



Labyrinth is a photo documentary collaboration and text-based chronicle of a walk to the center of a remote valley on the island of Kauai where in my experience, time forks. Across 2010-2012, I made this ritual walk daily while writing what would become *The Book of Embers*. A section of the book enacts this journey for the reader.

Photographer Jesse Recor accompanied me to this threshold during the pandemic when I was living a second chapter on Kauai, finishing the manuscript a decade later. The photography seen here is not present in *The Book of Embers* and forms a stand-alone record that is a pathway of its own making.

Labyrinth

WRITTEN BY KELLY PUIG
PHOTOGRAPHY BY JESSE RECOR



You open a door. Enter a stairwell with branching views of monkey pod tree to mark your descent. A screen door gives way to late morning, the kind where you are meant to leave your shoes behind.



You walk the length of gravel driveway bare feet unfazed. You cannot help but absorb what is piercing conditioned as you are to untrodden means and ways.

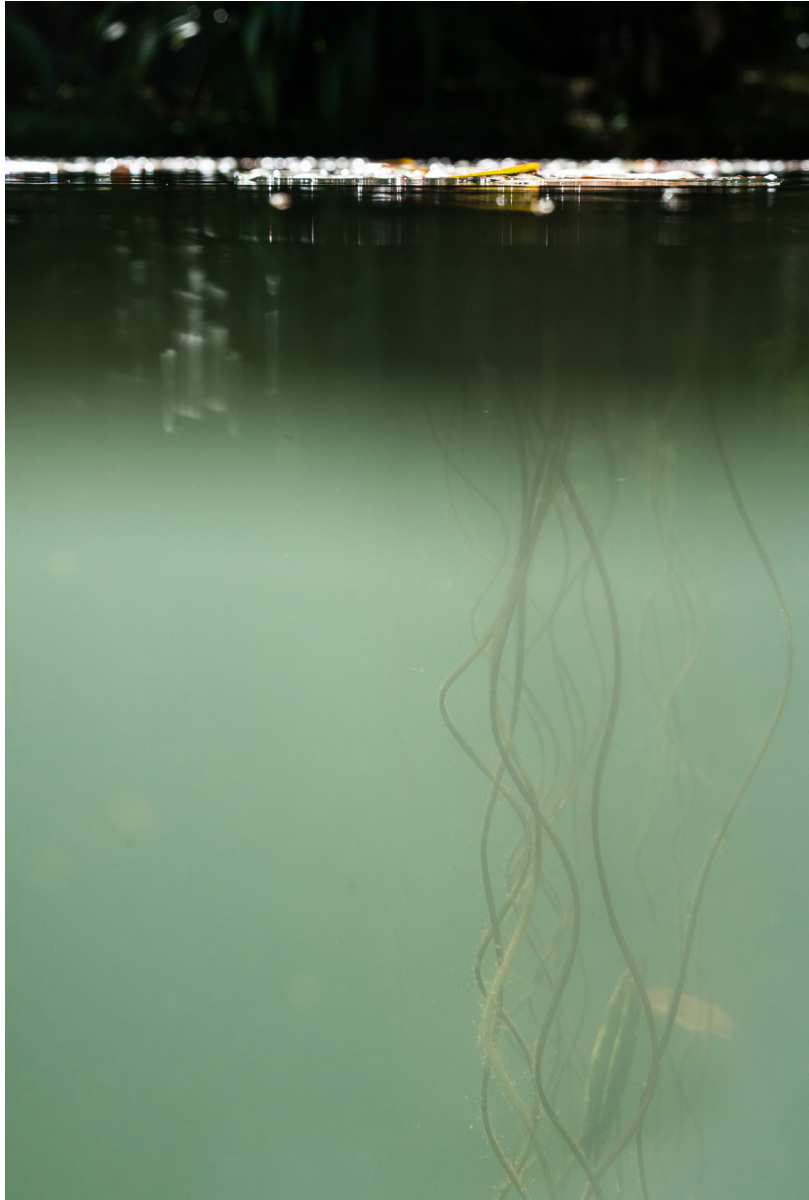
From driveway you merge with dirt road. Water trickles past on a circuit of irrigation ditch. In between flattened toads and a scatter of drift seeds, you form a parallel line with coursing stream. The direction you walk is ritual in nature following water to body of origin.

You proceed past the deserted house with blue tile roof. A sign claims PRIVATE PROPERTY. Unauthorized entry to overgrown chapters—in the end—never more human a plot.

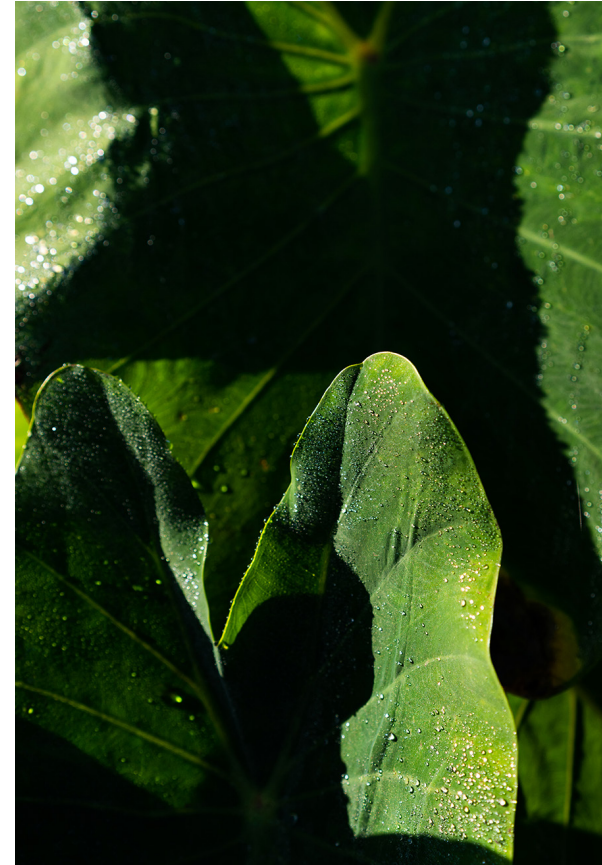


Through halls of bamboo palm you pass the entrance to vacant land. A stump of what was the largest banyan tree in the valley speaks of modern architecture soon to reside here. A pond on the property is fed by irrigation ditch. The water's surface has a way of confusing reflections, above and below often indistinguishable, a place from which you'll hover in time.





Back on dirt road, you detect water from irrigation ditch forking to feed a tunnel. You cannot see the tunnel beneath dirt road but you are stepping over it. Ahead of you, valley walls rise up in splendor. The sky, a pool of stark blue. No clouds. Just the faint lingering half-moon. Nearby, seven towering fans of seven traveler palms issue from a single trunk. Collective reminders that life is punctuated by the extraterrestrial.



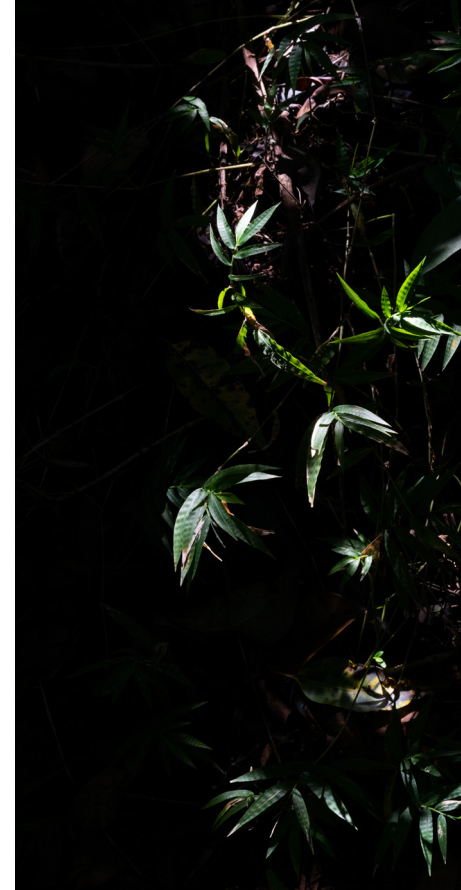
You come to a swing in the java plum trees as you follow dirt road into the valley's basin. On your left, thick tangle of hau bush. On your right, continuing irrigation ditch which feeds adjacent fields of taro. Taro remains the harvest that has fed the valley for centuries.



At the end of dirt road, a grassy trail emerges. Here, you border hau overgrowth and fragrant awapuhi ginger. You touch spindles of vervain with small violet flowers that taste like buttery mushroom. You pass a large mango tree and recall stories of an age-old poi pounder found in the crook of its roots. You hear thick yellow bamboo stalks bumping against each other in the wind. Knock/knock.

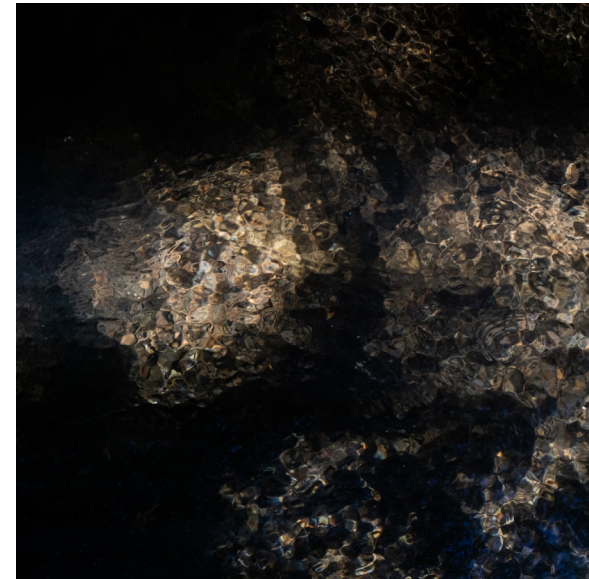


You pass through bamboo grove with river to your left. You parallel river as your feet press into forest floor with the climb of a hill. Tightly coiled fern fronds spiral in and out of brush. Before threshold of meadow, you witness a large black moth cut the air.



The meadow is surrounded by more hau bush. A lone polymorpha tree branches from its center. You follow the outline of meadow to narrowing path. Black like the sun, a lava boulder observes your approach. You touch patches of white lichen that mark its surface. As you chart narrowing path, it opens to a circle of grass. You enter the circle and walk it like a clock in reverse, delineating circle from the hour's inception.

You walk this cyclic boundary until a densely shrouded foot trail reveals itself. You enter veiled forest with ginger torches and bamboo grass underfoot. You walk the barely discernible trail as water rushes past you on both sides. River to left, stream to right, you wind your way through a corpus of greenery to the rush of water growing louder.



You reach an outcropping of rock where foot trail ends and forking river begins. On your left, river rushes out to sea. On your right, trickle of rivulet.

You edge toward rivulet from rocky barrier. Volcanic stones underfoot were hauled and assembled here during an unknown month, in an unknown year, prior to contact with the rest of the known world. You stand atop this barrier and watch the fork become a coursing channel to feed crops and a syntax of dreams.



You dip your feet into the water. It is cool and crystalline. With your feet between worlds, you think of the digging, the trenching, the roots, the rocks, and the enterprise of human heart runs clear.

You look over your shoulder at the path by which you came. Above you, half-moon still hangs.