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**“Ai Pohaku, Stone Eaters”** is a culturally rooted exhibition featuring multimedia artworks by nearly 40 Native Hawaiian artists. Works, from left, are **“That which is within must never be forgotten”** by Bob Freitas; **“Kilipue”** by Pam Barton; **“Maka”** by Charlton Kupa’a Hee; **“Hua La I”** by Kahi Ching; **“Ki’i Poho Pohaku”** by Hanale Hopfe; **“Pohaku (sentinel event)”** by Keith Tallett; and **“Mamo”** by Bernice Akamine. Hanging in the background is an untitled installation by Kaili Chun.

By Steven Mark  
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It has been 23 years since a major exhibit of contemporary Native Hawaiian artists has been on display on the University of Hawaii campuses. Since then, there have been major events such as the attacks on 9/11 and the subsequent war, the Great Recession of 2008, the election of a Hawaii-born man to the U.S. presidency and the pandemic.

“Ai Pohaku, Stone Eaters,” an exhibit that recently opened at the University of Hawaii Art Department’s main gallery and will extend to all UH campuses on Oahu in the upcoming months, is an attempt at addressing that absence, featuring the work of dozens of Hawaiian artists, organizers of the exhibit said. They said the lack of such an exhibit hasn’t been the fault of Hawaiian artists, who have been active and productive all along.

“This exhibition isn’t anything ‘new.’ It’s a continuation of the work that has been done, and that will be done, but it’s maybe long overdue,” said Drew Broderick, a multimedia artist who curated the exhibit along with Noelle Kahanu, a specialist in Public Humanities & Native Hawaiian Programs at the American Studies department at UH, and Josh Tengan, an independent curator. “It speaks to the kind of support that we are and are not receiving when we’re doing that work ... and our own sort of insistence on continuing to do that work regardless of what happens and how it manifests.”

The title of the exhibition refers to the song “Kaulana Na Pua” by Eleanor

## At long last, a place and time for art

*A new exhibit brings the works of Native Hawaiian contemporary artists to Oahu campuses*

Kekoahowiakalani Wright Prendergast in 1893. Also known as “Ai Pohaku, Stone Eaters,” the song was written to honor members of the Royal Hawaiian Band, who were ordered to swear allegiance to the Provisional Government after the overthrow of Queen Lili’uokalani and the Hawaiian monarchy. When they refused, they were told they would be “eating rocks,” Kahanu said. In the song, the moment is memorialized in the line: “We are satisfied with the stones / The astonishing food of the land.”

The song became “a broader song about patriotism — love of queen, love of country — that exists and that persists to this day,” said

Kahanu. She drew a connection between the suffering musicians resisting tyranny and contemporary Hawaiian artists struggling for recognition today.

“Ai Pohaku, who are the stone eaters?” she said. “In many ways, it’s the artists present in this room.”

The exhibit, developed over the last two years and funded by contributions totalling about \$215,000, features the work of some 40 Native Hawaiian

artists. Some artists will have works on display at multiple venues, but each work will be displayed at only one site. The exhibit is “linking the campuses, which normally are sort of ‘siloeed,’” Kahanu said.

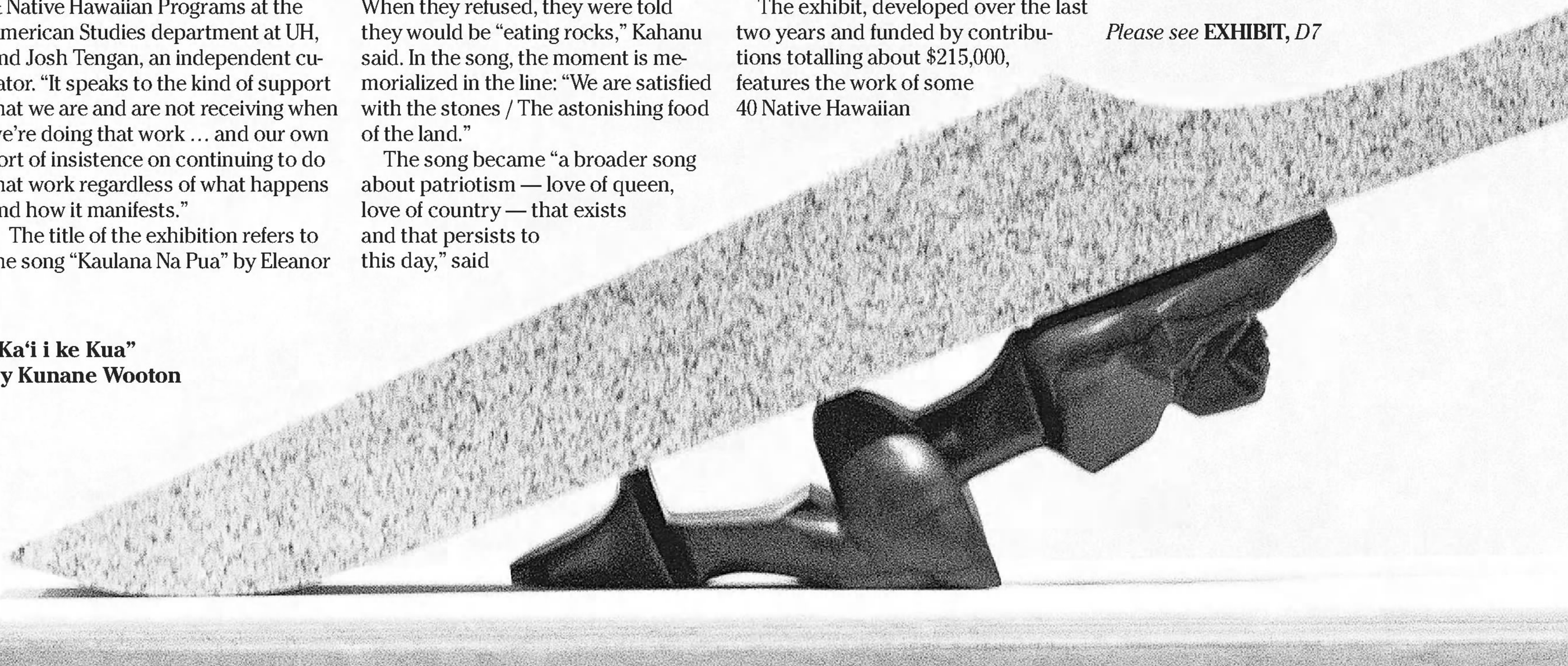
Each venue — the Art Department Main Gallery at UH-Manoa, Koa Gallery at Kapiolani Community College, the Commons Gallery at UH-Manoa, Gallery ‘Iolani at Windward Community College, the East-West Center at UH-Manoa and the new Ho’ikeakea gallery at Leeward Community College, where it will be the inaugural exhibit — will have a different theme.

For example, “the East-West Center gallery will bring together work by a hui of muralists, friends, frequent collaborators,” Broderick said. “The exhibition at Leeward Community College will speak to some of the issues of Puuloa — what’s happening with Red Hill. It will be more environmentally focused and engaged. Koa Gallery will be about ‘kane’ — the energy of men.”

Some of the artists had their work displayed in that last 2000 exhibit and are well-established, but many others are younger and are still struggling to find their place in the broader arts community.

Please see **EXHIBIT, D7**

**“Ka’i i ke Kua”**  
by Kunane Wooton



## Spill the Tea Cafe in Kakaako is a safe haven for teens

By Pat Gee  
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Throughout middle school, Jasper Ho was severely bullied by other students as he began to explore his sexual identity.

“I just knew that I wasn’t like the other girls my age and it was just after puberty; I started hating my body. I felt like an outsider,” said Ho, who grew up on Oahu.

He cut his hair really short in the eighth grade, and began binding his chest and wearing boys’ clothes at 14.

“I didn’t really come out till I was about 16,” he said. Now at 18, he identifies as a transgender man.

Counselors at school did little to help with the harassment and Ho struggled with mental health issues. Last summer, he started hanging out at the new Spill the Tea

Cafe in Kakaako, and his life turned around. The non-profit was opened in March by Haylin Dennison, a mental health therapist, to give troubled kids a safe place to be themselves and obtain counseling.

She was inspired to do so by her own transgender child Mattie, now 14, who faced similar problems with transitioning into a boy. Dennison and Mattie had found

few resources to help them deal with the bullying, social stigma and emotional turmoil of being transgender, and it became a calling for Dennison to provide aid to kids and their parents.

The combination cafe/clinic welcomes all adolescents (ages 11 to 18) regardless of their sexual identities. It was Mattie’s idea to open a place that was cool, fun and provides

free boba tea where kids can meet after school and on weekends. Services include individual and group therapy, mentorship and care coordination, but kids can also just play games or study.

“I was hoping to create a safe space for people just to hang out with friends, somewhere kids could

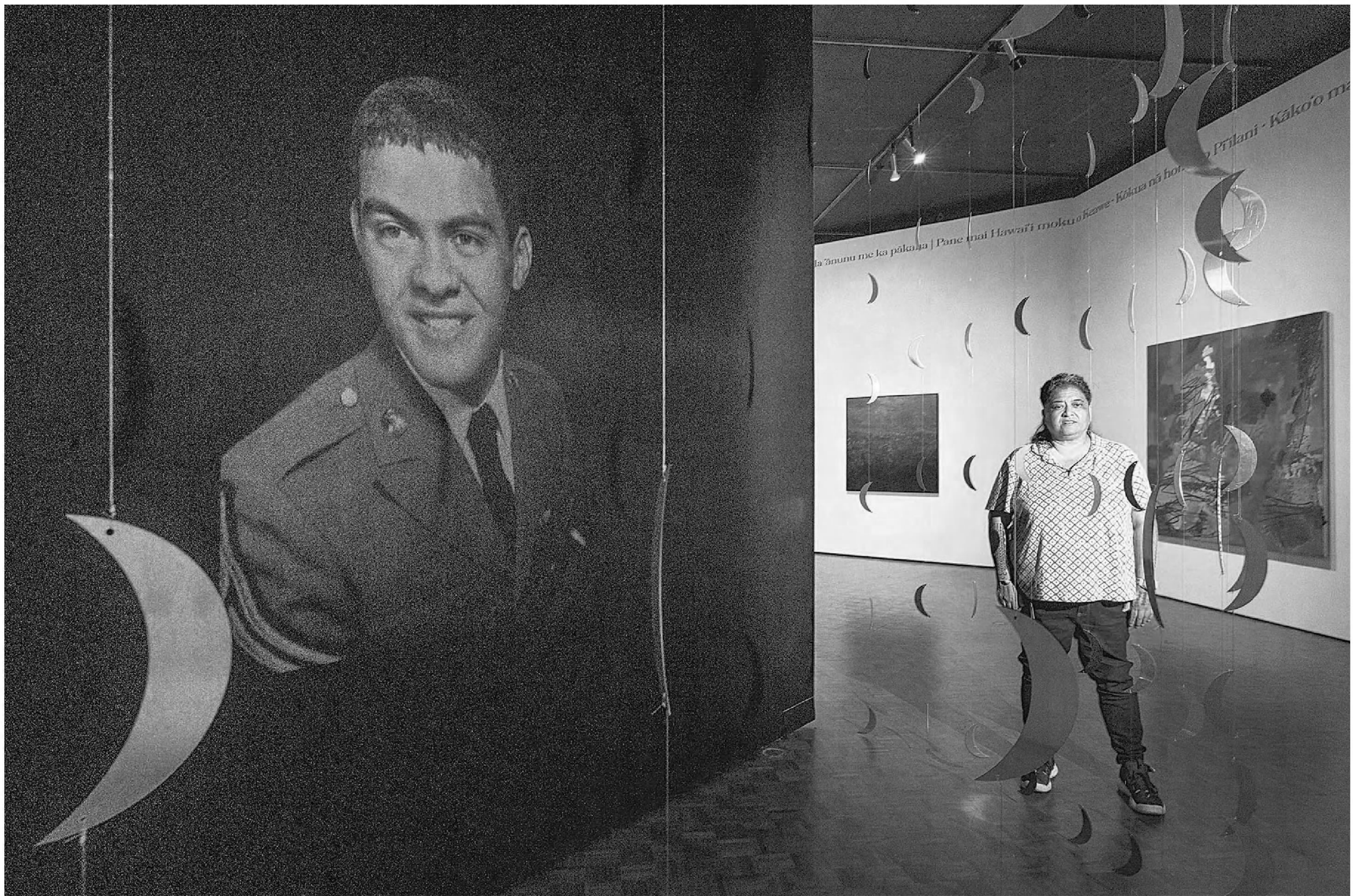
Please see **CAFE, D6**



COURTESY PHOTO

**Jasper Ho**





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Artist and Kapiolani Community College art professor Kapulani Landgraf created “E Ho’okanakai!”, which projects the words and portraits of leaders in the Hawaiian community. Behind Landgraf to the right is Nanea Lum’s painting “Loa’a.”

## EXHIBIT

Continued from D1

Kapulani Landgraf, an art professor at Kapiolani Community College, created a new work for the exhibit, “E Ho’okanakai!”, which involved getting quotes from leaders of the Hawaiian community about leadership. She then projected their words and portraits on a wall encircling the installation, which features hanging metal shards cut in the semi-circular shape of hoaka, the leaves of a koa tree, as a symbol of genealogy, succession and protection. It signifies that “it’s really remembering not to forget,” Landgraf said.

Another work of Landgraf’s on display is 2018’s “Battle Fatigue,” a collage of repeated closeup images of her eye with tiny iron nails driven into the tear ducts between them. The work stemmed from a panel discussion about the issues teachers confront in trying to validate their work to the public, which she saw as similar to what Hawaiian artists have to do in the broader art community, as well as among Hawaiians themselves, she said.

“We’re always facing non-Hawaiians,” she said, “so this is what happens when you have to do it with Hawaiians.”

Nanea Lum is one of the younger artists displayed in the exhibit. Her abstract painting “Loa’a” was originally created in 2016 for her bachelor’s degree in art and was part of two paintings she created reflecting her interpretation of the artist’s search for the truth. “I study painting from a deep knowledge of painting’s history and apply it directly to my philosophy of being a modern Hawaiian activist,” she said.

Her inspiration for the painting derived from, of all things, a piece of meat. “I would hold in my hand a piece of, like, venison,” she said. “The accompanying piece to this was like looking inside the body of an animal, so (it represents) searching inside our food systems, as Hawaiians do, in order to find the significant truth.”

Kunane Wooton, who has a day job managing nurses at Straub Medical Center, had a different kind of struggle creating his piece, “Ka’i i ke Kua,” a sculpture in the shape of a large Hawaiian adze, held up by a strug-



UH student Olivia Rigali stands in front of an untitled installation by Kaili Chun. Below, a granite sculpture, “Aina Lani II,” by Sean K.L. Browne.



gling human figure. The adze is carved out of a granite boulder, originally about 400 pounds, that had been brought to the islands as ship ballast.

It took Wooton a long time to figure out what to do with it. Eventually, it came to him that things that are “carried,” like ballast stones, are “almost burdensome,” he said. “But it’s also one of those things that’s necessary. So the piece being a non-native stone was key to that. And then (the human figure) underneath is ohia, so that’s the native part. It was important to me that it was a native part that it’s holding that weight up.”

Kaili Chun, a well-known multimedia installation artist, created a work that references the stone in the

exhibition name. The untitled work consists of basalt rocks harvested from Kapaa Quarry, which represent things like “ancestors, kin, all the creatures, creatures of the sea and plant life on land.” The rocks are suspended in hanging nets.

“We can either use those nets to feed ourselves metaphorically, or we could be trapped by those nets as well,” Chun said.

While Chun is grateful to the curators for organizing the exhibit, she said the fact that it’s been nearly a quarter century between exhibits of contemporary Hawaiian art raises questions about the university’s commitment to it. “One would think that over 23 years, more of the Indigenous perspective would be foundational, and yet it is

### “AI POHAKU, STONE EATERS”

- >> **The Art Gallery**, UH-Manoa Art Department; open now to March 26
  - >> **Koa Gallery**, Kapiolani Community College, Feb. 19 to Aug. 13
  - >> **Commons Gallery**, UH-Manoa Art Department, March 5 to April 2
  - >> **Gallery ‘Iolani**, Windward Community College, March 31 to May 5
  - >> **East-West Center Gallery**, April 30 to Aug. 13
  - >> **Ho’ikeakea gallery**, Leeward Community College, May 1 to Aug. 25
- Info: hawaii.edu/art/ai-pohaku

not,” she said.

The curators said the exhibit is particularly timely considering that UH president David Lassner recently described the university as “a Hawaiian place of learning.”

“The university system utilizes Hawaiians as a form of marketing, and yet, where is that show of support for Indigenous voices on this campus?” Kahanu said.

The curators are hoping that it won’t take another 23 years for UH to mount a similar exhibit.

“It could have happened earlier. It maybe should have happened earlier,” Broderick said. “I think the time that elapses between now and when it happens next will really tell us what the department’s relationship is to Hawaiian art.”

## NEW ART SHOWS EASE UP TO THE EASEL

There are a number of other exhibitions and events happening to keep art lovers excited and amused about the local scene. Here are a few. Admission is free unless noted.

- >> **“Accession”**: The Hawaii State Art Museum has opened an exhibition of 51 works by 38 local artists that have recently been added to the state’s Art in Public Places Collection. Seventeen of the artists are having works added to the collection for the first time under the state’s Art in State Buildings Law, which requires 1% of construction or renovation costs of state buildings to be spent on visual art. The museum is at 250 S. Hotel St. Hours are 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Mondays-Saturdays. Info: hisam.hawaii.gov
- >> **“The Wild, Whimsical World of Bonhui Uy”**: Architect Bonhui Uy was part of the original design team for Ward Warehouse. He is also a designer and artist who brings a playful sensibility to his work, which is on display at the Downtown Art Center through March 18. It features nearly life-size animals — dinosaurs, birds, dogs, cats, tigers, monkeys, porcupines and hippos — made of cardboard and recycled material. In March, Uy is giving several workshops on making collages; the classes are geared for people age 13 and up, fee is \$60 (see website for details). He also will be on hand to discuss his exhibit on March 3 for First Friday activities and will give a tour from 2-3:30 p.m. on March 4. The center is located at 1041 Nuuanu Ave., 2nd floor. Open Tuesdays-Sundays, 11 a.m.-6 p.m. Info: downtownarthi.org
- >> **“We Stand With Ukraine”**: Opening Friday at the Arts at Marks Garage, the exhibit is a fundraiser for the people of Ukraine. The artists Marina Borovok, Inessa Love and Alla Parsons hail from Ukraine and Russia, and even though their native countries are at war, they are friends and colleagues. There will be an opening reception at 5:30-8 p.m. Friday, with the works on display until March 2. An exhibit devoted to Women’s History Month is planned for March. The Arts at Marks is at 1159 Nuuanu Ave. Open noon-5 p.m. Tuesdays-Saturdays. Info: artsatmarks.com
- >> **“Ola Ka No’eau: Excellence in Hawaiian Artistry”**: Bishop Museum will explore how artistic knowledge is passed down among Native Hawaiians through the generations. The exhibit, which opens March 11, will feature 13 noted Native Hawaiian artists and will focus on the transmission of Hawaiian artistry from teacher to student. 1525 Bernice St. Open daily 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Admission \$10.95-\$28.95. Info: bishopmuseum.org
- >> **“Radical Wahine of Honolulu, 1945”**: Mari Matsuda, a Roosevelt High School graduate, has been an influential professor at the University of Hawaii’s William S. Richardson School of Law and other major law schools and is one of the founders of Critical Race Theory. She is also an artist who uses found objects to create sculpture and installation art. Her installation in the one-room Aupuni Space in Kakaako is a tribute to nine women in Hawaii who were active in promoting labor and union rights as part of the Hawai’i Youth for Democracy movement in the late 1940s and ‘50s. Aupuni Space is at 729 Auahi St. The exhibit is open 11 a.m.-3 p.m. Wednesdays, 3-7 p.m. Fridays, and 11 a.m.-3 p.m. Saturdays, through March 8. Info: aupuni.space
- >> **“Art Wave”**: Greenroom Gallery, a Waikiki space devoted to surf-related art, features the work of Margaret Rice, a self-trained painter who fills in her line drawings of island themes with muted, monochromatic colors to create graceful images. Her show will open with a reception that will include DJs and a free drink for the first 100 people at 6 p.m. Saturday. Greenroom Gallery is located in the Queen Kapiolani Hotel Waikiki Beach lobby, 150 Kapahulu Ave. Info: greenroomhawaii.com

Steven Mark, Star-Advertiser