



KUMU KEONE NUNES

EHCC BOARD MEMBER

ABOUT

Keone Nunes spent more than 30 years reviving the ancient Polynesian practice of tattooing, offering his services both to local people and visitors. Now, he is among the driving forces behind the revival of indigenous tattoo practices around the world.

For Nunes, the art of tattooing transcends the aesthetic aspect of body adornment – instead, it’s a gateway to a person’s ancestry. “It’s difficult to express to those who have never been through the process,” he says, “but when I tattoo someone, they change in a very profound way. As they lie on the mat getting work done, they’re connecting to their ancestors. It’s an unfiltered way of getting in touch with who you are as an Individual.”

Nunes, who was raised on O`ahu, is thought of as the godfather of traditional Hawaiian tattooing – though he would never refer to himself that way. Instead, he sees himself as a practitioner of the ancient art and a champion of indigenous Polynesian crafts. While Keone doesn’t restrict himself to tattooing only people of Hawaiian descent, he is selective about his subjects, imposing something of a spiritual test on all those he works with. “I’m interested in tattooing people who are committed to the culture [from] which they come,” he says. “I’m interested in people who have a genuine appreciation of the process because it is, in many cases, a leap of faith.”