

Hawaii Style Lei

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Disclaimer

I am not Native Hawaiian, just somebody who lived in Hawai'i growing up.

Anything I talk about in this presentation is based on research & my firsthand experience.

Anything discussed in the historical section of this presentation should be taken with a grain of salt, as many existing documents were written by colonists and early Hawaiian history was entirely oral—meaning much was lost over time.



A Brief History of the Lei

Early Lei

- The lei followed Polynesian migration to Hawai‘i
- Early lei in Polynesia are thought to have been made of marine snail shells, teeth, and fish bones (found in graves)
- Early lei in Hawai‘i were made from local leaves, vines, seeds, nuts, shells, feathers, and bones of certain animals.
- Lei are not associated with any particular ceremony in Hawaiian culture—other than generally honoring somebody who is loved and respected



A Ni‘ihau Shell Lei

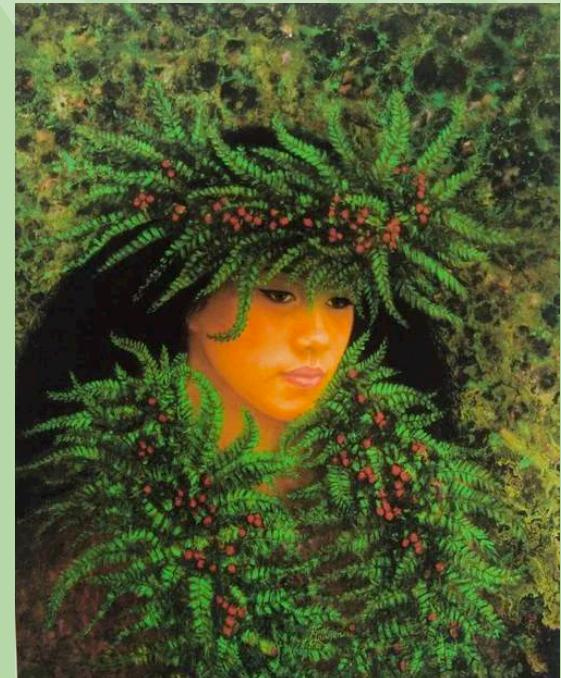


An example of a lei made from Ox bone, carved to replicate the Pīkake flower.



Lei & Hawaiian Creation Stories

- Kuku'ena (Kuku-'ena-i-ke-ahi-ho'omau-honua or Hi'iaka-i-ka-pua-'ena'ena) is the Hawaiian goddess associated with lei making
 - Kuku'ena is also a healer and guide for lost travelers
 - Kuku-'ena-i-ke-ahi-ho'omau-honua translates to beating hot in the perpetual earth fire.
- Kuku'ena was critical in Pele's, her older sister, journey to Hawai'i—using seeds and cuttings used for lei making and medicine.



An artist rendition of Hi'iaka

Lei in Modern Day

- In Hawai'i, May 1st is Lei Day
 - First created poet Eric Kosciuszko in the 1920s
 - Leonard "Red" & Ruth Hawk composed the hapa-haole song, "May Day is Lei Day"—first as a foxtrot, later choreographed as a hula.
- Each island is represented by a specific color and type of lei
 - Ni'ihau's lei is the only island with a shell
 - Maui has the only lei made from a non-indigenous plant



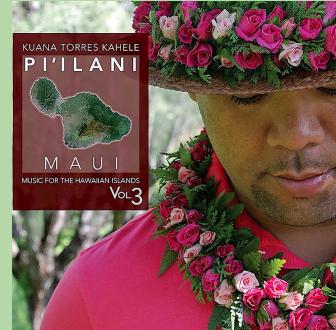
Ni'ihiu: White, Pūpū 'o Ni'ihiu



Moloka'i: Green Kukui



Hawai'i: Red, 'Ōhi'a Lehua



Maui: Pink, Lokelani (Rose)



O'ahu: Gold, 'Illima



Kaho'olawe: Silver, Hindahina



Lana'i: Orange, Kauna'oa



Kaua'i: Purple, Mokihana

Styles of Lei

- Lei Po'o: Floral Crown
- Kui Lei: Neck Lei
- Styles:
 - Haku: to braid or plait
 - Wili: to wind or twist
 - Kui: to string or thread
 - Hilo: to twist or spin
- The Maile lei are some of the most special lei to gift.
 - Made from the indigenous vine
 - Especially fragrant
 - Represent honor, respect, courtship, love, & peace



Lei Po'o



Haku Lei Po'o



Kui Lei Making



Hilo Maile Lei

Giving a Lei

- Given to celebrate love, friendship, honor, celebration & greetings
- Traditionally when a lei is given the giver and the receiver Honi (touch forehead to forehead, nose to nose, and exchange breath or Hā)
 - Now a warm hug and cheek kiss are more common
- Lei Etiquette:
 - Lei should *never* be refused—if you are unable to wear the lei you usually accept it & give the lei to a significant other or friend to wear
 - Closed lei should *never* be gifted to pregnant women, it is bad luck
 - When making a lei—it should *never* be worn before gifting



Honi



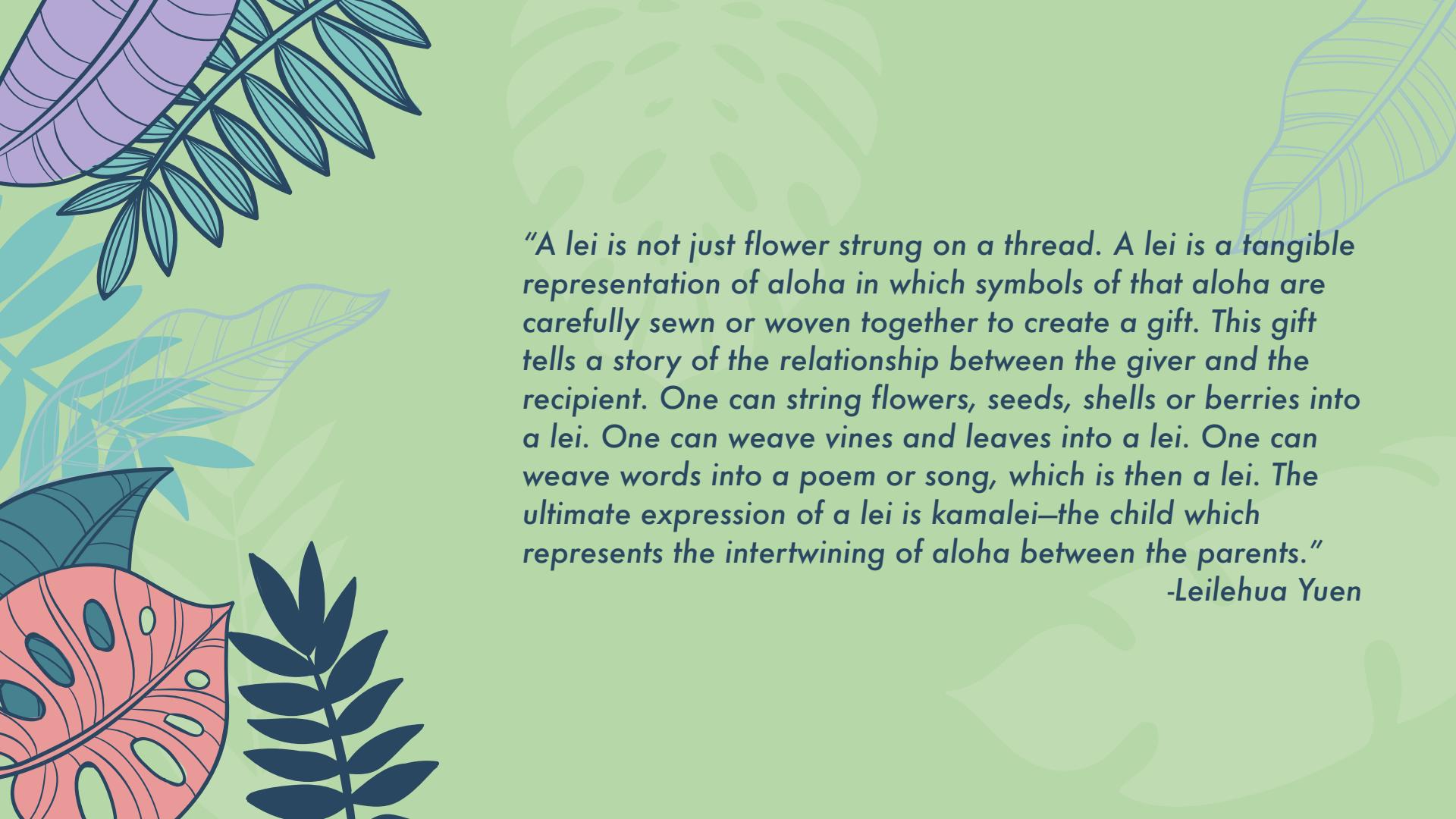
Photo by Monique Saenz

The End of a Lei

- Lei should be either returned to the earth
 - ideally the spot where the flowers were collected, hung from a tree, or buried
 - “Regardless of who gave it, a lei is also a gift from the ‘āina” —Kukui’ula
- Lei can also be kept and dried
- Remember, somebody put a lot of love into that lei



A dried Lei Po'o



"A lei is not just flower strung on a thread. A lei is a tangible representation of aloha in which symbols of that aloha are carefully sewn or woven together to create a gift. This gift tells a story of the relationship between the giver and the recipient. One can string flowers, seeds, shells or berries into a lei. One can weave vines and leaves into a lei. One can weave words into a poem or song, which is then a lei. The ultimate expression of a lei is kamalei—the child which represents the intertwining of aloha between the parents."

-Leilehua Yuen