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PHOTOGRAPHY BY PF BENTLEY

FEATURES

The Valley of Stone and Spirit

Moloka'i's Hālawā is a world outside of time

OPENING SPREAD / Spirits of the past still roam Hālawā, where centuries-old rock walls line the forest paths.

FACING PAGE / This secluded, off-grid valley in East Moloka'i is the oldest continuously occupied settlement in the Hawaiian Islands.

On moonlit nights in Hālawā, the kukui trees glow. Their luminous leaves shed silver light on paths threading through the dark forest. Deep in the valley, Moa'ula cascades down a sheer cliff to empty into a shimmering pool. Is it a portal? Possibly. Carved into the northeast tip of the island of Moloka'i, this secluded valley is a wahi pana (sacred and storied place). Time bends here; it eddies and flows in reverse—as does the silt-dark Hālawā stream when a strong sea tide heaves it back toward the mountains.

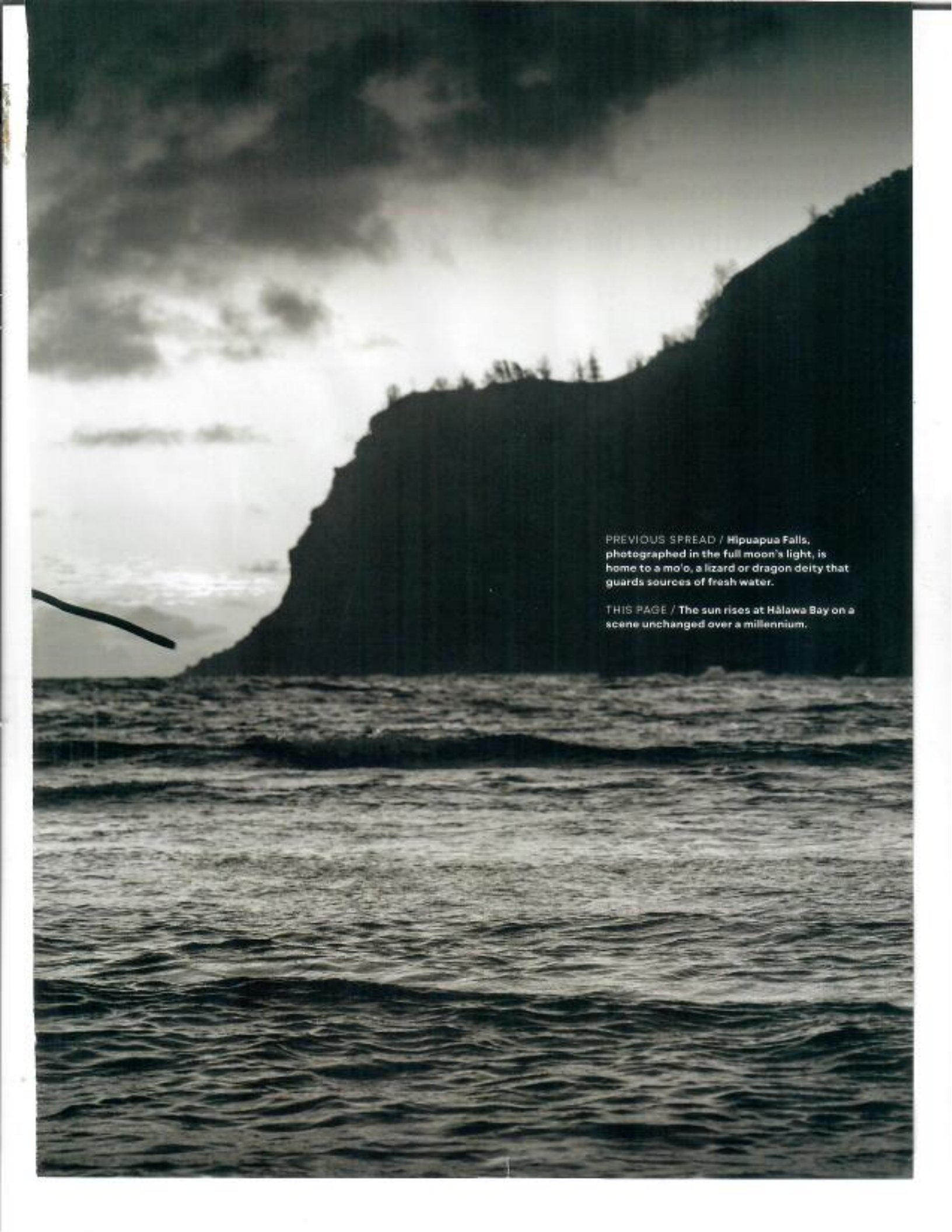
The name Hālawā means "sufficient breath," and the wind enters the valley like an inhalation drawn from beyond the horizon. Many believe that the Marquesans—the first people to inhabit Hawai'i—landed their canoes here, on the slate-gray sand where the stream meets the sea. Archaeologists found seven-hundred-year-old fire pits and fish traps in the nearby dunes, while oral histories of this place reach further into the past.

Even under the glare of the midday sun, Hālawā feels magical—an off-grid sanctuary at the end of the highway. Without the buzz of electricity, natural frequencies make themselves felt. Sound behaves differently inside the valley; conversations on the mountain can often be heard clearly down below. A pū (conch shell) blown on the beach will ricochet against the valley walls while the forest remains swaddled in silence.

For centuries, Hālawā supported a large population; evidence of this hides everywhere beneath the vines and leaves. The rock outlines of houses and lo'i (taro patches), petroglyphs and birthing stones stand as silent witness to the past. Lanikaula, a legendary priest said to possess supernatural powers, lived beside Moa'ula waterfall. He built a heiau (temple) here and taught students how to summon clouds and conquer enemies through prayer. The valley's other heiau are oriented toward the stars, built in line with the transit of the sun and the constellation Makali'i.

Hālawā's isolated community weathered many political upheavals. As the ancient kapu system gave way to a monarchy, then a territory and, finally, a state, little changed in the valley. Two tsunamis ultimately drove most of the residents away. The first barreled in on April 1, 1946, swallowing homes and unearthing hundreds of bones from an ancient battle. The second flooded the valley's lo'i with salt water.

Photojournalist PF Bentley lives on the opposite side of Moloka'i and embarked on a pilgrimage to capture the following images. He traveled to Hālawā once a week for six months, arriving before dawn and lingering until moonlight filled the valley's bowl. The photos, shot in monochrome, pay homage to the mana (power) of this place. A handful of families still call Hālawā home. Committed to stewardship rather than convenience, they fish and farm as their ancestors did. They watch the stars cross the sky and listen to the conversations carried on the wind.



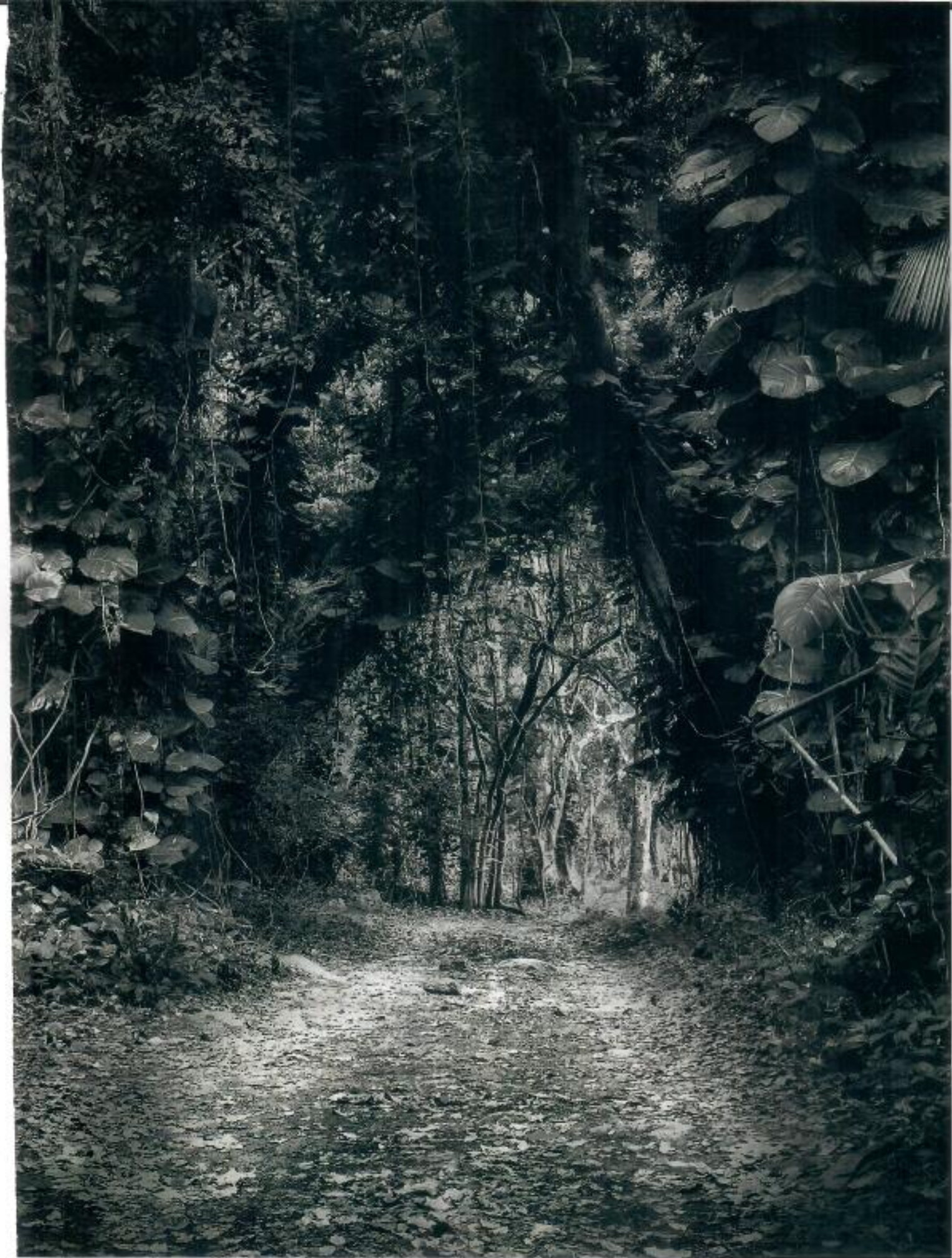
PREVIOUS SPREAD / Hīpuapua Falls, photographed in the full moon's light, is home to a mo'o, a lizard or dragon deity that guards sources of fresh water.

THIS PAGE / The sun rises at Hālawā Bay on a scene unchanged over a millennium.

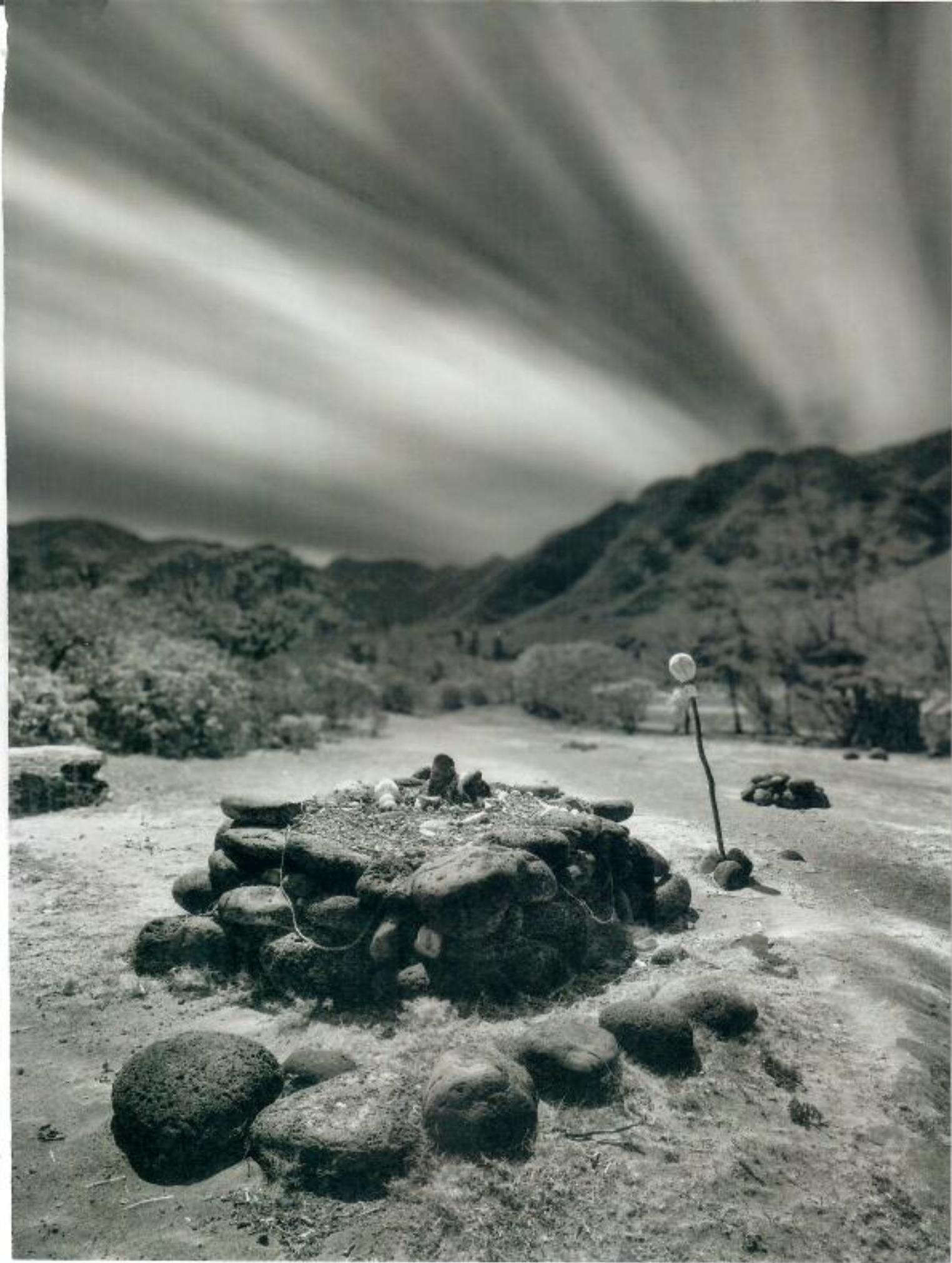




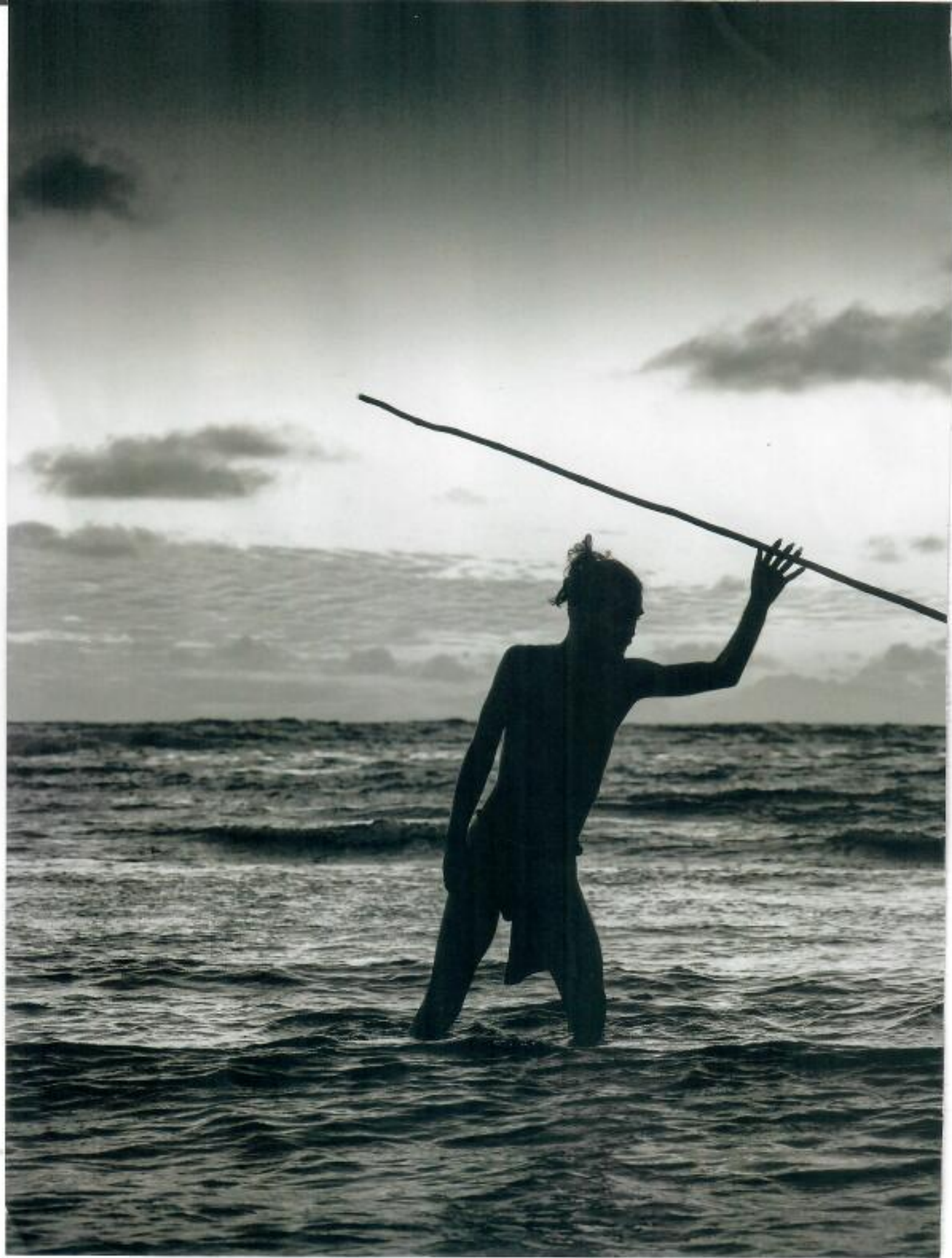


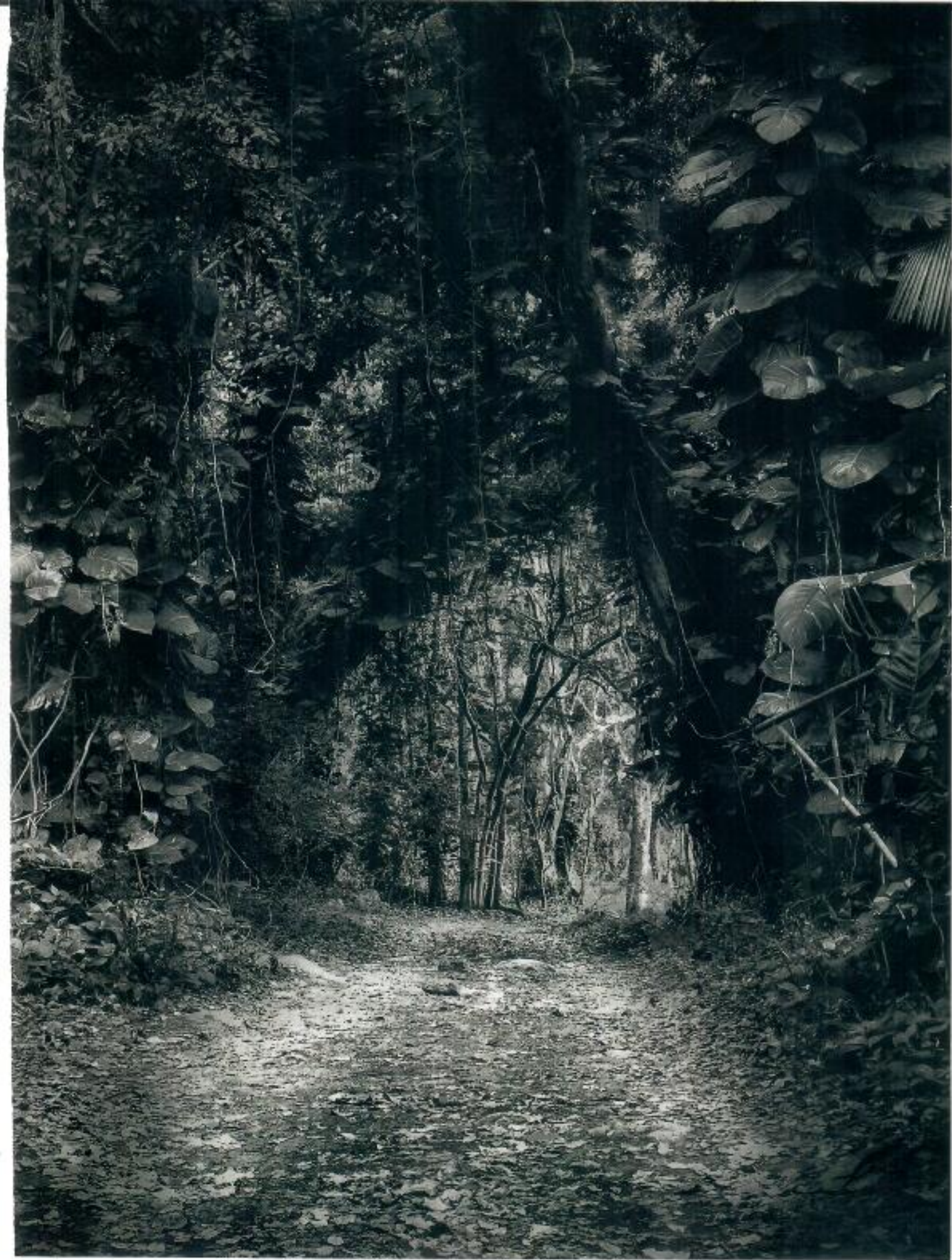
















ABOVE / The valley's dense foliage hides culturally significant artifacts, including these birthing stones once used by high-ranking women during labor.

FACING PAGE / A stone paepae (platform) honors the late 'Anakala Pilipo Solatorio, whose family has cared for Hālawas for fifty-two generations and counting.

PREVIOUS SPREAD / Each path here is a threshold—which to take is both a practical and metaphysical question.

hana hou!

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