

The Kamehameha I Statue Conservation Project Case Study: Hawai'i Alliance for Arts Education

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PREFACE

On the island of Hawai'i, residents of the rural region of Kohala deliberated how best to conserve a statue of King Kamehameha I, a hero revered as the indigenous unifier of the Hawai'ian islands and native son to Kohala. Should the statue be restored to the mainland artist's original intent of gilded bronze, or should it be re-painted in life-like colors, thereby continuing a longstanding community tradition? Through the respectful collaboration of the Hawai'i Alliance for Arts Education, conservator Glenn Wharton, and Kohala community leaders and cultural practitioners, a multiplicity of gatherings and activities were designed to engage local residents in the decision-making process. Drawing upon both indigenous Hawai'ian and Western ways of community engagement and exchange, activities included: *hula ki'i* (image dance puppetry), informal one-on-one "talk story," consultation with *kupuna* (elders), community meetings, a high school debate with public forum, and an opinion ballot. Arts education activities facilitated by the Hawai'i Alliance for Arts Education encouraged participation by hundreds of young people as well as adults.

The statue of Kamehameha was restored and the tradition of painting it upheld through an uncommon approach to sculpture conservation that engaged and empowered the entire community. Native and long-time residents participated, many who previously would not have come forward. Exploring the question of whether to paint or gild the statue deepened understanding of Hawai'ian history and connection to cultural identity and traditions. And the links between cultural identity, heritage preservation, and current issues of land and economic development became even clearer. The project fostered a heightened sense of responsibility toward the statue, which has, in turn, helped people to see their role in larger issues of cultural preservation facing Kohala.

This case study points to the potency of history and traditional cultural forms as vehicles for connecting the past to the present and the future. It reveals how historical social and political structures affect public participation in civic matters today and how cultural grounding can empower disenfranchised groups to participate in civic life. Further, the project illuminates the importance of understanding and respecting cultural norms of communication and exchange that affect how people engage in civic matters.

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BACKGROUND

North Kohala -- The Tail End of No Place

At the northernmost tip of the Big Island of Hawai'i is the rural and isolated region of North Kohala (population 1,800); some locals call it “the tail end of no place.” Soaring mountain ridges descend to the blue Pacific Ocean and deep green valleys furrow inland. Pacific Highway 270 follows along the western coast, passing historic remains of ancient *heiau* (temples), a fishing village, and the birth site of King Kamehameha I. More than 200 years ago, runners swiftly carried the newborn Kamehameha along a coastal trail toward the mountain ridges of Kohala to protect him from enemies who feared prophecies that he would one day hold great power. The legends of his birth gave names to places along the runners' route—Hawi, ‘place of famine,’ where the baby Kamehameha needed breast milk, and Kapa’au, ‘the place where the blanket went swimming,’ where his kapa (bark cloth) bunting got wet as he was carried across a stream. The prophecies of Kamehameha’s greatness came true when, in 1795, he conquered the islands and united them in peace.

In North Kohala, the coastal highway turns inward, winding through the small town of Hawi and then the slightly larger community of Kapa’au. Not far beyond, the road ends at Polulu Valley. In the center of Kapa’au, shops, restaurants, galleries, and businesses line one side of the road. On the other side, on a rise above the road sits the town’s old courthouse, a modest wooden building painted white that now houses a senior center. In front of it, standing where it has since 1912, is the bronze statue of King Kamehameha I, restored in 2001. The figure’s cast feather cloak is painted in brilliant red and yellow and his skin is painted brown. The statue serves as the focal point for celebrating Hawai’ian culture, in particular the annual Kamehameha Day ceremonies and celebrations. It is central to North Kohala’s identity.

The Statue – Matter and Mana

The Hawai’ian Legislature commissioned the statue in 1878 from Boston sculptor Thomas Ridgeway Gould as a way to commemorate the “discovery” of the islands in 1778 by Captain James Cook, the first European known to land there. Assemblyman Walter Murray Gibson, who spearheaded the project, worked with Gould to create what they called a “Pacific Hero” by portraying Kamehameha in the pose of a Roman Emperor. Their effort was in part to stimulate Hawai’ian nationalism in support of King Kalakaua, whose reign was threatened by American political and economic interests. They worked with Kalakaua, who supplied photographs of “models” from his court wearing the original feathered vestments owned by Kamehameha. Except for these vestments, Gould’s final rendition of Kamehameha conformed to neoclassical European sculptural style and conventions of the time, including Roman sandals. He created the work in bronze, embellished with gold leaf.

Gould shipped the completed sculpture from Europe in 1880, but during its voyage, it sank in a shipwreck off the Falkland Islands. A second cast was commissioned and unveiled in Honolulu in 1883. Meanwhile, the original sculpture, damaged by sea water and having suffered a broken arm, was recovered and brought to Honolulu where a committee formed by Hawai’i Governess Princess Kekaulike chose to place it on the Big Island near Kamehameha’s birth place. From its first big island location, it was moved in 1912 to Kapa’au where it stands today.¹

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Many believe that the original sculpture is the site of the considerable *mana* (divine power), accumulated over time from gifts and reverence for King Kamehameha. At some point early in the 20th century, community members began painting the sculpture in lifelike colors, in part to protect the statue from further deterioration, but also to humanize the image of the great king. Painting the statue became a cherished tradition. Kealoha Sugiyama, a longtime Kohala resident and officer of the Kohala Hawai’ian Civic Club, was the caretaker of the statue in most recent years. Sugiyama tells the story of standing in front of the statue as he contemplated painting it. The statue spoke to him to go across the street to the library and to find a specific book. The book contained information about the red feathers of the Hawai’ian honey-creeper (*‘iwi*) of which Kamehameha’s sash would have been made and the yellow feathers of the *mamo* and *manu* ‘o’o birds of which the cloak would have been made. This guided Sugiyama’s painting of the statue.



Restored statue of King Kamehameha I by artist Thomas Ridgeway Gould.

Like Sugiyama, others in the community point to relationships and connections with the statue that go beyond admiration for its artistry or its historic significance. Outsiders and newcomers do not always understand the Hawai’ian belief that objects embody life or *mana* (spirit). In the book *Voices of Wisdom*, Hawai’ian activist Kekuni Blaisdell explains that not only are objects such as a table alive, but they are conscious and able to communicate. They “receive messages and send out messages. All we need to do is open our receptors,” he says.² Sharon Hayden, a Kohala community organizer who led local efforts surrounding the restoration of the statue explains, “We feel the statue is the embodiment of Kamehameha and the Hawai’ian essence. It’s not an icon or symbol, it’s the real essence. We’re honored and protected by it.”³ With many Hawai’ians able to trace ancestry to Kamehameha,

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hula master and civic leader Raylene Lancaster adds, “We know that some people think we’re worshipping the statue. For many, this is *ohana* (family), great grandpa. When they talk to the statue, they’re talking to their ancestor.”

In recent decades, Kohalans became concerned by the statue’s dramatic deterioration. In 1996, prompted by inquiries from Sugiyama to the King Kamehameha Celebration Commission,

Honolulu officials asked international conservator Glenn Wharton, who had been caring for the replica sculpture of Kamehameha in Honolulu, to assess the condition of the original work in North Kohala. He found that the statue suffered extensive corrosion in the form of bronze disease, which, if unstopped, would eventually destroy the surface details and the interior structure of the sculpture. More significantly for this project, he discovered gold through x-ray fluorescence on the bottom of a paint sample, confirming the suspicion that the sculpture had originally been partial-gilt. The question emerged: Should the statue be restored back to reflect Gould’s original gilded bronze or continue the community’s tradition of painting it?

Restoration – A Decision in Context

For many Kohalans, this decision took on greater significance as they looked back to Hawai’i’s history of cultural heritage lost to outside forces and ahead to island development that could threaten other important heritage sites.

Prior to Western contact, the islands were thriving and densely populated.⁴ But European and U.S. westward expansion repeatedly dismantled Hawai'i's social fabric. By the mid 1800s, the social, cultural and religious systems of the Native Hawai'ians had been replaced by U.S. trade-driven plantation economy and Christian missionaries. The Hawai'ian monarchy co-existed with a legislature although struggles intensified over U.S. trade interests and political and business interests. Finally, in 1893, U.S. forces overthrew the last Hawai'ian monarch, Queen Lili'uokalani, and the U.S. annexed Hawai'i. It became a territory in 1900 and then, in 1959, the 50th U.S. state.

Kohala was sustained by the plantation economy until the 1970s when the Kohala Sugar Company closed, forcing most of the plantation workers to seek work outside of North Kohala, again greatly disrupting the community structure. Now, there is little but the tourist industry on the Kona coast to sustain Kohala residents. Many work two minimum wage jobs to survive. Since the sugar plantation closed, changes in land ownership and an influx of newcomers have characterized the region. Several of the region's historic sites are, in fact, surrounded by private land owned by absentee landowners.

Kohalans cherish the lifestyle that is afforded by the region. The spirit of *aloha*⁵ prevails, nourished by natural beauty and buffered by distance from the hustle and bustle of larger cities and commercial tourist destinations farther down the coast. But, as development and land use issues threaten to change Kohala, its residents face challenges in retaining this lifestyle and preserving cultural heritage sites. At the same time, many in North Kohala worry about the economic viability of the region. Some are afraid that economic opportunity might be lost or impeded if an appropriate balance between growth and preservation is not found.

Over time, Kohalans have been frustrated with local government. The entire island of Hawai'i is a county and county government is headquartered over the mountains in Hilo, about 83 miles away. Rarely do governmental representatives come to Kohala to gauge community perspectives on issues, and Kohalans find it difficult to participate in decision-making forums held far away and at inopportune times. As a result, many residents have adopted the attitude, "Forget the county, we can do it ourselves." Operating under this principle, they have initiated endeavors like the creation of a recycle center at the grassroots level, and implemented them without government assistance.⁶

In summer 2000, North Kohala community leaders organized a Millennium Gathering. Recognizing converging issues of cultural preservation, economic security for local people, and land ownership and development concerns, people gathered over five days to talk about these issues in relation to Kohala's past and future. Revisiting Kohala's history from pre-contact with westerners through the demise of the plantation economy as backdrop, they then looked at the region's present and future. The Millennium Gathering happened at about the same time that restoration efforts for the statue of Kamehameha were just getting started.

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Restoration Dilemmas and Directions

Artistic intent or community tradition

"I was astonished to see a bronze sculpture painted like that," Glenn Wharton recalled. "When I got to Kohala, I was told that people would not want me to take the paint off. That was deeply jarring for me. I couldn't get it off my mind."

After completing the condition assessment, Wharton wrote his proposal describing the necessary treatment and outlining the question to be answered—whether the statue should be brought back to the artist’s originally intended bronze and gilding, or repainted in the tradition upheld by the community. From Wharton’s experience, it was rare to find a community so connected to its past through a work of art. Ever conscious of the conservation field’s ethical standard to restore as closely as possible to the artist’s intentions, Wharton admits, “I was conflicted. ...I know the technical world. I don’t necessarily know the cultural world.”⁷ Even at this early point, realizing this unusual situation and the emotion linked to the statue, he stressed in his proposal that the people of Kohala should be involved in the decision about how to conserve the statue.

Whose responsibility?

Research through a somewhat murky bureaucracy revealed that while the sculpture is owned by the State of Hawai’i, it is not part of any agency’s official inventory list. Therefore, there was no official avenue or provision for care and maintenance of the sculpture. Unofficially, the King Kamehameha Celebration Commission, a semiautonomous state agency in Honolulu that oversees Kamehameha Day celebrations there, claimed jurisdiction over the statue. But it had not in recent times made any site visits to assess the statue’s condition.

When it was apparent that no state or city agency was willing or able to move forward, Wharton approached the Hawai’i Community Foundation for support and recommendations for a nonprofit organization that could serve as an umbrella for fundraising. The foundation recommended the Hawai’i Alliance for Arts Education (HAAE).⁸ Because it worked statewide and was experienced in community cultural work through its work in schools, the Alliance might be the most suited partner.

In 1996, the first time the Alliance board of directors considered a request to help, it had to decline due to a variety of circumstances. Two years later, Save Outdoor Sculpture! (SOS!), a national conservation project, contacted Wharton inviting recommendations for projects that could benefit from SOS! funds.⁹ Wharton asked Kealoha Sugiyama if the community would want the Kamehameha statue to be considered. With this question, the process was put in motion. Sometime later, HAAE received a call asking if it would accept a national SOS! grant to restore Kohala’s Kamehameha sculpture. The HAAE Board was a different group of people this time, including several individuals who were half or part-Hawai’ian. They considered the project in depth and investigated the cultural appropriateness and protocol involved in treating this project properly. After careful consideration, the Board agreed to accept the SOS! grant and help coordinate the project.

Assembling local leaders

The Hawai’i Alliance for Arts Education stepped up to enable the restoration project to move forward, providing fiscal sponsorship and critical fundraising. The Alliance began seeking matching funds to cover the \$75,000 restoration, securing support from the Hawai’i Community Foundation, Atherton Foundation, Getty Trust, and National Center for Preservation Technology and Training.

Marilyn Cristofori, HAAE’s executive director, and Glenn Wharton knew that fundraising was not the only responsibility; they would need to work very closely with local people to discuss difference of opinion around the question—to paint or to gild—and, according to the mission of SOS!, to train a corps of local people to monitor the condition of the statue once restored and

provide ongoing maintenance. In the summer and fall of 1999, they met with Kohala community leaders to design a program to enable community members to become involved in the restoration. They formed a local committee that would guide the design of public discussion about restoration options, cultural activities, and the actual restoration. They already knew Kealoha Sugiyama and believed the Kohala Hawai’ian Civic Club, of which Sugiyama was vice-president, should be a partner. The Kohala Kamehameha Celebration Committee, which plans the annual Kamehameha Day ceremonies, parade, and activities, was also a natural organization to provide local leadership. Several people from this committee signed on to help guide and assist with the restoration project, including Sharon Hayden, a 30-year island resident, organizer, and property manager; Raylene Ha’alelea Lancaster, community leader, president of the Hawai’ian Civic Club, and hula master; and Nani Svendsen, a lifelong resident, organizer, and small business owner. Lei Ahsing, program coordinator at the Hawai’i Alliance for Arts Education, worked with them to coordinate the local cultural and “public dialogue” activity in the schools as well as some in the broader community.

Linking to Animating Democracy

In fall 1999, at the same time as key project planning was underway, the Alliance became aware of Animating Democracy. This was a chance to gain support for planned school- and community-based programs that would engage young people in Kamehameha’s history, to continue HAAE’s efforts to enhance understanding of cultural traditions, *and* to generate public conversation about the restoration. Animating Democracy also offered an opportunity to connect the project to the larger issues of cultural preservation and the future of Kohala. The Alliance pursued Animating Democracy support, stating, “The aesthetic appearance of the sculpture is deeply intertwined with issues of cultural identity, control of public spaces and monuments, and the ways in which historic preservation impacts future growth and economic survival.”

The Animating Democracy grant was awarded in the summer of 2000. By that time, school and community activities were well underway. The final decision about how to restore the statue was slated for late fall 2000. The following chronicle of the project’s key activities consequently begins about a year *before* Animating Democracy support was awarded. (See the Timeline sidebar for an overview of the project’s evolution.)

KAMEHAMEHA STATUE RESTORATION PROJECT OVERVIEW

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|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Initial statue condition assessment by conservator (Glenn Wharton) | 1996 |
| SOS! grant award and HAAE brought on board | 1998 |
| Conservator's community research phase | 1998 - 99 |
| Millennium Gathering | July 2000 |
| Community leaders plan cultural programs and public conversation activities | July 1999- January 2000 |
| Notification of Animating Democracy opportunity | fall 1999 |
| <i>Hula ki'i</i> programs with kumu John Lake | February – June 2000 |
| Animating Democracy proposal made | May 2000 |
| Animating Democracy grant awarded | July 2000 |
| Planning for fall school & community activities and final restoration decision | July - August 2000 |
| School and Community Workshops | Sept - December 2000 |
| Opinion ballot | December 2000 |
| Preparation of conservation materials | January - March 2001 |
| Restoration of the sculpture is performed | March - May 2001 |
| Train community members in maintenance techniques | June 2001 |
| Re-dedication celebrations | June 10 - 11, 2001 |

THE PROJECT

Goals

The project took shape with multiple community-centered goals. First and foremost was to treat, stabilize, and restore the statue based on the community's decision about whether to paint or gild it. This would also include documenting the restoration and training local community members to effectively maintain the sculpture into the future. Local organizers hoped that school and community-based activities—including dialogue about the preservation of the sculpture and cultural traditions—would engage a large cross-section of the community. They envisioned young people and adults expanding their knowledge of the Hawai'ian past, as well as gaining better understanding of options for preserving their cultural heritage. This dialogue would inform a final decision about which restoration path to follow.

The Kamehameha statue restoration would serve as a model for incorporating public concerns and decision-making into conservation processes.

A second goal was to help people see the link between traditional arts, heritage preservation, and community identity, and the relationship between these things and future regional development. The Kamehameha statue restoration would serve as a model for incorporating public concerns and decision-making into conservation processes.

The Alliance hoped that, as a byproduct of the project, students and community members would recognize arts education and arts in education as valuable contributors to public life.¹⁰ Glenn Wharton saw that this project would challenge authority usually invested in the conservator. He used it as an opportunity to explore a “participatory conservation” model, in which conservation authority is shared, giving others a seat at the table. This involved using civic dialogue in the conservation process. As Wharton describes it, “The ‘conservation moment’ in an object’s life is a moment in which public attention can be drawn to explore relationships between community and their material heritage. This leads to social empowerment, as communities take on conservation decision-making, and choosing how to represent their past through conservation intervention.”

Talk Story

While the Alliance and local organizers conceived a range of cultural activities and community forums so that everyone from pre-schoolers to elders would have a way to engage with the project, they did so knowing that “talk story” would naturally propel the community’s decision about how to restore the sculpture.

In Hawai’ian culture, it is unwritten but understood among long-time and native residents that the decision-making process is based on a Hawai’ian kind of conversation called “talk story,” a culture of *‘ae like* (consensus), and respect for the wisdom and approval of the *kupuna*. Project organizers and community members consistently pointed out the significance within the project of talk story. Hawai’ians recognize talk story as one of the few cultural traditions that did not die out when western ways supplanted most others. Talk story is defined as “a complex art consisting of recalled personal events, parts of legends, joking, verbal play and ordinary conversation. ...people often talk story as a means of searching for and recognizing shared feelings.”¹¹

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“We found it difficult to describe talk story fully to our colleagues on the mainland,” Marilyn Cristofori wrote in HAAE’s final report. “Yet, we knew that talk story, along with other traditional community sharing activities, would be the only way to ensure a full and active community participation in this project. Talk story is informal and usually occurs during the course of daily activities, such as grocery shopping, doing laundry, before and after formal events, or at other social occasions. Although the content may appear to be inconsequential or everyday, there is an important exchange of information and significant communication that occurs along with the words, the body behavior, the relaxation (or not) of the participants, and a myriad of other subtle cues.”

Talk story naturally occurred all over Kohala, sometimes energized by restoration-related cultural events and meetings, sometimes by newspaper articles, and sometimes simply on its own momentum.

Beginning One to One

From July 1999 to January 2000, the Alliance and Wharton worked with community partners to plan community and school-based activities that would gauge community sentiments on the restoration question. Wharton was thinking about the restoration task ahead, but also planned to write about the project as part of his work on a doctoral degree and for dissemination to the conservation field as well. Coming from the mainland and wearing these hats, he was highly

aware that he was perceived as an outsider or “*haole*.”¹² Raylene Lancaster affirmed the island’s view of outsiders. “People come over with the desire to help. That’s wonderful. But sometimes the desire of the community gets pushed to the side.”¹³ Wharton asked his local partners how best to enter this community and was warned that you can’t just come and call a meeting. “If you call a meeting, only the *haoles* will show up. The only way is one-to-one.”

Wharton made eight lengthy visits to North Kohala over a thirty-four month period. He conducted repeated interviews with 50 people, meeting mostly with Native Hawai’ians and long-time residents. First he was introduced by the project’s local partners, then one person led him to another. He collected biographical information, explored views about Kohala’s past, present and future, and asked people about their knowledge of the history of Kamehameha, the man and the statue. He was keenly interested in people’s “personal relationships with the sculpture” and public memory of the Native Hawai’ian past in the context of the multicultural present. The sculpture of Kamehameha posed as a Roman emperor was a perfect window into this cultural hybridity. He asked, “What is the statue saying with the gesture? What, to you, is the symbolic meaning of paint or gold leaf?” He invited opinion about how the decision should be made, and who should make it. Often, conversation would gravitate from representing Kohala’s past to current issues of development, the encroaching tourist industry, and Kohala’s future.

Conversations rippled throughout the community as people talked with friends and neighbors about their connections with Wharton.

Wharton discovered that, although there was strong sentiment to continue painting the statue, there were many who favored gilding. Some felt that gold was beautiful, symbolic of royalty, and would best honor the king in addition to respecting the artist’s intent. Some Asian American residents recalled traditions of honoring bronze Buddhas with offerings of gold leaf. Others, like Kapa’au store-owner Shiro Takata, felt the statue should be like the other casts in Honolulu and Hilo. A wealthy newcomer to the island had offered to support the cost of restoring the statue if it could be guaranteed the original bronze and gold finish.

Through these interviews, Wharton also learned a great deal about Kohala and became sensitized to the cultural norms of the place. Listening with respect and openness, and gently reinforcing that there was no predetermined outcome, Wharton earned the trust of the people of the island. Conversations rippled throughout the community as people talked with friends and neighbors about their connections with Wharton. Emma Glory, president of Kohala’s Senior Citizens Club later confided to Wharton: “Initially, especially the Hawai’ians here in Kohala, got very suspicious of fair skinned blue eyed people, and when you were visible in coming to Kohala, everyone said ‘don’t tell him any stories’ ... (but) you related so well in Kohala that’s why we now say ‘Hey Glenn’—it feels like you have been here with us forever.”

Engaging Students and Community Members

Hula ki’i

The Hawai’i Alliance is dedicated to honoring traditional cultural values and adapting them for the future well-being of Hawai’i’s citizens. It had resurrected the nearly lost art of *hula ki’i* as a centerpiece of its community-based family arts program. *Hula ki’i* was banned by missionaries and western colonialists at the end of the 19th century although it existed underground, maintained by a few *kumu* (master) *hula* in rural areas. For this project,

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hula ki'i workshops and performance were central to the cultural experience that engaged people in education about the history and future of Kohala.

In the traditional image dance form of *hula ki'i*, *ki'i* (puppet characters) express all manner of human behavior through drama, movement, humor and song. *Ki'i* may perform alone or with humans and do hulas or plays, sometimes interacting with spectators. As a form, it was performed in the oral tradition of Hawai'ian culture. Kumu hula Lancaster revealed further that, "In Hawai'ian history, hula was sometimes a form of communication for messages that otherwise could not be expressed publicly or directly. Many layers could be added to the story. A *hula ki'i* might look wonderful and funny to the outside, but there may be a very serious message."



Kumu John Lake instructs children in *hula ki'i* as kumu Raylene Lancaster looks on.

During the spring of 2000 kumu hula Keola John Lake worked with Lancaster and her *halau hula* (school) to share throughout the area an original *hula ki'i* that he created. Lake is regarded as one of the most knowledgeable and important leaders in the renaissance of Hawai'ian cultural traditions. His *hula ki'i* focused specifically on the history of the sculpture. With Kumu Lake, school children and community members created puppet characters and learned the chants and hula that accompany the story. While making the puppets, people talked about ancestry and skin tone. Lancaster explains that, "Most people in Hawai'i are a combination of skin tones, so in painting the faces of the *ki'i*, we spent time talking about skin color. Sometimes puppets would have multiple layers of skin paint to reflect the different skin tones in a family. The eyes are also

important [in Hawai'ian culture] and we would ask in the making of the puppets, 'What do the eyes see? What do the eyes learn?'"

The *hula ki'i* workshops provided a direct cultural context for conversation about history and cultural traditions and the value of preserving them. Lancaster summarized, "As the community of Kohala evolves, it must keep its history alive. Inevitable as change is, the community has a better chance of fostering good health, economic well being, and stability if the community remembers its past."

At the culmination of the project, Raylene Lancaster created another *hula ki'i* about the statue restoration that was performed by North Kohala residents as part of the statue rededication ceremonies.

Community meetings

Wharton made presentations to community groups of all kinds to share his knowledge in a way that would help people come to an informed opinion on whether to paint or gild. When asked if he always remained neutral about his opinion as to which restoration approach, Wharton revealed, "It was a delicate dance. I was an outsider. ...People always said, 'Glenn, you're the expert, what do you think?' I decided at a certain point not to be invisible. ...I could contribute technical and financial information. But I had to be real sensitive. I also knew I couldn't bring cultural opinion to the table."

"The interest that the project sparked in the community was cultural rather than overtly political."

The restoration question was largely the focus of community discussions and, according to Wharton, occasionally led in an informal way to larger issues of cultural preservation, how young

people were more and more disengaged from Hawai’ian traditions, and Kohala’s future. He reflects:

The interest that the project sparked in the community was cultural rather than overtly political. The dialogue that I was involved in usually did not move to issues of Hawai’ian sovereignty, nationalism, or environmental degradation. At first this surprised me. In thinking about it, I believe that this is because, embedded in the sculpture are notions of cultural assimilation. The image represents a 19th century attempt to link Hawai’ian nationalism with European royalty and heroic classical traditions, which has different resonance today. If it had been a ki’i (Native Hawai’ian sculptural image) or a Hawai’ian “separatist” image, I believe that the dialogue would have gone straight to issues of repatriation, cultural ownership, and Hawai’ian nationalism.

School-based projects

Wharton joined with Keola John Lake and Raylene Ha’alelea Lancaster to make presentations to more than 500 students in the Kohala schools about the statue and its restoration. In addition, the Alliance found enthusiastic support from high school art teacher Margaret Hoy and civics teacher Fern White. Hoy conceived several project-based learning activities to introduce or deepen high school students’ knowledge of the statue and its history. One group of students did photographic documentation of the statue before and after restoration. As a community service project for a civics class that Hoy also taught, students created a tile mural for an outside wall of the Kohala Hospital, featuring an image of the Kamehameha statue sunken at the bottom of the ocean, surrounded by underwater fish and flora.



High School students debate whether to paint or gild the statue at a community forum.

With another class that was following trends in western art, Hoy developed a project she saw as somewhat riskier. Students were selecting and recreating notable paintings in western art as a way to construct a timeline and be exposed to various eras and developments. At a certain point, she saw it could be interesting to integrate into the paintings the image of the Kamehameha statue. “I was worried that someone would come in, one of the *kupuna*, and say, ‘Now Margaret this is not appropriate for our king.’ ...I knew this was a most important thing in our community. I saw the painting project as a way we were honoring Kamehameha. We were

“...The fact that they argued their points from the point of view opposite their own...helped them to stretch past their own feelings and opinions to understand the nature of debate and dialogue.”

distinguishing him in really high ranks.” But the project was well received. It was displayed, along with others, at the King Kamehameha Day festivities.

Fern White, also the high school debate club advisor, saw an opportunity for the debate club to address the paint or gild question and to bring together community people who held different opinions for exchange with the students and each other. Informed by Wharton about the implications of each choice, students took up the question in a public forum. Debate team student leader and moderator Daniel Otake said, “We weren’t necessarily trying to make one

argument superior to the other in our presentation. We were just trying to give the presentation in an objective manner.” Sharon Hayden reflected, “Our students put tremendous effort and energy into their debate. ...The fact that they argued their points from the point of view opposite their own, was a great lesson for all and helped them to stretch past their own feelings and opinions to understand the nature of debate and dialogue.”

The debate culminated the succession of community gatherings. A hundred people came out in support of their youth and to voice their views as follow up to the debate.

To Paint or Gild – The Community Decides

The opinion poll

Throughout these many community activities, community conversations also focused on who should finally make the decision about whether to paint or gild and how that decision would be made. The restoration committee weighed Hawai’ian decision-making models, including consulting *kupuna*, engaging in *ho’oponopono* (a form of negotiation used traditional to resolve conflict), and western democratic voting. The restoration committee finally decided that the restoration question would be answered by an opinion poll. “I was shocked that they would use a ballot process,” Wharton recalls, imagining instead that consensus would be reached in a more organic Hawai’ian way and in consultation with *kupuna*. “I guess they thought of this as a democracy, and you can’t go back. The committee was ready to accept the decision that would come out of the ballot process. At the time, I wasn’t sure which way a vote would go.” Some on the committee, and Wharton, wondered what would happen if the community voted in favor of gilding.



Sharon Hayden collects opinion ballots from the post office.

Wharton urged that there be more than just the ballot. He wrote a two-page memo to the committee, proposing that representatives of several local groups consider the ballot results and make a decision based on the previous year’s worth of discussions and activities. This decision would then be presented to *kupuna*. The committee agreed.

In November 2000, following the high school debate and community forum, North Kohala’s 1,800 residents received a ballot in their postal boxes. They were instructed to mark their opinion—to paint or to gild—and return it to the Kapa’au post office. By this time, almost everyone living in North Kohala had had contact with restoration-related activities and/or had read numerous articles and editorials in the local newspapers. The 71 percent vote “to paint” came as no surprise, although organizers were disappointed at only a 10 percent response rate. They surmise that the previous year’s activities had generated so much “talk story” that community members knew the overwhelming sentiment to paint would prevail. Wharton agreed, “The process had already done its work.”

Deciding specifics

Yet to be decided were specific choices about treatment and paint color. Skin color was a fundamental decision because of a desire to be true to the person of Kamehameha and a desire to reclaim the statue as a symbol of cultural pride and self-determination. At this point, Wharton and local organizers involved *kupuna*, high school student Daniel Otake, representatives of the Senior Citizens Club, the Royal Order of Kamehameha (a men's club whose members can trace their lineage to Hawai'i's kings), and the Ka'ahumanu Society (an association of Hawai'ian women), along with the core partner groups—the Hawai'ian Civic Club, Kamehameha Day Celebration Committee, and Lancaster's *halau hula*. Glenn Wharton wrote:



Glenn Wharton restoring the King Kamehameha Statue.

Following the public vote, I conducted a number of meetings with a committee of community leaders and *kupuna* (elders). We literally compared different peoples' skin to color chips for paint selection, which inevitably led to discussions of "what is a Hawai'ian?" and "what is a Hawai'ian skin tone?" These questions were particularly charged within this multicultural context, where very few people are pure Hawai'ian. The committee selected a medium-dark brown color, based on a variety of responses. An article that was co-written by committee members for the local paper stated: 'The skin tone was selected to represent Kamehameha, whose mother was Keakea Hawai'ian (light skin), and whose father had darker skin.' It went on to say: 'The red on the Ka`ei kapu o Liloa (sash of Liloa) was matched to a feather from the Hawai'ian honey-creeper i'iwi. The yellow on the 'ahu 'ula (feather cloak), mahiole (helmet), and ka`ei (sash) was matched to feathers from the o'o bird. The interior of the kihei is tan representing the woven cordage that supports the feathers, and the top section of the base is brown, representing the earth upon which Kamehameha stood.' Some committee members wanted the base to be painted black representing lava, but others insisted that Pele (the goddess of volcanoes) is not worshipped in the northern part of the island.'

Also at hand was the question of whether or not to retain eyeballs that had been added in the 1970s. It was a sensitive issue because Hawai'ians affix important meaning to the eyes. Many said the future of Kohala is seen through the eyes of its leader. It was decided, with the blessing of *kupuna* Marie Solomon, that Kamehameha should keep his eyeballs.

The Statue is Restored

Over four weeks, in the spring of 2001, Wharton led the restoration and painting. He involved a team of community members, including Sugiyama, Hayden, Otake, and Nalani Cabrera, a descendent of Kamehameha and also a student leader of Lancaster's *halau hula*. Wharton recalls:

Our community activities that led to dialogue about the layered meanings embedded in the monument brought a large number of people to the work site during the conservation process. Every time I looked down from the scaffolding, there were local people (as well as tourists) watching our work. We often climbed down from the scaffolding to speak with classes from local schools; even the girl scouts showed up one day. In twenty years of work as a conservator, I have never experienced this sort of community engagement in preserving local cultural heritage.

Nalani Cabrera’s connection to the statue was palpable. Cabrera revealed that the night before Wharton called to ask him to be part of the restoration team, he had a dream that someone would call on him and he did not know who it was. During the restoration, he avoided crossing its shadow and had reservations about working above the king’s head. Wharton acknowledged that, “For me, [restoring the statue] is a really interesting job; for [Nalani], it’s an act of devotion.”



Kealoha Sugiyama (center) and others perform with bird puppets at the statue rededication.

Statue Rededication

Everything happening at the Sunday ceremony was a consequence of years of research, desperate searches for funding, local debates and votes and then, following the results of the vote, more specific assignments and more specific research to ensure that before anyone touched the statue, that the procedures were appropriate, faithful to the history of Kapa’au’s eight-foot treasure, and blessed with the town’s approval.¹⁴

On June 10, 2001, North Kohala rededicated the newly-restored statue of Kamehameha. Ritual, blessings, ceremony, and remarks, lasted the entire morning. Wharton was recognized for his important contribution to the community. The *hula ki’i* lovingly created by Raylene Lancaster told the story of the restoration through a dialogue between children and *kupuna* and honored Wharton with a *ki’i* puppet in his image. He credited the Hawai’i Alliance, Hayden, Lancaster, and Nani Svendsen, for teaching him a whole different way of going about things in Hawai’i. He told the crowd of 300 that the project “changed the way I work.”

The next day, Kumu John Lake returned to offer the opening prayer for King Kamehameha Day, followed by lei draping, music, hula and the equestrian *pa’u* princess parade, featuring horses and riders representing each of the Hawai’ian islands and decorated in their symbolic color and flora. In the afternoon, festivities continued at Kamehameha Park with food, performance and an exhibition of the school and community art projects on Kamehameha, as well as other traditional cultural exhibits and demonstrations.



Marilyn Cristofori (center) of the Hawai’i Alliance for Arts Education chats about community projects at rededication festivities.

Video Documentary

Early in the project’s planning, Marilyn Cristofori contacted filmmaker Mary (Tuti) Baker about the possibility of creating a documentary about the Kamehameha project and its many dimensions. Immediately drawn to the project because her family was originally from Kohala, Baker signed on. The team succeeded in arranging a partnership with Hawai’i Public Television and secured further support from the Independent Television Service and Pacific Islanders in Communications, the Charles Englehard Foundation, National Endowment for the Arts, and the Atherton Family Foundation, as well as Animating Democracy. The half-hour documentary titled, *King Kamehameha I: A Legacy Renewed*, captures the history of the statue, the range of community involvement in deciding restoration approach, the actual conservation process, and the celebrations at the rededication of the restored statue. It effectively follows

Wharton's own critical self-examination of the way he conducts conservation work and how this project changed his thinking. The video also examines the dynamics of Kohala as a community to illuminate why this particular community has such a life-changing effect on Wharton. Local organizers Sharon Hayden, Raylene Lancaster, and Nani Svendsen see the sculpture and its conservation as one element of the ongoing work of leaders in the community to preserve Kohala's cultural heritage and rural lifestyle while allowing for economic development to improve life for residents of the region.



Kumu Raylene Lancaster performing hula ki'i on Kamehameha Day.

Like Wharton, Baker and her filmmaking crew became regular visitors to the island as they planned and shot footage. Baker's own Hawai'ian roots and connection to Kohala allowed a comfort level for local people to share their views on film. The finished documentary was premiered in Kohala just before Kamehameha Day was celebrated, a year following the rededication of the restored sculpture. Copies of the documentary were given to the Kohala School District, the library, and other educational and civic organizations in North Kohala. Baker also created a training video to be used by community members trained by Wharton as a companion to the written manual for ongoing maintenance of the sculpture.

OUTCOMES

The statue of Kamehameha was restored and the community's tradition of painting was upheld by community consensus. The project engaged almost everyone in the community, especially long-time residents and Native Hawai'ians who felt welcomed and respected by the open and culturally-grounded nature of the decision making process. Through this process, the sculpture was imbued with new layers of meaning and significance. What's more, citizens made connections between heritage preservation, cultural and community identity, and how their participation is critical to ensuring that these things are protected in the future as regional development efforts play out.

Cultural Regeneration and Community Empowerment

As important as the [statue's] physical restoration, was the spiritual restoration of [its] history and significance in the souls of Kohala's residents.

—Chris Dunlap, North Hawai'i News, June 14, 2001

For many people of Kohala, at a most basic level, the restoration project led to greater knowledge and understanding of Hawai'ian history and culture. The many school- and community-based projects, the meetings, the final dedication ceremony and the exhibits introduced or reinforced Kohala's unique role in Hawai'i's history. *Hula ki'i* not only served to convey the history of King Kamehameha and the statue, but was itself reasserted as an important cultural form to be preserved.

At an even deeper level, the project effected what Glenn Wharton refers to as "cultural regeneration." Values embedded in Hawai'ian culture—connection to the environment, respect for ancestors, caring for each other—were strengthened as they were practiced and referenced throughout the project. New cultural meaning was constructed for the statue. Aesthetic

choices—to paint or gild, skin and vestment colors, how to treat the eyes—held profound cultural significance for Hawai’ian community members. Negotiating skin tone for the statue was

“This project was a high profile allegory for the saving of tradition and the inclusion of all in the process of making decisions for ourselves in a collective manner.”

a deliberate act of self-representation, momentous given Hawai’ian history and because it was performed and sanctioned in the public sphere. The sculpture was inscribed with new civic meaning as well. It came to symbolize other heritage sites and cultural values that are endangered by potential development, and the role that citizens must play to preserve them.

Looking back on the Kamehameha restoration, Sharon Hayden summed it up this way: “This project was a high profile allegory for the saving of tradition and the inclusion of all in the process of making decisions for ourselves in a collective manner.”

People participated who previously would not have come forward. Hayden observes, “People were engaged to participate at almost every level of our community, from preschool to high school to important Hawai’ian organizations. It was important that the request for people’s opinions went out to the community. For many it was enough that you asked their opinion! We are still a small though diverse community and respect is still met with respect. Inclusion is a powerful tool for cooperation and movement.” Native and long-term residents felt welcomed into the public process in large part because the statue and traditional cultural programs provided a comfortable and respectful forum. The combination of all the various cultural activities and public conversations kept the issues in the community’s consciousness.

The project fostered a heightened sense of responsibility toward the statue, which has, in turn, helped people see their role in larger issues of cultural preservation in Kohala. Hayden continues, “Conversations addressed history, tradition, change and the ‘face’ of Kohala as we move into a new and very different future. Our citizens have been made aware of the recent sale of lands, for the first time in our history, and of the radical changes that we are on the threshold of. I believe that a feeling of ownership of our statue and our community has raised responsibility. ...Including so many on some level—in decision making, asking opinion, in the education setting—empowered people, gave them the confidence to express themselves in other arenas such as the new general plan for our County and the many development issues at hand.”

Looking ahead, Fred Cochola, who played a key role in organizing and facilitating the earlier Millenium Gathering, believes that the level of local participation and empowerment fostered by the restoration project will have “spin-off effect and gain momentum.” This momentum, he noted, was bolstered by recognition from national organizations, especially meaningful to Kohalans, who feel they are perceived on the fringes and receive little attention from state sources of support.

Built into the funding of the project was the cost of insuring that the process—the discussions, the arguments for and against this or that detail—would be remembered and that the results of the project would be maintained in very respect.

—Chris Dunlap,
North Hawai’i News,
June 14, 2001

Pushing the Conservation Envelope

The project pioneered a new approach to a participatory conservation that engaged and empowered the community. It not only challenged the field’s ethical standard of honoring artists’ original intent, but challenged who has the right to decide and how decisions are made.

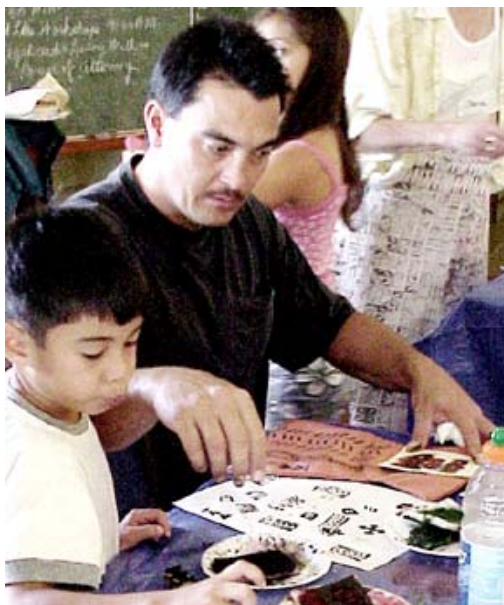
For Wharton, the project was personally and professionally transformative and he has analyzed and documented this paradigm-shifting experience. He comments, “After a lot of thought, I was finally able to articulate that we are engaged in a new form of heritage conservation. ... I am calling it ‘participatory conservation,’ following models of socially engaged public art and ‘participatory action research’ in the tradition of Paolo Freire. We have not only engaged community in thinking critically about its past and participating in conservation decision making, but the process itself became a vehicle to construct new meanings for the sculpture.”

For the 2002 ICOM Committee for Conservation meeting in Rio de Janeiro, he wrote:

Debate over how best to conserve material culture will continue. Some will argue for minimal intervention while others will argue for extensive restoration and active use of cultural heritage. The recognition of cultural relativism and contested meanings embedded in material objects has begun to enter conservation literature (Clavir 2002, Odegard 1995, Federspiel 2001). (‘Participatory’) conservation’ offers a model for bringing this knowledge into play. ... the conservation process can be used both as a vehicle for public engagement, and as a tool for critical discourse about how conservation represents the past.¹⁵

Wharton presented the Kamehameha restoration project at the 2001 conference of the American Institute for Conservation of Historic & Artistic Works and is working on a book that

looks in depth at the experience and its implications for conservation and related fields. The project was recognized by an independent group of conservators, art historians, public art professionals and preservationists with SOSI’s First Place Award for Achievement for its public awareness and conservation efforts.



Father and son create puppets together.

Arts Education Bolstering Civic Engagement

Built into the local schools’ curricula last year, and now permanent components, were stories, debates, and lectures at every grade level—and here is the answer to the question, What about tomorrow? Tomorrow sat in front of us on Sunday at the rededication; pre-schoolers with puppets on their left hands, and all manner of expression on their faces, anchoring the lauhala mats in the wind, sitting without complaint when the rain began and the adults ran for cover.

—Chris Dunlap, North Hawai’i News, June 14, 2001

Arts education activities facilitated by the Hawai’i Alliance for Arts Education encouraged and enhanced civic participation by both young people and adults. More than once, the people of Kohala expressed that children and education were among their highest priorities and the answers for Kohala’s future. More than once, people observed how reaching the children, in turn, reaches parents, through conversations at home and as they come out to school and public events in which their children are involved.

The project helped to cultivate young citizens as well as future community members concerned about preserving culture and making responsible civic decisions. When asked what his involvement in the project made him think about in terms of Kohala's future, high school senior Daniel Otake replied, "My hope is that Kohala doesn't really change, but that what we have here can be made better." He imagined development projects like restoring the old abandoned theater as the type that would be positive for the community. "The government," he observed, "has some obligation to the people to preserve what we lost so many years ago. But also the government has proven to be inefficient in many things. So the community has to really take part in preserving our culture and our town." He envisioned leaving Kohala to attend college and learn skills that he could one day bring back to Kohala.



Kupuna Kindy Sproat talks story at the high school debate.

The spin-offs of the Kamehameha project continue. Using the project as the case study, Margaret Hoy and Lisa Altieri developed a website sponsored by HAAE for the Hawai'i Learning Interchange that presents lesson plans for using public art as a resource for teaching in the classroom. Art activities from the school and community-based efforts are featured along with how these address both national and Hawai'i educational standards, reflections, parental/community engagement, and other resources. Raylene Lancaster is working to turn her *hula ki'i* script about the restoration into a coloring book with accompanying CD, so that the next generation of young people may learn about the statue and funds from selling these items can help children on the island.

LEARNING

For Animating Democracy, the Kamehameha restoration project was a fundamental learning experience, deepening understanding of the intricate relationship of culture to civic life. The

The Kamehameha project underscores the importance of understanding and respecting cultural norms of communication and exchange that affect how people engage in civic matters.

project demonstrated how a single cultural object—the Kamehameha sculpture—could become imbued with new meaning through a process of civic engagement. It emphasized the value of traditional cultural forms and the lessons of history as vehicles for connecting the past to present and future. It pointed out that western orientations to democracy and dialogue do not readily take into account the communication

norms of culturally specific groups, and, at the same time, in Hawai'i where cultures have hybridized over time, that cultural traditions and modern democratic processes co-exist to define a complex public sphere.

Civic Engagement in Cultural Context

The Kamehameha project underscores the importance of understanding and respecting cultural norms of communication and exchange that affect how people engage in civic matters. This means considering both tradition and history as well as contemporary dynamics within and between cultural communities.

In Hawai’ian culture, decision-making aims for ‘*ae like* (consensus). Sharon Hayden offers, “the challenge is to honor differences and allow space for all to be, then to synthesize the sometimes disparate opinions and arrive at a win-win, a place where a mutual agreement, a consensus, can be made.” Talk story, as it naturally occurs in a community, can eventually lead to consensus on important issues. Boyd Bond, local historian and lifelong resident of North Kohala, further describes that the Hawai’ian way is to sit as long as is needed to come to decision. He notes that town meeting-style public deliberation did not become part of local process until Caucasian newcomers arrived. Agenda-driven and intended to resolve issues quickly, such meetings are not geared toward consensus and are not a zone of comfort for most long-time Hawai’ians.

So it is not surprising that, when Animating Democracy came along looking for purposeful, structured public exchanges, explicit “civic” focus, and a format that engaged people representing all perspectives regarding the issues, HAAE and local organizers firmly held that western ways would not necessarily work in Kohala. “Animating Democracy presented certain parameters that needed to be acknowledged,” said Raylene Lancaster. “Just don’t structure me in a particular manner that is outside of my culture.”

Animating Democracy struggled at first to understand how talk story was more than private conversation and how it became civic. Similarly, Animating Democracy wondered whether the debate forum Fern White and her students were eager to mount would actually lend credence to the kind of public argumentation that Animating Democracy often held up as counterproductive to true and open dialogue. For Animating Democracy staff, it took a visit to Kohala to attend the statue rededication ceremonies and meeting scores of Kohalans to better understand talk story. Being there, one could understand the ripple effect of talk story as individuals referred to conversations with other community members about the statue restoration and related issues. An Animating Democracy staff member admits, “Ultimately, we were the learners and outsiders. The responsibility was not theirs to explain, but rather ours to learn and respect talk story as existing and functioning, just as they say it does, without our necessarily being able to experience it or fully understand how it works.”

The school debate was a useful opportunity for students to consider the opposite view that they personally held and to sharpen oratorical skills, also respected in Hawai’ian culture. What’s more, it proved to be an attractive forum for the community, which came out in large numbers and engaged in the question with the students.

Hawai’i is a complex place where non-Western and Western approaches to art, dialogue, and civic engagement co-exist discreetly and sometimes merge as hybrid forms. Democratic processes of voting and public forums (such as the opinion poll and high school debate) operate alongside traditional protocols like seeking advice and blessings of *kupuna*. A hybridization of these traditions also occurs. Locals described, for example, an important public meeting that succeeded in averting the construction of a diesel power plant in Kohala. The meeting opened with Hawai’ian chants and prayer and was closed by kumu singer and storyteller Kindy Sproat singing “The Winds of Kohala,” accompanied by his ukulele.¹⁶ Similarly, in recent years, Hawai’ians have looked to formalize traditional practices of ‘*ae like* and *ho’oponopono*—consensus and negotiation.

“In Kohala, if you want people to come and share, you tell them it’s a talk story session.”

—Tuti Baker, maker of the documentary video *King Kamehameha I: A Legacy Renewed*

Ultimately, project organizers drew upon both worlds, incorporating western democratic approaches into culturally-understood and honored traditions. They proved mutually supportive, one-on-one talk story informing public gatherings and vice versa. The cumulative effects of these

many private and public conversations and cultural activities over two years brought the community to consensus.

The Kamehameha project suggests that historical social and political structures affect public participation in civic matters today and that cultural grounding can empower groups to participate in civic life, particularly those who have experienced a history of subjugation or

The Kamehameha project suggests that historical social and political structures affect public participation in civic matters today and that cultural grounding can empower groups to participate in civic life.

exclusion. Local people often cited historical reasons for limited participation by Native Hawaiians in official public forums today. Hierarchical systems--chiefdoms, the monarchy, 19th century missionaries and 20th century plantation owners--reinforced a society in which decisions were made by a few for the many. These systems did not cultivate new leadership or participation in public matters by the people at large.

The high degree to which native and long-time residents actively participated in the Kamehameha restoration project is therefore significant. That Kohalans held their ground when Honolulu officials urged them to reconsider the decision to paint the statue is potent evidence of increased confidence and self-determination. Some Kohalans believe, in the past, they would have acquiesced to the Honolulu authority. Glenn Wharton believes that “old timers” came out in the first place because “the statue was an easy and familiar and important object to get them to connect. ...this project touched a nerve that other projects couldn’t have” because the statue was a focal point.

Participation in the project by part-time residents, large landowners, and pro-development business is less evident. These stakeholders were minimally present at public gatherings such as the debate and meetings to discuss restoration options, and there is no way to gauge if and how they responded to the opinion poll. Although project organizers did connect with a handful of local business leaders and regional master planning facilitators who favor economic development opportunity, many of these individuals are already sensitive to cultural preservation concerns and favor smart growth planning.¹⁷

One might perceive that an opportunity to bring more divergent perspectives together in dialogue was lost, as was suggested when HAAE made its proposal to Animating Democracy. Besides being impractical and unrealistic for off-island landowners and developers to attend project activities, there was nothing at immediate stake to motivate their participation even if they did. In retrospect, local organizers’ intuition not to push to engage these stakeholders at this stage was probably on the mark. Instead, they nurtured local community members in playing out their feelings and ideas about culture and Kohala’s future on their own terms first. The effect was to build confidence and empower local people to participate in high stakes development issues to come.

Navigating by the Local Compass

Negotiating the needs, interests, and priorities of the triumvirate of artist, cultural institution, and community partners is one of the most challenging aspects of civically engaged cultural work. Such endeavors bring many questions to the surface: Who owns the project? Who defines and



The statue draped in ceremonial leis on King Kamehameha Day.

represents local culture? How should power relations and political dynamics within the community be acknowledged and addressed? Who will maintain the relationships developed through the project into the future?

This project had the potential to be buffeted by a wave of outside agencies as well as by Wharton, an outside cultural agent. And yet, the project achieved a remarkable harmony among its many players while maintaining local control. What can other efforts learn from this example?

The project never lost its local compass due to a group of strong, committed, and savvy local organizers—Sharon Hayden, Kealoha Sugiyama, Raylene Lancaster, and Nani Svendsen. They remained firm and focused on the needs, values, and concerns of Kohala and its citizens. Although rightfully cautious of project outsiders at the beginning, they were generous and patient, and invested in deepening Wharton’s and Animating Democracy’s understanding of place, culture, and issues. They set the example of diplomacy and aloha that became the cultural norm of the project as well as the cultural norm of the place. Raylene Lancaster described at an Animating Democracy peer gathering:

Our culture is an oral culture, and we . . . say what we would like to have happen in a way of honoring each other rather than demeaning each other. That takes great skill, when you’re looking at someone who doesn’t understand you. You defeat yourself when you try to pound others down. I have learned to speak honestly, about why things are important. When we choose not to speak, or choose not to be present because we might have an influence on someone else’s perception, they too will not speak, or not address what’s important. You won’t know how I relate to things unless I tell you. I think we forget to do that, when we’re tangled up in the end product, and we lose the path of how to get there.

As the overall sponsoring organization, the Hawai’i Alliance for Arts Education found the right balance of support and hands-off in order to enable local control. HAAE project leaders deeply understand and themselves embrace Hawai’ian ways. Marilyn Cristofori and Lei Ahsing provided invaluable interface between local organizers and outsiders, informing and coaching about Hawai’ian ways and practicing appropriate protocols so that outsiders would not inadvertently offend local people. In her coordinating role, Ahsing gently supported local teachers and contacts to themselves define and implement school and community activities.

Finally, working on behalf of the community, Wharton served as an effective cultural agent. Although local people perceived him as an outsider at first, they soon recognized him as someone who listened intently and was open to and respectful of the community’s deep connection to the statue of Kamehameha. Wharton spent considerable time getting to know local residents and hearing their views and stories. He became intimately knowledgeable about the place and was thereby given the same respect he imparted to others. He gently guided processes related to the restoration. The Alliance praises Wharton as “both a superb technician and a wonderful human who perceived the need for his full personal involvement in order to move the project forward with integrity.” Raylene Lancaster’s tribute to Wharton in her *hula ki’i* for the statue rededication ceremonies is



Conservator Glenn Wharton with puppet in his image.

overwhelming evidence of the affection and respect he drew. The local newspaper astutely observed: “Trying to find THE hero in the story cannot easily be done, since from the very beginning this was to be avoided by design. That this can be the controlling theme can, perhaps, be credited to statue conservator Glenn Wharton, though he consistently and emphatically redistributes the credit through a cast [of] hundreds.”¹⁸

A CLOSING MAHALO

As a learning lab about “arts-based civic dialogue,” Animating Democracy has perhaps learned more than our Hawai’ian partners. They were very much our teachers. Animating Democracy comes away with new and deeper understanding thanks to the wisdom, patience, and generosity of the Kohala community; of local organizers, especially Sharon Hayden and Raylene Lancaster; of Marilyn Cristofori and Lei Ahsing of the Hawai’i Alliance for Arts Education; of Glenn Wharton; and of documentary maker Tuti Baker. The project will not only inform others doing civically engaged cultural work, but it will inform Animating Democracy’s future efforts in working with culturally specific communities. Mahalo.

Pam Korza is co-director of Animating Democracy, a program of Americans for the Arts. Animating Democracy fosters arts and humanities activity that encourages civic dialogue/engagement on contemporary issues. Supported in its first phase by the Ford Foundation, Animating Democracy advances arts- and humanities-based civic engagement through convenings, a web site, publications, and services and programs. Korza provided research for and co-wrote the study, *Animating Democracy: The Artistic Imagination as a Force in Civic Dialogue*. For 17 years, she worked with the Arts Extension Service (AES). While at AES, she coordinated the National Public Art Policy Project in cooperation with the Visual Arts Program of the National Endowment for the Arts, which culminated in the publication, *Going Public: A field guide to developments in art in public places*, which she co-wrote and edited. She directed the Boston-based New England Film and Video Festival, coordinated the New England Arts Biennial, co-authored *The Arts Festival Work Kit*, and was co-editor and contributing writer to *Fundamentals of Local Arts Management*, also published by AES.

¹ McCabe, Jeannie and Elizabeth Harryman, "Will the Real King Kamehameha Statue Please Stand Up?" *Hawai'i Westways*, June/July 2001, p. 6.

² Harden, M.J., *Voices of Wisdom: Hawai'ian Elders Speak*, Aka Press, 1999.

³ Quotations, unless otherwise noted, are drawn from Animating Democracy sources including project reports submitted by the Hawai'i Alliance for Arts Education, notes from presentations made about the project at Learning Exchanges, and interviews.

⁴ Kamehameha was about 25 years old when Cook arrived. His rule as monarch of the unified islands began in 1795.

⁵ Love, compassion; also a greeting of hello and goodbye offered with affection

⁶ At the time of the restoration project, many local people did point to then new mayor, Harry Kim, and planning director Chris Yuen as offering new hope for government action on issues of importance in Kohala.

⁷ From the video documentary, *King Kamehameha: A Legacy Renewed*, produced and directed by Tuti Baker, Ki'i Productions, 2002.

⁸ Formed in 1980 in response to the statewide need for arts as integral to education, the Alliance supports all art forms as essential to the education of all children, and for lifelong learning.

⁹ The project supported Save Outdoor Sculpture's core philosophy that people are the keepers and caretakers of culture and cultural objects. Save Outdoor Sculpture! is a public/private initiative to document all monuments and outdoor sculpture in the United States and to help communities and local groups of all ages and interests preserve their sculptural legacy for the next century. It is a joint project of [Heritage Preservation](#) and the Smithsonian American Art Museum.

¹⁰ Arts education consists of education in the art forms of music, dance, theater, literature, etc. Arts in education is differentiated as the use of arts in the teaching of other curricula, such as math, geography, sciences, etc.

¹¹ Boggs, S., K. Watson-Gegeo and G. McMillan, *Speaking, Relating and Learning: A Study of Hawai'ian Children at Home and at School*, Ablex Publishing Company, 1985.

¹² According to the web site Hawai'ian-roots.com, at first, all foreigners were known as "haole," which means outsiders or non-Hawai'ians. Since the first foreigners that the Hawai'ians saw were Europeans, the word soon came to refer strictly to persons of European ancestry. This meaning continues to this day although sometimes it can also be used derogatorily.

¹³ From the video documentary, *King Kamehameha: A Legacy Renewed*.

¹⁴ "A town's achievement—the rededication of landmark statue," *North Hawai'i News*, June 14, 2001.

¹⁵ Wharton, Glenn, "Conserving the Kamehameha I monument in Hawai'i: a case study in public conservation," Preprints 13th Triennial Meeting Rio de Janeiro, September 22-27, 2002. Published by International Council of Museums (ICOM), James & James Ltd. London, 2002, Vol. 1, p. 203.

¹⁶ Kindy Sproat, a lifelong resident of North Kohala, was recognized in 1988 by the National Endowment for the Arts with a National Heritage Fellowship Award for his storytelling and as a singer of old Hawai'ian songs.

¹⁷ Smart growth is development that responsibly considers and seeks to balance community, economic, environmental and other concerns related to sustaining livable communities. Smart growth aims for policies and practices that, for example, promote environmental protection, open space and farmland protection, affordable housing, and the creation of livable communities.

¹⁸ "A town's achievement—the rededication of landmark statue," *North Hawai'i News*, June 14, 2001.