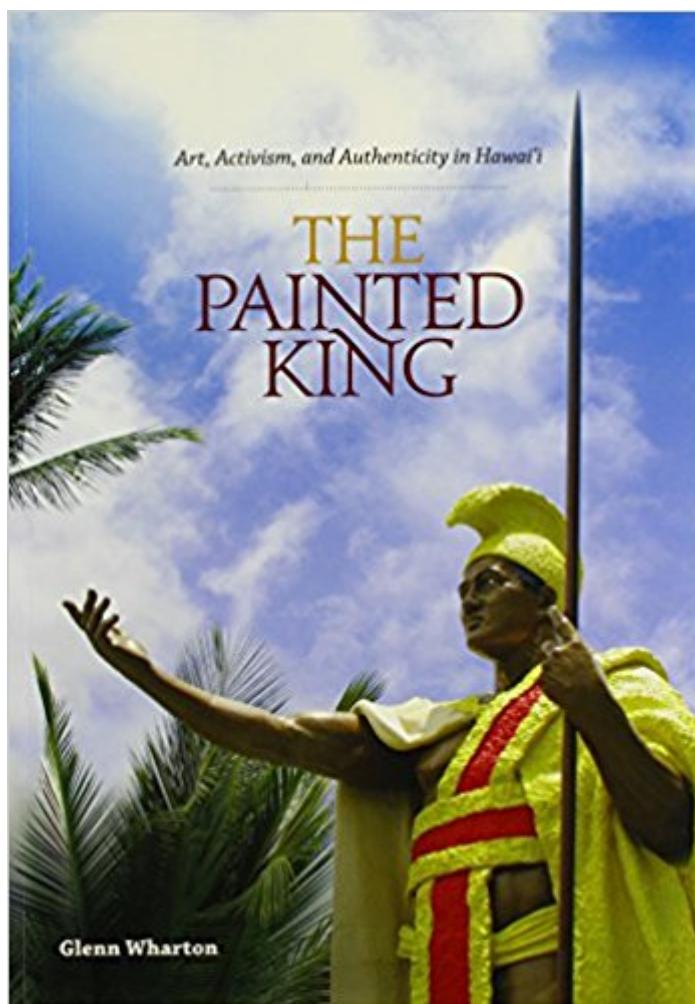


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# The Painted King: Art, Activism, And Authenticity In Hawaii



## Synopsis

The famous statue of Kamehameha I in downtown Honolulu is one of the state's most popular landmarks. Many tourists and residents, however, are unaware that the statue is a replica; the original, cast in Paris in the 1880s and the first statue in the Islands, stands before the old courthouse in rural Kapaau, North Kohala, the legendary birthplace of Kamehameha I. In 1996 conservator Glenn Wharton was sent by public arts administrators to assess the statue's condition, and what he found startled him: A larger-than-life brass figure painted over in brown, black, and yellow with white toenails and fingernails and penetrating black eyes with small white brush strokes for highlights. . . . It looked more like a piece of folk art than a nineteenth-century heroic monument. The Painted King is Wharton's account of his efforts to conserve the Kohala Kamehameha statue, but it is also the story of his journey to understand the statue's meaning for the residents of Kapaau. He learns that the townspeople prefer the more human (painted) Kamehameha, regaling him with a parade, chants, and leis every Kamehameha Day (June 11). He meets a North Kohala volunteer who decides to paint the statue's sash after respectfully consulting with kahuna (Hawaiian spiritual leaders) and the statue itself. A veteran of public art conservation, Wharton had never before encountered a community that had developed such a lengthy, personal relationship with a civic monument. Going against the advice of some of his peers and ignoring warnings about going native, Wharton decides to involve the people of Kapaau in the conservation of their statue and soon finds himself immersed in complex political, social, and cultural considerations, including questions about representations of the Native Hawaiian past: Who should decide what is represented and how? And once a painting or sculpture exists, how should it be conserved? The Painted King examines professional authority and community involvement while providing a highly engaging and accessible look at activist conservation at work, wherever it may be found.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"The Painted King will be essential reading for creators, curators, and devotees of public art."

--David Lowenthal, University College London; author of *The Past Is a Foreign Country* "A path-breaking volume in conservation studies, *The Painted King* is certain to prompt readers to think further about the relationship between community and conservation in Hawaiian art, identity, and history." --Stacy L. Kamehiro, author of *The Arts of Kingship: Hawaiian Art and National Culture of the Kalākaua Era* "This remarkable book reads more like a mystery novel than an account of the cultural politics of art conservation in a rural Hawai'i community. It is highly original--a personal reflection that is both accessible and deeply thoughtful about the ethics of research, public art, and cultural intervention." --Geoffrey White, Department of Anthropology, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa "This gracefully written work addresses issues that transcend the world of art conservation. I highly recommend it to anyone interested in discovering a model of successful collaboration between the academy and the community." --Kalena Silva, professor of Hawaiian studies and director, Ka Haka 'Ula O Ke'elikōlani College of Hawaiian Language, University of Hawai'i at Hilo "Glenn Wharton combines a deep knowledge of art conservation and its professional problems, an intensive study of a statue, and a profound sociological understanding of community structure to tell a compelling story of the conflicts that lie behind the practice of conserving works of art." --Howard S. Becker, author of *Art Worlds* "America's public sculptures offer on-site education opportunities for history, language arts, art, and service learning. Wharton's deliciously readable book illustrates these diverse access points." --Susan Nichols, Lunder Education Chair, Smithsonian American Art Museum, and former founding director of Save Outdoor Sculpture! "Who or what should decide the fate of a public sculpture? The ideas of the artist who created it, the conservator, or the community that interacts with it daily? In this page-turner, Wharton confronts this and other important questions." --Adrienne Kaeppler, curator, oceanic ethnology, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution

A conservator at the Museum of Modern Art, Glenn Wharton cares for video, performance, and

electronic collections. He is also research scholar in New York University's Museum Studies Program, teaching graduate courses on the conservation of cultural heritage.

The Painted King is an account of art restorer Glenn Wharton's involvement with the monumental statue of King Kamehameha I, located in the Hawaiian hamlet of Kapa'au. It relates his initial assessment of the statue as a piece in need of further study and repair, through his researches into its history, his participation in a broader project to consult the local community over its role and planned restoration, and finally the restoration work itself. This book does a good job of condensing a whole lot of time, scholarship, history and field research into an account that's accessible to the average reader. It's very well-written and approachable, balancing academic material with Wharton's personal involvement and giving a neutral survey of the issues and attitudes encountered throughout the restoration project. The timeline and Hawaiian glossary are helpful to the understanding of the text, and the comprehensive bibliography will facilitate any further reading you may wish to do. I enjoyed this book, not least because the issues were new to me. I also found it thought-provoking, which is what one hopes for from a book of this sort - though not always in ways that were flattering to the project or the community that benefitted from it.

I have long been interested in Hawaiian history and culture. And the statues of Kamehameha the Great have long held my attention and admiration, so much so that I have it tattooed on my right arm as representative of my love of Hawaii and its people. When I discovered this book recently, I was eager to read it; I was not disappointed. It is well written and tells a fascinating account of arguably the least known version of this magnificent work. If you have any interest in restoration work of this type you should read this book. If you have an interest in Hawaii, then you should especially read this book as it reveals not only some of the fascinating general history behind the creation of this work, but also gives you a touch of the emotion behind it as well.

I have heard many different stories with regards to North Kohala's King Kamehameha sculpture over the years and had always hoped to get a more definitive, detailed explanation of the King's history. The book, The Painted King, is what I had hoped for and much, much more. This book was a wonderful read, rich in history of the Big Island's North Kohala district as well as a wonderful revelation of its great sense of community. This book is a must read for anyone who has ever seen the Painted King, or who intends to see him! In addition to being a great read on the history of North Kohala you also get a fantastic look into the dedication of Glenn Wharton, and what is involved in art

restoration projects that we all may take for granted. The author's honesty and well written approach to this restoration project is simply another reason you will want to read this book. You will not be disappointed.

Things in life are rarely simple, but the story of the assignment to do preservation on a statue in Hawai'i, a statue that had been absorbed into the local culture in unusually complex ways, and of Wharton's attempt to adjudicate which of the local population's positions were the ones that most reflected the overall intention of the people toward this iconic statue, his journey of learning where the culture's values lay, how they'd been modified by modern changes and how they had hidden, unchanged beneath the surface, all makes this a fascinating study not only of art conservation but of anthropology and sociology, performed with great sensitivity and ethics. This is a wise and wonderful book and would serve well as a text for an ethics course as well as courses in conservation and art practices.

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