

Honolulu Museum of Art

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NEW EXHIBITION PUTS SPOTLIGHT ON HAWAI‘I DESIGNERS

*From fashion designer Sig Zane to surfboard maker CJ Kanuha, work draws from
Hawaiian traditions and deep knowledge of the islands and their history*

WHAT: Hawai‘i in Design

WHEN: March 17, 2016–March 12, 2017

WHERE: Honolulu Museum of Art, 900 Beretania St., Honolulu

COST: Museum admission \$10 general, free for children age 17 and under

INFO: 532-8700, www.honolulumuseum.org (publishable)

High-res images available on request.

HONOLULU, HAWAI‘I (March 15, 2016)—This month, the Honolulu Museum of Art’s John Dominis and Patches Damon Holt Gallery of the Arts of Hawai‘i gets an extreme makeover that will last for a year. Part of the installation of Hawai‘i art from the permanent collection has been removed to make way for the exhibition *Hawai‘i in Design*, a look at 10 island designers from across the state who make sense of Hawai‘i as a place where natural and urban elements, local and global aesthetics intersect.

Some of the designers are household names, others emerging talents that curator Healoha Johnston brings to light. In the lineup are furniture designer Iliahi Anthony, lamp designer Mark Chai, fashion designer Koa Johnson, alaia (traditional wood surfboard) maker CJ Kanuha, graphic designer Joseph Pa‘ahana, menswear line Salvage Public, typographer Matthew Tapia, artist and surfboard maker Keith Tallett, surfboard maker Eric Walden, and fashion designer Sig Zane.

The exhibition was inspired by an article by John Charlot, emeritus professor of religion at the University of Hawai‘i and son of artist Jean Charlot, says Johnston, curator of the exhibition and curator of the Arts of Hawai‘i collection. “He describes the Hawaiian aesthetic as a synthesis of the natural world into philosophy, form, function, and pattern,” says Johnston. “Considering this as a Hawaiian aesthetic principle requires us to take a broader look at visual culture, one that embraces design concepts, and is not limited to art historical frameworks. Functional and graphic design feed our perception and understanding of Hawai‘i.”

Honolulu Museum of Art
900 S Beretania Street
Honolulu, HI 96814
808-532-8700

www.honolulumuseum.org

Honolulu Museum of Art
Spalding House
2411 Makiki Heights Drive

Honolulu Museum of Art
First Hawaiian Center
999 Bishop Street

Honolulu Museum of Art
School
1111 Victoria Street

Honolulu Museum of Art
Doris Duke Theatre
Entrance on Kinau Street

For the exhibition, Johnston searched for artists and designers “who I thought were interpreting their environment in an interesting way.” For example, while Sig Zane’s aloha shirts aren’t revolutionary, the way he uses them as a mechanism to tell ancient stories is. “There’s a lot of kauna and layered meaning that go into their design,” explains Johnston. “They often draw upon Hawaiian history and hula practice as they conceptualize images. Designers find interesting ways to continue cultural practices through commercial work, translating their ideas across media while maintaining Hawai‘i-specific stories.”

Hilo-based Iliahi Anthony, raised in a hula halau on Hawai‘i Island, adapted the cultural practices she learned growing up into furniture designs made for contemporary island living. She integrates methods she learned creating hula implements—such as twisting, braiding, and weaving—with leather, felt, and metal to create new functional shapes. She does not consider herself a maker, but rather a designer who is interested in fusing cultural practice with a modernist furniture take.

“While not all the designers are Native Hawaiian,” says Johnston, “they all draw from Hawai‘i as their starting point and navigate a tourist economy without conforming to the expectations of the market. They are setting their own terms within the market.”

Enduring ancient Hawaiian beliefs suggest that for someone to truly understand a place, one must have knowledge about a site extending over many generations, in conjunction with personal experience caring for it and eating from it. In effect, one merges one’s self with the features of that locale. This type of connection enables a sensitive and highly attuned response to particular conditions and unique circumstances associated with the island environment. Informed by this approach, Hawai‘i’s design characteristics and construction methods often interpret essential qualities of natural elements into form, function, and pattern.

For example, Eric Walden incorporates his knowledge of O‘ahu’s surf breaks into his work. There is a lot more to his boards than their groovy 1960s surf aesthetic—he tailors them, using synthetic materials, to perform optimally not only in Hawai‘i waters but also to clients’ preferred surf breaks. Meanwhile CJ Kanuha uses ancient materials to create boards for contemporary conditions. He finds fallen trees, excavates them after carrying out traditional Hawaiian protocol, then carves boards from them.

In each case, Johnston worked with the artists to translate the essential quality of their work in a museum format, many of them showing in a museum exhibition for the first time.

Aspects of ancient Hawaiian aesthetics persist through artists and designers who are responding to our historic and contemporary island existence. The 10 featured designers and artists bring site-specificity to the forefront. Their contributions actively shape Hawai‘i as a place where local and global trends intersect, prompting us to consider how design has evolved in Hawai‘i, and how Hawai‘i has evolved in design.

This exhibition is made possible with generous support from Hawaiian Airlines Foundation with additional support provided by HILuxury Magazine.

About the Honolulu Museum of Art

One of the world's premier art museums, the Honolulu Museum of Art presents international caliber special exhibitions and features a collection that includes Hokusai, van Gogh, Gauguin, Monet, Picasso and Warhol, as well as traditional Asian and Hawaiian art. Located in two of Honolulu's most beautiful buildings, visitors enjoy two cafés, gardens, and films and concerts at the theater.

In 2011, The Contemporary Museum gifted its assets and collection to the Honolulu Academy of Arts and in 2012, the combined museum changed its name to the Honolulu Museum of Art.

Locations:

Honolulu Museum of Art: 900 S. Beretania Street
Honolulu Museum of Art Spalding House: 2411 Makiki Heights Drive
Honolulu Museum of Art School: 1111 Victoria Street
Honolulu Museum of Art at First Hawaiian Center: 999 Bishop Street
Honolulu Museum of Art Doris Duke Theatre: 901 Kinau Street (at rear of museum)

Website: www.honolulumuseum.org

Phone: 808-532-8700

Hours:

Honolulu Museum of Art: Tues.-Sat. 10 a.m.-4:30 p.m.; Sun. 1-5 p.m.; closed Monday.
The Honolulu Museum of Art Café: lunch only, Tues.-Sat., 11:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m.

Honolulu Museum of Art Spalding House: Tues.-Sat. 10 a.m.-4 p.m.; Sun. noon-4 p.m.
Spalding House Café: lunch only, Tues.-Sat. 11 a.m.-2 p.m.

Admission (permits entry to both museums on the same day):

\$10 general admission; children 17 and under are free.

Admission is free to: shop, cafés, Robert Allerton Art Library, and the art school

Free days: First Wednesday of every month

Bank of Hawaii Family Sunday: The museum is free to the public on the third Sunday of the month, 11 a.m.-5 p.m., courtesy Bank of Hawaii.