Artist Biography: Paulette Kahalepuna  

*Feather Lei Making*

Paulette Kahalepuna has been practicing the ancient Hawaiian art of feather lei making for thirty years. Inspired by her mother and teacher, Mary Lou Kekuewa, better known as the “feather lady,” she originally took up the art of feather lei making as part of a Hawaiian Studies project in high school at Kamehameha Schools.

The delicate art of feather lei making goes back centuries. In ancient Hawai‘i it was a highly valued skill; feathers were the prized jewels of society. Extreme patience and skills were required to fashion them into the exquisite strands that form a lei. Valued for more than their aesthetic quality, the feathers of forest birds such as the I‘wi, ‘apapane, o‘o, and mamo symbolized royalty and adorned the cloaks and helmets of Hawaiian Ali‘i, such as Kamehameha the Great.

Paulette has since gone on to lead feather lei making workshops around the state, the west coast, and the South Pacific, including participating in the Sixth Annual South Pacific Arts Festival in the Cook Islands and the Northwest Folklife Festival in Seattle, Washington. Paulette also lectured and taught in Western Samoa in a program funded by UNESCO and has been a resource person and lecturer for Royal Caribbean Cruises and Norwegian Lines.

She has served as manager of The Bishop Museum’s Atherton Halau, construction consultant of Kahili making, as well as feather lei and cape, and the cultural extension preservation for art with Kamehameha Schools.

In 2000, she received an honor for cultural preservation in the art of hulu through the Hawai‘i Historic Foundation. Commissioned works by the Office of Hawaiian Affairs, Hawaiian Airlines, Outrigger Hotels, Marriott Corporation and the State Chamber of Commerce, she received a master/apprentice grant in 2002 – 2003 to teach a student through the SFCA, making it possible to continue showing the uniqueness of this fine art.

Exhibits of her unique art form have been seen at The University of Hawai‘i Art Gallery, the Honolulu Academy of Arts, and throughout 2005-2007 Paulette served as one of Hawai‘i’s featured artists in the “Changing Hands” exhibit, sponsored by New York’s Museum of Arts and Design, which traveled all around the U.S. Her most recent exhibition displayed her exquisite feather cape at the Four Seasons Maui.

Paulette opened a feather shop providing supplies and classes with her parents, Paul and Mary Lou Kekuewa, and she is the author of two books. The most recent, *Feather Lei Making as an Art*, is currently in its third edition.