



July 6, 2023

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## **Bishop Museum's Mau ka Leo Project Preserves and Shares the Stories Around Its Collections**

*Part of the Museum's wider digitization efforts, Mau ka Leo collects and makes accessible  
the knowledge and stories held by its staff and community*

**Honolulu, Hawai'i** — Bernice Pauahi Bishop Museum is proud to announce **Mau ka Leo**, a project that documents, preserves, and shares the priceless knowledge and stories around the Museum's collections.

"Mau ka Leo is a digital storytelling space," said Melissa Tulig, Bishop Museum director of informatics and co-project lead. "Our goal is to show that the collections we steward at Bishop Museum are more than physical items: they are the stories of the living cultures of Hawai'i and the Pacific."

"The purpose of Mau ka Leo is to offer meaningful access to our digitized collections through collection-based narratives, knowledge-sharing, and multimedia expressions. In this way, we hope to ensure that the collective wisdom of the people of Oceania, from whom our collections come, is shared through the voices of the Museum 'ohana for future generations," Tulig said.

Since 2018, Bishop Museum's Digital Futures Initiative has been working to fortify the Museum's technical infrastructure and develop cross-disciplinary information systems to centralize its collections data. Yet, a digital archive of Bishop Museum's collections – even with high-quality images and accompanying metadata – does not give sufficient context to these materials, nor does it explain how different items relate to each other in significant ways.

These important connections can only be made by people who uphold the knowledge and stewardship of these materials. This includes Bishop Museum's curators, collection managers, cultural resource specialists, other staff, interns, and students, as well as communities of practitioners and knowledge-holders. Through a grant awarded by the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Museum secured funding for the Mau ka Leo project, which fills this gap by recording institutional and cultural knowledge as multimedia stories, while linking these stories to the Museum's digitized collections.

“Every item in Bishop Museum’s care is part of the interconnected histories of Pacific people, cultures, and languages, but it is the knowledge and the stories behind these items that reveal their meaning.” said Dee Jay Mailer, president and CEO of Bishop Museum. “The documentation and passing on of this Indigenous knowledge, particularly through the voices of our own staff and other community knowledge-holders, is a vital continuation of the oral traditions of Hawaiian culture. These are the voices that must be supported, stewarded, and given a platform. This is what Mau ka Leo is about.”

Stories in Mau ka Leo highlight the rich stories of our heritage curated by our experienced staff and enriched by cross-departmental connections between items. For example, an exploration of kapa (barkcloth) decorating tools is shared by kapa maker and cultural resource specialist, Kamalu du Preez. Her perspective into the nature inspirations behind ‘ohe kāpala (bamboo stamp) designs ties these items to the natural science collections. Another story features a collaboration between historian and curator DeSoto Brown and cultural advisor Marques Marzan, intersecting knowledge from the Museum’s Library & Archives and Ethnology departments. From the Archives, Brown shares a rare photograph of the original ‘Iolani Palace, which Marzan connects to a pair of hats belonging to Bernice Pauahi Bishop and Ruth Ke‘elikōlani that were made of materials from the Palace’s construction.

With the ability to weave and connect these voices, the Museum’s documented knowledge will expand its reach to better serve the community in Hawai‘i and abroad through increased public access. In a future version of the website, content in Mau ka Leo will link directly to the Museum’s newly-centralized online database for its digitized collections, continuing the cultural tradition of knowledge handed down through generations as it platforms Native voices and communities.

Support for Mau ka Leo is provided by the National Endowment for the Humanities American Rescue Plan: Humanities Organizations program (ZDH-283709), and through generous donations to the Museum’s Digital Futures Initiative.

“Mau ka Leo aligns with other strategic initiatives at Bishop Museum, including Digital Futures and the Pacific Pipeline Indigenous stewardship fellowship program, to connect people with the Museum’s Knowledge Core of more than 25 million collection pieces and to Hawaiian and Pacific heritages,” said Tulig. “Mau ka Leo is just one aspect of the digital transformation underway at Bishop Museum. We are collaborating internally and externally to centralize our information systems and technical infrastructure, so we can provide archipelago-wide and international access to ideas and information around our collections.”

For more information about Mau ka Leo, visit [BishopMuseum.org/MauKaLeo](https://BishopMuseum.org/MauKaLeo).

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### **About Bernice Pauahi Bishop Museum:**

Bernice Pauahi Bishop Museum’s mission is to inspire our community and visitors through the exploration, celebration, and perpetuation of the extraordinary history, culture, and environment of Hawai‘i and the Pacific. The Museum was founded in 1889 by Charles Reed Bishop in memory of his wife Bernice Pauahi Bishop, a royal descendant of King Kamehameha I. Today, the Museum thrives as an educational center for the community and is widely regarded as the world’s premier institution for Hawaiian and Pacific content.

Bishop Museum’s vast collections of more than 25 million objects and specimens represent nine disciplines and include more than 22 million biological specimens, over two million cultural objects, 115,000 historical publications, and one million photographs, films, works of art, audio recordings, and manuscripts. These collections tell the stories of the cultures and biodiversity of Hawai‘i and the Pacific as well as the proud legacy of scholarly research spanning 130 years.

Bishop Museum proudly serves more than 200,000 visitors each year, including 20,000 children on school visits.

To learn more about the Museum's research, collections, exhibits, and programs, visit [BishopMuseum.org](http://BishopMuseum.org), follow @BishopMuseum on [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#), become a fan of Bishop Museum on [Facebook](#), visit Bishop Museum's [YouTube](#) channel, or call (808) 847-3511. Bishop Museum is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.

Bishop Museum is proud to be an Equal Employment Opportunity and Affirmative Action Employer, and welcomes applicants from the military, veterans, and those with disabilities. Learn about careers at Bishop Museum at [BishopMuseum.org/Careers](http://BishopMuseum.org/Careers) and on its [LinkedIn](#) page.

[Bishop Museum Press](#) is Hawai'i's oldest book publisher and one of the first scholarly publishers in the Western Hemisphere, and has published over 1200 titles and distributed over 1,000,000 books in 72 countries worldwide.

Past news releases can be viewed and downloaded at [BishopMuseum.org/NewsRoom](http://BishopMuseum.org/NewsRoom).