When thinking about research, the creation of ideas, and the sharing of design concepts, it is clear that respectful collaboration, within and outside of a cast and creative team, can lead towards the building of a production that uplifts communities, represents Native culture with honor, and contributes to the performative sovereignty of Indigenous people onstage.

5

Native by Design: Exploring an Indigenous Approach to Theatrical Design

Noelani Montas

What is an Indigenous theatrical design process, and can it be defined?

Born in Southern California, my love for dancing hula every Sunday with my family led to performing in musical theatre as a young girl. After many years of performance, I shifted my interests into interior design, later leading me to scenic, lighting, and projection design for theatre and live performance. As the first student in the MFA Hana Keaka (Hawaiian Theatre) program at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa with a BFA in Theatre Design and Technology, I want to share my thoughts on the nexus of two very important and special spaces within the field of theatre: design and Indigenous performance. These two areas of the industry are crucial parts of my education and career in theatre, and I feel that they deserve more representation and recognition individually, and at the intersection of the two. As I approach the end of my graduate studies in Hana Keaka, I am honored to pose the thoughts and questions in this piece on the state of Indigenous theatrical design, experiences in the field, what is needed moving forward, and why this particular area operates in a way that is different from the norm.

Since time immemorial, Indigenous people have been storytellers, carrying ancestral knowledge from generation to generation in performance forms such as music, dance, and poetry. As Indigenous theatre practitioners, we have a clear understanding of our purpose in storytelling. Native artists and stories celebrate every aspect of our identities and cultures, from language to land to cultural practice and beyond. In the retelling of our histories and the creation of our futures, we claim ownership of our narratives onstage and in front of audiences, and emphasize the knowledge that is transferred and learned in our ways of storytelling. We are the vessels used in the creating and telling our own stories of past, present, and future, and our role is to continue the legacy given to us by our ancestors.

Design is celebrated around the world for its ability to solve problems and create beautiful work as the solution. Architecture and fashion are among popular fields of design that push innovation, creation, and function, while enhancing the quality of our experiences in life from the everyday to the extraordinary. Within the context of theatre, the same applies. As designers, we are still solving problems through our work, but the core 'problem' to solve is, "How can I bring the world of the play to life?" Each area of theatrical design: scenic, lighting, projections, costume, props, and sound, is hugely important in creating a visual and auditory language that engages with the senses, creating extraordinary experiences and stories that connect with actors and audience members alike.

And while the two above practices have their distinct function within the realm of theatre, the intersection of these two areas is harder to describe. Those of us who were trained as designers through American education systems approach a process differently than those trained specifically in Indigenous performance. Because of this difference, there is a unique weaving of the two forms that is necessary to create a process that is rooted in design but also honors and respects the Indigenous community that is represented onstage. Native design processes, created by an Indigenous designer and/or for a show based in Indigenous culture and storytelling, differ from the American tradition of theatre through their attention, care, and connection to the land, languages, histories, and communities represented in the story.

This essay will explore what an Indigenous design process is and can be, how it compares to the "industry standard," and what aspects can make a production design process distinctly Indigenous. This essay is not intended to teach theatrical design, but rather hopes to be a conversational comparison between the realms of Indigenous and American theatre, with the standard practice and learning of the theatre industry in America being referenced as the "industry standard." And while I am focusing on Indigenous theatre in this piece, the concepts and practices discussed in this essay may also apply to any theatrical production that is centered around cultural storytelling, as reflected in my design work on Spanish language productions at Repertorio Español in New York City. In addition, I am not claiming that there are only two approaches to a design process, Indigenous or American, as there are many forms of collaboration, such as devising, that have already begun to challenge the "industry standard." The hope in contributing to this discussion is that it will continue to evolve beyond this paper and beyond my career, and I feel very honored and privileged to bring all parts of myself and my work together in this exploration of Indigenous designers and our processes in theatre, and to dream about what this special field of performance may look like in the future.

Part 1: Foundations in Creation

'O ke kahua ma mua, ma hope ke kūkulu.
The site first, and then the building.[1]

As a theatre practitioner of any role, reading the script is one of the foundational first steps in beginning a new production process. But before a designer can start analyzing the text and sketching ideas, they must first ask why they are doing this piece, who it represents, and who does it benefit? These questions can already challenge the core values of the "industry standard" of producing and creating theatrical works as they call for a shift in purpose. Because American theatre is heavily commercial and reliant on capital, it can easily enforce a system that centers monetary wealth over the value of a story and representation of a certain group. However with Indigenous theatre, "the process of making Native plays relies upon the concept that the true worth of a production lies not just in the final product, reviews, or ticket sales; rather, the worth of a Native production derives from the relationships it creates, interconnections that branch out among artists, into the worlds of ancestors and audience alike."[2] So when asking the initial question of what makes Indigenous performance and design in theatre distinctly Indigenous, we can already see that a recentering in purpose of relationships—to land, community, language, ancestors, traditions—lays that foundation.

Asa Benally, Navajo and Cherokee fashion and costume designer, beautifully states, "My Indigenous upbringing created the foundation for where I am today."[3] As we continue building the framework for our production process as designers, we cannot forget our relationality to the stories we are creating, especially when creating a visual language for Native stories. Benally, who designs in both in commercial and Indigenous spaces, not only recognizes the significance of his Indigenous identity in his work, but credits it. This celebration of lineage and identity counteracts the practice of, "Leaving yourself at the door," a phrase that I and so many others heard often while growing up in theatre. This practice is slowly but surely being pushed out of rehearsal rooms, but many theatre practitioners began their careers while hearing a command that tells them to forget who they are, where they come from, and how they exist in the world when showing up to rehearse and perform. When applied to design education, this erasure of students' identities with the intention of teaching them to be able to design any kind of production affects the world-building and visual language that a designer is tasked with creating.[4]

As Native people, our connections to land, genealogy, and heritage are crucial aspects to the process of creating Indigenous-centered stories, as we continue to look to our ancestors and communities for guidance throughout

the production process. And as members of the creative team, we cannot forget that designers "are always part of not only the design process – but the very design itself," solidifying our 'always situated-ness' in our work.[5] Similarly to how performers can bring their cultural performance styles onstage to engage in theatrical storytelling, such as with hula in Hana Keaka productions, designers can bring experiences with ceremonial gathering spaces, endemic plants, regalia, and beyond, into design concepts and creations. Those of us who identify as Indigenous theatrical designers have engaged our senses in the practicing and understanding of the ways of life in our communities, and we should feel encouraged and excited to bring these lived experiences into a design process, as long as they are shared in a respectful manner that follows the appropriate protocols and traditions.

In this section, we have explored the 'site,' or the core purpose in telling Native stories, which will always engage with Indigenous land, communities, languages, ancestors, and cultural practices, as it pertains to the play, playwright, cast, creative, and production as a whole. Relating back to the opening 'ōlelo no'eau of this section, the markers that guide the intention of producing Indigenous stories through theatrical storytelling ensure that the kahua (foundation) of a Native design process begins to take shape, and that the kūkulu (building) is securely underway.

Part 2: Collaboration in Creation

Hili hewa ka mana'o ke 'ole ke kūkākūkā.
Ideas run wild without discussion.[6]

In this section, I want to talk about the ways in which we build off of our foundation and move into the creation of our theatrical production, focusing on Hana Keaka and related performances. These examples will highlight specific ways in which the collaboration process, regardless of design field, was influenced by an Indigenous methodology, ranging from the scale of production to the experience of the designer. Towards the end of this section, we will look at a distinctly Hawaiian view into how we perceive art and functionality, which influences the way in which we form collaborations, how we can support Indigenous artists perpetuating traditional and contemporary art forms, and the ways that these pieces fit in Native theatrical storytelling.

Case Study: Haku Wale, Part 1
In my work as the Scenic, Lighting, and Projection Designer for *Haku Wale*, a Late Night Theatre Co. production at UH Mānoa, I wanted to emulate the show's concept of 'haku wale,' translating to, 'just create.' This production

was a celebration of original, student-written compositions, ranging from Hawaiian and musical theatre to pop and reggae, and was directed by recent MFA Hawaiian Theatre and Acting graduate, Joshua "Baba" Kamoani'ala Tavares. Since we had about three weeks and a budget of $150 to produce this show, there was a huge emphasis on 'just create' from a practical standpoint as well as conceptual.

My first point of inspiration and lived experience was thinking back to the *'Avaiki Nui Social*, a night of Cook Islands music presented at the 2023 Kia Mau Festival in Aotearoa New Zealand.[7] This celebration of songs and musical styles from across the Cook Islands was elevated through the multilayered use of fresh greenery; three performance areas for the host, musicians, and actors; and projection designs that invited the audience to sing along in Cook Islands Māori.

Figure 5.1. *'Avaiki Nui Social* at the Kia Mau Festival 2023. Photo by author.

With this performance as my primary reference point, I started to develop ideas on how to incorporate distinctly Hawaiian ways of creating into the design. Hana No'eau is a term that references Kanaka Maoli visual and performing arts,[8] a category spanning from ha'i mo'olelo (storytelling) to hana kapa (cloth making) and countless other forms, with many of these fine arts practices, methods, and motifs being rooted in generational traditions.

In the set design for *Haku Wale*, I started with the idea of using hana kapa as a way to frame the performers from above, and wanted to create pieces of patterned fabric with the help and hands of our cast and team members. And while the process of cultivating wauke (paper mulberry) for this production was not possible due to many reasons, primarily time and lack of natural resources to grow and cultivate it before opening night, I thought of other ways to incorporate the designing and painting of Hawaiian patterns onto cloth. In talking with members of our creative team and my faculty advisors, we moved forward with the use of pareos (fabric panels commonly used in Oceanic dance) as the base to act as our "kapa." For the visual language used to adorn the fabric, we looked to one traditional style, 'ohe kāpala (bamboo carving and stamping), and one modern style, Hawaiian quiltmaking, for patterns and motifs. In addition, the process of painting and stamping Hawaiian motifs onto fabric is commonly seen not only in hana kapa as blankets or framed artworks, but also in costumes created and worn for hula performances. Knowing this application, I wanted to bring this element into the show as a reminder of the cultural practices that are seen in Hawaiian performance, even though the implementation in *Haku Wale* was through scenery instead of through costumes. It was important for me to highlight these two artistic styles that are distinctly Hawaiian and whose origins come from very different time periods in Hawaiian history to show the breadth of artistic expression that is present and inherent in Kānaka Maoli. The weaving of these two forms embodied a respect for the methods of creation that have been around for centuries and honored those who perpetuate them today.

Drawing on the foliage that surrounded the set of the *'Avaiki Nui Social*, I knew I wanted to have fresh plants and greenery onstage for our celebration of original student compositions featuring a wide range of musical styles, including the various genres within and outside of Hawaiian music. Through Kaliko Fase, an actor in previous Hana Keaka production, *Kaisara*, our team had a connection to Papahana Kuaola in Kāne'ohe, "an aloha 'āina-based education organization connecting our past with a sustainable future."[9] I made arrangements for us to visit and gather fresh greenery to use for our production with permission from members of Papahana Kuaola, with the purpose of bringing the community and land into collaboration during this Hawaiian theatrical design process. Christopher Patrinos, Assistant Professor

of Lighting at UH Mānoa, was also very generous in loaning his plants from home for us to use throughout the run, as well as advising my design work during our production process. The use of plants onstage in the *ʻAvaiki Nui Social* was a beautiful connection to the Cook Islands, bringing the nature of their islands into the theater, and was something I wanted to parallel with bringing our island of Oʻahu onstage for *Haku Wale*.

On Indigenous Collaboration

The research and collaboration process for *Haku Wale* differed greatly from any other design process I've had in that I drew references from my history and community as a Kanaka Maoli designer in the creation of the show's visual language. Instead of finding inspiration online and on my own, leading to a process that remains removed from the community and responsibility of the work, I made a point to connect and engage with the land and people that the show engages with. This difference highlights what I believe to be one of the most important shifts in design creation from the "industry standard" to an Indigenous methodology. Viewing research as "a mutual exchange… about building relationships, defining culturally-appropriate modes of engagement, recognition of differences (in process, catalysts, contextual understandings, protocol and communication methods), and devising methods of co-collaboration" reinforces the responsibility of the researcher, or the designer, to the themes and community they are connecting with.[10] Moving research beyond the individual recenters the wealth of knowledge that is present in Native land and communities, and that is vital in the creation of designs through an Indigenous lens for Indigenous stories.

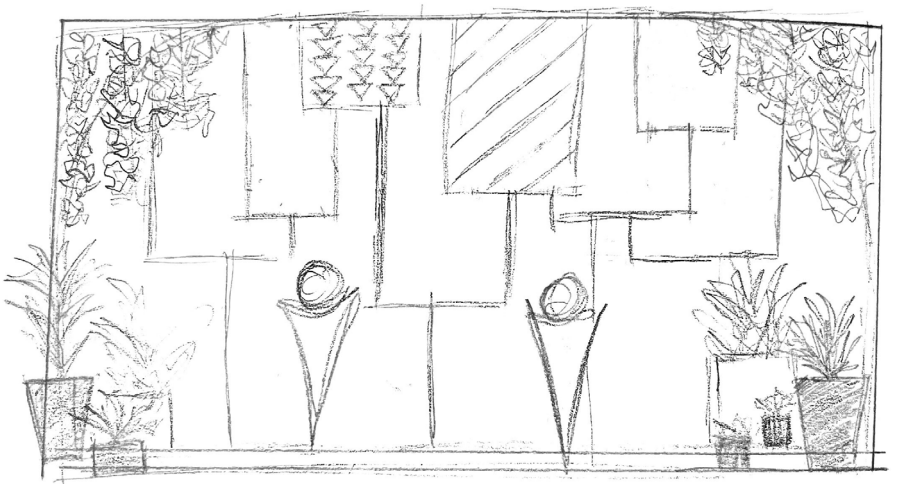

Figure 5.2. *Haku Wale* Scenic Design Sketch. Photo by author.

Building off of this practice, Native collaboration can look very different from the collaboration structures and styles taught in American theatre. In relation to research, the process of going into the community and speaking to families and elders requires a distinct level of respect and patience: respect in how one conducts themself in the asking of community members for conversations and their behavior in the presence of kūpuna (elders, ancestors), and patience in the building of these relationships that are not solely for the purpose of information extraction. Kumu Keawe Lopes, kumu hula and Director of the Kawaihuelani Center for Hawaiian Language at UH Mānoa, explains that "the quality of knowledge shared and gained is dependent on the depth of the relationship," and the depth of a relationship with kūpuna is not something that happens instantaneously.[11] The care and consideration that goes into asking community members for knowledge and involvement in a theatrical production is a process that takes time, and this valuable time spent with elders and knowledge holders may not fit well into the constraints of an "industry standard" production process. However, "in Indigenous frameworks, relationships matter. Respectful, reciprocal, genuine relationships lie at the heart of community life and community development."[12]

Figures 5.3 and 5.4. Students and *Haku Wale* cast members stamping quilt patterns (left) and ʻohe kāpala (right) onto pareos. Photos by author.

On Hana No'eau and Collaboration

Another collaborative tool for getting community members involved in a design process is hiring artists with specializations in Indigenous fine arts forms to create and collaborate on pieces that will support the visual storytelling of a production. For Kānaka Maoli, this practice calls back to traditional Hawaiian trades and professions, as mentioned above with the range of hana no'eau styles from woodcarving to weaving, etc. And through this practice comes the distinction between the perception of art in an Indigenous worldview versus and the West.

> In the Hawaiian context, it is more appropriate to say that Hawaiians did not view "art" as "product" but as "process." No'eau describes one's artistic skill or abilities (clever, skillful, dexterous, wise, artistic, talented, expert, technical), while hana no'eau refers to the act of art making (www.wehewehe.org). Thus what was important was the process of artistry as manifested in every facet of daily life, from the prayers and chants composed to the making of makaloa mats, kapa (bark-cloth), and 'ahu'ula (feathered cloaks)… This "legacy of excellence" attested to creative works that were inherently artistic yet wholly functional. Western distinctions between form and function, between product and process, are rendered immaterial; what matters are the relationships between the artist/creator and the spiritual world that not only provides the physical material resources but also enables what is created to have meaning and purpose.[13]

The encouragement of collaborations between theatrical designers and artists with Indigenous specializations is paramount if the storytelling engages with cultural elements, especially through costumes and worn pieces such as Native American regalia and Hawaiian lei. An example of this can be found in current Hana Keaka student Kāneikoliakawahineika'iukapuomua Baker's work as the Costume Designer for the 2022 Hana Keaka production *Ho'oilina*, where she collaborated with Keha Hawai'i, a Hawaiian fashion brand, to create bespoke fabric that was used in her designs onstage.[14] Maile Speetjens, Professor of Costume Design and Technology at UH Mānoa, believes that these kinds of reciprocal and collaborative relationships with members of our community are essential in a design process for Hana Keaka productions. Examples include collaborations with lauhala weavers to create fans for the 2015 inaugural Hana Keaka production at Kennedy Theatre, *Lā'ieikawai*, as well as the hiring of a lei hulu (Hawaiian feather lei) practitioner to mentor costume shop students in the creation of their own lei hulu, as done for *Ho'oilina*.[15] These

kinds of collaborations emphasize the importance of creating and sustaining valuable relationships within Indigenous communities, and not only help to respectfully and accurately represent Native stories in theatrical designs, but allow productions the opportunity to support artists who are valued members of their communities in the perpetuation of various Native traditions.

Thinking again about the ʻōlelo noʻeau of this section, "ideas running wild without discussion," we can start to see the beauty of Indigenous collaboration and relationships that is present when bringing Indigenous communities and cultural practitioners into the design process. We, as Native designers and theatre artists, value outside perspectives, experiences, and excellence in cultural practice, using our privilege as designers to call upon our people to contribute to the stories that represent us. And so, when thinking about research, the creation of ideas, and the sharing of design concepts, it is clear that respectful collaboration, within and outside of a cast and creative team, can lead towards the building of a production that uplifts communities, represents Native culture with honor, and contributes to the performative sovereignty of Indigenous people onstage.

Part 3: Culmination in Creation

Hoʻomoe wai kahi ke kāoʻo.
Let all travel together like water flowing in one direction.[16]

Part One of this essay set the foundation of an Indigenous design process. Part Two described distinctly Indigenous methodologies in collaboration to create and finalize design ideas while bringing Native communities into the work they are represented in. Part Three of our discussion on an Indigenous theatrical design production process brings us towards the end of the journey, towards opening night. As we have continued to build upon our foundation and foster important relationships with Native communities, we are now ready to see our creations onstage. For Indigenous theatre practitioners, we are finally arriving at the moment when we are ready to tell the stories of our ancestors and our grandchildren, in our Native languages, through our traditional and contemporary art forms. In this part, I will finish the case study on my design work for *Haku Wale*, by describing the collaboration with students and community members that brought my designs from idea to reality. It was through the many hands that touched this piece that we were able to accomplish so much in such a short amount of time, and with limited resources, and I mahalo everyone who gave their time and artistry to building this small-scale yet largely beloved production to life.

Case Study: Haku Wale, Part 2

In the first part of this case study, we talked about the inclusion of community into the research and creation of ideas on a production, specifically through inspiration from the *'Avaiki Nui Social's* celebration of Cook Islands music, planned use of traditional and contemporary fine arts practices, and connection to sustainable land resources. Moving into the physical creation of the scenic, lighting, and projection designs, I knew I wanted to extend the collaboration of building these design elements into the cast, crew, and community.

Using the book *Poakalani Hawaiian Quilt Cushion Patterns & Designs*,[17] I began sketching and translating my favorite quilt patterns into digital drawings to later be laser-cut into stamps with the help of our Technical Director, Justin Fragiao, at Kennedy Theatre. This method of drawing quilt patterns, laser-cutting them onto scrap pieces of plywood, and using the stamps and outlines to paint onto a surface was used by Justin in his wallpaper design as the Scenic Designer for *Kaisara*, a 2023 Hana Keaka thesis production written and directed by Iāsona Kaper. For *Haku Wale*, Iāsona served as our stage manager, and through his connection to cultural practitioners Kamalu du Preez and Kapalikū Maile, we were generously loaned a variety of 'ohe kāpala stamps to use in our creation process. These connections to designers and community members outside of the show allowed us to decentralize the tools and collaborators involved in the design process, as well as access to materials and ways of making that streamlined the work in our already tight production schedule. From these tools and motifs, I created various layouts of how I imagined the stamps and patterns to be painted and printed onto the fabric as a template, but allowed my team of artists the freedom to use them, modify them, and create their own. I also used some of these patterns in the projection designs for the show, giving an additional visual aesthetic and layer to each song and another technical application to traditional and contemporary Kanaka Maoli designs.

Cast and crew members of *Haku Wale* took time out of rehearsal to sit with the patterns and paint onto the fabric, which was also on the same day as our cast and crew potluck, a tradition in the Hawaiian Theatre Program as a way to bond with all members of the production over food at tech or at a rehearsal a few days before opening. Later in the week, students from the director's Film/TV Acting class also contributed their time and creativity to the project, painting and stamping as a group, and even volunteering to work with me one-on-one to finish the designs. During the performances of *Haku Wale*, these students also helped set-up and strike the shows as part of the crew.

On the morning of opening night, our stage manager and I spent time with Papahana Kualoa at Waipao during a community work day to gather fresh

lāʻī (ti leaf) to use as lei and as additional greenery on the set. This practice of gathering fresh foliage is very common in hula performance, as the relationship between the dancer and story embedded in the hula is strengthened through the harvesting, preparing, and wearing of plant elements important to the song, composer, island, etc. Wearing a fern grown on a certain island or a flower beloved by the person honored in that hula reminds Kānaka Maoli, and many other Native communities, of the reciprocal relationship we have between our land and our stories, and how it is our responsibility to learn the proper ways of engaging with our resources while celebrating them.

Figure 5.5. Morning with Papahana Kualoa at Waipao. Photo by author.

While a lot of the elements I've described in this process are common in student produced shows, I think the beauty of *Haku Wale* stemmed from the leadership of our creative team, which was fully comprised of students in the Hana Keaka Program. We worked under intense circumstances, as many productions do regardless of scale and budget, but held true to our values as practitioners of Hawaiian Theatre. We used ʻōlelo Hawaiʻi to communicate in meetings and rehearsals, personal experiences to guide the creation of the story and designs, called to traditional and contemporary methods of designing and making, and continued to teach and learn from each other throughout the process. When it came time to perform, each show opened with an oli (chant), saw the weaving of fresh lei by all cast members into one large lei throughout the show, featured a brand new hula, songs of various style ranges and types, and celebrated original compositions and the talent of students in the department.

This case study of *Haku Wale* covers a student-produced show that was created and performed in three weeks, and yet was full of new ways of thinking, designing, and collaborating, separating it from any production I had worked on previously. I leaned on my team, my mentors, my cast, and my community for their support throughout the process, and they are the reason that the show was a success. Thinking about taking these lessons into my future work, it is exciting to dream about the ways in which I can continue to incorporate distinctly Indigenous elements into new productions like *Haku Wale*, in ranging scales and sizes. But how can we begin to normalize and expand on these practices to include the next generation of Indigenous theatre artists and designers? To start, with access to education.

Part 4: Education in Creation

E lawe i ke aʻo a malama, a e ʻoi mau ka naʻauao.
He who takes his teachings and applies them increases his knowledge.[18]

In beginning this discussion on education and the final part of this essay, I first want to celebrate the Hawaiian Theatre Program at UH Mānoa, the only one of its kind in the world. I am endlessly thankful to Kumu Hailiʻōpua Baker for allowing me the opportunity to study in her program, and to past and present haumāna for their impact, innovation, and creation within Hana Keaka.

> The program includes courses on the history of theatre in Hawaiʻi, the study and analysis of indigenous Hawaiian theatre, and training in both traditional and contemporary Hawaiian performance forms. Original hana keaka produc-

> tions reflect and honor the language, traditions, history and values of Kānaka Maoli. A primary focus of the program is to grow practitioners of hana keaka; actors, playwrights, directors, designers, technicians, and patrons in order to grow the profession of hana keaka.[19]

As previously mentioned, Ka'iukapu Baker and I are the first students in the program to add design as a focus of study, and I am very excited and honored for us to add this element and create a pathway for future Kanaka Maoli students to focus in design and visual storytelling within the field of Hawaiian Theatre.

And as the fields of theatrical design and Indigenous performance continue to expand, it is important that opportunities are created to educate the next cohort of Native students, designers, and theatre artists. I am not sure what my career would look like without receiving a BFA in Theatre Design and Technology and later moving on to my MFA in Hana Keaka, and I recognize that it has been an immense privilege to study with and be mentored by some of the most incredible teachers and artists in the fields of theatrical design and Indigenous performance. In thinking about how I can contribute to growing the intersection of these two special fields, an idea that launched me into writing this essay is the creation of a university level course specializing in an Indigenous design process for theatre. Below is a first draft of my ideas for this class in the hopes that, alongside this essay, it will continue to grow and shift for many years to come.

Figure 5.6. "Ku'u Hoa o ka Hālāwai" written by Ikaika Mendez, performed by Mendez and Maile Kalama in *Haku Wale*. Photo by Hezekiah Kapua'ala.

Class Development: "Indigenous Research Methodologies in Theatrical Design"
This course for theatre and theatre design students would focus specifically on the pre-production process, as that is where I believe the foundation of an Indigenous process lies. Throughout the semester, students would have the opportunity to practice Indigenous methodologies in design creation relating to their design focus and interests, beginning with various scripts and moving forward in the conceptual design process. In thinking about who might want to enroll in this course, I want to make clear that this class is suitable for all students, Native-identifying or not. For students who do not have ancestral lineage to an Indigenous land or group, this class offers them a new methodology of approaching design work, and encourages them to respectfully interact with the world and communities around them as a part of their design process.

Their research, sketches, and presentations will reflect new discoveries made through practicing a design process through an Indigenous lens, and each design discipline will offer unique areas of collaboration and creation that may exist outside of the "industry standard" practice. Students are encouraged to speak to members of a community related to their piece, learn words of a new language, engage in the history of a place and its people, and thoughtfully bring what they've learned into their artistry. When it comes time to share work in class, students will be expected to talk about their process, who they connected with, what they created, how their design would be executed if fully realized, and what new discoveries they might bring with them into future design processes. Again, through focusing on the pre-production process, students will be challenged to expand their design ideas and collaborations outside of the classroom and themselves, and will hopefully see the beauty that lies in a community-first based approach to seeking and showcasing knowledge.

As an undergraduate theatrical design student, I loved when my professors would bring in outside professionals to talk about their experiences of working in the field. This course would do the same, but with all industry professionals being Indigenous designers and theatre practitioners. Through the talks and mentorship in class by outside professionals, students will be able to expand their professional networks, compare the design processes of different regions, languages, and performance types, expanding their worldviews and range of creation. And for the guest artists, the opportunity to speak to students interested and passionate about the areas of Indigenous and cultural performance and design for theatre bridges the gap between the education that was accessible to them during their journey through the university system and what is possible for the next generation of Native theatre artists.

While this is just the beginning of an idea for a single class, I can only imagine the change that would happen in the field through a wide range of coursework and mentorship built upon an Indigenous framework in theatrical design. Through the creation of more educational opportunities, the next generation of Indigenous artists and designers in theatre will be prepared to respectfully honor the stories of Native communities across lands and languages, and in turn, the field will see more of these stories being told. In creating this course, I hope to deepen the conversation around how we can encourage systemic change in the theatre industry and gain confidence in the teaching and learning of Indigenous theatrical design practices for the generations of Native designers and theatre practitioners to come.

Conclusion: Reflections in a Native Design Process

ʻAʻohe puʻu kiʻekiʻe ke hoʻāʻo e piʻi.
No cliff is so tall that it cannot be scaled.[20]

Native design processes, created by an Indigenous designer and/or for a show based in Indigenous culture, are distinctly different from the American tradition of theatre through their attention and care to the communities, languages, histories, and land represented. Both types of theatre will have a performance in front of an audience regardless of stage size or number of tickets sold, but the core difference in how the creation process is navigated is how we are able to showcase ourselves and our cultures as Indigenous people. Through the idea that "theatrical action turns Native philosophies about the sacred nature of speech into material form," we can identify design as a theatrical vehicle that continues to reinforce embodied performance through visual language, carefully sculpting the world of the story and, in Indigenous performance, the worlds of our ancestors.[21] This performance also extends beyond the stage and into our realities as Indigenous people. For myself, the process of Native performance that includes language learning, community building, and cultural research continues to increase confidence in my identity as an Indigenous artist and storyteller.

"By connecting the act of making Native theatre to the enactment of Native presence, worldviews, and self-governance, Native artists make a bold, significant statement: Native theatre is performative sovereignty."[22] Gunn Allen describes 'performative sovereignty' through emphasizing that "the way to liberation from oppression and injustice is to focus on our own interest, creativity, concerns, and community."[23] These focuses of an Indigenous worldview are fundamental to differentiating an Indigenous performance process from the American standard. It is undeniable that Native expression

through theater is "deeply embedded in unique spiritual, communal, political, and historical contexts."[24] And with Hawaiian Theatre, Kumu Hailiʻōpua Baker writes that "hana keaka is one of many cherished vessels for retaining our heritage, remembering our moʻolelo, and strengthening our fluency in culture and language."[25] In thinking about Indigenous theater as a whole, we can remember that because it is "based on communal relations, grounded in oral traditions, and tied to sacred relationships with land, Native poetics sharply contrasts with the European Aristotelian tradition."[26]

For as long as we continue to operate under the mechanics of the "industry standard," we as Native theatre practitioners must continue to challenge the narratives and statistics surrounding Indigenous productions and artists. "Indigenous peoples want to tell our own stories, write our own versions, in our own ways, for our own purposes,"[27] and when we show our communities that this kind of theatre is possible, that this kind of career and passion is possible, we encourage the future generations of artists to be proud in representing themselves, their families, and their communities through storytelling, performance, and design.

I hope that this discussion on Indigenous theatrical design methods and practice will continue through increased visibility, access, and knowledge into these areas of theatre that are too often overlooked, but are absolutely crucial to the field of live performance. I look forward to the many incredible designers and designs that champion Indigenous excellence in culture and performance, and continue to perpetuate innovation in tradition and the celebration of Native communities through theatre.

Mahalo palena ʻole iā ʻoukou pākahi no ka heluhelu ʻana mai i kēia pepa no nā ʻoihana a me nā hana noʻeau ma ka hana keaka ʻōiwi. He mea pono ke hoʻoulu a māhuahua i kēia hana nui, a hialaʻai nō koʻu naʻau i ka ʻike ʻana i nā hana noʻeau ʻōiwi i ka wā ma hope aku. ʻAʻole i pau.

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Noelani Montas is a Kanaka Maoli and Dominicana artist, performer, and designer from Southern California. She is an MFA candidate in Hana Keaka and received her BFA in Theatre Design & Technology from the University of the Arts in Philadelphia, PA. As a performer and designer, she is interested in culturally centered storytelling, especially Indigenous stories and new works. Recent credits include: *Glitter in the Pa'akai* ('Ānela) – UHM Earle Ernst Lab Theatre, *Haku Wale* (Scenic, Lighting, & Projection Design; Hula) – UHM Earle Ernst Lab Theatre, *Kaisara* (Emma Nāwahī) – UHM Earle Ernst Lab Theatre, *Primero Sueño* (Scenic & Lighting Design) – Repertorio Español, *Ka 'Umikūmālua o nā Pō* (Aweawe, Makalilo) – UHM/EWC, and *La Extinción de los Dinosaurios* (Scenic & Lighting Design) – Repertorio Español. She is endlessly thankful for the opportunity to be a student in the Hawaiian Theatre Program and to participate in the creation of original Hawaiian stories onstage. She thanks her family, friends, and collaborators for their unwavering support. E holomua, sigue pa' lante.