

Institute connects NHPI museum professionals

By Linsey Dower

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Cohort members of the Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander Summer Institute came together Friday for the soft opening of a gallery they put together using knowledge and skills learned throughout their six-month program.

Friday marked the final day of the program, where cohort members from 13 Native communities throughout Oceania were taught about the various aspects of artifact care-taking and NHPI culture and history.

Erlinda Cabrera Naputi, a cohort member from the Northern Mariana Islands, said that the experience was “amazing” because it brought individuals from Oceania together to learn about their shared passion.

“What’s so amazing is that a lot of us, we shed tears when we speak about what we do,” Naputi said. “We’re all from the islands; we all understand how important our history and our culture is; and we’re all left to care for what is left behind by our ancestors.”

Cohort members did an informal walk-through of the completed gallery Friday. The walls were lined with cultural items made by cohort members or brought from museums or galleries from their hometowns. Toward the front entrance, a brown net with woven leaves strung through it hung from the ceiling.

The group went around the gallery while each member shared what they brought and why they brought it, often bursting out into shared laughter.

“I guess when you all share the same passion, it’s easy to connect,” Naputi said. “It made it even easier to connect with each other because we all care for each other the same way we care for our collections.”

Reggie Meredith Fitiao from Pago Pago, American Samoa, applied to the institution to find ways to inspire younger generations to consider going into the field of art and artifact care-taking. But the knowledge, experiences and connections she wound up gaining were staggering, she said.

One of the standout experiences for her occurred at Iolani Palace.

“I knew that I was standing in a place where the queen was, and to see her quilt, it’s just so touching,” Fitiao said. “You can’t help but fall in love with those things.”

The support and mentorship from cohort leaders throughout the experience was also more than Fitiao could put into words, she said.

“We got to make stronger connections with each other, understand what our plights are in each of the museums, and really the



A soft opening of the exhibition “Weaving a Net(work) of Care for Oceanic Collections: A Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander Museum Institute (NHPIMI)” was held Friday in the East-West Center Gallery at the University of Hawaii at Manoa. The exhibition features traditional and contemporary works by Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders. Guam Museum curator Michael Lujan Bevacqua spoke about the collaborative mural titled “We-Kakou, ‘Weaving a Net(work) of Care.’” The painting was facilitated by kumu Meleanna Aluli Meyer and kumu Marques Hanalei Marzan and was painted by NHPIMI participants.

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Archie Ajoste examined a Samoan “taula” (canoe anchor) Friday at the exhibit.

love that we share — there’s this real bond,” she said.

The cohort included 17 attendees selected from more than 30 applicants. Members came from places such as Hawaii, Saipan, Guam, American Samoa, the Marshall Islands, Palau and Papua New Guinea.

The institute was organized by the University of Hawaii at Manoa’s Department of American Studies and the East-West Center, and funded by a \$350,000 grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Although COVID-19 postponed the program for nearly two years, it “has exceeded our wildest expectations,” said the project manager of the NHPI Museum Summer Institute, Noelle Kahanu, in a UH news release.

The first five months of the program consisted of Zoom workshops once every other week, where guest speakers talked to the attendees about various topics including repatriation, label writing, exhibit design and collection management systems, Kahanu said.

From July 5 to Friday, participants gathered on Oahu to begin a full-time schedule of workshops and gatherings at places such as Bishop Museum, Hamilton Library’s preservation department, Iolani Palace and the Hawaiian Mission Houses Historic Site and Archives.

The gallery that resulted is called “Weaving a Net(work) of Care for Oceanic Collections” and will be featured at the East-West Center Gallery from Sunday to Sept. 11. Admission is free, and gallery hours are from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Wednesdays and noon to 4 p.m. Sundays. The gallery will be closed Saturdays.

Although the cohort is uncertain when they will be able to reconnect in person, Naputi is certain that the connections she made will endure.

“Care for what we love and loving for what we care,” she said, quoting a guest speaker. “It’s really what we’re all about.” — — *Linsey Dower covers ethnic and cultural affairs and is a corps member of Report for America, a national service organization that places journalists in local newsrooms to report on undercovered issues and communities.*



Members of the Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander Museum Institute.

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A freehand-painted barkcloth, or “siapo mamanu,” uses the “atualoa” (centipede) pattern as a main motif. Artist Regina Meredith Fitiao used “u’a,” “lama,” “o’a” and “lega” dyes.

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