THE ARTS

A sense of beauty permeated the lives of the ancient Hawaiians, a beautiful people in a beautiful land. The esthetic impulse was not limited to the current category “Fine Arts,” but informed all creations from fishhooks to warfare. Dance, chant, love, cult, and sport, in all of which beauty and efficacy were judged one, were prime occupations of a people living easily in a subsistence economy.

Even in the context of Polynesia, the arts of Hawaii display extraordinary subtlety and finesse. The designs are simple and elegant, the handling of surface texture, particularly sensitive. The Hawaiian did not seek to impose himself on his material, but to recognize its peculiar mana and, by a few discreet touches, to release it to the perception of all. He did not try to rival or reproduce nature, but to distill its human and spiritual significance (page 85).

After Cook, certain areas of Hawaiian artistic activity were abandoned, but for sociological and religious reasons rather than from a general sense of cultural inferiority. Not only did Hawaiian culture survive, it became the foundation and inspiration for the most important subsequent achievements. Among the periodic re-embases of Hawaiian culture should be mentioned Kalakaua’s reign and the work of mid-twentieth century artists.

Other cultures were introduced from the Pacific, the Orient, and the West, giving Hawaii its unique richness. The process of mutual influence and accommodation is an important area for future study.
Visual Arts. Ancient Hawaiian visual arts and crafts were closely connected to religion. The overthrow of the social and religious kapus led to the systematic destruction of temple and family cult images. Although some stone images are made even today, Hawaiian art was channeled into Western forms or genres less obviously religious. Native woods were used for chairs and tables as well as calabashes. Feathers were used for fans and holokus, and, by the last of the great Hawaiian feather-workers, John Luney, for formal hatbands and ties, as well as leis.

The first Western artists to visit Hawaii were members of ships’ companies charged with making an accurate visual record of the landscapes, fauna, peoples, and artifacts encountered. Among these artists were John Webber (visited 1778), Louis Choris (1816), Jacques Arago (1819), and Robert Dampier (1825). Choris was an authentic genius with great insight into the personalities, life styles, and arts of the Hawaiians.

Missionaries used the visual arts for education and propaganda. Lorin Andrews directed the production of the important and varied Lahainaluna Engravings (approximate dates 1833-1846) by Hawaiians such as Kepohoni. Island newspaper illustrations were artistic and pioneering. As Honolulu grew, it spawned a school of urban topography, exemplified by the Paul Emmert-George Burgess lithographs (1854).

Artists came to reside in the islands, such as the Bostonian Charles Furneaux (arrived 1879) and the Frenchman Jules Tavernier (1884). D. Howard Hitchcock, whose career spans the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, was the first island-born haole artist. These and others concentrated on the esthetic assimilation of the Hawaiian landscape, with its strange sights, uneven lighting, and jumble of abundance. Attempts at portraying the place of man in that landscape evolved into a composition common to several artists: the bottom section is an area of water; above it, a very thin strip of houses; beyond them, the mountains and sky. The human community is depicted living in and from the island elements without disturbing them.

A tradition of Christian folk art and architecture came to Hawaii with the painted churches of the Belgian Sacred Hearts Fathers, John Berchmans Velghe (especially St. Benedict’s, Hana, completed 1902) and his disciple Matthias Evarist Gießen (especially Star of the Sea, Kalapana, ca. 1930).

In the twentieth century an unusually large number of good and even great artists have worked in Hawaii. Numerous art societies attest to a wide popular interest. Hue M. Luquien and John Kelly were master printers, the former specializing in land-
scapes, the latter in sensuous studies of Polynesian women. Luquiens wrote an early appreciation of ancient Hawaiian art.

The kamaaina Juliette May Fraser was stimulated by visitor Padraic Colum's literary work to pioneer in the representation of ancient Hawaiian life and mythology on a mural scale. English-born, much-traveled, Madge Tennent arrived in 1923 after studying in Paris. Her paintings of large, rhythmic Hawaiian women explored the special esthetic of the race and provided an inspiring image for later artists. The Tennent Art Foundation Gallery is devoted to her work. Isami Doi combined local influences and Japanese tradition in works which move from charming, spiritual depictions of Kauai life to intensely purified and imaginative icons of Buddhist mysticism. The Maui artist Tadashi Sato paints limpid oils reminiscent of the sea.

Internationally known, Jean Charlot arrived in 1949. His murals, sculpture, writings, and teaching helped stimulate an interest in monumental public art, which has blessed Hawaii with more such works per capita than perhaps any other state. His scholarly researches and reviews helped direct attention to ancient Hawaiian art forms such as petroglyphs, to the history of local art, and to the fruitful contemporary art scene.

Tseng Yu-ho arrived from China in 1949, already a finely trained artist, and developed an original, modern style of great radiance. Her scholarship is equally famous. Edward Stasack has based a bas-relief mural on petroglyphs. Ron Kowalke's prints combine mysticism and geometry in deep human concern. Stasack and Kowalke have had a great influence.

Of the many photographers attracted to Hawaii, Theodore Kelsey and Ray Jerome Baker offer haunting images of the Hawaiian people. Robert Wenkam combines his work with conservationism, while Francis Haar and Philip Spalding are predominantly art photographers.

Sculpture, especially monumental work, is currently being revived by, among others, Satoru Abe, Eli Marozzi, Bumpei Akaji, Edward M. Brownlee, Fred H. Roster, and Mirella Belshe.

Erica Karawina has done significant work in stained glass. Hester Robinson and Ruthadell Anderson are leaders in the practice of weaving as an art form. Local potters included the great Shugen Inouye, a Zen priest, who died in 1964 at the age of 29. He felt that his work combined the four elements, but it did not exclude violence and tragedy.

The Bishop Museum, founded in 1889 and devoted to ethnology and natural history, has the largest collection of Hawaiiana in the world. The Honolulu Academy of Arts (opened 1927) and
its annex contain an important Oriental collection as well as Western and local art. Some homes of the alli have been maintained with memorabilia. The State Department of Education operates an artmobile. The State Foundation on Culture and the Arts (established 1965) uses one percent of all public building funds for art commissions and projects.

Architecture. The Hawaiian did not seek to dominate his environment, but to live organically within it. The hut was as modest as the functions it performed for this outdoor people. Even the most imposing structures, the great heiau, followed the forms of their sites, evoking contemporary earth sculpture. The unobtrusiveness of man in a paradisical land remains an ideal.

The first Western settlers imported architects and even prefabricated buildings. But subtle accommodations were introduced. Native materials such as island woods, coral blocks, and, later, volcanic stone were found attractive. The Victorian Iolani Palace (1882) luxuriated in vegetal decoration. Ralph Adams Cram opened the sides of his Georgian Central Union Church (1924) onto an expanse of lawn. Kamaainas reacted to unadapted buildings in a Hawaiian way, appreciating discretion, spaciousness, free-flowing air, and garden settings.

Some see the emergence of a genuine regional style in such buildings as the Waiala Mission (1841), the Honolulu Academy of Arts (finished by Hardie Phillips, 1926), the 1924-1942 work of Charles W. Dickey, and buildings by Hart Wood, especially the First Church of Christ Scientist (1923). A long, horizontal, high-peaked roof, sloping down until it nears the ground, recalls Polynesian long houses. Houses open onto lanais which open onto gardens. Regardless of its sources, this style was felt to be appropriate to Hawaii.

The Chinese and Japanese communities confined their traditional architecture mainly to temples, although some elements and materials, such as tiles, were employed in public buildings. Oriental architecture was, however, a powerful influence on garden buildings, on such key works as the Academy of Arts, and especially on domestic architecture. The Japanese-style house is now a fixture.

Unfortunately, too many new buildings have a massive, heavy concrete style ill-suited to their locale. The general aspect of Honolulu now differs little from any mainland city.

Haphazard city planning produced earlier some colorful neighborhoods, now in danger of destruction, but uncoordinated planning has become a definite liability. Some plantation towns, have been planned with care, and certain architects, such as Alfred Preis, have designed suburban complexes with attention to the special character of the environment.
Music. Ancient Hawaiian music consisted of chants, often accompanied by percussive instruments, which were composed on all sorts of occasions and for many purposes. Critical judgment was acute, and skill, highly prized. Chant was inseparable from the Hawaiians' terse, liquid, and elliptical poetry. Rhythms shifted in subtle and dramatic ways. Tone intervals were smaller than in the Western scale. Scales were developed at will.

Many of these characteristics can be found today, despite assimilation of outside influences. The Hawaiians were intrigued by the melodic aspect of the hymns introduced by the first missionaries, but priority was still accorded to the words.

Throughout the nineteenth century, ali`i such as Likelike, Leleiohoku, and Kalakaua were composers. The greatest and most prolific was Liliuokalani, whose "Aloha `Oe" is the best-known Hawaiian composition. Her protest songs are being revived by the contemporary ethnic movement.


In the first part of the twentieth century, Charles E. King compiled Hawaiian songs and composed in a lilting style. Mary Kawena Pukui, Ka`upena Wong, and Noelani Mahoe are among the many who continue traditional music. Kui Lee wrote authentically Hawaiian songs in a modern idiom. Others have adopted more popular commercial styles, such as Harry Owens, Alfred Apaka, Jack DeMello, and Don Ho. An interesting combination with serious rock has been achieved by the group Sunday Manoa.

Of the many organizations for the cultivation of Western classical music, the most important is the Honolulu Symphony Orchestra. Founded in 1900, its first professional conductor was the estimable Australian composer Fritz Hart (tenure 1932-1949). Georges Barati (1950-1967?) maintained a serious program, enlarged the orchestra's activities, and was instrumental in the building of the present concert hall. He was succeeded by Robert LaMarchina.

Language schools, radio and television programs, festivals, and family practices have made Oriental music a part of everyday life. Visiting troupes draw large and varied crowds. Filipino music and dance, long emphasized by the consulate, are beginning to take their rightful place in local media.

Dance. The ancient Hawaiian hula, of which there were diverse types, was a highly religious act, requiring long training; stylized gestures were used for description and narration in con-
junction with chant. Christian missionaries campaigned against the hula because of its pagan connections and alleged indecencies. Kalakaua patronized the hula with great perseverance despite criticisms. The dancing master Ioanne Ukeke and members of the royal troupe continued to teach after the king's death. The growing interest of outsiders—scholars, literati, and tourists—gradually removed the missionary-inspired prejudice. Iolani Luahine is the foremost contemporary exponent of the traditional hula as a religious act.

Recently Tahitian, Samoan, Tongan, and Fijian dances have been introduced to the islands, partly through the efforts of the Polynesian Cultural Center at Laie.

Oriental dances are a regular feature of traditional festivals, such as the widely attended Bon dances.

Programs of Western classical and modern dance are offered occasionally at the University of Hawaii and other institutions. **Dramatic Arts.** The hula kī, in which a story was enacted by puppets in an esoteric language, was the most theatrical of ancient Hawaiian arts. As early as the reign of Kamehameha II, pageants and parades are mentioned, perhaps attempts at replacing ancient festivals. Pageants, usually on historical themes, continue to be presented by churches, schools, and other groups. The Kamehameha Day and Aloha Week parades, organized entirely by Hawaiians, are annual events.

Of Hawaii's many theatrical organizations, the Honolulu Community Theatre presents mostly popular works; the University of Hawaii Theatre, serious modern and classical drama; the Honolulu Theatre for Youth, original, participatory works for children and adolescents.

Oriental drama—especially Peking Opera, Noh, and Kabuki—is presented frequently by local and visiting groups. Earle Ernst of the University of Hawaii has stimulated much interest in Kabuki through his writings and stage productions.

Aldyth Morris, Jean Charlot, and John Dominis Holt, among others, have written original plays on Hawaiian themes. But movies and television have barely begun to exploit the visual and thematic possibilities of Hawaii. A talented group of local film-makers offers hope for the future.

J. P. C.