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## ENTRANCE GATES COMMISSION MAUI ARTS AND CULTURAL CENTER

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*Textile Society of America*

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ENTRANCE GATES COMMISSION  
MAUI ARTS AND CULTURAL CENTER  
by Pat Hickman

When asked to design entrance gates for the MACC in Hawaii, I drew on images of nets, from fishing nets used around the world to the specific background structure of ceremonial Hawaiian feather capes. As an artist, I'm intrigued with more than the utilitarian function of nets. I'm drawn to how nets filter light, air, visual ideas; I'm interested in the shadows created.

I have explored specific Hawaiian beliefs and cultural practices related to netting. My understanding of nets in the Hawaiian context has grown out of "talking story" with Hawaiian cultural specialists.

I learned of meanings and associations related to suspended nets, "nets in the sky", of a visual connection with the Pleiades or "Makali'i". The arrangement of stars in the Pleiades are like knotted corners of a netted unit. When that constellation, the Pleiades, arrives on the horizon, the rainy season begins. (Oct.-Jan.) It is believed that the "maka" or eyes (the openings) of the net in the sky need to be large enough to invite the rain and other "good things" to come through in abundance. This, the "makahiki" season is a time of celebration and of rest and renewal, a time of dispersing food--a time of that which sustains. It's a time for appreciating the abundance of the season, a time for receiving, a time for mending, a time of mending and patching nets.

I heard stories of nets being hoisted up into coconut trees, suspended for drying, sometimes stretched and under tension. I thought of nets at rest, in a relaxed state. I think of nets draping, and of the possible fluidity of nets moving under water or blowing in the breeze. Sections of the net gates suggest the weight of gravity and tautness. Visually, this textile like structure, a broad, multi-paneled expanse of netting, encourages passage from ordinary space to space that may transcend the ordinary.

I was told of a special "hale", a house set aside for storing nets, for protecting the net's "mana", a place for caring for the nets. And before fishermen went out to sea, there was a time to sleep and dream together, symbolically taking responsibility for each other, for the safety of each other--each individual part of a larger community.

In earlier Hawaiian history, the ritual of netmaking consisted of the thoughtful way of approaching the forest before taking natural plant materials and collecting fibers to make a net. The gathering of mountain plants for dyeing fishnets and for making the fibrous netting element seemed a

way of linking the mountains with the sea. In using the structural imagery of netting as gates in this setting, this specific site on the island of Maui, the "eyes of the net" in the gate, speak of respect for both the mountains the gates face and the sea, and of what they each give, being tied together in this place.

In the gate design, I kept in mind these associations and stories, the appropriateness of suspended nets as gates, and my hopes for how this cultural center will function in the community. The gates invite, symbolically welcome, and allow people to pass through to a special, public space, to be sustained and renewed by an experience of art in community, in public performance and celebration. In translating fiber into metal, I wanted to maintain the textile qualities of netting. This commission was for me an opportunity to understand more specifically the sacred and ceremonial context within which nets and netting have been used in Hawaii.

