

About the Cover Art

Located within the collections storage facility of the National Museum of Scotland is a box that contains a relic of Hawaiian antiquity—an akua kā'ai or 'god stick'. The object is anthropomorphic in appearance, its facial characteristics comprising a furrowed brow, slanted hollowed-out eyes, and a mouth pulled back in a grimace of truculent defiance. In the ancestral past, this portable wood sculpture functioned as a physical manifestation of divine mana and potency—it was the dwelling place of a god. But an examination of the figure's lower torso reveals a sight that mars its otherwise commanding presence. The phallus has been crudely cut away and reduced to a mess of chaotic striations. Its mutilation articulates with a broader historical context—which began around the early nineteenth century—wherein male and female genitalia on ki'i kūpuna (carved images of Hawaiian gods and ancestors) were summarily excised by European missionaries, traders and, in some cases, Hawaiians themselves as Christian values and beliefs gradually seeped into the bedrock of indigenous society.

Carl Franklin Ka'ailā'au Pao, the artist whose work, *Ki'i Kupuna: Maka*, features on the cover of this publication, argues that the emasculation of ki'i kūpuna, like the castrated akua kā'ai in the National Museum of Scotland, was not merely limited to the physical objects but it also had an adverse effect on the collective mana of the Hawaiian people. In response to what he believes has been a 'symbolic-spiritual stripping', Pao actively seeks to restore Hawaiian mana, in part by recuperating the iconography of the ule and kohe—male and female reproductive organs, respectively—through his art.

In *Ki'i Kupuna: Maka* (2013), Pao invokes male and female streams of procreative power through his abstract profile portrait of an ancestral carved image. The face of the ki'i is depicted in detail with flared nostrils and, more significantly, a gaping mouth that contains the

maka or centre of a flower. This is represented as a solid orange form comprising eight nodes, the largest symbolising the pistil or female sex organ of the plant and the smaller ones constituting the stamen or male sex organ. At the centre of the maka is a single sphere, the embryonic seed of the next generation (or perhaps, as Tengan writes in chapter two, 'an eye peering out'). The mouth of the ki'i functions as a sacred, protective space, safeguarding the maka—a metaphor for the Hawaiian people—as it regenerates itself in a perpetual cycle of growth and renewal. In this work, Pao uses a visual language informed by the past and the present to envision and instantiate a new Hawaiian mana. One that is revitalised, re-sexed and restored to pono (balance).

A. Marata Tamaira

This text is taken from *New Mana: Transformations of a Classic Concept in Pacific Languages and Cultures*, edited by Matt Tomlinson and Ty P. Kāwika Tengan, published 2016 by ANU Press, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.