Juliette May Fraser is a kama'aina artist. The Hawai'i she was born in was not however the 50th State of the Union, but a Sovereign Kingdom. This fact situates her in space and in time. It also shaped her career and her style.

Only non-kama'aina artists may underline with exclamation points how extraordinary were the sights of race and scape that struck them as they landed here. May could not, in good faith, use her own Hawai'i as a prop. Even less could she play the primitive, as Parisian Gauguin did in Tahiti. Noblesse oblige.

The Hawai'i May was born into was far from primitive. It was doubly hemmed in by protocols: the native tabus that underlined the sacredness of the chiefs and, superposed upon them, Victorian modes just as strict. May took both disciplines for granted.

She has built up an unforgettable image of premissionary Hawai'i in her "Makahiki" mural, that represented Hawai'i in the 1939 San Francisco Fair. Size fits thoughts, both being monumental. In the present show, strictures of space condense the 35 feet long mural to a photograph some ten inches long. Look at it well for it is one of the clearest images of ancient Hawai'i, totally devoid of condescension.

May is equally at ease with the very small and with the very large. With Chinese refinement she will choose a feather, not a quill, and dip its barbs in ink the better to portray Saint Francis, friend to birds. She is partial to small beings and small things, the wasp, the lizard, a dead leaf. Each blade of grass she portrays as an individual, distinct from each other blade.

By contrast, her largest mural remains an outdoor mosaic, done in 1959 for the Mid-Pacific Institute. It is 90 feet wide, over twice the width of Michelangelo's Last Judgment. It also is her greatest exercise in humility. The wall panels, stretched irregularly in the open, do no more than echo the line of hills behind them, and the colors are so artfully muted that they fail to disturb, to use a word in fashion, the ecology of the site.

Two crises have been instrumental in shaping May's art. After Pearl Harbor, as men went to war, women enlisted in the camouflage department. Some wove giant olona nets. Others, May among them, mixed paint by the hundred gallons in oil drums, using gardeners' spades.

It was work both hard and dirty. Where May was concerned it forever took art out of its ivory tower. From then on she felt more at ease on top of a scaffold than in front of an easel, side by side with the mason who trowels fresh mortar while she paints.

Her second crisis was the trip to Greece, where she frescoed, on the Island of Chios, a church of the Greek rite. Pearl Harbor had brought a crisis on human terms. Greece brought a crisis in stylistic terms.

In the West, she had witnessed a free-for-all among artists as to who would flaunt tradition most openly. May, who would rather keep her originality under a bushel, had felt somewhat cast aside. Now, in Greece, the values that applied to modern art were turned upside down. A refined Byzantinism ruled to the last detail the shape, composition, and color of church icons.

It was May's chance to feel like a wicked modernist as she arched the brows of Our Lady when the Greek Orthodox Bishop had wanted them straight. She nevertheless learned much from this iron rule, as is proved by her Madonna in iconic style, painted on her return.

Those who worship computers and tabulations will doubtless ask what rank rates Juliette May Fraser in the art of today. Perhaps here the answer is to echo Max Ernst's saying, more apt than ever where gentle May is in cause, "Painting is not a boxing match."

Jean Charlot