

Ki'i Kihawahine¹

One example of the fact that the „levelling influence of our modern culture“[120] could not completely erase the narrative tradition in Hawai'i is the statue (ki'i)[121] of the goddess Kihawahine (Fig. 8), which Eduard Arning presented at the Berlin Museum of Ethnology on February 11, 1887. [122] Today, this statue can be found in the exhibition of the Ethnological Museum in the Humboldt Forum.[123] In connection with the extensive destruction of Lāhainā in August 2023, the return of this cultural heritage was not only discussed in a public radio program in Hawai'i[124] but also soon afterwards in California[125].



Fig. 8: Ki'i Kihawahine²

During a visit by Kumu[126] hula Lorna Kapualiko Lim and Kumu hula Michelle Kaulumahiehie Amaral to the Oceania exhibition in the Humboldt Forum on September 1, 2023, the author witnessed a ceremonial encounter with Kihawahine, which impressively confirmed the view that museum objects act like subjects because they were created „as man-made companions of social and individual life.“[127] A schoolboy who was also in the same room and observed this encounter responded to his teacher's request to move on with the class: „No, I'm staying, this is more important.“ This emotional understanding of the special nature of such an event in a museum exhibition can perhaps be explained by the fact that this student felt the emotional shock of the two Kumu hula, as described by Josephine Ebiuwa Abbe, a choreography lecturer at the University of Benin City:

„You look and admire, and of course you are allowed to. But when I was in Berlin, it was like this: the Africans in the room shuddered when they encountered the items, there were also tears. They grasped - in their totality - their value, holistically, you understand? You study, perceive the outside, and you like it, we like it too. But it is the inside that shakes us and that you cannot see.“[128]

Such a „re-spiritualization“ and the consideration of „objects“ as cultural „subjects“[129] should only be possible within the framework of the cultures of origin with the people who think and act within them. The memory organization „museum“ could make its contribution to this beyond the previous contextualization by returning cultural assets and providing all information as „linked open data“. Copies and replicas can be used for the museum tasks of exhibiting and communicating, as „it is not so much the authenticity as the physical presence of the objects in the exhibition space that is decisive for the promotion of the historical imagination.“[130] Furthermore, digital reproduction

¹ Rough translation of „Ki'i Kihawahine“, in: Thomas Tunsch: Vom Museum der Dinge zu Erzählungen von Menschen / From a museum of things to narratives of people, Conference paper, „The 27th EVA Berlin 2023 conference on Electronic Media and Art, Culture, History“, Berlin, November 29th until December 1st, 2023.

² Ki'i Kihawahine: „Kihawahine“, von Claudia Obrocki [CC BY-SA 4.0 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>)], <https://id.smb.museum/object/996611>

technologies today enable such detailed replicas that essential features can even be preserved in the event of loss.[131]

References

[120] Eduard Christian Arning, Rudolf Virchow, und Philipp Wilhelm Adolf Bastian, „Conferenz vom 11. Februar 1887, 3 Uhr Nachmittags, in der Aula des Museums für Völkerkunde: Ethnographie von Hawaii“, Zeitschrift für Ethnologie 19 (1887): 130.

[121] Mary Kawena Pukui und Samuel H. Elbert, „ki‘i“, in Nā Puke Wehewehe ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1986), <https://wehewehe.org/gsd12.85/cgi-bin/hdict?a=d&d=D7938>.

[122] Arning, Virchow, und Bastian, „Conferenz vom 11. Februar 1887, 3 Uhr Nachmittags, in der Aula des Museums für Völkerkunde: Ethnographie von Hawaii“, 137.

[123] Ident.-Nr. VI 8375, „Kihe wahine“, Sammlungen Online (Staatliche Museen zu Berlin), zugegriffen 1. September 2023, <https://id.smb.museum/object/996611>.

[124] „The Return of Powerful Goddess Kihawahine Could Have Significant Impact on Lāhainā Community“, Local News (Hawai‘i Public Radio, 24. August 2023), <https://www.hawaiipublicradio.org/local-news/2023-08-24/the-return-of-powerful-goddess-kihawahine-could-have-significant-impact-on-lahaina-community>.

[125] Christine Hitt, „Hawaiians Demand German Museum Return Lahaina Deity Statue“, SFGATE, 4. September 2023, <https://www.sfgate.com/hawaii/article/hawaiians-german-museum-return-lahaina-kihawahine-18342908.php>.

[126] approximately: Teacher as a source of knowledge, cf. „kumu“, in Nā Puke Wehewehe ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1986), <https://wehewehe.org/gsd12.85/cgi-bin/hdict?a=d&d=D9786>.

[127] Albert Gouaffo, „Das Projekt“, in Atlas der Abwesenheit, von Bénédicte Savoy (Heidelberg: arthistoricum.net, 2023), 11, <https://doi.org/10.11588/ARTHISTORICUM.1219>.

[128] Ullrich Fichtner, „Die Masken des Menschen“, Der Spiegel 2023, Nr. 36 (2. September 2023): 53.

[129] vgl. „Objekt, Subjekt oder beides?“, Leonie Benker, „Koloniales Erbe und deutsche Erinnerungskultur: Die Restitutionsdebatte und ihre Fortläufer in deutschen Medien (2018–2020)“, Baessler-Archiv 67 (1. Januar 2021): 55f.

[130] Weindl, Die „Aura“ des Originals im Museum, 246.

[131] Maximilian Kostka, „Projekt Zedikum: Die Digitalisierung des Kulturerbes und das Yellow Milkmaid Syndrome“, 2021, 2, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tXnke92ohB4>.