

BREAKING OUTSIDE: NARRATIVES OF ART AND HAWAII

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This research examines the personal narratives of two contemporary non-native artists living and working on the island of Oahu, Hawaii. Issues related to narratives, power structures, artistic processes, insider/outsider dynamics, Hawaiian culture, island life, surfing, and the researcher's own experiences are woven together to formulate realizations surrounding alternative knowledge systems and the power of multiple or hidden narratives to the practice of art education.

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of my thesis research is to document the personal narratives, art practices, and histories of two artists who live in Hawaii, and to compare those stories to my brief personal experience living on Oahu and interning at the Bernice Pauahi Bishop Museum in Honolulu. I concentrated on obtaining interviews with artists who employed, referenced or engaged with Hawaiian art making methods, materials or themes in some way, especially related to exploring Hawaii as a concept or place. The overarching research question for this proposed study is: How do the personal narratives of these selected artists compare and what themes emerge from their stories? To answer and supplement the primary question, I created these supporting questions:

1. What are the biographical and personal narratives behind these artists and their aesthetic choices, including family history, artistic influences, memories, experiences, interests, and intentions?
2. How do the artists define “Hawaiian” and how do issues of identity or questions surrounding the concept of authenticity relate to their artworks or practices? How does being self-defined as an “outsider” to ethnic Hawaiian culture influence their practices?
3. What is the significance or influence of the concept of place to the artist’s process and products?

Justification of the Study

This study helps to satisfy the existing need to document and contextualize the stories of individual artists from the first person perspective. I offer context to these two artists’ narratives with supporting historical information from the recent and more distant past. I have synthesized

themes that began to emerge naturally from each story during the data analysis stage of the research process. The narratives stand alone as separate documents of individual experiences.

This research was partly inspired by a project that is supported by the Center for the Advancement and Study of Early Texas Art (CASETA). I first heard of this project during my graduate course in curriculum and assessment. A classmate explained the program during one of her presentations. Recalling Texas Modern: An Oral History of Modern Art Made in Texas is an oral history project that collects interviews with artists who were working in Texas during the rise of Abstract Expressionism and Pop Art throughout the United States (from approximately 1940-mid 1960s). The project seeks to document artists' memories and interpretations of certain experiences and issues of the era (Center for the Advancement and Study of Early Texas Art, 2005-2011). Inspired by this project, I conceived my own research to add to the call for the documentation of artist's memories and experiences.

I believe additional information and background on the artists in question is always welcome and adds to our knowledge of the artworks we study, helping us as art educators to construct more informed stories to present to audiences and students. My hope is that my research will add to the diversity of voices available for interpreting the work of contemporary artists. Through the in-depth study of two specific artists' life experiences, I wish to explore the profound connection we have to place as we relate to the world around us and find ways to communicate our knowledge through art making and as art educators.

Though the study of individual experiences does not readily lend itself to broad generalizations, I do believe this research will illustrate that a plurality of perspectives can coexist within a regional community of artists. Even those individuals who share many traits in common will have unique perspectives. I also believe this study is of value because one of the

artists I interviewed is an art professor at University of Hawaii, which makes her narrative doubly interesting to this investigation as she is both a practicing contemporary artist and an art educator.

Traditional Pacific Islander culture is a culture of storytelling. Histories that contained facts, legends, myths and truths about royal lineage, group identity, life lessons, and values were traditionally kept alive through storytelling. Songs and historical narratives were recited repeatedly during ceremonies at the royal court or in the more intimate family home environment (Wichman, 2003). Great efforts have been made by scholars and community members since the mid-nineteenth century to collect and record these narratives (Wichman, 2003). Therefore, I believe it is fitting to try and situate the personal narratives of two selected Hawaiian artists (even the stories of outsiders) within a larger context of narrative preservation. I hope the information gathered in the course of this research project will serve as an interpretive resource for multiple uses in art education, much the same way that narratives collected from Hawaiian culture have served as a rich resource for cultural scholars and community members seeking deeper knowledge of Hawaiian experiences. At the same time I hope these stories help to describe what it means to be an outsider or an insider in Hawaiian culture. I also hope to add to the wealth of available literature and resources in a particular way that addresses art and art education audiences.

Researcher Bias

Perhaps due to my undergraduate background in cultural anthropology, I believe in interviewing as a strong qualitative research method and an effective tool for learning through the experiences of others. I am also approaching this research through the lens of a museum

educator (because I am pursuing a career in that field), and as a social scientist in the discipline of art education. I have a keen interest in learning about the experiences and reactions of people. In this case, I am interested in learning about the first person experiences and reactions of a few selected artists who are living and working in Hawaii and capturing their stories. I believe some of my biases may serve as strengths for this research project because I have some familiarity with the practices and principles involved with interviewing as qualitative research.

One of my dearest and oldest friends moved to Honolulu, Hawaii in October 2010. Soon after Heath arrived, he began to experience the complex set of ethnic and geographic social issues that define “local” and surf culture on the island of Oahu. Specifically he was harassed and threatened with violence by some other surfers for being in certain geographic areas based on his outsider status as a white Anglo American and a newly arrived resident. People can be very territorial when it comes to waves, but I had to question if this territorialism in Hawaii was restricted to surfers. There are many oppositional categories at play operating simultaneously in contemporary Hawaiian culture—local v. tourist, settler v. native, brown v. white, Asian v. Pacific Islander—and all of them have their roots in the colonial plantation history of Hawaii.

I developed an interest in these issues because I felt curiosity when my friend described these experiences to me. My continued interest stems from my fascination with the unique set of social questions that are presented here in this specific place and time. I believe I can come to understand, through art and the lens of art education, what Hawaiianness means to these two artists who live and work in Hawaii (even if they perceive themselves as outsiders) through an exploration of their own feelings about their artwork and their identity. Art has the power to express and help us process complex and uncomfortable ideas. As art educators, we should seek to explore every opportunity for enlarging or enriching those experiences for those who learn

with us, and that is also why this particular subject makes good sense as an art education research project. I am not ethnically Hawaiian, I am Anglo and Texan, and my own “outsider” status as a researcher and a non-resident of Hawaii also plays a role in this research, which I readily acknowledge in my findings, summary, and conclusions.

Overview of the Study

Based on specific criteria, I drafted a list of Hawaiian artists from which I selected a few of the most valid and desirable prospects for this research project. The criteria included the following: 1) the artist will have had a show in a Hawaiian art museum, gallery or other cultural institution, or their artwork will be represented in at least one Hawaiian art museum collection; 2) the artist’s artworks employ or deal with traditional or historical methods, materials or subject matter or deal with issues that are distinctly Hawaiian or related to the place of Hawaii in some way; and 3) the artist lives on the island of Oahu (for the purposes of convenience sampling). I also attempted to finalize a list of participants that represented generational diversity in my sample.

After establishing my selection criteria, I then contacted each artist in descending order of desirability, and requested their participation in this research. Because this study self-selected for artists who have an existing interest in traditional Hawaiian culture or contemporary Hawaiian issues, I felt confident that at least a few of the artists I contacted would feel a connection to this project and agree to participate. I hoped to have at least three and no more than four participants. Due to the brief period of time I had to conduct the interviews (just a few weeks—my internship lasted a little over a month), I felt the need to limit the number of participants to a maximum of four in order to allow adequate time with each participant.

Because of my background in anthropology, as an interviewer, I knew it would be imperative to develop a genuine personal connection with each of the participants to allow adequate social space for comfortable in-depth interviews to develop naturally and at their own pace. The need to make a personal connection with each participant was an important part of this process and why I did not want to simply conduct phone or email interviews alone.

As a starting point for locating contemporary artists, I used the Honolulu Academy of Arts as a resource. Their exhibition, *Artists of Hawaii 2011*, ran until September 25, 2011, and I planned to be in Oahu through the full month of September for my internship at the Bishop Museum. Two of my top draft picks for this study were actually featured artists in this show. The works on view by Nero dealt with subject matter specific to Hawaiian culture such as storytelling and oral history traditions. The narrative qualities and titles of some of his artworks reference specific events in the history and the emotional memory of the Pacific Islander diaspora, conflating the emic versus etic view of Pacific Islander culture (Nero, 2011a). I managed to arrange a meeting with this artist and found that his personal narrative offered a unique perspective. Though his ethnic heritage is Pacific Islander, Nero does not identify himself as Hawaiian beyond the term's utility for describing his current state of residence. In his practice as an artist and in our conversation he sought to question what terms like 'home' and 'Hawaiian' are really all about. According to his artist's biography, Nero was born in "terra nullius" (no man's land) in the South Pacific in the vicinity of the Marquesas Islands. He lived for over a decade in China and now calls Hawaii his home (Nero, 2011f, 2011g, 2012). Nero's work intersects with my interest in exploring questions of authenticity and changing definitions of Hawaiian identity and Hawaiian art among individual artists with different cultural backgrounds.

The other artist I interviewed, Meg, also had work displayed at the Academy of Arts, Honolulu. She works at the University of Hawaii at Manoa as associate professor, fibers program chair, and art and art history graduate program chair. Meg had her own unique perspectives to offer as an outsider to native Hawaiian culture, and as an artist whose work is very closely tied to the influence of place.

I stayed with my friend and his family while I conducted my research to mitigate the logistical strife and high cost of living for over a month in Oahu. I was essentially working on my research while simultaneously staying for an extended personal visit with close family friends. The proximity of their home to Honolulu and the many museums and cultural institutions located there, including the Bishop Museum where I served as an archaeology collections intern for six weeks, allowed me to view some unique resources and archival information.

BACKGROUND AND REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The background literature for my research includes the subjects of Hawaiian history and culture from the perspective of insiders as well as outsiders, identity politics, and Hawaiian art history and museum practices with respect to Polynesian art. I am also interested in how traditional Hawaiian values have endured in contemporary Hawaiian culture. While religious beliefs and narratives demonstrate traditional values, this demonstration does not necessarily equate with the ways in which Hawaiian values manifest in the everyday lives of people who live in Hawaii (Kanahele, 1986). I thought I would look to see if the artists' themes or art making practices reflect or engage with Hawaiian values in some way according to their own point of view. Hawaiian identity is a multivalent construct to which I do not attempt to pin any overly limiting definitions. Hawaiian identity can be neither tied directly to geography (such as in the case of diasporic Hawaiians and Hawaiian communities located in the mainland U.S.), nor is Hawaiian identity simply a question of ethnicity (Halualani, 2002). Rather, my goal is to capture and express the selected artists' individual definitions of Hawaiian identification or non-identification, and their own constructions of the concept as they apply it to themselves, others, and perhaps to their artworks.

In 1993 the United States Congress issued a Joint Senate Resolution that acknowledged and apologized for the illegal invasion and overthrow of the Hawaiian Kingdom, and the following U.S. annexation. President Clinton signed the bill into law on November 23, 1993 (Hall, 2005). The legacy of colonialism in Hawaii includes the "racialization" of Hawaiians through state law and policy. The Hawaiian Homes Commission Act was enacted in 1920 based on a "50 percent blood quantum as the legal definition of Hawaiianness" (Halualani, 2002, pp. 38-39). This strange method for determining who is indigenous Hawaiian and who is not is a

post-colonial construct that has a lasting effect on how rights and entitlements such as land grants and other benefits are recognized or extended by the state. It has also resulted in a persistent ethnic racialization in our larger Western culture of non-white native Hawaiian and mixed race peoples despite the fact that they are the majority population over whites in Hawaii. Immigration and settlement from other Asian populations throughout colonial history including Japanese, Chinese, Indian, Korean and Filipino immigrants further complicates issues of identity and ethnicity in Hawaii.

Demographically, Asian immigrants and their descendants greatly outnumber the native Pacific Islander population in Hawaii. Some First Nation Hawaiian advocates view the white and Asian non-native populations, both of which can trace their presence in Hawaii to the colonial plantation era—whites as the settler landowning class and Asian immigrants as plantation workers—as equally illegitimate in terms of Hawaiian identity (Trask, 2008). Due to immigration and colonization by Asian and American settlers and the resulting multi-ethnic, multi-cultural Hawaiian diaspora, some activists believe that native Hawaiian cultural identity is being overwhelmed in its own place and is in danger of going extinct (Kamahele, 2008). If you go by this definition, the majority of people living in Hawaii would qualify as “outsiders.” The population is also a majority minority (majority non-white).

My own experience of living and working on Oahu for a short time included riding public transportation almost daily, working, grocery shopping, recreational activities in public places (such as attending friends’ softball games and parties), and generally taking part in the social community. My daily life anecdotally confirmed the statistical diversity and the general demographics I found in my research. Along the way, my central question became: what are the unique characteristics or experiences of an outsider culture in this context, and what is the

relationship to the insider culture? The two artists I interviewed did not define themselves as Hawaiian. However both of them engage in questioning definitions of place and home and their subject matter does frequently involve the referential use of associations with ideas of Hawaii in a number of forms.

Clearly, there are complicated, dynamic social and ethnic dimensions to Hawaiian identity. I was curious to see how identity issues would play out in the works of the artists I interviewed, because artworks often combine political statements with the intensely personal, and art brings substantiation to things that are invisible, ever present and difficult to name. I was also interested in investigating how ideas about Hawaiian identity might change over time or across subcultures in Hawaii and how those changes would visually manifest in the artworks themselves. I also wondered whether the artists I interviewed would necessarily want their work to be identified as Hawaiian art or to be identified themselves as Hawaiian artists versus a preference for self-identifying simply as artists working in a more universal or global context.

Hawaiian Culture, Identity and Place

The original inhabitants of the Hawaiian Islands are believed to have traveled there by canoe, first from the Marquesas Islands and later from Tahiti, during the first century AD (Kawakami, 1999). Hawaiian identity constructs incorporate elements of tradition that are defined in very eclectic and personalized ways, but usually look back to the ways Hawaiians lived prior to contact with the West. The Hawaiian cultural revival of the 1970s modeled many elements of “tradition” on the lifestyles of rural Hawaiians, but these are only one part of a complex, multivalent process for constructing identity (Linnekin, 1983). An emphasis on agricultural knowledge and other connections to the practices of the “people of old” are fostered

as elements of traditional Hawaiian life. Elements of history such as the strict social stratification and the intricate, draconian system of *kapus*, that defined everyday life under the unified Hawaiian kingdom, as described by Captain James Cook in 1778, are deemphasized. The breaking of *kapus*, or forbidden behaviors that reserved certain rights and privileges for upper class members of society and for men, was an offense punishable by death (O'Connor, 2006). Thus, the construction of what will be taken up as traditional and what will be left as part of history is a process that idealizes the past to some extent. This is just one example of how cultural and ethnic heritage are an ongoing negotiation rather than a fixed set of activities or beliefs that can be handed down and inherited the way an object might be.

A cultural movement of resistance to the colonial history of oppression in Hawaii is also integral to a definition of Hawaiian identity. Friedman (1993) states that cultural identities emerge under conditions of contrast or opposition:

Hawaiian resistance has a history very much longer than its current press coverage, and in that resistance... we can discover a great many continuities in what might be called Hawaiian culture. While it is difficult to ascertain at what point Hawaiian collective identity emerged, there is evidence that its contours became increasingly clear throughout the mid-nineteenth century. (p. 740)

During the 1970s, Hawaiian political activist culture defined the problem in terms of “first contact” with white Europeans. That approach divided the two sides into non-native white (*haole*) and native Hawaiian. One of the problems with this movement is that it never addressed the significant population changes that occurred during the 19th and early 20th centuries. Despite the important native Hawaiian rights grievances that the movement has brought to light and the significant progress that has been made from such efforts, it still fails to allow for more than one native Hawaiian identity, of which there are now many different types existing in Hawaii (O'Connor, 2006). There is, for example, a large population of Hawaiians who identify

themselves as “Local”—this community is generally comprised of island-born Asians and part-Asians (O’Connor, 2006).

In Hawaii about one fifth of the population reports Hawaiian heritage and only a small number, perhaps less than one percent, of the population can be traced as “full-blooded” Hawaiian. In census records from 2000, 35 % of respondents claiming Hawaiian as their race claimed Hawaiian alone, whereas 65 % of those claiming Hawaiian also claimed another race as well (Kana’iaupuni & Liebler, 2006). This diversity in self-identification is based solely in the category of race, and does not even begin to describe any number of other categories one could use to illuminate the range of identities that fall under various individual definitions of Hawaiian. Furthermore, feelings of Hawaiian identity are inextricably tied to place and the land. Genealogical and ancestral ties are also very important to many people in their identity construction as well as special naturalist knowledge, personal relationships, traditions, customs, and social interactions that reinforce Hawaiian physical and spiritual connection to the land and ocean (Kana’iaupuni & Liebler, 2006).

At the time of Cook’s arrival in 1778, there were an estimated 200,000 to 400,000 native Hawaiians living on the islands. By the time of the 1910 U.S. census, those numbers had been reduced to 38,547 (Meller & Lee, 1997) and some estimates put the population reduction from newly introduced diseases such as influenza, smallpox, measles, and various sexually transmitted diseases as high as 90% (Boylan, 2005; Kelly, 2003). With the Hawaiian population horribly decimated by the European introduction of diseases, and with growing numbers of Hawaiian young men leaving to join crews on trade ships, a need for cheap labor arose to feed the burgeoning sugar plantation system. From 1852 until past 1952, more than 400,000 people were imported from all over the world to work the sugar fields (Meller & Lee, 1997). The differences

in language, culture, and background of the workers helped insure the workers would not unite and would continue to have little bargaining or organizational power against plantation business interests (Hall, 2005). Hall (2005) speaks to the American mythology of Hawaii as a great melting pot of peoples and cultures:

The complexity and strength of a “local” identity [is] forged in shared (though not identical) oppression in the plantation work economy by immigrants from a number of cultures and countries including Japan, Puerto Rico, Scotland, China, Germany, Portugal, and more. (p. 407)

A contemporary reflection of the disastrous consequences native Hawaiians suffered as a result of that initial contact with the West manifests today in disproportionate statistics on Hawaiian health and social problems. Studies have shown overrepresentation of Hawaiians in “social problem” categories such as “low educational and economic attainment” and significantly higher rates of heart disease, diabetes, cancer, and accidents, as well as higher mortality rates than any other ethnic group in Hawaii and among the highest mortality rates in the U.S. (McMullin, 2005). Hawaiian health problems are linked to chronic poverty and the lack of education that is at the root of many of these inequalities.

Native Hawaiians have been persistently disenfranchised in many ways. English was declared the official language of public schools in Hawaii in 1896, and the Hawaiian language was banned. Teachers went so far as to make home visits and scold parents for speaking Hawaiian with their children. Hawaiian values such as home, family, community, and cooperation have been subsumed to Western educational values such as independence and competition (Kawakami, 1999). The long-lasting impact has been a native Hawaiian population that is extremely disconnected from, and grossly underserved by, public education and social services.

The response to historical assaults on Hawaiian culture and the resulting economic, political and educational inequalities that persist in contemporary Hawaii have also been diverse. On one side there are self-identified native Hawaiians who view the tourism industry as a source of employment despite the generally low incomes it generates for most entry-level employees. This group does not necessarily view the tourism industry as an active part of the colonization of Hawaii (Trask, 2000). Situated more toward the middle of the spectrum are mainstream struggles for equality and respect manifested by the Hawaiian Rights Movements. And on the far opposite side, at the most extreme end, are members of the Hawaiian separatist movement who believe Hawaii should be a sovereign nation run by native Hawaiians. (Technically, this may not be considered secessionist movement like the perennial one we seem to have in Texas. Hawaiian separatists do not recognize the legitimacy of Hawaii's statehood (Meller & Lee, 1997). How can a state secede if it was never really part of the Union?). Obviously this outcome would alienate the great majority of the population in Hawaii, which is non-Hawaiian, part-Hawaiian or mixed race. We have two polar opposite examples on this spectrum of political responses to systemic cultural oppression, and most Hawaiians probably fall within a close range of the median.

Hawaiian Arts of the Past and Present

When considering the arts of Hawaii, it is important to contextualize the fact that visual art is only one among many other highly valued traditional art forms such as dance, poetry, music and storytelling. Because material culture has survived over time, however, it often remains the easiest form, among those previously mentioned, for contemporary scholars to continually access and research (Dodd, 1967). In 1920 an explosion of institutional research and

interest emerged in the realm of Hawaiian archaeological studies following the establishment of anthropology as a legitimate academic field in the early 20th century. The Bernice P. Bishop Museum, where I completed an anthropology internship in September 2010, was founded in 1889 and quickly became the leading institution on Hawaiian archaeology (Kirch, 1985).

Studies of Hawaiian artifacts have usually been framed in the category of material culture and have emphasized the pragmatic function of objects and the clues they can offer about the ways people may have lived long ago (Kirch, 1985). Consequently, writings on the aesthetics and art of Hawaii are less common due to the fact that many anthropologists have an uneasy relationship with art discourse, and art historians have not covered this area to a great extent. Some of the art that has been preserved from Hawaii's ancient sites includes temples or shrines, sacred stones, and petroglyphs or rock art drawings. These artifacts have much in common with those found in other Polynesian societies, which demonstrates connections such as immigration and possibly regular travel amongst islands separated by vast oceans (Egan & Burley, 2009).

More recent history (17th, 18th and 19th centuries) has left us with personal adornments, musical instruments and a great number of ritual and functional objects and tools that occupy a pragmatic aesthetic space because they serve religious as well as practical functions in the world (Buck, 1964). Tools and their production processes underwent drastic changes upon the introduction of modern Western manufacturing methods. Hawaiians adopted metalworking, for example, in place of many traditional processes for making weapons and tools. Consequently, many of the old methods and tools suddenly ceased production (Kaepler, 1979). Many functional Hawaiian objects fit into multiple categories, including decorative arts, material culture, sacred religious practices, and art history, though the last category is rarely the lens through which these objects have traditionally been viewed. The legacy of "Primitivism" in

museums is alive and well in the classifications that are still used today to organize and house many art collections. Hawaiian and Polynesian art is often displayed and written about along with art from Australia and Papua New Guinea under the broad banner of Oceania despite vast cultural, aesthetic and environmental differences (Dodd, 1967).

Hawaiians may be best known for the amazingly colorful and sumptuous looking feather covered helmets, capes, leis, and kahili (large, elaborate fans or fly whisks) that adorned the persons and homes of Hawaiian royalty as well as some high ranking political and religious officials. They also produced large sculptural images of gods made from a basket weave armature and covered with feathers and shells to produce a sculptural bust (Hooper, 2006). The aesthetics of extremely fine feather work became a distinctly Hawaiian art form due to the amazing diversity of bird species that allowed for a more brilliant variety of colors in Hawaiian works compared to those found in other Polynesian societies. “Most were made from the very small tuft feathers of a few species of forest birds that produced a beautiful, even velvet texture” (Thomas, 1995). The colors indicated levels of chiefly standing and rank and the types of feathers used were also associated with certain Gods and were signs of the chiefly connection to divinity (Thomas, 1995).

While there are similarities in shape and style to feathered helmets and capes of other Polynesian societies, Hawaiians innovated and excelled based on the technical materials available to them (Kaepler, 1979). Feather working was considered a very prestigious artistic medium, and it involved many people of different social standings to complete one feathered cape. Commoners gathered the feathers and fibers (some species were selectively trapped, plucked and released rather than killed for their feathers), but only men of chiefly status were allowed to attach them to the cape, and the only way a chief could find access to the necessary

materials and workers was with the support of several kahuna—priests and highly skilled artists or craftspeople (Thomas, 1995; Kaeppler, 1979). Thomas (1995) explains how the structure of Hawaiian society underlies the production and the resulting aesthetic brilliance of Hawaiian feather art:

The early capes embody a quantity of labor that is simply extraordinary, not merely in Pacific terms, but in any frame of comparison. ... Larger capes that consisted mostly of tiny yellow feathers might contain up to half a million, extracted from between eighty thousand and ninety thousand birds... Nothing like these cloaks could have been produced in any other Oceanic society, because nowhere else did chiefs have the power to enforce such onerous demands upon their subjects. (p. 164)

The Hawaiian aesthetic style was also differentiated from other Polynesian styles in some functional objects such as bowls and furniture. The use of human figures as basic support forms appears in various fine objects, such as game boards, food bowls and spear rests, that would have belonged to people of very high social standing (Hooper, 2006). The reasons Hawaiians had for creating everyday objects, as opposed to ritual ones, out of exquisitely realized and stylized human forms is not definitively known, but it may be a metaphor for victory designed to flatter or empower the owner. The images of human figures carved as supports to a food bowl may depict vanquished enemies, for example, and the task of serving food “desecrated the conquered and elevated the conqueror” (Kaeppler, 1979, p. 84).

In the 20th and 21st centuries, contemporary Hawaiian art has emerged with a curatorial attempt to balance promoting regional interests with international perspectives in galleries and museums. A general backlash to regionalism in the art world has prevailed in recent decades, but Hawaii never really experienced the first wave of regionalism of the early to mid 20th century that spread in certain areas of the United States. Dialogue with the outside art world was missing in some ways in Hawaii for a long time. Because Hawaii was really defined by kitsch to outsiders until very recently (O’Connor, 2006), it makes a certain sense to now promote

Hawaiian artists from a regional perspective, especially as an organizing principle for curators who are interested in exploring space or place specific Pacific Island themes. Many exhibitions of contemporary Hawaiian art have also taken place outside of Hawaii in recent decades.

Various exhibitions have been organized in galleries and museums in New Zealand, Australia, Washington, DC, San Diego, CA, the United Kingdom, New York, and Paris, just to name a few (Imada, 2008; Myers, 2005; Crossings '89 France-Hawaii, 1989), while Hawaiian art institutions have hosted international exhibitions to foster global dialogue (University of Hawai'i Art Gallery, 2004). Hawaii is an ideal place to examine the intersection between internationalism and regionalism because of its prime location as an intersection of many cultures and travelers/immigrants from other places. The catalog for the Contemporary Museum's 1996 exhibition, *Artists/Hawaii*, includes painting, sculpture, photography and hybrid forms. In the Contemporary Museum's catalog for their exhibition of contemporary Hawaiian artists, titled *Artists/Hawaii* (Clarke & Dods, 1996), James Jensen spoke of the common ground to be found among native and non-native artists alike:

If there is anything that unites contemporary artists of Hawaii, it perhaps has as much to do with a geographic consideration as an aesthetic one. Living and working on a group of islands surrounded in all directions by vast stretches of water, the natural perspective is of limitless horizons. (p. vi)

[Since the time I conducted my research, the Contemporary Museum became a part of the Academy of Arts Honolulu in May 2011, and the Academy of Arts Honolulu, to which I refer multiple times in this paper, was subsequently re-branded as the Honolulu Museum of Art in March 2012. The Contemporary Artists of Hawaii exhibition of 2011 at the Honolulu Museum of Art (nee Honolulu Academy of Arts) included art works by both of my interview subjects: Meg and Nero. This was, in fact, where I first encountered Meg's work (Honolulu Museum of Art, 2011).]

For an even more recent perspective on the intersection of Hawaiian art and culture, take the Hawaiian Pavilion at the Academy of Arts, Honolulu, which is a fairly recent addition to the museum, having only opened in 2001. The Hawaiian galleries display an array of objects from feathered capes and helmets to post-colonial quilts and paintings by European settlers. The Hawaiian themed wing of the institution was conceived in response to criticisms that the museum is elitist and serves a very small segment of the local population. Thus the effort to display Hawaii-themed art as well as to emphasize inclusion of the work of contemporary native Hawaiian artists in the collection and in the exhibitions was a conscious gesture toward welcoming an excluded public (Kelly, 2001).

Perhaps a complement to the Academy of Arts Honolulu/Honolulu Museum of Art's rather recent attempt to situate traditional Hawaiian creations within a context of fine art, the Bernice P. Bishop Museum has established an annual exhibition dedicated specifically to native artists of Hawaii. The Bishop Museum, whose holdings and exhibitions consist primarily of natural history and anthropological collections, offers special attention and inclusion in their exhibition to artists who engage with traditional processes and are active in perpetuating traditional Hawaiian techniques or engage with themes of Hawaiian identity in some way. Maoli Arts Month at the Bishop began in 2006, and the festivities include a coordinated series of art exhibitions in galleries and public spaces, community events, film screenings, celebrations, performances, and an awards ceremony. *Maoli* literally means "man," and the phrase *kanaka maoli* means "native man." During my internship at the Bishop Museum I located back catalogs from past MAMo: Maoli Arts Months for the years 2008, 2009, and 2011. The most recent 2011 exhibition had just closed when I arrived, so I did not have the chance to view the exhibition in person. But the Bishop Museum's 2008 MAMo artist guide/catalog describes the event as:

... A broad community-based effort to celebrate the depth, breadth, and diversity of the native Hawaiian arts community, to create economic opportunities for native Hawaiian artists and cultural practitioners by increasing their presence in galleries, and to educate locals and visitors about native Hawaiian art. (Bishop Museum, 2008)

Just as geographic and environmental sense of place influences art everywhere, Hawaiian art is also permanently tied to culture, history, power, tradition, pride and change. And the ability of place, cultures, people and stories to adapt and change has, indeed, become a reoccurring theme of this project.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

For this study I use the theory of phenomenology as the lens through which I approach my research. Phenomenology is a philosophy or discipline through which consciousness is understood through the “intentionality” of an individual’s experience (the directedness of an experience towards some object, its content, or its meanings) (Smith, 2008). The phenomenological framework functions as a tool for structuring and organizing the first-person investigation of certain questions as they occur within a confined set of circumstances (or phenomena). The phenomena under investigation in this study are the personal narratives of specified Hawaiian artists. An individual’s lived experience can be communicated through rich description from a first-person point of view. Therefore phenomenology makes an appropriate theoretical match for the qualitative methods that I have used in organizing my research processes, and to report my observations and findings.

I only include this explanation of phenomenology theory as a discussion of how the discipline serves the interests for this particular study, and not as an in-depth discussion of phenomenology for its own sake. I recognize there is a historical-philosophical debate surrounding the definitions, ideas and structures of phenomenology that continues to this day among metaphysics scholars. Indeed, I have at times felt like Alice falling down the rabbit hole as I realized that every minute point had been the subject of seemingly endless scholarly or literary debate. But, I have come to hold certain understandings in my own mind with regard to phenomenology, and I have chosen the operational definitions that best serve the purposes of my research methods. I believe that because my research is reported from my own point of view, it is best to choose a first person, experience-oriented theory to order and communicate my findings. I also include a few caveats to my use of phenomenology as a theoretical framework.

Edmund Husserl is considered the founding theorist and writer on phenomenology, and

“bracketing” is a key principle of his conception of the theory:

We are to practice phenomenology, Husserl proposed, by ‘bracketing’ the question of the existence of the natural world around us. We thereby turn our attention, in reflection, to the structure of our own conscious experience. Our first key result is the observation that each act of consciousness is a consciousness of something, that is, intentional, or directed toward something. (Smith, 2008)

Through phenomenology Husserl believed we could understand the world by means of transcendental consciousness, wherein the objective world that we perceive through the lens of our own ego can be understood by others to have agreed-upon qualities. This unified, or continuously self-unifying consciousness settles itself upon an object in time so that our experience of the object begins to resemble a collective consciousness (Husserl, 1960, 1973).

Sartre questioned whether intentionality of experience leads us to apprehend objects as they exist outside of our own consciousness and whether a transcendental consciousness or experience of objects was possible or even a useful construct for human beings as a means of understanding the world (Sartre, 1957).

I do not believe it is possible to separate experience from context and memory, therefore I perform a modified version of Husserl’s “bracketing.” I also do not believe it is possible to conceive an experience as separate from our understanding of existence including theories of mind such as ontology and ethics. Husserl (1973) acknowledged the conflict inherent to perception, recognizing that perception is a complex process of the senses in some of his later writing, though he did not explicitly acknowledge how these limitations might necessarily affect the temporal experience of intentionality towards a given object:

...in perception, in the sphere of the living present, there is conflict, the sudden change of one perception into a second which is in a conflict of interpretation with it, ... and this is also true of every past perception which has emerged. Conflict occurs in sensibility itself (therefore, prior to all activity). (p. 163)

Merleau-Ponty (1964) was also aware of the contradictions at work within phenomenology and attempted to clarify some of the issues he found within Husserl's writings:

But reflection is not all the noting of a fact. It is, rather, an attempt to understand. It is not the passive attitude of a subject who watches himself live but rather the active effort of a subject who grasps the meaning of his experience. Husserl... granted a greater certitude, in certain respects, to external perception than to internal observation. (p. 64)

Though it may not be possible to approach an experience without prejudices or with a completely open mind that shuns interpretations, making a genuine attempt to do so is the key. The attempt itself is what indicates the self-awareness inherent in one's conscious intentionality towards an object within the context of a phenomenological life world. Knowing that you can't be objective but still trying to put context and pre-judgments aside through mental compartmentalization is just the kind of imaginative visualization and insertion of self into an unknowable reality that constitutes experience as a performative act. This performance of experience as intentionality is the truly useful thing that phenomenology helps to define, and that seems to have much in common with empathy. Empathy is the means through which Husserl believed experience could transcend the isolated nature of the personal and become a kind of shared truth (Husserl, 1960, 1973).

Phenomenology assumes that an individual has familiarity with the experiences being observed and described. It is the type of experience and how we can ascribe typology and characteristics to a given experience that is the true focus of phenomenology, rather than the more ephemeral or fleeting nature of experience (Smith, 2008). These typologies can be of use to broader applications and communication by translating the strictly internal, through the power of description, into an external manifestation so that others might recognize and understand our experiences by making connections to experiences of their own.

Though Sartre (1957) argued that our own personal experiences cannot ever truly be

shared or accessed in the transcendental sense that Husserl intended, through phenomenological processes they can be made accessible in some form that bears reasonable resemblance to the understandings of other human beings external to those of the experienced person in question. An underlying phenomenological framework will help to interpret and translate my research experience into a form that can be understood through empathy and used by other professionals in ways that might inform, corroborate or contradict their own experiences. My use of phenomenology also helped me to compartmentalize the different stages of my research procedure including interview and transcription, and to reserve my judgments for the analysis phase. This is an important part of the “bracketing” process, and it allowed me to identify themes and similarities as they emerged among the interviews that I examined and find narrative points of comparison.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

I used qualitative methods to construct my research framework. My primary method of research is narrative inquiry through interviews supported by historical research and content analysis. Historical research seeks to examine existing documents and articles of record, both primary and secondary sources, for new insights or interpretations. Histories can be re-framed, re-contextualized, or reexamined when new information is discovered or when familiar information is presented in a novel way that enhances our understanding. The steps involved in historical research usually include the following: define the problem, locate sources that address the problem, summarize and evaluate the information, and present and interpret the information (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). I have also attempted to use content analysis methods to contextualize the artists' works by studying museum information, the artists' websites, critical writings about the artists' works, media coverage of exhibitions or other materials to explore the underlying meanings that have been presented and to assess whether certain interpretations are being favored over others (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009).

I report my findings through rich description in the style of narrative inquiry. My primary data collection methods are interviews with the two artists themselves, my own observations and aesthetic interpretations and content analysis of articles, museum information or other materials that offer interpretations of the artists' works. I describe the nature of these selected Hawaiian artists' experiences through the first person narratives of those whom I interview, as well as my own perspective of hearing their stories, thus creating a multi-layered, narrative structure that privileges multiple perspectives (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). I acknowledge that I cannot tell the stories of others from my own perspective, so I include their

experiences at length in their own words, though my own reactions and judgments are also revealed. Multiple voices are privileged this way, and it allows for several sides of a story to emerge in my findings, should contradictions or subtle differences present themselves. I recount the personal stories of the artists, mostly through their own words, including their thoughts on artistic practice, Hawaiian identity, authenticity, history and contemporary Hawaiian social challenges.

Phenomenology theory and qualitative research methods generally function well together and support my writing style. I frequently use rich description from the first person point of view to communicate my observations and interpret my findings. My intention is for the reader to see my hand in crafting the study and my bias in reporting; therefore readers can judge for themselves what is of most or least value from the study, according to their own purposes and views. I have chosen my methods and theoretical framework carefully to reflect and highlight the subjective and specific nature of this research, though I do intend it to be of broadly applicable use through naturalistic generalization. I hope this research can be used by a range of art education and museum professionals on a basis of common experience (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Sample of Participants

The artists were purposively chosen based on the following criteria: the artists' works must have been shown in a Hawaiian art museum, gallery or other cultural institution at some point or their artwork must be represented in at least one Hawaiian art museum collection, and the artists' works must employ or deal with traditional methods, materials or subject matter (though their work may also address historic and contemporary Hawaiian issues). I hoped to

have at least three and no more than four participants to keep the sample pool to a manageable size and to favor quality and depth of interviews over quantity, although I was ultimately only able to secure two participants. Convenience sampling also figured into the selection process. All participating artists needed to reside on the island of Oahu, as I could not afford traveling to any other islands to conduct interviews.

Out of respect for my participants' privacy, I replaced any mention of their first or last names in the text of the study with assigned pseudonyms (Meg and Nero). In the reference section of the study, the correct first initial of each participant's surname follows the respective pseudonym. These references refer to information gathered from the artists' professional websites and public information they themselves have published online, as well as the personal interviews I conducted. This reference information includes links to the sites where I retrieved various pieces of corroborating information. Some of that reference information does contain the subjects' first and last names in the URL portion. This is necessary as I have no other way to cite these sources, and it does not undermine my goal with respect to using pseudonyms to refer to these subjects within the text of the study. The pseudonyms keep this study from appearing when third parties search for information regarding the two artists in question. I have to leave certain parts of the references intact, however, in order to sufficiently support my observations with proper citations.

Instruments for Collecting Data

Instrumentation included interviews and observations. I used the forms presented in *Folklife and Fieldwork: A Layman's Introduction to Field Techniques* as a starting point for organizing and documenting my interviews (Bartis, 2002). Interviews were in-depth, semi-

structured and phenomenology based (Seidman, 1998). I began with several pre-crafted, open-ended questions that led to basic information capture as well as unplanned conversational directions. My goal was to describe the experiences of the artists in their own words because I believe this information illuminates the larger context in which their works are produced. The themes that emerge are not exclusively pre-determined, but rather the result of data analysis and the search for commonalities and divergences found within the individual narratives under examination.

Validity

My main concerns for validity stem from the inherent difficulty of reporting the experiences of others through the lens of my own interpretation. I plan to strengthen the credibility of my findings through the use of structural corroboration (triangulation) among multiple sources of information (including interviews, field notes, content analysis, articles and other published sources such as archived documents and artist statements) to create a collection of evidence that establishes discernable patterns or themes and supports the conclusions I draw about the phenomena I studied (Eisner, 1998). Establishing credibility through the collaborative interview process is especially important in phenomenological research, and I believe it also speaks to Husserl's concept of intersubjectivity, wherein several people may have a simultaneously occurring experience of the same object (Eisner, 1998; Husserl, 1973). Phenomenology also works well as a framework that enables me to acknowledge and address my "outsider" status. This common trait that I share with the two artists I interviewed is an important theme in my research. I recognized these issues by continuously writing reflective journal entries from my own point of view as the events of the project unfolded.

Data Analysis

Data analysis consisted of transcription and analysis of interviews and written observations combined with content analysis. I began with one artist, collected my data, and then interviewed the second artist. I later performed the transcription and individual analysis of each data set. I repeated this process for each of the artists with an open mind to similarities and differences as they arose during the transcription and analysis portion of the process. I then compared my findings for each participant and synthesized some theories of differences and commonalities for each participant, looking to see if certain themes or categories emerged repeatedly. I tried not to pre-figure my foci very much before beginning the transcription and coding process to minimize the risk of forcing themes to appear that may not actually have been that robust. I collected these findings and interpreted them through a first person, narrative framework. I report my findings with asides and long quotes given directly from the subjects as necessary to be fully representative and illustrative. I also wove data from my own experiences based on journal entries into the findings section where appropriate.

More specifically, during the data collection stage I saw themes, topics and questions emerge as I developed conversational relationships with my participants. But I intentionally kept the same situational investigational framework in place with each artist as I conducted the correspondence and interview processes. I began with historical research and content analysis, and then moved on to the interview and interpretation phases. Phenomenology stresses the intentionality of experience as something that is becoming or occurring in the moment. As a researcher, this required my earnest intention to reserve (or “bracket”) my own judgments during the interview phase, and postpone making extraneous connections to my own prior knowledge or opinions until the data analysis phase (Smith, 2008). In some ways this process resembles the

suspension of disbelief that we engage in as audience members viewing a play, wherein we accept the information as it is given and do not contradict the world that is presented to us by burdening our experience with outside information from our own knowledge. As I have outlined in the phenomenology section of this proposal, the purposes of this magical thinking are constructive with respect to my chosen theory and research methods. Also my data collection process must be responsive and adaptable because I came to my participants without significant familiarity with their backgrounds, and as I learned more about their art practices and beliefs, new questions naturally emerged. This situation demanded that I, as the researcher, attempt to communicate my understanding of their experiences to the best of my ability through the tool of rich narrative description.

Limitations

This qualitative research project, by nature, concerns itself with the specific rather than the universal. Specificity can be a strength due to the level of nuance and detail one can achieve in reporting case study findings. Specificity allows researchers and readers to gain deep insight and knowledge through empathy with the experiences of others. The intrinsic value of experience must be considered because we can learn much from the experiences of those who are in similar positions or who are trying to accomplish things similar to our own endeavors. I would also like to point out that this research project does not qualify as ethnography, though some of the methods involved are similar to ethnographic research methods. There are significant differences that distinguish the generally qualitative research methods I utilize from ethnographic methods, especially in terms of the length of time I spent with my subjects.

The qualitative methodology of the research project involved purposive, non-probability methods of data collection. Inferential statistical analysis would not be compatible with the theoretical principles that frame the investigation nor the research methodologies that are applied. I will therefore not attempt to make formal inferences to a larger population based on my conclusions, as this type of inference requires a different kind of research design. But the highly descriptive narrative in which I present my research findings is applicable to generalization on a more intimate scale within the field of museums and art education. In qualitative studies, such as this one, naturalistic generalizations are more likely to be made by readers who are interested practitioners working in similar subject areas. That is not to say that the findings of this thesis will only apply to the specific phenomena under investigation. Those reading the finished report may judge whether the findings are applicable to their particular situations and determine for themselves the manner in which they may choose to apply the findings.

The fact that I was not able to recruit any artists who readily identify themselves as Hawaiian was a major limitation to this study, and this significantly changed the focus of the project and directed my findings in a more specific direction. But when undertaking a qualitative study of this nature, flexibility is always a concern because one must yield a great degree of control in order to move forward. One can only exercise one's own objectives as far as the cooperation of your participants will allow. The reality is that many people in Hawaiian culture are very wary of outsiders, and many artists (to my great surprise) are resistant to talking about their work. I tried but failed to obtain interviews with artists who did identify themselves as "insiders" in the sense that they stated their affiliation with native Hawaiian ethnicity and subject matter in their biographical materials. Ultimately, I am happy with the findings I have produced

and the learning that resulted from my data despite the lack of resemblance to some early versions of my plan for this project.

FINDINGS

Pau Hana

My findings describe the events, as I perceived them, I am the first person narrator of this story. I have organized my writing thematically rather than using a strictly linear structure. I allow you, the reader, to make your own interpretations of my accounts. In the interest of narrative inquiry research and phenomenological theory, I save my own learning and conclusions until we come to the end.

I didn't have a very heavy workload on my first day at the Bishop Museum. One of the senior staff members, a well-loved and fairly renowned member of the anthropology department, would soon retire. So, at the suggestion of our supervisor, I spent the morning with some fellow interns decorating the gazebo in the middle of campus with crepe paper and balloons for the send off party. The party stretched out over almost an entire workday, and it was a very fitting introduction to Hawaiian culture for me. Plus the delicious potluck lunch the museum staff put together allowed me to try all kinds of foods that I would really come to appreciate over the next six weeks, including lots of homemade poke, mochi, and musubi (just thinking about it now makes me hungry).

I found out that parties are extremely frequent in Hawaii. It is very hard to avoid them, really. Parties on the beach, house parties, community parties, park parties, workplace parties, softball team parties, family parties, birthday parties, parties on the side of the road... I've never been to so many parties in such a short period of time in my life. This first party at the Bishop, where I encountered a remarkably different professional atmosphere compared to any other museum in which I had previously worked, was the beginning of a series of huge, paradigm-shifting realizations for me. I was not expecting to encounter any really abrupt culture shock in

Hawaii—it's not technically a foreign country after all. But my normal mode of operating in the museum education field was really called into question by this experience. I was used to emulating the harried, thinly spread, and self-sacrificing professional examples I have seen. I had resigned myself to the notion that it's just the way things are in the museum world. I have now seen there is, indeed, another way.

During my first two weeks at the Bishop I was organizing and inventorying archeological artifacts in the anthropology lab. I had the opportunity to handle and care for a number of fascinating objects including fish hooks, shell picks made from bird bones, carved rocks, dog tooth pendants, shark tooth pendants, altered shells, and adzes. I am sure several of the objects I handled will be put on display as part of the museum's open storage initiative. I hope to recognize some of the artifacts from inside their cases and glass covered drawers when I'm finally able to return to Hawaii someday. The majority of my time at the Bishop, however, was spent in the library/archives. When I first arrived in the library to find Chris, my supervisor, I had to descend a heavy, iron spiral staircase to get to him. The stairs were beautiful and strangely out of place since the rest of the reference area looked like it was part of a decommissioned submarine. Making the trip to Chris's office always made me feel like I had wandered into a Jules Verne novel. For the remainder of my internship I organized and inventoried the contents of boxes from the archives that held archeological records and materials. I worked on records dated from about the mid 1960s to the late 1970s. Eventually this information will be available online for research purposes.

In between long stretches of sitting alone in the musty archives poring over field journals and archaeological site maps, I really enjoyed getting to know Chris. He surfs with his little boy, and from what I gathered it's really quite a life they have! It quickly became clear to me that for

the percentage of people who do surf, and I mean people from all walks of life from lawyers to small business owners and museum employees, when it's a good day out there, work will wait. People tend to come in a little later when a morning swell comes in. As a surfer Chris was very sympathetic when I had to miss work one day because I had a seriously painful run in with a sea urchin at Waikiki during an early morning surf session—I was not able to walk the five blocks from my bus stop to the museum.

I would accompany Chris to the archives at least once, sometimes twice a day to trade my inventoried boxes for un-inventoried ones. When we made these trips together I would help him empty the four industrial size dehumidifiers placed inside the storage area to keep the records from rotting away. This started to seem like a Sisyphean task to me, because it has to be done several times a day and it really seems to do almost nothing in terms of humidity reduction—it's the proverbial drop in the bucket. The air is basically full of water in Hawaii, and it would take an enormously expensive, specially designed storage environment to counteract that fact. The records I dealt with were separated by field site or project number and stored in file boxes. These file boxes were placed in a larger box and wrapped in a double layer of heavy black plastic bags, all in an attempt to postpone inevitable atmospheric destruction.

On our walks to and from the storage building, Chris and I would have lovely chats every day. He taught me what I believe to be the most beautiful phrase in the Hawaiian language. 'Pau hana' means done with work or after work. Seeing people live this concept has changed what I am looking for in my career and what my expectations are for myself and for my work life in the future. I think for the better.

The Fabulists

Hawaii has a strong traditional culture based on storytelling (Wichman, 2003).

Sometimes this trait can be fanciful in nature and sometimes we are all prone to exaggeration when we tell our stories. I contacted Nero after encountering his work at the Academy of Arts Honolulu, but I had also done some research on his work prior to coming to Hawaii as part of preparing my thesis proposal. He agreed to meet for an interview and his suggestion of where we should meet was interesting to me. I hate shopping malls as a general rule and Ala Mo'ana is as big and awful as any Texas sized galleria, but the restaurant he chose for our meeting was a nice hibachi grill and sushi place. The food was excellent, and although the clanging ambient noise from the table chefs would later frustrate my transcription project, we had a very lovely meeting.

All of our email correspondence had been professional in tone, maybe even a little formal, although very warm. Nero had jaw-length black hair streaked with silver. He looked sartorially relaxed but professional in stylish eyeglasses and a jacket that I believe had elbow patches. The overall impression he gave was that of a fairly hip literature professor (I would later find out he was formerly an art professor and taught literature and business as well). His academic background includes Columbia University's New School for Social Research and he was also a research fellow at a socially progressive NGO (Nero, 2011f, 2011g, 2012). He turned out to be very charming and intellectually disarming. He also had a slightly patrician bearing, hence the pseudonym I chose for him.

I can contact Nero by email only. He has no phone. He also technically has no home mailing address that I know of. He lives somewhere on private land that he does not own in Hau'ula, HI. Squatting is an ugly word, but it may be the most apt description of his living

situation. This is a person who has experienced success in the international art market, has had many solo exhibitions at galleries and museums throughout the world, and who won significant national art prizes in China in the 1990s. He holds degrees in literature and education and he chooses this lifestyle because it is simple and he has no need to earn additional income other than the funds he acquires from selling his art pieces, mainly to a handful of loyal patrons (Nero, 2011f). His description of his living situation was certainly mysterious:

No. My place is illegal. I'll come to a more legal place [in response to my offer to meet at his studio]. When it rains, it pours, it floods. There's mud on the ground. It's kind of a challenge. Fortunately it hasn't been raining lately... It is illegal... criminal trespass. (Nero, 2011f)

In any other case I would be inclined to skepticism, but in Hawaii the type of situation he described is surprisingly not all that unusual. I would find out more and more that exceptions to the rules are the norm here in many, many ways. I choose to give everyone I talk with the benefit of the doubt anyway, it's in my nature to do so, and life is just more interesting that way. If I happen to notice any inconsistencies, I usually choose to ignore them. Maybe it's naïve, but it doesn't bother me.

A few weeks after I met Nero, I encountered a truly great storyteller while exploring the North Shore. My friends and I were probably not far from Nero's secret hideout on the day we met this impressive man, whom I refer to in my memory as Kahuna since I don't recall his name. My spouse Kevin arrived for a visit near the end of my time in Hawaii, and with our friends Holly and Heath, we spent the rest of our time together in pursuit of fun. During a couple of days impromptu camping on the North Shore, we surfed most of one afternoon at a break called Chun's (located along the Kamehameha Highway about halfway between Waimea Bay and Puaena Point). It was kind of a flat day so we spent the better part of it relaxing and talking with the people around us on the beach. We met a surf instructor there who turned out to be a world-

class raconteur. He was just on the far end of middle aged but he seemed much younger. He was very fit. He had a charming way of telling stories and he spoke in Hawaiian pidgin dialect. He was spending the day giving surf lessons, mostly to a very cute little girl of about 5 or 6, and they were quite adorable together.

During one of his beach breaks, Kahuna told us all about an older girl of 15 whom he had been coaching for a while. They began working together after he politely insisted the local guys at the break where they met give them some space so she could make a little progress.

Apparently they deferred because they all knew him well and respected him. He said the way she popped up was like no one he'd ever seen in his whole life. He knew she was special and he wanted to help her, but he had to be careful not to get in the way of her talent. She had recently returned home to Canada, but she would be back soon to prepare for the competition season. She originally convinced her parents that she needed to go to Hawaii because it was her destiny. For most of her life she had been having recurring dreams about surfing, though she had never tried it before. There was a teacher who figured prominently in these dreams, although she could never see his face. She set off on her journey alone and when she met our friend, she decided that he must have been the teacher she was meant to find all along.

“Mark my words, you will know her name,” he said. Well, I don't remember her name. I do, however, recall that HE did not remember his protégé's last name. It was a really great story, and I enjoyed hearing it, so it doesn't really matter to me if parts of it were embellished or fabricated. Narratives are kind of like mending a textile, sometimes the parts of it get patched up or “helped out” along the way.

Weaving with Multiple Narratives

I met up with Meg at her office on the University of Hawaii at Manoa campus where she holds the positions of associate professor, fibers program chair, and art and graduate program chair. We walked to a nearby coffee truck and bought some drinks, then went back to her office to chat. I had reviewed the content of her website prior to our meeting and was impressed by the physicality captured in several of the photographs of her performance art pieces. She is pretty with blonde hair and intensely blue eyes. She wears little if any makeup and her clothes are casual and studio ready. Her lean, tone figure radiates a quiet, poised kind of energy. She has a very calm and kind presence and we instantly made a connection over our first impressions of Hawaii.

I was initially drawn to learning more about her work and her story when I visited the Artists of Hawaii exhibition at the Academy of Arts Honolulu and viewed some of the non-traditional tapestry pieces from her Salvaged Net Series (Meg, 2012). Notions of sewing and mending with regard to textiles carry through much of Meg's work as a metaphor for the way we engage in acts of weaving, unraveling and mending our personal stories and narratives. We discussed the ways that a dominant narrative defines our ideas about place and home, and ultimately our identities as well. The null-curriculum of growing up in white suburbia led her to experience many contradictions to those dominant stories. She elaborated about her background to explain how these stories influence the questions she often explores in her art practice and in her choice of techniques and media:

When I grew up people made things all the time. And my dad had a shop in the basement and my mom had a sewing room. It was pretty gendered. You know, the girls are in the sewing room, the guys are in the shop. But [making] was very natural. And my godmother was a special person in my life. We would go and do these creative activities together. We'd always make all of our Christmas presents and it was this big secret. There was a lot of joy around creativity and making. And it sort of got pushed out in

school, I think, because if you could excel in other things you didn't do art. Which is sad. So it took a while to sort of get back to.

But also I think it was idyllic in some ways, and in other ways I grew up in suburbia where everybody was all the same supposedly. There was a lot of distrust that nobody talked about and there was a lot of confusion for me from my experience versus what appeared to be the reality. And so I think those questions sort of stuck with me, and wanting to understand the suffering, the denial, the ways people cope or don't cope in the world. And there is this sort of [idea of] one whole layer completely idyllic and another whole layer of a lot of sadness and not talking about that. So I think those questions have continued. And I think maybe I have always been interested in voicing the sides that don't get voiced as loudly. Suburbia is a very neutralizing space. Or homogenizing space. So the interest is pushing against that I guess.... And [a dominant narrative that is] often told so much that there's this sense that's there, but you don't even have access to it.

I think now there's a lot more access to different ways of being, thinking, where people live—the internet, you know... it's not like that long ago, but on some level where I grew up everybody was white, everybody was middle income. Everybody was straight, everybody was Protestant—it's like, of course they weren't! But in the reality of where I lived, that's sort of what we thought. And so if you weren't that, it was sort of confusing. Or if you felt like that didn't make sense to you or if you saw other things... I wondered why we locked the car when we drove downtown where the black people lived. There were these sort of questions that weren't answered. Why do we do that? I think that all those unspoken narratives really impacted me. (Meg, 2011)

Dominant versus alternative narrative was a theme that also surfaced in my conversations with Nero. We discussed the concept of Hawaii as a place and as a home. As self-described outsiders we recognized that we have different perspectives on the layered nature of Hawaiianness. We wondered about issues of authenticity and the multiple versions of historical “accuracy” that go into creating these grand narratives about Hawaii and the alternative narratives that necessarily go expressed less frequently. He elaborated on his own perspective:

I'm not Hawaiian. I don't really deal with Hawaiianness [in his art]. I think it's an interesting kind of concept, and I think a lot of people take it a lot more seriously than I do. And then you have to question, are they pandering to me or do they actually know what they're talking about? How far does their idea of Hawaiianness go? Thirty years, fifty years? When you're talking about anything to do with home, especially when it's used when politicians speak or when people are trying to sell you something or disarm you by using these terms like home, you have to be careful... because you're so nostalgic about different things, right, and they're feeding off this. I'm not trying to put a

value judgment on this, I'm just saying it's an interesting idea to see how it's used. We are all constructed of different types of social identities, right? It's just good to be aware of whether you're being manipulated because of this. So the idea of "Hawaiianess"—you know, it can work for an artist, a professional artist, it has some great branding possibilities on the international stage because it's, people have no idea what that is except it's pleasant.

This idea of Hawaii isn't actually as old as people think. I imagine if they thought about it, they would realize this only started back in the 1950s right after WWII, their idea of what is Hawaiian. It might go back a little further but it goes really to radio shows and the selling of Hawaii as a destination. Like I said, it starts with radio programs in the 1920s and 30s and after WWII and with Trader Vic's and the Tiki culture. He [Trader Vic] invented Hawaiianess. Tiki bars and stuff. All these GIs had this nostalgia for Hawaii because they had R&R here, and then went back home to Oklahoma or whatever and they wanted a little piece of that. Also there were TV shows in the 50s, Elvis singing in Hawaii. Hawaii was a really a big deal in the 50s. And a lot of that is still with us. On the other hand it makes things pleasant, but it masks a lot of other different types of realities. Maybe people are very happy to live within that reality, but sometimes it is a good idea to step back and look at this and say, there are other ways of looking at things... And many artists here in Hawaii, I think they do tend to, some of them, tend to examine what's happening. (Nero, 2011f)

I was also interested in how older definitions of Hawaiianess might change the conversation, so I brought us around to a more distant historical subject. If we go all the way back to the unification of the Hawaiian kingdoms under Kamehameha I, we are still left with multiple narratives that we can explore to inform our definition of Hawaiian:

You gotta be careful how you frame this idea depending on whom you're talking to, about Kamehameha and all this. To some people he was like a god, to other people he was the Muammar Gaddafi of his time. There was a historian from the 1940s examining the stories about the conquest of Hawaii and the conquest of the island of Oahu. Apart from the romance of the great unifier, there stands this monument that nobody really goes to anymore. There was a warehouse I was illegally occupying that was right near Mauna Ala. It's near Waipahu, and there's a set of petroglyphs at the entrance of a valley. This basically signifies a graveyard, but most people don't know about this graveyard. The armies of Kamehameha obliterated the population of Oahu, anybody that mattered, by killing them. Some of them went over the Pali. You know that story, right? [He refers to the battle of April 1795 at the site of the present day Pali lookout above Nu'uuanu Valley in which a large number of opposition warriors from other Hawaiian kingdoms, possibly hundreds, were backed to the cliff's edge and driven over the Pali to their deaths by the army of Kamehameha I (Potter, Kasdon, & Rayson, 2003).] The other part of it was a line of skeletons were placed over the ridge beginning with those petroglyphs, that stretched for miles, the bodies of people who were killed. This is in the Bishop museum

archives. That's where I got it. There were a lot of the other royal families that were killed. And the rest of the population was enslaved. So that's another side of the story. (Nero, 2011f)

Among the archaeological records in the Bishop Museum archives, I found documentation of cultural sites that confirmed Nero's take on the existence of a graveyard dated to the unification period in the valley at Nu'u'anu, though I did not see the site myself. I did, however visit the Pali Lookout. I also found many comments in several different archaeologists' field journals from the mid 1970s indicating that community members had expressed displeasure with the disturbance of the sacred sites in this geographic area for archeological digs. Nero went on to discuss how stories in particular are relevant to Hawaiian concepts of identity, but in a broader sense some of these stories are not uniquely Hawaiian in tradition:

So narratives... my goodness. There's a ton of them out there. But the ones that make it to the top are the ones by people who are trying to promote a certain worldview... I've always been intrigued by creation stories. The one that's most heavily promoted in Hawaii is a chant by Queen Lili'uokalani. She was enslaved by the Americans and the soldiers that were working at the behest of the American businesses who ripped the Hawaiians off of their land and of their kingdom, and she tells her creation story. Now the creation story typically starts with this fish was created, this bug was created, this leaf was created... It's a long story. It's a chant basically... so this came up, and this came up, and at the end of the creation story is the Kamehameha line; the lineage: he was born, and then he was born, and then they were born, and so on. Whatever, right? That is the story of creation and it changes every time another King comes along. They change the ending part. These are creation stories that are constant. A lot of different Polynesian stories start this same way; I've heard the same thing with a different ending [to fit the name of the respective Polynesian lineage]. (Nero, 2011f)

Many of Nero's comments also touched on the reverse phenomenon by which Hawaiian cultural insiders were historically made into outsiders due to the racialization of ethnic Hawaiians through discriminatory colonial laws and customs. The legacy of these deep-rooted practices is still felt in contemporary Hawaiian society (Trask, 2008). Nero explained how a well-known Hawaiian chant and touchstone of Hawaiian identity has its roots in pre-Hawaiian traditions of Polynesian storytelling. If it is not uniquely Hawaiian does that make it more or less authentic,

and what are the implications for contemporary definitions of identity? Nero explained how claims to cultural authenticity are to him sometimes problematic:

What's fascinating to me are the different perspectives. A lot of Hawaiian feelings or ideas of Hawaiianness derive from this particular chant. The sadness, this nostalgia they have is for a kingdom that really only belonged to a small, few people. But then everybody else benefited because of a certain identity and an association with home. With mother and father. I'm fascinated by these kind of things because you start to realize that the world actually doesn't really make any sense. There are people that are very successful and what it is, is a great story. And you have a lot of people who pay tribute to it and align themselves along with those ways (Nero, 2011f).

As an outsider to Hawaiian culture, Meg was at first hesitant to participate in my study because she does not identify herself as a Hawaiian artist. Having only lived in Hawaii for about five years, she firmly identified herself as an outsider. I assured her that I was still interested in her perspectives because I feel that Hawaiian does not have a single definition. I believe it is a moving target, and that however many different people you ask to define it, that would be exactly the number of different definitions you would receive. Personally, maybe I'm not interested in finding one definition at all, I'm just curious about what different people say and trying to describe and share those perspectives. Meg had an interesting take on the questions my study raises:

I noticed that the Hawaiian part of it, when you said you wanted to talk to Hawaiian artists, my first reaction was: Oh, I'm not one of them. You know, like I can't say I'm one of them. And then I was like, well that's interesting that you're working on expanding that or questioning... But that's sort of radical here, in a way, I think. There are very strong positions about that here. So I think it's interesting even to just describe [what it means to be Hawaiian], actually. I think that's such a politically charged area. I think of myself as very informed by this place, particularly by the natural environment. I think my own beliefs on that are that we're such complex beings. I have no sense of where I came from before this. I have been to places that feel like home to me that I've never been to before. And for me personally, I think that's possible... I think that's very different from the way people think about ancestry or land for people who have lived here for very long periods of time.

Some of those people would include me in that [definition of Hawaiian] and some of them would not. There's sort of the definition of ancestry through bloodlines here that's

very strong. People who have the history of bloodlines here, who have a different understanding of Hawaiian. I don't think that personally, my locating myself within Hawaii is that important to me, but I feel I'm in that no man's land. Like I don't feel connection to my place of birth, so I've always felt like one of those islands I guess. I don't have that sense of bloodline tied to ancestry. It definitely plays itself out in different ways, in terms of some very practical things about land and rights and self-government, and those things are obviously not small things, they're really significant. And cultural identity and personal identity. (Meg, 2011)

Meg's choice of materials is very significant in many of her non-traditional tapestry pieces. *Triptych*, 2006, is woven from vintage fishing line and three different sections of geographic maps representing the continental U.S., several state maps, and a map of the Hawaiian Islands (Meg, 2006). The small scale (9 x 8 inches for each of the three squares of resulting "fabric") and the brilliant jewel like colors (variations of turquoise, blue, green, yellow) evoke associations with water and precious gemstones. The three sections of the piece represent different views of landmasses. The three panels (as depicted from left to right) include views of Oahu, Molokai, and Lanai woven from continental maps; a view of the continents of the globe woven from maps of the Hawaiian archipelago; and a self-portrait of the artist woven from road maps of places she has lived (Meg, 2006). Much of Meg's work is informed by the ecological, geographic and cultural significance of place, and in this piece in particular I see a reconfirmation or mediation on her status as an outsider, or a questioning of what the notion of home can mean. She elaborated for me about the story behind this piece, which was created while she was first living in Hawaii:

I was actually asked to be in an exhibition that was about island living very shortly after I got here. So I was like, huh... I don't know what I think about island living. And so that piece was trying to explore what it meant to come to Hawaii to me. So I was playing with this desire to be surrounded by water but also what it meant to come to a place that had all these different cultures here, that had its own culture. [What is] the difference between being on this little island versus this huge island—the continent is basically an island too, and the planet's an island, and then my own self as this island. So the triptych was three different pieces. The piece with the different pieces of islands of the Hawaiian archipelago was made out of maps from lots of different countries. The one that was sort

of a flattened out mapping of the continents, sort of the reverse, that one was made out of all the maps of the Hawaiian islands, and then there's the one that's like a figure of me and that one is created out of maps of all the places I've lived. So it's sort of playing with the idea of: What does it mean? What is island culture and are we all island culture of some kind? (Meg, 2011)

I was also curious about the pieces in Meg's Salvaged Net Series because some were made after she arrived in Hawaii. "The Salvaged Net Series is an ongoing body of large scale non-traditional tapestries [some of the pieces] are created ... from nets and ropes collected from the Pacific shorelines of Oahu" (Meg, 2012). With regard to the Oahu series, the tapestries have surprisingly vibrant colors (for being made from washed up materials collected on beaches) and a nicely limited color palette that brings to mind the relationships between oceans and landmasses. They include the use of bold color fields and some occasional striations of various thicknesses in earthy tones of red and brown against a background of greenish blue. But upon closer inspection one can see that each of the separate color masses is not solid, but flecked with subtle hints of other colors. I would later discover that Meg's color palette is curated for her in equal parts by fishing net manufacturers, the tide, and chance because she reclaims them when they wash up on beaches. The overall impression given by the tapestries is very painterly, and I felt a strong sense of rhythm when I first saw them at the Academy of Arts Honolulu. I was also very attracted to the texture of the pieces, which embody the intellectual contraries at play in Meg's works: the tapestries manage to look simultaneously rough/soft and loose/tight.

At this point, I was specifically interested in asking Meg about the pieces in the series that were made from nets collected on Oahu, and whether her choice for sourcing her materials might be related to contemporary Hawaiian issues, whether social, historical or environmental. Meg explained the story behind obtaining the nets and the painstaking process she goes through to produce these exquisite tapestries:

Those are really different. They're very similar to the other net ones, but they're very different, too. Those were made out of nets that I collected on the beach where I live. I live in Kailua and they were collected from Kalama beach or Kailua beach, and they're really quite different in terms of process because they're ocean nets. They're a lot about the unraveling actually. I collect those as nets and because they've been out at sea they're all tangled together. A lot of the blue is all these big ropes that wash up. I spend as much time with those pieces undoing, and spend a lot of time unraveling, before putting back together. So I think as a metaphor that's an important piece of knowledge. Of the undoing. I guess I'm always thinking of the undoing of narratives, of the way we have sort of layered things and then putting things back together. And being in Hawaii, it's such a complex place in terms of its current sociopolitical narratives. And so I think there's a lot of space to sort of undo how we think of this place before we have any hope of re-putting it back together in a way that might... I think there's a lot of embracing of difference here, but I think there's a lot hidden. There's a lot of discriminatory practice here too. That sometimes is hidden behind the embrace of multiculturalism.

There's a lot of obliterating here, and a lot of silencing. So, I think the undoing of the nets for me, is also giving me the space to sort of undo some of that, personally at least. But I also think the real focus on those pieces is water and the spaces that aren't so blatantly claimed as they are with land. So the primary part of what I'm doing with those pieces, when I start to bring those [net fibers] back together, is thinking of water or letting my hands start to explore the different moods of water. And then the colored areas in there are sort of referencing the land but really placing the water is central. So the color parts of those weavings—one is the outline of Kailua Bay and one is imagining the island from the side, if I were a seagull, imagining it from that perspective. But I think it's reversing that, those spaces of ownership and thinking about the water as this sort of shared space, whereas the land we're always trying to fragment, own, claim... and that sort of space of possibility. (Meg, 2011)

When researching Meg's work on her website, I noticed the catalog for *Tattered Cultures:*

Mended Histories, an exhibition she curated at the Academy Art Center in Honolulu as part of the Textile Society of America's 2008 International Symposium. The site describes it as "a curatorial project exploring contemporary fiber as a vehicle for articulating and 'mending' cultural narratives dismissed by dominant ideologies" (Meg, 2008b). I also noticed several artist statements from this exhibition mentioned the challenges of forming an ethnic identity in places of liminal space, where there is change and redefinition going on around you. I thought about how that is also strongly related to place in a geographic sense because the literal and the non-

literal begin to overlap in these sorts of spaces. Meg explained the project in more detail during our conversation:

I curated that exhibition for the Textile Society of America's Symposium that was held here [in Honolulu, 2008], and that organization is a wealth of historical knowledge about textiles and cultural knowledge. I was really interested in looking at contemporary artists who were interested in the living art of textiles and people who worked with textiles in such a way that they were commenting, adding, or altering knowledge that we carry. And particularly these stories of cultures that have become frayed, damaged or tattered in the narratives we tell about those cultures. Places where stories are left out, places where they're distorted, places where the information, the sort of general narrative is inaccurate. And interested in the ways that cloth can be tattered, torn, distorted, distressed, and starts to sort of fall apart. We have that same potential to take all those tatters, tears and mend them and hold them back together. And so I was particularly looking at artists whose work touched on marginalized peoples and the way in which their art practice was working to bring those stories back into relevance and significance.

... I will say that I've definitely lived multiple places... Arizona and North Carolina, places where there's this dominant culture, and there's the residual culture, and then there are these sort of syncretic areas, those overlays. So, I lived in Boone, NC and there's the Appalachian culture that still has its own sense of identity there, that's very marginalized. And having lived in Savannah, GA [where there are] very complicated politics of African American [culture] and the old south culture and how present day people in that area define themselves, both black and white people, was very complex. And Tucson, where the overlay of colonialism is still very evident and where as much as we like to celebrate the Mexican American heritage, there's a very complex economic political division and visibility division. I think I've lived in a lot of places where the presence of the layers of people before is there, but also there's very much a dominant culture that overrides that. I've been very interested in that, having [lived in] several places in the United States where that's very present. In Hawaii, of course it's very present because the overthrow of the monarchy is very recent. And it's not that that hasn't happened other places but it's so recent and fresh here. And it's so complex in how people talk about it or don't talk about it here. (Meg, 2011)

The Hawaiian monarchy was overthrown in 1893 by a small group of American businessmen, plantation owners and missionaries. Hawaii would become a U.S. territory just five years later. "Arguably the most pivotal moment in Hawaii's history, the loss of sovereignty and the ruling authority of Queen Lili'uokalani is still keenly felt by native Hawaiians more than 100 years later" (Gordon, 2006).

My conversation with Meg got me thinking about how there are so many different sides to every story, and multiple sides to the whole history or narrative of Hawaii or to any place. That is also the case for contemporary versions of current events, because so many people from so many different places have arrived at different times and added their own versions of the grand narrative to the mix. Meg's comments about how certain stories or different aspects of cultures get obliterated in spaces of change reminded me of an experience I had on the North Shore of Oahu. Change is a complicated and powerful force. In a lot of ways you either have to find a way to be flexible and adapt to new circumstances, or you will be crushed under the wave of change. It seems this has been the case for the multiple cultures represented in Hawaii and for the many cultures represented in the mainland U.S. as well. Sometimes that means the dominant narrative loses some nuance or some of the perspectives that make that conversation and that history more complete.

When we arrived at Chun's I could tell it was bigger than my first day out at Waikiki—these waves were at least twice the size of the ones I tried before. Heath said they were about 7 foot, and I didn't really know what that meant when I looked out. Suffice to say, my frame of reference was quite small and I didn't have enough sense to be concerned. I paddled out with Heath's sister, Holly. Heath had already charged outside the break and taken his spot in the lineup. Because it was fairly big, Heath and his dad suggested that Holly and I stay inside the break, and we did... for a while. Soon an officious Australian paddled past us several times on his way back to the line up and aggressively questioned Holly about me. "Does she know what she's doing? Cause this is not a good day to find out!" His comments made me angry and more determined to do what I wanted to do. I soon discovered his concern was warranted, even if he was a little rude.

He kept trying to get us to move further down the beach, and I was about to find out why. I stationed myself slightly inside the break away from the line up while Holly, a beginning surfer but far more experienced than me, hung out between my position and the line up behind us. After a few minutes of waiting, an absolutely massive wave began gathering size and speed behind me. I panicked but paddled anyway. I felt like my life depended on keeping pace with this wave. It picked me up and shot me forward—FAST! It was scary, but it felt pretty good.

So the first wave I caught under my own steam was a nice one but my failure to stand (I rode frozen, for what seemed like forever, on my hands and knees in a crouching position of fear) confirmed all the Australian's prior judgments about me. I paddled back in after that, and collapsed on the beach in a wizened state of adrenalin depletion. Before we left, my Australian buddy came by to check on me. He turned out to be an OK guy. He said, "Better on it than under it, though, eh?" Indeed.

Sometimes Artists and Outsiders are Seers

The act of traveling allows us to learn a lot about ourselves when we are placed in unfamiliar environments. I have found this experience to be very similar to the process of art making and the act of viewing art. The experience I have in a museum is very similar to the experience I have when I travel. It sometimes feels as though one must first go outward in order to really go inward. Both traveling and practicing an art allow us to see many things about ourselves that we were previously ignorant of. They also allow us to confront alternative ways of knowing or being. This is why the outsiders among us, and the artists, are often some of the keenest observers. A self-described nomad, Nero was born near the Cooke Islands and the

Marquesas in “terra nullius” (no man’s land or land not officially belonging to any country). He lived for many years in China until the massive 2008 earthquake in Sichuan destroyed his studio there, and he began to travel. As such he seems to have a citizen of the world quality about him. He says much of his work is influenced by his travels (Nero, 2011f).

I only became interested in art maybe 13 years ago. I was studying english [at Columbia University in New York]. Later I did my doctorate in education and law. And that’s why I ended up in China, because I was teaching there. I was teaching art, and I was teaching things I had no idea about, but they needed somebody. They needed the qualifications, and I fit. And it was a good life for a while because it paid me a lot of money... I’m not going to come to any kind of strict way of how it is that I became what it is that I am ... because that’s not the reality. I lived in China for twelve years. I was teaching business methodology, research methodology, art history, media and technology and intellectual property law. After I left China, I sort of drifted across the Pacific in a series of boats. I went across Polynesia and ended up down in New Zealand and went up looking for the place where I think I was born. The Marquesas... Atuona, where the artist Paul Gauguin got murdered... then I ended up in Hawaii. You asked me how I ended up in Hawaii. But the way I got here, I broke a lot of different immigration laws. And I did it without contacting anybody. I didn’t bother to get a visa [for travel]. So. It was an illegal trip.

[In reference to my question about whether he found the place where he was born] It doesn’t matter. Well, you know how it is... When you’re in a boat you have nothing to think about. Days and days when the wind isn’t blowing, you’re just sitting there looking up at the sky. And you think about things. You know. Then the wind picks up... You see the thing is my wife died years ago. And she suffered from MS and I spent a lot of time by myself, just walking around. And there was a bit of meditation involved... enough to pass the time. Also, it’s not a good idea to be too philosophical about it. What I was learning at that time was to see things as they are and the different ways that they are, so that got me onto the idea of being an artist (Nero, 2011f).

Many of the images in his photographic street series illustrate his nomadic nature and his travels. Nero explained his wanderings to me during our conversation, and I later began to see how he and Meg were similar in their view of themselves and their role as artists. My observation or interpretation, though he did not explicitly state this, is that Nero views an artist as one who is an observer of reality. And perhaps that is the artist’s primary role in contemporary society, to view reality and interpret it through an artist’s lens. I have noticed that being an outsider sometimes allows one to see multiple points of view, and also to pay more attention to the less popular

narratives. One sees things that might not attract the same level of attention from someone who is a cultural insider. One is able to notice things that someone else who is actually a part of the culture might tend to dismiss:

When you're a stranger in a strange place you often look for a certain kind of motif to give some kind of unity to your experience, it's just an easy way for me to have a framework for how I'm going to go to a new place. In Venice I'm always looking for things, and in Rome, I'll be looking for shrines, little streets and shrines. [I believe he is referring to the Catholic votive shrines that appear in various public places in Italy. I remember seeing them during my own travels]. I've been to Venice a few times for the biennale and so that's kind of a neat thing for me to find a new one [shrine]—one that I hadn't seen before. It just makes things more enjoyable. It gives me a little framework for enjoying a place. So I'll be going to Rome, because I'll be going to Venice anyway, to go to the biennale. It makes the place more comprehensible [if you have a framework]. Someone else might focus on the best restaurants, you know—the ten best restaurants, that's a good framework, right? Me, I use another method. As an artist, it's useful to work on themes. (Nero, 2011f)

Nero's website lists his various media as activism, conceptual, digital, installation, mixed media, painting, photography, sound, and video (Nero, 2011g). But the pieces that first attracted me to Nero's work when I began to research my thesis proposal were a set of paintings titled *The Death of Lono*. His website states that the series, “emulates the aesthetic style and storytelling of Pacific oral history tradition, [and refers to] the violent death of Captain James Cook... who ‘discovered’ the Hawaiian islands and was, at first, hailed by the native people as their returning god Lono” (Nero, 2011b, 2011c, 2011d).

This on-going series of paintings in acrylic includes at least three large-scale canvases of 3 by 5 feet (Nero, 2011a). All three contain mysterious, abstract imagery, and two of them contain a figural image. In *Death of Lono-Creation Stories*, the image of a young woman in traditional Hawaiian dress anchors the middle of the canvas while abstract shapes, bold, kinetic colors, and lines swirl around her (Nero, 2011b). In *Death of Lono-Crossings*, this time the figure is dressed in yellow feathers—a traditional symbol of Hawaiian royalty, and is barely

perceptible as if partially erased or faded beneath the rest of the images. The skeleton of a vague architectural structure is imposed on top of the entire composition (Nero, 2011c). In the third painting in the series, *Death of Lono-Mythologies*, the figure and the structure are removed, and all that remains are the swirling, abstract images, though these markings are more robust and developed in this painting than in the other two, as though now taking on a life of their own (Nero, 2011d). Also, the use of Fijian gold powder in the paint adds to the overall surreal or dreamlike quality of these paintings (according to Nero the only gold mine in the Pacific is located in Fiji). Nero says he mostly wants to investigate what happens when our old gods are no longer relevant (Nero, 2011a, 2011f).

There was another series of images titled *L'huître Chronicles* on Nero's website that I found very compelling (Nero, 2010-2011). These extremely large (5 by 6 feet), high-resolution, C-Type photographs draw on associations with fashion, travel or tourist art. They are labeled as photo composites, and they are digitally manipulated photographs of various landscape surroundings including a beach on Oahu, the Eiffel Tower in Paris, and The Bridge of Sighs in Venice. These photo scenes become the background to one repeated image: an Asian family in a traditional looking fishing boat. The placement of the image renders the backdrop into a stage for a performance that is transplanted into each of the photos. The boat and family, or maybe they are just a group of fishermen, are deposited on the Seine or in a Venetian canal in exactly the same pose in each repeated image (Nero, 2010-2011). These images are of course comical, sad, and a little sly, but they are also disconcerting in the way they implicate the viewer, perhaps for being complicit in the misfortunes of others. I don't really read French, but I can tell the individual titles of the photos are meant to be tongue in cheek: *Paris 2011 pêcheurs d'huîtres*

chinois dans la ville lumière, translates roughly as: *Paris 2011 fishing for oysters in the Chinese city of lights* (Nero, 2011e). The artist's website offers the following for context:

A family of oyster fishers from Ping Shan, China sail off to see the world after the centuries-old oyster beds of their clan were removed for a highway project (this part of the story really happened)... Photography can not only reveal and authenticate but it can also hide reality and provoke conflicting emotions through the insinuation of multiple, contradictory codes. This unsettles any straightforward reading. (Nero, 2010-2011)

It seems to me that a lot of Nero's work explores or investigates ideas of place in the geographic sense, but also in a less literal sense. I see a lot of questions, and most of them are not so much about what makes a place belong to a person, but more about what makes a person belong to a place. I detect a subtext of displacement working through both of his series I have mentioned here as examples (Nero, 2010-2011, 2011a). I think he clearly does not expect to find any definite answers, and maybe I do not either. One of the primary functions art serves for us is by acting as an alternative knowledge system. I find this to be a common thread in both Meg and Nero's approaches and their products. Meg opened up about her purposes in her art making with respect to accessing or unlocking different kinds of knowledge or alternative knowledge systems:

I guess I'm really interested in this notion of making as a form of contemplative action and the importance, particularly now, of contemplation as a means to access other means of knowing. I think I went into psychology because I was concerned about people, concerned about the world and my place in it. And I think psychology didn't answer that for me so I moved back to another kind of experience that I had growing up, and that was through the arts. For me that's been a much more fertile ground actually, like that onion idea, to peel away all these distractions to get back to a kind of knowledge that I think we all have. So I guess for me it is about art making, like my pieces [artworks] are remnants of a discovery process. And teaching is really important to me because to me art is about THAT not about the [object]. But the [object] is what allows us access into that world sometimes, too, though. I guess I'm very interested in art as discovery really.

I came into studio arts a little bit through the back door after doing my graduate career in psychology. So I think I am always really interested in those bridge points, those areas between areas, those touch points whether it's between textiles and performance or between art and psychology and I think now in my graduate career I was really interested in the intersection between art and ecology. And I really went to a graduate program where I could learn specifically about a place as well as about my art practice, so I'm

really interested in the way artists have an alternative paradigm for looking at a field of inquiry. So art piece studies or art practice can help us to sort of articulate some knowledge we already have but we aren't aware that we have. And how that can then be applied to other areas. (Meg, 2011)

Meg deals directly with knowledge systems in her art making processes. Defining the artist as one whose role is to see and interpret gives credence to the value of being an outsider with a different vantage point. Meg's process reminds me that the relationship between art production and knowledge production is very tightly knitted and that art is one of our best means of accessing alternative forms of knowledge. Because it's the art object or the process that allows us to access the conversation, either with another person or maybe with oneself, and the conversation leads you to deeper understanding.

I had a great conversation with my friend Cynthia at the Academy of Arts Honolulu when we viewed Meg's tapestries, and it stayed with me for a long time, thinking to myself and questioning about those meanings we discussed. The following can be found on Meg's website regarding the function of her Salvaged Net series, "The series explores the Oceanic concept of water as a means of connection, and the possibility of reclamation through re-embracing of 'old' technologies and thought systems considered to be useless and obsolete" (Meg, 2012). The idea of exploring thought systems that we may have previously tried to disregard, or pulling narrative threads that we have tried to bury or supplant with new stories is very interesting to me. Meg elaborated to me about how she involves alternative knowledge ways in her art making process:

I'm really interested in Eastern philosophy but also some of the knowledge from Tibetan Buddhism. It's like, at some point we'll get there. We'll get there again through theoretical physics and we'll understand what people have known for thousands of years. And I think that's really exciting, but that we're at a place where we miss so much because we only trust certain kinds of knowledge or certain kinds of technologies. Or something always has to be new or all about change. The notion that new is better. And it infiltrates the art world, still, even though I think we have sort of let go of the notion of uniqueness. I feel like I have more space to work against that here [in Hawaii]. (Meg, 2011)

During my totally separate conversations with each of them, both Meg and Nero brought up particle physics as a counterpoint of comparison to how they approach what they do in their work. This was completely unprovoked by me. It was a surprising, and in retrospect, a fitting similarity. Nero's ideas share many parallels with Meg's as he mused to me about the possibilities for knowledge and constructs of reality that are beyond our own familiarity or understanding:

How it is that we create realities? How it is that we explain things? One of the things in the news that has intrigued me lately is the discovery of faster than the speed of light neutrinos. There's a certain laboratory in Italy or Switzerland, they measured these particles that are traveling faster than the speed of light, and that may not seem like a very big deal except that our whole concept of what is, is based on a concept of relativity and that concept is based on the speed of light. And so if we have something going faster than the speed of light, it sort of throws away or allows or says that you have to revise a lot of your ideas about quantum mechanics. This is our latest and greatest theory... Because everyone believes this, because this is the latest science, it gets you thinking... Maybe there is more going on than you really planned for or imagined.

My idea really is that all these neutrinos are pixie dust, they're just mischievous little beings that are trying to upend our ideas of the world. ... in a sense you know that is how a lot of our gods were created... to explain the universe, to explain the world, to explain why it is that you didn't catch fish today. How it is that you could get fish the next day. Even now... It is related to the idea that if you get people to follow the rules or the beliefs of their tribe, you have an easier time getting things done for whatever purpose, good or bad. On the other hand, my speculations about these things, it's sort of like doing investigations without having any sort of appropriate methodology. (Nero, 2011f)

I was struck by the similarity in both Meg's and Nero's characterization of their processes—whether they involve traveling, mending, or making—as investigations. Nero says he carries out these investigations “without an appropriate methodology” but this may be exactly what makes it his viewpoint valuable—the fact that it is outside the realm of our normal systems of inquiry. A common thread to both of my conversations with my participants was our acknowledgement that there are different ways of knowing and understanding the world that often lie outside of the prescribed boundaries and methods that are sanctioned within our culture. Not to take anything

away from particle physics, but I do think it's important to pay some attention to these ways as well.

Different Kinds of Power

The influence of place on our personal trajectories and modes of operation can be very significant. Meg's description of how the physical properties of water have influenced her work and her art with respect to learning patience struck a chord with me. I had also been learning about flexibility as a mode of strength through my experience of surfing in Hawaii. I learned some of the same lessons from surfing that Meg talks about as part of her art practice, and I felt those lessons were very empowering. Her understanding of water and strength seemed to have a feminist sensibility that privileges traditionally feminine forms of strength (flexibility, gentleness, calmness, presence) over traditionally masculine versions like force. Meg explained the story behind her current feelings on island living to me:

I had no plan to come to Hawaii—the possibility opened up for me and I came. At the time I was really more and more horrified with what was going on in the U.S. with the militarism and the anger, and fear felt so much more a dominant force in American culture. I found my reaction to that was to become shut down. Like also afraid, tightened, more rigid. I've always been very attuned to the natural landscape in which I lived, and more and more I felt like I needed to learn how to be flexible because the world feels so unpredictable. It feels so radically unpredictable to me that safety feels not in borders and hoarding, it's not there, it's in flexibility. So for me it was about water. I felt really strongly that I wanted to learn by being with water. I've always loved being around water, but I felt like I need to be with A LOT of water because the essential quality of water is this amazing flexibility, resiliency and strength, all these different modes... the energetic quality of water, too. It's completely different to live surrounded by water... and the air. The [natural] elements here are so huge. And I knew the water would be significant, but when I first came it was the air, the clouds, and the movement in the sky. This place is about movement. Change. And a lot of change over small little geographic areas. I can go a mile and be in a completely different ecosystem. It's radically about change.

So ironically, or maybe it's not so ironic, what that has done with my work is allowed me the space to go into a much quieter less didactic space about my work, where I feel that I

can explore that territory—this is gonna sound weird—but it's less about thought and more about a different kind of knowledge, knowledge about how to exist in the present. That's less about language, less about discourse and more about trusting the inner knowledge that we all carry and wanting to facilitate that in myself and in other people. [Coming to Hawaii has] actually put me in a much more quiet space, and I still see that it's very important politically, like there's a lot of politics in my art for me, but it's taking a very different form. That gentleness and sensitivity and subtlety is power too. You know. That it's not all about... Force is power, but... the sea when it's rough is really powerful but it's also incredibly powerful when it's completely flat. There's just a really different energetics about that. So, it's shifted a lot. It's more my body, too. It's a quiet body, it's not like outward action body, but being grounded in my body. And my color sensibilities have completely changed because everything is COLOR here. I used to be all about greys, you know. And that's just not how it is here. (Meg, 2011)

My own experience of surfing involved learning the hard way that you cannot force your will on nature. Your effort must be strong, cooperative, and elegant because the ocean does not care about your desires. Instead you must inhabit each moment so fully that time slows down. Then you are able to create more space for yourself inside the chaos that surrounds you. While paying great attention to many things at once you must also maintain a calm, fluid, relaxation. This is not a physical state that I normally walk around in on land. The mental process of relinquishing control was a major challenge for me, and a major life lesson that surfing, and Hawaii, began to teach me.

But the real mistake lies in believing that letting go was my choice to make in the first place. Possession of control is an illusion. You do not get to dictate anything to the ocean, and to ever try to fight the current will be a very bad mistake. The best we can hope for is to adapt as needed. When you surf you remain relaxed and flexible but you still retain your power and self-possession, ready to make countless tiny, minute adjustments and decisions within fractions of a second. Meg's description of how water behaves was so perfect to me. There is always so much that is outside of our control in life, and that is what makes surfing and art making both very humbling pursuits. Both often require you to engage with and appreciate your environment. I

had a surf instructor about a year after my Hawaii adventure. He told me the only bad decision or action is no decision or action, because there is no such thing as standing still. Something is always moving you one way or another. Since that specific learning experience I have found this to be true in many other areas of life.

Where surfing is practiced in different places in the world, different styles tend to be emphasized from a cultural standpoint. My own philosophical understanding of surfing was confirmed when I learned of the traditional Hawaiian perspective on these matters. In traditional Hawaiian surfing the goal is to be as elegant, relaxed, and smooth as possible during your execution. The long history associated with surfing in Hawaii might have something to do with the regal bearing involved in the ideal technique. “Hawaiian chants as far back as the 15th century honor surfing and mention contests, competing chiefs, surfing wagers and remarkable waves” (HawaiiHistory.org, 2012). All of the lessons I have learned from surfing—live in the moment, be present, be calm, be patient—have carried over into other areas of my life, I believe profoundly for the better. But, like Meg, I am only learning to practice these modes of being, knowing full well that I cannot expect to ever truly master them.

Slowing down, being present, and paying attention are qualities that relate to my surfing philosophy and to Meg’s description of her artistic process. These actions relate to many disciplines that include elements of repetition and concentration. Repetitive action of any kind can become a meditation that leads to meaning and understanding. A meditative action that slows us down and trains, focuses or occupies the mind and body can also serve an organizing function, as it does for Meg. Because whether she is working in fibers, performance, or dried *Veleva Veleva* jellyfish that she collected on a beach in Oregon for an otherworldly piece she

titled *Drift*, intentional repetitive action is a common thread that runs through much of her work (Meg, 2008a).

My technical art training I think in some ways came from growing up in my mom's sewing room, and just always being surrounded by my mom, as a homemaker, making everything. And then my aunt, who was also this very creative person, really encouraged making as a way to engage oneself and then for practical purposes. When I grew up we were always making our clothes, we never threw anything out. My mom fixed everything. So you know your jeans had four layers of patches. It wasn't because we were poor, it was because that's how we did things. You didn't just cast things away... My dad too, he would do it in terms of woodworking and he was always repairing things. You didn't just go get something new—you fixed what you had. So I think growing up in that as a natural way of thinking, it's probably why I went into psychology, because the idea is that you don't just cast people aside and you don't cast problems aside. You look at what you can work with and repair. So that sort of notion of repair. I think in my own art practice I've been interested in that action of fixing things or doing these repetitive actions and using that time.

When you take the time to fix something, you're not doing a lot of other things that are distracting. You're staying still and fixing it. You're really focusing and also constantly building a relationship with that thing, too... I think in terms of process it slows you down, in a sort of settling way so your thoughts and ideas can settle. But it's also this action of constantly building, where I live in a world that becomes much more animated and interconnected because I have a relationship with this table that I salvaged [referring to the table where we are sitting in her office]. It means something to me, it's not just a function anymore. So in terms of the metaphors I think there is a lot of learning we can discover or uncover that we already know in a way. By doing this action it gives the mind time to recognize we know a lot actually about how to get along with other people, how to build relationships, how to mend and fix and sort of find areas of possibility if we take the time to do it. (Meg, 2011)

Meg's description of her influences reminds me of another connection to surfing. She cites resourcefulness and repairing or mending the things one has instead of casting them aside as the values with which she was raised. These values have come to inform her artistic practices in a substantial way. In surfing, too, there is a common thread in the sense that one must inhabit a space of acceptance regarding the forces that surround you—forces that are often out of your control—and make the best of them in your decisions and responses. Cooperation with your environment becomes the source of your strength.

Spaces of Hybrid Culture

During my stay in Hawaii the whole family went out for First Friday, a civic event that happens every month in downtown Honolulu's Chinatown district. Some of the main streets close down to make way for pedestrian traffic and a party atmosphere prevails. Galleries and shops remain open late and the bars and restaurants are full. The most eventful part of the night was when Holly and I stumbled upon the Chinatown Artists Lofts, a non-profit artists in residency program supported in part by the Hawaii Academy of Performing Arts. The rent may sound steep, starting at \$850.00 for a 500 square foot studio apartment, but this seems lower than average for urban Honolulu, where rents are high compared to some parts of the continental U.S. The recently renovated historic building is over 109 years old, includes 10 second-story artist units and a number of neighborhood retail tenants at ground level (Hawaiian Academy of Performing Arts, 2010). According to the Chinatown Artists Lofts website:

Applicants will be selected largely based upon creative merit. "Artist" will be broadly defined to include community-oriented creative professionals in performing, visual, literary, and culinary arts as well as cultural practitioners. An ideal mix of residents would include community minded individuals of an ethnic and cultural diversity that would reflect Honolulu's unique multi-cultural dynamic... Artists lofts will provide an anchor for the arts, and insure sustainability and depth for the growth of an authentic arts and cultural district. (Hawaiian Academy of Performing Arts, 2010)

The loft complex was having a big open house, and it seemed like every resident and studio holder was participating by leaving their door open and welcoming guests (and serving a complimentary alcoholic beverage of some kind). We met a lot of people who live in the lofts, including Kris Goto, a young artist and surfer in her early twenties who works mostly in pen and ink (Goto, 2012). She uses the front space of her apartment as a public gallery space for her work. I also met a resident who had fashioned the front of her studio space into a boutique of carefully selected vintage clothing, accessories and décor. She was also starting her own fashion

line and was a designer and seamstress. Like Kris, she had her small living space in the back of her studio.

But one of the larger loft spaces revealed a different situation all together. No one specifically lived in this very large studio space with two entrances, and you had to chip in a couple of bucks at the door (suggested donation \$2.00). On our way in several people handed me ¼ sheet fliers for DIY art shows, performances and parties featuring local DJs. There were several groups of kids lined up along the walls and a few sitting on couches. Everyone was very stylish. Typical hip hop/hipster scene kids in their late teens to mid twenties. I think I was on the older end of the average partygoer. But the MC, and a few of the others, were older than me by a little bit. I recorded some break dance videos of B-Boys and some footage of the rap battle on my phone. But really it was less of a battle and more of a circle in both cases. It was a very supportive, encouraging atmosphere with lots of respect for anyone willing to put him or herself out there. And most of them were pretty talented. I was impressed.

The space was a blank canvas, some unfinished brick walls, pillars, and exposed beams. The guy attending the beer coolers handed my friend and me one each. The room off to the side of the main room might be described as a storage space or office, I could see screen-printing equipment, a large press, and some drafting tables, a light box, some canvases of various sizes stacked upright in the corner. There was a donation-based beer sharing system in place so I kicked in a few bucks. I struck up a conversation about the space with the guy in the beer room. His personal style reminded me very much of the guys I know from my hometown who are engaged in similar art/graffiti/music/design/party activities (self-screened T-shirt and color coordinated skateboard shoes and fitted New Era baseball cap). He explained the group was an

informal collective of graphic artists, apparel designers, dancers, graffiti artists, DJs, MCs, poets, performers, etc. They share the workspace and the rent, and host events there regularly.

It turned out most of the people in the group were originally from L.A., though they were not acquainted prior to moving out to Honolulu, and almost no one I talked to was born in Hawaii. In fact I don't think any of the residents I talked to said they were born in Hawaii. The whole thing left me wondering why Hawaii is still in many ways, very much a place made by and for outsiders? I can only say that the colonial roots run so deep that from an outsider's perspective, it's really difficult to tell where outsider ends and insider begins a lot of the time, although many native Hawaiians might not share my opinion on that subject. There are significant cultural disconnects that persist between insiders and outsiders despite the small geographic area. As the night wore on it shifted to a less organized, less performance oriented vibe and became much more crowded. As people kept filing in it began to feel more like a house party than an open studio. It was a good time, and we made some new friends but we didn't stay out all night. We're too old, and we knew we'd be up before dawn the next day for more surfing.

Mana

Heath tells me that he's been charging bigger surf lately as the swell starts to grow with the change of season. Fall gets really big on Oahu. He says he's been banking a lot of *mana* in his surfboard, and now so he's getting really attached to it. *Mana* is a word of Polynesian origin associated with Hawaiian animist beliefs. It is "the power of the elemental forces of nature embodied in an object or person" (Mana, 2013). Objects can acquire and store this power on behalf of their owner or owners. *Mana* usually has to be earned through demonstrations of

bravery. If a surfboard can acquire and store *mana* for its owner, why can't a camera or a hand woven tapestry or a painting? Art making can also be courageous. Journeying to new places to live, explore, start new friendships and have new experiences and adventures should also allow a person to gain *mana*. *Mana* seems like a form of wisdom to me. So we gain *mana* when we travel, make art, surf and ask people to talk to us so we can write a thesis. Maybe when you have some sticky questions to ask, and a lot of people don't want to talk to you, but you go ahead and ask your questions anyway? These are also several of the ways we come to know ourselves better, by facing fears and overcoming challenges. Some of these challenges and opportunities are unique to outsiders, and I did my best to explore those issues in this study.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of this research is to investigate and describe the nature of two Hawaiian artists' experiences and processes with respect to their work and identity. A cross comparison of the findings in each artist's personal narrative yields instrumental value for art educators and museum workers by contextualizing and elaborating multiple perspectives on contemporary art forms. Through interviews, observations, historical research and content analysis, I have attempted to describe the phenomenon of these Hawaiian artists' personal stories and employ comparative analysis to construct multiple narratives that offer theoretically useful portions of knowledge for art education professionals like myself.

Each section of the study has dealt with an aspect of place within the mythos of Hawaii. I think the nostalgia people feel for home or the protectiveness we sometimes feel for a place when a connection is threatened might explain the hostility that my friend experienced surrounding surf breaks, and the violence that can sometimes be revealed there. The theme of outsiders who come to a place to experience and see new things through a particular lens, whether as an artist, an art educator, a tourist, or an explorer, was also revealed. This theme bears some unfortunate parallels to colonial histories of Hawaii in terms of exoticism and taking—but with very different intentions and outcomes. The loose narrative structure I have presented by alternating my own stories with the stories of my two interview subjects is meant to convey a sense of ambiguousness or a grey area that is open to interpretation. That said, I have formulated certain conclusions based on my findings relative to my original research questions. The biographical and personal narratives Meg and Nero shared with me seemed to very directly influence their aesthetic choices and the questions they seek to explore through their artistic practices.

Meg

Meg made multiple references to her childhood and family relationships as sources of inspiration or modes of operation that distinguish her artistic practice. She cited her personal experience of growing up and memories of her family life including acts of saving, fixing, mending, and repairing as influences on her generally. She shared memories of her mother in her sewing room and of making and mending as an activity she would frequently perform with her mother, aunt or other relatives. She also said that her father used to make, repair, and fix things in his workshop. In many ways this climate of repairing and saving, the ethos of working with the things one has instead of automatically discarding something that has seemingly surpassed its useful life, instilled in her the approach she brings to her art making process. Prominent themes in her work incorporate the physical act of mending as an external embodiment or metaphor for cultural and personal attempts to mend or repair non-physical, emotional entities such as collective cultures and interior lives. Her academic and clinical background in psychology also plays a major role in how she understands and constructs meaning from the world. It also influences the ways she chooses to present those meanings, whether through the lens of fiber based artworks or through other projects such as performances and installations.

Meg also remembers how growing up in a seemingly homogeneous suburban environment influenced her interests later as an artist. She became fascinated by the stories that remain untold when the prevailing dominant narrative assumes everyone is the same (white, straight, middle class, Protestant). But of course everyone is never really be the same. Separateness and insularity in a seemingly uniform group will always favor one narrative at the expense of a multiplicity of other identities and stories that don't quite fit. These orphaned

narratives are often covered up by the hidden curriculum of how to be. This curriculum is not always explicitly instructed, though taught nonetheless through cultural processes of implication and exclusion.

Meg made multiple references to weaving and the specific acts of undoing and re-doing as a meaningful parts of her process because of the time, attention, thoughtfulness, and concentration such methods demand of her. Slowing down and becoming engrossed in the meditation of a repetitive action forces her to process her own knowledge or thoughts while her hands are physically occupied. Things we might be inclined to overlook in our daily life find room to germinate in such spaces of mental and physical connection. Unraveling and re-weaving to make something whole also has a metaphorical relationship to ideas of narrative, history, and identity. According to Meg, reweaving is a process that creates meaning on a number of levels.

Meg's interest in the ways in which stories can become lost, frayed or tattered has been influenced by the different geographies in which she has lived, including Hawaii. She talks about how we can take narratives apart and weave them back together like fibers. Her process and her ideas make an apt analogy for Hawaii in many ways due to the many different stories of identity at work in that geography, and the great diversity of people who live there. Being an outsider may not consciously influence her practice, but being in Hawaii does greatly influence Meg's work. Place is highly significant, and environment figures largely in many of her pieces. Living in a place where she does not identify herself as an insider to the native culture is also significant. Her experiences in a number of the places she has lived are strongly tied to geography and place specific cultural and political issues. These issues do manifest quite explicitly in many of her artworks.

Nero

Nero's artworks are in part influenced by his extensive travels. He lived for many years with his wife in China while he was a teacher there. But following her death at a rather young age, he began a long trip that involved an extended period of wandering and drifting. He travelled on a series of boats through many countries without visas. He did not follow border entry and exit regulations. His artworks are substantially influenced by his travels and his experiences.

Nero holds a view of Hawaiian history that resists the prevailing romantic interpretations, and he privileges multiple narratives in the way he constructs meaning about the world. It seems like he has lived his life as a traveler and a wanderer for some time now, and that has informed him in his view of the world. Questioning, traveling, and wandering are also important themes that inform his process and his work. As a traveler, by definition, this makes his themes those of an outsider looking in and studying or interpreting what he experiences around him. He cites the ways that an artist will create a framework for organizing experiences as part of his process, and he seems to interpret the role of an artist as someone who describes experiences and asks questions about the places he encounters. Wandering, wondering and traveling figure prominently as themes in his work, but I'm not sure he actually sees himself as an outsider at all. He's not really fond of labels.

Nero describes the concept of Hawaiian as having many definitions depending on who you are talking with. He rather politely declined to offer one, in fact, when I asked for his definition. His unromanticized take on Hawaiian history, culture, and tradition is of value, and it does represent a distinctly outsider perspective because, as an outsider, he does not necessarily have a motivation to privilege a nostalgic version over his less varnished one. The violent,

tragic way he describes the unification of the Hawaiian Kingdom is very different from the traditional and more official Hawaiian take on the subject. He was also startlingly frank about the fact that nostalgia might cover the inequalities and brutal authoritarianism of the Hawaiian kingdom, wherein “things were good for a very few people, but not so much for everyone else” (Nero, 2011f). Nero also offers a context that reveals many aspects of Hawaiian culture to be less distinct from other Polynesian cultures and in some ways perhaps less precious or unique. In modern history, elements such as hulas and chants are often presented as unique things that fall under a cultural identity umbrella of “Hawaiianess”, whereas to others, especially outsiders to Hawaii, these aspects may be defined more broadly as falling somewhere within a larger context of Pacific Islander culture.

When Nero began his long journey several years ago, eventually settling down for now in Hawaii, he was originally searching for the place where he was born. That place is not part of any country, and he only knows it is an island somewhere near the Marquesas (which does make him a native Pacific Islander). When I asked him whether he found the place he went in search of, he said it didn’t matter. The significance of place, however, is definitely a theme in his work. In one of our conversations, he made some comments about pandering to ideas of home in his work, and my reaction was that he does quite the opposite. I think he questions ideas of home and what we define as home by changing contexts and playing with our associations as viewers. Wondering and wandering are related in his artworks, and his method of using a framework for organizing new experiences when he encounters new experiences during his travels is also a part of that process. He looks for patterns and signifiers. For example, when he travels to Rome, he looks for and photographs the small Catholic shrines that can be found in public spaces. His work

as an artist has now extended and shaped the direction of his wanderings because he has travelled to art fairs, biennales and gallery shows all over the world.

Points of Comparison

The role of an artist is similar for Meg and Nero. The process of searching, seeing, and describing various ways of knowing are also points of commonality. Art offers a different way of knowing or understanding the world than the disciplines in which we generally gain access to knowledge, such as science and history. It offers alternative forms of knowledge or inspiration that can broaden our understanding. Meg and Nero each separately and spontaneously mentioned particle physics as an analogy to their own artistic contributions, in which each looks for ways to explain or describe what we know or see in the world. Storytelling and narratives are also front and center in each of these artists' works. Both present multiple narratives and question or confront single or dominant narrative structures to illuminate alternatives.

Me

As an outsider to Hawaiian culture, my experiences related to Meg and Nero's in many ways. Like Nero, I had the experience of trying to orient myself to a place that was strange and unfamiliar to me by using patterns and other criteria. I also used photography and journaling to organize and process my experiences. Like Meg, I noticed the surface multiculturalism while also noting the inequalities and geographic racial separation that run beneath it.

Most important to me personally, though, was my discovery of an alternative narrative or way of living in my encounter with Hawaiian culture through the concepts of Pau Hana and Mana. These ideas have encouraged me to reevaluate and try to live a braver and more balanced

life, both professionally and personally. I succeeded in achieving my research goals by gaining meaningful answers to my research questions from my participants (summarized above), and by answering some personal questions of my own.

Surfing terminology refers to one's position as 'inside' or 'outside' relative to the crest of a breaking wave. Generally 'inside' means closer to shore whereas 'outside' means toward the open ocean. When your goal is to catch a wave you want to match your paddling speed and the force you exert to the momentum of the wave as it rushes forward and lifts you up. For this to work out as desired, your position in the water is very important. If you are too far outside, this means you are too far away from shore and the wave you mean to catch breaks in front of you as you are trying to paddle into it. In this case you will have to expend considerable energy trying to catch up with said wave, and will very likely miss your chance as it rushes away from you. In the alternative, if you are positioned too far inside of the wave, you will fail to catch it and may be rolled over and dragged under as it breaks on top of you. This is where I usually end up. This "on it or under it" situation can be a very stark realization as one tries to learn about surfing, and I noticed a similarity in the process of narrative making and the ways in which dominant histories are endorsed over alternative narratives. Multiple interests come together at once like currents, and if your story is not in the right place at the right time, yours will not be the most successful. Your story will be rolled under in the waves of history by the stories of those who happen to have more power. In surfing and in the formation of cultural narratives, power structures and forces beyond one's control play a large role. A solid theme that emerged from this research was the ability of cultures, individuals, institutions and places to adapt. This ability revealed itself as a source of common strength.

One lesson that I have learned personally from this research is the absolute necessity for art educators and art institutions to pay very careful attention to, and sometimes go so far as to uncover, hidden or invisible narratives. The voices that we need to hear from in our discourse may not always be apparent, and the responsibility is on our shoulders as professionals to find them and include them.

There is value to the field of art education within this study because of the intrinsic value of the personal narratives I have recorded. I am an art educator, and these are my stories combined with those of another art educator/artist and another artist. In my art education practice I am seeking to facilitate ways of understanding self and our connection to the world. Place as a concept is fertile ground for growing ideas surrounding cultural, historical, political, economic, geographic, relational, personal, philosophical, and identity based curriculum. My purpose with this study has also been to entertain fellow art educators as much as to inform or provoke their own creative musings and inspiration. I hope it can inform their practice in some useful way.

The main characters in this story, Meg, Nero, and I, all identify as outsiders, as non-Hawaiians. My intention was to examine this issue from many different angles and to privilege the voices of others to help tell a more complete story. I want to empower the reader to take what he or she wants from my findings, interpret it for him or herself, and construct his or her own conclusions. This basic idea of including multiple voices has influenced my practice as an art educator in developing multimodal gallery teaching approaches for museumgoers with visual impairments and for visitors with Alzheimer's diagnosis. I have been inspired by my own reaction to my thesis research and by visitor responses to a pilot program I am working to develop at the Meadows Museum at Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Texas. I am

seeking to expand opportunities for all visitors to benefit from multiple perspective learning through the use of specially designed multimedia content for tablet devices and gallery teaching approaches that privilege description and interpretation from multiple voices.

Suggestions for Further Research

Further research from this project might include repeating a similar process in other geographic locations, and these interviews could be used to create a series of reports from different locales. Geography can be utilized as an organizing principle under which to study different cultural approaches to art making by regional artists. The goal would be to investigate the nature of geo-cultural identity for the selected artists and whether or how these issues factor into their own personal narratives. The production of curriculum materials or interpretive materials for use in museums or classrooms based on the findings of this project are also a possible direction for future research, which I have in some ways already begun to do in my professional practice. I might later use the findings of this thesis to formulate a suggested approach for museum workers to use when designing curriculum, exhibitions or didactic and supporting materials that favor the use of multiple narratives when addressing complicated issues of identity.

If this approach were carried through to completion it might look something like the narrative based approach to exhibits and education materials implemented at the National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, D.C. Many of this museum's exhibition and education materials are enhanced by a narrative structure that includes the voices and personal stories of members of the communities whose art is being shown or studied. Video and audio recordings of personal narratives allow the immediacy of the extant culture to resonate with

visitors. For example, members of native communities are invited to act as curators by choosing an object from the museum's collection that holds a special personal and cultural significance to them. The community curator is then filmed explaining that personal meaning in a way that brings life and immediate context to that object. Some of this multimedia content can be viewed online (National Museum of the American Indian, 2012).

Showcasing multiple perspectives from within a community demonstrates that different points of view can coexist and tell a more complete story. Offering multiple perspectives and narratives also creates more opportunities for visitor engagement and empowers visitors to make their own interpretations. These principles could be applied even more broadly within the professional field of museums to great benefit. The pursuit of greater insight and a larger context for learning about art and culture serves the interests of art education and museum professionals. I would love to develop and implement an approach to museum representation based on artists' and viewers' narratives in my future research or museum work, including the development of didactic materials and education or curriculum resources. If this research were to be continued, I would also try much harder to enlist the close cooperation of several ethnically native Hawaiian artists (and artists who identify themselves as "Hawaiian" without regard to ethnicity) in order to add breadth as well as depth to my interview process. Some of the artists I approached for interviews did fit this description, but they never responded to my inquiries. I did, however, end up with enough data to do an in-depth study from the outsider cultural perspective. With more time, this project could be expanded by casting a wider participant net and obtaining some insider perspectives to balance and enlarge the scope of the research.

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