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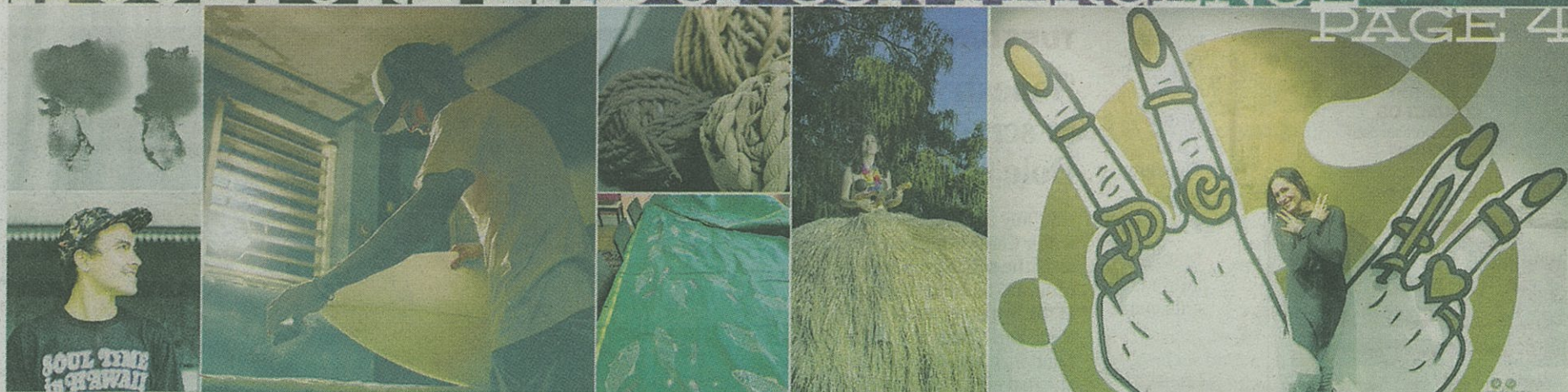
AN EDITION OF Star Advertiser



# 'AIEKAI

A CULTURE LAB OF CONVERGENCE

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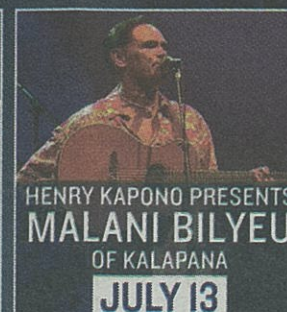
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COURTESY 'AE KAI

Clockwise from top left, sari created by Bangladeshi-American artist Monica Jahan Bose; "Hale La'au" mural by artist duo Wooden Wave; Hawaii island artist Katelin Branco with "E Ola Mau"; Carl F.K. Pao's fish stamp; "Converge" printmakers Abigail Romanchak and Charles Cohan.

# CULTURE CONVERGENCE

*A pop-up event features local artists, Cuban surfers and creatives from around the world*

## 'AE KAI: A CULTURE LAB ON CONVERGENCE

*Presented by the  
Smithsonian Asian Pa-  
cific American Center*

**WHEN:**  
11 a.m.-9 p.m. Fri-  
day-Sunday

**WHERE:**  
Former site of Food-  
land, ground level,  
Ala Moana Center

**INFO:**  
smithsonianapa.org/  
aekai

By Nina Wu  
nwu@staradvertiser.com

A shoreline is, symbolically, a place where various forces converge — where water meets shore and where visitors and locals alike come together.

Thus, the name of the Smithsonian Asian Pacific American Center's pop-up arts exhibit and attraction, opening today and continuing through Sunday evening at the former Foodland space at Ala Moana Center. It's been titled "Ae Kai: A Culture Lab on Convergence."

"Ae kai. The literal translation in olelo is the shoreline," said Kalewa Correa, the Smithsonian Asian Pacific American

Center's curator of history, art, and culture within Hawaii and the Pacific. "It is a place of blending and abundance, both naturally and culturally.

"Creativity is similar to water; it flows and connects ideas to people, like the ocean connecting Hawaii to the world."

The Honolulu show will feature more than 20 local artists, a collective of Cuban surfers visiting Hawaii for the first time and creatives from across the mainland U.S. and Pacific islands, exploring the theme of indigeness.

The pop-up exhibit is the last in a series of three "culture labs" that were planned by the Asian Pacific American Center, which describes itself as a "mi-

gratory museum" within the Smithsonian's expansive collection of museums and projects. Earlier culture labs took place in 2016, "Crosslines" in Washington D.C. and "CTRL+Alt" in New York.

A CULTURE LAB, according to Correa, brings artists together with the expectation that they will continue to collaborate after the pop-up has come and gone.

To start, participants in "Ae Kai" met in April to gather pili grass in Kalihi valley as a community project for the non-profit, Ho'oulu Aina, which is restoring 100 acres of upland forest in Kalihi. The philosophy is to give back to the community, Correa said, but that gath-

ering is also where many ideas and collaborations for the show began to germinate.

Whereas more traditional arts shows curated by the Smithsonian might take five to seven years to go on display, these pop-ups take an average of six months to put together.

It's a multigenerational, all-inclusive exhibit, including 17-year-old Katelin Branco of Hawaii island and master hula implement maker Calvin Hoe of Oahu. Surfboard shaper Ian Masterson will offer a hands-on workshop, while the Cuban surfers will use storytelling and board shaping to help advocate for surfing's recognition as a legitimate sport in their country.

It is also a multisensory exhibit, featuring presentations by spoken-word artists including Marshallese poet Kathy Jetnil-Kijiner and nightly musical performances by Tavana.

At this pop-up, artists will be present and available to interact directly with visitors during all three days.

Some of the art will be created in real time, and there will also be live performances and impromptu interactions.

"It's more like a night market," Correa said, "or a really great street party."

The selection of the 18,000-square-foot space that was once home to Foodland was purposeful, according to Correa, because it's a local supermarket chain and a convergence zone. Locals and visitors alike shop at Ala Moana Center, itself a crossroads of old and new. Food brings people together, but in Hawaii, in particular, the issue of food sovereignty is

an important one to address.

808 URBAN FOUNDER and artist John "Prime" Hina is offering a piece called "Foodland," described as part performance, barter store and farmer's market stand challenging our expectations of farming and commerce.

"We gauge, basically, what the community is talking about and the narratives going on," Correa said.

Maile Andrade, a professor at the University of Hawaii at Manoa, will build a representation of Oahu using canned goods purchased from Costco, to represent a bulk shopping mentality. After the show, she is donating all the cans to the Hawaii Food Bank. The title is "Aina Mea'ai (Food Land)."

"I have been thinking about how we import our food and depend on outside sources," she said in an email from Tahiti. "Also how we dispose of the waste that

fills our island. Rethinking (how an) island sustains itself and how we live."

Honolulu artist Carl F.K. Pao is creating an interactive piece, "He ahole ka i'a, hole ke aloha (Ahole is the fish, love is restless)," that asks viewers to participate.

Pao created handmade stamps of ahole fish, which viewers are welcome to use, selecting one of three colors of ink that corresponds to their socioeconomic status — low, middle and upper class — onto a large, 12-foot wide wall covered with white butcher paper.

He was inspired, in part, by the stark contrast between the emerging, luxury high-rises in Ala Moana and the homeless living along Nimitz Highway.

"In the end, I hope to get an accurate idea of the social-economic representation of the participating viewers," he said. "In addition, choosing the ahole fish has its own purpose too."

Culturally, said Pao, ahole are used in ceremonies to encourage the presence of aloha or love.

Today, art serves as a potential vehicle for bringing people from various social, economic and ethnic backgrounds together in the same space.

"Despite the different colors, it is still the same stamp image of the ahole fish," he said. "We are all just people doing what we do to get through this ocean of life. ... Schools learn how to work together to survive. So how are we going to uplift and help each other through these times?"

MANY ARTISTS took part in a spontaneous collaboration within "Ae Kai."

Hina Kneubuhl, one of the owners of Hawaii-inspired fashion line Kealopiko, collaborated with Monica Jahan Bose, a Bangladeshi-American artist from Washington, D.C., who features the sari as

a recurring symbol.

Their piece, "RECLAIM" is a video installation featuring 18-foot-long saris in the colors of the sea covered with images and words in Bengali and Hawaiian, communicating the views of people in both regions on the impact of climate change. Bose used traditional Bengali woodblock printing techniques, and Kneubuhl silk-screening techniques, to apply imagery onto the saris.

"Although it has played out quite differently in our respective places, language suppression is part of the histories of both Hawaii and Bangladesh," Kneubuhl said. "These shared experiences around language made us want to collaborate."

Visitors will be able to learn words in both Bangla and Hawaiian in a lab and check out a zine by Hawaii artist Sloane Leong. They can also make climate pledges on a sari that will be part of a performance piece

Saturday at Ala Moana Beach Park. The saris will be returned to Katakali, an island community in Bangladesh, according to Bose, to be worn as garments.

"By creating emotional connections across communities, the project seeks to create solidarity," Bose wrote in an email.

In "Converge," meanwhile, Hawaii printmakers Abigail Romanchak and Charles Cohan created a body of work reflecting the notion "of the continuous breathing of a volcano" based on the seismographic recordings of Kilauea.

Romanchak's prints are influenced by the sustained release of seismic energy typically associated with the underground movement of magma, while Cohan's prints reference a "graphic verb" of the movement of ground. The collaboration, they hope, reflects the "unceasing chanting of the land."

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