

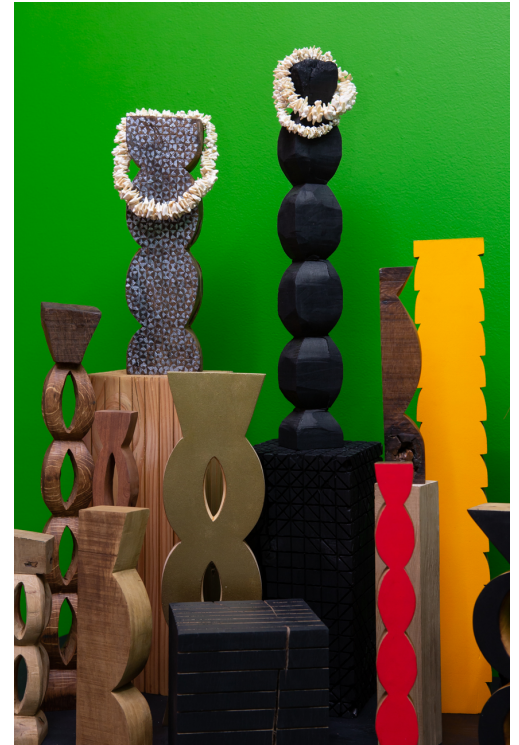
MARISA NEWMAN PROJECTS

Rā'au
by Maia Nuku

Ua òere haere noa
Te hinarere i to ù nei fenua.
Aitau rā, àitau rā, àitau rā i to ù nei fenua.

Devour the time, devour the lost time.
Consume the ravaged waste
so that the deep past can unite with the future.

- Henri Hiro, *Aitau / Devour Ravaged Time*ⁱ



Verdant, vibrant, vital: this green of the gallery walls is alive and tenacious, catching hold of your core and dragging you willingly into an alternate dimension. Trunks sprouting free from the confines of a chair. Yellow, red, gold and black: these upright armatures speak of ancient ways, gathered in clusters on *ahu* (altars) and garlanded with plaited twists of fiber, *couronnes* of tiny shells and seeds, threaded and wound around the shoulders of these thrusting, muscular forms. Bristling with Lee's energy, this forest of fractal elevations reflects the cultural milieu the artist was raised in. The sculptural volume of black stained and gold-edged *to'o* (batons) reminiscent of pods, bursting with energy, arching their way through the thick air, connecting the soil of the *fenua* (land) with *ra'iatea* (open and sacred skies). Veri: the centipede, is dynamic and active here, wrapping itself around the ankle, working its way along the branch, reaching upwards. It's a motif one finds stamped into the fibrous surface of bark cloth panels, notched into the carving, etched into the skin. Lee brings it all to life here in a twenty-first century homage to the fierce beauty of the islands that raised him. Lush and dynamic, drenched in the potent energy of gods and nature, they could not help but leave their mark on him.

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In his poem *Aitau*, Tahitian activist and poet Henri Hiro urged Tahitians to confront the ‘ravaged era of [their] past’, to reconcile the evangelical and colonial complexities of history by returning to their roots – the only way, he believed to renew the cultural foundation that would be vital in moving them forward into the future. “It’s what we must devour, digest, and overcome,” he wrote, “in order to reconnect again ... it’s up to each one of us to find his own way.”ⁱⁱ For Hiro, independence from French colonial rule not so much about “breaking away,” as demanding “sovereignty over decision making”ⁱⁱⁱ and his call went out to all those that called the islands home: those with ancestral connections to Polynesia alongside the many that have borne the trajectories of history and come to call it home. All those who breathe and taste its salty air. Alexander Lee’s installation answers this call to a return to roots as cultural foundation. Embracing the soil of the islands, the works seem to unleash the multiple and interlocking facets of his own relationship with place. The landscape he grew up in has seeped into his skin, it pours out of him in this show. *Rā’au: Wood. It is medicine; medicine for a new age.*

ⁱ Poem ‘Devour Ravaged Time’ by Polynesian poet and activist Henri Hiro (b. Mo’orea 1944 - 1990). Translation from French by Jean Toyama and Frank Stewart. Published in *New Writing From French Polynesia*, Frank Stewart, Kareva Mateata-Allain and Alexander Dale Mawyer (eds.), Mānoa: A Pacific Journal, pp. 84-6. (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2006).

ⁱⁱ The Source: An interview with Henri Hiro, Rai a Mai, Henri Hiro, Jeam Yamasaki Toyama. *Manoa*, Vol. 17, Number 2, 2005, 76

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid.*, 78