

ART



IMAGE: COURTESY HONOLULU ACADEMY OF ARTS/CONTEMPORARY MUSEUM

Waterston's exhibition is inspired by Pele

BY MATTHEW DEKNEEF | JUN 22, 2011

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WRATH, DARREN WATERSTON / After circling his 22-foot sculpture *Wrath* at The Contemporary Museum, it's safe to say the Hawaiian goddess Pele's notorious mood swings left quite the impression on Darren Waterston.

As part of the Contemporary's artist-in-residence program, the New York artist spent a year traveling in Hawaii, hiking Volcanoes National Park and researching writings and existing images of Pele.

His response to Hawaii's landscape, as channeled through Pele's mythology, resulted in *Forest Eater*: a two part exhibition at the Contemporary and the Honolulu Academy of Arts, which features three new sculptures and over 40 paintings.

Waterston is a California native whose paintings, watercolors and murals have been exhibited internationally and have been included in many collections across the West Coast. The ethereal curve and neo-mysticism that threads through many of his works translates with a restraint that doesn't rewrite Pele's mythology into something overly whimsical.

The centerpiece, *Wrath*, is the most notable of the new pieces, inspired by ka wahine 'ai

honua (“the woman who devours the land”), appropriate considering the piece devours right through the Spalding House gallery space itself. Constructed from wood, metal mesh, plastic foam, paint and found natural organic materials, *Wrath* evokes a God-like quality in its sheer size, hanging omnisciently from the ceiling like a menacing question mark. Against the space’s bright white interior, the pitch-black color weighs there like a creeping void. And like Pele herself, the piece has a presence.

In the center of the Holt Gallery at the Academy is another incredible sculpture utilizing the same techniques. An armature coated in a foam shell, the magmatic exterior of *Pueo* echoes the same slice of lavascape. The amount of experimentation behind the chemistry and materials of these new sculptures is clear: It nearly bubbles before viewers’ eyes.

Revolving around these sculptures at both galleries in *Forest Eater* are his paintings on panel, canvas and paper. For the first time, the Academy also pairs works from its collection (as selected from the museum’s prints and drawings by Waterston) with a contemporary installation. As a companion to Waterston’s own haunting imagery, *Forest Eater* paints a portrait of historical juxtapositions on volcanoes, or, in a broader sense, the stuff of Hawaii’s tropical life.

Runs through 9/12 at The Contemporary Museum, 2411 Makiki Hts., 523-3447, and The Honolulu Academy of Arts, 900 S. Beretania St., 532-8700, \$5–\$10 admission applies for both exhibitions.