

# MOCEAN

## Re-Storying Our Relationship to the Ocean through Movement and Lei-Making

**MOCEAN** is a movement and maker's workshop inspired by Polynesian and Hawaiian traditions in which the rhythms of ke kai (the ocean) are mirrored through hula, genealogy, and ecology, all embodied through dance and botanical adornment. Participants learn simple, accessible ocean choreography as a form of nonverbal storytelling, then create adornments using shoreline plants and **found ocean debris**—transforming materials marked by pollution into objects of beauty and healing; then wear these up-cycled lei as they move. By integrating embodied practice with material making, the workshop re-stories our relationship to the ocean, inviting participants to experience it not as a distant landscape, but as a reciprocal, familial presence in need of renewed connection and stewardship.

In ancient times, the hula practitioner was a living archive: a holder of ancestry and ecological knowledge encoded through motion, rhythm, and lei. MOCEAN introduces participants to this worldview not by imitation, but by **embodied relationship-building**—asking them to listen with their bodies, to move with the ocean's logic, and to create adornments that carry story, care, and intention.

### Workshop Structure & Experience

The workshop unfolds in three integrated stages:

#### 1. **Hula as Language of the Ocean**

Participants are introduced to foundational hula steps as a vocabulary of nature and story—learning how wave patterns, tides, currents, and wind are translated into gesture, tempo, and posture. Movement becomes a language through which participants express relationship, flow, disruption, and return—telling stories without words.

#### 2. **Lei-Making as Ecological Ritual**

Participants then create lei using a combination of shoreline plants and found ocean debris—materials that once had use, then became pollution. Through this act, ocean debris—symbols of environmental harm—are transformed into objects of beauty, care, and meaning. This is not simply up-cycling, but powerful **re-honoring**: restoring dignity and purpose to what has been discarded. Participants will learn the Hawaiian lei techniques, *wili* and



*haku*, the traditional practice of binding botanical materials to a foundation for adornment and healing. In this weaving process, participants explore how the process of working with ethically harvested shoreline plants and ocean debris create a new horizon for purpose and meaning.

### 3. **Integration: Story Without Words**

The choreography participants create is shaped by the story of their lei. Movement and material speak together—expressing the dual reality of the ocean as both giver and receiver, abundance and burden. The result is a full cycle of meaning: disruption, remembrance, and transformation held with respect. The final stage is presentation to each other, and/or to a larger audience via a small performance or simple video recording—this can be decided by each participant or the hosting club/school/institution.



### **Core Themes & Intent**

At its heart, MOCEAN is about **re-storying** our relationship to the ocean—one that is desperately in need of renewal. For Polynesian voyaging ancestors, the ocean was not a resource but a relative: a primary familial connection. This workshop asks participants to reclaim that kinship by engaging the ocean not intellectually, but physically and creatively.

The lei itself becomes a central metaphor. It is a line—like the horizon, the fishing line, the boundaries we draw between ourselves and nature. But when formed into a circle, the lei represents return, wholeness, and continuity. What was divided becomes unified. What was discarded comes back into purpose.

Through hula and lei-making, participants engage in a **ritual of reconnection**. Those who may feel distant from the ocean—or overwhelmed by ecological crisis—find a way to embody relationship rather than overwhelm. They become creators, caretakers, and storytellers.

### **Why This Matters**

MOCEAN is a contemporary reimagining of ancient ritual—cutting-edge in its interdisciplinary approach, yet deeply rooted in traditional practice. It bridges environmental curricula, movement arts, and cultural practice, offering participants a lived experience of stewardship rather than a conceptual one.

By transforming debris into adornment and movement into story, the workshop mends more than materials. It mends relationships—between self and ocean, between body and planet, between past knowledge and future responsibility.

MOCEAN invites us to remember our blue Grandmother not as something “out there,” but as something we are part of, and therefore, must care for.



## Practical Considerations

This is a low-tech, flexible workshop designed for classroom or studio-style public programming spaces. It requires an open room with movable chairs and tables to accommodate gentle, accessible movement and lei-making. No specialized flooring or projection is needed. Basic audio support (portable speaker or in-room system) may be used for music for the choreography. Materials include lei-making supplies, hula skirts, and shoreline plants or found ocean debris materials. The workshop supports approximately 20–30 participants and is fully adaptable to different room configurations.



## Meet Keya (kee-yah) - Cultural Educator and Practitioner

Keya Kai Guimarães is a cultural practitioner, educator, and certified herbalist whose work explores embodied storytelling, ecological relationship, and ritual as contemporary practice. She holds an MA in Indigenous Peoples' International Policy from The George Washington University and an MFA in Dance Choreography from UCLA's World Arts and Cultures/Dance program. Keya approaches hula as a practitioner and cultural educator, informed by Hawaiian epistemologies in which movement, chant, and botanical adornment carry genealogical and ecological knowledge. As a certified herbalist, she approaches plants as allies, utilizing lei-making as ritual, medicine, and storytelling. Her interdisciplinary work weaves movement, botanical medicine, and environmental literacy, inviting people into a healing relationship with land, water, and body.



## Material Costs

\$50 per person (\$1000-\$1500). Raffia and other lei making supplies; ethically sourced botanical materials for lei; practice hula skirts; as well as found ocean debris (fish netting, plastic wrapping/objects, other materials found at beach cleanups).

## Cultural Educator Honorarium

\$1500-\$3500 depending upon how many sessions are requested. The workshop could last an entire trimester, or be offered as a two-day intensive masterclass.