

Royal Hawaiian Featherwork: Nā Hulu Ali i.* Leah Pualahaole Caldeira, Christina Hellmich, Adrienne Kaeppler, Betty Lou Kam, and Roger Rose, eds. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2015. 280 pp. [Published in collaboration with the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco and Bernice Pauahi Bishop Museum]

Reviewed by Teresa Wilkins

One of the most significant publications on Hawaiian featherwork to be recently published, this catalog for the collaborative exhibition of the same name presents a number of scholarly essays accompanied by an up-to-date bibliography, index, and annotated photos and images of the works on display. The first half of the catalog is comprised of scholarly essays concerning Hawaiian culture and featherwork. While these essays provide a great amount of information, the authors have delivered it in such a way as to be entertaining to read and easily accessible, even to those not familiar with the subject. The first few essays present a brief examination of contemporary museological issues surrounding Hawaiian featherarts. The essays then move into examinations of a few specific featherwork types before Adrienne Kaeppler, Roger Rose, and Stacy Kamehiro provide in-depth historical context for the objects of view. The second half of the catalog features full-page color plates and the provenance of each item pictured. The timeline and selected biographies included aid non-specialists in understanding the flow of history and culture in Hawaii. A beautiful catalog by any standards, there are two things that elevate this publication above others: its accessibility and the authors' passion for their subjects.

Anyone familiar with Hawaiian featherwork is familiar with two women, Aunty Mary Lou Kekuewa and her daughter Paulette Kahalepuna. These two women dedicated their lives to the continuation of the art of featherwork, encouraging and educating countless generations. As such, it is only fitting that this catalog opens with a beautiful tribute to the late Aunty Paulette, and the importance of these women's work and of this exhibition as the first of its kind on the mainland United States are stressed throughout the entire catalog. In each essay, the pride in which these scholars discuss the subject shines through, and drives home the point to the reader of the prestige and the importance of this exhibition and accompanying catalog.

While the majority of the essays within the catalog focus on providing historical context for featherart, the "Introduction: A Journey of Encounters and Engagement" by Maile Andrade and Noelle M.K.Y. Kahanu stands out as providing a contemporary Hawaiian perspective on the importance of self-representation through the exhibition of featherwork. Taking on the format of a question and answer session, this introduction touches on concepts integral to museum and indigenous studies in a way that is truly accessible for the reader. Issues such as the "weight of the presence of absence" (20) are in play as the authors discuss how the Hawaiian voice must narrate these objects, and in turn, how these objects give Hawaiians a voice. I recommend this to anyone looking for an introduction into contemporary issues surrounding museums and the exhibition of indigenous arts.

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Another essay that stands out is M. Kamalu du Preez's examination of akua hulu. In it, he addresses both the individual interaction with featherwork as well as the responsibility of museums in terms of conservation and display with a primary focus on the image of Kūkā'ilimoku in the Bernice Pauahi Bishop Museum in Honolulu. The provenance of this piece, discussed as a biography, is illuminating, and gives weight to the author's argument for our responsibility to care for this image and others of its kind. Conversation of perseverance, preservation, confrontation, and contemplation are sparked by the examination of the akua hulu, and can be applied not simply to featherwork, but to Hawaiians as well. Per his usual writing, du Preez eloquently situates the importance of featherwork and the importance of this exhibition within the struggle for recognition of the Hawaiian voice in museums.

Building on the ideas of du Preez and others in the presentation of featherwork provenance as biography, Noelle M.K.Y. Kanau's essay of 'ahu'ula explores the history and importance of genealogy within featherwork through an examination of the feathered cloaks. The argument that the cloaks "give a tangible means of connecting to our ancestral past" (24) echoes the ideas of the author in the introduction on the contemporary importance of featherwork, within Hawaiian culture and museums worldwide. These first few essays, imbued with the authors' passion, lead the reader into more complex explorations into the aesthetics, materials, and methods of construction and historical usage for these objects. It is integral for the reader to understand these sometimes extremely complex processes in order to comprehend the importance of this catalog and exhibition. These authors successfully articulate these processes, imbued with great meaning, symbolism, and belief, in a way that is accessible to the reader, even one unfamiliar or with no previous knowledge of Hawaiian featherwork. The essays in the catalog culminate in a look at how featherwork functions within contemporary Hawaiian communities to serve as signifiers and symbols of tradition, aloha, and cultural pride.

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