Aha'aina

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‘Aha’aina

Tali Alisa Hafoka

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts

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ABSTRACT

‘Aha’aina

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In a Polynesian feast, food is a metaphor for the essence of Polynesian culture—giving without self regard. As Polynesian culture evolves, its aesthetic standard must necessarily change. Two seemingly conflicting essentials are necessary here for the survival of culture—the evolution of the cultural aesthetic, and the constancy of the culture’s essence. One might consider as a metaphor the evolution of a tree through the seasons—though the foliage blooms, changes colors, dies and grows brittle, falls and regenerates, etc., the roots remain constant—ever nourishing the tree and ever supporting it and holding it up. As with the tree, the essence of the Polynesian culture must always remain constant, though the aesthetic trappings evolve and adapt to survive in an ever-changing environment.

The work described herein demonstrates the glacial drift of culture and how, in the trappings of a modern, ever-evolving world, the Polynesian culture’s essence survives. This work stands as a signpost on the road of identity, helping the earnest searcher to see, through the ever-changing foliage, the root or essence of identity. Thus, this work imbues its viewer with a sense of freedom with respect to her search for identity; for once the viewer recognizes that which is necessarily constant, she can freely embrace that which is necessarily evolving.

Keywords: cultural identity, art about identity, Polynesia
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STATEMENT

Defining my own cultural identity is complicated by my alternating environment. My cultural diversity compels me to scrutinize my cultural surroundings and how they affect my identity. I am satisfied that my identity will always be unresolved.

‘Aha’aina is the term that preceded the word Luau as the definition of a Hawaiian feast. The diverse and variegated aspect of the Luau reflects my own diverse and variegated self/cultural identity. My cultural identity connects me to this setting and its origins and here I use it as a metaphor for the cultural diversity I have inherited and must navigate. Literally meaning “gathering to eat”, ‘Aha’aina is the place where a diverse narrative of people, history and custom combine to form an environment where identity can be examined.

INTRODUCTION

Because I am a hybrid of several cultures, I have the task of choosing which elements from each will make up my own identity, and also understanding how those elements combine to form my identity. My thesis exhibition, ‘Aha’aina, is a product of my personal need to understand these relationships (see figures 1-2).

My artistic sensibilities are shaped by my desire to define identity. My work is an investigation of identity. I am intrigued and frustrated by the mutability and ambiguity of identity. My own mixed cultural identity is the model I explore in my work. My father
immigrated to this country from the remote islands of Samoa. He was raised by devout Latter-Day Saint parents whose marriage was arranged so that the combination of their family titles would help them establish the LDS church in their village. My mother grew up in Northern California in a privileged and educated family. Her mother was a non-practicing Protestant of British decent and her father an agnostic Russian-Jew. My husband was born in America not long after his parents emigrated from the Tonga Islands and grew up in the heart of Salt Lake City where the Tongan community is tight-knit and somewhat closed from outside cultural influence. I grew up in Hawaii in a culturally diverse LDS family and community.

The Polynesian part of my identity is perhaps the most accessible to me and for that reason it was the natural choice to make Polynesia the setting for this exploration. I was taught that Polynesian culture is about giving. The Polynesian feast (what I am referring to as ‘Aha’aina) exemplifies this principle. The physical character of the contemporary feast is different from that of the traditional feast – ‘Aha’aina is being expressed in a new way. However, even though the physical expression has changed, the inherent meaning of the feast is the same – giving.

The transition of ‘Aha’aina from old expression to new expression is a model for the transition that other cultural objects and rituals have made as a result of shifting time and place. The physical expression may change only slightly or it may change dramatically, but the inherent meaning remains the same. In a similar way, I am always inherently me though my own identity seems to shift as the environment around me shifts.
BACKGROUND FOR MY POLYNESIAN IDENTITY

In the South Pacific, the Polynesian triangle is made up of some 1000 islands whose natives are connected by similar language, social structure, belief, and cultural and ethnic origins. On the western side of the triangle, almost directly between Hawaii and New Zealand, are the Samoan islands, where my father was born. In Samoa, names are owned and consecrated by families and clans. My father’s name, Mataumu, is an honored name from my grandmother’s family. “Mata” means eyes or face and “umu” is the underground oven or fire pit where the large cooking takes place. Cooking in the umu is dirty and strenuous labor. Animals must be slaughtered and cleaned, fuel for a fire must be gathered, other foodstuffs must be harvested and prepared and the pit must be carefully covered with layers of rocks, dirt and leaves so that the food will cook perfectly. All of this is done in the early morning before the sun comes up and the rest of the family wakes. Because of the physical nature of this work, it is the responsibility of the men and boys of the family. My father’s name, Mataumu, literally means “dirty face”. A dirty face is an indication of someone who does this work and who serves his family in the dark hours of the morning when no one is watching. It is an honor for my father to have this name because to serve without any need for recognition or reward is the most honorable duty or calling in Samoa.

My father was born in a small hut on his family’s plantation in Samoa. His father, Alisa Toelupe, was the chief of their village (which was comprised of extended family) and
was responsible for tending to many needs of the extended family. Because of my grandfather’s civic obligations he was rarely there with my grandmother during the births of their ten children. After delivering her babies on her own, Grandma would then enlist the help of one of the other children in cleaning and caring for her newborn.

When my grandfather was only 45 years old, he became very ill and died suddenly. Grandma moved her family from the plantation and settled closer to town and to the school where my father and his siblings would study. Not long after their move, my grandmother learned that Grandpa’s cousin had passed away leaving five children orphaned. Grandma sent one of her teenage sons to pick up the children. She adopted them and raised them as her own. During the next several years the family’s house was always busy and full of people. Because of their proximity to the school, they always had boarders from more remote parts of their island and other nearby islands whose parents had asked my grandmother to take their children in while they attended school. There were many mouths to feed but Grandma always made sure there was an extra place at the table in case they had any unexpected guests. She would tell the children, “You never know, an angel might show up.” In Samoa, it is not unusual to receive visitors at any time of the day or night. The visitor might be an acquaintance or he might be a stranger. If someone is far from home they may ask at any house for a meal or a place to sleep. My grandmother kept the children prepared in the event that an angel show up at their home and need a place to stay. My father remembers that the “angel” they usually took in was some drunk or vagabond who had stumbled by their house.
I have been closely connected to other Samoans for all of my life. I have also visited Samoa. But, I have never lived there. I really know Samoa – and Samoan culture and values – through stories my father has told me. My first impressions of Samoa from my father’s stories were lasting. The Samoa I am best acquainted with is a place where people are genuinely eager to give and serve.

THE MEANING OF POLYNESIAN CULTURE IS GIVING

Samoan society is organized so that everyone has the responsibility and privilege to give. One manifestation of this is the arrangement of the village and family compound. The largest and finest house in the compound is the guesthouse. Anyone may enter the guesthouse without being announced or invited. Once they’ve entered, the host family respectfully enters the house and welcomes them. Introductions and speeches are exchanged before the family hurries off to take care of their guests. Guests are always given the best the family has. It does not matter who they are. Although sometimes the family does not eat so that the guests may eat, the family considers this a privilege. Every member of the family, from the youngest child to the grandparents, understands and respects this system. The guests’ presence honors their hosts by giving them the opportunity to serve. These opportunities are most valuable to the community because they tie families and villages together. When people meet for the first time they introduce themselves by recounting such connections in their family lines. It is because of this system that Samoans feel such a strong sense of community and duty to community.
As I mentioned above, my understanding of Samoan culture comes to me from my father and from my grandmother. They taught me what it means to be Samoan. I recognize that Samoan culture, as my grandmother and father learned and lived it, cannot directly be translated to the place and time that I live in. For example, because of the absence of the arrangement of the Samoan family compound, and the lack of a general understanding that all guests are welcome all the time, I have to find other methods to give to others. Unlike my father and grandmother, I have to make conscious decisions about how I will be Samoan and also how my Samoan-ness will be expressed as a part of the whole of my identity.

THE FEAST AS A METAPHOR FOR GIVING

In Polynesia, a feast accompanies every important life event. At weddings, birthdays, graduations, family reunions, baptisms and christenings, and funerals, the food is integral to the celebration. At a Polynesian feast, the food is a metaphor for the essence of Polynesian culture: to give without self-regard. The meal is a manifestation of community values where people and families come together to give to one another, never seeking recognition. In fact, they ardently avoid it. In preparation for a typical family or community feast to celebrate an accomplishment or important life event, heads of individual families quietly gather donations from family members. Once the family head has assembled their collective gift, he approaches the family leader who is conducting the event and expresses his family’s love and support for the host family before presenting him with the gift. The gift might be food or money or anything of value that the family wishes to give. Whether the sacrifice is great or small, those giving as well as those
receiving avoid any fanfare. It is embarrassing to elicit or expect any extravagant expressions of gratitude. The quietness of the gesture shows the insignificance of the material gift to the giver and allows its symbolic meaning to prevail.

In the days preceding the feast, members of the extended family show up ready to work. They do not wait for instructions. Instead, they discreetly look for ways to be of service. Few words are exchanged but somehow everyone inherently knows which capacity they should fill. While preparations proceed no one seems to need sleep or rest. If someone does, there is always a replacement ready. The work seems effortless because everyone is in high spirits. This time of intense effort is the true celebration of the event. Everyone wants to be generous and to impart his or her love. Whether people are close connections or distant connections of the host family, they are eager to participate and support – and as a result community is reinforced and redefined.

NEW EXPRESSION OF THE FEAST

Culture continually evolves. The Polynesian feast of only a couple of centuries ago is almost unrecognizable compared to its contemporary version. In ancient Hawaii, it was taboo for men and women to eat together. Certain foods were reserved for men only and others strictly for nobility. Food even played a central role in the ancient Hawaiians’ polytheistic worship. Only the gods were permitted to partake of food that was prepared for worship. Today men and women of all classes and beliefs feast together in Hawaii. Once isolated from the outside world, early Polynesians cultivated and prepared food that
was uniquely theirs. Today the Polynesian menu reflects influences from all over the world.

The present-day Polynesian feast is most familiarly known as the *Luau*. With so many diverse influences impacting the experience of a luau, it is impossible to distinguish one pure version. There are countless versions of luau, none of which are made illegitimate by the existence of another or simply because they do not carry a value and presentation identical to that of the so-called original source. Each version has meaning and significance within its respective social and cultural context.

**THE INHERENT MEANING OF THE FEAST REMAINS THE SAME**

The physical expression of the Polynesian feast is different for me and my generation than it was for my father’s and grandmother’s generations. Over the years new customs have been introduced and become essential parts of the event. But though the presentation has changed, at its heart, the purpose and meaning of the event are the same.

For instance, the Styrofoam clamshell plate (from my installation piece) has become a part of the customary presentation of food for many Polynesian events. One of its predecessors, the *ma’ilo* in Samoa, is a plate-like container that can be quickly woven from a piece of coconut frond. Its function, like the clamshell plate today, was to contain the food that guests take home from a feast. Traditionally at a Polynesian feast, the host makes plans to prepare enough for the guests to eat their fill and then take food home.
Today the amount of food and the quality of food is still the common way to honor one’s guests at a Polynesian feast.

For reasons of convenience and economics, and perhaps other factors, the Styrofoam clamshell plate seems to have made its way into every corner of Polynesia. It has become the standard packaging for food, which in Polynesia is an expression that is central to culture and community. I have seen it everywhere from my brother-in-law’s funeral here in Utah, to a church hosted community celebration on the remote island of Vava’u, Tonga, to community fundraisers in Hawaii, to my own wedding.

While superficial changes like the Styrofoam plate have perceivably changed Polynesian culture, those who identify themselves as Polynesian find ways to preserve the meaning of the culture by perpetuating the values that define it.
ARTWORK

FOOD STILL LIFES

These paintings are about the mutability and variability of identity and culture. They are arranged in groups of four. Each grouping has paintings of the same food in four different contexts (see Figures 3-8). Here I juxtapose modern Polynesian presentation with traditional Polynesian presentation as well as non-Polynesian presentation. Although the function, cultural and social implications of the food vary within each group, the inherent identity of the food is the same.

In the group of pork paintings, for example, (roasted pig, canned Spam, sweet and sour meatballs, and sausage links) each version of pork has different value for different social and cultural groups (see Figure 3). Spam is a canned, pre-cooked meat product that is packed in a gelatinous block. It is high in sodium and economically produced and priced. In my experience, here in Utah, people find the idea of Spam to be unappetizing and have never tried it. But in Hawaii it is a staple. It is the most important ingredient in the local favorite, musubi, which is made with rice and nori like a sushi roll.

Like the food in these paintings, peoples’ identities can seemingly shift as we shift contexts, although our inherent identity does not change. There are many versions of my own identity, as many as there are contexts I have experienced. Each version is a valid interpretation of my “self”.
The centuries old tradition of still life painting in the West has seen many generations of subject matter. At different times in history still life has been characterized by its use of iconography and allegory. It has evidenced a general interest in everyday objects, the natural world, mortality, or the manipulation of formal elements to express the mood of the artist. Still life has occupied the most sacred of settings and has also been rejected as low art. It has been used by artists to exhibit their technical skill – and to experiment with color, light and perspective.

I have chosen to paint imagery from the Polynesian feast within this loaded tradition because it touches every part of art’s Western history. By using this traditional genre to comment on a Polynesian feast – something that is more or less disconnected from the West – I am forcing the feast into an unfamiliar context. By painting these still lifes in a classical way and displaying them in a gallery setting, I elevate the value and function of my subject matter in a way that is unmistakable to my Western viewer. I am also inviting my Polynesian and non-Western viewer to recognize that affect for himself or herself.

The Polynesian feast, like many cultural symbols, is evolving and will continue to do so. Although this modification is most obviously, or primarily, happening on a surface level, it complicates the meaning of “authentic” culture and identity. Is authenticity found in appearance or is it found in intrinsic meaning? Can I be an authentic Samoan or Polynesian outside of Samoa or Polynesia? Without Polynesian food, or language, or community?
BANQUET TABLE AND STYROFOAM PLATE SCULPTURES

The banquet table is white and designed with clean lines because I want its presentation to be as culturally and socially neutral as possible. It is like the sculptures of Styrofoam plates that sit on it (see Figures 9-10). They also are culturally and socially neutral. Styrofoam plates are cheaply manufactured in abundance and are consequently found everywhere in the world – even in the poorest and most remote islands of Polynesia. People from all social classes use them. They are not specific to any one social or cultural group. But, that does not mean they can’t have specific meaning or function within a cultural or social group. As I’ve worked on this project I have reflected on the fact that this is true of so many objects that are deemed cultural. All objects are of themselves culturally ambiguous and unimportant until someone assigns importance to them. This piece is intended to be culturally unspecific to show that culture and cultural identity are found in people, families, and communities more than it is in the artifacts, imagery or activities that are connected to them. People can assign (or discard) cultural value or meaning to (from) objects and events.

In Hawaii these Styrofoam plates are the packaging for the locally popular and ubiquitous “plate lunch”. This meal is packed with local favorites like sticky rice, macaroni salad, teriyaki chicken, kalua pork, and short ribs. If funds need to be raised for anything from a family reunion to costumes for a dance competition, a “plate lunch” sale is held. Food assignments are divided up and meat is barbequed under an open tent on the side of the road. In Hawaii the plate lunch is a familiar icon. There always seems to be a plate lunch sale going on somewhere and locals love it.
In Samoa and Tonga (and in Samoan and Tongan functions outside of Samoa and Tonga) this Styrofoam plate is the preferred presentation of food for important family functions. For example, funeral services are among the most important of family and community functions in Polynesia. These services typically continue for several days and are attended by a large extended family and other community connections. Funeral patrons bring money, food and gifts to support the immediate family of the deceased. The money and gifts are redistributed to the extended family and community to show gratitude for the support. Funeral guests are also fed by the family of the deceased. Many of the guests have traveled great distances to attend. The young men in the family cook during the few days that the funeral is going on so that each guest can be presented with a plate of food. Polynesian funerals in the islands and Polynesian funerals here in America and elsewhere all use the same dish – the clamshell Styrofoam plate.

In this piece I have created ceramic replicas of the Styrofoam plate. By so doing, I have reframed the plate by changing its material and presentation (turning it into sculpture and placing it in a gallery), thereby assigning new cultural and social value to it. In this particular presentation, the Styrofoam plate’s function, as an inexpensive, disposable, environmentally hazardous, mass-produced plate, is elevated as a result of being monumentalized in sculpture – a tradition which is loaded with history, culture, an emphasis on aesthetics, and a process that requires specialized skill and craftsmanship. This shift from ordinary to important mirrors a similar shift in my experience with the Styrofoam plate. In an American setting, the Styrofoam plate conjures thought of cheap
fast food, but when it is placed in a Polynesian setting, its function is elevated to the
physical expression of the familial and communal ties that unify the people attending an
important family event. Presenting someone with this plate in Polynesia is a gesture of
gratitude, community, and love.

THE INSTALLATION AS A WHOLE
My intention when designing this exhibition was to acknowledge the mutability of
culture and identity. My approach for both the paintings of food and the banquet table
with the sculptures of Styrofoam plates was to produce a meticulous facsimile of my
subjects. This was done with oil, pigment and brushes on panels in the case of the food
paintings, and with clay and glaze in the case of the plate sculptures. The most apparent
thing the facsimile does is to give the object a new existence in a new context. As I have
discussed previously, my hope is to connect imagery from my marginal cultural
perspective to familiar Western art traditions, thereby infusing that imagery with new
meaning, importance and accessibility. The closeness of the facsimile to the original is
conceptually important because any apparent embellishment or interpretation on my part
would upstage the basic shift in context I am trying to highlight. Likewise, the overall
appearance of the show is free of embellishment or overt sentiment so as not to distract
from the acknowledgement of context.

The exhibit is designed so that upon entering, the viewer is able to see all 24 paintings
above the 24 sculptures that sit on the banquet table (see Figure 2). The paintings and
sculptures are arranged in a similar way so that they are reflections of each other. They
inform one another both formally and conceptually, and for that reason are to be viewed as one whole before individual parts should be examined. The trompe l’oeil-like illusion of both the paintings and the sculptures is most convincing from afar, when the viewer first enters the gallery space.

INFLUENCES

I am drawn to representation because I like the story the superficial tells me. Sometimes it is truthful, and sometimes deceptive. I recognize this relationship in Ai Weiwei’s work, *Sunflower Seeds*, which is comprised of 100 million hand painted porcelain life-sized sculptures of sunflower seeds. My work has both formal and conceptual connections to his. At first glance, the tiny sculptures form an immense sea of grey. Initially, the sheer quantity of seeds strikes the viewer as the center of interest. But closer examination reveals that the seeds are not only hand painted porcelain, but are each unique.

Artists Kehinde Wiley and Kerry James Marshall are both African-American painters who’s work addresses issues of race and ethnicity. Wiley’s larger than life photo-realistic portraits of African-American men combine racial stereotype and African-American street culture with heroic poses and classically inspired motifs. Each painting references an Old Master work like that of Jacques-Louis David or Titian. By juxtaposing this American sub-culture with the old respected tradition of Western portrait painting, Wiley is imbuing the subjects of his paintings with new meaning and power. Kerry James Marshall depicts African-American life, politics, and history in his work, challenging
common perceptions. His chosen style is staged narrative. In *La Venus Negra*, a nude black female figure is almost indiscernible from her dark surroundings. In this work, Marshall challenges the concept of beauty established by Western tradition. I connect with Wiley and Marshall and their work because I am also interested in questioning boundaries of identity and ethnicity.

On a more fundamental level, I connect with the work of sculpture artists, Claes Oldenburg and Louise Nevelson. Both of these artists choose common, recognizable objects for their subject matter. Using a straightforward process, Oldenburg and Nevelson simply alter one or two of the formal qualities of the objects. Oldenburg creates gigantic replicas of objects like a clothespin, an apple core, and a rubber stamp. Nevelson creates large sculptural collages made up of furniture parts, balusters, and other discarded objects. By combining these individual objects into a monumental whole, and spray-painting that whole with one flat color, Nevelson is able to drastically alter their presentation and social importance. The work of these two artists addresses some of the concepts most central to my own research as an artist. I am curious about the fragility of identity. I am interested in the idea of creating art about objects that shift contexts.
MY POSITION

I feel at once immersed in and excluded from each of the social and cultural groups I identify with. Perhaps because none of these identities is my whole identity (and because I interact with individuals on a regular basis who, from my perspective, seem to have an identity that can be wholly defined by one cultural or social group), I sometimes feel obliged to defend my position within each group. I find myself getting caught up in a futile pursuit of some authentic model of culture and identity. I feel compelled to question the validity of what I find, and consequently feel further from “truth”. Despite efforts to define what is authentic and what isn’t, culture shifts, integrates, and becomes outmoded. It turns out that authentic culture is not a single and immutable truth. Authentic culture and authentic experience are as fluid as identity.

A few years ago I began my exploration of the concept of cultural identity with a Google search of “hula dancer”. I was a hula dancer in a show in Hawaii for more than a decade and had felt like a contradiction at times because I felt I was not representing an original authentic version of a hula dancer. In my mind this was not possible for more than one reason. I am not Hawaiian, in fact I could be classified as hardly Polynesian at all because I do not fluently speak a Polynesian language, I live in a Western home, eat Western food, have a Western education, and worship a Western god. Also, as a dancer in Hawaii, I performed hula for an audience of tourists, most of whom had little or no understanding of the history of hula and its traditional function. By “traditional” I mean indigenous culture that existed before Western contact. But I came to a new conclusion about authenticity after looking through the results of my Google search. Initially, I was
of the opinion that hula, and traditional culture as a whole, has basically one authentic model and that anything else resembling it only has the capacity to imitate or simply reference it. Creating another authentic model could not be possible. I should acknowledge that in Hawaii, the fact that innovation is and was always happening within that cultural group is overshadowed by the fact that after Western contact, it no longer occurred on their terms. As expected, my Google search turned up many different versions of the idea of “hula dancer”. It included dancers in commercial productions, Halloween costumes, dashboard ornaments, 1950’s pinup girls, women in hula halau (traditional hula schools), pornography, men in drag, and native Hawaiians who dance hula as part of a deliberate effort to be traditionally Hawaiian. After examining what I had found, it occurred to me that none of these versions of “hula dancer” are made illegitimate simply because they do not carry a meaning and value identical to that of the so-called original source. Each separate version has meaning and significance within its respective social and cultural context.

I find that this concept applies to my own identity as well, however confusing it may be at times. I am always inherently me. But I definitely feel my identity shifting constantly as I move from context to context. With my mother’s family I am the uninhibited Hawaiian, with my Hawaiian friends I am Samoan, with my dad’s family I am the mellow white cousin, with my husband’s family I am the non-Tongan, being one of very few non-Tongans in an enormous and tightly knit extended family. The list goes on.
I feel like I am constantly trying to safely navigate my own cultural circumstances or make sense of what others are doing culturally. I am very concerned about being culturally sensitive and appropriate. This is complicated at times because what is obviously culturally appropriate in one context may not be obvious outside of that context. I am also very concerned about choosing a set of traditions for my family that will best serve them by allowing them to continue to be connected to the past while moving into the future. I want to do this and remain a faithful Mormon at the same time.

Culture influences our thoughts, perceptions, communication, behavior and aspirations, whether we are conscious of it or not. As first generation American born Polynesians, my husband Inoke and I have to make conscious choices about what role culture will play in our lives and our children’s lives. Our parents’ cultural choices are influenced by a different background and context. We, and others in our generation of American Polynesians, find ourselves in unfamiliar territory.

As parents, Inoke and I want to teach our children to have good manners. But, what is appropriate behavior with some of Inoke’s family is not necessarily appropriate with my mother’s family, or my father’s family. And what might be appropriate behavior with my mother’s family may not be appropriate for an LDS person.

With large extended families on both sides, Inoke and I have many frequent family obligations. Before we attend events for one of our families, Inoke and I often brief one another on what behavior is appropriate and on what actions may need to be made to
satisfy cultural or social protocol. For example, when we wish to present a gift at a
family gathering, we talk about to whom we will present the gift and also on whose
behalf we will give it. We might decide that the gift is from the two of us only or from
his family or from my family. We also discuss what budget we have for a gift. The
concept of a budget does not exist in Polynesia because value is not assigned to money
and material objects as it is here in America. In fact, having a budget in Polynesia might
be considered selfish because to have a budget one must consider his own needs before
thinking of another’s. The best way to give is without any regard for one’s self. In
Polynesia, people do not hold onto things for long. Once money or material objects are
acquired they are quickly and ungrudgingly passed on to someone else. Because we live
in America we have no choice but to accept the value of money and material things that
exists here and to make careful choices about what we can give. We want to be both
prudent and giving and must adjust our culture to do so.

‘Aha’aina is a significant symbol in Hawaii and a valuable concept for me personally
because it unifies community by literally gathering people together and connecting an
apparently uncomplicated past to a complex present. It does this seamlessly and
unobtrusively. I am determined to do this for my family, present and future.

CONCLUSION
This exploration of my identity has allowed me to see the relationship between the
shifting physical expression of identity and the more constant values that are intrinsic to
identity. This understanding is essential if I wish to adapt the culture I have inherited to my reality. As all that claims to be authentic is becoming more and more diversified, I realize I cannot and do not wish to agonize over the superficial. Possible contexts for my culture are limitless. Physical presentation is fickle. The physical presentation of the cultures of my ancestors on all sides of my family is not the same for me as it was for them. The only solution is to distinguish the essence of my culture and to somehow perpetuate that essence in my time and place. I recognize my responsibility to do so and welcome it.
Figure 1. ‘Aha’aina exhibition

Figure 2. ‘Aha’aina – complete installation
Figure 3. Painting Group #1 (Pork) Oil, four 12”x12” panels, 2012
Figure 4. Painting Group #2 (Bananas) Oil, four 12”x12” panels, 2012
Figure 5. Painting Group #3 (Containers) Oil, four 12”x12” panels, 2012
Figure 6. Painting Group #4 (Taro) Oil, four 12”x12” panels, 2012
Figure 7. Painting Group #5 (Fish) Oil, four 12”x12” panels, 2012
Figure 8. Painting Group #6 (Coconut) Oil, four 12”x12” panels, 2012
Figure 9. Banquet table (detail)
Figure 10. Banquet table (detail)
Figure 11. Installation (detail)
Figure 12. Installation (detail)