For contemporary visual artists of Asian and Pacific backgrounds, tropes of food—embedded in lived experience and interwoven with themes of place, material culture, commerce, and migration—provide a plethora of multi-sited metaphors and iconographies for global circulation, intersections, and cross connections among peoples and cultures. This growing body of work, here mainly by artists from Hawai‘i of Asian or part-Asian backgrounds, offers insights into the expressive formation of globally mediated localism that underscores how the local is shaped and transformed by the global, and how diverse external influences have long been appropriated and reworked for local needs and circumstances.

Over the past few decades, the study of food has accelerated across a range of disciplines. Multifaceted issues of food, foodways, and food politics—sometimes addressing volatile matters like access to natural resources, land, and sources of nourishment to sustain diverse populations—have similarly become subjects for art. Fundamental to existence, food is an indispensable component of human culture that confers a common connection and source of contention between peoples. As a locus for social identification and a signifier of collective presence, food is a medium for sharing and exchange, its practices and rituals a bearer and catalyst of historical and personal memory and a vehicle for symbolic resistance and social critique. Food equally exists in complex relation to material culture and, like other Commodities, acquires histories, values, and “social lives” through human usage that are invested with multiple layers of meaning. Issues of food and nutrition—including dietary preferences, and its production, procurement, preparation, presentation, and consumption—thus open in many directions to examine individuals’ and groups’ understandings of their connections to place, other human beings, their historic and cultural origins, and relations of power.
Besides connecting human beings, food is tied to basic biological requirements for survival; has material, symbolic, and sentimental value; and bridges the sacred and profane. Resonant and evocative, food’s links to bodily appetites and sensory experiences invite considerations of the immediate needs and desires driving human behavior. Associating bodily imagery with food offers a medium for artists’ contention with wider social, cultural, and historical issues. Closely tying individual and collective experiences, the body serves as a sign of presence and physical engagement in the world, a focal point for social and historical texts, and a manifestation of the artist as a performing subject. For instance, in the 2005 work *Lovely Hula Hands* by Puni Kukahiko, multiple incarnations of a sinuously undulating, seminude hula girl cast in edible chocolate and molded by this Native Hawaiian artist from mass-produced tourists’ souvenirs, challenge how the figure of the Polynesian woman and, by implication, Polynesia itself, are being served up for Western delectation.²

Based on my current research with artists of Asian and indigenous Hawaiian backgrounds, the following artworks suggest the breadth of expressive and critical possibilities presented by food as an entry point to trace and question the continuum of historical trajectories, geopolitical conditions, and systems of production, distribution, and consumption that have brought together peoples and cultures from around the world in many Pacific lands. Besides emphasizing the United States’ long-standing and intimate ties to Hawai‘i and the Pacific region, these projects—many by artists of mixed descent who reside in both Hawai‘i and its continental U.S. diaspora—cast into relief the distinctive character of Hawai‘i as a dynamic transpacific zone of contact and mixing between indigenous and migrant peoples. Here the native presence often has a profound influence on diasporic Asian lives, sensibilities, and perceptions of place. Indeed, the first immigrants from Asia—Chinese sailors who soon married Native Hawaiian women—had arrived in Hawai‘i by the late eighteenth century.³ Drawing on recorded interviews with individual artists who use food-related imagery and themes to assert larger social claims of citizenship, positionality, and belonging, these works offer insights into the complex social and physical environments of Hawai‘i and island nations in the Pacific region. Their art, being open to the complexity of lived experience in the islands, delineates topographies, human relations, societal positions, and emotional responses shaped by indigenism, the historic impact of colonialism, annexation, settler cultures, and an outside military presence; by sociocultural hybridization via migration and transnational flows of labor, capital, goods, and ideas; and by international tourism and its marketing through tropes of an idyllic tropical paradise.

Figure 17.1. Puni Kukahiko, *Lovely Hula Hands*, 2005, chocolate, 9" × 3" × 3", University of Hawai‘i Commons Gallery, Honolulu. Collection of the artist.

**Circulations**

*Lynne Yamamoto*

New England–based, Honolulu-born sculptor Lynne Yamamoto is intrigued by the ways in which people’s lived experiences, material circumstances, and the environment of Hawai‘i have been transformed and imprinted by larger systemic conditions. Stirred by personal associations, her scrutiny of specific items, including foods, consumer goods, and the built environment, is based on an affective experience of her physical surroundings, influenced by her heritage as the descendant of Japanese migrant plantation workers, some of whom worked as servants in the households of American missionary families. Her background has made Yamamoto sensitive to the class and racialized hierarchies of the island society in which she was raised. Through poetically evocative assemblages of objects, a hands-on artisanal use of materials, and a research-based investigative approach, she works outward from the personal to produce layered engagements with historic patterns of global circulation across national and cultural boundaries.

The 2010 installation entitled *Genteel* has three major components: *Grandfather’s Shed (Lana‘i City, Island of Lana‘i)*, a small-scale rendering in marble of a humble work shed built of salvaged and scrap materials by the artist’s grandfather; *Insect Immigrants, after Zimmerman (1948) (Hawai‘i)* composed of white linen
doilies roughly embroidered with images of local insects; and Provisions, Post-War (Pacific Asia and U.S.), containing sculptural objects based on popular commercial foods ubiquitous in Hawai‘i and the Asia-Pacific region. In Provisions, Post-War (Pacific Asia and U.S.), white vitreous china castings of mass-produced food containers that Yamamoto associates with Hawai‘i’s working-class cuisine—SPAM vienna sausage, evaporated milk, and sardines—are arrayed in a row like a typical shop display. Among these prosaic provisions recalled from the artist’s postwar childhood, SPAM has a particular resonance because its introduction is linked to the World War II American military presence in the islands. War is “probably the single most powerful instrument of dietary change in human experience,” since basic resources on a mass scale are diverted toward the war effort.  

Spurred in part by the civilian population’s wartime food shortages and the military’s need for nonperishable foods to feed the troops in the field, SPAM became an internationally recognized commodity. SPAM, with its distinctive label and package, a round-edged rectangular metal can, is a processed pork product developed by the Hormel Foods Corporation in 1937. Integrated into numerous ethnic dishes in Hawai‘i, including the popular Japanese-derived finger food SPAM musubi, SPAM has since been absorbed into many nations’ diets and modified to suit local tastes.  

Transported along with military supplies, SPAM followed the U.S. armed forces’ progress, ultimately reaching populations across the Pacific and Europe. Today residents of Hawai‘i, Guam, and the Northern Mariana Islands are reputed to be the largest consumers of SPAM per capita in the United States and its territories. Partly as a legacy of the expanded U.S. troop presence in Pacific Asia after World War II, there currently are sizable markets for SPAM also in Japan and Okinawa, the Philippines, South Korea, and China.

Michael Arcega and Michel Tuffery

Yamamoto’s engagement with the transpacific circulation and consumption of processed Western foods and their relationship to war finds symmetry in a series of mixed-media works directly incorporating SPAM by Manila-born, San Francisco–based conceptual artist Michael Arcega. His 2001 SPAM/MAPS: World consists of a world map based on the European-devised Mercator projection, whose landmasses are formed entirely of carved slabs of hardened SPAM, a mock-cartographic device emblematic of “America’s ongoing influence on many nations.” The related 2007 work, SPAM/MAPS: Oceania, concentrates on the numerous Pacific island nations in which SPAM became “a standard source of meat” in the wake of that global conflict. Along the same lines, during the 1990s New Zealand–based sculptor Michel Tuffery produced a series of life-size renditions of steers fashioned from flattened corned beef tins to reference the historic impact of colonialism, Western influences, war, and global trade on island life in oceanic cultures, through their increasing dependence on, and taste for, such imported goods, which have often become local status items associated with Western-style modernity. Tuffery, who is of Samoan, Tahitian, Cook Island, and European descent, has also spoken publicly of the destructive impact of the absorption of this food into contemporary oceanic diets, leading to the spread of dietary diseases like diabetes and generating substantial waste that finds its way into the surrounding ocean.

Whereas Arcega’s SPAM/MAPS series incorporates a perishable food and Tuffery’s slyly humorous reconstructions gesture to the living animals from which these highly processed meat products are derived, Yamamoto is more interested in referencing the commercial goods themselves. Rather than simply reproducing such easily recognizable popular consumer goods, the artist defamiliarizes each item by casting its simple manufactured form in unadorned vitreous china, a glazed ceramic material today typically used in sinks and toilets. Seeking to shift the viewers’ perception, the artist strips out readily identifiable traits, thereby disengaging the objects from their familiar incarnation as visibly branded goods. The artist, long fascinated by the "circles of meaning}
that emanate from different objects,” here invites audiences to see them afresh and to more closely contemplate, as she puts it, “the idea of the SPAM can, and what that means in a larger sense.” Indeed, the use of vitreous china as a sculptural medium amplifies commercial products’ association with larger historic patterns of global trade and emphasizes the long-standing connections between the Asian Pacific and the Atlantic worlds by evoking the circulation of highly valued Chinese porcelain wares, which were exported to Europe and then to Britain’s North American colonies beginning in the mid-1700s.

*Keith Tallett*

Keith Tallett, a mixed-media artist who lives on the Big Island of Hawai‘i, has an abiding interest in Hawaiian popular culture, especially those aspects that retain a close connection to the land. Tallett creates a distinctly local sensibility by scavenging imagery and materials from his immediate surroundings, using techniques from vernacular idioms like tattooing and surfboard shaping to inform and to augment his formal training in studio art. His conception of what it means to be local comes from his mixed lineage as the descendant of indigenous Hawaiians and Portuguese who migrated from the Madeira Islands in the 1880s to work in Hawai‘i’s sugar plantations. Throughout his formative years, Tallett gained great respect for the resourcefulness of both sides of his family to sustain themselves. Among the relatives that Tallett cites as having affected his life is his maternal grandmother’s second husband, who was of Chinese descent. Besides producing much of their food by raising livestock and planting small gardens, Tallett watched his father crafting surfboards, his uncle carving wood and weaving fishnets, and his grandmother sewing much of the family’s clothing and traditional Hawaiian quilts—all influences and skills he credits with shaping his approach to art making, the materials he seeks out, and the subjects and life ways that most attract his attention.

In striving to “explore the blurred lines that define authenticity” and informed by his own mixed heritage, Tallett is captivated by the ways in which living things, goods, and ideas from around the world have long been accepted, assimilated, and transformed by the native society. Locally cultivated foods, therefore, figure prominently as subjects in the artist’s recent pieces. These include nonindigenous fruits like the Cavendish banana, and “invasive species” like the strawberry guava (which often crowds out native plants), both of which have become part of Hawai‘i’s cuisine. *Tattoo Williams*, for example, is a 2010 series of color inkjet prints produced from digital photographs featuring a type of Cavendish banana known as the Williams. The Cavendish, whose origins are traced to Southeast Asia, is one of more than seventy banana species. One of the world’s most widely grown types today, it can be found on farms and agricultural estates extending from the Philippines and Southeast Asia to India, as well as in Africa, the Caribbean, and Central and South America. Named after William Spencer Cavendish, the sixth duke of Devonshire (1790–1858), whose greenhouse in England nurtured an early specimen, the Cavendish was brought to Samoa in the 1830s by the English missionary John Williams before being transported to Fiji, Tonga, and other regions in the Pacific. Introduced into Hawai‘i around 1855, the Cavendish was, for a time, a significant export crop. Although the Hawaiian Islands remain the largest grower of bananas in the United States, they no longer are a major commercial producer for sales abroad. Nevertheless, in the context of Hawai‘i, such imagery evokes the local impact of U.S. corporations with multinational operations like the United Fruit Company (and its successor, Chiquita Brands International) and the Standard Fruit Company (now Dole Food Company). This imagery also has historic, material, and biotic linkages—via cultivation, crossbreeding, and transplantation—which arose in the post-Columbian age as globalized networks of circulation designed to enrich Western interests joined ecosystems and plantations to distant markets.
Using a tattoo gun, a modern mechanical inking device designed to rapidly imprint indelible markings on human flesh, Tallett hand-inscribes Cavendish bananas harvested near his home with various texts, numbers, and maps that he associates with Hawai‘i. Each photograph in the Tattoo Williams series documents, for the artist, the permanent “residue” that results from the act of tattooing directly on the fresh skin of highly perishable fruit. Among these inscriptions are an outline drawing of the Hawaiian Island chain, as well as “Watufaka,” a local pidgin English slang expression (translated as “what you fucking?”), and “808,” the islands’ area code. Both “Watufaka” and “808” are emblazoned on the bananas in ornate Old English script to resemble the gang and prison tattoos that are a familiar feature of contemporary continental U.S. urban street culture, music, surf, and hip-hop fashion, which themselves have been adapted and marketed in Hawai‘i to identify with island-style localism. In incorporating such overt commercial influences into his work, Tallett takes an ecumenical view of the role that popular devices like logos have in the social environment, as an expression of “local pride” and a means of allowing diverse people (including those born outside the islands) to identify with and support local culture and interests.

Since subsistence farming and fishing, and gathering staples like fruit remain important to many people in Hawai‘i, the use of bananas as a central motif in Tattoo Williams stresses that this locally available food is not regarded simply as a lucrative commercial crop but has become another means by which Hawai‘i provides for its peoples’ needs. Much as gang tattoos reinforce group solidarity, by tattooing fruit Tallett is asserting a symbolic claim on local resources for his fellow Hawaiians, thereby signaling their common purpose as primary stakeholders in the islands’ fate. The impetus for Tallett’s work and his focus on intersections between the vernacular and the commercial remain immediate, personal, and grounded in what appears around him. He thus regards the use of an expression popularized throughout the region like “Watufaka” and the similar slogans “Aloha Army,” “Soljah,” and “Warrior” as organic to the contemporary island sensibility. Such colloquial sayings are a familiar way of giving voice to common attitudes in Hawai‘i toward outsiders; since they appear regularly on locally produced T-shirts and car bumper stickers, and even tattooed on people’s backs—and also convey the defiant, deeply ambivalent attitude of many born and raised in Hawai‘i toward their economic overdependence on outside markets and tourism. Or as Tallett puts it, “Welcome to sunny Hawai‘i and [now] get the fuck out.”

Despite the artist’s confrontational posture, Tattoo Williams—which is part of a larger body of photographs, paintings, and mixed-media sculptures entitled Militia—does not seek to advance any specific politics or program of local resistance. Rather, by loosely using the metaphor of a volunteer citizen force mobilized for the islands’ defense, Tallett regards such eye-catching images and phrases as “tools” to help spur awareness of the need to protect Hawai‘i’s land, environment, and resources. This stance both embodies the artist’s pragmatic concern with how local land and resources are used and allocated and points to how control over these matters is very differently perceived by powerful outside interests like agribusinesses, the tourist industry, and real estate developers.

Kalo as a Cultural Signifier and Locus of Resistance

For many people in Hawai‘i, the cultivation of indigenous food plants and the teaching of traditional agricultural practices that respect the land and its resources are seen as vital to perpetuating the values and spiritual beliefs of its native culture. Central among these plants is the kalo, also known as taro. A tuber, it was introduced to the islands by the Hawaiians’ seafaring ancestors millennia ago and is a staple food in the indigenous Hawaiians’ diet as the source of poi. Kalo, considered a traditional ancestor of the Hawaiian people, is a hallowed figure in the Kumulipo, the Hawaiian creation chant. In this
sacral tradition, Hāloa, the *kalo* plant, originally emerged from the grave of the stillborn first son of the union between the Sky Father Wākea and his daughter Ho'ohōkūkalanī, following the deceased sibling’s burial in island soil. Accordingly, Native Hawaiians trace their genealogy through the land and thus see their social relationships as based on this shared ancestral lineage.

In pieces produced over the past decade, not only do representations of the *kalo* regularly appear as a key motif, but also the living plants themselves have been directly incorporated into art installations. In an island context in which taro farming is actively pursued in efforts to revitalize Hawaiian culture and to foster ecologically sustainable agricultural practices based on traditional uses of the land, art projects involving *kalo* serve a valuable dual purpose. They preserve the integrity of indigenous tradition even as they advance public engagement by extending the contemporary life worlds of Native Hawaiians to galleries and museums.\(^{31}\)

*Kaili Chun*

The wide-ranging works of Honolulu-born sculptor and installation artist Kaili Chun, who describes herself as a Native Hawaiian of indigenous, Chinese, and European ancestry, engage the ongoing “challenge[s] of continuing to exist as a Hawaiian,” given their displacement from the land and loss of agency extending from the initial penetration by U.S. settlers and business and military interests through the wholesale importation of foreign labor and commercial and industrial development.\(^{32}\) In expressing an indigenous standpoint, Chun was inspired by the 1970s renaissance of Hawaiian culture that began when activists revived and asserted the Native Hawaiian language and culture in all its forms—arts, crafts, music, and dance, as well as traditional agricultural, healing, and deep-water navigational skills. To this end, Chun apprenticed herself to Wright Bowman Sr., a master Hawaiian wood carver and canoe builder, and she also pursued academic training in architecture and studio art. Drawing on those precedents, her approach is quite contemporary even as it concurrently embodies a distinctively “Hawaiian epistemology” that derives from a primal spiritual connection to place.\(^{33}\) For Chun, this outlook is not motivated by an atavistic or romantic idealization of the precontact past but conveys a prevailing Native Hawaiian ethos grounded in a cultural view of local topography formed around the sacralization of the ‘*āina, the land itself.

For an untitled installation from the mid-1990s, Chun fashioned a group of fired, glazed ceramics to resemble *pōhaku,* a common local volcanic stone, as a compound sign to embody the land of Hawai‘i and the people who arose from it. To convey a sense of how Hawaiians remain “bound, manipulated, and whitewashed” by ways of thinking that arose in the wake of their culture’s “colonization and commodification,” each rocklike form is tightly encircled with rebar—twisted steel rods used to reinforce poured concrete—and inlaid with screws and bullet casings.\(^{34}\) All these materials were discarded construction and military supplies scavenged by the artist from the Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard. Through the incorporation of these man-made elements, Chun is simultaneously alluding to the employment of many Native Hawaiians by the shipyard (part of the sizable U.S. military presence on the islands) and to how the physical environment is being radically transformed by non-Hawaiian interests.

In another equally evocative project that features a living *kalo* plant, Chun also affirms that the spiritual values that are the basis of Hawaiian culture endure. In this untitled installation from the late 1990s (ca. 1996–1998) a *kalo* plant that was immersed in running water and set in a cairn-like basin fashioned from volcanic rock flourished for the duration of the exhibition. Symbolically protecting the installation’s living focal point is an encircling ring of polished wooden spears crafted by the artist and suspended by chains from the ceiling, their menacing sharpened tips aimed outward. For Chun, this arrangement emphasizes that the *kalo* provides the “very foundation of life, in body, mind, and mythology” in the Hawaiian tradition and underscores the common responsibility to protect and care for the land—*mālama ‘āina* in Hawaiian—which everywhere provides for the physical and spiritual nourishment of humankind.\(^{35}\)

*Puni Kukahiko and Maika‘i Tubbs*

A sprouting *kalo* plant likewise serves as the centerpiece for *Makua Bound,* a jointly conceived 2007 installation by O‘ahu-based Native Hawaiian artists Puni Kukahiko and Maika‘i Tubbs, both of whom are of mixed heritage that include East Asian ancestors. The piece is a tribute to Māku‘a Valley, a sacred O‘ahu site appropriated and fenced off by the U.S. military in the 1940s for use as a live-fire target range. *Makua Bound*‘s main component is an anthropomorphic personification of the valley in the shape of a woman—its curved female form an allusion to the Earth Mother, Papa (or Papahanaumoku, wife of the Sky Father Wākea), who is said to have given birth to the islands. The figure, pinioned on the gallery wall by the same kind of chain-link fence that currently denies access to the valley, was cast from Kukahiko’s own body, utilizing a cocoonlike mold fabricated from tightly wrapped layers of transparent...
packing tape. Cut away from its encapsulating mold and reassembled, the resulting planterlike concave form was packed with mulch, fertile insect-laden soil, and spent bullet casings gathered from the valley floor. Once this moist mixture began to decompose, the artists planted kalo shoots that flourished in the figure during the exhibition. Since Mākuʻa, according to Kukahiko, “is not just a valley, she is our mother,” the installation demonstrates that the indigenous connection to the land of Hawaiʻi is akin to a close familial relationship—and hence, new life, with appropriate cultivation and care, will reemerge on these neglected sites despite long years of depredation.16

The 2010 piece Mobile Taro Loʻi (Camouflage), part of Keith Tallett’s Militia series, consists of clear plastic buckets filled with bright green taro plants (the artist’s preferred term) immersed in water and conveyed on a working four-wheeled flatbed garden cart decorated in a stylized camouflage pattern. Because the Hawaiian word “loʻi” refers to irrigated terraces or taro patches, the artist regards this whimsical design as a fitting response to the current situation of the Hawaiian homelands. Tallett contends that indigenous families, once they are deemed eligible, can wait for years on a long list before finally being granted a “postage stamp spot [of land]” in the relatively small areas that the state government has designated for exclusive Hawaiian settlement under the Hawaiian Homes Commission Act of 1920.18 Because many are denied access to even this limited land base, Tallett has embodied the Native Hawaiians’ need to fashion an enduring form of “portable culture” for themselves—no matter how partial or jerry-rigged—in the figure of a wagon-mounted mobile taro patch that is readily transferable and available for immediate replanting wherever local conditions allow.

Plantation Legacies and Food Politics

It should be no surprise to find art in Hawaiʻi—the only state in the nation with a majority Asian population—that evokes the plantation system, its historic heritage, and its impact on present-day demographics. Beginning with the Chinese in the 1850s, the forebears of many artists of Asian ancestry arrived in Hawaiʻi as field laborers under contract to the American sugar and pineapple planters whose companies came to dominate the islands’ economy by the late nineteenth century. The first commercial sugar plantation was established on the island of Kauaʻi by New Englanders in 1835, on land leased for that purpose from King Kamehameha III. Hawaiians in general and foreigners were not permitted to possess land until 1850. But following the enactment of three reform laws, the Great Māhele (1848), the Alien Land Ownership Act, and the

Kuleana Act (both 1850), the right of alien residents to buy and sell land was deemed important to securing the “foreign capital, skill, and labor to develop the agricultural resources” of Hawaiʻi.19 Nonetheless, sugar growers subsequently acquired most of this newly privatized land, so that by 1890, “three out of four privately held acres were owned by haoles or their corporations.”20 (Haole is the Hawaiian term for a Caucasian.)21 The land and the wealth it generated for the sugarcane industry thus was concentrated in the hands of a small group of families, many being the descendants of American missionaries who played a crucial role in the overthrow of the indigenous monarchy in 1893 and successfully lobbied for the U.S. annexation of Hawaiʻi in 1898. The commercial interests of the corporations that these families founded, collectively known as the “Big Five,” consequently also dominated the islands’ emerging import, shipping, and banking industries.

The subject of the plantation, often situated in personal standpoints and centered on coextensive topics like family, food, and foodways, has led visual artists to explore the profound impact of this chapter in local ethnic history. Since the present is the partial creation of the past, these projects have expanded awareness of the dominance of the plantation system in molding
the islands’ economy, political infrastructure, and historic relations of different groups. Such efforts have also fostered an interest in the multifaceted formation and makeup of the overlapping labor diasporas that constituted the plantation communities, and the transnational connections that linked worldwide plantation economies by conveying agricultural workers, plants, and animals across oceans and continents. Owing to the escalating clamor for imported labor, many of the plantations had multiethnic populations that not only included large numbers of Asians—Chinese, Japanese, Okinawans, Filipinos, and Koreans—but also Portuguese, Puerto Ricans, Spaniards, Norwegians, and Germans. Initially, Native Hawaiians were part of this shifting polyglot workforce, but their participation soon declined because of their deaths from foreign diseases and a disinclination to work in these demanding, often harsh, conditions.

Trisha Lagaso Goldberg

The mixed-media work of Honolulu-born sculptor and conceptual artist Trisha Lagaso Goldberg, a descendant of Filipinos who worked in Hawai‘i’s sugarcane and pineapple fields, conjures a vision of hybrid localism that intertwines the histories, symbols, values, and expectations associated with various ethnic groups. The artist, conceiving of Hawai‘i as a complicated and frequently contradictory relational space for social interchange, works from a triangulated vantage point that is equally informed by her forebears’ experiences of plantation life, the common legacies of U.S. colonialism in Hawai‘i and the Philippines, and the omnipresent influence of Native Hawaiian culture. Influenced by an appreciation for graphic, interior, and fashion design, Lagaso Goldberg’s current work freely appropriates items closely associated with local hybrid materials and popular culture—food, clothing, adornments, and mass-produced memorabilia enjoyed by tourists and locals alike—that the artist considers typical of the creolized “pidgin-local” sensibility that has emerged in Hawai‘i.

The subject of agricultural labor has appeared in a number of Lagaso Goldberg’s works over the past decade. Among them is the Sakada Series (2006), a trio of wall pieces fabricated from sheets of hard, reflective Plexiglas that are dedicated to her maternal and paternal grandfathers, first-generation Filipino immigrants (known as sakadas) who worked on the sugarcane plantations. The square format and symmetrical design of these large plaquelike objects echo the syntactic form of traditional Hawaiian quilts. The hand-sewn quilt, introduced to Hawai‘i by American missionaries in the nineteenth century, was adapted by Native Hawaiian women using their own designs and motifs of cultural and spiritual significance, including local food plants like the ulu (breadfruit) and the kalo. Goldberg renders her interpretation of these quilt designs in an unconventional material to provoke viewers to reconsider how these intercultural objects have been subsumed by Hawai‘i’s commercialized landscape while also foregrounding symbols—the bolo (machete), the pickax, and the hoe—specific to another “historically invisible” local presence, Filipino fieldworkers whose labor has gone largely unheralded.

Over the past few years, in mixed-media and performative works, Lagaso Goldberg has experimented with producing linear “ground drawings” made from granulated sugar, a concept suggested by Hawai‘i’s cane fields as depicted on local maps. The use of sugar as a medium to represent the product of her family’s labor provides the artist with a tangible connection to the past. Sugar also summons warm memories of the artist’s Filipina grandparents, their cooking for their relatives and other migrant workers on the plantations, and the sticky rice, sugar, and coconut milk confection known in the Ilocano dialect as kakanen that was prepared for their families and sold for consumption in nearby towns like Hilo. The artist, who is too young to have shared in her family’s experience of the sugar industry, reimagines the period by joining elements of plantation landscapes and social milieus. To develop this visual mnemonic approach that she terms “memory-maps,” the artist interviewed her parents to elicit their recollections of the physical environments that they and their parents had known in “intimate, difficult, sometimes painful ways.” In addition, she conducted research in the Hawai‘i state archives on the Big Island of Hawai‘i’s Olaa Sugar Company, covering the 1930s to 1940s when her family members worked there, as well as historic photographs and aerial maps of plantations throughout the islands.

In Eshu Vve for Olaa Sugar Company, (ca. 2010/2011), a work currently in progress, Goldberg is extending her interest in the intertwined relations of plantation life, family, labor, and food, to her African American husband’s family history. The selection of Eshu, which her husband suggested, recognizes an important African orisha, or deity, in the Yoruba religious pantheon, who is the protector of crossroads and travelers. The artist, conceiving of Hawai‘i as the junction in which both their lives have converged, pondered how the world-spanning plantation system itself became the common link that brought their forebears to this nation—as Filipino contract labor brought to Hawai‘i beginning in the early 1900s, and as enslaved Africans transported to the Caribbean and the American South from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century.
By engaging her husband and young son in this effort, Goldberg is jointly devising a familial ritual to honor their combined cultural legacies by gathering together, mixing, and personalizing the signs of their various ancestors. Yet she is also aware that such an intimate, quasi-ceremonial project, intended to provide a “real function” in her family’s life, would not necessarily fit comfortably in a public activity like performance art. In June 2011, the artist and her husband collaborated in presenting and documenting, via digital photography, an exploratory “staging” of this concept in a borrowed artist’s studio in Honolulu’s Chinatown. In a “ground drawing” made from long white lines of sugar carefully strewn on the studio floor, Lagaso Goldberg combined a schematic map of the Olaa plantation with a vevé, a religious symbol originating in Africa that is associated with Haitian voodoo ceremonies in which substances like cornmeal and wood ash are sprinkled on the ground to summon ancestral spirits. The piece’s resulting impermanent pattern, although not meant to replicate existing devotional rituals, is also reminiscent of detailed sand paintings in Tibetan Buddhist and traditional Navajo spiritual practices, as well as the elaborate cosmograms found in many cultures.

Using the computer-aided design and fabrication techniques devised for the Sukada series, Lagaso Goldberg had the final pattern cut into a sheet of Plexiglas. With a flour sifter and this stencil-like Plexiglas device as a guide, she transferred the full-sized outline to the studio floor. The sugar was dispensed slowly and mindfully in a meditative process that Lagaso Goldberg equates with activating the circuit of historic connections joining her and her husband to each other and to their respective forebears. Over the subsequent half hour, the couple silently circled the design, placing food offerings and objects of personal significance—raw rice, black-eyed peas, wine, cheese, water, spools of thread, a tiny airplane—at selected points to note and to honor their combined ancestors. While the impulse that animates Eshu Veve for Olaa Sugar Company is primarily personal, the project nevertheless speaks to larger ongoing processes in which the traditions and belief systems of successive diasporic groups in the Americas are being reshaped, repurposed, and merged according to the particular needs of their times, places, and circumstances.

Alan Konishi

Currently based in Los Angeles, Honolulu-born mixed-media artist Alan Konishi grew up in rural Wai‘anae, one of the poorest areas on O‘ahu and the former site of a major plantation and sugarcane refinery active through the mid-1940s. As the descendant of two generations of agricultural laborers, Konishi has an abiding interest in local history that is rooted in immigrant labor. His awareness of this period is shaped by his nisei (second-generation) Japanese American father’s accounts of plantation life and his Laotian immigrant mother’s experiences as a seamstress in the local Hilo Hattie garment factory. Influenced by the legacies of plantation life and U.S. warfare and expansionism in the Pacific, Konishi’s art has delved into charged subjects like cultural assimilation, ethnic ambivalence and self-erasure, institutionalized discrimination, and uneasy intergroup relationships defined by class and ethnic stratification.

A pair of sculptures from 2006 entitled Yellow Peril (Remember Pearl Harbor?) and Yellow Peril (Am I White Yet?) are cast bronze representations of foods Konishi associates with local plantation life: musubí, a traditional Japanese cold rice ball usually wrapped in dried seaweed known as nori, and pine-apple, a plant indigenous to South America whose large-scale cultivation in Hawai‘i began in the early twentieth century. In Yellow Peril (Remember Pearl Harbor?), twin musubí resembling hand grenades nestle ominously in Konishi’s rendering of the kind of mass-produced disposable Styrofoam (or plastic) bento box used for take-out meals in Hawai‘i. Its companion piece, Yellow Peril (Am I White Yet?) consists of a mismatched pair of rough-hewn scrub brushes, each with rows of jagged bristles, in the guise of tiny pineapples.
after a modern disposable bento box, instead of from the round tin pails (also referred to as bento boxes) that once were carried into Hawai‘i’s cane fields by Japanese plantation workers. Whereas Japanese in Hawai‘i are no longer actively discriminated against, he sees a close equivalent between their historic treatment and current attitudes toward other immigrant groups, like Latinos and, especially, Muslims after 9/11.

The refashioned pineapples in Am I White Yet? convey a far more ambivalent message by speaking to Konishi’s profound personal discomfort following his acceptance into an elite local private school where he was made acutely aware of the class and regional disparities separating him from his peers. Here Konishi, having spent much of his childhood outdoors, evokes the heightened self-consciousness of a teenager in new surroundings whose skin tone was typically darker than that of the other students. He relates, “I remember scrubbing [my skin] hard to get the brownness off. So I wanted to make a brush that symbolized that angst.” Konishi’s transmutation of a scrub brush’s bristles into tiny pineapples, with their characteristically sharp spiny leaves and thick skin, shows how painful such acts of psychic self-erasure can be.

While this sculpture originated as the private symbol of a difficult period in the artist’s life, it also gives Konishi a larger metaphor for the response of earlier generations of Japanese immigrants in confronting difference as a non-white minority in the United States. The artist’s referencing of self-inflicted emotional wounds internalized by Asians as racialized subjects in the United States resonates with psychoanalytical concepts like “racial melancholia” and “abjection,” which are currently invoked to address the social trauma of people of color who are unable to assimilate entirely into the state of whiteness on which full “psychic citizenship” in the West is premised. Indeed, as Konishi describes his own sense of youthful unease, “This was something felt from the beginning: the need to assimilate, to become part of a status quo.”

**Mat Kubo**

O‘ahu-born mixed-media and performance artist Mat Kubo was raised in Honolulu and spent time in various cities across the mainland United States prior to moving to San Antonio, Texas, in 2009. For Kubo, the fourth-generation descendant of Japanese immigrant plantation workers, food is the locus for sculptural works crafted in Hawai‘i that function as touchstones to the evolution of the local socioeconomic environment, and also for a series of socially oriented performance projects staged in Hawai‘i and on the mainland aimed at engaging participants in an active interchange during the artist’s preparation of shared meals.
Figure 178. Mat Kubo, Big Five (full view and detail with pineapple open), 2004, bronze, steel, 4" x 4" x 11". Courtesy of the artist.

The design of Big Five, a sculptural object from 2004, makes ironic use of the pineapple—here emblematic of Hawai‘i—as an mini-memorial to the corporate oligarchy that shaped the islands' economy and the contested events that led to the ascendancy of the five companies that dominated 96 percent of the local sugar industry by 1933. This distinctive stand-alone piece—whose design recalls commercial pineapple-shaped ceramic cookie jars—is made from cast and patinated bronze, a material that Kubo chose for its close association with antiquity, permanence, and monumentality in Western culture. To produce Big Five, Kubo bisected an actual pineapple, complete with spiky leafed crown—its upper and lower halves each hollowed out and separately cast. The final "product" is presented either whole or split into constituent components, exposed to reveal five bullets hiding at its base. Cast from live shells, the ammunition is aimed skyward like lethal missiles in a Cold War silo. The object alludes to the "Bayonet Constitution," an 1887 document signed by Hawaiian King Kalākaua under threat of U.S. military force that severely reduced the monarchy's power while enfranchising local men of American and European descent. This incident presaged the 1893 coup d'état led by Caucasian businessmen and supported by U.S. Marines that overthrew the sovereign Hawaiian kingdom, deposing its last reigning monarch, Queen Lili‘uokalani. Among the coup's leaders was Sanford Dole, the son of a missionary family and relative of James Dole, who founded the Hawaiian Pineapple Company (later the Dole Food Company) on O‘ahu in 1901. Sanford Dole served as the Republic of Hawai‘i's only president until securing the islands' 1898 annexation. For Kubo, the concealment of bullets in Big Five's bronze core is a counterpart to the intimidation underlying the U.S. takeover and the Big Five's emergent economic and political power. This disturbing legacy, in the artist's perception, is all too often ignored or unrecognized, or even sometimes deemed praiseworthy outside the islands and even by local residents.

As a city-raised artist concerned with political activism, the trajectory of Kubo's performative work is shaped by his ongoing involvement with urban community and youth groups. Viewing food as a tangible connection between people that is basic to survival and also immediately gratifying, he uses foods as a platform to encourage conversation. The interest in sharing food—which, in Kubo's experience, breaks down social barriers by encouraging greater intimacy and trust between people—emerged out of the artist's apprehension over shifting social conditions in the islands caused by Honolulu's fast-paced urban lifestyle and the demographic shifts that occur as new groups take up residence in the city. These changes, which lead people to become increasingly distanced from one another, contrast sharply with Kubo's recollection of social relations in Hawai‘i's ethnic communities during his youth. This was a time, he recalls, when individuals usually knew their neighbors, watched out for one another, and willingly shared the fruit and vegetables from their backyard gardens.

In June 2008 Kubo launched OffTheGrid: ActionFunUrbanSurvivalism, a performance-based project centered on issues of sustainability in Hawai‘i for an exhibition entitled Eco/Logic. For this activity, Kubo chose to live for three weeks on only what he could "hunt, gather, glean, and trade" during daily excursions to different Honolulu neighborhoods. Seeking immediate public feedback, the artist kept an active web blog that solicited visitors to track and comment on his activities in real time. During this challenge, Kubo asked strangers for permission to take spare fruit from their yards while offering food from his own property in exchange. Finding that many of those he met were open to accepting this proposal, Kubo was encouraged in his belief that nascent local relationships based on neighborly reciprocity and cooperation could be reactivated, despite the changing social climate. Calling attention to "the kinds of ... relationships we need to forge and nurture if we intend to sustain ourselves here in Hawai‘i" underscored his central conviction that we "need each other to survive."
Kubo's subsequent ventures in Hawai'i and on the mainland often revolved around cooking for others—especially the cuisine Kubo associates with the Japanese presence in the islands—and stressed the importance of face-to-face contact and interchange. Kubo's use of cooking and sharing food as an art medium, mounted in a variety of settings to which he is invited, including art museums, galleries, schools, and private homes, is devoted to modeling alternatives to existing social relations through mutuality and sharing. The deliberate contextualizing of these projects as performance art serves a pivotal strategic function for the artist, as it directs the participants' attention to an occurrence that might otherwise be assumed to be a simple social gathering. Kubo views such activities as small-scale actions by which artists can "hack into existing systems and use them for our advantage," in support of social change.93

In 2008 and 2009, a half-year-long sequence of performances entailed Kubo's preparation of a variety of meals at private and public sites in Hawai'i. Entitled *Cook for You, Cook for Me*, the series culminated in two stagings at Honolulu's Contemporary Museum. In this highly visible setting, the artist made *nabe*, a hearty stew or souplike winter concoction originating in rural Japan, from a recipe regularly cooked by his maternal grandmother. Throughout each of these events, Kubo, against a backdrop of projected images and recorded conversations from earlier performances in the series, prepared this traditional one-pot dish for groups of twenty museum visitors at a time. For him, *nabe* was the "perfect metaphor for connecting over food," as in this style of eating, family members add ingredients and dine together from a communal pot of bubbling broth.94 Indeed, whereas Japanese food is customarily served as individual portions with separate utensils and dishes, eating *nabe* allows for the "breakdown of everyday reserve and a sense of fusion or solidarity among the diners."95

Kubo's projects find recent precedents in those of Argentine-born Thai artist Rirkrit Tiravanija, who gained international attention in the early 1990s by cooking Thai food for museum visitors in makeshift on-site kitchens. These open-ended approaches, with their emphasis on sociability and the creation of temporary spaces for exchange around shared activities, resonate with the notions of "relational aesthetics" propounded by French critic and curator Nicolas Bourriaud, whose writings Kubo cites as an influence. In the 1990s Bourriaud famously argued that contemporary art should be about "ways of living and models of action" that are anchored in immediate contexts of human interaction.96 Food-related activities that seek out audience participation and that aim to breach perceived boundaries between art and life, also have had well-documented precedents in American conceptual and performance art since the 1960s. Among them is American artist Allan Kaprow's 1964 *Eat*, a "happening" in which the event used foods to engage audiences in more interactive ways. In pursuing an avant-garde art practice "inseparable from real life," Kaprow propounded the use of everyday materials and processes that included the ways in which food "is grown, prepared, eaten, digested, and composted."96 Kubo has extended such life-based, performative models by making conversational interchange a major element in his artistic practice and by also moving beyond art contexts to solicit participants from popular venues like social media sites and Craigslist.

Gaye Chan

Two of Honolulu-based Gaye Chan's best-known public collaborative projects since the late 1990s are *Downwind Productions* and *Eating in Public*. Each includes spirited critiques, mounted from different angles, of the damage being done to Hawai'i's land and resources by corporate and state interests. These undertakings, conceived in the tradition of agitprop by this Hong Kong-born conceptual artist and cultural activist, use metaphor and ambiguity to address conflicted issues of food production and resource distribution in the islands. Chan, whose work likewise is influenced by Bourriaud, conceives of her collaborative undertakings as a "relational practice" mediated by a complex sense of "poetics," which is centered on establishing points of encounter for people to make conscious choices about their actions in relationship to Hawai'i's physical and social environment.97

*Downwind Productions*, a multimedia venture cofounded in 1999 by Chan and cultural historian Andrea Feesper and joined by sociologist Nandita Sharma, is an effort to provide a highly visible critique of the extensive environmental, human, and cultural costs of the development of the beachfront area surrounding Waikiki, the islands' economic dependence on the international tourist industry, and the U.S. military infrastructure. Appropriating two well-established commercial formats to serve their dissident agenda—informational websites and coffee table books—the collaborators developed a pair of related projects: a slickly rendered, web-based mock "travel site" (which went online in 2002) that also sells satiric ersatz souvenirs of their own creation, and a colorfully illustrated volume entitled *Waikiki: A History of Forgetting & Remembering* (2006).

For the website, the perspectives of a diverse range of people who live and work in the Waikiki area were elicited. To indicate how all their views, along
with other social and commercial pressures, exist simultaneously in Waikiki, and influenced by the concept of "contrapuntal analysis," the collaborators use multiple recollections and sources to counter the sort of clichéd, overly circumscribed representations of the area that primarily serve the tourist industry.48 Situating this broadly inclusive approach in the context of social justice, this representational strategy emphasizes that issues of tourism and development are located in larger global networks of social and economic relations.

Waikiki, a vacation-oriented beachfront neighborhood of Honolulu that had already been a retreat for Hawai‘i’s royalty in the nineteenth century, is today routinely decried by critics as an overdeveloped thicket of commercial high-rises, hotels, restaurants, malls, souvenir stands, and prepackaged entertainments that exploit indigenous traditions. The DownWind home page provides active links corresponding to the three commonly used terms by which people in Hawai‘i are primarily identified: kanaka maoli (indigenous Hawaiian), kama‘aina (island-born or long-term nonindigenous resident), and haole (Caucasian).49 No matter which category the visitor chooses as a point of access into the website’s content, she or he is presented with the same map of Waikiki on which more than 136 locales are marked with active links. One of these web portals—all of which display images, texts, and anecdotes closely connected to each of the different areas—reveals maps and historic images of local streams associated with traditional indigenous land divisions known as ahupua‘a. These once well-irrigated farming areas, extending from nearby mountain slopes to the Waikiki seashore, contained land that was used to grow kalo, along with other resources required for the Native Hawaiians’ sustenance before their watercourses were diverted by unrestrained real estate development and commercialization.

In the ongoing Eating in Public series, which began in 2003, Chan and Sharma aspire to effect change by making a local impact via social microinterventions. The collaborators’ turn to this more direct, real-world approach emerged from their recognition of the limits of DownWind as a conceptually oriented art project dealing with issues of representation.50 Eating in Public, an umbrella title for a group of interrelated works in progress, is documented on its website (http://www.nomouloa.com) and periodically exhibited in art venues in Hawai‘i, North America, and Europe. In this evolving, long-term undertaking, Chan and Sharma (along with an informal array of supporters) subversively seek to “insert themselves” into the local system of food production and distribution by periodically operating alongside and outside existing networks.51

These activities, listed on the website under categories like “gardens,” “weeds,” “bins,” and “stores,” include the establishment of a “free store” and the home manufacture and distribution of wire recycling bins to augment the limited number and availability of those provided by the state of Hawai‘i, many of which are commandeered by private groups, including charities. The collaborators’ interest in advancing local self-sufficiency and in providing unmonitored venues as “autonomous spaces of exchange” is inspired by diverse models.52 Their influences include San Francisco’s Diggers, a 1960s radical community-action group who foresaw a society without private property; their seventeenth-century namesake (an agrarian Protestant movement that formed small egalitarian communities in England); and the time-honored English tradition of the commons, which had once allowed widespread access to rural land and its resources.53

The first of the food-oriented projects involved the planting, without permission, of papaya seedlings on a strip of public land adjacent to the chain-link fence erected by a prominent private institution devoted to the education of Native Hawaiian children. Seeking alternative ways of relating to control over local land, Chan and Sharma solicited passersby—through an official-looking sign put up for the purpose—to help tend the growing crop and harvest mature papayas for their own use. Another project, entitled Free Grindz (meaning “free food” in local pidgin), was exhibited in San Francisco in 2011.54 This work consists of a rough-hewn, tablelike object whose multiple compartments hold reams of blank stationery, mailing supplies, and rubber stamps imprinted with recipes for preparing dandelion, purslane, and amaranth, edible plants that typically are considered weeds. This practical arrangement, reminiscent of an old-fashioned postal hutch, gives audience members a means of exchanging information about the location and preparation of a wild food source that is abundant almost everywhere, including Hawai‘i, yet is commonly ignored or stigmatized. Attitudes like these—despite the growing sympathy for sustainable management of natural resources—are prevalent not only because of the dominance of commercially cultivated fruit and vegetables in mass venues like supermarkets but also because of the uneasy associations this type of nourishment may have with poverty, scarcity, outdoor foraging, and filth. This negative connection, all too often ascribed to people of lower class, ethnic, and nondominant backgrounds, also applies to immigrant groups who grow and consume foods that others may regard as “weird.”55

Since the collaborators view the sharing of seed as an ancient worldwide practice that today is under threat from modern agribusiness, their project draws on elements of this prototypical design to install a number of unmonitored “seed-sharing stations” around demographically varied areas of metropolitan Honolulu and sites outside the islands.56 Each of these entities—here
presented in the form of smaller open-shelved display racks made from scrap or recycled wood—are stocked with a variety of seed packets and stationery supplies, allowing onlookers to readily take, share, and transmit food seeds. The racks, installed for at least one year, sport an eye-catching self-explanatory sign entitled simply “Share Seeds,” along with a web address, and are crafted individually to fit the demands of a variety of well-trafficked indoor locations, such as arts institutions, coffee shops, libraries, farmers’ markets, churches, and community centers. Seen against the marked decrease in biodiversity accelerated by corporate moves to bioengineer and patent plants, the collaborators argue that such a visible effort raises awareness of the need to retain and circulate multiple nutritious seed varieties (including ancient grains nearing extinction) as vital to the future of the islands, the planet, and their expanding populations. Taken together, the Eating in Public series emphasizes an ethics that places primary responsibility on the individual to decide how she or he will act and to determine how each will relate to other people in a changing global environment.

Interestingly, “Share Seeds” has echoes in Trisha Lagaso Goldberg’s 2006 piece Biag ti agravabo (The Lives of Laborers). This mixed-media installation has framed inkjet print photographs of malunggay (also known as kalumungay or Moringa tree) and paria (bitter melon vine) cuttings, both widely grown in Africa and Asia, eaten in the Philippines, and used by Filipinos in Hawai‘i, including the artist’s grandmother who often served malunggay with fried fish. Grown in backyards in Hawai‘i, the dark green leaves of the malunggay tree are used like spinach and even heralded as a “super food” in the Philippines, where it also has medicinal purposes. Yet in Hawai‘i, the malunggay generally remains an ethnic specific food and is sometimes associated with poverty. Although as an adult, Lagaso Goldberg recognizes and highlights these plants’ inherent value as a working-class Filipino staple that sustained plantation families, she still recalls her childhood embarrassment over bringing non-Filipino friends to the house because of this food’s pungent aroma when stewed.

Coda

Equally motivated by purpose and passion, the preceding artists’ works, using food-centered metaphors, symbols, emblems, and actions, demonstrate how social meanings are being manifested, negotiated, and imbued with communicative force—and even marshaled to facilitate change in the present-day world. Despite differences in these Asian American and Native Hawaiian artists’ backgrounds and concerns, a distinguishing trait of all the art discussed is its worldly orientation. Rather than providing autonomous objects and performative activities for the sole contemplation of sympathetic cognoscenti, the artists want their endeavors to be immersed in the immediate world around them and thereby provide for a positive real-world function. Even where these artists engage the material and social impact of large-scale forces, such as historic Western expansion or modern globalization, their apprehension of them stays rooted in local and personal experience through multisensory encounters with surrounding objects, spaces, and people.

All of them born between the late 1950s and 1980s, these artists, in part because of the period in which they studied art, are influenced by conceptualism (in which underlying concepts are deemed to be more significant to art making than materials or aesthetics), as well as by intellectual currents inflected by critical theory, feminism, and postcolonial theory that have strongly affected ethnic, indigenous, visual culture, and performance studies. For artists with moral imaginations informed by a relational aesthetic, food also acts as a modality for sociality, even as a means to directly engage with other people. As such, these artists’ interest in having an impact on public behavior and in promoting critical awareness of social problems is not unique to contemporary Asian Americans or Native Hawaiians.
Alongside a range of work on kindred sociohistoric themes by other groups of color in the United States, a parallel to Native Hawaiian art is evident in Native American art, in light of the importance of land and the sustenance it offers to indigenous peoples. For example, in Corn Blue Room, a 1998 multimedia installation by Tuscarora artist Jolene Rickard, six braids of dried corn are suspended from a gallery ceiling to signify the six nations in the Iroquois Confederacy. Here, as the central feature of an installation confronting a hydroelectric project’s partial displacement of Rickard’s tribe from its ancestral land in Upstate New York, corn embodies the artist’s conviction that working together to grow this ancient crop and sharing the traditional knowledge of its cultivation from one generation to the next is necessary to the continued physical, cultural, and spiritual cohesion of her people. Like kalo, corn has a spiritual and material significance as a revered staple food that sustains a native people, and art offers means by which this living presence can be manifested.

Ultimately, artistic projects like these, linked as they are to the distinct worldviews and empathetic interventions of creative individuals, offer access to the daily lives, internal conceptions, and group identifications of diverse peoples of color. By being both spatially and historically located, such socially engaged undertakings also speak to the entangled contacts, cultural overlays, and mutual transformations, reaching across boundaries and centuries, which increasingly constitute contemporary human societies.

Notes
3. According to J. Kēhau Kānauui, among Native Hawaiians, the most common cross-racial pairings in postcontact Hawai‘i were between Native Hawaiian women and white men. By the 1870s, however, with the growing influx of Chinese male workers, Hawaiian women who intermarried increasingly “partnered and reproduced with Chinese men.” See J. Kēhau Kānauui, Hawaiian Blood: Colonialism and the Politics of Sovereignty and Indigeneity (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 133.
5. For a discussion of how SPAM was incorporated in a range of local ethnic cuisines in Hawai'i, see George H. Lewis, “From Minnesota Fat to Seoul Food: Spam in America and the Pacific Rim,” Journal of Popular Culture 34 no. 2 (fall 2000): 90–92.
7. Ibid.
12. Keith Tallett and Sally Lundburg, e-mail correspondence with Margo Machida, November 4, 2011.
18. Keith Tallett and Sally Lundburg, e-mail correspondence with Margo Machida, November 18, 2011.
21. Some Hawaiian artists view their art making as coextensive with an array of life-based practices aimed at sustaining native culture and traditions. For instance, O‘ahu-based artist and activist community leader Eric Enos is the cofounder and executive director of the Cultural Learning Center at Kā‘a‘a Farm (founded in 1976). The center is dedicated to teaching traditional Hawaiian values and skills, including the care of the land and cultivation of kalo and other native plants. One of his sons, the prolific painter, muralist, and illustrator Solomon Enos, likewise pursues projects that provide concrete means by which “art, the land and the people can all take care of and inspire each other.”
27. Keith Tallett and Sally Lundburg, e-mail correspondence with Margo Machida, November 4, 2011.
35. Trisha Lagaso Goldberg, e-mail correspondence with Margo Machida, May 29, 2011.
36. Trisha Lagaso Goldberg, telephone interview with Margo Machida, July 8, 2011. Also Trisha Lagaso Goldberg, e-mail correspondence with Margo Machida, November 30, 2011.
37. Trisha Lagaso Goldberg, e-mail correspondence with Margo Machida, May 29, 2011.
38. Between 1500 and 1880, most enslaved Africans shipped to the Americas via the transatlantic slave trade were bound for the Caribbean sugar plantations. See Kenneth Pomeranz and Steven Topik, The World That Trade Created: Society, Culture, and the World Economy 1400 to the Present (Armonk, NY: Sharpe, 2006), 89.
40. I was invited by Trisha Lagaso Goldberg to view this private staging of Esha Veve for Olaa Sugar Company, which took place in Honolulu on June 25, 2011.
42. Alan Konishi, interview with Margo Machida, Honolulu, June 16, 2007.
43. Ibid.
45. Alan Konishi, e-mail correspondence with Margo Machida, December 27, 2011. Note that the term “bento” by itself refers to a type of meal rather than the container in which the meal is served. Bento containers take many forms, ranging from variously shaped, box-like containers to elaborate lacquerware. The etymology of the Japanese word can be traced to a Chinese slang term for “convenient” or “convenience,” originating in the Southern Song dynasty (1127–1279).
46. Konishi, interview.
48. Konishi, interview.
49. Okihiro, Pineapple Culture, 117.
52. Mat Kubo, e-mail correspondence with Margo Machida, November 25, 2011.
53. Ibid.
57. Gaye Chan, interview with Margo Machida, Honolulu, June 20, 2011.
60. Chan, interview.
61. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, “Playing to the Senses: Food as a Performative Medium,” Performance Research 4, no. 1 (1999): 12. See her discussion of other artists who similarly work directly with, or critique aspects of, the food system, including its production, distribution, exchange, and consumption.
65. Chan, interview.