

Features

# Photographers provide fresh perspectives on Hawaii issues

By Maria Kanai / Special to the Star-Advertiser

Posted May 08, 2016

May 8, 2016



Kapulani Landgraf's "Maka'e," a silver gelatin photographic print collage.

Each year since 2005 the Pa'i Foundation has presented the Maoli Arts Movement, or MAMO, a monthlong celebration of Native Hawaiian arts and artists. One of this year's MAMO art exhibits, "The Lab: Experiments in Photography," is showing work by Kapulani Landgraf, Ualani Davis and Dru Hara at The ARTS at Marks Garage.

The photographers' experiments include chemically and manually manipulated prints and mixed-media works, all of which make provocative statements about Hawaii's political, environmental and social landscape.

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## ON DISPLAY

>> **What:** "The Lab: Experiments in Photography," works by Kapulani Landgraf, Ualani Davis and Dru Hara

>> **Where:** The Arts at Marks Garage, 1159 Nuuanu Ave.

>> **When:** Tuesdays-Saturdays noon to 5 p.m. through May 28; closed Sundays and Mondays

>> **Admission:** Free

>> **Information:** [artsatmarks.com](http://artsatmarks.com), 778-6392

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This exploration of contemporary issues was prompted by Healoha Johnston, curator of the Arts of Hawaii department at the Honolulu Museum of Art, who organized the show in accordance with MAMo's mission to provide a platform for emerging as well as more established Native Hawaiian artists.

"I was really interested in creating a dialogue between artists in different places in their careers," Johnston said.

For the MAMo exhibit, she selected Landgraf, an art professor at Kapiolani Community College who is known for her black-and-white film photography, books and installations; Davis, who recently received her Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from the University of Hawaii at Manoa; and Hara, who is pursuing a B.F.A. in photography at UH-Manoa.

Landgraf, recipient of this year's MAMo Award as well as a Joan Mitchell Foundation Award in 2012 and a Native Arts and Culture Foundation Fellowship in 2013, "creates work that does work," Johnston said. "Landgraf makes bold statements about culture with her art, and she is a fearless risk taker who knows her medium so well."

The work Landgraf shows in "The Lab" confronts environmental and political controversies. "Maka'e," a silver gelatin print collage, depicts the unearthing of sacred burial sites in a black-and-white palette above a violent red area filled with burials.

"Black and white is devoid of color, so it strips away that stereotype of Hawaii being paradise," Landgraf said.

She also made a mixed-media mobile of large fishing nets on poles that hangs from the gallery ceiling; the mesh is woven from pig guts, with photos inserted in some of the holes. The installation addresses government-organized retaliations against

sharks, Landgraf said.

Davis, in her series of printed aloha shirts entitled “Nana i ke kumu,” tackles the critical question of cultural identity. She asked the iPhone’s Siri software questions such as “Am I Hawaiian?” or “How do I become more Hawaiian?” Siri would send Davis to UrbanDictionary.com, where Hawaiian is defined in broad strokes by various bloggers; Davis took screen shots of these answers and printed them onto bleached shirts along with other stereotypical images, such as zaftig hula girls, embraced by mainstream culture.

“(Davis) asked questions that she felt her generation and younger ones might be wondering or thinking about, and realized that the technology and sources of information provided degrading responses,” Johnston said. “For young people the phone is an extension of themselves. This is their source. This could change their identity and ideas.”

In his “Pia” series, named for the section of Niu Valley where he was raised, Hara took silver gelatin prints of a canal that channels water out of his suburban neighborhood. After printing the images, he manipulated them with chemicals in order to emphasize or omit aspects of the composition.

According to Johnston, Hara was inspired by Landgraf’s method of dealing with environmental and cultural issues in her homeland to take a closer look at water management and land development taking place in his backyard.

“Each of these artists really embraced the nature of the exhibit,” said Johnston. “I believe it’s important to curate exhibitions that prompt introspection for Native Hawaiian artists to critically think about Hawaii.”

The different interpretations of Johnston’s theme by these three photographers have resulted in a stimulating show. Each artist’s deep concerns about the issues we face in Hawaii allow the audience to look at our island home in a different perspective and begin conversations that might help us address these problems.