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PRESENTED BY:

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HONOLULU  
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HONOLULU  
BIENNIAL 2017

## **Islands of the Future**

**Fumio Nanjo, Curatorial Director**

For many people the Hawaiian archipelago calls to mind imaginings of a paradise in the Pacific Ocean. A map of the Pacific Ocean locates the island chain midway between North America and Asia, but Hawai'i is also linked by the ocean to thousands of islands to its north, east, south and west. Contrary to the belief that the Pacific is a vast, empty space, visionary Tongan Fijian scholar Epeli Hau'ofa once affirmed that "... the sea is our pathway to each other and to everyone else, the sea is our endless saga, the sea is our most powerful metaphor, the ocean is in us."

As we face the future we confront new challenges together. The islands of the Pacific Ocean are already dealing with devastating climate change. New technologies such as artificial intelligence, digital currency, and bioart are now changing the foundations of society, modifying the very meaning of what it means to be human. These transformative flows of time and events are like powerful ocean currents, while islands are like the human beings who boldly exist within that flow. Islands then, can be metaphors for human existence and the persistence of people despite successive waves of histories and migrations.

Islands have long been considered sacred centers of knowledge, exchange and communication, with migrations between islands and continents introducing new views and ways of thinking. Hawai'i is a vibrant Pacific Island intersection, and Honolulu is a global base for the economies of commerce, military, and tourism throughout the region, as well as a focal point for the place-based art and culture of Hawai'i. We thank the participating artists from Hawai'i, the Pacific region, Asia, and the continental U.S. for gathering in Honolulu, and we anticipate that you will be inspired by their works.

I would like to express my gratitude to the Co-Founders of the Honolulu Biennial Foundation: Dr. Kóan Jeff Baysa, Isabella Ellaheh Hughes, and Katherine Ann Leilani Tuidler, for the invitation to be the Curatorial Director of the inaugural Honolulu Biennial 2017; to Ngahiraka Mason, the Curator of the Honolulu Biennial 2017; to Dr. Greg Dvorak, Dr. Katherine Higgins, and Dr. Margo Machida of the Curatorial Advisory Board, for their counsel. I also wish to sincerely thank the Board Members of the Honolulu Biennial Foundation, sponsors, staff, volunteers, and supporters who all generously helped to realize this inaugural biennial.

# Talk Story: Mobile Geographies

Ngahiraka Mason, Curator

## Prologue

In a recent interchange with a downtown Honolulu retailer, we shared how special Hawai'i is and why we are energetically drawn to this location, over and beyond professional commitments and personal interconnections.<sup>1</sup> We instantly agreed that a defining feature we experienced in our journeys throughout the Hawaiian Islands is the practice and continuity of aloha. Despite diverse cultural, political, spiritual and social differences, aloha makes Hawai'i stand out in the Pacific and in the world. What is this aloha? At its simplest, it is good manners, respect, and compassion, showing and performing mundane tasks with kindness, care and joy. At its most complex, it is still these things.

In explaining my role with the Honolulu Biennial, I shared the tenor of topics and issues addressed by artists, imparting an opinion that biennials should also be uplifting and bear forward feelings of happiness. We talked about art as a mirror that reflects past, recent-times and present-day life realities and that understanding art *is* a pathway to uplifting people, as sharing awareness can produce happiness.

In this exchange I realized that the impetus for making art is not the same impulse for experiencing art. Seeing and experiencing art is different to talking and writing about art. Interpreting art for understanding rather than describing art for theoretical study engages different parts of our emotional and cognitive acumen. The heart's experience of art is dissimilar to the mind that seeks to describe and define the creative process. Like aloha, you firstly follow your heart.

In my exchanges with my retail discussant I came to see that one can be shaped by the process and frequency of aloha in Hawai'i. Notwithstanding, my

aloha for contemporary art is sometimes at odds with the conditions that produce and maintain contemporary art practice, especially here in the Islands. The history of contemporary art in Hawai'i is young when compared to other parts of the world, yet its achievements and historical perspectives have begun to unfold with an openness and depth of richness.

## Honolulu Hawai'i: Living Aloha

The image of Honolulu, Hawai'i in the 21st century is defined as a destination paradise, a worry-free place to escape the demands of life; complete with beachfront apartments, and first world shopping malls. The struggle to refine and expand this image is tied to tourism and the U.S. military, which provides the economic backbone in the Hawaiian Islands that its permanent inhabitants and visitors have come to rely upon.

The presence of corporations, investors, landlords, millionaires and billionaires are felt in the Islands as earnestly as the high cost of living, which has led to large houseless populations forming on beaches, sidewalks and public parks. Plastic, fishing and cruise-ship waste circulate the islands brought in on Pacific currents from continental mainland U.S., Japan and the Pacific. Hawai'i ships in 85-90%<sup>2</sup> of its food to feed its permanent population and tourists. Hawai'i has no recurring natural resources, and thus relies on the importation of domestic and commercial building materials and household commodities.

"Living Aloha" is a shared, cultural mantra and a hallmark of this dynamic society that has developed a way of looking outward to the world by first reflecting inward to its people and this place. The chain of eight islands that comprise Hawai'i are primarily inhabited by Native

1 Personal discussion with Tibetan store owner about Honolulu Biennial on February 7, 2017.

2 Retrieved from The Hawai'i Independent: <http://hawaiiindependent.net/story/hawaiis-path-to-a-better-food-system-where-were-at-by-the-numbers>.

Hawaiians, settlers from America, immigrants from Asia, and the Pacific. This diversity of people co-exists in a uniquely local style of accord that finds common ground through “talking story” or through cordial exchanges. Hawai‘i’s permanent population is open to finding solutions to island concerns, and innovating from an island worldview. The Honolulu Biennial was founded in this manner.

Why a biennial in Hawai‘i? Who are biennials for—the local community or for artists, curators, or institutional recognition on the world stage? Has a limit been reached for exhibitions of this type? Is it sustainable to travel to biennial destinations and to set up the circulation of art as a monetary system? What is the role of art today?

The Honolulu Biennial founders proposed to support and create opportunities for Hawai‘i’s contemporary artists, to showcase art from the region and to be conversant with our nearest neighbors connected by the Pacific Ocean. The Honolulu Biennial starts with the charting and mapping of a region as an approach to showcasing place. The inaugural Biennial has unfolded contemporary art practices in Hawai‘i to the world. It has achieved practical understandings of the complexities of bringing together geographic, temporal, and cultural ideas, which are regarded as important today.

## **Hawai‘i In The World: Island Thinking**

The power of geography is real. Where we live shapes who we are, and our everyday surroundings affect our daily lives. A tropical climate, active volcanoes, coral reefs, mountains, waterfalls and year-round blue ocean produces a different relationship to a place, to living in a densely populated city comprised of high-rise living, fast rail and underground transportation, pollution, metropolitan culture and concrete landscapes.

Geographic insights from this location are sightseen by artists; they are referenced and interpreted within a Hawai‘i contemporary art milieu. Michelle

Schwengel-Regala’s water column sculptures and knitted and embroidered data textiles combine her art, science and nature foci. She has created abstracted representations of ocean environments and the micro sub-structures that interpret what scientists are learning about the quality of water in the Pacific. Schwengel-Regala recently voyaged between Hawai‘i and Pape‘ete Tahiti aboard the research vessel *Falkor* learning how scientists collect and understand data. Embedded in Schwengel-Regala’s narrative, is also a deepened connection with ocean and a greater respect and understanding of Polynesian voyaging in the Pacific. In June 2017 the Polynesian voyaging canoe Hōkūle‘a, will return home after completing four years of sailing across Earth’s oceans, raising consciousness about sustainable coexistence with planet earth.

*Local Knowledge* by Les Filter Feeders is a series of paintings that recognize the way the “locals” talk. There is a dynamic living system of urban speech in Hawai‘i that interconnects with community knowledge to express how local interpretations of information relate to broader global systems of understanding. Colloquial language and a sense of humor shows cultural fluidity within community, and the role of the individual within them.

Charlton Kupa‘a Hee melds his science and art training and land conservation interests in his artwork. His hand-built ceramic gourd forms that are covered with contemporary stories show cultural relationships between people and land. Hee is part of a generation raising awareness of invasive flora and fauna in Hawai‘i by perpetuating living stories that matter in Hawaii; such as the endangered O‘ahu tree snail and O‘ahu ‘elepaio, an endemic bird whose habitats are threatened and whose numbers are in sharp decline. Borrowing from the ancient Greek tradition of sgraffito scratching on urns and vases, Hee has transferred this decorative technique to Hawaiian gourd forms. Hee has swapped the “gods and mythology” narrative used by Greek artisans for conservation concerns, taking a unique approach to the discourse on land and living history.

Chris Ritson's bio-generative artwork *The Corallinales* are living paintings, growing in two aquarium tanks under artificial light. To create this work, Corallines algae have been scraped from ocean trash collected from the Honolulu Harbor, Waikiki, Diamond Head and from the surf break where Ala Wai Canal, an artificial and controversial waterway at the northern end of Waikiki, flows into the Pacific ocean. The algae are placed in a supportive environment for the corallines to thrive on glass and plastic debris, allowing them to produce a range of red, pink, grey and mauve abstract paintings.

Drew Broderick's vinyl billboard work consists of a manipulated image with a neon sign and a reproduction of a historical painting by 18th century artist George Carter, entitled *The Death of Captain Cook* (c. 1783). Broderick's response to the painting is a direct examination of authorship, historic violence, and the realities of a highly militarized life in Hawai'i. Broderick grew up in an O'ahu suburb that overlooked the Marine Corps Base of Hawai'i between Kailua Bay and Kane'ohe Bay in the ahupua'a of Ko'olaupoko where military convoys used the same streets that he walked to get to school.

Trained as both an ocean engineer and an artist, Jane Chang Mi combines her interests in the revisionist politics of land and ocean with her focus on a cultural and military site Pu'uloa (Pearl Harbor), on the island of O'ahu. Underwater archival video-documentation taken by divers surveying the waters of Pu'uloa provides the impetus for her installation *The Eyes of God*. Pearl Harbor has an earlier history as a food basket and source of pearls, but is remembered for the 1941 bombing of Pearl Harbor, precipitating U.S. entry into WWII.

While deeper truths about water, food and shelter are obvious—we know the planet is mined out of balance—how do we move forward from this position? Sean Connelly's installation invites the contemplation of the future of building materials in places like the Hawaiian Islands where steel is

imported and not locally occurring. A component of Connelly's installation *Thatch Assembly with Rocks (2060s)* is locally sourced thatching, which Connelly considers a recurring resource for architectural and artistic achievement.

Tackling topics with an alternative viewpoint is a space that Kaili Chun inhabits. Chun's *Veritas II* is composed of 54 steel sculptural forms exhibited in a grid formation as an examination of containment and exposure, agency and restraint. The artist believes that art is a language to speak about issues through dialogue and through the materiality of her sculptural installations.

"Letting go" and "transcendence" are recurring themes in Andrew Binkley's art, which is focused towards Buddhist concepts. Binkley's *Stone Cloud* work is a large boulder floating in the sky intended to create a shift in perception of something solid that usually sits on the ground. Living in Hawai'i provides the artist with daily contact with ocean, sky and floating clouds, a reminder that even in nature, things do not stay the same.

Marques Hanalei Marzan is a student of Hawaiian material culture, a fiber artist and cultural specialist at Bernice Pauahi Bishop Museum, home to the largest Pacific collection of its kind in the world, numbering over 77,000 cultural objects. *A'ahu Kino Lau* is a fiber, textile and garment installation by Marzan that honors the four major gods of the Hawaiian pantheon—Kanaloa, Kane'ohe, Lono, and Ku—venerated for their divine dominion over heaven and earth.

At the intersections of world and personal transformation is where one can meet change. Al Lagunero's practice is based in old wisdom, rooted in the nature of nature, which he recognizes as a vital teacher. Lagunero's commissioned performance is inspired by a work by Japanese monk Myoe (1173-1232) who lived at Kozanjo Temple in the mountains outside Kyoto. Myoe wrote "*Letter to the Island*," which is addressed to his favorite island. On delivering the letter, Myoe's devotee casts the message to the wind.

## Mobile Geographies

As much as the Honolulu Biennial introduces Hawai'i's artists to a diversity of artists from Asia, the Pacific, Australia and the U.S., these geographies are also open to scrutiny and interpretation from this location, recognizing that artists take their worldviews wherever they go. In this way, the imprint of mobile geographies, technology and its global-reach connects us to the priorities of elsewhere. In some regions technology is used as a contemporary platform to raise awareness of issues, causes and conflicts as they occur.<sup>3</sup> Our dependency and reliance on information currents that flow and saturate without end (and sometimes without purpose) have impelled freedoms and access to people and ideas, unimaginable a decade ago. However, there is a shadow side to borderless cyber worlds, and actual borders in the lived world.

An artist residency program based in Honolulu<sup>4</sup> regularly hosts artists from Islamic countries to create artwork and contribute to the growth of Islamic Arts and Culture in the State of Hawai'i. Muralist, painter and Indonesian artist Eko Nugroho arrived to Honolulu recently on a valid P-3 visa for artists and entertainers and was required to leave before his residency was completed, following an executive order from President Trump. Global outrage and support for Muslim people was palpable in all forms of media and was responded to by Nugroho with a painted mural that asks for a deepened understanding of difference, a call for peace and a return to our humanity. The artist paints words and image in a graffiti street-style showing heavy black lines and dripping paint. His veiled and masked human figures appear caught up in the strangeness of threat and violence. Acutely aware of the politics of his homeland region, UAE artist Mohammed Kazem has an art practice that seeks to capture the intangible and make it tangible. A bringing together of Geographical Positioning Systems (GPS) coordinates is at the

center of Kazem's work. A pioneering conceptual artist, his work takes the country coordinates of artists participating in the Honolulu Biennial, and blurs fixed ideas of borders. The coordinates are transferred to vinyl and adhered to glass window surfaces enabling natural light to cast a shadow image on wall and floor surfaces.

*Wasl* (Arabic for "Union"), a new video work by Palestinian American artist Sama Alshaibi sets out to underscore peoples and cultures under threat of physical displacement, due to increasing fresh water scarcity and rising oceans levels. Underlying this project is the idea that the ocean does not follow boundaries set by individuals and nations, and that natural calamities can unite island nations. This fact has correlations with the focus of Marshallese artist Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner, whose homeland island was colonized and occupied first by German missionaries, then by the Japanese during WWII, before being "liberated" by America. Her project *Islands Dropped from a Basket* speaks to a Marshallese legend that is interwoven and directed to the Marshall Islands as a nuclear testing zone, which not only devastated the islands, and its peoples, but reduced its inhabitants to dependency on America. Tahitian American artist Alexander Lee has produced drawings and prints related to below and above ground nuclear tests performed by France in French Polynesia, to which the Mururoa atoll is largely a no-go zone. Lee's suite of mushroom clouds prints respond to 193 nuclear explosions undertaken in the region between the years 1966–1996. New Zealand Māori artist Brett Graham takes on American expansionism (recent and past) with four large discs that hang on walls positioned at true cardinal points in Honolulu. These 'four directions' represent the histories, rights, interests and subjugation of people and place, including the island of first contact "Guanahani to the east, "Code Geronimo" in the south referring to South West Apache resistance fighter whose name was appropriated as a code name for Osama Bin Laden, "Standing Rock" in the north a sacred site under threat of violation

3 Some recent grass roots organisations implemented viral messaging to support their activities and causes: the "Black Lives Matter" activist movement launched in 2013 after a series of killings of young black men. In 2015, Maunakea on Hawai'i Island, Hawai'i became a site of protest against the building of a Thirty Meter Telescope (TMT) proposed for the sacred site of Maunakea. In 2016 "Standing Rock" became a site for protest against the Dakota Access pipeline proposed to cut through a sacred site.

4 Shangri La Center for Islamic Arts and Culture, Honolulu was created in 1998 to promote the study and understanding of Islamic arts and culture.

and Kaho'olawe, Hawai'i in the west, where the U.S. tested weapons and nuclear projectiles for 50 years.

Beijing-based Chinese artist Zhan Wang creates sculptures that consider what it means to imitate nature. His presentation of two identical rocks—one natural rock and the other a stainless steel form—sit alongside each other, posing the question, does human activity supplant nature? Ken + Julia Yonetani's recent work is comprised of uranium glass—depleted of uranium—repurposed as the glowing element of four, hanging chandeliers, which are suspended in a dark room. The size of each chandelier represents the number of active nuclear power stations in the United States, China, Japan and Taiwan. When exposed in a dark room or under ultraviolet light, the uranium glass produces a rich glow-in-the-dark green color. Taiwanese American artist Beatrice Glow addresses the extraction of natural resources from the Indonesian Spice Isles, which began with the Dutch and British transnational colonial expansion during the 17th century. Nutmeg was naturally occurring in Rhun and through trading became a highly sought after commodity. Glow's scented installation incorporates a blood red Delftware porcelain tea set to amplify colonial commerce as exploitative of human labor and a natural resource.

"The beach" is contested space for artist Vernon Ah Kee, an Indigenous descendant of the Kuku Yalandji, Waanji, Yidindji, and Gugu Yimiithirr people of Far North Queensland, Australia. Much of Australia's sand covered coastal beaches are idealized and central to the identity of white Australia, yet these expanses are sites of historic and contemporary cruelty toward the indigenous peoples of Australia. The central component of Ah Kee's project *CantChant* is a three-channel video work. One screen depicts a hanging broken surfboard wrapped in barbed wire, being shot at; the second video shows the artist's family on the beach and the third video portrays indigenous pro surfer Dale Richards riding waves on the artist's specially made surfboard. Undertaking an alternative approach to "the beach" is Korean artist Choi Jeong Hwa with his large-scale installation

*Gather Together*. The commissioned project involves making art from plastic buoys collected from Hawaiian Islands coastline beaches. The artist's intention is to transform ocean debris into sculptural pillars bringing the discarded, overlooked and the obvious together as a platform for seeing everything as art. By way of contrast, Japan's Yayoi Kusama's room installation *I'm Here, but Nothing* is intended to be a grandiose caricature of modern Hawai'i. The rooms furnishings are submerged in purple eerie light and fluorescent polka dots, the signature form adopted by Kusama, flicker and fluoresce creating what appears to be another world. For Kusama, the polka dots symbolize the sun and other principles of nature.

In art today, how do we recognize the nature of reality and the reality of our nature as individuals in the world? Taiwanese artist Lee Mingwei is represented with the series *100 Days with Lily*, first made in 1995. Five large photographs show the artist's grief process following the death of his maternal grandmother. The artist ritualized the loss of his loved one by planting a lily and tending the natural cycle of the plant from germination, growth, full-bloom to the fading and death of the lily. He randomly chose a moment each day to document his grieving process. Death is also part of New Zealand, Ngāpuhi and Ngāti Hine artist Lisa Reihana's project *Tai Whetuki – House of Death, Redux*. The work unfolds the dramatic story of a dying warrior whose death is avenged by a chiefly mourning party. Using "day for night" cinematography, Reihana's project evokes imagined rites and rituals set in a dark landscape.

New Zealand photographer Fiona Pardington who is both Scottish (Clan Cameron of Erracht) and Māori (Kāi Tahu, Kāti Māmoe, Ngāti Kahungunu), works with archival material and museum collections. Pardington creates, re-presents and re-archives fragments and histories as a study that celebrates the assembling of collections and their preservation through a new series *Nabokov's Blues: An Enchanted Circle*. The project is a suite of photographs recognizing Vladimir Nabokov's life passion and study of butterflies. By way of contrast, *Graffiti Nature* by teamLab from Japan

is an interactive installation created for children of all ages. Visitors are invited to draw and color in animals and flowers, which are scanned and projected onto the floor, as one ecosystem. Intended to amplify and imitate nature, this is an environment where flowers grow and bloom, animals interact, eat, repel and attract each other, a place where the cycle of life and death is rendered through technology.

Yuki Kihara's photographic series considers 19th century anthropometry and motion studies of Samoan men portrayed as powerful, primitive and objectified specimens. Of Samoan and Japanese heritage, Kihara's project shows continuities between past and present representations of the Pacific male through *A Study of a Samoan Savage*. New Zealand born Samoan photographer Greg Semu addresses the male body through portraiture, tatau (tattoo) studies of Semu's body tattoos and photographs inspired by religious allegories such as the dead Christ. Conceptual artist, John Vea's video and floor-based installation reflects on how he relates to family land in his Tongan homeland, while living permanently in Aotearoa New Zealand. Vea constructs a conversation between what it means to belong to a place and owning real estate.

Pacific Asian American artist, Lynne Yamamoto was born and grew up in Honolulu. Her installation is inspired by plantation-style homes that can still be seen in neighborhoods around Foster Botanical Gardens. The artwork recalls the early 20th century period when Japanese immigrant enclaves wove around the land surrounding the Nu'uaniu and Puehuehu Streams. Families who lived in communities such as the one remembered by Yamamoto were enriched by familial systems, shared values and interwoven cultural perspectives.

Urban Honolulu in the 21st century like other centers in the world continues to evolve and change with new movements of migrants to the Hawaiian Islands. The range of people on the

move now includes refugees, asylum seekers and economic migrants, in pursuit of a better life. In this seemingly organized push for a new life in Hawai'i, people also bring their histories, rights and values with them that are physical and mental but also of the spirit. It is human to want to remain connected to a past and to transport what we are and how we think, to where we settle. People create human realities. We are the architects of our thoughts and we extend continuities of these realities.

## Transformative Epistemologies

But for the hard-won voices of Pacific peoples, perspectives about Island nations have changed little since Tongan Fijian scholar Epeli Hau'ofa wrote about them in his seminal essay "Our Sea of Islands." Island populations today are even more dependent on world powers - the military and financial aid, yet remain the most at risk from climate change, and problems that originate from developed nations. Political issues of the 20th century, prevailing views held by the West about Islanders continue to be perpetuated by well-meaning politicians, historians, anthropologists, critics and academics. Hau'ofa recognized in 1993 that Islanders possess transformative epistemologies<sup>5</sup>, which include Island knowledge, Island worldviews, wisdom and native common sense.<sup>6</sup>

The republishing of Hau'ofa's essay is powerful in the context of the Honolulu Biennial because it champions transformative epistemologies from Island perspectives and celebrates Island thinking. Hau'ofa models and exhibits his purpose in life: to share and reflect on self-knowledge, to amplify Island truths and one's lived realities with directness, conviction, wisdom and aloha. His legacy is important because it confirms that the future lies within us. We must express our own ideas, insert Island meanings and be clear about the richness and interdependency of our seas of islands.

5 Epistemology is the study of knowledge systems that asks questions that open up worldviews and understandings. The Honolulu Biennial has at its center multiple worldviews woven together to show the now and here.

6 I borrow the term "native common sense" term from Dr. Manulani Aluli Meyer. Retrieved 21 February 2017. <http://education.illinois.edu/docs/default-source/default-document-library/hereca256a3980b76a29a33dff4b008a8698.pdf?sfvrsn=0>.

As curator for the Honolulu Biennial, I demonstrate the privilege of Western schooling and over 20 years in a traditional museum setting. But, my cultural education as an Indigenous Tuhoe person from Aotearoa New Zealand dominates my curatorial practice that is place-based and is driven by tacit knowledge, propelled forward by a search for understanding what I said yes to and how best to serve and honor the invitation to co-curate the Biennial. It matters to me that the Biennial experience is transforming for the artists and its multiple publics.

One can come to contemporary art with a personal worldview, and comprehensions of historical, modern or contemporary art. One can also maintain Western training and combine these with cultural knowing. Information about social issues or knowledge of world politics has its place in society, but is not required to engage with the way artists express ideas. A one-world epistemology or single way to see ourselves in the world can separate people, but a willingness to engage with an open approach, from multiple perspectives can transform how we decide to see each other now and here.



# Entering the Same Waters Twice

Kóan Jeff Baysa

As the inaugural Honolulu Biennial (HB2017) opens on 8 March 2017 for two months, it marks Hawaii joining a roster of close to 200 international recurring art biennials and triennials that regionalizes and internationalizes art worlds. Hawai'i is unique in its central Pacific position north of the equator and HB2017 sharpens the growing global attention to its vibrant existing creative communities by showcasing the diversity of art and culture from Hawai'i, the Pacific Islands, Asia, North America, Australia, New Zealand and the Asian continent. This essay's title plays off of the epigram by the ancient philosopher Heraclitus about change and flow, and in this context refers to the waters of the Pacific as having properties and consequences of direction and transformation as functions of time.

The biennial (or biennale) is used as a general term for recurrent international contemporary art exhibitions, in contradistinction to art fairs that are essentially trade shows for art. The timely and relevant focus of Honolulu's inaugural biennial is reflected in its title, *Middle of Now | Here* with characteristic biennial agendas that include regional strategies, internationalism, re-imagining of history and political geography, renegotiation of public spaces, and site-specificity, all presented within the spectacle of a large-scale event with multiple venues in the host city. The art fair is presented in a similarly spectacular setting, but in contrast, is typically housed under one roof with fundamental strategies to promote and sell art. Whereas the biennial is where art and public spaces come together, the art fair is the space where art and commerce collude. However, as biennials expand as global purveyors of cultural capital, and grow as economic engines for cities, they develop more complex relationships with the commercial art market, and the margins between art fairs and biennials blur.

That the agendas of the two forms have become blurred is reflected in the history of the original event, the Venice Biennale. First held in 1895 with the goal of establishing a new market for contemporary art, it brought artists and clients together, with sales remaining an integral part of the biennale until the sales commission was banned in 1968. The Venice Bi-

ennale has never been just about art. In 1930 Benito Mussolini saw the Biennale's potential as a propaganda machine and controlled it from his office. In 2015 the Vatican used its first appearance to rebuild relations between art and faith. Every other year the Venice Biennale is in step with Art Basel, the world's prime commercial fair for modern and contemporary art. The brand Art Basel has extended its global reach with Art Basel Miami and Art Basel Hong Kong, appealing to and locating near the centers of international art collectors and art capital. Typically, the biennial itself lacks the funds to produce, ship, insure, and install large-scale works. Therefore, the financial involvement of galleries and dependence on commercial sponsors by both formats is largely unavoidable and indispensable, an often conflicted position.

Contemporary art biennials use public spaces and address public audiences more than other cultural models and have become the dominant formats for presenting, promoting, and critiquing culture, and thereby carry the weighty potentials for fostering change. They offer newcomers to the global art community a stage on which to participate in the contemporary art scene and provide the globally expanding art audience with more venues to view current art. For artists, they are opportunities for heightened visibility and experimentation in extraordinary venues and contexts. The proliferation of biennials has fostered a coterie of artists traveling globally from country to country creating large-scale, site-responsive projects with sundry degrees of socio-political commitment and orientation. Installation, multimedia, and performance works increasingly dominate contemporary exhibitions. For the purposes of presentation and collectability, these formats are ill-suited to the small booths of art fairs and are better served by the biennial model.

There have been various motives for forming international biennials. Established in 1955, Documenta that takes place every 5 years in Kassel, Germany was in part an attempt to counter the cultural repression of Nazism. Asia's oldest biennial, the Gwangju Biennale in South Korea, was founded in 1995, inspired by the memories of civil uprising and repression of the Gwangju Democratization Movement in 1980. The

inaugural Honolulu Biennial 2017 distinguishes itself from other biennials by its island location and ecosystem, delivered with Hawai'i's own unique ineffable form of hospitality. Concentrating on issues of the Pacific area, it heralds a paradigm shift away from the usual continent-based perspectives. Reflecting the diverse shifts in global demographics and art audiences are the notable curators of biennials. In 2015, Nigerian Okui Enwezor became the first African-born curator in the Venice Biennale's 120-year history. In 2017, the Whitney Biennial will open, organized by two of the youngest curators in the museum's history: Christopher Y. Lew and Mia Locks. In 2018, Japan's Mami Kataoka will be the first curator from Asia to be appointed as Artistic Director of the Biennale of Sydney that was established in 1973.

Heretofore, the proximal countries of Australia and New Zealand have received the most regional attention from the international art community because of the concentration of artists and works from Pacific islands in their larger cities and due to their established events, specifically the Biennale of Sydney and the Asia Pacific Triennial, home-based in Sydney and Queensland, respectively and New Zealand's Auckland Triennial. Outward from those perspectives are large expanses of water populated by islands, large and small, reaching out to the shores that define the perimeters of the Pacific Ocean. The inaugural Honolulu Biennial makes its mark by shifting the focus to the Pacific's geographic center, positing that these vast waterways always functioned as connecting bridges, rather than isolating expanses, that acknowledge, honor, and pay homage to the Pacific-wide shared histories of kinships and migrations.

Partially in response to threatening biennial fatigue, organizers scramble to come up with new paradigms. In 2008, *Prospect 1* was positioned as a post-Katrina initiative to boost tourism in New Orleans. The economic impact was \$25M, but in the end there was an \$800,000 shortfall in the \$5M production budget. Site Santa Fe staged its international biennial since 1995 then decided to halt production of its trademark show. For 2016, it unveiled a different type of international exhibition with regional roots: *much wider than a line* was "an articulation of the interconnectedness of the Americas and various shared experiences such as the recognition of colonial legacies, expressions of the vernacular, the influence of indigenous understandings, and our relationship to the land." The

landmark Whitney Biennial of 1993 was eye opening, provocative, and inclusive, touching on timely issues of gender, AIDS, diversity, and poverty. Similarly, HB2017 will galvanize audiences by addressing timely and relevant environmental and socio-political issues of the Pacific area, many within new contexts. A notable example is global warming and the mass migration of native individuals from the Marshall Islands to Hawai'i, where some come to be treated for the medical sequelae of radiation exposure and many encounter and suffer sharp discriminations. Commendably, the Marshallese Islander invited to participate is a poet, not a visual artist, and she has created a brilliant and incisive installation that explores some of these key issues facing her people.

In order to fulfill the definitions of a biennial, HB2017 needs to be recurrent. In order to be recurrent, we need to have continuity. In order to have continuity, we need to have longevity. In order to have longevity, we must be sustainable. The Honolulu Biennial must triumph with more than two successful iterations; otherwise those will be seen as just two large group exhibitions separated by time. The singular strengths of HB2017 includes its unique location in Honolulu, dramatic indoor and outdoor venues, performance, poetry, and large-scale, kinetic, immersive, and interactive installations, the integrating of native Hawaiian ceremonies, and the participation of artists ranging in age from 28 to 88 representing different countries and constituencies.

Solutions to our most pressing social and environmental problems will not be found in extant antiquated social policies nor in ossified political hierarchies but rather as consequences of daring imaginings by artists and other visionaries, with enacted moments of refusal and resistance, and consequent realizations of collective responsibility and action. The challenge of future biennial iterations will be to generate new orders and to build new infrastructures of transcultural exchange by using this recurring event as a medium and as a context for dialogue where vital concerns can be freely described, discussed, and challenged. Among those who affirm that art can make a difference, the inaugural Honolulu Biennial 2017 may well be viewed as among those creative global crucibles facilitating educational achievements and instigating heightened public awareness that effect change.



## Where the mo'ō lives: a perspective

Nāpali Aluli Souza and Manulani Aluli Meyer

I ulu no ka lālā i ke kumu.

*We are products of our genealogical connections.*

There is a belief that art starts at nothing. An empty canvas. A blank page. A shapeless mass. It is said that the job of the artist is to bring something new into existence, something out of the void, something that did not exist before.

In Hawai'i, genealogy is the meta-structure of space, place, and time. Genealogy is how we connect to each other and to 'āina; from ka wā kahiko, to right now, to the space and time in front of us. In Hawaiian thinking, all our beliefs, perceptions, practices, neuroses - the stuff of creative inspiration - they are inheritances. They exist because of succession.

Mo'ō is the Hawaiian word for succession and continuity. Mo'ō are also ancient reptilian beings, revered as ancestral gods and guardians of Hawaiian fishponds. It's no coincidence that the word for genealogy is **mo'okū'auhau**, the word for grandchild is **mo'opuna**, and the word for story is **mo'olelo**. Mo'ō is what they share. Family lineage is biological and spiritual succession. Stories, and the knowledge they contain, survive because of 'ōlelo, because of talking and speaking, and through expression and practice, from one generation to the next. Succession. Continuity. Purpose. *Meaning*.

In the same vein, art is the succession of human connection. The job of the artist then is to situate material in a way that triggers a connection at the level of meaning-making. In that space between the artist and the viewer, this is where the mo'ō lives. It is born from the artist's genealogy, a hologram of present/past, and within it the ability to transmit mo'olelo far into the future. Here is where culture matures. Here is where society transforms. Here is where mo'olelo inspires.

So, art starts not at nothing. It begins and thrives where the mo'ō lives, and the mo'ō lives in succession. It is the verb-nature of all life found in meaning-making, continuity, and the creative endeavor some call Art. The question remains: Where does the mo'ō live in this very first Honolulu Biennial?

Pu'upu'u lei pali i ka 'ā'i.

Even the different and imperfect lei is beautiful when worn, like the foliage in the cliffs.

*Diversity is essential to the acceptance of oneself and of others. It is the fiber of culture.*

We are not avid consumers of art. We are *producers*. Whether we call it design, pot-luck, lei-making, stone carving, aloha 'āina, or setting an imu for a family lū'au. We here in Hawai'i have our own ways to experience the purpose and function of creativity. The mo'ō thrives where meaning is shared. Continuity is thus found in how that sharing makes sense. We have never fully acquiesced to mainstream society's belief in art as a creation of artists for sale in galleries. What is the function of that? How is culture strengthened and extended?

Contemporary art here in the Islands for Kanaka ‘Ōiwi includes all expressions of life: music, dance, chant, care of land, child rearing, teaching, painting, surfboard shaping. The list is endless. The mo‘o thus lives in all forms of continuity, and because continuity evolves as culture, what then is the *culture* of the Honolulu Biennial? Will we add something unique on a world-stage as Island people, or will we simply link ourselves to a world-wide art phenomenon as another venue for the machinations of capital and political will?

‘A‘ohe hana nui ke alu ‘ia.

*No task is too big when done together by all.*

Effulgent coherence, the idea that our values touch everything simultaneously, is an operating philosophy of Island peoples. We here in occupied Hawai‘i know this as a touchstone for consciousness in our daily lives. *Aloha aku, aloha mai* - Love comes from loving. Here is the purpose of life; the mutual causal world explaining why things endure. Does meaning sit at the surface of things, or do we engage in the space “between” to create the on-going function of what meaning exists to produce? Here is where the contemporary of art makes sense to us. Yes, the mo‘o is found in the *quality* of how things are done, not just the product.

Meaning is then also found in what the designated artist accomplished and how the fullness of that event was experienced – by everyone and at every moment. Here is an example: This Honolulu Biennial has been produced through the vision of *people*. A small and fresh collective formed around the idea that Hawai‘i has something to express on a world-stage. Some called them naïve. Many doubted. They persisted, however, against all obstacles, odds and nay-sayers. It was to take them countless hours and years of volunteering, planning, meeting and struggle to come to this stage of what you now see.

We have before us a *miracle* of vision, persistence and trust. Three relentless founders discovered an international art director, an indigenous curator, and a cast of creative characters to pull off something *unknown, untried* and *spectacular*. So, what then is it? Does the mo‘o live in this exhibition? In Hawai‘i we thus can ask the question: **Is aloha present?** Have friendships survived the toss and turmoil of putting it on? Is there community forming around the concept of meaning-making in all its expressions? How is the quality of relationships being forged as ideas develop? What culture is found when strangers, friends, Board members, co-workers and artists share their excellence? Does the growing collective of individuals become ‘ohana? Aloha aku, aloha mai: does continuity exist in how people are being cared for?

The mo‘o runs throughout the all of life, but she lives where aloha finds safe harbor. We have seen it and cheered it on in both process/product of this very large public experiment. However, she has been tentative to claim a global space, but stepping from the shadow of all odds she now asks from us: Can Hawai‘i maintain the Aloha Spirit that has made us distinct in the world, or do we collapse into mainstream art rhetoric based on a-cultural assumptions of power and money? Here is the question we are asking in this essay. Here is the question we are asking the world.

Aloha mai, aloha aku. *Continuity comes from loving.*  
*Here is where the mo‘o lives.*



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