



STORIES

Luce Fellow Spotlight: Lloyd Sing



“The work we are doing through the Luce Indigenous Knowledge Fellowship is critical – not just in Indian country, but for humanity in general,” says Sing. “Indigenous people have the solution to many of the problems we currently see in the world. Our ancestral knowledge can help us survive and solve these problems. We just need the keys to open those doors.”

Lloyd Kumulā‘au. Sing, Jr. (Native Hawaiian) is among the first cohort of Luce Indigenous Knowledge fellows, who is reaching out online to share knowledge in both ‘ie‘ie basket weaving and traditional Hawaiian carving, helping preserve a precious cultural art form.

In 2020, First Nations Development Institute (First Nations) in partnership with the Henry Luce Foundation (Luce) awarded 10 \$50,000 fellowships to support Indigenous knowledge holders and knowledge makers dedicated to creating positive community change. The Luce Indigenous Knowledge Fellowship is a 12-month, self-directed enrichment



Luce Indigenous Knowledge Fellow: LLOYD KUMULĀ‘AU SING, JR.



Lloyd Harold Kumulā‘au Sing Jr., Hawai‘i

Lloyd Kumulā‘au. Sing, Jr. (Native Hawaiian) is among the first cohort of Luce Indigenous Knowledge fellows. Sing is a Hawaiian arts teacher at the Ka‘iwakīloumoku Hawaiian Cultural Center at the Kamehameha Schools, Kapālama Campus. He is also a cultural practitioner, who teaches ‘ie‘ie basket weaving, a nearly non-existent cultural practice and art form that is quickly fading among his people.

For nearly 20 years, Sing and his wife Haunani have taught Hawaiian studies in both the public and private sectors. Over the years, they have led classes, workshops, and other demonstrations that focus on traditional Hawaiian food, farming, music, dance, storytelling and art.

In 1998, Sing decided to try his hand at ‘ie‘ie basket weaving, having been inspired by Master ‘ie‘ie Weaver Patrick Horimoto, with the goal of re-introducing this unique cultural art form to his own native community. Sing eventually learned under Raymond Nakama, a mentor who helped him learn the intricacies of ‘ie‘ie basketry.

“Although Hawaiian art today is evolving and changing to reflect contemporary mores, the revitalization of ‘ie‘ie basketry has never been more needed,” says Sing. “We will continue to teach and encourage our students to develop their confidence with the hopes that they will join our efforts in helping bring this art back to life and become a basketry art commonly seen in Hawai‘i again.”



Kumulā'au Sing carves half round cuts on the Hawaiian ki'i, Maui-pōtiki. This piece is carved from 'ōhi'a wood.

Initially, Sing planned to host 12 workshops during the fellowship period to teach a new cohort of students the important cultural art form of 'ie'ie basket weaving. He had taught only three of these one-on-one, hands-on workshops when Hawai'i's governor shut down the state because of COVID-19 concerns. The pandemic forced Sing to alter his fellowship plans, and allowed him to pursue a new artistic endeavor: carving.

Community Background and Impact

Sing carries the Hawaiian name Kumulā'au. He was born and raised on the island of O'ahu. Sing and his wife have dedicated their lives to reclaiming and revitalizing traditional Hawaiian cultures, languages, and lifeways.

He has a bachelor's degree in Hawaiian studies with an emphasis on traditional Hawaiian culture and Hawaiian language, and a master's degree in education from the University of Hawai'i, Mānoa. Sing's personal and professional goal is to restore traditional Hawaiian cultural practices among Native Hawaiian families. He accomplishes this goal through teaching and sharing his knowledge of Hawaiian basketry and other traditional art forms.

"This knowledge isn't mine," says Sing. "I'm just a messenger; a bridge that connects the previous generation and the next generation. I hope the fire I set will ignite somebody from the next generation and encourage them to continue this work."

Revitalizing a Non-Existent Cultural Art Form



practice with other members of his community.



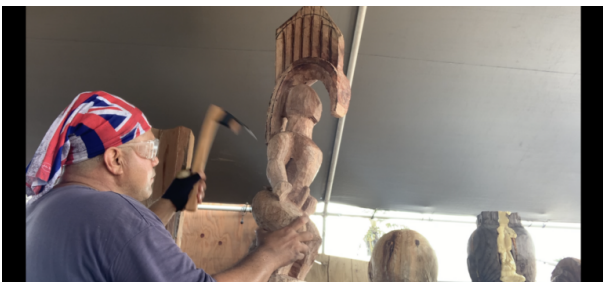
Cleaning up the carving on the arm and torso of Maui-pōtiki.

“I learned from two non-Native Hawaiians because Native Hawaiians weren’t practicing this art form anymore,” Sing explains. “Non-Hawaiians taught themselves something our ancestors used to do and they brought it back. As a result, I was able to learn this tradition from one of these two master artists. It was his wish that I would bring this cultural practice back to our communities.”

Sing and his wife have organized and hosted countless classes and workshops geared toward reviving ‘ie‘ie basketry. During these demonstrations, the Sings have taught and shared their knowledge of Hawaiian basketry, explaining how the elemental forces of Kū (male) and Hina (female) are present and prevalent in the cultural practice of ‘ie‘ie weaving.

Participants learn how to make ‘ie‘ie baskets traditionally from start to finish. They gather ‘ie‘ie and prepare the rootlets by cleaning them and weaving them into beautiful pieces such as hīna‘i (baskets), hīna‘i i‘a (fish traps), mahiole (helmet) and ki‘i akua (godly images).

“We teach both Hawaiian and non-Hawaiian students,” says Sing. “However, we don’t just take any student. We look at the heart of the student. We want to teach those who are serious and interested in becoming proficient weavers, and who want to teach and share that knowledge with future generations.”



Kumulā‘au Sing carves the image Lonopele using a ko‘i (adze).



“COVID really cut my legs out from under me,” says Sing. “My fellowship project involved a lot of travel, and a lot of social gatherings and cultural exchanges. Everything started off well, but there are eight islands in Hawai‘i. Ultimately, quarantine and travel restrictions prevented me and my students from meeting in person and participating in exhibits.”

Initially, Sing tried to continue teaching online. However, he quickly realized that Zoom is an inadequate tool for guiding students through hands-on, culture-based activities like basket weaving. Consequently, Sing altered his plans and decided to hone carving, another important, frequently overlooked cultural practice and art form.

Learning a New Cultural Art Form

In 2018, Sing began working with a master artist to learn the traditional art of Hawaiian carving. Although Sing enjoyed carving, he never seemed to have the time or appropriate tools to fully devote himself to this new craft.

The pandemic, and new social distancing requirements, provided Sing with the perfect opportunity to master and hone this new skill. Traditional Hawaiian carving is a solitary activity. During the revised fellowship period, Sing spent many hours alone in his workshop chiseling new sculptures and pieces of art. He laughs: “I’ve never carved as much as I did in 2020!”

Although carving is a slow and time-consuming process, Sing explains that it is also “a very spiritual process.” He says, “You don’t just go out, find a log and carve it. You have to first see the image in the wood.”

Traditionally, many Native Hawaiian carvings could represent a god or deceased ancestor. During the revised fellowship period, Sing completed four sculptures, including a new piece to honor a Maori elder who helped improve relations between Hawai‘i and Aotearoa (New Zealand) with the historic landing of Hōkūle‘a, Hawai‘i’s double hulled voyaging canoe at Waitangi in 1985.

The piece entitled Mauipōki‘i took six months to complete. When it’s safe to travel Sing will fly to Aotearoa (New Zealand) to present the piece on behalf of Ngāti Ruawāhia (Hōkūle‘a Tribe, a honorific designation as being the sixth tribe of Tai Tokerau) at Motatau Marae in honor of Sir James Clendon Tau Henare.

Although Sing’s fellowship project took an unexpected turn, he is grateful that he was able to use his fellowship year to learn and share a new craft. He says, “Everything that happened this year gave me the time and resources to elevate my carving skills. Now I can share these skills with my students. I don’t want to just keep this knowledge to myself. It’s something that I will share with my community.”

According to Sing, traditional Hawaiian carving, like ‘ie‘ie basket weaving, is a dying cultural art form, especially among younger generations. He says, “I want more young people to take an interest in carving because if they don’t, we will lose this traditional practice as well.”



and social media to share his work more broadly so that he could reach a wider audience.

Although Sing could not effectively teach ‘ie‘ie basket weaving online, he decided to make a series of educational videos titled “The Art of Healing.” As part of this series, Sing interviews Native Hawaiian artists about their work and how art helps them heal and better serve their families and communities. All of the videos are archived on Sing’s [Facebook page](#).

“*Mahalo* (Thank you) to First Nations Development Institute and the Henry Luce Foundation for supporting my work,” says Sing. “The work we are doing through the Luce Indigenous Knowledge Fellowship is critical – not just in Indian country, but for humanity in general. Indigenous people have the solution to many of the problems we currently see in the world. Our ancestral knowledge can help us survive and solve these problems. We just need the keys to open those doors.”



A close-up view of the carving of Maui-pōtiki.

The Luce Indigenous Knowledge Fellowship plays a pivotal role in helping open these doors for Indigenous knowledge holders and knowledge makers who might not otherwise have access to these types of funding and networking opportunities. Sing emphasizes, “This fellowship is important because it supports Indigenous knowledge holders and knowledge makers as we work to uplift and inspire our communities. There aren’t many fellowships that support this type of work.”

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