

# DYNAMICS OF PARTICIPATORY CONSERVATION: THE KAMEHAMEHA I SCULPTURE PROJECT

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**ABSTRACT**—The conservation of the King Kamehameha I sculpture in North Kohala, Hawai'i demonstrates a dynamic of public involvement in conservation. It shows how information gained from material analysis and archival research can merge with cultural knowledge to inform conservation decisions. New knowledge gained during treatment alters what is done to the object, in a continuous process of discussion, feedback, and intervention. Such participatory engagement has potential to broaden conservation research while opening up relationships between communities and heritage objects. It enables people to take greater control over elements of their environment in the process of conserving objects and cultural sites.

**TITRE**—Les dynamiques de participation en conservation: le projet relié à la sculpture de Kamehameha. **RÉSUMÉ**—La restauration de la sculpture du Roi Kamehameha à North Kohala, Hawaïi, représente bien les dynamiques d'une participation du public à un projet de conservation. Ce projet démontre comment l'information obtenue de l'analyse matérielle et de la recherche archivistique peut être fusionnée avec les connaissances culturelles pour enrichir le processus décisionnel en conservation. Les nouvelles informations acquises lors du traitement influencent le cours du projet, dans un processus continu de discussion, de rétroaction et d'intervention. Ce type d'engagement a le potentiel pour enrichir les recherches en conservation, tout en créant des nouveaux rapports entre les communautés et leur patrimoine matériel. Il permet aux gens de prendre un plus grand contrôle de certains éléments de leur environnement à travers des projets de conservation d'objets et de sites culturels.

**TITULO**—Dinámica de conservación participativa: el proyecto de la escultura de Kamehameha. **RESUMEN**—La conservación de la escultura del Rey Kamehameha en Kohala del Norte, Hawai'i, demuestra una dinámica de participación pública en la conservación. Muestra cómo la información obtenida del análisis de materiales y de la investigación de archivo pueden fusionarse con el conocimiento cultural para la toma de decisiones informadas de conservación. El nuevo conocimiento obtenido durante los tratamientos altera lo que se le hace

al objeto en un proceso continuo de discusión, retroalimentación e intervención. Tal compromiso participativo tiene el potencial de ampliar la investigación de conservación, a la vez que da apertura a relaciones entre las comunidades y los objetos patrimoniales. Permite a las personas tomar un mayor control sobre los elementos de su entorno en el proceso de conservar los objetos y sitios culturales.

**TÍTULO**—Dinâmica de conservação participativa: o projeto da escultura de Kamehameha. **RESUMO**—A conservação da escultura do rei Kamehameha em Kohala do Norte, Haváí, apresenta uma dinâmica de envolvimento público em conservação. Mostra como informação obtida a partir da análise de material e pesquisa arquivística pode se incorporar ao conhecimento cultural para a tomada de decisões em conservação. Novos conhecimentos alcançados durante o tratamento alteram ao que é feito ao objeto, num processo contínuo de discussão, *feedback* e intervenção. Tal engajamento participativo tem potencialidade para ampliar a pesquisa em conservação, ao mesmo tempo em que proporciona um relacionamento entre a sociedade e os objetos de herança. Isso possibilita às pessoas grande controle sobre os elementos de seu ambiente no processo de conservar objetos e sítios culturais.

## 1. SOCIAL INCLUSION IN CONSERVATION

People from outside of heritage professions increasingly play a role in conservation research and treatment decisions, particularly in areas with clear public constituents such as ethnographic materials, public art, and functioning architecture. Within the context of wider public engagement, this article considers community participation in conserving the King Kamehameha<sup>1</sup> sculpture in the North Kohala District on the island of Hawai'i (fig. 1). As a monumental painted brass figure depicting a local chief who became Hawai'i's first king, it carries considerable symbolic meaning. In semi-rural North Kohala, with a population of 1,800, local residents relate to their sculpture in ways that follow neither Western conservation canon nor any long-standing

## GLENN WHARTON



Fig. 1. The Kamehameha sculpture as it appeared in June 1996. Artist: Thomas Ridgeway Gould. Cast in 1880. The figure stands 8 ft. 6 in. (2.59 m) tall on its 5 ft. 1/2 in. (1.54 m) stone plinth.

indigenous custom. As project conservator, I participated in an extended process of public discussion about the sculpture and its conservation, helping stimulate a lively debate over cultural meaning and technical decision-making. The result was a negotiated conservation treatment, combined with new ethnographic understandings about how the sculpture fits into local history and contemporary life.

As Viñas points out, there is a growing literature on integrating non-technical expertise into conservation theory (2005). For instance, Clavir's ethnographic study shows how museum values contrast with those of First Nations, and demonstrates the need for giving consideration to sensibilities of proximate communities (2002). Odegaard created a "matrix" model for combining both cultural and physical criteria in developing conservation plans (1996). Conservators at the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) adopted a collaboration policy to

ensure that Native voices are honored in their conservation work (Johnson et al. 2005).

Participatory models that incorporate these views have by no means reached all potential areas of conservation (Stewart 2007), and very few publications portray the translation of this theory to actual practice. One such example is Levinson and Nieuwenhuizen's description of negotiating treatment of culturally sensitive materials with indigenous representatives at the American Museum of Natural History (1994). Avrami takes public inclusion a step further by suggesting that community engagement in conservation can foster ongoing care and watchfulness over heritage objects, a mechanism of what she terms "sustainable conservation" (2000, 19). The model developed for the Kamehameha project addresses this potential.

The case study provides an example of how the conservator can establish links within the diverse community, both drawing from and adding to the knowledge base, so that community participation influences the course of research and ultimately informs conservation decisions. There are always practical logistical issues of how to use information of various sorts that can come into the process "on the fly" as treatment occurs. These are compounded when integrating ethnic and religious variation *within* the community into the ongoing dynamics of the project. In North Kohala, people trace ancestry to China, Europe, Japan, Korea, Puerto Rico, the Philippines, and Hawai'i itself; sometimes all of these coexist in a single family. Moreover, a single person can hold to distinct traditions simultaneously; this is frequently the case in North Kohala.

Related to this diversity is the problem of who gets to decide on treatment when the object itself is of a hybrid nature, in this case, a sculpture that does not clearly represent Native Hawaiians or those who have largely replaced them on today's multicultural landscape. Almost all of those who identify as Native Hawaiian in the community at least partially derive from other ancestry as well, as evidenced by last names that connote a large swath of the world's peoples. To further complicate matters, many of the strongest advocates for preserving Hawaiian culture are Caucasian *malihini* (newcomers). Many who identify as Native Hawaiian are practicing Christians, and strongly express allegiance to US patriotic values. State and US flags flank the sculpture; exhibition cases identifying residents who died in the Second World War cover the courthouse walls just behind it.

## DYNAMICS OF PARTICIPATORY CONSERVATION: THE KAMEHAMEHA I SCULPTURE PROJECT

The complexity of such a mixed population led to multiple options for structuring conservation decision-making. This included variation in just how authoritative or deferential I, as the conservator, should act, given that local residents also differed in the degree to which they respected outside expertise versus honoring the views of one another.

### 2. INSTITUTING PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Whatever disagreements might arise, the need for some kind of conservation of the sculpture was not in doubt. More than one hundred twenty years in a semi-tropical, earthquake-prone location made its condition of concern to many in the community. A thick buildup of paint on the surface, resulting from many years of application, was faded and peeling. Further deterioration showed on the exposed copper alloy substrate in the form of small spots of light green powdery corrosion. Perhaps earthquake-related, a deep crack in the base implied possible structural instability.

But what should be the organizational and technical procedure to address such problems? My first approach turned out doubly misguided. In June 1996, I examined the work on a grant to assess three sculptures on the islands. When I arrived in the small town of Kapa'au to inspect the Kamehameha sculpture, I saw an unusual sight: a sculpture of a Hawaiian chief in the pose of a Roman emperor. Mounted on a plinth in front of the historic courthouse, its most remarkable feature was a coat of brightly colored paint, with white fingernails, toenails, and highlights in the black pupils. My remit was to perform a condition assessment and develop a conservation plan that would honor the artist's intentions, which presumably did not include a painted surface.

As I examined the sculpture on a ladder, some people took note of my presence as an obvious outsider. After inquiring about my mission, one onlooker asked me not to remove the paint. She commented that the paint makes the figure look more "life-like." On that brief visit I learned that she was not alone, and I decided that my initial presumption of straightforward conservation based on artist's intent was inappropriate.

My second misjudgment was to think that cultural administrators in Honolulu would agree that the circumstance was ripe for a participatory project.

Officials at the State Foundation on Culture and the Arts turned down my recommendation for such an approach. As one state administrator recounted: "When I first got involved with it over twenty-five years ago, I kept asking, 'Why are you painting it?' The answer I got back was, 'Because we like it that way . . . ' And this was from an older Hawaiian woman . . . I find it a little offensive. Every time I look at that statue and I look at those white eyeballs, it just turns me off." (December 17, 1999). I later heard comments in North Kohala evidencing distrust of outsiders, including authorities in Honolulu.<sup>2</sup>

I had to find other resources and modes of organization to convince the state that this was a worthy project. With potential support (later realized) from mainland granting institutions (Heritage Preservation, Ford, Getty, NCPTT, NEA, Smithsonian), the state-run Kamehameha Day Celebration Commission agreed to oversee the project. I joined forces with a non-profit organization, the Hawai'i Alliance for Arts Education, to co-organize the project and to seek funding for community activities to promote the project. Their staff's and board of trustees' familiarity with North Kohala led to selecting Native Hawaiian and other community groups to act as local partners: the Kohala Hawaiian Civic Club, the Kamehameha Day Celebration Committee, the Kohala Senior Citizens Club, and the Halau 'O Ha'alelea *hula* group. An Oahu-based filmmaker, Mary Tuti Baker (whose family comes from North Kohala), and her Ki'i Productions crew became participants through their work to create a documentary film about the project for Hawai'i Public Television. Her interviews brought additional opinions into view.

With funding in place, the project occurred over a thirty-four month period, from September 1999 through June 2002. My initial work as the project conservator was to perform conventional archival and material research that provided information on the sculpture's technical and cultural history, as well as its current condition. I searched the Hawai'i State Archives, the Bishop Museum, and the University of Hawai'i libraries in Honolulu and Hilo for historic documents and literature relating to the sculpture's history. I also had relevant early Hawaiian newspaper articles translated into English. To learn about its material composition, surface coatings, and deterioration processes, I took samples for cross section analysis, x-ray fluorescence, x-ray diffraction, scanning electron microscopy with energy-dispersive

## GLENN WHARTON

x-ray fluorescence spectrometry (SEM-EDS), and environmental scanning electron microscopy (ESEM). David Scott at the J. Paul Getty Museum and James Martin, first at the Williamstown Art Conservation Center and later at Orion Analytical in Williamstown, Massachusetts, conducted this analysis.

My research included investigating community relationships with the sculpture (as detailed in Wharton 2004). I carried out forty semi-formal interviews with Native Hawaiian, Asian, and Caucasian residents that represented groups I identified as important in the community: elders, activists, teachers, students, local business people, and *keiki o ka 'āina* (young people born in the region). Some of the most helpful information came from reactions to conservation treatment procedures, as the sculpture's surface visually changed through progressive stages.

The key public issue in the project was whether to repaint the sculpture after stripping the surface and addressing the corrosion and structural issues. Although state officials suggested that the figure was originally partially gilt, no one knew for sure. A great deal of discussion about honoring artist's intent versus honoring community tradition could be summarized in one salient choice: paint or gold? Under the conditions we established for the project, the decision was in the hands of the local committee. I stayed neutral on the question of repainting, choosing not to offer an opinion.

To stimulate public awareness and dialogue about the sculpture's conservation, the local committee organized a range of community activities for children, families, and *kūpuna* (elders). As one of the committee members explained, sparking interest among *keiki* (children) would interest family members who do not ordinarily attend public meetings. "It's the kids at a young age that can steer their parents . . . That's where you can get people to participate—through kids" (interview with Nani Svendsen, February 21, 2000).

An early project that captured family attention came in the form of a *hula ki'i* (puppet *hula*) written to tell the sculpture's story from the perspective of two birds sitting on its shoulders. The Halau 'O Ha'alelea *hula* group held puppet-making workshops, then repeatedly performed the *hula* in different venues. Another effort involved my visits to area schools: Kohala Elementary School; the Kamehameha Preschool; the Kohala Middle School art class; and the Kohala High School Hawaiian studies class, Hawaiian Academy, and art class. Speaking to more than five hundred students on these occasions, I joined with Hawaiian spiritual

leaders who communicated the history of the sculpture through *hula* and chanting (fig. 2). One class made a timeline relating Kamehameha's life to other world events, while other classes created artwork featuring the sculpture. Further stimulating attention to the project, Hawaiian Academy students at the North Kohala high school wrote a song about the sculpture, and Hawaiian Studies students held a session on its history and the technology of bronze casting. Teachers organized field trips to the sculpture throughout the project to discuss its history, social significance, and conservation. These events and activities evidently had a cumulative impact. As one lifelong resident of the district commented, "People are talking about it everywhere, within extended families and in public spaces and community group meetings" (interview with Boyd Bond, June 10, 2000).

During the early stages of the project, the local committee discussed mechanisms for deciding between paint and gold, and explicitly weighed the merits of traditional Hawaiian methods such as consulting *kūpuna* versus a more "democratic" process. The committee itself was diverse in background. It included three respected Hawaiian *kūpuna*, two descendents of Kamehameha, and others representing a mixed heritage of Native Hawaiian, Asian, and Caucasian descent. They settled on a process that blended ancient and contemporary traditions. After deliberating, they recommended blessing the project with a Hawaiian chant and arriving at a decision through a community vote. This was the course taken.

### 3. THE SCULPTURE IN HISTORY AND LOCAL USE

Weighing the alternatives included taking the cultural hybridity of the sculpture into account. It was commissioned in 1878 by a Hawaiian legislature strongly influenced by American sugar growers, but operating in league with the surviving Hawaiian monarchy. Although meant as a symbol of Hawaiian nationalism, it was to commemorate Captain Cook's "discovery" of the Hawaiian Islands. It is made of materials not found in precontact Hawai'i. The physical form combines attributes of a Native Hawaiian ruler, with the classic stance of a Roman emperor. Kamehameha was in his teens when Cook first arrived in Hawai'i. Born in North Kohala, he became a local chief, then conquered other islands to unite the archipelago under one rule for the first time in its history. His monarchy

## DYNAMICS OF PARTICIPATORY CONSERVATION: THE KAMEHAMEHA I SCULPTURE PROJECT



Fig. 2. John Keola Lake enacts the history of the sculpture using *ki'i* (puppets) with fourth grade class, Kohala Elementary School. February 2000. Courtesy of the Hawai'i Alliance for Arts Education

combined European court customs with ancient traditions of the *ali'i* (chiefs and rulers). Kamehameha's pose appears to be modeled after the Augustus Caesar from *Prima Porta* (Charlot 1979), while the feathered garments are modeled on those he actually wore. The *Lili'uokalani k̄'e'i* (sash), the *Kamehameha 'ahu 'ula* (cloak), and the *mahiolo* (helmet) reference the leader's *kū'auhau* (genealogy), *kapu* (special privilege), and rank (Brigham 1899; 1918; Holt 1997; Rose 1978).<sup>3</sup>

As revealed by letters between the artist and the commissioning committee in the Hawai'i State Archives, this fusion of Hawaiian and Western attributes was a deliberate effort. A close reading suggests a desire on the part of its makers to create a classical style sculpture that recalls indigenous cultural roots, yet distances itself from the "savage" and "barbaric" past (words used by a member of the Hawaiian legislature's Monument Committee). They reconstructed Kamehameha as a "Pacific Hero" (the artist's term)

who set the stage for transition from "barbarism" to a Christian republic. This hybridization of cultures embedded in the sculpture signals underlying tensions between incongruous pasts that continue into the present.

The sculpture began its life in an unusual manner. After receiving the contract in 1878, Boston sculptor Thomas Ridgeway Gould spent two years designing it at his Florence studio, with completion somewhat slowed by the need for approvals from Hawai'i at each stage. He sent the completed maquette and plaster cast to Paris for casting in brass at the Barbedienne foundry; we learned through x-ray fluorescence that the sculpture was not bronze as had been previously assumed. After completion in 1880, the sculpture was en route to Honolulu from its point of embarkation at Bremen, Germany, when the ship encountered a storm. A fire broke out and the ship sank near the Falkland Islands, with all cargo lost. Hearing of the

## GLENN WHARTON

mishap, Hawaiian officials commissioned a second cast from the artist. Meanwhile, it seems that a fisherman brought up the original cast from the sea. A British ship captain recognized it as the sunken sculpture of Kamehameha and purchased it at a junk shop in Port Stanley, then sold it for a profit to the Hawaiian government (Anonymous 1882; *Honolulu Daily Bulletin* March 29 and April 1 1882; *Hawaiian Gazette* March 29 and April 5 1882, *Pacific Commercial Advertiser* April 1 1882; *Paradise of the Pacific* September 1898: 132).

The Hawaiian legislature then owned two sculptures. They installed the second cast, which was in better condition, in Honolulu, and the original cast, which is the subject of this project, near Kamehameha's birthplace in the present-day district of North Kohala. The Honolulu cast has gold leaf garments and chemically patinated brown skin. Unfortunately, there is little documentation in the archives about the surface coating on the original cast. A key question remained unanswered by my research: had the North Kohala sculpture originally been partially gilded like the second cast, or had it been painted, perhaps in bright colors as was indicated in photographs dating from the early 20th century? As the first European style sculpture in Hawai'i, it is not a product of indigenous craft or intent. Deciding on its conservation could not simply be based on knowledge of Native Hawaiian traditions, nor, given the contemporary social circumstance, could it easily be decided by applying conventional conservation principles of authenticity.

Local people know much of the sculpture's early history. *Kūpuna* who sit on benches outside the old courthouse behind the figure enjoy recounting the story of the shipwreck and other aspects of its past, but many were surprised, and somewhat distressed, to learn that the original commission in 1878 was to celebrate Captain Cook's "discovery" of the Hawaiian islands. Local residents also know and proudly tell of the sculpture's iconic profile throughout the islands. It circulates widely as a symbol of official authority, appearing on the state seal, stationery, and other legal documents. To celebrate statehood achieved by Hawai'i in 1959, the federal government installed a replica in Statuary Hall inside the US Capitol in Washington DC. People in North Kohala, like millions elsewhere, also know the image as it appears on t-shirts, postcards, and miniature replicas in gift shops throughout the islands. A Japanese-owned resort commissioned a fourth cast, larger than the other three, for the Princeville Resort on Kauai'i. Residents on Kauai'i,

adding a note of their own local pride, protested its installation at the hotel, since Kamehameha never actually conquered their island; he gained authority in Kauai'i through negotiation with the existing chief. The Japanese cast was thus locally rejected and now resides in Hilo, the island of Hawai'i's historic industrial town, where it, too, is celebrated.

In describing the sculpture's role in community life, residents refer to its spiritual meanings, and its mimetic function in representing an ancestral chief. They tell stories of its role as part of community celebrations like holidays and weddings, and how repainting has occurred in conjunction with such events. No one, alas, could tell me when or how the tradition of painting began. By far its most important cultural use is in annual celebrations on the state's Kamehameha Day holiday, a two-day civic festival involving much of the local population. The day includes sunrise chanting at the site, conducted by priests from the Pu'ukohala Heiau (a surviving stone temple), the Royal Order of Kamehameha, and other Native Hawaiian groups. Celebrations on the lawn around the sculpture include *hula*, singing, chanting, slack key guitar playing, and *kūpuna talking story* about Kamehameha. A parade that ends near the sculpture is the focus of events. People in the parade stop as they pass the sculpture to hand *ho'okupu* (offerings) to children who carry them to the sculpture and place them on top of the pedestal. People also bring long *lei* that students from the Hawaiian Studies high school class place over the figure at sunrise (fig. 3).

*Kaona* is a Hawaiian word that many use in talking about the sculpture. It translates to hidden, subsurface meanings (Pūku'i and Elbert 1986). In conversation, it does not take long for residents to move beyond its materiality to these subsurface meanings and to the concept of the sculpture as a receptacle of *mana*. *Mana* means "supernatural or divine power." It also connotes the complex cultural system of *kapu* (or *taboo*) and its strict ordering of the world with privileged access to knowledge and power. *Ho'okupu* (offerings) are almost always present on the sculpture's pedestal in the form of food, flowers, ribbons and *pōhaku* (stones). Raylene Ha'alelea Lancaster, a local *hula* master and designated caretaker of the Kamehameha family *heiau* (temple), described the figure as a "go-between for people and the divine" (interview, October 30, 1999). She also explained that in the eyes of some, giving *ho'okupu* to the sculpture increases its *mana*.

Not all Native Hawaiians believe that the sculpture has *mana*. Some regard the idea as inconsistent

## DYNAMICS OF PARTICIPATORY CONSERVATION: THE KAMEHAMEHA I SCULPTURE PROJECT



Fig. 3. *Lei* draping ceremony on Kamehameha Day, June 11, 2001. Hawaiian Studies students from the Kohala High School place *lei* on the sculpture.

with their Christian values, although in subtle ways they reveal how Native Hawaiian and Christian traditions can be combined. Marie Solomon, one of the most respected *kūpuna*, told me bluntly: “It has no *mana*” (interview, February 20, 2000). But for her as well as others, a pervading respect imbues the object with extraordinary capacities. The sculpture carries down a sense of *kuleana* (responsibility) to the King’s descendents: “They are on his *‘āina* (land) . . . their *mana* and their responsibility of being Hawaiian is to be the keepers and to be the teachers” (interview with Audrey Veloria, February 20, 2000).

The degree to which the sculpture is an embodiment of Kamehameha was central in my conversations with local residents. For some, the sculpture stands in for the chief in a spiritual, or at least palpable way. Most people I spoke with, including the self-described secular, use the personal pronoun “he,” not “it,” when referring to the sculpture, and several referred to him as part of the community *‘ohana* (family). “For many, he’s great grandpa. When they talk to the statue, they’re talking to their ancestor” (interview with Raylene Ha’alelea Lancaster, May 4, 2002).

Some mentioned that they greet him as they drive by on their daily errands. At age ninety-five, Albert Solomon, distant relative to Marie Solomon, recalls, “All my life until now, if I go down there, I pass the statue and say *‘aloha o Mai Kailua Nui*” (greetings to the great king). I’ve always respected the statue, like my great-grandparents respected it” (interview, October 29, 2000). “Maybe I’m a Christian, but I don’t think too much about spirits . . . but when I am standing in front of the statue I think of all his accomplishments. How hard he fought to unite the Islands . . . I think . . . ‘thank you’, and I put on *lei*” (interview with Emma Glory, February 26, 2000). “I’m not going to worship him, but I respect him as a warrior. It’s good to recognise him as King of the Hawaiians” (interview with Henry Dulan, February 25, 2000). “When we view Kamehameha the Great and we look at the statue, we go beyond the metal form . . . to what he did for the Hawaiian kingdom . . . his unification of all the islands, preparing us for the coming of the foreigners” (Kealoha Sugiyama interview with Mary Tuti Baker, the documentary filmmaker, September 4, 1999).

Still others read the hand gesture with direct political interpretations, such as land reparations to Hawaiian people. “Kamehameha is asking the white man, give me back my land” (interview with Joe Chang, February 29, 2000). David Roy of the Royal Order of Kamehameha provided another perspective: “We don’t like the attitude of his holding his palm out like that. It’s like he is giving something away. That’s what they’ve been doing all their lives, giving things away. They’ve given land away, and all kinds of things. Now they don’t even have a kingdom” (interview, March 1, 2000).

### 4. NEW IDENTITY AS A “CONSERVATION OBJECT”

The conservation project put the sculpture in yet another light for people in North Kohala. Just as I learned about its cultural associations, local residents came to know the results of scientific analysis and ways that the data might influence conservation decisions. Through my conversations with people, reports to group assemblies, and articles about the project in the local newspapers, dilemmas of conservation came to people’s attention. Public discourse stimulated personal reflection about the appearance of the figure, its durability, and local traditions of honoring and caring for it.

## GLENN WHARTON

As the research results came in, my investigations and the understandings of participants became interactive. For instance, I learned from a state maintenance worker that the figure's eyeballs were bronze spheres that he had epoxied in place in the late 1970s. He painted them with irises, pupils, and white highlights. We needed to decide whether to retain them. Similarly, I learned from ESEM analysis that the powdery green oxidation contained trihydroxychlorides. This confirmed the presence of bronze disease (Scott 2000; Sease 1978), and provided justification for removing the thick paint layer during the conservation project, at least to treat the brass surface with the corrosion inhibitor benzotriazole before repainting it.

I also learned through x-ray fluorescence and cross section analysis that underneath the twenty-five-plus layers of house paint, traces of gold remained in the deep crevices of the drapery folds. This discovery of gold was the most striking finding from material analysis. It surprised everyone involved in the project, and it strengthened the argument for gilding over painting.

In community discussions about conservation, many people voiced opinions based on concepts of authenticity. In fact, the very notion of authenticity, a canon of conservation, became a topic of public debate as residents discussed honoring artist intentions, honoring the tradition of painting, and getting the skin tones and feather colors "right." Some also voiced their preference for maintaining a distinctive appearance, as expressed in a letter published in the *Kohala Mountain News*: "Some of you say all the statues should look the same; to me that is equal in comparison to re-facing our quaint Nakahara Store and giving it a WalMart sign . . . Are we not a unique community? Do we not live a unique lifestyle?" (Nani Svendsen, November 1, 2000).

A general theme in the pro-gold camp was the greater art historical propriety that would follow from honoring the artist's intent. For others, gold is symbolic of royalty and therefore suitable for a Hawaiian king: "Gold is the world standard . . . It's a standard for wealth, power, and strength. And gold is formed by sunrays that go to the earth . . . Shame—to disrespect the statue with paint!" (interview with Albert Solomon, October 29, 2000). Several people of Asian descent associated gold with its use in Buddhism, including the tradition of applying gold leaf as offering: "I think it should be gold, like the Buddhas in Japan" (interview with Gladys Nanbu, June 9, 2000).

Those in the pro-paint camp also had a variety of reasons. Some wanted to preserve the lifelike ap-

pearance. "Our King looks almost lifelike in the colors . . . as if he is still here" (interview with Stephanie Cabinis, February 26, 2000). Even when challenged, one informant stuck to her guns: "A friend of ours who is an ethnomusicologist from the University of Hawai'i at Manoa . . . said the statue looks like a cartoon figure . . . I took another look at him and thought, 'No, I like the paint.' For me it makes him look more real" (interview with Cheryl Sproat, June 2, 2002). Anti-gold arguments occasionally incorporated anger against Euro/American incursion: "It's stupid to gild it in European fashion" (interview with Anthony Anjo, June 8, 2000). "It shouldn't emit a Western value . . . it detracts from Kamehameha, the man. He was a very humble person. He worked in his favorite taro patches . . . a man of the people, willing to get his hands in the dirt . . . putting a gold cloak on him demeans him" (interview with Fred Cachola, March 15, 2000).

For many who raised the pro-paint argument in the name of authenticity, getting the colors right was of equal importance. As voiced by *kupuna* Marie Solomon at a project meeting, "The feathers should be painted red and yellow. They were the symbols of royalty" (June 14, 2000). According to another resident: "The correctness of it being yellow and red seems really important to me . . . When I go to Hilo and see the other one, or I go to Honolulu [both are gold leafed], they are beautiful statues but they are not him" (interview with Sharon Hayden, February 27, 2000).

Most discussions about color focused on skin rather than feathers. No one knows for sure the tone of Kamehameha's skin. Arguments moved quickly to the politics of skin tone, using distinctions that exist in Hawai'i as elsewhere, including some highly unpleasant racist remarks. Some of those who talked about skin color wanted light brown, but others wanted dark brown: "What's a Hawaiian brown? I have a niece that looks just like you [referring to my pale complexion] and she's quarter Hawaiian" (interview with Audrey Veloria, February 20, 2000). "Hawaiians are light brown color. They are not black. When you look at the [Honolulu] statue it's kind of black. It should be a little more brown" (interview with Naves Santiago, June 8, 2000). "If you go back to the books, Hawaiians were not brown. The old Hawaiians in those days they were like the Negroes. They had dark, purple black skin . . . No way were they tan colored" (interview with Sam Torres, October 26, 2000). "It would be more Hawaiian if the skin was darker" (comment



## DYNAMICS OF PARTICIPATORY CONSERVATION: THE KAMEHAMEHA I SCULPTURE PROJECT

from a fourth grade student at a school presentation, February 18, 2000).

Contrary to my prior assumptions about what I would find in North Kohala, no clear patterns emerged between treatment preferences and people's ethnicity, age, religion, or length of time in the community. Within a heterogeneous demographic setting, people struggled to come to terms with a culturally hybrid sculpture in ways their own backgrounds do not predict. Cultural strands of the Hawaiian past intermix within individuals who are ambivalent about how to honor elements of their identity through this representation of a Native chief.

### 5. THE TREATMENT: MUTUAL LEARNING

To organize the community vote on December 8, 2000, local leaders placed posters advertising the choice between gold and paint around the district. They designed ballots and sent them to each postal box in North Kohala. They stationed ballot boxes at grocery stores, the library, the post office, and other places that people frequent. Approximately 10% of the community voted, and of those, 71% chose paint. The results determined the direction of the project, but the level of turnout led to some of the most interesting discussion among project organizers. While some participants were disappointed by the "low" rate of voting, experienced activists argued that getting 10% of a population to take an active role by marking a ballot at home and taking it to a public ballot box is an indicator of success for any public project. Perhaps more interesting was the suggestion that voting is not a "Hawaiian" process. Elders who worked on plantations do not vote because they were not socialized to participate in any public forum. "In the plantation days when there was a foreman . . . you just followed directions . . . the plantation did all the thinking" (interview with Nani Svendsen, February 21, 2000). Still another reading expressed by some is that most people in North Kohala don't vote in special elections because they do not trust the process, believing it represses Native Hawaiians and other minorities who do not have a voice in the mechanisms of US-style democracy.

Regardless of the meaning of the turnout, the decision to paint moved the project forward. The Kamehameha Day Celebration Commission in Honolulu gave state approval after learning of the community's



Fig. 4. Removing paint with pressurized steam blasting, one of several methods used in the process

decision. This gave me direction to research paint technologies that would withstand the semi-tropical conditions of North Kohala, rather than methods of gilding and patinating.

We proceeded with conventional techniques of documentation and intervention. After installing the scaffolding, I took black and white images for archival records, along with color slides and digital images. I then made drawings and took further samples of paint for cross section analysis and archival storage. Over a period of seven days, I worked with two assistants to slowly strip off surface layers with repeated cycles of methylene chloride gel, starting with bird guano, spider nests, embedded soil, and peeling paint. After removing each cycle of gel, we blasted the surface alternatively with pressurized steam and cold water at approximately 3200 pounds pressure per square inch (fig. 4). I assessed the extent of corrosion and structural integrity of the cast after we removed the paint. Fortunately the cracks in the brass appeared stable. We filled them with structural epoxy putty and documented their location with additional photographs and drawings for future monitoring. Before applying the primer, we treated the surface with benzotriazole (3.5% by weight in ethanol:water 75:25) to help inhibit corrosion.

I selected the paint with the local project leaders using both technical and cultural criteria. I chose a DuPont polyurethane/epoxy automotive paint system for its adherence to metal substrates in semi-tropical climates, while the local committee selected the palette. A local member of the Royal Order of Kamehameha came forward with samples of the rare *'iwi* and extinct *mamo* bird feathers to match Kamehameha's garments at the Bishop Museum. We

## GLENN WHARTON



Fig. 5. Brown color sample wheel against Hilton Nalani Cabrera's arm. The selection of paint to represent skin color stimulated discussion of racial relationships in Hawai'i.

discussed color perception and color saturation, but after considering a less saturated palette, committee members chose a close match to the brightly colored feathers.

Our deliberations led to additional discussion of skin color. *Kupuna* Marie Solomon pointed out, for instance, that Kamehameha's mother was *Keakea* Hawaiian (light skin), and his father (either of two possible fathers) had darker skin. The issue of skin color was not easily settled. The committee agreed that the palette on the DuPont color sample wheel did not represent Hawaiian skin tones. I located a second paint brand, Valspar, with more options. After considerable debate, the committee decided to use the medium brown skin tone of an assistant on the conservation team, Hilton Nalani Cabrera, as a basis for color selection (fig. 5). Cabrera is a descendant of Kamehameha, as well as a descendant of Filipino, Japanese, Portuguese, and British immigrants.

From the very first step of the treatment, our actions led to further understanding of the sculpture's meaning in ways that refocused our attention on questions about the larger issues at stake, as well as the details of the treatment process. At the end of the first day on the scaffolding, I met with *kupuna* Marie Solomon and others in the group of local leaders to provide a project update. I explained that for safekeeping we had removed the bronze spheres that were epoxied into the eye sockets (fig. 6).

Solomon looked at me quizzically. "You took his eyes out?" "Yes. We took them out to save them, because otherwise they would have fallen out during the paint stripping." "Where are they now?" "They're in my pocket." Solomon asked to see them, then cupped



Fig. 6. Hilton Nalani Cabrera removes the bronze eyeballs added by Joe Chang in 1978



Fig. 7. The painted eyeballs that sparked concern about Kamehameha's gaze and spiritual protection of the community

her hands as I rolled the painted spheres out of the film canister (fig. 7). She then launched into a considered response:

In our culture, no one touches the *alli'i's* (chief's) things, his clothes, or whatever . . . no *maka'inana* (commoner) can touch anything. So the blessing that they had was to cut off whatever *kapus* come from behind. You folks are bringing things out of the grave . . . Now you give me the eyes! . . . You took the eyes out. That means he cannot see. What does that mean . . . for Kohala . . . you know, you've got to be careful . . . (February 27, 2001).

As to what to do next, Solomon seemed at a loss: "I kind of don't want to take part in this thing." One of the other Native Hawaiian committee members

## DYNAMICS OF PARTICIPATORY CONSERVATION: THE KAMEHAMEHA I SCULPTURE PROJECT

placed her hand on Solomon's shoulder, and described how the eyeballs would have fallen out during subsequent paint removal. Solomon fortunately started to laugh, breaking the tension. She agreed to be part of the group that would decide on the future of the eyeballs.

The instance of the eyeballs and Solomon's association with *kapu* reminded us that one can never be too cautious in cultural investigations, and highlighted once again my own status as an outsider. It fueled our conversations on the scaffolding throughout the rest of the project. Cabrera later described his experience on that first day at work, where he had sensitivities parallel to those of his elder: "We bow to him and acknowledge him. That is what the Hawaiians do . . . And then you told me to take his eyes out! . . . I said 'I'm taking out your eyes for a reason.' I *kūlō'd* (bowed) and then I took out his eyes" (interview, March 4, 2001).

The committee discussed the eyeballs after we repainted the figure. On the scaffolding, I alternately held them in and took them out, as committee members viewed the choices from the ground. In part due to *kupuna* Marie Solomon's prior response, they decided to put them back in. Contrary to conventions of honoring the original, we attached the eyeballs. We then painted the pupils, irises and highlights to the committee's on-site specifications (fig. 8).

At the rededication ceremony on Kamehameha Day, 2001, with hundreds of people in attendance (including representatives from our funding agencies, cultural administrators from Honolulu, and the documentary film crew), the conservation process received special notice. In addition to the usual program of sunrise prayers, offerings, *hula*, singing and parade, speakers *talked story* about the sculpture's retrieval from the sea, and how it came to be conserved. The Halau 'O Ha'alelea wrote a new *hula ki'i* (puppet *hula*) for the occasion. Part in Hawaiian and part in English, *keiki* (children) puppets asked questions to a *kupuna* puppet and a conservator puppet about bronze disease, and how Kamehameha "received his new clothes." As Raylene Ha'alelea Lancaster put it after performing the chant she wrote for the occasion, "The project is now part of our history" (interview, June 10, 2001).

### 6. HOW PARTICIPATION CAN FUNCTION IN CONSERVATION

Evident from prior reports in conservation studies, community involvement brings new issues into the



Fig. 8. The sculpture after conservation intervention

process, joining technical matters with moral and symbolic concerns. This project shows how new cultural and material knowledge obtained during the research and treatment phases can alter prior understandings of all parties involved. Some of the most significant conversations occurred during the physical intervention itself, as participants reacted to technical information and physical adjustments. Removing the sculpture's eyes for safekeeping led to more discussion about the ways in which the image represents Kamehameha and how, for some, it serves as a receptacle of *mana*. Similarly, choosing color samples for skin tones and bird feathers produced discussion about race and authority invested in feathered garments. Comparing empty eye sockets with painted brass spheres led to conversation about how Kamehameha watches over contemporary North Kohala and what it might mean to honor or offend his presence. The result was a dynamic *process* of investigation and intervention, with each modality looping back upon the other.

As the sculpture became a conservation object in the community, residents integrated new information about its fabrication and current condition into their thoughts about its representation, just as I

## GLENN WHARTON

incorporated cultural information into my own process of understanding. In addition to informing the research, the community discussion made the sculpture more salient on the landscape. It was now understood as a cast brass sculpture that was originally gold leafed and chemically patinated, suffering from structural damage and chloride-induced corrosion.

As Federspiel suggests, public participation in conservation can promote community building and civic dialogue (Federspiel 2001: 78). Kaminitz and her colleagues at the NMAI report that their consultations provide benefits both ways, by informing conservation decisions while reverberating back to associated communities (2005, 101). As found in this project, social inclusion offered tools for memory work and activism. It helped enrich readings of the collective past and future. It was not just about getting the past “right” for didactic, financial, or aesthetic purposes, but was also about finding value in an active process of exploring versions of the past and deciding how to communicate the past to future generations. Recognizing such value in social inclusion shifts the focus from conservation *product* to the conservation *process* (Avrami et al. 2000). One participant in the project remarked, “For many, I think they took it for granted that the statue was here . . . All of a sudden . . . you get the dialogue from them, and those who always had a bond with the statue are finding themselves even thinking more about it and his life. Then you start going back to his life, his purpose and what was he trying to do with his people” (Nani Svendsen interview by Mary Tuti Baker, October 27, 2000).

Several others commented that the project established new patterns of public involvement. In the words of Boyd Bond, a fourth generation descendent of North Kohala’s first missionary, “The process, the balloting and the debate and the discussion was a great model for us as a community . . . I hope we can continue what we learned here” (interview, October 29, 2001). In the same conversation, he referred to the project as a relatively safe space to learn tools of public expression: “The question was relatively benign when compared to some of the more contentious problems we face like rampant development, water issues, and the continuing drug problem. It gave us a chance to practice community discussion without getting at each others’ throats.”

Some might argue that enhancing community consciousness is not an appropriate mission for the profession, especially given the scarcity of resources for

conservation. Opening the door to non-professional participants may erode professional authority, and can lead to decisions that contradict conservation principles such as honoring artists’ intent and other versions of a settled “historic” value (Riegl 1996). On the other hand, some might charge this project with opening the door too wide for non-Native Hawaiians (including the conservator and the funders) to affect an outcome that should be solely in the hands of indigenous residents. And some may be troubled by borrowing research methods such as ethnography from the social sciences for use as conservation tools (for more analysis, see Wharton 2004).

Some of these concerns that played out locally received wider attention in the documentary film that aired on PBS Hawai’i and other public television stations on the mainland. As of this writing, state administrators continue to withhold support by denying funds for maintaining a painted surface rather than gilding. The irony of the state’s ongoing maintenance of the second gold-leafed cast in Honolulu and not the original painted cast in North Kohala is not lost on local residents who see it as “another slight from Honolulu.” Residents now fundraise locally to conduct condition monitoring and cyclical maintenance, as specified in the conservation reports and maintenance training sessions from this project.

Besides the controversies that socially inclusive conservation invites, both within the affected community and in the profession, there are practical difficulties. This project was indeed expensive and labor-intensive, hardly conducive to widespread adoption. But it hopefully provides elements that can be replicated in other projects. These include developing mechanisms of participation through which evolving cultural knowledge *elicited through the conservation process itself* becomes part of an ongoing, dynamic process. It means being prepared, on occasions when it is politically and socially feasible, for a result that runs counter to any convention whatsoever, indigenous or professional. Thus we have in this case a 19th century heroic sculpture finished in bright colors with financial backing (and therefore legitimation) from prestigious funding institutions. Such can be the unexpected results. Finally, projects of this sort mean that the conservator does not come down on one principle or another, one faction or tradition versus another. The conservator’s research aims to provide technical information and to expand

## DYNAMICS OF PARTICIPATORY CONSERVATION: THE KAMEHAMEHA I SCULPTURE PROJECT

an arena for cultural understandings to come forth. The conservator does not choose sides, but chooses to facilitate.

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### NOTES

1. Kamehameha I, also known as Kamehameha the Great, was followed by Kamehameha II, III, IV, and V. In this text, I drop the ordinal (I), and refer to him simply as Kamehameha, as is common among residents of North Kohala. His date of birth, recorded through oral Hawaiian tradition, is contested. Scholars place it somewhere between 1748 and 1761. For the purpose of this writing, I accept Kuykendall's calculation as reported in the Kamehameha Schools publication of Kamakau (Kamakau 1992:66).

2. Participants gave me permission to use their names in writing about this project. Names are used in this article, except in one instance, where comments could jeopardize the individual's relationships within the community. Although the use of real names is somewhat unusual in sociological and anthropological community studies, it is increasingly common when

the research aims to give voice to participant concerns and no harm will come to the subjects from disclosing their identity (Duneier 1999).

3. The "Lili'uokalani Sash," or *kā'ei* (BPBM Accession No. 1910.18.01), (Rose 1978, 24) consists of thousands of tiny red and yellow feathers intricately secured to a woven support of twisted yarn from the *olanā* (*touchardia latifolia*) bark. The *'ahu 'ula* (cloak) (BPBM Accession No. 6828) is commonly known as the *Kamehameha Cloak* (Rose 1978, 57). The helmet (BPBM Accession No. 959) is believed to be the one that Kamehameha gave to his rival Kaumuali'i (chief of Kaua'i), (Brigham 1899, 1918, 31). Kaumuali'i was the chief of Kaua'i that Kamehameha had twice attempted to conquer and finally brought under peaceful submission in 1810 (Kuykendall 1967, 48–51). During their historic meeting in Honolulu, it is believed that Kamehameha gave Kaumuali'i the *mahiole* and two feathered *'ahu 'ula* (Brigham 1899, 1918, 31). The *pololū* (long spear) in Kamehameha's left hand is an inexact replacement of the original, from a restoration campaign in 1883.

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## FURTHER READING

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DYNAMICS OF PARTICIPATORY CONSERVATION:  
THE KAMEHAMEHA I SCULPTURE PROJECT

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