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Presented at thirteen locations, Honolulu Biennial showcased forty-seven artists from fifteen countries and ran from March 8 through May 5, 2019. Participants included the prominent installation artist Chiharu Shiota (Japan | Germany), the Aboriginal artist and 2020 Sydney Biennale artistic director Brook Andrew (Wiradjuri People | Australia), the collective Postcommodity (Cherokee, Mestizo | United States), the installation artist Maika'i Tubbs (Kānaka Maoli | United States), and the transdisciplinary artist Demian DinéYazhi' (Naasht' ézhí Tábąąhá).

Newcomer iBiennale presented sixty-six artists from seventeen countries at one venue in Kapalama, Honolulu, over two weeks, March 9–24. Preeminent participants included Yoko Ono (United States, Japan) and David Medalla (Philippines, UK) as well as Masami Teraoka (Japan, Hawai'i), Dan Taulapapa (Samoa, United States), and FX Harsono (Indonesia). From April 4 through May 4 the exhibition *CONTACT 2019: Acts of Faith* featured twenty-one Honolulu artists who created site-specific intervention artworks installed at the Hawaiian Mission Houses Historic site. In its sixth year, the project explores “contact” as it relates to the Hawaiian Islands, its people, and their experiences. Participating Hawaiian artists included Drew Broderick, Nanea Lum, and Marques Hanalei Marzan. The touring exhibition *In Pursuit of Venus [Infected]*, by the New Zealand artist Lisa Reihana, showcased at the Honolulu Academy of Arts from March 2 through July 14. These four exhibitions are the subject of this review.

Honolulu Biennial

The Honolulu Biennial (HB) is a new leader for contemporary art in the Pacific. HB was founded to bring international art and artists from the margins and the center to Honolulu, Hawai'i, the fiftieth state of the United States. An effect of internationalization in the Pacific and a hallmark of HB is geography-, politics-, and place-based art practice from the Islands and from global loca-

tions.¹ Hawai‘i’s population is native, diverse, and underrecognized for deep social and cultural relationships to neighboring Pacific islands and American-protected territories. The enmeshing of its permanent, itinerant, and migrant residents is unspoken but understood in the community and local political frame.² Pacific peoples colonized by Britain, Spain, the Netherlands, Germany, or America produce human conditions markedly different from other parts of the world.³ In this way, discourses particular to Europe and Asia were less evident in the HB context.

Honolulu Biennial Theme: *To Make Wrong/Right/Now*

In its entirety, the curatorial premise was an elaborate thesis.⁴ The importance placed on the Native Hawaiian cordage knowledge and practice is a theoretical storying of cordage traditions shared by Pacific Island peoples. For example, ocean-voyaging double-hull canoes composed of wood were fastened and bound with traditional cordage lashing, a tradition still practiced today. ‘Aha, or braided or twisted fiber cordage, is thus a binding material that the curators embraced as a continuity metaphor for what connects Pacific peoples. A “call to action” poem by the biennial participant Imaikalani Kalāhele was cited to honor the artist and propel the theme and to underscore a Hawai‘i “situation” as evidence of something: toward making wrong right.⁵ The HB19 introduction to the catalog explains:

In honor of Kalāhele and his poetry, we have taken inspiration from the poem and tethered our approach to the metaphor of the ‘aha (cordage). . . . As a metaphor, ‘aha has several meanings, including the link or record that connects past, present, and future, transcending settler temporalities to focus on relationality and the transmission of knowledge between generations.

Where the proposition becomes unclear is that knowledge, and its intergenerational transmission, is continuous, Pacific-wide. Moreover, smart technologies have changed the way we relate as human beings, and the new “cordage” is wireless, artificial, and unbraided. Confusing “continuity” and “transmission” of knowledge is an unprecedented twenty-first-century world identity crisis, to which there is no escape or exemption for settler, immigrant, diasporic, displaced, itinerant, and indigenous peoples. Making right on any injustice or historical wrongs between colonizer and colonized is a real issue and a slow course of action. So is raising consciousness in the community, but it is an optimistic goal toward activating actual change in society. Despite this, visual art linked to local art conversations can change up the discussions.

The Art

HB had a two-month exhibition period. The biennial put artists of Hawai‘i, regional diaspora, and indigenous Hawaiian contemporary art in front of international contemporaries. Art from Asia to the United States of America, Mexico, China, Japan, Melanesia, Micronesia, New Zealand, and the Pacific came together across thirteen venues to illuminate three key ideas: to speak to contemporary conditions, highlight strategies of survivance, and focus on indigenous knowledge.⁶ Addressing the present time is commentary on present-day conditions, and a lot is going on. Thirty-one commissioned works developed in a particular way in the biennial. Some had the effect of magnifying concerns that are a real problem for Native Hawaiians and the State of Hawai‘i, such as homelessness. Historical grievances transferred to new generations have occurred in Hawai‘i, and “issues” have international reach through social media. The artworks provided thoughtful assessments and shed light on problems. The following section addresses art with an intentional focus on Hawai‘i.

The Big Issues

Two of the foremost topics in Hawai‘i are Maunakea and houseless-ness. Maunakea mountain on Hawai‘i Island has thirteen telescopes at or near the summit. The structures and equipment belong to an international community of supporters funded by multinational groups from the United States, India, China, and Japan.⁷ The University of Hawai‘i is the administrative caretaker of the mountain; the mountain is also Hawaiian home lands.⁸ Maunakea is complicated, contentious, and not dissimilar to the matter of houselessness in Honolulu. The urban center of Honolulu has the largest population of houseless native Hawaiian and homeless Micronesian peoples in Hawai‘i. In Waiānae, west Oahu, is a village of three hundred homeless Native peoples, who live in an encampment partially hidden from public view by large trees. Houselessness is used interchangeably with homelessness in the State of Hawai‘i, and politicians, Hawaiian leaders, and social activists have yet to arrive at a convincing solution for people and the environment.

Houselessness

The pairing of Bernice Akamine and the Mexican conceptual artist Abraham Cruzvillegas generated iterative works across six venues. Akamine’s Hawaiian flag tent titled *‘Ku‘u One Hanau* (sands of our birth) was conceptualized to



address Hawai'i's houseless native Hawaiian population (fig. 1). The artist claims that Hawai'i is the historical home of Hawaiians, landless and houseless. Cruzvillegas's sculptures titled *Self Deconstructed & Rehashed Polygonal Totemic Déjà Vu (for El Chamaco) I–VI* were made from found building materials created in his “autoconstrucción” style (fig. 2). Familiar with issues of house and home in his homeland Mexico, the materiality of Cruzvillegas's artworks portray human living structures, but also the realities of fellow human beings without shelter. Akamine's metal flag tents with a nylon Hawaiian flag fastened

Figure 1.

Ku'u One Hānau, 1999–present, by Bernice Akamine, Hawaiian flag, metal. 96 × 120 × 86 inches. Installed at the Foster Botanical Garden for the Honolulu Biennial 2019. Made possible by the generous support of Second Sister Foundation and Native Arts and Cultures Foundation. Courtesy of the Honolulu Biennial Foundation. Photo by Christopher Rohrer.

to the frame also respond to a fundamental human right to have shelter. Found objects and building materials in Mexico and “tents” in tropical Hawai'i evoke this awareness. Together, the works problematize the politics of space and human relationship to the natural world. A simple irony performed by an unknown person/s occurred soon after

the opening of Akamine's flag tent installation at Ala Moana Beach Park McCoy Pavilion venue. The flag tent was stolen and was not replaced by the biennial.

Maunakea

The Hawaiian relationship to the natural environment is in play differently on Hawai'i Island with the Thirty Meter Telescope (TMT) project. Complicating the issue is a community of elders occupying the base of Maunakea, blocking access to the summit.⁹ The standoff is not the first and will not be the last in the region. Should the TMT structure be built, it would be the largest visible-light telescope on Maunakea and would connect observatories around the globe. The TMT project is taken up in the biennial exhibition by Andy Graydon with a four-channel video work and sound composition titled *A**. Graydon's contribution is a focus on capturing the first image of Sagittarius *A**, a supermassive black hole at the center of the Milky Way. Accordingly, the ability to see the edges of the black hole is what the TMT telescope is expected to achieve. Graydon's image making, interference patterns, typed text, and a process called Very-long-baseline Interferometry gathers information and forms it into a “picture.” *A** is an unembellished vision and sound telling of the artist's interest and contribution to the TMT debate.



Figure 2.
Self Deconstructed & Rehashed Polygonal Totemic Déjà Vu (for El Chamaco) II, 2019; by Abraham Cruzvillegas. Wood posts, corrugated cellulose, asphalt, aluminum, paint, beer bottle caps. Dimensions variable. Installed at the Foster Botanical Garden for the Honolulu Biennial 2019. Courtesy of the Honolulu Biennial Foundation. Photo by Christopher Rohrer.

Maunakea and the Rashomon Effect

Indigenous scholars at the University of Hawai‘i are also gathering words and creating debate in social and academic forums. By contributing native thought to a regional controversy—with argu-

ably human, scientific, and economic consequences—scholars, too, are searching for better understanding of the issues.¹⁰ “The Canoe, the Wind, and the Mountain: Shunting the Rashomon Effect of Mauna Kea” was an opinion piece by Pacific studies scholars Vilsoni Hereniko and Philipp Schorch. Their ideas generated rousing debate that went viral in the University of Hawai‘i system. The term *Rashomon effect* refers to when an event is interpreted, experienced, and described markedly differently, sometimes to extreme contradiction. The 1950s film *Rashomon*, by Akira Kurosawa, is a story of a murder, described in four different ways, intensifying different interpretations, perception, and viewpoints.¹¹ The Hawaiian epistemologist and scholar Manulani Aluli Meyer replied with an alternative position: “The Canoe, the Wind, and the Mountain: Shunting The Rashomon Effect of Mauna Kea: An Aloha Aina Response.” The point is, continuous discussions are critical and future solutions cannot

be rushed, and indigenous thinking is changing opinion.¹² Making sense of what Maunakea represents to native Hawaiian peoples and astronomers is central to Kanaka Maoli Hawaiian resistance.¹³ Maunakea mountain is a place for spiritual well-being and healing. It is where native Hawaiians go to pray, honor ancestors, and practice continuous ritual and protocol. A spiritual and ongoing relationship with the mountain is not too much to ask for when compared with damaging structural possession by TMT, which has a limited life. Which one of these options is a powerful avowal of place?

The Power of Words

Are words adequate to disrupt or lift human consciousness to inspire a different set of considerations about a region—and in Hawai‘i’s case—an indigenous group of people technically occupied by a dominant world power, the United States of America? This discussion asks how much can be pictured in an exhibition to convey deeply held convictions around this view, yet point to a needed optimism?

Installed at Honolulu Museum of Art was a photographic installation titled ‘*Au‘a*, by Kapulani Landgraf (figs. 3, 4). HB commissioned the work, 108 black-and-white, digital metal-print portraits of native Hawaiians, with the phrase “We Are Not American—He Hawai‘i Au Mau A Mau” superimposed over each image. The 108 pictures on four walls in a purpose-built room produced an experience of respect, and aloha kekahi i kekahi, and an intimate acquaintanceship with the artist’s collaborators.

A large-format camera artist of over thirty years’ experience, Landgraf took each portrait using available light. She traveled to neighbor islands in the archipelago to capture her subjects and to O‘ahu island, where the artist lives. The 108 participants in this 2019 project are artists, activists, friends, community leaders, and academic colleagues. Upon agreement to have their image taken, Landgraf gave a simple instruction to sitters: wear a tank top or T-shirt with a low neckline. Landgraf’s uncomplicated focus is a hallmark of the artist and goes to her quiet style, refreshing in the age of Instagram art stars. Refusals to participate was a reality for the artist, as some potential cooperators considered the invitation a risk to their employment and to personal, political, and social separation from colleagues, friends, and family. Each portrait is evocative of magnified passport photos, where individuals present a neutral expression, with the sitter looking directly at the camera. The overlaying of text is a notable response in the HB context; native Hawaiian people stepped up to disclaim America. In this way, the phrase was efficient and pushed a line walked by



Figure 3.
Au'a (detail), by Kapulani Landgraf, 2019. Digital metal prints, audio. Dimensions variable. Installed at the Honolulu Museum of Art for the Honolulu Biennial 2019. Made possible by the generous support of Second Sister Foundation, Native Arts and Cultures Foundation in partnership with Honolulu Biennial Foundation, and Honolulu Museum of Art. Courtesy of Honolulu Museum of Art. Photo by Shuzo Uemoto.

artists such as the Chilean conceptual artist Alfredo Jaar and the Hawaiian poet and ordained Zen Buddhist priest Puanani Burgess.

During an intensive time of social and political activism in 1990s Honolulu, the Hawaiian activist Haunani-Kay Trask delivered a political speech.

A political rally on January 17, 1993, marked the one hundredth anniversary of the illegal overthrow of the Hawaiian Kingdom; fifteen thousand people marched from Aloha Towers to I'olani Palace to observe the historic event. Since then, new generations of Kanaka Maoli are now informed to a continuous protestor movement, function, and purpose to come to terms with the circumstances of history and real events of the past 130-plus years.

Au'a is a personal moment for Landgraf; Trask engaged the artist and Honolulu-based Ed Greevy as official photographers for her 1999 book *From a Native Daughter: Colonialism and Sovereignty in Hawai'i*. The pair documented political rallies, and Trask considered the photographers as political comrades.¹⁴

This Is Not America

Jaar's landmark work, *A Logo for America*, was an LED billboard installation in Times Square in 2017. The first image, a map of the continental United States, flashed text across the digital signboard with the words "This Is Not America." A second disavowal happened when an image of the United States of America flag appeared, followed by the words "This Is Not America's Flag," which then morphed into a map of the entire Americas—North, Central, and South. Puanani Burgess's 1999 poem *Hawai'i Pono'i* takes on Trask's 1993 political speech. In the poem, Burgess places herself in conversation with Queen Lili'uokalani (1838–1917), the last ruling monarch of Hawaii, overthrown in 1893, at I'olani Palace.¹⁵ The concluding lines of the poem offer this image:

Looking out on a world that once despised her.
 And in my left ear, she whispered:
 E Pua, Remember:
 This is not America
 And we are not Americans
 Hawai'i Pono'i

"Hawai'i Pono'i" translates as "Hawai'i's Own" and is the state song of Hawai'i.¹⁶ In Landgraf's photographic installation, "Hawai'i's own" is the artist's collaborators. The relational experience with the native viewer is real: faces merge, fade, and stand out. A recorded *oli* (chant) composed by Aaron Sala for the installation played in the background. The voice of Trask intrudes on the quietude of the space, shouting the phrase "we are not Americans; we will die as Hawaiians."

Protest Narratives

Connected to protest narratives from the region are colonial histories, and Landgraf's message is clear-cut; Hawai'i is not America and Hawaiians are not Americans. Landgraf, Jaar, and Burgess are staging artistic contentions, not as constructions, but as responses to forced ideas to which they do not agree. *Au'a* is also a future archive, a document of willing and conscious human beings, aware of a power-based dynamic that is personal, social, and political. The project for Landgraf did not garner the critical attention, she imagined. Through her photography, Landgraf is performing political resistance. Embracing politics in any age is to live in the world boldly.

Mafficking / Bang Up the Elephant / Podsnappery

There is much to the name SaVAge K’lub have given themselves: a play on words, urban slang, and historical innuendo. The effects of British colonization are continuous in the Pacific, and the presence of Christianity and British governance structures occupies the lives of Island peoples. This section discusses colonial continuities and ruptures that are also evidence of indigenous survivance.

SaVAge K’lub founder Rosanna Raymond heads the K’lub, which has a changing membership according to the invitations accepted by Raymond. The K’lub have performed at international exhibitions and events in Canada, Europe, Australia, and New Zealand. The cadre for HB19 numbered fifteen persons, including a delegation

Figure 4.
Au’a, Kā’elo, 2019 (detail), by Kapulani Landgraf. Digital metal prints. Made possible by the generous support of Second Sister Foundation, Native Arts and Cultures Foundation in partnership with Honolulu Biennial Foundation, and Honolulu Museum of Art. Photo courtesy of the artist.

of Vogue dance-scene performers FAFSWAG from urban Auckland, New Zealand, and two independent Chamorro performers based in Seattle, Washington. The ethnic formation of the New Zealand-based members is

the Pacific and urban diaspora in Auckland. SaVAge K’lub have a community agenda; they programmed their participation in the Biennial through art-making workshops, kava ceremony, partying, and conversations in a safe hub space for GBLT+ community.

Savage Club Background

What is the origin of the name SaVAge K’lub? Savage clubs or gentlemen’s clubs were first established in London in the mid-nineteenth century and expanded to regions colonized by the British Empire, such as New Zealand, Canada, and Australia. These so-called gentlemen’s clubs have social, scientific, and scholarly goals; for instance, they assembled historical and cultural objects for study and publication. At the peak of their popularity, Savage clubs explained native culture and peoples in the name of science to promote their scholarship. Savage clubs still exist as a liberal fellowship of white men; the clubs are independent institutions with British Empire conqueror history.

Raymond capitalized the *VA* in the word *savage* to emphasize the Samoan concept of “*va*”: the idea that space is active and can be made active.¹⁷ The term is also contemporaneously purposed to redefine space between two cultures, such as Samoan and Caucasian. The term is shared across Polynesia;

for Hawaiian, this is *wa*; for Tongan, this is the *ta*; and for Māori, this space is also the *wa* with permutations that extend the meaning of space with social particularities. For instance, the *wahi ngaro* is ancestral space activated by elders to reset cultural imbalance across time/space.¹⁸

Art in the K'lub

Raymond et al. created the SaVAge K'lub headquarters in downtown Chinatown (fig. 5). The headquarters space was fitted out in the style of a faux gentlemen's club with modern decor, objects, and hand-stenciled patterns and motif of the debated telescope project on Maunakea. Tiki images and graffiti-styled murals invoked idyllic scenes of Hawaiian sunsets, with swaying coconut palms and falling bombs invading the sublime landscape. A standout piece was a camouflage holokū garment made by Raymond, hung from a clothes hanger, suspended from the ceiling, a response to the military presence in Hawai'i.¹⁹ Displayed on a dress maker's mannequin was a second holokū, decorated bark cloth, also made by Raymond.

Placed around the studio walls were photographic portraits of club members, and on the floor were lauhala woven mats, collectible suitcases, cabinetry display cases, carvings, ceremonial objects, tapa bark cloth, conch shell, and two flags from New Zealand—one from the colonial period (United Tribes) and the contemporary Māori Tino Rangatiratanga (sovereignty) flag; two Hawaiian flags and the flag of Guāhan (Guam). The K'lub is an entertaining performance crew, and this very aspect was a strength in the Biennial. FAFSWAG members contributed glammed-up Vogue camp couture and dancing.

Performing Culture

The K'lub's connection to Savage Club history is a colonizing eccentric visual thread in the twenty-first century. Outside the Chinatown headquarters environment, the K'lub played on titillating viewers. Prior knowledge or understanding of Savage Club is a hard point to get across without props, and onlookers want to "get" the work. SaVAge K'clubs use colonization and visual and entertainment devices of the nineteenth-century Victorian age, including flamboyant dress-ups and exotica. Blowing a conch shell, to summon people to gather for HB public events, is a comparable action played out daily in Honolulu, used to call tourists to be entertained and "play." By way of contrast, blowing the conch shell to call people to prayer is performed daily at Maunakea mountain for the purpose of paying reverence to a sacred mountain,



Figure 5. Rossana Raymond with SaVAge K'lub members at 1109 Nu'uano Avenue, Suite 112 for the Honolulu Biennial 2019. Photo courtesy of Chaunnel Pake Salmon.

ancestors, and the natural world. On the other hand, acting out with taonga Māori objects (putorino, patu mere) and dance moves blurs lines between representing cultural protocols and satirizing the cultural practices of people.²⁰

Lore/Law

Noted were nudity and provocative adult themes that confronted native and nonnative audience spectators, moreover, that gestures were considered by onlookers as acts of obscenity. The K'lub's official VIP and opening night presentations generated discussion as to what constitutes an infringement of laws on obscenity in the United States. Federal law has guidelines as to what is acceptable behavior in public places, and complaints activate investigation. Moreover, highly valued in America is consent. Charges were not lodged against SaVAge K'lub, and the attending public was not warned of nudity or adult themes. Native lore comes into play, too, when children are part of the audience, which they were. No less, cultural objects, gestures, and actions activated outside a customary ritual, protocol, or inclusive cultural recital can rightfully cause objection.

When pressed for what guidelines Raymond may have received from the HB Foundation and curators, the artist confirmed that she was not issued with instructions about the K'lub's routines. Raymond is aware of public standards and parameters in New Zealand and Australia. In 2015 SaVAge K'lub performed for the Eighth Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art (APT8) at the Queensland Art Gallery in Brisbane, Australia. Guidelines provided to the collective were issued and followed. Posted in the museum were notices advising the public of nudity and adult themes.²¹ When contacted for a response, the HB operations director Courtney Chow gave this reply: "HBF supports the voices and expressions of its artists and refrains from imposing guidelines/limitations on their work wherever possible. No guidelines specific to nudity were provided to HB19 artists."²² Artistic freedoms and the right to express oneself are different sides of the same lawful coin, to which artists, founders, and biennial directors are accountable.

An Identity Conundrum

Raymond is a founding member of the late twentieth-century collective Pacific Sisters. She is comfortable working in a community space. Formed in 1990s urban Auckland, New Zealand, Pacific Sisters included fashion designers, musicians, performers, and visual artists, including Lisa Reihana. Auckland has the highest population of Polynesian diaspora peoples in the Southern Hemisphere and has become a launchpad for artists exploring identity. A plight of the New Zealand Pacific diaspora "sharing" on the international performance platform is the proclivity to "work out" identity in public, producing a spectacle. SaVAge K'lub is unapologetic about their indifference to what is considered contemporary performance art. The collective is at once pushing boundaries and posturing an entitled and arguably colonized attitude that may be fashionable in some quarters, but is inept in island contexts. In the spirit of the K'lub's *modus operandi*, this review looks to Victorian slang terms to flip period expressions to describe the K'lub's performances.²³

"Mafficking" means getting rowdy in the streets; "Bang Up the Elephant," perfect, complete, and unapproachable; "Podsnappery," a person with a willful determination to ignore the objectionable or inconvenient while assuming airs of superior virtue and noble resignation.

We cannot discover fire again, but we can ignite a different flame to raise our consciousness as human beings and activate an evident understanding of a region and times. We are not inferior and have never been mediocre in our human achievements and relations. World thinker Boaventura de Sousa Santos has this to say:

One of the most important events of the colonial intervention from the late seventeenth century to the early twentieth century was the invention of the “savage” as an inferior being and the promotion of the idea of scientific and technological progress to achieve the highest state of civilization—Western civilization.²⁴

CONTACT: Acts of Faith

A two-month-long exhibition, *CONTACT: Acts of Faith*, featured at Honolulu’s Hawaiian Mission Houses, ran from April 4 through May 4, 2019.²⁵ As the title and venue suggest, the faith-based exhibit looked at Christian beliefs and correlations across denominations and the missionization of Hawai‘i as part of the global colonial project. The curators’ intention to survey faith and spiritual knowledge today brought gravitas to the annual *CONTACT* project, now in its sixth year.

Missionary Background

The first pioneering teachers and preachers arrived in Honolulu from New England Massachusetts on March 20, 1820, sponsored by the Boston-based American Board of Commissioners of Foreign Missions (ABCFM), with this instruction: “You are to aim at nothing short of covering those islands with fruitful fields and pleasant dwellings, and schools and churches; of raising up the whole people to an elevated state of Christian civilization.”²⁶

Those who ministered at the Hawaiian Mission Houses have left practical, profound, and heartfelt legacies. Levi Chamberlain, a Ka Hale Kamalani resident, purposed the basement of his home to dispense necessary supplies to other ministers throughout the Hawaiian Islands. Missionary Gerrit P. Judd, also a physician, administered Western medicine and l’au lapa’au (Hawaiian medicine) to patients. Another resident missionary, Hiram Bingham, became an influential politician and archaeologist who lived at Hale La’au. The missionaries Elisha and Maria Loomis brought the first printing press to Hawai‘i; their son, Levi Sartwell Loomis, was the first white child born in Hawai‘i.

Acts of Faith Interventions

The Mission homes also hold indelible human history and tangible spiritual significance. Inside bricks and mortar, real people lived, loved, prayed, studied, and died in the homes. As an exhibition site, these sacred spaces lifted up the curators’ concept for *Acts of Faith*. Areas used for art were the basement, living quarters of both houses, and the grounds. Reflective probing into religion

and cultural knowledge produced interventions that addressed ideas that, in some way, recognize that all human knowledge is incomplete and continuous.

The piece by Drew Kahu'āina Broderick was a modest study of a big story. Titled *Creation Myths*, the work was made of coconut fiber lashed onto a bone pendant fashioned in the shape of a Polynesian fishhook, an ancestral symbol of continuity and Pacific peoples. Placed on a small covered pedestal with the fishhook and entwined with the woven coconut cord was a gold cross attached to a gold chain. The ornaments carry equal importance as knowledge iconography, one embedded in Christianity and the other in Polynesian customs, with both operating in a continuum.

Half of the *Act of Faith* exhibition focused on the “domestic arts.” Artworks were installed in the private spaces of the Mission Houses. The term *domestic arts* is a double entendre, with meaning related to homemaking and to materials that re-create a sense of the homemade. Nanea Lum's work was kapa (Hawaiian bark cloth), hand-beaten by the artist, stitched with embroidery thread and biblical painted text. The artist titled the work *Ka lelo no ke Akua* (the Word of God). Embroidered stitches were fashioned to look like they were pus-filled bodily eruptions on the cloth, in the style of a topical disease. Hawaiian-language text painted on the kapa is drawn from a Hebrew translation of the Ten Commandments. The Hawaiian language translation of the Second Commandment reads

II. Mai hana oe i kii kalai nou, aole hoi i ke kii i like ai me ko kalani i luna, a me ko ka honua i lalo, a me ko loko o ka wai ma lalo o ka honua:

[II. You shall not make for yourself a graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is the earth beneath.]

Arguably, the Second Commandment was a motivation for the destruction of carved deities of indigenous peoples during the missionization of the Pacific. Lum's work on bark cloth has a historical precedent. In 1835 missionaries printed ten thousand images of the Ten Commandments on eighteen-by-nineteen-inch handkerchiefs, presumably for distribution to Natives. Missionary domestic arts can influence “the contemporary”!

It Is People, It Is People, It Is People . . .

Hutia te rito o te harakeke / kei hea te kōmako e ko / ki mai ki ahau / he aha te mea nui o te ao? / maku e kī atu / he tangata, he tangata, he tangata.

[If the heart of the harakeke (flax plant) is removed / where will the bellbird sing / ask me what is the most important thing in the world / I will reply / it is people, it is people it is people.]²⁷

A hallmark of our human existence is our relentless desire to search for things that we believe will enhance our knowledge and understanding of ourselves as human beings, of the meaning of life, and the contextual framework wherein this drama is enacted.²⁸

The Ngāpuhi Māori proverb and the prescient words of Feleterika Nokise introduce a discussion on narrative and relational hermeneutics or interpretation. Let me explain. At the Honolulu Museum of Art opening reception for Lisa Reihana's four-channel installation titled *In Pursuit of Venus [Infected]*, a cultural welcome ceremony was held to show the importance that Pacific people place on maintaining island-to-island relationships.²⁹ Reihana's project co-opted Pacific peoples, traditions, and narrative and the ceremonial formalities attended to ancestral ties and meanings that Polynesians assign to place. Participants in the ritualized encounter exchanged protocol in four Pacific Island languages, and they pressed noses and shared breath through hongī. Embodied in this cultural affirmation system is the continuity of people and familial connections, and invitation for engagement with the project *In Pursuit of Venus [Infected]*.

Decolonizing Narratives?

Critical response to Reihana's *In Pursuit of Venus [Infected]* is discoursed here to elaborate on Pacific relations and the magnification of projects that simultaneously propel coloniality onto the international stage and generate spirited indigenous conversation. The artist's work is technologically astounding, with dynamic sound and movement across an eighty-foot-long wall. A similarly titled project *In Pursuit of Venus [infected], 2015–2017, "Emissaries"* was presented at the New Zealand Pavilion, Venice Biennale, in 2017, to acclaim. In the Honolulu Museum of Art iteration, *In Pursuit of Venus [Infected]* was paired with telescopic sculptures. In an adjoining space, one of few complete sets of *Les Sauvages de la Mer Pacifique* (Native people of the Pacific) was on display (fig. 6). The historical wallpaper is the artist's source, depicting panoramic scenes, block printed and hand-colored. The Honolulu Museum's historical collection work, and *In Pursuit of Venus [Infected]*, was a rare opportunity to compare centuries-apart storying of colonization throughout the Pacific.³⁰



Figure 6.

Les Sauvages de la Mer Pacifique (Native people of the Pacific) (1804–5). A twenty-panel panoramic wallpaper color block printed by Joseph Dufour, after a design created by the wallpaper illustrator Jean Gabriel Charvet. Collection of Honolulu Museum of Art. Installed at HoMA as a historical component of *In Pursuit of Venus [Infected]*. Photo courtesy of Honolulu Museum of Art. Photo by Shuzo Uemoto.

Manifesting Tension

Since the worldwide dissemination of the work, Reihana has stated that *In Pursuit of Venus [Infected]* corrects what she considers misrepresentations in the historical wallpaper, by dressing her “figures” in culturally appropriate garments, rather than Romanesque

dress. Reihana has said the project complicates the Pacific utopian image of Pacific peoples. The artist added a Hawai‘i sequence depicting the death of the explorer Captain James Cook, famously killed at Kealahou Bay, Hawai‘i Island. This addition drew blunt criticism from native Hawaiian academics, kupuna (elders), and artists for discounting Hawaiian knowledge and exoticizing Pacific storytelling. The performing of dance and song in the piece drew major criticism: actions, movements, and expressions appeared to be a mashup of “Pacific” dance barely recognizable as representative of Pacific groups. Pacific peoples scrutinized the “traditional garments” worn by actors representing Hawai‘i, Tonga, Samoa, and New Zealand, dissatisfied with the erroneous “dress,” particularly as traditional garment-making is a living practice in the

Islands. Against this criticism, Reihana stands by her conviction that *In Pursuit of Venus [Infected]* dramatically shifts the colonial gaze. However, toward what end and exactly where is not clear. How is the gaze different, as the artwork reinscribes the colonial view and obliterates indigenous self-knowledge?

The Hard Talk

Speaking about coloniality and decolonization politics in all sectors, including biennale and special exhibitions, is real—and speak we must. Indigenous knowledge and storied histories belong to communities, and permissions are required.³¹ The project suggests the need to raise the stakes of indigenous politics that will call for cultural leaders to assess an artist's relations to place and relationship to people. Diminishing another's form of knowing or belittling a collective's understanding of self, impoverishing and demeaning indigenous knowledge, is a direct effect of colonialization.³² Obligations to be present with artists/producers of projects such as *In Pursuit of Venus [Infected]* is real when we are forced to look at the colonial gaze presented as a technological spectacle, with actors performing cultural mimicry. Producing and passing on “knowledge” that passes as contemporary art, or “contemporary art” that passes as knowledge, is a new problem in the visual arts emerging from the Pacific. Long story short: indigenous audiences are persistent inquirers and will continue to question artists, whether they are Indigenous or non-Indigenous. The opinions in this essay thus far are, in some way, summaries of current tendencies in contemporary art and curation in the Pacific, with higher volumes of primary material culture and living histories within reach of all artists. On the one hand, visual historians could pay attention to analyzing what artists are working from, with, and how. Native peoples are living authorities who must be consulted. Love of old ways *still* persist.

A Newcomer iBiennale

A newcomer biennale in Honolulu may suggest that the city has an appetite for contemporary art. Kóan Jeff Baysa carried forward the new event with the descriptor iBiennale, which he says is a comparable project to HB. The “i” in iBiennial stands for itinerant, arguably a potent metaphor in the age of global movements of people and art around the world. Benefiting the project, however, is an international and local team of supporters and artists who participated in the inaugural event.

Artropocene: Art in the Age of Social Responsibility and Activism

Global and transgenerational in conception, *Artropocene: Art in the Age of Social Responsibility and Activism* struck a chord and raises questions as to its meaning. The *Art* in *Artropocene* riffs off the academic term *Anthropocene* that refers to now, a period during which human activity sharply contributes to unsustainable practices and irreversible activities, climate change, and environmental disaster. How are we to understand the theme *Art in the Age of Social Responsibility and Activism*? Social responsibility today is tied to economic growth, the environment, and the “welfare” of society, argued for as ethical theory and related to civic duty. In reality, few artists perform social responsibilities that benefit the whole of society; fewer still live to enjoy this accolade. Unless the provocation is: What is the social responsibility of the artist?³³

The conceptual artist Yoko Ono contributed *Wish Tree for Peace*, which had a commanding presence in the exhibition. Ono is renowned for decades of peace activism and protest activism with husband John Lennon. The tree in a *Wish Tree for Peace* project was a native Hawaiian gardenia purposed to hold handwritten peace messages tied to the branches of the tree. On the one hand, the framing of activism and social responsibility is a nod to acknowledgment of the globalized location of Hawai‘i. Baysa is not so much suggesting that the conditions of “Island” produces a regional impetus—but it does. The iBiennale, however, brings into focus how artists consider personal, social, and political matters on the world stage. The activist FX Harsona, a leading figure in the Indonesian art scene, participated with a video work titled *Writing in the Rain*. The piece shows the artist writing his name in Chinese characters with an ink brush; streaming water washes the ink away while the artist continues to write his name.³⁴

Itinerant in word and practice, the iBiennial ran for fifteen days at the YCenter for Visual Arts, a spacious loft-like venue in the Iwilei-Kapalama neighborhood of Honolulu. Exhibition space can make a difference when putting forward a sizable free project with the ambition to produce an experience of an international biennale without stage-managing the “art-product.” Artist-owners of the space, Jian Ji Jie and Yida Wang, were the critical sponsors of iBiennale, which *really* had no money. The arts community pitched in to co-create the event, which became the darling of spring contemporary art events in Honolulu. The project platformed bisecting human values and shared inspiring ways to strengthen community.

Vanguard/Rearguard?

Art as a commodity is an old/new problem recognized by the Venice Biennale when the event was first founded and by art-world critics since. The problem is old in that Venice started as an open-selling event and ceased to be an official “selling” event in the twentieth century. By its history and reputation, how does the Venice Biennale avoid making artworks available to patrons, private collectors, and museum curators? In the age of global capitalism, everything is for sale and has a price tag.³⁵ The flow-on effect for artists is genuine, and selling artworks uplifts artists as much as invitations to exhibit in a biennial increases their visibility. At the time of writing this review, *The Collection of Jane & William Ryan & William Saunders* was purchased for the Hawai‘i State Art Museum (HiSAM) collection.³⁶ The Los Angeles County Museum of Art and the de Young Museum jointly acquired *In Pursuit of Venus [Infected]*.

Modifying Roles and Seeing Indigenous

Curators play a role in stimulating and creating public interest in visual art. What are the imperatives of this job at present? Scholarship from visual and art historians can also create intellectual points for study and examination. How are curators, scholars, and funders “in conversation” with addressees outside the academic construct, who represent the more substantial part of humanity and are not inclined to academic, museum thinking, or for that matter, biennials or large interdisciplinary exhibitions? Globalizing problems through art or looking to social media to highlight stress points suggests we are still coming to terms with global forums.

Problematizing contemporary art discourse is a catchphrase. The term is put to use here to draw attention to a Eurocentric art world that persists in seeing indigenous societies through a colonial lens. The indigenous platform is much transformed and prepared to talk about native and diaspora art and curatorial practice across all fields of creativity and intellectual endeavor. Knowledge and human self-understanding will drive political and social transformation. Key to actualizing change is indigenous epistemology or ways of knowing, being, and doing. The Rashomon effect discussed in this essay is an epistemology. The next steps forward are critical.³⁷

This essay has identified a local contemporaneity that is dynamic and confident and indicates courageous knowledge and data sets from the Pacific. Contemporary art in Honolulu is nurtured by a diverse and creative population, and helped drive *CONTACT: Acts of Faith*, HB19, *In Pursuit of Venus [Infected]*, and iBiennale to success.

Notes

1. For further reading on the subject of how we are shaped by geography, see the 2017 Honolulu Biennial catalog, published by the Honolulu Biennial Foundation.
2. Diversity in the Hawaiian Islands developed with multiple generations of plantation labor immigrants, mostly from Asia and later from the Philippines.
3. Ngahiraka Mason, "Talk Story: Mobile Geographies," in *HB2017 Middle of Now | Here* (Honolulu: Honolulu Biennial Foundation, 2017).
4. Honolulu Biennial 2019 was curated by Nina Tonga, Josh Tengan, and Scott Lawrimore.
5. Imaikalani Kalāhele, *Manifesto* (Honolulu: Kalamāku Press, 1979).
6. The term *survivance* was coined by the Anishnaabe scholar and theorist Gerald Vizenor in his book *Manifest Manners: Narratives on Postindian Survivance* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010).
7. Since the occupation of Maunakea in July 2017, diaspora Hawaiians from the continental United States have returned to lend support, including the actor Jason Momoa. The Samoan American actor Dwayne Johnson, groups from New Zealand and Canada, and representatives of Native America, Samoa, Fiji, and the Tongan Islands have joined the support of the protectors of the mountain.
8. The Department of Hawaiian Home Lands (DHHL) is governed by the Hawaiian Homes Commission Act of 1920, enacted by the US Congress to protect and improve the lives of native Hawaiians. The act created a Hawaiian Homes Commission to administer certain public lands, called Hawaiian home lands, for Hawaiian homesteads. Maunakea is part of Hawaiian home lands.
9. On July 23, thirty-eight Hawaiians were arrested for blocking the Maunakea access road. Thirty kupuna (elders) were among the arrested. The protest at Maunakea started in 2009, when the telescope and structure was announced.
10. Philipp Schorch and Vilsoni Hereniko, "The Canoe, the Wind, and the Mountain: Shunting the Rashomon Effect of Mauna Kea," *Pacific Studies* 41.3 (2018): 119–30.
11. The Rashomon effect is contextualized in the academic context relating to new epistemologies for understanding complex issues in society.
12. Manulani Aluli Meyer, "The Canoe, the Wind, and the Mountain: Shunting the Rashomon Effect of Mauna Kea: An Aloha Aina Response," *Pacific Studies* 41.3 (2018): 131–33.
13. Emalani Case, "I ka Piko, To the Summit: Resistance from the Mountain to the Sea," *Journal of Pacific History* 54.2 (2019): 1–16.
14. Haunani-Kay Trask, *From a Native Daughter: Colonialism and Sovereignty in Hawai'i* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i, 1999).
15. Iolani Palace is the former residence of Queen Lili'uokalani, who was overthrown in 1893 and imprisoned for nine months in a small upstairs room. The building was used as the capitol building for the Provisional Government, Republic and Territory, and State of Hawaii until 1969.
16. "Hawai'i Pono'i" is the Hawaiian state song, but prior to that it was the national anthem of the Hawaiian Kingdom. "Hawai'i Pono'i" was written by King David Kalākaua in 1876.
17. Albert L. Refiti, "How the Ta-Va Theory of Reality Constructs a Spatial Exposition of Samoan Architecture," *Pacific Studies* 40.1–2 (2017): 216–88.
18. Hori Mataiawhea Tait, "He Koha Ki," in *Contemporary New Zealand Poetry: Nga Kupu Titobu o Aotearoa*, ed. Miriama Evans, Ian Wedde, and Harvey McQueen (Auckland: Penguin Books, 1989), 486–88.
19. *Holokū* is the Hawaiian name for the Mother Hubbard dress introduced by Protestant missionaries to Hawai'i in the 1820s. This dress has a high neckline and long sleeves.
20. Taonga Māori have a specific function in customary rituals and cultural occasions.
21. Raymond and two K'lub members, interview with the author, Nuuanu Chinatown, May 7, 2019. Guidelines provide to Raymond for APT 2015 were confirmed by Ruth McDougal, curator of Pacific Art, Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane, Australia.
22. Email request sent August 6 to Courtney Chow, Katherine Tuidor, and Nina Tonga, asking whether nudity and adult theme guidelines were issued to SaVAge K'lub. The Biennial's response is dated August 13, 2019.
23. Erin McCarthy, "Fifty-Six Delightful Victorian Slang Terms You Should Be Using," *Week*, November 23, 2018, theweek.com/articles/567412/56-delightful-victorian-slang-terms-should-using.
24. Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *Another Knowledge Is Possible: Beyond Northern Epistemologies* (New York: Verso, 2007).

25. *CONTACT: Acts of Faith* was curated by HB19 assistant curator Josh Tengan and Biennial artist Ara Laylo.
26. Patricia Grimshaw, *Paths of Duty: American Missionary Wives in Nineteenth-Century Hawaii* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1989).
27. This is a whakatauki, or proverbial saying, from Lisa Reihana's Ngapuhi tribe, from Northland, New Zealand. The proverb places a high value on relations between people.
28. Feleterika Nokise, foreword to *Relational Hermeneutics: Decolonising the Mindset and the Pacific Itulagi*, ed. Upolu Lumā Vaai and Aisake Casimira (Suva, Fiji: University of the South Pacific, 2017).
29. *In Pursuit of Venus [Infected]* was on display at Honolulu Museum of Art from March 2 to July 14, 2019.
30. *Les Sauvages de la Mer Pacifique* was made in 1804–5 by the wallpaper manufacturer Joseph Dufour, after a design by the textile and wallpaper designer Jean-Gabriel Charvet. The wallpaper portrays indigenous subjects modeled in poses symptomatic of the seventeenth century. Natives are pictured as exotic strangers to each other, poised to perform cultural observances and rituals. Images of this nature play to the fascination for and “othering” of non-Western peoples, whom Europeans knew very little to nothing about or may have seen sketches and paintings generated by explorer artists, promoted to Europeans as exotic beings in a utopian landscape.
31. Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London: Zed Books, 2012).
32. Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *Epistemologies of the South: Justice against Epistemicide* (New York: Routledge, 2014).
33. George Boas, “The Social Responsibility of the Artist,” *College Art Journal* 6.4 (1947): 270–76.
34. *Writing in the Rain* also appeared in Times Square on a digital billboard in November 2017.
35. Scott Reyburn, “At Venice Biennale, the Art's for Sale, If You Know the Right People,” *Independent*, May 16, 2019, www.independent.co.uk/news/long_reads/venice-biennale-art-italy-culture-a8915071.html.
36. *The Collection of Jane & William Ryan & William Saunders* by Pio Abad and Frances Wadsworth Jones, 3-D printed plastic, brass, dry-transfer labels. The works are replicas of the Emelda Marcos jewelry collection seized by US customs at Honolulu airport when the family went into exile in Hawai'i in 1986.
37. Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *The End of the Cognitive Empire: The Coming of Age of Epistemologies of the South* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018); Manulani Aluli Meyer, “Indigenous Epistemology: Spirit Revealed,” in *Enhancing Mātauranga Māori and Global Indigenous Knowledge*, by Tairahia Black (NZQA: Te Whare Wananga of Awanuiarangi, 2014), 151–63; Upolu Lumā Vaai, “A Relational Resistance,” in Lumā Vaai and Casimira, *Relational Hermeneutics*, 17–41.