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HANDEYE

Provocative Hawai'ian, May 3, 2012

By Leslie Mehren

Keith Tallett and Sally Lundburg are two vibrant Hawai'ian artists whose life and work gracefully intertwine. Partners in the truest sense of the word, they maintain individual styles and influences, yet create from a confluence of shared experiences and constant dialogue. Although both artists reference Hawai'ian culture in their art, they shun the notion of being relevant in a merely regional context. They prefer to see themselves as part of the larger conversation surrounding contemporary art while relating to issues that are particularly relevant to Hawai'i today.

Citing artists such as Georgia O'Keeffe and Donald Judd, who fled urban life for distant locales in the American west, the couple found the freedom to continue their art practice in the remote calm of a Big Island farmhouse. After years of living in San Francisco, earning degrees at the San Francisco Art Institute and participating in a lively arts community, they chose to return to Hawai'i before the birth of their daughter, Kia'i. It wasn't just the surfing that brought them home. They knew they were building a future and could strike the right balance for their careers.

Both artists agree that Keith's work is the more overtly Hawai'ian, with its inclusion of Polynesian tattoo patterns, tiki imagery and pidgin words emblazoned across tropical fruits and flowers. Keith blatantly challenges the notion of what it means to call something Hawai'ian, even something as seemingly innocuous as a guava fruit. The ubiquitous guava is not indigenous to Hawai'i, but was imported and allowed to become an invasive species on the islands. To Keith, it represents the kind of falsified culture imposed on Hawai'i by outside influences and assumed to be authentic. The image of a guava inked with Gothic pidgin slang could easily be interpreted as a self-portrait, a reflection on the artist's own struggle with his identity and the terms that others try to pin on him.

As both a practicing Polynesian tattoo artist and a second-generation surfboard shaper, Keith is reviving awareness of Hawai'i's diverse art traditions. He recently began handcarving traditional surfboards, called *papahe'enalu*, from native woods. Last year he was awarded a Cultural Apprenticeship Grant from the Folk Art Program of the Hawai'i State Foundation on Culture and the Arts. This grant will enable him to study with Tom Pohaku Keali'iahonui Stone in a project titled *Pae Ka Nalu – Traditional Wood Board Building*. "I'd been building boards from all kinds of materials," said Keith, "including stuff that was going to the dump and things from Home Depot." Some people questioned whether those boards could really be considered *papahe'enalu*, but for Keith it was all valid in the context of advancing the craft.

Defining Keith's artwork in formal terms is nearly as tricky as inking a ripe guava. His painting, sculpture and iconography have evolved over the last two decades into an amalgam of Hawai'ian culture packaged with razor-edged wit and conceptual art theory. Observing contemporary life and paying homage to his roots, Keith straddles two distinct worlds with complete ease. No matter if he is shaping a surfboard, executing an intricate tattoo design, or patterning a series of canvases with layered tire treads, his work is on-point, articulate and original.

Keith and Sally collaborate as half of an arts collective called AGGROculture. Together with artists Margo Ray and Scott Yoell, they are showcasing urgent issues like the recent conflict between APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation) trade liberalization and local land use rights. AGGROculture embraces art's ability to provoke and inspire, which is not what people normally expect from the paradise of Hawai'i, but it is what you'd expect from two of Hawai'i's most provocative young artists.

Big Island Weekly

A Crafting Papahe'enu – From Tree to Sea: Wooden Surfboard Shapers

Nov/Dec, 2011

By Hadley Catalano

“When Bob Russell began as a child, he surfed on blue and yellow canvas rafts along the Kona Coast. When Keith Tallett grew up in Hilo, his father couldn’t afford to buy him a board, so he shaped his son a foam one in the backyard. Carlos Kuhn had his first surfing adventure south of Moloka’i, on a racing canoe. The Story behind the legendary water vehicle has evolved, reshaped it’s curve and lines with time. The history behind papahe’enu, or surfboards, is as old as the sport itself, and as the saying goes, history does repeat itself. Riding on a wave of the emerging Hawaiian renaissance, the ancient practice of wooden surfboard shaping has been revived, led by the O’ahu surfer Tom “Pohaku” Stone.” - Excerpt from the article by Hadley Catalano – Ke Ola Magazine.

Star Advertiser

APECalypse Now?, November 20, 2011

By David A.M. Goldberg

The AGGROculture Collective relates APEC’s pursuit of trade liberalization to local struggles against the profit-driven and often foreign-based use of land and resources. “The Rat and the Octopus” is a triptych of photographs featuring two allegorical characters, the land speculator and the construction worker, and their magic economic ritual that turns land into a commodity. In the left panel, the phone-toting speculator wears a lime-green suit printed with a repeating pattern of handshakes and blooming dollar-flowers. The construction worker in the right panel exudes confidence in a stylized safety orange jumpsuit with reflective stripes. In between the two shake hands to seal the unspecified deal for the coastline behind them.

Big Island Weekly

Gallery exhibit proves what's old is new again, October 25, 2011

By Hadley Catalano

As Keith Tallett and Scott Yoell worked to arrange the final pieces in their upcoming exhibition “Current ReVisions – Hawaiian Craft Today” at the Kahilu Theatre gallery in Waimea, running October 20- November 27, an elderly Hawaiian man circled around the open exhibition space.

He carried on excitedly pointing out different woods he recognized in surfboards leaning in racks along the wall, and admired the handiwork of traditional canoe and sailing paddles.

Whether he was aware or not that the wooden surfboards and paddles, among the many other artworks, were considered contemporary Hawaiian art is exactly the line that Tallett and Yoell hope to blur.

“The art is about looking back but using the present,” explained Tallett, who along with fellow curator Yoell, Sally Lundburg and Margo Ray, established AGGROculture Collective, a Hawai‘i based art collective, has a means to create, showcase and promote cutting edge and challenging concepts in contemporary art.

The Current ReVisions exhibition, a free museum/salon style show, in collaboration with the Kahilu Theater Foundation, will feature local artists Tricia Allen (Polynesian tattoo), Dean Edwards, Carlos Kuhn and Bob Russell (wooden surfboards), Henani Enos and Olu Saguid (collaborative painting/wood carving), Gary Eoff (fishing lures), Scott Hendricks and Kaleo Pilago (wooden canoe paddles), Hualalai Keohuloa (canoe restoration), Beau Jack Key (fish hook carving), Carl Pao (ceramics), Nita Pilago (fashion design) and Tallett (mixed media).

The vision of this exposition, according to the artist’s statement, is to investigate how Hawaiian craft lives, influences and has evolved in the twenty first century, calling into question the many contemporary art-making practices and asking, “How has the artist incorporated the skills and techniques of the past into contemporary practices, and what do current skills and techniques tell us about who we are as a society and culture?”

Each artist’s work helps to answer that question with personal creative identity through traditional Hawaiian craft, through the visual examples of tattooing, sailing, surfing, textile and jewelry design, painting, woodworks and basket weaving.

Exploring traditions, decoration, community, design, practices and functionality, Tallett and Yoell hope to open doors to all facets of the Big Island artistic community, providing examples of how traditional Hawaiian art has influenced and adapted in the modern day setting.

“This is not a gallery’s preoccupied notions of Hawaiiana,” said Tallett, noting that too often Hawaiian art is catered towards tourists. “This is history, you can see the translation with the patterns, material, and use.” One common problem that many artists around the island experience is lack of available exhibition space. There are pockets of artistic uprisings such as the Donkey Mill Art Center in Holualoa, the University of Hawai‘i at Hilo and through individual efforts of people like Richard Smart and Stephen Freedman, but on the whole the island lacks contemporary art education and availability.

This is where groups such as the AGGROculture and like mind individuals have helped lead by example. All artists themselves, the four-member collective (with Lundburg, Tallett and Ray all born and raised on the island) has reached out and drawn in a wide assortment of artists.

“We try to help people understand that there is value in art besides it’s monetary value,” said Tallett, who is a native Hawaiian artist showcasing his “Flying Hawaiian” mixed media series called Rainbow Apparitions. “We are trying to show that our Hawaiian culture, through art, needs to be valued.”

As with Hawaiian artists and craftsman before, AGGROculture is providing a visual log of Hawaii’s cultural art scene. For future generations looking back, the exhibition provides a snapshot of a blossoming artist community, helping to grow the word slowly in the traditional word of mouth style, to local artists.

AGGROculture’s mission explains that Hawai‘i is a place rich in culture, diversity and is a microcosm of local and global issues. These statements will be reproduced and represented through artwork.

AGGROculture also nurtures and encourages other Hawai‘i based artists and their unique practices through collaborative themed exhibitions that will be available to the community.

Star Advertiser

No Rainbows, no problem, July 3, 2011

By David A.M. Goldberg

Juror Michael Rooks manages collections and exhibitions of post-1945 art for the High Museum in Atlanta, but he lived in Hawaii for six years, working as a curator at the Honolulu Academy of Arts and The Contemporary Museum. Using his insider-outsider status, Rooks has done a brilliant job of curating Hawaii's home-grown and indigenous talent without including a single work that panders to, exploits or distorts our image of ourselves. Though the show invites consideration of collective expression, it is by no means harmonious, for Rooks has not selected for an artificial unity that is neither plausible nor necessary.

Keith Tallet's "Flying Hawaiians" duet fuses the seductive aesthetics of the perfectly waxed surfboard with black tire tread patterns. Linking these repetitions to traditional Polynesian tattoos and gene sequences, Tallet has given us one of the exhibition's most successful evocations of and challenges to (post-) modern Hawaii. This hybridity that mixes media, subject matter and aesthetic conventions carries the viewer from high modernism to contemporary indigenous to the borders of "outsider art."



HI Art- Punch Flow, HI ART Magazine, Spring 2012

By Scott Yoell

Echoing the vibrancy of Pop Art and Neo Expressionism's emotional use of vivid color harmonies, the paintings & drawings of Keith Tallet are a punchy flow full of lyrical quality.

At first glance Keith's glossy fetishized surfboard-like surfaces could be categorized as a manifestation of late Pop or Post Pop eye candy, like the highly polished works of such contemporaries as Jeff Koons, Pharrell Williams and Takashi Murakami. But after time spent and closer inspection the viewer realizes that the artist is present in both concept and gesture. Brush strokes, squeegee lines and minor cracks and bubbles in the resin reveal a 'trace' that is definitely 'hands on' and very far from a place of mass production.

Although strongly influenced by artists like John McCracken, Chris Ofili, Fred Tomaselli & Raymond Saunders; Tallet's artwork draws from a deep rooted connection to his native Hawaiian heritage and that of surfing culture. It was during graduate school at the San Francisco Art Institute, punctuated by bad critiques and visits home, that Keith began to look at the physical practices/activities & materials that resonated with him. As an accomplished surfer and 2nd generation surfboard shaper, a craft learned from his dad; he realized that his work needed a radical change and decided to clean out his studio and begin re-contextualizing the process and materials used in the surfboard industry. Keith began making his pieces through a patient process of woodworking, resin, paint, fabric application, and finishing. In end, a highly crafted creation with a hint of a 'do it yourself' cottage and garage aesthetic.

In viewing his work, it is easy to see the use of patterning in colors, materials, and surface treatments. For example, Quiver (hotcoat), series and Hyperfreak, fluorescent series, large 4'x6' door shaped slabs share similarities in all three of these areas. It is in the hue and presentation that the artist creates radically different effects. Playing with fixed and dependent variables helps Tallet to open the viewer up to the plurality of perception. Emphasizing the details of the surface, the interrelation of numerous colored parts, and the overall feeling of the work, is therefore key.

In his painting series 'Fifty Greatest Surfers of All Time,' Keith presents a large number of works on paper hung in a grid ten high by five across. Together the works remind you of the power and impact of abstract values; swells of color united by repetition, color codes and symmetry. Yet the title of the work as in most of Keith's paintings and drawings alludes that the content is more than 'beauty as meaning'. That the issues surrounding Keith's work are found in the blurred lines that define authenticity as a cultural production and commodity; where the merging of space age surfboard material with that of the natural becomes a metaphor for native verse nonnative. As Keith Tallet has put it, "The process itself becomes a way of creating dialogue between an ingrained cultural knowledge, and my investigations as a contemporary artist."