

imua

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Weaving lasting lessons
of history, culture



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Faced with a slew of challenges resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, **Lloyd Harold Kumulā'au Sing Jr. KSK'89** has remained steadfast in his pursuit of sharing Hawaiian cultural practices and traditions.

The tic, tic, tic of a chisel on wood followed by the swishing of sandpaper are uniquely rhythmic sounds that, while simple and primitive, combine to compose a methodical melody.

For **Lloyd Harold Kumulā'au Sing Jr. KSK'89**, this craftsman's composition is a slow-developing opus featuring stanzas of planning, chiseling, sanding, weaving and finishing that crescendos with creations of beautiful and powerful representations of Native Hawaiian culture and history.

His knowledge of and passion for the Native Hawaiian arts of sculpting wooden figures and implements, and weaving a multitude of baskets and helmets is present in every work of art he and his students produce through painstaking dedication and attention to detail. Sing, a Kamehameha Schools cultural specialist based at the Ka'iwakīloumoku Hawaiian Cultural Center at KS Kapālama, is a traditional mixed-media artist and Hawaiian cultural practitioner who has created a community of 'ie'ie (woody climbing vine) basketry weavers who are, piece by piece, revitalizing this important practice.

Sing was selected as a member of the inaugural 2020 Luce Indigenous Fellows class that has worked to share a collection of knowledge with participants from Alaska, California, Minnesota, New Mexico, New York, North Dakota. The cohort, which was composed of 10

participants selected from a pool of 550 applicants, came together in person, and then virtually, to represent and share native cultures, while navigating the uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Kumulā'au is an amazing loea hana no'eau (master craftsman)," said **Lāiana Kanoa-Wong**, a KS cultural specialist. "I have had the pleasure of working together on many projects with him and have learned so much from him throughout the years. Kumulā'au has led projects from carving kānoa (wooden 'awa serving bowls) and ki'i (carved images), to creating 'ohe kāpala (bamboo stamps), making 'apu (coconut drinking bowls), shaping moa pāhe'e (sliding darts) and weaving coconut leaves as platters.

"My favorite group activity that he leads is our hau cordage-making workshop. In this large-scale workshop, we have facilitated more than 100 staff and teachers to individually hilo (twist) their hau until it becomes cordage. The activity culminates when Kumulā'au skillfully weaves everyone's individual cordage strands into a singular unified piece of cordage symbolizing the unity and strength of the group."

Traditional Hawaiian weavers gather and prepare the 'ie'ie rootlets for the purpose of creating sturdy baskets to sort

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Cade Blake worked under the guidance of Sing to craft a leiomano (shark-toothed club). Sing explained the process in easy-to-understand terms, provided hands-on examples of how to create the implement and checked on the student's progress along the way.



and protect their food and personal valuables, as well as serve as the repository for their bones. As part of the fellowship, Sing and his wife, May Haunani Balino-Sing, taught a cohort of students how to weave six different mahiole (traditional helmets worn by the ruling chiefs of Hawai'i) using 'ie'ie weaving techniques. Even after the fellowship wraps up, the couple will continue to mentor students to teach and demonstrate these techniques in public in order to share knowledge with additional Native Hawaiians and Pacific communities with the broader goal of raising awareness and generating interest in this unique form of art and storytelling.

"Being selected as a Luce Indigenous Knowledge Fellow has given me the opportunity to access resources that will further continue my journey to heal and empower my Hawaiian people and their communities," Sing said. "Proliferating cultural arts encourages my people to be their best selves; allowing them to connect to their kūpuna and strengthen their cultural identity: one class, workshop, cohort and community at a time. It is my kuleana to pass on the ancestral knowledge and practice that was given to me to share with others."

Traditions live on through art

Sing recognizes those who taught him the rare skills needed to produce the incredible works of art, including Raymond Nakama. Sing explains that Nakama, who passed away in 2011, was a "master weaver who learned how to craft on his own as a jack of all trades when it came to craftsmanship."

He also credits: Solomon Apio, a student of Sing's in 'ie'ie who reciprocated by teaching him small carving techniques including how to make a papa ku'i 'ai (kalo pounding boards); Gordon Umi Kai, a master of Native Hawaiian arts who specializes as a kumu in crafting weapons and fishing

implements; Bill Kapunui, who mentored Sing in the art of pahu drum making; Keith Maile, a Native Hawaiian artist who advised Sing on crafting lūhe'e, an octopus lure made from a cowry shell; Tom Stone, who taught Sing how to craft hōlua sleds; and Patrick Horimoto, who, along with Nakama, taught him basketry skills. When looking back on his inspiration to carve ki'i lā'au (wooden images), Sing acknowledges Sam Kaha'i Ka'ai, Rocky Ka'ioulikahihikolo Jensen, **Le Van Keola Sequeira KSK'63** and ki'i mentor Jared Pere.

"I stand on the shoulders of my many mentors, and because of them I shine brighter. I also have a kuleana to give back and teach those throughout the community who are interested in these skills," Sing said. "It makes me humble and proud to be able to share this cultural foundation with haumāna from so many different backgrounds."

It is that appreciation for his mentors that feeds Sing's passion to pass on his 'ike to the next generation of artisans. He notes that ki'i in particular are more than art pieces, and they are considered "living, breathing entities that uplift the lāhui," while also possessing a genealogical connection that crafters and observers can tap into.

"I didn't really start doing any kind of cultural hana no'eau until after I started teaching Hawaiian culture here at Kamehameha Schools," Sing said. "After implementing a cultural practitioner project for our students in order to pass the class, I took it upon myself to participate and found my mentor until I was ready to start teaching it. That led to my wife and I teaching at the college level, and at cultural festivals and workshops, until KS hired me as a kumu experienced in mixed-media Hawaiian arts."

There are multiple varieties of ki'i, including ki'i akua – deities that portray images of Native Hawaiian gods – and ki'i kupuna, which represent ancestral images. Sing said that ki'i kupuna often

are crafted with lauoho (hair) from the 'ohana to forge a personal bond between the family and the art form. These personal touches give artists, both experienced and novice, a tangible connection to Native Hawaiian traditions that serve as new chapters to centuries-old stories.

"One of the takeaways from this experience was starting to figure out how the fellowship can help us as indigenous culture bearers to bring awareness to what we're doing in the community," Sing said. "For me, involving my wife as the other kumu goes hand-in-hand with creating ki'i, helmets, heavy-duty baskets and more. The fellowship really supported our mission to increase the number of cultural practitioners who are weaving 'ie'ie, not just as a hobby, but to be mentored so they can, in turn, become mentors in their own communities."

"I continue to learn from Kumulā'au the importance of this 'ike kupuna and how the idea of attention to detail, paired with creativity, can lead to beautiful works of functional implements," said **Chris Blake KSK'91**, director of Pacific Innovations and kumu of Papa Kilo Hōkū at KS Kapālama. "Knowing that your mana has been placed into objects and to be able to connect to this part of our living culture helps us to keep our connections strong. As we continue to learn from masters in their craft, like Kumulā'au, we perpetuate and strengthen our identity as kāmaka maoli for generations to come. We have to capture the 'ike from our culture keepers and to put it into practice so our lāhui can thrive."

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Lloyd Harold Kumulā'au Sing Jr. KSK'89

Blake's son, Cade, had a chance to work under the guidance of Sing for a woodworking project prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Cade Blake crafted a leiomano (shark-toothed club) as Sing explained the process in easy-to-understand terms, provided hands-on examples of how to create the implement and checked on the student's progress along the way.

"As a kumu, finding ways to blend our 'ike kupuna as a framework for teaching our haumāna can be challenging," Blake said. "However, as we become more familiar with the multitude of knowledge that is out there, and then to blend it with our links to technology, we will continue to strengthen our connections to our past to create our present, which will shape our future. It requires a calculated risk as kumu, however when there is a connection to relevance and application for its use, haumāna will find ways to retain the information and to shift it into knowledge for regular use."

Remaining positive amid uncertainty

Kanoa-Wong explains that Sing embodies the 'ōlelo no'ēau that says "Kūlia i ka nu'u," to strive for excellence in everything he does: "I am always inspired when working together with Kumulā'au because I see how much he loves to perpetuate the cultural practices of our kūpuna."

Sing attended an in-person gathering in Boulder, Colo., with his cohort members in February prior to the COVID-19 situation escalating to the resulting worldwide pandemic that has altered so many facets of daily life. However, once social distancing measures and travel restrictions were put in place throughout Hawai'i and across the globe, the fellows transitioned to online meetings, collaboration sessions and

presentations with safety in mind.

"It's not the same as seeing the other fellows in person, but we've been able to collaborate and present on multiple research projects," Sing said. "During that initial meeting, we were able to bond and find out about the tribes that fellows represent, and the socio-economic issues affecting the different groups of indigenous people."

Sing's final presentation to cap his fellowship work includes creating a five-minute curated video about hope, and how COVID-19 has impacted the process and its accompanying grant, which Sing has utilized to advance his teaching.

"A lot of what I had planned did not come to fruition, and international travel was affected so we couldn't travel to the South Pacific and showcase our culture that way," Sing said. "Even traveling to Maui for weekends to teach workshops has been hampered."

"However, there is a silver lining to COVID: I've been working from home since March, so I've been able to create videos on the Ka'iwakīloumoku website. I've also been able to work on some carvings, including a large one being done at Polynesian Cultural Center that will eventually be taken to Aotearoa when travel restrictions are lifted."

In addition to reflecting on a year-plus of work, the video will also be used by the next cohort, which gets underway in 2021. Sing explained that the 2020 cohort could potentially meet up with the new group of fellows to share experiences if travel restrictions ease up in the coming months.

"We're focusing on very serious issues that affect indigenous people," Sing said. "For my video, I'll share the ability to transition during the lockdown and how we were able to shift gears without stopping our ability to carry our arts forward. We're taking advantage of technology, and while it's not the same as in-person interaction, it's better than nothing."

"We've shifted to more sharing as opposed to instruction, and that allows

As Sing continues his work, he inspires others to follow in his footsteps. It is through his guidance, and that of fellow mentors, that a new generation of skilled carvers and weavers can perpetuate this crucial cultural knowledge.

our students to grow even more with the added confidence that they gain through this approach."

Blake added that artisans and experts like Sing are important examples of the health of Native Hawaiian culture. As Sing continues his work, he inspires others to follow in his footsteps. It is through his guidance, and that of fellow mentors, that a new generation of skilled carvers and weavers can perpetuate this crucial cultural knowledge.

Blake, when describing the importance of Sing's mentorship and teaching goals, referenced the 'ōlelo no'ēau that says: "I ulu nō ka lālā i ke kumu," the branches grow because of the trunk.

"The idea is to have multiple branches to sprout off of this 'trunk' and to create their own path, based upon their foundation set by their kumu, and to have it to be their own," Blake said. "That is a sign of a living culture and a thriving lāhui. By creating these opportunities, we are perpetuating and ensuring our people will be able to be a part of the future of Hawai'i and to have another facet to their development as 'ōiwi leaders." 🌱



Kindness & Kōkua

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