

# Artists of Hawaii

Volume One

NINETEEN PAINTERS AND SCULPTORS

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## Introduction

It would be incongruous to pretend that Hawaii, for over ten years the Fiftieth State of the Union, is still the same exquisite Pearl of the Pacific whose palm trees in the nineteenth century beckoned to Mark Twain with magic unsurpassed.

For the few who land here still believing in Mark Twain's mirage, our newly hatched highrise Hawaii is a harsh eye-opener. More destructive than lava, a man-made flow of concrete mangles and buries palm trees and banyan trees, razes pagan temple platforms, fills up antique mullet ponds. In their place hotels mushroom high. Their disregard of aesthetic or, worse, their aesthetic of carnival, illustrates nothing more noble than the greed that brought them into being.

An artist just landed in Hawaii, unless he be unusually sensitive, need not modify what style of art he learned in Chicago, Los Angeles, or New York. Here as there the newcomer, insulated between familiar concrete walls, may live and work without becoming aware of a more mysterious Hawaii.

Though a chain of islands, our state, as concerns aesthetics, is in no way insular. It has played host to some among the giants of modern art. Josef Albers, fresh from Yale, taught at our university. Between sessions, in the relative wilds of the island of Hawaii, Albers would sit facing the Pacific, sketching. Sketching not any recognizable seascape but overlappings of horizontal planes that in their *double-entendre* raised

the timed motions of waves to a plane of timelessness.

The University of Hawaii is the only place where Max Ernst ever taught, the place where, in a lecture that lasted for over three hours, he improvised magical variations on the story of the birth of Surrealism. Genesis narrated by the Creator!

When our new state was asked to send to Washington the likeness of a local hero, it chose Father Damien, missionary to the Molokai lepers. A state-sponsored contest awarded the commission to the Venezuelan sculptress Marisol Escobar. Her *Damien* is to date the only modern work among the bourgeois bronzes in Washington's Hall of Fame.

As is made obvious by leafing through this anthology, Hawaii's resident artists are well informed about what goes on in the enclaves where styles are brewed, mostly New York and Paris. Nevertheless, there are very sound reasons to single out their works as distinct from those of any other group. Contradicting the tidy picture of the Fiftieth State racing to progress nose to nose with the other forty-nine, Hawaii, like it or not, remains unique.

Yesterday the crust of our chain of isles was covered with gently swaying palms; today, with hotels scraping the skies. No matter, our islands are only the tip-top of giant submarine mountains anchored deep in the primeval ooze. Similarly, modern Hawaii cannot be culturally wrenched apart from its prehistory.

As yet nameless, our islands had not known man until about A.D. 600, when heroic voyagers beached their dugout canoes on these shores. Throughout the following millennium, its ocean-locked people became a unified race, their culture, however complex, a culture of the Stone Age.

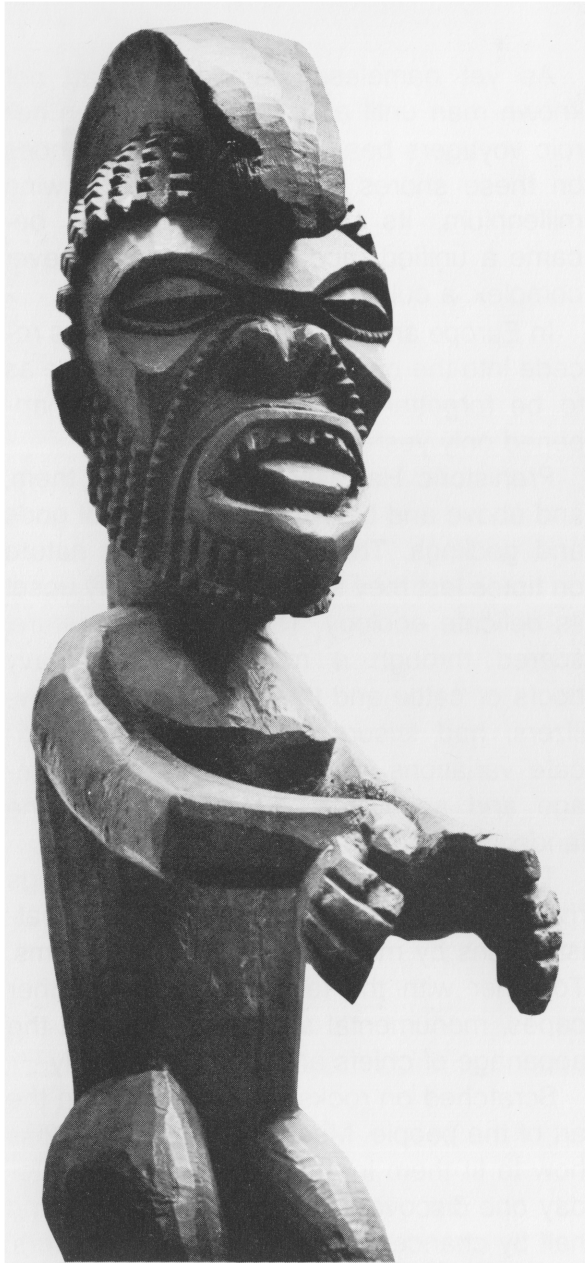
In Europe and Asia Stone Age cultures recede into the past, so fogged by distance as to be forgotten. In Hawaii prehistory happened only yesterday.

Prehistoric Hawaiians felt all about them, and above and below, the presence of gods and godlings. They walked through nature on tiptoe lest they should inadvertently upset its delicate ecology. Thus Hawaiian nature, spared through a millennium the heavy hoofs of cattle and the spiked boots of civilizers, had leisure enough to breed delicate variations on the theme of bird plumage and aerial roots. Man added to the landscape his art.

The best among Hawaiian wood carvings rival African sculptures at conjuring surrealist visions by means of stocky cubist forms. Together with the famed Hawaiian feather capes, monumental sculpture remained the appanage of chiefs and gods exclusively.

Scratched on rocks, petroglyphs were the art of the people. Museum men are at a loss how to fit them in their orderly halls. Still today one discovers them, half by search and half by chance, on boulders, under boulders, in the darkest dark of low-ceilinged caves. In





BLOXAM TEMPLE IMAGE. Bernice P. Bishop Museum.

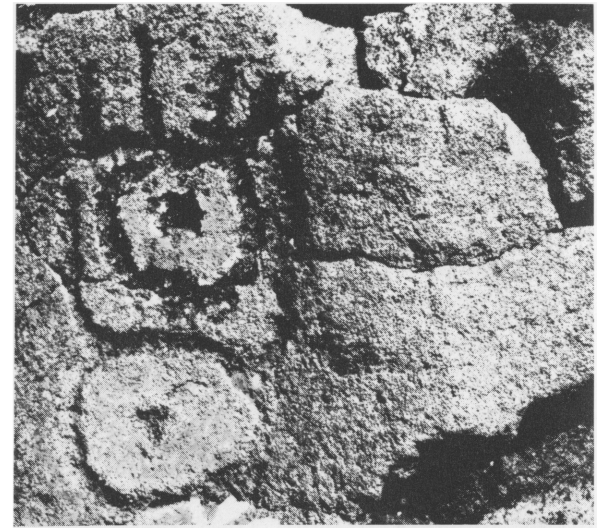
places once crucial, their crisscross lines by the hundreds tattoo the smooth skin of *pa-hoehoe* lava fields as far as the eye can see. Display meant so little to their makers that some petroglyphs, set on underwater rocks, surface only at low tide.

Not intended as art for art's sake, petroglyphs were mostly meant as proud footnotes to journeys by land or sea. At the time that our imported alphabet rendered petroglyphs obsolete, they were close to becoming true ideograms. Their sense lost, they still achieve a message of beauty. Pictures of dogs and men, birds and birdmen, fans and sails and paddles could remind the sophisticate of the doodles of a Paul Klee, were it not that wit is in no way of their essence, but rather a skeletal majesty.

However unclassical in form and in intent, Hawaiian prehistoric art proffers to the local artist its ancestral wisdom, as did to Europe the arts of Greece and Rome.

The native Hawaiian did not orient himself by nailing his world in spread-eagle posture between north and south, east and west. Two directions sufficed: *mauka*, toward the mountains, and *makai*, toward the ocean. These ways still cling to our ways and we feel disoriented, at least as regards east and west, the Orient and the Occident. Equidistant our land from Asia and America, its people funneled in from both sides—culturally we belong to neither, but stand rather at a crossroad between both continents.

Mainland America knows and collects Ori-



PETROGLYPH.

ental art, such masterpieces as the *Scroll of the Emperors* in Boston or Wen Cheng-ming's ink landscape in Kansas City. Brushed on fragile silk or paper, these acquire, when seen side by side with sturdier Occidental oils, a rare taste as of spice imported from far-off fairy lands.

Not so in our Hawaii. Here, most exotic perhaps are some of the European masterpieces. For Europe is farthest away, whichever way a Hawaiian circles the globe. And not only in terms of geography.

Shown at the Honolulu Academy of Arts, Claude Monet's late *Waterlilies* presupposes the cozily tended pond at Giverny, a shuffling of slippers, a folding stool and portable easel, and, unknown to the Master, a gardener paid to send a Paris dealer weekly bulletins on Monet's failing health,

on which the flux and reflux of the art market depended.

Picasso's cubist *Still Life* of the 1910s is better understood in terms of a Montmartre that is not anymore: endless nocturnal discussions about art, quaffing Pernods at sidewalk café tables, young art dealers nosing their way to future wealth as pigs wise to the spoor of buried truffles. These ways are far away from our ways.

More familiar appear the scrolls displayed in the Oriental wing of that same Academy: *Hundred Geese*, traditionally attributed to Ma Fen, or Wen Cheng-ming's *Seven Juniper Trees*. Unlike the European works, when assessed against the peculiar mores of our islands the shock comes from the impact of genius, not from any felt exoticism.

The brushstroke, wise or wild, switches at will from tangible object to intangible mood, the painter turns writer or else the writer, painter. Alternating with panels of orchid leaves, or sky-high above craggy cliffs, are blocked vertical columns of calligraphy. If asked, my Chinese friends will decipher their meaning, but I, true barbarian that I am, can only rejoice in their abstract beauty.

Oriental man has a way with ink that spells art regardless of intent, from such masterpieces down to the chop suey menu, or to the diagnosis that the herb doctor, having felt both my pulses, "brushes" fountain pen in hand before grinding for me with mortar and pestle most puzzling medicines.

As the West lent us Josef Albers and Max Ernst, great artists from Asia—rated as "living treasures" in their own countries—have lived, taught and worked in our Hawaii: the potters Shoji Hamada and Toyo Kaneshige, Shiko Munakata the printmaker, the Indonesian painter Affandi. But it also is true that the cheapest of Asiatic imports, paper carp flown on Boys' Day, kites, dolls, shadow puppets, show however faintly the imprint of very great cultures. To Hawaiian artists they may mean no less than Japanese *ukiyo-e* pennysheets meant to the French impressionists.

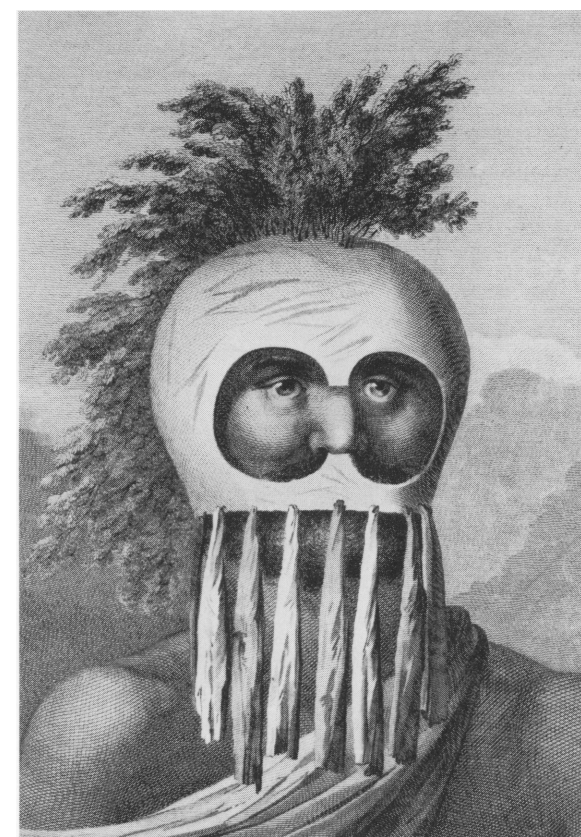
In 1778 Captain Cook discovered the islands. Attached to his crew was an artist, John Webber. In our pictorial history Webber stands as the sole outside witness to a Hawaii as yet undisturbed by our brand of civilization. One can hardly hold it against him if, able though he was, he failed to shake off his eighteenth-century mannerisms and to be born anew.

His *Young Woman* crowned with feather leis is a charming conceit, with a whiff of Gainsborough's lightheaded sensuousness. His *Man of the Sandwich Islands*, crusader-like, head encased in a helmet carved from a gourd, topped with a panache of ferns, ties in with the pre-romantic taste that added fake Gothic ruins to English gardens, to be gazed at in the moonlight.

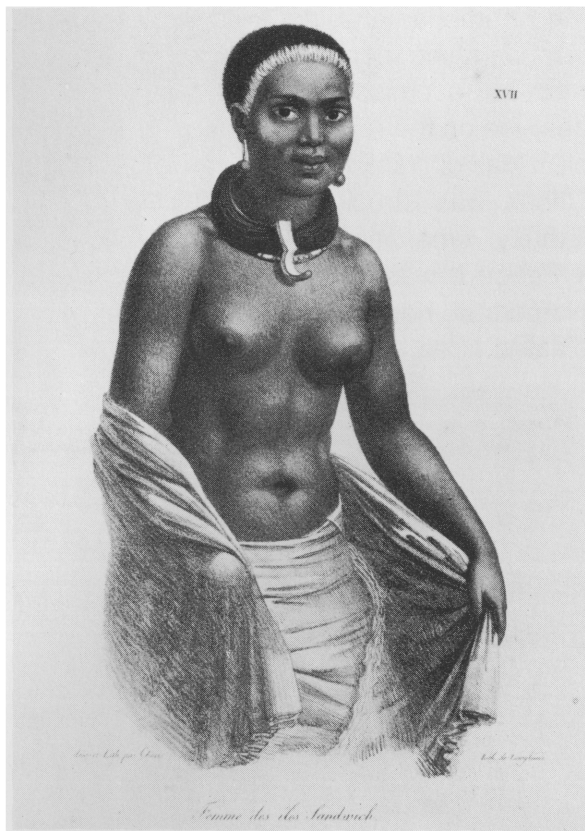
In 1816 a Russian imperial expedition under Admiral von Kotzebue anchored here. Ludvig Choris was the artist on board. Old

King Kamehameha, not knowing if the Russian warships meant war or peace, received Kotzebue's emissaries frigidly, seated Budhawise on the royal mat, wrapped in an ample cloak of black *tapa*, the native bark cloth. Choris was struck by the dignity, the solemnity, emanating from the savage king.

Peace it was to be. Agreeing to pose for his portrait, Kamehameha changed to pants, pleated linen shirt, orange silk necktie, and



A MAN OF THE SANDWICH ISLANDS, IN A MASK. Engraving based on a drawing by John Webber.



WOMAN OF THE SANDWICH ISLANDS. Lithograph by Louis Choris.

an English sailor's red vest. When asked, he resolutely refused to change back to his native cloak. The dismayed artist felt he had come too late to ever know the real Hawaii!

Choris was great enough an artist to compensate—as did Gauguin in Tahiti seventy years later—for the Pacific Paradise he had missed. His splendid lithograph *Woman of the Sandwich Islands*, barely based on life sketches, may be factually a lie, but as Degas

asserted, art can be a lie more truthful than the truth.

The Pacific Paradise now, thanks to Choris, had its Eve. The task of creating its Adam fell to Jacques Arago, artist to a French expedition. His engraving, printed in full color, *Officer of the King* orchestrates a splendid harmony of brown skin, blue tattoos, and the insistent chord of reds and yellows struck by feather cape and helmet. Despite the savage



OFFICER OF THE KING (detail). Engraving by Jacques Arago.

paraphernalia, memories of Greece and Rome seen through the eyes of the French classicist Jacques Louis David imbue with heroic overtones the languid adolescent leaning on his spear.

Kamehameha the Great was the last pagan king. About 1820, American Calvinist missionaries brought Christianity and the printing press. Choris and Arago, trained in Europe, were merely visitors to our islands. At the missionary school at Lahainaluna, Maui, were created, in the 1830s, the first works of art crafted by people who, by birth or by choice, lived in Hawaii; at least the first since the Stone Age.

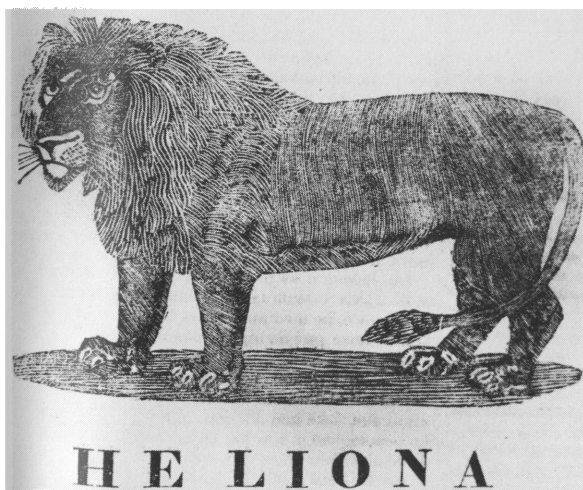
As remains true of petroglyphs, these works of art have no pretense to art. Their only aim is to preach and to instruct. Botany, zoology, anatomy, geography are their first concerns.

Native students engraved sundry maps: of the world, of the islands, of the Holy Land. Also a profile of Diamond Head, a volcanic eruption that spews smoke and lava over a rocky landscape, two natives—male and female, dressed to taste—their backs turned for modesty's sake. The choice of motifs may have been a hesitant answer to the first inquiries of voyagers for something typical to bring back home.

The Lahainaluna prints are no dazzling performance. Better than that, they are true primitives, with what awkward charm comes from uncertain artisanship and total dedication.

Some were done by natives, some by their missionary teachers. It is an impossible task to try and sift the ones from the others. As in all conquests, cultural or otherwise, the conqueror was not immune to native ways. By far the most “savage” among the Lahainaluna prints are the woodcuts that a well-meaning missionary, Alonzo Chapin, carved to show Hawaiians the great mammals they had never known: zebra, giraffe, bison, lion, hippopotamus.

By mid-nineteenth century, Hawaii had settled to its fate, civilization. Native games, sports, and dances were forbidden, frowned upon as pagan. Nudity was outlawed lest it offend the sensibilities of foreign ladies. The man in the street covered himself with rags that, at least, left him his freedom of movement. The sovereigns—noblesse oblige—had it worst.



LION. Lahainaluna woodcut by Alonzo Chapin.

Kings meekly donned the absurd paraphernalia their royal “cousins” adopted in Europe: full-dress uniforms stiff with braids and buttons and frogs, hung with medals, strapped with bandoleers and a belt from which dangled a useless sword. They encased their bronzed hands in white gloves, donned helmets topped with spikes or plumes, with chin straps that framed in brass the dark cheeks, hairy with black mustaches and sideburns.

For the queens it was even worse. Through most of the nineteenth century women’s fashions went counterwise to the shape and needs of a healthy body. Crinolines, stuff draped over iron hoops, encased the legs; stays and corsets mashed the torsos. And in the 1880s, false derrieres became the fashion.

Honolulu, seat of the government, was little more than a village. Still, there were itinerant portrait painters who braved the inconvenience of a long ocean voyage for what meager market the capital offered. None found himself without customers, and none made a fortune at it. More artisans than artists, they copied with great application and indifferent success what they saw, and for this we should be grateful. Not unlike European court painters whose true trade was flattery, when portraying royalty none betrayed the bulk, the thick-lipped features and golden color of the unmistakably Hawaiian bodies of their august models.

To the early sightseer Hawaii was mostly



BERNICE PAUAAHI BISHOP. Portrait by Federico de Madrazo.

landscape. Webber, Choris, Arago, among others, sketched, lithographed, engraved excellent impressions of Hawaiian nature. Theirs was, however, an outsider’s point of view.

Men who lived in Hawaii, though less highly trained than visiting artists, had leisure to feel in depth what they saw. There survives in their landscapes, not all of them masterpieces, traces of this unease that



made pagan man cautiously hedge his way between water and fire, between a fathomless ocean and bottomless lava pits.

As stated, homemade landscapes had humble beginnings in some of the Lahaina-

luna engravings. Then came Charles Furneaux and Jules Tavernier, both in the first half of the nineteenth century. They specialized in scenes of volcanic activities, lava flows glowing red against the deep blue of

a full-moon night. Admittedly their art falls short of their intent, and yet they must be praised for attempting an impossible feat.

Their French contemporaries favored minimal subjects, the better to emphasize their



VOLCANIC SCENE. Jules Tavernier.

art. A Corot filtered skies of dawn or dusk through a gauze of light foliage; a Monet could paint fifteen oils with a single haystack for his model. Closer to Hawaii, the American landscapists who trekked through the Rockies and the West believed otherwise; the magnificence of the scenery was bound to uplift their art to heroic levels. Furneaux and Tavernier cast their lot with these.

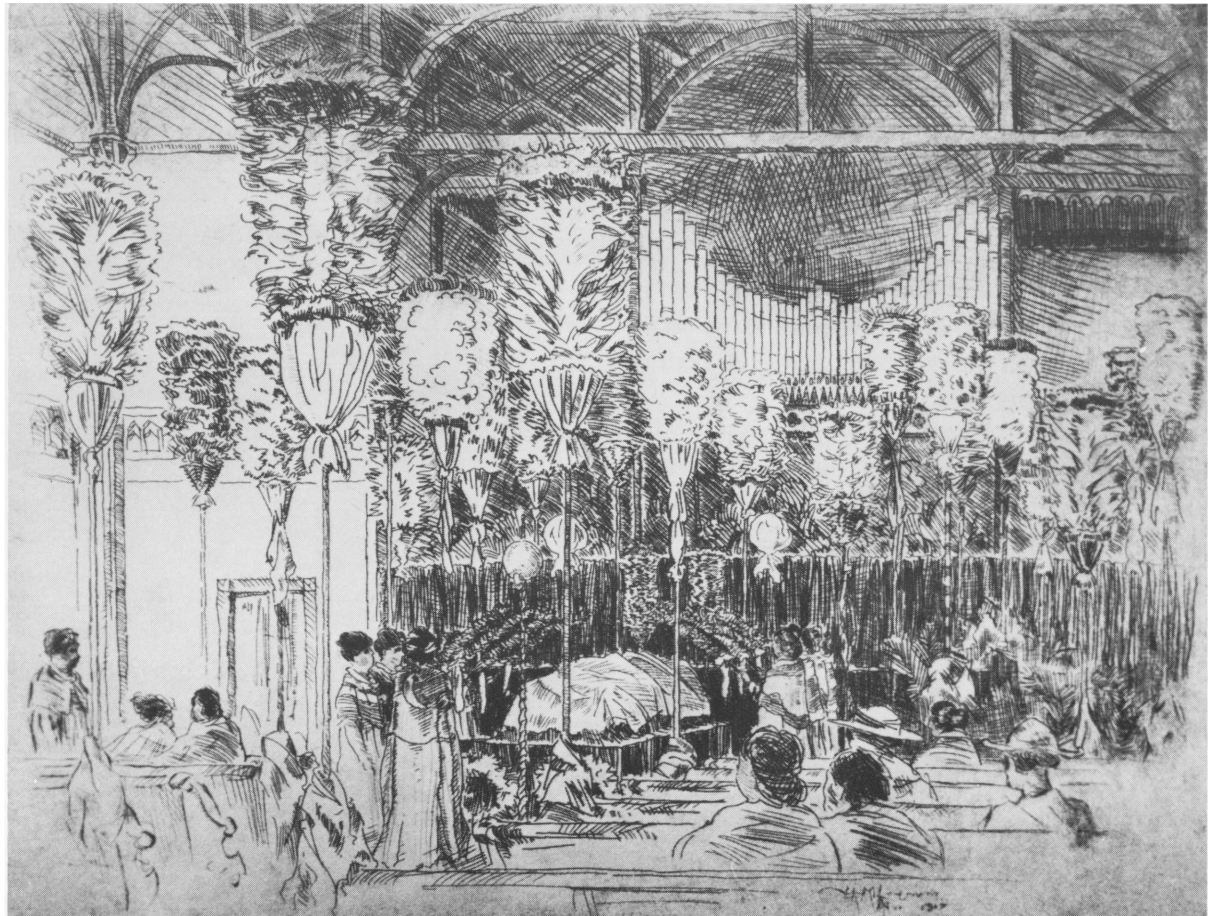
John La Farge, a major American painter, stayed here awhile in the late 1880s. When in Hilo, on the island of Hawaii, he visited Furneaux who lamented the fact that, though he had spent many years attempting to catch the magic of the volcanoes, still an elusive *je-ne-sais-quoi* eluded him.

As articulate with words as he was outstanding with a brush, La Farge was one of the few writers of the period to suspect, under an unruffled surface of Victorian gentility, the seething netherworld of *kahuna* and gods his Hawaiian hosts had discreetly failed to mention.

As a painter, La Farge proved less perceptive. In his tour of the Pacific islands he biased his sights toward a classical antiquity reborn. Dancing in glades or disrobing by the sea, his Polynesian maidens seem ready to take a dip in the Mediterranean rather than the Pacific. La Farge, a visitor, understandably clung to what he already knew rather than plunge into a world unknown. At the time, even Polynesians refrained from mentioning in public their unabated pride in their own language and culture.

Privately, King Kalakaua was a staunch believer in the worth of his ancestral culture. His preference for native chants and hulas and, so it was rumored, pagan rites, was frowned upon by all do-gooders. Yet when the king commissioned a monument to Kamehameha the Great, it was from an American sculptor famed as a classicist,

Thomas R. Gould, a Bostonian living in Florence and totally unversed in the lore of the Pacific. Gould patterned his work after an antique Roman model, a marble of Caesar Augustus addressing his cohorts. The imperial toga sprouted feathers to become the native cloak that drapes the Polynesian king.



FUNERAL OF LILIUOKALANI. Etching by Huc Luquiens.

For close to a century, Gould's *Kamehameha*, daubed chocolate and gold, was the only monumental statue displayed in our islands. To fill our allotted quota of heroes, the new state, on 15 April 1965, sent its replica to Washington as an unlikely companion to Marisol's *Damien*.

The next generation of artists brings us into this century. There was now a place for well-rounded professionals who could turn out a portrait as well as a landscape—Lionel Walden, Charles William Bartlett, D. Howard Hitchcock. Hitchcock's early works, subdued in their range of color, blossom in his later years into a mild version of impressionism. Unlike Tavernier and Furneaux, Hitchcock knew the value of minimal subject matter. Some of his loveliest landscapes are also the simplest, such as a lone outrigger canoe beached at low tide.

Among the artists whose works wholly belong to the twentieth century and yet who do not come within the scope of this anthology, one may single out John M. Kelly and Huc M. Luquiens, both known primarily as etchers.

John Kelly was an exacting technician and, within his etching craft, an expert on color. His Polynesian females vivaciously set against backgrounds of tropical leaves and flowers, loins clad in *kikepa*—in Hollywood called sarong—shaped his personal version of Hawaii along sinuous lines of *art nouveau*.

Huc Luquiens, master of value contrasts, was content to work within the range of

black to white. His *Funeral of Queen Liliuokalani* etched in 1917, remains one of his most impressive achievements. It is a moving eyewitness account of the event that closes the history of the Kingdom of Hawaii.

Jean Charlot

## Isami Doi



My first contact with Isami Doi, or at least with his art, predates by two decades my own awareness of Hawaii. In New York, in 1931, our works were exhibited side by side in a most exclusive annual show, "Fifty Best Prints of the Year."

His entry intrigued me. "The Bannister," a relief engraving, was a twisted, bemused version of his San Francisco habitat, a perspective rendering of the endless stairs one had to climb to reach the walk-up attic studios,

This article, a review of a memorial show of Isami Doi's works held at the Honolulu Academy of Arts, appeared in the *Honolulu Star-Bulletin* November 30, 1966. It is reprinted here, with minor editorial changes by permission of the publisher.

the only sort of housing we young artists could afford in any big city.

In the case of Isami Doi, the art and the man are as one. To paint meant for him more than an exercise in aesthetics. Encompassing as they now do the whole of his lifetime, his works are beaded together into a translucent recital of joys and sorrows, the stuff of a very special human life.

Perhaps more clearly than is the case with most, an even bigger theme dominates this recital. It is an active spiritual search that gives a unified flavor to this diary written with line and color.

Once Hemingway, in a gloomy mood, said that to be truthful all stories should end with death. In Hemingway's case, the end came as a door slams shut. In Doi's case, the end was more like the opening of a door to allow in at last a full share of light and of air.

Doi remains identified with his native Kauai. "Grassroots," "native son," are terms that have lost their freshness through political mouthings. Yet, in their pristine meaning they apply properly to Doi.

Doi's story parallels that of that other master, Peter Breughel of Flanders. Breughel toured Italy when Michelangelo was still alive. He returned home more Flemish than ever.

Doi's first models were the hills and cliffs of his Kauai. In New York he was featured by dealers and feted by collectors. The temptation crossed his path to become just another abstract expressionist. But his last pictures,

as were his first, were inspired by the hills and cliffs of his own Kauai.

Content with their lot, Breughel and Doi, by so-called international standards, remained provincial. But it is essential to remember that it was by their own choice. That is the very reason why they are true masters, while many an ambitious expatriate is forgotten.

As told in his pictures the story of Doi flows smoothly, if not uneventfully. To divide its text into chapters is but a device that allows for clarity. Rather than a book to leaf through page after page, his lifework is more in the nature of a scroll to be unrolled.

Here, even in a figure of speech, the duality of East and West that cohabit in his work is unavoidable.

Young painters, the world over, meet and conquer love as a first aesthetic affirmation. Doi's youthful pictures, painted in muted duns and browns, have a discreet erotic quality. The loosening of the cinch, a favorite image of Greek poetry, finds here its Asiatic counterpart, the untying of the kimono belt. The peculiar modesty of the presentation suits Doi who, throughout his life, was to avoid theatrics.

In mid-course, one meets in his work deep drama and the resulting scars. The artist goes through a time of unbalance. To describe emotional wounds, Doi turns for this once to the paraphernalia of symbols inherited from Greece and Rome. Centaurs, broken columns, sphinxes are snatched out



of context from their neo-classical frame. They become his own personalized images.

Typical is *The Centaur*, mutilated and its gallop reduced to the aimless rocking of a hobby horse.

The healing of the wound meant, in Doi's case, turning from the West toward the East. Most explicit in its imagery is *Occult*.

Doi's spiritualization deepened. Borrowed symbols, be they from East or West, were replaced by personal ones. Mystics have been at a loss to put their visions into words. Doi found it hardly easier to translate his in terms of line and color.

The works of that period come close to pure abstraction. His oranges and vermilions signify flames and light. A simplified Buddha shape is Doi's hieroglyph for meditation. Faceless, seen from the back, it assumes at times the dark musty outline of a mortuary bundle. At others, it whirls and blazes with light. For Doi light equals enlightenment.

The realm proper to the visual arts is, needless to say, that of the visible. There was a real danger that the artist, having crossed this borderline, would stop work. To intimates he would mention his intent not to paint any more.

We should be grateful that he changed his mind. Toward the end, warmed by a sort of Indian summer, he painted some of his best paintings.

Peace had been found the hard way. Doi left aside all symbols. He did not need them

any more. His search, in a circular motion that had lasted his lifetime, ended face to the hills, cliffs, and valleys of Kauai. In his youth he had used them as models in his search for form. Now he saw them as spiritual entities. Wisdom was not to be sought any more in other planets or in yoga postures. Wisdom was all around him.

In the paintings of the 1960s form and spirit are, at the end of the long search, reconciled.

The landscapes of the 1920s are sculptural, with values strongly contrasted. In the 1960s form gives way to space. The color thins. The bare canvas plays an increasingly dominant role. Curtains of clouds barely open up to disclose a narrow strip of landscape. One guesses at grassy plateaus on top of cliffs, the darkening vertical of their walls blending into the verdant slope of the valley below.

A key to Doi's masterly work is that he belonged. To Hawaii of course, but Hawaii includes the skyscrapers of Waikiki, the hotels of Kaanapali. He belonged most singularly to Kauai.

As we grow in size, now that we are one State among the many, a second wave of dogooders rushes our way. They are the missionaries of aesthetic. They proclaim international artistic formulas as a cure-all for ills we have not.

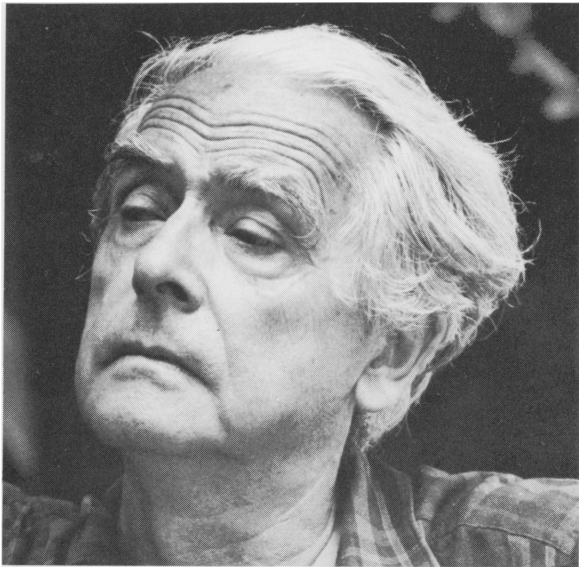
We should be wary of the sort of hit-and-run wisdom with which they deliver their admonitions before returning home. Could we

give them in turn an advice they do not ask for, it would be to try to empty themselves of selves long enough to look at our cliffs and sea, long enough to try and unravel the intricate complexity of our Hawaiian ways.

That there is here, right at home, matter enough to inspire great art is proved by Doi of Kauai.

Jean Charlot

## Jean Charlot



Painter—including murals—graphic artist, author, lecturer. Born 1898 in Paris of a French-Russian father and a French-Spanish-Sephardic-Aztec mother with strong family ties in Mexico. Showed a precocious interest in art, which was encouraged by his parents. Graduated from private tutors to the coulisses of the Beaux-Arts and the liturgical art movement of the French-Catholic renaissance. Specialized in wood bas-reliefs, textile designs for vestments, and prints. Designed his first fresco mural in 1919, after the experience of World War I. Wrote poetry.

Left for Mexico in 1921. Became a friend of local Mexican artists and was a key figure in the evolution

of the style and content of the Mexican mural renaissance. Completed the first fresco in Mexico since the Colonial period. His discovery of Manilla and Posada as fine-arts artists, and writings on Rivera, Siqueiros, Orozco, and others helped develop an ethnic cultural consciousness and explain it to the world.

Worked as an archaeologist in Chichén Itzá for the Carnegie Institution (1926-1929) and moved to Washington, D.C., to supervise the printing of his section of the official report. There, began a long friendship and collaboration with Paul Claudel.

Moved to New York where he helped launch his Mexican colleagues, collected Mexican prints for the Metropolitan Museum, lectured, and wrote. Worked at various times at Smith, Columbia, Yale, the University of Georgia at Athens, Black Mountain College, and the Fine Art Center, Colorado Springs. Began a long collaboration with the printer Lynton R. Kistler. Completed several murals in which he created a distinctive view of the United States.

On a Guggenheim scholarship in Mexico City (1945-1947), researched a book on the first years of the Mexican mural renaissance. Moved to Hawaii in 1949, where he taught at the University, did a number of murals on Hawaiian and religious subjects, learned Hawaiian, and wrote plays in that language. In Fiji in 1962 painted a fresco which inspired many new subjects. Has rediscovered his interest in sculpture and is experimenting in new media such as pottery, painted tiles, and enamels.

Married Zohmah Day in 1939. The couple has four children.



KAHUNA WITH GOD-STONE.  
1972.  
Oil, 60" x 40".  
State Foundation on Culture and the Arts.

The question of Mexico and me has been misrepresented somewhat. Critics date the beginning of my Mexican period as of 1920. Actually, I arrived in Mexico, I could say, the day I was born. For four generations—150 years—my people have lived in Mexico. My grandfather Goupil was born there and married a Mexican. Besides that I had since childhood a great awareness of Mexican archaeology. My great-uncle Eugène Goupil was a great collector. I grew up surrounded by many objects of pre-Hispanic art. I took their beauty for granted.

I myself have Mexican blood, the correct mixture of Spanish and Indian. My great grandmother was of undiluted Aztec stock. At times I felt a terrible pull toward things that were not what a good Frenchman would naturally enjoy. I leaned toward forms of art labeled by some as primitive or savage.

So, when I went to Mexico it was really a return rather than an arrival. I found there the things I had been looking for. It was extraordinary to see the people as I had imagined them come alive in the streets of Mexico City and even more so in Indian villages.

The religion of the ancient Aztecs included human sacrifices. Of course, nowadays even though Christianity came to the fore there remains a certain relationship to life and the value of life which is different from that I had known in France. When I landed in Mexico the military revolution had somewhat abated, but it still was smoldering. Many still died violent deaths. One of my dearest

friends was shot while he made ready to shoot the other guy. Such happenings clinched, I would say, my love of Mexico, tying, as they did, the Mexico of today with what I knew of ancient Mexico.

In Yucatán I found and copied representations of human sacrifices among the Mayans. The victim was bent backwards over a round stone so that the ribs got further away from the heart. The heart that the pagan priest held high as an oblation should be still throbbing. The god would have scorned the gift of a dead heart. I just give this as an illustration of the fact that, Frenchman though I am, I am also a Mexican Indian.

I held a unique position among the group of perhaps half a dozen artists who started what is now known as the Mexican Renaissance, being, as I was, both a practicing muralist and, since my early teens, an archaeologist. In the mid-twenties I joined an expedition to Chichén Itzá under the guidance of Dr. Sylvanus G. Morley. As we unearthed sculptures and frescoes I could check, so to speak, our brand of Mexican art with what the Mayan Indians had accomplished four or five hundred years before.

When I returned to Mexico City I would bolster my friends' hopes by telling them tales of ancient Yucatán and assuring them that they were—that we were—on the right track. In those days there were mighty few people interested in what men like Rivera, Orozco, Siqueiros, were doing. In fact, the conservative majority of cultured Mexicans

would have liked nothing better than to whitewash our murals.

In France, one of my interests had been popular art. In my teens, I already owned a collection of Images d'Epinal, pennysheets sold in the streets. These were mid-nineteenth-century woodblocks printed in black and colored by hand or stenciled in rather a rough way and deemed to be the work of artisans rather than that of fine-arts artists.

In Mexico in those days, most of the politicians were revolutionaries, more or less reformed. They were a rough lot. The secretary of education, José Vasconcelos, though interested in art, could not properly ask them to sponsor art programs. The frescoes of the Ministry of Public Education were listed in the budget as a repainting of the walls of the building which was, of course, absolutely correct. However, as a result, Vasconcelos could not afford to pay us more than was paid to masons and housepainters, which were the titles under which the muralists were listed.

The expedition to Chichén Itzá was sponsored by the Carnegie Institution of Washington. Originally I was hired to copy the Mayan bas-reliefs. But soon it was found that I was literate in a way, and that I already had an acquaintance with things pre-Hispanic. Eventually, when the time came to publish our final report, I was given the task of writing about the bas-reliefs and sculptures we had unearthed. I went to Washington to correct the galley proofs of





HAWAIIAN DRUMMER.  
1971.  
Acrylic on paper, 24" x 18".  
Collection of Mr. and Mrs.  
Robert S. Ichida.

the two volumes of the report and supervise the printing of its illustrations. And that is how I came to the United States.

On arrival I found that the fame of the Mexican muralists was seeping into New York. There they were more appreciated than in Mexico. I was asked to teach at the Art Students League of New York. I lectured in many places. I gave the famed annual Ryerson lectures at Yale, and so on.

One of my last stops among colleges and universities of the mainland was in Colorado Springs, where I was head of the art school. One day, Ben Norris came in, and he was a charming guy. He was looking for somebody he could induce to come and teach art in Hawaii. Now, just before his visit, I had received a letter from the Haitian Government inviting me to go there and start a renaissance. Why they did it, I know not. But Hawaii and Haiti sounded to me just about the same. I held a canny idea that perhaps I could go to Hawaii with Ben Norris, who described it, of course, as a place of palm trees, sunlight, and so forth. Then I could go to Haiti on the weekends and help them launch their renaissance. But when I looked at the map I found that it was quite impossible to do so. I had to choose the one or the other, and, for no other reason except that Ben was a nice guy, I chose Hawaii. Hawaii is so far away from everything else that here I am still, some twenty-five years later.



INSPIRATION—STUDY—CREATION.  
1967.  
Mural painting, 15" × 16'6".  
East-West Center, Honolulu.



