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## Herb Kawainui Kāne

Herbert "Herb" Kawainui Kāne (June 21, 1928 – March 8, 2011), considered one of the principal figures in the renaissance of Hawaiian culture in the 1970s, was a celebrated artist-historian and author with a special interest in the seafaring traditions of the ancestral peoples of Hawai'i. Kāne played a key role in demonstrating that Hawaiian culture arose not from some accidental seeding of Polynesia, but that Hawai'i was reachable by voyaging canoes from Tahiti able to make the journey and return. This offered a far more complex notion of the cultures of the Pacific Islands than had previously been accepted.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, he created vivid imagery of Hawaiian culture prior to contact with Europeans, and especially the period of early European influence, that sparked appreciation of a nearly forgotten traditional life. He painted dramatic views of war, exemplified by *The Battle at Nu'uaniu Pali*, the potential of conflicts between cultures such as in *Cook Entering Kealakekua Bay*, where British ships are dwarfed and surrounded by Hawaiian canoes, as well as bucolic quotidian scenes and lush images of a robust ceremonial and spiritual life, that helped arouse a latent pride among Hawaiians during a time of general cultural awakening.<sup>2</sup>

### Early life and education as an artist

Kāne (kah-nay) was born in the community of Paynesville, Minnesota in the United States.<sup>3</sup> His father, who was also named, Herbert, worked in family poi business, and became a paniolo (Hawaiian cowboy), then traveled the US in a Hawaiian Band. He

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<sup>1</sup> Emory, Kenneth P. (December 1974). "The Coming of the Polynesians". *National Geographic*. Washington, DC: National Geographic Society. **146** (6): 732–745.

<sup>2</sup> Kakesako, Gregg K.; Kubota, Gary (March 9, 2011). "Artist Herb Kane dies at age 82". *Honolulu Star-Advertiser*. Honolulu, Hawaii: Honolulu Star-Advertiser. Archived from the original on August 1, 2011. Retrieved October 12, 2013.

<sup>3</sup> Heckathorn, John (June 2011). "Herb Kane: The Last Interview". Honolulu, Hawaii: Honolulu Magazine. Retrieved July 8, 2011.

later served in the Army and Navy, and had his own practice as a doctor of Optometry. Herbert Jr.'s grandfather immigrated to Waipio Valley from China and being very industrious he built the first poi factory in the islands, growing taro and producing poi for market. His mother's family were farmers of Danish ancestry in Wisconsin.<sup>4</sup> Kāne's childhood was divided between his mother's hometown of Marshfield, Wisconsin and Hawai'i<sup>5</sup>. He describes in his book, *Voyagers*, an early awakening to art. In 1935 he was a barefoot child in Hilo, Hawaii, brought by his mother to the opening of a gallery exhibition of the work of D. Howard Hitchcock.<sup>6</sup> He writes that he was "stunned, confronted with miracles" seeing Hitchcock's work and speaking with him briefly.<sup>7</sup> Hitchcock was the first Hawaiian-born artist to achieve international recognition, and his work focused on unique Hawaiian subject matter, particularly the volcanic eruptions near Hilo.<sup>8</sup> According to his own account, besides this exposure to art and the ongoing encouragement of his parents to pursue his interest in drawing, Kāne's most formative experiences in childhood were in Hawai'i, where his father and his family passed along the traditional folk tales of the islands.<sup>9</sup>

Kāne served in the United States Navy, qualifying for veteran's educational benefits under the G.I. Bill. After he was discharged, he used those benefits to attend

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<sup>4</sup> Hauser, Susan G. (July 29, 2010). "[Interviewing Herb Kawainui Kane](http://hulainaloha.blogspot.com/2010/07/interviewing-herb-kawainui-kane.html)". Retrieved July 8, 2011. <<http://hulainaloha.blogspot.com/2010/07/interviewing-herb-kawainui-kane.html>>

<sup>5</sup> Heckathorn, John (June 2011). "[Herb Kane: The Last Interview](#)". Honolulu, Hawaii: Honolulu Magazine. Retrieved July 8, 2011. Hauser, Susan G. (July 29, 2010). "[Interviewing Herb Kawainui Kane](#)". Retrieved July 8, 2011

<sup>6</sup> Hitchcock was an American painter of the "Volcano School". The Volcano School refers to a group of non-native Hawaiian artists who painted dramatic nocturnal scenes of Hawaii's erupting volcanoes. See: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/D.\\_Howard\\_Hitchcock](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/D._Howard_Hitchcock)

<sup>7</sup> Kane, Herb Kawainui (1991). Berry, Paul, ed. *Voyagers*. Managing Editors Robert B. Goodman and Lorie Rapkin (First ed.). Bellevue, Washington: Whalesong, Inc. ISBN 0-9627095-1-4. OCLC 24562482. A Beyond Words Publishing Company Special Edition

<sup>8</sup> Krauss, Bob (July 2, 2006). "[D. Howard Hitchcock](#)". *The Honolulu Advertiser*. Retrieved July 11, 2011.

<sup>9</sup> Kane, Herb Kawainui (1991). Berry, Paul, ed. *Voyagers*. Managing Editors Robert B. Goodman and Lorie Rapkin (First ed.). Bellevue, Washington: Whalesong, Inc. ISBN 0-9627095-1-4. OCLC 24562482. A Beyond Words Publishing Company Special Edition

the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, in Chicago, Illinois, earning a bachelor's degree and, in 1953, a master's degree.<sup>10</sup> Under an arrangement between the two schools at the time, his master's degree was awarded by the University of Chicago.

## Early career

Herb had his own Advertising studio on Chicago's Michigan Avenue, which is known as "The Magnificent Mile." He was a very successful Designer/Illustrator/Author. His talents were expansive working with everything from books and magazines, architectural designs, commercial television work for Kelloggs and various companies, and more. Kāne said he found advertising work unsatisfying. "The end came when I won a Jolly Green Giant campaign, and for a year, did drawings and paintings of that big green fairy until I could no longer suffer it."<sup>11</sup>

Kāne had been sailing a racing catamaran on Lake Michigan, and had begun researching Hawaiian canoes in the library of the University of Chicago and in the Field Museum of Natural History,<sup>12</sup> where in 1961 the museum had installed one of the most extensive collections of artifacts from Pacific Ocean cultures put on view to that date.<sup>13</sup> Kāne produced a series of 14 paintings of Polynesian canoes in the 1960s, which were purchased in 1969 by the Hawai'i State Foundation of Culture and the Arts, then headed by its first director, Alfred Preis, architect of the USS Arizona

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<sup>10</sup> See: Kakesako, Gregg K.; Kubota, Gary (March 9, 2011). "[Artist Herb Kane dies at age 82](#)". *Honolulu Star-Advertiser*. Honolulu, Hawaii: Honolulu Star-Advertiser. Archived from [the original](#) on August 1, 2011. Retrieved October 12, 2013; Hauser, Susan G. (July 29, 2010). "[Interviewing Herb Kawainui Kane](#)". Retrieved July 8, 2011. <http://hulainaloha.blogspot.com/2010/07/interviewing-herb-kawainui-kane.html>; von Buol, Peter (May 20, 2008). "Chicago honors Hawaii artist Herb Kane". *Hawaii Magazine*. Retrieved July 8, 2011.

<sup>11</sup> Kane, Herb Kawainui (1991). Berry, Paul, ed. *Voyagers*. Managing Editors Robert B. Goodman and Lorie Rapkin (First ed.). Bellevue, Washington: Whalesong, Inc. ISBN 0-9627095-1-4. OCLC 24562482. "A Beyond Words Publishing Company Special Edition"

<sup>12</sup> Heckathorn, John (June 2011). "Herb Kane: The Last Interview". Honolulu, Hawaii: Honolulu Magazine. Retrieved July 8, 2011.

<sup>13</sup> "A. W. F. Fuller Collection". Chicago Illinois USA: Field Museum of Natural History. Retrieved July 8, 2011.

Memorial in Pearl Harbor, Oahu, Hawai'i.<sup>14</sup> Kāne has stated that this purchase made it possible for him to move to Hawai'i, where he lived in Honolulu and continued his study of Polynesian voyaging canoes.<sup>15</sup>

## The Hōkūle'a and its cultural impact

In Honolulu, Kāne attracted a group of sailing enthusiasts, including University of Hawai'i anthropologist Ben Finney and Tommy Holmes, author of *The Hawaiian Canoe*. Together they founded the Polynesian Voyaging Society and began work on the Hōkūle'a, a voyaging canoe based on historical Polynesian design, capable of sailing between Hawai'i and Tahiti.<sup>16</sup> Their purpose was to prove that ancestral Polynesian voyagers could have purposely navigated in vessels of similar type to colonize Hawai'i.<sup>17</sup> Kāne has said his goal was also to spur a revival of cultural identity among Hawaiians and peoples of the Pacific islands. He wrote that in 1973 he, with a number of others at the time, realized that "if a voyaging canoe were built and sailed today, it would function as a cultural catalyst and inspire the revival of almost-forgotten aspects of Hawaiian life."<sup>18</sup>

"What intrigued me was to see, if by building this canoe and putting it to active use and taking it out on a cruise throughout the Hawaiian islands, introducing it to the Hawaiian people, training Hawaiians to sail it, if this would not stimulate shock waves or ripple effect throughout the culture—in music and dance and the crafts. And we know it did."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Heckathorn, John (June 2011). "Herb Kane: The Last Interview". Honolulu, Hawaii: Honolulu Magazine. Retrieved July 8, 2011.

<sup>15</sup> von Buol, Peter (May 20, 2008). "Chicago honors Hawaii artist Herb Kane". *Hawaii Magazine*. Retrieved July 8, 2011.

<sup>16</sup> ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Zisk, Janet M. "The Polynesian Voyaging Society and Voyages of the Hokule'a Collection in the Kanehameha School/Bishop Estate Archives". Honolulu, Hawaii: University of Hawaii. Retrieved July 8, 2011.

<sup>18</sup> Kane, Herb Kawainui (April 1976). "A Canoe Helps Hawaii Recapture Her Past". *National Geographic Magazine*. Washington, DC: National Geographic Society. **149** (4): 476.

<sup>19</sup> Harden, M.V. "Herb Kane Artist And Historian". Kapaa, Hawaii: LBD Coffee LLC dba Coffee Times. Retrieved July 8, 2011.

Kāne designed and named the Hōkūleʻa, which was launched on March 8, 1975.<sup>20</sup> Technically, the craft is a performance-accurate full-scale replica of a waʻa kaulua,<sup>21</sup> a Polynesian double-hulled voyaging canoe. The name Hōkūleʻa came to Kāne in a dream, he has said.<sup>22</sup> It is the Hawaiian term for the star Arcturus, which is of critical importance to celestial navigation in the Pacific, and the zenith star of the Hawaiian Islands.<sup>23</sup> He served as the skipper for two years as the canoe sailed trial cruises among the Hawaiian Islands to attract crew and support for its maiden international voyage.<sup>24</sup>

Kāne's role in the creation and promotion of the Hōkūleʻa helped restore pride to the peoples of the Pacific, and his paintings of traditional Hawaiian scenes and historical events have helped restore lost identity and, in the words of the President of School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Tony Jones, "rewritten the history of the Pacific."<sup>25</sup> Kāne's colleague, Nainoa Thompson, navigator of the Hōkūleʻa, says Kāne was "the visionary,

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<sup>20</sup> Kakesako, Gregg K.; Kubota, Gary (March 9, 2011). "Artist Herb Kane dies at age 82". *Honolulu Star-Advertiser*. Honolulu, Hawaii: Honolulu Star-Advertiser. Archived from [the original](#) on August 1, 2011

<sup>21</sup> Chun, Naomi N.Y. (1995) [1988]. "Types of Canoes"(PDF). *Hawaiian Canoe-Building Traditions. The Hawaiian Electronic Library* (in English and Hawaiian). illustrated by Robin Y. Burningham (Revised ed.). Honolulu, HI: Kamehameha Schools Press. pp. 57–62. ISBN 0-87336-043-5. OCLC 35262569. Retrieved 2013-10-12.

<sup>22</sup> Kane, Herb Kawainui (1991). Berry, Paul, ed. *Voyagers*. Managing Editors Robert B. Goodman and Lorie Rapkin (First ed.). Bellevue, Washington: Whalesong, Inc. ISBN 0-9627095-1-4. OCLC 24562482. "A Beyond Words Publishing Company Special Edition". See also: Zisk, Janet M. "The Polynesian Voyaging Society and Voyages of the Hokule'a Collection in the Kanehameha School/Bishop Estate Archives". Honolulu, Hawaii: University of Hawaii. Retrieved July 8, 2011.

<sup>23</sup> Kane, Herb Kawainui (1991). Berry, Paul, ed. *Voyagers*. Managing Editors Robert B. Goodman and Lorie Rapkin (First ed.). Bellevue, Washington: Whalesong, Inc. ISBN 0-9627095-1-4. OCLC 24562482. "A Beyond Words Publishing Company Special Edition".

<sup>24</sup> Heckathorn, John (June 2011). "Herb Kane: The Last Interview". Honolulu, Hawaii: Honolulu Magazine. Retrieved July 8, 2011; and Kane, Herb Kawainui (April 1976). "A Canoe Helps Hawaii Recapture Her Past". *National Geographic Magazine*. Washington, DC: National Geographic Society. **149** (4): 476.

<sup>25</sup> von Buol, Peter (May 20, 2008). "Chicago honors Hawaii artist Herb Kane". *Hawaii Magazine*. Retrieved July 8, 2011.

the dreamer, and he was the architect and the engineer. He's the one that carried the burden of building, and constructing, and sailing Hōkūle'a."<sup>26</sup> Elsewhere, Thompson told an interviewer, "When you look at Herb's legacy, it is transforming Hawai'i's society because he brought pride and culture and inspiration back, through the canoe....He is the father of the Hawaiian Renaissance."<sup>27</sup>

Kāne died on March 8, 2011, the 36th anniversary of the launch of the Hōkūle'a.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Cunningham, Jai (March 9, 2011). "Herb Kane remembered as more than just an artist". Honolulu, Hawaii: KHON-TV. Archived from the original on April 3, 2012. Retrieved July 8, 2011.

<sup>27</sup> "Nainoa Thompson reflects on Herb Kane's legacy". WorldNow and KHNL/KGMB. Mar 10, 2011. Retrieved July 23, 2011.

<sup>28</sup> Kakesako, Gregg K.; Kubota, Gary (March 9, 2011). "Artist Herb Kane dies at age 82". *Honolulu Star-Advertiser*. Honolulu, Hawaii: Honolulu Star-Advertiser. Archived from the original on August 1, 2011