



A Native Hawaiian cultural trademark could protect the artwork of master Hawaiian weapons crafter Gordon 'Umi Kai (composite above) and the Jensen family (at right). Photos: KWO Archive

## Native Hawaiian artists seek greater recognition through a fine-arts market and a cultural trademark study

By Sterling Kini Wong  
Publications Editor

For too long, Native Hawaiian artist Maile Andrade says, she has watched non-Hawaiian artists garner recognition and wealth for art they try to pass off as being culturally Hawaiian.

"It's a theft," she says. "They're taking from our culture and using it to make money and publicize their name. A lot of times the culture they depict isn't even accurate – some of it's inappropriate."

Such problems have recently brought a number of Hawaiian artists together to seek some much-deserved attention – and protection – with their very own art market and a study on creating a Hawaiian-made trademark.

The art market and trademark

aim at helping consumers identify authentic Hawaiian art while also helping Native Hawaiian artists – who often have to compete with cheap knockoffs of their traditional wood crafts, feather works and quilts – charge the true value for their products.

During the first weekend in April, Bishop Museum will host the first Native Hawaiian Arts Market. The market, which will be part of the Maoli Arts Month (see box), will feature 20 booths filled with arts and crafts made by Native Hawaiians.

The Native Hawaiian Arts Market is modeled after the popular Santa Fe Indian Market, which draws more than 100,000 people every year for its high-end Native American art.

Bishop Museum Project

Specialist Noelle Kahanu says that while the market will create some much-needed visibility for Native Hawaiian artists, consumers better come ready to shell out some kalā.

"This isn't going to be a craft fair with cheap products," she says. "This is fine art."

In January, Hale Kū'ai, a Hawaiian producers cooperative, launched a seven-month study into the development of a trademark that will identify arts and crafts made by Native Hawaiians.

Funded with a \$74,000 OHA grant, the group will hold workshops throughout the state over the next four months to present information to Native Hawaiian artists and gather ideas.

Leighton Chong, a Native Hawaiian attorney specializing in intellectual property rights, says the trademark will give consumers – especially tourists – options.

"With the trademark, people have the choice of either paying \$200 for an authentic feather lei or \$5 for a cheap replica," he says. "The trademark creates a comfort zone for buyers, and they can decide if the authentic piece is worth the price."

Andrade says she sees the trademark as a way to promote greater authenticity throughout the entire Hawaiian cultural arts industry.

"It will give Hawaiians an edge in the market, because if we're visible, people will have to pay attention," she says. "And then we can call out non-Hawaiian artists on their inaccuracies. People will have to start doing better research" because their products will be compared with art that is recognized as being authentic.

While this would be the first trademark for Native Hawaiian artists, Maori in New Zealand and Native Americans already have their own insignias to protect their products. First-time violators of the Indian Arts and Crafts Act of 1990 face fines up to \$250,000 and possibly five years in prison; businesses that break the law may be fined up to \$1 million.

But Chong points out that a trademark proposal that only recognizes Native Hawaiian artists

may face legal hurdles because it could be interpreted as being based on race. While Native American tribes have a political relationship with the federal government, Native Hawaiians do not. Chong says that there are several ways around that issue, such as basing the trademark on the authenticity or quality of the product or the skill of an individual artist.

Gordon 'Umi Kai, a respected crafter of traditional Hawaiian weapons, believes that the quality component is essential to the trademark. "Without [that recognition of quality], I don't see the value in the trademark," he says.

Others, however, shudder at the thought of a board or an organization telling artists that their products aren't good enough. "I wouldn't want to be the arbiter who determines whether someone

else's work is pono or authentic," artist and filmmaker Meleanna Meyer says. "A seal that states that I'm a Native Hawaiian artist is enough for me. Lawa, ua pau [enough, all done]."

Nevertheless, there is a consensus that the discussions are necessary, and that the road to achieve a Native Hawaiian trademark will be difficult but rewarding.

Applications for artists to participate in the Native Hawaiian Arts Market are being accepted until March 17. For more information, call Noelle Kahanu at 848-4190 or email her at noelle.kahanu@bishopmuseum.org.

For more information on the Native Hawaiian Cultural Trademark Study, call Ho'oiipo Kalaena'auao Pā at 778-4030, or email malamaonakii@hawaii.rr.com.



### Native Hawaiian cultural trademark study workshop schedule

As KWO went to print, the specific locations and times had not been set. For details, call 778-4030.

Kaua'i – Feb. 11  
O'ahu – March 18  
Maui – April 8  
Hawai'i Island – May 13

## Maoli Arts Month

The month of March will be a time for Native Hawaiian artists to celebrate and be celebrated, as the Maoli Arts Alliance has declared it Maoli Arts Month.

The month will be filled with events that spotlight the talents of established and emerging Native Hawaiian artists, starting with the First Friday Gallery Walk on March 3. This version of the monthly arts event in Chinatown will showcase Native Hawaiian artists at several galleries, all located within walking distance of each other in Chinatown. As KWO went to print, six venues were slated to participate in the Maoli Arts Month: ARTS at Marks Garage, the Pegge Hopper Gallery, Into Gallery, the Louis Pohl Gallery and the Chinatown Courtyard.

Among other Maoli Arts Month events, the Brothers Cazimero will be performing at Hawai'i Theatre on March 10.

Check the March issue of KWO for a complete schedule of Maoli Arts Month events. For more information, call Vicky Holt Takamine at 754-2301, or email vickyt@ilio.org.