it. Wolfgang Laib stated this about the relationship between human life and hope:

... The focus must be on hopes... (the hope) is inconceivable, ostensibly not possible and yet will be possible, reality emerges now and for future life. The greatest revolution starts with our own deeds, with how we approach things in everyday life.³¹

His vision of hope is what I see in my life. Life's journey will never end as long as there are visions that offer guidance. My vision for today lies in the far corner of the gallery. It is not clearly seen from the entrance, but it is worth the time and travel to find out.

Visions like this compel people to grow.

³¹ Wolfgang Laib and Necmi Sönmez. *Wolfgang Laib: The Nine Planets, Or, How the Interrelationships Also Could Be* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2002).

CHAPTER 5: RETURN TO NATURE

Keeping in tradition with the ending of an *'uniki*, a ceremonial graduation for hula that I have recently experienced, my *kumu* hula took me to the ocean to release myself from the ritual ceremony. This is a ceremonial ending and the beginning of the next journey of life. All of the natural elements that I used for this exhibition will be returned to nature. This is the circle of life as I will return the salt to the sea and *kupukupu* fern to the earth in appreciation of their existence. Motoi Yamamoto also returns salt to its home after he is finished using it in his installations:

Each grain of salt contains its own history and trajectory.

Something so seemingly common becomes a metaphor for the evanescence and transience of human life... the work is destroyed at the end of the predetermined interval and returned to a body of water, thus enacting the circularity of life.³²

At the end of the exhibition, I collected all of salt that I installed on the floor and created a single large mound on the beach at low tide. The mound of salt was gradually dissolved in the ocean at high tide, and the energy collected in the exhibition was released into the ocean through the power of nature. This conveyed the end of the exhibition while also being a metaphor for my continued journey as a Japanese artist and a practitioner of the Hawaiian cultural art of hula.

³² Motoi Yamamoto, Mark Sloan, and Mark Kurlansky, *Return to the Sea: Saltworks by Motoi Yamamoto* (Charleston: Halsey Institute of Contemporary Art, 2012) 13.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

Through learning the cultural value of traditional Hawai'i, I rediscovered my birth culture's values which were similar in their respect of nature. Once I realized this value, I looked back at my path with awareness. That awareness became a key element in moving forward toward potential: hope.

While walking in the spiral from the outer world in toward the center, and untwining the spiral from the center back to the outer world, viewers can physically experience a spiritual meditation in their own way. It does not matter who we are or where we come from; we are all human beings and we all need to be aware that nature and humanity must be in harmony with each other. "*Owarinaki Michi: Ka Huaka'i Palena 'Ole*" represents my spiritual experiences and the ability to share those beliefs which have enriched my mind and life.

PLATE I



PLATE II



PLATE III



PLATE IV



PLATE V



PLATE VI



PLATE VII

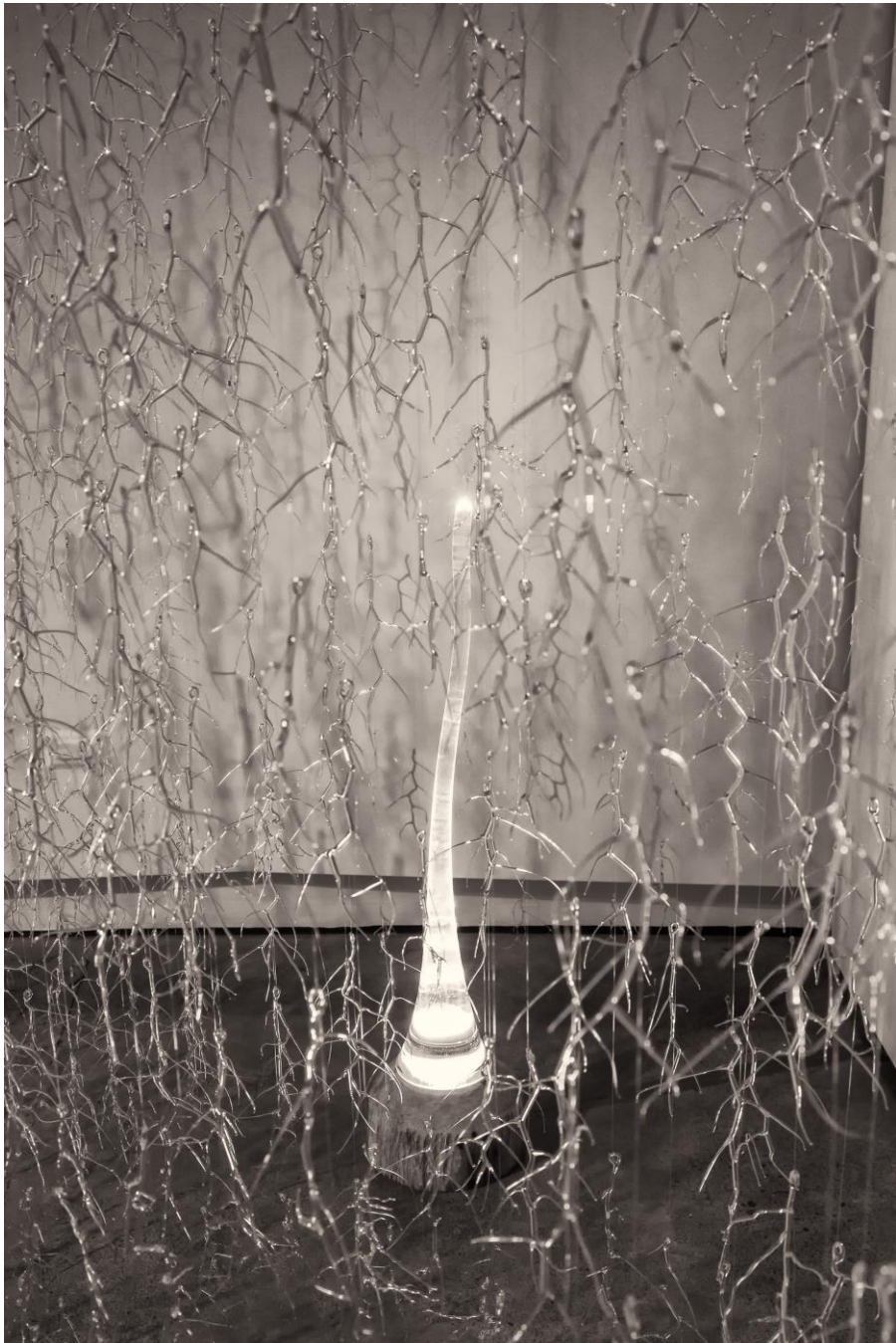


PLATE VIII



PLATE IX



PLATE X



PLATE XI



PLATE XII



PLATE XIII



PLATE XIV



PLATE XV



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