

# exposure



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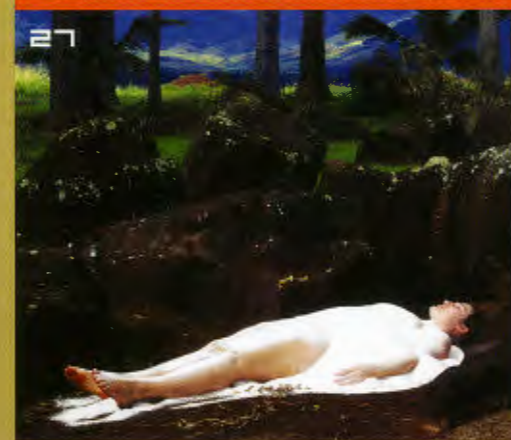
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# Adrienne Pao

## Beneath the Paradise

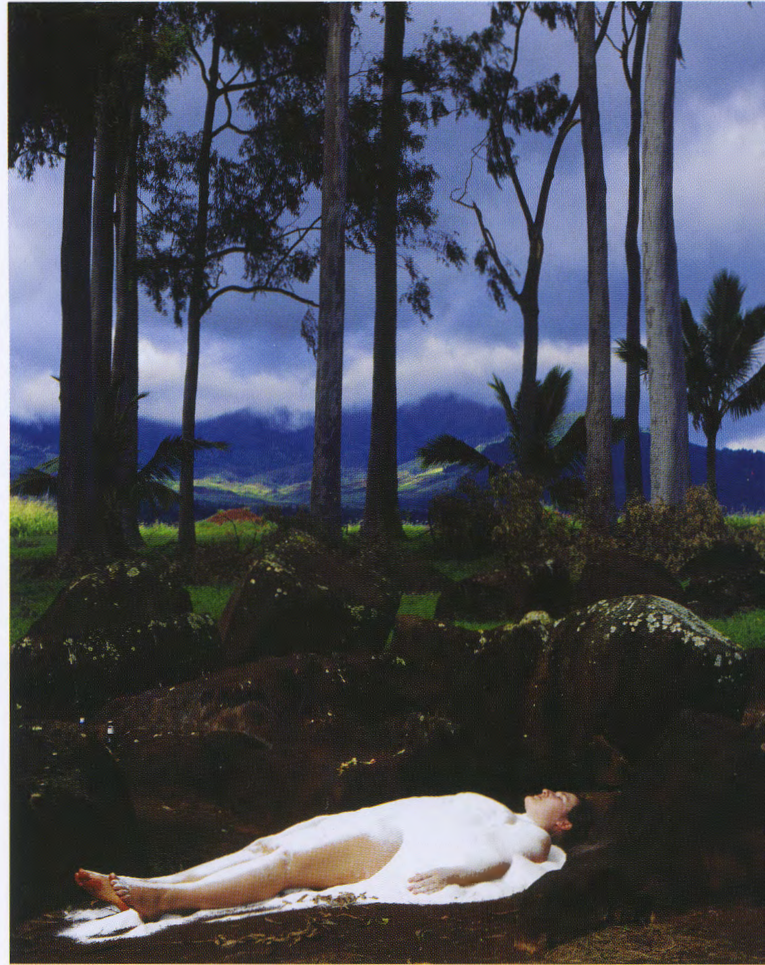
Bridget Cooks

The chance to escape from our everyday lives and lose ourselves in a tropical paradise is something many of us dream about. For hundreds of years Hawaii has been one of the most compelling places to make the dream a reality. The story of the islands reveals fantasies of tourist pleasures, the violence of colonization, grueling plantation labor, rich native folklore, and the struggle for native Hawaiian survival that continues today. In her landscape/performance photograph series *Hawaiian Cover-Ups* (2004-2005), Adrienne Pao explores this history and contemporary reality of Hawaii's allure and cultural oppression.

In *Sugar Plantations at the Birthing Stones/Kopa'a Kapa* (2005) we can almost feel the balmy breeze through the eucalyptus trees above. The thin ribbon of white clouds just beneath their branches mimics Pao's own shape partially buried under crystals of refined white sugar. The beauty of the sugar conceals both the history of labor and the female form beneath it. The site of the Kukanihoko Birthing Stones is a sacred place where women of royal blood would go to give birth to their offspring who would eventually become O'ahu's kings and rulers. Today visitors leave offerings to pay reverence at this sacred site. Pao lies still, resting and reenergizing from the land's life force derived from the strain of women giving birth and generations of harsh toiling in the fields. Pao pays tribute to the invisible labor on Hawaii's sugar plantations that has produced sugary sweet pleasure through backbreaking work.

**The photograph depicts the layers of this impossibly beautiful landscape and acknowledges its history of celebration and pain.**

*Fishskin Blanket Amidst the Mokolua's/I'a Kapa* (2004) combines the enticing Mokolua Islands in the distance, an image often used in relation to vacation or getaway ads, with the surreal image of Pao



covered with fishskins on the Lanikai (originally named Ka'Ohao) beach. The blanket of fish curves away from the land emphasizing its strong attraction for and quick movement into the ocean. The scene entices us to follow along into the water, a shark breeding ground where the skins would be eagerly consumed. Pao lays quietly beneath the skins resigned to this life cycle. Her photograph adds an informative layer to an area recognized for its scenic beauty and watersports. She pays respect to the natural environment and the process it facilitates.

Pao becomes a viewer with us in *View of Laie Point/He'e Kapa* (2005), her body covered with the octopuses that are plentiful in this inlet. As a child, her grandmother hunted the animals for food near this area. The photograph combines Pao's personal and larger native history with the perspective of a tourist. What looks at first like a typical postcard-like image is disrupted by the presence of

Above: *Sugar Plantations at the Birthing Stones/Kopa'a Kapa*, 2005, Lightjet print, 36 x 30 in.

the octopuses. The pleasurable, seductive view is complicated by the long slimy tentacles draped over Pao's skin. This play of attraction and repulsion is at the core of Pao's project. *Hawaiian Cover-Ups* mixes local history with tourist expectations to offer multiple perspectives on what many consider to be the untouched and therefore available paradise.

During their first moments on the islands tourists encounter one of the most popular symbols of Hawaiian hospitality. Receiving a lei from a beautiful Hawaiian woman as a gesture of welcome has become a ritual of tourist reception and has also impacted the perception of Hawaiian women as an accessible and obtainable form of the tourist experience. The row of lei vendors at Honolulu

International Airport is the site for *Lei Stand Protest/Lei Pua Kapa* (2004). Pao lies on her back covered by the orchid petals of dozens of leis. It appears as if something traumatic may have happened that has left her injured or dead. She raises her limp arm as a futile sign of protest. At this moment, the leis protect her; however when they are sold she will be left exposed and vulnerable. Pao explains that she is not protesting the lei vendors, who were excited to be involved in her project; instead she comments on the role of the leis in cultural tourism and female body politics.

*Adrienne Pao received her MFA in Photography at San Jose State University in 2005. She is currently an instructor at Modesto Junior College. Pao has shown her work nationally in art spaces such as the Morris Graves Museum of Art in Eureka, California, and also at Wave Hill Glyndor Gallery in the Bronx. Her photo series Dress Tents, created with artist Robin Lasser, will travel to various galleries throughout Argentina in 2006-2007. In 2006 the tourist magazine Hawaii, found on bedside tables in major hotel chains throughout the islands, will publish images from Hawaiian Cover-ups. Pao is excited about this subversive distribution of her work. She is a 2005 SPE Scholarship Award recipient. Her work can be viewed at [www.adriennepao.com](http://www.adriennepao.com).*

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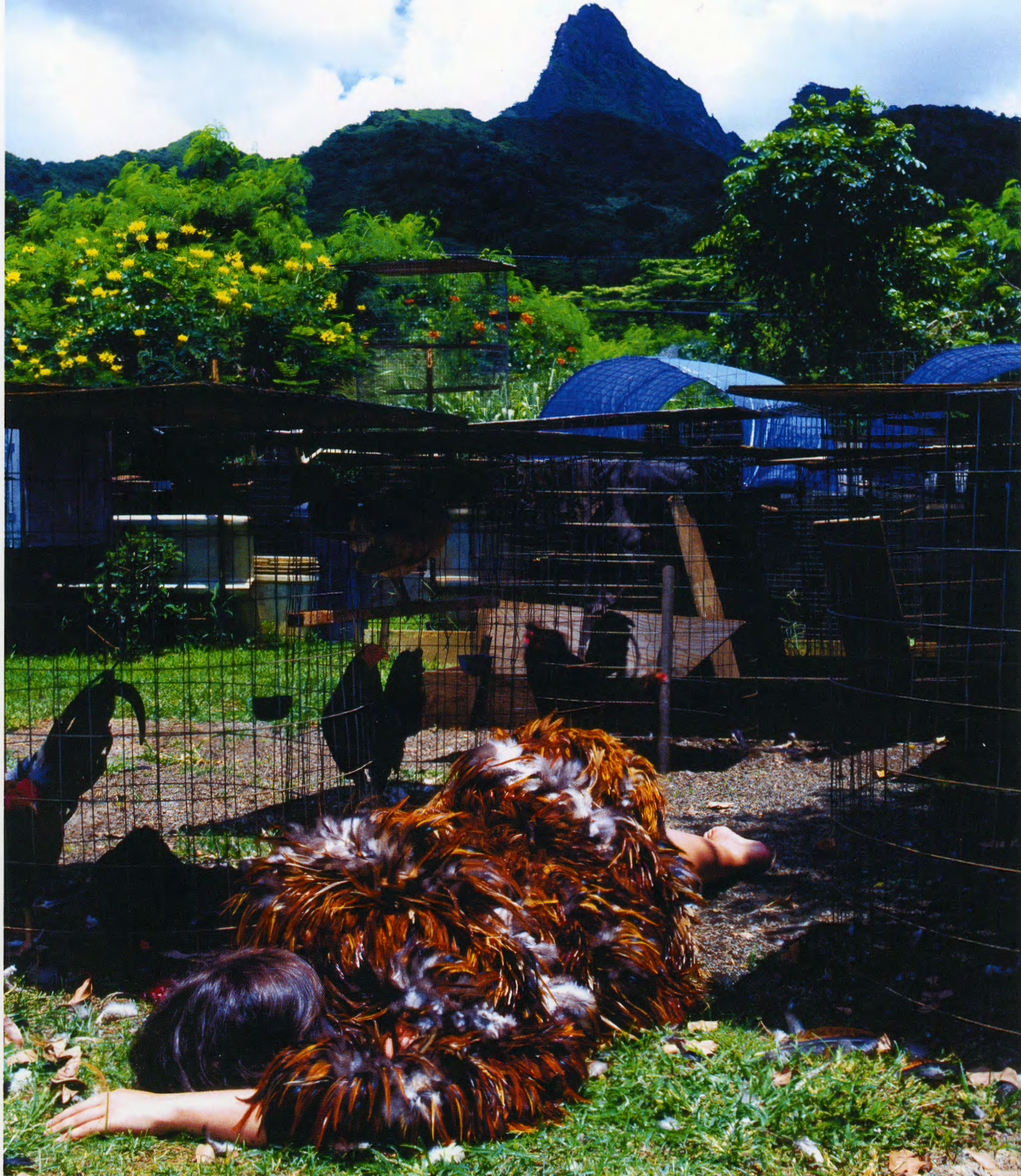
Above: *View of Laie Point/He'e Kapa, 2005, Lightjet print, 36 x 30 in.*

Right: *Fishskin Blanket Amidst the Mokulua's/I'a Kapa, 2004, Lightjet print, 36 x 30 in.*

Left: *Lei Stand Protest/Lei Pua Kapa*, 2004, *Lightjet print*,  
36 x 30 in.

Below: *Sunset at Sunset Beach/Napo'o 'ana o ka la Kapa*,  
2005, *Lightjet print*, 36 x 30 in.





*Cloaked by Cockfeathers/Hulu Kapa (Feather Covering), 2004*  
chromogenic print, 36 x 30 in.





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