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Artists capture essence of Hawai'i

By David C. Farmer

Special to The Advertiser

For us in Hawai'i, with its endless summer, the season has some of the standard associations — long days filled with outdoor activities, shared with family and close friends — but also very specific and unique features that works on view at downtown exhibition venues well capture.

'SUMMERTIME'

The newest exhibition in the Hawai'i State Art Museum's Diamond Head Gallery celebrates the season and this place with works by 96 artists, pieces mostly culled from the state's Art in Public Places Collection.

The design of the show, its diversity and balance, and the quality of the works selected are simply terrific.

Also gracing the exhibition in the cozy Media Gallery is a showcase of recent short films by three local filmmakers.

See this show and understand why, despite the occasional carping over the years by armchair quarterbacks about the selection process or the worth of a specific piece, this trail-blazing program, the first of its kind in the nation, continues to be a bright and shining example of what can be best in a public art program.

Judged from the increased number of visitors on a recent Saturday afternoon, the museum is finding its audience and fulfilling its ambitious public mission.

'REFLECTING HAWAII'

In the front section of the Diamond Head Gallery, the visitor is greeted by an exhibition of 14 paintings, mixed media and works on paper selected from a recent call for artworks as part of an acquisition award project launched in February 2004 by the Art in Public Places Program. The pieces were selected by a panel of community culture and arts leaders from 470 submissions.

Extremely high-quality works by Carol Bennett, Fabienne Blanc, Evelyn de Buhr, Ka-Ning Fong, Mark Kadota, Bradley Koki, Wayne Levin, Mark Maresca, Pat Masumoto, Vicki Penney-Rohner, Wanda Russell, Mari Sakamoto, Brett Uprichard and Cora Yee clearly demonstrate that this innovative acquisition process is a winner that should be made a fixture of the program.

In addition to these pieces, on display are by now classic black and white photographs also from the



John McLaughlin, "Komo Mai Kau Mapuna Hoe (Come Dip Your Paddle)," acrylic on canvas, 43 3/8 by 84 inches, 1982



Carol Bennett, "Quasimodo," oil on wood panels, 36 by 72 inches, 2002

state collection inspired by Hawai'i's special demographic and environmental qualities.

Included are the works by some of Hawai'i's acknowledged masters: Kanani Aiu, Bud Brooks, Barry Chann, Muriel Fujii, Francis Haar, Robin Kaye, Mary Ann Lynch, Frederick L. Morris, Boone Morrison, Franco Salmoiraghi, Norman Shapiro, Stanley Tomita and Eric Yanagi.

The works succeed in effectively reflecting the magical and seductive mana that has enticed so many of us to make this our home.

'HONOLULU TO NEW YORK'

As was true during the last century, Hawai'i artists in all media, if they wish to pursue their art in the most professional of contexts, must wrestle with the fact that New York City, for better and for worse, continues to be a major art center of the world. On display at the Contemporary Museum at First Hawaiian Bank is an exhibition of paintings, sculpture, prints, photography and mixed media by 15 former Hawai'i residents living and working in New York City.

Separated from the Islands, these expats have had to find their inspiration in a disjointed world.

Perhaps unfair to compare, this exhibition unfortunately lacks the coherence, unity and overall excellence of the usually high standards of the museum.

Which is not to say the exhibition is without merit.

Mysterious paintings on paper by Willa Cox, although not well served by their placement at the foot of the stairs above the eye line, are made of multiple layers of watercolor, gouache, pencil, ink and acrylic, influenced, we are told, by the tide pools of her grandparents' cottage on Kihei Beach.

Sheila Fletcher Kriemelman's large 1995 acrylic painting from her "Americans of Japanese Ancestry" project, while not particularly plowing new turf, is executed with a pleasing boldness of design and concept.

Lynne Yamamoto's haunting photographs of the interiors of abandoned homes where her father grew up in Honolulu evoke the seductive fascination of spirit environments.

She manages to capture in pristine digital prints the aura of these deserted rooms, photographed as she found them with their torn curtains, refrigerators and chairs, a solitary woman mysteriously flailing her ghost-like arms.

Gordon M. Sasaki's well-executed work, with its subtle imagery, evokes a minimal yet deeply felt sensibility that hints at subjective human emotion while dealing with the objective considerations of form, repetition and time.

The exhibition, organized by associate curator Allison Wong, is valuable for its exposure of Hawai'i artists not often seen here and as a fitting welcome-home embrace to some of our talented exiles.

David C. Farmer holds a bachelor of fine arts degree in painting and drawing and a master's in Asian and Pacific art history from the University of Hawai'i-Manoa.

'SUMMERTIME'
Hawai'i State Art Museum

Diamond Head Gallery
2nd Floor, 250 South
Hotel St.

10 a.m.-4 p.m. Tuesdays-
Saturdays

Through Sept. 3

'REFLECTING HAWAII'
Hawai'i State Art Museum

Diamond Head Gallery

**'HONOLULU TO NEW
YORK'**

The Contemporary
Museum at First Hawaiian
Center

999 Bishop St.
8:30 a.m.-4 p.m.
Mondays-Thursdays; to 6
p.m. Fridays

Through Sept. 27

Closed weekends and
bank holidays

Free admission

Validated parking for
museum members