



### **Hawaii Poi Pounder ex Herb Ritts**

A very fine small pohaku ku'i poi or pounder for crushing taro into the pudding called poi.

Kauai Island, Hawaiian Archipelago, Polynesia.

Fine grained dark grey basalt.

18.5 x 12 cm.

18th/19th century or earlier.

### **Exhibitions**

### **Literature:**

Historically, the act of pounding poi on a poi board was a common sight throughout Hawai'i. The following quote describes a typical scene of poi making in the densely populated area of Lahaina, Maui, prior to the arrival of westerners to the islands:

« *E ike mau ia ana malalo o na lau laau, iloko o kekahi wahi kuono malumalu, na papa koa kuʻi poi a me na pohaku oia hana, a e ike mau ia ana no hoi ke kino puipui a me na lima oolea o ke kanaka Hawaii, e kui ana i na kalo ono, e hoehoene ana ke pohapoha o ka pohaku kui ai a ke kanaka.* »

« It was a common sight to see under the trees, in some shaded nooks, poi boards made of koa wood and poi pounders used in that activity; it was also common to see the stout bodies and strong hands of Hawaiians pounding delicious taro, accompanied by the delightful smacking sound from people's poi pounders. »

One of the most ubiquitous Hawaiian objects found in museums and private collections worldwide is the humble poi pounder, known in the Hawaiian language as pōhaku kuʻi ʻai or pōhaku kuʻi poi. Ranging in size, color, and texture, they are carved from ʻalā (dense waterworn basalt) found on beaches, streams, and in rivers into elegant utilitarian tools. Paired with a papa kuʻi ʻai (poi-pounding board), the poi pounder is used in pounding kalo (taro, *Colocasia esculenta*) and other starchy vegetables such as ʻulu (breadfruit, *Artocarpus altilis*) and ʻuala (sweet potato, *Ipomoea batatas*) with water into a nutritious sticky paste called poi. Kalo is the primary staple crop of Kanaka ʻŌiwi (Native Hawaiians) and is considered to be a manifestation of Hāloanakalaukapalili, a premature child born to Wākea and Hoʻohōkūkalani whose earthly remains became the first taro plant. Their second child, also named Hāloa, is considered to be the progenitor of Kanaka ʻŌiwi. Thus, kalo is regarded as an ancestor by many. The pōhaku kuʻi ʻai, the primary instrument used in creating poi, is imbued with deep significance for Kanaka ʻŌiwi, representing a classic example of the union of functionality, form, and symbolism in Hawaiian art and design.

Ref. : [www.smarthistory.org](http://www.smarthistory.org)

Photo credits :

Beating poi, making poi from kalo, Sandwich Islands. Water colour. 1852. James Gay Sawkins (1806-1878).

Courtesy National Library of Australia

Herb Ritts (1952-2002)

Photo credit Richard Gere

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Male Nude with Shell II, Hawaii 1988

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